

VERVE

THE PROCESS

written by

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INT. THE MULTIPURPOSE ROOM - DAY

Rows of black folding chairs face an elevated platform.

The walls are oppressively grey. All we hear is the ubiquitous buzz of the ceiling lights.

There are no windows, no sunlight streaming in.

Its oppressive sparseness makes us think we are, perhaps, in an empty governmental office after hours...

But there are a dozen or so people in the room.

They are all wearing identical, unisex uniforms. Half air hostess, half nautical. These are the VOLUNTEERS.

Some standing by the walls, some sitting behind black desks. They are all staring ahead, focused. No small talk. Gearing up for something important.

We track through them, towards the DOUBLE DOORS. The only exit to this cement box.

INT. CORRIDORS - DAY

The doors lead to a long, wide corridor gaping at us like an open mouth.

We fall into the corridor, passing by closed doors that might open to anything. Offices maybe? Or classrooms? But there are no signs anywhere. Nothing to orient us.

The end of the corridor spills out to more corridors. We float down. More offices. More closed doors...

It feels like we've stepped into a maze, getting swallowed into the bowels of an endless building, and just as we're wondering if we're lost here forever...

We see SUNLIGHT on the beige carpet.

A melodic VOICE chimes in. At first distant, growing nearer:

VOLUNTEER 1 (O.S.)
Hello, my name is Anna and I'm so
glad you're here today! Please
follow me!

We brush by this VOLUNTEER, and see that she's leading a MIDDLE AGED MAN inside, rolling a suitcase behind him.

And an open glass door leads us outside:

EXT. CONCRETE BUILDING - DAY

The building stands tall and strangely alone.

We're somewhere outside of Los Angeles, in a nondescript industrial area, under the searing California sun.

Herds of people stream into the building, escorted by the wide-smiling volunteers. We overhear a nearby conversation:

PETER (O.S.)

"The Process may cause participants to experience brief, temporary episodes of mild psychosis--" Thank God it's only *mild* psychosis.

KIRSA

(O.S.)

Peter, it's just fine print.

PETER

(O.S.)

"And some participants have experienced unexplained suicidal or destructive behavior--"

(beat)

This is the kind of shit they have to play after a drug commercial in case people off themselves.

We see them now, tucked into a corner, hunched over a few pieces of paper. It's a health waiver.

They're a study in contrast: She's KIRSA REIN, graceful, a queen in a past life, 38 years old. She's in her sleek power suit, tastefully made up. She doesn't do casual.

He's PETER REIN, 31, effortlessly hot but lacks any semblance of grace, with his visible tattoos and wild facial hair. He's wearing old jeans and a fitted t-shirt.

She's picking lint and hair off of him as they talk.

KIRSA

I'm going to go out on a limb and say I'm pretty sure we're not going to kill ourselves.

PETER

Doesn't sound like a pleasant experience, is all I'm saying.

KIRSA

They're not going to waterboard us. They are a business, they have Yelp reviews. They want repeat customers, they want money.

PETER

They're a cult, man. You can't know what they want.

He says that a bit too loud. Kirsa looks around.

She realizes they are the last ones left out here. A MATERNAL VOLUNTEER, 60's, waits for them by the door.

Kirsa smiles at her, then turns back to Peter, her voice low:

KIRSA

I know. I don't get it either. But Arthur's obsessed with this thing. It's all he talks about. And I'm *THIS* close to making partner and if I have to spend a weekend here to assuage his worries that I'm not living a "truthful" life, I'm willing to do that. I know it's not fair to you but I just need you to be on my team. Please.

He thaws.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Just think of it as a three day couples get away. We'll have a room to ourselves. Nary a screaming child in sight.

He smiles, welcoming the possibility.

PETER

Beautiful, you know I'd love to but I can't get hard anymore without the Spongebob theme song blasting in the background. I just can't.

KIRSA

I know it by heart. I'll sing it.

PETER

Oh God.

She leans into him.

KIRSA

I'll serenade you with it.

He's laughing now. She kisses him, laughing too.

Once their laughter subsides, he SIGHS. He has a deep, loud SIGH where his entire body exhales out.

He puts the waiver over his knee and signs it.

He hoists up an old, tattered backpack onto his shoulders and she straightens up her small roller bag.

They walk to the Maternal Volunteer and hand over their waivers. She brightens up at once like a robot switching on.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER

Hello, my name is Mallory and I'm so glad you're here today! Please follow me!

She says the words with the exact sing-song cadence as the first Volunteer we heard.

Once they step in, the Maternal Volunteer closes the doors and LOCKS them. Both Kirsa and Peter take notice.

INT. CORRIDORS - DAY

Kirsa and Peter follow the Volunteer down the winding corridors. We stay with them for an uncomfortably long time as they are swallowed into the labyrinth. It becomes more claustrophobic with each step.

PETER

So, like, what will we be doing?

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER

I can't explain it to you see, it would be like explaining a joke! You have to experience it full on.

PETER

Can't you give us a hint?

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER

How about this: Do you ever wish you came with an instruction manual for your body and your mind?

PETER

An instruction manual? Like for a dishwasher?

He's fucking with her. Kirsa can't help breaking a smile but throws him a "cut it, please" glance.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER
(serious, thankful)
Exactly. But for us. All of us.

She looks at them, intense. They manage a nod or two.

They turn a corner and face the MULTIPURPOSE ROOM.

The participants are lined up at the desks, signing in. Some are already sitting in the black chairs, chatting.

INT. THE MULTIPURPOSE ROOM - DAY

Peter and Kirsa are the last ones to sign in.

TALL VOLUNTEER, 50-something with leathery skin, almost seven feet tall, sits behind his desk, staring right up at them. He doesn't smile like the other volunteers.

Peter and Kirsa are aware of his gaze. They exchange uncomfortable glances.

Kirsa gives him her form. The Tall Volunteer scans it.

TALL VOLUNTEER
Arthur Cunningham referred you to us?

His voice is dead flat. Monotone.

KIRSA
Yes. He gave us the tickets.

Tall Volunteer looks through a stack of name-tags.

A male, gay millennial CHIRPY VOLUNTEER appears next to them.

CHIRPY VOLUNTEER
Oh my God, Art sent you?! How do you know him?

KIRSA
I work with him at his law firm.

CHIRPY VOLUNTEER
You're so lucky. A bunch of us did our intro course with him and he really transformed.

KIRSA
Yes. He... really did...

CHIRPY VOLUNTEER

We had Aiden leading us, I'm pretty sure you guys have him today. He's the founder of all this, a real miracle worker. He's just so great at...

(pointing at his head)

Getting in there and cleaning out the cobwebs.

(sees someone behind her)

Excuse me, I need to go set stuff up. But oh this is going to be so amazing for you! I know it!

Kirsa tries to morph her face into a convincing smile.

He walks off. Peter leans into Kirsa, whispers:

PETER

I sort of like my cobwebs...?

He's half joking but she can see he's freaked out.

Before Kirsa can reply, the Tall Volunteer extends two brochures and a pair of name tags to them.

KIRSA

Thank you.

He points to a straw basket filled with cellphones.

TALL VOLUNTEER

Your phones.

Peter and Kirsa share a glance.

PETER

Uhh... Look man, we have a four year old at home. Phones are sort of mandatory.

TALL VOLUNTEER

Complete transformation requires complete commitment.

KIRSA

Can we keep them if we switch them off? We'll have breaks, I assume--

TALL VOLUNTEER

You have agreed to the Process. This is part of that agreement.

Peter pulls her back, leans in.

PETER
 (whispering)
 Kirs, this place has more red flags
 than a Chinese Armada. Seriously,
 we can still bolt.

But Kirsa overhears:

CHIRPY VOLUNTEER (O.S.)
 ... yeah, she works with Art...

She turns to see the Chirpy Volunteer talking to the others.
 They all smile and wave at Kirsa as if she's a celebrity.

She whispers back to Peter.

KIRSA
 It's too late. We can't.

She texts something quick then puts her cellphone into the
 basket.

PETER
 Really?

KIRSA
 It's okay. My parents will be happy
 to get some quality time with Sam.

Peter full body sighs. Puts his phone into the basket.

TALL VOLUNTEER
 Leave your bags here, we will take
 them to your rooms.

Peter flashes a frustrated smile as he drops his backpack to
 the ground, hard. Kirsa lets go of her rolling bag.

They look around for a chair to sit on. Thankfully, there are
 two empty ones next to each other. They move to the chairs--

TALL VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)
 You can't sit together. You need to
 focus on your own selves for--

Peter whips around, his frustration boiling over:

PETER
 Yeah? That also part of our
 "agreement"?

KIRSA
 (reigning him in)
 Peter.

He turns back to Kirsa but he's coiled.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
Please just...

PETER
Dial down the hate and make you
look good?

KIRSA
Try to give it a chance. Maybe
you'll take something out of it.

He scoffs at that. Still annoyed at this whole thing.

He spots an empty chair at the other end.

PETER
Alright, I'll catch you on the
flipside. Hold onto your cobwebs.

He's about to walk away when--

KIRSA
Peter.

PETER
What?

KIRSA
Thank you for being on my team.
You're the best.

He can't help but smile. Kisses her.

PETER
Actually, you're the best.
Scientifically. As you know, I
studied bestology in college.

KIRSA
I'm going to have to disagree. I
have a PHD in bestology. From CERN.

PETER
CERN? That lab with black holes?

KIRSA
Yep. That one.

A VOLUNTEER brushes by them and pops them out of their
bubble. Kirsa sees all Volunteer are taking their places at
the edges of the room, their backs to the wall.

Other people have noticed the change too. Conversations hush down. An excited, nervous energy grips the room.

Peter gets it's his time to leave. A quick kiss, and he walks away to the other end of the room.

Kirsa sits down, watches him go.

Something BANGS behind her and makes Kirsa JUMP in her seat--

It's the DOUBLE DOORS. They're closed now. The Tall Volunteer stands before them. He puts a KEY into the lock and turns it. The doors lock with a heavy CLICK.

He pockets the key and sits down behind his desk.

Kirsa looks at the closed, and now locked, doors.

AIDEN (O.S.)

Why the fuck are you here?

She sees the MAN on the stage, AIDEN CAUL. He's big with broad shoulders, dressed all in black. He might be in his 50's or maybe older, but there is a ferocity to him that makes you believe he can kill a bear with his bare hands.

He stomps around the platform, his eyes on the audience.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Come on, boys and girls. You can do it. I believe in you.

(shouting louder)

I said, WHY THE FUCK ARE YOU HERE!?

After a long beat, A YOUNG WOMAN with a SHAVED HEAD enthusiastically raises her hand. Aiden points at her.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Why are you here?

SHAVED HEAD

Enlightenment!

AIDEN

Enlightenment.

(walking to her)

What's your name?

SHAVED HEAD

Aspen.

AIDEN

Aspen. What does that mean?

Enlightenment.

Shaved Head nervously smiles under his intense gaze.

ASPEN
 Finding our center in the world
 and, like, empower ourselves
 through that knowledge. And live in
 gratitude and fulfillment.

Aiden waits for a beat. Then turns to those around her.

AIDEN
 Anyone understand any of that crap?

The leading question gets no response from the crowd.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 Me neither. Sit down.

ASPEN
 I'm sorry, I can clarify--

AIDEN
 What the fuck do you want, a medal?
 Sit down.

ASPEN
 No but I can, I know what--

Aiden
SIT THE FUCK DOWN!!!

Aspen sinks into her chair, scared.

Nothing moves for a long beat.

Then someone in the crowd SIGHS.

Kirsa knows that pronounced sigh. It's Peter.

Aiden's head snaps to Peter.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 You have something to say? What's
 your name?

Kirsa tenses, her eyes on Peter.

PETER
 It's on my name-tag

Aiden leans over Peter and RIPS away his name-tag. Crumples it and drops it to the ground.

AIDEN
I don't see a name tag.

PETER
(annoyed, not intimidated)
Why are you so rude, man?

AIDEN
Because I have to be. Because if I'm nice, you will go back to your nice, dead life. I only have THREE DAYS to resuscitate your aliveness. THREE DAYS to TRANSFORM your ENTIRE FUCKING LIFE and this is the ONLY WAY I know how.

He disengages from Peter, starts stalking through the room.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
If it makes you feel more comfortable, I don't like shouting at you. But I do it because
(even LOUDER)
YOUR! FUCKING! LIVES! ARE AT STAKE!

He stomps back to Peter.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
What is your name?

Peter sighs again, but sees Kirsa glancing at him.

PETER
(relenting)
Peter.

AIDEN
Why the fuck you are here, Peter?

PETER
(not sure, guessing)
Transformation...?

AIDEN
Transformation into what?

PETER
I don't know, man.
(can't help himself)
Into one of those wonderful volunteers you got back there?

A few people snicker at that. Kirsa shakes her head, not pleased. Aiden is stonefaced.

AIDEN
 I've been leading classes for seven years, Peter. One thing never changes: Class clowns turn out to be the saddest people in the room.

Peter doesn't know how to reply to that. It shuts him up.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 (to the room)
 What's the difference between a caterpillar and a butterfly?

Nobody answers. Not after what happened to those who did.

Kirsa tightens in her seat. Aiden is coming her way.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry. My bad. It's a big room, I should speak up.
 (SHOUTING)
 WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CATERPILLAR AND A BUTTERFLY?!

Aiden locks eyes with Kirsa. Kirsa looks away, but it's too late. He looms over her.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 What's your name?

KIRSA
 Kirsa.

AIDEN
 Kirsa. What is the difference between a caterpillar and a butterfly?

Kirsa takes a long beat.

KIRSA
 They're the same thing but transformed.

AIDEN
 Go on.

KIRSA
 (after another beat)
 The caterpillar doesn't become a different thing when it's a butterfly. It's still what it is. More beautiful, but still the same.

AIDEN

Yes. Good. Very good.
 (to the crowd)
 Transformation doesn't mean you
 will become a different person. It
 means you will become more You.
 (eyes pointing at Kirsa)
 Did you see that? She didn't spew
 out a buzzword. She dug deeper.
 (singling her out)
 Thank you, Kirsa.

She nods back politely, pleased she aced the question. People
 around her lean in to check out who she is.

