

CANYONLANDS

A Drama in Two Acts

by

Courtney White

This place has become so diverse nobody gets along anymore.

- a resident of Boulder, Utah

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Santa Fe, New Mexico
courtney@jcourtneywhite.com
www.jcourtneywhite.com

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This play explores the American, especially western, phenomena of rootlessness and the effects it has on families and communities at the start of the 21st century.

The play is set inside a bicycle shop in a small town in southeastern Utah during one summer. The shop's establishment has caused conflict between its owner, Joshua Rose, who recently arrived with his family from Los Angeles, and the last remaining farmer within town limits, who doesn't like the changes he sees taking place to his home town.

Joshua Rose is an entrepreneur with a Midas touch – every business he has started, and there have been many, has succeeded financially, practically without effort. He expects the bicycle shop to do the same. The trouble is Josh is incapable of settling down, emotionally or physically. He has no roots, no place he calls home. Utah is just another stop in a never-ending search for...something. It's always about the next town, the next business opportunity, the next career, the next move. The consequence of his restlessness in combination with his financial security, however, is that Josh doesn't have any idea of who he is.

The play starts when Leslie, his wife, decides she is sick of living “on the run” and wants to settle down and open a bookstore in town. Alarmed at the prospect of putting down roots, Joshua insists that they leave. A power struggle ensues within the Rose family. Complicating matters, Josh has ‘adopted’ a young man as the shop repairman for the summer and becomes attached to him despite, or perhaps because of, the young man's obscure origins. The young man's restlessness opens Josh's eyes to his own predicament.

Other characters include the Roses' two combative daughters, one of whom develops an attachment to the good-looking son of the farmer, with consequences of its own; the zen Buddhist bicycle salesman, Tad, who is not as clueless as he first appears; and Howard, a pushy lawyer and fellow big-city refugee who followed Joshua to the ‘wilds’ of southern Utah when his marriage fell apart. Howard also senses opportunity in redrock country, much to Joshua's ultimate chagrin.

A plot twist halfway through the play turns everyone's expectations upside down. And much like the town he has invaded, Joshua will never be the same again.

Cast:

Joshua Rose, father
Leslie Rose, mother
Erin Rose, daughter, 17
Samantha Rose, daughter, 14
PJ, a bicycle repairman, 17
Vernon Moss, a farmer
Kyle Moss, his son, 17
Tad, a salesperson
Howard, a lawyer
A Sheriff, two Male Customers, two Female Customers

Set:

The interior of a bicycle shop.

There is a long window on the left, with a bench underneath and a street lamp outside. There is a front door next to the window. A rack of used bicycles sits underneath a “RENTAL” sign. In the back is a dutch door that leads to a bicycle repair room.

There is a counter in the right-middle portion of the set. There are stools, a cash register, and a phone/fax machine. A large gap in the right-hand wall leads to the Showroom. There is a door marked “W” in this wall. Above both are two small windows.

On a wall is a large map of the Canyonlands.

Setting:

The action takes place during summer at the turn of the (20th) century in Jericho, a small town in southeastern Utah.

Act I:

Scene One: Tuesday morning
Scene Two: Tuesday afternoon
Scene Three: Wednesday morning
Scene Four: Wednesday afternoon

Act II:

Scene One: the following Sunday night
Scene Two: Monday morning
Scene Three: Tuesday afternoon

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: We are in the main room of a sparse but quaint bicycle shop. There is a long window, a front door, and a rack of bikes to the left. A “RENTAL” sign hangs above the bikes. A counter, an exit to a Showroom, two restroom doors, and two windows above them are on the right. A big map of the Canyonlands rests on a wall.

AT RISE: Early morning light streams through the long window. On the floor, sandwiched between the counter and the rack of bicycles is a SHAPE in a sleeping bag. A cheap alarm clock sits nearby.

