

Ch@t

by

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Feature screenplay. Romantic comedy

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INT. EMILY/KAYLI'S FLAT - LOUNGE - LATE MORNING

Meet EMILY, early 20s, marching into the room, her uniform giving away her job as a café worker. She holds aloft a jar of moisturiser like it's Exhibit A in a court of law.

EMILY

Kayli. A word. Now.

Let's take a moment to describe EMILY. She hardly wears any make-up and her hair hangs in a natural tangle, not cut and styled... because she doesn't think it's that important. She's the type of girl onlookers would call "ordinary."

Meet KAYLI, same age, spread idly across the sofa.

KAYLI

Are you going to the café today?

Theatrical and overblown, EMILY gestures at her work attire, as if to say, "Like, duh, obviously."

KAYLI

You won't ever catch me working on my day off.

Let's take a moment to describe KAYLI. She wears too much make-up and her clothes reveal a tad too much flesh... because she deffo thinks it's important. Oh, and her wild dyed-red hair (with black roots showing) is pretty cool.

EMILY

They've asked me to cover the lunchtime shift. Somebody's pulled a sickie.

KAYLI

You're way too soft, Emily. You let people take advantage of you.

EMILY

Don't I know it? Like you using all my moisturiser.

KAYLI

You said I could borrow a smidgeon.

EMILY

Since when did a smidgeon mean the whole bloody jar?

As EMILY seats herself at the nearby dining table, the letters of the month and year when this movie is set break free from a wall-mounted calendar and float into the air.

NB: The girls can't see this weird phenomenon. It's purely for our benefit.

EMILY screws open the jar and shows KAYLI its sparse interior. Out of the jar spill other floating words, the location of our characters. All words assemble above the girls to create --

CAPTION: "July 2000 - Worthing, West Sussex, England."

EMILY

See? Old Mother Hubbard empty.

KAYLI

In my defence, it came with 50% extra free. Most of what I used was the free half.

EMILY

That's... not how it works.

KAYLI

Oh, and I always need to apply two layers. I've told you a zillion times. That cheap tat is a false economy.

Flabbergasted, EMILY opens her mouth to react, but --

-- on the table, her mobile phone (a handset of the era, a Nokia 3310) screams it's painfully high-pitched jingle.

KAYLI

That'll be your work.

KAYLI holds an imaginary phone to her ear and mocks in an overblown posh telephone voice --

KAYLI

Emily, be a darling and slog your guts out twenty-four hours a day for us. Thank you. Kiss, kiss.

Grabbing her phone, EMILY can't help but see the funny side of KAYLI'S quip. For the first time, we see a bond between the two girls. She doesn't recognise the number, but still takes the call.

EMILY

Hello?

NATHAN (V.O.)

Hey. It's me.

EMILY

Who's me?

NATHAN (V.O.)

Shyboy549.

A harsh shot of icy dread slaps EMILY'S face.

EMILY

What??!

KAYLI

Who is it?

A dumbfounded EMILY gawks in stunned silence at KAYLI who abandons the sofa to trot towards her friend. EMILY turns away from her bamboozled flatmate. Phone convo continues.

EMILY

Who gave you my number?

NATHAN (V.O.)

You did.

EMILY'S face tells us she's certain she didn't.

NATHAN (V.O.)

Listen, I know it's a bit forward,
but... do you fancy meeting up?

EMILY

Um. One day. Perhaps.

NATHAN (V.O.)

How about now?

EMILY

What do you mean now?

NATHAN (V.O.)

I'm right here. In Worthing.

EMILY

Oh, my God!!

In a goggle-eyed panic, she drops her phone. It hits the deck, the back panel pops off, the battery pings out.

EMILY

Shit, shit, shit! It's him! He's here!

KAYLI

Who?

EMILY

Him. Shyboy549.

KAYLI

Oh, wow. That's great.

EMILY

Great? It's a total nightmare. How the hell did he get hold of my number?

KAYLI. Guilt mode.

KAYLI

I might have accidentally... on purpose... given it to him.

EMILY

What? When?

KAYLI

Yesterday. When you were in the bath.

KAYLI indicates to EMILY'S computer (a bulky tower unit, monitor and keyboard) perched upon a nearby desk.

KAYLI

You left the chatroom up. So I sent him a private message.

EMILY

Oh, God, God, God, God, God. You don't know what you've done.

KAYLI

Oh, yes, I do. I've finally got you two talking. Like, properly. With your mouths. Instead of hiding behind stupid text on a computer screen.

EMILY

You don't understand. We can't meet up. Not yet.

KAYLI

Why the hell not? That guy is fit.
-- Oh, Emily. Speaking as your
best friend and self-appointed
personal romance representative,
do not, I repeat, do not trash
this opportunity.

EMILY

But he doesn't even know I exist.

KAYLI

Course he does. You've been
chatting online to him for months.

EMILY

Yes, but he'll reject me when we
meet up in the real world because
I'm ugly.

She's not actually ugly. She just thinks she is.

KAYLI

He knows exactly what you look
like. He's seen your photo.

EMILY

He's seen a photo. I sent him the
one of us two on the beach.

KAYLI

So?

EMILY

He thinks I'm the pretty one with
the red hair.

KAYLI and EMILY stare wide-eyed at each other.

KAYLI

Oh, my God.

EMILY

Exactly. I'm hoping for a future
with somebody I've never met who
doesn't even know I'm me. How
mental is that?

KAYLI

Oh, babes, this is one clerical
error you need to rectify, like,
right now.

