

GOLDEN HOUR

By Emily Bohannon

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CHARACTERS

JOANNE "JO" BELL, 33, any race, Army officer & EOD on active duty in Afghanistan

ROBERT "ROBBIE" DUNN, 33, any race, journalist who lives in New York City

SETTING

the bleachers of a high school football field in rural Georgia

TIME

the present

A NOTE ON DIALECTS

Southerners who have lived outside the South awhile have a way of sliding in and out of their mother tongue when they come home.

Robert doesn't have a full Southern accent, but he drops in and out of it. When he was a teenager, it was thick as horse shit.

Joanne was a military brat, so her accent is less defined than Robert's, though she lived in their town for 5 years and acquired a noticeable twang on certain words.

In rural Georgia, any contraction with *s* is pronounced with a *d*. Isn't becomes idn't. Doesn't becomes duhdent. The *d* isn't hard, though; it's a light glottal stop on the back of the tongue.

I've added *g* on the ends of words for ease of reading. But folks in the South don't speak *g* on the ends of words. Again, this is a subtle drop; it's more about putting the emphasis on the first syllable than leaving off the *g*. I've dropped the *g* on words it's especially important to knock those *g*'s off for, but remember there should be *g*'s on none of them speakin' out loud. Only for readin' in your head.

Joanne Bell sits on football bleachers, staring out onto an empty field.

She checks her watch. Looks around.

Stands up and walks down the bleachers.

Sits down and stares at the field.

Checks her watch. Looks around.

She realizes she's sitting ramrod straight, so she adopts a few different slouches then gives up and shakes out her hands and shoulders.

She stands up and paces the bleachers.

Catches herself pacing and sits at the opposite side of the bleachers, trying a casual pose.

She loses her balance and falls between the seats as Robert Dunn appears.

ROBERT

You need me to grab one'a them butt cushions for old folks?

JOANNE

(beat) Hey.

ROBERT

Hey yourself. (beat) You gonna lie there or you gonna come give me a hug?

She stands up, walks to him, and gives him a stiff hug.

JOANNE

Didn't hear a car.

ROBERT

I walked.

JOANNE

It too cold?

ROBERT

Do I look cold?

JOANNE
My truck's got heated seats.

ROBERT
You asking me to go parkin' with you, Jo Bell?

JOANNE
It's, uh, Joanne now.

ROBERT
Joanne.

JOANNE
Yeah.

ROBERT
Joanne. Joanne Bell. Your mama call you Joanne?

JOANNE
No. Everyone else.

ROBERT
Durn, you look exactly like your--

JOANNE
Don't.

ROBERT
(beat) You do, though. Look like him.

JOANNE
Well, you look exactly the same.

ROBERT
They say not getting married's the key to looking young.

JOANNE
What's my excuse then?

ROBERT
(beat) Your mama give you shit about it?

JOANNE
Nah. She's got grandkids.

ROBERT
I still can't see Tonya as a mom.

Yeah, well... JOANNE

How's she doing? ROBERT

Hardly ever talks. Don't recognize her kids some days. But you know. Alive. JOANNE

I'm sorry. ROBERT

What for? JOANNE

(beat) I saw her at church on Sunday. ROBERT

She recognize you? JOANNE

Think so. She didn't say anything, but her eyes sorta flickered when she saw me. She know who you are? ROBERT

Yeah. I'm about the only one some days. JOANNE

She doing any kind of therapy? ROBERT

Yeah. JOANNE

Are you? ROBERT

Why would I? JOANNE

I don't know. ROBERT

You go to therapy? JOANNE

You know Georgia. Therapy's a 4-letter word. ROBERT

JOANNE

You don't live in Georgia anymore.

ROBERT

My family does. They'd think something's even wronger with me than they do now.

JOANNE

What do they think's wrong with you?

ROBERT

Gay. Ritual Satanist. Yankee.

JOANNE

You sound like a Yankee.

ROBERT

Everyone in New York says I sound too Southern, and everyone here says I don't sound Southern enough.

JOANNE

So pick one.

ROBERT

I did!

JOANNE

Yeah. You did. (beat) How's work?

ROBERT

It's work? You know, it's work, it's great, it's... So last week, my boss told me I get too *affected*.

JOANNE

Affected.

ROBERT

Emotionally? Apparently, my emotions are "too visible." And I'm like, with all due respect sir, I was up all night covering *yet another* police shooting, I'm hungover as shit, and I had a death knock this morning, so pardon me if my emotions are a little *visible* today.

