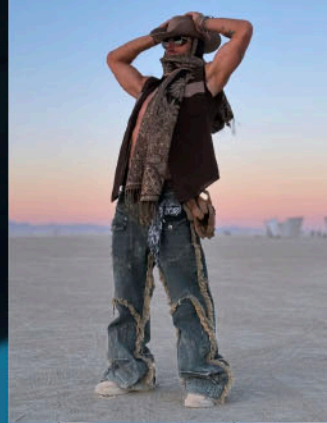




DIVIDED WE FALL



RUUDI O'MEARA



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DIVIDED WE FALL

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EXT. CENOTE, TULUM - DAY

Somewhere deep in the Yucatan jungle, two shirtless men stand at the edge of a sheer limestone cliff.

They're holding hands and wearing nothing but matching red swim trunks. Behind them: a good forty foot drop.

JAMES (30s, tense, fit, practical) looks to KENNETH (30s, loose, lean, puckish), smiles nervously.

Kenneth nods confidently, looks to a young woman in a sheer tunic, LAURA (30s, whip-smart, zero makeup).

Without saying a word, Laura SMACKS her hands together loudly. The sound echoes through the vine-laden trees.

LAURA
(to Kenneth)
I now pronounce you man...
(to James)
...and man.

Kenneth turns to James. They lock eyes.

LAURA (CONT'D)
You may take the leap.

We PULL BACK to reveal that the entire circular rim of the cliff is lined with WEDDING GUESTS. Men, women, young, old, all in color-coordinated bathing suits.

Kenneth kisses James gently, tightens his grip on his hand. And then both of them JUMP from the cliff's edge.

A loud WHOOP goes up from the assembled crowd.

And, one-by-one, the entire wedding party eagerly LEAPS out after them and down to the azure waters below.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER: TWENTY YEARS LATER

INSERT MONTAGE:

In a swift series of flash cuts, we watch as:

-- Kenneth (still lean, now wrinkled) tumbles in a jury-rigged gyroscope on the white sand Playa at Burning Man--

-- James (still fit, now bald) sprints up a misty hiking trail decked out in trendy athleisure wear --

-- Kenneth twists himself into a complex yoga pose next to a handful of other SCANTILY CLAD BURNERS --

-- James stands at the head of a sleek conference table presenting to a bunch of ON-TREND GEN-Z STRIVERS --

-- Kenneth rides a dust-covered, fur-clad bicycle next to FIRE-BREATHING STILT WALKERS --

-- James cranks away on a stationery bike in a spin class full of other TYPE-A TECH EXECs --

-- Kenneth dances at the foot a neon-lit stage surrounded by TRIPPING DESERT RATS --

-- James peruses the produce at a fancy organic market full of MONEYED VEGANS --

-- Kenneth stumbles through the inky darkness trailed by a pack of PHANTASMAGORICAL LIZARD PEOPLE --

-- James walks down the hallway of a posh condo building past other WELL-GROOMED URBANITES --

-- Kenneth stares at the LIZARD PEOPLE as they seem to devour a scantily-clad, nubile YOUNG BURNER --

LAURA (PRE-LAP)
Wait. What the what?

It's a terrifying, entirely bewildering spectacle.

END MONTAGE.

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Having only barely aged, Laura sits on a bar stool at the island of Kenneth and James's tricked-out kitchen.

Stainless steel. German appliances. Cararra Marble.

LAURA
Kenneth/Kenneth? At Burning Man?
Our Kenneth?!

James nods, darts back-and-forth between the sink and the cooktop while Laura refills her goblet of chardonnay.

JAMES
Emma is *mortified*.

LAURA
Uh, yeah.
(MORE)

LAURA (CONT'D)
(beat)
But, I dunno, good drugs?

JAMES
If you like, what, MDMA?

LAURA
Have you tried it?

James stares at her. *Are you kidding me?!*

LAURA (CONT'D)
It's like speed but sociable.

James SCOFFS, turns away, grabs a cleaver.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Best part is you kinda lose your,
like, inner critic.

JAMES
Yeah, well...

James precisely slices Japanese eggplant.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Kenneth's internal critic dried up
ages ago!

Laura reaches over, refills James's wine glass.

LAURA
Are you guys okay?

James shrugs, scoops the eggplant coins up with his cleaver,
slides them into a waiting silver saucepan.

JAMES
Well, now that Emma's headed off to
school...

He gives the SIZZLING pan a quick flick.

LAURA
God. Where does all the time go?

JAMES
Exactly!

Laura downs a prodigious gulp. James reaches for his glass,
takes a measured sip.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Now that we're empty nesters...

LAURA
Ooof.

JAMES
...I just hope it, you know, *forces*
us to get our shit back together.

LAURA
Is he even looking for work?

JAMES
No. He's just, like, living off the
dividends from his ancient Apple
options like a bum.
(deep sigh)
First, it's Transcendental
Meditation. Then he's, like,
designing his own handbags. Really?
He can't even sew.
(deep breath)
And now--

James can't even say it.

LAURA
Burning Man.

JAMES
And now Burning Man.

Laura nods, takes another long swig.

LAURA
How's Chamber?

JAMES
(fake smile)
Grrrreat.

LAURA
(dubious)
Uh-huh.

JAMES
He *hates* that I'm working there.
Hates it!

LAURA
What does he know?

JAMES

I just...

James, still clutching his glass, looks away, spies his own reflection in the floor-to-ceiling glass windows.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I just want my partner back.

LAURA

Oh, honey.

James' eyes fall to the smoking pan.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I'll give him a talking to.

James grabs the pan, yanks it off the burner.

JAMES

No, no.

He gives the pan another flick, adjusts the flame.

LAURA

When's he back?

JAMES

Tomorrow. For Emma's move-in.

Laura downs the last of her chardonnay, slams her goblet down on the island: CLINK!

LAURA (CONT'D)

Perfect. I'll get on his *packed* agenda first thing next week.

James parts his lips to protest. But then he realizes.

Resistance is futile.

EXT. UC BERKELEY, PARKING LOT - MIDDAY

As the morning fog burns off, James reaches into the open hatch of a Porsche Cayenne, pulls out a stack of book boxes.

Behind him, we can make out other similarly-aged, similarly-monied PARENTS helping their TYPE-A KIDS schlep stuff out of equally expensive-looking cars.

James turns, looks to see his daughter EMMA (18, fresh-faced, brainy, nervous) tromping sullenly around the car lugging a huge suitcase behind her.

EMMA

I miss Papa.

James lowers the boxes onto a hand truck, lifts his wrist to check the time, frowns.

JAMES

I know, baby. I'm sure he's just...

A dust-covered sprinter van crudely covered in pink and teal camouflage pulls into the parking lot blaring EDM.

JAMES (CONT'D)

...caught in traffic.

The van slows to a stop. The side door RUMBLES open. And out tumbles Kenneth, grinning ear-to-ear.

He wears nothing but cowboy boots, silver spandex short-shorts, a vintage Stetson, and a fuchsia fur vest.

Unlike the heap of HALF-DRESSED BURNERS caked in white sand dust behind him, Kenneth looks fresh as a daisy.

KENNETH

(way too loud)

Tortuga!

BURNERS

(in unison back)

Tortuga!!

The van's driver, AMETHYST (20s) rolls down her window.

At the sight of her, Emma frowns (just like James), turns, and then slowly drags her suitcase away toward the dorm.

AMETHYST

(to Kenneth)

Remember, Man child. Meander.

Kenneth nods deeply, makes a peace sign with one hand, slams it twice against his chest: THUMP, THUMP.

Amethyst nods wordlessly back, slowly rolls up her window as someone inside the van SLAMS the side door shut.

And as the van rolls off, leaving Kenneth and James alone in its MUTED TECHNO wake, James ventures:

JAMES

Man child?

Kenneth spins around to face him, the same gleeful grin still plastered across his sun-baked face.

KENNETH
Meanders! It's my Playa name!

James hands him a box.

JAMES
Don't you think that's a little on the nose?

KENNETH
I can't help it if total strangers grokk me instantly.

Kenneth grips the box, takes off after Emma.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Emma, darling...

Emma tugs her suitcase up a steep walkway.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
...is Papa embarrassing you?

Emma and James nod in unison as Kenneth bounds off after her, bearing the single box.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Oooh! I can't wait to meet your roommate!

I/E. PORSCHE / BAY BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

James and Kenneth drive back across the Bay Bridge in silence. The gleaming city looms ahead of them like OZ.

James cracks his window.

JAMES
God, you smell like a dirty hippie.

KENNETH
Mistakes were made.

Long airless pause.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
What're we gonna do without her?

JAMES
She's only, like, twelve miles away!

KENNETH
I know, but...

JAMES
I'm sure she'll come back for
weekends.
(beat)
Maybe?

Kenneth SIGHS deeply, rubs his dust-caked eyes.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Listen--

Kenneth cuts him off.

KENNETH
You know, I really think you should
come with me next year. It's, like,
really eye-opening.

JAMES
Breeders riding around on furry
tricycles naked? No thank you.

KENNETH
Well, yeah. It is that. But it's so
much more, too. The whole thing
reminds you of how, like,
insignificant we all are. In the
grand scheme of things. You know?

James doesn't know.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
All this striving. Working 24/7,
365. And for what?

JAMES
So that we can afford Berkeley.

KENNETH
Should've tred for Stanford.

JAMES
So that we can have a decent roof
over our heads.

KENNETH
Bah. That stupid condo sucks. I
miss our old house.

JAMES
Hold on. Hold on.

KENNETH
Selling that place was a mistake.

JAMES
Well, *somebody* had to make up for
how much you spend on boots!

Kenneth exhales slowly, can't argue the point.

KENNETH
All I'm saying is there's gotta be
more to life. I mean, look at you,
surrounded by all those CIS white
tech bro millennial Gen-Z coder
freaks day-in, day-out. They're all
just so... spectrum-y.

JAMES
That's just--

Kenneth lifts a hand, points toward an array of massive,
disc-shaped clouds hovering high over the Bay.

KENNETH
See those things?

James cranes his head, still stuck in the last argument.

JAMES
What?

KENNETH
The clouds. Weird, right?

JAMES
Uh, no. Now--

KENNETH
Look just like flying saucers.

JAMES
They're not all white, not all CIS.

KENNETH
We had 'em up there too. On The
Playa. Even the lizard people.

JAMES
Lizard people?

KENNETH
Apparently, even Congress knows
they live among us.

JAMES
They who?!

KENNETH
Aliens, silly. *Actual* aliens.

James looks like he's about to implode.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Just like everyone you work with
and everyone in our stupid
building.
(robotic)
Take me to your social graph.

James stares at the flying saucer clouds, flustered.

Kenneth (his eyes back on the road) gestures feebly forward.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Um...

James' eyes dart back to the road just in time to see a
silver sedan hit the brakes.

In a fright, he harshly over-corrects. And the car SQUEALS
across three lanes of traffic. Cars HONK and swerve.

JAMES
Jesus! Fuck!

KENNETH
Such language.

JAMES
Stop distracting me!

KENNETH
Stop yelling at me.

JAMES
(yelling)
I'm not yelling!

Kenneth SIGHS again, gazes back at the clouds.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - AFTERNOON

Kenneth and James stride away from the Cayenne as its hatch
slowly lowers automagically. The light is a harsh green.

JAMES

Can't believe you could survive
four days in the desert dressed
like that.

KENNETH

It's surprising how well silver
spandex holds up in the heat.

Up ahead, we spy a young mixed-race couple, MILES and GRANT
(20s) as they wait for the elevator.

They're both clad entirely in Uniform by Everlane. Only
James seems happy to see them.

JAMES

Hey, guys.

Grant turns, oddly robotic.

GRANT

Hello, *James*. How are you?

James twists two fists in the corners of his eyes, feigns
wiping away tears.

JAMES

Just dropped our daughter off at
Berkeley for first semester.

MILES

(also strangely stiff)
Daughter? You don't seem old enough
to have a college-aged child.

JAMES

Hashtag blushing.

As if on cue, both Miles and Grant swivel their heads toward
Kenneth. They look him up and down as if they're scanning a
an alien life form.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm sorry. Grant, Miles. This
is Kenneth. My, um, better half.

Miles and Grant both thrust a hand forward and then look to
each other as if to debate who should retract theirs first.

Kenneth smiles and side-swipes both their hands back-and-
forth with his free hand. Dusty black nail-polish.

KENNETH
Pleasure, gentlemen. Finally some
gays in the house.

Their arms still extended, Miles and Grant just stare at Kenneth for an overlong second while James, embarrassed, stabs the call button for the elevator.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Wait. You are a couple, right?

A strained smile washes briefly over each of their faces.

MILES
Ha, ha. LOL.

GRANT
Of course we are.

The elevator arrives with a DING.

KENNETH
Good, because my gaydar's on the
fritz of late. Goes with age.

The elevator doors slide open with a WHOOSH and the four of them step awkwardly in.

INT. ELEVATOR - AFTERNOON

As the doors close, we hold on all four men as they stand with their backs to the wall. Anodyne boutique hotel TECHNO thumps over invisible speakers.

GRANT
Say, James. What are you two doing
tomorrow night?

JAMES
Tomorrow? Nothing.

KENNETH
Like I said, we're OLD.

MILES
Well, why don't you both swing by
our... unit?

The word 'unit' just feels off. Weird.

MILES (CONT'D)
We're having a little cocktail
party. Nothing formal. Just a
few... co-workers.
(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)
 And some friends from the...
 building.
 (awkward)
 You know, *chillaxing*.

GRANT
 Say, 7:30? Unit 501.

Kenneth shrugs, game for anything. James nods.

JAMES
 Of course. That would be awesome.
 What can we bring?

MILES
 Nothing, nothing at all.

The elevator slows and the doors glide open again to reveal
 a warmly-lit, posh-looking lobby.

Grant and Miles step out in lockstep.

In the distance, clusters of paired-up TRENDY TENANTS cross
 in curated subscription clothing service ensembles.

GRANT
 (over his shoulder)
 Just yourselves!

The elevator doors close and we stay on Kenneth and James
 for a moment. Kenneth adjusts his fuchsia fur vest.

JAMES
 Don't say it.

KENNETH
 Flipping robots.

JAMES
 They're perfectly nice. C'mon.

KENNETH
 Perfectly *boring*.
 (beat)
 We never should've gotten married.

James spins toward him.

JAMES
What?!

KENNETH

As soon as you need a license to
love the one you're with, the whole
herd gets instantly un-fun.

James just stares, at a complete loss.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

That settles it.

The elevator DINGS. The doors open again. Kenneth steps out.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Next year, you're coming with me.

As Kenneth wanders off down the hallway, James stays behind
for half a second, still processing.

JAMES

(to himself)

I'm... fun?

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Back at Kenneth and James' kitchen island, James is in prep-mode again. A good culinary soldier.

Kenneth sits, hair washed, across the island like Laura was
as he flicks distractedly through Insta on a glowing iPad.

KENNETH

Oh, I forgot to tell you. I met
this guy up there who said he was,
like, your former CTO or CIO or
something.

JAMES

Huh?

KENNETH

At Chamber. God, what a stupid
name. Fucking echo chamber.

JAMES

Hold on. You met Ari?

