

SECRET COLORS

Written by

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN PATIO—DAY

A birthday party. KIDS run amok beneath a canopy of streamers. A CHEAP-LOOKING CLOWN crafts questionable balloon animals while a group of BEER-DRINKING DADS look on, chuckling.

JOEL HOLCOMB (30s), a sensitive hypochondriac, sits alone with a ginger ale watching his daughter PRUDENCE (6), birthday girl and life of the party, tell an animated story to a group of peers.

JOEL (V.O.)

We're all going to die. Everyone knows it, but not many of us seem to be aware. Look at these kids, running around without a care in the world.

A couple of kids with painted faces run past Joel.

JOEL (V.O.)

I'll bet some of them already have cancers forming in their tiny brains from standing too close to the microwave.

BETH (30s), Joel's down-to-earth wife, commands the party's attention.

BETH

Okay, everyone. Time to open presents!

JOEL (V.O.)

And Beth. Beautiful, pragmatic Beth. My rock. How many days do we have before the doctor discovers a fateful lump or asymmetrical mole?

Beth shoots Joel a concerned look, as if she can read his mind.

JOEL (V.O.)

She hates it when I get like this, but I can't help it.

(beat)

Everything's so fragile.

(MORE)

JOEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
How can I not be scared it's gonna
break?

The party gathers around a picnic table. Prudence tears into the biggest present.

BETH
(laughing)
Slow down, honey. Who's it from?

Prudence clumsily turns the package over to reveal a card. She looks at it with a furrowed brow.

PRUDENCE
Cole!!!

Prudence continues demolishing the wrapping. Beth glances over at COLE (6) and his mother, HOLLY (30s) and mouths thank you.

Prudence tears away the last of the paper to reveal a pair of purple rollerblades.

PRUDENCE (CONT'D)
Rollerblades!!

Joel jumps to his feet. He looks uneasy. He pulls ALAN (30s), Cole's listless, 300-pound father, aside and leads him into the house.

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

Joel and Alan stand on opposite sides of a peninsula cluttered with party snacks and decorations. In the center sits a birthday cake.

JOEL
What the hell were you thinking
getting a six year old a pair of
rollerblades?

Alan looks dumbstruck.

ALAN
I'm sorry, man. I didn't even think
about it. Holly picked them out.
What's the big deal?

Alan grabs a handful of nuts from a bowl that sits on the countertop.

JOEL

The big deal, Alan, is that she's my kid. And I don't want her getting hurt. She doesn't even have a helmet!

Alan shoves another handful of nuts into his mouth.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Are you even listening to me?
(beat)
Why don't you lay off the nuts? I thought you were trying to lose a few pounds.

ALAN

(with a mouthful of nuts)
There's no point.

JOEL

What do you mean, there's no point? Aren't you trying to get in shape to do a 5k soon?

Alan looks extremely upset. Joel becomes concerned.

JOEL (CONT'D)

What is it, Alan?

ALAN

I did something fucking crazy, man.

As he speaks, nut chunks spray from his mouth. He starts to cry.

ALAN (CONT'D)

These people are tryna kill-

Before he can finish a dart shoots through the window. It narrowly misses Alan's round stomach and lodges in the birthday cake.

Joel looks to the window in time to see a scraggly man duck out of sight. He reaches into the cake and pulls out an icing-covered dart.

JOEL

What the fuck, Alan?

Alan cries harder.

ALAN

You've gotta help me, Joel. There's this company. They want me dead!

Joel looks scared.

JOEL

What are you talking about? What sort of company?

ALAN

It's called Valentine & Shepherd. They're on Main Street between the Hallmark store and that new pet store.

Joel raises his eyebrows in disbelief.

JOEL

Furballs by Fred?

Alan nods vigorously.

ALAN

I know this sounds crazy, but I'm not kidding. You've gotta help me, Joel!

Prudence enters with a balloon tied to her wrist.

PRUDENCE

Dad! It's time for cake!

Another dart shoots through the window and pops Prudence's balloon. She screams. Joel runs to her and pulls her in for a suffocating hug.

JOEL

Oh my god. Prudence, are you okay, honey?

Prudence nods.

PRUDENCE

But my balloon isn't.

She holds up her wrist.

JOEL

Go outside with mommy and get another balloon. I'll bring the cake in a minute. And whatever you do, stay away from Cole's daddy, okay? He's, uh, sick.

Prudence looks with disgust at the snot and nut crumbs covering Alan's face. She nods and runs outside.

Joel stands up and puts a hand on Alan's shoulder.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Okay, Alan. I'm gonna do whatever I can to help you. But you have to promise me that you'll stay away from my family until we figure this out.

Alan nods and hugs Joel. He sobs freely. Joel looks at the icing-covered dart. In the background kids sing happy birthday.

EXT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD-DAY

Joel parks in front of a small office building. It looks like all the other flower shops or craft stores on the street. He gets out of his car and walks to the door, rehearsing an argument under his breath.

The sign on the door says VALENTINE & SHEPHERD. In smaller print underneath, EXISTENTIAL INSPIRATION.

Joel reads the sign and looks confused. He gets his bearings and walks through the door.

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD WAITING ROOM-DAY

Joel enters the empty waiting room. Piano covers of classic rock songs play quietly on the overhead speaker.

On a coffee table there is a stack of decades-old magazines and pamphlets titled YOUR DYING PROCESS. Joel's anger fades into curiosity. He takes a seat and begins leafing through a pamphlet.

KARLEEN (50s), a sickly-sweet southern Baptist receptionist, enters.

KARLEEN

Hey sugar, we're havin' an emergency staff meetin' right now. But I'll be with you in just a minute. Go ahead and make yourself cozy.

Joel glances up at her, nods, and returns to his pamphlet.

