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Pamela Paul:

Hello, I'm Pamela Paul, and I voice Dr. Savreen Khanna. Would you like to get your Apollyon episodes early, or maybe discounts on merchandise, access to exclusive companion series, or even chat with cast and crew members?

Pamela Paul:

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Speaker 2:

This episode contains discussion of suicide. Listener discretion is advised.

DiPA:

Observer Pictures presents Apollyon. Written and directed by Faith McQuinn. This is Episode Nine: Challenged. (silence)

Subject 32:

I don't know what I'm supposed to say. I guess there's no real script or anything, right?

Jamilla:

Have you ever been to therapy before?

Subject 32:

This is the first time I've talked to anyone. I mean, not talked... I talk all the time. I mean, talk to somebody like this. I did talk to my school counselor one time when I skipped a full week of school, but that's not the same, right? Of course not.

Subject 32:

Can you tell I'm nervous? (laughs) Which is kinda funny because I've been poked and prodded for as long as I can remember, and I'm nervous about this, which is just more poking and prodding. Right? Just with my head.

Jamilla:

I like to think of it as a simple conversation.

Subject 32:

Okay. Okay. I'm good at those. My dad used to say that I only stopped talking when I was sleeping. (laughs) That's why I'm here, because of him.

Jamilla:

Did he ask you to do this?

Subject 32:

No. He's dead. (silence)

Armand:

So I can talk to you about anything?

Jamilla:

Absolutely. Do you wanna sit?

Armand:

I'm more comfortable standing.

Jamilla:

That's fine. Is there anything in particular you'd like to talk about?

Armand:

It's been an interesting day. Have you seen a lot of people with AVS?

Jamilla:

More than I'd like.

Armand:

Ain't that the truth. I met a girl earlier who's never known anyone with AVS. When she told me that, I... I had this surge of jealousy. It hit me so hard and fast, I had to excuse myself.

Jamilla:

It's completely natural to be jealous of something you don't have, no matter what it is. It's good that you recognize it and didn't let it negatively affect your interaction with her.

Armand:

Yeah, I guess. Once I was outside though, the jealousy was gone, but I still wasn't okay.

Jamilla:

How do you mean?

Armand:

I know she won't go through her whole life like that. Every time I see another family torn up by this damn virus, I understand more and more why it's called The Destroyer.

Savreen:

Xavier, do you mind if I call you Xavier?

Weiss:

Not at all.

Savreen:

Xavier, do you know why you're here?

Weiss:

(laughs) I think I have an idea.

Savreen:

We're about to begin clinical trials with a new drug, and we need a team to work in conjunction with Dr. Hillman.

Weiss:

That sounds like an amazing opportunity.

Savreen:

That is an understatement. You have an MD in microbiology, correct?

Weiss:

Yes.

Savreen:

Why an MD instead of a PhD?

Weiss:

I wanted to keep my options open.

Savreen:

But you only did a year of residency before moving into research.

Weiss:

I felt that was enough experience.

Savreen:

(laughs) That was not the answer I expected.

Weiss:

I decided medicine wasn't for me.

Savreen:

You weren't good with patients?

Weiss:

Uh, I had a decent bedside manner. I just didn't like having to have one all the time.

Savreen:

(laughs) You're not a people person?

Weiss:

(laughs) Not especially, no.

Savreen:

Why did you become a microbiologist?

Weiss:

Our entire world was shattered by a virus. And the people who can fight that aren't scholars or politicians, they're scientists.

Savreen:

Oh, you want to save the world?

Weiss:

I don't have to be the one saving it, but I wanna be in the room where it happens.

Savreen:

Hm, there's an old song about that.

Weiss:

Yeah, I think I've heard it.

Savreen:

Xavier, I'm not one to mince words. You are not the best microbiologist in your department.

Weiss:

Uh... U- I, I thought Dr. Alexander recommended me?

Savreen:

No, Remy did not recommend you. If it were up to him, someone else would be sitting here. I picked you.

Weiss:

(laughs) But if I'm not the best, uh-

Savreen:

Being the best isn't always what's required. You must also be the right fit. Your medical background gives you the skills I need on this team. Most importantly, your ambition is exactly what I'm looking for.

Jamilla:

Savreen, what are you doing here?

Savreen:

I had a bit of free time, so I thought I'd drop by.

