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Cast of Characters

ASH, a specialist in the field of prefrontal cortex memory formation.
Any gender.

GRACE, a young patient with no memory of who she is. Also incapable
of making new memories. Female.

DR. FRAZIER, a member of the agency who hired Ash. Any gender.

DR. RUNNELS, in charge of the project to restore Grace's memory.
Any gender.

AGENT COSTAGLIOLA, a field agent posing as a lab worker. Any
gender.

AGENT CONTRERAS, a field agent posing as a lab worker. Any
gender.

AGENT CARON, a field agent posing as a lab worker. Any gender.

Production Note

All characters beside Grace may be any gender. For clarity, male pronouns are used throughout the script for all but Grace, but pronouns may be adjusted to suit your cast.

THE SPECIALIST

by Brent Holland

(When the lights come up, we see a young woman with restraints on on a bed. There are no wires attached to her, but it is obvious she's under medical care. DR. RUNNELS is looking at information on his tablet as DR. FRAZIER and ASH enter.)

FRAZIER. Dr. Runnels, is this a good time?

RUNNELS. *(Indicating the patient:)* Yes. She's starting to come to. Is this the new specialist?

FRAZIER. It is. Ash, I'd like you to meet Dr. Runnels. He runs the show here.

ASH. Nice to meet you.

(They shake hands.)

RUNNELS. Your thesis on the prefrontal cortex as it relates to memory storage was impressive.

ASH. Thank you, sir. I'm glad you think so. Is this the patient?

RUNNELS. It is. She's quite unique.

ASH. I've read her charts . . .

RUNNELS. Her charts don't do her justice.

FRAZIER. They really don't.

RUNNELS. For the most part, you'll find that Grace will challenge everything you've learned. *(To FRAZIER:)* He looks young.

FRAZIER. He is, but he's brilliant.

RUNNELS. I thought he'd be older.

ASH. You're in charge? I thought you'd be older.

RUNNELS. Indeed.

FRAZIER. Now that we have that out of the way . . .

RUNNELS. So . . . today we are trying a new sort of therapy on her that we think would be a breakthrough for the agency.

ASH. Breakthrough? What sort of therapy?

FRAZIER. We'll discuss that in the debriefing at the end of the day. We want you to go into this examination with only the basics of her condition.

ASH. I understand. So . . . the patient doesn't have the ability to form long-term memory . . .

RUNNELS. That's more or less true.

ASH. More or less?

FRAZIER. For the purpose of today's examination, proceed with the assumption that the patient cannot form long-term memories.

ASH. What does she remember of her past life? Is there anything? Shadow memories?

RUNNELS. At this time, she remembers nothing.

ASH. Nothing?

RUNNELS. She wakes up each day with no memory at all.

FRAZIER. A blank canvas.

ASH. A totally blank canvas? That's incredible.

FRAZIER. It's one of the reasons why the agency is so interested in her.

ASH. One of the reasons?

RUNNELS. (*With a look at FRAZIER:*) The primary reason and the only one that is important today.

ASH. Understood. So, what's my purpose in this examination?

RUNNELS. We have used a chemical compound to stimulate the prefrontal cortex. We want you to help her access memories from her past life.

ASH. What do we know about her?

FRAZIER. Next to nothing. We only know what we have gathered since she was transferred to us. What little we have learned was summarized in her patient bio.

ASH. There was next to nothing in the patient bio. Can you tell me the details of the chemical compound used?

RUNNELS. That's classified.

ASH. Can I at least know how it's supposed to work?

RUNNELS. I can only tell you we are hopeful that, with your expertise, her condition will reverse.

FRAZIER. That's why you're here.

ASH. If I knew more about her history . . .

RUNNELS. (*Pointedly:*) You know what we know.

FRAZIER. And you have everything you need. If you decide that you need anything additional, all you need to do is ask. We will be constantly monitoring your progress.

RUNNELS. Are you ready to meet her?

ASH. Yes. Her name is Grace?

RUNNELS. Yes.

(FRAZIER and RUNNELS go to leave.)

ASH. Wait, you're leaving?

RUNNELS. Our presence may disrupt your work. The sedative we used on her should be wearing off now.

ASH. So that's it?