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD CONFERENCE ROOM-DAY

The employees of Valentine & Shepherd sit around a conference table. EVA (20s), a cynical and pretentious intern, gazes at a book through a pair of vintage glasses. HARMONY (40s), a spiritually misguided yogi, sits next to her cross-legged, stroking his beard hair.

LEONARD (70s), a frail old man with an offbeat sense of humor, enters. Karleen follows and closes the door behind them.

LEONARD

I have some sad news, friends.

Harmony and Eva look up.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

My dearest friend and co-founder of this company, Alistair Shepherd, has passed on.

KARLEEN

Bless his heart.

LEONARD

No need for that, Karleen. His heart is food for the worms now.

Leonard cackles. Harmony and Karleen look uncomfortable. Eva stifles a laugh.

HARMONY

I'm so sorry, Leonard. I didn't even know he was sick.

LEONARD

He wasn't. He went quietly in his sleep.

EVA

Was it sleep apnea? Or a blood clot?

LEONARD

I don't know the intimate details, Eva.

(beat)

Maybe the old geezer was just tired of looking at you.

No one laughs.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Tough crowd.

KARLEEN
Well, we have a client waitin' out there, so I think the best thing to do right now is get back to business. That's what Alistair would want.

Eva rolls her eyes.

EVA
He doesn't want anything, Karleen. He's dead.

Leonard lets out another awkward laugh.

LEONARD
No, she's right, Eva! We've got motivating to do!

Leonard theatrically spins on his heel and exits the room. Eva follows. Karleen heads for the door, but Harmony grabs her arm.

HARMONY
(whispering)
Karleen, hold on a second.

Karleen looks surprised.

KARLEEN
What is it, sugar?

HARMONY
Doesn't this situation seem strange to you?

KARLEEN
Strange how?

HARMONY
You don't think it's a little weird that Alistair died for no reason? When he wasn't sick or anything?

KARLEEN
Well, he didn't die for no reason. He died because the good Lord was ready to take him home.

HARMONY

You don't think maybe someone sent him? Express mail? Like maybe someone here?

Karleen's looks shocked.

KARLEEN

You think he was murdered?

HARMONY

Exactly.

KARLEEN

Who'd do somethin' like that?

HARMONY

There's a certain young lady who seems pretty suspicious.

KARLEEN

Eva?

HARMONY

Think about it. She's been an intern for over a year. Unpaid. Now that Alistair's gone, she'll probably get hired as a full time inspirer.

Karleen considers.

KARLEEN

She does seem pretty heartless.

(beat)

Should we tell Leonard?

Harmony looks thoughtful. He strokes his beard.

HARMONY

We need proof first. Do you have a key to Alistair's office?

Karleen nods enthusiastically.

KARLEEN

(proudly)

I've got keys to all the offices.

HARMONY

Good. Meet me back here after closing and we'll take a look around.

Karleen looks skeptical.

KARLEEN
What if we get caught?

HARMONY
Karleen, a man might have been
murdered. Isn't finding out the
truth worth the risk?

KARLEEN
Well, I guess.

HARMONY
Good. I'll see you tonight.

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD WAITING ROOM-DAY

Karleen enters. Joel reads the dying pamphlet. He doesn't notice her.

KARLEEN
I'm so sorry to have kept you
waitin'. How can I help you, sugar?

Joel folds the pamphlet, puts it in his pocket and walks to the front desk, clearing his throat.

JOEL
Um...I'm not sure how to put this.

Karleen looks at him with infinite patience.

JOEL (CONT'D)
I think this place is trying to.
Well, for lack of a better word,
murder my friend.

Karleen smiles and nods.

KARLEEN
We call it existential inspiration.
What's your friend's name?

Joel pauses for a moment, somewhat shocked.

JOEL
Alan. Alan Valasquez.

Karleen puts on a pair of spectacles and leafs through a thick book of names.

KARLEEN
Oh, yes. Alan. That's correct.

JOEL
Okay. Can I ask why?

KARLEEN
Why what, sugar?

Joel gets frustrated again.

JOEL
Why you're trying to kill my
friend!

Karleen smiles.

KARLEEN
Well, because he asked us to, of
course.

Joel is at a loss for words.

KARLEEN (CONT'D)
You okay, sugar?

JOEL
He asked you to kill him?

KARLEEN
That's what we do here. Existential
inspiration.

JOEL
I don't know what that means!

KARLEEN
Well if you lower your voice, I'll
try to explain it to you.

Joel nods compliantly.

KARLEEN (CONT'D)
Here at Valentine & Shepherd we
help people who are dissatisfied
with their lives.

Joel starts to object, but Karleen raises a finger to silence
him.

KARLEEN (CONT'D)

Clients come to us with a goal. Maybe it's to finally write a novel, or take that European vacation they always wanted.

(beat)

They meet with one of our Inspirers and work out a deadline. If they don't complete their goal by the deadline, we help them terminate their lives.

JOEL

So you murder them!

KARLEEN

We're motivatin' them to live better lives.

(beat)

Ya know that Tim McGraw song, "Live Like You Were Dying?"

Joel nods.

KARLEEN (CONT'D)

(smiling)

That's how I like to think of it. We help people live life to the fullest.

JOEL

I can't believe this. There must have been some sort of mistake. He's terrified!

KARLEEN

Well, sugar, I don't know the specifics of his case. You'll have to talk to his Inspirer.

JOEL

Well, who the fuck is that?

KARLEEN

(suddenly very serious)

Sir. I'm gonna to have to ask you to leave if you're gonna use language like that.

Joel composes himself and grabs one of her hands.

JOEL

Please. Who do I talk to? I promised I'd help him.

Karleen softens.

KARLEEN

I guess I can bend the rules just this once. But don't tell anyone I helped you with this. Okay?

