

Limbo's Woodland

By

Steph Prizhitomsky

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...I dig a good ghost story and Steph Prizhitomsky's Limbo's Woodland slays. It's haunting, ethereal, sad, and even scary – as a ghost story should be. The setting, a forest where teenagers tend to lose their way evokes imagery from the likes of Brothers Grimm (the original manuscripts, not the Disney versions) inviting a similar confluence of myth and realism. Limbo's Woodland isn't a fairy tale, although part of the tension and delight created in the narrative lies in the Hansel and Gretel paradigm of figuring out the mysteries of the woodland and following the breadcrumbs for clues in the anachronisms, the anomalies, and the character's timelines, which don't necessarily point the characters in the right direction. Being lost in the woods or in limbo are metaphors for ways in which we can be lost or stuck in our lives or resistant to change. For the characters in Steph Prizhitomsky's play, it means looking for evidence that affirms their perceptions of reality. I'm struck by how a piece of fiction can summon up questions about the way we shape our own narratives and how a visit to Limbo's Woodland might be more than an escape from our reality but a way back into it. If all this is sounding heady, forget the preamble and head on down to the script. It's a great read. No Jungian therapy required.*

KAYA warily takes the recorder ROBIN offers up to her and examines it.

KAYA:

Strange...

ROBIN:

You know if you ask me, you're the one who looks like you forgot Halloween is still two months away.

KAYA

(shoves the recorder back into Robin's hands) I didn't ask you. I need to find my way out of here. That's all.

ROBIN:

...then I'm sorry. I'm just as lost as you are.

(Spacing is playwright's own.) JEC

LIMBO'S WOODLAND Written by Steph Prizhitomsky

The Synopsis

The woods of Saint Virgil's Cemetery seem to go on forever. Robin, a ghost hunter from 1984 enters the cemetery looking for the spirit of her sister but finds Kaya instead, wandering deeper into the open arms of the endless woodland.

The Setting

A graveyard under the soft glow of blue lighting with two large headstones partially obscured by darkness that are inscribed with Robin Sawyer and Kaya Castello, as well as a smaller headstone for Mae Sawyer and various others with unrecognizable names.

The Characters

ROBIN: female, 15-18, a ghost hunter from 1984 on the hunt for the spirit of her sister, wide eyed and eager of what can be found in the graveyard

KAYA: female, 15-18, a runaway from 1954 with nothing but a suitcase, lost in the graveyard; sensible and wary but lonely above all

LEO: all genders, 15-18, the leader in a way of the group of friends who stumble upon Saint Virgil's Cemetery sneaking out one night; he and his friends get more than they bargained for the night of August 9th, 2014

WILLOW: all genders, 15-18, part of the group of friends who stumble upon Saint Virgil's Cemetery sneaking out one night, tries to be a voice of reason but is often forgone in the moment.

SAM: all genders, 15-18, a part of the group of friends who stumble upon Saint Virgil's Cemetery sneaking out one night; he is light hearted and full of jokes and pranks.

JAMIE: all genders, 15-18, a boy who got separated during a mean spirited prank from his friends in the year 2014; he is more of a homebody and fraught with nerves that counter his friends' wilder, more careless demeanors; he spends the entire night alone and scared, looking for them, until his untimely end.

Act 1 Scene 1

Lights up. August 9th, moonlight shines on an empty graveyard surrounded by woods. Flickers of candlelight are the only illumination on the old stones from the candles left by the graves. Distantly an owl hoots. Once you are in, there is no out. The graveyard is the whole word. In the distance, three church bell chimes resound.

(O.S.) ROBIN:

This is Robin speaking. Robin Sawyer on the record.

Enter ROBIN. ROBIN speaks to her tape recorder in her hand.

ROBIN:

Today is the 9th of August, 1984. Saint Virgil's Cemetery. 3:01 in the morning. Hotter than hell, but I guess that'll make it easier to feel a cold spot when a ghost passes by... (clears throat) Off the record. Cut that out later.

ROBIN pauses, as if just becoming truly aware of her surroundings. She hums a few bars of a distant tune to fill up the emptiness of the silence. It's a calling out, an inviting in. She slowly walks towards the center of the graveyard, her fingers brushing over the graves, as she does.

ROBIN:

Anyone out here?...Mae?

ROBIN slowly turns around, extending the tape recorder out in her hand to capture any supposed ghost proof.

ROBIN:

Week 9. If you're here...talk to me.(ROBIN continues humming the melody, a familiar song to both herself and whoever she's reaching out to). Anyone?

The distance pounding of footsteps can be heard, and ROBIN glances expectantly to where it came from.

Enter KAYA from the opposite side Robin entered from.

