

THE WAY STATION

Written by

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INT. POD, ON SCREEN - CONTINUOUS

"To be born press: 'LAUNCH'

To resume prior state of non-existence press: 'RETURN'."

SYNTHESIZED FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

To be born, press Launch, to resume  
your prior state of non-existence  
press, Return.

Swirl of pixels concentrate.

"LAUNCH" lights up...

CUT TO:

Woman in doctor's office on back, feet in stirrups. Doctor performing D&C.

...and turns red.

Pod empties in a DARK DENSE KNOT.

JAKE

Occasionally not our choice. That's  
life.

The primary nutrients crossing the placenta are glucose,  
lactic acid, free amino acids, free fatty acids, and ketone  
bodies.

Let me do the math for you. She  
meets with people out there and  
people here disappear.

How Cassie scrambles geolocation with Patricia - silver-  
backed mirror shard.

2. P's birth is a secret so that when C finds out she can  
confront her with:

3. C asks P why did you launching knowing you hurt your  
child? She's a sociopath - T knows (a watered version?) bcse  
they were lovers so when he tells C, C realizes she LAUNCHED  
with such a story, **consciously hurt her own child.**

In woods with T - C: she Launched knowing she hurt her own  
child? T: what do you mean? C: I know P's birthed/human.

4. T tries tracking C while she's above ground and she's off the radar - where were you?

5. C: she's human but I assume you knew that? Banging the bird.

C > T: And you work for her.

**SIM: instead of Audrey????**

T: Used to. Can't people change? Escape their fate?

I don't know, can they?

TIME MARKERS - 23 hrs remain, 22 hrs remain

**or is the box people put them = their future (others' projections)**

**the stories we are told = our future?**

**P complains to J she can't track C...?**

Time markers throughout? 6 hrs left, 4 hours left...

ADD IN

Cassie arranges to meet Kate via simul dream and it doesn't go well.

Patricia doesn't want to be human while Cassie does. Being alive is fantastic. Being human, overrated.

What does Cassie do with knowledge P is human, there's a human among us. Open secret????? **SHE CONNECTS THE DOTS**

Cassie to Erika: Do you know if that's even true? And if it is is that all your life is? Maybe you overcome it. It's not all black and white, is it?

CHYRON: Pre-life. Underground, Lebanon, Kansas

INT. WAY STATION OFFICE, VIDEO CONFERENCE - 4:00PM

HETERO COUPLE, 30s, from BIRTH UNIVERSE appear onscreen.

MALE BUYER

Hello? Can you hear me?

FEMALE BUYER (O.S.)

Can the unborn hear?

The couple laughs.

The face of RACHEL YOSHIDA, 28, assistant, hair like a black waterfall, think: Japanese Hal 9000 pops up on screen alongside the male and female buyer.

RACHEL

We can hear you just fine. Thank  
you for your interest in Way  
Station futures.

FEMALE BUYER

When my husband first told me I  
thought he was crazy, just crazy-

INT. WAY STATION ARRIVAL BAY - CONTINUOUS

A vast white, fluorescent-lit room filled with transparent, single-occupancy pods filling with colored pixels and emptying, filling and emptying.

PATRICIA CANTWELL, 38, woman in charge, eats power for breakfast.

PATRICIA (O.S.)

Musical prodigy, you said?

FEMALE BUYER (O.S.)

Yes, always been a dream of-

PATRICIA (O.S.)

Rachel, dear?

Sound of tapping.

RACHEL (O.S.)

Looking.

Pod 1: fills with colored pixels.

INT. POD 1, SCREEN - CONTINUOUS

The word, "LAUNCH" and below it an image of a smiley face.

The word, "RETURN" and below it a smiley face with X's for eyes.

## SYNTHESIZED FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Welcome to the Way Station. You are in a state known as Pre-life, 25 years old with all the experience and capacity for thought and reason necessary to make the most important decision of your life. Raised by two loving parents, you excel from a young age, marry your high school sweetheart, start your own law firm, have two healthy children. Except for nursing your ill father, your life on-balance is a happy one. To be born, press Launch, to resume your prior state of non-existence press, Return.

Swirl of pixels concentrates.

## RACHEL (O.S.)

Sorry, still looking.

"LAUNCH" lights up.

CUT TO:

Woman screaming (no sound) delivering a baby.

Pod 1 empties in a BRIGHT WHITE SPARK.

Pan up to CONTROL TOWER overlooking Arrival Bay.

INT. WAY STATION CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

Like a mini Mission Control.

JAKE MARTIN, 31, unborn, catalogue handsome and about as deep sits in front of a wall of computer screens WHACKING a paddle ball.

## JAKE

Gu-bye.

Jake makes a hatch mark under the "win" column on a pad next to him.

Using keyboard, Jake brings Arrival Bay POD 2 interior on screen.

Pod 2 screen: "Launch" and "Return" with respective smiley faces.

RACHEL (O.S.)  
 There's a jazz prodigy due to  
 arrive any minute.

Pod 2: swirl of pixels concentrates.

Pod 2 screen: "Launch" and "Return" with respective smiley  
 faces.

JAKE  
 Not rocket science, folks. Do you  
 want to be born or not?

WHACK. WHACK. WHACK.

"Return" lights up.

Pod empties in a DARK DENSE KNOT.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 Was that so hard?

CUT TO:

ULTRASOUND TECHNICIAN who can't find a heartbeat.

Another mark for the "win" column.

WHACK, WHACK, WHACK...

FEMALE BUYER (O.S.)  
 I was hoping for something more...  
 classical.

PATRICIA (O.S.)  
 Or in the time you're all pussy  
 dickin' around...

Pod glows BLUE.

Jake CHUCKS the paddle, CHECKS the manifest, CONFIRMS ID.

SCAT SINGS as he jams on the keyboard.

JAKE  
 Hello, Prodigy!

A HOST (Way Station employees who assist in Arrival Bay,) approaches pod holding open a HUMAN SHELL, a clothed "skin" suit replica of PRODIGY at age 25.

Pod opens. Pixels swarm into the shell which self seals.

PATRICIA (O.S.)  
 ...this future's sold and you're  
 stuck with a Wall Street banker...

Host pulls down on the metal gun and air-guns ID chip into Prodigy's neck.

The newly arrived Prodigy comes to life and is escorted out of the Arrival Bay.

Jake stares at monitor. Drums fingers.

JAKE  
 Come on. Come on. Come on.

PATRICIA (O.S.)  
 ...or a reality-show president.  
 With bad hair.

FEMALE BUYER (O.S.)  
 Jazz prodigy would be great.

Prodigy's life clips download. Jake scrubs through till he finds...

...scene of Prodigy and family hiking. Prodigy, 8, slip-slides toward the edge of the canyon. Frantic parents yell. Prodigy regains his footing.

JAKE  
 Yeah, baby.

Jake edits, fingers flying:

Scene with Prodigy and family hiking replays. Prodigy, 8, slip-slides toward the edge of the canyon. He FLAILS, TRIPS, TUMBLES over the edge...PARALYZED.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 Hospital bills bankrupt the family,  
 bro. Yada yada. And scene.

Camera pulls back on Arrival Bay as pods fill and empty, spark white and collapse into a dark dense knot. Lather, rinse, repeat.

INT. WAY STATION OFFICE, VIDEO CONFERENCE - CONTINUOUS

On video screen:

MALE BUYER

Not sidelined with injury or pills  
or going nuts? Don't they go nuts,  
those prodigies?

Rachel types, searches.

RACHEL (O.S.)

No hospitalizations. Takes Lexapro-

PATRICIA (O.S.)

Like saying he breathes air. My  
lovely assistant will send over the  
paperwork. Bye for now.

MALE BUYER

Good-b-

Patricia disconnects.

PATRICIA

That's a wrap, and Rachel, favor,  
no questions? Erika Richards.

Rachel looks up the name on her e-device.

RACHEL

Erika Richards. Return?

PATRICIA

No. Launch.

RACHEL

Born in Appalachia to meth addicts  
and that's a Launch?

Rachel turns e-device so Patricia can see photo and profile.

PATRICIA

The very one and pronto. And  
Rachel, my sweet, anyone asks say  
she decided to Return. Just one of  
those things.

RACHEL

Private matter.

PATRICIA

Personal choice, exactly. That's my  
girl.

Patricia's e-device FLASHES: THE ONE, arriving!



Patricia and Rachel look as if they just won a golden ticket to the Chocolate Factory and RACE to the Control Room.

INT. WAY STATION CONTROL ROOM - 5:00PM

Patricia and Rachel enter out of breath as the image of a beautiful dark-haired woman downloads on the large monitor.

SYNTHESIZED FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
 Cassandra Hargrove, 25, Olympic runner, biochemist and youngest winner of the Nobel prize for harnessing the power of mycelium as a fully-recyclable building material to eliminate worldwide housing insecurity.

All in awe.

PATRICIA  
 Welcome my sweet blank check.

RACHEL  
 Cassandra, the truth teller.

PATRICIA  
 Who no one believed. It's perfect, really.

JAKE  
 Hubba.

PATRICIA  
 Well put, Jakespeare.

Jake types, keyboard on FIRE. Relief as the file downloads.

JAKE  
 Could you all have gotten me the file a little later?

PATRICIA  
 Step right up folks, the one, the only: cry-baby serial killer.

Rachel laughs.

JAKE  
 (to Rachel)  
 And orphaned-child-whore is laughing why?

Scenes of Cassie's idyllic life download onscreen: birthday parties, pony rides, magic shows, graduations, prizes, medals.

PATRICIA

We have got to be absolutely sure.

RACHEL

Think Greek-tragedy tragic.

JAKE

Not my first rodeo, ladies.

Jake scrubs through life clips.

Father PETER, 40, nerd handsome, mother KATE, 37, free spirit and Cassie, age 12, walk along the side of the road.

Cassie hip checks Kate as a SPEEDING car approaches. Kate LOSES HER FOOTING.

KILLED instantly.

JAKE (CONT'D)

What?!

Jake scrubs through again. Same.

PATRICIA

What is it?

JAKE

Nothing to edit.

Jake replays the life clip for all to see.

Patricia grabs her e-device, re-reads manifest.

PATRICIA

She's supposed to be THE ONE, the perfect one. The one-in-a-billion one.

Patricia panic-searches.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

There's no mention of killing mommy. No mention at all. Not one goddamn mention.

(beat)

Edit it out for the client file. If in 12 years she turns out to be a mommy killer, oh well.

Rachel's e-device beeps.

RACHEL  
She's here!

PATRICIA  
Chin up, flea-bitten chest out!

Rachel exits.

Patricia phones DADDIO, Cassie's buyer.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)  
Congratulations, Daddio! Human  
perfection just arrived. Going to  
change the world for the better and  
look good doing it. Wire payment in  
full and she's yours. Day after  
tomorrow. And Daddio, you're  
welcome.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)  
(to Rachel through headset)  
Show time!

On camera: Rachel smiles, winks.

INT. ARRIVAL BAY – CONTINUOUS

Cassie's pod glows BLUE, opens.

Rachel holds open the clothed human shell. Pod opens. Pixels  
swarm into the shell. Rachel air-guns chip into Cassie's neck  
bringing her to life.

RACHEL  
Welcome to The Way Station Cassie.  
I'm Rachel, your Host. Please  
follow me.

INT. ARRIVAL BUILDING – CONTINUOUS

Camera-monitored hallways bustle as Hosts escort other newly  
arriveds.

Cassie trails Rachel, taking it all in.

RACHEL

(recites rotely)

In a few minutes you will be shown clips detailing your life's highs and lows after which you will have 15 minutes to make the most important decision of your life. Should you choose to Launch you will begin life as a newborn and have no recollection of your time here, all ties to The Way Station severed.

A fist-sized drone camera buzzes by, circles back and hovers.

CUT TO:

POV from camera - Cassie and Rachel in hallway.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(over shoulder, to Cassie)

Mobile surveillance. For everyone's security.

Cassie lightning-fast snatches the drone, bounces it on the floor a couple times and releases.

CUT TO CONTROL  
ROOM:

Jake yanks off headset, rubs his ears.

EXT. LECTURE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rachel places Cassie in line with chip reader. Door unlocks.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rachel takes the stage. Cassie sits. Guards are stationed at exits.

CASSIE

I understand Launch. What's Return?

RACHEL

Do you recall where you were before you arrived?

CASSIE

No.

RACHEL  
Exactly. Let's begin.

Lights dim. Photos and life clip videos appear on screen.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
On January 16 you will be born.  
That is, should you choose to be  
born.

Still images of organically-shaped buildings.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
At the intersection of organic  
matter and human need, you,  
Cassandra Hargrove, discover a  
global housing solution. Abundant,  
affordable, sustainable, it's your  
innovative use of the ever abundant  
and renewable fungi plant that  
changes the world and wins you the  
Nobel Prize at 36.

Cassie jumps up.

Guards on alert.

CASSIE  
Where do I sign? I've got work to  
do.

RACHEL  
Just a bit more. Please re-take  
your seat.

Rachel motions to guards all ok.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
These are your parents, Kate and  
Peter.

Photo of the happy family.

LIFE CLIPS PLAY:

-Kate and Cassie, age 4. Bedroom decorated with hanging  
stars, silver streamers, draped canopy. Kate reads a story.  
Peter enters to say good night.

-Kate and Cassie, age 6. Both wear sparkly face masks and  
stare up at the night sky. Cassie points with a plastic  
scepter.

KATE ON SCREEN  
 That's called the big dipper, or as  
 grammy calls it...  
 (CASSIE and KATE on screen  
 together)  
 ...the beeg deeper.

Laughter.

KATE ON SCREEN (CONT'D)  
 Look, a shooting star!

Cassie in Lecture Room: enraptured.

KATE ON SCREEN (CONT'D)  
 Make a wish, my pet.

Both onscreen close their eyes.

CASSIE ON SCREEN  
 I want to be here with you forever.

Kate kisses Cassie.

LIFE CLIPS CONTINUE:

-Kate and Cassie, age 8, play with a magic kit.

-Kate and Cassie, age 10, struggle to open wrapped fortune  
 cookies with chopsticks.

-Kate and Cassie, age 11, in the woods digging in the dirt,  
 compare a variety of mushrooms to a chart.

Cassie in Lecture Room: in love.

