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Repurposed

“It won’t stop replaying,” Leo mumbles. Her fingers twitch as she anxiously crosses one leg over the other. Sitting just doesn’t feel right.

“The constant torment of these moments. It plagues me. Every day.” *All she wants to do is erase them.* “And it can’t be one; it must be both.”

Dr. Emmanuela Oscar, listens, remaining calm. She has the look and demeanor of a spiritual guide with wrinkles like a grandmother and a turtleneck from Chicos.

Dr. Emmanuela replies, “This is a quick, a bit gruesome, yet, satisfying procedure, Leo.”

Leo is a beautiful and clearly anxious young adult. The above-mentioned procedure will allow Leo to forget the ominous moments that plague her. Everyone she talked to will simply disappear from her consciousness. The memories perish into a cloud system that *no one* has access to. Leo will never remember, and her life will continue onward. Leo will not remember why she’s sitting here.

Leo stands up, eager. The guide motions her back down.
“I’ll begin now. Think about the first moment you’d like to forget.”

Flashing LED lights. Music. Leo dancing. A man’s hands nearing her lower body. Leo’s distraught face.

“Lock in on the moment. Take a deep breath...And again.”

An empty apartment late at night. Blood trickling down the floor.

Leo’s eyes dart open. “I still remember everything.” The guide doesn’t respond. Leo seems frustrated. Confused. Was any of this worth it?

The guide leads her to the doorway of a millennial gray hallway. Leo’s countenance strangely lights up underneath the bland doorway. The world has somehow shifted. It’s brighter. More Leove. The feeling that a weight has been lifted off the world’s shoulders.

Leo enters a huge parking lot in Los Angeles, CLeofornia. The sound of traffic and angry drivers give the location away. She starts her Audi S3 and turns on a podcast; an episode of *Bill Simmons: Rewatchables*.

Leo listens to the podcast while speeding twenty over. She looks serene, and somewhat innocent. Her mind is now blank and incapable of dissociative thoughts. Just as her meditative state locks into place, the calm of the podcast is replaced with the sharp sound of a ringing phone. Leo’s ease shatters.

“Leo! You have an audition in 15 minutes. Get off the 405.”

Leo is hesitant to go to the audition and tries every excuse in the book. None of them are working. Not because they’re bad excuses, but because her agent is a “hot-shot agent”; and Leo must act like a “hot-shot client.” The two met in high school. Jenna always wanted to work in the talent industry while Leo had no idea what she wanted to do. At the end of the day, Jenna’s doing Leo a favor.

“Okay, I’ll do it Jen.”

“Oh, thank God. Okay, so I can’t remember why they wanted you for this, but it must’ve made sense at the time.” Jenna goes on to explain her relationship with the casting director and how they slept together last week.

“Anyway, he mentioned the next morning, your character is a traumatized, yet ambitious young murderer – something like *Maxxine* or Carey Mulligan in *Promising Young Woman*.”

Leo’s demeanor shifts. She hates playing roles she can’t relate to. And for some reason, she can’t remember a single situation in her life that could channel this persona. Her mind searches for something to work with as she opens the door to the audition hallway.

“Leo Tuskin,” murmurs the casting assistant, in a fatigued, at wit’s end, intonation. Leo walks up to the assistant and gives a big toothy smile—as superficial as an actress can get. The assistant leads her down a hallway into an all-white room. Inside, three men sit behind a green plaster table, typing away at their computers. One of them looks up—presumably the casting director that Jenna slept with—and rushes over to Leo. He kisses her on both cheeks and says he’s very excited to see what she’s prepared.

Leo stands in the audition room silent. “So, Leo? How old are you?”

“I’m 24.”

“And have you had any boyfriends?” The casting team chuckles as they ask this question. Leo feels uncomfortable.

“Um, embarrassingly no. I’m more of a meet them as I go kind of person. Don’t have much time for the same guy to stick around.”

The casting team appears intrigued. The director continues on...

“But hypothetically, if this was a world where you could get away with murder, free of punishment.”

The director sighs, thinking to himself: “Can’t one of these so-called actresses get into character themselves?” He continues, nonetheless.

“What would you do to a man that tried to hurt you? You’d get revenge? Right? Why don’t you improv a quick monologue on your ideal revenge scenario.” The assistants turn to the casting director with a smile; they are very impressed by his introduction of the story world.

Leo stands perplexed. She has nothing to say.

Weird, blurry and distorted flashes fill her mind. Blood trickling on the floor. An empty apartment late at night. Flashing LED lights. A man’s hands on her waist.

“I- I- I can’t make out a moment. Um, I’m sorry.” Leo rushes out of the room, and slams the door shut. The casting director comes running after her.

The tears welled up in Leo’s eyes too quickly. She can’t hold them back before the casting director brushes her shoulder. “Hey. Sweetie. It’s alright. It’s a tough subject. And your agent told me you had a pretty personal connection. It’s no worry at all.” He says this while smiling comfortably by her side.

Leo’s response is grim: “I don’t know what you’re talking about sir. I’m really sorry. I don’t have anything to relate to this character.”

The director gives a look of confusion. He could’ve sworn that Jenna mentioned she was a perfect fit for this kind of role.