RUNNELS. You're the specialist. Do what you were hired to do. We've tried everything that conventional medicine would dictate. We've studied her condition, and while it's fascinating, we have an obligation to help Grace get her life back.

ASH. I will do what I can.

RUNNELS. I'm sure you will.

FRAZIER. And remember, anything you need will be yours.

ASH. Got it.

(RUNNELS and FRAZIER exit. ASH sits in a chair next to Grace's bed. After a few moments, she starts to stir.)

GRACE. Where am I? Is this a hospital?

ASH. Not exactly. It's more like a lab.

GRACE. Why am I in a lab?

ASH. You're being observed, but you're not in any danger.

GRACE. I can't remember how I got here. *(Starting to panic a bit:)* Wait . . . I don't know who I am.

ASH. *(Trying to soothe her:)* You're perfectly safe. There's no reason to get upset.

GRACE. But I can't remember who I am!

ASH. Everything is going to be alright. We have a team of highly trained experts working to restore your memory.

GRACE. Who are you?

ASH. I'm Ash. I'm a specialist working specifically on your case.

GRACE. How long have I been here?

ASH. According to your case file, you have been in this facility for the past two weeks. You were transferred here from a facility in Connecticut, but I don't have the specifics of your time there.

GRACE. I don't remember being in Connecticut. I don't remember anything!

ASH. Do you remember anything you did yesterday?

GRACE. Nothing. Have I met you before? Did we go through all of this yesterday?

ASH. No. This is my first time meeting you, Grace. The agency hired me specifically to work with you.

GRACE. My name is Grace?

ASH. That's what it says in your file.

GRACE. That name sucks. I don't like it.

(ASH laughs a little.)

ASH. I can call you whatever you like.

GRACE. But my name's Grace.

ASH. That's what I've been told.

GRACE. Then go ahead and call me Grace. Maybe it will help. What's my last name?

ASH. It's not in your file so I don't know. I'm not sure the agency knows.

GRACE. What's this agency you keep talking about?

ASH. Just the agency that hired me to help you.

GRACE. What happened to me?

ASH. I honestly don't know.

GRACE. You don't know much, do you, Mr. Specialist?

ASH. Call me Ash.

GRACE. If you don't know anything about me, how are you going to help me?

ASH. Well, my area of expertise is the formation and storage of memory. I think the idea is that if I can help you to form new memories, we can help you access your previous ones.

GRACE. That makes sense I guess and I guess I don't have a choice anyway . . . So how do we start?

ASH. Tell me everything you know about yourself.

GRACE. Have you been paying attention? I don't know anything.

ASH. Sure you do. There are at least a few things you've noticed since you woke up.

GRACE. Like?

ASH. You're female.

GRACE. Well, yeah. But so are lots of people.

ASH. But that's a start.

GRACE. (*Looking at her skin:*) I'm Caucasian.

(*Unless she isn't . . . Feel free to change this to the actress's race.*)

ASH. (*Handing her a mirror:*) Here, this may help. Recognize this face?

GRACE. (*Looking at herself:*) Not a bit. Well, at least I'm not ugly.

(*ASH laughs.*)

What?

ASH. I've never thought about what it would be like to get to see what you look like for the first time.

GRACE. I was afraid I would be hideous.

ASH. Well, you're not.

GRACE. (*Looking in the mirror:*) I wonder how I got that scar over my eye?

ASH. Think about it. Anything come to mind?

GRACE. I feel like maybe someone sucker punched me.

ASH. Do you remember who?

GRACE. I think it was my grandmother.

ASH. (*Intrigued:*) Really?

GRACE. No. Not really. I have no clue, and before you ask, I don't remember my grandmother either. Do you think you can fix this?

ASH. I don't know yet.

GRACE. You don't know?

ASH. Not yet. I'm just getting started.

GRACE. Not very good at your job, are you?

ASH. I was good enough to be hired by the agency.

GRACE. Does this agency have a name?

ASH. It's government based, that's all I'm allowed to tell you.

GRACE. Why?

ASH. I'm just doing what the people who sign my checks tell me to do, Grace.

GRACE. What did you say your name was again?

ASH. It's Ash.

