

MARTYR

by

Jean-Pierre Chapoteau

Jeanpierre_4_25@msn.com

FADE IN:

EXT. THEATER - DAY

Late afternoon. A sign against the side of the theater hangs for everyone to read:

'BRUCE ADLER, HERE TO SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT FINANCIAL HARDSHIP'

Students stand in line to enter.

A few students trickle by --

KENNETH, 20s, sits on a bench across from the theater. He wears a large coat despite the baking sun above.

A backpack sits on the ground next to him. An open TEXTBOOK, faced down, lies on the bench.

KENNETH

(whispers to self)

I'm the answer. The answer.

He wipes the sweat from his face and continues to mumble. His frazzled movements are close to a crack addicts.

Kenneth fidgeting comes to a sudden halt. He darts his attention toward --

ZOE, 20s, a hippie, save the world type.

She takes a seat beside him and puts down her purse. She removes several flyers and art tools.

Kenneth despises her presence with a glare.

Zoe tries to ignore him -- but she turns his way.

ZOE

Dude, seriously? You're not even trying to be inconspicuous about it.

Zoe notices his drug related behavior for the first time. She instantly regrets speaking.

She starts to gather her belongings.

KENNETH

If you get out of this seat, hundreds of people will die.

He has her attention. Zoe forms a slight grin.

ZOE

What are you talking about?

KENNETH

If you walk away, or talk to anyone else, the bomb they strapped to my chest will go off and kill everyone within a hundred yards.

Zoe eyes his large coat... then spreads a full blown smile.

ZOE

Then let me see it.

KENNETH

You're going to get a text. It'll be blank. That's when they got you.

ZOE

That's when who got me?

KENNETH

The terrorist will know who you are.

Zoe chuckles. Kenneth jumps a bit when her phone JINGLES, as if he really wasn't expecting it too.

Zoe eyes Kenneth, still not convinced. She checks her message: A blank one.

Zoe chuckles. Kenneth stares at his watch.

ZOE

Is this a joke?

Kenneth places his hand on his textbook. He clearly becomes frustrated.

ZOE

Do you know Jerry? This is all his idea isn't it?

KENNETH

You're going to have to believe me if we're going to survive this thing. Not just hear what I'm saying, but believe me.

Zoe searches in Kenneth's eyes for deceit -- but Kenneth keeps a stone cold glare.

Kenneth snaps his attention toward the sudden noise of a COUPLE rounding a corner. He releases a sigh of relief.

KENNETH

They're watching me. I just know it.

Zoe eyes his frazzled mannerisms.

ZOE

You're serious, aren't you?

KENNETH

My name's Kenneth Morrison, and I'm a student here just like you. Look at my face. I'm an honest guy. I would never kid around with something like this. These people are serious.

Kenneth eyes his watch and reaches in his backpack. He pulls out several crumpled pieces of paper.

KENNETH

Last night, this jacket and a letter came in a package to my front door.

Kenneth frantically unfolds it.

KENNETH

It explains what I have to do in detail. I thought it was joke, but I got phone calls. Threats. My phone couldn't dial out. When I tried to leave my house they --
 (glances at watch)
 I can't explain it all, but everything I need to do and know is in this letter.

Kenneth shoves the letter in Zoe's face. Zoe stands up. Kenneth instantly backs off.

KENNETH

I'm sorry. Please, I'm sorry. Just sit back down.

Kenneth moves to the other side of the bench, but keeps his pleading eyes on Zoe.

Zoe grabs one of her flyers.

ZOE

I'm part of the H.O.L organization, Help Others Live. And we assist those that fight with issues with substance abuse.

Kenneth works to hold his temper.

KENNETH

I need you to sit back down.
 (MORE)

KENNETH
(harsh whisper)
NOW.

Zoe eyes her surroundings. A few students wait by the theater door. Zoe starts to gather her belongings.

Kenneth scoots closer while reaching out a desperate hand.

KENNETH
You're making a mistake. You have
to stay. Everyone will die if you
don't.

Zoe places her art tools in her purse and lifts her bag.

KENNETH
You'll die to. They're serious. If
you walk away, you kill everyone.
Please. Listen to me.

Zoe points at the pamphlet.

ZOE
I hope we see you at the meeting.

Kenneth almost stands out of his seat as Zoe walks away --

But cyclic BEEPS originating from his jacket stops Zoe in her tracks.

Kenneth turns stiff. Zoe spins around and eyes Kenneth's jacket. Kenneth works to hold back a panic attack.

ZOE
This isn't funny.

Zoe is unsure of her own statement as the beeps continue at a steady pace.

