

Nature Calls

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Characters

Ben – Male, late 20s / early 30s.

Liz – Female, late 20s / early 30s, Ben's friend.

Chris – Male, late 20s / early 30s, Liz's boyfriend.

Three friends set out on what should have been a pleasant walk in the mountains but Liz and Chris are unaware of Ben's true motive in bringing them along leading to a chain of events which will change all their lives forever.

A hilltop / top of a small mountain with magnificent views. It is late afternoon. A walking pathway leads off stage right and a steep drop, not seen, just off stage left. On lights, the stage is empty. After a while, Ben enters followed by Chris and Liz. They are breathing heavily from the climb. Chris is carrying a rucksack.

BEN: (*Indicating view*) There it is. What do you think?

LIZ: Wow! Ben, it's fantastic

BEN: No matter how many times I see this, it still amazes me.

LIZ: You can see forever.

She wanders around checking out the views.

BEN: Well Chris. Didn't I say it would be worth it?

CHRIS: (*Breathless*) It's alright. I suppose.

BEN: Alright! Jesus Liz! Where did you find this one?

CHRIS: Give me a chance to get my breath back.

BEN: Where else would you rather be on a glorious Spring evening? (*Sarcastically*) Unless there's a life or death football match that needs to be watched!

CHRIS: There probably is.

BEN: Come on! Even you can appreciate this.

CHRIS: Even me! Alright! Alright! It's magnificent. Happy?

BEN: And you know what's really great. You can see no evidence that man ever existed. No houses, no roads, just nature.

LIZ: (*At stage left*) I'm glad we didn't try to come up this way. It's a sheer drop.

CHRIS: I just need to rest for a minute.

LIZ: Check it out Chris.

CHRIS: Gimme a sec.

He sits. Ben angles his head as if listening for something

BEN: Listen!

LIZ: What?

BEN: Can you hear that?

LIZ: The wind?

BEN: Listen carefully

LIZ: No, nothing.

CHRIS: I can't hear anything.

BEN: That's just it. The sound of the world turning. The sound of mother nature herself. Her secret message!

He does a circle with his arms extended. Chris and Liz exchange looks. Chris laughs.

BEN: You say something Chris?

CHRIS: No Ben. Just enjoying the moment!

Liz takes out her phone.

LIZ: I must take some photos.

BEN: Why do we do that?

LIZ: What?

BEN: Rush to take photographs that we'll probably delete in a few weeks while the real thing is laid out in front of us. I don't need photographs. I keep it locked in my head. I close my eyes and I see every detail. I could stay here forever.

He closes his eyes. Another puzzled look between Chris and Liz. They look at him in silence for a while which gets uncomfortable. Chris opens his rucksack

CHRIS: Who's for food? After two hours of walking uphill, I could eat a horse, I'm starving.

BEN: Just savour this for a while yet. Let's just stand here and take it in.

He closes his eyes again. Pause

BEN: There's only one thing missing.

He takes out his mobile phone and starts tapping.

LIZ: There's no signal.

BEN: That's exactly how it should be. Detached completely from humanity. Listen.

Beethoven's 6th Pastoral symphony begins to play. He puts the phone on the ground. Ben sways slightly with eyes closed. Chris looks at Liz, shaking his head.

BEN: Isn't it beautiful?

LIZ: *(Unsure what to say)* I know the tune. I'm not great on classical music. Do you know it Chris?

CHRIS: Not exactly my style. Is it ... Mozart?

BEN: It's Beethoven.

CHRIS: Roll over Beethoven!

Ben gives Chris a withering look.

BEN: His Pastoral symphony. I always play it when I'm up here. Other times when I play it, I'm transported here. It's like I've never left this place.

Ben continues to sway to the music.

LIZ: It's really nice. Peaceful.

BEN: It's almost too beautiful. You know, I don't really believe Beethoven wrote it.

CHRIS: So I was right. It was Mozart!

BEN: What I mean is ... well I know Beethoven physically wrote the notes onto paper but the melody, the sound, the feeling. That came from nature herself.

LIZ: He was inspired by nature?

BEN: More than that. It's like he became one with it. Nature was trying to give us a message and channelled it through Beethoven.

Chris laughs

CHRIS: Keep taking the tablets Ben.

Ben looks at him dismissively

BEN: You haven't a clue Chris have you?

He turns off the music. Awkward pause.

CHRIS: Well, I'm going to eat.

He picks up his rucksack.

BEN: I want to show you something Liz. I hope they're still there.

LIZ: What?

