
CHANGE OF HEART

A full length play by Caetlyn McLean

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HISTORY

Inner Paradox began as an audio project for a university assignment way back in 2006. Named *Sounds of Darkness*, it was told from the viewpoint of a young blind woman trapped in a coma. She used audio clues heard by the activity around her and various flashbacks to work out how she ended up in the coma in the first place.

Caetlyn received a Distinction for her efforts. She then went on the work on the second phase for the production as part of a more advanced assignment – adapting it into a small film known as *Inner Core*.

Using the audio from *Sounds of Darkness*, *Inner Core* was set mainly on a theatre stage. The flashback scenes were filmed in a house some weeks previously and were projected onto a scrim which was co-incidentally used for another unrelated project at the time. Rather than seeing the scrim as a setback, it added a new form of separation between the main character, Alex, who was on the stage and her sister, Beth, sitting alone in the audience watching Alex's performance.

Inner Core was met with critical acclaim which prompted the next stage of the production to be written as a feature film – *Inner Paradox*. More scenes were added to the existing script and the film also included Beth's thought processes and resulting consequences of her actions towards Alex. Sadly, due to lack of finances, the film never came to fruition.

Instead, in 2017, Caetlyn adapted the film into the stage production you see before you.



PRODUCTION NOTES

Overall Objective:

Mobility and simplicity are the keys for the overall performance of this play which means it is designed to be performed at any venue with minimal issues.

Therefore, props and scenery are restricted to one or two items per scene. This also includes minimal costume changes for each actor, allowing them to concentrate on remembering their lines rather than hurrying to change costumes for every scene.

Cast numbers:

As mentioned above, the key objective is simplicity. Therefore, the cast number for this production has deliberately been minimised for space on stage as well as efficiency of the overall performance.

Sound:

Much of the play's scenery are introduced using soundscapes designed by the production's sound designer. This will eliminate the need for backdrops for the play itself.

There are also short audio scenes within the play which will need to be pre-recorded and played during the performance.

It is also recommended that all dialogue spoken during Alex's "conscious" scenes be pre-recorded with effects and played back during the performance to provide realistic interaction with Alex.

Lighting:

There are two scenes where the coloured lights flash in quick sequence. This occurs shortly before Alex suffers from a seizure.

Costumes:

Once again, simplicity is the key. The play is set in the modern day and normal street clothes for the most part is can be worn with the exception of military attire and gothic costumes for one or two scenes.

Medical emergencies:

The play is written from the point of view of the main character, Alex. The majority of the script focuses on medical emergencies (such as seizures, poisoning, septicaemia, choking and cardiac arrests) and hence has been written accordingly to portray them accurately.

Cast

Alex Hasting, woman in her mid-30s.

Beth Hasting, Alex's sister (mid- 40s)

Samantha Johns, Major Crime Detective and Alex's best friend (mid-30s)

Claudia, ICU nurse (40s)

Charlotte, Alex's daughter (about 8).

Murray Parkes, Alex's boyfriend stolen by Beth (mid-30s)

Lawyer

Toxin, a psychotic male poison who creates havoc with Alex's body.

Voice Over only

PA Announcer

Doctor, ICU doctor

Gareth, ICU nurse



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ACT 1

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ACT 1 – SCENE 1

OFFICE

A small radio is resting on a desk, softly playing music in the background. ALEX and BETH are sitting on chairs, waiting. ALEX has her eyes closed in meditation while BETH is staring up at the ceiling nervously.

BETH begins tapping on the chair's armrest. BETH's continuous rhythmic tapping irritates ALEX and she opens her eyes to looks at her hand.

ALEX

Will you stop that? It's driving me nuts!

BETH stops tapping and looks at her with a small grin.

BETH (*teases*)

Cover your ears then.

ALEX (*not amused*)

Oh, very funny.

BETH just shakes her head, wondering what the fuss is all about. LAWYER enters. He picks up an envelope from the desk before turning his attention to ALEX and BETH who stand in greeting. LAWYER shakes their hands. He is slightly hung over.

LAWYER

Sorry, I'm a late. I was held up in court. (*takes a seat*) Now, it appears your father wrote a will before he passed on.

ALEX and BETH sit down again.

LAWYER rummages through the overflowing in tray, desperately trying to find something. He glances briefly at ALEX and BETH, and gives an embarrassed smile before going back to his search.

LAWYER

Just bear with me. It's here somewhere.

Papers and folders fall off the table as ALEX and BETH exchange bemused glances. After some time, LAWYER pulls out an envelope.

LAWYER

Ah, here it is!

He opens an envelope and takes out a letter. He gives another smile before nervously clearing his throat.

LAWYER

It says here ... "I, Matthew Joseph Hasting, hereby leave my collection of 13th Century coins to my eldest daughter, Bethany Joanne Hasting. To my youngest daughter, Alexandra Charlotte Hasting, I leave the house and the amount currently residing in my combined bank accounts to the sum of \$750,000."

BETH just stares at him in disbelief for a moment.

