

PROTOTYPE

Pilot

By
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First thing that hits us is the NOISE. A loud, persistent, THRUM. Mechanical in origin. Sort of sound that burrows into your nervous system.

FADE IN:

1

INT. A CONCRETE ROOM - DAY

1

Whatever that noise is, it's coming from this room.

We're CLOSE on the face of LAURA KALE. Mid 30s. Bags under the eyes because she hasn't slept in 34 hours. "Ragged" under the florescent strip lights.

WIDER and we learn that Laura is sat at an unspectacular desk in an unspectacular room. Concrete walls and floors, no pictures or artefacts. Industrial in nature, definitely not a home. Sort of place you'd keep a hostage, if you were that way inclined. The only items on the desk in front of Laura are an opened laptop and a set of headphones.

ANGLE on the laptop screen -- a WINDOW OPENS and the face of a MAN dominates the screen. This guy we will come to know as EDWARD (EDDY) CONWAY. Mid 40s, dark features, trim physique. Boyishly handsome. Eddy's also disheveled and ragged from a lack of sleep.

On screen, Eddy points to his ears. Laura gathers up the headphones from the desk, slips them on.

PEACE AND QUIET, finally, as the headphones cancel out that awful noise.

EDDY

How are you holding up?

Laura nods: "All good".

EDDY (CONT'D)

(firm)

Laura, I need to know that you've got your shit together.

LAURA

I'm good. I'm good.

EDDY

Let's just get this done.

But Laura clearly has doubts.

LAURA

It's not ready.

EDDY

It is. You have to trust me.

LAURA

Eddy-

EDDY

It's ready, Laura.

Laura takes a deep breath for courage, nods. She knows there is no option.

As she rises from the seat we reveal more of the room she's in. We notice two things, both of which sit uneasily.

First of all, that noise -- it's coming from a MACHINE established against the entire side wall. Eight foot tall, twelve foot wide, six foot deep. When I say "machine", it's not something we've seen before. This is home-made - cobbled together - not manufactured. What appears to be two tall, thick, copper plates flank the sides. We should get the impression that these are power cells, and that they're running so hot that they're vibrating the concrete walls, maybe even the foundations. The center of this machine - the hub - is a metal box with a single hatch opening in the middle section. The closest description would be a chiller drawer in a TV morgue, where they keep the bodies.

The second thing we notice -- another WOMAN, sat in a chair in the corner of the room. This is DONNA NEURING, 26 years of age. There's a blindfold over her eyes and her hands are tied behind her back. She's conscious, terrified. Ragged in a different way.

So this is a hostage situation after all.

Laura turns the laptop to face the machine so that Eddy can observe events in real time.

She crosses to Donna in the corner of the room, pulls her to her feet and begins to lead her towards the machine against the far wall. Donna struggles, RESISTS, in the knowledge that she's being led towards her own execution.

ANGLE ON THE LAPTOP SCREEN -- Eddy watching as Laura wrestles Donna towards the machine. This is painful for him to observe. A kidnapping that has gone very, very wrong. He knows Donna - he feels her pain. But he can't look away, he has to know that the task is being completed.

Laura gets Donna to the machine, pulls open the hatch to an inner compartment. She begins to push Donna into the machine, but it's a struggle because the victim is resisting and it's only a small opening.

If the NOISE from the machine wasn't so all consuming, we would be able to hear the screams.

In the heat of battle, Laura catches herself. This isn't her. She's no killer. She releases her victim and slumps to the floor in defeat, as Donna struggles blindly around the room, cowering into a corner.

ANGLE ON THE LAPTOP SCREEN -- Eddy can see that Laura isn't up to it. And this spells bad news for him. From behind Eddy's seated position we see the BOTTOM HALF OF A MAN step into frame. He pushes a LARGE KNIFE to Eddy's throat, ready to slit his windpipe if Laura doesn't finish what she started.

Eddy SCREAMS to get Laura's attention, but it's also drowned by that damn MACHINE. He's 10 seconds from death if Laura doesn't pull herself together.

WITH LAURA -- slumped on the floor, sobbing, defeated. She looks to Donna cowering, blindfolded, in the corner of the room. Then she looks to the desk, where finally she sees Eddy on the laptop screen, desperately screaming to get her attention. She can see the knife at his throat.

Something behind Laura's eyes changes. A bubble of inner strength rises to the surface. She knows she's come too far to give up now. She ROARS to gee herself on, rises to her feet, crosses to Donna, and drags her back towards the MACHINE. Just for one minute of her life she is prepared to be ruthless.

ANGLE ON THE LAPTOP SCREEN -- The knife is removed from Eddy's throat and he breathes. A stay of execution.

WITH LAURA -- as she ferociously forces Donna inside the machine, closes the hatch, bolts it shut.

Laura crosses back to the desk, sits, breathless from exertion. Emotionally broken by what she just had to do.

A NEW WINDOW opens on her laptop screen. The command prompt poses the old-school question: "EXECUTE?"

Laura slips the headphones back on, looks to Eddy on the screen.

EDDY (CONT'D)

I'm going to count you down. OK?

Laura nods, wipes her eyes.

EDDY (CONT'D)

This is going to work. 5, 4, 3,
2...

Laura's finger visibly SHAKES as it hovers over the RETURN key.

EDDY (CONT'D)

1.

The finger lands on RETURN.

CUT TO WHITE:

TITLE CARD:

"PROTOTYPE"

FADE IN:

2 EXT. MAYWEATHER AVENUE, FRESNO, CALIFORNIA - DAY 2

CHYRON:

"Six Months Earlier"

The sun shines over a nice - if somewhat average - suburban street in Fresno, California. CARS reversing out of driveways, CHILDREN dragging heavy school bags out of doorways, HOUSEWIVES and CIVIL PARTNERS waving goodbye at kitchen windows. As we witness the morning rituals, one HOUSE becomes our focus.

Rather, the GARAGE DOOR of one house. The whir of a motor kicks in as the aluminum door begins to roll itself upward, revealing the contents. And it's all somewhat typical of a modern garage: no room for a car, merely an over-flow storage facility for a young family. A broken dishwasher. Twisted stair guards. Burst paddling pools. Boxes labelled with dates or the Sharpied instruction "charity". Caked-up paint tins. Vacuum sealed clothes. Superceded technology. Battered baby toys. This could be anywhere. This shit could belong to anyone.

With one noticeable difference.

In the center of the garage floor, raised on a small home-made plinth, surrounded by towering storage boxes, is a MACHINE. Almost identical to that loud, ugly contraption in the opening sequence -- but on a far smaller scale, measuring just 3 feet by 3 feet.

We recognise the copper bars and the small hatch in the center of the hub. Undeniably a work in progress. A prototype.

REVERSE to find 35 year old MATT KALE stood on the driveway, suited for work, staring into the garage.

MATT
(calling)
Laura...? Laura!

Laura steps out from behind a tall stack of boxes inside the garage, dressed in professional attire. She's crunching on a half eaten piece of toast.

LAURA
Digital tape measure. Did you move it?

MATT
I have to go. Will we see you for ten minutes after work?

LAURA
I was thinking of heading straight off. Meeting them there.

MATT
(an edge)
Then maybe you want to say goodbye?

CUT TO:

A CAR parked in the driveway, with a 7 YEAR OLD GIRL (Leanne) and a 6 MONTH OLD BABY BOY (Charlie) strapped into a baby seat.

Laura steps up to the open car window, smiles warmly at her children.

LAURA
Hey guys... Mommy has to go away for a few days but I'll be back real soon.

She leans in, kisses the baby.

LAURA (CONT'D)
(to Leanne)
Daddy's going to pick you up later from Aunt Janey's, just like normal. And you have Nicole's party tomorrow, don't let him forget the present.

LEANNE
I won't. Good luck, mommy.

Leanne holds up a "crossed finger" salute. Laura's touched that her daughter knows how much this weekend means to her.

LAURA
Thank you, baby.

Laura sees Matt climbing into the driver's seat.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Oh, honey? Could you do me a teeny weeny favor before you go?

TWO MINUTES LATER--

Laura's SUV reverses to the open garage door, with the trunk wide open. Laura climbs out of the driver's seat, joins Matt in the garage, stood beside the machine.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Sorry, I know you're in a hurry.

They stand at each end of the machine, bend their knees and prepare to lift.

LAURA (CONT'D)
And - up.

They lift the machine and carry it towards the open trunk of Laura's SUV. It's heavy, very much a two man operation. As they shuffle:

MATT
Do you have to go this weekend?

LAURA
Yes, I have to be there.

MATT
Will it make a difference?

LAURA
It's going to work this time. I made some adjustments. Stabilized it.

They slide the machine carefully into the trunk. Matt brushes himself off, sees a spot of grease on his shirt, rubs it with a licked finger.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Damp cloth, it'll come right out.

MATT
Laura... we agreed a year. It's been two.

LAURA

Edison took a thousand attempts to perfect the lightbulb.

MATT

Edison had a good idea.

She reacts badly to this.

MATT (CONT'D)

I'm going to be late. We'll talk Sunday.

As Matt heads down the driveway to his own car he WHISTLES. A DOBERMAN DOG runs in from the yard, leaps into the driver's door.

LAURA

(calling)

I left a dozen bottles in the fridge. That should be enough.

