

THE INTERVIEW

A play about autonomy

by Richard Ehrlich

CHARACTERS

MICHAEL PORTER — Male, 62. Retired high school history teacher. Widowed three years ago. Lives alone. Dressed casually but neatly — khakis, button-down shirt, fleece vest. Tired but not frail. Alert but guarded.

SARA CHEN — Female, early 40s. Lead interviewer. Professional but warm. Dressed in business casual — slacks, sweater, low heels. Carries a tablet and a folder. Speaks with practiced empathy. Never cruel.

DAVID REESE — Male, late 30s. Second interviewer. Quieter. Takes notes on a laptop. Dressed similarly to Sara but slightly more formal. Interjects strategically. Observes more than he speaks.

SETTING

A small, windowless room. Institutional but not harsh. Could be a community center, a municipal building, a clinic. Neutral walls. Fluorescent lighting — not bright, just present.

A table. Three chairs.

On the table: a water pitcher, three cups, Sara's folder and tablet, David's laptop.

No clock visible.

The room feels temporary — like it's borrowed for this purpose, not designed for it.

TIME

The present. Late morning.

SECTION I — ORIENTATION

Lights up.

MICHAEL sits in one of the chairs. He's been waiting. Not long, but long enough to be uncertain.

He checks his phone. Puts it away. Looks at the door.

SARA enters first, followed by DAVID. Both carry their materials. Both smile.

SARA

Mr. Porter. Thank you for coming in.

She extends her hand. He stands, shakes it.

MICHAEL

Of course.

SARA

I'm Sara Chen, and this is my colleague, David Reese.

DAVID nods, shakes Michael's hand.

DAVID

Good to meet you.

MICHAEL

Yeah. You too.

They all sit. SARA arranges her folder and tablet. DAVID opens his laptop. MICHAEL watches them.

SARA

Can I get you some water?

MICHAEL

I'm fine.

SARA

Okay. Let me know if that changes.

She pours herself a cup. DAVID does not.

A beat.

SARA

So. First of all, thank you again for making the time. I know this wasn't on your calendar.

MICHAEL

Well, the letter said I should come in.

SARA

Yes. We appreciate you responding so promptly.

MICHAEL

It didn't really feel optional.

SARA

I understand why you might feel that way. But you were always free to contact us with questions first. We're glad you chose to come.

A slight beat. That landed.

SARA

So let me clarify what this is. Over the past few months, a few people have expressed some concern. About your wellbeing. And when that happens, our office conducts what we call a wellness review. It's very routine.

MICHAEL

Who expressed concern?

SARA

I'm not able to share specific names. But I can tell you it was more than one person, and they all care about you.

MICHAEL

So someone reported me.

SARA

No. Not reported. That's not the right word. They reached out because they noticed some changes, and they wanted to make sure you were okay.

MICHAEL

What kind of changes?

SARA

Well, that's part of what we'd like to talk about today. But before we get into specifics, I just want to make sure you understand—

She leans forward slightly. Her tone is very gentle.

SARA

—this is not punitive. No one is accusing you of anything. We're here to help.

MICHAEL stares at her.

MICHAEL

Help with what?

SARA

With whatever might be going on. If anything is.

A pause.

DAVID (looking up from his laptop)

Mr. Porter, can I just confirm a few basics? For our records?

MICHAEL

...Sure.

DAVID

You're currently residing at 428 Maple Street, unit 3B?

MICHAEL

Yes.

DAVID

And you live alone?

MICHAEL

Yes.

DAVID

How long have you been at that address?

MICHAEL

Four years. Almost five.

DAVID

And before that?

MICHAEL

Before that I lived with my wife. In a house. On Birch.

DAVID

And your wife is...?

MICHAEL

Deceased. Three years ago.

DAVID

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL nods but says nothing.

SARA

That must have been very difficult.

MICHAEL

It was.

SARA

And since then, how have you been managing?

MICHAEL

Fine.

SARA

Fine?

MICHAEL

I mean, it's been hard. Obviously. But I've managed.

SARA

Of course. We just want to make sure you're still feeling... supported.

MICHAEL

I am.

SARA

Good. That's good.

She glances at her tablet. Swipes. Reads something.

SARA

So. You retired from teaching about six years ago?

MICHAEL

Seven. Almost eight.

SARA

Right. High school history.

MICHAEL

That's right.

SARA

Did you enjoy it?

MICHAEL

Most of the time.

SARA

What made you retire when you did?

MICHAEL

I'd been doing it for thirty-two years. I was ready.

SARA

And have you stayed busy since then?

MICHAEL

I've done some things.

SARA

Like what?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Volunteering. Reading. I helped organize a local history group for a while.

SARA

The Heritage Society.

MICHAEL

Yeah.

SARA

But you're not involved with that anymore?

MICHAEL shifts slightly.

MICHAEL

Not as much.

SARA

When did you step back?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Maybe six months ago.

SARA

Do you remember why?

MICHAEL

I just... I didn't want to do it anymore.

SARA

Okay. That's fair. Did something happen, or did you just lose interest?

MICHAEL

I lost interest.

SARA

Was anyone upset about that?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I didn't ask.

SARA nods. Makes a note on her tablet.

SARA

And what about other activities? Do you see friends regularly?

MICHAEL

Sometimes.

SARA

How often is sometimes?

MICHAEL

I don't keep a calendar.

SARA

No, of course not. I just mean, generally speaking—do you get together with people once a week? Once a month?

MICHAEL

It depends.

SARA

On what?

MICHAEL

On whether I feel like it.

