

SEVERANCE- PILOT EPISODE-
"MISTER"

Written by

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INT. BOARD ROOM. DAY.

A NAKED MAN lies face up, unconscious on a large oak table. The room around him is comfortable but sterile. There are no windows and the only light buzzes from the florescent panels above. Pastel prints line the beige walls.

This is MARK, mid 30's. He's tall and thin, his hair neatly combed, his breath slow but even.

Suddenly, Mark's eyes shoot open and he bolts to a sitting position. He gasps as his eyes dart around the room.

For a very long moment, all is quiet.

MARK

Hello?

He tries to get to his knees but they give way and he tumbles off the table.

Shakily, he moves toward the door. He tries to open it, but it's locked solidly.

He turns back to the room.

MARK (CONT'D)

Where the hell am I!?

At the far end of the table is mounted a small, black Intercom. It clicks on, emitting a MAN'S VOICE.

MAN'S VOICE

Who are you?

MARK

What?

MAN'S VOICE

Who are you?

MARK

I- Who the hell are you?

Brief pause.

MAN'S VOICE

I'm sorry, sir. I got ahead of myself.

MARK

What is this place? Open the damn door!

MAN'S VOICE

Do you have a few moments to take a quick survey?

MARK

What?

MAN'S VOICE

Six questions. I feel confident it will benefit us both.

MARK

Wha- No! Let me the hell out of this room!

MAN'S VOICE

Okay, thank you for your time.

It clicks off.

MARK

Hey! Hey!

Mark scours the room, but can find no other way out.

He returns to the door, twisting hard on the knob. He kicks at it, but his weak legs give out and once again he falls to the floor.

MARK (CONT'D)

Damnit!

He lays on the carpet, breathing heavily.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hey! You there?

The intercom clicks on.

MAN'S VOICE

I'm here.

MARK

Six questions?

MAN'S VOICE

Yes, sir.

MARK

What do I get at the end?

MAN'S VOICE

Depends on your answers.

Mark sighs.

MARK

Well, since you seem to have caught me between things-

MAN'S VOICE

Who are you?

Pause.

MARK

That's the first question?

MAN'S VOICE

A first name will do.

Mark looks around the room. He furrows his brow.

MARK

What do I do if I don't know?

MAN'S VOICE

Unknown. Okay, great. Question two:
In which US state were you born?

MARK

Wait a minute-

MAN'S VOICE

Which state, please?

MARK

I- don't know.

MAN'S VOICE

Unknown. Terrific. Question three:
What is the name of a US State?
First that comes to mind.

MARK

-Delaware.

MAN'S VOICE

Question four: Who killed Mister
and how did he die?

MARK

That one makes no sense.

MAN'S VOICE

Unknown?

MARK

Sure.

MAN'S VOICE

Question five: Have you done any intravenous drugs today?

MARK

What's going on?

MAN'S VOICE

Please answer question five-

MARK

I don't know! I don't even know what day it is!

MAN'S VOICE

Unknown. Question six: By your closest approximation, what was or is the color of your mother's eyes?

Mark stares up at the ceiling, his breath growing fast. A tear slides down his temple.

Pause.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Unknown. Applicant's response record is Unknown, Unknown, Delaware, Unknown, Unknown and Unknown.

MARK

(quietly)

Please tell me what's happening to me.

All at once, the door unlatches and creaks open.

MAN'S VOICE

A perfect score. Very impressive, Mark.

Mark stares through the door. He can see only darkness.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Right this way.

End of Prologue.

Act 1.

INT. DARKENED HALL. DAY.

Mark creeps cautiously down a thin, unlit hall.

The hall is full of sharp twists, preventing Mark from seeing more than a few feet ahead.

Ahead is a bend, around which Mark can see light.

INT. ORIENTATION CHAMBER. DAY.

Mark steps out into a small, dimly lit room.

In the center of the room is a table, at which sit a man and a woman.

FRANK MILCHICK, 35, is a big and brawny, despite the dainty glasses perched atop his nose. In front of him is a microphone. His is the voice from the other room.

HARMONY COBEL, 40, is small, curt and well-kept, her hair in a tight bun. She takes notes, never looking up.

Milchick looks up and smiles.

MILCHICK

Mark! Come, have a seat!

Mark glances at a door on the other side of the room.

MARK

Who are you?

MILCHICK

Frank Milchick, PR. I'll be facilitating your orientation today.

MARK

Orientation for what?

MILCHICK

It'd be just terrific if you had a seat.

Mark slowly walks over and sits across from them.

Milchick organizes documents, excited but nervous.

MILCHICK (CONT'D)

Okay. Well, first and foremost, I'd like to congratulate you, on behalf of all our staff, at all levels of seniority, and of all races and sexual genders, on passing your entrance exam. Really stellar work. Delaware.

MARK

Again, entrance to what?

Milchick smiles, looks down and clears his throat.

MILCHICK

Mark- Mr. Scout- Your last name's Scout- Mr. Scout, we have selected you as the Secondary Conversion Analyst for our data culling team. You have graciously accepted-

MARK

I haven't graciously accepted shit.

MILCHICK

That's- a great opinion, and boldly expressed. But I do have the paperwork here.

He slides it across the table. Mark snatches it up.

At the bottom is a series of signatures, his included.

MARK

I didn't sign this.

MILCHICK

Let's take a step back-

COBEL

He needs pants.

MILCHICK AND MARK

What?

COBEL

By this point in the orientation, the applicant should have been offered pants. It's the first step in preparing him for the video.

MILCHICK

Of course. Sorry, ma'am.

COBEL
Don't apologize to me.

Milchick turns back to Mark. He produces a well-folded pair of black pants from under the table.

MILCHICK
Mr. Scout, at this time, I'd like to offer you this pair of empty black pants, along with a sincere apology for not having offered said pants earlier. Do you accept the empty black pants, and/or the apology, which I assure you is anything but empty?

Mark stares at Milchick for a long moment.

All at once, Mark leaps from his seat and runs for the door.