GRACE. So why you, Ash?

ASH. Why me?

GRACE. Why are you the one lucky enough to get to sit with me this morning? Are you here every morning?

ASH. No, this is my first day.

GRACE. Do you expect me to believe that?

ASH. Why wouldn't you?

GRACE. Because if you told me this was your fiftieth day here, I would assume that you are even worse at your job than I already suspect.

ASH. Well, I promise you that this is my first day. I was hired specifically to work on your case.

GRACE. I must be pretty important then.

ASH. Maybe.

GRACE. (*Looking around:*) What kind of lab is this?

ASH. Just a lab run by the agency.

GRACE. That's a vague answer.

ASH. To a question that isn't really relevant. Do you remember where you were before you got here?

GRACE. You told me I was in Connecticut. What was I doing there?

ASH. I was hoping you could tell me.

GRACE. I think I was looking for my grandmother.

ASH. What?

GRACE. (*Pointing at the scar over her eye:*) Revenge for this scar, ya know?

ASH. (*Playing along:*) Ah yes, the one who sucker punched you. An eye for an eye?

GRACE. (*Laughing:*) Something like that.

ASH. What do you remember about your grandmother?

GRACE. What?

ASH. Do you remember anything about her?

GRACE. I was just kidding when I said that I thought I was looking for her.

ASH. I know, but that's twice you've brought her up. It may be important.

GRACE. It's not.

ASH. Are you sure?

GRACE. No! I'm not sure! I'm not sure of anything. (*Getting frustrated:*) I don't *know* anything. I just used "grandmother" because the thought of an old woman being able to land a punch on me is kind of funny.

ASH. Why's that?

GRACE. Why's what?

ASH. Why's it funny that an old woman would be able to land a shot to your eye?

GRACE. I don't know . . . It just seems funny considering . . .

(She trails off.)

ASH. Considering what?

GRACE. Nothing.

ASH. You paused there.

GRACE. I thought I might have remembered something.

ASH. What did you remember?

GRACE. It was nothing . . . more of a feeling. I don't know.

ASH. What was the feeling?

GRACE. Just maybe that . . . a grandmother wouldn't be able to do that to someone like me.

ASH. That's interesting.

GRACE. What?

ASH. It could mean quite a few things. Maybe you're an MMA fighter or a martial arts instructor.

GRACE. Ha. If so, I must not have been very good to end up here. I have a question though.

ASH. If I can answer it, I will.

GRACE. Am I dangerous?

ASH. Dangerous?

GRACE. I'm just wondering.

ASH. To my knowledge, you aren't. Why do you ask?

GRACE. (*Indicating the restraints that keep her on the bed:*) I assume these aren't here to keep me from rolling off of the bed while I sleep.

ASH. It's not that uncommon for a patient with a brain injury to be restrained while they sleep.

GRACE. Do they take them off during the day?

ASH. I have no clue. First day, remember?

GRACE. Would you mind asking?

ASH. (*Pressing a button by the bed and speaking:*) Can I get someone in here to take off the patient's restraints?

FRAZIER. (*Voice only:*) Are you sure that's wise?

ASH. I have nothing in her paperwork indicating that she is violent.

FRAZIER. (*Voice only, after a moment passes:*) Someone will be in momentarily.

ASH. Thank you.

GRACE. Who was that?

ASH. That was Dr. Frazier.

GRACE. Do I know him?

ASH. I'm sure you have met him, but you just don't remember.

GRACE. His voice seems familiar.

ASH. (*Curious:*) Interesting. I suppose it could be from the repetition of seeing him every day.

GRACE. I see him every day?

ASH. I assume you have, at least for the two weeks since you transferred here.

(*COSTAGLIOLA comes in, dressed in lab technician clothing.*)

COSTAGLIOLA. I'm here for the restraints.

ASH. Excellent.

COSTAGLIOLA. Good morning, Grace.

GRACE. Good morning. (*Looking at him:*) Do you know me?

COSTAGLIOLA. Absolutely.

GRACE. How?

COSTAGLIOLA. How? Well, I'm the guy who removes your restraints each morning.

GRACE. Is that all?

COSTAGLIOLA. What do you mean?