Jamilla:

You came all the way here because you had a bit of free time?

Savreen:

It's not that far. Do you always work with the door open?

Jamilla:

If I don't have a patient, yes.

Savreen:

You really should dictate.

Jamilla:

Are you making fun of my typing?

Savreen:

Of course not.

Jamilla:

(laughs)

Savreen:

Do you have time for lunch?

Jamilla:

You had to close the door to ask me about lunch?

Savreen:

Not exactly.

Jamilla:

How was your week?

Subject 32:

As good as can be expected. I found myself reflecting a lot on the decision to be here. I know that last time we talked a lot about my dad, and, um, how his death affected me. But, um, I wasn't 100% truthful about how he died, and I think the reason I'm here has more to do with that.

Subject 32:

He wanted to leave, move. He wanted to move. He lost a lot in the first wave, almost all of his friends, his sisters. And he said everything here reminded him of everything he lost, and, and I was finally old enough to understand why he needed to go, but I didn't. I still don't. Everything I love is here, and we're not rich people. It's hard to move. It was hard before. But now, it's damn near impossible. But he figured it out. Sold a bunch of our stuff and packed up the house, but I couldn't do it. I couldn't leave my home. This is all I've ever known. And I knew if we left, I could never come back. I finally told him.

Jamilla:

And how did he respond?

Subject 32:

He understood. He smiled, and hugged me, and asked what my plan was. I was gonna stay with some close friends. He said he's help me take my things to them. I knew it was because he wanted to make sure I wasn't lying. I wasn't, by the way.

Subject 32:

So I got settled at my friend's house, and Dad said he'd see me at home later. He wanted to finish up packing. I thought he was sleeping. He was too still though, too quiet. There was a bottle, Barbitol. I bet you know what that is, but I didn't. I do now. He left a message for me and the money from selling the house. Told me to use it to build a life here, a family. I sat with him, I don't know how long, but the sun had set when I finally called Em Serv. So, The Destroyer struck again, right? Not directly, but it still took my dad away.

Jamilla:

I'm so sorry.

Subject 32:

Thank you, but that's why I'm here. I don't want that to happen to me. I don't want that to happen to... I don't want that to happen to anyone I love or might love. I need to know that I'm making an effort to change things.

Jamilla:

You are. (silence)

Savreen:

You've participated in human trials before?

Weiss:

Once, during my internship.

Savreen:

This one will look a little different. When dealing with AVS, the DHH has different protocols.

Weiss:

I'm more than prepared to learn anything I need to.

Savreen:

I'm sure you are. This drug we're testing has the potential to significantly change how we view AVS. And because of that, there are many eyes on us. With that many eyes, failure will hit hard. But success will undoubtedly change the world. Are you ready for that kind of pressure?

Weiss:

I am.

Savreen:

This isn't regular lab work, Xavier. Dealing with human subjects can take a toll, and I just wanna be sure that you're fully committed to the work we are about to do.

Weiss:

I will do anything to make this world better.

Savreen:

Good. (silence)

Armand:

Outside today?

Jamilla:

I thought a change of scenery would be good. It's quiet.

Armand:

It's quiet in the office too.

Jamilla:

This is different. This is-

Armand:

Calmer.

Jamilla:

(laughs) Yes. What do you wanna talk about today?

Armand:

Remember that little girl I talked about? The one who'd never known anyone with AVS?

Jamilla:

Yes.

Armand:

Well-

Jamilla:

Oh, no. I'm so sorry. Who?

Armand:

Her uncle.

Jamilla:

Is he getting treatment?

Armand:

Fortunately, yes.

Jamilla:

That's good.

Armand:

I wanted to protect her, and I didn't.

Jamilla:

You couldn't.

Armand:

Now she has to grieve like the rest of us.

Jamilla:

Her uncle is still alive though.

Armand:

Death isn't the only thing we grieve.

Subject 32:

It's been an emotional few days, a real roller coaster. I don't actually know what a roller coaster's like. I've never been on one, but that's what people say. The first day right after the test came back, I was numb. I remember one of the videos we watched in school said that getting the diagnosis makes a lot of people go through the steps of grief, stages, stages of grief.

Subject 32:

Well, I was 100% in denial that first day. The next day, I legit could not stop crying. I'd have moments where I thought I was done, but then I'd start crying again. I've never in my life cried that much, even when my dad died. Today is the first day that I've got a few hours without tears. That's embarrassing to say that.

