

SOUTH

Sixth version

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The stage is set up with one tent, a campfire, and various camping supplies scattered around. It is surrounded by a dense forest. The sound of crickets and birds can be heard in the background, along with the rustling of the trees. Gentle music plays.

LEAH, a girl in her late twenties, enters the stage carrying a backpack and a few pieces of kindling. She sets the bag down near the face of the tent and takes out a water bottle, which she takes a swig from before putting it back.

She pulls out a small knife and begins to scrape at the kindling slightly, taking off any damp edges. She then throws the kindling onto the fire and returns the knife to the bag.

She sees something that can't be seen by the audience, it catches her eye. She isn't disturbed by it, more curious. She stops and stares, silent. A blank, lost expression on her face.

Suddenly CHARLIE and ZOE enter, making LEAH jump back into the real world.

ZOE

Look at this.

LEAH

Shit, you scared the hell out of me.

CHARLIE

There's no way this is it. When you said "camping" I was picturing like, a cabin, in like, woods, like in "*Cabin in the Woods*".

LEAH

Not the dream holiday situation.

CHARLIE

This isn't even a 'woods'. This is a 'middle of nowhere'. This is the sort of place where people go missing for months and then their jumper is found nailed to a tree and when they go to reach out to poke it, an arm falls out of the sleeve.

LEAH

Specific.

CHARLIE

I'm not being an arm in a sleeve, Leah. I'm not.

LEAH

You won't be an arm in a sleeve.

CHARLIE

Promise me. Promise me I won't be hunted by a man in a hockey mask and sleeved.

LEAH

I promise. There's nobody else here, I've already been here three days and I haven't seen anyone. And there's a police station about a 20 minute walk away.

ZOE

I like it. It's like *Tarzan*.

LEAH

And there's safety in numbers Charlie.

ZOE

What numbers we talking? Thirty? Forty?

LEAH

Five.

ZOE

(Laughing)

Piss off.

LEAH

No, honestly, five.

ZOE stops laughing.

ZOE

Five? What are you talking about "five"? I thought you said it was a birthday party?

LEAH

I never said "party", I said "holiday"! It's you two, Sarah, Ava, and me. Five.

ZOE

Five including us?

CHARLIE

Ava's coming?

LEAH

Yeah, is that alright?

CHARLIE

Yeah, yeah 'course.

ZOE

Seriously? Five? Might as well be a staff meeting in the back of Sainsbury's.

LEAH

I've invited everyone I wanted to invite.

CHARLIE

And where we are we all sleeping? I can't share a tent, I'll get claustrophobic.

LEAH

There's here, obviously, there's a clearing just round from those trees there, and another, smaller one on the left.

CHARLIE

Okay, I'm going to have a look, and if they're too close to water, bushes or direct sunlight then I'm walking back.

CHARLIE walks off.

ZOE

Leah, Leah, come here a second.

LEAH walks over to ZOE, who's trying her best to be subtle.

ZOE

(Quietly)

I love Charlie, obviously, but there are other people coming, right? Proper people.

LEAH

What does "proper people" mean?

ZOE

You know, not like...

LEAH

Like what.

ZOE

You know.

LEAH

I don't know.

ZOE

Like people, like proper people, fun people, not people-from-school people.

LEAH

What's wrong with people from school?

ZOE

You're friends with people from school cause you're trapped in a massive concrete box and only see the same twenty people every day for 6 hours, it's like a job you're not being paid for and legally have to go to. You wouldn't hang out with people from work would you?

LEAH

Well, no, not the people at *my* work. They're all sort of horrible to me.

ZOE

There you go then, it's the same. I want to spend your birthday with people you want to spend your birthday with, of course I do, but also not boring people.

LEAH

Well, actually it definitely won't be boring. There will be a bit of a surprise tonight.

ZOE

Wait...you don't mean?

LEAH

Or should I say, a few surprises?

ZOE

Oh my God you didn't.

LEAH

I might've done.

ZOE

You didn't.

LEAH

Might've.

ZOE

Really?

LEAH

Really. Only because it's my birthday though.

ZOE

(Hugging LEAH)

I knew it, I knew it. There is a God! How many are there?

LEAH

About ten.

ZOE starts to pace as she talks, getting excited.

ZOE

Ten? Ten. Okay, I was thinking, like thirty or forty but we can work with ten. Fuck this is amazing, play it right and this could be the best day of my life. What are they like?

LEAH

Most of them are small, couple of bigger ones, and one massive one.

ZOE

I'm not really fussed about their size, Leah, I'm not that shallow. Unless...how big are we talking?

LEAH

Like massive, huge.

ZOE

Really? Wow. God, right, interesting choice but whatever floats your boat, I'm not one to judge. What else? Describe them properly.

LEAH

All different colours.

ZOE

Okay, wow, what's got into you all of a sudden?

LEAH

There's pink, erm, there's a green one, there's a-

ZOE

Green? Who the hell have you got? Shrek?

LEAH

What?

ZOE

What sort of people are green?

LEAH

Not people, Zoe! There aren't any other people, I said that! Fireworks!

ZOE

Firew-? What the shitting bollocks are you talking about? I don't want shitting fireworks!

LEAH

You used to love fireworks! You got all excited about the colours and the sound!

ZOE

Yes, Leah, when I was twelve! I'm twenty-fucking-three!

LEAH

Fine, well the others will like 'em.

ZOE

Who? Who will like them?

LEAH

Ava.

ZOE
No way! You still have a thing for Ava!

CHARLIE walks back in.

CHARLIE
Who's got a thing for Ava?

ZOE
Leah.

LEAH
I don't.

CHARLIE
No! Still?

LEAH
I don't.

ZOE
You do! Even after, what, six years, you still have a thing for Ava!

LEAH
Honestly, I don't.

CHARLIE
You definitely do!

(Beat)
Clearing on the left is mine by the way.

ZOE
(To LEAH)
You used to be obsessed. You used to talk her about her all the time, and walk her home from school and-...oh shit. Is this whole thing for Ava?

LEAH
Fuck off, it's for my birthday, you know that.

ZOE
It's for Ava, isn't it? I'm fourth-wheeling.

CHARLIE
(To ZOE)
How come you get to be fourth?

ZOE
(To CHARLIE)
You're the spare.

LEAH
And I thought it'd be nice to see you all again.

ZOE
(To LEAH)
You thought it'd be nice to see Ava again.

LEAH
Fuck off.

ZOE
You fuck off, you know I'm right.

CHARLIE
Alright, Zoe, calm down.

ZOE
(Laughing)
What?

CHARLIE
Stop being mean, it's Leah's birthday remember.

ZOE
Oh shut up, it's fine, it's a laugh. She loves it.
(to LEAH)
Don't you?

LEAH
Um, I guess?

ZOE
(To CHARLIE)
See? Shut up and stop being boring.

ZOE's phone goes off and she takes it out. LEAH immediately takes it out of her hand and heads over to the tent with it.

LEAH
No.

ZOE
Erm, I'm sorry, what the fuck are you doing?

LEAH
No phones. Phones are going in the bag.

She takes a tuppaware box out of the bag, opens it and places the phone inside.

LEAH
(To CHARLIE)
And yours.

CHARLIE gets hers out, turns it off and hands it over without fuss.

LEAH then seals both in the box and it goes back in the bag.

ZOE sighs, opens a can and takes a drink.

LEAH

You're starting early.

ZOE

Calm down Juliet, I thought we were here to have fun. I can't watch Netflix, I can't listen to music and I can't tweet about how shit it is being here, so yeah, I'm drinking early.

LEAH

Well you'll be on your own, no one else is gonna drink.

ZOE

You really are living in your own world aren't you?

CHARLIE

I'm not drinking.

ZOE

Shut up, of course you are.

CHARLIE

What does that mean?

ZOE

Nothing, just sayin' you like a bit of a drink, that's all.

CHARLIE

I do not. It's Leah's birthday, she decides if we're drinking.

LEAH

I thought you'd at least set your tents up and stuff first.

ZOE

My what?

LEAH

Your tent.

ZOE

I didn't bring a fuckin tent, I'm not a virgin.

CHARLIE

(Pause)

What?

ZOE

I'm gonna sleep under the stars, embrace nature, feel the wind on my face, like fuckin what's-his-name? Erm...what's his name, Indiana Jones bloke?

CHARLIE

Harrison Ford.

ZOE

Yeah, yeah, not him though. What's that other bloke?

LEAH

Who?

ZOE

Bloke with the-, you know the outdoor bloke. Does the outdoors.

CHARLIE

"Does the outdoors"?

LEAH

What are you talking about?

ZOE

Bear Grylls!

CHARLIE

What are you on about Indiana Jones for?

ZOE

I'm gonna be sleeping, pissing and crapping right in nature's back garden.

(Beat)

Speaking of, I'll be five minutes. Bit longer if it turns into a number two. Need to find a cubicle or something though, I'm a shy pooper.

She walks off leaving CHARLIE and LEAH

CHARLIE

(Pause)

Bet you've missed her?

LEAH

(Chuckles)

Yeah.

CHARLIE

She's just messing, I know it seems mean, but it's not. I don't think.

LEAH

No, yeah, I know.

CHARLIE

(Pause)

So Ava's coming?

LEAH
Yeah.

CHARLIE
That's...great, that's exciting.

LEAH
Yeah, it is.

CHARLIE
If you're not too busy at some point, I know it's your birthday, and obviously you can choose what happens and stuff, but I thought you might want to just go for a walk or something? See what's around, talk about stuff.

