

BEST SELLER

By Ruby Skippings

2nd draft

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INT. RIPE FRUIT - STAFF ROOM - DAY

BILLIE, 25, unassuming, looks out of the wall-to-wall window of a modern office building. She's on the phone.

The staff room is flashy but uninviting. All stainless steel surfaces, high stools and orange bean bags that no one uses. Fancy equipment for show more than use. Billie is the only person there.

As she listens, she looks down at boats slowly crawling up the Thames, people quickly walking on the bank.

BILLIE
The password is Blondie16
exclamation mark. Always has been.

LOIS (V.O.)
That's what I tried!

BILLIE
Try it again.

LOIS (V.O.)
Blondie like the singer?

BILLIE
(through gritted teeth)
Like my hamster.

CLEM, chic, 45, comes into the staff room.

CLEM
(clearing her throat)
Hm-hmm.

Billie half-turns around, then quickly puts her hand over the phone.

BILLIE
Gotta go, Mum.

She hangs up and faces Clem, holding her phone behind her back.

CLEM
Did I interrupt something?

BILLIE
Oh, no, not at all -

CLEM
I'm glad, as lunch ended...

She checks her Apple Watch.

CLEM (cont'd)
Oh, 45 minutes ago.

BILLIE
I was just sorting out...
(giving up)
Sorry.

Clem comes over to the window and uses her jacket sleeve to wipe a smudge off the glass.

She looks down at the passers-by. It's a difficult angle.

CLEM
(to herself)
Like ants.

She turns to Billie.

CLEM (cont'd)
I'll have an ice water with lime.
Make yourself another coffee if
you're feeling tired.

Clem's Apple Watch vibrates. She reads it.

CLEM (cont'd)
(looking at her watch)
Come through when you're ready.

Clem leaves. She almost bumps into a staff member, RHIANNON, who's also on the phone. Clem ignores this.

Rhiannon pushes past Billie to open the double-door fridge.

RHIANNON
(loudly, down the phone)
I mean, it was way overdue. I was a
Junior Agent for, like, ages.
(laughs)
I'm not saying how much!

Billie get a lime out of the fruit bowl.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - CLEM'S OFFICE - DAY

An immaculate office. Natural light beaming in from the sky lights makes it look even bigger than it is. Hardback books are stacked on glossy shelves.

The walls are decorated with certificates and accolades from publishing ceremonies. There's a framed picture of a smiling blonde woman holding a trophy. The text underneath reads: "Lara Fern, Best YA Author, 2017".

Billie sits on the other side of a large birch-wood desk, her MacBook open, typing. Clem pads around the carpeted room, heels off, reading from a red book.

CLEM

Set up a meeting with Marketing about the campaign for the Monica Galletti cookbook. Oh, and tell Jordan to make a presentation about predicted trends on TikTok and that stuff.

Billie clicks through an online calendar.

BILLIE

Next Monday at 11:30?

CLEM

11 on the dot, they complain when it runs into lunch. Do you watch TikTok?

BILLIE

Yeah, I do.

Clem makes a face as if to say "Of course".

BILLIE (cont'd)

Actually, I've had some ideas about how we could utilise social media a bit -

CLEM

Oh, what happened to that Times interview?

BILLIE

(quietly)

He's coming in tomorrow.

Clem flops down in her seat.

CLEM

Anything else on my plate?

Billie scrambles.

BILLIE

Uh...HR wants to know when you'll be available to start interviews for Michelle's position.

CLEM

Have we let her go?

BILLIE

No...she's going on maternity leave, remember?

Clem wavers, awkwardly moves papers around.

CLEM

Course. Who's been covering for her?

BILLIE

The other two in her team, probably.

CLEM

That's not good.

Clem takes off her glasses and rubs her eyes.

CLEM (cont'd)

But we don't have the budget for new hires right now, so hold them off. Oh, and do everything in your power to get Lara Fern in here.

Clem stands, walks to the centre of the room, and stretches her arms up. She folds at the waist and hugs her legs.

BILLIE

Uh, Lara's availability is blocked off for writing -

CLEM

(stern, still hugging her legs)

Just get her in here.

Clem unfurls and leans into a warrior yoga pose.

CLEM (cont'd)

She can either cough up or kiss the rest of her advance goodbye.

She walks back over to her desk and closes the red book, looking from her watch to the big gold clock on the wall.

CLEM (cont'd)
That's an hour slow.
(to Billie)
There's some shredding that needs
doing in the printing room.

Billie gathers her things and goes to leave. As she's about to open the door -

CLEM (cont'd)
Oh, and Billie?

Billie turns around, hopeful.

CLEM (cont'd)
Let Terry know about this.

Clem nods her head towards the clock.

Billie smiles weakly and steps out, closing the door behind her carefully.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - MAIN FLOOR - DAY

An open-plan office floor. Staff members work at individual desks arranged in a snake pattern. Spacious rooms with glass walls are dotted around the perimeter. On one side of the floor is the lift area, staff room and reception. On the other side is Clem's office. High on a wall is a neon orange sign: "Ripe Fruit Publishing Ltd".

Billie's desk is directly in front of a bamboo door that reads "Clemency Ripe, CEO", away from the main block. She sways slightly on her swivel chair, unabsorbed by her work.

JONATHAN, 30s, with slicked hair and heavy aftershave, comes marching over from a nearby desk. He ignores Billie and opens Clem's door without knocking.

CLEM (O.S.)
Just who I wanted to see.

The door slams, heavy, and locks.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

LOIS, early 40s, frumpy, sits on the sofa watching a Gogglebox re-run. She has her laptop open and is scrolling through a community chat site.

The house is filled with clutter. Much of it is dance-related paraphernalia: statues of The Nutcracker, books from the Royal Ballet and Opera, framed photos of dancers, even stuffed ballerina dolls. A step away from serious hoarding.

Billie enters the living room from the hallway. She's flicking through Lois' post.

LOIS

What've I got today?

BILLIE

Looks like you won on the premium bonds again.

LOIS

Won't be much.

BILLIE

The rest is spam. And British Gas.

LOIS

Just put them all in the bin.

Billie puts a letter from NHS Mental Health Services on the top and sets them all down on an existing pile of unopened post.

BILLIE

D'you want tea?

LOIS (O.S.)

The mug in the sink is fine.

Billie walks through to the connected kitchen.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

An outdated galley kitchen. It's similarly cluttered, with an over-full spice rack on the counter top and scraps on paper stuck to the fridge with magnets.

Billie puts her coat on the back of a chair and flicks the kettle on.

LOIS (O.S.)

I don't like that Maya Jama. She dresses so vulgar.

Billie gets the tea things ready, pretending not to hear her.

LOIS (O.S.) (cont'd)
Pretty girl but won't last forever.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Billie comes through carrying two mugs. She sets one down on the mantelpiece and hands one to Lois.

Lois takes it, and looks at it with disappointment.

LOIS
Oh. Okay.

BILLIE
What? This was the one in the sink.

LOIS
Well, you know I like to have a
small cup in the afternoon.

Lois hands it back to Billie, who reluctantly takes it.

LOIS (cont'd)
(sweetly)
Thank you babe.

Billie goes back into the kitchen.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Billie tips out the mug of tea, angrily puts it in the dishwasher and gets a small one out of the cupboard.

She squeezes her eyes shut for a second. Then, she takes a rag and starts wiping down the surfaces.

LOIS (O.S.)
Are you busy at work?

BILLIE
Relatively.

LOIS (O.S.)
That Clem still a horror?

BILLIE
Pretty much.

Billie finishes making the new cup of tea.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Billie delivers the new cup to Lois, who takes it without looking away from the TV.

She sits down on the arm chair.

LOIS
No one stays in jobs for a long
time these days. Only you.

BILLIE
(on edge)
I can't listen to this again.

LOIS
Vicky's daughter found her swank
job on Link-Up or whatever it's
called.

BILLIE
It's LinkedIn, and funnily enough I
know how to use it, thanks.

LOIS
Don't be smart with me, Billie. I'm
just trying to help.

BILLIE
But you aren't, though. Helping.

LOIS
Oh, well. Sorry.

They watch TV in an awkward silence.

LOIS (cont'd)
You're so much better than a
secretary -

BILLIE
(firmly)
MUM.

LOIS
You are! It's a waste! What do you
want me to do, not say anything?

Billie curls up on the armchair and starts scrolling on her
phone, regressing to her 15-year-old self.

LOIS (cont'd)
Fine.

Lois turns the channel over. A chat show host, PHIL, 50s, suave, is interviewing a POP STAR. The sign behind him reads: "The PHIL SULLIVAN SHOW".

PHIL (V.O.)
What do I know, I got married
before I started putting out music.

POP STAR (V.O.)
(cheekily)
What are you trying to say, Phil?

Lois scoffs.

PHIL (V.O.)
Ha, well, look, all I'm saying is
navigating the dating scene when
you're already famous must be
tricky...

POP STAR (V.O.)
Are you asking if I'm dating
anyone?

PHILLIP (V.O.)
Yes, yes I am!

The AUDIENCE laughs.

LOIS
Christ, he's lost even more hair.

Billie sits up, looking for the remote.

BILLIE
Let's put something else on.

Lois ignores her.

PHIL
(on the TV)
You have a new song out called
"Spill the Tea"...I don't know if
you know this, but over here in the
UK spilling tea is a serious
offense.

The POP STAR laughs.

Lois' lip starts to quiver.

LOIS
Cunt.

Billie jumps up to grab the remote off the mantelpiece. She turns the TV off. The screen goes black, reflecting Lois's face back at her.

But it's too late. She buries her face in her hands.

LOIS (cont'd)
It's just not fair.

Billie, still standing, studies her mother.

BILLIE
(firmly)
Stop crying.

Lois looks up at her, eyes red.

BILLIE (cont'd)
I mean it. Stop.

LOIS
(taken aback)
You can't speak to me that way.

BILLIE
You always do this. You insist on watching him and then you cry.

LOIS
I think I have that right!

Lois seems very small when she's hunched up. Billie picks up the half-drunk mugs of tea and takes them back to the kitchen.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Lois comes in after Billie. She looks for something to do and settles on watering a few potted plants with old glasses of water.

BILLIE
I'm gonna go.

Lois doesn't reply.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Mum? Did you hear me?

LOIS
(with her back to Billie)
Maybe you could get a job with
Ryan. You're like a glorified
waitress, anyway.

Billie grabs her coat off the back of the chair and walks
out of the kitchen quickly.

LOIS (cont'd)
Wait!

EXT. LOIS'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Billie opens the interior door and steps out of the house,
pulling her coat on. Lois can be seen rushing up behind her.

LOIS
Please!

She pauses.

LOIS (cont'd)
(feeble)
I need your help.

Billie realises Lois is crying again. She takes her hand off
the exterior door handle.

INT. LOIS'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Billie and Lois stand facing each other in the hallway. Lois
won't make eye contact. She wipes her nose on her cardigan
sleeve.

LOIS
I'm...a little behind on rent.

Billie frowns, concerned.

BILLIE
Why?

LOIS
No reason...car insurance...

BILLIE
Aren't you working?

LOIS
(defensive)
Of course I am.

The sound of rain starting to fall can be heard.

LOIS (cont'd)
I need a loan. 200 is fine.

BILLIE
I thought you said I don't make
much.

Lois bites a nail, guilty.