MATT

If it's not, I'll just grow some tits and feed him myself.

As Matt climbs into his car, Laura steps back into the garage, gathers up two dewar tanks labelled "LHe" and loads them into the trunk of her SUV, beside the machine.

3

EXT. PUMP STATION. STAFF PARKING - DAY

3

Laura's SUV pulls into a space and parks, arriving for work. She climbs out, crosses to the trunk and opens it. Laura gathers up a plaid picnic rug, unfolds it and drapes it over the machine. Once happy that it's concealed, Laura locks the car and walks towards the main building.

We CRANE UP over the building, to reveal the industrial heart that exists on the land behind it. Huge reservoirs of water, intersected by narrow metal walkways. Circular clarifying tanks, with slowly spinning arms skimming the surface of the brown water. There's no mistaking this for anything other than a sewage plant treatment center.

4

INT. PUMP STATION. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

4

A bank of monitors, levers, and buttons that control every pump and sluice gate in this treatment plant. 30 years ago this technology would've been considered cutting edge, but looking at it now... it feels somewhat antiquated. A remnant of the industrial era.

Labelled, single purpose control switches. Cracks in the concrete. Everything forged in a pre microchip age.

Laura is sat at the control desk, logging numbers and gathering up a handset. She's the chief engineer on duty. Responsible for the steady flow of shit through Fresno.

LAURA

(into walkie talkie)

Start prepping for blowers 1 and 4. Let's give Betsy and Liam a run out this morning, shall we?

5 INT. PUMP STATION. BLOWER ROOM - DAY 5

Four industrial sized "blowers", like aircraft engines, connected to low pressure air piping secured to the ceiling. The blowers themselves are bolted to the concrete floor with bolt heads the size of human skulls. Small traces of rust and decay are evident.

A RED LIGHT flashes from above as the SOUND of the blowers firing up for action fills the air.

6 EXT. PUMP STATION. AERATION BASIN - DAY 6

What looks like an Olympic swimming pool of sludgy brown water begins to bubble and boil from below, as the blowers force warm air up from the depths, fuelling the bacteria that break down the ammonia into nitrates. If you ever wondered where your poop goes after you flush, here's your answer.

FIND Laura, wearing a hi-viz jacket, crossing a narrow metal walkway that stretches across this aeration basin. Her cell phone begins to ring. She checks the ID and answers it.

LAURA

(into phone)

Hey, I was about to call you.

INTERCUT WITH:

7 INT. EDDY'S APARTMENT, LA - DAY 7

Eddy's at a breakfast counter, dressed in just his boxers. There's a cardboard box in front of him that contains what appears to be a mechanical part.

EDDY
(into cell phone)
Why did you order a...
(checks invoice)
Ramp generator?

We cut between both ends of the call, as we see fit.

LAURA
If we have greater control over the voltage going in, we can increase stability. That's been our problem all along.

EDDY
Laura, this thing is nearly three hundred bucks. You can't just buy stuff when the mood takes you. There's a protocol.

LAURA
It's a bargain. Don't question my shit and I won't question yours.

We follow Eddy towards a bedroom. The apartment is immaculately presented with a to-die-for view over West Hollywood. It's crammed full of toys and electronic gizmos. Curved TVs and high spec exercise contraptions.

EDDY
Listen, slight change of plan this weekend. We need to move location. I'll text you the new address.

LAURA
(concerned)
What's wrong with the lab?

EDDY
Nothing, the owner's just getting a bit pissy over the noise issue. We'll be back there in a month or two, I've sorted something in the interim.

LAURA
Is it suitable?

As Eddy enters his BEDROOM we find a beautiful 20 year old woman, JENNIFER, sleeping in the bed. Naked but tastefully covered by the twisted bedsheets.

EDDY
(hesitates)
We'll make it work. I'm leaving after my final lecture, I'll see you at six.

LAURA

Don't forget the- [generator]

EDDY

Yes, yes, got it.

Eddy hangs up the call and we--

END INTERCUT, remaining with Eddy in his bedroom. He stares down at the sleeping Jennifer in his bed. Nudges her to wake her.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Hey...

She smiles up at him, full lipped. A vision of beauty. But young. Noticeably so.

EDDY (CONT'D)

You need to leave.

JENNIFER

'You sure about that, Eddy?

He can't resist those soft, inviting lips. So inevitably he sinks onto the bed and proceeds to kiss and make love to her.

8 EXT. PARKING LOT. UCLA CAMPUS - DAY

8

CLOSE on a shin-high sign that reads "PROF. E. CONWAY". Not only is Eddy living the guy dream, he's also a God-damn recognized genius.

A slightly battered sports car glides into the space, boasting the license plate "QUANT3M". The car parks and Eddy climbs out of the drivers' seat, leather attache case in hand. He locks the car with a ZAP from the key fob as he strides towards the lecture halls.

9 INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

9

Eddy is stood at a lectern, addressing an auditorium filled with 20 YEAR OLD STUDENTS.

A projected image on the large screen behind him shows a black and white photograph of Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr, circa 1930.

EDDY

Einstein famously asked: "If a person such as a mouse looks at the universe, does that change the state of the universe?" The man to his left, as you should all know by now, is Niels Bohr.

A door at the back of the lecture hall opens, creating a disturbance as ALL HEADS turn to see who is entering. We see Jennifer shuffle inside, smile towards Eddy at the lectern as she takes her seat with the other Students. Eddy doesn't miss a beat.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Two titans of physics who regularly, openly, disagreed with one another. Didn't stop them being friends, though.

He flicks to another picture of Einstein and Bohr walking together down a street, both in good cheer.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Bohr argued that the properties of an atomic particle could not be measured without disturbing it. For Einstein, this was unacceptable. So the crazy haired German genius tried to prove a point.

Eddy flicks to another picture - Einstein's illustration of the light particle thought experiment box.

EDDY (CONT'D)

He proposed that a single particle of light could be emitted from the box and its weight would be measured simultaneously. Bohr countered that if such an experiment were possible then it would be the end of physics. They debated it furiously. Fortunately, Bohr was correct. Einstein's theoretical hunk of crap could never work. You have until Monday to figure out why. Discuss amongst yourselves.

Eddy pulls a coffee from under his lectern, sips it. His eyes are on Jennifer in the class, talking in a group. He knows this is wrong. But his weaknesses are at the controls.

10

INT. UNDER-STAIRS CLOSET. DONNA'S HOUSE, OAKLAND - DAY 10

Darkness. Just the light from a muted, ringing smart phone illuminating this cramped space. As the phone is answered and held to the side of a woman's face, we recognize--

Donna, the victim forced inside the machine in our opening sequence. She's regaining consciousness, blood dried into her matted hair. Seems that this woman is destined to be forced into confined spaces.

DONNA
(whispering into phone)
Yes?

INTERCUT WITH:

11 INT. PUMP STATION. CONTROL ROOM - DAY 11

Laura is sat at the control dials, eating her lunch.

We cut between both ends of the call--

LAURA
(cheery)
Donna, it's Laura. How are you?

DONNA
Laura?

LAURA
Laura Kale.

Donna's dizzy, concussed. Only just putting the details together.

DONNA
Oh. Oh, hi, Laura. It's a little hard for me to talk right now...

LAURA
I said in my last email that I'd call you at one o'clock. Just to make sure the changes are all good.

DONNA
Changes?

LAURA
Yes, the er-

DONNA
(remembering)
Yeah. Sorry, yeah. Checking them now.

Laura doesn't buy it.

LAURA
It's all done? Everything we agreed?

DONNA

I'm looking at it right now. Shouldn't be a problem.

LAURA

Great. That's... you're sure?

DONNA

I said so, didn't I?

LAURA

Good. And Eddy sent you the address for the new premises?

WITH DONNA -- the sound of HEAVY FOOTSTEPS on the low, sloped ceiling above her. Her fear antenna goes up.

DONNA

I have to go.

Donna hangs up the call and we END INTERCUT, remaining in the under-stairs closet.

THUMP THUMP THUMP as the footsteps close in on her.

Donna uses a light on the phone to scan her surroundings. Cleaning products and vacuum attachments scatter the ground around her. She sees a toolkit, opens it up and pulls out a heavy adjustable spanner. She puts the phone into her pocket, lays back down and closes her eyes - playing possum.

A beat. Sounds of the door being unbolted from outside.

LIGHT breaks in as the door is opened. A MALE FACE stands in semi-silhouette, looking down at the seemingly unconscious Donna. Late 20s, rugged, "Country Music" -- we'll come to know him as FORDE. He squats on his haunches, uses his hand to clear the hair from Donna's face.

FORDE

We're so nearly there, baby... And I know you know that.

Just as Forde leans in closer to inspect Donna's head wound, her eyes SNAP OPEN. With one swift move she swipes her arm towards him, the adjustable spanner connecting with a THUD across his temple.

Forde is knocked instantly unconscious by the blow. But instead of falling backwards, the distribution of weight makes him slump FORWARD, landing on top of Donna inside the closet.

Donna scrambles under the weight. She only just manages to maneuver herself free, pulls herself out of the closet.

12 INT. UPSTAIRS - DONNA'S HOUSE - DAY 12

Donna scrambles up the stairs, darts into a BEDROOM. Her EYES go to a vanity table across the room, where she sees a laptop. Donna hurries to the laptop, snatches it up. Whatever is on that hard disk, she can't leave it behind.

