

7. INT. BASEMENT. EVENING.

We open on a large basement room, poorly lit by a single portable halogen lamp in the middle of the floor. Tools and other miscellaneous items are stacked in piles against the back wall, including an old step ladder and a bench, but other than that it is spartan and bare.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor beside the lamp is PAIGE, looking bored. By the door, evidently furious, is ASHLEY.

She bangs frantically on the door, then tugs unsuccessfully at the handle. Bending down, she tries to look through the keyhole. PAIGE watches her silently. ASHLEY hammers on the door again, frustrated.

ASHLEY

I know you can hear me, you little bastards! I swear, when this door is opened, I'll - I'll strangle you all one by one!

PAIGE

Oh, that's a great idea. Threatening them with violence will definitely make them let us out.

ASHLEY ignores her, tugging at the door handle again with force. She lets out a howl of frustration and leans back against the door, momentarily depleted.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

You're just playing right into their hands. It's pointless.

ASHLEY pushes away from the door and begins to walk purposefully around the space, scanning the walls and floor for inspiration. PAIGE watches her closely.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?  
(beat)  
Ash?

ASHLEY neither looks at her nor speaks.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Fine, just ignore me, then. That'll help the time pass.

ASHLEY

(aggravated)  
I'd like to think that it's fucking obvious what I'm doing.

PAIGE

No, actually. It isn't.

ASHLEY

I am quite clearly looking for an alternative way out. A window, or a grill, or-or something ... anything.

BEAT.

PAIGE

In a basement?

ASHLEY turns away from her, irritated, and continues to search.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Personally I think you've been reading too much Agatha Christie, but you do whatever you-

ASHLEY

For God's sake, shut up! Just shut up, Paige!

BEAT.

PAIGE

Wow.

BEAT.

ASHLEY

I'm sorry, alright? But if you're going to just sit on your arse and not help, the least you can do is let me hear myself think.

ASHLEY starts to fish around in some cardboard boxes in the corner. Tools clatter around inside.

PAIGE

I don't know why you're getting this worked up - they can't leave us down here forever. You need to just calm down, stop giving them so much bloody entertainment and let them get bored. Because I'm sorry, but unless you know how to pick a lock, there's nothing we can do.

ASHLEY pulls a large hammer out of one of the boxes and weighs it in her hand. She turns to look at the door.

ASHLEY

I can't pick a lock, no ...

PAIGE gets to her feet, alarmed.

PAIGE

Don't even think about it.

ASHLEY doesn't reply. PAIGE crosses the room to her.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Ash, I mean it. If you hit the door with that, you'll break the lock and then we'll be stuck down here all night until Cara can find a locksmith. And let's face it, she's not exactly the most practical person in the world, is she?

(beat)

Please. Put it back.

There is a pause, and then ASHLEY reluctantly replaces the tool inside the cardboard box.

ASHLEY

I wasn't actually going to do it.

PAIGE

Good. You haven't totally taken leave of your senses.

They look at each other and smile. Then, as quickly as it arrives, the warm moment passes and ASHLEY walks away from PAIGE toward the halogen lamp. She slumps to the floor and pulls out her phone. PAIGE turns around, observes her for a moment and then joins her, settling herself on the other side of the lamp.

ASHLEY

The WiFi doesn't reach this far. Still no signal, either.

PAIGE

I know. I checked already, while you were planning your Great Escape.

ASHLEY groans loudly into her hands.

ASHLEY

Those fuckers - I'll kill them. Locking someone in for five or ten minutes - okay, sure. Fine. Congratulations, ha-ha, joke's on us. I have a sense of humour, I can laugh at that. But it's been *half* a bloody hour. They're sadists.

PAIGE

Why don't we play a game or something to pass the time?

ASHLEY  
And it's absolutely fucking  
freezing down here, too.

ASHLEY shuffles closer to the lamp, blowing on her  
fingertips.

PAIGE  
Ash.

ASHLEY  
What?

PAIGE  
Didn't you hear me? I said, why  
don't we play a game?

ASHLEY  
Why would I want to do that?

PAIGE  
Okay, fine. How about we just chat  
for a bit, then?

