

# **FOURTH OF NEVER JULY**

**By Jerold London**

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**Once every few years, even now ... I find it impossible to bear.  
– Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible***

## **FOURTH OF NEVER JULY**

### **TIME AND PLACE**

Scene 1: Late 1990's. Before Y2K and 9-11. Summertime.  
Midwest USA.

At center stage between two houses is a tree that can easily be climbed and sat in.  
Nighttime. (Say, 10:15).

### **CHARACTERS**

ANNE, female, 11 in Scene 1.

JULIAN, male (Anne's next-door neighbor), 11 in Scene 1.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

**SCENE 1**

**JULIAN creeps out of his house and climbs the tree, stage center, putting an envelope in a safe spot higher up.**

**Shortly thereafter ANNE creeps out of her house and climbs the tree, sitting on a parallel branch.**

**JULIAN**

[*pause*] Dr. Livingstone, I presume.

**ANNE**

[*laughs*] Nope.  
The one and only Anne Brown.

**JULIAN**

Julian Henman's my name. At your service.

**ANNE**

My pleasure, Master Julian, to be sure.

**JULIAN**

Are you in these parts often?

**ANNE**

When I'm exploring.

**JULIAN**

And what are you exploring tonight?

**ANNE**

Maybe just waiting.

**JULIAN**

For what?... For some news I have to tell you?

**ANNE**

For the fireworks. What else?  
What news?

**JULIAN**

Ah, the terrible fireworks of July.

**ANNE**

Independence Day, tomorrow....  
So ... what is it you have to tell me?

**JULIAN**

[*beat*] Independence ... that's what.  
But independence from what? would you think?

**ANNE**

From the British, I suppose. Is that what you mean?

**JULIAN**

Sometimes I'd just as soon trade our history of independence from England for another history.

**ANNE**

That's weird.

**JULIAN**

Look at it. Look at the world.

**ANNE**

What world? Down there? Or up here?

**JULIAN**

I mean, how different things might be if there could still be a United Kingdom.

**ANNE**

Are you starting on again about King Arthur?

**JULIAN**

And Camelot.

**ANNE**

Camelot's a musical.... Do you really want to know how different?

**JULIAN**

I guess so.

**ANNE**

First of all, no fireworks tomorrow night. Bonfires, maybe, on Guy Fawkes.

**JULIAN**

Big whoopie. I could deal without all the fireworks, and all the fire hazards.

**ANNE**

What fire hazards are you talking about?

**JULIAN**

You don't remember Linda's roof?

**ANNE**

I remember one of the rockets went on it, by mistake. But nothing happened.

**JULIAN**

She and her sister were crying their eyes out, afraid their house would burn down. *Remember that?*

They never should have been allowed to shoot rockets off in the neighborhood.

**ANNE**

Why are you thinking about that?

That was five years ago.

And they're not.

**JULIAN**

Not what?

**ANNE**

They're not allowed to shoot rockets off in our neighborhood.

**JULIAN**

Well, they will anyway. Roman candles, at least.

Go figure. Where's the justice?

I make a mistake, and it's punishment for the rest of my life.

**ANNE**

Stop that. You're being such a grouch.

**JULIAN**

Groucho Marx.

**ANNE**

Rosa Parks.

**JULIAN**

Patriarchs.

**ANNE**

Question marks.

Lost Arks. **JULIAN**

Meadowlarks. **ANNE**

Clark bars. **JULIAN**

Matriarchs. **ANNE**

Hark a herald angels harks. **JULIAN**

Puppies bark. **ANNE**

Tiger sharks. **JULIAN**

Hazard sparks. **ANNE**

Lizard parks. **JULIAN**

Smashing Pumpkins. **ANNE**

Whatever. Just keep rockets off *our* roof please. **JULIAN**

**Pause.**

Jules?... **ANNE**

Yes? **JULIAN**

If it was like you said ... still a United Kingdom .... **ANNE**

**JULIAN**

[beat] Yes....

**ANNE**

There wouldn't be as many countries in the world.

**JULIAN**

Duh!

**ANNE**

And fewer stamps to collect.

**JULIAN**

Oops! I hadn't thought about that.

**ANNE**

Think of your Presidents collection. Where would they be?

**JULIAN**

I have *all* of them, you know.

Every one.

Mint.

**ANNE**

I know.

I know.

You've shown me.

They must have cost a fortune.

**JULIAN**

Have I shown you my Legends of the West?

**ANNE**

Yes.

When you got them.

**JULIAN**

And the Bill Pickett misprint stamp I got later?

**ANNE**

No. You never showed me that one.

**JULIAN**

I won it in the lottery they had.



**ANNE**

Is that your favorite one?

**JULIAN**

Until they release the Legends of Baseball series next year.  
Then Barry Bonds will be.

**ANNE**

Stamps. Stamps. Stamps.... And baseball players.

**JULIAN**

Which reminds me ... there's a letter here for you.

**ANNE**

There is? Where is it?

**JULIAN**

**Reaches up to a higher branch, and touches something.**

Up here somewhere.

Can't find it now.

I'll find it later.

**ANNE**

No big deal. I'd rather talk to you than read some old letter.

So, as I was saying ... What was I saying?

Oh. That, where would all those Presidents of yours be if we hadn't gotten our independence? Or the Legends of the West, for that matter?

Not on U.S. postage stamps. That's for sure.

**JULIAN**

I could have lived without them.

**ANNE**

And could you have lived without baseball?

And your precious baseball cards?

**JULIAN**

Why would I have to live without baseball?

**ANNE**

Because all the baseball players would be playing cricket instead.

Or nothing at all, Stupid!

Even Barry Bonds.

**JULIAN**

Bor-ing! And anyway, you're crazy.

**ANNE**

You're the one who said it. Not me.

**JULIAN**

Well, it's not funny, like you seem to think.  
I love this country for its stamps and baseball cards.  
But not for its Fourth of July.

**ANNE**

Just saying. Not to mention the elephant.

**JULIAN**

The elephant? What elephant?

**ANNE**

The one in the living room.

**JULIAN**

What on earth are you saying?

**ANNE**

I'm just saying: If we hadn't gotten our independence, where would democracy be?

**JULIAN**

Details. Details.  
That's what democracy is: In the details.  
They'd work it out.

**ANNE**

Where?

**JULIAN**

On top of the world, if they had to.  
On Mt. Everest.  
Or the moon.

**ANNE**

An elephant. Like I said.  
An elephant on the dark side of the moon.

**JULIAN**

I'll tell you what's an elephant.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] Well, go ahead.

**JULIAN**

You being Catholic and all, answer me something....

**ANNE**

What?... Are you trying to start an argument, Jay?

**JULIAN**

What do you think God is?

**ANNE**

Like *you* know.

**JULIAN**

I asked you first.

**ANNE**

Well ... God's no elephant. That's for sure.

God's a Trinity.

The Holy Trinity of man, spirit,

and the super power that created the universe and everything in it.

And controls it all.

**JULIAN**

God is a man in body, with a superpower brain.

**ANNE**

That's hardly what I said.

Who believes anything like that?

**JULIAN**

Oh, there must be someone somewhere. But anyway, how can God control everything and let children die and Presidents be shot?

**ANNE**

I don't know. And I don't pretend to know things like that.

**JULIAN**

Do you think God has eyes in the trees and is watching us right now?

**ANNE**

I told you: *I don't know.*

**JULIAN**

Like a miracle, maybe?

**ANNE**

He's *more* than a miracle. I *do* know that.

**JULIAN**

And does he let children go to heaven?

**ANNE**

If they've been baptized.

**JULIAN**

Baptized Catholic, you mean.

**ANNE**

That's what the nuns tell us.

**JULIAN**

And if they're not baptized? What then?  
If they're pure of sin but die unbaptized?

**ANNE**

There's a place for them.  
Just ... it's not in heaven.

**JULIAN**

Where is it then?

**ANNE**

It's Limbo,  
where they stay as children, without any of the tortures of Hell.

**JULIAN**

Then when I die, I want to go to Limbo.

**ANNE**

I'll miss you.

**JULIAN**

It makes me mad.

**ANNE**

That I'll miss you?

**JULIAN**

No.

Not that.

That innocent children have to die.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] Can I tell you about a dream I had last night?

**JULIAN**

You're *always* having dreams, aren't you Anne?

**ANNE**

Sometimes they're about you.

But not this one.

I don't think so, anyway.

But now that you're acting all strange all of a sudden, maybe it *was* about you.

**JULIAN**

Then tell me.

**ANNE**

Do you remember the movie called "The Day the Earth Stood Still"?

**JULIAN**

Like I don't love sci-fi?

Of course I remember it.

It was one of the best, back in the day, and rerun on TV just a few weeks ago.

**ANNE**

And when the robot ... Gork I think they called him.

**JULIAN**

Gort.

**ANNE**

Gort. Yes, Gort.

**JULIAN**

What about him?

He was played by an actor who was seven-and-a-half feet tall, did you know?

**ANNE**

Well, when Patricia Neal goes to see him, and he starts to come after her, and she backs away, and falls down, and screams ....

**JULIAN**

And his death-ray visor goes up, and she has to tell him the three secret words, or he'll vaporize her.

**ANNE**

And most of the rest of the Earth with her.

**JULIAN**

And what?  
You dreamed about *that*?

**ANNE**

Do you remember what those three words were, by any chance?

**JULIAN**

Like I just don't happen to.

**ANNE**

Tell me.

**JULIAN**

**Slight pause, with a pretend apprehensive look.**

Klaatu.  
Barada.  
Nikto.

**ANNE**

What a memory!

**JULIAN**

It never helped me any.

**ANNE**

Well, in my dream I was outside somewhere, someplace like where Patricia Neal went to see Gort. And he was there.

**JULIAN**

Who was there?  
Gort?

**ANNE**

A robot like him, named Julian.  
And the robot spoke first.

**JULIAN**

And what did he have to say to you?  
Klaatu barada nikto, neighbor Anne?

**ANNE**

Not exactly.

**JULIAN**

Then what?

**ANNE**

Princess Anne ....

**JULIAN**

He called you "Princess"?

**ANNE**

As a matter of fact, he did.

**JULIAN**

Weird.

**ANNE**

Why is that weird?

**JULIAN**

For a rookie robot to call some girl "Princess" seems weird to me.

