

3 NIGHTS IN DECEMBER

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE: WEDNESDAY

FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - BROOKLYN - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

Descending on the vast cityscape of sparkling lights to --
One specific condominium building nestled there.

EXT. MAPLE STREET CONDOMINIUMS - COURTYARD - NIGHT

A calm and quiet space draped in old, lingering snow.
Benches. Bare trees and shrubs. Amber-lit street lamps.
A view up at the looming thirteen story building, dotted with
warm lights -- a good number of people are home.

INT. MAPLE STREET CONDOMINIUMS - UNIT 1242 - OFFICE - NIGHT

A darkened condo with a near luxury interior. Well kept.
Clean lines. A distinct lack of human touch. Except for --
A happy couple, photographed cheek-to-cheek at the Grand
Canyon, in a novelty PICTURE FRAME.

CLOSE ON FRAME - "Merrill ♥ Kaia!"

A PRINTER atop a cherry side desk blinks to life, WHIRS.
B.g. window view is resplendent: countless dazzling lights.
A PAGE slips from the device, rests in the paper tray.
What was just printed on it? What's it say?

INT. SEDAN - NIGHT

MERRILL BOYD (early 30s), the type of social introvert who
would have nothing and no one were it not for his marriage.
Glasses. Unkempt hair. Clean and casual, if a bit oafish,
he's nothing special but nothing to run from either.

Driving while on a hands-free call.

KAIA BOYD (late 20s), a present-day Stepford Wife eternally focused on what's best for Merrill, speaks on the other end.

KAIA (V.O.)
(on phone)
The package arrived today.

MERRILL
I know. I got the alert.

He touches the BOUQUET OF ROSES on the passenger seat.

MERRILL
Tonight's gonna be a special night,
isn't it?

KAIA (V.O.)
Yes. Very special. You won't be the
same.

MERRILL
(smiling broadly)
Is that right?

KAIA (V.O.)
(sensuously)
Mm-hmmm...
(then)
Seriously though, be careful out
there, it's just starting to sleet.

MERRILL
(turns on wipers)
Indeed. But I'll be home soon, so --

Merrill's phone BEEPS.

MERRILL
Oops. Gotta go. My battery's dying.

KAIA (V.O.)
Don't forget to charge it when you
get in. I'll be in the shower.
Can't wait to see you.

MERRILL
You too. Love you.

KAIA (V.O.)
Love you, bye.

BEEP! The call ends.

Merrill continues through the frigid, watery night.

INT. MERRILL & KAIA'S CONDO - UNIT 1242 - NIGHT

Kaia prepares the home for Merrill's arrival and gets ready.

--Living room lights switched on. Low and warm. Reveals clean and upscale but comfortable furnishings, minimalist decor

--Soft JAZZ MUSIC fills the space

--Office lights illuminate the Merrill ♥ Kaia novelty frame

--Stew simmers in a slow cooker on the kitchen counter

--The bathroom shower head sprays water

--From outside, Kaia's comely silhouette appears in the frosted shower door glass as she washes

MAILROOM

Merrill enters from the subterranean parking garage as --

Neighbors LAWSON PIERCE (mid-30s), a brash, high-stress day trader and his mismatched girlfriend, compassionate registered nurse BELLA KINCAID (late 20s) board the elevator.

LAWSON
(flat)
Nice flowers.

MERRILL
Thanks.
(turns away, keys mailbox)
Oh, and please hold the --

The door slides closed.

MERRILL
-- elevator?

Lawson and Bella head up in the --

ELEVATOR

CLOSE ON - Lawson's thumb, holding the DOOR CLOSE button

Lawson goes back into his phone.

LAWSON
 (under his breath)
 Loser.
 (perceives Bella's stare)
 What?

BELLA
 Do you have to be an asshole 24-7?

LAWSON
 (scrolling phone)
 Whatever. I'm low-key over that
 guy.

BELLA
 What did he ever do to you?

LAWSON
 I said "what's up" to him like
 three times when he moved in and he
 barely looked at me.

BELLA
 That doesn't mean you have to --

LAWSON
 (clearly scrolling social
 media)
 Shut up a second, wouldja? I gotta
 prep my watchlist for tomorrow.

Bella SIGHS. Gazes up at the rising numbers.

MERRILL & KAIA'S - 1242

Merrill struggles to move a large, waist-high CARDBOARD BOX into the unit while juggling the rose bouquet and mail.

MERRILL
 (calls out)
 I made it!

KAIA (O.S.)
 Hey! Can you set the table?

Merrill leans against the counter. Sifts through mail.

Able to see partway into the master bedroom, he notices --

Kaia. In the bedroom full-length mirror. Wrapped in a towel. Wet hair in a bun.

MERRILL
 (distant)
 Sure...

Suddenly, the mail no longer matters.

MERRILL
 You look beautiful.