Aiden takes a moment. Starts shouting again:

AIDEN (CONT'D)

To turn into a butterfly, the
 caterpillar disintegrates into a
 soup of its own organs! Then it
EATS ITSELF to transform into a
 butterfly. It's disgusting but it's
 the only fucking way.

He paces towards the platform, maintaining intense eye
 contact with those near him.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You think I've been rude? Harsh?
 That's nothing. You will hate me in
 the next three days. I will hurt
 you. I will psychically bleed you.
 I will make you piss your pants, I
 will make you vomit. Your entire
 being will resist, you will want to
 run out of here, you will want to
 slug me. Memories you've been
 repressing for decades will come
 out and the pain will be so fucking
 bad you will understand why you've
 repressed them in the first place.

Kirsa holds his gaze. Takes that in.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

But when we're done... You will all
 be butterflies.

There is genuine wonder on his face when he says that. Almost
 as if he's... sexually turned on.

He climbs to the platform. Looks over everyone. Intimate.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

(lighter)

You're probably thinking... Jesus Christ. This shit sounds intense. What did I get myself into?

That draws a wave of smiles. Some laughs.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Folks, ninety-nine percent of people who attend this class report they experienced a profound and lasting difference in the quality of their lives. It's not magic, it's technology and this technology works. I have experienced it, whoever recommended this class to you has experienced it. You will experience it.

He starts pacing around, pumping everyone up. Kirsa can feel the energy of the room change. People like this Aiden.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Give me three days. It's a fucking weekend for a permanent shift in your life. It's the best investment you will ever make. All I'm asking from you is to do it how it's supposed to be done. To commit to it with your entire body and mind and being. Are you open to that? Are you going to do it?

(pumping them up)

Do you believe in the possibility of a better life? A more truthful life? If you're willing to full-on commit to that life, raise your hand right fucking now!

One by one, everyone's hands go up. Kirsa raises her hand too, more out of obligation than anything.

She looks at Peter. His hands are on his lap.

She sees Aiden scanning the crowd. He sees Peter -- the only one who doesn't have his hand up -- and walks towards him.

Her eyes catch Peter's. They bore into him. *Do it.*

He gives out a long sigh, then raises his hand.

Aiden glares at Peter anyway... but then turns to the crowd.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 Well done. I'm proud of you.
 (beat)
 It's time for a quick break. I encourage you to talk with our volunteers and learn about their transformations.

It feels weird to have him stop talking. Nobody moves.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 (lighter)
 I'd get up if I were you. You're not going to have many of these.

He's charming again. Some people laugh.

Kirsa stands up, looking for Peter, but Peter is not where he was sitting a moment ago.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER (O.S.)
 Kirsa! How are you?

Kirsa smiles at her but she's still looking for Peter.

KIRSA
 Good. That was great. How are you?

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER
 I'm truthful and grateful to share this experience with you.

Kirsa nods a few times at that, not sure where to take the conversation... but she sees Peter.

He's at the far corner of the room, talking to a particularly ATTRACTIVE VOLUNTEER in her late-twenties.

The Attractive Volunteer LAUGHS at something Peter said.

Something in Kirsa stirs.

KIRSA
 Excuse me. I'll be back.

She beelines towards Peter...

ACROSS THE ROOM

Kirsa hears them as she gets near:

PETER
 Is The Process for-profit? Yes or no? Simple question.

ATTRACTIVE VOLUNTEER

It is, but none of the leaders are in it for the money. Most of them took huge pay cuts from their old jobs to come work with us.

PETER

I'm gonna go ahead and silently nod at that but I don't know if it's gonna be a truthful nod.

Attractive Volunteer chuckles at that.

Kirsa notices she's even better looking up close: Her skin is porcelain, her face is perfectly symmetrical. Her coiled snake earrings and short hair give her an alternative look that matches Peter's. They could easily be a couple. Hell, they look more like a couple than Kirsa and Peter.

She notices Kirsa. Sparks up. Aggressively happy.

ATTRACTIVE VOLUNTEER

Kirsa, I'm Maya! I've been wanting to talk to you.

KIRSA

Any particular reason why?

MAYA

Arthur told me you were coming.

Kirsa's body language changes at the mention of Arthur.

KIRSA

How do you know Arthur?

MAYA

We're doing AW together!

KIRSA

AW?

MAYA

Advanced Wisdom. It's a third-tier leadership course. We're training to be a course leader. Like Aiden.

KIRSA

That's great. Congratulations.

(re: Peter)

I hope he's not giving you too much trouble. He likes being a rebel.

MAYA

I don't mind it at all, I was the rebel in my intro course.

She smiles, broad. As if to say: "And look where I am now."

PETER

Well, fingers crossed.

Maya chuckles again. Either genuinely charmed by Peter or acting charmed to sell him on the program, Kirsa can't tell.

AIDEN (O.S.)

Everyone back to your seats!

Aiden is up at the platform again. Ready to command.

People start shuffling back. Kirsa mouths a quick "I love you" to Peter. He returns the gesture.

Maya steps up to Kirsa. Too close.

MAYA

I'll be here the entire weekend.
Let me know if you need anything.

Her tone is comforting. But Kirsa is not comforted.

Kirsa walks back to her seat, at the other end. She glances back and sees Maya escorting Peter to his seat.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

The lights have been dimmed.

Everyone has their eyes closed. Aiden is on the platform, sitting in a chair.

From the way people are concentrating, we can tell they've been at this for a while. He's mid-sentence:

AIDEN

... then you land and you're home.

His voice is low. Hypnotic.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

It's the house you grew up in. It feels almost sacred. Even if it was a bad place sometimes, this is where you learned happiness. Find that happiness. Stay there.

Kirsa has her head hung, eyes closed.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You're safe. Visualize the child you were. A happy child. Hopeful. This is before the time you knew you could be harmed.

Aiden stands up. Slowly starts pacing.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

From a time when all hopes and dreams were possible.

(long beat)

I want you to ask yourself one question: Am I happier now, as an adult, or was I happier as a child?

He descends from the platform.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You know the answer. You knew before you asked it. It's in your gut. It used to be better. And that child... That child is disappointed in who you have become. You've lost something, haven't you? And you are not okay anymore. Not like you were. You're a goddamn mess.

Now this voice morphs into something cruel. It gradually gets higher in volume until he's full on shouting.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Look at that child. You had so much promise. But you turned out to be a DISAPPOINTMENT. You FAILED yourself! You gave up on yourself! You LET YOURSELF DIE!

A man to Kirsa's right cracks, starts sobbing. More people start crying. Whimpering like children.

Kirsa opens her eyes, weirded out. Not willing to go with it, but keeping her head down, weathering it out.

Aiden is now shouting at the top of his lungs.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

WHY? Because you got HURT and instead of DEALING WITH IT you started AVOIDING and LYING and that stuck, and that's why YOU AVOID BEING TRUTHFUL AND LIE and you SAY IT'S OKAY when you feel like YOU'RE IN SO MUCH PAIN YOU WANT TO JUST FUCKING DISAPPEAR, but that CHILD knows and you KNOW and YOU CAN'T AVOID IT ANYMORE! YOU KNOW!

More people are crying. Ugly, guttural crying. It's a cacophony of raw pain.

Kirsa is absolutely still. Her heart is beating fast. A sick anxiety blossoming in her chest.

Aiden climbs onto the platform and CLAPS his hands.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Open your eyes. Look at me.

Kirsa lifts her head, looks around. People wipe their eyes and noses, red-faced.

Kirsa glances over at Peter, who looks dazed.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I SAID LOOK AT ME.

He points to someone in the back.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Stand up.

Kirsa, and everyone else, turn to find a woman in her 40's, a SOCIALITE type, who is still sobbing, make-up running.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Why does your life not work?

SOCIALITE WOMAN

... I don't know.

AIDEN

You know. You fucking know.

She starts breaking down.

SOCIALITE WOMAN

I don't know if I love my husband.

She starts crying. Vocalizing the words gave them weight she couldn't carry. Aiden looks at her, emphatic.

AIDEN

We'll figure it out together, okay?

She nods back, her hands intertwined across her chest as if in a prayer. Sits down.

He walks up to a big chalkboard at the front of the room, and starts writing on it: "PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS"

He points to a devastated OFFICE DRONE in an ironed white shirt sitting in front of Kirsa. He stands up.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Why does your life not work?

A long beat. Then he spits the words out all at once.

OFFICE DRONE

I see prostitutes and I'm going to stop but I can't and my wife doesn't know. I have to stop.

He looks at the people around him, feels ashamed. Sits down and starts rocking back and forth in his chair.

AIDEN

(softly, comforting)

We will fix that. Trust me.

The Office Drone stops rocking and looks up at Aiden. Nods, wanting to believe Aiden so desperately.

Aiden goes to the chalkboard and writes down: "ADDICTION."

Kirsa leans forward and looks towards Peter. His eyes are on Aiden, listening intently, one with the crowd--

AIDEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Kirsa. Why does your life not work?

She snaps to Aiden. All eyes snap to her.

She stands up after a beat. Tries her best.

KIRSA

... I have a fear of failure.

AIDEN

Go on.

KIRSA

I can take more responsibility at my work. I practice family law at large firm and I want to make partner but... But I always hold myself back for some reason.

Aiden walks to the edge of the platform, staring her down. Obviously dissatisfied with her composed answer.

AIDEN

Go on.

KIRSA

That's... that's it.

AIDEN

Kirsa. Did you do the exercise?

KIRSA

Yes.

AIDEN

It didn't work for you?

KIRSA

It did.

AIDEN

Kirsa, everyone in this room can tell you're not being truthful.
(giving her an out)
Because sometimes it doesn't work.

A beat. Kirsa decides to take it.

KIRSA

I couldn't quite get into it. Not because of the exercise itself--

AIDEN

You were open to it? You committed?
(Kirsa nods)
Then you don't have to elaborate.

KIRSA

(relieved)
Thank you.

AIDEN

As I said before, this course doesn't work for one person out of a hundred. You must be that person in this room.

(MORE)

AIDEN (CONT'D)
(to the Tall Volunteer)
Give her a full refund, please.

She's paralyzed for a beat.

KIRSA
I don't want to leave.

AIDEN
If this simple visualization
exercise didn't work for you, I
don't think you're going to get
much out of the rest of the course.

KIRSA
I've been getting a lot out of it.

AIDEN
(final)
Trust me, Kirsa. You should leave,
there's no use wasting either of
our time. I wish you the best.

The Tall Volunteer stands up. Waiting for Kirsa.

Kirsa stammers, not sure what to do. Peter looking at her.
Maya at the corner of her eye, observing her.

KIRSA
I will commit. Let me stay.

Aiden takes a long look at her.

AIDEN
Suit yourself. I'm not going to
have you dragged out. But don't
blame me or the Process if the next
two days are torture to you. I
warned you. You ignored it.

Without even waiting for her to sit down, Aiden points at
someone new as if their conversation never happened:

AIDEN (CONT'D)
You. Why does your life not work?

Kirsa slowly sits back down. Admonished. A little humiliated.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM - LATER

People are exhausted. Kirsa too.

An older man sits down.

Aiden writes something new onto the chalkboard: "SELF DOUBT". It's been filled up to the edges: "EGO," "RAGE," "TRAUMA," and more. He can hardly scribble the new one in.

Aiden points to Peter, the last one to go.

AIDEN

Peter.

(beat)

I did not forget about you. Tell us. Why does your life not work?

Peter stands up. A beat. Kirsa watches him.

PETER

Drugs.

He sits back down. Aiden takes a beat.

AIDEN

Are you in recovery?

Peter nods "yes" without standing up. Aiden knows he's getting as much as he's going to get out of him.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Well... That's progress.

Aiden underlines "Addiction."

He stands back, looks at the board.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

(to everyone)

And to think before you came here, you all thought you were doing good. What a bunch of fuck-ups you all turned out to be.

People around Kirsa smile. It's cathartic. Above all, Aiden is saying: You're not alone.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I'm going to let you go to bed now. BUT, before you sleep, I want you to do some simple homework: There's going to be a piece of paper in your rooms. On the left side of that paper, I want you to write the first words you have spoken in this life.

(MORE)

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Then draw a line to the right side of the page and write down the last words you think you will speak before you die if you keep living the way you've been living. If you don't solve these problems you got. Do not be a fucking coward. Be truthful. If it's not hard, if it's not uncomfortable, that's how you know you're lying.

(soothing, almost tender)

You owe it to yourself.

Kirsa clocks the people around her nod, taking in the lesson. She's a bit creeped out by how in sync they are.

The Tall Volunteer unlocks the doors and swings them wide open. People stand up, file out.

CHIRPY VOLUNTEER (O.S.)

(directing people)

If you're A to L, please come with me. If you're M to Z...

He keeps talking as Kirsa looks around for Peter.

She catches Aiden's eyes. He is standing on the platform, strangely motionless, looking straight at her.

She looks away and blends into the crowd, escaping.

INT. CORRIDORS - NIGHT

A crowd surrounds Kirsa. Together, they march down the dark nondescript corridors, following the volunteers.

No windows, clocks or mirrors.

She's looking for Peter in the crowd.

He comes up behind her.

PETER

Hey, beautiful.

She hugs him. Kisses him.

PETER (CONT'D)

Everything copacetic?

She leans against him as the answer to that.

KIRSA

(venting)

I feel like I'm being punished because my life works. Excuse me for loving my husband and not sleeping with prostitutes.

(whispering to him)

And it is a little too cult-y.

PETER

Eh.

(she's surprised by that)

It is intense but it's basically AA for sober people.

KIRSA

Do they mass hypnotize you in AA?

PETER

No. But, you know, some people need that shit.

KIRSA

What people? People who sleep with prostitutes?

That was too loud. She slinks a bit, checks to see if anyone heard her. They haven't.

PETER

When you're in that kind of haze, sometimes you need someone to knock you down to see which side is up.

KIRSA

(whispering)

What they need is therapy, not an unqualified autocratic dictator screaming at them for hours.

PETER

I don't know, man... He's obviously trained in some way. Plus, the people in the program who helped me the most are not therapists. I'd be surprised if they even graduated from high school, you know?

