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SF PERUSALS

Kayak

by Jordan Hall

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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KAYAK was initially developed as a monologue in a Playwrighting Masterclass at the Tarragon Theatre in December of 2008. Early drafts were presented in a reading at Women Playwrights International in Mumbai, India in November of 2009, and as part of Tableau d'Hôte Theatre's Series of New Canadian Works in Montreal in December of 2009.

KAYAK was first performed in The Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace on August 6th, 2010 as an official selection of the 2010 Summerworks Festival in Toronto, Ontario. The director was Tommy Taylor; the producers were Julian DeZotti and Tara Yelland; Gin Shulist stage-managed. The cast was as follows:

ANNIE . . . . . Rosemary Dunsmore
PETER . . . . . Daniel Briere
JULIE . . . . . Dienye Waboso

KAYAK was the winner of the 2010 Samuel French Canadian Playwrights Competition and the The PGC's Post-Secondary Playwrighting Contest.

CHARACTERS

ANNIE IVERSEN – a suburban housewife. Various ages, mostly fifty-six.

PETER IVERSEN – a recent university graduate. Various ages, mostly twenty-four

JULIE DANIELS – a Greenpeace activist. Various ages, mostly twenty-three.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

(Dear Reader: If you can bring yourself to wait, I would prefer you read these notes after the play. Because, when you get down to it, the play is what I meant to say, and how I meant to say it.)

Kayak began as a simple writing exercise. Late in 2008 – an unseasonably wet and cold year in Toronto – I was infuriated by conversations I'd have with Climate Change deniers. The sort of people who, despite irrefutable scientific evidence, pretend we aren't having an effect on the planet. I decided to conjure one up and make her explain herself: and there was Annie Iversen.

The kayak came later. As Annie explained why she'd refused to see it coming, and her frustrations coalesced around her son's girlfriend Julie and Julie's overtly left-wing politics, a few more of my infuriations wound their way into Annie's life:

First, there was Rachel Corrie, upon whom Julie's character had been modeled, and the furor that surrounded her death. It seemed to me, as people labeled her misguided or naïve, or segued into the Israeli/Palestinian debate, that they were either missing or deliberately avoiding the point: Here was a girl who had given up her safety and her comfort to help others. Who believed that it was "a good idea for us all to drop everything and devote our lives to making this [injustice] stop" (Corrie 49). Rachel is a reproach to those of us who just go on with our lives as though horrors are not happening in the world, and it seemed we would use any excuse we could find to avoid looking directly at that fact.

My second infuriation was the re-election of Stephen Harper in October of 2008. Despite Harper's disastrous fiscal showing and obvious contempt for social programs, the Canadian public didn't like Stephane Dion's image, and so they ignored an obviously superior political platform – or three. The idea that we had allowed how pleasant or comforting a person seemed to be affect our assessment of whether the things he was promoting were logical, beneficial or even ethical, terrified me.

These, strangely enough, led to the kayak. It was Julie's. Like Rachel, Julie is a figure of activism, feminism and ethical superiority. Julie, and by extension the kayak, is a reproach to Annie. She's uncompromising and she's right, but no one will listen to her because no one can stand her.

*(This, by the way, is the point where you should **really** stop reading, because I'm going to talk about the end of the play. At least you've been warned.)*

And so Annie came to be stranded alone on the water, finally able to recognize Julie because she was now literally in the same boat. But was she stalking Peter and Julie during a protest? Had a camping trip gone wrong? Something had happened to force Annie to see Julie. To recognize her as good. To recognize her as a daughter. And suddenly I was sure it had happened too late. The world had ended. A flood. And this is how I came to Noah, because poor Annie Iversen was alone in an Ark of One.

Invariably, after a reading of *Kayak*, someone will try to explain to me why they dislike the way Peter comes to love Julie because she's good, or because she's right. I've been told repeatedly that people don't fall in love with someone's ideals or morals. I cannot disagree more. I hope people leave this play with the thought that good – rigorous, deep good, the kind that isn't easy – isn't just something we should pay lip service to. It is exactly what we should love people for. Because if we cannot come to understand that, if we cannot do better than we have, then there's nothing left to do but wait for the flood.

(Thanks.)

Jordan Hall, February 2011.

Reference:
Corrie, Rachel. *My Name is Rachel Corrie.* Katharine Viner and Alan Rickman, ed. New York: TCG, 2005.

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A SPECIAL NOTE

For Environmental Groups considering staging amateur productions of *Kayak* as fundraisers: Please contact the playwright at www.jordanhall.ca, as she has made provisions for the donation of her portion of the play's royalties back to your organization, provided your group and the proposed production match certain criteria.

For Rachel Corrie, and every activist like her –
brave enough to change our world by saying:
"This comes first."

For David and Tommy and Julian and Cassandra –
and always, always, my mother.

