SCRIPT SAMPLE

This sample is an excerpt of a
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FLIES

by Charlie Josephine

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CHARACTERS

GIRL ONE
GIRL TWO
GIRL THREE
GIRL FOUR
GIRL FIVE
GIRL SIX
GIRL SEVEN
JACK
PIGGY
RALPH
LITTLUN
MAN

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Cast

A group of genuinely diverse young women aged about fourteen. It's useful if the actors are a bit older, so they feel confident talking about puberty in hindsight. It'd be great if they can realistically play fourteen-year-olds though please. They'll need to be able to move, though not be trained dancers. They'll need to be able to confidently eyeball the audience. This piece is an invitation for them to feel empowered onstage, an experiment in a new free existence, a game against the male gaze.

Script Notes

Stage directions are in italics and brackets.

/ indicates a fast run onto the next line, almost an interruption.

/.. indicates where a word can't be found and something physical is expressed instead, a small gesture or a big abstract movement, whatever's honest.

Words that are crossed out like ~~this~~ are mouthed but not voiced.

PLEASURE ACTIVISM

Dr Zoë Svendsen re-energized me recently with her brilliant interrogation of what dramaturgy is. She provokes me to take responsibility for the political implications of my work. To be bold and dare to dream new futures. To work with a conscious awareness of the conversation my words are having with an actor, an audience, the theatre, the world. So I'm no longer interested in presenting problems in plays, without even the bare beginnings of an offer of some flawed solution. Because culture changes culture.

I am also inspired by the wonderful work of adrienne maree brown. I therefore want to offer the idea that pleasure (erotic and otherwise) is not only a survival mechanism in this hetero-ghetto, but a radical tool for activism, for social change, for revolution. It's surely impossible to feel pleasure whilst in a state of survival. And I want us to thrive. I'm fascinated by how we access, and harness, the power of pleasure within our movement towards freedom from patriarchy.

Therefore, here are some rules to support the pleasure activism that sits inside the dramaturgy of this play:

- Rigorous honesty and radical kindness between cast, creatives and crew is a non-negotiable must.
- Actively, and perhaps vocally, celebrating each other during rehearsals and /or performance is encouraged.
- Giggles fits, should they honestly arise during rehearsals and /or performance, are allowed. They are encouraged. They are to be indulged.
- Platonic physical intimacy between performers is encouraged. Clear, confident consent and detailed vocal feedback before during and after any physical touch is vital. Anything but a "full bodied yes" is a no.
- A courage and comfort box, filled with things that nourish and nurture, should be provided for the actors to have easy access to during rehearsals and /or performance. Therefore, an actor may collect or ask for fluffy slippers for example, or a handhold, or a cup of tea, to aid their work.
- Fun is necessary. This material is dark at times. Mental health comes first. Where possible play against the text. Explore cheekiness. Indulge in mischief.

THANK-YOUS

Huge thank you to Rob Drummer, all at Boundless Theatre and Shoreditch Town Hall for your tireless work on getting this production off the page and onto the stage. Thank you to the brilliant Bryony Shanahan, Jenni Jackson and Elayce Ismail for your work on the piece during R&Ds and workshops. Thank you to Erica Whyman, Ben Tyreman, Pippa Hill, Becky Latham and James Pidgeon for your support. Thank you, as always, to Jonathan at The Agency for your care. Huge thank you to Julia Head, who somehow creates the best rehearsal room, full of cheeky curiosity and deep belly laughter. Thank you to the beautiful cast, creative team and crew for this production of the play, you're all excellent and wonderful. Biggest thanks is to all the brilliant young people I met during the development of the script, your honesty and humour in the face of persistent male gaze violence was so inspiring.

(A vast empty stage. Downstage centre there is a small island of sand on the floor. One by one, a group of young women, at least thirty of them, walk from the wings to the sand-island. They each pause briefly before stepping onto it and turning to face us. The sand-island is barely big enough to fit everyone, so some jostling for space occurs, and perhaps some frustration spills out as passive-aggressive shoves or looks. Once they're settled they stand still, looking at us. It's quiet. They speak directly to us.)

GIRL ONE. You're looking at me.

(Silence.)

I can see you, looking at me.

(Silence.)

You're /

GIRL TWO. Looking at me.

GIRL THREE. I can see you /

GIRL THREE & FOUR. Looking at me /

GIRL FIVE. Looking /

GIRL SIX. Looking /

GIRL TWO & ONE. I can see you.

GIRL SEVEN. You're looking at me.