KAIA
 I'm not even dressed, silly!

MERRILL
 Exactly.

She can see Merrill from her angle as well. Catches him.

Kaia rolls her eyes so hard her head goes back.

She turns from the mirror, presumably headed for the closet.

KAIA (O.S.)
 Is the table set?

MERRILL
 (distant, enamored)
 Almost...

CELESTE'S CONDO - UNIT 180

Cam girl and provider of adult entertainment CELESTE MALLORY (mid-20s) applies oxblood lipstick in the mirror.

A cold, sculpted, naturally expressionless face that's forgotten how to host emotion, particularly weakness.

Underbust leather corset. Black garter belt clipped to sheer thigh-high stockings in high-heeled boots. A thin O-ring choker encircling her neck. Elbow-length leather gloves.

She looks tired. Bored. Unhappy. Her home, at least her bedroom, bears none of the light and comfort of Merrill's.

It's dark. Almost foreboding. Red mesh cloth over the lampshade. A few toys and a laptop on an unmade bed.

She mounts her phone onto a tall tripod at the footboard.

Evidently, Celeste works from home. She starts the feed.

Lies on the bed, half-propped up on black pillows --

A thin, sheer wrap around her shoulders.

CELESTE
 (hair flip, fake smile)
 I'm back. Thanks for waiting...

She taps a key on her laptop. Discordant POP MUSIC plays.
 Her attention lingers on the computer. Her fake smile fades.

ON SCREEN - CHAT COMMENTS SCROLL

"U lonely gurl? Ima come over show what a real man like"

"She ain't never been wit no real man"

"wicked witch lez vibes, y'all"

"id hit it"

"skank"

CELESTE
 (at tripod)
 You losers know I can see these,
 right?

Slamming the laptop closed cuts the MUSIC OFF.

She strips the sheer wrap away.

Gets out of bed BLINKING BACK TEARS.

MERRILL & KAIA'S - 1242 - DINING ROOM

Merrill lights tall dining table candles.

Arranges roses in a vase for the centerpiece.

KITCHEN

He ladles hot stew into two bowls on the counter.

MERRILL
 (calls out)
 I brought it in, by the way! I
 can't believe it's finally here!

KAIA (O.S.)
It?

MERRILL
 It -- the package, I mean.

He glances toward the master bedroom as Kaia enters the mirror's reflection once more.

Now she's wearing a gorgeous, slim-fitting red dress. Her dark hair down in long, curling locks.

Seems a little formal for a weeknight dinner at home...

MERRILL

Wow.

KAIA

Are you staring at me again, mister?

MERRILL

I wasn't staring.

KAIA

(applying red lipstick)
No? What do you call it then?

MERRILL

Intense adulation. Not the same thing at all.

KAIA

(looks to him)
Yeah, it's definitely worse. You're lucky I love you so much.

Indeed. She's clearly wayyy out of his league.

BELLA AND LAWSON'S CONDO - UNIT 970 - LIVING ROOM

Their home is a few degrees nicer and more luxurious than Merrill's. Lawson lounges on the couch with his phone.

A stately GRAND PIANO autoplays CLASSICAL MUSIC behind him.

Bella enters.

BELLA

Dinner's ready.

LAWSON

Working. Shutup.

BELLA

It'll get cold.

LAWSON

I'll nuke it.

BELLA

Guess I'll have dinner by myself then.

LAWSON

(still scrolling)

Babe. Tomorrow's a huge day. Huge. I'm still prepping my watchlist so we don't have to keep living in this shithole. Now, do you mind?

Bella audibly SIGHS again. Returns to the kitchen.

NOLAN'S CONDO - UNIT 521

Wearing only an open bathrobe, power plant engineer and avid Internet user NOLAN WARD (early 30s) sits at his computer desk, glued to his screen.

Who is this? And what is he looking at?

MERRILL & KAIA'S - 1242 - DINING ROOM

Merrill pours two glasses of red wine from a decanter.

MERRILL

(calls out)

Y'know, if you want, after dinner we could open up --

BOOM! BLACKOUT! Every powered device, appliance, and light source except the dinner candles shuts OFF with a THUNK!

MERRILL

-- the box...

ELEVATOR

Cables wobble in the shaft above the abruptly stopped car.

QUICK FLASHES - BLACKOUT

--Nolan Ward. Seated exactly as before but cloaked in darkness before his desktop computer

--Celeste Mallory. At the mirror wiping off smeared makeup. Flickering candlelight replaces her extinguished mirror light and the red mesh lamp

--Two EXTERMINATORS in coveralls with filter masks around their necks leave the now dark lobby carrying equipment bags

--Lawson. Unfazed. Scrolls his phone beside the silent piano when Bella enters

BELLA
The power's out.

LAWSON
No shit.

BACK TO MERRILL'S

Merrill. Frozen in place. Worry replaces the joy on his face.

