**Rezumat:**

Odată revenit la realitate, David trebuie să învețe să se integreze într-o lume care, deși îi pare la prima vedere familiară, a încercat să elimine pe cât posibil hazardul și susține dreptul fundamental al omului la control asupra calității și duratei vieții prin organe artificiale, sistemul Oculus Rift, Oasis, eutanasie asistată etc. Pentru aceasta, el și alți 4 utilizatori Oasis vor forma o grupă de sprijin, dar terapia dă greș curând. David se apropie tot mai mult de Gloria. Cei doi încep să se izoleze de ceilalți,iar punctul de cotitură îl constituie sinuciderea unuia dintre cei 5.

**PERSONAJE**

DAVID

GLORIA – fiica unică la bătrânețe a unor avocați, venită pe lume datorită sistemului de fertilizare in vitro. La 17 ani a avut un accident de ski în urma căruia a intrat în comă, iar părinții semnează pentru integrarea ei în sistemul Oasis. Contractul stipula ca ea să fie trezită la 10 ani de la moartea lor dacă până atunci nu au hotărât acest lucru.

MR. SCOTT – un om de știință mediocru de vârstă mijlocie. Frustrat de nereușitele lui academice, semnează cu Oasis pe o perioadă de 50 ani, sperând ca între timp știința să fi progresat destul cât să își poate aduce aportul.

SARAH – o femeie divorțată căreia i-a murit unicul copil într-un accident stupid. A semnat cu Oasis pentru 5 ani.

DIANE – o bătrână, moștenitoare a unui „imperiuʺ aviatic. Și-a înmormântat atât copiii, cât și majoritatea nepoților. A semnat cu Oasis pentru a fi trezită când i se termină finanțele.

**DISCLAIMER: The work is an artistic homage to Vanilla Sky (2001). It is not intended to be published as a book, produced as a movie or utilized in any other money-making manner. It has no commercial purpose. This online posting does not intend to infringe the copyright of the movie, characters, and script of the Vanilla Sky franchise. The text cannot be produced without permission from its author.**

Cristina Diamant s-a născut pe 29 septembrie 1992 în Oradea.

În prezent este masterandă a Facultății de Litere, Universitatea

Babeș-Bolyai, urmând programul de Studii Culturale Britanice.

INTERIOR. A LIBRARY’S CAFETERIA. CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS ALL OVER THE PLACE. SEVERAL CHINA ELVES ON MUSHROOMS LEFT FROM HALLOWEEN.

A stout middle-aged man with a grey moustache enters.

WOMAN

 That will be 3.65, please.

STUDENT

Uh...I knew I had some change somewhere...

(checks her other pocket)

Here you are.

WOMAN

Thank you and good luck!

The man steps to the side without looking at the STUDENT. Raising his eyebrows, he approaches the WOMAN.

WOMAN

Mr. Scott! Haven’t seen you in quite a while. I was telling Ann the other day that either you forgot about this place entirely or you brew your own coffee now in the reading room.

MR. SCOTT

(playing with his moustache)

Very nice in here, very cozy. Quite romantic, with the red candles and Sinatra, the old boy.

WOMAN

It’s quite nice in here, isn’t it now? We bought the candles at the dollar store and they’re still glowing oh so bright. It’s warmer,too.

MR. SCOTT

Warmer, yeah...How come you don’t fall asleep standing, beats me.

WOMAN

(laughs)

It’s our coffee, of course!

MR. SCOTT

Then I’ll have one, too.

(coughs)

I was on the brink of dozing off in the reading room, too, but it was no good anyway. Head on the table? The back of my neck was killing me! Legs –

WOMAN

Milk and 2 spoonfuls of sugar?

MR. SCOTT

(looks around, but the cafeteria is empty)

Yeah, just how I like it.

WOMAN

Alright, here it is, nice and fresh.

MR. SCOTT

Thank you, dear. (sips) So as I was saying, legs on the table? That lady with the ugly green plastic rimmed glasses will start yelling, ‘cause you know, this is a public institution, you can’t just do as you like...!

WOMAN

(hand in her palm)

Which lady was it?

MR. SCOTT

That one I can’t stand!

The WOMAN laughs. MR SCOTT takes out a wallet rattling with coins. The WOMAN lightly touches his hand, smiling, and he puts it back in his pocket.

MR. SCOTT

Well, so I, you know what I told her?

WOMAN

What?

MR. SCOTT

I looked her up and down and said: “Well, cutie pie, if you want to, I can pick you up like you’re 20 again and you’ll feel alright, trust me”. I meant it, ugly glasses and all, but she was all like “Knock it off, will you”.

WOMAN

You can’t really joke with everyone.

MR. SCOTT

Yeah...Well, this looks romantic, indeed.

WOMAN

Until the holidays, at the very least, since in the first week...

MR. SCOTT

You know, I once told a lady friend of mine to meet me here for a coffee. It was a while ago, not nice like now.

WOMAN

Really? A lady friend?

MR. SCOTT

Yeah. I told her: “I’m in the reading room. Woman, come this way, as you are, coffee awaits us in the back”. She asked when. I said “now”. Now, come already. “But I’m not dressed yet!”. Very well then, come undressed.

(pause)

By the way, anything sweet, but really, really sweet...what do you have for sale?

WOMAN

Like a pancake or something?

MR. SCOTT

Something with some vitamins, too.

(playing with his moustache)

That’s for me, not for a lady friend.

EXTERIOR. PARK. AUTUMN AFTERNOON.

DAVID

(in a sing-song voice)

‘Cause after aaall-

GLORIA chuckles, then suddenly looks more serious, moving her curly head in the rhythm of the song.

DAVID

-you’re my wonderwaaaall.

(laughs)

Oh, come on! You’re cruel! No applause?

GLORIA

Alright, alright, you’ve earned this. (applause) Though it’s not really the Oasis I had in mind.

DAVID

Oh, well, it might just be the one I’m ready to discuss right now.

GLORIA

Don’t you think it’s, I don’t know, sort of funny? How you don’t look that much older than me, but, well...

DAVID

But I tell you stuff a grandfather might? (pause) No, no, there’s no use denying it, I do have more life experience, young lady...(smiles) What?

GLORIA

I just meant, it’s like this is some theatre rehearsal, this whole therapy group, like we’re all back in middleschool, sort of. At the end you’re supposed to say “yes, Mrs Mandy”, “I understand, Mrs Mandy”, and “thank you, Mrs Mandy”, but I really don’t see the point of this all. I’m not sure when all this talking will –

DAVID is searching his pockets.

GLORIA

Just what are you doing?

DAVID

Close your eyes. Come on, you know you can trust me. (pause) Your open palms now. Yes, like that.

(places one cold chestnut in her left palm)

Alright, feel it. Don’t laugh. (laughs) Can you tell what it is? Is it a pebble?

GLORIA

D’you really take me for a child? It’s a chestnut, silly.

DAVID

Aaand right you are! Congrats, here, have another one!

(gives her a hot chestnut from a brown bag)

GLORIA

Oh my! That burnt! Hey!

DAVID laughs and takes out another chestnut. Camera zooms out as they chat, eating chestnuts.

EXTERIOR. STREET.

An old lady in a faux-fur coat smoking an e-cig crosses the street without looking both ways first. A driver slams on the brakes and comes to a full stop not to hit her. Camera pans to the front of the building: OASIS PROJECT.

A ROOM WITH LIGHT GREEN WALLS.6 CHAIRS IN A CIRCLE. 2 ARE LEFT UNOCCUPIED.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Thank you, Gloria. That was nicer than usual and I’m glad for it.

DAVID smiles at GLORIA. She starts playing with a ring on her middle finger. The automatic glass door opens and MR. SCOTT enters coughing.

OLD WOMAN WITH A SCARF COVERING HER MOUTH

You’re late.

MR. SCOTT

(looks at her smiling with his eyes, but not his lips)

Oh, I’m so sorry. I did not quite get that. I was held up, you see.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Held up? There’s hardly any traffic today.

DAVID

There’s a free spot –

MR. SCOTT sits down next to the PSYCHOLOGIST.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Gloria was just telling us about the progress she’s making at school.

MR. SCOTT

(cleaning his glasses)

Oh, at school?

(puts them on)

That’s wonderful!

PSYCHOLOGIST

This is our 4th meeting, Scott. You know why we’re all here. Gloria apparently just realized, too, as she is now finally opening up.

MR. SCOTT

(coughs)

Opening up, the sweet little child, is she?

GLORIA looks down and crosses her legs.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Yes, opening up and fitting in better with her colleagues. And you, Scott? Anything you wish to share?

OLD WOMAN WITH A SCARF COVERING HER MOUTH

I bet no one held him up.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Diane, constructive feedback is what we need now.

MR. SCOTT

Well, I was held up! I really was. But I don’t have to tell you.

(pause)

It’s this nice lady I meet at the university’s library. Well, at the cafeteria, rather. We had a bit of a chit-chat, you see.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Bonding is more important than being on time, although they are not mutually exclusive. Go on.

MR. SCOTT

I joked a bit...she laughed. She laughs at my jokes. I had a nice coffee. It was a good week.

(frowns)

It was a good week.

OLD WOMAN WITH A SCARF COVERING HER MOUTH

He frowned.

MR. SCOTT

I was trying to think, woman! God, you’d think patience comes with age. (looks up) No offense meant.

PSYCHOLOGIST

(smiles)

Go on.

MR. SCOTT

Well, I frowned because it wasn’t all rosy-tinted bliss. My research isn’t going all that well. It’s...stalling.

(coughs)

DAVID

I’m sure it’ll pick up soon if you give it some time.

MR. SCOTT

(laughs)

Time, huh?

PSYCHOLOGIST

And how does this make you feel?

MR. SCOTT

It’s out of my control. I don’t recognize my own field anymore and it’s all moving too fast to change it. I hate it.

(raises his shoulders)

Who wouldn’t. There’s nothing wrong with me. Now, don’t you write that down! This has nothing to do with me being involved with the Oasis or not.

PSYCHOLOGIST

(puts the pen in the middle of the notebook)

Scott, we are here to help each other, not to judge one another.

MR. SCOTT

I’d like it to be easier. That’s all.

(looks away))

I remembered it being difficult, but not quite so, you know?

INTERIOR. HALLWAY.

GLORIA is waiting for her drink at the vending machine. MR. SCOTT walks by her in a hurried manner, nodding at people as he goes by.

DAVID

Today was...umm, pretty tense.

