

FAIL

(A Love Story)

by
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12/9/18

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*You hand in your ticket
And you go watch the geek
Who immediately walks up to you
When he hears you speak
And says, "How does it feel
To be such a freak?"
And you say, "Impossible"
As he hands you a bone.*

*And something is happening here
But you don't know what it is
Do you, Mister Jones?*

- Bob Dylan

WHITE SCREEN

Mulligan's hand draws a circle with a colored marker, then writes "**US**" in the center.

The screen is a white-board.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Let's start with the assumption that connectivity is cycle-dependent.

Draws arrows to flowchart shapes: *freemium wave-n-pay, cloud greentailer hub, incremental homeshored query optimization.*

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

But what if we apply some creative counterintuition?

INT. CORPORATE OFFICES - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

DREW MULLIGAN is working the white-board. In a suit with the jacket off, silk tie loose.

MULLIGAN

Okay? It's intermittent. Moves in packets. And this stuff is just camping out here, right? Eating up storage units.

He's leading a CORPORATE TEAM, all (like him) 20s/30s.

MULLIGAN

There's an entire supply-line kay-trolling off this thing, we're talking about a cascade. We need to rerez the whole module. Fix it while we're still in G-phase.

Mulligan's job is, literally, nonsense.

But: nice workplace. Good light, lots of glass, lots of flow. Out the big windows: other office buildings.

We linger on one Team Member, **FALLON**. She is corporate-stylish, very smart, fairly bold.

Fallon disagrees with Mulligan. Doesn't want to make a thing of it, but hesitantly tries to get his attention.

Mulligan ignores her.

INT. CORPORATE OFFICES - DAY

A CREDITS MONTAGE begins -- SPLIT-SCREEN, very 1960s:

Mulligan parking underground, getting into an elevator -- reading his phone. Never looks up.

Walking-and-talking in corridors, Team Members tagging along.

Watching work over shoulders, tinkering with people's spreadsheets.

We see him motivating. Explaining. He tweaks, he scolds, he challenges.

What we don't see Mulligan do is listen.

To anyone. Ever.

Now and then we linger again on Fallon, trying to contribute her "A" Game.

But Mulligan won't give her a chance.

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON (CREDITS MONTAGE)

Mulligan collects a sandwich from a food truck and walks away, eyes on his phone.

But then he stops. Looking in the glass front of a store. Vaguely yearning.

We don't see what he's looking at.

Mulligan shakes it off and walks on.

...and the CREDITS MONTAGE ends.

INT. MULLIGAN'S OFFICE - EVENING

Mulligan is unpacking a large box at his desk -- setting up a Brookstone-y "Positive-Ion-Transfer Air Purifier," amid a mess of styrofoam wedges and twist-ties.

Fallon steps into the doorway. Hesitant but determined:

FALLON

Did you get that Capacity Breakdown?

He swivels his chair to check email:

MULLIGAN

Yep, thanks.

He never looks at her. Fallon stays in the doorway a moment. Then, giving up, at least for tonight:

FALLON

So, we're out.

MULLIGAN

(nods absently)

Manyana.

TEAM GUY

(calls past Fallon)

Mulligan, go home!

MULLIGAN

(not looking up)

I'm good.

And they're gone.

Out his windows, it's getting dark. Through the open doorway: empty desks.

He glances at the instructions, with their international-symbol cautions, and sets them aside.

He switches on the Air Purifier.

Nothing.

Switches it on-and-off a few times.

Irritated, he finds the 800-number on the Instructions, puts his desk phone on speaker and dials.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CALL CENTER - EVENING

STEVE is in a cube, in a row of cubes, in a grid of cubes.

He is Mulligan's age, but scruffy: frayed jeans, a thrift-shop sweater, mismatched stripes and plaids, sneakers.

His workplace is cramped and dingy. No windows. A low constant murmur of voices. All we can see of his CO-WORKERS are backs.

Like everyone at this job, Steve wears a company photo-ID card on a lanyard around his neck.

He talks into a lightweight headset:

STEVE

Help Line. Before we get started,
may I have your first and last name?

MULLIGAN

Drew. Mulligan.

STEVE

Thank you for calling the Help Line,
Drew. My name is Steve. What issue
can I help you resolve today?

MULLIGAN

I'm calling about the Air Purifier?

Pulling the manual up on his computer:

STEVE

One second...okay: the "Positive-Ion-
Transfer Air Purifier." Is this
ionizing unit for use in a home, a
school or a business?

MULLIGAN

It's in my office.

Steve is playing with a rubber band, not entering info.

STEVE

And what kind of office is that?

MULLIGAN

What does that matter?

STEVE

I don't know. They tell me to ask.
You can opt out of disclosing, if
you're ashamed of what you do for a
living. We already know everything
about you anyway. This is more just
a test of wills.

Awkward silence.

MULLIGAN

I'm sorry -- what?

STEVE

JK, dude. Just messin' with ya.

MULLIGAN

Huh. That was...funny.

STEVE

I know. You can tell when something is funny because people say, "That's funny." I've heard there's some other kind of response -- a sort of grotesque grunting noise they call "laughter." Not really sure that exists.

Beat.

MULLIGAN

So...this air purifier.

STEVE

Not workin', huh?

MULLIGAN

No.

STEVE

How do you know?

MULLIGAN

What do you mean?

STEVE

How would you know if your air was being ionized?

MULLIGAN

The indicator light isn't going on.

STEVE

So your problem is with the light.

MULLIGAN

No. The light tells me if the unit is operating.

STEVE

But if the light is broken, then your doohickey could still be ionizing your air, right? Whatever that means. What do you care if the light goes on?

MULLIGAN

Because I don't know if it's working.

STEVE

But you don't know it's not.

MULLIGAN

What -- are you...?

STEVE

I'm just saying: this is more a question of faith than product support.

Mulligan takes a tiny beat to try processing this.

MULLIGAN

No. I want my products to work as described in the instruction manual.

STEVE

What if the manual sucks?
(beat)
Right?

MULLIGAN

Can I speak to your supervisor?

STEVE

I don't have a supervisor.

Steve looks down the rows: **GLORIA** -- in her 40s, wearing a **SUPERVISOR** ID card -- stands by another cube, supervising.

MULLIGAN

What are you talking about? Everyone has a supervisor.

STEVE

That's a really frightening world-view you got there, Drew.

MULLIGAN

It's not a world-view -- you're in a call center: you have a supervisor.

STEVE

Nope. Downsized. We are answering questions without supervision. It's anarchy. Run for your life.

MULLIGAN

Seriously. You have to put me through to your supervisor if I ask you to.

STEVE

What are you going to do if I don't?

MULLIGAN

File a complaint.

STEVE

With who? My supervisor?

MULLIGAN

The corporate offices.

STEVE

Yeah -- good luck with that. "Oh my God, stop the workings of this fifty-trillion-dollar-multinational corporation! Some sucker who bought one of our two-hundred-dollar-empty-plastic-housings-with-an-indicator-light is upset because our subcontractor's minimum-wage cube-jockey delivered unsatisfactory customer service! Holy crap! Send this right up to J.R.!"

Beat. Mulligan hangs up. Redials.

Steve hits a key on his keyboard:

STEVE

Help Line.

Mulligan is silent.

STEVE

Truth is, we cover like fifty companies, but only one desk is dedicated to this unit.

(beat)

Dedicated.

Mulligan is boiling. Silently.

STEVE

Okay, I'm sorry. Dude. I'm here to help. Come on now. Movin' on. Did you try resetting the unit?

Beat. Reluctantly:

MULLIGAN

How do I do that?

STEVE

Pull out the plug, wait nine seconds, and then plug it back in again.

MULLIGAN
Nine seconds?

STEVE
That's what it says.

Steve is not reading from his screen.

Mulligan sighs.

Gets on his hands-and-knees and follows the cord into a thicket of wires around the power-strip under his desk.

Pulls the plug --

-- **CRRRACK!** SPARKS AND SMOKE --

FLASH INTO:

WHITE SCREEN. THE SOUND OF WIND.

SLOW FADE IN:

INT. MULLIGAN'S OFFICE (POV) - NIGHT

MULLIGAN'S POV: *Looking up from the floor. The bottom of the desk. The drop-ceiling tiles, light fixtures.*

We tilt down -- to find:

Mulligan. Lying on the carpet by the smoking power strip, staring at the ceiling. Motionless.

INT. MULLIGAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Mulligan scrambles back. Staring at his own body.

MULLIGAN
What the hell just happened?

He's talking to himself, in shock -- he has forgotten the speakerphone. So he's startled by:

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

STEVE
Are we ionizing yet?

MULLIGAN

Hello?

STEVE

Hel-lo?

MULLIGAN

What is going on?

STEVE

Dunno. Have we resolved your issue?

MULLIGAN

No. Something very weird is happening.

(beat)

I'm looking at myself.

(beat)

I'm -- lying on the floor. And I think I'm...dead.

Beat.

STEVE

This is, like -- payback, right? You're messin' with me 'cause of the supervisor thing. Nice. Well-played, sir.

MULLIGAN

No. This is really happening.

Mulligan uneasily stands up, goes to the window. Doesn't see himself reflected in the dark glass. Touches it.

STEVE

Right. Of course.

(whispers)

I give tech support to dead people.

Beyond the reflection: the world goes on. In the windows of other office buildings -- other people, Edward Hopper-ish.

MULLIGAN

I am telling you -- I am separated from my body.

(turns around)

I'm looking at it. It has burns on its fingertips. I can smell it.

STEVE

Eew.

Mulligan rushes to the door, now closed. Frantically twists and rattles the knob. Locked.

MULLIGAN

This is insane.

Steve sits forward.

Uncertain, intrigued...but engaged, for the first time:

STEVE

Okay: Dude, seriously --

MULLIGAN

SERIOUSLY I AM LOOKING AT MY OWN
ELECTROCUTED BODY ON THE FLOOR!

Silence.

STEVE

You should call 9-1-1.

Mulligan goes to his desk, disconnects the call.

Dials 9-1-1. Listens to it ring.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Warily, kind of experimentally -- Steve hits the key and connects to:

STEVE

Help Line.

MULLIGAN

GOD DAMN IT! SHITKICKING MOTHER-F...

Mulligan snatches up the receiver and slams it down.

Slams it down a few more times, because it feels good.

Breathing heavily, he carefully dials 9-1-1 again.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Thoughtful, Steve hits the key. Reluctantly...amused:

STEVE

Yo.

Mulligan takes a moment. Trembling. Trying to cope.

Steve listens. He is gentle:

STEVE

The five stages of dying. Number one
is Anger.

MULLIGAN

But I'm not dying! I'm dead.

STEVE

Hey. Not everybody learns at the
same pace. I'm here to help. Let's
figure out what's going on.

(beat)

Did you unplug the unit?

MULLIGAN

Yes! And it killed me!

STEVE

Did you read the important safety
instructions?

MULLIGAN

What?

STEVE

In the manual. First section. Big
letters: "IMPORTANT SAFETY
INSTRUCTIONS"?

MULLIGAN

Nobody reads those.

STEVE

I know. Which is pretty amazing,
considering the universal-symbols of
people being electrocuted.

(beat)

But okay, so: you're dead. And yet
still talking to me. Why?
Everything happens for a reason.