MERRILL
Kaia?

He breaks through the fear. Abruptly dashes for the --

OFFICE

Merrill whips open his laptop.

CLOSE ON - bottom corner of the screen: "no connection"

He slams it shut. Straightens up. Panicked. Chest heaving.

He looks every which way. Threads his fingers into his hair.

Then breaks for the --

DINING ROOM

He grabs one of the burning candles. Then goes to the --

BEDROOM

The full-length mirror GLITCHES from a POWER SURGE just after he passes it -- leaving its surface gray. Non-reflective.

That's no ordinary mirror.

Despite the low light, there's clearly no one here.

MERRILL
KAIA!

BATHROOM

Merrill goes straight to the mirror.

Wipes the steam away but only sees his own reflection.

What the -- ?

He quickly surrenders. Leaves the bathroom defeated.

Bathroom MIRROR GLITCH -- just like the bedroom's.

Glass SHOWER DOOR GLITCH briefly shows Kaia's silhouette.

Wait. Does this mean she isn't -- ?

BEDROOM

Merrill goes to the window. Hauls the drapes open.

MERRILL

Oh, no...

The area-wide blackout has swallowed the city whole. Only a smattering of battery-powered emergency lights and skyscraper beacons pierce the utter dark.

Merrill suddenly straightens up. Runs back to the --

FOYER

Where he left the box, his keys, his cell --

He grabs the phone, unlocks it.

CLOSE ON PHONE - flashing low battery warning

Damn. He did forget to charge it.

CLOSE ON PHONE - he selects an icon labeled: 'KAIA'

Holds the phone to his ear.

KAIA (V.O.)

Hello?

MERRILL

Oh, thank god -- Kaia.

(catches breath)

For a moment there, I thought I'd lost you.

KAIA (V.O.)

I'm safe, I'm -- just not there right now.

Wait. Does this mean 'Kaia' is an Artificial Intelligence?

MERRILL

What are we going to do?

KAIA (V.O.)

We just have to wait it out. This sort of thing is just -- temporary, right?

MERRILL

Yeah. Yes, of course. It's just temporary. I'm sure the power will come back on any minute. But -- maybe we should brainstorm some backup ideas, y'know? For a second there, I --

(chokes up)

Like, when the power shut off -- it sounds stupid but -- I felt my heart stop beating. I thought I'd lost everything we built together. You were gone and I was alone -- just like before -- and I was about to go through that pain and misery and hell all over again.

(fights breaking down)

So let's come up with some ideas to make sure we never get separated again, O-K? And I think we should start by keeping more backup batteries charged...

Merrill stops at those last two words. Looks at his phone.

His DISTRAUGHT FACE, crestfallen in the BLACK SCREEN.

How long has he been talking to himself?

8TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Lit only by battery-powered emergency lights at each end.

Middle-aged anti-establishment environmentalist DEAN FINCH (late 40s) leaves his condo. Notices his NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR (70s) trying to access his unit.

FINCH

Reader's dead, boss. Storm knocked the power out. You won't be able to -- oh, fuck!

He stops himself. Turns back to his own door -- now closed behind him. He shakes the handle. Futile.

FINCH

Dammit! See? This is exactly why we shouldn't have shit like this!

Reliable building maintenance worker BYRON "HUTCH" HUTCHINSON (early 40s), an NFL linebacker just a decade ago, calls out to them while propping the stairwell door open.

HUTCH

Take it easy -- I'll letcha in.

He approaches, taking out a manual override key.

Unlocks the neighbor's door, then Finch's.

HUTCH

But if y'all wanna go out again before the power comes back up, yer gonna hafta prop yer door open cuz I ain't goin' up and down them damn stairs on these knees, got it?

FINCH

Yes, sir.
(going back inside)
And thanks.

HUTCH

Yeah, yeah. Come on up to the roof later. We got beers, lights, and music goin.

FINCH

It's not freezing-ass cold up there?

HUTCH

There's a big canopy and propane space heaters. Spread the word. I want people to have somewhere to go so they don't try and drive.

FINCH

It got bad?

HUTCH

There's an inch of ice on everything, the freeways are slammed, and there's no power in the tri-state area. At least.

So whether folks like it or not,
they got nowhere else to go.

BELLA AND LAWSON'S - 970 - LIVING ROOM

Still in her work scrubs, Bella rejoins Lawson -- light from her battery-operated camp lantern filling the space.

BELLA

Hey, do you think Mr. Hamilton is O-K? I'm gonna go --

LAWSON

(to self)

What the -- why isn't this fuckin thing refreshing?

BELLA

What's wrong?

CLOSE ON PHONE - Warning: Open Position Risk Alert

LAWSON

(stands up fast)

Holy SHIT! No Wi-Fi and I barely have -- no, no, no, no, no... not tonight -- motherFUCKER!

BELLA

Babe...?

