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FIELD TRIP

by
Charlotte Markle

Characters:

Natalia: A successful businesswoman. Driven and no-nonsense, she was promoted young and, up to this point, has been focused on her career.

Alexander: Her coworker and boyfriend. Fun-loving and amiable.

Setting: The stage is a suggestion of a field. Upstage is a black surface that can have lights projected on it to suggest evening moving into night. The scene begins just before sunset.

Alexander marches on briskly, wearing a suit and a large, full backpack and carrying a portable camping stove. He looks around in satisfaction and sets down his stove and backpack. He then sits down and takes his shoes off, one by one, followed by his socks. He takes a moment to relish the sensation of his bare toes nestling in the grass.

ALEXANDER

Yelling back to where he came from.

Come on baby, you're almost there!

A smartly dressed businesswoman enters, panting; running through the field is much harder in high heels.

Take your shoes off, Natalia; you're making it hard on yourself.

NATALIA

Looking down at his feet with distaste.

No thank you.

ALEXANDER

Suit yourself, but it's much nicer.

Wiggles his toes enthusiastically.

NATALIA

Alexander, where are we going? We're miles from the road.

ALEXANDER

This is it!

NATALIA

A field?

ALEXANDER

He stands up grandly

A field!

NATALIA

Thoroughly confused and tired, but humoring him.
It's...lovely.

ALEXANDER

With pride
I know.
Seductively, as he pulls her in close.
And so are you...

Giggling, Natalia allows herself to be dipped and kissed dramatically in the manner of an old movie.

NATALIA

You're crazy.

ALEXANDER

Crazy about *you*.

NATALIA

Embarrassed but enjoying herself
Stop it.

He pulls her in close and begins a slow swaying dance while humming "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You." After a little bit Natalia breaks away.

NATALIA

So...why are we in a field?

ALEXANDER

Because it's perfect.

NATALIA

Perfect for...

ALEXANDER

You and me. A spot just for us.

NATALIA

And as soon as we finish moving your stuff into my apartment we really will have a spot just for us.

She kisses him on the nose.
So now what? What are we doing here?

ALEXANDER

Well, first things first. Lets set up the stove.

NATALIA

Indicating the camp stove

I thought that's what it was. Dinner picnic? Is that what we're doing?

ALEXANDER

Deliberately not answering.

Why don't you get the stove set up while I—go over there. Nature is calling.

NATALIA

I told you that you should have used the bathroom before we went out.

ALEXANDER

Natalia, I'm a man; peeing in the outdoors is not only a possibility, it's a privilege.

NATALIA

Lovely.

Alexander exits. Natalia crouches down and starts to fiddle set up the stove.

I'm not sure how this goes together, Alex. This looks complicated.

ALEXANDER

Calling from offstage

That's why you're doing it.

NATALIA

Did you bring the instructions?

ALEXANDER

I don't think it came with instructions.

NATALIA

Stop fulfilling gender stereotypes.

She rummages around

Aha! Found them.

She starts putting it together. Alexander reenters and tries to help. She slaps his hand away before he can touch anything.

ALEXANDER

What?

She takes some Purell out of her purse and hands it to him.

Oh. Gotcha.

He cleans his hands while she continues to read the instructions.

NATALIA
Where's the propane tank?

ALEXANDER
It's not in the stove?

NATALIA
No.

ALEXANDER
It should be right—oh...Shit.

NATALIA
Alex!

ALEXANDER
I'm so sorry. I didn't realize that it was a separate attachment.

NATALIA
That's ok. We still have time to walk back to the car, go home and order in a late dinner.
Takes out her cell phone
Let me see if I can get a signal—

ALEXANDER
Grabbing her phone from her.
No. No. Nope.

NATALIA
Hey! Give it back!

ALEXANDER
There's no signal and you're just going to keep checking it and getting frustrated, so I'll hang on to it.

NATALIA
No I won't.
Alexander gives her an "I don't believe that for a second" look.
Fine.

ALEXANDER
I brought plenty of things that don't have to be cooked, don't even worry about it. Come on.
He takes a blanket out of the bag.
Spread this out. I'll see what I have.

He rummages around in the bag.

Here. Dried fruits and nuts...peanut butter...carrots...crackers—those might taste good spread with the cold pasta sauce—and we can still eat the ingredients for the s'mores...and, of course, the requisite—drum roll please—Spam!

NATALIA

Alexander...maybe we should just head back.

ALEXANDER

Please, just give it a try. For me.

NATALIA

Sitting down gingerly on the blanket.

Ok. The picnic must go on!

We can always order takeout later at the apartment.

