

THE SISYPHUS

Written by

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INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

TWO UNCONSCIOUS BODIES lay slumped in a slowly rising elevator.

On an overhead speaker, we hear the SCREECH of tires against asphalt, followed by a wet THUD, and then-

The elevator jolts to a stop, and PETER(19), an internet conspiracy theorist, gasps awake.

Vision blurry, he glances up to see..

Handprints - smeared with dirt and grease along the ceiling panels. He blinks. The handprints vanish.

On a sharp inhale, he pulls his backpack to his chest. **WOOF, WOOF!**

He WHIPS around to see LES(26), a disoriented businesswoman, half asleep as she fishes her BARKING PHONE out of her pocket.

PETER  
(pissed)  
What kinda ringtone..?

She SHRIEKS at the sound of his voice. BACKS into the corner.

LES  
Who are - wait - where the fuck are we?

PETER  
I don't know. I don't remember much...

She SCANS the room. Takes everything in.

LES  
Fuck, my head hurts...

PETER  
Mine too.

LES  
You think we were drugged?

PETER  
Most likely.

LES  
Why? By- by who?

PETER  
 No idea - wait - check your phone.  
 Mine's dead.

She TURNS-ON the screen. Tries to unlock it. FROWNS.

PETER (CONT'D)  
 The location.

LES  
 (annoyed)  
 I'm trying, but it's just this  
 weird, loading screen...?

He GRABS her phone. An animated tennis ball rolls indefinitely across a black screen.

PETER  
 S'just a ball? Why wouldn't it be  
 like, the normal loading screen?

LES  
 Oh my god - the ball drop! It's new  
 years eve...

PETER  
 What else do you remember?

INT. RED SEDAN - DAY

LES (V.O.)  
 ...I was on the phone with one of  
 my tenets.

Rush hour traffic. Rows of agitated drivers. At a red, Les talks on the phone.

LES  
 It's not about *if* you have the  
 money, but how you got it. I don't  
 rent to dealers, Jeremy. Can't do  
 it anymore. It's bad business. Be  
 out by tonight.

The tenet PLEADS, but it's unintelligible. She HANGS-UP.

The light turns green, but the car in front of her CRAWLS ALONG at a snails pace.

(Cutaway: At a dog park, a boy kneels to unleash his dog.)

She SCOWLS. HONKS at the car in front of her.

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

PETER  
You think it was him?

LES  
No - wasn't my tenet. Impulsive?  
Sure. But he's not psycho. What  
about you? Got any enemies?

Peter SNORTS.

PETER  
I make 'em for a living.

INT. BUGGIE - DAY

Busy traffic. Peter frantically PROPS his phone against the dash. Starts recording.

PETER  
At the ball drop, my next video  
drops too - exposing one of New  
York's most notorious hotels. Some  
of you might even be staying there  
tonight. If you are... consider  
this your warning. Word is, *they've*  
*got killer décor.*

His phone SLIPS from the dash, landing in the floor boards.  
He DIVES for it, vision blocked momentarily as-

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

LES  
Wait, you're that - that youtuber!  
Oh my god... wait... anyone could  
be after you. Who were you about to  
expose?

PETER  
It's an escape room hotel.

LES  
An escape room hotel?

PETER  
Yeah, one of those places where  
people pay to solve puzzles and get  
out of themed rooms. Except last  
year, this couple died in one.

LES

What happened?

PETER

It was supposed to be this immersive, "high-stakes" experience. They designed one of the rooms to feel like a collapsing building, complete smoke effects.

LES

What happened...?

PETER

The room's fire suppression system malfunctioned during the smoke effect. The sprinklers went off, and the doors locked automatically as part of the scenario.

LES

Oh my god, they drowned?

PETER

No, not exactly. The husband panicked and smashed open a pipe to try to stop the water, but the pipe was part of the room's heating system. It sprayed steam everywhere. They died from burns and smoke inhalation.

LES

That's awful...

PETER

The worst part? The hotel blamed the couple for "breaking safety rules" to dodge liability. They claimed the pipe rupture wasn't their fault, even though it was obvious the whole setup was a death trap.

LES

And you were going to expose all this?