EMILY

No chance. My only option is Plan B: Change my phone number and never use that chatroom ever again. There. Sorted.

KAYLI

Emily. The man who could turn out to be the love of your life is here. In the same town. You can't not meet him.

EMILY attempts to work things out in her head. Then --

EMILY

Right, I've got an idea. I think.

KAYLI

Is it mental?

EMILY

Totally barmy. But it should bag me enough time to figure out a way of telling him the truth. I hope.

KAYLI

Okaaaaay. So what's the plan?

EMILY

I'll arrange to meet him tonight.

KAYLI bends down and picks up the phone parts.

KAYLI

Cool. I'll snap these parts back together and you can --

EMILY

I'm not calling him yet, I'm not ready. I'll sort it when I'm on a break. Oh, and don't you dare make any arrangements for yourself tonight. You're coming along too.

KAYLI

Why?

EMILY

Because... for this to work... I need you to pretend to be me.

KAYLI gawps at the girl, mega-aghast.

EXT. WORTHING PROMENADE - LATE MORNING

NATHAN frantically paces to and fro, a mobile phone (yes, it's another Nokia 3310) pressed against his ear.

Let's take a moment to describe NATHAN. Women call him fit. Men call him expletives. To him, image is everything.

In defeat, he hangs up and ambles over to a promenade bench where he joins CHRIS, his best friend.

Let's take a moment to describe CHRIS. Women call him their "friend." Men don't call him anything. Why? CHRIS is no competition. Too invisible with his drab dress-sense and "normal" hair. To him, image isn't everything.

NATHAN

It's no good, I can't get through to her. -- Hold on, why am I doing all the donkey work? It should be you sorting out this little white lie of yours.

CHRIS

It's not a lie. Not exactly.

NATHAN

Chris. Your potential girlfriend thinks I'm you. You sent her a photo of me, you doughnut.

Ooh. The plot thickens.

CHRIS

I didn't know what else to do. You've seen what she looks like. It was a spur of the moment thing.

NATHAN

Well, we're here now, so we need to construct a plan of action.

CHRIS

Such as?

NATHAN

Telling her the truth would be a good place to start.

CHRIS

Are you mad? She's gorgeous. And I'm... not.

NATHAN

Think positive. You've been chatting to the girl for ages. You've formed a close bond. Which surely means she'll understand.

CHRIS

Oh, Nathan, let's cut our losses and go home. Back to London. Forget this travesty ever happened.

NATHAN

You can't give up on her now. You're practically on her doorstep. And you said yourself, this girl could be The One. Oh, mate, do not blow this chance.

CHRIS

Fine. You win. But only if we meet up as a foursome. Us two, those two.

NATHAN

Why?

CHRIS

So I can supervise your progress.

NATHAN

What are you banging on about?

CHRIS

Well... until I can think of a way to sort out this situation... I need you to pretend to be me.

NATHAN'S face drops from a great height.

OPENING TITLES.

INT. EMILY/KAYLI'S FLAT - LOUNGE - EARLY EVENING

It's a CLOSE-UP of that calendar at July 2000.

Oh, look, the months then "magically" rewind rapidly, June, May, April, March, February, before completing the reverse journey at January 2000.

Yes, folks, it's now SIX MONTHS EARLIER.

KAYLI sits at the dining table in a short black dress, gripping a handheld mirror and applying mascara. Her red hair is a fresh dye job, no black roots in sight.

EMILY enters, enveloped in the type of frumpy dressing gown which would make even the most gorgeous person look five hundred years old. She seats herself at her computer.

KAYLI

Ever considered a wardrobe update?

EMILY

Why would I?

KAYLI

Oh, no reason. So... are you coming out tonight or what?

EMILY

I don't do clubbing.

KAYLI

Let me guess. Instead of losing your virginity, you're planning on spending yet another evening on that dumb computer, skateboarding the interweb.

EMILY

Actually, you'll find it's "surfing the 'net."

KAYLI

Oh, babes, you need to start living. Like, in the real world. It's Saturday night. The bars will be heaving with talent. You're always saying you'd love to find yourself a man.

EMILY

If it works so well, how come you haven't got a proper boyfriend? I never see anybody offering to take you to the cinema. Or inviting you out for a romantic meal. Or telling you how much they love you.

KAYLI

The type of men I hang around with aren't like that.

EMILY

That's exactly my point. When guys take an interest in you, do they think, "Ooh, I'd love to settle down with that lovely young lady?" Like hell, they do. All they're hoping for is a trip to Between-your-legs-ville.

KAYLI

So I take it you're not coming out.

EMILY makes a face, as if to say, "Not bloody likely."

KAYLI scampers over to the sofa, plonks down her bum and places an overblown caring arm around her flatmate.

KAYLI

Pretty, pretty, pretty please. It's been, like, an ice age since we had a proper girlie night out together. Let's hit the town, yeah? Just you and me.

EMILY

You say that, but you'll only end up leaving me stranded while you get off with all the idiots on the dance floor.

KAYLI

No way. This time, it'll be different. Us two against the world.

EMILY

Promise?

KAYLI

Cross my tits and hope to die.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - WORTHING - LATE EVENING

Bored, EMILY sits alone at a table, wearing a dull top, naff jeans and hardly any make-up, idly watching KAYLI on the dance floor, idiots buzzing around her like flies to a fresh turd.

Sod this, EMILY'S had enough. She stands up and begins to shuffle away. KAYLI, a tad drunk, spots her friend's sly attempted escape and bounces over, full of life.