She looks up at him, a little on edge.

KIRSA

So anyone can tell you what to do and you'll just do it?

PETER

I should apparently, if it's you doing the telling.

She slides out under his arm.

PETER (CONT'D)

Look, all I'm saying is that it might be good for some people. Maybe not for us but, I mean, Trent fucking Reznor did this thing and loved it. If a stone cold genius benefited from it, you know...

KIRSA

Did Maya tell you that?

PETER

What?

KIRSA

You were talking. I assumed.

PETER

I read it on the little pamphlet thing. What are you saying?

KIRSA

Nothing. Just...

She goes quiet, embarrassed by her insecurity.

He stops her. Looks at her. They wait for the crowd to continue marching, leaving them with some privacy.

PETER

I'm telling you, we can still totally bolt if you want. I'm still on your team.

She takes it in with a small smile. He perks up at that.

They start walking again, catching up to the crowd.

KIRSA

No. I need to stay. Last thing I need is this asshole telling Arthur I'm a lost cause.

PETER

Cool. Well. Let me know if I can improve your stay. Wink-wink.

He rubs her back suggestively and wiggles his eyebrows.

Silly but also adorable. Makes her crack up.

KIRSA
I need to finish the "homework"
first. But then...

She gives him an impish smile.

PETER
Wow. You brought the...?
(she nods)
Groovy.

Their bliss is invaded by the Tall Volunteer.

TALL VOLUNTEER
(pointing to a door)
This is your room.

KIRSA
Do I get a key or...?

TALL VOLUNTEER
No.

She opens the door, it's unlocked. Peter follows her in.

TALL VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)
(to Peter)
Your room is down the hall.

PETER
We're staying together.

TALL VOLUNTEER
All rooms are singles.

KIRSA
(getting frustrated)
We'll figure out a way to share the
bed. Thank you.

The Tall Volunteer steps towards Kirsa, cranes his neck down.

TALL VOLUNTEER
Your homework requires solitude.

KIRSA
(not backing down)
We'll put on headphones.

It's suddenly tense. Peter sees it.

PETER
Maybe he's got a point.

KIRSA
What?

PETER
I mean, we're doing this thing,
might as well do it full on.

KIRSA
"Full on"?

PETER
When in Rome... We're here, let's
see if we can get something out of
it, you know?

Kirsa can't believe her ears.

TALL VOLUNTEER
(approving)
Peter, this way to your room.

Peter hugs her goodbye, whispers into her ear:

PETER
Just play along. I'll see you in
your room in an hour.

He gives her a quick wiggle of the eyebrows. She's overcome
with relief. She smiles.

PETER (CONT'D)
Good night.

KIRSA
Good night.

Kirsa watches as Peter is marched down to a room at the end
of the corridor by the Tall Volunteer.

Despite Peter's assurances, she still seems unsettled.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM

It's cramped. She goes for the sink. Washes her face.

Realizes there are no mirrors on the walls.

OLDER WOMAN (O.S.)
Each of us paid six hundred
dollars. Is a bathroom with mirrors
too much to ask?

Kirsa raises her head and sees the Older Woman, in her late 60's, fashionable, putting moisturizer on her face.

Aspen, the woman with a shaved head from earlier, chimes in.

ASPEN

I know, right? It's like Orange is the New Black in here.

The conversation is a breath of fresh air to Kirsa.

KIRSA

It's worse. The warden on that show is nicer than what we got.

The other women chuckle, agreeing.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

I'm Kirsa. You may remember me from out there. Public Enemy #1.

OLDER WOMAN

(amused)

Lori.

ASPEN

I'm Aspen. I think I'm on his shit list too.

Off Kirsa, happy to have made some allies.

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM - MAYBE DAY, MAYBE NIGHT

Kirsa enters in.

The room has no windows. It's cramped. It wasn't meant to be lived in, it was an office space once. Feels like a cell.

She sits down. Takes in her surroundings.

On a desk is the blank piece of paper Aiden mentioned and a pen that sits next to it.

She takes it... draws the line.

She has no idea what to write down.

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM - LATER

She has scribbled down a dozen things ("I wish I was more truthful." "I love my husband too much?" "Go fornicate with thy bottom, you quack.") but they're all scratched out.

She pushes away from the desk, frustrated. Looks at the door.

Wondering where Peter is.

She grins. Has an idea. Walks to her suitcase.

EXT. CORRIDORS

Kirsa slinks out of her room. She waits. Listens.

It's pitch dark and silent. Not a soul.

She's wearing a dark nightgown and BLACK HEELS.

She takes a few steps but the heels make too much noise. She takes them off and holds them instead.

She reaches Peter's door. Puts the heels back on.

Takes a deep breath, ready to make a blazing entrance--

When the door abruptly opens and Maya steps out.

MAYA

Kirsa! Are you here to see, Peter?

She scans Kirsa. Notices her heels.

KIRSA

(thrown)

... I was going to, yes.

MAYA

I'm sorry, he can't right now. He's meditating on the homework.

(before Kirsa can ask)

I'm helping him out with it.

Something about Maya's demeanor makes Kirsa want to grab her by the throat, but she takes a beat. Adjusts her tone.

KIRSA

Helping him out how?

MAYA

Getting him to be open to the possibilities of transformation.

KIRSA

He asked for your help?

MAYA

No. But I needed it when I did my intro course. He needs it too.

(before Kirsa can reply)

(MORE)

MAYA (CONT'D)
 Are you done with your own
 homework?

KIRSA
 ... I'm working on it.

MAYA
 You should go back to your room,
 then. You shouldn't be out here.

She delivers that with a friendly smile but it has the tinges
 of a warning.

MAYA (CONT'D)
 Oh, and Aiden is hard on everyone.
 He told Arthur to leave in our
 first day too. It was demoralizing
 for him back then but we laugh
 about it now.

Is she being genuinely supportive? Is she invoking Arthur's
 name to make Kirsa comply? Kirsa can't figure it out.

She turns away and starts walking back to her room. Her heels
 hitting the ground, echoing in the silence.

She glances back and sees Maya by Peter's door, watching
 Kirsa. The contours of her body visible in the darkness like
 a ghost. She whispers, trying to not wake anyone up but it's
 unquestionably eerie:

MAYA (CONT'D)
 Good night, Kirsa.

Kirsa reaches her room and gets in.

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM

She shuts the door. Composes herself.

Takes off her heels.

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM - LATER

On her desk is a clean piece of paper with one line: "I wish
 I was more open to guidance."

Kirsa stands by the desk, removing her makeup. She's in PJ's.

She checks the door. The lock doesn't turn, the door is
 permanently unlocked. No privacy.

From her luggage, she takes out a MOUTH GUARD and a SLEEPING
 MASK. She lies down on the bed.

She starts to breathe in a particular pattern: Inhales for four seconds, holds her breath for seven seconds, then exhales for eight seconds.

Falling asleep is a challenge to her, an ordeal...

But she's doing it... drifting off...

AND SOMEONE KNOCKS ON THE DOOR, THREE TIMES like the start of a fucking SWAT raid and the door is swung open.

CHIRPY VOLUNTEER

Wake up everyone! WAKEY-WAKEY!

Kirsa jumps from the bed. Takes off her mask. How long did she sleep? Did she sleep at all?

She can hear all the Volunteers going down the corridor, BANGING on doors and SHOUTING.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER (O.S.)

It's TIME! Wake up!

Kirsa straightens up in bed. Groggy.

She steps out. Gently closes the door, trying to reclaim some semblance of privacy.

She goes to her roller bag near the bed. Zips it open.

Inside are some clothes and other travel things. But she goes straight for a little pocket inside the lid.

She freezes. There's nothing there under the nets.

She takes a beat as panic coils through her.

She palms the other pockets of the bag. Then rifles through the clothes. Whatever she's looking for is obviously fucking vital. And it's not there.

Her heartbeat raises, she reflexively checks it, then immediately regrets it. It's POUNDING.

She charges out of the room.

INT. CORRIDORS

It's still dark. People are waking up, mumbling. It looks like someone pulled the fire alarm at a hotel.

And then there's Kirsa, exploding out of the room, more animated than we've ever seen her.

She goes to the first person she sees in a Volunteer's uniform who ends up being... Maya.

MAYA
(brightens up)
Kirsa!

KIRSA
There are things missing from my roller bag.

MAYA
Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that.
What's missing?

KIRSA
(she doesn't want to say)
Where is Peter?

MAYA
He already went down. He wanted to get a head start on his transformation.

A beat.

KIRSA
Do you people go through our bags?

MAYA
Well, there's a security check.
Some people try to sneak in phones.
But I assure you--

KIRSA
It's not a goddamn phone.

MAYA
Okay. But... What is it? I can't help you unless you tell me.

It pains Kirsa to admit her weakness. Especially to her. But she's desperate, she has to.

KIRSA
My Paxil.

MAYA
Is that some kind of medication?

KIRSA
For anxiety.

MAYA

Oh. Mind-altering substances are not allowed during the Process.

KIRSA

It's medicine, not LSD.

Maya cocks her head a little. "If you say so." Not contradicting Kirsa but also not giving her anything.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Did they take my pills from my suitcase? Because I need them.

(dreading to say it)

Paxil withdrawals are... bad. Even if I miss a single day. I have a strict regimen, I take a pill first thing in the morning which means I haven't taken it in a...

(realizes the severity)

What time is it?

MAYA

It's the beginning of the second session.

KIRSA

This is serious. What's the time? I need to know how long it's been since I've taken my last pill.

Maya takes a beat. Smiles. No menace in her voice.

MAYA

I'll look into it for you, I promise.

With that, she starts walking away, attending to others.

Kirsa squeezes her knuckles white.

INT. THE MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

The lights above have been dimmed for today. More intimate.

A desk nearby has a bunch of plastic cups filled with what looks like a green smoothie.

Kirsa comes in. She is approached by the Maternal Volunteer who hands Kirsa a cup of the drink.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER

Breakfast! Try it, it's yummy.

Kirsa takes it with a silent nod. She's about to walk away--

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)

Kirsa, sweetie, I want to talk to you about a possibility.

She launches into an obviously rehearsed sales pitch.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)

Some spots opened up in next week's advanced transformation classes and if you sign up right now, you can get twenty percent off. I've done those classes and trust me, this deal is a steal!

Kirsa sees that the other smiling Volunteers are giving the same pitch to the tired people streaming in.

KIRSA

(trying to get away)
I'll think about it.

Maternal Volunteer's smile fades for a second but then comes back with a vengeance.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER

If you wait, the spots might fill and you might miss what could be the best experience of your life!

KIRSA

(getting frustrated)
Thank you, maybe later.

A sudden manic desperation takes over the Maternal Volunteer.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER

Dear, why do you think you're resisting? What do you think is stopping you from committing full on to your transformation?

KIRSA

(finally snapping)
I don't know. My brain?!
(walking away)
Excuse me.

The Maternal Volunteer steps back, whispers something under her breath at Kirsa, perhaps a curse, and latches onto the next tired, defenseless person coming into the room.

Kirsa finds Peter in the chair he was sitting yesterday. Bags under his eyes, he hasn't slept at all. He waves at her.

Kirsa is about to beeline to him but the door CLOSES and Aiden ascends to the platform, surveying his flock.

People start taking their places. It's about to begin.

Kirsa brightens when she sees an empty chair next to Lori and Aspen. She walks towards them.

Lori is sipping from her "breakfast," her face scrunched.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
 (sitting down)
 How much would you pay for a Starbucks right now?

LORI
 My Lord. Do not tempt me.

ASPEN
 Oh no, I think we might be "transforming" into basic bitches.

They share a laugh.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM - LATER

Lori looks down, wiping a tear, distraught.

She's on the platform, sitting across Aiden.

Kirsa is watching them. It's dead silent. Tense.

Aiden holds up Lori's "last words" paper. His finger on the line from the first words to the last.

AIDEN
 The thing is Lori, you're much closer to this...
 (the "last words")
 ...than to this.
 (her "first words")
 I'm not saying that to hurt you, you know that. It's just the truth.

Lori forces a smile but she's hit by that.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
 Time is a resource and you don't have the resources to live unconsciously anymore.
 (MORE)

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You need to call your son and tell him the truth. You need to tell him you love him. If you still think that way about him being gay... Don't talk about that. He's your son. His sexuality is, what, a small part of him. He's your fucking son. You love him more than anyone else can ever love him.

LORI

(voice breaking)

I do. I do.

AIDEN

Say it after me: It's too late for me. I need to fucking live.

LORI

(a hoarse whisper)

It's too late for me. I need to... live.

She starts to cry in the way only old people do.

Kirsa shudders in her seat, uncomfortable.

AIDEN

Lori. Lori?

(gently, charming)

Lori, that's not what I said, was it? You missed a word there. Starts with F? I say it a lot?

A gentle laughter rises from the audience around Kirsa.

Lori breaks out a smile too.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

It's fuck, Lori. You can say fuck. We're all friends here.

A supporting laughter from the crowd, some people clap to show their support. They want Lori to do it.

Kirsa sees Aspen, next to her, is clapping too. Into it.

LORI

I need to...

AIDEN

(starting over for her)

It's too late for me...

LORI
It's too late for me. I need to...
(meek)
fucking live.

AIDEN
Again.

LORI
I said it!

AIDEN
You gave birth to four children and
you squeak like a mouse!? I don't
fucking buy it!

LORI
It's too late for me. I need to
fucking live.

AIDEN
Again!

LORI
It's too late for me--

AIDEN
Shout it! Top of your lungs!

LORI
(shouting)
It's too late for me and--

AIDEN
LOUDER!

LORI
AND I NEED TO FUC--

AIDEN
NO! FROM THE START!

LORI
IT'S TOO LATE FOR ME--

AIDEN
LOUDER! LOUDER!

LORI
IT'S TOO LATE FOR ME AND I NEED TO
FUCKING LIVE!

The words echo in the room and she starts bawling.

AIDEN
(lovingly)
Get up. Get up.

She does and Aiden embraces her. Tears in his eyes.

Thunderous applause rocks the room. Everyone gets up on their feet. Kirsa follows suit out of obligation.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
See how strong she is, folks?
Vulnerability is a strength. Don't
let anyone tell you otherwise.

