

THE DEATH ENGINE

BY MELISSA IQBAL

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FADE IN:

INT. ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE. BEDROOM - DAY.

TITLE: ENGLAND, 2041.

A path of clothes- a raincoat, a leather boot, a silk shirt- lie scattered across an otherwise impeccable bedroom, leading to a four-poster bed.

A scarf is strewn over a line of photographs showing a young couple travelling the world, ticking off every bucket list adventure from abseiling to mountain climbing. Some are modern, some retro, some old and faded. The only constant is the youthful, unchanging faces of the couple.

Sleeping pills next to an alarm clock. Black eyelashes flicker, a pupil, a sudden start.

The woman from the photographs- LILY (looks 28), dark hair, athletic- rises and stares at the clock. She rubs her head.

LILY

Shit.

Dropping her arm- revealing an eternity symbol tattoo on her inside elbow- she takes in the men's pajamas folded on a nearby chair. Her gaze becomes distant.

MAN (V.O.)

And how do you want to feel when
you die?

INT. MODERN BATHROOM - DAY.

LILY looks at herself in the mirror, hair a mess, panda eyes. She frowns, thinking.

WOMAN (V.O.)

I'm not sure I understand.

Running the tap, she splashes her face with water.

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY.

An umbrella is expertly unfurled and tipped skyward, revealing JAMES (looks 35, black suit). It starts to rain. A black labrador we'll come to know as TWENTY TWO follows.

MAN (V.O.)

Do you want to feel as if it were
planned, inevitable?

JAMES checks his watch, avoids a puddle.

INT. LILY'S CAR - DAY.

Light rain. LILY drives her black Mercedes down the driveway.

MAN (V.O.)
Like some higher power has
intervened...

A red bicycle blocks her way. She gets out and pushes it into the neighbour's garden.

EXT. LONDON STREET. COFFEE STAND - DAY.

Complete with coffee, JAMES resumes pace amid the towering billboards and buses: FOREVER NEVER ENDS, ORDER YOUR LONGEVITY SHOT NOW! REPAYMENTS STARTS AT 51%! NEED A LOAN?

MAN (V.O.)
Or would it feel like chance,
chaotic and random?

INT. TRAIN - DAY.

Exhausted, LILY stares out the rain-spattered window. Everyone around her appears between the age of 20 and 35.

Outside, the countryside gives way to a city of soulless commercialism: BECOME A LONG LIFER TODAY! LIFE INSURANCE- FOR ETERNAL PEACE OF MIND. BOOSTER SHOTS- LOOK EVEN YOUNGER!

As the housing estates loom, LILY watches a jellyfish swim across a giant screen: LONGEVITY TECHNOLOGY- OUR FUTURE.

MAN (V.O.)
Longevity technology means that, to
die, the body must experience a
trauma from which it can't recover.

The luminous blue of the water reflects in LILY's pupils.

MAN (V.O.)
That's what we offer, a unique,
unforeseeable and, above all,
permanent end... Sometimes it helps
to close your eyes.

She shuts her eyes. A tunnel- the sound of the train rises...

EXT. LONDON STREET. DEATH ENGINE BUREAU - DAY.

... becoming the deep rumble of thunder.

Sliding into a side alley, JAMES travels to the end, passing bins and spray painted graffiti, including an angel's wing.

WOMAN (V.O.)

I think... it would be sudden, like in one big burst and I'd go all at once. It would be as if all the life in me, all the years I've lived just began to buckle and overlap.

A door. JAMES taps in a code, folds his umbrella and enters.

EXT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING - DAY.

Heavy rain. LILY strides up steps beneath an imposing skyscraper- 'VERNON-CREST INSURANCE' above the entrance.

WOMAN (V.O.)

It would be like drowning, but in an instant. And though my body feels as if it's falling and my breath is impossible to catch, I'd feel like I'm lifting too, in every direction...

INT. DEATH ENGINE BUREAU. STAIRS/OFFICE - DAY.

While the storm rages outside, JAMES pushes through a door into an impressive open plan office- a well-kept secret.

WOMAN (V.O.)

It would be incredible and violent and devastating like how a star ends, in a great flash of life preceding its demise. Like a farewell cry, not a scream, but triumphant laughter.

He heads straight for a far office, knocks, enters.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Like beating an old friend at a game.

The door shuts.

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. LILY'S OFFICE - DAY.

A drawer is pulled out hard, home to cigarettes and a blue lighter- the drawer shuts- opens- and slams shut again.

LILY sits at her desk in front of a wall of windows, the city spread below in a patchwork of blues and greys.

DARREN (O.S.)

Why try so hard to quit?

Looking up, she's relieved to see DARREN (looks 35), a crisp cutout of a businessman, by the door, manila file in hand.

LILY

Richard hates the smell and I hate having to smoke down the bottom of the garden.

DARREN

I can see his point.

Fanning the air, DARREN thwacks the file on LILY's desk.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Christopher Dixon. Failed his psychological review.

He picks up a letter opener from the desk and examines his perfectly aligned teeth in the reflection of the blade.

LILY snatches the file, rifling through intently.

LILY

How?

DARREN

Pessimistic outlook, low spirit levels, high despondency rating...

The file shows a photograph of a happy looking MR DIXON (looks 35), slim, fair, slightly nerdy.

LILY

But Mr Dixon always seems so...

DARREN

Happy?

DARREN replaces the letter opener and makes for the door.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Some people have a talent for hiding the truth.

LILY is left looking into MR DIXON's smiling face...

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. LILY'S OFFICE - LATER.

CHRISTOPHER DIXON sits opposite LILY, tugging at his sleeves and eyeing the office as if he's never seen one before.

LILY

Mr Dixon, it appears you failed your last psychological review and I sincerely regret to inform you that we can no longer cover you.

It is clear from DIXON's face he wasn't expecting this.

CHRISTOPHER DIXON

Failed? I failed? The thing where you ask me questions about how often I go here and there and how I feel about the weather and- kittens or whatever it was?

LILY

Mr Dixon, those questions have been carefully designed to detect early signs of psychological-

MR DIXON

The melancholia. There's no need to tiptoe around the word, Mrs Harding. You can't possibly offend me because I-don't-have-it.

LILY

The test detects signs, Mr Dixon. It doesn't mean that you have the melancholia, it just means-

MR DIXON

It means you won't take the chance.

LILY

There are other ways-

MR DIXON

What? Become a hermit? Hire twenty body guards to swarm around me all day long? Call that normality? What's the point?

LILY

Mr Dixon-

MR DIXON

Stop saying my name like that.

LILY realises she's not helping.

LILY

I'm sorry.

MR DIXON

I work hard. I've worked all my life, day in, day out. What if I get hit by a car? What will my family do?

He looks at her, total sincerity in his eyes:

MR DIXON (CONT'D)
How could they live with just the
one house?

LILY
I'm sorry.

MR DIXON
Everyone has their down days, don't
they? Don't you? We can't be happy
all the fucking time!

This strikes a cord, but LILY maintains her professionalism.

MR DIXON (CONT'D)
I don't want to die.

LILY
I-

MR DIXON
Please!

MR DIXON slams his fist down on LILY's desk.

MR DIXON (CONT'D)
Stop saying you're sorry.

LILY swallows her apology, shocked by his sudden anger.

CUT TO:

The drawer is pulled out hard, the cigarettes slide, a phone
starts to ring...

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. STAIRWELL - DAY.

... The stairwell rises, it's endless tiers twisting their
way toward a fire exit at the top of the building.

The alarm's been disconnected. The ringing phone is answered.

EXT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. ROOF - CONTINUOUS.

RICHARD (V.O.)
Hi Tiger-Lily, honey. I was
thinking dinner at seven?

LILY stands puffing at a cigarette and staring out into the
city, the wind stealing the smoke as it escapes her mouth.

LILY (V.O.)
Better make it eight thirty...

The sky is alight with a brief display of pink and purple.

LILY (V.O.)
It's really busy here.

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. LILY'S OFFICE - NIGHT.

LILY pulls on her raincoat, slings her bag over her shoulder and leaves. It's only 06:36PM according to the wall clock.

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. LOBBY - NIGHT.

Hurriedly, LILY strides across the vast marble floors.

RECEPTIONIST
Goodbye, Mrs Harding.

LILY smiles as she makes contact with the revolving doors, pushing her way out into the cold.

EXT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - NIGHT.

LILY is completely rapt by a large print of a photograph made up of black, white and blue smudges, vaguely giving the impression of a woman standing by a window.

The rest of the gallery is deserted.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT.

Lost in the visual noise of the city, LILY watches the uniformly YOUNG PEOPLE roaming the streets amid lighted billboards: FOREVER NEVER ENDS!, WHY WAIT TO LIVE FOREVER?

She focuses on the reoccurring longevity technology (eternity) symbol. She opens her bag, pulls out a black wig.

CUT TO:

Having shed her coat, LILY sits wearing the black wig (straight, hard fringe). She looks like a different woman.

EXT. TAXI/RISK CLUB - NIGHT.

LILY exits in front of a sheek looking club, the street busy with nighttime adventurers. There's a BOUNCER outside and a long, unmoving queue of PEOPLE, all extravagantly dressed.

A group of SOCIALITES are admitted. LILY sees an opportunity to tag along, but at the last moment loses her nerve.

The BOUNCER is about to close the velvet rope when he spots her. He holds it back.

LILY enters, climbing the stairs beneath a neon sign: CIRKUS.

INT. RISK CLUB - NIGHT.

There's a cool, tense atmosphere as LILY negotiates the CROWD, their collective gaze challenging her very existence.

She takes it all in, noticing white tabs stuck to PEOPLE's cheeks printed with smiley faces, crescent moons, flowers...

Music beats, dead, without the usual maniacal club rhythm.

MEN and WOMEN drink flamboyant cocktails, dance trance-like, flirt and appear to communicate without words.

There's a bar dedicated to oxygen, WAITERS touting inhalators (resembling shot tubes) and communal shisha-like pipes.

Everywhere doors labelled 'Rabbit Holes' are guarded by cryptic sculptures.

The door to Rabbit Hole 1 opens to admit someone.

As LILY passes, she sees a euphoric JAPANESE MAN (looks 20) having his arm cut by a FEMALE KEY HOLDER, lines of blood swelling, a tray of scalpels and disinfectant hung from her neck like a cigarette girl from the 1950's. The door closes.

Turning away, LILY spots a TEEN KEY HOLDER (looks 16) standing at the balcony above her. She appears elegant, cynical, her hair snow-white.

LILY
(To herself, marvelling)
A seraphim?

KEY HOLDER (O.S.)
Welcome to Cirkus...

Turning, LILY bumps into a KEY HOLDER (looks 25), sharp-featured, unblinking, so tall he looms.

KEY HOLDER (CONT'D)
... the place people come to feel
alive.

He gestures to the row of Rabbit Holes.

KEY HOLDER (CONT'D)
Ten Rabbit Holes. Ten key holders.

He pulls at the chain around his neck, swinging the key at the end of it like a pendulum, its forks shaped into a 7.

KEY HOLDER (CONT'D)
Behind each door, a thrilling
wonder awaits. A secret, a game, a
risk...

LILY steps back, but the KEY HOLDER closes the gap

KEY HOLDER (CONT'D)
So, who do you want to be tonight?

LILY
(Confused)
No one.

KEY HOLDER
Alright.

He pulls out a pillbox and presents it to her.

KEY HOLDER (CONT'D)
Then that's who you'll be.

LILY turns, overwhelmed, pushing her way through the CROWD.
Amused, the KEY HOLDER snaps the pillbox shut.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT.

The door slams. Relief. LILY pulls off the wig and stuffs it into her bag. She tidies her hair roughly, mad at herself.

LILY
The mandarin please.

INT. MANDARIN HOTEL. LOBBY - NIGHT.

LILY strides to the rhythmic snap of her heels, a few loose tendrils of wig escaping her bag.

INT. MANDARIN HOTEL. BAR - CONTINUOUS.

Heading to the restaurant, LILY passes the bar where JAMES talks quietly to a SLIM WOMAN, her eyes tightly closed.

JAMES
Or would it feel like chance,
chaotic and random?

MAITRE 'D
Mrs Harding!

LILY spins to face the jovial MAITRE 'D, his blue paisley tie resembling falling teardrops.

LILY
Evening Marcus.

MAITRE 'D
He was late himself, don't tell him
I told you.

LILY
Thank you.

MAITRE 'D
What can I get you?

LILY
Martini, lots of olives.

JAMES
Your hair's coming loose, miss.

LILY instinctively touches her hair before realising he was referring to the wig. She tucks it away.

LILY
Thank you.

Powered by her embarrassment, LILY abandons the bar for the restaurant, leaving JAMES gazing after her.

Becoming impatient, the SLIM WOMAN finally opens her eyes.

INT. MANDARIN HOTEL. RESTAURANT - NIGHT.

Dropping into her chair, LILY smiles at RICHARD- looks 37, handsome, distinguished- who sits across from her expectantly, swirling half a glass of red wine.

LILY
You'll never believe the day I've had. First there was a hostage situation at work and I had to lead the negotiations. Then a comet destroyed half of east London. It was hell getting a taxi. Course, the rain didn't help.

The MAITRE 'D delivers LILY's martini himself.

LILY (CONT'D)
Thank you Marcus.

Watching her, RICHARD is unmoved.

LILY makes a display of mock exhaustion, sips her drink and slides an olive off the toothpick with her teeth. Chewing:

LILY (CONT'D)
It's a miracle I'm alive really.

RICHARD shifts. The joke's finally run out of steam.

RICHARD
Well, see, you've given yourself away there, Tiger-Lily.
(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)
I don't believe in miracles and, I
happen to know, neither do you.
You're just a survivor.

Exchanging his wine for her hand, RICHARD leans across and
kisses her before taking up his chair and glass again.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Cheers!

LILY holds back, making what seems to be a familiar demand:

LILY
To what?

RICHARD thinks, determined to do it justice.

RICHARD
To exciting times.

At first LILY appears disappointed, but she manages an
expression of optimism as their glasses meet.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
The menu's changed again.

LILY
Choose for me.

RICHARD nods as if this too is familiar.

RICHARD
You're having the veal.

While RICHARD looks for the MAITRE 'D, LILY watches a nearby
table- a MOTHER, FATHER and LITTLE GIRL of maybe 6. In fact,
the LITTLE GIRL has most people in the restaurant staring.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
She's not real. Already asked.

Snapping out of her stare:

LILY
You shouldn't have. Some people
don't like it. Besides, what are
the chances she'd be out in public
like this if she were.

RICHARD
Good point.

Flicking a hand in the air, RICHARD summons the MAITRE 'D.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
We'll both have the veal and two
more of these please Marcus.

He waves at their drinks and relinquishes the menus.

MAITRE 'D
Of course Mr Harding.

LILY is still watching the LITTLE GIRL as the FATHER cuts her meat and the MOTHER fusses over her dress. The LITTLE GIRL then drops her napkin, watching as her MOTHER retrieves it.

RICHARD
There's something knowing about them isn't there?

LILY
Mmm?

RICHARD
Cherubs. Bit smug, don't you think? Although, Meredith's one puts on a good show I suppose. No, I guess you're right. If that little girl really was six years old I don't think she'd have mastered that look of quiet cynicism just yet. A real child would be marvelling at the chandeliers or something.

LILY
I don't know. I don't know how someone so new would react to this world...

RICHARD
Well, Meredith soon will. She's decided her little designer baby's going to be a girl and she's going to call her Donnatella.
(With distaste)
Donna-tella. They're not even Italian.

RICHARD finishes his wine.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
The baby shower's tomorrow...

LILY
What will happen to the cherub?

RICHARD
Huh? Oh, his contract will end and he'll move on. I'm sure Meredith will give him a sterling reference.

LILY
I saw a seraphim today. I've never seen one before.

RICHARD

Argh, worse than a cherub. Who'd want to be a teenager forever? Bad skin, perpetually... pubescent...

LILY falls to watching the LITTLE GIRL again while RICHARD tries to find a way around his wife's distraction.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

She probably dropped that napkin on purpose for a chance to sneak a sip of the mother's G&T.

Suddenly, LILY feels RICHARD's hand covering hers and she looks up to find his eyes glossed over with seriousness.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

That'll be us soon. Only you'll be a real mum, I'll be a real dad and our kid will be a real child seeing the world for the very first time.

LILY

Richard...

Just then there's a huge crash.

Everyone in the restaurant turns toward the windows as PEOPLE scream and cars swerve outside. RICHARD and LILY rise.

EXT. OUTSIDE MANDARIN HOTEL. STREET - CONTINUOUS.

Lying in the road is CHRISTOPHER DIXON, blood pooling under his head, eyes wide open, staring up into the falling rain.

INT. MANDARIN HOTEL. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS.