MILCHICK (CONT'D)
Mr. Scout!

Mark bursts through the door. Cobel keeps writing.

COBEL
Well. How did that feel to you?

MILCHICK
Bad.

COBEL
It was very bad.

Milchick gets up to follow Mark.

INT. MAIN OFFICE. DAY.

Mark, still naked, runs out into the middle of a bustling office.

The room is vast and white, the ceiling very high. Everything is bathed in a sterile light, which seems to emanate from all surfaces.

The majority of the room is comprised of a wide maze of cubicle walls, made of a vaguely translucent glass.

The workers weave busily around, some of their forms obscured by the crystalline cubicle walls. Their hurried footsteps combine with the dim hum of routers and printers.

Mark looks around, panting heavily. One by one, the office-dwellers notice him and stop, shocked.

MARK

I'm being held here. I'm being held
against my will.

He glances up. Near the high ceiling is a small window, behind which is a hallway. A thin, BALD MAN stands at the window, watching the commotion.

A plump SECURITY GUARD approaches Mark.

SECURITY GUARD

Sir, I'd be happy to escort you to
your workspace-

Mark turns and runs, knocking over the Security Guard.

He runs into the maze of cubicles, nearly tripping over the tangle of computer wires that populate the floor, as workers dive out of his way.

He hears footsteps approach from around a corner. He ducks behind a copy machine.

A line of GUARDS run past.

Looking up, Mark spies an exit sign, but no path through the cubicles.

With a running start, Mark leaps onto a table and over one of the walls. He crashes down atop a table on the other side.

Seeing the exit, Mark breaks into a run.

INT. STAIRWELL. DAY.

Mark bursts through the stairwell door and runs down the stairs, tripping over his feet as he goes.

Spinning around on a middle landing, he comes face to face with HELLY RIGGS, 19, small but quietly fierce.

She smirks.

HELLY

First day?

Mark scoots around her and continues down the stairs.

INT. LOBBY. DAY.

Mark bursts out of the stairwell and into a spacious lobby. The granite walls are accentuated by hanging plants and mini fountains.

Ahead is a security checkpoint, where a MUSTACHED GUARD scans incoming EMPLOYEES with an electric wand.

Beyond them is a bank of glass doors, but a concrete wall beyond it blocks any view of the outside.

An elevator door opens, and Milchick and Cobel emerge.

MILCHICK

Mr. Scout!

Mark launches himself toward the security checkpoint. The Mustached Guard moves to intercept him.

MUSTACHED GUARD

Hold it, sir-

Mark elbows the Guard hard in the eye and tries to leap over a ribbon partition. The Guard grabs him by the foot.

COBEL

Just let him go!

Mark kicks the Guard and gets to his feet.

COBEL (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter! Let him go!

Mark darts across the entryway, past the security checkpoint, and through the exit door.

JUMP TO:

INT. LOBBY. DAY.

The light is suddenly different, indicating late afternoon. The room is far less busy.

Mark steps into the door he just ran out of. He's dressed in a simple black suit and tie.

He looks to his left. The Mustached Guard sits in a folding chair, holding an ice pack over his eye and glaring at Mark.

COBEL

How you feeling?

Mark whips around to see Cobel standing next to him. She smiles.

MARK

How am I-

COBEL

Relax. There's a lot that needs to be explained to you. Are you familiar with morons, Mark?

MARK

Morons?

COBEL

Idiots. Simpletons. Unfortunately, they have a king, who I brilliantly placed in charge of your orientation today. I apologize for that.

Mark looks at his hands, which are sunburnt.

MARK

Why is my skin warm?

COBEL

Same reason you feel suddenly calmer than before. You and I just had a two-hour walk together.

MARK

What?

COBEL

We went to a park. You fed apples to a horse. It was sweet.

MARK

What are you talking about? Why would I go on a walk with you?

COBEL

Because outside of this office, you and I are already good friends.

He stares at her, confused. She puts her arm around him.

COBEL (CONT'D)

Mark, my mother was Catholic. Not a very good Catholic. When I had a bad day, she used to tell me my angels had a hangover.

(MORE)

COBEL (CONT'D)

Right now, you probably feel like
your angels just OD'd on heroin.

MARK

You could say that.

COBEL

Well, the good thing about angels
is there's a shitload of them. And
when your angels OD, it's never too
terribly hard to find some new
ones.

Mark says nothing. Cobel turns and walks toward the
elevators.

COBEL (CONT'D)

Let's go find some new angels.

Mark stares after her for a moment, then follows.

End of Act 1

Act 2

INT. CULLING OFFICE. DAY.

IRVING BAILIFF, 65, sits under his desk. Irving is heavy and bald, but his demeanor is childlike.

On the carpet in front of him sit a dozen small objects. A snow globe paperweight. A couple of glue sticks. A handheld pencil sharpener.

As two co-workers converse unseen, Irving arranges the objects in a rough circle.

DYLAN

(o.s.)

Just seems soon to bring on a rook.
The ink ain't dry on Petey yet.

HELLY

(o.s.)

We need a fourth. We can't do the
job without a fourth.

DYLAN

(o.s.)

Well, then maybe you shouldn't have-

HELLY

(o.s.)

Petey got exactly what he wanted.
Besides, they've been training this
guy for months. It would have
happened eventually.

DYLAN

(o.s.)

Just seems soon.

Irving completes the circle and starts placing objects in the middle.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

(o.s.)

You really saw this guy's dick?

HELLY

(o.s.)

Just for a second.

DYLAN

(o.s.)

You shouldn't go around seeing
dicks, you know. It's a uniquely
distracting organ, biologically.

HELLY

(o.s.)

Well, I didn't exactly seek it out.

DYLAN

(o.s.)

Just makes me ill, them bringing in
some nice-dicked rook mere days
after Petey's departure.

HELLY

(o.s.)

I didn't say he was nice-dicked.

DYLAN

(o.s.)

What?

HELLY

(o.s.)

I didn't say that. You said that.

