

YOUTH IN ASIA

By Joe Dorsch

FADE IN

There's a series of video clips depicting human suffering: sickly patients in hospitals, close-ups of abuse victims, innocent civilians being shot, children overseas covered in dirt and mud, firefighters consumed by infernos...

All the while, a calming voice narrates:

VOICE

Death, disaster, poverty, famine. The world can be overwhelming, overpowering, terrifying, and it's only getting worse.

The video abruptly switches to upbeat footage: families united and celebrating, an elderly man walking in a park, dogs and cats bouncing on a trampoline.

VOICE

But thanks to right-to-die legislation, there's a way out of the chaos, out of despair, and towards a peaceful, happy, and dignified escape.

Switch to patients talking to doctors in colorful rooms with literal butterflies fluttering about.

VOICE

Here at Háleit, we take pride in our premium palliative care. Our trained medical staff will walk alongside you every step of your journey, ensuring that your final days are spent the way YOU want to spend them.

The footage is overlaid with three lines of text:
One-Month Plans / One-Year Plans / Ten-Year Plans.

VOICE

Choose a plan that's right for you. Don't leave your fate to chance. There's a better path.

End with an old woman smiling and waving goodbye as she's sealed in a coffin. The company name and slogan appear.

VOICE

Háleit. Death on YOUR terms.

INT. BRENNER FAMILY DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The TV cuts to the next commercial. The Brenner family is getting ready for dinner in their stereotypically modern, generally inoffensive middle class home.

At the table is VINCENT (48), the set-in-his-ways father; SYDNEY (22), the opinionated daughter; and ZACH (19), the self-effacing son. LAURIE (49), the mother, is in the kitchen making dinner (and conveniently avoiding conflict).

VINCENT

Fricking Háleit, selling murder on TV. I'm sorry, 'death with dignity'. Christ, people are nuts.

SYDNEY

It IS dignified. Some people are in excruciating pain all the time, and they deserve a chance to end their suffering instead of prolong it.

VINCENT

But you don't KILL them, you fix the problem that's causing the pain.

SYDNEY

Because all problems can be solved, of course.

VINCENT

Well not with that attitude, no.

ZACH

(quietly, staring off into space)
I'm going to kill myself.

SYDNEY

Aren't you libertarian? Isn't this your whole thing, letting people do what they want?

VINCENT

This is state euthanasia, sweetie, which is a clear government overreach.

SYDNEY

It's not overreach, it's them STAYING OUT OF IT by making it legal.

VINCENT

But some things should be illegal. Murder is illegal in ANY other context but this one!

TV

(in the background)

Welcome back to The Cusp. In local news, there was a crash on route 54 earlier this evening..

SYDNEY

So you just want people to suffer, is that it?

VINCENT

I don't want them to suffer, I'm not a sadist - contrary to what the MEDIA says...

SYDNEY

Oh okay, so this is about the MEDIA.

VINCENT

Yes! Apparently I'm heartless for suggesting that people shouldn't be able to COMMIT SUICIDE, because maybe you want them to enjoy life.

ZACH

(quietly)

I'm going to kill myself.

SYDNEY

But that's the point, is that they're in so much pain that they can't just 'enjoy life'. And you, being privileged, don't know what that's like.

VINCENT

Excuse me? I have FORGOTTEN more pain than YOU will ever HAVE. And let's be honest by the way, who actually uses these services? Huh?

SYDNEY

The elderly, the terminally ill, the people who it's designed to help.

TV

-driver is in critical condition, doctors are unsure whether-

VINCENT

But those aren't the people who use it! Most people who use it are under 30 - YOU, not US!

SYDNEY

Are you saying we can't experience pain too?

VINCENT

I'm saying-
(sighs)
Honey, back me up!

LAURIE

(from the kitchen)
I'm sitting this one out.

ZACH

I'm going to kill myself.

VINCENT

Look, when you're young, the world seems like everything is bad all the time, and part of being an adult is coping, not quitting.

SYDNEY

But the game is rigged, you can't win, so isn't quitting the best-

VINCENT

Oh, shhhh, I love this guy.

They go quiet. Sydney stares resentfully at Vincent as he turns up the TV volume. Zach is still looking at nothing. Laurie uses the brief respite to poke her head into the dining room.

TV

-next segment, 'White Men with Woke Opinions', hosted by Mike Michaelson.

SYDNEY

God...

VINCENT

Shh!

The news broadcast cuts to MIKE MICHAELSON (60), a generic, well-dressed news anchor sitting at a table with his bland, forgettable guest, DR. SMITH (62).

MIKE

Good evening. Here with me tonight is renowned clinical psychologist, author, and professor: Doctor George Smith. Glad to have you on, sir.

DR. SMITH

Glad to be had.

SYDNEY

Puke.

Vincent glares at her, then looks back at the TV.

MIKE

Doctor, the question for tonight is: what are the psychological effects of the new right-to-die movement, specifically on younger demographics?

DR. SMITH

Well Mike, as you know, adults ages 18-30 make up roughly a third of the right-to-die patient base, a much larger proportion than...

VINCENT

See? See?? I'm not crazy. Your generation doesn't actually HAVE the pain that these laws were made to help avoid, which is why they're so dangerous, because they open the floodgates for-

SYDNEY

We may not have YOUR pain, but we still suffer - think of how nihilistic it feels growing up in such a hostile, sick planet that YOU ruined.

ZACH

I'm going to kill myself.

VINCENT

So what, now we're just creating a culture where any pain is met with resignation? Isn't that leaving the world even WORSE off?

SYDNEY

At least we're sending a message. Maybe if you stopped complaining and started listening to us and said 'hmmm, I wonder why all these young people are choosing to die', you might learn WHY we're in pain, and then do something about it.

VINCENT

YOU should do something about it! It's not MY job to make your life easier!

DR. SMITH

(in background)

-boils down to brain structure, which tends to be impulsive compared to fully developed brains, and views the world more hyperbolically-

ZACH

I'm going to kill myself.

SYDNEY

How else will you learn? You always tell us about how we need to be BOLD, that people won't listen to you if you're not assertive. This is us being assertive and saying 'enough is enough!'

VINCENT

But holding your life for ransom isn't assertive, it's manipulative!

LAURIE

(walks in briefly to turn off the TV)

Can we keep it down to a dull roar?

VINCENT

(quiets down)

Look, sweetie... I'm just saying, suicide is a sad, pathetic way to get people's attention.

SYDNEY

That is SO insensitive.

VINCENT

I've been called worse. Let's say we put a pause on this until after dinner?

Suddenly Sydney jumps up, grabs a knife from her pocket, and stabs herself in the chest. Blood spurts everywhere. Laurie screams, Zach is stunned, and Vincent is annoyed.

SYDNEY

Is THIS pathetic?? HUH??

VINCENT

What the HELL is wrong with you??

SYDNEY

Oh look, you're taking an interest in me now!

VINCENT

I'm not playing this stupid game...

LAURIE

STOP ARGUING AND DO SOMETHING!

SYDNEY

MAYBE THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED TO TAKE OTHER PEOPLE'S PAIN SERIOUSLY!! NOW YOU KNOW WHAT REAL PAIN IS LIKE BECAUSE YOUR DAUGHTER IS DYING!!

VINCENT

Okay, good performance. You've made your point.

(Laurie tries to help her, but Sydney threatens her with the knife. Zach is staring at Vincent incredulously)

For Heaven's sake, she's fine! I signed for the blood packs yesterday.

(Sydney doubles over and starts gasping)

You hear that? Show's over.

SYDNEY

I cut too far...

VINCENT

See, she WAS faking it. She... she was...

SYDNEY

I'm sorry dad, I didn't mean to...

Vincent suddenly turns pale. Zach is frozen. Laurie tries desperately to revive Sydney, but it's too late.

INT. HÁLEIT LOBBY - DAY

The main lobby is spacious and sleek. There are couches, plants, a koi pond, and abstract modern art sculptures. Sunlight is streaming in through 30-foot high windows. There are a few dozen employees/patients milling about.

At the entrance is JEREMY (21), a bright-eyed, easygoing greeter who's trying to act professionally. However, he's being distracted by GIA (19), one of the patients who's in an especially chatty mood. Jeremy is both amused and annoyed while she peppers him with questions.

GIA

Is it just me, or is it hella busy today? Weird... Did somebody famous die? Are you even allowed to check in if it's just a copycat death?

JEREMY

(chuckles)

No, just a bunch of new hires. And I don't think copycat deaths are a thing...

GIA

Of course they are. Just look up any celebrity who killed themselves, and boom, you have like a 500% increase in suicides that month. Guaranteed.

JEREMY

If you say so...

(looks around anxiously)

Can I get back to work now?

GIA

Jeremy... Jeremy, buddy, come on. How long have we known each other? A year?

JEREMY

Since I started working here. So yeah, close.

GIA

Exactly. And have you EVER gotten in trouble for fraternizing with the victims?

(he shakes his head 'no')

So what are you worried about?

JEREMY

Oh look, somebody's here, sorry.
(she groans)
Please? I'm actually busy for once.

GIA

Fine. But I'm always watching you.
(she looks at him ominously)
You'll never be free from my clutches.

JEREMY

I'm aware.

She punches him playfully, then skips away. Just in time - a new hire named MARTY (29) walks in with a dirty shirt, stained jeans, and a half-stoned, half-asleep look.

JEREMY

Good morning. What can I help you with today?

MARTY

This place is briiiight... holy shit. I'm here for day hire, sorry, new orientation, yeah...

JEREMY

Excellent - welcome aboard! You're going to go straight back, take a left, and head inside the main auditorium. Can't miss it.

MARTY

Cool.

JEREMY

I'm Jeremy by the way.

MARTY

Okay... bye.

JEREMY

Looking forward to working with-

Marty walks away mid-response, completely oblivious.

JEREMY

Alrighty then...

Switch focus to Zach, who's sitting on one of the couches by himself, filling out paperwork, and bobbing along to the music playing through his headphones.

While he writes, Gia sneaks up on him. Actually it's not very sneaky, but Zach is tuning out the world, so he's startled to see her suddenly sitting next to him.

GIA

Whatcha listening to?

ZACH

Music. Hi, sorry.

GIA

Can I?

(she points to the headphones. Zach is hesitant, but decides to share them)

Thanks... You can play it anytime.

ZACH

Well... this is awkward... I don't actually listen to anything, only noise cancelling. I just pretend so that people don't bother me.

GIA

(gives them back)

But you were getting into the rhythm, you can't be THAT good at faking it.

ZACH

I've had a lot of practice.

GIA

Goddamn, that's impressive. Hey, do what works, right? I'm Gia.