**ANNE**

Well it was *my* dream.

**JULIAN**

Sorry. No offence intended.

**ANNE**

No problem....

**JULIAN**

[*beat*] And that's it?  
He just called you "Princess" and walked away?

**ANNE**

He said: "I will always believe in you Princess Anne, even when you make me mad. Or make me sad. Or be confused. Or make me feel used."

**JULIAN**

That makes no sense:  
What's a robot supposed to say?  
That he doesn't feel used?  
Because, what's the point?  
That's a robot's job, isn't it?  
To be used.

**ANNE**

I think the dream was a little more personal than that.

**JULIAN**

What? A personal robot like Data? On Star Trek?

**ANNE**

Yes. More like Data.  
More like you, to be exact.

**JULIAN**

Like me?!

**ANNE**

It was just a dream, Jay.  
And usually, in one of my dreams, when I don't recognize a character,  
it turns out in the end to be me talking.

**JULIAN**

But you're already in the dream.

**ANNE**

That makes no difference.  
One time I was in the same dream as four different people.  
All me. Talking to myself.

**JULIAN**

You *do* talk to yourself. That's for sure.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] Do you think it's true?



**JULIAN**

Do I think what's true?

**ANNE**

That he'll always believe in me, even if I screw up?

**JULIAN**

Depends.

**ANNE**

On what?

**JULIAN**

How bad you screw up.

**ANNE**

Catholics don't believe that.

Catholics know we can always be forgiven, no matter what we do.

**JULIAN**

Forgiven? By what? A priest?

**ANNE**

Yes. A priest.

**JULIAN**

The real question is: Can you forgive yourself?

**ANNE**

I don't know about that.

**JULIAN**

That's where Hell is: In the hands of people who cannot forgive themselves.

**ANNE**

God forgives you.

**JULIAN**

And that makes everything all right, does it?

**ANNE**

When you go to Heaven you see things differently.

That God is all there is that matters.

Everything else was just part of the road you had to take. Bumps and rocks.

**JULIAN**

But everything's not all right. Not when there are snake pits in the road.  
How obvious does it have to be?

**ANNE**

What's the matter, Jules? What's troubling you?

**JULIAN**

[*beat*] What about that bump in your road you told *me* about?  
Has God made that all right?

**ANNE**

What bump?

**JULIAN**

On your chest.

**ANNE**

Oh, my chest....  
Oh, that. It's nothing.

**JULIAN**

Nothing?

**ANNE**

Just nature.... What happens to girls my age. You know.

**JULIAN**

At eleven?

**ANNE**

Yes.

**JULIAN**

Oh.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] I wish I could make you feel better.

**JULIAN**

I have a lot on my mind.

**ANNE**

Maybe the fireworks will make you feel better.

**JULIAN**

I hate July fourth. Every July fourth.

**ANNE**

Why?

**JULIAN**

I just do, that's why.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] Oh my God! I forgot!  
It happened on the fourth of July, didn't it?  
I'm sorry. I forgot.  
Oh! I'm so very sorry.

**JULIAN**

Forget it.

**ANNE**

With all the voices then, I never heard yours.

**JULIAN**

That was the worst thing I remember:  
I couldn't shut up all the noise.  
That, and that I had to tell my mother.

**ANNE**

My mother told me never to talk about it.

**JULIAN**

Mine told me the same thing.  
But she needn't have.

**ANNE**

But if words were a way I could have told you how I've felt these two years ....

**JULIAN**

If words were an island I should have drowned by now.

**ANNE**

What happened, when you told your mother?

**JULIAN**

[*beat*] She screamed at me like a Banshee, and never forgave me.

ANNE

Dear Lord!

JULIAN

And she told me today we're moving away.

ANNE

Oh no!!

Moving away?

What will I do without you next door?

JULIAN

She said she can't go on living here anymore.

*They* can't. My father, either.

Like she's in a tunnel that's caving in and swallowing her.

She has to get away to forget.

ANNE

Is that what you had to tell me?

JULIAN

**Reaches and retrieves the envelope.**

Here's the envelope. What I've told you. And I'm going now.

ANNE

Don't go yet. *Please*.

I need to talk to you.

JULIAN

What about?

ANNE

I'm going to miss you so much.

What are we going to do?

JULIAN

There's nothing to do.

What's done is done.

ANNE

I care so much for you I can't understand it.

JULIAN

Anne, you've been the only thing good that's ever been in my life.

**ANNE**

And now what?...  
I know what!  
We can talk.  
Call me; and we can talk.  
Every time you can.  
Until we can see each other again.

**JULIAN**

I can call you.

**ANNE**

Until we can see each other again. Promise.  
Every chance you get.  
And write.  
*Please write.*

**JULIAN**

Okay.  
I can write.  
But I've got to go now.

**ANNE**

I love you.

**JULIAN climbs down from the tree.**

**JULIAN**

**Looking up at her.**  
Goodbye, Friend.

**JULIAN exits.**

**SCENE 2**

**Eleven years later. ANNE and JULIAN are both 22 and recently graduated from college. Anne's parents still live in the same house as before; and she is home for a few weeks in the summer staying with them. JULIAN has returned to visit.**

**The tree between the two houses is eleven years older, as well as larger.**

**ANNE is stepping out of the front door as JULIAN walks down the street. They meet at the tree.**

**It's daytime.**

**JULIAN**

Anne Number One? I presume.

**ANNE**

The one and only.

**JULIAN**

Julian Henman, at your service.

**ANNE**

Welcome back, Mister College Graduate.  
It's been a long time.

**JULIAN**

Thank God for the iPhone.  
I've watched you grow up on it.

**ANNE**

God?

**JULIAN**

Well, thank Steve Jobs then.

**ANNE**

Are you in these parts often?

**JULIAN**

This is the first time, Anne, that I've been back since my parents moved away.  
What? Ten, no eleven years ago.  
Everything seem so strange.  
I don't know what to say....  
Any news?

**ANNE**

What kind of news?

**JULIAN**

Are you engaged yet?

**ANNE**

Oh Jules, you would just love him.

**JULIAN**

Is he bonny?

**ANNE**

Bonny??  
Aren't you the quaint one now?  
How can you say "bonny," Jay?

**JULIAN**

All right, dammit.  
Is he hot then?

**ANNE**

You better believe it, he is!

**JULIAN**

Why do girls always get the hot ones?

**ANNE**

Happy Birthday to me!

**JULIAN**

You've never looked better, Anne, or happier. I can say that.

**ANNE**

I've never felt happier.  
It was just out there, waiting for me I guess.

**JULIAN**

[*pause, looking at her*] Do you remember when we used to sneak out of the house at night, and climb that tree together?

**ANNE**

Want to try it again?

**JULIAN**

I'm game if you are.

**ANNE**

Take off your shoes.

**They take off their shoes, climb the tree,  
and sit on the branches they sat on in  
Scene 1.**

**ANNE**

I always loved climbing trees.

**JULIAN**

So did Jesus.

**ANNE**

How could you know that?  
You're an atheist.

**JULIAN**

That's how I know it. It made him feel closer to his father.

**ANNE**

Sort of ironic, don't you think?

**JULIAN**

That's why I think it.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] How's *your* love life?

**JULIAN**

Slow, and even slower.

**ANNE**

Sorry to hear it.



**JULIAN**

But, what's the rush?  
I'll find him eventually, the right one. The very right one.  
Won't I?

**ANNE**

I suppose so.  
Why not?

**JULIAN**

I'm only twenty-two....  
But of course, so are you.  
And look at you!  
You're beautiful.  
You're bursting with vitality.  
And you've already found your love life.

**ANNE**

I couldn't be luckier, could I?

**JULIAN**

What about the future?  
Any plans?  
Grad school, or something?

**ANNE**

Plastics.

**JULIAN**

Did you say "plastics"?

**ANNE**

Just kidding.

**JULIAN**

Oh! "*Plastics.*"

**ANNE**

Our wedding will be quite different from that one, I'm sure.  
But in the meantime, Mark is determined to try the law.  
He's been accepted at Harvard and Yale, and he wants to wait till he gets his  
degree before we formally tie the knot.

**JULIAN**

And you're okay with that?

**ANNE**

What do you mean?

**JULIAN**

What do you mean, what do I mean?

**ANNE**

You don't have to be married nowadays....  
Do you?

**JULIAN**

Are you still Catholic?

**ANNE**

Yes.  
Why?  
I think so.

**JULIAN**

Because that sounds very *un*-Catholic to me.

**ANNE**

*He's not*, you see.

**JULIAN**

Maybe some of me has rubbed off on you.

**ANNE**

Some of your what?

**JULIAN**

My agnosticism.

**ANNE**

You're an atheist, I thought.

**JULIAN**

Ahhh, maybe only part way.

**ANNE**

Well, you were always challenging my faith, weren't you?

**JULIAN**

Not your faith so much. Just the porridge you were being fed.  
It's how true faith grows.

**ANNE**

We did have our arguments, didn't we?

**JULIAN**

Discussions, I'd call them.  
Up here, on top of the world.

**ANNE**

I've missed that.

**JULIAN**

Me, too.

**ANNE**

How can two such opposite views be so much fun to argue about?

**JULIAN**

Simple.

**ANNE**

There you go again.  
Why is it "simple"?

**JULIAN**

Because we don't threaten each other.  
We complement each other, as only such a joyful girl and a gay guy can do.

**ANNE**

Mark doesn't threaten me.  
But we still can't talk like you and I can.

**JULIAN**

There's more than one explanation for that.

**ANNE**

Oh?

**JULIAN**

Does he speak English?

**ANNE**

You idiot! Of course he does.

**JULIAN**

Well I didn't know.

Maybe all he says is *res judicata*, and *quid pro quo*, and *ipso facto*, for all I know.

**ANNE**

You're just being silly.

**JULIAN**

I had a law-school friend at college who told his girlfriend about a case they were studying involving a German citizen whose name was Zoffer Rocker.

**ANNE**

So?

**JULIAN**

He talked a lot about Zoffer Rocker. For a couple of months.

**ANNE**

Mark and I *do* talk.

And I expect we'll talk about a lot more things than what he studies in law school.

**JULIAN**

In Cambridge or New Haven.

**ANNE**

Yes. In Cambridge or New Haven, whichever he chooses.

