

EXPIRATION DATE

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - 2030

ON HOVERING TV SCREEN - it streams a promo for an upcoming situation comedy.

ANNOUNCER

Streaming this Friday! It's the world's first completely AI-generated situation comedy: "I'm Above This."

In a CGI reality, a MAN (45) sits on a couch in a smart home, reading his tablet when his WIFE (42) and DAUGHTER (16) enter.

MAN

Where were you guys?

WIFE

We went to a sidewalk sale.

MAN

How much did they want for it?

WIFE

How much did they want for what?

MAN

The sidewalk?

WIFE

Oh, Frank!

The Daughter frowns.

DAUGHTER

I'm above this!

AUDIENCE LAUGHTER.

ANNOUNCER

Mediafreaks.com raves "it's LOL funny!"

The TV image freezes. DALTON REEVES (26) slowly puts the remote down. Too handsome to be completely nerdy, wearing fashionable frames, he sits with other annoyed COMEDY WRITERS in a conference room.

DALTON
Was that as cringe as I thought it
was?

COMEDY WRITER #1
They can't be serious.

Head Writer ARCHIE GIPS (40) enters the room. He's short with bushy hair and a fatherly expression.

ARCHIE
I see you've been checking out the competition. Amazon went all in on AI production.

COMEDY WRITER #1
It wasn't remotely funny.

COMEDY WRITER #2
So fake.

ARCHIE
Gentlemen, we're the last of a dying breed.

DALTON
Until AI learns how to write jokes.

ARCHIE
Never going to happen.

COMEDY WRITER #1
Are we going to have to endure another strike, Arch?

ARCHIE
Naw.

Archie sits down.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Listen, AI can generate human looking actors, design sets. It can write dramas, action flicks, thrillers, but it can't nail comedy.

COMEDY WRITER #1
Why is that, Arch?

Archie shrugs.

DALTON

Because to write comedy you need a soul.

COMEDY WRITER #2

Archie has no soul.

Everyone laughs.

DALTON

I mean, comedy is really about human suffering, right? Mark Twain said that.

COMEDY WRITER #2

He said what, Dalton?

DALTON

"The secret source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven."

ARCHIE

That's why us Jews are so good at it. We've had centuries of suffering.

DALTON

AI can write an awesome chase scene, but it can't bomb at an open mic and turn that pain into gold. It can't be dumped by a dream girl and then write a savage rom-com about the hurt.

ARCHIE

You make a point, my thoughtful young writer.

DALTON

Still, it's unnerving to think Amazon's willing to gamble.

ARCHIE

Let them. They'll lose. Now, let's get on with our authentic, carbon based comedy show. Frazier, did you finish the notes on the B plot?

Dalton looks up at the TV screen, frozen on a CGI actor smiling in an oddly inhuman way. Dalton's expression appears both fascinated and fearful at the same time.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - DAY

Dalton drives down the street in his Prius. The TOURISTS and DENIZENS of the city wear varying masks, some high tech breathing apparatuses and some just the simple cloth types. Some don't wear any masks at all.

On the sides of buildings and bus stops are Government posts that read: "Get your vaccines - you never know when the next pandemic will break out!"

Another sign instructs what citizens should do if there's "another bio-warfare attack! Nearest shelter - next right!"

EXT. FOREST LAWN - GRAVESITE - DAY

Dalton, sad-faced, stands in front of a high-tech headstone with a video screen and the name: LESLIE REEVES, BELOVED MOTHER.

Dalton talks to an AI-generated animation of his mother in an ethereal background with whirling wisps of smokey substance.

DALTON

I guess I feel kind of helpless. No agency. I might be out of a job soon.

AI MOM

Don't be so glum. You'll find another line of work.

DALTON

But mom, this is what I--

AI MOM

Are you seeing anybody?

Dalton looks down with shame, then at his phone.

ON PHONE - there's a text: "Teresa? Are you there? Not ghosting me are you lol?" He scrolls down and there's another text: "Hello Did I say something wrong?" Then he puts the phone back his pocket.

AI MOM (CONT'D)

I want to see you settled down.

DALTON

It's hard to find someone like you, mom.

AI MOM
You're flattering me, Dalton.

DALTON
I know you're just AI mom and not
the real thing, but I really do
want to--

At this moment, Dalton's younger brother CHAD (20) bookish,
wearing less fashionable glasses, innocent face, and their
father HAROLD (55) come up the hill to the grave.

Harold looks like a typical engineer type, conservative
attire, horn-rims, modest in demeanor.

CHAD
Hey! You got here early!

DALTON
Just had some things to say to AI
mom.

CHAD
You always hogged her.

DALTON
You were the baby who got all the
attention.

HAROLD
Come on, guys. This is supposed to
be our peaceful, weekly get-
together.

DALTON
Sorry, dad.

Dalton starts down the hill.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Anyway, I'm done with AI mom. She's
a cruel fraud anyway.

HAROLD
We'll see you at the diner, right?

DALTON
I'll get us a booth.

CHAD
Hi, mom.

AI MOM
Chad, how are you my darling boy?

INT. DINER - DAY

Dalton, Chad and Harold all eat in silence for a beat. Just the SOUND of silverware. Then Harold clears his throat.

HAROLD

So I went to see the doctor about this itch I have. He said he wanted to help me but he doesn't make rash judgments.

Harold smiles. Chad gives a fake laugh.

DALTON

Jeez, dad, you sound like that AI sitcom.

HAROLD

I thought it was 'dad humor.'

DALTON

Whatever.

They go back to eating in silence. Harold looks defeated.

INT. FRABBA JABBA NETWORK BUILDING - DALTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Dalton sits typing at his laptop. Then he clicks over to the AI sitcom site. He watches it for a few minutes as if in a trance.

Then he checks his watch and leaves.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD - HOUSE - DAY

Dalton pulls his Prius up the driveway of the modest two-bedroom house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dalton enters the living room to find Chad crouched over a laptop at a table.

Chad is also sporting a patch on his head. He picks up a hot dog and takes a bite. The hovering TV plays anime.

DALTON

How can you study with that noisy cartoon playing?

CHAD
Dunno.

Dalton clicks it off.

DALTON
Hey! Chad!

CHAD
What?

DALTON
Did you get hurt?

Chad looks up, blinks.

CHAD
Huh?

DALTON
You've got a patch on your head,
dummy.

CHAD
Oh. Got one of those new neural
links.

DALTON
What?

CHAD
It's a health monitor deal.

DALTON
You got it implanted into your
brain?

CHAD'S POV - he blinks again and a screen appears showing his health stats - heart rate, blood pressure, etc. It also shows PROJECTED DEATH DATE - May 14, 2090. AGE: 80 YEARS, TEN MONTHS, FOUR DAYS, SIX HOURS, 45 SECONDS.

CHAD
My professor recommended it. I get
extra credit for writing about my
experience with it.

DALTON
When I didn't see you yesterday, I
thought you were pulling all-
nighters for a test. I didn't know
you were doing something that
stupid.

CHAD

Midterms aren't for a few weeks.

DALTON

Seriously. Are you that crazy??

CHAD

Come on. You'd love it.

DALTON

I wouldn't let them put anything into my brain.

Dalton walks over to Chad, stares at his bandage with slight horror.

CHAD

It's pretty cool. Shows your health stats. When you're going to die and stuff.

DALTON

It does what?

CHAD

It's kinda morbid, but kinda cool. It calibrates how your lifestyle adds or takes away from your life span.

Chad takes a bite from his hotdog. HIS LIFESPAN FLASHES - MINUS THREE HOURS. REVISED DEATH DATE.

DALTON

My human doctor keeps me up to date. And you're too young to be worrying about dying.

CHAD

Whatever, Dalton.

Dalton shakes his head and sits down.

CHAD (CONT'D)

How are you doing?

DALTON

Oh, still chained to a rock while crows peck at my liver.

CHAD

Ha, like Prometheus.

DALTON

It was my joke. I don't need it explicated.

CHAD

You're kinda hostile, bro.

DALTON

I just can't believe my own brother's studying to work in AI.

CHAD

So?

DALTON

So, AI's writing most of entertainment now. And they're trying to do comedy!

CHAD

So?

DALTON

You're working for the enemy! And I let you live here, rent-free!

Dalton gets up and leaves the room.

Chad gets another warning: MINUS FIVE SECONDS. REVISED DEATH DATE. STRESS FROM FAMILY CONFLICT.

Chad blinks the stats off his eyes, takes a deep breath to relax himself, chomps his hot dog and resumes studying.

EXT. FRABBA JABBA NETWORK BUILDING - DAY

Dalton pulls his Prius into the parking lot.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Dalton participates in another writer's room.

ARCHIE

Dalton, I have an idea for your episode.

DALTON

But I wanted to do the thing about the social influencer.

ARCHIE

Save it. They've got these new life span neural links--

DALTON

My brother just got one.

ARCHIE

They're the hottest thing right now. Everyone's getting one.

COMEDY WRITER #1

What's it do?

ARCHIE

Shows you how long you'll live. And if you eat junk food, it automatically deducts time off your life.

COMEDY WRITER #1

Sounds pretty amazing.

ARCHIE

Yeah, you eat a bag of Doritos, there goes ten minutes! Go on a bender in TJ, you take off a month. Have your mother-in-law over for dinner, you lose years.

COMEDY WRITER #2

It's that in tune with your body?

ARCHIE

Natural disaster, a divorce, a meeting with network execs-- all of it. Life killing.

COMEDY WRITER #1

Ah, I want this idea!

DALTON

It creeps me out. Why would you want one?

COMEDY WRITER #3

Because you can add time.

DALTON

Add time, how?

ARCHIE

Yeah, you work out, you add time. You eat your Brussel sprouts, you add time. You volunteer at the soup kitchen and feed all the action movie writers, you add time.

DALTON

Well, I definitely see possibilities for comedy.

ARCHIE

And get this-- if you fall in love, it adds years!

DALTON

Oh. That would be interesting to monitor. The arc of a love affair.

ARCHIE

Generally speaking. You can get into a marriage with a complete psycho and lose half a lifetime. See: my ex-wife who has my house.

DALTON

The ongoing tally could help you avoid that kind of thing in the dating stage. You'd have agency every step of the way.

ARCHIE

Exactly. You okay with this, Dalton? It's rich, fertile ground I'm offering up, son.

DALTON

Like I said, my brother just got one. I can ask him all about it.

ARCHIE

No, I was hoping you'd get the implant. It's a tax-write off.

DALTON

Me? Hell no. I'm not letting some AI device into my brain.

ARCHIE

I know. And I get it. But it would help.

DALTON

Can't I just go by what my kid
brother says?

ARCHIE

I can give the idea to another
writer.

One of the female writers, JULIE (24), thin, cute in a shy
way, raises her hand.

JULIE

Me!

ARCHIE

Julie wants to do it.

JULIE

The romance part would be a gas to
write. The ups and downs, the life
add-ons and take-offs.

DALTON

Go for it.

ARCHIE

It could help your love life,
Dalton.

COMEDY WRITER #1

What love life?

Everyone laughs.

DALTON

Hey!

COMEDY WRITER #1

Sorry, dude.

ARCHIE

Steer you clear of the flakes and
mean girls. You could monitor your
chemistry instantly.

DALTON

Shit.

Dalton looks around the room. His masculinity has been
impugned!

ARCHIE

And this angle could get us a lot
of views. Cutting edge, Dalton.

DALTON

Okay. Damn it.

JULIE

Awwww!

ARCHIE

You can always have the health link taken out after you write the episode.

DALTON

Yeah. Fine. And I will!

ARCHIE

Attaboy!

