

# ***Three Nights***

*Music up. One at a time, six actors walk onto the stage and settle into their work, each establishing their character in terms of action and environment:*

*Jacob is working out.*

*Maia quietly strums her guitar.*

*Charlie preps vegetables at a cutting board.*

*Shani is on her computer, typing out her message.*

*Lenny has a camera and a tripod.*

*Charlotte moves through her dance routines.*

*Enter the two Voices, Male and Female. They walk to the front, one each side of the stage, and face one another. As they speak, the music continues. They become progressively louder, interrupting one another so that by the end the two voices are spoken together.*

Male            Come on then son, get back up. You're fine. You're a big boy now. Big boys don't cry.

Female        Oh look at you, don't you look beautiful today?

Male            That's right. Hands out, eyes on the ball.

Female        We could play dress ups. Would you like to play dress ups?

Male            What have you got there? A hammer. Let me get you some wood.

Female        Gosh, you're lovely dancer. Would you like to be a dancer when you grow up?

Male            Don't take that son, push him back.

Female        You've made your brother unhappy. How would you feel, if somebody did that to you?

Male            That's right, off you go. Look at him go. Into everything, isn't he?

Female        Come and give me a cuddle. I'll read you a story. It's about the most beautiful little girl that ever lived. She was a princess and her mother and father loved her very much.

Male            And he was the strongest, bravest of all the young men and everybody in the village knew that one day he would do great things.

*The music stops and the actors freeze on the silence, holding their poses. One at a time, they break out of this freeze to address their audience, before returning silently to their tasks as the others speak.*

Charlie        I want to be a chef. That's my ambition. I understand this isn't exactly the most promising start, cutting up vegetables for a pizza chain, but here's the thing about hospitality, you have to be prepared to start at the bottom. You have to be the guy who gets shouted at for every mistake he makes, who works the longest hours for the least pay, who stays behind after everybody else has left, mopping the floors and scrubbing out the grease traps. It's about humility: understanding you've still got a lot to learn. I think a lot of my friends don't get that, and in twenty years' time, they're going to wish that they had... Is that what you meant?

Lenny            You mean, about me? About what I had to do with the night? Well, that's a long story and I... I don't want you to misunderstand. It was complicated. It's still complicated.  
I started out wanting to make movies but lately, I've become more fascinated by photography. It's simpler, cleaner, more powerful. If you can't say it with an image, maybe you don't have anything to say. I mainly do portraits. I spent that afternoon, you know, the afternoon when it first... I spent it shooting Shani. She blogs, and it's strange - a lot of people follow her. At school, people hardly know she exists, but online, it's just different, the rules are different, and they suit her.

Charlotte        In a lot of ways, dancing doesn't really suit me. I'm not a natural, I know that. But I work hard. You might have heard of the 10,000 hour rule, it's from a book called Outliers. I haven't read it, but our dance teacher printed out the Wikipedia page for us. It says if you want to be outstanding at something, then you just have to be prepared to practise, incredibly hard. It says talent doesn't matter as much as hard work. I work harder than the other dancers, I work longer, so even though I'm not as talented as them, you can't tell. Nobody knows, only me, and I'm keeping it to myself....  
Sorry? Oh, yeah, well of course I was there. What do you want to know?

Jacob            I was there, you already know that, or you wouldn't be... Could we maybe record this somewhere else? I don't really like to let on that I do this. I

can't explain. I love it. There's something about the way it feels, to have complete control, and then you hit fatigue but you push for one more rep, and it's pure will power that does the lifting. The next day, you can feel every muscle you worked, it's like this little secret between you and your body - it whispers its pain to you and you walk a little taller, a little prouder. I don't want people to know that about me. We all have our little secrets, right? Okay, you can stop now.

