Not Normal
A One-Act Play for Young Audiences

by Margaret O'Donnell
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32 pages/ 45 minutes run time

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**Synopsis**

The monster of climate crisis is staring eleven year old Savannah right in the face, and she’s petrified. She is convinced she’s too young, too ignorant, and too powerless to help stop the destruction, and she desairs in her attempts to write poetry and make videos calling for change. When the non-human beings of the Earth -- animal, plant, and mineral -- call a council to inspire humans to take action, though, it’s Savannah they invite to sit in the seat reserved for humans. The trees, forest deities, and the council of all beings shower their pledges of help on Savannah, but it may not be enough to convince her of her own abilities. That’s where a little forest magic may come in handy… A play for young audiences.

**Time and Place:** Spring 2020. A street in a newly-quiet city neighborhood, abutting a few acres of forested land.

**Characters**

Savannah, human female, age 11, city-dweller  
Midori, ancient forest deity  
Orrin, ancient forest deity  
**Voices of the Trees** (off-stage)

Council of All Beings:  
Coyote  
Crow  
Orca  
Polar Bear  
Goldenrod  
Coastal Redwood  
Lichen

**Note on Casting:** Except for the role of Savannah, any gender can play any character. Actors of any race may be cast in any role. The trees should be voiced by at least four actors.

**Setting:** I suggest indicating the city street with light and sound, showing houses or apartment buildings, and a forest of huge native conifers backing the street. The trees should dominate the set. The street and houses look small in comparison. Props can be few and easily moved. The mood is magical and mysterious. Strange things are about to happen.

**Council of All Beings:** The actors in the Council wear masks and/or costumes denoting which being they are. Information about the Council of All Beings is here: [https://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/Joanna%20Macy.htm](https://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/Joanna%20Macy.htm). I encourage involving children in making their masks and costumes, and in learning about the beings they play.
Margaret O'Donnell is an MFA candidate in playwriting at Hollins University. Her play *The Detention Lottery* was performed monthly in various locations in the Seattle area from June 2018 to February 2020, and *Undocumented* was produced at Burien Actors Theatre’s Showcase, Seattle Playwrights Salon, and Saint Mark’s Cathedral Drama Ministry in 2016. She has developed two additional plays with Seattle Playwrights Salon and Seattle Playwrights Studio. A staged reading of *Deadline 2037* was part of the 2020 Hollins Playwrights Festival in Roanoke, Virginia in July 2020. An excerpt from *Deadline 2037* will be performed at the 12th Women Playwrights International Conference in Montreal in June 2021. She is a co-founder of the Seattle Playwrights Salon, and holds a B.A. in English Literature from Purdue University, and a J.D. from Chicago-Kent College of Law. Find her plays at: https://newplayexchange.org/users/28755/margaret-odonnell.
Scene One

(Mid-afternoon, a sunny day. The first warm day of spring. The trees’ branches move gently in the breeze, and as they move their voices, both resonant and ethereal, float and swirl throughout the theatre. Four tree voices alternate.)

TREES
They’ve been quiet these last few months. What’s going on? Hardly any cars on the roads. Just a few planes. Shhh….. A relief. A taste of what it was like before they came. They wrecked a lot in the short time they’ve been here. An eagle told me they’re dying. We won’t miss them. Neither will the birds. Or the fish. Or the bears. Shhh… They never figured it out. Didn’t know or didn’t care. Ah well. Ah well. Shhh…

(Silence. The tree tops move in the breeze. Birdsong. Insect hum. On a porch, SAVANNAH sits alone, absorbed in her cell phone. She looks around to make sure no one is looking, then sets up her cell phone to take a video of herself as she speaks and reads her haiku. She opens a sketchbook and begins to read her haiku aloud while holding up her sketches illustrating the poems to the camera. The sketches and the words project behind her as she speaks.)

SAVANNAH
I was thinking today about how my mother used to take me walking in the forest. This forest, right here. Almost every day. And we’d talk to the trees. I didn’t know then how crazy it was. It seemed…right to talk to the trees. Well, the forest is toxic now. The gas
station on the corner leaked gasoline for decades, and poisoned the forest. Nobody wants to clean it up. Our part of town doesn’t have much power, I guess. And even if somebody did clean it up, what’s the use? Anyway, I don’t know why I’m writing the poems. Maybe just to remember things before it all goes up in flames. So here goes:

One cedar waxwing
Proclaims his strength all day long
Hopeful in the spruce.

Japanese maple leafs out overnight
A wild burst of joy
Curb-side.

Dogwood petals gleam
Cool white in the evening sky
Last light before dark

Yellow-green tips
Newly spangle
The old spruce’s uplifted branches

(Sighs) It’s not very good. I just thought…maybe one day, when there aren’t many trees, people could read this, and remember. But poetry… doesn’t change anything, does it?
(beat) I’ll be right back.

(Savannah exits. The trees begin to whisper and their branches sway. The four voices alternate.)

TREES

The girl
She’s writing poetry.
About our kind.
She’s the one
Isn’t she?
Who talked to us.
Some time ago it was
With her mother.
The girl is still here.
And Orrin.
Midori.
Where are they?
Hidden. Defeated.
Our gods abandoned us.
God of the forest.
Goddess of all that’s verdant.
When they married
At the beginning of the world.
They were strong.
What can they do now?
Our defeated gods.
Hmmmm…
There are some humans
Not enough
But some.
Hopeful.
Hopeless.
Hopeful.
Hopeless.