LIFE CLIPS CONTINUE:

-Peter, Kate and Cassie, age 12, walk along the side of the  
 road. Cassie hip checks Kate as a SPEEDING car approaches.  
 Kate LOSES HER FOOTING.

KILLED instantly.

CASSIE  
 Wait, what?

Rachel rewinds, replays clip in slow motion.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
 Oh my God! No, stop!

RACHEL  
When you are 12, there is an  
unfortunate accident.

CASSIE  
I don't need to see anymore.

Cassie tries to run out.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
You've made a mistake, a terrible—  
The guards block her exit.

RACHEL  
As unpleasant as you may find all  
this, our lives are a pre-destined,  
randomly-generated event lottery. I  
am simply giving you enough  
information to make an informed  
decision.

Cassie returns to her seat.

CASSIE  
There must be something I can—

RACHEL  
Launch and kill your mother or  
Return and let her live. The choice  
is yours. As for ripple effects,  
for example, were you to have  
children and chose not to Launch it  
causes some scheduling issues but  
nothing we can't handle. For a more  
detailed explanation please see the  
User Manual, pages 9-22.

A BELL sounds. LIGHTS come up.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
On behalf of The Way Station I want  
to thank you for your attention.  
Time to record your decision.  
Follow me.

Rachel and Cassie exit into a crowded hall.

Banners announcing the Titanium Jubilee line the walls.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
The Way Station is celebrating its  
9 billionth Launch this week.

CASSIE

Lucky me.

Cassie watches the stream of Hosts and newly arriveds zombie-walk the hall. She takes a left and disappears.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

Cassie appears onscreen.

JAKE

(to Rachel through  
headset)

Dropped something.

INTERCUT: CONTROL TOWER and ARRIVAL BUILDING HALLWAY

Rachel turns. No Cassie.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Left, up ahead.

Rachel turns.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Getting warm.

Rachel continues walking.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Warmer...

Rachel continues walking.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(through headset)

Hot. So hot.

Cassie looks through a window at workers high up on scaffolding.

Rachel leans in over her shoulder.

Cassie startles.

RACHEL

Repairing a panel of the digital  
sky. Ninety feet underground and  
you'd never know it.

(Hal mode)

This way please.



EXT. DETERMINATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rachel scans Cassie in.

INT. DETERMINATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RACHEL

(rotely reciting)

Time starts when I close the door.  
On behalf of The Way Station, thank  
you for your participation.

Rachel exits. The door locks.

A video presentation begins narrated by a David Attenborough  
type voice (NARRATOR).

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Every second of every day the world  
over, humans are having sex.

Couples climaxing in a bed, in a tent, in a kitchen, in a bar  
bathroom, in a car.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

With intention and not, those who  
can, are conceiving.

Sperm meets egg.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

A connection is made. Energy is  
created.

The outer periphery of egg appears to explode as it closes  
itself off to other sperm invaders followed by a graphic  
depiction of an invisible energy escaping a WOMAN's body as  
she climaxes in a car.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

This energy makes its way to a  
location deep underground...in  
Lebanon, Kansas to be precise, the  
geographic center of United States.  
Some energies, signals that are too  
weak, never make it here. But the  
rest, 96% of them, as if drawn by a  
homing signal arrive, and most  
important of all, decide if they  
want to live or die.

The presentation ends.

Cassie's life clips project silently onto the walls. Cassie sees her mother get hit and closes her eyes.

The second clip, in which her mother lives, plays after, but, eyes closed, Cassie doesn't see it.

The door opens. Cassie jumps. Patricia enters. Life clips stop playing.

Patricia, in a fitted skirt and weapon-grade stilettos, wears multiple bling-y rings.

PATRICIA

Hello, Cassie! Patricia, your personal Transition Coordinator.

Patricia laughs with a flourish, perches on the table's edge.

Cassie notices a long scratch under Patricia's stockings.

Patricia picks up the unmarked form.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Ah, to kill or not to kill. That is the question, Cassandra. Use your genius to help millions or kill your lovely mother? Seems obvious, but the choice is yours.

Patricia sees Cassie staring and re-crosses her legs, hiding the scratch.

Patricia looks at the unmarked form again.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Cassandra Hargrove, have you ever considered working at The Way Station? Buy yourself some time.

CASSIE

That's an option?

PATRICIA

This place doesn't run on air. Takes hundreds to make sure everyone gets on their proper way. We have great benefits, simulated-life vacation and Circus! Our night or day club where you can unwind. What happens at Circus...

Patricia winks.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

And yes, people fall in love here,  
even marry, although frankly, why?

Points to her nether region.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

The not-ok corral with everyone  
shooting blanks. Thank you, Shesus.

Blows on her finger gun.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

So while before you had two  
options: Launch and Return, now you  
have a third: Remain till your due  
date or pass up life entirely and  
stay here till your shell gives  
out. At any time, change your mind  
and Return or, of course, Launch  
and kill your sweet mother.

Cassie considers.

CASSIE

Twenty-four hours and I'll be on my  
way.

PATRICIA

At the end of which you either  
Launch or Return. Option to Remain  
is off the table.

CASSIE

Deal.

They shake.

PATRICIA

Our secret.

CASSIE

And my clips? Can I see those  
again?

PATRICIA

As often as you like.

Patricia pushes an e-device toward Cassie.

CASSIE

And what's your story, Patricia?

PATRICIA  
 Welcome to the Way Station,  
 Cassandra. I think you're going to  
 like it here.

EXT. WAY STATION CAMPUS - 7:00PM - 24 HOURS REMAINING

Rachel, Cassie and Prodigy (ALEX) cross the Way Station's crowded campus made up of artificial-turf greenbelts, concrete paths and modern low-rises.

The digital sky displays a dimming sun with fast-moving cloud patterns.

RACHEL  
 Cassie meet Alex. Alex, Cassie.

CASSIE  
 Nobel winner, kill my mother. Hi.

Cassie extends hand.

ALEX  
 Jazz prodigy, paralyzed in  
 accident, bankrupt my family. Nice  
 to meet you.

They shake.

CASSIE  
 So much promise and yet...  
 (directed toward Rachel)  
 ...like a disease around here.

No-response Rachel walks on.

ALEX  
 Hard to get your head around, but  
 just couldn't do that to my family.

CASSIE  
 Of course not, no.

All approach cafeteria building.

RACHEL  
 This way, please.

INT. CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Cassie, Alex and Rachel approach a crowded table covered with glasses filled with thick grey placental nutrition.

RACHEL  
Everyone, Cassie and Alex. Only a  
few hours old, so go easy.

JAKE  
Hellooo, Cassie.

Jake makes room.

All groan, roll their eyes.

Jake pours two glasses. Passes one to Cassie.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Welcome!

CASSIE  
What is it?

JAKE  
Placental nutrition. All a pre-life  
needs.

Alex hesitates. Cassie drinks up.

CASSIE  
It's like really delicious...but  
not.

Laughter.

BRITT VAN der HOVEN 27, unborn, tall, lithe, "hard pretty"  
inside and out.

BRITT  
Right on, girl! Britt here.  
Photographer and occasional Host.

GRETCHEN  
(cough)  
And international art sensation.

BRITT  
Were I to live, that is. Instead,  
I'll be covering the...  
(perfect Patricia  
impression)  
...Titanium Jubilee. And watch out  
for Jake and his pet snake.  
(beat)  
Keeps it in his pants. Sometimes.

JAKE

Britt Van der Hoven, folks. She'll  
be here all night.

GRETCHEN JAMESON, 30, unborn, Black, blond-tipped 'fro,  
pierced, marches to the beat of her own zither.

GRETCHEN

Newbie, Retch.

BRITT

Martial artist extraordinaire.

GRETCHEN

Back atcha.

Gretchen makes Wushu greeting.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

And manage Office of Launch &  
Return.

CASSIE

And the Office of "What the Hell is  
Really Going On"? Where's that?  
Anyone?

GRETCHEN

Oo, a live one. You find it, be  
sure and let us know.

MATT HEBRON, 26, unborn, LatinX, Bocelli voice, Fabio hair,  
on a scale of 1 to gay: gay.

MATT

Hey, Sunshines. Matt here. I manage  
SIM vacay. Come check it out, give  
you a reason to live. What are you  
two in for?

Laughs.

ALEX

Jazz prodigy.

JAKE

Who gets paralyzed.

Alex shoots Jake a look.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Was on duty when you came through,  
bro. Chill.

CASSIE  
Back up. SIM?

GRETCHEN AND BRITT  
(swooning)  
SIM virgins.

Matt  
Simulated-life vacation.

GRETCHEN  
Life on steroids.

BRITT  
You, only better.

GRETCHEN  
What makes pre-life worth living.

Gretchen and Britt do a complicated fist bump/handshake thing.

MATT  
Life-force energy never disappears. After death it's re-harnessed then filtered. Think of it like an unused wavelength the unborn can enter briefly then afterwards, like catch and release, it goes back into the pool.

BRITT  
Part of your bennies. Three weeks a year.

GRETCHEN  
504 hours or 30,240 minutes of deee-licious SIM. We're heading off next week!

Gretchen winks at Britt.

MATT  
But who's counting? You can use them in increments or take it all at once. After that you pay.

GRETCHEN  
Fifty cents a minute which doesn't sound like a lot till you do the math - \$22,000/month or to retire, \$250,000+ a year.

ALEX  
Three weeks isn't enough?

GRETCHEN  
Clearly, someone has never SIM'd.

BRITT  
Or SLA'd. SIM-Life Anonymous.  
Hello, my name is Britt.

CASSIE  
There are real support groups for  
fake vacation?

GRETCHEN  
Three times a day.

CASSIE  
You, too?

Gretchen nods.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
So it's a drug?

GRETCHEN  
Medicinal, yes. And fake is  
relative 'cause when you're in it  
it's realer than real. The drag is  
coming out.

BRITT  
Never coming out, can you imagine?

GRETCHEN  
SIM retire.

ALEX  
You mean living to escape?

GRETCHEN  
Every party has a pooper.

CASSIE  
When can we try it?

Jake looks at his watch.

JAKE  
Now?

Stampede.

Rachel's pad BEEPS.



RACHEL  
I'm out.

GRETCHEN  
Pity. Shame. BRITT

RACHEL  
Alex, too. We have an appointment.

Cassie takes Alex by the arm.

CASSIE  
What could be so pressing? We'll drop him after.

Alex looks to Rachel.

RACHEL  
Sorry, another time.

Cassie reluctantly lets Alex go. All leave.

INT. SIM LIFE CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Like an old Blockbuster with a stage and theater seating added.

Jake and Matt man the controls. The girls browse the aisles.

BRITT  
(to Cassie)  
Pick a dead life, any dead life and ...live it!

GRETCHEN  
(browsing categories)  
Actor, Rock Star, Reality TV,  
Online Influencer, Saint, Murderer,  
White-collar Criminal, Politician,  
Average Male-

Cassie holds up a SIM Life box of Ted Bundy.

CASSIE  
Oo, what would it feel like to be this guy?

GRETCHEN  
Ask Jake.

Everyone quiet.

CASSIE  
 (to Jake)  
 You're a serial killer? For real?

GRETCHEN  
 (to Jake)  
 Real as it gets...at The Way  
 Station.

Britt mimes playing a violin while Gretchen pretends to shoot herself in the head.

JAKE  
 (to Gretchen)  
 Newbie know you got your baby  
 sister drunk and because of you she  
 bashed her head in?

CASSIE  
 (to Gretchen)  
 She okay?

GRETCHEN  
 Yeah, she's okay but no 'Sister of  
 the Year' award for me, you know?  
 Ask him if he gets caught.

CASSIE  
 (to Jake)  
 Please tell me you get caught.

JAKE  
 Late in the game - 9 men, 2 women -  
 everyone wants to know the body  
 count, then I kill myself so, uh,  
 hi, nice to meet you.

Matt pats Jake's shoulder.

CASSIE  
 I kill my mother and change the  
 world, in that order.

BRITT  
 Try going crazy.

Matt gives a thumbs up.

CASSIE  
 You, too?

MATT  
 (sings)  
 Looney as a tune.

GRETCHEN

Me three.

CASSIE

Well, how weird is that?

BRITT

Going nuts is like the plague  
around here.

Britt looks at Jake then holds up SIM Life box of Audrey  
Hepburn.

JAKE

Out. Long wait list.

CASSIE

Aw, too bad.

JAKE

You like Audrey? Well, looky here,  
just so happens I have a copy.

BRITT

Imagine that.

JAKE

(to Cassie)  
Want to take her out for a spin?  
(to Matt)  
Man the controls, bro?

BRITT

Poor thing.

GRETCHEN

I saw a bumper sticker once: I'd  
rather be Returning. I'm out.

Gretchen leaves.

BRITT

This ought to be good...in a creepy  
sort of way.

Britt sits.

Jake takes the stage. Matt works the controls - a projection  
of Audrey Hepburn and her husband, Mel, walk the streets of  
Venice.

MATT

(to Cassie)  
Up you go.

Jake as Mel motions for Cassie to walk into the scene.

People respond to Cassie and Jake as Audrey and Mel.

CASSIE AS AUDREY

This is a hoot.

Montage: in Italy, eating at a cafe, gondola ride, splashing in a fountain, on a bench eating gelato...

Cassie signs autographs, poses for photos, runs her hand down her long neck.

Jake leans in for a nuzzle. Cassie pulls away.

JAKE AS MEL

Hey, I'm your husband, remember?

CASSIE AS AUDREY

You are and you aren't, and isn't that interesting how two opposite things can be true at the same time.

A flower seller comes by. Jake buys a rose, leans in to steal a kiss just as they are brought back to The SIM Life Center.

INT. SIM LIFE CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Jake tries to put his arm around Cassie. Again, no go.

CASSIE

Wow, when are those meetings? SIM 24/7 - can you imagine?

BRITT

Some people can, can't they Jake?

JAKE

Conspiracy-theory Britt, folks.

Cassie looks at Britt who shakes her head.

CASSIE

What can you do around here to make enough money to SIM retire?

JAKE

Never really thought about it.

Britt scoffs.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 (to Britt)  
 Calm thyself.

Britt holds up the Muhammad Ali SIM Life box.

BRITT  
 (to Jake)  
 Rumble in the Jungle. You and me.  
 I'm Ali.

MATT  
 Settle down, kids.

Britt checks her watch.