As Donna hurries back out with the laptop, we HOLD on a framed photograph on the vanity table. Donna and Forde - Victim and Abuser - together, in happier times.

13 INT. DOWNSTAIRS - DONNA'S HOUSE - DAY 13

Donna hurries down the stairs, carrying the laptop, racing against time. She makes it to the front door and then STOPS--

Donna turns back, looks down the entrance hall to the under-stairs closet. TWO MALE LEGS are protruding from the door. She realizes that she has time. He's still unconscious.

She walks slowly, cautiously, to those protruding legs. Stands over them for a beat, looking down at the face of her abuser.

She digs a hand inside Forde's pocket, pulls out his cell phone, throws it away down the hallway. It skids across the wooden floor, coming to rest at the front door.

Donna gathers up his protruding legs and bends them at the knees, stuffing them inside the closet. She shuts the closet door, bolts it, and walks back towards the front door.

She stops at the front door. Something still bothering her. Something more she wants to do. A little icing on the cake.

2 MINUTES LATER:

We follow a trail of scratched wooden floorboards from a LIVING ROOM into the ENTRANCE HALL, where we find Donna pushing a heavy, wooden cabinet towards the under-stairs closet. Putting her full weight into shifting it, the castors still scratching up the varnished floor.

Gradually the cabinet reaches the end of the hallway, blocking the door to the under-stairs closet.

Donna leans against the cabinet and gets her breath, exhausted.

JUMP CUT and she's gathering up the laptop, stepping out of the front door, closing it behind her. Forde is now barricaded inside the closet - it would be impossible to force his way out.

14 EXT. OUTSIDE SCIENCE BLOCK / PARKING LOT. CAMPUS - DAY 14

Eddy steps out of the building, free from his final lecture, and heads towards the parking lot. He's checking his phone as a graduate student, JOE OTTOMAN, follows him out. Joe is male, early 20s, 6' 5" and weighing in at 300 lbs. He's what you'd call a gentle giant.

JOE
Professor Conway... Sir...?

Eddy's engrossed in his screen, not hearing him.

JOE (CONT'D)
Eddy!

Eddy turns, sees Joe at his shoulder. He keeps walking and so Joe stays at his side, a head taller.

EDDY
Hey, Joe. I'm in a bit of a rush.

JOE
My father wants to talk to you.

Joe is clearly uncomfortable raising this, but for now it just feels like a student not making his grades, and being pressured by his folks.

EDDY
Absolutely, let's set up a time for next week.

JOE
He kinda said it has to be today. Tonight at the latest.

EDDY
I'm going away for the weekend, no can do.

As Eddy nears his parking space and throws it a glance, he SLOWS, comes to a halt. Something's wrong.

EDDY'S POV -- staring at an empty parking space. The pride and joy car's not there. We know he's got the right space because his name plate tells us so. Was it stolen?

Eddy looks to Joe, sees the AWKWARD GUILT etched on his student's face. Wait -- did Joe take his car?

JOE

I'm sorry, professor... He said to take everything.

On Eddy -- realizing the position he's now in. There's clearly a lot more to this than a student / teacher relationship. But Eddy's not going to be intimidated so easily.

EDDY

You tell that son of a bitch I'll come see him when I'm ready.

Eddy walks away to find alternative transport.

Off Joe -- knowing he's going to have to step this up to the next level. He pulls out his phone to report in.

15

EXT. STORAGE FACILITY. UNIT SECTION "D" - DAY

15

A vast "Stop-N-Stor" facility on the outskirts of Fresno. A row of numbered storage units like garages, all with BLUE ALUMINUM DOORS stretching for as far as the eye can see.

Laura's SUV pulls up outside of a unit labelled "82D" and parks. She climbs out of the driver's door, looks at her surroundings. This can't be right.

Laura pulls out her phone, dials.

LAURA

(into phone)

Hey. I think you gave me the wrong address.

The aluminum door of unit 82D rolls upward and Eddy emerges, his cell phone at his ear. Laura turns to the noise, sees him. He knows she's going to be pissed.

EDDY

Just keep an open mind.

Laura hangs up her phone, follows Eddy inside the unit. We see it from her POV --

10' wide, 20' deep. Brick walls and a concrete floor, reminiscent of the opening scenes but again on a reduced scale.

Eddy has just moved the equipment into the unit: a desk and a chair, two high stools, a step ladder, a camera on a tripod, a cardboard box filled with wires and extension cables, a large white board propped against one wall, covered with hand-written math equations. Other than that, it's just an empty rental space to work in.

Laura takes in her surroundings -- clearly disappointed. She didn't expect much, but this is a new low.

LAURA

You've gotta be kidding me.

EDDY

I told you, it's temporary.

LAURA

We're working with liquid helium. This environment isn't safe.

EDDY

So we'll be a little more careful. Come on. We've only got a twenty minute unloading window, then you'll have to move your car. Rules is rules.

Eddy and Laura cross back to the trunk of Laura's car, open it up and pull the plaid rug from the machine. They take one end each.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Did you do much work on it?

LAURA

Just internal stuff. Stability. And - up.

They lift together, shuffle towards the unit.

EDDY

How's Matt?

LAURA

Good.

EDDY

And the kids? Leanne? Toby?

LAURA

Charlie.

EDDY

Are you sure? I thought you had a Toby.

LAURA

Wait, let me think...

(then)

Nope. Pretty certain I still know the name of my own baby. And - down.

They rest the machine carefully down in the center of the unit.

16 INT. DONNA'S CAR (PARKED) - DAY 16

Donna examines herself in the rear view mirror. Dried blood on the side of her head and matted into her hair.

She reaches over to the glove box, pops it open. Rummages her hand inside for anything that can help her... but all she comes up with is a pack of glass wipes for the windscreen. In absence of anything better, Donna pulls out a few moist glass wipes and starts to clean the dried blood off her face and hair. Just to look presentable.

17 INT. STORAGE UNIT - DAY 17

The machine sits on its wooden plinth in the center of the storage unit. Laura is sat cross legged on the concrete floor beside it, a tool box by her side as she wires in the new ramp generator.

At the desk, Eddy unpacks a grocery bag onto the desk. A carton of eggs, followed by a carton of eggs, followed by another carton eggs....

EDDY

Did you hear from her?

LAURA

I called.

EDDY

And?

LAURA

And she says she's coming.

EDDY

She "says" she's coming or she's actually showing up this time?

LAURA

I don't know, she wasn't entirely lucid. If she hasn't made the changes, I swear to God I'm going to blow. She's been holding us back for too long.

EDDY

She's a bona fide genius. You checked her out yourself, don't go back on that now. We chose her together.

LAURA

And we rushed. I think we should shop around for someone who has a better handle on our requirements.

EDDY

You're going to fire her? You are going to fire her?

Something mocking in Eddy's tone. Laura doesn't strike us as the sort of person who could fire someone.

LAURA

We're two years and \$90,000 in the hole. If we can't get it working again by the end of this weekend... then yes. I think we have the conversation.

EDDY

She's a shareholder, Laura.

LAURA

Twenty percent of nothing will always be nothing. And I don't need a crazy unreliable math geek to tell me that.

Laura follows Eddy's eyes, turns and sees Donna stood in the open doorway, a laptop tucked under one arm, a grocery bag hanging from the other. Chances are she didn't just overhear that conversation.

EDDY

Hello, gorgeous.

Eddy crosses to Donna and gives her a welcoming hug. He has charm in abundance but she gives nothing back. Cold to the touch.

DONNA

Sorry. Traffic.

LAURA

Traffic? I didn't hit any traffic. What route did you take?

DONNA

The busy route.

Donna rests her laptop on the desk, takes in her surroundings. She likes the vibe.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Cool place.

EDDY

(to Laura)

There. See.

LAURA

I'm gonna do a coffee run. Anyone?

Donna delves into her grocery bag, pulls out a bottle of tequila and a stack of paper cups. She slams the bottle on the desk with intent.

Eddy doesn't think twice.

EDDY

Pour me.

Off Laura, resigned to a frustrating weekend.

18 EXT. STORAGE FACILITY. UNIT SECTION "D" - DUSK 18

The sun is setting over the neighborhood. Most of the storage units are closed, but a few have their doors open, with lights blazing, as PEOPLE rummage through their boxes of memorabilia - either dropping off or collecting.

19 INT. STORAGE UNIT - DUSK 19

From within, Eddy pulls the unit door down for privacy, enclosing them within.

Laura positions the step ladder under the ceiling light, climbs up and starts to dismantle the housing of the light unit.

As Laura removes the plastic housing, she passes it down to Donna at the foot of the ladder. Donna switches on a flashlight, aims it up at the overhead light. As Laura disconnects the bulb, the flashlight is all they can work by.

Eddy now passes up an electrical cord with an attachment. Laura connects the attachment to the bulb fitting, essentially hacking into the electricity supply (these places don't have power outlets, to discourage people living in the units or carrying out work in them).

EDDY

Free juice.

LAURA

We're only going to pull 120 volts out of this. If we blow the whole complex, I'm not taking the blame.

EDDY

Noted.