A beat. SARA's expression doesn't change.

SARA

Sure. That makes sense.

She looks at DAVID. He types something.

SARA

Mr. Porter, I want to ask you about something specific, and I hope you'll bear with me. It might seem like a small thing, but it's part of what we're looking at.

MICHAEL

Okay.

SARA

Over the past few months, several people have tried to reach you—by email, by phone—and you haven't responded. Does that sound accurate?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I might have missed some messages.

SARA

More than some. We have... (she glances at her notes) ...fourteen instances of outreach where there was no reply.

MICHAEL

Who's "we"?

SARA

The people who reached out. They let us know.

MICHAEL

So they reported that I didn't answer emails.

SARA

They expressed concern that you weren't responding. Which is different.

MICHAEL

Is it?

SARA

I think so. Don't you?

MICHAEL doesn't answer.

SARA

Can you tell me why you didn't respond?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I was busy.

SARA

With what?

MICHAEL

Things.

SARA

Like?

MICHAEL

I don't have a list.

SARA leans back slightly.

SARA

Mr. Porter, I understand this might feel intrusive. But we're trying to understand what's been going on. If you didn't have time to respond, that's one thing. But if there was another reason—if you were avoiding those people, or if you felt overwhelmed, or if something else was going on—that would be helpful for us to know.

MICHAEL

I just didn't feel like answering.

SARA

Okay. Why not?

MICHAEL

Because I didn't.

A pause.

DAVID (looking up)

Mr. Porter, were the emails upsetting to you?

MICHAEL

No.

DAVID

Were the people who sent them upsetting to you?

MICHAEL

No.

DAVID

Then why not just reply?

MICHAEL

Because I didn't owe them anything.

SARA and DAVID exchange a very brief glance.

SARA

That's true. You don't owe anyone a response. But when people reach out repeatedly and don't hear back, they worry. You can understand that, right?

MICHAEL

I guess.

SARA

And when worry reaches a certain level, sometimes people ask for help. Which is what happened here.

MICHAEL

So because I didn't answer emails, I'm here.

SARA

It's not just the emails, Mr. Porter. It's a pattern.

She says it gently, but the word lands hard.

MICHAEL

A pattern.

SARA

Yes.

MICHAEL

Of what?

SARA

Of withdrawal. Of change. Of behaviors that people who care about you have noticed.

MICHAEL looks at her for a long moment.

MICHAEL

And what exactly do you think that means?

SARA

That's what we're here to find out.

Silence.

DAVID types.

MICHAEL sits very still.

SECTION II — CLARIFICATION

SARA flips to a new page in her folder.

SARA

Let's talk about some specific moments. That might help us understand what's been going on.

MICHAEL

Okay.

SARA

A few weeks ago—September 14th—you sent an email to Barbara Lennox. Do you remember that?

MICHAEL

I've sent a lot of emails.

SARA

This one was about the book group you used to attend.

Recognition flickers across MICHAEL's face.

MICHAEL

Oh. Yeah.

SARA

Can you tell me what you wrote?

MICHAEL

I told her I wasn't coming anymore.

SARA

And how did you phrase it?

MICHAEL

I don't remember exactly.

SARA

Try.

MICHAEL shifts in his chair.

MICHAEL

I said something like... I'm done. I'm not doing this anymore.

SARA

“I’m done explaining. Please remove me.”

She says it from memory. MICHAEL looks at her.

MICHAEL

You have the email.

SARA

Yes.

MICHAEL

So why are you asking me?

SARA

Because I want to hear how you remember it. Sometimes the memory is more useful than the text.

MICHAEL

That was what I wrote.

SARA

Okay. And what did you mean by “I’m done explaining”?

MICHAEL

I meant I was done explaining to Barbara why I didn’t want to come to book group.

SARA

She’d asked you before?

MICHAEL

Several times.

SARA

And you’d given her reasons?

MICHAEL

I’d tried.

SARA

But she kept asking.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

And that upset you.

MICHAEL

It annoyed me.

SARA

Annoyed.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Enough to send that email.

MICHAEL

I guess.

SARA makes a note.

SARA

Barbara wrote back. Did you see that?

MICHAEL

I saw it.

SARA

What did she say?

MICHAEL

She asked if I was okay.

SARA

And did you respond?

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

Why not?

MICHAEL

Because I'd already said what I needed to say.

SARA

But she was worried.

MICHAEL

That's not my responsibility.

DAVID looks up from his laptop.

DAVID

She wrote twice more. On the 16th and the 21st.

MICHAEL

I know.

DAVID

You didn't reply to those either.

MICHAEL

No.

DAVID

Did you read them?

MICHAEL

Yes.

DAVID

And you chose not to respond.

MICHAEL

Correct.

DAVID

Can you explain why?

MICHAEL

I didn't feel I owed her anything.

DAVID types.

SARA

Mr. Porter, when someone reaches out multiple times expressing concern, and you don't acknowledge that concern, it creates... ambiguity.

MICHAEL

Ambiguity about what?

SARA

About your wellbeing. About your state of mind.

MICHAEL

My state of mind was fine.

SARA

But Barbara didn't know that.

MICHAEL

Barbara could have assumed I was fine.

SARA

Instead she assumed you weren't. And she reached out to us.

MICHAEL

To report me.

SARA

To ask for help. For you.

MICHAEL

I didn't need help.

SARA

She thought you did.

MICHAEL

And her opinion matters more than mine?

SARA doesn't answer immediately. She closes the folder, opens another.

SARA

Let's talk about your medical appointments.

MICHAEL

What about them?

