



Landmines

Phil Davies



Characters

VIDA

MURRAY
SCARLETT
TAYLOR
FREIBURG
SAMUELS

WILLIAMS
ESTHER
KAZ
BARKER
PRATLEY

CHANTAL
JO
AMMO
COBEN
ERICA
DANIEL

REGGIE
CHARLIE
ALEXI
ANGE
CRISTY

CLUBBERS
DJ
POLAR ICE
ANDY
LEXI
CAT
SECURITY STAFF

JEAN
TY
ELEANOR
MICKY

JOURNALIST
CAMERA OPERATIVE

Note for Scene 16

Polar Ice lyrics written by original cast member Denneil Dunbar.

1.

VIDA (*into phone*). Ambulance ambulance

What do you –

What do you –

What do you mean none?

None?

How can there be none?

Police, then.

Police!

You'd better get the police.

I think I've done something pretty bad.

2.

A chair is brought for VIDA and she is aided to sit down.

She shifts around on the chair as she speaks.

VIDA. I kept getting this

Like

This lump – (*Points to her throat.*)

And I couldn't swallow –

Well, I could, but I couldn't if you know what I mean.

Had to talk myself into swallowing every time which is incredibly draining.

It isn't normal

And it got worse as everything else did – as the world started to burn

As their tentacles spread further...

MURRAY, SCARLETT, TAYLOR, FREIBURG and SAMUELS, *the staff of the media start-up 'The Altar', surround the action and get straight to work. Unless otherwise stated, they remain on the edges of the action throughout the play.*

...As everyone happily swallowed their poison, the lump felt bigger.

Why am I telling you this?

Do you even want to know about this?

You asked about physical symptoms and that's what came to –

I'm not saying the lump in my throat made me do it by the way!

That would be...

No

I didn't do it because of that

I did it because we were heading for civil war and no one was doing anything to stop it.

3.

VIDA tries to grab at young secondary-school children as they run around but they constantly evade her. Their eyes are transfixed on mobile-phone screens. Whatever it is they're watching fills them with delight and excitement and they try to recreate its content.

She eventually manages to grab hold of a KID, snatches their phone.

She stares into the phone. She doesn't want to watch what she is about to watch but she can't stop herself.

She presses play on the video.

An out-of-focus smartphone video plays. It's a street on an early summer's evening and some people are screaming. On the other side of the road, a man is crouched over a woman and the movement of his arm makes it look like he's repeatedly punching her motionless body. A couple tentatively try to stop him but he doesn't seem to notice. The video zooms in. That's when we see he's not punching her. That's when we see the blood-soaked kitchen knife. He's stabbing her repeatedly. He turns, looks directly at the camera.

She drops the phone.

4.

SCARLETT, TAYLOR, FREIBURG and SAMUELS take over the stage and set up their office. An emergency meeting has been called and they're sat around a large table, waiting for the editor. There's a visible nervous excitement about them.

MURRAY marches in.

MURRAY. Who did it?

Silence.

One of you did. I know it wasn't me.

Wish it was.

Silence.

If there's one personality trait I can't fucking stand, it's modesty.

Silence.

Well, whichever one of you it was

You're a fucking genius

Four million views in less than five hours.

We've had more subscribers than the servers could handle.

MURRAY goes to each one of them and plants a huge kiss on their open mouths.

You beautiful

Beautiful

Beautiful
 Beautiful
 Fuckers.

5.

VIDA. It shouldn't matter that it was my hometown
 But it was
 And I can't escape that.
 The details 'emerge' don't they, as the press say
 And they make me feel as though I was there
 Because I know those shops
 And that pavement and those streetlamps
 I know the streets that cut off
 The first-rights and second-lefts
 I know all about that exact location
 So when the details emerged
 They made me feel like I was there
 Like I was her
 I could sense a seven-inch blade being plunged below
 my breast
 And out the other side
 I could sense it being pulled out of my torso and thrust back in again
 And again
 And again
 Fifty-six times
 I know she felt every single one of them
 Because I do too
 I lay in bed that night
 Imagining what happened
 And when I saw how he rammed the knife in and ripped it back out
 It struck me
 His hands
 His arms
 His whole body
 Moving decisively
 Being decisive in every movement
 There's not a lot more decisive than a seven-inch blade
 Being plunged and pulled over and over and over again
 It was then I realised
 To prevent the hate
 And delete the lies
 Be decisive
 In everything you do
 Be decisive
 But when I awoke the next day, I couldn't work out the difference between being decisive
 and doing everything that came in to my head.