MULLIGAN

I don't believe that.

STEVE

You don't believe that everything
happens for a reason?

MULLIGAN

No. There's almost no evidence that anything happens for a reason. That's, like -- Existentialism 101.

STEVE

Okay. Some of us got that higher education.

MULLIGAN

You didn't go to college.

STEVE

Who did you think sits in a cube and helps people who won't read the instructions?

(beat)

I went. I didn't -- remain. There. Which is fine.

(beat)

Everything happens for a reason.

Mulligan puts his head in his hands.

MULLIGAN

Just kill me now.

STEVE

Too late.

(suddenly)

Okay -- wait a second. Dude!

MULLIGAN

What?

STEVE

Soul of a dead person that will not or cannot leave the earth.

(beat)

What is: a ghost.

(beat)

Classic.

MULLIGAN

I'm...a ghost.

STEVE

What are you, gonna argue with the logic?

MULLIGAN

Ah-huh. Then what are you? An angel?

STEVE
(snorts a laugh)
Yeah. Right.

MULLIGAN
No: seriously.

STEVE
Seriously? I am a guy in a cube at a
Help Line.

Mulligan is less than thrilled. But the door is locked.

Steve can feel his fear through the phone line.

STEVE
I guess -- maybe -- I could be, like:
your...Spirit Guide. Or something.

MULLIGAN
Terrific.

STEVE
Okay: first step in your evolution?
Ease up on the snark. You don't want
to piss off your Spirit Guide.

MULLIGAN
Look, I just wasn't ready for this!

STEVE
Right: 'cause it's not like anybody
ever mentioned life was gonna end.
(beat)
Five stages. Anger -- Denial --
(groping)
-- Hungadunga, Hungadunga and
McCormick.

MULLIGAN
No: they told us -- statistics. And
statistically, I'm not supposed to
die yet.

STEVE
Mulligan: you are not a number.
You're a snowflake. A fingerprint.
A unique human spark.
(beat)
Which, unfortunately, just got
snuffed out.

MULLIGAN

I ate right. I exercised. No smoking. I took anti-oxidants.

STEVE

Anti-oxidants? You didn't read about that new study?

MULLIGAN

No -- what?

STEVE

One hundred percent of the people who read new studies...died. It's like The Ring.

Beat.

MULLIGAN

You done?

STEVE

Okay: spirit guidance. Comin' at ya.

Steve looks around. Reads from a fortune-cookie fortune pinned to the fabric cube-wall:

STEVE

"Live every day like it was your last. One day it will be."

MULLIGAN

Can we skip ahead? 'Cause I'm past that part.

STEVE

Fine.

(formal)

Spirit -- what is it that keepeth you here...thusly?

MULLIGAN

I don't know!

STEVE

Well: obviously you have to -- resolve some -- issue.

(beat)

Maybe you need to warn somebody about something.

(beat)

Or -- take vengeance on your killer ...which is an ion-thingy. So, maybe not that.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Anything ringin' a bell here? Any -- unfinished business?

MULLIGAN

No! I was -- good!

STEVE

If you were "good", you'd be floating up toward a bright, beautiful light.

(beat)

Has your life flashed before your eyes yet? Maybe you'll see something that can help. Try flashing.

Mulligan sits there, brooding.

STEVE

You're not even trying.

Busted, Mulligan sighs and pulls a post-it off a pad -- sticks it over the tiny lens on his monitor, as:

MULLIGAN

Fine.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS - MULLIGAN'S LIFE - (POV MONTAGE)

MULLIGAN'S POV: *ultra-fast cuts, hand-held, tinted and filtered to emphasize "memory" -- a BLUR of everyday images:*

Mom & Dad looking down at us in a crib

Mom spooning food at us

Being on a playground

Watching an old TV show

Playing with toys

Walking through a school

Taking a standardized test

Going to a high school party

Looking at porn

Pouring hot water into ramen

Taking another standardized test

In a mirror, Mulligan brushing his teeth
Dancing with a girl in a nightclub
Shopping in a supermarket
Driving a car
On a street at night with another girl, on a date
Working in the office
Meeting with his Team
Taking the Air Purifier out of its box --

INT. MULLIGAN'S OFFICE - (RESUME)

Mulligan blinks, startled.

MULLIGAN

That's -- it?

STEVE

What do you want, a slow flash? You
saw it: you wasted your life.

MULLIGAN

I didn't waste it. I had a very full
life.

STEVE

Very full of shallow crap.

MULLIGAN

Screw you!

STEVE

Was that Anger -- or Denial?
(to himself)
Anger -- Denial -- Carbohydrates --
Fruits and Veg...damn it.

MULLIGAN

Look: this may all be a big joke to
you -- but it's my life.

STEVE

Isn't that always the way?
(beat)
Okay: let's unpack this. See what's
missing. What do you regret?

MULLIGAN
Not reading the instructions.

STEVE
Something that, you look back and
just think: *I wish I had --*

EXT. NAIL SALON - (POV FLASHBACK)

VERY FAST -- POV: *A Nail Salon with big plate-glass windows. We are out on the street, looking in at:*

SASHA, *in one of the pedicure chairs. In her late 20s, mildly neo-hippie. Thoughtful but alive. Flipping the pages of a fashion magazine despite her own eclectic cheap style.*

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

STEVE
What was that?

MULLIGAN
Nothing. It's crazy.

STEVE
Didn't look like nothing. Looked like a girl. Not exactly your type. Kind of a hippie-chick.

MULLIGAN
I know.

EXT. NAIL SALON - (FLASHBACK)

MULLIGAN'S POV: *Sasha getting manicures and pedicures, on different days, wearing different outfits.*

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
When I go out to get lunch sometimes, I see her. Through the windows. I don't know her name. I don't know anything about her.

OUT OF POV: *Mulligan is on the sidewalk outside, carrying a sandwich from a food truck -- looking in.*

It's a reverse-view of the moment in the credits montage, when Mulligan stopped and got lost in something he saw through a store window...but we didn't know what it was.

Now we see it was Sasha.

STEVE (V.O.)
Mulligan, this is it. This is your
quest. Your impossible dream.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
I don't think so.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

STEVE
I'm telling you: I took a screen-
writing class. This is the hero's
journey.

MULLIGAN
You work in a call center and you're
writing a screenplay. And I'm
supposed to follow your advice?

STEVE
I'm not writing a screenplay.
Halfway through the class I realized
screenplays are over. I'm into game
design now. Art-form of the future.

MULLIGAN
Oh, much better: you're taking a
class in designing video games.

STEVE
Not really taking a class yet.
Mostly I'm just immersing myself in
the gaming world.

MULLIGAN
You are the reason civilization is
ending.

STEVE
Civilization is fine, my man. You're
the one who didn't *carpe* that *diem*.

MULLIGAN
I didn't what?

STEVE
Carpe diem. It's Latin for "Seize
the day." The one that got away, the
road less-taken. It makes all the
difference.
(beat)

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

Why didn't you ever talk to her,
Mulligan?

MULLIGAN

I don't know.

STEVE

Fear. Of rejection. Of change.
Disappointment. Sexually transmitted
diseases. You don't even realize how
much your life has been constructed
on the basis of fear. You numb
yourself with electronics and causes
and entertainment to ward off the
existential horror. Terror of the
true connection. The truly human
moment. For richer or poorer, in
sickness and in health.

MULLIGAN

What are you talking about?

STEVE

I have no idea. But I think I'm
really on to something here. You're
at a threshold of experience, man.
You need to lean in to that. Seize
the day. *Carpe --*

MULLIGAN

How?! I'm out of *diems!*

STEVE

Dude: you have already broken the
boundaries of life and death.

(beat)

Go. Find the girl. Connect. Change
your destiny.

Beat.

MULLIGAN

Okay.

STEVE

Yes. Okay -- say: "There's no place
like home."

MULLIGAN

What?

STEVE

You have to say it.

Silence. Reluctantly:

MULLIGAN
"There's no place like home."

Long awkward silence.

STEVE
Suckaaaa --

MULLIGAN
Would you just help me?! I'm dead --
in this office, with my body -- which
I think may have soiled itself -- and
I have no idea how --

STEVE
-- okay, okay-okay! Take the Red
Pill. Use The Force.

MULLIGAN
What?!

STEVE
Just let go. Flip down your visor.

MULLIGAN
I am not wearing a fuc--

FLASH INTO:

WHITE SCREEN. THE SOUND OF WIND.

SLOW FADE IN:

INT. CHURCH (POV) - DAY

BERKELEY'S POV: *we are looking up at a beautiful arched ceiling, a stained glass window. Maybe a crucifix.*

MYRNA (O.S.)
Father?

MYRNA, *steps into our view: a dowdy middle-aged woman -- standing over us, upside down, concerned.*

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

FATHER BERKELEY -- late 60s, black robes, white clerical collar. On the church floor. Staring up at her.

MYRNA

Are you all right?

Berkeley slowly sits up. Not sure where he is or what is happening.

Because he is Mulligan.

In this "new life" he is played by a DIFFERENT ACTOR.

The "film language" also noticeably changes for each of Mulligan's lives.

His original world was clean, carefully-composed, deep-focused, in cool tones. After his death: shallower focus, more close-ups, more contrast, backgrounds lost in darkness.

Think Michael Clayton or Margin Call.

But now that he is Berkeley, his world has a wide range of luscious colors, beautifully-lit, without a hint of gloom or danger. The compositions are conversational, human-scale, never too wide or too close.

More like The Devil Wears Prada or Sex In The City.

Steve's world and film-language, though, never change. It's natural but a bit artsy, intimate, offbeat.

Along the lines of 500 Days Of Summer.

Berkeley notices his old-man hands. Stares in shock.

BERKELEY

Oh, crap.

MYRNA

Should I...get someone?

He gets unsteadily to his feet, hurries to pick up a highly-polished silver goblet from the altar.

Studies his reflection, touching his face, shaken.

BERKELEY

Why am I old?

Looks down at himself -- turns to stare at the church. It seems very holy. Maybe because his soul has just experienced a supernatural transformation.

MYRNA

Father?

BERKELEY

(whirls, annoyed)

What?!

Myrna is taken aback. Timidly gestures to the Confessional.

Berkeley gets it. In over his head.

BERKELEY

Now? Can't you -- do it on-line or something?

Myrna looks like she's going to cry. But she pulls it together and accepts. As she turns to go, crushed -- Berkeley sighs.

BERKELEY

Okay, look, you know what? You're good. Forgiven.

MYRNA

I'm sorry?

BERKELEY

In the name of the father, and the son...you're fine. Poof. Wham-o. Go and sin no more.

MYRNA

Is that...enough?

BERKELEY

Come on. Look at you. How bad could it possibly be?

Her face trembles and her eyes fill with tears.

MYRNA

I was just trying to protect him. He survived three weeks in a shipping container with thirty-seven other people -- who would think he couldn't make it for two days in a basement?! I couldn't let him out while my husband was home! Bud would never believe that all we did was read the Bible together! And I put the rabbit down there for company. Rabbits are vegetarian -- why would Mr. Whiskerson eat Xui Li's face?!

(sobbing now)

(MORE)

MYRNA (CONT'D)

It's a judgement from God, isn't it?!
I am damned! Eternally damned for
holding private Bible study sessions
with the Chinese food delivery man!

