

HAL'S PARADISE

When a worldwide pandemic crumbles the dreams of a young woman's new life in paradise, she's forced to trust what she cannot see.

20-DE06-W33

INT. JULIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

JULIE (25) wears a T-shirt and jeans, completely exhausted, shifting large moving boxes. MOVER ONE (50) pulls out a set of wrinkled papers and a pen.

MOVER ONE

Sign here and we'll be on our way.

Julie quickly signs and hands back to Mover One. MOVER TWO (30) ENTERS from the back room, rolling an empty dolly.

MOVER TWO

You're all in! Hope your furniture arrives soon.

JULIE

My roommate's bringing it next week! -- Thanks so much!

Mover One and Mover Two EXIT.

Just as she's about to close the door, NATHAN (60), a nice man pre-occupied with a handful of papers, rounds the corner.

NATHAN

Hi, are you Julie or Darlene?

JULIE

Julie.

NATHAN

We spoke on the phone, I'm the manager, Nathan. Let me know if you need anything and welcome to Hal's Paradise.

Nathan quickly walks away before he even seemed to stop.

JULIE

Thanks.

Julie closes the door and surveys the sea of boxes covering her beautiful hardwood floors, and a rickety rocking chair.

INT. DINING ROOM

Julie opens a box and pulls out a 2020 CALENDAR. She flips it to MARCH 2020 and tacks it to the wall. She grabs a marker and neatly marks off Sunday, MARCH 1 where it states "Move to Paradise." Below, on MARCH 8, it states "Darlene arrives."

From the same box, she unpacks several books and lays each one on the counter. One of which is a worn Bible.

FLASHBACK - INT. ORPHANAGE

An awkward little girl steps up to receive a Bible from a set of blurred HANDS. Other young FIGURES are blurred in the background. She cradles it. It's YOUNG JULIE at age 8.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. DINING AREA (BACK TO PRESENT)

Julie holds the Bible in the same cradling way, lets out a deep sigh and lays the Bible on the counter with the others.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DINING AREA - EVENING

Julie, in pajamas, sits in a lawn chair at a cardboard table studying paperwork with a calculator, laptop and cell phone. Her cell phone RINGS.

JULIE

Darlene! You won't believe this place. The pool's right outside our door. The beach is twenty minutes away and I found out how to hike up to the Hollywood sign! -- What?

CUT TO:

INT. DARLENE'S PARENTS' HOUSE

Darlene (25) sits propped up on the couch with a medical boot on her foot.

DARLENE

-- It's the bone on the outside of the foot that connects to my little toe. Metatarsal something. --

INTERCUT JULIE/DARLENE

JULIE

-- Three to five weeks? -- We both start new jobs next Monday!

DARLENE

I know, Julie, I'm sorry, I have to postpone everything until it heals. I'm putting my things in storage and staying with my parents. --

JULIE

-- I'm sorry, too. Just get better,
clumsy nut. -- Bye.

Julie lays her phone down and closes her laptop in defeat. She stands and marks a line through "Darlene arrives" on the calendar.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. APARTMENT PARKING - DAY

Julie, wearing jeans and a T-shirt, walks through the breezeway struggling with two sacks of groceries. She bumps into a tenant, CINDY (55), who hurries past Julie without acknowledging her.

JULIE

Sorry!

(under her breath)

Oh, no thank you, I'm fine. I'm not
about to drop anything.

Julie readjusts her bags for a better grip and turns the corner nearly running into HAL (87).

EXT. APARTMENT - BREEZEWAY

Julie loses her grip on one bag as Hal leans forward to help but the bag falls to the ground.

HAL

Sorry, wasn't quick enough.

Julie bends down to pick up the bread, chips and cereal.

JULIE

It's okay, the eggs are in the
other sack. Thank God!

(she stands)

I'm Julie. I just moved in to 207.
It's a nice place, how long have
you lived here?

HAL

(slight laugh)

Since 1973. It's an old building in
need of repairs, like me. I'm Hal.
I own it, my son runs it. I call it
an ordinary place for extraordinary
people.

JULIE

Maybe so!

HAL

You take care, Miss Julie.

Hal smiles and turns to walk down the sidewalk. Julie is drawn to him and watches him shuffle away.

INT. DINING AREA - EVENING

Julie, dressed in pajamas, writes on the wall calendar neatly marking off MARCH 11 and walks toward the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Julie is curled up in her rickety rocker, using quilts for padding, watching the news.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Severe pneumonia cases were reported New Year's Eve in Wuhan, China. Evidence suggests that the earliest cases of COVID-19 were in November but there's more to learn about the origins of this virus.

Julie dismisses it and clicks it off.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Julie, dressed in business casual clothes, sits in a lawn chair, watching the morning news.

NEWSCASTER TWO (V.O.)

The first case of SARS-CoV-2 may not have emerged from a Wuhan market but it could've been the site of a super-spreader incident, a U.S.-based expert reports.