Joel nods. Karleen leafs through her giant book again.

KARLEEN (CONT'D)

Alright. It looks like your friend's Inspirer is...Harmony Smith. His office is the first door on the left.

Karleen points.

JOEL

Thank you so much.

Joel walks towards Harmony's office. Karleen hums "Live Like You Were Dying."

INT. HARMONY'S OFFICE-DAY

Harmony holds a downward dog and takes some loud cleansing breaths. Joel bursts through the door.

HARMONY

How can I help you?

JOEL

Are you Harmony Smith?

Harmony comes to the front of his mat, takes a deep breath, stands up straight, and turns to face Joel.

HARMONY

Yes, I am. And who are you?

Joel's face lights up with recognition.

JOEL

Hey, you're that psycho who tried to shoot Alan through my window last night!

Harmony backs away from Joel. He holds up two non-confrontational hands.

HARMONY

Let's not get worked up. I think we should discuss this calmly.

Harmony sits atop his desk cross-legged.

JOEL

How am I supposed to discuss this calmly? You're trying to kill my friend! A guy with a wife and kid. And you're acting like it's filing taxes or something! I feel like I'm in the fucking Twilight Zone.

Harmony listens patiently. A small smile spreads across his lips.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Why the hell are you smiling?

HARMONY

I'm sorry. I've just never heard someone put it like that. What we do here must look very strange to an outsider.

Joel puts his head in his hands. Harmony sees how upset Joel is and pats him on the back. Joel jerks away.

JOEL

Look. Can you just call it off this one time? Alan doesn't want to die. I don't know what his "goal" was, but I promise you that he didn't want it that bad.

HARMONY

I'm afraid I can't do that—

Harmony pauses.

HARMONY (CONT'D)

Um. What was your name?

JOEL

Joel.

HARMONY

I'm afraid I can't do that, Joel. Alan signed a contract. Until he completes his goal, I have an obligation to terminate his life.

JOEL

Let me see the contract.

HARMONY

I'm afraid I can't do that either.

JOEL
Why the hell not?

HARMONY
Patient/Inspirer confidentiality.

JOEL
You're already discussing his case
with me! Just let me see the
fucking contract!

Joel looks like he's about to hit Harmony. Harmony squirms
away and falls off the back of his desk.

HARMONY
(hiding behind his desk)
Look, I don't wanna fight. I'm a
pacifist.

JOEL
Yet you kill people for a living.

Harmony peeks out from behind the desk.

HARMONY
I'm helping them, Joel.

JOEL
Let me see the contract.

Harmony considers for a moment. He glances nervously around
the room. Then he rummages in his desk drawer and pulls out a
file.

HARMONY
Don't tell anyone I'm letting you
see this.

Joel nods and grabs the contract. He looks through it
carefully.

JOEL
Complete a 5k? That's his goal?

HARMONY
Your friend Alan came to me last
year pretty depressed. He said he
wanted to take control of his
weight. It was ruining his health
and his marriage.

(beat)

(MORE)

HARMONY (CONT'D)

He figured if he couldn't do a simple 5k in a year, well, what was the point? He'd be dead soon anyway.

JOEL

And he didn't complete it.

HARMONY

His time ran out hours before the encounter at your house last night.

JOEL

So, now what? You just keep trying to kill him until you succeed?

HARMONY

Well, technically as long as he completes the goal he's home free.

JOEL

So all he has to do is complete a 5k and you'll leave him alone?

Harmony nods. Joel looks hopeful.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Alright. That's doable. I can help him do that. Thanks, Harmony.

Joel shakes Harmony's hand and hurries out of the office.

HARMONY

Oh, and Joel?

Joel turns around in the doorway.

JOEL

Yeah?

HARMONY

You'll want to hurry. Our intern Eva is on the way to Alan's house as we speak.

Joel's smile fades. He looks shocked and angry.

JOEL

Fuck.

FADE TO BLACK.

END ACT ONE

She hits the gun against the door just to make Alan jump and smirks.

Joel pulls Eva away from the door forcefully.

JOEL
Stop it! What the hell's wrong with you?

Eva jerks away from Joel.

EVA
There's nothing wrong with me.
What's wrong with him?

They both look through the window.

EVA (CONT'D)
Does he seem happy?

JOEL
Well, no.

EVA
He's miserable. But he's clinging to his pathetic life anyway. It's a waste.

JOEL
He's—

Eva turns to face Joel and puts her gun in front of his mouth to silence him.

EVA
Let me tell you a secret. We're born, we live, and we die. And there's no point to any of it. The best we can do is try to make the most of our stupid days.

She points the gun to the window.

EVA (CONT'D)
That loser isn't making the most out of anything.
(beat)
I'm doing him a favor.

Joel looks taken aback, but quickly composes himself.

JOEL
You can't decide whether or not his life's worth living!

EVA

No, but he can! That's why he came to us.

JOEL

But he has a wife and a kid! They'd be lost without him.

Eva looks bored. Joel sees this and decides to try a different tactic.

JOEL (CONT'D)

And I'm sure things wouldn't go well for you at Valentine & Shepherd if you killed a guy who didn't ask for it. It seems like something like that could cost you a job.

EVA

Whatever. I'm just a stupid intern anyway.

Joel pulls out his phone.

EVA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

JOEL

I'm calling the cops.

EVA

Fuck you, dude.

Joel starts dialing.

EVA (CONT'D)

Stop!

She tries to take the phone.

EVA (CONT'D)

Seriously stop! I'll leave him alone, okay?

Joel puts his phone away and looks smug. Eva looks pissed off.

EVA (CONT'D)

For now.

She puts her gun in her backpack, and takes off on her bike.

Joel knocks on Alan's door.

JOEL
Open up, Alan. It's Joel.

Alan opens the door.

