

THE DIG

By
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ACT 1 **Scene 3**

(The present. MATTIE holds a photograph in hand. She speaks to the audience with feeling.)

MATTIE

(to audience) They're in two loose lines: young students, professors, a few locals, a few wives... The hills of Lebanon rise behind them, rough, looming, sparsely green. Slabs of stone and fallen pillars frame the group.

I love this picture.

They're all animated, smiling, in mid-laugh—as if they're in the middle of a shared, communal joke. Completely carefree—happy, held in time, like creatures held in amber. The late 1960's—no one knew what was to come.

But he is ... (searching for words) ... at the center. Like a bright star. Shining. He is like the sun.

YOUNG JAMIE

What a night!

(YOUNG JAMIE sets up a "car"—his VW bug. They are about to take a nighttime summer drive across the Illinois countryside.)

(MATTIE looks up and off into distance.)

YOUNG JAMIE

What a night!

Scene 4

(MATTIE is in her memory. YOUNG JAMIE gestures towards MATTIE.)

(MATTIE speaks the lines of the early-adolescent girl she once was.)

YOUNG JAMIE

Mattie!

MATTIE

Coming.

YOUNG JAMIE

Look—the stars! There's Venus ... and there's the big dipper!

MATTIE

Where?

YOUNG JAMIE

Right there!

MATTIE

Oh, I see them!

(YOUNG JAMIE and MATTIE get in the "car")

YOUNG JAMIE

What a night! (looking about him) Oh, take it in, Mattie! Can you imagine anything more beautiful?

Constellations everywhere!

(looking around)

MATTIE
I know! There are so many!

YOUNG JAMIE
It'll be a long time before you see anything more beautiful. Let's open our little sky-roof and we'll see more –
–

(he reaches up to the "crank")

MATTIE
I'll help you!

YOUNG JAMIE
My God, look at this big, black Midwestern sky!

MATTIE
I wouldn't call it black, exactly, with all the stars out.

YOUNG JAMIE
But they only make the black more black, Mattie. More velvety, velvet.

MATTIE
Yup, it looks like black velvet.

(he breathes in deeply)

YOUNG JAMIE
And, smell the air... ah, just a little bit of farm...

MATTIE
Ew... I don't like farm.

YOUNG JAMIE
Sweet to me. Oh, summer here is glorious, Mattie. Feel this air... We're on a marvelous adventure — thanks to reliable old Empedocles.

(YOUNG JAMIE starts the "car" and drives)

MATTIE
We're just going to Clear Lake. You're exaggerating, like Daddy always says.

YOUNG JAMIE
I'm speaking metaphorically. All things are metaphors.

MATTIE
Ugh, metaphors and similes...

YOUNG JAMIE
That's right. Describing something by comparing it to something else.

MATTIE
I know, you've told me...

YOUNG JAMIE
Like "she was a star among children"... Or... "You are the light of my life."

MATTIE
(smiling) Silly. Why do you call your car Impedo...?

YOUNG JAMIE

Empedocles? Because I like the character of Empedocles and I thought it was right for my little Beetle to have his archetypal name. (explaining) That means deep and old.

MATTIE

Anyway...

YOUNG JAMIE

Oh, I do go on, don't I?

MATTIE

Anyway....

YOUNG JAMIE

Anyway.... Empedocles was one of the greatest of the Greeks, Matt. A philosopher who tried to make sense out of his life. Kind of like your confusing brother.

MATTIE

Really?

YOUNG JAMIE

Yup. The Greeks were a brave and curious people, and lived by two seas—the Aegean on one side, the Adriatic on the other. They spun theories about the world in the most wonderful of ways. And Empedocles said that the world was made up of earth, air, fire and water.

MATTIE

That's not what Miss Beck says.

YOUNG JAMIE

Who?

MATTIE

Miss Beck. She says everything is made up of elements and atoms. In science class.

YOUNG JAMIE

Oh, Miss Beck's undoubtedly correct, but I'm guessing in your wisdom, you'll see that in his way Empedocles was also right. He said everything's in the process of change — birth, decay, re-birth.

MATTIE

Ugh. Decay.

YOUNG JAMIE

And that when things were going well, under the rules of the loving Gods, then everything whirled around in the right and proper way—in harmony, in equilibrium—and everything was happy. But when the world came under the sway of Strife, then trials and tribulations started — things began to break apart and fall away.

MATTIE

Like the strike at Daddy's mine?

YOUNG JAMIE

Yes, exactly! That's Strife for you. What a disaster.

MATTIE

Daddy says the miners have everything they need. He says they have good "paychecks and conditions."

YOUNG JAMIE

I know he does. But maybe not as good as at other mines... Anyway, what a mess it all is. Yes, that's the biggest Strife around these parts.

MATTIE

Except when you fight with Father.

YOUNG JAMIE

Except when I fight with Father. He and I agree about one thing, though.

MATTIE

What?

YOUNG JAMIE

That you're terrific. There's no arguing about that.

MATTIE

(smiling) Oh. (pause) I'm reading the book you gave me. About the Greek myths. I want to know all the stories you know.

YOUNG JAMIE

Lord have mercy.

MATTIE

I'm reading the one about the girl running in the woods... you know, running away from the man who was trying to catch her — the one who runs and runs and he runs after her?