LOIS
Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit.

Silence while Billie considers.

BILLIE
Fine. I'll bring cash.

LOIS
(softening)
Sweetheart, I really appreciate it.
Don't you want to wait for the rain
to stop?

Billie turns to look out the window. The rain lashes down.
She takes an umbrella out of the holder.

INT. BILLIE AND RYAN'S FLAT - LIVING AREA - NIGHT

The main room of a ground-floor flat. It's sparsely
decorated with mismatching furniture and art prints and
books in piles.

RYAN, 27, disheveled in an all-black uniform, lies asleep on
the slouchy red sofa. The lamp is still on, a dirty plate of
food at his feet.

Billie enters, trying not to jangle her keys too loudly. She
kicks off her shoes, sets down her bag.

She goes over to the sofa and lies down next to Ryan in her
work clothes. Outside, a car alarm horns.

Billie turns off the lamp.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A momentarily trendy Danish coffee chain called "Lys".
Billie waits in line with other city-types to collect her
order.

A bored-looking barista reads off the side of cups.

BARISTA
Order for James.

Billie looks around at the customers, trying to guess if they were before or after her.

Her phone screen lights up with a phone call. It's Clem.

Billie cancels it and texts: "Just getting the coffee :))"

Clem responds: "Don't bother. Pick up my dry cleaning from the usual place"

BARISTA (cont'd)
Order for Billie.

Billie walks up to the counter, ignoring the cup.

BILLIE
Could I get a refund?

INT. DRY CLEANERS - DAY

An empty dry cleaner's. There's a quiet whirring of machinery, the smell of heat and fabric.

Billie goes up to the front desk. There's no one there.

BILLIE
Hello?

A small old man wearing round glasses on his forehead appears from behind a door.

DRY CLEANER
Yes?

BILLIE
Hi, I've come to collect. It's under Clem Ripe.

The man puts his glasses on his nose and checks the book in front of him. His face becomes serious.

DRY CLEANER
You're late.

BILLIE
Sorry?

DRY CLEANER

You need to pay a holding fee of
£16.

BILLIE

(embarrassed)

I...I can't afford that.

DRY CLEANER

Ma'am, this is our policy. If you
can't pay I have no choice but to
keep your suit.

BILLIE

It's not my suit!

He looks at her unsympathetically.

BILLIE (cont'd)

I'll give you £10.

DRY CLEANER

£12.

BILLIE

Done.

Billie pulls her purse out of her handbag. She produces a
crumpled up £10 note and two £1 coins and hands it to the
dry cleaner.

The dry cleaner pulls down a green suit and hands it to
Billie.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - CLEM'S OFFICE - DAY

Clem sits crossed-legged on her desk chair, flicking through
a manuscript. There's a knock at her door.

CLEM

(absent-mindedly)

Come in.

Billie enters confidently. She lays Clem's suit on the
chaise lounge in the corner and sets the receipt down on her
desk.

She takes a step back and clasps her hands together.

Clem puts the manuscript down. She frowns at the receipt and
picks it up.

CLEM (cont'd)
What's this?

BILLIE
They, uh, charged a holding fee.
For late collection.

CLEM
That scheming little man.
(to Billie)
You shouldn't have paid this, you
know.

She crumples it up and throws the receipt - with astounding accuracy - into the bin.

Clem stands and starts to gather her things. She glances up and notices Billie shifting on her feet.

CLEM (cont'd)
Anything else?

BILLIE
I do have a question, actually.

Clem motions for her to ask it. Billie takes a breath.

BILLIE (cont'd)
As you know, I have a Masters in
Publishing from Edinburgh. On top
of this, I was selected to complete
a summer internship at Simon &
Schuster in New York, where I
helped with reading and selecting
submissions.

CLEM
That's not a question.

BILLIE
No, of course not. Sorry. I mean -
well, I feel that I'm underused
here...at Ripe Fruit.

A silence.

BILLIE (cont'd)
(faltering)
I mean, I read a lot. I know within
the first few pages of a book if
it's going to work or not.

Clem smiles a little, amused.

CLEM
You do, do you?

She picks up her things.

CLEM (cont'd)
I'll see what I can find for you to
do.

BILLIE
(surprised)
Um, sure. Great.

CLEM
Can you get the door?

Billie rushes to hold the door open.

BILLIE
Thank you so much...

Clem marches past her. Billie follows behind.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - MAIN FLOOR - DAY

A quiet, dull afternoon, but for once Billie has a spring in her step as she leaves the staff room with a cup of coffee.

From a distance, she notices a thick pile of collated paper on her desk. It looks like a manuscript.

Excited, she picks it up. The post-it note on the front reads: "Yr. 10 Work Experience Applications - pick the best ones".

Billie throws it down and slumps into her chair.

INT. BILLIE AND RYAN'S FLAT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A simple bedroom with blinds that let the street light in and a mattress on the floor. Billie sits cross-legged on it, scrolling aimlessly through LinkedIn. Next to her side of the bed is a stack of books, 15 or so high.

Her phone lights up with a call from Lois. She ignores it and lets it ring out.

Ryan comes into the bedroom, holding a tea towel and his phone. Sounds of cooking can be heard.

RYAN

Have - have you added to the
account yet?

Billie doesn't say anything.

RYAN (cont'd)

Bill?

BILLIE

Not yet.

RYAN

So...

BILLIE

I don't think I can this month, Ry,
to be honest.

Ryan sits down on the edge of the bed.

RYAN

Is everything okay?

Billie looks up at him and forces a smile.

BILLIE

Don't worry, okay? How about you
pay for us both this month, and
I'll cover next?

She turns back to her laptop.

Ryan starts to leave the room, but turns back and leans on
the doorframe with his arms crossed.

RYAN

You still want to save for a house,
right?

Billie makes an exasperated noise.

BILLIE

Oh my God, of course I do!

Ryan's face is still the picture of concern, causing Billie
to squirm.

BILLIE (cont'd)

Clem hasn't reimbursed me for the
month yet.

Ryan rubs his face with his hands.

BILLIE (cont'd)
I said yet!

RYAN
(frustrated)
She can't keep pulling this
bullshit. It's not fair on you...

Billie stands up and walks around him, out of their bedroom.

BILLIE
You think I don't know that.

INT. BILLIE AND RYAN'S FLAT - LIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Two pieces of fish are frying on the stove in the small
kitchenette, in the corner of the open-plan room.

The flat is far from luxurious but neat and homely. Dinner
mats and a candle are laid out on the coffee table.

Billie walks up to the frying pan, takes a spoon and tastes
the sauce for the fish. She adds more salt.

Ryan comes through after her.

RYAN
So what about the rest of it?

BILLIE
(not looking at him)
What?

RYAN
Clem's demands can't add up to
£200.

BILLIE
Ryan, you know what she's like, I
spend all day getting her fucking
Pret salads -

RYAN
You're giving Lois money, aren't
you?

Billie doesn't respond. She pokes the fish.

BILLIE
She's my mum.

Ryan walks over to the front door, grabs his keys and
quickly goes out.

Billie watches him, dumbfounded. She holds the spatula in one hand, dripping fish sauce onto the floor.

INT. BILLIE AND RYAN'S FLAT - LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Billie is curled up on the sofa, the glow from the TV illuminating her face. The fish is still frying on a low high, likely burning.

Ryan comes in from the front door, his hoodie pulled over his head. Billie sits up.

BILLIE
Where did you go?

He silently holds up a single-use plastic bag containing one lemon. He goes over to the stove and resumes cooking.

Billie stands beside him and rests her head on his arm.

RYAN
(quietly)
It never gets to be about us.

Neither of them say anything.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - LIFTS AREA - DAY

Jonathan stands in front of the sleek Ripe Fruit lift doors, nervous. He's watching the floor numbers change on the indicator.

Billie turns a corner, sees him there and sidles up to him. They don't speak much.

BILLIE
(casual)
Jonathan, hi. You busy right now?

Jonathan glances at her.

JONATHAN
I'm always busy.

BILLIE
True, true. You know, I could...

She looks over Jonathan's shoulder at his phone. He's double-checking a presentation. The first slide reads: "Spinoff Series Ideas".

He notices Billie and hides his phone more.

BILLIE (cont'd)
I'd be more than happy to help out!
Pick up some of your slack.

JONATHAN
What, you wanna be everyone's PA
now? Clem isn't stimulating enough?

BILLIE
(unconvincing)
No, she is. I just thought I could
try something new, is all.

The lift doors open and a petite blonde in a big coat, LARA, late 30s, steps out. Jonathan snaps to it, embracing her and kissing her cheek.

JONATHAN
Lara, darling! How was the trip?

LARA
It's just the Jubilee line.

Lara looks at Billie, who stretches out her hand. She shakes it.

BILLIE
Lovely to finally meet you. I'm a
big fan.

Jonathan hands Billie Lara's coat and guides Lara around her.

JONATHAN
Can you make Lara a peppermint tea,
one sweetener?

They walk away.

Billie looks up at the changing lift numbers, feeling the soft cashmere of Lara's coat between her fingers.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - MAIN FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The meeting between Lara, Jonathan and Clem is taking place in the boardroom nearest Clem's office. The blinds have been lowered but there are enough gaps to make out what's happening. Billie watches intently.

Clem sits at the head of the table, Lara next to her, facing the office floor. Jonathan stands at the opposite end by a smart board, clicking through the presentation Billie saw.

He's talking a lot, gesturing, smiling too much. Clem butts in occasionally. Lara looks thoroughly unimpressed.

Finally, Lara shakes her head and says something. Clem's smile drops - her face becomes a picture of quiet fury. Jonathan goes to sit near Lara, tries to get through to her.

Lara stands up and yells something at Clem, pointing at her. The yell is loud enough to be heard from outside; some staff members make faces at each other.

Clem doesn't retaliate. She looks at Lara, stony-faced.

Lara comes storming out of the board room, her face red. She practically runs in the direction of the bathrooms.

Jonathan clasps his hands together on the back of his head, rocking back and forth in this chair. Clem calmly stands and goes to look out of the window, her back to Billie.

Jonathan thinks out loud and shows Clem something on his phone. Clem shrugs him off and comes marching out of the board room and over to her desk. Billie scrambles, pretends to work.

Ignoring Billie, Clem goes into her office and slams the door. Billie looks over at Jonathan, who slopes back to his desk.

Lara comes out the bathroom, face slightly glistening, and walks towards the lifts.

Billie remembers Lara's coat - it's hanging on the coat stand in the corner. She jumps up, grabs it and hurries after Lara.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - LIFT AREA - CONTINUOUS

Lara steps into one of the lifts. She looks like she's just been crying. She presses the a button inside.

Lift announcement: "Lift going down".

Billie manages to jump in just as the doors are closing.

BILLIE
You forgot your coat!

Billie hands it to her.

LARA
Oh, thanks.

The lift doors close.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - LIFE - CONTINUOUS

Billie and Lara stand awkwardly side-by-side.

BILLIE
Seriously, "The Obsidian Locket"
was my favourite series when I was
younger.

Lara makes a noise of contempt.

BILLIE (cont'd)
I'm Billie, by the way. Clem's PA.

LARA
I know.

The floors descend - they'll almost be at the ground floor.

LARA (cont'd)
If she wants me to come back, you
can tell her I'm not doing that.

BILLIE
No, no. I actually wanted to ask if
you'd want to get coffee with me?