BRITT  
 It's late. I'm out. Matt.

Britt gives a mini salute.

BRITT (CONT'D)  
 Cassie, see you 'round.

Britt leaves.

JAKE  
 Schizo in real life, schizo at the  
 Way Station. Go figure. Back me up  
 bro, would you?

Matt, busy shutting everything down, throws up his hands.

CASSIE  
 It's been a long...I don't know  
 what but I need to find my  
 apartment.

JAKE  
 I'll walk you.

Cassie holds up her e-device.

CASSIE  
 Nope, I'm good, thanks. See you,  
 Matt.

INT. CHIP EXTRACTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sterile-looking room with a metal gurney.

In the background, HENCHMAN 1 hoists Jazz Prodigy shell, limp  
 and lifeless, over a shoulder.

Rachel works e-device.

Jake receives text: "Prodigy code ready for release."

EXT. SIM LIFE CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Cassie looks at an e-device map. Sees Circus is nearby.

Cassie FLASHES on meeting in Determination Room with Patricia, her words replay.

PATRICIA (V.O.)  
Our night or day club where you can  
unwind. What happens at Circus...

Cassie disables tracking on the e-device and navigates to CIRCUS.

EXT. CIRCUS - 11:00PM - 20 HOURS REMAIN

Large neon sign announces Circus.

Cassie gets in line, checks the time on her e-device:

CHYRON: 20 hours remain

Cassie looks around trying to take it all in.

ERIKA RICHARDS, 28, unborn, striking, tall with big unschooled hair, gets in line behind Cassie.

ERIKA  
Let me guess. You think you're  
being followed.

Cassie isn't sure Erika is talking to her.

ERIKA (CONT'D)  
(laughs)  
Because you are.

Erika points to the back of her neck.

ERIKA (CONT'D)  
Every minute of every day. You get  
used to it.

Erika extends a hand.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

Raised by meth addicts and join the family business. Eight months, two weeks.

CASSIE

Kill my mom. Accident. Change the world. Just arrived.

Cassie shakes.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Eight months plus? You're due any minute. You going to Launch?

ERIKA

Now why would I do that?

Erika pulls Cassie to the front of the line, whispers to the bouncer and they're in.

INT. CIRCUS - MIDNIGHT - 19 HOURS REMAIN

They deposit e-devices at entrance. Erika chooses a Snow White mask, Cassie Cinderella. They down placental nutrition spiked with extra ketone bodies, dance and, for a brief time, forget their non-existence.

INT. CIRCUS GAME ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Erika and Cassie lounge in an "infinite" mirror room with a laser light show. Soft music plays.

ERIKA

Orphan-child-whore hosted you?  
Doesn't usually waste her time with newbs.

CASSIE

What does she waste time on?

ERIKA

Sucking Patricia's balls.

They both laugh.

CASSIE

Met her, too.

ERIKA

Thing 1 and Thing 2? Somebody's special.

CASSIE  
Gave me my job. What'd she pass up?

ERIKA  
Nobody knows. Way Station secret.

Cassie cringes as she FLASHES on the life clip of killing her mother.

CASSIE  
You're on a trolley that has lost its brakes headed toward a switch in the tracks. If it stays the course you kill five. Divert the car and you kill only one. What do you do?

ERIKA  
Oo, toughie. So, your mother...or the world?

CASSIE  
My mother.

ERIKA  
There's your answer. Then again, there are those millions. According to my  
(beat)  
boyfriend? It's new. Anyway, he says pain is the most powerful portal to consciousness. Or can be.

CASSIE  
Oh, really? So what's Mr. Deep still doing here?

ERIKA  
Didn't say it was easy.

CASSIE  
And you?

ERIKA  
I like having teeth.

Erika jumps up.

ERIKA (CONT'D)  
That said, I need a smoke. Be right back.

Erika leaves.



Cassie, alone in the room, hurls the leg of a chair into the mirror. With the mirror shard she cuts off the bottom of a drape, wraps it up and pockets it.

As others enter, Cassie runs out.

INT. HALLWAY - VARIOUS

Cassie runs past a variety of rooms including rave, virtual gaming, wind tunnel, bouncy house, XXX, drum circle, basket weaving, knitting, painting, poetry slam, archery, sound bath etc.

Cassie returns the mask, collects her e-device, exits.

EXT. CIRCUS - CONTINUOUS

Cassie looks for Erika. In the near distance she sees someone with big hair forcibly pushed into the back of a car as someone else with a black waterfall ponytail swishing takes the passenger side. The car takes off.

Cassie runs like the wind after it, dodging in and out of the shadows.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Henchman 1 drives with Rachel in the passenger seat while Henchman 2 sits in back with Erika.

She tries the door. LOCKED. Sobers up.

ERIKA  
What's going on?

Silence.

ERIKA (CONT'D)  
Seriously, where we headed?

Rachel lowers the visor mirror, peers into back, nods.

Henchman 1 pulls out a syringe.

ERIKA (CONT'D)  
Oh, fuck no, Baldy.

Erika fights like mad. Henchman 1 plunges the needle into her thigh.

RACHEL  
 You know that sunny life you passed  
 up on meth mountain?

ERIKA  
 (groggy)  
 Huh?

RACHEL  
 One-way ticket. Appalachia or bust,  
 baby.

Erika passes out.

EXT. OFFICE LAUNCH AND RETURN - 2:00AM - 17 HOURS REMAIN

Cassie blocks tracking by tying the mirror shard over her neck chip. She watches as Henchman 1, carrying a limp body with its head covered, exits the car. Henchman 2 and Rachel follow.

There's the sound of rustling leaves.

Rachel attempts to geo-locate. Finds no one. She and Henchman 1 and 2 enter the building.

Cassie hears rustling leaves again and goes toward it.

POV: Cassie catches a glimpse of a shadowy figure.

POV: The person does a wide geo-locate sweep, registers nothing and proceeds. A seemingly invisible door opens. Light catches off bling-y rings as the person slips through the door and disappears.

Cassie runs and passes through the opening just as it closes.

EXT. UNDERGROUND - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

Cassie finds herself in a narrow vertical tunnel criss-crossed by a tangle of large tree roots with steps carved into the hard dirt. She's overwhelmed with nature's intoxicating scents - pine needles, rich soil, fresh air.

The person ahead ascends...stumbles.

PATRICIA  
 Goddamn.

Patricia rubs her shin.

Cassie FLASHES on the scratch under Patricia's stockings.

Cassie follows quietly behind.

Patricia disappears.

Cassie reaches the top and climbs out into a dense wood. Again, nature's scents are like a drug. She looks overhead, spots the big dipper. A squirrel skitters up a tree. The forest is magical until...

...pixels start to seep from her shell. Cassie leans against a tree to catch her breath, then continues trailing Patricia to a wooden shack.

INT. WOODEN SHACK - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

Patricia, inside dark shack, is seated at table across from MALE LIAISON.

EXT. WOODEN SHACK - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

Cassie crouches outside the shack's window, sees Patricia seated at a table across from a man.

INT. WOODEN SHACK - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

LIAISON

I can find buyers all day long for influencer/supermodels. As for the AI researcher, the client wants to know how pretty. Five is a no. Eight, okay.

PATRICIA

Like I'd sell a five. 30% upcharge for the insult.

LIAISON

And they want to meet in person. I told them no, but said I'd ask anyway.

PATRICIA

No one visits the Way Station, period. Tell them to go to the competition. Oh right, there isn't any. What else?

Liaison passes a photo across the table.

Patricia takes it, stares.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Will she?

Liaison shakes his head.

Patricia passes money across the table.

EXT. WOODEN SHACK - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

More pixels seep. Cassie's shell begins to melt. Unable to breathe, she cries out, collapses against the window.

INT. WOODEN SHACK - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

Patricia jumps up, runs out.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - 5:00AM - 14 HOURS REMAIN/5:00AM

Cassie, groggy, wakes up in bed in a mod, one-bedroom, "smart" apartment which has an anonymous hotel-room feel.

Sitting on the toilet, she notices the exterior of her thigh is mangled/melted.

Scenes from the night before FLASH: Circus, Erika, the limp body, ascending the tunnel, the woods.

Cassie finds her e-device, checks the time:

CHYRON: 14 hours remain.

She watches life clips:

-Peter driving. Kate and Cassie, 8, do the worm with their hands in synch singing along with the radio.

-Kate and Cassie, 11, hair in rollers, talk animatedly, painting each other's toenails.

-Kate and Cassie, in nightgowns, lie on their backs staring up at the night sky.

KATE ON SCREEN

Make a wish, my pet.

Seated on the bed, Cassie pauses the clip, stares intensely, enters into a hypnotic state.

BEGIN SIMUL-DREAM SEQUENCE 1:

INT. BEDROOM - BIRTH WORLD - NIGHT

Kate lies in bed with Peter.

EXT. NEW YORK

Cassie, simul-dreaming, walks the streets of New York, loaded down with shopping bags. She talks on the phone.

INTERCUT BETWEEN THEM

CASSIE  
(on the phone)  
Hello, mother? Ma? Mom? It's your  
baby, calling from the future.

Kate tosses and turns.

KATE  
I'm pregnant? We're pregnant?!

Kate rolls around in bed, touches her belly.

CASSIE  
Sort of. Technically, yes. How to  
put it? I'm your unborn daughter.

KATE  
Tell me something that would make  
me know this isn't a joke.

Cassie descends into the Subway.

CASSIE  
Beeg deeper?

Kate whimpers in her sleep.

There is a BUZZING sound in the background.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Train's coming. Got to go.

KATE  
(frantic)  
Okay, see you soon?

BUZZING gets louder.

CASSIE  
Maybe.

KATE

Maybe?

The line goes dead.

KATE (CONT'D)

Hello?

END SIMUL-DREAM SEQUENCE 1

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Apartment bell BUZZES.

EXT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

TREVOR PATTERSON, 34, too sexy for his...maintenance overalls which he wears like a Tom Ford suit, has been ringing Cassie's apartment. He steps back, yells up.

TREVOR

Erika, baby, open up.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Cassie rummages through the bureau, throws on shorts, a t-shirt, steps out onto 2nd floor balcony.

EXT. 2ND FLOOR BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

TREVOR

This is Erika's apartment. Who are you?

CASSIE

Erika? Tall, big smile, bigger hair. Smokes?

TREVOR

Yeah, how do you...?

Cassie disappears from balcony, goes downstairs.

EXT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

When she opens the apartment building door there's an intergalactic explosion of hubba between the two of them, though neither wants to be so crass as to react to it.

A tennis-ball sized drone swoops down. Trevor JUMPS and ninja-fast traps it in his fist. It buzzes like a muted bee.

TREVOR  
Mind if we step inside?

CASSIE  
Actually I-

Awkward moment as the two cha, cha, cha to avoid getting too close as Trevor HURLS drone and steps inside.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Trevor sees her mangled thigh. He reaches to touch it. Cassie bats his hand away.

CASSIE  
Who are you anyway?

Trevor shows his work credential.

TREVOR  
Trevor, maintenance. What're you doing in Erika's apartment?

Cassie FLASHES on the woods, passing out.

CASSIE  
Couldn't tell you. Woke up here.

TREVOR  
Some would call that a good time. How do you know Erika?

CASSIE  
Circus. Got to talking, hung out. Next thing she steps out for a smoke and...gone. In a car. With Rachel? Can't be certain, but I saw that hair.

TREVOR  
(shaken)  
Back up. You met Rachel? Who else?

CASSIE  
Jake.

TREVOR  
You know Jake?

CASSIE  
Know is pushing it.

TREVOR  
And?

CASSIE  
Patricia offered me my job.

Stunned, Trevor gives Cassie a long up and down.

TREVOR  
(whispers)  
The One.

CASSIE  
What?

TREVOR  
Nothing. Sorry, never mind.

Trevor turns to leave.

CASSIE  
Hey, is it true?

Trevor turns back.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Is pain really the most powerful  
portal to consciousness?

They hold each other's gaze.

TREVOR  
You take care of yourself.

Another too-close moment as Trevor exits, takes off running.

INT. PATRICIA'S OFFICE - 6:00AM - 13 HOURS REMAIN

Patricia, Rachel and Jake seated around a table. No cameras.

RACHEL  
Have some openings that need  
filling. Permission to pull the  
next 20 average somethings for  
training?

Rachel hands over e-device for approval.

Patricia signs off.



PATRICIA  
 Okay, exceptional lives for sale,  
 hit it.

Jake reviews his e-device.

JAKE  
 (to Rachel)  
 Hey, congrats on placing the  
 Prodigy. Way to go, Hal.

Jake raises a hand to high five. Whiffed.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 So been trying to place this best-  
 selling author for weeks and big  
 nada. Thought there'd be a bidding  
 war, but can't give her away.  
 Arriving today. Pass her through?

PATRICIA  
 (to Rachel)  
 A match for any clients?

RACHEL  
 Writer as in read?

PATRICIA  
 I'll take that as a no.  
 (to Jake)  
 Pass.

Jake makes a note.

JAKE  
 Other than that, no Einsteins, just  
 the easy money: online-influencer,  
 movie star, unicorn techpreneur,  
 supermodel/media mogul.

PATRICIA  
 Park every last one till we get  
 buyers. Worst comes to worst the  
 beauty index here rises for a bit.  
 And before I forget, the buyers for  
 that male diva, the tenor?

JAKE  
 Matt? Perfect-hair? Voice of an  
 angel?

PATRICIA  
 Do I look like I have time for  
 names?

(MORE)

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Couple forfeited their deposit.  
Husband blamed the wife, something  
about wanting to go old-school and  
roll the dice. How quaint.

Patricia sits up, pushes chest out as if for show-and-tell.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

How's the angel working out? Due  
date?

RACHEL

Three months to delivery. Jake gave  
him his standard-issue case of the  
crazies so don't see him Launching  
anytime soon. Manages SIM vacay.  
Hosts on occasion.

JAKE

Like to see how creative Orphan  
Whore is editing in last-minute  
disaster.

RACHEL

Have another glass of Chianti, why  
don't you?

PATRICIA

Children. As long as angel boy is  
useful let him linger. And more  
importantly, sell him!

Rachel takes over the presentation.

RACHEL

I've had a request for a  
groundbreaking researcher. And I  
see we have one coming but the  
research focus, well, it's not the  
sexi-

PATRICIA

Out with it.