BEN: *(Extending his hand to Liz)* Come on.

LIZ: What is it?

BEN: It's a surprise.

CHRIS: We'd better have the picnic before it's too late.

(Pointedly) Okay Liz?

He takes a small blanket from his rucksack and spreads it on the ground.

BEN: It's behind those rocks back there. Two minutes?

LIZ: Let's eat first.

BEN: I'll go and check.

CHRIS: Yeah. Do that Ben.

LIZ: Tell us what it is.

BEN: Just wait right there.

CHRIS: We're not going anywhere .. yet!

BEN: Right.

He exits UL.

CHRIS: What the fuck am I doing here?

LIZ: Would it hurt you to be nice to him?

CHRIS: I knew he was bad but ... he must be on something.

LIZ: He's very sensitive. Delicate.

CHRIS: A good kick in the hole is what he needs.

LIZ: Will you just try?

CHRIS: How do you put up with him?

LIZ: He's not normally as ... intense as this.

CHRIS: We'll have the picnic and then go.

LIZ: We can't just rush off.

CHRIS: I'm not hanging around longer than I have to.

LIZ: No one forced you to come.

CHRIS: I wouldn't let you off with him on your own.

LIZ: He's harmless. We've been friends since we were children. This is the way he's always been.

CHRIS: I don't want to be here but I'm glad I am. I can keep an eye on things.

LIZ: You make him sound like some sort of ...

CHRIS: Go on.

LIZ: But, he's really nice.

Movement from UL as Ben returns

LIZ: Here he is. Now behave!

Ben enters. He is holding a daffodil

BEN: I knew it would be there.

CHRIS: We're ready to eat Ben.

LIZ: A daffodil.

BEN: Yes. Isn't it great?

CHRIS: Jesus Ben. It's a daffodil!

BEN: I planted the bulbs back there last September. They normally wouldn't grow well at high altitudes. They're thriving. Come and see.

LIZ: Let's eat first

CHRIS: You came up here in September to plant daffodils?

BEN: I was coming up anyway.

CHRIS: (*Playfully*) Did you not think Ben? You may have upset the balance of nature here.

BEN: What?

CHRIS: You're more aware of the environment than I am but I imagine if daffodils were meant to grow here, then nature would have let that happen.

BEN: I gave nature a helping hand.

CHRIS: Who knows what impact that “helping hand” had? There may be other plants that were meant to grow in that spot. And perhaps there are insects that rely on those very plants. You may have single handedly annihilated a species that we never even knew existed.

BEN: What?

LIZ: Ignore him Ben. He’s joking with you.

BEN: Of course he is.

CHRIS: Well, I’m going to eat. Dig in if you want.

Chris removes sandwiches wrapped in tinfoil from the rucksack and places them on the blanket. He then takes out some cans of beer, opens one and takes a long drink.

CHRIS: Not as cold as I’d like but I’m not complaining. Liz?

He unwraps a sandwich and starts to eat. Liz joins him.

LIZ: We shouldn’t stay too long. It’s a long walk back. I don’t want to get caught in the dark.

BEN: There’s plenty of time.

LIZ: Are you sure you don’t want something to eat Ben?

Ben ignores her, takes out his phone and turns the music back on.

CHRIS: Maybe we could give the music a rest?

BEN: *(Ignoring)* Even though that music was written over two hundred years ago, I believe it was sending us a message. Nature is trying to tell us something.

CHRIS: It’s a nice piece of music Ben, leave it at that.

BEN: I wouldn’t expect you to understand.

CHRIS: Don’t patronise me. We came out for a walk, to enjoy a nice day and suddenly you’re in full eco warrior mode.

LIZ: He has a point Ben. Why do you do this? Why does everything have to be so intense, so urgent?

BEN: When it comes to the environment, it is urgent.

LIZ: You can't save the world in an afternoon.

CHRIS: Why can't you enjoy the moment?

BEN: What moment are you enjoying? Stuffing your face with a stale sandwich and drinking warm beer?

CHRIS: You know what I mean?

BEN: I've been enjoying the moment since we arrived. I'm just concerned that we don't have many moments left to enjoy.

CHRIS: For fucks sake!

LIZ: Chris!

CHRIS: I've had enough. I'm going.

BEN: I never wanted you here Chris.

CHRIS: There you are!

BEN: But I'm glad you are here.

LIZ: And it is nice to be here. Don't mind him. He's tired.

BEN: I need you to be my witnesses.

CHRIS: Here he goes again.

LIZ: Witnesses for what?