Natalia starts eating carrot sticks. Alexander takes out a knife and puts spam on a cracker. They eat in silence for a moment.

ALEXANDER

So, what do you think?

NATALIA

Well, it's a far cry from the scallop ceviché and wood-oven roasted, grass-fed beef medallions that you ordered for me last night, but I appreciate the variety.

ALEXANDER

Everything has its place. You can't eat scallop ceviché in a field.

NATALIA

This is true. Besides, it all depends on how you look at it. It's mostly about the fancy name. "Bits of raw shellfish" becomes "scallop ceviché" and suddenly everyone wants to eat it. Maybe I should use this example at the marketing meeting tomorrow...

ALEXANDER

Holding out a very unappetizing looking cracker with spam, peanut butter and cold pasta sauce.

May I offer you our signature hors d'oeuvres? It's a wheat crisp topped with a nut spread and our special blend of preserved meats, then drizzled with a chilled tomato purée.

NATALIA

I take it back. Fancy names can't fix everything.

ALEXANDER

Are you sure?

NATALIA

Yes.

ALEXANDER

He drops the “hors d’oeuvres” on the ground next to them.
Well have untoasted s’mores then.

NATALIA

Mmm gladly.

They eat their s’mores. When they finish Natalia gives Alexander a kiss and stands up.

Thank you for the hike and the “gourmet” picnic. I enjoyed it.

ALEXANDER

You are most welcome.

He stands up as well
Now time to explore our field!

NATALIA

The field is very nice, Alex, but we *do* need to make sure that we get back to the car before dark.

ALEXANDER

We wouldn’t make it back before dark. Help me set up the tarp and blankets...That looks like a nice spot over there.

He points offstage.

NATALIA

What? We’re not staying here overnight.

ALEXANDER

Cheerfully

Yup.

He sits back down on the ground, he unzips the backpack and begins pulling out a tarp and blankets. Natalia crouches down to his level careful not to get dirt on her slacks.

NATALIA

Ok, Alex, I love the idea of a camping adventure, but lets do it sometime when we’ve planned a little better, had time to pack what we need and found a site with...facilities.

ALEXANDER

I brought water, and all the basics.

Standing up and shaking her head, amused. She doesn't take it seriously; he's such a goof.

We have a meeting in the morning, Alex.

ALEXANDER

Ignoring her and continuing brightly as he removes objects from the backpack.

I brought hats with mosquito netting for both of us, an extra-absorbent towel, a swiss army knife—and the battery in this flashlight recharges if you turn this crank every three minutes. I doubt any five-star hotel would provide you with the same luxuries!

NATALIA

I'm *sure* they wouldn't.

She checks her watch, a little concerned that he is keeping up the charade.

Alex, I appreciate your sense of humor, but I'm only going to put up with this joke for so long...

ALEXANDER

So I was thinking that we should make our sleeping area in that spot with the trees over there, nice and far away from where we ate—

NATALIA

Curious in spite of herself.

Why so far apart?

ALEXANDER

We don't want the smell of our food too close to where we are sleeping—in case of bears.

NATALIA

Nervously, still not totally sure if he's joking.

Bears?

ALEXANDER

Bears are a common problem for campers. But there's nothing to worry about if you come properly prepared.

NATALIA

And are we properly prepared?

ALEXANDER

Sure are. If you see a bear, just remember not to run and to make yourself look really big, loud and intimidating. Besides...

He reaches into his backpack rummaging, then draws out a large machete (or it could be a switchblade) with a flourish.

I brought this in case of an emergency!

Natalia jumps back in shock and shrieks

NATALIA

Alex!

ALEXANDER

Laughing heartily and putting the machete/switchblade on the ground
I'm just kidding

Darkly
...mostly...

NATALIA

Not laughing.
Alex.

ALEXANDER

I you start cleaning this stuff up, I'll start laying out the blankets.
He grabs the tarps and blankets and heads off stage.

NATALIA

Calling after him
Alex, we're not staying here!

No answer
Honestly, sometimes it's like I'm dating a child.

Calling out again.
Alex, we have a *meeting* tomorrow morning and its getting dark!

Pause.
It is dark.

Natalia looks around and shivers. Suddenly there is a sound of something rustling briefly. Natalia looks up, towards the audience, and freezes, listening.

NATALIA

Alex?

There is no sound, she looks around for a moment and then returns to the stove. Again, there is a sudden rustling. She looks up, wide-eyed.

NATALIA

Afraid to speak above a whisper, pleading.

Alex...

There is the definite sound of something moving closer. It sounds big.

NATALIA

A small frightened squeak.

Alex!

