

5. INT. LIVING ROOM. AFTERNOON.

Open on a cosy but spacious sitting room. A large sofa sits in the middle, behind a small wooden coffee table stacked with books and newspapers. To the side of the room is a small dining table, and seated in one of the accompanying chairs is CARRIE. Behind the sofa is LEAH, who is pacing up and down nervously. CARRIE watches her closely from the table, slightly warily.

CARRIE  
You're nervous.

LEAH  
I'm fine.

She turns to face her and stops, observing her.

LEAH (CONT'D)  
What about you? Are you okay?

CARRIE looks at her hands in her lap.

CARRIE  
I'm alright.

BEAT.

LEAH watches her for a moment with a small smile. CARRIE refuses to look at her. Slowly, LEAH wanders across the room and slips her arms around her neck from behind.

LEAH  
(into her ear)  
Have I told you yet how cute you  
look today?

For a moment CARRIE keeps her arms folded and her face set, but eventually she relents and wraps her arms around LEAH's.

CARRIE  
I look cute every day.

LEAH  
You do.

She releases her. CARRIE turns in her seat to look at her. They smile at each other for a moment. Suddenly CARRIE's face falls.

CARRIE  
Did you pick up the wine?

LEAH laughs.

LEAH  
Where did that come from?

CARRIE  
Did you?

LEAH  
I forgot.

CARRIE  
Shit.

LEAH  
What's the problem? He was never a  
big drinker.

BEAT.

CARRIE  
I really think we should have some.

LEAH  
Carrie, I really don't think he'll  
care.

CARRIE  
It's good manners. Good hosting.

LEAH  
You need to calm down. I really  
don't know what you're so worried  
about ... where are you going?

CARRIE has picked up her keys from the table.

CARRIE  
I'm going to go and get some. I'm  
sorry, I just don't feel right  
without something to offer him.

LEAH  
But it's already half three-

CARRIE  
I'll be quick!

She hurries away through the front door and closes it with a  
slam. LEAH sighs, exasperated. Her gaze wanders around the  
room, landing upon a vase on the table - the flowers are  
arranged messily. She crosses to it and begins to arrange  
them, stepping back to survey her handiwork. Just as she  
does, there is a knock on the door.

She freezes. She turns to stare at the door, eyes wide.  
Slowly, she walks toward it, arranging her hair and smoothing  
her dress as she does so. She stops in front of it and  
extends a hand toward the handle, pausing briefly as her  
fingers brush the metal. She opens the door; behind it stands  
LUKE, wearing a smart suit. They stare at each other for a  
long time.

LUKE  
Hello, stranger.

LEAH just looks at him, mute and frozen to the spot.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
Aren't you going to invite me in?

LEAH steps aside. LUKE enters, surveying his surroundings.  
LEAH watches him, transfixed.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
You have a lovely place. A little  
different than I pictured, but ...  
nice.  
(beat, watching her)  
I've got to say, you're kind of  
freaking me out.

LEAH rouses herself.

LEAH  
Sorry.

LUKE  
It's alright.

LEAH  
I just ... I ... it's a lot to-

LUKE  
You don't have to-

LEAH  
No, please. I just ... I need time,  
I ... I don't know how to-

LUKE  
Please, it's okay. I get it.

LEAH  
You do?

LUKE  
Of course I do. Let's just take it  
easy, yeah?

BEAT.

LEAH  
Okay.

LUKE  
Okay.

They smile at each other, then fall silent, avoiding each other's eyes.

BEAT.

LEAH

What do you mean, 'different'?

LUKE

What?

LEAH

The place.

LUKE

Oh. I don't know, really.

(beat)

I suppose I expected more ... stuff. You always had a bit of a thing for knick-knacks.

LEAH

Did I?

LUKE

Are you joking? You used to pick up all sorts of cheap crap.

LEAH

No, I didn't!

LUKE

You did. Don't you remember when we went to that car boot sale up near your Mum's place in Grosmont? You insisted on buying that horrible little green vase - couldn't prise you away from it with a crowbar.