(Darkness. The sound of water against a fiberglass hull. A woman's voice hums snatches of Who Built the Ark?[1] *The darkness becomes the blue light of early morning.)*

*(***ANNIE IVERSEN***, a tall woman with peroxide blonde hair, sits centre stage in a large kayak. She is slumped over, drifting in and out of sleep. The kayak should sit on a riser, or blocks, to keep* **ANNIE** *at waist height. During the course of the play, unless specifically noted,* **ANNIE** *does not leave the kayak.)*

(The light grows. **ANNIE** *wakes and scans her surroundings. Whatever she's looking for, she doesn't find it.)*

ANNIE. I don't like kayaks. They're unstable. One second you're sitting there, the next you're upside down and underwater.

(During the following speech she takes out a packet of chocolate, a bag of marshmallows, and a sleeve of graham crackers. She makes herself a S'more.)

This one was my son Peter's. Peter's not much of a kayaker either. Or – he wasn't. He took it up because of Julie. Julie had this tiny little kayak, barely longer than she was. She could roll that thing over as easily as you turn a steering wheel. So fast you'd wonder how she'd have time to get wet. Not that it would matter if Julie got wet, because Julie doesn't wear make-up or believe in hair products.

(It's the last marshmallow. This hits her. She crumples up the empty marshmallow bag to stow it, pauses, then tosses it into the water.)

Or littering. *(She has a little chuckle about that.)* In case you're wondering, I don't really like Julie much, either.

*(***ANNIE** *eats the S'more as she keeps speaking.)*

ANNIE. *(cont.)* I thought she was a phase Pete was going through. He'd had Susan (his goth phase), and Terri (his actress phase) – Julie was just his politically correct phase. She was the sort of girl who floated around the world spraying Japanese whaling boats with firehoses, planting trees, and making perfectly nice people uncomfortable at parties.

*(***ANNIE** *considers the chocolate and graham crackers. She'd like to eat more, but she puts them away.)*

Once she stopped being new and exciting, Pete was supposed to move on to another phase. Possibly some kind of marry-a-nice-girl-with-hobbies-that-didn't-involve-the-Japanese-government-pressing-charges phase. And that would have been that.

*(***ANNIE** *pulls out a half-full Evian bottle, takes a short swallow, and carefully stows it again. This done, she unsnaps a GPS beacon from against the side of the kayak. She taps at it, shakes it.)*

GPS my ass. It would take a miracle to find anything with one of these goddamn things. The one in the BMW tells you which way to turn and how far to drive, which becomes more important than you'd think as you get older. Julie'd probably think this is hilarious. Stupid old Mrs. Iversen lost on the Credit River like Noah in the Ark.

*(***ANNIE** *reattaches the GPS beacon. During the following she takes out a traveller's toothbrush and brushes her teeth with water at the side of the kayak.)*

At least *he* had company. *(beat)* You know you're in a mess when biblical disaster starts sounding preferable. And Noah never had to deal with a post-third wave eco-feminist. Lucky bastard. *(She puts away the toothbrush.)* From the first mention of "Global Citzenship," you just knew she was going to be trouble.

*(***PETER IVERSEN**,[2] *a tall boy of twenty, enters right with a cellphone to his ear. He paces upstage right, then downstage right.)*

PETER. Still no answer from campus tours. I can't believe this.

ANNIE. Well, if the staff can't even be bothered to show you around, maybe –

PETER. Mom. I'm twenty. I can't live at home forever.

ANNIE. I know, I know. I just don't want you in some awful little place, sweetheart. The stress could disrupt your studies.

PETER. It's a business degree. It's not rocket science. *(under his breath:)* Or any science, really.

ANNIE. Peter.

PETER. What?

ANNIE. Don't be down on yourself. You've worked for this. Your father and I are proud of you.

PETER. Yeah. No. I know how much this means to you guys. *(He kisses her on the cheek.)* Look, would you mind waiting a sec in case someone actually shows? I'm gonna take one last shot at finding a hall rep.

(He exits up right.)

*(***ANNIE** *gives the dormitory surroundings a good once-over. She isn't pleased with what she sees.)*

(From offstage comes a peal of laughter. **JULIE DANIELS**, *nineteen, a tiny girl in pigtails and cargo pants, emerges upstage left. She's damp. She walks backwards, calling out to someone offstage:)*

JULIE. No. Carruthers'll push the paper until we get back. So we'll go. We'll go and IWL can choke on us. I'll catch you tonight –

(She's backed right into **ANNIE**.*)*

JULIE. Oh. Oh my gosh – Sorry. I didn't see you.

ANNIE. Of course not. *(She's got a damp spot where* **JULIE** *touched her.)* How did you get so – ?

JULIE. Wet? We do this thing at the harbour. Race kayaks. To raise awareness about runoff pollution. *(She gives a shake, accidentally spraying* **ANNIE** *with more water.)*

ANNIE. Runoff pollution. Lovely.

JULIE. Are you touring with someone, Ms. – ?

ANNIE. *Mrs.* Iversen.

