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Off Road

By

JULIANNA GROSS

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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Off Road premiered at Sherwood High School on Jan. 18, 2018.

CAST:

Mel Leah Packer
Oliver Nick Weinrich
Charlotte..... Marne Malone
Dad..... Julia Robins
Peter Adam Levine

PRODUCTION:

Director Julianna Gross
Producer Andrew Dodge

Off Road

CHARACTERS

MEL: a cynical 17-year-old girl.

OLIVER: her friend, a sensitive teenage boy.

CHARLOTTE: his girlfriend and Mel's best friend.

DAD: Mel's supportive father.

PETER: Mel's awkward first date.

SETTING: The play takes place over the course of a night on the side of a highway with various flashbacks laced in.

Off Road

SCENE 1

SETTING: *The side of a highway at dusk. Car lights flash by, illuminating a car with the hood open. A tree stump sits near the road rail. There is a dark forest behind the road rail.*

AT RISE: *MEL sits on the tree stump drawing pictures in the dirt with a stick. OLIVER is bent over under the hood of the car, working with the mechanisms inside and seeming frustrated. The car won't turn on.*

OLIVER. No ... come on ... this can't happen.

MEL. Why the heck not? Why can't we be stuck out here until we're thirty. It's a gorgeous night. You pitch the tent, I'll start the fire—no need to worry, I'm a Girl Scout.

OLIVER. Forty at least.

MEL. Let's hope you age well.

OLIVER. So far, so good.

MEL. Matter of opinion ...

OLIVER. Mel, I've known you since freshman year, and I've never once seen you be mean to anyone. Why only me?

MEL. Oh Ollie, you don't count, you know that. Silly boy.

OLIVER. Would you just come and help me over here?

MEL. You're doing a marvelous job over there by your lonesome. Quite spectacular actually. Have you ever considered a career as a mechanic?

OLIVER. Mel.

MEL. You'd look just darling in one of those smocks. Grease suits you. Matches the rest of you.

OLIVER. Melanie.

MEL. Melanie? I don't know a Melanie. Is she a former flame of yours? Pull out the list, I'll have to add her.

OLIVER. Can you just tell me your full name already? Melanie? Melissa?

MEL. Why do you care?

OLIVER. I just have to know.

MEL. That's a terrible reason.

OLIVER (*in a Russian accent*). I'll give you three of my finest goats.

MEL. Hmm ... How many rocks do they weigh?

OLIVER. At LEAST six.

MEL. Each?

OLIVER. Each.

MEL. You drive a hard bargain. I'll have to check with my husband when he gets back from the war in the old country, he handles all of our business. Women obviously have no place in the matter.

OLIVER. Melania, can you please come help?

MEL. Ugh, men are helpless.

(MEL goes over to the car and leans into the hood. OLIVER's phone dings with a text and he straightens to answer it. MEL follows slowly to glare at him.)

MEL. Oliver.

OLIVER. Mellifluous.

MEL. You have cell service.

OLIVER. Yes?

MEL. Why are we still here?

OLIVER. The car turned off, remember?

MEL. Call someone!

OLIVER. ... I was getting to that!

(OLIVER goes over to the stump and sits, calling CHARLOTTE with a stupid grin on his face. MEL watches him sit, still standing next to the car.)

MEL. Tell Charlie I say SAVE ME!

(OLIVER doesn't respond and puts the phone to his ear.)

OLIVER. Hey baby, how are you? ... Charlotte, stop. I'm sure you were great. You're always wonderful. You can't not be ... No, I love you more.

MEL. Hello? Gonna get hit by an eighteen-wheeler any minute? ... You can't make out thirty miles apart.

OLIVER. Right, so honey, I was driving back from ... Mark's house, and I guess the car was not having it, and now I'm stuck on here on Columbia Avenue ... that's fine, take your time ... I miss you ... see you soon.

(MEL smacks her forehead to her palm as OLIVER hangs up the phone.)

MEL. You're about as intelligent as those six rocks.

OLIVER. What do you mean?

MEL. So you lied about where you were going, also failing to mention my presence in the situation.