Irving finishes the pattern. The objects are now arranged in
a crude human face. He smiles at it, wistfully.

DYLAN

(o.s.)

Look, we can split hairs all day or
we can prepare like we were told.
Where's the welcome sign?

HELLY

(o.s.)

Irving's going to do it.

DYLAN

(o.s.)

And Irving is where, exactly?

As footsteps approach, Irving hurriedly gathers all the
objects back up and puts them in a paper bag.

He stows the bag under the far corner of the desk.

Helly, the young woman from the stairwell, kneels down to
address Irving.

HELLY
Hey, Irving.

Irving scoots around to face her.

IRVING
Hello.

HELLY
You having a little dark time?

IRVING
The lights hurt my brain.

HELLY
Mine too. Which is a good sign.
Means we have brains.

He smiles.

IRVING
Yeah. Big fat ones.

She smiles.

HELLY
Hey, I was hoping you'd hang up the
welcome sign before the next
culling starts. You did promise me.

IRVING
I was worried I'd mess it up and
Dylan would tease me.

She nods.

HELLY
Have you ever noticed how Dylan
never complains about the lights?

IRVING
Yeah.

HELLY
Yeah.

He laughs. She offers him her hand.

HELLY (CONT'D)
Come on. Let's hang it up together.

He takes her hand.

INT. OFFICE HALL. DAY.

Mark follows Cobel through the labyrinth of hallways.

MARK
Are there two buildings?

COBEL
Sorry?

MARK
When I ran outside, it led right
back into the lobby. Are there two
identical buildings?

COBEL
You'll be seeing the video this
afternoon, which will explain
everything. Right now I want you to
meet a few of your colleagues.

They reach a door, marked "Culling Office."

MARK
What's the Culling Office?

She opens the door.

COBEL
It's home.

She gestures for him to enter. He does.

INT. CULLING OFFICE. CONTINUOUS

The office is large, blank and white. In the center, four desks face one another. Helly sits at one, and to her left is Irving. To her right is DYLAN HOGAN.

Dylan is 40, and despite a sense of swagger, looks vaguely diseased.

All three type vigorously at clunky, beige computers at their desks.

Mark stares at these three for a moment. He turns to Cobel-

MARK
Who are these-

But she's gone. He turns back.

He slowly makes his way toward the center of the room.

The others don't look up from what they're doing.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hello.

No response.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'm Mark. Apparently I'm supposed to be-

DYLAN

So why aren't you?

MARK

Sorry?

DYLAN

Why aren't you doing what you're supposed to be doing?

MARK

I- They didn't tell me-

DYLAN

There's one chair without an ass in it. How many asses do you have?

MARK

-One.

DYLAN

Seems fortuitous.

Mark stares at Dylan a long moment, before moving to the empty chair. He sits.

IRVING

Did you see the sign?

MARK

The sign?

IRVING

I hung it for you. Helly helped.

Mark looks over. Small, gold paper letters spelling 'WELCOME' hang clumsily on the far wall.

IRVING (CONT'D)

It's meant to make you feel welcome.

MARK

Thank you.

He stares at the computer screen in front of him. A series of green symbols, including letters, numbers and pictographs, moves across it in a single line.

Mark glances at Helly, who sits across from him.

MARK (CONT'D)

I don't know what to-

HELLY

The game is to turn the green symbols blue. You have to trick them. They'll fight you.

MARK

Okay. How?

HELLY

Put your fingers on the keys. Your training will kick in.

MARK

I haven't been-

HELLY

Yes, you have.

Mark puts his fingers on the keys and looks at the stream of symbols.

He types a few characters into the computer. The stream turns red.

MARK

They're turning red.

DYLAN

Red's bad.

HELLY

I said blue, remember?

MARK

Listen, who are you people?

HELLY

Keep typing!

Mark keeps typing random keys. The symbols continue to come in red.

MARK

Please. I- I need help, okay? I woke up here an hour ago and I can't remember anything-

DYLAN

Sucks chunks, don't it?

MARK

This happened to all of you?

HELLY

Three years ago for me. Which now makes me the senior employee.

DYLAN

By like two days.

IRVING

I used to be the baby. Now that you're here, I'm just Irving.

MARK

What is this place? How do we get out of here?

DYLAN

It's all in the video, man.

MARK

What video?

IRVING

Why is he mad?

HELLY

He's not.

IRVING

Petey was never mad.

MARK

Who the shit is Petey?

DYLAN

You know, culling time tends to be quiet time!

MARK

To shit with culling time! I don't even know what that is!

IRVING

Language!

DYLAN

Damnit!

For a moment, everyone just types. Dylan rubs his face.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

It's Mark, you said. Right?

MARK

Yeah.

DYLAN

Okay, Mark, do me a favor. Look at your screen.

MARK

What?

DYLAN

Just look.

Mark looks. The symbols on his screen have all turned blue. He continues to type letters onto the keyboard, changing the symbols to blue as they appear.

MARK

I'm turning them blue.

DYLAN

Funny that, huh?

MARK

How am I doing this?

DYLAN

Because you were trained to. Mark, I know you're losing your shit right now. I did too. But there's an order to all this, and it will present itself to you in due time. So until that time comes, I need you to just take a breath and trust that you're gonna be okay. Can you do that for me, Mark?

Mark takes a deep breath.

MARK

Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay. I just- I'm okay.

They all keep typing. Long pause.

IRVING
Is he mad because I hung the sign
bad?

DYLAN
Nah, Irving. You hung the sign
great.

More typing.

INT. CULLING OFFICE MEN'S ROOM. DAY.

Mark enters the men's room stall and sits down.

He rubs his face, breathing heavily.

After a moment, he opens his eyes.

He notices a message scratched into the bottom corner of the
stall: I'M TAKING ME WITH ME.

HELLY
(o.s.)
Don't throw up, okay?

Mark straightens up, startled. Helly sits in the stall next
to him.

HELLY (CONT'D)
'Cause if you do, then I will. Then
the janitor will have to come
through and he hits on me.

