

"ENCOUNTERS"

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE BEACH - DAY

LUCY, 45, charmingly confident, looks straight in the camera. Her face is glowing, her eyes shining. The breeze blows gently through her hair.

LUCY

... and then, when the moment came, and I saw him smile at me with the exact same sweet look... I realized that to be alive... to be alive without really living... that's a kind of disrespect for the person you've lost... living a life with no smiles, no joy, no waking up to a new start every day.

INT. ELLEN'S STUDY - NIGHT

ELLEN, 35, is paging through a photograph album nervously. A baby is crying. She ignores it.

Her eye is drawn to a photo showing her younger self next to her MOTHER, 55. A tender moment. She detaches the photograph from the album.

The baby's crying gets louder.

ELLEN

Coming, darling!

She pauses at a different picture of Mother: alone, rather older. She detaches that photo from the album as well.

She scans both photos with trembling hands at the scanner on the desk.

The baby's crying gets tremendously loud.

ELLEN

(on the verge of
hysteria)

Mummy's coming in a minute!

She scrabbles through the files on her computer. She switches on an mp3 and hears Mother's voice and her own.

MOTHER (V.O.)

Have you switched it on, Ellie? Is it recording?

ELLEN (V.O.)
Yep.

Mother begins to sing. Ellen is overcome by the tenderness in her voice and switches off the mp3.

She attaches the two photographs and the mp3 recording to a website. She waits for them to load and clicks "send".

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Deafening sound from a playstation. JOSH, 42, is sprawling on the sofa in pijamas, the controller in his hand. He's playing aggressively, totally engrossed in the game.

The room is untidy. Stuff dropped all over the floor, draped over the chairs. Clothes, DVDs, a laptop.

The game sticks on the TV screen. Josh is no longer operating the control. His eyes are glued to a little model of the Eiffel Tower on the coffee table.

He drags himself up from the sofa, and slouches across the room. He sticks his hand in the pocket of a smart jacket thrown across the dining table and pulls out a cutting from a magazine.

He drags himself back to the sofa, his attention fixed on a few words on the paper: "LivingIsBelieving.com".

He crumples up the cutting and throws it on the floor, on top of a pile of other untidy stuff.

INT. GRANDMOTHER'S KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen looks like a time-capsule from the 1960s. Old-fashioned furniture, an old fridge, a small, old-style TV.

The GRANDDAUGHTER, 16, is sitting on a kitchen chair, drinking a virulently-colored drink through a straw.

Her GRANDMOTHER is sitting opposite her drinking tea, and dunking biscuits in it.

They're both smoking.

GRANDMOTHER
He loved my scrambled eggs. But he liked them with extra tomato sauce and not much egg.

GRANDDAUGHTER
Okay.

GRANDMOTHER

He was terrified of cholesterol. I mean, he used to get hysterical about it. Every time he saw me eating sweet stuff he kept on at me for days.

GRANDDAUGHTER

Poor Granny!

GRANDMOTHER

He made me have it tested three times a year... he had it tested too. And when the results came out, he used to say, really sarcastically, like this: 'Well, Renee, I see your cholesterol is down!' Oh, what made you bring all that up again?

GRANDDAUGHTER

D' you miss him, Gran?

GRANDMOTHER

Don't know really... the last few years, we did nothing but argue. Picking on each other all day long.

GRANDDAUGHTER

Come on, Gran. Not even, like, a tiny bit?

GRANDMOTHER

I was married to the man. I was only sixteen... you're sixteen, aren't you? We stuck together for forty years.

INT. ELLEN'S STUDY - DAY

Ellen opens her email. In her Inbox she sees a message from the sender "Living Is Believing" with the subject "Date and time confirmation". Ellen's eyes fix on the message:

"Tuesday, December 18th, 8 pm.
Please confirm your agreement to the specified date and time."

She opens her organizer page for 18 December. Nothing down on that date. She emails back:

"OK"

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Josh's laptop is open in front of him and he is reading from the site "LivingIsBelieving.com":

"You deserve to live your life in freedom".

A bit lower down:

"It's time to let go. And we can help you do it".

And:

"Remember them as they would like to be remembered".

He minimizes the site and searches through the files on his laptop. He opens an album of photographs and videos. He flicks through it. He selects two photos and opens them.

One is a picture of MARIA, 32, standing in front of the Eiffel Tower, and the other shows Maria on the sofa of Josh's room.

He opens a cellphone video of MARIA eating a burger, smeared with sauce. She's giggling.

MARIA

Come on! Cut it out!

She reaches out and grabs his cellphone. Josh protests as Maria turns it off.

INT. GRANDMOTHER'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Grandmother is sitting in her armchair, knitting. The front door opens, and Granddaughter rushes in. Her face is flushed.