JULIE. Mrs. Iversen. Because this isn't a frosh floor.

ANNIE. A what?

JULIE. A freshman floor. If you're checking out rooms for your kid, they're down on one and two. The whole "Finally free from Mom and Dad; Sex, drugs and rock and roll" thing works better on all sides if it's far away from the seniors.

ANNIE. Oh. Oh no. My son *isn't* – and he won't be staying –

*(***PETER** *returns.)*

PETER. No joy, Mom. I can't find – *(He takes in* **JULIE**. *They're on opposite sides of the kayak.)* – anybody. Uh – Hi.

JULIE. Hi. A little old for frosh, aren't you?

PETER. Third year. Actually.

JULIE. And you brought your mom with you?

PETER. Oh dear god, you've met.

ANNIE. Peter. Don't be a smart-aleck. This young woman –

JULIE. Julie.

ANNIE. Julie and I were talking about her charitable works. She kayaks for water pollution. Against water pollution.

PETER. Cool. Closest I've ever been to protesting was second grade. I refused to get off my skateboard when recess ended.

JULIE. A born rebel, huh?

PETER. Detention for the rest of the week, but they couldn't break me.

ANNIE. Stop that. He's modest, but he's starting his third year at the Rotman business school.

(beat)

JULIE. Rotman? Wow. And you look like such a nice boy.

PETER. Hey. I have facets. I'm not *just* a soulless capitalist. I'll have you know I've been considering doing a minor in bio – / maybe ecology –

ANNIE. A minor in – ? Peter you haven't /said –

PETER. It's just something I was thinking about, Mom. I'm not switching programs.

JULIE. Too bad. I think a degree in ecology is damn sexy in a man. *(They laugh.* **ANNIE** *doesn't.)* The faculty at Rotman think that environmental action means selling organic juice to yuppies.

ANNIE. That hardly seems fair. Of course they have a business perspective.

JULIE. Uh – Yeah.

PETER. Are you in Ecology? Or Poli-Sci or something?

JULIE. No. I just know some people. If you're interested there's a meeting tonight – IWL is diverting the Tuichi[3] river in Bolivia and we're part of the international campaign to stop them.

PETER. Oh. Yeah –

JULIE. Some of us are gonna be part of a Greenpeace demonstration – we'll shoot the rapids. Try to get some media attention. If they do divert it, we'll be the last people to ever run the river.

PETER. That's amazing.

ANNIE. And this sort of thing doesn't interfere with school?

JULIE. Well, yeah. A little.

ANNIE. And the expense. And the *danger.*

JULIE. No one said doing the right thing was going to be painless, Mrs. Iversen.

*(***PETER** *absorbs that.)*

ANNIE. Well. Then. It's been a pleasure meeting you, Julie. But since there's no one here to take us on our tour, Peter and I/ had better –

JULIE. I could show him around. If you like? I'm the hall rep for this floor.

PETER. Must be fate. The girl I've been looking for all along.

*(***JULIE** *smiles.)*

Y'know, Mom, you really don't have to stay here waiting for me. Why don't you take the car? I'll catch a bus back.

JULIE. Don't worry, Mrs. Iversen. I'll keep him safe and sound.

*(***PETER** *and* **JULIE** *move upstage to the back wall. At the back of the stage, or in the wings post-its, markers, banner making supplies and a pair of stepladders are waiting.* **PETER** *and* **JULIE** *begin fixing banners and post-its to the back wall. They flirt silently as they work.)*

ANNIE. I definitely couldn't stand her.* Four years and she never stopped calling me *Mrs.* Iversen. The next time I saw Julie, she was on Peter's laptop. He was home for Christmas and he had video of the little nitwit kayaking down that river as part of her protest. She'd actually gone. There she was, paddling that tiny boat down rapids so big you'd have thought she was suicidal. And Peter had that gleam in his eye. The same one he had when he first saw the boys jumping off the ramps at the skateboard park, and you knew it was going to take twelve bloody noses and a broken wrist before he'd listen to you about what a bad idea this all was. Then he refused to eat the turkey because it wasn't certified cruelty-free, free-range and organic. Herb and I ate turkey sandwiches for two weeks to finish the leftovers.

(Upstage, **PETER** *and* **JULIE** *continue to silently add post-its and banners to the back wall when they are not active in* **ANNIE***'s memory.)*

Now I recognize that what Julie was doing was – good. Or – right. I know about greenhouse gases. I recycle. I do everything I'm supposed to do. I even saw that movie with Al Gore and the big PowerPoint presentation.[4] I respected that she was trying to make the world a better place. But what I don't do is walk around as

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*See Appendix A

though the place I grew up in is Sodom and Gomorrah, and I'm waiting for the flood that's going to cleanse the earth of scum.

*(***JULIE** *looks back over her shoulder.)*

JULIE. You've got that confused, Mrs. Iversen.

ANNIE. You're going to correct me now too?

JULIE. Sodom and Gomorrah came after the flood.