OLIVER. You know Charlie, she gets jealous so easily, I just can't have another Rachel situation.

MEL. Rachel was your lab partner.

OLIVER. She came over when Charlie was there.

MEL. To pick up your notes.

OLIVER. She wouldn't speak to me for two days.

MEL. You know I love Charlie, she's my best friend, I knew her years and years before you ever came into the picture, but that's obsessive.

OLIVER. It's just easier this way.

MEL. Is it worth it?

OLIVER. Are you asking me if she's worth it?

(There is an uncomfortable silence.)

OLIVER *(cont'd)*. Yes, she is.

(OLIVER walks around the car, awkwardly inspecting the sides as if to look for a problem.)

MEL. One more thing.

OLIVER. Yes, little miss genius?

MEL. Where am I gonna be when she comes to pick you up from the return trip from "Mark's house?"

OLIVER. ... Shit.

MEL. That's what I thought.

OLIVER. Call someone else!

(OLIVER tosses her his phone. She awkwardly catches it, fumbling a bit.)

MEL. Who am I gonna call? Your speed dial looks exactly the same as mine.

OLIVER. What about your parents?

MEL. Working.

OLIVER. They can't pick up their daughter?

MEL. What about your parents?

OLIVER. I already called Charlotte.

MEL. Well, un-call her!

OLIVER. You are impossible.

MEL. Just tell her the truth.

OLIVER. No, she wouldn't understand.

MEL. Understand what? That you, her boyfriend, wanted to get something for her for her birthday and wanted me, her best friend, to help find something? We really should be hiding from the cops, it's not safe for criminals out here. The two dozen cupcakes in the backseat could incriminate us. Her favorites.

OLIVER. You know what it looks like.

MEL. It looks like you care. A lot.

OLIVER. I do.

MEL. I know. I do too.

OLIVER. I know.

(There is a pause. They realize they are comparing their relationships with CHARLOTTE.)

MEL. Well, good we're on the same page.

(MEL reaches back down into the front of the car and something breaks.)

MEL *(cont'd)*. Welp.

OLIVER. Never trust a woman to do anything!

(They laugh, and OLIVER walks over to help in the hood of the car. During this exchange, lights have been flashing past quickly to indicate cars driving by them. As they work under the hood of the car, an especially bright light flashes by and the stage immediately becomes dark as a flashback ensues.)

SCENE 2

(Flashback; the lighting is different and more focused on the stump on the side of the stage.)

MEL is sitting with her back to the log wearing a red baseball cap writing in a notebook. OLIVER comes up behind her wearing a bookbag and reads aloud.)

OLIVER. And I never believed he'd actually ...

(MEL shuts the book shut immediately and turns around, alarmed. OLIVER plucks the hat off her head and places it on his own as he plops down on the stump. MEL warily scoots away.)

MEL. Can I help you?

OLIVER. You probably could.

MEL. Do I know you?

OLIVER. You probably could.

MEL. Is this some bad flirting attempt?

OLIVER *(pointing to the notebook)*. Whatcha got in there?

MEL *(pointing to his head)*. Whatcha got in there?

OLIVER. A new hat.

(MEL snatches her hat back and puts it on her head.)

OLIVER *(cont'd)*. And I never believed he'd actually ...

MEL. Steer off the road.

OLIVER. Figuratively? Or literally?

MEL. Both.

(There is a pause as OLIVER considers her. CHARLOTTE comes bounding in out of breath L of the stump.)

CHARLOTTE. Mel! There you are, we have to go, we were supposed to meet Mr. Parsons twenty minutes ago for ...

(She trails off as she notices OLIVER standing up and turning to face her. Both of their eyes are wide.)

CHARLOTTE. Mel, who's your friend?

MEL. A thief.

OLIVER. Oliver.

(He reaches out to shake her hand. Hesitant and a bit nervous, she puts her hand out to meet his a few seconds after. They stare at each other. MEL stands and watches from the side, eventually walking out L, stealing CHARLOTTE's car keys out of her back pocket.)

MEL. I'll be in the car, Charlie, when you're quite done here.