The electrical cord now snakes from the ceiling to the floor, where Donna connects a multi plug extension. Eddy plugs a lamp into one of the outlets and they have LIGHT once again.

LAURA

OK. Let's do some work.

TIME CUT -- 10 MINUTES LATER.

FIND Laura crouched at the prototype machine, affixing a tank of liquid helium, "LHe", to a hose on the housing unit.

FIND Donna at the desk, adapting code on her laptop, intermittently sipping her tequila. A cable runs from the laptop to the prototype machine, connecting them.

FIND Eddy positioning the camera on the tripod, focusing on the machine. He hits RECORD.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Device is primed.

DONNA

20 seconds my end.

EDDY

(into camera)

Prototype test run 96A. Friday the third of May, 7.24 pm. Those present: Laura Kale, Donna Neuring, Edward Conway. Voltage?

LAURA

Variable.

EDDY

Code version?

DONNA

DN-204.1.

Eddy crosses to the desk, gathers up a single egg from a carton. He takes a digital tape measure from his pocket, wraps it around the egg - top to bottom.

EDDY

(into camera)

Test subject: a chicken egg. 156 millimeters.

Eddy carries the egg to the MACHINE, opens the hatch in the center of the hub and places it carefully inside. He closes the hatch, locks it with a bolt, flicks a switch on the MACHINE. The copper power cells begin to VIBRATE and HUM as it powers up. The noise is similar to the opening sequences but on a greatly reduced level.

LAURA

Let's start gently, run it out at eight seconds. Set?

DONNA

Set.

EDDY

Set.

LAURA

3, 2, 1 - go.

As Donna hits the return key on her laptop, CODE begins to roll frantically across the screen. At that very moment, Eddy clicks the button on a digital stopwatch, timing the experiment.

Laura turns the dial on the ramp generator in her hand, increasing the voltage, and as she does so the machine HUMS louder.

Eddy watches the stopwatch.

Donna watches the code.

The seconds tick by: 5, 6, 7...

EDDY

Done.

Donna hits the return key on the laptop. The code FREEZES on her screen.

Laura dials down the voltage and the HUMMING decreases.

Laura and Eddy cross back to the machine. Until they open that hatch, none of them have any idea if the experiment has been successful or not.

Laura pulls open the hatch and a puff of dry ice spills out.

She reaches in a hand, scoops out the contents: FRAGMENTS, like crystals, of frozen, shattered egg. It's been obliterated into a thousand pieces.

The looks on all of their faces tell us that this is not the result they were hoping for.

A frustrated Laura looks to Donna. Laura blames her for the failure, and Donna knows it. There is no female solidarity here.

DONNA

I thought you said you fixed the laser issue?

LAURA

There never was a laser issue. This is a coding issue.

DONNA

Did you want to check my work? Here -- pull up a seat, go right ahead.

Laura is about to explode at Donna, but Eddy steps in as peacemaker.

EDDY

Ladies - it's Friday night, we have a long weekend ahead of us. Let's keep it polite.

DONNA

If I can see the moment when the process fails, I can adjust the code accordingly.

LAURA

Impossible.

DONNA

Not if you build a camera in there.

Laura looks to Eddy.

LAURA

Do you want to explain this to her? Again!

EDDY

The properties of an atomic particle can't be measured without disturbing it.

(MORE)

EDDY (CONT'D)

A camera inside the machine would be considered an act of measurement.

DONNA

So if we look at it, it won't do what we want it to do?

EDDY

Correct.

DONNA

But if we don't look at it, I can't make it do what we want it to do.

EDDY

Quantum rules. Sorry.

Beat. Donna realizes that she isn't going to get any help. She crosses back to the laptop, slugs the tequila.

DONNA

So I'll check the code. Again.

Laura rolls her eyes at Eddy.

20

EXT. PARKING LOT. STORAGE FACILITY - NIGHT

20

Laura gathers a travel case from the trunk of her car, extends the handle, locks her car and starts to wheel the case across the parking lot. She falls into stride beside Donna, who doesn't have a case - just her laptop.

LAURA

You didn't bring a change of clothes?

DONNA

I was in a hurry.

They reach Eddy at his parking space, pulling a travel case out of the rear hold of a rental van. Having abandoned his car he's resorted to hiring a van for the weekend.

Laura stares at the livery on the side of the van: "ANY DISTANCE, \$99".

LAURA

What happened to the penis extension?

EDDY

In the shop. Short notice.

Eddy locks the van and they all head away across the parking lot, dragging their cases.

21 EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT 21

A pedestrian bridge extends across a busy freeway. Like the sewage plant, another example of mankind engineering solutions to problems, making the world safer and easier. We observe the THREE SMALL FIGURES of Eddy, Donna, and Laura walking across the bridge with their cases chundering in their wake. The lights of the city are the only stars visible.

22 INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT 22

Two travel cases, side by side on a shiny tiled floor. In hotel terms, think Courtyard Marriott.

FIND Laura, Eddy, and Donna stood at the reception desk, all simultaneously checking in for the weekend.

23 INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT 23

Laura, Eddy, and Donna are all sat on sofas in the bar. Drinks on the table, laptops open on their laps. They're all checking private emails.

Laura sees that Eddy is checking a financial spreadsheet. She knows there's something he's not telling them.

LAURA

How are our finances?

EDDY

Why do you ask?

LAURA

We're doing live tests out of a "stop 'n' store" unit, excuse me for being concerned. If we need to make savings anywhere, maybe we should have that discussion.

He decides to come clean.

EDDY

We're running on fumes. I was going to wait until Sunday but seeing as you brought it up -- we're all going to need to put in again. If we choose to carry on.

LAURA

What do you mean "if we choose to carry on"?

EDDY

It's an expression.

LAURA

It's a pretty damn negative expression. You wanna quit?

EDDY

I didn't say that.

LAURA

(to Donna)

What about you?

EDDY

Laura, we're all frustrated. A year ago we had it, we caught lightning in a bottle. Repeating the trick has proven harder, and more expensive, than we thought.

LAURA

Can't you talk to your man? Our investor. Offer him a second buy in. Another ten percent, same terms.

EDDY

Do you negotiate for a living? No, of course -- you flush turds. You only sell stock when you have something to show. I couldn't give him another ten percent right now.

LAURA

(sulking)

Fine. Then we all put in. But I can only go to \$2,000 right now.

Eddy's phone rings and he checks the ID.

EDDY

I need to take this.

Eddy rises and steps away as he answers the call.

We stay with Donna and Laura for a moment.

LAURA

\$1,120.00.

DONNA

Sorry?

LAURA

Your put in. If Eddy and I commit another \$2,000. Pro-rata.

DONNA

Actually it's \$1,143.

LAURA

Well thank God we've got you.

We FOLLOW Eddy, walking away from the bar.

EDDY

(into phone)

Hey.

INTERCUT WITH:

24

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE EDDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

24

Jennifer is stood outside Eddy's apartment, a cell phone at her face.

JENNIFER

(into phone)

Why aren't you letting me in?

EDDY

I'm in Fresno. It's a work thing. I'll be back Sunday.

JENNIFER

I could keep your bed warm for you.

EDDY

Don't you have an assignment you should be doing?

JENNIFER

Gravity. The reason Einstein's thought experiment could never work. He didn't account for his own theory of relativity in the equations.

EDDY

I'll grade you when I return.

JENNIFER

Just imagine how insanely wet I'm gonna be by Sunday...

On Eddy -- he knows he should shut this down, but it's not in him. Every beat he hesitates is just kidding himself.

EDDY

The apartment directly opposite. There's a sweet old lady called Patricia who holds a key. I'll call ahead, tell her you're my daughter in town for a visit.

JENNIFER

Daughter?

EDDY

Yeah. Sounded pretty bad this end, too.

25 INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT 25

A long, empty, corridor in a corporate hotel. Everyone's traversed one at some point in their lives. Eddy, Laura, and Donna all arrive at DIFFERENT DOORS interspersed towards the horizon. Electronic keys trigger locks and green lights admit entry. The only one without a travel case is Donna.

DOORS close behind them.

26 INT. LAURA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT 26

Laura is sat up on the bed, a cell phone at her ear.

LAURA

(into phone)

Sorry, time got away from us. Are they sleeping?

INTERCUT WITH:

27 INT. MASTER BEDROOM. KALE HOUSE - NIGHT 27

Matt is sat up in bed, phone at his face, a tablet propped up on the pillow beside him. We cut back and forth as we desire.

MATT

It's midnight, of course they're sleeping.

LAURA

I miss you all.

MATT

Really?

Laura bites her tongue. Matt's clearly in a pissy mood and she doesn't want a fight.

MATT (CONT'D)

This can't go on. It's every night.

LAURA

That's not true.

MATT

You come home from work and you roll straight into that damn garage. We don't see you.

LAURA

(stubborn)

Fine. You want a solution? I'll quit the brown pipe. No wait, I can't do that, can I?

MATT

Maybe you can.

LAURA

Matt, we can't afford-

MATT

(interrupts)

I'm on a short list for the Imperial job. I found out last week, didn't know how to tell you. I haven't got it yet, but if I do...

LAURA

(sneering)

Imperial, California?

MATT

We could live off that wage. All of us.

She hates the idea. It represents the end of her ambitions. A south to her north.

LAURA

What the hell would I do in the desert?