Shani

Some days, I want the world to stop: just long enough for me to get everybody's attention. So I can talk to them all at once, save me the effort of getting around them individually - I'd say: What the Hell? Where is your dignity? Like Lenny, who was my friend, still is my friend - just. At thirteen we were both complete dicks, because that's what being thirteen is, right? But he was smart and funny and confident and I thought he'd grow out of it, I have. But that afternoon Lenny came around to the house to photograph me, he had this portrait project he was working on, and he completely pissed me off. That was part of it, I won't pretend it wasn't. If we'd never argued, then he'd never have... No, that's not how it works. It's not how you apportion blame.

Maia

Who do I blame? That's a big question... The world? I wrote him a song. That's how my story starts. I didn't know him all that well then. I'd seen him around school, watched him, listened in without making it too obvious, laughed at his jokes. But low key, you know. Not on the inside, more standing at the border, waiting to be invited in. So writing him a song wasn't really a plan, I didn't think there was any possible world in which I would play it and he would hear it and, you know, the clouds would open, the sun would shine through and we would fall instantly, madly in love. It was more like a kind of therapy. I had this stupid, childish crush on him and I was never going to do anything about it. So writing the song and then singing it, alone in my room, over and over again, just somehow made that feel a little bit less appalling.

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*Jacob puts down his weights and walks towards Charlie who continues to chop.*

- Jacob Charlie had entered himself in a competition. It was the schools' burger section of the NZ lamb awards. They had to design the best burger featuring NZ lamb and then prepare it under competition conditions.
- Charlie I needed to do a trial, so I invited people round: Jacob, because he's my friend, and then Charlotte, because she's kind of a mate (Charlie and Charlotte, it's become a joke) and Maia because she was Charlotte's friend. So four altogether. Four's a good number for food.
- Jacob He invited Maia because he liked her, basically. Pretty sure that was it. I think he figured she'd see what a sophisticated, sensitive guy he was, with all his cooking and shit, and she'd fall for him.
- Maia I thought it was a joke at first. I mean, why would he invite me around for dinner? What I didn't understand was that Charlotte and Jacob were going to be there as well. I thought it was just going to be... I should have known. Life's never that simple. I shouldn't have taken my guitar.
- Lenny I'm sort of the unofficial school photographer. Ms Randall is the Hospo teacher and she asked if I could get some shots for the open day, of Charlie's cooking. But there was a bit of a miscommunication. I thought he knew I was coming.
- Jacob Turned out that Maia had already fallen for Charlie, so you've got these two people, both hoping, but too scared to say anything, like a bad British romcom. It was hard to watch.
- Shani It's not just that I hated the photos, and don't get me started, I did hate the photos - But then he went and posted them, without permission... So I went round to Lenny's place, to call him on it, because I believe in doing things face to face. But he wasn't there.
- All So it was one of those nights I suppose, where fate's just messing with you. That's the way it started.

*The Voices return, taking up the same places on stage. Again, they speak as the scene assembles itself.*

- Female Studies have shown that short bursts of high intensity training can raise your metabolic rate for up to twenty four hours.
- Male Twenty full pull ups will put you in an elite group.

- Female Foods with a low G.I release their energy more slowly, and help you avoid spikes and dips in your blood sugar, which can lead to over-eating.
- Male It is through the doing of microscopic damage to the muscle group that we make them stronger, by sending the body a signal to rebuild.
- Female A B.M.I in the range of 20 - 25 is considered healthy.
- Male Lead with your shoulder and then use your leg drive to explode into the tackle. The aim is to meet the other player's momentum head on and knock him backwards.
- Female It is important to know your own body type, so that you can choose clothes to highlight its strengths and draw attention away from its weaknesses.
- Male If you show your weakness, others will only exploit it. It is important to appear hard, unbreakable. In the privacy of your own home you can break down and cry like a girl if you want to, but in public, you have to stay hard.
- Both What you need to understand is that life is a competition. If you choose not to play by our rules, if you choose not to make an effort, over the way you look, over the way you conduct yourself, then you will lose. You will miss out on friends, you will miss out on love, you will miss out on life.
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*Music up, and an extended sequence of people arriving, all bar Shani, whose entrance must wait until the end. The set of the dinner party is established by the actors as part of this. We see people settling, the surprise of Maia that others are there, but false happiness. The awkward small talk, failed jokes, the building pressure on Charlie, as he attempts to make the meal work, made worse by the arrival of Lenny and his camera, and finally the meal dished up, Lenny conspicuously unfed, Charlotte not wanting to offend, but daunted by the size of the meal, and all made considerably worse by the realisation that the meat is severely, perhaps dangerously, undercooked. All this plays out as an elaborate mime, almost a dance, under cover of music. As the song fades, we have the four diners facing one another, all wondering how to proceed.*

