



Cherwell Theatre Company presents

ENACT

VOLUME ONE

Bringing young people's voices
into the conversation around
sexual violence and consent.

Based on young people's
observations and experiences.

Cherwell Theatre Company presents

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VOLUME ONE

Four original plays developed with young people in response to creative healthy relationships workshops delivered in schools.

Captured by *Aoife Mannix*

Exploded View by *Tristan Jackson-Pate*

Rumour by *Lynsey Cullen*

Happy Lovely Awesome by *Karen Featherstone*

With an introduction by Nicki Stevenson

First performance at The Mill Arts Centre, Banbury
on Wednesday 22nd March 2023.

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Disclaimer: These plays are works of fiction based on the observations and opinions of young people. Any resemblances to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Book design by Breezign with contributions from Stacey White

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INTRODUCTION

The ENACT project was created in direct response to the current epidemic of Violence Against Women and Girls.

As a company who have always championed young people's voices, we wanted to provide a platform for them to bring their invaluable insight to this conversation. Enact is an offering to our young people to be heard, and what you have here is the result.

This work was directly informed by a ten session creative exploration programme, taken to groups of young people from four schools, looking at healthy relationships. Working closely with a member of our creative team, each school has spent time examining the culture around relationships in their school and direct communities, and talking about the issues that their students have found most relevant to them. Our playwriting team have visited, listened, discussed, and taken the feedback of these groups to create the work in this anthology. All of the plays reflect the opinions and experiences that these brilliant young people have generously and courageously shared with us.

We hope that these plays will be used by schools, theatre groups and community settings and we offer them for free for these purposes. Read them, perform them, or take them as a starting point to inspire vital conversations. Our only ask is that you share with us whenever you use them, so that we can continue to see the project develop and grow.

I want to give a truly heartfelt thank you to everyone who has been involved in this project for their openness, dedication and invaluable support.

This discussion is one that cannot be ignored and these voices must be heard. Let's keep this conversation going.

Nicki Stevenson

Creative Communities Director and Joint CEO
Cherwell Theatre Company

THE PLAYWRIGHTS

AOIFE MANNIX

Aoife Mannix read English and Sociology at Trinity College Dublin and has a PhD in creative writing from Goldsmiths, University of London. She has previously worked as a script editor for the BBC as well as for Channel 4 and the Royal Court Theatre. She has published five collections of poetry, six libretti and a novel. She has been poet in residence for the Royal Shakespeare Company and BBC Radio 4's Saturday Live. She has toured internationally as a writer with the British Council. Her pamphlet 'Alice Under The Knife' won the James Tate Poetry Prize in 2020. She has been commissioned by the BBC, the National Archives, the Portsmouth Museum, Youth Music Theatre UK, the National Gallery of Ireland, the Bronte Parsonage, and Half Moon Young People's Theatre. She has taught creative writing at Goldsmiths, University of London, the University of Westminster, Anglia Ruskin University, and Bucks New University. She lives near Banbury in Oxfordshire.

TRISTAN JACKSON-PATE

Tristan Jackson-Pate trained initially as an actor at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. He now produces work for young audiences as a writer, director and composer. He is Artistic Director and joint CEO for the Award Winning Cherwell Theatre Company (CTC) and an Associate Artist at Royal & Derngate, Northampton.

Tristan has written and directed five original family theatre pieces for CTC (Robin Hood, Cinderella, Treasure Island, Myth and Myth II: Heroes and Halfwits) and a film exploring the internet and social media (Do You Accept?). In 2022 Tristan co-wrote and directed a new game theatre comedy 'Sam & Zoe Vs Evermore'. He also wrote, directed and composed music for 'Song of the Summer' a gig theatre coming of age story, co-produced with Royal & Derngate Theatres.

Other writing credits include: Pete Stays Home (CTC, UK Tour, Co-Composer), Much Ado About Muffins (Creation Theatre, The Mill Arts Centre), and Den (Shortlisted for the Pint Size Plays Festival, Supported Writer 2018).

LYNSEY CULLEN

Lynsey Cullen is a playwright, screenwriter, author and historian from Banbury. She has a PhD in the History of Medicine and currently works as a Research Fellow at the University of York. Lynsey is passionate about telling untold stories, especially those about women and the LGBTQ+ community. She recently finished the R&D for her Arts Council England funded play KIDS (www.kidstheplay.com), is currently under commission with Izzy Paris Productions to write her play UNCLE, and will have a podcast episode for 'The Scene' (Get Over It Productions: www.thescenepodcast.co.uk) released shortly, all on the theme of queer families. Lynsey is also currently working with director Oz Arshad on her short film BIOLOGY and with Polari Productions on her virtual reality short film CAKE. Her plays have been produced across the country by companies including Hive North at Hope Mill Theatre in Manchester and Full Disclosure at the Southwark Playhouse in London. She has also recently published her debut children's book, 'Marzipan the Clumsy Elf'.

KAREN FEATHERSTONE

Karen Featherstone is a disabled writer for stage and screen. Recently picked for the BBC Writers' Access Group, she's also an alumna of Graeae Theatre Company's year-long Write To Play initiative. Works have featured at the National Theatre Studio, Hampstead Theatre, Liverpool Everyman and Oldham Coliseum and for Little Pieces of Gold at Southwark Playhouse. Her radio drama Unthank, a surreal exploration of a wheelchair user's shrinking world, was produced by Polly Thomas and formed part of an episode selected as Radio 4's pick of the week. She's been a stand-up (sit-down; she's a wheelchair user). Her writing is often lifted by humour, with themes of identity and class. Commissioned three times by Cumbria's Theatre By the Lake, her solo show called I Surrender! premiered at Lancashire Fringe in 2019 and she's developing BLING which looks at how brands do or don't shape our identities. Her screenwriting work includes episodes of a children's animation series made by the legendary Mackinnon & Saunders. She reads scripts for BBC Writers room and the BBC Comedy Unit.

ENACT

VOLUME ONE

CAST

Krage Brown
Kylie Bates
Olivia Sinclair
Ross Tomlison
Zoe Croft

CREATIVES

Director: **Emelia Hutchinson**
Technical Designer: **Dan Parry**
Set Designer: **Madlen Burton**

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Management & Set Build: **George Whitley & Charlie Hopkins**
Book Designer: **Rhona Breeze-Lawlor, Breezign**
Printer: **Holywell Press Ltd., Oxford**

FOR CHERWELL THEATRE COMPANY

Project Director: **Nicki Stevenson**
Project Manager: **Stacey White**
Creative Practitioner and Workshop Designer: **Keziah Horgan**
Creative Practitioner and Workshop Designer: **Diana Christie**

FOR THE MILL

Interim Programme & Marketing Manager: **Sarah Wright**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to extend our gratitude to Catherine Marriot and Jacob Nurdan from the partnerships team at The Thames Valley Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner; Richard Webb at Cherwell District Council and our consortium partners: Chloe Purcell and Danni Hull from Safe! and Mark Ashfield and Jo Broughton from Lime.

We would like to thank the following people for their support, dedication and encouragement in helping us develop and deliver this programme: Sian Gibson, Lee Davies, Wayne Bartlett, Leanne Knight, Bethany Lovell, Kieran Chambers, Rob Chaplin and Deb Pulston at Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC).

We are extremely grateful to the following people for their continued support: Deborah Howe, David Adkin, Lynn Mumford, Cat Marin, Anna Frazer, Ingrid Manning, Clinton Osborne and Chris Keeping.

The writers and the team at Cherwell Theatre Company would like to thank our practitioners Keziah Horgan and Diana Christie for designing and delivering our creative workshops; Emelia Hutchinson for her invaluable contributions, vision and passion; our visiting artist, Tom Cross for his outstanding visual expertise; and last but not least, to all the students for generously sharing their time, humour, inspiration and insights throughout the project lifecycle.

CAPTURED

by Aoife Mannix

A teenage girl struggles to escape an abusive relationship after her ex-boyfriend shares intimate pictures of her with their friends.

Content Warning: contains themes of sexual violence, self-harm, suicide, pornography, rape and abuse.

CHARACTERS

ELLIE: A 16 year old girl

CURTIS: A 17 year old boy

MAISIE: A 16 year old girl

JOEL: An 18 year old boy

SETTING

Banbury, a historic market town in Oxfordshire, southeast England.

This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ from the play as performed.

SCENE ONE

ELLIE: I'm looking for someone who's good company, you know able to speak. Makes me laugh, funny without needing to make jokes all the time. Someone who likes dinosaurs, knows what a stegosaurus is. Someone who plays monopoly, I love a bit of monop. Or chess, I've got a chess board. They could teach me the rules.