(After a few seconds the alarm clock goes off. A hand emerges from the sleeping bag and gropes for the clock. It finds the target and the sound stops)

(After a few seconds the clock goes off again. The hand gropes for the offending clock, finds it, and hurls it into the showroom, offstage. The sound stops)

(Four PEOPLE cross in front of the sunny window, outside the shop, casting long shadows across the floor. The muffled voices of an animated conversation can be heard. They pause outside the entrance door)

(Suddenly the figure in the sleeping bag sits bolt upright. PJ, a lanky, fresh-faced lad of approximately seventeen years of age, wearing a white T-shirt and briefs, scrambles out of the bag as a key turns in the front door's lock)

(PJ hurriedly gathers his belongings together into a teetering armload. He glances around the shop as if looking for a place to hide. A shoe falls. As he bends over to pick it up he accidentally knocks a bike in the rack. The bikes fall like a stack of dominoes)

(The front door opens. The bell tinkles merrily. Panicked, PJ rushes to the nearest closed door, the one marked 'W', opens it, revealing a restroom, steps inside quickly and shuts the door behind him)

(JOSHUA enters. He is dressed in casual but expensive slacks and a golf-style shirt. He carries a copy of the New York Times under his arm)

(LESLIE enters. She is dressed matter-of-factly in jeans, and a cotton shirt. She is followed by ERIN, who is well-dressed, and SAM, who is not)

JOSH

All I'm asking for is a vote, fair and square, nothing more.

LESLIE

But why here?

JOSH

I thought it would be better if we voted on neutral territory.

LESLIE

I don't consider your bicycle shop neutral territory.

JOSH

Well, it is to me.

LESLIE

You know, letting the kids vote in family decisions is becoming a bit too democratic for me. It's like letting everyone put a hand on the steering wheel of a car. Sooner or later there's bound to be an accident.

JOSH

What? We've had some good votes. Remember when you didn't want to go see that movie last week and we did? You wound up thinking it was a great flick.

(LESLIE holds her ground near the door as JOSH crosses the room and drops the newspaper on the counter)

LESLIE

What about the time the three of us wanted to go rafting down that river and you didn't? Remember how you panicked when you saw water in the bottom of the raft and jumped out because you thought we were sinking? Remember clinging to that rock for hours while a zillion search-and-rescue guys hollered at you to let go?

JOSH

Hey, I became good friends with that rock. I like democracy. I know it can be a pain sometimes, but I still think it's good a principle for them to grow up with. It's certainly better than what I had: Do this! Don't do that! Go to your room! Stop torturing the cat! I vowed to never be ruled by tyranny again, or to rule by it. It hasn't been so bad.

LESLIE

That's because we used to outnumber them. Remember Sam's first vote?

SAM

A red '65 Cadillac convertible!

JOSH

That was a cool car.

LESLIE

It was an indulgence we couldn't afford.

JOSH

What good is an indulgence if you can't afford it?

LESLIE

I threatened a coup d'etat.

JOSH

Over a Coup de Ville, I remember. What's your point?

LESLIE

There are very good reasons why teenagers aren't allowed to vote anywhere in the world.

ERIN

(turns quickly)

Would you two just shut up and get on with the vote?

LESLIE

See what I mean? What's wrong with a little tyranny now and then?

JOSH

Plenty. Call me the last idealist on the planet. I still believe democracy's a good idea.

LESLIE

This isn't democracy, it's sour grapes. Don't get them confused.

JOSH

It's not sour grapes.

LESLIE

Josh, if the town council hadn't turned you down last week would we even be having this argument?

JOSH

We might. I've been thinking about leaving Jericho for a couple months actually.

LESLIE

Then why did you ask them for permission to open a microbrewery, of all things?

JOSH

Because I thought making beer would be fun.

LESLIE

This is southern Utah. You were there. You saw their faces. They were not amused.

JOSH

(waving a hand)

I was hoping to appeal to their sense of entrepreneurialness, or whatever. You know, the free market, and all that crap.

LESLIE

What did that one councilor call you - "immigrant scum"?

JOSH

I don't know what his problem was. He looked like he wanted to hit me. They're businesspeople. I was talking about economic opportunity.

LESLIE

You were talking about beer. I don't understand, if you've been thinking about leaving, why did you file a lawsuit against the city?

JOSH

That was Howard's idea. He thinks he can get the brewery decision overturned. He wants to shove it down their throats. Howard thinks he's the original tough guy.

LESLIE

A lawsuit's just going to make things worse.

JOSH

He doesn't care.

LESLIE

Neither, apparently, do you.

JOSH

That's not true. I care about how people feel, especially if they're potential customers. Trying to please all the people all the time is the first rule of business.

LESLIE

I thought your first rule of business was to be smarter than the customer.

JOSH

That too. Actually, I've decided the first rule of business is to have plenty of first rules. Just in case. Sam, Erin, come here please. It's time to vote.

ERIN

Finally! You two are such windbags.

SAM

Yeah, regular snow-blowers.