MARK
This is the men's room.

HELLY
The women's gets lonely.

Mark takes a deep breath.

MARK
You're from the stairwell, right?

HELLY
Not originally. But I saw you
there.

MARK
Sorry I was naked.

HELLY
It's cool. It was funny. I'm Helly.

He stares ahead, uncomfortable.

MARK

What's the thing with the letters?
Why do we do that?

HELLY

It's called data culling. And I
have no idea.

MARK

You don't know what it means?

HELLY

Nope. I know it's important,
though.

MARK

Uh huh. And how much of this is
going to make sense once I've seen
this video everyone keeps talking
about?

HELLY

Exactly four percent.

He smiles in spite of himself.

HELLY (CONT'D)

You're not going to see it, though.

MARK

Sorry?

HELLY

Not today, anyway.

MARK

Cobel said-

HELLY

Something will come up. There will
be an inspection, or a drill. I was
here six months before I saw it.

MARK

Why?

She thinks about this a moment.

HELLY

Because you're more likely to
accept it once they've broken you
some.

The door opens and Irving sticks his head in.

IRVING
Helly?

HELLY
Hi Irving.

IRVING
You're supposed to go in the girl's
room. You're a girl.

HELLY
I know. I'm sorry.

IRVING
Did you forget?

HELLY
Yeah, I forgot. Can you not tell on
me, please?

IRVING
Okay, but I'll write it in my
diary.

HELLY
That's good.

He leaves. A pause.

MARK
Is he okay?

HELLY
He's different. He's also by far
the fastest culler in the office.

The door opens and Irving pops in again.

IRVING
Also, if Mark's in here, tell him
that we have an inspection tonight.
So they'll show him the video
tomorrow.

HELLY
Thanks, Irving. I'll tell him.

Irving leaves. A long pause.

MARK
Is there any way out of here?

Long pause.

HELLY
You should watch the video.

MARK
Thanks. I'll look forward to that.

Using her foot, she slides a scrap of toilet paper under the stall wall.

HELLY
I mean you should watch it now.

Mark looks down at the toilet paper scrap. Drawn on it in pen is a crude map.

INT. THIN HALLWAY. DAY.

Carrying the toilet paper map, Mark slinks down the empty hall with what he thinks is stealth.

He rounds a bend and comes to a long line of doors. As he moves past them, he eyes the map.

MARK
Three, four, five-

He reaches the sixth door, marked STORAGE, opens it and steps inside.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET. CONTINUOUS.

Mark enters the closet, which is small and cramped and lined on all sides by deep shelves.

He shuts the door and turns on the light.

He locates this room on the map. Here, Helly has written the word UP.

Cautiously, Mark looks up, his eyes widening.

The narrow closet appears to stretch upward forever, with hundreds of levels of shelves stacked atop one another. The ceiling, if there is one, is not visible.

Mark looks back at the word UP printed on the map.

MARK
Shit.

INT. CULLING OFFICE. DAY.

Helly enters the office to find Milchick standing by the door.

MILCHICK
Miss Riggs.

HELLY
Mr. Milchick.

MILCHICK
Have you seen Mr. Scout?

HELLY
No. He's maybe in the bathroom.

Milchick looks at the floor.

MILCHICK
I forgot to offer him pants at the orientation today. Bungled the whole thing like a ninny.

Helly nods, empathetic.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET. DAY.

Mark climbs the shelves, his face drenched in sweat. The floor is no longer visible below.

He passes a shelf which contains a symmetrical pile of metallic gold boxes.

He rests a foot on this shelf, causing it to creak. He stops.

The shelf gives way, sending the gold boxes careening downward.

Mark grabs hold of the shelf above him, his feet dangling over the endless darkness below.

He struggles to find another foothold. Grimacing, he pulls himself up to the next shelf.

He forces himself to look up. About ten feet above him is a platform and a thin, metallic door, like the one he came in.

INT. UPPER HALLWAY. EVENING.

Mark opens the thin door, gasping for breath.

This hall is all black. What little light there is seeps out from behind massive, closed doors. Distant whispers echo from hidden rooms.

Mark shuts the supply closet and starts cautiously down the hall.

As he moves, he hears the sound of heavy footsteps approaching.

Panicking, he spies a door ajar and ducks through it.

INT. CUBICLE ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Mark scoots into the room, his back against the wall.

He shuts his eyes, terrified, as the heavy footsteps pass by outside. They slowly disappear down the hall.

Mark opens his eyes.

The concrete room is empty, except for a large cubicle. Unlike the ones downstairs, it is a perfect cube, complete with a "roof" on top. There are no apparent openings.

Mark gets up and moves toward the cubicle.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(o.s.)

Is someone out there?

Mark's breath stops, but he keeps moving.

WOMAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

(o.s.)

You can't keep me here. They'll come looking for me.

Mark stops inches from the cubicle. He notices an inch-wide gap between the frame and the fabric of one of the walls.

He leans in to examine it.

Suddenly, a horrible, bloodshot EYE peers out.

WOMAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

(o.s.)

I want to see my baby!

Panicking, Mark turns and flees the room.

INT. CULLING OFFICE. DAY.

Milchick sits in a plastic chair at Helly's desk as she goes over documents.

MILCHICK

I think the pants were a tertiary issue. The real problem's my personality. I've been told I'm just awful.

The door flies open and Cobel enters.

COBEL

Milchick! We've got a security breach upstairs!

MILCHICK

What? How?

COBEL

Where's Scout?

She looks around the room, approaching panic.

INT. UPPER HALLWAY. CONTINUOUS.

Mark runs down the hall. He passes a series of shut doors, his pace growing faster.

He suddenly stops.

In front of him is a door, smaller than the others, with a dim green light behind it. It reads VIDEO ARCHIVES.

He looks at the map. The final destination reads 'VA.'

COBEL

Mark!

Mark whips around to see Cobel and Milchick running down the hall toward him.