GRACE. (*Really looking at him.*) Nothing I guess.

(*COSTAGLIOLA removes her restraints.*)

COSTAGLIOLA. All better?

GRACE.(*As she rubs her wrists.*) All better.

COSTAGLIOLA. (*To ASH.*) Do you need anything else?

ASH. Not at the moment.

COSTAGLIOLA. Ring us if you do.

(*COSTAGLIOLA goes to leave.*)

GRACE. What's your name?

COSTAGLIOLA. What?

GRACE. I want to know what your name is?

COSTAGLIOLA. You won't remember it.

GRACE. (*Smiling.*) Humor me.

COSTAGLIOLA. It's Costagliola.

GRACE. (*Thinking.*) But I don't call you that.

ASH. What makes you say that?

GRACE. A feeling.

(*COSTAGLIOLA slips out during this. ASH doesn't notice.*)

ASH. (*To COSTAGLIOLA, who is now gone.*) Does she normally call you something else? (*To GRACE.*) That may be important. Can you describe the feeling?

GRACE. What feeling?

ASH. The feeling that you know you call him something else?

GRACE. It's important?

ASH. It could be.

GRACE. I don't know. I don't know why I felt that.

ASH. Do you feel that maybe you have had that conversation before?

GRACE. Maybe, but I don't think so. There's something familiar about him. I shouldn't have any reason to know him from my past, should I?

ASH. Not to my knowledge. As far as I know, he works at this facility.

(ASH thinks and then presses the button.)

FRAZIER. *(Voice only:)* Yes?

ASH. Can you send back in the orderly who just took off Grace's restraints?

FRAZIER. *(Voice only, after a moment:)* I'm sorry. That's not possible at the moment.

ASH. You said I would have everything I needed. I need that orderly.

FRAZIER. You can't have him at the moment.

GRACE. *(Softly:)* Costagliola . . .

ASH. Why not?

FRAZIER. *(Voice only:)* He is indisposed.

ASH. Well, can you send him back in when he's free?

FRAZIER. *(Voice only:)* I'll see what I can do.

ASH. *(To GRACE:)* Anything more?

GRACE. More?

ASH. The feeling.

GRACE. No . . . It's vague. It really could be nothing.

ASH. It could be. It could be that your brain is making memories of him taking your restraints off each day. That would be progress, considering your condition.

GRACE. Do I feel that way about him every day?

ASH. It doesn't say anything in your file about that. I assume you don't.

GRACE. It's probably nothing.

ASH. Maybe.

GRACE. It's frustrating, not being able to remember anything.

ASH. I can understand that.

GRACE. Have you worked with other patients like me?

ASH. I have. Well . . . not exactly like you, but similar.

GRACE. Had any luck fixing any of them?

ASH. In some cases . . .

GRACE. So, what's your opinion of me?

ASH. What do you mean?

GRACE. Am I fixable?

ASH. Undecided.

GRACE. What if I'm not?

ASH. I'm sure we'll make progress. There's no point in focusing on the negative.

GRACE. That's easy for you to say . . . you're not the one who can't remember anything.

(The door opens and CONTRERAS enters, carrying a tray of food.)

CONTRERAS. Excuse me. Is this a bad time?

GRACE. Is that breakfast?

CONTRERAS. It is.

GRACE. I'm starving! It's definitely not a bad time.

ASH. Bring it in.

GRACE. What's on the menu?

CONTRERAS. Country-style steak and eggs . . . your favorites.

ASH. How do you know it's her favorite?

CONTRERAS. *(Realizing he shouldn't have said that:)* Pardon?

GRACE. How do you know what my favorite breakfast is?

CONTRERAS. Uh . . . because you told me when I brought you the same thing last week.

GRACE. Did I tell you that?

CONTRERAS. You did.

(A moment passes.)

ASH. Are you alright, Grace?

GRACE. Yeah . . . I'm fine.

CONTRERAS. Can I get you anything else, Grace?

GRACE. No, thank you though.

(CONTRERAS exits.)

Something's not right.

ASH. What do you mean?

GRACE. How did he know that country-style steak is my favorite when I don't even know that?

ASH. He said you told him.

GRACE. Why would I have said that?

ASH. Is it your favorite?

