

CORNERED
By
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PLAY BREAKDOWN

CHARACTERS

ALEAH	A short-tempered 19 old who would do anything for her little brother. She dreams of open her own bakery someday.
MIKE	Aleah's 17 year old brother who often feels guilty for being friends with her ex-boyfriend.
BEN	Aleah's recently ex-boyfriend who charmed his way into the hearts of her family and won't go away.
HOPE	Aleah's high school best friend. An ambitious 19 year old with dreams to become a psychologist but can be slow-witted at times.
MAMA	A single mom to Aleah and Mike who can be overly protective but has good intentions,
sometimes.	

SETTING

A cozy but spacious apartment.

TIME

A warm August afternoon during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP on ALEAH and Hope in the hallway of ALEAH'S t family apartment. There is a welcome mat in front of the door and an umbrella lying on the ground. ALEAH and Hope are wearing face masks and ALEAH is holding a small box of cupcakes. Hope knocks on the door, no one answers.

ALEAH

What's taking them so long? I said I was gonna be here at 5 and it's...

ALEAH pulls her phone out of her back pocket and tries to balance the cupcakes with one hand.

5:45.

HOPE

We are kinda late though.

ALEAH

We would've been here on time if you didn't have to stop for-

HOPE

--Let's not play the blame game. You don't even wanna come anyway.

ALEAH

Sorry. I'm not trying to blame you, I'm just agitated.

HOPE

We can leave right now if you want?

ALEAH

No, I'm good. I promised Mike.

HOPE

So you're not mad at him for inviting, you know who...

ALEAH

You can say his name. It's not that serious.

HOPE

Are you sure?

ALEAH

Slightly aggressive

Yes, Hope. I have to be around him for the next couple of hours, so I think it's only right if I call him by his name. Not the "bum-ass dude who played me and is now all buddy-buddy with my little brother".

HOPE

Ok, ok. I'm just trying to make sure you're mentally and emotionally prepared for this... I heard you in the shower this morning singing Adele.

ALEAH

You heard that?

HOPE

Yes, I think the whole block heard you.

ALEAH

Sorry, I didn't know I woke you up.

HOPE

The singing wasn't that bad at first. Then you started that loud ass screaming, trying to hit the high notes.

ALEAH

I wasn't that loud.

HOPE

Yes, you were. You were like "HELLO FROM THE OUTSIDE, AT LEAST I CAN SAY THAT I'VE TRIED"

ALEAH

Ok, you're doing too much. I didn't sound that bad.

HOPE

No, Aleah. You sounded really bad. I thought you slipped and fell because I heard you crying. I was gonna call your mom but you got real quiet.

ALEAH

Sometimes I really regret asking you to move in.

HOPE

Okay but, what if you had actually fallen in the shower?

ALEAH

Hope, I'm 19, not 91.

HOPE

But still... Well, I'm glad I was there in case you did fall.

ALEAH

Aww, thank you so much. I have my own life alert assistant.

HOPE

I know. I'm such a good best friend.

ALEAH

You are definitely something... but if I'm being honest, I don't think I'm ready to see him yet.

HOPE

We can leave whenever you want...Should we come up with a secret hand signal or code word or something? In case things get heated.

ALEAH

No, I can use my phone to text you.... Like a normal person.

HOPE

Oh yeah, that's even better. You know I got your back, no matter what happens.

ALEAH

Thank you. The night just started and I know it's gonna be the longest one of my life.

ALEAH knocks on the door harder until MAMA opens the door.

SCENE 2

ALEAH and HOPE enter into the apartment.

ALEAH

Ma what took you so long?

MAMA

I was trying to do some cleaning before you two got here, I guess I lost track of time.

HOPE

Tries to hug MAMA.

Ms. Davis, how have you been?

MAMA

Nuh-uh, go wash your hands before you touch anything in my house.

HOPE

Of course. I could forgot.

MAMA, ALEAH, and HOPE walk towards the dining room. ALEAH places the cupcakes on the table and leads HOPE to the bathroom. MAMA cleans the cupcake container with a Clorox wipe. The sound of running water fills the silence in the apartment. ALEAH and HOPE reenter the dining room.

ALEAH

So where did Mike go?

MAMA

He went to the store with Ben to get some candles. The only ones we had 8 and 1 from your birthday last year.