BETH

Whoa! Wait a sec. I just get a bunch of useless coins and Alex gets the house and all the money?

ALEX

Look, don't worry about it. We'll share it amongst ourselves.

Unsatisfied, BETH just gets up and stalks out, leaving LAWYER somewhat shell-shocked by her reaction. ALEX is slightly embarrassed.

ALEX (to LAWYER)

Sorry about that.

Lights change as LAWYER exits.



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ACT 1 – SCENE 2

KITCHEN

BETH is sitting at the table. ALEX enters and sits opposite BETH, having dinner. They each have a bowl of spaghetti and glass of tomato juice in front of them.

ALEX
There's something about this juice ...

BETH
What about it?

ALEX
It tastes ... I dunno ... different. Did you buy a different brand or something?

BETH takes a sip of hers and shrugs.

BETH
Tastes alright to me. Maybe it's just your tastebuds.

ALEX (*sighs*)
Yeah, maybe ...

ALEX takes a sip, still frowning, but shrugs and accepts the taste.

TOXIN, a masked figure dressed in red, slowly enters, unseen by ALEX and BETH.

They don't say anything for moment and ALEX looks up at BETH to see her toying with her food.

ALEX
What's wrong?

BETH
Uh? Oh, nothing. The will reading just rattled me, that's all. (*pause*) What was Dad thinking? What the hell am I going to do with a bunch of 13th century coins?

ALEX
They're probably worth a mint though.

BETH
Yeah, but who in their right mind would pay for it? It's beyond ridiculous! I might as well just donate them to a museum.

ALEX's phone suddenly beeps.

ALEX (*sheepishly*)
Sorry.

She takes it out and reads the message. Her mouth drops open.

ALEX
I can't believe he would even do that!

BETH
Can't believe who did what?

ALEX
He's just called it off!

BETH
Murray? Did he say why?

ALEX
Only that he was "thinking about it"! I bet there's someone else and he's too gutless to tell me.

She puts the phone on the table and starts toying with her food as well but not really eating it.

BETH (*sympathetically*)
You okay?

ALEX blinks and looks up at her.

ALEX
Yeah, sorry. That text just threw me. I just can't believe he actually called it off!

BETH
I don't blame you. Most people do it face-to-face.

ALEX
Thanks for being so understanding.

BETH
Not a problem. I probably would've reacted the same way. (*pause*) Look, I know you're probably not up to it anymore but try and finish the spaghetti. I'd hate for the smell to permeate the room.

ALEX (*smiles*)
You can talk! (*pause*) I'm okay. I'm just pissed off with him, that's all.

They continue their meal.

BETH nervously watches as ALEX takes a mouthful and unconsciously taps on the table. ALEX looks at her.

TOXIN slowly takes a few steps closer to ALEX in determination.

ALEX
‘You nervous about something?’

BETH
No. What makes you say that?

ALEX
You always do that when you’re nervous.

BETH
Sorry. ’Bad habit.

BETH licks her lips nervously as ALEX takes a sip of the juice and looks at her watch discreetly. ALEX doesn’t notice and continues eating.

TOXIN takes a few more steps and lifts up a hand.

ALEX
You should do some meditation or something.

Taking one last sip, ALEX finishes her meal and drink and gets up to clear the table.

TOXIN comes up to ALEX and looks her up and down

TOXIN
Poisoning symptoms – (*bows to BETH*) thank you very much, Beth - part 1.
Nausea ...

He strokes ALEX’s stomach once and stepping back.

ALEX starts to feel queasy. BETH notices.

BETH
What’s the matter?

ALEX
I ... I dunno know. My stomach feels kind of ... weird.

BETH
Oh very funny. Butterflies in the stomach ... Ha ha ha ...

TOXIN
Part 2 – the vertigo ...

TOXIN waves a hand slowly above ALEX's head.

Slowly losing her ability to stay awake, ALEX holds onto the table for support, blinking violently.

ALEX (*sleepily*)

W-what's ... happening ... to me?

BETH

How should I know? Stop fooling around!

TOXIN

Part 3 – loss of breath.

TOXIN waves a hand in front of ALEX's face and steps back again, watching her.

Dizzy, ALEX starts losing her balance and suddenly finds herself unable to breathe.

ALEX

I'm serious, Beth. I c-can't ... breathe ...

TOXIN

And now the best part – well, second best ...

TOXIN gleefully rubs his hands together and grabs ALEX by the throat, choking her.

ALEX

Help ... me ... Please!!

BETH makes no attempt to move.

BETH (*snorts*)

And you're talking about me being nervous.

ALEX looks at her in horror.

ALEX (*slurred*)

Beth, what ... are you ... doing? ... I'm not -!

TOXIN suddenly pushes ALEX. She stumbles a few times before collapsing onto the floor, unmoving.

TOXIN

What a lovely position! How about I make it better, hey?

He then steps towards her and waves another hand above her whole body.

Terror sets in as we hear ALEX's inner thoughts.