KENNETH
(to self)
They're watching us. They have to
be.

Zoe looks around and walks back over. The beeping comes to an end. Kenneth sighs in relief.

ZOE
You have some sort of sensor in there,
right?

Kenneth drops his head in his lap.

KENNETH

(to self)

I can't do this. I just can't. I'm not going to have enough time.

ZOE

Dude, if you're doing some sort of shenanigan, just stop. Seriously.

Kenneth doesn't look up.

KENNETH

The terrorist have most likely contacted your parents by now. In a few minutes, your mom will call you. She'll be hysterical. You'll have ten seconds until the phone goes dead. Then that's when it starts.

ZOE

Good luck with that, 'cause my dad raised me, and he's not the prank call type.

Kenneth nervously runs his hand over his head as he looks off into space.

Zoe shakes her head and takes a step back, ready to leave --

But her phone rings. She shoots a quick glance at Kenneth and looks at her phone: DAD CALLING

Zoe reluctantly answers.

ZOE

... Dad?

Zoe's face flushes in panic. Her eyes start to tear up. Her voice, shaky.

ZOE

What? No, I'm okay, where are you?
 (unclear shouting)
 No, no, I'm fine. What's going on?
 Dad? Dad?

CLICK.

Zoe's barely holds on to the phone, lost in fear. She redials, but only gets static.

Kenneth stares at his watch. He clicks a timer. It counts down from six minutes.

KENNETH

If you want to live, sit down. Now.

ZOE

W- who are you?

KENNETH

You're causing attention to yourself.
They'll kill us if anyone comes over.

ZOE

What did they do to my father? Why
did they pick me?

KENNETH

(grits teeth)

Sit. Down.

Zoe almost collapses on the bench. She stares at Kenneth's coat and inches back as far as she can.

KENNETH

The only thing you did wrong was sit
next to me.

(holds letter)

That's how they explained it. Do
you believe me now?

Zoe is in her own world.

ZOE

We need to -- We should get someone
to help us. They can't do this.

Kenneth glances at his watch. Five minutes remain.

KENNETH

Since the call was made, we only
have five minutes until the bomb
goes off.

Zoe snaps her gaze up.

ZOE

What do you mean five minutes? I
thought if I sat here we'd be safe.

Zoe see's that Kenneth is holding something back.

ZOE

... Do we have to do something?

Kenneth looks around. He lifts the textbook next to him so
only Zoe can see.

Underneath the book lies a GUN.

ZOE
That's not real.

KENNETH
You have to kill someone.

Zoe flinches back. Kenneth raises a stern look.

KENNETH
You have to kill a random student in
order for all of us to live.

Zoe holds her purse close to her chest. She can't believe her ears.

Kenneth glances at his watch.

ZOE
Please tell me this is a some kind
of... test. Something to examine
human behavior. I get it. I promise.
Please, stop.

Kenneth's solemn expression doesn't change.

ZOE
Why? Why do they want me to do this?

KENNETH
The letter... these guys are all
screwed up. They want me to convince
an innocent person to kill another,
just to send a message to someone.

ZOE
A message?

KENNETH
That Americans need to unit and rebel.

ZOE
How will killing each other unit us?

KENNETH
It didn't say. But what was clear,
is that they don't really want you
to shoot anyone.

Zoe's eyes widen. She intently stares at the side of Kenneth's face.

KENNETH

The letter said that you were the messenger, but if the message wasn't sent...

Kenneth runs his hands over his coat.

KENNETH

Then I'm the answer.

Kenneth glances at his watch.

KENNETH

But the way it was written... it's as if they wanted me to fail. They don't think I'll convince you, and then the bomb will ultimately go off.

Kenneth peers into Zoe's eyes.

KENNETH

That's why you need to do it. They can't come in our country and expect us to keel over. We need to show them that we are united.

Zoe fiddles with her purse. She looks up at the students.

ZOE

... I can't.

Kenneth glances at his watch.

KENNETH

We only have a little over three minutes, you have to.

ZOE

I can't.

Kenneth grits his teeth -- but recollects himself.

KENNETH

What's your name?

ZOE

Zoe.

KENNETH

Zoe, if you can't then you will be responsible for the death of about a hundred people, including yourself.

ZOE

But if I do it, then I have to live
with the fact that I killed --

KENNETH

YOU'LL GET OVER IT!

Kenneth glances up at the few students that look his way.

He calms himself and reaches in his pocket. Kenneth pulls out his wallet.

KENNETH

I have a son. He's sick.

Kenneth shows Zoe a picture of a little boy.

