

EPISODE 2: GENRE

JANIELLE: Hi, y'all. I have a question for you. Right here at the top of the episode. An icebreaker, if you will. It's a question that never really occurred to me until my dad died, and I started working on this project and thinking about my life all the time through the lens of narrative. But if you had to give a genre to the story of your life so far, what would your genre be?

MONTAGE: Dark Comedy --- Musical --- Romantic Comedy --- Yeah I guess, romantic comedy? Like a series of unfortunate events, but some great twists and turns. --- Let's call it a self discovery, journey of self discovery movie. --- There was a string of, like, Adam Sandler dramadies that came out in the 90s --- Adventurous gay --- My impulse was documentary, but then it's just like, well duh. (*Laughs*) ---

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JANIELLE: One of the weirdest parts of finding out that the dad I didn't know, but always planned on reconciling with, died suddenly, and then going to his funerals and folks being surprised I existed, is that it didn't feel like I was a daughter mourning the loss of her father. It felt like I was a character who was ripped out of her page and thrown into a completely different book, with a totally different genre. Like, I was this character who was in an indie-rom-com, let's say. Like, our plucky female protagonist who's like making art and figuring out her place in this world in her 20s, and she's got this mom, and maybe they're like a little co-dependent, but like it's cute. They're the Gilmore Girls, whatever. And then I'm thrown into this world where I'm now the... surprise bastard daughter in a soap opera? And the details are so garrish, and on the nose? Like there's nothing subtle about it anymore. Everything is heightened and awful. My dad dies on my birthday? That's the character I am? That's the story this is? I walk into a funeral, and everyone says, "How come we didn't know about you?" and, like, whispers? Like... what is this new world? What are these new rules? What am I supposed to do here? Anyways, that's what we're gonna figure out. Welcome back to

Untitled Dad Project, Chapter 2: Genre.

[INTRO MUSIC]

[AD BREAK]

JANIELLE: First of all, thank you for coming back. It means the world to me. Second of all, I should reiterate the thesis of this difficult-to-describe-in-a-nutshell-you-just-kind-of-have-to-listen-to-it podcast: Untitled Dad Project is my meta-narrative quest to figure out how to tell my own story, decide what to do with my Dad Character, and hopefully find some kind of closure, even if it's just narrative closure. I'm Janielle, the writer, and also the main character (who we call Jan Character sometimes, when I need to kinda like, disassociate). *(laughs)*

CARSON: *(laughter)* And I'm Carson, and I'm the director.

JANIELLE: Each episode, we look through a different narrative lens. Last week was "Inciting Incident," this week is "Genre," with the hopes that by the end of this, I'll have figured out how to tell my own story.

CARSON: And hopefully, by the end of this, we will find a more concise way to describe this podcast.

JANIELLE: Yeah! On the last episode, we'll finally come up with, like, the elevator pitch.

CARSON: The one tag-line.

JANIELLE; Yeah, as opposed to, "Okay well... three years ago... um..."

CARSON: Janielle, you've been talking about genre for a while now. This is actually a clip of you about two and a half years ago telling me about it.

JANIELLE: Ok, so lights up on my genre. Um, my birthday. My 25th birthday. I am having a Mad Men inspired cocktail party. There was probably at least 60-70 people there. That was a big party. Um, and it's like a fancy cocktail party. And my friend, Jeremy's bartending, so we actually have fancy, fancy cocktails, like, you know like chartreuse, etc., (*laughs*) um, kind of cocktails. And I'm wearing this grey vintage dress that I love, and I'm you know, dating someone who's, like, wonderful and looks great in a suit. And so I was turning 25, so everyone around the room says, they-they collectively come up with 25 things they love about me. And um, I couldn't be more surrounded by like wonderful humans on my birthday. And meanwhile, my dad is dying alone in his apartment... Or rather he was declared dead on my birthday, so that's when a bunch of my dad's friends are getting - convincing the super to break down his door in which, when they discover, um, that he's dead in his apartment alone. Like that's what's happening side by side.

JANIELLE: Yeah, that to me is exactly the split screen that opens up. Like that's the moment when it happens, right?

CARSON: I actually want to take you to a different moment in this past interview, where you're talking about the macaroons in the bathtub.

JANIELLE: Oh, right right right.

JANIELLE: The next morning, uh a couple-a couple days. I took my bereavement days, so I just didn't go into work. Everyone was texting me, I didn't respond, but I appreciated it. And then I... So I ran a bubble bath, then I went downstairs, and I had all these leftover macaroons from my birthday, because I love macaroons, and they got them for

me, and um, they were fancy ones, too, and I had been like saving them for a special occasion, and then my dad died. And so I was like, "Okay, I'll enjoy them now." And so I get the macaroons, and I get - there's a bottle of red wine leftover from my party that someone brought as a birthday present. So I get in the tub, and I drink the wine, and I bite into the macaroons, macaroons and they crumble everywhere, because you can't keep macaroons for more than a couple of days, turns out. You have to like freeze them or something. So they just crumble everywhere. I had like wanted these to be really special, and they just... What a waste. It was a nice little metaphor for the dad stuff right? I wanted this to be something special. I thought maybe if I saved it, I'd wait, and I'd save it, and my email would be really special. What a waste. Just crumbled.