PETER

Yeah. I found out the building used to be a hospital in the 1950s, and half the safety features were retrofitted just to meet code.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

The fire systems were ancient, not even tested properly. I was going to blow it wide open.

LES

But if they knew you were onto them—

PETER

The hotel might've - god, I can't even remember the name, something greek like—

LES

The Sisyphus.

PETER

Yeah, how... oh shit.

Over Les's shoulder, we see an animatronic figure - an eerie mechanical man straining to push a stone up a rotating dial. Beneath it, a brass plate reads: "**The Sisyphus.**"

LES

It's mythology, right? The man cursed to roll a stone up a hill for eternity, never reaching the top.

PETER

Exactly. Perfect metaphor for an escape room, right? Except... *wait a second.*

A DRIVERS SAFETY POSTER hangs on the wall, depicting a boy chasing his dog through the street, racing to catch a tennis ball in oncoming traffic.

The ad reads: **He's got his eyes on the ball, but are yours on the road?**

A realization dawns. Peter launches into action, frantically pressing buttons, tapping panels, and scanning every inch of the space. His hands hover over the poster's edges, feeling for seams or creases, until finally—

He finds it. A metallic tennis ball - protruding from the wall. He PRESSES it.

PETER (CONT'D)

(re: the animatronic)

I knew it. This is an escape room, and that's the countdown.

LES  
Till the ball drops?

CLICK.

A skylight opens above them, revealing the suspension cords keeping the elevator dangling under their weight.

PETER  
No - till we do.

The lights FLICKER and the elevator DROPS a foot. They CLING to the rails.

Peter GRABS her forearm. Eyes wide. Frantic.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Okay - fuck - start pressing random buttons, mess with panels that look out of place, screws that don't fit right... Anything that could be a switch, anything that could tell us why they're after you too...

LES  
Why would they be after me?! I've never even heard of this place. I just - it doesn't make sense!

Her brows FURROW as something catches her eye on the poster. Peter follows her gaze to see...

LES (CONT'D)  
...That boy... he's familiar... I think I...

She trails her fingertips across his face.

PETER  
(softly)  
Me too. I know his face.

FLASHBACK:

INT. BUGGIE - DAY

Peter DUCKS down under the dash. Reaching for his phone. A voice CRACKLES to life on the radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

...Most of you are in traffic right now, stuck in an endless matrix of agitated people, half-crazed with the need to be somewhere else... But here at the mythology channel, we know this, patience is the sole virtue in a Sisyphean world... so just sit back, take a deep breath, and enjoy the ride, wherever it takes you...

Peters fingertips just barely SCATHE the corner of his phone when-

He SWERVES.

(Cutaway: In the park, a boy unclips his dog from the leash. A stray tennis ball rolls through green grass. Bounces off the curb. Rolls menacingly into the road.)

SLOW MO AS

The dog runs after the ball, the boy, right on his heels.)

Peter GRAPPLES for his phone, finally getting a grip on it, when-

THUD. The dog SPLATTERS against the windsheild. Then, soon after there's another THUD. The boy dies on impact; cheek pressed against the windsheild as blood pools at his temple, his curls slickened with black.

A car horn BLARES. Peter WHIPS around to see Les, face strained and knuckles white against the wheel.

Then he's BLINDED by her headlights, and CRUSHED on impact. MONTAGE SEQUENCE BEGINS:

- In NEW YORK CITY, the ball DROPS.

- In the elevator, the animatronic Sisyphus reaches the peak of the hill, clicking the boulder into place, only for it to ROLL BACK DOWN AGAIN.

- Then, finally, the elevator DROPS. Gravity's swift reversal SLAMS Peter and Les onto the ceiling. Peter THROWS his hands out in front of his face to break the fall, smearing frantic fingerprints against the metal before going unconscious.



INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

The elevator JOLTS to a stop, SLAMMING Peter and Les onto the floor. Once again...

TWO UNCONCIOUS BODIES lay slumped in a slowly rising elevator.

ZOOM-OUT TO SEE

Rows upon rows of elevators, with thousands of souls trapped in purgatory, reliving their trauma, their deepest sins, over and over, for all of eternity...