6.

A meeting room of a secondary school. The same large table and chairs, with newspapers left over from Scene Four.

WILLIAMS, ESTHER, KAZ and BARKER with VIDA sat with her head on the table. She looks tiny.

KAZ (*looking out of the window to the road below*). There's about ten of ours going in.

ESTHER. Ten?!

VIDA *joins* KAZ *at the window*.

KAZ. At least.

WILLIAMS. I hope that little bastard Niazi's there.

ESTHER. Do you mean Ahmed?

WILLIAMS. I prefer little bastard Niazi.

KAZ. They're shoving him in now.

WILLIAMS. Good.

KAZ. He's trying to get –
They're restraining him.

WILLIAMS. Good.

KAZ. What did he do?

WILLIAMS. Got cocky.

ESTHER. But why's he getting picked up?

WILLIAMS. What, you saying he doesn't deserve it?

ESTHER. I'm asking why he's been picked up.

WILLIAMS. I sent him out of my lesson this morning for being a cocky little twat and on his way to the door he said something about Allah under his breath.

VIDA. So?

WILLIAMS. I'm not asking you.

VIDA. How is saying Allah enough of a reason?

WILLIAMS. You wanna defend that kid?

VIDA. I want to understand why he's getting sent away.

WILLIAMS. I don't need to explain myself to you.

Something VIDA sees below makes her gasp with panic.

VIDA. Is that Dominic?

KAZ. Think so.

ESTHER. What's the matter?

VIDA. Oh my god.

VIDA returns to her seat and puts her head on the table. They watch her.

VIDA gets back up and looks out of the window. She feels a pain in her midriff. She returns to her seat and puts her head on the table. They watch her.

ESTHER. Is she...?

WILLIAMS. A fucking drama queen...?

Awkward silence.

BARKER (*making conversation*). Seen that video?

KAZ. It's fake.

ESTHER. Are you sure?

KAZ. Blood's the wrong colour.

WILLIAMS. It's in the fucking paper you tit.

ESTHER. What's that prove?

BARKER. You wouldn't be saying that if it was the *Guardian*.

ESTHER. They don't lie like these bastards.

Laughter.

KAZ (*checking on phone*). It is real.

WILLIAMS. Told you.

KAZ. I thought it was fake. The blood, it looked...

ESTHER. Shouldn't be allowed to watch it.

BARKER. Why not?

KAZ. I honestly wouldn't have watched it if...

ESTHER. Surely even your cold dead heart can see it's not right?

BARKER. Did you watch it?

ESTHER. That's not the point.

BARKER. You did didn't you.

ESTHER. What difference does it make?

BARKER. You fucking...

KAZ. It shouldn't be an option.

WILLIAMS. It's simple: don't like it, don't watch it.

KAZ. Not everyone can control themselves though.

BARKER. So we should all lower our standards because of a few idiots with no willpower?

WILLIAMS. Might help them learn. They might think, oh I didn't like watching that bitch getting stabbed so I better not press play next time.

VIDA raises her head. Everyone else freezes. VIDA stands, picks up a chair and forces one of its legs into WILLIAMS's mouth.

VIDA. And Vida rammed the chair leg so far down the bigot's throat that she was never able to speak again.

VIDA returns the chair, sits on it and places her head back on the table.

ESTHER. The whole internet needs policing.

BARKER. Who by? The 'liberal elite'?

WILLIAMS. Spend all your time making sure nobody's feelings get hurt.

ESTHER. By people who believe in truth and fairness.

BARKER. Believe me, your idea of truth and fairness is a world away from mine, darling.

ESTHER. What if it was one of your family in the video?