Julie dismisses it again, clicks it off and hurries to gather her bags at the dining table.

INT. DINING AREA

She neatly marks through the box of *Friday, MARCH 13*, dismissing the superstitious date.

INT. LAW OFFICE - NAOMI'S OFFICE

Julie sits across from her supervisor, NAOMI (40).

NAOMI

-- We feel the work-at-home strategy seems to be best right now and I'm sorry this happened in your first week.

JULIE

Is the virus really that bad?

NAOMI

We just want to ensure the safety of our staff. -- I plan to be in the office a day or two a week and I'm sure we'll all be back in no time. A couple of weeks, at most.

Julie nods but her insides are reeling.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Call or email me anytime. And feel free to grab some office supplies.

JULIE

Thanks.

INT. BEDROOM

Julie, dressed in pajamas, stands at the door, surveying her small bedroom of boxes, a dresser and a twin bed. It looks more like a storage shed than a bedroom.

She looks around the corner to Darlene's completely empty bedroom.

INT. DARLENE'S ROOM

SERIES OF SHOTS

Julie pulls an extremely small desk into Darlene's room.

She unpacks various office supplies and puts them on another box near the desk.

She places her laptop on the desk, which barely fits, and grabs a small table lamp to set on the box next to the desk.

She scoots a lawn chair over and stands back to admire her creation.

TIME CUT TO:

INT. DINING AREA

NOISE from the television fills the room. Julie, dressed in frumpy sweats, walks by the calendar on the wall. The marked boxes are sloppily marked through MAY 29. The apartment is looking less like a storage facility, but still bare.

INT. KITCHEN

Julie pours a glass of water and takes deep gulps.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

-- The CDC is recommending everyone two years of age and older to wear masks in public settings and around others who don't live in the same household. --

Julie quickly walks into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

She clicks the television off. She stares blankly for a moment, then gathers brochures of California attractions on her makeshift coffee table and throws them in the trash.

Julie walks to the window and takes in the sight of palm trees blowing in the wind. She sees Hal is out for his daily walk. She smiles.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS (with masks)

Julie and Hal sit on his bench, engrossed in a discussion.

Julie knocks on Hal's door and hands him a plate of cookies.

Hal instructs Nathan and another tenant to deliver a couch from one apartment to Julie's apartment.

While out for his evening walk, Hal sees through Julie's window as she sits and cries at her table.

Hal snips a couple of white roses from the rosebush in the courtyard.

He sits at his bench and plucks every thorn off the roses.

Hal knocks on Julie's door, there's no answer. He places the roses on the door mat.

INT. DINING AREA - LATE

Julie sits at the table flipping through her Bible, glancing at passages. Jars of peanut butter and jelly, an empty plate and glass, sit next to TWO WHITE ROSES in a vase, slightly wilting. The calendar behind her is marked through JUNE 15.

She cradles her head in her hands for a moment. Her phone RINGS, she jumps and knocks the milk glass and vase off the table, both shattering to the floor. She quickly starts cleaning up the broken glass and cuts her hand. Her phone displays "NAOMI-WORK."

INT. KITCHEN - SINK

She runs cold water over her hand and grabs several paper towels to wrap around it. She's fighting tears.

She grabs the phone to listen to a voice mail message on speaker mode.

NAOMI (V.O.)

Julie, it's Naomi. We've got a major project we need done by eight in the morning, call quickly if you can help. It pays overtime. Thanks.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DARLENE'S ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Julie sits typing like blazes, yet clumsily with her hand bandaged, clearly in pain and intently under pressure. She's sleepy. The window is open for fresh air. She double checks her work and breathes deep. She begins to nod off.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JULIE'S BEDROOM

Julie sits on her bed and sets her alarm for "4:00 A.M." She lies down and closes her eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DARLENE'S ROOM - 5:00 A.M.

Julie continues typing as fast as she can. She studies the screen and blindly reaches for a cup of coffee next to her computer, just as a car alarm BLASTS. The cup crashes and splatters her keyboard. She jumps up and trips over dangling cords. She falls hard to the hardwood floor with a THUD. She slowly rolls to her back, a trickle of blood flows from a gash below her eye. She stares at the ceiling, her eyes go blank. She's out.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LAW OFFICE - NAOMI'S OFFICE

Naomi, clearly stressed, quickly picks up the phone.

NAOMI

It's eight forty-five! I've tried
you twice this morning. We've
missed the deadline! There's no
excuse for this, Julie! Call me!

She slams the phone down and shakes her head.

INT. DARLENE'S ROOM - LATE MORNING

Julie lies on the floor, lifeless. Her phone RINGS again, she comes to and stares blankly at her phone laying on the floor by her broken computer.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DINING AREA

The calendar is marked through JUNE 19. The door SLAMS.

EXT. COURTYARD

Julie wears sweats, a bandana tied around her face that covers most of her bruise, and a bandage on her hand. She somberly walks past the swimming pool, noticing the PADLOCK on the gate. Very few TENANTS are out, all wearing masks, but still no one speaks, no one acknowledges anyone.

