

IN THE END

by

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Life's like a movie...

Write your own ending.

- Kermit The Frog

FADE IN:

EXT. EUROPEAN PASTURE - DAY

A bright blue sky hangs over a lush pasture. Cute woodland critters scurry to and fro. A deer dips down and drinks from a crystal stream. Blissful. Unaware.

A RUMBLE in the distance. Barely audible at first, but quickly right on top of us. The deer lifts her head, listening. Then turns and runs. All the animals flee.

A WWII FIGHTER JET zooms overhead. Two NAZI PLANES chasing.

INT. / EXT. FIGHTER JET - CONTINUOUS

Our hero pilot is EAGLE ONE, his face obscured by his helmet, goggles, and scarf. One of the planes behind him OPENS FIRE.

EAGLE ONE
Game on, you Nazi schmucks.

Eagle One jerks his throttle and banks hard to the left.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A control room lit only by monitors and projections. The technology too advanced, incongruous with the ongoing WWII dogfight, but it's hard to tell in the dim light.

A crew of engineers man their stations. PETER GRIMSBY [mid-30s] takes the lead.

In this room, this moment, Peter is calm, cool, collected. But, you get the sense that he's got a lot churning beneath the surface. A duck on the pond.

He leans into the microphone on the panel in front of him.

PETER
Eagle One, this is base command.

You got a couple birds on your six.

EAGLE ONE (O.S.)
You don't say!

INT. / EXT. FIGHTER JET - CONTINUOUS

Eagle One weaves through gunfire, dives toward the ground and pulls up at the last moment. Nazi bullets kick up dirt.

The enemy planes execute the same maneuver and stay right on Eagle One's ass.

Eagle One pulls up quickly, going almost vertical. Splitting the Nazi planes. Arcing upside down above them.

Eagle One gets a Nazi plane in his sights and FIRES. Bullets rip into the jet and it falls from the sky in a plume of black smoke.

No time to celebrate. There's one Nazi plane left. And, oh shit, it just fired a fucking rocket.

PETER (O.S.)
There's a rocket coming right for you!

EAGLE ONE
Stop telling me shit I already know!

Eagle One dives toward the tree-lined mountains.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter screams into his microphone.

PETER
Pull up! Pull up!

INT. / EXT. FIGHTER JET - CONTINUOUS

The hills are coming fast.

EAGLE ONE
Ahhhhhhhh!

Eagle One squeaks through a thin gap in the mountain range as the rocket hits the hill and explodes violently behind him.

The enemy jet gets caught in the blast and falling debris. It crashes into the ground and explodes.

PETER (O.S.)
Bogie down!

Eagle One celebrates wildly in his cockpit.

EAGLE ONE
Haha! Yes! Yes!

He clears the mountain range, and his jaw drops.

EAGLE ONE (CONT'D)
Son of a...
(then)
(MORE)

EAGLE ONE (CONT'D)

Base command, I've got a visual on the primary target.

Directly in front of him, hovering over a town, is a giant ZEPPELIN bearing a swastika.

EXT. EUROPEAN VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

A long, dark shadow falls over a shepherd and his flock. A young milkmaid gazes up in fear and awe from her stool.

Men and women leave their homes and storefronts and look to the ominous sky.

The zeppelin's high tech LASER CANON is charging, emitting an evil green glow.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter leans in to the mic.

PETER

The Doomsday Laser is almost fully charged. Eagle One, you are running out of time!

EXT. ZEPPELIN DECK - CONTINUOUS

On the deck of the zeppelin, laughing maniacally, is ADOLPH HITLER himself. Hitler turns toward our approaching hero.

Hitler grins and waves. Blows a kiss.

INT. / EXT. FIGHTER JET - CONTINUOUS

Eagle One flips a switch on his steering column, revealing a red button. He aims his rocket at the Zeppelin and locks on.

EAGLE ONE

Burn in hell, Adolph... Bombs away!

He pushes the button. The rocket sparks and fails to launch.

EAGLE ONE (CONT'D)

...Bombs away.

He hits the button again. The rocket is jammed.

Eagle One thinks a beat, then slowly, quietly removes his mask and helmet, revealing HAROLD, a 90-year-old man.

He pauses an emotional, heavy beat. Takes a deep breath.

HAROLD
Base command... I'd like to speak
with the President.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter hesitates a beat. Looks over at his other engineers,
then back to his microphone.

HAROLD (O.S.)
Mr. President?

INT. / EXT. FIGHTER JET - CONTINUOUS

Harold waits.

ROOSEVELT (O.S.)
Yes, Harold, this is President
Roosevelt.

Harold wipes away a tear. What an honor.

ROOSEVELT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Your country thanks you for your
sacrifice.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter leans into the mic, changing his voice. His best
Roosevelt impression. Pretty spot-on.

PETER
...I'm proud of you, soldier.

INT. / EXT. FIGHTER JET - CONTINUOUS

Harold sniffs back a tear. His face goes steely.

HAROLD
Mr. President. Do me a favor.
(beat)
Earn this.

Eagle One pushes down on the throttle and flies at full-speed
straight for the zeppelin.

PETER
(in his own voice)
It's been an honor to know you,
Harold.

HAROLD
Thank you, Peter.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter listens intently, fighting back emotion.

HAROLD (O.S.)
...For everything.

INT. / EXT. FIGHTER JET - CONTINUOUS

The jet comes at the Zeppelin fast. Harold lets out a primal yell. Hitler screams in terror.

HAROLD	HITLER
Fuuuuuuck youuuuuuuuuuu!	Neiiiiiiiiiiiiin!

Just before impact---

BLIP. A short staccato sound. Like a computer shutting off.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter's eyes snap to a monitor, which show the vital signs for HAROLD MENDEHLSON. His heartbeat has flat-lined.

Peter removes his hand from a button on his console and rises to his feet. Disconnects a little electronic dongle from his temple. The whole control room hushed...

Suddenly, everyone around Peter erupts in celebration like they landed a man on the moon. Pats on the back, handshakes, high-fives.

Two members of Peter's team join him on either side: ETHAN [mid-20s, doe-eyed, lanky and awkward] and KAI [early 30s, gothy, sarcastic with a smile].

ETHAN	KAI
Nice work, Peter.	Nailed it.

INT. NIRVANA ROOM - DAY

A bright white and nearly empty room. The body of a man lies on a high-tech table, more tubes and wires than man, his head covered by a sort of VR helmet.

DR. RAO [late-30s] stands next to Harold's body. He gives Peter a solemn nod. It's finished.

Peter removes the helmet, revealing the lifeless face of HAROLD. He looks peaceful. Almost euphoric.

Peter hesitates, looking down at Harold's hollow shell. He slowly reaches down, but his hand is shaking. Peter looks at his offending hand, confused, a little freaked.

He grabs it with his other hand to steady it.

Kai enters and walks straight to the body. Peter steps back and watches as she mechanically unplugs Harold from the machines.

A SAD TINKLE OF PIANO COMES IN AND CONTINUES OVER...

EXT. AVERAGE AMERICAN HOUSE - DAY (COMMERCIAL)

Children play outside on the swings. A sad-eyed OLD MAN watches them through the screen door.

COMFORTING WOMAN (V.O.)
You love your family. You'd do
anything for them.

INT. AVERAGE AMERICAN HOME - CONTINUOUS (COMMERCIAL)

The Old Man walks into his kitchen and sits down at the table. His wife and middle-aged children sit with them.

COMFORTING WOMAN (V.O.)
The last thing you'd want is to
leave them with the burden of
expensive medical bills.

Wife holds his hand, comforts him. She shows him a cheery pamphlet for ASCENSIONS. He smiles a relieved smile.

EXT. SCENIC HILLSIDE - MAGIC HOUR (COMMERCIAL)

The music changes. The sad piano replaced with the chorus of:

CUE MUSIC: FLEETWOOD MAC - GO YOUR OWN WAY

The Old Man is in a hot air balloon, waving happily at his family. They all wave back enthusiastically.

COMFORTING WOMAN (V.O.)
So, when it's time for you to go...

The balloon floats into the air and joins an entire fleet of hot air balloons.

COMFORTING WOMAN (V.O.)
...Go with peace of mind. Go with
Ascensions.

The name "ASCENSIONS" appears on the screen, along with its logo: a sailboat in front of a setting sun.

COMFORTING WOMAN (V.O.)
Bon voyage.

The video freezes.

INT. HOTEL MEETING ROOM - EVENING

Peter stands next to a flat screen TV with the Ascensions commercial paused.

He's speaking to a group of ill and elderly folks. It's very reminiscent of a timeshare presentation, but somehow weirder and sadder.

PETER
Any questions?

An awkward pause as several hands slowly raise.

PETER (CONT'D)
Okay, yes. I imagine... I imagine
there are.

In the small crowd, GALE DORIAN [~70] leans back in her chair. You know that song that goes "Hope I Die Before I Get Old?" She didn't, and she's still pretty pissed about it.

PETER (CONT'D)
You're here because you've gotten
the worst news someone can get...
You're dying.

Some uncomfortable shifting in the crowd.

PETER (CONT'D)
I'm not going to sugarcoat it. It
is what it is. We're all adults.

Gale leans to the man next to her and whispers. This is LEONARD WELLS [~75]. His body is frail, but there's still a twinkle in his eye.

GALE
Are we? It's like we're being
lectured about death by a fetus.

Leonard chuckles. Peter tries to ignore the side chatter.

PETER
Ascensions wants to return to you
control. Disease should not get the
final say anymore. You have the
right to choose when you die. What
we offer is a better how.

Gale whispers to Leonard again.

GALE

So, that's the guy who's going to kill me? He doesn't look anything like the gypsy said he would.

PETER

As the lead Transition Specialist at Ascensions, I'm here to--

Gale laughs now, loud enough to throw Peter off-track. His eyes find her in the crowd.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. Do you have a question?

GALE

Me? Oh, no. But... *Transition Specialist*? Really? That's the corporate jargon for smothering an old lady with a pillow?

Some chuckles in the room. Even in her 70s, Gale has some serious class clown energy.

PETER

Not exactly. My team and I create a sort of... enhanced simulation. Indistinguishable from reality. A departure that is unique to you and restricted only by your imagination. The perfect ending to your story.

(then)

They say your whole life flashes before your eyes when you die? We say, why limit yourself?

Gale rolls her eyes. She turns to the group.

GALE

Oh, come on. Are y'all really buying this? All this flowery die-however-you-want shit. It's fake. It's computers. Ones and zeroes. We're still gonna die in a bed, connected to a bunch of tubes and wires. Right, Transition Specialist?

PETER

Well, it wouldn't be safe or cost-effective to let people jump from the real Empire State Building or to sink a new Titanic every couple weeks. Trust me, we looked into it.

The room chuckles. Gale groans to herself. Peter hands a stack of pamphlets to the crowd.

PETER (CONT'D)

Take one, pass the rest down please.

The stack reaches Leonard. He takes one, hands off the rest to Gale. She passes them all without looking.

PETER (CONT'D)

This pamphlet has everything you need to know. From choosing your departure to applying for your next of kin legacy tax credit.

Leonard studies the pamphlet. "Take care of the ones you love." Gale watches him, with disbelief and sadness.

GALE

(quietly)

Seriously? Leonard. This is not the way to go out.

LEONARD

We're going out, Gale, one way or another. What's it matter how?

Gale's face falls, and she turns away from Leonard.

PETER

I know how hard this is. How emotional. But, I also know this. People don't come to Ascensions because they want to die. They do it because they want to live. One more time...

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Peter shakes hands with members of his audience. Answers questions. With some, he's solemn. With others, he jokes and laughs. He's able to match everyone's energy perfectly.

PETER (V.O.)

...The only certainty of life is that it ends.

The crowd dwindles until Peter is left alone. He clutches his jacket closed with a shiver. Stands and waits.

Finally, his phone buzzes, and he checks the notification. "Your CarPal is arriving."

On cue, a driverless ride-share vehicle pulls up in front of him. CARPAL emblazoned on the side.

PETER (V.O.)
For the lucky ones, it's quick and easy. But, too often, it's long and slow and painful.

Peter climbs inside. Looks into a camera lens. A touchscreen lights up. "Identity confirmed. Welcome back, Peter Grimsby. Please confirm destination."

Peter clicks "home."

INT. / EXT. CARPAL - NIGHT

Peter's CarPal puttters through the streets of New Orleans.

The car fills and empties, fills and empties, with Peter consistently cramped in the middle seat.

PETER (V.O.)
And, in that degradation and decay,
we lose the very spark that makes
us human.

No one speaks. They barely look at each other. Focused on their phones.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The CarPal arrives at Peter's home. Just off the beach, standing on stilts. It's old, outdated. Paint peeling.

Peter climbs the old wooden steps.

PETER (V.O.)
Too often, we die long before our
hearts stop beating.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The inside of Peter's home is just as antiquated. Most technology and furniture from around the 1990s.

He goes to the fridge. It's mostly empty, save for a few bottles of SUSTAIN, a meal-replacement shake. He grabs one.

PETER (V.O.)
What we offer is a choice. To go
out not with a whimper, but a bang.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter's bedroom is dark. Quiet. Full of small tchotchkes and collectibles. He places a toy WWII plane among the clutter.

Just like the plane in Harold's departure. His whole room is a makeshift mausoleum.

PETER (V.O.)
To rage against the dying of the
light.

Peter sits down at his computer, takes a swig of Sustain, and scrolls through digital files of his patients. Harold. Many faces we haven't met. A long, long list. All gone.

Finally, Peter stops scrolling. Pauses for a long beat. Peter places a similar dongle-like device from Ascensions to his temple.

PETER (V.O.)
Because, to its very end, life is
for the living.

CUE MUSIC: BEACH BOYS - DON'T WORRY, BABY

INT. / EXT. MINI VAN - DAY

A MOM and DAD [mid-30s] drive down the highway, chatting lovingly. Norman Rockwell in a minivan.

Everything is a little different, less modern. The clothes, the van, etc. The technology about 25 years less advanced.

Mom cranks up the radio volume. The couple happily sing and bounce along, looking back at their unseen child in the backseat. Blissful. Unaware.

Mom doesn't notice the SEMI-TRUCK that's crossed the barrier. Dad grabs her arm, and she tries to swerve.

But, there's no stopping it. Before impact--

EXT. ASCENSIONS - DAY

The sign for ASCENSIONS is golden white, glowing, a little halo over the A.

The building itself is modern, glass and steel. Surrounded by a garden of trees and flowers. Corporate but warm and welcoming.

As we PULL BACK, the peace is broken. A gathering of 20-30 angry protesters are lined up behind barriers outside of Ascensions, screaming and waving signs.

