

Great Land

a play
by Paul Barile

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Time: August, 1977

Place: From Chicago to Memphis, Tennessee

Characters

Nicky Hill	man - mid thirties
Danny Fischer	man - early thirties – developmentally disabled
Renata Prohoska	woman - late twenties
Sam	woman - early twenties
Larry	man - mid-late forties
Lovie	man - early thirties – transvestite
Dovie	man - early forties – transvestite
Albert	man - mid- late sixties
Ethyl	woman - mid- late sixties
Reba	(Sam doubled)
Dwight	(Larry doubled)

The set is a simple functional bar counter with an easel located at stage right. The writing/picture on the card marks the scene change.

Great Land

By Paul Barile
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The time is August 1977.
At opening sign reads, *A BAR IN
CHICAGO: SUMMER 1977.*
There are only two people in the bar at this
hour.
NICKY HILL sits reading his newspaper
and RENATA - the bartender - wipes the
bar.

RENATA

So I told Val that I remember a time when people did the right things for the right reason. They just seemed to know what they should be doing in a given situation and they did so without even a second thought.

NICKY

(not looking up)

Huh? Uh... Yeah...

RENATA

Me and my sisters would play with our Barbie dolls – that's before people started keeping them in boxes on shelves – we'd play in the front yard – the school yard – wherever and no one worried something was going to happen to us. People didn't lock their cars – didn't have to. Everyone kept an eye on the kids in the neighborhood. People where just – in general – more decent back then. At least that's how I remember things.

NICKY

Yeah... Kids... Decent...Cool, Ren...

RENATA

I think the thing I remember most was when the Good Humor truck would pull up... The bell was always ringing loud and clear... The impeccable white fenders reflected the early afternoon sun... The ice cream guy in the smart white suit would step off and open that little door and pull out a bomb pop or a push-up for the dirty face kid in the *Sox Park* t-shirt. Then he'd pull out a small shiny pistol and open fire on kids in the playground saving the last bullet for himself. The blood would run down his smart white uniform and splash off the side of that old...

NICKY

Yeah... That's nice, Ren...

RENATA

Nicky Hill, you aren't even listening to me.

NICKY

Yes, I was... Okay. No, I wasn't. I'm sorry. What were you saying?

RENATA

Nothing. Forget it.

NICKY

OKkay. Consider it forgotten. *(pause)* See I listened that time.

RENATA moves to the table NICKY is working. HE holds up his empty bottle. SHE ignores it. SHE takes the ashtray from his table and walks back to the bar. HE raises his bottle even higher and looks at her. SHE ignores him again and goes back to the bar. HE never takes his eyes off of her.

NICKY

I'm sorry, Ren.

RENATA

Forget it, Nicky Hill, I should know better by now.

NICKY

Seriously. So is this why you won't -

RENATA

- date you?

NICKY

Well it's just that I -

RENATA

We've been over this before, Nicky. I'm just not interested in your type. You're nice enough but -

NICKY

Nice enough? *I'm* nice enough? What the hell is that suppose to mean? Nice enough.

RENATA

Close your eyes

NICKY

My...

RENATA

Your eyes. Close your eyes. I am going to prove my point.

NICKY closes his eyes and crosses his arms
across his chest.

NICKY

Okay, Ren, go ahead.

RENATA

I'm going to ask you three questions; ready? Now keep your eyes closed.

NICKY

They *are* closed, Ren. G'head. Ask away.

RENATA

What color is my blouse?

NICKY

Pink!

RENATA

Wrong.

NICKY opens his eyes to challenge her.

RENATA

Keep 'em closed Nicky. You have two more questions. What color is the ribbon in my hair?

NICKY

Blue?

RENATA

AAANNHH! Wrong again. Pink was the right answer this time. Final question; what color are my eyes?

NICKY

Come on, ask me something I might know like whose jersey is hanging above the cash register. Ask me who's shooting the jumper in the photo next to the dartboard. Ask me something I know. Ask me which picture has Soldier Field spelled wrong.

RENATA

What color are my eyes?

NICKY
(whining)

I quit. This game is stupid.

RENATA

This game is illustrating my point. You don't know – or care about – anything that isn't about your job. If it isn't wearing a jersey with a number on it, you hardly notice it.

NICKY

Where is this going?

RENATA

I want to be with someone who takes a little time from their self-centered life to do the right thing for the right reason. I want someone who is unselfish - at least some of the time.

NICKY

And I'm not unselfish? You know I-

RENATA
(quickly)

I know you volunteer at the Boys' Club, but I – frankly – I have to question your motives; a lot of single moms picking up their kids after school.

NICKY

Gimme a break, Ren.

RENATA

I'm just saying the day I see you do something for someone else – the day you put someone else's feelings first. That's the day we start talking about having a date.

NICKY

So all I have to do is...

RENATA

Resist the urge to be yourself.

NICKY

You're a funny girl Ren, now bring me another High-Life.

RENATA

Don't you have to go back to work?

NICKY

Eventually but for now, just get me a beer and walk away slowly.

RENATA

Walk away?

