

(UN) EXPOSED

by

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CHARACTER LIST

CONNOR

A young adult in his late teens/early 20s diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder/Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder. He is very angry but contains his anger, coming across as quiet and unsociable.

BELLE

A teenage girl who is very sociable by nature but can also be hopeless. She tends to befriend those older than her. Diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa.

DAVID

A man in his late 20s who has befriended Belle. Diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder with secondary psychosis.

JESSICA

A chatty teenage girl, diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. She is positive about recovery and is the closest to being "recovered" than the rest of the group but that does mean that she can fall the hardest.

ETHAN

A man in his mid 20s, hospitalised due to severe suicidal ideation. He cannot seem to escape his downward spiral and does not feel hopeful about anything, particularly not recovery.

CAROLINE

A therapist in her 40s. She is naturally very caring, and

almost motherly towards her patients and holds them very dear to her.

SETTING

AN IN-PATIENT FACILITY IN A MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITAL. THE HOSPITAL IS LOCATED ON LARGE GROUNDS AND ARE SURROUNDED BY A LOT OF GRASS AND NOT MUCH ELSE. ALL OF THE ROOMS ARE SAFE GUARDED FROM THE PATIENTS SO THERE IS NOTHING AROUND THAT COULD POSSIBLY CAUSE ANY HARM TO BE BROUGHT TO ANY OF THE PATIENTS OR STAFF. PATIENTS AND STAFF CAN BOTH WEAR THEIR OWN CLOTHES BUT THESE ARE ALSO SAFE GUARDED, WITH NO SHOELACES OR JEWELLERY, ETC.

Scene 1

THE HOSPITAL GROUNDS.

CONNOR SITS ALONE, SR.

DAVID SITS ALONE SL, LOOKING
AROUND NERVOUSLY.

BELLE ENTERS AND SITS BY **DAVID**,
WHO IS IMMEDIATELY CALMED BY
HER PRESENCE.

DAVID I thought you were never comin'.

BELLE Sorry. They caught me trying to hide pasta up my
sleeve. They made me stay and have more to make up
for it.

DAVID Are you okay?

BELLE Just another day, isn't it?

DAVID Just another day.

BELLE KICKES HER LEGS OUT
AND TWO PIECES OF BREAD FALL
FROM EACH TROUSER LEG.

DAVID RAISES AN EYEBROW.

BELLE You saw nothing.

SHE HASTILY STASHES THE BREAD
AWAY IN A NEARBY BUSH AS **DAVID**

HOLDS HIS HANDS UP IN SURRENDER.
BELLE NOTICES **CONNOR** SITTING ALONE
AND GESTURES TOWARDS HIM.

BELLE Why doesn't he speak to anyone? Don't you think it's weird?

DAVID Lots of 'em don't speak when they first get here. I didn't.

BELLE I did.

DAVID Oh, we all know that you did. You wouldn't shut up!

BELLE I never forced you to listen!

DAVID We couldn't exactly help it. You were just chantin' numbers over and over.

BELLE Exactly, you're welcome.

DAVID Excuse me?

BELLE At least I provided something a little different. Added something a bit new and exciting to this place.

DAVID Ah yes, there's nothin' quite so fascinatin' than numbers that don't make sense. It was like livin' with a walkin', talkin' maths textbook. Very excitin'.

BELLE Well, at the very least, it was a little distraction. Something of me that they couldn't take away.

DAVID Or so you thought.

BELLE Or so I thought, yes.

BEAT.

Why didn't you speak?

DAVID What?

BELLE When you first got here. Why didn't you speak?

DAVID Didn't trust 'em. Didn't trust any of 'em. Thought they were out to get me. Thought they were gonna hurt me if I spoke.

BELLE The docs?

DAVID Nah, not the docs. Well, not after the first few weeks. Hated 'em at the start. Thought they were poisonin' me.

BEAT.

A KIND OF SHADOW SEEMS TO
COME OVER **DAVID'S** FACE AND
HE STARES BLANKLY AHEAD.

DAVID All of them pills they kept shovin' into me. The injections. Poison...

DAVID TRAILS OFF AND STARES AHEAD BLANKKY.

BELLE FOLLOWS HIM WITH HER EYES.

HE SEEMS TO SNAP OUT OF IT.

DAVID They weren't what I was scared of though. Thought I was smarter than 'em. Just pretended to take those stupid pills.

BELLE ...So who were you afraid of?

DAVID ...I guess I had things they couldn't take away either.

BELLE Or so you thought?

DAVID They're certainly workin' on it.

BEAT.

BELLE I wonder what he's here for.

DAVID Dunno. I guess that's kind of the point in this place though. It's usually quite hard to tell. Can't see what's in someone's head, y'know?

BELLE You can sometimes.

DAVID Well, yeah, but only sometimes. Even people like you don't always look the way everyone thinks they should.

BELLE I don't think that's why he's here, in any case.

DAVID Nah, I doubt it. Doesn't seem the type.

BELLE I've not seen him in any of the groups. Not even in any of the corridors.

DAVID Maybe he's not deemed ready.

BELLE He's been here ages though! How can he not be ready yet?

DAVID Guess he's not co-operatin'.

BELLE They'll force him to. I got a tube shoved down my nose when I didn't co-operate.

DAVID Oh, we know. The whole buildin' would have heard you screamin' about it.

BELLE I just like to keep you all updated on my life.