RACHEL

Mold spores.

PATRICIA

Hello, penicillin? Where would Jake  
be without it? Set up the-

RACHEL

Call is scheduled for this  
afternoon.

Patricia's e-device PINGS with a text.

PATRICIA

It's raining amniotic fluid, kids.  
Graffiti artist girl? Arrived some  
months ago? We parked her.

JAKE

Britt?

PATRICIA

Names again? Account is positive,  
mamma's due and with this one's  
chip her baby girl will be the next  
art world sensation.

RACHEL

Will download ASAP.

Rachel makes a note on her e-device.

JAKE

Ain't nothing higher...

RACHEL

...than SIM retire.

Jake goes to high five. Whiffed again.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

And FYI, mushroom girl is hosting  
shortly.

JAKE

I'll show her the ropes.

PATRICIA

Jake-olo, that dick of yours is so  
thoughtful, but save your charms  
for later. Show her a good time  
before it's lights out, but hands  
where we can see them, dick where  
we can't.

Patricia leans in close, gently places manicured talons on  
Jake's inner thigh.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Fuck this up, Cowboy, and you'll  
wish you were born a girl. We  
clear?

JAKE

Zirconia.

EXT. PATRICIA'S OFFICE RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Trevor, in jumpsuit, JETS past reception.

RECEPTIONIST  
I'm sorry but you can't-

TREVOR  
Watch me.

Trevor POUNDS Patricia's...office door.

INT. PATRICIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Patricia's e-device PINGS with a note from reception.

TREVOR (O.S.)  
Open up!

At the sound of Trevor's voice, Patricia brightens.

Rachel and Jake exit while Patricia enthrones herself behind a large desk, unbuttons, cleavage on display like fine sculpture, unlocks the door via remote.

Trevor BUSTS in.

PATRICIA  
Oh, how I love a man in a uniform.

TREVOR  
Where's Erika?

PATRICIA  
Missed you, too, baby.

Patricia rises, goes to bar, pours a glass of nutrition.

TREVOR  
Where is she?

PATRICIA  
English as a first language and you still can't get the tenses right.  
How sweet.

TREVOR  
Stop fucking around. What'd you do?

PATRICIA  
Sure, I'll tell you. Happy to.

Patricia unbuttons again as she dances her way over to Trevor, glass in hand, singing.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Oh, to live on  
Meth Mountain.  
With the barkers  
and the colored balloons.  
You can't be—

TREVOR

Cut the shit, Patricia!

Trevor BACKHANDS the glass, sends it FLYING.

PATRICIA

Deep breaths sweet T, deep breaths.  
Stress causes aging.

The two are inches apart, as if they might kiss.

TREVOR

Tell me. Now!

PATRICIA

I just did, but I can tell you  
again. Was it my singing or my  
dancing you liked best?

Patricia starts dancing again.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

(singing softly)  
Oh, to live on—

Trevor GRABS her hand and TWISTS it.

Patricia WINCES...with delight.

TREVOR

You Returned her?

PATRICIA

Oh dear Lord no, silly.

Patricia does a little shimmy with her hips.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

I Launched her.

TREVOR

Launched?

Shocked and distraught, Trevor STUMBLES, catches himself.

PATRICIA

You really thought you could leave me? Just like that? After all I gave you? After all you know? There was a price for leaving and Erika paid it for you. Too bad you can't thank her.

TREVOR

And too bad that baby of yours, the one you left swaddled so nicely by the dumpster, too bad she can't thank you either.

Patricia SLAPS Trevor.

PATRICIA

You mention that again, tell anyone, I'll Return your ass so fast you'll wonder where the time went.

Trevor SLAPS her right back, onto the floor.

Patricia regains her breath, laughs. Blood trickles down her chin.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Back to our old fun and games. And so quickly.

Patricia pulls herself up and slips into a chair. Adjusts her skirt, fixes her hair.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

A few short months ago you were more than willing to Return anyone with a dollar sign on their forehead. Fatten up your SIM account.

Patricia leans forward, breasts on full view.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

And who made that happen for you? Hm? I did, you fool. Me. I made you and when you left I unmade you. This is my show, hon.

Patricia FLASHES on memories:

-Age 16, thrown up against wall by father and raped.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

This place was a quaint little stop on the way to or through. No SIM, no Circus. Give the masses their opium and they'll work forever.

-Leaves home, begging on street.

-Gives birth, abandons swaddled baby by dumpster.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

But all this fun is expensive so I figured out how to sell what the Way Station "manufactures."

-Hides out in woods. Trips and tumbles Alice-in-Wonderland like into a secret entrance into the Way Station.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Who knew there was such a great future...in futures.

-She watches people scan in.

-We see her chatting up a pre-life. Suddenly, she CLAWS the chip out of the pre-life's neck who SCREAMS then COLLAPSES as Patricia RUNS.

-At KNIFE POINT, Patricia gets a TECH to insert the chip into her own neck taking on a new identity after which she kills the tech.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

I did. I saw the potential and made something of it. I did that. No one else.

Trevor claps.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Joke all you want, plumber boy. You and I are one and the same.

TREVOR

With one difference.

PATRICIA

Oh, really? And what's that?

TREVOR

I walked.

PATRICIA

And now look at you. Crawling back.

TREVOR

Is that what you think?

PATRICIA

It's what I know. You think your life is hell now? Give it a few weeks. You'll be begging to be Returned.

TREVOR

You are sick.

PATRICIA

I know, baby. Make me better.

Trevor walks over slowly. They eye each other.

TREVOR

Met your latest. The One...if I'm not mistaken. Quite a looker.

PATRICIA

Worth even more than we'd hoped. Come back, baby, and a life of SIM is yours forever.

Trevor reaches Patricia and puts a hand up her skirt. He leans in, WHISPERS in her ear.

TREVOR

How about I keep an eye on that...

He pushes his hand harder.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

...prize of yours? Keep her out of trouble?

Patricia tries mightily to maintain focus.

PATRICIA

Such the gentleman. Jake's already on duty, but it'd be fun to see who wins her...

(moans softly)

...heart.

Trevor jumps off, leaving Patricia panting. A look passes between them like two poker players.

TREVOR

Access to geo-locate?



PATRICIA  
Access...

As Patricia pushes forward, skirt rising.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)  
...granted.

TREVOR  
Be in touch.

Trevor leaves.

PATRICIA  
Yes, we will. And Baby, welcome  
back.

Door closes.

EXT. WAY STATION CAMPUS

Cassie crosses campus, checks the time on her e-device:

CHYRON: 10 hours remain.

Maintenance workers erect Jubilee banners, balloons,  
streamers, spray paint logos onto the artificial turf and set  
up LED tickers counting up to 9 billion in anticipation of  
the celebration.

Others scan into the Arrival building.

INT. ARRIVAL BUILDING, AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

New worker orientation. Cassie takes a seat in the packed  
auditorium. Lights dim. A slick promotional video with flashy  
graphics and music plays.

Patricia arrives on stage to loud applause.

PATRICIA  
Welcome new workers, welcome to The  
Way Station!

New video without sound plays in the background showing the  
process of Arriving: pixelating, entering clothed human  
shell, receiving chip, waking.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

The world depends on The Way Station, on you, working tirelessly behind the scenes, 24/7 to deliver to it able-bodied, productive citizens. So you didn't have a life worth living or you've magnanimously chosen to save others from your basest self. The Way Station thanks you.

Video freezes on a pod screen showing Launch and Return buttons.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Quite simply, without you, life ceases.

Video unfreezes. Launch lights up. A wisp of white smoke follows.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

We are thrilled to have you on our team.

Loud applause.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Lastly, as many of you already know, we will soon be welcoming our 9 billionth. In celebration, we have planned a veritable extravaganza, The Titanium Jubilee!

Loud applause.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Enjoy this short video, after which I will turn the presentation over to your Trainer. Welcome all!

The Jubilee promo video has all the pomp and circumstance of the Olympics' Opening Ceremony. In place of a traveling torch, LED tickers, placed throughout the campus, count up to 9 billion.

As Patricia exits, Cassie leaves to meet her.

EXT. AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

CASSIE

Patricia.

PATRICIA  
(surprised, recovers)  
Cassandra.

CASSIE  
I want to thank you for getting me  
back in one piece. Thigh's a bit  
mangled but could have been a lot  
worse.  
(beat)  
Funny, you're no worse for the  
wear.

Patricia looks at her watch.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Our secret.

Rachel appears, lab coat and headset in hand.

PATRICIA  
Rachel, my sweet.

Patricia gestures to Cassie.

RACHEL  
(to Cassie)  
This way, please.

Cassie checks the time:

CHYRON: 12 hours remain.

She follows.

INT. ARRIVAL BUILDING HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Hallways fill as auditorium lets out.

Cassie puts on the lab coat, carries a headset as she and  
Rachel walk to the Arrival Bay.

CASSIE  
There was a guy earlier, Trevor  
from maintenance, banging on my  
door, yelling for Erika.

Rachel momentarily freezes.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Saw you leave Circus with her. She  
okay?

Cassie looks over.

RACHEL

If I had a minute of SIM every time  
some guy was yelling around here  
about some girl, I'd be on  
permanent holiday drinking mai tais  
with James Dean in the south of  
France. Here we are.

INT. ARRIVAL BAY - 8:00AM - 11 HOURS REMAIN

Rachel and Cassie enter.

Pods fill with pixels and empty, fill and empty.

Hosts escort Blues.

CASSIE

And Alex, how's he doing? I texted  
him but never heard back.

RACHEL

Guess he's not interested.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jake sees Rachel and Cassie via security camera.

Yo-yo has replaced paddle ball.

INTERCUT: CONTROL ROOM AND ARRIVAL BAY

JAKE

(through headset)  
Hey, Audrey.

Cassie looks around.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(through headset)  
Up here.

Jake waves from Control Room.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(through headset)  
What do you say we grab a bite?  
Debrief on all things fungi...ble.

Cassie gives a blank stare.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
(through headset)  
Great, see you later.

RACHEL  
(to Jake through headset)  
That's sweet. You done?  
Give her access.

Jake flips a switch.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
(to Cassie)  
You manage this section. When one  
turns Blue, wait for the narration  
to end...

Rachel points to her headset.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
...and escort them out, review  
life's highs and lows, then  
decision time. Directions, scripts,  
all in here.

Rachel points to the e-device.

CASSIE  
Who are they, these Blues?

RACHEL  
You were one. Special selections,  
people who would have Returned, now  
given a second chance. To work  
here.

CASSIE  
And you're sure they would have  
Returned?

RACHEL  
If killing your mother is what  
you're after, Launch & Return is  
open 24/7. Now, if you'll excuse  
me.

Rachel walks away, phones Patricia.

INT. PATRICIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Patricia answers.

INTERCUT: ARRIVAL BAY AND PATRICIA'S OFFICE

RACHEL

Trevor met mushroom girl.

PATRICIA

Yes, seems the ghost of Erika introduced them.

RACHEL

Shall I Return him?

PATRICIA

Oh, Rachel, that's sweet, but I think my Mr. Fix-it will soon be back to show off his tools. That was him earlier, begging forgiveness.

RACHEL

And he knows Erika Launched?

PATRICIA

I explained it, yes. In his own way, I believe he was sorry about-

RACHEL

His tiny paycheck?

PATRICIA

(laughs)

You know me, all about second chances. We're only unborn humans after all. Keep an eye on him for me, will you?

RACHEL

Of course, anything else?

PATRICIA

That's all, my little Harajuku.

Rachel and Patricia disconnect.

INT. ARRIVAL BAY - CONTINUOUS

Cassie tunes into pod as newly arrived BESTSELLING AUTHOR pixellates.

INT. POD 3, SCREEN - CONTINUOUS

Life clips play.

SYNTHESIZED FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
 ...Raised by two loving parents,  
 you will marry well, have two  
 happy, healthy children and quite a  
 successful career as a bestselling  
 author. No major illnesses or  
 accidents.

The woman disappears in a BRIGHT WHITE SPARK.

CUT TO:

Woman diapering a baby.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

JAKE  
 Apparently, reading is not so  
 fundamental. Arrivederci.

Jake marks "win" on the pad then does a few yo-yo tricks  
 ("breakaway", "walk the dog"...)

INTERCUT: CONTROL ROOM AND ARRIVAL BAY

Cassie tunes in midway to newly arrived DRUG ADDICT, watches  
 life clips on e-device:

Teenagers run through a field, get high.

One kid lies passed out by a tree, a needle hanging from his  
 arm.

SYNTHESIZED FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
 ...parents never marry. Your father  
 is absent. At 13, you develop a  
 drug habit you never kick. You hold  
 a relatively steady job as a dock  
 worker. You have a girlfriend for a  
 brief period but she gets sober and  
 the relationship ends.

Life clip shows a lone kid coming to in a field. Drug Addict  
 tries to get up, stumbles.

SYNTHESIZED FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
 Eventually, you overdose alone in a  
 halfway house in your early 50s.

Jake "rocks the baby."

Drug Addict disappears in a BRIGHT WHITE SPARK.

Jake  
Ho, ho, balls to the wall. Dude!

Jake marks "lose."

Cassie tunes into another pod.

Life Clips:

-A MOTHER on a hospital bed cradles her newborn. The FATHER leans in. Both are astounded and thrilled with their baby.

-Mother feeding baby in high chair. Baby throws food. Mother laughs.

-Father pushing 5yo on bicycle. Cheers as she rides away.

-Mother fixing daughter's hair, making ringlet curls.

-Age 7, sings in school play.

-Age 10, singing on bigger stage.

-Age 12, winning singing competition.

-Age 23, On stage at Met.

-Picnicking in flowered meadow with a gorgeous MAN.

Woman disappears in a BRIGHT WHITE SPARK.

Cassie tears up.

A pod turns Blue. Cassie approaches the pod holding open a clothed human shell. Pod opens. Pixels swarm in. Shell self-seals. She air-guns ID chip into their neck and escorts out newly arrived LOSER.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CASSIE

On September 12 you will be born.  
That is should you choose to be  
born.

Life clips:

-A young teen girl sets a box on the steps of a hospital and walks off. Sound of BABY CRYING.

LOSER

Hold on a minute, my mom leaves me,  
just like that?



CASSIE

She does.

Life clips follow in montage fashion.