She sees Hal sitting alone on the bench with a mask on his face, pulled down slightly to breathe, and staring at the wall across the courtyard.

EXT. APARTMENT COURTYARD - BENCH

Julie slowly approaches the bench and sits on the opposite end.

Hal remains silent for a moment but doesn't completely ignore her. He can see her eyes are swollen from tears and her partially bruised face.

JULIE

Thank you for the roses -- and the couch.

HAL

In my life I've seen the Chinese communists rise and the British empire shrink, the attack on Pearl Harbor, D-Day, the fall of the Berlin wall.

He looks to Julie as if she should speak.

JULIE

9/11, COVID-19, -- and my last paycheck.

HAL

They're all storms. Disaster, financial hardship, hopelessness, fear -- doubt.

He studies Julie's reaction. She's intrigued by his knowledge of her circumstances.

HAL (CONT'D)

You can lose everything in this world, but don't ever lose faith.

Hal stands. He COUGHS and clears his throat.

HAL (CONT'D)

Maybe we're being forced to pause for a moment, regain our focus. Why else would this happen?

Hal smiles in amusement and turns to walk away, a bit unsteady.

HAL (CONT'D)

Take care of yourself, Miss Julie.

Julie watches him shuffle down the walkway, skeptical of his behavior, but finally realizing just how wise his words are.

INT. JULIE'S BEDROOM

Julie sits in her bed reading her Bible. She scribbles on a pad of paper. "Faith - complete trust or confidence in someone or something." She closes her eyes, silently prays and turns out the light.

INT. DINING AREA

The calendar is marked through JUNE 26. The door CLOSES.

EXT. APARTMENT COURTYARD

Julie, eyes swollen from tears, wears a mask and sits alone on the bench, deep in silent prayer. Her face is healed.

Nathan, wearing a mask, approaches and sits at the other end of the bench. He holds folders full of papers.

NATHAN

He liked you, you know that, right?
He'd always tell me when he saw
you.

(mimicking Hal)

"I saw Miss Julie today."

(back to normal)

He'd tell me what you were doing,
what you talked about, what you
were going through.

JULIE

How did he know? I never really
told him.

NATHAN

My dad was a man of few words, but
an intent observer. -- After mom
died, he told me to always have
faith in life, in others, in the
'why-this-why-that' of the world.
He knew what was important.

Julie shakes her head.

JULIE

I grew up in foster homes so it's
like someone finally watching out
for me. I didn't always see him,
but I knew he was close by, in the
apartment or walking the grounds.

(MORE)

JULIE (CONT'D)

I always looked for his smile as some sort of reassurance because I lost focus -- just wanted to play in paradise with my best friend and that didn't happen! -- Jesus led me here and rock bottom built my faith. There's apparently more for me to do so I know he'll take care of me, somehow.

NATHAN

When Dad lost his smile, I thought even he lost his faith. But that was me. You made him smile again, and that helped us all.

Nathan looks at the folders and quickly stands.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

(changing course)

Would you like to help me out? I need to post these on every tenant's door today.

He hands her a folder and she opens it to read.

JULIE

COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act of 2020?

She peruses the document quickly.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Nathan, this is amazing!

NATHAN

It's amazing for everyone else, too. Would you mind taking the upper floors? I'll do the lower.

JULIE

Absolutely!

Nathan walks away and begins taping notices to the doors.

Julie sits scanning the paper, she looks toward the breezeway as Hal stands smiling at her, the same as the day she met him. Birds CHIRP above, she looks up, looks back to the breezeway, and he's gone. She looks up and closes her eyes.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX

Julie goes door-to-door taping the notices on the upper floors as Nathan goes door-to-door taping the notices on the lower floors.

EXT. APARTMENT COURTYARD - A FEW DAYS LATER

A cheery Julie, with a mask, walking back from the mailbox sees Cindy, with a mask, struggling with two bags.

JULIE

Here, let me help you.

Cindy hesitates as a bag drops and Julie catches it. The two walk through the courtyard toward Cindy's apartment.

JULIE (CONT'D)

It's a beautiful day! I'm Julie!

CINDY

(amused)

I've heard of you. I'm Cindy.

They reach Cindy's door and Julie hands her the bag she's carrying.

JULIE

Would you like to help us Saturday?

CINDY

I'll check my schedule.

Julie strolls away. Cindy pulls down her mask and smiles. She quickly looks around to see if anyone caught her smiling and ducks into her apartment.

EXT. APARTMENT COURTYARD - SATURDAY

SERIES OF SHOTS

The tenants that previously ignored Julie are helping plant flowers, picking up trash, trimming bushes and washing outside windows as Julie supervises and helps.

Cindy sweeps the breezeway with a large broom.

Hal's bench has been dedicated.

"In loving memory of Hal, Rest in Paradise - 2020."

FADE OUT.