Lara glances at her.

LARA
Um, I'd better get my train home.
Got a lot on right now...

BILLIE
Sure, of course. Yeah.

The lift dings, the doors open. Lara walks out.

Billie follows her.

EXT. SOUTHBANK - DAY

Lara walks quickly towards London Bridge station, guided by
the Shard. Billie is only about 10 feet behind.

Lara hears heavy footsteps and speeds up, almost breaking
into a run.

BILLIE
(calling out)
Lara!

Lara stops and turns to face her.

LARA
Stop following me!

BILLIE
Please, just -

Billie struggles to catch her breath. Lara hugs her coat around her, defensive.

LARA
(exasperated)
What do you want?

BILLIE
Just...I think I could help. I saw
what happened.

LARA
You spied on our meeting?

BILLIE
Look, I know what's going on and I
certainly know what it's like to
deal with Clem's bullshit.

Lara looks at her, wary.

BILLIE (cont'd)
So...if you need anyone to rant to
or like, get things off your chest.
I can do that. We're in the same
boat.

People rush past them, but Lara doesn't seem to notice
someone hitting her bag.

BILLIE (cont'd)
I'm sorry. This was a mistake.

Billie turns, but before she can walk away -

LARA
Where would we go?

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The same coffee shop that Billie gets Clem's coffee from. Now mid-afternoon, it's a lot quieter.

Billie and Lara sit at a table by the window, overlooking a man-made lawn. Noises of work calls and steaming milk go on in the background.

Lara's latte sits untouched. Billie's black coffee is almost finished. They're deep in conversation, bodies angled directly at one another.

BILLIE

It's almost impressive how she makes people feel like there's room at the top without ever letting up the reigns. Take Jonathan.

Lara scoffs.

LARA

He's just her lap dog.

BILLIE

But he'll never have any real responsibility, that's the thing. He's just been brainwashed with scraps of attention.

LARA

I hate how he's so bloody obedient to her. She says jump and he says how high.

BILLIE

He's dim, for sure, but he doesn't have any choice over that. It's her way or the high way.

Billie leans in closer, a smile spreading across her face.

BILLIE (cont'd)

I'm pretty sure they got off once.

Lara's mouth hangs open.

LARA

NO!

BILLIE

At the Christmas party last year.

LARA

Oh my God! What a stereotype. I thought he was gay?!

Billie shrugs sheepishly, loving having Lara hang on her every word.

BILLIE

They went into her office for a really long time, and he came out looking all frazzled.

LARA

I mean, I'm not surprised. Her naked body is probably covered in fish scales.

They both laugh.

LARA (cont'd)

Have you ever dated anyone at work?

BILLIE

Nope. My boyfriend, Ryan, is a...we don't work together, no. You?

LARA

I'm a writer - most of the time. It's solitary. So no kids or husband, no.

BILLIE

I don't think I'll get married and have kids either.

LARA

Oh yeah? How come?

BILLIE

Uh, what happened to my mum, I guess.

(after a pause)

My dad left her for her best mate. They're married now.

LARA

Ouch.

BILLIE

Yeah, it gave her all kinds of trust issues. So I guess I don't have a great frame of reference.

LARA
You're worried your boyfriend would
do that to you?

BILLIE
No, Ryan's great. But...putting
your life in the hands of a man?

Lara nods, agreeing.

LARA
How old were you? When he left?

BILLIE
She was pregnant with me.

Lara puffs her cheeks with air as if to say "Shit".

BILLIE (cont'd)
I know, bad timing. She didn't
handle it well.

LARA
What do you mean?

Billie finishes the dregs of her coffee.

BILLIE
Well, I think she was more hurt by
the betrayal of her friend, Jen. I
mean, they were so close. I've seen
pictures.

LARA
Like from childhood?

BILLIE
No, they met at college. They all
met at college.

LARA
So what, Jen just stole her man?

Billie nods and shrugs at the same time.

BILLIE
Apparently Jen had always had a
crush on him. They - my parents -
had an argument and she swooped in,
a shoulder to cry on.

LARA
And your mum - what's her name?

BILLIE

Lois.

LARA

She didn't do anything?

BILLIE

Well...not exactly.

A WAITER comes over and puts the bill on their table.

Lara immediately takes out her purse. She puts a credit card on top of the bill.

The waiter carries it away.

LARA

Go on.

Billie fidgets with her hands.

BILLIE

She was devastated, obviously.
Betrayed by two people she loved.
Everyone's nightmare.

Lara looks like she's holding her breath.

BILLIE (cont'd)

So she decided to, uh, frame her.

A long pause. Lara is literally on the edge of her seat.

LARA

(whispering)

For what?

BILLIE

Doping. Performance enhancing
drugs.

LARA

And did it work?

The waiter comes back over with the receipt and Lara's card and clears away their cups. Lara's is still full.

BILLIE

I'm sorry, I should really be
getting back. Thank you for the
coffee.

Billie stands up and shakes Lara's hand. She walks out of the doors to "Lys", leaving Lara to sit on her own.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - STAIRWELL - DAY

The only unglamorous area of Ripe Fruit. Dimly lit, peeling paint and dusty corners. No one walks up and down here.

Billie comes into the stairwell. She walks a few steps down - wincing at the loud echoes - and crouches down to sit by the railing.

We see that she's getting a call from an unknown number. She eventually presses "Accept" and holds the phone to her ear.

BILLIE

Hello?

LARA

Hi, Billie, it's Lara.

Billie's face lights up - surprise mixed with joy.

BILLIE

Oh, hi!

LARA

The receptionist told me your number. I feel like we didn't get to finish our chat the other day. Just as it was getting juicy.

BILLIE

Right, sorry about that. I'm more than happy to meet up again -

LARA

Great. How's 6:30 tomorrow evening? My address is...

Billie struggles to quickly put Lara on speaker so she can type the address in.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - SPARE ROOM - DAY

An overhead light turns on in a messy spare room. It's full of disorganised piles of clothes, bedding, unassembled IKEA furniture, boxes, bags, baby stuff, shoes, curtains, gardening equipment. The floor can barely be seen.

Billie struggles through the stuff to an old chest of drawers. She gets down on her knees and grimaces as she reaches under it. She pulls out a shoebox - caked in a layer of dust - and opens it up.

Inside is a pair of bashed-up, faded pink pointe ballet shoes. At the bottom of the box are buttons, a small tub of Vaseline and an dead battery. Billie lifts the shoes and rifles through.

She picks up a piece of lined paper and unfolds it. It reads "Break a leg, as you always do. Kisses and hugs, Big Jen x".

LOIS (V.O.)

Billie!

BILLIE

One sec!

LOIS (V.O.)

Where are you? Could you go to the corner shop?

BILLIE

Just coming!

Billie puts the paper in her pocket and sticks her hand back under the chest of drawers. She goes deeper this time, making her strain and grunt.

Finally, she pulls out another smaller shoebox. It's been decorated, wrapped in wrapping paper that's flaking off.

Billie opens the box in a hurry. It contains sentimental mementos - a gift ribbon, ticket stubs, little cards and film photos.

Billie quickly flicks through the photos. Most are of nothing, scenery and random people. But there's one of a young, attractive Lois dancing ballet en pointe; one of the back of Lois and a woman sat next to each other in rehearsal; one of Lois at a bar smoking and talking to someone off camera; and one of young Phil Sullivan with his arm around someone next to him - who has Lois' distinct curly hair.

Billie shoves those four into her bra.

LOIS

Why are you up here?

Billie turns to see Lois at the door, looking at her.

BILLIE

(unconvincing)

I just like looking through your old stuff. You know me.

She picks up a ballet shoe and holds it up for Lois to see. Lois frowns.

BILLIE (cont'd)
So lovely.

LOIS
You haven't paid any attention to
that stuff since you were a child.

BILLIE
That's not true.

LOIS
Put it back and come downstairs.

Lois lingers and then goes.

Billie puts the lids on the boxes and shoves them back under.

EXT. LARA'S FLAT - DAY

A residential London street. We see Lara walk down it.

Outside a townhouse, a bin has been tipped over and rubbish is spilling out onto the pavement. Lara steps over it and uses a key to let herself in.

A few seconds later, Billie crosses the road and walks up to the same front door.

There are three slightly different, unlabelled door bells. Billie deliberates for a second and then presses the middle one. No sound.

After a while, the sound of a door opening comes from within the house. Slow footsteps down a tall set of stairs.

Lara opens the door, still wearing her coat. She registers Billie.

LARA
Wow, you're punctual.

BILLIE
Ha, thanks! I actually got here
earlier but waited till you got
home.

Billie gestures to the spot across the road where she was standing. Lara glances at it and back at Billie.

LARA
Come on in.

Lara holds the door open and Billie steps inside.

INT. LARA'S FLAT - DAY

An impressive mansion flat, the epitome of quiet luxury that shows Lara's commercial success. It's not huge, but light and quiet for central London.

The mantelpiece above the fireplace is adorned with small glass trophies. One is the shape of an orange. Photos of Lara surrounded by family and friends at her book launches.

Billie awkwardly perches on the corner of a large cream sherpa sofa.

Lara comes through from the kitchen, carrying two glasses of white wine. She sets them down on the glass coffee table, adorned with big artsy books.

She sits down on the other end of the sofa.

BILLIE
Your place is lovely!

LARA
I haven't stopped thinking about Lois. I mean, what a fall from grace.

BILLIE
Uh, sure. It's a shame.

Lara tucks her legs under herself.

LARA
Would you mind telling me more about this...
(almost mouthing)
Whole framing thing?

Billie picks up her glass of wine, takes a sip.

BILLIE
I don't know everything, but I can try.

LARA
Oh, and can I record you?

BILLIE

Record me?

LARA

Yeah. I do it for all my research.

Lara smiles at her. Billie smiles back and nods.

Lara takes out her phone and opens the Voice Record app. She presses the red button.

BILLIE

Should I, uh, just launch into it?

LARA

Please. So what pushed Lois to do what she did?

BILLIE

(speaking clearly)

I think it was a combination of things. Jennifer had been so supportive of her relationship with my dad. Like I said, they were in a big friend group, so they hung out all the time. She even said she thought they would get engaged right out of college.

Lara picks up her wine glass, too.

BILLIE (cont'd)

And then Lois got injured. Sprained ankle, quite standard in the ballet world. Her and my dad were in a show together - he was a music student - and he wanted her to drop out, rest her leg. But she didn't want to. They fought about it.

LARA

And that's when Lois swooped in?

BILLIE

She was the only one who could actually convince my mum to not do the final show - that's how close they were. Jen used the opportunity to offer to take her place.

LARA

And that's where her and your dad got close?

BILLIE

Hm-hmm.

LARA

Wow. I might want revenge after that too.

Billie makes a face.

LARA (cont'd)

What?

BILLIE

It didn't exactly go so well.

LARA

What happened?

BILLIE

I think she was caught trying to put the drugs in Jen's locker. Got expelled. Had almost finished her training. Never danced again.

Lara sits back.

Billie chuckles at her own phrasing.

BILLIE (cont'd)

"Never danced again". Sounds so dramatic.

LARA

It is. Wait, you *think*?

BILLIE

My mum didn't tell me that. She wouldn't have. I found out when I was a teenager.

LARA

How?

BILLIE

Uh, Jen went on Loose Women and talked about it.

Lara frowns.

