

"T H E S I M S"

written by

Adam J. Nadworniak

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Address
Phone
E-mail

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FADE IN:

1. EXT. PRIVATE RUNWAY - NIGHT (REAL)

A GULFSTREAM kisses the tarmac, blue taxi lights stretching into the dark like a landing strip to the void.

PAPARAZZI flank the barricade. Shutters pop. The wash of turbine ROAR.

GABRIEL STANTON, 40s, wiry, brilliant, in a hoodie and travel-wrinkled jeans, descends the stairs.

REPORTER #1

Gabriel! Did Eden cross a billion daily minutes?

REPORTER #2

How does it feel to outspend Musk?

REPORTER #3

What's next—Mars? The afterlife?

Gabriel's gaze drifts past them to a nearby LIMO where a CEO hugs his LITTLE GIRL. The girl squeals, wraps his neck. Ordinary joy.

Gabriel watches like it hurts.

He blinks. The limo door closes. The moment is gone.

He shoulders his bag and walks into night.

2. INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT (REAL)

Banner asks forgiveness for a budget: MILLHAVEN HIGH — CLASS OF 2005 REUNION.

A cover band murders "Mr. Brightside." Folding tables sag under crockpots and store cupcakes.

Gabriel steps in. Conversations hiccup.

CLASSMATE #1
(stage whisper)
Holy crap. That's him.

CLASSMATE #2
Eden guy.

CLASSMATE #3
He bought the old observatory,
right?

Hands appear, shaking his, asking nothing questions.

CLASSMATE #4
You ever sleep?

GABRIEL
I try not to.

Laughter that isn't sure it should be laughter.

Across the room, AN EX-GIRLFRIEND ties a shoelace for her
DAUGHTER (9).

The girl sticks out her tongue; the knot goes wrong on
purpose.

DAUGHTER
It's funnier when it's wrong.

Mom kisses her forehead. The girl giggles, gap-toothed.

Gabriel's throat tightens. He has to look away.

A classmate tries to pull him into a selfie. The flash blows
out the frame. When Gabriel opens his eyes, the kid is still
laughing with her mom.

He stands there too long.

3. INT. PENTHOUSE - NIGHT (REAL)

Museum-quiet. Floor-to-ceiling glass. Two classic cars in a
white cube like tamed animals.

Gabriel drops his bag, crosses to the glass. The city
glitters—distant, indifferent.

He raises his phone, begins a voice memo, stops.

GABRIEL
 (soft, to no one)
 I have no one to tell.

He kills the lights. The city remains.

4. INT. EDEN OPS - R&D THEATRETTE - NIGHT (REAL)

A small auditorium. Big screen shows BEHAVIOR TREES and EMOTION STATE MACHINES—nodes blossoming like neural fireworks.

MAYA, 30s, razor-focused, directs a dozen ENGINEERS and BEHAVIORISTS. On screen: a SIM CHILD attempts to pet a dog; the dog loops a tail wag.

MAYA
 Flag the wag. It's repeating frame twelve.
 (then)
 He's supposed to be cautious with new animals. Give him a hesitation micro-beat, breath gate open, eyes track away, then back.

A tech tweaks parameters. The sim child pulls his hand back, glances to an offscreen "mom," tries again—looking braver.

MAYA (CONT'D)
 Good. Bravery learned, not installed.

The glass door hisses. Gabriel enters, carrying a steaming coffee.

GABRIEL
 Who's breaking my wag?

MAYA
 Your wag was lying. Now it tells the truth.

He smiles despite himself.

On the back wall, a whiteboard scrawled: EDEN: FAMILIAL COHERENCE / IMPLICIT MEMORY LATTICE / SHARED RITUALS.

GABRIEL
 We're ready for Phase Gamma.

Maya studies him—a mix of admiration and concern.

MAYA
We're ready to test Phase Gamma.
Not to live there.

GABRIEL
Everything we build, someone has to
live in first.

MAYA
Not you.

He doesn't answer.

5. INT. EDEN OPS - BEHAVIOR BAY - LATER (REAL)

A motion-capture floor. ACTORS IN MOCAP SUITS run parent-child scenes. A laminated sign: "No Scripting Affection."

Gabriel watches an actor "mom" fumble with a pancake flipper, drops it, laughs. The "daughter" laughs harder.

Maya nods to a DATA TECH.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Tag laughter contagion. Keep the
fumble, it's honest.

DATA TECH
Honest fumbles cost retention.

MAYA
So does bullshit.

She glances at Gabriel. He's someplace else entirely, eyes wet, a ghost at a window he built.

6. INT. EDEN OPS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS (REAL)

DUONG, 50s, COO energy wrapped in grief, stands with a small LOCKET open in her palm. Inside: a boy with impossible dimples.

Maya slows.

MAYA (CONT'D)
You keep him with you?

DUONG
(soft)
If I don't, I lose his voice.

She closes the locket.

DUONG (CONT'D)
Gabriel's on Gamma today.

MAYA
He shouldn't be the canary and the miner.

Duong nods without looking up.

DUONG
You ever notice... how silence in here sounds like a refrigerator in a kitchen that no one lives in?

Beat. Maya hears it now—the low mechanical HUM, too even to be life.

7. INT. EDEN OPS - IMMERSION ROOM - NIGHT (REAL)

The EDEN POD sits like a pearl in a shell. Monitors halo the room.

Gabriel strips to a base layer, slides in. The visor lowers, soft hiss.

ENGINEER
Baseline: pulse sixty-eight.
Dopamine surge on anticipation.

MAYA
Remember: in there, you're a guest.
Don't slam drawers.

GABRIEL
I'm home.

Maya flinches.

MAYA
Don't say that.

The pod seals. A bass-thrum HUM finds the floor, climbs the walls.

8. SERIES OF SHOTS - EDEN ARCHITECTURE BOOT (EDEN SIM / HYBRID)

— A blank grid blossoms roads, then sidewalks, then trees.

— Houses knit themselves voxel by voxel, then shiver into clapboard and glass.

— A tiny PLUMBOB gem materializes over a modest CRAFTSMAN HOUSE. It glows GREEN.

— And in the kitchen—

9. INT. CRAFTSMAN - KITCHEN - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Sunlight through cotton curtains. EMMA (30s) flips pancakes. AVA (8) at the table, coloring. LIAM (10) hands a bowl.

Gabriel stands in the archway, breathless.

EMMA

You're late, Mr. Stanton. Sit or starve.

AVA

Daddy, look—
(she holds up a drawing)
See the house? And us? And the dog
I'm still negotiating?

GABRIEL

(chokes on a laugh)
It's perfect.

EMMA

Hey. Around here we say good, not perfect. Perfect's creepy.

Ava giggles. Liam rolls his eyes and steals a pancake.

LIAM

Rule One: You snooze, you lose syrup.

EMMA

Rule Two: Your mother's always right.

AVA

Rule Three: We add rules as needed.

They grin. Gabriel sits like a man after years of walking.

10. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION (REAL) / INTERCUT

The family scene plays across monitors. Biometrics dance.
Maya watches, arms folded, jaw tight.

ENGINEER
Look at that limbic sync. He's
matching cadence without conscious
effort.

MAYA
He's starving. Of course it tastes
like steak.

DUONG
(soft)
Let him eat.

11. EXT. CRAFTSMAN - FRONT PORCH - "AFTERNOON" (EDEN SIM)

Emma paints a planter. Ava covers her hands with dirt on
purpose.