LEAH

That wasn't horrible, it was cute!

LUKE

If you say so. Do you still have it? To say I hated it so much at the beginning, I became kind of fond of the thing after a while. It would be nice to see it again.

LEAH

Do you know, I have no clue where it ended up. Haven't seen it in years, I'd forgotten it existed. Out of sight, out of mind, I sup-

She breaks off suddenly, eyes wide with slight panic. She breaks eye contact again.

BEAT.

LUKE LEAH (CONT'D)  
Leah, it's alright. You don't Do you want to sit down?  
need to-

LUKE (CONT'D)  
(taken aback)  
Erm ... I'll stand, if that's okay.  
I seem to have a lot of energy to  
burn off, lately.

LEAH  
Sure. Okay. I'll stand too, then.

BEAT.

LEAH (CONT'D)  
God, I'm sorry, Luke. This is so  
awkward. I'm so awkward.

LUKE  
You're not awkward-

LEAH  
No, I am. I really am. You know,  
it's funny. I played out this  
conversation so many times in my  
head, especially in the first few  
years. I thought I'd imagined every  
possible way it could go,  
everything you might say, every  
facial expression, all of it. But  
now that you're actually here,  
standing in front of me ... I just  
don't have a clue what to say.

LUKE crosses to her and takes her hand.

LUKE  
Sometimes words aren't necessary.

She looks up at him and smiles for a moment, then starts slightly. She pulls her hand away and walks away from him into the centre of the room. She leans on the sofa and exhales.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
Are you okay?

LEAH  
Yes. No.  
(beat)  
I feel like I'm in a time warp.

LUKE  
You and me both.

BEAT.

LEAH  
Luke?

LUKE  
Yeah?

LEAH  
What was it like?

LUKE  
What was what like?

LEAH looks at him pointedly. He smiles slightly.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
Three words should cover it.  
Coldness. Darkness. Hunger.

LEAH  
Come on.

LUKE  
What?

LEAH  
Masking how you feel won't help.

LUKE  
I'm not 'masking how I feel'. I  
just don't have much to say about  
it.

LEAH looks at him.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
Look, I could tell you more, but I  
don't think you'd want to hear it.  
It doesn't make for happy  
listening.

BEAT.

LEAH  
Alright. I won't push. What I do  
want - need - to know, though ...  
is what happened at the end.

LUKE  
When they found us?

LEAH  
Yeah.

LUKE

Surely you've heard this already?  
It's been all over the news.

LEAH

I want to hear it from you.

BEAT.

LUKE

To be honest, the details are a little blurry. Lots of images and noises, some of which I'm not sure were even real. The shrink in my unit says some of them could even be false memories because they don't necessarily fit with the other reports, but he's not sure. Neither am I.

(beat)

What I definitely do remember though is hearing a lot of shouting outside the cell. It was usually so ... quiet in there. Whenever they would visit us, we never got any prior warning until the door actually opened - it was just something we got used to over time. But the shouts that day ... I don't know how, I just knew it was different. Still only had a split second to act, though. I told the rest of the lads to lie face down on the floor and to keep their hands on the back of their heads where they could be seen. Then the door burst open and all I could hear was the sound of gunfire - shots ricocheting off the walls above our heads. God, you wouldn't believe the noise - one of the loudest things I've ever heard, and probably ever will hear. In that tiny space, it sounded like hundreds of small explosions going off at once - I could actually feel the empty shells raining down on to my back. And then the noise stopped as suddenly as it started, and this pool of wetness started to spread around my hand.

LEAH

Oh, God. Blood?

LUKE

Piss.

LEAH

What?

LUKE

Turns out that Cootes was so frightened that he pissed himself next to me. I could smell it - fuck, it was so near to my mouth I could almost taste it.

LEAH

That's horrible. Awful.

LUKE

Can't blame him, though - it could just as easily have been any of us.

LEAH

What happened next?