JOANNE

A death knock?

ROBERT

It's a word for... It's when you interview the family of someone who's died.

JOANNE

Who died?

ROBERT

This man. He died in his apartment. Alone.

JOANNE

What happened?

ROBERT

It's not about what happened.

JOANNE

Isn't it?

ROBERT

There are always 2 things: the thing that happened and the thing people remember.

JOANNE

Aren't those the same?

ROBERT

Never. All any of us know is what we saw, or more accurately, what we *think* we saw, which may or may not be what we saw.

JOANNE

But at some point something happened.

ROBERT

Maybe.

JOANNE

The man died.

ROBERT

Yes. That's the one thing we can agree on, and the only reason we agree on that is there's a body. But the rest? Who knows if anything ever happens. Journalism is dead. Blah blah blah.

JOANNE

How long was he dead before they found him?

ROBERT

A week. They think.

JOANNE

Jesus.

ROBERT

I mean, it was *fine*, I didn't see the *body* or anything, just spoke to the coroner. And this happens all the time, cause New York is a place where people can live alone without judgment. *Unlike here*. But the downside of living without judgment is you may die without judgment. You'll lie down for a nap one day, and a neighbor'll find you a week later still lying there with your eyes closed.

JOANNE

People don't always die with their eyes closed.

ROBERT

(beat) So yeah. That's work. I am...working on my visibility. How's your job?

JOANNE

Fine.

ROBERT

Fine.

JOANNE

Yep.

ROBERT

Well, shit.

JOANNE

What do you want me to say?

ROBERT

I don't know. Are you dealing with visibility issues?

JOANNE

Only when I'm getting shot at.

ROBERT

That was funny.

JOANNE

You didn't laugh.

ROBERT

(beat) What are y'all doing for Christmas?

JOANNE

Going over to see Tonya and the kids. See what all they get from Santa.

ROBERT
You like her husband?

JOANNE
He's all right.

ROBERT
Mama and Daddy said their wedding was real nice.

JOANNE
Yeah.

ROBERT
Said you sat with them through the dinner.

JOANNE
Yeah.

ROBERT
Said Brian Burke asked you to dance.

JOANNE
Yeah.

ROBERT
Said you wouldn't dance with him.

JOANNE
Yeah.

ROBERT
Said you wouldn't dance with anyone.

JOANNE
I danced with Mom.

ROBERT
That doesn't count.

JOANNE
Didn't want to dance.

ROBERT
You love to dance.

JOANNE

No, I don't.

ROBERT

Um, who *dragged* me to the dance floor during Freak Nasty's Da Dip at prom?

JOANNE

I wouldn't know.

ROBERT

You wouldn't know.

JOANNE

Didn't feel like dancing.

ROBERT

And why'd you sit with my parents all night?

JOANNE

Damn, Robbie, I don't know!

ROBERT

Just interesting is all. That you wouldn't dance with Brian Burke.

JOANNE

You wanna go to Mom's house and watch the video or something?

ROBERT

Nope. Just interesting. (beat) Daddy said you defuse bombs.

JOANNE

Yeah.

ROBERT

Said you told him at the wedding.

JOANNE

Can we get off the subject of the wedding?

ROBERT

This isn't *on* the subject of the wedding.

JOANNE

I can't really talk about all that.

ROBERT

You talked about it with Daddy.

JOANNE

Your Dad could talk the hind legs off a dog.

ROBERT

Why'd you sit with him then?

JOANNE

Cause I like him! I always liked him! (beat) Yeah, I'm an EOD now.

ROBERT

EOD?

JOANNE

Explosive Ordnance Disposal.

ROBERT

Last time I saw you, you were doing something with weapons.

JOANNE

Last time you saw me, I didn't have gray hair.

ROBERT

Last time I saw you, you weren't defusing bombs.

JOANNE

Last time I saw you, I asked you to...

ROBERT

Well, the less said about that the better, I reckon.

JOANNE

(beat) Haven't been home for Christmas in 5 years.

ROBERT

I know. Could've knocked me over with a feather when I got your message.

JOANNE

I wanted to see you.

ROBERT

Couldn't believe it.

JOANNE

Why wouldn't I?

ROBERT

I wrote you. Lots. I don't expect brilliance. I know you're not one for words.

JOANNE

You've got enough for the both of us.