NICKY

That ass. I love that ass.

RENATA

You're the ass, Nicky Hill.

REN sets the beer in front of NICKY.

NICKY draws very close to
RENATA. Their faces nearly touch.

NICKY

I hate it when you leave but I love to watch you go. Bring me the phone too... Please...

There is a moment where they might kiss.
Just as it appears they are going to lock up,
NICKY steps away.

NICKY

The phone?

RENATA

I'm getting it.

NICKY

Remember to walk...

RENATA

Shut up!

RENATA sets the phone in front of NICKY.
HE dials. HE takes a drink from his beer.

NICKY

Yeah, Petie-boy? Did you line up that Avellini interview yet? No, I'm at the other office.
No. I'm in the pressroom. If you insist. *(to RENATA)* Petie-boy says to tell you `hello
Ren.

RENATA

You mean he didn't believe you were...wait the office by the... no the other office...

NICKY

He never does. (*back into the phone*) Petie-boy the Bears played 500 ball last season. The way things are going Payton is never going to get a chance to score in a Superbowl. The best you can do is line-up who Johnny Musso? Who in the hell is Johnny Musso? Do the readers care about a six-string running back? Petie-boy, you're my go-to guy. I need this. I only have a few days – okay almost a week - before I have to report to fall camp.

DANNY enters. HE wears a bright blue satin Cubs jacket with a matching hat.

RENATA

Hey there, Danny. How are you this morning?

DANNY

Good morning, Miss Renata.

RENATA

What did I tell you about that, Danny?

DANNY

Sorry. You're right... *Miss Ren*. Are you going to put the game on at 12 noon. The game is at noon on WGN channel nine in Chicago.

RENATA puts a coke on the bar in front of DANNY who takes a quick sip.

RENATA

You know the rules, Danny. First you sweep the floors. Then you load the coolers. Then you mop the bathrooms-

DANNY

Then you put the game on.

RENATA

Then I put the... that's right.

NICKY

Hey, could you people... I'm on the phone. What's up, kid?

DANNY

Hi, Nicky Hill. Hello, Nicky Hill. How are you today?

NICKY

I'm on the phone. That's how I am. Please go sweep a floor or flush a toilet.

DANNY

Funny Nicky Hill. Nicky Hill said flush the toilet.

RENATA

Why don't you hang up your jacket and get to work on the floor? They must have had a hell - a heck - of a party in here last night.

DANNY steps upstage left hangs his jacket on a hook. When HE turns around HE is wearing a t-shirt with an image of Elvis Presley with a tear running down his face. HE draws as much attention to the shirt as he can while trying to keep cool.

DANNY grabs a broom. HE wields it like a microphone stand. DANNY strikes an Elvis-style pose and begins wind milling his arm around. NICKY and RENATA watch him do this.

NICKY

Petie-boy I'll call you back. Get me Payton or Avelini. I'll settle for Baschnagel. Just leave Musso out of this. No. I'll call *you* back.

NICKY hangs up the phone.

NICKY

What the hell?

RENATA

What?

NICKY

What the hell is the kid doing?

RENATA

The kid's name is Danny. He works here, sort of.

NICKY

I know his name. He's... He's not right in the head.

RENATA

He's a nice kid who makes a few bucks a day to keep the floors cleaned and the coolers stocked.

NICKY

So the entertainment is free?

RENATA

He has this... Elvis thing.

NICKY

I see... it could be worse... I imagine.

DANNY

Hey Miss Ren, watch this. This is the big finish.

DANNY karate kicks into the air and pumps his arms with the slow punches. HE strikes a martial arts Elvis pose.

NICKY

This kid is brilliant, somebody call the Gong Show. Chuck Barris is not going to believe this kid.

RENATA

Nick, what's your problem? He's only having a little fun. Just relax and drink your beer.

DANNY walks back to the bar and takes a sip of his soda before he begins to sweep the floor. DANNY sweeps closely enough to NICK that it becomes uncomfortable but HE backs away just in time. Then HE moves in again. DANNY plays this game but only HE and RENATA see it as a game.

NICKY

Relax? Did you just tell *me* to relax? Can I tell you something about relaxing? Do you remember Virginia?

RENATA

The girl with the big...

NICKY

Yeah, that's her.

RENATA

You didn't strike out with *her*? No one ever strikes out with...

NICKY

Not likely. Danny over there wouldn't strike out with Virginia. But the weirdest thing happened. We were in my apartment and she was... you know...

RENATA

Get to the point Nicky.

NICKY

So I closed my eyes for a minute and all I saw was pictures of Walter Payton and Roland Harper. It was sick. I tried to stay focused on good old Virginia but when the big picture of Bob Love came streaking across my mind...

RENATA

She noticed?

NICKY

She wouldn't have noticed if he was in the room with us. It just bothered me that I am with this eager-to-please woman and my mind is on the job. And I –

RENATA

Love the job; need a vacation.

DANNY bumps into NICKY.

NICKY

Can you ask him to mop the john or something?

DANNY

You can ask me. I understand you.