KENNETH

Just because people can only react
to the exact same content--

JAMES

That's not how it--

KENNETH

Give your thumbs-up or thumbs-down
to the same set of posts that
everyone else on the planet sees
all at the same time...

James narrows his eyes. *Well, that is kinda how it...*

KENNETH (CONT'D)

...doesn't mean that we won't all
inevitably rush to the bottom just
like we always do.

(beat)

Plus where does all that content
come from? Big Brother?

James draws a breath.

JAMES

(as if scripted)

Chamber is designed to bring
everyone closer together, not
further apart. Instead of going
down our respective rabbit holes,
now the world can finally have one
collective conversation in real-
time. Everywhere. At once. And
what's so wrong with that?

Kenneth slides his empty wine glass toward him.

KENNETH

Mas Kool-Aid, por favor.

James reaches for the open bottle of wine and empties it
into Kenneth's glass.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Anyway, interesting guy.

EXT. BLACK ROCK DESERT - NIGHT [FLASHBACK]

By the light of moon, Kenneth stands shirtless again in the
middle of The Playa staring at the same pack of
phantasmagorical lizard people from earlier.

A VOICE from behind slithers in over distant MUSIC:

ARI (O.S.)

We are, most certainly, not alone.

Kenneth turns to see a scruffy-looking, long-haired man
wearing a leather kilt, many scarves, chunky strands of
beads, and a pair of vintage welders' goggles.

This is ARI (40s) a seven-figure dropout with a penchant for conspiracy theories.

ARI (CONT'D)
You'd think they'd have the good sense to attempt to take over a planet that *wasn't* doomed.

Kenneth stares at him blankly, stonily.

Ari wags his head toward the lizard people.

ARI (CONT'D)
Of course this is the only place in the world they feel entirely comfortable showing their true colors.
(beat)
Just like the rest of us.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Back in the kitchen, James just stares at Kenneth as he flicks through pic after pic after pic.

KENNETH
Guess he had, like, a falling out with Jacob. It is Jacob, right?
Your founder.

James half nods, still not following.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
A very, very firm believer that we're living in a simulation engineered by aliens so that we don't notice the temperature rising. You know, like lobsters watching "The Matrix".

JAMES
Wait, Jacob/Jacob?

Kenneth nods vigorously.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You met Ari?!

Instead of answering, Kenneth takes an absurdly large swig.

JAMES

The co-founder?! Of my company. Of Chamber. Where I work?

Kenneth nods again toward his iPad.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Of course that libelous freaking nutcase was there!

Kenneth looks up.

KENNETH

According to him, they've been here for decades.

James narrows his eyes again.

JAMES

WHO?!

KENNETH

The lizard people. Keep up.

James' face goes flush.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

But, I dunno. We were both pretty zonked on Peyote.

JAMES

Peyote?!

KENNETH

And Molly.

James' jaw drops.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Does make a ton of sense. Divide and conquer. Take over the planet by training us all to vilify our neighbors, stick to our little cliques. Doom scroll our way into a fractious fiction.

(beat)

A simulation of life.

JAMES

I have *literally* no idea--

KENNETH

Sounds a lot like Chamber. Huh?

JAMES

No.

KENNETH

Just sayin'.

JAMES

NO!

James turns toward the fridge.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Like I'm gonna listen to the critique of someone who just spent four days in the desert stoned out of his mind on MDMA and Peyote.

KENNETH

And a teensy-tinsy bit of meth.

James wheels back around.

JAMES

WHAT?!

KENNETH

I'm kidding. God-uh.

INT. THERAPY OFFICE, WAITING ROOM - MIDDAY

James gulps down his juice, stabs at his phone with one finger. We hear it RING faintly before he lifts it.

KENNETH (V.O.)

(on speaker)

Hello there. You've reached the voicemail of Man Child Meanders.

James GROANS.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

I'm away from the ashram at the moment. So please leave a message after the beep and I'll get back to you if and when the universe so ordains. Ciao!

After the BEEP, James STAMMERS:

JAMES

Um. We have Mark today, in case you forgot. And will you please change your stupid voicemail? It's--

From downstairs, we hear a door open and someone rush loudly up the stairs: THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

KENNETH
(not even winded)
Knew you'd beat me!

JAMES
You remembered. I just--

KENNETH
Called? I forgot my phone.
(air-quotes)
At "home".

The door down below opens again, and someone else trudges slowly up the stairs. THUD. THUD. THUD.

JAMES
How you can get by without a phone
is beyond me.

A stylish but slightly harried-looking man approximately their age, MARK (50s) crests the stairs.

MARK
Oy vey. You two again.
(to James re: Kenneth)
I thought the plan was to strand
that one in the desert.

JAMES
He did his best.

Mark passes them, gestures for them to follow him.

MARK
Come on back.
(to Kenneth)
How was it?

Kenneth grins dreamily.

MARK (CONT'D)
No, wait. Don't tell me.

Mark pauses at a water dispenser, fills up his mug.

MARK (CONT'D)
Anytime there are large gatherings
of nude straight people you can
count me out.

JAMES
Exactly!

Kenneth passes James, enters a neatly-decorated office.

KENNETH
Well, there are *some* things you
can't un-see no matter how many
controlled substances you consume.

INT. THERAPY OFFICE - DAY

James, glaring, follows Kenneth into the office.

Mark steps in behind them, closes the door.

MARK
(to Kenneth)
You never bring me anything.

Kenneth sits, taps the couch cushion next to him. James dutiful but sullenly takes a seat.

Mark sits opposite them in a well-worn Eames lounge.

MARK (CONT'D)
Alright, so. How are you two?

James and Kenneth turn to look at each other for a long-ish second before blurting out, in unison:

JAMES	KENNETH
Anxious.	Bored.

They both pause. Then:

JAMES	KENNETH
Afraid.	Tired.

James scowls.

JAMES	KENNETH
Irritated.	Curious?

James crosses his arms.

JAMES	KENNETH
Frustrated.	Unsurprised.

Mark takes a sip of his water.

JAMES	KENNETH
Angry!	Amused.

James throws up his hands, turns toward Mark. Mark sets his mug back down, smiles.

MARK
Alright. Good session.

James looks like he's ready to stand up and walk out.

MARK (CONT'D)
(to James)
Now, hold on. Hold on. Why are you
anxious? Why are you afraid?

JAMES
Because, well, for the first time
since Emma was born, it's just the
two of us now. Alone. Together.
Alone!
(beat)
He's on his own *flipping* planet.
And here I am, busting my ass to
keep a roof over our heads. And for
what? I mean, half the shit he says
these days doesn't make a bit of
sense!
(toward Kenneth)
Aliens?! Really?

MARK
(also to Kenneth)
I *did* see that hearing on CSPAN.

Kenneth touches the tip of his nose with one finger.

JAMES
What are you TALKING about?!

Mark slowly swivels his chair toward Kenneth. Kenneth turns toward James.

KENNETH
I hear that. I hear you.
(beat)
But...

JAMES
(to Mark)
See!

MARK
Let him finish.

KENNETH
Honestly, I'm glad Emma's out. It's
time for her to live her life. To
explore. Meander.

James lifts his hand like a kid in school. Mark nods 'no'.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(to James)
You've been using her, and that
job, as a crutch. As a way to,
like, paper over the emptiness of
your existence. Our existence. To
distract you from working on
yourself. On us.

Kenneth turns back toward Mark.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Now we're gonna *have* to work on our
shit. Or else, right?

JAMES
Or else what?!

KENNETH
Or else, not.
(back to James)
Life's too short to just muddle
along caught in the same treadmill
treading water. You know?

Kenneth looks to Mark as if for permission to continue.

Mark nods slowly.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(still to James)
I see you grinding away day after
day with all those vapid type-A,
robot kids and I wonder... is that
what you really want over me?

JAMES
Over you?

Kenneth doesn't budge. James looks away.

KENNETH
It might be all the drugs talking,
but I just want our life back. I
want it to be interesting again.
Weird. Remarkable. Not so *meh* all
the time.

James turns back toward Mark, looks for back-up.

Mark just nods again.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(still to James)
Remember the waterfall? The cliff?
The Cenote? I just want more of
that again. Just the two of us
against the world.

James and Kenneth stare at each other for a long moment.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Otherwise, why bother?

EXT. UNION STREET - AFTERNOON

Kenneth and James stand outside Mark's office. James
(looking a little shaken) calls an Uber.

Kenneth looks like he's said his piece. Content.

JAMES
Wanna hitch a ride with me?

KENNETH
Aren't you headed back to the
office?

JAMES
(toward his phone)
Yeah.

KENNETH
Rhetorical question.

James looks up from his phone. For a split second, it feels
like they're about to tumble into another argument.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Nah. I think I'll hoof it. Get some
fresh air.

James looks back to his phone. It's his default stance.

JAMES
Fine. Suit yourself.
(texting)
On the way back, grab something to
bring tonight.

Kenneth stares at him blankly.

KENNETH
Bring where?

A silver Prius pulls around the corner and slows. James waves toward the driver, pockets his phone.

JAMES
To Grant and Miles'! From the garage. Cocktail party? Hello?!

KENNETH
Oh, god. I totally--

James tugs the straps on his backpack tight like a kid going to middle school and turns back toward Kenneth.

JAMES
Of course you did.

James strides backward toward the Prius without so much as a proper goodbye.

KENNETH
Love you, too.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Kenneth and James stand shoulder-to-shoulder in front of the door to unit 501. They each clutch bottles of fancy bubbly.

Kenneth wears black denim and an un-tucked black tuxedo shirt. James wears a black polo over skinny white jeans.

The sound of MUSIC and VOICES can be heard from within.

KENNETH
Which one's which again?

JAMES
Miles is the black one.

Kenneth dusts something off of James' shoulder.

KENNETH
Are we alright?

James ignores this.

JAMES
Grant works at Chamber.

KENNETH
He does? You didn't tell me--

JAMES

Sure, I did. Ages ago.

James reaches for the doorbell.

KENNETH

God, does everyone in this building
work at that godforsaken place?

JAMES

No, Miles works at Google.

DING, DONG.

The VOICES inside quiet slightly. The door bursts open.

INT. APARTMENT 501 - CONTINUOUS

Grant stands in the doorway holding a martini in one hand.
He's dressed almost identically to James.

Kenneth does a slow double-take at their matching outfits.

KENNETH

Did I not get the memo?

Grant cocks his head, not getting the joke.

James rolls his eyes, pushes past Kenneth and in.

JAMES

Ignore him. I do.

GRANT

Oh, I see. Our *ensembles*.

Grant awkwardly hugs James.

GRANT (CONT'D)

(to Kenneth)

Come in, come in. The party is just
getting started.

Grant lets go of James, steps back, gestures stiffly for
Kenneth to come in for a hug. Kenneth does.

Awkward.

Behind Grant, the space is eerily similar to Kenneth and
James' apartment. Nearly identical.

KENNETH

That's... weird.

Behind Grant, Miles threads his way through a crowd of seemingly indistinguishable PARTYGOERS.

MILES

Hello, gentlemen. So glad you could make it.

Grant lets go of Kenneth.

Kenneth cocks his head, clocks the fact that the MUSIC is exactly the same track from the lobby, earlier.

Millennial MUSAK.

KENNETH

Miles.

Miles comes in for a hug. Kenneth just thrusts the bottle of champagne his way, cuts him off at the pass.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

God, it's, like, so weird to see another unit. Another apartment.

Miles takes the bottle as James wades deeper into the space, waves cordially to other fellow co-workers.

MILES

Oh, fantastic. You didn't have to--

Miles spins the bottle over in his hand, lets his eyes wash over the label as if he's decrypting an ancient tome.

MILES (CONT'D)

Schramsberg Modicum Extra Brut
2015. Very nice.

(extemporaneously)

A mild winter led to an early bud break, followed by a protracted bloom during an unseasonably cooler spring, which contributed to smaller grape clusters and variable crop size.

He pauses like he's reached the end of a recording.

And then he turns toward the kitchen, gestures for Kenneth to follow.

MILES (CONT'D)

A steady but moderate weather pattern during ripening allowed for gradual maturity and exceptional quality upon harvest.

Kenneth, perplexed, steps in behind him.

Miles tucks the bottle into a large silver tub full of chipped ice at the end of the island.

Again. Same appliances. Same marble.

MILES (CONT'D)

At nine grams of residual sugar,
the 2015 Modicum is crisp and an
ideal companion to oysters or
perfect as an aperitif.

Miles turns to Kenneth, cracks an odd smile. Fake.

KENNETH

(tentatively)

Wow, you really know your stuff.

Miles bats him off.

MILES

Not really. My team's been working
on an advanced predictive
recommendations algorithm for...

(conspiratorial)

...Amazon. I know. Weird, right?

(jovial)

But, well, some of that stuff just
sort of sinks in via osmosis.

Remind me to have you sign an NDA.

Kenneth narrows his eyes.

MILES (CONT'D)

Kidding. What can I get you?

KENNETH

What are you having?

MILES

Gray Goose. Up. Twist.

KENNETH

Sold.

MILES

And what about James?

KENNETH

God, you'd have to--

Kenneth turns to find that James and Grant are now surrounded by a gaggle of mostly-male COWORKERS (20s).

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(distantly)
He's been on this on again, off
again Keto thing. I can't keep up
with what he can and can't--

Miles magically produces a perfectly chilled, gigantic
martini just like his.

MILES
Don't worry, they're probably all
just talking shop already.

The gaggle of young men gathered around James gaze at him
like he's the Oracle of Delphi.

KENNETH
Ugh. Chamber?

MILES
Yep.

Kenneth grabs the martini, takes a quick swig. Medicine.

MILES (CONT'D)
You should be proud of him

As Kenneth swallows, he suddenly spies a strange-looking
figure ducking through the crowd.

He nearly gags.

It's a LIZARD PERSON dressed in immaculate khakis and a
tight-fitting chambray shirt.

MILES (CONT'D)
They all look up to him.

Kenneth, speechless, gestures meekly toward the lizard
person as they disappear behind a perforated room divider.

MILES (CONT'D)
Because he's got real wisdom.

Kenneth swallows, takes another huge sip, tries to shake it
off like it's all just a Peyote flashback.

MILES (CONT'D)
Understands human behavior.

Kenneth suppresses a spit-take.

MILES (CONT'D)
For an ISTJ he's surprisingly
sensitive.

Kenneth looks back to the room divider. No sign of the
lizard person.

MILES (CONT'D)
His emotional honesty and deep
insight make a powerful impression.

Kenneth downs another gulp.

KENNETH
ISTJ? You guys are hilarious.

MILES
The ability to clearly classify
humans is a hallmark of higher
intelligence.

KENNETH
Okay...

Kenneth fishes the twist out of his glass, thrusts it into
his mouth while nervously scanning the crowd for lizards.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
...do me then.

MILES
It doesn't work that way.

A human SERVER with a silver tray of canapes passes. Kenneth
grabs one, slams it into his mouth.

In the distance, still no sign of the lizard person.

KENNETH
(chewing)
Pretty please.

MILES
If you insist...

Kenneth seems almost relieved to be hallucinating.

MILES
Tell me about yourself.

Kenneth swallows loudly: GULP. Eyes on the divider.