ROBERT

So when I got your message, I was shocked. Thought, "Wonder what she wants."

JOANNE

(beat) What're you doing for Christmas?

ROBERT

Riding to all four corners of the state of Georgia visiting every last Dunn in creation.

JOANNE

Lord.

ROBERT

Yesterday at supper, Grandma Dunn asked me, "What's your long-term plan towards home ownership?"

JOANNE

What'd you say?

ROBERT

Nothing. I was trying not to spit buttermilk in her face.

JOANNE

You still drink buttermilk?

ROBERT

Yeah.

JOANNE

With pepper on top?

ROBERT

Yeah.

JOANNE

Can you *get* buttermilk up there?

ROBERT

Why you keep talking about New York like it's Tunisia? You lived there 4 years.

JOANNE

Not in the city.

ROBERT

You *went* to the city.

JOANNE

Not a lot.

ROBERT

Just about every time you called me from West Point, you told me you were going into the city.

JOANNE

Doesn't mean I always went.

ROBERT

You said you went. (beat) So I swallowed my buttermilk. Didn't spit in Grandma's face. Screwed up my pride, looked her dead in the eye, and said, "Grandma, I have no long-term plans."

JOANNE

You got to have SOME long-term plans. Just none that involve home ownership.

ROBERT

I don't. I honestly don't. I lead a frog's life.

JOANNE

A frog's?

ROBERT

Jumping from one lily pad to the next, hoping a snake doesn't eat me.

JOANNE

Robbie Dunn.

ROBERT

It's not Robbie anymore. It's Robert.

JOANNE

You only said that cause I said it.

ROBERT

So?

JOANNE

I will never not call you Robbie Dunn. (beat) You sure you're not cold?

ROBERT

My blood runs hot. You know this.

JOANNE

I've got an afghan in the truck if you want.

ROBERT

What'd you bring him for? (beat) Sorry.

JOANNE

Naw, that was funny.

ROBERT

You didn't laugh.

JOANNE

It's, uh...I was thinking about something else.

ROBERT

The only people who actually *use* afghans are grandparents.

JOANNE

Your mama made it for me, and she's not a grandparent.

ROBERT

No shit. I'm reminded of that all too often. She made it for you?

JOANNE

Yeah. Knitted it or crocheted it or. Needlepoint?

ROBERT

When did she do that?

JOANNE

Second tour.

ROBERT

She never told me.

JOANNE

The ladies at church have their knitting circle.

ROBERT

It's a quilting circle.

JOANNE

Well, this was knitted. Or something.

ROBERT

I thought they only made quilts for homeless people.

JOANNE

They do, but your mama saw on the news it gets cold in Afghanistan.

ROBERT

She didn't tell me.

JOANNE

So she sent me an afghan. Wrote in the card that every time she made a stitch, she said a prayer I'd come home safe.

ROBERT

(beat) Lemme see it.

JOANNE

I knew you were cold.

ROBERT

I'm not *cold*. I just wanna see it.

JOANNE

All right.

She gets up and leaves. He looks out on the field a moment, then gets up and sings while miming a trumpet and forgetting half the lyrics:

ROBERT

This is our fight song,
 Dah da da duh dah.
 We kill! We murder! We put you in the ground!
 Bury your bones in the House of Pain!
 Onward we fight on the side of the right...
 Dah da da dee dah dah duh-duh da da.
 We slay! We slaughter! We pack you in the dirt!
 Bury our foes in the House of Pain!
 Victory is ours in the House of Pain!

He chuckles to himself.

After a moment, Joanne reemerges holding an afghan.

JOANNE

What were you doing?

ROBERT

The House of Pain, man. Friday nights.

JOANNE

The House of Pain.

ROBERT

Why is it that there isn't a single coffee shop in town, yet we have this massive stadium with fucking tombstones and a cannon in the endzone. You ever thought about that?

JOANNE

Why would we have a coffee shop? We only have 4 stoplights.

ROBERT

You remember the last time we sat out here?

Joanne looks out at the field.

JOANNE

Yeah. (long beat) Here.

She hands him the afghan. He runs his fingers over the stitches and holds it to his nose to smell it. He lowers it and glares at her.

ROBERT

Since when have you started dipping?

JOANNE

Since always.

ROBERT

Bull shit since always. This afghan smells like a Virginia plantation.

JOANNE

So?

ROBERT

All my uncles chew tobacco, and it's the nastiest.

JOANNE

Okay.