LEAH
Yeah, yeah, sure.

CHARLIE
I just wanted to-.

LEAH
You know when Zoe said about finding a cubicle?

CHARLIE
Yeah?

LEAH
You don't think she meant your tent?

CHARLIE
(Laughing)
No, she wouldn't.

Pause.

CHARLIE
She wouldn't, right?

Pause.

CHARLIE
(Running after ZOE)
Zoe! Don't shit in the tent!

AVA
Sounds interesting.

LEAH quickly turns around to see that AVA is stood there.

LEAH
Ava. Hi. I didn't-...I didn't see the-...erm...I didn't...-

AVA

It's fine. Happy birthday Leah! I brought some drinks, I hope that's okay. I didn't know what to get you and I thought that might be a safe bet so I just-...yeah...so...

LEAH

No that's great, thank you. Zoe's brought some too so we should have loads, not that that isn't good. Can never have too much to drink.

AVA

Well I suppose you can.

LEAH

No, yeah, of course you can, well not *you*, just people, in general, general people. I'm not saying you're an alcoholic...or anything.

AVA

Are you okay?

LEAH

Yep.

There is a silence, which AVA feels obliged to break.

AVA

I didn't think Zoe would actually come, doesn't seem like her sort of thing.

LEAH

Yeah, she's just gone to the loo.

AVA

I heard.

LEAH

Oh, yeah, course you did, yeah.

AVA

How is she?

LEAH

Same as always, complete bitch.

AVA

Oh really? I quite like her.

LEAH

Yeah, no, me too, really like her.

ZOE comes striding back in, pulling up her trousers.

LEAH

Good news, no solids.

She looks up and sees AVA.

ZOE

Ava! Here she is, long time no see, how are you?

AVA

I'm good thank you Zoe, how are you?

ZOE

Fuckin...livid. It's like Jungle Run without any of the fun shit. No one's brought any mates, or anything, there's no one here. We might as well go home.

(She pauses, with an idea)

Unless...-

AVA

No chance in hell would I introduce you to anyone I know.

ZOE

Of course. Understood m'lady.

ILEAH

Erm, feel free to pitch your tent up anywhere, there's no other campsites for miles really so, just anywhere's good.

AVA

Right, will do. I'll be right back.

LEAH

Oh, also, sorry to be that person, but phones are going in the bag, just to make it more, I dunno, authentic you know.

AVA looks a little taken aback, but isn't too fussed, so smiles and nods.

AVA

Yeah, no worries, there you go.

LEAH reaches out for the phone.

AVA

Oh, hang on.

AVA unlocks it, sends a quick text, then hands it over.

LEAH

Thank you.

AVA

Right, be right back.

LEAH

Okay, yep, great.

AVA walks off and LEAH watches her go in silence.

CHARLIE and ZOE walk in, talking but we can't hear them.

Suddenly, almost as wind through the trees, whispers are heard.

LEAH turns to ZOE.

LEAH

What?

ZOE and CHARLIE look confused.

ZOE

What?

LEAH

What did you say?

CHARLIE

When?

LEAH

Just then.

ZOE

Nothing.

LEAH looks around, suspiciously.

CHARLIE

You okay Leah?

LEAH

Yeah. No, yeah, I'm just...just being silly.

There is a pause, LEAH still listening out for the whispers again, until ZOE breaks the silence.

ZOE

Screwed that one right up didn't you?

CHARLIE

Shut up.

ZOE

I'm just saying, she needs to get a move on.

(To LEAH)

Don't want to be a virgin forever.

CHARLIE

Zoe! Don't be so...just...stop it!

ZOE

Calm down, Jesus, I'm just playin' with her. You don't have to be so boring all the time you know?

LEAH heads over to the bag and the box, in which
she places AVA's phone.

ZOE

I'm just trying to help.

LEAH

I'm doing fine without your help.

ZOE

You're not fine. If you keep acting like this she's gonna call the police.

LEAH

What am I supposed to do then?

ZOE

Just act normal, stop being weird.

LEAH

Oh right cause you'd know.

ZOE

Oh trust me, I'd know.

CHARLIE

She doesn't have to do anything.

(To LEAH)

You don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

LEAH

I know Charlie, thanks, you're not my Mum.

CHARLIE

Yeah, sorry, yeah I know that, I'm just saying that-.

ZOE

Leah, listen, just pretend you're talking to me, it's not a big deal. Just have a normal conversation.

She throws a can to LEAH and opens one herself.

ZOE

Have a drink, calm down.

CHARLIE

You don't have to do that Leah.

LEAH

Oh fuck off Charlie.

ZOE

Yeah, fuck off Charlie.

LEAH opens a can and drinks the whole thing.

ZOE

Yes! There we go! Happy birthday!

Suddenly SARAH comes in with two bags and a suitcase trailing behind her. SARAH is substantially more energetic than everyone else has been so far.

SARAH

For fuck sake. I knew we'd be late. I told them, I said "drive quicker, I'm going to be late" but did they drive quicker? No they did not. "The speed limit is the speed limit" they said "we don't want anyone to get hurt now do we?", "frankly", I said, "frankly Mother I don't give a flying monkey's you-know-what about what happens as long as we aren't late" but she didn't listen, and now look where we are.

She takes a big gasp for breath.

SARAH

Anyway.

SARAH sighs and turns to LEAH

SARAH

Leah! Happy birthday! Look at you all grown up! I couldn't figure out what to get you so I brought some drinks, I hope that's okay.

LEAH looks at ZOE, who looks very smug.

LEAH

That's fine, Sarah, thank you.

SARAH reluctantly hands LEAH a gift bag with a bottle inside.

SARAH

It's Dom Perignon vintage, so, don't drink it too fast okay?

LEAH smiles.

LEAH

Got it, thank you.

SARAH

What's a party without drinks anyway, that's what I said to myself. "She's going to want as many drinks as she can at a camping party because if I know Leah, and I do, she won't want
(MORE)

SARAH (cont'd)
a boring normal camping trip for a birthday, and you can't have too many drinks" so that's what I did.

ZOE
(Coughs as she speaks)
Called it.

LEAH gives her a glare.

SARAH
And I'm so sorry I'm late, my parents really have no sense of urgency, drives me up the wall. At least I'm not the last anyway, that's what counts.

LEAH
Actually Ava got here a few minutes ago.

SARAH
(Forcing a smile)
Oh, did she? That's great...that's just...wow that's great it really is.
(Pause)
Great.

She turns to ZOE.

SARAH
And Zoe, look at you! Still...looking the same, and smelling the same.

ZOE
You're too kind, Sarah, too kind.

SARAH
And Charlie!

CHARLIE
Hi Sarah, how are you doing?

SARAH
Good good, didn't you get a new puppy recently?

CHARLIE
Er, yeah, I did, yeah.

SARAH
Cute! How is it doing?

CHARLIE
Not good. Hit by a car two weeks back actually. Three broken vertebrae.

They all stand in silence. That conversation has died.

SARAH
Where are we pitching up?

LEAH

Anywhere really, I was just saying to Ava there's loads of space so just pick where you want.

SARAH

Where are you pitched up Zoe?

ZOE

I didn't bring a tent, I'm gonna sleep on the ground, just here probably.

SARAH continues her forced smile and nods.

SARAH

Of course you are. Isn't that...bohemian?

(Beat)

Right, well I've got a four-man tent to put up. It's 'PRADA', sixty-thousand pounds, only five ever made. Samuel's in the car with it now, so I'll just tell him to go and get a start on that.

LEAH

Oh, also, phones-

CHARLIE

In the box.

ZOE

In the box.

LEAH

Yeah, sorry, we're just putting phones away for the weekend, get rid of the stress of work and life.

SARAH

Yeah, no.

LEAH

Sorry?

SARAH

Not happening. I need my phone.

They all stand in silence, unsure of what to say.

LEAH

Right...erm...

ZOE, LEAH and CHARLIE stand looking at SARAH.

SARAH

No.

(Pause)

No, it's not happening.

(Pause)

No.

Silence again.

SARAH

(Groaning)

Fine, but I won't be happy about it and it has already ruined my weekend.

ZOE

(To LEAH)

Told you.

SARAH

Right, off I pop.

SARAH goes to leave, struggling with her bags as she does.

CHARLIE

I'll give you a hand.

SARAH

Oh thank you Charlie, too kind.

CHARLIE grabs a couple of bags and they exit.

ZOE

(Still waving)

I could easily have gone the rest of my life without seeing any of these people again.

LEAH stops waving.

LEAH

(Exasperated)

Don't be a dick, for five minutes, it's a birthday and a break from work, and I really need it so just try and cheer up. It's supposed to be fun.

ZOE

Yeah, *I* keep telling *you* that. The next time I planned to associate with any of these was when they were invited to my funeral. Although to be fair to you, this might end up being that.

LEAH

Well it's nice to know we'd be invited at least.

ZOE

Yeah, of course. You, my kids, my grand-kids, my twenty-five-year-old French model boyfriend and the two-million fans outside.

LEAH

Oh good, exclusive list then.

ZOE

Yeah, 'course.

LEAH

(Pause)

So how old will you be when you die do you think?

ZOE

Dunno. Hundred?

LEAH

And your boyfriend will be...?

ZOE

Twenty-five.

LEAH

Twenty-five, yeah. So he'd have to be born in about...twenty-seventy-three?

ZOE

Sure.

LEAH

(Pause)

Bit weird.