KENNETH

Well, I make friends easily. I cry at sad movies. I never prepare, for anything. I'm almost never calm under pressure. And I'll talk to anyone at a party. Case in point.

Miles does a brief double-take toward the room divider.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Facts never stick in my head. I rarely do the same thing the same way twice. I could talk about art all day long. And I don't really care what anyone else thinks.

Miles looks back to Kenneth, takes a sip of his drink.

MILES

Are you prone to worrying things will take a turn for the worse?

KENNETH

Why do you--

MILES

If confronted by a life or death challenge, would you fight or run?

KENNETH

Run/walk? No, fight.

Miles just lets this hang there. Then:

MILES

You, dear neighbor, are a solid ENFP-T. Extroverted, Intuitive, Feeling, Perceiving.
(judge-y)
Turbulent.

Kenneth seems wholly taken aback.

MILES (CONT'D)

Prone to misread the signals of others. But capable of switching from driven idealist at work--

KENNETH

Oh, but there you're--

MILES

To rhapsodic free spirit on the dance floor.

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)
(beat)
Speaking of which...

Miles reaches into one pocket, pulls something out of it, thrusts his closed fist outward toward Kenneth.

Kenneth stares for a moment, reaches his free hand out palm up under Miles' fist.

MILES (CONT'D)
...for later.

Miles drops a tiny blue pill onto Kenneth's palm.

KENNETH
What... What is it?

MILES
Kit-Khat.

Kenneth draws his open palm closer, stares at the pill.

MILES (CONT'D)
A synthetic variant of Khat. Or
Cathinone. A stimulant which causes
excitement, diminished appetite,
euphoria, and occasional
hallucinations.

Kenneth lifts his gaze toward Miles, then past him.

Still no lizard people.

Seeming both alarmed and pleased that the night has taken an unexpectedly interesting turn, Kenneth smiles.

MILES (CONT'D)
Blended with mephedrone. Which
speeds up messages traveling
between the brain and body.
(beat)
We're *all* taking it...

KENNETH
Miles, you little devil!

Kenneth pops the pill into his mouth and quickly washes it down with the last of his martini.

MILES
...later.

Miles looks quickly around, as if having violated protocol.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - EARLY MORNING

Kenneth and James, both drenched in sweat, dance like dervishes at the center of the dance floor at a vast, hangar-like nightclub.

All around Kenneth and James, the entire crew from the cocktail party jumps and bounces in a tangled mass to THUMPING techno.

Even Grant and Miles seem to have shed their inhibitions.

JAMES

Oh my GOD! Screw fucking Burning Man! This is where it's at!

KENNETH

WHAT?!

GRANT

So glad you guys came!

KENNETH

WHAT?!

GRANT

We're so glad you came!

JAMES

Me too!

MILES

(toward James)

Can you feel it?

James nods, feral eyes.

MILES (CONT'D)

Good. Good.

KENNETH

(to James)

Are you okay?

James screws up his face. *Are you freaking kidding me????*

JAMES

I'm fucking GRRRRREEEEEEAAAAATTTTT!

KENNETH

I gotta pee.

Kenneth turns and threads his way through the undulating masses. James barely notices, too high.

INT. NIGHTCLUB, MEN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Kenneth, looking spent, pushes his way through a swinging door and into a surprisingly palatial bathroom.

Black and white tile. Red velvet walls. A long communal sink carved from a single slab of stone. Pill-shaped mirrors.

It's like something out of Twin Peaks.

Kenneth veers first toward the sink, runs some water, splashes his face. Outside, THUMPING EDM blares.

Kenneth looks to his own reflection, crestfallen.

Suddenly, a stall door behind him SMASHES open.

And a BURLY LIZARD PERSON dusted in white powder SURGES out of the stall, STUMBLES toward Kenneth.

LIZARD PERSON
(a reptilian hiss)
Your pitiful lack of focus...

The creature pauses, lifts a webbed paw to its gaping maw, rubs one white-dusted claw along the pale pink flesh above its jagged upper fangs.

LIZARD PERSON (CONT'D)
...will be your undoing.

All instinct, Kenneth grabs the creature by its scaly shoulders, SLAMS it head-first into the stone sink.

The creature SNAPS backward in puff of white, topples instantly to the marble floor with a meaty SMACK.

Kenneth staggers backward, stunned by his own brutality.

At his feet, the humanoid amphibian covered in what could only be cocaine wriggles and twitches.

KENNETH
I gotta get outta--

The door behind him CREAKS opens. The squall of MUSIC nearly blots out every other sound.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Watch out!

Kenneth runs for the door, barrels headlong into a tripping CLUB KID half his age.

CLUB KID
Easy there, geezer.

Kenneth tries to drag him away with him to safety.

KENNETH
You don't understand! They're...

He peers back over the Club Kid's shoulder, into restroom.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
...everywhere?

No they're not. There's no one there. No one at all.

INT. NIGHTCLUB, BANQUETTE - LATER

A small subset of the cocktail party crew have migrated from the dance floor to a private booth.

At the center of the banquette, behind two giant, sweating bottles of vodka sit Kenneth and James.

The tableau weirdly resembles da Vinci's "Last Supper".

JAMES
Oh, my god! Oh, my god, you guys. I don't do drugs. Like, ever. That's Kenneth's job. But this... This is insane! I would do this every day if I could. EVERY single day!

James flares his fingers in front of his face in time with the now slightly more muted MUSIC.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I just feel so, alive.

Terrorized and spent, Kenneth gulps down vodka.

KENNETH
I think I'm losing my mind.

James BRAYS a loud, manic laugh.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
No, seriously.

JAMES
(nodding furiously)
I KNOW!

James turns to Grant.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Where can we get more?

GRANT
I'll bring some to the office
tomorrow. I mean, today.

JAMES
The office? I can't go to work
today. Are you nuts?

GRANT
Aren't you supposed to be
rehearsing the demo with Jacob?
(pregnant pause)
Project Europe.

JAMES
Bah! Jacob. Who cares?!

And audible GASP goes up from all assembled.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(not noticing)
I'm going to stay up ALL NIGHT!

KENNETH
I think we already have.

JAMES
What? No way. What time is it?

Kenneth shakes his naked wrists toward James. No watch.

Grant tilts his glowing smart watch toward James.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Well, Jiminy Crickets. Let's get
some breakfast. I could eat a
horse!

GRANT
Don't you think you should--

JAMES
Should? C'mon, live a little. You
guys are always so... *serious*.

Kenneth's eyes say it all. *Pot. Kettle. Black.*

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - DAWN

The entire crew stumbles out into the daylight squinting
like vampires with ringing ears.

Kenneth and James bend left, leaning on each other.
Everyone else bears right.

JAMES
Alright-y then. Suit yourselves!

MILES
I've got a meeting with e-staff on-campus at 8:15. Gotta catch the 7:00 bus or I'm hosed.

GRANT
(to Kenneth)
Are you certain you can't convince him otherwise?

Kenneth clutches his temples, still spooked.

KENNETH
Yeah, right.

GRANT
(toward James)
Alright. I'll try to cover for you.

JAMES
Don't bother. It'll be fine. Jacob loves me.
(to Kenneth)
C'mon. Need carbs.

INT. DINER - EARLY MORNING

A red vinyl booth inside a grimy greasy spoon.

It's not the sort of place one would ever imagine either Kenneth or James frequenting.

JAMES
Wow. It's, like, *exactly* the same.

Kenneth nods, still massaging his skull.

KENNETH
Just... grosser.

JAMES
God, remember that time? During the dotcom?

KENNETH

That stupid party with stilt
walkers and the fire eaters and the
ice carvers?

(gravely)

And the cocaine.

JAMES

And those little lamb chops! And
the sushi! God, that was *such* a
different time.

KENNETH

You're not kidding.

A GRUFF WAITRESS dumps two plates down in front of them.
Pancakes and a breakfast burrito the size of your arm.

James pulls the pancakes closer, slathers them with syrup.

JAMES

I think that was the last time we
came here. After the after party.

KENNETH

When we were still dating. Still
so... young.

Kenneth ignores his burrito, blows steam from his coffee.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Doesn't your head feel like it's
about to explode?

JAMES

Nope. I feel... *fantatsic*.

James ditches the syrup, grabs his knife and fork, and
slices the whole stack in half and then in half again.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Now I understand. You and the
drugs. What I've been missing.

KENNETH

Um. I saw this thing. In the--

James shoves a massive wedge of flapjacks into his mouth.

JAMES

(orgiastic)

Mmmm! Mmmmmmmmm! Mmmmm!

Kenneth stares disbelievingly at him through steam.

KENNETH
There's something really, really
wrong with those guys.

James, caught in a carb reverie, ignores this.

JAMES
You're just jealous they all look
up to me.

KENNETH
There was one at their place, too.
One of those... things. I swear.

James shovels in another massive bite.

JAMES
(muffled)
What things?

KENNETH
The lizzzz-- Never mind.

While James continues wolfing down pancakes, Kenneth just
stares at his burrito.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Drink like fish. Dance all night.
Coked out out of thier--

JAMES
Coke?

KENNETH
Ready to crush it at an 8:15
meeting. I just can't keep up.

JAMES
(with his mouth full)
That's because you're old, darling.

KENNETH
Did I tell you Miles did my Meyers-
Briggs? Like, instantly?

JAMES
They all do that. Stupid McKinsey
parlor trick.

KENNETH
They all worked at McKinsey?

JAMES
Yeah, pretty much.

James takes another enormous bite and then points the sticky tines of his fork at Kenneth.

JAMES (CONT'D)
ENFP-T?

Kenneth nods. James stabs the fork into his own sternum.

JAMES (CONT'D)
ISTJ.

Kenneth nods again.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(almost inaudible)
We're a pretty easy read.

KENNETH
What?

James pauses, swallows.

JAMES
We're a pretty easy read.

KENNETH
Maybe so. But then he said this other thing.
(beat, quoting)
"The ability to clearly classify humans is a hallmark of higher intelligence."

James grins.

JAMES
Well, like you said. They're all a little bit on the spectrum.
(beat)
So, whaddaya wanna do today?

Kenneth looks at him like all he needs is a nap.

INSERT MONTAGE:

In a much slower, almost languid series of cuts, we watch as Kenneth and James:

-- Wander side-by-side through SF MOMA (James looking amped and Kenneth looking exhausted) --

-- Walk slowly past a series of boutiques (James looking wired and Kenneth looking spent) --

-- Shop the shoe section at a high-end department store
(James looking stoked and Kenneth looking beat) --

-- Peruse the monographs at a rare books store (James
looking intrigued and Kenneth looking wrecked) --

-- Sit down to dinner at a small brasserie (James looking
famished and Kenneth looking shot) --

END MONTAGE.

INT. BRASSERIE - NIGHT

James sets down his menu, pulls a starched napkin from a
silver ring, lays it down on his lap, smooths it out.

JAMES

Oooh, I got an idea. Why don't we
both play hooky again tomorrow and
just hang out all day at, like,
Blue Bottle or something. Pretend
like we're writing our great
American novels, you know?

Kenneth rubs his temples again, looks away.

KENNETH

God my head...

All of a sudden, everyone in the restaurant morphs into a
greedy lizard person.

Kenneth just stares as they ravenously gorge themselves on
overpriced *steak frites* and *foie gras*.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

...hurts.

James looks around, only sees a bunch of bitcoin
billionaires guzzling burgundy.

JAMES

What? Like you're too busy? Your
iCal is a wasteland.

Kenneth surveys the room again, looks like he's finally lost
his mind completely. No lizards.

KENNETH

I, uh...

(distractedly)

...I'm auditing Emma's Soc 167
class.

Kenneth reaches out, grabs his water, gulps it down.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Then lunch and, apparently, a
talking to from Laura.

James looks let-down, injured.

JAMES
You're going to Berkeley? With Em?

Kenneth's eyes still wash anxiously over the room.

KENNETH
Just her Intro to Virtual
Communities and Social Media class.

He sets his nearly empty water glass back down.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Because, you know, the big man will
be there.

James tries to catch Kenneth's eyes again.

JAMES
(annoyed)
What are you talking about?

Kenneth ignores this, looks past James.

KENNETH
Jacob. Your boss. He's speaking.

James picks up his napkin, slams it back down on the table.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
I'm sure it'll be the usual 'making
the world a better place' crap.

JAMES
Jacob is *speaking* at Berkeley?

Seeming only slightly relieved by the total absence of
lizard people, Kenneth finally locks eyes with James again.

KENNETH
Emma's hoping he'll give you, like,
a shout-out or something.

JAMES
And I'm not invited?

Kenneth shrugs, slips his own napkin onto his lap.

KENNETH
Your Google calendar is a jungle.

JAMES
How did I not know about this?

KENNETH
I'm sure one of us told you.

Kenneth distractedly grabs a handful of olives from the tiny bowl between them, wolfs them down like Valium.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(chewing)
Like, ages and ages ago.

James lets his hand fall to his knife, almost grips it.

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

James and Kenneth sleep sprawled under a tangle of bright white sheets. Outside, the sky is light blue with faint hints of orange and pink.

Sunrise.

Suddenly, an alarm clock on James's side of the bed blares: BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

No one stirs.

Then, James' phone starts bellowing a chirpy set of TONES.

Kenneth rolls over, stabs at his empty nightstand with an open palm. Still, the chorus of ALARMS continues. He rolls back over, nudges James.

KENNETH
Wake up, sleepyhead.

James GROANS, pulls a pillow over his head.

Kenneth reaches past James toward the nightstand, grabs James's phone, swipes it to snooze.

Then he grabs the alarm clock, fiddles with it with one eye open, having seemingly never operated it once.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
How do you get this thing--

James reaches a hand out, finds a button on the back of the alarm clock, taps it.

SILENCE.

Kenneth throws himself back down onto his side of the bed, stares briefly at the ceiling before nudging James again.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Hey, hey. Don't you have to get up?

JAMES

I don't wanna go to school today.

Kenneth looks out the window for a moment. The city is a glimmering sea of glass below them.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Now *my* head hurts.

KENNETH

Told ya so.

James rolls away from him, hogging the sheets.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Come on, get up.

JAMES

No.

Kenneth reaches over, rocks James back and forth.

KENNETH

Wake-y, wake-y. Time for you to stop living my life and start living yours again.

JAMES

But I like your life.

KENNETH

Don't you have some big--

James bolts upright in bed, wide-eyed.

JAMES

Rehearsal. Shit. That was yesterday!

James throws off the covers, swivels his feet to the floor.

JAMES (CONT'D)

How could you let me just blow them off like that? I'm gonna be in so much freaking trouble!

Kenneth tugs the sheets back over himself.

KENNETH
Relax. What'd Grant say? He'd 'try'
and cover for you.

JAMES
He said that? Oh, shit. I'm so
screwed.

James rushes to the bathroom.

We hear the SHOWER turn on. Kenneth reluctantly spins,
shoves his feet into a waiting pair of slippers.

KENNETH
No flapjacks this A.M. I presume?

JAMES
Never again! Just coffee. Black.

KENNETH
(shuffling away)
Yes, my liege.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Showered, caffeinated, and fully dressed, James scrambles
around the kitchen in a panic searching for something.

Kenneth lazily tops up his coffee while thumbing through
headlines on his iPad in a hooded bathrobe.