LAWSON

I'm LOCKED OUT, BELLA! Don't you know what that means? It means I'm completely overextended and if I'm not online when the fuckin market opens tomorrow, I'm gonna watch hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars go right down the FUCKING DRAIN!

BELLA

O-K, let's maybe try to calm down a little...

LAWSON

(pacing about)

Calm DOWN? Are you SHITTING ME?

BELLA

Look, the last time this happened, it was off for like, twenty minutes.

LAWSON
(brandishes phone)
You don't understand. My entire
fucking life is in this thing and
I'm seconds from throwing it
through the goddamned window.

BELLA
Well I wish you would! And maybe
it'll give you a chance to cool off
before I get back.

LAWSON
Where the fuck are you going?

BELLA
To Mr. Hamilton's. Exactly where I
said I was going while your head
was shoved up your phone.

She grabs her keys on the way out, but --
Immediately realizes she's locked out and --
Knocks until Lawson answers.

LAWSON
God DAMMIT! Now what, Bell?

BELLA
I'M LOCKED OUT, LAWSON!
(quietly)
Because the locks are turned off.

She flips the U-shaped swing bar out so the door falls closed
on it instead of locking shut again.

9TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Bella presses the down button for the elevator before
connecting its lack of response to the power outage.

She HUFFS her stupidity away, then enters the --

STAIRWELL

Goes down three flights to the --

6TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

And stops at Unit 603. She loudly bangs on the door with a carabiner clipped to her keyring.

BELLA
Mr. Hamilton? MR. HAMILTON! It's
Nurse Bella. Are you O-K in there?

She hammers the door a few more times.

BELLA
Do you need any assistance, Mr.
Hamilton?

Just then, college senior ZEKE PORTER (early 20s) -- beanie over long hair -- blasts down the hallway. A case of beer tucked under his arm like he's running for the end zone.

ZEKE
Outta the way! Blackout PARRRTYYYY!

He sees Bella turn just before reaching the stairwell.

BELLA
There's a blackout party?

ZEKE
Hells yeah! Up on the rooftop, it's
going OFF! They got lights. They
got music. And best of all? A
shitload of booze! WOOO!

BELLA
(laughs)
O-K...

Zeke disappears into the stairwell. And can be heard bounding up six flights to reach the --

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Zeke EXPLODES through the maintenance door.

ZEKE
(doubles over)
PARRR-TAHHH...!

He hacks and coughs, his chest hitching.

ZEKE
Gotta -- stop -- smoking -- so much
damn weed!

Finch lowers a lit joint down to him.

FINCH
But not today...

Zeke takes the joint. Straightens up. Relishes in a hit as --
A FEMALE RESIDENT (40s) puts a cold beer bottle in his hand.

RESIDENT 1
Are you all right?

ZEKE
Just went -- all the way -- down
and back up -- more people now.

Indeed. Around thirty RESIDENTS already mingle throughout garden boxes and near PIGEON COOPS under a large CANOPY covering half of the rooftop, a new community forming.

ZEKE
I got -- friends coming too -- this
shit's gonna be fire!

On the other half, a SMALL GENERATOR wobbles beside --

A Bluetooth speaker plugged into it cranking upbeat POP MUSIC just over its chugging motor. It also powers --

Overhead strands of bare lightbulbs casting a warm, welcoming glow despite the occasional blast of freezing rain.

Tall patio heaters drive back the chill.

Everyone's having an excellent time. From high above, the rooftop resembles a small life raft riding a black sea.

INT. 12TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Out-of-shape Hutch enters the hallway.

HUTCH
(exasperated)
Twelve! Finally, for goodness
sakes.

He approaches the nearest door with a long flashlight.

MERRILL & KAIA'S - 1242 - KITCHEN

Merrill. In candlelight at the counter. Downs a full wineglass, places it beside Kaia's now empty one.

He tries several dead power banks on his phone.

Gives up.

MERRILL

The car it is.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

Merrill looks to the front door. Answers it.

HUTCH

Hi there, Mr. --

(references old printout)

-- Boyd. You doing O-K?

He doesn't look O-K.

MERRILL

Um, yeah. I -- we're fine. Do you know what caused the outage?

HUTCH

The storm, no doubt. But the good news is, we got a little shindig goin on up the rooftop gardens -- plenty of cold beverages, even got the generator I use for the pigeon incubator runnin lights and music.

MERRILL

Power, eh?

HUTCH

Just make sure you prop your door open if you wanna get back in later. The readers are out and I only got the one key.

MERRILL

(aloof)

Thanks. I'll think about it.

But Merrill is in a frenzy the moment he closes the door.

Snatches his phone and charging cable off the dead charger.

Jams his feet into his shoes. Yanks his jacket from the coat closet. Rushes back to the --

BEDROOM CLOSET

CLOSE ON - a shoebox tucked away with "Alison" written on it

Merrill flips the top off.