Two Volunteers come up and escort Lori back down the stairs.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
If you want to find Lori during the
break or after the session and tell
her how brave you think she is...
you should. She deserves that.

Lori nears her seat. Aspen gets up and gives her a hug.

ASPEN
You're very brave.

Lori smiles through the tears.

Kirsa tries to smile at her but catches Lori looking back at Aiden. He's her God right now.

Kirsa looks around her. Everyone's faces are shining with that ecstasy. He's all of their God.

AIDEN
Alright, who's next?
(pointing)
Peter. Yes, you. Come up. Everyone
give him a hand, will you?

Peter stands up, uncomfortable. Trudges up to the stage as everyone applauds.

Everyone except Kirsa.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Share with us, Peter.

After a beat, Peter starts reading.

PETER

My first word was: "Moose." Or at least that's what my mama used to say. I said moose before I said mom, and she was so mad. She never forgave me for it.

A few people in the audience chuckle.

PETER (CONT'D)

Last words... I wrote down: "Shit."

AIDEN

Poetic.

PETER

I meditated on it a lot. I wasn't being lazy. It felt right.

AIDEN

Why "shit"?

PETER

It's ending, you know? There are things I still want to do but I don't have the time.

AIDEN

Why don't you do them now?
(Peter seems confused)
The things you want to do, why don't you do them now?

PETER

(after a brief pause)
I am doing them, I just want to do more of--

AIDEN

Why'd you pause?

PETER

I considered your question, I didn't pause--

AIDEN

Peter. Everyone in the fucking room saw you pause before you answered.

Peter shrugs. Avoiding it.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Fine, let's do it your way:
Everyone who saw him pause, raise
your hands.

Kirsa watches as everyone raises their hands. She doesn't.

Aiden scans the crowd, shows the result to Peter.

Peter takes it in.

Kirsa sees Aiden is looking straight at her. She now knows she's a player in this peculiar game.

Aiden directs his attention back to Peter.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Do me a favor, Peter. Rate your
life out of ten.

PETER

Seven, eight. Decent.

AIDEN

That's not decent, Peter. That's a
B- if it's an eight. C- if it's a
seven. That's decent?

PETER

(attempt at humour)
I sucked at school, man. C- would
have made my mama thank God.

He's good at it, some people chuckle but Aiden rolls through.

AIDEN

What's missing? Why not a ten out
of ten?

PETER

Nobody is at a ten.

AIDEN

You were never at a ten?

PETER

When my son was born, maybe.

AIDEN

Then it creeped down to seven?

PETER

Don't say that like that's a weird
thing. That's how life works.

AIDEN
You're at a C- and you're an expert
on how life works?

Now Peter is getting pissed off.

PETER
Your life is a ten? A+? Being
you're the life expert and all?

AIDEN
Of course it is.

PETER
(fuck you)
Right. 'Cause you're the butterfly.

AIDEN
Peter, how hard did your mother hit
you when she beat you?

All the air is sucked out of the room.

Peter is thrown by the sudden pivot, he's paralyzed.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
You talked about her twice. First
time, she was getting mad at you
for something beyond your control.
Second time, you sounded relieved
she wasn't angry. Am I wrong?

PETER
...I don't want to talk about that.

AIDEN
(without missing a beat)
You have a son. Are you married?

PETER
... yeah.

AIDEN
Rate your marriage for me.
(Peter is still paralyzed)
Is it "decent"? Six, seven. C-? C+?

PETER
(barely a whisper, still
thrown)
... Ten.

AIDEN

It was the conviction in your voice
that really sold that.

Peter straightens up. Looks at Kirsa, then back at Aiden.

PETER

She's the best goddamn thing that
ever happened to me. Ten.

If he's lying, he's great at it. He glances at Kirsa again
and she nods at him, steeling him up against Aiden.

AIDEN

(changing tracks)
You're a photographer.
(re: Peter's surprise)
I Googled you. I Google everyone,
by the way. I do my homework, too.

PETER

Yearbook photographer. I do high
school yearbooks.

AIDEN

That's an important distinction?
(Peter shrugs)
It is. You're not an artist.

Peter shrugs again, and Aiden... laughs.

It takes everyone by surprise, including Kirsa.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Here I am digging for some deep...
(his voice trails off)
Peter, you're just an average Joe
who hates his fucking job.

PETER

I don't "hate" my jo--

AIDEN

All who think Peter hates his job
raise your hand.

Again, everyone in the room raises their hands except Kirsa.

The room has relaxed now with Aiden laughing. Even Peter
chuckles at the result.

But Kirsa is getting pissed. Her hands rubbing against each
other, almost manic, cracking her fingers.

PETER

What do you want me to say. It's a job, man. You hate it sometimes--

AIDEN

No. Stop resisting. You hate it all the goddamn time.

(Peter is silent)

Do you know why? Because it's a betrayal of your being. You gave up on your calling.

PETER

I didn't give up anything. Don't make it sound dramatic. I just... wasn't that good at it.

AIDEN

Tell me what you mean by that.

PETER

I mean not everyone gets to be... you know. Some people become craftsmen. No shame in that.

Aiden takes a beat. Then looks at a Volunteer near the door.

The Volunteer switches OFF the lights. A PROJECTOR whirls up.

A white curtain rolls down behind them. Aiden and Peter become silhouettes against it.

AIDEN

I wasn't going to start on false narratives until tonight but this is such a perfect example.

Aiden stands up, back to lecture mode.

Aiden (CONT'D)

What he said, that bullshit about some people becoming craftsmen... that's his false narrative. That's what he tells himself to make sure his dreams stay impossible and far away. Hurts less that way.

He turns back to Peter.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

It's the answer you have when you ask yourself why you gave up. Which you do. Every. Fucking. Day.

Peter doesn't answer.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Often, these false narratives don't feel false. We think we have a firm grasp on the truth of who we are, but that's not true. We are all unreliable narrators of our own lives.

A few people around Kirsa have "a-ha" moments, they nod meaningfully. Some even tear up in the intimate darkness.

Behind Aiden and Peter, a PHOTOGRAPH lights up the room.

It's a younger PETER, looking straight at the camera. He has dark STRINGS attached to his hands that go down to smaller versions of him, controlling them like marionettes.

It's evocative. Warm colors, dark iconography. But Peter sinks down into his seat, embarrassed.

PETER

I thought I deleted this shit.

Aiden stands up, looks at the photograph.

AIDEN

You think this is bad?

PETER

It's just empty and edgy. It's like My Chemical Romance in photographic form.

(waving at the Volunteer)

Seriously, can you turn it off?

But more photographs appear behind them. All self-portraits from the same series: Peter dosing a smaller version of himself on fire. Peter ripping angel wings off of a smaller version as if he's plucking wings off of a fly.

AIDEN

These are beautiful. Even you have to admit: these show great potential.

PETER

Everything and everyone has potential. Potential doesn't mean shit if it doesn't become something.

AIDEN
Why didn't it become something?

PETER
I don't know, man. Life.

He glances at Kirsa for a split second, then looks away.

Kirsa stews in worried silence.

AIDEN
Peter. You're not dead. Whatever
you had, you still have it.

Peter can't help but look up at his past work. Dwarfed by the life he left behind.

Aiden turns to the crowd.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
"I wasn't good at it," he says. "It
doesn't mean shit" he says. He
needs to be right. He needs to be
shit. Otherwise it means he's
responsible for his own hell.
(appealing to the crowd)
What do YOU say, folks? Is this guy
talented or what?

People start clapping. It starts slow but soon everyone is on their feet and THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE is shaking the room.

Peter is shocked. Not the reaction he expected at all.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
See the truth, Peter. Hear the
truth. They're not lying.

He leans into Peter, as if he's sharing a secret.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
The thing is, this isn't only about
your aliveness. Do you understand?

Peter look up at him curiously.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Are you prepared for the day you're
going to have to tell your kid to
give up on his dreams?

And that just breaks Peter. He tears up.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You know from personal experience that unhappy parents make unhappy children. Do you want to do that to your kid? Do you want him to have the kind of life you hate?

PETER

... no.

AIDEN

Are you going to continue your C-life, Peter? Or do you want more?

PETER

... yes.

AIDEN

Yes, what?

PETER

Yes. I want more.

Everyone starts CLAPPING like mad again. Standing up, showing their utmost support for Peter and his transformation.

Kirsa is still. What the fuck is happening to her husband?

AIDEN

You want more, you have to take it.
(to a volunteer)
Let's get this man a phone.

Maya walks up and takes out her phone: a black smartphone with ornate snake decorations at its edges.

She gives it to Peter. On the phone's screen is a number, ready to be dialed with a simple tap.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I want you to call your work and do what needs to be done.

PETER

What?

AIDEN

You know what you have to do.

PETER

(after a beat)
You want me to quit?

Kirsa grips the sides of the chair. Her eyes boring into Peter's but they don't look at her anymore.

They look up at Aiden.

AIDEN

I want you to wake the fuck up. I want you to commit to your transformation.

Aiden leans even closer. His voice drops to an intimate whisper, reverberating through the room.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

(so fucking sincere)
You said your last word on this earth is going to be "shit".

Peter looks down at the phone in his hands.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Because you know you're wasting it.

Peter's eyes are drilling into the phone.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me "Aiden, you're talking outta your asshole and you're making me do this."

Peter looks up. Resolute.

PETER

No. You're not wrong.

Absolute silence as he dials the number, lifts the phone--

And Kirsa stands up.

KIRSA

Peter. Hang up.

(beat)

Peter. Hang up now!

All eyes turn to her. Including Aiden and Peter's.

Peter hangs up at once. Snapping out of his reverie.

Aiden's eyes mark Kirsa. They are brimming with wrath.

He turns to the Volunteer by the door. Signals.

The projector whirls to a stop. The lights come up.

Aiden stands. Looking down at Kirsa.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, but I had to say
something. I'm his wife.

AIDEN
(barely contained rage)
Here, you are Kirsa and he is
Peter. You are individuals. If you
cannot sit still and listen, you
have to leave the room until his
exercise is over.

KIRSA
I was only trying to help. He was
making a mistake and--

AIDEN
If you are still committed to your
transformation, leave the room and
someone will let you know when you
can come back in. If you are not,
talk to any of the volunteers for a
refund and go home.

Everyone stares at Kirsa. It's humiliating and intimidating.

Maya approaches her.

MAYA
Come with me, Kirsa.

Kirsa simmers, then seeing she has no choice, starts to leave
her row. People drag their chairs back to let her pass as if
she's radioactive. Even Aspen and Lori.

KIRSA
(powerless, to Peter)
Promise me you won't quit your job.

Peter nods weakly. She glares at him, wanting more than that.

PETER
Yeah. I promise. I won't.

Maya escorts her to the double doors in complete silence.

The Tall Volunteer unlocks the door for her. Holds it open.

Behind her, Aiden sits down across from Peter.

AIDEN
Let's talk more about your
marriage, Peter. Truthfully.

Kirsa shoots one final look at them before the Tall Volunteer escorts her out, shuts the door and locks it again.

INT. CORRIDORS

He leads her down the dark hallways.

We stay with them for an uncomfortably long time.

Kirsa gets more scared and tense with each step.

Then the Tall Volunteer stops.

INT. EMPTY ROOM

There is nothing here except for a single bulb dangling from the ceiling, emanating blindingly bright light.

The door unlocks. The Tall Volunteer signals for Kirsa to step in. She does, shielding her eyes.

KIRSA
How long am I going to be here?

THE TALL VOLUNTEER
(closing the door)
Until his exercise is over.

KIRSA
Wait, do you know what time it is?

He doesn't answer. Closes the door, then locks it.

Kirsa keeps shielding her eyes. Leans against a wall.

INT. EMPTY ROOM, LATER

Kirsa is pacing like a mad woman, picking at the sides of her nails. We don't know how long it's been. She doesn't either.

In silence, the light bulb BUZZES.

She looks for a light switch on the walls, but there is none.

The light bulb BUZZES even LOUDER somehow. As if the buzzing is coming from inside her skull.

KIRSA
Shut up. Please.

She stops. Swallows. She's having trouble breathing.

She takes DEEP BREATHS but the BUZZING persists and in a few seconds, her DEEP BREATHS quicken. Anxiety taking over.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
You can breathe. If you're
speaking, it means you can breathe.

It does little. She goes to the door, tries to open it.

It's locked. Of course. She BANGS on it.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
Is anyone out there?

No answer.

The BUZZING is still there. She looks up at the light bulb, shielding her eyes, then takes off her jacket, wraps it around her hand and reaches for the bulb.

She unscrews it, delicately but urgently.

It works. The room goes completely DARK and SILENT.

But her breathing quickens even more. It sounds worse, somehow, when it's the only sound.

She tries to calm herself, taking slow, measured breaths.

Except she hears people TALKING now, in a neighboring room.

She nears the wall. The voices are muffled.

PERSON 1
This square is red.

Now a chorus of people speak up. Ritualistic:

EVERYONE
That is true.

Kirsa puts her ear onto the wall. The voices get clearer.

She recognizes them:

MAYA
Mallory, you failed to sign up a
single person for the advanced
transformation class.

EVERYONE
That is true.

MAYA
What else is true?

A long, somewhat ominous beat.

VOLUNTEER #1
You smell like a disgusting old
person.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER (MALLORY)
That is true.

VOLUNTEER #2
You couldn't sign up your kids.
Your own children hate you.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER
(her voice breaking)
That is true.

MAYA
Even the people who love you don't
like you.

Maternal Volunteer chokes down a sob.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Is that true or false?

Maternal Volunteer doesn't answer or maybe won't answer.

A loud SLAP silences her.

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER
(giving in)
That is true. It's true.

She unravels. Breaks down, sobbing.

Kirsa steps away from the wall, seriously freaked out.

INT. EMPTY ROOM - LATER

Kirsa is sitting on the ground, hugging her knees.

The door opens. The light makes her wince.

The Tall Volunteer fills the doorframe.

He looks up at the dangling cord that used to be connected to
the light bulb, but doesn't say anything.

INT. CORRIDORS - LATER

Kirsa, disheveled and spent, walks side by side with the Tall Volunteer as if she's his prisoner.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM - LATER

The door opens and Kirsa steps in.