The room swells with hysteria as PEOPLE stifle screams, tears, gag reflexes. Chairs are pulled out, coats flung on...

LILY sees JAMES amid the calamity and, while everyone else is consumed with the window, she finds he only has eyes for her.

RICHARD

Come on, we're leaving!

Still JAMES is staring and still LILY is staring back until RICHARD takes her arm and pulls her into pace beside him.

EXT. MANDARIN HOTEL. MAIN ENTRANCE/STREET - NIGHT.

RICHARD barges through the gathering POLICE and BYSTANDERS, dragging LILY behind him. She tries to glimpse the body.

RICHARD

I wish people would keep these
sorts of things to the risk clubs!

Meanwhile, JAMES slips away down the street, arriving moments later at his car where TWENTY TWO is waiting in the back.

Finally, a sheet is thrown over DIXON's staring body.

INT. RICHARD'S CAR - NIGHT.

LILY sits in the passenger seat watching the now heavily falling rain. RICHARD is driving, tensely focused.

RADIO REPORTER

... the incident happened just
outside London's Mandarin Oriental
Hotel. The man, who we have come to
know as Mr Christopher Jon Dixon...

LILY closes her eyes.

RADIO REPORTER (CONT'D)

...a respected member of the first
generation, Primus, fell four
storeys and ended upon impact with
the street below. He leaves behind
his wife and two children. He will
be sorely missed... If you feel you
have been affected by the loss of
Christopher, please call...

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DINING ROOM - NIGHT.

LILY sits, lost in a stare, which breaks as RICHARD serves her a plate. She smiles and he kisses her on the head. The food looks as good as anything from a restaurant.

RICHARD tosses his apron aside and sits. There's a white candle in a glass holder between them.

LILY

(Pushing herself to speak)
It looks delicious.

RICHARD pours red wine and they raise their glasses, but before LILY can take a sip:

RICHARD

Do you want to say something or
should I?

She looks a little lost.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Wait, maybe I have something.

RICHARD frowns, channelling a sense of profundity.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Christopher was a unique
individual. A family man... who'll
be very much missed.

LILY is about to cheers when he continues.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
He was a man... not long for this
world...

LILY
Richard, honey...

RICHARD looks up as if he'd forgotten she was there.

RICHARD
Did you want to say something or
should we just light the candle?

LILY
The candle...?

RICHARD
You're right.

Rising, RICHARD retrieves a lighter.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
A moment's silence says more than
words ever could.

LILY puts her glass down as if she'll never get to drink it.

RICHARD flicks the lighter into life and swishes it over the
wick of the candle. The flame goes out without catching.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Damn.

He gives it another shot.

LILY
The food's going cold, darling.

RICHARD
So's Christopher Dixon, baby, I'm
just trying to-

The lighter refuses to cooperate.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Shit. Where's the lighter fluid?

LILY

Richard, I'm not going to sit here while you burn the house down for the sake of a man you never met.

RICHARD

What's that have to do with anything? The man ended right in front of us.

LILY

Darling, this man could have been a rapist for all we know. He could have been the most evil man to walk the earth since-

RICHARD

Death is evil!

LILY considers this, her silence worrying RICHARD, so he moves round the table and wraps her in a backwards embrace.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Oh, Tiger-Lily, I didn't mean to use that word. I'm sorry. I'm just a little upset what with Christopher's- the accident.

LILY

(Contemplatively)

Richard do you ever... stare into space and... say something over in your mind again and again like your own name until it moves past losing all meaning and into a place where you can see yourself from the outside... and then you try to figure out whether the thing you're seeing is full of secrets and life and just overshadowed by grey clouds or whether it's empty... but, either way, it makes you sad?

Thinking, loosening his arms slightly:

RICHARD

You mean like... when it rains?

Drawn completely out of the stare, LILY gives up.

LILY

Yeah, like when it rains...

RICHARD kisses her and returns to his seat.

RICHARD

Yeah, the rain depresses everyone, hun, so don't worry about it.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

If it gets too much, we can always
take a holiday somewhere.

Completely diffused, LILY plunges a fork into her food.

EXT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BACK GARDEN - DAY.

A small handheld shovel dives into a bed of white roses.

Sweating, LILY turns the soil. She works harder than the task
requires, stabbing at the dirt as if it's responsible for all
her woes.

She sits back on her heels, wipes her forehead with the cuff
of her gardening glove and sighs. A half empty bag of
fertiliser sits beside her, the label boasting the longevity
technology symbol for 'EVERLASTING LIFE'.

LILY cuts a large bunch of white roses. She rises, noticing
something in the soil. She looks around abstractly for a
moment before heading toward the house.

Pressed into the soil is a man's footprint.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - DAY.

LILY separates the white roses into two bunches.

The TV is on in the living room, set to a talk show on which
CURTIS MARTIN (looks 35) sits listening, a banner beneath him
stating his name and the words: "I demand the right to die!"

An ANGRY WOMAN is given the floor.

ANGRY WOMAN

His desire to end his life shames
us all. It shames his family who
he'd willingly put through grief
and it shames our ancestors who
worked so hard to discover a cure
to death in the first place...

Water pours into a glass vase and is set on the dining table.
The roses bounce and fall about the rim.

LILY arranges them, stands back, her satisfaction rising and
fading in one. She looks up at the TV.

The audience cheer. The camera cuts in close:

ANGRY WOMAN (CONT'D)

Everyone has the right to live,
death takes away our choices, thus,
death is an infringement of our
basic human rights!

It takes LILY a moment to bring herself back.

CUT TO:

The remaining roses are wrapped in tissue paper- distant voices, laughter, merriment rise...

EXT. LILY'S HOUSE/MEREDITH'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

GUESTS arrive at MEREDITH'S house, gifts in hand. LILY and RICHARD step through a gap in the hedge. LILY is holding a gift bag and the bouquet of white roses.

The cries of greetings...

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. ENTRANCE - NIGHT.

A neat, tastefully decorated homey home. MEREDITH (looks 25), blonde, pretty, dressed and styled for photographs, embraces LILY then RICHARD, taking the flowers with delight.

MEREDITH
Lil', they're beautiful! And so
white!

LILY and RICHARD step inside.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Coats, coats!

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - LATER.

MEREDITH holds up a baby's sheepskin coat, crumpling at its cuteness. The name 'Donnatella' is embroidered on the back.

MEREDITH
Aww, adorable! Look how tiny it is!

To a wilted looking HIPPIY WOMAN:

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Thank you, Amy.

Everyone is gathered round MEREDITH who's sitting in an armchair. Her husband, EMIL- looks 35, Scandinavian- is seated on the arm, keeping notes on a tablet.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
That's a sheepskin coat from Amy,
Emil darling. Thank you.

MEREDITH watches the screen as EMIL types this in.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

(Muttering)

... from Amy...

LILY is standing at the back, cradling a glass of wine. She looks around at all the enamoured faces, including RICHARD's, before slipping out unnoticed through the back door.

EXT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. BACK GARDEN - NIGHT.

The swish, swish, swish of a lighter that refuses to light.

LILY stands with a cigarette in her mouth and the faulty lighter from the night before clenched in her hand.

LILY

Shit.

The sound of wood creaking- LILY looks up at a tree house in the branches above her head. ANTHONY (looks 12) stares back.

LILY (CONT'D)

Hello, Anthony.

ANTHONY

Hello, Auntie Lily.

LILY

I don't suppose you've got a working lighter up there by any chance?

ANTHONY shakes his head. LILY forgets the cigarette. She glances up at ANTHONY who's watching her closely.

LILY (CONT'D)

Looks like you're out of a job.

Considering the house, ANTHONY smiles blankly.

ANTHONY

Wanna see the new model car mum got me? It's a jaguar. They're collectables. That means if you keep them for a really long time they get better.

LILY

(Laughs)

A professional to the very end. I admire that. Just make sure you don't sink with the ship.

ANTHONY climbs from the tree to his bedroom window.

ANTHONY

No, Auntie Lily! Not ships, cars!

LILY smiles cynically.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Night, Auntie. Don't tell mum, OK?

He disappears through the window with a cheeky grin.

LILY
(To herself)
Your secret's safe with me.

LILY watches the night, drinking in the solitude.

Just then something falls. She picks it up: a red lighter.

She looks up at the window, but ANTHONY's nowhere to be seen. She smiles- the back door opens.

RICHARD
There you are! Come on, your
sister's asking for you. She's
opening ours next.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

MEREDITH holds up a book on parenting, a little uncertain.

MEREDITH
It's a book!

She looks to EMIL for support.

EMIL
Thank you, Lily, Richard.

MEREDITH
I didn't know they wrote books on
how to have a baby.

LILY
It's on parenting, Meredith. They
say it's harder than you think.

MEREDITH
Well, I have a few million years of
evolutionary instinct and a hundred
odd years of experience as a woman,
plus I think Anthony's turned out
pretty well, but I guess no one can
be over prepared for these things.

LILY
Anthony's paid to be perfect.

Uncomfortable, RICHARD grips LILY's hand while MEREDITH pretends she didn't hear.

MEREDITH

It's the thought that counts. Thank you.

LILY tries to hide her irritation, smiling forcibly.

Picking up another gift, MEREDITH gives it a shake.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

I wonder what this could be?

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DINING ROOM - NIGHT.

LILY drops her bag on the table, pulls off her coat angrily.

LILY

(Imitating MEREDITH)

I didn't know they wrote books on how to have a baby.

(To RICHARD)

She thinks she's motherhood incarnate because Anthony gets straight A's. But something tells me she didn't pick the cherub package that includes hyper-activity and childhood obesity!

RICHARD

She can be a bitch. Let it go.

RICHARD holds her from behind.

LILY

No one can ever tell her anything.

RICHARD

She'll have to live it soon enough... and so will we.

Releasing herself, LILY looks him in the eye.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Our application for a license is being reviewed. We're almost there.

LILY embraces her husband to mask her unexpected uncertainty.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I wanted to tell you yesterday, but then, after what happened at the restaurant...

She pulls back.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

What's the matter?

LILY

Do you think this happened because
of someone like Christopher Dixon?

RICHARD pulls her in.

RICHARD

I think that when someone wants to
leave this world, it's very sad,
but then someone else gets to come
in. And that's always good.

They smile, embrace.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - NIGHT.

LILY and RICHARD are having sex. RICHARD finishes, pulling
her down and crying out in pleasure. Startled, LILY tries to
free herself, but he holds firm.

LILY

Wha- what did you just- fuck,
Richard! Fuck!

Furious, she climbs off him, dragging the sheet with her
while RICHARD is still riding a wave of relief.

LILY (CONT'D)

We haven't got the licence yet!

RICHARD

Tiger-Lily, calm down. We're always
so safe, let's just celebrate. It's
going to happen.

LILY

We don't know that! What happens if
it falls through? I don't want my
child growing up without a licence,
without choices. Do you think
Anthony works for my sister for the
great health benefits?

RICHARD

Anthony's already here. At least
we'd still have choices.

LILY stares daggers at him, then opens the door.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Darling, don't. Not tonight.

RICHARD grimaces. The door slams.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT.

LILY stands at the window, the night outside calm and quiet. She allows herself to look down the hallway at a closed door.

After a moment she walks toward it, lingering over the doorknob, letting her hand rest on it.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. SPARE ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The door opens. Inside is a baby's room, full of toys, matching furniture and colours dulled by the darkness.

LILY focuses on the mobile hanging over the crib, but it doesn't seem to inspire her. She closes the door again.

INT. LILY'S CAR - DAY.

LILY drives to the station, rain coursing over the wind screen, broken intermittently by the wipers.

The road winds ahead, unchanging, endless.

INT. DEATH ENGINE BUREAU - DAY.

Checking his watch, JAMES makes for the far office along with TWENTY TWO, who's limping slightly. JAMES stops as a CHATTY AGENT shakes his hand, a cheer rising up around him.

The next moment sees JAMES overwhelmed by co-workers looking to congratulate him on a job well done.

CHATTY AGENT 1

Wow, less than twelve hours from first contact to end, I'm in awe!

CHATTY AGENT 2

Still low on the leader board, but that's a new record!

Disinterested, JAMES shakes the odd hand while still making for the far office, etched with the name: 'VALERIE THEROUX'

INT. DEATH ENGINE BUREAU. VALERIE'S OFFICE - DAY.

Escaping the madness outside, JAMES shuts the door as on a crazed mob and sinks into a chair.

VALERIE (O.S.)

(Child's voice)

You used to enjoy being adored.

Behind an over-compensating desk sits VALERIE, a cherub, 12 going on 200, tough, no nonsense.

She's dressed in a black suit. Her long blonde hair is wrapped in a neat bun and she's wearing makeup and a startling shade of red lipstick.

The wall is covered in framed certificates, each commending a record-breaking 'PERMANENT END'.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

What's the matter with that animal now? She's limping.

JAMES

It's arthritis.

VALERIE

What's that?

JAMES

Old age.

VALERIE

And I suppose you're going to tell me that's normal?

JAMES

Sit, Twenty Two.

TWENTY TWO sits.

VALERIE

Twenty two dogs when one would do. It's cruel... and inefficient.

JAMES

So what? If you can't live forever, there's no point in living at all?

VALERIE

(Sarcastically)

Forgive me. I forgot for a moment I was talking to a Reaper.

JAMES pulls a file out of his coat and drops it on the desk, lighting VALERIE's eyes up with pride.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

I gave you that file at nine o'clock Friday morning and at eight fifty two that evening Christopher Dixon was pronounced ended. That's one cycle, eleven hours fifty two minutes. The record to beat.

Picking up a small frame from her desk, VALERIE shows JAMES the certificate that proves his success.

JAMES

You keep it.

VALERIE looks at the wall as if finding space won't be easy, but she'll find a way. She puts the frame down and flips open the file to reveal CHRISTOPHER DIXON's smiling face.

VALERIE

It's been a while, but I believe
that's what a happy customer looks
like. Do you want to do the honours
or shall I?

Gesturing his consent, JAMES doesn't appear the least bit interested in the ceremony.

VALERIE pounds a massive stamp into DIXON's face: ENDED.

INT. TRAIN - DAY.

LILY focuses on a newspaper article: PRIMER ENDS IN STREET.

A BUSINESS MAN sits down opposite, unfolding his own paper. Headline: UNEMPLOYMENT RISES FOR GENERATION TERTIUS.

LILY's eyes roam off the page onto the BUSINESS MAN's sleeve and the plain silver cuff link at his wrist...

EXT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. ROOF - DAY.

The door to the stairwell is plugged open with a stray brick. LILY exhales the last of her cigarette and stamps it out.

EXT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY.

LILY neglects her lunch- a big sandwich with everything in it- to look up at her favorite photograph.

The museum is deserted but for LILY and a sleepy MEMBER OF STAFF seated near the entrance.

EXT. STREET - DAY.

Passing an electrical shop window, LILY pauses to stare at the myriad TV screens on display.

While advertisements flash across most- NEED HELP PAYING THE BILLS? RAISE A CHERUB TODAY!- one is dedicated to the news on which CURTIS MARTIN (the man from the talk show) is a guest.

LILY imagines the competing sounds of the TVs before isolating the news, ascribing words to the movement of lips.

CURTIS MARTIN

I want to end my life, but I won't do it in the shadows like it's some ugly, debased deed and I don't want to leave behind a world in which the stigma attached to people suffering from the melancholia prevents them being treated fairly. It's natural to fear one's end, but death doesn't have to be the enemy.

INTERVIEWER

Thank you, Mr Martin, that's all we have time for. And we'd just like to apologise to viewers for the use of language in that interview...

The pounding rhythm of the risk club starts to encroach...

INT. RISK CLUB. BAR - NIGHT.

Seated at the bar, a more confident LILY nurses a martini while two WOMEN talk conspiratorially nearby.

WOMAN 1

Longevity technology means the body must experience a trauma from which it can't recover. That's what we offer...

Rabbit Hole 10 looms above LILY, heavy with the weight of the unknown. She stares at it until she's distracted by two MEN leading two FEMALE CHERUBS into a back room.

She turns away, hiding her disgust.

Someone tugs her arm. LILY looks to find a CHERUB WAITRESS (looks 8), fake eyelashes, fake mole, standing beside her.

CHERUB WAITRESS

She wants to know who you'd like to be tonight.

LILY makes eye contact with the TEEN KEY HOLDER who's marooned across from her amid a sea of the eager and trendy.

She holds the challenge of a stare.

LILY

Anyone but me.

The CHERUB WAITRESS presents LILY with a pillbox. LILY eyes it then takes it.

The TEEN KEY HOLDER smiles, returning to her company.

LILY rotates back to the bar, examining the pillbox as if it's both a dangerous secret and an exciting mystery. The lid is engraved with an eye. She opens it. Inside is a white circle with a teardrop on it.