ALEX (VO)

What's happening to me? I can't move. Beth? You still there? Why aren't you helping me? I ... can't ... breathe ... (*desperate*) Help!

Spotlight on ALEX and TOXIN.

ALEX's heart is slowing down as TOXIN looks down at her.

ALEX starts to sense TOXIN and slowly turns her head towards him but can't see him. TOXIN takes out a cattle prod.

TOXIN (*thoughtfully*)

What should I do with this?

He waves it once over ALEX's body, causing it to twitch.

ALEX (VO)

Can't ... think ... n-need-

TOXIN

Ah! I know!

Without warning, TOXIN zaps her as the lights flash and she goes into convulsions.

BETH still doesn't move. Instead, she continues to sit there watching as TOXIN zaps ALEX again, causing the seizure to become more violent.

TOXIN looks down at her.

TOXIN

Now, *this* is the best part!

He zaps her in the chest. ALEX's heart stops and she loses consciousness.

TOXIN

My, my, you do look down in the dumps. Let me take your breath away.

TOXIN places a hand gently above her mouth and she starts to weakly gasp for breath (agonal breathing) - with each breath growing further apart. TOXIN slowly pulls the hand away and she stops breathing completely.

TOXIN (*triumphantly*)
Ta-da!

TOXIN stands up and continues to look down at her, laughing.

BETH sits there for a moment, then suffers an attack of conscience and taps on the table once more.

BETH

Alex? You okay? (*She rushes over to ALEX as TOXIN steps back.*) Alex?
Can you hear me?

She tries to rouse her and starts panicking when ALEX doesn't respond.

BETH (*in desperation*)

No, no, no! Come on, Alex. Wake up. You can do it. I know you can ...
What have I done?

BETH bends down to access ALEX's breathing and starts to do chest compressions as the lights go down.



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ACT 1 – SCENE 3

VOID

Spotlight on ALEX who is now lying in bed, alone on stage. We hear the ambience of an intensive care unit ambience as she slowly sits up, disoriented. BETH and CLAUDIA are talking.

CLAUDIA (VO)

It's okay to be afraid.

BETH (VO)

Fear is for the weak. I need to be strong for her.

ALEX (*sitting up*)

Beth? Is that you? Help!!

CLAUDIA (VO)

How do you feel about seeing her like this?

There is a pause.

BETH (VO)

More concerned than anything. Concerned for her well-being. This shouldn't be happening to her.

CLAUDIA (VO)

Was there anyone you would like us to contact for you? Your parents perhaps?

ALEX

Who's she? Where am I?

BETH (VO)

No, it's okay. Mum's due back from holidays in a week. I can't let her see Alex like this. She'll be gutted!

CLAUDIA (VO)

You look exhausted. Why don't you go home and get some rest? The hospital will contact you if there are any changes.

ALEX

No, no, no! Don't leave me here! Beth, please! (*pause*) Come back! (*pause*) Hello? Beth?

The faint rhythmic rumbling sound of thunder fills the air. She gets up look around curiously.

Silence.

She slowly climbs out of bed, listening intently. The rumbling becomes louder. There is another rumble which repeats itself every few seconds.

ALEX

That sounds familiar.

ALEX wanders around, trying to find the source of the sound.

ALEX

Where's it coming from?

The rumbles stop as does ALEX. She waits but there is nothing but silence.

ALEX starts to become very depressed about her condition. She sits back down on the ground.

ALEX

I hate it here. I can't move, I can't talk to anyone and no one knows I can hear them! Why is this happening to me? I just want to get out!

There is the faint sound of an intensive care unit coming from somewhere, along with a ventilator and heart monitor. She starts to look around her.

DOCTOR (VO)

Claudia, how is she?

CLAUDIA (VO)

Still unresponsive. Pulse weak and irregular. BP 85 over 60. Oxygen level at 94%. Pupils are bilateral fixed and dilated. Coma scale at 3. The monitors are showing signs of heart arrhythmia. She's lucky the ambulance got to her when they did.

ALEX

Am I going to die? No, no. This can't be happening. I'm still here. Let me out. Beth!

DOCTOR (VO)

Alex, I'm just going to test your reflexes using the sole of your left foot.

ALEX

What for?

DOCTOR (VO)

Ready?

ALEX looks down at her feet briefly then back up again.

ALEX

Was that it? I didn't feel anything.

DOCTOR (VO, to Claudia)

Okay, give her the standard 1mg IV of adrenaline. Lets see if we can stabilise her heart again.

There is silence as DOCTOR and CLAUDIA leave her to rest.

ALEX

Hello? Is anyone still here? (pause) It's so lonely here.

She notices a jacket has been left on the ground. She bends down to pick it up and examines it.

MURRAY enters from behind.

MURRAY

I wondered where I'd dropped it. Thanks.

She stands up and turns to him before giving the jacket to him.

ALEX

I know how much it means to you. I remember you wore it when I first met you.

MURRAY (solemnly)

Yes and I remember how unimpressed you were at the time.