DAVID ...We all appreciate it.

BEAT.

BELLE Aren't you curious?

DAVID I've learnt not to be.

BELLE What's wrong with curiosity?

DAVID It's a slipp'ry slope to pryin'. An' people like us should know all about people pryin' in business that's got nothin' to do with 'em.

BELLE ...But aren't you curious?

DAVID Of course I'm curious! But that don't mean you ask questions. You don't cause trouble. That's not how things work here. You've surely been here long enough to have figured that out.

BELLE Asking questions doesn't always cause trouble.

DAVID Askin' questions leads to either gettin' answers or findin' answers. Or just endin' up with more questions.

BEAT.

DAVID The truth is a dang'rous thing. That's why people don't visit here. You get people visitin' children's hospitals and old folk's homes...but never here. 'Cause they don't wanna face the truth. An' somewhere like here is one of the most truthful places in the world.

BELLE What do you mean?

DAVID Think about it. We see the world diff'rently to everyone else out there. We have seen sides to the human mind and the human existence that people like that never get to see.

DAVID STOPS ABRUPTLY, AND LOOKS
AROUND NERVOUSLY. HE MOVES CLOSER TO **BELLE**.

An' they think it's some kind of stereotype. They say that we've "lost our minds" or "gone mental" because they don't want to believe that we have a more truthful view of life than they've got.

HE STOPS AGAIN, NERVOUSLY, MAKING SURE
NOBODY AROUND IS LISTENING IN.

They're stuck hidden behind these goggles of "hope" or "purpose", livin' in a narrow tunnel vision version of the world where the only thing they see is their own life or the lives of those around them and call that the world. "My family is my world".

DAVID STOPS A THIRD TIME, REALISES
HOW CLOSE HE NOW IS TO **BELLE** AND
NERVOUSLY BACKS AWAY SLIGHTLY.

It's sad really. They don't ever see the actual world. They're blind.

BELLE It must be easier being blind.

DAVID Nowhere near as rewardin' though.

BELLE Rewarding? I wouldn't call this "rewarding".

DAVID It is though. We got a glimpse of reality. We know more than they will ever know. They can't see the world for what it is, they can't see life, they will never know why they're alive.

BELLE But when we question that, we get shoved in here.

DAVID I don't think they call what most of us in 'ere have done "questionin'" life.

BELLE Yeah, I guess not.

DAVID Seems like we are the only kind of people on earth who can see reality the way it actually is. Guess you just have to kind of figure out if it's worth it.

BELLE Worth it? If what's worth it?

DAVID This. Here. The way you end up feelin'. Everythin' that's happened in the lead up to this. Is the short glimpse of truth worth all you've gone through? That's the question.

BELLE And what do you think?

DAVID I'm still figurin' it out.

BEAT.

BELLE I wonder if he thinks it's worth it.

DAVID Can't really say. Might not even know about it. You didn't.

BELLE But if he doesn't speak, he surely thinks.

DAVID I daresay he does. But who knows what he's thinkin' about. Could be anythin'.

BELLE It's creepy the way he just stares into space like that. He never blinks.

DAVID Maybe he's lookin'.

BELLE At what?

DAVID The world. While he still can.

BELLE Until they take it away.

DAVID Until they take it away.

DAVID STANDS UP AND EXTENDS
HIS HAND TO **BELLE**.

DAVID Come on, we're going to be late.

BELLE TAKES **DAVID'S** HAND
AND STANDS UP.
AS SHE DOES, A BALLED UP NAPKIN
FULL OF PASTA TUMBLES FROM
UNDERNEATH HER JUMPER.
THEY BOTH STOP AND LOOK
AT EACH OTHER.

DAVID I know, I know. I saw nothin'. Let's go.

EXIT.

Scene 2

A HOSPITAL ROOM.

BELLE, DAVID, ETHAN AND **JESSICA**

ARE SITTING IN A SEMI CIRCLE.

BELLE IS HUDDLED INTO CUSHIONS.

SHE IS NEXT TO **DAVID**.

DAVID IS STARING AT THE CLOCK
MAKING SURE TO NOT MEET ANYBODY'S EYE.

THERE IS AN EMPTY SEAT NEXT TO HIM AND

THEN THERE IS **ETHAN** WHO IS SITTING

STARING AT HIS SHOES.

NEXT TO HIM IS **JESSICA** WHO IS TAPPING

THE CHAIR IN A VERY DELIBERATE

AND OBSESSIVE MANNER.

THE LAST EMPTY CHAIR IS BESIDE HER.

ETHAN I swear these chairs have been here since the
founding of the NHS.

JESSICA I've been in and out of this place for, like, four
years, and they've never gotten any more
comfortable.

ETHAN The cushions really don't help, I don't know why
she's bothering with them.

HE GESTURES TOWARDS **BELLE**.

JESSICA To stop her hipbones from shredding the upholstery?

THEY LAUGH TO THEMSELVES.

BEAT.

ETHAN Why's he staring at the clock like that?

JESSICA Who? Him?

SHE GESTURES TOWARDS **DAVID**.

He always does that.

ETHAN Looks like he's trying to make it go backwards.

JESSICA Few extra hours in bed, can't say I blame him.

ETHAN Almost didn't bother today.

JESSICA Why did you?

ETHAN I knew that if I didn't, they'd come get me anyway.

JESSICA Could have pretended to be ill, that's got me out a few times.

