

Remote Access

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Scene 1

PHILIP's room. There is a big pile of bills, letters and exercise books on a desk. Beside the desk is a bottle of vodka. LIVVY is walking in and out of the room, carrying boxes out. PHILIP is calling out to her wherever she is.

PHILIP: Do you have to do this now, Livvy?

LIVVY: There was never going to be a good time, was there?

PHILIP: But on a Sunday evening? Before work? Look, I can stop being like I am. I can be stronger.

LIVVY: I keep telling you: you're strong, Philip. That isn't why.

PHILIP: Can we talk about why it hasn't felt the same? I'm sorry I was banging on about my lesson-planning and my book-marking and the fact I haven't looked at letters and bills for a month. And-

LIVVY: We've been through this. You'll cope. You have your subscription.

PHILIP: But who can I actually *talk* to? Now that my mum... Now that she's...

LIVVY: How about Tim?

PHILIP: Tim doesn't give a fuck about me. Tim's an absolute *colleague*.

LIVVY: Or any of your other friends. Look, you've got the Premium subscription.

PHILIP: And how am I going to afford that when I'm living by myself?

LIVVY: I'm sorry, Philip. I can't do this now. *(Checking phone)* My car's outside.

PHILIP: *(Picking up the bottle of vodka, ashamed)* Can you take this? *(LIVVY takes it)*

LIVVY: Oh, and don't forget it's Erica's birthday tomorrow.

PHILIP: And the fucking birthdays. Nothing stops the march of the birthdays. More things to do.

LIVVY: *(Stopping for the first time, holding his hand and staring him in the eyes)* Philip, I'm sorry. *(Exits)*

PHILIP: *(While LIVVY is exiting)* I'm sorry too.

PHILIP slumps into his chair. He flicks through his letters and bills, issuing heavy sighs. He weighs the pile of exercise books in his hands and slams them down, defeated. He gets up and paces the room, rubbing his hands together, clearly very stressed. Standing by his desk, he holds his head in his hands. He gets out his phone and presses a button.

The calm voice of ABDUL is heard, as if from a call centre. We can hear a keyboard being used.

ABDUL: Hi Philip, your Mellow Meadows Premium technician today is Abdul. Give me a second to see what I can do. I'm just remotely accessing you now.

PHILIP's hands gently detach and drop by his side. Controlled by ABDUL, he walks over to the window on the opposite side of the stage to the desk. He breathes deeply and calmly. At the window a pleasant green light comes in from the garden and we hear the sound of birds singing.

ABDUL: So I'll just be terminating some of these nasty thought processes. *(We will occasionally hear the sound of a program being closed down)* Right, here's a cognitive feedback loop that feeds on your sense of inadequacy... Here's a low amplitude wave of negative emotion oscillating around certain people in your life... And I'll be adjusting the levels of the different neurotransmitters in your system, to get you back to a nice balance. While I do this, would you like to hear your prepared message to yourself in the time of an episode? *(PHILIP nods)* You are a kind and caring person. Your friends love you very much. You have always been there for them. You have also been a good teacher for twelve years. Would you like to hear some messages of thanks from your former students? *(PHILIP shakes his head)* OK, and would you like to hear the message left to you by your mother? *(PHILIP shakes his head more emphatically)* Philip, is there anything else you require? *(PHILIP shakes his head)* In that case, I'm giving you back control. Remote access switching off.

PHILIP returns to his desk and calmly starts on his work. As the lights fade out, an electronic voice is heard:

VOICE 1: Would you like to review your technician? If so, please press 1. Thank you for using Mellow Meadows Premium.

Scene 2

PHILIP is working at his desk, stressed. There is a full bottle of vodka by his desk. He starts to pace the room and dials a number on his phone, which goes to voicemail.

PHILIP: Hi, don't worry about picking up. *(short, sad laugh)*. Just wanted to talk about today. How could they do that to me? *(Making sign for inverted commas)* "Performance management responsibility and remuneration adjustment." Same work, less pay, with a sprinkling of humiliation. Well I can say goodbye to ever getting my Premium account back. Anyway, I'm busy and you're, well... I've got so much stuff to do because I was preparing for that meeting. I miss you.

PHILIP returns to work but is soon overwhelmed by it.

How am I going to finish all of this?..

PHILIP checks his watch, sighs, and gets more and more agitated. He picks up the vodka bottle, puts it on his desk, but then calmly places it back down on the floor. He calmly walks over to the window – in a similar manner as when he was under remote access. After staring out of the window for a while, he calmly returns to work. Fade out.

Scene 3

PHILIP and LIVVY sitting in his flat, drinking tea.

LIVVY: I've gotten used to Yasmin, she's nice, and Steve – well, he's moving out, so we'll need to find another housemate. But yeah, that's me. *(After a long silence)* So are you still using Mellow Meadows?

PHILIP: You know, I actually haven't called them since you left. There've been a few nights when it's seemed like I'd have to but...

LIVVY: That's great, Philip.

PHILIP: I couldn't keep paying for Premium so I suppose I'm on Basic now.

LIVVY: Me too.

PHILIP: It's part-subsidised by the NHS, isn't it? I mean did you see that program on the call-centres they use for Basic? The huge one in Huddersfield? The waiting times? The inept technicians? Jesus Christ. I don't know. It's probably fine, right? And I've kept off the vodka too. *(pause)* I'm doing surprisingly well, all considering, what with work and... *(pause)* You know, it would've been her birthday next week.

LIVVY: I know. I'll be thinking of you.

PHILIP: *(sad jokey tone)* Nothing stops the march of the birthdays. *(pause)* You were always the one to send the card from us, which is embarrassing... Livvy, I still leave her voicemail, you know.

LIVVY: I know.

PHILIP: Look, I think if I can get to the holidays, I think I'll be fine.

