

The User Illusion

Written by

Olga Yakimenko

10 July 2025

olgayakimenko@gmail.com  
+436705557575  
Vienna

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

A black-and-white image of an EYE printed at low resolution. In slow motion, a big DROP OF WATER approaches. It splashes against the eye and explodes into a spray of droplets. More rain follows, hitting like juicy bullets.

Close-up of a living person's eyes. Water trickles into them but they remain open. They're fixed on a granite FAMILY MONUMENT. Etched into it is the word "KNIGHT", and below it:

EMILIA 1 DECEMBER 1985 -  
LEONARD 22 DECEMBER 2002 - 21 JUNE 2022  
JAMES 22 DECEMBER 2002 -

A black-and-white PHOTO of a handsome young man next to "LEONARD". The face of the person watching the monument is a perfect match for the face on the monument - it's JIM KNIGHT's (20s). Time picks up speed slowly. Thunder rumbles - thunder from another planet.

Jim's eyes remain fixed on the photo while an undertaker lowers a cremation urn into the ground and leaves.

The rain cascades now, a shimmering curtain between Jim and the world. We are vaguely aware of a WOMAN next to him.

She steps up to him but Jim avoids looking at her. We hear sounds of her voice, barely audible over the rain. She tries to force a PLASTIC ENVELOPE into Jim's limp hand. He pays her no attention. She lifts the envelope to Jim's nose, as if he's been a naughty dog and pissed all over the carpet. No reaction from Jim.

Her voice breaks into a shriek but it's drowned out by a THUNDERCLAP. She smacks the plastic envelope against Jim's face, drops it by his feet and storms away. As rain beads on the plastic surface, we see the words "EVIDENCE BAG".

INT. PSYCHIC'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ON SCREEN: "5 years and an eternity later".

A white CARD on the table reads "CLEO". Female hands hover over the card, fingers splayed.

[NOTE: use of dual-language indicates dialog in German.]

PSYCHIC  
You are tired of  
pretending... pretending  
like everything is alright.  
But she says...

PSYCHIC  
Du hältst es nicht mehr  
aus... so zu tun, als ob  
alles in Ordnung wäre. Aber  
sie sagt...

The PSYCHIC (50s-60s) opens her eyes to look at Jim, who is slouched in a chair across the table.

Jim's moist red eyes stare into the distance. He looks broken. The Psychic watches Jim react to her words.

PSYCHIC  
... she says you don't have  
to be ashamed of having  
secrets. Everyone has  
secrets.

PSYCHIC  
... sie sagt, dass du dich  
musst nicht dafür schämen,  
musst Geheimnisse zu haben.  
Jeder hat Geheimnisse.

She says the last line with extra tenderness.

PSYCHIC  
But...  
(furrows her eyebrows)  
Oh my word. Your grandmother  
did not leave this world in  
peace... Did she?

PSYCHIC  
Aber...  
(frown her eyebrows)  
Oh mein Gott. Deine  
Grossmutter hat diese Welt  
nicht in Frieden  
verlassen... oder?

Jim's face crumples in a grimace of unbearable pain... a grimace that, for a second, looks like a smile. Jim twists his body to hide this smile from the Psychic. As he whines, we see him adjust a MICROPHONE concealed in his pullover.

The Psychic's eyes are shut when Jim pulls himself back up. Drama builds in her voice. Jim's face relaxes as his attention focuses on her movements: hands, body, eyebrows.

PSYCHIC  
I sense an incoming vision.  
It is... big, angry... She  
is scared, so very scared...  
It is moving so fast, closer  
and closer!  
It is a... a... bear...?

PSYCHIC  
Ich spüre eine aufkommende  
Vision. Es ist... groß,  
wütend... Sie hat Angst, so  
große Angst... Es bewegt  
sich so schnell, immer näher  
und näher! Es ist ein...  
ein... Bär...?

THE PSYCHIC'S FACE AND BODY FREEZE INTO A STILL IMAGE.

JIM (V.O.)  
Gotcha.

The last signs of stress vanish from Jim's face, all his attention now on analyzing the Psychic. Jim TWISTS with his hand, as if turning an invisible dial.

PSYCHIC'S BODY SHUDDERS BACKWARDS IN TIME AND FREEZES. (JIM IS UNAFFECTED BY THE FREEZE.) "PLAYBACK" RESUMES.

PSYCHIC  
It is a... a... bear...?

PSYCHIC  
Es ist ein... ein... Bär...?

TIME REWINDS.

JIM (V.O.)

Every time.

Her voice slows down: sliced into frames of audio, synchronised with her NOISY, GRAINY MOUTH that is taking up the entire frame, complete with MOTION BLUR. It's as if an unseen editor is scrubbing through the "footage of reality."