**JULIAN**

Do you like New England?

**ANNE**

Yes. I suppose so.

**JULIAN**

And what will you be doing while he's chasing papers and precedents?

**ANNE**

I don't know. Get a job, I suppose.

**JULIAN**

At the Law School?

**ANNE**

Maybe. Why not?  
Why are you asking me these things?

**JULIAN**

Because I think that brain of yours deserves a lot more than shelving books in a law school library.

**ANNE**

You're just peeing on my parade, aren't you?  
Just jealous of me.

**JULIAN**

Zoffer Rocker.

**ANNE**

Why are you being so mean?

**JULIAN**

Why aren't you going to Med School, like you always planned?  
And let Mark get a job in the hospital?

**ANNE**

Not enough money.  
And that would mean we'd be separated, for the most part, for years.

**JULIAN**

Come on! Don't tell me you've been four years an undergraduate and never heard of student loans, for Christ's sake.

**ANNE**

What is a wife spost to do, when her husband has a career?...  
When he has a calling, to be a corporate lawyer?

**JULIAN**

Zoffer Rocker.

**ANNE**

Will you stop with that "Zoffer Rocker" bit.

**JULIAN**

Zoffer Rocker. Zoffer Rocker. Zoffer Rocker.  
What's a wife supposed to do? Why, follow his parade, of course.  
Support her husband at all costs, of course. From the back.

**ANNE**

Why are you being so mean?

**JULIAN**

Because what a wife is supposed to do is what any human being is supposed to do: Follow their own dreams.

**ANNE**

Like you?

**JULIAN**

My dreams went to shit thirteen years ago.

**ANNE**

And that's no excuse.

**JULIAN**

[*pause*] Have you ever seen pictures of places in World War One where people were killed and blinded by mustard gas?

**ANNE**

No.

**JULIAN**

Well thank God. Your God....  
What stands out is the darkness and filth on the glass.  
Room after room with so much death ... and not a broken window.  
Blackened, but not broken.

**ANNE**

Why are you telling me this?

**JULIAN**

Because this is who I am. Inside.

**ANNE**

How?

**JULIAN**

Anne, I killed my little brother.  
My six-year-old brother, who would be nineteen now.  
And you are the only person in the world I can breathe these words to.  
But it doesn't make it go away.  
The guilt has grown legs and arms, and won't let go of me.

**ANNE**

But, Jay, you never killed him.  
A driver did.  
Driving an ambulance.  
We all know that.

**JULIAN**

Not how I see it.  
And I'm no more a man now than I was back then.

**ANNE**

Jay, you are a wonderful man.  
And I'd give most anything to make the hurting in you stop.

**JULIAN half falls, half jumps down from  
the tree.**

**ANNE climbs down after him.**

**ANNE**

Are you okay?

**JULIAN**

If there was that God of yours, he wouldn't have let Cody die.

**ANNE**

I know how you are struggling with this.  
And all I can tell you is that our God, someday, will give me the power to  
straighten this out in you.  
I believe that.  
And I always will.

**JULIAN**

Oh, I'm a hopeless case.  
Let's, please, talk about something else. Please?

**ANNE**

[beat] Zoffer Rocker.

**JULIAN**

And a Zoffer Rocker to you, too.

**ANNE**

But you're right. Mark and I don't talk about our plans like this.

**JULIAN**

You're in a Goldilocks zone.  
It'll come around.  
You hide and watch.

**ANNE**

You're making me wonder about getting married at all.  
I was so happy to see you again, and you're making wonder about ever getting married.

**JULIAN**

Anne....  
I know I'd feel a lot different if I knew Mark.  
It's just ....

**ANNE**

Just what?

**JULIAN**

Just that life turns on such precious, small moments.  
Such inconsequential decisions.

**ANNE**

Getting married is hardly an inconsequential decision!  
Not to me it isn't.

**JULIAN**

No, of course not.  
But deciding to shelve becoming a doctor for Mark to go to his big time Harvard,  
or Yale ....

**ANNE**

It's seems like you're asking me to make a choice.

**JULIAN**

If looking out for yourself is a choice.

**ANNE**

I mean a choice whether I'd be a better doctor than Mark will be a good lawyer.

**JULIAN**

Oh, the world needs both, God knows.  
More doctors *and* more lawyers.



**ANNE**

You're just being snarky. I know you.

**JULIAN**

Me?! Of a gaggle of everyday snarks?

**ANNE**

You, being Groucho Himself Mister Marx.

**JULIAN**

Me, a tricky fox with Kryptonian birthmarks?

**ANNE**

You, in a clan of Arthur C. Clarke's.

**JULIAN**

Me, at World's End with only Deutschmarks?

**ANNE**

You, at the walls of Chicago ballparks.

**JULIAN**

Me, on a team of South African aardvarks?

**ANNE**

You, in the fields of moths and Monarchs.

**JULIAN**

Me, at the gate where Prince Charles embarks?

**ANNE**

You, with all the other skylarks.

**JULIAN**

Me, shaking hands with Zoffer Rucker himself?

**ANNE**

All right. All right. Who was Zoffer Rucker anyway?... Go ahead and tell me.

**JULIAN**

It's not so much *who* Zoffer Rucker was, as *what* Zoffer Rucker was.

**ANNE**

Okay. *What* was Zoffer Rucker?

**JULIAN**

One day my law-school friend, and his girlfriend, and I were riding in his car,  
and the radio was on, and someone said something about Betty Crocker.  
Like, her cake mix was in the Poisonwood Bible, or something.  
And my friend made a rhyme:  
“Betty Crocker, Zoffer Rocker.”

**ANNE**

And?...

**JULIAN**

And his girlfriend got all excited. She almost wet her pants.  
“Betty Crocker Zoffer Rocker” she said.  
“Betty Crocker Zoffer Rocker.  
Get it? Get it? Betty Crocker’s. Off her rocker.”

**ANNE**

So?

**JULIAN**

Well, my friend just looked at her and winked at me, and she got it.

**ANNE**

Got what?

**JULIAN**

That the bastard had set her up.  
Months’ worth of the set-up, just for that moment.  
You see, there never was a Zoffer Rocker.  
He made it up to play a joke on her.

**ANNE**

What a bastard!

**JULIAN**

Like I said.

**ANNE**

So, what’s the point?...  
Something about Mark and me?

**JULIAN**

It’s language.

**ANNE**

Language?

**JULIAN**

Doctors and lawyers both speak a language.  
Doctors heal, and save lives with their language.  
Lawyers win court battles and help rich men rule from the grave with trusts and wills.

**ANNE**

You don't care much for lawyers, do you?

**JULIAN**

I don't care much for anybody who takes you away ... doctor or lawyer.

**ANNE**

I'm trying to follow this. Are you suggesting Mark and I are talking a different language about getting married?

**JULIAN**

I'm suggesting you're not talking about *parts of it* at all.

**ANNE**

What parts?  
What are we not talking about?

**JULIAN**

Dreams.

**ANNE**

Dreams? We're getting married, and you want us to discuss our dreams.

**JULIAN**

Let your dreams be known.

**ANNE**

*My dreams??*

**JULIAN**

Of becoming a doctor. And saving pieces of the world.

**ANNE**

Or saving a piece of you....  
[beat] How does it feel? Being back, next to your old house after all this time?

**JULIAN**

They never come back, so far as I know.

**ANNE**

I thought I might never see you here again.

**JULIAN**

And here I am.

**ANNE**

Time flies like an arrow, you used to say.

**JULIAN**

From a bow of rusty feathers.

**ANNE**

How was college?

**JULIAN**

I chased it four years ... looking.

**ANNE**

Okay, I'll bite: Looking for what?  
All the king's horses and all the king's men?

**JULIAN**

Something like that.

**ANNE**

More specificity, please.

**JULIAN**

I had an idea that I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life.  
No idea what I was even looking for.

**ANNE**

Nothing?

**JULIAN**

Then one day god happened to me, in reverse.

**ANNE**

You found God?  
Or God found you?

**JULIAN**

I found a dog.

**ANNE**

You're an idiot, Jules.

**JULIAN**

A dyslexic idiot. Something like that.

**ANNE**

Shut up!

**JULIAN**

But not completely an idiot....

I never thought I could ever talk to Cody again.

Tell him how I couldn't imagine ... or stand myself for how stupid I was.

Because I don't believe in spirits and things.

You know that.

And I certainly would never have thought it would be a dog.

A lost puppy.

Thrown away, to be exact.

Because, he didn't just jump into the lake at State by himself.

He was in a bag....

Anyway, I wasn't thinking, which was easy for me at the time.

And I jumped into the lake, off the bench I was sitting on, after I heard the splash.

When I got out all I had were wet clothes, wet shoes,

and a wet bag with a wet Dalmatian puppy in it.

**ANNE**

O my God!! Really?!

**JULIAN**

I had no idea of becoming a dog owner.

But I did. For a year.

**ANNE**

You don't still have him?

**JULIAN**

Not anymore.

I finally found a family with a young boy who could be better dog owners than I alone can be.

With a couple of acres for Cody to run on.

**ANNE**

You named him “Cody”?

**JULIAN**

Not really.

He told me “Cody” was his name....

It was the first time, and the only time, I felt sunshine like that in my life again.

He was so happy to be with me.

Always.

Just to see me.

Wiggling and jumping.

I had to get on my knees and give him my face to lick to calm him down.

I’d sit on the ground, and when he quieted down he’d put his head in my lap,  
and look into my eyes.

Then we’d talk.

**ANNE**

What about?

**JULIAN**

My stamps. And my baseball cards.

And that made him happy, the way it used to do....

And about the mystery of life.

Why some children have to die.

[*beat*] But then he grew out of his puppy stage, and Cody left Cody....

[*pause*] Anne, if there’s one thing I’ve learned in this life ....

**ANNE**

[*beat*] What? What is it?

**JULIAN**

It’s how animals can heal a person.

Help heal, for a time.

And I thought, after that, I might become a veterinarian.

But becoming a vet is harder than finding golden hen’s teeth under your pillow.

**ANNE**

I’ve heard.

**JULIAN**

So, I’m thinking of finding a way to bring dogs that care to people who need  
emotional help from them.

**ANNE**

Wow!!

What a marvelous idea....