NICKY

Will you go sweep the head, *Danny*?

DANNY

You *know* the rules, Danny. First you sweep the floors. Then you load the coolers. Then you mop the bathrooms-

NICKY

I'm oughta to mop you...

NICK starts to get up. DANNY crosses to the stage quickly. NICKY follows.

DANNY

(sings)

You lookin' for trouble? Nah nah nah nah nah You come to the right place. Nah nah nah nah nah-

NICKY moves toward DANNY. RENATA moves toward NICKY.

NICKY
Why aren't you at Special Olympics camp?

DANNY
You lookin' for trouble?

RENATA
Nicky Hill! Leave him alone!

DANNY
Look right in my face

NICKY
(*whining*)
Aw, Ren, He started it.

RENATA grabs NICKY and brings him
down center far away from DANNY.

DANNY
Nah nah nah nah nah

RENATA
Nicky Hill. He is just a boy. Now sit your ass down!

DANNY
Not a boy, I'm a man. I spell that M – A – N!

NICKY
I'm sorry. You're right, Ren. Isn't there a special home for him?

RENATA
His caseworker is looking for a group home for him. He is not too excited about it, but his mother is getting old and he is going to need someone to look after him. I like to make him feel useful for a couple of hours a day.

NICKY
What are you talking about *useful*, Ren? He is going to be a burden on *someone* for as long as he lives. He can't be good for business.

RENATA
Actually, the ladies love Danny and the construction guys putting up all those new apartment buildings on Milwaukee tip him extra to take their empties away. He sings a little Elvis now and then. Everyone loves him – everyone but you.

NICKY

Nice, so he does his dog and pony show...

RENATA

Can you please just relax Nicky Hill?

NICKY

Fine, get me another beer... please.

DANNY crosses to NICKY.

DANNY

My friend Jesse said I look like Elvis Presley, Nicky Hill. Do you think I look like Elvis Presley?

NICKY

Actually I think you look more like Arte Johnson.

DANNY

Arte who?

NICKY pulls DANNY'S ID lanyard up from his chest and looks at it for a moment.

NICKY

Never mind. So tell me, Danny *Daniel* Fischer; why do you like Elvis so much? He's a fat guy in a jumpsuit who...

DANNY

He is the King of Rock and Roll.

NICKY

Guess again, bright-boy. Louis Prima was the king of rock and roll. Elvis broke a few barriers – I'll give you that much – but it was Prima and Sam Butera who made it all possible in the first place.

RENATA

Isn't Louis Prima dead?

NICKY

He's hangin' in there down in Nawlins. He's a fighter. He's a scrapper. Not some pill-poppin' joke who-

DANNY

You take that back, Nicky Hill. You take that back right now.

RENATA

Nicky, shame one you. Can't you be nice?

DANNY

You take that back, Nicky Hill.

NICKY

What are you gonna do, Danny? Are you gonna take a swing at me?

RENATA

Nicky, I have never seen you like this. What's gotten into you? He has feelings too, you know.

NICKY

Maybe I'm just sick of running into these guys in the jumpsuits who shake their ass and think they're Elvis. Fuck that! What did Elvis ever do for you or me?

DANNY

That shows how dumb *you are* Nicky Hill. If he wasn't so great, why do they call his house *Great Land*?

NICKY

Is this a joke? Kid, the name of the house is Graceland – not *Great Land*.

DANNY

It's *Great Land* and that's a known fact. You can read it in any book you have. He is the greatest so he lives in *Great Land*.

NICKY

Then we are sitting in Sucksville.

DANNY

No, this is Dew Drop Inn...

RENATA

I think that as a joke, Danny.

DANNY

Oh. It wasn't funny.

NICKY

Look, you believe what you want to believe. If I didn't have training camp coming up, I would drive your disillusioned ass down to Grace - Great Land and prove to you what a redneck slob your King is. It would be an educational experience none of us would soon forget.

DANNY

You want to go to Great Land?

NICKY

I said *If*...

RENATA

If I'm not mistaken you have a few days - almost a week - before training camp.

NICKY

Do *not* encourage this line of thinking, Ren. I wouldn't drive this kid home, let alone to Graceland.

RENATA

Awe, Nicky. I think it would be fun. Two swinging bachelors on the open road...

NICKY

Forget it. I can't stand this kid for ten minutes in a bar; I am going to be able to drive down to Tennessee with him? Forget it, Ren.

DANNY

I won't be no trouble at all.

RENATA

Danny, I think Nicky is afraid to take the time off. He might actually have a good time for a few days. What is it Stormy says when she comes in here.

DANNY

Too blessed to be stressed?

RENATA

Yeah, that's it, Danny. I think Nicky Hill is too stressed be blessed.

NICKY

If you are going to try to manipulate me, you're going to have to do better than that.

RENATA

What can it hurt? Take the kid for a couple of days. See some of the country. He's never been out of the city. It'll be good for both of you. I can call his caseworker. I'm sure they'll be cool with it. Nicky Hill – renowned sports journalist – takes Danny Fischer on a road trip to-

NICKY crosses to RENATA and pulls her aside.