ALEAH and HOPE sit down at the table.

ALEAH

Oh okay.

MAMA

I still can't believe you're working during all of this.

ALEAH

Yeah, me neither. But I need money to pay for school. Financial aid and scholarships can only cover so much.

HOPE

My financial aid packages are so bad. I might need a second job just to avoid going into debt.

MAMA

How are you gonna work two jobs and go to school? That's not possible.

HOPE

It's easy. All classes are online now so I just login into zoom on my phone and work at the same time.

ALEAH

Don't you have to turn on your camera for attendance?

MAMA

Yeah how does that work? Mike is only a junior and he's required to have his video on for all of his classes.

HOPE

Again, that's easy. I saw this tik tok for zoom hacks and you basically record a video of yourself being "engaged" in the lecture and use that video as your background.

MAMA

Hope, I see you're still cheating yourself out of a decent education.

HOPE

But think smarter not harder, right?!

ALEAH

I really don't know how you're gonna be a psychologist. You have to ST-UDY, and studying twenty minutes before the exams doesn't count. You know it takes four years of undergrad and two for graduate school to become a professional therapist.

HOPE

Yeah, I know. It's what I'm passionate about. I really wanna help kids understand and process the challenges of growing up.

MAMA

I didn't know you were so passionate about children. My mom didn't agree with my decision to become an elementary school teacher and it made school that much harder. Just know I support whatever decision you make.

HOPE

Thank you, Ms. Davis. Aleah is really lucky to have you as a mom.

MAMA

Jokes.

Try telling her that... So Leah how have you been, since you and Ben, you know...

ALEAH

Why is everyone so scared to talk about it? I'm fine. We broke up and that's that.

HOPE

She's having a hard time processing the break-up.

ALEAH

No, I'm not. I'm over him.

MAMA

Really? You two have been together since your junior year. I liked him. He was just such a sweetheart.

ALEAH

Trust me, it's all an act.

HOPE

I wanted him to propose. You guys were so cute together.

ALEAH

I'm too young to get married.

MAMA

Not if it's the right person. Have you talked to him since he moved out?

ALEAH

No.

MAMA

I think you were too hard on him.

ALEAH

Are you taking his side over mine?

MAMA

No, I'm not. Why would you say that?

HOPE

Leah, she was just asking a question.

ALEAH

Why would you say something like that? You know how I feel about him.

MAMA

Because you need to talk to him. I can tell something is bothering you.

ALEAH

I told you ma, I'm fine. It's okay. I'm here to celebrate Mike and that's it. Isn't that why you guys wanted me to come?

MAMA

Yeah, you're right. I'm not gonna push anymore. Hope, come you help me set the table?

HOPE

Sure.

MAMA and HOPE get up from the table and start to walk towards the kitchen.

ALEAH

Ma, what did you do?

MAMA

Nothing. I don't know what you're talking about.

ALEAH

Mom, I'm serious. What did you do?

MAMA

Uh. I know you've been kinda depressed since you broke up with Ben, so I told him you wanted to get back together. That's why he's here.

ALEAH

Why can't y'all just accept the fact that he was a bum and I deserved more?

HOPE

Because you've been together since junior year. You love each other, Leah.

ALEAH

Okay, maybe I did love him but you have no right to force me to be with him.

HOPE

No one is forcing you to do anything.

ALEAH

Why can't you just ask me how I feel about that situation.

HOPE

That's what we've been trying to do.

ALEAH

Oh.

HOPE

Yeah. So are you ready to talk about why you put up an emotional wall every time we talk about Ben?

ALEAH

Are you trying to psychoanalyze me?

HOPE

Well, I did take a psych class last semester.

ALEAH

Do I have to talk about it?

HOPE

It'll make you feel so much. Trust me.

SCENE 3

BEN and MIKE are in the hallway of the apartment. MIKE is holding a store bag with candles inside.

BEN

Aye, Mike come here, I gotta tell you something.

MIKE

What?

BEN

Uh, so you know how I and Aleah had the big fight about our apartment and then broke up after that.

MIKE

Yeah, what about it?

BEN

What did she tell you?

MIKE

She told me that you moved into her apartment and started living together before the quarantine. But you couldn't pay your half of the rent because you got fired.

