

PROPAGANJA ©

Episode 1

'Freshers Week'

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EXT. STUDENT HALLS - DAY

Somewhere in Manchester, it's move-in day for students.

The campus is filled with weeping parents waving off their eager adult children.

Resident Advisors in hi-vis hand out welcome packages to excited students.

ROYA, 19, Black, androgynous punk, squirms in her mum's embrace. VERNIE, 60s, short and Caribbean, squeezes tighter.

ROYA

Mum, let go, you're hurting me.

Roya shrinks under the stares of other students, self-conscious of how uncool she looks.

VERNIE

The house will feel empty without you.

ROYA

You still have Dad.

Vernie kisses her teeth and releases Roya.

VERNIE

I expect a call twice a week!

ROYA

Sure.

Roya's eyes light up when she sees cute boys smoking a joint out their window. Vernie notices and sternly hits Roya's arm.

VERNIE

No drugs, no alcohol, no sex!

ROYA

No promises.

Roya kisses her mum's temple. Vernie softens.

ROYA

I'll see you in a few weeks.

Vernie cups Roya's face. Roya smiles and walks away.

Vernie blinks away her tears and drives off.

INT. ROYA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Roya unpacks her moving boxes and hangs up indie band posters. There's a knock on her door. She answers it.

ZARA, 19, Kate Middleton lookalike, head-to-toe Lululemon, stands idly in the corridor with a deranged grin and empty eyes.

ZARA
Hiya! I'm Zara, I'm next door!

Zara moves forward to enter, but Roya doesn't widen the door.

ZARA
We're keeping our doors open,
it helps to break the ice.

ROYA
Cool.

Silence.

ZARA
We're in the kitchen. Come join us.

ROYA
Later.

Roya tries to close her door, but Zara sticks her foot in between the gap with an ominous smile.

ZARA
Doors open, silly.

Roya musters a dry, nervous laugh.

INT. ROYA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roya sits across from flatmates TILLY and BEX, both 19, identical to Zara.

Cards Against Humanity on the table. The speaker blasts Taylor Swift songs. Roya looks drained.

Zara brings a full tray of tequila shots to the table.

ZARA
Your turn, Roya.

Roya picks up a black card.

ROYA
"Can you smell that?
It smells like blank."

Zara, Tilly and Bex each place a white card in the middle. Roya reads the first white card, rolling her eyes.

ROYA (CONT'D)
 "Can you smell that?
 It smells like my grandma's pussy."

Zara, Bex and Tilly giggle. Roya picks up the next card.

ROYA (CONT'D)
 "Can you smell that?
 It smells like London Bridge is
 burning."

Silence. Roya picks up the final card. Zara bites her lip.

ROYA (CONT'D)
 "Can you smell that?
 It smells like Black People."

Zara, Bex and Tilly laugh. Roya shifts uncomfortably.

TILLY
 That card wins.

Zara, smug, waves her hands in defence.

ZARA
 Don't get triggered. It's a game.

Roya side eyes Zara. Tilly and Bex, down their shots.

EXT. GAY VILLAGE - NIGHT

Dressed up, Roya trails behind Zara, Tilly and Bex on the cobblestone path of Canal Street.

She checks her phone and ignores a text message from Vernie reading: 'How are you settling in with your flat? Xx'

INT. G-A-Y MANCHESTER - NIGHT

Roya bops along in a sea of sweaty bodies, screaming along to the lyrics of Call Me Maybe by Carly Rae Jepsen.

She pushes her way out of the crowd towards the bar.

INT. G-A-Y MANCHESTER - BAR - CONTINUOUS

Roya calls out to the bartender.

ROYA
Can I get three tequila shots?

AMELIA, 19, a boho white girl, posh, turns to face Roya and shouts over the music.

AMELIA
Manchester's safe as fuck!

Roya nods at Amelia and pulls out her phone to pay.

Amelia taps her card on the machine. Roya looks confused.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
My treat!

ROYA
Thanks!

The bartender presents the shots to Roya.

Roya takes two shots and hands one to Amelia. They down the shots, grimacing with limes between their teeth.