(They play a game with the audience. Repeating the phrase, "You're looking at me. I can see you, looking at me," over and

over in different ways. They gasp in faux surprise or genuine surprise, or pleasure, or coyness or pure joy at being looked at. They're clowning, being cheeky with us, it's fun. Suddenly, a CCTV camera, previously unnoticed, downstage right and pointing at the **GIRLS**, *moves and makes a noise. They all freeze, rabbit in headlights. The atmosphere instantly changes. They hold their breath, trying not to want to look. The camera stops moving, pointing at them. Their eyes flash up to it, then back to us.)*

GIRL ONE. I can see you /

GIRL TWO. Looking at me.

GIRL THREE. And I can see you've got /

GIRL THREE & FOUR. No idea /

GIRL SEVEN. What it feels like to be seen.

GIRL FOUR. Can tell by that look in your eyes.

GIRL SIX & FIVE. Don't blink!

GIRL ONE. Or you'll miss it.

(Their eyes flash back up to the CCTV camera, then back to us, quicker than before. They readjust their clothes. The movement turns into a sort of squirm-dance over the next bit of text.)

GIRL FOUR. Yeah.

GIRL FIVE. Yeah you're looking at me.

GIRL FOUR. And I feel /

GIRL ONE. Shame.

GIRL SEVEN. Girls like me?

GIRL FIVE. We're full of it.

GIRL THREE. Because we're not enough /

GIRL TWO. We're just not enough /

GIRL FIVE. And you can see that /

GIRL SIX. And we can see that you can see that and there's nowhere to hide.

GIRL SEVEN. Want to rip our own skin off /

ALL GIRLS. *Crawling* /

GIRL ONE. Under your gaze, *this* shame?

GIRL THREE. It burns.

GIRL FOUR. And on the good days when we're half enjoying walking down the road in our body in the sunshine /

GIRL THREE. Sunshine /

GIRL ONE. Sunshine /

GIRL SIX. And a car pulls up /

GIRL FIVE. And he shouts out some shit /

GIRL ONE. Telling us we're fit /

GIRL SEVEN. *"Oi love"* /

GIRL FIVE. And yeah even if what he's saying is actually nice /

GIRL FOUR. It doesn't feel nice /

GIRL TWO. *"Oi love"* /

GIRL THREE. When he's all like /

GIRL TWO. *"Yeah baby yeah you look amazing!"*

GIRL SEVEN. It doesn't feel amazing it feels /

GIRL ONE. Violent.

(Quiet.)

Because he can say that, with a confidence /

GIRL THREE. And a freedom /

GIRL TWO. Cus he's claiming the space /

GIRL SEVEN. See he's claiming the position of Looker. He's looking at us, we're being looked at.

GIRL ONE. Looking is privilege.

GIRL FOUR. The pleasure of viewing is a privilege that, ironically /

GIRL FOUR & THREE. He's blind to /

GIRL FIVE. Cus in the patriarchy /

GIRL FIVE & THREE. Men look /

GIRL FIVE. And women /

GIRL FIVE & SIX. Are looked at.

GIRL FOUR & TWO. Men do /

GIRL TWO. And women /

GIRL FOUR & TWO. Are done to /

GIRL SIX. So rape culture gets a whole new load of fuel.

GIRL ONE. And if you think we're being over the top you just watch how fast he gets ugly when we ask him to /

GIRL ONE & SEVEN. Stop.

GIRL FOUR. Our /

GIRL FOUR & THREE. 'No' /

GIRL FOUR. Threatens his masculinity /

GIRL FIVE. Caged animals are quick to /

GIRL FIVE & SEVEN. Bite /

GIRL SIX. And we're all caged by the patriarchy.

(They all shudder.)

ALL GIRLS. Ugh!

GIRL THREE. We don't even like that word.

GIRL FIVE. Who fucking, '*pat-ri-archy*'?!

(They shudder again, and the squirm-dance comes back over the next bit of text.)

GIRL THREE. It sounds so /..

GIRL FOUR. Male.

GIRL TWO. We're learning that a lot of words do /

ALL GIRLS. *Sorry!*

GIRL SEVEN. That's probably our fault.

GIRL FIVE. We're learning how the P-word teaches us to blame ourselves.

ALL GIRLS. It's *our* fault /

GIRL SIX. If they're looking at us.

ALL GIRLS. It's *our* fault /

GIRL THREE. Cus we're *too much* /

GIRL TWO. Or *not enough*.

ALL GIRLS. It's *our* fault /

GIRL FOUR. If we're desired /

ALL GIRLS. It's *our* fault /

GIRL SIX. If we're raped /

ALL GIRLS. It's *our* fault /

GIRL ONE. If I'm fourteen.