CARSON: That is the moment to me, the "oh shit" moment, the big visual representation of you moving from indie-rom-com genre suddenly to soap opera world.

JANIELLE: Yeah, it's the cinematic version of "there's no going back," like visually, there's crumbs everywhere, and you never get to return.

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: Yeah, you're right. From here on out, from macaroon crumbs on out, it's a funeral where people are standing on a dock, and wanting to have a nice time, and to say goodbye to their friend, and I enter, and I disrupt everything.

CARSON: Yes, there's big dramatic head turns and whispering happening behind your back.

JANIELLE: Like that's a soap opera, right? It is, and... And I'm a side character in it. I'm like a plot device. I'm just this thing that comes in and fucks everything up. So if I've suddenly arrived in the soap opera world, I want to figure out how I can move from

being a soap opera side-little-plot-twist that's fucking everything up to a protagonist in this new genre I find myself in.

CARSON: So to make all that happen, we sat down with Taylor Anne Ramsey.

TAYLOR ANNE: I'm Taylor Anne Ramsey, and I am so happy to contribute to this project. So my area of expertise is performing and having a perspective on the soap opera world.

JANIELLE: Taylor Anne's relationship to the soap opera world, started when she was a teenager.

TAYLOR ANNE: Well I was kinda thrust into it when, um, I was 17, it was my very first film and tv audition.

JANIELLE: First audition ever, she books Passions (which was on NBC, right after Days of Our Lives, for those of us who had to ask). And Taylor wasn't, like, a fan.

TAYLOR ANNE: You know, Parker Posey was my hero, and I listened to Porteous Head.

JANIELLE: Quirky girls!

TAYLOR ANNE: And, like, smoke Djarum cigarettes, right? So I was like a soap opera, that's kind of embarrassing, right?

JANIELLE: But it was her chance to ditch her high school, and move to California, and make money. And even within the soap opera universe, Passions was a *lot*.

TAYLOR ANNE: There was witchcraft, demons, a doll that came to life, an orangutan that was a nurse...

JANIELLE: She played Kay Bennett, who had one, single-minded purpose.

TAYLOR: Make Miguel fall in love with me, right?

JANIELLE: Miguel.

TAYLOR ANNE: Miguel. Miguel Lopez Fitzgerald. (*Laughs*)

JANIELLE: Miguel Lopez Fitzgerald...

JANIELLE: But Miguel Lopez Fitzgerald was in love with her cousin.

TAYLOR: Right, and my cousin was the perfect goody two-shoes, right? But she also happened to be like an angel, or something. She had some, like, supernatural powers.

JANIELLE: Oh, literally.

TAYLOR ANNE: Right.

JANIELLE: She was literally an angel.

TAYLOR ANNE: She was literally an angel. So my character became a witch, naturally.

JANIELLE: Great, as you do.

TAYLOR ANNE: As you do.

JANIELLE: Like, I am encouraged, right off the bat, by how wide this genre opens up my options, like, as a character in a story. And just like I did with you all listening, I gave Taylor Anne all the details of my story so far.

JANIELLE: The last I heard from him was, I guess, around 13-14...

JANIELLE: With Taylor Anne I hone in on the six months before my dad dies, starting out when he finally showed up at a court hearing about paying back child-support. And he sees my mom there, for the first time since I was in middle school, and we got lunch that one time, and I gave him those Farside Comics. And while they're waiting uh outside the court my dad apparently mentions the college I went to, and how I studied abroad at Oxford, and rattles off some details that he knows about me. And my mom asks, like "How do you know that, are you her Facebook friend?" and he replies, "No, I Google her." (Which kind of reveals a level at which my mom doesn't quite, um, get where I'm coming from with all this - like being Facebook friends with somebody is a level of like chill, casual acquaintance-ship that I do not have with this man. And she's really shocked when she calls me later that night to tell me how it went in court, and mentions, "Oh, did I tell you that Rick Googles you", and I then immediately burst into, like, child-like sobs. She was really surprised, but like, as far as I knew, this was the first indication that this man was even interested in the fact that I existed. To google passively. Anyhoo, um back at the court, when my dad says, "No I google her," my mom replies with:

JANIELLE: My mom was like, "Well instead of Googling her, you should reach out to her." Which is a pretty good line.

TAYLOR ANNE: Yes. Absolutely.

JANIELLE: I'm explaining all of this to you all because when I was talking to Taylor Anne, I was, like, pretty manic. But I go on to explain to her how my mom kept pressing me to reach out to him, she has these premonitions that he doesn't have much time. She would say, "You know it's Father's Day, why don't you call your dad?" And you know, I sobbed when I found out he Googled me, I obviously am not ready for just like a chill phone call, "Happy Father's Day!" So I just keep drafting. And I'm not ready to reach out to him. And she keeps having premonitions, but she always has premonitions, so I ignore them. But I keep drafting in my mind, something to say. Something of forgiveness, and you know the rest: he dies, I'm discovered, I'm cc'd on funeral arrangements, the whole enchilada.

JANIELLE: ...all of a sudden I'm thrust in a soap opera where I'm the bastard, surprise, bastard daughter of 2015. And I'm getting all these Facebook messages from people, like, "Your father meant so much to me, I had no idea he had a daughter. I'd love to get coffee," and I'm like, "What do I do with this?"