CURTIS: I'm looking for someone who likes watching football. Who loves the colour blue or if not blue, at least orange. Someone calm, who doesn't lose their shit over a spider.

MAISIE: I'm looking for someone charming, a prince who knows all the words to Whitney Houston's 'I will always love you.' Someone who knows how to eat spaghetti. That might have an extra hard shell but is soft on the inside when you get to know them.

JOEL: A dog lover, a collector of strays, someone who can't help trying to fix me, kind, totally loyal. Loyalty, that's the most important thing. Someone who knows I don't talk to my Dad after seven in the evening cos of his drinking.

SCENE TWO

ELLIE is sitting on her own in the school canteen. MAISIE is on the other side of the room. JOEL and CURTIS enter.

ELLIE: I was twelve when he said -

JOEL: Oi, gorgeous. Roses are red, violets are blue. I'm looking at you. You're mighty fine, tell you what, I'll be the six and you be the nine.

CURTIS laughs. MAISIE looks up. JOEL sits down beside Ellie.

JOEL: Where you been hiding all my life?

ELLIE: I'd been right there doing my best to perfect my invisibility cloak. To fold myself so small into the creases of my skirt, he'd never know I was origami vanishing before his eyes.

CURTIS: C'mon mate, we're gonna be late.

JOEL: Chillax, I'm just being friendly. Aren't I, sweetheart?

ELLIE: *(Whispers)* Please leave me alone, please go away, please leave me alone, please go away. Of course, I wasn't saying this out loud. Just inside like a mantra, like a prayer, like the repetition would make me Teflon.

JOEL: What's up? Cat got your tongue? Don't you speak English? Not a problem, I'm all about body language.

CURTIS: Seriously I can't be late again. That twat said he's gonna put me in isolation. You know I hate it in there.

JOEL: Ah don't be such a pussy. Bell's not even gone yet. And I've been wanting to chat to this beautiful creature for a while. Yeah, a long while.

ELLIE: I wanted to say I've never seen you before in my life but that wasn't true. No, that wasn't true. I knew exactly who he was.

CURTIS: She's just a fuckin' kid, I haven't got time for this.

JOEL: Well I heard from a very reliable source that she likes older men. Don't you, sweetheart? Not that innocent at all.

ELLIE: I started to sweat, not cos I was warm, but because a thousand tiny wasps were scurrying all over my skin. That's when she walked over.

MAISIE comes over to ELLIE.

MAISIE: Mrs Mulcahy is looking for you.

JOEL: *(In a high-pitched voice)* Mrs Mulcahy is looking for you. Who cares what that old bitch wants?

MAISIE: She said it was important. She said she needed to see you right away.

ELLIE goes to stand up. JOEL puts his hand on her arm.

JOEL: Don't leave so soon. You'll break my heart.

CURTIS: Mrs Mulcahy's a nightmare. You probably best get going.

ELLIE: So I walked away without saying a word. Mrs Mulcahy wasn't even my teacher, probably didn't even know my name. But she saved me that day.

SCENE THREE

MAISIE: He said I was his angel, he said I was so beautiful it blew his mind. He said sometimes when he couldn't silence all the dark ravens screaming through his nights and keeping him awake, he thought of me, and it made him feel just calm inside. He said if he had a photograph of me to look at, it would help him hold on when sometimes he wasn't sure he wanted to keep getting up in the morning. I said of course he could have a picture of a smile, but he said he loved every single piece of me. He wanted my toes and my elbows, my nails and my nipples.

We were smoking weed in his bedroom, just so mellow and relaxed. He said I could be a super model. We both started laughing cos we knew that wasn't true. He said it'd be fun to do a fashion shoot. Without clothes. Just for a giggle. Just for him. Of course, no one else would ever see it. He swore no one else would ever see me like he did. Didn't I trust him? Didn't I love him? Didn't I understand how much it would help to keep him in my arms? If he could hold me when I wasn't there. If we could hold each other. Forever in the click of his phone.

ELLIE gets a ping on her phone. She looks at it.

ELLIE: Oh shit. How could she be so stupid?

CURTIS gets a ping on his phone.

CURTIS: Ah no. Why is he such a fucking dickhead?

ELLIE walks over to CURTIS.

ELLIE: Have you seen this?

CURTIS: *(Shrugs)* Yeah reckon everyone has. He sent it to the whole WhatsApp group.

ELLIE: That's not okay. Not okay at all.

CURTIS: Just delete it. That's what I did.

ELLIE: What use is that? You just said everyone's already seen it.

CURTIS: I'll talk to him. Make him realise.

ELLIE: Does Maisie know he's done this?

CURTIS: Hope not.

ELLIE: Well I'm gonna tell her. She's got a right to know this is happening.

SCENE FOUR

MAISIE: Yesterday Instagram told me I was ice cold,
frost in the lungs, leather cool mini skirt
with just the right dash of frigid.

Today it says share your scars,
cut a little deeper,
lose the weight of the world
or we'll think you're fat.

Remember to be a gazelle,
thin as an exclamation mark.
Full of headlights,
caught in the act of being unlovable.

Tomorrow it will inform me -
don't you think we'd all be better off
without you. We're laughing at you
naked in the back of his pocket.
We've seen you without any protection.
Lipstick on your pillow,
your tattoos ridiculous riddles
read upside down on YouTube.
Don't you realise you're famous,
we all hate you now, want to see
what you'll do for your next party trick.
Thumbs up, love heart, horrified scream.

SCENE FIVE

ELLIE: Someone who really likes their bed. Someone who'll never let
you go out the door looking like a bin bag. Someone who'd come
round and bring me food, tidy up after themselves. Help with a bit of
cleaning. Someone gorgeous and bullet proof.

JOEL: Someone who gets why I don't like going home. That I feel safer
out walking on my own. Someone who understands my love of spicy
chicken and knives. Someone soft who likes their nights to have a bit
of an edge.

MAISIE: That loves the colour purple, is a little bit untouchable. That
when I take off their glasses, they won't be able to see how ugly I am.
Who understands what it's like to be socially awkward. Someone
who won't mind walking me home. Who doesn't care that I'm shit at
chemistry and maths and I really fucking hate school.

CURTIS: Someone who wants to join the army. Or do something useful.
Someone who loves alcohol and cats. Someone who forgives me even
if sometimes I can be a bit of a twat. Someone sexy, kind of fabulous,
but respectful. Loyal.

SCENE SIX

JOEL is on his phone. CURTIS walks over.

JOEL: Check her out. She's well fit.

CURTIS: Listen, I need to talk to you.

JOEL: What's up? Mr Leery Geary giving you a hard time again. Don't
let that tosser get to you.

CURTIS: No, it's not him. Did you send those pictures?

JOEL: What pictures?

CURTIS: You know of Maisie.

JOEL: Swear that girl's addicted to Insta. Her every living breathing
moment she's gotta catch on camera. Gets boring after a bit.

Curtis: I meant the ones on WhatsApp. Of the two of you... together.

JOEL: Don't know what you're talking about. Why would I do that when
we've split up?

CURTIS: *(Holds out his phone)* Well it says you sent them.

JOEL: I wouldn't do something like that.

CURTIS: But you clearly did.

JOEL: You should delete them. They're private.

CURTIS: Not any more they're not. That wasn't cool, mate.

JOEL: It wasn't me! Dumb bitch probably hacked my phone.

CURTIS: Why would she hack your phone to send nudes of herself to all our friends?

JOEL: I don't know, I told you she's mental. She's not right in the head. Stupid slag's probably all over the internet anyhow.

CURTIS: She might be now, but she weren't before.

JOEL: How do you know? Were you looking for her?

CURTIS: No, of course I wasn't.

JOEL: Well then how do you know what she gets up to? Trust me you don't know her. I thought I did but turns out I was a total mug.

CURTIS: Well, she's really upset about this. And Ellie's raging. She's talking about going to the police.

JOEL: Ellie wouldn't do that. Besides they got way more important stuff to be worrying about.

CURTIS: You do know doing shit like this is illegal?

JOEL: Fuck's sakes, it was just a few photos.

CURTIS: It was a really stupid thing to do.

JOEL: I'm sorry. I was off my face. I don't know what I was thinking. You know she was seeing someone behind my back?

CURTIS: Was she?

JOEL: Yeah, that's why she dumped me. I couldn't believe it when I found out. Felt like I'd been stabbed. She swore blind she'd never look at anyone else. That I was her only man. I was pure devastated. I thought we were going to be together forever. I don't know what I'm going to do without her.

JOEL starts to cry.

CURTIS: I didn't realise.

