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SF PERUSALS

Dead Man's Cell Phone

by Sarah Ruhl

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, produced the New York Premiere of "*Dead Man's Cell Phone*" Off-Broadway in 2008.

In addition the following credit must be given on title page, prominently visible:

Originally produced June 2006 by Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Washington, DC, Howard Shalwitz, Artistic Director; Kevin Moore, Managing Director.

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"*Dead Man's Cell Phone*" was commissioned by Playwrights Horizons with funds provided by the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Commissioning Program.

The world premiere production of *DEAD MANS CELL PHONE* was produced in June 2007 by Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company (Howard Shalwitz, Artistic Director) in Washington, D.C. The production was directed by Rebecca Bayla Taichman; the set design was by Neil Patel, the costume design was by Kate TurnerWalker, the lighting design was by Colin K. Bills, the sound design was by Martin Desjardins, the choreography was by Karma Camp; the properties master was Jennifer Sheetz; the dramaturg was Elissa Goetschius and the stage manager was Taryn Colberg. The cast was as follows:

A WOMAN, JEAN . . . . . Polly Noonan

A DEAD MAN, GORDON . . . . . Rick Foucheux

GORDON'S MOTHER, MRS. GOTTLIEB . . . . . Sarah Marshall

GORDON'S WIDOW, HERMIA . . . . . Naomi Jacobson

GORDON'S BROTHER, DWIGHT . . . . . Bruce Nelson

THE OTHER WOMAN/THE STRANGER . . . . . Jennifer Mendenhall

The New York premiere of *DEAD MANS CELL PHONE* was produced in March 2008 by Playwrights Horizons (Tim Sanford, Artistic Director; Leslie Marcus, Managing Director). The production was directed by Anne Bogart; the set and costume design were by G. W. Mercier, the lighting design was by Brian H Scott, the soundscape was by Darron L West and the production stage manager was Elizabeth Moreau. The cast was as follows:

A WOMAN, JEAN . . . . . Mary-Louise Parker

A DEAD MAN, GORDON . . . . . T. Ryder Smith

GORDON'S MOTHER, MRS. GOTTLIEB . . . . . Kathleen Chalfant

GORDON'S WIDOW, HERMIA . . . . . Kelly Maurer

GORDON'S BROTHER, DWIGHT . . . . . David Aaron Baker

THE OTHER WOMAN/THE STRANGER . . . . . Carla Harting

DEAD MANS CELL PHONE was produced in March 2008 by Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; David Hawkanson, Executive Director). The production was directed by Jessica Thebus; the set design was by Scott Bradley, the costume design was by Linda Roethke, the lighting design was by James F. Ingalls, the sound design and original music were by Andre Pluess, the choreography was by Ann Boyd, the fight choreography was by Joe Dempsey and the stage manager was Christine D. Freeburg. The cast was as follows:

A WOMAN, JEAN . . . . . Polly Noonan

A DEAD MAN, GORDON . . . . . Marc Grapey

GORDON'S MOTHER, MRS. GOTTLIEB . . . . . Molly Regan/ Marilyn Dodds Frank

GORDON'S WIDOW, HERMIA . . . . . Mary Beth Fisher

GORDON'S BROTHER, DWIGHT . . . . . Coburn Goss

THE OTHER WOMAN/THE STRANGER . . . . . Sarah Charipar

ENSEMBLE . . . . . Geraldine Dulex, Ben Whiting

CHARACTERS

1) a woman, Jean
2) a dead man, Gordon
3) Gordon's mother, Mrs. Gottlieb
4) Gordon's widow, Hermia
5) Gordon's brother, Dwight
6) the Other Woman/also plays the stranger. Has an accent.

SET

1) a moveable dining room table and chairs
2) a moveable cafe table
3) a cell phone
4) light

*One could technically double-cast the roles of Dwight/Gordon. One could also technically double cast Hermia/the other woman. Double-casting would require virtuosity on the part of the actors and a resistance to pure camp, and some good wigs. Judge for yourself the aesthetics at stake. I understand that these are dark economic times, and a four person play might be just the thing. When economic times change, add three angel-waiters to the cast, have them move the furniture, and pay them handsomely.