In hospitals, too, like when someone, a child maybe, has to go into surgery.

**JULIAN**

In hospitals ... yes.

*And* in courtrooms, too, while a witness testifies.

Or in church, when a child's being baptized.

**ANNE**

You just can't leave well enough alone, can you?

**JULIAN**

Sorry.

It's the nature of the beast in me.

**ANNE**

You *are* a beast.

**JULIAN**

[*thoughtful pause*] So, what are we doing today?

What's new around this town?

**ANNE**

What are you in to?

**JULIAN**

I don't know.

You're the expert.

**ANNE**

Well. There's a chess tournament at the Biltmore.

**JULIAN**

Will Bobby Fischer be there?

**ANNE**

I doubt it.

I think he died last year.

**JULIAN**

He did??

Where have I been?

**ANNE**

In Iceland, I think. Reykjavik. The place where he won the world championship.

**JULIAN**

Sorry. Never been there....  
Anything else?

**ANNE**

Want to go swimming at the Y?  
We still have a family membership.

**JULIAN**

No thanks. Not today.

**ANNE**

How 'bout the Casino?  
Now that we're old enough.

**JULIAN**

What else?

**ANNE**

Well, out at Sicilian Lake I read they are having an auto race.

**JULIAN**

An auto race?  
What?  
They've built a racetrack round the lake?

**ANNE**

No. They're racing *in* it.

**JULIAN**

You're joking.

**ANNE**

It's a bunch of VW Beetles, airtight, equipped to motor in the water.

**JULIAN**

Now *there's* an event you don't expect to see every day.... But I think I'll pass.

**ANNE**

What about the county arboretum?  
I hear they have an amazing exhibition of butterflies this summer.



**JULIAN**

Sorry. Anything else?

**ANNE**

Want to rent a bike?

**JULIAN**

Where would we ride?

**ANNE**

There are some nice trails in Oakwood Park.

**JULIAN**

*That's* a possibility.

Anything else?

**ANNE**

How about just hanging out along the river?  
You and I, walking with our thoughts together.  
Like we used to on Sunday afternoons.  
How does that sound?

**JULIAN**

That sounds perfect.  
Let's go.

**As they are exiting:**

**ANNE**

Why is it, when we talk, I feel holes inside me filling up?

**JULIAN**

I don't know....

**They exit.**

**SCENE 3**

**Eleven years later. ANNE and JULIAN are both 33.**

**Stage right ANNE is at a desk, on a laptop.**

**Stage left JULIAN is at a desk, on a laptop.**

**It's daytime.**

**ANNE**

Julian, is this you? I can barely see your face.

**JULIAN**

**Makes an adjustment.**

Is that any better?

**ANNE**

Yes. Much.

**JULIAN**

How are you, Princess?

**ANNE**

My upper half's together, I hope. Forgive the hair, and forget the rest.

**JULIAN**

COVID?

**ANNE**

No COVID, thank God. But no relief, either, from the quarantine. Mark is working three days a week from the apartment. The other three he goes in, with a mask on, of course. How about you?

**JULIAN**

About the same. Crazy like all the rest of the people trying to get on top of this. Except in our office most everyone has opted for working remote. So, it's damned quiet on work days. And likely to stay that way until we get the vaccines up and running. What about med school?

**ANNE**

Education interrupted. I'm getting antsy.  
We have Zoom lectures every day. But not any hands on stuff.

**JULIAN**

Ahh, you've got plenty of time.  
You're only thirty-three....  
What's the school's take on what's happening?

**ANNE**

People would be healthier without politics.

**JULIAN**

Aside from that truism.

**ANNE**

We need an effective vaccine.  
Period.  
Without it, we'll fall back on what they're calling "herd immunity."  
Which will be an unmitigated disaster, they're telling us.  
Three million lives in the U.S. alone. At best. Probably more.

**JULIAN**

I can't disagree.  
And on the other side, if we get to it soon enough,  
the economy will survive the day.  
No Doomsday.  
Give it a couple of years, with Government help of course.

**ANNE**

Mark figures the same thing....  
By the way, he's on track for a partnership vote in December,  
unless, heaven forbid, COVID sticks its ugly head in the way.

**JULIAN**

[*unenthusiastically*] Wonderful.  
Any other news?

**ANNE**

Oh, we got a dog.

**JULIAN**

Yeah. A golden doodle puppy. Saw it on Facebook.

**ANNE**

She's adorable!  
We named her Dodo, because Doodles aren't the smartest bark on the block.

**JULIAN**

What prompted that?

**ANNE**

Home alone.

**JULIAN**

I thought you said Mark was staying at home.

**ANNE**

Only half the time.  
The other half he's full time gone at the office.

**JULIAN**

Yep.  
That's dog country.

**ANNE**

How's everything with you?

**JULIAN**

Okay.

**ANNE**

And your folks?

**JULIAN**

We don't talk. We seldom talk.  
Too bad COVID doesn't have a side effect of loss of sense of loss.  
Like loss of sense of smell or something.  
And we could all catch it.

**ANNE**

You don't really mean that, Jay!

**JULIAN**

No. Not really.  
Half really.  
Parents can be sharper than a serpent's tooth.

**ANNE**

A grieving problem, I imagine.  
Maybe they haven't found closure.

**JULIAN**

**Closure?!**

I hate that damn word.  
It's a total myth.

**ANNE**

All right. All right.  
You're right.  
I never liked the word much myself.  
I should never have said it.  
Sorry.

**JULIAN**

No. *I'm sorry*, Anne.  
It just touches a nerve in me.  
Like some form of brain washing,  
that supposedly will produce eternal sunshine of the spotless mind.

**ANNE**

You once read me a poem about a spotless mind.  
I remember.  
But I can't remember it.  
Was it from the Psalms?  
Or Shakespeare?

**JULIAN**

A poem by the Pope. Alexander Pope.

**ANNE**

Oh.

**JULIAN**

Something like:  
"How happy is the vestal virgin's lot.  
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.  
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind...."  
Not me!  
I ceased being spotless on a day in July, when I was nine years old.

**ANNE**

Didn't they make a movie of a spotless mind?

**JULIAN**

A science fiction movie.

**ANNE**

Oh, yes. Science fiction. The Day the Earth Stood Still.

**JULIAN**

Not that one. Another one....

By the way, have you seen any good movies lately? On Netflix, or HBO?

**ANNE**

Just the normal stuff:

Stranger Things.

Westworld.

The Crown.

Game of Thrones reruns.

But I'm really looking forward to The Queen's Gambit next month.

I was always fascinated by the chess mind, back in the day.

**JULIAN**

You played chess, didn't you?

Weren't you on the high school chess team?

**ANNE**

I've lost interest in playing it.

I used to study chess, what? maybe ten hours a week.

More than homework.

It was a world in itself to me. A beautiful world of its own logic.

One that a girl can control just as well as any boy.

But that seems a lifetime ago.

Now I have other things on my mind.

**JULIAN**

Is that why you gave the game up?

**ANNE**

The problem I had was artificial intelligence.

**JULIAN**

AI? How was that a problem?

**ANNE**

A thousand different ways.  
But don't you remember?  
How the IBM computer beat world champion Garry Kasparov in 1997?

**JULIAN**

I'm afraid I wasn't much interested in following chess matches back then.

**ANNE**

The computer was named Deep Blue, and Garry Kasparov was my hero.  
World champion at age twenty-two. The youngest ever. The greatest ever.  
I followed all of his games.  
He was a monster.  
Almost *never* lost a game.  
Head and shoulders above everybody else.  
Plus, darkly handsome with piercing eyes.

**JULIAN**

That I might like.

**ANNE**

It came down to a single move,  
with the future of artificial intelligence on the line.

**JULIAN**

O! Come on! Now I *know* you're exaggerating.

**ANNE**

I remember it still.  
For me, like the world changed.  
Move 37 in game 2.  
Kasparov had just laid a trap that any normal computer would have fallen for.  
The machine thought an unusual 15 minutes,  
and then did something no computer had ever done before.  
It declined a two-pawn sacrifice,  
blocked Kasparov's crucial King pawn,  
and nine moves later Kasparov resigned.  
He was furious.  
He was convinced that someone behind the computer had tipped it off.

**JULIAN**

Was there someone behind it?  
Did the computer cheat?

**ANNE**

Not at all.

It took time, but in the end the computer out thought one of the greatest minds in the chess world.

**JULIAN**

That's what I don't get.

How can a computer, programmed by lesser chess players, or maybe even programmers who don't know crap about playing chess, how can it out think the world's greatest master?

**ANNE**

By being able to study millions of variations, and selecting the end position that looks the best, and usually is. It's because computers today can see moons farther into the future. Now all the best chess players in the world are computers. Garry Kasparov's rating was around 2900. Computers come in at 3400 or better today.

**JULIAN**

So, what's the problem?

**ANNE**

It's me. It's inhuman.

I wanted the best minds in the world to be human minds.

**JULIAN**

Why, exactly? And I'm not saying I disagree with you.

**ANNE**

Because human brains incorporate emotion. And humanity. And computer brains are cold and mechanical.

**JULIAN**

If it takes a cold, mechanical brain to feed all the people of the world, wouldn't that make a difference to you?

**ANNE**

Of course it would.

**JULIAN**

Or cure cancer, say, or diabetes, or Alzheimer's?



**ANNE**

Needless to say.

**JULIAN**

Or stop war?

**ANNE**

Gort!

**JULIAN**

What?

**ANNE**

Do you want a mechanical robot ruling your life?  
What if something goes haywire inside it,  
and the world forgets to say, “klaatú barada níkto”?

**JULIAN**

You have a point there.

**ANNE**

Artificial intelligence works when it works with people.  
When it’s on its own, it can go rogue. Like Hal, in 2001.

**JULIAN**

Because artificial intelligence lacks empathy. Is that it?

**ANNE**

History has had monstrous problems with people who lack empathy.  
But so far we’ve been able to deal with them.

**JULIAN**

Thirty million lives lost to Hitler and Stalin is hardly dealing with them.

**ANNE**

And artificial intelligence could?

**JULIAN**

Hey, I’m no AI fan, particularly. But a supercomputer might be able to give  
credible warning of the rise of a new Hitler, or the fall of the Earth’s environment.

**ANNE**

I just don’t want AI to take the life out of life.  
The way Deep Blue did to me when I was in high school.