COBEL (CONT'D)

Mark, don't go in there!

Mark grabs the handle, but the door is stuck. He yanks again, pulling it open.

INT. VIDEO ARCHIVE ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Mark enters the small, cramped room bathed in green light. He slams the door behind him and locks it.

All walls are covered with heavy file cabinets. In the corner is a small, dusty television with a built-in VCR.

There's a rapping at the door.

COBEL

(o.s.)

Mark! Open the door!

Mark moves to the end of the room and opens a cabinet.

It's full of VHS tapes, each labeled with a name, and all carefully alphabetized.

The door rattles.

COBEL (CONT'D)

(o.s.)

You weren't meant to come up here yet. Please, it's dangerous!

Mark moves to another cabinet and opens it. More tapes.

Searching, he finds a drawer in the middle of the room and opens it. These tapes are labeled with 'S' names. Rooting through, he finds one marked 'Scout, Mark.'

He moves to the television and flips it on. The image is of grey static, accompanied by a dull roar.

COBEL (CONT'D)

(o.s.)

Mark, I know you have questions. If you come out now, I promise I'll explain everything.

He pushes in the tape.

The static roar stops, and for a moment, the room is quiet.

End of Act 2.

BLACKNESS.

SCREEN TEXT: FIVE DAYS EARLIER.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM. MORNING.

Mark lays, asleep, on a mattress on the floor.

The walls are a gentle blue, and the room is outfitted for a baby. In the corner sits a crib.

A woman's bare foot slowly moves over Mark's face.

Wrinkling his nose, Mark bolts up.

MARK

What the shit?

His sister, DEVON, stands over him. She's 30, and many, many months pregnant.

DEVON

Hey, butterfly.

MARK

Your foot smells like pregnancy.

DEVON

Get up. You need toast.

MARK

I don't want toast.

DEVON

You're supposed to eat before an interview.

MARK

Says who?

DEVON

Science.

Mark sits up, rubbing his face.

MARK

I don't want to go. Go for me.

DEVON

I don't think they'll be fooled.

MARK

Yeah they will. Just cut your hair,
throw on a tie and have your baby.

She smiles and goes to the door.

DEVON

Come have toast.

MARK

No.

INT. HALE HOUSEHOLD, KITCHEN. MORNING.

Mark sits at the table in a shirt and tie, begrudgingly eating toast.

Next to him is RICKEN, 40, in a silk robe and androgynous glasses.

RICKEN

Has the mattress been comfortable?

MARK

Yes. Thanks.

RICKEN

What are you going to say at the interview?

MARK

I don't know.

RICKEN

You should mention that you're staying with us.

Devon brings over two glasses of grapefruit juice.

MARK

Well, living in the future bedroom of your sister's baby wasn't one of their preferred qualifications.

RICKEN

Tolstoy used to live with relatives for years at a time.

MARK

I'm not interviewing to be President of Russia.

RICKEN
Tolstoy wasn't-

DEVON
He knows, babe. He's screwing with
you.

MARK
No, I was being legitimately dumb
that time.

Ricken puts his hand on Mark's shoulder.

RICKEN
Mark, I think you're going to get
this job. I know things have been
hard-

MARK
Actually, things have been really
great since you put your hand on my
shoulder three seconds ago.

Ricken removes his hand.

RICKEN
I just think your life is about to
get a lot better.

Mark stares at him blankly.

MARK
Thanks for the toast.

He gets up and exits. Ricken shoots Devon an annoyed look.

EXT. HALE HOUSEHOLD, YARD. MORNING.

Mark goes to his car. Devon follows him out.

The suburban, Pacific Northwest neighborhood is coated in a
layer of frozen dew. Devon and Mark's breath is visible in
the morning light.

DEVON
It's cool how you act like you're
better than the man who's sharing
his house with you.

MARK
It's your house.

DEVON

Hey.

Mark turns.

DEVON (CONT'D)

If this interview goes- not great-

MARK

Why would it?

DEVON

Don't go to the bars after, okay?
Like, at least come home first.

Mark smiles.

MARK

You know, he made up the Tolstoy
thing.

DEVON

I know.

Mark gets in the car.

INT. MARK'S CAR. MORNING.

Mark speeds along an icy road surrounded by evergreen trees.
A thick fog makes for poor visibility.

He stares ahead, pensive.

MARK

Hi, I'm Mark Scout.

He shuts his eyes.

MARK (CONT'D)

Good to meet you. Mark Scout.

A deep breath.

MARK (CONT'D)

This place is great. My name is-

The car hits something with a thud. Mark opens his eyes and
slams on the brakes.

He sits for a long moment, breathing heavily.

MARK (CONT'D)

Shit.

EXT. FORESTED ROAD. CONTINUOUS.

Mark gets out of the car.

About ten feet behind him on the road lies a white cat. It doesn't move.

MARK

Oh no.

Mark glances over to a large, Victorian-style house just off the road. It's the only building in sight.

He takes a step toward the cat.

MARK (CONT'D)

Cat?

No response. He claps his hands. It doesn't move.

He glances down at his watch.

MARK (CONT'D)

Damnit.

He moves back to the car, plopping into the driver's seat. Gritting his teeth, he sounds his horn.

No response from the house. He lays on the horn again, this time for longer.

He notices the curtains in one of the upper windows move.

Hastily, he flips the car into drive and speeds off.

INT. CRAZY EAGLE VIDEO. DAY.

A card table has been set up in the middle of the store. Racks of DVD's line the walls.

Mark sits across from SETH, the store manager, 25 and mustached.

SETH

It's a lot of dusting of the DVD's and making sure they're in order. Do you have DVD's at home?

MARK

I do.

SETH

Yeah, so you know. I've been covering all the shifts myself for a year now. But massage school's a huge commitment so I'll be busy. Plus I expect to make friends there.

MARK

My schedule's very open.

Seth looks over Mark's resume. Mark shifts, uncomfortable.

SETH

You okay?

MARK

Yeah.

SETH

You seem weird.

MARK

I'm fine.