MATT

Shit, Laura, I don't know. Off the top of my head -- maybe be a mother? A wife?

Beat. It's the same argument they've been having for months.

LAURA

This machine will change everything.

He exhales, frustrated. He doesn't believe in what she's doing at all.

MATT

Sure it will.
(dry)
Kids send kisses.

Matt hangs up the call.

Off Laura -- down for the count.

28 INT. DONNA'S HOTEL ROOM. BATHROOM - NIGHT 28

Donna is stood in front of the bathroom mirror, removing her top. She runs the faucet and scoops up some water, splashes it under her arms to wash. She inspects a big, fresh bruise on her ribs. Still tender. She took one hell of a beating before she fought back. Maybe the most shocking thing is that not all of these bruises are fresh. The abuse has been going on for a while.

Donna dries under her arms with a towel, gathers up a tube of complimentary toothpaste and squeezes a blob onto her tongue.

As she stares deeper and deeper into her own reflected eyes we--

FLASH TO:

29 INT. BEDROOM. DONNA'S HOUSE - DAY. A YEAR EARLIER 29

It's a memory so the color is a little washed out.

Donna and Forde are naked in bed together, post coital, close. He has a tablet in his hand, watching footage that Donna is showing off.

ON SCREEN -- with the machine in the background of a laboratory, Eddy holds an egg with a digital tape measure at the camera. The camera records the size: "147".

FORDE

What is this, a magic trick?

DONNA

The egg went in at 160 circumference, came out at 147. That's an eight and a half percent reduction. It retained structure. Do you know what that means?

FORDE

You can shrink eggs?

DONNA

We can shrink anything. Imagine the implications on transport, medicine, technology. You think your cell phone does cool shit now?

This is all over his head, but he picks up on her excitement.

FORDE

Bottom line -- is this going to make us money?

She doesn't register the "us" comment.

DONNA

Millions. Potentially. I mean once we scale up, get proper funding, explore the practical applications-

FORDE

What's your cut?

DONNA

Twenty percent.

FORDE

And them? The other two?

DONNA

Thirty five each. Ten for the investor.

FORDE

They get almost twice what you do?

DONNA

They own the patent. It was their idea, they dreamed it up together like ten years ago. He used to be her professor, or something.

FORDE

Yeah but it's your code that got it working. Right?

He's planted a seed in her. Suddenly she's thinking: "yeah, why am I earning less?"

But that thought doesn't sit for long because he kisses her, passionately, starts touching her up under the covers. He's ready for round two. For a young woman who spent her formative years immersed in books, this physicality is new and exciting for Donna. She'd put with anything... for a time.

In between the kisses he asks:

FORDE (CONT'D)

This machine. Could you stop it working?
Kinda... turn it on and off?

FLASH TO:

30 INT. DONNA'S HOTEL ROOM. BATHROOM - NIGHT 30

Back with Donna, at the mirror, looking into her own reflection.

All this time she's been sabotaging the machine for her own gain.

But now she's no longer under Forde's influence, will she keep it up?

Donna gargles the toothpaste, SPITS into the basin.

31 INT. STORAGE UNIT - NIGHT 31

Dark, silent. We PUSH slowly in on the prototype machine, sat on its wooden plinth in the center of the floor. Something ominous in the air, a life behind its eyes, just waiting for the spark.

32 EXT. AERIAL OVER LOS ANGELES - DAWN 32

The sun breaks over the city. Our focus becomes an apartment block on the West side of the sprawl.

33 INT. EDDY'S APARTMENT - DAY 33

Start in the BEDROOM, with a sleeping, naked Jennifer.

She WAKES to the SOUND of a door being forced open in the apartment.

Jennifer steps out into the LIVING AREA, covered by just a small white towel.

JENNIFER

(calling)

Eddy?

In Jennifer's POV, a MAN emerges from the entrance... it's Joe, the gentle giant student who reluctantly stole Eddy's car.

They kinda recognize one another, but it takes a moment to click that they go to the same college. She's not sure if she should be scared or not.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

JOE

Aren't you a fish?

JENNIFER

Sophomore.

JOE

Right. Guess that makes it OK then.

TWO MORE MEN enter the apartment, big and burly and in their 30s. They stand beside Joe like his henchmen, though in reality they are removal men.

REMOVAL MAN

This the place?

JOE

Take everything.

The Removal Men walk deeper into the apartment, as Joe looks back to Jennifer.

JOE (CONT'D)

(calling after them)

You can leave the towels.

(to Jennifer)

Where did the professor go?

Off Jennifer -- not sure if she should say.

34

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - DAY

34

Donna is sat at a table, checking her phone for messages. Eddy crosses from a buffet serving area, carrying a plate fully loaded with eggs, meats, and cheeses. He sits with Donna, sees that all she has on her plate is a half nibbled muffin.

EDDY

Is that all you want? They have everything back there. European shit. Jellied pork with an egg running through the middle of it.

DONNA
(apropos of nothing)
How long can someone live without water?

EDDY
Did Google just break?

DONNA
I'm low on data.

EDDY
They have hotel wifi.

DONNA
You might as well drop your credit cards on
the floor. If you don't know the answer,
just say you don't know.

EDDY
Human survival plays by the rule of threes.
Three minutes without oxygen, three days
without water, three weeks without food.
(an aside)
Three months without sex? That doesn't
sound right, does it?

Eddy's cell phone rings. He checks the ID: "Jennifer". He
BUMPS the call to IGNORE.

EDDY (CONT'D)
You still with that model-actor guy? The
mactor?

A reaction off Donna - "what does he know?"

EDDY (CONT'D)
Fred? Felix?

DONNA
Forde. We moved in together. Like, a year
ago.

EDDY
Wow. Guess I didn't bother to ask in a
while.

DONNA
Or you did ask and you forgot.

EDDY
I don't forget anything. Eidetic memory. So
did you absorb him or he absorb you?
(off her confused look)
Houses. Who moved, who remained?

DONNA
He moved into my place.

EDDY
Right.

She doesn't like the way he says it. Doesn't realize he's actually looking out for her.

EDDY (CONT'D)
I'm with someone now. Jennifer. She's 20. Can you believe that? I mean just saying the number...

DONNA
If I was your age and having sexual relations with a child, I don't think I'd run around crowing about it.

EDDY
I'm not crowing.
(oh, go on then)
Maybe a little bit.

Donna has no interest in his hedonistic woes, looks around the restaurant.

DONNA
Where's Laura? She was the one who insisted on an early start.

EDDY
Oh she texted me at 4.15 this morning. Said to meet us at the unit.

DONNA
And you thought I'd want to sit here watching you eat eggs all morning?

Donna rises sharply from the chair.

35

EXT. PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE - DAY

35

Eddy and Donna walking together across a pedestrian bridge that stretches high across the freeway.

EDDY
Rich or famous?

DONNA
What's that?

EDDY

When it worked. Did you think to yourself "this is going to make me rich" or "this is going to make me famous"? And be honest.

DONNA

Rich. Probably.

EDDY

Me too. See, we're the same. But Laura, Laura thought about the fame. The notoriety. I know she did. Because she's different from us.

DONNA

I guess you know her better than me.

EDDY

She's going to fire you.

Donna stops on the bridge.

DONNA

What?

EDDY

At the end of this weekend. The machine won't work, she'll agonize over going home and explaining it to the old man, so she'll fire you to deflect from the obvious conclusion that we're flogging a dead horse.

DONNA

I have shares.

EDDY

You should remind her of that when she has the talk. It's not personal. She'll tell you that, too.

DONNA

Why are you telling me this?

EDDY

Because when she does it, I'm going to make a big song and dance about how if you go, I go too.

DONNA

You'd do that for me?

EDDY

No. I'd be doing it for me. If I create a fight, we'll all say some things that we regret. We'll agree to take a break. Weeks and months will go by, I'll ignore her calls and that will be that. We go back to our lives and have weekends free.

DONNA

You're giving up?

EDDY

I want out. I'm bored.

DONNA

And you can't tell her that to her face?

EDDY

I need something that will pay out. To me, this plan feels like it would upset her the least.

Eddy's cell phone rings. He checks the ID: "Laura".

A beat before he answers it.

EDDY (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hey, Laura, we'll be there in two.

He hangs up the call.

DONNA

It worked.

EDDY

One time. 8.5%. A fluke. An anomaly. Bad data.

DONNA

It can work again.

EDDY

Not soon enough. Not for me. Sorry.

Eddy starts away.

Off Donna, the guilt associated with her deception.

Eddy and Donna walk into the storage unit, to find Laura sat on the floor, the prototype machine in pieces around her.

It gives us an opportunity to see the working parts inside this machine -- mostly it's circuit boards, capacitors, resistors, relays, transformers... Laura's in the process of rebuilding the parts and has clearly been working on it for hours already.

Laura notices them in the door.

LAURA

Morning. I wanted to check the lasers. I think I've spotted an aligning issue. You were right, Donna. It's hardware. My bad. But it's fixable.

Eddy crosses to the white board, starts to erase his old algorithms. For Laura's benefit he tries to muster enthusiasm, though we already know he has one foot out of the door.

EDDY

OK, campers. Let's try this again.

Donna settles at her desk, opens her laptop. The guilt of her deception and sabotage weighing heavily on her.