Terrible, terrible silence. Except for the anguished sobs.

BERKELEY

Do you...have a phone I could borrow?

MYRNA

A phone?

BERKELEY

Just for a second.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Steve is fly-casting over the wall of his cubicle with a fishing rod made out of pencils, tape, string and a paperclip.

VERNON (O.S.)

Hey!

Steve pulls the string back: the clip has snagged a pair of eyeglasses from the next cube.

VERNON, mid-20s, nebbish-hipster next-cube-neighbor, leans around the cube wall to get his glasses back -- just as the call comes in.

Steve makes apologetic gestures, tapping a key to pick up:

STEVE

Help Line.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Father Berkeley is using Myrna's phone, pacing the church, talking low for privacy -- at the edge of panic:

BERKELEY

Is this some kind of a joke?!

STEVE

Mulligan! How's it goin'?

BERKELEY

I'm a priest.

STEVE

Say again?

BERKELEY

An old -- celibate -- Catholic Guy --
in a church!

Beat.

STEVE

I'm sorry. So many jokes are
occurring to me at the same time.

BERKELEY

This is not funny!

STEVE

No -- no, of course not! It's just
...okay, just one: a guy walks into a
priest --

BERKELEY

What is wrong with you?!

Berkeley, desperate and lost, sits in a pew.

BERKELEY

Why can't I talk to someone else?!
Why is this happening to me?!

Looking at his withered, elderly hands. At the sacred space
around him. Struggling to understand.

BERKELEY

Are you...God?

Truly startled, Steve laughs.

STEVE

Can you imagine?! You would be so
screwed.

He swivels idly, looking down the rows of murmuring cubes.

STEVE

And worse: I'm in a whole room full
of sad little "Gods." Minimum-wage
Gods. There's an album title, huh?
(beat)
Would explain a lot about the world,
though.

BERKELEY

I really thought you were.

STEVE

I feel ya. But the truth is: I am an ordinary guy working a lousy job -- and what's happening to you is a mystery to me.

BERKELEY

And this isn't messing with your whole sense of reality?

STEVE

Well...my reality hasn't changed.

(beat)

Let's face it: we hear about some horrible thing, like on the news, and it gives us a kind of -- delicious little shiver. But then we turn the page. Click on something else. Life goes on.

BERKELEY

Not mine! Those people you click away from? They're never gonna be the same.

STEVE

And you know what: when they put out some kind of tribute album that benefits you? I'm gonna buy it.

BERKELEY

You are so not God.

STEVE

Toldja.

(sighs)

Okay -- look. This is a Help Line, and that is, in its own way, a sacred responsibility. So let's think this out.

(beat)

Obviously: they can't throw somebody out of a body to give you one. So they have to give you one that's being -- you know...vacated.

BERKELEY

Who is "they"?

STEVE

I don't know. The Spirits, The Ancestors. The Ministry of Karma. The Reincarnation Department.

(beat)

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

The point is: they gave you a chance,
here. A quest, to give yourself some
meaning.

(beat)

And they gave you a life to do it
with.

BERKELEY

As a celibate old man.

STEVE

You're not a hero if it's easy.

(beat)

Go forth and carpe.

Steve disconnects.

INT. NAIL SALON - DAY

Sasha is reading a magazine as she gets a pedicure.

Out the window: Father Berkeley approaches on the sidewalk.

He looks in at her, through the glass.

EXT. NAIL SALON - THE SAME TIME

BERKELEY'S POV: *Sasha doesn't notice us. As she leans down
to scratch her ankle -- we glimpse:*

*A tattoo on her right shoulder-blade. Ornate calligraphy,
seen only in motion and obscured by her tank-top-strap.*

INT. NAIL SALON - DAY

Outside on the street, Berkeley squints, trying to read it --
but it's gone too fast.

He stares in at Sasha and the nail salon, having no idea how
to do this.

But he gets up his nerve and heads for the doors.

INT. NAIL SALON - SOON AFTER

Berkeley settles uncomfortably into the recliner next to
Sasha, who glances up from her magazine.

Startled, Sasha exchanges a polite smile -- then, as Berkeley self-consciously lets a NAIL LADY start working on his feet:

SASHA

Do you know, I don't think I've ever actually talked with a priest?

BERKELEY

Never too late.
(holds out a hand)
I'm -- Father Drew.

SASHA

Sasha.

She shakes his hand, awkwardly since their feet are planted in mini-jaccuzis.

SASHA

Must be difficult, knowing that everybody who meets you is thinking: is he a pedophile?

Beat.

BERKELEY

Does put a crimp in your social life.

SASHA

Sorry. I shouldn't have said it.

He smiles, shrugs. Unsure what to say. Tries:

BERKELEY

Live every day like it's your last -- one day you'll be right.

SASHA

I got a fortune cookie once that said that.

BERKELEY

Well: who gave us fortune cookies?

He points up. Pleased with himself. She's amused.

SASHA

Deep.

BERKELEY

Anyway, this --
(indicates himself)
-- is...not me.

She nods, listening. Serious. Berkeley realizes he is completely unprepared to explain further. Ends up punting:

BERKELEY

It's -- just a job.

SASHA

Wow.

(impressed)

Honest much?

Berkeley shrugs, unable to figure out how to tell her his truth. But Sasha is intrigued, inspired:

SASHA

I've been kind of -- searching. Myself. I mean, you know: everybody goes through their Satanist phase. But lately I've been thinking about going to Nepal. Or Peru. Taking a spiritual journey.

BERKELEY

I'm sort of on one of those right now.

SASHA

Really.

TIME CUTS: *The conversation flows as they move to different stages of a mani-pedi-and-makeover around the salon.*

Sasha is enjoying the chance to schmooze religion with a pro, as she and the elderly priest get painted with kabuki-ish facial masks, side-by-side:

SASHA

Original sin seems kind of unfair. Especially if it really was the tree of knowledge.

(beat)

But I do love the art. And Jesus is excellent.

BERKELEY

That's pretty much our main point.

SASHA

Not too thrilled with the Inquisition. Or the Crusades. In fact the whole Middle Ages was sort of a wrong move.

BERKELEY
I wasn't...involved in that.

SASHA
Right: no reincarnation. So you're
off the hook. Very convenient.

BERKELEY
You would think so. But sometimes
even if you don't believe in things --
they still happen to you.

SASHA
Huh.

TIME CUT: getting their nails painted, or eye make-up...

BERKELEY
The truth is, I've been thinking
about...leaving the church.

SASHA
Whoa. That's intense.

BERKELEY
For a while I thought God was -- like
a Help Line.

SASHA
I can see that.

BERKELEY
But then it turned out he's just some
jerk in a cube, doesn't know what
he's talking about.

SASHA
Okay...disturbing.

TIME CUT: getting toenails painted now. Sasha is relaxed,
open now -- reaching out with her soul:

SASHA
I don't know. Maybe the Wiccans have
it right, and there's just some
animating spirit -- and all religions
are equally worthwhile in their
struggle to find some kind of values
and meaning in this life.

Beat.

BERKELEY
Are you...dating anyone?

She looks at him, startled. Then, honestly:

SASHA
I meet a lot of jerks.
(shrugs)
You know: I like -- intimacy...

BERKELEY
Me too!

SASHA
...but then: after. And before. You
need to be able to talk. And trust.

They are looking into each other's eyes.

BERKELEY
Would you excuse me?

He gets up -- awkwardly, cotton balls between his toes to protect the brightly-colored polish -- and goes to the front of the store, where there is a phone on the counter.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - DAY

Steve hits the key on his keyboard:

STEVE
Help Line.

Berkeley is on the store's phone, eager:

BERKELEY
We're talking.

STEVE
Dog! Look at that. Sweet.

BERKELEY
Now what?

STEVE
What do you mean? Dude: leap of faith. Tell her everything. Bare your soul.

BERKELEY
And then what? I'm. A. Priest.

STEVE

So just imagine she's an altarb--
nevermind. Look: maybe you're not
supposed to have a physical
connection.

BERKELEY

Excuse me? After all this?!

STEVE

Maybe that's the point. Connecting
on a spiritual level.

BERKELEY

No! I need -- physical -- sexual --
connecting!

That was louder than intended. He turns, self-conscious:

Sasha -- who has come to the counter to pay -- is trying to
pretend she didn't hear it. Berkeley smiles uncomfortably.

Meanwhile, Steve sees:

Gloria, his Supervisor, coming toward him along the row of
cubes. Eyes on him.

STEVE

Oh -- crap, listen -- I gotta put you
on hold.

BERKELEY

What? No -- you can't --

But Steve does, just as Gloria arrives at his cube:

GLORIA

We should talk. In my office.

STEVE

I'm kind of in the middle of a --
thing.

He indicates the monitor. Gloria considers him.

INT. NAIL SALON - CONTINUOUS

Berkeley holds the phone, watching Sasha put away her
change, preparing to leave.

SASHA

It was nice talking with you.

BERKELEY
Could you wait a second?

She winces, backing toward the doors.

SASHA
They really get on us if we're back
late from lunch. I'm sorry. Take
care. Good luck on your journey!

Berkeley watches her leave. Stunned. Helpless. Except:

BERKELEY
Carpe diem.

He hangs up the phone.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - DAY

GLORIA
Okay. On your next break.

Steve nods. Watches her walk away. Exhales, hitting a key:

STEVE
Okay.
(beat)
Hello?

EXT. AVENUE - DAY

Berkeley comes out on to the street -- barefoot, with cotton balls tucked between his painted toes.

The Nail Lady steps out of the door behind him, with:

NAIL LADY
Your shoes!

BERKELEY
Keep em!

He runs awkwardly after Sasha.

EXT. AVENUE - DAY (POV)

BERKELEY'S POV: *About half-a-block away, Sasha jogs across the busy intersection before the lights change.*

EXT. AVENUE - CORNER - DAY

Berkeley slows at the corner, breathless -- watching Sasha disappear into a big office building across the street.

BERKELEY

Damn it.

With a deep breath and renewed determination, he steps off the curb to follow.

EXT. AVENUE - CORNER - DAY (POV)

BERKELEY'S POV: *We step off the curb -- and then hastily turn to look left -- because of the sudden BLARING HORN --*
-- as the BUS COMES RUSHING AT US.

FLASH INTO:

WHITE SCREEN. THE SOUND OF WIND.

SLOW FADE IN:

POV - CLOSE-UP - SASHA'S MOUTH

WENDY'S POV: *Sasha's mouth. Open wide, anatomical. We're talking gums and saliva, lit by a dental light. A spit-sucker gurgles, hooked over her bottom teeth.*

Worse, she's tilted-back, so there is a faint look of torture and panic in her eyes. But our attention shifts to our own hands:

Slender fingers in surgical gloves, wielding a dental pick and mirror. The hands of a young woman.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - DAY

WENDY -- *Sasha's dental hygienist -- stares at her hands. Slowly turning them, moving the fingers, to make certain they're actually being controlled by her brain.*

Wendy's "cinematic language" is wide-angle lenses, never at eye-level -- usually noticeably low. Lots of steadicam, off-kilter angles.

Think 1980s Brian DePalma, Dr. Strangelove or Breaking Bad.

Sasha's watching Wendy, puzzled.

