

When I Close My Eyes

By Michael Burger

Scene 1

A simple office setting. There are 4 desks with standard office equipment and minimal bric-a-brac to personalize. Mark is alone at his desk typing. Jeff enters carrying coffee.

Jeff: The coffee gods have graced us with fresh java.

Mark: Not right now.

Jeff: Well, right now it's hot. Later, you take your own chances.

Mark: I'll take the risk.

Jeff: Come on man. Take a breath. Five minutes isn't going to kill you.

Mark: See, you say that. And yet, if I am late meeting my wife for dinner, you cannot guarantee my safety.

Jeff: Jessica will understand man. Aaron only gave you those forms, what, an hour ago? I'm amazed you're as far through as you are.

Mark: Actually (*some quick typing*) I am nearly done.

Jeff: You're kidding me? How the hell did you manage to convert 37 forms in an hour?

Mark: Not stopping for coffee every five minutes was a big help. (*beat*) That, and I offered to do Karen's morning shift this Saturday if she finished the last twenty for me tonight.

Karen: (*Entering with coffee*) Which I said yes to.

Mark: Because you are an Angel.

Karen: Because my bed and I have become strangers this past week. Once the merger is over I'm starting an affair with the contents of my wine rack.

Jeff: You wanna take my work too? I'd like to get outta here while I'm still young and vital.

Mark: That ship has sailed my friend.

Karen: That ship never even came to port.

Jeff: Feelings.

Karen: Kidding. How's it coming?

Mark: Two more and I'm good to go.

Karen: Go ahead and take off.

Mark: You sure? I only asked you to do twenty.

Karen: Yeah, get out of here. Two more isn't going to break me.

Mark: You are the best.

Jeff: Hey, why didn't you ask me?

Mark: Because I wanted someone who would say yes. Have you seen my coat?

Jeff: You left it in the break room. *(Mark exits)* So, tell me the truth. Did he ask you to cover the last of his reports, or did you offer?

Karen: Why? What're you insinuating?

Jeff: Oh, just wondering if you were hoping to get me alone in the office, that's all.

Karen: Why would I want to do that?

Jeff: I can think of a few reasons. *(Jeff comes up behind Karen and tries to kiss her)*

Karen: *(She coyly avoids his advances)* Sometimes a person is nice, just to be nice.

Jeff: Yes, but only sometimes.

Karen: Stop.

Jeff: No?

Karen: Not here. I told you, I don't want anyone to know yet.

Jeff: It's a good thing I'm not self conscious, because if I was I would be inclined to think you were ashamed of me.

Karen: Ashamed is a little harsh, don't you think?

Jeff: *(Is insulted by this phrasing and backs off)*

Karen: Look, that's not what I meant. Its just- there's a stigma for women that date while they're still married.

Jeff: You're getting a divorce, or did I misunderstand?

Karen: There's still a stigma.

Jeff: There's a stigma for guys to you know.

Karen: Yeah, but you don't care about it. For a woman its different. You just- *(Jeff motions that Mark is coming)*

Mark: *(Reenters wearing coat. Goes and gathers up belongings from desk)* Thanks Karen. I appreciate this.

Karen: No problem.

Mark: Everything all right?

Jeff: Just the daily grind. I'll stay and help out with these if you want?

Karen: I'd appreciate that.

Mark: Terrific. You guys are my heroes. I will call Jessica from the car and tell her I'm on the way. I will see you guys Tuesday. *(Begins to exit)*

Jeff: Don't forget about the meeting Monday afternoon.

Mark: What meeting?

Jeff: The meeting about finalizing the merger.

Mark: You're kidding?

Jeff: No man, they sent out a reminder this morning.

Mark: Jessica is going to kill me.

Jeff: Why? What you got going on?

Mark: It's just typical. You try to have any kind of personal life whatsoever and- *(Mark puts his fingers to his temple and make the gesture of a gun's hammer falling. An actual gunshot sound rings out and Mark falls to the floor, dead)*

Karen: Ohmygod!

Jeff: Get down! *(Jeff tackles Karen to the floor and pulls her under the nearest desk)*

Karen: What just happened?

Jeff: I don't know!

Karen: What just happened?!?

