

EPIISODE 3: SCRIPT

JANIELLE: There's a reason we have a script for most important events. Like for celebrations: Congratulations!

CARSON: Surprise!

JANIELLE: Best wishes to the bride and groom!

CARSON: Happy birthday!

CARSON: I'm so happy for you.

JANIELLE: I'm SO happy for you.

[LAUGHTER]

JANIELLE: For important milestones:

CARSON: Happy Anniversary.

JANIELLE: To 50 Amazing years. To Chelsea and Charles.

CARSON: Happy 40th, you're over the hill now.

JANIELLE: Happy 21st birthday, don't get too drunk tonight.

CARSON: New jobs. Oh, congratulations on your new job.

JANIELLE: Stay in touch!

CARSON: Happy housewarming!

JANIELLE: And losses: Our condolences.

CARSON: I'm so sorry this happened.

JANIELLE: It's with a heavy heart that we....

CARSON: We regret to inform you...

JANIELLE: When I showed up at my dad's funeral, I expected it to be really hard. I - I was dreading it, and I thought, okay, I'll show up, um, I will just disassociate, hover over my body, and I will smile and nod my way through this, because I can smile and nod and perform my way through anything. I'll just say whatever I'm supposed to say. And I didn't realize, until I reached into my toolbox for the arsenal of the random things you're supposed to say while you smile and nod, that I didn't have any. There is no script for being the estranged, surprise daughter who shows up at the funeral, and no one knew you existed. There's no script for that, like, every funeral line no longer works.

CARSON: "Oh I'm so sorry for your loss..."

JANIELLE: Right, right. And to which I say, um, I didn't actually lose him, I didn't ever have him.

CARSON: "This is such a tragedy. He was such a great man."

JANIELLE: Yeah, yes, absolutely... Also, he might have been a deadbeat dad.... Sup, everyone. I kind of threw a wrench in that.

CARSON: "At least he was able to leave behind you as a legacy."

JANIELLE: No. Didn't have a legacy. I don't know him. What happens when the script fails you? What do you do when there are no lines that work? If there's no room for you in the script, do you exist at all? Welcome back to Untitled Dad Project, Chapter 3: Script

[MUSIC]

[AD BREAK]

JANIELLE: In lieu of a script, which I'd never really appreciated until it was gone and I couldn't grab it, everyone led with a "How come we didn't know about you?," which I also didn't know how to answer. The closest feeling I have to describe this moment was: I walked on stage and captured everyone's attention, and I had no lines, no script, nothing. That feeling, that nightmare feeling you have when you walk on stage and you don't know your lines? That, um, kind of times a million. So I revisited the funeral, and tried to write it like a scene in my story. And aside from that, you know, soap opera moment of me storming down the docks that we talked about with Taylor Anne, I don't remember very much, especially not when we went out to pour my dad's ashes. Like, that big moment when you're supposed to say goodbye. I, umm... What I remember is seeing my Aunt Lisa, my dad's sister, holding his ashes to her chest and just weeping like a little girl, like a child. I remember before we took off on the boat from the dock, one of his really good friends, Cindy, kind of hovering on the edge of the dock and then just saying, "Oh, you know what I'm getting in." And then taking off her shoes and jumping in the boat. And I remember thinking, "Oh, she's so much more certain she should be in this boat than I am. She knows she should be here to say goodbye to her friend. I don't know that I should be

here to say goodbye to this man. He gave me an x chromosome and here I am holding his ashes.” But the thing I remember most vividly of all of that was when we got out on the water was the reverend, how he was really concerned with making sure we were downwind. I remember thinking about him as a character in the story and wondering like, God, I guess I'm in one of the most tragic moments of my life, but he's in this little dark comedy where he has to make sure that these ashes don't fly back up in our face when we pour them out. And I remember later he came up to me and he talked to me and he said, “This must be hard for you.” And that meant something to me. So I decided to reach out to him. His name is Reverend Christopher Yoder as a, a character in this funeral scene to see if he remembers things that I don't remember about... what matters. What am I missing in the script as I remember it? What did he see that I didn't? And also just to get a sense of how he feels about the quote script of funerals, as someone who writes them, and delivers them, and officiates them.

YODER: Yeah, so, um I'm Chris Yoder, I'm a priest, uh, so that means I'm an expert in doing all sorts of priestly things. It's a little terrifying to call myself an expert, because I've only been a priest for about three years now. But I, I do all kinds of priestly things. I, I marry people, I bury people, I baptize their babies, uh, and everything in between.

JANIELLE: Yeah. Awesome. Uh, would you feel comfortable saying, like, “And I'm an expert in, um, burying your father?” Or..?

YODER: Yeah, sure. I guess I, that's fair to say, I'm an expert in burying your father, because it's, I was, as you say, the only person who did that. So I guess that makes me uniquely qualified to talk about that.