ZOE

Nah it's not, it's legal.

LEAH

Anything that you have to defend by saying "it's legal" is probably weird.

ZOE

Yeah...well...you're...shut up.

LEAH looks into the distance, squinting.

ZOE

What?

LEAH

Who's that?

ZOE

Who's who?

LEAH

That man there.

ZOE

Where?

LEAH

(Pointing)

There.

ZOE looks, both in silence.

ZOE

I can't see anyone.

LEAH

Just walking behind the tree, there.

ZOE

Where?

LEAH

There, look! Walking there!

ZOE

(Looking, getting more
frustrated)

There's nothing there Leah!

LEAH

There is! It's...it's...-

LEAH pauses, looking, fixated still.

LEAH

They're gone.

ZOE

Where?

LEAH

I don't-...I don't know. They were...-

ZOE

Right...good..well either you've gone crackers or we're all gonna die. Happy birthday.

LEAH

Maybe it's nothing. Probably nothing. Probably tired, that's all.

ZOE

Yeah, fingers crossed.

(Pause. Switching back to
upbeat)

When's the party happening then?

LEAH

Hmm?

ZOE

Party. Party time. Party time when?

LEAH

Oh, right, yeah. Well I thought we'd go for a walk, maybe see what's around and then we can all have a chat, a nice catch-up.

ZOE

Oh my God, Leah, what is wrong with you in the head? No one wants a fuckin' chat and a catch-up! We want to get wankered and then try and fight a wolf and end up in A&E.

LEAH

No one wants that.

ZOE

I want that, and it's your birthday trip so I want that for you.

LEAH

I know you think that sounds nice, but it really isn't.

ZOE

Look, there's no bouncy castles or treehouses, and that's fine, I get that, we all make mistakes, but please let me fight a wolf.

LEAH

There aren't any wolves in the lake district, Zoe!

ZOE

Yes there are!

LEAH

Right, I'll do you a deal, if you come on a walk with us, and you see any wolves, any at all, we will cheer you on whilst you fight it.

ZOE rests her hand on LEAH's shoulder.

ZOE

You're a good friend.

LEAH

Yeah, whatever. Come on.

LEAH grabs her bag and they head off. At the last second ZOE runs back and grabs a crate of drinks which she takes with her.

FADE TO BLACK

*CLASSICAL MUSIC PLAYS OVER
TRANSITION.*

*Same setting as previous, but night.
Campfire burns brighter and the sounds of*

nature are replaced by the occasional cricket or owl. The wind in the trees has also quietened.

It's much calmer than earlier.

The group walk back into camp, silently laughing and chatting as the music plays.

They stand around the campfire. As they do the music softens and the sound of their interactions can be heard.

AVA, CHARLIE and SARAH sit down on chairs.

AVA

I honestly don't remember!

SARAH

You have to! It was in front of three-hundred people and-

CHARLIE

Three-hundred and eighty, Mrs Andrews brought the year eights in half way through.

LEAH

That didn't help.

SARAH

So three-hundred and eighty people, Leah stands up for her big scene, 'Romeo and Juliet'. I saw it in Paris, entirely in French, l'incroyable, but that's by the by. It's gone perfectly, every rehearsal, stands up for her big scene, raises her hand in the air, and completely freezes.

AVA

Why?

SARAH

I can't believe you don't remember this.

CHARLIE

She got stage fright. She'd never done it in front of a crowd before, didn't know what to do.

LEAH

I *did* know what to do, I just...sort of...blanked in the moment. Not because of the audience.

SARAH

There was the longest, most silent silence you've ever heard.

CHARLIE

Or not heard.

SARAH

And a little puddle started to grow at her feet, and she started to cry.

LEAH

I didn't cry.

CHARLIE

You *did* cry.

SARAH

Then someone complete arse at the back shouted "she's pissed herself"!

ZOE

(Smiling)

That was me.

ZOE sits down.

SARAH

And she ran off and didn't come back to school for a week.

CHARLIE

You definitely remember that.

AVA

I promise I don't.

SARAH

Maybe you were off?

CHARLIE

She'd still have heard about it.

ZOE

Nah you weren't off cause it was the same day Maddie Lewis got suspended for nicking tea bags from the staff room.

AVA

I don't remember that either.

ZOE

Shit, maybe you were off then.

LEAH

Look, can we maybe not talk about me pissing myself in front of three-hundred people on my birthday?

There is an awkward silence.

SARAH

Three-hundred-and-eighty.

They all try their best not to laugh but don't hide it very well.

LEAH

Yeah ha ha ha, we've all done embarrassing shit at some point so let's just leave it.

LEAH sits down.

ZOE

I haven't.

LEAH

You tried to fight a squirrel.

ZOE

It could've been a wolf!

LEAH

Get lost.

ZOE

It could've been. Some breeds of wolf look like squirrels.

LEAH

Which ones?

ZOE

French ones.

CHARLIE

Bullshit.

ZOE

You're bullshit.

CHARLIE

I don't even know what that means.

ZOE

Yeah well you wouldn't, idiot.

SARAH

It wasn't Maddie Lewis. Maddie was the one getting..."extra tutoring"...from Mr Hodgkins.

CHARLIE

She was not.

SARAH

She was!

CHARLIE

No, she was shagging Mr Evans.

CHARLIE

(To ZOE)

You couldn't kill a wolf anyway!

ZOE
(To CHARLIE)

Erm, yes I could.

SARAH
(To AVA)

Ava, if you wouldn't mind partaking, was it Mr Evans or Mr Hodgkins?

CHARLIE
(To ZOE)

No you couldn't.

AVA
I don't remember I'm afraid, it was such a long time ago.

ZOE
(To AVA)
Fuck me, you don't remember anything do you?

CHARLIE
(To ZOE)
You can't even kill spiders.

ZOE
(To CHARLIE)
That's cause they're innocent. I could definitely kill like, a serial killer, or a terrorist or something.

ZOE
Wasn't Hodgkins the one who went batshit and killed his flatmate?

LEAH
We don't know he went batshit, he might've had a point.

AVA
What happened?

ZOE
(To LEAH)
He didn't have a point. He didn't think like normal men. He was unhinged.

SARAH
(To AVA)
It's not even true.

CHARLIE
(To SARAH)
It *is* true.

ZOE
(To LEAH)
He was mental in the head.

SARAH
(To CHARLIE)

It isn't true, it's a myth.

AVA

What happened?

LEAH
(To ZOE)

I'm just saying it's plausible.

SARAH
(To LEAH)

You're just an idiot.

LEAH
(To SARAH)

Fuck you.

AVA
Can someone please tell me what happened?

ZOE
Someone explain it to her.

SARAH
Right, so, Mr Hodgkins-

CHARLIE
I'll tell her, you'll just tell her it's all made up.

LEAH
It is made up.

SARAH
It is made up.

CHARLIE
Right, how about everyone shuts the fuck up, then I'll tell Ava, and Ava can decide for herself whether it's true or not.

AVA
That would be very helpful.

CHARLIE
(To the group)
There you go.

ZOE objects.

ZOE
Erm, no way. You're gonna tell a bullcrap version, she needs to hear the truth. The harsh, heartbreaking, but honest truth.

CHARLIE
Fine, I'll start and you can help out, yeah?

ZOE

Right.

CHARLIE stands up.

CHARLIE

Move round.

CHARLIE gestures to the group to move round to create an audience, which they do, leaving her and ZOE still stood. They act out the following story.

CHARLIE

Right, so Mr Hodgkins was one of the most respected teachers Plowcroft Secondary had ever had, qualified to teach thirty-four subjects, and an expert in the tuba, but beneath it all was a dark, troubled mind.

ZOE

Sexy.

CHARLIE

Mr Hodgkins lived with a man called Nathan, a retail assistant in his mid-thirties, nothing too special about him, and every day he'd go about his business, waking up, showering, going to work, coming back from work, putting his feet up and watching the telly until bed.

ZOE

A fan of *Catchphrase* so we're told.

CHARLIE

Now nobody knows for sure what happened, maybe it was the stress of work, maybe the fatigue of the long school hours, but Mr Hodgkins began to become suspicious of Nathan. He no longer saw a plain, simple, boring man, but a plain, simple and boring man who was too plain and simple, and too boring. Suspiciously boring. He realised that he didn't really know Nathan anymore. The man he'd moved in with was fun and exciting, always up for a piss up and a night out. This Nathan was tired, and slow and wouldn't move quicker than a snail if the house set fire. This wasn't the Nathan he knew, and if it wasn't the Nathan he knew, who was he?

ZOE

Hodgkins began to follow Nathan to work, to the shop, recording what he ate and who he spoke to. He became convinced that Nathan was a government spy, sent to track him and find out what he could. What the government wanted with him, Hodgkins didn't know, but they clearly wanted something and they had done something to Nathan to find out. They had drugged him, or-or brainwashed him maybe. Hodgkins had seen films where this sort of thing happened, he wasn't an idiot. So Hodgkins comes home one day and Nathan's made dinner right? He's got it all laid out on the table.

CHARLIE

Hodgkins, suspicious as always, asks what's going on. Nathan explains that he knows he's been a bit off lately and he's just been overworked and he wants to make it up to him. Hodgkins knows something's off, Nathan knows he's been following him, he's trying to kill him, the foods poisoned, or the drinks poisoned, something's poisoned. Hodgkins makes his excuses: he's tired, it's been a long day, he's grateful but he's just gonna go to bed. He

(MORE)

CHARLIE(cont'd)

makes his way halfway up the stairs and watches through a gap in the banister. Nathan picks up his plate from the table and goes to sit on the sofa. He turns on the TV, it's the Champions League final, Remain United against Pammy's Angels, a big game, the biggest. Hodgkins knows Nathan's eyes won't leave the screen for a moment.