(Savannah enters and sets up her cell phone to record. She speaks directly to the audience, as if in a TED talk, but it’s clear to the audience she’s online. Troll comments project during her talk, as Savannah’s live image and slides projects on flats behind her.)

SAVANNAH
Hello everybody. This is Savannah again. This is the first of the We Can’t Go Back to Normal call to action episodes. Thank you, friends of the Earth, for watching. So, here’s the Not Normal, I guess you could call it a platform. Ta Da!

(She reads from index cards in her hands, which she fumbles and gets mixed up. She clears her throat, coughs, plays with her hair, tugs at her clothes and in general is a nervous wreck. When she sees the troll comments, they rattle her profoundly.)

During this coronavirus pandemic, when the whole world is slowing down and dramatically reducing our consumption of the earth’s resources, we are calling upon all governments and all people to not return to normal.

Our call is for a general strike of all kids and teens, and everybody under twenty-one everywhere, but especially in countries with a very high use of fossil fuels, like the United States and China, and many European countries. So, what we are saying is we refuse to participate in the rape of the Earth. And why kids and teens and the under twenty-one? Because it’s our future!

(Troll comments, noted in all caps, begin to appear on the projected screen, and pop up throughout the rest of SAVANNAH’s talk.)
NOBODY NEEDS YOU OR ANYONE TELLING US WHAT TO DO.
WHO’S THIS ‘WE’ SHE’S TALKING ABOUT?

SAVANNAH

*(reading)* We are in a climate emergency. We are putting so much carbon in the air we are choking ourselves to death. In fifty years, much of the southern half of our planet will be too hot for people to live in. That’s our only Earth we are talking about. Most people under twenty-one now will still be alive in fifty years. Nobody knows if it’s too late or not, but we have to try.

IT’S TOO LATE! WHY BOTHER?
NOBODY’S GOING TO DO WHAT SHE SAYS.

SAVANNAH

So here’s the thing we’re calling for, in this general strike of the young. It’s really, really specific what we can do, right now. And if all of us are doing it, everyone their small part, we can change direction! We can save ourselves. *(she stops reading)* I’ve got some slides, here. Okay, here’s the thing that might make the most difference, especially in the United States where we have almost as many gas-powered cars as people.

*(Slide projects: DON’T DRIVE OR RIDE IN GASOLINE-POWERED VEHICLES, then other slides project as she speaks, showing environmental degradation due to carbon emissions.)*

*(reading)* Don’t drive or ride in gasoline-powered vehicles. This is first because it’s the biggest source of carbon emissions, at twenty-nine percent of the total US carbon footprint. A gallon of gasoline burned in cars and trucks makes a total of twenty pounds of carbon dioxide in the air. And that is the greenhouse gas that is cooking our planet.

PEOPLE NEED CARS!
EVERYTHING SHE SAYS IS JUST GOING TO MAKE THINGS WORSE.
YEAH. MAKING BATTERIES IS WORSE THAN DRILLING FOR OIL.

SAVANNAH

*(reading)* Lifetime costs for many electric cars are already cheaper than for gas-powered cars, and electric car engines last four hundred thousand miles or more right now. So what’s stopping us? It’s our lives we’re talking about saving.

WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL IT MAKE IF I DON’T GET INTO A CAR?
YOU’LL BE LATE FOR EVERYTHING.
HAHAHAAHAHAHA!
SAVANNAH
(reading) I know this won’t be easy for us. But this is how all change starts. (stops reading) I’m going to post all the strike stuff right after this, so you can share with everybody you know. Doesn’t matter if we start with just two or three people striking. It will grow!

THIS IS ALL ABOUT HER GETTING FAMOUS.
FAMOUS! HAHAHAHAHAHA!
SHE WANTS TO KILL THE ECONOMY!

(Savannah, flustered and crying, slams down her laptop cover. She slumps and hides her face in her hands. She looks up in time to see POLAR BEAR enter, walking fast, then exiting. She’s astounded and leans out over her porch to look after the bear.

ORRIN and MIDORI enter, dressed as forest royalty. They walk from one side of the stage to the other, down one side of the street, and back on the other, as they talk. Savannah listens; they don’t seem to see her.

ORRIN
I don’t see how we can call the Council. I mean, we could call it, as the forest deities, but no one would come. We’ve lost our power, Midori. You’re living in a world that no longer exists. Back then/

MIDORI
Back then, we had hope, Orrin! Admit it! None of this ‘we lost our power.’ We let it happen. We were blind to the threat. Blind!

ORRIN
Now that’s harsh. We weren’t blind. People lost their connection to the land. They couldn’t see us anymore, and if they did, they didn’t believe we were real.

MIDORI
I think we could have tried harder to make them listen. We’re the forest deities, after all. We could have, I don’t know, done something to make people see us again, hear us/

(As they talk, POLAR BEAR enters again, walking rapidly across the stage, holding a sundial.)
POLAR BEAR
(to no one in particular) Hurry up, please, it’s time!

(Polar Bear exits.)

Orrin
It is time. Past time. It hurts me to see the entire Earth calling out to us to help, Midori! But without humans, it’s hopeless. You know that. We can’t call the Council without them. Their presence is vital to the Council.

Midori
The humans don’t see us. They don’t hear us anymore. They think we don’t exist. Imagine. As if they could even breathe without the trees.

