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FORTHCOMING premiered at Stuggart High School in Böblingen, Germany, on October 27, 2023. The cast and crew were as follows:

MARGOT ..... Kayleen Meade
BECKY ..... Kaja Harcrow
SHANNON ..... Zohra Etheridge
PAUL ..... Jase Burkman
DAWN ..... Raine Merrill
SCOTT ..... Aaron Geise
JEN ..... Emma Malone
GUS ..... Merrik Pieper
RICK ..... Cyrus Montandon
CHRIS ..... Angelina Iverson
CONNIE ..... Isa Duggan
ANNOUNCER ..... BJ Lange
LIMINALS ..... Rosalyn Aikens, Samantha Leon, Charles Sheiffer, Helena Spivak, Emily Wheeler
DIRECTOR ..... Lindsey Bagnaschi
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ..... Mirabelle Krokoski
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR ..... Solenn Neal
SOUND ..... Morenike Fakunle
LIGHTING ..... Solenn Neal, Adrianna Allen
SET/RUN CREW ..... Austen Hobbs, Jaida Lee, Grace Pledger, Zuriah Varner
COSTUME/PROPS ..... Elsiana Johnson, Zuriah Varner

CHARACTERS

MARGOT

LIMINAL 1 (BECKY)

LIMINAL 2 (SHANNON)

LIMINAL 3 (PAUL)

LIMINAL 4 (DAWN)

LIMINAL 5 (SCOTT)

JEN

GUS

RICK

CHRIS

CONNIE

ADDITIONAL LIMINALS/TEENAGERS

OFFSTAGE ANNOUNCER

FORTHCOMING

ACT ONE

Open to a large, dark room, bare but for a long table and some chairs. The upstage wall undulates with various dark hues so we can only see those who enter as silhouettes. A low thrumming sound comes from all around. After a few seconds, Margot enters.

MARGOT. You know, it would be very helpful if you would allow the lights to turn on. *(Trips over a chair.)* Ow! You see, it's just this sort of passive-aggressive behavior that is really hurting us right now, really getting in the way of the progress I'm sure we could be making. Hello? Could you please show yourselves, just for the sake of a little cooperation? A slight sign of good faith so we can be certain…

Five teenagers enter silently from both sides of the stage. They have no problem seeing where they are going. They take seats at the table and stare straight out, ignoring Margot.

Excellent. Here comes the parade, ha, ha. Nice to see you all, as much as this bright atmosphere of yours allows me to. I can imagine that any small talk is out of the question, so let's get right to business. We need to be on the same page right now; that's important. We clearly haven't been for quite some time, but we need to be today. Everything is arranged, as promised. The announcement will be made, and then we can expect them to arrive, our winners.

FIVE TEENAGERS. Ha!

MARGOT. Fine, you resent that title. Regardless, the selected five will be arriving soon; a transition needs to occur, and it will be in everyone's best interest if it happens smoothly.

TEENAGER 1. Liar.

FIVE TEENAGERS. Liar!

MARGOT. We're not going to address that accusation at the moment. Now, as I know you are aware, I have written up a plan for the transition, in this very room; I have read it aloud here every night for the past month. I just need to know you are going to follow it.

The lights undulate more quickly across the back wall. The thrumming sound intensifies, punctuated by eerie moans and groans.

Great. By all means, we need more sound effects.

As Margot speaks, the sounds and lights grow more intense. She has to get louder to be heard.

This is not just for me, you know—if you're going to get what you want, you need to hold up your end of the agreement! Are you going to do it? Are you going to follow the plan? It's not that complicated, but there is a particular order to it, a specific design! Are you going to do it? Speak to me, please! Are you going to…

Suddenly, the noise cuts out. The undulating light stops. The teenagers rise and start to file out of the room.

Oh, well, that's an extremely satisfying nonanswer. As I've come to learn, I can count on you to be nothing less than completely and utterly unpredictable, thank you very much!

The teenagers stop, face outward.

TEENAGER 2. We say what you say…

TEENAGER 3. We say what you say…

TEENAGER 4. Over and over…

TEENAGER 5. Over and over…

They repeat these phrases for several seconds, overlapping, getting louder.

MARGOT. Stop, you brats!

Silence.

FIVE TEENAGERS. Wait and see.

They exit. Margot shakes her head for several seconds, then goes to leave. She trips on another chair.

MARGOT. Darn it!

She exits. We hear an announcer's voice.

ANNOUNCER. Ladies and gentlemen, we here at Forever Fun Amusement World are thrilled to announce the winners of our once-every-thirty-year raffle! Drumroll please!

A canned drumroll plays.

Take a gander at your ticket stubs, folks, and see if you have the lucky numbers 58762 through 58766… That's right, a party of five has won unlimited lifetime season passes to Forever Fun Amusement World! You heard that right—unlimited season passes to Forever Fun Amusement World for life! Once again, those numbers are 58762…

As the announcer reads the next four numbers, we hear a group of five teenagers excitedly reading along with him.

58763, 58764, 58765, and 58766!

TEENAGERS. *(Off.)* 58763, 58764, 58765…58766!

During the announcer's following lines, the teenagers ad-lib their amazed reaction to winning.

I can't believe it! We won! Yes, yes, yes! That's us! That's us!

ANNOUNCER. Please proceed to the black-and-red checkered building adjacent to the Haunted Castle, you fortunate five. All five must arrive to claim their prize. Congratulations to the winners of this once-every-thirty-year giveaway! Please proceed to the distinctive black-and-red building right beside the Haunted Castle. And even if you didn't have those lucky numbers, you're all winners, ladies and gents, because you're spending the day here with us at Forever Fun Amusement World!

The lights brighten as we hear the teenagers enter the building.

JEN. *(Off.)* Is this it? Is this the place?

GUS. *(Off.)* How many black-and-red buildings next to the Haunted Castle could there be?