Signs with slogans like: "Save Our Grandmothers!" "Assisted Suicide Is Murder!" "No Death Panels!"

PROTESTER 1
Murderers! You're all murderers!

Peter steps out of his CarPal and quickly walks past the screaming, sign-waving protesters.

Suddenly, he's hit by a large blue Slurpee, which explodes all over him.

He looks at the crowd and sees SLURPEE DOUCHE laughing and high-fiving a buddy.

Peter sighs and goes inside.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter stands in front of a mirror, trying to wipe the blue goop off his shirt.

Three quick knocks on his door and it swings open. ARDEN CHASE [early-60s] enters with a theatrical flourish. Charismatic, quirky, and outwardly, performatively kind.

ARDEN
We sail this day upon the winds of
lamentation, dear ferryman. So row
with rapid stroke in conveyance of
the dead. To the unseen land that
receiveth all men.

He finally notices Peter's blue-stained clothes.

ARDEN (CONT'D)
Whoa. What happened to you?

PETER
Nothing. I'm fine.

ARDEN
You look like you slaughtered
everyone in Smurf Village.

PETER

Eh, I got Slurpeed on the way in.

ARDEN

Bunch of savages out there.

Peter gives up and opens up his mirror, revealing a closet. Several sets of fresh clothes, a hamper full of stained and damaged ones.

He takes off his shirt and throws it in the hamper. Reaches for a clean one.

ARDEN (CONT'D)

You see the news this morning?

Peter puts on his new shirt and buttons up.

PETER

No, why?

ARDEN

The universal healthcare bill
flamed out in committee again.

PETER

Seriously?

ARDEN

Medical costs spinning out of
control. Social security almost
bankrupt. Climate change turning
our coastlines into a new Atlantis.
God bless America.

Peter sighs to himself.

ARDEN (CONT'D)

It's getting pretty bleak out
there. The Enterprise is crashing,
and people are looking at us like
we've got the escape pods.

PETER

We're about to get slammed here,
aren't we?

ARDEN

You up for it?

Peter puts on a confident smirk, turns to Arden.

PETER

Bring it on.

Arden gives Peter a grin and a hearty pat on the shoulder, then makes his exit.

ARDEN
Sail on, dear ferryman.

Peter looks in the mirror and takes a calming breath.

INT. LEONARD'S HOUSE - DAY

Peter paces around a living room, looking over the clutter and collectibles one gathers over a long life. A fold-up hospital bed sits in the center of the room.

Kai works on her laptop, and Ethan goes over some paperwork. Leonard putters around in the kitchen, walking with a cane.

LEONARD
Would any of you like tea or
coffee? Water?

PETER
Don't go to any trouble for us.

LEONARD
It's no trouble at all.

KAI
(quietly, to Peter)
You think he'd make me a sandwich?

PETER
We're fine, Leonard. Please come
sit.

Leonard hobbles into the living room, carrying a single cup of tea. He sits down in his favorite chair.

PETER (CONT'D)
Do you have the suggested
materials?

LEONARD
Right here.

Leonard grabs a grocery bag, and Peter takes it from him. He glances in. Knickknacks, photographs, etc.

PETER
This is great. Thank you.

He hands the bag to Ethan who starts going through it.

Kai stands next to Leonard and starts scanning his face with a digital wand connected to her computer, casting a blue glow on his face.

KAI
Hold still please.

Leonard's immediately uncomfortable but tries to stay calm.

PETER
Have you thought at all about how
you might like to go?

LEONARD
Are you kidding? It's all I can
think about.

PETER
And where have you landed?

LEONARD
I don't know. I want my family
there. But, beyond that, I... I
mean, how do you even begin
deciding on something this big?

PETER
It's different for everyone. But,
we're here to help.

LEONARD
It's so much.

Peter sees Leonard's fear and sadness.

PETER
Kai. Can you stop for a second?

KAI
I'm almost done.

PETER
Kai.

Kai turns off the wand and backs away.

KAI
Okay, but if his projection is
missing an ear or something, it's
on you, dude.

Kai plops down on the couch, grabs a yearbook from Ethan's bag, and starts flipping through. Peter sits down next to Leonard. Puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

PETER
How are you feeling, Leonard?
Really?

A million answers go through Leonard's head, but he can't get any of them out.

PETER (CONT'D)
You know you don't have to do this
if you don't want to. This is one
hundred percent up to you.

LEONARD
What other choice do I have? Buy
myself a couple months and my
daughter loses out on the stipend?
No, this is how it has to be.

Peter looks at a framed picture. Leonard and his wife middle-aged with a young daughter. He turns back to Leonard.

PETER
Why don't you tell me about your
family?

LEONARD
Well, Kate passed a few years back.
And Merrily, she's out running some
errands. She didn't want to be here
for this. She's... skeptical.

PETER
Goodbyes are hard for everyone.

Peter hands the photo to Leonard. Leonard studies it with a sad little smile.

PETER (CONT'D)
You all look really happy here.

LEONARD
Oh, yes. This is from a trip to New
York. Probably, God, almost 30
years ago. 30 years? How is that
possible?

ETHAN (O.S.)
You were in the Navy?

LEONARD
Hmm?

Ethan holds up a photo of a young Leonard in a Navy uniform.

KAI
Whoa. You were a flippin dreamboat,
huh?

Peter shoots her a look.

LEONARD
Oh, no. I wasn't-- That's from a
play I was in. Back in college.

PETER
You were an actor?

LEONARD
No, not really. A hobby is all.

Leonard pauses a beat, remembering.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
It was fun, though... Ya know, Kate
always said seeing me on that stage
is when she fell in love with me.

Peter picks up a snow globe. It's from Broadway. He looks at
it, then up at Leonard. He's got it.

INT. CHEMOTHERAPY INFUSION SUITE - DAY

CUE MUSIC: THE CLASH - SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO

Leather chairs and IV drips. Walls decorated with children's
drawings and Get Well Soon cards. Curtains drawn to keep the
light out.

Gale leans back in her chair, poison slowly dripping into her
arm. She has headphones on, bopping along to The Clash.

Across the room, Leonard is handing out homemade cookies.
Hugging nurses and patients. Saying his goodbyes.

Gale sighs to herself, cranks her music up, and closes her
eyes.

Leonard hobbles his way over to Gale's chair and gives her
foot a little tap with his cane. She opens her eyes, but
doesn't take out her headphones.

Leonard shakes his cookie tin at her, extends it to her. Gale
hesitates a second, then takes a cookie.

They both offer each other a sad little knowing smile.

Leonard moves on to the next patient in the room.

INT. CANCER TREATMENT CENTER LOBBY - DAY

A bell on the wall rings. Three times. Leonard draws his hand away from the rope.

He nods at the staff, offers a little wave, and limps toward the door.

As he disappears, Gale stands off to the side. As she watches him go, she finally takes a bite of the cookie he gave her.

INT. EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

It's a late night at Ascensions. Peter meticulously goes frame-by-frame through Leonard's departure, three different screens showing various angles. Leonard's snow globe sits on the desk in front of him.

Kai works next to him on her laptop, a string of code on her screen. Ethan thumbs through paperwork, taking notes, double-checking everything.

Kai and Ethan struggle to keep their eyes open. Peter is locked in.

PETER

Kai, can you take down the ambient lights? And bring the music up three percent?

KAI

Totally.

Kai punches in some code, then looks over at her boss.

KAI (CONT'D)

When's the last time you got laid?

PETER

...What?

KAI

Oh, I'm sorry. You're not a virgin, are you? It's cool if you are. Ethan's a virgin.

ETHAN

That's not true. Are people saying that?

PETER

You can't ask-- This is not appropriate work talk.

KAI
It's not appropriate during work hours. It's 11pm.

PETER
Can we just focus?

ETHAN
Who said I was a virgin?

KAI
Not now, Ethan... But everyone.
Everyone's saying it.

ETHAN
I've had sex. Like twelve times.

Peter sighs.

PETER
Ya know what, why don't you guys
take off? I'll finish up here.

Kai immediately slams her laptop shut. You don't have to tell her twice.

KAI
Dope. Let's go, Ethan. You're
buying me a drink.

Kai is quickly out of the room. Ethan stands and follows behind her.

Peter watches them as they leave. Turns back to his work.

Ethan stops at the door and looks back.

ETHAN
Good night, Peter.

PETER
(without looking up)
See you Monday.

Ethan nods, turns, and leaves. Peter pauses a second, rubs his eyes, then gets back to it.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

- Peter wakes up alone. Forces himself out of bed.
- Now wearing running clothes, stretches.

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

- Peter jogs on the winding road through the hilly cemetery.

EXT. PETER'S NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

- Peter jogs down the street, the graveyard looming nearby.
- Peter runs by empty house after empty house, For Sale signs like tombstones.
- A neighbor packs up a U-Haul. Another one bites the dust.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - DAY

- A notice hangs on Peter's front door. WARNING. YOUR HOME IS IN A FLOOD ZONE. IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU VACATE--
- Peter, returning from his run, rips the notice down.

INT. / EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - DAY / EVENING / NIGHT/ ETC.

- Peter works on Leonard's departure.
- Watches a microwave meal slowly turn.
- Works on Leonard's departure.
- Scrolls a dating app. No. No. No. Nodding off.
- Falls asleep on the couch.
- Runs through the graveyard. Through the neighborhood.
- Microwave meal.
- Mows the lawn.
- Scrapes mud off the bottom of his house's stilts.
- Eyeing Leonard's snow globe.
- Leonard's departure.
- Dating app.
- VR dongle on. Jacking off.
- Falls asleep at his desk.

INT. ASCENSIONS LOBBY - MORNING

Peter stands in the elevator. Just before the doors close, Kai stops it with her arm and moves next to Peter. Her hair is messy, and her skin still bears the weekend's glitter.

KAI
Good weekend?

PETER
Yup.

He notices a red, raised tattoo on her arm.

PETER (CONT'D)
Is that a new tattoo?

KAI
Oh shit, is it?

The elevator doors close.

INT. NIRVANA ROOM - DAY

Leonard sits on the table. His daughter MERRILY [mid-30s] sits next to him, holding his hand. She's kind but guarded. Her soft parts callused over.

MERRILY
I don't like this.

LEONARD
I know, sweetheart.

MERRILY
You could have more time.

LEONARD
I want no part of what's coming for me. I'm not gonna put either one of us through that.

She sniffles, nods. His mind is made up. He reaches up and wipes a tear from her cheek.

MERRILY
What am I going to do without you?

LEONARD
If I did my job right, you'll be fine.

The doors open and Peter walks in, trailed by Ethan and Kai.

PETER
Afternoon, Leonard. Feel like
taking a trip?

LEONARD
You pack us some snacks for the
ride?
(then)
Peter, this is my daughter Merrily.

Peter looks at her and is, briefly, struck. But, he stumbles through, back into work mode.

PETER
Nice to meet you, Merrily. I'm very
sorry for the circumstances.

Merrily barely acknowledges Peter, her face cold.

She turns back to her father. Her lips quiver. This is it. He pulls her in for a hug.

Peter looks away, doing his best to give them a moment.

MERRILY
Don't do this. Please--

LEONARD
It's okay. This is right.

MERRILY
I love you so much.

LEONARD
Hey, I love you too... Now, go on.
I'll see ya when I see ya.

She kisses him on the cheek and Ethan leads her out. The doors slide shut behind them.

INT. JORDAN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Jordan Room is calm, peaceful. New Age-y. A fountain into a flowing river. A two-way mirror looking into the Nirvana Room.

Merrily sits on a comfy-looking bench and takes a breath, trying to calm herself.

She watches the Nirvana Room. Her father is now lying on the table. Peter stands beside him as Kai plugs him in.

INT. NIRVANA ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kai attaches a wire to Leonard's chest. Dr. Rao oversees and checks vitals.

LEONARD
Ooh, that's cold.

PETER
Before we get started, I need to go over a couple things.

LEONARD
Alright.

PETER
You have the right to stop at any time. Say the word, and we'll shut down the simulation and pull you out.

LEONARD
I'm ready.

PETER
Do you understand what this procedure is going to do?

LEONARD
I do.

PETER
I'm sorry, but I need you to say it for me.

Leonard pauses a second. Looks over at Dr. Rao, who is hooking up a small IV syringe filled with BRIGHT WHITE LIQUID -- the departure drug. Leonard turns his head back to Peter.

LEONARD
I'm going to die.

Peter nods and glances over at Kai, who gives a thumbs up. Peter hesitates, looks down at Leonard. Takes a breath.

PETER
It was nice to know you, Leonard.

LEONARD
You too.

PETER
...Bon voyage.

Peter places the VR helmet on Leonard's head.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Peter sits at his console, Kai and Ethan at theirs. Peter puts the little dongle on his temple, and it powers up. He raises his hands like a conductor.

PETER

Lights up.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - NIGHT

Leonard wakes up in a new world. He still looks himself, but somehow newer. More vibrant, more alive. He looks with awe at his hands. At his perfectly-functional body.

He's backstage at a packed Broadway show and dressed like a 1950s rock star.

On the stage in front of him, there's a gaggle of excited young women in hoop skirts and retro dresses. A lavish Broadway production of *Bye Bye Birdie*.

The song: *ONE LAST KISS*.

A STAGE HAND approaches Leonard. It's PETER, his projection inside the simulation.

STAGE HAND

Leonard. You're on.

Leonard pauses a beat, then grins.

LEONARD

Magic time.

He rushes out onto the stage, taking on the role of CONRAD, singing and dancing with the passion, gusto, and skill of a much younger man. The girls on stage go nuts for him.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Oh, one last kiss. Give me one last kiss! It never felt like this, no it never felt like this. You know I need your love!

CHORUS GIRLS

Oh oh oh!

LEONARD

Oh, give me one last kiss!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

The teams watches Leonard's departure on their monitors. Working their consoles, watching his vitals, etc.

LEONARD (O.S.)
Oh, one more time. Baby, one more time...

KAI
 Mmm. He's still got it.

Peter looks over at Kai. She snaps a bite off her Red Vine.

LEONARD (O.S.)
It really is sublime, oh honey so sublime. You know I need your love!

Peter turns back to the monitor and his microphone.

PETER
 (into mic)
 Yeah yeah--

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - CONTINUOUS

The chorus girls finish Peter's line.

CHORUS GIRLS
...Yeah!

The MUSIC SWELLS and Leonard grabs a rope and kicks it loose of its knot. A sandbag drops from the ceiling, and he rides the rope up to a catwalk.

The audience - faces from Leonard's yearbook, his family, people from all his pictures - gasps in excited awe.

LEONARD
Darling, it isn't right! Why must we say good night? Don't let me go like this!