Jamilla:

You have no reason to feel embarrassed. Every emotion you have is completely valid.

Subject 32:

Thank you. I needed to hear that. I'm past denial. I think I'm getting past the crying, but I am for damn sure still processing. I know the odds are against me. It feels like everyone I know is getting sick. I guess that's why they call it The Destroyer, right?

Jamilla:

(laughs)

Subject 32:

I... I'm sorry. Laughing is stupid. I shouldn't. Fuckin' roller coaster. I thought I'd really prepared myself for the day I found out, but I wasn't. Not even close. (silence)

Savreen:

You really have a problem with closed doors.

Jamilla:

Good Lord! You startled me.

Savreen:

If your door (laughs) was closed, this wouldn't be a problem.

Jamilla:

If I had a window, I would. It feels too much like a cage, staring at these four walls.

Savreen:

Maybe put in a request.

Jamilla:

For a window?

Savreen:

(laughs)

Jamilla:

If you came by for lunch, I don't have time.

Savreen:

You cannot constantly work through your lunch.

Jamilla:

I can take my work home, and I won't stay here longer than necessary. Thus, working through lunch.

Savreen:

Is it really that bad?

Jamilla:

Yes, Savreen, it really is. But I know it would be worse if I weren't here. Now, if you'll excuse me.

Savreen:

I can bring the food to you.

Jamilla:

I had an apple.

Savreen:

I can (laughs) bring you an actual meal.

Jamilla:

Sure, whatever you're getting.

Savreen:

Did something happen today?

Jamilla:

Something happens every day here.

Savreen:

Jamilla.

Jamilla:

Maybe close the door. I have been practicing for over 20 years, and I've never had a session with someone who has AVS. I found myself thrilled by it, and then immediately guilty for that particular feeling.

Savreen:

I find myself thrilled when I get to study a rare element.

Jamilla:

These are people, Savreen.

Savreen:

I'm simply trying to absolve you of any guilt. As scientists, we are thrilled by new things.

Jamilla:

I found myself empathizing with many of my patients, and I think it makes me better at my job. But it's also-

Savreen:

Exasperating?

Jamilla:

Quite.

Savreen:

I may tease you about your area of study, but you are an essential part of this team. I do appreciate you and your work.

Jamilla:

I knew coming into this, that it would be hard. But I know this is important work. It's easily the most important work I've done in my life. My exhaustion is nothing in comparison to what my patients are going through.

Jamilla:

How are you feeling today?

Subject 32:

I feel good. It's been three weeks, and I'm still here. That's (laughs) unreal, truly. No one is marking my door or hurrying me off to QF. I mean, I guess that wouldn't happen here anyway, right?

Subject 32:

When my grandma was taken to QF, we got to speak to her. We weren't in the same room of course, a video feed. I hadn't seen her in the flesh in weeks. Christmas, I think. Anyway, she said something that stayed with me, something I've been thinking on since my diagnosis. She got real close to the camera and said, "I have to accept the undeniable approach of my own death." It was her way of saying she'd stop fighting, or maybe she never really started. Because really, how do you fight something that destroys you so thoroughly? (laughs)

Subject 32:

I guess that's the question y'all have been trying to answer, right? I mean, that's why I'm here. I wanna make sure the world is better for my-

Jamilla:

Are you all right?

Subject 32:

I'm fine. I just got a little overwhelmed for a moment. I have finally accepted that this is my destiny, the outcome of my life. I don't accept the undeniable approach of my own death, at least not at the hands of The Destroyer. I have faith in what is happening here. (silence)

Armand:

Can I ask you a question?

Jamilla:

Of course.

Armand:

Why psychiatry?

Jamilla:

(laughs) I've been asked that many times. Mostly because I have friends who are chemists and biologists. I assume your reason behind asking isn't the same as theirs.

Armand:

Probably not.

Jamilla:

I've always prided myself in being a good listener. When I was growing up, many of my friends came to me with their problems. I knew if I pursued it as a profession, I could really help people.

Armand:

But you could've been a regular doctor.

Jamilla:

Yes, I could have been. But psychiatry gives me the chance to really know a person. I think that's really the only way to truly help.

Armand:

I like that. You are, without (laughs) a doubt, the nicest doctor I've ever met.

Jamilla:

Thank you.