Seeing an opportunity for a private conversation with Donna, Laura rises from the floor and collects something from her handbag.

LAURA

Donna... I got you this.

She hands Donna the item from her bag. It's a stick of deodorant.

LAURA (CONT'D)

You didn't pack a case and... it's pretty tight in here. Not much air.

DONNA

Right. Thanks.

LAURA

And -- I'm sorry. You're doing a great job. We're lucky we got you. If I'm a bitch sometimes, it's usually because I'm hungry.

Laura smiles - genuinely - and heads back to the machine parts.

Off Donna's unbearable guilt--

FLASH TO:

37 INT. DONNA'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - DAY - A YEAR AGO

37

Another washed out memory.

Donna and Forde are sat side by side at the kitchen table, staring at Donna's laptop screen. In terms of a time line, this is a couple of days after Donna's previous flashback, when the plan has solidified. She's talking Forde through the changes she has implemented into the code.

DONNA

It's a trojan horse. All it does is bounce over a section of the code. If they review it - and they definitely will - everything looks normal on the surface.

FORDE

But you didn't delete anything?

DONNA

No babe, it's all still there. Just switched off.

Forde sits back in his chair. He sees a very profitable future ahead of them. Donna, on the other hand, already feels out of her depth.

FORDE

So now their's don't work, we build our own.

DONNA

Babe, that's not possible. They own the patent, we can't just copy it. We can't even make it different enough. The only way to get a bigger slice is to buy out their shares.

FORDE

Even better. Soon as they realize their piece of crap doesn't work anymore, they sell it to us cheap. We just sit back and wait it out.

Donna takes a moment, thinks clearly.

DONNA

Is this right?

Forde KICKS at a nearby empty chair, SKIDS it across the room. His temper bubbling momentarily to the surface.

FORDE

That right there. That's why people are always gonna undervalue you. And you're just gonna let it happen, aren't you?

He puts a loving hand to her face, caressing. He's got her. He's in control.

FORDE (CONT'D)

You need to listen to me on this. I'm gonna make you a better, stronger person.

He kisses her, smiles.

FORDE (CONT'D)

You're my little machine.

FLASH TO:

38 INT. STORAGE UNIT - DAY 38

Back with Donna, staring at the code on her screen. She's been carrying this secret for a year, and now Forde is out of the equation there's no one to talk her into the subterfuge any longer.

Donna checks that Laura and Eddy are not watching her, then drags a file from an open window and drops it into the TRASH. She's removed the trojan horse. The machine can now work.

39 EXT. STORAGE FACILITY. UNIT SECTION "D" - DAY 39

The BEEP BEEP BEEP of a reversing vehicle as a U Haul van backs through the storage facility, heading to another unit. At weekends these places are teeming with activity. Storage units are where memories and new adventures reside.

40 INT. STORAGE UNIT - DAY 40

The door is closed as Laura, Eddy, and Donna go about preparing for another test run.

Eddy switches on the camera, gathers up his stopwatch.

EDDY

Test run 100C. Saturday, fourth of May.
11:16 a.m. Present: us. Voltage: variable.
Code?

DONNA

214 dead.

Laura collects an egg from the carton, carries it to the machine and loads it into the hatch in the center of the hub. She powers up the machine and it emits a low HUM.

LAURA

Primed.

DONNA

Good my end.

LAURA

Let's run it for twelve seconds. 3, 2, 1, - go.

Donna hits the return key and the code starts to run.

Eddy clicks the stopwatch.

Laura dials up the ramp generator.

The seconds tick by. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8-

Our focus is on Donna. She knows that it's going to work this time, and she needs to act as surprised as everyone else.

9, 10, 11, 12-

EDDY

Done.

Donna hits the return key as Laura dials down the generator.

Eddy crosses to the machine, opens the hatch in the center of the hub.

On Donna -- watching Eddy, waiting for the celebration.

But nothing. Just frustration on his face.

EDDY (CONT'D)

You forgot to load it.

Eddy crosses back to the desk, gathers a fresh egg.

LAURA

What?

EDDY

You didn't put the egg in, Laura!

Laura thinks back. She's sure she did.

LAURA

I did.

(looks to Donna)

You saw me.

Donna crosses to the machine, crouches and looks inside the hatch. Eddy's right - it's empty. She reaches a hand into the compartment and feels around. Nothing. She doesn't understand it. She saw Laura load the egg.

Donna looks to the camera. She could rewind the footage and prove that the egg was loaded.

Eddy moves Donna aside, puts the fresh egg into the machine.

EDDY

Hormones playing up, Laura?

LAURA

I'm sorry. Let's just roll into 100D. Same code, same settings.

Donna crosses back to the desk, sits at her laptop.

With everything in place, Eddy sits on the stool and gathers up the stop watch.

EDDY

100D. Set?

LAURA

Set.

DONNA

Set.

EDDY

5, 4, 3, 2, 1-

Donna hits the return key. Eddy clicks the stopwatch. Laura dials up the ramp generator.

As the seconds pass, Eddy and Laura glare at one another. Eddy screws a finger to his forehead, calling Laura "mental". Laura flips him the bird. It's good humored enough.

After 12 seconds:

EDDY (CONT'D)

Done.

Laura powers down the machine as Donna halts the code.

On Donna -- watching Eddy open the hatch in the center of the hub. But again... no celebration is forthcoming. Eddy looks numb.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Can you both come have a look at this,
please?

Laura and Donna cross to Eddy at the machine. They crouch beside him and stare into the open hatch.

ANGLE ON the compartment. It's EMPTY. No egg.

A beat as they all try and compute what this means. They know it was loaded, no question this time.

LAURA

Eddy, where did the egg go?

The gears aren't even turning.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Eddy?!

The ferocity in her voice snaps Eddy back to attention.

EDDY

(numb)

I've got some weed in the van.

Eddy cranks open the door, steps out.

41 EXT. STOP-N-STOR PARKING LOT - DAY

41

Laura, Eddy, and Donna are all leaning against Eddy's hired van. Eddy takes a toke on a joint, passes it to Donna.

EDDY

Matter can't physically be removed from the universe. Unless we just created a black hole with a 120 volt ceiling light, which I very much doubt. So where did the egg go?

DONNA

Is this a trick question? Is it back inside the chicken?

EDDY

Maybe it was never there. I mean never just there.

LAURA

Should you guys be getting high right now?

But Eddy's on a roll, thinking fast.

EDDY

Probability tells us that the egg will be inside the machine. We open the hatch a trillion trillion trillion times and it will always be there. But the laws of physics tells us that one time it won't be. It's just that as human beings we could never live long enough to witness that result.

LAURA

So we got lucky?

EDDY

At those odds? No. Laura, you know this stuff. Unless you never paid attention in my class.

LAURA

I was twenty, give me a break.

EDDY

Just for a minute let's pretend that we created a quantum superposition. The machine didn't change or remove matter, it just altered the probability of it being there. So the egg is now as likely not there as it is there.

Head spinning stuff, and Laura and Donna won't even pretend to fully understand it. But for Eddy, this is his bread and butter. He couldn't be more excited right now.

EDDY (CONT'D)

That's actually not crazy...

Eddy starts to walk away across the parking lot, puffing on the joint.

LAURA

(calling)

Eddy...?

EDDY

I need to walk. I think clearer when I walk.

LAURA
(confused)
Should we follow him?

Donna's distracted by her own problems.

DONNA
Are we on a break?

LAURA
What?

DONNA
I got about an hour's sleep last night. If we're on a break then I'm going back to the hotel.

Donna walks away in the opposite direction.

We stay with Laura, watching them both walk away. She walks out of frame, in the direction of the storage unit. We HOLD on the side of Eddy's hire van, and the promise: "ANY DISTANCE, \$99".

42

INT. STORAGE UNIT - DAY

42

As Laura walks in through the open door of the storage unit, alone, she sees the BACK OF A MAN stood in the unit, staring down at the parts of the machine.

LAURA
Excuse me...? Hi.

The MAN turns to her. He's in his 60s, crumpled in the face. Maybe nothing more than a nosey neighbor on first impressions.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
(the machine)
What does it do?

Her antenna is up.

LAURA
Sorry - who are you?

He nods his head out of the open door, to a storage unit directly opposite.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
61D. Collecting crap since 1981. Saw your door open, thought you might have forgotten to lock up.

He throws a look around the rest of the unit. Obvious to him that they're not using this space for the purpose it was designed. He looks up at the cable connected to the overhead light unit.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

You know they've got strict rules about that...

LAURA

I won't tell them if you don't.

As his eyes rest on the white board filled with math equations, Laura consciously steps into his eye-line, blocking his view of the algorithms.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR

(starts out)

Well... I'll let you get back to it.

He TAPS his nose as he leaves.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

Secret's safe with me.

Laura watches as he crosses back to his own unit, directly opposite. She grabs the door handle and pulls the aluminum shutter down for privacy.

Laura crosses to the machine, looks inside the hatch -- still no egg.

43 INT. DONNA'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

43

Donna is asleep on top of the covers, fully dressed. She senses someone in the room and slowly blinks awake. As she regains focus she sees--

Forde. Stood beside the bed. Looking down at her. She tries to find a smile but before it forms, a FIST is coming her way.

FLASH CUT. Donna snaps awake. She's alone in the room, gasping for a breath. It was a nightmare.