BEN

I was still giving her money even after. She knew I couldn't work

MIKE

And she told you to get a job or get out of her damn house because she wasn't gonna be the only person working during a pandemic while you waited for another stimulus check.

BEN

Dang, she told you all of that?

MIKE

Yup.

BEN

What happened to grown folks' business being grown folks' business huh?

MIKE

I don't know how you thought she wouldn't tell me. Yeah, we friends, but she's my sister. She might be older than me, but that won't stop me from trying to protect her.

BEN

Yeah, I understand that... before I tell you, you gotta promise not to tell your mom.

MIKE

Oh, so you did something worse than living rent-free in her house for months, eating up all her food, and using all her tissue?

BEN

Man stop, can you just listen? So I lost my job in May, you don't need to know why it's not important. But yeah, so I was looking for another job but nobody wanted to hire me, not even Walmart. They need to hire as many people as they can, like how y'all gone have only three lanes in the store open when you got sixteen empty registers. But I be ringing up my stuff in self check out with my employee discount, it's free if they don't catch me. Uh but yeah, I didn't have a job but I needed money. My cousin already loaned me \$100 and he wanted his money back. So I took \$250 from Aleah's banking account. And when she asked about me, I told her that she probably got overcharged for something she brought on Amazon.

MIKE

You gotta tell her. Bro, if you don't, I will. Ben, I'm serious. That's messed up. How could you steal money from her, after all, she did for you.

BEN

I know man it's bad. Trust me I wanna tell her, but we already know how your sister is gonna react.

MIKE

That doesn't mean you keep lying to her face.

BEN

I know. I just don't know what to say.

MIKE

Umm. Here's an Idea, tell her the damn truth before I do.

BEN

Okay, I will. Just calm down. If your momma ever found out what I did, she'd kill me and chop up my body or sum. You know she be watching How to Get Away with Murder.

MIKE

You already know she gon do you like them crazy-ass people on criminal minds. Tie your ass up in the basement and feed you dog food.

BEN

And that's exactly why you need to handle let me.

MIKE

Takes out his key and unlocks the door.

You better pray Leah doesn't kill you herself. You know we gotta really big deep freezer downstairs? and it locks too.

SCENE 4

BEN and MIke enter the apartment

MIKE

Leah, you made it!

ALEAH

Why do you sound so surprised? I said I was gonna come over, didn't I.

MIKE

Where's my present?

ALEAH

What are you talking about? I didn't say I was getting you anything.

MIKE

Okay, so you came all the way over here and didn't bring a present.

ALEAH

I guess so.

MIKE

Well, I guess your not my favorite sister anymore.

ALEAH

Mike, I'm your only sister.

MIKE

Nah, Hope has been around basically my whole life. She's my favorite now.

HOPE

Hugs Mike.

Aww, thank you, Mike. I love you too.

ALEAH

So you're just gonna replace me like that? After I pre-ordered you the PS5 you wanted.

MIKE

You're getting me a PS5?! Mom couldn't even find one.

ALEAH

Yeah, I know people who know people.

MAMA

Leah, how are you paying for it? Do you need any help, cause that thing is expensive?

ALEAH

Don't worry about it, Ma. I got it.

MAMA

Are you sure?

ALEAH

Yeah, I had a little money saved up because I was planning on taking a few days off and going to Miami. But since everything is closed down, I figured why not?

HOPE

I chipped in too. I wanted you to have an extra special 17th birthday since you can't have a normal celebration.

MIKE

Thank you guys so much! I'll pay you back, I swear.

ALEAH

No. You deserve it. These past few months have been so depressing, we all deserve something special and exciting.

BEN

What kinda games did you get him?

ALEAH

I didn't get him any. He can pick out his own games. I thought it would be rude to pick for him since I don't know what he likes.

MIKE

Tries to change the subject.

Leah, you made cupcakes too.

ALEAH

Yup, my cupcakes are way better than that trash from the grocery store.

BEN

So are we gonna eat them or what?

MAMA

Yes, after you two wash your hands.

BEN

I put hand sanitizer on before we came in.

MAMA

I don't care.

MAMA pushes the boys to the bathroom.

Use some soap AND water.

ALEAH

I don't think I can be in the same room as him right now.

