

Lost and Found

Chamber piece · 6-character play · 4 women, 1 man, 1 either · 18 min · Beginner

Last day of the school year: the six members of the student council have three hours to clear out the lost and found room, which is about to become a meeting room. Between a lonely ski boot and fourteen calculators, they find a notebook with no name in it that tells the story of their year, day by day, in embarrassing detail. Someone has been watching them very closely, and nobody will own up.

The lost and found room of a French high school, one afternoon at the end of June, today.

Casting

NINA (Female role, Teen) 17, president of the student council, elected in September.

ZOÉ (Female role, Teen) 16, council member, in the drama club.

MILA (Female role, Teen) 17, council member, captain of the handball team.

YASMINE (Female role, Teen) 16, council treasurer, keeps the accounts for the bake sale.

JONAS (Male role, Teen) 16, council member, wears a red scarf even in June.

ALEX (No gender marker, Teen) 16, council member since September, always takes a seat at the back.

SCENE 1

(A windowless room. Shelves, boxes, bags, a table in the middle. In a corner, Alex is sorting through a box balanced on Alex's lap.)

(Nina comes in, a list in her hand, followed by Jonas, Zoé, Mila and Yasmine.)

NINA

Right. It's two o'clock. By five o'clock, this room is empty, the table is clean, and the principal has a meeting room.

JONAS

And what do we get?

NINA

The satisfaction of a job well done.

JONAS

I'd rather have a pizza.

YASMINE

There's forty cents left in the council cash box. I can buy you an olive.

JONAS

What's your list written on the back of? It's all green on the other side.

NINA

The minutes from the last meeting. I use them as scrap paper.

JONAS

They're weird, those minutes. They turn up in our lockers the day after every meeting, all by themselves, in green ink. Like magic.

YASMINE

It's the school office, Jonas. It's not magic, it's admin.

(Mila lifts a bag and puts it straight back down.)

MILA

It smells like a locker room in here. An old locker room.

ZOÉ

It smells of abandonment. All these things nobody ever came back for... It's just so sad.

MILA

It's a ski boot, Zoé.

ZOÉ

One ski boot. That's even sadder.

NINA

Three piles. Here, what we give away. There, what we throw out. There, what goes back to its owner. We wait for Alex and then we start.

ALEX

I'm here.

(Everyone turns round.)

NINA

Since when?

ALEX

Since the start. I've already done the calculators.

YASMINE

How many are there?

ALEX

Fourteen.

YASMINE

Fourteen calculators. And then everyone wonders why the math grades keep going down.

(They get to work. Jonas pulls a scarf out of a box and wraps it round his neck, on top of his own.)

JONAS

Give away.

NINA

You're wearing it.

JONAS

I'm giving it to myself. Charity begins at home.

(Zoé pulls a trumpet out of a bag.)

ZOÉ

How do you lose a trumpet? You get home, you put your bag down, and you think: huh, my hands feel light today.

MILA

Give back. There's a label. "Town brass band."

JONAS

The brass band came through here? The whole brass band?

NINA

No, the driver of the number 12. Whatever people leave on his bus, he drops off here, on Fridays.

(Yasmine opens a small box.)

YASMINE

A retainer.

(Everyone takes a step back.)

NINA

Throw out.

YASMINE

You don't throw out a retainer. They cost four hundred euros.

MILA

Who are you going to give it back to? Make the whole school try it on, like Cinderella's slipper?

JONAS

I want to see that. I want to see the principal try it on.

(Mila pulls a flat handball out of a sports bag.)

MILA

That one's mine. I've been looking for it for two years.

NINA

You never thought of looking in here?

MILA

I didn't know this room existed.

JONAS

Nobody knew. That's why it's full.

(Alex gets up and takes a box down from the top shelf.)

ALEX

I'll take care of this one. It's just papers.

ZOÉ

Wait. I love papers.

(Zoé takes the box out of Alex's hands and rummages through it. She pulls out a notebook with a green cover.)

ZOÉ

A notebook. No name on the cover. No name inside.

ALEX

Anything without a name, we should throw out without opening it. That's the rule.

ZOÉ

"Monday, September 4th. Nina rehearsed her election speech on stairwell B. Four times. The fourth one was the one. She replaced 'Dear fellow students' with 'Hi.'"

(Silence. Everyone looks at Nina.)

NINA

Give me that.

(Zoé takes a step back and turns the page.)

ZOÉ

"Tuesday, September 5th. Jonas made the lunch lady laugh. She never laughs."

JONAS

Her name's Josiane. And she laughs all the time. With me.

MILA

Somebody's spying on us.

YASMINE

Since September?

(Zoé flips through the pages, faster and faster.)

ZOÉ

One page a day. All the way to May. And then it just stops. On a Thursday.

SCENE 2

(Nina shuts the door of the room.)

NINA

Nobody leaves this room until we know who wrote that.

JONAS

We've got a trumpet and a retainer. We can survive a siege.

MILA

It's you, Zoé. You read it like you'd rehearsed it.

ZOÉ

I read everything like that. I read the cafeteria menu like that.

JONAS

"Thursday. Lentils."