(They walk in silence for a few beats. Savannah opens her mouth to speak, but doesn’t. Polar Bear enters.)

Polar Bear
(in a hurry) Deities, the beings are ready. We await your call.

Midori
Thank you, Polar Bear. Please tell them/ (she sobs)

Orrin
Yes, thank you, Polar Bear. We hope to be there very soon.

Polar Bear
(exiting) Some beings are losing hope. Some are gone forever. Some are very sick. I will tell them I spoke to you/

(Polar Bear exits in haste.)

Midori
What are we to do? Only humans can stop the destruction. We can’t.

(Savannah half-raises her hand to gesture to the deities, but stops herself.)

Orrin
But where can we find one?

(Orrin and Midori exit. Savannah sits back on her porch steps, thoughtfully. She listens as the trees talk.)
TREES

Orrin and Midori
Our forest deities.
What can they do?
So much is gone.
So much is gone.
What can they do?
Will the people help?
Sigh.
Sigh.
The young people are different
Maybe
They think they don’t have the power
Power
Power
Will they find it?
Find it?

Orrin.
Midori.
Our forest gods.
They’re back.
The Polar Bear called them.
The Polar Bear knows it’s time.
Long past time.
But still time?
Are they hopeful?
But it’s been so long.
It’s too late.
Is it?
Do the humans believe in them?
No. No. No.
But not all humans need to believe.
Why not this girl?
Why not?
Why not?

(Savannah stands, hesitates, then runs after Orrin and Midori.)

SAVANNAH
(as if falling into a deep hole) Ohhhhh/

TREES

Humans! Look up! Look around!
Look up! Look around! Smell the air.
Feel the air.
Hear the birdsong.
The insect buzz.
Our leaves in the breeze.
Walk in the forest today.
Touch our bark.
Smell the earth.
Yes, now. Now. Now.
Before it’s too late.
Too late. Too late.

(Light fades to deep blue. It’s night on the street. Street lights and porch lights glow. COYOTE AND CROW enter and walk down the street. They sit on the curb, dejected.)

COYOTE
It’s all temporary. All this quiet. All this fresh air.

CROW
Yeah. We should’ve known better. They’ll never change. Same old stinking gasoline. Same old roar overhead and on the streets. It’s coming back.

COYOTE
Yeah.

CROW
Them too. Only they don’t seem to know it.

(Long silence. COYOTE does some mournful howls. CROW picks up and plays with some shiny objects.)

COYOTE
You know, we’re some of the few that can survive anywhere, anyway. Us and rats and cockroaches.

CROW
Ants and mosquitos.

COYOTE
Yeah. No matter what humans do, short of complete incineration, coyotes and crows got it covered.

CROW
Murder on everybody else though. And who wants to live in a smoking oven, anyway?
COYOTE
Yeah.

COYOTE
(Long moody pause.) The Council! What about the Council?

CROW
Ha. Nobody will come. Most are dead. A bunch are sick. And everybody’s given up.

COYOTE
I don’t know. I think it might work. Orrin and Midori are back.

CROW
What!?! News to me. They went away, like thirty crow generations ago. Back when it started to get really bad. We pass down the stories of the forest gods, but they’re like myths, aren’t they?

COYOTE
Myth or real, they’re back. I saw them. They’re here.

…

COYOTE
…

CROW
Aw. What’s the use? Even the deities can’t change anything without humans.

(As if by magic, with color and sound, Savannah tumbles onto the stage, and sits up, looking around with great surprise.)

COYOTE
Wow. Now I take that as a sign. Let’s see if she can see and hear us. (beat) Good evening, young person.

SAVANNAH
(jumps up) Did you just speak? You’re a coyote, right?

COYOTE
Yep, that’s me. (with excitement, to Crow) A human! Who can hear us.

CROW
(to Coyote) Hmm. I’ve seen this before. Humans are tricky. Just because they can hear us doesn’t mean they’re good. We don’t know anything about this human.
SAVANNAH
Where am I? It looks like my street, but you’re here, talking!

COYOTE
Of course we’re talking. We’re always talking. But humans can’t hear us, or won’t hear us. It’s so exciting that you do!

CROW
(to Coyote) I’m not excited. What if she is useless? What if she can hear us, and doesn’t care?

SAVANNAH
It’s the first time I’ve heard animals talking. Is this a dream?

COYOTE
We’re not in a dream. We’re real. You look real too. By the way, I’m Coyote, and this is Crow.

SAVANNAH

CROW
Hello. You must have done something to get here. It’s not usual.

SAVANNAH
I heard these two...they looked like, I don’t know, like they weren’t…well, ordinary, I guess. They were walking past my house. They didn’t see me. They were talking about environmental destruction/

COYOTE
Yes! Orrin and Midori!

SAVANNAH
Yes, that’s what they called each other.

COYOTE
I’ve seen them too. Crow, she saw them!

CROW
So you saw them. And?

SAVANNAH
Well, I’ve been reading about the climate crisis, and trying to talk about it, and I was interested in what they said, so I…followed them. They said they needed humans for the Council/
CROW

Hmm. *Crown is skeptical*

COYOTE

(to Crow) Let me handle this, okay? (to Savannah) You know we’re in desperate times, what with the climate crisis. We need humans if we’re gonna stop this race over the cliff. But hardly any humans can hear and see the natural world anymore. You can. And you’re talkin’ about the emergency, interested in what our forest deities said/

CROW

We need to make sure we don’t call the Council for nothin’. Then we’d really be discouraged. Orrin and Midori, all of us. Even more than we already are.