Leonard dances around on the catwalk. He spots his wife and kids, looking like his NYC picture, in the audience. He smiles and gestures to them without losing a step.

INT. JORDAN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Merrily watches Leonard's departure on a screen. This is her dad like she's never seen him. Her face softens. She can't help but smile through the tears.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Leonard joyously dances on the catwalk.

LEONARD

*Baby, I need you so, but if I have
to go, just give me one last kiss!*

The guitar music picks up and Leonard jumps onto a pole and slides back down to the stage.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter stares at Leonard's happy face. He looks down. On the console in front of him is Leonard's Broadway snow globe.

He looks at another monitor. Merrily in the Jordan Room.

Suddenly, Peter starts to look unwell. Nervous. He struggles to catch his breath. His hand trembles.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - CONTINUOUS

The music swells to a crescendo and... nothing happens. Leonard looks back at the chorus. They've missed their cue. The simulation PAUSED.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kai notices the stopped departure, looks over at Peter.

KAI

Boss, you okay?

Peter still looks out of it. Unmoored.

ETHAN

Peter?

Peter snaps out of it, nods. Puts on a fake confident smile. He leans back into the mic, and--

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - CONTINUOUS

CHORUS GIRLS

*Darling it isn't right, why must we
say good night?*

The departure is back on track.

LEONARD

Don't let me go like this.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter's back in the game but still a little out of it.

PETER

*Baby, I need you so. Why did you
have to go?*

LEONARD (O.S.)

Just give me one last kiss.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - CONTINUOUS

The music is starting to wind down and Leonard's big finale is coming to an end.

LEONARD

One more tiiiiime.

INT. JORDAN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Merrily braces herself. She knows what's coming.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter warily eyes the button in front of him.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Leonard makes his way to the edge of the stage.

LEONARD

Give me one last kiss.

Leonard lets himself fall backward off the stage and into the crowd. Into the arms of his family. Right as he lands-- *BLIP*.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter raises his finger from the button. He struggles to find a full breath, his skin pale and sweaty.

PETER

Excuse me.

Peter gets up and rushes out. Kai turns to Ethan at the console next to her.

KAI

That was pretty hot, right?

ETHAN

...No.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter paces around his office. Feels his pulse. Swigs from a water bottle. Sits on the floor, leans back against the door.

INT. DOCTOR RAO'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter sits in the exam room at Ascension. A patient this time. Dr. Rao rolls his stool over to Peter. He's cool and casual. Maybe a little too casual.

DR. RAO

Well, you're not dying.

PETER

What?

DR. RAO

Tests are all negative, Pete. Blood work looks good. You're healthy as a horse. A healthy horse. Not like a racing horse, but maybe a horse that gives rides at kids' parties. Like a pony.

PETER

Awesome... But, uh, are you sure? It's just, I've been having these chest pains. I can't breathe, like, I can't get a full breath sometimes. Ya know? I can't sleep, can't focus. I just feel... off.

DR. RAO

I'm going to tell you the same three things I told you last time you came in here. You're fine, it's all in your head, and don't wear so much cologne... That last one is more for the people around you.

Peter nods, but he's in his head.

DR. RAO (CONT'D)

How are things here at work?

PETER

Great.

Dr. Rao takes out a prescription pad and starts writing.

DR. RAO
 You know what? I'm going to write
 you a prescription... for a little
 R and R.

He hands Peter the prescription.

DR. RAO (CONT'D)
 Take with food. And a fruity rum
 drink.

PETER
 My job's not the problem.

DR. RAO
 Look.. I'm a doctor, not your
 therapist. But, yeah it is. You
 gotta stop living and dying with
 these patients. You get too close
 to them.

PETER
 ...I don't do that.

INT. BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

A church half-full of black-clad mourners. A casket and a
 portrait of Leonard at the altar. The organist plays *BE NOT*
AFRAID.

Peter sits toward the back, alone. Trying to not be noticed.
 A PASTOR stands at the lectern.

PASTOR
 Leonard Wells was many things to
 many people.

GALE (O.S.)
 Ugh, God.

Peter turns around and sees GALE sitting a row behind him,
 her clothes much more colorful than everyone else's. She
 leans in to whisper to Peter.

GALE (CONT'D)
 Many things to many people. What a
 fucking cliché. Five bucks he says
 something about Leonard finding
 rest in the Lord's warm bosom.

PETER
 I'm sorry. Have we met?

GALE

Yeah, a couple weeks ago. You were offering to kill me and my friends. I interrupted with some hilarious asides.

PETER

Well, at least you're consistent.

GALE

I'm Gale.

PETER

Peter.

(then)

...Were you and Leonard close?

GALE

Nah. I'm crashing. Be cool.

PETER

What? Seriously?

GALE

No. God, you're gullible. We sat next to each other in chemo. And they say there's nowhere old people can meet new friends.

(beat)

Hey, what do you think of the vibe in here? I gotta be honest, I'm not really feeling it... It's kind of a bummer.

PETER

It's a funeral.

GALE

Like I always say, you can't spell funeral without fun.

PETER

You always say that?

GALE

When I check out, none of this depressing churchy bullshit, okay? Cremate me, put my ashes in fireworks. Grill up some burgers. Throw a party. Who gives a shit?

Back at the front of the church--

PASTOR
We should be comforted that Leonard
is in the arms of our Lord.

GALE
Damn.

PASTOR
Nestled in his welcoming bosom.

GALE
Haha! Pay up!

An offended mourner glares at Gale. She doesn't care.

PETER
I'm not-- I didn't-- Never mind.

GALE
Hey, you going to the after party?

PETER
After party?

INT. LEONARD'S HOUSE - DAY

Leonard's house is set-up for the funeral reception. Mourners comfort each other in hushed tones, offering condolences.

Gale overloads a paper plate with food. Peter stands next to her, looking very uncomfortable.

GALE
This is more like it. Come on,
beanpole. Pile it on. Get some
carbs in you.

PETER
I'm not hungry.

GALE
What's your deal? Do you always go
to your patient's funerals? Is that
standard procedure or some kind of
deluxe package?

PETER
It's the least I can do.

GALE
Young hotshot like you, this can't
be how you spend your free time.
That'd be fucking depressing.

PETER
I like to pay my respects.

GALE
...Nah, that can't be it. Is it
like a sex thing?

PETER
What?

GALE
This where you troll for snatch?

PETER
No. I--

GALE
You dog.

PETER
I'm not... trolling for snatch.

GALE
No shame in it. Grief is a natural
aphrodisiac.

She leans in close. Puts on a sad, whispery, sexy voice.

GALE (CONT'D)
I just... don't think I should be
alone tonight.
(back to herself)
You dog.

PETER
That's not--

Peter bumps into a mourner, spilling some food on her dress.

PETER (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry--

She turns around. It's Merrily.

PETER (CONT'D)
Merr-- Miss Wells. Hi.

Merrily wipes the food off her dress with a napkin. Gale
slinks away, watching them as she goes.

MERRILY
What are you even doing here?

PETER
I'm sorry for your loss. Your dad
was a good man.

Merrily slaps Peter across the face, causing everyone in the house to look over.

MERRILY
How the fuck would you know?

Merrily storms away. The whole room stares at Peter, who tries to act like nothing happened.

Gale pops in next to Peter.

GALE
You. Dog.
(then)
Fuck it. You can kill me. See ya at
the office, kid.

Gale slaps Peter on the back then strolls off.

Peter stands a confused beat.

PETER
...Great.

INT. ASCENSIONS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A conference room full of Ascensions employees, including Peter, Kai, and Ethan.

Arden leads a meeting. He holds a document in the air.

ARDEN
Can anyone tell me what this is?...
Anyone?

ETHAN
...A departure consent form?

ARDEN
Good. Very good.

KAI
(whispering to Ethan)
Kiss-ass.

ARDEN
You're almost right.

Arden hits his clicker and the patient consent form shows on a PowerPoint presentation.

ARDEN (CONT'D)

It would be a departure consent form, if the patient had initialed page 73. As it is now, it's a loaded gun pointed at our heads.

KAI

It's just one small little mistake. Who cares?

ARDEN

Without a client's legally binding consent, a departure is, technically-speaking... murder.

KAI

Hardcore.

ARDEN

The protesters out there aren't the only ones who haven't caught up to why we do what we do. Why it matters. And, they'll use any small little mistake to come after us.

Click. Next slide. SUSAN ROSS [mid-40s]. A gold cross around her neck. A smile that says Southern Hospitality. She stands in front of a building with the sign LIVE AND LET LIVE.

ARDEN (CONT'D)

This is Susan Ross. Her organization Live and Let Live has already shut down three of the top compassionate care companies.

SLIDE: SWAN SONG.

ARDEN (CONT'D)

Swan Song.

CLOSED is stamped on the logo. SLIDE: HAPPY TRAILS

ARDEN (CONT'D)

Happy Trails.

STAMP: CLOSED.

SLIDE: MOVING ON UP

ARDEN (CONT'D)

Moving On Up.

STAMP: CLOSED

ARDEN (CONT'D)
And now, she's gunning for us.

SLIDE: ASCENSIONS

STAMP: WORKING ON IT

ARDEN (CONT'D)
What does this mean for you? Well--

Click. Another slide. This handy-dandy acrostic: CURTAINS.

Complete Paperwork
Understand Client Needs
Recheck Paperwork
Triple Check Paperwork
Ascertain Patient Consent
Innovate Customized Departure
No, Seriously, Check Paperwork One More Time
Say Goodbye

ARDEN (CONT'D)
If we want to stay in business...
If we want to keep helping these
people, we have to cross every t.
Dot every i. And every j. People
forget j's have dots. We don't have
that luxury.

KAI
Do you think you're overreacting?
Maybe just a teensy bit?

INT. LEONARD'S HOUSE - DAY

Leonard's living room is an empty shell. Merrily sits on the floor, packing her dad's life up into boxes and trash bags. She picks up a picture of the family all together and hesitates on it a beat.

Suddenly, a KNOCK at the door. Merrily gently puts the photo in its box, gets up, and answers the door.

It's Susan Ross. Bearing a smile and a casserole.

MERRILY
Hi... Can I help you?

SUSAN
Miss Wells?

MERRILY
Yes.

SUSAN
Merrily Wells?

MERRILY
That's right.

SUSAN
Merrily, you don't know me, but my name is Susan Ross. My deepest condolences for the loss of your father... Ham salad?

MERRILY
Um, thank you.

Merrily takes the casserole.

SUSAN
May I come in?

Merrily steps aside and Susan walks in. Merrily shuts the door behind her.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Gale sits across from Peter. Peter drops a giant stack of paperwork in front of her.

GALE
You've gotta be shitting me.

PETER
Dying is a complicated business.

GALE
No it's not. People do it every day. Babies do it.

Peter inches closer to Gale, softens his demeanor, his voice. Practiced.

PETER
I know how hard it must have been to come here. You're very brave.

GALE
Fuck off.

PETER
...What?

GALE

I don't need anyone to hold my hand
and tell me everything's going to
be okay.

PETER

Of course. I'm sorry--

GALE

And stop apologizing. You're way
too formal. It's weird.

PETER

Mrs. Dorian--

GALE

See, right there. That shit. First
of all, Gale's fine. Second, it's
not "mrs." Not married, never was.

(then)

And don't get excited. I'm not
hitting on you. Just correcting the
record.

PETER

Record corrected.

(then)

Have you started thinking about how
you might want to go?

GALE

I have, actually.

Gale reaches into her bag and pulls out a hammer. She put it
on the desk in front of Peter. Peter has no idea what to say.

GALE (CONT'D)

Well, what are you waiting for? Let
me have it.

Peter slides the hammer back toward her.

PETER

I'll let you brainstorm a little
more.

GALE

Probably for the best. You have
skinny arms. It'd take all day.

Gale puts her hammer back in her purse.

INT. LEONARD'S HOUSE - DAY

Merrily sits across the kitchen table from Susan, a couple coffees between them. Susan scans the room like part sweet Southern lady, part Terminator.

SUSAN

It's strange, isn't it? To see your childhood home so empty. It feels wrong. Eventually all we have left is our memories.

MERRILY

I keep expecting to turn a corner and see him sitting in his chair.

SUSAN

That hole's always there. You start to feel it less, but it's never quite filled in again.

MERRILY

Yeah.

SUSAN

It's especially hard when the people we love are taken from us before their time.

Merrily looks up from her coffee. Where is this going?

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I mean, your father could still be sitting here right now. Should be sitting here right now. I don't know if you're familiar with me or my work, but every day I stand up for people like you and your father.

(then)

We can't bring him back. But, we can get justice. We can help you move on.

MERRILY

I'm sorry?

Susan reaches into her attache and pulls out some paperwork. Slides it over to Merrily. Merrily cautiously picks it up.

SUSAN

At the end, was your father, and I ask this as delicately as I can, of sound mind?

Merrily starts to open her mouth.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

And before you answer - If you believe your father was pressured into receiving end-of-life care, that he wasn't able to make that choice for himself, we could have a case to go after Ascensions.

MERRILY

You're talking about a lawsuit?

SUSAN

Not only can you help end this barbaric practice, but you can secure your own future. Which, I think we can agree, is what Leonard would have wanted.

MERRILY

...You should leave now.

SUSAN

Miss Wells--

MERRILY

My dad was very sick. For a very long time. I didn't want to lose him, I didn't totally understand, but I respected his wishes. And now you're here trying to bribe and manipulate me using his name? You have no idea who he was. He went into that place with eyes wide open. So, please take your sanctimonious bullshit and your ham salad, which is the most disgusting thing I think I've ever heard of by the way, and get the hell out of my dad's house.

Susan seethes a moment, but covers it with a plastic smile. She picks up her ham salad, turns to leave. Stops--

SUSAN

It's a family recipe.

Chin up, Susan strolls out. Merrily sits in the silence.

INT. VR STUDIO - EVENING

Peter, in a skintight green chromakey bodysuit and tracking marks all over his face, is engaged in a choreographed FIGHT with Ethan and other technicians, also in similar getups.

PETER

No, no. Stop.

Everyone halts. Peter paces like an annoyed director on set.

Kai sits off to the side with her laptop, watching their movements in a computer program.

PETER (CONT'D)

It's got to feel real. This whole thing only works if it feels real.

KAI

Yeah! Shape up, ya nerds!

The clearly exhausted technicians nod.

PETER

Okay, we're going again.

Peter picks up a heavy-looking prop stick.

PETER (CONT'D)

(demonstrating)

It's not that complicated, okay?
Left jab, left jab, bob your head
right, up and under, knee, knee,
right elbow, uppercut, hip toss to
the ground.

Ethan and the other techs nod, but look overwhelmed.

