

SOMEWHERE DOWN THE ROAD

by

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Cast of Characters

Joanne: 30s, in a dress
Michael: 30s, in a suit and tie
Maddie: child of about 5
(may be played by an adult)

Setting

A car driving down a rainy road.

Time

The present. Late night.

(At Rise: Outside the car, Maddie stands, gazing into the distance. Sometimes walking, sometimes dancing, she's lost in her own world.)

(Michael sits shotgun, asleep. Joanne drives, staring glassy-eyed at the passing cars. She shifts, spots Maddie, reaches toward her...)

(Michael awakes, startling Joanne. He grabs for the radio.)

JOANNE

Doesn't work, remember?

MICHAEL

I'm just --

JOANNE

It doesn't work.

MICHAEL

-- checking. Sometimes it shorts and needs a rest.

JOANNE

You want to pet it, too? Hug it, kiss it, make it all better? It's not human, Michael. Leave it alone.

MICHAEL

You know that old TV at my parents'? Sat in the living room covered in dust and potpourri. My entire life! I grew up thinking it was an aquarium that smelled good. Then I came home one day, saw the cord, and --

JOANNE

-- you plugged it in and it turned on. A miracle.

MICHAEL

You never know. It pays to be --

JOANNE

-- stubborn...

MICHAEL

-- persistent to find that spark of life.

(He fiddles with the radio.)

JOANNE

Like scratching a scab. Look, stop it. Stop...

(He plays with it some more.)

STOP IT! All right? Just... you can only listen to so much Barry Manilow anyway. I'm fine with it off.

MICHAEL
What do you want? Classic? Alternative? Hip-hop?

(He begins hip-hopping.)

JOANNE
Michael.

(More. It's laughable.)

MICHAEL
Come on, Joanne, that's what all the kids listen to these days. I'm jump'n jivin' with the flow, groovin' to my hang-low. I'm cool, I'm down, I'm hep.

JOANNE
The wedding's over, we don't have to be nice anymore.
(beat)
I'm sorry. It's just... I don't know, Megan and Steve... they seemed so happy, they reminded me of... I don't know -- us, I guess -- and I... I think the caviar was cooked.

MICHAEL
Want to pull over, let me drive?

JOANNE
It's only an hour more.

MICHAEL
The chicken wasn't any treat either. Didn't even taste like chicken. What does chicken taste like if it doesn't taste like chicken?

JOANNE
Caviar?
(no laugh from Michael)
Serves you right for picking something you couldn't pronounce.

MICHAEL
I can pronounce chicken cym... cym..., well never mind. What is it, anyway? Welsh for "chicken with bones"?

JOANNE
In German it'd be chicken heimlich.

MICHAEL
Ich bin ein a chicken drumstick caught in my throat.

(They smile.)

JOANNE

Think it'll last? Megan and Steve?

(Maddie glances at the car, heads toward it.)

MICHAEL

Maybe they were acting happy because they didn't want their friends and relatives to know they were already separated.

JOANNE

They should win an Academy Award.

MICHAEL

We should.

JOANNE

But they were always smiling and holding hands. They probably developed callouses.

MICHAEL

"May our only pain be champagne"? It was a wedding, for crying out... of course they were smiling. If they weren't smiling they'd be crying. Chocolate swans cost a fortune.

JOANNE

They were holding hands even under the table. I saw.

MICHAEL

Don't tell me --

JOANNE

I dropped a fork.

MICHAEL

Joanne...

JOANNE

I swear, I dropped a fork.

MICHAEL

And?

JOANNE

...The tables were from Home Depot.

MICHAEL

Isn't confession good?

JOANNE

Good for the soul.

(Maddie steps to the front of the car. She squints into the headlights.)

MICHAEL

Five years, tops. Plus five if they have kids. Minus five if they become famous.

JOANNE

We lasted six.

MICHAEL

Our kid didn't count.

JOANNE

I can't believe you said that.

MICHAEL

It was a miscarriage.

JOANNE

You know, you can be a real prick sometimes.

MICHAEL

What's a fake prick?

JOANNE

No. All the time. All the time. Christ, Michael, you don't know how --

MICHAEL

I was just --

JOANNE

-- hard --

MICHAEL

Joanne.

JOANNE

-- that was.

MICHAEL

Come on.

JOANNE

I had to go through --

MICHAEL

You had to go through?

JOANNE

Let me finish!

MICHAEL

No! It wasn't just you. I was there, too. Don't forget that I --

JOANNE

Stop --

MICHAEL

-- also wanted a baby -- Jesus!

(They scream; Joanne suddenly swerves to avoid hitting Maddie.)

(Maddie walks to the rear of the car.)

MICHAEL

Did you see that? It looked like a little --

JOANNE

Sorry, sorry.

MICHAEL

Are you okay?

JOANNE

Yeah, yeah. Was that a --

MICHAEL

-- deer, I think so. Was it alive?

JOANNE

Should we go back and check?

MICHAEL

Probably too late.

JOANNE

Probably too late.

(Maddie climbs in the back, fastens her belt.
They drive a moment.)