GLORIA

Do you really think Sarah is down with the flu?

DAVID

I don’t know.

(pause)

I hope so.

GLORIA

(takes her cup)

I hope so, too.

DAVID

It’s pretty dark. I’ll walk you home.

GLORIA

Okay, just let me grab my coat.

INTERIOR. THE LIGHT GREEN ROOM AFTER EVERYBODY HAS LEFT.

WOMAN STANDING IN THE DOORFRAME

So you’re done for the day, eh?

PSYCHOLOGIST

(moving the chairs back to their places)

Yeah, I am. (stops, arms resting on a chair) There’s this patient I’m concerned about. She hasn’t shown up today and I keep getting the answering machine, so I told the others she’s down with the flu since it’s, well, season appropriate. (smiles) The problem is, she’s been very silent lately and I can’t get her to talk about Mark just yet.

WOMAN STANDING IN THE DOORFRAME

You mean the one with the freak accident?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Oh yes, the poor woman. If only they’d let us help them, you know?

WOMAN STANDING IN THE DOORFRAME

You want to discuss this over coffee?

PSYCHOLOGIST

It goes a bit against the etiquette-

WOMAN STANDING IN THE DOORFRAME

Alright, how about we make it coffee at my place then?

PSYCHOLOGIST

(moving the last chair)

That sounds nice actually. Yeah, I could use it. (smiles) Thanks.

OUTDOORS. CITY CENTRE CAFÉ.

DAVID and GLORIA sit down. She turns her back, fumbling with the bag. David takes her frappé paper cup and laughs.

DAVID

“Gloria the Glorious”? So this is the name you go by these days after dark?

GLORIA

(brushing a curl out of her eyes)

What? Let me see that.

(takes the paper cup and laughs, covering her mouth)

I can’t-

(laughs harder)

I can’t even-

DAVID

(laughs)

What? So you didn’t ask for it?

GLORIA

(shrugs, laughing)

I can’t even remember what the barista looked like! Not even if it was a he or a she!

(sighs)

Let me see yours.

(takes it)

Oh, David? That’s it?

DAVID

Well, what were you expecting, really? David the Divine?

GLORIA

It doesn’t really have the same ring now, does it? Now, if your name were Dave, for instance…

DAVID

Ok…Go on, you have my full,undivided attention.

GLORIA

Then “Divine” wouldn’t cut it. It sounds more like a mechanic’s name, doesn’t it? Actually, to look at you, my first guess would have been Sam. Then again, the biblical ring, though a bit less (makes air quotes) “in your face”.

DAVID

I think Gloria really suits you. Your crazy hair makes me think of the 80s and you do have that survival kind of, hmm, aura about you.

GLORIA

I have no idea what one has to do with the other, but thanks, I guess?

(sips)

So you’d have guessed my name?

DAVID

Certainly. (smiles) You see, I really am good with people.

GLORIA

So the rumour goes.

DAVID

Gloria…It’s a nice name. You know, it’s probably in my top three female names now. Quite classy.

GLORIA

Is one of them your mother’s?

DAVID

(laughs)

Oh, no, God rest her soul, but Ann’s a dreadfully bland name. Absolutely no poetry in it.

GLORIA

But quite a bit of history, wouldn’t you say? Alright. Let me take a guess.

INDOORS. A stylish studio. Two women at a coffee table.

A helicopter is seen flying off in the distance through the window.

WOMAN

Wait, so it isn’t Sarah the one you’re worried about?

PSYCHOLOGIST

It’s Diane and David I’ve been following closer lately, actually. Sure, I knew from the get-go I would deal with another group where some have codependency issues, others control issues and some both, but it’s been over five weeks now.

WOMAN

At least they don’t suffer from culture shock like Zoey in my group.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Mm, you’re right. But they’ve all lost someone. You see, in the beginning, Mr Scott tried Oculus Rift, but before it got too serious, we had a talk about how and why it can’t and shouldn’t be a substitute for Oasis. At first I thought Diane was already too detached in her own right, but her approach is surprisingly pragmatic lately. You see, I checked her file the other day and (takes a sip) she’s caught up with the technology, too.

WOMAN

Who would have thought, at her age! And I still can’t get my father to get an eye surgery. He keeps saying he likes keeping the eyes that first saw his current wife.

PSYCHOLOGIST

 Apparently she applied for one of those experimental programs and she’s getting an artificial liver next month.

WOMAN

Planning ahead at her age might be a good sign. At least she’s still interested in keeping her living standard up and, really, isn’t that the best any of us can hope?

PSYCHOLOGIST

I’d be happier about it if I didn’t suspect she’s taken to drinking, though. Whenever she’s with the group, she’s, well, indisposed, to say the least.

WOMAN

What about David? From what you were telling me, it sounded like he’s the most level-headed of the five.

PSYCHOLOGIST

He is, generally speaking, and that’s what worries me. Whether I see him with the group or at an individual meeting, he never seems to break character. Considering his background, I suspect – but I really hope I’m wrong – that he’s dealing with a different kind of addiction.

OUTDOORS. CITY CENTRE CAFÉ.

GLORIA

(sips)

Mmm, not fair! I never had a Miss Lilly! Primary school would have been so much fun with one. Of course, this is all assuming you’re a creditable narrator. But I agree, it really is a beautiful name.

DAVID

Thanks.

GLORIA

Although admittedly a bit on the cheesy side. So, Sofia is the only name you like without a story attached to it?

DAVID

What do you mean? Of course it has. (pause) It’s short for philosophy.

GLORIA

Now you’re just pulling my leg. The book was called “Sophie’s World”. Are you sure?

DAVID

I may have met a few Sofias in my life, but I can’t think of anything now. (sips)

GLORIA

Oh, ok, cool. (looks away)

DAVID

Rhymes with yours a bit. Imagine such a dynasty – Sofia, Gloria…

GLORIA

(still looking away)

Then rinse and repeat?

The music starts getting louder.

INDOORS. A stylish studio.

WOMAN

You should probably call Gloria in for a private talk, though.

PSYCHOLOGIST

And I will. I don’t want them to play surrogates any more than you do.

OUTDOORS. Street.

GLORIA stops in front of an electronics shop and rearranges her hair and orange scarf, checking her reflection in the window shop.

Sound-over of the news on TV:

 TV REPORTER

Religious extremist group protesting in front of Clinic 42 as we speak, blocking the entrance for anyone who wishes to terminate. We now speak to their leader. Sir-

MAN IN BLACK

Please, call me Father.

GLORIA walks away, checking her phone.

INDOORS. EARLY MORNING.

A woman in her late 30s is staring at the ceiling. The answering machine next to her shows 13 missed calls. She picks up the phone and calls a number.

Sound-over from the phone: “We’re sorry, but the number you have reached is not in-“. She reaches behind the nightstand and unplugs the phone.

OUTDOORS. The park.

MR SCOTT is reading the newspaper, with several broadsheets next to him on the bench. He keeps changing position and coughing. A page flies off because of a sudden gust of wind. He frowns, but then keeps reading. After a while, he can hear the sound of a bouncing ball in front of him.

KID 1

(the one with the ball and holding the page)

Uh, mister.

MR SCOTT

Umm, yes?

(coughing, closes the newspaper)

How can I help you?

KID 2

(looking at the screen of his phone)

No…We help you.

KID 1

(holding the page out to him)

Is this yours, sir? Sorry it has a footmark now, but that’s how we found it over there-

MR SCOTT

Oh, no, it’s not mine. (opens his newspaper)

KID 1

(hesitating)

It sure looks like, though. (pause) Same issue and all.

MR SCOTT

No, it’s not mine.

(suddenly closes the newspaper, making KID 1 flinch)

Now, boys, what’s the matter, really?

KID 1

Nothin’. We saw it, is all. And there aren’t too many people buying big printed ones these days, only…Only people with glasses or new eyes.

SCOTT adjusts his glasses, frowning.

KID 2 puts his phone in his pocket.

 KID 1

Is mom ok?

KID 2

Yeah, she just said to buy some almond milk.

(suddenly looks up at MR SCOTT)

Sorry for disturbing, sir.

KID 2 grabs the page, making it into a ball and throws it in the nearby bin, then grabs KID 1 by the shoulders and they walk away.

MR SCOTT keeps reading. One article ends in a hyphen and the next page is missing. He looks up, sighs, and takes out a cigar. MR SCOTT closes the newspaper and leaves it next to him. He starts reading the next broadsheet.

INDOORS. DAVID’S OFFICE.

DAVID is checking his mail. He opens one and scribbles on his clipboard “MAN REFUSES REPLACEMENT SURGERY – DIES TRAGICALLY AT 103”, then adds a question mark. He picks up the phone and makes a call.

DAVID

Hey, Tim. How old is your grandfather again? Actually, you know what – ask a bit around the office for an average age, then come back at me.

INDOORS. School cafeteria.

GLORIA is eating at a table for four with headphones on although she is not listening to music. The other three are talking and laughing out loud. She is going through college brochures and circling some words while crossing out others.

INDOORS. Dimly lit hallway of a small, but elegant apartment.

DIANE is wearing a faux-fur coat and is speaking to a teenager in casual wear who is petting a rather large white cat.

DIANE

Well, sweetie, take good care of my love while I’m out, will you?

TEENAGER

Of course, Mrs D.

DIANE

(petting the cat)

He gets dreadfully lonely without me, the poor soul.

(the cat runs off into the room through the door left ajar)

Oh, also don’t forget to set the AI for cleaning the house, too, if you’re only going to sit in the living room. You know better what settings to pick. Alright, I’ll be back come evening. I have some shopping to do before visiting an old friend of mine. You know how it goes.

TEENAGER

(smiles)

Yes, I know. (pause) I can only stay until 7 today. I promised-

DIANE

Oh, you don’t have to tell me all that. So be it, dear.

(gesturing to the cat)

Ciao, amore!

(puts her sunglasses on)

The teenager closes the door behind her.

TEENAGER

Psst, come here!

She gets the cat and walks into the room.

OUTDOORS. The street.

The LED screen in the bus stop: “DID YOU KNOW? It only takes 3 generations to be forgotten! Why live up to only 150? See the future for yourself! Join us now at ForeverHere Clinic and…”.

INDOORS. The mall.

DIANE exits a deli shop with a box of macaroons. As she puts them in her bag, David stops next to her.

DAVID

Diane!

DIANE

(startled)

Oh, it’s you.