ANNIE. Well, pardon me very much. If you're going to correct me you could at least have the decency to get me out of this mess.

(During the last, the morning light has been getting brighter. **ANNIE** *squints into it.* **JULIE** *drifts downstage towards the kayak.)*

JULIE. I'm more interested in keeping this little yarn honest.

*(***JULIE** *leans on the side of the kayak. It wobbles.* **ANNIE** *doesn't like that.)*

ANNIE. Dying of exposure on some ridiculous parody of a camping trip isn't honest enough for you?

JULIE. Mmm. How long has it been now? A week?

ANNIE. Six days. This is the sixth day.

JULIE. Think someone'll find you before it hits forty? *(beat)* You want help, Mrs. Iversen? Sunstroke can cause hallucinations. You might wanna cover up.

*(***JULIE** *releases the kayak with a wobble and heads back upstage to* **PETER**.*)*

ANNIE. I'm working on my tan.

*(***ANNIE** *waits until she's sure* **JULIE***'s gone, then pulls out a pair of sunglasses and a headscarf and puts them on. She looks around, decides on a direction, and starts paddling.)*

(Behind **ANNIE***, the motion of her paddling sets* **JULIE** *and* **PETER** *in motion. As* **ANNIE** *speaks they move downstage, playing out a series of scenes from the past around* **ANNIE** *in the kayak:)*

*(***JULIE** *is distributing pamphlets.* **PETER** *sees* **JULIE***, comes closer to talk. They chat, and* **JULIE** *makes a "Call Me" motion.* **PETER***'s puzzled. He doesn't have her number.* **JULIE** *shakes her head and gives him a flyer.)*

ANNIE. *(cont.)* I did my best to like her. I honestly did. But sometimes she'd be over for dinner and it was all you could do not to slap her in the face.

*(***ANNIE** *paddles harder. In the past,* **JULIE** *and* **PETER** *hoist placards for a protest.* **JULIE** *is very serious, but* **PETER** *only has eyes for* **JULIE***.)*

And, yes, I'm sure the lamb was tortured and the emissions from transporting the fruit from Argentina were excessive and we were supporting Coke's abuse of child labour in third world countries by drinking soft drinks and the excess waste we were producing has doomed the world environment to a catastrophic meltdown.

*(***ANNIE** *paddles as hard as she can. In the past,* **JULIE** *and* **PETER** *are both distributing flyers now. They see each other.* **PETER** *waves.* **JULIE** *waves. As a joke, they each give each other a flyer.* **JULIE** *gives* **PETER** *a peck on the cheek, laughs. Beat.* **PETER** *grabs* **JULIE** *and gives her a serious kiss. Flyers spill everywhere. They exit upstage right.)*

But people have lives and habits and comfort foods and places they need to go. And that doesn't change because you make them feel guilty and uncomfortable. You can't just force them. You can't just take away someone's son.

*(***ANNIE***'s exhausted. She stops to rest, mopping at her brow with her sleeves.)*

*(***JULIE** *re-enters. Her hair is askew. She's wearing a camisole and carrying her shirt.)*

Julie?

(Surprised, **JULIE** *shrieks.* **ANNIE** *shrieks.* **PETER** *comes running out, without a shirt.)*

PETER. What the – *(sees his mother)* Oh god. *(He darts back into his room.)*

*(***JULIE** *drops her face into her hands. Her shirt is still in them. She pulls it on.)*

ANNIE. Julie. What a surprise. That you're here. So early this morning.

JULIE. My thoughts exactly.

ANNIE. I thought you were off somewhere protesting the Olympics.

JULIE. Human rights violations in Tibet,[5] Mrs. Iversen. I had a few things to handle here on campus before – *(She realizes how that sounds.)* I mean – obviously not handling – I was dropping a few courses.

ANNIE. Oh. Something you didn't like this semester?

JULIE. All of it, actually.

ANNIE. All – ? You're leaving school?

*(***PETER** *re-emerges, now with a shirt. He gives his mother a hug. Over* **ANNIE***'s shoulder he mouths, "Sorry!" to* **JULIE***.)*

PETER. Hi Mom. What are you doing here? At nine on a Saturday?

ANNIE. Some of your mail got delivered to the house. I thought you might need it.

*(***ANNIE** *hands him a handful of envelopes.)*

PETER. Wow. Thanks. *(beat)* And you opened it for me too.

ANNIE. I thought I'd show your father your fall course schedule.

PETER. Oh.

ANNIE. Imagine our surprise.

PETER. I was going to tell you.

ANNIE. Organisms in their Environment? Conservation Biology?

PETER. It's just a few credits to make up a minor. I'll take a few courses in the summer and graduate in September.

ANNIE. It's an extra semester. We agreed that you wouldn't –

PETER. No, Mom. You agreed.

ANNIE. You certainly agreed to letting your father and I pay for all of this.

JULIE. It's just a few courses.