ETHAN With the weather heading the way it is and the heating being this useless, might not need to pretend soon enough. Just look at those clouds.

JESSICA They fork out all this money to get industrial strength windows and make all the door handles round instead of even slightly pointed but can't pay for heating. Typical.

ETHAN Wish they'd let us have a fire.

JESSICA Ha! Can you imagine the risk assessment for that?!

ETHAN Gotta love the government and their funding cuts.

BEAT.

CONNOR ENTERS.

HE SITS IN THE CHAIR BETWEEN

DAVID AND **ETHAN** IN A VERY

AGITATED AND ANNOYED MANNER.

DAVID LOOKS DISTRESSED AT THE NEW

ARRIVAL BUT CLOSES HIS EYES AND

BREATHES DEEPLY FOR A FEW SECONDS.

HE OPENS THEM AGAIN TO

RESUME STARING AT THE CLOCK.

ETHAN New guy.

JESSICA Oh, *that's* the new guy?

ETHAN Never seen him before so I guess so.

JESSICA Why's he slumping about in his chair like that? He looks ridiculous.

ETHAN Guess he's not up for making friends. Can't say I blame him.

JESSICA ...I'll pretend to not be offended by that.

ETHAN Maybe he reckons he'll be out soon.

JESSICA Everybody does to start off with.

ETHAN Chance would be a fine thing. He'll learn soon enough.

CAROLINE ENTERS, IRRITATINGLY CHEERY.

CAROLINE Hi everybody. Welcome. How are you all doing? Thank you for coming!

ETHAN (muttered) Like we had a choice.

CAROLINE I thought we would start off today with a little exercise. So we've got this big ball of wool and what we're going to do is to unravel a bit, wrap up our fingers and then throw the wool to someone else in the circle and say your name - but make sure you're keeping hold of the wool around your hands!

SHE LOOKS AROUND AT THE GROUP
WHO SIMPLY STARE BACK AT HER
AND THEN LOOK AT EACH OTHER,
CONFUSED AND WITH RAISED EYEBROWS.

Got it? Alright, great! So I'll start: Caroline.

SHE THROWS TO **ETHAN**.
HE LOOKS AT THE WOOL IN HIS
HANDS AS IF HE HAS NEVER
SEEN IT BEFORE.

ETHAN And what exactly is this going to achieve?

CAROLINE Let's just keep going and we'll find out at the end!

ETHAN ...

CAROLINE So your name?

ETHAN Um...Ethan?

CAROLINE Welcome Ethan.

BEAT.

ETHAN BLANKLY LOOKS AT **CAROLINE**

AND THEN BACK AT THE WOOL.

CAROLINE Now throw to somebody else!

HE CONFUSEDLY THROWS TO **DAVID**

WHO STILL REFUSES TO MEET ANYBODY'S

EYES.

DAVID David.

CAROLINE Welcome David.

HE THROWS TO **JESSICA**.

SHE OBSESSIVELY WRAPS

HER FINGERS SO THAT EACH

ONE IS THE SAME AND THE WOOL

IS DISTRIBUTED EVENLY.

SHE TAKES LONGER THAN ANYBODY ELSE.

JESSICA Jessica.

CAROLINE Welcome Jessica.

SHE THROWS TO **BELLE**.

BELLE Belle.

CAROLINE Welcome Belle.

SHE PASSES TO **CONNOR**
WHO DOES NOT WRAP UP HIS
FINGERS BUT SIMPLY
HOLDS A SINGLE
STRAND OF WOOL.

CONNOR ...Connor.

CAROLINE Welcome Connor.

CONNOR THROWS THE WOOL BACK TO **CAROLINE**.
THEY ARE ALL NOW CONNECTED IN A MESSY WEB OF WOOL.

CAROLINE Thank you. Great! Now, let's just pull tight on
the wool so that there's tension all through it.

NOBODY DOES.

Just tug a little bit on the wool.

ALL JUST LOOK AT EACH

OTHER BLANKLY.

CAROLINE PULLS ON THE WOOL.

SHE IS THE ONLY ONE TO DO SO.

ALL BUT **CAROLINE** LOOK AROUND THE

CIRCLE WITH RAISED EYEBROWS.

Can you all feel that? Now, what we want to do with this group is keep this feeling of connection. We are all connected to each other physically by being here in this room right now; mentally by the experiences that we share and can learn from and metaphorically with this wool.

SHE LOOKS AROUND WITH A HOPEFUL

AND ANNOYINGLY PROUD SMILE.

SHE IS MET WITH INCREDULOUS STARES

BUT IS UNDETERRED.

Okay, what kind of other words could we use instead of "connection"? What else do we want from each other?

SILENCE.

Jessica? Any ideas?

JESSICA Oh. Um. Trust?

CAROLINE Trust, yes! That's a great one! Anyone else?

BEAT.

David?

DAVID Respect.

CAROLINE Perfect, respect, we all need to respect each other and respect our different situations. Anybody else? Ethan, how about you give me one.

ETHAN I'd rather not.

CAROLINE Come on, give it a try.

ETHAN Understanding.

CAROLINE Exactly. Understanding. But remember that a lack of understanding can be helpful too. That means you can learn something new, or find a different viewpoint. Yes, that's a great one. Connor? Any thoughts?

BEAT.

Connor? What do you think?

BEAT.

What do you want from the other people in this group?