BILLIE (cont'd)

She's a celebrity. Jennifer Sullivan?

A flicker of realisation crosses Lara's face.

LARA

Wait a second...that means...Phil
Sullivan...

Billie reaches down into her handbag and pulls out the
photos she stole from Lois' house. She hands them to Lara.

Lara flicks through them. Then, she lets out a loud school-
girl-like squeal of excitement.

INT. CLOTHES SHOP - DAY

A run-of-the-mill fast-fashion clothes shop, H&M or similar.

Billie flicks through the racks, holding a bag full of
office attire. Lois comes round the corner, holding a thick
turtleneck.

LOIS

This is very smart.

BILLIE

It's too hot for that right now.

Lois puts it back on the wrong rack.

LOIS

Well, ignore me then. You really
don't need new clothes.

She picks up a trainer, frowns and puts it down.

LOIS (cont'd)

When I worked in an office I only
had three shirts.

Billie ignores this lie and takes her ringing phone of her
pocket. She checks it. It's Lara.

BILLIE

I have to take this...wait here.

Lois doesn't hear her, preoccupied with a blouse. Billie
drops the bag by her mum's feet.

EXT. CLOTHES SHOP - DAY

Billie stands nearby the entrance/exit doors of the shop,
leaning against the glass.

BILLIE

Hello?

LARA (V.O.)
Hi, I've just Googled Lois - she
was actually pretty well known in
the ballet world!

BILLIE
Yeah, she was probably gonna go
pro...

Billie peers through the glass at Lois.

BILLIE (cont'd)
If she hadn't had me.

Lara snorts.

LARA (V.O.)
Just goes to show, kids will ruin
women's lives but you'll come away
unscathed if you're a man!

Billie doesn't say anything.

LARA (V.O.) (cont'd)
I mean, does Phil even know you
exist?

BILLIE
Nope. She decided to keep me when
she found out, but not tell him.

LARA (V.O.)
See, she's just such an interesting
female character...makes me want to
write it even more.

BILLIE
Really?

LARA (V.O.)
Really. Do you wanna do this? Be my
eyes and ears?

BILLIE
Absolutely!

Billie looks through the window again. Lois is now clearly
looking for her.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Should I put together a contract? I
help Clem draft them sometimes.

LARA (V.O.)
Let's just have a verbal agreement,
yeah? Open communication, 100%
honesty, and you can pull out at
any time.

Billie is still listening, but increasingly distracted by
Lois.

BILLIE
Sounds good...sorry, Lara, I've
gotta go.

LARA (V.O.)
By the way, can you get me any more
stuff of hers?

BILLIE
I'll try.

Billie hangs up. She rushes inside the shop, smiling
slightly.

INT. CLOTHES SHOP - DAY

Lois is talking the ear off a saleswoman. She points at
Billie as she approaches, and the girl walks off.

LOIS
There you are! I had to ask where
you were like you're still 6.

BILLIE
(brightly)
Do you want to go get dinner?

LOIS
(flicking through a
clothes rack)
You eat dinner, Billie, you don't
get dinner.

Billie waits. Lois inspects a cardigan. After a while -

LOIS (cont'd)
You paying?

Billie picks up the bag full of clothes and walks towards
the tills. Lois follows, carrying the cardigan.

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - EVENING

An independent Italian restaurant, nice but not overly fancy. Only a few tables remain.

Billie and Lois sit opposite each other at a small table by the window. Their plates are empty and they're only drinking tap water.

Lois looks at the old Italian-style photos on the wall.

LOIS

This is nice. Not that I would know.

Ryan, wearing his uniform, comes over to the table. He picks up their plates.

RYAN

(in a faux fancy waiter voice)

Anything else for you ladies?

LOIS

That's all, thanks, Ryan.

Ryan walks off with the plates expertly balanced on his arms. Billie and Lois sit in silence, until -

BILLIE

I have some news.

Lois' eyes widen.

LOIS

You're not pregnant, are you?

BILLIE

No, Mum.

LOIS

Thank God.

BILLIE

It's about work. I think you'll like it!

Lois fiddles with the now-mushy paper straw in her glass of water.

BILLIE (cont'd)

I'm helping an author with her next book.

LOIS

Oh yeah? How are you doing that?

BILLIE

With the, uh, story. Giving her ideas, you know, inspiration for what to write about.

Lois raises her eyebrows. Billie flinches.

BILLIE (cont'd)

What?

LOIS

(disbelieving)

No, that's great. Go you.

The other remaining guests leave the restaurant. Ryan comes over to their table and pulls up a chair.

RYAN

What'd I miss?

LOIS

Billie was telling me about her chatting with the authors at work.

Ryan looks at Billie to elaborate.

LOIS (cont'd)

You haven't told him?

RYAN

Told me what?

Billie glances at Lois, then looks at Ryan.

BILLIE

I, uh, was just telling Mum that I'm working with an author right now.

(pause)

She's writing, but I'm sourcing material and...providing an editorial eye.

RYAN

Wow, that's amazing, Bill!

Lois scoffs at the nickname.

RYAN (cont'd)

What's it about?

BILLIE
(vaguely)
Well, I can't really share any
details. It's against my contract.

This catches Lois' attention.

LOIS
You have a contract?

BILLIE
I do.

LOIS
(excited)
Well, that's a promotion, isn't it?

BILLIE
Don't get ahead of yourself, Mum.
But...it could turn into one.

Lois squeezes Billie's arm affectionately. It's a tender,
rare moment between them. Billie genuinely smiles.

RYAN
Well, this is cause for
celebration. Complimentary
Prosecco?

LOIS
Yes please!

They both laugh at Lois' enthusiasm.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - NIGHT

A semi-full Windrush line train comprised of people
returning home from the city.

Ryan and Billie sit side-by-side. Billie leans her head on
Ryan's shoulder, content. He has his hand on her knee.

BILLIE
That was nice tonight.

RYAN
Hmm. She was on decent form.

The train slows.

TRAIN ANNOUNCER
This is...Dalston Junction.

The doors open and close. The train pulls away.

RYAN
I have a question.

Billie lifts her head slightly.

RYAN (cont'd)
(whispering)
Is it Lara Fern?

Billie sits up fully and looks at him, panicked.

BILLIE
What?

RYAN
I know you probably can't say.
(teasing)
Blink twice if I'm right.

Billie tries to keep her eyes open. Ryan laughs.

RYAN (cont'd)
I had a hunch. You're so excited!

Billie can't spit out any words. Ryan kisses the top of her head.

RYAN (cont'd)
Proud of you, *Billie*.

TRAIN ANNOUNCER
This is...Haggerston.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Early evening, the sun just starting to set. The rays coming in illuminate the dust.

Lois is passed out on the sofa, snoring. "Location, Location, Location" continues to play on the TV.

Billie creeps in carefully. She goes over to the dining table, covered in piles of paperwork and other miscellaneous tat.

In the far corner of the table is a pile of notebooks and annual diaries. Billie carefully takes one from the bottom: old, black, leather-bound.

She opens it and thumbs through. It contains pages and pages of scribbled handwriting. Yellowed with age.

There's a section missing from the middle - it looks like it was badly ripped out.

Lois stirs, murmurs and turns over. Billie, petrified, watches her.

Once Lois has stopped moving, Billie takes a similar-looking black notebook out of a tote bag, slots it in the pile where the diary was, and puts the diary in her tote bag.

She creeps towards the front door.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - BOARD ROOM - DAY

Billie sets up a board room for a meeting, pouring water into glasses around the table. There are covered flip charts in the corners and an IT GUY fiddling with a projector.

Clem enters, agitated, and sits down at the head of the table. She opens her laptop and fixes her hair in the screen reflection.

CLEM
(not looking up)
That'll do, Billie. Go greet the
Waitrose people, give it 5 minutes
and then come in.

Billie nods and leaves.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - MAIN FLOOR - DAY

At her desk, Billie gets together her laptop, a notebook and pen. Her phone vibrates.

Text from LARA that reads: "Can't do tmrw. Outside the office rn. Can u come down?"

Billie looks up to see people in business attire - the Waitrose team - getting out of the lifts.

She glances over at the board room. Clem is muttering to herself and hasn't noticed them.

The group huddles around a random desk, looking lost. Billie walks over.

BILLIE
You can go straight in!

She points them in Clem's direction and, when the coast is clear, heads towards the stairwell.

EXT. SOUTHBANK - DAY

Lara sits on a bench not far from the glossy office block. She vapes and looks out onto the Thames.

Billie walks over, hugging herself against the wind. Lara looks at her.

LARA

Hi. Thanks for coming down.

Billie sits down.

BILLIE

No worries. What did you think of the diary entries?

LARA

They were...weird. A lot about when she first met Phil - she had such a crush on him.

BILLIE

I know.

LARA

And the stuff when she found out Jen and Phil were together is powerful, but there's a big chunk missing in the middle?

Billie looks down at her feet.

LARA (cont'd)

Chronologically, that would've been when they were in a relationship and Jen grew jealous. Stuff I need for the story. D'you know where it is?

BILLIE

I assume she threw it out. Pretend it hadn't happened.

LARA

Then why not throw out the whole diary?

Billie shakes her head apologetically.

Lara looks out at the river, takes a puff of her vape.

LARA (cont'd)

I'm not so sure about this.

Billie looks at her.

BILLIE
(panicked)
What do you mean?

LARA
I need to know *how* the
relationships broke down.

BILLIE
Well I can try and find out more...

Lara turns to Billie, realising something.

LARA
Oh my God, it's so obvious! I
should meet her!

Billie's eyes widen.

LARA (cont'd)
Yeah. That way I could really get
inside her mind.

BILLIE
I don't think so...

LARA
Authors don't write books about a
woman they've never met.

BILLIE
I've told you everything I know.

LARA
No offense, but you don't seem very
solid on the details. Like, have
you ever seen a letter from Phil or
anything?

Billie shrugs.

BILLIE
Maybe she threw them out with the
diary entries?

Lara stands up, seemingly decided. Billie grabs her sleeve.

BILLIE (cont'd)
She doesn't like meeting new
people. It would confuse her. I'm
going to her work tomorrow, I'll -
I'll ask.

Lara looks from her sleeve to Billie's face.

BILLIE (cont'd)
(in a small voice)
Please.

LARA
I don't even know what she works
as.

BILLIE
A librarian in Camberwell.

Lara blows air out her nose. She picks up her hand bag,
slings it over her shoulder and starts to walk away.

BILLIE (cont'd)
(blurting out)
I want a credit.

Lara slowly turns around.

BILLIE (cont'd)
You know everyone in publishing. An
acknowledgment...would change
everything for me.

LARA
If I even write the book.

Lara walks off, in the direction of London Bridge.

Billie suddenly remembers about Clem. She jumps up.

BILLIE
Shit.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - MAIN FLOOR - DAY

The office is eerily quiet now Waitrose have left. Billie
tries to sneak over to her desk without being noticed.
There's no sign of Clem.

She sits down in her chair slowly, thinking she's gotten
away with it. Then, from behind -

CLEM
Where were you?

Billie spins around to see Clem standing in the doorframe,
arms folded.

BILLIE
I'm so sorry, I had to step out
because of a, a family emergency...

CLEM
What was it?

As Billie struggles for what to say -

CLEM (cont'd)
The family emergency. What was it?
Did someone die?