Seth looks back at the resume.

SETH

So, it says you used to be a professor of-

MARK

That was a while ago.

SETH

You know this is minimum wage?

MARK

It's fine.

Seth stares at Mark a minute. Mark is sweating.

SETH

Okay, well, the last question is one I ask everyone. Do you have any weaknesses that you think would prevent you from living up to the tradition of Crazy Eagle Video?

Mark looks down, fidgeting.

MARK

No.

SETH

I gotta write something or my uncle gets pissed.

Pause. Mark looks back up at Seth.

MARK

I ran over a cat.

SETH

What?

MARK

On my way here. With my car. I don't know if it's dead.

SETH

I don't-

MARK

I should have checked, seen if it was breathing, but I was nervous to get here. Can cats be in a coma?

SETH

I don't know.

MARK

What kind of monster am I? Who hits a cat and then drives off to interview for a job no sane person would even want?

SETH

So- what should I write?

Mark thinks a moment, then gets up.

MARK

I'm gonna go see if it's dead. Good luck with your movie store. Don't give me the job.

Mark puts on his coat and exits, leaving Seth baffled.

EXT. FORESTED ROAD. DAY.

Mark stands in front of his car, staring at a BLOOD STAIN on the pavement where the cat used to be.

He turns and looks at the house.

With a deep breath, he walks toward it.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOUSE. DAY.

Mark knocks on the door. He looks around. The forest is silent.

A LITTLE GIRL, 3, opens the door.

MARK

Hello. I was just- Are your parents home?

LITTLE GIRL

Someone killed our cat.

MARK

That's- awful.

LITTLE GIRL

Did you kill our cat?

Mark stares at her a moment.

MARK

I did.

She turns and walks into the dark house.

Mark cranes his neck to look after her.

Suddenly, a WOMAN steps in front of the door, startling Mark. This is Harmony Cobel, the woman from the Orientation Chamber.

MARK (CONT'D)

Oh. I'm sorry-

COBEL

So it would appear.

MARK

What?

COBEL

You're here. One would assume that means you're sorry.

MARK

I- Well, I wanted to check on the cat-

COBEL

He was dead the moment you hit him and he's remained so.

MARK

I'm sorry.

COBEL

You mentioned.

MARK

How did you know I had-

COBEL

You came here from work?

MARK

An interview.

COBEL

Did you get it?

MARK

No.

COBEL

Condolences.

MARK

Yes. Well- Look, I want to apologize. Truly, I can't tell you how sorry I am. I'd be happy to pay you for-

COBEL

Would you like to see it?

Pause.

MARK

Would I like to see the cat?

COBEL

Yes.

MARK

No.

INT. COBEL'S HOUSE, PARLOR. DAY.

Mark and Cobel stand over the body of the cat, which lays on a white linen tablecloth surrounded by candles.

Cobel munches on a pickle. She offers one to Mark.

COBEL

Pickle?

MARK
No. Thank you.

COBEL
I grew them myself. I insist.

Mark takes the pickle. Awkwardly, he takes a bite.

Pause.

MARK
What was his name?

COBEL
Mister.

MARK
That's a funny name for a cat.

COBEL
Well. I suppose I'm funny.

Each takes another bite of pickle.

MARK
I'm Mark.

COBEL
Harmony Cobel.

MARK
Pleasure.

COBEL
It's of interest to me, Mark, that you drove away. You seem more courteous than that. Were you afraid?

MARK
I guess.

COBEL
Yet you had the courage to come back, knowing our disdain for you would be compounded by the initial act of cowardice.

MARK
Well, it seemed right.

COBEL
And how did the actual slaying feel?

MARK

Slaying?

COBEL

I, myself, have only murdered small insects. Nothing mammalian. Did it make you feel powerful?

MARK

No. No, not at all. It was the opposite of that.

COBEL

The opposite of power? Describe that for me.

MARK

I just had to go. I felt horrible for- Mister, but- I had an interview. I couldn't feel horrible right then.

COBEL

And how many things in your life are you putting off feeling horrible about?

She takes a massive pickle bite.

MARK

I should get home. Excuse me.

He turns to leave.

COBEL

Do you feel horrible about Eleanor?

He stops. He turns around, his legs suddenly shaky.

COBEL (CONT'D)

In the divorce proceedings, she accused you of, quote, acute workoholism. I've never heard it phrased that way. She sounds like a firecracker.

He stares at her, steadying himself against a side table.

MARK

How do you-

COBEL

Or what about being fired via text message two days after signing divorce papers? Decreased focus, they cited. Have you gotten around to feeling horrible about that?

Mark falls back against the wall.

MARK

I feel sick.

COBEL

Take it easy.

MARK

What was in that pickle?

COBEL

I won't lie, there were drugs in the pickle.

Mark falls to the floor, his vision blurring.

Cobel slowly walks toward him.

COBEL (CONT'D)

I'm proud of you for coming back, Mark. That was very, very brave.

The room goes dark as Mark passes out.

End of Act 3.

INT. COBEL'S HOUSE, BASEMENT. NIGHT.

Mark slowly awakens, his head spinning. The room is dank, the walls made of rotted wood.

He sits in a chair at a table. Cobel sits across from him. In her hand is a shoebox.

COBEL

You're up.

Mark tries to stand but finds he's handcuffed.

COBEL (CONT'D)

Mark, I feel like I've been hard to read so far. That's irksome. Will you let me explain myself?

MARK

Please- let me go.

COBEL

I heard you slam on your brakes after you hit Mister. I wrote down your plate number on a takeout menu and looked you up after you drove off. That's why I know who you are. Simple as that.

MARK

The things you knew- There's no way-

COBEL

It was specific, right? That's the other thing I wanted to talk about. See, I work for an organization that's in the business of specificity. We don't like not knowing things.

MARK

What else do you know about me?

She leans back.

COBEL

I know you're brilliant. I know you were doing calculus at nine, took college classes at eleven.

