

~~Will~~

a coverup

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Kelly Fleming (she/they)
kfleming@uarts.edu
www.kelfleming.com

Characters

James McKenzie: Frontman and co-lead songwriter of The Grooves. Dead.

Harry Sefton: Co-lead songwriter of The Grooves. Singer, guitarist.

Winston “Winnie” Miller: Lead guitarist of The Grooves.

Richard “Richy” Best: Drummer of The Grooves.

Sam Alistair: The Grooves’ manager.

Will Peers: The stand-in. American.

Notes on Casting

While the characters in this story all use he/him pronouns, that does not have to be reflected in the performance of the piece. Preferred if it's not.

This is not a true story, so do what you want with the casting.

However, the actors should mimic, as closely as possible, the accents of those they are portraying.

Notes on Music

This piece is to be underscored with a psychedelic mishmash of sounds.

The music should be used to enhance the action, not become it.

The performance of this play is to feature a live band of 4 musicians.

Original underscoring by Ben Rothschild.

Notes on Text

- ‘/’ indicates an interruption.
- Indented italics in the format of a line are not to be read but should be treated as stage directions.
- Indented lines are to be said off-stage/from on high.
- Ad Libbing and small improvisations are encouraged in all interludes.
- Lines placed next to each other horizontally are to be said at the same time.

Notes on Time and Place

The following events take place in London, England between the years 1966 and 1969.

While it seems the events happen in quick succession to each other, this story encapsulates the three-ish year journey of this group.

Time plays tricks on us in this piece, some moments consist of months that feel like days, some days feel like years. Let the trip happen.



Prelude: Before

Music begins. A low rumble.

JAMES MCKENZIE and bandmate HARRY SEFTON enter the space with a bass and guitar, respectively. One of them must have just told a joke because they are laughing like two schoolboys. We can't fully see them but they feel young, probably mid-late teens.

They face each other and begin to play a tune.

They're having fun, they're pushing each other, it's what they do.

WINNIE MILLER, their bandmate, enters the space and also begins playing this tune. They're all friends, that point could not be clearer.

They're aging. Shifting into their early 20's in energy.

Suddenly, RICHIE BEST enters on the drums. Energy and noise flood the space.

The band is jamming. Laughing, exploring how they can squeeze every bit of enjoyment out of the moment.

We hear screaming fans, their names announced on variety shows, the whole gamut.

"Here they are... The Grooves!"

As we travel through their career in this way, they are moving into their mid-20's. Not old but they're fully adults at this point.

The song grows, builds, and finishes. A low rumble remains.

Richie, Winnie, and Harry leave the space, James remains.

Lights fade more to darkness, we can barely see James's face. Sounds of the city and the stars emerge.

He keeps looking to the back, referencing someone, talking to them, but we cannot see who it is. He moves closer and closer to the edge. Music begins to swell and we can almost feel what is going to happen.

With eyes on the sky, James walks to the edge, and in the blink of an eye, disappears.

Scene One: Welcome, Will

Trident Studios. Thursday, November 10, 1966. It's raining outside.

HARRY is asleep in the studio, wearing his clothes from the night before. The way he is sleeping doesn't look comfortable but he could not look more peaceful. Soft snores.

SAM ALISTAIR enters a little wet from the rain and spots Harry from across the room.

SAM

Harry?

Harry still snores.

Sam crosses to him.

SAM

(yells) HARRY!

Harry jolts awake, falls, etc. He stands groggily, recovering from his rude awakening.

HARRY

Sam? Is that--you? Is this a dream?

SAM

Get up.

HARRY

It's been *ages* since you've visited our hovel.

SAM

If it smelled better, maybe I would be here more often.

Now, get up.

HARRY

Alright, alright.

Are those contracts in your arm or are you just happy to see me?

SAM

Harry--

HARRY

Ah... contracts.

SAM

Did you--sleep here?

HARRY

Looks like it.

SAM

Does your wife know where you are?

HARRY

Doubtful.

SAM

Are things ok at home?

HARRY

That's a bit forward.

SAM

I mean no offense.

HARRY

Sam, if you're interested, all you have to do is say so.

SAM

I just figured you would want to spend time /with...

HARRY

/James and I had a late night. Guess I ended up in here.

SAM

You were both here?