Wendy thinks a second, then wipes off the tiny dental mirror and looks at herself:

Very attractive, quite the girly-girl. In her 20s. Make up. Stylish hair. Jewelry. Breasts.

Wendy looks down at herself -- then at Sasha, trying to conceal her dismay.

WENDY

Could you -- just hang on a minute?

Leaving Sasha in the chair, confused --

-- Wendy goes to pick up a wall phone. Dialing, she steps out into the hall, the long cord stretching around the open doorway.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Steve hits the key and talks into his headset:

STEVE

Help Line.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Wendy paces in the hall, talking low and furious:

WENDY

I'm a girl!?

STEVE

But: young, right? Not celibate.
So...movin' up the karmic scale.

WENDY

I am a young, non-celibate woman!

DR. FURMAN comes out of an office -- and hears that. A dentist in his late 40s.

Wendy forces a smile, waiting for Furman to move along.

But Furman lingers...intrigued.

STEVE

You know, maybe that's the whole point. I've been thinking this all out --

WENDY

I can't talk now, call you back.

Polite but businesslike, Wendy nods 'bye to Furman and heads back into the exam room.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Hanging up the phone:

WENDY

I'm so sorry. A personal -- thing.

Sasha nods. As Wendy sits beside her, improvising:

WENDY

Guys, right?

Sasha makes a sympathetic face, despite the spit-sucker. Awkward beat. Wendy realizes she has to keep pretending to be a hygienist.

WENDY

Open?

Sasha does. Wendy takes up a device, experimentally.

WENDY

Do you...have a boyfriend?

Mouth full of dental stuff, Sasha indicates: *no*.

WENDY

So tough to find Mr. Right.

She tests the device -- it startles them both with a horrible whine. Hastily puts it back, picks up a simple tool. Begins aimlessly tapping teeth as:

WENDY

What would you say you look for most in a guy?

Sasha tries to talk, but really can't.

WENDY

Right -- of course, sorry.

(beat)

But: do you need a guy to be...rich?

Sasha scrunches up her face: *no, not at all.*

WENDY

Muscular?

Sasha: *it's okay, but it's not make-or-break.*

WENDY

Smart.

Sasha: *yeah -- definitely like that.*

WENDY

Confident.

Sasha: *oh...that can be good -- or go really bad.*

WENDY

Right, right -- more, like:
sensitive.

Sasha: *honestly -- that can go bad too...*

WENDY

A good lover.

Sasha grins slightly: *well -- can't say no to that.*

WENDY

Ah, but: what makes a man a great
lover? That's the real question,
isn't it.

Sasha: *uh -- well, sure. Not exactly dental-chair
conversation, though.*

But Wendy is hot on the trail now:

WENDY

I mean: for you.

(beat)

What's the secret?

Sasha: *I am so glad I have an excuse not to talk right now.*

WENDY

It's not -- size, is it? That's like
-- what guys...worry about. But
(MORE)

WENDY (CONT'D)
they're so wrong. About that. Being
a big deal.

Sasha: *okay...this is way too weird.*

WENDY
I mean it's so ridiculous, that guys
are all concerned with -- performing
...when what really matters to us --
is...

Wendy watches Sasha intently, trying out:

WENDY
Hygiene.
(beat)
Cuddling.
(beat)
Oral.

Sasha: *I really need for a fire alarm to go off soon.*

Wendy sees it in her eyes. Freezes.

WENDY
You know what? I think we're done
for today. Rinse!

Confused, as Wendy removes the sucker:

SASHA
You're not gonna -- polish them?

WENDY
Nope. You're beautiful. And you
have an amazing mouth. Just as it
is.

Sasha hesitates, then goes with it, getting up. Her dress
lets Wendy catch a fleeting glimpse of the tattoo --

-- but Sasha immediately pulls on a sweater, covering it.

WENDY
Would you like to...get together some
time?

Sasha turns, startled.

WENDY
To talk?
(beat)
Trade -- woman -- thoughts. Some
(MORE)

WENDY (CONT'D)

time when we're not -- you know,
scraping stuff out of your mouth.

Sasha is totally baffled, but trying to be polite.

SASHA

Sure.

WENDY

I'll call you.

Just relieved to get out of there:

SASHA

Okay.

She's gone. Wendy slumps, exhaling. Self-mocking:

WENDY

"I'll call you."

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - THE SAME TIME

Steve is lost in thought. Sees the call come in, hits the
key to connect.

STEVE

Well: you wanted to get physical.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Wendy's on the wall-phone again:

WENDY

Yeah: great. I got all creepy and
she left. And I am so freaked out
because I'm really attracted to
myself. This is messed-up.

STEVE

Are you kidding? This is perfect.
She has to come back.

WENDY

I am not gonna clean teeth for six
months so I can see her again!

STEVE

Then don't. Man up! So to speak.
Go find her. Quest a little.

WENDY

I don't even know her last name.

STEVE

Yeah. Gee. If only...doctors and dentists kept some kind of...I don't know...records of their patients. Damn.

WENDY

Asshole.

She hangs up.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - CONTINUOUS

Wendy comes out to the Reception Area --

-- where the desk is cluttered with packing materials for a "Positive-Ion-Transfer Air Purifier," which stands, like The Grim Reaper --

-- as **HELEN**, the receptionist, prepares to put the plug into a power-strip.

WENDY

Oh God -- NO, DON'T!

Too late. Helen pushes the plug in.

The little indicator light comes on.

HELEN

What?

Wendy stares, wary, as Helen moves the unit out of the way.

WENDY

I just...heard those were...recalled. Safety -- problems.

HELEN

Really?

Shaken but moving on:

WENDY

Yeah. Um -- can I see the file for my last patient?

It's on the desk, so Helen just hands it over.

Wendy flips it open. As she borrows a pen and slip of paper, jotting down Sasha's name and number:

HELEN
Whoa. You were right.

WENDY
Huh?

Helen tilts her monitor to show a news item: MAN ELECTROCUTED BY AIR PURIFIER. With a photo of Mulligan.

HELEN
But there's no recall. It was just a freak accident.

WENDY
(snaps)
It was a normal accident.
(beat)
Accidents are already freak. Just because somebody has -- things -- happen to them, doesn't automatically indicate...freakishness.
(beat)
A man is dead. His life is over. Just like that, for no reason. You don't have to ridicule him, too.

Uncomfortable beat. Helen hesitantly offers an apologetic:

HELEN
It was under "Funny News."

Wendy stares at her.

Dr. Furman steps into the Reception Area.

FURMAN
Wendy? Got a minute? I need to talk to you about Mr. Robinson.

Wendy has no intention of keeping up the hygienist thing now that she has Sasha's name and address.

WENDY
Uh, yeah. Can we do that later?

FURMAN
It's about Mr. Robinson.

His tone is oddly personal and urgent.

Wendy reluctantly follows.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE #2 - SOON AFTER

As Wendy steps in, Dr. Furman locks the door behind them.

WENDY

What are you doing?

FURMAN

It's been over a week since we talked
about Mr. Robinson.

He corners her, begins kissing and fondling. Wendy
struggles, completely unprepared for this:

WENDY

It's not -- really a good time -- to
"talk" --

FURMAN

-- but Mr. Robinson has been missing
you.

He takes her hand and puts it on his crotch --

WENDY

What?! No -- ew, no "Mr. Robinson"!

-- she knees him in the balls, hard. As he doubles over,
she backs away.

Breathless, he staggers back -- staring.

FURMAN

What the hell, Wendy?! Usually I say
"Mr. Robinson" and you're down on all
fours!

WENDY

Nothing, I just -- what?

FURMAN

Is this about what I said last week?

WENDY

No.
(beat)
Maybe.

FURMAN

I will get a divorce. I promise you.
It's just timing. You know what it's
like for me, with Jane and her pre-
nup and her father the lawyer. I
(MORE)

FURMAN (CONT'D)

mean, what have you done about
Rodrigo?

WENDY

About...?

FURMAN

See?! And he's just a bird! I mean:
I know, rare tropical cockatoo, your
best friend since you were a little
girl -- I'm just saying it's
complicated, this stuff, and you
can't just make -- ultimatums.

(beat)

I'm asking you to hang in for just a
little while longer.

Wendy has been nodding and frowning, desperately trying to
keep up. Now she stares. What the hell:

WENDY

Okay.

FURMAN

You will.

WENDY

Yeah.

FURMAN

Thank God.

He nods, grateful. She shrugs, uncomfortable.

A moment of reconciliation and trust.

FURMAN

So -- what. Biker and bartender?

WENDY

What?

She would go -- but he's got his back against the door.

FURMAN

Vampire and werewolf? Get some
wolfie-style?

WENDY

No!

FURMAN

The French missionary nun and the
little native boy who got possessed.

WENDY

No! Look -- Dr...

Damn. Doesn't even know his name.

FURMAN

"Doctor"?

A lightbulb moment. Delighted:

FURMAN

Yes. Back to basics. I'll get the
nitrous.

Wendy watches horrified as he starts adjusting the chair:

WENDY

No! Look: I'm not into it today.
Okay?

FURMAN

Oh, God. Yes. I love this one.

WENDY

No: seriously --

She starts for the door -- he blocks her path:

FURMAN

Part of the game is you resist.

WENDY

This is not a game!

FURMAN

You said ignore you when you say
that. No safe words. So get in the
chair.

She tries to push past -- he grabs her by the throat, shoves
her down into the dental chair --

-- yanking on ropes that seem to come out of nowhere,
binding her wrists to the chair.

As he steps back -- and she takes it in, realizing:

WENDY

You had this...prepared.

FURMAN

I guess you're right, Wendy. Not a
game. Any more.

Furman smiles. Cold. Not sexy. Evil. Savoring this now:

FURMAN
You're gonna call my wife?!

WENDY
No...

FURMAN
No?!

WENDY
I...just --

FURMAN
Are you out of your fucking mind?!
And then what? We get married?
After blackmail? After you make my
life a fucking shambles?!

Wendy stares at him, desperately trying to catch up.

WENDY
I...take it back?

Furman shakes his head, grim. Turns to open a cabinet --

WENDY
Please: listen. I am not -- who --
you think I am.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE #2 - CONTINUOUS (POV)

WENDY'S POV: *Furman takes out a stack of brand-new clear plastic drop-cloths...and a saw. Turns to us, calm.*

FURMAN
Well, that makes two of us.

He unfolds a clear dropcloth with a flourish and comes at us, the plastic enveloping us -- blurring everything --

FLASH INTO:

WHITE SCREEN. THE SOUND OF WIND.

SLOW FADE IN:

CLOSE-UP: WORK TABLE - DAY (POV)

MANUELA'S POV: *A shabby cluttered worktable with an industrial sewing machine, a pile of half-finished blouses, a plastic container full of buttons.*

We look around at:

A noisy, dirty, poorly-ventilated, ill-lit industrial space. Rows of LATINA WOMEN, from age 10 to 70, labor at sewing machines.

A sweatshop.

INT. SWEATSHOP - CONTINUOUS

MANUELA, 12 years old, glances down at herself in shock -- then around at her miserable surroundings again.

Manuela's world is gritty and grainy, like a 1970's doc-inspired drama, film-looking 16mm-ish and hand-held.

Think Norma Rae or Blue Collar.