**JULIAN**

Or to replace lawyers with processors that can write wills and contracts, and litigate court cases.

**ANNE**

No. Not that either.

**JULIAN**

John Henry was a steel drivin' man.

**ANNE**

I mean ... and try to take this seriously, Jay:  
Kasparov suspected there was a human brain behind Deep Blue that helped it cheat.

Ridiculous, we now know.

But in the future, how ridiculous will it be when some player suspects that his opponent is cheating *using a computer* during a chess match?

**JULIAN**

If it weren't for technology, we wouldn't be talking now.

But, you win.

Let's talk about something else....

Anything else new?

**ANNE**

Well ... I did hear a remarkable interview on the radio the other day.

It was Connie Francis. She's 82 now, and what a life she's had!

**JULIAN**

I remember the name, but ....

**ANNE**

She was probably the biggest female recording star of the late 50's and early 60's.  
More than 100 million records sold worldwide.

And in 1960 she co-starred in the movie, "Where the Boys Are."

**JULIAN**

Oh, I remember that.

Fort Lauderdale, right? Spring break? Fifty's female coming of age?

**ANNE**

Correct. Very good.

**JULIAN**

I have a picture in my mind of a sweet teenage blond,  
walking dazed, down the middle of a street, traffic around her, being hit by a car.  
Maybe one of the most beautiful faces and smiles that didn't make it around long  
enough.

**ANNE**

Yvette Mimieux.  
Same movie. One of the four co-stars.

**JULIAN**

What ever happened to her?

**ANNE**

Yvette Mimieux?  
I think she gave up acting.  
But I was talking about Connie Francis.

**JULIAN**

It was hard for a woman back then.

**ANNE**

Damn hard. Even for a Marilyn Monroe.

**JULIAN**

I suppose your Connie Francis sang the title song to the movie.

**ANNE**

She did. It changed the life of Fort Lauderdale forever.

**JULIAN**

I remember that song very well.... Where the boys are.

**ANNE**

Do you remember "Who's Sorry Now"?

**JULIAN**

She sang that, too? What an angelic voice she had, in my memory.

**ANNE**

It almost didn't get recorded.

**JULIAN**

How so?

**ANNE**

MGM Records had signed Francis to a contract when she was seventeen, but after ten or so mostly flops, they were ready to give up. And she was getting ready to pursue a career in medicine at, go figure, NYU.

**JULIAN**

NYU?

**ANNE**

The same.  
She'd graduated salutatorian of her high school class.  
I mean: She had brains as well as talent.

**JULIAN**

Salutatorian, like you.  
But brains and talent don't always win the battle over luck.

**ANNE**

They told her it was her last recording session with them. Actually, "Who's Sorry Now" was the last song to be recorded that day with the orchestra, and she wasn't at all fond of it. She delayed and delayed, until there was barely enough time left. When the recording was completed there were only a few seconds left on the tape.

**JULIAN**

I'll never get it: Why life is so full of twists of fate like that.

**ANNE**

Within six months "Who's Sorry Now" had sold more than a million copies. And for the next four years Francis was voted the Best Female Vocalist on American Bandstand.

**JULIAN**

Where's this going?

**ANNE**

She fell in love with Bobby Darin.  
But her father scared the bejesus out of him. At gunpoint.  
Told him to get out of his daughter's life, or he'd kill him.

**JULIAN**

And, did he?

**ANNE**

Darin ditched her and married Sandra Dee.  
And even at age 82 Francis says that not marrying Bobby Darin was the biggest mistake of her life.

**JULIAN**

We're not all the same, that's for sure; but it does ring a bell.  
How many people, even after years have gone by, find it nearly impossible to bear, when they start thinking about the one lost moment in their lives?

**ANNE**

You just never know, do you?  
We think from the outside that other people's lives go so swimmingly, when, in fact, they may be close to drowning.

**JULIAN**

People too much don't want what they get.  
Connie Francis might actually have been happier going to NYU with you, and becoming a doctor.

**ANNE**

And meeting a man like my Mark....  
Or meeting a man like you, for that matter.

**JULIAN**

Well ... any other news before we log off?

**ANNE**

Not much.... Oh, I'm pregnant.

**JULIAN**

*You're pregnant?!* God dawg, Anne! That's huge news!

**ANNE**

I think so.

**JULIAN**

How does Mark feel about it? Over the moon?

**ANNE**

Not quite that high.  
Maybe just a tad worried. Like I am.  
These aren't the most certain of times.

**JULIAN**

Most babies *aren't born* in the most certain of times, Princess.

**ANNE**

We're asking around for a nanny.  
Do you know of any?

**JULIAN**

In Atlanta?  
To move to New York in this season?  
Not very likely, my dear.  
Sorry.  
But I'll check with some of my gay friends.

**ANNE**

Just thought I'd try.

**JULIAN**

Any names picked out?

**ANNE**

We're holding off.  
We don't even want a gender reveal yet.

**JULIAN**

Like Kirk?

**ANNE**

Kirk?

**JULIAN**

Or Dirk?

**ANNE**

What are you doing?

**JULIAN**

Maybe Burke?

**ANNE**

Are you being a jerk?

**JULIAN**

With a smirk.

**ANNE**

A jerk with a smirk that's becoming a dull irk.

**JULIAN**

A Mechanical Turk.

**ANNE**

No. That won't work.

And seriously, I'd prefer it to be a girl, God willing.

**JULIAN**

Sperm willing.

**ANNE**

Cute.

**JULIAN**

Girl or boy, just so that it's ....

**ANNE**

Healthy.

**JULIAN**

Right. Healthy.

That's what *I* was going to say.

**ANNE**

[*pause*] Jay ...?

**JULIAN**

Yes?

**ANNE**

I'm worried about something.

Can we talk about it?

**JULIAN**

Of course.

**ANNE**

That I'm not good enough to be a mother. Not kind enough.

**JULIAN**

That's ridiculous.

Of course you're good enough, Anne.

**ANNE**

I worry into the night, when Mark is asleep. Snoring.

**JULIAN**

He snores?

**ANNE**

Maybe it'll be a girl.  
I feel better when I think maybe it'll be a girl.  
If it's a boy, I think I might be all at sea.

**JULIAN**

You'll be a great mother. Think of *your mother*.

**ANNE**

I do.  
And I do love her. But that's part of what I worry about:  
I don't know how to ask her.  
I have no idea how to be kind, other than to be just me. That's all I know.  
I've not been around babies much; and that's all I know about it.  
I don't even know whether I *am* kind, or not.  
Not enough to be a mother.

**JULIAN**

Of course you are.  
Of course you will be.  
Don't be silly.

**ANNE**

I don't know.

**JULIAN**

It's human nature.  
It's an instinct.

**ANNE**

[*silence*]

**JULIAN**

Needless to say, it would scare the poo out of me.

**ANNE**

What if I screw up?



**JULIAN**

I'm sorry.  
I know you won't.  
But I don't know what to say.  
Except, you're right.  
No one teaches a person how to raise a child.  
I wouldn't have a clue what to do.  
Except pray for the right instinct.

**ANNE**

What if it gets sick?  
Or has a fall?  
Or can't sleep at night?  
Or doesn't love me?  
What do I do?

**JULIAN**

You'll know.  
Just like other people have done from the beginning of time.  
It'll just come naturally to you, what to do.  
Like being a good wife.

**ANNE**

Am I?  
Am I a good wife? I don't know that.

**JULIAN**

Aren't you?

**ANNE**

I'm not sure anymore.  
Something's missing.  
Something's missing in my life, Jay.  
In me.  
Something's missing in me.

**JULIAN**

Do you know what it is?

**ANNE**

No....  
But if it weren't I wouldn't want to be something else.

**JULIAN**

*Something else??*

**ANNE**

I want to be a doctor.

**JULIAN**

You're going to be a doctor.

**ANNE**

Maybe not now.

**JULIAN**

Why not? People can do both these days all the time.

**ANNE**

It oughtn't feel like this, I know,  
like it does at nights while I'm lying there,  
but it feels like something has died inside me. *Died.*  
Like I felt when my love of chess died in me.  
Like, actually, I've been in the process of dying all along.

**JULIAN**

Life's not easy, is it? through the struggle of the miles.

**ANNE**

Just random and fugitive bits of it.

**JULIAN**

But it'll be fine.  
I promise you.

**ANNE**

What is it about you why it's only you I can always talk to?

**JULIAN**

Tomorrow and tomorrow.  
It's what's gotten me by all these years.

**ANNE**

Maybe that's it. Maybe I'm afraid of some tomorrow.

**JULIAN**

Which tomorrow?

**ANNE**

That that'll be the day I miscarry, maybe.  
That's she's going to die....  
My God! The things we dream up.  
It could make saints tremble.

**JULIAN**

You're making *me* tremble.

**ANNE**

Thanks for being there when I need you, Jay.  
It means the world to me, talking to you.

**JULIAN**

What have I said?

**ANNE**

You've listened.  
That's what matters.  
I'm fine now.  
And when the time comes, I'll be fine then.

**JULIAN**

When is that?  
When is the due date?

**ANNE**

In early March. The third, they think.

**JULIAN**

That gives us plenty of time.

**ANNE**

For what?

**JULIAN**

To pick a name for the little squirt.

**ANNE**

Mark and I will take care of that, thank you.

**JULIAN**

Just let yourself do it, Anne, and quit thinking so much.  
It'll just happen. Like ibuprofen.

**ANNE**

Pregnancy can drive a woman crazy.  
Sorry for being such a burden.

**JULIAN**

What burden?

**ANNE**

[*beat*] So? Time to go?

**JULIAN**

Yep, guess so.  
But we'll be back in touch a dozen times before the little squirt squirts out.

**ANNE**

If you say so.

**JULIAN**

Take good care of yourself, Princess. You're my only princess.

**ANNE**

I will.  
You, too.

**JULIAN**

Bye.

**ANNE**

Bye bye.

**Darkness.**

**SCENE 4**

**Eleven years later. ANNE and JULIAN are both 44.**

**JULIAN is standing in front of the tree (twenty-two years older than it was in Scene 2). Using a handheld, he is attempting to reach ANNE.**

**ANNE (offstage) is in Zomba, Malawi (Africa).**

**It's daytime.**

**JULIAN**

Anne Brown.

