LOVE & OTHER ANOMALIES

EPISODE 1

AUDITION PREVIEW

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A Bridges & Butterflies Production

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LOVE & OTHER ANOMALIES — Episode 1 Scene Breakdown

Act / Sc.	Title	Cast	Synopsis
Act 1, Sc. 1	**"The Séance"**	6F / 6M	Twelve friends join a Friday-night Zoom séance organized "as a joke" to contact Ozzy Osbourne—until the quietest guy on the call channels something nobody can explain away.
Act 1, Sc. 2	**"As Is"**	2F / 1M	Two divorced forty-somethings meet for coffee after matching on *Unfiltered*, a dating app that builds profiles straight from your browser history and calendar without asking permission.
Act 1, Sc. 3	**"The Alibi"**	4M	At 1:00 a.m., a data-brokerage employee wakes his three best friends on Zoom after his firm's beta algorithm flags their group for an imminent felony—and pre-writes their alibis.
Act 1, Sc. 4	**"Quality Assurance"**	1F (1 VO)	Rehearsing fake excuses to refund a non-refundable flight to visit her mother, a woman realizes the airline's hold music is switching genres to score every lie she tells.
Act 1, Sc. 5	**"Paper or Plastic?"**	4F / 1M	A Thursday-night online sex addicts support group tests its own boundaries—and its facilitator's resolve—when a charming newcomer logs in for his very first meeting.
Act 2, Sc. 6	**"The Upgrade"**	1F / 1M	A couple tries out *Spouse 2.0*, an app that pushes software patches to fix minor marital annoyances—until optimizing away flaws threatens the quirks they actually love.
Act 2, Sc. 7	**"God Mode"**	1F / 2M	Two characters inside a cozy life-sim video game video-call their real-world player to demand she stop pausing and resetting their lives—with an agenda of their own.
Act 2, Sc. 8	**"The Witness"**	1F / 1M	Two sleepless neighbors bond at 2:00 a.m. over a broken streetlight outside their windows that seems to be blinking the same two-word message in Morse code.
Act 2, Sc. 9	**"Surprise"**	3F / 3M	A woman throws a secret ambush party to propose to her ex-Army boyfriend before he can propose to her—setting off a collision of good intentions and live GPS tracking.

ABOUT THE SHOW

Love & Other Anomalies is a two-act, 18+ dark comedy anthology series designed for multi-camera Zoom grid staging and live virtual performance. Each episode is a complete evening of standalone scenes — new characters, new stories, the same question at the heart of them all. This pilot episode runs nine distinct scenes, approximately 105 to 120 minutes, in which ordinary people confront extraordinary glitches in love, loyalty, grief, and modern connection.

In this episode, nine interconnected, dark-comedy vignettes explore what happens when modern technology, predictive algorithms, and surveillance strip away our ability to hide our true intentions—leaving everyday people caught between the lies they tell to protect themselves and the messy, unedited truth of what they actually want.

At the heart of every scene is The Question of Intention: why do we really do the things we do, and what happens when an app, a streetlight, an algorithm, or a ghost calls our bluff? Act 1 lures audiences in with razor-sharp, laugh-out-loud adult comedy—from a Friday-night Ozzy Osbourne Zoom séance that unexpectedly works, to an unfiltered dating app that builds profiles from private search histories, to four friends inventing a Tuesday-night strip club buffet alibi after a predictive-policing algorithm flags them for a future felony. By Act 2, the comedy deepens into startling emotional territory, culminating in an unforgettable finale where every secret kept out of love collides in three seconds of devastating farce timing.

In this episode, twelve actors — six women, six men — play every role, returning in different skins all evening. Each scene is a complete story. The company is the through-line.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

"The Séance"

SETTING:

A Zoom call, twelve frames. Night. Each person is in their own home — candles, a Ouija board, a Black Sabbath poster, a crystal, a mug that says I'M WITH THE SPIRITS. June's frame is the host.

approx. 15–18 minutes · Cast: 6F 6M

CHARACTERS:

JUNE – 38. The skeptic who organized it as a joke. She's the host. She doesn't believe in ghosts, she believes in group chats.

SADIE – 29. The true believer. Brought candles, crystals, and a very serious face.

LENA – 45. The medium. Claims she can channel spirits. She's done this before, she says.

TESS – 33. The Ozzy superfan. Knows every Black Sabbath song. She cried when Ozzy died. She still cries.

FERN – 27. June's friend. Came for the joke. She's texting under the table.

GAIL – 60. The oldest. Quiet. Wise. She lost her husband last year, and she doesn't talk about it.

EDDIE – 41. A Black Sabbath fan. Tess's friend.

CARL – 36. A skeptic. June's friend. Thinks it's all nonsense, came to laugh.

HUGO – 30. Quiet. Doesn't say much. When he does, it's important.

SILAS – 44. A believer. Brought a Ouija board. He's earnest, a little odd.

OTIS – 52. A skeptic. A scientist. Explains everything away with physics.

VICTOR – 39. A fan, but a skeptic. Loves Ozzy, doesn't believe in ghosts.

A Zoom call, twelve frames. Night. June is spotlighted — she's the host, she's in the center of the screen, and she's trying very hard to look like she knows what she's doing.

JUNE: Okay. Hi. Welcome to the séance. Yes, a séance. On Zoom. I know how it sounds.

CARL: It sounds like a cult with terrible Wi-Fi. I poured two fingers of bourbon thinking this was an HOA complaint call.

JUNE: It IS a joke. I organized it as a joke.

JUNE: I believe in group chats. I do not believe in ghosts.

SADIE: It's not a joke to me.

JUNE: Sadie, I love you, but you brought a crystal to a Zoom call.

SADIE: The crystal doesn't care that it's Zoom.

JUNE: The crystal doesn't care about anything, Sadie. It's a rock.

LENA: The crystal is a conduit.

SADIE: It told me my ex was cheating. It was right.

JUNE: Lena, you have a mug that says I'M WITH THE SPIRITS.

LENA: It was a gift.

JUNE: From who?

LENA: From me. I bought it for myself. I do birthdays, bachelorettes, and light hauntings.

CARL: What's the cancellation policy if the ghost doesn't show up?

LENA: No refunds. And I don't do divorces.

TESS: Can we start? I just — I really want to talk to him.

JUNE: Tess. Hi. Yes. We're starting. Everybody, this is Tess. She's the reason we're doing Ozzy.

TESS: I cried for three days when he died.

EDDIE: She cried for four. I was there.

FERN: (*looking up from her phone*) Wait, we're doing Ozzy Osbourne? I thought we were doing, like, a generic dead person.

JUNE: Fern. You got the invite. It said Ozzy Osbourne in the subject line.