People are sitting. Their eyes on her.

Aiden is on the platform. A chair across him.

AIDEN

Kirsa. Come up. Sit.

She walks towards the platform, slowly, as the door BANGS behind her, making her jump. People's eyes trail her.

She sees Peter in the crowd, sitting at his chair. He catches her eyes. He looks drained. They all look drained.

Kirsa notices the Maternal Volunteer and Maya, leaning against the wall at the back, standing side by side.

They both brightly smile at her.

Kirsa is so frazzled she doesn't know if she heard them earlier or if she imagined it.

She steps onto the platform.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Sit. Please.

She does. Aiden takes a seat across her.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

We talked for a little while with Peter and one thing became crystal clear: He loves you.

Kirsa straightens up, surprised at how warm Aiden sounds.

KIRSA

I love him too.

She says that while looking at Peter. He smiles back.

AIDEN

How did you meet?

KIRSA

He hasn't told you?

AIDEN

He did.

KIRSA

So then why?

AIDEN

I'd love to hear it from you too. And the non-bullshit version, please. We know what you usually say to people. We already went down that road with Peter. So, just give us the truth.

Kirsa takes that in. When she starts speaking, she is vulnerable. Maybe because of the exhaustion. Maybe because Peter's love is the only anchor in this mad place.

KIRSA

I met him in the hallway of a courthouse. I was there to represent a client, and he was waiting for his trial. He had stolen a laptop from a coffee shop to... well, to feed his heroin addiction. He was trying to get clean, then. But he wasn't when he stole the thing. He looked like a man who was too tired to cry and too sad to sleep.

She looks at Peter. He's watching her. Nods her to go on.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

The owner of the laptop was a wedding photographer. Peter went into the computer, and saw all these photographs of a couple who had gotten married the day before. They were all going to get lost forever if he sold it to someone. So he went back to the coffee shop and tried to track this guy down. That's why he got caught, because he was trying to do the right thing. Again, this was before he was clean too. Imagine the will power and selflessness that must have taken. The simple goodness in that. It made me fall for him. I wanted to help him.

A long beat.

AIDEN

So, in a way, you rescued him?

KIRSA

I don't know about that. But I saw him, this wonderful person who was lost and afraid, and he needed stability, and love.

AIDEN

You make him sound like a cute little puppy.

KIRSA

Excuse me?

AIDEN

You talk about Peter like a dog you rescued from the pound.

KIRSA

Seriously?

(beat, then to Peter)

You got nothing to say about all this?

Peter says nothing.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

(rising frustration)

Do you think I treat you like a cute little puppy dog?

No answer from Peter.

AIDEN

He can't speak. He took a temporary vow of silence. If he speaks, he will be removed. Here, you are individuals, not husband and wife--

KIRSA

(curt)

I know.

(beat)

Okay, then, is that how he said he feels, or is that your "professional opinion"?

AIDEN

It's what he showed me. No matter what I said, he refused to make that call to his boss.

(MORE)

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Even though he wanted to. Because he promised you. You have him on a short leash.

Kirsa puts on a tight-lipped smile. Aiden is trying to get to her, and she's not going to let him.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You punish him to keep him there. In his little place where he can't get away from you.

KIRSA

And how am I punishing him?

AIDEN

He's living a C- life and you're not letting him transform. That is the definition of punishment.

KIRSA

The only thing I've done today is stop him from making a huge life decision without thinking it through--

AIDEN

Do you always make Peter "think things through" whenever he disagrees with you? Does he need to "think things through" until he does agree with you?

Kirsa scoffs at that, not even dignifying it.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I see. You think you know what's best for him.

KIRSA

Maybe I do. Because I've known him for years, you've known him for a day. I'm his wife.

Aiden stands up, turns to the crowd. Lecturing, using Kirsa as an example:

AIDEN

"I've known him for years. I'm his wife."

(points to Kirsa)

Kirsa's belief that time is how we know someone is ignorant.

Anger bubbles in Kirsa by Aiden's dismissal of her.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

We don't talk, really talk, with the people closest to us, do we? We speak, but most of the time it's nothing authentic, nothing truthful.

(raising his hand)

Raise your hand folks if you feel that the people who think they know you--your partner, your mother, your father, your brothers and sisters--they don't really know you.

Every person in the audience raises a hand.

Peter doesn't, but averts his eyes when Kirsa looks at him.

Aiden gets to his feet, towering over her.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Kirsa thinks she knows her husband. But we listened to Peter speak. He has made himself known to us and--

KIRSA

This is ridiculous.

(turns to Peter)

You're just going to let him talk about us like this? Or is this how you actually feel?

Peter's eyes are boring into the ground.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Peter! Look at me!

AIDEN

Bark, Peter! Roll over, Peter!

Kirsa whips around to Aiden, furious.

A beat. She laughs in nervous anger. Disbelief.

KIRSA

Oh my God! I knew this would be crazy but this is crazy.

Aiden is calm. Not reacting to her outburst.

AIDEN
Let's talk about why Kirsa is
punishing Peter--

KIRSA
Punishing? I saved his life. I
helped him get clean, I helped him
get a job--

AIDEN
(to the crowd, lecturing)
"I saved his life." That's Kirsa's
false narrative. That's what she
tells herself when she is
challenged about their
relationship.

KIRSA
It's the truth!

He whips back around at her and leans into her, close.

AIDEN
(raising his voice)
No. The truth is that you're tired
of justifying your mistake.
(pointing at Peter)
You never meant to be with him, did
you? Maybe a quick fuck but have a
child with him? A life with him?

Her eyes find Peter, betrayed by his silence.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
How long have you known Peter?

Kirsa doesn't answer.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
(louder)
How long?

KIRSA
Four years.

AIDEN
How old is your son?

Kirsa just glares at Aiden.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Four.
(beat)
(MORE)

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You got together, got married and had a child in the same year. Life rushed you along and you gave in. You told yourself and your family it was fate. They must have told you it was a mistake for you to marry a junkie but you said, no, it's not.

(a whisper that slithers through the room)

But now you know they were right and you were wrong. Look at what you're stuck with. With a child that derailed your career! With a husband you have to take care of! That's why you punish Peter! Because you made a mistake and you HATE yourself for it!

Her eyes flare and she PUSHES Aiden back so hard that Aiden, a giant of a man, STUMBLES BACK.

Kirsa glares at him, shaking with primal rage.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

If you thought I was wrong, you could have just told me I'm wrong. Why do you think you pushed me instead, Kirsa?

KIRSA

Fuck you. You're insane. This whole thing is insane!

She rushes down the stage towards Peter.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Come on. We're leaving.

She grabs him by the arm. She pulls him up out of his chair.

He lets her. They charge down towards the doors.

Aiden watches them... Then smiles.

AIDEN

I told you folks, didn't I? You will resist. You will hate me, you will want to hit me... I said it.

Across the room, Kirsa and Peter get to the doors and she pulls at the handle... except it doesn't turn. Locked.

Kirsa snaps at the Tall Volunteer, who is standing nearby.

KIRSA
Open the doors.

The Tall Volunteer looks up at Aiden for instructions.

Aiden descends from the platform. Slowly, he walks towards Kirsa and Peter, every step echoing in the silent room.

AIDEN
I told you that you will kick and
scream. You'll want to leave. The
truth can do that to you.

Kirsa white knuckles Peter's hand, standing tall.

KIRSA
We're not prisoners here. You have
to let us go.

Aiden reaches them... Walks past them, towards the Tall Volunteer. He takes the KEY from him.

AIDEN
If any of you want to leave, this
is your chance. You will get a full
refund, no questions asked.
However, if you choose to stay,
that means you're committing to
stay until you are truly
transformed. Is that understood?

People stir in the crowd. An OLDER MAN speaks up:

Older Man
You mean until Sunday?

Aiden wait for a somewhat ominous beat before:

AIDEN
This introductory class runs from
Friday to Sunday.

He says it with some ambiguity, but the Older Man sits down.

Kirsa's eyes are burning into the door, every cell in her body commanding her to get the fuck out.

KIRSA
Open the door.

Aiden turns to her and Peter. Scans them.

Then inserts the key into the door and turns it.

He swings the doors wide open.

Kirsa launches out, holding Peter, but Aiden stops them.

AIDEN

Peter. One more thing, before you
go.

Aiden walks up to Peter and SLAPS him across the face, hard.

There are GASPS from the audience.

The Volunteers are not fazed at all. They've seen it before.

KIRSA

Get your hands off him!

But Aiden lunges at Peter and puts his hands at the sides of Peter's head, as if he's going to wring his neck.

AIDEN

That hurt? That fucking hurt?

(Peter nods, scared)

That's temporary pain, Peter. It's nothing. You won't remember what it felt like in ten minutes. But you stay in this job buddy, you stay in this life? You'll know real fucking pain. Slow, life-long pain that will fucking rot whatever's left of your fucking soul and your kid's.

And with that, he gently lets go of him.

KIRSA

Peter. Peter, we have to go.

But Peter starts sobbing.

Kirsa hugs him, trying to contain his unraveling.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Peter?

(to Aiden)

You assaulted him! That's battery!

Peter takes a deep breath, composing himself.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Peter, come on, let's go back home.

Peter looks up at Aiden.

AIDEN

You can speak now. You are released
from your vow of silence.

Peter steels himself. Turns to Kirsa.

PETER

I can't leave. I'm sorry.

KIRSA

(holding it together)

Peter, I know it feels hard right
now but it's because of this place.
He's brainwashing us and he's good
at it. Once we get home, you will
feel so much bett--

PETER

No.

(vomiting the words)

This is how I always feel. You're
just seeing it for the first time.

Kirsa's face falls, devastated.

Aiden pulls Peter up. Grabs his shoulders.

AIDEN

You're so brave, Peter.

He embraces him, then escorts him back into the room.

KIRSA

Peter.

Kirsa powerlessly trails them.

AIDEN

Isn't he so brave, folks? That took
guts, didn't it?

People start to clap but--

KIRSA

This psycho hit him and you're
cheering? Think for yourself, he
will hit you too! We all need to
leave!

It seems to snap some people out of their reverie but Aiden
nips it in the bud.

AIDEN

They committed to staying until the end of their process, Kirsa.

The subtext is clear: Nobody is allowed to leave.

Kirsa can sense people are unnerved by the way Aiden declared that but not enough to stand up to him.

Aiden turns to Kirsa now, his arm still draped around Peter.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You have not. Will you?

She looks at Peter.

PETER

You don't have to stay, Kirs. You got your shit together. Go home. I'll see you in a few days.

She knows "in a few days", he is going to be a pod person.

KIRSA

I can't leave you here.

AIDEN

Well, then, Kirsa. Are you committed?

She looks between Aiden and Peter.

Kirsa steels herself. Makes her choice.

KIRSA

I'm not leaving.

AIDEN

I need to hear you are committed.

A long beat. She looks straight at Peter.

KIRSA

I'm committed.

It's clear what she means: I'm committed to you.

AIDEN

Congratulations. Now, sit your ass back down and shut the fuck up.

Aiden tosses the key back to the Tall Volunteer.

Kirsa watches Peter wipe tears, embarrassed.

The Tall Volunteer SLAMS the doors shut and LOCKS them.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM - LATER

Kirsa's skin is wan, her eyes sunken, the Paxil withdrawal really starting to drown her in nausea. Her head is in her hands. The ceiling feels lower, the lights murkier.

She snaps out of it when everyone START CLAPPING and get on their feet. Aiden, on the platform, is hugging Aspen.

Kirsa doesn't get up or clap. She winces at the sound.

Aspen comes over and is embraced by Lori.

Everyone sits down.

Aiden walks to the edge of the platform.

AIDEN

You've all done great work here today. You are alive. Isn't it fucking great, being alive?

A THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. Kirsa presses her palms into her ears.

Aiden waits for it to die down. Warm again. His voice softer.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I know it wasn't easy but you persevered. If anything, you now know you are stronger than you thought you were.

People around Kirsa nod meaningfully.

Aiden pulls up an empty cork board.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

At your rooms, you will find one of these and a collection of pictures. I want you to use them to show us what your transformed life will look like. You will pin them onto your board. You will bring the board with you to our next session and present it to us as a totem to your aliveness and we will unleash your life onto you.

He stops for a long beat. Stares everyone down.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Make sure you believe in it. You
might have to bleed for it.

He doesn't elaborate what he means by that and people in the
room are too drained to ask.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Go now. Get some sleep.

The Tall Volunteer UNLOCKS the doors. Swings them open.

People stand up and make their way towards their rooms.

THE CHIRPY VOLUNTEER

You know the drill, if your last
name starts with A to H, you're
with me...

It gets loud and crowded really quickly.

Kirsa catches a glimpse of Peter in the outgoing herd. He's
walking to the doors, Maya buzzing alongside him, chattering
into his ear. Pouring poison into his weakened mind.

Other volunteers descend upon the vulnerable people like
vultures. They pass by Kirsa, barely giving her a glance.

The Maternal Volunteer approaches Aspen, and Kirsa overhears:

MATERNAL VOLUNTEER

Oh, Aspen, I'm so happy for you.
What a breakthrough. I thought you
might be interested in signing up
for the next class...

Kirsa pushes past them, tracking Peter in the crowd...

But she can't find him.

INT. CORRIDORS - LATER

The silent herd of people march in creepy unison.

The lights above are dim. Kirsa searches their faces in the
darkness for Peter, one after another. No luck.

She passes by a Volunteer standing besides Lori as she fills
the Advanced Transformation class form on a clipboard.

People start streaming into their rooms.

Kirsa beelines towards Peter's room.

INT. PETER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kirsa bursts in.

KIRSA

Peter--

But Peter's not there. Maya is. She's making the bed.

MAYA

Oh, I'm sorry, it's just me. We moved Peter to another room.

KIRSA

... Why?

Maya tucks in the bedsheets.

MAYA

We had to separate you. We knew you'd visit him. You're too close.

KIRSA

He's my husband.

MAYA

Here, he's Peter and you're Kirsa. Two individuals focusing on your own transformations--

Kirsa makes a sound that's half-laugh, half-scream.