WILLIAMS. Right, listen. Let's be honest about this – she had it coming –

ESTHER. What?

WILLIAMS. Maybe not had it coming... She put herself in the firing line though, you've gotta accept that.

ESTHER. How d'you work that one out?

WILLIAMS. Defending terrorists for a start.

BARKER. It's true, you know.

ESTHER. No, that isn't true.

BARKER points out something in the newspaper to ESTHER.

KAZ. Not condoning what happened to her.

WILLIAMS. No, not condoning it.

ESTHER. You are.

BARKER. No.

WILLIAMS. It's just...

KAZ. If you associate yourself with those types of people –

ESTHER. Which she didn't.

WILLIAMS. You have to be prepared for consequences.

PRATLEY, an assistant head, enters, flustered, unprepared, logs in to a computer and turns on a projector.

PRATLEY. I am so late.

(Noticing VIDA.) Are you?

Is she?

(Mouths silently to the others.) Is she okay?

Some shrugs.

(Mouths silently again.) What's her name?

Some shrugs.

Hello?

Are you okay?

(Looking at notes in book.) Is it Vida?

Vida?

Some nods.

Vida? Are you alright?

Silence.

Do you want to take a moment outside?

Silence.

Okay...

Erm...

I'll just...

We'll start and –

Hands out sheets to all the trainee teachers.

Thanks for coming at such short notice.

You probably heard, the D of E have updated schools on –

BARKER. More new rules.

PRATLEY. These are good ones.

KAZ. Yey! I love good rules.

Sorry. I just do.

PRATLEY. Okay, so some clarity on the 'British Values and Traditions' policy –

VIDA. Why was Dominic Green picked up?

PRATLEY. Sorry?

VIDA. I saw him getting pushed onto the coach.

PRATLEY. We're not here to talk about that –

VIDA. What did he do?

PRATLEY. Did you hear what I said?

VIDA. I don't care what you said. I want to know what he did.

PRATLEY. Who do you think you're talking to?

VIDA. Just tell me what he did. Is it too much to ask?

PRATLEY. Something to do with his history teacher.

VIDA doubles over.

VIDA. I've been stabbed.

ESTHER. Are you okay?

They watch VIDA suffer.

VIDA falls onto her hands and knees.

VIDA. These kids will never come back.

Their whole families deported for adolescent boldness

Even if their parents lived here for decades,

Even if they have no ties to the place they're going to be dumped in,

Even if they fled the place because it's not safe.

She stands, confronts PRATLEY.

The message is clear:

Raise the drawbridge,

Find as many categories of people as possible

Who we can demonise and victimise.

Fill the catapults

And rid ourselves of the responsibility.

VIDA swipes the newspapers and hand-outs off the table and then pushes PRATLEY.

I can't be a part of this.

7.

A spotlight falls on VIDA.

VIDA. A boy goes up to the librarian during a library lesson,

A really nice boy

Wanted to do well, you know. The kind with parents who do all the hard work for you.

And he says,

'Where are all the black books?'

I didn't know what he was on about at first,

The librarian grinned a belittling grin and said,

'We're not talking about your black books again.'

The boy, Dominic, he kissed his teeth

Which I thought was completely unlike him,

'You got rid of all the black books. You're getting rid of my history. You're deleting my role models. No books on Africa or the Caribbean. No slavery days, no uprisings, no defeating the imperialists.

No books on black kings and queens,

And we had a black queen here,

Charlotte,

Bet you didn't know that.

Nah,

I've had enough of this shit.' And then he swiped everything off the librarian's desk onto the floor.

The librarian looked at me, as the teacher responsible for this boy who was demonstrating such thrilling defiance,

He looked at me like he was drowning
And urged me to do something,
To take control,
To go against my instincts and punish him.
You should never, I now know, punish someone on behalf of someone else
But I did
And they got him taken away.
When they look back on now
In years to come,
If there's anything left,
I want them to see,
I want them to know,
Not that I said no,
Not that I didn't vote for this,
Not that I shouted against it,
But that I went out there and did something.

*

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