ROBIN stumbles as she clumsily dives behind a gravestone, just as she sees Kaya enter, just before she has time to be seen.

KAYA has a large red suitcase in hand and walks hurriedly, as if she has somewhere to go but doesn't quite know where that somewhere is yet.

KAYA whirls around in a circle, desperately. She starts in one direction before faltering and trying another direction. It makes no difference. She's hopelessly lost.

Defeated, KAYA slumps down on the ground, her suitcase falling to the side, and with her back against a gravestone, the very gravestone Robin is hiding behind.

KAYA finally exhales and takes in her surroundings, believing herself to be alone.

Unbeknownst to Kaya, ROBIN's hand slowly peeks out from the top of the grave, carefully extending the tape recorder towards Kaya. The recorder grows closer and closer to Kaya's head.

KAYA snuffles and wipes her tear stained eyes.

ROBIN jolts the recorder back, out of view. A beat. When ROBIN realizes she hasn't been found out, she tries again, lowering the tape recorder down tentatively. A beat.

KAYA stiffens. Slowly almost comically, she raises her head up, just as the tape recorder is lowered towards her, mere inches away. KAYA freezes.

She screams and scrambles to get up and away from the gravestone.

ROBIN's hand disappears out of view. A beat.

KAYA stares back at where she was just sitting. No movement from the other side.

KAYA carefully inches closer, her suitcase extended before as flimsy protection.

Without warning, ROBIN peeks over the gravestone, recorder in hand. KAYA screams again and scrambles to get a safe distance away.

ROBIN:

(startled, ducks behind the stone) Will you quit your yelling already?!

KAYA:

(stares at her bewildered and speaks breathlessly) What are you- What were you thinking sneaking up on me?! I could've killed you!

ROBIN:

(stands up promptly and dusts herself off) I sincerely doubt that. I'm Robin. (She extends her hand to shake but is ignored).

KAYA:

I thought you were a raccoon or something

ROBIN:

Stealthy like a raccoon? Near invisible? Intimidating?

KAYA:

Small, loud, and plunderous. Like a raccoon.

ROBIN:

Plunderous?

KAYA:

Thieving.

ROBIN:

I haven't stolen anything.

KAYA:

Not yet. But you're some kind of crook, I'll bet. Who in the right mind hides out in a cemetery at night?!

ROBIN:

You're here, aren't you?

KAYA:

I didn't come here on purpose! (She turns away to survey the deep woods before her) I need to catch a train at sunrise, but-

ROBIN curiously begins to look through the contents of Kaya's suitcase, picking through piles of clothing, all the needed supplies of a runaway.

KAYA:

-Idiot me, thought I could take a shortcut off the beaten path...Shit!! Been wandering around for ages. These woods feel like they actually go on forever! Or I've been going in circles or something.... (notices Robin rooting through her things) Hey! Stop that! (she slams the suitcase shut with her foot, just narrowly missing Robin's fingers).

ROBIN:

Sorry! I've just never met a real life ghost before. Especially one that...talks this much.

KAYA:

(stares at her before bursting out laughing) Oh god...you're crazy.

ROBIN:

I'm a ghost hunter.

KAYA:

(She laughs in frustration) Serves me right leaving on foot in the middle of the night...I get stuck with a crazy person!

ROBIN:

...ghost hunter.

KAYA groans.

ROBIN:

Why do you have so much stuff in your bag? (She holds out a classically 50s dress she managed to hold onto)

KAYA:

None of your (she snatches the dress back and takes the suitcase out of Robin's grasp) Business. Now if you'll excuse me. I really do have to be going. (She packs the dress back into her suitcase easily) Good day. (and sets off towards the endless woods of the audience).

ROBIN:

I wouldn't go that way if I were you.

KAYA stops, not looking behind her.

ROBIN:

Nothing but thickets and thorns. It's as good as a dead end.

KAYA

(finally whirls back around to face Robin) Alright then, ghost hunter. How do I get out of here?

ROBIN:

(shrugging) How would I know that?

KAYA:

You seem to know a lot more than me.

ROBIN:

About the way out?

KAYA:

About...everything?! You're strange, and you dress funny, and you hold that yellow box toward me like it means something!

ROBIN:

(grins) You afraid of me?

KAYA:

Of course not

ROBIN:

I just figured people were supposed to be afraid of ghosts,
and not the other way around

KAYA:

I'M NOT A-(she lets out a frustrated noise and throws
suitcase to the ground)

ROBIN:

Alright alright...maybe I'm strange. Wouldn't be the first
time I've been told that, but I dress just like everyone else,
and this yellow box is a tape recorder.

A beat. KAYA stares at her blankly.