(MORE)

COBEL (CONT'D)

I know you've struggled with focus your whole life, and that after your divorce, you spent most of a night standing on the Skagit bridge begging yourself to jump.

MARK

No one knows that.

COBEL

Someone does.

MARK

Why am I here?

COBEL

I want to offer you a job.

MARK

Why am I handcuffed?

COBEL

The job's a tough sell.

She pushes the box toward him.

COBEL (CONT'D)

Let me digress a second. I want to introduce you to someone who's actually grateful to you for killing Mister. Are you okay? I know this is a lot.

Mark says nothing.

She takes the top off the box. Inside is a black rat. Mark recoils.

COBEL (CONT'D)

This is Miss. Don't let the name fool you, he's male. My daughter picks the names.

Cobel reaches into the box. Miss nuzzles her hand.

COBEL (CONT'D)

Now, I've raised Miss from infancy. I cuddle him at night, feed him by hand. See how he loves me? Yes, you do, little Miss.

MARK

Why are you showing me your rat?

She reaches under the table and pulls out a small cylindrical device with a single switch on top. She lays it on the table next to the box.

COBEL

This beacon was built by my company. It broadcasts a hyper-sonar frequency, which activates a chip inside Miss's brain. When the beacon is on, Miss can only access memories from when it was on. When it's off, he remembers everything else. Does that make sense?

She flips the switch on the beacon, which hums almost inaudibly.

Miss instantly becomes hysterical, retreating to the back of the box and squeaking in terror.

COBEL (CONT'D)

Now, I should mention that when the beacon is on, I burn Miss on the belly with a soldering iron.

She reaches into the box. Miss cowers in terror.

COBEL (CONT'D)

He screams and screams. But I don't stop. Sometimes it lasts an hour.

She removes her hand.

COBEL (CONT'D)

Okay, enough of that.

Cobel clicks the beacon off again. Miss instantly calms down. Cobel picks her up and nuzzles her affectionately.

Mark stares at this in horror.

MARK

Who the hell are you?

Cobel lets Miss crawl onto the back of her neck.

COBEL

I'm an office manager. I work at the most revolutionary company on the planet, and I'm prepared to offer you half a million dollars a year to come join us.

(MORE)

COBEL (CONT'D)

The only condition is that you will receive a beacon of your own and your perceptual chronologies will be split. Between the hours of nine and five, you will have no knowledge of who you are or where you are from. Only work memories. And in your outside life, you will know nothing of what you do for the company. The vital nature of the work requires such secrecy.

Mark stares at her. He has no words.

COBEL (CONT'D)

By the way, those cuffs are plastic.

Mark looks down at the cuffs. He pulls his arms up sharply, breaking them.

He stumbles to his feet.

MARK

This is psychotic. There's no way what you're describing-

COBEL

It's real. It violates no law, and it's brought solace to many of our workers.

MARK

By cracking their brains in half?

COBEL

Mark, my mother was an atheist. She used to say that there's good news and bad news about Hell. The good news is that Hell is the product of an overactive human imagination. The bad news is that what human beings can imagine, they can create. I think that Hell is a world where you eternally obsess over where you'll be in twelve hours. Where your marriage freezes to death in the shadow of your career. Mark, what if you could walk into work in the morning and skip straight to the quitting bell? Remove the anxiety of being a worker and only be a person. That's what it's like.

MARK

Unless you're unlucky enough to
wake up as the worker.

COBEL

In which case you know nothing
else. Those who have had the
procedure are happier, both at work
and at home, than ever before in
their lives.

Mark stares at her another moment.

MARK

Have you had it?

COBEL

No.

He nods.

MARK

Then when you get to work tomorrow,
you can tell everyone that I told
you to go straight to Hell.

Cobel laughs at this. Mark turns and stumbles to the door.

COBEL

Give it some thought, Mark. You
know where to find me.

Mark reaches the door and shoves it open.

Cobel scratches Miss's neck.

COBEL (CONT'D)

That was a funny thing he said,
wasn't it, Miss? Yes, it was.

Miss nuzzles her hand.

INT. POLICE STATION, OFFICE. NIGHT.

Mark sits across from OFFICER IRONS, 40 and incredulous.

OFFICER IRONS

Okay, so- You hit the woman's cat.

MARK

Yes.

OFFICER IRONS
And didn't go back to check on it.

MARK
No.

OFFICER IRONS
In cases like that, sir, you should
get out of the car and assess the
animal.

MARK
Please listen. This woman drugged
and kidnapped me!

Officer Irons ponders this a moment.

OFFICER IRONS
Would you give me a moment, please,
sir?

MARK
Yeah.

Mark gets up.

INT. POLICE STATION, WAITING AREA. NIGHT.

Mark sits down in one of a long row of chairs.

Through the window, he sees Officer Irons talk to OFFICER
GREEN, 55 and skinny.

Mark leans back, rubbing his face. He doesn't notice KAIA,
26, petite and strung out, sitting a few chairs away.

KAIA
Why did they bring you here?

Mark looks at her, exhausted.

MARK
They didn't. I came to report a
crime.

KAIA
Me too. But they won't listen to
me. They say I'm bonkers.

MARK
Okay.

KAIA

My dad was killed when I was ten.
On his birthday. But they'll never
catch who did it. You know why that
is?

MARK

Listen, I've had kind of a rough
night-

KAIA

Because he was killed by angels.

Mark stares, speechless.

KAIA (CONT'D)

He flew out of one of his presents,
the one with gold paper. And they
pulled bones out of him til he
died.

Mark nods.

MARK

Okay.

The door to the office opens and Officers Irons and Green
emerge.

OFFICER IRONS

Mr. Scout?

MARK

Yes.

The Officers glance at each other.

OFFICER IRONS

Take us there.

INT. FORESTED ROAD. MORNING.

As the sun rises, the Officers get out of their car.

They walk along the road to join Mark, who is standing in
front of his own parked car, staring in disbelief.

The area where the house stood is now a vacant field. Only a
plastic Port-o-Potty sits in the center.