ZACH

Zach, nice to meet you.

GIA

So are you checking in or checking out?

ZACH

I don't... what?

GIA

Wait, I phrased that wrong. Are you planning to check in before you check out?

ZACH

I still don't follow... I'm just here to die.

GIA

I mean obviously you're here to die, but some people like me are in a 'committed'-

(she winks very obviously)

-relationship with the facility.

(the joke is lost on Zach)

Like, you get committed, to live here under supervision if you're too crazy.

(it clicks, they both chuckle)

So are you a 'quick and painless, please kill me right now' sort of guy, or a 'take my sweet time, smell the roses, and get used to my straitjacket because why rush the inevitable' sort of guy?

ZACH

I mean quick and painless would be ideal, but I don't know how any of this works, so...

GIA

Ooh, well don't let me spoil the surprise!

(she gets up to leave)

I'm a live-in, so if you do end up staying here, come find me. Contrary to popular opinion, there aren't many young people here - at least not at this facility. It's not as 'hip' as some of the newer places.

ZACH

Good thing I'm not a 'hip' person.

GIA

Rough. But you're not wrong.

(they laugh)

Later!

ZACH

Bye...

She skips away and chats with some of the other employees. Zach puts his headphones back on, finishes the final page, then takes it over to Jeremy.

ZACH

I think it's good. I don't need my parents' information or anything, right?

JEREMY

Are you over 18?

(Zach nods)

Then you're all set. And actually, you can take those with you. Go down to the right, just follow the arrows on the ground, and they'll walk you through the next steps.

ZACH

Okay.

Zach walks away, still jamming to his 'music'. Jeremy watches to make sure he doesn't get lost - which he does after about fifty feet. He's embarrassed and asks for help.

ZACH

Sorry, you said to the right?

JEREMY

Yep! See the arrows on the floor?

(Zach doesn't see them yet)

Further ahead.

(Zach finally notices them)

There you go! Just follow those.

ZACH

Okay... Thanks.

JEREMY

No problem!

Jeremy turns back around and is suddenly face to face with LEON (52), the company CEO. He immediately switches into ultra-friendly mode.

JEREMY

Good morning, sir. My apologies.

LEON

For what?

JEREMY

For not - I mean, sorry, I- never mind. Hello!

LEON

Blessings. Jeremy, right?

(Jeremy nods)

Please - call me Leon.

JEREMY

You got it, Leon.

LEON

A word from the wise. Think of this as advice from a spiritual father, not your CEO.

JEREMY

Okay...

LEON

If I may. Avoid saying 'no problem'. It implies that the other person thinks they're a problem, and you're excusing them. You never want to impress upon people that THEY are the problems. Perhaps replace it with 'you're welcome' or 'anytime', or even 'the pleasure is all mine'.

JEREMY

Will do. Thank you, sir!

LEON

No, Jeremy-

(puts his hands on his shoulders and looks him directly in the eyes)

Thank YOU. You are like the gateway of HÁLEIT.

(he says 'Háleit' emphatically)

You are the first line of empathy for newcomers, and you are doing a genuinely remarkable job.

Leon smiles sincerely, stares for a few more seconds, pats him on the back, then continues walking through the lobby. Jeremy waits until he's out of sight, then oscillates between excitement, anxiety, and sheer bewilderment.

Switch focus to Leon. He strolls through the lobby with an odd mix of confidence and detachment, like he's an alien who doesn't realize he's on the wrong planet. He greets a few other employees on his way in, but he also pauses to soak in the ambience and be at one with the room.

INT. HÁLEIT OFFICES - DAY (cont.)

Leon enters the back offices, which look much more like a traditional cubicle farm. He greets each employee as he passes their desks.

LEON

Blessings, Ginger... Blessings, Patrick... That tie is transcendent! Blessings, Eric... Beatrice, don't think I forgot about you - blessings!

This continues all the way down the hall as he makes his way towards his personal office.

Another employee, Julia (48) is sitting outside the door of his office and comforting CONSUELA (41), who's sobbing profusely and adding a crumpled tissue to a growing pile. As Leon draws closer, Julia walks over and preps him.

LEON

Blessings, Julia. How can I help?

JULIA

Her name is Consuela, been here for a few months doing one-on-one care with seniors, and she was managing it well enough. And then there was one gal who she really took a liking to, and it finally hit her. Hard. You know how it goes.

LEON

I do. Thank you Julia, you sensitive pearl of great price.

Leon smiles sincerely, and approaches Consuela warmly.

LEON

Consuela, is it?

(she nods, he spreads his arms open)

May I embrace you? Are you comfortable with that?

She stands up and hugs him - he holds her gently for a few seconds, then sits down with her.

LEON

Consuela, you are radiant, and you are blessed. Please allow me a moment to discuss your options, of which there are two. Option one - you take the next month off. You unwind, you decompress, maybe go on a pilgrimage. However you find closure in this tribulation, you are free to do so.

(pauses briefly)

Option two - and I mean this with all sincerity - nobody would fault you for leaving. You are not the first, nor will you be the last. This job is fraught with sadness, and-

(he starts tearing up)

I want to see you thrive, Consuela, I do, and I will see to it that you are happy, and that you are provided for, and that you are successful at whatever new career path you choose.

Now he's sobbing too, which makes Consuela cry even more. Julia is standing patiently to the side, another box of tissues at the ready.

LEON

I can't enumerate how much it pains me to see your suffering, you sweet flower, and I would be remiss if I didn't do everything in my power to see that get through this. So please, Consuela, take the day off, go home to the familiar, and-

(gets choked up)

And try to find meaning and hope in such a bleak and unforgiving world. Because we are all we have in this life, and we must depend on each other if we're to survive.

He gestures for another hug, they both lean in and embrace once again. After a few seconds, he turns to Julia.

LEON

She doesn't speak English, does she?

Julia shakes her head 'no'. Leon nods and continues to console her.

INT. HÁLEIT INTAKE OFFICE - DAY

Zach enters the office quietly. DOREEN (30) is at her desk, typing away rapidly without noticing him.

The walls are vibrant and colorful, similar to what was advertised in the commercial. There are butterfly stickers and posters all along the wall. The largest poster is a llama stuck in a chimney, with the phrase: 'sometimes it's better just to give up'. Zach is fixated on a cartoon of a woman writing a legal contract with the grim reaper.

ZACH

That's funny. Did you draw this?

DOREEN

(she jumps)

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Did you knock? I'm so sorry hon, get caught in my zone.

(finishes typing, then focuses on Zach)

And no, I wish I could draw, I found it online. Kind of on-the-nose, but it's cute. But the llama... Lord have mercy, he gets me every time.

(she chuckles)

I can take those.

(he hands her the forms)

How old are you??

ZACH

Nineteen...

(Doreen isn't convinced)

Here, uh- let me...

He looks for his driver's license and hands it to her. She's still uneasy, but nonetheless starts looking through the paperwork and checking for accuracy.

At one point, it looks like she's about to say something, but then she just starts typing. Zach sits in the chair across from her and sways quietly while he waits.

DOREEN

Alright, looks like your insurance will cover it. Good. I just have a few more screening questions for this stage, very quick.

ZACH

Okay.

DOREEN

Why do you want to kill yourself?

ZACH

I feel like - it's hard to describe, I just feel different, and I want out... so...

DOREEN

Sorry, we need a better answer.

(Zach stares blankly; she chuckles)

Kidding. When do you want to set the end date?

(Zach is confused)

You can do a month, six months... how about a year?

ZACH

Okay, yeah that works.

DOREEN

Mmkay.

(types)

Do you want a narrative add-on?

ZACH

What is that?

DOREEN

You just pay extra to make your death a story. One of our associates would help you plan it.

ZACH

No, no that's fine. I'll pass.

DOREEN

Okay, we'll leave that as 'no'... Have you ever been employed by one of our competitors?

ZACH

What? No.

DOREEN

We have to ask. It's actually come back to bite us in the past, don't get me started.

ZACH

Okay...

DOREEN

And just to make sure, do you KNOW anybody who was employed by one of our competitors?

ZACH

No, I don't think so.

DOREEN

Do you know anybody who's killed themselves-

ZACH

Yeah, my sister Sydney, just last week.

DOREEN

Let me finish. Do you know anybody who's killed themselves using one of our competitors?

ZACH

Oh. No. It was an accident.

DOREEN

Perfect. That's the last question in that vein.
(chuckles)
Vein.

ZACH

I don't get it. Oh, like a vein you cut open?

DOREEN

Yeah. Alright, have you-
(she can't stop giggling)
I'm sorry hon, it's just how I cope. Alright...
Have you ever tried to kill yourself?

ZACH

No, I've just thought about it. I don't even know how I would do it...

DOREEN

Well, you came to the right place.
(she chuckles - no response)
I'm so sorry. Lastly, do you feel that your situation requires you to be committed?

ZACH

Will insurance pay for it?

DOREEN

Well, you didn't list any pre-existing conditions, mental health problems, trauma, accidents, or history of illness in the family... did you mean to? Did you forget something?

ZACH

Nope, just... suicidal.

DOREEN

Then no, you would have to pay out of pocket.

(Zach face drops, but he just nods in resignation. Doreen pauses and sighs)

Zach. I don't know your whole situation, and I don't want to minimize what you're going through. This is more of a last resort for people who are... maybe you want to start with counseling first?

(Zach is silent and shakes his head 'no')

Mmkay. For now, I'm going to set you up with a support group for young adults, they meet three times a week here at the facility. And just know that you are free to change your mind anytime. You have a whole year, and you won't be penalized if you opt out for any reason. Sound good?

ZACH

Yeah.

DOREEN

Perfect. The next group meeting is tomorrow, so you're all set for today. Feel free to hang out in the lobby, check out the art, but otherwise you're good to go.

ZACH

Thanks.

He shakes her hand and leaves. Once he's gone, she chuckles to herself.

DOREEN

HANG out... I kill me. Hah! I did it again!

INT. HÁLEIT AUDITORIUM - DAY

There are about fifty new hires, including Marty, spread out in a room that seats a few hundred. Leon is up front giving a passionate presentation. Julia is off to the side writing notes on her laptop.

LEON

HÁLEIT! Which means 'sublime' in Icelandic. Sublimate. To pass from solid to vapor. To divert an activity towards a nobler goal. Welcome, and blessings to you all. My name is Leon, and I am the CEO of this noble establishment.

(mumbling response)

Now, I need a volunteer - you!

(to Marty)

With the glazed eyes and abundance of frump, bring yourself here forthwith!

Marty awkwardly shuffles to the front of the room.

LEON

And you are...?

MARTY

Present.

LEON

Present! Delighted to meet you, present!