JAMES
Where the heck is it?!

KENNETH
Where's what?

JAMES
My *fucking* phone.

KENNETH
Where'd you last see it?

James GROANS.

JAMES
If I knew that--

KENNETH
Want me to call it?

JAMES
Already tried that.

Turning over a stack of mail, James sends papers flying.

KENNETH
I remember you had it at Miles and
Grant's place.

James freezes.

JAMES
God, that's right. Shit.

KENNETH
That can't be the last time you
used your phone.

JAMES
No, I think it was.

Kenneth sets his coffee mug down, marvels.

KENNETH
It's a minor miracle.

James turns, looks at his smart watch.

JAMES
I gotta go. I'll ask Grant if he's
seen it.

Kenneth shoots him an absentminded thumbs-up, returns to the
news of the world.

KENNETH
See you tonight?

James doesn't respond, sprints for the door.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Love...

The front door SLAMS.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
...you.

INT. LECTURE HALL - MORNING

Emma and Kenneth shuffle with a crowd of scruffy STUDENTS
into a vast, nearly full lecture hall.

Up on the stage sits a clear glass podium in front of a large, sheer, scrim-like screen slung from the ceiling.

EMMA

All I'm say is, if you guys end up getting divorced just like all the other straights, I'm gonna be so pissed. With you both.

KENNETH

Hold on, hold on. Who said anything about getting a--

EMMA

Dad did.

Kenneth stops dead in his tracks. The students behind him part ways, glaring.

KENNETH

He's found someone else, hasn't he?

EMMA

What? No.

KENNETH

It's someone at work, isn't it?

EMMA

No-uh!

(slowing)

He's just, like, sick of you two being on completely different planets all the time. While you're gallivanting around like some aimless emo stoner kid having an early-onset midlife crisis--

Kenneth picks up the pace.

KENNETH

Midlife crisis?

EMMA

So cliché. Both of you.

The lights in the lecture hall FLASH twice.

Kenneth and Emma look around quickly for seats. The nearest two are a row apart on opposite sides of the aisle.

Emma darts toward one.

EMMA (CONT'D)
To be continued.

The lights DIM. And Kenneth pauses.

As the lights come back up, everyone in the lecture hall is instantly transformed into a trendily-attired amphibian.

KENNETH
(weakly)
Emma?

Uproarious APPLAUSE.

Kenneth turns, looks to Emma. Eyes full of fear.

EMMA (CONT'D)
(mouthing)
Sit down.

Everyone's suddenly back. Just a bunch of clapping kids.

Kenneth blinks, staggers toward his seat just as a solitary figure emerges on-stage.

This is JACOB (early 40s). He sports a shaved head, deep tan, snake eyes, and expensively distressed jeans.

An unmistakeable douche-y billionaire tech-bro type.

Kenneth sits, pulls a MacBook Air out of his shoulder bag, flips the lid open, looks around again.

No lizards. Just Jacob up on stage.

INT. LECTURE HALL, STAGE - ON JACOB

Jacob steps behind the translucent lectern, lifts his arms imperiously. Like a conductor. Or puppet master.

The APPLAUSE instantly ceases.

But, instead of speaking, Jacob just stands there, surveys the room in icy silence. Then:

JACOB
Mindfulness.
(long pause)
That sense of being just one step
ahead of yourself. Able to observe
your own emotions from a slight
remove. Clinically. Coldly.
Rationally.

He takes a step back from the lectern.

Behind him, the sheer scrim fills with seemingly RANDOM IMAGES projected in rapid succession.

Close-ups of ears and eyes, planets, lips, aerial shots of urban sprawl, freeway overpasses, the Space Shuttle Columbia blowing up, the Twin Towers.

The Mĩ Lai Massacre.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Watching yourself. All of your
 reactions. Your default stances.
 Are you angry? Hurt? Threatened?
 Guilty? Vulnerable? Defensive? Full
 of fear? Primed to attack.

The screen behind him fills with nothing but white.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 What if you could just watch? And
 wait. And choose the right
 reaction. Select the effective
 stance - the emotionally sound
 course of action.

The screen fades to a vividly-colored MRI scan of the human brain in action.

And then: circuitry, silicon chips, server banks.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 In some spheres, it's called the
 Wise Mind. In Buddhism, it's No
 Self. A state of consciousness
 wherein one *transcends* the
 unwholesome aspects of the
 cognitive and egoic mind so that
 the sense of personal self drops
 away. Like a feather.

Jacob pauses at the center of the stage, arms wide again.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Well, my friends, what if you could
 crowd source all that shit?

ON KENNETH:

Lit by the glow of his laptop, Kenneth scowls.

The students all around him stare at Jacob, enraptured.
 They're clearly eating this shit up.

ON JACOB:

Jacob lowers his arms, reaches into his pocket, pulls out what appears to be a tiny, wafer-thin electronic device.

JACOB

I'm sure you've all been following
Mister Musk's very exciting work on
Neuralink, DOGE be damned.

Jacob holds the device aloft like it's the Hope Diamond.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Developing ultra high bandwidth
brain-machine interfaces to connect
humans and computers. Seamlessly.

ON KENNETH:

Kenneth types furiously, eyes cast downward.

ON EMMA:

Emma's eyes drift to her matching MacBook. Over her shoulder a text message POPS up. It reads:

I KNEW IT! TOTAL BS!

ON JACOB:

Clicking a button on a small device in his other hand, Jacob brings up an image again on the scrim behind him.

ON KENNETH:

Kenneth looks up to see James' face projected, thirty feet tall, on the scrim behind Jacob.

He's surrounded by YOUNG ENGINEERS in the same glitzy conference room from earlier.

JACOB

(from the stage)

I'm here today to give you, the
next generation of disruptors...

ON EMMA:

Closing her laptop, Emma flashes Kenneth a hand signal. *Eyes up front, old man!*

JACOB
...just a quick preview of
something brand new that we're
going to be launching *this* weekend.

ON JACOB:

Behind him, we see what appears to be some sort of surgical procedure happening in a blindingly white operating room.

JACOB
I can't say too much. Or I'd have
to kill each one of you.

Smattering of LAUGHTER.

JACOB (CONT'D)
But, suffice it to say, Neuralink
plus Chamber equals a potential
quantum leap in human-to-human
interaction. Global, real-time, AI-
powered emotional intelligence.
(beat)
Here, allow me to show you...

INT. LECTURE HALL, EXIT - LATER

Emma and Kenneth emerge from the lecture hall with very different expressions on their faces.

EMMA
You're just jealous because Dad's
part of something larger than
himself.

KENNETH
Give me a break. It's all just
smoke and mirrors nonsense.

A handful of YOUNG PROGRAMMERS give him the stink eye.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Do you *really* want social media to
control all your deepest emotions?

EMMA
Papa, it already *does*!

KENNETH
Well, I say no *fucking* thank you.

Emma shakes her head.

EMMA

Come to think of it, I'm pretty sure some of us wouldn't mind if you had a reset button.

KENNETH

Ouch.

He pauses, looks genuinely wounded.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Coffee?

EMMA

Can't. I'm late for Comparative Lit.

He SIGHS, a man stuck adrift in a world full of strangers. She smiles, steps closer, and kisses him on the forehead.

EMMA (CONT'D)

It's okay Grandpa. AI can't take your job if you don't have one.

She steadies her backpack, turns to go.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(over her shoulder)

Now remember, I will not *tolerate* a divorce. So you've got to work it out! Whatever it is. You hear me?

He nods, looking unconvinced.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, HALLWAY - LATER

Standing at the door to Kenneth and James's apartment, Laura presses the doorbell: DING, DONG.

The door opens with a WHOOSH, revealing Kenneth again - all decked out now in a white denim shirt with pearl buttons.

KENNETH

Well, howdy stranger.

LAURA

Greetings... burner?

Kenneth throws his arms around her and they hug for a long second before he pulls her inside.

KENNETH

Where you wanna go?

LAURA
I dunno. Zuni?

KENNETH
The chicken!

LAURA
The chicken.

KENNETH
Now you speak-a my language.

He turns to pull a jacket from a nearby coat rack.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Lemme get my--

His phone RINGS on the kitchen counter. The ring tone is
"Stop in the Name of Love" by The Supremes.

LAURA
That's just darling.

Kenneth scoops up the phone, unlocks it with his face.

KENNETH
(into the phone)
Hey. Everything okay?

SPLIT-SCREEN:

On James in a sound-proof phone booth at work and Kenneth at
the island in their kitchen with Laura in the background.

JAMES
No, no. Well. Yes, but no.

KENNETH
Well, which is it?

JAMES
I don't... I don't know. Everyone's
treating me so... weird. Giving me
the cold shoulder. Like I don't
even exist!

Kenneth rolls his eyes to Laura. *Boo-hoo!*

KENNETH
Maybe they finally figured out
you're fifty?

James looks around nervously.

JAMES

I don't think... I don't think it went well with Jacob yesterday.

KENNETH

Man, that d-bag is full of--

James cuts him off, lowers his voice:

JAMES

Listen, I need you to do me a huge, huge favor.

KENNETH

Shoot.

JAMES

Swing by Miles and Grant's place. Grant's working from home. See if he found my phone. I just texted him. But I didn't hear back.

KENNETH

Wait. How are you calling me now?

JAMES

With my watch, silly.

KENNETH

You can do that?

Now James rolls his eyes.

JAMES

Yes, grandpa.

KENNETH

Why does everyone keep calling me that?! What's their, uh--

JAMES

Your brain's a sieve. 501.

KENNETH

Okay, I'll go after lunch.

JAMES

Can you just go now, please? It's, like, *really* urgent.

James gestures toward someone outside the booth. *One sec...*

JAMES (CONT'D)
(barely audible)
There's a beta build of the new app
on my phone - Project Europe - and
I'd be up shit's creek if the wrong
person got a hold of it.

Kenneth mimes 'blah, blah, blah' hands to Laura.

KENNETH
Yeah, fine.

JAMES
Thank you. Just... hurry.

The line goes dead.

And Kenneth lowers his phone looking like someone accustomed
to being hung-up on, by James in particular.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, FIFTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Laura follows Kenneth down the hall toward the door to Miles
and Grant's unit.

LAURA
You're *such* a bad influence.

KENNETH
It wasn't me. It was them. I'd
never heard of the stuff before.

LAURA
And it's, like, speed-y?

KENNETH
Sorta. I dunno. It's not like
anything I've ever done before. At
first you feel great, like you're
way out ahead of your brain. In
touch with everything. And then,
bang. You short-circuit. Or I did.
James was fine for, like, hours.
(beat)
He even ate pancakes.

Laura slows, aghast. Kenneth nods gravely, reaches for the
doorbell. Instead of ringing it, he pauses.

KENNETH
Hmm.

The door is slightly ajar. Laura shoots Kenneth a
conspiratorial eyebrow flare.

LAURA
Well, go on then.

KENNETH
Really?

Laura lifts a hand to knock: BANG! BANG! BANG!

The door, CREAKS slowly inward. No one responds.

Inside, we see that the formerly immaculate apartment is now strewn with junk.

Empty bottles, broken champagne flutes, used napkins, half-eaten *hors d'oeuvres* as far as the eye can see.

Tiny blue pills litter the floor.

LAURA
Eew.

Kenneth pushes the door further open. It looks like the place has been full-on ransacked.

KENNETH
Um, Grant? Miles??

No reply.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Yoo-hoo? Anybody home?

SILENCE.

LAURA
Either these guys are secretly straight, or something's *really* wrong.

She presses past Kenneth, steps inside.

KENNETH
(hushed)
Wait. What are you doing?

LAURA
Snooping. C'mon.

As she CRUNCHES her way across the floor, Kenneth looks nervously up and down the hall before following her in.

INT. APARTMENT 501, GREAT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kenneth scurries across the detritus behind Laura.

LAURA
It's like a freaking bomb went off
in here.

Kenneth just nods.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Was it like this before?

KENNETH
Totally not.

He cautiously steps over what appears to be vomit-like slick
of pale blue ooze on the floor.

Laura looks into the rectangular ice bucket from earlier.
It's now crammed with overturned expensive bottles of
champagne, vodka, tequila, and gin.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Grant? Hellooo? It's just me,
Kenneth. From upstairs.
(beat)
Anybody home?

Kenneth veers right, heads for the perforated room divider.

LAURA
What is it?

Kenneth slows, peeks around it. No one's there.

KENNETH
Last night. At the club...

Turning, Kenneth tiptoes toward where James was holding
court with his Chamber underlings.

On a glass coffee table, he sees what appears to be the
corner of mobile phone sticking out from under a desiccated
slice of pepperoni pizza.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Never mind.

Laura spins to watch as Kenneth tries to flick the slice of
pizza off the phone with his middle finger.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
So. Dis. Gust. TING!

The slice finally peels off, revealing James' greasy phone.
The screen is now splintered mess.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Oh, man.

Laura crosses toward him.

LAURA

Is that it?

Kenneth cautiously picks up the phone with his sleeve.

KENNETH

Screen's smashed.

LAURA

He is not gonna like that.

She veers past him, ducks behind the room divider.

KENNETH

Wait. Where are you--

LAURA (O.S.)

Shhh!

Kenneth slips the phone into his pocket, swiftly scurries through the debris after Laura.

INT. APARTMENT 501, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Rounding the corner into a narrow hallway, Kenneth HISSES:

KENNETH

I got the phone. Can we just--

LAURA

(hushed)

I think I heard something.

Laura points down the hall toward a door that's slightly ajar. A pulsating, faint blue light emanates from behind it.

LAURA (CONT'D)

There.

Kenneth slows, squints toward the door.

In time with the pulsating light, we can barely make out a low, mechanical THRUMMING. It's almost heartbeat like.

KENNETH

So what? Let's go.

Ignoring him, Laura takes a couple more steps forward.

Kenneth hesitates, GRUMBLES, hurries up behind her.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(whispering)
I really don't think this--

Before he can finish, Laura reaches out for the door, slowly pushes it open.

Kenneth cranes his neck.

LAURA
What the what?

INT. APARTMENT 501, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is entirely devoid of decoration or furnishings other than a giant, glossy white, metallic, pill-shaped pod which seems to hover just slightly above the floor.

It's about the size of an old-fashioned dialysis machine. Or a fancy, high-tech coffin.

Laura steps toward it.

KENNETH
No, no...

A band of clear glass wraps around the center of the pod. Through the glass, we can see a bubbling bright blue liquid.

LAURA
The heck?

The neon blue glow shifts from dark to light and back again with the now much louder, heartbeat-like THRUMMING.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Tanning bed?

Laura reaches a hand out toward it.

KENNETH
Don't touch it.

Kenneth grabs her head.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Last night. I saw--

Laura leans her face closer to the glass. The liquid dims and then glows again, near blindingly.

LAURA
Wait a minute...

Kenneth lets go of her hand, leans in too.

Out of the ooze, a face appears. Grant's face!

Eyes closed, mouth open, he floats suspended.

Laura jumps back, looking like she's about to scream.
Kenneth covers her mouth, pulls her away.

KENNETH
Go, go, go, GO!

Together, they turn and sprint from the room.

But, instead of following them, we stay locked on Grant's
placid face floating behind glass.