SCENE SEVEN

JOEL: The thing is if I walk down a dark lane after midnight flashing my cash around, singing look at what a mad bad rich bastard I am, waving twenty pound notes in the air, shouting check out my Rolex, my gold chain, I can't really be surprised if I get mugged. Can I? I'm not saying it's right. I'm just saying we all have to take some responsibility for our actions. You can't go flashing your knickers and not expect a dog to come sniffing. Most of them are asking for it, gagging for it, begging for it, why else would they be dressed like that? Why else would they be out on their own? Why else would they be drinking and laughing and catching my eye? She winked at me. I'm nearly sure of it. And that skirt was so tight, it was obscene.

She probably were just annoyed she didn't get paid for it. Half these 'rape victims' only moaning cos a punter walked away without coughing up the going rate. I'm not paying for it, no way. Not when she's laying it all out on a plate. If she had a boyfriend, why wasn't she with him? If she didn't want it, why could I see right down her top?

She said I was scaring her. I'm not scary. Why would she say that? She should meet my Dad when he's had a few. I'm not like him, not like him at all.

Fucking bitch needed to be taught a lesson.

MAISIE: He was the shiniest boy in the room. All shark's teeth, silver dimples, his eyes with their glow in the dark nine lives feline glint. His every word a gift to be unwrapped, his smile fireworks you wouldn't dare forget. He said I was gorgeous, he said he'd look after me.

But when there were clouds in his beer, it was like someone turned the lights out. The rain of his accusations soaked me to the bone.

Afterwards he was like a baby in my arms. For whole afternoons I was his princess, the sunshine in his hair, and he could make me laugh more than anyone I'd ever met. You're not supposed to say that

I know. That he was funny, and kind, and he told me how hard he was trying to be a better person. Some of it was true. I'm sure it was.

But it didn't stop him turning day into night. His vampire fear of my friends, his sucking the messages from my phone, following me home. How I belonged to him forever, how he couldn't live without me. I was so worried about the pills, the suicide threats, the desperate excuses, I didn't notice how he'd nibbled away at my shadow.

No one tells you how you can love someone nearly as much as you fear them. No one tells you that the darkness falls so slowly you could never explain, even to yourself, how you came to be all alone on this moonless night.

He was the shiniest boy in the room.

JOEL: Course it's not violence. I never touched the frigid, stuck up cow. Never laid a finger on her. Never slapped her, never hit her, never punched her, never kicked her. Never grabbed her by her hair. Never slammed her against a wall. Never spat in her face. Never knocked her downstairs. Never broke her ribs or her arm. Not to begin with anyhow.

SCENE EIGHT

JOEL and CURTIS are at a house party drinking beer.

JOEL: Seriously, mate, when did you last have a shag? You need to get yourself on Tinder.

CURTIS: I can't be bothered with all that.

JOEL: I'll do your stats for you. Sell you to the highest bidder. You've got to be worth at least a fiver.

CURTIS: I'm not for sale.

JOEL: Well what are you looking for in a relationship? How would you

describe yourself?

CURTIS: I've no idea.

JOEL: I'm trying to represent you as a very attractive man, you're making yourself look like a total fucking idiot. It's like trying to get someone to shag a brick wall.

MAISIE and ELLIE enter. MAISIE tries to turn around when she sees Joel.

JOEL: Alright?

ELLIE: We don't want any trouble.

JOEL ignores her.

JOEL: *(To MAISIE)* You're looking well. Fancy a beer?

MAISIE: No thanks. *(Quietly to ELLIE)* Let's just go home. I'm knackered anyhow.

JOEL: You not been sleeping well?

ELLIE: What's that supposed to mean?

CURTIS: I'm going out for a fag. *(To Joel)* You want one?

CURTIS goes to leave but hesitates when Joel shows no sign of following him.

JOEL: *(To MAISIE)* Just thought you might be feeling lonely, missing me a bit.

ELLIE: She misses you like a hole in the head.

JOEL: Mind your own business. We all know what a juicy slut you are.

MAISIE: Don't talk to my friends like that.

JOEL: Why? What are you going to do about it?

MAISIE: I'm not scared of you anymore.

JOEL laughs.

JOEL: Well, you should be. I know where you live.

ELLIE: You come round her house again, she's calling the police.

JOEL: Like they're gonna give a shit.

CURTIS: Have you been going round there?

JOEL: Free country, I can go where I fucking like.

ELLIE: It's called harassment, stalking, you wanker. There's laws against it. Not to mention assault, GBH, intimidation, rape.

JOEL: You wish.

ELLIE: What?

JOEL: You're just fucking jealous. You always have been.

MAISIE: Nobody's jealous of what you did to me.

JOEL: Ah boo hoo, poor little you. What you talking about? You been hearing voices again? Inside your head? No one believes a liar.

ELLIE: Well, I believe her. *(To CURTIS)* Why are you friends with this asshole?

JOEL: We're best mates since day one of primary. He's not gonna listen to some mouthy cow who's been spreading her legs since she was barely out of nappies.

ELLIE: Fuck off.

ELLIE shoves JOEL in the chest.

JOEL: *(To CURTIS)* Did you see that? You're a witness, mate. She assaulted me.

CURTIS takes a long slug from his beer.

CURTIS: Actually, mate, I've seen more than enough. And you are way out of order. You always have been. You need to catch on to yourself, stop behaving like such a dick. What is wrong with you anyway?

JOEL: Wrong with me? Daft mare attacks me and that's all you've got to say?

MAISIE: *(To JOEL)* Stay away from us, please. I don't want anything to do with you anymore.

ELLIE: Just go. Nobody wants you around.

JOEL: *(To CURTIS)* C'mon, mate, let's leave these psycho bitches. This party's pathetic anyhow.

CURTIS: You go on, I'm okay where I am.

JOEL squares up to him.

JOEL: You've always been a spineless little prick, do you know that? Sad little teacher's pet. Does Mr Geery pay you to suck his cock or what?

CURTIS: People change, Joel. And whatever kind of man I turn out to be, at least I know I'm not like you. And I'm not listening to your shit anymore. Do you understand me?

JOEL: You're such a fucking snowflake. Stay with these ugly slags if you want.

JOEL storms off.

CURTIS: Sorry about all that.

MAISIE: I don't know what I ever saw in him.

ELLIE: We all make mistakes, the trick is to not keep making the same one over and over.

SCENE NINE

ALL: I'm looking for...

CURTIS: Someone who's maybe also seen shit they wished they hadn't.
Someone kind.

ELLIE: Someone who gets that when I'm shouting, giving it attitude, it's
cos even though I'm the hardest bitch you'll ever meet and you don't
want to mess with me ever, I might also just be a little bit lonely. And
scared. Really fucking scared

CURTIS: Someone who's maybe also seen shit they wished they hadn't.
Someone kind.

MAISIE: Someone who gets that my ambition is to be invisible. Someone
who doesn't ask too many questions.

JOEL: Someone who needs protecting. Someone who knows that if she's
in danger, I'll stab whoever's trying to kill her, someone who knows I
could stab her if I felt like it.

THE END.

EXPLODED VIEW

by Tristan Jackson-Pate

A man approaches a woman at a party. A woman searches for her boyfriend, and two actors rehearse an intimate scene. Unwanted attention, consent and communication are explored through an explosion of scenes.

Content Warning: contains strong language, scenes of physical harassment and depictions of misogynistic behaviour.

CHARACTERS

M: Male

M2: Male

F: Female

F2: Female

D: Director, female.

Ideally M and F should be played by the same actors throughout.

SETTING

Various house parties, a train carriage, and a rehearsal room in the UK.
Present day.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

A double space between lines indicates short pause or beat.

/ indicates an interruption.

- indicates a thought stopped in its tracks.

... indicates a thought trailing off.

Two speeches on the same line indicates the two characters speak at once.

This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ from the play as performed.

SCENE ONE

A house party. Music playing in the background. M approaches F.

M: You alright?

F: Yeah, thanks. I'm just waiting for/ someone-

M: Here I am.

F: Um. What?

M: You know. You're waiting for someone... here I am.

M leans in, touching F's arm.

M: Hi.

F: Hi.

M: Those your friends over there?

F: *(Moving away from M)* Yeah.

M: *(Nodding to a group of people off stage)* Alright?

M: Who you waiting for then?

F: My friend.

M: Oh yeah?

F: Yeah.

M: Cool.

They both look around the room.

M: How do you know Charlie?

F: I don't really/ I'm just-

M: You a gate crasher then?

F: Not really. Like a friend of a friend.

M: What's your name?

F: Look, I'm just/ waiting for-

M: I only asked your name.

F: I'm just waiting/ for-

M: Your friend. You said. Message received.

My name's Tom, by the way.

F: Oh right.

M: Wasn't so hard, was it?

F: I'm just going/ to-

M: It's actually pretty rude, don't you think? To shut someone down.