ROBIN:

A walkman...Little magic box. Like a genie in a bottle except
there's no genie unless you count the Sony Corporation

KAYA:

What?!-

ROBIN:

I use it to capture voices, music, things like that.
KAYA warily takes the recorder ROBIN offers up to her and
examines it.

KAYA:

Strange...

ROBIN:

You know if you ask me, you're the one who looks like you
forgot Halloween is still two months away.

KAYA

(shoves the recorder back into Robin's hands) I didn't ask
you. I need to find my way out of here. That's all.

ROBIN:

...then I'm sorry. I'm just as lost as you are.
A beat. KAYA begins to come to terms with the reality of her
situation. She slowly sinks to the ground and leans against the
gravestone, hugging her knees up to her chin and lowering her

face to hide away from the darkness before her. After a moment, ROBIN joins her. She holds the recorder out to Kaya. KAYA lifts her head up.

ROBIN:

Talk.

KAYA:

What?

ROBIN:

Talk. I can try and help you find your way out of here, but you need to help me first.

KAYA

Help you...how?

ROBIN:

I've been looking for proof of ghosts for months now. So I can't leave. Not now, not when I've come so close to getting an actual ghost's voice on record...but you might be able to change that.

KAYA:

(looks at her skeptically but takes the recorder) I'm not a ghost.

ROBIN:

You sure put on a good show.

KAYA:

Ok what do I even say? How do I work this thing?

ROBIN:

Just say anything. Your name, the date, your favorite color, why you're out here. Doesn't matter. But your name and the date are the most important. You say that everytime something happens, so whoever ends up listening knows who it happened to....and when.

KAYA:

This isn't some sort of trick, is it?

ROBIN:

(shakes her head) It's no trick. (presses a button on the recorder with a click.)

KAYA:

Ok uh hello. My name is Kaya Castello....My...favorite color is blue?...um.....I'm here....I'm here because I ran away from home.

ROBIN:

To go where?

KAYA:

It's not really a 'run away to' type of story...more of a run away from...And it's uh August 9th.

ROBIN looks to her expectantly. The two lock eyes for a moment.

KAYA:

August 9th....1954.

ROBIN:

(she grins and jumps up from the ground quickly) Come on. Let's get out of here. (she holds her hand out to Kaya and helps her stand back up, unable to contain her excitement in her discovery and hurriedly walks ahead of Kaya on her way out of the grove)

KAYA:

Did it work?

ROBIN:

(stops in her tracks and eagerly comes back to face Kaya) It worked perfectly. ROBIN begins to hum that same tune as she exits, and it continues as KAYA follows her, lagging behind for a mere moment, taking in her surroundings, the endless woods, the unsureness of her future, before exiting as well.

Act 1 Scene 2

The cemetery sits in its silence, in emptiness. All is still. Enter JAMIE, disoriented, flustered, hopelessly lost, as those who came before him. He has a dim flashlight in hand, and a backpack on his back.

An owl hoots distantly, and JAMIE flinches, gazing up in fear of the unknown before him. A beat.

JAMIE sinks to the ground and roots through his backpack until he pulls out his phone, a modern day phone. He calls a familiar number. It goes to voicemail after several rings.

JAMIE:

Guys where'd you go, seriously?! (He hits the flashlight against his leg and shakes it around to try and make it glow brighter, but it doesn't seem to work. He lowers his voice to say the next part, as if it is some terrible secret) It's almost my curfew, I gotta get home soon, so just...

JAMIE gives up on finishing his thought and hangs up the phone. He scowls at the faltering flashlight and throws it to the ground. It rolls away from him towards where Kaya and Robin had left not long before. JAMIE dials the phone number again. It goes to voicemail much quicker this time.

JAMIE:

Look, this isn't funny anymore. And I know you're declining my calls! Answer! The! Phone! (hangs up and angrily throws his phone into his backpack.)

(O.S.) LEO:

Jamie! Where are you?!

JAMIE nearly jumps out of his skin, at the sudden calling.

(O.S.) SAM:

JAAAAAAMIE!

(O.S.) WILLOW:

Come on! We were just kidding around!

(O.S.) SAM:

Here, Jamie! Ksksksk!

(O.S.) WILLOW:

Sam, he's not a cat.

JAMIE runs off towards his friend's voices, grabbing his backpack and flashlight from the ground without stopping, on the way. He exits.

Act 1 Scene 3

ROBIN's humming can be heard from somewhere close by.

(O.S.) KAYA:

Will you stop that?!

(O.S.) ROBIN:

Shh! This tune is supposed to call ghosts to you.

(O.S.) KAYA:

Do you even hear yourself?