Charlie        You don't have to eat it all, if you're not.  
 Charlotte     No, it's good.  
 Jacob         Real good.  
 Charlotte     Just quite big, really.  
 Jacob         That's the recommended serving size, for the competition.  
 Maia         I suppose because they're trying to sell the meat.  
 Charlie       Yeah... But if it's too much, you know, that's...

*Awkward silence*

Jacob         You brought a guitar.  
 Maia         Yeah.  
 Jacob         Cool.  
 Maia         I'm... it's not mine. I'm meant to drop it back at my aunty's after this. Her little boy has just started lessons so she needs it back.  
 Charlie       You write songs though, right? I think I've heard you, at assemblies.  
 Maia         Once, maybe. Year 10.  
 Lenny         You did the talent quest... What, am I not meant to talk?  
 Charlie       You're not meant to be here.  
 Lenny         I just need one more...  
 Charlie       Not of the meal. It's not ready yet. It's just a prototype.  
 Charlotte     Is this mango?  
 Charlie       And mint, yeah.  
 Charlotte     Love mango.  
 Jacob         Play us a song, Maia. You should play us a song.

*Maia addresses the audience*

Maia            So what I did, is I sang the song. I didn't say it was about him, of course, but you know...

*Maia proceeds to sing her delicate love song. The performance is interrupted by the arrival of Shani, fair pissed and looking to vent.*

Shani            What the hell?

Maia            I just, it doesn't mean anything.

Shani            What are you talking about?

Maia            It's just a song, and anyway, I don't really see how -

Shani            I'm not talking to you.

Maia            You interrupted me.

Shani            To talk to him.

Charlie          He wasn't even invited.

Shani            Which is your thing, right?

Lenny            Sorry?

Shani            Did you ask to post my picture?

Lenny            I asked to take it. I thought you'd assume that if it was any good I'd -

Shani            Well, it wasn't any good, and I didn't assume.

Lenny            What was wrong with it?

Charlie          Do you mind both taking this outside. I just, it's -

Lenny            I just need one more photo.

Shani            Really? And sorting this out doesn't feel more important to you than -

Lenny            I don't even know what it is you need to -

*Shani and Lenny are up in one another's faces. Jacob attempts to step in, to usher Shani out the door. She reacts badly, he steps away, lest it look like he assaulted her, stepping into Maia and her guitar, which in turn sends Maia sprawling into the food, possibly collapsing the table.*

*Freeze, all contemplating the damage the night has done. Then the actors set about clearing away the mess, speaking to each other as they do so.*

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Maia I don't see how it could have been any more shit.

Charlotte He didn't seem that angry.

Jacob I was surprised how well you took it.

Charlie I'd undercooked the patties. It's lucky you started that fight. Saved us all from food poisoning.

Jacob I didn't start anything.

Lenny Why are you even starting this?

Shani I didn't start it.

Charlie I know what I did wrong. I had the heat up too high, so the outside was burning before the middle was cooked. I'm not used to that gas top. I panicked.

Maia I completely panicked. I didn't mean to sing that song. I know a lot of songs. Why did I play that song? Do you think he noticed?

Lenny You know how much photography means to me. And then, in front of everybody, you have to criticise my work?

Shani Okay, I could have picked a better time, but I was angry.

Charlotte It's a beautiful song. Probably he was impressed.

Maia I don't think he was even watching. He seemed distracted. And I think I know why.

Lenny Look at the light on your cheekbones. That's gorgeous.