BILLIE
Uh, my mum...had a fall...

Clem cocks an eyebrow, seeing right through this.

CLEM
(exaggerated)
I'm so sorry. It must be hard to be
only 25 and already at the age when
your mum falling down means you
have to miss taking minutes at one
of the biggest meetings this
company has had this year.

BILLIE
(scolded)
It won't happen again.

CLEM
It'd better not.

Clem puts a USB stick down on Billie's desk.

CLEM (cont'd)
I took a recording for you. Send me
the minutes by the end of the day.

She goes back in her office. Billie looks at the time on the
wall clock. 4:43pm.

Billie's phone lights up. It's a text from Lara: "Really
hope you'll reconsider".

Billie runs her hands through her hair. She opens her
laptop.

INT. LIBRARY - PRINTER AREA - DAY

A run-down inner-London library. The floor is open plan with blocks of book-shelves dotted around, so it's clear there aren't a lot of people there.

Lois stands by the printer, a lanyard around her neck. She's growing more frustrated by the fact she can't get it to work.

LOIS
(under her breath)
For fuck's sake.

Billie approaches, carrying a Tesco bag.

BILLIE
What's wrong?

Lois gives her a dirty look.

LOIS
Keep your voice down! Two degrees
and you've never been in a library
before?

Billie look around. There really aren't enough people for it to matter, bar one old man in the war novel section.

BILLIE
(whispering)
Can I see?

LOIS
Ah!

The printer finally spits out a sheet of paper. Lois takes it out triumphantly. In bold letters it reads: "NO SPAM MAIL" with a big red circle around it.

LOIS (cont'd)
Now where's the laminator...

She looks around half-heartedly.

LOIS (cont'd)
Ah, this'll do.

Billie holds up the Tesco bag she's been holding.

BILLIE
I brought lunch! Can we eat it in
the staff room?

Lois takes the bag from Billie and looks through it.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Two Ploughman's, salt-and-vinegar
crisps and diet lemonade.

LOIS
How much did this all cost...

BILLIE
It was in the meal deal.

Lois hands the bag back to her.

LOIS
(suspicious)
It's a trek from the office to
here. Won't you be late?

BILLIE
It's fine. I just wanted to chat.
When do you go on lunch?

Lois shrugs and walks towards the front desk.

INT. LIBRARY - FRONT DESK - DAY

Lois stands behind the desk and starts scanning in a pile of
returned books. Billie stands on the other side.

BILLIE
(hesitant)
You know how you told me that your
friend Jen started going out with
Phil right after you broke up?

Lois looks at Billie with horrified shock.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Were there any signs? That she
liked him?

LOIS
Why on earth are you asking that -

Lois looks around, paranoid.

LOIS (cont'd)
Here?

BILLIE

I'm just curious. I know neither of them came to see you in hospital with your ankle...did anything else happen?

Lois shakes her head, humiliated, and carries on scanning.

Just then, Billie sees a familiar blonde woman approaching them out of the corner of her eye. It's Lara.

LARA

Billie, what a surprise!

Lara wraps Billie in an uncomfortable hug. Billie doesn't hug back.

Lara turns her attention to Lois.

LARA (cont'd)

Hi! I'm Lara. I work with Billie.

She shakes Lois' hand. Lois doesn't bring up her loud volume.

LOIS

Hello, I'm Lois, Billie's mum.

LARA

I was gonna guess sister!

Lois can't help but smile.

BILLIE

(with fake breeziness)

What are - what - what are you doing here?

Lara shrugs, actually coming off as breezy.

LARA

I was in the area, thought I'd pick up a book. So, Lois -

(turning back to her)

Billie tells me you used to be a ballerina?

LOIS

(tuts)

She likes to exaggerate, but yes, I was. Not anymore. Obviously.

Lois gestures around. Billie makes a show of checking her watch.

BILLIE

We were just gonna go eat lunch -

LARA

I like lunch.

BILLIE

But - surely you have a meeting or something?

Lara shakes her head, brushing Billie off.

LARA

(to Lois)

That's so cool. Was ballet always your passion?

Lois nods solemnly.

LOIS

Ballet was my escape.

LARA

You know, I can tell you were a ballerina. Long neck, great posture.

LOIS

Thank you.

(nod at Billie)

She hated ballet lessons, cried about being the big girl in her class.

Billie clenches her jaw.

LOIS (cont'd)

You know, there's a newspaper article with me in my ballet days around here somewhere...

LARA

Amazing! Should I go get us coffees and we can look over it?

Lois nods obediently.

BILLIE

(to Lois)

I thought you can't bring hot things into the library?

LOIS
(dismissive)
That's only hot food, Billie.

LARA
(to Lois)
What's your order?

Lara and Lois smile at one another.

INT. LIBRARY - STAFF ROOM - DAY

A small, fluorescent-lit kitchen area at the back of the library. Cardboard boxes of books and red children's stools are stacked around.

Lara sits at the cheap table. The lunch Billie bought has been pathetically put out on plates and in cups. It look

There are also two paper Costa cups and a clear one containing an iced matcha.

Billie looks through the window pane of the door, keeping an eye out for Lois.

LARA
See, it's going well!

BILLIE
(pleading)
Please go. She'll think something's up.

LARA
She's more confident than you made her out to be.

BILLIE
You've only just met her.

Billie hurries away from the door to sit back down.

A second later, Lois enters, carrying an old newspaper.

She sets it down on the table. She sits across from Billie and next to Lara.

LOIS
(flicking through)
Ah, here it is!

She turns the paper around for Lara to see. There's a blurry picture of about 6 ballerinas on a stage, all holding a position, except for the one at the front doing an elaborate jump. Lois points.

LOIS (cont'd)
That's me. The prima's always
centre stage.

The caption reads: "Lois Harris, 20, shines in Trinity Laban's production of Swan Lake." It's dated June 1998.

Lara looks at it with fascination.

LARA
Wow. Yeah, I can tell.
(looking up at Lois)
Was this before or after you met
Billie's dad?

Lois' face falls. Billie freezes, shocked.

LOIS
Excuse me?

Lara smiles at her sweetly.

LARA
Sorry, I just figured you must have
had her so young!

There's an excruciating pause.

Then, Lois snorts. It's a surprising noise.

LOIS
Oh, you career girls.
(to Billie)
I like this friend!

Everyone laughs, slightly forced.

LARA
I don't mean to pry.

LOIS
Bless you.

Lois traces the picture with her fingers and speaks softly to no one in particular.

LOIS (cont'd)
I'd been with Billie's dad for a
while at this point.
(MORE)

LOIS (cont'd)
We were so in love. He came
backstage with a big bunch of
roses. My best friend at the time,
Jen, came too...

She trails off.

Billie takes the silence as her chance.

BILLIE
I'll come with you back to the
office, Lara.

LOIS
She doesn't have to leave.

Lara smiles at Billie.

LOIS (cont'd)
I'm in no rush. I think I'll stay
here.

Billie hesitates, staring at Lara. The lunch stuff sits
completely untouched.

Billie goes to take the newspaper.

BILLIE
I can take that back..

LOIS
(to Billie)
Leave it here.
(to Lara)
Little did I know, Jen had come
with him for a different reason...

Billie walks towards the staff room door.

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

Billie stands by the gates to the library, waiting.

Lara comes through the library doors and walks out of the
gates onto the street.

BILLIE
Hey!

Lara jumps, stops in her tracks. She realises who it is.

LARA
Jesus.

BILLIE
Why the fuck did you do that?

LARA
Because I knew it would help.

BILLIE
I told you not to -

LARA
For crying out loud, Billie, she's
none the wiser!

Lara gestures to the library. Billie looks in, worried Lois
can see them.

LARA (cont'd)
And now I see what you mean. She's
already a character. It writes
itself.

Billie realises what she's saying.

BILLIE
We'll use fake names?

LARA
Obviously, it's a Roman a Clef, not
a biography.

BILLIE
A Roman a what?

Lara sighs.

LARA
Don't be so worried. It's
flattering. Wouldn't you want a
book about your life?

Billie thinks about this, bites her lip.

BILLIE
Her point of view. Her side of the
story.

LARA
Exactly. Do you have a printer?

BILLIE
Uh, no. There's one in the office.

LARA

Well, be subtle. When I send you
pages it'd be best if you wrote
your notes in the margin.

With that, she walks off down the street.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Billie stands at the kitchen sink, doing the washing up.

Lois walks in carrying a thick, navy blue photo album. She's
blowing dust off it.

LOIS

Here.

She puts it down on top of several recipe books on the
kitchen table.

LOIS (cont'd)

I don't think you've ever seen
this. Lara might want to see what's
in it, too.

She walks out.

Billie pulls the washing gloves off and walks over to the
book.

She opens it on a page towards the end. It only has one
photo in it.

It's of Jen and Phil holding hands, smiling, as they take
their final bow on stage.

Billie pulls it out of the album to get a better look.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - PRINTING ROOM - DAY

Billie stands by the high-tech printer as it slowly churns
out pages of paper. She's looking around to see if anyone's
about about to come in.

The machine makes a beeping noise, indicating it's finished.
Billie gathers the pages and checks how many there are. Each
page contains prose broken up into paragraphs of various
sizes. It's the beginnings of the book.

Rhiannon walks into the room. Billie scrambles to shield the
pages from Rhiannon's line of sight with her body.

Rhiannon rethinks and walks out again.

Still paranoid, Billie takes a dark orange "Ripe Fruit" file out of a drawer and slots the pages into it.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - BATHROOM - DAY

A modern, fancy office bathroom. Billie comes out of a toilet cubicle and goes over to the sink to wash her hands. She has the file tucked under her arm.

Clem walks in, texting. She sees Billie and beelines over. Billie tries to keep the file out of Clem's sight.

CLEM

Lara Fern isn't returning any of my calls. Have you heard from her?

Billie over-focuses on washing her hands and shakes her head, playing dumb.

CLEM (cont'd)

I swear to God, I'm *this* far away from getting our lawyers involved.

Clem holds her index finger and her thumb about a centimeter apart.

CLEM (cont'd)

After all the money we've given her...the fucking cheek.

Clem looks at herself in the light-up mirror and angrily rubs make-up from under her eyes. She goes into a cubicle.

Billie instantly rushes out.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A swanky corporate bar with a view of the Shard. It's near closing time and there are only a few stragglers left.

Billie and Lara sit at the bar, notebooks in front of them. They're quite drunk.

LARA

You know what we need - a shot!
Yeah, we need a shot for clear thinking.

She tries to catch the eye of the bartender. She turns back to Billie.

LARA (cont'd)
Do you want vodka or tequila?

Billie laughs.

BILLIE
Neither! I have to go home to
Ryan...

LARA
Oh, screw him! We're writing a
masterpiece!

She leans down the bar to yell at the bartender.

LARA (cont'd)
Two of your finest tequila shots,
good sir!

They both descend into giggles.

The bartender reluctantly puts down his phone.

INT. BILLIE AND RYAN'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ryan sits in the darkness, drinking a beer and watching TV.
It's turned down low. It's very late.

Billie stumbles in, letting things fall off her lazily.

BILLIE
Hey! You're still up.

RYAN
Where've you been?

Billie walks over to the kitchenette and opens the fridge.

BILLIE
Didn't I text you?

RYAN
Nope.

BILLIE
(half-heartedly)
Oh, sorry. I was, uh, at a writing
session with Lara. Is there any
food?

