Alexander The Great

a very short play
by Anna Ziegler

The Players:

Julie (a mother and a playwright)

Alexander, Julie’s 6-year-old son

Alexander the Great

Hoplite 1

Hoplite 2
Lights up on a beautiful, ornate palace in Babylon around 325 BC. Alexander the Great sits on a throne; two of his soldiers (Hoplite 1 and 2) enter.

Alexander the Great (AG):
Ah. Good. Two of my most loyal soldiers! Thank you for coming. You’ve been with me god knows how long –

Hoplite 1 (H1):
Twenty years, sir.

Hoplite 2 (H2):
Thirty-one years, my lord.

AG:
My goodness! That long? Your devotion humbles me. May the gods look kindly upon you and give you strength. Because I know you must be weary after so many battles. So many victorious battles, yes, glorious, life-affirming—but still: tiring. Speaking personally, I can feel them in my bones now.

H1:
Well, it’s our honor, sir–

H2:
We are here to serve.

H1:
If it wasn’t for you, we’d never have seen the world.

H2:
When I was a boy I thought the whole world was the field outside my grandparents’ village. It was quiet and full of crickets.

H1:
I was different. I saw the gladiators. I saw Athens. Thebes. I saw great towering temples so vast you could not hold the whole of them in your eye and yet, to the Gods, were like slippers in which to rest a foot every now and then.

AG:
And you’re not tired?

H2:
It’s a fatigue mitigated by exhilaration, sir. About what might be right around the bend.

H1:
Coming down the pike.
H2: What’s just out of view is always more interesting than what’s right here, my lord.

AG: But you must be...weary. I mean, all of a sudden I am just incredibly...weary.

H1: No, sir.

H2: Energized, sir.

AG: (in disbelief) Really?

H1: Ready to go on to the ends of the world and the Great Outer Sea!

AG: Hm. But...what if I were to tell you that...actually...we will not go on to the ends of the world and the Great Outer Sea. That we’re done now. Stopping. Our conquests no more.

(Silence while they take this in)

H1: Well.

H2: It’s not what we imagined, sir.

H1: It’s not what we signed up for.

H2: (delicately) Frankly, it would be a disappointment.

H1: To be honest.
H2:
To have left all that we knew behind but not go as far as one can go—

(All of a sudden, Alexander – age 6 – pipes up)

Alexander:
(interrupting—sharply, angry)
Mom! What is this? This isn’t a history of Ancient Greece. This isn’t what we talked about.

Julie:
Well, it’s related to Ancient Greece.

Alexander:
It’s not about the founding of Ancient Greece. It seems like Ancient Greece isn’t really a part of this.

Julie:
You said you wanted it to be about Alexander the Great. And he came later, so...

Alexander:
No no no no. This isn’t what I wanted. I wanted it to be about the founding of Greece all the way up to Alexander the Great.

Julie:
Well, what if they talk about the founding of Greece?

Alexander:
No, that doesn’t do it.

Julie:
Okay...let’s just pause for a second. Why do you think there should be a play about Alexander the Great?

Alexander:
Because he was great!... Because he did great things. Because he was this amazing conqueror and he made the world a smaller place. Because civilization changed profoundly with the founding of Greece and then again with Alexander.

Julie:
Okay. Wow.

Alexander:
I’ve listened to so many YouTube videos about Alexander the Great.
Julie:
(worried she’s a terrible parent)
Have you.

Alexander:
I am like an expert on him, mom. Did you know that by the time he was thirty, he’d created this huge empire stretching from Greece to India? I mean, what did you do by the time you were thirty?

Julie:
Right. Well...

Alexander:
So here’s what I think. I think the hoplites should say: we already know you’re going to stay in Babylon and die in Babylon because this play is being written in the year 2020 and we already know what happened in 324 BC because it happened already.

Julie:
But then we wouldn’t have any conflict, which you kind of need in a play.

Alexander:
(exasperated)
Fine, mom. Then how about the hoplites take out their swords, or, like, spears, and just kill Alexander the Great and change the story.

Julie:
Like a coup?

Alexander:
I don’t know.

Julie:
A coup is an uprising against a government usually.

Alexander:
I know what a coup is, I’m just not sure this would qualify as one.

Julie:
Oh, okay.

Alexander:
They could spear him and kill him because he’s probably not wearing armor right now, if he’s just sitting on his throne—

Julie:
Admiring the hanging gardens of Babylon.