Jeff: I don't know!! *(Karen starts to crawl toward Mark)* What do you think you're doing? Get back here!

Karen: I have to see if he's okay!

Jeff: He's not!

Karen: Where did that come from?

Jeff: Shh!

Karen: But where-

Jeff: Shh! *(They wait a few beats in silence)* Give me your phone.

Karen: It's in my purse. Where's yours?

Jeff: On my desk. Shhh. (*Jeff commando crawls over to his desk and grabs his phone*) I've got no signal. Where's your purse? (*Karen points. Jeff crawls over to Karen's purse and pulls out her phone*) Nothing.

Karen: I don't hear anybody.

Jeff: Stay down.

Karen: (*Takes a beat and then crawls around the desks, looking this way and that, trying to see where the gunman is*)

Jeff: Karen! (*Jeff stays hidden*)

Karen: (*quietly*) There's nobody here.

Jeff: (*quietly*) Stay down! It must've come from across the street.

Karen: (*crawls over to the window, quietly*) It couldn't have. There's no holes or broken glass.

Jeff: (*Staying down, reaching for the office phone*) Well it had to come from somewhere.

Karen: (*Standing up*) Where could it have come from?

Jeff: Probably some sort of terrorist- what are you, insane? Get down!

Karen: Seriously, where the hell did it come from?

Jeff: Karen!

Karen: Just shut up for a minute Jeff!

(*Karen stands staring at Mark. Jeff gets up and tries the landline. It is clear that it isn't working. He sees Karen staring at Mark. Jeff goes and hugs her and tries to turn her head away*)

Jeff: It's all right. It'll be all right. We're okay.

Karen: (*In disbelief*) He shot himself.

Jeff: We'll figure this out.

Karen: No, listen to me dammit! He shot himself.

Jeff: What are you talking about Karen?

Karen: I figured it was the adrenalin, or that it all happened so fast that my eyes were playing tricks on me, but I saw what I saw. Didn't you see it?

Jeff: Yeah, Mark got shot.

Karen: No, he took two fingers and pointed them at his head and shot himself.

Jeff: Karen, he doesn't even have a gun.

Karen: I know. He shot himself with his fingers.

Jeff: How?

Karen: I don't know how. You saw it.

Jeff: Yeah, its like the worst case of bad timing in the world, but he didn't shoot himself.

Karen: I saw it. He took two fingers and pointed them at his head, like this and-

Jeff: (*Grabs her hand and pulls it away*) Don't-

Karen: So you did see it.

Jeff: I don't know what I saw.

Karen: Then why did you grab my hand?

Jeff: I don't know. Because I'm pretty freaked out here. And on the off chance that there's some sniper watching us right now with a sick sense of humor I don't really want to give him any invitations.

Karen: Go look at him.

Jeff: What?

Karen: Mark. Go look at where- *(she taps her head where Mark held the faux gun)*

Jeff: No way in hell.

Karen: I have to know.

Jeff: Then you go look. I am not touching him.

Karen: *(Annoyed)* Chivalry?

Jeff: I'm pretty sure looking at bullet holes in your best friend's head doesn't fall under the umbrella of chivalry.

(Karen goes over and carefully crouches on the floor next to Mark's body. She gets as close to his temple as she dares to inspect it)

Jeff: I'm pretty sure this is a big no-no as far as the police are concerned. Holy shit. We need to get ahold of the police right away. *(Grabs his phone again)* Still no signal! I never don't have signal in here, do I?

Karen: Jeffrey? I was right. Looks like he was shot exactly where he pointed at his head, and from the same direction too.

Jeff: How can you tell that?

Karen: Because I'm not an idiot, for starters.

Jeff: But he couldn't have been.

Karen: Well, he was.

Jeff: That's not possible.

Karen: Well, apparently it is.

Jeff: But how?

Karen: I don't know. It's impossible. What did the police say?

Jeff: Still no signal.

Karen: Did you try the landline? *(She goes to try it)*

Jeff: It's dead too. *(Karen looks at Jeff)* I'm not trying to be funny.

Karen: Something's very wrong here.

Jeff: You think?

Karen: Why wouldn't the landlines be working?

Jeff: They might've been knocked out by the storm?

Karen: There isn't a storm.