NOTES

A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this. No more can I turn the leaves of this dear book that I loved, and vainly hope in time to read it all…. It was appointed that the book should shut with a spring, for ever and for ever, when I had read but a page.... My friend is dead, my neighbour is dead, my love, the darling of my soul, is dead… In any of the burial-places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me, or than I am to them?.... The messenger on horseback had exactly the same possessions as the King, the first Minister of State, or the richest merchant in London. So with the three passengers shut up in the narrow compass of one lumbering old mail-coach; they were mysteries to one another, as complete as if each had been in his own coach and six, or his own coach and sixty, with the breadth of a county between him and the next.

– Charles Dickens, *Tale of Two Cities*

"…you have done a braver thing
Than all the Worthies did;
And a braver thence will spring,
Which is, to keep that hid."

– John Donne, *The Undertaking*

"In Hopper's paintings there is a lot of waiting going on…They are like characters whose parts have deserted them and now, trapped in the space of their waiting, must keep themselves company"

– Mark Strand, *Hopper*

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for anthony
first braid:
two parts, now three.

Scene One

An almost empty cafe.
A dead man, Gordon,
sits on a chair with his back to us.
He doesn't look all that dead.
He looks – still.
At another table, a woman – Jean –
sits, drinking coffee, and writing a thank-you letter.
She has an insular quality,
as though she doesn't want to take up space.
She looks over at the man.
She stares back at her coffee.
She sips.
A cell phone rings.
It is coming from the dead man's table.
It rings and rings.
The caller hangs up and calls again.
Jean looks over at him.
She sighs.
The phone keeps ringing.

JEAN. Excuse me – are you going to get that?

No answer from the man.

Would you mind answering your phone?

JEAN. I'm sorry to bother you.
If you could just – turn your phone – *off*?

The cell phone rings again.
Jean gets out of her chair and walks over to the man.

JEAN. Are you ill?

No answer.

JEAN. Are you deaf?

No answer.

JEAN. Oh, I'm sorry –

Jean signs in sign language:

Are you deaf?

No response.
The phone rings again.

JEAN. All right.
Excuse me.

She reaches for the cell phone. She answers it.

JEAN. Hello? No. This is – you don't know me.

To the dead man:

Are you Gordon?

No answer.

I don't know. Can I take a message?
Hold on – I don't have anything to write with.

She sees a pen on the dead man's table.

To the dead man:

Thank you.

To the phone:

Go ahead.

She writes on a napkin.

How late can he call you?

The voice on the phone begins to sob.

I'm sorry. You sound upset. I'm not –

The caller hangs up.

Gordon?

She touches his shoulder.

Oh –

She checks with a spoon under his nose to see if he's still breathing.

The phone rings again.
She answers it.

Hello? No, he's not. Can I take a message?

A pause as the person on the other end makes a very long offer.

No, he doesn't want one. He already has one.
No, I don't want one.
I already have one.
Thank you, good-bye.

She hangs up.
She looks around for help.

Help.

She dials 911.

Hello?
I think that there is a dead man sitting next to me.
I don't know how he died.
I'm at a cafe.
I don't know.
Hold on.

She exits with the cell phone to look at the name of the cafe and the address.
We just see the dead man and an empty stage.
She returns.

JEAN. It's on the corner of Green and Goethe. *(pronounced Go-thee)*
Should I stay with him?
There seems to be no one working at this cafe.
How long?
Thank you.

She hangs up.
A pause.
She looks at him.
His cell phone rings again.

Hello? No, he's not.
I'm – answering his phone.
Does he have your phone number?

Pause while the woman on the phone says:
of course he has my phone number. I am his mother.
The enormity of her loss registers for Jean.

Oh…Yes, of course.
He'll – I'll leave him the message.
Have a – hope you have a – good day.
Good-bye.

She hangs up.
She breathes, to Gordon.

JEAN. It was your mother.

She looks at Gordon's face.
It is transfigured, as though he was just looking at something he found eminently beautiful.
She touches his forehead.

JEAN. Do you want me to keep talking until they get here?
Gordon, I'm Jean.
You don't know me.
But you're going to be just fine.
Well, actually –
Don't worry.

Are you still inside there?
How did you die so quietly?
I'll stay with you.
Gordon.
For as long as you need me.
I'll stay with you.
Gordon.

She holds his hand.
She keeps hold of it.
The sound of sirens, rain, and church.