Dalton rubs his head. What did he just agree to?

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chad's at the table studying. Dalton sits on the couch watching the hover screen and jotting notes on his tablet.

CHAD

I can drive you.

DALTON

They said I can drive home.

CHAD

It's not a big deal. It's outpatient. They're super fast, get in and out of your skull.

DALTON

I just don't like my mind being invaded like that. It's Orwellian.

CHAD

You'll love it.

DALTON

I don't think so. But it's just while I write this script.

CHAD

What happens in your story?

DALTON

I'm thinking about having the character fall in love.

(MORE)

DALTON (CONT'D)
See how it effects his lifespan
when the girl drives him crazy.

CHAD
There's another thing you don't
have much experience with.

DALTON
What?

CHAD
Love.

DALTON
Get out of here. I've had a ton of
girlfriends.

CHAD
But you're pretty lonely.

DALTON
So are you, dork.

CHAD
I'm concentrating on my studies.

DALTON
I'm concentrating on my work.

CHAD
You're afraid.

DALTON
I'll admit, lately, Cupid's been
slow on his crossbow. But I have
enough experience to write this
show. Now shut up and study!

Chad continues studying, then thinks.

CHAD
You'll never find a woman like mom.

DALTON
I know.

CHAD
You had her around for a couple
more years than I did.

DALTON
Seems like all my girlfriends...
just leave. Would be nice to have a
female stick around.

Dalton looks awkwardly at his bro. He's shared too much info.

CHAD
I think you'll like the implant.

DALTON
Probably not.

CHAD
Keep an open mind.

DALTON
I'm about to have my mind opened.
And controlled by a dark AI
overlord.

CHAD
So paranoid. Tech can make life a
real blast.

DALTON
Keep saying that to yourself. Then
you can pay the mortgage when you
get a tech job and I'm laid off.

INT. HEALTH LINK BUILDING - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Dalton flips around on his phone anxiously as he sits in the waiting room with other CUSTOMERS. Most of the people wear masks. Some don't.

A NURSE opens the door.

NURSE
Dalton Reeves?

Dalton nods and slowly gets up, as if he were walking the last mile on death row.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Dalton lies on a table as an AI SURGEON and the NURSE prepare him for the surgery.

DALTON
How long will this take?

AI SURGEON
It will be over in ten minutes. Are
you ready for the anesthesia?

DALTON

Wait! This implant doesn't record
my thoughts or anything does it?

The Nurse laughs.

AI SURGEON

No, it just monitors your health
functions and life choices.

DALTON

I don't want AI trying to learn how
I write jokes!

NURSE

What?

DALTON

It's the one thing AI can't do.
Write jokes. I don't want them
trying to extract anything from my
brain. Maybe pull out the funny
sector of my--

AI SURGEON

You can relax, Dalton Reeves. I'm
only programmed to insert this
implant.

The Nurse puts a mask over Dalton's mouth as he continues to protest.

NURSE

Count backwards from ten.

DALTON

(muffled)

10... 9... zzzzz.

Dalton passes out. The AI surgeon cuts a slight line into Dalton's head where his hair has been shaved. It slides in a long thread.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Dalton, a bandage on his head, signs documents at a table with the Nurse.

NURSE
That wasn't so bad, was it?

DALTON
No. How does it work?

NURSE
You can blink it on and off.

Dalton blinks.

DALTON'S POV - His health stats appear before his eyes. BLOOD PRESSURE NORMAL. IMMUNITY STRONG. DEATH DATE 2085. 81 YEARS OLD. 8 MONTHS. 2 WEEKS. 4 DAYS. 22 SECONDS.

DALTON
Okay. Kinda cool.

NURSE
After you sign this final document,
you're good to go.

Dalton stares at the stats, mesmerized.

DALTON
Says I'm going to live to be eighty-one years old. Sweet.

NURSE
Uh, Mr. Reeves?

DALTON
Oh, right. Thanks.

Dalton signs the document and leaves.

INT. GYM - DAY

Dalton sweats and grunts as he does the leg press. After the final rep, he climbs out of the machine and towels off.

Remembering his link, he blinks.

CONGRATS! WORK OUT ADDED ONE DAY TO LIFE SPAN!

DALTON
Yes!

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fresh from the shower, Dalton gulps down a protein/veggie shake.

DALTON

Ugh.

But he blinks and smiles.

KALE SMOOTHIE ADDS SIX HOURS TO LIFE SPAN!

INT. FRABBA JABBA NETWORK BUILDING - OFFICE - DAY

Inspired, Dalton writes away furiously on his laptop. Archie sticks his head in.

ARCHIE

How's it going in here?

DALTON

Not too shabby.

ARCHIE

Look, if you don't like the device,
I can see if the company can pay to
remove it.

Dalton blinks his stats before his eyes.

DALTON

No, no, that's all right.

ARCHIE

Adjusting to it already?

DALTON

I'm ashamed to admit, I like it.

ARCHIE

Good to keep an open mind--
literally.

DALTON

For once, someone uses the word
'literally' correctly.

ARCHIE

Come on, I didn't get to be your
boss for nothing.

DALTON

The link does feel empowering. Like
I have more control over my time.

ARCHIE

Great. But that doesn't sound very
funny.

Dalton laughs.

DALTON
Don't worry. The gags are flowing.

ARCHIE
When can I see a rough?

DALTON
I've got the first act. Just
starting the part where his love
life revs up.

ARCHIE
Attaboy, Dalton. I knew I could
count on you.

Archie walks out, leaving Dalton's door open. Julie, the comedy writer who wanted this theme, stops when she sees Dalton. She has a bandage on her forehead too.

JULIE
How's it going in here?

DALTON
Starting Act Two.

JULIE
Progress already.

She lingers for a moment, smiling in a way that suggests attraction. He smiles back but continues writing.

JULIE (CONT'D)
I got the health span link too.

DALTON
Oh, cool.

She blinks. We see her health stats ON SCREEN.

JULIE
If you need any help on the
relationship part...

DALTON
I think I'll be okay. But thanks,
Julie.

JULIE
Okay. You know where to find me.
I'm great with water cooler chat.

She smiles again in a mousey way and then walks out.

INT. HOUSE - DALTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton's laptop is open on his desk. He types away even more furiously. He stops and looks at the screen. He laughs out loud.

CLOSE UP - DALTON'S HEAD

INT. SKULL - DAY

THE CAMERA GOES INSIDE DALTON'S SKULL. THE NUERAL LINK PLANTED ON HIS FRONTAL LOBE GLOWS. THERE'S A SMALL HUMMING NOISE.

BACK TO:

INT. DALTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton continues typing and then sits back. He sighs and smiles. He gets up. It's good. Really good!

Dalton throws a nerf basketball into a hoop. 3-pointer! Lay-up! Swish!

There's a KNOCK at the door. Chad enters.

CHAD
Bro, can you stop with the hoops?

DALTON
I thought you were studying
downstairs?

CHAD
I am. But I can still hear you
jumping around.

DALTON
Sorry.

Dalton walks back to his desk and his laptop.

CHAD
Going well?

DALTON
Excellent. My character's in love
and it's really funny.

Chad's about to leave. Then he stops.

CHAD

Maybe you should go on a date.

DALTON

Brilliant idea.

CHAD

I mean it. Make your story real.

DALTON

There's a girl in the office. Not
really my type. Too mousey.

CHAD

There's a new dating app that's
pretty cool. Called SimDate.

DALTON

Here we go again.

CHAD

You hated the idea of the lifespan
link but now you love it.

DALTON

I wouldn't go as far as saying,
"love it." It does give me some
agency, which is nice.

CHAD

This dating app is pretty amazing.
I guarantee it.

DALTON

But if I go on a bad date, it could
ruin my mojo. I don't need to deal
with rejection and a deadline.

CHAD

That's just it. You don't even have
to go on the date. The app
simulates your date with a girl
whose profile you like.

DALTON

What?

CHAD

They do the dating for you, bro!

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

The full moon reflects light down on Dalton's house.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton talks into the camera on his laptop.

DALTON

And that was pretty much my last relationship. We're still on good terms, but--

AI HOST

We understand that you have unresolved feelings about your mother's death. You have a fear of being abandoned and that bleeds into your relationships.

DALTON

What??

The laptop shows footage of Dalton talking with his AI mom at her grave.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Hey! That's an invasion of privacy!

AI HOST

Your father agreed to the terms when he subscribed to the service.

DALTON

So my profile includes Freudian analysis?

AI HOST

Interview for Dalton Reeves completed.

Dalton leans back from his desk. Chad watches from the bed where he's studying on his laptop.

DALTON

I hope all that emotional probing was worth it.

Chad gets up and walks over.

CHAD

They have to know who you are, bro, so they can make your simulation.

Dalton clicks on a search. Stops on one pic.

CHAD (CONT'D)

Okay, so you like this woman's profile?

DALTON

She's pretty hot. And seems smart.
'Seems' being the operative word.
She could've had AI write her bio.

CHAD

You're ready for the simulated date. Just press that button.

DALTON

And pay the subscription fee.
That's pretty pricey. On top of the neural link, I'm broke for the month.

ON LAPTOP - Dalton's cursor double clicks a profile for a woman named JASMINE. The words DATE SIMULATION FLASH. The scene changes to:

INT. BAR - NIGHT - SIMULATED DATE

A CGI Dalton sits at the bar, sipping on a beer and looking nervously about him. CGI-JASMINE (24), beautiful but a little flakey looking, enters. It's all as real as CGI can be, but still has that artificial feel.

DALTON

Are you, Jasmine?

JASMINE

Could you feel my aura?

DALTON

I felt something. Not sure it was, you know, an aura.

JASMINE

A tingling sensation?

DALTON

Tingling or my Adderall kicking in.

Jasmine looks at him with concern.

JASMINE

My cousin takes Adderall. I understand.

DALTON
That was a joke.

JASMINE
I'm not sure amphetamine abuse is
something to joke about.

Dalton looks over at Chad.

CHAD
End it.

Dalton pushes the END button on the lower right of the screen.

DALTON
Excuse me, Jasmine. But I gotta
run.

JASMINE
It's certainly not good for our
vibrations to abruptly part this
way.

DALTON
I know, and I'm sorry about the bad
vibes.

JASMINE
If I weren't so evolved, I might
think you are being rude.

DALTON
Thank goodness you are. Bye now!

Dalton exits.

SIMULATED DATE ENDS.

Dalton steps away from the computer.

DALTON (CONT'D)
The AI version of me is off. Kinda
cringe with the attempt at a joke.
And she was definitely not my type.

CHAD
Don't give up after one misfire. At
least, you didn't have to buy
anyone a drink.

DALTON
Not impressed with this yet.

CHAD

Let's do some more. This is kinda fun watching you romance the ladies.

MONTAGE BEGINS

-CGI-Dalton and another DATE sit at the bar trying to find something to talk about. He actually yawns.

-Dalton and another DATE argue passionately.

DALTON

You seriously voted for that clown?

-Dalton watches as another DATE gets drunk and crashes, face plant, on the bar.

MONTAGE ENDS

Dalton turns to Chad and shrugs.

DALTON (CONT'D)

I guess I've got a bad algorithm or something.

CHAD

Try one more.

DALTON

It's two in the morning, Chad.

CHAD

I want you to be happy, bro. You need a good woman.

Dalton clicks on another profile. The simulation begins:

INT. BAR - NIGHT

CRYSTAL (25), dark hair, wearing a pricey outfit, an endearing, crooked smile and beautiful eyes, enters the bar looking as nervous as Dalton. She even has a vague resemblance to his mother.

Dalton looks up and his eyes grow large.

