

**LYDIA**

## CHARACTERS

VOICE ONE (female)

MOTHER

VOICE TWO (male)

FATHER

VOICE THREE (male)

JAMES  
BOY TWO  
TOY MONKEY

VOICE FOUR (female)

GRANDMOTHER JOAN  
POPPY

VOICE FIVE (male)

FATHER GEORGE  
BOY ONE  
LAMBCHUCK  
FUR

VOICE SIX (female)

THE BIRTHDAY CAKE  
JAMBON

VOICE SEVEN (female)

DOLLY

VOICE EIGHT (female)

ANNOUNCER

VOICE NINE (male)

NARRATOR

**ACT ONE: THE ARRIVAL**

**SCENE ONE**

**INT. HOME**

NARRATOR

Lydia has come from nothing and entered a family of three. She is gifted. Articulate. New. She is dressed in child's clothing and does childish things. She learns to walk by putting one hand on the edge of a table. Many tables can be found around the house. A fantastic table -

MOTHER

It stands on five legs.

NARRATOR

A docile table -

MOTHER

It would not move.

NARRATOR

A solid table -

MOTHER

It holds a child.

NARRATOR

A writing table -

MOTHER

Better known as desk.

NARRATOR

A hot table -

MOTHER

Nothing ever stays on that table

NARRATOR

An ambivalent table -

MOTHER

Sometimes used as chair.

NARRATOR

A pirate table -

MOTHER

With one wooden leg.

NARRATOR

An orphan table -

MOTHER

With mismatched chairs.

NARRATOR

And a white table -

MOTHER

On which we draw.

NARRATOR

This room is the mirror room. Yes, that is you, Lydia.

FATHER

Look at her. She has no thoughts, none at all, but she has desire. What will she do with this desire? What will become of her, once she has learned to walk and talk? What sort of person will she be?

MOTHER

I say - let's ask her. Lydia? Who will you become?

NARRATOR

Lydia presses her head against the mirror as if she's looking out of it. She is very still.

FATHER

Lydia? What are you thinking?

NARRATOR

She steams the glass up with little puffs of breath. With one fat finger, she draws a perfect circle.

## **SCENE TWO**

NARRATOR

Lydia is in the brother's room. A red guitar hangs on the wall.

JAMES

Cow. Say cow. COW.

NARRATOR

The brother rarely leaves the room. Sometimes, Lydia is afraid of him, but other times she isn't.

JAMES

One, two, three. Mother and father and you are three.

### SCENE THREE

#### EXT. FIELD

NARRATOR

One summer afternoon, the brother leaves the house and takes Lydia out for a walk. They walk and walk.

James puts his hand around her shoulders and pulls her closer to him. He knows they are about to walk past the tractors.

*Wind increases.*

JAMES

Tractors stood and watched us.

NARRATOR

The tractors stare intently.

JAMES

We averted our gazes.

NARRATOR

The grass moves.



JAMES

We looked away from the tractors.

*Wind subsides.*

#### **SCENE FOUR**

#### **EXT. ZOO**

NARRATOR

Father takes James and Lydia to the zoo. But it is on this day when the last monkey dies. Visitors are still gathering at the empty cage, looking in. Several toy monkeys are on display, but father says they are too expensive.

JAMES

Mon-key. Monkey. Can you say *monkey*, Lydia?

#### **SCENE FIVE**

FATHER

*(Almost in a whisper)* Lydia... We need to tell you something.

MOTHER

Sweetie, look at us.

FATHER

You know James was very sick. Don't you? We've talked about it before. We've also talked about how sometimes, when people are very sick, they need to go away.

MOTHER

James had to go.

FATHER

He's gone, Lydia.

NARRATOR

Lydia draws an empty triangle on the table and fills it with slow, deliberate strokes.

MOTHER

It's time to sleep.

NARRATOR

She finds a toy monkey in her bed.

## SCENE SIX

INT. HOME.

NARRATOR

Father George comes to visit. He tells her about God.  
What he says is this -

FATHER GEORGE

Who made this? Who made this? And this, who made  
this? Who made this? And this? Who made this?

NARRATOR

Lydia thinks he made this, and mother and father, and  
herself, and James, and the monkeys and the tractors.  
Without Father George, there would be nothing to draw  
or talk about.