(They all suddenly stop squirming, freeze in whatever position they're in. **GIRL ONE** *speaks to the camera.)*

I'm fourteen years old. On the cusp of womanhood, and what I can see of what lies ahead I don't understand. I mean /

ALL GIRLS. *Is this it now?*

GIRL THREE. *Is this how it's going to be?*

GIRL FIVE. *Every day?*

GIRL FOUR. Sorry, but I just want to check that I've got this /

GIRL FOUR & TWO. Crystal clear /

GIRL FOUR. What you're asking of me.

(The cheery and polite mask is slipping.)

GIRL ONE. So from now on /

GIRL SIX. You're gonna watch me, yeah?

ALL GIRLS. *All the time?*

GIRL TWO. I hit puberty so now I'm prey?

GIRL THREE. And it's *my* job to be /

GIRL SEVEN. *Constantly* policing my own desirability because /

ALL GIRLS. *(To the camera.) Not enough* /

GIRL SEVEN. Gets me nothing and nowhere, but /

ALL GIRLS. *(To the camera.) Too much* /

GIRL SEVEN. And I'm asking for it?

GIRL FIVE. So either way /

ALL GIRLS. *(To the camera.) I'm* blamed /

GIRL THREE. For how /

ALL GIRLS. *(To the camera.) You* see me /

GIRL TWO. Is that right?

(They move, neaten themselves up and calm themselves down. They smooth down hair, readjust clothes, wipe sweaty faces. They

breathe, smile, and try again, 'cheery and polite'.)

GIRL FIVE. I don't hate men.

GIRL FOUR. And I'm not gonna burn my bra.

GIRL THREE. I don't even really like the word feminist I just want to ask /

ALL GIRLS. *Is this it now?*

GIRL TWO. Because childhood was great. That was really fun.

(The 'cheery and polite' mask is slipping as the tempo picks up.)

GIRL SEVEN. But now my body is developing faster than my mind /

GIRL THREE. I'm not sure I've got the time to catch up with myself /

GIRL ONE. I can't help thinking who would I be if I wasn't thinking about being seen?

GIRL FOUR. Surely there's a better use of my time?

GIRL FIVE. But now a *huge* chunk of my brain space /

GIRL SIX. Is taken up with having to navigate *you* and your *looking*?

GIRL ONE. I mean how free would I be /

GIRL TWO. To think and /

GIRL THREE. Move and /

GIRL FOUR. Make shapes /

GIRL FIVE. And create?

GIRL SEVEN. I'd have so much more space inside my brain /

GIRL THREE. If I didn't have to spend so much /

GIRL THREE & TWO. Fucking time /

GIRL TWO. Thinking about if how I'm being seen is safe for me.

GIRL ONE. Because it's not a mere /

GIRL ONE & FOUR. Vanity /

GIRL ONE. Not a silly /

GIRL ONE & FOUR. Girly /

GIRL ONE. Complaint. But a desperate question of safety /

GIRL FOUR. Of survival /

ALL GIRLS. Am I safe?

GIRL SIX. Being seen like this /

GIRL THREE. Under your gaze /

GIRL FIVE. Your shame /

GIRL SEVEN. Infects every decision /

GIRL FOUR. Interrupts every thought /

GIRL SIX. *Constantly* checking myself /

GIRL THREE. *Constantly* on alert /

GIRL TWO. I don't feel safe /

GIRL TWO & SEVEN. I don't feel safe /

ALL GIRLS. I don't feel safe /

GIRL ONE. How can you expect me to be the best version of me when I'm scared like this?

(Quiet. They breathe.)

I'm tired, I'm /

GIRL SIX & SEVEN. So tired.

GIRL FOUR. We're only at the beginning, and already I'm /..

GIRL THREE. Because, for women, desire is shamed?

GIRL TWO. I am woman /

GIRL FIVE. And I desire /

GIRL THREE. And so I am shamed?

GIRL SIX. I am fourteen years old.

GIRL TWO. And already /

GIRL ONE. I'm fucking exhausted.

(Silence. Then a sudden burst into lights and noise. The **GIRLS** *perform a movement sequence exploring puberty. It's fun and upbeat.* **GIRL SIX** *suddenly stops and speaks to us.)*

GIRL SIX. Game Three – Take Up Space.

*(***GIRL SIX** *joins back in with the dancing.* **GIRL THREE** *stops dancing, takes the centre, and begins a bit from* Lord of the Flies. *The others start to notice her and stop to watch. Someone signals to the tech box for the music to cut and it does.)*

GIRL THREE. *(As Piggy.)* She wants to know what you're going to do about The Beast? A Beastie. Ever so big. She saw it. A terrible Beastie, with claws and /

GIRL TWO. What are you doing?