Shani Okay, this here is exactly my point.

Maia I think he likes you.

Charlotte What?

Jacob I think there's another reason you didn't get upset.

Charlie I'm a mellow guy. It takes a lot to get me angry.

Jacob I think it's because Maia was the one who fell onto the table.

Charlie It wasn't her fault.

Lenny No, you don't have a point. What you have is an attitude.

Shani My blog is an attempt at serious social commentary, and your photo makes me look like Typewriter Barbie. How can you not see that?

*The next line is spoken by Lenny, Charlotte and Charlie in unison*

All three Okay, well for the record, that is complete bullshit.

*The room now rearranged, the actors move back into their worlds. Jacob again at the weights. Charlie mixing in a bowl, Charlotte dancing, Maia back at her guitar. Lelani with*

*her camera, flicking back through photographs, thoughtful. Shani at her keyboard, agitated.*

Charlie        When I say complete bullshit - I couldn't get Maia's song out of my head. I liked the idea she might have been singing about me. I mean, I know she wasn't, but I can still like the idea, right?

Jacob         Charlie says him and Charlotte are just friends, but I sometimes get a feeling there's more to it than that... And yeah, that would be bad for me. So Charlie and Maia? I'd be okay with that.

Shani         When I get angry, it always sounds like I'm making way too big a thing of something that's really quite small. But that's the point, it's all those small things adding up that does the damage.

Charlotte     Is it just me, or is Jacob a lot hotter this year? He can't have always been like that, I would have noticed.

All together    And it might have ended there, but then there was a party.

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*Music up and we move into party world. All eight actors dancing now, not drunk, but an element of abandonment.*

*Actors shout over the music at the audience, moving in and out of the dancing.*

Jacob           By the time of the party, that was a week later, a lot of things had changed.

Maia            I'm never that person, okay? I'm never pushy. But Charlotte got angry with me.

Lenny           I get angry in the moment, like with Shani. At first I was furious.

Charlie          I ended up changing my whole concept. The mango salsa was taking over. You're meant to highlight the lamb. I was in danger of drowning it out.

Shani           The thing I like about Lenny, that I've always liked about him, is he listens. He gets pissed off at the time, but -

Lenny           I listen. I went to her blog. I started reading.

Charlotte       Maia was nervous, but I knew it was the only way of convincing her I wasn't into Charlie. Setting the two of them up, I mean. I made her call him, while I was in the room. It was painful.

*Music fades, dancers freeze. Charlotte and Maia on the phone. Charlotte stalks the background, doing all she can to keep her mouth shut.*

Charlie         Hey, Maia. Hi.

Maia            Hi.

Charlie         What are you up to?

Maia            Not much.

Charlie         Cool.

*Charlotte pokes Maia*

Maia            Ow!

Charlie         What was that?

Maia            Nothing. Just, someone being a dick.

Charlie         Who's there?

Maia            No one now. They've gone.

Charlie         Okay... So?

Maia            Yeah, right. I am, are you, you know...  
Charlie        Yeah, um, I don't... I, ah, I liked your song.  
Maia            What song?  
Charlie        The one you were singing the other night, just before -  
Maia            I broke your table.  
Charlie        Wasn't that bad. Just popped back in.  
Maia            Cool.

*Charlotte, exasperated, grabs the phone from Charlie. At the same time, Jacob, exasperated in the background, grabs the phone from Charlie.*

Charlotte     She wrote the song for you. She really likes you, okay? She wants to go out.  
Jacob         Me?  
Charlotte     Yeah, you. You're as bad as each other.  
Jacob         Are you sure it's me?  
Charlotte     Who's this?  
Jacob         Jacob.  
Charlotte     *To Maia* You were talking to Jacob?  
Maia          No,  
Jacob         I just took the phone off him, because he's completely -  
Charlotte     Useless.  
Jacob         Song wasn't about me, was it?  
Charlotte     No.  
Jacob         Shame, it's a nice song. You don't sing do you?  
Charlotte     Dance.  
Jacob         Dancing's cool... Hey, Charlie, Maia wants to go out with you.  
Charlie        When?  
Jacob         Yeah, he says he'd love to. How's Saturday night? He can pick her up.  
Charlotte     Yeah, sure, she's good with that. Bye then.  
Jacob         Bye.