Jeff: There was one earlier, wasn't there?

Karen: And our cells?

Jeff: So, what, you're saying that something is cutting us off?

Karen: I don't know, but I'm full up on weird for tonight.

(Mark's cell phone begins to ring in Mark's pocket. Karen and Jeff both look at Mark, then each other)

Karen: Don't look at me.

Jeff: Uhhh. Okay, this is happening. Looking through my dead coworkers pockets. I'm actually doing this. *(Jeff carefully peels back Mark's coat and looks through his pockets until he finds the cell. He answers it.)* Hello? Jessica? Uh, no. This is Mark's friend Jeff. No. No, Mark isn't available right now. No, he hasn't left yet. He's, uhh. There's been a small accident. Well, he's... he's not around right now. I'll have him call you when he gets back. *(Karen hits him)* Alright, I'll let him know. Bye.

Karen: What the hell was that about? Why didn't you tell her?

Jeff: Look, I don't know how many widows you've had to break the news to, but it's not as easy as it looks, all right?

Karen: Now she's expecting her husband to call her back!

Jeff: I know. I panicked, all right? You're the one that wouldn't answer the call.

Karen: Call her back.

Jeff: And say what? Hey Jessica, Your husband isn't actually going to make it because he finger-gunned himself to death? That'll go over real well. *(Jeff begins dialing the cell)*

Karen: Then who are you calling?

Jeff: *(Mouths the word "police." Closes his eyes in frustration and drops the phone to his side.)*

Karen: What is it?

Jeff: No signal.

Karen: His wife just called.

Jeff: I know. I was there. But it's got no signal now.

Karen: *(Takes the phone)* That doesn't make any sense.

Jeff: What the hell is going on here? As if a murder wasn't disturbing enough already.

Karen: Let's just go.

Jeff: Just go?

Karen: To the police station. We can report it in person.

Jeff: You want to just leave Mark like this? What if somebody else finds him?

Karen: Please Jeffrey, let's just get out of here. There's something really wrong going on.

Jeff: Maybe it has to do with something he was working on?

Karen: Please, Jeffrey.

Jeff: What is this?

Karen: What now?

Jeff: These files are all the same. Look. (*She does*) Every file Aaron gave him was identical. Mark spent the last hour entering the same file over and over and didn't realize it? How is that possible? (*Jeff continues to go through the files*)

Karen: (*After a thought. She goes over to Jeff's desk and looks at the paperwork on it*) You'd think he would've noticed, right?

Jeff: Seriously.

Karen: Then how come you've been doing the same thing?

Jeff: What do you mean?

Karen: Just look. (*Jeff looks at his own desk and the files*)

Jeff: What?

Karen: Look!

Jeff: What're you talking about?

Karen: You can't see it?

Jeff: See what?

Karen: Every one of these files is the same. (*She spreads the files out so Jeff can get a better look*)

Jeff: No they're not.

Karen: What? Look again. (*Jeff does but he is at a loss. Karen picks up a file.*) What does this say?

Jeff: System File 107

Karen: And this one?

Jeff: System file 107

Karen: And this one?

Jeff: (*Slowly realizing*) System File 107.

Karen: They all say System File 107. They're all exactly the same.

Jeff: (*Sinks to his chair in disbelief*) What is... (*beat*) (*Mark's phone rings again. Jeff moves to answer it. Karen stops him*)

Karen: Don't answer it.

Jeff: Why not? (*looks at phone*) It's Jessica.

Karen: What's Jessica look like? (*Karen is looking at a picture on her desk*)

Jeff: I don't know. Never met her. If the picture on his desk is anything to go by, she's quite a looker. Long blonde hair, green eyes-

Karen: Is she wearing a blue dress?

Jeff: Yeah, how'd you-

Karen: Why do I have a picture of Mark's wife on my desk? (*She holds up a photo identical to the one Jeff is looking at. The phone rings a few more times and Jeff hangs it up and throws the phone down next to Mark's body. They both sit in silence for several beats*)

Jeff: (*In a flurry of motion*) I got to get out of here.

Karen: What?

Jeff: I can't be here. I have to go.

Karen: Where?

Jeff: Somewhere. Anywhere. I need to go and drink until things start to make sense again.