LUKE

Nothing at first. Everything was just so quiet. The guns had stopped, but it wasn't just that - there was no footfall either. No running, no voices, nothing. I still don't know whether that moment lasted ten seconds or ten minutes, but I just stayed exactly where I was, face down on that cold, dirty floor in an ever-spreading pool of piss. I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, I couldn't even open my eyes. It was like I was paralysed. And you know, for a second I thought that a stray bullet had clipped me in the neck and that I really was paralysed, because you could have told me that a bomb was going to go off next to my head and I still wouldn't have moved. I didn't know who was there around me or what was happening. All I knew was that there had been a confrontation and someone was the winner, but I had no idea who it was. It could have been a rival group for all I knew, there to drag us off into a different kind of hell.

(beat)

I wasn't sure if any of the other lads had taken fire, if they were alive or dead, and still, I couldn't bring myself to lift up my head. I just laid there and waited.

(MORE)



LUKE (CONT'D)

Then suddenly I was flipped on to my back and a light was shone into my eyes, so bright that I couldn't see a thing - it felt like my retinas were frying in my head. And then, out of nowhere - I heard it.

LEAH

(breathlessly)

What?

LUKE

A fucking Scouse accent. Can you imagine that? Five years in the dark and the first English accent I have to hear from my rescuers was Scouse.

LEAH doesn't smile, still watching him anxiously.

LEAH

And after that?

LUKE

After that I can't really remember much else. Pretty sure I passed out again. The next thing I knew, I was waking up in a makeshift hospital on the border of the Nimruz Province, listening to Smith asking an Afghan doctor for a bag of Chipsticks. Fucking idiot.

LEAH stares at him, lost for words.

BEAT.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

LEAH

You're asking *me* that?

LUKE

It's a lot to process.

BEAT.

LEAH

How did you feel? When you got off the plane?

LUKE

The jury's still out on that one, I think.

LEAH  
Right.

BEAT.

LEAH (CONT'D)  
It is alright, isn't it? Me asking  
you things? It's not going to ...  
you know ...

LUKE  
What?

LEAH  
Trigger things.

LUKE  
I'm not going to hide from  
imaginary gunfire under your  
kitchen table, if that's what  
you're worried about. I'd like to  
think I'm made of tougher stuff  
than that.

LEAH  
(suddenly annoyed)  
It's not about being "tough". PTSD  
does exist, you know, and it's  
serious. And those who suffer are  
held back by people like you who  
constantly dismiss their ... what's  
so funny?

LUKE  
Nothing.

LEAH  
Well, clearly something is.

LUKE  
You just ... you're still kind of  
hot-headed, that's all.

LEAH  
(challengingly)  
Yeah?

LUKE  
Yeah.

BEAT.

LEAH  
I guess I am.  
(chastened)  
Sorry.

LUKE

Don't be. It's kind of comforting to know that some things, at least, haven't changed.

(beat)

At home it's hard to find much that's stayed the same.

LEAH

How are your family? I haven't seen them in a while. How's your Mum?

LUKE

She's good, mostly. More tired than I remember, though. There's a weariness around her eyes I haven't seen before.

LEAH

She's older. We all are.

BEAT.

LUKE

You haven't changed a bit, you know.

LEAH

Yeah, right. The last five full years have left me completely untouched.

LUKE

No, really - you haven't. I mean, okay - your hair is a little different, and your clothes, but ... you still have the same face. The same eyes.

A long moment passes as they look at each other.

LUKE (CONT'D)

I sometimes catch her staring at me like that, too, you know. When she thinks I'm not looking.

LEAH

Like what?

LUKE

Like she's looking at a ghost.

LEAH

In a way, she is.

LUKE reels as if stung. LEAH steps forward, worried.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Oh God, Luke, I'm so sorry. I just didn't think. I didn't mean to hurt you. I only meant that she ... she grieved you. We all did. We had a funeral with an empty casket. We read poems, we sang your favourite songs, we cried together. We had to find our own ways to get closure, to let you go, and now you're ... that's all I meant. Look at me, please ...

She steps closer, placing a nervous hand on his arm. After a moment, he reaches up and covers her hand with his. He stares at the floor for a long time.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Luke? What's wrong?