The five teenagers enter the room.

RICK. Gotta be the place.

JEN. Hello? Hello, it's your lucky prizewinners. Where is everybody?

CHRIS. Maybe the person doing the announcement is the same

person who's going to bring us the prize, and maybe the microphone is in another building so we beat them here.

CONNIE. What, you work here now? You know the whole layout?

CHRIS. I'm just guessing.

RICK. Whatever, whatever, no worries. It's not like we can't come back anytime we want, for free, for the rest of our lives!

GUS. Because we won!

JEN. *(Singing and dancing.)* We won it, we won it, we won the lifetime tickets!

Others join in.

We won it, we won it, we won the lifetime tickets! We won it, we won it, we won the lifetime tickets! *(To Chris.)* You were dancing.

CHRIS. Who, me?

JEN. Yes, you—Miss "no way, I never dance"—were dancing.

CHRIS. That was foot shuffling.

JEN. With hip involvement, right? You saw it!

RICK. The hips were involved.

CHRIS. Perhaps, slightly.

JEN. So perhaps, slightly, you were…

CHRIS. I was…

CHRIS and JEN. Dancing!

CONNIE. This is crazy! I never win anything!

CHRIS. I wonder if that includes food.

GUS. Oo. Oh, dude, no. Unlimited funnel cakes? Unlimited deep-fried Twinkies?

JEN. Unlimited cotton candy?

RICK. Unlimited heart disease? Yeah, baby!

CHRIS. I wonder why my mom hasn't texted back.

JEN. About what?

CHRIS. About winning the prize! She was the first one I… What the heck?

RICK. What?

CHRIS. My phone is dead.

CONNIE. Why did you even bring it? You just have to worry about it getting soaked on the water rides.

RICK. Mine's gone too. Won't even turn on.

GUS. Same here.

A chair moves a foot away from the table.

CONNIE. Hey, did you see that?

GUS. What?

CONNIE. That chair.

JEN. I saw it. I saw it!

GUS. Saw what? It's a chair. Table, chairs, no big deal. They make them every day.

RICK. That chair just moved. On its own.

CONNIE. Guys, don't do this. Do not do this.

CHRIS. *(To Jen.)* Did you move it?

JEN. How? I'm eight feet away. What did I do, blow on it?

CONNIE. This isn't funny. This is so not funny!

GUS. It's a chair, look.

CONNIE. Don't touch it!

GUS. I will touch it. I will sit in it. There. I am butt-touching it.

RICK. You didn't see. It moved, on its own.

CHRIS. How does it feel?

GUS. Well, it feels… *(Screams as if being electrocuted; the others yell in reaction.)* Relax, relax, come on! I'm just kidding.

CONNIE. I told you to stop it! Cut it out!

GUS. I'm not doing anything! I'm sitting in a chair!

CONNIE. You screamed like it hurt you!

GUS. It was a joke!

CONNIE. Not to me! I'm telling you, I don't do scary. Did you see me walking into that Haunted Castle? No, you did not. I wouldn't even be in this building *next* to that Haunted Castle if it weren't for the prize. I detest scary!

JEN. What about the roller coasters? You went on those.

CONNIE. That is an adrenaline experience. And it's controlled. And I understand it. I look at it and my logical mind says, "There, you're going to be upside down; there, you're going to be at the top of an eighty-foot tower; there, you're going to be suddenly turning almost ninety degrees." But scary, that's all about what you can't see, you can't predict, you can't prepare. I do not do scary. Don't try to make me do scary.

CHRIS. Boo!

CONNIE. I'm not kidding. I will claw your eyes out.

Margot enters, wearing a very colorful outfit and an odd hat. She has dots of makeup on her cheeks.

MARGOT. Hello, everyone. Sorry to keep you waiting. This is a busy place.

RICK. Hi.

CHRIS. We were starting to wonder if we had the wrong building.

GUS. Who was wondering that? Nobody wondered that.

CHRIS. I'm just saying.

MARGOT. Nope, no problem, you made it to the right place. Congratulations, everybody! I am looking at five winning individuals.

RICK. Do you want our tickets?

MARGOT. Oh, uh, yes, yes, of course.

RICK. I put them all in order so you could see they're the right ones, starting with 58762.

MARGOT. So you did. Excellent. *(Puts the tickets in her pocket, clearly not interested in them.)* I have to admit, I expected a slightly more festive atmosphere.

CONNIE. That chair moved. By itself.

MARGOT. Did it?

CONNIE. Why did it do that?

MARGOT. Well, uh…

CHRIS. Plus our phones won't work.

GUS. Were you, like, trying out a haunted house move on us or something?

MARGOT. Oh, goodness, no. You're not our guinea pigs—you're our prizewinners! I'm sorry about the chair. You know, this place gets some odd vibrations sometimes. Who knows? If you get the Tilt-a-Whirl spinning at a certain rate while the Crazy Coaster is zipping by…

RICK. That's a fair explanation.

MARGOT. Oh, yes. Lots of moving parts around here. And the phones, well—again, with all the electrical things going on around here, I'm not surprised.

GUS. Can I ask you something?

MARGOT. Of course, anything.

GUS. I get the unlimited admission part, um…

MARGOT. Lifetime, don't forget. For everybody.

GUS. So cool. But, uh, what about food?

RICK. Gus!

GUS. I'm just asking!

MARGOT. Mm, normally, food is not part of the prize.

GUS. I didn't think so. Can't blame a guy for hoping.

MARGOT. However, given that you had to wait and given the chair scare and the phone problems, I am inclined to say…

CHRIS. No way.

MARGOT. Yes to the food.

Ad-libs of amazement and thanks.

RICK. Wow, that is so awesome! Thank you, Miss…

MARGOT. Call me Margot, please. But, given that little addition, I have to beg your indulgence and leave you again for a short while, so I can get it all arranged. We'll have your passes printed up, your vouchers set so you can get on with your Forever Fun lives, how does that sound?