Scene Two

A church.
A Mass is being sung in Latin.
Jean kneels down, wearing a dark blue rain-coat.
Her cell phone rings.
She looks at it.
She hesitates.
She answers it.
She whispers.

JEAN. Hello?
No, he can't come to the phone right now.

On the line, inaudible to us, a woman says:
I know he's dead.

Oh, you do?
I'm sorry.
Then – why?
Okay, I'll meet you.
What will you be wearing?

A pause while the woman says:
I will be wearing a blue rain coat.

Really? That's strange.
I'll be wearing a blue rain-coat too.
I'll see you then. Good-bye.

Mass continues to be sung.
Jean kneels. She prays.
A spot-light on Jean.

JEAN. Help me, God.
Help me to comfort his loved ones.
Help me to help the memory of Gordon
live on in the minds and hearts of his loved ones.
I only knew him for a short time, God.
But I think that I loved him, in a way.
Dear God. I hope that Gordon is peaceful now.

The music stops.
A woman comes to a podium.
Mrs. Gottlieb begins her eulogy.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. I'm not sure what to say. There is, thank God, a vaulted ceiling here. I am relieved to find that there is stained glass and the sensation of height. Even though I am not a religious woman I am glad there are still churches. Thank God there are still people who build churches for the rest of us so that when someone dies – or gets married – we have a place to —. I could not put all of this – *(she thinks the word grief)* – in a low-ceilinged room – no – it requires height.

A cell phone rings in the back of the church. Jean turns to look.

Could some one please turn their fucking cell phone off. There are only one or two sacred places left in the world today. Where there is no ringing. The theater, the church, and the toilet. But some people actually answer their phones in the shitter these days. Some people really do so. How many of you do? Raise your hand if you've answered your cell phone while you were quietly urinating. Yes, I thought so. My God.

Where was I? A reading from Charles' Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*. "A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. No more can I turn the leaves of this dear book…than the book should shut, forever, when I had read but a page…My friend is dead, my neighbour is dead, my love, the darling of my soul –

Jean's cell phone rings. She fumbles for it and shuts it off. Mrs. Gottlieb looks up and sees the audience.

Well.

Look at this great big sea of people wearing dark colors. It used to be you saw someone wearing black and you knew their beloved had died. Now everyone wears black all the time. We are in a state of perpetual

mourning. But for what.

Where was I? Gordon.

Well. I've forgotten my point. Let's have a hymn. Father?

A hymn.
Preferably "You'll never walk alone."
The singing begins.
Jean's cell phone rings.
Jean sneaks out, covering the phone.

You'll never walk alone. That's right. Because you'll always have a machine in your pants that might ring. Oh, Gordon.

She sings too.

Scene Three

A cafe.
Film noir music.
The Other Woman waiting in a blue rain-coat.
Jean enters in a blue rain-coat.

JEAN. Hello.

OTHER WOMAN. Hello.
Thank you for meeting me.

JEAN. Not at all.

OTHER WOMAN. We like the same clothes.

JEAN. Yes.

OTHER WOMAN. I suppose that's not surprising, given the circumstances.

JEAN. I don't know what you mean.

OTHER WOMAN. You don't need to pretend.

JEAN. I know.

OTHER WOMAN. Gordon has good taste. You're pretty.

JEAN. I'm not –

OTHER WOMAN. Don't be modest. I like it when a woman knows she's beautiful. Women nowadays – they don't know how to walk into a room. A beautiful woman should walk into a room thinking: I am beautiful and I know how to walk in these shoes. There's so little glamour in the world these days. It makes daily life such a bore. Women are responsible for enlivening dull places like train stations. There is hardly any pleasure in waiting for a train anymore. The women just – walk in. Horrible shoes. No confidence. Bad posture.

She looks at Jean's posture.
Jean sits up straighter.

OTHER WOMAN. A woman should be able to take out her compact and put lipstick on her lips with absolute confidence. No apology.

The other woman takes out lipstick
and puts it on her lips, slowly.
Jean is riveted.

JEAN. I've always been embarrassed to put lipstick on in public.

OTHER WOMAN. That's crap. Here – You have beautiful lips.

She hands Jean the lipstick.

JEAN. No – that's –

OTHER WOMAN. I don't have a cold.

JEAN. It's not the germs. It's –

OTHER WOMAN. Put it on. Take your time. Enjoy yourself.

Jean puts on some lipstick.