(O.S.) ROBIN:

It works!-

(O.S.) KAYA:

Does it now-

(O.S.) ROBIN:

Because it's in a frequency only they can hear. I read all about it in-

(O.S.) KAYA:

Then how come I can hear it miss ghost hunter? Hm?

(O.S.) ROBIN:

Well-

(O.S.) KAYA:

Don't even start. We're going the wrong way.

(O.S.) ROBIN:

There is no wrong way; there's just out

KAYA:

(enters and kneels down by a grave to inspect) We've passed this grove like seven times already.

(O.S.) ROBIN:

Look if we just keep going straight in one direction

KAYA:

Here! I told you! It's all the same!

Enter ROBIN.

KAYA:

(moves from grave to grave, frantically) Mae Sawyer, Simon Roth, Jason Frey- I've seen all these names before! We're back where we started! (She stands back up to face Robin). You said you knew the way out.

ROBIN:

I said I'd try to help you.

KAYA:

And that's working out marvelously.

ROBIN:

We just need a bit more time

KAYA:

Time?! Time?! We've run out of time. (She grabs Robin's arm and turns it over to look at the watch face) It's already- (She falters upon seeing the time. Her voice grows quiet, full of confusion) 3:01.

ROBIN:

Still?

KAYA:

I- I don't...Wasn't it just past 3 an hour ago? A beat.

ROBIN:

I don't know.

KAYA:

What's wrong with your watch?!

ROBIN:

Nothing! It's still ticking and everything. It's just....

KAYA:

3:01...

Silence. WILLOW's terrified scream pierces the silence. ROBIN wastes no time to grab KAYA's wrist and pull both of them behind a grave out of sight to all but the audience. Though KAYA tries to grab her suitcase in the split second they have to hide, she fails, and her suitcase remains in plain sight. Enter LEO, SAM, and WILLOW, laughing, joking, not at all a threat, just a group of friends messing around. Strangely, SAM holds a dead mouse by its tail in one hand with the intention of startling others. All three have backpacks for an overnight trip.

WILLOW:

(pushes SAM away jokingly) Don't scare me like that! (she walks ahead) Great more dead people.
Behind the grave, KAYA and ROBIN sit uncomfortably squished but fully hidden. The two exchange a look.

LEO:

Well there's this thing called a graveyard, Willow. (He lifts his cell phone up to try and get a signal)

WILLOW:

Can't believe I let you two talk me into this. (SAM begins to sneak up behind Willow with the mouse in hand as she complains) This really is your stupidest idea since SAM drops the mouse in the back of Willow's shirt. WILLOW shrieks again and manages to ungracefully remove the dead mouse from her person.

KAYA and ROBIN freeze up.

SAM begins to laugh much to Willow's dismay. ROBIN makes a move to peek behind the grave to see who the outsiders are with her tape recorder poised at the ready.

WILLOW:

I swear if you try that again I'll skin you.
KAYA pulls her back frantically upon hearing this and motions with her hands, pointing first to the others, then mimics the motion of decapitation, and lastly to Robin. At the same time, WILLOW tries to shove Sam again, but SAM moves out of the way and leans down to pick up the dead mouse again.

SAM:

Hey Leo if we don't find him, can we just keep this thing, tie a little string around its tail, call it Jamie?
ROBIN looks over her shoulder and points back to the group skeptically.

WILLOW:

You are such an asshole.

SAM:

What?! It's kind of cute... (he extends the dangling mouse towards Willow) If you squint

WILLOW:

Put that thing down

SAM obliges her tossing the mouse aside. It lands unfortunately close to Kaya and Robin. KAYA cannot help but flinch, and her movement causes an audible scuffle.

SAM:

Did you hear something?

KAYA covers her mouth with her hand as if her breathing could be heard.

WILLOW:

Not going to work a third time, Sam, don't even try it.
ROBIN probes at Kaya's arm with the tape recorder in hand, and KAYA swats her away.

SAM:

No I'm serious I thought I- (peers curiously at where Kaya and Robin hide but dismisses it)

LEO:

Still no service (he lowers the phone and throws it back into his bag)

WILLOW:

Wait are you serious?

LEO:

Looks like we're stuck here for the night. KAYA and ROBIN look to one another wide eyed. WILLOW groans and stretches out on the ground with her feet propped up on a gravestone carelessly. Her backpack is left on the ground beside her. KAYA closes her eyes and lets her head fall back against the gravestone.

WILLOW:

Hilarious. Truly. It's really telling how eager you are to bunk with a bunch of corpses. SAM follows her lead to sit strangely but comfortably, perched like a cat.

SAM:

Think they'll send out a search party for us? ROBIN tries to sneakily peek behind the gravestone with her tape recorder outstretched. KAYA grabs her, still with her eyes closed, and pulls her back once more.