She closes it as if someone has discovered all her secrets.

Nearby, a CHISELLED MAN slowly, sensuously licks a white circle off the cheek of a RED HEAD and swallows it.

LILY looks at the pillbox. The teardrop stares back.

Then it's on her fingertip, her tongue, she swallows, she sips her drink. The sounds of the club expand and condense.

INT. RISK CLUB. BAR - LATER.

Glistening eyes, flashes of pearly white teeth, sparkling laughter. Everything's heightened- sound, touch, taste.

LILY is laughing with a HANDSOME GUY. She sips her drink flirtatiously- her taste buds electric, pulse racing- when a PRETTY WOMAN interjects, dragging the GUY onto the dance floor like a vortex. He only manages a weak look of apology at LILY before becoming a willing victim.

Unfazed, LILY smiles and sets her drink down, playing with the stem as if glass is the most incredible invention ever.

JAMES (O.S.)

Buy you another?

There's a hand on the bar beside her and she notices this first along with the silver cuff link- an angel's wing.

She looks up at the man belonging to the hand as he hails the BARMAN, ordering with a gesture, which unsettles her vision and everything starts to shake like the world is dancing.

JAMES offers LILY his hand. She takes it and everything steadies, becomes clearer.

JAMES (CONT'D)

James.

LILY

Christine.

Still holding her hand:

JAMES

Try again.

LILY throws him an unconvincing look of confusion.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Don't worry, it's a virtue to be a terrible liar.

She's taken aback, but maintains her cool.

LILY

Lily.

JAMES

Much better.

JAMES releases her hand as their drinks arrive. He slides her martini over before settling down to two fingers of whiskey.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Come here often?

LILY breaks into a smile.

LILY

Is that the best you've got, James?

JAMES

I'm not trying to pick you up, Lily. I'm genuinely asking, how often does your misery drive you to come to a place like this?

LILY

Do I look miserable?

JAMES

Do any of these people?

LILY looks around. For the first time the smiles seem false.

JAMES (CONT'D)

This is the place people come when the world holds no more joy.

LILY

Is that why you're here?

JAMES

In part.

She watches JAMES closely for a moment as he sips his drink.

LILY

I know who you are.

This surprises JAMES, but he masks it well.

JAMES

You do?

LILY
You're a Reaper.

JAMES
Where'd you hear a word like that?

LILY
Is it true you guys use all these
mind tricks to discover clients? Is
that how you knew I was lying?

JAMES
I don't need to resort to tricks to
know you're lying. But, truth be
told, I am having some trouble
figuring you out.

LILY
(Proudly)
Yeah?

He looks her over, rooting out some deep truth and LILY plays
up to it, smiling and angling her head toward the light.

JAMES
House in the country. A garden you
manage yourself. A first generation
job in the city. You and your
husband. Something paper-based like
stocks or banking, perhaps
insurance. Something with a high
tax bracket.

Reluctantly, feeling exposed, LILY nods.

JAMES (CONT'D)
And yet here you are. At a risk
club. Drinking a martini. Slim
chance of drowning in such a
shallow drink. So what is your fix?
And why, in the name of all that is
everlasting, are you pretending
you're not the least bit curious
what lies down those Rabbit Holes?
Afraid the other sinners will judge
you?

LILY
Do you tear everyone apart like
this or am I just special?

JAMES
And here I was thinking I was being
polite. If I wanted to tear you
apart, I'd have pointed out that
you've removed your wedding ring.

Stoney, offended, LILY glares at him. JAMES downs his drink, rises, placing his hand on the bar.

Eyeing his hand spitefully:

LILY

They used to call a thing like this ambulance chasing.

JAMES

I don't deal in accidents. Only certainties.

LILY

Yeah, and money up front. I'd ask how you sleep at night, but something tells me you do all right.

Staring into her:

JAMES

Everything serves its purpose. So let me know if you don't find what you're looking for in a bar or at the bottom of a Rabbit Hole. Maybe I can be of some use to you.

LILY

You're wrong about me. I'm not a certainty.

JAMES

(Smiling)

Good night, Lily. Never play poker.

When he's gone, LILY looks at where his hand was at a black business card with an angel wing logo: THE DEATH ENGINE.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Where'd you go last night?

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DINING ROOM - EVENING.

LILY is chewing a mouthful of food, her eyes darting back and forth between RICHARD and her plate.

LILY (V.O.)

Drinks, a bar in central. They were all bitching about Harrison still being on paternity leave.

Oblivious to his wife's scrutiny, RICHARD is eating happily. He looks up briefly, motioning at his plate- it's so good!

RICHARD (V.O.)
Mmm... listen, don't forget to fill
in that psychological evaluation
for the licence people. I've
already sent mine.

She swallows, finds it hard to take another bite.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - NIGHT.

LILY lies awake. The clock reads 4:06am. She stares at the
roof of the bed, embroidered with blooming flowers.

RICHARD is sleeping contentedly. She looks at him, wanting to
wake him. Instead she turns over- what's the point?

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. LILY'S OFFICE - DAY.

LILY sits with the blank psychological evaluation form in
front of her, an endless array of questions under the FAMILY
PLANNING AGENCY logo: 'Are you a Long Lifer?', 'Do you cope
well with stress?', 'Where do you see yourself in 100 years?'

Frustrated, she stuffs the form into her bag where she finds
JAMES' business card. Her face is the playground of debate...

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - DAY.

LILY wakes up from a deep sleep. She rises, slightly
perplexed. She rubs her head and notices something on the
floor amid her clothes- a matchbook.

Picking it up, she flips it: CIRKUS. WHAT WOULD YOU RISK?

INT. BATHROOM - DAY.

LILY looks at herself in the mirror, hair a mess, panda eyes.
She frowns uncertainly, thinking.

Running the tap, she splashes her face with water. Another
day, same old routine.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DINING ROOM - DAY.

LILY sits at the table, her hands wrapped around a cup of
steaming coffee. She's wearing a dressing gown, her hair
messily tied. She's staring at something, suspicious.

Before her is the vase of white roses, still fresh and
perfectly alive. The phone rings and rings and- she answers.

LILY
Hello.

EXT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. FRONT DOOR - DAY.

MEREDITH opens the door in a whirlwind of a rush.

MEREDITH

Lily! Thank God. I owe you for this! Emil's waiting and we promised we would buy everything together, so everything matches and coordinates and that little pest, Quentin, cancelled again!

LILY

(Tired, irritable)

You know Anthony can be left alone. You'll have a kid soon who really can't look after itself, so there's no point stressing over a cherub.

MEREDITH

Oh, please! Anthony may not really be twelve, but he's still a child.

LILY

Whatever...

MEREDITH

Now, we'll be back before five. No snacks after four, make sure he watches what he wants on TV, but no flicking. If he's flicking, he might as well do something else.

LILY sees MEREDITH couldn't stop the facade if she wanted to.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - DAY.

Everything is clean and uncluttered as if it's part of a show room, destined never to be used.

Seated at the breakfast counter, LILY pours a glass of white wine and flicks through a newspaper: NEED HELP WITH LONGEVITY SHOT REPAYMENTS?

ANTHONY stands in the doorway unnoticed.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BACK DOOR - DAY.

Someone's fiddling with the lock. A few seconds later, the door opens and JAMES enters, shutting it gently behind him.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - DAY.

While careful not to touch anything with his body JAMES' eyes are busy pulling the room apart.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - DAY.

ANTHONY pulls out a stool opposite LILY and climbs onto it.

ANTHONY
Can I have a glass of orange juice?

LILY
Get it yourself.

ANTHONY
(Embarrassed)
The glasses are too high.

LILY looks at him, unsure whether he's playing the child.

After a moment, she takes pity on him. She heads to the cupboard, pulls out a wine glass and sets it down in front of ANTHONY who then watches as she pours him some wine.

ANTHONY considers the glass, then the woman who poured it.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - DAY.

JAMES opens a draw in LILY's bedside table, revealing a stack of notebooks- diaries. He flicks through the top one until his business card drops out. He picks it up.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BATHROOM - DAY.

Opening the cabinet, JAMES pulls out two pill bottles and pockets them. Closing it again, he catches the eye of his reflection in the mirror as if he hasn't really looked at himself in some time.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - DAY.

ANTHONY swirls his wine, taking a long, measured sip.

ANTHONY
I don't mind a Pinot Grigio.

LILY watches him.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
It's the Sauvignon Blancs that
taste like piss.

He glances at LILY, then settles on the glass again.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Twelve year old's taste buds.

Making a slapping sound with his tongue:

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Gotta keep them in practice or they'll only be able to appreciate chocolate milk. Course, it's hard to sneak anything past your sister. She's what we call in the trade, a-

LILY

Bitch?

They laugh.

ANTHONY

I was going to say a sleeping beauty.

ANTHONY sips his wine.

LILY

What's a sleeping beauty?

ANTHONY

Sleeping beauty, you know, the fairy tale. Lady is put under a spell that makes her sleep for a hundred years.

LILY

Yeah, and Meredith?

ANTHONY

Well, sleeping beauty slept away most of her life, didn't she? She wasn't involved in the adventure that saved her, she just woke up one day and lived the perfect life. It means Meredith's a client mother who doesn't want to see the strings behind the puppet show. Before the licence, I think part of her believed that if she wished hard enough and kept her eyes closed tightly enough, one day I'd become a real boy and she wouldn't have to wake up.

LILY raises her glass.

LILY

That's Pinocchio.

ANTHONY

Yeah, but the analogy doesn't work with Geppetto. Dude was alright.

They both laugh and take a drink.

EXT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. STREET. JAMES' CAR - DAY.

JAMES sits watching LILY's house, lost in thought.

Pulling himself angrily out of his preoccupation- keys, ignition, engine- he speeds off down the street.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

The sound of JAMES' car speeding off rises and fades. LILY listens to it until ANTHONY interrupts.

ANTHONY

You know, Meredith talks about you a lot- a lot a lot.

LILY

Yeah?

ANTHONY

She worries about you more than anyone. And poor Emil's the ear she pours all her worry wax into.

LILY

Meredith worries about me so she doesn't have to worry about herself.

ANTHONY

Maybe... She says you haven't been yourself lately. She thinks you're hiding something. Like maybe you're having an affair in the city.

LILY

What?

ANTHONY

I don't know...

(Suspiciously)

You that kind of woman, Aunt Lil'?

She smiles, amused.

LILY

No. Forever never ends, remember? What's the point in suffering in silence?

ANTHONY

Well, you don't seem all that happy. Your sister might be... highly strung, shall we say, but even I've noticed you're all bent out of shape.

(MORE)

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

I would have chalked it up to Meredith getting her child licence, but you were moping around way before that. So if it's not an affair or a kid what is it?

LILY

You know what- who knew you were really a little shit behind all that mummy-Auntie Lily bollocks? No one asked you for your opinion.

ANTHONY

Fine. Click your fingers and I'll go back to drinking orange juice and whining about how a newer, better, more expensive toy will fulfill me as a human being.

LILY thinks. Sincerely:

LILY

Don't go back.

ANTHONY

So, tell me. Why the long face?

Pushing her glass aside, she proceeds measuredly.

LILY

I don't know.

ANTHONY is patient.

LILY (CONT'D)

But I can't sleep. When I do I only dream about everything as it is. No flights of fancy, just... this.

She looks around vaguely.

LILY (CONT'D)

Neighbours, my family, everyone at work smiling away like their faces are chiseled out of concrete. Sometimes I imagine all their teeth falling out... then I think about Richard and his smile- his stupid fucking smile- and I just want to fold my fingers around his neck and squeeze and the thought of his smile becoming something else other than a smile makes me want to laugh- you know, that kind of breathless, choking laughter you can't help, that takes hold of you until it's not laughter anymore...

(MORE)

LILY (CONT'D)
and it's like... you're the one
being strangled.

ANTHONY stares at her, trying to work something out.

ANTHONY
Maybe you should see a doctor.

LILY
A doctor?! How'd we get to doctor?

ANTHONY
Listen, a cherub I knew when I was
with one of my old hire families
started feeling tired and sad all
the time. One day his parents came
home to find him hanging from one
of his dad's work ties. You need
some perspective. Go to the city,
spend a day doing all your favorite
things, things that remind you of
how great life can be.

LILY
I'm just stressed or something.
Maybe Richard was right and we
should go away.

ANTHONY climbs down off the stool.

ANTHONY
I don't know. Sounds like it could
be the melancholia and that's
serious. If it were me, I'd want to
make sure.

Taking his wine, ANTHONY leaves LILY to reflect.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

The TV is advertising cherub packages: 'The Spoiled Brat',
'The Quiet Type', 'The Perfect Model'.

LILY's staring blankly at the screen. She slides a finger
across the top, dismayed at the sight of dust.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

Having pulled everything off the shelves, LILY sits
surrounded by books and knickknacks, dusting vigorously.

Eventually she looks up at the mess she's created- just as a
tall stack of books collapses without warning.

She throws the dust rag down in anger.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT.

LILY's vague shape swells into view beyond the distorted glass of the front door. A loud knock, knock, knock!

MEREDITH answers it, wiping her hands on a tea towel.

MEREDITH
Lily! What's wrong?

LILY
Hi. Nothing's wrong. Why should anything be wrong?

Taking in the tea towel:

LILY (CONT'D)
Oh, you're in the middle of dinner?

MEREDITH glances back toward the kitchen.

MEREDITH
Well, yeah, but... do you want to come in?

LILY
No, no. I just wanted to stop by...

MEREDITH
Oh, OK...

LILY
Anthony in?

MEREDITH
Of course. Where else would he be?

They both laugh awkwardly.

LILY
Yeah, no, right, right... Erm, look, can I just have a quick word with him?

She barges through, heads for the stairs.

MEREDITH
Well, he's in the bath, Lil'.

LILY
It won't take long, promise.

MEREDITH
Did something happen today?

LILY's already upstairs.

LILY
No, everything's fine!

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. BATHROOM - NIGHT.

Swinging into the bathroom, LILY shuts the door behind her. ANTHONY's in the bath, bubbles up to his ears.

ANTHONY
Hey!

Seeing it's LILY:

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
What are you doing? Can't a guy scrub behind his ears in peace?

LILY picks up a yellow bath duck from the loo seat and sits, tossing the duck at ANTHONY who catches it with a squeak!

LILY
(Angrily)
You can't say to a person what you said to me today without ruffling that person's feathers. I was perfectly happy before I met you!

ANTHONY points at her with the duck.

ANTHONY
No, I was perfectly happy before I met you. You were unhappy before you pestered me. Difference is, now you might know why.

He drops the duck into the water.

LILY
Haven't you ever heard the saying ignorance is bliss?

ANTHONY
Sure, I've heard it. Don't put much stock in it though. Especially in your case.

LILY
My case? Don't you want to conduct a full physical before you diagnose me?

Scrubbing his toes.

ANTHONY
When's the last time you felt blissful about anything?

LILY

Oh, don't fuck with me.

ANTHONY

I'm not. It's not my fault. I'm never going to see the other side of puberty and longevity taxes mean I'll be working as a hire child for the rest of my life. We all have our crosses to bear, but sticking our heads in the sand isn't going to change anything. I don't go around pretending to myself that I'm satisfied riding my bike and kicking a ball around the garden-

LILY

Your whole life is pretending!

ANTHONY

Outside. Inside, I'm fucking well-adjusted. I know I can't be happy all the time being a kid because I daydream about things I could never have. Like a wife with a massive pair of tits, my own house, a mistress with a massive pair of tits, a real job, a working cock...

ANTHONY slaps the water limply.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

... my secretary's mouth wrapped around it- with a massive pair of tits-

LILY

I don't want to hear this-

ANTHONY

No, you don't want to hear the scummy truth, right, sleeping beauty?

He picks up a back scrubber and starts on his back.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Because it interferes with your perfect fucking life in your perfect fucking house.

Bringing the scrubber forward, he twirls it in his hand.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

So riddle me this, princess, if everything's so fucking perfect, why does it matter what I said so much that you just had to come over and interrupt bath time to yell at me?

LILY is silent for a moment. She looks around, thinking.

LILY

(More calmly)

I don't really daydream about having anything.

ANTHONY

Then maybe that's your problem. You already have everything.

She considers this.

LILY

So, if I do what you suggested and go have fun in the city being free, doing anything and everything I want... will you come with me?

ANTHONY

Why do I have to go?

LILY

Happiness should be shared. Or so they say.

ANTHONY

Another example of you putting too much stock in what people say.

LILY

Next weekend. Will you come or not?

ANTHONY is paying undue attention to his fingernails.

LILY (CONT'D)

Please.

ANTHONY

Fine. But you talk to your sister. I'm not burning any bridges just so I can witness your breakdown.

Big smile from LILY.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Can I have some privacy now?

