

EXCERPT

The Sand Game

a play in two acts

by Karen Schiff

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CHARACTERS

JANE GERSON, 38. An Assistant U.S. Attorney living in New York City.

MICHAEL GERSON, 37. Jane's brother. V.P. of Sales/Marketing for a high tech firm in Silicon Valley.

NANCY GERSON-LINDSTROM, 30. Jane and Michael's sister. A doctor living in Rochester, Minnesota.

PATRICIA LEWIS, early 30s. Michael's girlfriend. A pharmaceutical sales rep.

PETER GOODMAN, late 30s. An investment banker.

GLENN/GLINDA ARMSTRONG, mid 30s. A transsexual day-trader turned waitperson.

TOM PIPER, mid 40s. A retired Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.

ERIK LINDSTROM, early 30s (optional). Nancy's husband. A wilderness adventure tourguide.

TIME

Summer, Fall, Summer. The present.

PLACE

Various locations are represented throughout the play: restaurants in New York City and San Francisco, the balcony of a NY apartment, Jane's studio apartment, Nancy's kitchen, and the back deck of the Gerson's family beach house on the New Jersey shore.

Settings can be minimal -- just enough to suggest the location and the action.

NOTE

Depending on production resources, Nancy's husband, ERIK, can make appearances where appropriate throughout the play.

ACT II

SCENE 1

(Three weeks later. A weekday afternoon. MICHAEL and JANE sit at a café table. JANE reads her menu. MICHAEL reads the NY Times)

MICHAEL
Huh.

JANE
What?

MICHAEL
Nothing.

JANE
What?

MICHAEL
Nothing. Just a coincidence. Some scientist at the conference was just telling me about this.

JANE
What is it?

MICHAEL
Dark energy. They confirmed it.

JANE
Dark energy? That's a bit of an oxymoron, yes?

MICHAEL
Yeah. Exactly. It's repulsive gravity.

JANE
What?

MICHAEL
Says it's a repulsion between objects normally attracted to each other by gravity.

JANE
Oh my God.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Apparently Einstein first proposed it but then he thought it was so bizarre he took it back.

JANE

And now they've confirmed it?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

JANE

How much of this dark energy is floating around the universe?

MICHAEL

When did you get so interested in astrophysics?

JANE

Just tell me what it says. How much is there?

MICHAEL

A lot. Looks like there's now more repulsive gravity than regular gravity.

JANE

Oh. Is it reversible?

MICHAEL

What do you mean?

JANE

Does repulsive gravity ever turn back into regular gravity?

MICHAEL

I don't think it can. I think they're two different types of forces.

JANE

So what if something's caught between them? If both repulsive gravity and regular gravity exert influence on something, what happens?

MICHAEL

Doesn't say. Probably wouldn't move. Just stay where it is. Sort of like a New Yorker in a rent-controlled apartment.

(GLENN, now GLINDA, enters)

GLINDA

Hello, I'm your waitress, Glinda. Are you two ready?

MICHAEL

Glinda? Like from the Wizard of Oz?

GLINDA

Why yes. And who would you be? Scarecrow, Tin Man, or Cowardly Lion?

MICHAEL

What are you kidding? I'm the Great Oz, of course.

JANE

Oh my God.

MICHAEL

Hey, that's pretty funny, don't you think? She's the good witch of the North and you're the wicked bitch of the /

JANE

I'll have a decaf and a lemon bar, he'll have a double latte and a piece of cheesecake.

(she grabs MICHAEL's menu and hands them to GLINDA)

JANE (Cont'd)

(curt)

Thank you.

(GLINDA gives her a look)

JANE (Cont'd)

Thank you.

(GLINDA takes the menus and exits)

MICHAEL

What was that about? She was cute.

JANE

You think so?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

JANE

Well then go for it brother Michael. The change may do you good.

MICHAEL

What does that mean?

JANE

Nothing, nothing. So, how's the conference?

MICHAEL

You know, I'll play with your company if you play with mine. The usual bullshit. It's good to take a break.

JANE

And how's Patricia?

MICHAEL

I don't want to talk about it.

JANE

Have you spoken to her since you broke up?

MICHAEL

I said I don't want to / talk

JANE

Just one little question. Have you spoken to her?

MICHAEL

Yeah, once.

JANE

Is she ok?

MICHAEL

I don't know. She didn't say much.

JANE

Are you going to try to work it out? I mean, you dated her for more than two years.

MICHAEL

I don't think so. I think it was the right decision.

JANE

Ok.

(pause)

MICHAEL

It's hard, you know. I miss her.

JANE

So then why did you end it?

MICHAEL

Cause I had to. It wouldn't have worked out in the long run. Wasn't right to string her along.

JANE

So then what were you doing for two years?

MICHAEL

I was dating someone. What have you been doing?

(GLINDA enters)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

Look. Sometimes you can't explain these things. Just a gut feeling. I know you didn't like her. I thought you'd be relieved to hear that we broke up.

JANE

That's not the case. Not at all.

(GLINDA puts coffee and pastries down on the table)

MICHAEL

Looks great. Thanks.