GRANDMOTHER

Goodness! You... you frightened me
to bits! Where did you get the
keys from?

The Granddaughter lights a cigarette, gives it to Grandmother, and then lights one for herself.

GRANDDAUGHTER

(very excited)

Okay, Gran... You'll never guess
what I'm gonna get you for your
birthday. Something like, ultra
cool!

GRANDMOTHER
When is my birthday?

Granddaughter laughs and runs into Grandmother's bedroom.

INT. GRANDMOTHER'S BEDROOM — DAY

She makes towards the dressing table.

GRANDDAUGHTER
In twenty three days. Exactly!

GRANDMOTHER (O.S.)
Oh... right.

Granddaughter snatches up two frames containing old black and white photographs. One shows GRANDFATHER, 55, his expression hard and severe. The other one is a wedding photograph of Grandmother and Grandfather.

GRANDMOTHER (O.S.)
Come out of there, I haven't got any more money.

Granddaughter tries to stuff the photo frames in her pocket.

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Josh is still in "LivingIsBelieving.com", filling in some details.

He reads "Name of person you wish to speak to".

He types out "Maria".

He reads "Person's pet name for you?"

He types out "Honey".

He reads "What do you hope to gain from your conversation?"

Josh hesitates for a second, then types out "Nothing".

INT. ELLEN'S STUDY — NIGHT

Ellen is sitting in front of her computer. Hands unsteady, she picks up a glass on the desk and takes a sip of water. She looks at the time on the screen. It's 19:55.

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Josh reads "Please describe in up to 100 words your connection to the person and how he or she passed away".

Josh's hands are on the keyboard. He writes something. He deletes it. He writes again. He deletes again. He pauses. Then writes:

"Maria and I got married four years ago. I had never noticed..."

INT. GRANDDAUGHTER'S PARENTS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Granddaughter sneaks her hand into the inner pocket of a man's jacket and extracts a credit card.

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Josh is holding a credit card. He enters the data from the card into the laptop.

INT. ELLEN'S STUDY - NIGHT

The computer shows 19:57. The clock on the wall shows the same time. Ellen jumps out of her chair.

ELLEN
(yells into the
next room)
I need ten minutes absolute
silence!

She slams the door shut.

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Josh clicks "enter" and the system shows that it is checking the data on his credit card.

INT. ELLEN'S STUDY - NIGHT

It's 19:59. Ellen is standing over the computer. Her eyes are fixed on the screen.

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Josh is reading from the screen.

JOSH
(mechanically)
"Email confirming the
transaction... sent to your
address."

INT. ELLEN'S STUDY - NIGHT

The clock registers 20:00. Ellen stares at the screen.

Suddenly there is a sound like a phone ringing and a light starts flashing on the computer screen. A window appears with the message:

"Mom calling.
Accept call?"

Ellen remains motionless. She stares at it, frozen. The sound persists. She clicks "accept call".

A full-screen video appears, Mother's face. Mother smiles warmly, looking right into Ellen's eyes. Her make-up looks natural, her complexion flawless and glowing.

MOTHER
Ellen, sweetheart?

A status bar at the bottom of the window begins counting down from 90 seconds.

MOTHER
Darling?

Tears start to Ellen's eyes, and roll, involuntarily, down her cheeks.

MOTHER
Speak to me, sweetheart. Speak to me, Ellen, my darling girl. What is it you wanted to apologize for?

Ellen, weeping, makes a huge effort to speak.

Ellen
I... I... That last day... I was coming... I was on my way... I just stopped to get my test results.

Ellen can't go on. Mother looks at her with the same warm smile.

MOTHER
Go on, sweetheart.

Ellen watches the seconds ticking away. She manages to concentrate.

ELLEN
I wanted to tell you myself mom.
I wanted to see your face when I told you, but I didn't get there in time.

Ellen is sobbing, almost choking.

ELLEN

I'm so sorry, mom, I didn't get there in time. I was pregnant... I wanted to tell you myself... But I didn't make it in time. And when I came running in... there was Ben. I could tell from his face what had happened.

MOTHER

(comfortingly)

One bad moment can't wipe out a whole lifetime of love.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)

Ten seconds remaining.

ELLEN

She's beautiful. I've called her after you. I'm so sorry, mom, I just... I wish I could turn back the clock...

MOTHER

One bad moment can't wipe out a whole lifetime of love. Do you hear me?

Ellen nods. Mother's image fades to white.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)

Time over.

INT. GRANDDAUGHTER'S BEDROOM — NIGHT

Granddaughter is sitting on the floor, with her laptop on her knees. The credit card on the floor beside her.