MANUELA

(low, to herself)

Oh, ninguna manera. Ninguna manera en infierno.

(subtitled as:)

Oh, no way. No way in hell.

Startled, she turns to **FRIDA**, 30ish, at the next machine.

MANUELA

¿Soy español de discurso?

Am I speaking Spanish?

Frida meets Manuela's eyes, scared -- then:

FRIDA

Hsst!

Frida glares a warning -- indicating:

HUMBERTO, walking toward them along the row of machines: a middle-aged Latino man in a bad tie, no jacket. A nightstick dangles from a leather loop on his belt.

Frida hastily returns to her sewing.

Humberto stops beside Manuela -- who nervously begins to try to work, making button-holes.

After a moment:

HUMBERTO

*Usted está haciendo los ojales
demasiado pequeños.*
You're making the button-holes too
small.

Manuela looks up at him.

MANUELA

Es más de moda.
It's more fashionable.

HUMBERTO

*Usted necesita hacer los ojales la
talla correcta.*
You need to make the buttonholes the
right size.

MANUELA

*Todo a la derecha, tome una píldora
desapasible, Steve Jobs.*
All right, take a chill pill, Steve
Jobs.

Humberto slaps Manuela on the side of the head, hard.

HUMBERTO

*Eso le costará la mitad de salarios
de hoy.*
That will cost you half of today's
wages.

He walks away.

MANUELA

Estoy tan fuera de aquí.
I am so out of here.

She ducks down and moves along the row of work-tables.

Staying low, dodging among the sewing machines and rolling
bins, Manuela makes her way to --

-- the exit doors.

They are chained-and-padlocked.

MANUELA

Por supuesto.
Of course.

She looks around. Sees a small office in the corner.

INT. SWEATSHOP - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A cluttered warren of beat-up office furniture, stuff that needs repair, porn magazines, Humberto's personal crap. (In among the mess: a Positive Ion Transfer Air Purifier.)

Manuela sneaks in, shuts the door. Picks up the phone.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

STEVE

Help Line.

(Manuela is subtitled in Spanish when we see her, but on the phone with Steve -- he hears Mulligan's voice:)

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

I'm a twelve-year-old sweatshop worker.

STEVE

Okay.

(beat)

Could be worse.

INT. SWEATSHOP - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MANUELA

¡¿Cómo?!

How?!

STEVE (ON PHONE)

You're...employed?

MANUELA

¡Para como dos dólares por semana!

For like two dollars a week!

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

STEVE

Ah: but the cost of living --

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

How am I supposed to seize the day like this?!

STEVE

I don't know. It's a different *diem* -
- maybe you need a whole new concept
of *carpe*.

INT. SWEATSHOP - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MANUELA

Usted le conoce, para una línea de ayuda, realmente no me da mucha ayuda.

You know, for a Help Line, you don't really give me much help.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

STEVE

Hey, pal: you called me.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

Actually, no. I just dialed random numbers. Any call I make: it goes to you.

STEVE

(startled)
Really?

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

So: you want to quit messing with my mind?

Beat.

STEVE

All I can think of is: you were sorta whining a bit.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

"Whining"?!

STEVE

Kind of a little.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

I am being killed! Repeatedly!

STEVE

Okay, I've been giving this a lot of thought.

(beat)
I believe we're dealing with some kind of instant karma.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

Say what?

STEVE

You know how, like, in a video game: there's all these traps, like a secret flame-wall, or two worms with laser guns on a balcony when you go through a door. So you die, right? But then: you get another life, and now you know a little more about how to get to the next level.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

Except every time I come back, it's a completely new game.

Silence.

STEVE

Right. Okay.

(beat)

Let's just go with the obvious. Maybe you're supposed to learn some humility and gratitude.

INT. SWEATSHOP - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Manuala wrestles with this one. Annoyed:

MANUELA

Muy bien. Lo que. Muy agradecido.

¿Ahora qué?

Fine. Whatever. Very grateful. Now what?

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

STEVE

I don't know. Maybe you can form a union and get better working conditions.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

Are you kidding me?! No: you learn the lesson, you don't have to keep learning the lesson. You -- go to the next level.

STEVE

I don't think that's how it works with gratitude.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)
This is a nightmare. This is not
happening. I don't even think this
is happening.
(beat)
I bet you're not even real.

STEVE
I'm...not?

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)
No. I fell asleep at my desk.
You're a bad dream. You're some ripe
sushi I had at lunch. I'm gonna wake
up, and you're gonna be gone.

Steve takes this seriously. Kind of intrigued.

STEVE
Ow. Dude. A little social graces?
You couldn't break my non-existence a
little more gently? Like, you know:
"Mom's on the roof"? "Not so fast,
Abernathy..."

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)
You know what? I'm done. The dream
is over. I'm not doing this any
more.

STEVE
What are you gonna do -- quit?

INT. SWEATSHOP - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MANUELA
Míreme.
Watch me.

Manuela hangs up.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Steve looks at his monitor.

STEVE
Hello?

But Mulligan is gone.

Kind of freaked-out, Steve takes off his headset.

Looks around. Uneasy.

STEVE'S POV: *Cube Workers in their cubes.*

Steve rolls his chair back to peek around the cube-wall at Vernon, the 20ish hipster in the next cube.

STEVE
Hey. We're real, right?

VERNON
(into headset)
May I put you on hold a moment to
access some information?
(to Steve)
What?

STEVE
What if we're all just...in somebody
else's dream?

VERNON
When did you get high? No fair! Do
not Bogart the doobage, that is
cruel.

STEVE
Never mind.

Steve rolls and swivels back into his cube. A little
uncertain about...

STEVE'S POV - VERY CLOSE: *his reality.*

Extreme close-ups, hyper-detailed.

Scratches and doodles on the desk surface.

Faint swirls of artificial-creamers in a cup of coffee.

The gnarled mystery of the knuckles on his fingers.

Steve stands, stretching a bit, fake-nonchalant.

Looking around at the nearby cubes.

STEVE'S POV - VERY CLOSE: *the other CUBE WORKERS.*

*The parts in their hair, the convolutions of their ears,
their grime-smudged keyboards.*

HEIGHTENED SOUND: *keys clicking, breathing, the creak of a
chair, the buzz of the fluorescent lights.*

Steve surveys his existence, increasingly freaked.

INT. SWEATSHOP - CONTINUOUS

Manuela steps out of Humberto's office. Stands a second, summoning her nerve.

She begins to walk, upright, along the rows of work-tables.

The SWEATSHOP WOMEN look up, startled.

Across the big noisy workshop, Humberto frowns.

HUMBERTO

*¡Hey! ¡Usted! ¿Qué usted está
haciendo?*

Hey! You! What are you doing?

Manuela looks him right in the eyes, over the astonished workers -- and keeps walking.

Humberto starts toward her, pulling his nightstick out.

HUMBERTO

Vuelva a su máquina.

Get back to your machine.

But as Manuela walks past them...other Sweatshop Women slowly begin to stand up.

HUMBERTO

*¡Todo a la derecha -- ¡Usted se
sienta detrás traga!*

All right -- all of you sit back
down!

Too many for him to beat, and they all know it.

Humberto watches, helpless --

-- as the Sweatshop Women begin stepping out from behind their machines.

Scared, proud, defiant -- a little wave of human dignity, following this uneducated twelve-year-old hero girl, moving away from their work-tables --

-- a whole Norma Rae moment --

-- right up until she reaches her destination:

A grimy patched-together tangle of high-voltage plugs and industrial power cords, way-overloading the outlet box on the wall.

MANUELA

(to herself)

Esto es todo apenas un sueño.

This is all just a dream.

Winching slightly, Manuela reaches out --

-- as Humberto and the Sweatshop Women, watching in horror, start to scream --

INT. SWEATSHOP - CONTINUOUS (POV)

MANUELA'S POV: *her hand plunges into the snakepit of jerry-rigged wires, and we hear the harsh crackle, see electricity arc into it -- illuminating, x-ray-style, the bones within --*

FLASH INTO:

WHITE SCREEN. THE SOUND OF WIND.

SLOW FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - DUSK

REALITY'S POV: *we are lying on a city sidewalk, watching pedestrians and traffic pass by.*

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Oh come on. I'm homeless?

(beat)

Wait a second --

We see Sasha walking toward us, down the block.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Get up. Stand up.

(beat)

Why can't I stand up?

We shift around, but stay at knee-height.

Sasha slows, looking at us. People walk past.

SASHA

You poor thing.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
All right. Stay cool.
(panting)
Why am I breathing like this?

Sasha comes toward us, bending...holding out a hand, palm down.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Hand out, Sasha edges closer to a scruffy **MUTT** cowering on the sidewalk.

Yes: Mulligan is a dog.

We are often in his up-tilted, roving POV. His world is comical and poetic, full of painterly colors and lighting in imaginative, expressive compositions.

Think The Shape Of Water or Amelie.

SASHA
Whatcha you doin' out here, huh? You lost?

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
It's been a really, really strange day.

SASHA
No collar?

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Excuse me? Why would I have a...?
(beat)
Oh my God.

SASHA
What are we gonna do with you?

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Oh my God no. No no no no no.

SASHA
Aww -- look at those sweet eyes! All right, okay...Fallon's gonna kill me.

Sasha gently scoops the mutt into her arms.

As she carries it to the corner and crosses the street -- we linger on a lamp-post:

A home-made memorial shrine. Flowers, candles and teddy bears piled at the base, hand-drawn messages taped to the post, along with pictures of Father Berkeley.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The living room of a two-bedroom apartment. The decor is slightly confused, since one roommate is into Restoration Hardware and the other's into authentic Cambodian knickknacks and late-1960s memorabilia.

Sasha lets herself in, carrying the mutt --

SASHA

So this is my apartment...

-- wincing a bit as:

FALLON (O.S.)

You're gonna have to change quick.

FALLON looks out of her bedroom, in the midst of preparing for a date.

SASHA

...and this is my room-mate, Fallon.

The very same Fallon who worked in Mulligan's office.

Coming into the living room, struggling against the cuteness of the dog, melting but scolding:

FALLON

Oh -- no. Sasha: no.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Wait a second. Fallon? From work, Fallon?

SASHA

I know, I couldn't help it.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Okay, this is weird.

FALLON

You're kidding me. Sash.

SASHA

I can't explain it, but I felt like this little lost mutt needed something only I could give.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Yes! Yes -- exactly! Me too!

FALLON

It's gonna get hair all over everything. I spend a lot of time making hair go away. You cannot bring more hair into my life.

SASHA

But look at her little face.

FALLON

"Her"?

SASHA

Huh. Hold on.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

No -- wait -- don't --

Sasha turns the dog and checks its genitals.

SASHA

Him.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Jesus. Why did I like that?

FALLON

Sasha, you are a better person than I am. And the dog is adorable. But sooner or later -- you know you also have to deal with reality.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Shut up, we're fine.

FALLON

Do I need to bring up the kitchen compost? Or turning the bathroom into a sweat-lodge?

SASHA

I know, I know: I'm impulsive.

Sasha is setting the mutt down on the floor, tenderly:

SASHA

But I'm gonna figure out what to do with little Reality here, I promise.

FALLON

Little what?

