

IMAGINARY CONVERSATIONS WITH MY
DAUGHTER

or Spiders in Dental Scrubs

by

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CAST

ME

40s, an expectant father, having his first child much later in life than he expected which has made him an over-thinker who often speaks too quickly

MY DAUGHTER

She speaks as a grown up though she is present during several different ages of her life, from five years old to middle age.

SETTING

Various. A kitchen table one morning.

PRODUCTION NOTES

How to represent the daughter's age changes is completely at the discretion of the production. Feel free to be creative. A simple costume addition, physical or vocal choices would all be appropriate, but the author welcomes other interesting choices. The key is that whatever the choice, it is secondary to the relationship created between the two characters.

A breakfast table with two chairs. ME, pacing and talking to someone seated opposite.

ME

(attempting to solve a problem)

And that's what you should say. Say that. Yes. Say THAT. That's good, right? Yes, I think you should say that. Now, now...don't mince words. Treat her nicely. Don't act pushy. Be assertive. Don't react in any way that she might misconstrue -- Misconstrue? What does that mean? Make sure you're clear so she knows what you're talking about. You know. You want to make sure she understands you, right? And well, this Bobby character. That's different. He shouldn't have acted like that. Or said that. Or done that. I don't like that Bobby. What he did was....well... I don't like that Bobby. You should have punched him. Right in the balls. No, god, don't do that. In fact, don't say that. Don't use that word. Balls.

(giggles then stops himself)

Don't use that word. Shit. I mean, crap. I mean...don't say any of those words either. I know I just did and I shouldn't have. Those are adult words. Only adults may use those words. Why? Well, because. Because adults have important things to say sometimes. Tough things. Sometimes words don't fit so we just say....other things. Yes, I know we shouldn't say those words but we do. We do, but we shouldn't. That's what's important.

We now see that he has been talking to his daughter - age 5 - who is seated at the table.

ME (cont'd)

Let's see. What else? In school you're going to face a lot of decisions. Decisions I won't be there to help you make. So I'm going to make them for you right now. Right here. Mark these words. In fact, write them down. All of this. It's good stuff. Like a survival guide. You have paper? A pencil? Use a crayon, a pen from mommy's purse. Don't touch the candy in there. You'll ruin your dinner.

The daughter moves out of the light and returns with one piece of paper and a worn-down pencil.

ME (cont'd)

Ok. So decisions. First and foremost, always do your best. In everything. Just try. Try your best. School. Activities. Sports. Art. Whatever.

MY DAUGHTER

You're going too fast. I can't write that fast.

ME

Sorry. I'll slow down. You good? Ok. Try your best to be good at it all. Everything. Except kissing. You need to be very bad at that. That's no good.

MY DAUGHTER

Kissing? Like boys? Gross.

ME

Yes. Gross. It's very gross. Don't do that. Ever. And girls. Some will be nice to you. Some will hurt you. They will say nasty things. Well, boys will do that too.

MY DAUGHTER

What about kissing girls?

ME

Oh, god. Never thought of that. Don't kiss anyone. I mean, boys or girls. Just stick to your books. I'm sorry I brought that up. And driving. Don't worry you'll get the hang of it. Kinda like kissing.

(laughs at his joke, then realizes once again who he's talking to)

Forget about kissing. I'll be right there. I mean, for driving. I'll be there for you. Right beside you. But then I won't. You'll be on your own. Behind the wheel. Out there in the world free. Driving to school, to work, to a restaurant. Out at night with your friends. On dates. Good God. You'll go to movies. Out to eat. Parking. Parking with a guy. Or a girl. Oh god. Forget about driving.

MY DAUGHTER

(slightly older - seven or eight)

But I want a car.

ME

You can't have one.

MY DAUGHTER

Daddy.

ME

Ok. Ok. I can fix this. Write this down. Who you are is what you are when no one is looking.

MY DAUGHTER

Did you make that up?

ME

Did I make that up? Sure. Yes. Those are my words. You may see them attributed to someone else, but you remember I gave them to you.

MY DAUGHTER

(she seems a little older now - twelve or thirteen)

We need to talk about boys.

ME

Oh, Jesus. Don't use the Lord's name in vain.

MY DAUGHTER

Dad. We need to talk about boys...and girls. That talk you keep avoiding.

ME

Who's avoiding? How about a car? Some new clothes?

MY DAUGHTER

What's first base?

ME

Who told you that? (No answer.) Well...ok. First base is a term that some guys use - girls may use it too, it's been years. Who knows what they say?

MY DAUGHTER

First base? Dad? What's a home run? I think I may have given Bobby a home run.

