

CHARACTERS

LEE – MALE – LATE 20'S

GILL – FEMALE – LATE 20'S

(A WOODEN BENCH, WITH A SMALL PLAQUE ATTACHED. LEE IS SITTING ON THE BENCH. GILL ENTERS, PAUSES SLIGHTLY BEFORE GOING AND JOINING LEE ON THE BENCH. SHE STARES AT HIM. A FEW MORE SECONDS PASS BEFORE LEE LOOKS ACROSS AT GILL, THEIR EYES MEET AND HE LOOKS AWAY.)

Lee: You look nice.

Gill: Thank you.

Lee: Not what I was expecting.

Gill: In a good way or..?

Lee: No. In a good way.

Gill: I was on my way out when I got the call. I was the nearest.

Lee: I see.

Gill: Didn't see the point in changing. (PAUSE) Should have, I suppose.

Lee: No.

Gill: No?

And The Rocks Called Out "No Hiding Place"

Lee: Better. Like this.

(PAUSE)

Gill: How long have you been here?

Lee: Dunno. A while.

Gill: They said I should have looked here first. After you went.

Lee: I saw you coming up the drive. Went through the back door.

Gill: But how did you know?

Lee: The walk.

Gill: Ah. (PAUSE) Anyway, found you now.

(PAUSE)

Gill: You ok?

Lee: What do you think?

Gill: You're mam says that you got on the telly.

Lee: Yes.

Gill: She's been so proud.

Lee; I know.

Gill: Her son. The returning soldier.

Lee: I know.

Gill: Lee...

(PAUSE)

Lee: Proud of her brave son.

Gill: Yes..

Lee: But I'm not brave. Lucky, aye, but not brave. That word gets used too often. Stops the real meaning.

Gill: I know you've been through a lot.

Lee: Really? You know do you?

Gill: Afghanistan is one of the worst places...

Lee: (INTERRUPTING) IS the worst place. IS!

(PAUSE)

Lee: You've no idea. (PAUSE, THEN QUIETLY) Dozakh.

Gill: Dozakh? You've picked up the language.

Lee: Difficult not to.

Gill: Which one? Dari or Pashtu?

Lee: Bit of both.

Gill: And Dozakh?

Lee: Means hell. (PAUSE) That's what the yanks call Helmand Province. "Hell, man"

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(PAUSE)

(GILL LOOKS AT THE PLAQUE)

Gill: Wasn't there a nickname for Andy?

Lee: Aye. "Bacha". Means young boy. And he was. He only had to shave once a month and was desperate to learn to drive.

Gill: I understand he was quite a character.

Lee: A skinny 5 foot 7 inches, often carrying more than his body weight in kit, patrolling the Green Zone in temperatures in the 50's. And the only thing that kept him going? The thought of jam sandwiches back at patrol base. Bloody practically lived on them! Just like a bairn. Which was all that he was. A bairn.

(PAUSE)

Gill: That explains the plaque. (READS) In memory of Jam Sandwiches. With all my love.

Lee: His mam couldn't think of anything else to say. (PAUSE) I mean, what else *is* there to say? (PAUSE) He would have been 25 this year.

Gill: Is that the date he died? 20th March 2004?

Lee: No. That was the day he was killed. I prefer the word "killed".
"Died" always sounds as if he was in a bed surrounded by family and friends and flowers. Died always sounds as if he had some choice in the matter. He was killed.

Gill: You all know the risks, Lee.

Lee: I know.

(PAUSE)

Gill: It's a nice space here. Quiet.

(PAUSE)

Gill: Perhaps it's time to..

Lee: (INTERRUPTING) Wind chimes.

Gill: Sorry?

Lee: Next door. They've put up wind chimes. (PAUSE) Done my tour of duty as part of the Combat Logistics Team and I come home to wind chimes.

Gill: I don't understand.

Lee: The Americans drape the dog tags of their fallen soldiers on one of the signs at camp. They clink in the wind and sounds just like wind chimes. I think next door think it's restful. Not for me.

Gill: So many people have been there for you.