DAVID

To think I almost passed by you. How are you doing? I never see you in town for some reason.

DIANE

Yes, well, the weather brought me out.

DAVID

You’re talking about yourself like you’re on a nature documentary.

DIANE

Ah, I need new gloves. (pause) My mauve ones are so last season, it’s not quite the proper thing anymore.

DAVID

Oh, I see. (pause) Hey, I have some time right now. How about I join you? I think I saw some nice red leather gloves that would suit you well.

DIANE

Ah…That is most thoughtful of you, but it’s alright. I’m looking for faux-leather ones. You can’t love one animal and use the other, you know. (smiles)

DAVID

Didn’t mean actual leather either. (pause) Well, will you at least let me help you with the bag?

DIANE faintly smiles as she lends him her arm.

OUTDOORS. A semi-central area.

In front of a block of flats, the wind makes two swings move slightly. There are no children outside. The woman in her late 30s looks out the window at the swings. She watches intently.

INDOORS. Diane’s apartment.

The teenager is on the couch with the cat, watching TV.

TEENAGER

Why she won’t have you on the couch, beats me.

(holding the cat up)

You don’t shred all that much now, do you, grandpa?

(the cat climbs on her shoulders)

Are you thirsty? ‘Cause I’m thirsty.

(scratches the cat behind the ear as it purrs)

God, this place is so empty. Even the TV only has like 31 channels.

(getting up, the cat follows her into the kitchen)

What do you do all day, huh?

(the cat yawns)

Wish I could sleep that much, but mom would have none of it.

Looking through a cabinet, she takes a glass out and starts filling it with tap water, then changes her mind and throws the water away.

TEENAGER

You know what, grandpa. I’ll make some water boiling for coffee and take out the trash while I’m at it. You like the sound of it, I’m guessing. Your mistress is actually not that bad, compared to my neighbours, but I bet her arthritis is killing her. Random acts of kindness, eh boy?

She leaves the pot on the stove, then checks under the cabinet, where she finds a dozen of empty whiskey bottles.

INDOORS. A designer shop.

DAVID

You really don’t like these ones, either?

DIANE

No, no, I don’t really think it’s what I’m looking for. Not quite…my style.

DAVID

Are you really not just saying so? Look, if you change your mind, I’d like to make it my gift to you.

DIANE

That’s very sweet of you, but

(leans in and whispers)

I suspect they’re made in China from dog leather. As a pet lover, naturally I can’t support such practice.

They exit the shop.

DAVID

(hands in pockets)

Diane, really now. This was the seventh shop. Are you sure there’s nothing wrong?

DIANE

Oh, I’m so very sorry if I wasted your time, but I’m quite the picky customer, you see. Then again, I had a marvelous time and –

DAVID

And this wasn’t really why you were here, was it?

DIANE

(smiling)

As I was saying, it was a marvelous time. Let’s leave it as such.

DAVID

Look, Diane, if you ever need some help or even just someone to talk to –

DIANE

I will consider it. Now, pray excuse me, I am meeting an old friend of mine over tea.

DAVID

Something tells me you don’t want me to give you a ride, right? (pause) Alright. Have a nice evening with…what’s her name?

DIANE

Rose. Her name is Rose.

 DAVID

Of course it is.

 DIANE

Speaking of dogs – there’s a thing called “intelligent disobedience”. You should look it up these days from that nice office of yours. Maybe write a cute throw-away article for me, why not?

DAVID gives a light, surprised laugh, then raises his arms and leaves.

DAVID

(walking away, turns around)

Women!

INDOORS. DIANE’S APARTMENT.

DIANE

(in the hallway with a large bag rattling with bottles)

Honey, I’m home!

The teenager comes in the doorframe, followed by the cat.

DIANE

Alright, dear, here’s your pay. I’m sorry if I’m a bit late, Rose wouldn’t let me leave until our fifth tea and the ATM isn’t too close to her home. Stories of bygone days that won’t stay bygone, you’ll see when you’re my age.

TEENAGER

(eyes the money subtly, then puts it in her back pocket)

Thank you. Should I help you with the bag?

DIANE

Oh, no, it’s alright, I can handle it myself.

TEENAGER

Are you sure?

DIANE

(taking off her faux-fur coat)

Actually, you know what. I bought some milk, let’s give our darling a treat, what do you say?

(takes a milk bottle out of the bag)

OUTDOORS. The terrace of the university library.

MR SCOTT smokes by himself, looking over the town. He finishes his smoke and steps on the cigar, then returns inside.

INDOORS. DIANE’S APARTMENT. EVENING.

DIANE is lying on the sofa, watching the news while slowly eating macaroons.

TV ANCHOR

Academy award nominee Scarlett Reed may be the last one in the industry to look like her own daughter anymore. Steering clear out of the little nip and tuck, her profile is more distinct now – though is it really for the better? Nysine, an accomplished song-writer and performer herself, had nothing to say about her mother’s looks. Instead, she reminds us that…

OUTDOORS. The terrace of the university library.

Two students come out smoking e-cigs. One of them points with his foot at the cigar on the floor and the other laughs loudly as he kicks it.

Helicopters fill the sky at sunset.

INDOORS. Contemporary art museum.

GLORIA

I like this one best.

DAVID

You sure made up your mind fast. Did you even see half of the exhibition?

GLORIA

(still eyeing the drawing)

I don’t need to, I can tell what I like when I see it.

DAVID

(moving along)

Then you’re one of the lucky ones. Most people can’t until they’ve passed it.

GLORIA

Most people don’t want to become artists.

DAVID

Was that it? I thought architecture was more about Maths than drawing.

GLORIA

And about the money and showing people only what they want to see.

DAVID

(laughs)

I know a thing or two about that. Is publishing an art then?

GLORIA

I don’t think there’s much between the lines there anyway. (looks at him) The way you deal with it, actually.

DAVID

Oh, don’t judge me so harshly just because I don’t leave too many gaps to be filled. I used to have nightmares because of my associates. Owning 51% makes you feel very vulnerable.

GLORIA

(looking at another piece)

You sure like discussing Maths more than drawing.

DAVID

What can I say? I don’t really do drawing anymore.

GLORIA

What happened?

DAVID

I once broke my arm and made the mistake of drawing with it broken.

GLORIA

(frowns)

That’s not possible.

DAVID

I was using my left arm to direct my hand. By the time it was healed, I had stopped believing in my talent altogether.

GLORIA

When was that?

DAVID

I must have been a teenager then.

GLORIA

Oh.

DAVID

What did your parents think about becoming an architect?

GLORIA

Well, they were always busy working on their cases, so they didn’t

notice the early signs. The doodles on the side of my notebooks, framing a shot of an 18th century townhall I took on our Swiss trip.

DAVID

Must have been tough, growing up with two lawyers.

GLORIA

(laughs)

For one thing, I never managed to learn how to properly lie like my friends at the time did.

DAVID

There was no getting the perfect lie right, was there?

GLORIA

Exactly! And no matter the topic, they were always right. (pause) What they had in mind for me was med school, actually.

DAVID

The plus side, I suppose, is that they didn’t think you to be the kind that’s faint of heart.

GLORIA

Oh, the fight that night was legendary! They had all these neat little theories coming together so nicely but –

(stops)

No, that’s not right.

DAVID

(stops)

Mmm? This statue, you mean?

GLORIA

No, thinking back on it, I think that was after the splice. I wanted so badly to talk to them about it, but it couldn’t possibly have gone that well. Don’t get me wrong, I’m sure they loved me well – I was a much wanted child, after all, a “wonder of technology and genetics”, especially with our family’s medical history – but I could never look them in the eye and think in terms of “dear mom” or “beloved dad”. To me, they were larger than life even long after I could go to bed without my night lamp.

DAVID

So even with Oasis, you saw them more like authorities to be persuaded than like parents to be won over.

GLORIA

(biting her lip)

Yeah. (pause) That’s a hideous statue, by the way.

(moves on)

How do you remember yours?

DAVID

Not very different from yours, I’m afraid. They were making big money with the firm and working long, irregular hours. A call at 9 PM meant I’d no longer get my good night story. Besides, they died when I was 10.

GLORIA

I’m very sorry.

DAVID

(smiles)

It’s ancient history now.

GLORIA

I remember how, when I was 5 or 6, I would wake up in the dead of the night and slip into their chamber to check their pulse. Whenever my dad would wake up, I’d pretend I had a nightmare, but the truth is I was confused for the longest time when I realized they were the same age my friends’ grandparents. I wished I had magic powers to protect them, you know?

DAVID

And live happily ever after? The talk about the birds and the bees that you got must have been different from the one I did back in the 20th century.

GLORIA

(smiles)

I suppose it was.

DAVID

Do you ever miss them?

GLORIA

I’ve spent 30 years in Oasis with them. The greatest shock when I woke up wasn’t finding they died – I grew up expecting it any moment now, after all. It was looking at my own hair. (laughs) In my dream, I had already graduated college, cut my hair short, dyed it violet and moved to Spain. It was strange to think all those nights video-chatting with mom never happened or that I had never owned a parrot called Jack.

DAVID

I wish I had dared to do something that scale in mine. I just lived my life like nothing had happened.

GLORIA

(stops)

If you don’t mind, how did you…?

DAVID

Die? (pause) A car accident. The breaks stopped working and the car went over a bridge.

GLORIA

Oh.

DAVID

Yeah.

GLORIA

I knew technology was lacking in your world, but I never imagined the simple things to be so dangerous. That was before automatic pilot mode on personal cars, I guess?

DAVID

Indeed. Though skiing seems to have been no less dangerous in yours.

GLORIA

Just because we went to a national park. Most are hologram theme parks nowadays.

DAVID

Anyway, good thing I had signed with Life Extension before that, right? Or else I wouldn’t be here with you laughing at the works of…by God, this is unintelligible! Andy C.? Is that his genius signature?

GLORIA

How come you signed with them? I wouldn’t have dreamed to do it if it weren’t for my parents to put me in it after my accident.

DAVID

(smiles)

Let’s just say that, like you expected something to happen to your parents anytime, I also expected something, but to me. My associates were not the most trustworthy of the bunch.

GLORIA

And now you have new ones. Do you miss anyone in particular?

DAVID

I miss my best friend, but at least this way I know for sure he got his happy ending.

GLORIA

How would you define your own happy ending?

DAVID

That’s a trick question right there, is it not?

GLORIA

Oh, come on. You’ve had your slice of virtual reality. I told you of my Heaven, tell me something of yours.

