

**BOUNCE
THEATRE**

THREADS



THE SCRIPT

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THREADS

Written by
Louise Pendry

Characters:

CHARLIE	12 YEAR OLD GIRL
BERNIE	13 YEAR OLD GIRL
HAZEL	12 YEAR OLD GIRL
TEACHER	ADULT WOMAN
CHRISTOPHER	13 YEAR OLD BOY
FINN	12 YEAR OLD BOY
FLAVIA	13 YEAR OLD GIRL
BEATRICE	13 YEAR OLD GIRL

LANGUAGE NOTE: THE STORY WAS WRITTEN WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2023. VERNACULAR WILL HAVE CHANGED AND IT MAY BE APPROPRIATE TO SUBSTITUTE SOME OF THE WORDS FOR THE CURRENT AUDIENCE.

BOUNCE THEATRE

CHARLIE: Can you pass me the tissues?

BERNIE NODS AND PASSES THE TISSUE. CHARLIE WIPES EYES.

CHARLIE: Are you ok?

SILENCE.

BERNIE: Are you ok?

THEY BOTH LOOK AWAY. BERNIE LOOKS BACK.

BERNIE: What happened to ...

SHE POINTS TO HER OWN FACE.

CHARLIE: I punched a girl.

BERNIE MOVES A LITTLE AWAY.

CHARLIE: I don't go around doing it regularly.

BERNIE: Oh.

PAUSE.

BERNIE: Does it hurt?

CHARLIE: Yes.

BERNIE: Sorry.

CHARLIE: Don't be. You should see the other girl.

BERNIE: LOL.

CHARLIE: Why are you here?

BERNIE: Ummmm. I felt sick.

SHE MOVES AWAY.

CHARLIE: Are you going to be?

BERNIE: No. Never mind. It's ok.

SILENCE. SHE STARTS TO LOOK FOR HER PHONE. REALISES IT'S CHARLIE THAT IS BUZZING. CHARLIE IGNORES IT.

CHARLIE: (TO AUDIENCE) This morning, my phone started buzzing again. People are tagging me in a video that's been leaked. My friends are already messaging me to check I'm ok. Everyone knows you have drama before you have drama these days. I skim through the messages.

It's those girls again. They've leaked photos of me shopping in the boy's section and I'm not even going to repeat their comments. ... They won't let it go. Standing up for yourself is exhausting. It's hard to pretend it doesn't get to me.

(She turns her phone off as Bernie starts to fiddle with her phone)

BERNIE: (TO AUDIENCE) As the sun hits my curtains, for a moment, I lie still, I am calm. I stretch out and for a second, I forget. Every morning it's the same. Then, I remember. I wonder for a minute if my mind is playing tricks on me. As the sun lights up the blind, I take in the piles of clothes over the floor and wonder how many times I have lived this moment.

I remember all the years where my clothes were folded up neatly on the chair. Perfect. Pristine. I never stopped to appreciate it. Every day I would just take a neatly folded shirt and put it on. I'd come home and throw it on the floor at the end of the day. Then it'd be back again, clean, folded up and on my chair a few days later.

My dad breaks the silence shouting that the McDonald's breakfast has arrived. He knows what day it is. It is his way of trying to make it better. Like a McMuffin will stop us both from crying ...

I never appreciated birthdays before today. Today, I'm a teenager. I lie back on my bed and for a minute it's like the roof disappears. I can see myself in the clouds. I am 7 years old. My mum had made me a dress for my birthday that year. There is cake and I am swishing around like a princess in the swishy pink fabric. Mums laughing. I'm laughing. People say how much I look like her.

Suddenly it's gone and I have to get up and out of the room.

BERNIE PUTS HERS DOWN AS CHARLIE PICKS HERS UP.

CHARLIE: (TO AUDIENCE) Some of the girls in my class have been trying to bait me for a while. I buy boys' clothes because I am tall. It's not my fault if the people in shops don't think there are tall girls in this world is it?