“Okay. Leo. First off, I’m Logan, the casting director for *our* film.” He shakes her hand. “I really like you. I mean, your look, uh, for the character. Why don’t we grab drinks tonight? We can talk about the script in a more nonchalant setting. I know a good place off Sunset. No pressure.”

Leo wipes away a fading tear, and with an authentic smile, nods her head. This feels like the right thing to do. Her gut instinct tells her to go with this man. She can’t make out the feeling, but it’s potent. Logan says he’ll pick her up in a few hours and that she should wear something nice. It all feels too exciting.

Leo speeds her way home. She makes an intentional effort to avoid calling her agent, Jenna. Even though Jenna would never care about Logan and will be forever loyal to Leo, she also knows how this industry works. In other words, Leo has a feeling that Logan will make a move tonight. She decides it’s better not to tell Jenna now and avoid making a big thing of nothing.

Tearing out dress after dress from her closet, Leo has the realization that she has nothing to wear. She settles on a trusted red, strapless bodycon dress. It has a few stains here and there, but it blends in with the blood red hue of the material.

Logan picks her up sharply at 7 pm. He drives an old BMW M3. It’s red like Leo’s dress.

He keeps a hand on her thigh as he speeds down the freeway. Leo doesn’t stop him.

The restaurant he chose is loud and noisy. It smells of Grey Goose vodka. No one is seen without some fruity cocktail in their hand.

They stay for 20 minutes until Logan says something like, “Wanna get out of here?” She knew this was never a business meeting.

Logan drives the two of them to a techno club in West Hollywood. He’s friends with the bouncer, who secures them at a table beside the DJ booth.

As the beat of the music speeds up, Leo’s eyes scream anxious and uncomfortable. Logan’s hands rub her waist and slowly edge towards her lower back. He slips his fingers under the bottom of her dress, nearing her black lace underwear.

Leo shifts and throws her body away from him. He sobers up in an instant. “Oh my god, I’m sorry. I-”

She tracks back, seemingly still okay with him, “No. I- I just don’t think we should do this here. Let’s head back to my place.” He settles at the sound of this and grabs her hand to leave.

As his hands lead her out the dark club, sudden flashes of blood fill her mind. A large Japanese knife is in her hand. It’s smeared with dark blood and guts. In an instant, the images disappear from her mind. Like a freak moment of Déjà vu.

Leo opens the door of her apartment and leads Logan towards the kitchen. He is animalistic at this point. He cannot stop groping. Touching. Fighting every demon in his mind not to tear her clothes off and have her on the kitchen table. On the contrary, Leo is disconnected and focused on something else. She’s determined to crack that flashing feeling.

“Why don’t you head to my room, Logan. I’ll meet you there in just a minute. And take off all your clothes now.” She smiles superficially.

Logan runs to her bedroom. Leo opens a kitchen drawer and takes out the knife she envisioned before. The same Japanese knife. The flashes begin: Music. Leo dancing. A man’s hands nearing her lower body. Blood trickling down the floor.

Before Leo can understand her own convoluted thoughts, she looks down to see Logan lying in front of her, lifeless; stabbed to death by a Japanese knife. Blood oozes out of his ribcage, while his entrails pour out on the cold floor.

The bodycon dress is covered in dark red blood. It seems all too blended together. The stains are unrecognizable from the hue of the gown.

Two months later, Leo enters a large parking lot in her Audi S3. She opens a door to a millennial gray hallway and takes a seat beside an office. The place card next to the door reads, Dr. Emmanuela Oscar’s Office.

Emmanuela opens the door. Her demeanor is still spiritual and hopeful.

“Nice to see you, Leo Tuskin. Your agent gave me a call. I assume you’re here for the procedure.”

“Emmanuela, I need help. The constant torment of these moments. It plagues me. Every day. I can’t go on like this. I need you to erase them for me. My agent told me about you and your company, and uh something is wrong. I need your help. I don’t–”

She breaks down crying.

“I don’t want to be a murderer.”

“Well, this is different than the usual.”

“Excuse me? Have I. Have I been here before?”

Emmanuela leads Leo inside a familiar, plain office room. “Leo, I’m going to make you a proposition this time.” Leo doesn’t understand but nods and sits on the stale couch.

“You see, my company here. That I’ve built over the last 40 years. We create assassins. We train and raise assassins. And you are one of our brightest.”

Leo’s face turns white. Her mouth drops.

“Basically, we program you to find the next victim, and then you kill. Well of course, the human being isn’t capable of being a true assassin. The brain is all too conscious of guilt, grief, and regret. So, we strip you of that. We leave you with memories of yourself, but none of the real gory stuff. Sometimes, some flashes will occur, no way of stopping it. But you are doing some real good. You know the guy you killed, Logan? He’s a sexual offender. Harassed hundreds of young women like you. We need you. To help our world stay a better place.

Leo remains shocked. The doctor continues.

“Now the proposition is this, you can go to the next level - a real working assassin, no punishment from the government, working full time under our company.

“Or I can erase this, and you’ll continue in the infinite cycle of low-level murder. Never remembering what happens, or who you even are. The choice.... is yours.”

Leo is still blank. She barely can get a word out except the phrase, “How many did I kill?”

“This was your 50th kill, Leo. A true accomplishment. Congratulations.”