we all know how this ends.

by Molly Taylor

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-0009-04

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we all know how this ends. was first produced by Stratford East Young Company, presented by Stratford East on 25 July 2024. The performance was directed by Katie Greenall, with sets and costume design by Mona Camille, sound design and composition by Roly Botha, lighting design by Joshie Harriette. The Movement Director was David Gilbert. The Production Stage Manager was Rob Hearn. The cast was as follows:

SAFF. . . . . Giorgia Valentino
BEZ. . . . . Reece Ford
CASSIE . . . . . Zainab Lawal
NOAH . . . . . Dany Mutamba
ALFIE . . . . . Ayomikun Omiteru
DENISE . . . . . Isla Pennell Swift
FARAH/KEZIA. . . . . Maya Bassi Curtis
ISABELLA/JO . . . . . Ciara Amas
ANYA. . . . . Sofe Barker
MINA . . . . . Lorraine Adeyefa

CHARACTERS

SAFF – Puppy dog energy, well-intentioned, scatty but loving

BEZ – Saff's oldest mate, and her safe place / cheerleader

CASSIE – Saff's second-oldest mate, feet on the ground, super driven

NOAH – Saff's flatmate. The 'house-dad'; nurturing, reliable, great cook

ALFIE – Saff's flatmate. Laid-back and free-spirited

DENISE – Saff's flatmate. Spiky, independent, prides herself on being 'up-front' (when it suits her)

FARAH – Saff's flatmate. Ambitious and single-minded, a slightly tortured actor

ISABELLA – Saff's flatmate. Zen energy, always wants to believe the best in people

ANYA – Staff at Willows. Cool, grounded, comfy-in-their-skin, easy charisma

MINA – Manager of Willows. Warm, wise, kills at karaoke

JO – Client at Willows

KEZIA – Client at Willows

TRAINER

SETTING

Most of the action takes place in the Guardianship setting (an old primary school) and the professional world of a funeral home. Occasionally, action leaps between these two settings within the same scene and skips forward in time.

TIME

It is set in 2024, over the course of a year.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Note on the text

A forward slash / indicates a character speaking over the remainder of that line.

An ellipsis in the dialogue … indicates someone has run out of steam.

A dash at the end of a line – indicates someone being cut off mid-sentence.

A double forward slash // indicates a character directly addressing the audience.

In the original production Anya was played by a non-binary actor, and Jo's part was originally given to a male cast member, and then swapped out for a female – so they/them pronouns have been used in this script. Essentially casts could swap the gender of a lot of the characters to best fit the make-up of their companies and pronouns accordingly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This play was developed with members of the 2023–24 Theatre Royal Stratford East Young Company, a fierce group of actors with brilliant instincts, and big hearts, who weren't scared to look at love and death head-on. Thanks for your patience and belief when the wheels came off.

Thanks to Temi Wilkey for her dramaturgical flair and incisive thinking, and for being a joy to have in the room.

Thanks too to the fearless and generous Katie Greenall – you are a beautiful director and an even better human being. Thanks to the wonderful Participation Team at TRSE; Kirstin, Flo and Bethan, who had my back every step of the way, and boy – did I need it.

Without the incredible team at Poppy's Funeral Home in southwest London, I would never have been able to tap into the world of careful and conscientious death care. Their approach to death and dying changed my perspective; when I began writing this play I didn't realise just how quickly I would need to draw on their work and wisdom.

Lastly, I would like to thank my mum, Sue, who loved everything about theatre, and who never got to see this show. I will miss you in every audience, Mum.

To my mum, Sue T, who could always bring it.

Scene: Wake Up

(The Guardianship – an old Victorian primary school. Night. Quiet.)

(A makeshift living room. Some old sofas and throws. TV light. **SAFF** *asleep on a sofa.)*

(We see **BEZ***, sitting close by, scrolling on his phone.)*

(In the distance, a siren, getting louder and louder. **BEZ** *clocks that* **SAFF** *is asleep.)*

BEZ. Saff. Saff.

(He gently shakes her.)

Babe. Saff!

(She is jolted out of sleep. Bewildered.)

SAFF. I dunno!

BEZ. What?

SAFF. What??

BEZ. Sssh.

SAFF. Fuck.

BEZ. Babe.

SAFF. Where am I?

BEZ. You're at home.

SAFF. What?

BEZ. The Guardianship.

SAFF. Where's...

(She looks around as if trying to work something out.)

Was I asleep?