ASHLEY  
I don't know about you, but this  
hasn't really put me in a 'chatty'  
mood.

PAIGE  
Come on. At the very least it'll  
waste a few minutes.  
(beat, irritably)  
Or alternatively, we could just sit  
here in complete silence, feeling  
each miserable minute drag by  
until-

ASHLEY  
(snaps)  
Fine!  
(relenting)  
Alright. We can ... we can chat.

BEAT.

PAIGE  
(pleased)  
Great.  
(beat)  
So, then. How have you been?

ASHLEY  
Fine. You?

PAIGE  
Good, yeah. Moving along, you know.

ASHLEY  
Good.

BEAT.

PAIGE  
Actually, there's something I forgot to mention upstairs - I do have some pretty exciting news.

ASHLEY  
Oh?

PAIGE  
Yeah, so - well, I mean, it's not a big deal really. When I say 'exciting', I meant in the sense that it shows some progress-

ASHLEY  
(interrupting)  
What is it?

Surreptitiously, she glances at her phone on the floor.

PAIGE  
Jenny called me into her office last week. I didn't really know what she wanted because, to be honest, I never thought she liked me very much-

ASHLEY  
(picking up her phone)  
I've got a bar!

She scrambles to her feet and rushes across the room toward the door. PAIGE looks a little wrong-footed.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
Right. Time to tell those little shits upstairs that if they don't come down and let us out right now, I'm calling Cara's parents.

PAIGE  
(looking at her phone)  
I'm still out. I doubt you'd have enough signal to make a call, even if a message somehow gets through.

ASHLEY  
Yes, but they don't need to know that, do they?

There is a pause as ASHLEY stands by the door and begins to type feverishly.

PAIGE

Erm ... yeah, so. So anyway ...  
where was I?

ASHLEY doesn't reply.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Oh, yeah! So all this time I  
thought she didn't like me, but it  
turns out that she really loved the  
work I did on that foyer  
installation at the V&A. I wasn't  
responsible for all that much,  
obviously, and the senior members  
of the team had to give me a lot of  
help, but apparently it made her  
realise that I'm not useless.

ASHLEY

(distracted)

Great ...

PAIGE

So anyway, here's the exciting bit.  
We're partnering with a Sicilian  
team on a conservation project at  
the Villa Romana del Casale next  
month, and she's decided to send me  
with the rest of the team! You  
should see the photos, Ash, you'd  
love it - amazing Mediterranean  
landscape, sun-drenched old  
buildings, it's like paradise. And  
it has some of the oldest frescoes  
in the world, they're so beautiful.  
Honestly, I was so jealous whenever  
anyone mentioned it, but now I  
actually get to see them up close.

PAIGE looks at ASHLEY, waiting for a reaction. ASHLEY is  
still looking at her phone. Suddenly she realises that PAIGE  
has finished speaking.

ASHLEY

That's amazing, Paige.  
Congratulations, you deserve it.

PAIGE

(pleased)

Thank you.

ASHLEY

I guess you'll get a load of  
credits for it, too, which helps.

PAIGE

Credits?

ASHLEY

Yeah - for your course. Doing extra work, surely it'll count?

BEAT.

PAIGE

I graduated from my course six months ago.

BEAT.

ASHLEY

No, you didn't.

PAIGE

Yes, I did.

ASHLEY

Did you finish early or something?

PAIGE

No. Right on time.

ASHLEY

Oh. I could have sworn you said it was this year. In fact, you did - you definitely did say that.

PAIGE

I never said that, because it never was. I graduated last year.

ASHLEY

Oh.

(beat)

Are you sure?

PAIGE

Am I sure that I attended my own graduation?

BEAT.

ASHLEY

The signal has gone again.

She holds the phone above her head, circling in the space.

PAIGE

What did you think I've been doing all this time?

ASHLEY

Oh, thank God - it's back.

PAIGE

I must have mentioned my job at least twenty times in the group chat - especially at the beginning.

ASHLEY

(typing aloud)

'It's not funny anymore, fuckers ...'

