

1 EXT. FOREST - DAY**1**

Frostbitten trees hang overhead as the ground underfoot begins to thaw. An unassuming figure steps into sight, headphones in to block out the world. They (ASTER, 18 years old) crouch to examine a lone flower, pluck a single petal and let it drift to the ground.

All we see is darkness, then, slowly, a series of images coming into focus. A computerised voice can be heard, reverberating slightly as if echoing in a silent room.

THE VOICE

Following the events of the early '20s - a pandemic, unprecedented loss of life - global governments began to see the value in what we were doing. We had found a way to accurately predict when life would cease to function.

A brief pause.

THE VOICE

We called it the LifeTime report. We were so blinded by the magnitude of the accomplishment that we never considered what it could do to humanity. The results came in and within hours it was approved for worldwide distribution.

Heavy breathing can be heard, as the voice stops momentarily.

THE VOICE

It was simple. Swab inside the cheek, tick boxes in a questionnaire. That was all it took for us to tell you when you'd die. Most people found out when they turned 18. They figured that was old enough. If you were unlucky, you knew before then.

The voice is heard clearing their throat.

THE VOICE

Every year after your eighteenth we sent letters - 'updates', as they were referred to. Markets sprung up selling anything that claimed to increase life expectancy. The

economy was booming, but people had never been more divided.

A sigh.

THE VOICE

You could see your life counting down on an app. It was on everyone's phone. Couldn't delete it. We'd compile all the data we harvested to inform the annual LifeTime results.

A longer pause.

THE VOICE

It wasn't until it was too late that we realised in 'playing God' with our science and technology, we'd only ever played ourselves.

2 INT/EXT. ASTER'S HOUSE - SAME MORNING 2

We see a white letter drop through a letterbox. Inside the same house numerous well-wishing cards are sat on every available surface, collecting dust. Torn-open envelopes lay, discarded, forming a pile.

We see Aster fully for the first time, clutching one of the cards, blinking as though not seeing, before returning it to a nearby surface. An important date - her eighteenth birthday - is circled on the calendar, having been crossed off.

3 INT. ASTER'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY 3

Aster's eyes open, darting in the direction of the front door. She creeps throughout the house, as though hiding from something - just what isn't clear. As she looks down at the letter, it's as though it stares back in confrontation.

Arms wrapped around herself, she inches forward to pick it up. Fingertips just grazing the envelope, she recoils as though burnt by something invisible. A flashback to flowers against a gravestone appear, gone in a flash, as a candle is blown out. Aster's chest heaves, starved for air and she scrunches up her face, eyes sealed shut.

A drawer opens and a pair of gloves are retrieved. The letter is picked up and banished to a dark drawer, out of sight.

4 INT. ASTER'S HOUSE - SAME DAY 4

The doorbell outside sounds. We see FINN (18 years old, wealthy), Aster's best friend from her childhood on the doorstep.

FINN
Aster, how are you?

ASTER
(Half-heartedly)
Oh, Finn. Hey.

Finn searches for a reaction from Aster, dissatisfied, she realises Aster hasn't opened the letter she received earlier.

FINN
You haven't opened it...?

ASTER
(Looking down)
It'll be the same as theirs.

FINN
(Reaching out towards Aster)
We don't know that. You're only just 18.

ASTER
(Looking right at Finn, almost coldly)
There's still dying 18 year olds, Finn.

Finn recoils.

Sighing, she brushes past Aster and into the house. Finn takes a seat on the couch as she has done countless times, at ease and unfazed. Noticing the cards, she rises to look at them.

FINN
How considerate.

Turning swiftly, she joins Aster on the couch, sitting upright.

FINN
It'll be okay. You don't have any underlying health conditions, that's what matters-

ASTER
(Cutting in)
Neither did Mum or Dad.

FINN
(Voice tightening)

I know, I know... What happened to them was a tragedy. It wasn't right, how they were taken.

Aster remains silent with her hands interlinked in her lap, she lets Finn keep talking.

FINN
(Almost rambling)
They did so much for others. My parents practically bought longer lives. Organic everything, water filtration, private healthcare, personal trainers, bodyguards...

Aster blinks slowly, pain in her eyes as she watches Finn talk animatedly, making wild gestures.

ASTER
That was never an option for us.

Finn doesn't respond. Clearing her throat, she turns to face Aster, holding both of her hands.

FINN
Open it. It's out of your control. We've tried all we could to change it.

Aster looks away, her gaze on the well-wishing cards.