CONNOR BLANKLY STARES AHEAD, COMPLETELY
IGNORING THE QUESTIONS, REFUSING TO ENGAGE.

CAROLINE Okay. Let's all just tug on the wool a little more and let Connor feel the connection and support.

THE GROUP VERY HESITANTLY AND CONFUSEDLY
TUG THE SLIGHTEST BIT ON THE WOOL.
CONNOR JUMPS UP AND STARES AT THEM, ANGRY.
HE DROPS THE SINGLE STRAND OF WOOL.
CONNOR EXITS.

Scene 3

INSIDE A HOSPITAL ROOM.

CONNOR AND **CAROLINE** SIT
OPPOSITE EACH OTHER.

CAROLINE So, how do you feel?

BEAT.

Better? Worse?

BEAT.

Empty? Numb?

BEAT.

Do you want to talk about why you left the group?

BEAT.

I heard that they had to go and get you up for it.
That you fought with them to not go. Do you want to
talk about that?

CONNOR DOES NOT ENGAGE.

CAROLINE PULLS HER CHAIR CLOSER.

CAROLINE You have to work with us, Connor. We're not here to
hurt you, or make you miserable, or angry. We're

here to help you. And we can't do that unless you co-operate.

BEAT.

I can't make it better on my own, Connor. You have to help me figure out how to do that. Help me understand what the problem is.

BEAT.

You need to help me help you.

CONNOR I don't want you to help me.

CAROLINE And why is that?

BEAT.

Why don't you want us to help you?

BEAT.

Do you feel unworthy?

BEAT.

Connor, you have to respond, you have to work with me here. What you think you need?

CONNOR DOES NOT RESPOND.

CAROLINE Come on, how can we help you?

BEAT.

Connor. How can we help you?

CONNOR I don't want you to help me.

CAROLINE Unfortunately, that's my job.

CONNOR I'm not your job.

CAROLINE No, you're not. But you're a patient. And helping patients is my job. So help me do my job. Help me help you.

BEAT.

Should we talk about what brought you here?

CONNOR DOESN'T RESPOND.

CAROLINE Why don't you want to talk about it?

BEAT.

What do you think will happen if you do?

BEAT.

Do you think it'll make you feel worse?

BEAT.

Did you want it to...?

BEAT.

I don't know. A lot of people do things like that to cry out. To show that they're in pain. To get help. Do you think that's what it was like for you?

BEAT.

Do you think it was a way to get people to see you?

CONNOR I meant it.

CAROLINE Okay. So why do you think it didn't work?

CONNOR Because people interfered.

CAROLINE Interfered?

BEAT.

What makes you call it interfering?

CONNOR They had no right to bring me back.

CAROLINE Why do you think that?

CONNOR DOES NOT RESPOND AGAIN.

I think they were trying to save you.

BEAT.

Did you want to be saved?

BEAT.

CAROLINE Why do you think you were?

CONNOR I want to go now.

CAROLINE We still have 25 minutes left.

CONNOR Well, isn't that unfortunate.

CONNOR TRIES TO GET UP.

CAROLINE DOES NOT MOVE BUT STOPS
HIM IMMEDIATELY WITH HER WORDS.

CAROLINE You know that's not how this works, Connor. You can't just walk in and out deciding when to speak to people. You're on a timetable. You would just get brought back.

CONNOR SITS BACK DOWN.

You need to talk about what happened. What brought you in here. You need to let yourself process it - let me help you do that. Tell me what happened.

CAROLINE PULLS HER CHAIR CLOSER

Come on. Let's talk.

THE LIGHTS DIM AS SPOTS COME UP
TO SHOW **BELLE, DAVID, ETHAN** AND **JESSICA**
STANDING IN ADJACENT SPLIT STAGES DOWNSTAGE.

BELLE I don't remember it. I just woke up in a hospital. I knew I hadn't done anything on purpose but I kind of felt right to be lying there. Like I deserved it. Like someone was telling me "You don't deserve to not hurt yourself, I'll do it for you". I had a seizure and bit through my tongue. When I woke up, I had a tube down my nose. They were pumping all of these disgusting liquefied calories into me - that hurt so much more than collapsing. I would have a seizure again over that any time. Being in hospital just made everything worse. And then they sent me here.

JESSICA I didn't mean anything by it. I never intended to go as far as I did, I just had to keep going. It had to be even, it had to feel right. It didn't feel safe, nothing felt safe and I knew that it never would unless I kept going until it felt right. And there was blood everywhere but I didn't even notice. I felt nothing. No remorse, no pain. Just this constant panic that it wasn't even, it wasn't good enough, it didn't feel right, it didn't feel safe yet. And then I guess I lost too much blood. I don't remember the rest of what happened... I don't think I want to.

DAVID They were inside me. Their blood and sweat coursing through my veins, masquerading as my own. Nobody could see it, but I could. It was poisoning me, downsiding me in his DNA, contaminating my whole body and all of my organs. I could feel it seeping beneath my skin, crawling all over my cells, slipping between my bones and saturating themselves

into my muscles. I needed to get it out. I had to get it out. So I drew it out myself. I didn't care if I lost my own insides along the way, as long as I got what was left of them out from inside me. I didn't care, it didn't matter. I just needed to feel clean. I needed him to get out. I needed him to finally leave me.