ALAN
Thank God it's you.

They enter the house.

INT. ALAN'S HOUSE-DAY

Food packages and beer cans litter the floor. A cat sniffs the bag of chips Alan left on the couch.

JOEL
Why'd you lie to me?

ALAN
I didn't lie.
(beat)
I just didn't tell the whole truth.

JOEL
Jesus, Alan! I can't believe you'd ask those people to kill you. What were you thinking?

ALAN
I don't know, man. I just didn't know what else to do. Things haven't been good for me.

Joel shakes his head. He looks around the filthy room.

JOEL
That's apparent. How are you living like this? Where's Holly? And Cole?

ALAN
Holly said she needed a break. She took Cole to her mom's house.

Joel turns sympathetic.

JOEL
I'm sorry, man.

ALAN
Can you really blame her? Who'd wanna live with a fat slob like me?
(beat)
(MORE)

ALAN (CONT'D)

You know what? It doesn't even matter. I'll be dead soon anyway.

JOEL

No, you won't. I talked to that Harmony guy. As long as you complete the race, they'll leave you alone.

ALAN

But the race was Saturday.

JOEL

So what? Beth's working at this zombie 5k at the high school this weekend. You could enter that!

ALAN

With a bunch of high school kids? That's humiliating, man.

JOEL

Well it's a hell of a lot better than dying.

Alan sighs and sits on the couch.

ALAN

You're right. Sorry for being such an ass. I can't even motivate myself with a gun to my head.

Alan grabs a handful of chips.

JOEL

We'll start right now. Let's go for a run.

ALAN

Can we at least wait til this episode ends?

He gestures towards the television. Joel snatches the chips away from him.

JOEL

No. You can thank me later.

EXT. JOEL'S HOUSE-DAY

Beth beams as Prudence rollerblades down the driveway.

Joel gets out of his car and grabs Prudence's arm just before she gets to the street.

PRUDENCE

Ouch! You're hurting me!

JOEL

I'm stopping you from getting hurt.
Do you see how close to the street
you got?

BETH

Honey, she's fine! I'm right here.

Joel pulls Prudence by the arm into the house. She rolls along behind him, giggling. Beth follows, trying not to laugh.

INT. JOEL'S HOUSE-DAY

Joel, Prudence and Beth enter the house.

JOEL

No more rollerblades.

Joel picks Prudence up, puts her on the couch, and takes the rollerblades off. Prudence starts wailing.

PRUDENCE

That's not fair! I didn't do
anything.

BETH

Joel, don't you think this is a bit
much?

JOEL

She's only six years old. Who
rollerblades at that age?

Beth shakes her head.

BETH

You two sort it out. I don't have
time for this.

PRUDENCE

No, mommy! Make him stop!

BETH

Sorry, honey. This is between you
and Safety Dad.

Beth leaves the room.

JOEL

I'm sorry, sweetie. You can have them back when you get bigger.

PRUDENCE

They won't fit me then!

Joel almost laughs at her practical objection, but remains stern.

JOEL

We'll get you a bigger pair.

PRUDENCE

But I want these!

JOEL

Well, I'm sorry, but you can't have them.

PRUDENCE

I hate Safety Dad!

Joel looks hurt.

JOEL

Prudence, I-

Prudence runs out of the room. Joel drops the rollerblades and slumps onto the couch.

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD WAITING ROOM-NIGHT

Harmony turns on a light. Karleen glances around nervously.

KARLEEN

Are you sure we should be doin' this?

HARMONY

Do you wanna find out if Eva's guilty or not?

KARLEEN

Well of course. But this just seems so sneaky and wrong.

HARMONY

Not as sneaky and wrong as killing a guy to get ahead.

KARLEEN
I guess you're right.

They walk down the hallway and stop at Alistair's office.
Karleen unlocks the door.

INT. ALISTAIR'S OFFICE-NIGHT

Karleen turns on the lights to reveal the office of a man who spent more time at work than home. Photographs and trinkets from around the world cover the walls. Mementos of a life well-lived.

HARMONY
Wow. Look at all this stuff. I had no idea Alistair was so well-traveled.

KARLEEN
No family pictures. He must've gotten pretty lonely on all those long plane rides.

Harmony examines the pictures. Karleen looks through desk drawers. She struggles to open the bottom drawer.

KARLEEN (CONT'D)
I can't open this drawer.

HARMONY
Let me try.

Harmony pulls a bobby pin out of his man bun. He breaks it in two and picks the lock. He opens the drawer and goes through the documents inside.

HARMONY (CONT'D)
Oh my god.

KARLEEN
Language!

HARMONY
Oh my gosh.

KARLEEN
What is it?

HARMONY
A will!

KARLEEN
So he knew he was going to die.

HARMONY

Well, he was at least prepared for it.

Karleen thinks for a moment.

KARLEEN

What if Alistair wasn't murdered?
What if he asked Eva to kill him?

Harmony looks doubtful.

HARMONY

But it seems like he had such a good life.

He gestures to the wall decor.

KARLEEN

If I've learned anything workin' here it's that looks can be deceivin'.

(beat)

What good are all those experiences if you don't have anyone to share 'em with. Who'd he leave all this stuff to anyway?

Harmony examines the will again.

HARMONY

Hm. That's strange.

KARLEEN

What?

HARMONY

He left everything to Leonard. Maybe this explains why.

He holds up an envelope addressed to Leonard.

EXT. PARK-DAY

Joel, dressed in running shorts and a T-shirt looks around and checks his watch. He starts stretching.

Alan runs past him at break neck speed.

ALAN

(breathless)

He's following!

Joel sees Harmony running with his tranquilizer gun a few yards behind Alan.

JOEL

Shit.

Joel grabs Alan's arm and they run to Joel's car. Just as they get inside a dart hits the door.