Zara interrupts Roya and Amelia's conversation by spilling a drink on Amelia. Amelia shrieks; Zara and Tilly snicker.

ZARA
Whoopsie!

Roya dabs the wet patch on Amelia's dress and scowls.

ZARA (CONT'D)
Hey Amelia.
(to Roya)
I see you've met my stalker.

Roya furrows her eyebrows. Amelia looks bashful.

ROYA
How'd you know each other?

AMELIA
Boarding School.

ZARA
Millie was obsessed with me.

AMELIA
(defensive)
We were friends.

ZARA
Until you had your dyke breakdown.

AMELIA
I prefer the term 'bisexual panic'.

ROYA
(to Zara)
Save some slurs for me.
I like the classics.

ZARA
(deadpan)
You're hilarious, Roya.

Zara grits her teeth and struts off. Amelia softens.

ROYA
What a cunt.

AMELIA
Do you want to get fucked up?

ROYA
Desperately...but not here.

Roya signals Amelia to leave, they link arms and waltz out.

INT. 42S - NIGHT

Inside 42s the vibe is polar opposite to G-A-Y: Dim, gritty, smokey.

Roya fits in with her band tee, denim skirt and docs compared to Amelia's glittery slip dress.

Roya orders more shots, and Amelia pays. They dance and mosh with indie boys with floppy hair and pearl necklaces.

A short montage of Roya and Amelia bonding: sitting opposite each other in a booth, necking the shots from a tray and bursting into fits of laughter.

INT. AMELIA'S HALLS - NIGHT

Drunk, swaying side to side, Amelia and Roya stumble to Amelia's flat, unable to use an inside voice.

Amelia tips out her handbag on the floor to find her fob.

She holds the fob to the reader, but it doesn't scan.

Frustrated, Amelia bangs on the front door, but no one answers.

AMELIA
 FUCK. What should we do now?

INT. ROYA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Roya passes the joint to Amelia. They sit on the bathroom floor, the room fills with smoke and steam running from the shower.

AMELIA
 So, where are you from?

ROYA
 London. What about you?

AMELIA
 Surrey.

ROYA
 Of course, you are.

AMELIA
 You think I'm a tory, don't you?

Roya chokes on smoke, laughing. She shakes her head, but her smile gives it away. Amelia groans.

ROYA
 Well, are you?

AMELIA
 I'm not a Tory.
 I'm just posh and a bit gay.

Amelia turns to face Roya, their faces inches apart.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
 So, are you...like...y'know

Amelia flicks her wrist. Roya raises her eyebrows, amused.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
 Come on. You have a vibe.

ROYA
 You're not my type.

They both laugh, but Amelia looks slightly disappointed.

INT. ROYA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Roya wakes up in an empty bed with no trace of Amelia.

INT. ROYA'S HALLS, KITCHEN - DAY

Roya enters. Zara and Tilly stop mid-conversation.

ZARA
Morning.

ROYA
Morning. Does anyone want a coffee?

ZARA
Still tired?

ROYA
Yeah, a bit.

ZARA
(passive-aggressive)
Weed has that effect.

Roya tenses, unsure how to respond. Zara stands.

ZARA (CONT'D)
You should ask us first before you
decide to hotbox the flat.
Did you know that Tilly has asthma?

Tilly stares blankly at Roya, vaping into her fruit salad.

ROYA
Sorry.

ZARA
We want to keep the flat drug-free.

Roya eyes the coffee table cluttered with empty alcohol bottles and poorly hidden coke baggies.

ROYA
It won't happen again.

ZARA
Appreciate it.

Zara gives a forced smile. Roya grits her teeth

Roya boils the kettle. Zara and Tilly resume their conversation full of shrill, obnoxious laughter.

INT. FLAT PARTY - NIGHT

Lights on. Loud drum and bass. Awkward as fuck.

More people enter the kitchen; it's overcrowded and cramped.

Roya leans against the wall; she yawns over a Calvin Harris remix, checking the time; it's only 10 PM.

She watches Zara flirt with a boy whilst Tilly lingers behind her, gormless, probably ketty.