HARRY

Yeah, pretty sure. We were writing pretty late but at a certain point it's all a blur.

SAM

(Under his breath) Damn.

HARRY

What?

SAM

Uh, where is--where's Winston?

HARRY

What time is it?

SAM

Half-past nine.

HARRY

Should be walking through that door any second.

SAM

Good, good.

HARRY

Are you all alright?

SAM

Why do you ask?

HARRY

You're sweating like you've just run a marathon and you've been here for, what, five minutes and you haven't pleaded for a smoke.

SAM

I'm... I've been better.

Harry pulls out a cigarette and offers one to Sam. He shakes his head no.

Harry offers again, Sam caves in.

After a moment, WINNIE enters.

WINNIE

Morning.

SAM

Ah, Winston!

WINNIE

(To Harry:) Have a good night?

HARRY

I hope so, I don't remember most of it.

WINNIE

So a *great* night.

They laugh and get settled into the studio to start for the day.

SAM

Boys, I need you to listen for a moment.

HARRY

Where do you reckon Richy is?

WINNIE

Late.

HARRY

And James?

WINNIE

Late?

HARRY

He better not be. He needs to tell me what we got up to. And why I have such a headache.

WINNIE

I'm sure I could guess why.

SAM

I don't think he's--

Winnie pulls out some pills, aspirin, and tosses them at Harry.

Winnie starts making a cup of tea.

HARRY

(Taking the aspirin:) These better be strong enough.

SAM

Do you remember *anything* that happened last night?

WINNIE

That's not the Harry Sefton way!

HARRY

It wasn't a good night if I could tell you what I did.

But James would know.

WINNIE

That responsible prick.

SAM

I don't think I can ask him.

HARRY

Sure you can. He should be here soon.

SAM

I don't think he's coming.

WINNIE

Of course he is.

HARRY

Why wouldn't he?

WINNIE

Ooh, did you fire him?

SAM

NO--why would I do that?

HARRY

Did he get in trouble? Did *we* get in trouble?

WINNIE

Bet he got booked for something daft.

HARRY

Oh yeah, that's why he hasn't called.

WINNIE

Drug possession.

HARRY

Disorderly conduct.

WINNIE

Public nuisance.

HARRY

Public indecency.

SAM

There's been an accident.

HARRY

You mean Winnie's shirt?

Bud-um-tiss

WINNIE

I quite like this one.

HARRY

You would you tiny man.

SAM

This is serious.

HARRY

I would call that serious.

SAM

James had an accident yesterday.

WINNIE

Wet his pants again, did he?

HARRY

Potty training just isn't his strength.

SAM

Please just listen, boys. You know I wouldn't be here unless I had to.

WINNIE

Fine, fine.

What happened?

SAM

James had a fall last night.

HARRY

A fall?

WINNIE

But he was the most grounded Groove!

They snicker.

SAM

He... fell off the roof of the studio.

HARRY

W-What!

WINNIE

Are you serious!

HARRY

Where is he?

SAM

He's gone.

HARRY

Gone where?

SAM

Uh--I don't know. No one *knows*. That's one of the great mysteries of life.

WINNIE

What bullshit are you talking about!

SAM

He's dead.

Silence. Long silence. Someone drops a teacup.

HARRY

...

WINNIE

...

HARRY

...

WINNIE

He's--

HARRY

No.

WINNIE

There's no way.

HARRY

He's not. I would know if he was.

SAM

How?

HARRY

Because I know him, *Sam*. I would know if something happened to him.

SAM

He's gone, lads. I'm sorry.

WINNIE

How long were you gonna let us dick around before you told us?

SAM

I don't know, I didn't know how to tell you.

HARRY

You should have called.

SAM

I had to make sure we had a plan first.

HARRY

What plan!

SAM

I--erm. I'll get to that.

WINNIE

How did it happen?

SAM

We don't know. Maybe he just fell.

WINNIE

We? Who's we?

SAM

Uh...

HARRY

Sam?

SAM

I can't tell you.

WINNIE

What?

SAM

It's on a need to know basis.

WINNIE

Well, we need to know.

SAM

I can't.

WINNIE

Unfuckingbelievable.

HARRY

(To Winnie:) What are we gonna do?

WINNIE

I don't know.

SAM

Well, act/u--

HARRY

/This is my fault, I should have known, should have been there for him. I don't even remember how we left things.