BEZ. Not for long. Must've conked out. Y'okay?

SAFF. What time is it?

BEZ. One-ish. I missed the tube.

SAFF. Am I awake now?

BEZ. Saff, look at me. I need to stay over. You need to go to bed. I'm going to take the couch.

SAFF. Was I okay?

BEZ. Yeah. You're fine.

SAFF. Am I?

BEZ. Yeah.

SAFF. Was I breathing?

BEZ. You're alive and well, come on.

SAFF. Shall we have a cup of tea?

BEZ. Babe, you're working in the morning, go to bed.

SAFF. Which one?

BEZ. Which bed??

SAFF. Which work?

Scene: What Can I Tell You About Saff?

(An alarm goes off, almost like a school bell, and the Guardianship – an old Victorian primary school – is suddenly madly alive with morning energy. A constellation of flatmates emerges, used to each other's morning routines; they weave in and around each other with an easy choreography.)

ISABELLA. Morning.

ALFIE. Hey.

SAFF. Coffee??

BEZ. There.

ISABELLA. Hi Bez.

SAFF. Shit!

ISABELLA. Time?

SAFF. Eight.

BEZ. Late!

ALFIE. *(Putting an earbud in* **SAFF***'s ear.)* Listen.

DENISE. Morning.

NOAH. Morning.

FARAH. Morning!

ISABELLA. I had the oddest dream last night.

SAFF. *(Bopping to* **ALFIE***'s track.)* Into it.

ALFIE. Wait for the drop.

ISABELLA. I was giving birth in a cave.

BEZ. You can drink coffee there.

SAFF. True.

ISABELLA. In the nighttime, except it was light.

NOAH. *(To* **FARAH**.*)* Nice look Farah.

DENISE. Audition?

FARAH. Recall.

ISABELLA. And a puppy came out.

NOAH. What for?

FARAH. Can't say. Signed an NDA.

NOAH. Do Not Resuscitate??

FARAH. *(Spelling it out like he's a child.)* An 'N', 'D', 'A'.

DENISE. Give us a clue Farah.

FARAH. I speaketh not.

ISABELLA. *(To* **SAFF**.*)* And the puppy started running around and it had your face.

SAFF. *(The beat has dropped – they are both dancing.)* On fire Alfie!

ALFIE. Innit.

DENISE. Crocks?

ISABELLA. It was still a puppy, but it was you.

DENISE. Crocks, anyone??

BEZ. Hallway?

ISABELLA. And then you ran out of the cave and got run over.

FARAH. Guys.

NOAH. Yep?

ISABELLA. It was astonishing.

FARAH. Gas bill.

ALFIE. No!

SAFF. So skint.

FARAH. Massive.

NOAH. Fuck.

ISABELLA. And then all the afterbirth came out.

BEZ. Find them?

DENISE. No!

BEZ. Staircase?

DENISE. You know what this is? Mercury. In retrograde.

SAFF. Don't.

ISABELLA. And I scooped up all the afterbirth and made it into a hotdog.

NOAH. Thinking curry tonight guys.

ALFIE. Win.

SAFF. Big win.

ISABELLA. It was completely bonkers.

BEZ. D'you do Deliveroo Noah?

NOAH. One day my friend.

SAFF. Got an interview today. Make-up gig.

ISABELLA. God it's all happening isn't it.

FARAH. Don't forget your power pose Saff.

*(***SAFF** *doesn't know what a power pose is but tries.)*

BEZ. Don't forget you're at bingo later.

SAFF. No.

BEZ. Yep.

SAFF. Is it –

BEZ. Wednesday.

SAFF. If I'm late, save me some.

BEZ. Go!

ALFIE. Good luck.

SAFF. Thanks.

NOAH. Break a leg Farah!

FARAH. I'm going to book this job. Tell me.

ISABELLA. You're going to book this job.

DENISE. Found them!

BEZ. See ya.

SAFF. *(To* **ALFIE**.*)* Send me that track!

ALFIE. In a bit.

*(***SAFF** *calling* **CASSIE**.*)*

SAFF. Sweet, sweet Cassandra. Beat of my heart. Light of my life.

CASSIE. The answer's no, whatever it is, I'm on a chapter deadline.

SAFF. This is bigger than your PhD. This is about my birthday. Twenty-five. I'm getting closer to death every passing moment, so you need to hear me out; I need you to organise me a big fucking surprise birthday party.