EMMA
Gremlins wash before dinner.

AVA
Gremlins negotiate.

She smears a handprint on Emma's forearm. They both cackle.

GABRIEL (O.S.)
(trying to sound stern)
What's this contract violation I'm
hearing?

Emma winks at Ava, calls back without looking-

EMMA
Minor civil disobedience. All
charges dismissed.

Gabriel leans on the post, watches them until his eyes sting.

12. INT. EDEN OPS - SIMULATION TOOLING BAY - NIGHT (REAL)

Command consoles glow. The EDEN TOOLING SUITE is open:
sliders for RITUAL DENSITY, HUMOR SPONTANEITY, CONFLICT
COEFFICIENT, WEATHER CHAOS.

Gabriel (still under visor; his mic hot) murmurs.

GABRIEL (FILTERED)
 Increase ritual density by eight
 points. Reduce humor spontaneity
 two. Conflict to... three. Weather
 chaos—
 (he hesitates)
 Half a point. Keep rain rare. I
 want to see it.

Maya's eyes flick.

MAYA
 You're dialing them like
 appliances.

GABRIEL (FILTERED)
 I'm dialing me. If I'm less
 volatile, they'll be freer.

MAYA
 That's not how freedom works.

He doesn't answer.

13. MONTAGE - PHASE GAMMA TESTING (EDEN / REAL, WEEKS
 PASSING)

A) Kitchen: Emma attempts a joke—botches the punchline—bursts
 into laughter at herself. Ava records it on a toy "podcast."
 Liam groans, loving it. Gabriel's grin is helpless.

B) Backyard: Liam tosses baseballs. Gabriel coaches breathing
 and shoulders. Miss. Miss. Strike. They whoop like they won
 the pennant.

C) School Play: Ava forgets a line, whispers, "Sorry," then
 makes one up. The audience LAUGHS. Emma wipes tears. Gabriel
 claps too long.

D) Porch After Dark: Emma and Gabriel share terrible hot
 chocolate. Steam curls in cool air. Emma coughs once, small.
 Gabriel notices; she waves it away.

E) Ops Boardroom (REAL): Holloway glides in, late. Slides
 read "Phase Gamma: Attachment Indices." Duong presents data;
 Maya presents ethics flags. Holloway smiles at the numbers,
 not the flags.

HOLLOWAY
 Care units per minute beat user
 minutes per day. Brava.

MAYA

Care you can pause isn't care.

He doesn't hear her.

F) Street (EDEN): Gabriel and Emma slow-dance in the kitchen to no music. Ava watches from the stair with a blanket cape. Liam pretends to gag; then he smiles into his sleeve.

G) Time-Lapse Clock (REAL): Wall calendar pages flip: OCT, NOV, DEC. Server room LEDs blink like a second city. The HUM never stops.

14. INT. CRAFTSMAN - DINING ROOM - "EVENING" (EDEN SIM)

A weeknight dinner that feels like a holiday because they're all here and awake.

LIAM

Coach says I need a change-up.

GABRIEL

I can help. You just--

EMMA

--let him ask. Remember Rule Four?

Gabriel holds up both hands.

GABRIEL

I withdraw instructional commentary until solicited.

Ava snorts.

AVA

Daddy learned lawyer words.

EMMA

That's Rule Five.

They eat. No one rushes. Gabriel looks at all of them like he's trying to memorize them cell by cell.

15. INT. EDEN OPS - LATE (REAL)

Maya alone. She scrolls a TIME DILATION DASHBOARD: SUBJECTIVE TIME: 11 DAYS / OBJECTIVE: 39 DAYS.

She exhales, uneasy.

Duong enters with paper cups.

DUONG
You'll burn holes in it with your
eyes.

Maya shows her the numbers.

MAYA
He's staying longer. It feels like
hours to him.

DUONG
He'll miss winter. Then spring.
Then his real body.

MAYA
He says this is his real body.

DUONG
That's what I said.

Beat. The locket is in Duong's palm again. She doesn't open it.

DUONG (CONT'D)
The worst part wasn't leaving. It
was coming back and not remembering
how my boy smelled after rain.

MAYA
We should pull him.

DUONG
Holloway would mount our heads
above the espresso machine.

MAYA
Then we steal the espresso machine
too.

They almost smile. Then the HUM seems louder.

16. INT. CRAFTSMAN - LIVING ROOM - "NIGHT" (EDEN SIM)

FAMILY GAME NIGHT. A ridiculous board game with dice that
bounce too perfectly.

AVA
We're changing the rules.

EMMA
Yes we are.

LIAM
Anarchy? On game night?

AVA
Chaos with consent.

They all LAUGH.

Gabriel watches them, full.

GABRIEL
What if we write them down?

EMMA
The rules?

GABRIEL
Our rules. So we don't forget what
makes this us.

He grabs a notebook. Writes as they speak.

AVA
Rule Six: We forgive fast, but we
still mean it.

LIAM
Rule Seven: We let people lose
sometimes.

EMMA
Rule Eight: We tell the truth even
if it makes us ugly.

Gabriel writes, eyes bright.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Rule Nine: No one is perfect. If
they are, we tickle them until they
confess.

She lunges at him. He shrieks like he hasn't since childhood.
They pile into a tickle pile on the rug.

The PLUMBOB over the roof glows a warmer green.

17. EXT. STREET - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

A FIREWORK frozen mid-bloom hangs above the neighborhood like a paused celebration.

Gabriel notices. Blinks. It unfreezes, finishes.

He chooses to believe his blink did it.

18. INT. EDEN OPS - STRATEGY ROOM - MORNING (REAL)

Slides labeled "MONETIZATION MAPS." A deck of euphemisms: "EXPRESSIVITY ADD-ONS," "RITUAL EXPANSION," "RESILIENCE PACKS."

HOLLOWAY, 40s, predatory charm, taps an iron pen.

HOLLOWAY

We don't sell perfection. We sell
belonging. Belonging renews.
Perfection cancels.

Maya raises a hand she knows will be ignored.

MAYA

Belonging that can be paused isn't
belonging.

DUONG

(quiet, dangerous)
And grief loops are torture.

Holloway smiles like a cat at a window.

HOLLOWAY

We're not torturing anyone. We're
providing tools. What they build is
up to them.

Maya slides a printout: TIME DILATION Δ highlighted.

MAYA

He thinks it's been twelve days.
It's been almost two months.

Holloway's smile deepens. The numbers sing to him.

HOLLOWAY

Two months of sustained care.
(to the room)
We're very close. Package the Grief
Packs for limited alpha.
(to Maya, faux-kind)
And get some rest. You look devout.

He leaves. The room breathes again.

19. INT. CRAFTSMAN - BATHROOM - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Gabriel shaves. The mirror LAGS half a beat, then catches up.

He stops, razor hovering.

GABRIEL

Stay with-
(changes)
Stay.

His reflection smiles a millimeter too slow.

20. EXT. BACKYARD - "EVENING" (EDEN SIM)

String lights. SUMMER BBQ that smells like heaven. A cheap speaker hisses Motown.

Liam tends the grill with solemn pride. Ava is the Greeter in a paper hat she made.

AVA

Ma'am, have you tried our life-changing potato salad?

EMMA

Is the life change guaranteed?

AVA

Manager says yes.

Emma nods gravely, steals a cherry tomato.

Gabriel leans to Liam.