His eyes WHIP open and blink twice.

Once with eyelids that close top-to-bottom and once with
eyelids that close side-to-side.

INT. FIFTH FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Kenneth and Laura run from of the apartment, SLAM the door
shut behind them.

LAURA
The hell was that?!

KENNETH
I don't know! I don't--

Another TECH-BRO TENANT rounds the corner ahead of them and
they both slow, trying to look natural.

He nods their way.

TECH-BRO TENANT
Yo.

KENNETH
Yo.

Kenneth and Laura round the next corner, race away.

LAURA
(under her breath)
Yo?!

KENNETH
I have got to get out of this
fucking building.

INT. ZUNI CAFE - MIDDAY

Still looking completely weirded the fuck out, Kenneth and Laura approach the host stand at this SF institution.

HOSTESS
Hello, welcome to...
(recognizing Kenneth)
Oh, hey.

KENNETH
(unusually abrupt)
Hey. Marcie, right?

She nods.

HOSTESS
Your usual--

Kenneth nervously scans the room.

Of course, everyone instantly morphs into a sea of lizard people grazing on multi-course expense account lunches.

LAURA
How 'bout there?

Laura points to a a patch of empty tables in the center of a large wedge-shaped bay window.

Kenneth wheels around wildly to find that all the lizards are gone. Now, it's just fancy foodies, cheek-to-jowl.

HOSTESS
Certainly. Follow me.

Kenneth staggers after her like a man having an acid flashback-induced panic attack.

KENNETH
Two Bloody Marys and the chicken
for two.

She nods, doesn't even bother with menus.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
The *frisée* salad with beets and
pistachios and, um, a side of the
marinated olives.

HOSTESS
Well, okay then.

 KENNETH
Sorry. Thank you.

She nods, departs.

Kenneth slips to his seat, looks furtively around.

Over Laura's shoulder, we notice a very familiar-looking waiter eyeing Kenneth from a distance.

Even without the vintage welders' goggles and dusty leather kilt, we can tell it's him: Ari from The Playa.

Kenneth, frazzled, doesn't clock it.

 KENNETH (CONT'D)
I *fucking* knew it.

Laura slowly sits.

 KENNETH
These guys, every single one of them and everyone in our building everyone who works with James and Chamber, everyone in social freaking media...

He leans in closer, bloodshot eyes full of fear.

 KENNETH (CONT'D)
 (hushed)
...they're all fucking autistic robot lizard people!

Laura screws up her face.

 KENNETH (CONT'D)
 (through clenched teeth)
Aliens.

 LAURA
You do remember that I work at Meta, don't you?

Kenneth's eyes dart around the room again.

 KENNETH
But you're in Marketing. Doesn't count.

LAURA
What are you looking for?

KENNETH
You saw that... *thing*.

LAURA
Yeah. I'm sure there's a perfectly
rational--

Kenneth grabs fork from the table, holds it to the light.

KENNETH
Is this real?

He stabs the tines into the tablecloth repeatedly.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Or this? Or this? Or--

Laura lets her gaze slowly drift to a nearby table full of
nervous-looking Tesla drivers.

LAURA
It was probably just some sort of
fancy sensory deprivation chamber.

KENNETH
Ugh. That word!

LAURA
Or like, you know, a cold plunge
machine thing.

Kenneth just stares her.

LAURA (CONT'D)
They're all the rage in Hollywood.

Kenneth loudly clears his throat: AHEM. He leans closer.

KENNETH
Okay, listen to me. There was,
like, this guy. On The Playa. Who
was, like, Jacob's co-founder or
CTO or something. He had ALL sorts
of theories. The lizards. The
clouds. You know which ones?

LAURA
(mockingly)
The ones that look like *flying*
saucers?

Kenneth nods. Laura scoffs.

In the distance, we notice the same waiter pass slowly by again. His eyes are fixed on Kenneth.

KENNETH
(under his breath)
He was saying we're *all* living in,
like, a simulation.

LAURA
Oh, jeez. That old chestnut?

KENNETH
That social media is poisoning our
minds, zapping our attention span.
Sucking our focus. Dumbing us down.
Turning us into a bunch of stupid,
easily manipulated, quickly-divided
little minions.

LAURA
Uh, duh.

We see the waiter stop by the bar to pick up two drinks.

KENNETH
Don't you get it?! Don't you see?!
(quick breath)
It all makes so much... *sense!*

The waiter turns and slowly approaches their table.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
They're spoon-feeding us this shit,
this drivel, so that we're too
divided to fight back!

Laura stares at him, not buying it.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
It's like they're, like,
terraforming our brains!

LAURA
They who?

The waiter pauses right next to Laura. On his tray: two
gigantic Bloody Marys.

WAITER
(way too calm)
Why, E.T., of course.
(MORE)

WAITER (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Two Bloody Marys?

Kenneth looks up, stunned.

KENNETH
 No, no, no. Hell, no!

The waiter, grinning, sets down Laura's drink first.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
 (beyond spooked)
 Ari?!

ARI
 Hey Dude. Thought I'd run into you
 here eventually.

Kenneth slowly begins to hyperventilate.

Ari, strangely, pulls out a chair and sits down.

ARI (CONT'D)
 You're right, this place rocks.

Kenneth blinks as if trying to make Ari disappear.

ARI (CONT'D)
 And, like I told you dude,
 everything happens for a reason.
 Not just on The Playa. *Everywhere.*

Kenneth holds up a trembling hand, one index finger
 extended, and takes a hilariously long pull on the straw
 sticking out of his Bloody Mary.

LAURA
 (toward Ari)
 I'm sorry. Who are you again?

Kenneth gulps, GASPS.

KENNETH
 (breathlessly)
 Laura, Ari. Ari, Laura.
 (to Laura)
 This is exactly the person I was
just telling you about.
 (to Ari)
 What are you even *doing* here?

ARI
I work here. Well, sort of. My
shift just ended.

LAURA
Wait a minute. Wait a minute.
Ari/Ari? The co-founder of--

He nods.

ARI
Yep.

LAURA (CONT'D)
And now you're waiting tables. At
Zuni?

He nods again. Kenneth continues draining his Bloody Mary.

ARI
Actually, I'm more of a busboy.
Working my way up. Learning the
ropes.

KENNETH
We need to talk.

Ari taps the table.

ARI
You're in luck.

LAURA
Sorry, I'm confused.

INT. ZUNI CAFE - LATER

All that's left on the table is the debris of a drunken
repast: empty wine bottles, a half-finished salad, chicken
bones, and James' splintered, greasy cellphone.

ARI
So, yeah. That's about it. As soon
as I found out what Jacob's real
deal was, that he was one of them,
I just bailed.

LAURA
Puh-lease. Jacob. An alien?

ARI
Well... he's not from around here.

Ari gives the now nearly empty space a quick once-over twice before WHISPERING:

ARI (CONT'D)
Europa, man.

LAURA
I thought he was Canadian.

ARI
(conspiratorially)
No, the moon. Of Jupiter.

Laura slaps an open palm to her forehead.

ARI (CONT'D)
They look like us. They talk like us. Hell, they might as well be us. But they're different, man. When Mars died, they migrated to Europa. And then they sucked it dry, too. Now its oceans are covered in miles and miles of ice.

Kenneth searches the table for more wine.

ARI (CONT'D)
My hunch is they've been slowly setting up shop here for decades.

KENNETH
How do you mean?

ARI
Well, you called it. This place is literally crawling with 'em. Every single day.
(beat)
At first they just wanted us gone. You know, Goebbels, Oppenheimer. That didn't work out. Apparently, we're hard to snuff out. So, then they thought, hey, maybe we could be useful. Cheap labor.

Kenneth and Laura simply stare back.

ARI (CONT'D)
If they could distract us enough. Amuse us enough. Get us to let our guard down long enough.
(MORE)

ARI (CONT'D)
 (then, hushed)
 Enter Jimmy Stewart. Rod Serling.
 Boris Karloff. Jim Henson. John
 Denver. Cher.

LAURA
 No, no, no--

ARI
 (continuing)
 Steve Jobs, David Lynch. Jack
 Dorsey, Zuck, Elon.
 (beat, scoffing)
 Mars?! Gimme a break. He's just
 fucking homesick.

LAURA
 Enough.

ARI
 Keanu Reeves, Anderson Cooper, Lady
 Gaga, Vanna White... the list goes
 on and on and on!

KENNETH
 Peter Thiel?

Ari nods deeply.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
 Sam Altman?

ARI
 Duh.

Laura loudly SCREECHES her chair back from the table.

ARI (CONT'D)
 They've been living among us, our
 next door neighbors...

KENNETH
 In my case literally.

ARI
 ...for decades. Poisoning our minds
 with all this inane fucking
 nonsense so that we don't notice as
 the lobster pot just--

James' splinted phone BUZZES. Only Ari doesn't flinch.

The caller: Jacob.

KENNETH

Shit! What are we doing?! We've got to warn him! Warn James!

LAURA

Don't tell me you actually believe any of this... claptrap.

Kenneth looks to Ari who looks back to James' phone.

ARI

Answer it.

KENNETH

No way. James'll know. He's got his watch on.

ARI

I should answer. Blow Jacob's mind.

Ari reaches for the phone. Kenneth bats his hand away. The call goes to voicemail. Suddenly, a text CHIMES through.

Kenneth picks up the phone like it's a bomb.

KENNETH

Shit. He's texting.

LAURA

What is he--

KENNETH

(reading)

"Hey there. Good session. Thanks for coming in. You had us worried for a minute there."

ARI

Dickhead.

KENNETH

Oh, no! James is writing back.

(beat, doing James)

"Thank YOU!"

(looking up)

All-caps.

(reading again)

"Sorry again about yesterday. Won't happen again ever."

BUZZ! A new text comes in.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(reading again)
*"All good. Looking forward to
tomorrow! History, my brother."*

ARI
Gag.

Kenneth looks up, sets the phone down. All the color drains
from his face.

KENNETH
"The Final Countdown."

LAURA
Gimme that.

Laura grabs the phone, scrolls.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Lightning bolt. Electric guitar.
Champagne bottle emoji?
(beat)
The heck does that even--

Ari leaps to his feet.

ARI
I need decent WiFi. ASAP.

EXT. DOWNTOWN SAN FRANCISCO - CONTINUOUS

Kenneth and Laura speed-walk behind Ari as he scrolls and
swipes through screens of code on James' cracked phone.

ARI
Dude, this is bad.

At every corner, passing TECH WORKERS eye them menacingly.

ARI (CONT'D)
Like, really bad.

Laura glares at Kenneth.

LAURA
Honestly?

KENNETH
He's just taking a look.

ARI
Fuck me. It's like auto-correct.
But for emotions.

KENNETH

Huh?

Ari stops dead, wheels around, holds screen toward them.

ARI

They're scraping the platform and using AI and some sort of super-sophisticated sentiment analysis engine to short-circuit your amygdala and override your fear response. Your everything.

Laura rolls her eyes, presses past them both.

KENNETH

And that's bad because...

ARI

Because it's like a freaking puppet show, man. No free will. Human beings on total remote control!

Ari spins back around, falls in behind Laura.

ARI (CONT'D)

(still scrolling)

But I think we have options.

Kenneth just stands there as every passing pedestrian abruptly mutates into a well-dressed reptile.

KENNETH

Guys? Guys!

Kenneth, stuck briefly again in a fear-induced peyote fever dream, jogs off after Ari.

LAURA

Do not tell me you're listening to this... busboy!

Like a magic spell, Laura's words suddenly flip every passing lizard back into warm-blooded, VC-backed human.

Ari looks up, slows. Did he see the lizards too?

ARI

I, uh, left a bug in the code base. In incognito mode.

He clicks the phone off, starts walking again.

ARI (CONT'D)
If we can get behind their
firewall--

Laura GROANS.

ARI (CONT'D)
I can snatch every account's access
tokens and then run a script to log
into all sixty million accounts at
once. Forcing every account to like
and dislike the same post, like,
forty thousand times a minute.

Kenneth stares at him, comprehending nothing.

ARI (CONT'D)
Hobbling their AWS and their local
infrastructure. Forcing the system
to automatically log every user out
and then invalidate their tokens.
So that every user has to log back
in manually and change their
password.

Ari turns, thrusts Kenneth back James' phone.

ARI (CONT'D)
It'll be like they DDoS-ed
themselves!

LAURA
Unbelievable.

Up ahead looms Kenneth and James' building. Kenneth and
Laura veer toward it.

ARI
Then we query the API, make them
think we stole something critical.
They'll have to disable incognito
mode. Removing anyone's ability to
post anonymously. Problem solved.

Ari does a quick double-take.

ARI (CONT'D)
Wait a minute, dude. You live
there?!

KENNETH
I know. Gross.

Now Laura stops dead.

ARI
No flipping wonder!

LAURA
(under her breath)
The guy in the thing, the tube.
Twelve o'clock.

Kenneth looks past Laura to see Grant warming up in high-end running gear just outside the entrance.

ARI
That place is, like, Moonbase Alpha
for these freaks.

KENNETH
Yeah. Yeah, it is.

Kenneth reaches out, grabs Laura by the shoulders, pushes her with him around the corner and out of sight.

Ari looks to Grant, then to Kenneth and Laura.

ARI
Oh, snap.

He sprints off after them.

ARI (CONT'D)
(to Kenneth)
Slow down. Hand me your phone.

KENNETH
No.

ARI
Now!

Run/walking again, Kenneth shoves one hand into his pocket.

LAURA
Are you kidding me?

The three of them skid to a stop.

Kenneth hands Ari his phone now. Laura just stares.

LAURA
(to Kenneth)
Will you please just stop?

Ari hits a button on Kenneth's phone, flips the screen over, close to Kenneth's face. It unlocks.

ARI
One more little...

He scrolls through a couple screens, thumbs another button, looks back up to Kenneth expectantly.

Nothing happens.

ARI (CONT'D)
(seeming relieved)
Okay. Cool. You pass.

Ari hands him his phone back, spins back around, takes off.

ARI (CONT'D)
(to Kenneth)
Is there any way you can get me in there? Behind their firewall?

Laura puts her hands on her hips. *What the actual fuck?*

ARI (CONT'D)
Can't be VPN. On-campus.

Behind Kenneth, Grant sprints by, oblivious.

LAURA
It was just a flipping tanning bed.

Kenneth wants to believe that. Can't. Looks to Ari.

KENNETH
There's a thing there, tomorrow night. A launch party.

LAURA
Don't do it.

Kenneth lifts his phone, looks at his calendar.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
7:30. I was invited. But I replied 'Maybe'. What an asshole.

Ari pauses at an alleyway, turns back around.

ARI
Don't look for me.

Ari looks furtively both directions.

ARI (CONT'D)
I'll find you.

As he shuffle/runs away, Laura just wags her head side-to-side dismissively.

LAURA

For how much you spend on therapy,
you could not be *more* insane.

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - EVENING

The sun has set, and James stands again at their kitchen island wearing the same denim apron furiously whisking something in a silver mixing bowl.

His therapy.

KENNETH

What do you mean they're coming
up?! Why didn't you ask me?

JAMES

Ask you? Now I need permission to
have my friends over?

KENNETH

That's not what I-- It's just--

JAMES

Thanks for forgetting to pick up my
phone by the way.