(to PAIGE)

It's not like I knew nothing, is it? I knew you were doing something ... you know ... artsy. I just didn't know what.

PAIGE

Did you even read my messages?

ASHLEY

Don't be silly, of course I did ... right, done. Hopefully that goes through ... look, does it even really matter? I couldn't tell you what half of that lot up there do, either. Not in any detail, anyway.

PAIGE

You talked to Cara for a good twenty minutes about her job. Seemed like you knew plenty of 'detail' to me.

ASHLEY

That's different - her job is related to mine. SAP Finance and Accountancy go hand in hand. Whereas what you do ... it's not in my lane.

PAIGE

Pretty sure I heard you talking to Marnie about her work, too. How is dog grooming 'in your lane'?

ASHLEY

Oh, for fuck's sake. They aren't sending. Why not? There's a bar, there's one bar, it's right there!

(beat)

This is the worst fucking weekend of my entire life.

PAIGE

Because you're stuck down here? Or because you're stuck down here with me?



ASHLEY finally prises her attention away from her phone and looks at her.

ASHLEY

What?

PAIGE

You heard me.

BEAT.

ASHLEY

Maybe there's something I missed in one of these boxes. A crowbar or something-

PAIGE

(getting up)

You're not even denying it, are you? You're not even denying the fact that you can't stand to be around me anymore.

ASHLEY

I'm not discussing this.

PAIGE

Of course not, because you'd rather stick pins in your eyes than have a conversation with me that lasts more than twenty seconds.

ASHLEY

I think you need to up your meds. Your paranoia is out of control.

PAIGE

Don't you dare do that. I've been fine for ages - which you'd know, if you bothered to take even the slightest bit of interest in my life.

ASHLEY

Are you really this pissed off about the uni thing? Because if so, fine - I'm sorry, okay? I should have known that you'd graduated. That wasn't great of me. But if you're going to keep punishing me for an honest mistake, then-

PAIGE

I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about earlier. At dinner.

ASHLEY

What happened at dinner?

PAIGE  
You completely ignored me.

ASHLEY  
What? No, I didn't.

PAIGE  
Yes, you did. Every time I tried to speak to you, you started a conversation with somebody else. Christ, the only time you even looked at me directly was when you asked me to pass the potatoes.

ASHLEY  
That's complete bullshit.

PAIGE  
If it's bullshit, name the topic of one conversation we had at the table. Just one.  
(beat)  
You can't do it, can you?

ASHLEY  
Do you know what your problem is? You're always trying to read something insidious and hurtful into everything everybody does. This weekend was supposed to be about reconnecting and sharing some proper quality time together as a group for the first time in ages. Maybe I was just excited to see everyone, have you considered that? No, of course not, it has to be part of some targeted attack against you. What was I supposed to do, act like it was just me and you there? Ignore everyone else and give you all my attention? Would that have made you happy, Paige?

PAIGE  
You always fucking do that - make me out to be needy. It's not needy to expect your best friend to actually look you in the eye during a meal.

ASHLEY  
It's like we're back at school.  
What's next?  
(MORE)

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Are you going to get mad at me for being someone else's partner in P.E.? I've spent the best part of an hour trying to get us out of here, and all you're doing is picking fights. When are you going to grow up?

PAIGE

It isn't just me who noticed, you know. Jay asked me if we'd fallen out.

ASHLEY

Jay should keep her nose out of other people's business.

PAIGE

I told her that we hadn't fallen out, you just never speak to me anymore.

ASHLEY

That's not true.

PAIGE

Isn't it?

BEAT.

ASHLEY

Look, I admit that I've been a bit off the grid, lately. And not just with you - with everyone. What do you want me to say about it? We're adults, life gets busy.

PAIGE

That's it? That's your excuse for avoiding me like the plague? You're just ... busy?

ASHLEY

It's not an excuse, it's a fact.

PAIGE

You weren't too 'busy' to go to Jay's on Halloween though, were you? Or to go with Cara on her work trip back in June? No, no, it's just when my name pops up on your phone that you suddenly have this wild, go-getting schedule-

ASHLEY

Can I just remind you that you were invited to both of those things and you didn't go?