JOSH

Alright. Who wants to move back to Los Angeles?

(ERIN raises her hand dramatically. JOSH raises his more slowly. LESLIE folds her arms. SAM does nothing)

JOSH

Sam? What about our talk last night?

LESLIE

What talk last night?

SAM

I don't know. I don't like LA.

ERIN

Sam! You loved it. What about all your friends?

SAM

What friends? You mean all your friends. That and your mickey mall.

JOSH

We can go somewhere else Sam. What about San Francisco?

ERIN

Dad!

LESLIE

Josh!

SAM

I don't know. San Francisco doesn't sound very skanky.

JOSH

Skanky?

ERIN

You and your stupid thrills and chills.

JOSH

Is this about mountains? There are mountains near San Francisco, I think. Let's go there.

(LESLIE moves close to SAM)

LESLIE

Hold on here. You don't really want to leave Jericho, do you honey? What about your favorite places to skateboard? Could you give up The Iron Maiden? What about Mega-Death? Wouldn't you miss The Endless Void?

JOSH

(snaps fingers)

We can move to New York City. It's kind of like southern Utah, only with more people. It's got canyons.

(ERIN can't believe she's being ignored so she stomps off)

JOSH

How about Florida? We'll move right next to Disney World.

SAM

(looks up sharply, smiling)

Cool!

LESLIE

(counterattacks)

I'll buy you a new skateboard.

JOSH

I'll buy you a year's pass to the Magic Astrodome, or whatever it's called.

LESLIE

(rapidly)

I'll buy you two new skateboards.

JOSH

(faster)

I'll buy you a scooter.

LESLIE

(faster)

I'll buy you two scooters.

JOSH

I'll buy you a three-wheel ATV.

LESLIE

I'll buy you a four-wheel ATV.

JOSH

I'll buy you a dune buggy.

LESLIE

I'll buy you a motorcycle.

SAM

Cool! I vote with mom. A tie means we stay here, right? Fat!

JOSH

A motorcycle?

LESLIE

(slaps a hand to her forehead)

This is your fault.

SAM

A motorbike. How totally garbanzo! Minkin' shaker wipe out!

(SAM points a finger at ERIN. ERIN sticks her tongue out)

ERIN

Rock Head.

SAM

Store Slut.

(SAM parodies a fashion model on a runway as she walks)

ERIN

That's it! I can't stand any of you. I'm going to get a cappuccino. You know where I'll be if you need me, which you obviously don't.

(ERIN exits in a huff. SAM pulls a skateboard from behind the counter)

SAM

A motorbike. Totally Ozzie. This calls for a major shank. I think I'll do Total Annihilation.

(SAM crosses to the door and exits)

JOSH

Voting is still a good thing. In theory anyway.

LESLIE

Our daughter is on her way to Total Annihilation and you're still talking about democracy?

(SAM opens the door and leans in)

SAM

I forgot. Hey dad, it happened again.

(SAM nods at the collapsed row of bicycles and exits)

JOSH

(hollers toward the repair shop)

PJ! Come out here!

(to Leslie)

Are you really going to buy her a motorcycle?

LESLIE

Of course not.

JOSH

Good. Then, we can have another vote in a week.

(yells)

PJ!

(the door to the Women's restroom opens slowly. PJ stands inside his bag)

PJ

Good morning Mrs. Rose. How are you?

LESLIE

I'm fine PJ.

JOSH

What are you doing in the women's bathroom?

PJ

Nothing!

JOSH

Then come out of there. We need to have a little talk.

(after a pause PJ bunny-hops out into the room)

PJ

Sorry about the bikes Mr. Rose.

(leans over awkwardly, trying to right a bike)

Perhaps I should get dressed first.

JOSH

Perhaps you should.

(PJ hops quickly to the repair shop door and exits)

LESLIE

You're amazing. No one else in the world could move to a small town he never saw before, open a bicycle shop that no one said was needed, hire a Buddhist to sell bicycles that no one thought they needed, take in a young boy off the street as if he were a stray dog and make him the shop repairman, and still make money off the whole thing!

JOSH

You're just jealous.

LESLIE

Of course I'm jealous. I've been jealous since I've known you. You do the craziest thing you can think of - and you make it work! It's unnatural.

JOSH

It's perfectly natural. It's all part of my plan.

LESLIE

What plan? You hate plans.

JOSH

(speaks as he opens the store for business).