INT. JOEL'S CAR-DAY

Joel starts the car and speeds away from Harmony. Alan wheezes.

ALAN

I can't keep running from them, Joel. I'm afraid to go to sleep at night. Maybe I should just give up.

He breaks into tears.

JOEL

Stop it. Do you know how selfish you sound? Think about Holly. And Cole! What would they do without you?

ALAN

They'll be fine. They're doing fine without me right now.

Joel pulls over. He looks at Alan who sobs quietly.

JOEL

I guess if you really want to give up I'd support you.

Alan looks surprised.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Hell, I'd even respect you. I sure couldn't do it. I'd miss Beth too much.

(beat)

And sunshine, and cable, or those taquitos that Holly makes.

ALAN

She makes the best.

Joel smiles and nods.

JOEL

And I'd miss Prudence, of course.
I'd rather hear her tell me I'm a
horrible dad every single day than
spend one day without her.

Joel and Alan are both quiet for a moment.

JOEL (CONT'D)

I couldn't let any of that stuff
go. But if you can, if you're
really ready to, I won't stop you.

Alan starts to cry again and shakes his head. Joel smiles.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Okay then. Let's get you ready for
that race.

FADE TO BLACK.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD WAITING ROOM-DAY

Karleen sits at the front desk. She reads Steven King's *Gerald's Game*. Joel enters. He looks exhausted.

Karleen flashes him a fake smile.

KARLEEN

Oh, hello again. How can we help you today?

JOEL

Look. I'm trying my hardest to help my friend complete his goal. But you people are making it fucking impossible.

Karleen's smile fades. Her eyes narrow.

KARLEEN

Sir. We're just doing our jobs.

JOEL

I wanna speak to whoever's in charge.

KARLEEN

I'm afraid I can't-

JOEL

Who the fuck's in charge?

Joel slams his fist on the desk. Karleen backs away and holds up her hands.

KARLEEN

Leonard Valentine. His office is right there.

She points. Joel storms towards the office.

INT. LEONARD'S OFFICE-DAY

Leonard bends over his desk piecing together a puzzle. Joel bursts in. Leonard looks up.

LEONARD

Hello there! Who are you?

JOEL
I'm Joel Holcomb.

LEONARD
Joel Holcomb! I heard about you
from Harmony. Come in!

He gestures for Joel to take a seat.

JOEL
I'm sick of playing your fucked up
game. I need you to leave my friend
alone.

Leonard smiles and rests his chin on his hands.

LEONARD
Now why would you want us to do
that?

JOEL
Because he's my friend! And I don't
want him to die. And he doesn't
want to die either!

LEONARD
How can you be sure? Do you have a
signed contract?

He leans forward. His eyes are full of genuine curiosity.

JOEL
He came to me and asked me to stop
you!

Leonard says nothing. He keeps his eyes locked on Joel.

JOEL (CONT'D)
And he's scared! He cries all the
time. And he can't sleep-

LEONARD
Dying can be a scary thing.

JOEL
But he doesn't have to die! Can't
you just call it off?

Leonard leans back in his chair and taps his fingertips
together.

LEONARD
Remind me, Joel. What was your
friend's goal?

JOEL
He, uh. Wanted to complete a 5k.

Leonard smiles.

LEONARD
How simple.

Joel nods again slowly.

JOEL
Yeah, but-

LEONARD
Why would he choose not to complete
such a simple goal? Could it be,
perhaps, that he wants to die?

JOEL
No, he just. He didn't have the
will power! I know he doesn't want
to die.

Leonard says nothing for a moment. He smiles.

LEONARD
Are you familiar with the work of
Elizabeth Kubler-Ross?

Joel looks dumfounded.

JOEL
Um. No?

LEONARD
She developed the five stages of
dying and grieving?

Joel remains quiet.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Well, according to her, depression
is the final stage before
acceptance. Your friend's attitude
is quite common. Textbook even!

Joel puts his head in his hands. Leonard looks sympathetic.
He reaches out a hand and pats Joel on the head.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Sometimes, Joel, we let our own
wants get in the way of seeing what
others need.

Joel looks up.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
May I share a personal story with
you?

Joel nods.

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD WAITING ROOM-DAY

Eva enters and walks towards her office. Karleen glares at her. Eva notices and stops.

EVA
What?

KARLEEN
Harmony and I know what you did to
Alistair.

Eva looks uninterested.

EVA
Yeah? What'd I do?

KARLEEN
You helped him die.

She whispers "die" like it's a bad word. Eva looks interested. She moves closer to Karleen and smiles mischievously.

EVA
You think I killed him?

Karleen looks taken aback by Eva's attitude.

KARLEEN
Well, no. Uh. Not exactly. We think
he asked you to.

Eva laughs.

KARLEEN (CONT'D)
But that doesn't make it any
better! We needed him here. Only
someone with selfish motives would
kill him!

EVA
I'm not saying I wouldn't do it. I
definitely would have if he asked.
(beat)

(MORE)

EVA (CONT'D)

But it wasn't me. What makes you so sure someone killed him?

KARLEEN

We found a will. He was prepared to go.

(beat)

And there was letter. Addressed to Leonard.

Eva looks interested.

EVA

Did you open it?

KARLEEN

No. I'm gonna give it to Leonard.

Eva looks suspicious.

EVA

You're a sneaky bitch, Karleen. I like this side of you.

Eva smiles at Karleen and walks away. She passes by Leonard's office and hears voices. She stops and presses her ear against the door.

INT. LEONARD'S OFFICE-DAY

Joel looks at Leonard intently.

LEONARD

Last year my friend and co-worker came to me with a request. He asked me to kill him if he didn't share his feelings with his greatest love.