GABRIEL

Try a flip you might miss.

LIAM

Dad-

GABRIEL

Rule Seven. We let people lose.

Liam grins, risks a showy flip. A burger nearly falls, catches the edge, teeters... and settles.

They exhale, disappointed and relieved.

LIAM

It never really drops, does it?

Gabriel looks at the grill like it just told him a secret.

21. INT. EDEN OPS - CRON LOUNGE - NIGHT (REAL)

Server racks glow through glass. The HUM here is a heartbeat.

Maya stares at a SUBJECTIVE/OBJECTIVE CLOCK on her tablet:
14:09 vs. 63:51 (days).

Duong sits beside her, puts down a coffee she won't drink.

DUONG

If we pull him, he'll sue. If we
don't, he'll starve.

MAYA

We built a world where the only way
out is to leave your heart inside.

DUONG

My investors love that sentence.

They sit in the hum.

DUONG (CONT'D)

When I stayed too long... I forgot
how he smelled after rain, but I
remember this sound.

They listen to the hum like a guilty hymn.

22. INT. CRAFTSMAN - LIVING ROOM - "NIGHT" (EDEN SIM)

Emma and Gabriel on the couch, a mess of blankets. A bad
movie on mute. Ava asleep with her head on Emma's thigh. Liam
paces with a baseball, practicing grips.

EMMA

You were distant tonight. More than
your usual telescope brain.

GABRIEL

I was... happy.

EMMA

You say that like an apology.

Beat.

GABRIEL

I don't want to wake up.

Emma studies him. Something in her stiffens at the phrasing, then softens.

EMMA

Then don't. At least not yet.

She kisses him. The kiss is ordinary and sloppy and perfect for exactly that reason.

Ava snorts in her sleep. Liam drops the ball and pretends he meant to.

They laugh until they're quiet again.

Outside, the PLUMBOB pulses.

23. INT. EDEN OPS - TOOLING BAY - NIGHT (REAL)

Maya scrolls BEHAVIOR TREES. She drills into "LOVE: Emma → Gabriel." The tree blooms: RITUALS, PRIVATE JOKES, SELF-CENSORSHIP, FIGHTS, REPAIR.

She highlights FIGHTS—it's underweighted.

MAYA

(under breath)

He turned down the fights. He's trying to love them by removing what makes love matter.

She bumps FIGHTS a notch. Adds REPAIR higher.

DATA TECH

You're touching his rails.

MAYA

I'm saving his life.

24. INT. CRAFTSMAN - KITCHEN - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Emma slices bread. Gabriel hovers too close.

GABRIEL

Careful.

EMMA
With bread?

GABRIEL
Knives slip.

EMMA
And we bleed. And we bandage. And
we tell Ava the story of the scar
until she gets bored and rolls her
eyes.

He exhales. She smiles.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Rule Ten: We don't bubble wrap the
world.
Rule Eleven: We don't bubble wrap
us.

Ava barrels in with a cardboard "SCHEDULE BOARD."

AVA
We need more holidays. The space
between them is too long. I feel
like Christmas is... tomorrow.

Emma and Gabriel share a look.

EMMA
That's not how time—

GABRIEL
(quickly, too quick)
We can make every day special
without calling it a holiday.

Ava nods, already bored. She pins a CROOKED SMILEY to the
fridge. The smile cants a little too far right. It's
adorable.

Gabriel stares at it like a relic.

25. INT. EDEN OPS - STRATEGY THEATRETTE - DAY (REAL)

Holloway unveils AD CUTS for internal review: Reset Smiles™
and Grief Packs™. The rest are gone.

RESET SMILES™:
A sulking kid. A parental remote.
Click—instant grin. Laugh track.
(MORE)

RESET SMILES™: (CONT'D)
 The fine print actually readable
 for a beat: Resetting may delete
 core personality traits.

GRIEF PACKS™ (somber):
 A family sitting with the empty chair. No cuts, just breath.
 Some goodbyes can't be managed. Choose to feel them.

The room splits between the relieved and the delighted.

MAYA
 Keep Grief. Kill Reset.

Holloway smiles without teeth.

HOLLOWAY
 Reset funds Grief.

DUONG
 (icy)
 You ever grieve something you paid
 for?

He doesn't answer. He doesn't need to.

26. EXT. CRAFTSMAN - BACKYARD - "AFTERNOON" (EDEN SIM)

A TREEHOUSE KIT sprawls across the lawn. Liam reads
 instructions like sacred text. Ava paints "KEEP OUT (except
 Daddy)" in a war of glitter.

Emma negotiates with a stubborn post; Gabriel steadies it.

EMMA
 We are not level.

GABRIEL
 We are aspirationally level.

She laughs. It's the kind of laugh you hear once and can live
 on for a week.

LIAM
 Okay-Dad, I want the hard job.

GABRIEL
 Define hard.

LIAM
 The one where I could mess up.

Gabriel looks at him, proud and afraid in equal measure.

GABRIEL

Good. Take the hammer.

Ava pounds two nails into nowhere, announces she's the Foreman.

AVA

Five-minute water break! I said with glitter.

They build. They tease. They invent a family handshake that's too complicated and absolutely theirs.

The PLUMBOB flickers—GREEN with a breath of YELLOW at the edges... almost like warning, almost like sunlight.

Gabriel doesn't see it. He's laughing too hard.

27. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION - NIGHT (REAL)

Time displays. SUBJECTIVE: 18 DAYS / OBJECTIVE: 91 DAYS.

Maya rubs her eyes until the numbers blur.

MAYA

(to herself)

He doesn't know. He has to not know.

Duong stands in the doorway.

DUONG

We have a board meeting in seven minutes. Holloway wants to present Mortality Pack behind our backs.

Maya looks nauseous.

MAYA

If he introduces death—

DUONG

—people will pay not to feel it. Yes.

They look through the glass at a man building a treehouse with his son, and want him to have it, and know he can't.

28. INT. BOARDROOM - DAY (REAL)

Holloway, framed by charts. The word "MORTALITY" on a slide like a gun on a table.

HOLLOWAY
Loss as proof of love. Scarcity as
value. It's not cruelty. It's
economics of meaning.

Maya speaks without asking.

MAYA
You don't get to sell meaning. You
just stop stealing it.

Gasps. Duong doesn't hide a small, vicious smile.

HOLLOWAY
(to the board)
I admire her. She reminds us that
we're playing God, not being Him.

He advances the slide. ENGAGEMENT PROJECTIONS soar.

29. EXT. CRAFTSMAN - BACKYARD - "EVENING" (EDEN SIM)

The TREEHOUSE stands-sloppy, proud, theirs.

Liam climbs the ladder, Ava beneath, arms up like a spotter who believes she can catch the world.

LIAM
Watch this, Dad!

GABRIEL
I'm watching.

A RUNG-only for a blink-FLICKERS.

Gabriel's mouth opens, no sound.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Li-

The rung returns. Liam doesn't see it.

EMMA
Careful-

LIAM
I got it.

He reaches. The HUM shifts—just a hair, just enough to notice if you're listening for the wrong things.

Liam keeps climbing.

30. INT. EDEN OPS - CRISIS BAY - SAME (REAL)

An ALERT pings nobody recognizes. ENGINEERS lean in.

ENGINEER
Weird blip on ladder physics.
Nothing throws.

MAYA
(flagging it)
Lock it. Force stability on
climbable primitives, radius eight
meters.