SASHA
Reality. That's what I'm gonna call
him.
(to dog, cute-voice)
'Cause sooner or later we have to
deal with you, right?

FALLON
What happens when Reality starts
pissing on everything, Sasha?

Scratching behind Reality's ears, Sasha grimaces; has to
admit this would be a problem.

FALLON
Or when Reality gets inconvenient?
Like now, since Gavin's gonna be here
in about fifteen minutes...with Leon?

SASHA
Oh, crap -- I forgot, I'm sorry!

As Sasha hurries into her bedroom:

SASHA
I told you I didn't want to do this!

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Reality follows Sasha to the bedroom door, where --

FALLON
Gavin says you'll like him.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
"Gavin"? "Leon"?

-- with her back to him, she pulls off her shirt to change --

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Oh wait! The tattoo!

-- but it's too high up, and then she shuts the door.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Damn it.

He turns...to see Fallon going to finish getting dressed.
She leaves the door to her room open.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Okay: moral quandary.

He moves in for a better view. Fallon throws a shoe to back him out and then slams her door in his face.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Solved.

Left alone, Reality notices, on the coffee table, amid work documents by Fallon's open briefcase...a phone.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The dog jumps up on the coffee table; we recognize corporate logos from Mulligan's first life on the pages, and his white-board flow-chart...marked-up:

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Wait a second, is this the key-chart from G-Phase? Fallon, what are you doing? That's a pinnacle segment!

Distracted, he roots among the papers, making a mess:

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

You step away for, like, two lifetimes --
(then, impressed)
Hold on. Fallon...whoa. You cut out four trans-net cycles with a single pin-seg? This is fucking brilliant.
If we just -- just --

He scratches frantically on a page with his paw.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Damn it! Okay, focus...

He puts his nose to the touch-screen of Fallon's phone.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Steve sits, surveying his reality.

Hesitantly touches the fabric of the cube-wall, studies the whorls of his fingerprint.

Opens a search window on his monitor, types into the box:

Am I Real?

He's got his finger poised about the return key -- a little scared --

-- when he sees Gloria, his supervisor: coming along the row of cubes, eyes fixed on him.

She seems pretty damn real.

So when the call comes in, Steve gratefully holds up a "hang on a sec" finger to Gloria -- and hits that key fast:

STEVE
(into his headset)
Help Line.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Reality whines and barks into the phone on the coffee table.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Gloria stands beside Steve's cube, watching him talk into his headset:

STEVE
Before we begin, my name is Steve.
May I get your first and last name?

She scribbles a note on his desk pad:

**SEE ME
BEFORE THE END
OF THE DAY
- G**

Steve nods, *got it*. Then, watching Gloria walk away -- speaking into his headset:

STEVE
So I guess I'm real enough when you
need something, huh?

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)
I'm a DOG.

STEVE
(scolding)
You killed yourself, didn't you?

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Reality growls into the phone.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

STEVE

Major fail. Life is precious.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

Meanwhile: I'm a DOG.

STEVE

Hey. She'll feed you. Rub your belly. Pay for everything. You could have like 80% of an amazing marriage.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

I'M! A! DOG!

STEVE

Maybe you need to think about exactly what it is you want out of being with this woman.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

I want everything to be normal.

STEVE

Seriously?

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

Yes. What's wrong with that?!

STEVE

I don't know. It just doesn't sound very -- realistic.

(beat)

I mean: what is "normal," anyway?

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

Normal! Not -- weird.

STEVE

She chews on straws.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)

Who?

STEVE

Your girl. She wants to stop, but she can't. And she's always trying to learn languages and failing -- and she secretly says grace to herself before she eats.

(beat)

Everybody's a little weird.

Beat.

MULLIGAN (ON PHONE)
How do you know all that?

Steve hesitates, trying to formulate an answer -- but:

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fallon comes out of her bedroom, ready for a date --

FALLON
Okay, the yapping is driving me nuts.

-- and stops, staring at the dog making a mess of her work.

Sasha comes out of her room, hastily put-together for a night out --

-- to see Reality scramble out of the way as Fallon goes to get her phone.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - THE SAME TIME

Steve sees the call disconnect.

STEVE
(Scooby-style)
Ruh-oh.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Exasperated but with a soft spot for her hippie-souled roommate:

FALLON
Your dog ate my homework.

Sasha sighs...heartbroken. Because Fallon is right. Reality really is a little too much for her. But:

SASHA
I can't just...abandon Reality.

FALLON
That lady down the hall is all into animal rescue.

SASHA
Mrs. Crippen? With the recipes and
the leftovers all the time?

Fallon shrugs: *do you have a better plan?*

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE MRS. CRIPPEN'S APARTMENT - SOON AFTER

MRS. CRIPPEN -- over 50, sweater-set and pearls, sweet and
motherly -- stands in her doorway, beaming at Reality in
Sasha's arms. Fallon waits, behind Sasha.

SASHA
Maybe you could...look after him for
tonight, and then --

FALLON
Sash.

SASHA
I just want to make sure he goes to a
really good place.

MRS. CRIPPEN
Oh, honey: I've been making sure
little poochikins go to a good place
for thirty years now.

She's reaching out to scratch his head --

MRS. CRIPPEN
Hello little poochi-poochi!

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Back off, ladyyy--
(but then, swooning:)
--yyyaaaahhhh that's so good.

Everyone turns as **GAVIN** and **LEON** come up the stairs: both
30ish. Gavin is pretty much ideal: a carpenter and wood-
craftsman, gorgeous and calm. Leon is a musician, more
offbeat but cute.

FALLON
Hey, you.

Fallon and Gavin kiss, brief but private; Sasha and Leon
wait...a blind date. After, taking in the dog situation:

GAVIN
What's the rumpus?

FALLON
We're saving the world again.

GAVIN
Ah. Sasha -- this is Leon. Leon:
Sasha.

Sasha gamely tries to shake Leon's hand, holding Reality:

SASHA
I found a dog.

GAVIN
See? She picks up strays. You've
got a chance.

FALLON
(smiles but hits him)
Don't say that.

GAVIN
(to Leon)
Sorry: you don't have a chance.

SASHA
Guys!
(to Leon)
I don't know if you -- have a chance.
I'm not really -- dating so much --
God this is already awful!

LEON
Nice to...meet you, too.

FALLON
Can we donate the dog, please?

Everyone looks at Sasha.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
No -- look: I never pee on anything.

Mrs. Crippen holds out her arms. As Sasha hands over
Reality, truly torn:

SASHA
I am so sorry, Reality. But you're
better off without me.

MRS. CRIPPEN
He'll be in dog heaven.

As they ad-lib farewells and Mrs. Crippen closes the door:

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Seriously, don't! I'll be your dog!
I'm good with it! Really!

INT. MRS. CRIPPEN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

A cozy, antique-y old-lady apartment. The TV's on, muted, and as Mrs. Crippen carries Reality past we see:

***ON TV:** A REPORTER covers a shocking murder: happy stills of WENDY, video of DR. FURMAN perp-walked out of his office...*

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Oh, wait! I want to see this --

Mrs. Crippen sets Reality on the kitchen table, sweetly:

MRS. CRIPPEN
Such a cutie-face. Let's see what we have here. Not much meat, should we fatten you up?

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Yeah, sure, okay. Sounds good.

She's baby-talking as she examines him:

MRS. CRIPPEN
Ehhh...scrawny little mutt like you --
I think we're talking soup no matter what.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Dogs eat soup?

MRS. CRIPPEN
Gonna boil you up, make some stock.

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
I'm sorry -- what?

MRS. CRIPPEN
Ohhh you'll make a good little soup stock, won't you?

MULLIGAN (V.O.)
Wait a second -- oh holy christ --

MRS. CRIPPEN
Stay still, poochie, I need to get that fur off you.

Shing! Holding the dog with one hand, Mrs. Crippen draws a butcher knife from a block --

MULLIGAN (V.O.)

Are you out of your freaking mind?!

-- Reality squirms away.

MRS. CRIPPEN

Damn it! Little bugger!

REALITY'S POV: *we scramble around the little apartment at knee-height --*

-- but Mrs. Crippen corners us with the big knife --

FLASH INTO:

WHITE SCREEN. THE SOUND OF WIND.

SLOW FADE IN:

INT. CAR - DAY (POV)

SHOTGUN'S POV: *in the back seat of a parked car. In front are **BARROW** and **NELSON**: hard-case street criminals, 20s-40s, any race. Leather coats, wool hats, rubber gloves.*

They are locking-and-loading automatic weapons: snapping and clacking stuff like people do in action and crime movies.

BARROW

Okay, gentlemen. Time to rock and roll.

NELSON

In and out. Dominate the moment.

BARROW

Shotgun: good to go?

They turn to us.

INT. CAR - DAY

Mulligan is now: **SHOTGUN**. In his 20s, African-American. Wearing dark rough clothes, gloves, wool hat. Gun.

Shotgun's world is fast-cut and constantly moving, hand-held and slick, hard-edged, slightly desaturated, with lots of lens-flare.

It starts like The Town but devolves into Dog Day Afternoon.

SHOTGUN

You guys...go on ahead. I'm gonna wait here.

BARROW

You're gonna what?

SHOTGUN

I -- think I'm coming down with...
(indicates his nose)
...I don't want to get you guys sick.
(beat)
I'll keep the engine running.

BARROW

We can't cover a bank with two guns.

NELSON

We go back to Marvin empty-handed...

He cocks his gun and points it at Shotgun's face.

NELSON

I don't wanna die. Do you?

SHOTGUN

Nope.

NELSON

You a'ight now? You up to this?

SHOTGUN

Yeah, thanks. I'm good.

Nelson uncocks his gun, lowers it.

BARROW

Anybody gotta go to the bathroom or anything? Or are we ready to fuck some shit up?

NELSON

Let's go make some money!

Barrow and Nelson pull down their wool hats, revealing ski masks -- and look at Shotgun.

SHOTGUN

Yes.

NELSON

Pull down your damn mask.

Barrow reaches back and yanks the mask down on Shotgun's face -- crooked, only one eye visible -- but Barrow and Nelson are already getting out of the car --

NELSON

Go -- go -- go!

EXT. PARKED CAR - CONTINUOUS

Razzle-dazzle fast-cut hand-held movie-rush bank-robbery:

Three masked men hustle across the sidewalk to the bank doors.

Shotgun has his gun in one hand, the other tugging at his ski mask --

-- so he slams face-first into the doorjamb, reels back -- Nelson pushes him through the doorway.

INT. BANK - CONTINUOUS

The robbers fan out, waving guns and shouting --

NELSON

Hands up! Do not move! Do not!

-- frightened CUSTOMERS raising hands -- Barrow roughly shoving as he passes, to get people down on the floor:

BARROW

Down! Down! Down!

Confused, Shotgun starts pulling at the customers' wrists to lower their raised hands --

SHOTGUN

Down! Get 'em down!

BARROW

Not their hands, moron! On the floor! Hands on heads! Cell phones: on the floor! Purses, bags: on the floor! Empty your pockets, turn 'em inside out!

Shotgun hastily starts pushing people to lie face-down, too -
- as Nelson tosses empty duffle bags at the BANK EMPLOYEES --

NELSON

Fill those up! No alarms! No dye packs!

-- when Shotgun stops in shock, staring at:

Sasha.