JANIELLE: I wondered when we brought Reverend Yoder in if I'd have to give a lot of context about my podcast and the goals of this, but he was more than hip to the podcast world. He told me he actually steals story ideas from Radiolab for sermons sometimes.

YODER: I learn a lot listening to those guys.

JANIELLE: Yeah!

YODER: They, they're really good at crafting stories and putting them together in really interesting ways -

JANIELLE: They really are, and it's really, um... Now that we're making a podcast, I'll go back and listen and actually think about the words as if they were a transcript, and I'll be like, oh, this is a series of very simple sentences, like this isn't good writing, but it's really evocative...

YODER: But I actually like - sometimes a series of really simple sentences is exactly what you want for --

JANIELLE: Yeah!

YODER: --Really like punchy, um, writing sometimes, but also especially, like, speaking. I mean, sometimes I find myself, when I'm writing a sermon, anyway, being too much of a writer.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: And not enough of a preacher, and sometimes like, listening to podcasts helps me think more in, like, terms of speaking.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: And helps me get out of my writerly brain, and more into the kind of spoken word mode of things.

JANIELLE: I'm really relieved that Reverend Yoder has context for the podcast world, cause this was just a weird email to send. Like... Like whenever y'all are listening to a podcast, and you hear somebody telling their story, just imagine whatever email some producer had to send to get them into the studio on a microphone. My email was something like, "Hi, Reverend Yoder. You might not remember me, but you officiated my dad's funeral a while back, comma, and I'm on a years long narrative quest to understand my story through the lens of story. Would you mind coming in and reenacting some scenes from the funeral as I remember them? Regards, comma, Jan." It turns out I had nothing to fear, he absolutely remembers me, and remembered that memorial service, because it was the first memorial service he had ever officiated. He was like a baby priest, and this was the first time he was in charge. So I ask him, "Well, what did that funeral scene mean for him as a character?"

YODER: It was maybe the scene where he kind of takes what he's learned and goes off and tries, tries it out on his own. Um, I, I think actually this is a little bit, a little bit different kind of metaphor than narrative, but for me, I think of it a little bit like improvisation, because your, your father's memorial service was, was unique. It was different than funeral services I'd been a part of before that, and afterwards. Um, so it's, it was a bit like, you know, maybe like a jazz musician who's been practicing, and then all of a sudden, he's out there and he's improvising for the first time. It felt a little bit like that for me.

JANIELLE: I ask him if he'd be willing to act out a scene with me from the funeral based on a script I've put together from what I do remember.

YODER: Sure.

JANIELLE: And then you can tell me what stood out to you, what is absolutely not how you remember it, um...

YODER: Sure.

JANIELLE: Okay, great. Awesome. We can just jump in. Um, I'll read the characters, I'll read stage directions, you're reading "Rev Yoder," and the other characters as well--

YODER: So I don't read the stage directions

JANIELLE: I read stage directions. Alright, we can jump in.

YODER: Alright.

JANIELLE: Setting: windy spring day. A boat out on the lake. Scene: downwind. Lights up, heavy wind whips through the boat as the ensemble sits in silence. Rev Yoder sits at helm with boat driver. Jan nods. All of a sudden, the wind stops. The boat rocks. All are silent, except for Reverend Yoder and Boat Driver, who quietly discuss logistics.

JANIELLE: We're gonna coast for a bit, get further out.

YODER: Sounds good. Are we, then we're downwind?

JANIELLE: Will be. I'll get us further out and make sure we're downwind.

YODER: So if I stand here and face this direction, I'll be downwind. I want to make sure--

JANIELLE: Yep.

YODER: You'll let me know if the wind changes...

JANIELLE: Yep. (A moment in silence. Everyone is still.)

YODER: We've come here today to remember, before God, our brother Claude Frederick Tears, the Third. To give thanks for his life, to commend him to God, our merciful redeemer and judge, to commit his body to the water and to comfort one another in our grief.

JANIELLE: The boat rocks suddenly and Reverend Yoder regains his balance. Reverend Yoder and boat driver exchange a look. Aunt L's crying intensifies. She begins weeping and clutching her brother and father's ashes to her like a child. The wind picks up periodically, drowning out Reverend Yoder.

YODER: Let us pray.

JANIELLE: To the boat driver.

YODER: Are we still...?

JANIELLE: Boat driver nods, yes. Reverend Yoder takes a moment.

YODER: Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence that we may remember that it is only by your gracious gift that we're given everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.

JANIELLE: To Boat Driver, whispering.

YODER: We're still downwind?

JANIELLE: Boat Driver nods yes. Reverend Yoder nods at Aunt L and Jan, who pour the ashes into the water.