(some laughs)

I'd like to tell you about a social experiment conducted by Icelandic scientists.

MARTY

Far out.

LEON

Now, these scientists split their participants into two groups. One was the control group, and the other was the-

(Marty exhales impatiently)

I beg your pardon? What was that?

MARTY

Sorry, dad, I'll pay attention.

Marty rolls his eyes, which gets more laughs, but Leon is not amused in the slightest.

LEON
Get out. Now.

MARTY
What?

LEON
You heard me. Out! GO!!

MARTY
Geez, who put YOU in charge?

LEON
We are dealing with people's LIVES! I just spent the last twenty minutes with a woman who QUIT after FIVE MONTHS because this job BREAKS YOU!
(dead silence)
Why are you still here? GET OUT! NOW!! OR I WILL CALL SECURITY!!

Marty leaves in a huff. Leon is fuming.

LEON
Julia, get that boy out front, Jeremy, tell him he's being promoted. He actually DESERVES this.
(Julia leaves to fetch Jeremy)
The rest of you! Stand up if you have ever lost somebody you loved, whether to suicide, cancer, car accident, old age. Do it!
(about two thirds of them stand)
Good. Everyone sitting down may join Mr. Present and leave, this is NOT the job for you.
(nobody moves)
What? Do you all think I'm joking? DO I LOOK LIKE I'M JOKING? OUT!!

The ones who were seated also leave, with similar expressions of disgruntlement and confusion. Leon waits until they're gone to calm down.

As they leave, Julia walks in with Jeremy. He's excited to be there and takes a seat in the front.

LEON

I apologize. It's been a loud day, spiritually speaking, and some of your orientation-mates were adding to the cacophony. Julia can corroborate, rarely do I lose my temper, and never with those who don't deserve it.

Julia nods sincerely and unironically, although most of them are still on edge.

LEON

Now, Jeremy - Jeremy has been vigilantly patrolling the front entrance for..

JEREMY

Eleven months.

LEON

Thank you. Eleven. Months. It's a job that is perhaps the furthest removed from the actual business of death that we so nobly execute, and yet he is committed, day in and day out, to being a beacon of light. And for that, I am promoting him to be a group therapy leader - with proper training of course.

Jeremy is elated. Leon signals for them to clap, which they all do - albeit still tentatively.

LEON

You see, here at HÁLEIT-

(he loves to emphasize it)

We are all stewards of life. From the greeters to the grieverers, from paper pushers to pill pushers, we make death tolerable - nay, beautiful. It is demanding, taxing, and emotional labor. In fact, that was the reason for my outburst earlier, to impress upon you the necessity of approaching your work with the utmost solemnity. It is part and parcel of this industry, so if that isn't what you signed up for, please leave.

(nobody leaves)

For the record, that young man I berated? He was in on it the whole time. Wasn't he, Julia?

Julia shakes her head 'no'. One of the audience members awkwardly raises his hand.

RANDOM GUY

I didn't want to say anything, but I was the one you were supposed to get mad at.

LEON

Oh, you're the actor? Who was the other fellow?

RANDOM GUY

I think he was just a new hire.

LEON

Oops. Well, you're also free to leave, I'll double check the picture next time. Thank you.

The guy leaves. Now everyone is really confused.

LEON

So! The Icelandic social experiment! There were two groups. Group A was presented with a generic interrogation room. They were the control group. Group B was presented with the same room, except there was a noose hanging from the ceiling.

As you can guess, those in the noose room were apprehensive, shocked, and on high alert upon seeing the noose, whereas the control group exhibited minimal levels of agitation.

For the tests, the candidates were asked a series of intense questions. Naturally, the control group became more anxious over time. But group B, the ones with the noose - their anxiety and stress levels DECREASED. Because UNLIKE the control group, they knew they had an escape - DEATH - and it helped them survive.

Now, this study is not real. I made it all up. But the principle still applies at HÁLEIT!

As he rambles on, the new hires buckle in for the ride, their own prior anxiety slowly shifting towards apathy. Except Jeremy, who's inexplicably entranced by Leon.

INT. BRENNER FAMILY LIVING ROOM - DAY

Vincent is sitting somberly on the couch as the clock ticks loudly in the background. There's a shrine to Sydney on a table across from him - photos, poems she wrote, trinkets...

Laurie is sitting in the rocking chair crocheting. She and Vincent don't make eye contact, they both just stare ahead. Finally, Laurie breaks the silence.

LAURIE

Do you want to go somewhere for lunch?

VINCENT

No.

LAURIE

Are you hungry?

VINCENT

No.

LAURIE

You need to eat sometime.

VINCENT

No.

More silence.

LAURIE

I want you to go to CORE with me tonight.

VINCENT

No.

LAURIE

Just once.

VINCENT

No.

LAURIE

It will help, I promise. There are a lot of people there affected by... you know.

VINCENT
I don't do church.

LAURIE
But it's not really a church..

VINCENT
I DON'T do church, Laurie. You should know better
than anyone.

BEGIN FLASHBACK - ALL IN BLACK AND WHITE

INT. MEGACHURCH SERVICE - DAY

Vincent and Laurie are in the pews, both fidgeting
nervously. The pastor, BIG SIMON (55), is on a rant.

BIG SIMON
Unless a grain of seed DIES, it CANNOT grow!
Christ showed us by his example that there is a
time to LIVE, and a time to DIE!

The congregation says 'amen', then erupts into applause as
Big Simon takes a pill, starts foaming at the mouth, then
collapses on the stage and dies. Vincent and Laurie both
run out in shock, but everyone else keeps cheering.

END FLASHBACK

Vincent shudders in the present just thinking about it.

LAURIE
CORE doesn't take a stance on the right to die.

VINCENT
So they condone it?

LAURIE
They don't glorify it.

VINCENT
Mm... I'll go once, just to get you off my back.

LAURIE
Thank you.

INT. CORE CHURCH SERVICE - NIGHT

The sign out front reads: The Church of Randomness and Existentialism. Laurie and Vincent greet the USHER (31). There are a few hundred other congregants.

USHER

Welcome to CORE - Laurie, always good to see you.
(Laurie blushes, Vincent is miffed)
Couple, I assume?

VINCENT

Couple of what?

LAURIE

Yes, this is my husband, Vincent.

VINCENT

Why the hell do you care, buddy?

LAURIE

Dear...

USHER

It's for a group activity.
(grins and hands them a program)
Don't lose the number.

Vincent opens the program - there's a yellow index card with a large 23 written on it.

VINCENT

What the hell...?

USHER

You'll see!

LAURIE

Thank you.
(leads Vincent inside)
It's probably for a meet and greet, they do one every week. Now can you please just be polite?

VINCENT

I will be myself, thank you.

They sit near the back as others continue to file in. Laurie occasionally smiles and waves at somebody, Vincent just scans the room impatiently.

Finally, EVE (50) walks onstage and settles them down. She's grinning from ear to ear, and has a psychedelic tie-dye outfit - with neon green hair to match.

EVE

Hello family! Good evening!

CONGREGATION

Good evening!

EVE

If this is your first time, I want to personally and graciously welcome you to CORE. We are a diverse collective of seekers and thinkers from all backgrounds, all creeds, and all genomes.

VINCENT

(whispers)

Wake me when it's over.

Laurie shushes him, he rolls his eyes.

EVE

Now, today we're going to be talking about the role of chaos in determining our life paths. We'll talk about the history of chaos as a concept in religion, philosophy, mathematics, and how it impacts us on a daily basis. I will try to keep it brief - emphasis on 'try'.

(laughter)

And after I'm done, we'll have group breakout discussions with some questions about how to harness the chaos and divert it towards order.

LAURIE

(whispers)

Sounds interesting, doesn't it?

VINCENT

(whispers)

Shoot me now.

Laurie elbows him, he grunts disinterestedly.

EVE

Before we start though, I'd like everyone to pull out the numbers from your programs.

(rustling of papers)

Everybody has a match - so if you're number 6, there is somebody else with a number 6 that you need to find. Singles are paired with singles, couples with couples. This will be your group for our discussion later. Once you find your match, we'll give you some time to get acquainted and swap stories before we jump in! And... go!

There's a lively bustle as people stand up and start searching for their matches. The room is suddenly alive with the sound of numbers being called. Laurie waves the yellow card proudly while Vincent sulks.

LAURIE

23! 23 anyone?

DOREEN

(a few rows away)

23?

(holds up her card)

We're coming!

She and her husband HECTOR (28) walk excitedly over. Vincent grudgingly stands up to greet them.

DOREEN

Hey!! I'm Doreen, this is Hector!

HECTOR

Call me Hec.

LAURIE

I'm Laurie, this is Vincent. I love your dress!

DOREEN

Thank you, I love your sweater!

As the women chat, Hector and Vincent exchange 'exasperated husband' looks, which cheers Vincent up a bit.

EXT. CORE CHURCH BUILDING - NIGHT

The two couples are conversing outside after the service. Most of the congregants are lingering around to chat.

DOREEN

But my old church, let me tell you... The pastor every week would go off on if you choose to die, you're going straight to hell, or if you support right-to-die laws you're going to hell with them, and it was so incessant - drove me mad.

LAURIE

Ours was the other extreme, he killed himself DURING the service.

DOREEN

No!

VINCENT

Damn straight. Made headlines. Big Simon, definitely put First Communion on the map.

DOREEN

I heard about that! And you were there??

(Laurie and Vincent nod)

Lord... I don't understand why people can't find a middle ground. That's why I love CORE. It's much less conflict, especially with my job.

LAURIE

Where do you work?

DOREEN

I'm an administrative assistant at Háleit.

(Vincent tenses up)

I'm so sorry, I know it's a sensitive topic.

LAURIE

It's fine, we're just... going through some stuff.

DOREEN

If it helps, I try to deter people when I can, or at least try to get them on a longer plan so they have time to change their mind.

HECTOR

Making waves from the inside out, that's my girl.

(he pecks her on the cheek)

I'm in insurance, whole other can of evil.

(they laugh)

What about you two, what do you do?

LAURIE

I'm a stay at home mom - kids are grown, but the title still fits.

(waits for Vincent to respond; he doesn't)

And HE is in construction. 19 years now?

VINCENT

Damn right.

DOREEN

Wow...

HECTOR

Hey that's great - kind of like what we talked about earlier, you're building something structured out of the chaos. Very fitting.

VINCENT

Yessir. Well, it was great to meet you both, but we should be leaving.

LAURIE

Gotta make that 9:00 bedtime.

They laugh - even Vincent chuckles, although he's clearly hit his limit for the evening.

DOREEN

But we should all meet again. Come over Friday for dinner, our treat. I'll text you.