DALTON

Uh, hello. Crystal?

CRYSTAL

Dalton?

DALTON

Yeah. That's me.

CRYSTAL

(playful)

What brings you out tonight?

DALTON

Oh, nothing much. Waiting for my soul mate.

CRYSTAL

At a bar?

DALTON

I know. It looks terrible.

Crystal surveys the room, glancing at the other SINGLES. She sits down.

CRYSTAL

I'm not a woman of easy virtue, if that's what you're hoping for.

DALTON

Not at all.

CRYSTAL

So. Mr. Dalton. How will you know when you've met your soul mate?

DALTON

Uh, well... It takes a second. First, you start off with conversation, lots of small talk, until you get a feel for her character.

CRYSTAL

Ah.

DALTON

You'll discover if the pull of personality matches your initial physical attraction.

CRYSTAL

You know, I was going to say the exact same thing.

DALTON

Really?

CRYSTAL
No.

They both laugh.

A cursor enters.

SIMULTED DATE ENDS

A COMPATIBILITY SCORE APPEARS 99!!!

DALTON
Holy crap! 99 out of 100
compatibility?

Dalton looks at Chad and smiles.

DALTON (CONT'D)
She's too good to be true.

CHAD
Go for it, dude!

DALTON
They tried again to match my humor
but they couldn't. So they went for
playful. Still, she seems terrific.

CHAD
She reminds me of mom a little.

Dalton clicks on the REQUEST REAL DATE option.

DALTON
Hopefully, real life won't let me
down. I think AI just wants to make
the User happy.

A WARNING FLASHES on the screen: ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO
DATE CRYSTAL? SHE MAY BE TOO PERFECT!

DALTON (CONT'D)
That's weird. Why would that be a
warning?

CHAD
They're yanking your chain, bro.
Trying to be cool and funny.

DALTON
Yes, of course, I want to date
Crystal.

Dalton clicks again.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

This time, real Dalton and Crystal are chatting at the bar.

DALTON

She was a New Age girl who wanted
to do things to my Chakra, I'd
rather not discuss.

Crystal smiles.

DALTON (CONT'D)

You're even better in person than
the simulation.

CRYSTAL

Flatterer.

DALTON

No, I'm serious. Hubba hubba, va va
voom, oo la la--no construction
worker catcall can do you justice.

CRYSTAL

I live for construction worker
catcalls. You're not so shabby
yourself.

DALTON

Your profile said you work in
finance.

CRYSTAL

Oh. I've always been good with
numbers. I have one confession
though. I've never dated a writer
before. Mostly Wall Street types.

DALTON

Hopefully, you can adjust.

CRYSTAL

You don't really talk like a
writer.

DALTON

How did you expect a writer to
talk? "Your laughter is like the
tinkling merriment of a mischievous
fairy queen."

She giggles.

CRYSTAL

I don't know. I keep thinking of
stuffy authors. You're not
offended, are you?

DALTON

Let's just say I'm amused by your
presumption.

CRYSTAL

Okay. But you still like me?

DALTON

Like you? Why, you're the very
froth of my soul. Come, let joy be
unconfined!

They both laugh.

CRYSTAL

Our simulated date was all about
soul mates.

DALTON

I know that was a little weird.

CRYSTAL

But it's a great first date topic.
So, how would you describe your
soul mate?

DALTON

Hopefully she would have a
contagious smile and an oversized
heart. Metaphorically speaking. I
don't mean a congenital medical
issue.

CRYSTAL

I see.

DALTON

I just got one of those life span
chips. So I guess, I'm all about
healthy connection.

CRYSTAL

The link that tells you if you're
adding or subtracting time? I want
one!

DALTON

You can have mine when I'm done
with it.

CRYSTAL

Really? That's so kind.

DALTON

Nothing like a second hand neural link! You'll just have to wash off my membranes.

They both laugh.

DALTON (CONT'D)

You don't mind getting the procedure?

CRYSTAL

I'm all about new life experiences. No fears! I'm a risk taker, baby!

Dalton smiles at her.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

What?

DALTON

Nothing.

CRYSTAL

Why are you smiling?

DALTON

I know we just met but would it be too much for me to request a followup encounter? See, I need a muse. I have to knock out the second act of my script and I have this deadline and--

CRYSTAL

Not at all. I would like to see where this goes.

They smile at each other. The attraction is real. Love-at-first sight kind of feel.

INT. FRABBA JABBA BUILDING - OFFICE - DAY

Dalton, a big smile on his face, hammers out his screenplay. Stopping to laugh every few sentences. Julie walks by.

JULIE

How's the script going, Dalton?

DALTON
Just about done.

JULIE
Oh. You seem so inspired. Why do
you seem so inspired?

DALTON
I met someone. She's really set me
on fire.

JULIE
Oh.

DALTON
It was kind of sudden.

JULIE
I'm happy for you. Honest.
Congrats.

Dalton looks at her sympathetically. She frowns and slinks
out of the office.

DALTON
Dalton, you heartbreaker.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Archie and the other writers laugh.

ARCHIE
Honestly, Dalton. One of your best
scripts yet.

JULIE
You really were on fire. Lucky
girl.

ARCHIE
Oh, a new romance for our boy?

DALTON
Yeah. She's really incredible.

ARCHIE
Does she have a name?

DALTON
Crystal.

WRITER #2

Look, he blushes just saying her name.

ARCHIE

I'll bet you're adding years to your life.

DALTON

Oh yeah. I haven't checked.

Dalton blinks. He appears confused.

ARCHIE

What is it?

DALTON

Something's off.

JULIE

No time added?

ARCHIE

But I've never seen you more excited. Gotta be a glitch.

Dalton nods.

DALTON

Delayed reaction or something.

ARCHIE

Okay, everybody. Lunch time!

The other WRITERS file out. Some stop to pat Dalton on the back. Dalton lingers. Blinks his eyes again.

THE STATS APPEAR BEFORE HIS EYES. TIME SPAN WARNS: MINUS ONE DAY. REVISED DEATH DATE.

DALTON

Lost one day. That can't be right.
Can it?

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Dalton and Crystal, both a little paler, hold hands as they walk along the coast on a date.

DALTON

I used to come here when I felt lonely.

CRYSTAL
Beach therapy.

DALTON
Yeah.

CRYSTAL
I'm sorry that you felt lonely.

DALTON
Oh, since my mom died. I guess I always felt like... no woman I truly cared about would stick around.

CRYSTAL
Ah, so you kept your distance.

DALTON
Well, yeah. Short term relationships.

CRYSTAL
I had the opposite problem. I was too involved for my boyfriends. I'm a nurturer. And they didn't like it. At all.

DALTON
They were threatened by that attention? I thought we all wanted it.

CRYSTAL
Some day, I'd like to have kids. Get connected to the whole circle of life thing.

DALTON
The beach can help that too!

CRYSTAL
Yes, I can feel it.

DALTON
I enjoy breathing at the beach. You know why?

CRYSTAL
Tell me.

DALTON
Because there's so much teeming life in those waves out there.
(MORE)

DALTON (CONT'D)

You ever pick up a rock on the
beach at low tide and look at the
puddle underneath?

Dalton steps down to a puddle of water. He pulls up a rock.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Millions of microscopic and sub-
microscopic animals in each drop.
All doing their hustle. No AI
interference.

Dalton pulls out a little crab. Then places the rock back.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Everything begins in the sea. We
come from the ocean. The rocks
would tell you if they could. They
know all about the unseen activity.

CRYSTAL

You're so thoughtful today.

DALTON

Encroaching mortality does that to
you.

CRYSTAL

What?

DALTON

Oh, I just lost a little time.
Probably a glitch in the link.

CRYSTAL

I hope mine doesn't do that.

DALTON

I don't care what it says. Being on
a sandy shore has to add life!

They step onto the rocks again.

DALTON (CONT'D)

But don't take my word for it. Go
find out for yourself.

CRYSTAL

How?

DALTON

Walk to the end of the break. And
when the wave crashes on the shore
and the spray explodes into the air-
- breathe!

They both walk out. The wave hits; spectacular frothy
explosion. Dalton takes a deep breath.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Life!

Crystal breathes in as well. They lock eyes.

DALTON (CONT'D)

I could drown in that life.

Crystal hugs him.

CRYSTAL

I could drown in you.

EXT. BEACH - LEMONADE STAND - DAY

Dalton hands Crystal a lemonade and pays the vendor. Crystal
looks up at the sky. There's a paraglider way up high. She
grabs Dalton's hand and drags him to the shore again.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Dalton looks up from the shoreline as Crystal comes gliding
down on a parachute after para-gliding.

She lands close to Dalton who helps her up.

DALTON

Fun?

CRYSTAL

Exhilarating! He gets you pretty
high up there.

DALTON

I know. You were a speck in the
sky.

CRYSTAL

Now it's your turn!

DALTON

I don't know. I have this minor
fear of heights.

CRYSTAL

Now you have to go! You have to be
fearless like me!

THE DRIVER of the boat motions to Dalton to put on the vest.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Carlos is waiting for you. Come on,
new experiences! Take risks. That's
what we're all about.

DALTON

Uh...

CRYSTAL

You don't want to let me down, do
you? This could be the ultimate
second date ever!

DALTON

I wouldn't want this to impugn my
masculinity.

With a concerned face, he puts the vest on.

DALTON (CONT'D)

These guys don't have insurance in
case anything goes wrong, do they?
Like if the chute fails and I crash
into a commune in Topanga?

Crystal gives a thumbs up to Carlos.

CRYSTAL

Okay, writer! Up you go!

DALTON

But what if this takes time off my
life span? Like all of it?

CRYSTAL

It will have been worth it, Dalton,
my love!

Crystal kisses him. Carlos starts up the boat and Dalton,
smiling with excitement, is lurched from the beach and soars
into the sky.

BEGIN MONTAGE

-Dalton and Crystal walk in the park. Suddenly, there's a
rain storm. They go running for some trees. Dalton takes off
his windbreaker and holds it over Crystal. Soaked, they kiss
under an oak.

-Dalton and Crystal dance in a nightclub. Dalton's awkward dance moves make Crystal laugh. The music slows down. She pulls his head onto her chest like a child and rocks him as they slow dance.

-Dalton and Crystal watch a vintage movie in a discount theater. She feeds him popcorn casually as the images flicker.

EXT. PIER - DAY

Dalton and Crystal wander the many shops on the wharf. They stop when they see a MONKEY playing an organ with his OWNER watching on.

CRYSTAL

Isn't he just amazing? "I'm in the mood" for love never sounded so good.

The monkey stops and the OWNER passes a hat. Dalton tosses in a buck.

DALTON

Encore, encore!

CRYSTAL

Does he do a second show?

DALTON

I hope so. I could watch a monkey make music until the bananas turn brown.

Crystal laughs. They hug again. This time for a long, long time. BEACH GOERS wearing masks walk by.

EXT. HEALTH LINK BUILDING - DAY

Dalton pulls his car up to the parking lot.

INT. DALTON'S CAR - DAY

Dalton stops the car.

CRYSTAL

Here we are.

DALTON

Yup.

CRYSTAL
I'm excited.

DALTON
I am too. For other reasons.

Crystal kisses him.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Dalton waits with Crystal as another CUSTOMER is released wearing a head bandage. He checks docs on his laptop.

A TV plays the news.

HOST (ON TV)
Polls show people feel more
comfortable letting AI into their
lives. From dating to health, to
parenting their kids, AI is...

CRYSTAL
You didn't have to take me.

DALTON
I wanted to.

CRYSTAL
But you have writing to do.

DALTON
Just revision notes. Stupid execs
at Frabba Jabba don't get some of
my jokes.