*Charlotte and Jacob hang up and turn back to their friends.*

Together     Sorted.

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*Music back up and the party resumes. As the music fades the six characters move towards the audience, and speak almost as if trying to drag our attention away from the others, towards their story.*

Lenny           It was eye opening, Shani's blog. Like I'd spent all this time photographing the world, but I'd never really looked at it.

Charlotte       So, I know it's like a romcom cliché, but I thought I was talking to Charlie, and I was impressed by how relaxed and smooth he'd suddenly become, and I almost wished it was me going to ask him out... and then I realised it was Jacob... Jacob.

Shani            Each year the world spends over 65 billion dollars on cosmetics. And by the world, I mean women.

Lenny            That's enough money to provide every last person in the developing world with access to sanitation and clean drinking water, and education too.

Shani            If only we weren't so uncomfortable with the way we actually look.

Charlotte       I knew he'd be going to the party because, well, I checked.

Jacob            I sort of used it as an excuse to text Charlotte. It became our little project, getting Charlie and Maia together, although really it was just to have a reason...

Charlotte       To talk to him. He's a lovely listener. Like he hears what you say, he lets you lead the conversation.

Jacob            She's a dancer, you know. Graceful, and, well, okay, she's hot.

Charlie          Okay, I've decided I'm going to be honest, so yeah, um, I do get nervous. About a lot of things, but especially about girls. Women, I mean. See, even the language scares me.

Lenny            Did you know body image is a more powerful predictor of a woman's long term happiness than the love she received as a child? How's that not completely screwed up?

Charlie          So, I don't know. I see other guys, and they don't seem to care about being rejected. They just try, you know. And that seems sort of shit, but the thing is, they're the guys who always end up with the girls, so what does that tell you?

Shani            Lenny was a total convert. Like completely enthusiastic. Maybe too enthusiastic.

Lenny            And then there's us, right. There's the way we treat each other. Take a walk through a school ground, any day of the week, and just listen to the things we're saying...

*Shani and Lenny move together, arms around one another, playing the role of leering males.*

- Would you look at her.
- You know what I'd like to do to her?
- You know what I have done to her?
- Yeah, slut.
- Slut.
- What are you looking at?
- Ugly girls are always angry.
- She could at least grow her hair, try to cover it up.
- Don't look at that one.
- Really? I don't know.
- You couldn't afford the antibiotics.

*They high five one another's genius then slip back into place and role.*

Charlotte I have these trousers I got at the end of last year. I like them. They're the only trousers I really like.

Maia I haven't told him, about the song. But I'm going to. I'm going to tell him I wrote it for him.

Charlotte I look good in them.

Jacob I know I don't look like I work out. It takes a while, to make a proper difference.

Maia I have this plan, I know this sounds silly, because we haven't even been on a date yet...

Shani 1 in 3 girls in New Zealand are estimated to have been sexually abused by the age of sixteen. 90% of the perpetrators are people they already know. It happens in our homes, at our parties, amongst our friends. So my argument is, we need to take responsibility for that. Because it's everybody's problems.

Lenny And I had a plan.

Charlotte Trouble is, the trousers are hard to get on. Okay, to be honest, if I want to wear them in the evening, I can't really eat that day. But they look great. I feel good in them. It's important to feel good.

Maia No, it's too silly. I'm not going to say. I don't know why I even started.

Jacob I know she's a dancer, and that's cool. Like our class went in to watch their dance assessment the other week, and I liked that. But I'm not really a dancer myself. I hope there won't be any dancing, at the party.

Charlotte Once I have them on, I can't really move much. Like, there won't be any dancing.

Charlie It's hard to know what girls expect, sometimes. It's hard to know if they really like you.