LIVVY: It's really good to see you. I don't want you to think I'm just, you know, checking up on you or anything.

PHILIP: It's cool, Livvy. It's good to see you too.

Scene 4

PHILIP at his desk, on his phone.

PHILIP: Hi mum. Don't worry about picking up. Sorry – same old joke. I'm just worried about this observation tomorrow. I mean, what if they – what if they decide enough's enough and they let me go? I don't know. I'm sorry that I've become such a fucking self-indulgent *downer*. You would've laughed at me –

with me – and that would've helped. I've let you down. I'm seeing Livvy later. That'll help. Will it help? I don't know. Sorry I didn't call on your birthday yesterday. *(Puts phone down)*. Who am I apologising to?

PHILIP looks through a folder of work, sighing and wringing his hands. He gets up and starts pacing.

What am I going to do?.. Why can't I just do what I need to do?..

As before, PHILIP picks up the vodka bottle, puts it on his desk, but then calmly puts it back down. As before, he calmly walks over to the window. After staring out of it for a while, he calmly returns to work.

You've got this. You've got this.

After a brief period of work, he suddenly stops and then springs up, kicking his chair back in the process. He spins around, looking all about him. Deep in anxious thought, he goes over his previous actions: picking up and putting down the vodka bottle, retracing his steps to the window. He gets out his phone. He lets it ring through to voicemail.

Hi Livvy, are we still on for 8? Look, don't go to the pub, just come straight to our flat – my flat. There's something I really need to talk to you about. So come soon. Just come as quick as you can.

PHILIP paces the room. He gets out his phone again. He is exasperated when he gets through to voicemail again.

Livvy, I'm sorry, it's me again. I've got lots of thoughts racing around my head. Do you think that it's possible that... Look, you know how much I used to rely on Mellow Meadows, right? For years. But here's the thing: I haven't called them since you left. And this crazy thought just came to me. What if they've still been helping me? Even though I haven't asked them to? I know how

ludicrous this sounds – but it wouldn't be hard for them, right? I'm going to look online. I need to find some answers. See you soon.

PHILIP researches on his phone, pacing the room, getting more and more agitated. Fade out.

Scene 5

Fade in. It's later in the day in PHILIP's room. PHILIP is on his phone.

Livvy, please pick up. Are you nearly here? I've done a lot of reading. I'm pretty sure that they've been intervening - using remote access when I'm in trouble. Oh my God, I think they've been doing it for months. I just read the blog of this guy who had exactly the same thing happen to him when he got bumped down to Basic. They take away the fancy package: the nice soothing voice, the guaranteed waiting times. But they still won't let you *do* something to yourself. Why would they risk it? It would wreck their ratings. How else have I been making it through? On my mum's birthday yesterday I had this strange feeling – when I tried to look at pictures of her, I couldn't keep the focus. It was like I had a mouse pointer that just started drifting off to the top of the screen, but I wasn't controlling it. And every time when I get so stressed like I've always done, they take me over to the window. They rebalance me. Tell me you're close, right?

PHILIP puts the phone down, paces and looks around. Then he calls out, assuming someone can hear him:

You're logged in right now. Aren't you? Just give me some sign. I promise you I will review this technician so poorly. Switch this off.

LIVVY knocks on the door and PHILIP lets her in.

Livvy, thank God you're here. It's Mellow Meadows-

LIVVY: I got your messages, Philip.

PHILIP: Good. So they could be controlling anything I say or do right now. That's the power we've given them, right? We gave them that power to help us. So if I start denying this, it might be because they're using remote access to control my words. They don't want this to be found out, for us to spread the truth. They've shut down so many websites-

LIVVY: Just calm down. Take a minute. Sit down.

PHILIP: It makes so much sense, don't you see? It costs the government on average, what, X amount per alcoholic, Y amount per depressive, Z amount per suicide – imagine how messy the clear-ups can get. The taxes they lose.

LIVVY: I'm sure there's some explanation. Just calm down. I'm going to find a number we can ring together, just to put your mind at rest.

LIVVY leafs through papers on PHILIP's desk, opens letters, and investigates his phone.

PHILIP: Millions of people are on Basic and it's part-subsidised by the NHS – the government – so why wouldn't they monitor us? All the weak people, like me? Some of the stuff on the sites I've found – it's outrageous. *(Addressing Mellow Meadows)* I can feel you here. How long have you been lurking inside me? How many people do you watch over? *(Softly)* How many tragedies have you saved us from?

LIVVY: *(Calmly holding PHILIP by his shoulders, speaking slowly)* Philip, you never activated your Basic account. You missed your payments on Premium, but you never sorted out a replacement. I know because I had to do it for my own account. Mellow Meadows cut you off. You have no subscription.

PHILIP frantically rifles through his letters and checks on his phone.

(Trying to be positive and reassuring) You've been coping absolutely fine by yourself. There's nobody there, Phil.

PHILIP: *(Dejected, walking away from her)* Just give me a second.

LIVVY: Nobody's controlling you. You're free. And I know that might be scary, but you'll-

PHILIP: *(In an icy tone)* Get out. Everything we've done for each other, Olivia, and you try to trick me like this. You've been working with them.

LIVVY: Listen to what you're saying!

PHILIP: Get out of my flat.

LIVVY: Phil, just listen. I'm worried-

PHILIP: Did you plant the letters? Did you mess with my emails? Did you-

LIVVY: No! *(Holding her palms up to him)* Phil!

PHILIP: *(Marching her out)* I knew I needed help, but *this*?

LIVVY: You've got to believe me. There's nobody there, Phil.

LIVVY exits. PHILIP anxiously paces the room and looks around as if searching for something. He slumps down at his desk, his head in his hands. He rises and walks calmly over the window. He stares out. The sound of birds singing.