A customer. Hands raised. Meeting his eyes...over his gun.

Behind her, seeing that Shotgun is distracted: the BANK
MANAGER pushes a floor button with his foot.

Nelson reacts to an alert on his phone, checking it:

NELSON
Silent alarm! Mother fucker!

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - DAY

**SEE ME
BEFORE THE END
OF THE DAY
- G**

Steve meditates on the note.

When the call comes in, he hits the key absently.

STEVE
(into headset)
Well...on the bright side: now you've
got some time to really talk.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BANK - NIGHT

A hostage situation. Lights and AC cut off. Searchlights
glare in the windows. We hear helicopters.

Shotgun whispers into a desk phone in a quiet corner, grim:

SHOTGUN
Oh: thank you. So much.

Nelson guards the CUSTOMERS and EMPLOYEES, sitting in a row
on the floor by one wall. Barrow is at the front doors,
looking out. Everyone is sweaty and frazzled.

STEVE
Hey: a lot of first dates are
essentially hostage situations. Just
talk to her, man. From the heart.
(beat)

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

And find out what that tattoo says,
while you're at it.

SHOTGUN

You know what? I'm gonna change my
quest.

STEVE

I don't think that's a good idea. I
think you really need to connect with
this girl.

SHOTGUN

Yeah, but after that: since I'm this
guy now...I'm gonna keep going.

(beat)

On a quest to kill you.

STEVE

(truly startled)

I'm sorry -- what?

SHOTGUN

Seems only fair: you've been killing
me all day long.

STEVE

No, I mean -- you...can't do that.

SHOTGUN

(dead serious)

Why not?

STEVE

I just -- you can't.

SHOTGUN

How do you know? You're just some
guy who works in a cube. Right?

Steve winces. Hoisted on his own excuse.

STEVE

Yes.

SHOTGUN

And that cube is in a call center.
How hard could it be to find?

(beat)

Gonna seize the day.

(deadly)

Whoops.

STEVE
Listen. Don't do anything crazy.

SHOTGUN
Crazy?! I am on my fifth life in
twenty-four hours!

STEVE
I know -- but -- this isn't you --

SHOTGUN
No?
(beat)
Which me are we talking about, now?

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Steve abruptly disconnects. In a panic.

Takes off his headset.

Trying to think. Scared. Confused.

INT. BANK - NIGHT

Shotgun hangs up. Newly-empowered, he looks across the room
at Sasha, sitting on the floor in a row of hostages.

He goes over to Nelson:

SHOTGUN
Hey. I wanna talk to one -- alone.

Shotgun indicates Sasha.

Impressed, Nelson shrugs, bows slightly as he steps aside:

NELSON
You only live once.

INT. BANK MANAGER'S OFFICE - SOON AFTER

Shotgun brings Sasha in, shuts the door. Lets her sit in
the big desk chair but he stays on his feet, edgy.

SHOTGUN
So...how's it going?

SASHA
"How's it going?"

He shrugs. She tries to answer honestly:

SASHA

So-so.

Shotgun nods, fretting about how to say what he wants to say. He pulls off his mask.

SASHA

Oh God, no -- don't!

She turns away, holding up a hand to block her view of his face.

SASHA

I didn't see anything.

SHOTGUN

Oh! No, it's okay -- this is just:
I'm a person, you're a person.

SASHA

(not looking)

A person who cannot identify you.

He comes around into her view, struggling to explain:

SHOTGUN

No, listen: we're all -- more than
just these -- roles we're playing
out.

(beat)

Have you ever just looked around and
said, "How did I end up here? In
this life?"

This is so not-going-where-she-expected that, despite the
terror of their situation -- they begin to connect:

SASHA

I think: everything we do is a
choice. And those choices define who
we are.

SHOTGUN

There's an awful lot you don't choose
-- that can make you -- somebody you
didn't want to be.

SASHA

All right: but you know, you didn't
just wake up one morning with that
gun in your hand.

SHOTGUN

I don't mean to be rude, but you have
no idea.

She raises her palms, quick to own her white guilt:

SASHA

No, I don't.

He paces, frustrated...

SHOTGUN

Look: maybe I did make choices that
ended up with -- this. But I
honestly don't know what they were.

...which puts him in a position to see a bit of the tattoo.
Beat.

SHOTGUN

Can I ask you to do something?

She looks up at him. Wary.

SASHA

What am I gonna say, no?

SHOTGUN

(gestures with his gun)
Pull your sleeve down a little.

Sasha sighs, disappointment conquering even mortal fear.

SASHA

I thought I was a person.

SHOTGUN

No, I just want to see your tat--

They turn as Barrow opens the door:

BARROW

Shotgun.

Shotgun gestures for Sasha to wait. Goes to Barrow, in the
doorway. They confer, low:

BARROW

Got The Man on the phone.

SHOTGUN

(sighs, resigned)
Okay, lemme talk to him.

BARROW

What?

SHOTGUN

The man. On the phone.

BARROW

What're you gonna say to the FBI?

SHOTGUN

(sighs, realizing)

Right, never min-

BARROW

I made us a deal: witness protection,
if we roll on Marvin.

Shotgun nods. Glances over at Sasha.

SHOTGUN

No.

BARROW

"No"?!

SHOTGUN

Not -- yet.

(trying to improvise)

Get us a plane. To Wyoming.

Barrow is staring like Shotgun is insane. For good reason.

Shotgun takes a leap of faith:

SHOTGUN

I just need more time. To get her to
-- look for me. When I'm -- in a new
life.

(beat)

In witness protection.

Barrow studies Shotgun. And Sasha.

BARROW

You want to hang out a while.

SHOTGUN

Just a little.

Barrow nods. Then he pulls the slide on his pistol.
Shotgun sighs.

SHOTGUN
Okay -- fine. Kill me. Get it over
with.

BARROW
Kill you?

Barrow shoves Shotgun aside. Sasha looks up.

SHOTGUN
NOOO!!!

SLOW MOTION: *As Barrow raises his gun, aiming at Sasha --
Shotgun hurls himself forward between them in a dive --*

INT. BANK MANAGER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS (POV)

SHOTGUN'S POV -- SLOW MOTION: *Flying sideways -- Sasha
staring into our eyes, confused --*

*-- as we HEAR THE GUN GO OFF behind us, and see her FLINCH,
SHOCKED --*

FLASH INTO:

WHITE SCREEN. THE SOUND OF WIND.

SLOW FADE IN:

EXT. PARK - DAY (POV)

GAVIN'S POV: *A football COMES FLYING AT US -- we catch it,
running, dodging into a CROWD OF GUYS playing touch --*

*-- until we thud into a grunting, yelling out-of-control
tackle pile-up -- and the daylight is blocked-out.*

EXT. PARK - DAY

The pile-up of GUYS in their 20s and 30s sorts itself out,
everybody laughing --

-- revealing **GAVIN** (*Fallon's fiancée, who we met when
Mulligan was Reality*)...lying motionless on the grass.

On the sidelines, Fallon frowns. Around her -- a picnic:
folding sun-tents, grills, OTHER COUPLES.

Gavin's world is romantic and lush, ever-so-slightly diffused, with real darkness but touches of unexpected colored light: yellow and teal and ruby.

Think Netflix's Daredevil, or Feast Of Love.

As Fallon jogs out to kneel beside him, Gavin sits up -- wincing but smiling, shaking off the hit. And the soul-transfer.

FALLON

You okay?

He looks at her, then down at himself, trying to catch up.

GAVIN

Yeah, it's...just a head injury.

FALLON

So it's not a vital organ.

Fallon grins, kissing his head -- and then on the lips.

He responds: familiar, passionate --

-- and when they stop, he stares at her. Shaken by how right it felt.

It's like he's a princess, at last woken from a spell, by a kiss.

FALLON

What?

GAVIN

I just...um...wow.

FALLON

Okay, slugger: you're outta the game.

EXT. PARK - SOON AFTER

Gavin picks up a barbecue spatula and looks at himself in the wavery, perforated metal.

Sets it aside and gets a beer from a cooler.

Goes to sit beside Fallon, swigs from the bottle. Trying to adjust to his new handsome, athletic self and this apparently-ideal life...

...and then he sees Sasha. At a distance.

Sitting by herself. Sipping white wine from a plastic cup, lost in thought.

Gavin watches her. Also lost in thought.

INT. APARTMENT - FALLON'S ROOM - EVENING

A framed photograph of Fallon and Gavin, in Gavin's hand. They're happy together.

Gavin studies it. Sets it back among a collection of similar photos on Fallon's dresser.

A shower runs behind the half-open bathroom door: Fallon.

But he looks at the open door to the living room.

His phone vibrates. He takes it from his pocket, checks the caller ID: **STEVE**.

Taps **IGNORE**.

INT. SASHA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Gavin comes out of Fallon's room.

Sasha is curled-up, alone on the sofa, ignoring a paperback copy of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, open in her hands.

This is it. The end of his quest.

Sasha realizes Gavin's there, puts on a weak smile.

SASHA

Hey.

GAVIN

Hey.

SASHA

You guys goin' out?

GAVIN

Yeah. Wanna come with?

SASHA

Not really.

GAVIN

You...okay?

Beat. Sasha shakes her head.

SASHA

I feel like I'm supposed to -- get
something out of...what happened.

GAVIN

At the bank?

She nods, shrugs. Wrestling with it:

SASHA

I had a near-death experience.
(beat)
But it wasn't my death.

GAVIN

Happens a lot more than you think.

SASHA

I just...I always think I want to be
on this "spiritual journey," you
know?

(beat)

But when life gets real? I go right
for the junk food and the bad TV.

(beat)

Maybe I just like the lifestyle --
just want to watch the TED Talk.

(honest, anguished)

And why isn't that good enough? Why
can't I just be getting high and
wearing bright colors and smelling
good and getting laid?!

(devastated)

Because I am worse than shallow. I'm
shallow and pretentious -- and I want
my life to have "meaning."

She sighs. Already feeling foolish about saying it.

Silence.

Gavin nods, taking her in.

GAVIN

Wow.

SASHA

What?

He's mostly talking to himself, realizing:

GAVIN

Steve...is an idiot.

SASHA

Who is Steve?

GAVIN

I have no idea.

(beat)

But -- you know how, some people, it
doesn't matter: morning breath, bad
moods -- you still want to be with
them?

Talking recklessly -- as he thinks, discovering:

GAVIN

Just now, when you were going on
about your -- spiritual crisis...

(beat)

I could not have cared less.

(with -- awe)

I'm just not in love with you at all.

Sasha nods, tentative.

Long awkward pause.

SASHA

Well -- that's good, Gavin.

(beat)

Especially for Fallon...your fiancée?

He's realizing how it sounded, truly meaning no harm:

GAVIN

I'm sorry. It's not your fault.

(beat)

I was given the wrong quest.

She's getting up: amused.

SASHA

No. It's fine. It's what I needed
to hear, actually. Thank you.

(kindly)

I'm not in love with you, either.

Gavin watches Sasha go into her room.

Reborn. Or at peace. Or something.

Turning -- as Fallon steps out of the other bedroom, in a
robe, toweling her wet hair, no make-up.

FALLON

Hey.

GAVIN

Hey.

FALLON

You really want to go out?

GAVIN

Nope.