OTHER WOMAN. That was disappointing. Oh, well.

JEAN. I'm very sorry about Gordon. You must be – his friend?

OTHER WOMAN. Gordon didn't tell you much, did he?

JEAN. No.

OTHER WOMAN. Gordon could be quiet.

JEAN. Yes. He was quiet.

OTHER WOMAN. He must have respected you. He was quiet with women he respected. Otherwise he had a very loud laugh. Haw, haw, haw! You could hear him a mile away.

She remembers Gordon.

You must wonder why I wanted to meet with you.

JEAN. Yes.

OTHER WOMAN. You were with Gordon the day he died.

JEAN. Yes.

OTHER WOMAN. Gordon and I – we were – well –

You know. *(She thinks the word – lovers)*

And so – I wanted to know…

this is going to sound sentimental…

I wanted to know his last words.

JEAN. That's not sentimental.

OTHER WOMAN. I hate sentiment.

JEAN. I don't think that's sentimental. Really, I don't.

OTHER WOMAN. So. His last words.

JEAN. Gordon mentioned you before he died. Well, he more than mentioned you. He said: tell her that I love her. And then he turned his face away and died.

OTHER WOMAN. He said that he loved me.

JEAN. Yes.

OTHER WOMAN. I waited for such a long time.
And the words – delivered through another woman.
What a shit.

The other woman looks away.
She wipes a tear away.

JEAN. It's not like that. Gordon said that he had loved many women in his life, but when he met you, everything changed. He said that other women seemed like clocks compared to you – other women just – measured time – broke the day up – but that you – you stopped time. He said you – stopped time – just by walking into a room.

OTHER WOMAN. He said that?

JEAN. Yes.

OTHER WOMAN. Oh, Gordon.

The phone rings.
Jean hesitates to answer it.

OTHER WOMAN. Aren't you going to get that?

JEAN. Yes.

She answers the phone.

JEAN. Hello?

On the other end: who is this?

My name is Jean.
Yes, of course.
How do I get there?

A pause while the mother gives directions.

JEAN. *(to the Other Woman, whispering) Sorry.*

The Other Woman shrugs her shoulders.

JEAN. All right, I'll see you then.
Good-bye.

Jean hangs up.

OTHER WOMAN. Who was it?

JEAN. His mother.

OTHER WOMAN. Oh, God.
Mrs. Gottlieb?
Let me touch up your lipstick before you go.

She does. Jean puckers.

OTHER WOMAN. Good girl.

Scene Four

Jean and Gordon's mother, Mrs. Gottlieb,
at Mrs. Gottlieb's house.
The house smells of dry cracked curtains
that were once rich velvet.
Mrs. Gottlieb wears fur, indoors.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. I don't know why I didn't see you at the funeral.

JEAN. I was in the back.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Would you say that you tend to blend in with a crowd?

JEAN. I don't know –

MRS. GOTTLIEB. You might wear brighter clothing. Or a little mascara.

JEAN. It was a funeral, so I wore black.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Fine, fine. That's beside the point.
Gordon left his telephone to you?

JEAN. Yes – he left it to me.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Why?

JEAN. He wanted me to have it.
Why did you call him on the phone – *after* the funeral?

MRS. GOTTLIEB. I call him everyday.
I keep forgetting that he's dead.
I do a little errand, take out my purse, and call Gordon while I'm stopped in traffic.
It's habit.

JEAN. I'm very sorry. It must be awful to lose a child.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. It is. When someone older than you dies it gets better every day but when someone younger than you dies it gets worse every day. Like grieving in reverse.

JEAN. I'm so sorry.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. I see it as my job to mourn him until the day I die.

JEAN. Oh – yes…

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Please, sit down.

Jean sits down.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. So.

JEAN. So.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Does anyone continue to call Gordon?

JEAN. Yes.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Who?

JEAN. Some business acquaintances who don't know that he's dead.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. And do you tell them he's – *(she thinks the word dead?)*

JEAN. Yes.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. I can't bring myself to tell anyone.

JEAN. I understand.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. It's so painful, you have no idea.

JEAN. *(overlapping)* No, I don't.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. What it's like to lose a child.

JEAN. No.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. You don't have children?

JEAN. No.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Why not?

JEAN. I might have them, one day.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. You're getting older. How old are you?

JEAN. Almost forty.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Married?