HOPE

He hasn't even said anything.

ALEAH

It's not about what isn't saying now, it's about what he's already said to me.

MAMA

What has he been saying to you? You know I'll kill him.

MIKE and BEN reenter the dining room and it gets silence.

MIKE

Why are y'all so quiet? Who died?

ALEAH

Whispers to herself.

Nobody yet.

BEN

You say something?

ALEAH

No. Just minding my own business, you know. I'm gonna go get some napkins.

ALEAH heads to the kitchen and BEN sits down in her seat. MIKE sits next to BEN.

BEN

She's so in love with me.

HOPE

Don't be so cocky. She barely said two words to you.

BEN

She's just warming up. We don't do a lot of talking anyway.

MIKE

Bro chill.

BEN

I'm just being honest.

MAMA

Well, keep some of that honesty to yourself.

*ALEAH enters the dining room with a stack of napkins and water bottles.
ALEAH almost drops the cups, but HOPE and MAMA quickly
get up to help.*

MAMA

I didn't tell you you were bringing all of this out here. We could have helped you.

ALEAH

Sorry, I wasn't thinking.

MIKE

Okay, let's eat.

ALEAH

Excuse me.

BEN

Are you talking to me?

ALEAH

Yes, you. You're sitting in my seat.

BEN

I thought you weren't gonna talk to me.

ALEAH

Can you just get up?

BEN

Dang. At least say please.

ALEAH

Please don't start with me. I'm just trying to enjoy my baby brothers' birthday.

BEN

I am too.

Hope

Y'all need to stop acting like children.

ALEAH

Whispers to Hope

I'm trying to be the bigger person.

BEN moves. Everyone is seated at the table. Hope is sitting to the right of ALEAH and BEN sits on her left side. MIKE sits next to BEN and MAMA sits by HOPE. The room is filled with tension and MIKE is secretly anticipating disaster to strike. EVERYONE grabs a cupcake. MIKE places his candles on both of his cupcakes.

MAMA

Wait, we have to sing happy birthday.

MIKE

Hope, can you dim the lights?

HOPE

Ok.

HOPE walks over to the light switch and dims it. As she does this, MIKE lights the candles.

MAMA

One. Two. Three...

EVERYONE except MIKE begins to sing "Happy Birthday". MIKE pauses before blowing out the two cupcakes.

HOPE

What did you wish for?

MIKE

For this pandemic to be over and everything to go back to normal.

ALEAH

Hey! You weren't supposed to tell anyone your wish. Now it won't come true.

MAMA

Well, let's just hope and pray that it does come to an end.

There is a comfort silence as the group eats their cupcakes. BEN drinks

some water and continues to eat noxiously loud. No one seems to mind but ALEAH is trying really hard to control herself.

ALEAH

Stop eating like a dog. I can't stand it when you chew with your mouth open, it's disgusting. Like how hard is it to chew with your closed mouth, it sounds so freaking nasty. It makes me lose my appetite and you know it irritates me and you do it on purpose. How would you like it if I was smacking food in your ear? You wouldn't like it, so why would you keep on doing it to me after I'm telling you to stop? You always do stuff like this to irritate me. Anytime I tell you to stop you say "oh no I'm not even doing it that, this is just how I eat". You know that's not how you eat. Nobody wants to hear that, it's disgusting. Can't nobody even enjoy their food without you smacking in their ear. Ew and Your breath already smell like crap too.

MADDIE pushes BEN. BEN falls, slipping a cup of water on the table.
Look what you did, you dipshit. Now move.

BEN tries to clean his shirt with a napkin, but the stain won't budge.

MAMA

Aleah!

ALEAH

What? He kicked the table, not me.

BEN

It's cool. I'll be right back.

BEN exits to go to the bathroom. Everyone tries to clean the water before the cupcakes are soaked. HOPE finds a phone on the table and gives it to ALEAH.

HOPE

Aleah, here's your phone. Why didn't you text me like we talked about?

ALEAH

I'm ready to leave. I'm sorry but I can't do this.

MAMA

Really? I haven't seen you in months and you're leaving already?

ALEAH

Ma, I tried to be cordial with him but he's exactly what he's doing.

MIKE

You didn't give him a chance.

ALEAH

Why should I though?

