

LIFELINE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. INNER CITY GHETTO - NIGHT

A no man's land populated by deteriorating buildings and abandoned vehicles. Steam rises from manhole covers, and drifts across the littered streets.

LISA YOUNG (26), a brunette in a waitress uniform, walks alone. Her face is attractive, but marred by stress.

She studies the ground below her with exhausted eyes.

Lisa turns a corner.

A young, drugged-out PROSTITUTE dances poorly in the distance.

As Lisa nears her, electronic music from an old-fashioned beat-box becomes audible. A PIMP in tattered clothing leans against a graffiti-marked wall next to the prostitute.

His head bobs back and forth, eyes following the prostitute.

He notices Lisa.

PIMP

Hey, mommie, who you with?

Lisa seems unaffected by this comment, keeping her slow pace.

PIMP

(calling out)

You don't wanna make real money?

A subway entrance is ten feet ahead.

INT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Lisa waits in a dimly lit subway platform. Eyes staring blankly ahead.

There is no one else in sight. A train RUMBLES in the distance.

Headlights glow brighter from within the tunnel.

Lisa moves toward the edge of the platform.

The RUMBLING of the train grows louder as it draws nearer.

Lisa inches closer to the tracks. She now stands just behind the yellow line.

A rat scampers across the tracks below.

The headlights continue to glow brighter from the tunnel as the train nears. The rumbling becomes deafening.

She takes one step closer, now mere inches from the platform's edge. Lisa closes her eyes.

She drops her purse out onto the train tracks below.

The train rushes by in front of her, centimeters separate it from swiping her face.

The train slows to a halt.

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - LATER

Lisa sits at the far end of a fiberglass bench on the subway car.

The dark tunnel walls flash by.

A homeless man, the car's only other passenger, lies asleep beneath a filthy blanket. Occasionally his body shudders. It is the only sign of life in him.

Lisa takes notice of a brightly lit ad above the bench opposite of her. It reads "LIFELINE, INC. - Happiness is just one phone call away". It includes an address and phone number.

The train slows, wheels sparking against the rails.

INT. LISA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A cramped studio apartment.

Lisa sits at the foot of her bed, staring at her cell phone. Pondering.

After a few moments, she dials a number.

OPERATOR (V.O.)

Thank you for calling Lifeline.
Please hold as we transfer you to
one of our associates.

A whimsical song spills out of the phone as she waits on hold.

The music stops.

ISAAC (V.O.)
Thanks for calling Lifeline. How
can I help you?

Lisa remains silent. She hangs up, places the phone beside her, and buries her face into her hands.

Suddenly, the cell phone RINGS, startling Lisa.

She stares at the phone as it continues to ring. The caller ID reads: "UNKNOWN".

She picks it up apprehensively.

LISA
(into phone)
Hello?

ISAAC (V.O.)
Why did you hang up, Lisa?

Silence.

LISA
How do you know my name?

ISAAC (V.O.)
You called us because you need
help, right? Let me help.

LISA
How do you know my name?

ISAAC (V.O.)
When you called, our system
retrieved all of your information.
Name included.

Lisa hangs up again.

The phone immediately rings.

Lisa gets up off the bed. She paces back and forth, considering whether or not to pick up the phone.

After the fifth ring, she grabs it.

LISA
What the hell do you want from me?

ISAAC (V.O.)

I only want to help you, Lisa. Just as I've helped thousands of other callers.

LISA

You have my name. What else do you know about me?

ISAAC (V.O.)

Only what's in our records.

LISA

Do you have my address?

ISAAC (V.O.)

175 Norstrand Street, isn't it?

Silence.

ISAAC (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Please, Lisa, listen to me. You called us for a reason. Let us help. Believe me when I say our organization has led thousands of people, just like you, on paths to happiness.

LISA

What is this? Is it therapy?

ISAAC (V.O.)

We do whatever is required to find you happiness.

LISA

No, I mean, what does your company sell?

Isaac laughs.

ISAAC (V.O.)

Sell? Oh, no. We don't sell anything.

LISA

Then what's in it for you?

ISAAC (V.O.)

We'll get to that. Trust me. First, just tell me why you called.

A beat.

LISA

I called you because... because I hate my life.

ISAAC (V.O.)

Now we're getting somewhere.

(beat)

Tell me about your life. What do you hate about it?

LISA

I don't know. Everything.

ISAAC (V.O.)

Be more specific. Tell me what's wrong with your life.

Lisa takes a deep breath.