ME

What? That Bobby. I don't like that Bobby. Where are his parents? I have to buy a gun.

MY DAUGHTER

Jessica told me that Paul told her that Bobby told him he got a home run when we were at Jessica's birthday party.

ME

Where's your mom? Why is your mom never around for these talks?

MY DAUGHTER

We just kissed.

ME

You kissed Bobby? Or did Bobby kiss you? Because there's a difference. One doesn't cause the terribly painful death of Bobby.

MY DAUGHTER

I kissed him then I let him do more.

ME

I think I'm going to have a stroke. I need a drink. You want something - a coke? Some juice? I need something to drink. Then a talk with that Bobby character.

MY DAUGHTER

He was very nice, Dad. So sweet. I let him see them.

ME

Oh, God. I'm in a nightmare. Where is your mother? I can't do this. You let him see what? Never mind. I don't want to know.

MY DAUGHTER

He just sort of smiled and started shaking. Then he said "Thank you." That was odd, wasn't it? Thank you? Then he just got up and walked away. With very small steps. He looked like he was having difficulty walking.

ME

Ok, that's it. No more parties. No more Bobby. Tomorrow you're changing schools.

MY DAUGHTER

DAD! No. Stop it. I did it. My choice. Bobby did nothing.

(Sounding disappointed)

Literally. Nothing.

ME

(trying to remain calm)

This isn't normal. Aren't you supposed to not want to talk about this stuff with your father? Girls don't talk about this stuff with their dad. Isn't this girls' talk?

MY DAUGHTER

(she seems older now, a high schooler)

But we've always talked about these things. You started it.

ME

I did? I did not. Started what?

MY DAUGHTER

When I was five. You started it.

ME

I did this? I mention kissing one time when you're five and now this?

MY DAUGHTER

No, not the kissing. This. Us. Talking like this. Who else do I talk to? Mom and I talk as well, but you have a unique perspective. You don't mince words.

ME

Unique? Oh, I mince words. Believe me. I can mince with the best of them.

MY DAUGHTER

What should I do?

ME

You have your whole life ahead of you. You're sure? I mean you're positive you're -- . What does your mother say? Never mind. I know what she said.

MY DAUGHTER

Should I have -- ? Should I get married? Should I -- ?

ME

I think you should do what you want to do.

MY DAUGHTER

I'm asking you. I need your advice.

ME

My advice. I'm going to screw it up. Don't ask me. Look at you. I screwed this all up.

MY DAUGHTER

You didn't screw me up.

ME

Look at you. You're....a grown woman. Alone. Messed up in the head with sex. I never should have said "balls" in front of you. Knew that was going to come back to bite me.

MY DAUGHTER

You told me to stay away from Bobby. So how could I?!

ME

Oh, please. Stop. Like this is my fault? Shit. No. Wait. Ok, I can fix this. Let's back up. You love him?

There is a long pause.

ME (cont'd)

Then no. Don't. Marriage is tough. But in a good way. Tough if you love each other. Impossible if you don't.

MY DAUGHTER

I'm okay with being alone. I can do things all by myself. I don't need anyone. You taught me that.

ME

Well, hold on. I may have been a bit off base. It's important to have connections.

MY DAUGHTER

I like sex.

ME

Jesus, can we stop going there?

MY DAUGHTER

Dad, you raised a confident, strong, independent daughter who's not afraid to speak her mind. You should be proud of that.

ME

I think I may have raised a sex fiend.

MY DAUGHTER

Dad! Ok, maybe. But that's not all you raised.

ME

Oh, really? Because that's all I hear. Sex, sex, sex, sex. I love sex. Bobby felt me up. Jimmy loves me. I think I want to have sex with him. Junior high?! We had that talk in JUNIOR HIGH? Jesus.

MY DAUGHTER

I didn't have sex in junior high, Dad.

ME

But we had that talk. That's just as bad. Bobby, Jimmy, Rick, Alex, Russell. So many boyfriends. I hate to break it to you but your father has a vivid imagination.

MY DAUGHTER.

No shit, dad.

ME

Don't say that. Don't use that language.

MY DAUGHTER

(older now)

Dad. I'm twenty years old. I've had a lot of sex. I date guys. I even dated a woman.

ME

Wait. What?! Who?

MY DAUGHTER

Casey.

ME

I thought she was your roommate.

MY DAUGHTER

She was. We dated toward the end. That's why I moved out. We broke up. Mom knew.

ME

Your mother knew? Why didn't someone tell me? Ok. Point made. Ok, I can fix this. I think I'm doing this wrong. I'm definitely in line for a heart attack.