SAVANNAH

You’re discouraged too?

CROW

Yeah, of course we are! Look at what we’ve already lost.

SAVANNAH

…

CROW

…

COYOTE

All right you two! Enough of the pity party! There’s plenty to do, and you know it. Savannah, the Council is a way for non-human beings to show humans what’s happening to the Earth, and what can be done. It’s speaking directly from our non-human knowledge. Are you in?

SAVANNAH

Well…yes. I’m in.

COYOTE

We’ll call Orrin and Midori to convene the Council.

CROW

All right! Hope this works/

(COYOTE howls and yips. CROW joins in with caws. Long pause.

Silently, animals and plants enter, one at a time, and stand: ORCA, GOLDENROD, COASTAL REDWOOD, LICHEN.)
COYOTE and CROW join, and POLAR BEAR enters, moving quickly. Savannah stands on the edge of the stage, apart and watchful. As they are gathering, the Trees speak.)

TREES

The Council.
The Polar Bear, the Coyote, and the Crow have called the deities.
They know it’s time.
Long past time.
But still time.
There must be time.
Orrin.
Midori.
Will they hear? Will they come?
The girl is here too.
Yes. Yes.
A human who can see and hear us.
At last.

ORCA

O ho! A human! Now that’s unexpected. It’s been so long.

POLAR BEAR

How did that happen, I wonder?

GOLDENROD

Unusual to see a human here. They live so closed in, now.

COYOTE

Let’s ask her. Hello, girl! Over here!

SAVANNAH

Hello. Um, where am I? And who are you all?

COASTAL REDWOOD

Who are you?

SAVANNAH

Savannah.

CROW

Now that’s a positive sign. She has an Earth name.
LICHEN
Why are you here?

SAVANNAH
I don’t know. I just followed Orrin and Midori.

ORCA
You saw them!

POLAR BEAR
People haven’t seen or heard the deities in so many seasons.

GOLDENROD
What’s different about you, Savannah?

COASTAL REDWOOD
Yes, what’s different?

SAVANNAH
I’m just an ordinary person! I don’t know what’s different.

LICHEN
Do Orrin and Midori know Savannah is here?

CROW
I’ll tell them. Caw! Caw!

Crow exits, flapping. The beings wait expectantly. Crow enters, then turns and raises their wings. Orrin and Midori enter. Orrin and Midori raise their arms in greeting. All the beings raise their arms in greeting.

MIDORI
Hello, dear beings!

ORRIN
Hello, friends!

ORCA
Hello, Orrin and Midori! We have missed you.

POLAR BEAR
It’s been so long.
GOLDENROD
We’ve needed you.

COASTAL REDWOOD
Have you seen what has been happening?

CROW
Why did you disappear?

LICHEN
You left us alone.

COYOTE
It’s been so very bad without you.

MIDORI
Dear beings, the truth is...we (beat) lost hope.

(The beings groan, sigh, sharply exhale, sob.)

ORRIN
We were discouraged. You all know humans are the only beings who can slow and stop their destruction of the Earth. And we need their cooperation to restore the Earth.

MIDORI
But we couldn’t find humans who could hear and see us anymore. So we...gave up. We went into hiding.

LICHEN
But you are our deities! The forest deities. You abandoned us.

COYOTE
It got worse for the earth when you left.

MIDORI
We know that. Hiding ourselves away...we’re done with that.

ORRIN
And even though we’re still discouraged/

MIDORI
And even though we don’t know what will help/

ORRIN
Or even if anything will help/
MIDORI
We are hopeful. That’s why we came to talk with you.

ORRIN
And we will call the Council as soon as we find a human/

ORCA
A human! There is one here.

(All the beings point to Savannah)

MIDORI
Young human, what is your name?

SAVANNAH
Savannah.

ALL BEINGS
Savannah! Her name is Savannah!

ORRIN
How did you find your way here? That’s quite unusual.

SAVANNAH
I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to break in/

MIDORI
O, please don’t be sorry, Savannah. We are delighted you are here. It’s just that...humans don’t connect much anymore in the natural world. We are so pleased you did.

ORRIN
And we’d love to know how you did it.

SAVANNAH
I don’t know. I just saw you walking on my street and I followed you.

MIDORI
But that is what’s so unusual. Most humans don’t see us now, or even understand that other beings are on this earth.

ORRIN
We wonder why you did.
Here’s why
She writes poetry
About our kind
She asks other humans
To stop using fossil fuels
She called for a gasoline strike
That’s why.

MIDORI
Ah. Your eyes and ears are open.

ORRIN
And your heart.

POLAR BEAR
She heard you talking about the Council.

MIDORI
O yes! Orrin, Savannah might be…shall we ask her?

ORRIN
Yes! We must tell her what the Council is, first. And then, what a human’s role is.

MIDORI
Good. Savannah, would you like to know what the Council is?

SAVANNAH
Um, well, yes. (beat) But, I’m only eleven years old. I’m not powerful or anything. I don’t have anyone who listens to me. I don’t know if I say the right things. I’m not the smartest in my class/

ORRIN
We understand. None of those things are needed, though, to be a part of the Council. You have something more important. You love the beauty of the Earth. You write poetry about it.