(beat)

He had loved this person his whole life and never said a word. Then a year went by and he still couldn't do it. So two weeks ago I gave him the pills. Just like going to sleep.

Leonard smiles. There are tears in his eyes. Joel looks shocked.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

This man was my dearest friend. My favorite person on this earth.

(beat)

(MORE)

LEONARD (CONT'D)

And that's why I respected his request. I could see that he was suffering and I wanted that to stop.

Joel is speechless.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Life's hard, Joel. We can never understand the depths of a stranger's sorrow. Your friend could be experiencing pain that you know nothing about. Perhaps it's best to let us do our job.

JOEL

Mr. Valentine, I'm sorry about your friend. But I'm not gonna give up on Alan. If you won't call this thing off, I'll just try twice as hard.

Leonard smiles.

LEONARD

I can respect that.

He offers Joel a hand to shake. Joel reluctantly accepts, then heads for the door.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Oh. And Joel?

JOEL

Yeah?

LEONARD

What do you do?

JOEL

Um. I'm a CPA.

Leonard gags.

LEONARD

How boring. Look. Now that my friend's gone, we have a job opening here. I think someone with your passion for life would fit in nicely.

Joel looks repulsed and opens the door.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Think about it!

Leonard returns to his puzzle.

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD HALLWAY-DAY

Eva hurries away from the door just before Joel opens it. She smiles to herself and walks to her office.

INT. JOEL'S HOUSE-NIGHT

Joel gets home and finds Beth grading papers on the couch. She doesn't hear him come in.

He watches silently as she marks on the papers and adjusts her glasses. Finally he goes to her and kisses her on the head. She smiles but doesn't look up from the papers.

BETH
Hey you.

JOEL
Hey.
(beat)
Where's Prudence?

Beth's smile fades. She looks up at Joel.

BETH
She's been in her room all day. I think she's still upset about the rollerblades.

Joel sighs.

INT. PRUDENCE'S BEDROOM-NIGHT

Prudence sits on her bed drawing in a notebook with crayons. Completed drawings cover her bed and the floor.

There's a knock at the door. Prudence doesn't look up.

PRUDENCE
Who is it?

JOEL (O.S.)
It's daddy. Can I come in?

PRUDENCE
No.

The door opens and Joel enters.

PRUDENCE (CONT'D)

I said no!

She throws a crayon at him. He catches it and looks down at the drawings.

JOEL

Hey. These are pretty good, P. When does the gallery open?

Prudence smiles.

PRUDENCE

Um. Tomorrow.

She looks at Joel hatefully.

PRUDENCE (CONT'D)

But you aren't invited.

Joel sits next to Prudence.

JOEL

I'm sorry I took away your rollerblades.

Prudence keeps her head down to hide her teary eyes.

PRUDENCE

They were my birthday present.

Joel winces.

JOEL

I know, sweetie. But they aren't safe. Do you know how sad I'd be if something happened to you?

(beat)

It'd be like I got the only pair of rollerblades on earth for my birthday. And they were the shiniest, fastest pair you've ever seen. And then someone took them away from me before I even learned how to use them.

PRUDENCE

But mommy doesn't care! You're just scared of everything.

Joel looks surprised.

JOEL
I'm not scared of everything.

PRUDENCE
You are too! You made mom stop
scuba diving 'cause you're scared
of the bends.

JOEL
Did she tell you that? Because
that's-

PRUDENCE
And you're scared of hospitals.

JOEL
No I'm-

PRUDENCE
You won't even use public
restrooms!

JOEL
I do in emergencies.

She bursts into tears.

PRUDENCE
I'd rather get hurt having fun than
not be allowed to do anything!

JOEL
Honey, if you get hurt bad enough
you won't be able to have fun at
all.

Prudence buries her head in a pillow.

PRUDENCE
Fine. Just go away.

JOEL
Prudence, I-

PRUDENCE
Go!

Joel looks defeated. He stands still for a moment, then
leaves the room.

INT. JOEL AND BETH'S ROOM-NIGHT

Joel's phone rings and wakes him up. He looks at the clock. It's 4 AM. He answers the phone.

JOEL
Hello?

INT. ALAN'S HOUSE-NIGHT

Alan peers out his window cautiously. He holds a large kitchen knife.

ALAN
Joel? They're outside my house.
You've gotta come help. I'm
freaking out, man!

INTERCUT:

JOEL
Okay. Lock the doors and stay away
from the windows. I'll be right
there.

ALAN
Okay. Hurry!

Joel hangs up the phone.

Suddenly a dart lodges in Alan's neck.

Joel gets out of bed and starts getting dressed. Beth wakes up and looks confused.

BETH
Where are you going?

JOEL
Alan's going through something
right now. He really needs my help.

Beth looks concerned.

BETH
In the middle of the night? Is he
okay?

JOEL
He will be. If I get there in time.

Joel smiles at her and leaves. Beth goes back to sleep.

EXT. ALAN'S HOUSE-NIGHT

Joel gets out of his car and runs to Alan's front door. He knocks.

JOEL
Alan, it's Joel. Open up!

No answer. He knocks again.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Alan! Open the door!

The door is locked. He looks inside a window. He sees Eva dragging Alan's lifeless body across the room. He bangs on the window.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Hey! Stop it! Let him go!

Eva hears him. She looks up, sees Joel, rolls her eyes and continues dragging the body.

JOEL (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Okay, Alan. Where do you keep your
spare key?

He looks under the doormat and in a potted plant. Nothing.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Shit.

He looks through the window again but doesn't see Eva. Suddenly he hears a car start. The garage door opens and Alan's car backs out.

Joel runs and stands behind the car. Eva rolls down her window and looks at him.

EVA
Get out of the way, moron. I won't
think twice about running you down.

JOEL
You wouldn't kill an innocent guy!

EVA
Don't bet on it.