GLINDA

You're very welcome. I slaved away all night in the kitchen baking.

MICHAEL

Oh, c'mon.

GLINDA

Oh, you're right. I'm no Pillsbury doughboy. Let me know if you need anything else.

MICHAEL

Should we /

GLINDA

Don't say it.

MICHAEL

Tap our heels?

GLINDA

He said it. Just for that, he gets the check.

(she puts down bill on table and exits)

JANE

Hmmm.

MICHAEL

What?

JANE

Glinda Armstrong. ... God Almighty. It could work.

MICHAEL

How do you know her last name?

JANE

Her brother, Henry, wanted to set me up with her.

MICHAEL

What?

JANE

Long story.

MICHAEL

What are you trying to tell me?

JANE

Nothing. / Forget it.

MICHAEL

No, c'mon. Tell me. Jane / tell me.

JANE

Alright, alright. I'm trying to tell you that my love life is so bad these days that I'm getting fixed up with transsexual waitpersons.

MICHAEL

She's a he?

JANE

Yes. She's a he. Or was. Or will be. I don't know. When we met, she was still Glenn, the good warlock of the North. He was a day trader, if you can believe it. He went bust.

MICHAEL

Boy did he ever. He's very attractive. I mean she.

JANE

I agree. I should have such legs.

MICHAEL

God. That's amazing. But her brother wanted to fix you up? What was he thinking?

JANE

He didn't know.

MICHAEL

He didn't know?

JANE

No. Apparently they have a strict don't ask, don't tell policy.

(short pause)

MICHAEL

So, things aren't going too well for you? Socially?

JANE

No, Michael, they're not.

MICHAEL

Is that why you want to become a man?

JANE

What?

MICHAEL

Nancy told me.

JANE

She did?

MICHAEL

Look, if you really want to, it's ok with us.

JANE

No. Of course not. She knew I was kidding. I'm gonna kill her.

MICHAEL

Relax. She was worried about you. She was just trying to help.

JANE

Yeah, well so was Henry.

MICHAEL

Hey, what about Peter? Peter Goodman? You asked about him a few weeks ago. He's a nice guy. Why aren't you interested in him?

JANE

I was. He wasn't interested in me.

MICHAEL

Not interested in you? Why not? What's his problem?

JANE

He said sometimes you can't explain these things. Just a gut feeling.

(short pause)

MICHAEL

Oh Jane, it's just that you're so /

JANE

Don't say it. Don't say that word. I'll vomit. Right here.

MICHAEL

But it's /

JANE

Such a fucking cliché. Special. Applicable to half the women marching down the streets of Manhattan. All those big brains you think you recognize from your physics honors class or your eating club at Princeton or whatever. You call them special Michael, but it's not like you'd ever want to fuck them.

MICHAEL

Jane!

JANE

What? What? It's true, isn't it? It's not like you'd sleep with me if I weren't your sister. Right? Right?

(GLINDA enters with a coffee pot)

JANE

Would you sleep with me? If I weren't your sister, would you want to have sex with me?

(GLINDA turns around and exits)

MICHAEL

Jesus Christ, Jane.

JANE

Answer the question.

MICHAEL

No. For God's sake, you're my sister. That's disgusting.

JANE

It's hypothetical, not literal. Answer it.

MICHAEL

No. It's sick. How you could you ask me that?

JANE

Because I can't win, Michael. Because the Peter Goodman's of this world seem to find me totally undesirable ... sexually ... romantically ... whatever. But I'm a great friend. I'm their bosom buddy. I'm their special sister.

MICHAEL

So what does that have to do with me?

JANE

Because all your girlfriends ... they're never like me. Or even like Nancy. So, on the surface it seems like you've pretty much ruled out the idea that anyone like your sisters could be your girlfriend which I could accept, if you could actually commit to one of them. But you can't. You can't. Which always gives me hope that one day, you'll want someone like me. One day, the Michael Gerson's of this world will want someone like me. Cause that's who I want. That's who I ... that's who I deserve. ... So I need to know. I need to know once and for all whether I should have hope. Whether you would ever want, and I mean really want, someone like me.

MICHAEL

Oh, Jane, I can't ... I can't.

JANE

You can't what?

MICHAEL

I CAN'T ANSWER THAT. AND YOU CAN'T MAKE ME!

(pause)

JANE

(gently)

Let me rephrase the question.

(MICHAEL winces and groans)

JANE (Cont'd)

Can you imagine a scenario in which you fall in love with a woman who is ... nice and pretty.

MICHAEL

Of course I / could.

JANE

She is not only nice and pretty, she is also your intellectual equal. She is one of those women who you might call "special." She is one of those women who you might not call "Pattycake." Is such a scenario possible? Could Michael Alexander Gerson fall in love with such a woman?

(short pause)

MICHAEL

If I answer that question, tie's broken. I get the win. And you can't ask me anything else. Those are the rules.

JANE

Fine, fine. Could you? Could you fall in love with such a woman?

(pause)

MICHAEL

I did.

JANE

What?