Although, to be fair, I actually like shopping in the boys' section. I mean, my t-shirts tell me to "think like a boss", "be a legend" and to "break the walls". If I was smaller I'd be dancing like a

unicorn and sparkling. I mean, which would you pick?!

Still, it takes a lot to not let it get to you though when it's broadcast to thousands of people online - 'cause suddenly everyone thinks it, so you start to wonder if it is. That's how they do it isn't it. Get inside your head.

I dart from lesson to lesson trying not to overthink it and trying to not let it get to me. I'd like to swipe it all away and go home.

SHE TURNS OFF HER PHONE, AS HAZEL ENTERS. SILENCE. HAZEL WIPES AWAY A SNOTTY NOSE.

CHARLIE: Do you need a tissue?

HAZEL: No thanks.

CHARLIE: It's just that you sound like you do.

HAZEL: Hay fever.

BERNIE: Charming.

CHARLIE: What?

THEY MAKE A FACE AT EACH OTHER AND THEN TAKE IN HAZEL.

BERNIE: Have you been crying?

HAZEL WIPES HER EYES AND NOSE - IT'S OBVIOUS SHE'S BEEN CRYING.

HAZEL: No.

CHARLIE: Do you want to talk?

HAZEL: It's ok. I'm ok.

BERNIE NODS IN UNDERSTANDING WHAT THAT MEANS.

BERNIE: Ok.

SILENCE. CHARLIE PLAYS WITH HER PHONE.

CHARLIE: (TO AUDIENCE) The school camera caught me throwing the first punch. I had no line of defence. I just walked into the ringleader at lunch time. I could feel my face going red, but you've just got to pretend it's not going red. She laughed at me. She opened her mouth and before she'd closed it, I punched her.

Just for a minute, I didn't regret it. I felt free. Free from the pressure of walking around looking over my shoulder and wondering who was talking about me. Then, she punched me back. I tried not to cry. People were all around us. I was committed now. It was officially my first fight. It's funny, people think girls don't fight, but it gets mad quickly. When you are throwing punches, you suddenly notice the lunch area is full of odd earrings from the fights before you.

I'd never get involved usually, but today was different... I snapped. Freedom was swiftly interrupted as I came crashing back to reality with a bloody nose and teachers yelling at me as they separated us out.

When they pulled me to the office, I cried. It all came out - the name calling, the stalking, the girls that were following me around, photographing and videoing me. I told them everything.

They were kind. They listened to me. I'd still get a detention for throwing the first punch, but first I'd come to welfare.

I have to write a statement. What to say? You push people enough and eventually they will break.

PAUSE.

CHARLIE: Busy in here today isn't it.

BERNIE STRETCHES BACK - REVEALS NECKLACE.

CHARLIE: I like your necklace.

BERNIE: Um. Thanks.

CHARLIE: Breaking uniform rules.

HAZEL: Like it affects your learning.

BERNIE: No.

CHARLIE: Keep it covered up. You'll be joining me in detention otherwise.

HAZEL: I cried a waterfall in my first detention.

CHARLIE: You've been in detention?

HAZEL: Yeah. In my old school.

CHARLIE: What for?

HAZEL: Rebelling.

CHARLIE: Really? I didn't think... you're...

HAZEL: You don't really know me.

CHARLIE: Sorry, I didn't finish ...

THEY ALL LOOK AWAY.

HAZEL: (TO AUDIENCE) Ah, my first detention. I remember it like it was yesterday. I didn't mean to, it wasn't my fault. Up until then I had been a relatively good girl, good grades, good reputation. I even won the award for best contributor to learning for goodness sake.

But this girl just handed me a note, whispering "pass this to Matilda." And I did. But I got caught. My teacher glared at me, saying "Really, HAZEL? Passing notes in class? That is so unlike you and that's detention." I could feel my face going bright red as I sunk into my chair. I tried my hardest not to cry, but at the end of the class I was spouting waterfalls.

