

One Stop

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Characters

Annie, a woman in her late twenties. Foundered.

Cody, a man in his mid-twenties. Liminal. Appears as a stranger to Annie at the start of this play.

Darkness. An alarm clock goes off. It begins in the distance, a distance of consciousness or geography, but a distance, before moving closer. The lights slowly come up on Annie as it does.

Annie is seated. She does not face us. She has a small yellow bedsheet in her lap.

*Annie reaches out a hand and the alarm clock quiets. She is now **awake**.*

*The two-tone warning sound of a subway door. Annie is now **on the train**. She checks email on her phone. She gets a message that disappoints her. She gets a message from a friend that makes her smile on the inside.*

Annie looks up. She daydreams. A little.

A man steps aboard. He makes eye contact with her. Uncomfortable, Annie checks her phone again.

*A phone rings. Annie is now **in an office**.*

She types. She waits. She types some more.

*The sound of ambulance sirens in the distance. Annie is now **outside, on a bench**. She expectantly checks her phone. A man walks past her. She does not notice him.*

The ding of an email being sent. Annie is back in an office. She types. The ding again. Annie stretches. She pulls a pocket knife out and twirls it in her hand. She puts the knife back.

The two-tone warning sound of a subway door. Annie is again on the train, now facing us. She checks email on her phone. She gets a message that disappoints her. She looks straight ahead of her.

After many stops, Annie checks her phone again.

A man appears. He stands next to Annie. She does not notice him.

He stands across from Annie. She does not notice him.

He stands right in front of Annie. She does not notice him.

He pushes her phone down with his index finger.

CORY

You're here.

ANNIE

Yes. Yes I am.

CORY

That's exciting, isn't it?

ANNIE

I...

I think it's exciting you are here.

CORY

Thank you. So do I, I guess.

ANNIE

Say, do you have any-

CORY

Look I don't have any money. Okay?

ANNIE

You're broke? I'm so sorry to hear that.

CORY

Oh I don't need- Maybe I do have a little money, okay?

ANNIE

Good.

CORY

But I don't want to feel guilty about that.

ANNIE

No.

CORY

If you want to recite poetry or sing a song or tell me a joke or tell me a story about your blind albino puggle named Max who needs a bus ticket to Jersey City...I just can't. It's a philosophical thing. Today's just not the day.

ANNIE

I didn't mean to upset you.

CORY

You didn't. It takes a lot more than- I'm not upset at all. I'm sorry I was rude.

ANNIE

You weren't rude.

CORY

Oh...I was trying to be.

ANNIE

Have a nice day.

She goes back into her phone.

After a moment.

CORY

It is a nice day, isn't it?

ANNIE

Huh?

CORY

The sun just playing peekaboo with us.

ANNIE

That's one way of putting it. I would just say it's shitty outside.

CORY

Give me a quarter.

ANNIE

I told you I won't-

CORY

You cursed. Pay up lady.

Cory holds out his hand.

It's a philosophical thing.

ANNIE

No. I'm not going to pay for exercising my rights as a human being.

CORY

I didn't know cursing was a human rights issue.

ANNIE

Now it is.

A beat.

CORY

You shouldn't have to say bad words. They are a sign of anger.

ANNIE

I- look. There are plenty of other cars you can hop on. This is a long train.

CORY

I like this one.

ANNIE
Go figure. The one time in my life I have a car to myself you-

CORY
That's why I like this car.

ANNIE
It's obviously not for the peace and quiet.

CORY
Pay up.

ANNIE
I'm not giving you a fu...gging quarter.

CORY
That's fine. You can pay me later.

A beat.

I do charge interest.

ANNIE
Ah!

CORY
You take yourself / very seriously.

ANNIE
/ You might think you are being funny but-

CORY
I can-

ANNIE
I'm just not feeling well today.

CORY
Want to hear a joke?

ANNIE
Please just leave me alone. There are other people on the train who might like you.

CORY
But I want to do this for you.

ANNIE
Don't worry about me.

CORY

You take yourself very seriously. This is all you have, you know? Me, this train and this view. It's not so bad really.

A beat.

Cory starts humming an old tune. Something like "For the Beauty of the Earth".

Annie shoots him a look. He stops.

Annie looks away.

He starts humming softer.

Annie shoots him a look. He stops.

Annie looks away.

He moves to another part of the car and starts humming.

Annie shoots him a look. He does not stop.

ANNIE

I'm changing cars at the next station. That's it.

CORY

Going to be a few minutes.

ANNIE

What? Is this thing running express?

CORY

I mean we only have a few minutes. You and me.

ANNIE

I can't wait for them to be over.

CORY

Going to take a little time.