Without moving the rest of her body, she slowly reaches for the machete/switchblade on the ground next to her. A large blurry shadow is projected on the back wall behind her. She stands up and widens her stance while muttering to herself.

NATALIA

Big, loud and intimidating. Big...

The blurry shadow starts to solidify and take shape as it moves closer, the sounds are clearly from an animal now. She raises the machete/switchblade.

NATALIA

Big...loud...loud...

As the shadow becomes what is clearly a four-legged animal, Natalia raises the machete/switchblade high above her head and with her tongue out and eyes bugged out she lets out what resembles a Maori war cry.

NATALIA

AAAAAAAEEEEUUUGH!!!

At this instant Alex runs on and shape solidifies into the shadow of a medium sized goat. There is a moment of stunned silence. Then the sound of the goat, "Maaaaaah."

ALEXANDER

Approaching the still frozen Natalia cautiously.

Natalia? Nat...?

NATALIA

Slowly lowering the machete/switchblade.

It's a goat.

ALEXANDER

What did you think it was, baby?

NATALIA

A...a bear?

ALEXANDER

A bear?

There is a moment of silence and then he bursts out laughing, unable to control himself. Natalia looks embarrassed and furious at the same time.

ALEXANDER

Trying in vain to control his laughter.

I'm sorry Nat—I'm sorry, I—its just your face—and the goat, and—The bears were just a joke honey—and the machete [knife]—I was teasing, this is just a field; there's no bears here. Judging by the looks of it, it's a goat pasture. I'm sorry I scared you baby—

He attempts to hug her but she shoves him away violently.

NATALIA

In hysterics

God Alex, this is insane! You told me we were going on an "adventure"—I had no idea what it would be. A picnic, with shitty food I could handle, but this—I'm not prepared—I'm going to miss my meeting in the morning—I haven't been camping since I was in high school—I'm scared of the dark, terrified of bears, I HATE goats—and I have no idea *where* we are or *why* the hell we're here!

ALEXANDER

Natalia...

NATALIA

Screaming.

WHY ARE WE HERE!

ALEXANDER

Putting his hands on her shoulders

Natalia, what time are our Thursday meetings?

NATALIA

Caught off guard and completely confused.

What?

ALEXANDER

What time are they?

NATALIA

8:30.

ALEXANDER

And what time did you arrive last Thursday?

NATALIA

8:25

ALEXANDER

And the week before?

NATALIA

Hesitantly

8:25

ALEXANDER

When did you first let me kiss you?

NATALIA

When you dropped me off after the third date—I don't see how this is relevant—it was perfect, why are you bringing it up now?

ALEXANDER

Yes it was perfect. So perfect it seemed...choreographed. And last night, at that *perfectly* romantic dinner, when I asked you to move in with me, you said, "Yes." And the way you said it—In my mind I saw you checking it off in your "to do" list.

NATALIA

What? Alexander, I don't understand—

ALEXANDER

Trying desperately to explain.

Nat, I love you—but I needed to see you...do something crazy. You never do anything spontaneous. You wouldn't even eat my "hors d'oeuvres."

NATALIA

Because it was peanut butter and spam on a cracker!

ALEXANDER

You're missing the point!

Pause.

I guess that if I can get you to spend the night with me in a—a goat-field, then I can believe that you can actually do this—you know—live with me.

Beat

NATALIA

Like a test.

ALEXANDER

I guess you could see it that way.

NATALIA

That is...

She struggles for words.

...so utterly and completely selfish of you!

ALEXANDER

What? No, Nat, it was supposed to be fun. I just thought it might help us understand our relationship better.

NATALIA

You thought that an elaborate and inconvenient “test” was the best way to do that? We could have just talked about it like adults, Alex.

ALEXANDER

Like you’ve never tested me.

NATALIA

What?

ALEXANDER

Everything has been a test with you. If I had been late to a single date would I have had a chance? You dropped hints for weeks about having a nice dinner, because you wanted to have the “living together” conversation, but I had to be the one to figure it out and plan it like it was all my idea.

NATALIA

How paranoid are you! I’m not some kind of evil mastermind. Besides this is entirely different! To put me in a situation way outside of my—just because of your—*insecurities*—God, I can’t believe this—

ALEXANDER

He is getting angry now.

So maybe I am *paranoid* and *insecure*, but there’s a lot of pressure when you’re trying to be in a relationship with a woman who is so goddamn *perfect*.

NATALIA

What the hell is that supposed to—*I never claimed to be perfect*—don’t make me sound so bitchy.

I’m not perfect! Happy?

ALEXANDER

But you are, that's the thing. You're perfect. Everything that you do works out.