CASSIE. I'm going to refer you to the dictionary definition of 'surprise'.

SAFF. Invite everyone and get everyone to invite everyone and force everyone to come.

CASSIE. It's one thing that you've usurped my place in the Guardianship –

SAFF. Yeah yeah, I know, invasion of the life snatchers.

CASSIE. It's another thing for me to be your party planner.

SAFF. But that's why it's genius, everyone misses you and wants you around, you love a committee more than life itself, and I need to feel like the centre of the universe for once in my life.

CASSIE. I'll think about it.

SAFF. I knew you'd say yes! Btw Farah's got an audition today, if you want to send vibes.

CASSIE. Haven't you got a thing too?

SAFF. Yeah, an agency for older models or something. I dunno. Winging it.

CASSIE. That's not like you.

SAFF. How's your nan?

CASSIE. She's surviving.

SAFF. Aren't we all, send her my love!

(Beat.)

BEZ. // The thing about Saff is she's basically my wife for life. Ever since me, her and Cassie played the three wise men in Year 6 nativity. Her wisdom hasn't massively improved, since then, but she's the sun to my moon, the east to my west. I am the cheese to her cracker.

(Snap to **SAFF** *working in the café...)*

SAFF. *(To herself.)* Fuck, forgot to order oat milk. *(To customer.)* Sorry, the oats are on strike today due to pay and conditions.

ALFIE. // She's definitely my go-to person in the Guardianship.

NOAH. // Would you say she's got commitment issues?

BEZ. // I'd say she's got like, Gemini issues.

NOAH. // She's in two minds, all the time.

FARAH. // She works three jobs.

DENISE. // She does eight things at once.

(Snap to **SAFF** *working in the café…)*

SAFF. I've got basic cow's milk. Or there is a woman over there breast feeding, you could ask her for a quick. *(She mimes milk squirt.)* Is breast milk dairy? I dunno.

ISABELLA. // I'd say she's got quite a high vibration. I mean that in the best possible way.

FARAH. // Saff is the adopted puppy of the flat.

DENISE. // She's more like a stray dog that you want to take home, but you know you shouldn't.

ALFIE. // When Cassie had to leave to move in with her nan, it was a no-brainer.

(Snap to **SAFF** *working at the bingo hall…)*

SAFF. Getting plenty… twenty!

BEZ. // Saff is a barista, a bingo caller and a make-up artist.

SAFF. *(As if quoting her CV.)* "I have a polyamorous approach to my work life."

ISABELLA. // She can just turn her hand to anything.

SAFF. "I have a dynamic attitude to a multifaceted career."

NOAH. // Like I said, commitment issues.

SAFF. "I strive for endless and extreme challenges in which I mount success."

BEZ. // And I'm basically her unpaid PA. And guarantor. You're not meant to know that.

(Snap to **SAFF** *working at the bingo hall for her next lines…)*

SAFF. Staying alive… eighty-five!

FARAH. // She has nervous energy, so she washes up a lot. Which I appreciate.

SAFF. Up to tricks… forty-six!

NOAH. // She moved her dad in for a month. Which was…

ISABELLA. // So cute!

ALFIE. // An insight.

DENISE. // Really fucking awkward.

NOAH. // But now he's caravanning around France or something.

ISABELLA. // I love that for him!

SAFF. Young and keen… number fifteen.

Scene: Interview

*(**SAFF**, in the middle of a job interview at Willows, with her make-up case.)*

MINA. So, what made you apply to Willows?

SAFF. Well, erm, just raw passion really. Looking to expand my portfolio. New challenges.

MINA. Looking at your CV, this would be a real diversion from your previous experience.

SAFF. Well, yeah, not really. Because, obviously all my make-up jobs, they do vary, and I like that, but my skill set remains very suited to, y'know, different briefs. I can be very responsive. In the moment.

MINA. Saffron / do you –

SAFF. Everyone calls me Saff. If you have a model, I can do a trial. I'm better at doing than talking.

MINA. Saff…do you know what we do at Willows?

SAFF. Yeah.

MINA. We're a funeral home.

SAFF. *(Nodding.)* Oh. *(Silently 'fuck'.)*

MINA. *(Warmly.)* I feel that this might be news to you.

SAFF. Is this real, or is this a test?

MINA. We care for people, who have died, and we prepare them for burial or cremation.

(Pause.)

We do, sometimes, put make-up on the people we look after. But that's a tiny element of what we do. Has there been a bit of crossed wires?