ANNIE. I'm sorry, Julie – but this is a family matter.

PETER. Mom, don't.

JULIE. Hey. I'm proud that Peter's taking an interest in his ethical existence.

(beat)

ANNIE. His ethical existence? The implication being that the path his father and I have laid out for him is *unethical*?

PETER. No. Mom. No one is saying that.

ANNIE. Don't think I don't know exactly why you're doing this, Peter. Your father and I aren't going to pay for you to flit around the world on an adventure tour disguised as social work. No offense meant, obviously.

JULIE. Oh. Obviously. You'd really do that, wouldn't you? Cut him off for wanting to be something other than a yuppie drone.

PETER. Jules. It's okay. I'll talk it out with them. Maybe it won't be a minor – maybe I'll just take Bio 150 as my last elective instead.

ANNIE. We just want to make sure you graduate on time.

JULIE. You're really going to let them run your life like this?

PETER. They're my parents –

JULIE. You hate your courses –

PETER. I can't pay for it without their help –

JULIE. And that's the deciding factor?

ANNIE. Oh for goodness sakes – of course it is. And it's a shame you don't have parents or someone with a lick of sense to stop you from dropping out and throwing your life away too!

(beat)

JULIE. Real nice. Good luck "talking it out" with her, Pete.

PETER. Jules!

*(***JULIE** *exits upstage left.)*

She's taking a leave to spend six months with Greenpeace.

ANNIE. Oh. *(beat)* Oh dear. Well, I didn't mean that –

PETER. We can talk about this later, okay?

*(***PETER** *runs after* **JULIE**.*)*

ANNIE. Not that she ever went back to school. First it was an extension of her "leave of absence." Then an "indefinite leave." She'd be here for a few months, then off on the next campaign. And never mind abandoning her education or wasting her life: It was a wonder she wasn't killed. That slip of a girl with her pretty face, standing there judging you like Solomon himself. That attitude in front of Indonesian riot police,[6] and crooked bureaucrats in the Philippines,[7] and U.S. army contractors in Okinawa[8] and their fingers must have been itching for the billy clubs.

(The day has become incredibly bright. **ANNIE** *takes off her headscarf and sunglasses and mops her brow.)*

(As **ANNIE** *keeps speaking,* **PETER** *and* **JULIE** *return to the back wall.* **JULIE** *keeps adding post-its, but* **PETER** *now wears a suit and carries a paper coffee cup. He faces front, working on the exchange floor. He waves at* **JULIE**. **JULIE** *joins him, takes away his coffee cup and replaces it with a reusable thermos.* **PETER** *smiles and loosens his tie. Together, they go back to work on the wall.)*

Not that I cared what sort of danger the pest flung herself into. But it was hard for Peter. Knowing that she might be in trouble, or hurt, and not being able to do anything about it. I waited for the stress and the distance to bring the whole silly thing to its natural conclusion, but every few months, there she was again. Dragging him off on camping trips or down to the harbour to splash around in sea kayaks, and always with

new opinions about our "selfish" lives. No meat. No corn. Nothing from further than 100 miles away. Public transit. No new clothes. You had to agree, there was nothing to do but agree – but Dear God, it was just – exhausting. Peter was losing weight just trying to keep up with it all. He'd finished his degree – on schedule and with honours – and took a job as an assistant at his father's firm. I thought he might come home and commute with Herb, but instead he took an apartment in the city. Julie was there when she wasn't putting herself into life-threatening situations to protest palm kernel oil and the like. For awhile, she looked for a permanent placement with some local non-profit, but it never quite happened. Even the people who were supposed to agree with her couldn't stand her.

*(***ANNIE** *takes out the half-full Evian bottle and looks at it, weighing whether or not to drink.)*

*(***JULIE** *leaves the back wall and moves towards* **ANNIE** *in the kayak again.)*

JULIE. Don't hold back, now.

ANNIE. I'm sorry. Have I omitted some critical detail? Mixed a metaphor?

JULIE. Poor insufferable Julie, unreasonable Julie, fanatical Julie –

*(***JULIE** *leans on the kayak beside* **ANNIE**. *The kayak wobbles.)*

ANNIE. Stop that. I'm in no rush for my first Eskimo roll.

JULIE. Julie, Julie, Julie. *(***JULIE** *rocks the kayak in time with her speech.)* I'm hearing a lot about Julie. Not so much about Peter. Why do you think that is?

*(***ANNIE** *bats her away from the side of the boat.)*

ANNIE. Oh for goodness sakes. Who knows? Maybe I'm dehydrated. *(***ANNIE** *shakes the Evian bottle at* **JULIE**.*)* I'm sure you appreciate the karmic justice. *(She puts the water away without drinking.)*

JULIE. You really think I'm happy about that?

*(***ANNIE** *turns to* **JULIE**. *Unnoticed, the headscarf and sunglasses slip off into the water.)*

ANNIE. I think that mercy wasn't your strong suit.