She moves the car back an inch. Joel jumps out of the way.

Eva laughs and speeds out of the driveway.

JOEL
Shit. Shit. Shit.

He gets in his car and follows Eva down the street.

FADE TO BLACK

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD-EARLY MORNING

The street is silent. The sun starts to rise.

INT. EVA'S CAR-EARLY MORNING

Eva parks and looks back at Alan. Duct tape covers his mouth. His arms and legs are bound. He slowly regains consciousness and a look of terror washes over his face. Eva sighs.

EVA

How the hell are you awake already?
Guess I should've used a second
dart.

(beat)

Don't move a muscle. I'm gonna get
someone to help drag your fat ass
inside.

She gets out of the car and enters the building.

INT. JOEL'S CAR-EARLY MORNING

Joel turns onto Main Street just in time to see Eva and Harmony dragging Alan into the building by his feet.

He slams on the acceleration.

EXT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD-EARLY MORNING

Harmony and Eva see Joel's car speeding towards them and dive out of the way.

Joel screeches to a halt. He gets out of his car and cuts the tape off Alan's hands and feet with a pair of safety scissors. Alan's eyes fill with tears when he sees Joel. Joel rips the duct tape off his mouth.

ALAN

Joel! Thank God! Where am I?

He slurs his words.

JOEL

Don't worry, buddy. You're safe now. But you've gotta get up and run.

Alan struggles to stand up. Eva and Harmony rush back towards them.

Behind them Joel sees a group of running HIGH SCHOOLERS. Some wear workout clothes. Others sport zombie makeup and brandish fake weapons.

EVA

Seriously? Give it up dude.

Joel looks panicked. He dives toward Eva and tackles her.

JOEL

Alan! Run!!

Alan struggles to his feet and hobbles away.

Eva struggles to get away, but Joel holds on tight.

EVA

Don't just stand there, Harmony!
Fucking help me!

Harmony tries to pull Joel off Eva, but his grip is too tight.

EVA (CONT'D)

How the hell are you not stronger?

HARMONY

I do yoga for flexibility. Not strength!

EVA

Forget it. He's getting away!

Harmony looks conflicted.

EVA (CONT'D)

Go get him, idiot!

Harmony joins the group of high schoolers jogging after Alan.

EVA (CONT'D)

(to Joel)

You know this is hopeless, right?
He can't just join in when the race is nearly over.

JOEL

The contract didn't say anything about starting a race. His goal was to *complete* a 5k.

Eva looks enraged. She screams and Joel covers her mouth. She bites Joel's hand. He screams and lets go. She races off.

JOEL (CONT'D)

No way.

Joel opens Eva's car door, grabs the tranquilizer gun and joins the zombie runners.

INT. LEONARD'S OFFICE-DAY

Leonard enters and spots a letter sitting on his desk. He sits down and opens it.

LEONARD (V.O.)

"Dear Leonard, thank you for helping me. If you ever have any doubt, please know that you did the right thing."

(beat)

Now, I have a confession. It was you."

Leonard puts a hand over his mouth. His eyes fill with tears.

EXT. FINISH LINE-DAY

Beth, Prudence, Holly and Cole stand among other PARENTS and FACULTY MEMBERS. They wait for the runners to finish.

BETH

I'm so glad you and Cole decided to come.

HOLLY

Well we weren't planning on it, but Joel called me last night. He said Alan had been training really hard for this. I figured I'd have to see it to believe it.

Beth smiles.

ALAN'S P.O.V.-FINISH LINE-DAY

Everything spins and blurs. For a moment Holly comes into focus.

ALAN

Holly!

EXT. MAIN STREET-DAY

Alan swerves from side to side. Several runners pass him. Harmony gets closer. He looks around nervously.

HARMONY

(under his breath)

How am I supposed to do this?

Suddenly a ZOMBIE rushes towards him. He screams and runs off the track. The zombie looks surprised and laughs.

Eva pushes other runners out of the way as she speeds toward Alan. Joel lingers close behind. He blends in with the other zombies.

Eva dives toward Alan, but Joel hits her with a tranquilizer dart and she falls to the ground. A RUNNER stops and looks concerned.

Joel runs to Eva, kneels down and sneakily removes the dart. He pretends to take her pulse.

RUNNER

Is she okay?

JOEL

I think it's dehydration. I'll take her to get some water.

RUNNER

Do you need help?

JOEL

Nah, you should finish the race!

The Runner nods and jogs off. Joel picks Eva up, takes her off the track and walks back to Valentine & Shepherd.

He looks back just in time to see Alan cross the finish line. He breathes a sigh of relief.

INT. LEONARD'S OFFICE-DAY

Leonard holds Alistair's letter with shaking hands.

LEONARD

"In the end I decided it was better to die knowing I had your love. Even if it was only platonic. Than to risk losing you. Yours forever, Alistair."

Leonard wipes his eyes. He gently folds the letter and puts it in his desk drawer.

EXT. FINISH LINE-DAY

Alan stumbles across the finish line and collapses. Holly and Beth run to him.

HOLLY

Oh my god, Alan. What was that? You were stumbling all over the place. Are you drunk?

ALAN

No. I just hate running.
(beat)
But I love you.

Holly drops to her knees and takes Alan's hand.

HOLLY

Aww. I love you too, baby. And I'm so proud of you.

Cole and Prudence run to Alan.

COLE

You didn't even come in last!

Alan laughs.

PRUDENCE

Are you still sick, Mr. Valasquez?

ALAN

No, P. I think I'm finally better.

EXT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD-DAY

Joel lugs Eva to the door of Valentine & Shepherd. Harmony jogs onto the scene.

HARMONY

Hey! What'd you do to her?

Joel turns around.

JOEL

I, uh, hit her with one of your darts.