Lee: You haven't. (PAUSE) Well, I don't mean you, personally, like.

Gill: That's not really very fair, is it?

(PAUSE)

Lee: No, not really. I'm sorry. (PAUSE) Alan put his wedding off until this tour was over. Said it kept him going. All the lads try and find something to keep them going.

Gill: Like jam sandwiches?

Lee: (LAUGHS) Even jam sandwiches. I was invited to the wedding, but I couldn't go.

Gill: Maybe you should have. Might have helped.

Lee: I didn't want a wedding to end up with soldier talk. It was their day.

Gill: You've managed it before.

Lee: I'm not sure I've ever managed it.

Gill: You've done some good stuff out there.

Lee: We try, I know, but you kill a bunch of them, but they're like a seeping wound. You put on a bandage and the blood comes right back.

Gill: So are you questioning why we're there?

Lee: No, I'm not bloody questioning why we're there! I know why we're there! I've seen why. I've heard why. I've felt why. I've even tasted why! (PAUSE) Have you ever *done* this before?

Gill: Yes. A few times.

Lee: Really.

Gill: It's not something I look forward to.

Lee: We all have to do things we don't like.

Gill: I'm not here to patronise you, but that's the nature of the job.

(PAUSE)

Gill: I'm just trying to understand.

Lee: So am I. (PAUSE) Do you know, I never really listened to music. Now I listen to the same piece before I turn in. I've listened to it for over four months now. I've no idea where it came from, but it will stay with me forever. I put my shoes on in a certain order. Fold my socks in a certain way.

Gill: The rituals of war.

Lee: No, it's more than that. I've never been a rituals man. Never had little foibles about the order in which I do things. A few bad habits, maybe, but no rituals. Now, most of us wear a crucifix and carry a prayer. You don't find too many atheists on the battlefield. (PAUSE) I'm different. Changed.

Gill: Maybe this self imposed decompression period was too long. It's given you time to dwell.

Lee: Maybe. (PAUSE) Are you still the same person? Aren't you sick of playing the same game?

Gill: We both know it's not a game. (PAUSE) Why don't you give your mam a quick call? Let her know you're ok.

(PAUSE)

(GILL REACHES INTO HER COAT POCKET AND TAKES OUT A MOBILE PHONE. SHE OFFERS IT TO LEE)

Gill: Lee..

(LEE TAKES THE MOBILE PHONE FROM GILL)

Gill: Just tell her you're ok.

Lee: But I'm not. I'm tired of lying.

Gill: You're a damned sight more ok than most I've had to deal with. The amount of car journeys. (PAUSE) I've had to drive the infamous saloon slowly down the street, looking for its next family. My silent passenger rehearsing the

same lines in their head each time. (PAUSE) It's like the plague as we move down the street. (PAUSE) Moms and dads get their children and quickly hide them within closed doors. Only the crying from the family that received the notification can be heard for hours afterward. (PAUSE) You learn to lie very well during this part of the "game". We look at others with our false smiles and say we are fine.

(PAUSE)

Lee: Did you...?

Gill: Yes. I drove the car that visited Andy's parents. (PAUSE) Even though I stay outside, those screams of anguish stay in your head.

Lee: Like wind chimes.

Gill: Yes, like wind chimes.

(LEE EXAMINES THE MOBILE PHONE)

Lee: Is this a picture of your boyfriend?

Gill: Sorry. Didn't have time to pick up my work phone. It's my fiancé. Got engaged about 4 months ago.

Lee: Congratulations.

(LEE PASSES THE PHONE BACK TO GILL)

Lee: I think it's time.

Gill: Are you sure?

Lee: Yes.

(GILL STANDS UP)

Gill: Corporal Lee Reynolds, I am placing you under arrest on suspicion of going absent without leave, in contravention of the Army Act of 1955 sections 37 and 38. You will accompany me to Langley Army base, where you will be detained pending the filing of any formal charges. (PAUSE) Lee?

Lee: Do you know what the irony is? Just before the end of my tour out there, it had gone quiet. They were too busy harvesting the poppies for opium.
Poppies, man. Poppies.

End