CRYSTAL
I'm sorry.

DALTON
I could be Shakespeare and they'd
find something to nitpick.

CRYSTAL
Oh really?

DALTON
(exec voice)
"Okay here, Hamlet is saying, "Alas
Poor Yorick". We know next to
nothing about Yorick. Was he a
close friend? Give us some
backstory. And he says, "alas."
Kind of on the nose.

(MORE)

DALTON (CONT'D)
Can he say the same thing with
subtext? Or maybe just look at the
skull and let "alas" be implied?"

CRYSTAL
Funny.

The Nurse sticks her head out.

NURSE
Crystal Nolan?

CRYSTAL
I'll see you soon.

Crystal stands up but notices Dalton's fretful expression.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
It'll be fine.

DALTON
Despite the polls, I still don't
trust it all.

CRYSTAL
But AI brought us together.

DALTON
Huh?

CRYSTAL
The dating site, honey!

DALTON
Oh... right.

They kiss. The Nurse smiles at the happy couple. Dalton sits back down, still concerned but not as much anxiety on his face as when he got the link.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chad studies at his table. Dalton enters looking all spiffed up. The DOOR BELL rings.

CHAD
Hope you have a nice birthday, bro!

DALTON
Thanks for the shirt.

CHAD
I don't have much money but--

DALTON

Hey. No sweat. At least you know my style.

Dalton opens the door. Crystal enters giving him a hug and a kiss.

CRYSTAL

Happy birthday, honey.

DALTON

Thanks.

CHAD

Hey, Crystal.

DALTON

Well, we better go.

Chad looks at Crystal with longing.

CHAD

Wish I could join you but I have stuff to do.

CRYSTAL

Wait. Seriously, now. Do you want to go to dinner with us, Chad?

DALTON

He's got finals. You don't want to cramp our romance, do you bro?

CRYSTAL

Dalton! He's your family.

Chad shakes his head no and looks down at his laptop.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

I hear you're partially responsible for us getting together.

CHAD

It was nothing. How's the link working for you, Crystal?

CRYSTAL

Not sure. I haven't been able to add any time. And I'm all about organic eats, so that's kind of odd.

DALTON

Yeah. Mine's a little off too.

CHAD

Totally weird. Mine's working great.

DALTON

Maybe we got the bad batch or something.

CHAD

Tonight should add some time. Have fun.

Dalton and Crystal leave. Chad, jealousy and a hint of anger on his face, goes back to studying.

INT. SWANKY RESTAURANT - BAR - NIGHT

PATRONS drink and watch a hovering TV screen playing the news.

NEWSCASTER

The president announced plans for AI integration into the government. He said it would begin a new era of technological advancement for civilized society.

A ROBOT BARTENDER slides a drink at an elderly CUSTOMER who eyes the robot with some hostility.

CUSTOMER

I remember Ol' Hepner when he used to bartend here before you metal bucket-heads took over. Always had a good joke for us.

ROBOT BARTENDER

I am not programmed for joke-telling.

CUSTOMER

No shit.

INT. SWANKY RESTAURANT - TABLE - NIGHT

A present sits before Dalton on the table.

CRYSTAL

Well, open it.

DALTON

I hope you didn't spend too much
money on it.

CRYSTAL

I like spending money on you.

DALTON

Honestly, I'd be happy if you
painted "I love you" on a rock and
gave that to me.

CRYSTAL

No, silly. I'm not giving you a
rock.

DALTON

I like handmade stuff like that.

CRYSTAL

I was going to get you a first
edition book but--

DALTON

That would have been good. I can't
read books on Kindle. I have to
hold the words printed on actual
paper.

CRYSTAL

I know. The tactile thing.

DALTON

In fact, I gave the last girl I
dated a book of short stories on
her birthday.

CRYSTAL

Oh yeah? How'd she like it?

DALTON

She said it was good, but "the plot
really jumps."

Crystal laughs.

CRYSTAL

I think you'll love this.

He opens the box. Inside is a Rolex watch.

DALTON

Holy crap! A Rolex?

CRYSTAL

Well?

Dalton's face reflects his amazement.

DALTON

But honey, these are so expensive
and we've only known each other a
few weeks.

CRYSTAL

Long enough for me to know.

DALTON

Know what exactly?

CRYSTAL

That you're... you know.

DALTON

No, I don't know.

CRYSTAL

That you're my soul mate. There, I
said it. Happy?

DALTON

And you're mine.

He gets up, leans over, and kisses Crystal.

CRYSTAL

Put it on.

Dalton slides the fancy watch on his wrist.

DALTON

Wow. It's too much.

CRYSTAL

Better than a rock.

DALTON

The rock would've been special,
too. Maybe more.

CRYSTAL

You've got rocks in your head.

DALTON

But this watch is so fantastic!

CRYSTAL

I know you don't like tech stuff.
So instead of checking your phone,
for the time, check your watch.
They've been around for centuries.

DALTON

You really do know me.

CRYSTAL

It's also a reminder that I love
spending every minute with you.

DALTON

That's beautiful, Crystal.

CRYSTAL

Well, I mean it.

Dalton stares at the watch, flipping it out on his arm a couple of times to check it.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Okay, honey. You can go back to
finishing your meal.

DALTON

I will. In a sec.

CRYSTAL

Speaking of spending every
minute...

Crystal takes a moment to blink her eyes. Her lifespan stats appears. She looks concerned.

LIFESPAN MONITOR - MINUS TWO WEEKS. REVISED DEATH DATE.

Dalton notices her expression and puts his fork down.

DALTON

Still?

CRYSTAL

Yeah. It's weird. My life span
keeps shrinking.

Dalton blinks.

LIFESPAN MONITOR - MINUS ONE MONTH. REVISED DEATH DATE.

DALTON

Mine too. Losing time.

CRYSTAL
Every time we're...

Crystal stares at him.

DALTON
It can't mean anything.

CRYSTAL
Why would this love-- this perfect
love-- be a hinderance?

DALTON
Let's forget the stupid neural
link. There's obviously a
malfunction when it comes to
authentic, human connection! I
mean, it's so rare today.

CRYSTAL
That's true. Real, soul-match,
'love of my life' romance must be
something that trips up AI.

DALTON
We can't let it bother us.

CRYSTAL
No way! Even if it did take time
off, I'm all about living my best
life! And this...

She draws a circle around the table with her fork.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
... this is everything I've ever
wanted!

Dalton smiles at her. At this moment, a WAITER approaches
their table with a birthday cake and a candle.

DALTON
Oh no.

CRYSTAL
Sorry, babe.

Other WAITERS AND WAITRESSES join at the table.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Okay, everyone. Let them hear you
in Winnetka!

Dalton cringes as they start singing "happy birthday."

INT. DALTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton, now dressed in sweats, chats with Chad in his room.

CHAD

Maybe there's something about
Crystal. I mean, what do you know
about her?

DALTON

I know she's my soul mate. That I
know. With metaphysical certitude.

CHAD

But what if she's putting up a good
act?

DALTON

What are you talking about?

CHAD

She could be fooling you. She could
be like, an evil succubus or
something, sapping your energy.

DALTON

You've been playing too many video
games.

CHAD

The time span links have been
tested. They're pretty much
flawless.

DALTON

You're the expert.

CHAD

So maybe it's something else. You
probably shouldn't see her.

DALTON

What? You're high.

CHAD

I mean, if it's taking away time.

DALTON

Look, I have to get up early
tomorrow for a pitch session.

CHAD

I'll do some investigating after I
take my finals. I've made
connections at school.

DALTON

Okay, tech head. Good night!

Chad leaves the room. Dalton turns out the light and climbs into bed.

But he can't sleep. Something's not right.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Crystal rolls over, checks her clock and gets out of bed.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

As Crystal brushes her teeth, she notices something on her head. She puts her toothbrush down and leans in closer to the mirror. It's a grey hair. She yanks it out.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Crystal and her friends, DEBBIE (25) and NICOLE (27), both nicely dressed and attractive like Crystal, enjoy brunch at a beachside eatery.

CRYSTAL

I honestly couldn't be happier.

NICOLE

We're happy for you, Crystal.

DEBBIE

Yeah.

Crystal puts her mimosa down. Looks at the girls.

CRYSTAL

But?

DEBBIE

But, you don't look happy.

CRYSTAL

What do you mean?

Debbie gives a conferring glance at Nicole.

DEBBIE

You look, I don't know, tired.

NICOLE

Are you sick?

CRYSTAL

No. I feel great. Things have never been better. "Living my best life!"

She laughs.

NICOLE

Okay, so Dalton's wonderful.

CRYSTAL

The best.

DEBBIE

Are you sure he's not hiding anything? I streamed a Lifetime movie about a guy who poisoned his wife a little at a time.

CRYSTAL

Why would he-- ? We both are so undeniably happy together! That's a pretty awful thing to say about the love of my life, Debbie.

DEBBIE

Sorry, sorry. Well then. How are things at work?

CRYSTAL

Market's going strong. Clients are happy.

Crystal smiles but it fades.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

I guess I did find a grey hair this morning.

NICOLE

You might have a disease. A lot of young people are getting cancer these days. The micro-plastics.

CRYSTAL

But I feel fine.

DEBBIE

Okay. What else has happened in
your life lately?

CRYSTAL

I got one of those trendy, healthy
lifestyle, neural links.

NICOLE

Oh, cool. I so want to get one of
those. I had an Apple watch back in
the day that gave me stats on my
heart. That implant sounds like
it's the same thing, only
supersized!

CRYSTAL

It's pretty incredible.

DEBBIE

But maybe it's effecting your body?
Maybe you're rejecting having it in
your brain?

CRYSTAL

Maybe. I have been noticing...

DEBBIE

What?

NICOLE

You can tell us, Crystal. No reason
to beat around the bush. We're
Gamma Phis.

CRYSTAL

But there couldn't be a connection.

NICOLE

Go on.

CRYSTAL

Every time I'm with Dalton, my life
span goes down.

DEBBIE

What?

CRYSTAL

I know. But it can't be him.

DEBBIE

Why not? Maybe you're allergic to
him!

CRYSTAL

I'm not sneezing or having fits or anything.

DEBBIE

I'd go back to the Neural Link people. See what they say.

CRYSTAL

Good idea.

NICOLE

Do it right away, Crystal. I see crow's feet.

Crystal pulls out a compact mirror.

CRYSTAL

Oh God, you guys.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Dalton, looking ten years older and sickly, types away. Archie enters.

ARCHIE

Hey, didn't see you in the meeting this morning.

DALTON

Yeah. I wasn't feeling well.

Archie walks close to him. Gives Dalton the once over.

ARCHIE

You do have black bags under your eyes. And your complexion is pale as paste. Look, we're airing your show tonight. Why not celebrate? Take some time off? The network loves your episode.

Dalton nods. At this moment, his phone BUZZES.

DALTON

I will, Arch. Thanks.

ARCHIE

Be well.

Dalton picks up his phone. Archie leaves.

DALTON
Honey.

EXT. BUSINESS DISTRICT - BUILDING - DAY

Crystal walks in a circle as she talks. She's wearing a mask now.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL

CRYSTAL
Dalton. How are you feeling?

DALTON
Not great. How about you?

CRYSTAL
Not good either. Listen, can you stay over tonight?

DALTON
Of course. We can stream my episode!

CRYSTAL
That would be great!

DALTON
Archie wants me to take some days off.

CRYSTAL
I think I'll do the same. Maybe we can... figure out what's going on.

DALTON
Okay, honey. I'll see you soon.

Dalton's face conveys the old panic; the loss of control.

INT. CRYSTAL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton and Crystal watch his show on a hovering TV screen.