LAURIE

Sure! Here, let me get you my number.

While they swap numbers and make plans, Vincent and Hector just watch the traffic go by. Although after a bit, they start exchanging comically impatient looks as their wives keep chatting in the background.

INT. BLANK WHITE ROOM - DAY

The room is padded on all sides. There's a lone whiteboard on the wall with a list of names: Doreen, Eve, Gia, Hector, Jeremy, Julia, Laurie, Leon, Vincent, and Zach.

In the middle is JOE DORSCH (26), spinning casually in an office chair. There's a nameplate mounted on the wall:
Joe Dorsch, writer of 'Youth in Asia'.

JOE

Hey everyone. Welcome to my writing studio. Obviously not my actual studio, my real studio is just a desk at my house. But this is a fun visual representation. And it's META.

(he dabs)

So, full disclosure... I've hit a snag this time. Usually I have everything planned out at this point in the story, and I have some general ideas for where to take things... but this one isn't coming together as nicely as I'd like...

(he stands and starts pacing)

So, to fit the spirit of the story, I'm going to do a little forced story-writing. You may have noticed my whiteboard of the main characters.

(focus on the whiteboard)

I guess I'm also a character now...

(he pauses, snaps his fingers, and a marker appears. He writes his name on the board)

There we go. So what I'm gonna do, and I'm actually doing this as I write - I kid you not, this is genuinely random. I'm going to go down the list and flip a coin for each character. Heads they live, tails they die. And then we'll get back to the story.

He snaps his fingers: a quarter falls from the ceiling into his hand. He starts flipping and marking:

Doreen - Die | Eve - Die | Gia - Live | Hector - Live
Jeremy - Live | Julia - Die | Laurie - Live | Leon - Die
Vincent - Live | Zach - Die | Joe - Die

He steps back blithely, apparently unfazed by his own imminent death. Another snap of the fingers, and...

INT. BRENNER FAMILY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laurie jolts awake and tries to catch her breath while talking to herself.

LAURIE

Doreen die, Eve die, Gia live, Hector live...

Vincent is sound asleep next to her. She immediately rushes downstairs to the kitchen and searches for a notepad.

LAURIE

Jeremy live, Julia die, LAURIE LIVE...

She starts writing down an exact copy of the names/fates of the characters on the whiteboard. Her hand is shaking, but after a minute, it's complete. She pauses, scans the list, exhales slowly, then goes through the names one by one.

LAURIE

Doreen, from CORE... Eve, also CORE... Gia... Gia...

(she puts a question mark)

Hector - right, Doreen's husband... Jeremy... Jeremy?

(another question mark)

Julia?

(question mark)

Laurie live. Thank God. Leon... Leon...

(question mark)

Vincent live. Good. Zach...

She has a quick flashback in black and white to the night Sydney died. She recalls Zach saying repeatedly 'I'm going to kill myself'.

LAURIE

No Zach, honey, no no no. Okay, focus. And Joe...

HIS name was Joe, I think...

(half question mark)

Okay... Zach, Zach.

She walks briskly over to Zach's room, opens the door, and hears him sleeping. She starts crying softly.

LAURIE

It was a dream, it was a dream... it's not real...

EXT. HÁLEIT OFFICES - DAY

There's a crowd of protestors gathered around Marty, who's much more alert than the day before. Several news vans are live-streaming the event. Julia is there as well, as the official spokesperson for Háleit.

MARTY

He harassed me, it was emotional ABUSE, and he got away with it! So what that I was bored, tired, WORN OUT. I was having a bad day, and I think everyone's entitled to at least one bad day every now and then, right?

(the crowd cheers in agreement)

But what he did was inhuman! Shut down Háleit!
Shut down Háleit!

A JOURNALIST from The Cusp pivots to Julia.

JOURNALIST

I have with me Julia Thompson representing Háleit and CEO Leon Volker. Tell me Julia, these are serious allegations that Martin Burge is making against Leon. Are they true?

JULIA

Let me be clear - while Leon's methods may seem extreme at times, Mr. Burge was acting in a very unprofessional manner, and given the sensitive nature of our work, we have very high standards and expectations to meet. At the time, Mr. Burge was acting as a Háleit employee, and although the 'outburst' was reportedly harsh-

She's drowned out by the chanting, the journalist pans back to the crowd: "Take responsibility! Give him an apology!"

MARTY

Shame on you Leon Volker! Shame on you Háleit!
And shame on you Ms. Thompson! You protected him in that room, and you're protecting him now!

With that, he pulls out a gun, shoots Julia in the chest several times, then shoots himself in the head. The crowd isn't alarmed, in fact, they just chant louder.

INT. BRENNER FAMILY LIVING ROOM - DAY

Vincent is watching live coverage of the Háleit protests.
Laurie is doing stretches in the dining room.

JOURNALIST

-confirmed two dead. The leader of the protests
and recent Háleit employee, Martin Burge, and one
of Háleit's spokespeople, Julia Thompson, who was
shot by Mr. Burge before he-

Laurie's ears perk up, she jogs into the kitchen.

LAURIE

Did she say Julia?

VINCENT

What?

LAURIE

The story - they said somebody named Julia...

VINCENT

(leans in and reads the news ticker)
Let's see... Julia Thompson, PR executive. Why?

LAURIE

No reason.

VINCENT

Mmm. If you ask me, those protestors are doing
the right thing, the public's gotten cold feet
about this whole right-to-die nonsense, glad that
they're putting it back in the spotlight.

LAURIE

He shot her though.

VINCENT

Oh I'm not supporting the guy - no no, that's
extreme even for me...

(chuckles)

But at least he's making a point. He's bold,
gotta give him credit for taking a stand.
Sometimes enough is enough.

LAURIE
(to herself)
You sound like Sydney...

VINCENT
What was that?

LAURIE
Nothing, just thinking out loud. Hey, can you
turn it up quick?

He turns up the volume and reclines in his chair.

JOURNALIST
-allegations against Håleit CEO Leon Volker who
has not appeared for comment. Sources say-

Laurie jogs into the kitchen and pulls out the notepad.

LAURIE
Leon and... Julia.
(she crosses out the question marks)
Julia...
(she crosses the name out)
This can't be happening...

VINCENT
(from the other room)
Hey, thanks for making me go out last night!

LAURIE
Mm-hmm.

VINCENT
No really, I needed that - you know me, I get
stuck in my head sometimes.

LAURIE
Glad to do it!

VINCENT
Our dinner is tomorrow, right?

LAURIE
Yep, 7:00!

Laurie is having a mini panic attack, but she tries to hide the worry in her voice. Vincent is oblivious, and goes back to watching TV.

JOURNALIST

-will continue to keep you informed as the situation develops.

TV VOICE

Stay tuned for more coverage from The Cusp, right after these messages.

The Háleit commercial starts playing. Vincent is enraged.

VOICE IN COMMERCIAL

Death, disaster, poverty, famine.

VINCENT

Give me a break!

In the other room, Laurie is still trying to calm down. Vincent mutes the TV and joins her - she quickly hides the notebook before he sees it. He's still oblivious.

VINCENT

No conflict of interest there... insane how BRAZEN these networks are.

LAURIE

Mmm.

She's suddenly agitated as Zach comes out of his room.

VINCENT

Morning, sport!

LAURIE

Where are you going?!

ZACH

Out... Why do you suddenly care?

LAURIE

I always care! And don't talk back to me, okay?! Don't you EVER - you be SAFE out there! Please!

She gives him a hug that lasts far longer than Zach is comfortable with. Zach and Vincent exchange puzzled looks.

ZACH

I'm just going to see some people..

LAURIE

What people? Where? You know there's protests downtown, it's not safe.

ZACH

I'll be fine.

LAURIE

How can you say that? You don't know that!

VINCENT

Honey, let's take a step back.

LAURIE

Don't tell me to calm down! He is my SON, and I worry about him, is that a crime?

VINCENT

I think you're a little-

LAURIE

You said you wanted to kill yourself that night! Nobody ELSE seemed to have heard you-

(glares at Vincent)

But I did, and I love you, and you are part of this family, and WE. LOVE. YOU.

ZACH

Okay... I love you too... I was kidding when I said that, okay?

LAURIE

Were you? What about your sister?

(she tears up)

I feel like I don't even know you anymore...

She starts sobbing and runs to the other room. Zach and Vincent are still puzzled, but they just shrug it off. Eventually Zach leaves and Vincent goes back to the TV.

INT. HÁLEIT LOBBY - DAY

Doreen is trying to enter the building quickly while the protestors swarm around her. Finally she makes it inside in one piece. The protestors stay outside. She calms down, but then jumps nearly a foot when she hears Leon's voice.

LEON
Blessings, Doreen.

DOREEN
Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

She looks around wildly but sees nobody.

LEON
In the bush!

She turns towards a post-modern bush sculpture that's shrouded in faces instead of leaves. One of the faces is talking to her - it's Leon, hiding inside the art.

DOREEN
What the...

LEON
Shhh, don't expose me! Last night, my chakras were flaring like an open sore, trying to warn me of an impending commotion. So I slept in my office... and they were right!

DOREEN
Why aren't you in your office now? Christ, you gave me a fright!

LEON
Did you know that the human mind is designed to notice a face even when there isn't one there? They've done experiments on it... we're experts at finding faces. So I figure that being surrounded by faces is the ideal camouflage...

Doreen rolls her eyes and walks to her office. The next employee manages to get inside, and is equally startled when Leon greets them out of nowhere.

INT./EXT. HÁLEIT OFFICES - DAY

Jeremy is standing on the balcony, several stories above the protestors, drinking coffee and watching them with a mix of empathy and anxiety.

EVE

Is this your first protest?

Jeremy is startled and accidentally drops his coffee over the edge. It hits one of the protestors, who immediately cusses Jeremy out.

JEREMY

(to the protestor)

I'm sorry!

(to Eve)

No, I've seen a few since I started working here.

EVE

Mmm. It never gets easier, unfortunately... But you are not a scab.

(she hugs him)

You are a strike-breaker.

JEREMY

Okay... the pleasure is all mine?

EVE

Oh, you humble thing.

She holds him a few seconds longer, he rolls with it.

JEREMY

I've seen you before, haven't I?

EVE

You must be a CORE member. I'm the lead teacher, pastor, guide, whatever you prefer - it's my second job, but by no means my inferior job,

JEREMY

CORE...? No no, I meant, sorry - I used to work in the lobby, and so I see everyone, so I recognize your face is all.

EVE

(laughs)

Verstanden! My apologies for assuming, and now that you mention it, I recognize you too, you always seem full of verve. I see many faces in my lines of work, they all blend after a while.