MOTHER

No, no. (*Amused*) Father George is a priest, sweetheart. He  
tells us what God is doing and what He wants from us. But  
he is not God.

NARRATOR

Lydia finds it hard to believe Father George is not God  
when he points and asks is this the train and the train

overflows with popcorn and the people run away from the train screaming run run there is no room for us anymore we got to go and James is there looking sad resigned he doesn't say anything everyone else has left but he doesn't move his eyes don't move his lips don't move and then his arms move just a little they seem to slide off yes they are sliding off they are the colour of bad banana peels they are rotten they slip away from him -

MOTHER

Lydia...

NARRATOR

- the right arm falls first then the left one but he really is okay now from time to time a solitary corn pops but there's no one left to see it no one...

MOTHER

Lydia, sweetie... Wake up... Wake up! There, there. You've had your first nightmare. A nightmare is a very bad dream, a dream you want to get out of. I have them too. Your father has them. Even Father George has them. There's nothing to be afraid or ashamed of. Quite the contrary. It's a sign - a good sign - that you're starting to understand more and more about the world. I say we celebrate. I'll make you a cup of cocoa. You can drink it in bed.

## **SCENE SEVEN**

NARRATOR

The mother buys blue paint. She paints Lydia's room. Above the bed, there is a picture of a rabbit. It has always been there, although Lydia had never noticed it before. But she really likes it! She really, really likes it. In fact, it is her favourite picture in the whole world. And so, mother carefully paints around the rabbit.

## **SCENE EIGHT**

**EXT. BEACH**

NARRATOR

Lydia meets her grandmother, Joan. She's come to town especially for her. First, they go to the beach.

GRANDMOTHER JOAN

Ah, children. Wet in the water, dry on land.

NARRATOR

Then, they have a birthday party.

## THE BIRTHDAY CAKE

Happy birthday, Lydia! I am the birthday cake, and like the Christmas tree, you can have me once a year. This is a great age to be. You are not confused by anything. There are no misunderstandings in your life. My candles are hot. I am excited for you. Blow and make a wish!

*Everybody claps and celebrates.*

## SCENE NINE

### EXT. TRAIN STATION

*Faint sounds of trolleys and announcements.*

#### NARRATOR

When the party is over, the three of them take grandmother Joan back to the train station. Lydia asks her how old she is.

#### GRANDMOTHER JOAN

I am 79 years old, dear.

#### ANNOUNCER

Thank you. That'll do, Joan.

*Sound of a departing train.*

NARRATOR

And Joan is never seen again. Father George has taken her too.

## SCENE TEN

**INT. HOME.**

NARRATOR

It is now time for Lydia to go to school. Lydia becomes more and more aware of me. So I become quieter and quieter.

FATHER

No. That's not how you do it. Eight doesn't equal three plus three, you don't add the shapes of the numbers, you add the numbers! Lydia, pay attention!

MOTHER

Where's your homework? What was it you had to do?

FATHER

Here, in Roman numerals, ten, you write down ten as X. First of all, it's a letter, it doesn't even look like a number, but it is a number. Because we're treating it like a number. So ten is V plus V. No! No! It has nothing to do with the shapes! (Exhausted) Go to bed, Lydia.

MOTHER

That's not how it's spelled. Here, let me show you. You can't just write down what words sound like to you. Because it's not how we write them! Writing is one thing, speaking is another. Look - every word has two shapes. Its sound shape and its written shape. You need to pay attention to spelling when they're in their written shape. Alright?

FATHER

Alright?

MOTHER

Alright, Lydia?

NARRATOR

Lydia has learned many things. She has learned about numbers and letters and mountains and rivers and battles in 1661 and she knows what's inside a frog or a rabbit. But now she is in her room. There is nobody else in there. She closes her eyes and instantly falls asleep. Goodnight, Lydia.



## ACT TWO: THE DEPARTURE

### SCENE ONE

#### INT. CIRCUS

*Music, voices.*

#### NARRATOR

The crowd applauds. Lizzie the elephant stands up on her back legs. Lydia remembers something she had read about circus animals during the first World War. Many of the horses were sent to the front, and menagerie animals gradually took over their jobs. Elephants were used to plough fields and move heavy things. These elephants were very smart and sociable. It is why they were able to learn so quickly. Lydia now wonders which of the two jobs they enjoyed the most. And whether she'll ever have to make that kind of choice. Lizzie unfurls her trunk and falls back on her legs. The crowd is bored.