SARA

You missed two appointments with Dr. Callahan. One in August, one in October.

MICHAEL

I rescheduled the August one.

SARA

For when?

MICHAEL

I don't remember. Later.

SARA

Did you attend the rescheduled appointment?

Beat.

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

And the October appointment?

MICHAEL

I forgot.

SARA

You forgot.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Had that happened before?

MICHAEL

Probably. I don't know.

SARA

Dr. Callahan's office said it was unusual. They said you'd always been very punctual.

MICHAEL

Well, I'm not perfect.

SARA

Of course not. But when someone who's been reliable becomes unreliable, that can indicate something.

MICHAEL

Like what?

SARA

Change. Difficulty managing.

MICHAEL

Or it indicates I forgot an appointment.

SARA

Two appointments.

MICHAEL

Fine. Two.

SARA

And when the office called to follow up, you didn't return the call.

MICHAEL

I didn't think it was urgent.

SARA

It was a follow-up for bloodwork. To monitor your medication.

MICHAEL

I felt fine.

SARA

But you're not a doctor.

MICHAEL

It's my body.

SARA

It is. But your doctor has a professional obligation to monitor certain things. When you don't respond, that creates a gap.

MICHAEL

A gap.

SARA

In care. In communication. And when we see gaps appearing in multiple areas—medical, social, community—that's what we call a pattern.

The word hangs in the air.

MICHAEL

Or it means I've been busy.

SARA

Have you?

MICHAEL

Have I what?

SARA

Been busy.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

With what?

MICHAEL

Things.

SARA

Can you be more specific?

MICHAEL

Reading. Walking. Errands.

SARA

Those are solitary activities.

MICHAEL

So?

SARA

So you used to be very social. Very engaged.

MICHAEL

That was before.

SARA

Before your wife died.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Three years ago.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

And since then, you've withdrawn.

MICHAEL

I've adjusted.

SARA

To what?

MICHAEL

To being alone.

SARA

Is that how you'd describe it? Adjusted?

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Would the people around you agree?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I haven't asked them.

DAVID looks up.

DAVID

Mr. Porter, when was the last time you spent time with a friend?

MICHAEL

I don't keep a calendar.

DAVID

Roughly.

MICHAEL

I don't know. A few weeks.

DAVID

What did you do?

MICHAEL

We had coffee.

DAVID

For how long?

MICHAEL

Maybe an hour.

DAVID

And before that? When was the previous time you saw this friend?

MICHAEL pauses.

MICHAEL

I don't remember.

DAVID

A week? A month?

MICHAEL

Longer.

DAVID

How much longer?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Two months.

DAVID

So you saw this person once in two months.

MICHAEL

I guess.

DAVID

And before your wife died, how often did you see them?

MICHAEL

More.

DAVID

How much more?

MICHAEL

Weekly. Sometimes more than once a week.

DAVID

So there's been a significant change.

MICHAEL

My wife died. Of course there's been a change.

DAVID

But three years is a long time.

MICHAEL

Not to me.

Silence.

SARA

Mr. Porter, I want to ask you about the Heritage Society.

MICHAEL

What about it?

SARA

You were one of the founding members.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

And you organized the monthly meetings for almost four years.

MICHAEL

That's right.

SARA

And then six months ago, you stopped attending.

MICHAEL

I stopped organizing.

SARA

Did you tell anyone you were stepping back?

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

You just didn't show up.

MICHAEL

I told them I wasn't coming anymore.

SARA

When?

MICHAEL

After I missed a meeting.

SARA

So you missed one, and then you told them?

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

How did you tell them?

MICHAEL

By email.

SARA

And what did you say?

MICHAEL

That I didn't want to do it anymore.

SARA

Just that?

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Did you explain why?

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

Why not?

MICHAEL

Because I didn't owe them an explanation.

SARA leans back slightly.

SARA

That phrase again.

MICHAEL

What phrase?

SARA

"I didn't owe them."

MICHAEL

Because I didn't.

SARA

Even though you'd been working with these people for years?

MICHAEL

That doesn't obligate me.

SARA

It doesn't. But it does make your sudden departure more noticeable.

MICHAEL

I'm allowed to change my mind.

SARA

Of course you are. But when you change your mind about multiple things—book group, medical appointments, the Heritage Society, social contact—without explanation, people notice.

MICHAEL

Let them notice.

SARA

They did. And they asked us to follow up.

MICHAEL looks at the door.

MICHAEL

How long is this going to take?

SARA

As long as it needs to.

MICHAEL

That's not an answer.

SARA

We're about halfway through.

MICHAEL

Through what?

SARA

The assessment.

Beat.

SARA

Can I ask you something personal?

MICHAEL

You've been asking personal questions for twenty minutes.

SARA

Fair. But this is more direct.

She leans forward slightly.

SARA

Do you feel like your life is working?

MICHAEL

What does that mean?

SARA

Do you feel like you're managing effectively? Like you're in control?

MICHAEL

I'm here, aren't I?

SARA

You are. But that doesn't answer the question.

MICHAEL

I don't understand the question.

SARA

Let me put it differently. If you could describe your life right now in one word, what would it be?

Long silence.

MICHAEL

Quiet.

SARA

Quiet.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Is that good or bad?

MICHAEL

It's neither. It's just what it is.

SARA

And you're content with that?

MICHAEL

I don't know if content is the word.

SARA

What word would you use?

MICHAEL

I'd use quiet.

SARA writes something.

MICHAEL

What are you writing?

SARA

Notes.

MICHAEL

About what?

SARA

Your responses.

MICHAEL

For your report.