Retrieves his wedding band. Slips it on.

BATHROOM

He stops in front of the mirror.

MERRILL

I know you probably can't hear me.
But I'm gonna try and see what's
going on with the power, maybe get
my phone charged. I'll be back as
soon as I can.

KITCHEN

He leaves the front door open a crack and sticks a rubber
doorstop under it.

BELLA AND LAWSON'S - 970 - LIVING ROOM

Bella returns. The camp lantern lighting her way.

Lawson paces, eyes glued to his phone.

LAWSON

...Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.
Fuck. Fuck. Fuck...

Bella absently jangles her keys.

BELLA

Anything?

LAWSON

What do you think?

Before she can respond --

LAWSON

(going for coatrack)
Piece of SHIT! This isn't gonna
work. I need to get a better signal
before the battery runs out. I'll
be on the roof.

BELLA

(down)
They're having a party up there, F-
Y-I.

LAWSON

Who is?

BELLA

The residents. Apparently, there's a generator.

LAWSON

Perfect.

BELLA

Oh, and Mr. Hamilton didn't come to the door, thanks for asking.

But Lawson's already gone.

The door BANGS shut on the swing bar after him.

BELLA

(to self)

I hope he's alright in there...

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Standing behind a workbench, Hutch passes a beer to Merrill.

Merrill takes it, nodding. He feels better now.

Hutch goes back to grilling.

CLOSE ON GENERATOR - Merrill's phone, charging from its port

They'll be together again soon enough.

Beside the workbench and generator, there's a metal tub full of BEER and LIQUOR BOTTLES packed in fallen snow. Plenty of backup cases behind it too.

MERRILL

Thanks for letting me charge up.
I'm sure I won't be the first to ask.

HUTCH

No problem. I'd much rather you do it here than running your damn car in the garage. I already had to yell at a bunch of residents about that. How stupid do you have to be?

(to everyone)

YOU FOLKS HEAR THAT? NO CHARGING YOUR PHONES OFF YOUR CARS IN THE GARAGE! PASS IT AROUND!

MERRILL

By the way, where'd all the booze come from?

HUTCH

You remember that Halloween party the H-O-A threw? They went all out and nobody showed up.

MERRILL

How come?

HUTCH

You tell me. There was a sign in the elevator for a month. If ya ask me, the problem was the poster forgot to write "free beer" on it.

Hutch hands a beer to Celeste, who's still adjusting to the temperature in the type of coat Cruella de Vil would wear.

Lawson appears in the b.g. Waves his phone around in an effort to acquire the best possible signal. He checks it.

CLOSE ON PHONE - Wi-Fi out. Diminished network signal. Its endlessly SPINNING WHEEL. Low battery warning

LAWSON

Stupid bullshit just KILLS the battery. Jeezus fuckin fuck.

He looks toward Merrill and the others. Marches over.

LAWSON

(to Hutch)

Hey! This is the generator, right? I need to charge my phone. You mind if I charge my phone?

MERRILL

Yes, as a matter of fact. I'm using the charging port right now -- there's only one.

LAWSON

(snickers)

I don't believe we've met. I'm Lawson. I work on Wall Street and live on the ninth floor. What's your name, tough guy?

MERRILL

Merrill.

LAWSON
 (scoffs)
 Meryl? Like, Meryl Streep?

MERRILL
 No, like Merrill-Lynch, Mr. Wall
 Street bigshot.

Instead of responding, Lawson rips Merrill's phone off the cable and plugs in his own.

MERRILL
 What the -- fuck? Who do you think
 you are?

LAWSON
 Look, pal. I need this way more
 than you right now. You can have it
 back as soon as mine's charged up
 enough to get my work done so it
 doesn't cost me a motherfucking
 fortune, got it?

MERRILL
 No. No, I don't got it. And I don't
 think I'm gonna -- gonna --

LAWSON
 Gonna what, tough guy?

MERRILL
 Gonna let you cut in front of me!

LAWSON
 You better stay outta my way --

MERRILL
 Or --?

LAWSON
 Or I'll take my bad night and make
 it your WORST FUCKING NIGHTMARE!

They tussle over the generator as Bella arrives.

Hutch gets between them.

LAWSON
 Oh look, the janitor's getting
 involved. Stay outta this -- peon!

But his tone suggests he'd rather use a different slur.

Bella pulls him back.

BELLA
STOP IT! STOP RIGHT NOW!

Lawson grabs a frosty vodka bottle from the snowpack.

LAWSON
(backing off)
Think I'll see if the signal's
better over there.

As Bella and Lawson leave, three of Lawson's already
intoxicated BROKER FRIENDS from the building arrive and make
matters three times worse.

Bella peels him off for a word.

BELLA
Listen. I'm gonna find a way to
check on Mr. Hamilton downstairs.
Can you control yourself for the
next few minutes?

