

PERUSAL SCRIPT

OFF THE PATH

A TEN-MINUTE PLAY

BY
CONI KOEPFINGER



Newport, Maine

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OFF THE PATH

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Grace Anderson - An interaction designer for Google; works in Manhattan. Raised Catholic, but now questioning. Happy but seeking deeper meaning in life. Trusting and kind, comfortable in nature and their new environment. Recently doubting her self-worth.

Greg Anderson - Her husband, also works at Google in Chelsea, but is a product analyst in data science. Recently opened his own start up. Happily married for 3 years. He really wants kids, but Grace was told she cannot conceive. Not so happy in the woods, liked living in the city.

The Stranger - Very tall, either male or female, and very emphatic in speech. Has a kindly nature and bright spark. Most people take a shine to them almost immediately.

Woman/Mary Katharine – Their neighbor, a mother of 4, early 40s.

Man/Michael – Her husband, late 40s, a university professor

OFF THE PATH — *a one-act play by Coni Koepfinger. 2w, 2m. 1 either. About 12 minutes. Contemporary costumes. Simple setting: interior/exterior. Grace Anderson and her husband Greg recently bought an old farmhouse in New Jersey. The house and its surrounding property date back to the 1800's. They love the area even though they were told it might be haunted, since it's quite remote and their distant neighbors would see lights going on and off at various hours of the night. But the Andersons are quite happy with their little piece of serenity that is nestled firmly in the woods. There is a great walking path behind the house. Behind that is an old building that used to be a church that sits on the nature reserve and a bird sanctuary. Grace and Greg love to take their dog, Bruiser, walking in these magical woods. One day, Bruiser disappears. When Grace goes to look for him, she meets some strangers who will change her life forever.*
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*Artist and Educator, **CONI KOEPFINGER** is the host of AIRPLAY, a weekly virtual theatre program now in its 12th season that brings the voices of artists, actors, playwrights from all over the world together. Also via new media, Koepfinger has created DETERMINED WOMEN, a monthly feature that interviews women who share stories to encourage and inspire. In addition to teaching theatre and composition, Koepfinger is an internationally published and produced playwright and theorist. As a Media Advisor for the Lifeboat Foundation, her play Get the Message was in their Visions of the Future anthology 2016. Coni is a former board member of the International Center for Women Playwrights/ ICWP and committee chair for the League of Professional Theatre Women /LPTW. Recent work includes three new powerful pieces with her writing partner Joe Izen: including Eve of Beltane, Broadway Bound Festival (2019),; Schoolhouse (2015) and the first musical to usher in the singularity, Kingdom Come (2020). She has written well over 40 plays, short stories, books and commissions such as Takin' It Back a ten-minute play for THE ME TOO PROJECT in Harlem, and Playing House a commissioned one-act about Bella Abzug for the UNTOLD STORIES OF JEWISH WOMEN and Playing Fate which was accepted for New Blood Series at Theatre for the New City. Now in 2020, Koepfinger's work is virtually shown all over globe, My Dinner with GREG, which was read*

online for The Producer's Circle and was then streamed live from The Player's Club in NYC in TNC's ON AIR podcast. It will be produced in the Dream Up Festival in 2021 at TNC. Her play Simon Says, was one of 12 selected in the world's first Virtual Theatre Festival by PLAYBILL 2020 and is slated for Manhattan Rep's STORIES film competition in 2021.

DEDICATION:

*To Bruiser,
truly a joy and a blessing*

OFF THE PATH

The stage is dark, as the lights come up, we see GRACE putting on her boots. She calls off to her husband, Greg.

GRACE: Hey Greg... Where's Bruiser? I want to take him with me on the path.

GREG: I let him in. I thought.

GRACE: You thought?

GREG: Well... I did. I let him out and fed him, then he wanted out again. He didn't scratch to get in yet...

GRACE: Can you check under the bed please?

GREG: Sure.

GRACE: These new boots are great, just hard to get on.

GREG: Maybe they will break in.

GRACE: Maybe. Bruiser's leash is here. It's on the wall.

GREG: Well, he's not. I looked everywhere.

(Enters kitchen)

I'll go find him.

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GRACE: No, you stay home. I'm expecting a grocery delivery.

GREG: Are you sure?

GRACE: He always comes when I call him.

GREG: Oh, so are you saying he doesn't come for me?

GRACE: Let's just say I'm his fav.

GREG: True. You are the love of his life!

GRACE: And vice versa.

GREG: What about me?

GRACE: What about you?

They share a laugh.

GREG: Sure that you don't want company?

GRACE: Sure, but more than that, I don't want ShopRite to leave my ice cream in the morning sun. Plus, what if he isn't on the path and he comes back before me.

GREG: True.

GRACE: He's not much of a latch-key kid; he expects to be let in.

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GREG: True. I'll watch out for him. Do me a favor, honey, watch yourself on that path. I mean we are pretty secluded here and you just never know...

GRACE: Look Greg, we moved here for the solitude. Don't let yourself be afraid of it. We say our prayers, Greg, we are protected. I'll be back in about twenty minutes, just doing the path around to the side road. I'll find our little Bruiser. Love you, Greg.

(Grace exits the kitchen and heads through their backyard to the newly cleared path in the woods. Greg, remaining inside, hollers after her.)

GREG: Love you too, Gracie.

(Offstage)

Have a nice walk. And if you don't find Bruiser, don't worry he knows where his bread is buttered!