#### MOTHER

Lydia, do you know that boy? I think he's waving at you.

#### BOY ONE

*(Whispering)* Meet me by the monkeys.

MOTHER

Lydia, where are you?

NARRATOR

Their lips touch among the strong odour of animals.

MOTHER

*(Gasp)* Lydia!

*The mother slaps her.*

## **SCENE TWO**

NARRATOR

Mother peels the rabbit poster off the wall, revealing a perfect white rectangle underneath.

### **SCENE THREE**

#### **EXT. GRAVEYARD**

NARRATOR

The three of them visit the brother's grave. They find a snowman on top of it. The head is picked up by Lydia, the body is picked up by mother, the bottom is picked up by father, and so the snowman is moved to a different location.

### **SCENE FOUR**

#### **INT. HOME.**

*Mother is overheard talking on the phone.*

MOTHER

I like watching her draw. She works hard for her drawings, which aren't very good. She puts them up on the walls and joins them together with tape, so she can make one big drawing that goes across the room.

FATHER

Is it a whale?

MOTHER

Each day, another piece of paper is added.

FATHER

Or a comet?

MOTHER

And another.

FATHER

A bee?

MOTHER

And another.

FATHER

A bicycle?

MOTHER

And another, until we can't tell what the drawings are anymore. She gets so upset when we stop guessing correctly, that she refuses to talk to us for the rest of the day.

FATHER

A giraffe?

MOTHER

How could I tell her that all this hard work is put into the worst job possible? I can't. Because I love her. But I should, because I love her.

FATHER

A trampoline?

MOTHER

His relentless guessing encourages her.

MOTHER

I don't think she needs me anymore.

## **SCENE FIVE**

**EXT. BEACH.**

*Wind, commotion.*

NARRATOR

It is her eighteenth birthday. Lydia goes to the beach, alone. The sight is depressing. Boats are constantly flipping upside down. No one ever reaches their destination. Lydia stays here for a little while.

*We hear this scene for a little longer. The silence should be uncomfortable.*

**ACT THREE: OUT IN THE WORLD**

**SCENE ONE**

**INT. SHOPPING CENTER**

*A happy, lighthearted atmosphere. Soothing music. People chatting.*

ANNOUNCER

Attention please. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a fine selection of meat and groceries for our customers. High quality only. Just look at LAMBCHUCK and JAMBON.

LAMBCHUCK

We sit in the cold -

JAMBON

seducing customers -

LAMBCHUCK

mostly women -

JAMBON

who have to feed their families -

LAMBCHUCK

we've never met our families -

JAMBON

nor they us -

LAMBCHUCK

such is the way of meat -

JAMBON

meat is very quiet -

LAMBCHUCK

we sit in the cold.

ANNOUNCER

Attention please. Thank you for visiting our new shopping center. We hope you are enjoying our services.

*Commotion.*



## SCENE TWO

ANNOUNCER

Attention please! Ladies and gentlemen, we are offering Lydia a job. *(Beat)* Lydia, how about ladies' underwear?

*Suave music starts playing.*

ANNOUNCER

For a sumptuous yet casual evening wear, we introduce you to this nylon and net creation. Here, take a small sample and rub it against your cheek. Yes. Yes... You are safe here. Everything is alright. This habitat has been especially created by and for women –

BOY TWO

Excuse me -

ANNOUNCER

- catering for their wants and needs.

*Music stops.*

BOY TWO

Excuse me. I'm here to buy my mother some lingerie, but instead I have found you. You are very pretty. I am rather handsome myself. Will you go out with me tonight?

ANNOUNCER

*(Sigh)* Alright, Lydia. See how it goes. But do not forget the promise you have made to World of Wear!

*The two run away from World of Wear...*

BOY TWO

Run, run! We must... get away...