DAVID

That’s precisely why. After you spend so much energy constructing your own world, it’s difficult to picture a happy ending that feels definite enough to make a sequel redundant or that doesn’t make you worry about next week.

GLORIA

In other words, you no longer know what happiness is.

DAVID

Fair assumption. Spoiler: no one really does, though.

GLORIA moves on, looking at the exhibits.

INDOORS. DAVID’S DESK. THE VIEW OF THE CITY BEHIND HIM.

DAVID is standing with a mug with “#1 Boss” printed on it. Staring in the distance, he smiles. Helicopters fly around the city.

He unlocks a top drawer and takes out some meds, which he gulps down with water.

INDOORS. THE ROOM WITH LIGHT GREEN WALLS.

DIANE

Alright, so I guess it’s my turn this week. My sappy story, what have you not. Not much to say there, though, is it?

PSYCHOLOGIST

We’re between friends, Diane. We’re interested.

DIANE

(looking at them from left to right)

Fine then. I’m old, everybody I’ve ever known is dead, included my children and grandchildren. Blue Airways used to be big in the industry, but my associates were all idiots.

DAVID laughs. DIANE eyes him suspiciously.

DAVID

Sorry. I know a thing or two about that, as well.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You can go on.

DIANE

 I’ll soon be dead myself, and the business could be called practically non-existent these days. It only ever does second-class flights across the country anymore, anyone who can afford their own private plane or helicopter has one. I heard our old nemesis, CloudNine are trying to bring the zeppelins back. The fools. I’m not bitter about it, though – this is a more comfortable place to be in your 70s. Still, is it just me or the food doesn’t have the same taste anymore? Scott? I could swear the bread used to be better.

MR. SCOTT

Well, if you ask me-

DIANE

Or it might just be my age.

MR. SCOTT

Pardon me, Diane, I was going to say that.

DIANE

Sure you were. (smiles condescendingly) Luckily I have my little beast by my side. When they say purring adds years to your life, they don’t have it wrong now, do they? But people now make it to 120 and beyond.

PSYCHOLOGIST

And how do you feel without Oasis?

DIANE

(laughs)

The food tastes worse, sweetie. Otherwise, the technology is the bees’ knees. (pause) Not too different, I’d say.

PSYCHOLOGIST

David, would you like to ask Diane anything?

DAVID

(smiles)

Not particularly.

DIANE smiles back.

DAVID

(smiles, tilting his head)

She’s like an open book to me now.

DIANE’s mouth tightens.

EXTERIOR. In front of the OASIS PROJECT building.

MR SCOTT takes out his lighter.

DIANE

(snorts)

For a scientist, you sure swear by the old poison.

MR SCOTT

(stammering)

Ah, no, it’s just that it helps my frame of mind, to stay focused and-

DIANE

(taking her e-cig out of the bag)

You delightful old fool. Step up your game.

MR SCOTT

It works by association with past situations, actually.

DIANE

Still holding on to the old life? Why don’t you return to Oculus Rift then?

MR SCOTT reddens.

DIANE

You know what? I couldn’t care less.

GLORIA

(pushing past her)

Thanks, I guess we all got the memo.

EXTERIOR. PARK. SUNSET.

DAVID and GLORIA on a picnic. She is taking pictures of leaves falling.

GLORIA

This must be the best time of the day.

DAVID

I can tell. How many pictures do you have in there by now, 366?

GLORIA suddenly shifts and takes a close-up of him.

DAVID

(covering his face)

Oh no, the paparazzi!

GLORIA

(returning to the scenery)

Paparazzo. There’s just me. Talk about habit.

DAVID

On the contrary. You never know how many there are out there. A good paparazzo is always silent and deadly.

GLORIA

Like a ninja.

DAVID

Exactly. Which is quite the opposite of what you are, with that infamous orange scarf of yours.

GLORIA

Careful, careful. If I’m neither fast nor deadly, you might be up for torture if you misspeak.

DAVID

I thought this was a free country. What year is it again?

GLORIA turns to him and shows him a picture.

GLORIA

I’m framing this.

DAVID

And here for a moment I thought I was the one framed as usual. (pauses) It *is* beautiful. It’s somehow unlike you. See? No buildings.

GLORIA

But no people either.

DAVID

That, my dear Watson, is a perfectly primeval thing to say.

GLORIA

Or post-apocalyptic.

DAVID

The sky looks like ice-cream, though, doesn’t it?

GLORIA

It does…Caramel.

DAVID

Sickly sweet.

GLORIA

Technicolor sweet.

DAVID

Like this world. Cover it all up, if it’s not sweet enough, you’re clearly not using enough sugar.

GLORIA

And if you are, you’ll get burnt.

DAVID

That’s the soppiest, sorriest piece of metaphor I’ve ever heard.

GLORIA

But it does look like caramel sky, though, doesn’t it? I’m so framing this.

People walk with their dogs.

INTERIOR. NIGHT.

The woman in her 30s sleeps with a larger pillow in her arms, as if cuddling it. The camera pans from one side of the bed to the other.

INTERIOR. NIGHT. HALLWAY OF A BLOCK OF FLATS.

MR SCOTT is walking the length of the hallway mumbling something to himself. Whenever a tenant walks out of the elevator, he turns the other way. He returns to his room and furiously throws a pile of papers out of the window. A sudden gust of wind throws one back into his face.

OUTDOORS. Street.

GLORIA

(walking towards him)

Here, I got you coffee, too.

DAVID

Thanks. What did she have to tell you?

GLORIA

She seems to be randomly asking for one-to-one meetings. Apparently this Friday it’s my turn.

DAVID

Friday, huh. She once called me on a Wednesday.

GLORIA

That’s a pretty flexible schedule.

DAVID

Maybe she’s being considerate and doesn’t want to interfere with your studies.

GLORIA

(tucking her orange scarf)

Or maybe she wants to hold me more. Now that makes me wonder what I did.

They walk away.

INTERIOR. DIANE’S APARTMENT.

DIANE is lying on the couch with the cat in her lap. The teenager is sitting cross-legged on the floor. There is a plate half full with macaroons on the table.

DIANE

Eat up, dear. You’ll wish you had later, when no superfood in the world can bring your metabolism back to its golden days. (pause) Don’t you believe all that goji and chia seeds crap.

TEENAGER

But studies have shown –

DIANE

Studies, studies, again with the studies! Whose studies, though? I’ve lived through a whole bunch of studies. Once, these lovely scientists of yours were trying to make us think bread made you lose weight. Then it was no carbs. Tapeworms. “Nutritious” milk-shakes. It all looked like the real deal each time. All studies do is go around in circles.

TEENAGER

They do bring new ideas every now and then, though.

DIANE

Oh, yes, the zeppelins! Fancy what having idiots for associates brings you with time. It’s all the rage again. The fifth time since I’ve been counting. Anyway, the first time when all these voices were trying to rehabilitate this sad old idea, praising how aerodynamic it was, how safe from now on, naturally we were afraid we might be left in the dump with the old. There’s nothing stranger than making the old chic and vintage. Anything can be that, if you give it enough time to age.

TEENAGER

Technology aging like wine, who would have thought?

DIANE

You got it backwards, sweetie. The customer will always say the wine is good. Besides, its value increases steadily with time. Of course, granted it’s kept properly, not dumped around some hot place. With technology, it’s-

(breaks a macaroon into two)

* half a moon hard facts and science, the other half dreaming up.

(eats them in one bite)

It’s a cycle, all of it. If one half stays intact, it can grow back. If there’s a God, this world is a bike and all he cares is that he has one spare tire left. Then everything can get to be recreated. Give it what name you want, the bird is still going to sing, the bike is still going to take you places.

TEENAGER

The dark side of the moon, though?

DIANE

If you can’t see it, who cares?

TEENAGER

Have you ever been to the Moon?

DIANE

Oh, yes. Wore that ridiculous puffy white suit with an aquarium on your head and all. That was grand. I liked Mars better though. Never been to your sweet cotton-candy-coloured satellites, though. Considering my health state, I guess it’s safe to say I missed my chance.

TEENAGER

My parents promised me I could have a weekend get-away to one of the Star Hotels with a friend once I turn 18.

DIANE

To be honest, I’m not really in touch in what you’re all up to these days. Back in my day, there weren’t so many planets and moons to choose from. There were like 5 at most. And people were still crazy about Mars being open for everyone.

TEENAGER

As opposed to the moons? Do you mean it was because of all those sci-fi flicks about Martians they used to have?

DIANE

Oh, no, far from it. When we think of the people before us, we tend to make them into large-sized children, but they were far from it. No, it’s because at first there were some sort of preselections going about. You had to be important to go to Mars. That, or a robot.

TEENAGER

Sounds strange as fiction.

DIANE

Oh, sweet child. You have no idea.

TEENAGER

Not really a child since I’ll soon get to go outside, too. (laughs) But I’d like some more macaroons if there are any left.

DIANE

So you like them? Rose gave them to me.

TEENAGER

They sure look a lot like those sold at The Sweet Palace.

DIANE

Well, she did use to be a chef. One of the best, too.

INTERIOR. NIGHT. DAVID’s room.

DAVID wakes up screaming. Trembling, he starts touching his chin, then his nose. Gently massaging it with one hand, he reaches for the top drawer of his nightstand and takes some white pills. He takes his mug to the bathroom and fills it with water without looking at the mirror.

INTERIOR. HALLWAY.

DAVID is standing by the vending machine with a coffee paper cup in hand. SARAH (the woman in her 30s) is seated next to him, bag on her lap.

DAVID

Sarah, do you drink your coffee with milk?

SARAH

Excuse me?

DAVID

I like mine black, just the occasional teaspoon of sugar. Keeps me alert.

SARAH

(smiles)

Two teaspoons, no milk.

DAVID

Then it’s settled.

DAVID pushes the buttons, then hands SARAH a coffee paper cup.

DAVID

Cheers! For early birds.

SARAH

Cheers indeed.

(looks at her coffee, then looks up)

How come you never had any children of your own? You seem to enjoy taking care of people.

DAVID

Oh, I...

SARAH

Sorry, it’s quite the heavy topic to bring up so suddenly. We...haven’t talked much before.

 DAVID

I was 25 at the time I, well, signed, you know? Time wasn’t exactly patient with me.

SARAH

I had the feeling you were the kind to say you didn’t meet the right girl.

DAVID

(takes a sip)

Thing is, I did.

SARAH

(tilts head)

Is that why you signed..?