LILY rises and leaves, but just as the door shuts behind her, she opens it again, startling ANTHONY.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

What now?!

Lifting up her top, LILY flashes ANTHONY her breasts.

LILY

Bigger's not always better.

She leaves with a cheeky smile. ANTHONY looks stunned. He squeezes a sponge over his head.

EXT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - DAY.

While RICHARD sleeps like a baby, LILY is wide awake. After a moment, she touches the lamp so it glows dimly and by it's paltry light she retrieves her diary from the drawer and starts writing.

INT. TRAIN - DAY.

LILY people watches. The TICKET COLLECTOR clips a ticket, a COUPLE laugh, a BUSINESS WOMAN rubs her foot.

INT. STATION - DAY.

Once again, LILY joins the mass exodus, flowing along with the current of PEOPLE all heading for the ticket barriers.

EXT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY.

LILY's lost in her favorite photograph. The sound of rain...

EXT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. GARDEN - DAY.

The back door opens and LILY hurries out into the downpour, no umbrella, only a heavy jumper, jeans, wellies.

Beyond the trees, LILY shelters a 'CIRKUS' match, lights a cigarette- utter relief. She's soaking, but doesn't care.

ANTHONY (O.S.)

Not having an umbrella in England
is like not having a turban in the
desert.

LILY approaches the fence. ANTHONY sits on the other side by a shed, an umbrella balanced on his shoulder and a cigarette between his fingers. He smokes with unsettling familiarity.

In answer to LILY's quizzical gaze:

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

I'm surviving in the wilderness.

LILY
I can see that.

ANTHONY
(Sarcastically, with a
child's enthusiasm)
The rain makes it realler!

ANTHONY extinguishes his cigarette in a broken plant pot and covers it with soil. Reaching inside his pocket:

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
I have something for you.

He approaches the fence, hesitates, a wry grin.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Don't get upset.

LILY
Just give it to me.

A scrap of paper: 'DOCTOR YEUNG', a phone number.

ANTHONY
He's based in London. Discreet and
all that.

She nods, taking in the reality of it.

LILY
You shouldn't have gone to the
trouble.

ANTHONY
It wasn't any.

They share a look.

MEREDITH (O.S.)
Anthony, honey! Come dry off!

ANTHONY
Bye Lil'.

LILY
Bye Ant.

He smiles and runs off. LILY folds the paper.

INT. DOCTOR YEUNG'S OFFICE - DAY.

DOCTOR YEUNG (looks 25) sits behind his desk, looking ponderously over LILY's file. He's backed by a wall of perhaps every specialist qualification a doctor can achieve.

LILY sits before him, backed by a wall of leaflets:
MELANCHOLIA- THE SIGNS, ILLEGITIMATE CHILD? THE TRUTH ABOUT
CHERUBIM.

DOCTOR YEUNG

Well, Mrs Harding, I would begin by saying that not everyone who experiences the onset of melancholic symptoms will necessarily go on to be diagnosed with full blown melancholia. It's a common misconception and one that still has some stigma attached, so I can see why you're nervous, but believe me, it's too early to worry too much about it. Worrying will only exasperate the problem.

Far from comforted, LILY nods anyway.

LILY

But I do have a problem? This isn't normal right?

DOCTOR YEUNG

You've been feeling this way for a while. How long's a while?

LILY

I'm not sure. Feels like years.

DOCTOR YEUNG

Unfortunately, that is the nature of these things.

DOCTOR YEUNG reaches for his prescription pad.

DOCTOR YEUNG (CONT'D)

I'm going to prescribe you two pills to be taken once daily for a minimum of three weeks. We'll then schedule another appointment to see how you're getting on.

He rips the top sheet off the pad and hands it to LILY.

DOCTOR YEUNG (CONT'D)

Now, remember. Pills work differently for different people. If these don't work, we have other options available to us. However, if you find yourself feeling hopeless, if you think you might do harm to yourself, get in touch with us or the help line immediately. Also, avoid third parties promising you relief.

(MORE)

DOCTOR YEUNG (CONT'D)
You'll find them in bars, on the
street- they're con-artists, all
they want are your bank details.

LILY regards the prescription.

DOCTOR YEUNG (CONT'D)
See the nurse on your way out.
She'll sort out payment, take a
urine sample, some blood and weigh
you for the record.

EXT. DOCTOR'S SURGERY - DAY.

Exiting the surgery, LILY heads down the street.

JAMES sits in his car across the road, watching.

INT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY.

LILY sits in her usual spot before her favorite photograph.

Today there are more PEOPLE, all swarming around the same
nearby exhibition, all talking loudly. Suddenly:

LILY
SHUT UP!

Everyone silences, shocked by LILY's outburst. After a while,
they resume, gradually increasing in volume...

LILY loses herself in the photograph, the two pills YEUNG
prescribed sitting in her open palm. One white, one red.

She necks them, chasing them with water.

Noticing her bag, she spies the psychological evaluation form
and pulls it out, reading it as if she'd forgotten all about
it. She searches for a pen and starts filling it out.

INT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - LATER.

The crowd of PEOPLE part slightly, revealing the exhibition
that has drawn so much attention.

An OLD WOMAN (looks 95) sits calmly as the crowd scrutinise,
marvel and comment as if she can't hear them. Her hair is
white, her back bent, her face crumpled with the lines of age-
quite a refreshing sight in a world of unrelenting youth.

LILY stands watching her as if they have a lot in common. The
OLD WOMAN spots LILY, her expression ambivalent.

EXT. LONDON. STREET - NIGHT.

The sealed evaluation form is dropped into the mailbox.

LILY hails a taxi.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT.

LILY pulls on the black wig, checks it in a compact mirror. She stares at her reflection as if something's familiar, but she can't quite grasp what.

INT. RISK CLUB - NIGHT.

LILY watches the hedonism unfold as the KEY HOLDER appears.

KEY HOLDER
What'll it be?

A faint recollection passes over LILY's face.

LILY
What would you recommend?

INT. RISK CLUB. OUTSIDE RABBIT HOLE 7 - NIGHT.

The KEY HOLDER leads LILY to Rabbit Hole 7, guarded by a sculpture depicting an angel about to take off into flight.

LILY takes it in as the KEY HOLDER unlocks the door for her.

KEY HOLDER
We'll put it on your tab.

INT. RISK CLUB. RABBIT HOLE 7 - CONTINUOUS.

More doors, this time ordered around a large column.

The KEY HOLDER stops in front of one. He presents LILY with a pillbox, this time with a sun engraved into the lid. Warily, she opens it to find a white tab with a cloud on it. She looks at the KEY HOLDER who smiles knowingly. She then takes the tab on her finger and licks it off.

The KEY HOLDER pushes the door open, a gust of wind flowing out from the darkness within.

INT. RISK CLUB. RABBIT HOLE 7. ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

LILY steps inside, her curiosity battling her uneasiness.

Suddenly the door is slammed behind her.

Shaking off her surprise, LILY remains calm, focusing instead on discovering the Rabbit Hole's secrets. She stares at a source of light emanating up ahead, her eyes wide with the effects of the drug, the wind blowing stronger.

She approaches slowly.

A big glassless window reveals itself- the source of wind and light. Beyond lies the city, it's sounds rising to meet her.

Standing at the very edge, LILY gazes down at the street below where PEOPLE walk and cars speed and slow.

LILY's eyes are lost in the fall.

She absorbs every last drop the high can offer her until the well appears to run dry and the wonder of it all to fade.

She examines the distant city again, probing its depths.

Her toes inch over the edge.

She reaches out into the open air, pauses, reaches a little further, a little further...

Until her hand hits a wall, which disrupts what is now clearly a holographic projection. The lights flicker, illuminating the encircling rooms where the silhouettes of other CLUBBERS flirting with the drop briefly appear.

The projection disappears, the houselights come on and the room is transformed into a normal, unremarkable box.

The KEY HOLDER's voice booms over some invisible speaker:

KEY HOLDER (O.S.)
Please don't touch.

LILY
I thought it was real...

KEY HOLDER (O.S.)
It's the only risk we have that isn't simply because it cannot be contained within the club. We can't have you jumping and hurting any innocent people now, can we?

She considers this, a change coming over her face.

INT. LILY'S CAR - NIGHT.

LILY drives recklessly, still riding the effects of the drug.

EXT. LILY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS.

The car speeds round a corner, it's lights splintering through the roadside trees and casting sharp lines of shadow.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Suddenly, the door opens on LILY digging around inside her bag for her keys. She looks up, a loud cheer greeting her.

EVERYONE
SURPRISE!

RICHARD's standing at the front of the GATHERING, everyone grinning and making a fuss as LILY's ushered in, awe-struck.

Smiling and touching the ends of her wig:

RICHARD
Aw, you knew?

LILY touches the wig- she'd forgotten- before taking in all the expectant, happy faces- MEREDITH, EMIL, DARREN... She looks past everyone at ANTHONY who's sitting on the dining table beneath a banner: HAPPY 128th BIRTHDAY!

He smiles and LILY smiles back.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

Having removed the wig, LILY's hands are now covering her eyes with ANTHONY's pressed on top.

Everyone watches in anticipation.

RICHARD
OK...

RICHARD plonks a black labrador puppy in LILY's lap.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Open!

ANTHONY and LILY take their hands away. LILY's mouth drops. Everyone claps.

ANTHONY
What are you going to name him?

MEREDITH
(To RICHARD)
Where did you find such a cutie?

RICHARD
Guy at work had a litter of them.
Gave them away for free.

LILY can't seem to process how alive the puppy is.

EXT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. FRONT GARDEN - NIGHT.

LILY hugs MEREDITH while EMIL and ANTHONY stand waiting.

MEREDITH
Night, my love. Another year
younger as they say!

Leaning in, EMIL kisses LILY politely on the cheek.

EMIL
Happy Birthday.

ANTHONY lingers while his parents head home, but he speaks loud enough for them to hear.

ANTHONY
Night Auntie Lily. I can look after
the dog any time you want.

They hug.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
(More quietly)
Not really. I'm really more of a
cat person.

Smiling, LILY nods as if this was to be expected.

EXT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. FRONT GARDEN - CONTINUOUS.

ANTHONY joins MEREDITH and EMIL as they draw up to the door.

MEREDITH
What did we get her again?

EMIL
My secretary picked out a nice
flute.

MEREDITH
Oh, that's nice. It's hard to know
what to get anyone anymore.

EMIL
Forever never ends, my love...

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

LILY wanders in. Exhausted, RICHARD sits down on the sofa.

RICHARD
You've still got presents to open.

LILY
Are any more of them alive?

RICHARD
(Laughing)
I don't think so.

LILY
Then they can wait till tomorrow.

LILY picks up a stray piece of wrapping paper.

RICHARD
Leave that, come here.

She drops the wrapping paper and joins RICHARD on the sofa.

LILY
Thank you, darling.

RICHARD
Glad you enjoyed yourself.

They kiss.

Scratching, biting, tearing noises- they look round to find the puppy going to town on an empty espresso maker box.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
This was one of my better gift ideas, right?

LILY
It was a lovely thought.

RICHARD sinks deeper into the sofa, closing his eyes.

RICHARD
Let's wait till we train him before we give him the longevity shot, OK?

LILY's expression becomes distant. She looks back at the puppy again as it tears off another piece of cardboard.

EXT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BACK GARDEN - CONTINUOUS.

Through the window, RICHARD can be seen asleep on the sofa while LILY is teasing the puppy with a strand of ribbon.

JAMES stands in the garden, his feet in the flower bed. He moves off, followed reluctantly by TWENTY TWO.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

LILY looks out the window, her attention drawn by something. Forgetting it, she looks at the excited puppy.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BATHROOM - NIGHT.

The mirror. LILY's reflection. She studies herself.

Rolling up her sleeve, she peels off the plaster from where the nurse took a blood sample, revealing her longevity technology tattoo. Apart from that her arm is as good as new.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. FRONT DOOR - DAY.

MEREDITH is doing up the zip on ANTHONY's coat and pulling at it unnecessarily to neaten some invisible crease.

Looking overly bundled up, ANTHONY waits impatiently while LILY stands by the door just as impatiently.

MEREDITH

Now, you listen to your Aunt Lily,
I want you on your best behaviour.
London is a dangerous place, it's
full of weirdos and children get
kidnapped there all the time- even
cherub children- so no wandering
off. Understand?

ANTHONY nods quickly as if this will hurry her along.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

(To LILY)

Are you sure you'll be alright?

LILY

Oh my god, Meredith! We'll be fine,
for goodness sake, stop worrying!

ANTHONY

Yeah, mum!

LILY

And it's London, not Antarctica,
does he need all those layers?

MEREDITH

You can shed layers, but you-

ANTHONY

-can't shed what you don't have on!

MEREDITH flashes ANTHONY a look- don't be cheeky!

INT. LILY'S CAR - DAY.

LILY plugs in her seat belt while ANTHONY loosens his scarf.
MEREDITH is standing on the doorstep waving.

ANTHONY

I feel sorry for her kid already.

LILY

Tell me about it.

ANTHONY waves unenthusiastically back at Meredith.

ANTHONY

You better stay sharp. I don't want
to end up in some pedophile's
basement.

LILY laughs. Far from assured, ANTHONY grabs his seat belt.

INT. TRAIN - DAY.

ANTHONY has stripped down to a red jumper. He's showing LILY a game on his smart phone and making her laugh. For LILY the journey is entirely different from her usual commute.

EXT. LONDON ZOO - DAY.

ANTHONY and LILY eat ice cream and watch the pandas. There's a plaque nearby with the longevity technology symbol on it.

ANTHONY

At least they can stop trying to
get them to fuck all the time.

LILY

Yeah...

ANTHONY

Poor bastards.

LILY

(Pityingly)
Yeah...

EXT. HYDE PARK - DAY.

ANTHONY and LILY play a game of giant chess, hiding behind the pieces and laughing. But, ANTHONY soon wins, shoving LILY's king over and throwing his hands into the air.

ANTHONY

Game!

In retaliation, LILY kicks ANTHONY's king over and does a little victory dance.

EXT. HYDE PARK - LATER.

ANTHONY makes his finger into a gun and starts firing at all the pigeons, running into their flocks to scatter them.

LILY watches until ANTHONY grabs her hand and they run together, the bane of every pigeon in the park.

A duck passes the Peter Pan statue and ANTHONY emulates its waddle. LILY laughs, her face lighting up.

Meanwhile, nearby, an inconspicuous JAMES looks on, his gaze completely invested in LILY, the crack of a smile breaking involuntarily across his lips.

EXT. HYDE PARK. SERPENTINE RIVER - DAY.

From a distance, it's clear ANTHONY and LILY are being very English and 'fighting' over who's paying for the row boat. A sign displays rates for adults and cherubs.

EXT. HYDE PARK. SERPENTINE RIVER. ROW BOAT - DAY.

Finding the oars impossible to coordinate, LILY and ANTHONY abandon them and allow themselves to drift.

Together, they notice a THIN WOMAN pushing a baby pram in the park. They watch, intrigued as a FEMALE JOGGER stops eagerly to enquire. But, when she's presented with a tiny dog instead of a baby, she resumes her jog as if the THIN WOMAN is crazy.

ANTHONY

Did you ever want a baby?

LILY

I think so.

ANTHONY

But not anymore?

LILY

I think you can want something for too long. After a while, you forget why you wanted it so badly in the first place.

ANTHONY ponders this.

ANTHONY

So, what now cap'in?

LILY smiles mischievously.

EXT. HYDE PARK. SERPENTINE RIVER. ROW BOAT - LATER.

Holding hands across the width of the boat, ANTHONY and LILY lean back in unison. ANTHONY looks anxious, but he commits to trusting LILY.

But, LILY soon loses faith and jerks up, losing her grip on ANTHONY who falls into the water.

She laughs uncontrollably... until she realises ANTHONY's not a strong swimmer and jumps in after him.

EXT. HAIRDRESSERS - DAY.

Through the window, a SKINNY MAN with a shaved head is drying ANTHONY's hair while the other HAIRDRESSERS neglect their clients in favour of fussing over the cherub.

LILY watches, thoughtful, her smile fading. She turns to the window... but before she sees him, JAMES turns away, pulling at his collar. He disappears with TWENTY TWO as PASSERSBY cast disapproving stares at his dog's unsightly limp.

INT. EXPENSIVE RESTAURANT - DAY.

LILY and ANTHONY sit at a table by the window. The WAITRESS delivers the menus- one adult, one child. ANTHONY takes the menu, trying not to seem offended.

ANTHONY

(Chuckles)

Two specials and they're both soups.

LILY

What do you want to drink?

ANTHONY

A whiskey would go a long way, but then this is your enjoy-life day, not mine.

LILY

Nonsense, you're sharing it with me. Nothing's off the table, right?