JEREMY

It's okay. I'm Jeremy.

EVE

Jeremy Stowe?

(he nods)

Well what a happenstance! You've been assigned to my group, you'll be my shadow! I'm Eve!

JEREMY

Oh excellent!

EVE

I was thinking the same thing! Do you mind if we relocate to somewhere quieter? My aura can only manage so much turmoil.

Jeremy nods, they go inside, and Eve closes the sliding door for the balcony. The interior is a cubicle farm, which is much more tranquil than outside.

Eve leads Jeremy over to her cubicle so she can fetch her water bottle. He admires all the flowers and geodes.

EVE

I am sensitive to the needs of the masses - I was a suffragette back in the day. But I also believe that change must be affected from within.

JEREMY

Makes sense to me.

EVE

You are a prize! Onward!

She pokes him playfully on the nose and giggles elatedly. Jeremy, once again, just rolls with it as she leads him down the corridor to their group session.

INT. HÁLEIT GROUP THERAPY ROOM - DAY

The setting is rather traditional: bright lights, a circle of twenty or so chairs, a table of refreshments, and morbid inspirational posters ('It doesn't get better', 'Why wait?' or 'Live is just an anagram for Evil').

There are several young adults hanging out, including Gia, who has a plateful of muffins. People are still coming in. When she sees Zach, her eyes light up. His do as well.

ZACH

Hey! We meet again. How are... things?

GIA

(her mouth full of food)

Mfmgh mrghrhm ghrgmrh, fmrhg!

ZACH

Yeah, same.

(they laugh)

Sorry, bad timing - story of my life.

GIA

(finishes chewing)

That's really sad. You'll fit right in. Also you should have food. It's AWESOME.

ZACH

Cool. Yeah, that's, okay, I already ate.

GIA

But it's FREE.

ZACH

I know, I just-

GIA

FREE food.

(she stares with exaggerated intensity)

FREEEEEE. FOOOOD.

ZACH

Fine. But only because that face is terrifying and I want it to stop... Like my life.

They both laugh - he's rather proud of the joke. Meanwhile, Jeremy and Eve arrive. Eve makes the rounds and welcomes everyone personally, while Jeremy waits in the background. Until he recognizes Zach and walks over to greet him.

JEREMY

Hey, glad you found the room!

ZACH

Oh, okay...

JEREMY

Because you were lost yesterday.

ZACH

Oh right - right, yeah, I remember you now.

JEREMY

Jeremy - I don't think we officially met.

ZACH

Zach. Cool.

GIA

And you already know me.

(whispers to Jeremy)

Spoiler alert, most people in this room are going to die, so I wouldn't get too attached.

JEREMY

Oh... okay, well I-

(realizes Gia is being funny)

Ahhh. Okay, classic Gia, making jokes, okay, I can vibe with that.

GIA

(to Zach)

I think he'll fit right in.

(to Jeremy)

But seriously, most of us will die, so it's pretty fucking depressing.

Jeremy isn't sure how to respond now, so he just nods and deflects by getting food. Gia and Zach walk over to the chairs and sit down. Gia giggles to herself.

ZACH
Be nice to him!

GIA
He's fine. You gotta break 'em in, like shoes.
Shooooes. Do you ever have that happen where you
keep saying a word over and over and suddenly it
sounds really stupid? Like Shoes. Shoes. Shoes.

ZACH
Shoes. Shoes.

GIA
Shooooes? Shoooooooooes!

ZACH
Shoes! Ugh, yeah, that's terrible!

GIA
SHOOOOOES!
(they both burst out laughing)
Alright, so let's see who we have today.

This next bit is told in a back and forth style. Gia will describe somebody to Zach pre-group-session, and then it'll cut to the person mid-group-session.

GIA
So first up, we have Chad. He's literally a chad.

She highlights CHAD (22), a muscular 'bro' who's flirting with one of the girls.

GIA
He's not suicidal, he just likes women who are vulnerable and 'ill'. Fucking creep.

Switch to Chad telling his story.

CHAD
So then I was like, bro, don't do it - but then he shot himself. And even though we needed a quarterback that season, I quit the team because it wrecked me, because he was my bro, and now I feel like I'm headed down that path too.

He pretends to cry, but very obviously flexes his muscles while doing so. Still, several of the girls in the group are fawning over him. Gia and Zach roll their eyes. Even Jeremy and Eve struggle to keep straight faces.

Back to Gia's narration pre-group.

GIA

Next is Chloe. She's been here all of three days, and may not make it to the weekend.

CHLOE (17) is wearing all pink, scrolling through her phone and taking selfies before the group starts.

ZACH

Because she's that close to the edge?

GIA

Because her parents will find out, and they'll punish her for making them look bad by going to a suicide clinic, so they'll pull her out of the program and pay for a therapist instead.

ZACH

But if she's here, then she needs help, right? She couldn't be here without a legitimate reason.

GIA

Well...

Switch to Chloe telling about her 'troubles'.

CHLOE

And then my dad totally got mad when I went over my data limit, and like he said 'no Starbucks for like the next HOUR', and I was like, 'but I NEED my PSL to stay awake', so I like had to take addy and it like TOTES made me crazy. And also I had like JUST broken up with my boo because he didn't comment on my post for like a DAY, so I was like, I should just kill myself if THIS is what I have to deal with, ohmaigod I hate my life.

ZACH

Yikes...

Back to Gia.

GIA

That's D'Shawn, he's actually pretty cool.

D'SHAWN (24) is catching up with Eve - he's full of energy and keeps making Eve laugh.

GIA

He has a super long-term plan, ten years I think? Very chill, mostly he lives a normal life, he's - shoot, what's the term he uses?

Switch to D'Shawn.

D'SHAWN

Predictable fatalism. Knowing that death is inevitable, I take the randomness out of the equation by choosing an end date to structure my life around. Nine years to go, and I tell you, existence is so much more valuable knowing that I'm on a timeline, and it's been liberating to have an exact end date. And of course, it gives me a chance to meet all of you!

EVE

D'Shawn is one of our long-term members. Always a pleasure to have you with us, D'Shawn.

They clap. Zach is both intrigued and impressed.

Back to Gia.

GIA

Over there is Izzy. She has cancer, so she's got a month left - technically four with the cancer, but she'd rather not be around when it gets bad.

IZZY (22) is making small talk with some of the others - she's thin, frail, and looks completely defeated.

GIA

I'm actually really gonna miss her. Usually I don't get too attached - you know, kinda stupid when you think about it - but I like her.

ZACH

But what's REALLY going on? Like with the others, what's the catch?

GIA

Very funny.

(Zach is confused)

Wait, seriously?

(Zach nods)

Dude, she doesn't have one, she's legit trying to avoid a shit-ton of pain.

ZACH

Oh...

Switch to Izzy sharing her story. Everyone else in the circle is quiet; some of them are crying, including Gia. Others, like Zach, are just looking at the floor.

IZZY

And then my breathing would get worse, I would lose control of my bladder, probably pass out from time to time, and generally feel more pain each day than I've felt for most of my life. Which is why I'm here, because that sounds like a godforsaken nightmare.

The room is silent.

EVE

Thank you for sharing, Isabelle. I know that this has been a painful journey, and while we love you and don't want to lose you, we know what the next few months hold, and we can't imagine going through that sort of pain. You are very brave for being here today.

IZZY

And I actually have a REASON to be here, unlike some people...

The reactions are mixed. The more privileged attendees (Chad, Chloe, Zach to some extent) are understandably uncomfortable with being called out. The others just nod and try their best to empathize.

Back to Gia and Zach pre-group.

GIA

So where are YOU at, what's YOUR story?

ZACH

I was about to ask you the same.

GIA

Oh, mine is good, trust me. You'll feel so bad that you'll literally be begging to kill me.

They chuckle. Switch to Gia sharing with the group. No more cutting back and forth, the rest of the scene takes place in the present.

GIA

Hi everybody, I'm Gia.

EVERYONE

Hi, Gia.

GIA

I'm a regular, for those who don't know, so I'll try and keep to my usual 'script'.

(they chuckle)

Basically I have the full collection of mental illness in my genes. BPD, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and the usual substance abuse, alcoholism, childhood trauma, PTSD. Fun shit that I would LOVE to pretend isn't a problem.

(they chuckle again)

So any break I can get from being trapped inside my head is a HUGE relief, and as much as I love these meetings, I am looking forward to being able to move on. That's the gist.

They all clap - she comically takes a bow, they laugh.

EVE

Thank you so much, Gia. And if I remember, you have less than a month to go?

GIA

Yep. 22 days of hell left. No offense.

EVE

We understand. We'll certainly miss having you, but you'll be free soon.

GIA

That's the goal, right?

EVE

It is. Thanks again for sharing. And lastly we have a new member... Zach, whenever you're ready.

Zach nervously leans forward to present. Jeremy seems especially interested, even more so than Gia or Eve.

ZACH

Hey, so I'm not great with words... I'm Zach.

EVERYONE

Hi, Zach.

ZACH

Hi... I've just always felt like I don't... belong. And I don't have any medical or trauma or, I mean compared to some of you - it's probably not as extreme or relatable, but I just have always wanted to escape, so yeah... sorry, I'm not, still kinda figuring it all out.

They clap, Zach avoids making eye contact with anyone.

EVE

Thank you, Zach. We are happy to have you, and there's nothing wrong with figuring it all out - you're not the first, trust me.

(they all chuckle, even Zach)

Honestly, many of us are still in that phase, and we hope this is a safe, judgment-free space to process through all those feelings. We're very glad to have you.

ZACH

Thanks...

They all clap again. Gia, Jeremy and Eve smile at him supportively - he's embarrassed, but also relieved.

INT. WMWO STUDIO - NIGHT

On the set of 'White Men with Woke Opinions' is the host, Mike Michaelson, sitting opposite Leon.

MIKE

Good evening. Here with me tonight is the CEO of Háleit, Leon Volker. Háleit is a right-to-die facility that has come under scrutiny the last few days over the treatment of a former employee, but the protests have revitalized the debate over state-legalized euthanasia. Mr. Volker, it's a pleasure to have you on.

LEON

Blessings, Mike. Call me Leon.

MIKE

(chuckles)

Sure thing, Leon. Let me start by asking: why have you been so reluctant to speak up about the deaths of Ms. Thompson and Mr. Burge?

LEON

Well Mike, let ME start by saying that HÁLEIT has always had its fair share of controversy, and I've learned that it's not always prudent, nor constructive, to jump to making statements until the situation can be thoroughly assessed.

MIKE

So do you have an official statement now?

LEON

As a matter of fact, I do.