(draws herself back)

Sorry, I know we’re not supposed to discuss our backgrounds yet. Readjust first, they keep saying.

(nervously laughs, then chokes)

DAVID

Do I think about her? Well, to be completely honest, I don’t think about her anymore, but I don’t think about her any less either.

SARAH

(smiles)

That was beautiful.

DAVID

The stuff of Hallmark greeting cards, right?

(smirks)

And you?

SARAH

Before I signed, I just got out of a nasty divorce. Well, not really, it may have been a full year in between, but I’m not sure.

DAVID

Do you still see him when you close your eyes?

SARAH

Yes. But with his back facing me.

DAVID

That’s the same way I see Sofia.

SARAH

Do you ever tell her anything?

DAVID

“Do not go gentle into that good night”. But she laughs at me. She goes, but wicked. Swift. Out of sight, out of mind. Like an alley cat. You know the kind.

SARAH

I tell him to come back to us, but when I look beside me, my son isn’t there, so my husband only says “What ‘us’? There’s just you. What am I to do with you, woman?”.

DAVID

I say you forget the bastard. That’s a Jesus complex if ever I heard one!

SARAH looks down and smiles. GLORIA walks up to them.

GLORIA

So, what’s the gossip?

DAVID

No gossip, just the weather.

GLORIA

(smiles)

You’ve got quite some skill, making people laugh just by discussing weather.

DAVID

(moving his head in the direction of the seat next to him)

Atta, girl. Now you tell us about the weather, it’s been a while since we had news from the outside world. Why, just two more years and we might have created our own language.

GLORIA

(sits down and places her school bag on the floor in front of her)

Then claim independence, why not? Hey, did you look for that book I told you about?

DAVID

Is it by any chance the one where the character gets on the train at page 37?

GLORIA

(laughs)

What on...?

DAVID

I don’t know, that’s where I got. And he’s buying apples.

PSYCHOLOGIST walks by, greets them and unlocks the door.

GLORIA

Well, then I won’t spoil you. As far as you know, right now he both eats them and doesn’t.

SARAH looks at them, smiling faintly.

INTERIOR. LATE EVENING. PUB.

SARAH is sitting alone at a table, hands clasped on a glass of water.

 DIANE

(walks in with a swagger, then puts a whiskey glass on the table)

Oh, dear, look who’s here. It’s too early to be drinking water, don’t you think? You got the order all mixed up.

SARAH looks up with red, puffy eyes.

DIANE

There’s one hell, missy, and it’s not this one.

(takes a mouthful of whiskey)

Trust me, I’ve been there.

(pause)

Do you happen to have a lighter?

SARAH slowly moves her head sideways.

 DIANE

(smiles condescendingly)

Of course.

 (leaves)

SARAH sits in the dark looking straight ahead. After a while, she gulps down the whiskey in one go. She covers her eyes with her palm and starts sobbing.

EXTERIOR. DAYTIME. The terrace of the university.

DIANE and MR SCOTT are talking. There is a group of students at a distance from them. The dialogue is inaudible. DIANE laughs out loud as she rolls her eyes.

INTERIOR. PSYCHOLOGIST’S OFFICE. AFTERNOON.

GLORIA

(with a glass of water in hand)

No, it’s fine, really.

PSYCHOLOGIST

And where do you see this going?

GLORIA

(blushes and laughs)

Excuse me?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Gloria, all the people you interact with have their own minds and patterns of thought which may be more than slightly different from yours. Don’t lose sight of this.

GLORIA

(bites her lip)

But I’m not pinning my hopes on anyone. I’m not projecting.

PSYCHOLOGIST

I see you and David have grown very close.

GLORIA

Jesus, is this what this is all about?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Are you sure both of you think the same way about your situation?

GLORIA

Situation? You’re making it sound like a disease. Like we’re diseased or...is that how you see us?

PSYCHOLOGIST

You know that’s not what I mean. I’m just asking if you are not reading too much into things. Your thoughts no longer have the same power to shape reality. Naturally, I want you to be safe.

GLORIA

No, you want me to be patronized. You look at me and see a teenager.

PSYCHOLOGIST

I look at you and see a confused young woman. I look at me and see, well, a slightly less confused and slightly less young woman.

GLORIA

People actually think I’m crushing on David? Seriously?

PSYCHOLOGIST

This is not about “people”, Gloria. It’s about accepting that every relationship is built on compromise. Friendship is no exception.

GLORIA

How long do I still have to be in here?

PSYCHOLOGIST

How long do you think?

GLORIA

(looks at the minimalist clock on the wall in front of her)

About forty minutes or so.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Would you rather we spent them in silence?

GLORIA

Aha, a trick question. Am I supposed to meditate or something in the meanwhile?

PSYCHOLOGIST

If you don’t want to open up to me, I can’t force you. I can’t help you without your consent.

GLORIA

Worst. Superhero. Ever.

(drinks water while looking out the window)

They spend a few moments in silence. The office phone rings, but the PSYCHOLOGIST mutes it. A few more moments pass.

INTERIOR. CLASSROOM. MORNING.

GLORIA finishes her test and goes up front to the teacher. Most of her colleagues are still typing. She excuses herself to the bathroom. A few colleagues glance at her leaving.

INTERIOR. GIRLS’ BATHROOM. MORNING.

GLORIA sits with her shoes up on the toilet seat. She sets the alarm on her phone for 10 minutes later, then sits with her head on her knees.

INTERIOR. CLASSROOM. MORNING.

Her test shows up on the screen of the teacher’s laptop with a 97 percentage written in red. GLORIA returns to her seat. A few more moments pass, then the bell rings.

TEACHER

Alright, time’s off. Don’t forget to log out and shut down before leaving class. I want no more slip-ups. Did you hear that, Alex? Results are in next –

(clears throat above the students’ chatter)

I said results are in next Tuesday. Have a nice weekend.

TEACHER leaves class.

INTERIOR. CAFETERIA. NOON.

Two girls sit at GLORIA’S table with their food.

GIRL 1

Hey, sorry, we couldn’t help but notice you left all of a sudden today in the middle of the test.

GIRL 2

Yeah, are you feeling alright?

GLORIA

(hands in pockets)

Umm, I was a bit sick.

GIRL 2

Do you want some tea? It might help you. Here, they say tannins are good for you.

GLORIA

Uh, thanks.

(takes a sip)

Sorry, I didn’t quite get your name. Come again?

GIRL 2

(laughs)

Don’t be silly, Gloria, we’ve been classmates for a while now! This is Julie. And I’m Tess.

GLORIA

Oh, hi. I have some chocolate left. Want some?

JULIE

I’d love some, but (whispers) Tess is on a diet.

TESS

Some of us don’t trust surgeons, you know?

(laughs)

The old days couldn’t have had it all wrong.

INTERIOR. TEA SHOP.

DAVID

You look positively distracted today. What’s his name?

GLORIA

(drawing him on a napkin)

Name? Oh, no, you got it all wrong. (pause) Actually, I think I made new friends today.

DAVID

Oh, it looks like someone’s taking her time! Doing anything fun yet?

GLORIA

Almost. We’ll go see a movie. There will also be people I don’t know, but –

DAVID

That sure is a fast moving friendship.

GLORIA

(distracted)

Yeah, I guess.

DAVID

Just so you know, I finished your book.

GLORIA

(putting the pen away)

Oh, you did?

DAVID

I must admit, you’re a precocious little thing.

GLORIA

(sniggers)

Little thing...

DAVID

Hey, can I see it?

(reaches for the napkin)

GLORIA takes the napkin and wipes her lipstick away with it.

GLORIA

Sorry, you said something?

INTERIOR. SARAH’S ROOM.

SARAH is sitting on the floor, surrounded by toys. Before her are two boxes labelled “Mark” and “Charity”. She is holding an octopus plush, sniffs it, then puts it carefully in the “Charity box” which is otherwise empty. The “Mark” box is half-full. A swinging sound is heard and she gets up to look at the window. The swings are once again only moved by the wind.

EXTERIOR. IN FRONT OF THE CINEMA. NIGHT.

TESS

Alright, so the Maths study group is still on, right?

GLORIA nods, hands in pockets, surrounded by a group of teenagers.

JULIE

My place at 5 then. Guys, don’t you dare be late!

The group disbands. TESS takes GLORIA by the arm.

TESS

Hey, are you okay?

GLORIA

Oh, yes. It was a fun night, thanks. We should go out more often.

TESS

Oh, we will, just after this test.

JULIE

Thanks so much, really. Especially since you’re taking AP classes. Anyway, don’t sweat it, it’ll be fun.

(takes her by the arm, too)

We’ll have nachos and ice-cream. Do you have a favourite flavour?

GLORIA

Umm, caramel.

TESS

This girl sure has good tastes.

JULIE

So, there will be Kate, whom you’ve met tonight, you know, the blonde one.

GLORIA

Oh, the one who sat to your right.

JULIE

Yes. She and her “brother” are coming.

TESS

She means boyfriend, but her mother doesn’t know. He’s already working for a corporation. Anyway, just so you know, he’s off limits.

GLORIA

Umm, alright...

JULIE

Why would you assume she’s into older guys anyway? Oh, right, did you tell Tom about it? Look, I’ll just text him now. He’s bringing three friends. One of them is Paul, he sat to your left today.

GLORIA

(laughs)

Wait, it’s still going to be a study group, right?

INTERIOR. THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY’S CAFETERIA.

Students are eating and drinking coffee at the tables.

MR SCOTT

(walks in with a swagger, then stops)

Oh, isn’t Amy working today?

WOMAN behind the counter looks up and smiles.

WOMAN

Oh, no, she basically lost her voice. No one’s safe from the flu these days, isn’t that so?

MR SCOTT

I see.

(looks around)

I’d like a coffee.

WOMAN

Sure thing. How much sugar?

MR SCOTT

No sugar, thank you.

(plays with his moustache)

Give Amy all my best wishes.

WOMAN

Who should I tell her...?

MR SCOTT

She’ll know.

(leaves, raising cup in the air)

WOMAN looks slightly confused. A student comes up front and asks for a sandwich. WOMAN still looks in the direction where MR SCOTT left, frowning absent-minded.

EXTERIOR. STREET.

DAVID is standing next to a red traffic light. The street is empty. He

looks both ways, but it’s still red. The moment he gives a loud sigh, the light changes to green and the street is suddenly crowded with people and cars. He crosses the street and looks around, frowning.