Maia Okay, but you can't tell anyone. Like, you know how Charlie's really into cooking, and I've always had this dream of working in a cafe by a beach somewhere. I'm not saying... it's just a thing I like to think about... okay, it's stupid.

Lenny And so often, there's other people there who know what's going on. Like I remember I had this friend, and there was this guy deliberately getting her drunk, and I didn't... I was too busy getting photos.

Shani Whenever I post anything that is, you know, honest, the trolls come out. And the thing about them, apart from their ignorance and cowardice, is they're all so angry. There are so many people out there who are so incredibly angry.

Charlie It sounds stupid, I know, but some things, you just know they're going to be important.

Maia Like that party. I knew before I went. I had a feeling.

Shani I knew it was going to move beyond the keyboard. I knew that would have to happen.

Lenny So I said to her, why not now? Why not tonight?

Charlotte I've been looking forward to it since I woke up. I've had this fluttering in my stomach all day, not just the hunger, a different fluttering.

Jacob I haven't made plans. If I make plans, I get frustrated when they don't work out. And then I get grumpy, and hard to like.

Maia Go with the flow, that's the thing. Don't try too hard.

All It is what it is.

*Party Music back up*

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*The party goers are standing together, talking, laughing, maybe trying to dance. As the voices tell their stories, the two couples emerge, in both cases the boy leading the girl away. She looks neither excited nor reluctant. An ambiguous scene.*

- Male           The trick is to make it light to start with. Make her see how much fun it is to be with you. Make her see how much she has to lose.
- Female         Remember he'll be nervous, just like you are. You need to put him at ease. Help him to relax.
- Male           Don't let her know you're nervous. Even if you are not feeling confident, it is important to fake it. There is nothing more attractive than confidence.
- Female         Ask him to help you with something. It will make him feel important.
- Male           Compliment her early, but then hold back a little. Make her work for your approval.
- Female         Ask him questions. Give him plenty of opportunity to talk about himself.
- Male           Be honest about your intentions. Don't let her say you misled her. If she's not interested, no loss. Move on and try again.
- Female         Let him take the lead. He will feel threatened if you are too pushy.
- Male           Physical interactions are emotional, not cognitive. Don't talk about it, it will only ruin the mood.
- Female         It is your right to say no, but it is also his right to lose interest in you if you do. Nobody will tell you this, but everybody knows it's true.
- Male and  
Female         Because in every competition there is a price to pay for winning. Do not be afraid of that. Those who are afraid of paying the price will forever be the losers.
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*The two couples now stand, so that one on one side of the room are the two boys, on the other the two girls. Although all four face the audience, this scene plays out as if each couple is alone in the room, sitting alongside one another. At first the movements and speech of both couples is completely synchronised i.e Maia and Charlotte speak and move together, as do Charlie and Jacob.*

C and J        So, that's better. Away from the noise.

C and M        Yeah.

*C and J make their move, arm around the girl. C and M notice, smile, and after a moment's hesitation, settle into this.*

C and J        *Whispered* You're beautiful.

C and M        Thank you.

*C and J move in. A kiss. Once, awkward and tentative, then another, longer and more assertive. The other free hands moving as they kiss. Bodies moving in response.*

*As C and J's hands move and from the response on the girls we see how. At this point both girls, after a beat of doubt, move, taking the offending hand and moving up, off the couch.*

C and M        Sorry. I'm just not comfortable with this. I, ah, I think we should get back to the party.

*Suspended silence. Then Jacob moves forward, takes Charlotte's hand.*

Jacob         Yeah, sure. Sorry.

*They move off, leaving Charlie and Maia standing apart and alone.*

Maia          Sorry.

Charlie        That's okay.

*Charlie extends his hand, and it is as if Maia has taken it, allows herself to be drawn back down.*

*Meanwhile, Kenny and Shani arrive at the party, energised and motivated, fizzing with intent. Kenny stands on a table.*

Kenny           Everybody, can I have your attention?

*Shani rushes over*

Shani            What are you doing?