JEAN. No.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. How do you expect to have children then?

JEAN. I don't know. I could –

MRS. GOTTLIEB. When you're thirty-nine your eggs are actually forty, you know.

JEAN. I could adopt.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. It's better to have your own. They resemble

– it's the little ticks – the family eyebrow – Gordon's eyebrow –

She makes a little line in the air,
indicating his eyebrow shape.
The mother tries not to cry.

JEAN. I'm sorry.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Gordon – and I – had a falling out – you know – after that, he never returned my phone calls –

JEAN. He called you the day he died.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. What? How do you know?

JEAN. Your number was on the out-going calls.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. It was?

JEAN. Yes. It said: Mom.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Let me see.

JEAN. I deleted it by mistake.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Gordon called me.

JEAN. Yes.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. He wanted to speak with me.

JEAN. Yes.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. How did you know Gordon, anyway?

JEAN. We worked together.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Really.

JEAN. Yes.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. No wonder you don't have children.

JEAN. What do you mean?

MOTHER. Gordon's line of work was – toxic.

JEAN. It could be.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Did you do the out-going or the in-coming business?

JEAN. In-coming.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Oh – I see.

Why don't you stay for dinner. Gordon's brother will be here. And Gordon's wife – you know – his widow.

JEAN. Oh, I wouldn't want to intrude. You must need family time now.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. You knew my son. I insist that you stay.

JEAN. If it would help.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Yes, I think it would. You're very comforting, I don't know why. You're like a very small casserole – has anyone ever told you that?

JEAN. No.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Are you religious?

JEAN. A little.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. I see. We're not religious. Our name means God-loving in German but we're not German anymore. Hermia chose a Catholic mass for Gordon because she likes to kneel and get up. I did not raise my children with any religion. Perhaps I should have. Certain brands of guilt can be inculcated in a secular way but other brands of guilt can only be obtained with reference to the metaphysical. Gordon did not experience enough guilt. Dinner will be served at seven. Do you eat meat?

JEAN. Um – Kind of.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Good. We'll be having large quantities of meat. I'm a little anemic, you know. I eat a large steak every day and it just goes right through me.

JEAN. Oh, I'm sorry.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. So – seven o'clock.

JEAN. Seven o'clock. Great. I'm just going to run out for a moment – I have an errand –

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Very good, Jean. We'll see you at seven.

Scene Five

Gordon's brother, Dwight.
Gordon's widow, Hermia.
Gordon's Mother.
And Jean.
Everyone wears black, except for the mother, who is in a bright red get up.
A flurry of activity getting to the table.
Everyone sits in the wrong spot.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Place cards, there are place cards!

Everyone moves to their assigned place,
saying things like:
Oh, oh, sorry, excuse me.

Jean stares at Dwight.
He looks so much like Gordon.
But Jean doesn't want to
remind anyone of Gordon's death,
so she doesn't comment on the resemblance.
A silence.

HERMIA. Gordon used to sit – there.

She points to Jean.

DWIGHT. That's right, he did.

JEAN. Oh, I'll move –

MRS. GOTTLIEB. No, no, time to move on, no time like the present.

They all look at Jean for a long moment.
Jean hiccups.

JEAN. Excuse me, I'm sorry. I have the hiccups.

Jean stands up and hiccups.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. There's water through there, dear.

JEAN. Thanks.

Jean exits and hiccups.

HERMIA. What a strange duck.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Yes, but she knew Gordon. Try to be welcoming, Hermia.

DWIGHT. How'd she know Gordon?

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Work.

The mother nods knowingly.
Everyone murmurs knowingly
and says things like:
Really? You don't say. Well…Mmm. Hmm…

DWIGHT. Out-going?

MRS. GOTTLIEB. In-coming.
Or so she says.

They murmur knowingly.
Jean enters.
A silence.
She sits down.
She hiccups.

JEAN. Oh! Excuse me. My hiccups are so loud.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Yes, they are, aren't they? Remarkably loud hiccups for such a small woman.

DWIGHT. Mother. Come with me, Jean. I'll show you my secret. It's drinking a glass of bourbon upsidown.

JEAN. Okay. *(hiccup)* Thank you.

Dwight pulls Jean's chair out for her.
Jean and Dwight exit to the kitchen.

HERMIA. Dwight likes her.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. I thought he might.