SAM

It's not your fault, Harry. It's no one's fault.

WINNIE

That's a nice thought.

SAM

It didn't happen.

A pause.

WINNIE

What?

HARRY

WHAT?

SAM

Lads--

WINNIE

Are you taking the piss?

SAM

No, no, no! James is dead! James is dead!

WINNIE

Then what do you mean?

SAM

I meant, no one can know this happened.

So, it never happened.

HARRY

But it happened...

SAM

Yes.

WINNIE

And we know...

SAM

Well, I *had* to tell you.

HARRY

So, who else knows?

SAM

You're the only ones.

WINNIE

There's no way!

HARRY

Whoever found James, they know.

WINNIE

Whoever /is...

SAM

/I found him.

A hush.

SAM

I didn't know what to do so I called emergency services.

They didn't come. Instead, MI5...

I've said too much. Need to know.

HARRY

Need to know? Are you fucking serious?

WINNIE

What does that even mean!

SAM

I would tell you if I could.

HARRY

You can tell us.

SAM

I swore to my government, my Queen.

HARRY

The Queen?

WINNIE

Fuck off, Sam.

HARRY

Either you tell us, or I walk out that door and tell every single fan that's waiting outside the studio.

SAM

You wouldn't.

HARRY

I'll do it. I'll tell them everything.

SAM

They wouldn't believe you.

WINNIE

Wouldn't they? They *love* us.

HARRY

They're waiting outside in the cold rain just to catch a *glimpse* of us.

SAM

You're bluffing.

HARRY

(Walking toward the exit.) Am I?

SAM

Harry--

HARRY

Winnie, won't you join me.

WINNIE

Gladly.

They're both dangerously close to actually leaving.

SAM

STOP! STOP! FINE! I'll tell you.

They retreat and look to Sam for an answer.

SAM

MI5 and MI6 are taking care of James in an effort to keep this as far from the public as possible. The situation has been deemed a matter of public concern and national safety. If the truth was revealed, they believe that the public distress would be too volatile and dangerous for the greater public.

Therefore, the public must believe that James is still alive and well.

HARRY

And how do you suggest we go about that, *Sam*?

SAM

One moment.

Sam leaves for a moment.

HARRY

Where the fuck is he going?

WINNIE

Hell if I know.

Sam reenters with WILL PEERS trailing behind him.

SAM

Boys, meet Will Peers.

A moment of silence. A slow roll of laughter grows from Winnie and Harry.

WINNIE

(Laughing) Screw you, Sam!

HARRY

(Laughing) You're fucked up.

WINNIE

(To Harry:) We should have known this was a joke.

HARRY

You really had us going. I was crying!

WINNIE

I've never seen you cry like that!

HARRY

I know! I went soft just like that!

WINNIE

I'm impressed, Sam! I didn't know you could trick us like that!

You sly dog, you.

HARRY

But, MI6? Really Sam?

WINNIE

What is this? James Bond?

They continue laughing. Will looks to Sam who pushes him forward.

WILL

(In an American accent.) It's nice to meet you.

The air has been sucked out of the room. The laughing stops. A second teacup is dropped.

Will retreats.

HARRY

That's not--

WINNIE

But it looks like--

HARRY

How did--

WINNIE

What is--

SAM

Will, I'm sure you already know who these two are.

WILL

Of cour--

SAM

Let me introduce you.

This is Mr. Harry Sefton, your writing partner and best friend.

WILL

Hel--

SAM

And this is Winston Miller, you can call him Winnie.

WILL

It's such an honor to meet you.

SAM

Wish it was under better circumstances, eh?

WILL

Right. I am so sorry for your loss. I was so shocked to hear--

HARRY

How much does he know?

SAM

Enough.

WINNIE

So what is he doing here?

SAM

Will is going to stand in for James.

HARRY

Stand in?

WINNIE

Where did you find him?

SAM

Will won a look-alike contest in America a few months ago. We tracked him down and added him to the list.

WINNIE

List?

SAM

You all have body doubles in case something like this happens. Good thing we did or we would be *screwed*.

He chuckles.

The rest of the group does not.

WINNIE

You've been /planning...

HARRY

Morbid thing to /prepare...

SAM

/We got him here in just a few hours. Be kind, he's jet lagged.