Karen: You can't just leave me here.

Jeff: Watch me.

Karen: You're just going to walk out on me. Leave me here with him?

Jeff: (*Overlapping*) I don't know what to do here. None of this makes any sense.

Karen: We have to figure this out.

Jeff: What's to figure out Karen? How does any of this make any sense?

Karen: I don't know, but we can't just ignore-

(*Mark suddenly jumps back up to his feet*)

Mark: So where were we guys?

Karen: Oh my god!

Jeff: You- you were dead.

Mark: I was what?

Jeff: (*Walking around Mark, but keeping his distance. He is looking for the hole that they inspected earlier*) You had a hole the size of a grape, clean through your head!

Mark: You remember that? I knew it didn't autosave. So hang on, its been running this whole time?

Jeff: I don't know what you are talking about, but we both saw you die not ten minutes ago.

Karen: You held your fingers to your temple and that was it.

Mark: Yeah, there's a bug. It registered me firing a gun before I acquired one because I made the gesture. You remember that?

(Karen and Jeff both nod)

Mark: I'm sorry. That should not have happened. I'll mark that down in my notes.

Karen: What is going on here? We tried calling for the police but the phones were dead. And your wife called, who I'm apparently involved with enough to have a picture of her on my desk.

Jeff: And we apparently just do the same work over and over.

Mark: And you're aware of that? That is disturbing.

Jeff: Not as disturbing as watching your friend pull a Jesus. *(Jeff grabs Mark by his collar and presses him against the desk)* Now tell us what the hell is going on here.

Mark: Look, I'm just beta testing. The game should have restarted, but it just reloaded from where I logged off.

Jeff: Beta testing?

Mark: Clearly there are some bugs.

Karen: We're a game?

Jeff: What're you talking about.

Mark: Save and logout.

Karen: We're just a game?

Mark: Save and logout.

Jeff: What're you doing?

Mark: Trying to exit, but its not working!

Karen: *(To Jeff)* We're not real.

Jeff: *(Releasing Mark and comforting Karen)* Of course we're real.

Karen: Can you remember your parents?

Jeff: Of course I can.

Karen: Can you though?

Jeff: Of course. They're... they're uh...

Karen: Neither can I.

Mark: Look, this is really weirding me out, so I'm going to go.

Karen: What happens to us?

Mark: Sorry?

Karen: Where do we go?

Mark: *(Looks at them confused a moment, then puts his finger to his temple and fires again. This time the stage goes dark and stays dark long enough for the transition. Sound effects could be useful)*

The same office setup. Mark is sitting at the fourth, previously unused desk. He is wearing some kind of elaborate VR equipment. The cubicles have a few more decorations now and are less "factory standard."

Mark: *(Is taking off the VR equipment. Deep exhalation)*

Justin: *(Enters)* So, what do you think? Did you get to the bus stop and swap briefcases with the agent yet?

Mark: Nope. Never even made it out of the office.

Justin: Aww, man. You didn't even play past the exposition? You never even got to the game part. Your car is supposed to break down on the way to dinner, then you

accidentally swap briefcases with a secret agent at the bus stop. You can't just quit before the game lay begins.

Mark: I didn't quit. I died.

Justin: How did you die before you left the office? There aren't even any agents there.

Mark: *(Something is troubling him)* Let's just say that you've still got some bugs to work out. Nice job modeling the office by the way.

Justin: I thought it'd give it an at home feel. C'mon. We've got that meeting in five and then I want to hear all your notes at dinner. Remember, I'm buying tonight.

Mark: Hang on, there's something I want to talk about with those characters you made.

Justin: Can it wait until after drinks tonight?

Mark: Yeah. *(Snaps out of it)* Yeah, I suppose it can. *(Mark begins to exit)*

Justin: Did you turn off the system?

Mark: No. *(Exits)*

Justin: *(Goes to power it down. As he does, he is stopped by a single line of dialogue appearing on the VR screen. He either reads aloud or the sentence is projected)* Where does the world go when I close my eyes?

Justin powers down the system and the sentence disappears. A sound effect should be used to signify powering off. Justin exits the stage. As he does, the stage blacks out and the power-down sound is played a the moment of blackout.