Ryan stands, stretches.

RYAN
My parents ate it all.

BILLIE
That was today?

Ryan moves past her to refill a glass of water.

RYAN
Remember Joy and Charlie are coming
to London on the 18th before they
go to her parent's. I've booked us
a table at The Dog and Parrot.

Billie nods, takes the glass out of his hand and gulps the
water down quickly, spilling some on her blouse.

RYAN (cont'd)
Are you drunk?

BILLIE
(obviously drunk)
Noooo.
(after a pause)
I've got to go to bed.

She stumbles through to the bedroom down the hall.

Ryan sighs and sits back down in front of the TV.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Billie and Lara sit opposite each other at their usual table
at Lys. It's topped with paper, pens, and Lara's rose gold
MacBook.

Billie reads and Lara writes.

LARA
Question - how did Lois injure her
ankle in the first place?

BILLIE
Uh, apparently it was a lift and
someone dropped her too hard.

LARA
Yikes. So she's injured, doesn't
want to stop rehearsing, Jen swoops
in and takes over...

BILLIE

All with the plan to get close to Phil.

LARA

What is she - Kate - had been faking the injury to test, uh, Heather?

Billie looks at Lara.

BILLIE

That's pretty extreme.

LARA

But it adds drama. And to be fair, this is a woman who framed her best mate for doping. Oh! What if -

Lara stops scribbling and holds her pen up with another idea, but sees Billie's concerned face.

LARA (cont'd)

Don't worry, okay? It's first person so readers will really get a sense of her perspective...read this.

She holds the book out to Billie. Billie leans forward and reads a few sentences.

BILLIE

That is good.

Lara makes a face to say "Obviously".

BILLIE (cont'd)

But we should try to stick to the story we're telling.

Lara nods. They go back to their individual work.

BILLIE (cont'd)

Do you think there'll be a launch party?

LARA

Ugh, I hope not. I hate those arse-kissing "network" things. I'm not going if there is.

Billie, unsure of what to say, looks out of the window. Standing on the lawn outside the coffee shop is Clem. They lock eyes.

Billie freezes. Clem continues to talk on the phone. She only takes her eyes off Billie to flit them over to Lara.

Clem hangs up and walks off in the direction of the office building.

Billie looks at Lara - who's none the wiser.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - CLEM'S OFFICE - DAY

Clem flicks quickly through Granta literary magazine, clearly not reading a word.

There's knock at the door. She ignores it. Then comes another knock, more urgent.

CLEM

Yes?

Billie pokes her head around the door.

BILLIE

Only me.

She steps inside cautiously. She places a glass containing a dark green drink and a straw on the ceramic coaster on Clem's desk.

BILLIE (cont'd)

Here you go.

(a pause)

I want to explain.

Clem dramatically tears her eyes from the magazine and looks at Billie over her glasses.

CLEM

Explain?

BILLIE

The...why I was sitting with Lara Fern in Lys. You saw us.

Clem folds her arms.

CLEM

I don't think I did. But go on.

Billie opens her mouth and closes it, unsure of whether to continue.

CLEM (cont'd)

Did she need some PA work done?

Billie pushes her shoulders back, pleased with herself.

BILLIE
No. We're writing her next novel
together. It's called "Second
Position".

An silence. Clem's face doesn't move. Billie loses some of
her confidence.

BILLIE (cont'd)
I should've told you earlier, but
Lara wanted to come to you with a
full draft. We should get there in
a two months or so...

CLEM
And that's why your work for me has
been slacking so much?

BILLIE
Yes. Sorry. I promise I'll get back
to where I was.

CLEM
Where you were was barely good
enough.

Clem heaves herself up from her chair, as if physically
pained, and goes to look out the window.

BILLIE
(in a small voice)
I'm really sorry.

Tears start to well in Billie's eyes.

CLEM
(without turning around)
What's it about?

BILLIE
What's what about?

CLEM
(spitting it out)
"Second Position".

BILLIE
Uh...it's about students at a
Performing Arts college. There's
betrayal, lies, twists and turns...
it's really good.

Clem holds up her hand, signalling Billie to stop.

CLEM

We'll see what Jonathan thinks.

Clem turns, comes around the desk and stands quite close to Billie. They're almost the same height - they look each other dead in the eyes.

CLEM (cont'd)

(threatening)

I will know everything - every
little detail - from here on out.
And you will get a lot better at
doing your actual job.

BILLIE

Yes, Clem.

Clem picks up the green juice and takes a big sip.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

A busy Southeastern train. Billie stands up, holding a pole in one hand and the orange file in the other. She tries to let go of the pole to make notes in the margin.

The man next to her opens his water bottle, which flicks a few drops of water onto the page. Billie dabs it with her sleeve and shoots him a dirty look.

She unlocks her phone and presses a button. She holds it to her ear and waits.

VOICEMAIL

The person you're calling isn't
able to answer the phone right now.
Please leave your message after the
tone...BEEP.

BILLIE

Hi, it's me. I'm reading the new
pages and I'm worried it's straying
from what we agreed on at the last
meeting? Anyway, I have some ideas
for what to change. Call me back.

The train starts to slow.

TRAIN ANNOUNCER

This is...New Cross.

Billie closes the file and gets ready to get off.

INT. PUB - NIGHT

A bog-standard old man pub, fairly busy for a week night. Billie and Ryan sit on one side of a table. Two of their friends, a similar-aged couple, JOY and CHARLIE, sit opposite.

They're all nursing pints. Billie's is almost finished.

Joy is showing Billie and Ryan pictures of a small tortoiseshell kitten.

BILLIE
(making a fuss)
Stop it!

RYAN
Very cute. How old?

JOY
5, 6 weeks?

CHARLIE
Round about that, yeah. We should really learn his birthday.

Billie's phone vibrates, but she ignores it.

JOY
We pick him up after we go back to New York for Charlie's show.

RYAN
Knew you were only faking those allergies!

He claps Charlie round the arm.

JOY
I know, right?

CHARLIE
I'm not! I still want a dog! But anything for you, darling.

He kisses Joy's cheek. She rolls her eyes.

BILLIE
Naww.

Billie's phone vibrates again. This time, she does quickly check it.

She has 3 missed calls from Lara. And a text: "Had the BEST writing day. Need to chat!!"

Billie tries to secretively type back: "Will call in a sec".

The other three at the table notice this.

RYAN
What's up, Bill?

Billie finishes typing and then turns her phone over triumphantly.

BILLIE
Nothing! What's, uh, his name gonna be?

Joy smiles at her.

JOY
We're not sure yet. Hey, how's it going with the flat purchase?

RYAN
Ah. Not great, to be honest.

He scratches the back of his neck, hesitant to fill them in.

Billie's phone vibrates again. She's frozen, trying to resist the urge to check it.

RYAN (cont'd)
Um...when did we last see you guys?

JOY
You'd just been to meet with the estate agent.

RYAN
Oh, right, yeah. Well I found this flat on Rightmove, nicer area, okay price - like crazy but not London crazy - and went to go view it while Bill was at work. But we couldn't put the deposit down and ended up...

Billie has turned back to her phone. She's had five more texts from Lara, including "It's really coming together" and "Call me ASAP!!!"

RYAN (cont'd)
Losing it.
(gently)
You sure everything's okay?

BILLIE
(still absorbed in her
phone)
Yeah, yeah...

Ryan faces their friends.

RYAN
She works herself to the bone.
(to Billie)
Clem or Lara?

CHARLIE
Who's Lara?

BILLIE
Sorry guys, I've just gotta call
someone quick. Back in a sec.

She stands up so fast she almost knocks her chair over. Ryan catches it.

They all watch her speed-walk out of the pub.

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

Billie stands by the curb of the pavement, trying to read the number plates of the cars that pass. She's on the phone.

BILLIE
It said 5 minutes away 5 minutes
ago!

LARA (V.O.)
Ugh, let me book it for you.

BILLIE
No it's fine.

LARA
Can't wait for you to read Chapter
12.

BILLIE
Wow, you've made progress.

Billie spots Ryan coming out of the pub and over to her.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Oh the car just pulled up! See you
in a sec.

LARA (V.O.)
Okay. Be quick!

BILLIE
Yeah, bye, bye.

She hangs up.

RYAN
What are you doing?

BILLIE
I have to go to Lara's. Can you
tell them I had a work emergency?

RYAN
You're not really about to ditch me
and your mates - who are here from
America - to go to that woman's
flat, are you?

Billie puts her hand out for a car, but it's the wrong one.

BILLIE
Ry, I can't do this right now.

RYAN
When then! When! It's never the
right time!

A gaggle of drunk teenagers laugh at Ryan. Billie looks at
him with shock.

BILLIE
(serious)
Don't yell at me.

RYAN
Fine. I won't.

Ryan goes to go back into the pub.

BILLIE
(calling after him)
I'll be home as soon as I can.

Ryan turns.

RYAN
Why not stay round?

BILLIE
I - you said you were proud of me.

RYAN
You don't care about that.

The Uber pulls up.

RYAN (cont'd)
It's me - our life - or her. Them.
Your choice.

Billie's eyes start to well. She looks at the car - then back at Ryan. His face says he means it.

She gets in the car.

INT. LARA'S FLAT - NIGHT

Billie sits on Lara's expensive rug, sifting through loose pages of the manuscript. She seems distracted.

Lara sits on her cream sofa, looking through photocopies of the diary entries, pictures and memorabilia that Billie has given her.

LARA
Well? What do you think?

BILLIE
Did you, uh, get my voicemail?

LARA
What voicemail?

Billie shuffles the papers around, not making eye contact.

BILLIE
It's just become so dark. Kind of
malicious.

LARA
This story is dark and malicious.
Are you okay?

Billie rubs her eyes.

BILLIE
I...had a fight with Ryan before I
came.

Lara sighs, like Billie is a child telling her her pet ladybird died.

LARA

No one gets it but us.

She turns back to her work.

Billie looks at the pages. A tear rolls down her cheek.

INT. BILLIE AND RYAN'S FLAT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bedroom is perfectly neat but looks emptier than usual. There are gaps where stuff that was previously there - Ryan's stuff - has gone missing.

The bed is made, but the orange folder sits on top of it.

BILLIE (V.O.)

Ry? Ryan?

She opens the bedroom door, confused to not see anyone there.

Her eyes fall onto the file. She rushes over, picks it up. She flicks through, but nothing's been changed.

Billie gets on her knees and looks under the bed - there's nothing there. There are marks on the carpet that show stuff has been moved.

She puts her back against the bed frame and starts to cry.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - STAFF ROOM - DAY

Billie, looking tired, watches filter coffee drop down into its pot. It's a shabby machine compared to the sleek Nespresso one on the other side of the counter.

Jonathan enters, carrying an M&S bag that he sets down on the island. He pulls out a microwavable lunch, looking at Billie's back. She doesn't notice he's there.

JONATHAN

So, the big day approaches.

Billie glances in his direction.

BILLIE

(distracted)

Hmm?

JONATHAN

Lara's been in contact, finally.
She said she's getting the first
draft over to me by the end of the
week.

BILLIE

Draft?

JONATHAN

Of "Second Position".

He does air quotes when he says the title and puts on a
melodramatic voice.

JONATHAN (cont'd)

Obviously needs some refining but
it's strong. To be honest, I didn't
know she had it in her.