MIDORI
And you can see and hear us and non-human beings. It’s something that humans often lose as they grow older. You are most definitely not too young.

SAVANNAH
Well, if you think so, then yes, I’d like to hear about the Council.

ORRIN
Lichen, will you begin?
LICHEN
Me? O joy! Most of the time, nobody thinks of me first. But we were the first complex plants on Earth. Ah. Where to begin? The Council is a coming together of all beings, animal, mineral, plant, to support and inform each other as we protect our mutual home.

MIDORI
And now, Orca.

ORCA
So much to say, such a deep topic. (beat) In the Council, all beings work together for what we need to survive and thrive. We build the web of life together.

ORRIN
And now, Crow.

CROW
Many humans have forgotten that we all are connected. When one of us suffers, we all suffer. Each of us is interrelated.

MIDORI
And now, what is the role of the humans we invite to the Council? Goldenrod, will you lead us off? And then, anyone, please add your thoughts.

GOLDENROD
Gladly! Human, your role, if you accept it, is to hold what you learn as a deep trust. We only speak to humans who have ears to hear us.

POLAR BEAR
To tell what you learn to other humans in ways they can understand.

COASTAL REDWOOD
To keep your heart open.

COYOTE
To listen to the beings around you.

LICHEN
To spend time with us

CROW
To teach others to see and hear us.

ORCA
To make room for all Earth’s beings in your heart and mind.
POLAR BEAR
To learn about the Earth and its beings throughout your life.

GOLDENROD
To keep telling the story of Earth’s beings even when other humans turn away.

ORRIN
Thank you, beings. And now, Savannah, what do you think?

SAVANNAH
I’m…overwhelmed by this responsibility! I feel inadequate. I’m just one person. And I’m very young. I don’t have power. No one outside of my school and my family even knows me. And you know that so much of the time, I think it’s probably too late to save the Earth. We have caused so much destruction. And governments who must act, haven’t acted. Many governments say there is nothing we can do, or it’s not our fault, or it’s not even happening. I’m afraid.

MIDORI
Of what are you afraid?

SAVANNAH
People will make fun of me for trying. People won’t listen to me. Your faith in me will be shattered. I’m not good enough. I’m not smart enough. I don’t speak or write well. I don’t know what to say.

ORRIN
Ah. These reasons are all understandable. Almost everyone feels this way at the beginning of a quest, any quest that is worth doing.

MIDORI
This is not an easy thing. Very few important quests are.

SAVANNAH
I might fail.

ORRIN
Yes. That’s almost certain. Everyone fails at some time. Then we start again. Failure leads to learning.

SAVANNAH
I’m afraid.

MIDORI
Yes. That means you know how important this is. This is a solemn task.
SAVANNAH
No, I can’t! I can’t! I’m the wrong human. I’m weak. I get discouraged. I’m discouraged most of the time. I can’t!

(Savannah exits, running. All the beings wilt. Orrin and Midori exit, followed slowly by all the beings.)

TREES
How sad
For all of us
And for Savannah.
She sees and hears us.
She doesn’t know how rare that is.
We thought she was the one.
Now what?
More destruction.
When will we see another such human?
How much longer will the forests burn
And birds die?
How much longer will plastics and acid fill the ocean
And taint the rain?
We thought she was the one.
Sad. Sad. Sad.
For the Earth.
For all beings.

(Darkness falls.)

Scene Two

(Morning. Savannah enters her porch, and stares moodily at the street. She writes and draws on her phone, and the words and drawings project scenes of forest devastation and smoke.)

SAVANNAH
Desolate forest
Birds flee for their lives
Air smells foul with smoke.

No hope in the dark
The future is hidden
The candle gutters.
Smoke haze fills the air
Shrouds the hills and mountains
City shutters down.

(Savannah slumps. Coyote enters, sauntering.)

COYOTE
Yip! Yip! Hello Savannah!

SAVANNAH
What!

COYOTE
Didn’t mean to startle you. Remember me? Last night?

SAVANNAH
Oh! I thought/

COYOTE
That it was a dream? (sighs) Some of the humans we invite think that. Then they forget all about the Council. Or try to. But you (beat) we thought you’d stay.

SAVANNAH
You did? Why?

COYOTE
You called for a gasoline strike. You write nature poetry about the beauty, and the destruction. We were so disappointed when you left. (stopping himself) No, no! Everyone told me not to pressure you. Sorry! I just…never mind. (he half-turns away)

SAVANNAH
Coyote…

COYOTE
I’m just such a dreamer. (sniffles) Everybody makes fun of me for being so hopeful about humans. After all they’ve done. The other coyotes call me naïve. Can you imagine what a coyote feels like to be called naïve? It’s bad. We’re supposed to be tricksters, and wily, and cunning. I’m just a failure at that! (he gives a sob)

SAVANNAH
You think you’re a failure because you’re hopeful? Really?

COYOTE
Don’t tell anyone, please, that I was crying. The rest of the pack will never let me hear the end of it.
SAVANNAH
Coyote/

COYOTE
No, it’s okay. It’s time I started thinking like everybody else. Coyotes always say, ‘the only good human is a dead…’ No! Sorry! I don’t believe that. It’s just what some of the pack says/

SAVANNAH
I’m the same. I feel the way you do.

COYOTE
You do? How?