YODER: Father, we commend to you the spirit of Rick and commit his earthly remains to his final resting place. Earth to Earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. May you bless him, may you keep him, and may your countenance shine upon him and bring him everlasting peace.

JANIELLE: The ensemble throws rose petals onto the water.

YODER: Amen.

JANIELLE: (None of the ensemble says amen except the Boat Driver.) Amen.

JANIELLE: And scene! What, what is right and what is wrong in your impression?

YODER: Um, I, I had forgotten about the, my, my worry about the, uh, the, the being downwind. I was terrified that we would sprinkle your father's ashes and that they would end, like, all over us. I had, I had almost entirely forgotten about that. Um, I think actually now that you, now that we've read that, I'm remembering how, um, I wasn't really sure how most of it was gonna go. And I was, I was pretty nervous that it would go well, because I know that, um... I mean, funerals are such really important times in people's lives. And I knew particularly in this instance, um, because it was, it was like a kind of sensitive situation.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: Because I don't remember exactly, but I think you hadn't really known your father at all. Right? I mean, the, there was a way that he, that his death kind of suddenly made him appear in your life, in a way.

JANIELLE: Yeah

YODER: Is that, is that right?

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: And so I was, I was like also like really aware of that awkwardness for you, and um, so I wanted it to go as, as smoothly as possible. But now like in retrospect and, and kind of reading, hearing the story from your memory, um, I mean I'm realizing like how, despite that concern maybe, maybe partly because of that concern that was, it made it a little bit maybe more awkward than it would have been otherwise.

JANIELLE: I think it was, um, I think it was more that I didn't have anything to attach to. I had ashes. I didn't know how to attach to these ashes in the way that I saw my aunt, my aunt Lisa holding--

YODER: Yeah, yeah

JANIELLE: --her brother and father's ashes to her.

YODER: And actually I remember now the difference in the way that you and your aunt held the ashes.

JANIELLE: How so?

YODER: I remember that. I mean she did. She was kind of clutching them to herself, um, and I remember that you kind of held them gingerly. Uh, and um, that seemed a kind of metaphor to me about what your relationship with your father was, was like, or lack thereof.

JANIELLE: Are there any other um, details, or vivid details you remember from being out on the boat? Or rather, let me put it this way, I don't remember what you said.

YODER: Yeah, I actually, yeah, I could tell that- you I - I -

JANIELLE: I just pulled from the, I looked up funeralhelper.org

YODER: Yeah, you--

JANIELLE: And googled, uh, Episcopalian and Anglican prayers.

YODER: Yeah, so a lot of those actually, interestingly, are from the funeral liturgy. Although, one of the lines, the one about ashes being assigned a penitence, that's actually from the Ash Wednesday liturgy.

JANIELLE: Ah, da-- I just, I just control F'd ashes.

YODER: Right. But, uh, I do remember what I said. I actually have it in this. Do you want me to just read it? Because it was, it was just a, it's this short prayer and it's, um-

JANIELLE: Before you jump in, would you mind telling us why you chose this prayer?

YODER: Yeah, sure. So let me just... So I mentioned that, that the circumstances of this funeral were, were unique, so it was unique in a number of ways.

JANIELLE: So it was unique in that it was one of Reverend Yoder's first ever funeral services that he was running where he was flying solo, but he also said it was unique because every other funeral that he'd been a part of, it was always the family planning it, and in this case it was his friends. And it was also unique because they didn't want it to be like a church service. They want to be, you know, on a boat on the lake, but, like, he's a reverend. Church services are kind of his gig. So he felt kind of back-footed there.

YODER: And then, then the biggest question for me, actually, was that nobody was sure whether your father had been baptized or not.

JANIELLE: Which makes apparently a huge difference, because there are entirely different services that are written for a person who is a baptized Christian and someone else who has a sort of ambiguous relationship with the church. There are like entirely different scripts.

YODER: And so one of the big questions in my mind about this funeral, actually, it was like, what rite do I use? What, which prayers do I use? And how do I, how do I craft this liturgy in a way that's, uh, honest to the tradition, uh, and honors the dead, um, and is meaningful also to his friends and his family and, and suiting to that context, like out on the Corinthian sailing club, u ...

JANIELLE: So you were kind of going off script as well.

YODER: Absolutely. Yeah, it was one of the ways--

JANIELLE: We both were off script

YODER: It was, it was very much. And I mean, it wasn't just that it was like one of my first kind of instances planning a funeral, it was that it was, it was kind of pretty outside the box.

JANIELLE: Hmm.

YODER: And so what I ended up doing was uh taking a few prayers from the burial rite and then adding at the end for when we actually committed his ashes to the water, uh, was using a prayer that comes out of the old prayer book, uh, for a burial at sea.

JANIELLE: Huh.