GUS. Amazing! Thanks!

CHRIS. That's so cool.

MARGOT. I'll tell you what, I'm just going to take this chair right out of here, all right? Could be a little unbalanced, I don't know. Could be *(Raises her voice slightly, speaking to the whole room.)* a little uncalled for. Let's just take it right out of the way. Back soon!

Margot exits.

GUS. Can this day get any better?

JEN. We just scored lifetime food.

GUS. Hey, just for the record, *I* just scored us lifetime food, thank me very much.

JEN. I hope we get this done soon. I am going to begin my journey through the one hundred and fifty different ice cream flavors, starting with blueberry-chocolate swirl.

RICK. Uck.

JEN. Hey, if I don't like it, I take a bite and toss it out. Unlimited.

CHRIS. Margot seemed cool.

RICK. What did she mean when she said "uncalled for"?

CONNIE. What?

RICK. Just before she left. She said the chair was "uncalled for."

JEN. I don't know. You saw how she was dressed, the makeup. She's a showperson. She's just spouting words.

RICK. That was a weird word to spout.

The lights suddenly dim. Up high, a single, shimmering spot appears, accompanied by an eerie female voice. Connie sees the spot, hears the voice; everyone else pantomimes continuing on with their conversation, unaware that anything has changed.

VOICE. Constance.

CONNIE. *(Whispering.)* Oh no.

VOICE. Constance shouldn't be here.

The light moves. Constance follows it with her eyes.

Constance made a mistake.

CONNIE. What… Who are you?

VOICE. She's in trouble. Constance is in trouble!

Connie screams. The lights go back to normal; the shimmering spot disappears.

CHRIS. Holy crap!

JEN. Connie, what? What?!

CONNIE. You didn't…you didn't see that? You didn't hear any of that?

RICK. Con, Margot took out the chair. It's okay.

CONNIE. This has nothing to do with the chair! The lights went out! It…it called me by name!

GUS. Who did?

CONNIE. The light!

CHRIS. I thought she said the lights went out.

CONNIE. *(Crying.)* I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this.

JEN. Connie, Connie, it's all right.

CONNIE. It's not all right! Didn't you see it? Didn't you hear it?

RICK. Look, you got spooked by the chair thing. Plus it's hot outside; you're probably dehydrated.

GUS. That is dead on. When's the last time you had something to drink?

CONNIE. I am not dehydrated. I am not hallucinating, you guys. I told you, I told you I hate scary!

RICK. Look, Con, okay? You're on edge, right? None of us saw this light. None of us heard any voice.

CONNIE. It said I was in trouble. It said I shouldn't be here.

JEN. Just you?

RICK. *(To Jen.)* Don't, don't. *(To Connie.)* Con, look at me. I'm not blaming you, but listen: This is a you thing.

CONNIE. How did it know my name?

RICK. Because you know your name. Now, the chair thing happened. It was nothing; it's gone; but it happened, and it set you off. That's the deal. You got spooked. You hate being spooked. It got to you, that's all.

CHRIS. We'll get out of here soon, Connie. It'll be behind us.

CONNIE. It called me Constance. Nobody calls me that.

GUS. That's your name?

CONNIE. You got a problem with that, Augustus?

GUS. No, Constance is a primo name. I just didn't know.

RICK. You good?

CONNIE. I don't know. Can we leave? Did she give us her phone number or something, that Margot woman? Can't we do this later… or tomorrow?

CHRIS. I don't know if we're allowed to. I think we have to be here to claim the prize.

CONNIE. We are here! We gave her the tickets!

CHRIS. I'm just saying.

RICK. Listen, how about this? Jen, why don't you and Connie go out and just chill for a while, take a walk? Just…talk about other stuff, right? We'll text you when Margot comes back.

CONNIE. I don't have my phone.

JEN. Mine's dead.

RICK. That's right. Dead zone for the phones. But anyway…

CONNIE. What about you guys?

JEN. They're good. They're good. They'll come get us when Margot gets back. We're just gonna take a break, get some fresh air.

RICK. Exactly.

GUS. Maybe good old Margot will just give us your vouchers and stuff. You won't even need to come back.

CHRIS. We'll let you know.

JEN. Come on. A blueberry-chocolate swirl is calling to me.

CONNIE. Okay. But you guys—be careful.

GUS. We're on it. I got my lightsaber ready.

JEN. Come on.

Jen and Connie exit.

CHRIS. Wow, she was spooked.

GUS. Got that right.

RICK. I wish we did have a way to contact Margot. I'd like to get this over with.

GUS. I say don't rush her if she's getting us a lifetime's supply of corn dogs.

RICK. Those things are so bad for you.

CHRIS. I can't even eat those anymore. I ate three of them one Halloween night before we went out trick-or-treating. I got so sick.

RICK. Corn dogs and Halloween candy. That's a menu to die for.

CHRIS. Oh, it was so bad. Especially 'cause I had this mask on that made it hard to breathe, and…

The lights dim again. A glowing orb rolls out in front of Gus. He stares at it. Rick and Chris pantomime going on with their conversation. A male voice speaks.

MALE VOICE. Augustus.

GUS. Whoa.

MALE VOICE. You shouldn't have come, Augustus.

Gus reaches toward the orb. It rolls away from him.

Now it's your destiny. Now your fate is sealed.

GUS. What does that mean?

The orb rolls off. The lights come back up.

What does that mean?

CHRIS. It means I can't eat corn dogs anymore. You know how it is when you get sick on something. Even the smell of them…

RICK. Gus, what?

GUS. Houston, we have a problem.

RICK. What's going on?

Jen and Connie enter. Connie is hyperventilating.

JEN. Just breathe. Deep breaths.

RICK. I thought you guys were gonna wait.