ZOE

It's now or never, he has to get Nathan before Nathan gets him. He shuffles down the stairs, and into the kitchen. He slowly opens a drawer with a quiet 'creak' and pulls out a long, sharp, kitchen knife.

CHARLIE

He holds it tight, sweating. He sneaks behind the sofa, the floorboards barely creaking below him. He grasps the handle with two hands, holds it over Nathans head.

ZOE

(Shouting as Nathan)

"Penalty ref!".

CHARLIE

Hodgkins freezes, Nathan is sat forward with excitement. If he turns around now it could all be over, this is life or death. Nathan sits back again. Relief. Hodgkins rolls the knife around his hands, building up to it. It's now or never. He slams the knife down into Nathan's shoulder, there's blood everywhere, screaming. He draws it back out and in it goes again, deeper into the cut. In and out, in and out until Nathan has stopped moving. Hodgkins drops the knife, his hands bloody. It's done.

There's a silence.

AVA

What happened to him?

CHARLIE

No one really knows. Some say a neighbor called the police and when they got there he was still sat, staring at the body. Some say no body was ever found, and Hodgkins completely disappeared, the house still lying empty, silent with secrets. Perhaps we'll never know.

The silence returns as the group thinks.

AVA

Shit.

SARAH

Don't listen to them, Ava, they're being arseholes. I heard he got a job in Manchester teaching P.E.

CHARLIE

As if.

SARAH

Right, well let's say he did kill this man, hypothetically. Let's say he did kill him and disappeared. Why is it then that Susan Barrington saw him in Tesco two weeks ago?

CHARLIE
Different bloke.

SARAH
Right.

CHARLIE
Or she's crazy too. We'll never know.

LEAH
He might've done it. Things like that happen to people. People go missing and no one knows why all the time.

SARAH
I thought you were smarter than this Leah.

LEAH
Yeah well, I'm just saying, we shouldn't ignore it completely.

CHARLIE
What do you think Ava?

AVA
It's hard to say. It does sound unlikely-.

SARAH
Yes, thank you.

AVA
-but, I agree with Leah, things like that do happen sometimes. Especially when someone's stressed and tired and stuff.

LEAH
Yeah, exactly.

AVA
Everyone can be pushed to their limits, and sometimes they snap. It doesn't excuse their actions, but it reminds us that everyone's made of both good and bad. I think it's important to remember that we never truly know the battles someone else is fighting nor can we assume to know. We shouldn't dismiss the possibility that there's more to the story that maybe we just haven't heard. Obviously, we can't take rumours as fact. There's often varying circumstances that lead people down dark paths, and it's our duty to try to understand those paths, even if they seem unimaginable to us.

There is a silence.

LEAH
Yeah, see?

ZOE
Fuck off.

LEAH
What?

ZOE
You don't know what she's talking about.

LEAH
I do know what she's talking about.

ZOE
You fuckin' don't.

LEAH
I do.

ZOE
Go on then.

LEAH
I don't need to explain to you, thank you.

CHARLIE
You don't need to explain anything Leah.

ZOE
Not if she doesn't know.

LEAH
Fine.

(Pause)
She's saying...that...we shouldn't take rumours as fact.

ZOE
Get lost.

LEAH
That's what she said!

ZOE
That's literally what she said, yeah, you're just repeating it!

LEAH
Piss off.

ZOE
(To CHARLIE and SARAH)
Come on guys, back me up.

CHARLIE
No, I'm not being part of this. I'm gonna grab some more drinks if anyone wants one?

ZOE
I'll take a few.

Leah? CHARLIE

LEAH
(To AVA)
Ava, are you having one?

AVA
Erm, yeah go on.

LEAH
Yeah, we'll have two please.

CHARLIE
Right, sure.

CHARLIE stands up.

CHARLIE
Sarah, could you give me a hand?

SARAH
Yeah, sure.

SARAH also stands up and they both go over to the bags.

CHARLIE and SARAH talk together away from the group, as silent conversation happens amongst the others.

CHARLIE
Sarah, I've decided to tell Leah about...what we talked about.

SARAH
Really? I thought that was a joke?

CHARLIE
Why would it be a joke?

SARAH
Because she obviously...she...
(Thinking)
Actually, never mind, I think it's an excellent idea.

CHARLIE
She's obviously what?

SARAH
It doesn't matter. What matters is you, and what the plan is.

CHARLIE

I don't know. I feel like now is a good time. Maybe it isn't, I don't know. Maybe the morning would be better, when everyone's a bit more sober.

SARAH

"Don't leave until tomorrow what can be done today" Charlie, that's what Nanny used to say. Of course, she got fired for stealing silverware, so maybe she was a touch too impulsive.

CHARLIE

I can't do it when everyone else is around though.

SARAH

Why not?

CHARLIE

What if she says no? What if it's embarrassing and makes her uncomfortable?

SARAH

She won't say no. I think it's a very good idea and I am of the firm belief that it couldn't possibly go wrong.

CHARLIE

You're sure? And you don't think it'll make things weird?

SARAH

No, it'll be fine.

CHARLIE

Okay. How do I get it started?

SARAH

I'll help.

CHARLIE

No, please don't, it's fine, honestly.

SARAH

It'll be good, watch.

SARAH grabs a few drinks and walks back to the group. CHARLIE makes a futile attempt to stop her and then quickly follows behind.

ZOE

(To the group)

So I was panicking right? Thinking, "I'm screwed here" then I had a moment of genius, pointed at Leah and said "it was Leah sir". Leah looks at me, then at Mr Davies, then at me, and Davies says "is this true Leah?", and guess what?

AVA

What?

ZOE

She just took it, she just said "yes" and took it, got three days of detention and didn't say a word. Legend.

LEAH

Yeah, and you never said thank you.

ZOE

No, but you know I appreciated it, don't you?

SARAH

Everybody, Charlie has something to say.

Everybody looks at CHARLIE, who stands like a deer in headlights.

ZOE

What?

CHARLIE

It's not important.

SARAH

It is, say it Charlie.

CHARLIE

I'd rather not.

SARAH

Come on, do it.

CHARLIE

Sarah, seriously, I'd prefer not to.

SARAH

Fine, it all falls on me, as always. So we're all friends, obviously, but there's someone in the group who maybe wants to be more than friends with someone else, maybe. And it may be the case that this person is nervous about their feelings not being reciprocated and therefore is keeping them to themselves, and this may be causing more harm than good, if I'm making myself clear? So, it's possible, that the relevant parties may find it beneficial to share their feelings with each other, regardless of the outcome, just to get it all out there. Does that make sense?

ZOE

No.

SARAH

What about you Leah, does that make sense to you?

LEAH

Yeah, yeah I think it does.

SARAH

You follow what I'm saying?

LEAH

Yeah, yeah and I think I agree, thank you for saying that.

SARAH

(To CHARLIE)

Well, there we go. 'Sarah the match-maker' to the rescue as always with Cupid's arrow adorned. Let the sparks fly.

LEAH stands up.

LEAH

Shit!

AVA

What?

LEAH

I've just remembered something. Stay here.

LEAH runs off, there's a pause, then she runs back.

SARAH

What's happening?

LEAH

Wait for it, its a surprise.

ZOE

Don't get your hopes up.

AVA

For what?

ZOE

Shrek.

LEAH

Any second now. Three...two...one...-

*The lights go down and bright colourful
flashes fill the stage for a minute or so.*

*As they die down, lights come back up on
AVA, LEAH and ZOE, sat around the fire.*

*ZOE is throwing things onto the fire whilst
SARAH and LEAH watch.*

ZOE

So what do you wanna do now?

LEAH
I don't know, what do *you* want to do?

ZOE
Know any drinking games?

LEAH
Not really.

ZOE
Cool, cool.

There's an awkward silence.

ZOE
Right, I'm gonna go to bed, this is shit.

ZOE stands up to leave, LEAH stops her.

LEAH
Zoe, zoe, wait.

ZOE
What?

LEAH
I-I need your advice?

ZOE
My advice? Well, well, well, how the table...does...something.

LEAH
I'm gonna tell Ava.

ZOE
Tell her what?

LEAH
You know, that I like her.

ZOE
No way! Tonight?

LEAH
Yeah, I don't know how to do it though, I'm a bit nervous.

ZOE
Right, so I go up to people in clubs and stuff all the time right, just think like this: you don't know them, they don't know you, you'll never see 'em again, it's just a one-night stand, no emotions attached, right?

LEAH
Yeah none of that applies to this.

ZOE

Oh yeah, right. Okay, because we're friends, I'll let you in on a little secret of mine, a little trick.

LEAH

Okay.

ZOE

When I get scared about doing stuff, which doesn't usually happen, obviously, but when it does, I count down from three, and then I have to do it. Just do a run-up. Three, two, one, bang. Done.

LEAH

Just three, two, one?

ZOE

That's it, and then go for it. Once it's done, it's done.

LEAH

Right, you're sure?

ZOE

I'm sure.

LEAH

Okay, I'm gonna do it.

ZOE

Do it.

LEAH

I'm doing it now.

ZOE

Go for it.

LEAH

Three, two, one.

AVA walks in.

ZOE does a very over-the-top, exaggerated departure.