-Loser, age 4, eating in a large cafeteria.

ANGLE ON: A COUPLE in the doorway. ORPHANAGE WORKER approaches. A child hides food in the fold of her dress before greeting the couple. The FEMALE of couple kneels to greet the child.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

A loving couple adopts you.

-Age 9, leaving trailer with father and sibling to go fishing. They run through woods, catch frogs.

-Age 18, crosses stage to receive high school diploma. Celebration at Chi Chi's.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

A man you love leaves you.

-Age 22, pregnant, working line at Wendy's.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Another man comes along and you marry.

-Age 23, evening, at home with friends. Men are playing cards drinking beer. Women with their babies in kitchen.

-Age 25, finds HUSBAND in bed with her best friend.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

But that doesn't work out either.

-Age 27, in night class at community college.

-Age 30, desk job.

Lights come up.

LOSER

So that's it?

CASSIE

Of course there's more, but those are the highlights. I will now take you to the Determination Room where you will make your decision.

LOSER

I don't need time. I already know.

CASSIE

I understand but protocol requires.  
You don't want to give it all up  
without some reflection.

LOSER

Who says I'm giving anything up?

CASSIE

You're going to Launch?

LOSER

I'm going to live. Don't look so  
surprised.

CASSIE

I just thought-

LOSER

So my life's not filled with glitz  
and glamor, money and romance, the  
razzle dazzle, but it's a life.  
After that crap beginning, people  
take care of me, I get a family, I  
have a healthy daughter. I'm loved.

Cassie is silent.

LOSER (CONT'D)

And were I lucky enough to stay  
here, what do I get? A job like  
yours? Where I can pass judgment  
but pretend not to. You call that a  
life? No thanks. I'll Launch and  
take my chances.

INT. BREAK ROOM - 9:00AM - 10 HOURS REMAIN

Cassie enters. Crowded. Cameras adjust. She checks the time  
on her e-device:

CHYRON: 10 hours remain

Cassie pours herself a glass of placental nutrition.

Gretchen, engrossed in Donkey Kong, messes up.

GRETCHEN

Aw, shut the fuck door!

HURLS a ninja star. Break room clears.

Cassie doesn't react.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
 (from across the room)  
 Newbie, pour me a glass. Extra  
 aminos.

Cassie pours a second glass, spoons in acids.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
 More.

Cassie empties the bowl of amino acids into the glass, pulls the ninja star from the wall and uses it to stir then drops it in.

CASSIE  
 Here you go, and name's Cassie.

Gretchen takes the star out, licks it.

GRETCHEN  
 Newbie looks sad.

Gretchen pats the seat beside her.

Cassie remains standing.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
 Let me guess. You just hosted some  
 sad-sack life, not tragic but  
 nothing to write home about and yet  
 she waxed poetic about the  
 'experience,' the road less  
 traveled, the love! And dammit if  
 she didn't Launch her ass right out  
 of here.

CASSIE  
 Yes! How did you—

GRETCHEN  
 Because I can read you like a  
 leaflet. That and I saw the  
 schedule today.

Gretchen takes a long swallow.

CASSIE  
 When are you due?

GRETCHEN

None of your buzz wax. Nine days.

CASSIE

What if I told you pain was the most powerful portal to consciousness? Or can be.

GRETCHEN

I'd say you were smoking something and can I have some? Or you met Trevor. Maybe both.

CASSIE

What are we hiding out here for?

GRETCHEN

Welcome to the wound station. I'm saving my sister. Can't answer for you.

CASSIE

But she's okay.

GRETCHEN

And live with that guilt lorded over me my whole life? No, thank you. You sure got a lot of good advice for everyone else. Why don't you jet the eff out of here?

CASSIE

I kill my mother!

GRETCHEN

Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know your pain was more important than mine. My bad.

CASSIE

Maybe zoning out for the rest of your existence in some dead person's life is the answer.

Gretchen rises to put more aminos in her glass but the bowl is empty. She leans against the counter.

GRETCHEN

How did you meet Trevor already, and better question, has he gotten into your shell?

CASSIE

Met his girlfriend at Circus and apparently I'm now in her apartment, which in itself is weird, like they knew she'd be leaving? She's MIA and he came looking for her.

GRETCHEN

MIA equals Launch or Return, one or the other - not that complicated.

CASSIE

Doesn't seem fishy to you? Whatever happened to good-bye?

GRETCHEN

No matter how long you've been here, it's upsetting when someone leaves, but hey private matter, personal choice.

Gretchen finishes her placental nutrition, hands Cassie her glass.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Got a meeting.

CASSIE

Hello-my-name-is?

Gretchen nods.

GRETCHEN

We'll be kickin' it at Circus later. Come find us.

Cassie is preoccupied.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

See you 'round. That is, if you're still around.

Gretchen winks and exits.

EXT. CAMPUS WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Cassie takes the longer route home through a wooded area with real grass, flowers, trees that max out at 50ft. She lifts a handful of soil and inhales. Everything smells plain as paper.

Clip FLASHES: digging in the woods with her mother, Kate.

Trevor just happens along.

TREVOR  
We meet again.

CASSIE  
Because you're tracking me.

Cassie tucks a sprig of lavender behind her ear, gathers wildflowers, pockets a few stones.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Any word on Erika?

Trevor hesitates.

TREVOR  
She Returned.

CASSIE  
What?

TREVOR  
We'd talked about it, but I never thought. Well, private matter-

CASSIE  
Personal choice, right.  
(beat)  
I'm sorry.

TREVOR  
Thanks.

Cassie inspects a patch of mushrooms and picks one.

CASSIE  
According to my clips I change the world with these, the below ground part, mycorrhizal fungi. An enormous underground network of microscopic threads that connects and communicates with every plant we see on the earth's surface. The entire above ground world connected from below - the dark giving way to the light. Amazing.

Cassie holds up the mushroom, inhales deeply. She shakes her head, holds it out for Trevor. He leans in, sniffs, shrugs.

Trevor looks down at her mangled thigh.

TREVOR  
Smells different up there, huh?

CASSIE  
A lot different.  
(beat)  
Hard to believe, but fungi made the world as we know it, consuming minerals locked in rocks which created soil and plants and animals.

Trevor  
And us.  
(beat)  
I mean people, humanity.

Awkward...in a good way.

CASSIE  
That's right. Fungi are this super material - renewable, durable, 100% recyclable. And thanks to me a solution to global housing. Guess someone else'll have to do it. Although according to you I should Launch and get conscious?

Trevor looks confused.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Pain? The most powerful portal to consciousness? Erika told me. I like the sound of it but following through is the part I'm having trouble with.

TREVOR  
You and me both.

She splits the shaggy growth in two, holds out a piece.

CASSIE  
Trust me?

Trevor takes it.

TREVOR  
No.

Cassie holds hers in her mouth.

CASSIE  
One...

Trevor puts his piece in his mouth.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
...two...

Trevor removes it.

TREVOR  
How far along were you in your  
studies when you—?

CASSIE  
...three!

Cassie pops the mushroom and chews. Trevor pops and chews.

TREVOR  
Mmm. Nutty.

CASSIE  
Green-beany.

TREVOR  
Briny.

CASSIE  
Dirt.

Suddenly, Cassie doubles over, CLUTCHES her stomach.

Trevor RUNS over.

TREVOR  
Oh Jesus, Cassie, are you okay?

Cassie stands up, laughs.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Really?

Trevor spies a large pine cone, pulls out a pocket knife and pries open a closed shaft, shells the nut, offers it to her Cassie.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Second course.

CASSIE  
Look at you.

TREVOR  
In my clips I spent a lot of time  
out in nature with my little  
brother.

(MORE)



TREVOR (CONT'D)

Taught ourselves all we needed to survive in the great outdoors.

Cassie takes the seed. They both chew. He cups the pinecone, presents it as a gift.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

M'lady.

They reach her apartment.

CASSIE

This is me.

TREVOR

Guess I'll see you around.

CASSIE

I'm sure I will.

Awkward moment. Trevor leaves.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - 9 HOURS REMAIN/10:00AM

On a living room bookshelf Cassie lays out the items she collected on her walk creating a small altar.

INT. PATRICIA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Patricia, nursing a martini, watches Cassie via camera in Cassie's apartment.

She, too, sets up an altar space: fake flowers in acrylic water, lights a half-burnt candle, stares blankly into the flame.

FLASHES on memory of baby by dumpster, faint CRIES play as her e-device registers Trevor en route to Circus.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Cassie adds a photo of herself and Kate and lights a candle.

CASSIE

(whispers)

Mom, I'm making a wish.

Cassie replays her life clips. A different accident scene plays...

...one where there is no accident.

Stunned, Cassie replays both clips. Again. Again. Again.  
She pauses the clip, stares, enters meditative state.

INT. MALL, SIMUL-DREAM SEQUENCE 2 - DAY

Kate and Cassie, 25, walk a stark-white mall crowded with people "frozen" in place.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
I change the world but I can't be  
born because I kill you.  
Accidentally. At least I think I  
do.

KATE  
You're killing me now. Slow down.

They slow down, window shop.

KATE (CONT'D)  
(points to her belly)  
And I have no say?

Cassie stops, turns.

CASSIE  
You want me to kill you?

KATE  
I can't wait to be a mother, am  
desperate for it. Your father and I  
worked hard to make this happen.  
There are risks yes, of course to  
live fully is to risk. I want this  
baby. I want you and you want to  
take that away from me?

Kate takes Cassie's hand.

KATE (CONT'D)  
Besides, what's the alternative?

CASSIE  
Return me. Get your money back. Did  
you keep the receipt?

Kate searches through her purse.

KATE  
Oh, where did I put it?

The purse grows larger...

KATE (CONT'D)

I know it's in here somewhere.

...and larger still until the two are inside of it.

CASSIE

Are you sure they gave you one?

KATE

Here it is!

Cassie grabs the receipt and reads.

CASSIE

No returns. Store credit only.

(beat)

Anything else you want? Vases? A mixer?

KATE

No, just you. I just want you. And all that that brings.

END SIMUL-DREAM SEQUENCE 2

INT. KATE AND PETER'S BEDROOM - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

KATE

(talking in her sleep)

No mixer, no vases-

PETER

Sweetie, wake up.

KATE

Hm, what? Oh. The dream again. She kills me. Or is afraid she'll kill me?

PETER

Karate kick on the way out?

Kate groans.

KATE

And she changes the world.

PETER

Without you, the world would certainly be changed.

Kate and Peter cuddle and go back to sleep.

INT. PATRICIA'S PENTHOUSE - 8 HOURS REMAIN/11:00AM

Patricia downs her drink and extinguishes the flame with finger.

The wick SIZZLES as a thin wisp of SMOKE rises.

She heads out.

INT. CIRCUS, SECOND FLOOR BAR - CONTINUOUS

Trevor, masked as batman, at the bar nursing a glass of placental nutrition spiked with extra ketone bodies.

INT. CIRCUS, THIRD FLOOR PRIVATE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jake and Cassie enter. Dinner has just been served.

Inside the smoked-glass room it appears as if they are touring the bottom of the ocean at dusk, bioluminescence trailing as they move about. Gentle music plays as realistic images of sea turtles float by. Fish dart in and out from a coral reef.

Glasses raised, they cheer and drink.

Cassie points to the hanging mushroom string lights.

CASSIE

Nice touch.

JAKE

Like it?

Jake pulls a box from under his chair.

JAKE (CONT'D)

And I got you this.

Cassie opens box revealing a "Mushrooms are Magic" t-shirt.

CASSIE

Thank you. Fun fact: a morel and a button mushroom are about as closely related to each other as a flea is to an elephant.

Jake isn't trying to appear blank. It just comes naturally.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
 Okay, okay, moratorium on the  
 fungus amongus. No, okay,  
 seriously, stopping.

Cassie checks the time on her e-device:

CHYRON: 9 hours remain

She twirls spaghetti on her fork.

JAKE  
 You late for something?

CASSIE  
 Any idea what happened to Alex?

More blankness.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
 The prodigy? From the cafeteria?

And still more.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
 Rachel took him before we SIM'd?  
 Been texting and nothing.

JAKE  
 Busy, I guess.

CASSIE  
 And this other woman, gone, too.  
 Trevor, the maintenance guy, her  
 boyfriend, came looking for her.  
 I'm in her old apartment which is  
 weird, no? Like she was scheduled  
 to be on her way out?

JAKE  
 You and Britt ought to start your  
 own show.

CASSIE  
 So Trevor came looking for her and  
 got me instead.

JAKE  
 Lucky man.

Jake winks.

JAKE (CONT'D)

And as far as people coming and going? Their business. Good-bye is hard. Some choose not to. Private matter-

CASSIE

Personal choice, right. Hear that a lot.

Cassie takes a piece of bread.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

So what do you do all day up in the God Tower?

JAKE

A lot of tech stuff. Pretty dull, actually.

CASSIE

Ever wonder what it might be like to not be a, you know...I mean, what if instead you were just a regular guy. Hardworking, construction, middle management, I don't know, maybe a lawyer with a loving wife, two kids, good father. That sort of thing?

Jake's jaw tightens.

JAKE

And your point?

CASSIE

Seems like it'd be easy or possible to, up in that tower, I don't know, maybe change things? With all that tech stuff? I mean, just think, if I didn't kill my mom I would Launch and change the world.

JAKE

But you do kill her.

CASSIE

Do I?

Jake on the edge of losing it.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Aha, gotcha! Of course, I do. Ha.

Cassie raises a glass.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
To saving the world...from the  
likes of us.

Jake raises his glass.

JAKE  
To saving the world.

They toast.

INT. SECOND FLOOR BAR CIRCUS - CONTINUOUS

Patricia enters the bar wearing a quite large, feathered mask.

BARTENDER  
Rooster. Nine o'clock.

Trevor looks to the door then downs his placental nutrition. The bartender pours him another. Patricia locks in, approaches, goes to finish his drink and thinks better of it, fingers his collar.

PATRICIA  
(in his ear)  
Hey, Little Boy Blue. I've come to  
blow your...

Patricia slowly tugs on his zipper.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)  
...horn.

TREVOR  
Lucky me.

Patricia pulls the zipper lower...

PATRICIA  
Good things await those who see the  
error of their ways and come  
crawling back on their hands and  
knees.

...and runs her hand down inside. Trevor nods at the bartender who pours him another drink. Trevor downs it then grabs Patricia's claw.