(pulls out a sheet of paper)

I would like to personally, and sincerely, apologize to Mr. Martin Burge for behavior that was not intended to be malicious, and was the result of a genuine misunderstanding. While we do take our employee training seriously, given the gravity of the work we do, I will readily admit when I have overstepped, and that was the case. To Martin's family, and Ms. Thompson's - deepest, heartfelt condolences are in order.

MIKE

Thank you. It's rather encouraging to have a CEO who addresses problems head on.

LEON

Well Mike, at HÁLEIT, we like to set the standard for corporate responsibility.

MIKE

Debatable. I'd like to address some other issues that have been raised this week. For instance, there are numerous concerns from current and former employees that you are not in the right frame of mind to be leading the company.

LEON

I told you, my outburst was a misunderstanding.

MIKE

I'm not talking about the outburst. We've heard from multiple sources that you routinely go on nonsensical tangents, you spend thousands of dollars on art pieces for your lobby, and you have an air of being "completely and wholly detached from the real world".

(Leon is silent)

There are also concerns about your screening process for new patients. Questions like "Do you want a narrative add-on?", "Have you ever been employed by one of our competitors" and "Do you know anyone who's killed themselves using one of our competitors?" are asked BEFORE questions like "Have you ever tried to kill yourself". And then there's the infamous 'motivational' posters, which have been controversial since day one.

(Leon is silent)

Would you care to comment?

LEON

(after a long silence)

HÁLEIT!

He looks at Mike deliberately but proudly, as if that's a sufficient answer. Mike is stumped, and they just stare at each other for a bit.

INT./EXT. DOREEN AND HECTOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The remnants from dinner are on the table (dirty plates, chicken bones, crumpled napkins). The house is quaint with modern, DIY decor and warm lighting.

Doreen and Laurie are chatting in the kitchen, while Hector and Vincent drink beers on the back patio. Focus first on Hector and Vincent.

HECTOR

Question. What is the single greatest problem facing humanity?

VINCENT

Death?

HECTOR

Close. Imbalance of power. Every major threat, problem, and source of brokenness all goes back to that imbalance. So death, for instance. It's a problem because death has too much power, and this push towards euthanasia - abhorrent as some may find it - is a flawed, but understandable attempt to give power back to humanity. To help us fight against death's unpredictability.

VINCENT

That seems like a stretch.

HECTOR

Challenge accepted. Name a problem.

VINCENT

Well, the flipside: euthanasia in itself being a problem to those of us who are still here.

HECTOR

But that's just an imbalance of power between the dead and the living, because the living feel cheated, i.e. powerless, to the dead and dying.

VINCENT

Mmm... It certainly applies to the usual issues like corruption, greed, selfishness...

HECTOR

You can't unsee it, can you? It's the disease. Everything else is the symptom. So now the real question: how do we combat it?

(Vincent leans in closer)

Randomness. Chance. Coin tosses, drawing lots. Being unpredictable. Let's use... how about politics as an example. Do you know the best way to reform the system and make your voice heard?

(Vincent shakes his head 'no')

Voting randomly. If you met the two candidates and said 'I don't care about your policies or your personalities, I'll just flip a coin to see who to vote for', how audacious would that be?

VINCENT

Woah...

HECTOR

Or with death. You can stick it to death AND the euthanasia companies by picking a random date and saying: 'THEN - that's when I want to die, and YOU ALL have to accommodate it.'

(Vincent's mind is blown)

And it can be small things. Say you're shopping - you randomly choose what brand to buy. If you're driving, randomly choose what radio station to listen to. If you need to make a big life choice, don't trust your brain to be reasonable. We act based on biology and our environment, not REASON. So you flip a coin!

VINCENT

That's brilliant...

HECTOR

It's liberating.

(raises his bottle)

To unpredictability!

VINCENT

Hear, hear!

They clink bottles, drink up, then sit back and enjoy the crisp night air.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (cont.)

Meanwhile, Laurie and Doreen are having their own existential discussion.

DOREEN

Do you ever feel like your life is... like you're part of a story, and the chapters are being written as you live them, but you don't know what they'll say until the moment they happen?

LAURIE

From time to time, certainly. It's usually easier to notice the beginnings and endings after a few years have passed, but sure, I think of my life as having chapters.

DOREEN

Okay good. For me, that's always been a 'I'm literally the only person who thinks this way so I must be crazy' sort of thing. Sometimes I get carried away trying to guess what happens next, which I'm terrible at. Even though it should be easy because everything is predetermined...

(she catches herself)

I'm so sorry, this is probably a little too deep.

LAURIE

No no, I think about this too - trust me.

DOREEN

Phew. Hector is all about 'fighting the flow' with coin tosses, I'm more of a 'surrender to the flow and try to guess what's coming next'.

(she chuckles)

Very practical, right?

LAURIE

To be fair, you're up against a very complex reality, LOTS of unknowns... At least you still have your optimism, trying to predict things.

DOREEN

But isn't it futile to even try? What's the point of fate if you can't anticipate it?

LAURIE

I don't know... that's the paradox. If you knew what your fate was, it wouldn't be your fate, because you could change it.

DOREEN

True enough.

There's a brief pause.

LAURIE

So this is related, I hope *I* don't sound like the crazy one now, but can I let you in on a secret?

DOREEN

Absolutely!

LAURIE

So I had a dream that there was a list of names on a board, and this random guy flipped a coin for each name to decide whether they lived or died. It had me, you, Vincent, Hector...

DOREEN

Interesting metaphor. Creepy as all get out, but that's fascinating. So it's like you were seeing behind the curtain.

(chuckles)

Funny what our subconscious can do!

LAURIE

Right, but I think it was real.

(Doreen is confused)

We might want to sit down.

DOREEN

Okay... just a second.

(to the husbands)

You all need more beers?

HECTOR

We're good for now!

VINCENT

Thanks!

Doreen is mildly concerned. She and Laurie go into the living room and sit on the couch.

DOREEN

You think it's real? The dream?

LAURIE

Yes. At first I thought, this is bizarre, but it was probably just a dream. BUT, I wrote it down to be safe, and it's - here, look.

(she pulls the list out of her purse and puts it on the coffee table)

So I still don't know some of them. Like 'Joe', I'm pretty sure - I think - that he was the guy from the dream.

DOREEN

The one flipping for your fate?

(she chuckles, Laurie doesn't laugh)

Sorry.

LAURIE

Forget it, you're right, this is too-

DOREEN

No, really, I'm sorry - I have a morbid sense of humor working at Háleit. Sorry. So Joe might have been the guy in the dream.

LAURIE

Right. Eve - from CORE, obviously. Then you, me, Hector and Vincent.

DOREEN

All three of you are marked 'live' except me.

(she jumps up)

Alright, what the hell is going on?

LAURIE

I'm not trying to scare you, I promise.

DOREEN

Too late for that.

(sits back down slowly)

Julia - from Háleit, she just died in the-

LAURIE
The protests. Right.

DOREEN
Well maybe you saw coverage of them and it worked its way into your subconscious.

LAURIE
No. This was the night before she was shot.

DOREEN
But she's their PR person. Same with Leon, the company's always in the news over some scandal, so both of those make sense.

LAURIE
Maybe... But it was literally the next morning, what are the odds?
(Doreen mulls it over)
And the one that terrifies me: Zach.

DOREEN
Zach, Zach... do I know him?

LAURIE
My son.

DOREEN
Oh right, you've mentioned him before. And he's marked as-
(it clicks)
Ohhhhh. You're worried about your boy. Now it makes sense why you're so worked up. Come here.

She opens her arms for a hug, but Laurie refuses.

LAURIE
You don't believe me, do you?

DOREEN
I- well, you have to admit, it's a little-

Laurie abruptly stands up and walks out angrily to her car. Doreen watches despondently, desperate to help but holding back for fear of making things worse.

INT. BLANK WHITE ROOM - DAY

Joe is pacing the room around with his eyes closed, humming to himself. On the whiteboard, Julia's name is crossed off. There's a steady knocking sound that starts soft, but keeps getting louder and louder...

INT. GIA'S ROOM - DAY

Zach is knocking on Gia's door. Her room is one of several patient rooms in the Háleit facility. He looks up and down the hallway, then checks his phone to make sure he has the right room number.

He's about to knock again when Gia excitedly swings the door open and startles him.

GIA

You found it! Enter at your own risk!

ZACH

Okay. Thanks...

Her room is small and strikingly empty. Other than her bed, her nightstand, a minifridge, some books, and a handful of photographs pinned on the wall (mostly of her and Eve), there's no decor, no personal items... nothing.

ZACH

It's very...

GIA

Minimalist? You surprised?

ZACH

Well, I... I guess that makes sense.

GIA

You can't take it with you! So no sense having it to begin with, right? In other news, I'm glad you survived the mob.

(Zach is confused)

The protestors? Seems like they're more aggressive than usual, ergo, good job!

ZACH

Thanks. Can I?

(gesturing to the bed)

I don't see any chairs.

GIA

Oh, hold up. HOLD up.

She opens the closet, pulls out a colorful rug, and unfurls it dramatically in the center of the room. Then she takes two of the pillows off the bed and puts one at each end.

ZACH

Fancy.

GIA

Right?

(they sit on the pillows)

So, I have a suggestion. You know they do narrative add-ons, right? Well, what if we did the Romeo/Juliet package, you and I?

ZACH

What?

GIA

You'd have to move up your date by... well, you would have all of two-ish weeks, but at least we'd die in each other's arms.

ZACH

Oh right, so I meant to ask... were you serious when you said you had 22 days?

GIA

Mm-hmm. Why, were you hoping that I would stick around longer?

ZACH

No. I mean yes. No.

(buries his head in his hands)

Sorry, I'm terrible at this.

GIA

No shit!

They both laugh. Zach is flustered, but also amused.

ZACH

Let's start over. I like you, but I'm not into you that way... or anybody in general, that way...

GIA

Ahhhh, that makes sense now. I was joking about the Romeo/Juliet thing. I literally just like making you uncomfortable.

ZACH

Wow. That's not cool.

GIA

Agree to disagree.

(Zach is still flustered)

I'm kidding, you're actually really adorable and I feel bad now. I feel like we click, and you haven't tried to hit on me - which you'd think would be less common, but guys are guys even when they're about to die, so...

ZACH

Yeah, I'm glad I don't deal with any of... that.

GIA

Is that why you're suicidal? You feel like you don't fit in because you're asexual?

ZACH

Maybe, it's more... there's a lot of other stuff...

GIA

I get it - it's a lot to process. Here, why don't I fill you in on MY backstory first. You seem like more of a listener anyways.

ZACH

(chuckles)

Yeah, definitely.