Armand:

You (laughs) make me feel safe.

Jamilla:

I wish I could do that for everyone. (silence)

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Savreen:

Jamilla.

Jamilla:

I have a session starting in less than a minute. You can't be in here.

Savreen:

I'm sorry, but that's why I'm here.

Jamilla:

Was there a change of schedule?

Savreen:

Subject 32 passed away.

Jamilla:

What?

Savreen:

My apologies for not informing you sooner, but it only happened an hour ago.

Jamilla:

Was, was there a complication?

Savreen:

The dosage she was receiving, it wasn't enough. I'm so sorry. I, I know how much you care about every single person here, but you knew this could happen.

Jamilla:

I know you may be used to this, but (laughs) it doesn't make it any easier for me.

ICRS Computer:

[inaudible 00:19:55] Weiss, Xavier.

Savreen:

Entry granted.

Weiss:

Good afternoon, Dr. Khanna.

Savreen:

Did we have a meeting?

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Weiss:

No, I needed to speak with you about the subject who died this morning.

Savreen:

And this couldn't be sent via message?

Weiss:

I believe this is a conversation we should have in person. It seems Subject 32 lied on her intake.

Savreen:

Lied about what?

Weiss:

In preparing the documents to send to her family, I contacted her next of kin. It turns out, she doesn't have one exactly. Her emergency contact was a close friend.

Savreen:

Please come to the point, Xavier.

Weiss:

I received a message from that friend asking if there would be compensation for a child.

Savreen:

Please tell me it's the friend's child.

Weiss:

It is not.

Savreen:

Well, this is unfortunate. I'll need all your correspondence with the friend. No copies, the originals. You will discuss this with no one. I will handle the paperwork from here on out.

Weiss:

Shouldn't we report it?

Savreen:

You have, to me. If there is anything you will learn working in this department, it's that everyone views secrets as a weapon. We don't ever want those weapons used against us.

Weiss:

Of course. I don't know how this happened.

Savreen:

And yet, it happened. It is times like this, Xavier, that we must remember that everything we are doing is for the greater good. It will be difficult at times.

Weiss:

But it is all worth it in the end.

Savreen:

(laughs) Yes.

Jamilla:

Good afternoon.

Armand:

Hey.

Jamilla:

What would you like to talk about today?

Armand:

You told me you were married.

Jamilla:

I was.

Armand:

Do you ever think about your partner?

Jamilla:

He's with me every day.

Armand:

How long were you together before he passed?

Jamilla:

We were married for 10 years, but I knew him longer.

Armand:

Wow, that's... That's amazing. I think I'll sit today.

Jamilla:

Whatever makes you comfortable.

Armand:

I've been thinking about my mother lately. She died when I was seven.

Jamilla:

I know.

Armand:

You do?

Jamilla:

You spoke about her before, remember?

Armand:

Oh. When I think about her, I don't know if I'm really thinking about the person I knew. I have some pictures and recordings, and I don't know if the memories I have are really mine or if they're from watching that stuff. Do I really remember what she sounded like or how she smiled? How much can a person even remember from being so little?

Jamilla:

We can form memories as early as two years of age.

Armand:

That's (laughs) good to know. Maybe most of those memories are mine.

Jamilla:

Of course they're yours. No matter how many years you had with her, you did have years with her. And it doesn't make a difference where the memories come from. How do the memories make you feel?

Armand:

Sad, but happy too. Mostly happy. Like you said about your husband, I think my mom is with me all the time. Sometimes she's just a tiny thought in the back of my brain. Sometimes it's like today where she's taking up all the space.

Jamilla:

Stop worrying about how you got the memories, and focus on the memories themselves. How others remember us is important. As long as we're remembered, we never truly die.

DiPA:

This episode featured the voices of Janet Simmons as Jamilla Ramsey, Pamela Paul as Savreen Khanna, J.K. Robbins as Xavier Weiss, Torres Fontain Jr as Armand, Elaine Weatherby as Subject 32, Marta da Silva as ICRS Computer, and me, Drea Silvertooth as DiPA.

DiPA:

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Producer, Amanda Lorraine. Sound design and mix, Joshua Suhy. Sound recordist, Karl Huber. Original theme, Katharine Seaton. Additional music provided by Soundstripe Music. For more information, please visit apollyon.observerpictures.com. (silence)