KIRSA

Does he know you hid my Paxil? I imagine he'd have trouble "focusing" if he knew that.

MAYA

I didn't hide your Paxil, Kirsa. We looked everywhere, you probably forgot to bring it.

Maya turns back around to finish smoothing the blankets.

Kirsa clocks the PHONE protruding out of Maya's back pocket.

KIRSA

I need to know he's okay.

MAYA

He is okay. He is better than he has ever been.

KIRSA
How would you know? You've met him
yesterday.

MAYA
You get to know people quick here.

KIRSA
I don't know what that means. Does
it mean you tried to fuck him?

Maya stops. That bland smile still on her face.

MAYA
Kirsa, you sound a little paranoid.

KIRSA
Do I?! Maybe MY FUCKING ANTI-
ANXIETY DRUGS COULD HAVE HELPED
WITH THAT!?!

After the outburst, she's breathless for a second. She sits
onto the bed, sinks in.

Maya gingerly sits next to her.

MAYA
Arthur was the same way. He saw the
worst in people. It must be because
of what you do. You see people at
their worst. Even good people must
get nasty when they're going
through a divorce.

Kirsa looks at her. Gazing into her fucking soul.

Then she nods.

KIRSA
I'm sorry. You're right.

She embraces Maya.

Maya is surprised but accepts the hug.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
My job is basically destroying
people's lives.

That's an oddly threatening thing to say but she says it in
such a... peaceful tone. Maya can only smile back.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

I should go back to my room. I have homework.

MAYA

Sure thing. See you next session!

She's happy Kirsa is getting on with the program.

INT. CORRIDORS -

Kirsa walks towards her room. But it's different now, she doesn't seem lost. She knows exactly what she's doing.

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM

She comes in and closes the door.

She pulls out Maya's PHONE.

She dials a number. It rings.

She sees the corkboard on the desk and a collection of printed pictures. They're all abstract: An empty house with a Sun shining inside it. Two naked people embracing each other inside a flying globe of water...

The person on the other end picks up the phone.

KIRSA

Hey, it's Kirsa. I need you to do me a favor and run me a name: Aiden Caul. C-A-U-L. Founded an organization called The Process. It's an emergency.

(listens)

No, I don't. Sorry, they don't let us know the time while we're here--

(listens)

Wait, what day is it? ...No, that's-- but I slept. It can't be Friday, we came here Friday morning.

She takes a glance at the phone screen.

It is Friday Night, 11:43 PM.

She starts pacing, angered by this manipulation.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

These fuckers. They've been messing with our sleep schedule.

(listens)

(MORE)

KIRSA (CONT'D)

No. I'm fine. Did you get the name?
I want everything on him. Just say
it's for a potential client. I need
all the dirt you can get.

After a beat, the person on the other end responds.

A smile blooms on Kirsa's face.

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM - LATER

KNOCK KNOCK, deafeningly loud, and the door swings open.

It's the Chirpy Volunteer--

CHIRPY VOLUNTEER

Rise and shine!! It's time for--

He's surprised to see Kirsa is already up. Make up on,
armored in her power suit.

KIRSA

Thank you.

She picks up her cork board and strides by a somewhat puzzled
Chirpy Volunteer.

INT. CORRIDORS - LATER

People are groggily following the Volunteers down the hall.

Kirsa is wide awake, alert.

Other people, including Aspen and Lori, give her a wide
berth. They know she's the enemy.

She sees Maya scuttling from one Volunteer to the next--

MAYA

I can't find my phone. Did you see
it anywhere?

Kirsa can't help but crack a satisfied smile.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM -

She's one of the first ones here.

AIDEN (O.S.)

You look like you finally
committed.

He's on the platform, beaming down at her like a prophet.

KIRSA
You're right. I am committed.

She sits down in her seat.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM - LATER

Peter is among the late stragglers. Kirsa watches him take his seat and start slurping his green smoothie.

The Tall Volunteer SLAMS the doors and LOCKS them.

AIDEN
Alright, how is everyone feeling?

People mostly grunt back.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Like shit, huh?
(that draws some laughs)
You're meant to. It means you're doing hard work. I know you feel like death but trust me, you're more alive than you've ever been.
(a beat, deliberating)
Let's start with something different. Wake you all up.
(points to Kirsa)
Come up. Let's talk.

People are taken aback. Not sure whether to applause or not.

She raises from her seat.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Go ahead. Give her a hand.

They obey but it's still smattering, hesitant.

She climbs the platform. Sits down across Aiden. Faces him.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
What do you have for us?

Kirsa turns her board to the audience and to Aiden.

At the center is a photograph of her, Peter and baby Sam together. It's surrounded by the abstract photographs.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
That's your family.

KIRSA

Peter and our baby Sam. I had the photograph in my wallet.

AIDEN

You put them at the center.

KIRSA

Sorry, is that corny? My son is the center of my universe. It becomes that way when you have a kid.

(light banter)

Do you have children? I realized, you know us better than most people in our lives but we don't know anything about you.

The audience stirs. They are definitely interested.

AIDEN

You're deflecting. This isn't about me. This is about your aliveness.

KIRSA

This is going to be about you, a little bit at least.

After a tense beat, she points to a picture of light shining through the clouds onto two blurry men on a beach.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

This powerful, blinding light is this program, the Process. The man on the left is Peter. And this man is you, his therapist.

(pointing)

You're the one on the right because that one looks like a doctor.

Aiden is catching onto what she's doing.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

You are a doctor, right?

AIDEN

I never said I was.

KIRSA

I'm sorry. I was-- What we do, it feels like a form of therapy and--

AIDEN

It's not therapy.

KIRSA

You're not a therapist? I assumed.

AIDEN

Kirsa, it feels like we're talking about everything except you.

She leans in now. A declaration of war.

KIRSA

Why don't we ever talk about you?
You take away our phones, lock us
in rooms, we even let you hit us.
But we have no idea who you are.

The crowd is eagerly waiting to see where this goes.

AIDEN

Kirsa, ever since the beginning of
this class you have been
slandering, deflecting, resisting--

KIRSA

You've done the same. And I know
why. I know who you are.

Aiden's eyes narrow.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

You're an abusive, disgraced
therapist who drove his last
patient to commit suicide.

An older woman in the audience actually GASPS.

AIDEN

If you know of that incident, you
also know I was cleared.

KIRSA

Criminally. They still took away
your license for patient abuse.
Because of your experimental
therapy "technology" which is
basically what we have been doing
here. Isn't that true, Aiden?

AIDEN

He was a troubled man.

KIRSA

Five of your ex-colleagues
testified that the Process was the
reason Warren Rich killed himself.

AIDEN

They did.

She pulls out her trump card: Maya's phone. On it is the photograph of a young man in his 20's. Thin with big eyes.

KIRSA

(going in for the kill)

Are you using the techniques you used on Warren Rich on us?

He glances at the phone for a second but then looks away.

She turns the phone towards the crowd.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

This boy put his trust in Aiden and he killed him. We should not make the same mistake.

She gives the phone to someone in the front row.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Scroll down and you can read all about it.

People gather around the phone. Peter. Aspen. Lori.

A sense of unease overtakes the room. Volunteers look at each other, confused about what they should do.

Aiden sits motionless for a long beat, then stands up.

He walks towards Kirsa and she steps aside, afraid of him, but he goes past her, into the crowd.

He extends his hand to Aspen, who hands the phone over to him. He looks down at the photo.

Kirsa thinks maybe he's going to smash the phone or something but he turns it towards the crowd. Walks through the rows, making sure everyone sees Warren's face.

AIDEN

When Warren was twelve, he drank an entire bottle of Drano. And when that didn't kill him, he jumped from a sixth store window onto concrete. He couldn't talk after that, which made things worse. He came into my care after his sixth suicide attempt.

Suddenly, he's almost at the edge of tears.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

That is not an excuse. He was in my responsibility. I should have done better by him.

He continues to hold the phone towards his flock.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I was a young man, the Process was primitive and I didn't trust myself. When Warren pushed back against the Process, I decided to stop and go back to what we'd tried before... More therapy.

He lifts his hand up.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

How many of you have been to therapy and got nothing out of it? Just a guy, sitting across you like a fucking Buddha, nodding to every thing you say but has nothing to say back to you other than vague aphorisms and thin platitudes?

Hands go up. Slowly but surely. He got that one right.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Warren is the reason why I expanded the Process. Because I saw that providing him with gentle guidance and coping strategies was not enough.

He pauses for a long while. Making sure everyone takes a look at Warren's face, to see what he has lost.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

If I need to push you to resuscitate your aliveness, I WILL. I don't want you to cope, I want you to live. You are free to ask for your money back or call me a quack after we're done with your graduation. But until then, you are mine.

(final)

I lost him. I will not lose you.

He gives the phone back to Maya, then declares to the crowd:

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Let's take a quick break. I will be here to take all the questions you might have.

People scuttle towards Aiden, surrounding him. Their savior. Now even more fascinating than before.

Kirsa is left on the platform. Powerless and alone.

She sees Peter emerge from the crowd, walks towards her.

Maya is on his heels but he turns around, strict:

PETER

I want to talk to her alone.

Maya wants to argue but he's resolved. He walks up to Kirsa.

PETER (CONT'D)

Hey. You're alright?

She shakes her head. No.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM - LATER

Kirsa and Peter are huddled up in a corner.

PETER

Your Paxil? The fuck.

KIRSA

I've been trying to tell you but they've been keeping us apart.

PETER

Well, fuck, how are you holding up?

KIRSA

Like I'm under a heavy, invisible blanket of needles.

PETER

Jesus.

He embraces her. She takes it in. Feels validated. At home.

PETER (CONT'D)

You saw this coming.

(shaken)

You stayed because of me. I pulled you into my shit again.

She doesn't correct him.

PETER (CONT'D)

I regretted staying the moment you decided to stay, you know.

KIRSA

Why?

He doesn't go on for the longest time.

PETER

Aiden was right about a lot of things. My mother, you know. How I feel about my work at the studio--

KIRSA

You don't hate your work, Peter--

PETER

I do. He was right on that. He allowed me to come out and say it.

KIRSA

He attacked you--

PETER

Kirs, can I finish?

Kirsa backs down. Nods; go on.

PETER (CONT'D)

He was right about everything when it came to me.

(beat)

So I was like... What else is he right about, you know?

KIRSA

He was wrong about plenty things.

PETER

I guess. He was wrong about one thing at least. You saved my life. That's the truth.

(beat)

That's why I could never ask why we got married so quickly. I think I was afraid you'd tell me.

He sheds the weight. This was a long time coming.

KIRSA

I married you because I love you.

PETER

Man, I was so not marriage material back then.

KIRSA

To me, you were.

He lifts his head a little. Wanting more.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Do you remember when you helped Lauren move out of her place?

PETER

Lauren... Lauren my ex?

KIRSA

She got you addicted to poison. She hurt you so bad. But you helped her when she needed you. You got her into the program. You never, ever called her a bitch or a cunt, which is so rare, trust me. You didn't hate someone you had so much cause to hate and most people are so petty and terrible. Every day I see them spend thousands of dollars just to screw over their exes. Over some worthless trinket they don't even want. But you... You don't hurt people even when you're hurt. I wanted to be with you, Peter. How can I not? You're the best.

She's so sincere it almost makes him cry.

PETER

Why the rush though? Why did we get married so quick?

KIRSA

I wanted to lock your ass down, you idiot.

PETER

(smiling)

My ass. That's the reason?

KIRSA

You bet your ass it is.

He laughs. She smiles, things are back to their old normal.

She takes his hand in hers. He kisses her.

AIDEN

Alright, recess over. Let's work.

He signals to the Volunteers and they start folding up the chairs, carrying them away to the corners.

Kirsa and Peter watch. With anticipation. With dread.

Aiden turns towards the two of them.

He walks towards where Peter was sitting and pulls up his cork board.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Peter. Is this yours?

Peter looks at Kirsa. Unsure what he should do.

Aiden walks up to them. People are starting to form a circle around them, curious.

PETER

Why?

AIDEN

Tell us about it.

Peter again looks at Kirsa, Aiden reads his hesitation.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Fuck it, you know what it's about.
You did the work. I can tell.

(beat)

Everyone come with me. Peter, you
go over there.

He points across the room, towards the doors.

Aiden starts to walk to the other end of the room. People follow their shepherd.

Kirsa stays with Peter, holding his hand. Aiden sees it.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Kirsa, he's not going to float away
if you let go of his hand.

Kirsa doesn't reply.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

What do you think is so wrong with
him that you don't trust him to
make his own decisions?

Peter turns to Kirsa, hushed:

PETER

Go. Let's just get this over with.

KIRSA

No. He's being vindictive, he's punishing me through you.

PETER

He's going to do that either way.

KIRSA

Peter, he's a bully. He's not going to magically stop. We have to stand up to him together.

Aiden has lost his patience by now:

AIDEN

(to the Volunteers)

Do it.

Six Volunteers SWARM Kirsa and Peter.

Kirsa and Peter resist but they are forcefully separated, each dragged to the opposite ends of the room.

The crowd watches, impassive. More fascinated than anything.

The Volunteers leave Kirsa before Aiden, then flutter away back to their positions.

She doesn't even look at Aiden, she walks by him and blends into the crowd.

At the other end of the room, the Volunteers leave Peter near the doors, next to the Tall Volunteer.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Peter!

Aiden walks to a wall near the crowd and hangs Peter's board onto a nail there. Looks over it.

It's filled with a myriad of pictures to the edges. Peter really worked hard on whatever this is.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You did this board truthfully, I can tell. I don't know what these mean, but you do. This is what you want your new life to be.

He turns around and faces Peter down across the room.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
So come and get it.

PETER
What?

AIDEN
Nobody is going to just give it to
you. You need to come and get it.

Peter is not sure what's going on but starts walking tentatively towards his board to get it over with.

Aiden turns to the crowd.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Keep him away from his board.

Now they're confused too.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
(to Peter)
See, this is not some bullshit
Oprah vision board. You need to
fucking fight for it if you want
your life to change. Your life
won't change just because you feel
bad about it. Addicts know drugs
are bad for them but it doesn't
stop them from using. You know
that, Peter. So, if you want to
start living, you need to fight.
You will only change when the pain
of staying the same becomes larger
than the pain of changing.
(to the crowd)
You are the obstacle. You are the
pain. Unless he has it in him to
break through you, then he will
never change. Do it for him.