ASTER
Yeah... Yeah, you're right.

We watch Finn leave with a strained smile. Finn pauses in the doorway of the living room.

FINN
Aster?

ASTER
Yeah?

FINN
Open the windows. Let in some light.

ASTER
(Looking around)
Yeah...

Aster looks at a letter for a black-market drug, marketed as a LifeTime expectancy aid - claiming to increase the lifespan

of one-time users.

A single pill can be seen on a countertop next to a glass of water. Aster is seen picking up the pill and the glass, before setting the glass back down half-full.

Aster opens the letter. In bold lettering we see she has a week left, her hands beginning to shake.

5 EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

5

Aster stands over her parent's graves, hands in her pocket to conceal the shaking. Finn approaches from the background.

FINN
(Cheerily)
Hey.

ASTER
Hi.

Finn looks around, taking in the bleakness of the cemetery, pulling her jacket closer.

FINN
(Sarcastically)
Nice day, huh?

ASTER
(Half laughs)
Ha, they'd have something to say
about it.

Aster tilts her head at the gravestones. A small flower lies on the granite. There's a brief silence, as the wind whistles and they both stand, blinking.

FINN
(Looking around,
fidgeting)
This'll pass.

ASTER
(Spaced out)
Huh?

Finn forces herself to stand still and face Aster.

FINN
(Trying to be positive)
A few more years and they'll invent
something so that you can see them
again.

Aster half-smiles, looking off into the distance as though transfixed by something else.

ASTER
Think so?

FINN
(Nodding)
Know so.

Finn looks at Aster, who is watching the trees sway in the wind. Aster's expression gives nothing away.

FINN
(Apologetically)
I'm sorry but I gotta go. Call me,
okay?

Aster doesn't turn to acknowledge her. Finn pauses to look at Aster briefly, a look of puzzlement etched on her face. She turns to go, her back already turned when--

ASTER
(As though her mind is
elsewhere)
Bye.

Aster looks downwards at the grave, Finn momentarily pauses but then resumes walking.

ASTER
(Under her breath, words
catching in her throat)
See you soon.

6 INT. ASTER'S HOUSE - LATER

6

Aster flips through a photo album, her expression softening as her eyes shine. Her under-eyes are dark and hollow, skin sallow with patches of redness around her nose and mouth. A notification sounds out; a reminder from LifeTime. Aster freezes.

Her eyes flutter to a close as she slumps backwards into the couch, chest heaving a few times to the ticking of a clock as the front door is unlocked.

FINN
(Chirpy, mid-sentence)
So, I was thinking today that we-

Finn can be heard talking frantically, ceasing as she abruptly stops in the doorway of the living room. Speechless,

she calls out:

FINN
 (Hesitant, hands coming up
 to cover her mouth)
 ... Aster?

Finn looks around almost looking for someone to help,
 reaching for her phone when--

A letter can be heard coming in through the letterbox. Finn
 forces her horrified gaze away from Aster to look, before
 picking it up, opening it haphazardly and reading aloud
 through a choked voice.

FINN
 (Shaking the letter)
 Is *this* why you didn't tell me?

Finn shakes her head, trying to focus enough to read the
 small letters.

FINN
 (Looking back and forth
 from the letter to the
 living room)
 Aster! Oh, God, no... Didn't you get
 the text? They were *wrong*, they sent
 out false results.

Aster is silent.

Finn is crying, as she reads the letter through tears.

FINN
 Aster Bright, we are writing to
 inform you that the LifeTime report
 issued February 3rd, 2021, was
 incorrect.

Finn pauses, looking around trying to compose herself.

FINN
 (Speaking as though
 running out of breath)
 We are delighted to inform you that
 you currently have 82 years, 6
 months, 13 days and 17 hours as of
 February 5th, 14:30 hours, 2021.

Finn reappears in the doorway, clinging to the letter.

FINN

(Hand half-covering her
mouth)
Aster? Are you still there...?

The LifeTime alert can be heard ringing out from Aster's
phone. Aster's eyes can be seen moving ever-so-slightly.

THE VOICE
We only ever made one mistake.

THE VOICE
(Hesitant)
One year the system failed. We told
millions of kids they'd die at the
wrong time.

THE INTERVIEWER
And what of the orphan of the two
initial volunteers for the LifeTime
report? What became of her, in the
end...?

Longer silence. Aster's eyes blink open.

THE VOICE
It nearly cost her everything.

FADE TO BLACK.