YODER: Because there's this a prayer that was it used to happen much more often in the days of sailing ships and things that you'd have burials at sea, and there's a special prayer for that. So--

JANIELLE: Yeah I'd like to hear it

YODER: When I, so yeah, do you mind if I just describe the service, would that be kind of interesting to you?

JANIELLE: Yeah, I would love to hear it from your, yes, I wonder what I don't remember. Please tell me.

YODER: And I had forgotten this, so I had to look in my files, um.

JANIELLE: He pulls out this big folder, and he describes for me all of these moments that I didn't remember.

YODER: Then we all said Psalm 23 together, uh, you know, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Um..

JANIELLE: All this planning he had put into it.

YODER: I think the other thing, now that I'm actually thinking about it, I wanted to make sure that the people on the dock could see what we were doing as well.

JANIELLE: All of these passages, he had selected...

YODER: Unto Almighty God, we commend the soul of our brother departed, and we commit his body to the deep, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life through our Lord, Jesus Christ. The sea shall give up her dead, and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in him shall be changed, and made like unto his glorious body. So it's a bit like what you remembered.

[MUSIC]

CARSON: Before we go on to the next scene with Reverend Yoder, I think now would be a good time to take a break.

JANIELLE: Okay, let's do it.

[AD BREAK]

JANIELLE: When we left off with Reverend Yoder, we were talking about how my Dad's funeral was unusual for him. Another reason he was thrown off-balance was because apparently when they were cleaning out my dad's apartment, they found my grandfather's ashes. (You might have heard that in the scene I wrote earlier out on the boat, that we poured out my father *and* grandfather's ashes.) Well Reverend Yoder hadn't known about that, so he hadn't prepared a dual prayer. And he remembers vividly that the ashes themselves were kept in these larger plastic jugs (that kind of look like, um, big kids lemonade jugs) which struck Reverend Yoder as something that he would have done differently.

YODER: I wished for more, um, for, for that service. Um, kind of more dignity, um, and I wished that I would've been able to, to kind of provide that. Um, so...

JANIELLE: That's so interesting. I hadn't thought of that, like, um, you're the, you're the ringleader, you're the director, sort of, of the thing. Or sort of, the role you play, if we think of you as a character again, is to bring the dignity and the um, the occasion to this moment like that it is sacred. It's not just another day on the dock.

YODER: That's right. And what one of the, I guess one of the awkward things in relation to that is that that was my role, but I didn't feel like I ever had control of the whole event.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: Um, and so that, that made me like kind of unsure of my place. And so I was a little bit like you, I guess in a way, like kind of wondering, like, what are my lines here? Uh, and, and looking around for stage directions, and kind of making it up as I went, and, um, wishing in retrospect that I would have, um, maybe demanded more control of the whole thing, because I think I would have done it in a way that I think would have been a bit more, uh, dignified, if I would have been calling all of the shots.

JANIELLE: Hmm.

CARSON: When you hear Reverend Yoder describe all of the work that he put into the funeral, or would have liked to have put in, does it change your understanding of the scene you wrote in any way?

JANIELLE: It changes my understanding of the scene as I remember it, entirely. I would zoom in closer on the burial at sea that he prepared for my father, because in a really tricky situation, how beautiful it is to write a script that honors a man for a thing that he honored about himself, that he was a sailor. He may not have been a good dad. He may not have always been a good brother or family member, but he was a good sailor. So that's really um, honoring. And if I were

to rewrite the scene now with this in mind, I would add in stage directions with Reverend Yoder, checking in on me, looking at me, noticing my hands holding the jugs the way they were, caring that this go well, not just for the deceased, not for the, you know, people planning the funeral, but for me. I would add in those little moments of him acknowledging me, because now I know they were there. Which brings us to the second scene.

JANIELLE: Okay, great. So this one I know I butchered, but um, um, but we'll jump in.

YODER: Oh, this is gonna be interesting

JANIELLE: It's just the two of us. Okay, ready?

JANIELLE: This next scene takes place immediately after the scene that I described to Taylor Anne in Chapter 2, where I embarrass myself in front of those women, I storm up the dock crying, I go to the bathrooms, when I make my way back down the dock into the clubhouse, and I see Reverend Yoder there. And I want to talk to somebody for whom I won't be a sad point of gossip, and I open my mouth to talk to him... But there's no lines. There's no good script, so I forge ahead, and I try leading with...

JANIELLE: Thank you for... You did a great job on the boat. That was a lovely prayer I liked the, uh...

YODER: Of course. You're very welcome.

JANIELLE: This is kind of a, it was nice on the boat. This must be sort of a weird situation to step into for you.

YODER: Not so weird, but yes, I hear this is, I hear this is a difficult situation for you.

JANIELLE: Oh. Yeah. Yes. I didn't really know him. I...

YODER: I'm so sorry. This must be very hard for you.