She is on the site "LivingIsBelieving.com". She scrolls down the "Terms of use" section. She reads random excerpts.

GRANDDAUGHTER

(mumbles)

"If you are unable to send a voice sample, we can't guarantee..."

She scrolls further down.

GRANDDAUGHTER

"Never use our service on another person's behalf."

GRANDDAUGHTER (Cont'd)
"The consequences could be very
serious..." Yeah, right.

She ticks two boxes:

"I confirm that I am over 18".

And

"I agree to the terms of use".

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A sound like a phone ringing is heard, the light flashes on the screen, and the message reads:

"Maria calling.
Accept call?"

His hands firm, Josh clicks on "accept call". A full-screen video appears, Maria's face. Maria smiles warmly, looking right into Josh's eyes. Her make-up looks natural, her complexion is flawless and glowing.

MARIA
Honey?

Josh stares at Maria, speechless.

MARIA
Speak to me, honey. Is there
something you wanted to tell me?
Please, honey, talk to me.

No reaction. Fifty seconds remaining. Josh stares expressionless. Forty seconds remaining.

MARIA
I want you to get on with life. I
want you to free yourself from
whatever's holding you back.
Please, honey, talk to me.

The seconds tick by.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)
Ten seconds remaining.

MARIA
I want you to get on with life.

The countdown continues. Maria continues to smile brightly, looking straight into Josh's eyes. She fades to white.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)
Time over.

INT. ELLEN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ellen is sitting on the floor and playing with her BABY DAUGHTER.

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Josh is on the site "LivingIsBelieving.com". He clicks on the link "Testimonies":

"Jack, USA
Julia, USA
Lucy, UK
Johnny, UK
Lucile, France
Alexander, Germany
Monica, Germany
Katerina, Greece
Nadja, Russia
Tonia, Albania
Katia, Serbia
Anna, Sweden"

He clicks on "Lucy, UK", and the video clip from the first scene appears.

LUCY

When I first heard of 'Living is Believing', I was skeptical. But then one afternoon I was coming home from work and I felt this overpowering need to speak to him. I rushed to the cemetery. I threw myself on his grave. It hurt so much to think of him lying alone in the cold earth. I just wanted to remember him with that smile on his face. I hurried home and registered on 'Living is Believing'. And then, when the moment came, and I saw him smile at me with the exact same sweet look... I realized that to be alive... to be alive without really living... that's a kind of disrespect for the person you've lost... living a life with no smiles, no joy, no waking up to a new start every day.

LUCY (Cont'd)
We owe it to our loved ones not
just to stay alive, but to...
truly live. 'Living is Believing'
helps me to be strong again.

INT. GRANDMOTHER'S BEDROOM — DAY

The sound of a party is coming from the living room. Talk,
laughter, sounds of celebration.

Granddaughter is on Grandmother's bed, her laptop on her
knees.

GRANDDAUGHTER
(shouts impatiently)
Gran! Gran! Come quickly!

MOTHER (O.S.)
No, Lauren, you come here! We're
just going to blow out Gran's
birthday candles!

GRANDDAUGHTER
I'm not talking to you, I'm talking
to Gran! Can you come here a bit,
please Gran! Now!

Grandmother comes into the bedroom.

GRANDMOTHER
What's all this? Keeping secrets
from your mother again?

Granddaughter gets up and locks the door.

GRANDDAUGHTER
D'you remember the surprise I
promised you? Get ready for it!

GRANDMOTHER
Oh, I'd forgotten all about it.

GRANDAUGHTER
But, like, first you have to swear
not to breathe a word to Mom and
Dad. Not a word! Ever!

GRANDMOTHER
Lauren, lovey! Think! How many times
have I covered up for you?

There's a sound like a phone ringing, the flashing light and the status bar come on screen. Granddaughter jumps back on the bed.

"Richard calling.
Accept call?"

GRANDDAUGHTER
Swear?

GRANDMOTHER
Swear!

Granddaughter clicks on "accept call", and places the laptop in front of Grandmother, who stares baffled at the face of Grandfather smiling warmly at her from the screen. He looks way younger than she does.

GRANDFATHER
Renee?

Grandmother stands like a pillar of salt. Granddaughter is in transports of delight.

GRANDDAUGHTER
Go on, Gran! Speak! It's Granddad!
Gran! Come on! Granddad's talking to you!

GRANDFATHER
I could really fancy a plate of scrambled eggs and tomato sauce,
Renee!

Granddaughter lets out a shout of enthusiasm, and nudges Grandmother, who doesn't respond.

GRANDFATHER
Is your cholesterol down, Renee?

GRANDDAUGHTER
Answer him!

The seconds tick away. And tick away.

