

ACT OF NATURE

By

Paul Dryland

Contact:

Pantheatre@hotmail.co.uk

07851 619906

FADE IN:

ONE YEAR AGO - THE IMPACT

EXT. A WOODLAND PATH- DAY

Sunlight dapples through tall trees. A cultivated field stretches out ahead, cut by pylons that loom over the landscape. Birds chirp, the wind hums through leaves. The world feels quiet, deceptively ordinary

A PHONE SCREEN FILLS THE FRAME-grainy, handheld footage. Olivia is filming as they walk along the path, BEN plays up to the camera. BEN enters the field Olivia follows.

Ben and Olivia walk. Olivia fingers a folded piece of paper in her pocket. She's rehearsing something in her head, nervous.

OLIVIA
Okay, don't laugh.

BEN
(grinning)
I'm definitely laughing.

OLIVIA
Ben-

She hesitates. He's teasing. The moment doesn't feel right. She lets it go.

Then-BOOM. The sky RIPS OPEN. A streak of light. A roar. A BLAST.

The phone screen jerks violently

BEN
Shit-

Instinct kicks in. He SHOVES Olivia aside, DIVING for cover. The shockwave impacts.

Beat. Silence, except for ringing ears. Smoke. Olivia coughs, pushes herself up. Blood on her knee. Ben stands, frozen. A flicker of guilt-gone as fast as it comes.

BEN
Liv-
OLIVIA
(quiet, realizing)
You pushed me.

Not an accusation. A fact. Like she's seeing him for the first time.

FADE OUT

2.INT. OLIVIA & BEN'S FLAT - DAWN

A small, dim kitchen. The kind that holds echoes of old conversations. The hum of the fridge. A clock ticking. Outside, the sky is thick with that post-night hush. Olivia stands at the sink, rinsing a cup. Ben sits at the table, eating toast. The radio hums in the background.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Midnight tonight, global servers are back online. The last step to full recovery.

Olivia switches it off. Silence settles.

BEN
(chewing, casual)
Weird, right? Like we're waking up.

Olivia flips the kettle on. Finally looks at him.

OLIVIA
You think this is waking up?

BEN
(shrugs, swallowing)
I think it's... I don't know. A step forward. Like coming out of hibernation.

OLIVIA
(not turning, voice measured)
You make it sound like some great awakening.

BEN
(light, teasing)
Well, yeah. No more rationed outdoor hours, no more weird curfews. Best of all—no more crappy emergency broadcasts every morning. Just normal again.

Olivia turns, mug in hand.

OLIVIA
Normal.
BEN
(nodding, grinning)
Yeah.

A pause. Olivia tilts her head, studying him. Unimpressed.
Ben falters but keeps the smile.

BEN
(gesturing to her)
Come on, Liv. You can admit it. You're
excited too.

OLIVIA
(folding arms, skeptical)
Excited? To scroll our lives away again?

BEN
(mock offense, hand to chest)
Okay, rude. First of all, I missed
scrolling. And second—

OLIVIA
(cutting in, sharper now)
We've had to actually live, Ben. No
distractions. Just... here. Together. And
now? We all go back to pretending?

BEN
(defensive, but light)
I'm not pretending. I just think it'll be
nice, you know? To have more than just...
this.

He gestures vaguely at the kitchen. Olivia's expression
hardens.

OLIVIA
(quiet, pointed)
And what exactly is this? Deep as a puddle
again, Benjamin?

The kettle clicks off. She pours. Ben shifts, uncomfortable.

BEN
(sighing, switching gears)
Can we not do this now? We're meeting Chris and Laura soon.

OLIVIA
(pushing)
To talk about our wedding.

BEN
(nods, cautious)
Yeah.

OLIVIA
(soft, almost to herself)
Ironic. Planning a wedding at the place I almost died.

Ben exhales, jaw tight. He starts clearing the table.

BEN
(low, measured)
You didn't almost die.

OLIVIA
(sharp, stepping forward)
I was on the ground, Ben. And you—

BEN
(cutting in, voice rising slightly)
And I came back.

BEN
(softer, pleading now)
I came back, Liv.

OLIVIA
(quiet, unwavering)
You left first.

Ben looks at her. Holds her gaze.

BEN
(half-laughing, frustrated, helpless)
What do you want me to say? That I wasn't
scared? That I didn't panic?

OLIVIA
(steady, voice like a blade)
I want you to own it.
Silence. Ben exhales, glancing away. Then-

BEN
(soft, almost offhand)
Chris and Laura are bringing cake. Lemon
drizzle. Laura's obsessed with getting it
right.

OLIVIA
(quiet, resigned)
Of course they are.

The clock ticks. The fridge hums. Neither of them moves
until OLIVIA exits leaving her coffee to get cold

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. WOODLAND FIELD WITH PYLON - DAY

A vast, open field, power lines slicing through the sky.
The four of them—BEN, OLIVIA, CHRIS, and LAURA—stand in a
loose circle. The tension is thick, words unsaid but loud
in the space between them.

OLIVIA stands slightly apart, arms crossed, gaze distant.
She hasn't looked at BEN once. He notices. Pretends he
doesn't. CHRIS and LAURA feel it, trying to keep things
light.

LAURA
(forcing brightness, lifting a cake box)
I made lemon drizzle. Thought we
could-celebrate.

(She opens the box. A golden sponge, glossy with glaze. A
small offering of normalcy.)

LAURA
(nudging it toward OLIVIA, hopeful)
You love lemon drizzle.

A pause. OLIVIA barely glances at it.