For a long moment, all stare.

OFFICER IRONS
This is the house, sir?

MARK
I don't-

OFFICER IRONS
Sir, this is a portable lavatory.
Frequently used for temporary waste
management, but insufficient for
habitation.

MARK
There was a house here.

The Officers glance at one another.

OFFICER GREEN
You know what I think this is?

OFFICER IRONS
What's that?

OFFICER GREEN
Bunch of crap.

Officer Green bursts into a fit of laughter.

OFFICER IRONS
Aw, that's classic!

OFFICER GREEN
Thought of it a minute ago. It
wasn't improvised.

OFFICER IRONS
Still. So funny.

Their radios bleep.

COP VOICE
Possible homicide on Fourth and
Vice. All units-

OFFICER GREEN
Shit. We gotta go.

MARK
Wait, can't you-

OFFICER IRONS
Please return home, Mr. Scout.
Contact us only if there's an
emergency.

The Officers run to their car and get in. They peel out and speed off.

Mark stands at the side of the road, staring after them.

He starts to walk to his car.

He turns, regarding the Port-O-Potty.

INT. PORT-O-POTTY. MORNING.

Mark enters and sits down. He shuts the door behind him.

He looks around, silent for a long moment.

MARK

Are you here?

Pause.

COBEL

(o.s.)

Of course I am.

Mark looks up. At the top of the Port-O-Potty is a speaker.

MARK

How did you do that?

COBEL

(o.s.)

I can't tell you. But let me ask you this, Mark; Is it not worth considering that a company that can make a house disappear may also be able to fix your somewhat broken life?

Mark thinks about this.

MARK

If I was unhappy, could I get out of it?

COBEL

(o.s.)

Both halves of you would need to request it. But that won't happen. I'm offering you something you've craved your whole life, Mark. I'm offering you focus, and all that comes with it.

(MORE)

COBEL (CONT'D)

You can explore what that means, or you can go back to your sister's baby's room. I believe a nearby food court is hiring.

Mark lets out a slow breath.

COBEL (CONT'D)

(o.s.)

Mark? When you step out of this Port-O-Potty, would you like me to be there? You can say no. Or you can say yes.

Mark shuts his eyes.

MARK

(whispers)

Yes.

COBEL

(o.s.)

I'm glad you said that. Come out.

Mark opens his eyes. He opens the door.

EXT. FORESTED ROAD. CONTINUOUS.

Mark steps out to see Cobel standing in front of a sleek black car.

Next to her is Milchick, smiling like an idiot.

Mark lets out another long breath and makes his way to the side of the road.

COBEL

This is Frank Milchick, newly hired PR director.

MILCHICK

So psyched you're joining us.

Cobel smiles and opens the rear door of the car.

COBEL

Shall we?

Mark nods. He gets in the car.

BLACKNESS.

SCREEN TEXT: FOUR DAYS LATER.

INT. WHITE ROOM. DAY.

Mark sits at a wooden table in a surgical gown, a thermometer in his mouth and a sheet of paper in his hands. Milchick stands over him.

The room is perfectly cubic, and all white.

Milchick removes the thermometer.

MILCHICK

All good. You ready for this?

MARK

Yeah.

MILCHICK

Great. Let's make some rad magic.

Milchick moves to the other side of the table, a camera has been set up.

Cobel stands in the corner.

MILCHICK (CONT'D)

Okay, we're on Mark in one, two-

He hits record.

Mark picks up the paper and reads.

MARK

My name is Mark Scout. I have, at the suggestion of my employer, elected to undergo the procedure colloquially known as severance. I give consent for my unconscious body to be transported to my workplace and my personal beacon activated, creating a new perceptual chronology. I understand that the skills required to perform my job will be implanted in the mind of my employed self, along with a cursory awareness of the outside world for conversational purposes. I will not, henceforth, seek knowledge of my outside life while at work, nor of my work life while at home.

CUT TO:

INT. VIDEO ARCHIVE ROOM. EVENING.

Back in the cramped room, Mark crouches before the television set, watching the recorded image of himself reading the waver.

He can hardly breathe as he stares at his own pensive face.

MARK

(on-screen)

I say these things of my own free accord, and being of sound mind.

MILCHICK

(on-screen)

That's good, Mark. That's real good.

MARK

(on-screen)

Would it be alright if I said something? To him?

Pause.

COBEL

(on-screen)

No.

The screen cuts to static.

Mark leans back. He stares into the static for a very long moment.

INT. UPPER HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Mark opens the door and steps quietly out of the archive room.

Cobel and Milchick stand before him.

MARK

When was that taken?

COBEL

This morning.

Mark nods.

MARK

I'm never going to leave here.

COBEL
You'll leave here at five.

MILCHICK
But in your current state of
awareness, you won't perceive it.

Mark nods again.

MARK
Do I have a family?

COBEL
You'll never know.

MARK
And I don't have any choice.

Cobel stares at him, solemnly.

COBEL
You did. You chose yes.

Mark lets out a long breath.

Milchick and Cobel stand still, giving him all the time he
needs.

End of act 4

INT. DARK HALL. NIGHT.

Cobel walks down a hallway, darker even than the one before.

She rounds a corner and stops. Before her is a corridor so dark that the end is not visible.

COBEL

He's gone.

A soft, raspy MAN'S VOICE echoes down the hallway.

MAN'S VOICE

Has he come to us defective?

COBEL

No.

MAN'S VOICE

He's curious. Like the other before him.

Cobel looks at the floor, uncomfortable.

CUT TO:

INT. LOBBY. NIGHT.

Mark stands at the security station as a GUARD pats him down.

COBEL

(o.s.)

That won't happen again. This one may fight for a time. But he will choose us as his home.

MAN'S VOICE

(o.s.)

And if he doesn't choose us?

The guard waves Mark to the door. Mark stares at his reflection in the glass, then pushes the door open and exits.

Darkness.

COBEL

(o.s.)

Then he'll have nothing left but the dark.

End of Episode