TAYLOR ANNE: Wow, wow, wow.

JANIELLE: And going to his funeral, and everyone kind of, like, knowing who I was, but not knowing what to say to me. So their first line was, "How come we didn't know about you?"

TAYLOR ANNE: This is very dramatic. You're right, extremely dramatic. Yes.

JANIELLE: Okay!

TAYLOR ANNE: And it sounds like maybe it happened, you know, over the course of, like, many, many, many days, which also happens in soap opera world. Like, it just

drags on, and it's like, everyone's bursting through the door with more dramatic information.

JANIELLE: Carson, I sound so like... thrilled.

CARSON: You're very excited to hear that you are correct in assuming that you've been dropped into a soap opera.

JANIELLE: Yeah, I sound so delighted talking to Taylor Anne about this. I guess, like, when I'm looking at it through the lens of soap opera ... Like this was the first convo that I had where all these awful hairy, dramatic, on-the-nose components of my trauma are fantastic. Like I'm killing it. Like, I'm-I'm in a soap opera, but like I'm - it's a good one! That like, people will find awe and, sort of, delight in.

TAYLOR ANNE: What's interesting about it, too, is the timing, right? So it sounds like when you finally came to a place where you got his email address, and you were ready to make contact, like BOOM. Wow. There's no more opportunity for that. And so how do you deal with that fallout? And what does that look like? Um...

JANIELLE: And that lines up kind of, with the dramatic arc of a soap opera?

TAYLOR ANNE: I definitely think it does, right, cause it's-it's very rare that there's any resolution, you know, whatsoever. It's-it's mostly uh confrontation, or surprise, or um, you know... to keep the drama going, right? So the actual sitting across from the table, or having the conversation, or you know, working through ... processing something doesn't happen.

JANIELLE: Right.

JANIELLE: That's kind of a bummer of the soap opera genre, because the whole point of this is finding a resolution.

CARSON: Yeah, we don't want the drama to keep going. We want to get you out of the soap opera genre, eventually.

JANIELLE: Right, so we need to—we need to excel at the soap opera genre, so then hopefully I can graduate from it.

CARSON: Yes.

TAYLOR ANNE: I imagine too, and you can tell me more about this, but like, what must that have been like for you to show up at that funeral?

JANIELLE: And I think of the perfect scene to tell Taylor Anne. And I'm going to narrate it for you again, because past Jan was really, like, excited, and frenetic, and kind of hard to follow. Um, so I tell her about how most of my early interactions at the funeral were with my Dad Character's friends asking me, "How come we didn't know about you?!" which left me with this choice, uh to respond with option one, which is: say something really nice that would make them feel better about their friend who just died. Something like, "You know things just y'know happened, people grow apart you know?" Or option two: um, tell them the truth and say, "Well my dad abandoned me, and didn't tell you about it, so you should probably think about what kind of man that makes him." Which is like, like true, and would vindicate me and my pain, but is sort of a hard way to navigate your way through a funeral. Or the third option, which I chose, which was to make a bunch of pleasant mouth sounds. "Well I don't know, I wish I knew too..." Uh. But the question itself felt violent. It felt like either destroy their narrative, or destroy my own existence and my own pain. But then, the scene I wanted to talk about with Taylor Anne. In the middle of this funeral, a woman who was my dad's friend pulls me aside,

and had a completely different vibe. She had these, like, a sadness in her eyes, and she was really gentle but also kind of desperate? Like she'd clearly been waiting to talk to me all afternoon? Um, and she said, "You know, like, I lost my father, or my father left us when I was really young." And she was like, "And I got to reconcile with him as an adult! Like in my late 20s." And she was like, "And I just really wish you could have had that." And I was like, "Uh ... Yeah, me too."

TAYLOR ANNE: Right.

JANIELLE: And she was really lovely, like, not at all trying to be hurtful.

TAYLOR ANNE: Trying to relate, maybe?

JANIELLE: I don't think she could help but relate. I think she was, like, projecting on to me, and she was like, "You know, your dad... When my father got sick, and I didn't have the money to go fly, he found two buddy passes and showed up at our door and said like, 'I want you and your husband to be able to go see your father before he dies.'" And, uh, she was like, "I just want you to know that that's the kind of man he was." And I was like, "That's great. Like how wonderful."

TAYLOR ANNE: Right. And what would it be like for me to have that opportunity to know him, right?

JANIELLE: Yeah! And then, then she segues into being like, wanting to know, like, "So what is like, why was it, he not it your-?" Obviously just wanting to know, like an answer to make her feel better. I can tell it was really eating her alive.

JANIELLE: And I was like, well you know the last I heard from him was 10 years ago. And she goes, "Oh! Oh! That's right around the time when he was diagnosed with throat

cancer.” Because he had cancer at some point. And she was like, “Well that’s just like him. Okay. that make sense.”

TAYLOR ANNE: Everyone’s trying to make sense of this.

JANIELLE: Absolutely.

TAYLOR ANNE: Everyone’s trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together--

JANIELLE: Absolutely.

TAYLOR ANNE: --from their own frame of reference and their own information, and it’s like, it’s just incredible to me that everybody’s trying to make sense of this.