LUKE shakes his head.

LEAH (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Come on. Talk to me.

BEAT.

LUKE

There's no place for me anymore, Leah. There's just ... there's nothing left. No trace of who I was. My own family look at me like I'm a stranger. I feel like I'm standing in a glass box, and everyone else is on the other side, and no matter how hard I try I just can't seem to find the way out. It's as if ... as if I really did die down there. Maybe it would have been better for everyone if I had.

LEAH

Never say that ever again. Do you hear me? Listen to me. This moment was all we've thought about for years. It's all we dreamed of, all we hoped for. You need to give yourself time, and give your family time - but don't for one second think that that phone call to say that you'd been found wasn't the best moment of your Mum's life. Okay?

Slowly, he turns to face her.

LUKE

There wasn't a single day you  
didn't cross my mind.

They look at each other, brimming with emotion. Slowly, he reaches down and takes her other hand. She looks at it for a moment, before looking up at him. Gently, he leans down as if to kiss her, but before their lips meet she turns her head down to face the floor and his kiss touches her forehead instead. They remain close together in the space for a moment, holding each other sadly. Eventually, he eases back and releases her. They observe each other and a moment of understanding passes between them. He nods and smiles sadly.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Does he make you happy?

LEAH

She does. Very.

(beat)

Yeah, you heard correctly.

LUKE

Are you in love?

LEAH

Yes.

BEAT.

LUKE

Well, then. That's all I could ever  
ask for, isn't it?

LEAH

(crying)

Oh, Luke. I'm so sorry.

He crosses to her and lifts her chin up.

LUKE

What do you possibly have to be  
sorry about?

She continues to cry. He strokes her hair gently.

LUKE (CONT'D)

When I thought about you, all I  
ever pictured was that you were  
happy, you know. It's all I've ever  
wanted for you. I hoped every day  
that you'd found someone who would  
give you everything you deserve and  
more. I must admit, the image I had  
is a little different from reality,  
but hey, if your type's changed,  
your type's changed ...

LEAH lets out a watery laugh.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
Believe me. All I've ever wanted  
was the best for you. Even if it  
isn't possible anymore for that to  
be with me.

LEAH  
I only want the best for you, too.

LUKE  
I know.

There is a long pause. LEAH wipes her eyes and takes a deep breath.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
Are you okay now?

LEAH  
Yeah.

LUKE  
Listen, I have to go. I'm meeting  
my old Sergeant for dinner at half  
four, and it's all the way across  
town.

LEAH  
Is that why you're dressed so ...?

LUKE  
Yeah.

LEAH  
Do you want to meet her before you  
go? She should be back any minute -  
she just went to get wine.

He considers.

LUKE  
I think, on reflection, I'd rather  
not. Is that alright?

BEAT.

She nods. Wordlessly, he opens his arms. She crosses to him and they embrace softly. When they pull apart, LEAH has to wipe her eyes again.

LEAH  
Take care of yourself, won't you?

He nods, picks up his bag and heads for the door.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Luke?

He turns back. She looks at him.

LEAH (CONT'D)

I did wait for you, you know. For years. For far longer than anyone thought I should. I just ... I needed you to know that.

LUKE smiles at her and nods. His eyes are suddenly wet with tears. He gives her a final wave, and leaves. LEAH stands, very still, for a long time.

Suddenly the door opens and CARRIE walks in, clutching a bottle of wine in a carrier bag. She looks warily around her.

CARRIE

Is he here?

LEAH

You just missed him.

CARRIE

What? Already?

LEAH nods.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

(disappointed)

But I bought wine ...

Suddenly, LEAH crosses to her and throws her arms around her, pulling her into a tight hug. It is very loving and intimate.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

What's this for?

LEAH

I'm just grateful for you.

She releases her.

CARRIE

Silly little mush-ball.

(holding up the carrier bag)

Do you want some?

LEAH

Alright.

CARRIE leaves with the wine. LEAH takes a long, deep breath, before following her out of the room.

FADE OUT.