SARA

Yes.

MICHAEL

The one you're going to submit to people I don't know.

SARA

The review board, yes.

MICHAEL

And what are you going to tell them?

SARA

That depends on the rest of this conversation.

Silence.

MICHAEL

He's been typing the whole time.

SARA

He's documenting.

MICHAEL

Every word?

DAVID

The relevant ones.

MICHAEL

Who decides what's relevant?

DAVID

I do.

Beat.

MICHAEL

This doesn't feel routine.

SARA

I understand.

MICHAEL

Do you?

SARA

I do. This process can feel invasive. But it's designed to help.

MICHAEL

I don't need help.

SARA

You've said that. But the people who reached out to us disagree.

MICHAEL

So you believe them over me.

SARA

We're here to evaluate the situation. That's all.

MICHAEL

By asking me questions I don't want to answer.

SARA

By asking questions that give us a complete picture.

MICHAEL

Of what?

SARA

Of whether you're managing your life in a way that's sustainable.

MICHAEL

And if you decide I'm not?

SARA

Then we make recommendations.

MICHAEL

Recommendations I have to follow.

SARA

Recommendations that are in your best interest.

MICHAEL

According to you.

SARA

According to the system.

Silence.

MICHAEL stands.

MICHAEL

I need a break.

SARA

We're almost done with this section.

MICHAEL

I need a break now.

SARA (calmly)

You can leave the room for a few minutes. But please don't leave the building.

MICHAEL

Why not?

SARA

Because we need to complete the assessment.

MICHAEL

And if I do leave?

SARA

Then we'll have to document that you were uncooperative. And that will affect the outcome.

MICHAEL stares at her.

MICHAEL

You're threatening me.

SARA

I'm explaining the process.

MICHAEL

It sounds like a threat.

SARA

I'm sorry you feel that way.

Long pause.

MICHAEL sits back down.

SARA (gently)

Thank you.

She pours him a cup of water. Slides it across.

SARA

We'll take a two-minute pause. Then we'll continue.

She and DAVID wait. MICHAEL does not touch the water.

Silence.

Lights hold.

SECTION III — CONSTRAINT

The two-minute pause has passed. MICHAEL has not moved. The water sits untouched.

SARA

Let's continue.

She opens another section of her folder.

SARA

I want to talk about daily management. Your routines.

MICHAEL

What about them?

SARA

Are you able to maintain them consistently?

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Grocery shopping, cleaning, that sort of thing?

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

How often do you shop?

MICHAEL

When I need to.

SARA

Once a week? Twice?

MICHAEL

It depends.

SARA

On what?

MICHAEL

On what I need.

She makes a note.

SARA

And your home—are you keeping it maintained?

MICHAEL

It's fine.

SARA

No issues with cleanliness, organization?

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

Good.

She flips a page.

SARA

Let's talk about finances. We touched on this briefly, but I'd like to go a bit deeper.

MICHAEL

I already told you. I manage them myself.

SARA

And we have documentation of some late payments. Three in the past six months.

MICHAEL

I know. We already discussed that.

SARA

I'd like to understand if there's a pattern to when you forget.

MICHAEL

There's no pattern. I just forget sometimes.

SARA

Do you use any systems? Automatic payments? Reminders?

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

Why not?

MICHAEL

Because I've never needed them before.

SARA

But you might need them now.

MICHAEL

I don't want them.

SARA

Even if they would help?

MICHAEL

I don't need help.

SARA pauses.

SARA

Mr. Porter, would you be open to having someone check in with you regularly? Just to see how things are going?

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

What if it was someone you trusted?

MICHAEL

There's no one I'd want doing that.

SARA

What about a professional? A social worker or—

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

Can you explain why you're resistant to support?

MICHAEL

Because I don't need it.

MICHAEL

What evidence?

SARA

Everything we've discussed. The withdrawal. The missed obligations. The late payments.

MICHAEL

Those are small things.

SARA

They add up.

Silence.

DAVID (looking up)

Mr. Porter, if you were to become unable to manage on your own, who would you want us to contact?

MICHAEL

No one.

DAVID

There must be someone.

MICHAEL

There isn't.

DAVID

No family? No close friends?

MICHAEL

I already told you. There's no one.

DAVID

That's concerning.

MICHAEL

Why?

DAVID

Because everyone needs someone.

MICHAEL

I don't.

SARA

Mr. Porter, isolation is a risk factor.

MICHAEL

For what?

SARA

For decline. For crisis. For situations where intervention becomes necessary.

MICHAEL

I'm not in crisis.

SARA

Not yet.

Lights hold.

SECTION IV — RESISTANCE

SARA opens a different section of her folder.

SARA

I want to talk about your finances more specifically.

MICHAEL

We already did.

SARA

There's more to discuss.

She pulls out a document.

SARA

We have a note here that your electricity was shut off briefly in September.

MICHAEL's jaw tightens.

MICHAEL

That was a mistake.

SARA

On whose part?

MICHAEL

The company's. I'd paid the bill.

SARA

But it was late.

MICHAEL

By a few days.

SARA

According to the records, it was seventeen days past due.

MICHAEL

I forgot to pay it on time.

SARA

That's understandable. But it's also unusual for you.

MICHAEL

How would you know what's usual for me?

SARA

Because we have your payment history going back six years. And until recently, you never missed a payment.

MICHAEL stares at her.

MICHAEL

You have my payment history.

SARA

We have access to relevant records.

MICHAEL

Relevant to what?

SARA

To this assessment.

MICHAEL

Who gave you access?

SARA

The system did. It's part of the authorization.