LILY calls the WAITRESS over, but something about her sternly polite face causes ANTHONY to lose his nerve.

ANTHONY

I was joking. I'll have a coke.

LILY

You're sure?

He nods.

LILY (CONT'D)
A glass of the Malbec and a coke,
please.

The WAITRESS leaves and LILY catches ANTHONY looking around the restaurant at all the other customers, the first time she's seen him look genuinely uncomfortable.

LILY (CONT'D)
So, what next?

ANTHONY
That's up to you.

LILY
Would you stop saying that?

ANTHONY
No. We're trying to pull you back from the brink, remember? So what do you want to do?

LILY
I'll tell you. If you order for me.

LILY hands him her menu.

LILY (CONT'D)
The only clue you get is that
salads don't impress me.

Unsure, ANTHONY opens the menu, which is very large for him.

LILY (CONT'D)
Come on, Ant. Everyone deserves a
break. Even cherubs.

ANTHONY considers this as the WAITRESS brings their drinks.

WAITRESS
Are you ready to order?

LILY looks at ANTHONY.

ANTHONY
Nothing's off the table?

She smiles.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
(To WAITRESS)
I'll have the steak, rare, au
gratin potatoes. She'll have the
same. And I'll have a whiskey, ice.

A SNOBBISH MAN at the next table overhears and glances their way, giving off a faint air of disapproval. The WAITRESS doesn't know what to do.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
And just to let you know in
advance, we'll be ordering the
souffle for dessert.

ANTHONY shuts the menu and holds it out to the WAITRESS. The
WAITRESS stares at ANTHONY.

WAITRESS
Erm...
(To LILY)
Would your son prefer to order from
the kid's menu?

LILY
He's not my son.

ANTHONY
(To WAITRESS)
I'm sitting right here. Please
don't talk about me like I can't
hear you.

The WAITRESS is getting increasingly nervous, her attention
naturally gravitating toward LILY.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
I just want to enjoy a nice lunch
with my friend, so if you wouldn't
mind fetching our order.

WAITRESS
Please. The other customers...
(To LILY)
Miss, please. We don't want any
trouble... I could bring him some
crayons, some paper...

ANTHONY
OK! Bring your crayons. Bring the
paper. Go.

The WAITRESS doesn't move.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Didn't you hear? I want some
crayons! Now, lady! It's whiskey or
crayons! Go!

LILY
You heard the man.

ANTHONY starts banging the table.

ANTHONY
Now! Now! Now! Now!

LILY lifts her glass off the table to keep it from spilling.

LILY
Just get him his fucking drink.

Everyone in the restaurant looks, scowls, judges. Finally, the WAITRESS gets it and runs off.

Unashamed, LILY meets the gazes of the other customers.

LILY (CONT'D)
You know how kids are.

The dregs of ANTHONY's fury fall away and he laughs loudly.

ANTHONY
What's next damn it?

LILY
I want to go to the museum.

ANTHONY
(Announcing)
She wants to go to the museum!

The WAITRESS returns with crayons, paper and whiskey, arranging it all before ANTHONY as she might a rabid dog.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
I'm glad we understand one another.
Now, bring our steaks or, honest to God, there'll be tears. I'm talking lakes, lady.

The WAITRESS hurries off again. LILY smiles as ANTHONY raises his glass:

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Cheers.

LILY
To what?

ANTHONY
Um... to us! And today! Let's live like it'll end tomorrow.

LILY
(Truly satisfied)
Cheers.

EXT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY.

ANTHONY and LILY enter while others simply pass by.

INT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY.

Laughing, ANTHONY and LILY come upon the photograph LILY loves so much... only to find it's been replaced by a completely different photograph of a man- nothing special.

LILY's face drops. ANTHONY tilts his head.

ANTHONY

Really? This is what you find so inspiring.

LILY

That's not it.

LILY spots a MEMBER OF STAFF and catches her.

LILY (CONT'D)

Excuse me, do you know what happened to the photograph that was here before?

The MEMBER OF STAFF looks up at the wall LILY is pointing at.

MEMBER OF STAFF

Before? The exhibition hasn't changed miss.

LILY

But this isn't the same photograph.

MEMBER OF STAFF

Perhaps I can help you find the one/ you're looking-

LILY

(Irritated)

I haven't misplaced it, you have. It was always on this wall. It's a photograph of a woman standing in front of a window.

ANTHONY

Is she about to jump?

LILY flashes ANTHONY a look of anger.

MEMBER OF STAFF

I'll check the books. If your photograph was here, we'll find it. Just give me a few moments.

Although unconvinced, LILY lets her go.

Just then she spots PEARL sitting in her chair a short distance away, this time without the usual crowd.

ANTHONY

They probably just lost track of
it. She'll find it.

Ignoring him, LILY approaches PEARL. ANTHONY follows.

PEARL is reading a book, pretending not to notice them.

LILY

I'm looking for that photograph
that was here before. It was of a
woman-

PEARL

-and a window, right?

LILY

Yes!

PEARL

(Chuckling)
Haven't seen it.

LILY

(Increasingly angry)
It was here. You saw me last time I
came, I know you did! Where is it?

ANTHONY

Lily...

PEARL studies ANTHONY.

PEARL

You're so young.

ANTHONY

You're so old.

PEARL

That's why I'm forgetful.

She looks back at LILY.

PEARL (CONT'D)

That woman'll help you out. I'm of
no use to anyone anymore.

Holding out the book and flipping the pages:

PEARL (CONT'D)

See? No words, just paper. They
thought it would add to the exhibit
if I was reading a physical book.

LILY snatches the book and throws it across the room before
heading back toward the imposter photograph.

ANTHONY looks sharply at PEARL who's enjoying herself no end.

ANTHONY

You're a mean old woman.

PEARL

And you're a snotty old man. Only I look like what I is. That's why I'm on display, so the rest of you can come gawk at me. The only place you'll find truth these days is in a museum apparently.

ANTHONY scowls at her, but her old eyes quell him somewhat.

ANTHONY

Fuck you... Ma'am.

Chuckling to herself, PEARL watches as ANTHONY joins LILY and the MEMBER OF STAFF returns.

MEMBER OF STAFF

I'm sorry, miss, I-

LILY

Forget it!

LILY's already making for the exit when ANTHONY draws up alongside her, tugging at her sleeve.

ANTHONY

Come on, Lil'. Let's go. I know what we can do next.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

The TV blares, tuned to a manic talk show on which the two presenters are cherubs. The FEMALE PRESENTER is wearing a bo-peep costume and the MALE PRESENTER a multi-coloured suit and they play tricks on and generally torment their guests.

ANTHONY sits watching and laughing uncontrollably while LILY strokes the puppy, an assortment of fatty food favorites surrounding them.

LILY looks into the dining room at the vase of white roses, still very much alive. The sight of them disturbs her.

EXT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. ROOF - NIGHT.

LILY and ANTHONY lie on a blanket staring up at the stars.

ANTHONY

Shouldn't we talk about how tiny and insignificant we feel?

LILY

Really? You feel small? I feel like
a giant.

Reaching out two fingers toward the sky as if she's picking a
berry, LILY squints through the gap between the tips.

LILY (CONT'D)

See? I could squish each one.

Mimicking her, ANTHONY squints and mimes the squishing.

ANTHONY

Oh, yeah...

MEREDITH (O.S.)

Anthony Thomas Kestler! You come
down from there at once!

Peering down into his driveway, ANTHONY sees MEREDITH
standing by the car. EMIL climbs out of the driver's side.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Emil, say something!

EMIL

Anthony! Come down.

MEREDITH grunts at his pathetic outrage.

ANTHONY throws LILY a look that indicates the day's over.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - NIGHT.

LILY stands with her arms folded while MEREDITH paces
furiously in front of her.

MEREDITH

Completely unacceptable! Utterly
irresponsible! What were you
thinking? What if he had fallen and
broken his neck? I mean, my god,
Lily! Did it even occur to you?

LILY

OK, OK...

MEREDITH

It's not OK! Do you know how
expensive he is! He's a first
generation cherub! Our insurance is
already through the roof. We've had
him for decades and you want to
break him days before his contract
ends. I've got so much on my plate
right now, I don't need this!

LILY

I get it, Meredith, don't go on.

MEREDITH

You may live in your own little world where everything's about you, but the rest of us have responsibilities! I have a child!

LILY can't help herself:

LILY

He's not a child! You have an employee! And you're letting him go, so stop playing the worried mum when you couldn't give a shit what happens to Anthony. To you he might just be a toy you've grown out of, but he's my friend and I need him!

MEREDITH

(Nonplussed)

You need him? He's a cherub, Lily. You can't be friends with a cherub.

(Sincerely)

What's the matter with you? Why can't you just be normal?

LILY slaps Meredith hard across the face.

There's a deep silence as Meredith processes her shock, red faced and speechless. LILY storms out.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS.

EMIL arrives at the bottom of the stairs as LILY flies out the front door, slamming it behind her.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

Entering, EMIL finds MEREDITH at the breakfast counter.

EMIL

That was a little cruel, pet.

Regret shows all over MEREDITH's face.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DINING ROOM - NIGHT.

Storming in, LILY drops her bag on the table and spins round, not quite sure what to do with herself.

She calms herself by degrees.

The white roses stand before her, perfect, everlasting.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - NIGHT.

The bin opens, the roses are dumped unceremoniously inside.

LILY flinches, sucks her finger, then examines a small cut from a rogue thorn, blood forming- the bin drops shut.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BATHROOM - NIGHT.

LILY opens the cabinet and dispenses her pills. She tips them into her mouth and washes them down with water from the tap.

Holding her finger up to the light, she sees it's healed. A thought- she rolls up her sleeve.

Retrieving the nail scissors, she prepares herself with a deep intake of air before parting the scissors and sliding one of the sharp edges down her arm, leaving a line of blood.

Drops hit the tile floor. Fascinated, LILY watches as the cut heals before her.

The sound of a car. She peers out the window- RICHARD'S home.

LILY wipes the blood up. The toilet flushes.

CUT TO:

From the doorway, the bathroom looks pristine. LILY flicks the light switch and everything falls into darkness.

INT. RISK CLUB. BAR - NIGHT.

LILY'S laughing at something a TALL MAN is saying. In fact, she's enjoying herself so much it's likely she's taken a tab again and there's two more stuck to the side of her cheek.

The music we hear doesn't match the raving spirit of the club, but rather evokes a very different, calmer, far away place and some hopeless, unnameable loss.

LILY'S eyes lock with something across the room.

At the end of the bar, JAMES stands staring at her with the same intensity as on the night of DIXON'S death, only this time there's a greater sense of inevitability, of sadness.

INT. RISK CLUB. BAR - LATER.

The TALL MAN has now disappeared. LILY and JAMES are talking.

LILY'S eyes are glazed, the tabs like falling teardrops, a galaxy of glitter shimmering across her cheek. She looks like someone else... until her smile disappears and we see a flicker of the real LILY underneath.

She holds JAMES's business card: THE DEATH ENGINE.

INT. CAFE - DAY.

JAMES sits drinking coffee, watching his mobile like a pot that won't boil. He checks his watch. A BEARDED MAN and an AFRICAN WOMAN are having a conversation nearby:

AFRICAN WOMAN

And how do you want to feel?

JAMES' mobile rings: LILY HARDING. A wave of disappointment.

AFRICAN WOMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Sometimes it helps to close your eyes...

JAMES closes his eyes. TWENTY TWO lies despondently under the table as if sharing his master's pain.

EXT. STREET - DAY.

JAMES walks down the street, just another suit in the city.

VALERIE (V.O.)

She called, didn't she?

A limo pulls up and JAMES gets in.

INT. VALERIE'S LIMO - DAY.

VALERIE

She's always going to call, James.

JAMES

I just need a little more time.

VALERIE

You've had a little more time! And a little more! I can't hold my neck out for you any longer.

JAMES

Oh, is that what you've been doing, Val? Really?

VALERIE

You think you can go around doing whatever the fuck you want and the bureau's not going to give a tidily wink? Wake up, James, and grow a brain. The Death Engine is a big hungry beast and it feeds on the dead, not the living. Lily Harding's paid for a death.

(MORE)

VALERIE (CONT'D)

Instead, you insist on giving her
life after Goddamn life for free.
How many more second chances are
you going to give her?

Watching him, VALERIE's anger only permits a hint of concern.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

The cycles are getting shorter.
Flash-wiping memories has never
been an exact science.

JAMES searches the view from the window as if it might hold
the answer to all his problems.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

You can't save her, James.

JAMES

Can you drop me off up here?

Begrudgingly, VALERIE presses the intercom for the DRIVER.

VALERIE

Let him off Charlie.

EXT. STREET. VALERIE'S LIMO - CONTINUOUS.

The limo pulls over.

INT. VALERIE'S LIMO - CONTINUOUS.

JAMES moves toward the door, but VALERIE stops him.

VALERIE

As your friend, I'm sorry. But as
your handler, I think you need to
take new clients. Dixon was a good
death in spite of your using him to
scare the shit out of her.

JAMES

I have to push her, to test her. To
make sure that, when the cycles
end, she doesn't call... And that
she never will. Until then she's
the only client I care about.

He exits the car, straightening his suit as he turns back.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Do you like dogs, Val?

Making a puzzled face, she considers the question.

VALERIE

I don't like anything that relies
more on me than itself.

JAMES

That's fair.

He swings the door shut.

VALERIE

Drive Charlie.

The limo drives off and VALERIE shakes her head.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

(To herself)

Lily fucking Harding.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - DAY.

LILY wakes up, rises. She groans and lies back down.

Suddenly there's a bark and LILY rises again, startled.

The puppy wags its tail, eager for attention.

LILY thinks. She rubs her head, looks around. Slowly, her
mind appears to throw up an explanation for the puppy. She
throws the covers off and moves into the bathroom.

The puppy watches her.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

LILY looks at herself in the mirror, hair a mess, panda eyes.
She frowns uncertainly, thinking. She turns on the shower.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY.

The puppy lifts a leg, a stream of piss hitting the carpet.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY.

Running a palm over the steamed up mirror, LILY reveals her
reflection. She looks at something in her hands- obscured
beneath a strip of condensation- emotion bubbling up.

At first she seems to be in control, but the next moment sees
it all come pouring out in breathless sobs and angry scowls.

INT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY.

JAMES is standing by PEARL, watching something off screen.

PEARL

She was upset about it.

JAMES

How upset?

PEARL

Just upset.

JAMES

Upset like she'd just seen a butterfly being squashed or upset like the world's about to end?

PEARL looks at JAMES, but his mind is elsewhere.

PEARL

She was with the cherub. I like him. He's a fiery little sod, but cherubs are cherubs. They're like cats. No loyalty. Remember that.

It's clear now that what JAMES is watching is two MOVERS reinstalling LILY's favourite photograph on the wall.

PEARL (CONT'D)

She comes here a lot. That photograph is precious to her for some reason. It was cruel to take it away.

JAMES

Things are only precious when you lose them.

Opening his wallet, JAMES counts out some cash and hands it to PEARL who squirrels it away discreetly in her bra. He then leaves her to probe the photograph for its secrets.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - DAY.

A pile of LILY's unopened birthday gifts lie in the corner. She resolves to open them- a chore. She picks up a long rectangular one, reads the card: 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY! LOTS OF LOVE, MEREDITH, EMIL AND ANTHONY XXX.'

The wrapping paper is carelessly torn away, the black case it reveals snapped opened and the brand new flute inside presented on a bed of blue velvet.

LILY examines it's shining metal, holds it as she imagines it to be held and blows in the mouthpiece. At first a hiss, then a stifled whistle, then an almost perfect note rings out.

EXT. BUSY ROADSIDE. COFFEE STAND - DAY.

JAMES stands blowing at his coffee while the KEY HOLDER, now dressed in the sobering guise of a civilian, talks, his own disposable cup steaming in his hand.

KEY HOLDER

She always wears the wig, usually comes in on a Tuesday or a Thursday, sometimes a Friday. She was hesitant about the drugs at first, but then, you know... duck to water. She didn't recognise me during the last cycle, but this time round... I dunno, Jay... It was like she'd forgotten me, but she still knew me, like, in her bones, unconsciously or something. She just went with it after that.

JAMES nods distractedly, sips his coffee.

KEY HOLDER (CONT'D)

She wasn't too happy when she discovered the fall is an illusion... The pattern will change now, right? Because the risk is gone. What is it you called it?

JAMES

An escalation.

KEY HOLDER

Yeah. So, in other words, she's gonna do something stupid.

The KEY HOLDER watches JAMES, noticing his distraction.

KEY HOLDER (CONT'D)

What's taking so long? You've never had to take anyone through so many cycles before. She broke or what?

Ignoring the question, JAMES hands the KEY HOLDER a wad of pre-prepared bank notes with an air of finality.