ROBERT

It's like chewing shit and spitting diarrhea.

JOANNE

All right.

ROBERT

I'll bet you smoke now, too.

Every once in awhile. JOANNE

How many whiles? ROBERT

Gonna quit next year. JOANNE

I'll have you know I have never smoked a single cigarette other than the one you made me smoke that day out fishing. ROBERT

I didn't make you. JOANNE

Oh, yes you did. ROBERT

Thought you were gonna flip the boat over coughing. JOANNE

Would've served you right. Sullyng my virgin lungs. ROBERT

Wasn't anything virginal about you. JOANNE

I was still a...! Oh, no I wasn't. ROBERT

Let's not talk about that. JOANNE

Well, you wouldn't date me, so what was I supposed to do? ROBERT

I wasn't allowed. Wasn't allowed and wouldn't are two different things. JOANNE

Same result. ROBERT

Didn't mean you had to date my sister instead. JOANNE

I never went out with Tonya! ROBERT

JOANNE

Yes, sir, you did.

ROBERT

I most certainly did not! I think I'd *remember*.

JOANNE

And my ROTC commander. AND my shop teacher!

ROBERT

She had a motorcycle! And it's not like you ever asked.

JOANNE

I asked you to prom.

ROBERT

No, you didn't. We all "went as a group" remember?

JOANNE

My dad wouldn't let me have a boyfriend.

ROBERT

You could've rebelled.

JOANNE

And then what?

ROBERT

And then... I'd have had virginal lungs on that fishing trip. But probably not after.

They stare at each other, then Joanne looks away.

JOANNE

(beat) I'm getting married.

ROBERT

Oh. (beat) Who is he?

JOANNE

His name's Cody.

ROBERT

Cody.

JOANNE

I, uh...served with him. He's, uh...a really great person.

ROBERT

Person.

JOANNE

He's strong. And he knows what I been through. And...he loves me.

ROBERT

Do you love him?

JOANNE

Yeah. (beat) So. That's why I wanted to see you. So you'd hear it from me.

ROBERT

You sound like someone died.

JOANNE

Well? Given our last conversation...

ROBERT

Thought we weren't gonna talk about that.

JOANNE

We don't have to. I just thought...if you heard it from your parents, you'd be mad at me.

ROBERT

I'm mad at you anyway.

JOANNE

Why?

ROBERT

Having the conversation we did, then not one word for 5 years? Never answering a letter to let me know you're okay?

JOANNE

Who said I'm okay?

ROBERT

Alive then.

JOANNE

I'd think if one of us had a reason to be mad, it'd be me.

ROBERT

I'm sorry!

JOANNE

(beat) Don't say anything, okay? My mom doesn't know yet.

ROBERT

You told me before your mama?!

JOANNE

I just explained--

ROBERT

She even know you have a boyfriend?

JOANNE

Yes.

ROBERT

Well, I didn't, so word must not travel fast as you think.

JOANNE

I only told her I have a boyfriend yesterday.

ROBERT

That's gonna be quite a leap when you clarify then!

JOANNE

I started to tell her. Then I thought about you.

ROBERT

What about me?

JOANNE

(beat) You think everything would've ended up the same?

ROBERT

If what?

JOANNE

If I had rebelled? Been your girlfriend?

ROBERT

Well, you didn't and you weren't.

JOANNE

But if I had.

ROBERT

Jo--

JOANNE

Don't call me that!

ROBERT

Jo! Jo Bell the Second! (beat) We shouldn't have met here.

JOANNE

We couldn't exactly have this conversation in McDonald's.

ROBERT

But here?

JOANNE

Here's where it started. Well, no. That's not right.

ROBERT

It started at youth group.

JOANNE

No.

ROBERT

Yes! The first time I saw you, we were in the church basement in youth group.

JOANNE

That wasn't the first time.

ROBERT

I remember cause Mr. Cheely introduced you and Tonya and said, "These are the new pastor's daughters." And Brian Burke leaned over and whispered, "Damn, they are FINE," and I said, "Brian Burke, you should not be thinking about that in the Lord's house," and he said, "Best place to think about it."

JOANNE

The first time I saw you, you sat behind me in church. You were wearing a grey sweater with a little green duck on it and grey pants with a silver cross around your neck. And your head was hanging down like maybe you were completely miserable.

ROBERT

I totally was.

JOANNE

But then you lifted your head. And you smiled. And I knew you weren't completely miserable.