MICHAEL

What authorization?

SARA

The one that allows us to conduct wellness reviews.

MICHAEL

I didn't authorize anything.

SARA

You came here voluntarily.

MICHAEL

Because the letter said I should.

SARA

And by coming, you consented to the process.

MICHAEL

That's not consent.

SARA

It is in this context.

Silence.

DAVID (looking up)

There were also two other late payments. Smaller amounts. Cable bill in July.
Water bill in October.

MICHAEL

So I forgot to pay a few bills.

DAVID

Three bills in four months.

MICHAEL

That's not a pattern.

DAVID

It's the beginning of one.

MICHAEL

Or it's just life.

DAVID

Maybe. But combined with everything else, it suggests difficulty managing.

MICHAEL

I'm managing fine.

DAVID

Are you?

MICHAEL

Yes.

MICHAEL

They tell you what you want them to tell you.

Silence.

SARA

Mr. Porter, I'm going to be very direct with you.

MICHAEL

Finally.

SARA

We're seeing a pattern of withdrawal, missed obligations, and declining engagement. On their own, any one of these things might be unremarkable. But together, they paint a picture.

MICHAEL

A picture of what?

SARA

Of someone who's struggling.

MICHAEL

I'm not struggling.

SARA

You say that. But your behavior suggests otherwise.

MICHAEL

My behavior is my business.

SARA

Not when it affects others.

MICHAEL

How does it affect others?

SARA

It worries them. When people have to follow up with you repeatedly, when they have to wonder if you're okay, that's a cost they bear.

MICHAEL

That's their choice.

SARA

Is it? Or is it a consequence of your choices?

MICHAEL

I'm not responsible for how other people feel.

SARA

You're not. But you are responsible for your own wellbeing. And when that wellbeing declines to the point where others notice, it becomes a community concern.

MICHAEL

A community concern.

SARA

Yes.

MICHAEL

So now I'm a community problem.

SARA

You're a member of a community who may need support.

SARA

Everything we've discussed today. The emails. The appointments. The bills. The withdrawal.

MICHAEL

Those are just... those are just normal things.

SARA

For some people, yes. But not for you. Not historically.

MICHAEL

People change.

SARA

They do. And when they change in ways that suggest decline, we intervene.

MICHAEL

I'm not declining.

SARA

Then help us understand what's happening.

MICHAEL

Nothing's happening.

SARA

Then why are you here?

MICHAEL doesn't answer.

SARA

Mr. Porter, I'm going to ask you a question, and I need you to answer it honestly.

MICHAEL

I've been answering honestly.

SARA

Do you think your life is sustainable as it is?

MICHAEL

What does that mean?

SARA

Can you continue living the way you're living without consequences?

MICHAEL

What consequences?

SARA

Further withdrawal. Further decline. Eventual crisis.

MICHAEL

You're making that up.

SARA

We're extrapolating. Based on patterns we've seen before.

MICHAEL

In other people.

SARA

Yes.

MICHAEL

I'm not other people.

SARA

No. But patterns are patterns.

Silence.

MICHAEL

I don't want to be here anymore.

SARA

We're almost finished.

MICHAEL

You said that twenty minutes ago.

SARA

And we're closer now.

MICHAEL

To what?

SARA

To a recommendation.

MICHAEL

I don't want your recommendation.

SARA

That's not your decision.

MICHAEL stands.

MICHAEL

I'm leaving.

SARA

Please sit down.

MICHAEL

You said I could leave.

SARA

You can. But if you do, we'll have to proceed without your input.

MICHAEL

Good.

SARA

Mr. Porter, if you leave now, our recommendation will be based solely on what we've observed. And what we've observed is someone who's resistant to help, unwilling to engage, and potentially unable to manage independently.

MICHAEL

That's not true.

SARA

Then sit down and help us understand.

Long pause.

MICHAEL remains standing.

MICHAEL

You want me to explain myself.

SARA

I want you to give us context.

MICHAEL

So you can use it against me.

SARA

So we can make an informed decision.

MICHAEL

About my life.

SARA

About what support you might need.

MICHAEL

I don't need support.

SARA

Then sit down and tell us why not.

MICHAEL looks at the door. Then at SARA. Then at DAVID, who's watching him carefully.

Slowly, MICHAEL sits.

SARA

Thank you.

She pauses.

SARA

Mr. Porter, I understand that this feels invasive. But I need you to understand something too.

MICHAEL

What?

SARA

This process exists because people care.

MICHAEL

They don't need to be worried.

SARA

But they are. And when enough people express that worry, we have an obligation to investigate.

MICHAEL

An obligation to who?

SARA

To the system.

MICHAEL

What system?

SARA

The one that ensures people don't fall through the cracks.

MICHAEL

I haven't fallen through anything.

SARA

Not yet.

Silence.

MICHAEL

You've already decided.

SARA

No. We're still gathering information.

MICHAEL

But you have a recommendation in mind.

SARA

We're considering options.

MICHAEL

What options?

SARA

That depends on what you tell us.

MICHAEL

So if I say the right things, you'll leave me alone.

SARA

If you can demonstrate that you're managing effectively, yes.

MICHAEL

And if I can't?

SARA

Then we'll recommend additional support.

MICHAEL

Forced support.

SARA

Structured support.

MICHAEL

Same thing.

SARA

It's not.

MICHAEL

It is to me.

Beat.

MICHAEL

What do you want me to say?

SARA

I want you to tell me the truth.

MICHAEL

I've been telling you the truth.

SARA

You've been telling me facts. I want to know how you feel.