PETER (CONT'D)

...Roll out, jump up, 180 spin,
sweep the leg, roundhouse left, and
a throat rip. Got it? Cuz I'm gonna
come at you hard.

Peter raises his stick and charges. Ethan instinctively whimpers and covers himself.

INT. ASCENSIONS HALLWAY - EVENING

The technicians file out of the VR room, some limping. Ethan holds a paper towel over his bleeding nose as he rushes off. As Peter steps out, he shouts after Ethan.

PETER
Sorry about your face!

Kai walks out and keeps pace with Peter.

KAI
You were really working something
out in there, huh?

PETER
I really didn't mean to--

KAI
It's not your fault. Ethan has a
very punchable face.

PETER
It's this new client... I think she
got in my head. She's gonna be a
challenge.

KAI
If you want, I can sit in on your
next session. Provide some rah-rah
moral support.

PETER
Yeah? That'd be great. Thanks.

INT. ASCENSIONS COMMUNION SPACE - DAY

A large room with giant bay windows. Carefully designed to be
as comfortable and soothing as possible. A therapist's office
as engineered by industry experts.

Peter in one chair, Gale across from him. Kai sits off to the
side.

Gale hands Peter her giant stack of paperwork.

PETER
That wasn't so bad, was it?

Peter takes her paperwork and gives it a cursory glance.

GALE
Are you kidding? That was
fantastic. I don't even need to get
in your magical murder machine.
This is the way to go out. Death by
carpal tunnel.

PETER
I don't see your last will and
testament in here.

GALE
I'm working on it.

PETER
We need it for our files.

GALE
Yeah yeah. You'll get it. I'm still
tinkering. Picture this... A
treasure map.

PETER
What?

GALE
That'd be cool, right? An honest to
God treasure map. "Good luck,
assholes. Find my shit." People
would talk about that for years.

KAI
Okay, I am obsessed with you.

MOMENTS LATER -- Peter shuts the door on Kai, having kicked
her out of the session. He walks back to his seat.

PETER
Have you been thinking about your
departure?

GALE
Isn't that your job? You're the
arteest.

PETER
Clients usually come in with at
least a spark of an idea. Then, we
talk and flesh it out together.

GALE
We just... talk?

PETER
Right. We have a few sessions--

GALE
How many?

PETER
As many as it takes.

GALE

What a waste of time.

PETER

No one's ever complained.

GALE

Sure, killing your customers is a great way to keep the one-star reviews off the ol' Yelp page, isn't it?

PETER

You're deflecting.

GALE

I tell you what, why don't we just lock something in right here, and I can get out of your hair?

PETER

Gale.

GALE

Seriously. What do most people go out with? The greatest hits?

PETER

It doesn't work like that.

GALE

I won't tell if you don't.

PETER

Every departure is different. And, I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't give your life an ending that is exactly and uniquely you.

GALE

Gimme a break. You never phoned one in?

PETER

...No.

Gale takes a beat to clock Peter's earnestness. He really means it.

GALE

Okay, so what are the rules? Say I wanted to Catherine the Great myself? Ya know, get crushed to death by a very randy horse.

PETER

Did that really happen?

GALE

Who cares? It's a great story. And, what a way to be remembered.

PETER

Technically, there are no limits. But, with government oversight and public opinion what it is, we try to keep our simulations PG-13.

GALE

Well, sure. This is America. You don't want any natural, beautiful human sexuality to get in the way of all the violent bloody death.

PETER

I wouldn't say that exactly...

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

ERNESTO [late 60s] works the register of a convenience store. It's a quiet day. A nearly empty store. His son LUIS [21] mops the floor.

The DING of the front door. A gang of tough-looking dudes enter. Their leader GATOR approaches the counter. He's a tatted up redneck, wearing a trench coat and gator skin boots. He's terrifying.

He's also PETER's projection.

GATOR

Hola... Ernesto.

Gator's boys start opening snacks and eating them in the aisles. Luis looks at his father with concern.

Ernesto reaches for the silent alarm. Gator opens his coat to reveal a handgun.

GATOR (CONT'D)

Tut tut tut. Don't do anything loco, *cabron*. Empty the register, and we'll all be *a-o bueno*.

Ernesto nods and opens the register. Before he can hand over the money, Luis charges at Gator. Grapples with him.

ERNESTO

Luis! No!

Gator pushes Luis to the ground and takes out his gun. Points it at Luis.

GATOR
Bad move, *chico*.

Before Gator can pull the trigger, Ernesto picks up the register and bashes Gator over the head with it. Gator crumples to the ground.

One of Gator's lackeys pulls out a gun. Ernesto slides over the counter, disarms him, and shoots another thug several times. Throws the gun at another, nailing him in the head.

Ernesto grabs a mop and wields it like a bo staff. Left jab, left jab. Bobs his head right. An up and under strike. Two knees to the gut. Right elbow to the head.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ethan looks on at the fight, impressed. He tries to match the movements in his chair. Still can't quite do it.

Peter is focused, intense.

INT. JORDAN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ernesto's teary-eyed wife NATHALIE [60s] watches the departure on the screen. As she sniffs back tears, a hand reaches into frame, offering a box of movie theater popcorn.

Nathalie looks down at the popcorn, then at its offerer: Gale.

Nathalie glares, and Gale gives the popcorn box a little shake -- "You sure?"

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

A henchman hits Ernesto with an uppercut. Hip tosses him to the ground. He goes to kick him, but Ernesto rolls out, jumps up. A 180-degree spin. Sweeps a leg. Hits a roundhouse left punch. *Road House*-style rips out a man's throat.

ERNESTO
C'mon, son! We gotta go.

Ernesto grabs Luis and they rush off.

INT. JORDAN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gale watches the screen, into it. Nathalie cries as she munches on some of Gale's popcorn.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ernesto and Luis run onto the roof, where a helicopter is waiting for them.

Ernesto helps Luis into the helicopter. The door behind them bursts open and Gator emerges, gun pointed right for them. He FIRES.

Ernesto dives in front of Luis, firing back. He hits Gator several times, and he drops dead.

Ernesto hits the ground, having taken a bullet himself. Luis leaps down from the helicopter and cradles his dad.

LUIS

Thank you, Papa. Thank you.

Ernesto weakly turns and points to the helicopter and Luis nods. He gently lays his father down and gets in the helicopter. It takes off.

Ernesto watches his son fly away. He takes out a cigarette, lights it, takes a drag.

ERNESTO

Fly free.

He tosses the cigarette into a vent that reads: "HIGHLY FLAMMABLE. DO NOT FLICK CIGARETTES HERE."

The convenience store explodes--

BLIP.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Distantly, Peter hears the team congratulating him, congratulating each other, but his head is swimming.

Peter looks down at the panel in front of him. A newspaper article. LUIS DOMINGUEZ, 21, KILLED IN CONVENIENCE STORE ROBBERY. FATHER SURVIVES.

His hands shaky, he folds the article and pockets it.

EXT. GALE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

An old, dirty building that's seen better days. Stained spackle, a green-tinted pool, overgrown bushes.

INT. GALE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Peter paces around Gale's small apartment. It's basic. Cheap. Low-rent, heavily used furniture. A small boxy TV. Faded, cracking paint.

But, the walls are covered in photographs. Beautiful landscapes. Landmarks from all over the world. Portraits of people from different cultures. Magazine covers.

GALE

That was pretty awesome, I will
say. Can I do something like that?
Kick somebody's ass?

Kai scans Gale into her computer. Ethan goes through a stack of photos and magazines.

PETER

Whose ass?

GALE

I don't care. Anybody's.

PETER

I think we can find something more
personal.

GALE

Ugh, fine.

Ethan shows Peter an old, black and white picture of younger Gale and a young woman about her age. CORA.

They're posing in front of Gale's Mustang, brand new in this picture. All smiles. Young and free.

PETER

Who's this you're with?

Gale looks over at the picture, pauses a second.

GALE

Oh, who can remember? A friend from
school? Cora something? Who cares?
This is creepy, just so you know.

PETER

What is?

GALE

All of it. This whole vibe. You casually rifling through my shit so you can get in my head, figure out how to kill me in just the right way? I mean, what has to happen in a person's life to do this job?

Ethan and Kai look at her.

GALE (CONT'D)

Not you all though. I'm sure you had super normal childhoods.

PETER

What was your childhood like?

GALE

Pass.

PETER

Come on. Talk to me.

GALE

Normal.

PETER

Where'd you grow up?

GALE

South Carolina.

PETER

How was that?

GALE

Hot and wet. Is this helpful for you?

PETER

Not yet. Not especially.

GALE

Then we finally have something in common.

PETER

It's a process. Most people use their departures to close the book, so to speak. Do something they never got to do. Find closure, erase a regret.

GALE

Well that's fucking tragic. I almost got a tattoo once that said "No Regrets." But, I didn't. Because I knew I'd regret it. And, I have no regrets.

KAI

That tracks.

Ethan examines one of the magazine covers. Looks closer. In small print: "Cover photograph by Gale Dorian."

ETHAN

Did you take all these pictures?

Gale shrugs.

KAI

That's so boss.

PETER

You've lived quite a life, haven't you?

GALE

I saw a lot of shit, did a lot of shit. Ran with the bulls, swam with the sharks, marched with the penguins.

(then)

I decided a long time ago to ride this thing til the wheels came off, which they eventually did... And I think I did a damn good job of it.

PETER

I'll say.

GALE

I mean, really, how sad would it be to live any other way?

Peter nods, Gale's words eating at something inside him.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - EVENING

Peter sits at his desk, lost in thought. He's reviewing Gale's pictures, looking for inspiration.

A sudden KNOCK at his office door. He closes the file.

PETER

Come in!

The door opens and Merrily timidly peeks her head in. Peter jumps up.

PETER (CONT'D)
Miss Wells? What are you-- Can I help you?

MERRILY
Hi. Um, hi. I think I owe you an apology.

PETER
...You're blue.

MERRILY
No. I mean, the last few weeks have been hard, but I'm okay--

Peter smiles subtly, then indicates her shirt. Stained with blue Slurpee goop.

MERRILY (CONT'D)
Oh, that. Yeah, some asshole outside--

PETER
I know him well.

Peter stands up and walks to his closet.

MERRILY
It's fine.

PETER
No, here, please.

Peter hands her his stain stick.

PETER (CONT'D)
You're not the first.

MERRILY
Thanks.

Merrily takes the stain stick and swipes at her stained clothes.

MERRILY (CONT'D)
I wanted to stop by to say I'm sorry. For slapping you. And generally being an asshole.

PETER
You weren't--

MERRILY

I was. I was an asshole.

PETER

Forget about it. You were upset.
This can be an overwhelming
process.

Merrily finishes fiddling with her shirt and hands the stain stick back to Peter. He places it back in his closet.

MERRILY

You were just doing your job. He
liked you, by the way.

PETER

I liked him too. Truly.

MERRILY

And, honestly, looking back at it,
that departure-- That's what you
call it right, a departure?-- I
hadn't seen him like that in I
don't know how long. He was so...
light. Unburdened?

(then)

It was really special what you gave
him. So... thank you for that.

Peter smiles a sad little smile.

PETER

Are you doing okay?

MERRILY

Ya know... As often as I'm getting
that question, I'm not getting any
better at answering it.

PETER

I get it... I lost both my parents.

MERRILY

Did you kill them too?

An awkward shared half-laugh.

MERRILY (CONT'D)

Sorry, bad joke.

PETER

No, it's okay. They died in an
accident, when I was young. It's
hard. It's hard for a long time.

Merrily nods. A heavy beat hangs in the air.

MERRILY

Can I ask you something?

PETER

Why do I work here?

MERRILY

I mean, honestly, who the fuck was your guidance counselor?

PETER

Uh, well, I was working in VR. Video games, augmented reality, that kinda thing. Ya know, escapism. And, I started to feel... Like, I dunno, like I wasn't doing anything that mattered. That the world was burning down around me, and I was making fiddles.

MERRILY

But why this? Why...

PETER

Euthanizing the sick and decrepit?

MERRILY

It sounds so romantic the way you say it.

PETER

...I guess I wanted to use what I know how to do to help people.

MERRILY

Isn't it kind of sad though?

PETER

Sure, but it's also rewarding. Uplifting.

MERRILY

No, I mean... Not just the whole departure thing. Like, isn't it sad that this is a job at all?

Peter isn't sure how to answer.

MERRILY (CONT'D)

I mean we're living in the freaking future, man.

(MORE)

MERRILY (CONT'D)

Leaps and bounds of technology, and this is what we do with it?

(then)

Didn't we used to like... fix our problems? We cured diseases. Went to the moon. Smashed a bunch of atoms together in a big collider thingie. Why? I dunno. Because we could? When did we give up on trying to make things better? The world got bad and people were like, oh I guess the world is bad now, we had a good run. And then, of course, people who can actually afford treatment are fine, but to everyone else, don't let the door hit you on the way out?

(then)

What you do, what you did for my dad, it's sweet and, for people without any choice left, I'm sure it's comforting. But, it's really fitting that this country's last big innovation is just... a way to die better.

Peter takes this in a beat.

PETER

I guess I don't really see it like that... I think of it as a gift. I know how that sounds, but what we can give to people... They get to leave on a high note, ya know. Without pain, without suffering, on their own timeline. Their story complete.

(then)

That's not a luxury everyone gets.

Peter's face softens. He tries to cover it, but Merrily catches it. She looks at him with kindness, with something like sympathy.

The moment hangs in the air until--

PETER (CONT'D)

I should get back to work.

MERRILY

Oh, right, totally. I need to get back too, so...

PETER
Watch out for flying slurpees.

MERRILY
Ha, yeah... You too.

Merrily walks to the door, giving Peter one last look back before she's gone.

CUE MUSIC: BEACH BOYS - DON'T WORRY, BABY

EXT. ASCENSIONS - NIGHT

Rain pours down on the waiting CarPal. Peter hesitates behind the glass doors, pulls his jacket up over his head. Steps outside and jogs to the car.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ankle-deep flood waters lap at the stilts of Peter's house. As his CarPal drives off behind him, Peter sloshes through his driveway. Trudges up the stairs.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Pots and pans collect the rainwater leaking through the ceiling. The house groans and creaks.

Peter is nowhere to be seen.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In his dark bedroom, the patients' collectibles forming a makeshift memorial, Peter sits at his computer.

He scrolls through the names. Stops. Clicks.

He attaches the dongle to his temple, plugging into the departure from earlier -- the family in the van.

INT. / EXT. MINI VAN - DAY

Mom and Dad in the front seat, Mom behind the wheel. Beach Boys on the radio. Joy and innocence.

In the backseat, we see their child for the first time. A little boy, about nine years old. Looking adoringly at his parents.