There was something about the rush of the class staring at me. The teacher looked so annoyed - it made me laugh. So, I started getting more and more rebellious, with my good reputation fading into the darkness. I was a rebel girl now. Then I realised I could rebel for good. I could be the one everyone respected, with views no one dared disagree with - the climate crisis, save the rainforest, and its creatures, respect people for who they are. Black Lives Matter, queer lives matter and no one could stop me. I started skipping school because standing up for things was worth it.

This is why we moved - so I could stop being a rebel. Now, I'm just the new girl at school that no one bothers to talk to. When I arrived, everyone had already made their friends. There wasn't room for me.

It's like I have become invisible, and I don't know how to be visible.

At first my parents thought I'd settled in really well. I was doing everything right again. I can't skip school and go on protests if I have no friends, can I? Only now I've become too silent, people are

worried about how I'm fitting in, so they send me to Welfare for a weekly check in. Funny really, they want it both ways, but they can't have it like that. They thought that the group was a bad influence on me. Only it wasn't. It gave me a voice, something I believe in, something to fight for, something visible. So, they've made me invisible.

PAUSES. KICKS CARPET.

BERNIE: (TO AUDIENCE) I feel like I'm floating through the day. I try to concentrate in lessons. I nod vaguely when Miss Smith asks me something in English. I realise she keeps calling my name. I snap out of the bubble. She asks me if I'm ok. I don't say anything. I must look a state as she takes me out of class. She tells me to go to the Welfare for the rest of the lesson. I scratch the edge of a curled-up mat with my foot. Miss is calm and just lets me be. I sit and look at the dust.

PAUSE.

CHARLIE: No one want to chat then?

ALL LOOK AWAY.

HAZEL: What do you want to chat about?

CHARLIE: Dunno. State of the world? Or, the next general election / protests?

HAZEL: You really want to do that now?

SILENCE. THEY ALL LOOK AWAY.

CHARLIE: Are you ok?

BERNIE: Yeah.

PAUSE.

BERNIE: Are you going to detention after this?

CHARLIE: Yeah. It's fine though.

BERNIE: I saw some of the Snapchats. They were so mean to you.

CHARLIE SHRUGS.

HAZEL: I liked your t-shirt.

CHARLIE: Thanks.

HAZEL: I admire you for being yourself. People don't do it enough.

CHARLIE: Thanks, that's nice of you to say.

AWKWARD SMILE.

HAZEL: Hey, are you ok? You're crying.

BERNIE RUBS EYES.

BERNIE: I'm fine.

HAZEL: You don't look it. Have you seen Miss?

BERNIE: Not yet.

CHARLIE: Are you going to be sick? I can't do vomit after blood ...

BERNIE: I'm fine.

HAZEL: Are you sure?

BERNIE: Positive.

PAUSE.

BERNIE: (TO AUDIENCE) It's funny how a day can feel like an eternity, and it was yesterday all at the same time. I wish I could go back and get Mum to tell me all her secrets, teach me all the things that she said she would, when I said I was too busy.

Last night was the first time in a long time I thought I'd cry and never stop. I was at the bus stop. I said goodbye to people from school. People going back to people, to families. I was going home. Alone. The night before my birthday.

The cold autumn air crept in around my collar. Mum always used to tell me to put a scarf on. Since she ... I had started wearing hers. Only last night, I realised the smell of her had gone, just after my bus arrived. I have sunk into the seat trying to make myself smaller, warm, I don't know. As we were coming up to the church, I wanted the bus to stop before, to break down, to force us all into conversation, but it didn't. We passed the little church, and the same stained-glass window caught my eye. Then, it dutifully dropped me off by the park, where the evening illuminated the leafless branches of trees. I took 23 steps to my front door, put in the key, and pushed it open. The house was silent.

The air was stale - like the life in the house died when mum died. Three months on and it's the same routine every day. I don't remember what it's like not to miss her.

There's a moment every morning, in the silence before the day begins, where I wonder how I will survive the rest of my life without my mum to tell me what to do. I wonder if grief ever ends.

SILENCE. CHARLIE LOOKS IN POCKETS.

CHARLIE: Anyone want a sweet?