WILLOW:

They better not. My parents would kill me if they knew I was out here....Jesus this place gives me the creeps.

LEO:

Just think about what Jamie is doing right this second. Should give you a good laugh.

SAM:

Probably shitting his pants, jumping ten feet in the air everytime he sees his own shadow.

WILLOW:

Is that really supposed to make me feel better?

LEO:

Relax, Willow. Poor guy probably just flaked and went home already. (He turns back to the graves Kaya and Robin huddle behind)

WILLOW:

Well if he's at home warm in his bed, and we're stuck out here, I wouldn't exactly say we're in any position to judge.

SAM:

Since when are you so uptight?

LEO narrows his eyes at something he sees and inches toward it slowly, towards where Kaya and Robin hide. KAYA and ROBIN stiffen upon hearing quiet footsteps coming their way.

WILLOW:

I just think that the second he realized he got separated, he would've called or texted or something like a thousand times at least.

SAM:

What? You think something actually happened to him?

WILLOW:

I- I couldn't say, okay? I don't-

LEO stops just close enough to almost be able to see Kaya and Robin hiding in plain sight.

LEO:

Hey guys. (he picks up the suitcase in his path instead) Someone else was here.

WILLOW:

What the hell....

Behind the gravestone, ROBIN elbows Kaya for leaving the suitcase behind. LEO places the suitcase in the center of the grove. WILLOW and SAM join him by his side, huddling on the ground with the suitcase before them. ROBIN cannot help her curiosity and pops up over the gravestone to see what is going

on, so suddenly that when KAYA tries to stop her, she cannot.
None of the trio notice.

WILLOW:

It's so...old.

LEO:

Who's betting the owner is buried here?

WILLOW elbows Leo. ROBIN stands up quietly, with KAYA following suit reluctantly, and the two slowly sneak behind the group amidst the graves at their backs.

SAM:

Maybe it's a prop for a movie or for a play someone put on or something.

LEO reaches out to open the latch.

WILLOW:

Seriously? Who's going to put on a play in a graveyard?

LEO clicks the latch open.

WILLOW:

Wait! (LEO, KAYA, and ROBIN all freeze. WILLOW closes the latch, unwilling to be in contact with the strange object longer than she has to) Come on, I have a bad feeling about this. This was clearly left behind, and I don't....

WILLOW turns her head to glance around, just as KAYA and ROBIN dive behind a grave, out of sight to all.

WILLOW:

(hushed) I don't really feel like running into its owner right now.

LEO:

If someone left this behind, it was clearly a long time ago, can we just-

WILLOW glares at him.

LEO:

Ok fine all cowards in favor of tossing the suitcase unopened raise your hand.

WILLOW raises her hand, followed by SAM sheepishly. At their backs, KAYA's hand shoots up from behind the gravestone. The quiet sounds of a scuffle causes the trio to pause. ROBIN manages to grab Kaya's arm and pull her down, just as SAM and WILLOW whip their heads around at the disturbance.

SAM:

What the hell was that?

With Sam and Willow occupied, LEO hurriedly clicks the latch open once more and opens the suitcase. It sits before them opened at a 90 degree angle towards Leo, Willow, and Sam. WILLOW and SAM turn back to the suitcase, thoroughly spooked.

WILLOW:

So much for democracy.

LEO:

This is a democracy. I've vetoed your decision. SAM slowly reaches into the suitcase and takes out a single silk glove, holding it with just two fingers out in front of him.

WILLOW:

Jesus, don't touch that.

SAM:

(slyly leans in to sniff the dangling glove and pulls away immediately) Smells prehistoric.

ROBIN snorts from behind the gravestone. SAM, WILLOW, and LEO turn their heads around, startled.

SAM:

Ok don't tell me you didn't hear something that time...Think we've stumbled upon a crime scene?

WILLOW:

Oh god we're gonna get murdered.

LEO:

No one's getting murdered; it's probably just- (a premature realization draws upon his face) Ok I get it now. Real funny Jamie. (LEO gets up from the ground. WILLOW and SAM exchange a look before cautiously following) Come on quit hiding around already; you got us.

WILLOW:

...Jamie? We're sorry, okay?!

LEO slowly walks to the graves where Kaya and Robin hide behind, with WILLOW and SAM behind him.

WILLOW:

We really didn't mean to get separated. It just happened- (The quiet sounds of scuffling cut her off)

KAYA:

(furious barely audible whisper) Move!

All goes silent. WILLOW, LEO, and SAM exchange a terrified look.

