

EXCHANGE

Screenplay by James Hancock

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FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY.

The typical living room of an English home. Small, lived in, yet homely. We are looking at a laptop screen, from the viewpoint of MICHAEL, a seventeen-year-old boy.

An online video chat screen is calling *Lucie*.

LUCIE, a seventeen-year-old French girl, appears on the laptop screen. She beams a big smile. We can see Michael's face in the smaller box in the corner.

LUCIE (French accent)
Bonjour.

MICHAEL (English accent)
Bonjour.

LUCIE
How are you?

MICHAEL
Good. You?

LUCIE
I'm okay. My friend Clara was sick last night. She phoned me. A quick...

...Lucie is unsure of the word.

LUCIE
Chat?

MICHAEL
Yes. A quick chat.

LUCIE
She had a nasty cough. She'll be okay though. She is strong. How is your Nan?

MICHAEL
Good. I'm cooking us a shepherd's pie.

LUCIE
Yummy.

Michael smiles and pulls an unsure face...

MICHAEL

...Well, it's homemade, so no guarantees it's gonna be any good.

LUCIE

I'm sure it will be lovely.

There is a pause. Michael and Lucie smiling at each other.

MICHAEL

So what do you want to do?

LUCIE

I'm open to suggestions.

MICHAEL

Battleships?

Lucie frowns.

MICHAEL

It's a game. You secretly place your battleships on a grid, and I secretly place mine. Then we give coordinates and fire at each other...

LUCIE

(Interrupting)

...What about music?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Music is good.

LUCIE

I pick a song for you, and play it. Then it's your turn. Okay?

MICHAEL

Okay.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

Michael's living room. The TV is on quietly and Michael is sat on the sofa next to his Nan. Michael's NAN, a woman in her early seventies, sips a cup of tea.

NAN

You should tell her how you feel.

MICHAEL

I dunno, Nan. I'd feel stupid. We only went on two dates.

NAN

And more than twenty of those internet chat things. What does that tell you?

MICHAEL

(In an agreeing tone)
That we like each other.

NAN

Tells me, she's your girlfriend.

MICHAEL

What if she sees it as just good friends though? She's French. They're friendlier.

NAN

Yes, she's French. So woo her.

Michael LAUGHS.

MICHAEL

Woo her?

NAN

Yes. Turn on the charm.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I'm not very good at that.

NAN

She won't care. If she sees you're trying, she'll help you. She'll appreciate the effort.

MICHAEL

How? How do I woo her?

NAN

Not with battleships, that's for certain. What sort of things does she like?

They both LAUGH.

Michael thinks for a second.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY.

We are looking at the laptop again, and Lucie's face on the screen.

LUCIE
...and it's strange. Of all the foods, I fancy fish and chips the most.

Michael LAUGHS.

MICHAEL
(Jokingly)
You were here too long.

Lucie frowns, unsure of that comment.

MICHAEL
No! I didn't mean it like that. I mean... You have better food in France. Fish and chips is nice, but...

LUCIE
(Interrupting)
...Calm down, Michael. I know it was a joke.

Michael sighs and relaxes. There is a silent pause.

MICHAEL
You weren't here long enough. I wish...

...Michael pauses, unsure of the words. Lucie smiles.

LUCIE
Go on. Tell me more.

MICHAEL
Four months, and I only really got to know you in the last couple of weeks. It wasn't long enough.

LUCIE
I know. I wish I could have stayed.

MICHAEL
You'll come back though, right? After. When things go back to normal.

LUCIE

My mother has spoken to Hannah's mother, and I will be resuming my stay, yes. Maybe adding some time on to make up for the interruption.

MICHAEL

Great. I can take you out. Properly.

LUCIE

Where will we go?

MICHAEL

Cinema. Maybe bowling. And then a fancy restaurant.

LUCIE

Which restaurant?

MICHAEL

Something Italian.

LUCIE

Pizza, right?

Lucie gives a cheeky smile, and Michael reciprocates.

MICHAEL

No. Somewhere with candles.

LUCIE

Ooh, romantic.

MICHAEL

Yeah. I can be. Why not... You're worth it.

LUCIE

I like that. It sounds nice.

MICHAEL

And real flowers. Not just sending you photos of flowers.

LUCIE

I can't wait.

There is a pause. They both look at each other. Happy.

MICHAEL

It's a date then.