ALEX

Well, what do you expect? You were tearing across a protected area in that bloody Harley-Davidson of yours.

MURRAY (grins)

At least you didn't throw it over the cliff. Speaking of which, there's something I want to show you.



He puts on the jacket then takes her hand and begins to lead her offstage towards the bed.

ALEX

Really? What?

MURRAY

Words just can't describe it.

ALEX

Sounds ominous.

MURRAY

Come on then ...

MURRAY runs off stage. ALEX tries to keep up with him but is running out of breath.

ALEX (*pants*)

Murray! Slow down!

MURRAY (*off*)

God, you're really out of shape! And you call yourself a park ranger!

ALEX sits on the ground, trying to catch her breath. In the background, we hear CLAUDIA and GARETH in conversation, muffled and barely audible.

GARETH (VO)

Well, we have the initial blood test results back. She had alcohol reading of .07 but that shouldn't be enough to cause any major issues.

CLAUDIA (VO)

I don't really understand it. Her sister said she didn't have any heart problems so she shouldn't be having arrhythmia.

TOXIN slowly enters, unseen by ALEX. Instead, she moans and places her head in her hands.

ALEX (*groans*)

What's happening to me? My head hurts.

GARETH (VO)

Maybe she accidentally ingested something she shouldn't have. If that's the case, this is either a case of attempted suicide or attempted murder.

TOXIN (*to* ALEX)

Why, my darling. You've got a good head on your shoulders. Lets see how good it really is, shall we?

Coming up behind her, TOXIN slowly grabs her by the neck and places a hand on her head. ALEX looks down at her hands and struggles to move them.

ALEX

I don't feel so good. My body's starting to go ... numb ...

CLAUDIA (VO)

Don't even go there. We're not here to judge anyone. Lets just wait until the toxicology report comes back.

TOXIN

How much pressure can you handle?

ALEX isn't pay any attention to them anymore as TOXIN starts to add pressure on her head. Their conversation begins to fade.

ALEX blinks, disoriented.

ALEX (*slurs*)

Someone help me ... I ... can't think straight ...

ALEX starts to have trouble breathing. We hear loud ventilator alarm sounds.

ALEX (*moans*)

Is anyone there ... Help ... me ...

In a distance, we hear the very muffled voice of CLAUDIA.

CLAUDIA (VO)

It's alright, Alex. Just try and calm down. We'll work this out. (*pause*) Your blood pressure's a little high but I'm just going to test your pupil reaction. Just stay with me.

Two separate and very faint lights sweep across the stage – first from the left and from the right but ALEX doesn't react to them.

CLAUDIA (VO to GARETH, *concerned*)

Gareth, we're going to need James back here again.

GARETH (VO)

What's wrong?

CLAUDIA (VO, *urgent*)

Her pupils aren't reacting and her BP is slowly increasing.

GARETH (VO, *thoughtfully*)

Her heart rate's dropping as well which means she might have increased ICP. You better give her some Mannitol. I'll call James.

TOXIN (*yawns*)

I'm bored now.

TOXIN pushes ALEX onto the ground, causing her to pass out completely as the lights go down.

CLAUDIA (VO)

She suffered some brain swelling but we've managed to bring it back down with some antibiotics and minor surgery.

*Lights come back up as ALEX stirs and looks around, curiously.
TOXIN is lingering in the background but ALEX doesn't see it.*

TOXIN (*thoughtfully*)

However, this looks like a good opportunity ...

BETH (VO)

Can she actually hear us?

CLAUDIA (VO)

No one knows for sure but we do know that the hearing is usually the last to go.

BETH (VO)

She just looks so vulnerable lying there. (*pause*) Do we know what caused the swelling?

ALEX

Beth? 'That you?

CLAUDIA (VO)

We're not entirely sure. Whatever caused her to end up here is wrecking havoc with her body. Do you know what she ate or drink before she collapsed?

BETH (VO)

I made her some spaghetti and tomato juice before going out to hang the washing. (*hasty*) But I made it the way I always have.

CLAUDIA (VO)

Hey, it's okay. I'm not trying to lay blame on anyone. I'm just trying to help you work out what happened.

TOXIN slowly approaches her with a cattle prod and looks at it.

TOXIN

I could get used to using this.

ALEX starts to get a headache.

ALEX (*moans*)

My ... head ...

CLAUDIA (VO)

There is some good news. Her pulse is getting stronger so there's a high chance she can still hear you. The best thing you can do for her now is talk to her. I just need to do some paperwork.

TOXIN

But first, a little test – an aura, if you will.

TOXIN zaps the air with the prod. Coloured lights suddenly flash across the stage in quick succession.

Dizzy and disorientated, ALEX puts her head in her hands.

ALEX (*sleepy*)

What's going on? Where am I?!

CLAUDIA (VO)

I need to go and attend someone else. (*to ALEX*) Alex, I'll be back to do your obs.

Footsteps can be heard followed by a rhythmic tapping sound.

BETH (VO)

I don't really know what to say. It just feels so weird talking to you but not knowing if you can actually hear.