BEN: We're killing it, the planet, but it's not too late.

Chris stands up.

CHRIS: You're like a broken record Ben. I've had enough.

Liz shakes her head.

BEN: Go then. We don't need you here. Best of luck getting back down.

CHRIS: Are you coming Liz?

BEN: I said go on. We don't need your negativity.

LIZ: Ben!

BEN: That's the problem. Nobody listens. Nobody cares.

LIZ: Are you alright Ben?

BEN: I felt so helpless. I had all these feelings inside me but I didn't know what to do. Then it came to me. It was so simple really.

*Ben is almost in a trance like state, swaying to the music.
Long pause.*

CHRIS: (To Liz) Is he Ok? What is it?

LIZ: Come on Ben. We'll go back down, it's getting late.

Ben doesn't react.

CHRIS: What's wrong with him?

Liz shrugs.

CHRIS: Is it the music?

He picks up Ben's phone and stops the music.

BEN: It's alright. It's still in my head.

Liz grabs Ben by the arm.

LIZ: Come on Ben, let's go.

Ben pulls away and moves left.

BEN: It was staring me in the face but I chose to ignore it just like you Chris and even you Liz! It can't be ignored anymore. That's why I came up here. What better place. It's perfect.

LIZ: You're scaring me now, Ben. Stop it.

BEN: I knew there was nothing I could say but maybe a gesture would work.

LIZ: A gesture?

BEN: Then people might take notice.

Chris starts packing his rucksack.

CHRIS: Come on Liz.

BEN: You must stay.

He moves close to the edge DL.

LIZ: Careful Ben. It's dangerous there.

BEN: I'm not in any danger. I finally understand.

CHRIS: You're upsetting Liz. Whatever you're doing, stop it.

Ben turns towards the drop.

BEN: This is going to be so beautiful.

CHRIS: He's not going to ...

LIZ: Come away from the edge. We'll talk.

BEN: No one really listens.

LIZ: We will. Won't we Chris?

CHRIS: Just step back from the edge.

BEN: *(Turns to face them)* I wanted to make a sacrifice. To show people that I was really serious.

LIZ: We know that.

BEN: You're here as a witness Liz so that everyone will understand why. I hadn't planned on you being here Chris but you too will have the privilege.

CHRIS: What if we both left now? Then you wouldn't have any witnesses. I don't want to be a witness.

BEN: You already are.

Pause.

BEN: I wouldn't recommend going back down now. You'd never make it before dark. It's too dangerous.

He turns away.

LIZ: No Ben, stop.

She gestures to Chris to do something. He shrugs.

BEN: I've written it all down in my blog. It will auto publish at twelve noon tomorrow.

CHRIS: Christ! You had it all planned and you just used us. Why did you have to involve us?

BEN: I told you.

CHRIS: Whatever you're thinking of doing won't make one bit of difference.

LIZ: Chris!

CHRIS: It will be news for a day. It won't achieve anything.

BEN: What else can I do?

LIZ: Just think Ben. Think of your family, your friends. Think of us.

BEN: Our lives are just an instant, a brief flash of light and then gone. We're insignificant ... but the world, nature ... we're killing it. Humans are like a disease on the world but nature will fight back.

LIZ: There are other ways. You haven't thought this through.

BEN: I've thought of nothing else for weeks.

LIZ: Come away from the edge and we'll talk. I promise we will listen. Won't we Chris?

CHRIS: Of course.

BEN: It's too late.

Ben turns away to face the drop. Liz thinks fast.

LIZ: You never showed me where you planted the daffodils. I'd like to see them. Will you show me?

BEN: Just back there. You can't miss them.

Pause. Liz motions to Chris to get ready. She moves further DS to distract Ben. Chris moves US.

LIZ: Tell me about the day you planted them. How were you feeling?

BEN: That day?

LIZ: I've never seen such a beautiful daffodil. The colour is very unusual. It must be the altitude. Look.

Ben is distracted. He steps back slightly and turns to look. Quickly Chris pounces on him, grabs him and pulls him back from the edge. Both men tussle.

BEN: What are you doing? Let me go!

LIZ: Hold on to him Chris.

CHRIS: Take it easy now Ben. Relax.

The struggle continues. Ben tries to get free, he slips and falls heavily to the ground centre stage.

CHRIS: Now, stay down Ben.

Ben remains motionless.

LIZ: Ben.

No movement. Liz rushes to Ben.

LIZ: Ben! Ben! Are you Ok?

CHRIS: What's wrong?

LIZ: I don't know. Ben, wake up.