WOMAN’S VOICE

Do you like this?

DAVID wakes up, panting. The clock on the nightstand shows 3:03.

INTERIOR. JULIE’S ROOM.

The group is laughing. GLORIA is playing with a mechanical pencil.

TESS

Oh, Gloria, speaking of which, are you seeing anyone?

GLORIA

Wait, what?

(chokes on her drink, then laughs nervously)

 How did it get to this?

TOM

Knock it off, Tess. It’s none of your business.

TESS

Oh, come on. I bet he’s tall and dark and handsome. Oh my God. Gloria, you blushed!

GLORIA

(blushing)

What? I so didn’t!

JULIE

Who’s this David you keep mentioning anyway? Is he your uncle or something?

TOM

(rolls eyes, then looks at the other boys in the room)

Here they go again...

JULIE

What? Maybe she has a curfew and she can’t go out too much.

KATE

(sitting in the lap of her boyfriend)

That’s soooo nineteenth century style.

PAT

Not everybody’s cisgendered and into the whole heteronormative thing, though.

(smiles)

Just ignore them if it bothers you, ok? You don’t owe them any explanation.

TESS

Well, if they’re related, then it’s not weird at all, he might be super-protective of sweet Gloria so that no one dares date her.

GLORIA

Ah, no...we’re not related. He’s a friend. Just a friend.

KATE’S BOYFRIEND

What do you call guys who go out with waaay younger girls without being related? Like “cougar” is for women. Umm...

TESS

Oh, I think you call them “men”.

The group laughs. GLORIA bites her lip.

INTERIOR. GLORIA’S ROOM. NIGHTIME.

GLORIA leaves her bag on a chair. She takes a long look at the framed picture of the sky. She turns the picture against the wall and goes takes a shower.

INTERIOR. REFUGEE CENTRE.

SARAH enters with a box in her arms. She looks around hesitantly. As she eyes the woman at the white desk, a child sitting in the waiting room coughs. She looks at the child, leaves the box on the floor and immediately goes out.

WOMAN AT THE DESK

Miss, can I help you? Miss?

INTERIOR. BAR.

DIANE is sitting alone with a half-empty whiskey bottle. MR SCOTT walks in.

MR SCOTT

(sitting down)

I had a hunch I’d find you here.

DIANE passes him the bottle.

MR SCOTT

(getting up)

No, I think I’ll go just buy a drink first.

DIANE

(eyeing him before taking a shot)

More is more and less is a bore.

INTERIOR. WHITE HALL.

PSYCHOLOGIST

(knocking on a door)

How’s the supervising going?

MAN

Come in, I’ll show you.

EXTERIOR. STREET.

DAVID

(on a swing)

Didn’t expect to see you again.

SOFIA

(on another swing)

Me, neither.

DAVID

Do I have to wake up?

SOFIA

Do you want to?

DAVID takes her hand in his.

INTERIOR. GLORIA’S ROOM. EVENING.

GLORIA is typing on her laptop while reading an e-book of Shakespearian criticism. She keeps eyeing her phone as she is tapping her fingers on the desk while humming.

On the screen, the following line is visible:

“Sh. scholar – Jan Kott: ancient tragedy = loss of life; modern tragedy = loss of purpose”

INTERIOR. DAVID’S DESK. NOON.

DAVID

(on the phone)

I’ll be out in 30 minutes. Leave the report about the family with 5 children on my desk when you’re done with it. I want it proofread properly first, not like last time. (pause) Yes. No, double-check it. (pause) I’ll run through it before the meeting tomorrow. Alright.

DAVID takes his coat one and runs his fingers through his hair, then heads towards the elevator.

INTERIOR. THE ROOM WITH LIGHT GREEN WALLS.

PSYCHOLOGIST

(looking at their faces)

Alright, everyone. Sarah here would like to share something with all of you as a token of her trust. Isn’t that right, Sarah?

SARAH suddenly looks up and nods. She gulps.

 SARAH

(almost in a whisper, looking down)

Thank you. I wanted to tell you all about my Mark. He was such a good kid, sometimes it still feels weird to speak about him in past tense. (pause) He’d always be where you left him. I always thought he had the hazel eyes of a pup, come to think of it. (smiles) Surely, he also had the energy to come along with it, so there was never a dull day with him around the house.

(draws breath)

MR SCOTT is looking down at his wrinkled hands.

SARAH

When you didn’t tell him to sit still, he wouldn’t. He’d be up in a tree throwing paper airplanes at passers-by, for example. I couldn’t shout at him then either because all those pieces of paper turned out to have smiley faces all over them or just a “Good luck, stranger!” written on the left wing. There was so much love, a jest for life, so to speak, bubbling inside him. Bubbling to the point of bursting, so to speak.

(frowns)

But I digress.

PSYCHOLOGIST

We don’t have a set topic, so it’s okay to let your thoughts wander.

SARAH

He’s the only one I really miss.

(smiles)

That’s about it. What else is there to say? He lived, I was his mother, he died, I am no longer his mother.

MR SCOTT

I don’t think anyone can take that away from you.

(coughs)

I’ve never had any kids of my own-

DIANE

That you know of, you mean.

MR SCOTT

That way or another. Work and work again. But my first cousin did and it even changed the way she walked on the street.

SARAH looks up, hands clasped in her lap.

MR SCOTT

Before, although she was already working and making big money, she used to have that sort of school-girl stride where she took up half the street. Once she got herself a mini-me, though, she’d fold her arms – not without grace, mind you – around her little frame, as if she always expected children to run past her. Her handbags got bigger, her voice was kinder. When her mini-me turned into a maxi-me out of college, she was still this little old thing walking the streets with a smile saying “look at them, so young”. It puzzled me at the time.

(laughs)

Maybe that’s why I never wanted any of my own. I’m too...erm, round, right? Too round to carry myself like that. But I stand by my words: once a mother, always a mother.

GLORIA

(with a sideway glance)

I don’t remember much about my mother, but I now wish she thought about me the way you do about Mark.

SARAH

(smiles, eyes cast down)

You are all too kind.

(draws breath)

Here comes the thorny bit. (nervous little laugh) The short of it is that he died in a freak accident. My husband buried himself in his work while I would lock myself in Mark’s old room and just dust all his toys all over again. When someone dies, it doesn’t feel too final at first. Surreal, you could call it. You expect to still hear their voice through the intercom. You look around and all their things are there. His soccer practice jersey thrown carelessly on the bed, as if dinner was ready and he was starving. A dirty sock on the floor next to his e-book reader he never got to recharge. I don’t even remember when my husband left me.

GLORIA takes her hand and squeezes it.

 SARAH

The worst of it is that I couldn’t talk about his death. Did he drown? Was he hit by a bus? Of course not, I taught him to look both ways before crossing.

DAVID

Are you sure it’s alright for you to..?

SARAH

Yes, I think so. I think it’s about time.

(stares out the window)

It was late October. I remember that because he had kept begging me to bake him pumpkin pie for days, but there was so much work at the office, I never got round it. They finished classes earlier because the teacher was down with the flu, just like half of our neighbourhood. His friends kept joking about the upcoming Halloween. It must have been a week before that, if not a few days. I don’t remember. Anyway, there was this deserted villa on the hill they wanted to check out. Boys will be boys, isn’t that what they say?

(smiles)

Though apparently Maddy was there with them on that day. Funny enough, I don’t think he would have gone there at all if it weren’t for her. They all thought they were brave adventurers or something of the sort – and they were dead set on not leaving anyone behind. And so they entered the property. Warily at first – everything was overgrown and the gates were too rusty to budge, so they had to scale them. I heard Maddy was the first to do so, and the rest followed suit. The place hadn’t been touched for quite a while. At first, because no one could afford it, then because no one cared. They wandered one room after the other. I saw the place a year later. It was terrible, obscene graffiti all over the place and the glass of the French windows was smashed in.

(sighs)

I won’t bore you any further. One of the boys – I think it was Ralph, his best buddy since kindergarten – suggested jumping on the old lady’s bed. It was that kind of Renaissance-looking four poster bed, expensive enough not to strike you like kitsch. So they all started jumping and I can’t help but imagine the chill in that room. Ralph later came to my house and admitted there was no dog. They had told the police that they heard a dog, got scared and ran away. There was no dog, but it all happened so fast. One of the boys fell and rolled off the bed, dragging the curtain along. It was all shaky, so it fell, and it also hit a rather large dolphin statue. It’s ridiculous, isn’t it, for rich people to keep large dolphin statues around? Marble, even. Especially when we’re so far from the sea. Now, Mark was sitting on the floor cross-legged – he didn’t take part in the jumping – and had got up to help the boy tangled in the curtain, when the statue fell flat on his head. It crushed him. When he wouldn’t move, the boys got scared. They all ran off when they saw the blood. The pasta got cold – we always had pasta for dinner, my husband was half-Italian – and he still wasn’t home. I called everyone. My husband drove to the houses of all his friends that we knew by face or name. Coming home, we found Maddy’s note on the front lawn. It told us, in no ambiguous terms, that he’s dead, he’s cold and alone, someone should pick him up because it’s too far and she can’t, or at least not without her parents noticing.

DIANE bursts into hysterical laughter.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Diane, are you feeling alright? If not –

DIANE

Without her parents noticing!

(chokes)

No, this is just too good!

GLORIA stares at her.

(laughing)

Oh, boy, this is just –

(laughing to the point of tears)

Just absolutely ridiculous!

(covers her mouth)

So he was there dead on some dead hag’s floor for half a day and nobody could be bothered!

(laughing)

Poor precious Mark! Dead like a dog in the –

SARAH’s hand falls out of GLORIA’s.

DAVID stands up. PSYCHOLOGIST nods to him. DAVID takes DIANE out by the arm.

DIANE

Just about the best –

(bites her lip)

And did they get in trouble? I mean, for trespassing?

(exits, laughing)

INTERIOR. THE ROOM WITH LIGHT GREEN WALLS.

GLORIA

(bringing SARAH’s coat)

I’m sure she meant none of it.

SARAH

(taking it)

I don’t...I don’t know. I don’t. I’m sorry, I have to go somewhere.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Mr Scott, don’t you take the same bus home as Sarah?

MR SCOTT

Ah, yes.

(looking at Sarah)

If you don’t mind.

SARAH walks away, a few steps in front of him, staring at her feet.

PSYCHOLOGIST

David, could you please help me take the flower pots to my office? They will be painting the walls on Thursday.