WILL

All the way /from--

HARRY

/This is ridiculous, Sam.

WINNIE

He doesn't even sound like James.

HARRY

That stupid accent.

SAM

He has a good James impression.

(To Will:) Do it.

WILL

Sir...

SAM

Do it.

Will takes a deep breath and begins to get into the zone.

WILL

(As James:) When I write a song, well, it happens lots of different ways. Sometimes it's a lyric first or the tune--sometimes it's both together. When I write with Harry you know---

His voice trails off. Harry isn't too happy to be mentioned at this time, in this way.

Will wants to stop but Sam nods at him to continue.

WILL

(As James:) S-Sometimes he'll write a whole song himself, or I will. Sometimes he'll do one line, sometimes I'll do one line. It's very varied. But we always say that we've both written it.

Will returns to his regular stance.

They're dumbfounded. It was a really good James impression.

Sam starts a little applause but the sentiment is not shared with the others.

SAM

So, what'd you think?

Harry and Winnie begin to circle Will like vultures.

HARRY

How could you even think that we *could* replace him? You can't just 'replace' a person.

WINNIE

What do we do if this doesn't work? Do you know how fucked this will look?

HARRY

About half as fucked as it *IS*.

WINNIE

Do you even know how to play? We still have to make music.

SAM

He's a studio musician. He can do it.

HARRY

What if people recognize him?

SAM

He walked in the studio today unnoticed. Right, Will?

WILL

Yes, they thought--

SAM

See?

WINNIE

But they were expecting to see James.

HARRY

It's not like his mum was waiting out there.

WINNIE

What if someone recognizes *Will*? What happens then?

SAM

They won't.

WINNIE

But what if?

SAM

He's dead.

HARRY

Jesus Christ, Sam.

WINNIE

Sam the Ripper.

SAM

His family was notified that he died in a car accident late last night.

HARRY

(To Will:) You said yes to this?

WILL

I--

WINNIE

(To Will:) No backing out now.

SAM

This will work.

A moment of quiet. They're thinking.

HARRY

No.

SAM

Harry--

HARRY

No.

SAM

You can't say no.

HARRY

I don't know about you, Win, but I am an adult who can fully say the word, No.

WINNIE

An adult who can make his own decisions.

SAM

You signed a contract.

HARRY

Then let me out of the damn contract.

SAM

I can't do that, Harry.

HARRY

Why not?

SAM

I'll sue you.

HARRY

You wouldn't.

SAM

The label will sue you. Everything made under the Grooves name will be sold to the highest bidder.

HARRY

So?

SAM

So that means everything you have done, or are currently working on, anything you had planned to use as the Grooves--

WINNIE

Would no longer be ours.

HARRY

James.

SAM

None of it would be his anymore.
I'm doing this for you. Can't you see that?

HARRY

I can't believe this.

Harry heads for the door.

SAM

What are you doing?

HARRY

I'm fucking leaving, that's what I'm doing.

WILL

WAIT!

He stops in his tracks

HARRY

What.

WILL

I--I'm sorry. I don't want to be here. I mean--no that's not what I meant. I don't want to be here for the reason that I am. I know that you don't want me here but I promise I am only here to help. I know you don't want me here. I'm just trying to be useful.

HARRY

And what use do you wish to serve?

WILL

Uh--bass player?

WINNIE

Is he getting paid?

SAM

Yes, the same as you.

HARRY

The *same*?

WINNIE

That makes no sense.

HARRY

Next, you're gonna tell us that he's gonna live in James's house and wear his clothes!

An uneasy silence from Sam.

WINNIE

No...

SAM

We have to sell the illusion that this is James to the fullest extent.

HARRY

So you're gonna put this tosser in a dead man's clothes just to keep your pockets stuffed and your pills popped, huh?

SAM

What would you have *liked* me to do, Harry?

HARRY

You could tell the truth!

SAM

What would that do to his legacy? If the world found out they would write him off as some tortured artist and ripped you apart for not saving him! Is that how you want him to be remembered? All of your work would be tainted. Do you want to spend the rest of your public life tortured by those questions?

Because I can make that happen. All I have to make is a few calls.

HARRY

You really are screwed in the head.

SAM

Enough! Do not make me the bad guy in this situation. I am just doing what has to be done. I am keeping his legacy alive and yours too.