CONNIE. We can't get out!

JEN. It's not that we can't get out.

CONNIE. Yes, it is! The doors are all locked! We're trapped in here!

JEN. There's probably a code or something to unlock…

CONNIE. That would be for getting in, not for getting out! Jen, think about it! We're prisoners!

RICK. Margot will be back.

CHRIS. *(To Connie.)* You better sit down before you pass out.

CONNIE. When? When will she be back?

RICK. Your mind is running away from you, Connie. This is all totally explainable.

JEN. He's right, Con. Just breathe.

CONNIE. We're trapped.

JEN. Close your eyes and breathe.

GUS. *(To Rick.)* Dude, come here. Come over here.

RICK. What?

GUS. Rick, look, it might not be just in Connie's mind.

RICK. What are you saying?

GUS. I…heard the voice, too. And, uh, it wasn't a light for me— It was a…glowing ball. Like a bowling ball.

CONNIE. What are they talking about? Are you guys talking about me over there?

RICK. Connie, no.

GUS. It's a guy thing, okay? And it's embarrassing, so—you just do your breathing.

JEN. *(To Connie.)* Look in my eyes. Just focus on me.

RICK. A glowing bowling ball talked to you.

GUS. It wasn't exactly that. It was *like* that. It told me my destiny was sealed or something.

RICK. Gus.

GUS. It was weird. It was creepy weird. I could've screamed like Connie did, not gonna lie.

RICK. What am I supposed to do with that?

GUS. I don't know. Probably keep it to yourself, at least for now. I

just wanted to tell you that this could be a bigger deal than, you know, Connie being Connie.

CONNIE. I heard you say my name.

JEN. It's okay.

CONNIE. It is not okay. I heard you say my name, you guys. I'm not deaf.

GUS. Nobody said you were. I've always admired your keen sense of hearing, Con.

CONNIE. Don't give me that. What were you guys talking about?

The lights gradually dim.

RICK. Listen…

CHRIS. Hey, is it getting dark in here?

CONNIE. It is! It is! You're seeing it, too?

JEN. It's pretty hard to miss when there's… I swear those look like clouds gathering on the ceiling.

The lights further dim and we hear a low rumble of thunder.

GUS. Okay, indoor thunderstorms were not in the forecast for today.

CONNIE. You're all seeing this! You're all hearing this!

RICK. Yes, Connie; we're with you.

The room is very dim. We hear wind and more thunder. A shadowy figure, trailing black tendrils, passes silently behind the group.

JEN. All right, I'm feeling a breeze in here. This is definitely weird.

More figures like the first glide through the room. We barely see them before they disappear.

CHRIS. Whoa! Something just touched me.

CONNIE. What?

CHRIS. It felt like, like a spider on my neck or something.

The shadow figures continue to move through the room, now whispering, almost below the threshold of hearing.

VOICES. We are wind. We are shadow.

JEN. Who's talking?

RICK. Not funny, Gus.

GUS. I haven't said a thing!

VOICES. We are mist. We are distant rumors.

CONNIE. No, no, no. I told you guys—this is exactly what I hate!

CHRIS. I don't think anybody's loving this.

VOICES. We are shiver. We are tingle. We are wonder.

The thunder and wind increase until suddenly, the lights flash once, simultaneous with a huge thunderclap. The group screams and cowers in reaction. Silence and darkness for a second. Then, a slight sound of wind. Then, a large glowing paper airplane flies slowly across the room, then across again, finally settling on the floor. The sound of the wind subsides. The lights come back up. The five stare at the airplane in front of them.

JEN. What is that?

RICK. I think it's clear what it is. How it is, why it is…

GUS. There's something on the paper.

CONNIE. I don't think you should touch it.

GUS. I doubt it's radioactive or anything.

CONNIE. How do you know? There was just a thunderstorm inside this room. You don't know anything.

RICK. Fair point.

GUS. Look, I left my Geiger counter at home. I risked my butt in the mysterious chair; I'll risk my hand touching the mysterious paper airplane. Rick?

RICK. Connie's right. We don't have a clue what's going on. It looks harmless enough.

GUS. I'm going for it. No need to thank me; it's just who I am. *(Unfolds the paper airplane.)* Well, would you look at that?

The others gather around.

CHRIS. What's on it?

JEN. Is it a message?

Gus turns the paper around. On it is a crude picture of Margot with the word "LIAR" scrawled underneath.

GUS. I guess it's a message. Somebody's not a big fan of Margot.

Margot enters. Her makeup is more elaborate now, as is her costume. It matches the picture.

MARGOT. Well, my winning friends…

The group backs away quickly. Gus hides the paper.

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you.

RICK. No, we just were, uh…

MARGOT. No matter. I regret even more keeping you waiting again.

CONNIE. You've got some explaining to do, Margot. I don't want to stay in this room anymore, and I don't appreciate being locked in.

MARGOT. Constance, Constance. So straightforward. I appreciate that.

CONNIE. I never told you my name. How do you know it?

MARGOT. You've been coming here for years; you all have. I've watched you grow up. What kind of proprietor would I be if I hadn't picked up your names by now? Rick, Gus—although you went by Auggie for a few years, there…

GUS. Yeah, not anymore, okay?

MARGOT. Constance, now Connie; Jen and Chris. Your father used to call you Chrissy, though, didn't he?

CHRIS. Stepfather. Yeah, he's way out of the picture.

MARGOT. Understood. Oh, you never noticed me, of course, nor should you have. I donned various costumes, faded into the scenery. But I observed. That's my main job—to observe.

RICK. That's all well and good, Margot, but I have to agree with Connie. Waiting here has not been…uneventful.

JEN. It's been weird!

MARGOT. More chair issues?

CHRIS. Not just that.

CONNIE. Try the room going dark, weird voices coming from some shimmering little light.

MARGOT. Shimmering little light? Did Tinkerbell arrive, ha, ha?