ALEX (*quickly*)

Something's not right. Why am I feeling like this? Not again! Help! Let me out!

She kneels on the ground.

BETH (VO, *guilty*)

It was a really, really stupid thing to do. You know I don't usually do things on a whim. I don't know what came over me. It just ... happened. (*pleads*) Don't die on me. Please? I feel really awful about this. You have to believe me.

TOXIN slowly moves towards her. This time, ALEX becomes aware of him.

ALEX (*curious*)

Who's there?

TOXIN (*putting fingers to his lips*)

Sssh! You'll spoil the surprise!

BETH (VO)

Alex? (*pause*) Can you hear me?

Trying not to startle him, she slowly turns her head towards TOXIN but he manages to keep out of her sight and moves behind her.

TOXIN

And ... here we go!

Then without warning, he zaps her in the back of the neck with the cattle prod, sending ALEX into convulsions on the ground.

An alarm on the heart monitor goes off. A few beeps can be heard in the background.

BETH (VO)

Oh god. Claudia, help!

TOXIN (*gleefully*)

Zap number two!

TOXIN zaps ALEX again as lights flash across the stage. She tries to call out but her jaws locks up.

A heart monitor goes off.

CLAUDIA (VO)

It's okay, Alex, I'm just going to give you something to relax those muscles.

TOXIN

And zap number three!

Lights flash across the stage as TOXIN zaps ALEX again and her body stiffens even more.

CLAUDIA (VO, *calls out*)

Gareth! I need a hand here! (*pause*) She's moving too much. I can't get a clear shot.

TOXIN (*thoughtfully*)

Actually, lets make it four ...

Laughing, TOXIN zaps her again and the lights flash.

GARETH (VO)

Have you got it ready? I'll hold her down.

CLAUDIA (VO)

Yeah, right here.

TOXIN steps back and waves the prod over ALEX's body.

TOXIN

Ah! Such is the pleasure of life. My dear Alex, I shall bid you adieu – for now ...

He exits.

ALEX soon relaxes, twitching slightly and she looks around, disoriented.

The lights dim.

ALEX (*sleepy*)

My head hurts. Where am I? Why can't I move? Where's ...

She passes out.

GARETH (VO)

I'll go write it up.

CLAUDIA (VO)

That's it. Just try and sleep it off for now.

BETH (VO)

What happened?

CLAUDIA (VO)

She suffered a severe seizure, possibly from the brain swelling. She's not out of the woods yet but we'll need to keep a close eye on her.

A phone beeps. ALEX's body jerks briefly.

BETH (VO)

Oh, crap ... I've got to go. There's something I need to do. (*Pause*) Hey, I gotta go to work but I'll be back later, okay?

There is silence for a moment.

GARETH (VO)

How is she?

CLAUDIA (VO)

She's okay now. It was almost a status situation. I've increased her oxygen intake so we'll need to keep an eye on that.

CLAUDIA enters with a wheelchair and sees ALEX on the ground.

CLAUDIA (*concerned*)

Alex? Are you okay?

She goes up to her and slowly tries to rouse her. ALEX stirs and looks up at her.

CLAUDIA

Come on. Up you get, Alex. We need to get you back into bed.

CLAUDIA slowly helps ALEX into the wheelchair.

CLAUDIA
You gave us quite a fright there.

ALEX (*groggy*)
Who are you?

CLAUDIA
You don't recognise my voice?

ALEX (*trying to think*)
Ummm ... I think you're my nurse, Claudia.

CLAUDIA (*smiles*)
Yes, that's right.

ALEX
What happened? Where am I?

CLAUDIA
You had a bit of a tumble. (*pause*) We are getting quite worried about you. You don't seem to be responding very well to the treatment. We need you to wake up for us.

ALEX
Why am I here?

CLAUDIA kneels in front of her.

CLAUDIA (*gently*)
That's what we're trying to figure out. What do you remember before you came to us?

ALEX (*upset*)
I ... I don't remember .. anything. I just want to get out of here. Please help me.

CLAUDIA
It's okay. We're doing everything we can, I promise. We just need you to be strong and hang in there for us. Can you do that?

ALEX (*nods*)
I'll try.

CLAUDIA (*smiles*)
Good girl.

She gets up and starts pushing the wheelchair towards the bed.

CLAUDIA

In the meantime, lets get you back into bed.

She helps ALEX climb back into bed as the lights go down.

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ACT 1 – SCENE 4

BUSHLAND

BETH enters the main stage and starts attending to a campfire. ALEX enters, carrying several large branches. BETH's outdoor clothing has been designed to resemble the military.

BETH

Ah, you found some! Put them down for a sec and help me with the tent.

ALEX (*heartily*)

Don't you ever get tired for being so bossy?

BETH picks up a piece of tent equipment.

BETH (*teases*)

'Course not. Now shut up and show me how to put this bloody thing together.

ALEX just shakes her head with a smile.

ALEX

Since when have you become interested in camping anyway?