SAVANNAH
People make fun of me, too. They say it’s too hard to save the Earth now. They saw it will cost too much, and cause too much disruption. They say people will never do what we need to do, even though we know what to do. They say…all kinds of mean things about people like me.

COYOTE
So, you too. Huh. So you know what it’s like. Is that why you left last night? ‘Cause you’re afraid people will make fun of you?

SAVANNAH
No! (beat) Well, kind of. And because it’s hard. And I don’t know what I’m doing. I think I’ll let all the beings down. I’m shy. The responsibility is just too much. Really, nobody will listen to me. Why should they? I’m not a scientist.

COYOTE
Yeah. I understand. On the plus side, you can see us. You can hear us. That’s not usual. That’s really cool and special.

SAVANNAH
But I’m like the other coyotes in your pack. I don’t believe we humans want to change anything. And what if it’s too late anyway? That’s what a lot of people think. That we’re doomed.

COYOTE
Wow, that’s bad news. Humans won’t even try to change to save themselves/

(Crow enters, flapping)
CROW
Caw! Listen to you two! What a couple of sad sacks! Coyote, you should know better! How often does a human come along who can see and hear us? Huh? How long you gonna keep this pity party goin’? Caw!

COYOTE
Aw, Crow. You’re always butting in. We’re having a private conversation here! I’m trying to be sensitive.

CROW
Caw! Caw! Caw! Don’t make me laugh. You’re a coyote! You’re as tough as crows are. Gotta be. Savannah, I heard you say that humans just won’t do what has to be done to save the Earth. Nobody knows that! Humans made that up for their own convenience. So they don’t have to change.

SAVANNAH
But the oceans are full of plastic! The air is heavy with carbon. We’re cooking ourselves to death. Even if all of a sudden, we change, what good will it do?

CROW
Look what humans have already done in many places to restore clean air, and clean up rivers and lakes, for just one example. Humans can change. You already have proof of that.

SAVANNAH
But you should find someone better than I am. There must be plenty of people. I don’t have any power. You should go talk to presidents, and Congress, and corporations. They have power.

COYOTE
Yip! Yip! So few people can see or hear us. The ones who can, like you, aren’t politicians or business leaders. They are almost always young people like you.

CROW
Caw! Crows and coyotes figured out how to live with human better than most beings. That’s why we are the messengers so much of the time. Plus, we’re loud! And sassy.

COYOTE
Speak for yourself, Crow! I’m a sensitive coyote.

CROW
Caw! Tell me that next time I see you tearing up the compost bin. Okay, my turn to watch the nest. Gotta go! (as she flaps off) Don’t be just another selfish, lazy human, Savannah!
SAVANNAH
Crow’s right. I am selfish. And lazy. That’s why I can’t do this.

COYOTE
That’s not what Crow meant. That’s not you. You’re a poet, and a fine human being. The best kind of human. The kind that’s able to learn.

SAVANNAH
Coyote, I think I should be alone for a while. I need to think/

COYOTE
Yeah, okay. I’m a sensitive being. I hear you. I can understand. I get it. I’m not one to push anybody, except maybe a raccoon who’s getting into my trash cans/

SAVANNAH
Coyote!

COYOTE
Okay! I’m going! Yip! Yip!

(Coyote exits. Savannah sits with eyes closed listening to the breeze and birdsong for a few beats. The Trees begin to rustle.)

TREES
Can we find someone else?
Maybe.
But there are so few!
She is unusual.
Open. A listener.
Powerful.
But she doesn’t know it.
What can we do?
We can tell her she’s powerful.
But she won’t believe it.
(rustle)
(rustle)
How can we show her?
Maybe she will listen to us.
Not by words.
By our gifts.
The gifts of spring.
Cherry. Cherry.
Cherry, send your blossoms to the human.
Blow, breeze, blow.
Blow. Blow.
(Cherry blossoms begin to fall on Savannah, on the porch steps. She looks up and around. She’s filled with delight.)

SAVANNAH
Cherry blossoms! All over me. Just me. But where are the cherries?

(She lifts her arms and dances among the blossoms, to a cherry blossom melody from Japan. She laughs.)

TREES
We need you.
You, Savannah.
Just as you are.
Just as you are.

(Orrin and Midori enter and stand smiling at the end of the street. Savannah sees them.)

SAVANNAH
Hello! I’m coming!

(All exit. Lights change to afternoon as the beings enter, followed by Orrin, Midori, and Savannah. The beings rejoice, forming a semi-circle around them, facing the audience.)

ALL BEINGS
She’s here! She came back! Welcome, Savannah!

MIDORI

(Orrin and Midori raise their arms in convocation.)

MIDORI
Council of All Beings, we Forest Deities welcome you. We apologize to all of you for our long absence. We allowed our deep sorrow at our Earth’s destruction to exile us. But now we are with you again.

ORRIN
We have called you together to hear your wisdom. We have among us a young human, Savannah, who has accepted the charge to help restore all of us to life and health.
MIDORI
Savannah, like you, we allowed our deep sorrow at the Earth’s suffering to isolate us from what could give us life again. But when you found us, we also found hope again. We have given each other hope.

ORRIN
For that, we thank you, Savannah.

MIDORI
Humans refer to us as deities, other-worldly beings, because that is how you can understand us. But other beings – the oceans, the mountains, streams, rocks, plants, animals, insects, fish, birds – know us as the life force, the spirit that animates every being on earth. We are the symbol of the spirit of life.