WILLOW:

Guys I don't think that's-

KAYA and ROBIN pop up from behind the grave, standing before the trio. KAYA has grabbed onto Robin's shirt sleeve, dragging her up with her unwillingly. ROBIN shyly extends the tape recorder towards the trio.

WILLOW, SAM, and LEO stumble back slightly and look on in silent, frozen horror.

KAYA:

(She attempts her best at politeness with an awkward smile on her face as if she's been caught) Sorry. Hi. I'm Kaya. That's...that's my suitcase. I uh-We didn't mean to eavesdrop; I just thought you were a bunch of weirdos hanging around a graveyard, and you're clearly not so...(She seems to finally take in their horrified expressions) Oh uh that's Robin. She's harmless. (She tilts her head and whispers to Robin with the same nervous smile stuck to her face) Robin say hi (ROBIN waves

awkwardly with the recorder in hand. KAYA seems to realize just how strange Robin appears) Oh god- put the tape recorder away. (to the trio) Look I've been wandering around for hours I just- we need to....(She gives up on formalities, and her words come out rushed and frantic) Can you please just point me the way out? Please?

A beat. The shock abruptly wears off. LEO, WILLOW, and SAM take off running, yelling their heads off, scrambling to not be left behind. Exit LEO, WILLOW, and SAM, leaving the backpacks behind.

KAYA:

Wait! Come back! What the hell did they see that made them so afraid of me?

ROBIN:

(jokingly) Maybe it was the transparency.

KAYA scoffs, furious. She pauses and first walks, then runs off after them. Exit KAYA.

ROBIN:

Kaya where are you going?!...Kaya!! (She tries to go after her, but Kaya's already gone, and ROBIN is left standing in the center of the grove, alone)

Act 1: Scene 4

ROBIN simply stands there, unable to figure out what to do. Then...in one of the trio's backpacks, a phone screen lights up, and it begins to ring. ROBIN nearly jumps at the sudden noise. She settles down on the ground and reaches into the backpack to take out the ringing phone. She has no idea how it works or how to answer it. The ringing suddenly stops, and ROBIN drops the phone in surprise. Enter KAYA from the opposite side to which she left. ROBIN looks as surprised to KAYA, as KAYA is to see her.

KAYA:

No no there's no way.

Exit KAYA, desperately. Mere moments later, enter KAYA from the opposite side, at the end of an endless circle once more.

ROBIN:

(looks at Kaya incredulously) How'd you-

KAYA:

This can't be possible!

ROBIN:

Did you catch up with them?

KAYA:

They were just there. I mean I was running towards them, but they were getting farther away, and I was getting slower. But they were there; I swear they were right there...and then it's like...they just...they just weren't.....and I ended up back here somehow. Right where I started.

ROBIN:

How does that-

KAYA:

It doesn't! It doesn't make any sense! Nothing makes sense anymore, and you don't seem to care at all!...Is this what you wanted? Is that why you're out here?

ROBIN:

(quietly) ...I'm just looking for ghosts.

KAYA:

And you think you found one, don't you?!
A beat. Robin doesn't answer her. She doesn't need to. KAYA snatches the recorder out of Robin's hand.

ROBIN:

Hey! Be careful! (reaches for the recorder, but KAYA pulls back)

KAYA:

(dryly, angrily) This is Kaya Castello speaking. Still speaking. For this entire time we've been traipsing around like crooks on the run, I've been babbling into this tape....box...thing, and for what?!

ROBIN: Kaya give that back!

KAYA:

I'll still miss my train, (ROBIN tries for the recorder again, but KAYA is too quick for her and turns her back on her taking a few steps away) Miss everything because somebody has been leading me in circles

ROBIN:

I haven't!

KAYA:

(she begins to laugh in exhaustion) I'm never getting out of this town, am I?

ROBIN:

Kaya...

KAYA sucks in her breath and rights herself. She turns back and walks to Robin.

KAYA:

Enough of this....for real this time. I'll find my way out with or without you....(almost mockingly to the tape recorder) Signing off: August 9th at Saint Virgil's Cemetery. 4...5...am? (She takes Robin's hand and turns it over to look at the watch's face) God it feels like it could be even later- KAYA gasps and stumbles back upon seeing the time. The tape recorder slips out of her hands and falls to the ground, unintentionally. It cracks at their feet.

ROBIN:

No! (She falls to the ground, desperately trying to put together the broken pieces) No! No! No! No!

KAYA stands back. The loss of all reason and logic to what she saw has visibly shaken her. It's the final straw. ROBIN fumbles with the parts to no avail.

KAYA:

(hushed) It really stopped.

ROBIN:

(she throws the broken tape recorder back to the ground and stands) Why would you do that?! What the hell is wrong with you?! What is wrong with you?!