BETH

I've always been interested. I just... never got around to it until now. And don't look at me like that. I'm here, aren't I?

She exits.

ALEX

Yeah, okay. I've just never seen you as a camping sort of girl, that's all.

The ruffling of a tent can be heard.

ALEX

Wait a sec. You're my sister. I'm supposed to know what sort of person you are ...

BETH (VO)

Will you relax? I don't know what you're like half the time.

The sound of the tent collapsing can be heard, causing ALEX to giggle.

ALEX

Apparently that applies to tents as well. You okay there?

She moves to the exit. She hears a familiar tapping sound coming from within the tent.

ALEX
Beth?

She exits briefly and re-enters with an army rifle. She stares at it curiously.

Suddenly, there is a burst of activity nearby as inaudible two-way radios can be heard. ALEX gets very anxious.

A single gunshot has her ducking for cover behind some thick scrub.

The rumbling of a helicopter causes her to look around but she can't see it. The faint yet inaudible chatter from a two-way radio slices through the air.

BETH (off)
I'm sure I saw her head this way.

ALEX is relieved to hear her voice and is about to get up to get her attention.

MURRAY (off)
You know we can't afford to let her get away.

ALEX ducks behind the scrub again and tries to remain inconspicuous but she accidentally rustles some leaves instead.

BETH and MURRAY enter.

BETH
What was that?

MURRAY
She's around here somewhere. I can almost smell her perfume.

There is a pause. ALEX closes her eyes in terror, trying to steady her breathing.

MURRAY and BETH look around systematically, trying to find ALEX. MURRAY's eyes rests on the shrub she's hiding behind. He signals BETH to the shrub and gestures her to say something. BETH gives a knowing smile.

BETH
Give yourself up, Alex! You knew blowing up a government building would result in this!

MURRAY and BETH exit once more. ALEX frowns in surprise. Another burst of radio chatter floods the air.

ALEX starts walking around, trying to find the radio. She moves to the side of the stage.

BETH (VO, taunting on radio)

Alex! We know you're hiding! Come out wherever you are!

MURRAY (VO, on radio)

You can run but you can't hide, Alex!

ALEX hesitates as the voice stops. She is shaking her head in disbelief.

ALEX

No ... Something's not right. I'm imagining this.

Suddenly in awe of her surroundings, she just stands there got a moment, lost in a trance.

SAMANTHA enters and is relieved to see ALEX.

SAMANTHA

Oh, thank god! Do you realize how many of us are looking for you?

ALEX spins around in surprise and gapes at her. She looks around cautiously.

ALEX

Sam? What are you doing here?

SAMANTHA (*surprised*)

What do you mean what I am doing here? You've been reported missing since yesterday.



ALEX starts shaking her head in disbelief and backing away from her, closer to the edge of the stage but not realizing it.

ALEX

Stay away from me, Sam! You're not real!

SAMANTHA

Of course, I am.

She stares for a moment and realizes how close to the edge ALEX is.

SAMANTHA

Alex, Please! Just come away from the edge ...

ALEX

Why? So you and your mates can kill me? You're not even in the army anyway!

SAMANTHA

What are you talking about? Look, just calm down. You're not well.

*The faint sound of a ventilator and heart monitor fills the air.
ALEX looks around.*

ALEX

You hear that?

SAMANTHA just shakes her head, still confused.

ALEX

This whole thing. Can't you hear it? It's the Intensive Care Unit! (*upset*) I'm on a bloody coma!

SAMANTHA

Alex, you're scaring me. Come on, I'll take you home.

*The sound of the ventilator and heart monitor strengthens.
ALEX hesitates as SAMANTHA waits.*

In the background, we hear the faint sound of TOXIN laughing.

SAMANTHA

Please?

ALEX finally makes a decision and takes a few steps towards SAMANTHA who happily moves forward to take her hand. As SAMANTHA's hand touches ALEX's, however, the sound of the heart monitor suddenly starts racing, causing ALEX to jerk her hand back in shock.

Lights dim.

BETH (VO)

Come on, Alex. It's time to go.

ALEX (*backing away*)

Leave me alone!

BETH (VO)

Don't you want to come home? Mum and Dad are waiting.

Lights up.

BETH has now replaced SAMANTHA and moves towards her but ALEX isn't having a bar of it. She desperately starts taking a few steps back away from the stage's edge.

ALEX

Just back off! I mean it!

Spotlight on ALEX. The ambience of the intensive care unit can be heard again.

BETH (VO)

You can do it, Alex. I know I didn't just imagine it.

ALEX (*surprised*)

What?

BETH (VO)

Sister, she moved.

CLAUDIA (VO)

Moved?

BETH (VO)

She just squeezed my hand.

ALEX looks down at her hands, confused.

ALEX

No, I didn't.

She suddenly starts blinking, feeling dizzy.

BETH (VO)

I was just wishing her a happy birthday and she squeezed my hand. It was like she was reacting to my voice.

CLAUDIA (VO)

Try not to get too excited. It might just have been an involuntary muscle contraction.