Liz bends down close to Ben

LIZ: He's not breathing.

CHRIS: (*Shaking Ben*) Come on Ben. Wake up!

LIZ: Check his pulse.

Chris does so.

CHRIS: I can't find any.

LIZ: What?

She grabs Ben's wrist.

CHRIS: I think he's ... I think he's dead

LIZ: Jesus! What did you do to him?

CHRIS: I hardly touched him.

LIZ: *(Crying)* No ... no.. he can't be.

CHRIS: We had to stop him. He was going to jump. We had to ...

LIZ: He can't be. He was just do something ... CPR .. whatever.

Chris tries to do CPR.

CHRIS: I don't know how to do this. He must have hit his head ... I don't think this will do any good.

LIZ: Don't stop! We need to get help.

CHRIS: Check your phone again.

She does.

LIZ: No signal.

Chris stops CPR.

CHRIS: This is no good. Maybe I should try and make my way down.

LIZ: You heard what he said about trying to get down in the dark.

CHRIS: I have to try.

LIZ: I don't want to be left on my own. Are you sure he's

CHRIS: Yes.

LIZ: What can we do?

CHRIS: We'll have to wait until morning.

LIZ: *(Panicking)* I can't do that. We could die up here too.

CHRIS: No, we'll be fine. Just let me think. *(Pause)* Jesus. How can we explain this?

LIZ: What?

CHRIS: It doesn't look ...

LIZ: We'll tell them exactly what happened.

CHRIS: They won't believe us. They might suspect us of
Why did he have to drag us into this?

LIZ: We'll tell them the truth.

CHRIS: He was really going to do it, wasn't he? He would have jumped.

LIZ: I don't know. I don't know anything anymore.

CHRIS: Because if he didn't mean to do it then I ... Oh God!
What did I do?

LIZ: You were trying to stop him.

CHRIS: But what if he wasn't I'm responsible.

LIZ: Don't think like that.

CHRIS: What will the guards think? It looks ... How do we explain it?

LIZ: We'll tell the truth.

CHRIS: Everyone will think that I did it.

LIZ: They won't.

CHRIS: The longer we leave it the worse it will look. No. I have to go down and get help.

LIZ: It's too dangerous.

CHRIS: I have to do something.

LIZ: I told you. I can't stay here on my own.

CHRIS: Come with me.

LIZ: You're not thinking straight Chris.

Chris thinks. During the following, he becomes more agitated.

CHRIS: Perhaps ... no ... but maybe ...

LIZ: What?

CHRIS: Let's say he was planning to go ahead with it. Maybe if we ... well ... if we made it look like he actually did it ...

LIZ: What are you saying?

CHRIS: Just listen. All we'd have to do is drag him /

LIZ: Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?

CHRIS: Then it will look like he did as he intended to do and /

LIZ: How could you even think such a thing?

CHRIS: He'll be found by someone else and we'll be out of the picture.

LIZ: I don't believe this.

CHRIS: It's what he planned.

Liz looks at him in horror.

CHRIS: I mean he's already dead.

LIZ: That would be like really killing him. Worse.

CHRIS: No one will know.

LIZ: I will know. You will know. Listen to what you're saying.

Chris breaks down.

CHRIS: I'm ... I'm sorry Liz. I don't know what to do. I really didn't mean to harm him. I was only trying to help.

LIZ: You did what you had to do.

CHRIS: I didn't mean ... I only ...

LIZ: We'll stay up here until dawn and then make our way down. As soon as we get a signal, we'll ring the guards and take it from there.

CHRIS: Okay.

Liz embraces Chris.

LIZ: It wasn't your fault.

Long embrace. Chris relaxes.

CHRIS: What'll we do with Ben?

LIZ: It's best not to touch him.

Chris picks up the blanket.

CHRIS: I'll cover him.

LIZ: I think we'll need the blanket more than Ben tonight.

Chris nods. Liz moves to Ben.

LIZ: Poor Ben. What was going on in that troubled mind of yours?

CHRIS: Check his phone. Maybe it has a signal.

Liz checks Ben's phone.

LIZ: Nothing.

Chris takes the blanket, sits down and drapes it over his shoulders

CHRIS: Come here.

She sits beside him. He drapes the blanket around both of them.

CHRIS: It'll be alright, won't it?

Liz nods

LIZ: It's going to be a long night.

She looks at Ben's phone, turns the music back on and begins to sob gently. Chris puts his arms around her and they snuggle together to keep warm. The lights slowly fade while the music swells.

END OF PLAY