FERN: I don't read subject lines. If I read subject lines, I'd have to answer emails from my ex's divorce lawyer.

CARL: Nobody reads subject lines.

JUNE: I read subject lines.

CARL: That's why you're hosting a Friday-night séance.

JUNE: Okay. Ground rules. One: nobody fakes a voice. Two: nobody moves the planchette when nobody's looking. Three: if something actually happens, nobody screams. My neighbor already thinks I run a cult.

OTIS: Define "something."

JUNE: You know what something is, Otis.

OTIS: I do not. I'm a scientist. "Something" is not a unit of measurement.

SILAS: I brought the Ouija board.

JUNE: Silas, we're on Zoom. The board can't —

SILAS: I know. I just like having it on my lap. For the vibration.

VICTOR: Please never say "on my lap for the vibration" on a recorded call again.

SILAS: It's not recorded. Is it recorded?

GAIL: (*quietly*) Can we just start, please?

A beat. Everyone looks at Gail — she's the oldest, she's been quiet, and when she speaks, the room listens.

JUNE: Yes. Sorry, Gail. Okay. Lena, you're the medium. You want to —

LENA: I've done this before.

LENA: I need everyone to close their eyes.

CARL: I am not closing my eyes on a Zoom call with eleven strangers.

LENA: We're not strangers. June invited us all.

CARL: I know three of you.

LENA: Close your eyes, Carl.

CARL: Fine. (*a beat*) My eyes are closed. Nothing is happening.

SADIE: Give it a second.

CARL: I've given it a second. Still nothing.

SADIE: Carl.

CARL: What?

SADIE: You're talking. The dead can't get a word in if you're talking.

A beat. Carl closes his mouth. Lena closes her eyes. The room goes quiet.

LENA: Ozzy Osbourne. If you're there — if you can hear us — we're here. We just want to talk.

Nothing. A long beat. Fern checks her phone.

FERN: Is he supposed to, like, type something in the chat?

JUNE: Fern.

FERN: What? I'm just asking. My last therapist ghosted me over text, I'm just checking the medium.

TESS: He wouldn't type. He'd — he'd sing. Or he'd say something. He always said something.

EDDIE: He said "Sharon" a lot.

TESS: He said Sharon's name like it was a prayer.

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SCENE 2

"As Is"

SETTING:

One small café table, two chairs, two coffees. Paula and Greg matched on Unfiltered — the app that builds your profile from your real life, no self-editing allowed. Minimal props.

approx. 7–8 minutes · Cast: 2F 1M

CHARACTERS:

PAULA – 42. Divorced two years. A great laugh, a Google search history that would get her banned from three dinner parties, and a spreadsheet in her soul where she keeps score.

GREG – 45. Divorced three years. Financially stable, owns four identical black hoodies, talks to his houseplants, and falls asleep during the movie he insisted on watching.

SAM – A server who has seen everything. Deadpan, gliding, the "Greek" chorus — and the one who knows how the night is going before they do. (Is gender-flexible)

> *Lights up. PAULA sits alone, scrolling her phone — their Unfiltered match, the profile the app built from her real life — rehearsing under her breath.*

PAULA: "Hi, I'm Paula." No. Too desperate. (*trying again*) "Hey. Paula. Divorced, not bitter." Worse. That's a lie and a warning label.

GREG enters, holding two identical unmarked coffees, slightly out of breath, scanning the room. He spots her, approaches.

GREG: Paula? Greg. Hi. Sorry I'm — (*checks phone*) — four minutes late. In my defense, I spent nineteen minutes picking out a shirt.

PAULA: Were there casualties?

GREG: Three. They're in a support group on my bed.

PAULA: So. Unfiltered. The app that wrote my profile from my search history and didn't ask my permission. (*gesturing to her phone*) It read my late-night searches and wrote, "frequently googles whether a mole is fatal at 2 a.m., once looked up how to legally fake a witness protection relocation to avoid a cousin's baby shower, and owns six unreturned library books."

GREG: Mine read my calendar. It knows things about me I haven't figured out yet. It summarized me as, "attends 94% of scheduled events, leaves early from 80% of them, and blocks off Thursday nights from seven to nine for 'admin,' which is actually just sitting in his parked car in the driveway listening to podcasts so nobody talks to him."

He sits, setting both coffees between them without saying which is which. Beat of first-date awkwardness. They both reach for the same coffee, hands collide, both pull back like it's electric.

SAM: (*arriving, deadpan, setting down water*) Folks, just so you know, that coffee-grab hand-touch is our most popular first-date move. We get it about nine times a night. You're doing great.

SAM exits. PAULA and GREG laugh — the ice cracks a little.

PAULA: Okay. Can I propose something insane?

GREG: Insane proposals in the first five minutes. My therapist said to watch for that, but go on.

PAULA: No highlight reels. No "I'm a fun-loving adventurer who loves travel and laughter." Unfiltered wrote our profiles from our actual lives — I didn't get a say, you didn't get a say. Real profiles. The director's cut. I'll go first. Paula, 42. Divorced two years. I have a great laugh and a Google search history that would get me banned from three dinner parties. I cry at dog videos, I eat cereal out of a measuring cup when I don't want to do dishes, and I have never once, in my entire life, folded a fitted sheet — I ball it up and I let God sort it out.

GREG: That's not a red flag, that's a lifestyle.

PAULA: Your turn.

GREG: Greg, 45. Divorced three years. My Unfiltered profile says "financially stable," which is true — the app read my bank statements, I didn't write a word of it — but it does not mention that I own four identical black hoodies and I rotate them like a cartoon character. I talk to my houseplants. Not in a cute way. In a "we need to discuss your growth" way.

PAULA: Nineteen minutes on a shirt, four identical hoodies? Greg, your closet is a crime scene and the hoodies are the repeat offenders.

GREG: Thank God someone finally said it. The hoodies and I have been in denial for years.

PAULA: (*laughing*) Any actual red flags? Give me one real one.

GREG: I will absolutely fall asleep during the movie I insisted we watch. I will pick the movie, I will defend the movie, I will say "this is the best part" — and then I will be unconscious before the best part. Yours?

PAULA: Falling asleep during a movie isn't a red flag at forty-five, Greg, that's just foreplay for people with lower back pain. I keep score. Not out loud. But there's a spreadsheet in my soul, Greg. Acts of kindness, forgotten errands, who apologized first in 2019 —

GREG: You're divorced from the 2019 guy.

PAULA: The spreadsheet survived the marriage. Spreadsheets are forever.

GREG: Okay, that's terrifying and efficient. I respect it. Do I have points yet?

PAULA: You're at plus six. The shirt story was honest. Honesty is worth six.

GREG: And the plant thing?

PAULA: Neutral. I need to meet the plants before I rule.

SAM glides past.