This is YOUNG PETER.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

His headset on, Peter is immersed in this departure. And, for the first time, we see the name he's landed on. Peter Grimsby.

Peter is working on his own departure.

INT. / EXT. MINI VAN - DAY

The semi-truck crosses the barrier. Mom swerves. This time, we don't cut away. She clips the truck, spinning the car.

Mom struggles to regain control. Hits a barrier. Careens into the air.

FADE TO BLACK:

GALE (PRE-LAP)
Why don't you tell me about you?

INT. ASCENSIONS COMMUNION SPACE - DAY

Peter and Gale sit opposite each other, and Gale is getting restless.

PETER
That's not really how this works.
(then)
You know, we still need your will
for your file--

GALE
Yeah, yeah, I'm on it. Whatever.
And "how this works" isn't working
for me. Let's mix it up.

PETER
There isn't much to tell.

GALE
You're, what was it, *deflecting*.

Peter shakes his head. His own words turned against him.

GALE (CONT'D)
What?

PETER
No, I just suddenly get why
executioners wear hoods.

GALE

Come on. I'm not exactly compelled to open up my entire history to a complete stranger.

PETER

Fair point. What do you want to know?

GALE

First, is there some rule we have to do this here?

Peter looks confused. Gale smirks.

EXT. ASCENSIONS - DAY

Peter and Gale step outside, Gale lighting a cigarette and taking a puff. The protesters start their booing and yelling, but Gale is not bothered.

The Slurpee Douche from earlier, sipping on his giant drink, gets all up in Gale's face, screaming in her ear.

SLURPEE DOUCHE

Another cow to the slaughter!

PETER

Okay--

Gale stops and digs for something in her purse. Sunglasses. She calmly puts them on.

SLURPEE DOUCHE

Moo! Moo, you fucking cow!

PETER

Leave her alone, dude.

Gale reaches back into her purse.

SLURPEE DOUCHE

Do you hear me, you fucking cow?
You ugly old bit--

Gale pepper sprays him in the face. He screams in agony, spilling his own slurpee all over himself.

GALE

I heard you.

She casually turns to Peter, like nothing happened.

GALE (CONT'D)

Let's go.

The other protesters back off, and Peter follows Gale to the parking lot. Her car. An old Mustang. She's taken good care of it.

PETER

You still drive your own car?

GALE

Why is that so surprising? Because I'm old?

PETER

Because nobody drives anymore...
And, because you're old.

GALE

Just because I'm old, half-blind,
and prone to fits of violent rage
doesn't mean I can't drive my own
fucking car.

She opens her driver-side door.

GALE (CONT'D)

You coming or what?

Peter hesitates, nervous. But, climbs in.

INT. / EXT. MUSTANG - DAY

Peter settles in and immediately buckles his seat belt. Gale puffs her cigarette and revs the engine.

PETER

They still let cars like this on
the road?

GALE

Didn't you hear? The environment's
over. We lost. Just enjoy the ride.

ON THE ROAD, Gale speeds down the highway, wind whipping her hair. Passing slow-moving driverless cars. Peter white knuckles his door handle.

Gale notices Peter's abject terror and grins. Speeds up. Peter looks over at Gale. So alive.

INT. PRESERVATION HALL - EVENING

A jazz band is killing it on-stage in a pretty packed bar. The place is rustic, cool. Filled with history.

Peter and Gale sit at the bar, drinks in front of them. Enjoying the music and the scene.

GALE

What's the craziest thing you've ever done?

PETER

Pass.

GALE

You can't pass.

PETER

Really, I don't-- I'm pretty boring.

GALE

When was the last time you bought a spontaneous plane ticket and just took off? Or danced all night? Or put your head in a lion's mouth?

PETER

Jesus, that's your baseline?

(then)

Okay, okay. In college. I went to this beach bar. Right off the ocean. And, there was this girl.

GALE

Now we're talking.

EXT. BEACH BAR - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A younger Peter is talking to a spirited young woman at a bar. Tattoos and a nose ring. Peter's captivated.

PETER (V.O.)

We got a little tipsy, and she wanted to go for a swim.

INT. PRESERVATION HALL - EVENING

Gale leans forward, intrigued. Peter deep in nostalgia.

GALE

Ooh, is this a skinny dipping story?

PETER
We walk down to the beach...

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Peter follows the young woman down to the shore. He's nervous, looking around. Jealous of her. Her freedom. Her every step like a dance.

PETER (V.O.)
...And it's pitch black. She starts taking off her clothes. So, I start taking off mine.

She starts to strip. Peter reluctantly does the same.

PETER (V.O.)
And, the whole time, you know what I'm thinking?

INT. PRESERVATION HALL - EVENING

GALE
I can guess.

PETER
I'm thinking... This how every horror movie starts. They're going to find our bodies and close down the beach. We're about to ruin a whole lot of kids' summer vacations.

GALE
...You didn't get in.

PETER
No, I got in. Didn't you hear me? She was naked.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The woman swims out beyond Peter. Further than he can go.

PETER (V.O.)
But I couldn't... relax. I couldn't be in the moment, ya know?

She calls back after him, reaches out her hand.

But Peter is frozen. He slowly, sadly turns around and swims back to solid land.

INT. PRESERVATION HALL - EVENING

Peter hangs his head, the memory still painful.

GALE

What happened to the girl?

PETER

That's the crazy thing... No one ever saw her again.

GALE

No fucking way.

PETER

No, I dunno... But I sure didn't.

GALE

...How about now? Any ladies in your life?

PETER

No.

GALE

Yeah, I didn't think so.

PETER

Ouch.

GALE

Not because-- No. You just seem... lonely.

PETER

I mean, my job keeps me busy.

GALE

Believe me, I hear that.

Peter looks up from his drink. Gale is finally opening up.

PETER

Did you ever think about... settling down?

GALE

...Me? No. God no.

(beat)

I'll tell ya one thing, though. I never thought I'd go out like this.

PETER

Like what?

GALE

Old and alone. All the crazy shit I did, I guess I always figured I'd die with my boots on. Out in the field somewhere.

(then)

You know my left leg is almost entirely fake? Metal rods and screws.

PETER

Really?

GALE

Yeah, you didn't realize I was a cyborg, did you? I hide it well.

PETER

What happened?

GALE

I was on a freelance assignment in Alaska. Trying to get a shot of some of the last polar bears in the wild. Camped out for three weeks. And, one morning, there he is. Maybe 500 feet away. This sad, little emaciated thing...

Peter is rapt, and Gale knows how to spin a yarn.

GALE (CONT'D)

I mean, you could see its bones through its fur. So I start taking pictures. And I'm so focused, I don't hear the rustling behind me.

PETER

Shit. Another bear?

GALE

I fucking wish.

(then)

I turn around just in time to see this half-ton bull moose charging right at me. Absolutely crushed my leg. Like a bag of pebbles and goo.

PETER

Fuck.

GALE

At the hospital, they wanted to take the whole thing off, but I said no. I can't do my job with one leg. So, they Frankensteined me right the hell up.

PETER

That's awesome.

GALE

Yeah... Yeah. Six surgeries and a few months of rehab, I was back out in the field. Doing my thing.

(beat)

But, here's a fun fact. The metal they used back then has a tendency to break down in the human body. Leak into the bloodstream. Cause all sorts of cancer.

PETER

No...

GALE

Took 40 years, but that goddamn moose finally got me.

Gale laughs a sad little laugh.

PETER

That sucks.

GALE

What I never, ever pictured was this... wind-down. Knowing it was coming. This unchangeable, inevitable, creeping thing. And not being able to do shit about it.

Gale's strong facade begins to crack, but then she suddenly remembers--

GALE (CONT'D)

Fuck, what time is it?

Gale grabs Peter's arm and yanks it to her. Checks his watch.

GALE (CONT'D)

We gotta go.

She gulps down the rest of her drink. Peter, confused, does the same. Follows her out.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Gale leads Peter through a dark cemetery. She's on a mission. He's a little freaked out. And they're both a little tipsy.

PETER
Why are we in a cemetery?

GALE
Scared?

PETER
Only like a rational amount.

GALE
Relax. There's no sharks. And,
we're almost there.

PETER
Almost where?

GALE
No, no. It's my turn to ask
questions tonight, remember? Where
are you from?

PETER
Here. Like, right here, actually.
My house is like a block that way.

GALE
You live next to a cemetery? That
explains so much.

PETER
Yeah, but I don't come hang out
here in the middle of the night.

They crest over a hill, where there's an outdoor movie screen setup. People sitting on folding chairs and blankets.

GALE
Maybe you should start.

EXT. CEMETERY MOVIE SCREENING - NIGHT

Peter and Gale sit side-by-side in two folding chairs. Tombstones behind them. An inflatable movie screen in front.

An event PHOTOGRAPHER approaches them.

PHOTOGRAPHER
You want a picture with your mom?

PETER
Oh, we're not--

GALE
Shut up, son.
(to the photographer)
Get my good side.

Gale and Peter lean in closer to each other, and they really do look like family. The photographer snaps a pic.

A LITTLE LATER, the movie's playing. *The Ballad of Narayama* - a black and white Japanese film. On-screen, a man carries an old woman on his back, up a mountain.

Gale reaches into her coat and pulls out a joint. Lights up.

GALE (CONT'D)
(off Peter's look)
Don't worry, it's not medicinal. I bought it off a guy who lives behind my building. I don't know what it's laced with, but whatever it is, I like it.

Gale takes a hit, offers it to Peter. He hesitates a second, then takes it. Hits it and immediately coughs. Gale laughs. Then Peter laughs. He passes the joint back.

GALE (CONT'D)
See? Isn't it nice to let yourself stay in the water once in a while?

Gale takes another hit. Peter considers that a beat, then turns back to the screen.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter works at his computer, Gale's file open. Notes. Scanned pictures. He scrolls through. She really has lived a life.

Peter stops. Thinks a beat. Reaches for his phone. Reads a number off the screen and slowly dials. Raises the receiver to his ear. Waits as it rings--

PETER
...Hey. This is-- Yeah. This might sound weird. But, would you maybe want to get dinner with me? Or a drink or-- No, okay, I wasn't-- That sounds good. Saturday works. Okay. Great... Yeah, see you there.

Peter hangs up. Can't believe he did that.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Peter and Merrily walk together along the shore, wearing orange vests over their clothes, carrying trash picker spears and plastic bags. Part of a small volunteer group, cleaning up the beach.

PETER

You really do this every Saturday?

MERRILY

Most Saturdays, yeah.

PETER

That's really cool of you.

MERRILY

Yeah well, it beats sitting around the house, being all mopey all the time.

PETER

It's good to stay busy, keep your mind off it.

MERRILY

Totally.

An awkward beat between them.

MERRILY (CONT'D)

You're nervous.

PETER

I'm not--

MERRILY

Look at you. You're so uncomfortable.

PETER

Fine, yes, okay. I'm... I haven't done this in a while.

MERRILY

It definitely shows. But, hey, if it takes the pressure off, this isn't a date or anything like that.

PETER

...Oh, yeah. I didn't think--

MERRILY

Don't get me wrong. I know it's a classic fairy tale romance set-up. Girl meets boy, boy kills girl's dad... Vaguely Shakespearean.

PETER

Did Shakespeare do that?

MERRILY

Yeah I think so. Hamlet killed Ophelia's dad, right?

PETER

...Yeah, this is weird.

MERRILY

Which is why we should clear the air and take anything romantic off the table right here.

Peter tries to hide his disappointment.

PETER

Sounds good. I was thinking the same thing.

MERRILY

I'm sure.

Another awkwardly quiet beat as they spear some trash.

PETER

So, Merrily's an interesting name.

MERRILY

Smooth transition. Technically, it's Mary Lee, but my dad was really into musicals, which I guess you know, and he always called me Merrily. After that one song, um...

(singing softly)

Yesterday is done. See the pretty countryside. Merrily we roll along, roll along, bursting with dreams.

PETER

(a little uncomfortable)

I don't think I know that one.

MERRILY

Really?

(with more feeling)

(MORE)

MERRILY (CONT'D)

*Time goes by. And hopes go dry, but
you still can try for your dream.*

Some people are looking, but Merrily doesn't give a shit.

PETER

Okay, that's--

MERRILY

(even bigger)

*Soon enough you're merrily,
merrily, practicing dreams!*

Off Peter's look, Merrily turns apologetically to onlookers.

MERRILY (CONT'D)

So sorry. Can't take him anywhere.

PETER

Why did you agree to hang out? I
mean, you don't know me.

MERRILY

Honestly, I don't know anybody
right now, Peter. I left New
Orleans when I was 18. Had
something vaguely resembling a life
in California. Then, when Dad got
really bad, I moved back here to
take care of him. That was my
entire life for two years, and now
he's gone. So, practically
speaking, yeah, I don't really know
anybody anymore.

(then)

And, I dunno, patricide aside, you
seem like a nice guy.

PETER

What'd you do in California?

MERRILY

I worked in environmental law.

PETER

So, this is like... what you do?

MERRILY

Yeah. I know a lot of people have
kinda given up on anything getting
better, but I'm not ready to do
that just yet.

(then)

(MORE)

MERRILY (CONT'D)

I guess maybe we both have a thing
for lost causes.

Their eyes meet, and Peter can't help but smile.

INT. BASKETBALL ARENA - NIGHT

BWAAAAAAA. The buzzer of a basketball game. The Lakers at The Pelicans.

It's a tie game with mere seconds to go in the fourth quarter. Off an inbound pass, a Lakers player fights his way into the lane and dunks it home.

PELICANS COACH slams his clipboard down. A projection of Ethan inside the simulation.

PELICANS COACH

Goddamn it! Time out!

The ref blows his whistle. Pelicans Coach looks at the clock. Five seconds and they're down 99-97.

The Pelicans gather around their coach, who is livid.

PELICANS COACH (CONT'D)

Is this y'all's first day? Can any
of you happy assholes even play
basketball?

He holds up a basketball.

PELICANS COACH (CONT'D)

Have you ever seen one of these
before? The whole season is on the
line! It all comes down to this one
shot, and I can't trust none of
y'all.

He looks into the crowd.

PELICANS COACH (CONT'D)

Hey! Hey, you!

Popcorn vendor ISAAC [70s] stops in the aisle. The coach is looking right at him.

ISAAC

Me?

PELICANS COACH

Yeah, you. You know how to shoot?

ISAAC

Yeah.

PELICANS COACH

Well, get on down here!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Ethan is in Peter's usual seat, taking the lead on this departure. On the screen, Isaac makes his way onto the court. Is handed a uniform.

Ethan looks a little nervous. He looks over at Kai for assurance.

KAI

Doing great. Don't screw it up.