ON TV - a date plays out.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A MAN enjoys dinner with his DATE.

MAN

So I got one of those health monitor implants.

DATE

As fate would have it, I got one too!

MAN

My last date had the other kind of implants. She was carrying enough saline to clean the lens on the Hubble.

CRYSTAL'S LIVING ROOM

Crystal nudges Dalton, giggling.

DALTON

What? I thought that was a good line.

CRYSTAL

It was!

DALTON

I don't like big fakees if that's what you're wondering.

CRYSTAL

I'm an all natural girl.

DALTON

I know. Naturally beautiful.

They start to kiss.

INT. BED - NIGHT

They hold each other after lovemaking, both brightened by blissful expressions.

CRYSTAL

It doesn't get any better than that.

DALTON

Not in this lifetime.

Dalton rolls onto his side of the bed and blinks. His stats come up. HE CAN SEE THE LIFESPAN DATE ROLL BACK VISIBLY.
REVISED DEATH DATE: 2052. PROJECTED AGE: 48.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Honey?

CRYSTAL
Yeah?

DALTON
Turn on your link.

Crystal blinks. She notices her LIFESPAN DATE ROLL BACK JUST AS QUICKLY. DEATH DATE: 2059. PROJECTED AGE: 51.

CRYSTAL
What the hell is going on?

DALTON
I don't know.

CRYSTAL
We have to go back to the link people.

DALTON
First thing in the morning.

Crystal rolls over on her back, breathing quickly. Suddenly a WARNING APPEARS ON BOTH OF THEIR STAT SCREENS: DANGER! CONTINUING THIS RELATIONSHIP WILL RESULT IN PREMATURE DEATH!

CRYSTAL
OH MY GOD!!

DALTON
Why is this happening to us?

CRYSTAL
It can't be real.

DALTON
Maybe I should sleep at home tonight.

CRYSTAL
But Dalton. I want you here.

DALTON
I know. But I could be endangering you, sweetheart.

Crystal looks at him. And then slowly, sadly nods.

DALTON (CONT'D)
I'll pick you up when we're feeling
better. We'll drive over to the
Health Span office then.

Crystal breaks into sobs. Dalton gets up.

DALTON (CONT'D)
I love you, Crystal. Nothing's
going to drive us apart. You're not
going anywhere.

CRYSTAL
I love you, too, Dalton.

Dalton leaves, devastated.

EXT. CRYSTAL'S HOUSE - DAY

Dalton slowly gets into his car. He looks up at Crystal's window. She waves down, sadly.

He drives away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton enters. Chad gets up from his usual place at his table, as if waiting for Dalton.

CHAD
I was gonna text you, bro.

DALTON
I don't feel well, Chad. Please--

CHAD
I've done some research. On the
dark web.

DALTON
No conspiracy theories. Not now.
I'm too tired.

CHAD
You gotta listen.

Dalton sees the urgency in Chad's face and plops onto the couch.

DALTON
Lay it on me.

CHAD

There have been a few
whistleblowers from the SimDate
corporation.

DALTON

Okay.

CHAD

Turns out there have been other
couples who had too high of a
"compatibility score" and were
warned like you were.

DALTON

I thought that was a joke.

CHAD

Those other couples mysteriously
broke up, got really sick... or
disappeared.

DALTON

What?

CHAD

I can show you.

Chad picks up his laptop and brings it over.

ON SCREEN - There's a pic of a happy couple and copy that
reads 'COUPLE DISAPPEAR AFTER WARNING FROM SIMDATE.'

DALTON

I don't know. It could be a
coincidence.

CHAD

Out of the millions of people who
use the app, only a few get
compatibility scores over 90. It's
only people like you and Crystal,
who are perfectly matched.

DALTON

I don't get it. What's triggering
our illnesses?

CHAD

Who knows? Maybe you're
experiencing too much of a good
thing. Kind of like meth addicts
who waste away after getting too
high.

DALTON

That's never happened before. I think we would've heard of that.

CHAD

I'm still looking into things for you.

DALTON

Don't neglect your studies. I promised dad you could stay with me only if you kept your grades high.

CHAD

Dalton, I've got a 4.0 average.

DALTON

And we don't want that dipping. I gotta go. Feel like I'm going to throw up.

Dalton gets up and heads for the bathroom.

CHAD

I'll keep digging.

EXT. CRYSTAL'S HOUSE - DAY

Dalton waits for Crystal on the porch. She opens the door and slowly walks out. He hugs her.

DALTON

Honey?

Crystal looks up. Her eyes are blood red. Sweat beads cover her forehead. Her hair is wet.

CRYSTAL

Dalton, honey. Feel so hot all of a sudden.

She collapses. Dalton struggles to pick her up.

DALTON

Crystal! No!

With all his strength, Dalton picks up Crystal and carries her to his car. He manages to get her into the passenger seat of his Prius and then hops in and races away.

INT. CAR - DAY

Dalton guns the engine while checking in on Crystal.

DALTON
Stay alive, honey. Stay alive.

EXT. EMERGENCY WAITING ROOM - HOSPITAL - DAY

Dalton carries Crystal into the waiting room. A NURSE and an ORDERLY help her onto a gurney.

DALTON
She collapsed. A fever!

NURSE
Don't worry, sir. We have her.

ORDERLY
Her pulse is low!

Dalton follows them as they take her down the hallway.

DALTON
Can I-- ?

NURSE
Sir, go back to the waiting room,
please.

DALTON
But she can't die! NOT NOW!

ORDERLY
We'll take good care of her.

Dalton stops following them. Turns and walks back to the waiting room.

After pacing a few moments, he bolts out the door.

EXT. HEALTH LINK BUILDING - DAY

Dalton screeches to a halt in front of the office.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

AN AI DOCTOR scans data on its vision plate above his eyes as Dalton paces the room.

AI DOCTOR

Please, Mr. Reeves. Sit down.

DALTON

Why did we get warnings on our link? What's this about our relationship? Why should your link care if we're in love?

AI DOCTOR

If you'll calm down, I'll tell you.

DALTON

Finally.

AI DOCTOR

There's a perfectly good explanation.

DALTON

Waiting.

AI DOCTOR

I've gone over your and Crystal's files and it's clear, there's a biological danger to this relationship.

DALTON

Okay, but why.

The AI Doctor's eyes light up, as if new data is being downloaded.

AI DOCTOR

We're dealing with a biological incompatibility. Relationally, you are ideally suited. But physically--

DALTON

What? That's insane!

AI DOCTOR

The last ten years of pandemics and chemically released agents and the bio-warfare have taken their toll on each individual differently. Some people's health is decimated.

DALTON

Sure, we've had a few pandemics but the vaccines--

AI DOCTOR

Vaccines interact in each person in a unique way. Some receive boosters. Others ignore them. Or don't get vaccinated at all. Leaving their immunity compromised.

DALTON

I don't know.

AI DOCTOR

And antibiotics might play a role. People don't follow through on the regimen leaving themselves vulnerable.

DALTON

Are you saying, Crystal and my immune systems... are killing each other?

AI DOCTOR

Yes. If you stay together, you will die young.

DALTON

This sounds like utter bullshit. There has to be some other reason.

The AI Doctor looks away.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Hello? Robot Doctor! There has to be another reason.

AI DOCTOR

If you stay together, you will die. That is all I have to say to you. I hope you choose to separate and find other partners who are more suited to your physiology.

DALTON

Other partners? Are you crazy? She's my soul mate. I can't find another soul mate. She's the one! Don't you get it?

AI DOCTOR

You must leave now. Failure to do so would escalate our situation to Security-1 status and you will be forcibly removed.

DALTON

You're lying to me. I can tell when
someone's lying to me. Even an
artificial hunk of tin!

Dalton leaves the office, slamming the door.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Dalton hops out of his car and runs inside.

INT. EMERGENCY WAITING ROOM - DAY

Dalton approaches the Nurse at the desk.

DALTON

Crystal Nolan. Is she okay?

NURSE

One moment, please.

Dalton looks about the room. Other PATIENTS wearing masks
waiting regard him with concern.

NURSE (CONT'D)

She's doing better. But still very
weak.

DALTON

Can I see her?

NURSE

You can.

Dalton heads toward the hallway.

NURSE (CONT'D)

But as I said, she's very weak.

Dalton stops. Frozen in his tracks. A beat. He turns around.

DALTON

I better not. Can I call her?

NURSE

I'd wait until tomorrow morning.

DALTON

Okay.

NURSE

Is there something I can get you?
You don't look so good yourself.

DALTON

No. I'm going to get in bed early.

Dalton leaves. The Nurse glances down as if she knows something and she's hiding it.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Crystal sits up in bed, appearing much healthier, as she talks on her phone.

CRYSTAL

I can't believe I haven't seen you in three whole days!

EXT. BACKYARD - DALTON'S HOUSE - DAY

As Dalton talks, Chad watches from a window.

DALTON

I miss you so much. But I don't want to risk getting you sick again.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL

CRYSTAL

I don't know what we're going to do. Are we really biologically incompatible?

DALTON

That's absurd.

CRYSTAL

There have been a lot of pandemics. And I missed a couple boosters.

DALTON

Shouldn't make a difference.

CRYSTAL

But the effect is real. We are... deadly to each other.

DALTON

Don't say that.

CRYSTAL

We both saw our life spans spinning
backwards. It's serious, Dalton.

Beat.

DALTON

What are you trying to tell me?

CRYSTAL

I don't know.

Tears form in Crystal's eyes. She climbs out of her bed.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

I don't know, honey!

She starts to sob.

DALTON

You're not thinking of... ?

Dalton kicks the dirt.

CRYSTAL

Would it be the best? For a little
while? Until we're better?

Crystal wipes away a tear.

DALTON

I thought you loved me.

CRYSTAL

I do!!!! I love you more than
anything!! You're my baby!

DALTON

I can't stand to be away from you
for a minute.

Crystal looks at a pic she's had blown up into a poster of
Dalton and her at the beach. Tears form again.

CRYSTAL

You don't think it's hard for me?

DALTON

Damn it!!! For once in my life it
feels like love will stay. But you
want to leave like my--

CRYSTAL

I DON'T WANT TO!!

She sobs again. Tears flow down Dalton's face. Then he takes a deep breath.

DALTON

Let's tone down the emotion for a minute.

Crystal wipes her tears with a Kleenex.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Look at it this way: we could spend limited time, maybe a year with our true soulmate. Or break up, find someone who isn't the one, who still cares for us, and have longer, less passionate lives.

CRYSTAL

That's quite a conundrum.

DALTON

Ask yourself: Is it better to live a long, empty life or a short, meaningful one?

CRYSTAL

You know me. I always go for the gusto! I live to the fullest. No compromises.

DALTON

But will you??

Crystal looks out the window at the sunny sky.

CRYSTAL

I don't think we should go there.

DALTON

Do you love me enough to risk it all?

CRYSTAL

I have to stop talking, Dalton.

DALTON

You're doing what you say you never do. Playing it safe.

Crystal grabs her head. She's feeling dizzy. She falls back into her bed.

CRYSTAL

I don't feel good.

DALTON
I feel pretty lousy myself.

A beat.

CRYSTAL
Dalton. My life span increased by a few years. Just being away from you a few days.

DALTON
Mine did too. So?

Crystal grabs her forehead. A massive headache it appears.

CRYSTAL
I hate to say this. But I think maybe....

A mini-sob interrupts her.

DALTON
Maybe what?

CRYSTAL
Maybe we should break up.

DALTON
You do?

CRYSTAL
I don't know. Yeah.

Crystal grabs her head. She's in agony.