DAVID

Oh, alright. Gloria, see you after this?

GLORIA

I have a study group tonight, but I’ll call you, ok?

DAVID

(taking two flower pots)

Alright. Knock’ em off their feet.

INTERIOR. PSYCHOLOGIST’S OFFICE. DAYTIME.

DAVID

Where should I put them?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Ah, just about there is alright. If they’re left in the shade they’ll change colour. Anyway, if we don’t have our room back by next week, we’ll have it by the next one.

DAVID

Well, I’ll be back to my office then. Still have some paperwork left.

PSYCHOLOGIST

David, don’t forget that if you ever want to discuss something, we can.

DAVID

(smiles)

Oh, and here I thought you were seeing someone. (pause) Alright, I’ll give it a thought. Still, I think I pretty much have it in control, but thanks.

PSYCHOLOGIST

It’s not the others in the group you should be comparing yourself with.

DAVID

Who should it be, then? The David before Life Extension? (pause) Let’s not go there.

PSYCHOLOGIST

I’ve never told even one of you to reject what has happened to you.

DAVID

The five stages theory, then?

PSYCHOLOGIST

(smiles)

Yes. Have you reached acceptance yet or do you still want to joke around to make you feel like you have the upper hand?

DAVID

Believe it or not, I don’t feel very old just yet. So let me hope youth is indeed forgiven everything.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Bargaining.

DAVID

Yes.

He exits.

EXTERIOR. PARK. NIGHT.

DIANE, red-faced, is sitting on a bench with her cat in her lap. She is petting it, but is shivering with cold. A jogger passes her by. He turns back to her.

DAVID

(panting)

Diane? Is that you?

DIANE

No, I’m the ghost of Christmas past. Do you think they’ll take those obnoxious lights off anytime soon?

DAVID

Knowing New York, not till they replace them with hearts.

DIANE

(petting her cat)

Ah.

DAVID

Are you...Are you drunk? You seemed out of it today.

DIANE

Oh, drop that mask, David.

DAVID flinches and involuntarily touches the side of his chin.

DIANE

I can drink if I want to, I can buy myself another liver – who gives a rat’s ass?

DAVID

People. They care about the consequences even if you don’t.

DIANE

Spare me the sermon. Jogging out late?

DAVID

A rather healthy habit, unlike some, you must admit.

DIANE

(smiles)

Trying to stay forever young, Teddy Boy?

DAVID

Does it give you joy to scare people? Because cranky people don’t scare me.

DIANE

(petting her cat)

Unless they’re right.

DAVID

I have two more laps. I can give you a ride home then.

DAVID goes on running. The camera follows him.

INTERIOR. HOUSE PARTY. NIGHT.

TESS

(handing GLORIA a red cup)

Here, try this.

GLORIA

Do you know all these people?

TESS

Who cares, some are friends of my friends, so yeah.

Someone moves past GLORIA when she’s trying to take a sip, so she ends up drinking it all in one go and choking.

TESS

You alright?

GLORIA nods, then walks to another room.

INTERIOR. HOUSE PARTY. EARLY MORNING.

A golden retriever pushes the door with its nose. GLORIA is in bed with PAT. The dog gives out a whiny sound and leaves. GLORIA tries to get up, but falls on the floor. She gets on all fours and starts searching the bags on the floor until she finds hers and takes out her phone. She tries calling DAVID, but gets the answering machine. She tries writing him a message, but it looks like gibberish.

PAT

(drunk)

Oh my Goood, calling him again? He doesn’t care, don’t you-

GLORIA throws her bag in PAT’s face, then breaks down crying. The dog returns in the room and sits next to GLORIA, but she ignores it.

INTERIOR. DIANE’S APARTMENT. AFTERNOON.

DIANE

(looking at the cat)

There’s no point in it all. I should just go see Rose.

The cat jumps on the couch, purring. DIANE sends it off, then goes to the kitchen.

INTERIOR. MR SCOTT’S APARTMENT. NIGHT.

MR SCOTT is sitting at his desk, cigarette butts in plastic cups everywhere. He’s making a call, but he gets the answering machine.

MR SCOTT

Diane? Look, it’s me.

(brushes the back of his hand against his forehead)

About that drink. That’s why I’m calling. If you change your mind, I think I need it. (pause) Well, this is my number. Call me back.

INTERIOR. GLORIA’S ROOM. NIGHT.

The picture is still turned towards the wall. The screen of GLORIA’s phone lights up with a text message: “Hey! Thanks so much for everything! We’ll surely all pass this one! Kisses/ Tess”.

GLORIA checks the dial log, but there are no missed calls. She turns off her phone.

INTERIOR. WHITE AND BLUE HALLWAY.

WOMAN AT DESK

(all smiles)

Hello, how may I help you?

The woman in a faux-fur coat takes off her sunglasses.

DIANE

(smiles)

I’m here for the appointment.

WOMAN AT DESK

Certainly. Can I see your ID, please?

INTERIOR. WHITE AND BLUE ROOM.

MALE NURSE

The doctor will be with you soon.

(adjusts her pillow)

Does anything hurt?

DIANE

Ah, my father used to say that pain is only weakness leaving the body.

(smiles sleepily)

No, honey, your anesthetic is A+. Ready when you are.

EXTERIOR. A SMALL FENCED AREA WITH BENCHES.

DAVID

You wanted to see me?

MR SCOTT

Ah, well, yes. It’s about all of us. I’m kind of worried, actually.

DAVID

Let me guess – it’s your turn for one of those one-on-one meetings?

MR SCOTT

(coughs)

No, far from it. I was doing some reading and…I don’t want to return to Oasis.

DAVID

What’s gotten into you all of a sudden? Reading your spam mail? The thing about the free test of a new prototype is just a hoax, we –

MR SCOTT

No, hear me out first. Do you know why they always make us groups of 5?

DAVID

I was guessing it’s for the group dynamics to be optimal.

MR SCOTT

That, too. But what is good for people is also good for business. (pause) Also because it’s easier to identify the “5th”.

DAVID

Counting doesn’t sound too troublesome for them, though.

MR SCOTT

The rate of success for this whole rehabilitation process was never 100%. Actually, it’s always been around 80%.

DAVID

And you’re worried about who the bad apple is…?

MR SCOTT

Sarah’s going to a lot of those meetings lately, I heard. I mean, I tried scheduling one for myself, but she always gets one first on the best of days.

DAVID

I’m glad she’s finally doing something.

MR SCOTT

Spoken to Gloria lately?

DAVID

Yes, just today. Why do you ask?

MR SCOTT

Did you know her parents killed themselves?

DAVID

So that’s what you do all day? Reading old newspapers to make yourself feel better? That’s a pretty hasty conclu-

MR SCOTT

It runs in her family. Mental illness, I mean. I’m just saying, watch out for her.

DAVID

I mean no disrespect, but this conversation is over.

MR SCOTT

(patting his pockets as he gets up)

Fair enough.

EXTERIOR. STREET. AFTERNOON.

DAVID is waiting at a crossing. DIANE comes up and just then the light changes to green. They walk together to the other side.

DAVID

You’ve got awfully good timing.

DIANE

Oh, don’t I?

DAVID

Scott’s worried about you.

DIANE

Tell him to worry about himself. I’m fine. Sublime, even.

DAVID

Is that you or the drink speaking?

DIANE

Pity the sober. Especially those who need others. We won’t be five forever, you know? What then?

DAVID

This is an awfully long crossing, isn’t it?

DIANE

(smiles)

Do you like this?

EXTERIOR. DAVID’S CAR. DAYTIME.

DAVID turns the automatic pilot on and adjusts his rearview mirror. He runs his fingers through his hair. He calls GLORIA on handsfree mode.

INTERIOR. THE HALLWAY LEADING TO DIANE’S APARTMENT.

TEENAGER and a NEIGHBOUR are whispering in front of her door.

NEIGHBOUR

No one’s seen her in 2 days. It’s not like her.

TEENAGER

It’s not like she went out a lot, though...

NEIGHBOUR

You don’t understand, she’s always been all about being noticed.

TEENAGER

(smiles)

I guess.

NEIGHBOUR

Yesterday night was opera night on Channel 2. Everybody on the floor got used to her listening to it loudly with the windows open. And her cat. We’ve heard it scratch the doors.

TEENAGER

She told me she was going to have surgery soon.

NEIGHBOUR

No one’s inside. She always called you to watch the cat, though, didn’t she?

TEENAGER

What do you need me here for?

EXTERIOR. STREET. DAYTIME.

GLORIA walks by the park and looks at her reflection in a passing white car. She takes her orange scarf off and hides it in her bag.

EXTERIOR. EARLY MORNING ON A STREET CORNER NEXT TO AN OFFICE BUILDING.

MR SCOTT walks hesitantly up to a pole and puts his arm on it, panting. He drops to his knees and looks up, shouting incoherently like a wounded animal.

Camera zooms out.

 MAN AT THE WINDOWSTILL (putting out his cigar)

Seriously, you’d think this is a good neighbourhood and all, but then you hear drunkards this early. Good thing no one’s attacked us on these streets yet, eh?

(spits out and closes the window)

INTERIOR. THE HALLWAY LEADING TO DIANE’S APARTMENT.

NEIGHBOUR

You’re the only one who can have access to her apartment.

TEENAGER

Well, if you say you heard the cat...

(places her hand on the finger prints scanner and the door opens)

The cat hurriedly comes to the TEENAGER.

TEENAGER

(crouching down)

Maybe she just forgot to call me before surgery.

The cat meows once and goes to the living room. The TEENAGER and the NEIGHBOUR follow it. On the table there is a piece of paper that says “If her parents won’t let her take Napoleon, ask a nursing home nearby”.

EXTERIOR. STREET. DAYTIME.

SARAH is walking slowly on the crossing. A group of teenagers giggle at each other and vaguely gesture in her direction. She notices she had been petting the bag the whole time. She enters a pharmacy. A man in a black suit follows her inside.

INTERIOR. DAVID’S OFFICE. MORNING.

DAVID is talking on the phone while playing with an engraved pen. Two agents suddenly enter.

DAVID

I’d like to see you again. I know you’ve been studying these days, but it’s not like you to avoid me.

(on the phone)

Sorry, I have to hang up, I’ll call back in a minute.

(standing up)

May I help you?

AGENT 1

David Aames, if you could please follow us.

DAVID

Of course, but...what’s the rush? (smiles)

AGENT 2

We are here sent by Oasis. There has been a breach of etiquette and we were sent to retrieve all of you.