YOUNG JAMIE

Was she, perchance, a nymph named Daphne?

MATTIE

That's it, Daphne! She ran and ran and was really scared—but then she turned into a tree. Her legs turned into roots and leaves grew out of her fingers. That was kind of weird. It was like she was frozen.

YOUNG JAMIE

I agree. A strange fate for Daphne. (he stops the car, letting it idle) Oh, look, a shooting star! Make a wish, Matiola.

(they look together, silent)

MATTIE

I'll remember this night forever, Jamie.

YOUNG JAMIE

Me, too. Yep. So will I.

MATTIE

(Pause) Did you like your time in Greece last summer?

YOUNG JAMIE

Indeed I did. I'd happily re-experience midnight at a certain little taverna on a tiny island on the sea.

MATTIE

But you like it just as much as here? At home with us?

YOUNG JAMIE

Oh, absolutely.

MATTIE

Do you like your time with Leah as much as your time with me?

YOUNG JAMIE

Oh, it's really, really different, Mattie—but you're both fantabulous. I love my time with both of you. Leah can't wait to really get to know you, by the way. (pause) Did you get the sample of the fabric she sent you? For your dress?

MATTIE

Mm-hm. It's lavender. I like lavender.

YOUNG JAMIE

Good. You'll be the prettiest bridesmaid ever. I can't wait to see you in it.

MATTIE

Where are you going on your honeymoon?

YOUNG JAMIE

Don't you know?

(he drives again)

MATTIE

Know what?

YOUNG JAMIE

We're not going on a honeymoon, Mattioli. We're going to work. Professor Stone asked me to help him on a dig.

MATTIE

What?

YOUNG JAMIE

It'll be great. Leah and I will be working close to each other. She'll be studying journalism in Tel Aviv and I'll be digging near her.

MATTIE

Where are you going?

YOUNG JAMIE

A place called Lebanon. Once upon a time it was "Phoenicia."

MATTIE

Is it far away?

YOUNG JAMIE

Pretty far, I'd say. It's in the Middle East.

MATTIE

How long will you be gone?

YOUNG JAMIE

A year.

MATTIE

A whole year? That's way too long!

YOUNG JAMIE

There's loads to be dug up at this one, Matt. Lots of layers. Phoenicians, Assyrians, Greeks—it'll be a full summer at the Dig and then post-doc work at Beirut University.

MATTIE

(hurt deeply) No one told me.

YOUNG JAMIE

(pause) I'm sorry, Mattie. Someone should have. I should have. Dad's busy and I guess I just forgot. It won't be a solid year, though. We'll be coming home for Christmas. All the way from Lebanon, just think of it — oyster stew, chocolate steamed pudding — all of us coming down the stairs on Christmas morning... we'll walk down slowly, slowly, you and Leah at my side ... we'll close our eyes so we won't see the lovely lights and presents under the tree.

(MATTIE turns away, silent, looking out the window.)

And maybe someone will bring you back some extra-special treat from Lebanon. Some pretty pointy shoes, perhaps — like the ones Alladin wore.

MATTIE

Those are for kids. I'm thirteen now. I'll be fourteen by then.

YOUNG JAMIE

Of course you will. Sorry. What a bungle-headed brother.

(pause) Mattie? (silence)

MATTIE

I don't want you to go.

YOUNG JAMIE

I know you're growing up and things are changing. (pause) You may feel lonely sometimes. Mother's been gone for four years now --

MATTIE

Five.

YOUNG JAMIE

Sorry. Five. You're right. (beat) You must miss her.

MATTIE

I'll miss you more.

(he stops the car, shuts engine off)

YOUNG JAMIE

Listen. I want you to remember something when I'm gone, okay? No matter what, no matter where I am, I'm not really too far away. Not from you.

(silence)

YOUNG JAMIE

See those stars up there?

(he points)

YOUNG JAMIE

See that constellation? The two bright sets? Those are Gemini. The Twins. That's you and me. Look, see us sparkling?

MATTIE

Not really.

YOUNG JAMIE

Old Gemini will never vary. Those two bright stars will always shine for both of us—here and everywhere. You can look at us next summer from this spot in Illinois and know that I'm looking at us too. In Lebanon.

(silence from MATTIE)

YOUNG JAMIE

Now and always, Mattie. (beat) Promise.

Scene 5

MATTIE

(to audience in present; bittersweet)

I watched their plane take off; my father stood beside me. The plane started, moving down the runway, fast, then faster, faster... then parted from the ground and seemed to start a tear - a growing rent between ground and air. Something had sundered, ripped away. The plane continued climbing, up and up, sparkling, screeching higher, higher... carrying them away from us, carrying them away. Away from O'Hare, away from the green corn fields surrounding us, away from the hills of Galena, from the swelling Scales Mound and the snake-like Fever River ... off into the blue, blue stratosphere, into abstract space, into nothingness, out over the ocean—nothing more than energy and vapor, in a searing white line... They'd been transported. Transformed. Ripped through time, through space, through worlds unseen, unknown... They were gone from us. (pause) "Goodbye, goodbye," I called, waving at the airplane. My Father called out, "Good Luck! (pause) But they couldn't hear us. They had flown away.