FALLON

Me neither.

She stops toweling, seeing the raw wonder in his gaze.
Recognizing that it's for her.

FALLON

What?

He takes a moment, letting it in.

GAVIN

I was just thinking that: if my life -
- this life -- was flashing before my
eyes...it would be good.

INT. SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Gloria works at her desk. A single lamp on her. Despite
the crumminess of the place, it gives her an aura of power.

She looks up at a knock:

Steve is in the doorway. She gestures and he sits.

GLORIA

So what's going on in your life,
Steve?

STEVE

What do you mean?

GLORIA

You've been here four years. That's
longer than anybody, except me.

STEVE

So, you mean: what's wrong with my
life?

GLORIA

This type of work...it takes a unique
kind of person.

STEVE

I'm sorry about today. I don't know
where I was. It won't happen again.

GLORIA

No, I don't think it will.

(pleased)

We want to offer you a promotion. To
Associate Supervisor. No more cube,
better pay, benefits.

(beat)

And you get to be God.

Beat.

STEVE

I'm sorry?

GLORIA

You listen in -- or not. You choose.
You sit in judgement, make the law.

(beat)

You'll start out as Associate God.
But after a few more years -- I
retire, and then you're God.

Uneasily silence.

STEVE

Do you mean...you're actually...God?

Gloria studies him. Sits forward slightly. Quietly:

GLORIA

Yes, Steve. I am the supreme being
of the universe.

Steve stares. Frozen.

Then Gloria cracks up, sitting back.

STEVE

Right.

GLORIA

Sorry. I couldn't help it.

STEVE

My mistake.

She waves it off, chuckling.

STEVE
Okay. So, um -- wow.
(beat)
A...promotion.

Steve takes a deep breath. Thoughtful.

STEVE
No. Thank you.
(beat)
In fact: I quit.

GLORIA
You quit.

STEVE
Yeah. I think so. Yes.

GLORIA
Okay. That's a whole other way to
go.

STEVE
I keep saying I don't like my life.

She nods -- then frowns, seeing how big this is for him:

GLORIA
Are you all right, honey?

Steve nods, distracted.

STEVE
Yeah. You know, just -- I'm gonna
die.

GLORIA
Right now?

STEVE
No. Don't worry about it. You're
gonna die too.

She is getting freaked-out now.

GLORIA
Ohhh-kay. You want me to get you
something? Call someone?

Steve smiles, standing shakily. As he heads for the door,
already getting better...

STEVE
Like who -- the help line?

INT. SASHA'S APARTMENT - FALLON'S ROOM - MORNING

Morning light. Gavin wakes, in Fallon's bed.

She is getting dressed for work. Realizes he's watching, smiles slightly.

He keeps watching, full of gratitude. And love. As she zips up the skirt to a black suit, explaining the outfit:

FALLON

I have to go to Mulligan's memorial today.

GAVIN

"Have" to?

FALLON

Yeah: we all do. The whole floor. 'Cause he died at work.

GAVIN

I guess he was...kind of a jerk to you.

Fallon nods, hesitant.

FALLON

I feel bad about how happy I am he's dead.

Gavin grimaces slightly, but takes it.

GAVIN

It's...okay.

She gives him a grateful little smile, and gets a blouse out of a drawer.

As she takes off the price tag, Gavin frowns: it's one he was putting buttons on in the sweatshop, as Manuela.

GAVIN

Is that new?

FALLON

Yeah.

(grimaces, discovering)
The button-holes are too small.

He winces as she tries to unbutton it.

GAVIN

Does it really make a difference?

She gives one button a rough yank and it pops off --
-- flying across the room, bouncing off the wall with a
little *CLICK* --
-- then it *CLICKS* off the dresser --
-- and ricochets into Fallon's open mouth.
Into her throat.
Wide-eyed, silent, she tries to cough it out.

GAVIN

Oh no -- wait -- no no no --

Fallon is getting scared, because she can't breathe.
Gavin rushes to get behind her and Heimlich --

GAVIN

No, come on -- I gotcha --

But the button is stuck and Fallon is growing dizzy --
groping uselessly at her neck.

In a panic, she starts for the door, but staggers, falling
to her knees and then sprawling out on the floor --

GAVIN

No -- this can't be --

Fallon's on her back, flailing weakly at her own throat,
staring up at him.

Gavin frantic and helpless --

GAVIN

This IS NOT HOW IT GOES! I'm the
one! I die! You -- can't -- NO --
NOOO!!!

He stares into Fallon's eyes as she starts to die.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - DAY

Steve is packing his personal stuff into a file-box.

His computer signals incoming call. He checks the monitor.
Takes a deep breath.

Puts on the headset and connects.

STEVE

Help line.

INT. SASHA'S APARTMENT - FALLON'S ROOM - THE SAME TIME

Fallon is on the floor, dead. Gavin is on her phone:

GAVIN

Where is she?

Steve sighs. Rubs his eyes. Honestly:

STEVE

I don't know.

EXT. GAVIN'S WORLD - CONTINUOUS

GAVIN

What do you mean, you don't know?!

Gavin looks around, in confusion.

The world around Gavin begins changing without rhyme or reason -- he's on a rural road, a beach, in a run-down industrial landscape, a fashionable street. It's like a music video: he's playing the continuous scene, but jumping locations, film stocks, etc.

STEVE

I don't know. Look, man: we've been doing this all day. I'm fried, I can't. I don't even work here any more.

GAVIN

What?! Can you give me, like -- a case number or something?

STEVE

No. There is no case number. I made you up.

GAVIN

You did -- what?

STEVE

Yeah, look, it wasn't supposed to get so elaborate.

(beat)

I made you up. I'm sorry.

GAVIN
What are you TALKING ABOUT?!

STEVE
Come on -- seriously? You couldn't
tell? This all made sense to you?!
I've been making it up as I went
along.

Gavin tries to grasp it. Watching his world shift
irrationally around him. Going through at least five stages
...and only coming up with:

GAVIN
WHY?!

STEVE
Why? Because I was in a cube!

GAVIN
You said you're not God!

STEVE
I'm not!

GAVIN
You -- created me!

STEVE
Well, hell: somebody "created"
bendable straws! We gonna worship
them?

GAVIN
"Worship"?! What about
responsibility?

STEVE
Oh -- fuck you. So it was fine when
I didn't exist, right? When this was
your dream.
(beat)
Look: I'm sorry! I feel bad. I was
just -- working some stuff out, for
myself.
(beat)
So I guess I am, sort of. Your God.
As you understand me.
(beat)
Now you know. Everything happens for
a reason -- but the reason may have
nothing to do with you.

GAVIN

I'm not -- real?

STEVE

Semantics, bro. If a tree gets made up in the forest, you know what I mean? Do you feel real?

GAVIN

...yeah?

STEVE

Then nothing to fear except fear itself.

GAVIN

But...what happens to me?

STEVE

I don't know. What happens to anyone? What does the Grinch do for Easter? You make it up as you go along. You want an ending? The ending is death, pal.

(suddenly, delighted)

Acceptance!

GAVIN

What?

STEVE

Anger, denial, bargaining, depression -- acceptance.

(beat)

Just because you're not dying right now...

GAVIN

I'm...scared.

Steve is filled with an unexpected rush of awe and love for his fragile imaginary friend:

STEVE

You're aware. Don't turn away. Feel it. Grab that *diem* by the nuts. Find true love. Make true love. Or rule your world, man. Bend time and space. I don't know.

GAVIN

Or maybe I'll live out my days in anguish because I know my world was created on a whim that I'll never

(MORE)

GAVIN (CONT'D)
understand, and my creator has other
things to do now.

STEVE
Well...join the club.
(beat)
You've done things I didn't think up.
Things I would've stopped if I could.
(beat)
You're making choices and they make a
difference.
(beat)
That's as real as it gets.

Beat.

GAVIN
That's...it?

STEVE
Would you be willing to take a short
survey on customer satisfaction?

Uncertain, afraid, but determined...Gavin hangs up.

Looks around.

*Whatever film stock and location he's in now...we stay in.
He's there. It's real. It's beautiful.*

People sit at a cafe, drinking coffee. Reading newspapers
and phones. Waiters work, around them.

A couple is having an argument.

Old people waiting for a bus. One is having a coughing fit.

A fountain splashes. Kids play in it.

Birds, startled, take off all at once into the air.

Gavin looks around at the whole messy miracle of creation.

And then, he sees it:

In the distance -- glimpsed through a shifting crowd, or
just going around a corner --

-- he sees Fallon. Alive.

She glances back, for just a second. Meeting his eyes.

And then she slips out of sight.

Gavin starts walking. Through his new world.

Faster. Hurrying after her.

Away from us.

Losing himself in it.

INT. STEVE'S CUBE - CONTINUOUS

Steve takes off his headset. Sets it on the desk.

Surprised at the loss.

Sits for a long time, accepting it.

Then he picks up his box of crap and stands up.

INT. STEVE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

As Steve walks through the sea of cubes, he looks around --

-- at OTHER CUBE WORKERS, talking into their headsets. A few look up as he passes.

Mrs. Crippen or The Nail Lady, Myrna, Dr. Furman, Barrow...

None show any recognition; they have no idea he used them to make Mulligan's world.

INT. STEVE'S OFFICE - ELEVATORS - CONTINUOUS

Steve gets to the end of a cube-aisle.

To his left, the elevators.

But he turns right.

INT. STEVE'S OFFICE - OTHER CUBES - CONTINUOUS

Carrying his box of personal stuff, Steve walks a row of cubes -- until he sees:

Sasha.

She is taking off her headset, logging out of the system.

Her cube is full of her own personal stuff -- much of which we have glimpsed during Mulligan's encounters with her: a

patchwork shoulder-bag, a paperback copy of *The Metamorphosis*.

She is chewing on a little coffee straw. When she notices Steve, she tosses it in the trash, self-conscious.

SASHA

Hi?

He isn't entirely sure what to say.

STEVE

Hi. I'm Steve.

SASHA

Yeah, I've seen you around. Sorry I never...

STEVE

Nah, it's on me, too. I just...
(re: box)
It's my last day.

SASHA

Oh!
(beat)
Well...bye.

Awkward silence.

STEVE

I just always wanted to ask you out.

More awkward silence.

SASHA

Too bad you didn't.

STEVE

I know, right?

She smiles slightly. Writes her number on a slip of paper, puts it in his box.

He smiles too. Starts to walk away.

Then he comes back.

STEVE

Can I ask you something?

SASHA

Sure.

STEVE
What's your tattoo say?

SASHA
You saw that.

STEVE
Yeah, but I could never read it.

SASHA
You never got close enough.

STEVE
Exactly.

She smiles. Turning around:

SASHA
It was sort of stupid. I wasn't
drunk or anything, I actually thought
for a long time before I got it. But
-- best laid plans...

With her back to him, she pulls her shirt off one shoulder
enough to let him see it.

SASHA
I didn't realize I was putting it
where I could never read it.

Steve smiles slightly.

There on the back of her shoulder, in the ornate calligraphy
we've glimpsed before -- we can finally read:

CARPE DIEM

He looks up from it, to Sasha.

STEVE
Maybe it wasn't meant for you.

Sasha smiles too, pulling her sleeve back up and turning to
look at him.

SASHA
I like that.