JAMES

Thanks, Bahla. I'll be in touch.

JAMES strides away.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. LOFT - DAY.

A large sheet of tarpaulin is whipped away. LILY sighs.

Before her stands a piano and a collection of cases- each one the shape of a different instrument- along with broken music stands and various music books. It's a sad sight to behold.

The flute case is dropped on top of a box.

LILY lifts the piano lid, each key begging to be touched. She gives in, playing a beautiful, heart-stopping melody.

Abruptly, the music stops, the silence heavy with its loss.

The tarpaulin is quickly spread over the top again.

INT. SCHOOL. CLASSROOM - DAY.

ANTHONY sits drawing a picture of himself and LILY in the park when the TEACHER comes over, crouching beside him.

TEACHER

That's wonderful, Anthony.

She speaks slowly, her smile alarming in its friendliness.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Why don't you take a break. Your uncle needs a word. Then you can come back and finish. OK?

As the TEACHER moves away, ANTHONY looks up at the door where JAMES is waiting awkwardly on the other side of the glass.

ANTHONY

Shit.

INT. SCHOOL. CORRIDOR - DAY.

ANTHONY shuts the door to the classroom, flashes a disapproving look JAMES' way and walks toward the exit.

ANTHONY

Come on, Uncle James.

Obediently, JAMES follows with TWENTY TWO in tow.

EXT. SCHOOL. PLAYGROUND - DAY.

While ANTHONY sits bobbing on a frog on a spring, JAMES sits on a nearby slide watching TWENTY TWO frolic on the grass.

ANTHONY

Fucking-a, James. You have to come here of all places to see me?

JAMES

Meredith never leaves you alone in the house, what was I meant to do? This can't happen on the phone.

ANTHONY

Still. I'm working for crying out loud.

JAMES

I know, but you're always working.

ANTHONY folds his arms, still bobbing.

JAMES (CONT'D)

So.

ANTHONY

So?

JAMES

How is she?

ANTHONY

(Sharply)

You took the photograph away.

JAMES rises, paces.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

She fell out with Meredith. Screwed our day right up. All that work trying to get her to have fun and you fuck with her, her sister fucks with her. I'd say maybe her husband provided her with some comfort, but the likelihood of that marshmallow sensing changes in the complex emotional landscape of a woman experiencing the melancholia is slim to none.

Ceasing to pace, JAMES stares beyond the playground.

JAMES

She is complex. Human beings are complex machines. They don't have happy switches.

ANTHONY

Then why are you still treating her like she's just another client when we both know she's not?

This needles JAMES and he gazes back questioningly.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

She's Lily.

The cherub's eyes are full of earnestness.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Stop hiring other people. If you
care about her at all, you'll find
a way to help her yourself.

JAMES considers this. He then pulls out a small teddy bear.

JAMES
Your money's inside. Tell the
family not to spend it all at once.

For a moment ANTHONY looks as if he's offended, but he soon
swallows his pride and takes the bear.

ANTHONY
A teddy bear? Really? I'm supposed
to be twelve, not two.

JAMES
Well, I don't know, do I?

The tension falls away as they allow themselves to laugh.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Where are they sending you?

ANTHONY
I've got a gig in Hampstead. Well-
to-do couple want a shy boy with
attention deficit disorder.

JAMES
Your job's so fucked up.

ANTHONY
Look who's talking.

JAMES half smiles, nods.

JAMES
She won't remember you broke
character, Ant. Or anything
specific about your time together.
New cycle, new memories. Don't
bring it up. I don't want to have
to start all over again.

ANTHONY
I wasn't born yesterday.

JAMES
Yeah, none of us were...

ANTHONY watches TWENTY TWO digging at a patch of soil.

ANTHONY

What's the deal with your dog?

JAMES

What do you mean?

ANTHONY

I mean... what's the deal? Do you get a kick out of watching her die?

JAMES

I get a kick out of watching her live. I had a longevity dog once. They don't age physically, but... that excitableness they have... they lose that after a while. Twenty Two's coming up for twelve next month, that's a lifespan to be proud of. She's survived cataracts, hip surgery, this time a couple fed her chocolate because they didn't know she wasn't a long lifer. And she's still got it, that look. She doesn't bounce off the walls when I come home anymore, but she wags her tail and looks at me with those big eyes, you know, a look that climbs all over you even if she can't. I love that look.

ANTHONY

But one day she'll die and you'll be sad.

JAMES

So I'll be sad. Sadness isn't the worst thing.

ANTHONY

Tell that to Lily.

JAMES

I'm trying...

JAMES whistles for TWENTY TWO and sets off.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Good luck, Ant.

ANTHONY

You too.

ANTHONY climbs down and makes his way back to class.

INT. LONDON VICTORIA TRAIN STATION - DAY.

LILY is an island stranded in a sea of slow moving COMMUTERS. She twists and pulls at her wedding ring, her mind churning.

The ring falls off and her heart leaps.

She gropes her way through the legs of PEOPLE eager to pass through the barriers, snatching it up just as her turn comes.

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. LILY'S OFFICE - DAY.

The desk drawer opens, the pack of cigarettes slide- the drawer shuts- the drawer opens...

LILY's staring into space, no makeup, her hair tied up. There are files on her desk, but she ignores them. It's 10:12am.

The light on her face begins to shift- she looks at the clock again: 12:55pm. Immediately, she rises.

INT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY.

LILY sits before the restored photograph. Her mobile vibrates- work calling. She ignores it, tears falling from her cheeks.

After a time, PEARL arrives beside her, holding out a tissue.

PEARL
Why are you crying?

LILY
I don't know.

INT. LILY'S CAR - EVENING.

LILY pulls into her driveway. She sees ANTHONY riding his bike next door and they briefly make eye contact.

When she stops she takes a second, something occurring to her. She looks back, but she can't see ANTHONY for the hedge between them. Forgetting it, she opens the car door...

Meanwhile, ANTHONY is forcibly shaking off his hurt.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. HALLWAY - EVENING.

LILY shuts the front door and pauses. There's a mirror on the wall. She stares at herself.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DINING ROOM - NIGHT.

LILY sits at the table while RICHARD dismantles the takeaway food from a large brown paper bag in the kitchen.

RICHARD
Nope. It's not here. We did order
the cashew didn't we?

The table is already laid and LILY focuses on the painted flowers lining the plate in front of her.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Honey?

LILY
Richard. Would you come sit down.

RICHARD
Huh?

RICHARD is too busy checking the foil containers.

LILY
Richard.

RICHARD
What is it?

LILY
Would you come here?

He looks at her, confused.

RICHARD
The food will go cold.

LILY
Please.

Reluctantly, wiping his hands on a tea towel, he faces her.

LILY hesitates.

RICHARD
Lily, honey, Chinese doesn't stay
hot and it's impossible to reheat-

LILY
I'm pregnant.

RICHARD pulls out a chair, sits, takes her hand.

RICHARD
(Overjoyed)
I can't believe it. I knew
everything was about to change.

LILY
Nothing changes.

RICHARD
Yes it does. Look, I wanted to save
this until after dinner, but...

He finds his briefcase, takes out a letter. Returning, he
places it before LILY like some sacred object.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
You open it.

LILY looks down at the envelope. There's a stamp on the front
reading: FAMILY PLANNING AGENCY.

LILY
Richard-

RICHARD
OK, I'll do it.

Excitedly, he snatches the envelope, tears it open, reads...
his face slowly falls. He re-reads, lowers the page.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
I don't understand.

LILY
(Almost to herself)
It doesn't matter...

RICHARD
Wait...

He frowns at her.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
You told them you smoke?

LILY
I-

RICHARD
You told them?

LILY
What was I supposed to do? They
asked the question.

RICHARD
Fuck.

LILY
Richard-

RICHARD

They're not going to let us have a baby so we can blow cancer in its face everyday till its eighteen! What were you thinking? Why didn't you lie like a normal person? Everyone lies with these things! Why couldn't you?

LILY

I was too busy lying about everything else. Smoking didn't seem important.

RICHARD

What does that mean?- It doesn't matter! Maybe we can contest... say it was a mistake...

LILY grips RICHARD's arm, looking him square in the eye.

LILY

Richard. I have the melancholia. I don't want a baby. I want to die.

Confusion plays across RICHARD's face.

LILY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

RICHARD

Tiger-Lily, I know you've been... down recently, but the melancholia? That's not you. It's probably hormones. You know, hormones. That's what happens with pregnancy. You're not yourself.

LILY

What do you know about who I am?

Taken aback, but pushing forward determinedly:

RICHARD

Dying isn't a solution to anything. It's giving up. It's losing. You're a survivor, remember? We both are. We'll get through this together.

LILY takes her hand away.

LILY

No. We won't.

It takes RICHARD a moment to realise that this is the end. Afterwards, he stands, not knowing what to do with himself.

RICHARD

I don't understand... You're not even upset.

LILY

I am upset.

RICHARD

I don't see it. Is that what the melancholia does? Make you so dead inside, you have no choice but to kill the outside?

LILY throws her plate against the wall, shattering it.

LILY

(Furious)

Does that help? What can I do to make this easier for you? Please, just tell me what to say, who to be, what to think, how to feel!

This anger is new to RICHARD. He doesn't know what to say.

LILY (CONT'D)

This wasn't the plan! This was never my plan!

RICHARD

What are you saying? You don't... want our baby?

Her eyes are two cold daggers.

LILY

It's a bit late to start asking me what I want.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DINING ROOM - LATER.

Sitting, RICHARD sorrows the past half hour while LILY can be seen through the window getting into her car.

RICHARD looks at the broken plate.

Retrieving a dustpan, he starts to sweep up the shards. After a moment he stops, covering his tearing eyes with his hand.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. ANTHONY'S ROOM - DAY.

ANTHONY

(Arguing into a phone)

It's in cash, mum, what do you want me to do?... I can't just go to the bank, you know that...

(MORE)

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Never, I can never slip away, five minutes and Meredith would have the police and every neighbour within ten miles looking for me...

ANTHONY looks out the window, watching as LILY drives away.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Yeah, well, we're all desperate... having a nice house doesn't help as much as you'd think...

INT. RISK CLUB - NIGHT.

LILY's rocking hard on the dance floor. She's not wearing the wig and it's clear from the way she moves that she's drunk.

INT. RISK CLUB - LATER.

LILY approaches the KEY HOLDER. He does a little magic trick, showing his empty hands before producing a pillbox.

Disinterested, LILY shakes her head, speaking into his ear. He gestures powerlessness before gazing up into the balcony.

LILY turns to spy the TEEN KEY HOLDER while the KEY HOLDER holds ten fingers up in the air.

Agreeing, the TEEN KEY HOLDER beckons LILY.

INT. RISK CLUB. OUTSIDE RABBIT HOLE 10 - NIGHT.

LILY stares at the white tab stuck to the tip of her finger, a coin printed on its surface. She licks it off, swallows.

The TEEN KEY HOLDER unlocks the door, allowing LILY to enter first before locking it behind them.

There's a statue outside depicting a casino roulette wheel.

INT. RABBIT HOLE 10 - CONTINUOUS.

Music, a repetitive dirge, low mutters, dim lighting.

The order LILY notices what the room contains- the PEOPLE, the table, the gun.

The PEOPLE. A different class from the CLUBBERS satisfied with the dance floor. They're many, rich, loud, their style a precarious balance of trendy and psychotic.

A TOUGH WOMAN sporting more tattoos than clothes lets out a puff of smoke, which to LILY's eyes slows in the air. She then speeds up, picking at her teeth with a fingernail.

There's a SUAVE MAN in the corner holding a ferret, laughing manically and he seems to rewind and repeat.

LILY swallows, her breath loud. This drug is different...

The table stands in the centre around which everyone is crowded. It's metal, like ones found in interrogation rooms.

The gun. LILY stares at the gun lying on the table.

She then notices the blood splattered across the floor and the half drawn curtain at the back, barely covering the foot of what looks like a body bag.

INT. RISK CLUB - NIGHT.

JAMES is fighting for the attention of the BARMAN.

Giving up, he spots the KEY HOLDER and makes a bee line for him through a group of overly excited DANCERS.

INT. RABBIT HOLE 10 - NIGHT.

It's LILY's turn.

The gun is wiped of sweat and loaded with one bullet by the CHERUB WAITRESS who handles the weapon with the flair of a croupier- a performance that dismisses foul play.

INT. RISK CLUB - NIGHT.

The KEY HOLDER points up at the door to Rabbit Hole 10, shaking his head in refusal at something JAMES has said.

However, apparently there are no hard feelings because JAMES pats him on the back, leaning in close to thank him.

INT. OUTSIDE RABBIT HOLE 10 - NIGHT.

JAMES arrives outside the door, pulling out the KEY HOLDER's key which he lifted from him moments ago only to find its the key to door number 7 only- shit...

INT. RABBIT HOLE 10 - NIGHT.

The TEEN KEY HOLDER is watching LILY, fascinated.

INT. OUTSIDE RABBIT HOLE 10 - NIGHT.

JAMES falls to picking the lock.

INT. RABBIT HOLE 10 - NIGHT.

The CHERUB WAITRESS places the prepared gun on the table.
Suddenly the room erupts in chaos as the betting begins.

INT. OUTSIDE RABBIT HOLE 10 - NIGHT.

Mid-way through picking the lock and JAMES is struggling.

INT. RABBIT HOLE 10 - NIGHT.

Battling her nerves, LILY picks up the gun, holding it to her head. She stares into the crowd of strangers.

Suddenly the TEEN KEY HOLDER turns as JAMES enters. She disapproves of his means of entry with a look.

LILY's gaze finds him, catches, won't let go.

He's stony-faced and tense, begging her with his eyes not to-

LILY pulls the trigger. JAMES flinches.

An empty chamber. Pandemonium.

Pale and uncertain, LILY looks at the gun in her hand and, when she raises it for a second attempt, JAMES sweeps in. He pries the gun from her fingers and leads her out.

Unconcerned, the TEEN KEY HOLDER watches as JAMES flashes her a begrudgingly respectful nod at the door.

EXT. RISK CLUB - NIGHT.

JAMES leads LILY down the street. She pauses by a side alley, ducks in, vomits.

EXT. LONDON VICTORIA TRAIN STATION - NIGHT.

JAMES and LILY approach the entrance. LILY's twitchy, upset.

LILY
I'm not normally like this.

JAMES
I know.

LILY
Honestly. I've never even been to a risk club before.

They draw to a stop at the same time.

LILY (CONT'D)
That was a lie.

JAMES
It's OK.

Tears form, she's tense with the effort of suppressing them.

LILY
Apparently it's a virtue, not being
very good at lying.

JAMES
Wise words.

LILY
(Confidingly)
I feel like I'm sinking.

JAMES
It happens. Otherwise how would we
know when we're floating?

He takes her hand, more an embrace than a shake.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Life isn't about being happy all
the time, Lily.

The tighter she holds on, the more he feels compelled to pull
away, his fingers running over her wedding ring as they part.

LILY smiles hollowly, wiping at a stray tear.

LILY
Thank you.

JAMES nods and starts off down the street. His pace picks up.
He passes a HOMELESS MAN holding a sign: PLEASE HELP. 42
YEARS OLD. NEED MONEY FOR LONGEVITY SHOT DOWN PAYMENT. JAMES
empties his pockets of coins.

Striding purposefully, no longer concerned with the world
around him, he bumps into a ETHEREAL MAN (looks 20) who
glares at him with intensely blue eyes.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT.

JAMES stands in front of a vast array of dog and cat food.

GOTH (O.S.)
Surely no animal needs this much
choice.

JAMES turns to find a GOTH (looks 21), pierced, pink streaks
in his hair, sucking casually on a lollypop.

GOTH (CONT'D)

And they don't even get to choose.
We do.

He eyes JAMES.

GOTH (CONT'D)

What number we at?

JAMES

Twenty two.

GOTH

Haven't seen you since eighteen.

JAMES stares at the dog food. Moments pass.

JAMES

I just need more time.

GOTH

We all need more time. But
everything comes to an end
eventually, James.

JAMES

Everything?

GOTH

Yeah, everything. Look at mankind.
Even when we can live forever
something like the melancholia
springs out of evolution or God or
whatever to keep us in check. It's
give and take. Give- eternal life.
Take- the desire for death. Give-
you and I have jobs. Take... look
at what we give.

He watches JAMES, helplessly absorbed in the cans.

GOTH (CONT'D)

Valerie's worried about you.

JAMES

Valerie's worried about her career.
She just wants to be number one on
the leader board again. And you...
I don't know why you're here,
Ethan. Maybe The Engine asked you
to come. Or maybe you're just
curious and you want to see if the
rumours are true, that I'm hung up.