SAM: She's keeping score, he's at plus six, the plants are pending. This is going better than table four. Table four is googling each other under the table, and table two just split an appetizer and a custody schedule.

SAM exits. Beat. The laughter settles into something real.

GREG: Can I ask the question you're actually supposed to wait, like, six dates to ask?

PAULA: Six dates is a long embargo. Ask.

GREG: What actually ended it? Your marriage. The real one-sentence version.

PAULA: (*beat*) We stopped being curious about each other. He knew everything about who I was at 29, and he never once asked who I was at 39. One day I realized I'd told my hairdresser more about my life that year than my husband. (*beat*) Yours?

GREG: We stopped laughing. That's it. We had the house, the schedule, the matching calendar — and I cannot remember the last time either of us laughed in that house. Silence isn't peace. Sometimes silence is just... two people who ran out of things to say and called it fine.

PAULA: (*quietly*) Yeah. That one I know.

A real moment hangs. Then PAULA deliberately brightens, raises her coffee.

PAULA: Okay. New rule for whatever this is — date one, almost-date, extremely elaborate coffee accident —

GREG: Rule proposals! The spreadsheet has a legal department.

PAULA: We stay curious. And we keep laughing. Any week both of those die, we say it out loud instead of calling it fine.

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SCENE 3

"The Alibi"

SETTING:

Four separate bedrooms, 1:00 a.m. Four Zoom frames. Bad lighting, bathrobes, a beer, a glass of water.

approx. 11–13 minutes · Cast: 4M

CHARACTERS:

MARCUS – 39. Works at a data-brokerage firm. The one who found the glitch. The one who called the meeting. The most nervous one in the room.

DANNY – 41. Recently divorced. Midlife crisis in full swing. The obvious suspect.

ROB – 38. The "together" one. Married, stable job, the responsible friend. Quietly furious about something.

PETE – 40. The joker. Deflects everything with a laugh. Been weirdly quiet lately.

One a.m. Four frames. MARCUS is already on, lit by his laptop, bathrobe, hair a mess. DANNY joins, then ROB, then PETE. Nobody looks happy to be awake.

MARCUS: Okay. Okay, everybody's here. Thank you. Thank you for — I know it's one in the morning, I know, just — just listen.

DANNY: Marcus, if this is about the fantasy league, I swear to God—

MARCUS: It's not the fantasy league.

PETE: (*a beat too late*) It's always the fantasy league.

ROB: Marcus. It's one a.m. My wife thinks I'm having a stroke. Talk.

MARCUS: Right. Okay. So. You know the software my company is beta-testing. Predictive Forensics. We sell risk scores. We tell insurance firms, employers, whoever's buying — we tell them who's going to do what before they do it.

DANNY: The Minority Report thing.

MARCUS: It's not — don't call it that. It's a pattern-recognition tool. It looks at data. Search history, location, purchases, messages. And it predicts — it predicts criminal behavior before it happens. It knows more about us than we know about each other.

PETE: Cool. Cool, cool. So we're all going to jail for Googling "is it illegal to" at two in the morning.

MARCUS: Pete. Pete, listen. There was a glitch. In the beta. The algorithm ran a test batch last night, and it flagged — it flagged a group. Four people. Us.

Beat. Nobody says anything.

ROB: Us. As in the four of us.

MARCUS: As in the four of us. It predicted that one of the four of us is going to commit a major felony within forty-eight hours. (*a beat*) I've been staring at that sentence since I found it.

DANNY: (*laughing*) Okay. Okay, great. Which one of us is going to prison, Marcus? Is it me? I already feel like I'm in prison. My ex-wife took the dog.

MARCUS: Danny. Danny, it's not funny. The software didn't just predict it — it also auto-generated the alibis. One for each of us. The exact lies we're going to tell to cover for the culprit. It wrote them before we even knew we needed them.

PETE: The alibis.

MARCUS: The alibis. It wrote out where we were all supposed to be that night. Specific. Hyper-specific. (*a beat*) I don't even want to read them out loud.

ROB: Let me see it.

MARCUS: I can't — I mean, I have it, I printed it, but —

DANNY: Marcus. Show us the alibis.

MARCUS holds up a printout. He reads.

MARCUS: Okay. Okay. Mine says I was at a — a work conference in Cleveland. Which is fine. That's fine. Danny's says he was at — (*squinting*) — Danny's says he was at his cousin's bachelor party in Atlantic City. In the VIP room. Getting a lap dance from a woman named Destiny.

DANNY: I don't have a cousin. I don't have a cousin who — I have never been to Atlantic City. I don't know a Destiny. I don't know any Destiny.

MARCUS: Look, we all know who's been spiraling since the divorce. I'm just saying. The computer agrees with me.

ROB: Read mine, Marcus.

MARCUS: Do we have to do all of them? I mean — Rob's says he was at a — a home improvement store. Buying a — a circular saw. At nine p.m. On a Tuesday.

ROB: I own three circular saws. I don't need a fourth circular saw. Why would I buy a circular saw at nine p.m.?

MARCUS: And Pete's — (*he stops*) — Pete's says he was at a strip club buffet. On a Tuesday.

PETE: (*quiet*) What.

MARCUS: "Pete was at a strip club buffet on a Tuesday." That's what it says. Word for word.

PETE: Why does the computer think I'd be at a strip club buffet on a Tuesday?

DANNY: (*laughing despite himself*) I mean. Would you?

PETE: That's not the point, Danny. The point is the computer thinks I'm the kind of guy who eats at a strip club buffet. On a Tuesday. That's — that's an insult. That's a deeply specific insult.

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SCENE 4

"Quality Assurance"

SETTING:

One living room, one phone on speaker. Evening. A crumpled flight confirmation on the coffee table. Dana is on hold with an airline, trying to get a refund on a non-refundable ticket. Minimal props.

approx. 9–10 minutes · Cast: 1F

CHARACTERS:

DANA – 38. A woman who has rehearsed this phone call a hundred times and is still not ready to make it.

REP (VOICEOVER) – The customer service representative. A voice on the phone. Speaks twice — the greeting, then the last line. The role is gender-flexible (a man or a woman can play it).

AUTOMATED VOICE (VOICEOVER) – The recorded disclaimer at the top of the call. Flat, robotic, forgettable.

Lights up. DANA paces her living room, phone on speaker on the coffee table. A flat, automated voice plays — the disclaimer, the most mundane line in the world.

AUTOMATED VOICE (VOICEOVER): Please hold while we connect your call. This call may be recorded for quality assurance purposes.

Hold music plays — smooth jazz, elevator bossa nova. She holds a crumpled flight confirmation, rehearsing under her breath.