NICKY

In the first place, the kid is not normal and I wouldn't know what to do if something happened. I don't know how those people are. What if something goes wrong?

RENATA

Those people are just like us, Nicky. If you get to know this kid-

NICKY

(quickly)

I'm being serious here. I know could use a vacation, but I was thinking maybe someplace hot with a beach... Maybe you and me and trip out east – New York – see a show. Babysitting for your janitor is not my idea of a vacation.

RENATA

Oh, there's that unselfish Nicky Hill again. The guy who puts other people's feelings before his. Where's the guy who does the right thing for the right reason? I almost hoped it might be you, Nicky Hill?

NICKY

Gimme a break, Ren.

RENATA

Think about it, Nicky. Proving the kid wrong suddenly becomes pretty irrelevant because *he* is going to have a good time on the trip either way. You can actually do the right thing for the *wrong* reason. How about that? Just do the thing for *whatever* reason this one time – trust me –you'll like how it feels.

NICKY

Why do I feel I am about to make the worst decision of my entire life?

DANNY

Are we going to Great Land, Nicky Hill? Are you and me going to go to Great Land?

RENATA

How long will it take for you to get ready.

DANNY crosses to the coat rack and puts on his jacket. He strikes an Elvis pose before turning back to NICKY and RENATA.

DANNY

I'm ready.

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE SCENE TWO

The sign on the easel reads:
*A UNION 76 STATION: JOLIET
ILLINOIS.*

Lights up on SAM working the counter.
SHE is reading Camus and chewing
bubblegum.
DANNY enters quickly – HE has to go to
the bathroom. HE runs past SAM. HE runs
back to where SAM is standing. SHE points
off left. DANNY is uncertain. NICKY
enters.

NICKY

Aw, Danny, I told you to go before we left the city.

DANNY

I'm sorry, Nicky Hill. I was too excited... I...

NICKY

I know you were excited, Danny, but if we're going to make it to Graceland before 1978,
we can't be stopping every hundred yards to empty your bladder.

SAM

Welcome to-

DANNY

I'm sorry, Nicky Hill.

SAM

Union 76 where you can get-

NICKY

Just get in and get out. Will ya?

SAM

A Super-Duper-Guzzler with a bag of chips-

NICKY

What?

DANNY

A Super-Duper-Guzzler, Nicky Hill. That's about the biggest soda anywhere. *(to SAM)*
Hi, Miss Lady. My name is Danny. Danny Fischer. What's your name?

SAM

My name is Sam, Danny. Did you know Union 76 recently introduced the Ultra-Super-Duper-Guzzler and that-

DANNY/SAM

...holds 96 ounces of cold refreshing soda.

SAM

You knew... you...

DANNY

That's a lot of soda. You have a boy's name?

NICKY

Forget it. *You* need soda? *You* need something to drink? You *need* to take a piss so we can get back out there.

DANNY

Nicky Hill?

SAM

It's actually Samantha. My friends all call me Sam. You can call me Sam, Danny. We're also having a two for one sale on Clark Bars and Zagnuts.

NICKY

What? (*to Danny*) What? (*to Sam*)

DANNY

Can you say bathroom or restroom? Piss is not the nicest word. Even potty is a better word. She has a boy's name, but she is still a girl.

NICKY

Will it make you go faster?

DANNY

I don't know for sure, but it might.

NICKY

I'll work on it.

SAM

Vintner's snacks are mighty good. They're made right here in-

NICKY

Are you talking to me, Honey?

DANNY exits stage left.

SAM

I'm selling you – trying to sell you some delicious snacks for your trip.

NICKY

My trip? I don't need *any* snacks for this little joyride, Babe. I need to have my head examined for even agreeing to this debacle in the first place. Do you have any aspirin?

SAM

But your kid looks really excited. He's-

NICKY

He's not my kid. He's the janitor at the bar where I drink my lunch. He's one of those guys who thinks he's Elvis. I'm taking him to Great – Graceland to prove him wrong. Do you have any-

SAM

What's the harm in him thinking he's Elvis?

NICKY

Oh Great. Not another one. DO YOU HAVE ANY ASPIRIN?

SAM

Geez, you don't have to shout, mister.

SAM tosses aspirin on the counter.

SAM

Another what?

NICKY

Huh? What?

SAM

Another one? You said *Not another one*.

NICKY

Another person who is going to enable this kid to... You see... Ren... she's this girl I... She can't figure out why I have a problem with it either. I just...

SAM

Do you think *your* Elvis?

NICKY

Do I look like I think I'm Elvis?

NICKY picks the aspirin packet and slips it into his pocket.

SAM

As compared to...

NICKY

What?

SAM

I don't know what a guy who thinks he's Elvis should look like.

NICKY

Sideburns...Maybe a little flipping hair thing going on up there...

SAM

Your kid doesn't have sideburns. He -

NICKY

HE'S NOT MY KID!

SAM

There's no reason to be ashamed. I have a cousin who-

NICKY

Then you know what I'm going through.