ETHAN

Ouch! And yours are the skills
everyone wants- it's deductive, not
ree-ductive.

(MORE)

ETHAN (CONT'D)

No doubt what you say could apply
to any number of Reapers we know,
but do you really think that of me?
Of Val?

JAMES regards him for a moment.

JAMES

No. No I don't... I'm just hung up.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

JAMES enters, switches on a lamp.

Two labrador puppies welcome him. He drops a bag of dog food,
tears a hole in the bottom and watches them chomp on the
escaping kibble. He passes into the living room.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

JAMES stops dead.

LILY's standing by the window, TWENTY TWO fussing at her
feet. She turns.

LILY

Nice dogs.

They stare at each other.

LILY (CONT'D)

I couldn't go home. I started
walking. I ended up here.

JAMES glances at the notice board above his desk. It's LILY's
life pieced together out of images- flowers, the Vernon-Crest
building, her brand of cigarettes, a CIRKUS postcard.

LILY (CONT'D)

Your neighbour let me in. Ingrid?
She said she's always liked me,
when are we going to settle down?

JAMES looks as if the world's caving in on him.

LILY (CONT'D)

I've been here before.

She searches the flat with her eyes.

LILY (CONT'D)

That dog is my puppy's mother. My
whole life is plastered over that
wall. And these...

Frowning, she picks up a pile of photographs from the coffee table- which JAMES only notices now along with a collection of pill bottles. She holds them in her hands, each one a slightly different abstract image of a woman by a window...

LILY (CONT'D)
They're me, aren't they? My...
disease... and the one at the
museum... you arranged everything.
The club, the pills, Doctor Yeung.

She gestures at the pill bottles, then grimaces:

LILY (CONT'D)
Christopher Dixon...

She throws the photographs at JAMES angrily, breaking her reserve. They scatter and fall to the floor.

LILY (CONT'D)
After everything why did he deserve
to die and not me!

JAMES can't quite find the words...

LILY (CONT'D)
How many times have we done this? I
assume you don't usually bring
clients here. Were we lovers? Did I
cheat on my husband?

He manages to look her in the eye.

JAMES
We only talked. You never stayed
and I never asked you to.

She nods mechanically.

LILY
You're fired.

He starts picking up the photographs, infuriating LILY.

LILY (CONT'D)
I bet that's never happened before.

JAMES' eyes are stuck on a photo. LILY snatches it.

LILY (CONT'D)
Give me that!

The image pulls her in...

INT. THE DEATH BUREAU. INTERVIEW ROOM - FLASHBACK.

A multitude of moments all compressed into one vision unfold.

JAMES takes LILY's photograph in front of the window again and again. At first they behave as strangers, then gradually they become more comfortable with each other.

Laughing, LILY's voice echoes across the memories...

INT. JAMES' FLAT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

While LILY sits on the sofa, dazed, JAMES is perched on the coffee table, holding a glass of water to her lips.

JAMES
Are you feeling better?

Wearily, she nods. JAMES turns on a mini flashlight, which he produces as if from nowhere and shines it in LILY's eyes.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You have a flood?

Seeing that she doesn't understand:

JAMES (CONT'D)
Of memories?

LILY
Is that what it was?

JAMES
You can never really delete them.

LILY
There were so many...

JAMES
I'm sorry if it scared you.

She stares at him, at his concern for her, remembering...

He turns off the flashlight. LILY pulls him in. They kiss.

With difficulty, JAMES forces himself to stop. He pulls away, standing at a distance, collecting his thoughts.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You've fired me, followed me-
that's how you ended up here the
first time- you've reported me to
the police, you've confronted me,
once you even hired an
investigator... You've never kissed
me before.

He looks at her.

JAMES (CONT'D)
What happened?

Upset, sinking inwardly:

LILY
I left Richard...

JAMES looks slightly torn.

LILY (CONT'D)
And I'm pregnant.

JAMES looks completely stunned.

JAMES
That's never happened before.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

JAMES lies on the sofa, made up as a bed, staring out the window at the streaming lights of the city.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

LILY lies in JAMES' bed with one of the puppies, also staring out the window. A phone on the side table rings.

JAMES (O.S.)
Can you get that?

Unsure, LILY picks up the phone.

LILY
Hello?

INT. JAMES' FLAT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

JAMES has his mobile pressed to his ear.

JAMES
Hi.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Relaxing back into her pillow, LILY smiles.

LILY
Hi.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. KITCHEN - DAY.

JAMES is busy scrambling eggs while LILY is sat at the table lost in thought. The radio is on in the background:

RADIO VOICE

... Longevity technology. Because
remember, nothing's out of reach...

Chilled upbeat music starts to play as JAMES sets breakfast down in front of LILY. A face made out of bacon and eggs smiles back at her.

Pleasantly surprised, she looks up at JAMES who's finishing off two cups of coffee. She digs in.

INT. CAFE - DAY.

Sitting across from one another, JAMES and LILY drink coffee and laugh, oblivious to the moving world around them.

JAMES (V.O.)

We talked for a long time about a lot of things. Mostly treading old ground...

INT. JAMES'S FLAT. KITCHEN - DAY.

Various pots and pans bubble away on the stove while LILY dices and stirs, chatting all the while to JAMES who stands watching her, completely enraptured.

JAMES (V.O.)

But then pieces of the conversation started to become new. She started saying things I've never heard her say before...

LILY tastes the sauce and it drips down her chin. She bursts into laughter as JAMES stuffs a tea towel at her face.

INT. BABY SHOP - DAY.

Wandering the isles, JAMES absentmindedly takes LILY's hand. She's slightly surprised, but doesn't let go.

JAMES (V.O.)

It was like filling in the gaps in this person I thought I knew... she became real for the first time...

Suddenly excited, JAMES lets go of LILY and she watches as he picks out the perfect crib- dadaaaah! He spins the mobile hanging above it and LILY smiles.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. BEDROOM - NIGHT.

JAMES lowers LILY gently onto the bed, stroking her hair out of her face and making love to her tenderly, passionately.

JAMES (V.O.)
And I just wanted to know more, to
know everything about her...

INT. DEATH ENGINE BUREAU. VALERIE'S OFFICE - DAY.

JAMES
I love her.

JAMES waits for a response.

VALERIE is leaning back in her chair, squeezing the life out
of a stress toy at intervals.

VALERIE
And she's just living with you now?

JAMES
Give me a break, Val.

VALERIE
Lily Harding wants to die.

JAMES
She's not going to die.

VALERIE
Because you won't let her.

JAMES
Because she's having a baby.

This VALERIE hears. It's like a bee sting she can't ignore.

VALERIE
She's pregnant?

JAMES
That's what I said.

VALERIE
That's not what you said.

JAMES
She can't-

VALERIE
Don't do that.

JAMES
Do what?

VALERIE
Take the high road on something you
can't understand.

JAMES

Ah, Val, what the fuck...

VALERIE

You can pick up the pieces of your broken heart, but she can't white-knuckle her way through the melancholia. That's a fact.

JAMES

You just want me to take new clients.

VALERIE

Shit off and tell me what you really think.

JAMES

If I'm fucking so much with your fifty year plan, why don't you find yourself another agent? We both know I'm not worth this for the sake of a few successes that happened a lifetime ago.

JAMES stands, throwing a hand up at the wall of past victory.

VALERIE

(Laughs)

As if good Reapers just fall out of the sky! You're mine until I say otherwise, understand?

JAMES

Whatever.

JAMES leaves.

VALERIE throws the stress toy. It flies out the open door, missing JAMES and falling somewhere with a squeak!

Spinning her chair to face the wall, VALERIE is completely concealed by the high back of her chair.

CHERUB AGENT (O.S.)

Trouble in paradise, Val?

Swinging back, VALERIE faces a fellow CHERUB HANDLER (looks 12), slick, suited and smug. He's holding the stress toy.

VALERIE

There's never trouble in paradise, that's why it's paradise.

CHERUB HANDLER

You've gotta reign that one in.

He tosses the stress toy at her. She catches it.

VALERIE

He's fine, it's not his fault he's
blind with love.

CHERUB HANDLER

Blind horses get put down.

VALERIE

Yeah, well, I back my fucking
horses.

Doubtful, the CHERUB HANDLER meanders off while VALERIE
evaluates her options.

INT. JAMES' BLOCK OF FLATS. STAIRS - DAY.

JAMES returns with a bouquet of flowers. He holds the front
door for a passing NEIGHBOUR before trotting up the stairs.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. LIVING ROOM - DAY.

The lock sounds, JAMES enters.

JAMES

It's a nice day outside. I thought
we could wander the market.

JAMES goes into the kitchen, the sound of water running.

JAMES (O.S.) (CONT'D)

There's a recipe for minted lamb
burgers I want to try. How about we
get the lamb at the market?

He comes back in with the flowers in a vase and places it on
the coffee table.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Lily?

INT. JAMES' FLAT. BEDROOM - DAY.

Facing the closed bathroom door, JAMES is very still.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY.

JAMES bursts in, full of fury, expecting the worst.

LILY is lying in the bathtub, her whole body submerged.

Grabbing hold of her, JAMES pulls her out with such force
LILY barely knows what's happening until she's standing on
the bath mat being shaken violently, water flying everywhere.

JAMES

In my home? In my home! Godamn you!
What's the matter with you? What's
the matter with you?

LILY can't catch her breath, she's naked and trembling and
JAMES won't stop shaking her.

LILY

I didn't hear you-

JAMES

What's the matter with you!

LILY

I didn't hear you come in.

JAMES

I'd have found you. Did you think
about that? How I'd carry it with
me, huh?

Finally taking control of her senses, she tries to pull away.

LILY

Like I'll carry Christopher Dixon?

JAMES

It's not just your life anymore!

LILY hits JAMES across the face, forcing him back a step. The
hurt in his eyes isn't just from being struck.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Were you even going to say goodbye?

She stares at him, also hurt.

It's all JAMES can do to embrace her tightly as if even while
holding her he's in danger of losing her.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I can make you happy. If you'll
just let me.

LILY doesn't reciprocate, but nor does she fight him.

Eventually she maneuvers herself out of his arms, snatching a
towel from the rail. Without looking at him:

LILY

I was just taking a bath.
Drowning's not my fix, remember?

She leaves JAMES standing alone, his arms empty.

INT. JAMES' FLAT. LIVING ROOM - DAY.

Wrapped in a towel, still fuming, LILY stops when she sees the flowers on the table, so full and lush and beautiful.

A card reads: 10 YEAR LIFE GUARANTEE.

INT. THE DEATH BUREAU. INTERVIEW ROOM - FLASHBACK.

Flowers overflowing in a vase.

LILY eyes them. She's seated across from JAMES who's too involved in his paperwork to notice her distraction.

JAMES

(Carelessly)

And how do you want to feel when you die?

LILY

I'm not sure I understand.

JAMES

Do you want to feel as if it were planned, inevitable? Like some higher power has intervened? Or would it feel like chance, chaotic and random? Longevity technology means that, to die, the body must experience a trauma from which it can't recover. That's what we offer. A unique, unforeseeable and, above all, permanent end. Sometimes it helps to close your eyes.

LILY does so. After a moment or two:

LILY

I think... I think it would be sudden like in one big burst... and I'd die all at once. It would be as if all the life in me, all the years I've lived just... began to buckle and overlap.

This catches JAMES' attention...

INT. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - DAY.

The photograph dominates the wall in front of LILY.

Inside her bag, her phone rings. It's JAMES, but it's on silent, no vibrate and LILY doesn't notice.

Eventually, she rises, leaves. PEARL notices her as she goes.

EXT. STREET - DAY.

JAMES is waiting when VALERIE's limo pulls up.

INT. VALERIE'S LIMO - DAY.

VALERIE is angrily filing at a chipped nail.

VALERIE

Apparently a week ago The Engine appointed Harding a new Reaper. I only found out today because according to the files, today's D-day. I thought you should know.

JAMES

Who is it?

VALERIE switches on a look of defiance.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(Rapidly)

A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M,N.

She twists away from JAMES' unrelenting gaze.

JAMES (CONT'D)

L? M? M? Michael? Maya? Makhim?

Tightly controlling his temper, JAMES gives up and knocks on the driver's panel.

VALERIE

I'm not done yet.

VALERIE motions to CHARLIE to keep going.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

I wanna tell you to snap out of it. I wanna tell you to grow up, start acting like a man. But, it hasn't done any good so far, so I'll put a lid on it and just say this.

She leans forward in her seat, tossing away the nail file.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

(A matter-of-factly)

My parents had me by mistake. Surprise, surprise. They were too poor to put food on the table let alone afford a child licence. My mum was a good woman, but a total nut.

(MORE)

VALERIE (CONT'D)

She believed in all that god stuff, so she saw longevity technology as a sin, even when she was diagnosed with leukemia and had to give up her job. My father, on the other hand, believed in surviving-impossible for three people on a street cleaner's income. So, he took out a loan and I received the longevity shot on my twelfth birthday. That's life. I got a job as a hire child like every other cherub with a family to support, with a hire mum that couldn't sleep if the house was a mess and a hire dad with a fetish for knee-high socks.

JAMES

I'm sorry.

VALERIE

(Carelessly)

Thanks.

She has JAMES' attention.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

I supported my parents and I saved. By the time I had enough for another shot, my mum was pretty ill, but it was nothing longevity technology couldn't fix. But she still refused to take it. We fought until eventually I gave it to her while she was sleeping. She woke up the next day completely cured and never spoke to me again. A few years later the melancholia set in and a few years after that she walked out into the path of a moving car.

VALERIE leans back again, letting JAMES absorb all this.

INT. LILY'S CAR - DAY.

LILY drives home from the station.

VALERIE (V.O.)

My point is you can't change people, you can't make them love you, you can't make them better than they are and you can't make them live.

INT. VALERIE'S LIMO - DAY.

VALERIE

Call it the wonder of life, call it
sod's law. It's just the way it is.

She glances at JAMES, registering the impact of her words.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

And if you continue to push...

EXT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DRIVEWAY - DAY.

LILY stops the car at the bottom of the drive. Through the window, she can see RICHARD working at the table.

VALERIE (V.O.)

You'll just push them closer to the
edge of the thing you don't
understand.

She squeezes the wheel.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. DINING ROOM - DAY.

LILY appears in the doorway. RICHARD is waiting for her, expectant. Neither says a word.

INT. LILY & RICHARD'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - DAY.

While LILY folds clothes into a suitcase- the bare necessities- Richard is gesticulating wildly.

RICHARD

Please don't do this, Tiger-Lily,
please don't throw everything away
because you're angry.

LILY

That's not why I'm doing this.

She piles her diaries into her handbag.

RICHARD

We were years in the making, it's
always been you and me. Please
don't undo that. We can work
through this.

LILY

There's nothing left to work
through.

Tearfully, RICHARD grabs her hands. LILY avoids his gaze.

RICHARD
I can do better, I can be better.

LILY
Richard, please...

He holds her, trying to gather her closer than possible.

RICHARD
I can make you happy.

LILY closes her eyes, a tear falls. She can't move.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Please. Please don't leave me. I'm
lost without you. If you go, I'll
be alone and miserable and I'll
spend the rest of my life wishing
you were here with me. Please. You
make my life worth living.

She opens her eyes.

LILY
I'm what makes your life worth
living?

Releasing herself, shaking her head:

LILY (CONT'D)
I can't be, Richard. I can't be
your reason to live... You have to
find something... something more in
this world...
(Realising)
And that's OK because you have the
rest of forever to find it.

She releases herself, leaving RICHARD at a complete loss.

RICHARD
What about the baby?

LILY winces and shuts the suitcase.

EXT. LILY'S CAR - DAY.

With the suitcase in the back, LILY bundles into the driver's seat with her handbag, pushing it over into the passenger seat. A diary falls out and she picks it up, open at the first page.

She reads, '1st August. This feeling of hopelessness isn't going away and Richard doesn't seem to understand...'

She flicks through until she comes to another entry, '1st December. This feeling of hopelessness isn't going away and Richard doesn't seem to understand...'

Frowning, she flicks past a few more pages to, '1st March. This feeling of hopelessness isn't going away and Richard doesn't seem to understand...'

Abandoning the diary, she turns the key in the ignition and whacks it in reverse.

A knock at the window- MEREDITH. LILY winds the window down.

MEREDITH

Hey! You're home early.

LILY

(Distracted)

Yeah... Actually, I left something at the office. I have to go back.

LILY looks past her sister at the neighbouring driveway. The boot of MEREDITH's car is open, a suitcase waiting beside it. ANTHONY sits on the doorstep, wearing a coat and backpack.

MEREDITH

Are you OK?

Caught on the sight of ANTHONY:

LILY

I'm fine.

Noticing the suitcase on the back seat, MEREDITH glances at LILY's house before putting a hand on her sister's arm.

MEREDITH

What happened?