LISA

I'm just not... where I wanted to be. I'm stuck in a dead end job. Going nowhere. I've got no friends. I'm not exaggerating, I really don't have any friends. I can't seem to get along with my mother, and I despise my father. I just feel I've got nothing to live for.

(beat)

I've been thinking about suicide for a while now. You know what I realized?

ISAAC (V.O.)

What?

LISA

I realized no one would even care. And if I'm wrong, and someone does care, maybe my death would be the rude awakening they needed. I don't even know why I called you. I'm sure you don't care.

ISAAC (V.O.)

You're wrong, Lisa. I do care. Depression is a disease. A disease no one should have to suffer through. But in order to fix it, we have to target the causes. Now, what did you say about your family?

LISA

I don't have one. Growing up, I always thought I'd get married, maybe have a couple of kids. But I'm 27 years old, and I've got nobody.

ISAAC (V.O.)

You said something about your father-

LISA

I haven't talked to him for over two years. The last time we spoke, he told me I was dead to him.

ISAAC (V.O.)

I see. What if I told you that if your father visited our headquarters, we could... rectify that problem?

LISA

I don't think counseling would help.

He chuckles.

ISAAC (V.O.)

We don't offer family therapy here. We use our own methods.

Lisa's forehead creases.

LISA

You wouldn't hurt him, would you?

ISAAC (V.O.)

Only if it would heal you.

LISA

I'm not agreeing to anything that would harm my father.

ISAAC (V.O.)

This isn't about his well-being, Lisa. It's about yours. Your happiness, your livelihood. Seize it.

KNOCKING from the front door startles Lisa.

LISA

Hold on.

She gets up off the bed.

ISAAC (V.O.)
Oh, yes. I should have told you...
I sent an associate of mine to help
with your situation. His name is
Vincent.

Lisa stops dead in her tracks.

LISA
What? Why?

ISAAC (V.O.)
Vincent will help persuade you to
take initiative. Answer the door.
Invite him in. Explain your
situation to him.

The knocking becomes POUNDING.

ISAAC (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Take control of your life.

Lisa nervously paces back and forth.

LISA
I didn't ask for this. Make him go.

ISAAC (V.O.)
Answer the door, Lisa.

LISA
Why?

ISAAC (V.O.)
Because if you don't, I'll cut off
your finger. Or rather I'll have
Vincent cut it off. We must allow
him his little, uh, pleasures.

Lisa hangs up and throws the phone on her bed.

The pounding at the front door gets louder.

Lisa makes her way to the kitchen counter top.

She grabs a knife off the counter. The pounding on the door stops.

She heads over to the front door, and looks out the peephole.

LISA'S POV - THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE

The hallway looks completely empty.

LISA'S APARTMENT

Lisa slowly turns the doorknob, and in a quick, swift motion swings the door wide open.

Nobody there.

HALLWAY

Lisa steps out into the hallway, and looks around. The place is desolate.

Lisa notices something at her feet. A business card.

She picks it up.

The card reads "LIFELINE, INC. - Happiness is just one phone call away".

Her cell phone RINGS again.

Just as Lisa steps back into her apartment, someone violently grabs her from behind and throws a bag over her head.

INT. WAITING ROOM - LATER

Black screen.

CHEERFUL VOICE (O.S.)
Thank you for calling Lifeline.
Please hold as we transfer you...

Lisa wakes up in a brightly lit room, dazed and confused.

CHEERFUL VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
... to one of our associates.

Lisa glances around. Empty chairs and four white walls surround her. No windows. A clock on the wall reads "5:37". She appears to be in a waiting room.

Gradually her confusion subsides. Panic replaces it.

She checks her fingers. All ten are there.

She desperately gets up out of her chair, stumbling. Disoriented. She can hardly walk.

Lisa looks for an exit.

She finds a white door on the opposite side of the room. She attempts to turn the door handle but it won't budge. Locked.

Her eyes gravitate toward the front desk around ten feet away. Nobody sits at it. A door to the right of the desk stands wide open, revealing a hallway.

A phone RINGS from a room beyond the hallway. The CHEERFUL VOICE answers it.

CHEERFUL VOICE (O.S.)
Thank you for calling Lifeline...

Lisa slowly approaches the open door behind the front desk.

CHEERFUL VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Please hold as we transfer you to
one of our associates.

Lisa peruses the room for some kind of a weapon. She grabs a VASE.

She steps through the open door and into the hallway.

HALLWAY

Lisa notices another open door about five feet ahead.

The phone rings again from inside the room. Lisa cautiously walks toward the room, clutching the vase as one would hold a club.

The phone stops ringing, and someone answers it.