People in the crowd exchange glances. Then a BIG MAN steps forward, followed by two other men.

Aiden stands to the side.

Kirsa is at the back, watching. Doesn't want to engage.

Peter bumps into the three men and they push back. He tries to side-step them but they won't let him.

Peter laughs. This is silly.

PETER

Yo gang, I'll give you a dollar each if you let me through?

AIDEN

Your jokes won't work. We all saw you, Peter. We know who you are.

PETER

No, actually, you don't.

AIDEN

We know you're unhappy. We know your dreams matter to you. We know you want to start living again.

PETER

By touching a board?

AIDEN

You need to start somewhere. Go.

Peter does another attempt at crossing through the men but it's half-assed. They push him back again with ease.

PETER

Okay guys, stop it. This is stupid.

He folds his arms over his chest, giving up.

AIDEN

Do you enjoy being pushed around? Do you like not trying? Maybe that's why you liked drugs. Your life sucks but it's not because of you, it's because of the drugs. Perfect, easy scapegoat.

(pointing at Kirsa)

You know she controls you because you cede control over to her.

Peter raises both hands into the air and flips Aiden off.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Did you want to come here and try out the Process, Peter?

PETER

You kidding me? Fuck no.

AIDEN

But you're here. She made you.

PETER

Yeah, that's called a compromise.
It's something grown-ups do when
they're in a relationship.

AIDEN

Compromise only works if both sides
are telling the truth. Otherwise,
it's manipulation. Would you agree?

Peter is silent. Kirsa stirs. Where is this going?

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Your wife told you Arthur, her
boss, gave her two tickets: one for
her and one for you. You *had* to
come, or risk being rude to her
boss. Is that correct?

PETER

Are you telling me it's not?

AIDEN

Arthur only gave her one ticket.
She bought yours. It wasn't a
compromise. It was manipulation.
She made you come here.

Peter shakes his head: no. No fucking way.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Why don't you ask her?

Peter finds Kirsa through the crowd.

The crowd parts for a clearer look at her.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Ask her.

KIRSA

We're not your playthings. We're
not going to--

PETER

Is what he's saying true?

KIRSA

You're playing his game, Peter.

PETER

I want to play. Answer me.

KIRSA
We'll talk about it when we get home. Okay?

Peter starts laughing in disbelief.

He starts pacing and ends up bumping against one of the men who are keeping him from getting to the board.

PETER
Dude if you push me one more fucking time, I swear I will cave your face in.
(yelling at Kirsa)
What are we DOING HERE, Kirsa?

KIRSA
I'm sorry.

PETER
Why would you lie to me!? What the fuck is wrong with you?
(better question)
What the fuck is wrong with us?

KIRSA
There's nothing wrong.

AIDEN
I'll tell you what is wrong: She doesn't respect you.

PETER
Shut your fucking mouth, man!

But then, he looks to Kirsa for an answer. He wants one.

KIRSA
I'm sorry. You know you would've come anyway. I didn't want to argue. That's all.

PETER
"That's all"? That's your defense? You're supposed to be a lawyer!

KIRSA
Peter. Think, he's trying to get into your head--

PETER
And here I was, feeling fucked up I made you stay!
(someone pushes him back)
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

What did I say before?! Do you want me to fucking hit you?

Aiden nears Peter. The mood is tense but he's calm.

AIDEN

Remember how you told us she doesn't trust you with women? I think it's a clue.

He's next to him now. He has his ear.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

She's projecting. She wonders if she made a mistake by marrying you, so she thinks you have the same doubts. She thinks you're always looking for a way out.

KIRSA

That's not true at all.

Peter glances between Kirsa and Aiden. Stuck in the middle.

AIDEN

She doesn't trust you, Peter. What's a relationship without trust? What's a relationship without respect--

Peter loses it, lunges towards the three men. To shut Aiden up. To keep himself from hearing Aiden.

PETER

All I need to do is touch the fucking board? I'll touch the fucking board! Let me through!

They push him back. But this time, he pushes back. Hard.

AIDEN

(to the crowd)

They need help. He's waking up.

Additional men and women join in, helping to keep Peter away.

PETER

Let me THROUGH!! LET ME THROUGH!

He's in it now, elbowing his way, flailing his limbs, trying to make a way for himself, boring a way through--

Someone in the crowd hits the ground. A young man gets elbowed in the face and steps back, holding his nose.

Peter is still pushing through sweat and tears but the crowd is still a barrier-- Peter pushes and pushes--

AIDEN
Physical pain is temporary, Peter!
Transformation is forever!

The back of Peter's right hand gets caught in someone's belt and the skin bleeds and the blood blends with the sweat--

AIDEN (CONT'D)
YOUR LIFE DOESN'T WORK ON ITS OWN!
YOU HAVE TO MAKE IT WORK!

Peter falls to the ground but gets up and continues pushing with abandon-- He lets out a loud GRUNT as he lunges into a LARGE MAN and they both fall and finally he pushes THROUGH the crowd and he's face to face with--

Kirsa.

The only one left between the board and him.

PETER
Get out of my way.

KIRSA
Peter.

She puts up her hands, trying to calm him down.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
You said it yourself. This is stupid. You're going to touch a cork board because he's making you?

PETER
Move, Kirsa.

KIRSA
You can't see what's happening?
He's manipulating you. Peter!

Peter charges for the board behind Kirsa.

She steps into his path, blocking him.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
Peter--

Peter side-steps her, still going for the board--

She digs her fingers into his shirt, grabs him and--

PETER
LET GO OF ME!

He pushes her away and he doesn't realize how powerful he is, how angry he is, and he THROWS her to side--

She hits the ground with a loud SMACK.

She's stunned. On the ground. Blood running down her nose.

Suddenly, the crowd erupts into APPLAUSE.

Kirsa looks up to see Peter. He's holding his cork board. He even smiles a bit, relieved.

And then his eyes meet hers, and slowly, it sinks in what he's just done.

Kirsa looks away. Notices all eyes are on her. The participants. The Volunteers. Aiden.

She climbs to her feet, her heart beating at her throat.

Peter catches up with her.

PETER (CONT'D)
Kirsa. Kirs. I'm so sorry.

She charges towards the doors. Peter on her heels.

KIRSA
(to the Tall Volunteer)
Open the doors.

TALL VOLUNTEER
You committed to staying until the end.

Her heart is beating like it's a living thing trying to claw out of her chest and she SCREAMS--

KIRSA
LET ME GO!!

TALL VOLUNTEER
You committed.

And Peter catches up, tries to put his hand over her shoulder but she tears away from his grip, tries her best to be composed as she commands the Volunteers to--

KIRSA
OPEN THE--

But she can't even finish the finish the sentence. The words are choking her, she's WHEEZING and she CAN'T STAND.

She slowly sinks into the ground, on her hands. She starts to cry, in the midst of a full blown anxiety attack. Paralyzed.

She tries to get up but her vision begins to wobble and tilt. Her limbs go weak, and she can only look up at the ceiling and Peter comes into view, his face aching with concern--

PETER

Shit, she's-- She's having an anxiety attack.

People start crowding around Kirsa. Her vision is fading away but she can see Aiden, leaning in, his face inscrutable:

AIDEN

It's okay, Peter. She'll be okay.
(leaning down onto Kirsa)
We'll take good care of her.

Her vision goes dark, wanting to scream but unable to, Aiden's words ringing in her head as she passes out.

FADE TO:

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM

It's a dreamy transition as Kirsa opens her eyes. She's groggy as hell, holding her head.

Her vision comes back slowly...

She's in the cramped room she was staying in but it has been cleared of all her possessions.

It's dark. Silent. She's in a teal hospital gown.

She climbs out of the bed but her limbs are heavy and she stumbles towards the wall. Something is wrong.

Undeterred, she presses on. Labors her way to the door.

She's about to reach it... And it opens.

It's Maya, holding a green smoothie. She's not in her Volunteer uniform but wearing a dark shirt and jeans.

MAYA

You're up!

KIRSA

Where... What's going on?

Kirsa can hardly stand up. Maya puts the smoothie onto the bedside table, then helps her stand.

MAYA

Let's get you back to bed.

Kirsa has no choice but to give in.

KIRSA

Where am I?

MAYA

You're in your room.

Maya fluffs Kirsa's pillow and straightens the sheets like a nurse before putting Kirsa into the bed.

KIRSA

... Where is Peter?

MAYA

Oh, he went back home. He's taking care of Baby Sam. I'll tell him you woke up.

KIRSA

... He left?

Maya hands over the smoothie to Kirsa. She's famished, she takes a sip from it. Winces, but drinks more.

MAYA

Yeah, he graduated the other day!

KIRSA

When?

MAYA

You're still in the class, Kirsa!
You know I can't tell you that.

KIRSA

What... What day is it?

Maya smiles in response.

Kirsa takes a long beat. Looks at Maya's civilian clothes.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Is the course over?

MAYA

Not for you.

KIRSA

... no?

MAYA

You committed to staying until you transformed. You remember.

Kirsa puts the smoothie down. Shocked at the implication.

KIRSA

Maya, listen to me. I want to leave. If you stop me, it's a clear cut case of kidnapping and imprisonment. In California, that's sixteen to twenty years in prison.

MAYA

But you committed.

Her voice is serene, angelic.

KIRSA

Let me go.

She tries to get out of the bed, pushing Maya, the smoothie drops to the ground--

MAYA

Kirsa, you need to be in bed.

KIRSA

Please. Let me go. LET ME GO!!

She tries to stand up but falls to the ground. Tries to claw her way back up but she's powerless.

She looks at the smoothie, oozing into the floor.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

What... what... was in that...

Maya pulls Kirsa up to the bed.

MAYA

Just some natural stuff to help your body get rid of the drugs you put into it all these years. It will help you regain your equilibrium.

Kirsa can't speak now. Her body sinking into the bed.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Don't worry. It's all organic and plant based.

Kirsa's fading away, she strains her eyes to fight against the incoming darkness but everything is fading...

Her eyelids slowly droop, in a slow motion blink--

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM

Eyes open, she's suddenly laying face-up in her bed. Groggy, nauseated.... And possibly high on something. Everything is tilted, wobbly, dreamy.

Kirsa holds her aching head, confused.

She tries to get out of bed--

But the door opens and Aiden walks in. Scans her face.

AIDEN

Easy. You're fine. You're safe.

KIRSA

(slurring)

What do you want from me?

AIDEN

You are here because there are no distractions and you can meditate better on your exercises.

KIRSA

I don't want to do any more exercises. I want to go home.

AIDEN

You will. Soon.

He takes out a pen and grabs a note pad from the desk.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

For your next exercise, I want you to write down what you want your obituary to be. How you want people to remember you.

He offers them to her. She doesn't take them.

KIRSA

Someone will know I'm missing.

AIDEN
 You have to face this head on.
 There is no way out except through.

KIRSA
 When they know I'm missing, they'll
 come for you. They'll know I'm--

AIDEN
 Peter already knows. Arthur already
 knows. They're both supporting you.

He leaves the pen and paper onto her lap.

KIRSA
 You're lying. Peter wouldn't--

AIDEN
 He has transformed, Kirsa. He knows
 how powerful that is and he wants
 you to experience it too.

KIRSA
 I don't believe you.

AIDEN
 Truth doesn't change depending on
 whether if you believe it or not.

KIRSA
 I don't believe you! I DON'T
 BELIEVE YOU!

She throws the pen and paper back at Aiden, losing control,
 and tries to claw at his face-- Except she starts shaking,
 anxiety gripping her again, her body betraying her at the
 worst moment, her heart pounding, choking on her words....

KIRSA (CONT'D)
 I don't... believe...

Aiden hushes her as he tucks her back into the bed.

AIDEN
 It's okay, Kirsa. You're having
 another anxiety attack. It will
 pass. All this will pass.

He stays with her, hushing her, consoling her as she has her
 attack and she can only look at him with absolute horror in
 her eyes-- She blinks and--

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM

Suddenly, she's sitting in a chair. Disoriented. Her vision still fuzzy and stretched.

There's a notepad and a pen on the desk in front of her. The same ones Aiden gave her earlier.

She looks past them. Defiant.

She can see the door if she cocks her head to the right.

She takes a deep breath. Very, very carefully steps up.

It's hard. She's wobbly but she's going to get out of that fucking door one way or another--

Her legs fail her, she collapses but covers her face with her hands as she hits the ground. She crawls on her elbows.

She's by the door now. She reaches for the door knob and pulls herself up. It takes everything in her power just to stay standing, her legs wobbling--

She turns the knob and pushes--

Except it doesn't turn. It's locked.

KIRSA

It wasn't locked-- NO--

She frantically tries to turn the knob but it doesn't work and she collapses to the ground again and lets out a CRY.

The door opens. It's Maya.

MAYA

What are you doing out of bed?

KIRSA

Don't fucking touch me.

MAYA

(pulling her up)

Kirsa. You should do your exercise.

Kirsa tries to resist but Maya is stronger. Like a play thing, Kirsa is hauled and deposited into the chair.

MAYA (CONT'D)

There you go. I'll be leaving now and you will too if you focus on finishing your exercises. Okay?

Kirsa doesn't reply. Maya steps towards the door.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Oh and is there anything you want me to tell Peter? Any message?

Kirsa's voice is so small.

KIRSA

... Peter?

MAYA

He's looking for a new job and Sam is a handful, so I help him around the house. He can't cook, can he?

She says that as if she expected Kirsa to laugh along.

KIRSA

... You've been in my house?

Maya responds in a flat affect that does not recognize the sheer terror on Kirsa's face:

MAYA

It's beautiful! Ah, that garden... You're very fortunate. I'd love to have a place like that someday. I still rent. Ugh.

KIRSA

How long... When...

MAYA

Sorry, I gotta go. But you should work on your homework. I'll come check on you later.

Maya leaves. Kirsa looks down onto the pen and paper.

She slowly writes out a word. She nods off--

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM - LATER

Kirsa opens her eyes again, now on her hands and knees on the ground. She is staring down at a bucket filled with greenish vomit. She wipes fresh puke off the corners of her mouth.