JANIELLE: (Jan pauses. Jan wonders why no one else has said this to her. Jan tries not to cry.)
Jan: Yeah, it's... Thank you. It's really, really hard. (Jan is very much starting to cry. She does not want to fall apart and cry.) So where's your, uh, parish, your congregation your, your people?

YODER: I'm over at the Church of the Incarnation off of--

JANIELLE: Oh, that's the one near the, the froyo shop off Mckinney?

YODER: Yeah I think, it's near uptown.

JANIELLE: I went to a concert there. (Jan is concerned she seemed disrespectful.) I have friends who go there, too. It's really beautiful inside, it's... (Jan can't remember those friends' names and is concerned it seems like she's lying.) And I have other Episcopalian friends... Anglican friends? They go to Saint A's with--

YODER: Paul.

JANIELLE: Father Paul, yes, I know them. (Jan feels proud that she's made a connection.)

YODER: I was mentored by Father Paul before he left to join Saint A's. That's a great church.

JANIELLE: (Jan realizes that he knows people she knows and feels suddenly exposed.) Yeah, they really, they really like it. It's great. Okay. Okay. Well thank you again.

YODER: Of course. I'll be praying for you.

JANIELLE: Thank you. Thanks. (Jan breathes. Jan exits.)

JANIELLE: Do you remember this scene?

YODER: Yeah

JANIELLE: How do you remember it from your perspective?

YODER: Uh, I remember, I remember not knowing what to say, which is a bit clear from your memory. Actually, this is very much how I remember it actually. Um... Honestly, I hadn't, I hadn't thought about that conversation until just now, um... I remembered, um, it was clear to me that you were feeling incredibly awkward and that you were upset. And I didn't know what to say in that space. I wanted to, to say something that would suggest to you that I kind of understood something about how strange and painful it must have been for you. But I also think I was pretty aware of your being on the edge emotionally and that it was like this kind of public space. Um, and I, I didn't want to probe too far, because I didn't want to, I didn't want to make you cry, really. Because I, I didn't want to cause you to like break down in front of all these people you barely knew. And it was, it was obvious that you were this kind of object of curiosity to, to them.

JANIELLE: Yeah. Well, I, I remember that moment as you saying exactly the right thing, which was, "This must be so hard for you." And you were the first person who looked at me like I was a human who was allowed to be, like, upset and, uh, was allowed to feel like they were owed something that wasn't there for them in this room.

YODER: Right.

JANIELLE: Um, and I really appreciated that. So I wanted to thank you.

YODER: You're welcome. I'm, I'm glad that that meant something to you.

JAN: It did. That's funny to me to hear that for, to you, you thought it was like not, not enough. And to me it was exactly what I needed. I don't think I could have taken much more.

YODER: Oh, praise God. You know, I was really struck by the kind of disconnect, maybe. A disconnect between your father's friends and your family. Um, because for me it seemed like the Rick they wanted to remember was this kind of happy-go-lucky, sailing, drinking, smiling kind of guy, and for you in particular, and um, there was, you know, a lot more to the story than that. Um, and so there was this really odd disconnect between that, that was like really evident to me.

CARSON: Before we go on, uh, something I want to say is when we did this interview, I got very emotional here.

JANIELLE: Really.

CARSON: Yeah. And just like choked up in my throat, um, because... It meant a lot to me that someone saw this.

JANIELLE: Saw what?

CARSON: You. It meant a lot to me that someone saw both pieces of what this man was and tried to create a funeral that honored both.

JANIELLE: Oh, yeah. So if we think about that back to my story, what is the function of his character? I guess he's-- This is him showing us that he can bear witness. He can bear witness to everything that's happening at once. It's that moment when someone says, "I believe you."

CARSON: Yes. And it's a stranger. And... Here's what I mean to say. I was taken aback to hear him want to dig where there's pain. He saw that those friends wanted to remember their friend as a happy, go-lucky guy. Great. But he believed his role was to also honor the really uncomfortable parts. The really sad, maybe dissonant, or what's the word he used?

JANIELLE: Strange and painful.

CARSON: Yeah, and difficult situation. This must be really difficult for you.

JANIELLE: Yeah. What we're saying in so many words is, um, there was a character who saw what was happening, and bore witness to my truth. And more than that, they also were willing to take a stab at veering off-script to try and say something to grapple with how awful this must be for you. That's remarkable. I guess I'm becoming thankful for all the characters who bear

witness to our stories. Who notice us who say, hey, I saw that. And they might have thought that they fell short. But it means the world when you're the person who's seen. For anyone out there who's noticed when the script is denying agency or dignity to somebody and decides to veer off the script, to go find that person, talk to them, acknowledge them, try to forge new script... If you're out there and you've done that, um that mattered. It mattered. It mattered to me.