GRANDFATHER
Is your cholesterol down, Renee, or have you been at all that sweet stuff again?

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)
Ten seconds remaining.

Grandfather keeps looking straight into her eyes and smiling.

GRANDFATHER

Well, I'm glad you were lucky enough to grow old. You're so beautiful!

GRANDDAUGHTER

So sweet!

Grandmother stares at the screen as Grandfather fades to white.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)

Time over.

GRANDDAUGHTER

Gran! Granny! Hey, Gran!!!

GRANDMOTHER

How did he get here, the...

GRANDDAUGHTER

Gran, that was your present. And it cost me like a month's pocket money.

GRANDMOTHER

How did he get here?

GRANDDAUGHTER

Where???

GRANDMOTHER

Here, there!

GRANDDAUGHTER

(annoyed)

What the hell are you on about, Gran?

GRANDMOTHER

How did he get here?

GRANDDAUGHTER

It's a computer program! It's all electronic... it's not real... it's a new computer program.

GRANDMOTHER

(murmurs)

Bloody idiot!

GRANDDAUGHTER

I thought it would make you happy to like talk to him after so many years.

Granddaughter sees Grandmother's lowered gaze.

GRANDMOTHER
Stupid bastard! Where is he now?

GRANDDAUGHTER
Where do you think he is, Gran!
He's, like, dead! It's all virtual.
So-o convincing, isn't it?

GRANDMOTHER
He always was a bastard...

GRANDDAUGHTER
(frustrated)
Come on, Gran, weren't you even a
little bit pleased?

GRANDMOTHER
Scum...

INT. JOSH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sound of a phone ringing. A light flashes on the screen, and on the status bar:

"Maria calling
Accept call?"

Josh watches the bar without reacting for a few seconds, then clicks on "accept call". Maria appears on the screen again, wearing the exact same smile.

MARIA
Honey?

Josh doesn't react. The only sign to betray his agitation is a slight twitching of his facial muscles.

MARIA
Speak to me, honey. I'm sure you have lots to tell me. Josh, please.

No reaction. Thirty seconds remaining.

MARIA
What happened wasn't your fault. I was the one with the problem, I was sick.

Countdown continues.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)
Ten seconds remaining.

MARIA
Tell me you understand what I'm
saying. What I did was my choice.
Mine and mine only.

Maria is still smiling in the same way, as she fades to white.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)
Time over.

Josh springs up. He stands motionless, staring into space. Then, he gets his credit card out of his wallet.

INT. GRANDMOTHER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Granddaughter is pacing up and down in front of Grandmother. She's taking short, sharp drags from a cigarette.

GRANDMOTHER
Look at him, and look at me!

GRANDDAUGHTER
I'm sorry, Granny! I didn't mean,
like, to upset you. Honest.

GRANDMOTHER
Did you see how young he looks? How
did he get to look like that! Look
at him, and look at me! The
bastard... And where is he now???

INT. COMPANY OFFICES - NIGHT

The office space is large, ultra-modern and luxurious, and is divided into a numerous small cubicles. An employee sits in each office, wearing earphones. There are two computer monitors in front of each.

EMPLOYEE #1 is speaking French, EMPLOYEE #2 German,
EMPLOYEE #3 Greek.

EMPLOYEE #4, 45, is sitting at his desk, sipping cold tea from a can, and watching the time bar on his computer. It is 15:58.

Now the clock shows 15:59. He puts down his drink can, and with impressive dexterity clicks on a few keys on his computer. One of the monitors in front of him lights up with an image of Maria. The other screen is blank.

The computer registers 16:00. Employee #4 puts on his earphones, types in something at even greater speed, and Josh appears on the second screen.

Maria comes alive on Screen 1. She is glowing, smiling warmly. Her lips are in synchrony with Employee #4.

EMPLOYEE #4
Honey?

Josh scowls directly at EMPLOYEE #4.

EMPLOYEE #4
Are you going to speak to me this time? Please, honey.

No reaction. The seconds tick away. And tick away.

Suddenly, Josh pushes himself right up against the screen, his facial muscles twitching.

JOSH
(screaming)
What the fuck do you know about how I feel? Who the fuck are you to tell me what I should or shouldn't feel? I gave you fucking everything! What the fuck do I have to feel guilty about?

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)
Ten seconds remaining.

JOSH
What have you got to say now? Speak, you fucker, whoever you are...

Employee #4 opens his mouth to speak, but Josh cuts him off.

JOSH
Just fuck off!

Josh gets up from the chair and leaves the room. The computer is still running. Employee #4 clicks a key and Maria's picture starts to fade to white. He clicks another key.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (V.O.)
Time over.

FADE OUT.

THE END