She sees Aiden sitting at the foot of the bed, reading Kirsa's "obituary". He seems lost in thought.

She presses against the ground, balances herself.

He looks up at her. Then goes back to reading.

Her legs wobble under her weight but she can stand.
She tries to appear composed. Stand up straight.

KIRSA

I tried to be brave. And open.

Aiden doesn't react.

After an agonizingly long time, he gives her back the pad.

AIDEN

I'm sorry. I don't believe it.

KIRSA

Truth doesn't change depending on
whether if you believe it or not.

AIDEN

But this isn't true, is it?

(pointing at the pad)

She was transformed... She lived
life full-on...

(back to her)

You don't mean any of this. You
need to dig deeper, Kirsa. You have
to let me get to know you.

He leaves the pad onto the desk. Turns to leave.

KIRSA

(pleading)

Aiden. You said the first day, it
doesn't work on 1 out of 100
people. Maybe I'm that person.
Maybe that's what happening.

AIDEN

I was guiding you when I said that.
I knew you would stay.

All of her composure melts away, leaving a desperate woman.

KIRSA

Maya's going to see Peter in my
house. Do you know about that?

AIDEN

She's helping with housework
through Peter's transition. He's
part of our family now.

KIRSA

You don't understand...

AIDEN
You're tired, Kirsa. Maybe you
should go to bed.

KIRSA
(starting to cry)
Let me go.... Please... let me go.

Aiden looks at her, then leaves. Locks the door after him.
She starts crying, heaving, her ears RINGING--

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM

Kirsa jolts up in the bed as if waking from a nightmare.
She looks around the swirling room.
Her eyes find the pad and the paper.
They first focus on the pad... then at the pen.
Her eyelids are heavy again. Everything is out of focus...

INT. KIRSA'S ROOM - LATER

And back in focus. She's looking at a gray wall.
She slowly realizes she's sitting in the chair.
Maya is washing her hair over a metal bucket of water.

MAYA
Then we watched the new episode of
Game of Thrones, which I will not
spoil for you, so don't even ask.
But, seriously, Peter is such a
scaredy cat. There was this, no
spoilers, violent scene and he just
kept looking away. It was so funny.

Kirsa searches for something under her clothes.

MAYA (CONT'D)
(not really hearing her)
Anyway, he graduated from his
advanced seminar today. It was SO
powerful. I think he's still in the
building but only third tier
members are allowed onto this
floor, sorry.

Kirsa tilts her head all the way. Looks up at Maya.

KIRSA
How many third tier members are there?

MAYA
Not many. It's a struggle to climb that high, let me tell you. Even Arthur isn't there yet.

KIRSA
Good.

She has an intense look in her eyes. From Maya's POV, Kirsa's face is upside down and it makes it especially unnerving.

MAYA
Can you put your head down, so I can...
(pointing at the pad)
You can work on your exercise.

She grabs the notepad from the desk. She gives it to Kirsa, looking around for something--

MAYA (CONT'D)
Huh. I can't find the pen.

KIRSA
I know where it is.

Maya turns to Kirsa, puzzled--

And Kirsa STABS her in the FACE with the PEN.

Maya lets out a PAINFUL SCREAM but Kirsa drops on her and STABS HER AGAIN and covers her mouth--

She grabs a nearby smoothie and pours it into Maya's mouth--

Some of the green ooze overflows and mixes with the blood running down her face--

It's a struggle until Maya's body finally goes limp.

Kirsa searches her pockets for keys-- Finds a ring of keys--

She climbs to her feet, her body is still uncooperative--

Kirsa struggles toward the door. Her eyelids droop-- But she SLAPS herself in the face to stay away. Once. Twice. Hard.

It seems to be working. The pain is waking her up--

She leans against the walls-- Goes to the door--

Tries the keys... First one doesn't fit. She tries another--
Hears Maya GRUMBLE on the ground, waking up--

Kirsa's eyes are closing-- She SLAPS herself-- Doesn't work.

She STABS HERSELF IN THE LEG with the PEN.

The pain jolts her awake. Blood runs down her leg.

She goes back to trying the second key on the door. It
doesn't work either. She lets out a long GROAN.

Behind her she can hear Maya softly CRYING in PAIN. She's
holding her face, confused.

MAYA

... Kirsa?

She shoves the next key into the door and turns it--

It works. The door opens--

She charges out-- But collapses to the ground--

INT. CORRIDORS -

She STABS HERSELF in the leg again with the pen.

Deep, powerful stabs. Pain waking her up. Keeping her alive.

She can look around now. Pulls herself up.

Maya is GROANING in the room. Kirsa knows she needs to run.

MAYA

(low)

Heeelp.

Kirsa stumbles down the dark corridor, into the maze--

MAYA (CONT'D)

(clearer)

HELP! SOMEBODY HELP!

Kirsa spots The Tall Volunteer appear at the other end of the
corridor. He sees her.

She starts RUNNING now, powered by adrenaline and pain--

She finds a door, opens it--

INT. MORE CORRIDORS -

More labyrinthine corridors.

She charges down one of the corridors, the footsteps behind her getting closer, every sound echoing in the silent halls--

THE TALL VOLUNTEER
STOP HER!

More footsteps now, her pursuers have joined up with others--

She STABS herself again, this time burying the pen deeper, TWISTING IT, and she SCREAMS--

She goes for a door, it's locked-- Another, locked again--

One opens-- She SPRINTS DOWN--

INT. ANOTHER CORRIDOR

She's running on fumes now, and it's yet another almost identical corridor--

She's getting nowhere. She STIFLES a SCREAM in frustration--

She starts crying softly, defeated. Her eyelids drop and she lets them. Surrendering...

But she sees PETER standing in the darkness-- Peter-- Is it him? Is she dreaming-- No, it is him--

She sprints towards him. Falls into his arms.

KIRSA
Peter!
(suddenly alert)
They're coming. We need to go, now.

But Peter says nothing. He just looks at her.

She is confused. Then anger bleeds through.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
You knew I was here. They said...

Peter just looks at her. Feeling for her but not speaking.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
You knew and you did nothing. They weren't lying.

No answer. Betrayed, she steps away from him. Anger building.

KIRSA (CONT'D)
They drugged me! They imprisoned me and you let them! You let her...!

He doesn't answer.

But that's an answer in itself. Her eyes tear up with ANGER. So much ANGER. Her entire body is shaking. ENRAGED.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

You're weak. You're worthless. I never should have married you.

Peter steps back. His face falls.

Kirsa realizes the gravity of the words she just said. She wants to take them back but it's too late.

FOOTSTEPS come up behind her but they are measured, not the frantic footsteps of her pursuers.

She looks back at them, confused.

Then the doors behind Peter open up and reveal that familiar multi-purpose room-- and all the people in it--

Everyone streams out of the room, led by Aiden. The Volunteers in their uniforms. Aspen, Lori and the others.

AIDEN

Your vow of silence is over Peter.

Peter doesn't react. It's not like he has anything to say.

She understands now, she was tricked-- She turns to Peter--

But one look at Peter and she knows there is no coming back from those words.

Aiden approaches her.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

You finally spoke your mind, Kirsa. You are finally truthful. You have made your first step towards your transformation. You're so brave.

Aiden leads everyone to hug her in a circle.

Kirsa tries to repel them but she has no strength left and they all take turns, hugging her and telling her--

ASPEN

Kirsa, you're so brave.

LORI

Kirsa. You're so brave.

And so on... As Kirsa tries to find Peter in the crowd but he's already walking away. Not even looking back for her.

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

Kirsa is back in her clothes and looking lucid.

She stands by the double doors. They are open.

Peter stands in front of the platform, on ground level, encircled by the Volunteers and the participants alike.

He's reading from a paper. It's intimate.

PETER

... Peter died at the age of eighty-nine. A celebrated photographer, his self-portraits have been featured in Tate Modern and MOMA...

He looks down a bit, bashful... but the crowd cheers him on with encouragements.

Peter manages a smile, continues.

PETER (CONT'D)

He died peacefully in his sleep, surrounded by friends and family, including his son Sam, who made Peter a proud father and... the happiest man in the world.

No Kirsa.

His voice breaks at the end and everyone hugs him to know he's loved here. Even Aiden gets into the hug.

Kirsa limps away from the room. Her legs still aching with hurt, her body and soul broken.

Aiden's eyes track her.

INT. CORRIDORS

She's walking away.

AIDEN (O.S.)

Kirsa.

She whips back around, faces him. They are alone.

KIRSA

I will sue you. I will take down
this entire organization.

Her voice is hoarse, raw with rage.

Aiden's is tender.

AIDEN

People have said that to me
hundreds of times. People I pushed
even further than you. None of them
ever sued us. You know why?

No reaction from Kirsa.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I gave you so many chances to
leave, Kirsa. I ordered you to
leave. But you didn't. Because you
knew, deep down, you needed to find
out who you really are. And you
did. That's what we gave you.
Nothing less, nothing more.

KIRSA

That wasn't me saying those things.

AIDEN

Who was it then?

KIRSA

You. You drugged me. You said I
hated him again and again until it
took root in my mind.

AIDEN

The Process is designed to unearth
thoughts, not create them. It
can't. I wish it could.

KIRSA

Bullshit.

AIDEN

Being in an altered state gives
people permission to say what they
are really feeling inside.

KIRSA

No, no, you did something more.
Some kind of neuro-linguistic
programming or mind control--

AIDEN

Kirsa. Those things aren't real.
 (comforting, simply)
 I know you are in denial now, but
 in time you will see that this was
 a good thing.

KIRSA

A good thing?

AIDEN

Yes. You were incompatible.
 (beat)
 Your marriage would have slowly
 collapsed over the years, ending in
 a bitter divorce that would have
 hurt you, Peter and your child.
 This hurts too, but you ripped off
 the band-aid and it will get
 better. It might not feel like it
 now, but you will soon realize we
 saved you from long years of pain.

She can't even conjure a reply. Disgusted beyond words.

He understands this might be goodbye.

Hoping it's not, he takes out a brochure from his pocket and
 extends it to her. She takes it.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

We can do much more for you. I hope
 you sign up for the next course.
 I'm teaching that one too.

After a long look at her, he turns around and walks away.

She rips that brochure apart. Loud enough so he has to hear.

INT. EXIT CORRIDOR - DAY

It's the corridor Peter and Kirsa entered through.

The sunlight streams onto the beige carpet.

Now tables are set up all around. Many participants are
 signing up for the next class. There are long lines.

Kirsa sifts through a luggage cart for her roller bag.

She finds it. It's next to Peter's tattered backpack.

She grabs her rollerbag and puts the backpack over her
 shoulders.

She looks for Peter in one of the lines and finds him.

KIRSA

Peter.

He looks like he aged ten years. She offers him the backpack.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

Let's go home.

He looks at her in disbelief.

After a beat, he takes the backpack but only offers a cold:

PETER

Thanks.

KIRSA

We can still fix this. We can go to therapy, talk through it--

PETER

We did talk. I heard you.

The line goes forward. Peter steps forward. Kirsa follows.

KIRSA

I was drugged. You know what that's like. I wasn't myself.

Peter doesn't react. Not buying it.

The line moves up. Peter steps forward.

Kirsa changes tacks. Pleads with him as others look on.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

You can't sign up. If you're going to find a new job, you need to save your money, not spend it on--

PETER

It's free if you volunteer.

Kirsa glances at the Maternal Volunteer smiling goodbyes to those who are leaving like an air hostess after a flight.

KIRSA

Remember when Aiden kicked me out when I stopped you from calling your boss? They put me into a room and I heard things. These people don't live a good life.

He doesn't answer her.

KIRSA (CONT'D)

What about Sam, Peter? Have you thought about that?

PETER

They do have a course for children but he has to be at least seven before I can sign him up.

(re: her horrified face)

I'm joking.

She smiles, at least a part of the old Peter is in there.

PETER (CONT'D)

We'll split custody. You're a good mom. This isn't about that.

Her face falls. He sounds so final.

PETER (CONT'D)

Just do me a favor and never tell him you regretted having him.

(speaking from experience)

That tends to fuck people up.

KIRSA

I'm not-- Of course I don't regret having him, why would you say that?

He looks at her but his face is devoid of warmth. Of that easy intimacy they used to share.

PETER

I don't know anymore.

He's not even angry. He's just lost. It speaks to the fact that what they used to have might be now irrecoverable.

The line steps up and it's Peter's turn and he doesn't look enthusiastic about signing up but it's clear he'd rather be in here with these people than be out there with Kirsa.

He walks towards the desk... manned by MAYA, of all people, wearing a few bandages on her face.

She welcomes him with a smile.

Kirsa, broken and defeated, leaves.

EXT. CONCRETE BUILDING - NIGHT

She steps out.

She sits down onto a nearby ledge, trying to compose herself. Footsteps approach her from the direction of the building-- Is it Peter, coming after her? No. It's Maya. She extends Kirsa her phone. She takes it.

MAYA
We found this too.

It's her Paxil bottle. She grabs it. She looks at Maya's face. The bandages.

MAYA (CONT'D)
I knew it might happen when I signed up for it. It was worth it to see you transform--

KIRSA
(I don't give a fuck)
You destroyed the most important relationship in my life.

Maya takes her time. This is a more thoughtful Maya than we've been used to seeing.

MAYA
You love him.
(no response from Kirsa)
You don't have to lose him. This happens to many couples during the intro course. I've seen them survive through it.

KIRSA
... how?

MAYA
When they both do the advanced course and hash things out.

KIRSA
My life ended back there and your priority is to try and recruit me?

MAYA
That's not what this is about.

She stands up, looks at Kirsa. Sincere and empathetic.

MAYA (CONT'D)

If you still love him... It might
work. I've seen it work.

She walks back to the building, leaving the glass doors open
for Kirsa if she wants to come back in.

Kirsa sits there. She can see Peter talking with the
volunteers, shaking their hands and embracing them, now as
equals, ready to morph into one of them...

And Kirsa, on the outside, feeling guilty, feeling like she's
abandoning him to his fate, a part of her needing him, all of
her still loving him... Perhaps thinking of saving him...

FADE TO BLACK.