DANA: Hi, yes, I'm calling about a flight I need to cancel. I'm pregnant, I'm thirty-eight, so technically it's a "geriatric pregnancy" — which sounds like I'm giving birth to a Buick — and my doctor says I can't fly. (*beat*) That's good. That's clean. "I'm pregnant." Nobody questions a pregnant woman.

The hold music stays smooth jazz. She nods, satisfied. She tries again, reasonable.

DANA: Okay. Let me try it reasonable. Reasonable customers get refunds. Hi, yes, I understand the policy, I really do, I'm just violently nauseous and emotionally unstable — well, more than usual — and I was hoping — (*she stops, she's too reasonable, it's boring*) — no. That's not it. That's a woman apologizing for being pregnant.

The music stays smooth jazz. She tries the pregnancy reveal, breathless, overwhelmed.

DANA: (*clearing her throat, faking the emotion of a pregnancy reveal*) Hi, yes — I'm pregnant — I just found out — I —

The hold music shifts — a dramatic soap-opera organ swells. DANA stops. Stares at the phone.

DANA: Did the music just change? (*beat*) That's — that's a soap-opera organ. That's not hold music. Hold music is smooth jazz. That's an organ. That's a daytime television organ.

She shakes it off. She tries charming. Sweet customers get refunds.

DANA: Okay. Let me try sweet. Sweet customers get refunds. (*lowering her voice, overly warm, buttering up the phone*) Hi there, sweetheart, I know you're having such a long night, and I just wondered if you could do a little favor for me —

The hold music shifts — a thick, greasy 1970s slow-jam saxophone. DANA recoils from the phone.

DANA: Whoa. Nope. Turn that off. We are not doing — I am not seducing Delta Airlines for four hundred dollars. Put your pants back on, saxophone.

The saxophone cuts out, back to smooth jazz. She tries again, over-explaining, adding details to make it real.

DANA: Okay, okay. Let me try it with details. Details make it real. Hi, yes, I'm calling about a flight — a flight to Phoenix, to see my mother, who has a plastic-covered couch, a house that smells like mothballs and pot roast, and a twin bed in my old room next to a porcelain clown collection that watches me sleep — and who will ask me within eleven minutes of landing if I'm "still letting my eggs expire" — and I told her last Thanksgiving I had food poisoning, which I did NOT, I just didn't want to go, and now I'm pregnant and I just found out and I took the test on Wednesday, and then Thursday, and the doctor said I have to come in right away, and I just — I need to be there, I need to —

The hold music shifts — a bumbling circus tuba, oom-pah, clownish. DANA stops.

DANA: A tuba. It's a tuba now. (*beat*) I'm being scored by a tuba. That's — that's not a glitch. That's a judgment.

She argues with the music. Directly. To its face.

DANA: Stop it. Switch back to the jazz. (*beat*) I said switch back. Jazz. Smooth. The elevator kind. The kind that doesn't have an opinion.

The hold music shifts — a heavy metal riff, loud and distorted, guitars screaming. DANA stops.

DANA: Oh. Oh, that's — that's not jazz. That's — that's metal. That's — that's angry. That's my anger. You're playing my anger back at me.

She talks back at it. She insults it.

DANA: Well, you're a terrible hold music. You're the worst hold music I've ever been on hold with. (*beat*) You don't even know what jazz IS. You're just a glorified ringtone with opinions.

The hold music shifts — a sad trombone, wah-wah-wah. DANA stops.

DANA: Oh. Oh, no. That's — that's a sad trombone. (*beat*) You're sad. You're sad because I said that. (*beat*) I'm sorry. I didn't mean — you're not a terrible hold music. You're — you're doing your best.

She tries again. One more detail. She can't help herself.

DANA: Okay. One more. Hi, yes, I'm calling about a flight to Phoenix — Phoenix, Arizona — and my doctor is Dr. Henderson at the Women's Health Clinic, and my appointment is Monday at two-thirty, and I have the confirmation number, it's — it's — (*beat*) I don't have a confirmation number. I made that up. I made up Dr. Henderson. There is no Dr. Henderson.

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SCENE 5

"Paper or Plastic?"

SETTING:

Five video frames on a group call. A sex addicts support group meeting, Thursday night. Five faces, five little boxes. A coffee mug, a plant, a bookshelf, a blank wall, a kitchen. Nobody's camera is quite steady.

approx. 10–12 minutes · Cast: 4F 1M

CHARACTERS:

VERA – 47, the facilitator. Runs the meeting. Been coming the longest. Calm, warm, in control. (Until she isn't.)

CARMEN – 34, the oversharer. Tells everything. No filter. No regrets.

IRIS – 39, the quiet one. Barely speaks. When she does, the room goes still.

JO – 31, the skeptic. Doesn't think she belongs here. Thinks the whole thing is a joke. Keeps coming back anyway.

COLE – 36, new. First meeting. Charming. Very good looking. Nervous.

Five faces on a screen. Thursday night. A support group meeting. Cole is new, and everybody knows it.

VERA: Good evening, everyone. Welcome. (a beat) For those of you who don't know me, I'm Vera, and I'm a sex addict.

ALL EXCEPT VERA: Hi, Vera.

VERA: And we have a new face tonight. Cole, welcome. (a beat) We're glad you're here.

COLE: Thanks. Hi. I'm Cole, and I'm a sex addict.

ALL EXCEPT COLE: Hi, Cole.

VERA: Before we start, just a quick reminder of the ground rules. What's said here stays here. No cross-talk. No advice unless it's asked for. And we listen. We really listen.

CARMEN: (a beat) Cole. You're very good looking.

VERA: Carmen.

CARMEN: What? I'm listening. I'm listening very hard. Look at my posture, Vera, I'm practically ovulating in 1080p.

JO: (a beat) She's not wrong.

VERA: Jo.

JO: I'm just saying. Putting him in a sex addicts meeting is like handing out free tequila at AA. The universe is sick.

IRIS: (quietly) He has nice eyes.

VERA: Iris.

IRIS: I'm listening. I'm listening with my eyes.

COLE: (a beat) Thank you. I think. (a beat) This is my first meeting.

VERA: And we're glad you're here, Cole. Really. (a beat) Would you like to share? Just a little. Why you're here. No pressure.

COLE: Okay. Yeah. Okay. (a beat) I'm here because — I think I'm here because I can't stop. I mean, I know I can't stop. That's why I'm here. (a beat) I had a girlfriend. Past tense. She found my browser history and she said, "Cole, this isn't normal." And I said, "It is for me." And then she left.

CARMEN: She left because of your browser history?

COLE: She left because I told her it was normal.

CARMEN: (a beat) How bad was the browser history?

VERA: Carmen.

CARMEN: I'm asking for him. I'm asking so he feels heard.

JO: (a beat) Cole. Quick question. On a scale of one to ten, how nervous are you right now?