KAYA:

(her voice remains shaky and hushed, almost in disbelief of her own words) 3:01. Look for yourself.

ROBIN:

What are you talking about?!

KAYA:

Look.

ROBIN slowly checks her watch, staring down at its face. The realization comes slowly.

KAYA:

It's like time stopped....We're back where we started....and time has stopped.

ROBIN sinks down to the ground with her back against the gravestone, the remains of her tape recorder by her side. KAYA slowly follows suit, sitting by her side.

KAYA:

(quietly) I'm sorry.

ROBIN:

What does it matter? If we're really stuck out here forever?

KAYA:

Forever's a long time. When I left home, I thought it was forever....but now I'm sorry that I ever left....That matters for something right?

ROBIN:

You'll get out of here. I know you will, at least.

KAYA:

And do what? Maybe it's...maybe it's better that I'm here. I don't have to choose whether to stay or to go....And I'm sorry I'm not a ghost worth finding.

ROBIN:

I just wanted it all to mean something.

KAYA:

Doesn't it?

ROBIN:

...you know about six thousand people are buried in this cemetery...and over a hundred of them died on its land. Mysteriously, without rhyme or reason. They were just gone. Over a hundred just like that. I read that somewhere...read a lot about this whole place after my sister died.

KAYA:

...how did she die?

ROBIN:

I was hoping to ask her that.

KAYA:

(jokingly) And instead you got saddled with...me.

ROBIN:

I don't mind. I mean I did mind at first (KAYA begins to laugh) quite a bit actually, but if nothing else, I know I won't be lonely. Guess the song works after all...

KAYA:

How did the melody go again?

ROBIN hums a few bars. KAYA pauses, getting the hang of the way the song goes, then joins in, quietly. Their humming blends together. The phone by the backpack begins to ring once more, a cheesy obnoxious ringtone.

KAYA:

What is that?

ROBIN:

(picks the phone up) I think it's a phone.

KAYA:

A phone?!

ROBIN:

(she peers at the screen) Incoming call from...Jamie. Hey weren't those weirdos looking for a guy called

KAYA:

Answer it, Robin! What are you waiting for?!

ROBIN:

I don't know! Why would I know how- I mean look at this thing!

KAYA and ROBIN fumble with the touchpad pressing random buttons far too aggressively, fighting over who holds the phone, until they accidentally manage to accept the call. Loud staticky sound resounds from the other side.

ROBIN:

Did it...did it work?

JAMIE (PHONE AUDIO):

(frantic) Hello?! Leo, can you hear me?!

ROBIN is so startled she drops the phone, and KAYA scrambles to pick it back up.

KAYA:

I can hear you, but I'm not Leo.

JAMIE (PHONE AUDIO):

Who are you then?!

KAYA:

I- I'm Kaya. I think we just saw your friends, but they ran off. I'm sorry.

The audio on the other side becomes garbled, indiscernible.

KAYA:

Hello?!

JAMIE (PHONE AUDIO):

Listen I have no idea where I am. You have to get help.

KAYA:

But I'm not-

JAMIE (PHONE AUDIO):

I don't care who you are, just please get me out of here!
The audio becomes garbled once again, as if the connection is slowly fading.

KAYA:

I can't hear what you're saying!!

ROBIN:

(grabs the phone out of Kaya's hand) Jamie!...What year is it?

JAMIE (PHONE AUDIO):

What?!

ROBIN:

Just answer the question! What year is it?!

JAMIE (PHONE AUDIO):

It's 2014, who the hell are y-
The call cuts off abruptly, and the phone's light shuts off.

ROBIN:

(quietly, shakily) So if it's 2014 for him...1954 for you...and 1984 for me then-

KAYA:

1984?! You're from 1984?!

ROBIN:

(quietly, shakily) Does that mean that I'm...

KAYA:

(slowly begins to take charge, acting more determined than she feels) No. No this can't be it. It's not. There's still time for us, and we're going to get out of here. You and I, we'll make it out, okay?

ROBIN:

How?!

KAYA:

(takes a few steps forward then stops suddenly.) If we go forward, then we end up right where we started.

ROBIN:

Exactly?! We're stuck.

KAYA:

So we don't go forward. (She turns towards Robin) If it really is 2014, we don't need to go forward.

ROBIN:

...we have to go back.

KAYA:

Exactly. Retrace our steps.

ROBIN:

(jokingly) 60 years is a long journey to walk backwards. KAYA cautiously begins to retrace her path from hiding behind the graves up until standing in the center of the grove, as she was at the start.

ROBIN:

What now?

KAYA takes a step backward towards where she first came from. Nothing...and then... The church bells ring three times. ROBIN slowly gets up off the ground. The two face one another in the center of the grove.