Kenneth freezes, reflexively covers his pants pocket.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You never listen to me.

KENNETH

You never listen to ME!

JAMES

I ask for one thing--

KENNETH

Laura was here. I got distracted!

JAMES

When are you not distracted? Hand
me the Gruyere.

Kenneth stares at him blankly.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(pointing)

The cheese.

Kenneth bites his lip, slide the Gruyere toward James.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Anyway, doesn't matter. I.T. set me
up with a new phone.

The doorbell rings: DING! DONG!

Kenneth nearly jumps out of his skin. James SIGHS.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Like you need speed.

The bell rings again: DING! DONG!

JAMES (CONT'D)
Hello? Doorbell.

KENNETH
Fine.

Kenneth turns, heads for the door.

James pulls a baking pan out of the oven.

Beat.

Kenneth stands frozen at the door.

JAMES
Open it, silly.

Kenneth draws a breath, reaches out, grabs the doorknob, slowly pulls the door open to reveal Grant standing on the threshold with Miles right behind him.

GRANT
Well, well. It appears we're not
alone in the universe after all.

Grant THRUSTS Kenneth a bottle, pushes his way inside.

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - LATER

Sitting at the island, Grant spears a wedge of cheese with a spade-shaped blade while gazing coldly at Kenneth.

GRANT
So how is it exactly that you
happen to know Ari?

Kenneth, taken aback, STAMMERS:

KENNETH
I'm... I'm sorry?

GRANT
Ari. What's the connection?

Kenneth looks to Miles. Miles slowly crosses his arms.
He's ripped.

GRANT (CONT'D)
I saw you. This afternoon. Outside
the building. With him.

JAMES
Wait. What now?

Grant nods.

JAMES (CONT'D)
The Ari? Here?

Grant and Miles both nod in unison.

KENNETH
He's just some rando I met at The
Burn. Ran into him again. At Zuni.

Grant shoots him a menacing stare.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
He works, like, there.

GRANT
At Zuni?

KENNETH
Yes. As a freaking waiter.

GRANT
How the mighty are fallen.

MILES
(to Kenneth)
Dude, that guy's no good. Total
nutcase. Conspiracy theory freak.
(beat)
Even though his code is core to--

James SLAMS his wine glass down loudly on the marble. Only
Grant doesn't flinch.

JAMES
 (to Kenneth)
 You went to Burning Man with Ari?

KENNETH
 Not *with* him. He was just *there*!
 All sorts of interesting people--

GRANT
 Domestic fucking terrorists.

Kenneth turns to him. *What?!*

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Not only is he behind the most significant hack of our platform - entirely out of spite and greed, I might remind you - but he's also sold state secrets to Iran. Shared plans for disabling the U.S. power grid on Discord. And is an all-around class-A nut job on every conceivable level.

(beat)
 I wouldn't be surprised if he was casing our building to blow it up.

Kenneth draws a breath, searches for some way to spin it.

MILES
 There's even a rumor that he put a bounty out on Tim Cook's head for some whackadoodle reason. Tim?!
 He's, like, the nicest guy in tech.

James looks at Kenneth. Angry and disappointed.

KENNETH
 I don't know about any of this.
 He's actually pretty fascinating.
 Not like all you corporate slaves of the mother ship.

Grant narrows his (eerily reptilian) eyes.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
 A free thinker. A free spirit.
 That's all. Plus, I had no idea he used to be one of you.

GRANT
 What's that supposed to mean?

KENNETH
You know *exactly* what I mean.

JAMES
No, I don't.

KENNETH
Tech-bros. Turning users into the product. Mining every interaction for commercial value. Building an economy of constant distraction. So, yeah, he used to be one of you. But not anymore. And neither am I.

JAMES
Well then, I think you should leave.

Beat.

KENNETH
What?!

JAMES
You heard me. Get out.

KENNETH
But--

JAMES
We're here to celebrate something that I dedicated six months of my life to. My blood, sweat and tears. And look at you. You don't have the *slightest* idea what I'm even talking about, do you?!

Miles sets down his napkin, stands.

MILES
I'm sorry, maybe we should--

JAMES
No, no. You guys stay. At least you get me.

Grant nods, seeming pleased as punch to stay.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(back to Kenneth)
I'm tired of being the only one pulling my weight in this relationship.
(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)
While you gallivant around with
fucking Ari? The fucking terrorist?

Kenneth stares sheepishly at his feet.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I don't care where you go, but I
don't want you here. Out. Now.

KENNETH
Please--

James vehemently points to the door.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
I do know what you're talking
about! Project Europe. The launch.
Tomorrow!
(beat, quoting Ari)
Letting users interact with each
other anonymously in real time.
Like Clubhouse. But using AI to
parse your emotions and autotune
your responses.

James stares, shocked by the detail of Kenneth's response.

JAMES
It's nothing like Clubhouse!
(beat)
OUT!

Kenneth draws a breath. James cuts him off:

JAMES (CONT'D)
And if you spend more than three
hundred dollars a night, I'm going
to cancel all of your fucking
credit cards! You hear me?

EXT. THE MISSION - NIGHT

Kenneth wanders alone past expensive-looking restaurants and
bars overflowing with smartly-dressed YOUNG STRIVERS.

In the sky above, we can barely make out the vaguely
spaceship-like clouds still hovering over the city.

He's got his AirPods in.

KENNETH
Aliens?!

A NERVOUS COUPLE look up from their phones as they pass.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
How could I have been so stupid? No
more drugs. No more booze. No more
Burning Man. No more--

Kenneth stops in his tracks, pads his pockets as a phone
BUZZES from somewhere on his person.

The first phone he pulls out is James's cracked phone.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Dammit!

He pockets it again, reaches into his jacket, holds his
phone to his face to unlock it.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(into his AirPods)
Hello? Hello? Hello!

GOOGLERS seated outside a nearby bistro stare at him like
he's an elegantly dressed homeless person.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Are you there? Hello?!

LAURA (O.S.)
(on speaker)
I'm here. But I can barely--

KENNETH
Hold on. One sec.

He yanks out his AirPods.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Goddamn things never work.

LAURA (O.S.)
We gotta stop him.

Kenneth shoves his AirPods into his pocket.

KENNETH
Oh, now you--

LAURA (O.S.)
I just did some research. That dude
is bad news. Bad!

KENNETH
I told you.

LAURA (O.S.)
Like, Guantanamo level bad.

KENNETH
He can't be that--

LAURA (O.S.)
Why didn't you just give James back
his flipping phone?

KENNETH
I don't know. Wait, how'd you--

LAURA (O.S.)
He called. He's pissed.

KENNETH
Who?

LAURA (O.S.)
James! Listen to me.

KENNETH
Why do I always have to go and--

LAURA (O.S.)
Listen.

KENNETH
Little fucking green men?!

Another YOUNG COUPLE passes by, eying Kenneth anxiously.

LAURA (O.S.)
I think he means it. He's gonna
Hack in, disable Chamber. Bring it
down. Undo all of James' work.

Kenneth starts walking again. Aimlessly.

LAURA (O.S.)
We can't let him do that. We need
to stop him from hacking back in.

KENNETH
But, we're not even programmers.

A gaggle of PROGRAMMERS peel around him like a wave.

PROGRAMMER
Not in a centillion years.

Kenneth GLARES back.

KENNETH
Can I crash at your place?

LAURA (O.S.)
No.

KENNETH
Please.

LAURA (O.S.)
No. I've got a date.
(beat)
Plus, you my dear need a proper
wake-up call.

KENNETH
What I need is room service.

LAURA (O.S.)
I'm speaking metaphorically.

KENNETH
I know. God, I'm so sorry I dragged
you into all of--

LAURA (O.S.)
Here's what we do. Pick me up at my
place around five, five thirty. We
go get Em, head to the thing
together. All three of us.

Kenneth SIGHS deeply, slows in front of a trendy bar.

KENNETH
What thing?

LAURA (O.S.)
The stupid launch, dummy. The one
you told freaking Ari about.

KENNETH
Oh... *right*.

LAURA (O.S.)
We see him, we do whatever it takes
not to ruin James' day, capiche?

KENNETH
Capiche.

LAURA (O.S.)
Good. God, you two would be lost
without me. Absolutely lost.

CLICK. Laura hangs up.

And Kenneth gazes into the warm light spilling from the crowded bar. His eyes soften. *Maybe just one...*

INT. TRENDY BAR - LATER

Kenneth sits slumped at one end of the now nearly empty bar, entirely alone.

Faint, vaguely IRONIC MUSIC fills the air.

A mustachioed MIXOLOGIST spins a perfectly clear block of ice block inside a crystal mixing glass before dipping a pipette into it and drawing up a tiny bit of liquid.

He dabs the pipette onto his tongue, nods to himself, turns, adds a tiny dash of exotic-looking bitters.

KENNETH
(slurring/sloshed)
You guys are so funny.

MIXOLOGIST
Thank you?

KENNETH
Lemme ask you a question.

MIXOLOGIST
Hit me.

The mixologist pours Kenneth's drink, slides it across the bar. Kenneth scoops it up, takes a greedy sip.

KENNETH
Delightful.

The mixologist bends to grab some glasses to dry.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Is it safe to assume, sir, that you
are not a millennial?

MIXOLOGIST
Nope. Solid Gen-X.

KENNETH
Not a coder?

MIXOLOGIST
I can barely get my DVR to work.

KENNETH

Perfect. Now, this particular establishment is relatively *popular* with the younger set, correct?

The mixologist nods.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

And I imagine that, on any given night, nearly *all* of your patrons work at either Google, Apple, Meta, Anthropic, or Chamber, right?

MIXOLOGIST

Uh, yeah?

Kenneth takes another sip, savors it.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

So, you probably spend a lot of time talking to these *hilariously* pampered infants, correct?

MIXOLOGIST

Well, I wouldn't say--

KENNETH

Suppose someone told you that every single one of them - with their matching Everlane get-ups and their on-campus haircuts, the stupid fucking buses, insane catering, massage therapists, bone broth bars, color-coordinated bicycles, and the fucking scooters... God, the fucking scooters--

(gathering himself)

What if someone told you that every single last one of them was a little green man from Mars?

MIXOLOGIST

Bah.

Kenneth takes another long sip.

KENNETH

But believable, yeah?

MIXOLOGIST

I guess you could say a lot of them are pretty much on the--

Kenneth suddenly jolts forward.

KENNETH
Hold that thought!

Kenneth fishes around in his pockets again, yanks out his phone, stares at it bleary-eyed before answering:

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Hello? This is Kenneth.

SPLIT-SCREEN:

On Kenneth on his bar stool and Ari seated at a cluttered desk in a darkened loft full of jury-rigged electronics.

ARI
(hushed)
Yo, man. I got another way in! My pal, Eugene--

KENNETH
I'm sorry. Who is this?

ARI
Dude, it's me. Ari.

KENNETH
Oh, no, no, no. NOPE!

ARI
I've got it all worked out. These fuckers are going down!

KENNETH
Ixnay on the fuckers-nay. Cease and desist. You hear me? They told me all about you. What you've done. You, you, you... terrorist.

Ari SIGHS, as if having heard this a zillion times.

ARI
Propaganda, man. Fake news. Don't let 'em get to you.
(beat)
Wait. You didn't squeal did you?

KENNETH
Noooo! But my partner, my husband, James. He kicked me out of the fucking house because of you.

ARI
Well, then, he's probably one of them by now.

KENNETH
Don't say that.

ARI
Listen.

Ari takes a quick SLURP of Cup-O-Noodles.

ARI (CONT'D)
There's a little trick. To tell
who's who. On which side.

Kenneth looks up at the mixologist. He lifts his wrist,
pokes his watch. *Closing time, man.*

ARI (CONT'D)
All you gotta do is get a hold of
their phone, right? They ALWAYS
have a fucking phone. iOS, never
Android. Go to settings, turn off
Location Services.

KENNETH
And?

ARI
And, you'll see.
(beat)
Bingo-bang-o. Cuts them off from
the motherfucking mother ship!

Ari takes another sloppy gulp of ramen.

KENNETH
The mother ship?

ARI
(mouth full of noodles)
The clouds, dude! Turn off Location
Services and they fold like paper
tigers. Can't phone home.
(beat)
Anyway, man. See you at 7:30.

KENNETH
No, no. Wait.

CLICK. The line goes dead.

EXT. BAY BRIDGE - THE NEXT DAY

Kenneth, blisteringly hungover, speeds across the Bay Bridge
in the Porsche Cayenne with Emma in the passenger seat and
Laura between them in the back.

EMMA

But that's just... dumb.

KENNETH

I know. I know!

EMMA

You gave him Dad's phone?

Laura nods vigorously.

KENNETH

He just seemed so--

LAURA

Straightjacket-y?

Kenneth steps on the gas. Up ahead, the city looms.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Doesn't matter. We need to stop him, or else.

(deep breath)

Em, you go find Dad. Tell him you Ubered over or something. Pretend you don't know he kicked Papa out.

EMMA

(to Kenneth)

He kicked you out?!

Kenneth just nods, bloodshot eyes on the road.

LAURA

Ask him to make sure that Papa and I are still on the guest list.

EMMA

But--

LAURA

He'll probably have to go backstage and, like, warm up or something.

Kenneth SQUEALS across three lanes of traffic just like James did earlier. Emma braces, both hands on the dash.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Text me once he's gone.

EMMA

Why not Papa?

KENNETH
I forgot my phone. At the hotel.

EMMA
Hotel?

LAURA
Unbelievable.
(head wag)
We duck in, try to blend in. Try to
find Ari before it's too late.

EMMA
Who the hell is Ari?

KENNETH
Language.

LAURA
(to Emma)
The cray-cray hacker dude.

In the dark of the Treasure Island tunnel, Kenneth reaches
past Emma to pop open the glove box.

KENNETH
God, my head's killing me.

LAURA
Trick Dog is never a good idea on
an empty stomach.

Kenneth pulls out a pack of mints, shakes a couple into his
mouth, dry swallows.

Laura notices immediately that they're both blue.

LAURA
Oh, no you didn't.

KENNETH
Hair of the--
(gagging)
Ugh! These taste terrible!

Emma calmly gestures toward the windshield.

EMMA
Um.

Kenneth slams on the brakes, barely misses a minivan.

KENNETH
Clarity. I need CLARITY!

Emma and Laura swap a nervous, condescending glance.

EXT. CHAMBER HQ - EARLY EVENING

Kenneth, Laura, and Emma run/walk toward massive former ship factory turned gleaming tech company headquarters.

A single massive circular cloud hovers over the roof.

KENNETH
(re: the cloud)
God, those stupid things.
(jumpy/speed-y)
Okay, okay, okay. Stay calm. Stay
calm. Stay--

LAURA
We are calm.

KENNETH
(to Emma)
Invite?

Emma flashes him her phone.

EMMA
I'll make sure you're still on the
guest list when I sign in.

KENNETH
What'd you text Dad?

EMMA
That I Ubered over. Just like--

LAURA
How did he sound?

EMMA
Weird. Depressed?

KENNETH
Probably just nerves. He hates--

EMMA
Didn't sound like himself.

Kenneth nervously scans every person they pass, seeming to imagine they'll just happen to wander into Ari again.