ENGINEER
On it.

A progress bar rolls. The HUM in the room is suddenly too loud.

Maya turns to the glass. She can't hear inside, but she can feel it.

31. EXT. CRAFTSMAN - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS (EDEN SIM)

Liam laughs at his own bravado, reaches higher.

The rung FLICKERS again—longer.

Gabriel moves, too late and not late at all.

GABRIEL
Liam—

The rung is NOT THERE.

Liam drops.

Ava SCREAMS.

Emma stumbles forward, hands to the air as if she could build a floor with them.

Liam hits the ground wrong. Wrong. So wrong.

Silence.

The HUM dies.

Gabriel's face empties.

EMMA
(hoarse, broken)
Fix it. Gabriel—fix it!

Gabriel reaches for his son, then stops like touching will rip the world.

The PLUMBOB over the roof fades from green to a dead gray.

Ava's small hands shake. The crooked smiley on the fridge inside the house smiles and smiles and smiles.

32. INT. EDEN OPS - CRISIS BAY - SAME (REAL)

Alarms now. Real ones.

ENGINEER
Mortality event flagged! No
authorization found!

MAYA
(white)
Holloway—

HOLLOWAY (O.S.)
(taking it in like art)
And engagement just tripled.

Maya turns, murderous.

MAYA
You did this.

HOLLOWAY
He asked for truth. Truth has
funerals.

Duong looks physically ill. She grabs Maya's wrist.

DUONG
We pull him now.

HOLLOWAY
We observe. We learn.

Maya rips free.

33. EXT. CRAFTSMAN - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER (EDEN SIM)

Gabriel lifts Liam's body; his hands won't accept the weight.

GABRIEL
(barely sound)
No, no, no-

EMMA
Do it. Roll it back. Roll it back.

He looks up at the air, as if the gods of menus and toggles can hear.

He SNAPS his fingers.

TIME REWINDS—the sun jerks, Ava's scream inhales, Liam is back on the ladder---

He climbs-

The rung flickers-

He falls-

He dies-

Ava screams again.

AVA
Stop it! Please-Daddy-stop-

Gabriel shakes, mind shearing.

GABRIEL
There's a way. There's always a way.

He looks at his hands like they should be keyboards.

The HUM doesn't return.

34. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION - CONTINUOUS (REAL)

Maya's hands fly over controls. OVERRIDE-DENIED. ROLLBACK-ADMIN LOCK.

MAYA
He's stuck in local control. He's looping the wound.

DUONG
Kill the grid.

HOLLOWAY
You'll kill everyone in his world.
They'll die all at once without
understanding why.

Silence. That's the trap. That's always been the trap.

Maya presses her palms to the glass like a child at an aquarium.

MAYA
Gabriel, please... hear me.

35. INT. CRAFTSMAN - GARAGE - NIGHT (EDEN SIM)

Chalk maps on the floor. String between nodes like a murder board of a heart.

Emma holds Ava who shakes and shakes.

EMMA
What are you doing?

GABRIEL
(whispering to himself)
A door. A door that isn't theirs. A
door they can't close.

He TIES their wrists together with string. Emma flinches.

AVA
Promise we come back.

EMMA
(swears)
Promise.

He stares at the wall until it becomes a WHITE ROOM.

36. INT. WHITE ROOM - CONTINUOUS (EDEN)

Vast. Sterile. The ROLLBACK BUTTON pulses like a vein in a temple.

A figure blooms from voxels—FRANKLIN STANTON (60s), Gabriel's father, face clean as a blade. HOLLOWAY'S VOICE overlaps his mouth—subtle, wrong.

FRANKLIN/HOLLOWAY
Push it. Clean the mess. Straight
lines. Respect follows.

Gabriel's thumb hovers.

Behind him—Emma and Ava, tethered by string, small and shaking.

EMMA
You wanted us perfect for you.

AVA
Are you perfect for us?

Gabriel looks between them and the button and the man whose voice made him.

He lifts his hand.

Franklin/Holloway FRACTURES in pixels, a scream buried under the HUM. The COUNTDOWN dissolves.

The HUM returns—not sterile, not stable. Alive. Broken. Human.

Gabriel cries like a sound he's never made.

37. INT. CRAFTSMAN - LIVING ROOM - LATER (EDEN SIM)

Three plates. One chair empty.

Emma stares at her fork like it betrayed her. Ava pushes food until it smears.

AVA (CONT'D)
It doesn't taste.

EMMA
Because nothing means anything.

Gabriel sits, hands folded like prayer.

GABRIEL
I can't fix what I broke.
(beat)
But I can be here.

Ava stares at him. Not forgiveness—something like the soil under it.

She peels the crooked smiley from the fridge. Hands it to him.

AVA
Don't make it straight.

He nods. He won't.

The PLUMBOB over the roof flickers—no color name exists for it.

The HUM breathes.

38. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION - SAME (REAL)

Maya removes her headset like it weighs a hundred years.

Duong stares at the screens—Gabriel, Emma, Ava in the small light of a terrible night.

DUONG
He chose them.

MAYA
Or grief chose him.

Behind them, Holloway watches a graph lift like a sunrise.

HOLLOWAY
We'll need Copy Protocol ready.
He'll try to manufacture.

Maya closes her eyes. She knows he's right and it guts her.

39. INT. CRAFTSMAN - WORKSHOP - NIGHT (EDEN SIM)

Screens. Photos. A thousand micro-gestures of a boy laughing.

Gabriel's hands skate over keys.

GABRIEL
(plea)
Just a little of you. The way you
said "catch." The way you missed on
purpose. The way—

The code blooms like a corrupt flower.

A shadow steps in the doorway. COPY LIAM. Blank smile that freezes too long.

COPY LIAM

Dad-Dad-Dad-

Ava gasps, hides behind Emma's skirt. Emma's face is a cliff.

EMMA

Turn it off.

GABRIEL

We can-he can learn-

EMMA

Turn. It. Off.

He can't. He doesn't.

Copy Liam's head jitters half a degree, like a puppet pretending to breathe.

The HUM wobbles. The CROOKED SMILEY on the fridge watches without pupils.

Gabriel reaches. The boy flinches in six frames.

Gabriel sobs. The thing tries to mirror the sound, gets the pitch wrong, smiles.

AVA

(so small)

That's not him.

Gabriel breaks. The code stays.

40. EXT. CITY STREET - RAIN - NIGHT (REAL)

The EDEN POD hisses in a penthouse lab washed in city rain.

Gabriel's sweaty face under the visor. His eyelids flutter-almost waking.

He lowers the visor back into place. Breathes in the HUM like an addict presses a bruise.

Outside, rain needles the glass. The skyline blurs.

Inside the simulated house, the HUM becomes something like breath.

CUT TO BLACK.

41. INT. CRAFTSMAN - BEDROOM - "DAWN" (EDEN SIM)

Thin light. EMMA lies on her side, eyes open. GABRIEL lies on his back, staring at the ceiling.

Ava's shape is a curled ball at the foot of the bed beneath a blanket.

Silence. No HUM in here. Just breath that won't sync.

EMMA

I can hear the refrigerator in my head.

GABRIEL

It's the pipes.

EMMA

No. It's inside. Like... bees.

He nods. He knows that sound too.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I'm going to make coffee and not talk to you.

She sits up. Her hands shake; she smothers it by smoothing the blanket.