GRACE. (*Looking at her plate:*) They didn't leave me a knife.

ASH. What?

GRACE. I'm going to try it and see but I can't cut the steak without a knife. I just have a fork.

ASH. Hold on a second.

(He pulls a pocketknife out.)

GRACE. What's that?

ASH. A pocketknife. I always carry one.

(He walks over and grabs a towel to sterilize it.)

All clean now if you'd like to use it.

(GRACE takes the knife and cuts the steak.)

GRACE. (*Before trying the food:*) This is a nice knife.

ASH. Thanks. It belonged to my dad.

GRACE. (*Shifting it:*) It's balanced. Your dad had good taste in knives.

(She takes a bite of her food.)

Wow . . . yeah. This is really good.

ASH. Interesting. Maybe he just inferred from your reaction last week. Maybe you said it was your favorite then.

GRACE. (*As she keeps eating:*) Maybe. Something still feels off. So how much do you know about your employers?

ASH. My employers?

GRACE. The people signing your paycheck?

ASH. I don't know much, really.

GRACE. You took a job without knowing anything about your employer?

ASH. All I know is who I report to and that I am being paid way more than my normal rate to work with you.

GRACE. Have you thought about why?

ASH. I assume your case must be important.

GRACE. My case, or me?

ASH. What do you mean?

GRACE. Maybe it's me that's important.

ASH. Possibly. But if you are, no one is telling me. I have a pretty complete file on you.

GRACE. Complete? Who told you that? How do you know it's complete?

ASH. Dr. Runnels mentioned . . .

GRACE. (*Cutting him off:*) Dr. Runnels is here?

(*She reflexively grabs the knife.*)

ASH. You know Dr. Runnels?

GRACE. (*Thinking hard:*) I do. I know Dr. Runnels . . .

ASH. How? This is important. I'm sure you met him in your previous days here . . .

GRACE. It's not that. It's something else.

ASH. Are you sure it's something else?

GRACE. I just feel like I know that name well. That name sparked something.

ASH. You picked up the knife.

GRACE. I know. It wasn't a pleasant memory.

ASH. Memory?

GRACE. Memory . . . feeling . . . whatever it was. I know that feeling well.

ASH. You know it well, like from your past?

GRACE. Yes!

ASH. I don't see how that's possible. To my knowledge you never met Dr. Runnels until you came to this facility.

(*CARON enters.*)

(*Seeing him:*) Can I help you?

CARON. I came to see Grace. We are monitoring from the control room and when she mentioned me by name . . .

ASH. She mentioned you by name?

CARON. I'm Dr. Runnels.

GRACE. You're Dr. Runnels?

CARON. I am.

GRACE. No you're not. You're not him.

(ASH watches, unsure of whether or not he should say something.)

CARON. I assure you, Grace, that I am. I visit with you each afternoon to check on your progress.

GRACE. *(Confused:)* You do?

CARON. Of course I do.

GRACE. *(To ASH:)* Does he?

ASH. *(Trying to piece it together:)* What?

GRACE. Does he visit me each afternoon?

ASH. Dr. Runnels?

GRACE. Yes! This guy. This guy who says he's Dr. Runnels.

ASH. I don't know for sure, but it's certainly possible.

CARON. We have spent a lot of time together since your transfer here.

GRACE. I don't believe you.

CARON. Why wouldn't you believe me?

GRACE. Because you're not Dr. Runnels. *(To ASH:)* He isn't Dr. Runnels, is he?

ASH. *(Not wanting to lie, but . . . :)* He is, Grace. This is Dr. Runnels. I met him this morning.

GRACE. You're lying to me too.

ASH. Grace . . .

GRACE. This could be important!

ASH. You're confused.

GRACE. I know I am, but I also know that he is *not* Dr. Runnels! I also know that I'm not someone you should lie to.

CARON. *(Listening to an earpiece:)* I assure you, Grace, that I am. You're just confused. I have another patient to attend to at the moment, but I will see you for our normal time this afternoon.

(He exits quickly.)

GRACE. That's not Dr. Runnels.

ASH. What makes you say that?

GRACE. I just know.

(She looks at him and decides.)

And you know too!

ASH. What?