SAM

Somehow I get this feeling your relationship with Danny is not the same as my relationship with Nadine.

NICKY

It isn't a relationship. I am- How did you even have a relationship with your cousin? What you could you have possibly had to talk about?

SAM

Girl stuff.

NICKY

So Nicky and I can – what – talk about babes? Cars?

SAM

I just think if you're going to be in the car for any length of time, you might want to find some common ground you both can be comfortable with.

NICKY

Now I'm taking advice from the truck stop Nancy Drew.

SAM

You know what Camus said, don't you?

NICKY

Yeah... Camus! Didn't he bat clean up for the Orioles last year?

SAM

Camus said, *Do not wait for the last judgment. It takes place every day.* I think if you apply that to this trip, you and your kid will have a better time.

NICKY

Look Babe, he is *not* my kid. He is *not* my friend. He is a janitor who has delusions of grandeur. He needs to be put back in his place.

SAM

By you?

NICKY

I just...

SAM

You're driving all the way to...

NICKY

Memphis, Tennessee

SAM

...to Memphis, Tennessee to put this kid in his place? If your anger was your fuel, you could drive all the way around the world.

NICKY

You can't drive around the-

SAM

It's an expression.

NICKY

It's a stupid expression.

SAM

(quietly)

Camus also said, *There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.*

Huh? NICKY

DANNY enters. HE stands behind NICKY mimicking NICKY'S movements. NICKY senses DANNY behind him.

Are you ready? NICKY

I could use a candy bar. Do you want a candy bar Nicky Hill? DANNY

NICKY takes a dollar out and throws it on the counter.

For the aspirin. *(to DANNY)* You buyin'? NICKY

Sure. My mother gave me three dollars for an emergency. DANNY

Clark Bars and Zagnuts are two for one today. SAM

DANNY begins to pull change out of his pocket. SAM helps him sort it out.

I'll take two, please. DANNY

Look at all those nickels, Danny. Did you break your piggy bank? SAM

My Ernie Banks. DANNY

Your Ernie? SAM

Banks. I have a Ernie Banks bank. I took his head off and took some nickels to go with the dollars my mom put in my wallet. Candy bars aren't really an emergency. DANNY

SAM

So is that two two-for-ones?

NICKY

No. That's two candy bars. Give us two candy bars and charge us for one.

SAM

I thought so. I just wanted to be sure.

NICKY

Now you're sure.

DANNY

I would like Clark Bars please, Samantha.

NICKY

We'll have Zagnuts, thank you.

DANNY

I really *would* like a Clark Bar, Nicky Hill.

NICKY

No one ever buys Clark Bars, Danny. It will be either broken or stale. That's a guarantee. It will be either stale or broken. They should write that on the wrapper.

DANNY

Zagnuts make crumbs. I don't like crumbs. If I get crumbs in your car... whoa...

NICKY

Clark Bars are shit, Danny.

SAM

Now who's got the problems?

NICKY

I'm looking out for the kid on this one. We can't have him eating stale, broken Clark Bars.

DANNY

Can I get a Clark Bar and can Nicky Hill get a Zagnut for the two-for-one? Is that OK, Samantha - Sam?

SAM

I don't see why not, Danny.

NICKY

Problem solved. That was good thinking, Danny. I'm proud of you.

Don't be so surprised, Nicky Hill.

DANNY

NICKY and DANNY take their candy bars
and exit.

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE SCENE THREE

NICKY and DANNY enter the empty restaurant.
The sign on the easel reads:
*HAPPY JACK'S WORLD O' WAFFLES:
WARDELL, MISSOURI*

Danny, can you sit here for a minute? I gotta take a...

NICKY

Say it nice, Nicky Hill. I gotta what?

DANNY

Go to the restroom.

NICKY

Thank you Nicky Hill. That's nice for me. Isn't that nice for you?

DANNY

Whatever you say, Danny. Just sit here quietly until I get back. Can you do that for me?

NICKY

NICKY turns to leave.

Nicky Hill?

DANNY

Yeah, Danny.

NICKY

Can I get a cola?

DANNY

Fine.

NICKY

NICKY turns to leave again.

Nicky Hill? DANNY

Danny? NICKY

Can I get some Frenchie fries? DANNY

Can I go to the restroom? NICKY

Of course, silly Nicky Hill. DANNY

Then you can get some fries, Danny NICKY

NICKY turns to exit. Takes a step catches himself turns back to DANNY. NICKY stands there for a moment looking at DANNY.

What? DANNY

Nothing. NICKY

NICKY exits right. LARRY enters left and approaches the table. HE is wearing a nappy apron over HIS jeans and an Oklahoma University sweatshirt. He pulls out a green tablet.

How do you do there, Gov'ner? LARRY

Hi, there. Can I have one cola and one order of Frenchie – uh – French fries? Please and thank you. DANNY

Here alone today, Buckaroo? LARRY

I'm just Danny. That's all. Just Danny. DANNY

LARRY

Whatever you say, Captain. Do you want to hear about today's specials?