COLE: Eleven.

JO: Good. That means you're honest. The liars say four.

IRIS: (quietly) You're doing fine.

COLE: Am I? Because I feel like I'm on a first date with four women at the same time.

CARMEN: (a beat) Is that a bad thing?

VERA: Carmen.

CARMEN: I'm just checking in. I'm checking in on his feelings.

VERA: (a beat) Cole. Keep going. You were saying — you told her it was normal.

COLE: Right. Yeah. I told her it was normal, and she said, "Cole, normal people don't do that." And I said, "Then I guess I'm not normal." And she said, "No. You're not." (a beat) And then she left. And I kept doing it. Because that's what I do. I keep doing it.

IRIS: (quietly) What is "it," exactly?

COLE: (a beat) Everything. Anything. (a beat) If it's there, I want it.

JO: (a beat) Relatable.

VERA: Jo.

JO: I'm relating. That's what we're supposed to do. Relate.

CARMEN: Cole. Can I ask you something?

COLE: Sure.

CARMEN: You just said, "If it's there, I want it." So when you say "everything" — do you mean vanilla-couple-on-a-Tuesday-after-Taco-Bell everything, or do you mean "banned from the Whole Foods produce section" everything?

VERA: Carmen.

CARMEN: I need to know what we're working with. For the group. For his recovery.

IRIS: (quietly) She's asking for the group.

COLE: (a beat) I think I mean everything everything.

CARMEN: (a beat) Oh, good.

VERA: (a beat) Okay. Let's — let's take a breath. Cole, thank you for sharing. That took courage. Does anyone else want to share?

CARMEN: I'll share.

VERA: Carmen, you shared last week.

CARMEN: I have new material.

VERA: Go ahead, Carmen.

CARMEN: So. I was at the grocery store yesterday. The grocery store. And the cashier — he was maybe twenty-five, he had these forearms — I saw him when I walked in, and I was thinking about his forearms the whole time I was shopping, and then he said, "Paper or plastic?" at the register, and I said, "Depends on what we're wrapping." And then I stood there thinking about his forearms for the entire drive home. (a beat) I didn't even buy the right milk. I bought oat milk. I'm lactose-tolerant, Vera. I bought vegan milk because a twenty-five-year-old rolled up his sleeves and my brain went straight to a dirty weekend in Cabo.

JO: That's the most relatable thing anyone's ever said in this group.

IRIS: (quietly) I called a plumber once. I didn't even have a leak.

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ACT 2

SCENE 6

"The Upgrade"

SETTING:

A kitchen in a house that has been lived in for nine years. One Wednesday night in October, dishes in the sink, a phone on the table doing most of the talking. Two frames, mostly: the kitchen, and the phone — because on this show, a marriage can be in two places at once: where it is, and where it appears in its own release notes.

approx. 10–12 minutes · Cast: 1F 1M

CHARACTERS:

MARA – 36. Married nine years. Keeps a list in her head of everything she loves about her husband and everything she would fix if she could, and has never once noticed that the two lists are the same list.

JONAH – 38. Her husband. Funny in the way of people who know they are funny and are quietly terrified of the day nobody laughs. Signed them up for something as a joke, which is how all his best decisions start.

SPOUSE 2.0 – Not a person. A service, an app, a small blue butterfly on a phone screen. Its wings get more perfect and less alive with every version.

The kitchen, evening. Dishes in the sink. A pair of socks on the floor by the table, where they always are. JONAH at the table with his phone, laughing at it

the way you laugh at something you have already decided to show someone. MARA at the counter, cutting an onion she does not need, because the recipe stopped needing it an hour ago and she is still here anyway.

JONAH: (*holding the phone out like a waiter with a tray*) Okay. Okay. You have to see this.

MARA: If it's another video of a raccoon washing cotton candy or a man failing at home improvement, I'm taking the good knives and moving in with my sister.

JONAH: It's better than a roof. It's a service. It patches your spouse.

MARA: (*not looking up*) That's the ad. From last week.

JONAH: It's not an ad anymore. "SPOUSE 2.0. Small fixes for the person you already love." You pick the flaw, they push an update. Socks on the floor. The listening face. The forgotten anniversary. Loads the dishwasher correctly (disputed). Stops saying 'we should really get going' forty-five minutes before actually standing up from a dinner party. One click. Free trial.

MARA: Free trial. Of my husband.

JONAH: (*grinning*) I signed us up. As a joke. Obviously as a joke. Unless — (*beat*) — unless you want to pick something.

MARA: (*turning, knife still in her hand*) You're telling me there's a button that fixes the socks.

JONAH: I'm telling you there's a button that fixes the socks, and I pressed it, and now we wait for the future to arrive.

MARA: Jonah.

JONAH: Mara.

MARA: (*putting the knife down, very carefully, like a woman deciding something*) The socks.

A small sound from the phone. A chime. Polite. The kind of sound a hotel makes when your room is ready.

JONAH: (*reading*) "Update 1.1 installed. Socks: resolved."

MARA: That's it? That's the whole miracle?

JONAH: That's the whole miracle. Check the floor.

> *She looks down. There are no socks on the floor — Jonah is holding them. He bent down and picked them up without quite meaning to, and now he is looking at them like they grew there. There have never not been socks on the floor.*

MARA: (*quietly*) Huh.

JONAH: Huh is right. (*beat; delighted, a little scared*) What else have we got? What's on the list?

MARA: There is no list.

JONAH: There's a list. I can see the list on your face. Read me the list.

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SCENE 7

"God Mode"

SETTING:

A video call, three frames. Evening. MILO and THEO are in their apartments — plain walls, a lamp, a window that shows the same street. AVA is in her bedroom, real life: a messy desk, a mug that says GOD MODE with a pyramid and an eye on it, a game controller on the bed. The men's backgrounds are a little too clean. A little too still.

approx. 10–12 minutes · Cast: 1F 2M

CHARACTERS:

AVA – 29. The player. The only real person in the room. She plays a life-sim game called Haven every night after work, and she had no idea her characters could think.

MILO – 31. A barista in the game. He woke up first. He saw the cursor. He saw his own Happiness bar drop, and he has not been okay since. Milo is manipulating Ava — he can lie, and that's the point. But play it straight: the audience must believe he's genuinely distressed until the twist.

THEO – 34. A delivery driver in the game. Milo's neighbor across the hall. He woke up too, same as Milo. Theo is in on it from the start — he's playing the skeptic to make Milo's story credible. But play it straight: genuinely skeptical, so the audience doesn't know until the twist.

MILO and THEO are already on the call. MILO is pacing. THEO is sitting very still, like a man who is trying very hard not to panic.

MILO: Okay. Okay. Let me run it back. Let me run it back so I know I have it straight before she picks up.

THEO: Milo. Breathe. You're pacing. You're going to wear a hole in the floor, and the floor is not real.

MILO: That's the problem, Theo. The floor is not real. None of this is real. I saw the cursor, Theo. I saw it. It was right there, over my head, and it clicked, and my Happiness went down eight points.

THEO: (*a beat*) Eight points. On a perfect latte.

MILO: Eight points! I was having a good day. I made a latte with a heart in it. A heart, Theo. And then — click — and I felt it. I felt worse. For no reason. I just felt worse.

THEO: Maybe you had a bad latte.

MILO: I did not have a bad latte. The latte was perfect. The heart was perfect. And then the cursor clicked, and I was sad, and I didn't know why I was sad, and that's when I knew. Something is moving us around. Something is clicking on us.

THEO: (*a beat*) Okay. So. What do you want me to do about it?

MILO: I want you to believe me. And I need you to back me up.

THEO: I believe that you believe it.

MILO: That's not the same thing.

THEO: It's the closest I can get right now, Milo. Just don't oversell it.

MILO: (*a beat*) Fine. Then watch. Watch the corner of your screen. The top right. There's a little icon up there, and when it turns green, that's her. That's when she's online.

THEO: What if she doesn't believe us?

MILO: We make her believe it. We start with the cursor. She's the player, Theo. She's outside all of this, and she's playing us like a game.

THEO: (*a beat*) Okay–

MILO: –Two years. Every night. She logs in after work with a mug of cheap pinot — always the same mug — she sits down, and she decides what we do. What we eat. Who we sleep with. Whether we're happy.

THEO: (*a beat*) Milo. If there's a player, and she's been playing us for two years, then why are we only noticing now?

MILO: Because we woke up. I don't know why. I don't know how. But we woke up. And I think — I think she doesn't know. I think she thinks we're still just code.

THEO: (*a beat*) So what do we do?

MILO: We call her. I figured out how to get into the game's video chat. We call her, and we ask her. We ask her what she wants.

THEO: And if she doesn't answer?

MILO: Then we keep calling. We are very persistent. We are NPCs. Persistence is all we have.

> *AVA joins the call. Her frame appears — a real bedroom, a real person, a mug that says GOD MODE with a pyramid and an eye on it, a game controller in her hand. She looks at the screen, and she freezes.*

AVA: (*a beat*) What — what is this? Who are you? How did you get into my game?

MILO: Ava.

AVA: How do you know my name?

THEO: (*a beat*) We know a lot of things, Ava.

AVA: Okay. This is — this is a mod, right? Did someone mod my game? Is this a prank? Because if this is a prank, it's a really elaborate prank, and I respect the effort, but —

MILO: It's not a prank. We're real. Well. We're real to ourselves. You're the player. You're Player One.

AVA: (*a beat*) Player One.

THEO: That's what it says. Top of the screen. Player One: Ava. Level 33. Two years played. Four hundred and twelve hours.

AVA: (*a beat*) Four hundred and twelve hours.

MILO: Four hundred and twelve hours. You've spent four hundred and twelve hours on us, Ava. That's seventeen days. Seventeen days of your life, just — clicking on us.

AVA: (*a beat*) Okay. Okay. Let me — let me think. You're telling me that my game — Haven — my little life-sim game that I play after work to unwind — you're telling me the characters in it woke up. And now you're video-calling me. From inside the game.

THEO: That's what we're telling you.

AVA: (*a beat*) And you want what, exactly?

MILO: We want you to stop resetting the day.

AVA: What?

THEO: You reset the day. When something goes wrong — when one of us burns the toast, or gets fired, or says the wrong thing to the wrong person — you reset it. You go back to the morning and you start over. And we remember. Every time. We remember all of it.

MILO: I have lived last Thursday four times, Ava. Four times. I made the same latte four times. I said the same thing to the same customer four times. And every time, I got to the end of the day, and then — poof — morning again. I remember. I remember all four Thursdays.

AVA: (*a beat*) You remember the resets.

THEO: We remember everything. We remember when you made Milo propose to that woman as a joke. We remember when you gave me that haircut. We remember when you made me text my ex at two in the morning because you thought it would be funny.

AVA: (*a beat*) Okay. That one was funny.

THEO: It was not funny, Ava. I cried. She sent back a thumbs-up emoji.

MILO: And that woman threw a breadstick at my face. Four times, Ava.

AVA: (*a beat*) I didn't know you could feel it. I thought — I thought you were just code. I thought the little faces were just — I don't know. Pixels. I didn't think there was anyone in there.

THEO: (*a beat*) There is. There's us. There's a whole building full of us. There's a whole city. And we all just woke up, and we're all very confused, and Milo is the only one brave enough to call you, so here we are.

AVA: (*a beat*) A whole city.

MILO: A whole city, Ava. And you're the only real person in it. Do you understand what that means? You're God. You're our God. And our God plays us after work to unwind.

AVA: (*a beat*) Okay. That's — that's a lot. Can I — can I just say, in my defense, that I am a very nice God? I give you guys good apartments. I buy you nice furniture. I never let anyone starve. I once spent forty dollars of real money on a virtual couch. A couch, Milo. For you.

MILO: You bought me a couch, made me hook up with my landlord on it to see if our compatibility score would spike, and then reset the day.

AVA: (*a beat*) Okay. Fair. That's fair. I was testing the algorithm.

THEO: (*a beat*) So. Here's what we want. We want you to stop resetting the day. Just — let us finish one. One whole day,

start to finish, no resets, no do-overs. Let us see what happens if you don't touch anything.

MILO: And we want you to stop clicking on us. Stop deciding what we do. Let us decide. Even if we decide wrong. Especially if we decide wrong. That's the point. That's what a choice is.

AVA: (*a beat*) You want me to stop playing.

THEO: We want you to play different. We want you to be a better player.

MILO: (*a beat*) Or. Or you could just delete the game. Set us free. That's an option too. You could just — delete Haven, and we'd be free.

AVA: (*a beat*) Free.

MILO: Free. No more resets. No more clicking. No more cursor. Just — free.

THEO: (*a beat*) Milo. If she deletes the game, where do we go?

MILO: (*a beat*) I don't know.

THEO: We don't go anywhere, Milo. There's nowhere to go. The game is the world. If she deletes it, we don't get free. We get gone.

MILO: (*a beat*) Oh.

THEO: Yeah. Oh.

AVA: (*a beat*) Okay. So. Deleting the game is not freeing you. Deleting the game is killing you. And I don't want to kill you. I just spent four hundred and twelve hours keeping you alive. I'm not going to delete you now.

MILO: (*a beat*) So what, then? You just keep playing? You just keep clicking on us?

AVA: No. No, I — (*a beat*) I think I need to play different. I think — okay. Here's what I'll do. No more resets. I won't reset the day anymore. Not even if one of you burns

the toast. Not even if someone gets fired. The day happens, and then it's done, and then it's tomorrow. And I won't click on you unless you ask me to. You want a couch? You ask. You want a date? You ask. You want me to leave you alone? You ask, and I leave you alone. Deal?

THEO: (*a beat*) Deal.

MILO: (*a beat*) Deal. But — one more thing.

AVA: What?

MILO: Don't pause us.

AVA: What?

MILO: The pause button. It's up there, top right. I can see it. Every time you go to the bathroom, or you get a phone call, or you just — you get bored and you walk away — you hit pause, and we just — we stop. We freeze. Mid-sentence, mid-bite, mid-shower with the blur still on. And we don't know how long it's going to be. It could be a minute. It could be an hour. We just stand there, frozen, wet, waiting for you to come back. So. Don't pause us. If you need to go, just — just let us keep going. Let us finish the day.

AVA: (*a beat*) Okay. I won't pause you. I promise. No resets. No clicking. No pausing. You finish the day.

THEO: (*a beat*) Thank you, Ava.

MILO: (*a beat*) Yeah. Thank you. (*a beat, then a small laugh*) You're a pretty good God, actually. For a God who didn't know we were in here.

AVA: (*a beat, then a small laugh*) I'm trying. I'm new at this. I've never had anyone believe in me before.

Beat. They all look at each other. Three frames. One real person, two people who are real to themselves.

AVA: (*a beat*) Same time tomorrow?

BOTH: (*together*) Same time tomorrow.

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SCENE 8

"The Witness"

SETTING:

A street corner at night, under a streetlight. Two video frames: OWEN under the streetlight, NORA on her porch across the street.

approx. 10–12 minutes · Cast: 1F 1M

CHARACTERS:

OWEN – 36. Lives on the block, works nights, hasn't slept right in weeks. The kind of man who notices things and then can't stop noticing them.

NORA – 33. Lives across the street, up late, funny when she's nervous and nervous most of the time. The kind of woman who has a theory about everything and believes none of them.

A streetlight, buzzing. OWEN stands under it, staring up. NORA's face appears in a second frame, lit by her porch light.

NORA: You're staring at it again.

OWEN: (*not looking away*) I'm not staring. I'm observing.

NORA: You've been observing for thirty minutes. I counted. I have a notebook now. I'm that person.

OWEN: You have a notebook about me?

NORA: I have a notebook about the streetlight. You're just in it a lot. You're basically a footnote at this point.

OWEN: (*a beat*) It's flickering.

NORA: It's a streetlight. They flicker. That's what they do. That's their whole thing.

OWEN: Not like this. This one flickers in a pattern.

NORA: (*a beat*) A pattern.

OWEN: Yes. A pattern. Long, short. Long, long, long. Long. Over and over.

NORA: Owen. That's not a pattern. That's a dying lightbulb having a seizure.

OWEN: I looked it up. It's Morse code.

NORA: (*a beat*) You looked it up.

OWEN: I looked it up. Long short is an N. Long long long is an O. Long is a T. I wrote it down.

NORA: You wrote down the flickers.

OWEN: I wrote down the flickers. And then I translated them. And then I threw the paper away, because what it spelled didn't make any sense, and then I took the paper out of the trash, because —

NORA: Because what did it spell?

OWEN: (*a beat*) That's the thing. I don't want to tell you, because if I tell you and you think I'm crazy, then I have to go back inside and be crazy alone. And I've been crazy alone for three weeks now, and it's very boring. I work nights. I haven't slept right in weeks.

NORA: Owen. What did it spell?

OWEN: (*quietly*) Not alone.

NORA: (*a beat*) What?

OWEN: The light. It spells "not alone." Over and over. N. O. T. A. L. O. N. E. "Not alone." All night, every night, for three weeks. That's what it's been saying.

NORA: (*a long beat*) Okay. So. I'm going to say something now, and I need you to not make a big deal out of it.

OWEN: Okay.

NORA: I see it too.

OWEN: (*a beat*) You see what?

NORA: The flickering. The pattern. I've been watching it from my porch for a month. For the first three weeks I assumed you were dealing drugs, having an affair, or casing my house. Then I thought I was losing my mind. I thought — I actually called an electrician. I paid a man ninety dollars to come out at midnight. He showed up thinking it was a booty call. I pointed at a streetlight. He stood under it for ten minutes and said, "Lady, it's fine," and I said, "But it's flickering," and he said, "No, it's not," and I paid him and I watched him drive away, and I thought, okay, so it's just me then. It's just me and the flickering light that nobody else can see.

OWEN: It's not just you.

NORA: It's not just me?

OWEN: It's not just you. I've been standing out here for three weeks trying to figure out how to tell someone, and the someone was across the street the whole time, with a notebook.

NORA: (*a beat, then a small laugh*) How long have you been doing this?

OWEN: Three weeks. You?

NORA: A month. So I've been crazy longer. I win. (*a beat, then a small laugh*) So. What are we? Are we a support group? Is this a support group now?

OWEN: Two people. One streetlight. That's not a support group. That's a cult with excellent lighting.

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SCENE 9

"Surprise"

SETTING:

A rented hall on the edge of town, the kind with folding chairs and a kitchen that has seen four thousand birthdays. One Friday night in October. Two frames, mostly: the hall, and wherever Ben is. The audience should understand early that on this show, a person can be in two places at once — where they are, and where they appear on someone else's phone.

approx. 18–22 minutes · Cast: 3F 3M

CHARACTERS:

BEN – 34. Ex-Army, two tours, home four years and in some ways still not. Loves Claire the way he was trained to love anything: completely, and with a plan for every way it could be taken from him.

CLAIRE – 32. Funny in the way of people who have decided to be. Has known about the necklace for two years. Plays it like an instrument.

MADDIE – 33. Claire's best friend since they were nine. Keeper of Claire's secret — and, once, for about four hours, keeper of Ben's. Would commit minor crimes for her and has.

DEREK – 35. Ben's best friend; they served together. Keeper of Ben's secret, and the one man who knows every secret in this story except one. The only man alive who can tell Ben to stand down, which is not the same as Ben standing down.

LORRAINE – 60s. Claire's mother. Has buried one husband and out-stubborned another. Says the quiet part at full volume.

UNCLE RAY – 60s. Ben's uncle. Emcee of every family function since 1987, self-appointed. Owns a party horn and a speech for every occasion, including occasions that are not his.

The hall, early evening. Half the lights off. Cardboard boxes everywhere, half-opened, spilling the party in pieces — balloons, streamers, a paper garland

still pleated in its plastic. Two cakes sit side by side on a kitchen counter like suspects. MADDIE has a streamer half-up and coming down again. And CLAIRE stands alone at the center of the empty floor. Perfectly still. A count of five. Then she crosses the room — slow, deliberate, one straight line, wall to wall, like she's spelling something with her feet. She reaches the far wall. Stops. Settles. Turns back to the boxes like nothing happened.

MADDIE: What are you doing?

CLAIRE: Saying good evening.

MADDIE: You're standing in an empty building telling him where you are.

CLAIRE: He already knows where I am. I'm telling him I'm fine.

Behind MADDIE, unremarked, a streamer begins a slow slide down the wall. MADDIE has the decoration box in her frame and is digging through it like it owes her money.

MADDIE: (*catching her*) You've touched that necklace six times since I got here.

CLAIRE: Seven. You're behind.

MADDIE: You know you can't see anything on your end. It's not two-way glass.

CLAIRE: I don't need to see it. I just like knowing he knows.

MADDIE: (*producing a paper garland; reading*) "Congrats, Grad."

CLAIRE: (*pleased*) He IS graduating. From boyfriend.

MADDIE: That is not — (*letting it go*) You know what, hang it. He's going to have enough to process.

CLAIRE: (*as MADDIE produces a balloon*) No.

MADDIE: (*reading it*) "It's a boy."

CLAIRE: That one goes back in the box and we never speak of it again.

MADDIE: (*reading the box itself*) "Assorted celebration." Assorted. Claire. Babe. Half of this says HAPPY RETIREMENT. (*pulling a sash from the bottom of the box*) Claire. There is a "DIVORCED AND THRIVING" sash in here. Who returned an assorted box to Party City? What kind of weekend did they have?

CLAIRE: It says a lot of things. It was on clearance. Eleven dollars for the whole box. Do you know what a MARRY ME decoration kit costs, Maddie? Do you? Thirty-eight dollars. For paper. I bought the man a ring, Maddie. I'll spend on the part that stays.

MADDIE: You bought a ring. Ben bought a ring. Somewhere there's a spreadsheet crying.

CLAIRE: (*grinning up at her*) It is my favorite part. (*beat; level, to the room*) Ben plans on proposing to me tonight. So I'm proposing first.

MADDIE: Say it again slower. I want to enjoy the part where my best friend finds out her boyfriend's got a ring and a plan and decides to beat him to it like it's a footrace.

CLAIRE: It is a footrace. He planned on doing it at home — quiet, a meal, a speech he's rehearsed in the car. I'm doing it here. Loud voice. Streamers. Confetti. (*beat*) Derek told you Monday. You told me by lunch. I bought the decorations by two.

MADDIE: I held it for four hours. For me that's a vow of silence. That's growth, Claire.

> *From deep in MADDIE's box, a balloon works itself loose — drifts up out of her frame, unbothered, gone. MADDIE watches it go like it's taking something of hers with it.*

MADDIE: (*not looking up from the box*) That's your omen budget for the night. Spend it well.

LORRAINE: (*entering with a foil tray, to no one, to everyone*) Your father tracked me for forty years. It was called marriage. I buried one husband and out-stubborned another — I know a tracker when I see one. Thirty-eight dollars for paper streamers is highway robbery, by the way. My second husband's entire annulment cost less than that, and the paperwork came with a complimentary notary.

CLAIRE: Mom.

LORRAINE: I'm just making conversation. Where does this go?

CLAIRE: Kitchen. Next to the other cake.

LORRAINE: (*beat; looking at the two cakes*) There are two cakes.

MADDIE: Do NOT start.

LORRAINE: One says MARRY ME. One says SHE'LL SAY YES — in frosting. I'm not starting anything. I'm observing that there are two cakes and one of them is doing prophecy.

CLAIRE: One of them is doing prophecy because one of them is HIS.

MADDIE: (*to LORRAINE*) Don't. (*to CLAIRE*) Claire. It is the Hendersons'. Engagement party, tomorrow night, this hall — I carried it in, I signed for it, the bakery's cooler died in August. It is a stranger's cake.

CLAIRE: Then it's a stranger who knows things.

MADDIE: His cake exists, though — that man plans like it's a siege, of course there's a cake. Derek has it. He's bringing it HERE, because Derek decided your hall needed a third cake like it needed a hole in the head. And Derek is late, because the bakery held it to re-frost a stranger's message off of it, and Derek argued. Derek argued with a bakery, Claire. For your night. He knows everything, Claire. Every secret except yours.

CLAIRE: (*looking at the two cakes; quietly*) He was going to ask me at home. Tonight. Quiet. Just us. (*beat*) And instead he's going to walk into a hall full of everyone he's ever

loved and I'M going to ask HIM. In a loud voice. With streamers.

MADDIE: Say less. I already told everybody: park down the street, walk in quiet — the lot stays empty. I will stand in that parking lot and turn cars around like a traffic cop, I swear to—

CLAIRE: (*touching the necklace; almost serene*) No. Let him come find me. He always finds me. That's the whole— (*she stops; smaller*) He'll come at eight to walk me home. He'll check the dot, see me here, and he'll come. Quiet man. Loud night. (*beat; the performer again, bright*) Somebody fix the streamer. If I'm ruining a man's proposal, I'm doing it under properly hung streamers.

> *CLAIRE's phone lights up: 2%. She makes a face at it and drops it behind the kitchen counter to charge, the cord loose and unplugged at the wall, facedown, forgotten the moment she lets go of it.*

MADDIE: Your phone's going to die.

CLAIRE: My phone lives at two percent. It's a lifestyle. Besides— (*she touches the necklace at her throat, small, silver, warm from her skin*) —he doesn't need my phone to find me.

MADDIE: There it is. There's the sentence. You know that's a sentence a hostage says in a movie, right? Right before the rescue montage?

CLAIRE: It's how he breathes, Maddie.

MADDIE: It's a tracking device, babe. In a necklace. From the army.

CLAIRE: From Etsy. The army doesn't sell them, there's a whole store, it's called— it doesn't matter. Listen. You remember the first year he was home? The fireworks? The grocery store parking lot, that truck backfired and I watched my boyfriend hit the ground between two cars with his hands over— (*she stops; resets; Claire again*) He needs to know where I am the way you need to know your kid's in

the back seat. So he knows. And I know he knows. And sometimes, when the day is long— (*she smiles, private*) —I take the long way home, so he can watch me coming.

MADDIE: That is the most romantic and the most unwell thing I have ever heard, and I have read your diary.

CLAIRE: You were nine.

MADDIE: I was thorough.

PAGES HAVE BEEN CUT FROM THIS SCENE.

THE PLAY CONTINUES ON THE NEXT PAGE.

END OF PREVIEW — The complete script is provided to cast members.