ZOE

(Almost shouting)

Well, I am tired, so I'm gonna be off to bed. I hope nothing exciting happens whilst I'm gone.

LEAH turns to face ZOE, disapproving.

ZOE gives her a not-so-subtle thumbs up and leaves.

LEAH takes a deep breath and sits down next to
AVA.

Where's Zoe going?
AVA

Bed I think?
LEAH

Really? Already?
AVA

Yeah, I just-...yeah.
LEAH

There is a silence.

Leah, I-
AVA

LEAH
(Turning back around)
I did know what you were talking about by the way.

Sorry?
AVA

LEAH
What Zoe said, I did know what you were talking about, when you said what you said.

AVA
Oh yeah, right. Yeah, I know.

LEAH
Yeah. Good.

Silence again.

AVA
Well, I should probably get some rest. It's been a long day.

LEAH
Wait, Ava. Lets just talk for a bit? I mean, it's been so long since we've seen each other properly.

AVA pauses, her eyes meeting LEAH's for a brief
moment before she settles back down

AVA
Erm, okay. I guess I can stay up a little bit longer.

Another awkward pause.

LEAH

So how's work going? Are you still working with animals?

AVA

No, no I'm doing a degree in law actually. Training to be a barrister.

LEAH

Oh really, nice. Thought you wanted to be a vet?

AVA

Yeah, maybe I did, I dunno, just quite interested in law now I suppose.

LEAH nods, trying to keep the conversation flowing.

LEAH

That's good, that you're pursuing something you like. How you finding it so far?

AVA shrugs, her gaze drifting away momentarily.

AVA

Not easy, but manageable for the time being I think. Expensive as well.

LEAH

Yeah, yeah, good.

AVA

How about you? You busy at the moment?

LEAH

Yeah, yeah really busy actually. We've just had loads of people leave, and we're really understaffed so I've been picking up a few extra shifts now and then, working extra hours to pick up you know?

AVA

How many hours do you do?

LEAH

What, like this week?

AVA

Sure.

LEAH

Erm, sixty something?

AVA

Leah, that's not normal, I don't even think that's legal.

LEAH

It's fine, someone needs to do it.

AVA

But not you, it's not on you to pick up after them.

LEAH

It's fine. I had a bit of a rough patch where I wasn't sleeping much and I might've said some things I regret so they've given me some time off, which is good, cause it means I can come to this.

AVA

Yeah.

LEAH

So...every cloud.

AVA

Sure.

There is a pause as LEAH builds up courage.

LEAH

Okay.

AVA

What?

LEAH

(Breathes)

Three, two, one.

(Beat)

You know, if you were ever in town maybe we could go for a drink or something? I dunno.

AVA

Erm, Leah, it's-.

LEAH

Just a small thing, doesn't have to be anything fancy if you don't want, I'm easy.

(Correcting herself)

No, wait. No, I'm not easy. Sorry, I didn't mean that.

AVA looks at LEAH with a mix of sympathy and unease, realizing her attempt at lightening the situation.

AVA

Leah, I appreciate the offer, and I know it's a bit awkward, but I just want to say I'm actually going out with someone.

LEAH's face flushes with embarrassment and disappointment. She quickly tries to mask her emotions.

LEAH

Oh shit, yeah, of course, yeah, I didn't mean it like that really, I just meant as friends.

AVA

Right, just because Zoe mentioned something earlier and it just felt a little bit like I needed to say something you know?

LEAH

What? Zoe? She doesn't know what she's talking about, what did he say?

AVA

It doesn't really matter.

LEAH

Yeah fuck her, fuck her. Stupid. I'm fine with you having a partner or whatever, that's fine.

AVA

Yeah, his name's Jason, he's on my uni course.

LEAH's face contorts, her discomfort palpable. She tries to compose herself, but her words come out in a strained manner.

LEAH

It's great that you're... I didn't know you were... that's good cause...great. Good.

AVA's expression shifts to a mix of surprise and concern, realising LEAH's unease.

AVA

I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I'm sorry if it came as a surprise, I just didn't want stuff to be weird, you know? She's a big part of my life, and I just wanted you to know that.

LEAH's evidently discomforted.

LEAH

Yeah, yeah, of course, not weird. It's just... I didn't expect it, you know? I thought...I hoped you might be...doesn't matter. I think everyone thought that you were single that's all. They know I'm single, and I think they thought that you were single, and-.

AVA

They all know.

LEAH

How?

AVA

Dunno, seen pictures and stuff, I guess?

LEAH

Oh right, so I'm the last to know, cool.

AVA

No, it's not like that.

LEAH
Feels like that.

AVA
Leah-

LEAH
It's fine, just shouldn't lead people on, that's all.

AVA
What?

LEAH
Nothing.

AVA
Sorry, I haven't led you on, Leah, what you've chosen to interpret from our friendship, from me being nice to you, is on you, that's not my fault.

LEAH
"Being nice to me", is that what we're calling it?

AVA
I think that's what most people call it.

LEAH
Do they? Right.

AVA
Are you going to have a proper conversation about this like an adult?

LEAH
I don't think there's any conversation to be had really. It's pretty fuckin' obvious to me what's happening.

AVA
Well it's not that obvious to me, I'm afraid. I think we've both understood different things.

LEAH
Yeah, I bet you do.

AVA
For fuck sake, Leah. Look, I know you've had a bit to drink, and so have I, so neither of us are thinking properly, so I'm just gonna go to bed and maybe we can talk about this tomorrow yeah?

LEAH
Yeah maybe.

AVA
Okay. Night then.

LEAH says nothing and doesn't make eye contact.

AVA stands up with a sigh and leaves LEAH on her own, in silence.

ZOE comes in, slowly, knowing full well what's just happened.

ZOE
(Cautiously)

So how'd that go?

LEAH's gaze remains fixed on the floor. She doesn't respond immediately, lost in her own thoughts.

ZOE
Leah?

LEAH finally looks up at ZOE, her expression guarded.

LEAH
She's seeing someone, this guy, Jacob or Jason or some stupid...shit like that, I don't know.

ZOE
Oh yeah, yeah she is, I forgot about that.

LEAH
Just doesn't make any sense.

ZOE
What do you mean?

LEAH
She's just so different, you know? Everything's different about her.

ZOE
She's had some sort of accident if you ask me, can't remember a thing, I did notice that.

LEAH
Yeah, exactly but it's not just that. She's not interested in the same stuff, she talks different, she acts different and now there's...you know, all this shit.

ZOE
People do change though. We've changed.

LEAH
Yeah, but none of us have changed that much. I don't know, it's just weird. For years I've thought we had something and now, just, nothing.

ZOE
I think you're over-thinking it a bit if I'm honest. People are just different sometimes, life's like that. You don't seem 'em for a while and suddenly they're like, dunno, surgeons or some shit.

LEAH
Yeah.

ZOE
Come on, get some sleep.

LEAH
(Distant)
I think I'm gonna for a walk actually.

ZOE
Where?

LEAH
Dunno, just around.

ZOE
Around where?

LEAH
Around, Zoe.

ZOE
Yeah, but where? It's a forest and-.

LEAH
(Straight to ZOE)
Dunno, just around, fuck off!

ZOE
Where's this coming from?

LEAH
Why didn't you tell me? Why did you let me go in there and embarrass myself?

ZOE
I just forgot, calm down.

LEAH
Don't tell me to fucking calm down! I can't go back now can I? I can't see her now, I'm a joke!

ZOE
It's fine, she won't mind.

LEAH
I mind! I fucking mind, and it's your fault!

ZOE
I don't think-.

LEAH
Just fuck off Zoe, you're fucking useless, you always are.

ZOE is visibly upset but keeping it together.

ZOE

Alright, alright. Just stay safe, and don't go too far, okay?

LEAH

Whatever.

LEAH walks off, leaving ZOE watching her go.

ZOE

Don't go too far!

(To self)

Shit.

FADE TO BLACK

*CLASSICAL MUSIC PLAYS OVER
TRANSITION.*

3

SCENE THREE

3

CHARLIE and SARAH are sat listening to ZOE who is stood telling the story of last night.

ZOE

That was it, she walked off and I haven't seen her this morning.

CHARLIE leans back.

CHARLIE

Shit, that's...wow.

SARAH

She'll be back by lunch. Most likely blacked out and slept in a bush, those of a lesser palate can't handle a nice Perignon, let alone vintage. If we're being honest, I think it's a bit creepy.

ZOE

Alright, bit harsh.

SARAH

Quite the contrary, she's put a pressure on Ava that isn't her problem and then got annoyed when it wasn't reciprocated.

ZOE

You were the one who got her to do it.

CHARLIE

What? When?

SARAH

No I didn't.

ZOE

With all that "sometimes people feel things" stuff.

CHARLIE

Oh shit.

SARAH

No, no that wasn't about...that was...no.

ZOE

What did you think you were doing?

SARAH

It wasn't about Ava! Jesus, it was about Charlie! I didn't even think about Ava.

ZOE

Charlie, what about Charlie?

CHARLIE

Nothing!

SARAH

It was about Charlie and Leah, not Leah and Ava! It was a joke! I was just playing with Charlie!

CHARLIE

Playing? What do you mean "playing", how were you "playing" with me?

SARAH

Oh come on Charlie, Leah's had an obsession with Ava for years, open your eyes.

CHARLIE

What? Since when?

SARAH

Since always.

CHARLIE

Why didn't you tell me?

SARAH

Because it was funny Charlie, grow up.