GIRL THREE. Piggy, from *Lord of the Flies*. *(Looks at audience.)* I thought, aren't we doing *Lord of* /

GIRL FIVE. No! We're done with that. It's dead.

GIRL ONE. What?

GIRL TWO. It's boring!

GIRL ONE. Erm, it's a classic!

GIRL TWO. Who says?

GIRL THREE & ONE. Everyone!

GIRL FIVE. Nah it's shit. Honestly it's so boring.

GIRL SIX. Yeah we're not doing some dead white man story.

GIRL THREE. Isn't that like, what you're meant to do, in theatre? Shakespeare and that?

GIRL TWO. Another dead white bloke?

GIRL SEVEN. Yeah why're people *still* doing Shakespeare?

GIRL FOUR. Seriously!

GIRL ONE. I like Shakespeare.

GIRL FOUR. We're *not* doing Shakespeare!

GIRL FIVE. Dead, so dead!

GIRL ONE. Okay so what are we doing?

GIRL SIX. Anything we want! We could just /

> *(***GIRL SIX** *looks around at the vast stage. She looks down at her feet, at the sand-island they're stuck on.* **GIRL SIX** *attempts to step off the sand-island. Everyone holds their breath. She changes her mind.)*

Here is good. We can do it from here.

GIRL THREE. Okay but, can I just be honest about something?

GIRL FOUR. Yeah?

GIRL THREE. Okay so like, when they said *come do some theatre, come make a play, about being young women* and all that. I was like, yeah yeah yeah cool, but then actually /.. Okay, this might sound a bit dumb, but I was like, oh *fuck I actually don't know what I wanna say!* Like, we have to fight so much to just even get the chance to "take up space" and then when you finally get it, it's like oh shit! /.. Like I actually dunno what I wanna say because I've just been so focused on /

GIRL SEVEN. Getting the chance to?

GIRL THREE. Yeah!

GIRL SEVEN. Yeah.

GIRL THREE. So I just thought maybe it'd be cool, to do, like, something we wouldn't normally get to? Like a classic, like *Lord of the Flies* or whatever. But to do it *our* way. Put a modern twist on it.

GIRL TWO. That is kinda cool.

GIRL FOUR. Yeah it is but like you could do *anything*! Why do some dead white bloke?

GIRL SEVEN. Yeah like no offence but, is it *really* that interesting to do a "modern take on a classic"?

GIRL FOUR. Exactly. I wanna hear what *you've* gotta say!

GIRL ONE. Yeah but that's like so much pressure on us?!

GIRL THREE. Yeah!

GIRL SEVEN. Okay okay, so what if we took a story, like a classic one, as like a framework? As like /

GIRL TWO. A road map?

GIRL SEVEN. Yeah. To help us, like, navigate /

GIRL FOUR. Misogyny.

GIRL FIVE. Rah! Deep!

GIRL FOUR. Okay, but they are actually all dead white men. The writers. And all the main parts are boys. Look, Peter Pan and the Lost *Boys*. Of Mice and *Men*.

GIRL FIVE. That's racist.

GIRL SIX. Yeah fuck that.

GIRL FOUR. Oliver Twist. James Bond. Harry Potter.

GIRL FIVE. Nah nah nah!

GIRL THREE. Terf!

GIRL TWO. Haha yeah seriously we can't endorse that.

GIRL ONE. Okay okay. Nothing by she-who-shall-not-be-named.

GIRL SIX. Okay erm. *The Jungle Book*?

GIRL SEVEN. 1984.

GIRL SIX. *Robinson Crusoe.*

GIRL SEVEN. *Huckleberry Finn.*

GIRL SIX. *The Catcher in the Rye.*

GIRL SEVEN. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.*

GIRL FIVE. Ok, I think we get the /

GIRL FOUR. *Dracula*!

GIRL ONE. *A Christmas Carol*?

GIRL TWO. *A Clockwork Orange.*

GIRL SEVEN. A Curious Tale of The Dog of the, tale of the, whatever.

GIRL THREE. *The Odyssey.*

GIRL FOUR. *Waiting for Godot.*

GIRL ONE. *Wind in the Willows.*

GIRL FIVE. I like that one!

GIRL SEVEN. *Treasure Island.*

GIRL SIX. *Sweeney Todd.*

GIRL SEVEN. *Threepenny Opera. Uncle Vanya. Edward the Third. Richard the Third. The Great Gatsby. The Hobbit. King Arthur. King Lear. King John. James and the Giant Peach. The Merchant of Venice. Julius Caesar. Coriolanus. Titus Andronicus. Othello.* Henry the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Twenty-Seventh. Part one part two part three. *Animal Farm. Lord of the Rings.*