TOXIN enters and laughs.

TOXIN

This is too good an opportunity to miss.

He goes up to her and waves his hands above ALEX's head.

TOXIN

Abra-cadab-bra! Going down!

Alarms go off in the background. ALEX sits down on the ground with her head in her hands.

ALEX
Why is everything moving?

BETH (VO)
What's going on?

CLAUDIA (VO)
It's okay. Her blood pressure just dropped but it can easily be fixed.

TOXIN kneels beside ALEX and whispers into her ear.

TOXIN
I'm not finished with your yet.

ALEX (*moans*)
I don't feel so good ...

ALEX starts to feel sleepy and TOXIN helps her lie down.

TOXIN
Good night, my darling sweetheart. Save you strength. Trust me, you'll need it.

He gets up and leaves.

CLAUDIA (VO)
Alex, I'm just going to give you a bit more fluid through your IV line.

Lights down.

CLAUDIA (VO)
You must be getting sick of this. Ready?

Faint light sweeps past the stage from the left.

CLAUDIA (VO)
Good. And the other eye.

Semi-faint sweeps past the stage from the right.

CLAUDIA's voice starts fade out as ALEX falls asleep.

CLAUDIA (VO)
You're improving, Alex. Keep it up.

ACT 1 – SCENE 5

BUSHLAND

ALEX is making her trek through the shrubland. There is a bottle of water on a table in the middle of the stage.

She is still a little rattled by the realization that she has been imagining things. As she makes her way through the trek, the faint ambiance of the intensive care unit can be heard.

She stops and listens then becomes annoyed.

ALEX *(to no one in particular)*

Stop it! I can't even leave! Give me a way out and then I'll start listening!

Frustrated, she storms ahead.

She stops once more at the sound of the beach and gives a ridiculous laugh.

ALEX

Oh, nice one! I'm in the middle of the bloody country! Where the hell is the beach?

She looks around purposefully.

ALEX

Well?

She snorts and keeps going as both ambiances continue. She slowly stops and takes a sniff but soon shakes her head in disbelief.

ALEX

No, my mind's just playing tricks again. *(yells out)* I know what you're doing! It's not going to work!

BETH (VO)

Alex!

ALEX looks around curiously but can't see anyone. As she continues moving, the beach ambiance is slowly replaced by that of splashing water which gets louder with every step.

She stops where she is and takes a deep breath, muttering to herself.

ALEX

I'm not going crazy. I can beat this. *(pause)* I just need to find a way out.

BETH (VO)
Alex!

ALEX looks ahead and blinks in disbelief. We hear the sound of water splashing.

She moves to the edge of the stage in a trance.

BETH (VO)
Come on in! The water's beautiful!

ALEX just shakes her head. We hear CLAUDIA, distorted and faint.

CLAUDIA (VO)
You haven't had a good wash in two days. This will freshen you up a bit.

ALEX is starting to freak out and begins backing away from the watering hole towards the bed.

The lights suddenly change to blue as she climbs unto the bed.

In her mind, ALEX is in the watering hole, drowning.

CLAUDIA (VO)
She means well. Try not to be too upset by what's happening.

Spotlight on ALEX. She is sitting up and starts gasping for breath.

The heart monitor start racing.

ALEX
No... Let me out! (to BETH) Beth! Help!

CLAUDIA (VO)
It's okay, Alex. Just try and calm down. Now, I know this might feel a bit overwhelming to you but you haven't had a wash since you came here. This will freshen you up a bit.

The heart monitor start racing. ALEX starts trembling.

CLAUDIA
It's okay, Alex. Just calm down. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm sure you're not used to having someone else clean you but I'm only here to help. (pause) I'm just going to wash your hands and face to start off with. I hope the water's not too cold.

ALEX takes a few deep breathes as the heart monitor slows down again.

CLAUDIA (VO)

I'm just going to wash your eyes so if you feel some water on your eyelids, don't panic. It might feel a bit rough from the flannel.

We hear more water running. ALEX shivers slightly and lies down.

CLAUDIA (VO)

That's feel better, isn't it? We're nearly done. I'm just going to do your hands and arms.

We hear the soothing splashing of water as ALEX slowly falls asleep.

CLAUDIA (VO)

There you go. (*curiously*) Your skin feels hot. Let me just take your temperature.

There is a slight pause and a small beep.

CLAUDIA (VO)

Mmmm ... 38 one. We'll have to keep an eye on that, won't we?

Lights up.

MURRAY is tending to the campfire next to ALEX as she wakes up again. He looks up at her.

MURRAY

Ah! I see that the sleeping beauty has finally woken.

ALEX

How long was I out for?

MURRAY just shrugs and turns his attention to the fire once more. ALEX climbs out of the bed.



There is a pause. ALEX notices a can of spaghetti on the ground and picks it up.

ALEX

What's this for?

MURRAY

For a park ranger, you don't know much about camping, do you? (*chuckles*) What do you think it's for?