JANIELLE: Yeah, absolutely! And, and, cause she was like, “Oh, that makes perfect sense, because he wouldn’t have wanted to burden you while he was going through this illness.”

TAYLOR ANNE: Oh ok. So that fits her narrative.

JANIELLE: And so this is my option right? This is the crossroads. I have the chance to give her that.

TAYLOR ANNE: Sure.

JANIELLE: That must have been it. Like give her that gift.

TAYLOR ANNE: Right.

JANIELLE: And I can't, everything in my body cannot relinquish that as the narrative. I cannot let her off the hook. Um, and so I said, like "Well I think that would line up if he was, you know, paying child support while he wasn't in my life."

TAYLOR ANNE: Good for you. Why make it more palatable for her? You know? It's not your responsibility, and I think it's really admirable that you were authentic in that moment.

JANIELLE: I don't... agree. Like, I still don't. I agree, she's right, it's not my job to make my dad's choices more palatable for his friends. Um, but that's not how I felt. You know, like, I wasn't rude to that woman, at all. Uh - I really wasn't - but I, but I really wanted a version, or a story that could help her hold onto this vision of her friend as like a sweet man, and not have to complicate it with the fact that he might have been a really bad father. She seemed really nice, and in a lot of pain, and my dad clearly meant a lot to her. But in order to give her a version of the story, to say "Yeah, that must have been it, you know? He was so selfless that he just didn't want to burden me." That would be to ignore my lived experience. Like, to give her that gift would mean to exist a little less. Like, something to consider, if you are somebody who has ever had your understanding of your world, or like the people in your life, disrupted or upended by some side character -- on behalf of the side character: We don't want to ruin things for you. We wish this guy was the way you think he is, too. Like on behalf of the other woman you found out about via text message on your husband's phone, who completely disrupted your marriage. Or...like the nameless alien who crash-landed on your planet, disrupting your home and your corn field. Like, the woman who steps forward with like an awful story about that celebrity whose work you admire. Or the surprise bastard child who shows up at your friend's funeral? Like, on behalf of all of us side characters who ruin your story and your narrative, I offer this: We don't want to screw up your story either. We know you liked things better before we showed up. Like we had rich and full lives where we were the protagonists, you know? Like, a romance where we weren't the

other woman, like, we didn't know he was married maybe? Or a home planet, a life that we loved, you know? We didn't want to ruin things either. I wish these people were who you thought they were. I wish your story could be what you want it to be. I wish it was less complicated for you.

[MUSIC]

JANIELLE: Anyways, back to the scene at hand, um, that I'm telling Taylor Anne about. So this very sad woman asks to meet my mom, and then another one of my dad's friends joins us, so there's the four of us standing there. And this, you know, new friend goes:

JANIELLE: "Well isn't that just like Rick if he couldn't do something perfect he just wouldn't do it at all. So if he couldn't be like an all-in dad to you, he probably was just whatever whatever, and they're just like: Hahaha." And my mom says something to the effect of like, "Oh well yeah, you know, you know, I saw him, and he had said that you know that Janielle, blah blah blah, and cause, cause they're Facebook friends." Because she still doesn't remember that Google is not Facebook. She goes, "They're Facebook friends!" And this other, this sweet woman, goes like "Oh! Oh, so he was your-your friend on Facebook? He could follow your life?" Whatever, just like desperate for some--

TAYLOR ANNE: Right.

JANIELLE: She goes, "Oh, so he was your Facebook friend?" and I go, and I snapped. That was the moment. I had like kept it? And I snapped, and I go, "No! I was not his Facebook friend! He googled me from afar! It's different!"

TAYLOR ANNE: Absolutely!

JANIELLE: And then I started sobbing, and stormed off. So this is like a soap opera?

TAYLOR ANNE: Absolutely!

JANIELLE: But my dad's funeral was on a dock at White Rock Lake, so there are no bathrooms there.

JANIELLE: So to storm off to the bathrooms, the bathrooms are portapotties that are, like, a half a mile up this narrow ramp. So I storm off weeping, and the only place to go is to then keep storming half a mile up this narrow dock, like, through the water. And so I can feel like everyone has turned and looked, and is, like, "Well that's the daughter..." And I'm, and then like 10 minutes go by, and my mom comes in, and is like, "Oh, Honey." And was like, "Why did you -- did you stay and talk to them? Like, why didn't you come after me?" And she was like, "I did, but I walk so much slower than you." So then, if you zoom out, the scene is actually me trucking it down half a mile of this narrow thing, and this woman like behind me kind of like walking slowly, toddling behind me, "Oh that's the, that's the mother." You know?

TAYLOR ANNE: Also, you know you can see this very dramatic moment, and there's probably, it's probably like a beautiful day with like sailboats on the lake.

JANIELLE: Gorgeous. Gorgeous.

TAYLOR ANNE: Right? People holding hands walking around.

JANIELLE: There's a breeze. Everyone's in sailing wear.

TAYLOR ANNE: Totally. Totally.

JANIELLE: On this beautiful, like, lake.

TAYLOR ANNE: Unreal.

JANIELLE: So yeah, so that's the scene. So is that rife for any soap opera?

TAYLOR ANNE: The whole thing is! From-from start to finish. Absolutely!