CONNIE. Hilarious, Margot.

GUS. Yeah, how about having a glowing ball suddenly show up in front of you and tell you your fate was sealed?

CHRIS. Glowing ball? When did that happen?

JEN. Why didn't you tell us?

CONNIE. That's what you guys were talking about!

GUS. I told Rick.

RICK. We thought it might be better…

CONNIE. Might be better to leave me thinking I was losing my mind? Thanks a lot!

GUS. And then there's the little matter of an indoor thunderstorm, Margot, and this mysteriously floating down out of the indoor cloud bank.

Gus puts the picture down in front of Margot.

CHRIS. Plus more voices. Plus feeling like…I don't know about you guys, but I kept getting the sense that there were other people in the room besides us.

JEN. Yeah, I know what you mean. I saw someone out of the corner of my eye.

CHRIS. And then they'd be gone! Exactly.

MARGOT. *(Looking at the picture.)* Sad. So sad.

Margot slowly rips the picture in half, then in half again.

GUS. Hey, you know, maybe somebody wanted to save that.

CHRIS. It's not yours, Gus.

GUS. Well, maybe it's not hers, either. I unfolded it.

Margot clucks her tongue and sighs as she rips the picture into smaller and smaller pieces until it's a pile of confetti in front of her. Finally, she resignedly throws the pile into the air.

MARGOT. Whee. Sad.

Margot closes her eyes.

RICK. Uh, Margot?

MARGOT. I have not been entirely forthcoming with you all. Sit down. Please.

The five sit at the table on either side of Margot.

Thank you. Now, my friends, my patrons, my…life's blood, really—why are you here?

CONNIE. Listen, I…

MARGOT. You really want to leave. I know, Constance. You are deeply uncomfortable here. I am going to alleviate that sensation for you, but not everything can happen on your precise timeline. A little patience. Now, again to my question: Why are you here?

GUS. Because we won? Because unlimited lifetime funnel cakes and rides and, you know, the whole shebang.

MARGOT. Yes, yes, that, but what brought you to Forever Fun in the first place today? And twice last month? And last year six times and the years before that?

JEN. Our parents…

Margot suddenly bangs her hand down on the table. Everyone jumps.

RICK. Hey!

GUS. Holy crap, dude!

MARGOT. I'm sorry, but please, do not be obtuse with me. We are well aware you were brought here in the early years, but you were never dragged here, were you? Of course not. You looked forward to your visits to Forever Fun. You begged for them. Why? More importantly, once you got beyond the years of adult accompaniment, once you could get here on your own steam, so to speak, and pay with your own funds, why here? Your options are practically limitless. Why here?

CHRIS. Because it's…

MARGOT. Speak, Chrissy.

CHRIS. You're not going to bang the table again, are you?

MARGOT. No, Chrissy, Auntie Margot won't bang the table again. Auntie Margot gets impatient sometimes when she is not *(As if speaking to others beyond the five.)* appropriately listened to. Please, answer the question: Why Forever Fun Amusement Park?

CHRIS. It's…I don't know. It's different here. I mean, everything's kind of, like…

RICK. Enhanced.

CHRIS. Yeah. Yeah! I mean, if something's supposed to be bright, it's brighter here. If it's supposed to be scary, it's scarier here.

GUS. And funny. I used to laugh my head off here when I was a kid; I don't even know why. I still do, not gonna lie.

MARGOT. Good. I am very pleased with that answer. I particularly like that word "enhanced." Yes, what has kept Forever Fun a favorite for so many people over the years—for one hundred and fifty years, as a matter of fact, right here, in this same spot—people can't quite put their finger on it. But it's that *je ne sais quoi* that brings them back.

JEN. Je ne wha?

RICK. *Je ne sais quoi*. It's French for "I don't know what." It's like describing a special ingredient.

MARGOT. Do you agree, Jen?

JEN. Yeah. I mean, I don't know French, but yeah, I feel it.

MARGOT. Constance?

CONNIE. It's Connie, Margot, and the only "I don't know what" I'm contemplating right now is I don't know what we're still doing in this room where the chairs move and the voices speak out of thin air and we have indoor thunderstorms and I don't like it!

GUS. She does kind of have a point. Are we gonna, you know, get those passes anytime soon?

MARGOT. Such a shame. The conversation was very pleasant for a few moments there. *(Getting agitated.)* But isn't that the way of things? Isn't that just the way? Do you know what's hardest about running a place like Forever Fun. Do you, Rick?

RICK. Uh, I would think advertising would be quite a…

MARGOT. Maintenance. Maintenance! Because just like our little conversation that was proceeding along so smoothly, in such an edifying way…things break down. Degrade. Rust. Erode. Wear thin. You can hardly take a single deep breath of satisfaction without asking yourself: Do I detect a whiff of oil from a leaking gasket? Smoke from an overheating piston? Do I hear the squealing of a worn-out belt? Never mind employees calling in sick or being derelict of their duties. It's endless! But my father warned me, and his father before him warned him, back and back four generations. One hundred and twenty

years of trying to keep the chaos at bay. One thing, Augustus, only one thing never needs maintenance here. What do you think that is?

GUS. The *je ne sais quoi*?

MARGOT. Oh no. No, no, no. You have witnessed the breakdown of that in this very room. All of Constance's—er, Connie's—complaints have been testaments to that particular degradation.

RICK. What do you mean? All those things we saw were malfunctions?

CONNIE. Why did you put us in here, then?

MARGOT. You winners just needed a place to be, that's all. Augustus, did you come up with an answer?

GUS. Uh, can you repeat the question?

MARGOT. What is the one thing that never needs fixing, that we can always depend on never to fail? Hint: It's a trick question.

GUS. I'm really bad at those.

MARGOT. The only thing that never needs maintenance…is the need for maintenance.