F: Look, I don't really-

M: I was only trying to be nice.

F: Right.

M: Make conversation.

F: Fine.

They stand there awkwardly.

M is annoyed. He shakes his head.

M: Be like that then.

M walks away.

SCENE TWO

A house party again, different music playing. M approaches F, all suave smiles.

M: Hi, sorry to bother you, I know this is a bit forward- can I just get your advice on something please?

F: I'm actually just waiting for my-

M: It will only take a minute. I'd really appreciate it.

F: Um. Ok.

M leans in, touching F's arm

M: Thanks so much.

F: *(Moving away from M)* What is it?

M: So, my friend Matty's out in Monaco with work at the moment, but his anniversary's coming up.

F: Right.

M: And his fiancée is flying out on Saturday, but the anniversary's Friday and he hasn't got her a present. So, he's asked me if I can get her something and drop it round, tomorrow. Fucking peak.

F: Ok.

M: It's got to be something really tasteful you know, something classy. She's 22, petite, dark hair... like you, really. What do you think?

F: *(Laughs)* Are you serious?

M: What?

F: I mean, I've heard some lines before, but/ that's really-

M: What are you talking about?

F: Do you expect me to buy that shit?

M: Ok. Alright. Let's roll back a second.

F: No, you're alright.

M: Who are you anyway? Do you even know Charlie?

F: Nope.

M: What's your name?

F: What's yours?

M: You're a gate crasher.

F: If you say so.

M: What's your name?

F: I don't have to tell you/ my-

M: I can have you chucked out of here like that.

F: Go on then.

M: My name's Jack, by the way.

F: Is it.

M: Wasn't so hard, was it?

F shrugs.

M: Do you know what, if someone takes the time to come over and introduce themselves *politely*, it's actually pretty rude to/ lash out at-

F: I don't care what you think.

M: I've been watching you. Strutting around. If you don't want attention, why are you dressed like that?

F: Are those your mates over there?

M: You're a slut.

F: *(To a group of people off stage)* Does one of you want to call a Taxi? He's done.

M: *(Turning to his mates, smiling)* It's alright. I've got this, honestly. It's all good.

F: Have you?

M gets in F's face.

M: I am going to have you thrown out of here so fast/ you won't-

F: *(Pushing M away)* Fuck. Off.

F walks away, full of adrenaline.

M seethes for a moment. Then he looks to his friends, smirks and straightens his clothes.

M spots someone else, offstage.

M: Hi, sorry to bother you, I know this is a bit forward- can I just get your advice on something please?

SCENE THREE

A house party again, music playing: 'S&M' by Rhianna. F is drunk and dancing alone, like no one is watching, her drink held aloft.

After a time, M, also drunk walks up behind F, holding a bottle of lager.

M grinds up against F. She springs away from him. They both shout over the music.

M: Alright? You want a drink?

F: No.

M: Only asking. You waiting for someone?

F: Yeah.

M: Here I am.

F moves away from M, takes out her phone.

M: *(Referencing the lyrics)* Chains and whips. You like that do you?

F: No.

M: You sure?

M imitates F's dancing. F doesn't react.

M touches F's arm.

M: Those your mates over there?

F: *(Pulling away)* Yeah.

M: *(To the group of friends, wagging the beer bottle around in front of his crotch)* Alright?

F calls a number. M turns and sees this.

M: Who you calling, your boyfriend?

F: Yeah.

M: S'alright, I like a challenge. I'm Connor, by the way.

F turns away, on her phone.

M: I'm talking to you.

M advances on F again.

M: You know it's pretty fucking rude to-

F 'accidentally' spills her drink over M. M leaps back in shock.

M: What d'you do that for?

F2 walks over to F.

F2: There you are! We need to go, alright?

They leave quickly. M looks down at his clothes.

M: Fucks sake. *(Shouting off)* You're clapped anyway.

SCENE FOUR

A house party again. Loud music playing. This time we can't hear the characters speak at all.

F and F2 are talking excitedly, hyping each other up.

M stands alone.

F and F2 approach M.

F speaks to him, touches his arm.

Then they suddenly kiss him on both cheeks, simultaneously.

M is shocked and embarrassed. He laughs awkwardly.

F and F2 return to their friends, laughing.

M watches them go, then looks over to a group of people off stage.

He tries to laugh along with them, then gives them the finger.

SCENE FIVE

A house party again, different music playing in the background.

F approaches M.

F: There you are.

M: Alright.

F: What you doing here?

M: What does it look like?

F: You ignoring me?

M: What? No.

F: Only found you from Snapmaps.

M: That's a bit...

F: What? You said you were gonna meet me from work. 10, you said. I had to walk all the way up here from town.

M: Alright, sorry.

F: Can't you check your messages?

M: Yeah.

F: It's actually pretty rude, don't you think/ to just-

M: *(Mumbles)*

F: What?

M: Why've you got to be so overprotective?

F just stares at M.

F: Fuck you.

M: Look, it's not... just listen, yeah- I'm not being funny, but does Charlie know you're/ here because-

F: Whatever.

F walks off. M follows.

M: Just wait a second-

SCENE SIX

We're in a rehearsal room. Actors M and F are working with a Director, D.

D: Ok, so we're going to just talk through the action, just the physical action of the scene, as written, moment by moment, and let's stop if there's anything you're unclear about, or anything you want to question, is that ok?

M: Yeah, sure.

F: Absolutely.

D: So, we're looking for a staging which makes sense for your characters but really, it's more important to me that everyone feels safe and is comfortable with what they're being asked to do. Is that ok?

F: Yes.

M: That's great, thanks.

D: Ok, Greg, are you happy to begin?

M: Sure. So, I walk up to Nina, and she's stood over by... the stairs is it, or is it a door?

F: I saw it like she's near the front door maybe, like she's ready to leave, when her boyfriend comes back. If there is a boyfriend that is...

D: Well, yes exactly.

M: Yes. And I say 'You alright?'

F: Yeah, and I say 'Fine thanks, I'm just waiting for someone.'

M: And I say 'Here I am.'

F: *(Cringing)* Ugh, that's so...

D: Yes, isn't it?

F: No, I mean, I believe it.

D: Oh of course.

M: It's great writing.

F: Yes, exactly. And then he...

M: Yeah, so it says at that point he touches her arm, which to me, feels like something quite deliberate.

D: Yes.

M: He doesn't accidentally brush past her arm-

F: No, but do you feel it's a stroke, or a hold or...?

D: What do you feel, Nina?

F: I don't know... do you know what- I find it a bit easier to sort of walk it through with this kind of thing, if you're ok with that?

M: Sure.

D: That's alright?

M: Sure.

M and F stand facing each other.

M: (*Indicating with his own arm*) Do we think he would put his hand on her arm, sort of here?

D: Perhaps.

F: I don't know. Would you mind if we just tried that? Just, with the line and see how it feels?

M: I'm ok with that.

D: Of course. Thank you.

M and F stand close together.

F smirks.

F: Sorry.

M: It's ok.

D: Are you alright, Nina?

F: Yes fine. It's funny that this is our job.

M laughs.

D: Yes, I know. But look, we're early in the process, we're all still getting to know each other, and this work, well, it does demand a certain vulnerability from you, as actors.

M: Of course.

D: So, it's absolutely fine for us to discover these moments at our own pace.

F: Of course.

M: Absolutely.

F: So, shall we give it a try with the line then?

M: Sure.

D: Thank you. Ok, so what we'll try, is when Greg says 'Here I am', he's going to place his right hand on your left arm Nina, and it's up to you how long you think it should be there.

F: Right.

D: Do you have a sense of how long that might be?

F: Um.. maybe three seconds?

D: Ok. So, we'll do a little exercise with this. Without any contact at first. When Greg says 'Here I am', what I'd like you to do is to hold eye contact and just count in your heads, one elephant, two elephants, three elephants- it's roughly a second if you add the word elephant each time. Shall we try that?

F: Yes

M: Sure. Ok. Could you just give me the line going into it Nina, is that ok?

F: Yes, of course.

M and F prepare.

F: 'Fine thanks, I'm just waiting for someone.'

M: 'Here I am'

They hold eye contact as they count for three seconds.

D: How did that feel?

F: Alright. M: Long.

F: But maybe that works?

M: Can we try two?

D: Of course.

F: Ok.

M: Let's.

F: 'Fine thanks, I'm just waiting for someone.'

M: 'Here I am'

They hold eye contact as they count for two seconds.

D: Thoughts?

F: That felt.. yes, I think so.

M: Yes.

D: Alright. How do we all feel about trying it with contact now?

F: Fine with me.

M: Yes, no problem.

D: Alright, thank you. So, when Greg says 'Here I am', he's going to place his right hand on your left shoulder Nina, and your both going to count for two elephants and we'll see how that moment feels. Ok.