CARSON: Alright, before we get deeper into the soap opera world and activate this for you, Janielle - we need to take a break.

[AD BREAK]

JANIELLE: Alright, so if I'm going to be stuck here in a soap opera, I want to take matters into my own hands, and (instead of being a, like, side character, quietly traumatized in everyone else's story) be a protagonist in a soap opera of my own making, and see what that can teach me about my story.

TAYLOR ANNE: I mean, all I can tell you as an actor is that you say the same people's names over and over and over again.

JANIELLE: You do?

TAYLOR ANNE: Unlike in real life. Right, right?

JANIELLE: Okay, over and over again.

TAYLOR ANNE: Also, I would say the people that come up to confront you in the funeral, I would really, um, I would up the ante in terms of like their investment in confronting you.

JANIELLE: Oh, okay.

TAYLOR ANNE: So whatever that is about, you could even, you know, add some sort of element behind it of, like, what they need from that moment from you.

JANIELLE: So in the soap opera world, everyone has a very clear target.

TAYLOR ANNE: Very clear, and they never let you forget it, right? Whether they're having, you-you could add a monologue! Like, there's a thing that happens in the soap opera world, which is an inner monologue, but you're talking out loud to yourself, and that's very normal.

JANIELLE: Ooooo. Could you give me an example? Like, so if you'd be alone in a room.

TAYLOR ANNE: So maybe you're alone at your house, and you're thinking of going to the funeral, and you're thinking of the people that you're going to see, or you're thinking of your mother. Whatever the conflict may be. And you say, you know, "If that so-and-so shows up, I'll be sure to tell her, you know, to read her the riot act, and tell her that she has no right to speak to me about my experience with my father."

JANIELLE: Okay, great.

TAYLOR ANNE: Or something, something something, but you know. You can embellish it.

JANIELLE: Right

TAYLOR ANNE: But yeah, there's like a moment where you're like sitting at your desk alone. Just talking out loud to yourself.

JANIELLE: What I remember of my limited exposure to soap operas is, like, there tend to be, like, violent gestures that button things?

TAYLOR ANNE: Mhmm.

JANIELLE: Like the throwing of the glass. Or like a-a slamming of a door.

TAYLOR ANNE: Absolutely.

JANIELLE: I guess I don't remember that many slammings of doors.

TAYLOR ANNE: Lots of throwing of glasses, though.

JANIELLE: Lots of throwing of glasses. Are there other sort of gestures that are-are-are signature that I should think about?

TAYLOR ANNE: Yeah I mean, you could even add some elements, some supernatural elements to your story, why not? Um...

JANIELLE: I had a line come to me that I thought could be interesting. As like an end to the confrontation with the dad moment, and this is indicative of the larger problem which is that I don't know what the father would say. I don't have information there.

TAYLOR ANNE: Right.

JANIELLE: So I guess names are a lot.

TAYLOR ANNE: Yes.

JANIELLE: So I would say "Rick, Dad, why didn't you tell anyone about me? Were you ashamed of me?" Maybe the glass is there?

TAYLOR ANNE: Yeah.

JANIELLE: And then he would say "No. I- I was ashamed of... myself.

TAYLOR ANNE: Oh, I think that's brilliant.

JANIELLE: That sounds good?

TAYLOR ANNE: That sounds -

JANIELLE: Ok great!

TAYLOR ANNE: Spot on!

JANIELLE: I don't know what the lines would be leading up to that. And so, should the water be before the throw -- like the toss? And then the like, the question?

TAYLOR ANNE: Yes, the toss first. And I love the, and I know this is crazy, but I love the Rick/Dad.

JANIELLE: You don't even know, Taylor Anne.

TAYLOR ANNE: I mean, I think you should keep that, in every line. Rick. Dad.

JANIELLE: Okay, I will! Okay, so that's actually like a, become a big narrative theme throughout this, was that the last birthday card he sent me he signed Dad/Rick.

TAYLOR ANNE: Wow.

JANIELLE: I know. Doesn't that tell you everything you need to know, but also not tell you anything that you need to know?

TAYLOR ANNE: Yes, yes.

JANIELLE: It does both at the same time.

TAYLOR ANNE: It does and that's what - you gotta keep that.

JANIELLE: If it's supernatural, could I be monologuing by like his tomb-- his graveside? And he can hear it?

TAYLOR ANNE: Perfect! I love it, yes!

JANIELLE: But he can hear it, because in the supernatural he's a ghost or something.

TAYLOR ANNE: Yes, and just his voice could come on from the other side.

JANIELLE: Ok ok ok ok ok. Ok. Write it by the...

TAYLOR ANNE: This is great.

JANIELLE: Write it by the... um. Graveside. Um. Jan monologues. Dad/Rick voice ghost. Ok.

TAYLOR ANNE: I love that one.

JANIELLE: That could be really powerful.

TAYLOR ANNE: Very.

JANIELLE: Last question I asked Taylor Anne is: what is there to admire about the soap opera world? Like as a genre is there anything to learn or-or glean from it, that I should keep in mind?

TAYLOR ANNE: Oh, you mean for real life?

JANIELLE: Just like any, anything that you think is worthy or admirable in the way people -

TAYLOR ANNE: In the way people communicate in the soap opera world?