ANNIE

Too much time.

CORY

That's only the Manhattan Bridge right there.

ANNIE

No. That's the Brooklyn Bridge. We're on the Manhattan Bridge.

Really? CORY

Really. ANNIE

That's awesome. CORY

Ok. ANNIE

CORY
It is awesome. How much thought went into that, just figuring out how to...I don't even know... keep the cables tense. That problem alone must have taken years to solve.

Maybe lifetimes.

How many people gave up their lives to build that huge thing? Just so other people think a little less about crossing a river...entire lives spent figuring out how to make crossing a river a little easier.

Tension and compression. ANNIE

What? CORY

That's what makes the bridge work. The two forces are tension and compression. ANNIE

You are an engineer. CORY

No I'm- I don't know what I am really. ANNIE

No. You are an engineer. And an architect. And an artist. CORY

I don't know about that. ANNIE

I do. CORY

ANNIE

Ok.

CORY

You're not happy.

ANNIE

Right now? No. I've got a stranger pestering me and I'm...this isn't my favorite day.

CORY

It ought to be.

ANNIE

Well it's not buddy.

CORY

Which one is?

ANNIE

What?

CORY

Which one is your favorite day?

ANNIE

I don't know.

CORY

How about today?

ANNIE

No. No. I'm...this is a boring, mediocre day. I didn't really *do* anything. And now I have this...a thing.

CORY

A thing? Very specific.

ANNIE

A thing I need to do. Yes.

CORY

What kind of thing do you need to do?

ANNIE

I don't know. Maybe it's just a yearly habit. It's... just something to do with a past life.

CORY

Then tell me who you were today.

I don't even know how to...I was me. Annie.

ANNIE

I know lots of Annies.

CORY

Well, I'm like a lot of them I bet.

ANNIE

No you're not. You're *Annie*. You have a name. A history. A place. And they are yours.

CORY

Yeah and that place isn't rent controlled. Look, I-

ANNIE

So you work.

CORY

Yes. I work. At a job.

ANNIE

Awesome. Sounds like an adventure.

CORY

I have a computer. And a phone.

ANNIE

That doesn't sound like an adventure.

CORY

It's not an adventure.

ANNIE

But that's you. You accomplish big things. You're a superhero I'm sure. Even today.

CORY

No accomplishments that...I completed a list of tasks. This is my last one, so just-

ANNIE

And a traveller.

CORY

...

ANNIE

You are also a traveller.

CORY

ANNIE
Yes. Right now I am.

CORY
Travelling really far.

ANNIE
Yes. Travelling far out there. Past where the tracks end.

CORY
Where?

ANNIE
A beach.

CORY
I wish we had time to go swimming... / but we don't

ANNIE
/ There's not a we.

CORY
Do you like swimming?

ANNIE
No. / I don't even-

CORY
I bet you're a great swimmer. You have those long arms. All grace and power.

ANNIE
I'm not a swimmer. Ok?

CORY
Are you a lifeguard then?

ANNIE
No. I don't do anything remotely related to water. I don't even eat seafood.

CORY
I don't eat seafood either. It smells bad.

ANNIE
Absolutely awful. I wonder how people can smell fish and actually want to eat. Actually have an appetite.

CORY
I know. My mom used to make fish sometimes.

ANNIE

Mine too. Everybody's did I'm sure.

CORY

But she'd make it in the morning so she could bring that little fish filet to work with her. Some kids woke up to the smell of bacon or pancakes on a skillet. I got orange roughly.

ANNIE

Gross.

CORY

At least she was healthy. It made her happy. I'd go back to smelling fish everyday just to wake up in her house again.

ANNIE

Is she...

CORY

Mom took me to the pool sometimes. But never the beach. She wasn't one for beaches. /I was though.

ANNIE

/I used to love the beach.

CORY

Action Park. Way out there in Sussex County. It was the closest park with a wave pool. I was such a nut for waves.

ANNIE

That place was shut down. Dangerous-

CORY

I had this babysitter who took me to the beach everyday.

ANNIE

Sounds nice.

CORY

I had such a crush on her. She was probably four years older than me. Early teens so she might have been too cool for school if she wanted. But not this girl. She was like a kid, just always...

ANNIE

In the moment.

CORY

Yeah. Exactly. We never stopped playing games. She told me we could assume special powers. It was kind of like whatever we were doing was everything. The most important thing in the world. We were the tooth brushing heroes, we were the naptime avengers, the hugging champions. And we had a special power to do it whenever we wanted.

ANNIE

Nice fantasy.

No. It wasn't a fantasy. She made grilled cheese. She was a grilled cheese making superhero...Yellow bed sheet for a cape. Almost the color of hair. / We'd get on the train and head to Coney Island.