Laura reaches into her jacket, pulls out a bundle of zip ties, thrusts them toward Kenneth.

KENNETH

Oh, no, no...

EMMA

What are those for?

Laura points to Emma's purse.

LAURA

You still have the thing?

EMMA

What thing?

LAURA

Your Taser. I gave you.

KENNETH

(to Emma)

You have a Taser?!

EMMA

You don't know how boys can be these days.

LAURA

Just keep it handy.

EMMA

In case of what?!

KENNETH

In case of what?!

Laura, exasperated, turns to see a NEWS CREW pulling gear out of a white van with a telescoping transmission dish.

Amongst them stands Ari in an obviously paste-on beard.

LAURA

Bingo.

Ari grabs a crate of cables, heads toward the building.

Laura slowly tucks the zip ties behind her back. Kenneth spins away, covers his face with one hand.

KENNETH

Shit, shit, shit.

EMMA

Guys?

KENNETH

(to Laura)

You were right.

(MORE)

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(to Emma)
Go, go. Get in there!

EMMA
Okay. God. Take a chill pill.

KENNETH LAURA

I did! He did.

Emma jogs off toward the entrance, glaring back at them both but trying to look as inconspicuous as possible.

KENNETH
What do we do now?

Laura slips the zip ties into her pocket.

LAURA
Stop him. C'mon.

She grabs him by the elbow, drags him toward the building, trying to blend into the crowd.

KENNETH
(quietly)
God, my brain is going, like, a
zillion miles an minute.

LAURA
Well, that's... new.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Emma pauses at the entrance, looks back.

There's Ari approaching with the bins of cables. He seems full-tilt calm, cool, and collected.

EMMA
Actually, he's kinda cute.

She presses through the tall glass doors.

EMMA (CONT'D)
For a terrorist.

As she continues on toward a sleek reception desk, Ari catches the door with his heel, spins, heads inside.

Emma slows again, flashes a RECEPTIONIST (20s) her phone.

EXT. CHAMBER HQ - SAME

Still outside, Kenneth and Laura watch Ari as discretely as possible as he steps into the lobby.

Laura's phone BINGS.

She whips it out, unlocks it with her face.

LAURA

Okay. She's in. We're on the list.

She looks up, back toward Kenneth.

LAURA (CONT'D)

She says James didn't even smile.

KENNETH

Maybe he thinks she's on my side now or something.

LAURA

Nah, they've always been closer.

KENNETH

Thanks a lot.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, LOBBY - SAME

Kenneth and Laura pass through the same glass doors and veer toward the same reception desk.

Laura flashes her invite. The receptionist scans it.

Behind the receptionist: a vast, lushly-appointed, airy open-plan office space and a smattering of TECH WORKERS.

Scandinavian sectionals. Spend-y lounge chairs. Vivid poufs. Well-tended exotic plants. Kombucha and nitro coffee bars.

Basically all the standard Silicon Valley HQ trappings gathered in what was once a lofty manufacturing space.

At the center of it all: a two story tall, hive-like Corten steel tank with irregular laser-cut glass portals through which we can see all manner of sea life swimming.

KENNETH

This place.

The receptionist gestures grandly for them to enter.

RECEPTIONIST

Alright, you're all signed in.

LAURA

Do we, um, need badges?

RECEPTIONIST

No, no. The NDA you just signed allows us to track your whereabouts via the SIM card on your mobile phone for the duration.

Kenneth narrows his eyes.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Of the event.

Beyond her, we see Ari scaling a set of cantilevered stairs toward a mezzanine lined with glass conference-rooms.

From the ceiling above him dangles a massive, rusted steel ball hook on rusted tracks that span the entire space.

KENNETH

Of course it does...

INT. CHAMBER HQ, MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS

Kenneth and Laura step into the main hall looking nervous doing their best to act natural.

Above the cauldron/aquarium, a thick glass footbridge leads to a cantilevered circular glass stage.

Faint TECHNO plays over invisible speakers.

LAURA

You've never been here?

Kenneth wags his head side-to-side, finally spying a long steel table lined with crystal champagne flutes.

LAURA (CONT'D)

That says a lot.

Kenneth veers toward the bar like a moth to the flame.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Oh, no you don't.

She grabs him by the elbow again, points discretely to Ari as he crests the stairs to the mezzanine and disappears.

KENNETH

Right, right. You go that way.

He points to a nearer set of identical stairs.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
I'll go this way. We cut him off.

Laura nods. *That actually kinda...*

LAURA
Whatever you do, do not let him
touch anything. No laptops. No
phones. No nothing.

She nods, snatches a champagne flute from a passing WAITER
and takes off, saying nothing.

Kenneth watches her as she goes.

She pounds the champagne, sets the glass back down on
somebody's workstation, starts climbing.

Kenneth wheels around to climb the nearest flight.

But then, BANG. He runs right into Jacob.

JACOB
Well, hello there. You must be
Kenneth. I've heard so much.

Kenneth STAMMERS blankly.

JACOB (CONT'D)
So. Very. Much.

KENNETH
Ja-Ja-Jacob. So nice to, um,
finally meet you/meet you.

JACOB
Ditto.

Jacob wraps one arm around Kenneth, drags him away from the
stairs, toward the bar.

JACOB
I'm so glad you actually came. You
should be so proud of James. So
proud. What he and his team have
achieved... it's truly momentous. A
major milestone in the evolution of
human interaction.

KENNETH
Why do you all talk about us like
we're some foreign species?

JACOB
Well, you are. Aren't you?

He thrusts Kenneth a flute of champagne.

Over Jacob's shoulder, Kenneth spies Grant gliding in past the receptionist like he owns the place.

JACOB (CONT'D)
I mean, after six million years of evolution...

Kenneth just stares as Grant calmly turns and scales the same stairs Laura just crested.

JACOB (CONT'D)
...we still know so very little about each other. Yes?

Kenneth still stares past Jacob, anxiously tracking Grant.

JACOB (CONT'D)
But no worries.

Jacob SMACKS Kenneth between the shoulder blades.

JACOB
That changes today.

Before Kenneth can utter a word back, someone who looks an awful lot like ELON MUSK waves toward Jacob.

Jacob, waving back, veers away.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Enjoy James's night.
(winking)
History, in the making...

As Jacob saunters over to Elon, Kenneth gulps down the whole flute, slams it back down on the bar, takes off after Grant.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, MEZZANINE RAILING - CONTINUOUS

At the top of the stairs, Kenneth slows, winded.

No sign of Laura or Grant or Ari. Just darkened glassy conference rooms and a vast open-plan workspace.

KENNETH
C'mon, c'mon. Where the hell are you, you spray-tanned--

Suddenly, he catches a glimpse of Grant's silhouette moving moving slowly through a cluster of Aeron chairs.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Gotcha.

Two transparent teleprompters slowly descend from the ceiling toward the glass stage suspended over the cauldron.

Kenneth takes off running full-bore.

But then he skids to a stop at the sight of James down below. He stands at the far end of the footbridge to the translucent stage, staring at his phone.

For a second, it looks like Kenneth wants to call out to him, to warn him. But, then he catches another glimpse of Grant's rippling reflection in his peripheral vision.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

Dammit.

Suddenly, the lights go down and a strangely familiar series of ELECTRONIC TONES fills the air.

As Kenneth turns and through the darkness, the TONES build and build. Then we hear an equally familiar SYNTHETIC CLARION CALL, repeated over and over again.

God, what is that song?!

Kenneth, hunched, runs from darkened conference room to conference room in a desperate search for Grant.

Over the speakers: a faint COUNTDOWN.

And then the SMASH of drums and THUNDEROUS GUITARS.

Kenneth slows. Still no sign of Grant or Laura.

An irritatingly recognizable EUROPOP VOICE fills the air:

EUROPOP VOICE (V.O.)

*We're leavin' together.
But still it's farewell.
And maybe we'll come back
To Earth, who can tell?*

Kenneth stops, turns back around, walks to the edge of the mezzanine, looks down.

James stands next to Jacob on the footbridge. They're both lit by bright shafts of white light.

EUROPOP VOICE (CONT'D)
*I guess there is no one to blame.
 We're leaving ground leaving...*

Kenneth stops dead, transfixed.

EUROPOP VOICE (CONT'D)
Will things ever be the same again?

Kenneth's face falls as he finally clocks the song.

EUROPOP VOICE (CONT'D)
It's the final countdown!

Below him, James and his boss triumphantly march together toward center stage as the SONG on the blares on:

EUROPOP VOICE (CONT'D)
The final countdown!

KENNETH
 Fuck me. Europe. The band.

A reflection glides again across the glass behind him.

Kenneth ducks as the MUSIC FADES and the gathered attendees burst into fawning APPLAUSE.

In the distance, behind him, a solitary figure disappears around a corner.

Kenneth takes off after it, low to the ground, as Jacob BELLOWS from below:

JACOB (O.S.)
 Thank you. Thank you all. Really.
 Thank you!

INT. CHAMBER HQ, MEZZANINE OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Kenneth zigs around plants, office chairs, napping pods, and uncluttered desks as the APPLAUSE dies down.

JACOB (O.S.)
 We're so pleased to have you here for this... *momentous* occasion. Before we get started, I'd just like to introduce one of the rising stars here at Chamber. Some of you might remember him from last month's launch of Project Pantera, James Hernandez.

On the run, Kenneth scowls (either at James getting the APPLAUSE he deserves or the realization that all of their stupid project code names are heavy metal themed).

JACOB (CONT'D)

He and his team have made a massive, *massive* contribution to the evolution of our platform. And, as you're all about to witness, to the evolution of humanity itself.

Kenneth slows, inching along the frosted glass wall of a darkened, sound-proof phone booth.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Of course, we all know that Chamber was designed to bring everyone in the world closer together, not further apart.

As Jacob continues, we catch glimpses of the thin scrim above the stage reflected in the glass all around Kenneth.

On the scrim FLASH images of the world as seen from space.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Instead of going down our own respective rabbit holes, now we can have one global conversation in real-time. Everywhere. All of us. At the same time. And what's so wrong with that?

Kenneth cranes his head around edge of the phone booth. There's no one to be seen.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Now, imagine if you will, a world where each of us could finally and forever *understand* each other.

In the distance, Kenneth picks up the faint light of a glowing monitor. *Is there someone there? Someone typing?*

KENNETH

(under his breath)

Ah-ha.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, WORKSPACES - CONTINUOUS

Kenneth creeps toward the figure in the darkness.

JACOB (O.S.)
 Where our deepest intentions were
 clear. Our tone, unmistakable.
 Always real. Honest. Appropriate.

Kenneth ducks behind a rolling whiteboard covered in
 ridiculously complex dry-erase diagrams.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 And always in sync with our
 deepest, truest feelings.

Kenneth pauses at a towering rubber plant, strains to make
 out who is in front of the monitor. *Grant? Ari?*

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Imagine a world where the thing we
 all love most about the Internet -
 anonymity - actually summons our
 better angels, not our darkest
 demons.

Kenneth sprints for a counter with yet more Kombucha taps.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Imagine. The emotional intensity
 and honesty of Burning Man...

The crowd in the distance CHUCKLES knowingly.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 ...but powered AI and without all
 the *unfortunate* nudity...

The crowd LAUGHS louder.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 ...*Kenneth*.

Kenneth stops dead, stands up. *The fuck?*

Someone else emerges from the darkness and lunges at Kenneth
 with what appears to be a pistol.

Kenneth GASPS, staggers backward, stifles a scream.

EMMA
 God! Papa. You scared the shit--

KENNETH
 Shhh!

Kenneth tugs Emma and her Taser down with him out of sight.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
(hushed)
Are you okay?! Are you okay?!

She nods furiously.

EMMA
(whispering)
Did he just say your name?!

Kenneth nods furiously.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Weird.

Kenneth nods again, his eyes scanning the desk in the distance again for the hooded, typing figure.

JACOB (O.S.)
Now, James here is going to give
you a little demo of what we're
calling... Sounding Board.

Kenneth finally tunes Jacob out.

KENNETH
Where's Laura?

Emma shrugs her shoulders. *Heck if I know.*

JACOB (O.S.)
It's a fully autonomous sentiment
analysis engine that mines the
totality of your digital
footprint...

Kenneth points forward.

KENNETH
He's right over there. I'll
distract him. You shoot him.

JACOB (O.S.)
...to build an entirely emotionally
intelligent...

EMMA
But he's kinda--

Kenneth lifts two fingers to her lips.

JACOB (O.S.)
...interactive avatar representing
your truest, deepest, best self.

KENNETH

Go.

Gripping her Taser, Emma reluctantly takes off.

JACOB (O.S.)

Alright, James. Let's show the
world, shall we?

Another smattering of APPLAUSE. And then, James' VOICE takes
over the narration:

JAMES (O.S.)

(almost robotic)

Sure thing, Jacob.

Something about James sounds off, oddly devoid of emotion.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Hi everybody. Great to be here.

Kenneth shakes his head, tries to focus up.

JAMES (CONT'D)

We're all super-pumped about
Sounding Board. So without further
ado...

Kenneth slinks forward from shadow to shadow.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Meet Kenneth. My husband.

Kenneth freezes again. *What the what?*

JAMES (CONT'D)

We've been going through a rough
patch lately.

Drawn like a moth again to the flame, Kenneth turns around
and walks back toward the railing overlooking the main hall.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Arguing about everything. Never on
the same wavelength. Living in
different worlds, different orbits.

Kenneth slows at the sight of his own avatar flickering
nearly fifty feet tall on the clear scrim up ahead.

JAMES (CONT'D)

So I decided to rebuild him. Here,
take a look.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

(beat)

Hi Kenneth. How are you today?

AVATAR KENNETH responds:

AVATAR KENNETH (V.O.)

Honestly, I'm feeling a little...
lost lately. Like I really don't
know who I am anymore. I mean, now
that I'm, you know, fifty.

Kenneth grimaces, mortified. The audience SNICKERS.

JAMES (O.S.)

(devoid of emotion)

Whoopsie-daisy.

AVATAR KENNETH (V.O.)

How are you feeling?

Kenneth peers over the handrail to see James, solo on-stage
and bathed in the light of Kenneth's glowing avatar.

JAMES

(monotone)

Anxious. Nervous. Afraid.

AVATAR KENNETH (V.O.)

(earnest)

Afraid of what? Are you nervous
because our little girl is headed
off to university?

Suddenly, real Kenneth snaps to. *Shit, Emma!*

He spins back around and sprints back into the shadows as
the weird CONVERSATION continues:

JAMES (O.S.)

I guess so, yeah. I just don't know
what life is going to be like
without her, you know?

AVATAR KENNETH (V.O.)

Without her? She won't be far. We
just have to give her space.

Kenneth trips over a garbage can and tumbles under a
cluttered standing desk.

KENNETH

(under his breath)

Fuck, Em...

AVATAR KENNETH (V.O.)
To become her own person.

Two desks over, a figure writhes on the ground. It's Laura!

AVATAR KENNETH (CONT'D)
(deeply empathetic)
Do you remember what it was like,
going to college? Leaving home for
the first time?

Real Kenneth pulls himself across the carpet on his hands
and knees toward Laura.