JANIELLE: Yeah, or the way it's handled.

TAYLOR ANNE: No, I think it's dumb, and it makes no sense.

JANIELLE: It makes no sense. Okay, great.

JANIELLE: I tried again. This is my new genre, there has to be something to celebrate about it.

JANIELLE: Or really if there's anything that you think is interesting or good.

TAYLOR ANNE: Hmm. Everyone in the soap opera world is extremely determined, right? So maybe that's an asset.

JANIELLE: Ok. Ok. Determination. Totally.

TAYLOR ANNE: That tenacity. Like nothing's gonna stop me from getting what I want. Don't let anything keep you from your goals?

JANIELLE: Sure.

TAYLOR ANNE: And I think, in looking at it for your specific purposes, say whatever you want to say. Like give yourself the freedom to say it all and leave, you know, no stone unturned, cause I think that's a hallmark of the soap opera world, too, is like, nothing is off limits or out of bounds. And... and nothing is too ridiculous either.

JANIELLE: Okay. Okay. I've never written for my - I've never spoken like that, actually, I don't think, very often in my life. Um, nor have I written like that. So that's like an interesting exercise.

TAYLOR ANNE: Yeah.

JANIELLE: Well thank you so much for this Taylor Anne this has, like -

TAYLOR ANNE: Thank you.

JANIELLE: Been a delight.

TAYLOR ANNE: Same. I'm so so happy to be a part of it.

JANIELLE: Such a joy to see you.

TAYLOR ANNE: You too.

CARSON: Here is us debriefing right after that conversation with Taylor Anne, which is almost exactly a year ago:

JANIELLE: I'm-I'm feeling this like other thing now after telling the story to Taylor Anne, um, where I kind of want to have the scene at the funeral, where I confront like all these random people. But I don't think that's actually the task at hand, because it is really easy for me to be angry at these random friends of his? And it is really hard for me to be angry at him.

CARSON: The thing I would like this activity to do is force you to have some of that about your dad. Have some of that same--

JANIELLE: I know!

CARSON: Ready to say all of those things.

JANIELLE: I think what I have to rely on here, honestly is, um, my instinctual desire for good dialogue. To let that take the wheel.

CARSON: Yes.

JANIELLE: And let my obsessive, um, concern over whether or not he loved me, or he cared, or was ashamed of me, or was an awful person, like my need to know exactly what he actually was and what his motives really were, um, has to take a back seat here.

CARSON: Write a good scene where you say all the things that you want to say unapologetically, but it's just a good scene.

JANIELLE: Yeah. I can do that.

CARSON: It's not easy though, I'm sorry.

JANIELLE: Well, throwing a glass will be fun. I'll look forward to that moment.

CARSON: Are you ready to write your scene?

JANIELLE: Yeah. Now a year later. *(laughter)* We talked to Taylor Anne and debriefed on this a year ago, and now we're putting all this audio together, and making it into the podcast, and into the story, and figuring it out, and I have gotta write the damn soap opera scene in which I confront my father.

CARSON: But I think you did a pretty good job at procrastinating, because while you weren't writing that scene, you were casting a dad.

JANIELLE: Okay, will you show me the website?

CARSON: Uh, yes I will.

JANIELLE: He looks like, um--

CARSON: Just the daddy-est of dads. It says uh, he's a native Texan, which means, you know.

JANIELLE: Nothing.

CARSON: Nothing.

JAN: Yogi Bear impression, he's a puppeteer. I think I like Bob's look. He could definitely be my dad. This Bob is um, a lot more soap opera-y. But he looks a lot less like he'd be my dad.

CARSON: This Bob has the command more than the other Bob we were looking at.

JANIELLE: What's the, who's the other Bob?

CARSON: The other Bob is this Bob.

JANIELLE: It's just like a chorus of Bobs. Which Bob do you want? I like this Bob, though. This is Jim.

CARSON: Jim. Jim could do it.

JANIELLE: Jim is kind of scary, and I think I should be a little scared of him.

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: He's, he's not scary.

CARSON: No.

JANIELLE: He's just intense. Like all his photos are really intense.

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: He has a baritone singing voice, he snow skis! Okay, great, so we have our plan. We have--

CARSON: We have our plan. Great.

JANIELLE: Awesome, let's see who we end up with. Go team.

CARSON: Go team.

CARSON: So while I cast a dad, and Jan writes a scene, you listen to these ads, and when we come back, we'll make a soap opera.

[AD BREAK]

JANIELLE: Okay, I'm recording now. Hi, guys! Hi!... I don't know why no one knew about me. It's not like I never... It's like I never. It's like I ne-. Never. This is, this is not well written at the top. I don't know why no one knows. I don't know why no one knew

about me. It's like I never even existed to them. I want to let him know how much that hurts, to not exist in this world. His world. To not be acknowledged. But I bet I knew, know where to find him now. I throw my drink in his face. Oo! Why didn't you tell anyone about me? And I have to ask these questions. These are questions. Dad. Rick. Why didn't you tell anyone about me? I was ashamed of--myself.

CARSON: Big, deep breath. You can think about breathing from your toes...