JULIE. Mercy only helps the guilty.

ANNIE. And you wonder why no one could stand to be in a room with you for more than ten minutes?

JULIE. You're the one who keeps conjuring me up. Why not your doting son?

ANNIE. I'm not conjuring. I'm hoping I'll remember how to fix this piece of shit.

*(***ANNIE** *gestures to the GPS beacon.)*

JULIE. It isn't broken.

ANNIE. Oh really? And I suppose by some miracle you and Peter are coming to take me home right now?

JULIE. And if we were? What would you say to him?

ANNIE. I'm not having this conversation with you.

*(***ANNIE** *goes to put the sunglasses and headscarf back on and discovers they're missing.)*

What – / Where are my –

*(***ANNIE** *checks the water. Nothing.)*

JULIE. Would you tell him you were sorry?

ANNIE. Did you do this?

JULIE. Would you ask him to forgive you?

ANNIE. Did you distract me so you could –

*(***ANNIE** *checks again. She's on the verge of tears.)*

JULIE. And if he did? Would that mean you weren't guilty?

ANNIE. Stop it! I don't want to think about Peter –

(Behind them both, **PETER** *turns away from the paper and maps he's pinning. He climbs one of the stepladders.)*

– when I think of Peter all I can think about is –

*(***PETER** *shuffles, nervous:)*

PETER. The story of Noah and The Ark, by Peter Iversen, age ten. And a half. A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, there lived a man named Noah. He had the biggest zoo in the whole universe, with lions, and penguins, and great big elephants. Two of every kind of animal. One day, God told Noah that everyone in the land was bad, and he was going to send a flood. "That's not fair!" said Noah, "I'm not bad, and my family's not bad, and the animals haven't done anything at all!" And God saw that Noah was right, and the animals hadn't done anything at all, so God told Noah to build a really big boat for his family and all of the animals in the zoo. And then it rained for forty days and forty nights, and everybody who was bad was drowned away, and on the boat everybody was happy, until a dove came to tell them that the world was ready, and everything could begin again. The end. *(***ANNIE** *claps.)* Mom? Was I good? Did I say it right?

ANNIE. You were perfect, sweetheart. Mommy is so proud of you. What do you want for a present? A new baseball glove?

*(***PETER** *rushes down from the ladder but before he reaches* **ANNIE**, **JULIE** *runs to him. He lifts* **JULIE** *off the ground and spins her.)*

PETER. A kayak! You got me a kayak?

JULIE. Pete! It isn't even new. It's my old trainer.

*(***ANNIE** *leans towards them, trying to capture* **PETER***'s attention.)*

ANNIE. Lego? Ninja Turtles? A new Nintendo game?

PETER. It's perfect. When you get back this summer, we'll take the boats and just – paddle away from everything.

JULIE. I got you a GPS module, too. Maps, beacon – everything.

ANNIE. An SUV!

*(***PETER** *and* **JULIE** *turn to her in astonishment.)*

PETER. Mom? You…bought me an SUV?

ANNIE. For your first year on the job. Your father and I wanted you to know just how proud of you we are.

*(***PETER** *shifts uncomfortably between* **JULIE** *and his mother.)*

PETER. Uh – thanks, Mom.

ANNIE. You can use it to take the kayaks out to the lake.

(beat)

JULIE. No. We can't.

PETER. Jules –

ANNIE. What?

JULIE. It's an SUV, Pete.

PETER. I know. But – Jules – we shouldn't do this right now.

JULIE. Really?

ANNIE. Is there something wrong with giving my son a car for his birthday?

JULIE. Yes!

ANNIE. What is wrong with you?

PETER. Mom!

JULIE. What is wrong with you?

PETER. Jules. You aren't being fair. She means well and you're just going to upset her.

(As the argument builds **PETER** *and* **JULIE** *begin to circle around* **ANNIE**.*)*

JULIE. She means well, Pete? They blackmailed you into a life you didn't want, and now she's bought you your own private environmental disaster, and you don't want me to talk about it so she won't get her feelings hurt?

PETER. You know it isn't that simple!

JULIE. It isn't?

PETER. This is why you lost your placement with Oxfam. You have to pick your battles, Jules. Fighting all of them – all the time –

ANNIE. We researched this. We looked at safety records and fuel economy and emissions standards. We paid $45,000 for a model with very low emissions standards. How is a "green" vehicle some kind of crime?

JULIE. Does it use gas?

ANNIE. Oh my God!

PETER. Jules, you're being completely unreasonable. There are sides to this. Facets. She's doing her best with something very complex –

JULIE. No. It isn't complex. Complex is just what people say when they want to muddy up the waters.

PETER. Is that what you think I'm doing?

JULIE. Are you going to drive your shiny new SUV, Pete?

*(***PETER** *goes to speak but she's got him trapped.)*

How many more years before you quit the market?

PETER. I have stopped eating meat and I bicycle to work and I do it for you so you don't get to judge me on this.