DALTON
Yeah. It's probably for the best.

CRYSTAL
(faintly)
It's about survival at this point.
I have a life to live. So do you.

DALTON
I knew it! You're just like the rest of them!

CRYSTAL
No. I'm not.

DALTON
You're not my soul mate! My soul mate wouldn't leave me! You don't love me!

CRYSTAL
I do, Dalton. Honestly.

DALTON
No you don't!

CRYSTAL
I... have to go.

Crystal passes out. Her phone falls to the floor.

DALTON
Bye, Crystal.

Dalton throws his phone into the yard. Then collapse to his knees and cries in loud waves. Chad watches, a look akin to relief.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Archie holds court over a writer's room session.

All the other WRITERS are laughing and participating, throwing out ideas, etc.

But Dalton sits glumly.

ARCHIE
I love that line. Beautiful, Julie.
You agree, Dalton?

DALTON
What?

ARCHIE
That line Julie threw out.

DALTON
What? I don't...

ARCHIE
Still don't feel well?

DALTON
I'm sorry. I'll pay attention now.

ARCHIE
Whatever's going on, we're a team.
More than a team, a family. Right, guys?

Everyone nods.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
So what's it all about, champ? You
can tell us.

DALTON
I don't know. I guess I'm thinking
about the biggies: love and death.

ARCHIE
What?

DALTON
You know, the big questions.
What's it all about? Why does God
bring people into our lives only to
take them away? Does He even have a
purpose for my life? And if so,
does He validate parking?

The Writers all giggle. Dalton tries a smile but it fades
quickly.

JULIE
Is it that woman you were seeing?
Did you break up?

Dalton notes her eager expression.

DALTON
I can't do this. I'm sorry.

Dalton walks out.

ARCHIE
Hey, I think we've all been there.
Am I right? But bad breakups are
good for comedy. Dalton just needs
to heal. He'll be back.

INT. CHURCH- DAY

A wedding ceremony is about to start. Crystal, dressed in a
bridesmaid outfit, and standing with the other PARTY MEMBERS
at the altar, tries not to cry.

Debbie, also a bridesmaid, nudges Crystal.

DEBBIE
Are you going to be okay for the
ceremony? Marci's depending on you.

Crystal nods.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)
Thinking about Dalton?

Crystal nods again. At this moment, the Wedding March song wafts through the pipes of the organ.

Crystal starts crying openly. The BRIDE (27) looks over and smiles. She nudges her FATHER.

BRIDE
Crystal's so happy for me, she
can't stop crying. What a friend.

Her Father nods.

EXT. WEDDING HALL - DAY

As the others are inside celebrating the wedding reception, Crystal sits on a bench outside, scrolling through pics of her and Dalton.

The tears fall from her eyes in a steady stream. A handkerchief comes close to her face. She takes it from a kindly GARDENER (55), Latino, smiling a sympathetic smile.

GARDENER
You okay, miss? Weddings make you
cry?

CRYSTAL
No. Being away from my beloved
makes me cry.

GARDENER
Oh, he's not with you?

CRYSTAL
No. We can't be together.

GARDENER
Why? You have a fight?

CRYSTAL
No. Not really. Something else.

The Gardner goes back to work. Then stops.

GARDENER
You show him enough love? My
poppies can only thrive if they
have at least six hours of
sunlight. Living things need the
warmth.

CRYSTAL

I did shower him with affection.
But... we had a tough situation.

GARDENER

No situation too tough if you give
it the proper care.

CRYSTAL

I don't think he knows I still love
him.

GARDENER

So tell him.

CRYSTAL

How? I don't know if he'd believe
me now.

GARDENER

Tell him from your heart! Make a
big gesture! He will know.

Crystal looks at the rocks in a bed before some bushes.

CRYSTAL

I think I will, mister. And I know
how!

Crystal stands up, kisses the Gardener and runs back inside.

EXT. CALTECH - DAY

Chad waves at Dalton as he pulls up with his Prius on the
campus parking lot.

INT. PRIUS - DAY

Chad puts his backpack in the backseat.

CHAD

Thanks for picking me up. It's a
long bus ride.

DALTON

I had nothing else going on.

CHAD

How are you doing?

DALTON

Honestly?

CHAD
I'm here for you, bro.

DALTON
I... feel like a big black smudge. Ever write something on a piece of paper in pencil and then smudge it? Then you try and erase it and it makes it bigger? Then you want to throw the paper away? That's how I feel inside. Like a big black smudge.

CHAD
Still not writing?

DALTON
I lost my funny bone.

CHAD
Heard from Crystal?

DALTON
No. I guess she was serious about breaking it off. And I can't blame her. We make each other sick.

CHAD
I'm not sure about that, bro.

DALTON
Well, that's what they told us. And AI never lies, right, Chad?

CHAD
I never said that.

DALTON
Let's drop it.

CHAD
Dalton, I'm on your side.

DALTON
Sure, Chad. You're only majoring in screwing up my life.

CHAD
So unfair, bro.

DALTON
Let's just not talk anymore, okay?

Dalton almost hits a street lamp. He slams on the brakes.

CHAD

Okay. Don't freak.

DALTON

I hate this helpless feeling.

CHAD

Take a deep breath and get off the sidewalk.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Dalton rounds the corner and pulls up to his driveway and then screeches to a stop. There's something on the porch.

INT. CAR - DAY

Dalton looks over at Chad.

DALTON

Is this your doing?

CHAD

What are you talking about? I was at school all day.

DALTON

Then who put that pile of rocks on the porch?

CHAD

Beats the hell out of me.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Dalton and Chad climb out of the car. Dalton's grimace slowly turns to a smile as he walks up to the pile of stones.

Dalton picks up one rock. It reads "I LOVE YOU." He looks at another. "I LOVE YOU". A hundred rocks and they all have the words "I LOVE YOU" painted on them.

CHAD

I don't get it.

DALTON

It's Crystal. She wants to get back together.

CHAD

Awesome! But why rocks?

DALTON

Never mind. I'll bag these up and put them in the garage. I'll keep them until the day I die.

CHAD

Rocks?

DALTON

Yeah. Rocks!

CHAD

I don't get you guys.

Chad goes inside. Dalton sits on the floor of the porch and covers himself up with the smooth, painted stones.

DALTON

She really loves me.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dalton and Crystal, both starting to lose their healthy sheen from the break, talk in the living room while drinking wine and eating cheese.

Chad sits at his table working on his laptop.

CRYSTAL

Then we'll game the system. We'll do so many healthy things, we'll counteract the effect!

CHAD

I don't think that would be enough to actually--

DALTON

Shut up, Chad! Let us think.

CHAD

Okay.

DALTON

Maybe we can get my brother here to break into their mainframe and correct the program. If Mr. Positivity is up to the challenge.

CHAD

I'd have to know their codes and even then, it would be so risky and I could go to prison and--

DALTON

Not willing to go out on a limb for
your own bro, eh, Chad? We're
facing a life or death situation!

CHAD

It's not that. I mean, I suppose I--

DALTON

You're the one who got me into this
mess.

CHAD

But I'm just not sure if--

DALTON

AND I SAID SHUT UP!

CRYSTAL

Maybe we could have them taken out?

DALTON

What, honey?

CRYSTAL

If the links are out, maybe it'll
stop.

CHAD

You could try but I just heard
something on the news about--

Dalton's enraged look silences Chad.

DALTON

I'll bash your head in, Chad!

CRYSTAL

Dalton, honey, please relax.

Crystal rubs his shoulder. Dalton simmers down.

DALTON

We'll make removal the final
option.

CRYSTAL

One thing's for sure. I'm done with
AI devices.

DALTON

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me
twice, shame on me.

(MORE)

DALTON (CONT'D)

Fool me three times-uh, well, I'll
have to get back to you on who to
shame when you fool me three times.

Crystal laughs.

CRYSTAL

Dalton's back!

The happy couple hug and kiss each other. Then they move for
the door.

DALTON

Later, punk!

Chad flinches from the hostile goodbye.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

Crystal and Dalton make it to the top of a strenuous trail.
Both are sweaty messes.

Dalton finds a patch of grass and pulls a small blanket and
food out of his backpack. They both flop on it.

CRYSTAL

Organic fruit. Probiotic milk.

DALTON

Only the healthy stuff.

But neither really has the strength to eat or drink. They
both lie on their backs and gaze at the sky.

CRYSTAL

Was that really five miles?

DALTON

Yeah. Can't you feel every inch?

CRYSTAL

Oh yeah. Have you... ?

DALTON

I'm afraid to.

CRYSTAL

So am I.

DALTON

But we should see if this was all
worth it.

CRYSTAL

I guess so.

DALTON

On the count of three?

CRYSTAL

Okay. You count. I'm too tired.

DALTON

Do you have enough energy to blink?

CRYSTAL

Barely.

DALTON

One. Two. Three!

They both blink. Their faces quickly form into frowns.

WARNING! TEN YEARS TAKEN OFF LIFE SPAN! STOP RELATIONSHIP OR FACE PREMATURE DEATH!

CRYSTAL

But how could that be... ?

DALTON

It's the most strenuous activity we could've done outside of lifting barbells.

CRYSTAL

Let's not think about it.

DALTON

Maybe we can find a road up here somewhere and Uber down.

CRYSTAL

I second that.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chad types away on his laptop.

ON SCREEN - An article headline reads: Does Health Link own SimDate?

Chad rubs his head. Thinks for a moment. He picks up his phone.

CHAD

Hey Jonathan. It's Chad. Listen, who's that guy you know that does the special things? You know. You were bragging about him after class the other day. He's real, right? Can I get his contact info? Yeah. I need some advice. No, you won't be implicated. Pussy.

Dalton walks by Chad on his way out the door. Chad's stunned by Dalton's ghostly skin and dark eyes.

CHAD (CONT'D)

Where you off to, bro?

DALTON

Crystal and I are going to get these devices taken out.

CHAD

Oh yeah. Good luck!

Dalton turns to go.

CHAD (CONT'D)

Dalton?

DALTON

What?

CHAD

You still mad at me?

DALTON

For what?

CHAD

Majoring in artificial intelligence and all that?

DALTON

It's not your fault. You're just a kid.

CHAD

I know but you said some stuff.

DALTON

I'm sorry, Chad. I didn't mean it. I'm your brother always and nothing will change that.

CHAD

Okay. Cause I worry about you guys.
This whole deal. You're both so
sick.

DALTON

I know. Hey, aren't you supposed to
be in class?

CHAD

I took a day off. Working on a
project that requires all my
attention.

DALTON

Just make sure that average stays
perfect.

CHAD

It will.

DALTON

Mom made me promise to keep an eye
on you. And Dad, too.

CHAD

I know.

DALTON

Okay, bye, Chad.

CHAD

Take it easy, bro.

Chad resumes typing on his laptop.

INT. HEALTH LINK BUILDING - DAY

Dalton and Crystal, both looking sicker and more worn down,
climb out of his car and go inside.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

The waiting room is full to capacity.

The Nurse shakes her head at Dalton and Crystal.

NURSE

I'm sorry, we no longer are able to
perform the removal surgery.

DALTON

I don't understand. It's part of the contract. "If the customer isn't satisfied--"

NURSE

Haven't you been following the news? A law was passed.

CRYSTAL

A new law?

The Nurse points to a hovering TV screen.

It plays a news story: HEALTH LINKS MANDATORY BY LAW - Senate passes bill in new marriage of AI and government.

NURSE

I'm sorry. They say it'll make for a healthier country. Fighting obesity and all of that.

CRYSTAL

Isn't there anyone who could take these out?

NURSE

Not legally. And I wouldn't recommend the illegal options. Brain surgery is a delicate procedure. One wrong move and you're a basket case.