GUS. Yeah, no, I never would've got that.

RICK. Um, a little while ago, you said that you hadn't been completely forthcoming with us.

MARGOT. I suppose I did.

RICK. What did you mean?

MARGOT. What didn't I mean? *(Laughs slightly.)* Here's one thing: Do any of you know what a liminal space is?

GUS. Uh, like, where there's just a tiny bit of something?

JEN. You're thinking of minimal.

GUS. That's what she said.

CHRIS. No, she said liminal, liminal space. It's, like, an area between things. Twilight is the liminal space between day and night.

GUS. Whoa. Somebody sprouted some smarts.

CHRIS. It's a video game. I looked it up. But I am smart.

GUS. Liminal smart—in between.

MARGOT. That's right, Chris, well defined. I was not forthcoming

when I said this room was simply a repository for you winners. This is, in fact, a liminal space. Like the surface of a pond—that boundary between the air and the water.

CONNIE. Okay, but what are we actually in between in here?

MARGOT. You may not like the answer.

GUS. *(Eerie voice.)* Life and death.

CONNIE. Don't. I told you how I feel about scary.

GUS. Kidding. Lighten up.

MARGOT. Well…

RICK. He didn't get it right, did he?

MARGOT. You've seen waterbugs, haven't you? How they seem to dwell impossibly on the surface?

CONNIE. Wait, are you saying Gus got it right? That this is a liminal space between…

MARGOT. Ghosts…

CONNIE. Please stop.

MARGOT. I'm sorry, Connie. I am not trying to be frightening, only forthcoming. Ghosts are not dead people. They are liminal people.

JEN. So you're saying this place is haunted?

CONNIE. Unlock the doors. You need to let me out. Now.

MARGOT. Actually, I can't do that at the moment.

RICK. What do you mean, you can't?

MARGOT. I'm afraid I have to leave again right now, for just a short while.

CHRIS. Wait, wait, you can't just drop this whole liminal thing on us and then leave!

MARGOT. I must. I'm sorry.

Margot exits. Everyone looks around at each other for a second, shocked.

GUS. This is seriously whacked.

CONNIE. I can't…I'm not… *(Runs off after Margot.)* You can't leave me in here!

Jen and Chris run after Connie.

JEN. Con, wait up!

CHRIS. I'm coming too!

Gus and Rick remain.

GUS. This is seriously whacked.

RICK. You said that already.

GUS. It needed repeating. Liminal space? I thought the haunted house was next door.

RICK. I've got nothing, believe me.

Jen, Chris, and Connie return.

CONNIE. In my face—did you see that? She slammed the door in my face!

CHRIS. Well, it was a heavy door. It just kind of shut after she went out.

CONNIE. In my face, who's side are you on?

CHRIS. I'm just saying.

CONNIE. "I'm just saying, I'm just saying." That's all you say, is that you're just saying.

JEN. Come on, Con, relax.

CONNIE. Oh, yeah, relax, after the weirdo lady drops a scare bomb about ghosts and liminal spaces and then locks us all in here, I'm supposed to relax? Good advice.

RICK. Everybody, cool it.

GUS. When are we gonna get our unlimited passes? I'm hungry!

The lights shut off suddenly.

CONNIE. Not funny!

RICK. Connie…

CONNIE. Is it dark in here? I just have to know that right now—is it dark in here for everybody?

JEN. Yes, Con. It's dark for all of us.

CONNIE. Good. At least we're all seeing the same thing.

GUS. Or not, as the case may be.

CHRIS. Do you think Margot shut them off on her way out?

RICK. Maybe. I don't…

During the following lines, glowing white masks appear and disappear.

VOICE 1. Once upon a time…

VOICE 2. Once upon a time…

VOICE 3. Once upon a time…

FIVE VOICES. There were five.

The faces are gone.

CHRIS. Five? Are they talking about us?

JEN. You saw those faces, right?

The faces reappear and disappear as the names are spoken.

VOICE 1. Nathaniel.

VOICE 2. George.

VOICE 3. Cecelia.

VOICE 4. Raelyn.

VOICE 5. Ruth.

FIVE VOICES. Once upon a time there were five.

The faces disappear.

CONNIE. What is the point of this? What is the point?!

The faces reappear and move around the room during the next section.

VOICE 1. Is this just a dream?

VOICE 2. Maybe that's all it is.

VOICE 3. All it is.

VOICE 4. All it is.

VOICE 5. All it is.

FIVE VOICES. Maybe just a dream is all it is.

CONNIE. Please go away. Please!

GUS. Don't freak out, Con.

CONNIE. Shut up! You think I can help it?

VOICE 1. Pinch yourself and see.

JEN. Hey! Ow!

VOICE 2. Pinch yourself.

RICK. Don't touch me!

CHRIS. What's the matter?

RICK. Something just stung me!

GUS. Okay, now I'm freaking out.

VOICE 3. Is it just a dream? Pinch yourself and see.

GUS. I felt that! Hands off!

VOICE 4. Pinch yourself!

CHRIS. Ouch!

CONNIE. Nobody better touch me. Nobody better touch me.

VOICE 5. Pinch yourself!

CONNIE. No…aah! That hurt!

FIVE VOICES. Pinch yourself and see, it isn't just a dream.

The upstage wall begins to pulsate with dark, amorphous shapes. As the liminals narrate, gauzy shapes appear and disappear on the walls and in the air.

VOICE 1. George.

VOICE 2. Cecilia.

VOICE 3. Raelyn.

VOICE 4. Ruth.

VOICE 5. Nathaniel.

FIVE VOICES. Once upon a time, there were five.

VOICE 1. And then…

VOICE 2. they were…

FIVE VOICES. no more!

A whoosh of sound and movement, then sudden blackness and silence.

CONNIE. Okay, I'm done. Seriously. I can't take this anymore. You guys?