HARMONY

Those are for client use only!

JOEL

Well, I didn't have a lot of options!

HARMONY

You could've minded your own business!

JOEL

I'm sick of having this conversation. Can you just help me get her inside?

Harmony opens the door and Joel lugs Eva inside.

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD WAITING ROOM-DAY

Joel puts Eva on the couch. Harmony follows him inside.

JOEL

She's gonna be okay, right?

HARMONY

Yeah. The tranquilizer should wear off within the hour.

(beat)

But we're not gonna be okay when she comes to.

Leonard emerges from his office holding a briefcase. He looks all business.

LEONARD

You're all here early today.

(beat)

Oh. Mr. Holcomb. Hello.

JOEL

Hi Mr. Valentine. Could I talk to you for a minute?

LEONARD
Of course. Come with me.

Leonard leads Joel to his office. Harmony looks puzzled.

INT. LEONARD'S OFFICE-DAY

Leonard and Joel sit down. Leonard puts his briefcase on the table.

LEONARD
Want to know a secret?

JOEL
Sure.

LEONARD
I don't keep anything in here. It's
all for show!

He laughs and opens the briefcase to show Joel its empty interior.

JOEL
Wow. That's really something.

Leonard puts the briefcase on the ground. He puts his elbows on the desk and leans forward.

LEONARD
Now. What is it you wanted to talk
to me about?

JOEL
My friend. Alan. He just finished
the race. He completed his goal!

Leonard smiles.

LEONARD
Congratulations!

JOEL
Thanks.
(beat)
Leonard, I wanted to ask you
something.

LEONARD
Go ahead.

JOEL
Your friend. The one who asked you
to. Um. Help him.

Leonard nods.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Do you ever wonder if maybe you
could've convinced him to. Well.
Not to die?

Leonard's eyes fill with tears. He remains quiet for a moment
as he composes himself.

LEONARD
You know, Joel. When Alistair and I
started this company we were so
sure that we were helping people.
Offering them something they
needed. That they couldn't get
anywhere else.
(beat)
But I've seen several cases like
Alan's over the years.

Leonard puts his head in his hands. Joel leans forward and
puts a hand on his shoulder.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
And Alistair. If I had just paid
more attention. Maybe I could have
kept him with me.

JOEL
It's not your fault. You were just
trying to be a good friend.

Leonard looks up and wipes his eyes.

JOEL (CONT'D)
But I think I have an idea about
how to handle those more, um,
ambiguous cases.

Leonard looks interested.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Everyone goes through hard stuff.
But for most people there's a light
at the end of the tunnel. I think
some people just need help finding
it.

Leonard nods.

JOEL (CONT'D)

What I'm saying is I think I wanna work for you. But not as an inspirer.

(beat)

I wanna do what I did for Alan. For other people.

Leonard beams.

LEONARD

When I look at my life and its secret colors, I feel like bursting into tears.

Joel looks confused.

JOEL

What?

LEONARD

It's a quote from Camus' *A Happy Death*. You have a talent Joel. For helping people appreciate those secret colors.

(beat)

Welcome to the team.

He holds out a hand for Joel to shake. Joel takes it.

INT. VALENTINE & SHEPHERD BREAK ROOM-DAY

Eva blinks her eyes open. Karleen enters and hands her a cup of coffee.

EVA

What happened?

HARMONY

Joel hit you with a dart.

EVA

He what? From whose gun?

Harmony and Karleen exchange nervous glances.

HARMONY

Um. Yours.

Eva looks shocked.

EVA

Please tell me you caught that
fucking bowl-of-jelly friend of
his.

Harmony shakes his head slowly. Eva glares at him.

Leonard and Joel enter the room.

LEONARD

Good morning everyone! I'd like to
introduce you to our newest
employee, Joel Holcomb.

Harmony forces a smile. Karleen looks shocked. Eva slams her
coffee cup on the table. Hot coffee splashes everywhere.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

I'm not cleaning that up!

INT. JOEL'S HOUSE-DAY

Prudence sits on the couch. She looks excited. Joel stands in
front of her holding her rollerblades.

JOEL

Today I realized that it was wrong
of me to take something that makes
you so happy away. I shouldn't have
done that. I want you to be happy
more than anything. I want you to
like your life, P.

Prudence squeals with delight. She jumps off the couch and
hugs Joel's legs.

PRUDENCE

I do like it. Thanks dad!

Joel kneels down to Prudence's eye level.

JOEL

Just promise me you'll be careful.

Prudence nods.

JOEL (CONT'D)

And always wear this.

He reaches into a bag on the floor and produces a purple
helmet. He puts it on Prudence's head.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Deal?

PRUDENCE

Deal.

Prudence holds out a hand. Joel shakes it. She runs outside. Joel watches her go.

EXT. JOEL'S BACKYARD-DAY

Beth, Alan and Holly sit around a picnic table. They talk, eat and drink. Prudence runs out of the house with her rollerblades. She puts them on and skates skillfully around the table. Cole follows on a bike. Joel stands in the doorway.

JOEL (V.O.)

We're all going to die. It could be from a brain tumor.

Beth rubs her temples.

JOEL (V.O.)

An accident.

Prudence wobbles but regains her balance.

JOEL (V.O.)

Or a heart attack.

Alan grabs a handful of taquitos.

Beth looks at Joel and winks. He joins the table.

JOEL (V.O.)

But until then there's Beth's smile. And all 300 pounds of Alan.

Holly kisses Alan on the cheek.

JOEL (V.O.)

And Prudence.

Prudence skates by. Joel catches her and pulls her in for a hug. She laughs and struggles to get away.

JOEL (V.O.)

And it's all going, going, going. So hold on tight. We don't all get a second chance to appreciate it before it's gone.

Prudence breaks free and skates away.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT IV