No.

Shit!

Anne Whitman.

Hell, I don't know.

One of the two:

Anne Brown Whitman....

A doctor.

She's a doctor.

In the clinic there.

In the health facility at the University.

[*pause*] Yes.

Anne Whitman.

An American.

[*pause*] Yes. Yes.

I'm Julian. Julian Henman.

Calling from the United States.

She emailed me that I could reach her at this number today at six.

[*beat*] It's six there isn't it?

It's Noon here.

[*pause*] Yes. I can wait.

**Pause.**

**ANNE**

Hello?

**JULIAN**

Anne?

**ANNE**

Julian?  
Is that you?

**JULIAN**

The one and only.  
Who did you think it would be at this time of day, Princess?

**ANNE**

I thought you were going to call tomorrow.

**JULIAN**

Tomorrow? Did I screw up?...  
What day is it there?

**ANNE**

June 25<sup>th</sup>.  
What day is it there?

**JULIAN**

The same: June 25<sup>th</sup>.  
Is it Wednesday in Malawi?

**ANNE**

It is Wednesday in Malawi, and most of the rest of the world I suspect.  
*I* must have gotten mixed up.  
I wrote it down on my calendar for Thursday.  
Sorry.

**JULIAN**

No problem.  
Should I call back tomorrow? At six?

**ANNE**

No. We're on the line now. Let's talk.  
No telling what tomorrow may bring.  
It gets crazy here.

**JULIAN**

Sorry about the mistake.

**ANNE**

It's probably mine.  
Getting more like Mom every day.

**JULIAN**

Like your Mom? did you say?

**ANNE**

A little forgetful. Lots on her mind.  
Sometimes she doesn't quite remember why I came to Africa in the first place.  
Mothers can be like that, if they don't understand why their daughters do things.  
Unlike me, she wants so much to hold tight to all the memories. You know.

**JULIAN**

It's a problem, isn't it?  
What memories to lose, and not want back the very next day.

**ANNE**

Once the mind is spotted it's never spotless again.

**JULIAN**

Oh, the proverbial sunshine of the spotless mind!

**ANNE**

You still remember?

**JULIAN**

How could I forget?

**ANNE**

How are you?

**JULIAN**

About the same as always, just a little older.  
Forty-four and still in the fight.

**ANNE**

Me, too, I guess.

**JULIAN**

It's been how long now you've been in Africa? Three months?

**ANNE**

Four, going on five.

**JULIAN**

Horse flies!  
And how are you and Malawi getting along?

**ANNE**

The country seems to like me okay, despite my occasional moods.  
People here are incredibly friendly.  
They don't have all that much,  
but they'd share anything they have off their backs in a heartbeat.  
Especially advice.  
Which turns out to be a life-saver.

**JULIAN**

Where are you living?

**ANNE**

Outside of town.  
Zomba it's called.  
The town, I mean, where I work.  
At the University.  
Not the village where I live.  
It's a mud hut with a brown thatched roof.  
And it's lovely

**JULIAN**

Indoor plumbing?

**ANNE**

You're kidding, of course.

**JULIAN**

Just hoping, I guess....  
How far outside Zomba is it?

**ANNE**

About fifteen kilometers.

**JULIAN**

Any goats?



**ANNE**

As a matter of fact, yes.  
I'm sharing a pair with neighbors of mine right now.  
They seem to have a particular fondness for my digs.

**JULIAN**

And a car?

**ANNE**

What??  
People here ride bikes.

**JULIAN**

Do they speak English?  
In your village?

**ANNE**

Enough for me to get by.  
With some sign language thrown in.  
Until I learn more of their words.

**JULIAN**

Wow! English? Really?  
In the African bush?

**ANNE**

English is Malawi's official language in the cities.  
By ten children in school are taught almost exclusively in English I'm told.  
They're proud of it.

**JULIAN**

Great Britain's greatest gift to the world ... their tongue.  
Do many kids in Malawi actually go to school?

**ANNE**

In Zomba most all of them do.

**JULIAN**

One surprise after another, for this provincial American.

**ANNE**

You're hardly provincial, my friend. Maybe a little more Googling might help.  
But for me at least, this is certainly a place for constant surprises.

**JULIAN**

[*pause*] I'm sorry about what happened, Anne.  
I just never seem to know how to say it right.  
It devastated me, finding out.

**ANNE**

I know, Jay. And I love you for it.  
But I'm not ready to talk about it yet.

**JULIAN**

Of course.

**ANNE**

You can find sorrow wherever you go.  
I'm hardly unique.  
I tried God, for a while.  
But it's not religion that's brought me some peace. It's Africa.  
I balance the darkness of the nights here with the days, and that gets me through.  
The days are nonstop.  
And that's a blessing.  
But why am I telling you all this, like you don't already know?

**JULIAN**

It's work that finds you escape.  
In Africa or in America.  
I totally understand.

**ANNE**

With one difference:  
If you see someone on an American street you probably have no idea what they're walking from.  
In Malawi you have every idea.  
Food.  
Shelter.  
Babies.  
Toil and troubles.  
And some simple happiness.

**JULIAN**

I get that.

**ANNE**

So how are *you* doing? How's your love life?

**JULIAN**

Haven't you heard?  
I'm dating Harry Styles.

**ANNE**

*You are??*  
Really?

**JULIAN**

Nah! Just kidding!  
There's nothing new under the sun over here.  
And you might as well stop asking.

**ANNE**

Miracles can happen.

**JULIAN**

For Catholics maybe.

**ANNE**

If I've learned one thing, Jules, it's not to talk Catholicism with you.  
Look what you've done to my faith over the years:  
Making me question things like the virgin conception and immaculate perfection.

**JULIAN**

Jesus was a man.  
And no man is a perfect island, no matter who his father is.

**ANNE**

So *you* say.

**JULIAN**

Everything good they say Jesus was, is in you.  
Including his imperfections.

**ANNE**

That's the thing, isn't it? Perfection.  
That's the wall.

**JULIAN**

The wall?...  
Oh yes, *it is* the wall.  
The wall that was built around Jesus when he died, to keep him hidden.

**ANNE**

So you've told me.

**JULIAN**

Look at Albert Schweitzer.  
He knew Jesus wasn't perfect.  
But he still gave his life to him.  
*In Africa....*  
That's what *I* can't do.  
I understand the mystery of it.  
But I've never found the quiet.  
I've never found the peace.

**ANNE**

Not having to believe in God's perfection at least should unlock some of the guilt,  
doesn't it?

**JULIAN**

I don't have God to blame.

**ANNE**

In Africa it's so very, very easy to release the divine illusion of perfection.

**JULIAN**

So ... how *is* the medical business on top of the world?

**ANNE**

Malawi is hardly on top of the world.  
Certainly not on top of the Earth's wealth.  
Or health.  
It's one of the least developed countries there is.

**JULIAN**

Oh?

**ANNE**

It has a horrible infant mortality rate.  
I had no clue before I came.  
It tears my soul apart to see how these young mothers lose their babies,  
and open their mouths in grief, like holes in their mosquito netting.  
I do what I can, but there's nothing you can do about it.  
There's simply not enough medicine. Not enough pre-natal care.  
Not enough corn and fish. And far too much cholera and malaria.

**JULIAN**

It sounds awful.

**ANNE**

It is.

And people .... So many people in the world have no idea.

They live in comfort and just don't know.

They have no idea how lucky they are.

The mothers in America who don't lose a baby.

They should spend time in Africa.

And yet, somehow, the people here are happy.

It makes as much sense to me as poetry I don't understand.

**JULIAN**

Life, and happiness, they seldom make much sense.

**ANNE**

You know, Jules, it's the most baffling mystery of nature:

How people in some places can find a way to die from too much food,

while others die from too little.

It's cruel.

So many people in Malawi are going hungry every day,

while other places people's bodies keep getting stronger and taller.

World records fall every year in sports.

But not in Malawi.

**JULIAN**

And that's why you're there.

**ANNE**

Yes.

Malawi is damaged goods, like me.

**JULIAN**

*You are not!*

**ANNE**

You should see me.

**JULIAN**

Yes, indeed. I should.

*I should.*

**ANNE**

You wouldn't like it.  
What you'd see.  
I'm not that young girl anymore who used to climb trees with you....  
By the way, how is our tree doing?  
Have you seen it lately?

**JULIAN**

I'm standing in front of it as we speak.  
It's taller than ever.  
And if you believe it, it was talking to me just before I called.

**ANNE**

What did it say?

**JULIAN**

It asked me where in the world you are.

**ANNE**

Tell it I don't ever want to lose it.

**JULIAN**

[*to the tree*] She's in Malawi, Africa, and she never wants to lose you.

**ANNE**

You and our tree are the two most lasting pieces of goodness in my life.

**JULIAN**

You *do* sound down.

**ANNE**

I am sad, Jay.  
I won't lie to you.  
But if it were a choice, I'd choose sadness over ever losing a child.  
And now I'm both.  
But I'm doing something.  
And that makes all the difference.  
Serving the less fortunate and letting time take the sting out.

**JULIAN**

You're an amazing person, Anne.  
I can't tell you that enough.

**ANNE**

Malawi is the amazing.

**JULIAN**

O Poverty, be thou an amazing bride.

**ANNE**

I can imagine more disappointing marriages.

**JULIAN**

What ground is there in which some kind of disappointment doesn't lurk.

**ANNE**

Like clockwork.

**JULIAN**

Tripping young turks.

**ANNE**

Or desk clerks.

**JULIAN**

Or Captain Kirk.

**ANNE**

Or a soda jerk.

**JULIAN**

Or the Shadow lurks.

**ANNE**

And knees jerk.

**JULIAN**

And flies berserk.

**ANNE**

And time's patchwork.

**JULIAN**

Are you coming back soon? I miss you.

**ANNE**

Not for a while, Jay. This is where I belong now.

**JULIAN**

How long?

**ANNE**

Maybe ten years.

**JULIAN**

Oh!

**ANNE**

Would you like to come visit me?  
There's plenty of space on the ground of my one-room hut.  
And I keep the dirt floor well swept.

**JULIAN**

In the universe there are things that are known, and things that are unknown,  
and in between there are doors.

**ANNE**

Who said that?

**JULIAN**

William Blake, I believe.  
Something like that.