Ethan nervously nods then turns back to the microphone.

ETHAN

Put it on, man.

INT. BASKETBALL ARENA - NIGHT

The buzzer sounds. Isaac steps onto the court.

At the announcer table, PLAY BY PLAY MAN and COLOR COMMENTATOR are dumbfounded.

PLAY BY PLAY MAN

Subbed in at shooting guard is...
Isaac Moss?

COLOR COMMENTATOR

I'm being told Isaac has been a
popcorn vendor here for many years,
but now we'll see what he can do on
the court.

Isaac spryly runs around a screen and catches the ball at half court. He blows by a defender and pulls up for three.

The whole arena goes silent as the ball hovers in the air. SWISH. The buzzer sounds and the crowd goes apeshit.

PLAY BY PLAY MAN

It's in! The Pelicans win!

COLOR COMMENTATOR

Isaac Moss will forever be a New
Orleans Pelicans legend!

The Pels swarm Isaac and celebrate with him. Jump all over him. He's crying with joy. The entire stadium starts chanting his name. An invisible man, finally seen.

The team lift him up on their shoulders, and as he rises--
BLIP.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Ethan leans back in his seat. Relieved, accomplished. He and Kai exchange smiles.

KNOCK KNOCK.

They turn around. Peter stands at the observation glass. He offers a proud thumbs up. Then, turns and hurries off.

Ethan and Kai look at each other again.

ETHAN

...Want to get a drink tonight?

KAI

Hmm. No. I don't like it when
you're this confident.

Ethan deflates.

ETHAN

I understand.

KAI

9:00?

Ethan perks back up.

ETHAN

Seriously? Yeah!

KAI

And you just ruined it.

Ethen sulks again.

KAI (CONT'D)

See you then.

Kai gets up and leaves.

ETHAN

Wha-- Where? I don't understand
what's happening!

INT. ASCENSIONS HALLWAY - DAY

Peter walks down the hallway, moving with purpose. Reviewing Gale's file as he walks. Just as he reaches his office, before he can open the door, Arden appears.

ARDEN

I thought Isaac Moss was your departure.

PETER

Yeah, he was. But, I've been really wrapped up in another case, so I let Ethan take lead on one.

ARDEN

Peter, buddy, I know you're a perfectionist, but you can't spend this much time on one client. We need your head in the game. In all of the games.

PETER

I understand. I hear you. And, I'm sorry, but I need to get this one exactly right.

ARDEN

Hm... Okay. Do what you gotta do.
(then)
If you need me this week, I'll be in Belize. So... Don't need me.

Arden peels off, and Peter takes a beat then goes into his office and shuts the door.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREETS - NIGHT

Peter and Merrily walk down the bright, vibrant streets of New Orleans, drinks in hand. It's a night alive with music, revelers, and possibilities.

Peter's mind is still back at the office, and Merrily can sense it. She breaks the silence.

MERRILY

Do you think you'll live in New Orleans forever?

PETER

I guess so. Until the ocean swallows it up, at least.

MERRILY

Don't say that.

PETER

I dunno, it's kinda cool going down with the ship.

MERRILY

There's nowhere else you'd wanna go?

PETER

I grew up here... It's home.

MERRILY

Yeah, me too. But, there's something to be said about getting out of your hometown, at least for a while. And definitely before it sinks.

PETER

I guess...

MERRILY

Like, you've never been on vacation somewhere and thought, ya know what, this. I could do this forever?

PETER

I haven't really traveled much.

MERRILY

Have you ever left the country?

PETER

To be honest, I've barely left Louisiana.

MERRILY

Seriously? Why not?

Peter hesitates, unsure how much he wants to open up, but something in Merrily pushes him to let it out.

PETER

We couldn't afford to go anywhere when I was a kid, and I just never... My mom always wanted to take a big family trip. We had this jar we kept on top of the fridge...

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A young Peter watches his mother put a dollar in a jar, place it on top of the fridge.

PETER (V.O.)
...And every spare dollar we had
would go right in there.

She cooks from a French cookbook. Gives young Peter a taste with a big wooden spoon.

PETER (V.O.)
She wanted to see France more than
anything. Paris. Marseilles.
Cannes.

She playfully boops young Peter's nose with the spoon.
Lovingly wipes the sauce off his face.

PETER (V.O.)
She had it all mapped out in her
head. Talked about it all the time.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

Peter's father, covering his wife's eyes, leads her onto the porch. Takes his hands away. She opens her eyes and immediately glows with joy.

PETER (V.O.)
I remember, on her birthday one
year, my dad turned the porch into
this little Parisian cafe.

The porch is decorated with a little table, string lights, a picture of the Eiffel Tower. Coffee, cheese, pastries.

They eat and drink and laugh. A beautiful memory.

PETER (V.O.)
It's probably the happiest I ever
saw her.

Young Peter watches his mom and dad slow dance under the string lights.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREETS - NIGHT

Peter and Merrily keep strolling.

MERRILY
That's so cute.

PETER

Yeah. It was. But, she, uh, she died before she ever got to see the real thing.

(then)

I still have the jar. So many times I thought about pulling it down. But, I guess it never felt right to do it without them. To see more of the world than they got to.

MERRILY

I'm really sorry... How old were you when they died?

PETER

...I was, uh... I was nine.

Merrily stops and pulls Peter in for a hug. He's stiff at first, but relaxes into it.

MERRILY

God, Peter, I'm so sorry.

PETER

It's alright.

Merrily sniffs back a tear.

MERRILY

No, it's not. It sucks. It's not fair. It's not fair to them, and it's not fair to you, how long you've had to carry that by yourself. Fuck.

PETER

Why are you the one crying?

She gives him a playful shove.

MERRILY

Because it's fucking sad, you asshole.

They start walking again, a little closer now.

PETER

It's weird, I haven't really talked about them in a while. It's kinda nice, remembering the good parts.

MERRILY

Well, I'm pretty sure those are the parts they'd want you to remember.

Peter and Merrily stumble upon a small crowd gathering in the street. A brass band parade joyously dances and plays in front of them.

A second line of people dance joyously and follow the parade. Merrily starts to move toward the dancing.

MERRILY (CONT'D)

Come on.

PETER

I don't think so.

MERRILY

Peter.

PETER

I don't really dance.

MERRILY

It'll be fun. Please.

Merrily steps toward the parade, and Peter stands frozen.

She calls back after him, reaches out her hand.

Peter hesitates a beat, then takes her hand.

Peter and Merrily join the other revelers. Peter is awkward, but loosens up fast.

The parade is pure, unfettered joy. Peter and Merrily laugh with the others. Follow their dance moves.

They dance close, slower now, holding each other.

Slowly, their lips are drawn together. A gentle, tender kiss.

In the midst of a grand party, under the string lights, a moment where they're the only two people on earth.

INT. GALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Peter and Gale are having another session, but the vibe is way more chill. Friendly. They each have a beer.

Peter is perusing her photos again.

GALE

Leonard's daughter? No shit?

PETER

I'm as surprised as you are.

GALE

What did I say? I knew what you were up to at that funeral... Trolling for snatch.

PETER

She's really great. Sweet. Cares about shit. Like, she hasn't given up on the world like the rest of us have. It's, uh--

GALE

Nauseating?

PETER

Refreshing.

GALE

Well, good for you, kid. She could do way better, so you hold on for dear life.

PETER

Trust me, I know.

Gale takes a swig of beer.

GALE

I'm glad you're happy. I was worried about you.

PETER

You were worried about me?

GALE

Yeah, I don't want you to end up like me.

PETER

What the hell are you talking about? Gale, you've lived the most amazing life of anyone I have ever known.

GALE

And, don't get me wrong. I have loved so much about my life and my work. But, looking back, it might have been nice to have someone on the ride next to me.

Peter is starting to put some pieces together.

PETER

...You lost someone?

GALE

By the time you're my age, you've lost most everyone.

PETER

No. Someone you loved.

Peter raises a photograph. Young Gale and Cora in front of Gale's Mustang.

PETER (CONT'D)

Who's this?

GALE

I told you, I don't remember.

PETER

Gale. Please. In this whole place, this is the only picture you've kept of you and another person.

(beat)

What happened?

Gale looks caught. Flashes through deflection, anger, annoyance, sadness. Until, finally...

GALE

Cora. Her name was Cora. She wanted to get married. Her family didn't understand, but she said she didn't care. That all we needed was each other.

(beat)

I couldn't do that to her. Couldn't be the reason she threw everything and everyone else away. What if it went bad? What if she regretted it? That's so much pressure to get it right. To be the right choice. I knew the life I wanted, and it was too much to ask of her.

PETER

Did she ever get married or anything?

GALE

I don't know. I never let myself look back.

(MORE)

GALE (CONT'D)

But at the end, you can't help but think of the paths you didn't take, right?

(then)

Maybe we're not meant to do this thing alone. Especially not these last laps...

PETER

You're not alone.

GALE

Oh fuck off, yes I am. You know why you haven't gotten my will yet, for your precious files? Because there's no one to will my shit to. How fucking pathetic is that?

Gale wipes away a tear.

GALE (CONT'D)

Fuck, my only friend was the guy dying in the chemo chair next to mine. And, he got out first. Fucking quitter. I never even said goodbye because that's the kind of asshole I am. I was so mad at him for going through with it.

PETER

Then, why did you sign up?

GALE

...Don't make me say it.

PETER

Say what?

GALE

Because of you. Okay? Goddamn, don't get a big head about it.

PETER

...Because of me?

GALE

I thought you were full of shit. Until I saw you at his funeral. You were there with him all the way to end. And, I realized, I didn't have one single, solitary person who would do that for me.

PETER
Gale. Look at me.

Gale finally looks up at Peter. He puts a comforting hand on her shoulder.

PETER (CONT'D)
You are not alone. Okay? I'll be there with you. You'll have the perfect ending you deserve. I promise.

Gale's tears dry up, and she nods. She and Peter sit together in the silence.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Peter hangs up some of Gale's photos on a cork board over his computer. Including the picture of Gale and Cora.

He sits down at his computer. Flexes his fingers. Attaches the dongle to his temple.

And gets to work.

EXT. SMALL TOWN BACKYARD - NIGHT (DEPARTURE)

A summer evening in a large, grassy yard. Green trees, a stream, white picket fence. Twinkling fireflies. Classic Americana.

Peter stands in the yard, surveying the world he's built. The creator within his own creation.

He looks up at the night sky, filled with stars. He points up and, with his finger, adds a few extra stars to the sky. Erases one with his sleeve.

CHILD CORA and CHILD GALE run by him, unaware of his presence. They chase the fireflies, catching them in a jar.

A LITTLE LATER, the two girls lie on their backs, admiring the night sky, the jar of lightning bugs between them.

Peter, off to the side, points like he's cuing something. And, in response, a shooting star arcs across the sky.

Child Gale points up at the shooting star, and they both close their eyes and make a wish.

EXT. GRAND CANYON - DAY (DEPARTURE)

A hang glider flies across the impossibly blue sky, looking down at the orange and red canyon below.

Inside the glider, Gale and Cora (now young adults) soaring and loving the view.

On the ground, Peter looks up as they sail above him.

The wings of the glider morph into--

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - NIGHT

A brightly colored flag waving in the wind from a street cart. Peter and Merrily buy some food from the vendor.

They stop to listen to a busking trumpet player. Merrily drops him some money.

EXT. SMALL TOWN FRONT YARD - DAY (DEPARTURE)

Gale and Cora, now young adults, stand together in front of Gale's Mustang. Talking, laughing, posing for a picture -- the picture that inspired all of this.

As the camera's flash goes off--

EXT. GARDEN - DAY (DEPARTURE)

Cameras flash at a beautiful garden wedding. A tuxedo-clad brass band plays under a white archway. Gale and Cora are getting married surrounded by a sea of colorful flowers.

The officiant pronounces them married. They lean in and kiss--

INT. WEDDING RECEPTION - NIGHT (DEPARTURE)

The brides separate from a kiss, to the delight and cheers of the crowd, who clink their champagne glasses.

Peter and Merrily cheer from their table, beaming.

EXT. FAN BOAT - DAY

Peter and Merrily ride a fan boat in the bayou, standing at the railing. Basking in the view and in each other.

Peter raises a camera and takes a picture of this perfect moment.

As he clicks--

EXT. ALASKAN TUNDRA - DAY (DEPARTURE)

Gale, now in her mid-40s or so, camps out behind her camera in the middle of the frozen Alaskan wild, snapping pictures of a polar bear scrounging for food a safe distance away.

A sudden rustle. A snapping of twigs. Gale looks up from her camera, turns around, and sees a giant MOOSE coming right at her.

Right before the moose attacks, Cora's fist comes from nowhere and punches the moose square in the jaw. It goes down in a heap.

Gale and Cora share a laugh as they sip hot cocoa next to the moose's unconscious body.

INT. LOVELY HOME - DAY (DEPARTURE)

The moose's head is now mounted on Gale's wall. Next to many framed pictures. The wedding. The car. Gale on her various adventures. But now, she's not alone. Cora is with her in them all.

Gale adjusts a photo, straightening it, then joins Cora on the couch. As she sits down beside her--

EXT. SMALL TOWN BACKYARD - NIGHT (DEPARTURE)

Gale lies back onto Cora's arm, on a blanket in their yard. They're older now. The age Gale is now. A shooting star passes overhead and they point up in wonder. Make a wish.

Take each other's hands--

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (DEPARTURE)

Gale and Cora both lie in a hospital room, their beds close enough together to hold hands. Their heart monitors beating slowly and in rhythm.

Peter watches from the corner of the room, his eyes wet.

Suddenly, simultaneously, both heart beat monitors flatline. Gale and Cora pass on holding hands.

The room is enveloped in glowing white light and becomes--

EXT. SMALL TOWN BACKYARD - NIGHT (DEPARTURE)

A shooting star flying over two young kids, holding hands, and lying on their backs, watching the star streak across the sky. Making a wish on it.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT (DEPARTURE)

Peter watches the scene from above, the shooting star passing over him.

He pauses a moment, taking it all in. Then, Peter reaches up to his temple, and--

BLIP.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter puts down the dongle, and rolls his chair back away from his desk.

He smiles to himself. Satisfied. This is his masterpiece.

INT. MERRILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter climbs in bed next to Merrily, who's already sleeping. She stirs slightly, but goes right back to sleep.

Peter, glowing from a job well-done, finally happy and relaxed, watches her sleep for a beat before peacefully falling asleep himself.

INT. GALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gale's bed lies unmade. Pill bottles scattered around the night stand next to a bottle of water.

Gale stands on her balcony, overlooking the overcast city. Street lights just coming on. A city vibrating with energy.

