

A CURE FOR LONELINESS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. JOEL'S OFFICE - DAY

JOEL, 40, sits in a chair, a notebook in his lap. Glasses, casual clothes, he's the quintessential psychiatrist. Cerebral, steady, his smile encourages.

On a couch, MELODY, 30, plain vanilla, a woman without angles or bright colors. In an office that soothes.

MELODY

I'm just so alone. I live alone-- except for my cat. I work from home, so I never meet the people who hire me. My neighbors are never home, or they move in and out like criminals, or they don't even speak English.

JOEL

But you're connected to the internet, correct?

MELODY

All day, every day, but that's not real, is it? I mean, whenever I see someone's selfie from Cancun, I feel even more lonely. That sounds whiny, doesn't it?

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Joel sits by himself at a small table. He eats a salad and reads his tablet computer.

He's one of a dozen people who all sit alone at their tables, eating and reading or watching something on tablets.

INT. BUS - DAY

Joel stands, holding onto a strap on this crowded bus. Next to him, a FAT MAN, buds in his ears, listens to his phone. In the seats, PEOPLE read tablets or listen to phones or merely stare out the windows.

INT. COMMUTER TRAIN - DAY

Joel sits by himself. He types notes into the tablet on his briefcase. The car is sparsely populated, everyone in their own row, all busy or daydreaming.

EXT. HIGH RISE BUILDING - DAY

Joel, briefcase in hand, approaches a tall apartment building, all glass and steel.

INT. HIGH RISE BUILDING - MAIL BOXES - DAY

Joel pulls his mail from his box. Next to him, a WOMAN, professional, attractive stops to get her mail.

JOEL

Hello.

WOMAN

Hello.

With a nod, Joel locks his box and moves on.

INT. JOEL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Joel sets aside the TV table and its empty plate. On the TV is HOUSE OF CARDS. He stands and moves to the glass wall and its view of half a dozen high-rise buildings just like his.

As he watches, a dozen windows go dark as curtains slide across. The number of dark windows is now larger than the lighted ones.

INT. HIGH RISE BUILDING - MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

A large room with rows of folding chairs. Joel sits in the front row. Half a dozen MEN and WOMEN dot the room. At the front, at a podium stands a tall, bald, TAN-WOMAN.

TAN-WOMAN

I'm happy to report that the new sound abatement efforts have reduced ambient noise by two percent. And lastly, the pitch-in scheduled for next week has been canceled due to lack of participation.

Joel looks around the room, and no one seems interested.

INT. JOEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Joel, just as casual as the last time, listens to WEBSTER, 30s, overweight, tattooed, scruffy beard, unappealing.

WEBSTER

I took your advice, doc. I joined a fitness club. And I've been working out for a couple weeks. But it hasn't helped. I still don't know anyone's name. I mean, I know the exercise is good for me, but I thought it would help with the other stuff, you know?

JOEL

These things take time. People want to see that you're committed before they commit.

WEBSTER

Yeah, but it's not much fun working out all alone.

JOEL

Surely, someone talked to you.

WEBSTER

The only time anyone talked was when someone broke into the lockers and stole some stuff.

JOEL

Did you lose anything?

WEBSTER

No, I got a good lock.

EXT. HIGH RISE BUILDING - EVENING

A police cruiser, lights flashing, sits in front of the building. A small CROWD mills around. Among them is Tan-Woman. Joel joins her.

JOEL

What happened?

TAN-WOMAN

There was a break-in. Well, several break-ins. I'm not exactly sure how it happened.

JOEL

I better go check my place.

TAN-WOMAN

Oh, I think it was only the lower floors. You should be OK.

JOEL

We'll have to do something.

TAN-WOMAN

I've called a meeting.

INT. HIGH RISE BUILDING - MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is half-full of RESIDENTS. Joel sits in the last row. Tan-Woman is at the podium.

TAN-WOMAN

I want to thank everyone who signed up to monitor their floors. You will become the eyes and ears of the community. I'm sure we can stop these criminals in their tracks.

EXT. HIGH RISE BUILDING - EVENING

Two police cruisers and an ambulance, lights flashing, wait outside the doors. A large CROWD has gathered and RESIDENTS talk as Joel approaches.

Out of the building come EMTs pushing a gurney. On the gurney a middle-aged WOMAN.

Joel watches them load her into the ambulance.

INT. HIGH RISE BUILDING - MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is packed, every seat taken. RESIDENTS line the walls. Standing against a wall on the side is Joel. Tan-Woman has the podium.

TAN-WOMAN

To recap, everyone has been assigned to a committee. All committees will meet next week and select a chair who will report directly to me. The date for our fund raiser has been set.

(MORE)

TAN-WOMAN (CONT'D)

The proceeds will be used to upgrade security. I want to thank everyone for volunteering. Oh, if any of you are feeling stressed, our resident psychiatrist has generously offered counseling. Joel?

Joel raises his hand and smiles.

INT. JOEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Joel with his notebook and in his chair. On the couch, TUCKER, 30s, in shape, handsome, dressed well.

TUCKER

I have to tell you, doctor, I'm feeling some pressure.

JOEL

That's understandable given your circumstances.

TUCKER

I can't keep doing what I'm doing.

JOEL

Can you foresee stopping?

TUCKER

Sure, sure, but it's not so easy, is it?

JOEL

We're making progress, Tucker.

TUCKER

You know, the reason I came here in the first place was because it was part of my sentence.

JOEL

I provide regular updates to your parole officer.

TUCKER

Yes, I know, and I thank you for that. But that doesn't address the problem.

JOEL

I would think one or perhaps two more times will suffice.

TUCKER

I don't know. It gets tougher every time. They're adding more cameras and locks and watchers and everything.

JOEL

If you had been at the meeting, you would have witnessed the solidarity.

TUCKER

That's what I'm talking about. They're going to catch me.

JOEL

Is this about the money?

TUCKER

That's part of it. More risk, more reward. But I really don't want to go back to prison.

Joel taps his pen on the notebook.

JOEL

Another ten percent. But you have to cause more injuries.

TUCKER

Doctor, that's getting out of my comfort zone.

JOEL

Don't con me. You're a psychopath. You enjoy hurting people.

Tucker smiles.

JOEL

But your work is done in my building. I want you to target unit three.

TUCKER

You'll provide access codes?

JOEL

Of course, I have several patients there.

Tucker stands, goes to the door and stops to face Joel.

TUCKER

Why, doctor, why are you doing this?

JOEL

Before you, there were five hundred lonely, isolated people. Because of you, there are five hundred people connected to each other in ways they never dreamed possible.

TUCKER

No, why are YOU doing this?

JOEL

It would take a lifetime to bring these people together individually. A common cause works wonders.

Tucker nods and slips out.

EXT. HIGH RISE BUILDING - EVENING

Two police cruisers and two ambulances, lights flashing, wait outside a high rise just like the one where Joel lives. A large CROWD mills around, waiting.

At the edge of the crowd, Joel smiles.

FADE OUT.