[MUSIC]

YODER: So that kind of reaction of wanting to remember like the joyful, happy, go-lucky, sailing, drinking Rick, and not wanting to, kind of, face difficult aspects of his past and present. I mean, there you are, his daughter, um, I think that's part of a piece of how people in our culture generally have a really difficult time facing death. And so I think maybe for them it was also a really uncertain situation, too, 'cause here they are faced with this death of this man that they thought of as smiling and all full of fun, and they're not sure what to do with that.

JANIELLE: So what I'm thinking about as you say that is, um, I was so upset because I didn't have a script, but also their narrative was upended, too, by my entrance. Like they don't have a script for me, so... I guess I wonder what their lines should have been? What would have been a more mature response? Um, "I'm so sorry. I didn't know you existed." Like--

YODER: Yeah, I mean I don't know.

JANIELLE: It's a little unfair.

YODER: They, I, I think what they were, maybe, that's an attempt to kind of remain at the surface level. But I don't think that's, they're aware of that.

JANIELLE: No, not at all.

YODER: I think they're wanting to stay on the surface, and here you are, like, the depths of this situation.

JANIELLE: Yeah, I guess I've never represented the depths of the situation before. I've never like walked into a room and brought with me the gravity of an entire man's existence and like the dark underbelly of what happens when you have a fun life where you don't have to accept a ton of responsibility.

YODER: Right.

JANIELLE: Like I just walked in and was like, hey, responsibility that wasn't met. Present.

JANIELLE: This gave me a little more empathy for all the people at the funeral who, uh, didn't have a script either. I was thinking about how the narrative of, "I'm so sorry for your loss. Wasn't

he a wonderful man?" um, fell so short for me, because I didn't have a response. I didn't think about how awful it must have been for them. Because the script failed them, too. What's the script for your friend's surprise daughter?

YODER: I mean, in some ways, maybe the most empathetic thing if they could have done is not to say anything. I mean, not to like not acknowledge you, but not to try to... Sometimes the impulse to say something is more about comforting the person who's saying it than the person it's being said to. They feel like a tension in this situation, and they want to say something to take that tension out.

JANIELLE: I very much so relate to that. I, I often find myself in situations where, like, the group doesn't know what to say, so I like nominate myself as tribute (Do you know I volunteer as tribute?) to try to say the thing, because nothing is being said as opposed to sometimes silence being the right thing

YODER: Yeah, I feel the same thing. I mean, partly because I wear a collar.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: I'm, I'm kind the person who--

JANIELLE: They all look to you.

YODER: --has to say something sometimes.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: And maybe something shouldn't be said some of the time.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

JANIELLE: We then segue into talking about what I should do next.

YODER: I mean if you were asking like what to do, I mean, I know I'm not supposed to be a priest in this moment.

JANIELLE: No, no, what would an Episcopal, like an Episcopalian tell me to do?

YODER: If you were my parishioner and were coming to me as a priest--

JANIELLE: Okay, great.

YODER: I would suggest maybe reading some of the Lament Psalms. So there's Psalms in scripture that the Psalmist kind of is like crying out in like frustration or confusion to God. Because it can help us to turn that, whatever it is we're experiencing, into a prayer.

JANIELLE: Yeah. So the reason I just smiled is because, do you know what you just did? You just gave me a script.

YODER: Ah, I did, look at that.

JANIELLE: You gave me some lines to try out to see if I can find meaning in them. I really appreciate that.

[MUSIC]

CARSON: We're going to take a break, and when we come back, more from Reverend Yoder, and Janielle reclaims her script.

[AD BREAK]

JANIELLE: Back to Reverend Yoder, I ask why funerals matter so much anyway, and he contends the preparation leading up to the funeral is the most helpful part.

YODER: Part of the help is just kind of a practical thing, um, particularly right after somebody has died, people don't know what to do, and it gives them something to do. And it's also a time when people just spend time talking about their loved one, and they'll often cry, and that's always like a really helpful part of the mourning process, right?

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: Um, so the kind of closure that a funeral gives, and particularly like the committal of someone's body to the ground or the deep, is a really important way of, you know, ending that chapter of the mourning process. So I wonder if maybe part of the difficulty of the mourning process for you has to do with kind of what is often a kind of sequential series of chapters of the story has all been mixed up a bit.

JANIELLE: Yeah, yeah

YODER: Kind of like, it's like, uh, chapters of the mourning story have been kind of snipped up and kind of pasted together in an odd sort of collage.

JANIELLE: In like a montage that makes no sense.

YODER: Yeah.

JANIELLE: And I guess now what I have to do is have my own sort of funeral, my own mourning, my own preparation.

YODER: Yeah, yeah, I think so in a way, yeah.

JANIELLE: I don't know how to, but I'll come up with something. I'll come up with something.