Alexander:
Which were by the way built by the Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II sometime between 605 and 562 BC.

Julie:
Really?

Alexander:
(getting a little frustrated)
Yes, mom.

Julie:
The thing is, honey, I guess I just wanted to write something that was less about who did what when than about a decision someone made – and not just someone but one of the world’s more notorious movers, conquerers—just to stay still for a bit. I’m interested in the decision not to keep going and why someone would make that choice.

Alexander:
(unimpressed)
Oh my god, mom.

Julie:
What?

Alexander:
That’s not interesting at all. That’s not a play.

Julie:
What makes a play then?

Alexander:
Like if the soldiers took their spears (like I already said!) and killed Alexander the Great and then were suddenly like “oh wait...” and they didn’t know what to do because it’s like: now what? Like, a) is he still great? and b) if he’s not great and we’ve devoted our lives to him, what does that make us now?” You know?

Julie:
(surprised and impressed)
Oh I like that. Let’s do that.

Alexander:
Great.
(The hoplites kill Alexander the Great with their spears. Because we don't actually have to enact this on a stage we can imagine it as really bloody. Maybe they behead him! Whatever it is, it's awkward and takes a long time. When they're finally finished, the hoplites look at each other.)

H1:
Huh.

H2:
Yeah. So that was...

H1:
Intense.

H2:
I didn’t wake up this morning and think: today I might kill our supreme leader, did you?

H1:
No way.

Alexander:
(whispering)
This is good, mom.

H1:
Are you thinking what I’m thinking?

H2:
I don’t know. What are you thinking?

H1:
I’m wondering, like...how can Alexander be so great if two lowly hoplites just managed to kill him?

H2:
Right! How can that be?

(They marinate on this for a bit. For an uncomfortably long amount of time.)

H2:
And, like...if he’s not great...was he ever great?

H1:
And if he was never great, or isn’t great anymore, than what are we?
H2:
Just two foot soldiers of a not very great man, I guess...

H1:
And what do we do now?

Alexander:
(suddenly really into this)
Yeah, what should they do now?

H2:
Should we try to complete his mission? Finish what he started?

H1:
Or should we just...after all this time, maybe...

H2:
Go home.

H1:
I do miss my home, you know.
I dream about it.
About that field outside the village.
The way you could hear the crickets.
See, there was nothing quieter than my little village.
I haven’t seen it since I was twelve years old.

H2:
And I miss the hustle and bustle of the city, or city-state, where I grew up. The way, even at sunset, the streets were filled with people in sandals. Eating spanakopita, and olives, with their hands.

Alexander:
Mom.

Julie:
What?

Alexander:
Did they have spanakopita back then.

Julie:
Could be. There are some things we just can’t know for sure.
Alexander:
Not sure this is one of those things.

H1:
So maybe we should go home.
I’m sure our parents, who love us more than anything, even when we’re obstinate or frustrating to
be around, would be happy to receive us.

H2:
Surely they’d be happy to see us after such a long time.

H1:
What a reunion that would be.

H2:
Just imagine...

H2:
Or maybe...

H1:
What?

Alexander:
What?

H2:
Maybe we don’t go home.

H1:
Huh.

H2:
Maybe we keep going.

Alexander:
No, I think they should go home.
I think their parents miss them.
I think they probably take for granted that their parents will always be there when really that’s
entirely in doubt. I mean, that’s one of those things you can never really know.

(Julie looks lovingly at her son, who is very wise for his years)

H1:
On second thought, my little village calls to me. And now that I’ve executed this bloody coup, or whatever we should call it, it might be prudent to lay low for a little while.

H2:
I might hole up and spend some time researching Ancient Greece. I’ve always wanted to know more about its founding. And to try to connect it to our lives right now, and to Alexander the Great, whose life—however great it was or wasn’t—is directly linked to, bound up in, ours.

H1:
Such a good idea.

H2:
I’d like to eat anachronistic foods with my fingers and sit under stone towers at sunset.

H1:
So, we go home then?

H2:
(a little bashful about this new thought)
...The irony is...we probably didn’t need to kill him.

H1:
Well. Yeah. True.

H2:
Ah well.

H1:
We all make mistakes.

Alexander:
(displeased)
...is that the end??

Julie:
No. This is.

(She hands her son her computer)

Alexander:
But I don’t know how to type.

H1:
niolnkmsisoftnsgnki;osn
Alexander: Is that a good ending?

Julie: Yes. I think so.

(End of Play)