OLIVIA
(flat)
I'm not hungry.

BEN
(forced chuckle, teasing)
Come on, Liv. Even you can't be mad at cake.

LAURA
(laughs, seizing the opening)
I swear, it's foolproof.

CHRIS
(grinning, arm around her)
A rare kitchen success. Probably the first
edible thing Laura's ever made.

LAURA elbows him, but her eyes flick back to OLIVIA. Still unreadable.

LAURA
(gently, offering again)
It's a celebration, right?

She lifts the box one last time. But her fingers slip—just slightly—
The cake tumbles. Lands face-down in the dirt. A dull,
final thud.
A horrible silence.

LAURA
(blinking, then forcing a laugh)
Oh. That's... great.

She crouches, flustered, reaching for it. BEN shakes his head, amused.

BEN
(half-laughing, but tense now)
Well. We tried.

CHRIS
(playing along)
Yeah. 'A' for effort.

LAURA hesitates, cheeks warm with embarrassment.

LAURA
(muttering, chuckling weakly)
This never happens at home. Must be the
gravity of the situation.

BEN gestures at the mess, looking to OLIVIA for a
reaction—any reaction.

BEN
(grinning, nudging at her silence)
Guess the cake just wasn't meant to make it.

And finally—OLIVIA looks at him. Not amused. Not annoyed.
Just... hollow.

OLIVIA
(quiet, cool)
Yeah. It wasn't meant to make it.

A pause. Then—

OLIVIA
(soft, deliberate)
Just like a lot of things.

BEN's smile falters. The shift is immediate, suffocating.

BEN
(guarded, jaw tightening)
Liv, don't start. It's just cake.

OLIVIA
(sudden, sharp)
It's never just anything with you, is it?

BEN stiffens. Throat working around a response he doesn't
have.

OLIVIA
(calm, but laced with something raw,
simmering)
It's always nothing. Not a big deal. Not
worth talking about.

BEN
(exhales, exasperated)
Jesus, Olivia—

OLIVIA
(cutting him off, stepping forward now)
You left me, Ben.

Silence. CHRIS shifts. LAURA doesn't dare move.

BEN
(quiet, controlled, defensive)
That's not fair.

OLIVIA
(hollow laugh, shaking her head)
No?

BEN
(firmer now)
I didn't leave you. It wasn't like that.

OLIVIA
(level, almost gentle—somehow worse than yelling)
I watched your back as you ran.

BEN falters. CHRIS moves slightly forward, unsure. LAURA looks like she wants to disappear.

BEN
(quieter, like he's trying to believe it himself)
I came back.

OLIVIA

(soft, final)
You hesitated.

The words land heavy. Brutal. Inescapable.

BEN blinks. Jaw clenches. But he has nothing to say.
OLIVIA storms off but quickly returns.

OLIVIA
Laura, your lemon cake is number 1, too good for some of us here. And Laura, as a friend I would strongly ask you to reconsider your own wedding.

OLIVIA continues to storm off.

BEN
(soft, breathless, barely audible)
Liv—

She doesn't turn. Walks toward the trees, the pylons, the horizon. BEN stands there, frozen. Then, slowly, his gaze drops. To the cake. A crumpled, ruined thing in the dirt. The joke is gone now. The warmth. The ease. All of it, sinking under the weight of something far heavier. The pylons hum. The wind cuts through the field. No one speaks.

FADE TO BLACK.

NT. FLAT - NIGHT

Dim light. The hum of the fridge. The world outside is still. Ben stands outside the spare room door, hesitates, then knocks

BEN
(soft, unsure)
Liv...?


No answer. Inside, Olivia sits at a desk, pen in hand. The letter in front of her. She adds a final line

Ben lingers, then exhales and heads to their bedroom. Collapses onto the bed, phone in hand. The glow of the screen flickers across his face as he scrolls. Mindless. The world at his fingertips again. Eventually, he drifts to sleep, the screen slipping from his grasp

INT. FLAT - MORNING

Sunlight leaks in. Ben stirs, reaches across the bed—empty. Not unusual. He stretches, groggy, moves into the kitchen. Starts making coffee. His phone buzzes on the counter

PHONE SCREEN:

 **Olivia - Location: Woodland Field**

Ben frowns, staring at the notification. Then—grabs his jacket.

EXT. WOODLAND FIELD - DAY

The pylons loom in the distance, humming faintly in the breeze. Ben moves through the field, scanning.

BEN
(calling, hesitant)
Liv...?

No answer. Just the wind. Then—his eyes catch something in the grass. A phone. Olivia's. Next to it—a neatly folded letter

His breath catches. Kneels. Shaking fingers unfold the paper. His eyes scan the words—then stop. A heavy exhale. His body slackens, sinking to the ground.

OLIVIA'S VOICE

(calm, direct, but cutting):

You ran, Ben. Not out of bravery, not out of some noble instinct—just because you were scared. You didn't look back, not even once.

PAUSE.

You made a choice. A coward's choice. To protect yourself before anyone else.

A beat, her voice softening slightly but still cold.

I thought maybe I'd understand. Maybe you'd prove me wrong. But no. You don't get to walk away from that."

Another beat, bitter now, final.

It wasn't an accident, Ben. It wasn't some grand tragedy. It was just you. Just your nature."

Ben swallows hard. His gaze drifts up—to the towering pylon in the distance. Small against the vast, empty sky.

His phone buzzes. Again. And again. Notifications stacking. The world rushing back in. But he doesn't move. Doesn't check. Just sits there. Still. Alone. The hum of the pylons stretching into the silence.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END