LAWSON
Don't treat me like a child, Bella.

Lawson puts his lips around the vodka bottle and throws it
back, chugging like a greedy infant.

Bella crosses back to the workbench.

BELLA
Can I talk to you a sec, Hutch?

HUTCH
Sure, whassup?

BELLA
You're not gonna like this, but I
need to borrow your override key.

HUTCH
Nope. No way. Not a chance in hell.

BELLA
I want to go check on Mr. Hamilton.
I knocked on his door earlier and
didn't get a response.

HUTCH
(sighs)
Well, O-K.

But only because you're a nurse and
I know he's alone in there hooked
up to all that medical whatnot.

He passes it to her.

BELLA
Thanks, Hutch.

HUTCH
Don't you dare use it for anything
else, give it out, or go into any
other units. And if yer not back up
here in ten minutes, I'll send your
charming boyfriend down after ya.
Which I might do anyway.

BELLA
(departing)
Got it.

INT. NOLAN'S CONDO - UNIT 521 - NIGHT

Nolan. Still seated at his desk in near dark.

Waiting for the power to come back on.

At least the robe is closed now.

He finally stands.

Collects his shirt and pants from the floor.

5TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Nolan's door opens. He exits his home donning his coat.

Like every floor hallway and stairwell landing, insufficient
battery-powered emergency lights glow at each end. For now.

The first one not to discover the RFID readers are off by
locking himself out, he flips the brass swing bar outward.

He goes to the stairwell eschewing the elevator button.

As he heads down, some RESIDENTS are going up.

RESIDENT 2
(laughing)
You're going the wrong way!

NOLAN

Pardon me?

RESIDENT 2

The party's on the roof -- you're going the wrong way!

NOLAN

Oh, no -- I'm heading out.

RESIDENT 3

Really? Be careful, man. The roads are slick. Hey, aren't you that engineer? You work at the power plant?

NOLAN

Yeah, that's me. I'm off today, though.

RESIDENT 2

So, what's going on?

NOLAN

As far as I know, it's nothing to do with the station. I'm heading over there now. They'll know which grids have been affected by the storm.

RESIDENT 3

Storm? I was on the phone with my cousin in Seattle before the signal dropped and he said they have a blackout too.

NOLAN

Wait -- you mean, the outage is nationwide?

RESIDENT 3

That's just what I heard. In any case, drive safe out there.

RESIDENT 2

Drive? He's not going anywhere -- the garage door is out of service until further notice.

NOLAN

Oh, I parked on the street.

RESIDENT 3

Take it easy, is all I'm saying.
And when you get back, come
upstairs and let us know what's up.

NOLAN

For sure.

They part ways in opposite directions.

6TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Bella KNOCKS.

BELLA

Mr. Hamilton? It's Nurse Bella. I'm
coming inside to check on you.

She lets herself into --

HAMILTON'S CONDO - UNIT 603

It's extremely dark. All Bella has is a penlight attached to
Hutch's keyring, but it's enough.

She goes down the short corridor to the --

BEDROOM

Where she finds WARREN HAMILTON (early 90s) alone in bed. His
respirator and monitors are OFF. Silent.

She takes his pulse.

BELLA

Can you hear me, Mr. Hamilton?

He nods weakly.

BELLA

Your caretaker probably can't make
it because there's a bad storm. I'm
going to leave for just a few
moments, but I'll be right back
lickety-split to get your equipment
up and running -- just hang in
there, O-K?

More of an eyeblink this time.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Lawson has caught up to his friends' intoxication.

LAWSON

...but you guys get it -- if I can't finish up tonight or access the market in the morning, I'm capital F FUCKED.

(bottle swig)

Shit. Where's Bella? Any of you guys seen Bella around?

Lawson tears free from them.

LAWSON

No? Good.

(calls out)

HEY! HEY YOU! MERYL STREEP! Why don't you get the fuck outta my way and let me charge my goddamn phone?

Another tipsy RESIDENT disagrees.

RESIDENT 4

PUT THE FUCKING MUSIC BACK ON!

Lots of supportive residents CHEER ON that idea.

Merrill takes his phone and cable out of the port.

MERRILL

Mine's good enough for now, anyway.

LAWSON

Hey, but I need that, though.

MERRILL

What, this?

(brandishes charging cable)

Get your own, Mr. Wall Street bigshot jerkoff.

The argument attracts other PARTIERS' ATTENTION.

LAWSON

Hey, I got a question: where's your wife?

MERRILL

Excuse me?

LAWSON

Your wife? The lady you brought flowers home to today? You're wearing a wedding band -- yet, somehow, in all these years, I've never met your wife or even seen her in passing. So, where is she?

MERRILL

Her name is Kaia.

LAWSON

Yeah, I know. Merrill and Kaia Boyd. I've gotten your mail. It makes absolutely zero sense that I did, but I did. That's not what I'm asking.