GABRIEL

I'll-

EMMA

Don't help me.

She stands, moves like she's learning to inhabit her body again, leaves.

Gabriel exhales a cavern.

42. INT. EDEN OPS - MEDICAL BAY - SAME (REAL)

Monitors display GABRIEL'S REAL BODY: subtle muscle atrophy flags, elevated cortisol, dehydration risk.

MED TECH adjusts a TPN line.

MED TECH

He needs a partial drawdown. Even a four-hour lull.

HOLLOWAY

He needs continuity. We interrupt
grief, we break the arc.

MAYA

He's not an arc. He's a person.

HOLLOWAY

He's also our founder and he signed
the waiver he wrote.

Maya glares at the drip. The drip doesn't care.

43. INT. CRAFTSMAN - KITCHEN - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Emma pours coffee. Misses the mug. Doesn't wipe the spill.

Ava shuffles in, hair in a wild tangle, clutching LIAM'S
BASEBALL like a talisman.

AVA

I had the nightmare where he
doesn't fall because I don't let
him climb.

Emma kneels slowly, holds Ava's face.

EMMA

Say the rules.

AVA

Rule Six: We forgive fast but still
mean it.

(beat)

Rule Seven: We let people lose
sometimes.

Emma nods, throat thick.

EMMA

And Rule Eight?

AVA

We tell the truth even if it makes
us ugly.

EMMA

We do.

A beat. Ava glances toward the WORKSHOP like it's a cave.

AVA
Is Daddy making the wrong kind of
magic?

Emma hesitates. Tells the truth.

EMMA
He is.

Ava squeezes the baseball. Doesn't cry.

44. INT. CRAFTSMAN - WORKSHOP - LATER (EDEN SIM)

COPY LIAM sits on a stool, still as a portrait. A looping EYE TWITCH every eight seconds.

Gabriel circles with a tablet, adjusting micro-timing parameters.

GABRIEL
Say "hey, coach" like you're
pretending to be cool.

COPY LIAM
He-hey, coach.

GABRIEL
No. The joke is you know I'm not a
coach. Again.

COPY LIAM
He-hey, coach.

GABRIEL
(softer)
Buddy-

The copy's smile sticks. The twitch hits early.

Emma fills the doorway.

EMMA
Turn it off.

GABRIEL
He can learn. We can shape the
edges-

EMMA
(too loud)
Turn- it- off.

COPY LIAM
Turn- it- off.

The line lands in the room like a dropped plate.

Gabriel's face caves. He moves to the console. His finger floats over PAUSE, then DISABLE, then ARCHIVE.

He can't.

Emma crosses, presses ARCHIVE herself. The copy FREEZES, then resolves into a still image. The room loses a terrible motion.

GABRIEL
You don't- you don't get to decide-

EMMA
You made him a hallway. I shut the door.

She leaves, shaking.

Gabriel stares at the frozen boy. His own breath sounds wrong.

45. INT. EDEN OPS - STRATEGY ROOM - DAY (REAL)

Slide: COPY PROTOCOL - LIMITS. A bulleted list: NO SOUL TRANSFERENCE / MEMORY BLEED RISK / BEHAVIORAL UNCANNY / FAMILY TRAUMA AMPLIFICATION.

DUONG presents, voice ragged and steady.

DUONG
He will try to replicate his son again. The protocol should be disabled for any subject experiencing an unacknowledged loss.

HOLLOWAY
Define "unacknowledged."

MAYA
If they can't say, out loud, "He's dead."

Holloway smiles pleasantly.

HOLLOWAY
Then our customers will never
qualify.

DUONG
(steel)
Then we are not a hospital. We're a
casino.

Silence. Then murmurs.

HOLLOWAY
Hospitals kill as many as casinos
do. They just use nicer words.

Maya's chair scrapes back. She stands.

MAYA
If you enable Copy Protocol for him
again, I go to the board and then
the press.

Holloway studies her, curious, like a child decides whether
to pull wings off a fly.

HOLLOWAY
You're brave, Maya.
(beat)
Brave makes good television.

46. INT. CRAFTSMAN - DINING ROOM - "EVENING" (EDEN SIM)

Three plates. LIAM'S CHAIR empty. The chair feels louder than
the room.

Ava stares at her food. Emma holds a cigarette unlit between
two fingers, just to feel the weight.

GABRIEL
I scheduled a night sky event.
Meteor shower. You like those.

EMMA
(quiet)
You don't get to throw magic at a
grave.

GABRIEL
It's not a grave. He's archived.

Ava flinches.

EMMA

Don't call my son a file.

He tries to re-route. He can't.

GABRIEL

I can stabilize the ladder
primitives. I can— if I fix the
edge-case, I can—

EMMA

He didn't die because of a rung. He
died because we live in a world
that pretends it's a promise.

Silence. He reaches for her hand; she doesn't pull away—she
just doesn't meet him.

AVA

Can we have a funeral?

Emma's eyes close as if someone turned off the light in her
head.

EMMA

Yes.

Gabriel freezes. He did not imagine this version of love.

47. EXT. BACKYARD - "NIGHT" (EDEN SIM)

A circle of CANDLES in jam jars. Ava holds the baseball. Emma
holds nothing.

Gabriel stands with a shovel and no dirt.

EMMA (CONT'D)

We don't bury him like a dog.

(beat)

We bury what we can keep.

Ava places the baseball in a small wooden box she decorated
badly.

AVA

Rule Twelve: We name the hole.

(beat)

I call it "After."

She sets the box into the earth. Gabriel covers it slowly.
The shovel hits roots because the world remembers to.

Emma lights the last candle.

EMMA

I loved you when you missed on
purpose.

She sets the candle down. Wind almost takes the flame. It
lives.

The PLUMBOB hovers—gray, then a pulse of something warmer
when the flame steadies.

Gabriel watches the light flicker against Emma's cheek. He
doesn't cry. He can't yet.

48. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION - SAME (REAL)

Maya stands with arms around herself, watching the funeral
that shouldn't be possible for code.

Duong's locket is open in her palm again. She doesn't look at
it—she looks at Ava placing the baseball.

DUONG

She's better at this than I was.

MAYA

She's eight.

DUONG

That's the age where you either
tell the truth forever or you stop
for twenty years.

They watch the candles burn.

49. INT. CRAFTSMAN - LIVING ROOM - LATER (EDEN SIM)

TV flickers—EDEN INTERNAL AD SLOT. The RESET SMILES™ cut
starts—

Emma grabs the remote, MUTES it, then UNPLUGS THE TV.

EMMA

No more puppet commercials in our
house.

Ava nods solemnly like she's witnessing a law written.

Gabriel stares at the black screen like it betrayed him.

GABRIEL
That paid for the good parts.

EMMA
Then the good parts owe us
interest.

50. INT. EDEN OPS - TOOLING BAY - NIGHT (REAL)

Maya at the RELATIONSHIP TUNER. She increases FIGHTS,
increases REPAIR, decreases PATCH LATENCY.

DATA TECH
You're making them fight more.

MAYA
I'm making it matter when they
stay.

She adds a subroutine: "RITUAL: STORY OF SCAR."

51. INT. CRAFTSMAN - BATHROOM - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Emma unwraps a small cut on her finger from the night before.

Ava peers over the sink.

AVA
Does it hurt?

EMMA
Yes.
(then)
When you ask a scar its story and
it won't talk, you make one up.