JOANNE

I had a good time.

MICHAEL

Me too.

MADDIE

Me three.

MADDIE

I want to plant it in the garden and water it with milk and watch it grow a million miles tall.

MICHAEL

I think it means death. What if it means death?

JOANNE

Eat another cheesesteak in bed and you'll find out.

MADDIE

That's not nice, Mommy.

MICHAEL

Yes, that's not nice, Mommy.

(Joanne checks her side mirror. Note: Michael no longer interacts with Maddie.)

JOANNE

Our last public appearance as a couple.

MICHAEL

Wasn't so bad, was it?

JOANNE

Except the deer blood all over the hood.

MADDIE

Apologize to Daddy.

MICHAEL

Just think, when we get home, it won't be "our" home anymore.

JOANNE

Can... do you ever think we can, you know, start over? Michael?

MICHAEL

Signing the papers is about as over as we can start.

JOANNE

No, I mean...

MADDIE

Mommy, listen to me.

MICHAEL

I know. "Till divorce do us part."

JOANNE
(eyeing the rear-view mirror) Fuck.

MICHAEL
That's what got us into this in the first place.

JOANNE
It's the same guy.

MICHAEL
Still following?

MADDIE
Apologize to Daddy.

MICHAEL
Maybe he's trying to tell us something.

MADDIE
Say you're sorry, Mommy. I mean it.

(Honking from behind.)

MICHAEL
It's not a cop. Your tail lights working all right?

JOANNE
He's drunk.

MICHAEL
Don't keep looking, you're antagonizing him.

JOANNE
I'm not antagonizing.

MICHAEL
Maybe he's responding to your bumper sticker.

JOANNE
Honk if you're an asshole? Slow down, son of a bitch.

MICHAEL
Sounds like our first date.

JOANNE
I hate this.

MICHAEL
Should've let me drive.

JOANNE
That would've fixed everything.

MICHAEL

Let him pass.

JOANNE

I tried to let him pass an hour ago. Wait, wait...

(The car behind flashes on its brights.)

JOANNE

I knew it, there they are. His high beams work.

MICHAEL

How do you know it's a he?

JOANNE

Oh my God, it's the guy from the gas station.

MICHAEL

What?

JOANNE

Look!

MICHAEL

I can't see him, are you sure?

MADDIE

Daddy, my tooth hurts.

JOANNE

Not now, sweetheart.

MADDIE

I'm talking to Daddy.

JOANNE

I said, not now.

MADDIE

Yes, now!

(The brights go brighter.)

JOANNE

Goddammit!

MADDIE

Goddammit!

(Then they shut off.)

MICHAEL
Where'd he go?

JOANNE
He's right behind us!

MICHAEL
He must've turned at the offramp, was it really him?

JOANNE
The light's too bright.

MICHAEL
That was freaky. He just disappeared.

JOANNE
He's right there!

MICHAEL
Where?

JOANNE
The light, I can't see anything!

MICHAEL
Joanne, you're going too fast.

MADDIE
Mommy!

JOANNE
He wants Maddie! He wants to take her away!

MICHAEL
What're you talking about? Who's Maddie?

JOANNE
I won't let him!

MICHAEL
Slow down!

JOANNE AND MADDIE
Listen!

MICHAEL
Joanne, please... calm down...

JOANNE
Don't tell me to calm down! I'm plenty calm!

MICHAEL

There's no one there.

MADDIE

Now.

JOANNE

No.

MICHAEL

Let go. You're driving --

JOANNE

I can't.

MADDIE

Now!

JOANNE

It wasn't a miscarriage!

MICHAEL

What?

JOANNE

I'm sorry, I couldn't tell you. I wasn't ready, I... I had an abortion --

MICHAEL

Look out!

(The sound of the car being hit. Then skidding.
Then a horrific crash.)

(Michael's shaken, but alive. Unharmed, Maddie
rolls out of the car and slowly walks away.)

JOANNE

Michael!

(cradles his head; he moans)

Oh, thank God. Michael, thank God.

(Suddenly, the radio comes on: it's Barry
Manilow's "Somewhere Down the Road.")

JOANNE

I'm sorry, Michael.

(Maddie halts.)

Maddie? Is that you? Wait.

(Maddie turns, extending her arms, echoing the
opening scene.)

MADDIE
My tooth fell out, Mommy.

JOANNE
It did?

MADDIE
I didn't pull it, either.

JOANNE
That's great. That's great, honey.

MADDIE
Is Daddy going to be okay?

JOANNE
I... I think so. I hope so.

MADDIE
Good! See ya.

JOANNE
Wait, don't leave.

MADDIE
I have to.

JOANNE
Why?

MADDIE
I'll be late.

JOANNE
I... I don't understand. Where're you going?

MADDIE
Silly goose.
(points to the stars)
I have to see the tooth fairy.

(Maddie grins at the sight of Joanne and Michael embracing. Satisfied, she skips away.)

MICHAEL
What... what happened?

(Joanne just smiles and hugs Michael.)

END OF PLAY