TREVOR

You wouldn't be tracking me now,  
would you Patricia?

PATRICIA

Can't two people be thirsty en même  
temps?

"Love Rollercoaster" by The Ohio Players comes on.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Oh, T, they're playing our song.

Patricia drags Trevor onto the dance floor.

INT. CIRCUS, THIRD FLOOR PRIVATE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jake and Cassie wave their hands in the air creating a trail  
of bioluminescence.

CASSIE

What else can this room do?

Via remote, Jake turns off the mirroring on the glass-  
enclosed room. Suddenly it's apparent they are above a  
crowded bar. Both get up.

Cassie sees someone in a blue jumpsuit who looks an awful lot  
like Trevor grinding with a woman in stilettos on the dance  
floor.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Trevor and...Patricia?

JAKE

Very funny. And just a heads up.  
Watch out for that guy.

CASSIE

And why is that?

JAKE

Has a reputation is all.

CASSIE

Unlike some people?

Jake pushes a lock of hair behind Cassie's ear. Pulls her  
closer.

JAKE

Just be careful is all I'm saying.



Cassie looks back at the dance floor to see Patricia and Trevor still grinding. Cassie suddenly turns, holds up her glass.

CASSIE  
Got anything stronger?

Jake turns the mirroring back on. Privacy returned, he pours spiked nutrition from the mini bar.

Cassie downs hers. Jake joins her. She hits the table for another.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Retch said they'd all be here tonight.

JAKE  
I'll bet I know where. Let's go.

Cassie and Jake go to the first-floor bar where they meet up with Gretchen, Britt and Matt for dancing.

INT. CIRCUS, SECOND FLOOR BAR - CONTINUOUS

Trevor and Patricia go to the bar. Trevor looks down onto the 1st floor bar, sees Jake and Cassie, both unmasked, dirty dancing.

INT. CIRCUS, FIRST FLOOR BAR - CONTINUOUS

Britt stumbles through the bar on her way out for a smoke.

Cassie joins Gretchen and Matt at the bar.

CASSIE  
Where's Britt?

No one pays Cassie any attention.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Guys, Britt?

MATT  
Out for a smoke.

Cassie takes off.

EXT. CIRCUS - 7 HOURS REMAIN/NOON

Cassie exits breathless, looks around, sees Britt alone smoking, runs over.

CASSIE  
Britt!

BRITT  
Hey, girl.

Britt drags on her cigarette, loops arms with Cassie and walks her away from the entrance.

Cassie looks around.

CASSIE  
Hey, Ali, what do you say we head back in?

BRITT  
'Fraid of the dark?

Britt mock dives and dodges.

CASSIE  
People have a tendency to disappear around here. Like, right here.

BRITT  
You get used to it. Learn not to get too close. Personal matter, private-

CASSIE  
Okay, let's cut the crap.

Britt puts out her cigarette.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
All this human potential coincidentally thwarted by tragedy. You, Matt, Retch, me?

Britt pulls out another cigarette.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
People who conveniently disappear. And, perhaps not so coincidentally, some around here just happen to have a lot more money-

Britt lights up again.

Cassie pulls up her pant leg to reveal her thigh.

BRITT

Nasty.

Britt reaches to touch it.

BRITT (CONT'D)

And kind of beautiful. What was it like? Out in the real world?

Cassie pulls away, rolls down her pant leg.

CASSIE

Amazing. What I remember anyway.

BRITT

How'd you get back?

CASSIE

Had an expert guide. Patricia.

Stunned silence.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Has contacts above ground. And let's just say she ain't helping feed the needy.

(beat)

Making some sort of deal...

Matt, Gretchen, Jake appear.

BRITT

Hey, y'all.

Jake's e-device BUZZES.

JAKE

Duty calls.

CASSIE

At this hour?

Cassie and Britt exchange looks.

BRITT

Such dedication.

JAKE

(to Cassie)

I'll walk you home.

CASSIE  
I'm good. Goon squad's got me covered.

Britt, Cassie, Gretchen and Matt go off in one direction, Jake in another.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jake and Rachel meet.

RACHEL  
You're looking weirder than usual.

JAKE  
I fucked up. Cassie knows. Gave her a copy of the edit.

RACHEL  
As fuckups go, that's impressive. Well done.

JAKE  
Thank you.

RACHEL  
And you've already deleted, right?

Jake works the keyboard, searching.

JAKE  
Do you have to-

RACHEL  
-tell Patricia?  
(beat)  
Normally, yes, but it's my neck as much as yours.

Jake finds the clip where Kate lives and deletes it.

JAKE  
I owe you.

RACHEL  
Don't mention it. A month of SIM should cover it.

JAKE  
What?

RACHEL  
You're right. Make it two.

Jake sends it over. PING!

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
Now, for code. I've got three.

JAKE  
Busy Hal.

RACHEL  
Some of us work around here.

Rachel works her e-device.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
Sending.

Jake does his computer thing.

JAKE  
Got it. Releasing.

RACHEL  
Ain't nothing higher.

EXT. CAMPUS - 6 HOURS REMAIN/1:00PM

Cassie, Matt, Gretchen and Britt walking home from Circus.

Cassie checks the time on her e-device:

CHYRON: 6 hours remain

GRETCHEN  
Princess late for a very important  
date?

CASSIE  
Oh look, the Big Dipper.

Cassie points.

GRETCHEN  
Bang up algorithm, no?

Just ahead, a small drone BUZZES.

CASSIE  
Watch this.

Cassie takes four long-jump strides and Jordans herself into the air, snags the drone and hurls it in the opposite direction.

GRETCHEN

Damn girl.

MATT

Drone mess with you!

Matt does his own version of the run-and-jump only it's more like the trip-and-fall. All applaud. Matt does a perfect-hair toss and curtsy.

CASSIE

So what keeps you from venturing out of the bunker?

MATT

The part where I go crazy and get locked up.

CASSIE

Right, the universal crazies. Do you hurt anyone?

GRETCHEN

Here we go, Miss Rainbow, Fungus and Butterflies. Hit it.

MATT

Just my hopes and dreams.

CASSIE

At least you don't kill your mother, don't have to live with that.

MATT

But we do live with it. I mean we're talking about it right now, feeling it, sort of. And we're not even born!

BRITT

Girl's getting deep.

Cassie stops.

CASSIE

So I should kill my mom?

Matt turn, puts his arm around her.

MATT

Oh, don't listen to me. It's the Circus talking. Tell me about your favorite clip.

CASSIE

(dreamy)

Star gazing with my mom looking up  
at that beautiful beeg deeper. You?

Matt goes into a drama mode.

MATT

Curtain's down and I walk out on  
stage. I'm in my tux - piqué  
collar, double cuffs, silk bow.  
There's that szh-szh, white-noise  
buzzing sound of the crowd settling  
in - loud, soft, loud. Everything's  
completely still. The curtain  
rises. And I sing.

Matt belts out the opening lines to Nessun Dorma.

Matt (CONT'D)

(bright, clear tenor)

Nessun dorma! Nessun dorma! Tu  
pure, oh Principessa.

Cassie, Gretchen and Britt are dumbstruck.

GRETCHEN

Mama mia!

BRITT

Papa pia!

CASSIE

You're amazing.

Cassie locks arms with Matt.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

I think some crazy dude with  
perfect hair needs to Launch that  
amazing voice into the world.

MATT

Maybe. Someday. A couple months to  
figure it out.

They arrive in front of the Britt's apartment building.

CASSIE

Let us walk you up.

BRITT

I'm good. Night all.

All say good-bye and part.

INT. BRITT'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Britt enters her apartment, switches on the light.

Rachel is seated in the living room.

RACHEL

Welcome home, Britt. Have fun?

Henchman 1 and 2 appear. Britt tries to run. Henchman 1 zip ties her wrists. Henchman 2 runs tape across her mouth. All exit.

EXT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Gretchen and Matt drop Cassie off.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Cassie enters her apartment, pours herself a glass of nutrition.

FLASHES on the LOSER from earlier.

LOSER (V.O.)

And were I lucky enough to stay  
here. A job where I can pass  
judgment? You call that a life?

Cassie goes to the living room and projects happy life clips.

-Kate appears in a home movie, talks directly to the camera.

KATE ON SCREEN

Cassie!

CASSIE

(thinking Kate's in room)  
Yes, what? I'm here!

KATE ON SCREEN

Earth to Cassandra.

-Cassie, age 7, inspecting an ant hill, looks up, runs to Kate.

Cassie realizes she's talking to the projection.



INT. CHIP EXTRACTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Britt, strapped face up on the gurney, YELLS through tape.

Rachel, Henchman 1 and 2 stand by.

INTERCUT: CASSIE'S APARTMENT AND CHIP EXTRACTION ROOM

Happy life clips play:

-Cassie and Kate, hair in curlers together, eating cotton candy.

RACHEL

Let her speak.

Henchman 1 rips off the tape.

Britt fights against the straps.

Happy life clips play:

-Family at park, winning stuffed animal at a fair.

Henchman 2 fills syringe.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Time to Return.

Happy life clips play:

-Family jumping waves at the beach.

BRITT

Feel better calling it Return? How is this any better than what you would have been on the other side - an orphan whore pimping out her daughter for drugs.

Rachel nods to administer the sedative.

RACHEL

Anything else?

Cassie curls up on sofa.

BRITT

(groggy)  
They know.

Rachel laughs.

Britt goes limp on the gurney.

RACHEL  
 (to Henchman 1)  
 Remove it.

With Britt still strapped, the gurney rotates 180°. A claw-like device at the end of a metal arm descends and simultaneously laser cuts and seals back of neck to remove chip.

Pixels seep. Shell deflates.

Reflection of happy clips play across Cassie's face.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
 (via e-device, to Jake)  
 Central, come in.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

JAKE  
 (via e-device)  
 Central. I read you.

INT. CHIP EXTRACTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RACHEL  
 (via e-device)  
 Next art sensation ready for  
 download. Over.

INT. OR - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

Woman in hospital bed having just delivered.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

JAKE  
 (via e-device)  
 Roger that. Releasing. Good night.

INT. OR - BIRTH WORLD - CONTINUOUS

Machine prints code. Syringe prepared. Doctor inserts needle with code into newborn.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - 5 HOURS REMAINS/2:00PM

Cassie hears repeating voices from earlier:

KATE (V.O.)  
But you want to be born, right?

LOSER (V.O.)  
You call that a life?

ERIKA (V.O.)  
Pain, the most powerful portal to  
consciousness.

Cassie sits, inhales deeply, closes her eyes.

CASSIE  
(holding head, whispers)  
Mom, help me.

EXT. BACKYARD POOL, SIMUL-DREAM SEQUENCE 3 - DAY

Cassie, 25, in a swim cap and one-piece suit, alone, poised on the edge of a pristine backyard pool. The sky is a bright cloudless blue, the grass perfect. She dives in.

Cassie underwater, eyes closed, smiling, bubbles trailing as she descends but then she just keeps going deeper. The water darkens. She's out of air, flailing in a panic as she starts toward the now dark and roiling surface.

From underwater, Cassie sees Kate standing at the edge of the pool under a storm-dark sky, her image rippling, hair and clothes whipping in the wind as she searches for Cassie.

From Kate's POV she sees movement underwater, a body struggling.

Cassie wants to surface but she's frozen.

The sky cracks open.

END SIMUL-DREAM SEQUENCE 3

INT. KATE AND PETER'S BEDROOM

Kate wakes screaming. Peter comforts her.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Cassie checks the time on her e-device:

CHYRON: 5 hours remain.

FLASHES on:

PATRICIA (V.O.)

Our secret.

Cassie changes to go running.

EXT. CAMPUS WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Cassie runs in woods, a flower behind her ear. Trevor appears. They fall in step together.

The running path is lined with reflective titanium-colored balls. Streamers run from one tree to the next. Launch numbers flip by on the LED ticker like seconds on a clock.

TREVOR  
Enjoy yourself at Circus?

CASSIE  
Mm, you?

TREVOR  
Yeah, okay.

CASSIE  
Looked like it was better than  
okay.

TREVOR  
Could say the same for you. You got  
a thing for serial killers?

CASSIE  
You got a thing for birds of prey?

TREVOR  
Touché.

CASSIE  
What's her story?

TREVOR  
Young, alone, incest, pregnant,  
abandons her newborn by a dumpster.

Cassie stops.

Trevor, seeing Cassie is no longer beside him, runs back.

CASSIE  
Why in the world did that woman  
launch?

Trevor looks at Cassie...

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Kind of pokes a hole in your pain  
theory or maybe it's just not for  
everyone.

...and looks away.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Oh, we're going to pretend, is that  
it? Sure, okay and this...

Cassie points to her thigh.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
...happened in the shower, I guess.

A digital cloud passes overhead. The "sun" dims.

Cassie shakes her head, takes off running. The flower falls  
to the ground.

INT. PATRICIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Patricia seated, staring up at a monitor.

Rachel paces.

PATRICIA  
Come on.

Waiting.

PING! Bank account fills.

Rachel runs to monitor, stands behind Patricia's chair.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)  
(relieved, whispers)  
Daddio.

RACHEL  
Permission to download.

PATRICIA  
Permission granted.

Rachel runs out.

INT. ARRIVAL BAY - CONTINUOUS

The usual hive of activity.

Rachels enters out of breath.

Cassie crosses room.

CASSIE

Where's Britt? Told me she'd be working.

RACHEL

Called in sick. Circus does that to a person.

CASSIE

I'm here and I saw her before we all left. She was-

RACHEL

Blue.

Rachel points to a pod.

CASSIE

You take it.

Cassie runs out of the Arrival Bay, ducks into bathroom and ties mirror shard to back of neck.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - 4 HOURS REMAIN/3:00PM

Jake's yo-yo is now replaced by cup and ball which he manipulates with impressive dexterity until he sees Cassie run out of Arrival Bay.

INTERCUT: ARRIVAL BAY AND CONTROL ROOMS

JAKE

(to Rachel through headset)  
Way Station to Orphan Whore,  
Diamond on the loose.

RACHEL

(to Jake through headset)  
Let her go. And say your good-byes.  
Payment received and downloading.

Rachel approaches the Blue pod.

Jake hurls the cup and ball at the wall.