GIA

Also, do you want juice? I have juice boxes and only 18 days to use them.

Zach nods excitedly. Gia skips over to the fridge, grabs two juice boxes, and sits back down.

GIA

So, my story. And this stays between us, nobody besides Eve knows about this.

ZACH

Okay.

GIA

I do have some of those issues I talked about, but I'm TECHNICALLY not suicidal. I learned how to cope at a very young age, mainly through humor, screaming into pillows, and generally not giving a flying fuck.

(Zach chuckles)

But. My dad ran off when I was eight - surprised he made it that long. And it took my mom all of two weeks to find a replacement, a guy who just 'wasn't emotionally ready for a daughter'. So I was shuffled in and out of foster care, shelters, juvie twice... fun stuff.

ZACH

Sounds like it.

GIA

It turns out - the social safety net is almost nonexistent when you turn 18. Except if you say you're suicidal. So, I checked in here, and they gave me a place to crash, food, counseling-

ZACH

So you're lying?

GIA

I don't think of it as lying per se, just using a broken system to my advantage. Legally I have to put on the charade of being suicidal if I want the benefits. But I'm working, I've been saving for over a year - and in a week or so, I'll tell them I have a new lease on life, and I'll be free to go, no harm no foul. Then I can actually SURVIVE on my own and start my life!

ZACH

Damn... and they're okay with it? I mean, Eve is?

GIA

Oh yeah, she gets it. It was her idea actually, she brought me in when I was homeless.

ZACH

You were homeless?

GIA

For like a week.

ZACH

That sucks. I mean, awesome that she helped you, but still...

GIA

Yeah, she's pretty impressive. So that's my life. I'll be gone in a few weeks, just not the way everything is expecting.

(they chuckle)

You had some time to think over YOUR story?

ZACH

Not really... I feel, I don't - clearly I'm not as desperate as some people, I feel like I shouldn't be here, but I don't know what else to do.

GIA

My. Thoughts. Exactly.

ZACH

No, it's NOT exactly, because you've been through real shit, and I haven't.

GIA

Everyone's shit is different.

ZACH

But mine doesn't actually matter.

Without warning, he stands up and leaves in a silent rage. Gia watches him from the door, but doesn't follow after him as he storms down the hallway.

INT. EVE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eve is going through her evening workout routine: a series of yoga poses while hanging from the rafters; dancing to classic 30's swing music; running in place on hot coals; and finally, a meditation cooldown.

However, in a bizarre twist, her meditation is actually a pre-recorded video. Which she's watching in the present, *while she's meditating in the exact same spot.*

EVE (video)

And one last breath.

(they both breathe in unison)

Doesn't that feel invigorating?

EVE (real life)

Unbelievably so.

EVE (video)

I'm glad. I pray this has been as life-giving for me as it has been for you, future Eve. I look forward to becoming you.

EVE (real life)

And I reflect fondly on having been you.

They close their eyes and bow in unison.

BOTH EVES

Namaste.

A bit later, she's bundled up on the couch with a cup of blue tea and a book called: The Vulgate, Nirvana, and You.

While she's reading, the door opens - she can hear her husband taking off his shoes and jacket, putting his keys on the ring, setting down his briefcase...

EVE

You made it through the storm! I take it the protest dissipated?

LEON

Mostly.

Leon strides into the room; they kiss tenderly.

LEON
You are lustrous.

EVE
YOU are lustrous.
(they kiss again)
Are you hungry? I made quinoa and edamame pâté.

LEON
Ooooh. Sounds delectable.

INT. EVE/LEON'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT (cont.)

They're sitting at the table eating dinner and having a brainstorming session. Although it mostly involves them just sitting and thinking.

LEON
Meet and greet, meet and greet...
(long silence)
What if you line everyone up by height, and then you pair them off for the discussion groups - the tallest two, then the next two, all the way down the line...
(pause)
It would be effectively random.

EVE
Line them up by height...
(Leon nods)
But what do we do if somebody is wearing a hat?

LEON
Mmm. Good point...

With that idea off the table, they resume their silent contemplation. After a bit, Eve has a suggestion.

EVE
What if we line them up by aura?

LEON
Yes!

INT. EVE/LEON'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (cont.)

Leon is lying on the couch, venting as if he's at a therapist's office, while Eve reads her book and listens.

LEON

You know that if our office was boring, then they would accuse us of insensitivity. 'How dare you make death a bland, cold, soulless experience?'

EVE

Mmm.

LEON

But if we spend money on sculptures, then it's frivolous, excessive. They don't see the beauty because they don't want to.

EVE

Mmm.

LEON

It's such an intricate dance... life and death, infinity and finality.

EVE

Yin and Yang.

LEON

Exactly.

(silence)

I really don't like killing people.

(he sits up and looks at Eve)

Which means I'm perfect for the job, right? If I took some perverse pleasure in it, how horrific would that be?

(he lays back down)

I HAVE to be the one who does it... But I hate it. How can those truths coexist?

EVE

It's all about balance.

LEON

It is...

He sits up and takes a sip of a smoothie that's sitting on the end table. The flavor intrigues him.

LEON
Is this kale?

EVE
Beef liver. I'm switching things up.

He nods, impressed, and takes another sip.

INT. EVE/LEON'S BATHROOM - NIGHT (cont.)

The room is romantically lit. Incense is burning, candles are flickering, and the bathtub is filled with boba.

They're sitting opposite each other in the tub, staring deliberately into each other's eyes. Finally, Eve cracks and bursts out laughing.

EVE
That's unnatural!

LEON
I don't know what to tell you. It's not that I can't laugh, I just don't.

EVE
(finishing his sentence)
You just don't. I know, I know.

LEON
Even as a child, I didn't laugh. Everyone assumed that I was miserable. I was a very happy child, nobody believed me when I told them.

EVE
Mmm. Well this may surprise you, but I was a very happy child, and everyone knew it.

LEON
You? No!

He smiles but doesn't laugh, Eve chuckles to herself, then throws boba at him playfully.

INT. EVE/LEON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (cont.)

It's almost midnight. The lights are all off. The only color is coming from an orange lava lamp on the nightstand. They're both lying serenely in bed, on the brink of sleep. Leon is spooning Eve and stroking her hair.

LEON

You smell heavenly.

(Eve chuckles softly)

Today was a precious day. YOU are a precious day.

Eve chuckles again. There's a poignant silence.

LEON

I see you.

EVE

I see you, too.

The house is still and peaceful. The ceiling fan whirs away quietly overhead.

Suddenly, there's a loud, chaotic rush of glass shattering, like all the windows are being smashed at the same time.

Leon and Eve jolt awake. The alarm starts blaring, and there's a voice outside thundering on a megaphone.

VOICE

Innocens ego sum a sanguine iusti huius populis!

EVE

(translating simultaneously)

I am innocent of the blood of this people.

VOICE

Sanguis eorus super manos vestros!!

EVE

Their blood is on your hands...

She and Leon hold each other, both of them numb with fear. Suddenly the house rumbles, rocked with violent explosions, and everything is instantly consumed by fire.

INT. CORE CHURCH - DAY

It's raining, the sun is shrouded by clouds, and there's a somber crowd attending a joint funeral for Eve and Leon. Although there are protestors raging outside, the noise is muted inside the sanctuary.

Sitting in one of the rows are Vincent, Laurie, Zach, Doreen and Hector. Gia is in a different row with some of the group members, including Jeremy.

The room is silent. Gia occasionally looks over at Zach, but his head is down the whole time. Doreen also keeps glancing at Zach and fidgeting anxiously.

INT./EXT. CORE CHURCH - NIGHT

Some time later, the crowd has thinned out, and the protestors have dispersed. There are still a few hundred attendees lingering and chatting. Jeremy and Gia are gone, but the other five are still there.

Focus first on Doreen, who's in tears outside by herself, completely drenched and shivering in the rain. She has a flashback (black and white) to Zach checking in at Háleit.

DOREEN

Why do you want to kill yourself?

ZACH

I feel like - it's hard to describe, I just feel different, and I want out... so...

She has another flashback to the night with Laurie.

DOREEN

Zach, Zach... do I know him?

LAURIE

My son.

DOREEN

Oh right, you've mentioned him before. And he's marked as-

Back in the present, she almost throws up as she puts the pieces together. She gets in her car and drives away as fast as she can.

Switch focus to Laurie, who's scanning the crowd inside the main auditorium.

LAURIE

Doreen? Doreen?

Switch focus to Vincent, Hector and Zach, who are standing casually in the lobby.

HECTOR

That was a beautiful service.

VINCENT

Agreed. Understated, but simple is good.

HECTOR

Amen.

ZACH

Can I go now?

VINCENT

Stick around a bit - your mother's not done yet.

ZACH

I want to kill myself..

VINCENT

Hey, not a good time!

ZACH

Sorry.

(awkward pause)

Actually, no, there will never be a 'good time'.

Vincent is prepared to snap, but Hector calms him.

HECTOR

You make a valid point, Zachary. This is as good a time as any, seeing that death is on our minds, right Vincent?

VINCENT

Okay, sure. So you want to kill yourself?

ZACH

Yeah.

HECTOR

But you realize that you wanting to die is a decision largely out of your control, an amalgam of chemical processes, external stimuli, and stored memory leading to that conclusion.

(Zach is confused)

See, you are a slave to your desire, and you don't even realize it.

ZACH

What?

VINCENT

What he means is, you may not understand WHY you want to die - but given how grave and permanent the choice will be, it's probably better left to chance than to your cognition.

(Zach is completely lost)

It's not your fault.

HECTOR

Not at all your fault.

VINCENT

Like Hector said, we're trapped with decisions that we don't consciously choose. So, sometimes it's better to just... flip a coin.

(he pulls out a quarter)

Heads you live, tails you go through with it.

ZACH

Seriously??

He scoffs at them and storms away to his car. Vincent and Hector seem genuinely unsure as to why he's upset, but they shrug it off. Laurie approaches them.

LAURIE

I can't find her. Is she out here?

HECTOR

Nope. Odd.

LAURIE

Where's Zach?

VINCENT

He just left. He was in one of his moods.

LAURIE

Seriously?? What did you say to him?!

VINCENT

Nothing! Why do you assume it's me?

LAURIE

This can't be happening... It's all too fast...

(she flashes back to the list and focuses on
'Eve' and 'Leon', both crossed off now)

Okay, deep breaths. Hector, what about your car?
Maybe she's waiting there.

HECTOR

Let me check.

Hector goes to check on the car. Laurie is staring daggers
at Vincent.

VINCENT

What? What now?

LAURIE

If anything happens to him, I swear.