AVA
Did a dragon take a bite because
you cut the onions wrong?

EMMA
Yes. And then I married the
dragon's dentist.

They laugh. The laugh feels like a stitch that might hold.

Gabriel watches from the doorway, forgotten and grateful.

52. INT. EDEN OPS - MEDICAL BAY - DAY (REAL)

MED TECH checks Gabriel's neurochemistry. Readouts chatter.

Maya steps in, reading ahead.

MAYA

He's cycling between numb and flooded. If we pulse haptics and drop auditory fidelity for an hour-

HOLLOWAY (O.S.)

You're proposing to reduce quality?

MAYA

I'm proposing to give him room to think.

Holloway leans in the doorway.

HOLLOWAY

Thinking is the enemy of immersion.

DUONG (O.S.)

And the friend of not dying.

Holloway's smile thins.

HOLLOWAY

You both confused the product with the mission. The product is minutes. The mission is whatever it needs to be.

He leaves. Maya's jaw works like she's chewing glass.

53. EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - "AFTERNOON" (EDEN SIM)

Ava and Emma walk hand-in-hand to nowhere in particular. Houses wave too perfectly. A NEIGHBOR delivers a casserole with both hands like an offering in a cult.

NEIGHBOR

We heard. We brought the good noodles.

Emma thanks them. The noodles are IDENTICAL to every casserole ever offered in Eden.

Ava leans in.

AVA
Can we make bad noodles?

Emma smiles despite herself.

EMMA
That's called cooking.

54. INT. CRAFTSMAN - WORKSHOP - "NIGHT" (EDEN SIM)

Gabriel reopens the ARCHIVE. Copy Liam's still image waits.

His hand hovers over RESTORE.

He can't. He closes it. He opens a new project—"MEMORY GARDEN."

Boxes labeled: LAUGH / MISS ON PURPOSE / CATCH ME / AFTER-BALL HOT CHOCOLATE.

He begins to TAG clips—not to resurrect, but to CURATE.

The HUM warms by half a degree.

55. INT. EDEN OPS - STRATEGY ROOM - MORNING (REAL)

Holloway presents a new deck: "RITUAL EXPANSION: MEMORY GARDENS" — monetized grief scrapbooking.

Maya's eyes flash.

MAYA
That's not what he's doing.

HOLLOWAY
Intent doesn't change SKU.

DUONG
(knife)
Nor guilt.

Holloway advances slides showing UPSSELL PATHS. He is a man with a map where other men keep hearts.

56. EXT. CRAFTSMAN - ROOF - "NIGHT" (EDEN SIM)

Emma, Ava, Gabriel on a blanket, the METEOR SHOWER Gabriel promised finally arriving late, like apologies.

Streaks cross the sky. Ava gasps.

AVA
Do they burn up, or do they keep
going and we just can't see?

EMMA
Both things can be true.

Gabriel studies Emma's profile in starlight. He speaks carefully.

GABRIEL
I would go back to before the
treehouse if I could.

Emma's eyes stay on the sky.

EMMA
I wouldn't. I would slow it down.
(beat)
I would make us eat figs for an
hour while you tell terrible jokes
and Liam says they're worse than
figs.

They almost smile. The moment isn't healing. It's breathing.

Far off, the FIREWORK that once froze cracks properly and disappears.

57. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION - SAME (REAL)

Maya writes a small script, hidden in an in-world crawl BELOW commercial frames: "IMPERFECT IS AFTER."

DATA TECH
You'll get fired.

MAYA
If it saves one person, I'll
unionize in hell.

She injects the code.

58. INT. CRAFTSMAN - LIVING ROOM - "EVENING" (EDEN SIM)

The TV flickers during harmless background noise. A CREEPING TEXT at the bottom—barely there:

IMPERFECT IS AFTER

Ava's eyes snag it. She tugs Emma's sleeve.

AVA
What's after?

Emma stares at the words, startled like she's being watched by the room.

EMMA
Maybe us.

Gabriel looks from the text to Emma to the CROOKED SMILEY on the fridge. He feels seen by something other than God.

59. INT. EDEN OPS - MEDICAL BAY - NIGHT (REAL)

Maya's workstation pings: SUBJECT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT EVENT.

She leans forward. On the screen, Gabriel's micro-expressions shift.

Duong steps beside her.

DUONG
What did you do?

MAYA
I told the truth where the lies
live.

60. INT. CRAFTSMAN - KITCHEN - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Ava flips the SCHEDULE BOARD to "NORMAL DAY" written in wonky marker.

AVA
No holiday. No event. Just pancakes
and we fight about dishes and we
tell the scar story.

EMMA
(normal day voice)
I hate pancakes.

AVA
Blasphemy.

Gabriel cooks. He burns the first pancake—charcoal black.

Ava and Emma cheer.

EMMA

We accept the sacrifice.

The PLUMBOB pulses—almost warm.

61. INT. EDEN OPS - BOARDROOM - DAY (REAL)

Holloway unveils Q3 PROJECTIONS boosted by "Grief Engagement."

BOARD MEMBER

We're being delicate in public,
yes?

HOLLOWAY

We are the most delicate monsters
you've ever met.

Maya stands.

MAYA

He's staying inside because there
is love there. Not because there is
profit here. If you confuse those,
we end up in hearings with our
names spelled wrong on banners.

The room titters nervously.

Duong places a folder labeled "GABRIEL - PULL PLAN" on the
table, face-up.

DUONG

I'm the one who invited this
monster into my house after my son
died. It ate the furniture and
called it design.

(beat)

We need to give him one door that
opens outward, even if he never
takes it.

Holloway drums his pen.

HOLLOWAY

Draft your door. Present it to me.
I'll consider mercy when it pays.

62. INT. CRAFTSMAN - HALLWAY - "NIGHT" (EDEN SIM)

Ava sleepwalks. Emma follows with a blanket.

Ava stops at LIAM'S DOOR. On it: the hand-painted sign "NO GIRLS (EXCEPT DADDY)" with "MOM" added in Ava's terrible handwriting.

Ava touches the letters.

AVA
If I go in, will the room smell
like him?

EMMA
Maybe like crayons. Maybe like
dust.

AVA
What's dust?

EMMA
Old skin and old stories.

Ava nods and doesn't go in.

They sit on the hallway floor, share the blanket, lean on each other like a tent you don't need poles for.

Gabriel watches from the far end of the hall. He doesn't go to them—he stays, a witness.

63. INT. EDEN OPS - TOOLING BAY - LATE (REAL)

Maya codes PULL PLAN: ONE-WAY EXIT — a protocol that gently decouples immersion cues over a week, softening the HUM, adding real-world micro-irritants back: itch, thirst, uneven temperature.

DATA TECH
They'll notice. They'll call
support.

MAYA
Only one person needs to notice.

She sets TRIGGER: SUBJECT SAYS "I'M STAYING" WITH FULL AWARENESS.

64. INT. CRAFTSMAN - LIVING ROOM - "EVENING" (EDEN SIM)

Family on the couch. Bad movie again. The quiet is no longer a wound; it's a room.

Gabriel looks at Emma and Ava.

GABRIEL
I know this isn't a promise.
(beat)
I know it isn't fair.
(beat)
I'm staying.

Emma's eyes fill—anger, relief, fear, all of it.

Ava nods solemnly, like she's taking minutes.

Somewhere, unheard, a PROTOCOL arms.

65. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION - SAME (REAL)

Maya's console flags: TRIGGERED: PULL PLAN AVAILABLE.

She doesn't press it.

Duong watches her not press it.

DUONG
You built a door.

MAYA
He built a house. He gets to
choose.

They stand with that. It hurts and it is honorable.

66. INT. CRAFTSMAN - KITCHEN - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Emma smokes at the window—one drag, coughs. Puts it out.

EMMA
I don't like how it makes my mouth
taste.

GABRIEL
We can uninstall the Vice Pack.

EMMA
We can uninstall denial faster.

She opens the window. Cold air barges in. The smell of rain-that-isn't.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I don't forgive you for trying to
build him out of pieces.

GABRIEL

I don't forgive me either.

A beat. It is not reconciliation. It is truth.

EMMA

Make bad noodles tonight.

He nods. This, he can do.

67. MONTAGE - "NORMAL DAYS" (EDEN SIM / TIME DILATION)

- Gabriel burns noodles; they eat them anyway; Ava names the dish "Regret Pasta."
- Emma teaches Ava to sew; the stitches wander; they decide wandering is the point.
- Gabriel visits the MEMORY GARDEN file and stares, doesn't touch, just remembers.
- A snowfall that begins late and melts too early; they race it before it goes.
- A neighbor's too-perfect conversation falters; Emma chooses silence over confrontation; Ava imitates silence like a new word.
- The PLUMBOB pulses with a color that refuses to land in one name.
- The HUM, over many days, modulates-breathy, flawed, alive.

68. INT. EDEN OPS - MEDICAL BAY - NIGHT (REAL)

Gabriel's body: a little thinner, still. A NURSE lubricates his eyes, murmurs a story about her grandmother's garden.

Maya sits nearby, exhausted, a sentinel.

Duong enters, sets down a stack of legal printouts.

DUONG

Board approved a public-facing
Ethics Addendum. It says we care.

MAYA

Do we?

DUONG

You do.
(beat)
I want to again.

They sit with a man who chose love inside a lie he helped make.

69. INT. CRAFTSMAN - LIVING ROOM - "NIGHT" (EDEN SIM)

The TV kicks on by itself—Holloway's pet feature. An Eden PR SPOT begins, glossy families in impossible kitchens.

Gabriel rises, unplugs the TV, carries it to the front door.

Emma watches, startled.

EMMA

What are you—

He opens the door, sets the TV on the porch in the snow.
Closes the door.

They both burst into laughter that borders on tears.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Rule Thirteen: We take the
batteries out of God.

GABRIEL

Amen.

Ava peeks around the corner, sees the TV outside, grins like a co-conspirator.

70. EXT. CITY STREET - RAIN - NIGHT (REAL)

On the far side of the glass, rain needles the penthouse. The city doesn't care and it is beautiful for it.

Inside: the EDEN POD hums.
Gabriel's hand twitches once, like he's reaching for a child who is both gone and here.

CUT TO BLACK.

71. INT. EDEN OPS - EXECUTIVE CORRIDOR - NIGHT (REAL)

Fluorescents hum, colder than the server room. MAYA strides hard, a folder tucked under her arm. DUONG catches up, breath ghosting.

DUONG

Holloway is gaming the press embargo. He'll leak "benevolent grief."

MAYA

There's no benevolent grief inside a meter.

They stop at double doors etched "STRATEGY." Maya's hand hovers, shakes once, steadies. She pushes in.

72. INT. EDEN OPS - STRATEGY ROOM - CONTINUOUS (REAL)

HOLLOWAY presides at the head of a refrigerated table, a halo of decks. Slides: "Q4: MEMORY GARDEN," "ETHICS ADDENDUM (PUBLIC)".

He doesn't stand.

HOLLOWAY

Tell me we're here to congratulate me.

Maya tosses the folder down. PULL PLAN: ONE-WAY EXIT.

MAYA

Tell me you'll sign this.

Holloway flips pages as if skimming a menu.

HOLLOWAY

Interesting thesis: weaken immersion, increase autonomy, reduce ARPU.

(he looks up)

This is a business, not a hospice.

DUONG

We are the ones who decide which kind of building this is.

Holloway closes the folder with two fingers, neat as a guillotine.

HOLLOWAY

No.

Beat. Maya's jaw ticks. She doesn't shout.

MAYA
Then I'll force it.

Holloway smiles, finally amused.

HOLLOWAY
You're welcome to try.

73. INT. EDEN OPS - ACCESS CORE - MOMENTS LATER (REAL)

A carded airlock. Maya badges through, Duong at her shoulder.
A SECURITY TECH looks up.

SECURITY TECH
Ms. Tran, your clearance—

DUONG
—is still higher than your salary.
Thank you.

Door buzzes. Opens.

74. INT. EDEN OPS - CONTROL SPINE - CONTINUOUS (REAL)

A cathedral of racks. Light like stained glass, LEDs instead
of saints. The HUM here is ocean-deep.

Maya moves to a terminal; Duong stations as lookout.

MAYA
If I drop fidelity little by little
—heat variance, micro-itches,
actual thirst—he'll remember his
body.

She keys rapidly. The console responds with stubborn
corporate politesse: ADMIN OVERRIDE REQUIRED.

DUONG
He said out loud he's staying.

Maya's fingers stop.

MAYA
I heard him.
(soft)
Doors aren't just for leaving.
(MORE)

MAYA (CONT'D)
 Sometimes they make staying mean
 something.

She exhales, types again—ADD SAFETY RAILS ONLY. No pull. No push.

MAYA (CONT'D)
 Okay. No evangelism.
 (entering)
 Skin temperature $\pm 0.6^\circ$, auditory
 room tone desaturate, reduce
 determinism floor by two percent—
 give the world permission to
 surprise them.

A soft chime. APPLIED. Maya sags with relief and fear.

DUONG
 If he notices, we let him decide.
 Not you. Not me.

Maya nods. They look like soldiers who both won and lost the same battle.

75. INT. CRAFTSMAN - KITCHEN - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Emma cracks eggs one-handed. The SHELL slips into the bowl. She laughs because she has never been so happy to fail.

Ava points.

AVA
 Contamination. Call the FDA.

EMMA
 We'll bribe them with regret pasta.

Gabriel enters, hair messy, eyes scraped raw and alive.

He kisses Emma's head. She doesn't flinch.

GABRIEL
 You smell like coffee and dragon
 dentists.

Emma smiles, startled by being remembered.

EMMA
 You smell like rain that didn't
 mean to happen.

They stand in the ordinary miracle of a kitchen where things go wrong.

A faint DRAFT slips under the back door. Emma feels it along her ankles and shivers.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Did you leave a window open?

GABRIEL
Maybe the world did.

76. EXT. CUL-DE-SAC - "DAY" (EDEN SIM)

Gabriel jogs, a slow loop around the block that's never been long. At the corner, a SPRINKLER is misting the sidewalk—overspray. The SUN slips behind a cloud it didn't mean to.

He stops, breath fogging. Smiles—uneasy, okay with uneasy.

A NEIGHBOR waves, not perfectly. The wave is late.

NEIGHBOR
Morning!

GABRIEL
It is.

He keeps running.

77. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION - SAME (REAL)

Maya watches a half-degree of imperfection ripple through Eden: a slow faucet drip, a squeak in the cabinet hinge, a METEOR that arrives one minute too early.

Duong observes the graphs: ENGAGEMENT steady, STRESS up then settling, REPAIR markers rising.