They stand for a moment, preparing to run the action.

F: 'Fine thanks, I'm waiting for someone.'

M: 'Here I am'

M touches F's arm. F breaks away after two seconds.

F: Yeah. I think that's it.

D: How did it feel, Nina?

F: It felt... It's silly really. It's just a touch on the arm, but actually... in those moments, when something... happens, you know without your consent, I think sometimes it does take you a moment, you know, just to... absorb it. There's a sort of shock.

D: Yes.

F: You know?

D: Mm.

F: It feels like she just freezes.

D: Yes.

M: It's actually pretty rude.

F nods.

D: Thank you both. Shall we take a break?

SCENE SEVEN

A packed train. M and F are pressed together standing in a busy carriage. They are both wearing headphones. M2 is nearby, reading a book, F is looking at her phone.

M looks around the carriage.

M brushes his arm across F's.

F registers this, briefly looks up.

M adjusts his headphones.

F returns to her phone.

*M stands behind F. He is pressed more closely into her.
F looks uncomfortable, rubs her neck.*

F focusses on her phone again.

M slides a hand down F's thigh.

F looks around the carriage for help.

M2 looks up. They lock eyes.

The train starts to slow.

M2: I think this is our stop, isn't it?

F: Um, yeah.

The train arrives at a station.

M2: After you.

F: Yeah.

F and M2 leave quickly.

SCENE EIGHT

Another house party. Music playing in the background. M approaches F.

M: I'd like to get to know you. If you're ok with that? I'd like to talk a bit and see if we get on and then if we do, then great- maybe we'll go out a few times and if that goes well then maybe... I mean, no pressure or anything! I know you don't know me, and you've got no reason to talk to me, but...I'm not a twat or anything! Honestly, I... and I'm not that drunk. Just drunk enough to give this a go. So um....

F: Sorry, I have no idea who you are? I mean, I know your mates with Charlie, but... you might be alright, ok, but to be honest I'm just waiting for my friend to come out of the toilets so we can go, so... I didn't really want to come here in the first place. But what's the alternative, stay home and watch it all on everyone's stories? Honestly? I just came here to dance, but the music's shit and two of my mates have gone off with guys and I just want to go, but I can't leave Jess on her own... why aren't there places you can go where you can just have a drink and dance without your friends ditching you, or some guy giving/ you hassle-?

M: Ok, so you're looking a bit nervous, and I don't want you to think I'm just like one of those dickheads, cos I'm not, I'm genuinely not. So, just to reassure you... I am alright, actually? Like I have a sister. Not that that's... but I grew up in a house with women is what I'm saying so I don't... this is going badly. Why do I always get so stuck in my head? Keep it simple, eye contact/ smile.

F: Look. I didn't come here to meet anyone, ok? And even if I did, it's nice to be introduced, you know? Maybe by a friend who thinks we might get on, not cornered by some intense guy who just... stares at you... which is a bit like what you're doing now?

M: (To himself) Come on, say something! Don't be so serious, have fun- just ask for her number, then you're done, you can walk away. Look, I was just wondering...

M leans in, touching F's arm.

F: Why did you do that? M: Why did I do that?

M lets go of F's arm. She moves away.

M: No, no no, that was wrong and awkward and now you're backing away, shit. Wait, wait, wait- this isn't me! I'm a good person. Ok? I have friends who are girls. Some. And it's not complicated, it's not...

M looks over to a group of people.

M: Oh God, are those your mates?

F: *(To her group of friends)* Why are you all just staring? You're trying to suss out whether this is a thing or not. And it's not. It's not a thing, I didn't ask for this. And what happens if one of them is into you, or one of your mates gets jealous and suddenly I'm in the middle of something I didn't want to be a part of in the first place. Or if I walk away, then what? That's some kind of 'diss to the popular boys' and I'm called frigid or- God, Jess, will you just hurry up?

M: Who you waiting for?

F: My boyfriend.

M: Oh. Cool.

They both look around the room.

F: Look, I don't know what you want me to say? I don't want to argue with you. I mean touching me like that was... but you probably didn't mean it like that, I'm not trying to be... I'm not a prude/ it's just-

M: Of course you have a boyfriend, you're beautiful. Unless you don't and you're just saying that to get rid of me. That's worse!

F: God this is a minefield. M: God this is a minefield.

M looks over at his mates.

M: Two secs, yeah! *(To F)* Look, I'm sorry, I can't walk away now. Quitting is not an option... please! They'll never let me forget this. Either I get your number or-or- we both do the walk of shame and... look, I'm not like this! I just want to get to know you, to... Look, what's your name?

F: I'm not-

M: I only asked your name.

F: I'm just waiting/ for-

M: Your boyfriend, yeah, you said.

M: Look, do you have any idea of the pressure?!

F: M: Look, do you have any idea of the pressure?!

M: It's not like... no one talks about it. It's not like your mates sit you down and go come on, you got to get with someone tonight... but you still feel it... this pressure to... and it's constant. You've got to work on yourself, you know? Constantly. You've got to look good. Get fit. Dress right. Smell good. I mean, I don't have a problem with that one, obviously. But it's... self-improvement, right? Else who's going to want you, at the end of the day? Fuck it. You've got to stand your ground, that's it, or no one's going to respect you. My name's Will, by the way.

F: Oh right.

M: Wasn't so hard, was it?

F: Look. This has gone too far, ok? Please, you have to go.

M: Look it's actually pretty rude to just... Why can't you understand? I know there are wankers out there, but I'm not one, alright? I'm not!

F puts her hand on M's arm, as if to stop him.

A moment.

They take a breath.

M: Sorry. That was horrible. I didn't mean that. That's not me.

F nods.

F: Ok.

F2 enters.

F: Hey, Jess.

F2 looks at M and back to F.

F2: You alright?

F: Yeah.

F2: Ready to go?

A moment.

F: Yeah.

F and F2 leave.

M is left, ashamed.

SCENE NINE

Another house party. A slow, romantic song plays loudly. We can't hear the characters speak at all.

M stands alone.

F approaches M.

They talk. It's clear that they have an established relationship.

F leans in, touching M's arm and speaks softly to him.

M moves away from F.

M looks to a group of people off stage: F's friends.

F takes M's hand.

They talk, their foreheads touching.

F leaves, reluctantly.

M stands, heartbroken.

SCENE TEN

A final house party. Music playing in the background.

M approaches F. They are both clearly nervous.

M: You alright?

F: Fine thanks.

M: Sorry?

F: *(Louder)* Fine thanks.

M: Oh. Cool.

An awkward pause.

F: I'm just... waiting for someone.

M: That's ok. Sorry, I don't normally do this kind of thing, just... Charlie said I should say hi.

F: Did he?

M: Yeah. I'm Lewis. I saw your T-Shirt and... well, I'm really into Billy Joel, so/ he said you-

F: Really?

M: Yeah. I know that's not exactly a reason to talk to me but...

M shrugs.

F: What's your favourite album?

M: Um... well, it's not really the coolest choice, but I've always been really into 'River of Dreams'? My Dad used to play it a lot when we were growing up and I guess it kind of... stuck... but you know, 'The Stranger'. I mean that's pretty great.

F: Do you want to get a drink?

M: I'd like that.

They look at each other. It gets a bit awkward.

F: Like, now?

M: Right, course! Course.

F: I'm Kiera, by the way.

M: Marcus.

They look at each other again.

F: Wasn't so hard, was it?

They smile at each other.

The music gets louder as they exit.

THE END.

RUMOUR

By Lynsey Cullen

What happens when an innocent act sparks a vicious sexual rumour? RUMOUR explores the power of words and the impact of rumours on their victims.

Content Warning: contains strong language and themes of bullying and sexual violence, with reference to paedophilia and sexual perversion.

CHARACTERS

KATE
TOM / TEACHER
SIMON
SARAH
OLIVIA

Characters listed are in-person roles only. All are students aged 15 years except the Teacher, who is 30.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Scene titles, where applicable are presented in capitals with bold text. All SNAPCHAT messages/photos conversations should be projected above the stage.

In scenes which are entirely SNAPCHAT conversations: Photographs are described in [brackets], with corresponding text after.

In scenes where SNAPCHAT conversations appear alongside actors on stage, conversations have been described in [brackets: "With corresponding text in quotation marks"], to differentiate between written and spoken text.

This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ from the play as performed.

SCENE ONE

SNAPCHAT CONVERSATION 1: MATTY P to SIMON.

MATTY P: *[Photo: A sweaty Liverpool FC shirt on a changing-room bench]*
Alfies!

[NOTIFICATION THAT A SCREENSHOT HAS BEEN TAKEN]

SIMON: *[Photo: Corner of a computer console]* Shhhit! How much \$\$\$?!