YODER: I hope you do. I think maybe this is, maybe this is part of that.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

YODER: You're kind of taking these bits of the story that had been a kind of collage and putting them in order, in a way.

JANIELLE: Yeah, that's a great point. I'm, I'm turning my expressionist, non-linear story and making it into a cohesive narrative that hopefully has some closure at the end.

YODER: Yeah, I think so.

JANIELLE: That's so wonderful. Well, thank you so much for your part in, um, in making this project happen. I really appreciate it. And, when you're the, um, like, abandoned daughter or the illegitimate daughter, whatever, like just being acknowledged, uh, it means a lot. So your acknowledgement mattered to me a lot, so I really appreciate that.

YODER: Oh you're welcome. I... Praise god.

CARSON: I think I'd still apologize for my inadequacy in not doing enough.

JANIELLE: Ha.

CARSON: And I like that this character in your story says, "You're welcome. That's what I meant to do."

JANIELLE: Yeah, you're right. I like that too. You don't get characters that often who, in the face of such, like, "Hey, you did something to me, and it meant something to me," says, "You're welcome." Yeah. "You're welcome" is again another way of saying, "I heard your thank you."

CARSON: Okay. So I'm about to ask you what I always ask you, uh, after our interviews, which is: How do we take what we have learned and activate it as part of your story? But immediately after this interview with Reverend Yoder, I had an idea about how to activate it.

JANIELLE: He left the room. We said goodbye, and your body snapped into director mode.

CARSON: My new obsession is: I want you to plan a funeral for your dad.

JANIELLE: I know, but I don't know how to --

CARSON: My, my imagination, and even as he was talking, because he was saying it is a practice for the person to process. So when I imagine Janielle Kastner processing her father, it's sitting down, and like, telling shitty dad stories while doing a project, like something with your hands.

JANIELLE: It sounds to me like the preparation of a funeral, how that gets you from one stage of mourning to the next stage of mourning, is that it gives you a productive thing to do that honors you and your relationship with the deceased. So like my impulse is the opposite of like, let's tell shitty dad stories. It's: Can I find an inroad that gives honor and dignity and something sacred? Is there a process or a project that can give dignity to the fact that I am the daughter of a man who was pretty shitty to me, but give it dignity?

CARSON: Mmm.

JANIELLE: I was really struck when he talked about how preparing a funeral brings up memories. Maybe I could try to think of like the few scattershot memories I have.

CARSON: Ooh I wrote this down. Here's something we could do. He said, like, "When you commit the ashes to the earth or to the sea..." Like, I wonder if there's something of yours, or a possession of his, that you could commit to the earth or the sea?

JANIELLE: Maybe I could write my own liturgy and commit something of his to the water, because, I mean, I have all his possessions now.

CARSON: I would love-- I would, that would be a really interesting ritual.

JANIELLE: Yeah...

CARSON: So that was us talking right after Reverend Yoder. How do you want to activate this *now*?

JANIELLE: I still don't want... I still don't feel ready to like bury my dad because I don't, or like commit something of his to the earth, because I still don't know exactly what I'd want to say... But I'm feeling really inspired by his advice for me to activate by reading lamentations aloud. Doing something with that grief. Let's put a pin in the funeral.

CARSON: Before we move on, I want to point out something you just said, which is, "I don't yet feel ready to bury my dad, because I don't yet know the right words to say." And that, to me, sounds a lot like the way that you've described the email you wish you would have sent to your dad. Even if it was imperfect, you didn't send it, because you didn't yet have the right words to say. So I think this might be a lesson that applies here, too.

JANIELLE: Yeah. Again, I'm falling into that trap. It's okay if I don't know what I want to say, I just... Yeah, I just need to try. A gesture of dignity, a gesture of empathy, even if the script fails me. Okay.

CARSON: It's still not something you have to do this week.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

CARSON: Or ever.

JANIELLE: I think I should do it eventually.

CARSON: We'll get there.

JANIELLE: I also want to take Reverend Yoder's note about what he loves about Radio Lab, in that they use short, evocative sentences that maybe aren't flowery writing, but, um, are really brilliant oration. So, um, that being said, here are our Lamentations options: "He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones." That's very intense

CARSON: Mmhmm.

JANIELLE: Ew. "But now they are blacker than soot. Their skin has shriveled on their bones, it has become dry as a stick." Wow.

CARSON: One of the things he said is the Lament Psalms?

JANIELLE: I thought that was Lamentations. It's not--NO! Uh-oh.

CARSON: So Psalm 44.

JANIELLE: Oh my god. I'm so glad you realized that.

CARSON: Yeah. I mean, well, Lamentations is appropriate, but...

JANIELLE: Yeah, but a little visceral.

CARSON: List of Psalms of Lament. 44..

JANIELLE: Ok, here's one. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? That's a good one.