[MUSIC]

CARSON: Exterior. Sunny, windy day. A dock on a lake. Sounds of women laughing, not seen. Enter Jan, running from the women's laughter, she stops, looks out at the lake, monologues to herself.

JANIELLE: I don't know why no one knew about me. It's like I never even existed to them. I don't think I exist to them now, not really. I don't know how to answer their question, "How come we didn't know about you?" Only he knows that answer, and I never got to ask him. He died before I could get an answer to that question. I want to know why he ignored me and didn't tell anyone about me. I want to let him know how much that hurts to not exist in his world. To not be acknowledged. To be a surprise to everyone at his funeral. I never knew my father then, but I bet I know where to find him now.

CARSON: Cut to interior, clubhouse on the dock by the lake.

JANIELLE: Dad! Rick. There you are.

DAD/RICK: Here I am. I didn't know if you'd go to my funeral. It was nice of you to pay your respects, though a bit awkward for me. Grab a drink.

CARSON: Jan grabs a drink on the table.

JANIELLE: I didn't come to pay my respects. I came to get answers. About what kind of man you are. About what I meant to you. About why you didn't acknowledge me. You aren't even acknowledging me now! Look at me!

CARSON: He doesn't turn.

JANIELLE: Look at me.

CARSON: He doesn't turn.

JANIELLE: Look at me!

CARSON: Dad/Rick finally turns to face Jan. Jan throws her drink in his face.

JANIELLE: How dare you believe you didn't owe me anything!

DAD/RICK: What did I owe you?

JANIELLE: Love! Care. But most of all, answers. How dare you die before giving me answers.

DAD/RICK: Well, I'm here now. What do you want to know?

JANIELLE: Dad. Rick. Why didn't you tell anyone about me? Why didn't you reach out to me, besides that birthday card a decade ago? Why did you die before I could say

goodbye? What was I to you? Do you wish I was never born? Were you ashamed of me?

DAD/RICK: I was ashamed of. . . myself.

CARSON: A knock on the door. Jan turns toward the noise. She looks back. Dad/Rick is gone. His grave remains. She crosses to the drink, picks it up, stares meaningfully.

JANIELLE: He's gone.

[MUSIC]

JANIELLE: (Yawn) That was exhausting.

CARSON: Was it?

JANIELLE: Yeah, it was really emotionally draining.

CARSON: Yeah, you had it-- there were a lot of feelings all at once.

JANIELLE: Yeah, that was a lot of feelings. There's like the feeling of like, the baseline feeling that is this project, which is like when I invite people into it, whether I ask them to let me interview them or, um, ask them to be the actor who is my dead dad ghost so I can confront them. There's just this feeling in the room of like, "Is this insane?" and then just pretending like it's normal. And you, you made it, you pretend, you acted like it was a super professional, normal engagement for someone to get from their agent and do that job as an actor.

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: Um, I felt really like, uh...it felt really good, actually, to throw it in his face. But I was surprised, but one of the most meaningful parts was, um, asking the questions at the end. Like, "How dare you die without giving me answers?" and, and uh, "Why didn't you tell anyone about me?" and, uh, "What was I to you?" Like I found myself

getting like, really dropping in and feeling very moved as the character when I asked those questions.

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: You know, It's much easier for me to like to talk around the idea of my dad than it is to, like actually ask those questions cause there's like, inevitably some pretty scary answers at the end of it. And then when he was like, I was ashamed of myself, people have said that to me a lot. And you said that to me that you think he was just ashamed of himself, like--

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: --But it feels so easy and convenient, and I am unwilling to, like, just accept the easy, convenient answers for myself, because I fear that they're crutches. But as he said it, I was like, yeah, that's probably true.

CARSON: Hmm.

JANIELLE: I mean I wrote it, kind of, cause it fits the scene very well. But as he was saying it, I was like, yeah, he probably really was. It's nice to confront someone. But I didn't feel the fear in my belly that I think I would as a child. The power dynamic of somebody having like loved you, and left you, and the way that feels in your belly when you don't have power and you're searching for it is a very particular thing, and I didn't feel the feeling, like, I created a world in the script in which I was a character who didn't have the power and was reaching for it, demanding it, snatching it, splashing for it. But... I didn't feel the feeling in my body, which is I have less power than the other person does.

CARSON: Can you tell me why you think that?

JANIELLE: Cause I don't know, because I don't know what I am to him, whether he loved me or cared about me. Whether he, you know, sent that one birthday card that one time cause he felt guilty, and um, otherwise didn't really, you know? Like, had I actually gotten lunch with him, maybe he would have said something, like, "Well you never reached out to me or your mom," you know? All this stuff I know isn't true, because my mom never kept him from me, and I-- He knew where I was. I didn't know where he was.

CARSON: Can I counter?

JANIELLE: Yeah.

CARSON: Had you met with him for lunch, there is a scenario in which you could have walked in cards close to the chest. He also doesn't know how you feel about him or what he meant to you, or if you were calling him there to confront him or reject him. And in that way you had a lot of power. There was agency and power in you. Yes, you had these questions, but it's funny to me to hear you say that you wrote a scene where you were grasping at power, because from a director's standpoint, you came in with all the power. He had to come to you as a ghost. He had to sit there and stay, and when you said, "look at me," he looked, and you threw the drink.

JANIELLE: Hmm.