VINCENT

Laurie, he's fine, it's a phase. I know you're
worried about him after Sydney and all, but he's
not like her. No offense, he's weak, he wouldn't
really DO anything.

LAURIE

You don't know what I know.

Vincent grumbles. Suddenly, Hector returns, his eyes wide.
Laurie immediately goes outside and calls Doreen.

INT. DOREEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Doreen is gripping the steering wheel while the windshield wipers swipe back and forth, with the road only barely visible ahead of her.

Her phone rings. Incoming call from Laurie. She accepts - Laurie's voice fills the car.

LAURIE (phone)

Doreen, thank god, where are you?

DOREEN

You were right. You were right...

LAURIE (phone)

Are you okay? Where are you?

DOREEN

Your son. I didn't realize... He came in for an appointment last week.

(her voice cracking)

And Leon and Eve, you were right.

LAURIE (phone)

No, no I was wrong - like you said, it was all subconscious, he had told me he wanted to kill himself and so it was part of my dream, but the list is not real. You're going to be fine.

DOREEN

I'm scared. I'm really scared, Laurie.

LAURIE (phone)

Listen to me. I want you to pull over and try to calm down - can you do that for me?

DOREEN

Okay, okay - please God, please, please.

She spins the steering wheel too hard. Suddenly the world slows down and goes silent. The car spins out of control and hydroplanes into the other lane, right in front of an oncoming semi truck. Back to Laurie, who drops the phone and passes out.

INT./EXT. HÁLEIT OFFICES - NIGHT

Jeremy is sitting quietly at his desk. Except for him, the office is empty. He walks over to Eve's cubicle and stands in front of it contemplatively.

After a bit, he goes outside on the balcony. Between the rain and lack of protestors, the silence is refreshing. Jeremy looks around, does a double take, and notices Zach sitting without an umbrella on one of the benches.

JEREMY

Zach? Zach!

(Zach looks up)

I'll be right down!

He runs inside, grabs his umbrella, and hurries downstairs.

INT. HÁLEIT OFFICES - NIGHT (cont.)

A few minutes later, Zach is in the office with Jeremy, both of them warming themselves by a space heater.

ZACH

Thanks again.

JEREMY

Anytime. Do you need me to get you anything?
Food, something warm to drink?

ZACH

No thanks.

JEREMY

Sure.

(pause for a bit)

The funeral was... both of them, it's messed up...

ZACH

Mm-hmm.

JEREMY

I can't imagine...

(he scoots closer)

If you want to talk about it... Or anything else...

No response from Zach. Jeremy's heart is pounding, his breathing quickening. He inches his hand closer to Zach's. Zach turns his head slowly, looks into Jeremy's eyes, then leans in and starts crying.

ZACH

I can't deal with this shit anymore.

Jeremy awkwardly realizes that this isn't going to be a romantic moment. Embarrassed, he quickly wraps his arms around Zach and consoles him platonically.

ZACH

I feel like nobody gets it, like all the stuff that 'regular' people do, I don't understand, it's like I'm a fucking robot pretending to be like everyone else, but I don't like sex, or music, or PEOPLE, or being alive, or doing all the normal shit that humans do, and then they're like 'oh Zach, you're just figuring things out' and I'm NOT, I figured it out, but I can't fucking talk to people, and so then I sound like a loser and apparently I don't have anything that's actually worth killing myself over.

And then my dad is literally like 'why don't you flip a coin?', because I guess that's what my life is worth, right? And like he doesn't get that honestly that's how I feel. So I just have to pretend like everything is fine and I'll get over it and be okay, and what I really want-

What I really want is to just be alone. I don't want to deal with fucking people fucking things up and treating me like I'm an idiot. I want to live by myself and not have to deal with humans and that's NEVER gonna happen, because nobody will actually LET me, so this is my best option, and I fucking hate it, because I don't want to be here, I fucking HATE it here. I hate my life, and I hate the pressure, and I just wish everything would just fucking stop.

He keeps sobbing. Jeremy holds him close and assures him that everything will be okay.

INT. BLANK WHITE ROOM - NIGHT

The room is dimly lit and eerily still. Joe is standing in the middle, bracing himself. On the whiteboard, Eve, Doreen and Leon have all been crossed off. Of the remaining names, the only ones marked 'Die' are Joe and Zach.

Suddenly Laurie appears. She takes a second to adjust, then immediately lunges at Joe and pins him down.

LAURIE

WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?!

(she picks up the office chair and starts beating him with it)

IS HE STILL ALIVE?! TELL ME WHERE MY SON IS!!

TELL ME IF HE'S ALIVE!!

(Joe is starting to lose consciousness)

YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO TREAT PEOPLE LIKE THIS!!

THIS IS **SICK!!**

(his face is a bloody mess)

TELL ME WHERE HE IS!!

She collapses with exhaustion. Joe is coughing up blood and gasping for air. He crawls to the whiteboard, grabs the marker, and struggles comically to cross off his own name.

LAURIE

You psychopath. You think this is funny?

(she glares at him furiously)

Tell. Me. Where. My. Son. Is.

With his last bit of energy, Joe hands Laurie the marker and looks at her sympathetically. She watches in stunned silence as he takes his last breath.

After a few seconds, she goes to the board, erases the 'Die' next to Zach's name, and writes 'Live'. She almost faints with relief and starts crying with joy.

With that, she tries to erase the other names marked as 'Die', but she can't - it's too late. She keeps trying, and starts screaming and pounding on the board.

Finally, she gives up and stares at the ceiling, waiting for the nightmare to be over.

INT. LAURIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The EKG is beeping steadily. Laurie is laying in the bed. She slowly opens her eyes and smiles. Vincent is sitting next to her, holding her hand tightly.

VINCENT
She's back.

LAURIE
She is... what did I miss?

VINCENT
(bites his lip)
There was... an accident.

LAURIE
No, that's not possible, he can't- no, no no.

VINCENT
He? Honey, not a he, it was Doreen.

Switch to a silent sequence of Hector racing to the scene of the accident. He runs into the wreckage, shoving past first responders, trying to free Doreen's lifeless body from the crumpled car. He shouts in despair as he realizes he's lost her.

Switch back to the hospital. Laurie wipes away tears from her eyes, then clutches Vincent's hand again.

LAURIE
I'm so sorry I lost her. I couldn't save her, couldn't save her in time.

VINCENT
It's not your fault, it was an accident.

LAURIE
I didn't save her in time...
(fades for a second, then returns)
Where's Zach?

VINCENT
He's downstairs, he had a rough night.

LAURIE
He's still alive.

VINCENT
Yeah, but you were right about him wanting to...
to... You know. It's like Sydney all over again.

LAURIE
They get that from you.

VINCENT
(bursts out laughing)
No, actually, I think it was your hit list.
(he grabs her list from the bedside table,
she's caught by surprise)
It was in your purse. I found it while I was
looking for your insurance card. Don't worry, it
was a one-time thing. After finding this bad boy,
believe me, I will keep out of your stuff.
(she chuckles)
Now, flattered as I am that you didn't kill ME...
(he rips it up)
You don't mind, do you? Pretty incriminating.
(they both laugh)
In any case... he's doing okay, but we have a lot
to talk about. You want me to get him?
(she nods)
Alright, we'll be back quick.
(he kisses her)
Love you. Hang tight.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - DAY (cont.)

Zach and Jeremy are sitting quietly next to each other.
Vincent steps out of the elevator and motions for Zach to
join him upstairs.

JEREMY
Do you need me to come with you?

ZACH
No, I'll be fine.

He meets his dad at the elevator. Jeremy watches even after
the elevator doors close.

EXT. SMALL FOREST TOWN - DAY

SUPER: Two Years Later

Zach is jogging along the dirt road while the sun rises - no headphones, just the sounds of nature. He rounds the corner and enters a neighborhood of tiny houses.

He pauses briefly in front of one of them. As he stops to catch his breath, Gia steps outside in her robe, smiles, and flips him off before yelling at him comically.

GIA

Pervert! Get off my street!

ZACH

Did you just assume my sexual inclinations?

GIA

Damn it!

They both laugh. She goes inside, and he continues jogging until he reaches his own tiny house, which is nice and secluded at the end of the road.

INT. BRENNER CONSTRUCTION OFFICES - DAY

Jeremy is manning the front desk. It's a small office, just a few rooms. There are medals, accreditations, and pictures of the crew hanging on the wall.

Since there's not much to do, Jeremy is watching an online clip of Vincent giving an interview with WMWO. It was just released last night.

MIKE

So tell me, Vincent, this new program, the PAQ housing initiative - what inspired it?

VINCENT

Well Mike - huge fan of the show by the way.

MIKE

Thank you!

VINCENT

So, the PAQ initiative - for those viewers who don't know, PAQ stands for Peace and Quiet.

(they chuckle)

You know, it wasn't an overnight thing, there were a lot of influences. But the bottom line was that the right-to-die programs weren't addressing some of the deeper issues and gaps in our social welfare system. Like chronic homelessness, or people who don't want to spend their last days in a hospital or a clinic. Or people like my son, who just wanted to be left alone.

So rather than tell people, 'your only option is to commit suicide' - why not give them affordable and isolated housing? Next thing you know, we're working with insurance companies who are THRILLED to divert the right-to-die money towards a cause that's not as controversial. And just like that, we have twenty communities, with twenty more planned for the next year.

Jeremy is interrupted by Laurie and Hector pulling up. Hector's on the phone - he holds the door open for Laurie, then continues his call outside.

HECTOR

But the per-member cost is LOWER because you can cut the medical entirely, so you don't have to sort through the red tape of healthcare - just construction, which is ONE expense... Exactly!

Laurie smiles and hugs Jeremy.

LAURIE

Good interview, right?

(Jeremy nods)

I don't know why he was so nervous, I think he's a natural... Anything to report?

JEREMY

Well, still at zero fatalities, which is infinitely better than my last job.

(they laugh)

Just a few calls scheduling more interviews.

LAURIE
Get out! Did you tell him yet?

JEREMY
Nah, I figured you should. I can get you the names and numbers of the contacts.

LAURIE
Later, no need to rush. Thank you!

JEREMY
The pleasure is all mine.

LAURIE
You sound like a butler!
(she chuckles)
Is Gia here?

JEREMY
Not yet.

LAURIE
Well when she gets here, tell her I said hi.
(she heads back outside)
We'll be back for lunch!

Jeremy waves goodbye and watches them drive away. He stares out the window at the peaceful woods, sipping his coffee and enjoying the scenery.

The moment of peace is shattered when he turns around and sees Gia hanging from the ceiling (she's not really dead).

JEREMY
AHHHH!!

GIA
AHHHH!!

FADE OUT.