LILY

It's fine. Please, let go.

MEREDITH

Did you and Richard fight? Is it the licence?

LILY

It's fine! Everything's fine!

MEREDITH snatches the keys from the ignition, the car dies.

MEREDITH

Come inside.

LILY

Meredith! I have somewhere I have to be! Give me my keys!

At the sound of her raised voice, ANTHONY stands up, watches.

MEREDITH
Come inside and we'll talk.

LILY
I'm not a child!

ANTHONY battles the impulse to intervene.

MEREDITH
Lily, what's gotten into you?

Taking a deep breath, eyes forward, regaining control:

LILY
Meredith, you're my sister and I
love you.

She looks at MEREDITH.

LILY (CONT'D)
I have a real chance at happiness,
but not if I stay here. For once,
do something for me. Give me my
keys and let me go.

Unsure, MEREDITH glances back at ANTHONY. Then, slowly,
reluctantly, she relinquishes the keys.

LILY seizes them, starts the car.

LILY (CONT'D)
Your kid's gonna hate you- they say
that's normal, so don't worry.
You'll still be the best mum ever.

Speechless, MEREDITH watches as her sister speeds off before
turning back to the house where ANTHONY stands waiting.

EXT. CAFE - NIGHT.

Neglecting his coffee, JAMES sits at the window watching the
alley across the street that leads to the The Death Engine.

After a while, a TALL WOMAN (looks 25) exits, Asian, long
black hair, stylishly dressed in boots and a leather jacket.

JAMES rises, spins into his coat and heads out.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - NIGHT.

Sitting at the counter, MEREDITH nurses her worry.

ANTHONY appears in the doorway, still wearing his coat.
Gradually, uncertainly, he approaches her.

ANTHONY

Are we leaving?

Nodding slowly, MEREDITH bursts into tears. ANTHONY holds her, awkwardly at first, then less so. She takes a fistful of his sleeve, letting it all out.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

JAMES watches from across the street as the TALL WOMAN enters a door by a corner shop, a shopping bag hanging from one arm.

INT. BLOCK OF FLATS. NUMBER 14 - NIGHT.

The TALL WOMAN enters, swinging the door shut and greeting a cat. She removes a tin of cat food from the shopping bag.

TALL WOMAN

I bet you've waited all day for this! Yes you have...

But the door hasn't shut and it opens again now as JAMES enters, startling the TALL WOMAN.

Moving inside, JAMES examines the flat. It's not very different from his own, an overriding sense of organisation only slightly at odds with patches of messiness and chaos.

She too has a notice board. He zeroes in on LILY's picture, the beginnings of her life in notes and images...

JAMES

Maya.

MAYA

James.

JAMES

This is gonna sound crazy...

MAYA

(Quoting)

When a death is issued, a Reaper is assigned. The choice of Reaper is entirely the decision of The Engine.

JAMES

She's my /client-

MAYA

The Engine has the right to assign multiple Reapers or to terminate or reassign deaths at their discretion and without warning.

JAMES

I need to talk to you as a human being, not as a mouthpiece for The Engine. I know the fine print.

MAYA

(Dropping the quotation)
There's nothing to discuss, James.

JAMES

Please, just listen-

MAYA

(Resuming the quotation)
The design of the death is the responsibility of the assigned Reaper.

JAMES

Maya-

MAYA

Once a death has been approved, there is no stopping it without written authorisation from The Engine. Do you have written authorisation?

JAMES

No.

MAYA

Then get the fuck out of my home. You had no right to come here.

INT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

Seated at the computer, ANTHONY breaks the screen saver and is prompted for a password. He thinks, types: A,N,T...

Reconsidering, he deletes the letters. Types: D,O,N,N,A... He's in. He opens MEREDITH's address book, searches. LILY-WORK: VERNON-CREST LIFE INSURANCE DEPARTMENT, 16TH FLOOR.

INT. BLOCK OF FLATS. FLAT 14 - NIGHT.

JAMES paces heatedly, trying to figure out his next move.

JAMES

Where is she now?

MAYA

I can't tell you that.

EXT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. BACK GARDEN - NIGHT.

With his coat and backpack on, ANTHONY climbs out of his bedroom window and down via the tree house.

EXT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE. FRONT GARDEN - CONTINUOUS.

Stealthily, ANTHONY uses the car to hide from view of the kitchen window where MEREDITH can be seen pouring herself a glass of whiskey. She downs it in one.

ANTHONY grabs his bike, pushes off, cycles away.

INT. FLAT 14 - NIGHT.

Frantically, JAMES is pulling things out of drawers, leafing through paper and, in short, devastating MAYA's desk.

MAYA

It's too late! Stop this!

MAYA tries to stop him, but he shoves her away.

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT.

Negotiating his way down the aisle of a crowded train, ANTHONY finds a seat. When the other PASSENGERS realise he's alone, they start to stare. ANTHONY takes a breath, keeps his cool.

INT. FLAT 14 - NIGHT.

Having no luck at the desk, JAMES pulls out his mobile.

MAYA

You're acting like I'm trying to take something from you.

Cunningly, MAYA manages to wrap her hand around the slim neck of a flower vase while JAMES is occupied with his phone.

MAYA (CONT'D)

But my responsibility has always been to my client.

He ignores her, trying to concentrate.

LILY (O.S)

(Voice mail recording)

Hi, you've reached Lily Harding...

MAYA

Lily Harding wants to end her life.

JAMES hangs up and glares at MAYA.

JAMES

You don't know her.

MAYA

I'm a Reaper. I don't have to fuck her to know her.

Grabbing her:

JAMES

I know you! I know you! Look at this shit hole of a flat! Mine's no different. We're no different. We have a talent for getting people to trust us, for manipulation, for turning estimation into certainty and that's our function. Human beings are nothing but psychological equations to us. And look at us. Look at how we live. Eating, sleeping, no time to spend our money, staring into the black hole of death everyday and envying the people we toss in. Are you satisfied, Maya? Are you content with the illusion of getting to know people, of losing everyone you care about, with day after day of mind numbing loneliness?

MAYA

Stop it!

JAMES

The thing about forever? It-never-fucking-ends.

MAYA

Stop it!

MAYA breaks the vase over his head, shattered pieces flying.

INT. STATION - DAY.

Pushed and shoved, ANTHONY experiences the crush LILY faces every morning, only he's half the size of everyone else.

INT. FLAT 14 - NIGHT.

MAYA drives JAMES into the desk, punching him hard across the jaw. He pushes her back, but she comes at him again, striking him in the ribs so he crumples in pain.

Losing it, JAMES throws her over the sofa, coming about as she falls to the floor. He grabs her by the collar, hits her, again and again...

She's still, gasping, choking on blood.

He drops her and backs away, shocked at his violence.

EXT. BUS STOP - NIGHT.

Seated on the bench, ANTHONY watches the number of every passing bus as a COUPLE make out beside him. The WOMAN stops long enough to spy ANTHONY, clearly drunk or high or both.

WOMAN

You lost little boy?

The MAN bursts into maniacal laughter, setting off the WOMAN.

ANTHONY ignores them. He sees his bus, flags it.

INT. FLAT 14 - NIGHT.

JAMES touches his injured temple, his fingers wet with blood. He stares at it, unable to reason it.

Carefully, apologetically, he helps MAYA up onto the sofa.

Breathless, bloodied and bruised:

MAYA

I once had a client I had to push off a bridge so he could die in the manner of his choosing. My job came pretty close to murder that day. I had another who only needed me to put a picture of his wife in a particular place before he'd pick up the gun.

(Quoting again)

A permanent death is natural, unforced, simple, but above all, it is set in motion, not by the Reaper, but by the client.

She looks JAMES in the eye, shakes her head.

MAYA (CONT'D)

With Lily Harding? I don't have to do anything.

JAMES looks over at the picture of LILY on MAYA's board then flies out the door.

Ambivalent, MAYA watches him go before closing her eyes- a weak and momentary escape from the devastation JAMES has inflicted on her home, her body, her world.

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. LILY'S OFFICE - NIGHT.

LILY's taking in the view. The lights are off, so the full spectacle of the city can be appreciated in all its glory.

In the distance, there's a billboard advertising cigarettes: 100% SAFE FOR LONG LIFERS! LIVE LIFE RISK FREE!

She pulls out her desk drawer, the pack of cigarettes slide.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT.

LILY climbs the stairs to the top of the building. When she comes to the door to the roof she unhooks the fire alarm.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT.

As the wind pesters her, LILY wedges the door open with the brick. She walks to the edge, lighting a cigarette.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

JAMES exits a taxi and runs toward the Vernon-Crest building where he collides with the revolving doors- locked.

He bangs on the glass for the NIGHT PORTER's attention.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

ANTHONY jumps off the bus and runs down the street.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT.

There's a line of untapped ash culminating at the end of LILY's cigarette. She leans forward, taking in the drop.

The cigarette burns her fingers. She stamps it out.

But the drop draws her back in. She climbs onto the wall, wanting to experience what she was denied at the risk club.

She stands, the city beneath her, the drop calling.

INT. VERNON-CREST BUILDING. LOBBY - NIGHT.

The NIGHT PORTER strains to hear JAMES through the glass.

JAMES
Harding! Lily Harding! Is she up
there? It's an emergency!

Finally the NIGHT PORTER relents and unlocks a side door. But as soon as it's open, before JAMES can step foot inside, ANTHONY speeds past them both into the lobby.

NIGHT PORTER

Hey!

JAMES

Anthony!

Ignoring them, ANTHONY slides under the employee barriers. JAMES tries to follow, but the NIGHT PORTER delays him.

NIGHT PORTER

Hang on, what's going on?

JAMES

Anthony!

Freeing himself of the NIGHT PORTER- who immediately reaches for the reception phone- JAMES runs toward the lifts.

The doors open and ANTHONY gets in. He can't wait for JAMES. He presses the button for the 16th floor. The doors close.

JAMES hits the wall as he draws up before stabbing at the call lift button. A moment later, another lift arrives- bing!

INT. 16TH FLOOR. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

The lift opens and ANTHONY steps out.

ANTHONY

Lily!

No answer. A breeze. He spots the door to the stairwell.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT.

ANTHONY bursts through, looks up- an open door...

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT.

LILY is completely calm and at home standing on the ledge. A few moments pass. She turns.

ANTHONY is standing behind her, out of breath.

LILY

Anthony?

ANTHONY

I- I didn't want you to go without remembering me.

LILY
Remembering you?

ANTHONY
(Emotion brimming)
All the things we did together.
Please remember. You were sad, so
we went to London. We played big
chess and ran around the park and
then we had lunch... It was the
best day of my life.

LILY stares at him.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
You have to remember...

Neither says anything for a time. Then:

LILY
(Thinking)
We ate our favourite food and
climbed onto the roof. Stared at
the stars...

She looks up into the night sky. ANTHONY smiles, relieved.

Just then JAMES appears. When he sees LILY standing on the
ledge, he stops alongside ANTHONY.

JAMES
Lily, hang on! Watch yourself!

LILY looks at herself as if unaware of the danger.

ANTHONY
James paid me to help you. But I
don't want the money anymore.

ANTHONY takes out the envelope of money and tosses it at
JAMES. It hits his arm and he rubs it in confusion.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
It was stupid of him, but he's in
love with you, so he doesn't know
what he's doing.

JAMES
What?

ANTHONY
(To LILY)
And I love you too- probably not in
the same way- but I do. You have no
idea how lonely I was before I met
you.

At the mention of loneliness and, seeing the sincerity in ANTHONY's eyes, JAMES looks lost suddenly.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

But I know you're unhappy, so I won't try to stop you. I just wanted to say those things and... to say goodbye.

JAMES

Wait, what?

(To LILY)

Lily, please, just step down and consider this a second.

LILY looks back down at the drop, something dawning on her, everything suddenly makes sense.

She smiles at ANTHONY, spinning her finger in the air. He turns round, tears falling.

JAMES watches, devastated- it's the end of the road.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Was there ever anything I could have done?

LILY shakes her head sadly.

LILY

There's just no such thing as forever.

Slowly, wanting to say more, but stopping himself, JAMES turns round too. He then hears her voice as if she's whispering in his ear.

LILY (CONT'D)

Goodbye, James.

JAMES presses his eyes closed. A gust of wind. At the last moment, he turns back, catching sight of her just as she disappears over the edge.

FADE TO WHITE:

INT. THE DEATH BUREAU. INTERVIEW ROOM - FLASHBACK.

JAMES

And how do you want to feel when you die?

LILY

I'm not sure I understand.

JAMES

Do you want to feel as if it were planned, inevitable? Like some higher power has intervened? Or would it feel like chance, chaotic and random? Longevity technology means that, to die, the body must experience a trauma from which it can't recover. That's what we offer. A unique, unforeseeable and, above all, permanent end... Sometimes it helps to close your eyes.

She does so. After a moment or two:

LILY

I think... I think it would be sudden... like in one big burst... and I'd go all at once. It would be as if all the life in me, all the years I've lived just... began to buckle and overlap.

This catches JAMES' attention. He listens, intrigued.

LILY (CONT'D)

It would be like drowning, but in an instant. And although my body feels as if it's falling and my breath is impossible to catch... I'd feel like I'm lifting too in every direction. It would be incredible and violent and devastating like how a star ends, in a great flash of life preceding its demise. Like... a farewell cry, not a scream, but triumphant laughter. Like beating an old friend at a game.

LILY comes back to the room.

LILY (CONT'D)

Is that enough?

JAMES is lost in her. He looks down at his form- tick boxes beside unremarkable words: drowning, falling, suffocation...

JAMES

Yes. Thank you Lily.

LILY smiles.

In succession, JAMES takes out a camera, wipes the lens, gestures for LILY to stand by the window and- snap!

The flash erupts... and from within the light emerges the outline of a woman made up of black, white and blue shadows.

CUT TO BLACK:

TITLE: THREE MONTHS LATER.

INT. ANTHONY'S NEW HOUSE - DAY.

ANTHONY sits at his desk. His homework is open in front of him, but he's staring out the window, lost in thought.

NEW MOTHER (O.S.)
Jonathan! I hope you're doing your homework up there!

His only reaction is in his voice- a perfect kid's imitation.

ANTHONY
Aw, Mum! Do I have to?

Something catches ANTHONY's attention out the window.

NEW MOTHER (O.S.)
I don't want to hear it, Jonathan!
I want those sums done before dinner or no dessert!

ANTHONY drops his pencil and rises, his movements totally detached from the emotion in his voice.

ANTHONY
Argh! Fine!

He pulls a shoebox out from under the bed. Inside are a boy's innocent treasures: a toy robot, some playing cards... He rummages until he finds a pack of cigarettes and a lighter.

Returning to the window, he stands in the repose of a much older man. He deftly lights the cigarette and sighs smoke.

The view from the window- there's a black limo parked across the road. JAMES stands alongside it, looking patiently up at ANTHONY's new house. TWENTY TWO sits beside him.

ANTHONY looks at his room. A child's room full of childish things. He focuses on a shelf of collectible model cars.

EXT. ANTHONY'S NEW HOUSE - DAY.

The window of the limo slides down to reveal VALERIE.

VALERIE
It doesn't look like he's coming.

JAMES grins. VALERIE looks at the house.

ANTHONY is standing outside. He approaches the car.

JAMES

Nice house.

ANTHONY

He's a musician. She's a chef.

JAMES

So, you're doing well then?

ANTHONY

I'm making do. That's all I've ever done.

JAMES

How's that working out for you?

ANTHONY turns briefly toward the house, not really seeing it.

ANTHONY

Cherubs aren't real unless they're playing a part. That's just how it is.

JAMES nods.

JAMES

You understood her, Ant... and you understood her unhappiness... The unofficial motto of The Death Engine is, death is no evil thing. And you understood that too, even when it came to Lily standing at the edge of a skyscraper.

He gestures at VALERIE.

JAMES (CONT'D)

This is Valerie- that's her real name. Before she became my handler she delivered more successful deaths with The Engine than any other Reaper on record.

Just then ANTHONY'S NEW MOTHER (looks 25) hurries outside.

NEW MOTHER

Johnny! You know better than to speak to strangers! Come here at once!

JAMES

(To ANTHONY)

Cherubs make great Reapers apparently.

NEW MOTHER

Jonathan!

ANTHONY looks into JAMES' eyes and they seem to agree silently with one another.

JAMES opens the car door. ANTHONY gets in, doesn't look back.

NEW MOTHER (CONT'D)

Jonathan! Jonathan!

JAMES and TWENTY TWO get in after him.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS.

ANTHONY

My name is David Alistair
McKendrick.

VALERIE

Welcome to The Death Engine, David.

EXT. ANTHONY'S NEW HOUSE. LIMO - DAY.

The limo speeds off down the street.

FADE OUT.