ETHAN

Nothing happened. Nobody let anything happen. And everyone thinks that I'm so angry about that. But I'm not. I couldn't care less. It doesn't make a difference to me whether I die now or I die later - I'm going to go at some point and I'm going to go on my own terms. It doesn't matter either way. I'm a speck of dust in a universe that is bigger than anybody can ever comprehend. In a thousand years I am going to be nothing but an old photograph in a shoebox and nobody will remember my name. So what does it matter if I die of old age when I'm 93 or die here and now? It doesn't matter. And I understand that. That's why people are afraid of me. But they just don't understand and I'm getting punished for it.

SPOTLIGHT ON **CONNOR** AS OTHER

SPOTS DIM TO DARK.

CONNOR

I crashed. I felt wrong, everything felt wrong, and there was this ringing in my ears and this fizzing in my mind and everything felt unsafe and unstable and I didn't care, it didn't matter, nothing mattered anymore and then suddenly there was nothing. There was white noise. There was a horrible sense that I was floating, that I was not real, that nothing around me was real anymore. And it was all so far away but so close by and black but white and hot but cold and there were blue flashing lights and the world was still spinning and I was spinning with it. The grass was still growing, the wind was still blowing, the clocks were still ticking and I was still breathing. And I wished it would all stop. And I wished I could stop too.

BEAT.

Maybe we don't all want to get better. Maybe I would rather stay the way I am. But you never consider that, do you? I want to be me - not the "me" that you construct on society's behalf.

SPOTLIGHT COMES OFF **CONNOR** AND
COMES BACK ONTO **DAVID, BELLE,**
JESSICA AND **ETHAN.**

BELLE And now I'm here.

JESSICA Stuck behind some veil of expectations.

DAVID Always wishing I had done better, had done more, had fixed everything.

ETHAN With my options frozen, being forced to exist when I don't want to.

SPOTLIGHTS FADE OUT
ON **BELLE, DAVID, JESSICA** AND **ETHAN** UNTIL
ONLY **CAROLINE** AND **CONNOR** REMAIN ON STAGE
AS BEFORE.

CONNOR I never wanted you to fix me. I never asked you to, I never asked anybody to. I didn't want help, I don't want help. You don't know anything about me; you don't know anything about this. You have no clue how I feel, or how this feels.

CAROLINE I'm trying to figure that out, Connor. You have to help me do that.

CONNOR No. I don't. I shouldn't have to. You shouldn't try to see this world if you're not in it. Nobody can understand this life if they don't live it. And you don't. You don't and you never will. I am not a subject for you to study to try and make yourself feel better about your own life. If I wanted your help, I would ask for it. But I haven't. It's forced on me. And maybe I'm sick of it. Maybe I'm sick of this place. Maybe I'm sick of it all.

CONNOR EXIT.

Scene 4

A HOSPITAL BEDROOM.

SPOT ON **CONNOR** AS HE STANDS
UPSTAGE CENTRE, FACING AWAY
FROM THE AUDIENCE.

EITHER SIDE OF THE STAGE BESIDE
HIM IS DIMLY LIT WITH FIZZING
SOUNDS AND SPORADICLY STATIC
SOFT WHITE LIGHTS.

CONNOR It feels like static electricity. You know the way
the TV goes when there's no signal? That fuzzy,
white noise? Shimmering balls of constant energy?
That's what it's like. All over. Constantly.

BEAT.

AS HE SPEAKS FORKS OF LIGHT
ILLUMATE THE STAGE EITHER
SIDE OF HIM AND THE FIZZING
SOUND IS REPLACED BY THAT
OF A STORM IN THE DISTANCE.

Sometimes I think I was born in a thunderstorm.
Struck by lightning, fed by the forks shooting down
from the sky; sung lullabies of thundering claps and
screaming wind.

BEAT.

THE STORM SEEMS TO GET CLOSER.

I can still hear it. The thunderstorm. I can still
feel it.

BEAT.

SUDDEN SILENCE.

That's what it's like. In my head.

BEAT.

THE FIZZING AND STATIC LIGHTS
AND SOUNDS RETURN, ACCOMPANIED
BY HEADLIGHTS AS IF FROM
A TRAIN AS THE DISTANT SOUND
OF A TRAIN IS HEARD.

Being here makes it worse. The electricity and the static energy fizzles everywhere, wanting to get out but having no way to do it and nowhere to go. Being stuck on a runaway train and you're locked inside and everyone expects you to feel safe but they don't notice that the tracks are broken - that you're careering off and they just sit there smiling and it's so infuriating because you're going to die, can't you see that you're going to fucking die?!

BEAT.

THE HEADLIGHTS CONSUME THE STAGE
IN A LONG FLASH OF WHITE AS THE
SOUND OF A TRAIN HORN IS DEAFENING.
SNAPS BACK INTO THE FIZZING AND
STATIC FROM BEFORE.

We're all going to die. It's all constantly moving. Constantly fizzing inside. It doesn't get out. Just builds and builds until the train crashes. And I crash with it. And I burn. And I forget.

BEAT.

SILENCE.

BLUE AND RED FLASHING LIGHTS ON
EITHER SIDE OF **CONNOR**.

And then there's silence. Like white noise.
And I'm bleeding. And there's empty pill packets.
Paramedics. And I don't remember.

BEAT.

SILENCE AND A SINGLE SPOT ON **CONNOR**.

CONNOR TURNS TO FACE AND
ADDRESS THE AUDIENCE.

But I do remember. As if I could ever forget.