GRACE. I can read it in your eyes . . . You *know* that's not Dr. Runnels!

ASH. *(Struggling:)* That's not true.

GRACE. It is! You're a really bad liar.

ASH. Calm down, Grace. Finish eating your breakfast.

GRACE. I'm not hungry anymore.

ASH. *(Trying to make her smile:)* But it's your favorite.

(She shoots him a look then picks up the knife and fork and starts to eat again.)

GRACE. Do you think that happens often?

ASH. What happens often?

GRACE. That I feel like I remember something. I'm sure I know Dr. Runnels.

ASH. I don't know. I do know that they started you on a new treatment this morning . . . Maybe it's working.

GRACE. They started me on a new treatment?

ASH. That's what I was told.

GRACE. Why wasn't I told?

ASH. Perhaps you were and don't remember.

GRACE. I hate this. This feeling of not knowing what's going on.

ASH. I know. I'm sure it can be very frustrating.

GRACE. I don't remember anything but I keep getting flashes of something.

ASH. That could be a good sign.

GRACE. When Costagliola came in . . .

ASH. You said you don't think you call him that.

GRACE. I don't. I'm sure of it. I got a feeling when he was here.

ASH. What type of feeling?

GRACE. I'm not sure. I felt comfortable. Does that make sense?

ASH. Maybe he reminds you of someone from your past life.

GRACE. Or maybe he was *in* my past life.

ASH. That's unlikely.

GRACE. Why?

ASH. As far as I know, he is assigned to this lab.

GRACE. As far as you know.

ASH. Right.

GRACE. But you're new, or so you say.

ASH. So I say? Do you think I'm lying to you, Grace?

GRACE. You lied to me about Dr. Runnels, so I don't trust you.

ASH. I didn't lie to you.

GRACE. That was *not* Dr. Runnels.

ASH. (*Hitting a button:*) Excuse me, Dr. Frazier?

FRAZIER. (*Voice only:*) Yes?

ASH. Is Costagliola free now, or is he still indisposed?

FRAZIER. (*Voice only, after a pause:*) One moment please.

GRACE. What are you going to ask him?

ASH. Me? Nothing. I was going to let you talk to him.

GRACE. What should I ask him?

ASH. You could start with trying to figure out why he makes you feel comfortable. If you still feel that this time.

GRACE. I think I will.

ASH. I'm on your side in this, Grace . . . I really want to help you figure this out.

COSTAGLIOLA. (*Poking his head in:*) Knock knock. You wanted to see me?

ASH. Yes. Please come in. Grace has some questions for you.

COSTAGLIOLA. For me?

GRACE. Yes. First . . . I know I don't call you Costagliola, what's your first name.

ASH. (*As COSTAGLIOLA starts to answer:*) Don't answer that.

GRACE. But . . .

ASH. What do *you* think it is?

GRACE. Just let him tell me! I don't know. That's why I asked!

ASH. Grace says that you made her feel comfortable earlier.

COSTAGLIOLA. Comfortable?

GRACE. Like I know you . . . Like I have a reason to trust you. Does that make sense?

COSTAGLIOLA. I have a trustworthy face.

(GRACE and COSTAGLIOLA *laugh*.)

GRACE. I feel like you've told me that before.

COSTAGLIOLA. Oh yeah?

GRACE. Can you tell me why I feel like that?

(FRAZIER *enters*.)

FRAZIER. Maybe I can answer that.

GRACE. Who are you?

ASH. Now is not a good time, Doctor.

FRAZIER. I hate to interrupt your work, but she's making connections.

ASH. If you give me more time, I think I can . . .

FRAZIER. She's making the right connections.

GRACE. (*To ASH*;) I don't like him.

ASH. What?

GRACE. He's not a good person.

FRAZIER. You recognize me, Grace?

GRACE. You work for Runnels.

FRAZIER. You're right, Grace, I do. So do you.

GRACE. I do?

ASH. Can someone tell me what's going on?

FRAZIER. Do you have any memory of what you were doing in Connecticut?

GRACE. What I was doing?

FRAZIER. You work for the agency.

ASH. But you told me . . .

FRAZIER. (*To COSTAGLIOLA*;) Remove him.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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