SILENCE. ALL EVENTUALLY TAKE A SWEET. SILENCE. THEY LOOK UP.

BERNIE: It's my birthday today.

HAZEL: Happy Birthday.

CHARLIE: Happy Birthday.

BERNIE: Thanks. It's the first...

CHARLIE: First?

BERNIE: Nothing. Doesn't matter.

HAZEL: I hope the day improves.

THEY ALL LOOK UP TOWARDS THE TEACHER WHO APPEARS IN THE DOORWAY.

BERNIE: Coming Miss. Good luck with sorting everything out.

CHARLIE: Thanks.

HAZEL: You too. Happy Birthday by the way.

BERNIE NODS AND EXITS STAGE.

CHARLIE PICKS UP HER PHONE AND BEGINS TO MESSAGE. MOVEMENT - PRESSURE. MOVEMENT INTO DETENTION. LOOK AT WATCHES/PHONES. AWKWARD PAUSE.

CHRISTOPHER: Oi, mate, do you want some gum?

FINN: Where is Miss?

CHRISTOPHER: I dunno.

FINN: Shall we just go?

LOOKS AROUND.

BOUNCE THEATRE

FLAVIA: Are you trying to get us in another detention?

CHRISTOPHER: What are you worried about? Miss ain't here yet.

FLAVIA: I can't afford another detention. The office will have a register of who was meant to be here.

FINN: She has a point. Maybe give it 10 minutes.

PAUSE.

CHRISTOPHER: What are you in for? I didn't take my hoodie off and was rude to the teacher.

FLAVIA: Proud of that?

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah. She deserved it.

FLAVIA: Aren't you lovely.

SILENCE.

CHRISTOPHER: Hey, I'm Just passing time. I know why you're in here.

HAZEL SHRUGS.

CHRISTOPHER: It was a good impression. I saw it online.

HAZEL SHRUGS.

CHRISTOPHER: Do you regret it?

HAZEL: No, a little, I dunno, I didn't think it'd get filmed.

FLAVIA: Everything gets filmed these days.

CHARLIE: Whether you want it to be or not.

CHRISTOPHER: He's in for his trainers.

THEY ALL LOOK BRIEFLY AT FINN'S FEET.

FINN LOOKS AT THE AUDIENCE.

PAUSE.

FINN: (TO AUDIENCE) I put my trainers on this morning. Split second decision because it was raining. In the eyes of everyone else I rolled up to school a rebel. Sir asked me where my shoes were. I just shrugged. He put me in detention for my uniform and my indifference to breaking the rules. So, I sit here

watching seconds of my life disappear and I accept it all. No one needs to know my school shoes have a hole in and my mum can't afford to replace them. I tried to repair them with some glue I found at school, but they didn't last the day. So, I shoved them under my bed so she wouldn't see them when she gets back from work. She would want to fix them, but I know she can't afford it. I walk through school and watch people hiding their phones, talking about social media, what's on trend and I wonder how many of them get it. Threads have a price tag & some of us can't afford it.

BEATRICE ENTERS.

BEATRICE: I'm sorry I'm late... I...

FINN: Miss isn't here yet.

BEATRICE: Oh, right.

CHRISTOPHER: It's been 8.5 minutes - like we can now.

FLAVIA: I'm sure she'll be here soon.

CHRISTOPHER: How did you end up in detention when you obey the rules so much?!

FLAVIA: You can go if you want. I told you I just don't want to have to come back again.

BEATRICE: She has a point. There was a lot going on at the gates at 3.30. She might just be delayed.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, get ready to sit and lose an hour of your life in silence.

FINN: If it means you'll be quiet, I'm starting to look forward to it.

SILENCE.

CHRISTOPHER: Why did you get a detention?

FLAVIA: Can you ever just be quiet?

BEATRICE: Giving the teacher a real talk about feminism.

FINN: That earnt you a detention.

BEATRICE: It was meant to be silent study.

CHRISTOPHER: Respect. You don't look the type.