NATALIA

So your problem with our relationship is that it doesn't have problems? That's healthy.

ALEXANDER

Stop twisting my words, that's not what I—

NATALIA

The only reason we're having problems now is because you stirred it up.

ALEXANDER

I wasn't trying to *stir*—

NATALIA

Fine. Then don't.

She starts to pack up the picnic things

We are going home now. I'm sure we will both feel better once we're inside and comfortable.

ALEXANDER

No! You can't end the conversation like that!

He goes behind her and starts to deliberately unpack everything that she has packed.

Natalia, you can't just make this go away.

NATALIA

Repacking what he has unpacked, it's a race now.

Make what go away? All this—whatever *this* is—is something that you conjured out of thin air. It's totally irrational. Hand me that flashlight.

There is a tense pause while Alexander picks up the flashlight, but doesn't hand it to her.

Come on. Alexander...

He shakes his head and starts to set it down.

Fine. I will get it myself.

She moves towards him quickly, but he holds it out of her reach.

She grabs for it again, but he starts to play the "keep the ball out of reach" game that big brothers always play with their siblings. He starts to chuckle as she struggles.

She stops reaching and stares him down.

I will knee you in the balls.

He starts to laugh, but then sees her expression.

ALEXANDER

Gotcha.

He starts to run away, she chases and they run in circles during the following dialogue.

NATALIA

Oh. My. God. Cut it out.

ALEXANDER

This is the only way I can get you to stay and talk to me!

NATALIA

I can't talk if I'm winded from playing chase with a grown man!

ALEXANDER

So start talking fast.

NATALIA

What is there to talk about?

ALEXANDER

Slightly winded now.

About us—about life—about—moving in and stuff

NATALIA

Also out of breath

So what's the matter Alexander? I love you—you love me—We're—moving in—
together— isn't that—how—it—should go?

Stopping to catch her breath.

Stop making problems out of nothing.

ALEXANDER

Coming to an abrupt stop so that they are a good distance apart and speaking almost more to himself than to her.

Do you though?

NATALIA

Taken aback.

What?

ALEXANDER

Raising his voice very slightly.

Do you love me?

NATALIA

Of course I—didn't I just say that?

ALEXANDER

But do you love *me*? How do I know that if I had come along later you wouldn't have started dating whatever Joe Schmo came along at precisely the right moment? How do I know that I'm not just penciled in your planner? **(mimes writing)** "May 4th: Board meeting. May 5th: Fall in love."

Tense pause.

NATALIA

Swallowing her anger and speaking matter-of-factly.

You know what—it's true—timing has a lot to do with it, no matter what, but you can't spend your life jealous of some hypothetical guy who could have gotten there before you.

ALEXANDER

But what is it about *me* in particular that makes you love me?

NATALIA

God Alex, are you listening? It doesn't matter!

Realizing that he's not going to let her get off that easily.

Fine. Jesus. You—uh, you make me laugh. You look good in a suit. You need me to remind you to do things like clean your hands and read instructions which—for whatever reason—I find endearing. I don't know—you're just you.

ALEXANDER

And *this* is "just me" doing something spontaneous. I won't always follow a plan. Will you be able to deal with it?

NATALIA

Did it occur to you that I might already have thought of these things? Don't you think I might have weighed the pros and cons and gotten over it?

Alexander tries to say something and she stops him.

No, I'm talking now.

I've come to terms with the fact that we are different people but you obviously haven't and you decided that you had to arrange this crazy *test* of my *spontaneity*—which incidentally is more *planned* than anything I've ever come up with—Well Alex, it shows that you are spending more time worrying about yourself than actually thinking about our future and honestly I'm not sure that I can live with someone who chooses such childish behavior—

ALEXANDER

Now she's set him off as well.

Childish? No—fine—you know what? You're right. I am childish, paranoid and insecure. Thank you Natalia for reminding me that you were willing to go for me even though I'm a total jerk. How kind of you.

NATALIA

That's not—Ugh! You're proving my point!

ALEXANDER

If I'm childish maybe it's because I would rather be a child than an adult who has to sit at a desk and plan their whole life out. Just cuz you get off on work doesn't mean that—

NATALIA

I don't get off on work! I'm just practical and I understand that you have to work hard if you want a good life—

muttering

And in my case you have to work about ten times harder than the other employees because you're a—

ALEXANDER

Jesus Natalia, do not turn this into one of your feminist guilt trips—

NATALIA

Excuse me? One of my *what*?

ALEXANDER

Realizing that he may have gone too far

I'm sorry—that's not—I just feel like you are just saying that to make me feel guilty.