MICHAEL

I feel fine.

SARA

Do you?

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Then why are you isolating yourself?

MICHAEL

I'm not isolating. I'm choosing solitude.

SARA

What's the difference?

MICHAEL

One is intentional. The other is pathological.

SARA

And you believe yours is intentional.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SARA

Even though it's causing concern.

MICHAEL

That's not my problem.

SARA

It is when it brings you here.

Silence.

DAVID (quietly)

Mr. Porter, when was the last time you felt happy?

MICHAEL looks at him.

MICHAEL

I'm not answering that.

DAVID

Why not?

MICHAEL

Because it's none of your business.

DAVID

It's part of the assessment.

MICHAEL

I don't care.

DAVID

Can you remember?

MICHAEL

I'm not answering.

DAVID

Because you can't remember, or because you won't?

MICHAEL

Because I don't owe you that.

SARA

Mr. Porter, refusal to answer is also information.

MICHAEL

Then write that down.

SARA

We are.

MICHAEL

Good.

SARA

But I want you to understand what it signals.

MICHAEL

I don't care what it signals.

SARA

It signals defensiveness. Resistance.

MICHAEL

Or it signals that I have boundaries.

SARA

Boundaries are healthy. But so is cooperation.

MICHAEL

With people who are trying to control me?

SARA

With people who are trying to help you.

MICHAEL

You keep saying that. But you're not helping. You're interrogating.

SARA

We're assessing.

MICHAEL

By asking invasive questions I never agreed to answer.

SARA

You agreed when you walked through that door.

MICHAEL

No. I came because the letter said I should.

SARA

And now you're here. And we're doing our job.

MICHAEL

Your job is to decide whether I'm competent.

SARA

Our job is to determine what level of support you need.

MICHAEL

Which is the same thing.

SARA

It's not.

MICHAEL

It is. You're deciding whether I can manage my own life.

SARA

We're deciding whether you need help managing it.

MICHAEL

Against my will.

SARA

For your wellbeing.

MICHAEL

Who defines my wellbeing?

SARA

We do. Based on established criteria.

MICHAEL

Whose criteria?

SARA

The system's.

MICHAEL

And who made the system?

SARA

That's not relevant.

MICHAEL

It's completely relevant. If someone else decided what's normal, and I don't meet that standard, then I'm being judged by a measure I never agreed to.

SARA

You agreed to it by living in a community.

MICHAEL

That's not consent.

SARA

It's the cost of social participation.

MICHAEL

Then I withdraw my participation.

SARA

You can't. You're already part of the system.

MICHAEL

Then it's not voluntary.

SARA

It's consensual.

MICHAEL

Those aren't the same thing.

SARA doesn't respond. She makes a note.

MICHAEL (continuing, louder)

Stop writing that down.

SARA

I'm documenting your responses.

MICHAEL

You're twisting them.

SARA

I'm recording them.

MICHAEL

For a report that will be used to justify whatever you've already decided.

SARA

We haven't decided anything yet.

MICHAEL

Yes, you have. You decided the moment I walked in here.

SARA

That's not true.

MICHAEL

Prove it.

Silence.

MICHAEL

I'm not frustrated. I'm angry.

SARA

Okay. You're angry.

MICHAEL

And you're going to write that down too. "Subject became angry." As if that's evidence of something.

SARA

It is evidence. Of emotion. Of engagement.

MICHAEL

It's useful for painting me as unstable.

SARA

Anger isn't instability. It's a response.

MICHAEL

To being trapped.

SARA

You're not trapped.

MICHAEL

Then let me leave.

SARA

You can leave.

MICHAEL

Without consequences.

SARA

There are always consequences. For every choice.

MICHAEL

Then I am trapped.

SARA closes her folder.

SARA

Mr. Porter, we're going to take a ten-minute break. When we come back, we'll discuss our recommendation.

MICHAEL

You're making a recommendation now?

SARA

We have enough information.

MICHAEL

Based on what?

SARA

Based on this conversation. And the documentation we've reviewed.

MICHAEL

I haven't told you anything.

SARA

You've told us a great deal.

MICHAEL

I've told you to leave me alone.

SARA

And we've noted that.

She stands. DAVID closes his laptop.

SARA

We'll be back in ten minutes. Please stay in the room.

MICHAEL

And if I don't?

SARA

Then we'll proceed without you. And the recommendation will reflect your absence.

She and DAVID exit.

MICHAEL sits alone.

He looks at the water. Doesn't drink it.

He looks at the door.

He stands. Walks to the door. Puts his hand on the handle.

He doesn't open it.

He returns to his chair.

Sits.

Puts his head in his hands.

Silence.

Lights slowly fade.

SECTION V — RECLASSIFICATION

Ten minutes have passed.

MICHAEL sits at the table. He has not moved. His head is no longer in his hands, but his posture is different—smaller, more contained.

The door opens.

SARA enters, followed by DAVID. They carry the same materials. They sit.

SARA arranges her folder. Opens it to a marked page.

Silence.

SARA

Thank you for waiting.

MICHAEL doesn't respond.

SARA

We've completed our review. And we're prepared to make a recommendation.

MICHAEL

To who?

SARA

To the oversight board. They'll review our findings and issue a determination.

MICHAEL

When?

SARA

Within ten business days.

MICHAEL

And until then?

SARA

Until then, you continue as you have been. With one modification.

MICHAEL

What modification?

SARA

We're implementing what's called Supported Autonomy.

The phrase hangs in the air.

MICHAEL

What does that mean?

SARA

It means you retain your independence, but with additional structure.