She's been hog-tied with Kenneth's zip ties and gagged with
a Chamber-branded t-shirt.

AVATAR KENNETH (V.O.)
She's probably just afraid, too.

Kenneth quickly rips off the gag.

LAURA
(breathless)
Ari. He's here. He's doing it!

AVATAR KENNETH (V.O.)
And that's okay. Right?

Kenneth yanks at the zip ties. They won't budge.

LAURA
(wagging her head)
Go, GO!

In the distance, James' VOICE drones on:

JAMES (O.S.)
Now, if you knew the real Kenneth,
you'd know. That conversation would
literally never happen.

Another smattering of SNICKERING.

LAURA
(wagging her head)
Get. Him!

Now, Jacob's disembodied VOICE reenters the mix:

JACOB (O.S.)
I've met him.

Kenneth leaps to his feet, runs.

JACOB (CONT'D)
It's true.

Another ripple of LAUGHTER as we finally spy Ari.

His gray hoodie and tangle of stubble are illuminated by the blue glow of a massive monitor.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Now, you might have noticed
something *strange* about James here.

Just past Ari, Kenneth sees Emma hiding behind a task chair, reluctantly at the ready with her Taser

JACOB (CONT'D)
Especially if you're on his team.

Kenneth grabs a stapler from a nearby desk, takes a couple of tentative steps toward Ari.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Normally, he's pretty expressive...
for an ISTJ.

Peals of POLITE CHUCKLING in the distance.

Kenneth steps into the light, stapler raised overhead.

KENNETH
Ari?

Ari leaps up, trips backward.

ARI
Jesus, dude!

JACOB (O.C.)
Now, just to prove a point...

ARI
Don't sneak up on me like that!

Ari clutches his chest. Kenneth lowers the stapler.

Jacob's VOICE continues in the background:

JACOB (O.S.)
...James was kind enough to allow
us to implant one of Elon's
Neuralink prototypes...

At the word Neuralink, Ari's face falls.

ARI
Oh, shit.

KENNETH
It's over, Ari. It's done.

JACOB (O.S.)
...just under the skin of his left temple. There.

ARI
You're not kidding.

KENNETH
Step away from the desk!

Ari, his face white as a sheet, drifts toward Kenneth.

ARI
Oh, dude. We're too late.

JACOB (O.S.)
See, you can barely even notice the incision.

KENNETH
What do you mean? You did it?

ARI
No. Neuralink, dude.

KENNETH
What?!

JACOB (O.S.)
Through the implant, we can now finely tune emotional reactions in real-time so that they're always contextually relevant.

Emma stands, eyes Kenneth. He gestures. *Stay back.*

JACOB (CONT'D)
Emotionally honest.

Ari steps past Kenneth, toward Jacob's projected face.

ARI
Oh, buddy.

JACOB (O.S.)
Truly mindful.

ARI
This is way worse than I--

Kenneth grabs Ari by the shoulders, spins him back around.

KENNETH
I told you to stop, you freaking
terrorist! You crazy...

Ari's eyes stay fixed on something in the distance.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
...QAnon nutcase. I never
should've--

Suddenly, Grant steps from the shadows, YANKS Ari away from
Kenneth, TOSSES him away like a rag doll.

Kenneth tumbles backward, hands-up.

JACOB (O.S.)
Have you ever found yourself in the
middle of an argument...

GRANT
(to Kenneth)
I told James you were no good.

Grant slowly advances, pure menace.

JACOB (O.S.)
...with someone you really love...

In the distance, Ari, pained, pushes himself to his feet.

GRANT
You unemployed little traitor.

JACOB (O.S.)
...wondering, how did I get here?

Kenneth staggers toward Emma (still hidden).

KENNETH
I didn't know. I didn't--

JACOB (O.S.)
Well, now, with a little help from
us, you can bypass your default
reactions automatically...

KENNETH
I tried to call him off. I--

JACOB (O.S.)
 ...and tap into your wise mind.
 Always. Everywhere. Without fail.

Grant pauses, smiles maniacally.

GRANT
 I'm going to enjoy *deleting* you all
 by myself.

JACOB (O.S.)
 Here, allow me to show you...

Unexpectedly, Ari leaps up, LUNGES toward Grant.

But, instead of tackling him to the ground, he thrusts a hand into Grant's Everlanes, pulls out his phone, tosses it toward Kenneth.

Kenneth bumbles it. Emma stands.

ARI
 (toward Kenneth)
 Do it, man! Do it!

Grant thrusts a hand out, grips Kenneth by the neck, lifts him into the air, spins him back toward the main hall.

In the distance, the same set of RANDOM IMAGES from Jacob's lecture flash across the scrim above the stage.

GRANT
 Good riddance, feeble human!

His eyes bulging, Kenneth flips the phone over in his hand, swipes, and tilts the screen toward Grant's face.

Behind them both, Emma takes aim with the Taser.

BANG! ZZZZZAAAAAPPPP! Emma fires both barbs.

But each barb sinks into Ari's face!

In the light of the charge, Grant's phone unlocks.

GRANT
 What are on Earth do you think--

Kenneth, losing consciousness, swipes twice and STABS his thumb at a button on-screen.

KENNETH
 Location Services, bitch.

Grant's lifeless body instantly crumples to the ground with a heavy THUD.

Kenneth scrambles free, staggers toward Emma.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Oh my god, it actually--

Ari and Grant both convulse violently on the carpet.

But something's different with Grant's throes. It's like he's being ripped apart from within.

EMMA
Papa?

Kenneth grips Emma protectively, shields her from Grant's thrashing body until: CRRRRUUUSHHHH!!

Grant's body explodes like a fleshy firecracker.

JACOB (O.S.)
Imagine. A world united again.

A squall of bright blue fluid spatters across the floors and up the eco-felt walls of every nearby cubicle.

JACOB (CONT'D)
No more strife. Tribalism.
Factionalism.

Ari, still on the ground, HOWLS with spasmodic laughter:

ARI
Fuck, yeah. Dudes! Told ya so!

EMMA
Oh. My. GOD-uh!

JACOB (O.C.)
A world where we can all be one.

From what's left of Grant's torso wriggles a dark green, alligator-like creature.

EMMA
What the hell IS that?!

JACOB (O.S.)
All brought to you... by us.

From the ground, bathed in blue liquid, Ari barks back:

ARI
Shoot it, man!

JACOB (O.S.)
Available to all...

Emma reflexively drops the Taser.

ARI
Do I have to do everything?

JACOB (CONT'D)
...for a just the cost of...

Ari staggers to his feet, grabs the nearest potted plant by its trunk, hefts it aloft and SMASHES it down on top of the injured creature crawling across the blue-slicked carpet.

SQUEAL!

JACOB (CONT'D)
...a single monthly cup of coffee.

Kenneth looks to Ari, then the flattened lizard.

KENNETH
It's all... true.

EMMA
Papa?!

Ari, his face still twitching, yanks out the barbs, turns, swipes all his gear into his shoulder bag.

ARI
You gotta go, man. Get down there.
Unplug him.

KENNETH
You just killed that--

ARI
Your dude! He's tethered to the
mother ship. You gotta cut him
loose or he'll get fucking DDoSed!

For perhaps the very first time, Kenneth finally completely understands Ari.

KENNETH
(to Emma)
Untie Laura. That way, by the
Kombucha bar. And then get the hell
outta here. Quick as a bunny.

EMMA
What about--

KENNETH
Go! I'll deal with Dad!

Kenneth gives Emma a quick kiss on the forehead before whirling around and running full-bore back toward the edge of the mezzanine.

ARI
(to Emma, flirting)
Oh, uh, hey there.

Emma looks him slowly up and down.

EMMA
Hey.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, MEZZANINE - CONTINUOUS

Kenneth skids to a stop at the edge of the mezzanine.

Looking down, he sees James standing, frozen, next to Jacob like a puppet on strings.

AVATAR JAMES glows on the thin scrim behind them.

JACOB
See, James can be more emphatic...

Jacob spins a digital wheel on the screen of James' phone slowly counter-clockwise.

JACOB (CONT'D)
...or more subdued.

James and his digital dummy react together in real-time:

JAMES
(descending energy)
Hi. Hi. Hi. Hi, hi. *Hi*.

AVATAR JAMES
(descending energy)
Hi. Hi. Hi. Hi, hi. *Hi*.

Kenneth looks left and right. There's no time, no way down.

JACOB
With one single, tiny little
implant, you can not only control
your avatar self, but your also
corporeal presence as well. The
possibilities are infinite.

The stage is a good two stories below him and a good twenty five feet out. Too far to jump.

JACOB
 Think of the ramifications of, say,
 the entire voting populace being
 able to moderate the responses...

Jacob hits a button and pauses, does it again.

Nothing happens.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 (hint of frustration)
 ...of a President in real-time. Or
 even subtly adjusting your life
 partner's reactions to...

Jacob looks from the stage to a gaggle of PRODUCTION STAFF gathered around a nearby mixing board.

Suddenly, a chorus of CHIRPING PHONES go off all over the space. Hundred of them. The phones of everyone gathered.

James's projected avatar FREEZES, glitches out.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Bear with us here, one--

Kenneth looks up toward the ceiling.

The massive steel ball hook hangs in the open air suspended from rusted tracks about fifteen feet dead ahead.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 We seem to be having some sort of
 traffic spike. I'm not sure if--

Without even thinking, Kenneth runs back to the conference room, pauses, turns back around, and then sprints full-bore toward the handrail.

At the very last second, he LEAPS up into the air, SKIPS across the handrail, LUNGES toward the dangling ball hook.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, MAIN FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

For a breathless few seconds, Kenneth hurtles toward the hook, arms flailing in SLOW MOTION.

SLAP. SLAP.

He barely catches the hook with both hands, grips it, swings sideways. The force sends the ball sliding swiftly toward the center of the main hall.

From below: a COLLECTIVE GASP.

From above: metal-on-metal GRINDING.

Until, BANG! The hook hits a block in the track.

CLANG!

The chain holding the hook releases. And Kenneth plummets downward toward the stage trailed by a two thousand pound orb of rusted steel.

Kenneth lets go of the hook, falls feet-first onto the glass stage as the ball hurtles by.

KA-BOOOM. It smashes into the mirror-polished concrete floor three stories below.

Every eye in the room whips to see Kenneth standing triumphant, like a fucking superhero, right behind Jacob.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Jacob drops James' phone, slowly turns around.

James doesn't budge. His frozen avatar flickers and flashes.

JACOB
You'll never get away with this.

KENNETH
Really?

Kenneth, seeming stunned to be alive, takes a couple tentative steps toward Jacob.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Something tells me we already have.

Jacob veers around Kenneth slowly, cautiously.

JACOB
This is a mistake. You're making a mistake.

KENNETH
Yeah. I guess I've been doing that a lot lately.

Kenneth slows. Jacob slows.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Guess that makes me... *human*.

Jacob lifts his wrist, MUTTERS something into it.

Kenneth steps directly toward him, fearless.

KENNETH
Are you prone to worrying things
will take a turn for the worse?

JACOB
Stay back.

KENNETH
If confronted by a life or death
challenge, would you fight...

JACOB
Don't make me do this.

KENNETH
...or run?

Jacob momentarily lifts his eyes to the roof.

JACOB
You have no idea the forces you're
messing with here.

KENNETH
Nah. I think I've got a pretty good
idea actually.

The entire roof of the warehouse loudly RIPS open to reveal
bright white metallic spacecraft hovering just above it!

Kenneth stares up it as if nothing could surprise him less.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Typical ENTJ. Always bossing
everybody else--

JACOB
(a beastly roar)
Enough!

Jacob reaches up, grips his own scalp with both hands, and
then TEARS his own head asunder.

Beneath his spray-tanned perfect skin: craggy green scales.

JACOB (CONT'D)
You and your kind have already sewn
the seeds of your destruction!

FLASH!

A bright white beam of light surges down toward the stage.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Just ask Elon.

Jacob's amphibian figure rockets up toward the spacecraft.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, MAIN HALL - SAME

Below Kenneth, more and more lizard people rip through their fleshy skins and launch skyward.

Only Elon Musk and a handful of STUNNED (HUMAN) SPECTATORS are left in the grandstands.

ELON
What?! Not an alien. So, sue me.

From above: a DEAFENING ROAR.

INT. CHAMBER HQ, STAGE - SAME

Kenneth turns to see James still motionless on-stage.

He runs toward him, dipping en route to scoop up James' phone from the edge of the cantilevered glass platform.

As bedlam breaks out down below, Kenneth lifts James' phone, swipes his thumb across the screen, flips the screen toward James' face, breathlessly waits.

CLICK! It unlocks.

Above, the spacecraft WHIRS and HOWLS.

Kenneth frantically swipes through a series of screens as people SCREAM and scatter in the distance.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Please work. Please work. Please--

Amid a hail of smoke and flames from above, Kenneth closes his eyes and URNS OFF LOCATION SERVICES.

James' body buckles. Kenneth catches him gently.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
James! James!

James' head swivels toward him. His eyes flutter.

Above: the spacecraft MOANS deafeningly. Sparks shower down.

JAMES
(groggily)
What are you--

Kenneth, his eyes welling, kisses James on the forehead.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You replied 'maybe'.

Kenneth LAUGHS out loud before a huge BLAST of energy gusts down from above, nearly knocking them both off the stage.

From below, a VOICE calls out amid the frenzy:

LAURA (O.S.)
(quickly)
I now pronounce you man and man!

Kenneth looks down to see Laura running through the throngs with Emma at her side.

She points furiously toward the open cauldron of seawater just below the stage.

LAURA (CONT'D)
TAKE THE LEAP!

Kenneth looks to James.

KENNETH
(to James)
Can we make it?

James straightens himself, gathers his strength.

JAMES
I don't... know.

KENNETH
Please. I promise. I'll work at it.
I'll work harder.

Kenneth pulls him closer to the edge. They look almost exactly like they did twenty years ago at the Cenote.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
I don't wanna get divorced. I--

JAMES
Divorced?

KENNETH
Emma said--

A blizzard of blinding plasma rains down all around them.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Never mind. We can make it.

They lock eyes briefly and then lean forward. The engines THUNDER above. The spaceship pushes skyward.

James takes Kenneth's hand, clutches it tight.

JAMES

I will if you will.

Kenneth nods. And, in unison, two of them LEAP together down to the safety of the roiling waters of the cauldron below.

SLOW FADE TO:

EXT. DINER - LATER

From outside the neon-lit windows of the same greasy spoon, we slowly PUSH IN on the same red vinyl banquette.

FRANTIC STRANGERS cascade down the sidewalk outside in fits and starts, all seemingly freaking the fuck out about the fact that we're no longer alone.

But, inside, Kenneth, James, Emma, and Laura sit calmly shoulder-to-shoulder around a table full of sloppily-portioned midnight breakfast.

And as they contentedly chitchat and silently laugh, all we hear is the building CHAOS AND SIRENS outside.

Grinning ear-to-ear, James reaches across the table, grabs the syrup, slathers another massive heap of pancakes, and cuts the whole stack twice right down the middle.

Kenneth smiles, over the moon and entirely at home all at the same time.

At last.

CUT TO BLACK.

ROLL END CREDITS --

To "Such Great Heights" by The Postal Service.

THE END