DANNY

Just Danny, please and thank you. No specials for me. I just want my cola and some-

LARRY

Fries. Got it. Okay, *Just Danny*... so you'll be dining alone today?

DANNY

Nicky Hill is in the restroom.

LARRY

Nicky Hill?

DANNY

Nicky Hill is taking me to Great Land.

LARRY

Great Land? Hmmm...

DANNY

To see Elvis – Elvis Presley. Who is that man on your sweatshirt?

LARRY

That there's a sooner, *Just Danny*.

DANNY

A soon-

LARRY

Hell I don't know what it means no how. It was a gift from a buddy down Oklahoma way. I never been more'n five miles from this building ceptin' the 'Nam.

DANNY

I wasn't in the 'Nam

LARRY

Didn't figure you was.

DANNY

Nicky Hill said he wasn't in the 'Nam too.

LARRY

Nicky Hill your driver?

DANNY
Yes. Nicky Hill is driving me. Do you know him?

LARRY
Can't say as I do.

DANNY
He told me he didn't go to the 'Nam.

LARRY
What was he a chickenshit?

DANNY
No. He was a fullback.

LARRY
A what?

DANNY
He was a fullback at University of Miami.

LARRY
That's a fancy way of sayin' Chickenshit if'n you ask me. Now Carl, Carl Elder from up Oklahoma way. He was no chickenshit.

DANNY
Was Carl, Carl Elder a sooner?

LARRY
Could be. Me? I'm a *later*.

There is no response from DANNY.

LARRY
Sooner? Later? That's a- That's a joke there. Ah forget it. Fries and a cola?

DANNY
Nicky Hill will probably want coffee and a piece of pie but-

NICKY enters unaware that DANNY is talking.

NICKY
What kind of pie ya' got, friend.

LARRY

Excuse me, Chief. Someone else was talking. You'll need to wait your turn.

NICKY

What are you the courtesy police? I asked you kind of pie you have.

LARRY

Just Danny was talking, *Sporto*. You went and interrupted him.

NICKY

Just Danny?

DANNY

That's what he calls me. Because I told him my name was *just* Danny.

NICKY

Well let me know when you and *Just Danny* are done so I can order a cup of coffee and a piece of pie.

DANNY

We're done, Nicky Hill. I was just asking...

LARRY

Larry.

DANNY

I was just asking Larry what kind of pie he has. I know you like to eat the pie.

NICKY

Oh...

LARRY

Well, Scout, there's cherry, blueberry, coconut cream, and rhubarb-strawberry.

NICKY

These pies are fresh baked?

LARRY

All exceptin' the coconut.

NICKY

Why's that?

LARRY

Well Colonel, did you ever try to grow you some coconuts in Wardell, Missouri?

NICKY

Blueberry. Coffee. Cream. Whatever he wants.

Frenchie fries and a cola.

LARRY

Thank you.

NICKY

You're welcome... chickenshit.

LARRY
(*under his breath*)

LARRY exits.

Better bathroom than the last one?

DANNY

Fine.

NICKY

Sorry about the -

DANNY

Forget it, Danny. It's an 8-track tape. I can replace it when we get back to the city. They'll be making them things forever.

NICKY

But I like that *Mony Mony* song.

DANNY

So did I... the first 64 times.

NICKY

I just thought if I hold the button...

DANNY

Let it go, Danny.

NICKY

Do you have any more tapes, Nicky Hill?

DANNY

LARRY enters with sodas.

There's bound to be a *proper* truck stop down the road. I'll buy a couple new ones.

NICKY

DANNY

Can we get some...

NICKY

Yes Danny. If they have some Elvis, I guess it wouldn't hurt to buy one or two Elvis tapes.

DANNY

Can we get...

NICKY

Whatever you want, Danny. Just give me a minute here.

LARRY enters with the food and sets in on the table.

NICKY
(to Larry)

Sooner?

DANNY

Later.

LARRY teaches DANNY the high-five.
NICKY watches in silence.

DANNY

Larry was in the 'Nam, Nicky Hill.

NICKY

A lot of guys were in the 'Nam, Danny.

LARRY

THEY BRINGING YOU YOUR FUCKIN' COFFEE, BOY-O. No, I don't think so.
(pause) You know me and *Just Danny* was havin' a fine time of things until you came along.

DANNY

We were talking, Nicky Hill. Larry is my friend.

NICKY

Larry is not your friend *Just Danny!* Ren is your friend. Ronnie at the ballpark is your friend. Larry – for the love of Jesus – is *not* your friend!

DANNY

Are you my friend, Nicky Hill?

NICKY

Why are you asking me that? I don't know. Why are you asking me that, Daniel?

LARRY

I would know, Ace. If'n he asked me I'd just say *yes*.

NICKY

No one asked you. Did they?

LARRY

I'm just sayin', Cowboy. I'm just sayin' if'n he asked me-

NICKY

BUT HE DIDN'T!

LARRY

But if'n he did-

NICKY

But he didn't, Chief – Sport – Gov'ner – Captain – Ace! I am not sure why we are having this conversation. We came in to take a piss and have a cup of coffee.