CARSON: And you asked your questions, and he conceded, "I was ashamed of myself." And then he couldn't bear to be there anymore, and he left.

JANIELLE: Hmm.

CARSON: And that to me feels like a woman exercising her power.

JANIELLE: Yeah, I guess so. Yeah. Maybe I would have, had I ever confronted my dad felt, felt, uh, felt that power. Maybe some--okay. So, so in the scene how I was saying, like, I guess I felt sort of like I wrote a scene where I'm grasping for power, but I didn't feel very powerless. You're saying "that's probably because you actually did have power."

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: And I was thinking that it's because it wasn't my real dad. But you're saying "No, you had power."

CARSON: Yeah. You've had power the whole time.

JANIELLE: Huh. Yeah. Maybe I did have power. Maybe he was afraid of me or would have been afraid of what I, what I would've said over lunch or... Hm. I guess I hadn't thought of that. I guess I just haven't thought of it that way. I've always had power. I just

don't have any evidence of that. What you're describing. I just don't have any evidence of that. But that's something I'll think about. Have I had power this whole time?

CARSON: And was this the evidence of that? This?

JANIELLE: Maybe. Hmm. It did feel nice to just like yell "look at me." That felt nice. I never get to yell stuff like that, like demand stuff, especially of like, uh, you know, a grown ass white man. It's fun, to demand it.

CARSON: What do you want to take with you moving forward from the feelings you had? Hmm.

JANIELLE: Um, you know, the first time I threw the water, I like grazed his ear and splashed like all the carpeting behind us. And then the second time I threw it, I like had like a parabolic whoosh and it like twisted around past him onto your script and onto you. And then the third time where like I actually hit him on the face, it felt so good. Like I hit the mark, you know, I hit it. That's who I was supposed to hit with this. How dare you believe you didn't owe me anything. I finally hit the right person with that! And it's been like so much easier to hit other people with my pain, you know, his friends for being just so like unaware that I could be having a different experience than this, but you know. I was like angry at my mom in advance of the funerals for like how I thought she was not going to be able to handle herself. She handled herself fine. I'm the one who stormed off into a bathroom. She was-She was great. And I just have very rarely been able to hit the mark. It's his, that's on him. When I finally got that water in sweet Jim's face with that line. It felt like, oh, it feels great. I hit the mark. I hit him right in the nose, you know? I hit him right. Hit the right person, the right target for that demand. And I think that's what I want to take with me. That it actually feels quite good when you can send the right feeling to the right person, you can send the right invoice to the person who actually owed you.

CARSON: Do you feel like you're still in a soap opera here today? Right now?

JANIELLE: Oh, my genre?

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: Maybe for a little while longer. I don't wanna-I don't wanna let go of being a soap opera, a character in a soap opera, because I, I see the merit of speaking plainly and clearly, declaring here's what I actually feel. Let me declare what I mean. I want to keep that with me. If my genre can change soon, and I can still keep that lesson with me in the back pocket, that would be ideal. That would be ideal.

CARSON: I think that's nice.

JANIELLE: Hm. Oh, I'm exhausted.

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: It's exhausting confronting your ghost dad.

[MUSIC]

CARSON: Next time on Untitled Dad Project, Janielle visits with the Reverend who officiated her Dad's funeral, and we reckon with what to do when the script fails us. It's Chapter 3: Script.

YODER: Yeah, sure, I guess I, that's fair to say, I'm an expert in burying your father...

JANIELLE: If there's no room for you in the script, do you exist at all?

JANIELLE: Ew! But now they are blacker than soot. They are not recognized in the streets...

YODER: So I don't read the stage directions? This is gonna be interesting.

JANIELLE: This is the two of us, okay, ready?

CARSON: See you then.

[CREDITS]

JANIELLE: Untitled Dad Project is co-hosted by me, Janielle Kastner, and Carson McCain. If you like this project at all, the best thing you can do to help us is head over to Apple Podcasts, or wherever you listen to podcasts, and leave us some stars, and write a review. It helps so much.

JANIELLE: And we'd really love to hear how "Genre" is relevant in your life, has your genre switched suddenly on you? Has it switched again? Has it switched back? Tell us @untitleddadproject on social media or email us at untitleddadproject@spokemedia.io. We think your story matters, and you might be kinda cool.

JANIELLE: Untitled Dad Project is a Spoke media production, and we're produced by Carson McCain, with associate producer Kelly Kolff, and our "sweet baby intern" Lauren Floyd.

JANIELLE: Special thanks to Taylor Anne Ramsey, talented actress, even more wonderful person to sit across a table from. Miguel Lopez Fitzgerald would have been lucky to have you, but I'm glad your genre has changed.

JANIELLE: And thanks to wonderful actor, Jim Johnson, who played my Ghost Dad. And Collyer Spreen for figuring out how to record our soap opera session.

JANIELLE: This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett, and our head of post production is Will Short.

JANIELLE: The music you heard at the end of today's episode was composed in

response to this chapter by Rat Rios. She also wrote our theme song “Flora vs. Fauna”. Check her out @ratrios on Instagram and Rat Rios on SoundCloud. Our executive producers are Alia Tavakolian and Keith Reynolds.

JANIELLE: Thank you for listening. It means the world.