She finishes off a cigarette and snubs it out on the balcony railing. She opens up her pack and reaches for another one. Empty.

She crushes the box and tosses it down. Steps back inside.

She putters over to a calendar on the wall. X's out today. LAST DAY ON EARTH is just a few days away. The rest of the month, every day is marked DEAD.

Gale stands in front of the calendar, staring at the little future she has left.

INT. ASCENSIONS COMMUNION SPACE - DAY

Peter sits in his usual chair. Anxiously rubbing his hands. The chair opposite him sits empty.

Peter checks his watch. Waits a few more beats. Then, slowly rises. Walks out.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter holds his phone to his ear. It rings and rings.

EXT. GALE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Peter knocks on Gale's door. Knocks again. He steps over to a window, peers inside. His eyes go wide.

PETER

No...

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - EVENING

Peter anxiously waits in a packed hospital waiting room. Long lines of patients waiting to be seen and scared emergency contacts.

Peter flips through a magazine, trying to distract himself.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Were you or someone you care about
offered a so-called perfect ending?

Peter looks up. The old TV in the corner of the room plays an ad from Live and Let Live. Susan Ross addresses the camera.

SUSAN (ON TV) (CONT'D)

Did you have a loved one ripped
away from you inside a simulated
virtual reality deathscape? You may
be entitled to a cash settlement!

Peter grumbles and stands up, walks toward the TV.

SUSAN (ON TV) (CONT'D)

Call 1-800-Let-Live. Or visit our
website--

Peter turns off the TV, then silently makes his way back to his seat.

INT. GALE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Gale lies in a hospital bed. Unconscious.

Peter stands over her bed, Dr. Rao enters and stands beside him.

PETER

What happened?

Dr. Rao sighs.

DR. RAO

I talked to the doctor who admitted
her. They're not sure what caused
her fall.

(MORE)

DR. RAO (CONT'D)
They're waiting on the toxicology
report, but Pete, man, sometimes
these things just happen.

Peter is still speechless.

DR. RAO (CONT'D)
She has a subdural hematoma. A
buildup of blood on the surface of
her brain. They induced a coma to
try and relieve pressure, stop the
bleeding--

PETER
...Is she going to wake up?

The pause Dr. Rao takes says it all.

DR. RAO
It's too early to tell.
(then)
I'm sorry.

Dr. Rao puts a hand on Peter's shoulder, then steps out of
the room, leaving Peter standing by Gale's bed. Suddenly so
frail. A hollow shell. More tubes and wires than person.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter sits at his desk, still barely present.

ARDEN (O.S.)
What happened to the Dorian
departure?

Peter looks up. At some point, Arden came into his office and
is now standing expectantly in front of him.

PETER
I'm sorry, what?

ARDEN
Gale Dorian. The departure you've
spent so much time on. You pulled
it from the schedule?

PETER
Yeah, she uh... I don't think it's
happening.

ARDEN
Oh.
(understanding)
Ohhhhh... You okay?

PETER

Yeah.

Arden moves closer to Peter. Sits on the edge of his desk.

ARDEN

Maybe it's a lesson for us. Hmm?
This is a fragile business, and the
timeline isn't always so forgiving.

PETER

She needed the extra time.

ARDEN

Sure. But, this is kinda what you
do, right? You get so emotionally
involved. We can't afford to put
that much energy and that much work
into every client. Not if we want
to keep the doors open. We've got a
lot of desperate people in the
queue, and they're all counting on
us. Counting on you.

PETER

I just wanted it to be perfect.

ARDEN

Despite what our marketing campaign
might say, there's no such thing as
a perfect ending. Perfect is the
enemy of complete. Maybe if you
weren't so worried about perfect,
you could have been there with her,
given her something great. And,
maybe even helped more people you
didn't have the margin for.

Peter shakes his head.

ARDEN (CONT'D)

Listen to me. When someone climbs
into your boat, they are scared.
They're lost. They don't know what
to expect. And you, in a way only
you can, plot the course. You ferry
them safely and comfortably across
the River Styx into the Fields of
Elysian. Peter, this is your gift.
Your calling...

(then)

"For in that sleep of death, what
dreams may come." I think maybe the
man was writing about you.

Peter doesn't react. Just lets Arden's words hang there.
Arden gives the desk a couple taps and rises.

ARDEN (CONT'D)
You good? Ready to get back to
work, my dear ferryman?

Everything inside Peter says "no." But, Peter looks up at his boss and says...

PETER
Bring it on.

EXT. UNDER THE SEA - DAY

An older woman, in this departure a MERMAID, swims along the ocean floor. High-fiving some fish, drumming on some coral, just living it up in the ocean.

She spots a sunken PIRATE SHIP and swims toward it.

EXT. UTOPIA CITY - DAY

In splashy comic book panels, a giant MONSTER ravages a futuristic metropolis. A young woman falls off a roof, plunging toward the ground.

Suddenly, she's saved by a flying colorful blur. It's an old man, in this departure a SUPER HERO. He gently places her safely on a fire escape.

Hovering in the air, he turns toward the beast. Then, takes off like a rocket toward it.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Peter operates a departure, looking emotionally empty.

INT. MANSION BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

A lavish masquerade filled with the elegant and wealthy. A dance floor of attendees dancing the waltz.

A buffet table jammed with every piece of delicious food imaginable.

At the head table, an older THIN WOMAN has her plate full of everything. Eating it all and enjoying every moment of it.

Peter's projection, a waiter, stands beside her awkwardly, watching her eat. Not much for him to do.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Peter sits at his seat, watching the video monitor of the woman just eating and eating. Ethan looks over at him. He shrugs. It's what she wanted.

EXT. THE OLD WEST - DAY

It's HIGH NOON, and a COWBOY faces down a gruff black-hatted villain. Hands over their holsters. They draw.

Before the bang-- *BLIP*.

INT. NIRVANA ROOM - DAY

SHTK. The glowing white drug shoots out of its syringe and through a tube, toward a client.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

A hand comes down on the departure button, and the heart monitor flatlines.

The room celebrates around Peter -- a successful procedure. Kai gives him a congratulatory finger gun.

INT. FUNERAL - DAY

Peter sits quietly in a funeral service. Stone-faced.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Peter and Merrily sit across from each other, eating dinner in a nice restaurant. But, Peter is barely there. Merrily looks concerned.

EXT. UNDER THE SEA - DAY

The MERMAID swims through the sunken pirate ship. A treasure chest catches her eye and she heads toward it.

The treasure chest opens. Gold and jewels with an unnatural, beautiful white glow.

INT. NIRVANA ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Peter meets with the old woman who will become the mermaid. He offers her a reassuring smile. Takes her HAND.

BLIP.

INT. NIRVANA ROOM - DAY

The old mermaid woman lies dead, Peter's hand on hers. Dr. Rao looks on with concern.

EXT. STOOP 1 - DAY

A front door opens, and Susan Ross stands there smiling with a ham salad casserole in hand.

INT. MANSION BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

The thin old woman continues to eat. Peter's avatar standing beside her. Not much for him to do in this departure.

Even inside the simulation, he's looking emptier, sadder.

INT. VR STUDIO - NIGHT

Alone in a mostly dark studio, VR-suited Peter lumbers and swats the air, just as...

EXT. UTOPIA CITY - DAY

The MONSTER swats at the flying Super Hero, missing every time. Super Hero grabs the monster by the tail and flies off. Into the sky. Beyond the sky. Into...

EXT. OUTER SPACE - NIGHT

Super Hero flies the giant beast through the stars and toward the SUN.

The sun's white light envelopes them and-- *BLIP*.

INT. JORDAN ROOM - DAY

Peter, his shoulders slumped, his pallor drained, offers his condolences to a client's loved ones.

EXT. STOOP 2 - DAY

Door opens. Susan Ross. Ham salad.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter places an amateur but lovingly-illustrated comic book among his collection.

INT. GALE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Peter sits next to Gale's hospital bed. No change.

INT. MERRILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Merrily lies in bed, wide awake and alone, her thoughts elsewhere.

INT. MANSION BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

The thin old woman has many empty plates in front of her. She takes one last bite of an impossibly rich chocolate dessert. Savors it for a moment. Gingerly wipes her mouth.

She turns to Peter's projection and nods. She's ready.

BLIP.

She collapses onto the table like someone hit her off switch.

The MUSIC STOPS. The dancing stops. Everything and everyone freezes. Everything but Peter's projection.

Peter stands there a moment, looking down at the woman's dead body. Her stillness, the stillness of the entire simulation, odd and unnerving.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Peter backs away from his console. Removes his dongle.

There's applause around him, but Peter doesn't hear it. For him, the room is SILENT.

INT. LEONARD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter sits at the kitchen table, writing and sketching in a notebook, a small photograph of ED, a new client, pinned to the page.

Hard at work. Shoulders slumped. Burnt out.

MERRILY (O.S.)

Peter?

Merrily, half-asleep, walks into the kitchen, a look of worry on her face.

MERRILY (CONT'D)

What are you still doing up?

PETER

Hey, sorry, just a little more to do tonight.

MERRILY

Please, come to bed.

PETER

In a bit.

Merrily slowly, gingerly sits across from Peter.

MERRILY

You're kind of... starting to scare me.

PETER

It's fine. I'm good.

MERRILY

Are you?

PETER

I've been doing this a long time.
You don't have to worry about me.

MERRILY

I am worried about you.

Peter puts the pen down. Pauses.

PETER

I'm not a lost cause you have to fix.

MERRILY

I couldn't fix you if I wanted to.

PETER

I'm not--

MERRILY

I can't fix you. I can't save you.
I can't complete you. I'm going
through my own shit here, okay. No
one can fix you but you. All I can
do is be here for you. And I am.
I'm here for you. Okay?

(then)

Maybe this job isn't good for you.
It's too much.

Peter leans back in his seat. He knew this was coming.

PETER

I can handle it. But, I shouldn't
have brought you into it.

MERRILY

...What are you talking about?

PETER

It never works. I've tried. But, in the end, it just doesn't. No one gets it. They can't. This is more than what I do. This is part of me. But, it's always too much.

Merrily leans back, processing his words.

MERRILY

Are you breaking up with me?

Peter looks down at the table.

PETER

I really care about you--

MERRILY

Stop! Stop. You are such a fucking martyr. I'm sorry about your family. I'm sorry about Gale. But, some things are just bigger than you. Beyond your control. I just lost my dad. My mom died when I was 19. I'm fucking sad all the time. But, they wouldn't want me to stop living my life. You are destroying yourself because of something that happened 25 years ago.

PETER

I have to do this.

MERRILY

Why?!

PETER

My parents were so young. And they died in so much pain. Screaming. And with so much left undone. So many dreams they never...

Merrily softens, watches as Peter's eyes well up.

PETER (CONT'D)

If there's one thing I understand, one thing I'm alive for, it's this.

MERRILY

You have to stop using your job as an excuse because you're so afraid of anything real.

PETER
I'm not afraid--

MERRILY
Yes you are! All you are is afraid.
That's why are you throwing this
away. Why you've never left your
hometown. Why you still live in
that house. You're so scared of
losing people, you won't let anyone
get close to you unless they
already have an expiration date...
And, if you can't let go, move on,
I'm so scared of what's going to
happen to you.

Merrily pulls Peter into a desperate hug.

MERRILY (CONT'D)
Listen to me. We can just go. Okay.
Please. Let's get out of town.
Start something new together.
There's nothing keeping us here.

Peter pulls away.

PETER
...I can't.

Peter closes his notebook and picks it up.

PETER (CONT'D)
This was a mistake. I'm sorry.

He sniffs back a tear as he brushes past Merrily.

MERRILY
You're going to regret this.

Peter stops at the door.

PETER
I know. But, there's so much I've
already had to bury, and I'm
getting pretty good at it.

MERRILY
Yeah... But, nothing stays buried
forever, Peter.

With that, Peter walks out, and Merrily breaks down in tears.

INT. NIRVANA ROOM - DAY

Peter stands in front of Ed while Kai hooks him up to the machine. Ed's eyes dart around the room, looking for comfort. Peter is barely present.

PETER

You have the right to stop at any time. Say the word and we'll shut down the simulation. Do you understand what this procedure is going to do?

ED

...Yes.

PETER

Okay.

Kai looks over at her boss, concerned. Ed looks like he wants to say something, but he doesn't. Peter takes the VR helmet from Kai and places it over Ed's head.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Peter takes his place at his station. Kai and Ethan share a worried look.

KAI

Boss, you okay?

PETER

Yeah, let's just do this. Start it up.

Kai nods and boots up the simulation.

ED (O.S.)

Where am I?

Peter leans into his microphone, his voice devoid of emotion.

PETER

You've reached the Cave of Mystery, brave knight. Your journey is nearly at its end.

The AMBIENT SOUNDS of a cave. Dripping water, echoing footsteps, the burning fire of torches.

ED (O.S.)

It's dark and cold.

PETER
It's a cave... You have to keep
moving.

An inhuman screeching and cackling.

PETER (CONT'D)
Sire, the goblins have awakened.
Draw your sword and strike them
down. The princess awaits.

Sounds of swords clanking. Screams.

ED (O.S.)
There's too many of them!

PETER
You can do it. Your sword is...
magic.

ED (O.S.)
This isn't right.

On the monitor in the JORDAN ROOM, Ed's family is starting to
look around nervously.

Kai looks over at Peter, who is unresponsive. Ed's vital
signs are spiking, his heart racing.

KAI
Peter...

ED (O.S.)
Hello?! Do you hear me?! I don't
want this!

In the Jordan Room, Ed's family is freaking out. Waving at
the camera, banging on the glass.

Peter is oblivious. His hand hangs over the button.

KAI
Peter.

ED (O.S.)
Let me out! I want out!

Peter is in his own world. His hand inches closer to the
button.

ED (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Please! Get me out!

KAI

PETER!!

Kai jumps up and is quickly at Peter's station. She pushes him back and hits a few keys. ESC.

The simulation stops. Kai looks back at Peter, who is visibly shaken.

KAI (CONT'D)

What the hell were you doing?

Kai rushes out of the room and heads toward the Nirvana Room.

Peter sits in dumbstruck silence, everyone in the room staring at him.

EXT. LIVE AND LET LIVE - DAY

Reporters and a crowd of supporters gather for a press conference outside the Live and Let Live building. Susan Ross stands at a podium, Ed beside her. His family behind them.

SUSAN

This is Edward Wyatt. Edward has brain cancer, mere months to live. And, due to their negligence and greed, Ascensions nearly robbed him of his little remaining time. They claim to care about people like Ed, but this sweet, brave man was almost killed. Against his will, trapped inside a virtual tomb, his family forced to idly watch as Ed begged to be let out, his cries nearly unheard.