**ANNE**

Meaning what, exactly?

**JULIAN**

There's always a chance I'll come.

**ANNE**

Fat chance, eh?

**JULIAN**

Like straws on a camel's back.

**ANNE**

Sometimes when ice cracks, it pops.  
But there's not any surplus of ice in this place, I tell you. No. Sir.

**JULIAN**

It seems so utterly strange that I am here, with our tree,  
and your nearly a third of the world away in Africa.



**ANNE**

[*aside*] What?  
Okay, I'm coming.

[*to JULIAN*] Sorry. Something's come up.  
Got to go.  
Talk soon. And email.  
Love you.

**JULIAN**

Love you, too.

**The call disconnects.**

**JULIAN walks offstage.**

**SCENE 5**

**Eleven years later. ANNE and JULIAN are both 55.**

**The tree between the two houses has been cut down. All that remains of it is a high stump – high enough to sit on comfortably. Next to it is a large stone with a flat surface – large enough to sit on comfortably.**

**ANNE and JULIAN enter from opposite sides of the stage; and upon seeing each other they run into each other's arms.**

**It is a LONG and tearful embrace.**

**Daytime.**

**JULIAN**

What a sight you are for sore and longing arms.  
And you don't look a day older, Princess.

**ANNE**

My hair does.

**JULIAN**

Where has time gone?

**ANNE**

Into books.

**JULIAN**

Into the libraries of our minds.

**ANNE**

Time flies like an arrow, you always used to say.

**JULIAN**

Like fruit flies like a banana.

**ANNE swallows a laugh.**

**JULIAN**

You're the only medicine that's ever worked for me.

**ANNE**

Me?

**JULIAN**

Yes, you.

**ANNE**

Same here.

**JULIAN**

I occasionally wonder what it all would have been like,  
if we had just run away together, and I had never played tennis.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] Are you ready to talk about it now?

**JULIAN**

To talk about it? Oh. That morning.

**ANNE**

Yes.

**JULIAN**

Forty-six years, and it still puts pain into my throat,  
and into my stomach.

**Pause.**

**JULIAN**

I can't believe how many children Nature produces to reproduce itself,  
so that so many people have to bear such heartache.

**ANNE**

You can't care for life in this life without loss.  
Or live long without feeling the pain of it. It's the blight of human being.

**They sit – ANNE on the stone, JULIAN  
on the tree stump.**

**ANNE**

Tell me what happened.

**JULIAN**

Why did they have to cut our tree down?

**ANNE**

Lightning hit it.

**JULIAN**

Jupiter sparks.

**ANNE**

Maple tree barks.

**JULIAN**

Sparrow larks.

**ANNE**

Groucho Marx.

**JULIAN**

Lightning never strikes twice, they say....  
And it always does, doesn't it?  
In our lives.

**ANNE**

Tell me what happened....  
It's been forty-six years.

**JULIAN**

How could a brother live so long in such self-blame?  
I'm an idiot.

**ANNE**

Given that you're an idiot, talk to me.

**JULIAN**

I *am* an idiot....

**Pause.**

**JULIAN**

It was July Fourth.  
July Fourth, 1996.  
I was nine, and already people were telling me I'd be a champion....

**ANNE**

A tennis champion.  
Yes, I remember.

**JULIAN**

Yes.

**ANNE**

You were really good.

**JULIAN**

I've never picked up a racket since....  
Cody was only six that morning.

**ANNE**

He idolized you.

**JULIAN**

His loss.

**ANNE**

I did, too.

**JULIAN**

An idiot, but not a demon. I didn't do it on purpose.

**ANNE**

You were only nine. Nobody thought you did it on purpose.

**JULIAN**

But I should have known better.

**ANNE**

A nine-year-old is not an Atlas.

**JULIAN**

[*beat*] It was a beautiful morning.  
Like 9-11 was in New York.  
And I was babysitting him while Mom and Dad were getting ready for the  
cookout that evening....  
Before the fireworks.  
We always had a cookout at the house on the Fourth.  
And then went to watch the fireworks at the park on the hill across from the  
country club.

**ANNE**

I remember. I went with you and your family a few times.  
It was a beautiful place.

**JULIAN**

Yes, it was.

**ANNE**

Some of my happiest memories growing up.

**JULIAN**

Memories. Where do they all come and go?

**ANNE**

Memories, in the moonlight, as the saying goes.

**JULIAN**

As the song goes.

**ANNE**

O my God, it was so long ago.

**JULIAN**

Without memory we'd be even more alone. But not know it.  
With it, endless lyrics of "I should have known better."

**ANNE**

A gift of the gods.

**JULIAN**

Being with you *was* a gift of the gods.

**ANNE**

We never needed anything special, did we?  
To be just ourselves together.

**JULIAN**

Like what?

**ANNE**

Like the same church.  
Or poetry.  
Or sex.  
Or God.

**JULIAN**

Why is that, do you think?

**ANNE**

I don't know.  
I really don't know.  
Maybe we learned it young, and never forgot.

**JULIAN**

Nothing to hide.

**ANNE**

Nothing to hide behind.

**JULIAN**

From a tennis phenom one day, to a has-been the next, all at age nine.

**ANNE**

You didn't have to quit.  
No one wanted you to quit.

**JULIAN**

Oh how wrong you are.  
So very, very wrong.  
It's a modern-day miracle I've lasted this long.  
Our tree didn't.  
And tennis would have driven me absolutely insane....

**ANNE**

[*beat*] What happened?  
Tell me what happened that day

**JULIAN**

July Fourth.  
Ross and I went up to the courts.  
Like we always did.  
And Cody tagged along.  
Because I was "babysitting" him.  
And we just started hitting balls.  
Back and forth.  
Just hitting them.  
Without a care or purpose in the world.  
I should have known better.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] And ...?

**JULIAN**

We weren't playing an actual game.  
Just taking turns slamming the ball.  
As hard as we could.  
And sometimes the balls would bounce over the fence.  
And Cody would chase them down....

[*beat*] O shit!!

**Pause.**

**JULIAN**

He'd chase them down, and come back laughing all the way....  
There never was a hint.  
Never the slightest hint....  
Are there hints?

**ANNE**

Who knows?

**JULIAN**

I should have known better.  
And then Cody was gone.  
Gone forever.  
A shot I could never take back.  
Never....  
[*beat*] I ask myself, from time to time, how old would he be today?

**ANNE**

Maybe there are signs. And maybe your parents ....

**JULIAN**

Maybe you're thinking what's been on my mind, too.

**ANNE**

Maybe I am.

**JULIAN**

Grief, and the glassy stare of death, are shot from the same needle.  
Vying for the same space.



**ANNE**

They say a man dies but one death only if he has no family or friends.

**JULIAN**

Why did I have to hit it that hard?  
Is that what I was doomed to do?  
To homerun a ball out of the ballpark?  
Over the fence and out of the park at the wrong time?  
Into fucking traffic....  
But I did.

**ANNE**

And he chased it.

**JULIAN**

Cody chased it, into the street.

**ANNE**

Enough blame to feed a herd of elephants.  
With cars there always are.

**JULIAN**

So much confusion.  
We didn't even know what happened at first.  
Or what words to say to change things.

**ANNE**

Klaatu barada nikto.

**JULIAN**

Grief becomes its own addiction.

**ANNE**

There's a hole in my heart for Cody.  
And for Anna.  
And for you.

**JULIAN**

You hope the memories go away.  
And then you don't want them to. What's left of them.

**ANNE**

So much time ... wasted.

**JULIAN**

I see him sometimes. In a park, somewhere.  
Or in a dream, still six, and running, and cheerful,  
and looking at me the way he used to.  
But when I wake up, there it is: The lack of Cody all over again.

**ANNE**

I see Anna the same way.  
We're all so much different, you and I.  
And all so much the same.

**JULIAN**

When childhood is crushed that way,  
is there any chance of going back?

**ANNE**

Some say life is all a story, and we live it the way we wear it.

**JULIAN**

A story, told by an idiot

**ANNE**

With only actors brave enough to go on every day, saying,  
"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow."

**JULIAN**

We all have our own story, don't we?

**ANNE**

I'm afraid so.

**JULIAN**

I feel so old.

**ANNE**

Fifty-five. Too young to be old.

**JULIAN**

When do we start to forget?

**ANNE**

I don't think we ever get rid of the old thoughts.  
We simply place new books closer to the front of our library.

**JULIAN**

[*pause*] What about you?

**ANNE**

About Anna?... I don't know what you know.

**JULIAN**

I know only the end.

**ANNE**

Mark graduated Harvard law in 2012, and we got married.  
He got a good job in New York City, with a top-flight law firm.

**JULIAN**

And worked his ass off.  
Sixty hours a week, I bet.

**ANNE**

Plus transportation.  
Actually, it's a strange existence, being married like that in New York.  
So much wealth hanging down from trees you can smell. You just never know.  
So many people climbing to get on top of everybody else's world.

**JULIAN**

Until either you make it, or you don't.  
I've heard.

**ANNE**

Maybe not *that* bad. But worse than law school, that's for sure.  
By the time he was getting himself established on partnership track I'd decided I  
had to get a life of my own.  
Not just a dust cover for someone else's achievements.  
So I applied to Med School, and got in. NYU Grossman. Midtown. Manhattan.  
And then Anna came.  
I got pregnant in my second year.  
"Great timing," Mark said.  
"Ditto."  
He made partner the end of the year, and Anna was born the next March.  
March 3, 2021. Right on schedule.  
We got a nanny. Maybe an illegal one.  
But it worked out okay at first.  
I spoke enough Spanish; and she spoke enough English.  
But it couldn't last.

**JULIAN**

No. Right.  
Not for a partner in a big name New York law firm.

**ANNE**

So we let her go, and I took time off from my residency.  
Which worked out horribly.  
Not Anna's fault. She was an angel.  
I never loved anyone like I loved her.  
Or ever imagined I could.  
She was my life.  
If people think of me at all, they must think of me first as a mother.  
That's what I am. A mother.  
And now the mother of my daughter's memory.  
She was the most beautiful creature in Creation. Mine and Perfect.  
But *I* wasn't. I needed more than that.