CHARLIE

Fuck you, why would you do that?

ZOE

Well Leah didn't think it was a joke, and now she's gone, so what are we gonna do about that?

AVA walks in.

AVA

Good morning.

Everyone greets her, careful not to say the wrong thing.

AVA

Everyone sleep alright?

ZOE

Yeah, you?

AVA

Yeah, not bad, thank you.

There's a silence, no one wanting to speak first.

AVA

Leah not around?

SARAH

Ava, I owe you an apology. I think I inadvertently pushed Leah to say whatever she said to you last night and I'm truly sorry.

CHARLIE

Sarah!

SARAH

No I can't lie to her.

AVA

It's fine, honestly. We'd all had a long night and said some things, it happens. Is she around?

SARAH

No, she's gone off. I feel really awful.

AVA

When?

ZOE

Last night.

AVA

Last night? She's been out all night and no one's gone to look for her?

ZOE

She'll be somewhere.

SARAH

Ava, I didn't know that...you know...if I'd known that Leah felt how she felt I wouldn't have said any of it I promise, it's just because Charlie-

Sarah, stop.

CHARLIE

What?

SARAH

Just leave it.

CHARLIE

Charlie what?

AVA

It's not important. We should go look for her.

CHARLIE

I'm not going looking for anyone, it's a forest, it'll take hours. I'm hungry anyway.

ZOE

For fuck sake Zoe!

CHARLIE

What?

ZOE

Why is everyone being so...just...shitty? We're here for Leah's birthday, she's had a really shit year and none of you have done anything to help, so how about we act like it and stop being so horrible.

CHARLIE

How am I being horrible? And what have you done for her?

ZOE

Stop pretending that you don't care about her. It isn't cool, it isn't impressive, it's horrible.

CHARLIE

Oh fuck off Charlie, you don't like her either.

ZOE

Fuck you!

CHARLIE

Look, regardless of who does or doesn't like who, she's not going to be alright out there on her own without any food, and in the cold, right?

AVA

They all nod, slightly reluctantly.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

ZOE

SARAH doesn't say anything.

AVA
I'm going to look for her. Make sure she's alright.

ZOE
Really?

AVA
Really.

CHARLIE
I'll come with you.

ZOE
For fuck sake, really?

CHARLIE
Yes, and we're both going.

SARAH
I'll stay here just in case she comes back while you're gone.

AVA
Okay.

CHARLIE stands up.

CHARLIE
Alright then.

ZOE
Can I stay here with Sarah?

CHARLIE
No.

AVA goes to walk off.

AVA
(To Sarah)
Let us know if you see her.

SARAH
Of course, straight away.

AVA leaves. SARAH stops CHARLIE.

SARAH
Charlie.

CHARLIE turns around.

SARAH
You're right, about us being here for Leah. I'm sorry.

CHARLIE
I know.

SARAH nods.

She watches CHARLIE leave then stands in silence.

SARAH
Shit.

4 SCENE FOUR

4

LEAH stands alone in the midst of a dense forest,
rain pouring down around her. She is soaked,
disheveled and tired.

Nothing can be heard but the wind and rain, until...

The WHISPERS echo around her, muttering names,
indistinct words, bouncing between the trees.

LEAH
What? What do you want?

The WHISPERS continue, incoherent.

LEAH
I can hear you. I know you're there, what do you want?

Suddenly, a faint figure emerges from the rain,
gradually taking shape. It is the APPARITION OF
AVA, distant and ethereal, her movements almost
robotic.

LEAH
Ava?

AVA APPARITION
Hello Leah.

LEAH
What are you-...how did you get here?

AVA APPARITION
Leah, you shouldn't have said what you said.

LEAH

I know, I'm sorry. I just... I couldn't keep it inside anymore. I needed you to know, and I should have taken it better, I know, I just felt like-.

AVA APPARITION

Feelings... they complicate things, Leah. You should have kept them to yourself.

LEAH

But Ava, you know how I feel, and I'm sorry but I can't pretend otherwise. I thought you felt the same way, and I know I was wrong now and-.

AVA APPARITION

Leah, you've misunderstood everything. I never felt anything for you. You were delusional, stupid.

LEAH

I know, but... but you gave me hope, Ava. I genuinely believed...

AVA APPARITION

Believed? There's no room for belief here, Leah. There's no room for you here, with us, anymore. You've embarrassed yourself. You are a liability, a weakness.

LEAH

That's not true. Why are you saying that? Why are you acting like this? Why are you being so different?

An apparition of CHARLIE emerges from behind,
acting similarly. Distant, cold.

CHARLIE APPARITION

She is acting different isn't she?

LEAH

Charlie, when did you-?

CHARLIE APPARITION

Strange. Not like herself. Almost like...like somebody else.

LEAH

I said this. I said this to Zoe. I said she was acting different.

An apparition of ZOE emerges.

ZOE APPARITION

You were right, I should have listened to you.

CHARLIE APPARITION
You were right.

LEAH
Who is she then?
(Turning to AVA
APPARITION)
Who are you?

CHARLIE APPARITION
She's been acting differently, speaking differently.

ZOE APPARITION
She doesn't remember anything.

CHARLIE APPARITION
She's different.

ZOE APPARITION
She's a different person.

CHARLIE APPARITION
Who is she?

LEAH
(to AVA APPARITION)
Who are you?

An apparition of SARAH emerges. It is now LEAH,
facing the AVA APPARITION with the others stood
behind her.

SARAH APPARITION
You need to keep us safe, Leah. You need to keep us safe from her.

CHARLIE APPARITION
We need you.

ZOE APPARITION
We love you.

LEAH
You don't love me! None of you love me, you don't even like me! You just make fun of me
and laugh at me and-!

ZOE APPARITION
No Leah!

SARAH APPARITION
No!

CHARLIE APPARITION
That's all in your head. All in your mind. We love you.

We love you.	SARAH APPARITION
We love you.	ZOE APPARITION
Ava loves you.	SARAH APPARITION
Ava loves you.	ZOE APPARITION
Ava loves you more than anything.	CHARLIE APPARITION
She doesn't. She said she doesn't.	LEAH
That's not Ava.	CHARLIE APPARITION
She's not Ava.	SARAH APPARITION
Ava would never say that, she loves you.	ZOE APPARITION
She does?	LEAH
She loves you.	SARAH APPARITION
She loves me.	LEAH
She loves you.	AVA APPARITION
Who are you?	LEAH (to AVA APPARITION)
The APPARITION OF AVA doesn't speak. The others begin to circle the pair slowly, like sharks, feeding into LEAH's ear.	
You were right, Leah, we need to get rid of her to be safe.	ZOE APPARITION
We need to be safe Leah.	SARAH APPARITION

CHARLIE APPARITION
You need to keep us safe.

LEAH
How?

SARAH APPARITION
Get rid of her.

CHARLIE APPARITION
Get rid of her Leah, just like you said.

LEAH
I don't know how.

CHARLIE APPARITION
What would a leader do, Leah?

SARAH APPARITION
What would a strong, brave leader do?

LEAH
Get rid of her. Keep everyone safe.

There's a crash of thunder and the lights cut to black, just for a second. Lightning flashes, and when the lights come back up, LEAH is stood alone.

LEAH
(Calling out)
Sarah? Where did you go? Charlie? Please don't leave me alone, I'm scared. Zoe? Please.

There's another crash of thunder.

LEAH
(Quieter)
Please.

*Lightning flashes, and the stage goes dark,.
Pouring rain is heard.*

5

SCENE FIVE

5

A sequence ensues during which AVA, CHARLIE, SARAH and ZOE enter and exit stage looking for LEAH, carrying torches and calling out into the darkness through the wind and rain.

AVA enters and stands in the centre, calling out as the lightning flashes.

AVA

Leah? For God sake! Leah!

CHARLIE enters, shouting over the rain.

CHARLIE

It's freezing, maybe she went back to the camp.

SARAH enters, also shouting over the rain.

SARAH

I'm going back. It's cold, I can't see anything, I'm not getting lost too!

AVA

You guys go, I'll keep looking.

SARAH

(Walking off, To CHARLIE)

Charlie, let's go.

CHARLIE

(To AVA)

Are you sure?

AVA

Yeah, go, go.

SARAH

(To CHARLIE)

Charlie, come on.

CHARLIE

(To AVA)

Stay safe, alright?

SARAH

(To CHARLIE)

Charlie!

CHARLIE

Two hours and then I'll come find you.

AVA nods and CHARLIE and SARAH run off.

6

SCENE SIX

6

Again, there's a crash of thunder and the lights cut to black. Lightning flashes, and when the lights come back up...

AVA walks back into the camp, finding Leah kneeling, looking down at the ground at a folded cloth. Rain is still pouring.

AVA

Fuck, Leah, where have you been?

LEAH says nothing.

AVA

Leah? Leah are you listening? I said where have you been? You know we've all been looking for you?

LEAH still stares at the ground in silence, lit only by the torch in AVA's hand.

AVA

Leah, if you're upset about our conversation then it's fine, honestly. We can talk about it, it's not worth freezing over.

Still nothing.

AVA

Or not, if you don't want to. We can just pretend nothing happened, I don't mind.

No response.

AVA

Leah, please.

She awaits a reaction of any kind but gets nothing and eventually goes to leave.

AVA

Okay, fine. Well stay here and I'll get the others.

LEAH does not move, and shows barely any sign of life, but lets out softly spoken words.

The whispers float through the trees again, key words can be heard such as "Ava" and "lies".