ROBIN:

You really think we'll make it?

KAYA:

I don't know...Go right the way you came. No stopping....Even if you see something...or someone else....I have no idea if this'll work but...we have a shot, and that's enough for me.

ROBIN:

Where are you going to go...once you make it out?

KAYA:

(a slow smile begins to spread over her face) I'm going to catch my train.

ROBIN nods. KAYA turns to leave.

ROBIN:

Kaya-

KAYA stops and turns back.

ROBIN:

Good luck.

KAYA:

You too Robin.

ROBIN walks backwards for a few steps, then turns and runs the way she came. Exit ROBIN. KAYA slowly walks in her respective direction. She takes a moment to look up and around the endless woods, as she did when she first arrived. Then, she's gone. Exit KAYA. The broken pieces of the tape recorder, and the old suitcase are left behind, forgotten. All is still and silent.

Act 1: Scene 5

Enter JAMIE, flashlight in hand, terrified, alone, and still desperately lost.

JAMIE:

Hello?! Who's there?!...Anyone?!

He sees the suitcase open on the floor and approaches it slowly. He squats down to inspect the strange object closer.

Just as his hand brushes over the suitcase, a small red light switches on behind him, from the broken tape recorder.

The noises that come from it are garbled, intermittent with static, remnants lost to time.

JAMIE whirls around to the sudden noise, startled. He turns the flashlight on it, as if it were some kind of defense and illuminates the tape recorder.

The tape recorder spurts out glitchy passages of Kaya and Robin's recordings, their words barely discernible, short bursts of songs, news reports, unknown voices from Robin's previous recordings. A beat.

The recorder's static quiets for a moment. JAMIE raises his flashlight's beam up to the two graves behind the tape recorder, the very ones Kaya and Robin sat leaning against before, and with the beam of light finally reveals what they say: "Kaya Castello Born December 21 1937 Died August 9 1954" "Robin Sawyer Born March 12 1966 Died August 9 1984"

Robin's distant, ghostly hum fills the air.

JAMIE looks up and slowly rises to his feet and drifts towards the song.

As if in a trance, he leaves the flashlight on the ground. The flashlight's beams continue to illuminate the engravings on the gravestones.

JAMIE takes one last look at the recorder and the graves behind it. He pauses, glancing out at the endless woods of the audience, then picks up his pace and follows the humming to wherever it may lead. Exit JAMIE.

Saint Virgil's Cemetery sits in silence once more, waiting. The broken tape recorder lets out one last staticky message from the past.

ROBIN (TAPE RECORDER) :

Anyone out here?

Lights down.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *Limbo's Woodland was written on a rainy day a year after lockdown began, two months after returning from a trip to Ukraine where I had visited a graveyard with quite a bit of my family laid to rest. The deep blue sky and the gloom of dusk it cast over everything is what I remember the most, and this made it onto the stage play, a blue glow illuminating the characters. I did not and still do not believe in ghosts, but they've fascinated me for as long as I can remember and the impact their portrayal in the media has on a world so obsessed with death. The fun ghouls just jump out and say boo or stand in a long hallway ominously speaking in sync, but the ones that stood out the most to me are those that really stop and listen to their stories. The Haunting anthology specifically the Haunting of Bly Manor is the most obvious influence, and Mike Flannigan is a proper genius for that. There is just something so bitterly ironic about a ghost getting scared by another ghost. And for the whole thing to not really be scary in the end, just unfamiliar at first. That's the best thing about horror. You lure an audience in promising scares, but once the scares have passed, the true terror of melancholy begins, and well by then you've already paid your ticket and are sitting in the seat, so there's nothing to be done but to watch and to listen. The names themselves: Robin, Kaya, Mae come directly from my first ever screenplay, one of many abandoned projects that I repurposed. The names stay the same, some character traits pass on, and they take on a new form in a new world, so in a way, these characters are ghosts of another story that too was left behind, sitting on my desktop since August 2020 in a limbo's woodland of its own.*

AUTHOR BIO: I'm Steph. I'm the seventeen year old head screenwriter of Future is Female Productions, which has produced the feature length films *You're Just Like Me* and *Roads for a Lost Boy*, as well as the short film *Two Way Mirror* and miniseries *The Confession Tapes*. I wrote *Limbo's Woodland* and directed and played the role of Robin in its premiere at the Chain Theatre NYC. I'm a semi believable actress and won best young actress at the NJ Film Awards for my portrayal of Andie in *Silence of the Mirage*. I'm also the screenwriter and director of the horror found footage miniseries *Distress Signals* and the editor in chief of *Suits and Sage Magazine*.