LUCIE

Yes. It's a date.

Lucie is smiling. Michael looks unsure of something, and looks down at his feet.

LUCIE

You okay? Something on your mind?

MICHAEL

Yeah, err... There's something I'd like to do, but I'm not sure.

LUCIE

Battleships?

MICHAEL

(Smiling)

No. Something else.

LUCIE

Sounds interesting. What is it?

MICHAEL

Well, I... I wrote you a song.

Michael picks up an acoustic guitar (the thing he was looking at by his feet). Lucie beams a big smile.

MICHAEL

It needs work.

Michael rests his guitar on his lap, ready.

MICHAEL

A lot of work.

LUCIE

(Excited)

I want to hear it.

MICHAEL

No laughing.

LUCIE

No promises.

Michael shakes his head, regretting it.

MICHAEL

Now, this isn't finished, and I wrote it in...

LUCIE
 (Interrupting)
 ...Come on. Quit stalling.

Michael takes a deep breath and tries to relax.

MICHAEL
 Okay...

Michael starts to play and sing. Lucie listens, captivated, and enjoying it.

MICHAEL
 (Singing)
*I'm drinking lots of vitamin C,
 Garlic on my dinners,
 And toast with honey,
 I'm topping up on my good bacteria,
 Avoiding lockdown-based hysteria,
 Keeping fit and keeping sane,
 Counting the hours until I see you
 again,
 Wishing the virus would disappear,
 I hate the distance,
 I want you near,
 Lucieeeeeeeeeee,
 Play battleships with me!*

Michael stops. They both LAUGH.

LUCIE
 Beautiful. I loved it. Thank you.

MICHAEL
 As I said, it's a work in progress.

LUCIE
 It was perfect. And I can't wait
 too. To be with you.

There is a pause. They both smile at each other.

LUCIE
 But one thing.

Michael nods and waits.

LUCIE
 Never mix honey and garlic.

They both LAUGH. Lucie's laugh turns into a COUGH.
 Michael looks worried.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY.

We are looking at the laptop again. Michael is calling Lucie, but she isn't responding. Michael looks concerned.

Nan walks up to Michael and places a hand on his shoulder.

NAN

I'm sure she's fine. She's young and healthy. It's probably just internet problems. Everyone's trying to video chat now, and that slows things down.

Michael nods his agreement, but he is fighting back the tears. Nan rubs his back. She can see he is upset.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

We are looking at the laptop again. Michael is calling Hannah, who answers. HANNAH, a seventeen-year-old girl.

HANNAH

And what do I owe this pleasure?

MICHAEL

Have you heard from Lucie?

HANNAH

Yesterday morning. Is everything okay?

MICHAEL

I don't know. We talk three or four times a day, but she hasn't been answering.

HANNAH

Did you say something stupid?

MICHAEL

I played her a song I wrote.

HANNAH

That bad? No, I'm sure she's fine.

MICHAEL

I'm worried. She had a cough.

There's an uncomfortable silence.

HANNAH

It's the boyfriend's job to worry.
But I'm sure she's okay. I'll let
you know if she calls. Chill out,
lover boy.

MICHAEL

Thanks, Hannah.

INT. Living Room - DAY.

We are looking at the laptop again. Michael is looking at
internet news pages, showing the virus cases in France.
It looks bad, and he looks concerned.

Michael exits out of the pages, and buries his head in his
hands.

FADE TO BLACK:

Roll Credits: Title. Director. Writer. Producer.
Actors...

Interrupted by a 'DINGING' sound of a call coming in...

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

We are looking at the laptop again, with Michael sat in
front of it and Lucie calling. Michael answers, and
Lucie's face is on the screen. She is smiling.

MICHAEL

Oh thank God!

LUCIE

Sorry. I had a fever, and was in
bed.

MICHAEL

I was so worried. Are you okay?

LUCIE

The worst has passed, and the fever
is down.

Michael gives a sigh of relief. He relaxes back in his
chair, rubbing his hands over his face.

LUCIE

I did what you said. In your song.
Vitamin C, garlic and honey.

Michael beams a big smile.

MICHAEL

Not all together I hope.

Lucie screws her face up - Disgusting. They both LAUGH.

MICHAEL

So... What would you like to do?

Michael waits as Lucie thinks on it for a moment.

LUCIE

Battleships?

FADE OUT:

THE END

Roll Credits.