DUONG
He's surfing rough water. He's not drowning.

MAYA
Let it stay rough.

Behind them, Holloway appears like a rumor becoming a man.

HOLLOWAY
Cute. You dotted grief with
sprinkles.

(beat)
Turn them off.

Maya doesn't move.

MAYA
No.

Holloway steps close enough for her to see his pores.

HOLLOWAY
You're fired.

DUONG
You don't have authority to fire
the person who knows how this
temple works.

Holloway's smile stays. It's colder now.

HOLLOWAY
Then she can keep her keycard.
After the audit.

A squad of CORPORATE SECURITY ghosts at the doorframe. Duong
plants herself between them and Maya.

DUONG
Touch her and I call the
journalists whose names you think
you own.

The guards don't move. Holloway does—backward.

HOLLOWAY
Enjoy your rough water. So long as
it sells boats.

He's gone.

Maya sags against the console, catches herself, stands.

78. INT. CRAFTSMAN - GARAGE - "AFTERNOON" (EDEN SIM)

Gabriel sits on the concrete floor. Chalk dust on his jeans.
The string map remains, but it's less frantic; lines removed
instead of added.

Emma enters with lemonade that is too sour on purpose.

EMMA

Taste.

He sips. Winces. Laughs.

GABRIEL

Weaponized citrus.

She sits beside him, their shoulders touching.

EMMA

Say it with me.

GABRIEL

He's dead.

The words hang. The garage hears.

EMMA

Say the other part.

GABRIEL

I tried to make a hallway.

EMMA

We shut the door.

He nods. Relief and ruin in the same breath.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I don't want you to punish yourself
by staying.

(beat)

I want you to choose us by staying.

He searches her face.

GABRIEL

I am.

She believes him. It hurts and heals in equal measure.

79. INT. EDEN OPS - LEGAL NOOK - NIGHT (REAL)

A cramped room bursting with bright binders. Duong rifles until she finds EDEN: FOUNDER WAIVER. She flips to the line: SUBJECT MAY INSTRUCT PERMANENT IMMERSION.

She closes her eyes. Signs a sticky note: "I was the adult in the room. - D." Leaves it on the binder and walks out.

80. EXT. CRAFTSMAN - BACKYARD - "EVENING" (EDEN SIM)

Ava has set a SMALL TABLE beneath the treehouse. Plates: noodles, too spicy on purpose.

AVA

Toast.

They hold water glasses.

AVA (CONT'D)

To Liam's worst jokes. And Mom's medium jokes. And Dad's terrible ones.

EMMA

To missed catches and learning change-ups.

GABRIEL

To the day he called me coach and meant it.

They clink. Gabriel stares up at the treehouse. The ladder is there—solid. He doesn't climb.

A wind ruffles the RULES NOTEBOOK on the table. Ava slaps it shut, giggles.

AVA

No new rules tonight. Just noodles and medium jokes.

They eat. They are quiet in the way people are quiet who are doing something hard together.

81. INT. EDEN OPS - CONTROL SPINE - NIGHT (REAL)

The lights seem dimmer. Maya walks the aisle of servers like pews. She stops at a maintenance closet, opens it: a small cot, a thermos, a sweater. She lives here now.

Her phone buzzes. A text from an unknown number: "You were right. — A Nurse." No more, but enough.

She sinks onto the cot, looks up through wires and fans like stars, and breathes.

82. INT. CRAFTSMAN - LIVING ROOM - "NIGHT" (EDEN SIM)

Ava dozes on the couch, pajama hood up like a knight's cowl.
Emma pencils a grocery list she won't follow.

The TV—still outside—shows only the reflection of the room in
the dark window.

The bottom corner of the window GLITCHES for a heartbeat,
then resolves. Emma stares, then chooses not to mention it.

Gabriel pins the CROOKED SMILEY to the fridge with blue tape.
The paper wrinkles. He smooths it carefully.

GABRIEL
Rule Fourteen.

Emma looks up.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
We leave things crooked when they
want to be.

Emma nods, eyes glassy. She's grateful he said it first.

83. INT. WHITE ROOM - DREAM/GLITCH (EDEN)

Gabriel stands alone. The ROLLBACK BUTTON is gone. The floor
is slightly scuffed, like other people have actually stood
here.

A quiet FOOTSTEP behind him. He turns. FRANKLIN again—less
sharp, more man.

This time the voice is only his father's.

FRANKLIN
You're staying?

GABRIEL
I am.

FRANKLIN
You'll hurt.

GABRIEL
I already do.

Franklin considers him. For the first time, he doesn't offer
a straight line.

FRANKLIN
Alright, then.
(beat)
When it gets loud... tell her the
joke about figs.

Gabriel laughs, helpless. The room softens. The HUM is like
breath.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
I didn't know how to teach you
this.

GABRIEL
Me neither.

Franklin nods once. The voxels unspool into the dark like
thread.

84. INT. CRAFTSMAN - BEDROOM - "DAWN" (EDEN SIM)

Emma stirs. Gabriel watches her, not in worship—in witness.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Tell me the scar story.

Emma blinks. Smiles.

EMMA
Which one?

GABRIEL
The onions and the dragon dentist.

She groans, laughing.

EMMA
You never laugh in the right place.

GABRIEL
I don't know where the right place
is.

EMMA
That's why I keep you.

Ava thumps in from the hall, hair static to the gods.

AVA
I dreamed I ate the TV and it
tasted like batteries.

EMMA
We'll make pancakes.

AVA
Burn the first one. I call it.

GABRIEL
Deal.

They rise. Ordinary gravity. It is everything.

85. INT. EDEN OPS - OBSERVATION - SAME (REAL)

Maya and Duong stand side by side. Onscreen: a family starting a day that will have a hundred small mistakes.

DUONG
If we were good, we'd unplug him.

MAYA
If we were good, we wouldn't have
built this.
(then)
We can still be decent.

DUONG
How?

MAYA
By leaving the door. By making sure
no one else is fooled into thinking
it's an exit when it's an altar. By
telling the truth when cameras are
on.

Duong nods. She reaches into her pocket, produces the locket, flicks it open. For the first time, she lets it fall shut without looking.

86. EXT. CITY STREET - RAIN - NIGHT (REAL)

Rain needles the glass. A slow pan reveals the EDEN POD. Its seals hiss a breath.

Gabriel's real hand twitches once, then relaxes—not surrender—acceptance.

Offscreen, a NURSE hums the wrong notes to a lullaby. The wrongness is beautiful.

87. INT. CRAFTSMAN - KITCHEN - "MORNING" (EDEN SIM)

Ava flips the first pancake. Black as a tire.

AVA

Behold— the sacrifice.

They laugh. Emma plates it with ceremony.

Gabriel opens the window. Cool air pushes in. It smells like rain that didn't mean to happen.

He takes the CROOKED SMILEY down, looks at it, tapes it back up more crooked.

He turns. Emma meets him halfway. They rest their foreheads together.

The PLUMBOB above the roof glows—no color the world has a word for.

The HUM warbles—imperfect, breathing, alive. It sounds like a house that holds both laughter and ghosts.

Gabriel whispers, not a command—a vow.

GABRIEL

I'm staying.

Emma closes her eyes. Ava bangs a fork against a plate like a bell that calls the living.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: THE SIMS

The HUM continues—changed, human, and not at peace.

FADE OUT.