MERRILL

Not that it's any of your business, but she's not home. That's why I needed to charge my phone.

LAWSON

(inflated sarcasm)

Right. And that's so much more important than anyone else's possible needs.

MERRILL

Well, I know what I don't need. And I don't need this. Any of it.

(chucks cable to him)

Use it in good health, dickhead.

His phone back on, Merrill backs away.

MERRILL

(into phone, flipping off Lawson)

Hey, sweetie -- I'm back.

When Lawson goes for the generator, Hutch plugs the speaker back in. Joyous DANCE MUSIC livens everyone up.

LAWSON

I was gonna use that.

HUTCH

No -- we're keeping the music on.

In the b.g., Merrill suddenly looks at his phone.

MERRILL
Hello? Kaia? Hello?

Back to --

LAWSON
(whining)
C'mon. You let that asshole charge
his and you're not gonna let me?
(holds up phone)
Do you have any idea how much --
AAAHHHH! OH FUCK! OH SHIT! OH FUCK!

CLOSE ON PHONE - the endlessly spinning wheel is now a
terrifying RED X

He hurries back to his broker friends under the canopy.

LAWSON
That's it. I'm out. I lost the
connection. Can't access my
portfolio. I'm totally blind. And
if I don't somehow get back online
before the open tomorrow, I'll lose
a million or more.

Someone puts a beer in his hand. He drains it.

BROKER 1
Just a million...?

LAWSON
Shut up, wiseass. It's not funny.

Another beer. Gone.

LAWSON
And you know whose fault it is?
(points at Merrill)
That motherfucker over there. Maybe
I should give him a little taste of
what's in store for him if the
power doesn't come back on before
morning.

Two brokers look at each other uncertainly.

Lawson looks to a third, SEAN O'LEAR (30s) -- the kind of man
whose scruples becomes dangerously absent in times like this.

LAWSON
Back me up on this.

O'LEAR
I'm on board.

All Lawson needs. That and his EMPTY BEER BOTTLE.

He charges back to the workbench side. Everyone notices.

LAWSON
HEY! Generator hog! I have an idea:
maybe when your M-I-A wife gets
here, you explain how charging your
stupid, piece of shit phone cost me
a million fucking dollars.

MERRILL
Cost you a million -- what the hell
are you even talking about?

LAWSON
What am I talking about? WHAT AM I
TALKING ABOUT??

Lawson SMASHES THE EMPTY BEER BOTTLE OVER MERRILL'S HEAD,
laying open a savage wound right along his hairline.

LAWSON
THAT'S WHAT THE FUCK I'M TALKING
ABOUT!

Bella, just arriving, rushes to a stunned Merrill's side.

Holding his head, Merrill slowly goes to his knees before he
falls down.

BELLA
Jeezus, Lawson! What the FUCK?

She takes Hutch's clean "bar rag" from the workbench. Holds
it against Merrill's injury.

BELLA
Merrill? It's Merrill, right?

MERRILL
Y-Yeah.

BELLA
Put your hand right here and apply
as much pressure as you can take, O-
K?

O'Lear passes another beer to Lawson.

LAWSON

Whatever. He had it comin, Bell. He had it comin! Cost me a goddamn fortune, that sumbitch.

(swig)

That son of a BITCH!

BELLA

Take a walk, Lawson!

He only stands there. Unsteady on his feet.

BELLA

I said, take a walk!

LAWSON

Fine. Whatever.

He leaves. She turns toward Hutch.

BELLA

We have a situation with Mr. Hamilton. He's gonna need the generator to power his machines and I can't carry it by myself so...

HUTCH

Aw, shit. That's a no-can-do, missy. We'd have no light up here -- and I need to keep an eye on things. It can't wait till morning?

BELLA

I'll see if he can get by on his portable oxygen and mobile C-PAP -- that might suffice for tonight. But first thing in the morning we'll need to lug that bad boy down to 6-0-3.

HUTCH

My back --

BELLA

We'll get people to lend a hand, there's enough around. In the meantime, I have to get this fella to the hospital.

A new voice speaks up.

NOLAN

You can't.

BELLA

I'm sorry?

NOLAN

The hospital. You can't get there.

BELLA

Why not?

NOLAN

Well, A, because the garage door won't open with the power out, and B, even if you -- y'know what? I should tell everyone this.

(to Hutch)

I have an announcement, can you please cut the music?

(he does)

Thanks.

(to all)

HEY -- CAN I HAVE EVERYONE'S ATTENTION, PLEASE? For those of you who don't know me, my name's Nolan. I work at the power plant and I just wanna give you a heads up about a couple things. First, I was off today, but I tried calling in when the network was still up and all the lines were busy. Even the unpublished ones. So I don't know what's going on apart from the ice storm. Second, my car was parked on the street, so I tried to drive but I barely made it to the end of the block on that black ice -- it was like trying to drive a bar of soap. Not only that, but from what I could see, the freeway was and still is, completely jammed. Now this guy is hurt and we're more or less stuck here, so... Maybe try being nicer to one another? I dunno -- I guess that's all I had to say.