Roya notices a white boy with dreadlocks toking a joint, eyeing her up. Roya's face screws up in disgust; she leaves.

INT. ROYA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roya tosses and turns in bed, trying to drown out the drunken, shrill screams from Zara's friends partying upstairs. Her alarm clock reads 3 AM.

Roya texts Zara: Can you turn the music down?

Zara starts typing and then stops. Roya hears the music turn up louder, followed by laughter.

She rolls out of bed and puts a sock over her smoke detector.

INT. ROYA'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roya sits on the toilet, smoking her joint, swiping through Tinder. She flicks her lighter, and it breaks.

Absentmindedly, she stands up and opens the bathroom door.

INT. ROYA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roya searches for a lighter on her cluttered desk with the joint still in hand. Suddenly, the smoke alarm rings.

ROYA

SHIT.

Roya stubs out the joint and tries to open her window, but it has a safety lock on it and won't open wide enough.

She waves a towel below the smoke alarm, but no luck.

Banging can be heard outside her bedroom door.

Roya panics and tries to force the window open wider.

SECURITY GUARDS unlock the door, catching Roya in the act.

She stands frozen like a deer in headlights.

ROYA (CONT'D)
I can explain.

EXT. ROYA'S HALLS - NIGHT

Students stand shivering and moaning in pyjamas and skimpy clubbing outfits, waiting for fire alarms to stop ringing.

Roya is escorted out of her accommodation by the security guards.

Students gawk at her as she weaves through the crowd of whispers and stares.

Roya keeps her head down until she feels a hand on her shoulder; it's Zara with a drunk, smug grin.

ZARA
Unlucky, babe.

INT. STUDENT UNION, DEBORAH'S OFFICE - DAY

Roya shifts anxiously in her chair in Deborah's clinical, white office decorated with motivational posters.

DEBORAH, 50s, eccentric Geordie, sits hunched over her keyboard, mouth breathing, typing with two fingers.

DEBORAH
So, the bad news is you've broken the halls of residence code of conduct.

ROYA
What's the good news?

DEBORAH
The good news is that two other first-year girls require emergency accommodation.

ROYA
What happens if I can't find somewhere to live?

DEBORAH
You could always buy a tent and join them in Piccadilly Gardens; it's like a festival down there.

ROYA
They're homeless.

Deborah scribbles on a Post-it note and hands it to Roya.

DEBORAH
Here are the students' names and numbers - best of luck with your search.

ROYA
Can't you help us find student accommodation?

Deborah snorts and gives Roya an exaggerated pout.

DEBORAH
That is above my pay grade.

ROYA
What are they like?

DEBORAH
You'll get on like a tent on fire.

Roya reluctantly takes the Post-it note and exits.

INT. STUDENT UNION PUB - DAY

The Student Union Pub is filled with bodies and noise. Glass shattering. Applause. Football on TV. Cheers followed by boos.

Roya scouts EVE, 18, South-East Asian, Northern, geeky but pretty, frantically waving at her.

ROYA
Hey, I'm Roya. You must be Eve.

Roya goes to fist bump, but Eve extends for a handshake. She's jittery from the caffeine, but it looks like she's tweaking. Roya sits down with caution.

EVE
It's nice to meet you. I'm Eve. But you just said that. C'mon Eve, get it together. Idiot.

Roya nods, slightly unnerved.

ROYA
Which halls are you in?

EVE
I'm not in halls. I live at home.

ROYA

So, why do you need a house?

EVE

Well, I stayed at home because my parents said I should save my money and don't get me wrong, I LOVE my family; we're super close, maybe even a little bit too close, and I tried to be okay with missing out on halls, but I realised that if I don't move out now, my family will never let me go and I'll miss out on a real uni experience and then three years will fly by and nothing will have changed and then I'll probably kill myself. What about you?

Beat.

ROYA

Yeah, same. Want a pint?

EVE

I don't drink. I'll have a Redbull.

Roya looks at the empty Redbull cans on the table.

ROYA

Is Amelia coming?

EVE

She should be here by now. I've been texting her, and I'm not being funny; she seems like a twat.

Roya smirks at Eve.

ROYA

How so?