MICHAEL

Structure.

SARA

Support systems. Check-ins. Oversight.

MICHAEL

Oversight of what?

SARA

Of your wellbeing. Your daily management. To ensure you're maintaining the baseline.

MICHAEL

The baseline.

SARA

Yes.

MICHAEL

And if I don't want that?

SARA

It's not optional.

MICHAEL looks at her.

MICHAEL

You can't force me.

SARA

We're not forcing you. We're implementing a protective measure.

MICHAEL

That I don't want.

SARA

That you need.

MICHAEL

According to you.

SARA

According to the assessment.

She slides a printed document across the table. MICHAEL doesn't touch it.

SARA

This outlines the specifics. But I can summarize.

MICHAEL

Please do.

SARA

Starting next week, you'll have a weekly check-in. Tuesday afternoons at two o'clock. By phone initially. If necessary, in person.

MICHAEL

For how long?

SARA

Indefinitely. With reviews every six months.

MICHAEL

And what happens during these check-ins?

SARA

We ask how you're doing. Whether you've kept your appointments. Paid your bills. Maintained social contact.

MICHAEL

So you monitor me.

SARA

We support you.

MICHAEL

By checking up on me.

SARA

By ensuring continuity of care.

MICHAEL

Against my will.

SARA

For your protection.

Silence.

MICHAEL

What else?

SARA

A secondary contact will be assigned.

MICHAEL

What does that mean?

SARA

Someone who will receive notifications if you miss appointments or if there are concerns.

MICHAEL

Who?

SARA

That depends. Do you have family? Close friends?

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

Then we'll assign a community advocate.

MICHAEL

A stranger.

SARA

A trained professional.

MICHAEL

Who reports to you.

SARA

Who coordinates with us, yes.

MICHAEL

So I'm being assigned a handler.

SARA

You're being assigned support.

MICHAEL

Stop calling it that.

SARA doesn't respond. She turns to another page.

SARA

Additionally, we're flagging your accounts for monitoring.

MICHAEL

Which accounts?

SARA

Financial. Medical. Utility services.

MICHAEL

You're watching my bank account?

SARA

We're receiving alerts if there are irregularities.

MICHAEL

Like what?

SARA

Late payments. Unusual withdrawals. Missed transactions.

MICHAEL

That's private.

SARA

Not anymore.

MICHAEL

You can't do that.

SARA

We can. Under the Wellness Monitoring provisions.

MICHAEL

I never signed anything.

SARA

Your participation in this process constitutes authorization.

MICHAEL

That's not legal.

SARA

It is. If you'd like, I can provide the relevant statute numbers.

She waits. MICHAEL doesn't ask.

SARA

There's one more component.

MICHAEL

Of course there is.

SARA

Your medical providers will be notified of this designation.

MICHAEL

Designation.

SARA

Supported Autonomy status. So they can coordinate with us.

MICHAEL

You're telling my doctor I'm incompetent.

SARA

We're telling your doctor you're receiving enhanced support.

MICHAEL

Which means the same thing.

SARA

It means we're working together to ensure your wellbeing.

MICHAEL

Without asking me.

SARA

We're informing you now.

MICHAEL

After you've already decided.

SARA

After we've completed the assessment.

DAVID opens his laptop. Types briefly. Closes it.

DAVID

Mr. Porter, this recommendation is based on observable patterns and documented concerns. It's not punitive. It's precautionary.

MICHAEL

It's control.

DAVID

It's accountability.

MICHAEL

Same thing.

DAVID

No. Control would mean removing your autonomy entirely. This preserves it. With guardrails.

MICHAEL

Guardrails I don't want.

DAVID

Want isn't the criterion.

MICHAEL

What is?

DAVID

Need.

Silence.

MICHAEL

And if I refuse?

SARA

Refusal triggers a secondary review.

MICHAEL

Which means what?

SARA

Escalation. To a higher level of intervention.

MICHAEL

You'd force me into care.

SARA

Only if necessary.

MICHAEL

Define necessary.

SARA

If you demonstrate an inability to manage independently.

MICHAEL

I haven't demonstrated that.

SARA

Your participation today suggests otherwise.

MICHAEL

I answered your questions.

SARA

Eventually. And with significant resistance.

MICHAEL

Because you were invading my privacy.

SARA

Because you struggled to justify your choices.

MICHAEL

I don't have to justify my choices.

SARA

You do if they create concern.

MICHAEL

To who?

SARA

To the community.

MICHAEL

I don't care about the community.

SARA

That's noted.

She writes something.

MICHAEL

You're writing that down as if it's evidence of something wrong with me.

SARA

It's evidence of isolation.

MICHAEL

It's evidence of preference.

SARA

When preference becomes withdrawal, it's concerning.

MICHAEL

To you.

SARA

To anyone who's trained to recognize decline.

MICHAEL stands abruptly.

MICHAEL

I'm not declining.

SARA

Please sit down.

MICHAEL

No.

SARA

Mr. Porter—

MICHAEL

I'm not sitting. I'm not signing anything. I'm not agreeing to any of this.

SARA

You don't have to sign. The recommendation is already filed.

MICHAEL

Then what was the point of this?

SARA

To give you the opportunity to participate.

MICHAEL

Participate in my own judgment.

SARA

In your own care plan.

MICHAEL

It's the same thing.

He moves toward the door.

SARA (calmly)

Mr. Porter, leaving now won't change the outcome.

MICHAEL (hand on the door)

Then why shouldn't I leave?

SARA

Because we still need to schedule your first check-in.

MICHAEL stops. Doesn't turn around.