CHEERFUL VOICE (O.S.)
Thank you for calling Lifeline.

Lisa reaches the open door, and looks inside.

Nobody there.

CHEERFUL VOICE (CONT'D)
Please hold as we transfer you to
one of our associates.

The cheerful voice emanates from an old-fashioned telephone sitting on a desk.

The room is small and dimly lit. It is comprised of only the desk and a filing cabinet. Newspaper headlines adorn the walls.

Lisa steps inside the room.

SMALL ROOM

She takes a closer look at one of the newspaper headlines.

The headline says, "MAN FOUND BRUTALLY MURDERED ON SUBWAY."

She turns to look at another.

"KIDNAPPED GIRL FOUND SLAIN; DISMEMBERED, HIDDEN IN SEWER."

Panicked confusion consumes her face. She continues clutching the vase.

BANGING from the opposite side of the wall startles Lisa, and she drops the vase. It shatters into pieces.

ISAAC (O.S.)

Lisa? You're still here?

Lisa turns around to meet the eyes of ISAAC. He stands in the doorway.

He is a middle-aged man with black hair and fiery eyes. Clean cut and nicely groomed, he wears black suit.

He smiles at her.

ISAAC

I'm glad our appointment went well. You've made some excellent progress. If you keep at this rate, you'll be living the life you dream of in a month's time.

LISA

You- you're the voice-

Lisa darts for the door, but Isaac blocks her exit.

ISAAC

Lisa, what's the matter with you?

LISA

Where am I? Why did you bring me here?

Isaac raises an eyebrow.

ISAAC

You don't remember?

He appears genuinely disappointed.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

The Lorazepam can sometimes have this effect.

Lisa makes another attempt at the door. Isaac blocks her.

ISAAC

Lisa, please. Think. We had an appointment last night. Remember?

LISA

The last thing I remember was you throwing a bag over my head.

ISAAC

Throwing a- We've already went over this. That was an exercise intended to demonstrate your desire to live. You passed. You grabbed a weapon and showed genuine concern for your life.

Lisa stands silently. Contemplating.

ISAAC

That was two nights ago, Lisa. It's hard to believe the drug wiped out your memory for an entire two days.

LISA

What the hell did you put me on?

Isaac sighs.

ISAAC

I knew that was a mistake. We gave you a dose of Lorazepam, a powerful Benzodiazepine. We deal with heavy topics here, and some clients get a little too anxious. You're an example of one.

Lisa still looks skeptical.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

But look how much progress we've made, even as you question me right now. What kind of suicidal person would interrogate me?

He points at the pieces of broken vase on the floor.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Or use a vase to defend themselves?

A beat.

LISA
You say I blacked out two days?

ISAAC
It would appear so.

LISA
Why should I believe you?

Isaac grins.

ISAAC
Would you like to see what else
we've accomplished?

HALLWAY - LATER

Isaac leads Lisa to another door.

He grabs keys from his pocket. They jingle as he unlocks the door handle.

He opens the door to reveal...

THIRD ROOM

A BODY lies on the floor. Blood everywhere. A bag over the body's head conceals its identity.

ISAAC
You did some excellent work on your
father, Lisa.

Lisa stares at the gruesome scene with an expression of terror.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
He died painfully.

She sprints to the body on the floor of the room.

Isaac slams the door shut.

LISA
Dad? Dad?!

Tears begin to stream down Lisa's cheeks as she tries to pull the bag off her father's head. A tight knot prevents her from doing so.

LISA
(hysterical)
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Lisa gives up trying to untie the knot. She looks around the room. A bloodied knife lies beside the body.

Lisa grabs the knife and cuts the rope of the bag. She pulls it off her father's head.

She turns the body around and looks at his face.

A dummy head stares back at her.

LISA
(barely audible)
What?

She takes a closer look at the rest of the body. No wounds. Rubber skin.

She walks back to the door, and turns its handle. It opens.

The hallway is now pitch black.

HALLWAY

She pulls out her cell phone and uses it to navigate her way to a light switch.

She flips the switch. Light pours into the hallway.

Isaac is nowhere in sight.

WAITING ROOM

Lisa heads toward the white door of the waiting room. She turns the door handle.

It opens to reveal a sunrise.

Lisa looks at her cell phone, dials a number, and presses it to her ear.

FATHER (V.O.)
Hello? Who is this?

Dad? LISA

Lisa? FATHER (V.O.)

She breaths a sigh of relief.

LISA
You have no idea how happy I am to
hear your voice.

FATHER (V.O.)
I'm- I'm happy to hear yours too.

For the first time, we see her smile.

FADE OUT.