SPOT OFF TO DARK.

Scene 5

GROUP THERAPY.

ALL SIT IN A SEMI CIRCLE, AS BEFORE.

THERE IS A SMALL STACK OF A4
SHEETS OF PAPER AND A HANDFUL
OF SHARPIE PENS.

CAROLINE Okay, so we all know what we need to do? Okay great, so everyone grab a pen, doesn't matter what colour, and get writing!

ALL BUT **CONNOR** BEGIN TO WRITE
WORDS ON THE A4 SHEETS OF PAPER.

ONCE THEY HAD ALL WRITTEN SOME
THEY PUT THEM ALL IN A PILE INTO
THE CENTRE OF THEIR GROUP.

JESSICA SHUFFLES THEM AND FIXES
THEM SO THAT THEY ARE ALL STRAIGHT.
THEY ARE UNPLEASANT - A REPRESENTATION
OF THE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS WITHIN THEIR HEADS.

Okay. Alright. Everyone finished? Right. So now I want you all to stick your words up on the wall here. It doesn't matter who wrote what, what matters is what the messages say, what the words mean, what the meaning behind those words can mean and how they impact our recovery...

CAROLINE FADES OUT AS **BELLE, DAVID,**
JESSICA AND **ETHAN** ALL STICK
THE WORDS UP ONTO THE WALL.
THE WORDS ARE VISIBLE TO THE

AUDIENCE SO THAT THEY CAN BE READ.

CONNOR DOES NOT ENGAGE AND SIMPLY WATCHES.

CAROLINE FADES BACK IN AND ALL

RETURNS TO NORMAL.

CAROLINE Now I want you to think about the future. Of your future. Yourself at the end of your hospital journey, or even further after your discharge date. What kind of words would you associate with that? What are your hopes? How do you imagine it will feel? Let's try writing those words this time!

DAVID What if we don't have any hopes about that?

CAROLINE There is always hope. Maybe pick one of the words already up and reply to it? If you can't figure that one out, then move onto a different one that you can. Don't try and force yourself to be perfect, don't let yourself get stressed over it.

ETHAN But how are words meant to help?

CAROLINE Words can make people feel better. They can make someone feel valued, listened to, accepted. Being able to put our recovery goals into words can make it easier for us to plan how we are going to get there.

DAVID No it doesn't.

BELLE Can I just say this?

SHE HOLDS UP A PIECE OF PAPER

ONE WHICH SHE HAS WRITTEN

"RICH, SUCCESSFUL, WITH HOT BOYFRIEND".

ETHAN No words can change the past.

CAROLINE No. But they can change the future.

DAVID But the future can't be reached.

CAROLINE Of course it can. There is a future after all of this, you can recover and make your own future.

DAVID No, no you can't. The future can't even be anything more than the future. Otherwise it just becomes the present. And how are we supposed to change the present when it's speeding away from us. Every second is lost as we decide what to do with it. We can't change the present and the present is as close as we'll ever get to the future. We just have to wait and see what happens.

CAROLINE And how does that point of view make you feel about the future?

DAVID REALISES THAT HE JUST
SPOKE UP, AND NERVOUSLY RETREATS.

DAVID Just confirms that it's pointless to think about.

CAROLINE And what do the rest of you think?

JESSICA I think it has some truth in it.

CAROLINE Want to expand on that?

JESSICA If all we ever do is focus on the bad things then we aren't going to get anywhere. Looking at the positives gives us at least something to think about other than the fact we are here. Not much point in wallowing in something that we can't change.

ETHAN Yeah, let's all smile and try to polish the giant turd of a hospital that won't let us out.

JESSICA Or just focus on the things we want to focus on. Like the people we've met. Or the steps that we've managed to take and how far we've come.

BELLE Or the super hot boyfriend we'll get when we leave here and become all rich and successful.

ETHAN You're all delusional.

JESSICA I prefer to think of myself as hopeful.

CAROLINE That's a wonderful way to think about, Jessica. Perhaps "hopeful" can be a word that you can write! Are we ready?

ALL BUT CONNOR NOD.

CAROLINE Okay, on you go!

ALL BUT CONNOR WRITE UP THEIR WORDS
AND STICK THEM UP ON THE WALL OPPOSITE
THE NEGATIVE WORDS FROM BEFORE.
BELLE ATTEMPTS TO STICK UP HER JOKE
SIGN BUT **JESSICA** PULLS IT DOWN AND
HANDS IT BACK TO HER.

CAROLINE You see? There are always positives that we can find, and I am so glad that you all have managed to come up with something! Take the time to have a look at these words - try to think about what they mean. About how they make you feel -

CAROLINE'S WATCH BEEPS.

And that's time! Thank you as always, and I can't wait to see you all tomorrow!

ALL EXIT EXCEPT **CAROLINE** AND **CONNOR**.

ON HER WAY OUT, **BELLE** QUICKLY RUNS
BACK AND PUTS HER SIGN BACK
UP BEFORE SHE EXITS.

CAROLINE Anything I can help you with, Connor?

CONNOR ...Did you really mean what you said earlier?

CAROLINE What did I say earlier?

CONNOR That we can make our own future. That we can decide what we do with ourselves?

CAROLINE Of course.

SHE GOES TO LEAVE BUT HE
STEPS IN THE WAY OF HER.

CONNOR Seems a bit hypocritical, doesn't it?

CAROLINE What do you mean?