KENNETH

A four year old, handsome, talented
little boy. You'd love him.

Kenneth holds the photo closer to Zoe's face.

KENNETH

But I'm all he has. I work two jobs
just to get by with the medical bills.
He needs me, and I need him.

Zoe takes the photo. Her eyes fill with sorrow.

KENNETH

Your dad, he loves you. I could
tell how worried he was by your face.
He would do anything for you. You
have to understand.

Zoe sets Kenneth's photo beside her and eyes a couple of students as they walk by.

Kenneth lifts the text book and urges Zoe to take the pistol.

Zoe stares into Kenneth's eyes.

ZOE

What's going to happen after I do
it?

KENNETH

It'll all be over. We can go to the
police and tell them the whole story.
Your dad can testify to --

Kenneth's coat BEEPS. Their attention snaps to the jacket.

ZOE
What's going on?

KENNETH
I- I don't know.

The coat steadily beeps. Kenneth looks at his watch: 1:52.

KENNETH
We have less than two minutes.

Zoe's hand hovers over the gun. She peers at Kenneth.

He begs her with his eyes.

The BEEPING grows faster.

Zoe grabs the gun. She looks up at a SLACKER STUDENT, leaning against the wall, taking a drag from a cigarette.

KENNETH
It won't be your fault. We're close
to just a minute, Zoe. This thing
is getting hot.

Zoe glares at the Slacker. She clenches the gun --

Kenneth starts to profusely sweat from the heat generating from his coat.

Zoe trembles as she stares at the pistol in her lap.

The coat beeps furiously. Kenneth's watch hits the 30 second mark. He snaps his gaze up at Zoe, who only stares at the pistol in her lap.

KENNETH
Zoe, please, we only have 30 seconds.
You have to --

ZOE
Great job.

Zoe removes her phone from her purse and dials a number.

ZOE
You grabbed my attention with your
opening line. It was quick, and to
the point.

The BEEPS heighten to just one long high-pitched tone --

But come to an end. Zoe sets her phone down.

Kenneth looks utterly confused.

ZOE

But ultimately, the phone call was what kept me. You have to work harder than that in order to convince the subject to stay.

Zoe starts to pack her belongings. Kenneth, stuck in fear, works to find his next words.

KENNETH

What's going on?

Zoe doesn't look up.

KENNETH

Is this a fake?

Kenneth starts to unzip his coat -- but Zoe whips him a glare.

ZOE

DON'T do that.

Kenneth releases the zipper. Zoe places the pistol back under the text book.

KENNETH

Who are you?

ZOE

The trial. Your only one. When the subject approaches, open as you did, but do not allow them to stand, or we will end your mission. That is not a joke, Kenneth. Treat your next subject with certain care, or they will be the last person you will ever talk to.

KENNETH

What the hell are you talking about?
You're... American?

Zoe shoots him a glance as she packs her belongings.

KENNETH

Why are you doing this to me? What did I do to deserve this?

... Zoe's face softens a bit. She stops packing. She can't meet Kenneth's eyes. She doesn't want to say anything, but --

ZOE

You work two jobs to support your son. Cancer, right?

KENNETH

... Yes.

Zoe stares at the sign hanging up on the theater.

ZOE

You are most likely going to lose
your son, Kenneth.

Zoe doesn't allow Kenneth to see the pain in her face. She focuses on the sign.

ZOE

Bruce Adler is the brother of an
government official who works to
maintain our current, and highly
frowned upon, government policies.

Zoe stands, never taking her eyes off of the sign.

KENNETH

I - I don't understand.

Zoe turns to Kenneth and looks deep in his eyes.

ZOE

Your son will be a casualty to the
system. They'll never know. They
won't lose sleep over it. It'll
just be one, out of the many. We
are giving you, and another the
opportunity to rebel against them.

KENNETH

But you're killing innocent people.
Why?

ZOE

Each fall of an innocent, no matter
how big or small, represents the
death of another living in poverty.
When the system they constructed to
abuse the poor starts to be the very
reason their loved ones die... then,
and only then, will America wake up.

Zoe grabs Kenneth's sons' picture and hands it to him.

ZOE

If occupying the streets won't get
their attention, then shedding blood
on them definitely will.

Zoe starts to head off.

KENNETH
Who - Who are you?

Zoe turns.

ZOE
I'm just a student. Just like you.

She disappears around a corner.

Kenneth runs his hands over his jacket, and look up at the theater where more student enter.

Kenneth wipes his hands over his face as a few students walk past.

But one stops -- and starts to take a seat...

FADE OUT