BEATRICE: See, there's the problem, we all think we know what type someone else is.

CHRISTOPHER: What, I was only saying!

BEATRICE: Well don't, ok. You don't know me at all.

SILENCE.

FINN: Miss hasn't turned up. Let's go.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah.

FLAVIA: No. Sit down.

CHRISTOPHER: Why?

FLAVIA: I don't want another detention. Or for this to go on any longer than it has to.

BEATRICE: Why are you in?

FLAVIA: Didn't do my homework.

CHRISTOPHER: Really, you? You seem so... Good.

FLAVIA: Please stop talking, I'm begging you.

SILENCE.

FLAVIA: (TO AUDIENCE) I was meant to write an essay about The Great Gatsby and the American dream. I didn't, that's why I'm in detention. Cause all I wrote is that dreams die and the Great Gatsby is a liar.

In primary school, the teachers used to say they felt sorry for me because I always wrote stories about being in the shop. I never once felt sad about it. The shop was like our second home. It's been our family business for years - ever since Nan and Grandad saw an opportunity to turn their sewing skills into a business.

Mum says she has the same memories as me of weekends at the shop, sitting out the back, watching the fabrics arrive and be unpacked. She said grandad travelled the world for each of them. They all represented little pieces of home for someone. People who were coming in to choose fabric for a special outfit or event.

Patterns would somehow get cut out and become these beautiful items.

She grew up around and after she had me, she'd bring me to the back of the shop to help out.

When I was old enough to reach them, nan let me run my hands over the fabrics. I would stare at the silks for ages and invent outfits in my head. They'd give me off cuts and I'd dress my dolls up.

Nan used to say it was an honour - to help people choose something. Their choice told their story - colours and textures - they meant something.

Nan taught me how to sew. I had plans to go to college and study design. I was going to take over the shop one day, but that dream has gone. Instead. I go help out after school, so they don't have to pay anyone else, not because its busy. They've already started talking about when it closes not if.

A little piece of our family story is disappearing, and I can't do anything about it. There's no point in telling the teacher any of this though is there? So, I just shrugged when he asked me what I was thinking. So here I am. I just want it to be over & go help my parents.

PAUSE.

FLAVIA: Can you chew gum any louder?

FINN: My bad.

CHRISTOPHER: Are you on your period?

BEATRICE &
FLAVIA: OMG.

BEATRICE: You just did not just say that.

FLAVIA: How rude.

CHRISTOPHER SHRUGS.

BEATRICE: I cannot believe this world sometimes.

FLAVIA: I hear you.

BEATRICE: I mean what a lame assumption to make. Like a woman can't be angry about anything unless she's on her period.

CHRISTOPHER: I wasn't trying to...

BEATRICE: Save it for someone who cares.

CHRISTOPHER: (TO AUDIENCE) I can literally never say the right thing. I get it wrong all the time. It's like the harder I try, the more wrong I get it. There are all these confusing rules in life - like boys have to wear ties to school and girls don't, but they say uniform is for all genders. What's that about? Yet girls can wear trousers but boys can't wear skirts - is that equal? Also, what happens when it's really hot. What do boys do then? I read recently some boys went to school in skirts in protest. I don't know if I'd be bold enough to do that in our school. People might think I'd gone mad.

See, everyone tells us to be yourself, but in reality that's quite hard when everyone has different rules for the version of you that they want.

I don't know. It's just hard to fit in.

CHARLIE: What did you say to him?

BEATRICE: What? I just snapped, I gave Mr Smith a polite lecture about women's rights, and he put me in detention. Ironical much.

CHARLIE: Let's hear it.

BEATRICE: Why?

CHARLIE: Pass the time.

HAZEL: Yeah. I'd like to hear it too.

THE OTHERS NOD.

BEATRICE: Ok, ok. It was something like this...

What I don't understand about school or life is that we all exist in tribes. We wear the same clothes, we do our hair the same way, it's like a comfort blanket to be the same. You pick up a magazine or go online and everyone is telling you to be yourself but also to buy the same clothes, make up, hair stuff as everyone else - be part of a community.