NATALIA

This is a sensitive issue for her

I'm just stating fact, Alexander. It is only my drive to work that is keeping me from being some asshole's sexy pool toy like my sister! And, you know what, maybe you should feel guilty.

ALEXANDER

What? I should feel guilty because your sister is married to a misogynistic jerk? It's not like I support that.

NATALIA

No, you should feel guilty for not respecting my commitment to my job and putting me in a situation that could jeopardize it!

ALEXANDER

Look, I'm sorry, but what about respecting my need for a little more in life? Can't you meet me halfway?

NATALIA

No! because you've already taken it more than half your way! You took me somewhere without my consent and now I'm stuck here in the middle of nowhere with no way of leaving

Alexander tries to say something, but she continues over him
I have a meeting to attend—

Nat—
ALEXANDER

—I have a job I to lose—
NATALIA

Natalia—
ALEXANDER

—and so do you—
NATALIA

ALEXANDER
Exploding.
WOULD YOU JUST SHUT UP AND LISTEN FOR A SECOND!

She shuts up. He takes a deep breath. In a low voice.
We're not in the middle of nowhere.

What?
NATALIA

ALEXANDER
Sadly.
I lied to you. We are not in the middle of nowhere. Okay? I wanted it to seem like we were all alone together in the wilderness. I thought that if I did it right I could make a romantic adventure for us out of a night together in a goat-field—like your fucking scallop ceviché—it's all in how you look at it, right? But I lied to you.

He takes another deep breath.
There is a road behind those trees like a half a mile away and a cab driver with instructions to wait for you until midnight.

Beat
NATALIA
There's a cab...you knew that I would want to leave?

ALEXANDER
I hoped you wouldn't.
Long pause.

NATALIA

I just—I can't—

ALEXANDER

Dropping his gaze.

Well, I schlepped everything out here so I'm going to spend my night here. I'll be there tomorrow—a little late, and sweaty and stinky—for the meeting.

He picks up the backpack full of things

Save me a donut.

He walks off in the opposite direction of the road with his backpack and blankets. Natalia watches him go. She looks around, not entirely sure what to do, on the verge of tears. Finally she pulls herself together and prepares to walk off. The sound of the goat is heard from the direction that she is headed.

NATALIA

Taking out all her anger on the goat

Go away you stupid animal!

I just want to get past you and you kind of freak me out. Please, *please* go away.

The goat maaahs again.

I'm having a horrible day, just go. Go! Shoo!

There is another noise from a different goat in the same direction.

There's two of you?

More "maaaaahs"

You brought your girlfriend.

Thanks for rubbing it in.

Asshole.

Of course, the difference is that your girlfriend *likes* fields. This is like fine dining and a luxury hotel all rolled into one for you. I bet you'd never take her somewhere that she wasn't comfortable like a—a—well I'm having a hard time thinking of a place that a goat wouldn't go, but you get my point!

More to herself now than the goat.

It's not fair to base an entire relationship on one stupid *test*.

The goat "maaaaaahs." Natalia takes off her shoe and hurls it at the goat as an emphasis when she says "spontaneous".

So what if I'm not *spontaneous*!

We hear a thud and an angry grunt as the shoe hits the goat.

It serves you right, you dumb—what are you—No! Stop it. That is not food! Drop it. Come back—COME BACK! Please—

Natalia screams in frustration and sinks down into the grass sobbing.

Pause.

Muttering to herself.

Who's being childish now?

She picks the "hors d'oeuvres" up off of the ground and holds it out towards the goat.

Here. You want this? Yummm look at this—much tastier than that nasty old shoey-shoe. You want it?

No?

Yeah...neither would I.

She contemplates the cracker.

It *isn't* fair to ruin an entire relationship because of one silly test.

The goat “maaahs”

Don't call me a hypocrite!

Pause.

Oh Jesus Christ...now I'm worried about a pair of goats judging my love life.

She takes a deep breath. Yells

Alex!

Pause. Yells louder.

ALEX! Please come back!

Pause

ALEX! I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME!

Alexander reenters reluctantly and waits silently for her to say what she has to say.

NATALIA

I need to take that taxi and I need you to come with me.

ALEXANDER

Why should I do that?

NATALIA

I'm not ready to abandon my schedules and miss a meeting yet. These things have to happen in little steps.

ALEXANDER

Tired and dejectedly.

What little steps, Natalia? I've been flexible for you, when are you going to be flexible for me?

Natalia steels herself. She holds out the “hors d'oeuvres” dramatically.

You wouldn't.

NATALIA

Miming a toast with the cracker.

Little steps.

She closes her eyes and eats the whole thing in one bite. Dirt and all.

Lights.