A silence.

HERMIA. Are you sad?

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Yes, are you?

HERMIA. Yes. So sad that it's – awful. Now I know why they call it awful sad.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. I'm glad we can share this, Hermia. We loved him most of all.

HERMIA. I hope that – the two of us – can continue to – mourn together – Mrs. Gottlieb. I feel so all alone sometimes.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Call me Harriet.

HERMIA. Harriet.

MOTHER. I never could get used to Gordon having a wife but now that he's dead you're going to be a very great comfort to me, Hermia.

It is one of the first nice things Mrs. Gottlieb has ever said to her.
Jean and Dwight re-enter.
Jean is laughing.

DWIGHT. That's better.

JEAN. Dwight got rid of my hiccups!

MRS. GOTTLIEB. You're amazing, Dwight. You have so many hidden talents. Always have. Remember when Dwight was little and he could grow stiff as a board and his friends pretended he was a plank or a dead insect and they would carry him around the living room at my lunch parties and how we all would laugh! Oh. I guess there's no one here to remember that.

A silence.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Well. Let's eat. Rib-eye steak. Do you like rib-eye, Jean? Nothing better in the world, I tell you. Ribbons of flesh, ribbons of fat, all in one bite. Dwight, why don't you carve.

Dwight takes up the carving knife.
He's never carved before. It was Gordon's job.

JEAN. Um –

MRS. GOTTLIEB. A hiccup?

JEAN. No, I'm –

DWIGHT. She's talking, mother.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. Oh.

JEAN. I brought some presents for all of you. From Gordon.

DWIGHT. You did?

JEAN. Yes. In his last moments. He wanted to give each of you something. From the café. Before he died. He was thinking of all of you.

Dwight puts down the carving knife.

Jean gets out a little bag of presents.

JEAN. This salt is for you, Hermia. Because he said you were the salt of the earth.

Hermia takes the salt-shaker.
She is moved.

HERMIA. Thank you.

JEAN. And this is for you, Dwight.

Jean gives Dwight a cup.

JEAN. Because Gordon said you were like – a cup. Because you can hold things. Beautiful things. And they don't – pour out.

Dwight is moved.
He takes the cup.

DWIGHT. Gordon said that?

JEAN. Yes.

DWIGHT. Wow.

JEAN. And this is for you, Harriet.

She gives Gordon's mother a spoon.

JEAN. Because of your cooking.

There is a silence.
Everyone is still.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. What did he mean by that?

JEAN. I – when he was little – and grew up – eating – your food –

MRS. GOTTLIEB. No –

JEAN. It was only a nice – he meant it nicely.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. HE COULD NOT HAVE MEANT THAT NICELY!

Mrs. Gottlieb slams down her chair and exits.
Dwight goes after her.

DWIGHT. Excuse me.

Dwight exits.

JEAN. What did I – ?

HERMIA. We never talk about her cooking.

JEAN. I'm so sorry.

HERMIA. Don't worry. She's just – you know.

Hermia plays with her salt.

HERMIA. I love the salt.

Hermia is sad.

HERMIA. Did he use any of it? On his food?

JEAN. Yes, he sprinkled it on his potatoes before he died.

HERMIA. Oh…how beautiful…His last flavor. Oh.

JEAN. I'm glad you like it.

HERMIA. Yes, I do.

You know, I always thought if Gordon died I'd never want to see my in-laws ever again, and I'd be happy and relieved to never lay eyes on them again, but now that Gordon's dead they sort of remind me of him, and it sort of comforts me. You know?

The mother enters.

MRS. GOTTLIEB. *(to Jean)* I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

DWIGHT. We haven't even cut the meat, mother. Jean hasn't eaten –

MRS. GOTTLIEB. All right, Dwight. You seem to know what's best for the household. Why don't you take over now that Gordon's dead. I know that's what you've always wanted. *(with a nasty look at Dwight.)*

I'm going to lie down. Upstairs. Hermia – come with me. You can put a cold compress on my head. Dwight – be sure she *eats* something. I'm afraid if she doesn't eat she'll disappear into the *ether.* Poof.

Mrs. Gottlieb and Hermia exit.

DWIGHT. Can I cut you some meat?

JEAN. I'm sort of a vegetarian.

DWIGHT. Oh – I'm so sorry. Why didn't you say so?

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