ZOÉ

And if it was me, there'd be more adjectives. It's dry, this notebook. You want proof, Mila? Here. "Tuesday, November 21st. Mila gets here at seven. The gate opens at seven thirty. She sits on the bench and waits. She doesn't look at her phone. She watches the caretaker watering."

(A pause.)

NINA

Why do you get here at seven?

MILA

At home, in the mornings, there's yelling. Not at me. At each other. Here, at seven, it's quiet. There's the bench, the caretaker, the hose. That's it. It's nice.

JONAS

What's he watering? There isn't a single plant in front of the gate.

MILA

The tarmac. I don't know. He waters.

(Jonas laughs. Mila snatches the notebook from Zoé and looks for a page.)

MILA

You think that's funny, Jonas? Hang on. "Monday, January 15th. Jonas is wearing a red scarf. It comes from the lost and found. He took it in November. He also took an umbrella, a beanie, and a book of poems that he reads on the bus."

(Jonas slowly takes off both scarves.)

JONAS

I gave the beanie back.

NINA

You stole from the lost and found?

JONAS

You can't steal something that's lost. It's already lost. I'm the one who finds it.

YASMINE

That's the most dishonest argument I've heard all year.

JONAS

It had been there for months, that scarf. All alone on a shelf, in the dark. Nobody came. I thought: somebody has to wear it. Otherwise what's it for? It just waits. It waits for someone who's never going to come.

ZOÉ

That's beautiful, what you just said.

JONAS

It's a scarf, Zoé.

ZOÉ

And you read poetry?

JONAS

On the bus. Nobody looks at anything on the bus. Everybody's looking at their phone.

MILA

Somebody was looking.

JONAS

So it's someone who takes the 12. Mila, you live on the 12 route.

MILA

I walk.

JONAS

Even in winter?

MILA

Especially in winter.

(Jonas takes the notebook from Mila and flips through it.)

JONAS

And you, Yasmine, honesty in person, let's have a look. Here we go.
"Wednesday, October 11th. Yasmine sings in the second floor bathroom,
the one where the door won't lock. She sings in tune. Nobody has ever
applauded her."

YASMINE

There's an echo. It's for the echo.

ZOÉ

What do you sing?

YASMINE

Opera. In Italian. I don't understand the words.

MILA

You? You told us you wanted to be an accountant.

YASMINE

I do want to be an accountant. It's a real job. My parents are happy.
Singing isn't a job, it's a noise you make in a bathroom where the door
won't lock.

JONAS

Sing something.

ALEX

On October 11th, it was Mozart.

YASMINE

Mozart, yes, so what? Mozart could have been an accountant too, if he'd
had sensible parents. Right. No more guessing. We do this properly.
Everyone takes a sheet of paper and writes the same sentence: "The lost
and found room." Then we compare it with the handwriting in the
notebook.

*(Yasmine hands out sheets of paper. Everyone writes. Alex goes through
every pocket.)*

ALEX

I don't have a pen.

JONAS

Fourteen calculators and not a single pen?

*(Jonas hands Alex a pen. Yasmine collects the sheets from Nina, Zoé,
Mila and Jonas, and lays them next to the notebook. Alex puts one sheet
face down at the end of the table.)*

YASMINE

The notebook: small, slanted, green ink. Nina: all capitals, like a campaign poster. Zoé: little circles on the i's. Mila: looks like a doctor's prescription. Jonas...

JONAS

Yes?

YASMINE

Jonas, what is this?

JONAS

The lost and found room.

YASMINE

It looks like a heart monitor.

NINA

Zoé. Earlier, you flipped through the whole notebook. You read everybody's page. Except one.

ZOÉ

There isn't one about me.

NINA

You read mine first, in front of everyone. My turn.

(Nina takes the notebook, searches, and finds it.)

NINA

"Thursday, February 8th. Zoé asked the school office for transfer papers. For a high school in Lyon. She hid them in her geography textbook, the one book nobody will ever open."

YASMINE

You're leaving?

ZOÉ

My dad's changing jobs. We're moving in August.

NINA

And when were you planning to tell us?

ZOÉ

Today. At five o'clock. I had it all worked out. I'd climb up on the table, I'd say "My friends, I'm leaving you," I'd walk out without looking back, and the door would slam behind me.

JONAS

It doesn't slam, that door. It creaks.

ZOÉ

I was going to push it really hard.

YASMINE

You wanted to tell us you were leaving like it was a scene in a play?

ZOÉ

It was easier than a scene in real life.

(A pause. Nina lays the notebook on the table, open at the first page.)

NINA

Me, you already know. Stairwell B. Four times.

JONAS

You were good, the fourth time. "Hi." It really worked.

NINA

You want to know why I ran? Because in September, the teacher asked who wanted to be a candidate, and nobody put their hand up. Nobody. The silence went on. And on, and on. So I put my hand up to make it stop.

MILA

That's it?

NINA

That's it. And then I had to write a speech.

SCENE 3

(Later. The shelves are almost empty, the three piles have grown. Yasmine sits with the notebook; she turns the pages one by one and counts on her fingers.)

YASMINE

Hang on. There's an accounting problem.