DANNY

Go to the -

NICKY

- go to the restroom. Sorry, Danny. Now would you kindly excuse yourself? Can you do that please?

DANNY

You're still *my* friend, Larry.

LARRY

Looks like the only one you have in the room right now.

LARRY exits quickly. NICKY begins to devour his pie. DANNY begins to eat his fries one at a time. THEY eat in silence.

NICKY

Danny?

DANNY

What, Chief?

Don't *you* start.

NICKY

THEY eat in silence a little longer.

Danny?

NICKY

What, Nicky Hill?

DANNY

Nothing. I'm sorry I yelled. Sometimes I... Never mind. I'm sorry. Just go ahead and eat.

NICKY

Danny?

NICKY

Don't be mad at me, Nicky Hill. Please don't be mad. I'm eating. I'll be quiet. I'll be really really quiet for you.

DANNY

That's fine, Danny. You're fine. I was just wondering something. Can I ask you a question?

NICKY

Of course – sure yeah, Nicky Hill. I would like to have a question from you.

DANNY

Does Ren – Miss Renata – does she ever talk about me? You know when I'm not there. Does she ever talk to Val or the other girls about me?

NICKY

Sure she does. Sometimes she does. Sometimes she doesn't, but sometimes she does.

DANNY

What does she say, Danny? Can you remember?

NICKY

Mostly her and Val talk about a lot of different guys and stuff. I know Miss Renata likes a guy named Paul. She loves him. He was an insect like a cricket or a beetle or something. She talks about him all the time. He's in a band.

DANNY

Paul *McCartney*?

NICKY

DANNY

That's him. That sounds like him. I think that's him. Do you know him, Nicky Hill?

NICKY

Not exactly. What else does she say? Take your time, Danny.

DANNY takes a long contemplative pause.
HE is either lost in some memory or simply
blinking out. The pause is too long for
NICKY.

NICKY

This is pretty important. What else does she say? What does she say about me?

DANNY

This one day I was walking out of the bathroom and I went to the bar to get the remote control because it was almost time to put on the Jack Brickhouse because he was interviewing -

NICKY

Can you get to the point, please?

DANNY

I didn't hear the whole thing. The last part I heard though.

NICKY

And that was...

DANNY

I heard Miss Renata say something about the last man on earth.

NICKY

Nice... Real nice.

THEY eat in silence for another minute.

DANNY

One day I heard Miss Renata tell Miss Valeria that there was something inside of you that makes you special – like me I guess.

NICKY

Special? Ren thinks I'm special?

DANNY

She said you are hiding from something. What does that mean, Nicky Hill? Are you afraid? What are you hiding from? She said you hide yourself in your work. What did she mean by that?

NICKY

She meant she knows me better than I thought she did.

DANNY

I think maybe Miss Renata likes Nicky Hill.

NICKY

That would be great. *(beat)* Let's wrap up and get out of here.

DANNY

Fry?

DANNY offers a French fry to NICKY.
NICKY uses it to get the last of the pie off
of his plate. NICKY puts the French fry in
his mouth and smiles at DANNY.

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

Lights up on LOVIE and DOVIE. LOVIE is in tight pants and a shirt which is tied up at his waist. DOVIE is dressed more like an athlete. THEY are dancing. The sign on the easel reads
THE LOVE NEST: BIRDSONG, ARKANSAS

DOVIE

On four...

LOVIE

To the left?

DOVIE

Yes, Lovie. To the left. We go four to the left - clap - and four to the right.

DOVIE demonstrates. LOVIE watches.

LOVIE

Ooohhh! Would it be delicious if this was our adagio?

DOVIE

You would be delicious... delicious and precious...

THEY look at each other for a moment.

LOVIE

I'm sorry, Dovie. Where were we?

DOVIE

You're going to grapevine left four and clap. Let's do it.

THEY dance. LOVIE stops abruptly.

LOVIE

Are you sure it's this simple? I think if we slipped a chasse in there...

DOVIE

Lovie, you're going to be the most beautiful belle of the ball. You don't need to chasse or adagio or anything fancy. Your jazz hands are more exciting to me than anything anyone else is going to be showing off.

LOVIE

You are so sweet to me, Dovie. Even when I feel about as sexy as a water buffalo...

DOVIE

Someday you'll be free, my tender cherub. When you are, I'll be there. But tonight we're here. Tonight we dance.

LOVIE

You're the best, Doug – uh - Dovie.

DOVIE

No... You... and one – two – three - four...

LOVIE

...and five – six – seven – eight...

THEY do a pass or two before DOVIE bumps into LOVIE.

DOVIE

Now who's the water buffalo?

LOVIE

Are you okay?

DOVIE

I'm fine, sweetie. *(pause – panic)* Oh...My...God...

LOVIE
Do I have something on my teeth?

DOVIE
Did you forget to powder, Lovie?

LOVIE
I don't know. I was so excited about the new steps... I...

DOVIE
Your brow is breaking into a fine sheen of perspiration and you... Are you going to...
You'd better sit down...

LOVIE
Quick, Dovie. Get me some powder before someone comes in here. I can't have *anyone*
seeing me like this.