For some unknown reasons, some people become more popular than others and then it gives them license to be horrible to everyone else.

When I was little, all people would say is that I had lovely hair and a pretty face. No one ever talked about my desire to be a nuclear scientist or a racing driver, I mean what's that all about? So, I

started to just smile and say thanks. I didn't challenge it.

Now, at school, I am surrounded by girls doing exactly the same thing. There's a whole heap of girls struggling to believe they are good enough right now - right body size, shape, style. It's unbelievable. Getting put down by people who are in the right tribe. It's so scary that we can believe that there are only certain people who are the right way to be.

Like the rest of us stop believing our bodies are worthy of respect. What comes after that? If we don't make a change.

When I was growing up, I never expected my whole social identity could be determined by the length of my skirt, the way I wear my blazer.

SOME APPLAUDE / GESTURE APPROVAL.

HAZEL: That was great. You're so right.

IMPROVISED DIALOGUE.

FINN: Miss hasn't turned up. We can definitely go now.

CHARLIE: Thanks, but I am in enough trouble today as it is.

FINN: What happened?

CHRISTOPHER: You didn't see the videos?

IMPROVISED DIALOGUE FROM THE GIRLS.

FINN: No interest in social media.

ALL LOOK AT HIM. HE SHRUGS.

BERNIE APPEARS.

CHARLIE: What is happening today? Why are you here?

BERNIE POINTS TO HER SOCKS. THEY LAUGH.

BEATRICE: You're in detention because of a necklace? This school is unreal.

HAZEL: I know right, learning would be much better if you were comfortable and wore clothes that made you feel good.

BERNIE SHRUGS.

BERNIE: It was my mum's.

FLAVIA: I'm sorry about your mum. She used to come into our shop.

BERNIE: Yeah, thanks, she loved to sew.

SHE NODS.

CHARLIE: OMG, I'm sorry. That's why you were in Welfare earlier...It's your first birthday without your...

BERNIE: Yeah. The day felt a bit too much.

CHARLIE: I'm not surprised.

BEATRICE: Don't the teachers know this?

FINN: I'm really sorry.

BERNIE: Supply teacher.

CHARLIE: I don't know what to say.

BERNIE: Don't need to say anything.

BEATRICE: You should really protest your detention.

BERNIE: It's alright. I think it'd make my mum laugh at how ridiculous it is.

SILENCE.

CHRISTOPHER: You don't deserve to be here.

FINN: Look, why don't we write down our names. We can give it to the office. Say we tried to stay.

They all look at FLAVIA and CHARLIE.

CHARLIE: Ok, ok. On one condition.

FLAVIA: What?

CHARLIE: We go and celebrate her birthday.

BERNIE: What?!

CHRISTOPHER: I don't know her... I don't really know any of you.

CHARLIE: Maybe that's the point. Instead of silence being the punishment, we should talk more.

BEATRICE: Yes. I am in.

FINN: Sure, why not.

CHRISTOPHER: Ok. I'm in.

BERNIE: You don't need to do this.

CHARLIE: I know, but I want to. Today has been mad. I punched someone for the first time, because I didn't talk about what was going on beforehand. So maybe I've already learnt my lesson. Talk more. Punch less. Change the world.

THEY ALL LOOK AROUND, SMILE, GET READY TO GO, APART FROM FLAVIA.

CHRISTOPHER: Oi, you coming?

FLAVIA: Alright. As long as we leave our names at the office.

BEATRICE: Look, I've started a list. Put your name down.

START PASSING PAPER AROUND.

BERNIE: Are you sure you all want to do this? We don't really know each other.

BEATRICE: Yet.

HAZEL: Let's go.

CHRISTOPHER: We need to stop and get some food.

FINN: Ah, I left my wallet at. Home.

CHRISTOPHER: It's on me mate.

BERNIE: Ok.

FINN: Let's get out of here.

GROUP MOVEMENT PIECE - RECONNECT EVERYONE ON STAGE.

FILM.