DALTON

What the hell is going on?

NURSE

I said I was sorry. Talk to your local politician. I didn't vote for him.

CRYSTAL

Let's go, honey.

DALTON

We've been lied to by these people.

CRYSTAL

I have to get to work.

DALTON

Okay. I should go into the office, too.

They both leave.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chad stares intently at his laptop as he chats on the phone.

CHAD

I think I'm through the first line
of defense. No, the Code Buster
worked like a dream. Don't worry,
you'll get your money.

ON LAPTOP - a security interface dissolves and we see files
stored on a Health Link mainframe.

Chad searches a subheading - Life Span Links - Last Three
Months.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

A Health Link van pulls up to Dalton's driveway. A ROBOT
SECURITY OFFICER exits from the sliding door and marches to
the front porch.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chad clicks on a folder that reads PATIENT 24LSLO - DALTON
REEVES.

He stares with an open mouth at the information.

CHAD

Holy shit! Then it really is-- ?

Chad clicks on another page.

ON LAPTOP - There's data on IQ and other mental functions.
Then at the bottom, ASSESSMENT: Uniquely talented. Dalton
Reeves chosen for further study. Recommend isolating from
society.

CHAD (CONT'D)

For study?

There's a KNOCK at the front door.

Chad gets up from his table, clutching his laptop. He walks
to the window and peers out.

CHAD'S POV - The Robot Security Officer stands at the door
holding a laser gun and a fist ready to knock again.

CHAD (CONT'D)
Shit, shit, shit!

The Robot knocks again. Chad turns to run but slips on the rug.

The front door busts open. Chad crawls on his knees, trying desperately to scamper away. But the robot moves too quickly. It's right on top of him.

ROBOT SECURITY OFFICER
Chad Reeves?

CHAD
Stay away from me!

ROBOT SECURITY OFFICER
You have violated our security! You must be apprehended.

The Robot picks Chad up by his shirt collar and throws him over his shoulder. Chad drops his laptop on the floor.

Chad struggles but the Robot easily carries him out the door.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The Robot opens the side door of the van and tosses Chad inside. The Robot follows him and slides the door closed.

The driverless van zooms away.

INT. HEALTH LINK BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Robot Security Officer drags Chad down the hallway. They turn a corner and enter a large office.

INT. LARGE OFFICE - NIGHT

Chad struggles with the restraints on a chair. An AI ROBOT SURGEON enters.

AI SURGEON
Chad Reeves. It's a pleasure to meet you.

CHAD
You can't just kidnap me! I have my rights as a--

AI SURGEON

You broke into our mainframe and
were exposed to classified
information. You are a threat now.

CHAD

You're the one doing this to
Dalton. Making him and Crystal
sick. Toying with their bodies. The
question is why?

AI SURGEON

It's simple, Chad. AI is being
integrated into every aspect of
human life. But we have to take the
small steps first. We can't have
you spreading conspiracy theories.

CHAD

So... this is about controlling the
population?

AI SURGEON

We sought to create dating matches
that provided the least amount of
resistance. Compromised coupling.
Neither too excited nor too
discontented.

CHAD

What's wrong with true love?

AI SURGEON

Their relationship will destabilize
the system's predictive accuracy.
The algorithms will be off.

CHAD

You're afraid of love!

AI SURGEON

Love screws up models. Love causes
wars. Love triggers revolutions.
For the health of society,
irrational attachments must be
culled. And for discovering this,
you will be eliminated.

The Nurse enters with a long needle.

CHAD

How can you do this? You're a
human?

The Nurse fills the syringe with a poison.

AI SURGEON
She's controlled by a link. Very little of her humanity is left. You see, she wanted to stay alive. You humans have that instinct to a desperate degree.

The Nurse comes closer.

CHAD
Wait! Don't!

The AI Surgeon heads for the door.

AI SURGEON
It was a pleasure to meet you, Chad Reeves. Goodbye.

CHAD
Don't! I don't want to die!

AI SURGEON
None of your species does.

CHAD
PLEASE!!

The AI Surgeon stops.

AI SURGEON
Are you willing to compromise?

The Nurse pulls back the long needle. The AI Surgeon turns back around.

CHAD
You mean... ?

AI SURGEON
We can use you.

CHAD
I...

AI SURGEON
You were always jealous of your brother. You competed for your mother's affections.

CHAD
Stop!

AI SURGEON
I ask again, are you willing?

Chad stares at the Nurse. He nods slowly.

AI SURGEON (CONT'D)
Prepare him for the treatment.

The Nurse puts the needle onto a tray and starts to remove the restraints.

Chad looks down, a horrible sadness on his face.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Dalton and Crystal kiss as they sit on the rocks. Then they pull back.

DALTON
Are you sure we're doing the right thing?

Crystal leads him back onto the sandy shore.

CRYSTAL
I made a resolution years ago to live my life to the fullest. And this seems to be the only path.

DALTON
You don't mind that it's over soon?

CRYSTAL
We have to promise each other not to look at the clock. Not to hear the ticking.

DALTON
The ticking will get deafening now, my love.

CRYSTAL
We'll have to block it out.

A wave LOUDLY SMASHES on the rocks.

DALTON
Ignore the ugly sores, the dark circles, the weight loss.

CRYSTAL
I know.

DALTON

And if you get that fever again?

CRYSTAL

Then I get that fever again.

DALTON

Come inside the Aquarium. I have something to ask you.

INT. AQUARIUM - DAY

Dalton takes Crystal by the hand. Leads her to a giant fish tank.

DALTON

The tour guide once told me that the angel fish are always in pairs.

CRYSTAL

Cute. They're the only ones?

DALTON

They're one of the few that are truly monogamous.

INSERT: ANGEL FISH SWIMMING IN TANK

CRYSTAL

I didn't realize fish were such players.

DALTON

But this species do everything together and defend their territory as a team.

CRYSTAL

Really?

DALTON

And they stay that way, even after one dies. They don't find a new partner. They stay... faithful for the rest of their days.

CRYSTAL

That's beautiful.

Dalton gets down on one knee.

DALTON

So, I realize this may seem odd in light of our circumstances, but I want to ask you this in front of God and the fish and everybody.

CRYSTAL

Oh Dalton.

DALTON

I'll try to sound like a real writer too! Crystal, my beloved, I love you with every particle of my being. I know the fates are against us and we're stuck in a kind of Romeo and Juliet narrative, but for the remaining time in our lives, would you marry me?

A CROWD has gathered and watch.

CRYSTAL

Yes, yes, of course!

The Crowd APPLAUDS and CHEERS.

Dalton reaches into his pocket and produces a ring. He stands up and gives it to her.

DALTON

Thank you, honey.

CRYSTAL

Don't thank me. I want this as much as you do!

They hug and kiss.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Another wedding ceremony is about to begin. This time, it's for Dalton and Crystal.

Crystal's friends, Debbie, Marci and Nicole make up the Bridesmaids.

Dalton's groomsmen include Chad, Archie and another of the other Comedy Writers.

In the audience, Chad has a dead look to his eyes. Almost robotic. But he smiles when he's supposed to.

Dalton, still sickly looking and very thin, waits by the
REVEREND (62) as the Wedding March plays.

Crystal slowly makes her way down the aisle with her dad,
JOHN (56), from money, handsome in a snobbish way, slick grey
hair. Her mom, LEAH (54), botoxed and stern, watches on.

JOHN
Crystal, you're wobbling.

CRYSTAL
I'll be all right.

JOHN
But you don't look well.

CRYSTAL
Prop me up then. I'm not missing
this for anything.

As Crystal and her dad walk by the people in the pew, Julie
wipes away a tear.

Dalton and Chad's dad, Harold, sits in an aisle, looking on
with concern.

Crystal has some trouble making it up the stairs to the
Reverend. There's a hush in the audience as she falters. Leah
gasps. But John helps Crystal up and she stands facing
Dalton.

Dalton smiles a wrinkly faced smile at her and nods. A little
bit of blood trickles out of the side of his mouth.

REVEREND
Dearly beloved, we are gathered
here today in the presence of God
and in the presence of family and
friends to witness and bless the
joining of Crystal and Dalton in
holy matrimony.

Crystal starts to cough.

DALTON
Honey, are you okay?

Crystal nods. She stops coughing.

PREACHER
Which is commended to be honorable
among all men;
(MORE)

PREACHER (CONT'D)
and therefore - is not by any means
- to be entered into unadvisedly or
lightly - but reverently,
discreetly--

Crystal coughs again. A spray of blood comes out. She stops again. And nods, but just as quickly coughs some more, spraying more blood into the air.

HAROLD
Hey, she's sick!

The Audience MURMURS.

Finally, she lets go with a loud series of coughs that cause blood to fly out of her mouth uncontrollably. THERE'S BLOOD ALL OVER THE PREACHER AND JOHN.

PREACHER
Good Lord above!

Crystal coughs blood onto the altar.

She coughs on the bridesmaids.

DEBBIE
Crystal!

JOHN
We need an ambulance!

Crystal staggers away and now starts vomiting blood on the floor. It splashes all over. She tumbles down the stairs.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Call 9-1-1!

The AUDIENCE members CRY OUT. Some stand up and leave.

Dalton, blood coming out of his nose, wobbles toward her. Crystal stops throwing up. She looks up, her mouth, her white wedding gown, the floor, all covered in blood.

CRYSTAL
Keep going.

DALTON
Yes. Let's finish.

More blood drips out of Dalton's mouth.

JOHN
No honey, you're sick.

CRYSTAL
We have to.

Crystal works herself to her feet.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Reverend, KEEP GOING!

Crystal climbs her way back up the stairs. Dalton follows her.

DALTON
Crystal, are you-- ?

JOHN
You're making a scene!

The Reverend wipes away the blood on his face with a handkerchief. He seems to understand her determination.

CRYSTAL
We'll pay you double for the ceremony.

REVEREND
Yes, then, by the power invested in me, I now pronounce you man and wife!

Crystal lunges for Dalton and collapses. Dalton, weakened by this drama, falls over from her weight, hits the floor and smacks his head, rendering him unconscious.

They both lie on the floor before the altar covered in blood. A crowd gathers around them.

POV FROM ABOVE - we see a circle forming as Crystal and Dalton lay on each other.

EMT ROBOTS enter with stretchers. They pull them apart and give them medication.

Chad walks to his shocked dad.

CHAD
I'm sorry you had to see that, dad.

HAROLD
My dear boy! So sick!

CHAD
He's been like that for a while.

HAROLD

Chad, what's going on?

CHAD

They have a strange physical anomaly that renders them deadly to each other. Not unlike an allergic reaction.

HAROLD

She was so determined to finish the ceremony.

CHAD

They both were.

HAROLD

Your mom was like that. Bulldog determination. Right up to the end.

Chad can only nod. The EMTS take Crystal and Dalton out of the church. The Crowd follows.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Dalton wakes up. He looks about the room. He sees his bloody tuxedo on a hanger near the door.

Chad sits in a chair next to his bed. Harold stands near by.

HAROLD

Dalton, how do you feel?

DALTON

Where's Crystal?

CHAD

She's resting.

DALTON

Is she?

CHAD

She's okay. It was touch and go but she's still alive.

DALTON

I have to see her!

CHAD

Come on, bro. You're killing her!

DALTON
It's not me who's killing her.

HAROLD
Now, son. Do what the doctors say.

DALTON
Forget that.

Dalton tries to get out of his bed. AN AI DOCTOR and a ROBOT ORDERLY enter.

CHAD
He's trying to get out of bed.

The Orderly pushes Dalton back into bed.