JULIE. You do it for me? Did you just say –

PETER. I didn't mean –

JULIE. No. You did. I have waited and waited for you to stand up for yourself with them. For the things you believe. I could never figure out why you didn't. But this – You don't want to.

PETER. Jules – believing in things doesn't mean making everybody miserable. You used to be fun. Now I can't even be around you without wondering what I'll do to set off Perfect Julie's moral compass.

JULIE. You want a moral compass, Pete? Stupid or evil, pick one.

PETER. What?

JULIE. That's the choice. Does she not know she's hurting people? Or does she just not care? Because Pete – meaning "well" doesn't count for shit.

ANNIE. Alright. This has gotten out of control. It's just a car, not the end of the world – and I'm sorry if it isn't the best choice – but you've got to allow people the room to make mistakes.

JULIE. And when there's no room left for anyone? You think being kind and making allowances is going to make a difference?

PETER. Julie – you can't seriously believe what you're saying. It's crazy.

JULIE. You know what the worst part is? Her – I expected. But you – Pete – how can you know what you know and do nothing?

PETER. Because I have to live here, Julie. In the real world. Not in some dreamland where you pretend you're nineteen forever and your life isn't passing you by.

(beat)

JULIE. You know what, Mrs. Iversen? He's all yours.

*(***JULIE** *exits.)*

PETER. God. Mom, I'm sorry. I can't believe she said that –

ANNIE. It's alright, Peter. Everyone gets angry. Once she's blown off some steam you'll talk –

PETER. There's nothing left to talk about. Once Julie decides she's right…

ANNIE. I'm sure she feels that way now –

PETER. No. She's already on my case about the job – about –

ANNIE. Well. Then…Maybe it's best to take a break. You can't decide to love somebody because they're right or wrong.

PETER. Yeah. No. No, of course not.

*(***PETER** *heads up right to the post-its. He slumps back against the wall.)*

ANNIE. And just like that, she was gone.

*(***ANNIE** *looks around to make sure she's alone.)*

How about that? Little Miss "Saves The Day"? Got anything clever to add about that?

(No sign of **JULIE**. **ANNIE***'s skin and eyes are starting to hurt from the sun.)*

ANNIE. *(cont.)* Not so mouthy when you aren't shoving boats and stealing sunglasses, are you?

(Still nothing. As she speaks, **ANNIE** *takes out her supplies and indulges in a celebratory treat of chocolate and graham crackers and a short sip of water.)*

He never did drive the SUV. In the end, I started using it to putter around town. And everything was lovely. For awhile. No more soy products at family dinners, and no more awkward silences when Peter and his father talked about the market. Peter even went out on a few dates with Tamara (the event planner), and Angie (the executive assistant), both of whom, I would like to add, might have made lovely fiancées, and very good mothers for my grandchildren*.

(Upstage right, **PETER** *tidies up his tie and jacket, going through the motions.)*

But…he just didn't seem that interested. In anything. He started spending all his free time down at the marina with that blasted kayak. Still, he had a steady job that paid well, enough protein in his diet, and there was no one shooting at him in the streets of Johannesburg,[9] or deporting him from South Africa.

*(***JULIE** *enters up left with a placard.* **PETER** *watches her from his side of the stage.)*

And if he was spending his nights on the Internet scanning video of protests for her face, or hopelessly re-watching that clip of her kayaking in Bolivia – well – he'd been seeing her for three years. He wasn't going to forget her overnight. He just needed to be reminded of where his life was headed before Julie – collided with it.

(Underneath **ANNIE***'s voice the sound of a protest in a busy street has been growing.* **JULIE** *is silently yelling and waving her placard.)*

(As **ANNIE***'s speech ends, three gunshots ring out. Silence.* **JULIE** *falls.* **PETER** *is frozen, watching her from his edge of the stage. Beat.)*

---

*See Appendix A

*(***JULIE** *pushes herself to her knees. Looks around. Checks her arms and head for blood. Slowly, deliberately, she raises her placard again, then returns to the upstage wall to continue adding post-its.)*

*(***PETER** *exhales in relief. He comes downstage to lean against the kayak.)*

PETER. It's okay, Mom. You don't need to take me to lunch just because I helped Dad fix the air-conditioning.

ANNIE. You had to go all the way down to the basement. And it's been so hot this summer – Thirty-eight degrees last week. *(beat)* How are you doing? You look tired.

PETER. Late nights, I guess.

ANNIE. You need to get your sleep. You're looking skinny, too. Did you eat the mashed potatoes I sent home with you last week?

PETER. Uh-huh.

ANNIE. I know you've been down, sweetie – but you'll pick up. We just need to shake you out of this – rut you're in. You should come over for Labour Day. We'll do steaks, lemonade.

PETER. Sure.

ANNIE. Sweetie.

PETER. It's fine, Mom. I guess I just thought – that after school, or after the job, that – things would be different.