MATTY P: *[Photo: Blurred locker]* Like 100.

SIMON: *[Photo: Carpet]* Need one.

MATTY P: *[Photo: Blurred football/gym bag]* Need \$\$\$!!

SIMON: *[Photo: Corner of a packet of crisps, with streaming laughter emoji]*

SCENE TWO

School lunchroom. SIMON, TOM, and KATE chat as they enter and take their seats. They continue to chat as they eat.

SIMON: Cost like 100 quid.

TOM: Shit.

KATE: What does?

TOM: Alfie's new shirt.

KATE: Who pays that for a stupid football top?!

TOM: I would if I had the money.

SIMON: Yeah, it's well nice...

Simon gets out his phone and shows Kate the screenshot from SNAPCHAT 1.

Check it out...

KATE: EEWWW, SIMON! As if I wanna see some guy's sweaty shirt!

SIMON and TOM laugh.

Did you take that?!

SIMON: No. Matty P sent it me.

KATE: Urrrrmmm... Why?

TOM: Cuz it's a well nice shirt.

KATE: OH MY GOD!

SIMON: What?

KATE: That is so weird.

SIMON: What is?!

KATE: Why would he take a picture of Alfie's sweaty top?!

SIMON: Cuz we want the same kit.

KATE: So?! Google it! Don't take some weird photo of your mates sweat.

TOM: Yeah, I guess that is a bit weird.

KATE: Thank you, Tom.

SIMON: I suppose...

KATE: Send it me.

SIMON: Why?!

KATE: Just send it!

SIMON: Alright, calm down.

[SIMON sends the photo to KATE via SNAPCHAT. She opens it.]

KATE: Matty P is so weird.

[NOTIFICATION THAT A SCREENSHOT HAS BEEN TAKEN.]

TOM: Remember when he said that really weird thing in French class, in like, year 8?

SIMON: Oh, yeah...

KATE: I can't remember what he said, I just remember thinking what a weirdo he was.

SIMON: Wasn't it something about going shopping with his mum?!

KATE: OH MY GOD, YES!

TOM: Probably took photos of guys sweat patches then, too!

KATE: Urrrrh!

SARAH enters and walks towards the group.

That is so sick.

SARAH: What is?!

SARAH sits.

TOM: Matt Peterson.

KATE: He's into other guys sweat.

SARAH: What?!

KATE: He takes pictures of guys sweaty tops.

SARAH: Really?!

KATE: Look...

KATE shows SARAH the photo.

SARAH: Ewww! Yuck!

KATE: He's always been so weird.

TOM: He's a smelly sweat perv!

KATE: Oh my God, that is too funny.

SARAH: I'm telling Ruby.

SARAH gets out her phone.

KATE: Wait, you need the pic.

SIMON: Hold on...

[KATE sends SARAH the photo via SNAPCHAT.]

KATE: What?! It's funny!

SARAH: So weird.

[NOTIFICATION THAT A SCREENSHOT HAS BEEN TAKEN.]

TOM: It is pretty funny, mate.

KATE: So funny.

[SARAH sends RUBY the photo via SNAPCHAT: "MATTY P TAKES SWEATY PERV PICS!"]

SARAH: Sent!

TOM: Hilarious.

SIMON looks uncomfortable.

KATE: Oh, come on. We're just having a laugh.

TOM: Exactly.

[NOTIFICATION THAT A SCREENSHOT HAS BEEN TAKEN.]

KATE: It's his own fault... He shouldn't be such a weirdo.

SCENE THREE

Personal Development Classroom. SARAH and OLIVIA sit facing the TEACHER.

TEACHER: Right. Five minutes in your pairs then I want to hear your thoughts on this chapter.

SARAH and OLIVIA shuffle closer together.

SARAH: Have you heard about Matty P?

OLIVIA: Yeah, Tom sent me the photo the other day.

SARAH: The whole school must have it by now!

OLIVIA: Jake and that lot were calling him Pervy Peterson in maths.

SARAH: Oh my God, soooo good!

OLIVIA: By the end of class everyone was sayin' it.

SARAH: Hilarious.

OLIVIA: Is he just into sweat?

SARAH: Who knows?! That could just be part of it.

OLIVIA: How many do you think he's taken?!

SARAH: He could have photos of half the guys in the year by now.

OLIVIA: That's messed up.

SARAH: He's a full on perv.

OLIVIA: Wait... Didn't you ask him out?!

SARAH: OLIVIA! That was like a million years ago! We were in, like, year 7.

OLIVIA: Did he say no?

SARAH rolls her eyes - that's a yes.

Well now we know why.

SARAH: Shit. I hadn't even thought of that.

OLIVIA: Imagine if he'd said yes.

SARAH: Ewww!

OLIVIA: He would have made you wear guys shirts!

SARAH shudders.

Got you all sweaty...

SARAH: Yuck! Don't!

OLIVIA: You would have been going out with Pervy Peterson!

SARAH: Gross!

OLIVIA: Mrs Pervy Peterson!

SARAH: STOP!

TEACHER: Something to share, Sarah?

SARAH: No, Sir.

The TEACHER moves on.

OLIVIA: Pervy Peterson's so sick.

SARAH: Right?!

OLIVIA sneaks her phone out of her pocket.

SARAH: What you doing?!

OLIVIA: Telling Charlie and Sam and that lot.

SARAH: Love it.

[OLIVIA sends a message in a group SNAPCHAT CHAT: "Pervy Peterson"]

OLIVIA: That name is so sticking.

OLIVIA and SARAH snigger.

TEACHER: Something funny, over there?

They can't contain their sniggers.

BOTH: No, Sir.

TEACHER: Right, that's enough. You two can be the first to share. Up to the front...

SCENE FOUR

SNAPCHAT GROUP CONVERSATION 2: Olivia to multiple students.

OLIVIA: Pervy Peterson

CHARLIE: *[Dying/skull emoji]*

EM: I'm dead!

ELLA: Pervy Peterson! *[Steaming tears emoji]*

CHARLIE: Proper weirdo.

ELLA: Max says he got 100s photos.

DAN: Of who?

ELLA: Guys in year.

EM: No way.

SAM: Proper stalker.

CHARLIE: That's why he's skiving P.E.

DAN: He knows we know.

CHARLIE: @Ella. Doesn't he coach under 8s?

EM: Shit. Ur bros team?

ELLA: *[Shocked emoji]*

SAM: Sick.

CHARLIE: Perv.

EM: Tell ur mum.

DAN: Messed up.

OLIVIA: Shiitt!!

SAM: Paedo Peterson! *[Child emoji]*

CHARLIE: *[Dying/skull emoji]*

EM: *[Laughing emoji]*

OLIVIA: *[Dying/skull emoji and child emoji]*

ELLA: *[Laughing emoji]*

DAN: *[Laughing emoji]*

SAM: *[Laughing emoji]*

SCENE FIVE

Sports hall. P.E lesson. KATE and TOM play badminton.

KATE: Oh my God! So it's definitely true?

TOM: Well they've stopped him being assistant coach.

KATE: Then it's gotta be true.

TOM: Naaaa...

KATE: TOM! We totally uncovered a paedo.

TOM: Matty P ain't a paedo.

KATE: Well, why else would they stop him coaching if it isn't true?

TOM: I dunno. I know he's a bit weird, but he ain't an *actual* paedo.

KATE: You don't know that.

TOM: Me and Si used to hang out with him.

KATE: I wouldn't tell people that.

TOM: Oh, come on, Kate.

KATE: Look, It doesn't matter who hung out with him. The point is he's been off school for

Like two weeks and he isn't allowed to help coach the kids team anymore.

TOM: Yeah... I guess.

KATE: Says it all.

TOM: I dunno...

KATE: And stop telling people you were his mate. You don't want people thinking you're into all that sick pervy stuff as well

TOM: Of course I'm not!

KATE: Then stop saying it.

TOM: Yeah, yeah, alright.

Beat. They continue to play.

KATE: You keeping score?!

TOM: No! I thought you were?!

They snigger.

KATE: Just pretend so Miss C don't come over!

TOM: Yeah, alright...

They continue to play.

SCENE SIX

SNAPCHAT GROUP CONVERSATION 3: Multiple students.

The messages appear/disappear slowly to start (represented by the sound of a 'ding'), then get quicker and quicker.

CHRIS: *[Photo: Ceiling]* Paedo.

WILL: *[Photo: Side of sofa]* Sick.

BECS: *[Photo: Kitchen counter]* Bye bye!

LILY: *[Photo: Floor and Dying/skull emoji]*

The photos appear/disappear faster.

JACK: *[Photo: Carpet]* Perv.