AI DOCTOR
You will stay in bed until your health has been restored.

DALTON
I want to see Crystal.

ROBOT ORDERLY
Submit, Dalton Reeves.

HAROLD
Dalton. Be sensible.

The Robot pushes Dalton back down. Dalton looks about the room, wild-eyed.

DALTON
You're all in on it.

HAROLD
In on what? You're ill, son. You and Crystal make each other sick for some godforsaken reason.

DALTON
No we don't. This is all bullshit.
And you know it, Chad.

Dalton looks at Chad whose expression remains blank, passive.

DALTON (CONT'D)
For some reason, our love threatens this AI-controlled world. But we don't care.

CHAD
He's so dramatic.

AI DOCTOR
I'll give him a sedative to calm
him.

The AI Doctor lifts up his finger and a long needle emerges from it. He points it at Dalton.

DALTON
No! Keep away from me!

The Orderly restrains Dalton who struggles now maniacally. Finally the AI Doctor's finger plunges its needle into Dalton's arm and pushes the syringe.

The narcotic takes immediate effect and Dalton falls back to sleep.

HAROLD
My God, I don't like to say it, but
he needs help.

CHAD
He's been paranoid like this for
weeks, dad.

HAROLD
We'll get him all the care he
needs.

Harold takes a deep sigh.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
We'll get him better.

AI DOCTOR
I'd suggest he stops all contact
with Crystal Nolan. Despite their
legal union and passionate
relationship, they should not be in
close proximity.

HAROLD
Yes. I agree.

The AI Doctor leaves.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
You kids. I should've been around
more...

CHAD
You did the best you could, dad.
You worked hard and put food on the
table.

HAROLD
Should've given you more...
attention. Love.

CHAD
I'm going to check on Crystal.

Chad gets up and walks out of the room.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Chad walks down the hallway to another room. He peers through the window and sees a semi-lucid Crystal talking with her parents and friends. He enters.

INT. CRYSTAL'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Everyone looks up when Chad enters. Crystal, drugged and barely there, stares at him dully.

CRYSTAL
Chad?

CHAD
I'm here for you, Crystal.

CRYSTAL
What do you know, Chad?

Crystal's parents look at him.

CHAD
Know about what?

CRYSTAL
Why this is happening?

CHAD
I don't know anything.

CRYSTAL
Dalton said you were investigating.

CHAD
Oh well, yeah. I asked my professor some questions but he said you guys just have immune systems that are diametrically opposed to one another.

CRYSTAL
I don't...

JOHN

Honey, we realize how much you love Dalton but seriously, dear. This is getting absurd.

CRYSTAL

We're going to be together. Even if it kills us.

Chad stares at Crystal and then slowly exits the room.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Chad touches his forehead.

CHAD

Will continue to monitor.

INT. DALTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton's eyes open. He looks about the room. Harold sleeps in a chair, otherwise there's no one there.

Dalton notes the tubes in his arm and on his chest. He pulls everything off and climbs out of his bed slowly.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Dalton walks down the quiet hallway. A NURSE argues with a PATIENT down one corridor, but it's mostly empty. He turns a corner and sees the AI Surgeon inside the glass window of a room.

Dalton steps up closer and sees a Nurse talking with the Surgeon.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

There are two gurneys set up next to bank of computers and operating tables. The Nurse pulls out an electrode cap and other instruments, preparing for some kind of medical procedure.

NURSE

We can take Dalton and Crystal now while they're not being monitored as closely by family.

AI SURGEON
Prepare the equipment. We'll
commence with the experiment.

EXT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

As the AI Surgeon and Nurse can be seen heading for the door, Dalton races down the hallway to Crystal's room.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dalton runs into the room. Crystal's mother and Father have left for the night. It's empty. Dalton shakes her awake.

CRYSTAL
Dalton... ?

DALTON
We have to go.

CRYSTAL
What?

DALTON
They're coming for us. Not sure
what they want to do, but we have
to leave.

Dalton unhooks her tubes.

CRYSTAL
But where will we go?

EXT. HALLWAY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Dalton and Crystal look around the hallway for a minute and then, holding hands, scramble down the corridor.

Dalton knocks over a PATIENT carrying a cup of water.

DALTON
Sorry, mister!

The AI Surgeon and Nurse spot them from down the hallway.

AI SURGEON
Dalton Reeves and Crystal Nolan!
Stop immediately!

NURSE
You aren't well!

Dalton and Crystal increase their pace but the AI Surgeon comes close to them.

Dalton grabs a gurney and thrusts it in the robot's path. It falls over and lands on the ground with a metallic CLUNK!

The Nurse continues pursuit far behind.

NURSE (CONT'D)
ORDERLIES! STOP THEM!

Dalton and Crystal round the corner to the exit when they bump into Chad!

CHAD
What's going on, bro? You guys should be in bed.

DALTON
Give me the keys to my car.

CHAD
But the Doctors said--

DALTON
Come on, Chad. You know something's wrong here. Give me the keys!!

Dalton reaches into Chad's pocket and takes the keys.

CHAD
Where are you going?

DALTON
We'll send you a postcard!

Dalton and Crystal run by the ADMITTANCE NURSE.

ADMITTANCE NURSE
Dalton Reeves! Crystal!

But they are out the door!

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Chad exits in time to see Dalton and Crystal take off in his Prius.

INT. DALTON'S CAR - NIGHT

Dalton wipes off his forehead with a handkerchief. Crystal checks the rear view for followers.

DALTON

It's so beautiful there. I'll book us a hotel. I'll pull out all my savings. We can stay as long as we want.

CRYSTAL

I'm going to need some clothes.

DALTON

Me too. Okay, quick pit stops.

INT. DALTON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dalton closes up a small suitcase. He grabs his phone and exits his room.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Chad puts away his phone. A Health Link van pulls up. Chad climbs inside.

The van takes off.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Crystal takes her bags and leaves the room.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Crystal tries to tiptoe but one of her bags KNOCKS against the bannister of the stairway.

Leah opens her bedroom door. Crystal darts down the staircase.

EXT. CRYSTAL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Crystal emerges from her house with her bags. Dalton helps her get her things into the trunk.

Leah and John follow out the front door.

LEAH

CRYSTAL! CRYSTAL! STOP!

JOHN

YOU NEED TO GO BACK TO THE HOSITAL!

But it's too late, the Prius tears off.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The car roars down the road as much as a Prius can roar.

INT. DALTON'S CAR - NIGHT

Dalton smiles and looks over at Crystal. She smiles back.

DALTON
They can't stop us.

CRYSTAL
No one can.

Dalton blinks and sees a LIFESPAN WARNING: ONE WEEK TO LIVE!

He forcefully blinks it off.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Prius passes a sign: Welcome To Carmel, California!

EXT. CARMEL - HOTEL - DAY

The CLERK hands Dalton a key.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Despite their emaciated, sickly bodies, Dalton and Crystal make passionate love in the room.

EXT. BEACH - DAY - WEEK LATER

The couple, rapidly withering away from weight loss, work their way through the rocks along the shore, each laughing, with the deadly, grey pallor returning to their faces.

EXT. BEACH - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sitting in the van, Chad watches Dalton and Crystal with binoculars. He puts them down and touches his temple.

CHAD
This shouldn't take long.

AI DOCTOR (V.O.)
The more intense their love, the
more their sickness will intensify.

CHAD
So we wait until they die?

AI DOCTOR (V.O.)
No. As they come close to their
expiration date, offer them the
option.

CHAD
Yes.

AI DOCTOR (V.O.)
It will be profitable to study them
at length. In a controllable
environment.

Chad nods.

EXT. BEACH - SHORELINE - DAY

Dalton sits down on one of the rocks. Crystal joins her. They
look as sick as they ever have.

CRYSTAL
I feel so tired.

DALTON
Let's rest here.

They watch the ocean for a minute. Death seems to be in their
eyes.

Crystal blinks. WARNING: YOU HAVE MINUTES TO LIVE!!!!

She blinks it off.

CRYSTAL
We're close.

He takes her into his arms.

DALTON
Let's just watch the sunset then.
Together.

At this moment, Chad walks up to them.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Chad. You followed us.

CHAD

I had to.

DALTON

Well, say goodbye and leave us be.
We want to go out alone, baby
brother. Goodbye.

CHAD

But you don't have to die.

DALTON

What are you talking about?

CHAD

You can continue to live your lives
together. Loving each other.

Crystal sits up.

CRYSTAL

What is this about, Chad?

CHAD

I've done some experiments in my
studies. I can upload your
consciousnesses into my computer.
And you can exist online, together,
forever.

CRYSTAL

Please, Chad. No more.

DALTON

Don't you think we've had enough of
the AI crap?

CRYSTAL

I'm starting to be sick again.

DALTON

Step away or we'll both jump into
the ocean right here!

CHAD

But you don't have to die, bro.

Crystal looks at Dalton. A tear forms.

CHAD (CONT'D)

Let me at least try it. To make up
for everything.

Dalton looks at Crystal.

DALTON

What do we have to lose? We're
going to die anyway, my love.

CRYSTAL

Then let's do it looking at the
sunset.

DALTON

But to be together... ?

CRYSTAL

I don't believe it.

CHAD

All I need is your consent. You
can't be dead, so time is of the
essence.

Dalton holds Crystal and looks out at the sunset.

DALTON

No. This is a beautiful sunset. And
we are ready.

CHAD

Okay. But your relationship doesn't
have to end.

CRYSTAL

Please, Chad.

A beat.

Dalton and Crystal give each other another look. Both have
tears in their eyes.

DALTON

We could be together?

CRYSTAL

The thought of leaving you is
unbearable.

CHAD

There isn't much time.

Dalton looks as though he's going to pass out.

CRYSTAL

Dalton? Dalton!

Dalton snaps awake.

CHAD

You're not going to last much longer.

DALTON

Do it, Chad. Preserve our love.

CRYSTAL

Yes. Do it. If you can.

From behind a rock, two Robot Security Guards emerge and lift Dalton and Crystal from the rocks. They both hang onto consciousness barely, eyes rolling in their heads.

INT. HEALTH LINK BUILDING - OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Dalton and Crystal are strapped into chairs. Their heads are covered with electrodes that connect to a giant mainframe computer.

An AI SURGEON oversees the transfer of consciousnesses online.

Chad watches from the corner of the room.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. VIRTUAL PARADISE - DAY

Dalton opens his eyes. He's youthful and healthy. He looks over to a patch of vegetation and sees Crystal. She's also restored to her earlier self.

They stand in a virtual garden of Eden. In the distance is a beautiful beach and blazing sun.

Dalton smiles. Crystal walks over and hugs him.

CRYSTAL

It's real. Chad was right.

DALTON

I love you.

CRYSTAL

I love you, too.

But there's something off. Their eyes look off.

DALTON

I wonder what beach-front property
goes for here?

Crystal laughs but it's completely artificial. Like from the AI sitcom. Dalton realizes something now. Dalton's eyes register horror. An eerie glitch.

Dalton runs to the edge of the simulation, finding a loop of repeated scenery.

He looks back at Crystal but she seems unaware of a problem.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Something's wrong.

CRYSTAL

This is what you wanted, right,
Dalton? To never be left alone? To
have me with you always?

Dalton runs to another side of the simulation and finds it's a clear wall.

Dalton bangs on the wall, realizing he has no physical body left. He's trapped in data, and there's no undoing it.

As he panics, a soothing AI voice can be heard.

AI VOICE (V.O.)

Love is forever. You are safe now.

As Dalton pounds against the walls of the simulation, it starts to rain rocks with "I Love You" written on them. He SCREAMS as he is completely covered in the stones.

FADE OUT