Exactly. Except for the plan to have no plans. I've been thinking about this - I've succeeded at everything I've tried when I should have failed, why? Because there was no plan. I trust my gut.

LESLIE

And now your gut is telling you to leave Jericho?

JOSH

Yes. Frankly, I'm finding it rather hard to pour my heart and soul into a bicycle.

LESLIE

That doesn't seem to be a problem for Tad. Or PJ.

JOSH

They're young, and the young take pride in odd things. Did I ever tell you about my grand scheme to make money when I was fifteen? Homeless people trading cards. Like baseball cards only with pictures of vagrants instead. I thought I could make a profit and help the poor bastards at the same time. Except I could never figure out why they kept trying to break my camera.

LESLIE

For a capitalist, you're one sick socialist. So what's the real reason for leaving this time?

JOSH

You make me so sound so shallow.

LESLIE

Josh, how many times have we moved since we've been married? Eight? Ten?

JOSH

Are you counting houses, or just cities?

LESLIE

Jobs. Careers. When we met you were selling computers on campus, remember? Then you bought a bar. Then you became a stockbroker, which was totally crazy. You've been a restaurant owner, a mobile home dealer, a frozen pizza entrepreneur, and even a dot-com guy, though it was never clear to me what you were actually selling on the Internet.

JOSH

(shrugs)

Me too.

LESLIE

And they all made money. One after another. Of course I'm jealous. You hardly broke a sweat. But what's next, Josh? What non-plan does your gut have in mind?

JOSH

I was thinking about gambling actually. It's hot. Maybe we could buy a riverboat. Wouldn't that be great, floating up and down the Mississippi like Mark Twain?

LESLIE

This is about my bookstore, isn't it?

JOSH

No, this is not about your bookstore.

LESLIE

It opens in less than a week and suddenly you're talking about moving? That's a coincidence?

JOSH

Yeah. I've been thinking about this for a while. Before the bookstore. I'm bored. I want to move on. Besides, I'm sick of all this damn red rock.

LESLIE

I'm sick of living on the run. I feel like a fugitive. Why can't we settle down?

JOSH

We can, and we will, but not in Jericho.

LESLIE

Why not Jericho? What happened Josh? You were crazy about this place when came here.

JOSH

I know, but I've decided there's too much sun here. It shines all day. It beats on my skin like a drum, it hurts my eyes. It's probably giving us cancer.

LESLIE

You worshipped the sun in Seattle! You said you were going to rust in all that rain.

JOSH

I know, but it never rains here, or when it does it washes half the mountain into the river. This country is too extreme. I want to go to someplace softer. What about New Orleans?

LESLIE

This is about my bookstore, isn't it?

JOSH

Of course not. I promise we'll stop moving next time. We'll settle down, I swear. You can start another bookstore.

LESLIE

Where, on a riverboat in a Louisiana swamp? What would I sell - Fifty Ways to Beat the Dealer? Postcards of crocodiles? I don't want to move to someplace softer. I want to stay here. I like it here. I like the red rock, and the sun. I like the people, even the tourists. I like the idea of selling books to them.

(pause)

You're afraid it will succeed. You don't want it to, because it's my idea, my dream, and not yours. Right?

JOSH

No! I like success. I don't care whose dream it is, if it makes us money.

LESLIE

What is it then? You don't think I can pull it off, do you?

JOSH

Hold on, there's a lot of my money invested in that bookstore....

LESLIE

But nothing else. It opens in a week and you haven't even set foot inside the store. You haven't carried one box, or lifted one book. And now you're talking about leaving?

JOSH

(sighs)
I'm asking us to consider it.

LESLIE

And I'm asking us not to.

(the door opens and TAD saunters inside, leading a bike)

TAD

Good morning, howdy, top of the day to you all.

JOSH

You're late Tad.

TAD

Time is meaningless when you're in the middle of a ride. And this one was sweet. I hit Level Three early, near Teapot Rock, and then just kept climbing. By Sleepy Tom Canyon I was already in Level Four, after that I was flying through heaven. Miles are meaningless too. It's the ride that counts, not how far you go. You should try it Mr. Rose. You really should take a ride sometime.

LESLIE

(begins to leave)
That would be the day.

JOSH

Leslie wait!

LESLIE

Good-bye, I have work to do.

TAD

Everyone should ride a bike. What a wonderful world that would be.

(LESLIE exits. TAD walks down the ramp and exits)