JESS: *[Photo: TV screen]* Freak.

SAM: *[Photo: Stairs]* Sicko.

The photos appear/disappear even faster.

FRANKIE: *[Photo: Plate of food and laughing emoji]*

EM: *[Photo: Pavement with laughing emoji]*

ROWAN: *[Photo: Can of Coke with dying/laughing emoji]*

CHRIS: *[Photo: Side of bed with laughing emoji]*

The images appear and disappear so quickly that the notification 'dings' become merged into one endless noise.

Cut to black.

SCENE SEVEN

School lunchroom. SIMON, SARAH, TOM, and KATE chat as they eat...

TOM: You guys heard the latest?

SIMON: About what?

TOM: He's moved schools. Somewhere like an hour away.

SARAH: Well that's hardly news. He's missed half the term.

SIMON: Can we not talk about it.

KATE: What's got you?

SIMON: I just don't want to hear about him anymore... It's boring.

TOM: No its not!

KATE: We were so right.

TOM: The whole thing's unreal.

KATE: We figured him out. Us.

SARAH: You're like a proper detective, Kate.

KATE: Thank you, Sarah.

SIMON: What the fuck are you on about?!

TOM: Alright, mate?

SARAH: Calm down, Si.

SIMON: We didn't figure anything out!

KATE: Urrrr, yes we did.

SIMON: No we didn't.

TOM: Mate, he's a total perv. People say he's an actual paedo.

SIMON: You don't actually believe that, Tom?!

KATE: Piss off!

TOM: Yeah, hang on mate.

KATE: He moved schools, Simon. Why would he do that if none of its true?

SARAH: Yeah, it's so extreme.

TOM: He's ashamed.

KATE: Exactly. Because we figured him out.

SIMON: He literally just took a picture of a footy shirt and sent it to me.

KATE: Yeah. And look what it uncovered.

SIMON: It didn't uncover anything! Just got worse and worse as it spread.

TOM: So why didn't he just deny it? Why run?

KATE: Exactly. I'd just tell people to shut the fuck up if they said shit like that about me.

SIMON: He did! He kept denying it... but no one believed him.

SARAH: Yeah. Because they'd all heard what a weirdo he was.

SIMON: Because of some stupid rumour we started.

KATE: We were just taking the piss. Whatever came out after isn't on us.

SIMON: Nothing came out! He took a photo of the new strip, now everyone's calling him a paedo.

TOM: They wouldn't stop him coaching the kids team if it wasn't true.

SIMON: Wouldn't they?! Maybe they just heard everyone calling him a pervy paedo and assumed the worst.

SARAH: I'm sorry, but I wouldn't move schools if I didn't have something to hide.

KATE: Exactly.

SIMON: Wouldn't you?! Not if everyone was calling you a paedo?

SARAH: I'M NOT A PAEDO!

SIMON: Says who?!

TOM: Alright, just stop it, yeah?!

Beat.

Let's just chill.

They all stop and take a breath.

SIMON: I'm just saying...

Beat.

What if none of it's true?

KATE: It's true.

TOM: Definitely.

SARAH: For sure.

SIMON: OK...

Beat.

But what if it isn't?

(SARAH, TOM, and KATE seem unsure.)

SARAH: It has to be... Right?

TOM: Yeah. It has to be.

KATE: Yeah.

Beat.

SIMON: But what if it isn't?

Everyone sits in silence.

What if some stupid rumours ruined his life?

Beat.

It was just a nice shirt.

THE END.

HAPPY LOVELY AWESOME

by Karen Featherstone

When Georgia meets Rachael, an old friend who works in a restaurant, Georgia's date with gaslighting boyfriend Ben turns from bad to better in the time it takes to microwave a macaroni and cheese.

Content Warning: contains strong language and themes of coercive control.

CHARACTERS

GEORGIA: 19

BEN: 20

RACHAEL: 20

SETTING

A restaurant. Evening.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

A word followed immediately by a dash e.g - indicates an interruption. An ellipsis, e.g....indicates a pause.

Beat indicates a longer pause.

Italics are used within dialogue to indicate emphasis.

This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ from the play as performed.

SCENE ONE

GEORGIA is sitting alone at a table for two. She is uneasy and drums her fingers.

BEN approaches from the WC offstage still zipping up his fly and shaking dry his hands. At the sight of Georgia's restlessness, he halts.

BEN: What you doing?

Georgia looks guilty, stops drumming. BEN sits on the chair opposite her.

We stopped you biting your nails, didn't we? That's the next thing we can work on. Why do you do it?

GEORGIA: Don't know.

BEN picks up a menu. Peruses.

BEN: (Not looking at her) You're not finding something else to be stressed about, are you?

GEORGIA: I don't want to do it. I tell my body not to be stressed, but... it just comes out through my hands.

GEORGIA sits on her hands.

BEN: Well, quit it for tonight, ok? Tonight, we're enjoying ourselves.

RACHAEL comes to take their order. She holds a notepad and pen.

RACHAEL: Shut the front door. Well! If it isn't...you two! (To GEORGIA) George... It's Georgia, isn't it? And (to BEN uncertainly) it's...you!

RACHAEL clearly doesn't recognise BEN.

RACHAEL: (To both) We went to the same sixth form?

GEORGIA: (To RACHAEL, really pleased) No. You used to get my bus! We'd sit together. You'd get off first to go to your college, and I used to stay on...

RACHAEL: That's right. You went to the other college, for the-

GEORGIA: For SEND kids. I used to miss you when you got off. You were good to talk to. (Shy) What you doing working here?

BEN: (To GEORGIA, deprecating) Well... she's, uh, working here. (Fake amiable, to RACHAEL) quite obviously.

RACHAEL: (To BEN) Ah. I remember you now. You were in my form. You tried to win 'The Voice' at the Year 13 fundraiser and when you found out you hadn't, you had this-

BEN: I don't remember that.

RACHAEL: Massive meltdown and-

BEN: You've got the wrong person.

RACHAEL: You haven't changed.

BEN: (Runs his hand through his hair conceitedly) Thanks.

RACHAEL chooses politeness. She looks from BEN to GEORGIA, trying to work them out.

RACHAEL: You two. Are not...are you?

GEORGIA nods happily.

BEN: We are. We are hungry. That's what we are.

RACHAEL: 'Course.

RACHAEL hovers her ballpoint over her notepad.

Drinks?

BEN: Not excessively, but it's best she doesn't. It doesn't take much.

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* Are you thirsty?

GEORGIA: Orange juice please.

BEN: Whatever my lovely companion is having. But, uh, slip a finger of vodka in there for me, will you? We're enjoying ourselves tonight.

RACHAEL: One of you is! Haha. Haha. *(Falls flat)*. Just to let you know, the salmon's off.

GEORGIA: Then why don't you throw it away?

RACHAEL: No, I mean it's off the menu. Sold out.

GEORGIA: Oh.

BEN: *(To RACHAEL)* Sorry about her. She's a bit...

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* It's coming back to me now. Georgia. You were a very ... truthful person. You were always brilliant to talk to. So interesting.

GEORGIA: *(Pleased/embarrassed)* Do I have to have a starter... to start? Or can I have it with the main. At the same time.

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* See, you are just like me. Straightforward. Starter, finisher. Whatever and whenever you want. End of the day, it's olives on a bed of... on a bed of... *(checks menu, gives up)* It's only olives!

BEN: She hasn't been to a lot of restaurants.

RACHAEL: You're showing her the ropes.

BEN: Yeah. How to... restaurant.

BEN smiles, twinkles at RACHAEL. She's having none of it.

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* Blimey. Stakes are high tonight! Steak's also off, by the way.

BEN: *(Looking again at menu)* She'll have...

RACHAEL: Sure she can order for herself.

BEN: Quicker if I say it. I know what she likes. Lasagne. Two lasagnes please.

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* You'd like lasagne?

GEORGIA: *(Worried about BEN'S response)* I like macaroni and cheese.

BEN: Not proper restaurant food though, is it? Unless someone's been reading from the kids' menu.

GEORGIA: It's just food.

BEN: Kids' food, yeah.

RACHAEL: So...

GEORGIA: Two lasagnes.

RACHAEL: Sure?

GEORGIA: Yeah.

Unconvinced, RACHAEL leaves.

After a pause, GEORGIA drums her fingers again. In irritation, BEN clamps his hand over hers to still it.

GEORGIA pulls her hand away and calls to RACHAEL.

GEORGIA: Mac and cheese. I'll have macaroni and cheese, please.

RACHAEL nods, retreats again.

A tense mood. BEN acts upbeat.

BEN Nice this, innit?

GEORGIA is subdued.

You enjoying this? Me taking you out. Proper sit-down meal.