Jonathan smiles faintly.

JONATHAN (cont'd)

Are you gonna say it was all you?

BILLIE

I didn't know she was that close to
finishing it.

Jonathan shrugs.

The microwave beeps. He takes the food out - salmon on a bed
of wild rice. He arranges it on a plate neatly.

JONATHAN

You do know that it'll only be
published under her name, right?

BILLIE

That's...yeah. Whatever.

Jonathan raises an eyebrow.

JONATHAN

Must be a relief that it's good,
eh? The gamble paid off. That
Kate - phew!

He carries the plate out of the room, leaving Billie alone.
She checks her phone. There are no missed messages.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - DAY

Billie, wearing her work clothes, walks into Lois' hallway. She sets an overstuffed overnight bag down at the bottom of the stairs.

BILLIE
(calling out)
Mum?

LOIS (V.O.)
Upstairs!

Billie climbs the stairs two at a time.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Billie finds Lois sat on her bedroom floor.

The room is like the rest of the house - filled with junk. The outdated 70s curtains are closed and only one half of the bed can actually slept in because of the piles of stuff.

But Lois is putting things in donation bags.

BILLIE
What are you doing?

LOIS
Clear out.

She holds up a top for a toddler with a giraffe on it. She gives it a sniff and puts it in one of the bags.

LOIS (cont'd)
I might need to move one day, and I
don't want to leave you with all
this crap.

Billie can't hide her surprise. Lois glances up at her.

LOIS (cont'd)
Stranger things have happened!

BILLIE
I know, I know...

Suddenly exhausted, Billie walks over to the clear patch of the bed and lies down.

LOIS
Don't feel the need to help or
anything.

Billie rolls over and starts to gently cry. Lois looks up at her.

LOIS (cont'd)
Why are you making - are you
crying?

When Billie doesn't respond, Lois stands up and goes to sit on the edge of the bed next to Billie.

BILLIE
(in a small voice)
Can I stay here?

LOIS
What about Ryan?

Billie's cries deepen. Lois tentatively puts a hand on her foot.

BILLIE
I can't take it Mum...

For the first time, we see Lois as Billie's mother. Her eyes start to well, moved by her daughter's tears.

BILLIE (cont'd)
(sniffing)
He's gone.

LOIS
Why? Did you push him away?

Billie buries her face further into the pillow and pulls her feet under her legs.

LOIS (cont'd)
(touching her hair)
Yes, you can stay here. How long,
uh, for?

BILLIE
I can pay rent. Plus any money you
need. Not saving any more, so.

LOIS
I don't need your money.

Billie frowns, sits up slightly.

LOIS (cont'd)
In April I reduced my hours at
work. I don't like it there, it's
so boring.
(MORE)

LOIS (cont'd)
(self-conscious)
But I've been selling the hair-
band-scrunchie things I make on
eBay. Apparently people like
them...

She pulls at the home-made fabric hair band on her wrist.
It's silky, pink, something a ballerina would use.

LOIS (cont'd)
So that's bringing in some cash.

BILLIE
Really?

Lois nods.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Mum, that's great.

LOIS
Thank you baby. I just want what's
best for us.

Lois stands up and walks to the door.

LOIS (cont'd)
Don't open the curtains. That nosy
cow keeps looking in.

She closes the door behind her.

EXT. LARA'S FLAT - DAY

A warm early evening on the residential street. A few more
people are about.

This is the first time we see Billie out of work clothes and
in an old tracksuit. She walks up Lara's path and rings her
doorbell.

She rocks from side to side on the doorstep, rehearsing what
to say.

Lara swings open the door.

LARA
Hi, come in, I just need 10 more -
oh.

Lara is wearing a silk robe and a full face of make up. Only
half of her hair has been curled.

BILLIE
Why haven't you responded to me?

LARA
I've been busy.

She tightens the robe around herself.

BILLIE
Silly me, of course you have.
Talking to Jonathan behind my back!

LARA
I'm not gonna explain myself -

BILLIE
I don't want to go ahead with it.

LARA
What?

BILLIE
It's too - it's too harsh on her.
It's not what I thought it would
be. It makes her seem insane.

Lara scoffs.

LARA
You think she is.

BILLIE
Look, it's not the book I agreed to
help with and you said we could
stop at any time.

LARA
No, I said you could back out at
any time. I didn't say anything
about me.

Billie is lost for words.

Lara goes to close the door, but Billie puts a hand on it.

LARA (cont'd)
Let go.

BILLIE
I need to hear you say you won't
send it to him.

LARA

Are you mentally deranged? What about my advance? What about your "credit"? We have to give him something!

At that moment, a tall MAN wearing a suit approaches the path. Lara composes herself.

MAN

Am I interrupting something?

LARA

(beaming)

No! Sorry about that. Come on in.

Alex pushes past Billie and heads inside. Before Lara can close the door again -

BILLIE

Please. What if she finds out?

A flash of guilt crosses Lara's face. Then she shuts the door in Billie's.

BILLIE (cont'd)

(yelling)

You're a shit writer!

Billie kicks the door and winces. It hurt. She walks down the path.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LOIS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Billie sits on Lois's sofa, eating toast and getting crumbs all over herself. She hasn't gotten dressed for the day.

She scrolls aimlessly through Instagram. She clicks on her DMs and scrolls down to her conversation with Ryan. The green dot says he's active but hasn't replied to her last message: "Please unblock me".

Lois enters, vacuuming. She passive-aggressively hovers the area around Billie over and over.

LOIS

This is terrible for my back.

Billie stands up, careful to not spill any more crumbs.

BILLIE
I'm going out.

She walks into the hallway and shoves her feet into trainers without undoing them.

LOIS (V.O.)
You can't go out in that!

Billie slams the door.

INT. UNDERPASS - DAY

A busy train station underpass. Billie trudges along, absorbed by her phone.

She almost walks straight into a COMMUTER. He grumbles something.

BILLIE
(weakly)
Sorry.

She gets to the end of the underpass. On the wall directly in front of her is a large poster, the kind you'd see on the tube.

It's advertising a book with the silhouette of a ballerina as the cover. Titled "Second Position".

Billie's breath catches. She stares at it.

The circle in the corner says "Out Now!"

Billie runs up the stairs.

INT. WATERSTONES - DAY

A quiet mid-morning in the Southbank branch of the bookstore.

Billie enters. She immediately goes over to the "New Releases" table.

In the centre, pride of place, is several copies of "Second Position". The little placard on top says "Brand New!"

Billie picks one up like it might be hot. She runs her thumb over the large, embossed font that spells out "Lara Fern".

She turns it over. The blurb simply says "This is a story about survival".

Billie quickly flicks the pages. At the front, the Acknowledgement reads "To the woman who gave me this story. I couldn't have done it without you".

Billie, ghostly pale, picks up three copies and walks out, ignoring the security gate going off.

EXT. THAMES RIVERBANK - DAY

Billie, carrying the books, walks across the sand to the edge of the river. She stands slightly in the water, her trainers getting wet.

With all her might, she throws the books - one by one - into the river. They don't go very far. She yells as she does it.

Downtrodden, she walks towards the metal steps that lead back up to the bank.

A TOURIST looks at her with perplexity.

TOURIST
Hey! You left your books!

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

Billie sits squashed between commuters, on her way to work. She's obsessively checking the Notification Centre on her lockscreen. There's nothing.

The MAN next to her is reading the Metro. Billie glances at it once. And then again.

On the front page there's a gossip article teaser. It's a picture of Phil and Jennifer Sullivan with the caption: "Ex-noughties heartthrob and chat show host Phil Sullivan linked to tell-all novel!"

BILLIE
(desperate)
I'm sorry, can I read that?

She practically takes the newspaper out of the man's hands. He's too shocked to protest.

Billie opens it to the right page. There's a blown-up picture of Lara posing with the book, serious.

She skim-reads: "Lara Fern, author of the best-selling YA series "Obsidian Locket", published by Ripe Fruit, told exclusive sources that she was approached by an anonymous person to write this story."

Fern states "She had all the evidence and I am fully convinced what happened in this novel actually happened in real life with the Sullivans". Phil and Jennifer Sullivan's representatives have declined to give a statement.

The question remains - who is this woman?"

The train stops. Billie runs off, taking the newspaper with her.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - MAIN FLOOR - DAY

An all-staff meeting takes place outside Clem's office. People stand gathered round - their body language is tense. Clem leans casually against Billie's desk. Jonathan stands nearby.

Billie slows from a run to a hesitant walk as she approaches. Clem beams when she sees her.

CLEM
Welcome back, Billie!

Clem starts clapping. Everyone else joins in, looking at Billie, confused.

CLEM (cont'd)
Come up here.

She beckons Billie.

In an awkward silence, Billie joins the edge of the huddle of colleagues. Jonathan studies her.

CLEM (cont'd)
(diplomatic)
As I'm sure you've all seen, there have been several articles in the press about the latest Lara Fern release.

A low mumble. It's a hot topic.

Clem raises a hand to silence them.

CLEM (cont'd)
I called this meeting to clarify - that's a good thing!

She claps her hands together and laughs, once.

CLEM (cont'd)
In fact, Ripe Fruit has never, in
15 years, reported such strong sale
numbers in the week following a
publication. Jonathan?

Jonathan jumps to it, clicking a small remote. The smart TV
on a stand nearby lights up. It shows a bar chart.

CLEM (cont'd)
This is the average sales for new
releases in the first week -

She gestures to the smaller bar.

CLEM (cont'd)
And this is what "Second Position"
earned.

The second bar is four times the size.

Someone starts clapping again. People join in. Clem and
Jonathan share a joke: Jonathan pretends to flip his hair
and Clem laughs.

Billie doesn't clap.

CLEM (cont'd)
Okay, settle down - it's not good
for Jonathan's ego.

Jonathan resumes his original position, glowing.

CLEM (cont'd)
This -
(pointing at the graph)
Is what we care about. Our earnings
as a result of this buzz have been
absolutely record-breaking. As the
old saying goes, no publicity is
bad publicity!

A staff member, CARL, confidently puts his hand up.

CARL
How did it get leaked? The Phil
Sullivan thing.

CLEM
(nonchalant)
My suspicions are a hungry
journalist overhead Lara talking
about it at an industry party.

Billie's mouth opens slightly.

CLEM (cont'd)
(to the whole group)
It's natural to have questions, but
please refrain from bringing this
up to Lara. It's still a sensitive
matter. I for one will never look
at Phil the same!

A light laugh.

CLEM (cont'd)
Okay, meeting dismissed. Less
gossip and more work!

A few claps. Everyone walks back to their desks, chatting
away.

Billie approaches Clem, who's talking to Jonathan.

BILLIE
Uh, Clem -

Clem turns to her. Her expression is blank, unnerving.
Almost indifferent.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Can I - can I do anything for you?

CLEM
Sure. You can call my children's
nursery and tell them their father
will be picking them up tonight. If
you can manage it.

She strides into her office and shuts the door.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - BATHROOM - DAY

A toilet cubicle.

Billie sits down on the toilet and leans forward, her elbows
resting on her hamstrings.

She puts her head down and breaths in, out, quickly.
Hyperventilating.

She becomes dizzy and puts a hand on the toilet door to
prevent her from falling forward.

She holds her face in her hands for a while. She rubs her
eyes, exhales, and stands up.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - CLEM'S OFFICE - NIGHT

It's pitch black outside. The illuminated skyline of the Thames northbank can be seen from the window.