JEN. I just don't want them touching me again. No touching!

The faces and flowing shapes return during the next section.

VOICE 1. Once upon a new time,

VOICE 2. Then there came a new five,

VOICE 3. Becky.

VOICE 4. Shannon.

VOICE 5. Paul.

VOICE 1. Dawn.

VOICE 2. Scott.

FIVE VOICES. We pinched ourselves!

Rick, Jen, and the others ad-lib reacting to being painfully pinched: "Ow!" "Quit that!" "Aah!"

VOICE 1. It wasn't just a dream.

VOICE 2. Not a dream.

VOICE 3. Not a dream.

VOICE 4. Not a dream.

VOICE 5. Not a dream.

VOICE 1. Who will be the next upon a time?

VOICE 2. Who will be the next?

The voices keep repeating "who will be the next," overlapping and fading out to darkness and silence again. For a long moment, nothing happens. Just darkness.

CONNIE. Is it over?

GUS. I think they're gone. It feels like they are.

RICK. Sh.

JEN. What?

RICK. I thought… No, I guess it's nothing. Chris, you okay?

CHRIS. I'm here. Do you think it's over?

RICK. Let's see if we can find some lights.

Suddenly, all the masked faces appear. The five voices, along with legions more, shout a single word.

FIVE VOICES. Who!

Rick and company scream long and hard.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Act Two begins where Act One left off—the five characters in mid-scream in the dark. All special effects are gone, though, and after three seconds of the five screaming, the lights come up in the room to reveal them: Gus, semi-fetal on the floor; Rick standing alone; Connie, Jen, and Chris holding on to each other. Once the lights come up and the five see they are alone, no longer haunted, their scream peters out.

RICK. What are you doing down there?

GUS. I'm…I dunno. I just fell down.

CONNIE. We have got to get out of here, now!

CHRIS. No argument from me.

Margot enters, wearing a strange new outfit and makeup.

MARGOT. I know, I know, I know, I know.

RICK. Listen…

MARGOT. I know! You're scared. You want to leave. You have a million questions.

JEN. I don't think you…

MARGOT. Understand? Oh, but I do. I understand how you feel, and you are completely justified. What's more, I understand the big picture, the broader view of this situation, and know that your needs and desires are only one element of the overall scheme.

CONNIE. You can't keep us trapped in here!

MARGOT. That depends on your definition of "can't." I am keeping you here, so clearly I can.

JEN. This is, like, kidnapping!

MARGOT. We can discuss semantics for the next several hours, or we could solve some problems that allow us to move on with our lives. I prefer the latter. Rick, what about you?

RICK. I'd like to know what's going on.

MARGOT. I can accommodate that desire.

CONNIE. I want out! Now!

MARGOT. I cannot accommodate that desire.

CONNIE. *(Threatening violence.)* Well, you'd better start figuring out…

GUS. Whoa, whoa, cool it!

CONNIE. I am scared! I can't stand being scared!

CHRIS. I think we all are, but if Margot can tell us what's going on…

MARGOT. In a few minutes, if you'll allow me to explain, this whole situation will be contextualized and, I suspect, less frightening.

JEN. But what if the lights go off and we start getting stung again?

GUS. Yeah, not a fan.

MARGOT. They're not here. Very rarely do they visit when I'm around.

RICK. "They"?

MARGOT. The current five liminals—Becky, Shannon, Paul, Dawn, and Scott. They arrived in 1994.

Dates may be altered in accordance with the present year.

JEN. Thirty years ago.

MARGOT. Yes.

CHRIS. What do you mean by current liminals?

GUS. What have they got against you?

MARGOT. These are excellent questions. Important questions.

CONNIE. Yeah, and I suppose you're going to answer about half of one of them before you decide to take off again.

MARGOT. No. I will stay until you know why you're here and what is happening.

GUS. *(Pulling up a chair.)* Shoot.

Rick, Jen, and Chris sit as well. Connie stands for a few seconds, then gives in.

CONNIE. Fine.

MARGOT. It's hard to know where to begin when a story encompasses four generations. The liminals are the *je ne sais quoi* of Forever

Fun. These ghosts, if you need to use the more common but less accurate term, have provided that extra element for our park ever since it opened in 1903. They have enhanced the experience here, have provided that ineffable spark, that has kept Forever Fun in business for one hundred and twenty years when so many other establishments have failed.

RICK. How did they get here in the first place?

MARGOT. The first five were orphaned immigrants my great-great-grandparents hired when the park opened.

CHRIS. They hired ghosts?

MARGOT. No, no, they weren't liminals initially. As the story goes, Great-Great-Grandmother Eileen came across these poor teenagers talking together one evening. They were saying how apprehensive they were of the future, how they wished they could stay there, at that same age, well, forever.

JEN. And this Eileen woman, your relative, made that happen?

MARGOT. She was a woman of unique talents.

CONNIE. A witch.

MARGOT. Another word that often gets misconstrued.

GUS. This is— I need a corn dog and a nap.

RICK. But the five liminals here now, they're not those kids?

MARGOT. Great-Great-Grandmother Eileen discovered that, after about thirty years, the liminals tended to…lose energy. In short, get old. So began the tradition of releasing and replenishing.

CHRIS. Releasing?

MARGOT. Passing out of the liminal state into death.

CHRIS. Replenishing?

MARGOT. Passing from life into the liminal state.

CONNIE. So let me get this straight—your family has created four sets of teenaged ghosts, forced them to haunt this place for thirty years per set, and then said, "We've got your replacements. Go die now."

MARGOT. No.

CONNIE. Which part am I getting wrong?

MARGOT. The word "forced." Each new generation has signed on voluntarily, knowing full well the conditions of their time here.

GUS. Oh now, okay, hang on. Once-every-thirty-year raffle? That's what we won? Not unlimited cotton candy and roller-coaster rides, but thirty years as ghosts—pardon me, liminals—giving Forever Fun its zing? Sorry, I will not be signing up.