44 INT. RESTAURANT AT HOTEL - DAY

44

Laura, Eddy, and Donna are all sat at a fine dining table. Napkins and everything. All of the tables around them are EMPTY. Yet still they whisper.

LAURA

OK. So while you two were off getting baked and sleeping, I did some thinking. We just made something disappear. Although that may not be the result we were looking for, it's still pretty fucking huge. No?

DONNA

Sure. We can sell out Vegas.

LAURA

Actually, smart ass, I was thinking about landfill. Do you have any idea how much trash is generated in this country? Do you even know where it goes?

EDDY

Laura, as much as the environment keeps us all awake at night, you need to shut up for three minutes and listen to me.

A WAITER delivers three plates of steak and fries to the table.

EDDY (CONT'D)

(to Waiter)

Thank you. And could I get some dijonnaise when you have a moment?

WAITER

Dijonnaise?

EDDY

It's a combination of mustard and mayonnaise. Creamy but with a kick.

WAITER

I'll ask the kitchen.

The Waiter heads away. Eddy sips his water, prepares to voice his big idea.

EDDY

What I'm about to say will not only change the course of our lives, but will also have dramatic repercussions on the very fabric of society as we know it.

(then)

Did that sound pretentious?

LAURA

I can't do this if you're stoned!

DONNA
(to Eddy)
Go on...

EDDY
We need to build a second machine.
Identical in every respect to the one we
already have.

Eddy pulls a crumpled slip of paper from his pocket, lays it
on the table.

EDDY (CONT'D)
I made a list of the components we need.
Stores close in an hour, that should give
you just enough time. I would have done it
myself, but as you've noticed I am far too
banjoed to safely operate a car. If we work
through the night and all pull together,
the second machine could be operational by
lunchtime tomorrow.

Eddy carves into his steak and starts eating.

Laura and Donna exchange a look.

LAURA
What's the second machine for?

EDDY
I didn't explain that bit?

LAURA
I think we would've remembered that detail.

A beat as Eddy chews and swallows.

EDDY
Einstein hated quantum physics, he couldn't
handle the uncertainty. He called the
behavior of entangled particles "spooky
action at a distance". But we're a century
on. Even my freshmen can tell you that sub
atomic particles can exist in more than one
place at a time. It's only when we observe
them that their position becomes fixed.

Eddy plunges his fork into Donna's steak, holds it aloft.

EDDY (CONT'D)
So when we observe that an object does not
exist here, in that moment we recognize
that it must exist elsewhere.

Eddy drops Donna's steak onto his own plate, carves into it.

EDDY (CONT'D)

If we want to get the egg back, we just need to create the other environment -- another quantum superposition.

LAURA

(catching on)

The second machine...

EDDY

And here's the opportunity: that other machine, it can be anywhere we want it to be. We can send the egg across the room, across the country, across the universe. Instantaneous. By quantum rules, distance is irrelevant.

A beat as Laura and Donna consider what he's actually saying. In the broadest terms he's just told them that they're on the verge of manufacturing a teleportation device.

DONNA

Could we send the chicken instead?

Eddy considers it.

EDDY

If we could bring it back from absolute zero... yeah. In theory.

Laura gathers up Eddy's hand written list of parts. No time to waste.

LAURA

(rising)

I'll bring the car round front.

DONNA

I'm coming with you.

Laura and Donna hurry out of the restaurant together, leaving Eddy hungrily eating his steak.

The Waiter returns to the table with a small pot of home-made dijonnaise.

WAITER

Dijon mustard and mayonnaise. Combined.

EDDY
(touched)
You did all that just for me?

45 INT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY 45

FAST CUT IMAGES of Laura and Donna searching the shelves of a hardware store, JUMP CUTTING from aisle to aisle as they procure items from the list Eddy wrote up. Generators, wires, copper plates, mounting boards, circuit boards, hinges. All the composite parts of the original prototype machine piling up in a shopping trolley.

At the CASH REGISTER, as the final items get rung up, the till displays the final total: "\$1,226.88".

Laura hesitates with her credit card in hand. She knows she can't have this purchase showing up on her statements.

Seeing the hesitation, Donna steps in front of Laura and hands her own card to the SALES ASSISTANT.

DONNA
I've got this.

46 EXT. STORAGE FACILITY. UNIT SECTION "D" - NIGHT 46

Music over.

Night has fallen on the Stop-N-Stor facility. A SECURITY GUARD is doing his rounds, shining his torch and ensuring that the units are all secure.

As he passes the closed door on the unit labelled 82D--

47 INT. STORAGE UNIT - NIGHT 47

Laura, Eddy, and Donna are all sat on the concrete floor, surrounded by the parts, sharing the tools out of Laura's tool box as they build the second prototype machine. Laura's soldering a circuit board as Eddy and Donna help one another to construct the housing unit.

TIME LAPSE as we witness the second machine gradually taking form--

INTERCUT WITH:

48 EXT. AERIAL OVER FRESNO - NIGHT TO DAY 48

The STARS shift and roll through the night sky.

Traffic STREAKS down the freeway.

Dawn breaks.

The Sun climbs to its highest point.

49 EXT. OUTSIDE STORAGE UNIT - DAY 49

On a shot of the closed blue aluminum door... It ROLLS UPWARD, revealing Eddy, Donna, and Laura in the unit. Exhausted from a busy, sleepless night.

They stand and stare at the result of their labor: TWO MACHINES, identical, side by side.

We move INSIDE the unit.

LAURA

We should name them. For clarity in the log.

EDDY

(points to one machine)

Bert.

(points to the other)

Niels.

(explaining)

Einstein and Bohr. Friends but rivals.

Donna and Laura consider the names.

DONNA

I'm good with that. I mean, if it's a vote.

LAURA

So... shall we try this?

Donna crosses to 'Niels', gathers up the electrical cord hanging out of it. She starts to carry the cord towards the outlet, snaking down from the light fitting.

DONNA

Er... guys? How much voltage is this going to need?

Off Laura, a solution forming.

50 EXT. OUTSIDE STORAGE UNIT - DAY

50

Laura steps out of the storage unit, carrying a crow bar from her toolkit. She crosses towards the opposite unit belonging to the Nosey Neighbor. She looks up and down the parallel lines of storage units. No one is watching her. So she digs the crowbar under the unit door and begins to PRIZE it open.

Eddy steps out of 82D, carrying the step ladder. Donna follows with some cables.

As they cross to Laura, she is yanking the unit door open - breaking in.

Eddy, Laura, and Donna walk into the unit and start shifting boxes to clear a path. Eddy sets up the step ladder under the ceiling light. He climbs up, starts to dismantle the light guard to access the power.

TIME CUT -- five minutes later.

Eddy and Laura carry the second machine, 'Niels', out of their unit and shuffle across to the opposite unit.

51 INT. STORAGE UNIT - DAY

51

The unit doors are open, giving a view of both machines across the divide. No cables connect them.

We're with 'Bert' as Laura switches it ON. She looks to the opposite unit, where Eddy is stood with 'Niels'. She gives him a signal and he powers it up, connects the second dewar tank of LHe, then heads back across the divide to join them.

There's a breathlessness. An expectation. An appreciation of what they're actually attempting.

LAURA

Both machines primed.

Eddy switches on the camera, takes it off the tripod.

EDDY

Prototype test run...

(considers)

Should we be starting over?

LAURA

1A.

EDDY

Sunday, May 5th. 5:16 pm.

DONNA
Code version DN01.

EDDY
Voltage: variable.

Donna picks up an egg from a carton on the desk, tosses it to Laura, who catches it.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Test subject: a chicken egg.

Laura loads the egg into the hatch.

LAURA
Set?

Donna's finger hovers over the RETURN KEY.

DONNA
Set.

Eddy gathers up the stopwatch.

EDDY
Set.

Laura takes a breath. Appreciating the gravity of what they're about to attempt.

ALL EYES as--

EDDY (CONT'D)
5, 4, 3, 2, 1-

Donna hits the return key and CODE scrolls across the screen.

Eddy clicks the stopwatch.

Laura dials up the voltage on the ramp generator.

The HUMMING increases as the seconds pass.

3, 4, 5, 6--

They wait. Throwing looks between Bert and Niels in opposite units. Time seems to be slowing down.

7... 8... 9... 10--

Donna's finger hovers over the return key.

Laura increases the ramp generator to full voltage.

Eddy's eyes watch the seconds tick by.

11... 12.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Done.

Donna hits the return key. Laura dials down the voltage.

As the HUMMING decreases, they ALL rise from their positions and stand in front of 'Bert'.

Laura opens the hatch in the center hub, stares inside.

Laura's POV -- staring inside the machine, at the empty compartment. The egg has gone. She reaches in a hand, feels inside. Nothing.

They ALL turn towards 'Niels', across the divide, in the opposite unit. If the egg's in there, their lives will never be the same again.

52 EXT. OUTSIDE STORAGE UNIT - DAY

52

Laura, Eddy, and Donna walk slowly across the divide, towards 'Niels' in the Nosey Neighbor's unit.

We FOLLOW them inside. PUSH IN.

Tension builds as Laura crouches at the hatch. She throws a small look to Eddy and Donna, as if asking permission to proceed. They give her small, encouraging nods.

Laura reaches out. CLOSE on her fingers as she grips the bolt and slides it open.

IN PROFILE -- Laura opens the hatch in the center of the hub. Looks inside. Nothing on her face gives away the result of the test run.

SMASH CUT TO:

53 INT. EDDY'S HIRE VAN (MOVING) - NIGHT

53

Start in the rear hold of the van, where 'Niels' is strapped to the floor, rocking and shaking from the van's movement.

MOVE into the front cab of the van, where Eddy is in the driver's seat, gunning Southbound down the 5, radio blasting. He stares intensely at the HEADLIGHTS coming towards him, conscious of how precious his cargo is.

54 EXT. DRIVEWAY - KALE HOUSE - NIGHT 54

The reversing lights of Laura's SUV advance towards us as Laura backs the car up to the open garage doors.

55 INT. GARAGE - KALE HOUSE - NIGHT 55

Laura arranges the wooden plinth on the concrete floor, crosses back to the open trunk to collect 'Bert'.

She starts to pull it out of the trunk, with no help. It's heavy. She struggles. Stumbles for a moment but just manages to keep her footing. As she rests it on the floor of the garage it lands with a slightly heavy CLUNK. She checks the housing unit. It's OK. Nothing broken.

56 INT. MASTER BEDROOM - KALE HOUSE - NIGHT 56

Laura stands in the door frame for a moment, looking in at Matt and the 7 year old Leanne, side by side in the bed, asleep. Just a warm bedside lamp lighting them.

She steps fully into the room, crosses to Matt. She reaches a hand to his shoulder, to gently wake him, to tell him her big news. But just before she makes contact... she STOPS HERSELF.

Does she really need him to know right now? Would he just kill her excitement? Remind her of her other responsibilities? Maybe this can wait until the morning...

Leanne opens her eyes, sees her mommy at the bed.

LEANNE
(whispering)
Mommy... did it work?

INTERCUT WITH:

57 INT. STORAGE UNIT - DAY - EARLIER 57

CLOSE on Laura, crouched at 'Niels'. She reaches a hand into the center hub - exactly where we left her at the vital moment.

She pulls out--

The EGG. Whole. Perfect.

BACK IN THE BEDROOM --

Laura looking at her daughter. She raises a "thumbs up" in answer to the question.

Leanne smiles, happy for her mommy.

Laura pushes a "hush" finger to her lips. Either she doesn't want to wake Matt, or she doesn't want him to know. She switches out the bedside lamp, and exits.

58 INT. DOWNSTAIRS - DONNA'S HOUSE, OAKLAND - NIGHT 58

CLOSE on the front door, from within, as it creeps slowly, silently open. Donna's face peers through the gap. All is quiet and peaceful inside, so she pushes the door fully open and takes a step inside. She sees that Forde's cell phone is still on the hallway floor, where she left it. As she looks up:

REVERSE into Donna's POV -- looking down the length of the entrance hall, at the wooden cabinet still barricading the door to the under-stairs closet. Undisturbed from how she left it two days ago. Forde, the abusive boyfriend, must still be in there. Like Schrödinger's cat, both dead and alive until she opens that door...

59 EXT. OUTSIDE EDDY'S APARTMENT BUILDING, LA - NIGHT 59

Establishing, with LA's artificial stars lighting up the night sky. The "ANY DISTANCE, \$99" hire van is parked at the entrance to the building, the rear doors wide open -- but no sign of Eddy.

60 INT. EDDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 60

Dark. The front door CRASHES open and Eddy staggers inside, half carrying and half dragging 'Niels'. He wrestles the machine deeper into the apartment, settles it on the floor of the LIVING AREA. He grabs the electrical cord hanging out of the back of the housing unit, SCAMPERS to a skirting outlet and plugs it in.

Eddy takes a moment to recover, sits against the wall, breathless.

CLOSE on Eddy's face as his eyes adjust to the darkness, and he notices something PECULIAR about the apartment.

EDDY
(calling)
Lights.

The LIGHTS gently swell, operated by voice command. As they illuminate his surroundings Eddy realizes that the apartment is COMPLETELY EMPTY. Every piece of furniture, every lamp, every hanging picture, every book in the bookcase - gone.

EDDY (CONT'D)
(calling)
Jennifer...?

Eddy rises, crosses cautiously to the BEDROOM DOOR. He pushes it open, stares inside--

EMPTY. Not only no Jennifer, but no bed or linen. Every single item has been cleared out. Maybe just a hanger in the closet remains.

Eddy TURNS away from the bedroom door, faces the KITCHEN AREA. He sees--

Joe, his student. Take-out cartons on the counter beside him. He's patiently waited Eddy's return. He can't go back to his father until he does what he's been told to do -- which, as we'll learn, amounts to proving himself in daddy's eyes.

Joe rises from the stool, grows another couple of feet before Eddy's eyes.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Joe... your dad's going to get his money.
And so much more.

Although this time it's true, that's the line Eddy's been giving for the last year.

JOE
I'm sorry, professor. Better it's me than someone else.

Off Eddy, knowing what this means -- PAIN.

We should NEEDLE DROP just about here, for the closing moments.

61 INT. GARAGE - KALE HOUSE - NIGHT

61

The garage door is open, giving us a view over the sleeping suburban neighborhood. Through the orange haze of street lights, STARS IN THE SKY. A magnificent, infinite universe out there.

In the GARAGE, Laura has wired up "Bert", ready for another test run. She thinks Eddy is waiting to receive in LA.

She reaches for a box of eggs at her side but withdraws her hand when she sees a SPIDER crawling over the box. She watches it for a few seconds, intrigued. It's just a common house spider, nothing dangerous about it.

Laura follows the spider across the garage floor. She cups her hand on the concrete and the spider crawls into her palm. Laura quickly cups her other palm on top and captures the spider in her hands.

INTERCUT WITH:

62 INT. DOWNSTAIRS - DONNA'S HOUSE - NIGHT 62

Donna is stood staring at the barricaded under-stairs closet. She knows she can't avoid this forever. Eventually she has to face what is behind that door.

In her hand we notice--

A KITCHEN KNIFE, five inches long. She clutches it with white knuckles.

Donna moves to the wooden drinks cabinet, gets her shoulder to the join and begins to slide it across the floor.

ADD TO INTERCUT:

63 INT. EDDY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 63

We are now intercutting between our three principal worlds. With the music carrying us.

Eddy is taking a physical beating from Joe. He's FLUNG into walls; fists connecting with facial bones. He doesn't even try to fight back against this giant of a man. No point.

WITH LAURA -- alone in her garage, surrounded by the boxes and broken gizmos that define the last decade of her married life. With her cupped hands she crosses to "Bert", opens the hatch, tips the spider inside. She's going to send it to Eddy.

WITH DONNA -- the wooden cabinet now clear, she gets her hand on the bolt. Hesitates. Takes a breath. Clenches the knife handle tighter, slides the bolt OPEN.

WITH EDDY -- taking a never-ending beating from Joe. His face a bloody mess.

WITH LAURA -- sat at the work top, she hits RETURN on her laptop and CODE frantically scrolls across the screen. She picks up a stopwatch, presses GO.

Seconds tick by.

WITH DONNA -- fearful, she grabs the handle to the under-stairs closet and slowly pulls the door open. ANGLE ON HER POV, and we see--

Just a VACUUM CLEANER. No sign of Forde.

Donna looks back down the entrance hall to the front door. He couldn't have escaped. Impossible. In her head she tells herself: "he disappeared, just like the egg." And it's a brief, happy thought. A solution to all her problems.

WITH LAURA -- she opens the hatch on "Bert". Clicks on a flashlight, SHINES it into the hatch.

It's EMPTY. No spider.

WITH EDDY -- the beating over, he lays CRUMPLED and semi conscious on the wooden apartment floor. Joe stands over him, pulling Eddy's clothes off. Literally taking the shirt off his back, stuffing them into a trash bag.

ANGLE ON -- 'Niels', as Joe grabs one end of the machine, LIFTS it and begins to drag it ungracefully out of the apartment. The hatch in the center of the hub FLOPS OPEN, but we're not close enough to see if anything crawls out.

CLOSE on the electrical cord as it stretches, and then POPS out of the outlet, snaking away out of the apartment.

REST on Eddy -- laying beaten, bloody, and naked on the apartment floor.

CLOSER on his face, and we see a SPIDER crawling over his skin. Impossible to know if it's the same spider that Laura sent...

CUT TO BLACK:

Silence.

Then that loud mechanical THRUM from our opening scenes invades the quiet, filling us with dread.

FADE IN:

64 INT. A CONCRETE ROOM - DAY - 6 MONTHS LATER

64

Back with Laura, sat at the desk, exactly where we left her in the opening sequence. Broken, corrupted, and beaten.

The machine still THRUMS in the room.

ANGLE ON THE LAPTOP SCREEN -- in one WINDOW, the CODE halts. The machine begins to power down, the NOISE abating. Laura looks to the other WINDOW, but a message reads: "CONNECTION LOST". Eddy is no longer in contact.

Laura turns to the machine, rises, hurries to the hatch. She waits until the noise has fully died and the machine has powered all the way down.

She grabs the bolt, unlocks it. Pulls open the hatch to reveal--

NOTHING. The compartment is EMPTY.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF PILOT