DAVID

(hand on the desk)

Can I at least take my coat first? I’d hate to start sneezing on you.

AGENT 1 takes his gun out, but AGENT 2 stops him.

AGENT 2

He won’t stop us.

DAVID

No. (smiles, putting his hands up) Not me. I know you.

EXTERIOR. THE FARMERS’ MARKET. MORNING.

MR SCOTT is looking at fruits.

MR SCOTT

(pointing at the dried plums)

Organic, aren’t they?

MAN IN BLACK takes him by the shoulder and turns him around to handcuff him.

MR SCOTT

What the hell do you-

(elbows him)

MAN IN BLACK grabs him, but MR SCOTT tries to run away and plums fall behind him as the farmer yells. MR SCOTT skids on the icy mud and tries to cut a corner, but another MAN IN BLACK grabs him.

MR SCOTT

You pigs! Release me!

A father takes his children away by the hand, but they keep staring at MR SCOTT. THE MEN IN BLACK take him to a white car. The car is headed to the suburbs.

EXTERIOR. THE PARKING LOT. MORNING.

DAVID

Is it etiquette to have such sinister-looking white cars?

AGENT 1 handcuffs him.

DAVID

What in –

AGENT 2

This is for your own protection, sir. Please excuse us.

AGENT 1 turns on the station.

VOICE ON THE STATION

Retrieved No. 2. I repeat, retrieved No. 2.

AGENT 1

Roger that. Retrieved No. 3.

DAVID

Oh, and I thought I had the longest history with you guys. If I’m number 2, then who’s number 1?

(laughs)

AGENT 1 adjusts the rearview mirror.

DAVID

(rattling his handcuffs)

No car radio it is, then.

(loud sigh)

Fine. I’ll let you guys focus.

INTERIOR. THE FIRST FLOOR OF A HOSPITAL.

DAVID

Fancy being escorted like this.

(looks around)

One paparazzo would be enough to make me feel familiar.

AGENT 1 and AGENT 2 lead him to a nurse, who takes him away.

AGENT 2 follows AGENT 1 out, who is smoking an e-cig.

AGENT 2

Whatever went wrong with this group anyway.

AGENT 1

I don’t know.

(frowns)

First Oasis suicide I hear of.

AGENT 2

Do you think the rest were covered up or...?

AGENT 1

Stop it. I don’t want to know anything about it.

INTERIOR. WHITE ROOM.

VOICE IN THE SPEAKERS

Do you know why you’re here?

MR SCOTT

(shouting)

I’ll be damned if I know! Now let me out.

VOICE IN THE SPEAKERS

Have you spoken recently with anyone from your support group?

MR SCOTT

(mumbles)

I don’t see what it has to do with being tied up like a calf and brought for slaughter...

The speakers are turned off. MR SCOTT starts yelling incoherently.

MALE NURSE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

(with food in hand)

He’s too agitated. Release the gas first.

INTERIOR. WHITE HALLWAY.

Two agents are dragging along SARAH, who looks half-afraid and half-drugged.

INTERIOR. WHITE ROOM.

VOICE IN THE SPEAKERS

Do you know why you’re here?

GLORIA

(whispers)

No.

VOICE IN THE SPEAKERS

Do you know why you’re here?

GLORIA

For the glory of the Empire! To design better-looking rooms! Now give me a pen!

(laughs)

INTERIOR. WHITE ROOM.

DAVID

It would have been nice to let us keep our watches at least, you know? That way-

The door opens. NURSE enters.

DAVID

So I’m not dangerous anymore? Or am I suddenly interesting enough to be studied with a closer look?

NURSE

We apologize for the inconvenience. We have to improve our protocol in such cases, yet I must admit we were not prepared.

DAVID

On that we can agree.

NURSE

Your tests came out just fine. Have you been experiencing withdrawal symptoms from the Oasis lately?

DAVID

I suppose our psychologist would have told you if I did.

NURSE smiles.

DAVID

So either you suppose I’m a liar or she messed up.

NURSE

Do you wish to see anyone?

DAVID

Why don’t you ask me directly if I miss Sofia?

NURSE

It would do you better if you were less sceptical of everything and everyone.

DAVID

It’s worked fine so far for me. I apologize, however, for the inconvenience of being unpredictable.

NURSE

 We’ve watched the recordings of the surveillance cameras at your workplace.

DAVID

Oh.

NURSE

We couldn’t help but notice you didn’t interact with anyone, while off-job calls were directed to one person only.

DAVID

Is she okay? Did you “retrieve” her, too?

NURSE

We advise you to no longer contact one another.

DAVID

Well, I certainly hope it’s not what you’re making it sound like.

NURSE

Her state is…unstable.

DAVID

It is? You can’t possibly blame me for –

NURSE

This is not a punitive measure. We had to isolate you all and trace the issue with the group dynamic.

DAVID

So this is all because Gloria is depressed? Because Gloria and Sarah are depressed? Shouldn’t you be going after Diane then?

(pause)

You can’t, is that it?

NURSE slides the page on the tablet in her hand.

NURSE

If you could please fill in this form.

INTERIOR. WHITE ROOM.

NURSE

Gloria, just talk to me.

GLORIA

I don’t want to talk to you. Where’s David?

NURSE

He can’t visit you yet.

GLORIA

Oh, come on, he’s just as much a nutcase as I am.

NURSE

We really need you to take this quiz before we can assess your state.

GLORIA

Is it because his lucid dream was boring? I bet that’s it. Anything in this world’s better than there, so no regrets, right? No dissociative identity or whatever? I should have just had an Oasis nightmare to be deemed stable here?

NURSE

I’ll leave you write the answers by yourself.

GLORIA

You write them if you already know everything.

INTERIOR. PSYCHOLOGIST’S CABINET.

SARAH

(smiling)

I’m okay.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Are you sure you don’t want to return? There’s a new trial version and they allow people to sign for free.

SARAH looks up.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Just choose wisely.

SARAH

I have.

(gulps)

I want back out there. I think I can help.

(tugging at her long white sleeves)

But I want a hysterectomy first.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Are you sure? (pause) Very well then, I’ll make the calls.

INTERIOR. WHITE ROOM.

GLORIA

(staring at the floor)

I didn’t do anything wrong. It’s not my fault no one misses me.

(touching the side of her chin)

Stop making me think it’s because I expect people to bend to my will. I don’t like you all treating me like a kid.

(suddenly looks up)

I bet my birth date makes me older than all of you. I’ll outlive every last one of you sorry creeps.

INTERIOR. HALLWAY.

AGENT 1

Apparently No. 1 is stable enough to be released today. He was just a bit too shaken, but that’s expected.

AGENT 2

I would have expected him to be the one not to make it.

AGENT 1

They had counselling with them by pairs, though. No. 1 and No. 3 are leaving together. You’ll have to escort them to the parking lot.

AGENT 2

I still don’t understand what‘s suddenly gotten into No. 5.

AGENT 1

Who knows? You can’t predict humans.

NURSE comes out of a room.

NURSE

Someone call security! He’s fighting back!

EXTERIOR. BUSY MAIN STREET. NOON.

DAVID is standing in the middle of the street as people drift by. He sees an orange scarf in the crowd and pushes his way through the crowd to reach the person. When he gets close to her, he places his hand on her shoulder, but when she turns around, she isn’t GLORIA.

DAVID wakes up in his room.

INTERIOR. SCHOOL HALLWAY. DAYTIME.

MR SCOTT is talking to a teacher, hand in pocket. His face is clean-shaven.

MR SCOTT

Well, teaching primary school. The benefits aren’t obvious, but they are there, right? A sense of purpose, for example.

A LITTLE GIRL runs by.

MR SCOTT

Where are you running to? Don’t you like your own legs well enough?

The LITTLE GIRL stops, looks down, then walks away.

MR SCOTT

Preparing the future just as any other branch, aren’t we?

SARAH walks by, register in hand.

SARAH

(smiles)

Good day, Mr Scott.

MR SCOTT

Charming, charming. With summer just around the corner now, it sure isn’t easy to stop children being children, eh?

SARAH

Indeed. I have class with 2 C right now.

MR SCOTT

Oh, the little rascals! What are you doing?

SARAH

“Little Red Riding Hood”. We’re preparing a play. Naturally, you’re invited.

(looks at the other teacher)

Spread the word, will you?

SARAH walks away.

TEACHER

What’s her story anyway? Do you happen to know if she’s dating anyone?

MR SCOTT

She’s divorced. (pause) But as far as I know, she’s over it now.

INTERIOR. A STYLISH STUDIO. AFTERNOON.

PSYCHOLOGIST

(sighs)

I’ve had better support groups.

WOMAN

Still, 3 out of 5 isn’t bad odds. Sure, it’s less than the required 80%, but it’s not bad enough to taint your record. We can’t always fix everyone.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Fix, huh?

(takes a sip of coffee)

WOMAN

About the girl. I heard they’re taking her case from you.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Yes, it’s gone to clinical now. I was told I’ll get a new group starting next Monday. Three people only.

WOMAN

Look, you did not fail her, alright?

(places her hand on top of hers)

PSYCHOLOGIST takes her hand away and picks up the coffee cup. They look out the window.

PSYCHOLOGIST

There will always be a piece that doesn’t really fit the puzzle, won’t it? And sometimes, there just are no signs.

They drink coffee in silence.

INTERIOR. ROOM DIVIDED BY A GLASS PANE.

GLORIA walks in assisted by a nurse. She sits down and takes the phone. DAVID is sitting in front of her, phone in one hand.

GLORIA

(looking away)

Hello, hello, is this Tokyo?

DAVID

Gloria, I begged them, but they gave me only 5 minutes –

GLORIA

Hello, hello, Nagasaki?

DAVID

If you could cut it out with this play we could –

GLORIA

What do cherry blossoms smell like in Nagasaki? I bet they smell like burnt sugar. The air there is bound to smell like ashes till today, right?

DAVID

(sighs)

Have I ever mistreated you? Gloria, if I –

GLORIA

Hello, hello, this is Tokyo. Gloria is not here.

(hangs up with a straight face)

DAVID places his right hand on the glass pane. She moves her hand towards it like an airplane, then softly crashes it against the glass.

GLORIA

Boom. No one’s right, no one’s left.

NURSE

He can’t hear you without the phone, miss.

GLORIA

(still looking at him)

Good.

They leave. DAVID drops his head in his hands. The camera zooms out.