CARSON: ...142 In the path where I walk, they've hidden the trap for me. Look to the right and see. There's no one who takes notice of me. No refuge remains for my soul. No one cares for my soul.

JANIELLE: Let me try that one. Okay. Do we need the trap part?

CARSON: No, you can probably take it out.

JANIELLE: So I just need to practice saying this stuff. Simply.

CARSON: Mmhmm.

JANIELLE: Look to the right and see. There is none who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul. Look to the right and see. There is none who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul.

CARSON: Will you say it simply, but don't shut it off from your heart.

JANIELLE: Okay. Look to the right and see there is none who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul. Look to the right and see there is none who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul. No one cares for my soul. No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul. What should I be doing? Which one was that?

CARSON: That was Psalm 142.

JANIELLE: Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need. Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need. Listen to my cry, for I'm in desperate need. Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need. Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need. I don't know that the Psalms of Lament are doing very much for me.

CARSON: That's okay.

JANIELLE: Maybe I need to make my own lament.

CARSON: Hmm.

JANIELLE: Like, what would my lament be? What am I asking? Words are falling short. There is no room for me. Please see me. Words are falling short. There's no room for me. Please see

me. Maybe, bear witness to me. Bear witness-- Is that a thing that happens in the Bible? Bear witness? I think my lament, my cry, my cry is... Bear witness to me, because I feel very alone. Bear witness to me, because I feel very alone. Bear witness to me, because I feel very alone. Bear witness to me, because I feel very alone. The script has failed. Please notice me. The script has failed. Please notice me. The script has failed. Please. Notice. Me. That feels like a good lament.

CARSON: I think so.

JANIELLE: Do you have a lament? The director's lament?

CARSON: Um... All my laments are for you, are like, if I had to write a lament to a higher being or to the world for this project, it would be: Why did you let this happen to my friend? Why did you abandon her? Why did you allow there to be pain, and what good did you think it was gonna bring? And please, stop it. Bring some comfort. It's not funny anymore. It's not cliché. It's not... ironic. It's just hard. And that's not fair. And I think my friend deserves some fair. That's my lament.

JANIELLE: I like your lament .

CARSON: It's... I don't really have a director's lament other than like... This is a really hard story. And it's really painful to be in. And if it's painful for me, how much more painful for you to live in it every day. If it's painful for me just to listen, and my lament is that your story has to have lamentations at all. I don't like that. I'm mad that there's pain in your life, and I'm mad that there's regret in your life, and I'm mad that it's not going to go away.

JANIELLE: Thank you for bearing witness to my story.

CARSON: You're welcome. I love you.

JANIELLE: I love you, too. I can't reach you across the booth. Thank you, Boo. I love you.

CARSON: I love you a lot. It was much more affecting to me than to you.

JANIELLE: I'll get the next one.

CARSON: I don't know if that's the point.

JANIELLE: It's fine. I don't know what the point is anymore. We're inside the thing, you know? We can't tell. Thank you.

CARSON: Thank you.

JANIELLE: Can I give you a hug?

CARSON: Yeah. I love you.

JANIELLE: I love you, too.

CARSON: I'm glad.

JANIELLE: I love you, too. This is such a big story...

[MUSIC]

CARSON: Next time on Untitled Dad Project, Janielle consults an expert in plot structure, and we figure out what you're supposed to do when your plot twists. Chapter 4: Plot.

PETER: It would have been a very nice plot for you, no doubt, but a fairly conventional plot.

JANIELLE: What would it take for you, as a father, to remove yourself from your children's life?

PETER: But plot is essential. I mean it's what, um, structures your experience of time... Men are, men are afraid of reproduction, I'm convinced.

CARSON: See you then.

[CREDITS]

JANIELLE: Untitled Dad Project is co-hosted by me, Janielle "Jan-Yell" Kastner, and Carson "Kitty Cat" McCain. If you're enjoying our podcast at all, please put off doing whatever you're supposed to be doing right now, and instead go to Apple Podcasts and leave us a bunch of stars and write a really nice review. It is the most generous way you can convince yourself you're being productive, while putting off that thing you're supposed to be doing.

JANIELLE: And we'd love to hear how "script" is relevant in your life. Have you reached for lines and found they weren't there? When have you gone off-script? Let us know @untitleddadproject on instagram, or email us untitleddadproject@spokemedia.io. We want to bear witness to your story, too.

JANIELLE: UDP is a Spoke media production. We're produced by Carson McCain, with associate producer Kelly Kolff, and our "sweet baby intern" Lauren Floyd. Special thanks to Reverend Christopher Yoder. Thank you for responding to what was probably the weirdest email you got that week, and thank you for seeing me. 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 original! It 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 cool mountain artwork was created by @kevincraftco. Executive producers are Alia Tavakolian and Keith Reynolds. And thank you for listening. It means the world.