LEAH

Where did we go when it rained?

AVA stops and turns around.

AVA

Sorry?

LEAH

When it rained, where did we go?

AVA

When?

LEAH

When it rained.

AVA

When it rained when?

LEAH

(Pause)

We used to go to the park, under the climbing frame. We used to sit, our shoulders together, and listen to the rain hit the roof and bounce off. One time we'd been under there for hours, and Ava lay her head on my shoulder, just here.

(He touches his shoulder)

Her hair was wet and cold, but I didn't mind. I felt the weight of her head, and the cold of the air, and I could smell the rain and I thought, "I could die here. I could die here and never regret not living another moment. I could die here and it would be the perfect end". Ava loved the rain.

AVA takes a step toward LEAH.

AVA

Leah? Leah it's me, this is Ava, I'm Ava. I'm here.

She walks over to her and sits down in the rain, opposite.

AVA

I remember, I remember the park and the climbing frame.

LEAH's eyes slowly look up to meet hers.

She slowly shakes her head.

LEAH

No you don't.

AVA

I do, I promise I do.

The whispers can be heard again, scattered around.
"Liar, liar, liar".

LEAH

(Still calm)

Liar.

AVA

Leah, I'm not lying. I promise I remember.

The whispers are heard again. "Liar, liar, liar".

She pulls away from AVA's hand, a mixture of fear, confusion and anger in her eyes.

AVA

Please explain what's happening because I want to help but I can't if I don't understand.

LEAH

Where is Ava? What have you done to Ava?

AVA kneels to meet her.

AVA

I'm here, look, it's me, I'm here, I'm real.

The whispers harshly cry out "no, no, no, no".

LEAH

No, you're not.

AVA

Then who am I?

LEAH

I can see through you, through your lies and your pretending and I can see that you want to hurt us. You hurt Ava and you want Zoe and you want Charlie and you want Sarah and you want me but I have to keep them safe, they told me to keep them safe, and I have to keep them safe from you.

AVA

I'm not trying to hurt anyone. I don't know what you're talking about. I came here because you invited me.

LEAH

I invited Ava.

AVA

And I'm here, Leah, I thought that's what you wanted.

LEAH

They warn me about you. They tell me you're dangerous. They say you're not Ava, they say you're a liar.

AVA

Who warns you?

The whispers echo again.

LEAH

I can't trust you. I can't tell you and I can't trust you.

AVA

There's no one else here, Leah, just you and me.

The whispers echo "ask her, ask her."

LEAH

Where is she?

AVA

Who?

LEAH

Ava, where is she? Did you kill her?

AVA

Leah, I am Ava, I didn't kill anyone, I wouldn't ever do anything like that to anyone.

The whispers repeat "Liar, liar, liar".

AVA

I wouldn't hurt Zoe, or Charlie or Sarah and I wouldn't hurt you. I am Ava and I'm fine and there is nothing to keep anyone safe from.

The whispers repeat "Liar, liar, liar".

LEAH screws her eyes tight and lowers her head.

AVA

Okay, Leah, I need you to listen to me for a minute okay? Ignore everything else. You're not well. I'm not your enemy. I want to help you. There's something inside your mind that's stopping you from seeing things properly. It's not your fault. I know you're still the same person on the inside but you're not being you at the moment, not the Leah that we came to see. If you come with me then we can find help together, alright. How does that sound?

LEAH looks up again and looks AVA in the eyes.

There is a pause before she slowly nods her head.

AVA

Yeah?

She nods again.

AVA

Okay, I need you to tell me where the phones are.

LEAH points at her bag behind AVA.

She turns to look at it.

AVA

In the bag?

LEAH nods again.

AVA

Okay, wait there a second, I'm just gonna call Daphne to come and get us.

She stands up and goes over to the bag and rummages through it before pulling out a tuppaware box. She pulls the lid off and grabs her phone, putting the box down.

She unlocks it and holds it to her ear.

AVA

Hello? Hello?

(Looks at phone)

Shit, there's no fucking signal.

(Phone back to ear)

Hello?

(Looks at phone.)

Fuck sake.

She turns away from LEAH and holds her phone to the sky.

AVA

Come on, come on.

The whispers are louder than ever: "Now, now, now".

LEAH unfolds the cloth and picks the now unwrapped knife up in one hand and the cloth in the other.

Stands and walks towards AVA.

AVA

Come on!

LEAH

Three.

AVA

Why isn't it working?

LEAH

Two.

AVA

Come on, please.

LEAH

One.

AVA

Stupid piece of-.

LEAH covers AVA's mouth with the cloth and plunges the knife into her back, blood running down her arm and dripping to the floor.

AVA screams through the cloth.

LEAH pulls out the knife and stabs her again, she slowly stops screaming.

She pulls it out and stabs her again.

She drops to the floor.

LEAH

I have to keep everyone safe from you. I have to protect everyone else. You hurt Ava, and you want to hurt everyone else. It's the only way to keep everyone safe.

LEAH stands over her for a moment, ensuring she's gone.

She then stands up, and backs away, knife in hand, staring at her.

CHARLIE, ZOE and SARAH hurry in.

CHARLIE

Ava?

SARAH

Leah, thank God, where were you?

SARAH looks down and sees AVA.

She rushes down next to her.

CHARLIE and ZOE follow suit.

SARAH

Oh my- Ava? Ava? Shit, shit, Ava, can you hear me? Ava?

ZOE looks up and sees LEAH with the knife.

ZOE

What the fuck did you do?

SARAH

(To AVA)

I'm sorry Ava, this is my fault, I'm a terrible person, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

ZOE launches at LEAH. CHARLIE gets in first and holds her back.

ZOE
You fucking psychopath! What did you do?

CHARLIE pushes ZOE away who isn't happy about it but calms down a little.

CHARLIE
(To ZOE)
Hang on, hang on.
(To LEAH)
Leah, what happened? Who did this?

ZOE
She did, she's fucking crazy!

CHARLIE puts her hand up to ZOE.

CHARLIE
We don't know that, let's hear her out.
(To LEAH)
Leah, what happened?

LEAH
I had to protect us. I had to. She wasn't Ava. We had to...be safe.

ZOE
"We"? There's no "we"! I didn't do this, I didn't kill her! Charlie and Sarah didn't kill her. This is mental, Leah! You've lost it, you're fucking mental!

LEAH
No, Zoe! I've fixed everything. I did what needed to be done. You see? We're safe now!

ZOE
With you here? Look at yourself! You're covered in Ava's...in her..you're a fucking psychopath! We're not fucking safe!

LEAH is genuinely confused.

LEAH
I don't-I don't understand. I did it, Zoe, what we agreed. She was going to hurt us, tear us apart, you said so. But I took care of it. I saved us.

ZOE
You've gone mad. You've actually lost it.
(To CHARLIE)
I can't do this. I don't know what this is Charlie, I don't know what to do.

SARAH
Charlie, we need to call the police and an ambulance, and-and whoever, whoever else, we need to-

LEAH

No...stop it!

SARAH

Maybe if we can get her to a hospital, there might be a chance-...I don't know, maybe we can get a car or something, I-

LEAH

Stop it! Shut up! Shut the fuck up!

She holds out the knife again and has taken a step towards CHARLIE who holds her hands out in front of her.

CHARLIE

Okay, alright, calm down, careful.

(To SARAH)

We don't have our phones, what am I calling them with?

LEAH

(To everyone)

You all told me she needed to be taken care of, you told me she was a danger to us.

CHARLIE

(Calmly, slowly)

We didn't, Leah.

LEAH

You did! You did!

CHARLIE

I swear to you, none of us said that.

LEAH

Stop lying! Stop it!

SARAH

Leah, we need to help Ava.

LEAH

This is your fault. All of this is your fault.

SARAH

I know, I know that now. I completely understand why you're angry at me, but I assure you it was never my intention. I didn't mean this Leah, I just meant-.

CHARLIE

Leah, you have to understand that what you've done to Ava is very serious.

LEAH

(Pointing the knife at

CHARLIE)

That wasn't Ava! Stop fucking saying that! You said it wasn't Ava!

CHARLIE

Okay Leah, woah, woah, woah, let's calm down Leah. Let's just take a minute, we're all friends here.

LEAH

She's fucking wasn't our friend! She wasn't my friend! She wasn't your friend! She was trying to hurt us, all of us. And what has she done to the real Ava? Huh? Have you thought about that?

CHARLIE

Okay, Leah, listen for a second, okay? You need to understand that what you're thinking, what you believe, it isn't real. We can find a way to get through this, and we can help you, but you have to put the knife down, and you have to let us go and call someone, alright?

LEAH

(To ZOE)

Zoe, tell her. Tell her what we said.

ZOE

What?

LEAH

About Ava, about Mr Hodgkins, about how he was right, about how someone's out there trying to hurt us all.

SARAH

Charlie!

CHARLIE and ZOE turn around to see SARAH holding AVA's phone.

SARAH

Ava's phone, it's her phone.

ZOE

Call the police, call the fucking police.

SARAH attempts to make a call but also finds no signal.

SARAH

There's no signal. Charlie there's no signal, how do we get signal?

LEAH

Why are you calling the police?

CHARLIE

(To SARAH)

Okay, Sarah, me and Leah and Zoe are gonna stay here and have a chat whilst you go and find some signal, yeah?

(To LEAH)

Yeah, Leah? How do we feel about that? Maybe Zoe can go to? Maybe it can just you and me, how's that?