Kenny            I'm taking a stand.

Shani            You're being a dick.

Kenny            The first step towards taking a stand. You want to know what the second step is?

Shani            No.

Kenny            Not caring that you're being a dick.

Shani            Four days ago you thought it was okay to take photos of women and post them on-line without permission, now you're lecturing me on activism?

Kenny            Most women are on a diet for most of their lives. We've created a world where women are taught to forever dislike the way they look. That's insane.

Shani            Yes I know. And I know how you know. You read it on my blog.

Kenny            From the youngest age little girls are taught it is their job to please others and keep the peace. They are basically being conditioned to be exploited.

Shani            I agree with you.

Kenny            A young woman today will be exposed to more images of the female form in a single day than their grandmothers saw in their entire lives.

Shani            Yes, and if give in to this relentless objectification and attempt to participate, you're called a slut.

Kenny            And if you don't you're called a prude.

Shani            Or ignored completely. Kenny, I already know this. You don't have to tell me.

Kenny            I'm not telling you. I'm telling them.

Shani            They're not listening.

Kenny            So what we do?

Shani            You have to be patient.

Kenny            I don't want to be patient. Right now, as we speak, in this very house, a young woman is standing before a young man, and wishing she wasn't, but she doesn't know how to get out of it.

Shani            You don't know that.

Kenny           Odds on it's true. And I think this is exactly the thing. I think we have to stop being patient.

*The smallest hesitation from Shani, then a determined nod.*

Shani           Yeah, you're right.

*Shani produces a megaphone as if it is a powerful weapon, action movie piss-take style. Freezes.*

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*Spotlights back up on Maia and Charlie. They animate, making it appear, despite still being apart, that they are kissing. Again Charlie's hand wanders. Again Maia wriggles away. Silence.*

Maia            Sorry, I just...  
 Charlie        Nah, that's cool.  
 Maia            Thank you.  
 Charlie        It's okay.  
 Maia            Are you all right?  
 Charlie        Course.  
 Maia            We could go back to the party.  
 Charlie        Yeah, soon. Just taking a moment.  
 Maia            I didn't mean to -  
 Charlie        I might just go home actually. I'm not really in the mood for a party.  
 Maia            If you want to... I can get a ride with somebody else.  
 Charlie        I thought you liked me.  
 Maia            I do... Who are you texting?  
 Charlie        Does it matter?

*Still in their spotlight, Maia leans back into him.*

Maia            That's not fair.  
 Charlie        What did you think would happen, when you came through here?  
 Maia            I just... Yeah, I know, I should have said... I didn't know. I wasn't sure.

*Looks at his phone, incoming message.*

Charlie        Anyway, out of here.  
 Maia            I do like you. I'm just not sure I -  
 Charlie        It's all right. I shouldn't have asked. You just seemed like the girl who'd be relaxed with who she was, you know. It's one of the things I like about you.

*Charlie turns, again, kisses her. She does not resist.*

Charlie        You're beautiful.  
 Maia            You really think so?  
 Charlie        Yeah, I do.

*Action freezes.*

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*Enter our Host, who walks centre stage and addresses the audience directly.*

Host            So, there are a number of ways this story could end. Some of those endings are hopeful, some of them familiar and depressing. But we are interested in hopeful endings tonight, and so we offer you three and ask you to choose between them. We want you to think about the thing you most want to happen next. The ending which receives the most audience votes is the ending you will see played out before you tonight. Here are your choices:

Number one. Maia has had enough, and finds the strength and courage to call Charlie on his emotional manipulation. She calls his bullshit and walks out on him.

Two. Charlie's male friend, Jacob, decides it is his responsibility, as a young man, to call out his friend on his predatory behaviour. He locates his courage, crashes into the room and lets rip.

Three. Lenny and Shani, our locked and loaded activists, play out the little protest they have planned, and it is precisely loud enough and embarrassing enough to bring the would-be couple back out into the light.