ALEX is still staring at the can with a sense of déjà vu and MURRAY looks at her oddly.

MURRAY

You okay? It's not going to bite you.

ALEX

Huh? Oh, nothing. *(pause)* I just had a really weird dream. I woke up in the middle of a outback in my car.

MURRAY *(teases)*

Well, you're awake now. So, you don't have to worry. *(serious)* By the way, Beth popped around. She wanted to know how the water was.

ALEX suddenly looks at him, feeling cautious.

ALEX

What water?

MURRAY

The one in the watering hole. What's the matter with you today? Apparently, you had ripe old time, splashing about in there.

ALEX slowly stands up again and start backing away. MURRAY just looks at her.

MURRAY

Alex? What's wrong?

ALEX

I ... I ...

She looks around desperately, trying to make sense of what she's going through.

ALEX

I'm not really awake, am I?

MURRAY *(confused)*

What are you on about? You're standing right in front of me.

ALEX

What did you mean by Beth "just popping around"? No one just pops around when they are camping.

She looks around and listens but all she can hear is nature. She becomes annoyed and starts calling out to no one in particular.

ALEX

Oh, what? Now, you're scared?

MURRAY

Alex, just calm down.

ALEX (*ignores him*)

Come on! Where are those sounds I'm supposed to hear? I'm not really out camping, am I?

MURRAY

Come on, you're scaring me ...

ALEX (*sarcastically*)

Well, boo hoo for you. That's exactly what Sam said before and I'm not falling for that again!

MURRAY moves to hold her but she violently retracts.

ALEX

Just back off! Doesn't anyone ever listen to me?

MURRAY just looks at her.

ALEX

Look, I'll prove it. I'm going to close my eyes and when I open them again, you're going to disappear.

MURRAY

Oh, come on. Don't be ridiculous!

ALEX just glares at him and takes a deep breath. She then closes her eyes for a few seconds before opening them again. She moans miserably.

ALEX

It's not fair! Nothing makes sense!

MURRAY (*to himself*)

You can say that again.

ALEX

You're not helping, Murray!

MURRAY

What the hell am I supposed to think? You're going off about who-knows-what and I'm just supposed to pretend it's not happening!

ALEX

That's because it isn't! You're not here. I'm not even supposed to be here! This whole thing is a facade! (*calls out*) This is all your fault!

MURRAY

Alex ...

ALEX (*grumbles*)

Look, just leave me alone.

She turns to leave and a distant, yet inaudible PA announcement is suddenly heard as MURRAY exits.

ALEX stands there for a moment, listening intently as the PA announcement gradually gets louder.

ANNOUNCER (VO)

Calling Doctor Quick. Code Blue. Ward 5C, Room 302. Calling Doctor Quick. Code Blue. Ward 5C, Room

This is followed by general hospital ambiance as ALEX slowly smiles. She spins around to face MURRAY but he is no longer there.

ALEX (*calls out ecstatically*)

Thank you! I knew I was just imagining it.

She stands there, grinning for a moment when it soon dawns on her that she still needs to find a way out. She groans as TOXIN enters, thoughtfully.

TOXIN

You know, my dear. You're not really in a coma until you've had an infection. Allow me.

He pushes her, causing her to stumble, slightly disoriented. She wipes her brow.

ALEX (*pants*)

Is it me or is it getting hot in here? Why am I sweating? (*pause*) I'm so thirsty!

She starts to have trouble breathing again and starts to panic.

ALEX

What's going on? Is anyone there? I need some help here!

She suddenly hears footsteps.

CLAUDIA (VO)

It's okay, Alex. I got it. Let me just take your temperature for a moment. I'm just going to stick the thermometer in your ear again.

There is a slight pause and another small beep as ALEX rubs her ear clear.

CLAUDIA (VO, *concerned*)

41 five. That's not good. I'm going to add more fluid to your IV to try and bring it down. We might have to get the doctor in. I'll be back in a minute.

Footsteps move away.

ALEX staggers towards the bottle and opens it to take a drink. TOXIN closes his eyes in prayer as the lights slowly change.

TOXIN

Oh, Mighty One! I summon thee!

A soft yet deep growling sound can be heard.

ALEX stops drinking and looks around curiously. The growling continues but barely audible. ALEX shakes her head in wonder and looks at the label on the bottle. It too has numbers on it - 41.5. She frowns.

Faint footsteps return.

CLAUDIA (VO)

Alex, we're a bit worried about your temperature and we've called the doctor to come and have a look at you. For now, try and get some sleep.

Her voice fades out as the growling becomes louder accompanied by raspy breathing.

ALEX

Who's there?

TOXIN

Behold the beast!

TOXIN slowly retreats offstage.



ALEX slowly puts the bottle down and turns around. She sees a Beast - unseen - and stares at it in horror. The growling grows louder and more menacing.

ALEX takes a few terrified steps back then makes a run for it.

In a panic, she stumbles and trips, twisting her ankle. Growling grows louder and we hear TOXIN's laughter ring out.

Blackout.