ALEAH'S phone begins to ring but she doesn't recognize the number. She declines the call after a few rings.

HOPE

Who was that?

ALEAH

I don't know. Probably a scammer calling about "car insurance".

ALEAH unlocks the phone to double check the number, but when the phone unlocks her bank account is seen.

What the hell?

HOPE

What's wrong?

ALEAH

I opened my phone and the website for my bank is right here with all of my information on it.

MIKE

So?

ALEAH

I never check my account like that, I use the app.

HOPE walks over to ALEAH and they scroll through the phone.

ALEAH

This isn't my phone.

MIKE

It looks like your phone.

ALEAH

But it's not.

MAMA

Are you sure?

ALEAH

Yes, I'm sure... it's Ben's.

HOPE

Why does he have YOUR information on HIS phone?

ALEAH

I don't know but I'm gonna kill him.

MAMA

Aleah, don't say stuff you don't mean.

ALEAH

I'm serious Ma. I'm gonna kill him.

MIKE

Leah, calm down before you do something you'll regret.

ALEAH

Mike, did you know?

MIKE

No...

ALEAH

Don't lie to me. This is not the time for games.

MIKE

Yeah, I did.

MAMA

Micheal, why didn't you tell anybody? I invited him into my house and he's stealing from your sister. How could you not tell anyone?

MIKE

He just told me. Right before we came in.

SCENE 5

BEN enters the dining room to find everyone gathered together looking at a phone.

BEN

Hey... what's wrong with your face?

ALEAH

Mike... get your friend.

BEN

What's wrong with her?

MIKE

She knows bro.

BEN

How? Did you tell her? You promised me that you wouldn't tell her.

MIKE

No, I didn't. She found out on her own.

ALEAH

You know how you pressured me to get matching phone cases? Well, I accidentally picked up your phone thinking it was mine. Why are you logged into my bank account?

BEN

How did you unlock my phone?

ALEAH

Apparently, you have the same code as me too!

BEN

So, you still have our anniversary as your password?

ALEAH

Don't try to change the subject, answer the question. Why can I access MY bank account on YOUR phone?

BEN

I don't know.

ALEAH

Answer. Me.

BEN

I don't know, I swear.

ALEAH

Stop lying!

BEN

Now, before I say anything, promise me you'll stay calm.

ALEAH

I am calm! Just tell me the truth.

BEN

Okay, Okay. Um, so yeah. I needed to pay back my cousin the money he loaned me and I didn't have it. I asked my mom, but she won't give me no more money.

ALEAH

So because nobody would loan your broke ass some more money, you decided to take from me?!?

BEN

Nah not really. I was gonna pay you back.

ALEAH

How? You don't have a job.

BEN

I get my stimulus check next month.

ALEAH

Stop talking about this damn stimulus. That's all you do is sit on your lazy ass and wait around for handouts. When were you planning on telling me that you took my money in the first place?

BEN

I kept trynna call you.

ALEAH

No, you never called me.

BEN

Yes, I did.

ALEAH

When? What day? What time? Show me when you tried to call me? You're a damn thief and a liar.

BEN

I don't think of myself as a thief unless stealing your heart counts.

ALEAH

Stop.Talking. To me.

BEN

You know you still love me, baby.

ALEAH

I can't believe I used to think you were attractive.

MIKE

It's time for you to leave Ben.

MAMA

Actually, Mike, I think it's nice enough to put something on the grill today. Ben, can you please go to the basement and get it.

BEN

Yeah, of course, Ms. D.

MIKE

Leah, go with him and make sure he doesn't get locked down there.

BEN

Good looking bro. Remember when me and Mike got locked down there for an hour and we tryna call but my phone wasn't working.

ALEAH

Did you really call somebody? or are you lying about that too?

BEN

I did, but there's no service down.

HOPE

Yeah, it's getting dark too. We can roast marshmallows later.

ALEAH

Good idea.

MAMA

Leah don't forget to get the steaks out of the freezer.

ALEAH

Okay.

BEN begins to walk out toward the door and ALEAH hesitates. MAMA opens a drawer and puts a hammer and makes sure BEN isn't looking. she gives the hammer to ALEAH and gives her a reassuring look. ALEAH meets BEN at the door and leaves.

BLACKOUT.