DOVIE
Okay, relax, Sugar. Your Dovie's right here. I'll take care of you... My little gossamer
angel...

THEY move to the chairs center and pick up
powder puffs. DANNY enters frantically searching
for the bathroom. NICKY enters. DANNY is trying
to ask where the bathroom is, but is having trouble
spitting the words out.

DOVIE
Sorry, Sinners. We aren't open yet.

NICKY
My fault. We saw a light on and the kid needs to use the head.

DANNY
Nicky Hill...

NICKY
The restroom. Sorry, Danny. It's habit.

LOVIE
The kid?

DANNY
Not the kid.

NICKY

(too quickly – too loudly)

Danny, what did I tell you about talking to strangers?

DANNY

I'm sorry, Nicky Hill, but I'm not the kid.

NICKY

I don't want to hear that you're sorry. I want to know that when I talk to you, you are listening to me.

DANNY

How could I not listen? You are always yelling.

DOVIE

Be nice to him. He's -

NICKY

I know. I know *exactly* what he is.

LOVIE

Well if you *know* he's cute as a little bitty bug in a rug, why ain't you more nice to him?

NICKY

Not again. Not tonight. It's bad enough the kid can't get his bladder on *my* schedule now I gotta answer to Peter Pan and Wendy.

LOVIE and DOVIE cross to NICKY.
LOVIE grabs NICKY'S shirt.

DOVIE

You best watch your tongue, Mister.

LOVIE

Take it easy, tough guy. We're soft – we're not weak.

DOVIE stops to admire LOVIE'S arm.

DOVIE

Have you been working out?

LOVIE

A little does it show?

NICKY

Jeez-us. I didn't come here looking for trouble. The kid needs to... go to the restroom. He's been whining for an hour. Can he please use your restroom?

DANNY

Not the kid. Can *Danny* use the restroom?

DOVIE

Sure enough, Danny. You can use the bathroom. Your boyfriend though...

NICKY

I'M NOT HIS BOYFRIEND!

DOVIE

It's a little kinky, but whatever works for you I guess.

NICKY

Could one of you *gentlemen* please show Daniel the restroom?

LOVIE

Why didn't you say so in the first place? Dovie, please be a dear and take *Daniel* to the lavatory.

DANNY

The restroom is Okay.

DOVIE

(to *Danny*)

Come on, Delicious.

(to *Lovie*)

You be a good girl while I'm gone, Lovie.

LOVIE

You be a good girl while you're gone Dovie.

DANNY and DOVIE exit.

NICKY

Can I push my luck and ask if you have a pay phone I can use.

LOVIE

The phone is on the wall outside. I don't know how you missed it coming in. Feel free to help yourself. Just turn around and walk out that door. You'll see it hanging on the wall.

NICKY

Fine. I'll catch it on my way out.

LOVIE

Don't stay in on account of lil ol' me. I gotta make pretty pretty. By nightfall this place will be crawling with nasty bitches who get pretty catty about the way the other nasty bitches look. I just got to be ready for the bitchfest.

NICKY

I'm sure you can win any bitchfest you enter.

LOVIE

You bet your sweet pink ass I can.

NICKY

Let's leave my ass out of this if you don't mind.

LOVIE

Lighten up, straight date. Life is *too* short.

NICKY

I'm fine.

LOVIE

I could give you a shoulder rub. Those big strong shoulders would melt in my hands like butter on a tanning bed.

LOVIE crosses to NICKY. LOVIE puts his hands on NICKY'S shoulders. NICKY bolts and crosses down left.

NICKY

I don't need a shoulder rub right now. Thank you. I just need the kid.

LOVIE

Danny?

NICKY

I need Danny to shake his *willie* so we can go. In the meantime I need to get out there and make a few calls. I want to get the hell back on the road.

LOVIE

A back rub would do you wonders. I have been told my hands are magical – simply magical.

LOVIE crosses back to NICKY.

NICKY

I'm not like that. I'm not like you.

LOVIE

Easy, Cowboy. I have my own special someone. I was offering you a little relaxation for Danny's sake.

NICKY

How is *you* giving *me* a back rub going to help Danny?

LOVIE

You're so tight, you squeak when you walk. And don't give me that new shoe jive. You need to relax so the kid can enjoy your little vacation.

NICKY

I'm sorry. Do I *know* you all of a sudden? How did we go from the kid using the can to a backrub? Now you want to analyze my character flaws.

LOVIE

I'm sensitive like that.

NICKY

You're sensitive? Try driving across the state with...

LOVIE

Why do it then? Is he family? Is he your friend? You don't treat him like a friend. Did you lose a bet?

NICKY

It's not like that. Listen, I appreciate you letting Danny use your restroom. I'll go outside and make my calls. When Danny comes out will you just tell him where I am?

LOVIE

It's hot outside.

NICKY

I'll be fine.

LOVIE

Look, friend I -

NICKY

I'll be outside.

NICKY crosses to stage left. There is a short pause.

LOVIE

Your little brother counts on you, you know.