## Ending Number One

*Charlie springs suddenly back, hand to his mouth.*

Charlie      Ow, what the -  
Maia         Sorry, did I not make myself clear earlier?  
Charlie      You bit me.  
Maia         You groped me.  
Charlie      It's bleeding.  
Maia         Got your attention.  
Charlie      You're out of your mind.  
Maia         Yeah, being frightened can do that.  
Charlie      What did you have to be frightened of, I wasn't going to -  
Maia         You already had.

*Charlie stops, thinks. He's got nothing. We see him realise, soften.*

Charlie      I'm sorry.  
Maia         You were the only other person in this room who could keep me safe,  
               Charlie. That was your job. It's always your job.  
Charlie      I said I'm sorry.  
Maia         Yeah.  
Charlie      I do feel like shit.  
Maia         Hang on to that feeling. Next time I want you to remember it.  
Charlie      I will.  
Maia         Some things, there are a lot of grey areas. This isn't one of them... I'm  
               going back out to the party now.  
Charlie      You mind if I come with you?  
Maia         Maybe another time.

*Maia moves back out to the others, all fake smiles. Music up, people dancing. Charlie moves back into the space, watches.*

*Scene freezes. The two voices move back through the frozen actors. Lights down.*

## Ending number Two

*Charlotte and Jacob are together.*

Charlotte     You have to do something.

Jacob         I have to do something?

Charlotte     He's your friend.

Jacob         And she's your friend.

Charlotte     This only gets better when men find the balls to make it better.

Jacob         He's not... he won't.

Charlotte     You sure about that?

Jacob         Maybe she wants to.

Charlotte     She told me she didn't. I think this is why she told me. I think she wanted me to have her back.

Jacob         Told you, not me,

Charlotte     Okay, well you got halfway to really impressing me tonight. Just want to say that.

Jacob         All right, I'll go.

*Deep breath from Jacob. He is not looking forward to this. He moves into the room, pushing the door open, hand theatrically over his eyes.*

Jacob         Room service!

*Charlie and Maia spring apart, snapped.*

Charlie        What the hell, man?

*But it is obvious from the guilt on his face, and the relief on Maia's, that Jacob has arrived at exactly the right time.*

Jacob         You're an asshole.

Charlie        I didn't do anything that she didn't want me to do.

*Jacob looks to Maia, who won't meet his eye.*

Charlie        So you're just going to take her side?

Jacob         I think the fact that you think there are sides here says plenty.

Charlie        And you just thought to come here all by yourself did you? That wasn't  
                  Charlotte's idea? Bitch whipped.

Jacob         If by that you mean I want the people I like to be happy, then sure. How  
                  screwed up would you have to be for that to ever become an insult?

Charlie        I'm not listening to this shit.

*Charlie storms out. Jacob and Maia return to the party. Music up, dancing. Charlie  
returns to the edges and watches.*

*Scene freezes. The two voices move back through the frozen actors. Lights down.*

## Ending Number Three

*Shani moves forward with her megaphone, but doesn't speak into it.*

Shani           Where are they? Where's Charlie at?

*Jacob nods in the direction of the room. Shani nods. She and Lenny creep forward, commando style, signalling to one another as they go.*

*Shani, through the megaphone.*

Shani           Charlie, we know you're in there. I need you to move away from Maia and come out slowly, with your hands in the air.

*We see Charlie and Maia pause. Maia suggesting they should respond, Charlie waving it off as a joke to be ignored.*

Shani           Don't make this any harder than it needs to be.

*Shani nods to Lenny, who begins to chant. He quickly enlists the help of the rest of the cast, who join in. Shani is next to join, on the megaphone.*

*Lenny turns to the audience, to call upon their support. Cast members in the audience lead the participation.*

Chant           Don't guess the yes. Don't guess the yes. Don't guess the yes...

*Charlie relinquishes, moves out into the space, hands in the air. He walks off. The others move back to the party. Music up. They dance. Charlie returns to the edges and watches.*

*Scene freezes. The two voices move back through the frozen actors. Lights down.*