CONNOR We get to decide what we want to do. Yet I made my decision. I made it long ago. And it landed me here. And while I'm here, I don't get any decisions. Everybody makes them for me. How am I supposed to learn how to influence my future with my own decisions when they've all been taken from me?

CAROLINE Well, that's a bit different. When it's a concern of safety -

CONNOR It wasn't. It was a decision. One that I maintain I should have been allowed to make.

CAROLINE It was a decision that you would have regretted.

CONNOR No I wouldn't. I wouldn't be able to, would I? But you don't see it, do you?

CAROLINE See what?

CONNOR The world. The real world.

CAROLINE This is the real world, Connor. I understand the real world.

CONNOR No. No, it isn't. This is a hidden corner of reality designed to keep those of us who understand hidden away.

CAROLINE Who understand what?

CONNOR The world.

CAROLINE This place is designed to help people who have had a tough time find some stability and figure out helpful and healthy coping mechanisms.

CONNOR By locking us up?

CAROLINE By working with you in a safe environment.

CONNOR This place doesn't feel safe. Not to me. Not to quite a lot of the people in here. I mean, sure, for some people it's some kind of haven but you can't just assume that we all need the same thing.

CAROLINE What do you need then, Connor?

CONNOR To be free.

CONNOR EXIT.

Scene 6

THE THERAPY ROOM.

CONNOR HAS MANAGED TO SNEAK
INTO THE ROOM AFTER HOURS
WHILE EVERYBODY ELSE IS ASLEEP.
HE IS NOT ALLOWED TO BE THERE
AND IS NOT ALLOWED TO BE
UNSUPERVISED SO HAS TO BE
FURTIVE AND QUIET SO HE
DOES NOT GET CAUGHT.

CONNOR "A concern of safety," she said. It's all a matter of safety. "It is for your own safety that we are transferring you to an inpatient facility. It's a matter of safety that we are sectioning you under the Mental Health Act. You have Borderline Personality Disorder. You have Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder. It's all part of your disorder. It's not you, it's your illness. You were not thinking clearly, you can barely even remember, it's a concern of safety..."

BEAT.

HE TAKES A STEP DOWNSTAGE.
RIPPLING LIGHTS DIMLY FLOOD THE
STAGE, A COMBINATION OF BLUE
AND WHITE, LIKE WATER.

It's hazy but that doesn't mean I don't remember. I remember how it started. I remember looking down at the pills. Looking back at it is like staring through milky water. It's visible. Cloudy. Barely discernible. Visible all the same.

BEAT.

I remember looking at the pills in my hand. I was scared about backing out so I popped them all out of the little film thing together so that I couldn't put them back. So that I didn't have a choice. So I had to take them.

BEAT.

THE FIZZING STATIC NOISE
STARTS QUIETLY BUT BUILDS
WHILST CONNOR IS SPEAKING.

I don't know how many pills there were - but they kept falling out of my hand, there were too many to hold on to. I don't remember if I took them all, or only some of them, I don't think it really matters. I remember looking at them. Seeing them lying there and imagining them coursing through my veins and shutting down my organs. I could almost see them inside the veins on my wrist, I could feel them behind my eyeballs, hear them rattling around in my brain.

BEAT.

SUDDEN SILENCE.

Yet they were still in my hands.

BEAT.

THE SPORADIC WHITE LIGHTS
FROM BEFORE RESTART.
CONNOR FINDS HIMSELF BY THE
POSITIVE WORDS STUCK TO THE WALL.
AS HE SPEAKS, HE TAKES THEM DOWN,

ONE BY ONE AND TEARS THEM IN HALF,
LEAVING THEM SCATTERED ON THE FLOOR.

And I looked around at the room and back down at my hands and I was thinking to myself: "Isn't this mundane? Isn't it so bland, so grey, so meaningless? These tiny little pills are enough to make it stop, to make existence cease, these tiny little pills can make the difference, they hold the key to being a human..."

BEAT.

Isn't life fragile?

BEAT.

A DISTANCE SOUND OF AN AMBULANCE
SIREN IS HEARD.

But I looked at these pills and I thought to myself; "This is the last thing I'm going to see. I'm never going to see anything else ever again. These tiny, mundane pills will be the last thing I see." And I was okay with that. I accepted that. I closed my eyes.

BEAT.

THE SIREN GETS DEAFENINGLY
LOUD AND THE STAGE IS LIT UP
BY FLASHING BLUE AND RED LIGHTS.

SILENCE.

CONNOR IS NOW BY THE NEGATIVE WORDS.

HE TAKES THEM DOWN, INDIVIDUALLY,
AND CRUMPLES THEM UP, AGAIN
DROPPING THEM ON THE FLOOR

AS HE CONTINUES TO SPEAK.

But then I opened them again. And there were these bright lights and ugly curtains and beeping machines and an IV drip in my arm and heart monitors and stickers all over my body and it wasn't mundane. But it wasn't okay.

BEAT.

CONNOR FALLS TO THE FLOOR AND
SITS AT THE EDGE OF THE STAGE.
ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE.

What are you supposed to do when you accept the end and it doesn't come. How are you supposed to move on when you said your goodbyes, you ripped off the plaster, you threw it all into the fire and watched it burn as you let it go.

SPOTLIGHT OFF **CONNOR**.

Scene 7

BELLE AND **DAVID** SIT TOGETHER

AS IN SCENE 1.