MY DAUGHTER

Don't say that. What would I do without you? And I'm not broken.

ME

(offhandedly)

Obviously, sleep with every Tom, Dick and Jane that buys you a drink.

MY DAUGHTER

(snickering)

Dick.

ME

Stop it please. You're killing me. You have a weird sense of humor.

Then he starts to giggle as well.

MY DAUGHTER

You're doing just fine, Dad. And they have to at least buy me a nice meal. I'm not a cheap date.

ME

And you'd rather talk to me about sex and boys and relationships and school and friends? Those big decisions that everything hangs on? Those turning points, the paths least travelled? Don't listen to me. There. That's good advice.

MY DAUGHTER

(younger now - sixteen maybe)

And boys? Bobby for instance? We're going out Friday.

ME

Didn't I just say -- ? Fine. No first base. Or second base. Nothing. You break his roaming hands and punch him in his wandering eye. I don't want people to talk about you. You don't want that reputation.

MY DAUGHTER

Dad. I don't care what others think. It's about happiness, isn't it? I feel funny when I'm with him. I want him to do things.

ME

Where the hell is your mother? Sweetheart, people can be very cruel. And I won't be there all the time to punch them in the face. Bobby is...fine. Okay? He's fine. Not harmless but fine.

MY DAUGHTER

You're not going to punch anyone in the face. I may go to first base or even second.

ME

I'll ground you till your graduation.

MY DAUGHTER

Then I'll sneak him in through the window and have sex in my room. Homerun. Homerun. Homerun.

ME

What? Oh, that's really funny. Maybe I'm old. Maybe I'm not hip. Maybe I don't want to talk about these things. Boys, sex, vaginas, periods, bras. God, I bought your first bra.

MY DAUGHTER

It fit fine. Wearing it now actually. Why didn't I get Mom's boobs? I'm flat as a board.

ME

(under his breath)

Maybe that's a blessing in disguise. Boys like...big boobs....and other things.

She seems deflated by that comment.

MY DAUGHTER

(younger now - maybe twelve or thirteen)

What if I don't get asked to dance? What if I'm not good enough?

ME

Then I'll dance with you.

That comment doesn't raise her spirits.

ME (cont'd)

Ok, well, ask that Bobby. He'd do anything for you. He's not the sharpest tack but he seems to like you. You like him?

MY DAUGHTER

Not like that. Not in that way.

ME

Well, believe me it will change. That Bobby has a way of sticking around. Honey, I'm not going to promise that you won't fail or choose the wrong guy or find your way into the porn industry. Or have way too much sex...

MY DAUGHTER

Really? You think?

ME

(hesitant, unable to decipher her last comment as disgust or excitement)

If I give you the wrong advice or say the wrong thing, I chase you away. You get angry with me and do the opposite or something regrettable. You become addicted to heroin or a sex addict or a Republican or worse, a Republican sex addict. All of these choices come back to haunt you. Life doesn't care how you were raised or if you're a good person. There's pain. Suffering. Envy. Rage. Lust. Love. Sometimes people die suddenly. A random act of terror. A jealous friend or lover. A reckless driver. Why am I saying all of these things? To you? Look, just have fun. Enjoy yourself. And punch the first guy that tries to reach up your shirt. Keep your pants on. God, this is terrible advice. I mean, it's good advice, but just done in a horrible way. None of this is getting through, is it?

MY DAUGHTER

(even younger)

What if the teacher hates me?

ME

Well, then she's an idiot. No, forget I said that. You're teacher's not an idiot.

MY DAUGHTER

What if I forget the words? What if everyone in the class makes fun of me?

ME

I can't promise they won't. Not every seven-year-old chooses to dress as Eve Ensler and perform "My Angry Vagina" for their Prominent Historical Figures project. Choosing Susan B. Anthony would have been easier. Who gave you that play? Never mind. I know. Your mother. And the teacher is okay with it? Parents aren't freaking out? Parents these days.

MY DAUGHTER

You're not that old, dad.

ME

Once I thought having a kid would be immortality. Now I'm beginning to think it will be the death of me.

MY DAUGHTER

(younger, around five)

Is there anything you're afraid of?

ME

(quickly)

Spiders. Dentists. And these conversations. No, wait. Forget that. I shouldn't say that to you. I have fears. We all do, but it's how we face them.

MY DAUGHTER

Will you be there after school to pick me up?

ME

Every day. Till I won't.

MY DAUGHTER

Then what?

ME

Then you'll be fine without me. (Pause) Well, at least I didn't say "balls" this time...Shit.

BLACKOUT
END OF PLAY