INT. BREAK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cassie enters, sees Gretchen tucked in a corner, creating a long cord on a Knitting Nancy. The room is empty. Cassie pours two glasses, carries them and the bowl of amino acids over to Gretchen whose face is red and puffy.

Gretchen spoons acids into her cup, drinks down half, holds up the contraption she's using.

GRETCHEN

Did you know the Knitting Nancy,  
also known as the Bizzy Lizzy, is a  
relative of the medieval lucet?  
Pretty scarf.

Cassie tucks her "scarf" under her collar, sits next to Gretchen.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Most of the clothes from that time  
were laced together by a cord.

Gretchen holds up the purple cord she's made.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

By threading and turning and  
lifting the one over the other...

Head down, Gretchen demonstrates the process on the Nancy.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

...it created something to keep  
your shirt from flying open.  
Genius, no?

Gretchen coils the cord around her head.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Going to be a hat.

CASSIE

That's nice.

GRETCHEN

You tried last night. I know. I  
thought you were just being-

Paranoid.

CASSIE

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Stupid. Crazy.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

I mean what does a paranoid,  
stupid, crazy Newbie know?

(MORE)

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Anyway, Returned, late last night  
or early this morning.

CASSIE

You mean was Returned, don't you?

Gretchen knits faster.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Easier to zone out on SIM, huh?

GRETCHEN

That horse of yours? Didn't seem  
possible, but it's gotten taller.

CASSIE

Tell me about Launch and Return.  
How it works.

GRETCHEN

You going out on us, too?

Cassie shrugs.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

You put in your request and-

CASSIE

Thought it's my choice?

GRETCHEN

No one's denied but there's a  
process. Once approved, off you go.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Private matter-

CASSIE

Personal choice.

GRETCHEN

Someone's been studying.

CASSIE

And Return versus Launch versus  
Return? Just hope the idiot behind  
the keyboard gets the buttons  
right?

GRETCHEN

That, a triple verification process  
and hope the idiot likes you or at  
the very least doesn't hate your  
guts.



Gretchen stands, pockets her Nancy.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
Back on the clock. See you round.

Gretchen leaves.

EXT. CAMPUS - 4:00PM - 3 HOURS REMAIN

Cassie walks to her apartment, checks the time on her e-device:

CHYRON: 3 hours remain.

Cassie FLASHES on:

EXT. ROAD SIDE - BIRTH WORLD - DAY

Cassie hip checks Kate as a SPEEDING car approaches. Kate loses her footing and is killed instantly.

EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Cassie hears voices from earlier:

LOSER (V.O.)  
So my life's not filled with glitz  
and glamor, but it's a life.

ERIKA (V.O.)  
Pain is the portal to  
consciousness.

Cassie sees Trevor.

He holds a mushroom and gives her half. Together, they chew.

CASSIE  
Mm, cardboard?

TREVOR  
I'm getting something closer  
to...newsprint.

They walk for a bit in silence.

CASSIE  
So you've never told me. As Matt  
would say, what are you in for?

TREVOR  
Boring stuff.

CASSIE  
So bore me.

TREVOR  
In most of the clips I saw, Dad's a drinker. One night he goes after my mom and my little brother with a knife...

Trevor picks up a rock and hurls it. It ricochets off a reflective panel that makes the wooded area appear larger than it is.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
...so I shoot him.

Cassie stops.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Five years in jail.

CASSIE  
And then?

TREVOR  
Some hard times. Eventually I get it together, start a foundation to help others in similar situations.

CASSIE  
Lemonade out of sociopaths.

TREVOR  
Something like that.

CASSIE  
You make the world a better place. Why not Launch, Trevor?

TREVOR  
Did you miss the part about me shooting my father or having a father worth shooting?

CASSIE  
Sounds like a one-way ticket to consciousness to me.

TREVOR  
Some might call my staying here selfless.

CASSIE  
Or fear. You need to do what those  
of us here can't.

TREVOR  
You sure you can't?

CASSIE  
Can I show you something?

TREVOR  
Best offer I've had all day.

EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Rachel tries to locate Cassie but signal is white noise.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Cassie brings Trevor into her bedroom, pats the bed.

CASSIE  
Be right back.

Cassie returns with her e-device, pulls the blinds, sits  
beside Trevor and projects clips.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Sorry to brag, but my family is  
amazing.

Life clips:

-Cassie and Kate, in nightgowns, lie on their backs staring  
up at the night sky.

KATE ON SCREEN  
Make a wish, my pet.

CASSIE  
Isn't she incredible?

TREVOR  
Apple doesn't fall far.

-Peter, Kate and others at backyard BBQ. POV Cassie, age 6,  
playing hide-and-seek with other kids in and through adults'  
legs.

Cassie mutes the volume. Clips continue to play silently.

-Cassie, age 8, dressed as a tootsie roll, trick or treats with friends. Kate, wearing sequin leotard, pink tutu and sneakers follows behind.

-Peter, Kate and Cassie, age 11, and others play charades. Cassie hams it up miming clues. All laugh.

Cassie and Trevor are laughing as Trevor mimics Cassie's on-screen movements.

As the tragic scene starts to play, they sober up.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Cassie, I'm so sorry.

Trevor reaches for her hand. She lets him take it.

CASSIE

Hold on.

Cassie searches for the second clip, the happily-ever-after.

Nothing.

Cassie frantically searches.

TREVOR

What?

CASSIE

I'll just sound crazy.

TREVOR

Wouldn't be the first. Tell me.

CASSIE

There were two files, one where my mother dies and one where she doesn't, and after my dinner with Jake the one where she doesn't...is gone.

Cassie still searching.

INT. GYM - CONTINUOUS

Jake in gym doing bench presses.

His e-device pings with text from Rachel: "can't locate mushroom girl. Orders to download ASAP. Call me."

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - 2 HOURS REMAIN/5:00PM

Trevor's e-device pings with text from Rachel: "can't locate mushroom girl. Orders to download ASAP. Call me."

CASSIE  
What?

TREVOR  
(distracted)  
No, nothing.

Cassie tries to grab Trevor's e-device. He holds tight.

CASSIE  
Can we cut the crap? I saw you at Circus. I know you're banging the bird.

TREVOR  
Was. Not anymore. But she has a hard time letting go. When I met Erika, she got jealous so she launched her.

CASSIE  
Launched?! I thought you said Returned.

TREVOR  
I couldn't explain it to you then. Cassie, I know it doesn't look good, but I'm not with Patricia.

CASSIE  
Maybe better if you go.

Trevor doesn't move.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Now.

Trevor gets up, crosses room.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Wait.

Trevor turns.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
So which clip is real?

TREVOR  
Don't know. Does it matter?

He starts to leave.

Cassie races after him.

CASSIE  
(yells)  
Does it matter?!

Trevor stops.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Who in the goddamn are you to make  
light of the most important  
decision of MY LIFE! You can shove  
your conscious pain right up your  
ass. And just to be clear, YEAH IT  
MATTERS, this decision of MAYBE  
KILLING MY MOTHER MATTERS. Taking  
her life, devastating mine? It  
matters! Killing your a-hole  
father, maybe not so much, but my  
life, MINE? Yeah, IT MATTERS!

Trevor turns, grabs Cassie by the shoulders.

TREVOR  
Cassie, you don't have much time.

Cassie confused, PUSHES him away.

Trevor backs up, hands raised.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
What matters is you need to live  
your amazing life in spite of what  
happens. It's an accident, no mal  
intent. Time heals. You move on,  
make the world a better place.  
Unless you'd rather play Hamlet for  
the rest of your non-life. As for  
my father, thanks for the  
confirmation that blowing his  
brains out was correct. Before I  
wasn't so sure, but with your de-  
facto approval I feel much better.

Trevor JETS out of the apartment. Door slams.

Cassie, sits, breathing hard, closes her eyes - breathes in,  
breathes out. Hears from earlier:

LOSER (V.O.)  
People take care of me, I get a  
family. I'm loved.

FLASHES on all the wonderful moments with her mother.

Cassie opens her eyes, checks the time on her e-device: 2 hours remain and races out of apartment...

EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

...across campus where people are getting a jump on the Jubilee celebration - shaking noisemakers, wearing pageant sashes, t-shirts and crowns.

INT. OFFICE OF LAUNCH AND RETURN - CONTINUOUS

Cassie enters breathless.

Gretchen, wearing her new hat, plays Pong. She misses.

GRETCHEN  
Jiminy fuckits!

Gretchen looks up.

CASSIE  
Here to Launch.

GRETCHEN  
Even though you-

CASSIE  
Even though I, maybe, yes. There's more to life than its worst moments. Intention matters. Purpose matters. I matter. My mom matters, yes. All the people I help, they matter, too. I can't live small, in this dugout, forever wondering what if? Forever knowing I took the easy way out in this 200,000 square foot climate-controlled dungeon.

(beat)  
That and they're after me.

GRETCHEN  
Where's your pretty scarf?

Cassie touches her neck.

CASSIE  
Fuck.

GRETCHEN  
Wasn't that pretty.

Gretchen executes a few commands and presents Cassie with an e-device for signature.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

You agree to Launch, we're not responsible, etc. etc. Sign here and here...and here.

CASSIE

There's no time. Can't you just make it happen?

GRETCHEN

Fungus humor, I like it.

CASSIE

I'm not kidding.

GRETCHEN

Good, me neither. So off you go, protocol be damned, but I stay...to get bitch-slapped by Patricia, most likely returned.

Cassie is silent.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Thanks for understanding. Now, sign.

Cassie signs her life away.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Approval is typically 30 minutes or so but with festivities underway turnaround is delayed. Most people aren't checking out on Jubilee. But you aren't like most people, are you?

Gretchen hovers a finger over the send button.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Now they're for sure going to come running. All set?

CASSIE

So you believe me?

GRETCHEN

My girl, Britt didn't die for nothing.



CASSIE  
 (deep breath)  
 Ring the dinner bell.

Gretchen hits send.

GRETCHEN  
 You'll be notified.

Cassie tries to make eye contact but Gretchen goes back to playing Pong.

Cassie leaves.

As soon as the door closes Gretchen tears up, takes off her hat and dries her face.

INT. JUBILEE GALA - CONTINUOUS

Patricia, Jake and Rachel, at separate Jubilee parties, receive Cassie's Request to Launch.

Patricia rushes to the bathroom, kicks everyone out, e-conferences. Rachel and Jake appear on split-screen.

PATRICIA  
 Princess has the right idea but  
 Rachel? Jake? If you would all be  
 so kind, please do me the favor of  
 explaining WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING  
 ON?

JAKE  
 I got this.

PATRICIA  
 No, Jakestein, I don't think you  
 do. Cassandra Hargrove leaving the  
 Way Station with her chip intact is  
 not how the story goes. Timing is  
 everything, Romeo. Just ask  
 Juliette. Oh, wait, we can't,  
 BECAUSE SHE KILLED HERSELF! Fuck  
 this up and I will Return your ass  
 so hard you'll be shitting out your  
 dick. Are we clear?

JAKE  
 Affirmative.

PATRICIA  
 (to Rachel)  
 I expect this sort of thing from  
 Sperm-for-Brains, but not from  
 Kitty. Hello?!

Rachel humiliated.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)  
 Now go! Run as if your SIM depended  
 on it. Because it does.

Patricia ends e-conference, calls Trevor.

INT. TREVOR'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Classical music plays in the background as Trevor is getting  
 the balance on a delicate Calder-esque stabile just right.

He puts Patricia on speaker.

INTERCUT: TREVOR'S APARTMENT AND JUBILEE BATHROOM

TREVOR  
 Patricia, to what do I-

PATRICIA  
 Just received Princess's request to  
 Launch. Seems your charms are  
 waning.

Trevor smiles.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)  
 I've got a large SIM deposit that  
 says you can make her stay.

TREVOR  
 How large?

Patricia taps her e-device. Trevor checks his account.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
 Call me when you mean business.

Trevor starts to hang up.

PATRICIA  
 Wait.

Patricia taps some more.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Look again.

Trevor re-checks.

TREVOR

Deal.

They hang up.

EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Jake locates Cassie.

She spots him and runs. Revelers weave around them.

JAKE

(yelling)

You weren't going to say anything?

CASSIE

(yelling back)

Personal, private, remember? None of your business Jake.

Jake gets closer. Cassie keeps her distance.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Or is it, Jake? Am I your business?

JAKE

What are you talking about?

CASSIE

Must have been in some kind of hurry up in the God tower because after our dinner, the clip where my mother lives disappeared.

(beat)

Tell me something. When exactly did you sell your soul if you ever had one to begin with?

A drone ticker flies by. Arrived numbers climb. Revelers pass tooting kazoos.

Jake steps closer. Cassie steps back.

JAKE

Hold on a minute. I'm a serial killer for Christ's sake. The most stand up thing I ever did was not Launch.

Cassie claps.

Revelers toss confetti.

JAKE (CONT'D)

But why is that my lot? Like you said, why can't I be just a normal, hardworking guy with a loving wife, be a good father? That sort of thing? Don't I deserve better?

CASSIE

You play the hand you're dealt.

JAKE

Easy for you to say, Cassie. Not everyone leads as charmed a life as—

CASSIE

As who Jake? Me? Charmed? I kill my own mother. Don't I Jake? Don't I kill her? Well, don't I?

JAKE

Honestly, I really don't know.

CASSIE

You've had my life for sale all along. You, Patricia and Rachel. I'm your SIM ticket out.

Jake says nothing.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Right, what is there to say?

Cassie disappears into the crowd.

EXT. CAMPUS - 1 HOUR REMAINS/6:00PM

Seemingly from out of nowhere Trevor pulls up alongside Cassie on a motorcycle. He holds out a helmet.

Cassie is surprised and not.

There is the sound of someone calling Cassie's name, whispers of:

KATE (V.O.)

Make a wish, my pet.

Cassie closes her eyes to focus. Or is it just the noise of revelers?

Cassie opens her eyes, sees the chaos all around, checks the time: 1 hour remains.

CASSIE  
How much SIM you got?

TREVOR  
Enough, why?

CASSIE  
Good, I'm going to need it.

Cassie puts on the helmet, jumps on the bike.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Office of Launch and Return. Go!

They take off.

INTERCUT:

-Rachel and Jake on two motorbikes, in hot pursuit.

-Jubilee festivities in full swing, revelers wasted.