SARA

Tuesday. Two o'clock. We'll call you.

MICHAEL (quietly, not turning)

And if I don't answer?

SARA

Then we'll try again. And if we can't reach you after three attempts, we'll send someone to your residence.

MICHAEL

To check on me.

SARA

Yes.

MICHAEL

And if I don't let them in?

SARA

That would be noted as non-compliance.

MICHAEL

And then what?

SARA

Escalation.

Long silence.

MICHAEL turns around slowly.

MICHAEL

This doesn't end, does it?

SARA

It continues as long as necessary.

MICHAEL

Forever.

SARA

Until you demonstrate sustained stability.

MICHAEL

How do I do that?

SARA

By meeting the baseline. Consistently.

MICHAEL

Your baseline.

SARA

The system's baseline.

MICHAEL

And who decides when I've met it?

SARA

We do. Based on documented progress.

MICHAEL

Progress toward what?

SARA

Toward reintegration.

MICHAEL

Into what?

SARA

Into functional participation.

MICHAEL

I'm already functional.

SARA

By some measures, yes. But not by the ones that matter.

MICHAEL walks slowly back to the table. Doesn't sit. Stands looking down at the document.

MICHAEL

This isn't help.

SARA

It is.

MICHAEL

It's surveillance.

SARA

It's both.

He looks at her.

MICHAEL

Do you believe this is right?

SARA

I believe it's necessary.

MICHAEL

That's not what I asked.

SARA doesn't answer.

MICHAEL

Do you think people should be allowed to live quietly? Without explaining themselves?

SARA

I think people need community.

MICHAEL

Even if they don't want it?

SARA

Especially then.

MICHAEL

Why?

SARA

Because isolation leads to decline. And decline leads to crisis. And crisis costs everyone.

MICHAEL

So this is about cost.

SARA

It's about prevention.

MICHAEL

Prevention of what?

SARA

Of what happens when people fall through the cracks.

MICHAEL

I'm not falling.

SARA

Not yet.

She closes the folder.

SARA

Mr. Porter, I know this feels like punishment. But it's not. It's structure. And structure is what you need right now, whether you recognize that or not.

MICHAEL

You don't know what I need.

SARA

I know what the data shows.

MICHAEL

I'm not data.

SARA

Everyone is data.

Silence.

MICHAEL (quietly)

What if I just... stopped?

SARA

Stopped what?

MICHAEL

All of it. Bills. Appointments. Calls. Everything.

SARA

Then we'd intervene more directly.

MICHAEL

You'd take over.

SARA

We'd provide full support.

MICHAEL

Against my will.

SARA

For your safety.

MICHAEL

And I'd have no say.

SARA

You'd have less say than you have now.

She lets that sit.

SARA

This is the better option, Mr. Porter. You retain your home. Your routines. Your choices. You just have to demonstrate you're managing them responsibly.

MICHAEL

To you.

SARA

To the system.

MICHAEL

And if I can't?

SARA

Then we adjust.

MICHAEL

Adjust how?

SARA

That depends on the circumstance.

MICHAEL sits down slowly.

MICHAEL

I'll be at home Tuesday. At two.

SARA

Thank you.

MICHAEL

I won't like it.

SARA

You don't have to like it.

MICHAEL

But I have to do it.

SARA

Yes.

She slides a card across the table.

SARA

This has the contact number. If anything changes—if you need to reschedule, if there's an emergency—call that number.

MICHAEL

And someone will answer?

SARA

Always.

MICHAEL

Even at night?

SARA

Always.

He takes the card. Looks at it.

MICHAEL

This room doesn't end here, does it?

SARA

No.

MICHAEL

It just... moves.

SARA

In a sense, yes.

MICHAEL

Into my home. My phone. My accounts.

SARA

Into your life. But not to control it. To support it.

MICHAEL

You keep saying that.

SARA

Because it's true.

MICHAEL puts the card in his pocket.

MICHAEL

Am I free to go?

SARA

Yes.

He stands. Doesn't move toward the door.

MICHAEL

What happens if I don't call back? If I just... disappear?

SARA

We'd find you.

MICHAEL

How?

SARA

We have resources.

MICHAEL

And then?

SARA

We'd bring you back into the system.

MICHAEL

By force?

SARA

By necessity.

He nods slowly.

MICHAEL

Then I'm not free.

SARA

You're accountable.

MICHAEL

Same thing.

SARA

No. Freedom without accountability is chaos. This gives you both.

MICHAEL

I don't want both.

SARA

I know.

She stands.

SARA

Is there anyone you'd like us to notify? Anyone who should know about this?

MICHAEL (after a long pause)

No.

SARA

No one?

MICHAEL

There's no one.

DAVID types one final line. Closes his laptop.

SARA

Then we'll be in touch Tuesday.

MICHAEL

At two.

SARA

Yes.

MICHAEL

I'll answer.

SARA

We'll expect you to.

MICHAEL walks to the door. Stops. Doesn't turn around.

MICHAEL

Do you ever sit where I'm sitting?

SARA doesn't answer.

MICHAEL opens the door.

Exits.

SARA and DAVID remain at the table.

DAVID opens his laptop. Types briefly.

DAVID (quietly)

Status?

SARA

Compliant.

DAVID

Prognosis?

SARA

Sustained monitoring.

DAVID nods. Types.

SARA closes her folder. Gathers her materials.

They exit.

The room is empty.

The water cup sits on the table. Untouched.

Lights fade slowly.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY

Running time: Approximately 71-73 minutes

END OF PLAY

Running time: Approximately 71-73 minutes