On cue, Amelia makes a dramatic, stumbling entrance into the pub with oversized sunglasses and a fur coat.

She takes off her sunglasses to reveal bloodshot, dilated pupils - evidence of an unfinished Class A bender.

AMELIA

WAGWUN SLUTS!

Roya smiles, Eve looks horrified.

Amelia spots Roya and bolts towards her with open arms.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

(gleeful)

BABE! Where the fuck've you been?

Amelia hugs and kisses Roya. Eve looks jealous.

ROYA

You're the one who left my room
like a one-night stand.

Glad to see you're still alive.

AMELIA

Babe, I'm hanging out my arsehole,
but strangely, I've never felt
better.

Amelia throws herself in the seat between Roya and Eve.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

I'm Amelia.

Amelia extends her hand, but Eve doesn't shake it.

EVE

I know. You're late.

AMELIA

(sarcastic)

That doesn't sound like me.

ROYA

Why are you moving out of halls?

AMELIA

Long story short; this weird guy in
my flat called Dean installed a
tiny camera in my bedroom. I only
found out when the maintenance guy
found it on the shelf.

ROYA

That's illegal.

AMELIA

Probably.

EVE

Surely he should get kicked out?

AMELIA

Apparently not, since his Dad is
the Vice Chancellor and claimed
he's "going through a phase."

Roya and Eve groan.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
How's the house hunt going?

EVE
This is all that's left in
September.

Eve shows her laptop screen to Amelia and Roya; their jaws drop as they flick through the low-quality images of grotty houses on Zoopla, each photo more gag-worthy than the last.

ROYA
Don't piss me off.

AMELIA
I'd rather be homeless.

EVE
This one's cheap and close to
campus. We should try it.

Amelia screws her face at the listing and whines.

EVE (CONT'D)
What's wrong with it?

AMELIA
Isn't Moss Side rough?

ROYA
By 'rough', do you mean ethnic?

Amelia waves her hands in defence.

AMELIA
I heard people get stabbed there!

ROYA
Stabbings happen everywhere.

EVE
I could stab you right now.

Amelia inches closer to Roya.

EVE (CONT'D)
Term starts on Monday, and this
house is available, we should at
least view it.

ROYA
She's right.
We can't afford to be picky.

AMELIA
All I want is an ensuite and free
parking; I don't think I'm asking
for too much.

Eve and Roya exchange a look of disdain.

Amelia gets a Tinder notification. She beams at her phone.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Phwoar, he's FIT!

Amelia shows Roya and Eve her phone for a comment.

The photo shows ZAC, 20, a baby-faced rugby boy flexing his
arms in a dirty mirror selfie. Eve looks unimpressed.

ROYA
Cute. He lives in Moss Side.

Amelia sighs, her giddy smile fades.

ROYA (CONT'D)
I thought you had a boyfriend?

AMELIA
I had a boyfriend.

EVE
Why did you break up?

AMELIA
I'm too young to be doing long
distance.

ROYA
Carpe Diem.

Amelia clinks her glass with Roya.

EVE
Isn't it a bit too soon to move on?

AMELIA
Would you like some lube while you
ride my dick?

A goal is scored on the TV. Fans in the pub erupt into
cheers.

EXT. OXFORD ROAD - DAY

Roya and Eve trail behind a wobbly Amelia, walking towards a bus stop.

EVE

I'm just saying, aren't you supposed to process the breakup before you start dating again?

AMELIA

The best way to get over someone is to get under someone else.

ROYA

Plus, women tend to clock out of relationships quicker than men. You could be together for six months but emotionally check out after three. It happened to me.

AMELIA

Exactly. I won't be this young and hot again, so why not enjoy it?

ROYA

Everyone deserves a hoe era.

Eve rolls her eyes at Roya.

EVE

Why is our generation obsessed with equating casual sex as liberation when it's used to avoid communication and emotional intimacy?

Roya and Amelia exchange a look.

AMELIA

Wow. You must be fun at parties.

ROYA

Wake up, Eve. Monogamy is overrated. Chivalry is dead. We're all socially inept.

The girls arrive at the bus stop. The bus doors open.