Billie and Clem work in silence. The set-up mirrors their first scene in her office. Business as usual.

Clem reads her laptop with her glasses on, legs folded under her. Billie types, looking exhausted.

Clem glances at the now-fixed gold clock on the wall and grabs the fire stick on her desk. She turns the mounted TV on and flicks through the channels, until she lands on the "The PHIL SULLIVAN show" opening credits.

Billie looks up.

BILLIE

Why are you watching this?

CLEM

(as if obvious)

It's the first show since the press broke.

Unusually, Phil isn't sat behind his desk, but stood on the carpet in front of the live studio audience. He looks sombre, angry.

He waits for the applause to die down.

PHIL (O.S.)

Thank you. Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, I feel the right thing to do is start the show with an announcement.

Billie and Clem both watch intently, as do the audience.

PHIL (O.S.) (cont'd)

As you'll have no doubt seen, there have been some chastising articles circulating UK media outlets this week. These articles claim that a new novel, titled "Second Position", is based on the relationship between me and a woman while I was at Undergrad at Trinity College in the mid 90s.

His mannerisms reflect that of a politician giving a career-defining speech.

PHIL (O.S.)

I want to set the record straight that this is completely, 100% falsified. I do not even know this woman, let alone fathered her child. I would like to invite these people onto this show to set the record straight. I am even prepared to do a DNA test - live on national TV.

The audience gasps. Clem looks at Billie, who's eyes are still glued to the TV screen.

Phil looks straight down the main camera.

PHIL (O.S.)

So if you see this, get in touch with the show. I want to set the record straight for myself, my wife, and my family. We do not deserve this.

A held pause. Then Phil's body language switches.

PHIL (O.S.) (cont'd)

(energetic)

Now, onto tonight's show! We have an excellent line up of guests tonight...

The theme music plays. Clem turns the TV off.

Billie avoids Clem's stare.

CLEM

(sincere)

What are you gonna do?

Billie closes her laptop, stands up and walks towards the door.

Just before she gets there, she snaps.

BILLIE

(yelling, pointing)

You fucking leaked it! I know you did!

Billie takes several steps towards her.

BILLIE (cont'd)
That party thing is bullshit! She
told you and you went to the press!
You did this on purpose, admit it!

Clem meets her gaze coolly.

BILLIE (cont'd)
(faltering)
I'll - I'll hire a lawyer.

CLEM
And what would that achieve?

Clem uncurls herself and stands up.

CLEM (cont'd)
You should be happier, Billie. You
worked exceptionally well with
Lara. I misjudged you.

She says this in a way that Billie knows is not a
compliment.

Clem walks around her desk and goes over to the door. For
once, she holds it open for Billie.

CLEM (cont'd)
Congratulations.

INT. RIPE FRUIT - LIFT AREA - NIGHT

Billie pushes the "down" button and waits for a lift. Her
face is a complete blank.

The lift doors open. There's one other person inside. Billie
is about to step in without thinking when she looks up - and
makes eye contact with Lara.

They stare at each other. The lift doors are about to close
again when Lara steps out, avoiding Billie's gaze.

Lara walks in the direction of Clem's office.

Billie gets in the lift, and presses "G".

EXT. RYAN'S PARENT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A quiet street of uniform. Billie approaches a standard
semi-detached house with the lights still on.

She opens the gate hesitantly, trying to not make too much noise. She walks up to the door and knocks gently. A jolly gnome sits on the doorstep.

When there's no response, she knocks again, slightly louder.

The sound of movement from inside. A small figure walks down the hallway.

The door opens. It's a middle-aged woman, JAN. She resembles Ryan.

BILLIE
Oh, hi, Jan.

JAN
Billie?

BILLIE
Sorry about this. Is Ryan in?

Jan gives Billie a disgruntled look. She leaves the door open but doesn't invite her inside.

Jan walks to the bottom of the stairs.

JAN
(shouting up)
RYAN! IT'S BILLIE!

Sound of a door opening. Ryan appears at the top of the stairs and gallops down them.

JAN (cont'd)
Dad and I want to go to bed soon.

RYAN
Okay.

He walks past his mother. Without looking at Billie, he puts the front door on the latch and pulls it to as he steps outside onto the door mat.

They stand in silence.

BILLIE
(weak)
Hi.

RYAN
You alright?

Billie can't hold it in any more - she starts to sob. Into her hands at first, then onto Ryan's shoulder.

After a few seconds. Ryan puts an arm around her.

BILLIE
(still crying)
What do I do?

RYAN
I don't know.

Billie pulls back, red-faced. She's left a wet patch on his t-shirt. She tries to stop the tears with her fingers.

BILLIE
Did you...

RYAN
Yeah.

Billie blows air out her nose.

BILLIE
You're the only person I thought to
come to.

Ryan looks up, biting his lip.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Can we go back to how it used to
be?

RYAN
Billie...

BILLIE
Why not?

RYAN
(softly)
You're not the same person you used
to be. And you don't like that I
am.

Billie turns her face away and takes a deep breath like she's trying to control a pain.

RYAN (cont'd)
And I think you should go on the
show.

Billie frowns, not expecting this.

RYAN (cont'd)
Look, you shouldn't have done what
you did.
(MORE)

RYAN (cont'd)
When I found the file I - I
couldn't believe it. But at least
if you - and Lois - go on, you can
settle it for good.

Billie stares into the distance, contemplating.

RYAN (cont'd)
I've known for four years. You've
known since you were what, 8? And
Lois...why shouldn't everyone else
know?

BILLIE
She - we can't do that.

RYAN
He's not expecting anyone to
actually come forward. He just
wants to make himself look good
before it dies down, like this
gossip shit always does.

The living room light turns off from inside.

RYAN (cont'd)
I should go in. But think about it.

BILLIE
Okay.

RYAN
Good luck.

They hug tightly. Ryan lets go first.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

There are no overhead lights on, making the room almost
completely dark. Lois sits in her usual spot on the sofa. No
TV, no music. Silence.

Billie enters from the hallway, her keys jangling.

BILLIE
Mum?

She can see Lois illuminated by the street lamps.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Why are you still up?

Lois doesn't respond.

As Billie approaches, she sees Lois is holding a picture of Billie as a little girl. Around 7 or 8 years old, on a scooter, with a pink streak in her hair.

On the sofa next to her is the shoe box and fake diary.

LOIS
Does she have my things?

BILLIE
I'll get them back.

LOIS
No need.

Billie kneels down on the floor beside Lois.

BILLIE
I'm so, so sorry Mum. Please...
please forgive me.

She's beginning to get choked up already.

BILLIE (cont'd)
I will fix this. I'll do anything
to fix this.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Please, Mummy. Say something.

LOIS
(looking at the photo)
You were such a sweet girl.

Billie takes Lois' hand, unsure of herself.

BILLIE
This could be a good thing. People
will finally know the truth if we
got in contact with him -

Lois shakes her head.

BILLIE (cont'd)
It won't actually happen. He'll get
cold feet, but it'll prove you
right. Don't you want that?

BILLIE (cont'd)
You've held onto this for decades.
People will finally know why you -
why you did what you did...

LOIS
How did you find out?

BILLIE
(ashamed)
A Jennifer Sullivan interview.

LOIS
And you put two and two together.

BILLIE
I don't judge you for it.

LOIS
That's not true.

Pause.

BILLIE
I'll get in touch with them, his
people.
(more firmly)
Mum, we have to.

LOIS
You're not gonna do that.

Billie's demeanour switches from pleading to angry. She
stands up.

BILLIE
Why not? Why are you so resistant
to do *anything* that will help you?

LOIS
You're the one that fucked up.

BILLIE
I did it to finally - finally do
something!

LOIS
(sarcastic)
Well, thank you so much, Billie.
You know what's best again.

Lois gets up, slowly, and drifts over to the kitchen.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lois gets a bottle of red wine out of the cupboard and pours
herself a big glass. Billie comes in.

BILLIE
We're having a discussion.

LOIS
You always want to have a fucking
discussion.

Lois takes a sip.

BILLIE
You know what Mum, I'm so sorry I
ruined your life but at least you
ruined mine back! Now we're even!

LOIS
Oh, shut up. I gave you your life.

BILLIE
And you've punished me every day
for it! You're the reason I'm the
tragic nobody you think I am! Do
you have any idea how many self-
esteem issues you've given me?

LOIS
Is it my fault that you're such a
cry baby, then?

Billie scoffs at the irony.

BILLIE
Says the biggest victim that ever
walked the planet! Why is only your
life allowed to be hard?

Lois goes to leave, but Billie stands in the way.

LOIS
Do not threaten me.

BILLIE
I did everything to try and make
you happy, I moved back here from
in Edinburgh, got the first job I
could, and you *berating* me for
every little thing is the fucking
thanks I get! No wonder you have no
one else!

In a moment of madness, Lois launches her glass of wine at
Billie's head.

Billie ducks just in time. It breaks against the wall behind
her. The wine drips down like wine.

LOIS
You're a pathetic excuse for a
daughter.

BILLIE
(screaming)
Well maybe you should've made Phil
wear a condom then! Maybe you can
tell him he dodged a bullet in real
life!

LOIS
(screaming back)
Phil is not your dad!

A deafening, echoing silence.

BILLIE
No...

LOIS
Get out of my way.

Lois pushes past her and walks up the stairs.

INT. LOIS' HOUSE - STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Lois rushes up the stairs. Billie holds onto the banisters
below her.

BILLIE
Who is? *Who?*

Lois keeps walking up.

LOIS
Another man who didn't want you.

BILLIE
(nearing tears)
Why did you lie to me? Why did you
lie to me my whole life?

Lois ignores her.

BILLIE (cont'd)
Tell me!

Billie runs up the stairs behind her, reaches out and grabs
Lois's foot. She yanks at it.

LOIS
Ah!

Lois falls, hard, down the stairs and knocks Billie down with her.

Billie collapses on her back, hitting her head against the carpeted floor. She lies there, wheezed, in shock.

When the shock wears off, she starts to sob. Hard.

Lois didn't fall all the way down the stairs. She lies across them, catching her breath, likely injured.

Silence apart from Billie's crying.

LOIS (cont'd)
It's horrible. Loving someone who
doesn't love you back. I started to
believe...he could've been...

Tears are falling down her cheek.

LOIS (cont'd)
I'm sorry.

She starts to painstakingly pull herself up the stairs one at a time.

INT. BILLIE'S FLAT - EVENING

An unfurnished, almost-empty studio flat. There are cardboard boxes piled high in corners and a bike leaning against the wall.

Billie pulls things out of boxes and bags and tries to put them away - cutlery in drawers, coats on the back of the door.

She goes to put an empty box on the floor but realises it's not empty. She reaches in and pulls out a VHS tape. She reads the spine: "Cinderella rehearsal 04/98"

On the floor, near a wall, sits an crappy old-school TV with a VHS player in the bottom. She kneels down and slides the VHS in. She leans against the opposite wall.

The screen goes white-and-black and fuzzy. It settles on a pixilated video of a young Lois, dancing alone in a studio. The low music is "Waltz" by Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

Billie watches Lois gracefully leap and spin and pirouette. Totally in control, totally in her element.

For the first time, Billie really sees who her mother used to be...

FADE TO BLACK.