LEAH says nothing.

CHARLIE

Leah? We alright with that?

LEAH still says nothing but lowers her knife hand.

LEAH

Why the fuck won't you leave me alone?

CHARLIE

What?

LEAH points the knife at CHARLIE as she talks, not threateningly, just gesturing.

LEAH

Why...the fuck...won't you leave me alone? You're always following me around, trying to get me to go places with you. I moved cities to get away from you and you just keep messaging me. What the fuck is your problem?

CHARLIE

Leah, I-.

LEAH

Why do you keep saying my name? What's wrong with you?

SARAH

(Slowly)

Okay, I'm going to go and call the police now. Is that alright?

SARAH gets up, slowly and cautiously. She obviously doesn't feel comfortable taking this risk.

She walks around the side of the group, watching them all.

She passes Leah and as she does, LEAH raises his knife to her, stopping her in her tracks.

LEAH

No. I can't.

CHARLIE

What are you doing? We need to let her get help don't we?

LEAH

I can't. We can't trust the police.

CHARLIE

Yes we can.

SARAH

Please, Leah, I just want to get help for A-...for her. Please.

LEAH

She doesn't need help, why do you all keep trying to help her?

CHARLIE

Leah-.

LEAH

Stop fucking saying my name, I'm not a child!

CHARLIE

Sorry, right, just look at me, for two seconds, please.

LEAH looks to SARAH then back at CHARLIE.
There's a silent pause.

CHARLIE

(To SARAH)

Sarah, go.

SARAH hesitates for the slightest of seconds and then runs.

LEAH turns toward SARAH leaving.

CHARLIE steps forwards, arm out.

CHARLIE

Leah, please, I n-

CHARLIE and LEAH look each other in the eyes before they look down at LEAH's hand, gripping the knife which has embedded itself in CHARLIE's stomach, blood staining through her shirt.

She stumbles back, the knife sliding out, still in LEAH's tight grip.

They face each other, CHARLIE drops to her knees and hits the ground.

ZOE and LEAH stare at each other, both frozen with fear.

LEAH

I-.

ZOE

Shut up.

LEAH

What?

ZOE

Stop talking, for a second, shut up.

ZOE crouches down to CHARLIE, careful not to take her eyes off LEAH for too long.

LEAH

I'm sorry, she was going to-...she stepped towards me, she-she was going to-.

ZOE

Stop.

They both stand still, looking at one another.

ZOE

This is fine, it's gonna be fine, alright?

LEAH

I don't know what I did, I didn't mean to do this, I just thought-I-I wouldn't-

ZOE

We're gonna fix it, but you need to listen okay?

LEAH

Yeah...yeah.

ZOE

This is really bad, Leah. Really bad. You know that don't you?

LEAH nods.

ZOE

And I need you to help me fix it, okay?

LEAH nods again.

ZOE

I need you to give me the knife.

LEAH

I-I can't.

ZOE

(Angry)

You can.

(Calming herself)

You can. Here-.

ZOE puts out her hand, keeping a safe distance.
LEAH slowly reaches out.

The whispers return, almost incoherent.

LEAH immediately pulls her hand back.

LEAH

No, I can't.

ZOE

You can. Please, Leah.

The whispers are heard again.

LEAH

I don't know if I can trust you.

ZOE

Why can't you trust me? Ava was the problem, yeah? She's gone now, it's just us, we're okay. Give me the knife, Leah. Now.

(Pause)

Please.

ZOE takes a step forward.

The whispers are heard again.

LEAH

I don't know. I don't know. I don't think I can.

ZOE

Leah, stop, look around. Look at what you've done. You've killed two people. Killed them, do you even know what that means anymore? Do you know what's happening at all? You can't run away from that, or hide from it, or talk your way out of it. Not just people either, your friends, Leah, you're fucking friends. People who supported you and wanted to keep you safe and this is what you've done to them. It's fucked up. They won't let you walk away from this. Sarah's gone to the police, and they'll be here any moment now.

LEAH

I didn't want to hurt Charlie, I wouldn't.

ZOE

You think anyone will listen to that? They won't care. They won't. It makes no difference what you did or didn't mean to do. You'll go to jail, Leah, to fucking jail. You killed your friends. It'll be in the news.

LEAH

She was trying to kill us, you said that remember?

ZOE

You're gonna go to prison for the rest of your life. You'll never go to the pub again, or the cinema, or see any of your family, or-.

LEAH

I can't go to prison.

ZOE

I know.

LEAH

I can't, they won't understand, they won't understand what she did, why I did it.

ZOE

I know, I know, which is why you have to let me help you.

LEAH pauses for a moment, thinking.

Then she nods.

ZOE

Yeah?

LEAH nods again then holds out her hand with the knife.

ZOE reaches out to take it but LEAH pulls her hand back.

ZOE

Leah, I'm trying to help you.

The whispers sound again, they grow louder and louder until-

LEAH puts the knife in ZOE's open hand and then backs away. As soon as she does the whispers stop.

There is a clear look of relief on LEAH's face.

She takes a deep breath. The torment has stopped.

ZOE

Okay?

LEAH

Yeah.

(Smiles)

Yeah.

ZOE

Okay, good. Okay. Right.

She looks around at CHARLIE and AVA on the floor, and the mess.

LEAH

I'm sorry, Zoe. I'm really sorry, I didn't want any of this to happen. I just wanted to come on a nice trip away, get away from work, spend some time with you, and Sarah, and-and-a...

ZOE

I know.

LEAH

I'm sorry.

ZOE

I know, and I forgive you.

LEAH has tears in her eyes as she smiles at ZOE.

LEAH

You do?

ZOE

(Smiling)

Of course I do, you're my friend.

LEAH

Thank you, Zoe.

They look at each other and smile.

ZOE

Okay, we need to get this cleaned up now though, don't we? Yeah?

LEAH wipes her face and nods.

ZOE

So I'm gonna get them back to the camp.

LEAH

What about Sarah? What-what about the police?

ZOE

Yeah, yeah, you're right. Okay, so I'll take...

(She looks around)

I'll take Charlie back, hide her, you stay here and keep an eye out for Sarah and the police.

LEAH

Yeah, right, yeah.

ZOE turns LEAH around to face the edge of the forest.

ZOE

(Pointing over LEAH's shoulder)

So you see that hill there?

LEAH
Where?

ZOE
Between the two trees on the right there, you can see it just past there.

LEAH
(Pointing)
Those two?

ZOE
Yeah, those two there, you see it?

LEAH
Yeah, I think so.

ZOE backs away from LEAH, leaving her looking at the horizon.

ZOE
So the other side of that hill is a village, just down that road, and that's where they'll come from.

LEAH
Right, okay.

ZOE
So keep your eyes on that okay? It's important.

LEAH
Okay.

ZOE
So we don't get caught.

LEAH
Yeah, okay.

ZOE stands, fixed on the back of LEAH's head. The knife gripped in her hand.

ZOE
Leah?

LEAH
Yeah?

ZOE
Why did you kill her?

LEAH goes to turn toward ZOE.

I-.
LEAH

No, no keep looking out, alright? It's important.
ZOE

Yeah, sorry.
LEAH

Why did you kill her?
ZOE

She was trying to hurt us.
LEAH

But why did you have to kill her?
ZOE

I thought she was going to hurt you, and Charlie, and Sarah, and I wanted to keep you safe.
LEAH

We could've talked about it, Leah. For fuck sake, if you'd just-if you'd just talked to us, properly, we could've helped.
ZOE

I needed to keep us safe.
LEAH

But you didn't keep us safe. Did you? Char-.....Charlie isn't safe.
ZOE

I'm sorry, I didn't want to hurt Charlie, it was a mistake.
LEAH

A mistake.
ZOE
(Chuckles in disbelief.)

There is a silence.

I'm sorry Zoe. We're gonna fix it though, aren't we?
LEAH

Yeah. Yeah.
ZOE

(Pause)
Leah, if someone is... a danger, to people, could act violently, hurt their friends. What should someone do about that?

They have to protect themselves, and protect each other.
LEAH

ZOE

So, it's okay to hurt other people to protect yourself. It was okay to hurt Ava and Charlie to protect yourself?

LEAH

I was protecting you and Sarah. Charlie was an accident, I'm sorry, I-.

ZOE

Right. So what if I needed to protect us from you?

LEAH starts to turn around again.

ZOE

Stop turning around Leah, please. It's important, okay?

LEAH nods.

ZOE

Do you think...do you think maybe...maybe we would need to be protected from you?

LEAH

I don't know.

ZOE

What do you think would be the best thing to do? If that was the case?

LEAH

I think-I think you would need to make sure I didn't hurt any more people.

ZOE

Yeah. I thought that might be it.

There is a silence.

LEAH

How long do you think it'll be until-.

ZOE

Three, two, one.

ZOE lunges at LEAH and pushes the knife into her shoulder.

LEAH falls to her knees, struggling to breathe.

She takes on last gasp of air, then falls down onto her front.

ZOE then stumbles back and drags her forearm along her mouth, attempting to wipe it clean but smearing blood across it.

She throws the knife onto the floor, she did what had to be done. Nothing more and nothing less.

She slowly kneels down, surrounded by the bodies of CHARLIE, LEAH and AVA, her clothes and hands bloodied, and the floor around her soaked.

The classical music we have heard throughout begins to build as we stare at the gory scene.

Blue lights flash across the stage accompanied by muffled sirens.

ZOE looks up.

The music stops.

BLACK OUT