GRACE: True! He never misses his morning toast with me.

(Calling for her dog.)

Bru! Bruiser! It's Mommy. Where are you hiding Bru? Come out now, I'll make you some turkey bacon! Bruiser! Come on Bru!

(Starting to run faster, GRACE is now in the thick of the woods. It is springtime and the trees are starting to bud. Suddenly startled she notices a tall figure up ahead, standing still, blocking her path.)

(Calling out) Hello! You there. Did you see a dog? A little brownish tan Yorkie-Poo.

THE STRANGER: Yes.

GRACE: How long ago?

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THE STRANGER: About a minute.

GRACE: Really?

THE STRANGER: Yes.

GRACE: Did you see which way he went?

THE STRANGER: Yes.

GRACE: We just bought the property. Nice to meet you. My name is Grace. Which way did my dog go?

THE STRANGER: He's just gone.

GRACE: What do you mean? Which way did he go?

THE STRANGER: Well, he went off the path.

GRACE: Where? Into the woods?

THE STRANGER: He passed on. See the rainbow. That's where he went.

(A fine rain creates a mist in the sunlight. In the distance off, we see a faint rainbow.)

GRACE: Wait, what?

THE STRANGER: Your dog Bruiser, he transcended this plane of reality. Look. *(Pointing)* He took the rainbow bridge to eternity.

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GRACE: How do you know that?

THE STRANGER: I watched him cross over it.

GRACE: Wait. How? I mean, you're saying he just dematerialized right before your eyes. How can that be?

THE STRANGER: Ever think about how life begins? It's quite spontaneous, you know. You're a very devoted human, serving others quite humbly, well up until recently. You have been blessed and will continue to be blessed. I've been watching him and you for quite a while now, Grace.

GRACE: I'm sorry. Who did you say you are? Are you a neighbor?

THE STRANGER: No.

GRACE: Then?

THE STRANGER: I'm your guardian angel.

GRACE: Yeah, right. Excuse me, but I have to find my dog. And you might be a little more polite when walking about on other people's property.

THE STRANGER: Ever wonder how humans got to be so possessive about material things? You know, you can't take even a pinch of this land with you when you die.

GRACE: Come on stop it. I'm really freaking out here. I love my dog and I really want, need, to find him. Okay? So, stop freaking me out. Either go back to where you came from or just leave me alone.

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THE STRANGER: Sorry. I can't do either.

GRACE: And why is that?

THE STRANGER: This is my job. By your side. Especially during moments of transition and transcendence for you and your loved ones. You will see Bruiser again. Trust me. He will return to you shortly. His matter transformed into spirit; he is now in heaven awaiting a new earthly form.

GRACE: Look, I don't really believe in ghosts or alternative universes; I work for Google and that is enough virtual reality for me. Okay. What did you say your name was?

THE STRANGER: I didn't.

GRACE: No, that was a polite way of trying to start over.

THE STRANGER: You can call me Angela or Angelo. Depending on your gender identity preference.

GRACE: What do you mean?

THE STRANGER: Gender is obsolete in my realm... It's immaterial. In any event, Bruiser is already on his path to a new incarnation. He'll return to you, as soon as he picks up a new body. And he wants you to know, he's moved up the evolutionary ladder... He's coming back as a human.

GRACE: Are you serious?

THE STRANGER: You know how you've been trying to have a baby? Well, I think he's trying for that role. If he passes the audition, you'll see him in a few months.

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GRACE: My dog is going to be reincarnated as my child? That is the wildest thing I have ever heard. Are you kidding me?

THE STRANGER: I think so. But not my call. It's up to the director.

GRACE: Director?

THE STRANGER: Yes. God, the Great Divine Director.

GRACE: Are you for real?

THE STRANGER: Yes.

GRACE: They said this place was haunted... We knew it was a deal. Okay so what do you want from us?

THE STRANGER: Want?

GRACE: Yes, if you're a ghost, you must want something from me. I've read about earth-bound spirits troubling humans, if you ask me, darkness pales in comparison to the light. Maybe you are my guardian angel, I don't know. But if you are a dark spirit, why did you come here, to see me?

THE STRANGER: First of all, I am not a ghost. I am an omnipresent spirit.

GRACE: Same thing.

THE STRANGER: No, not at all the same. Ghosts are manifested in your left channel, from the energy of the collective past. I'm an angel, here now to help direct your future. I am a heavenly messenger here to guide you. When humans go off their preordained path... we are sent to give alteration. Besides ghosts,

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usually are malevolent tricksters, and cannot appear to people like you who are generally centered and focused. “Protected” as you say.

GRACE: Oh, okay, that makes sense to me. But what makes you think I am off my path?

THE STRANGER: You’ve given up on having a child, right?

GRACE: Yes.

THE STRANGER: Well, don’t. It will happen. And your writing career will take off and you can work from home. This is your path. To be a mother. Don’t search for alternative routes. Greg has not given up hope, but you have. You have even taken to drink lately.

GRACE: Oh, a glass of wine now and then can’t hurt.

THE STRANGER: Oh, no? Your body is a temple...

GRACE: I know that.

THE STRANGER: I know that you know that. You just need to do something creative right now Grace. You love helping others. There are three laws for happiness. Something to do. Someone to love. And something to look forward to. Besides, you know that when you light the flame of love in another it can only help your own to burn brighter.

GRACE: You think?

THE STRANGER: I know.

7 more pages to the end