GEORGIA: You're not taking me out. We've gone out together.

BEN: Touchy! Means the same thing.

Beat.

I'm only saying, you've got me thank for this place. Who told you about it?

GEORGIA: You.

BEN: Me. So without me, you wouldn't be here.

GEORGIA: Ok, but it's we. We wouldn't be here. You don't 'we' very often lately.

BEN performs a big sigh.

BEN: What's the problem? What have I done now? Did I look at you funny, did I forget your Nan's birthday and, (wags finger at her) I didn't, did I... I mean, I don't know, what terrible crime have I committed this time?

Beat.

You always do this...

GEORGIA: Do what?

BEN: Ruin the mood. I'm trynna have a nice time. It's not fair you making me feel like this. You never used to be such a, such a -

GEORGIA: Sorry.

BEN Ball ache.

GEORGIA urgently counts to herself, on her fingers. Runs out of them.
BEN offers his, kindly.

BEN: Here, use mine.

GEORGIA: (*Ignoring his offer*) Fourteen months.

BEN: Right? Something to celebrate. (*Softer now*) Didn't think I'd have a chance. With you. I had it in my head that girls don't like nice guys. (*Soppy*) You're not going off me, are you? You'd tell me, wouldn't you? Don't suddenly spring it on me. Because... I don't know what I'd do.

GEORGIA: I like nice guys.

BEN: Girls say that, but...do they? I'm not so sure. Fine. I'll act nice for the rest of the date. You watch.

He pours her some water.

GEORGIA: (*Direct*) Then, can I have my phone back.

BEN: We talked about this.

Georgia: You said I could have it back when I grew up. My birthday's June. It's taking ages.

BEN: This is what I mean about you. Who can't live without their phone for a day or two?

GEORGIA: I didn't think it would be like this.

BEN: Make sense for once, will you?

GEORGIA: Being in... being in a relationship. I thought it would be different.

BEN looks round self-consciously, concerned people are overhearing.

BEN: (*Low*) Go on then, show yourself up. What did you think it would be like?

GEORGIA: *(In a rush, joined together)* Happylovelyawesome.

BEN laughs.

BEN: See what I mean? I say this for your own good. Sometimes you're like a child.

This really hurts GEORGIA.

GEORGIA: Stop.

RACHAEL arrives back with identical-looking orange drinks. She puts them down. They each take a sip.

RACHAEL: Oh! Where is my mind.

RACHAEL switches the drinks. BEN is annoyed GEORGIA'S had alcohol.

RACHAEL: *(Enjoying BEN'S reaction, to GEORGIA)* You only live once, eh?

RACHAEL goes to leave when GEORGIA hears a notification on her phone. It's 'This Is Me' from The Greatest Showman.

GEORGIA: *(Pleading, to BEN)* It's for me! Can I have it?

Hearing this, RACHAEL returns to the table.

RACHAEL: *(To BEN)* You've got her phone? Why have you got her phone?

GEORGIA: *(To BEN)* Please.

RACHAEL: *(Disbelief)* Give her the phone, y'bastard.

GEORGIA reaches to get the phone out of BEN'S pocket. She manages, but BEN snatches it back. Finally, RACHAEL takes it. It stops ringing.

It's locked.

BEN: *(On the back foot, to RACHAEL)* Don't let her see it. She won't understand.

RACHAEL: *(To BEN)* What do you mean?

BEN: *(To RACHAEL)* I don't want you upsetting her.

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* What's he on about?

BEN: I can explain-

RACHAEL: *(Respectfully, to GEORGIA)* Do you want me to look at your phone for you?

GEORGIA: *(Panicked, looking between the two of them)* I... I don't know.

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* If you unlock it for me, I can look for you. But...I need your fingerprint. Yeah?

She holds it out to GEORGIA. GEORGIA is frozen with indecision and doesn't respond. She drums her fingers.

RACHAEL tries to time it right to place the thumbpad of the phone under GEORGIA'S index finger. After a couple of goes, she succeeds.

She seeks permission from GEORGIA.

OK?

GEORGIA nods. RACHAEL swipes through GEORGIA'S phone.

Woah, girl, you've got an awful lot of Whatsapps.

RACHAEL'S scrolling halts.

(To GEORGIA) I'm sorry. I'm sorry to have to do this...

RACHAEL shows GEORGIA the phone screen. GEORGIA takes it. She loses it at BEN.

GEORGIA: That was private! *(Dead serious whisper)* I can't believe you shared a private photo. It's gone round everyone. It was just for you and me to see!

BEN: *(To GEORGIA)* You're not embarrassed? Couples - adult couples - do this all the time. Sharing photos with someone you love, it's part a normal relationship.

GEORGIA buries her face away.

My other girlfriends never minded.

GEORGIA: Girlfriends.

BEN: *(Another sigh)* Don't be getting jealous. What have I said before? Don't go looking for reasons to be unhappy, because you will always find them.

RACHAEL looks on, wanting to intervene, but letting GEORGIA handle things herself.

I didn't say girlfriends. I said 'friends who are girls'.

Beat.

You're imagining things.

GEORGIA: You said girlfriends.

GEORGIA looks to RACHAEL for confirmation.

RACHAEL: *(To BEN)* Girlfriends. I heard it.

BEN: I didn't! Christ. It's like some mass delusion between the two of

you. Are you both on your periods on something.

BEN hides his face behind a menu. RACHAEL looks to the kitchen *(off)*. Raises a hand in acknowledgement.

RACHAEL: Food's ready.

She's reluctant to leave, but has to.

BEN: *(Loaded, to GEORGIA)* Happy? I'm the one should be embarrassed. Right scenes you're making.

GEORGIA squirms, upset.

RACHAEL comes back with food. She puts a mac and cheese down for GEORGIA and a marinara pizza for BEN.

What's this?

RACHAEL: Your marinara.

BEN: I didn't order pizza.

RACHAEL: Think you did.

BEN: *(As if RACHAEL is stupid)* I ordered lasagne.

RACHAEL: You ordered pizza.

BEN: *(To GEORGIA)* Didn't I? Tell her I ordered lasagne.

RACHAEL checks back through her pad.

RACHAEL: No, I've got here marinara pizza. And you specified no prawns.

BEN: *(To GEORGIA)* Tell her!

Before GEORGIA has a chance to speak, RACHAEL dives forward.

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* Did he though? Or did he order a marinara pizza? Is he imagining things. Could he... be looking for problems, he's sure to find?

BEN: *(To GEORGIA)* Tell her! What did I order?

RACHAEL'S face is egging GEORGIA on.

GEORGIA locks eyes with RACHAEL and finds her confidence.

GEORGIA: *(To BEN)* Pizza.

RACHAEL: *(To GEORGIA)* Thank you.

BEN: No.

GEORGIA: *(To BEN)* You did. I heard you.

BEN gets up, annoyed, from the table, fighting to get his arms into his coat.

BEN: This is bullshit... I know what you're doing. You know, some men – not me – but some men would call you two a couple of bitches. Plotting. Scheming. *(Pointedly, to GEORGIA)* Some men would call you a prick teaser. *(To both)* All your...games.

BEN hesitates, then reaches into a pocket and makes a point of planting cash on the table.

BEN: *(To GEORGIA)* I am not having you paying the bill. One day, Georgia, when you're with some using piece of shit... you'll realise how good you had it and what you lost. This is all your fault.

BEN leaves.

A deep breath.

RACHAEL sits where BEN sat.

RACHAEL: All right?

GEORGIA nods, shell shocked.

Oops I've dumped your boyfriend for you.

GEORGIA: I did that. You helped though.

RACHAEL: Least you got your phone back. Wanker. *(She picks at BEN'S pizza).* You know, I always liked you. On the bus.

GEORGIA: I liked you too.

RACHAEL: I really liked you. I wanted to hang out where you were. Hear you laugh. Your voice. Your thoughts. *(Gruff, shrugging)* Just... that sort of thing.

A moment. There is something there between them. GEORGIA looks at the money.

GEORGIA: He does...did... always insist on paying the bill.

RACHAEL: You don't need to feel like you owe him ever again.

Beat.

You going to be ok?

GEORGIA nods.

This was worth it, but I am so going to lose my job.

RACHAEL sits back, deflated, after all the drama. She starts drumming her fingers.

GEORGIA: I'll talk to your boss. I'll explain you helped me.

Happy Lovely Awesome by Karen Featherstone

GEORGIA reaches out, gently puts her hands on top of RACHAEL's to still them. Then takes her hands in hers.

Because you really did.

GEORGIA's notification sings out. She glances at her phone, and decisively kills the call from BEN.

GEORGIA and RACHAEL look into each other's eyes.

You and me, we're going to be fine.

THE END.

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