## SCENE TWO

### INT. RESTAURANT.

*... and enter a quiet restaurant.*

BOY TWO

It makes me happy. You, that I'm out with you. Careful, it's very cold. *(He blows his nose)* Your eyes look funny. Has anybody told you that? You have big, funny eyes, perfectly circular eyes, eyes that could have been painted over. They're very still. Like Orphan Annie. There used to be this cartoon of a little girl. She had no eyeballs. But some manufacturers felt uncomfortable with that, and so they painted little pupils in for their dolls. *(A long pause)* Am I talking too much, Lydia? I don't know. Is this how people talk? Is this what people talk about? *(Distraught)* I can never tell, Lydia. My mind is jumping around, I can't hold on to anything. The thing that makes the climber climb and the diver dive, I have it. But I don't go anywhere. I don't talk to people. It's always so painful. I'm a good boy, Lydia, I swear I am. I'm all good inside. Be patient with me. And you're not just pretty. You're smart too. And you're

kind. And it's not always like this. There are other times when there's nothing to think about, my thoughts are very quiet, my mind collapses into itself like an old mattress. Stop looking at me, Lydia. I'm scared, you're scaring me. I'm scared all the time. And it's exhausting. I'm sick. The truth is I'm very sick. Boy, oh boy. How I wish I wasn't sick. *(He blows his nose again.)* I love you.

ANNOUNCER

We are very glad for you, Lydia. We believe our employees should live happy, fulfilling lives -

BOY TWO

Let's be together all the time!

ANNOUNCER

That... That is impossible. Nothing like this has ever happened in World of Wear!

BOY TWO

Run! Run, Lydia! We must run again!

ANNOUNCER

Where are you going? Attention please...

BOY TWO

Let's go to the sea, Lydia! Let's go to the sea and think about all the good things that can happen!

ANNOUNCER

Attention please...

### **SCENE THREE**

#### **EXT. BEACH**

*They arrive at the sea. They can't run any further. Loud wind, waves, and seagulls.*

BOY TWO

There's no question, they could really happen for you and me! Oh, if you'd only let me, Lydia! I could build a boat, a bear, a boar, a whole barrel of blossoms and bees and so on. We'll live off fish. We'll write home daily. Your little body will cast a long shadow over the waters. Swimming children will find shelter in it from the sun. Shelter from the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful sun.

*Increasingly loud seagulls.*

BOY TWO

*(Shouting, his voice barely audible at this point)* Lydia! Will you marry me in spite of these violent seagulls?

ANNOUNCER

Attention please... *(A long pause)* Attention please...  
Reporting a missing person. Reporting a missing person,  
by the name of Lydia. Attention please. Attention please...  
If you see this woman, please return her to World of Wear.  
Attention please...

## ACT FOUR: THE OTHERS

### SCENE ONE

#### INT. NURSING HOME

*Poppy reads to Dolly from a strange magazine. It is not clear whether she believes what she is reading, or if she is simply trying to entertain herself.*

POPPY

*(Reading)* All one has to do is observe an old couple on vacation, how adamant he is on deciding where to go next even though her toes have started bleeding, or the way her gaze is slightly off-kilter when she holds his hand, to understand the real reason behind why the dead never come back to us. Dolly, listen to this! To win back the dead you must first know what sort of activities please them, what kind of things they like, and then find a way to make them happen. You should also carefully identify what sort of activities irritate them, and why, so as to avoid them.

POPPY

You know I'm going to die before you, dear. But I am really adamant about coming back. Oh yes. And you're my only hope, Dolly. That isn't much of a hope, but I'm willing to take it. What do you say?

POPPY

Let's see. What sort of activities please me?

DOLLY

Please you...

POPPY

Yes. Activities. Things I like to do.

DOLLY

Where are we?

POPPY

I used to like dancing. Did I? I can't remember.

DOLLY

Are we old?

POPPY

I must have. Who doesn't like dancing?

DOLLY

Poppy...

POPPY

I can't, for the love of me, think of something that I truly enjoyed doing in my youth.

DOLLY

*(Whispering)* Poppy... I think there's a girl here, I can smell her.

POPPY

Why, yes, it's Lydia. *(Pause)* Lydia, darling, come here for a minute!

*Lydia approaches.*

POPPY

Do you dance? Do you like dancing?