(then)

Make no mistake, Ascensions will pay for the suffering they caused Edward. And for every life they've prematurely taken.

INT. ARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Arden stands next to his desk, watching the press conference on his TV. Peter sits on Arden's couch, tired and broken.

Arden flips the TV off, then turns to Peter.

ARDEN

You've really put us in a tough spot here, Peter.

PETER

I'm sorry.

ARDEN

I know you are. In a way, maybe this is my fault. Maybe I pushed you too much. I should have seen how hard this was on you.

PETER

I can fix it.

ARDEN

I'm counting on that.

(beat)

You're suspended. Indefinitely.

PETER

Arden, no--

ARDEN

In that time, the board will review your continued employment.

PETER

How long will that take?

Arden shakes his head.

ARDEN

I wish it didn't have to be this way, believe me I do. But, I have to protect my company.

PETER

There won't be a job for me to come back to, will there?

ARDEN

...I don't know. Hopefully this all blows over. Maybe it will. But, when there's a decision, I'll call you. Okay?

PETER

Don't do this. Please.

ARDEN

We wouldn't be where we are without you, and I can't even begin to express how grateful I am for everything you've given us.

PETER

This is all I have, all I am.

ARDEN

Try to see this as an opportunity to chase new horizons. This time is wide open for you, and you've been docked here too long. Remember, a ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.

And that's that. Peter rises, starts to leave.

PETER

Man... I don't even like boats.

Peter shuffles out of Arden's office.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - EVENING

Peter packs his few personal possessions into a box as rain pours outside his window.

He reaches for something in a drawer, hesitates. Considers.

There's a knock on the door and Peter quickly places whatever it was into the box just as Kai enters.

Kai carefully considers her words, then blurts out--

KAI

What the fuck was that?

PETER

I don't know. I didn't hear him.
God, I fucked up so bad. I almost--

KAI

But, you didn't. He's okay. Nothing happened. Not really.

PETER

Kai... How do you do it?

KAI

Do what?

PETER

How do you keep all this from getting to you?

KAI

Are you kidding? Every one of them gets to me.

Peter looks up at her. Kai's demeanor suddenly softer.

KAI (CONT'D)

The first six months I worked here,
I cried myself to sleep every
night. Grief really fucks with you.
Not just emotionally. Physically.
Psychologically. Like, my brain
started blocking it out. And with
that, I started losing other stuff.
Whole days just gone. I couldn't
focus on anything. I felt like I
was floating outside my own body.
My brain was literally trying to
protect me from the constant grief.
That's what my shrink said, at
least.

(then)

When I'm here, I'm here for them.
When they go, I grieve for them.
But I had to learn to separate
myself enough to survive it. Not
everyone can do this kind of work.
It asks for so much... To be
honest, I've always admired how
much you care, how much you want to
give people what they really need,
but you have to find balance. You
have to take care of yourself too.

Peter picks up his box.

PETER

Thanks, but it's a little late for
that.

KAI

I really hope it's not.

Kai gives Peter a hug. Peter looks stiff, confused. This has
never happened before.

The hug ends as quickly as it started, and Kai scurries away.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - EVENING

Ethan, tablet in hand, checks the Ascensions inventory.
Counts the white vials of the departure drug. Comes to an
empty slot.

Is there... a vial missing?

Ethan looks confused. Double checks his numbers.

EXT. ASCENSIONS - EVENING

Rain pours down as the sliding doors open and Peter steps out, carrying the box of his stuff.

The protesters are out in large number, and they are extra pissed.

Peter trudges through the rain, his clothes getting soaked. Keeping his head down, avoiding eye contact with the gathered crowd.

Peter gets about halfway between the door and the waiting CarPal when the first bottle is thrown.

First a trickle, then a barrage, assaulting Peter. Whatever trash they have to throw. Peter tries to power through, not let it bother him. Until a well-placed bottle strikes him in the head.

Peter falls to his knees. The contents of his box spill out. Blood and rainwater rush down his face.

"Monster," they scream. "Murderer." They keep throwing trash as Peter struggles to gather up his possessions from the wet ground.

Finally, he gets his stuff together and gets in the CarPal.

It pulls onto the road just as a concerned Ethan steps outside. He can only watch as Peter is driven away.

EXT. PETER'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The CarPal inches down the street, kicking up standing water. Still raining so hard, Peter can barely see out the windows.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - DAY

The rising water laps and lashes at the poles of Peter's house. Peter sloshes through, surveys the damage.

PETER
Fuck! Fuck, fuck!

Peter puts the box down on a chair and rushes over to the storage shed. He throws up the door, revealing a pile of sandbags.

Peter starts throwing down sandbags at his driveway line, just in front of the house's support legs. It's futile, the water too high and getting higher, but Peter doesn't stop.

That is, until he catches something out of the corner of his eye. A double take to confirm just what he's seeing.

He stands up straight and watches as a casket floats down the flooded street.

Another. A couple more. Coffins displaced from the cemetery by the storm, drifting like rafts on the River Styx.

Peter, his eyes disbelieving, watches them float on by.

Nothing stays buried forever.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Soaking wet and carrying his box of office possessions, Peter drags himself through the front door. Puts his box down.

The ceiling leaking, the lights flickering, the house creaking and rocking. On its last legs.

Peter stands in the middle of it all. He looks around, unsure what to do next. Absolutely lost.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter sits down at his computer, opens it up.

Peter puts on his VR dongle. Takes a deep breath. Finds his own name.

As he hits START--

CUE MUSIC: BEACH BOYS - DON'T WORRY BABY

INT. / EXT. MINI VAN - DAY

And we're back in the minivan. Mom driving, Dad in the front seat. Laughing, dancing, swaying. Nine-year-old Young Peter in the backseat, gazing adoringly at his family.

The semi-truck. The swerve. The crash. Violent. Ugly.

The van hits the ground hard, rolls, and finally comes to a stop on its side.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter's body jerks along to the crash. His house leaking and creaking and falling apart around him.

INT. / EXT. MINI VAN - DAY

Young Peter wakes up in a fog. Smoke building up. His parents not moving.

YOUNG PETER
Mom. Dad. Mom!

A loud THUMP next to Peter. He jumps, screams. Another. Another. The window finally SHATTERS. A GOOD SAMARITAN has kicked her way through. She drops to a knee.

GOOD SAMARITAN
Hey, hey. You okay? Hold still.

The Good Samaritan reaches in, reaches to Peter.

YOUNG PETER
No!

GOOD SAMARITAN
It's okay--

YOUNG PETER
Mom!

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A single tear rolls down Peter's cheek as the simulation plays out in front of his eyes.

INT. / EXT. MINI VAN - DAY

Peter's parents still aren't moving. The smoke getting thicker. Young Peter coughs and thrashes.

The Good Samaritan extends her hand as far as it will go. Begging Peter to reach out and take it.

In the distance, the RINGING of a phone.

GOOD SAMARITAN
Come on.

The ringing gets LOUDER.

GOOD SAMARITAN (CONT'D)
Please.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM

Peter's cell phone rings. And rings.

Peter stops the simulation. Unplugs the dongle from his temple. Picks up his phone.

The CALLER ID says it's the HOSPITAL calling. Peter quickly raises the phone to his ear.

INT. GALE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Peter rushes into Gale's room and finds her just as he last saw her, eyes closed. Asleep. Weak and pale.

Then, her eyes open.

GALE
What's with the glum face?

PETER
You're awake.

GALE
How about that?

PETER
How about that.

GALE
Sorry I tried to rush things along.
I've always been a fan of the ol'
Irish goodbye.

PETER
At least you're consistent.

A sad little chuckle between them.

GALE
Hey... Listen. Before I go, I need
you to promise me you're going to
be okay.

PETER
What?

GALE
When I was lying on the floor of my
apartment, do you know what my
biggest regret was?... Not something
that happened 50 years ago. I
didn't want to go without knowing
you were gonna be okay here without
me.

PETER
...I'll be fine--

GALE

No, no. Don't just say it. You're so goddamn fixated on how things end. On that last number on the tombstone. But, it's the dash, Peter. It's the dash that matters. There's so much in that one little line. That's where all the good shit is. If you get that right, that last number doesn't mean a fucking thing.

Peter nods, his eyes starting to well up.

GALE (CONT'D)

Don't close yourself off. Don't run from something that could make you happy. Really happy... Don't fuck it up like I did.

PETER

...Okay.

GALE

I'm serious.

PETER

I promise.

(beat)

Hey, I want to show you something.

Peter reaches into his bag, comes out with his laptop. He opens it, scrolls through some files.

GALE

What are you doing?

PETER

I want to show you what I made for you.

Peter opens Gale's departure. As it starts to play, she reaches out and closes the laptop.

Peter starts to cry.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Gale. God. I'm so sorry I couldn't give you a perfect ending.

GALE

Peter, you fucking idiot. Don't you get it?

She reaches out her hand.

Peter takes it.

GALE (CONT'D)
...This is exactly perfect.

Peter cries harder. Gale reaches up and wipes away his tears.

GALE (CONT'D)
Hey, hey. Come here.

She waves Peter in for a hug. He rests his head on her shoulder and she strokes his hair.

GALE (CONT'D)
Everything's gonna be okay.

A messy little makeshift family. In this moment, one last time, together.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

A barbecue. A caterer grilling up hot dogs and hamburgers. A sheet cake decorated like a cartoon cemetery.

An easel on the beach welcomes guests to Gale Dorian's memorial service. A photo of her flipping off the camera.

Peter stands on the beach, talking to mourners and guests, most of whom seem to be regular beach-goers and tourists checking out the scene.

BOOM. FIZZZzzzz. BOOM. FIZZZzzzz. Fireworks go off over the water. Peter stops and watches the show.

A few feet away, some other mourners between them, stands Merrily. She and Peter lock eyes, offer sad half-smiles, and turn back to Gale's grand finale.

PETER
Bon voyage.

BOOM. FIZZZzzzz. A trail of ashes falls into the water below.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter sits in a lawyer's office. A will-reading. The LAWYER hands Peter a letter, and he opens it. Starts reading...

GALE (V.O.)
The only certainty of life is that
it ends.

The Lawyer hands Peter the key to Gale's car. Surprised, Peter reaches out and takes it.

GALE (V.O.)
I don't remember who said that.
Some jerk who tried to kill me.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - DAY

Peter's house is falling apart at the seams. Barely standing. Flooded and muddy. But, he looks around with a sense of peace.

In his BEDROOM, he looks around at the gathered items from his past clients, stops at a picture of Gale on one of her adventures. He traces his finger across it, then steps back.

GALE (V.O.)
For most of us, it's long and slow
and painful.

Peter takes a seat at his desk. He picks up the VR dongle, gives it a look, then puts it down. He spots the vial of departure drug.

He stares at it a second, then turns to his computer.

Peter scrolls through the names of the departed. Reaches his own name.

He pulls up his file. Pulls up the options.

Run. Delete.

GALE (V.O.)
But maybe it doesn't have to be.

Peter hesitates. Takes a breath. Offers a little half smile.

Clicks delete.

INT. PRESERVATION HALL - EVENING

Peter sits at the bar with Kai, Ethan, and Dr. Rao. Chatting and laughing together.

GALE (V.O.)
We can choose to live it to its
fullest, while we still can...

INT. / EXT. GALE'S CAR - DAY

Peter starts up Gale's car. Feels the engine roar.

GALE (V.O.)
Before our regrets can harden.

He looks around the interior. Opens the sun visor and a piece of paper falls into his lap.

Peter unfolds the piece of paper. It's a TREASURE MAP. Scrawled at the top: "GOOD LUCK, ASSHOLE."

Peter smiles, shakes his head.

EXT. LEONARD'S HOUSE - DAY

Peter pulls up in front of Leonard's house. He looks down at the map. X marks the spot.

GALE (V.O.)
And, if you're really lucky...

Peter walks up the walkway to Leonard's front door and knocks. Merrily answers.

GALE (V.O.)
You'll find someone to take the
ride with you.

She and Peter stop a moment, each unsure what to say, what to do. Slowly, Merrily steps aside and lets Peter in.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - EVENING

Peter packs his disheveled and crumbling house into moving boxes and trash bags. He steps over to the fridge and reaches up.

He pulls down a huge jar, stuffed with dollar bills. Taped to it, an old faded photograph of a French street, the Eiffel Tower in the distance.

GALE (V.O.)
Ya see, we're not meant to do this
thing alone.

Peter pauses a second, then puts the jar under his arm and heads for the door.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - EVENING

Peter packs a U-Haul of his belongings. Slides the trailer door shut.

His phone RINGS and he takes it out of his pocket, looks at the caller ID: Arden.

GALE (V.O.)
By all means, rage against the
dying of the light...

Peter thinks a second, then hits ignore and pockets the phone. He climbs into the truck.

The U-Haul takes off down the street, leaving Peter's old family home standing empty, waves lapping at its stilts.

INT. PETER'S NEW OFFICE - DAY

Peter's new office is small and homey, decorated with photos of landmarks from all over the world. Maps.

And, the knickknacks and tchotchkes from his old patients. Harold's WWII plane, Leonard's Broadway snow globe, Gale's pictures. A photo of Young Peter with his Mom and Dad.

Peter and Gale at the cemetery movie night, posing for the camera.

GALE (V.O.)
...Life is for the living, yadda
yadda yadda.

Peter sits at his desk, having a very nice conversation with an older couple. Going through photographs, a map, a travel itinerary.

EXT. PETER'S NEW OFFICE - EVENING

Magic Hour. Peter steps outside his new building and locks up. In the middle of New Orleans. Surrounded with life.

The sign on his office front: *DASH ADVENTURE TOURS*.

Posters on the window. A hang glider over a beautiful landscape. A gondola in the Venice Canals.

The posters promise: "Live the life you've always imagined!"
"Make your dreams a reality!"

GALE (V.O.)
Just make sure, whatever you do,
you find yourself something that's
worth living for.

Peter walks over to his waiting car. Gale's car. Merrily in the driver's seat.

Peter sits in the passenger seat and closes the door. They share a kiss.

MERRILY

Where to?

PETER

...What's France like this time of year?

MERRILY

Hmm... Let's see.

They grin at each other. Content. Merrily turns on the radio.

CUE MUSIC: BEACH BOYS - DON'T WORRY BABY

Peter recognizes the song immediately. The song from his own departure...

But, he looks over at Merrily who offers a comforting smile. And, whatever weird feeling the song instilled in him, Peter brushes it off. In this moment, everything is perfect.

Peter and Merrily pull onto the road and head off to a new adventure.

As their car disappears in the distance, a shooting star streaks across the sky, and--

BLIP.