ANNIE. You're in an in-between place. Once you meet someone nice, settle in – maybe some grandchildren…

PETER. I don't want to make the world any worse, Mom.

ANNIE. Grandchildren wouldn't make the world worse – you'd raise them like we raised you.

PETER. Look, Mom – some things you can't fix with barbecue and a middle-class life plan – It's fine. I'll figure something out, okay?

ANNIE. Of course, sweetie. I was just – oh dear god what's that in front of City Hall?

PETER. It's a protest, Mom.

ANNIE. Why?

PETER. They're – The government in Iran is killing protestors.[10]

ANNIE. So they're protesting for other protestors? Sometimes, Peter, this all just gets confusing.

PETER. Wait – wait – stop the car.

*(***PETER** *pulls away from* **ANNIE** *in the kayak as though he's hopping out of a car.)*

ANNIE. Peter! What are you – ! Don't open the door – We're in traffic – ! Peter Scott Iversen!

*(***JULIE** *is now standing on her stepladder, upstage left.* **PETER** *freezes.)*

JULIE. This is not a new story. This is the first story. They told it every year in Sunday School. There was a flood coming. Noah knew about the flood but he wasn't scared, because he was rich and could build an Ark. The world would end, but Noah would be safe. And after everyone else had been drowned the whole earth would be his, and there wouldn't even be anyone left complain about how it came to be that way. Late at night after Sunday School I would wonder about Noah's neighbours, and what they did when the rain began to fall, so fast and so thick they knew everything was ending. All those tall, dark men with their beards in wet curls and women with their sopping veils, and children with big brown eyes. Didn't anyone think of Noah? Did they come wading through the water? Calling out for help, holding their children out to be pulled into the Ark and saved? Maybe Noah believed that they were all wicked; or that if he let even one onto the boat with his family he'd have to let everyone on and there wouldn't be enough room; or that it was his boat built with his labour and his money and nobody had the right to force him to share it. But there must have been so many of them. Hoping to be saved. Clinging to the Ark as the waters rose.

Why didn't they just climb on board? I was nine or ten when I figured it out. Noah had known about the flood, so Noah had known about this, too. He had built an Ark to save himself from the flood. What had he built to save himself from them? Spears, or clubs, or arrows? Did he pour boiling oil down the sides as they tried to climb up? Or was it as simple as pushing them under the waves with his oars? What else could Noah do? There was a flood, and he had to defend his Ark. This is the lesson of Noah: The price of boarding the Ark has always been murdering the people who don't get saved, whether you do it up close and personal or from millions of miles away. Your choice is a dead body in the water or a murderer on an Ark. Unless you want to defy God. Unless you start working to stop the flood now.

PETER. Nice speech.

JULIE. Yeah. I thought it might depress the shit out of everyone in earshot. How's prosperity?

PETER. Prosperous. How's self-righteousness?

JULIE. Justified. *(beat)* Look, Pete – I've got killer jet-lag and a hard-line regime to annoy, so unless you're here to pick up a sign…

PETER. You didn't call.

JULIE. I crashed with a friend. No phone. Besides, nothing's changed.

PETER. You got deported from South Africa.

JULIE. Oh. That. People there didn't like the things I said about their mothers.

PETER. I saw the footage of the riot.

*(***JULIE** *grins.)*

JULIE. Cyber-stalking? Very classy. I hear the tear gas shots were exciting.

PETER. Jesus Christ – ! They were shooting at you, Julie!

JULIE. I remember.

PETER. If they'd killed you – what would I do if they killed you? *(Beat. They don't look at each other.)* Look – After what happened, I was angry. And then for awhile I was relieved – I could get up in the morning and go to Starbucks and not worry about fair trade coffee or international graft before 9 AM –

JULIE. Sounds like that worked out then.

PETER. I was doing it just to piss you off. I'd catch myself looking for you, like you'd be across the street, or at a corner table. And I realized that what I really wanted was for you to be there, so that I could do better. So that you could be proud of me.

JULIE. You want a gold star for bicycling and recycling? It's yours, Pete. But don't pretend that it's anything but window dressing. There's a line, and we both know which side of it you're on.

PETER. Did you ever love me at all? Or was I just another pair of hands to hold a sign?

JULIE. Why are you watching footage of protests? Why do you care *so* much, whether or not I'm proud of you? Last I recall I was at a permanent disconnect from reality.

(beat)

PETER. Jules, I'm really trying here.

JULIE. *(gently)* I know you are.

(They stand, not looking at each other.)

ANNIE. *(as though she has just pulled alongside in the SUV)* Julie! How – well – I suppose *unexpected* isn't the right word for finding you at a protest –

JULIE. Mrs. Iversen. The BMW is looking flash.

ANNIE. Peter and I were picking up supplies for the barbecue. Though I suppose with what we're eating, we'll have to hope you don't picket that, too.

PETER. Stop it, Mom.

ANNIE. Oh, don't be silly. Julie knows I'm just kidding around.

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