ANNIE

/ You don't know-

CORY

She wore that cape onto the beach. Even with other teens there judging her. Laughing at her. / She didn't care.

ANNIE

/ This is-

CORY

I pretended I could control the wind with my pinky fingers. She said she could-

ANNIE

Control the waves.

CORY

Exactly. So we'd stand there like two crazy conductors with our symphony of wind and water.

ANNIE

Who put you up to this?

CORY

Just *in* the world.

ANNIE

Tell me who you are right now.

Cory turns. She has pulled out her pocketknife.

CORY

I don't want to hurt you Annie.

ANNIE

How did you hear about me? How do you know about Cory? Some friend I told? Some-did the police tell you?

No- CORY

Are you a cop? ANNIE

Please- CORY

A friend? You're sick. ANNIE

I'm not sick. CORY

Get away from me. ANNIE

Calm down. CORY

Answer me! ANNIE

Don't be afraid. You're alright. CORY

He embraces her, calling Annie's bluff on the knife.

You're alright Annie.

Do you want to hurt me? ANNIE

Never. I don't want to hurt you. CORY

I'm paying my dues. I've said I'm sorry. I've been sorry. ANNIE

I don't want to hurt you. Look at me. We don't have much time. CORY

She does.

You- I saw you buried. ANNIE

That's right. CORY

I saw your mother wail. ANNIE

That's right. CORY

I left your house forever. ANNIE

That's right. CORY

And here you are... ANNIE

I am here for you. CORY

You left. You left my side. ANNIE

No Annie. CORY

I was responsible for you. ANNIE

This isn't about blame. CORY

And you left. ANNIE

I don't have time for blame. CORY

I was getting you popcorn. Just a box of popcorn. ANNIE

Annie please stop. CORY

I turn around and you're gone. Just kites and umbrellas and...and all those people. More skin than sand. All those people. ANNIE

CORY

Our stop is coming up Annie. Please let me-

ANNIE

I was just a kid. I couldn't be responsible for you. I was just a kid. I was just a kid. I was just a kid.

CORY

I know. It's not your fault.

ANNIE

You broke me.

CORY

No I didn't.

ANNIE

Why didn't you stay by me?

CORY

Annie, listen. I don't want to upset you.

ANNIE

Ghosts are upsetting. Very upsetting.

CORY

I want to show you something. You don't have forever. You've got to let go of this. You've got to be a kid again.

ANNIE

I can't.

CORY

You have to. You've got to be blameless and fearless. There isn't any more time to waste. You don't have enough time to waste.

ANNIE

Why did you leave my side?

CORY

I just wanted to see if I could do both. It's not your fault.

ANNIE

Do both?

CORY

I wanted to try conducting the wind and the water. But I was wrong. That's what I want to tell you Annie. I was feeling silly.

ANNIE

Of course you were. That was just a stupid game.

CORY

I know. And I'm sorry for what I did.

ANNIE

I hurt everyday Cory. I hurt.

CORY

Let go. Your life is yours. It's mine and yours. You need to be brave again.

ANNIE

I am. It's an act of bravery to get up everyday.

CORY

That's not enough.

ANNIE

Oh who are you to say?

As the following happens, Cory and Annie are transported. They move into the distance, consciously or geographically.

CORY

I know. Look, when I went down to the water, I just dipped my big toe in at first. People all around me stayed in or out of it. They drank a beer on the sand and then they ran into the sea. I walked in between. Like a tightrope. Just one foot in front of the other. Tried to predict where the waves would exhaust themselves and put my foot right there. I was right the whole way. Just walking a tightrope. And the people were behind me and all around me and above me and...

I ran in. I just made the choice and I went as far as I could. In my orange polo and my swimsuit with the big pockets, I just stood there. In the deep end of the ocean to my little body. I turned and looked up at this wall of water, falling and rising at the same time, pulled and lifted...larger than I would ever be and smaller than I could ever imagine. The beauty in the wholeness.

I saw the sun blocked out and knew the universe was inside me. Inside you Annie. You told me that that very day when I asked why I was special. The same atoms that made the stars explode, that made the universe...inside those drops of salt water. Inside me...

Little bits of starlight. Waiting for you to give them some shape. To do something with them. And I felt big. I came from those stars. Connected. Relevant. A participant. A superhero. Just by being alive.

A beat.

What did you call it...tension and compression?

The sound of a subway train coming into a station.

This is my stop.

Please note:

The hymn indicated for Cory is only a suggestion. A solid sound file of it can be found at:
<http://www.mostfreebies.com/Hymns/Praise/mp3file/FortheBeautyoftheEarth.mp3>