-Trevor zips through the crowd trying to lose Rachel and Jake, who appear as dots moving on his e-device. Cassie and Trevor near Circus, ditch the bike and rush the line.

-Rachel and Jake arrive moments later, ditch their bikes, rush the line.

-Cassie and Trevor, masked, race inside Circus hand-in-hand.

-Rachel and Jake, masked, inside Circus in hot pursuit.

-Cassie and Trevor slip out a back exit where Trevor knocks someone off their scooter. The two haul ass shedding disguises.

-Jake and Rachel run outside, locate Cassie and Trevor, knock revelers off their scooters and take off.

INT. OFFICE OF LAUNCH AND RETURN - CONTINUOUS

Cassie and Trevor enter, breathing hard.

Gretchen, playing Tetris, messes up.

GRETCHEN  
 (to self)  
 Bip, bomp, bam, alaka...damn!  
 (to Cassie and Trevor)  
 Kids.

Gretchen checks her e-device.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
 (to Cassie)  
 Approval denied.

CASSIE  
 Denied?! What happened to my  
 choice? I need to Launch. Now!  
 How much SIM for an override?

GRETCHEN  
 (to Trevor)  
 What are you doing here?

TREVOR  
 Making sure she catches the bus.  
 How much?

GRETCHEN  
 We've been through this. And have  
 Patricia Return my ass, no thank  
 you.

CASSIE  
 And if you Return hers first?

GRETCHEN  
 Do you have to be so new?

CASSIE  
 Do it for Britt.

INTERCUT: JAKE, RACHEL, PATRICIA and CASSIE, TREVOR, GRETCHEN

-Rachel and Jake fast approaching.

-Patricia, in a helicopter tracking everyone on screen.  
 Henchman 1 and 2 pilot and co-pilot.

-Patricia tunes in a drone in the Office of Launch and  
 Return.

PATRICIA  
 (through headset, to  
 Henchman 1 and 2)  
 Skirts down, panties up, girls.  
 Let's go!

-Office of Launch and Return:

TREVOR

I've got four weeks of SIM says you can override.

GRETCHEN

Think Launching cupcake over here will make up for Erika, is that it?

TREVOR

It's a start.

GRETCHEN

Four months and you got yourself a Launch.

TREVOR

Four months?!

CASSIE

You heard her. Let's go.

GRETCHEN

Someone's a good saver.

Gretchen turns the e-device toward Trevor.

The sound of revelers draws closer.

TREVOR

You're kidding.

GRETCHEN

I'm not.

CASSIE

What?

TREVOR

She wants it now.

GRETCHEN

Such a quick study.

TREVOR

We have no time.

CASSIE

Oh my God, give her the SIM!

Fingers blur as Trevor logs into his account. He leans in. Gretchen scans his neck.

DING! - transfer complete.

Revelers, just outside the door, YELL, swing NOISEMAKERS. A BAND strikes up.

Gretchen jumps into action pushing a complex set of keys, hands Trevor the e-device again.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
(yelling)  
Now what?

Trevor leans in again for a neck scan.

GRETCHEN  
Think I'm taking the fall for Lover  
boy? Think again.

Cassie looks to Trevor who ignores her.

Gretchen's fingers fly.

The door opens.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
Let's go!

POV Patricia's drone: sees Gretchen, Cassie and Trevor running down a long hallway, dodging revelers.

Trevor slams Patricia's drone to the ground. It shatters.

POV Patricia: drone screen goes black.

Gretchen searches e-device for an open Launch/Return Room.

INTERCUT: LAUNCH/RETURN ROOM and BUILDING HALLWAYS

Rachel and Jake enter the building as revelers break a window, bust through a door. Everyone, including a band, pour in.

Gretchen opens an occupied Room just as someone goes off in a dark dense knot. Trevor HURLS the OPERATOR out of the room.

Gretchen scans Trevor's neck again to operate under his ID.

Cassie checks Trevor's e-device. The moving dots are closing in.

CASSIE  
They're coming.  
(beat)  
You in?



All three eye each other.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Goddammit! Erika! Britt!

GRETCHEN  
Holy turd. We're doing this?

TREVOR  
Or Return trying.

EXT. BUILDING ROOF - 30 MINUTES REMAIN/6:30PM

Patricia lands on roof and enters the building with Henchman 1 and 2.

INT. BUILDING HALLWAY

Rachel and Jake race down the jammed hallway, fighting their way through the crowd. Jake breaks away and JETS through the crowd.

INT. LAUNCH AND RETURN ROOM

Gretchen on the keyboard.

Sound of MUTED BAND MUSIC.

INT. BUILDING HALLWAY 1 - CONTINUOUS

Henchman 1 and 2 bodily clear the path for Patricia.

PATRICIA  
(to displaced Revelers)  
Happy Titanium Jubilee!

INT. BUILDING HALLWAY 2 - CONTINUOUS

Jake DODGES in and out of drunken revelers, PEERING into rooms, sees Cassie. Rachel not far behind.

JAKE  
(muted, through the glass)  
Cassie!

Jake unlocks the door with e-device.

Gretchen HURLS a ninja star.

THUNK to the head.

GRETCHEN  
 (to Jake)  
 Invite-only asshole.

Jake goes down.

Trevor drags him to the chair, locks him in.

Gretchen FREEZES.

Jake starts to come to.

CASSIE AND TREVOR  
 Return him!

Gretchen HAMMERS the keys.

Rachel enters as Jake DISAPPEARS in a dark dense knot.

As she tries to escape, Trevor GRABS her, locks her in.

Rachel stoically endures.

Patricia and Henchman 1 and 2 are seconds away.

Trevor LOUDLY CLEARS his throat.

GRETCHEN  
 A serial killer I get but this  
 feels more complicated.

CASSIE  
 You're operating under Trevor's ID.

GRETCHEN  
 But I'm the one pushing the keys.

Angle on: Rachel looking stoic/resigned.

Cassie  
 Is now really the time for  
 philosophic inquiry?

Trevor runs over, BANGS the keys.

GRETCHEN  
 Git 'er done.

Patricia and Henchman 1 and 2 enter as Rachel disappears in a dark dense knot.

Patricia GASPS, STUMBLES. Looks at Trevor.

PATRICIA  
 (to Henchman)  
 Get him.

Both Henchmen go after Trevor. In spite of all his muscly hubba hotness, he's outnumbered.

Gretchen whips out a set of nunchucks.

GRETCHEN  
 (to Cassie, yelling)  
 Get over here.

Cassie runs over.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
 Push this and this and this, when I say.

Cassie, PANICKED.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
 This and this and this,  
 Grasshopper!

Gretchen LEAPS off the control board and HIGH KICKS the shit out of Henchman 1 and NUNCHUCKS the pre-living daylight out of Henchman 2 as Patricia tries to ELECTRIC SLIDE her way out of the room.

Trevor GRABS Patricia who gets in a few bloody claw swipes as he DRAGS her over, locks her in.

Trevor DRAGS knocked-out Henchman 1 to chair left of Patricia. Locks him in as he starts to come to.

Gretchen gives another nunchuck tap. Out again.

Patricia  
 All my SIM...yours.

TREVOR  
 There's nothing I want from you.

GRETCHEN  
 All of it?

CASSIE  
 Retch, focus!

Gretchen tries to drag knocked-out Henchman 2 to a chair but it's like relocating Mt. Rushmore.

GRETCHEN

A hand here?

Trevor DRAGS Henchman 2 to chair to right of Patricia. Locks him in.

Skirt askew, pump broken, Patricia closes her eyes. Face cast upward she reaches out to the Henchman on either side. All join hands.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Cassie, now!

Fingers on the keys, Cassie HESITATES.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Princess, now!

PATRICIA

She's not a murderess, are you Cassie?

CASSIE

Patricia, why did you Launch?

GRETCHEN

Launch? Wait, what?

Gretchen drops her nunchucks.

PATRICIA

Nothing versus something. How hard is that math?

CASSIE

And inflicting pain? Abandoning your baby?

PATRICIA

Did what I had to do. She's grown into a fine woman.

CASSIE

Who wants nothing to do with you.

Cassie fingers are poised above the keyboard.

GRETCHEN

Excuse me, could someone please—

CASSIE

Oh, for God's sake, she's alive!

Cassie fingers still poised.

GRETCHEN  
Hold on there. This here's murder.

TREVOR  
And what was it before?

GRETCHEN  
Murder lite?

PATRICIA  
You're not a murderer!

The potential of the repercussion drags Cassie down.

TREVOR  
Not as easy as it seems, doing the things that others can't.

CASSIE  
And Erika and Britt and the thousands of others?

GRETCHEN  
Excellent point. Hit it, Princess.

PATRICIA  
Noooo!

Cassie PUNCHES the keys.

Patricia's SCREAMS echo as she and the Henchmen DISAPPEAR in a dark dense knot.

Cassie, Trevor and Gretchen STARE IN DISBELIEF.

There is faint sound of revelers' CHEERS...

Gretchen goes back to the control board.

GRETCHEN  
All aboard. You're up, Puddin' Pie.

Cassie looks at Gretchen, TERRIFIED, backs up.

TREVOR  
You can do this.

GRETCHEN  
But you don't have to. Private matter. Personal choice.

Gretchen and Trevor glare at each other.

TREVOR

You don't have to but you can.

Slowly, Cassie walks to the chair.

CASSIE

Just to confirm, this is a Launch  
Retch, Launch. Love me, hate me,  
get the keys right.

Cassie laughs, starts to cry, jumps up, runs to Gretchen.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

So this is good-bye.

Gretchen doesn't turn.

Cassie kisses her on the cheek then runs to re-take her seat.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

What's going to happen?

GRETCHEN

Familiar with Wonkavision?

CASSIE

(to Trevor)  
Launch with me.

TREVOR

We've been through this.

CASSIE

There's nothing for you here.  
You've got a life to get to, good  
to do in the world...  
(beat)  
...lemonade to make.

GRETCHEN

She's got a point.

Cassie taps the seat beside her.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Inaction Jackson, What's it going  
to be?

Trevor takes a seat, leans over toward Cassie. They kiss.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Cue the Barry Manilow.

Trevor and Cassie separate.

CASSIE  
 (to Gretchen)  
 Retch.

Cassie taps the chair on the other side.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
 This one's for you. Launch with us.

Gretchen scoffs.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
 Your sister survives. You help her  
 do that. You learn from it. She  
 needs you. Don't pay for one  
 mistake with your whole life.

Cassie looks at Trevor.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
 Come with us and live!

Gretchen doesn't look up.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
 You can handle the pain.

GRETCHEN  
 With SIM I already do.  
 (to Trevor)  
 But hey, as long as you're leaving.

Gretchen points toward her neck.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
 (to Trevor)  
 Wouldn't want me to not get all the  
 keys right, would you?

Trevor shakes his head, gives Gretchen access to scan his  
 neck and takes all his SIM.

DING!

Trevor re-takes his seat. He and Cassie lock in, hold hands.

CASSIE  
 One last thing.

GRETCHEN  
 Like trying to say good-bye at a  
 bar mitzvah.

CASSIE

Matt!

Gretchen looks up.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Tell Matt the world needs him and that beautiful voice of his. Tell him to Launch.

Cassie nervous/giddy, does her best Matt impression.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

(hand to heart, belts out the opening lines...)  
Monsoon doormat. Monsoon doormat. Princess and the pea something, something.

GRETCHEN

Keep that up and I see a Return in someone's future.

CASSIE

Tell him, please. Promise you will.

Gretchen looks up in all seriousness.

GRETCHEN

Promise, pumpkin. Now, prepare to jet.

TREVOR

(to Gretchen)  
See you around.  
(to Cassie)  
Make a wish, my pet.

CASSIE

(whispers)  
To life.

Gretchen hits the final keys.

Cassie and Trevor go up in two bright white SPARKS.

The digital ticker stops on 9,000,000,000.

Clock goes to zero.

Horns toot. The band plays. People cheer.

Life clips play:

-Kate, Peter and Cassie, age 3 picnicking in a park.



-Kate enters a darkened kitchen with a cake lit by sparklers. Kate and Peter sing. Cassie, age 5 claps.

-Kate and Cassie, age 6 in nightgowns lie on the lawn staring up at the night sky with cat-eye masks pushed up on their foreheads. Cassie points a plastic scepter at a star.

-Kate and Peter watch Cassie, age 7 play the big old Oak in the school play.

-Kate and Cassie, age 10 in woods wearing flower crowns collecting wild mushrooms.

-Kate and Cassie, age 11 pick blackberries from the side of the house, mouth and fingers stained dark.

-Cassie receives gold medal on an Olympic podium.

-Cassie graduates summa cum laude, gives valedictorian speech.

-Cassie in the field overseeing construction using her ground-breaking mycorrhizal technology.

-Cassie 36, receives Nobel Prize.

INT. LECTURE HALL - BIRTH WORLD - DAY

Cassie on stage, lectures to packed auditorium. Her voice fades as music rises.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - BIRTH WORLD - DAY

Gretchen at bedside as her sister opens her eyes.

GRETCHEN  
 (overcome, crying,  
 whispers)  
 I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I love  
 you.

INT. THEATER - BIRTH WORLD - NIGHT

Matt on stage singing the lead in Puccini's Turandot.

INT. LECTURE HALL - BIRTH WORLD - DAY

Cassie is surrounded by well wishers, members of the scientific community.

Cassie's father, Peter joins them. They embrace.

PETER  
(whispers)  
Honey, congratulations. Your mother  
would have been so proud.

Cassie cries. Embrace ends. Peter hands Cassie a  
handkerchief, helps wipe her tears.

A COLLEAGUE approaches with Trevor.

COLLEAGUE  
Cassie, someone I'd like you to  
meet. Trevor Patterson, founder of  
S.H.I., Safe House Incubator, an  
international organization that  
provides trauma counseling and seed  
money for gifted youth in the  
aftermath of abuse.

Their eyes meet - an inexplicable energy runs between them.

CASSIE  
(whispers)  
Lemonade out of sociopaths.

Cassie reaches out to Trevor. They shake hands.

TREVOR  
I'm sorry, what?

CASSIE  
No, nothing. Very nice to meet you.

The four talk as the camera slowly pulls back.

An overview of the crowd...

the building exterior...

the city...

the country...

the world...

A shooting star SPARKS WHITE as it arcs across the sky.

FADE OUT.