ORRIN
The Council will speak of the hardships all beings face now.

MIDORI
And will speak directly to humans about what must be done now.

ORRIN
And will give gifts to humans so that they can face what must be done with strength. With courage.

MIDORI
With this knowledge, understanding, and empathy, and with the gifts the Earth and its beings give to humans, we ask the human who has chosen to see and hear to go forth to other humans, and engage them in the work of restoration.

ORRIN
Savannah has chosen to be the representative of humans at this Council.

MIDORI
This is a deep commitment that will guide you throughout your life.

ORRIN
There will be moments during the Council meeting when the sorrow you are hearing will seem too heavy to bear.

MIDORI
We will be beside you to give you strength.

ORRIN
Let each being now introduce themselves.
(Each stand to announce their names:
ORCA, POLAR BEAR, GOLDENROD,
COASTAL REDWOOD, CROW, LICHEN,
COYOTE.)

ORRIN
We begin with acknowledging what we have lost. Orca, will you begin?

ORCA
We are the small black and white whales. We are dying because there aren’t enough salmon for us to eat. We are starving, we are hit by ships, and our blood is contaminated by the water in which we swim.

POLAR BEAR
We are the bears who live in the Arctic Circle. We hunt for our food on the ice, raise our young on the ice, sleep on the ice, and travel on the ice. But now the ice is melting. We are starving to death.

GOLDENROD
We are the golden yellow flowers that grow in open fields and meadows in the United States and Canada. We are the most important source of food for many birds and insects. The open land we grow in is disappearing. People are building more each year on the land that sustains us.

COASTAL REDWOOD
We big trees live all along the Pacific coast. We are dying from much more intense and frequent forest fires, and the air temperature increase that brings invasive species to our forests. We are dying from land development that diverts the water we need to live.

CROW
We crows can survive where other beings die. But we don’t want to be the only birds left on Earth! Forests and wetlands and meadows are disappearing, so birds don’t have food or shelter.

LICHEN
We are a tiny plant, but we are vitally important all over the world. We convert carbon dioxide in the air into oxygen, through photosynthesis. We absorb pollutants. The air is too polluted for us to live in many places now.

COYOTE
Like the crow, coyotes can live anywhere. But we don’t want to be the only mammals left on Earth. I speak on behalf of endangered mammals that have lost their habitats and food, clean water, and clean air due to rising temperatures and pollution.
MIDORI
Thank you, beings. Now, please tell Savannah what each being needs to survive and thrive, with our fellow beings, the humans.

ORCA
We ask humans to leave space for us to live in our Pacific waters. We ask them to be mindful of us in their ships and boats, and to allow salmon once again to swim freely to their breeding waters. We ask humans to keep our ocean clean from industrial chemicals and acids that poison our blood.

POLAR BEAR
Carbon released in the air by fossil fuel burning traps the heat of the Earth close to the ground and melts the ice we live on. Our ice is disappearing fast, and we can’t travel to find food and shelter. We ask humans to use fuels that allow all beings to live.

GOLDENROD
As we disappear, so do all the beings who depend on us for food. The birds, butterflies, bees and other insects, and many small mammals are starving. We ask humans to stop taking so much open land for development.

COASTAL REDWOOD
Our land is disappearing, too. And our clean water and our clean air. The intense and frequent fires are killing all living things around us. We ask humans to stop burning fossil fuels and stop building in the wilderness.

CROW
We birds are dying by the billions each year in the United States. We ask humans to make their buildings visible to us. We ask humans to turn down their electric lights at night. We ask them to use non-toxic and natural pesticides on their crops. And to build densely, instead of in wilderness.

LICHEN
The polluted air is killing us. When humans burn fossil fuels, it makes the air too toxic even for us to clean. We ask humans to stop their reliance on gasoline, oil, and coal, and find non-toxic alternatives.

COYOTE
We mammals are losing our land to development. We are choking on air pollution from fossil fuels. We are dying in the intense and frequent forest fires. We are poisoned by toxic waters. We ask humans, who are our fellow mammals, to stop the use of fossil fuels, and stop building in the wilderness.

MIDORI
Thank you, beings. You have spoken of the destruction of our Earth, and made your requests to humans. You have called for a revolution in human behavior.
Orrin
You have shown us the state of the Earth now, and you have asked humans for what you need to survive and thrive, along with humans.

Savannah
Midori. Orrin. And all beings. What you are asking is not easy.

Coastal Redwood
It wasn’t easy for me to reach three hundred feet high. When I started as a seedling, two hundred and fifty years ago, I had a less than one percent chance of making it to three feet high. Day by day, I accepted the help I needed from the Earth.

Polar Bear
When I was a cub, I wasn’t ready when my mother sent me out to live on my own. I had to find my own food for the first time. Day by day, I learned and I thrived.

Orca
Everything looked bad for us orcas just two years ago. But then some humans started to pay attention to what they were doing in the coastal waters. We started to see salmon increase, and paths free of big ships cleared for us. Day by day, we swam with more strength and confidence.

Goldenrod
We goldenrod are often overlooked. We are weedy, and humans often don’t value us. But we persist. We know that without us, bees, birds, and insects will not eat, and human crops won’t be pollinated. Day by day, we give our very best to the Earth, as the Earth gives to us.