*Silence.*

DOLLY

*(Whispering)* What is she doing?

POPPY

*(To Dolly)* She's thinking.



*A long pause.*

POPPY

It's alright. It's alright, darling, you don't have to have an answer to that -

DOLLY

You used to paint my nails. Won't you paint my nails again, Poppy?

POPPY

What do you need your nails painted for? You're blind.

DOLLY

I still like it.

POPPY

*(Sighs)* Lydia, could you bring us a little bottle of nail polish, please? Thank you.

DOLLY

Are you going to paint them?

POPPY

Yes.

DOLLY

*(Giggles)*

POPPY

I don't know, Dolly. I can't find anything I would come back from the dead for. I can only remember you. You, with your stupid yellow ribbons flapping around your face. Always crying about something. Always getting hurt when you were on my watch. You could've died so many times! But here we are. And here you are. And here is the nail polish! *(Sigh)* To win back the dead you must first know what sort of activities please them, what kind of things they like, and then find a way to make them happen. *(Beat)* You should also carefully identify what sort of activities irritate them, and why... Well, well, well. What if the thing that I like the most and the thing that annoys me the most are one and the same? Thank you, Lydia, darling.

*Lydia places the little bottle of nail polish on the table. Dolly suddenly grabs Lydia's wrist.*

POPPY

Dolly, what are you doing?

*Dolly doesn't let go.*

POPPY

Dolly, let her go. Dolly!

DOLLY

No.

POPPY

You need to let go of her arm. Now.

DOLLY

I want to see her face. See who she is. *(To Lydia)* How old are you?

POPPY

Stop it.

DOLLY

Where is your family?

POPPY

Let go of her.

DOLLY

Are you tall?

POPPY

Lydia, I'm so sorry.

DOLLY

Come closer!

POPPY

Dolly!

*Dolly lets go of Lydia.*

POPPY

What's gone into you?

DOLLY

I've never liked it. I've never liked our game, Poppy. You always do this. I'm always the one to wear the blindfold. And then you leave, all of you. You run away to Charlie's to listen to his records. You laugh at how I must still be looking for you. And of course I am still looking for you. And I'm very scared to take the blindfold off, I don't want to lose! But I lose anyway. When I catch one of you, I never guess who it is. *(In a whisper)* I caught this girl, Poppy, but I don't think she should be playing. I could've hurt her. *(To Lydia)* You're a good girl, Lydia. Me and Poppy think you should go home.

POPPY

*(Absent minded)* Yes... Maybe you should go home, Lydia.  
Take the evening off. We'll make up something. *(Lydia  
hesitates)* Go!

*Lydia leaves. Poppy opens the nail polish.*

POPPY

I thought you were having fun. You never said anything.

POPPY

Why didn't you say anything?

POPPY

*(Pause)* Alright, here we go. Left hand first.

## ACT FIVE: THE BEGINNING

### SCENE ONE

#### INT. HOME

*Lydia returns home. Sounds of keys in the door.*

#### NARRATOR

Lydia is back in her old room. She searches for the rabbit poster, but it is no longer in here. Her bed is there. She climbs into it. The walls close in, the scenery changes, now, all of a sudden, the sea - she approaches it, she is very careful, there is no one else on the beach, not a single soul, she's not afraid, no, she is very confident she looks at the horizon, there's something there, yes, something is there, emerging, and soon enough she finds out what it is; yes, she feels a warm longing in her body, like dropping from high up on a rollercoaster, it reminds her of something, it's something important, and just as she starts remembering, the water recedes, she thinks - this is how I should have felt back then when I had the chance, I should have let it happen, there wasn't any reason to be scared, and even if there was, I could have handled it, because it was a right thing and it was a good thing, but now it's gone, it's too late, the longing leaves her body as she wakes up doused in cold sweat.

#### NARRATOR

Lydia goes downstairs to make a cup of cocoa. On the couch, she finds the father dreaming.

FATHER

I, too, am dreaming.

NARRATOR

His house is sinking into the ocean.

FATHER

Not sure what it means.

NARRATOR

The house rebuilds itself.

FATHER

Ah. All's well that ends well.

NARRATOR

Lydia presses her head against the kitchen window. With one short sweep, she draws a perfect circle.

THE END.