PSYCHIC

Aaa a . . . bb e e e e a a  
a a a a a a a r r r  
r . . . . . ?

PSYCHIC

Eee i n . . . Bb ä ää ä  
ä ä ä ää r r r .  
. . . ?

FREEZE FRAME.

JIM (V.O.)

Every single time.

A digital news feed that looks like a Facebook "timeline" scrolls up, partially obscuring the magnified Psychic.

We see bits of a Facebook profile of a woman (80s) named "CLEO EDWARDS": a photo of a graveyard with an announcement of her death ("💔 our angel is with god now 🕊️"), comments from mourning relatives.

Dates of posts are magnified. A CURSOR highlights TEXT on screen: "tragic incident," "long assumed to be harmless", "she thought they were friends". Then: "Barry the Bear." All other posts vanish. Playback resumes in background: "footage" of the Psychic is grainy. Her face is scrambled by a "mosaic" effect, her voice adjusted to hide her identity.

PSYCHIC

I see a name... Thomas? No,  
it's a "B". Bernard?  
Brendan? Barry. Oh, Barry...

PSYCHIC

Ich sehe einen Namen...  
Thomas? Nein, es ist ein  
„B“. Bernard? Brendan?  
Barry. Oh, Barry...

She continues to move and speak but freezes every 1-2 seconds when the video is paused. Her hands and body are enlarged and tagged by remarks ("fake sympathy," "sleight of hand"); her speech is captioned ("Barnum statement", "HOT READ: she's regurgitating the bait I set for her").

A red INFOGRAPHIC whooshes onto screen over the Psychic's face: the word "FRAUD", styled like a rejection stamp. DANCING BEAR ANIMATIONS appear on the screen, moving to a remix of "The Teddy Bear's Picnic", TikTok-style.

## VIDEO MUSIC

If you go down in the woods today,  
 you're sure of a big surprise.  
 If you go down in the woods today,  
 you'd better go in disguise!

Music intensifies. Aggressive text on screen: "THIS IS HOW THEY LIE TO YOU" and "THEY PROMISE MIRACLES AND DRINK YOUR MONEY". We see the video title: "No. 49: Barry the Bear."

ROLL CREDITS  
 OVER VIDEO

INT. HEURIGER - NIGHT

We see a Heuriger: a traditional wine bar. Photos of long-dead patrons adorn the walls. The atmosphere is lively. Warm light from overhead fixtures bathes all faces in gold.

From a distance, we see a COUPLE (20s) chat excitedly. A FINGER points at them while an obnoxious voice comments.

MAN (O.S.)

She's a 7.2, he's barely a 6. You can see the bald patch from here. First guy who's 9% better...

(Fingers snap)

It's over.

Finger points to a COUPLE (30s-40s) sat further back: a woman chews as she watches her male companion play with his phone. He is completely absorbed. She takes a sip of wine.

MAN (O.S.) (cont'd)

2%. He's in love with his phone. Next month she'll be sitting there with someone 2 inches taller.

WOMAN (O.S.)

The confidence in your voice goes up precisely 12% when you make things up.

A COUPLE (teens) wrapped up in each others' arms in bliss.

MAN (O.S.)

5%. Teenagers.

BERNIE (male, American, 20s) cringes in embarrassment (what if other patrons see?) and lowers HANNES'S (male, Austrian, muscular, 20s) finger. ROSE (female, Czech, blind, 20s) leans against Bernie forlornly, her eyes downcast.

BERNIE

Can you... not point fingers at  
people in public?

Jim rocks up and beams at the table with a bright "Good evening!" Hannes responds with a throaty bellow, Bernie with a relieved "Oh thank God!" Rose tilts her head toward Jim's voice. Jim takes a seat.

JIM

Have you started without me?

ROSE

Shhhhhh! Our brilliant Hannes is  
converting love into decimals again!

HANNES

Why am I the bad guy? All I'm saying  
is that any human being would leave  
their partner if they met someone  
better. For some people, it could be  
70% better, and for others it would  
only take 10%.

(turning to Jim)

How am I wrong?

Jim looks around: people's body postures as they engage in conversation, status symbols like jewellery, men's muscles flexing. A woman flirtatiously brushes a strand of hair from her face. Hands lovingly clasp hands.

JIM

Age, health, social status - it's  
there for everyone to see... All they  
have to do is look.

HANNES

(to Rose)

You see? I know how people work.  
People are made of numbers.

ROSE

Oh, really? Is that why a blind  
mathematician has been ahead of you  
all year?

HANNES

(dismissive)

Early leads rarely last.

Bernie pretends the spat isn't happening: he pulls up his  
PHONE.