PAIGE

That's not fair. You know why I didn't go.

ASHLEY

I'm just saying. How can I make an effort with you when you're never there to see?

BEAT.

PAIGE

It's not that I didn't want to go, it's just ... it's overwhelming.

ASHLEY

I know that. Which is why I didn't give you shit for it at the time.

PAIGE

You didn't give me anything at the time. You didn't even send me a text.

ASHLEY

What did you want me to text you? 'Hi Paige, we're having an amazing time here without you'? That would have gone down super well.

PAIGE

Checking how I was would have been a start! I was going through a really rough time, and you-

ASHLEY laughs to herself.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

What?

ASHLEY

Nothing.

PAIGE

No, come on. What's so funny?

ASHLEY

Paige ... you're *always* going through a rough time.

BEAT.

PAIGE

No, I'm not.

ASHLEY

Yes, you are. If it isn't your mental health, it's your job, and if it isn't your job, it's your relationships. And if it isn't that, it's your finances. Or your issues with your Mum. There's just always something.

PAIGE reels from this.

PAIGE

So what? Having problems doesn't make someone a bad person.

ASHLEY

You're not a bad person, no. But ...

PAIGE

But what?

ASHLEY

But you can be a lot, okay?

PAIGE turns away, upset.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

I'm not trying to hurt you. I didn't want to have this conversation at all, but you insisted on bringing it up, so ...

BEAT.

PAIGE

Well, I suppose I should thank you for your honesty, Ash. Really appreciate it. Always nice to have your character assassinated by one of your oldest friends.

ASHLEY

Don't be like that.

PAIGE

No, no, I mean it. I'm just sorry that I bring you down so much. I'm sorry that my life hasn't gone on so perfectly the way that yours has.

ASHLEY

For fuck's sake.

PAIGE

Rest assured, I'll avoid bothering you with my problems in the future.

(MORE)

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Actually, you know what? I'll go one better. I'll remove my presence entirely, how's that? Not that you'll notice much of a difference-

ASHLEY

See, this is what I'm talking about. This is what you do. It's like you punish me for handling life better than you do.

PAIGE

It's pretty fucking easy to handle life when you have no problems, isn't it?

ASHLEY

I do have problems.

PAIGE

Oh, I know you do. I heard one of them earlier at dinner. Ground-breaking stuff: 'Mummy, you won't believe what happened to me! I was bumped to Economy Plus on my trip to Singapore and forced to mingle with the peasants!' I've heard Ken Loach is looking for a subject for his new film - you should send him that for inspiration.

ASHLEY

See, *this* is the point. *This* is the problem. You think you have it so much harder than everyone else. And you know what? Maybe you do. But regardless of what you think, I do have my own issues and my own stresses, and you're always too bogged down in your own to notice.

PAIGE

How can I notice if you won't talk to me? You don't give me the chance to help you.

ASHLEY

I don't need help from you.

PAIGE

Well, what do you need?

(beat)

What do you need?

Suddenly, the lock clicks. Giggling can be heard on the other side, which quickly fades.

ASHLEY

Oh, thank God.

She crosses to the door.

PAIGE

So, is that it, then? You're just going to leave it there?

ASHLEY turns back at the door, frustrated.

ASHLEY

What do you want from me, Paige?

PAIGE

I want you to give a shit! I want you to care enough to fix what needs to be fixed between us. Because I do. Care.

(beat)

I miss you. I have for ages.

BEAT.

ASHLEY

Look, maybe you're right. Maybe I am selfish. I'm not updated on your life, I don't text you enough. I don't think I'm as bad as you make me out to be, but you definitely do have a point. But I think at a certain point - a couple of years ago, maybe - I realised ... I don't know.

(beat)

There's just no space for me in this friendship. And it probably makes me a bad person, or a quitter, or disloyal. But after I realised that ... I guess I just stopped trying.

PAIGE

But what does that mean? What are you saying?

ASHLEY

I don't know, Paige. I'm sorry. I just don't know.

ASHLEY leaves the room. PAIGE remains where she is, looking through the open door.

FADE OUT.