Don't do this for me or for yourselves, do this for James.

Work with him. This will work if you just try.

WINNIE

What about James's family?

SAM

I spoke to his father this morning.

HARRY

(Almost sarcastically.) Is he under contract too?

SAM

A non-disclosure agreement, yes.

WINNIE

Jesus, you did all of this in a day?

SAM

I've had to move fast.

HARRY

Clearly.

SAM

Speaking of NDA's...

Sam takes two legal documents out of his jacket pocket and hands them to Winnie and Harry. They reluctantly flip through them and sign, handing them back to Sam.

A moment of quiet.

WINNIE

Where's Richy?

HARRY

Yeah, why isn't he here for this?

SAM

We need to make sure Will passes as James. Richy happens to be a prime test subject.

A breath of realization/agreement from Winnie and Harry.

SAM

We need to test this on a small scale before we do anything somewhat public. You have a few performances scheduled over the next few weeks and a media day for the album as well. This all needs to be hunky dorey before Will gets before a camera.

WINNIE

Mother of God.

SAM

What? Would either of you have liked not knowing?

WINNIE

Richy has a right to know what's going on.

SAM

He has been deemed too much of a risk.

WINNIE

A risk?

SAM

You know him. He loves to talk to the fans and he doesn't have much of a filter.

HARRY

Or social awareness.

WINNIE

Harry!

SAM

He's right. Boys, he cannot know that Will isn't the real James. The less people that know the truth, the better.

WINNIE

What if he finds out? Do you know what that would do to us?

HARRY

Forget the public finding out--Richy would never trust us again!

SAM

So don't let him find out! He's been put in the dark about things before, why not this?

WINNIE

This isn't just not telling him about what songs are on an album or anything! This is lying about who that is!

SAM

It shouldn't be too hard.

HARRY

Yeah, you try lying to one of your best friends and see how easy it is.

SAM

We're all in the same boat here, Harry.

He can do this! Trust him!

RICHY enters with his things, a little soggy from the rain.

RICHY

Ah, boys! You're already here! Thought we were starting later today, was hoping I would be early for once.

Winnie and Harry give Sam an “Are you fucking kidding me?” look.

RICHY

How are we doing today! *(They grumble back.)*
James, you look different.

Everyone’s breath is knocked out of their bodies.

WILL

Uhhhh.

RICHY

I haven't seen your hair combed back like that in years!

WILL

Uh--

RICHY

(Suddenly noticing his presence:) Sam, what are you doing here?

SAM

Was just leaving actually. Had some business in the building so I thought I would stop by.

RICHY

Good to see ya.

*Richy puts his things down, gets a cup of tea, and starts to get ready behind the drums.
Sam, Will, Harry, and Winnie are standing stiff in the middle of the room, too tense to do or say anything.
Richy continues to get ready without any realization of the tension that is fully present in the room.*

RICHY

What are ya doin standing there? Don’t we have work to do?

SAM

Yes, yes you do. I’ll get out of your hair.

HARRY

Sam--

SAM

Have a great day, boys! Make me proud!

*They take a breath and go through the motions of beginning a rehearsal/recording session.
Sam looks to Will, this might work.*

SAM

Good luck, kid.

WILL

Thank you, Sir.

Sam pats him on the back and exits.

RICHY

Did you see how many people are out there today? In the rain!
One of them gave me this little scarf.

He shows off his new gift.

WINNIE

It's nice, Rich.

HARRY

You gotta stop taking things from them.

RICHY

Why is that?

HARRY

They're like wild animals. The more you feed them, the more they come and the more friends they bring.

RICHY

You're just jealous. *(Under his breath:)* Buzzkill.

*Will begins to gravitate to James's bass, ready as he will ever be to do this.
He picks up the bass; Winnie and Harry notice this.*

RICHY

Where do we want to start?

Richy looks between Harry and Will.

WILL

Uh--I don't. I don't know.

HARRY

Let's go from where we left off last night. You all remember where that is, right?

WINNIE

Harry...

HARRY

Right?

RICHY

Ready when you are!

HARRY

Count us in, Rich.

RICHY

(Quickly.) One, two. One, two, three...

WINNIE

Let's take it a little slower.

RICHY

You're no fun.

(Slower:) One! Two!

One, two, three, FOUR!

Music begins, warps, and transitions into...