MARGOT. No. Contrary to the illustrated paper airplane rumor circulated by the current five, I am not a liar. You all will get your vouchers, unlimited and for as long as Forever Fun stays in business, though how many years that will be once we no longer have liminals…I can't say.

RICK. So, this current group is the last?

CHRIS. Why?

MARGOT. Because of my failure. Somehow my parents, their parents, and theirs before them managed to maintain their liminals in a way I haven't been able to. Yes, the previous generations grew tired when their time was up, a bit ineffective, but never malevolent and unpredictable as mine have, actually causing detriment to our park rather than improvement. They refuse to listen to me. I have lost their trust. And now, out of spite, they seem unwilling to move on even though they're deeply discontented. They have to go. And then, no more.

RICK. All right. I guess most of my questions are answered, bizarre as those answers may be, but…

CONNIE. What do you want with us?

RICK. Exactly.

GUS. She wants to give us passes and feed our cakeholes, what else?

CHRIS. Yeah, but why keep us here, why tell us all this?

JEN. Why have us meet the liminals, get pinched by them?

MARGOT. I am very sorry about that, as I am about keeping you all in the dark, literally and figuratively. I…would like your help.

GUS. Oh, so there is a catch.

MARGOT. My hope was that the liminals might try to connect with you. And they have.

CONNIE. Oh, is that what that was? Connecting?

MARGOT. Actually, yes—in their way, it was. Look, Forever Fun has been a positive part of your lives; you've admitted as much. Could you find it in your hearts to… No, this is too much.

JEN. Go ahead.

MARGOT. To meet with them once more?

CONNIE. Forget it! No way!

RICK. Why?

CONNIE. Rick, don't even!

RICK. Con, listen, I know you're scared and you hate to be scared and you've told us that a thousand times, but, to be honest, this is one of the most fascinating afternoons I've ever spent in my life. I just want to hear her out.

CONNIE. Ridiculous.

MARGOT. Meet with them and try to convince them to move on. To pass over beyond the liminal. And then, I promise, I will not be asking for anything more. I will be firmly and completely in the giving posture, forever in your debt.

RICK. I don't know.

MARGOT. Try. It may not work at all.

CHRIS. I'm game!

CONNIE. Chris!

CHRIS. Rick's right. I mean, you can't get much more interesting.

JEN. I'll do it. Can you guarantee no more pinching or stinging or whatever?

MARGOT. I wish I could, but…

JEN. I'll still do it.

RICK. I'm in.

GUS. All right, fine, but can we please eat afterwards?

MARGOT. I will personally see to it that you get a good meal, Augustus.

GUS. Then count me in.

CONNIE. Sure, fine, go ahead. I'll wait outside. I hope you don't get sucked into some liminal vortex or something. I am not doing this.

MARGOT. That's very disappointing.

CONNIE. What difference does it make?

MARGOT. All the difference, I'm afraid. Five has been the connective number down through the years. If it's not all of you, it might as well be none of you.

JEN. Come on, Con.

CONNIE. You guys are nuts.

CHRIS. But you kinda love us, right?

CONNIE. Look, I'll stay in the room…

GUS. All right, Connie!

CONNIE. But I am not in any way participating. I am not trying to convince anybody of anything, ghost or not. I am just going to do my best to survive. And then, Margot, you are going to open that door and let us out of this place, right, no matter what happens?

MARGOT. No matter what happens, you will be making a glorious exit parade, all of you.

CONNIE. I can't believe I'm doing this.

MARGOT. Now, as I mentioned, the liminals won't be inclined to come back if I'm here, so I will need to leave again.

GUS. Wait, so what are we supposed to do again? Convince these ghosts to just move on down the road? Hurry up and die?

CHRIS. How do we do that?

MARGOT. Remember that they don't communicate the way we do. Try to look beyond their cryptic manifestations.

RICK. I'm still unclear on why they're so unhappy with you.

JEN. That would be good to know.

MARGOT. Thirty years ago, when the last transition took place, I was only fifteen, but my mother wanted me involved. She knew I would always stay deeply committed to the family business…

CONNIE. *(Pretend sneezing.)* Witchcraft!

MARGOT. So she brought me into its workings at a young age. During that event back in 1994, I didn't follow my parents' lead very well. I was young! I thought I knew everything when I knew nothing. I was too soft. I promised things I shouldn't have. And

over the years, Scott, Becky, Dawn, the others—their resentment grew until here we are now. I can't risk starting over.

CONNIE. So we're supposed to solve all this in one spectral family counseling session? Come on!

MARGOT. You are what they were, what they still are, in many ways. I'm asking you to use the power of that connection.

CONNIE. Whatever. Like I said, I'm in but mainly, I'm out.

GUS. Well, I'm not waiting around for the next generation of corn dogs and fried bread, I can tell you that. Let's get this party started.

MARGOT. Thank you. Thank you all so much.

CHRIS. Don't expect a miracle!

MARGOT. You will help immensely. I just know it.

She exits.

JEN. Okay, so, how does this work?

CONNIE. I am sitting here. I am saying nothing. I am waiting for it to be over.

CHRIS. Rick?

RICK. It's not like I have previous experience.

GUS. I mean, the lights are on. No weird noises. No indoor thunderstorms. They're probably not even here.

Three chairs move away from the table on their own.

Okay, so they're here.

JEN. Now what?

RICK. Hello? Uh, Scott, is it? Um, Becky?

GUS. Yeah, yeah, names are good.

CHRIS. Shannon? Hi, I'm Chris.

JEN. Who else was there? Uh…Paul, right? And Dawn! Dawn, are you here?

CONNIE. This is stupid.

Connie screams and falls out of the chair.

CHRIS. What are you doing?

CONNIE. One of them just tipped me out of the chair!

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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