CONNOR'S ABSENCE IS OBVIOUS.

BELLE Where do you think he is?

DAVID It's hard to say. I don't know how long 'e was gone before they noticed.

BELLE The alarms were going off for, like, 3 hours.

DAVID More like 40 minutes but yeah, felt like that, didn't it?

BELLE I don't remember a day without the alarms...They even go off in my dreams.

DAVID I remember when it was you settin' 'em off every five seconds. Tryin' to run away. Tryin' to break the windows.

BELLE Never worked though, did it?

DAVID Never does.

BELLE And yet Connor managed to find a way out. I just can't believe he's gone.

DAVID Never knew you liked 'im.

BELLE I don't like anybody. It's just strange, it's different without him.

DAVID Cool, I don't like you either then.

BELLE ...Of course you do, I'm a delight.

BEAT.

DAVID They'll find 'im. They'll bring 'im back.

BELLE Do you think he'll let them?

DAVID He'll fight it, that's for sure. He ran away for a reason.

BELLE Running back to the broken world that landed him here.

DAVID No. Runnin' back to the freedom that lead 'im here.

BELLE Do you think he would have gotten better here?

DAVID Who knows? They try to change the way our brains work, but never quite manage. People get stuck on this false hope that everythin' will be better, they'll make us all better and we'll leave here lookin' all shiny an' new. An' they get disappointed when that doesn't happen. Nothin' is ever quite a smooth as that.

BELLE Sometimes I question why we're looked at as the crazy ones.

DAVID Only sometimes?

THEY LAUGH.

We see the world differen'ly, remember?

BELLE Until they take it away.

DAVID At least, they think they do. Now come on. We better not be late today, they'll think we've pulled off The Great Escape as well.

DAVID HELPS BELLE UP.
NOTHING FALLS FROM HER
CLOTHES THIS TIME.

DAVID Has your jumper finally retired as a food storage facility?

BELLE Shut up, let's go!

THEY EXIT.

Scene 8

THE THERAPY ROOM.

JESSICA, ETHAN, DAVID AND BELLE

ARE SEEING ALL OF THE WORDS
DESTROYED AND STREWN ON THE FLOOR.

ETHAN Well, I guess he made a little pit stop here before getting out.

DAVID Shit.

JESSICA What a mess.

BELLE Quite impressive, really.

JESSICA What is?

BELLE He's managed to create a visual representation of our lives - a complete state.

DAVID I can never tell if I find you funny or not.

BELLE You should, I'm hilarious.

ETHAN And very accurate.

JESSICA STARTS TO LEAF THROUGH
THE MESS ON THE FLOOR.

JESSICA We can't leave it like this.

ETHAN I don't remember being hired as a cleaner.

JESSICA Come on, please? Just help me.

ETHAN AND **DAVID** LOOK AT EACH OTHER.

BELLE GOES OFFSTAGE BUT CAN STILL BE HEARD.

DAVID Where are you going?

BELLE Just give me a moment.

ETHAN Does this mean we get to skip therapy today then?
Because I really can't be bothered, quite frankly.

JESSICA Can you ever?

ETHAN As a rule, no. Never get a choice though, do we?

BELLE RETURNS

SHE HAS A ROLL OF SELOTAPE
WHICH SHE HANDS TO **JESSICA**

BELLE Here. Let's go then.

BELLE AND **JESSICA** LOOK TO THE MEN
WHO HESITANTLY BEGIN JOINING IN
THE GIRLS TAPE THE RIPPED WORDS
BACK TOGETHER AND HANG THEM UP
AND THE MEN ATTEMPT TO UNCRUMPLE

WORDS AND HANG THEM BACK UP.

CONNOR CAN BE SEEN USC.

HE IS SILENT AND STARING AHEAD.

THE LIGHTS ARE ONLY ON **CONNOR** AND

THE TWO WALLS WHERE THE WORDS ARE

BEING STUCK BACK UP.

AS THEY SPEAK, THE CHARACTERS

DIRECTLY ADDRESS THE AUDIENCE.

JESSICA I am more than how they see me.

ETHAN I do not want to be seen as a patient. That's not who I am.

BELLE They stick me with a label like a burning warning sign.

DAVID I don't expect you to understand and I don't want your pity.

JESSICA Labels do not help anything.

BELLE Your sympathy is not wanted.

ETHAN I am not ashamed of who I am, but that does not mean that I don't hate it.

DAVID There are things that you jus' don't understand.

JESSICA Maybe I'll get out of here soon. And maybe I'll have to come back again.

BELLE Maybe the same thing will happen again.

DAVID Maybe the best I can ever hope for is that I will learn to live with it.

ETHAN Maybe things don't get better. Maybe they do.

BELLE Just because I know that I will get better one day, doesn't mean that it doesn't still hurt now.

DAVID Sometimes I can't plan a future and you need to let me just get through right now.

JESSICA I don't want to imagine a future when I am fully recovered. I want to try to make it a reality now.

ETHAN Stop telling me it gets better. Prove it.

LIGHTS GO DOWN ON **JESSICA** AND **ETHAN**.

BELLE This is now.

DAVID And now is what matters.

BELLE AND **DAVID** LOOK AT EACH OTHER
AND SMILE AS THE LIGHTS FADE
ON THEM, LEAVING ONLY **CONNOR**.

HE IS SILENT AND HIS SPOT
SLOWLY FADES INTO BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY.