BACK SOON

Ву

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FADE IN:

EXT. CAR PARK - DAY

The top level of a multi-story car park. A sunny day, blue sky above.

One lone car, an expensive-looking five-door, sits in a space.

INT. CAR - DAY

STEVE, 38, well-kept but weary, sits in a suit in the front seat. In his hands he holds a photo, a holiday snap of a beautiful woman holding a beautiful baby boy. Steve looks down at the photo. A tear lands on the woman's face.

A gun rests on Steve's thigh.

Music comes from the CD player, a sad love song that obviously means something to Steve. When the chorus arrives, he mouths along, crying a little more. He wipes his eyes.

He looks down at the gun, touches it with his fingertips. He raises the photo to his mouth, kissing it.

STEVE (a whisper) I'll find you. I love you.

He lets the photo fall from his fingers, swings the gun up and presses the muzzle underneath his chin. He screws his eyes shut, breathes in.

Everything goes white. Then, the sound of a single gunshot.

INT. TICKET ROOM - TIME UNKNOWN

The whiteness fades, and Steve's face appears, eyes still closed. He opens them, breathes in. He sits up.

The room is bare, walls painted white, carpet underfoot. An OLD MAN in a long white robe sits on a chair by the door, asleep. Next to him, mounted on the wall, is a ticket dispenser.

Steve climbs to his feet, looking around him in a daze. He pats his hands over his chest. He is still in the suit he was wearing in the car. He runs his hand across the skin under his chin. It's unbroken, no entry wound there.

STEVE

What on earth?

He spots the man on the chair, approaches him slowly, reaches out and gently shakes his shoulder. The man's head lolls sideways, but he does not wake up. Steve shakes him harder.

> STEVE Hello...excuse me...

He gives the man's face a gentle slap. Suddenly the man awakes with a jolt. Steve leaps back in surprise.

> OLD MAN What'd you wake me up for? Couldn't you see I was sleeping?

STEVE

Oh, I'm sorry...

The old man shakes his head in disapproval. He waves a hand in the direction of the ticket dispenser.

> OLD MAN Just take a ticket and move along, please.

Steve looks at the dispenser. The forked edge of a ticket is visible. Steve grabs it, and pulls out a long strip of paper, with a number on it.

ON THE TICKET:

89733795840

Steve holds the ticket up and shows the man the number.

STEVE What's this?

OLD MAN Your ticket.

tour ticket.

STEVE Ticket? Ticket for what?

The old man sighs.

OLD MAN It's your queue number, all right?

STEVE

My queue number?

OLD MAN

Look, why are you just repeating everything I'm saying? These are perfectly simple concepts, especially in the time you're from.

STEVE But what does it *mean*?

OLD MAN

What does it mean? What do you think it means? It means there are eighty-nine-billion-seven-hundred-an d-thirty-three-million-seven-hundred -and-ninety-five-thousand-and-eighthundred-and-thirty-nine people ahead of you. Your soul is important to us, and we will get to you as soon as possible. Now please move along.

A moment of recognition on Steve's face.

STEVE 'Soul'? Wait a minute, is this Heaven?

The old man laughs. He stands up, takes Steve by the arm.

OLD MAN

Not quite, I'm afraid. Not quite. Now please move, I think someone else is coming through.

A swirling mist begins to appear at the centre of the room. The old man opens the door, guides Steve through, and shuts it behind him.

INT. MAIN WAITING HALL - TIME UNKNOWN

Steve turns around to find himself in an impossibly huge hall. It stretches away in all directions. The ceiling is high up, out of sight, the walls far-off horizons. The floor is filled with endless rows of cheap, plastic chairs.

On the chairs sit the billions. All ages, all races. Wearing different clothes from across history. But their faces are uniform - most of them have a vacant look, as though they are asleep with their eyes open.

Steve wanders between the rows. As he walks past a young, beautiful woman dressed in the muddy clothes of a peasant

farm-girl, she reaches up and grabs his arm.

YOUNG WOMAN (in French) Is he back yet?

STEVE

Err...

YOUNG WOMAN (in French) Is he back? I've been waiting for my turn for a long time, you know. How much longer will he be?

STEVE

I...I don't understand you...(bad
accent) je ne speak francais...I'm
sorry...

She waves her ticket at Steve. Confused and scared, he shrugs her off and hurries away. Every chair is full. Eventually he sees an empty seat and collapses into it.

HARRY

A newcomer, are you?

Steve jumps at the unfamiliar voice. HARRY, 50s, sits to the seat on his right. He is dressed in a jogging outfit.

STEVE

Err, yes. Yes I am.

HARRY Thought so. You can always spot the newcomers - they have the same look.

STEVE

Look?

HARRY

Yep, that one right there. The one that says, 'What the hell is happening, where the hell am I?' I had that look once, too. What's your name, friend?

STEVE Steve. Steve Richards.

Harry holds out a hand. They shake.

HARRY

Good to know ya. Forgive my rudeness in not reciprocatin', but to tell you the truth I can't recall what my name was.

STEVE

Oh, I'm sorry. Amnesia?

HARRY

(chuckles) Kinda. It's what happens here, see. The longer you're here, the more you lose. Names and dates go first. Then your memories, and slowly you forget all the words you knew. Eventually, you and me are gonna end up just like him.

Harry jerks his thumb at an old Chinese man sitting on his right. The man's chin rests on his chest, and his open eyes have a glazed look. Harry leans over and waves a hand in front of the Chinese man's face.

> HARRY Hey, Chop Suey! Hello!

No reaction from the Chinese man. Harry turns back to Steve.

HARRY

See? Nothing. An eternity as a freakin' zombie, that's what awaits us. (pause) You okay, friend? You seem awful quiet.

STEVE

No! No I'm not okay! I'm confused, scared, disoriented, in shock...I don't know where I am, I'm sitting on a shitty plastic chair, holding a piece of paper with the longest number I've ever seen on it, and I have no idea what's going on!

HARRY

Well, why didn't you say so? I can fill you in on that. There ain't much to tell, really. We're all just waiting.

STEVE Waiting for what?

HARRY

To be judged. We're gonna be called up one by one, and then they'll decide whether we go upstairs or downstairs. You get it? (pause) You don't get it. Okay. You know you're dead, right? Well, this is where all the in-betweeners end up. The ones not virtuous enough to get a free pass to Paradise, but not downright wicked enough to be sent down into the fiery depths.

STEVE

So this is...Limbo?

HARRY

There we go! You're not too stupid after all. Yes indeed, my friend, Limbo. We wait to be called up, they look at our lives, they make a decision, and we either go up to the clouds or down to the flames. That's the idea. Trouble is, I think they're building up quite a backlog. No-one's been judged for a long time, see. A very long time.

STEVE

Why?

HARRY

Well, I don't rightly know. I've asked the guys in white and they won't give me a straight answer. Some trouble with the upstairs management, is my best guess. That's not the only way out, of course.

Steve looks up, interested now.

STEVE

Then what are we waiting for? Let's go!

HARRY

Hold on there, friend! I said there was another way out. I didn't say it was one you'd want to take. Unless of course, you're a fan of never-ending torment.

STEVE Oh. You mean Hell, don't you? Hsrry points into the distance in front of him.

HARRY

The guy downstairs is happy to let new people in. The staircase down is way over there. Truth be told, I'm starting to wonder if it might not be easier to just give up waiting and go that way. It might not be so bad.

STEVE

Eternal damnation doesn't sound very fun. What with the fire and the torture and all that.

HARRY

True, true. Maybe later. Who knows, maybe they'll get normal service resumed again soon. So why're you here, friend?

STEVE

What do you mean, why am I here? I'm here because I'm dead, aren't I? The same reason we're all here.

HARRY

Sure you're dead, but I didn't mean that. Out-and-out good people don't end up in Limbo. You seem like a pretty decent kinda guy...what did you do that wound you up here?

STEVE

I don't really know. I thought I'd led a pretty good life, to be honest. I wasn't a saint, but I was a nice enough person.

HARRY Ever beat your wife?

STEVE

What? No!

HARRY Ever cheat on her?

STEVE

Excuse me?

HARRY

Ever commit a crime? Ever steal anything, beat someone up?

STEVE What the hell are you -

HARRY Ever kill anyone?

STEVE

No! What kind of person do you think I am?

HARRY

Okay, okay, no need to blow a gasket! Just tryin' to get a picture of your life. Me, for instance, I must have done something to end up here. Same with all of these poor suckers. But if you really were as decent as you say, then why're you not up in the clouds strumming on a harp and singing 'Hallelujah' right about now? How did you die?

STEVE

Well, I...oh.

HARRY

Oh? Now that sounds like a moment of self-realisation right there. Oh what?

STEVE I killed myself.

HARRY

And there, my friend, is our answer. Suicide ain't looked upon too kindly by the Big Guy Upstairs. Kinda considered a sin and all that. In fact, you're lucky you didn't fall straight into the fire and brimstone. Why'd you do it?

STEVE

Well, I wanted to see my...oh my God!

Steve leaps to his feet, slaps a hand to his forehead.

Whoa, what's the matter?

STEVE Maria and Charlie! I completely forgot about them!

HARRY Ma-who-ma and cha-what-now?

STEVE

My wife and son! I killed myself so I could be reunited with them. I wasn't really even sure if there was an afterlife, but now that I know there is, they must be here somewhere! I've got to find them!

HARRY

How did they die?

STEVE

What? Oh, err...a car crash. A schoolgirl ran out into the road and Maria swerved to miss her. They got hit by an oncoming van.

HARRY

Sorry, friend, but if that's the case then I think you're bang outta luck.

STEVE 'Bang outta luck'? What does that mean? They have to be here somewhere! I promised I'd find them.

Steve turns, begins to move off. Harry calls after him.

HARRY

They won't be here, friend.

Steve stops, turns, looks at Harry.

STEVE

You don't know that.

HARRY

No, but I'd be willing to bet...well, not my life, but you get the gist. Sounds like your wife and son died what I'd call a 'righteous death'. Sacrificing themselves to save the life of a little girl? It'd say they're floatin' around upstairs even as we speak. And you're stuck down here, with no prospect of getting up there until whatever technical hitch we have has been resolved. Like I say my friend, bang outta luck.

Steve lunges forward, grabs Harry by the front of his tracksuit.

STEVE You're wrong. You have be wrong.

HARRY Sorry, friend, but I think you're stuck here.

STEVE I didn't kill myself to spend an eternity sitting around in a sodding waiting room. I'm going to find them.

Steve releases Harry and walks away. Harry shakes his head and sits back in his chair.

INT. ELSEWHERE IN THE WAITING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Steve wanders between rows of chairs, all of them filled with people in varying comatose states. Eventually, he spots an ATTENDANT in long white robes walking purposefully in the opposite direction. Steve hurries to intercept him.

STEVE

Excuse me.

ATTENDANT

Yes?

The attendant keeps on striding forward. Steve has to half-jog to keep up.

STEVE

Why is no-one being processed?

ATTENDANT

We're currently experiencing some communication problems. As soon as these are resolved we'll resume normal service. Please hold onto your ticket and wait to be called. STEVE

Look, I don't have time to wait. I think my wife and child are upstairs, and I want to see them.

ATTENDANT

I'm afraid that's impossible, sir. You must wait to be processed.

STEVE But how long will that be?

ATTENDANT As long as it takes, sir. Please just find a seat and sit tight. Your soul is important to us -

Steve reaches out, grabs the attendant's arm, stops him.

STEVE

Look, why don't you really tell me what's going on?

ATTENDANT Let go of my arm, sir.

STEVE

Communications problems? That's bollocks. I've been doing the sums in my head, and some of these people must have died thousands of years ago.

ATTENDANT

They're ongoing problems. However, we're confident that it won't be long before -

STEVE

'Won't be long'?! How can you possibly say that?

ATTENDANT

Sir, I'm telling you to let go of my arm.

STEVE

I'm not sitting here and waiting thousands of years! I want to see my wife and son!

The attendant suddenly brushes Steve's arm off and pushes him backwards into an empty chair.

ATTENDANT

You'll wait your turn like everyone else! I'm sick of people asking me questions I don't know the answers to. I don't know what's happening, all right? The word from upstairs is that we give people tickets and tell them to wait. Yes, it's annoying. Yes, it's frustrating for all of us. You think you've got it tough - I'm on my way to do a shift over in the Limbo of the Infants!

STEVE

The Infants?

ATTENDANT

Millions and millions of unbaptised babies, all awaiting processing. We have to keep them here until service starts up again and they're crying, always crying...so you just sit down, shut up, and wait your turn, like everyone else. He has to come back eventually.

The attendant claps a hand over his mouth. He turns and walks quickly away. Steve gives chase.

STEVE

Who? Who has to come back?

ATTENDANT

No-one, sir. Please go and sit down.

STEVE

You mean God, don't you? Don't you? Just look at me and answer my question.

The attendant stops suddenly, wheels round and presses his face close to Steve's.

ATTENDANT

Yes, all right? That's who I mean. No-one's heard from Him ever since that business with His son. He just upped and disappeared, left the world to sort out it's own mess. And now Limbo's filling up, and no-one's been processed for such a long time, and everyone gets angry at us when we have no more idea of what's going on than you do! It's ridiculous really, abandoning everything and just leaving one stupid little note. There are billions of people here now, billions upon billions. And look up there, that's just how much trouble we're all in.

The attendant points upwards. High above the seated masses is a giant board, with a huge number '1' on it. Steve looks down at the ticket in his hand, at the very long number on the white piece of paper.

> ATTENDANT No-one'll ever be processed again.

STEVE What did the note say?

ATTENDANT

What?

STEVE The note He left behind. Did it say when He'd be back?

ATTENDANT No, not really, nothing like that. It was just two words: 'Back Soon'.

STEVE

(weakly) 'Back Soon'?

ATTENDANT That's what it said. So just sit tight and wait, sir. We'll get to you when we get to you.

The attendant moves off. Steve is left standing, looking after him.

INT. SOMEWHERE ELSE IN THE WAITING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Harry still sits in his seat. Steve wanders up and collapses onto the chair next to him. Both stare forward into nothing, not looking at each other.

> HARRY Well? Did you find anything out?

STEVE

HARRY

Ha! Wait. We'll be sitting on these chairs, waiting, for the rest of time.

STEVE He says He'll be back soon.

HARRY

Of course He will. I've half a mind to get up, walk over to the gates of Hell and end this hanging about.

STEVE

Go on then.

A moment's silence.

HARRY

Maybe later.

Another moment's silence.

STEVE

You know, I'm starting to think that perhaps killing myself wasn't a good idea, after all.

HARRY

Perhaps not.

STEVE

All I wanted was to see my wife and little boy again. Is that such a sin? To miss someone? Maybe I should have kept going. But it was just so hard to wake up every morning without...(pause)...I can't remember her name. Why can't I remember her name?!

HARRY

Oh dear, it's happening to you, too, friend. Slowly, we forget, our former lives fading away until all we have are the ghosts of memories.

Harry smiles at his own eloquence. Steve isn't paying attention to him.

One day He'll be back. He'll come back, and then I'll see them again. One day.

HARRY

Maybe. One day. Although by then you'll probably have forgotten everything, and even if you do see them again you won't even know who they are.

STEVE

Oh. (beat) At least that means I won't miss them anymore.

A long moment of silence.

STEVE What do we do now?

HARRY What do you think we do? We wait.

High above, the board stills shows a giant '1'.

A second passes. It doesn't change.

It doesn't change.

It doesn't change.

And then, suddenly -

It doesn't change.

FADE OUT