**JULIAN**

There must be some hidden purpose in wanting.  
People do it all the time.  
More than eating.  
More than praying.  
More than taking someone to bed with them.  
They want more room.  
More money.  
More people to chase.  
But how can we be that irrational when we have the world in our hearts.

**ANNE**

At that time I had a new religion.  
Woman's rights.  
And a woman's duty to claim those rights against the Caesars of the male world.  
I had the Earth in my arms and a craving for something more, like you said.

**JULIAN**

At least it was a longing to do for other people.

**ANNE**

I needed to get back into the hospital.  
Back to the medicine I knew.  
To prove a woman can be just as powerful and healing as a man.  
And I let myself be tricked by those feelings.

**JULIAN**

Because you are a woman.

**ANNE**

Whatever...

We got another nanny, at five times the price.

And I went back.

And to drinking, a little.

We both did.

The stress.

And, let's face it, the damned disappointment of marriage.

Why is it so glorified, when it makes a wife feel like her husband's instrument?

His animal?

**JULIAN**

I think I get the picture.

**ANNE**

And I met a different Mark when he had too much to drink.

Life started falling apart.

Booze. Arguments. And an affair I found out about.

**JULIAN**

I think that's enough.

**ANNE**

And then that evening.

That God-awful evening.

When he yelled at me he was getting out.

I don't even remember what started the argument.

But Anna ran to *him*.

And hugged *him*.

And told him he couldn't go without her.

I screamed "NO!!"

And he hit me, and left.

With her ... and with our dog, Dodo.

**JULIAN**

Dammit!... God dammit!!

**ANNE**

I cried myself to sleep like an idiot.

And never ...

**JULIAN**

[*beat*] You never ...?

**ANNE**

I never called 9-1-1, or anything.  
That's what I did.  
I didn't do a thing.  
Until they came to tell me....

**JULIAN**

They just came?

**ANNE**

I wouldn't answer the phone, would I?  
And when they came, I knew right away.  
Not about the truck they thought caused the accident. But the rest.

**JULIAN**

There's a darkness in a knock at the door like that.

**ANNE**

My little baby.  
My precious angel was gone when I loved her so.  
The last of the world I loved like that. My own. At seven....  
She'd be twenty-one now. And would be what I so longed for:  
To see a part of myself live on beyond me.

**JULIAN**

I know, Anne. I know.

**ANNE**

I know you know. The judgments of heaven for the mistakes we make.  
Hounding people with all deliberate speed on those small feet that follow us for  
our lives.

**JULIAN**

When a child dies, we die too.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] I had a dream, Jay. I saw it in my dream.

**JULIAN**

You saw it?

**ANNE**

In my dreams.  
In the one dream I had so many times....  
I've never told anyone.

**JULIAN**

A dream about Anna?

**ANNE**

I knew we had to get out, but I had no idea where to go.  
It never would have happened but for that place we got ourselves into.  
That's what you can't forget. Can't squeeze out of your thoughts. The *place*.  
Was it my destiny? Or just my Original Sin?

**JULIAN**

How can you know?

**ANNE**

Oh we can know, we can know if we're wise enough.  
I believe that.  
We can know even when we're paralyzed with the knowledge.

**JULIAN**

What *was* the dream?

**ANNE**

I was in a large hotel.  
Walking down the hallway on some upper floor.  
The rooms had numbers on them, and pads by the handles to open with a card.  
Until I'd come to a plain, wooden door at the end.  
Not like any of the modern doors.  
A plain wooden door with no number on it.  
I'd open it; and there was a long flight of stairs going down and down.  
Almost forever.  
At the bottom I could hear Anna, calling to me.  
So terribly afraid.  
I'd start running down the stairs.  
But I could never get to the bottom. Never get to her.  
The stairs went on and on.  
Endlessly.  
With her calling to me in fear.  
And me asking, why does God make these stairs last for so long?

**JULIAN**

Why does God ...?

**ANNE**

I really didn't care to go on any farther.  
But my friends ganged up on me.  
They forced me to care by caring so hard themselves for me.  
There's no justice in this world, I told them.  
You plant a seed, and it grows to smother your heart in grief.  
But they pulled me back, into medicine.  
And then I found the chance to move to Malawi through the Peace Corps.  
And Africa ...  
Africa brought peace to my mind.  
Not forgetfulness.  
You never forget.  
But peace.  
I had never really felt sorry for myself before Anna died.  
And the life I saw in Malawi cured me of that.  
For better or worse, it saved my life.

**JULIAN**

But you moved back.

**ANNE**

Schweitzer didn't, I know.  
He stayed in his part of Africa until the end.  
But I had my parents to consider.  
They're growing older.  
And I'm the only one to look after them.

**JULIAN**

How are they?

**ANNE**

They're doing pretty well.  
We just moved them into a retirement home last week. And they seem to like it.

**JULIAN**

How do you feel about it?

**ANNE**

It'll take a bit of getting used to.  
I'm staying in the old house. By myself. Probably till they're gone.



**JULIAN**

I'm at a crossroads, too.  
Thinking of taking early retirement from my company this year.

**ANNE**

And then what?

**JULIAN**

Buying some land.  
I've lived in apartments long enough.  
Planting a garden.  
I've always wanted to do that.  
And letting flowers, tomatoes, and vegetables judge me as they will.

**ANNE**

Maybe it's time to retire from the other thing in your life, too.

**JULIAN**

What?

**ANNE**

Jay ... I'm not getting religious here.  
All I'm saying is:  
Maybe now is the time to forgive yourself.  
For not being perfect.  
It's time.

**JULIAN**

My grief is all I have left of him, and my childhood.

**ANNE**

Find a place where you can be with him in your memories.

**JULIAN**

Your God gives people a place like that.  
I don't have a God like yours.

**ANNE**

My God's not done with you yet.

**JULIAN**

And you?  
Are you going back to Africa eventually?

**ANNE**

The thought's a lonely one, isn't it?

**JULIAN**

It's not just the grief and loneliness. It's the fear, too.

**ANNE**

Fear?

**JULIAN**

That I'll find my heart coming up empty.

**ANNE**

There's not anyone else you've found?

**JULIAN**

Never. And why?

Because sex doesn't sow love in this barren ground.

**ANNE**

Amen to sex.

**JULIAN**

How did I let it happen?

Was I that inferior to caution?

**ANNE**

At age nine?

What caution does an active nine-year-old have?

**JULIAN**

I should have known better.

**ANNE**

And your parents?

**JULIAN**

They're both still alive.

I think.

We don't talk much.

**ANNE**

That is sad.

**JULIAN**

What about yours?  
Did *they* ever forgive me?

**ANNE**

I've told you: They never blamed you.  
You were a part of the tragedy. Not the cause.

**JULIAN**

They never blamed me?

**ANNE**

They loved you.

**JULIAN**

I thought *you* were the only one who never blamed me.

**ANNE**

*Well, I wasn't the only one.*

**JULIAN**

But I thought you were.  
Not your Bible, though.  
*It faulted me up one side and down the other.*

**ANNE**

You're wrong there, too.  
But it's not so much my Bible anymore.  
Not when it told me that women, for all eternity, must inherit sorrow from Eve's  
mistake in the Garden.

**JULIAN**

Genesis is a trap for the unwary.

**ANNE**

What's happened to the good people God created in Chapter One of Genesis ...  
*before* Adam and Eve?

**JULIAN**

That's my kind of question.

**ANNE**

They died, and we were saved.

**JULIAN**

They died, and we were saved.  
You and I, not Cody and Anna, saved.  
For this day.  
For this moment.

**ANNE**

So, *are we saved?*

**JULIAN**

Are we worth saving?

**ANNE**

In the end, every good need is worth saving.

**JULIAN**

Do you think we are?

**ANNE**

As much as everyone else I do.

**JULIAN**

And I'll have help?

**ANNE**

Grief is not a war you can win on your own.

**JULIAN**

[*beat*] Anne.

**ANNE**

Yes?

**JULIAN**

What a beautiful name.  
All these years a name that anchored me to a life I wasn't so sure I wanted to keep.

**ANNE**

Strange. How one doesn't think about how others are thinking about them.

**JULIAN**

Or how long one thinks about a normal nine-year-old boy on a Fourth of July whose world changed in an instant, never to be normal again.

**ANNE**

We can change that. I can finally see that now.

**JULIAN**

How?

**ANNE**

By sharing the sorrows and remembering the laughter.

**JULIAN**

Can that work for you?

**ANNE**

If I find the right person.

**JULIAN**

You're talking about the rest of our lives, aren't you?

**ANNE**

Because that's exactly what we have left.

**JULIAN**

Just talk?

**ANNE**

No. Not just talk. There has to be motion.

**JULIAN**

Motion?

**ANNE**

Growing things.  
Fostering the less fortunate.

**JULIAN**

A new life you mean?

**ANNE**

To live outdoors as much each day as possible. Under the sun.  
Breathing in as much of the sun-drenched air as can be....  
My little beast. My little eyes.  
My eyes in the trees.  
My stolen moments of joy.  
It's time I opened the wounds and shared you with another.

**JULIAN**

What will happen to us?

**ANNE**

What happens to anyone who leaves home for a long time, when they come back.

**JULIAN**

Forgetting Cody is something I'm not capable of doing.

**ANNE**

That's not what I'm saying.

I'm saying to find him again in your heart, alive.

Like finding something like Jesus born anew inside you.

**Long pause.**

**JULIAN**

Anew?... Anne?

**ANNE**

Yes?

**JULIAN**

Will you marry me?

**ANNE**

What?! You're saying what?

That I should marry the very best friend I ever knew?

Whose companionship I'd rather have than the love of any lover in the world?

**JULIAN**

But only if that's what you want to do.

**ANNE**

And hope that our souls' goodness can get us through?

**JULIAN**

Hope that the sky turns a brand new blue.

**ANNE**

And makes old things, a brand new new.

**JULIAN**

And feelings become passion's greatest glue.

**ANNE**

And all of this you wish to be true?

**JULIAN**

With all my heart I do.

**ANNE**

Then yes, my Dear, I shall marry you.

**They stand and embrace.**

**THEN, AS SOLEMN AS A PRAYER,  
THEY EACH PRODUCE, EXCHANGE,  
AND EXAMINE WELL-WORN PHOTO  
WALLETS, WITH THE SOFT DELICACY  
AND LOVE OF ANGELS.**

**END**