(MEL exits and the two tear their hands apart and laugh a little. There is another bright flash of car lights going by and the stage goes dark again.)

SCENE 3

(The flashback ends and the normal set and lighting continues.)

MEL and OLIVER are exactly as they were before the flashback occurred, both hunched under the hood of the car.)

MEL. This is hopeless. You're hopeless.

OLIVER. Me?

MEL. No, no, the cupcakes. What's that? Oh stop, delicious but hopeless. What's it take to get some helpful cupcakes around here?

(MEL crosses over to trees on the opposite side of the car and looks through the forest aimlessly.)

OLIVER. You know what I thought when I first met you?

MEL. That I have good taste in hats?

OLIVER *(laughing)*. No.

MEL. How can I steal her notes from Mrs. Mitchell's class?

OLIVER. Yes. But no, I thought, here's an interesting one. A little sassy, but interesting all the same.

MEL. That doesn't sound too pleasant.

OLIVER *(laughing to himself)*. It surprisingly was.

MEL. What did you think when you met Charlie?

(He pauses, clearly caught off-guard.)

MEL *(cont'd)*. Wow.

OLIVER. Yeah, basically.

MEL. What was that?

OLIVER. What was what?

MEL. That was cold.

OLIVER. It's like seventy degrees.

MEL. No, what you said. What happened?

(MEL gets up and walks toward the car. OLIVER puts the hood down, and MEL hops up onto it and sits.)

OLIVER. Happened?

MEL. With Charlie. Last time I checked you were happily snogging under the bleachers.

OLIVER. What are you talking about? Nothing happened.

MEL. I don't believe you.

OLIVER *(defensively)*. How the heck would you know? Does that hat of yours let you read minds?

MEL. Oliver. You can tell me.

OLIVER. You'll just tell her.

MEL. No, I won't. I don't tell other people things. I don't say things, like at all. I hardly speak.

OLIVER. You speak A LOT.

MEL. I'm serious. Pinky promise.

(MEL thrusts out her pinky toward his face. He laughs and lowers her hand down.)

OLIVER. I'm just not that sure anymore if the "wow" that was there at the beginning is all that ... "wow."

MEL. Anymore?

OLIVER. Yes? No? Why am I telling you this? This is bad, I can't.

(OLIVER crosses toward the stump and paces back and forth in front of the car.)

MEL. Shh shh.

OLIVER. I didn't say anything.

MEL. SHH.

OLIVER. What?

MEL. Uh huh. I'll tell him.

OLIVER. Tell him what?

MEL. The cupcakes are confused.

OLIVER. Mel!

MEL. They want to know what happened to the "wow."

OLIVER. Nothing happened. Can't a "wow" just stop being a "wow"?

MEL. It's against the definition of "wows."

OLIVER. It's like I'm talking to a chicken nugget.

MEL. Pretty much!

OLIVER. You've never lost that "wow" feeling?

MEL. I've never had that "wow" feeling.

OLIVER. Never? You're seventeen.

MEL. Is that supposed to be significant? Like there must be something wrong if I've screwed my head on right and haven't fallen "head over heels?"

OLIVER. I didn't mean there was something wrong with—

MEL. It's fine, really. We were discussing your "wow," please continue.

OLIVER. Mel—

MEL. What happened with you and Charlie?

(There is a pause as OLIVER debates whether or not to go along with the subject change, eventually deciding to continue on as he sees her becoming upset.)

OLIVER. You know that thing that people do?

MEL. That thing, yup.

OLIVER. In a movie, or at the park, and you're sitting on the bench or in the seats, next to each other, and she leans her head and it touches your shoulder, gently, 'cause she's holding it up, waiting for you to flinch or not to see if it's OK. And you don't move, so she rests her head there. In the bend.

MEL. I am familiar with the motion, yes.

OLIVER. She's never done that.

MEL. She's never put her head on your shoulder.

OLIVER. Nope.

MEL. Maybe she's scared of lice?

OLIVER. Mel.

MEL. Oliver, why do you care? Why did you notice that, out of all things?