Savannah
You are all so strong and brave! But I feel so weak. And the destruction is just too much. And we humans…we mostly don’t believe it can be done. We think it’s too hard.

Orrin
Yes, we have heard that. But then, we see the changes humans have already made, in just a few months last year.

Midori
To fight the coronavirus crisis.

Lichen
Air pollution levels dropped.

Orca
Water pollution lessened, too.
CROW
Birds started raising more chicks who survived.

COYOTE
Human societies re-directed their money to deal with the effects of the virus.

GOLDENROD
Countries that had never cooperated before began to work together to save human lives.

Orrin
Such radical change, even overnight! Humans are very clever.

Midori
In a crisis, humans change and adapt so quickly. What a gift to share with all of Earth’s beings!

SAVANNAH
I need your help to take the first steps. And then to keep going.

Orrin
Ah! You just took the first step. You asked for help. Beings, how can we help Savannah?

(Each being approaches Savannah separately, then returns to the semi-circle.)

ORCA
I give you trust in your inner light to find a way through, around, under, and above obstacles. I give you vision in dark places.

POLAR BEAR
I give you strength to survive and thrive when you feel alone and threatened, no matter how cold and unwelcome the world around you is. I give you fortitude and courage.

GOLDENROD
I give you staying power. Power to spring back after losing ground, and power to sustain others. I give you resilience.

COYOTE
I give you knowledge of the intelligence you already have to understand the Earth’s interlocking ecosystems, and to explain it to others. I give you ability and competence. I give you cunning.

COASTAL REDWOOD
I give you the long view, and the confidence to stand tall, and the knowledge that what you will do, however small you think it is, may make the difference to tip the balance towards the Earth’s recovery. I give you foresight. I give you grace.
LICHEN
I give you humility and patience. I give you clarity.

CROW
And I give you playfulness despite the darkness. I give you the ability to form loving bonds with others in the tasks. I give you humor.

MIDORI
Savannah, do you accept the task, and these gifts?

SAVANNAH
(looking at each being in turn, and the deities) Yes. I accept the task to help humans and our governments learn that it’s not too late to save ourselves and all beings on Earth from the destruction of climate change. I accept with gratitude all the gifts the beings have given me.

(All beings cheer.)

ORRIN
Go forth, Savannah! Take your gifts, and all the knowledge you’ve gained.

MIDORI
Orrin and I will be always with you. You only need to call us.

(Trees)
Ahhhh…
She’s wondering
She’s thinking
Did it really happen?
Or was it a dream?
Does she really have what it takes?
The knowledge?
And the wisdom?
Let’s show her a sign
To tell her
The Council is a real as courage
As real as strength
As real as all that’s worth having
And being
Now?
Now.

(The Trees rustle louder and louder.)

We are with you, Savannah.
All the beings are with you.
You are not alone.

(Savannah hears and is moved. Time passes, with lighting changes, as she writes and draws. Then, she speaks into her cell phone, and the poem projects behind her, with more of her drawings. She recites the poem.)

SAVANNAH
Good morning, everyone. Since the last time I posted, I’ve had an…awakening. I was discouraged about what the world’s governments will do to save our Earth from destruction due to climate change. But then…I listened to the Earth and its beings. All the beings who are suffering. All the beings who hold wisdom for us. And I drew inspiration from them. I’ll say more about that in a poem. Oh, but first, why a poem? What good will a poem do in an emergency? Here’s why. There is nothing that will change, nothing that can change, until we humans change our minds about what’s possible. Art gets into us in a way nothing else can. So, here’s my poem. It’s called ‘Hope.’ I hope it inspires you to write your own. Poetry changes the world!

The Earth is burning
Our futures are disappearing
The water is poisoned
The air is choking us
And it’s up to me?

Governments turn away
It’s too hard, they say
Maybe someone else, sometime, someplace
Will come along
So we won’t have to bother.

But there is no one else
We’re all the Earth has
We who have turned away
We no longer know
We are one with the Earth

But why me? I said
I don’t have enough!
Governments are big and powerful
Why would they listen to me?
I’m far too small.
Then the Earth came to me
And poured out gifts
Gifts for me
Gifts for healing the Earth
Gifts for healing ourselves.

Orca gives me inner light to find my way
Courage and strength flow from Bear
The power to spring back after losing ground
Grows in me from Goldenrod.
Cunning and competence are the gifts of Coyote.

Redwood gives me the long view
And grace, and the confidence to stand tall.
Humility and patience come from Lichen
Crow bestows playfulness and humor
And loving connections with others in the work.

No one knows what will happen
Maybe no government will listen
They may listen and turn away
Or act in ways that harm.
The future is dark.

The future is always dark.
And in that darkness possibility grows.
We humans shine the light as we go
In fear and in hope
Walk towards that future with me.

(ORRIN and MIDORI enter in full forest royalty regalia, strong and upright, and walk down the street. They exit. The Trees blow in the breeze and rustle, receiving the forest gods. The Council members enter and walk through the audience, holding out their hands in welcome, and inviting the audience to take hands, and to stand. Savannah picks up a big mirror, written across the top, ‘What Will We All Do?’ facing the audience.)

TREES

What will they chose to do?
These humans with all fates in their hands.
What will they choose?
(A video projects on the flats showing young people striking, showing more and more people striking; people walking, riding bikes; electric buses; and showing the strengths the beings gave people: patience, foresight, etc. The music soaring.)