JONAS

We're forty cents short?

YASMINE

I counted the pages. Nina: thirty-one. Mila: twenty-nine. Jonas: twenty-eight. Me: twenty-seven. Zoé: twenty-five.

ZOÉ

Why do I have the fewest?

YASMINE

You were on the school trip in March.

ZOÉ

Oh, right. The notebook knows that too.

NINA

So what's your problem?

YASMINE

We're all in it. All five of us. Nobody writes about themselves, in the third person, for months. So it's none of us.

ZOÉ

Then it's someone from outside. A hall monitor. A teacher.

MILA

The caretaker. He's here at seven, he sees everything, and he waters tarmac. That's suspicious, someone who waters tarmac.

JONAS

The caretaker doesn't know Yasmine sings Mozart.

YASMINE

Nobody knew I sang Mozart.

(Nina looks at the sheets of paper on the table.)

NINA

All five of us. You said: all five of us.

YASMINE

Yes. Nina, Mila, Jonas, Zoé, me.

NINA

How many of us are on the council?

JONAS

Five.

(A pause.)

ALEX

Six.

(Everyone turns to Alex, who is still holding Jonas's pen. Nina turns over the sheet lying at the end of the table.)

NINA

Alex, your sheet is blank.

ALEX

I was waiting for inspiration.

MILA

It was one sentence. We told you what to write.

(Nina turns her list over and lays it next to the notebook.)

NINA

The minutes from the last meeting. Who writes the council minutes?

JONAS

The school office. Yasmine said so.

YASMINE

The school office types everything. It doesn't write in green ink.

(Nina puts a finger on the minutes, then on the notebook.)

NINA

Same ink. Same handwriting.

ALEX

The minutes are me. Since September. Somebody had to do it. You all talked at the same time, and the next day, nobody knew what we'd voted on.

NINA

I sign them. Every month, I sign at the bottom: "The President." I never once asked who was writing them.

ALEX

You sign very well. A real president's signature.

ZOÉ

And the notebook?

(A pause. Alex gives the pen back to Jonas, takes a green pen from a pocket and puts it on the table.)

ALEX

The notebook too. At the first meeting, in September, I figured something out. I can put my hand up, say something smart, and five minutes later, nobody remembers. It's not mean. That's just how it is. So I thought: if nobody's looking at me, then I can do the looking. One true thing a day. Not a secret. Just one true thing. I wanted it to

exist somewhere. To not get lost. And then, one Thursday in May, the notebook is what I lost. I left it on a seat, on the bus.

JONAS

The 12.

ALEX

Every evening. Two rows behind you.

JONAS

I never noticed.

ALEX

I know. That's the whole point.

MILA

And the driver of the 12 drops everything off here, on Fridays.

ALEX

And this room, the caretaker only unlocks it once a year. Today. And today, I got here before anyone else.

JONAS

You don't need the caretaker. You lift the door while you turn the handle. I've been doing it since November.

ALEX

I knew you were getting in. I didn't know how.

NINA

The caretaker would have opened it for me. All you had to do was ask me.

ALEX

Ask you what? "Nina, can I have back the notebook where I write about your life?"

MILA

And earlier, you wanted to take it back without anyone opening it. "Anything without a name, we throw out."

ALEX

A notebook like that is beautiful as long as nobody reads it. After that, it's spying.

ZOÉ

And you? There's not a single page about you?

ALEX

To write what? "Monday. Alex watched the others." A hundred and forty

times?

(A pause.)

MILA

Ten past seven. The bench across the street, on the other side. You're reading.

ALEX

Five past seven.

MILA

I saw you every morning. I never once waved.

ALEX

Neither did I.

(Yasmine opens the council cash box and looks inside.)

YASMINE

The forty cents. After the last bake sale, the cash box was at zero. The next morning, there were forty cents in it. I never understood.

ALEX

Jonas ate a cookie without paying. A cookie is forty cents.

JONAS

It was a free sample.

YASMINE

There are no free samples, Jonas. There have never been free samples.

JONAS

And you laugh at my jokes. Three seconds late. I thought it was the echo.

ALEX

They take a while to get.

ZOÉ

At the drama club show, in April, somebody clapped in the middle of the scene. Just one person, in the dark. I always wanted to know who.

ALEX

You'd stopped. I thought it was the end.

ZOÉ

I'd forgotten my lines.

ALEX

It was really beautiful, the way you forgot them.

MILA

Yasmine. Sing.

YASMINE

There's no echo in here.

JONAS

We'll be the echo.

(Nina picks up the green pen from the table. She opens the notebook at the last page and writes. Yasmine sings a few notes, very softly.)

NINA

"Friday. Last day. Alex was here from the start."

(A bell rings in the corridor.)

JONAS

Five o'clock. Zoé, it's your exit. The table, the creaky door.

ZOÉ

No. I'm staying a little longer.

(Nina closes the notebook and holds it above the three piles.)

NINA

There's one thing left. Give away, throw out, give back?

(A pause.)

ALEX

Give back.

(Nina holds the notebook out to Alex. Alex takes it. Blackout.)

What you can do with it

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