One person CLAPS.

BELLA

(still attending to
Merrill)

In that case, we'll get you patched up downstairs. I can close this up with some medical adhesive or Steri-Strips generously donated by my employers.

(to Hutch)
 If Lawson gives you any more
 trouble, just throw him over the
 side, wouldja?

HUTCH
 (grins)
 I was planning on it...
 (then)
 What about my key? People heading
 down gonna find themselves locked
 out. So I got that to look forward
 to.

BELLA
 (handing it back)
 Thanks for trusting me with it.

Bella helps Merrill to his feet.

Guiding him toward the rooftop door, she yells to Lawson.

BELLA
 HEY! DON'T COME DOWNSTAIRS, GOT IT?

Lawson. On the canopy side of the roof. More unsteady.

LAWSON
 WHATEVER!

Lawson really doesn't care -- he's busy faking his attention
 to his broker buddies while eavesdropping on Finch nearby.

FINCH
 I, for one, am super glad the
 power's out. This is how humans
 were meant to live: talking to each
 other, living together for better
 or worse -- not walking around
 staring at their phones like fuckin
 zombies. These tech-bro
 billionaires got us by the balls!
 You know? And that power plant is
 like a giant shackle around all our
 freakin necks! Rolling blackouts
 spike energy prices so they can
 manipulate the market and enrich
 themselves.

Lawson nearly falls over listening in.

LAWSON
 (slurring)
 HEY! Hey, you're right!

You're sho fucking right on with that. And didn't that guy say he works at the 'lectric company? Couldn't get to work, my ass. I'll bet he knows all about this. Maybe we should have a word with him...

FINCH

Eh, well, yer on yer own, guy. I like things just the way they are. You might wanna back off all the finger pointing, though. That kinda shit's contagious.

Back to the workbench side. Nolan. Angling his way through the gathered residents. Then, BAM! He bumps directly into --

CELESTE

(grins disarmingly)
Oops! Pardon me.

She moves on. But Nolan experiences the accident differently. He freezes. His face drops. His wordless mouth hangs open.

Does he know her?

Through her online work, perhaps?

He unfreezes. Pushes his way through to the stairwell door.

Disappears through it in a hurry.

INT. 9TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Bella's neighbor, ANITA FEN (50s). Tries accessing her condo by slipping a credit card between the door and jamb.

Bella and Merrill arrive at her and Lawson's condo.

BELLA

Oh, no!

MERRILL

What is it?

BELLA

I forgot to prop the door open. We can't get in.

Nolan looks on from the stairwell when --

A sudden POWER SURGE floods the space with bright light then EXPLODES the CEILING LIGHTS.

Everyone shields themselves from FALLING PLASTIC AND GLASS.

Thinking quickly, Bella notices the READER IS ACTIVE and touches her fob to it. It blinks green, UNLOCKS.

Anita is right on the heels of the idea, but her reader, like all the others, is still out.

ANITA
(frustrated)
How did you do that?

BELLA
I -- I don't know. It worked for just a second.

ANITA
Why yours and not mine, though?

Bella shrugs, assists Merrill inside.

ANITA
(angry)
Why yours, Bella!? Why did just yours work?

Nolan continues downstairs having seen everything.

BELLA AND LAWSON'S - 970 - BATHROOM

In camp lantern light, Bella carefully aligns the ragged edges of Merrill's scalp. Closes the wound with Steri-Strips.

Merrill. Slight flinch.

BELLA
(gently)
It hurts, I know.

MERRILL
Your boyfriend is a real nice guy. Super friendly, easygoing...

BELLA
He has better sides. When he's not acting like a maniac. Nobody ever sees them, though. Not even me these days.

She causes another flinch.

BELLA
Sorry.

MERRILL

I'm O-K.

BELLA

No, I mean, I'm really sorry this happened to you. You're owed an apology and Lawson doesn't apologize, so... Again, I'm so sorry about this, Merrill.

MERRILL

It's not your fault. In the end, it didn't even matter.

BELLA

Were you able to get ahold of, of --

MERRILL

Kaia, yes. Just briefly.

BELLA

Is she safe?

MERRILL

I think so. With the power out, it's hard to say -- for sure.

BELLA

I'm kinda the opposite of you right now.

Merrill glances her way.

BELLA

I'd give anything not to be stuck here with Lawson. Lately, I've been working long hours and picking up extra shifts so I don't have to be home as much.

(then)

I probably shouldn't have said that.

MERRILL

No, you can say whatever you want around me: I'm trusting you to pick all of the glass out of my head.

She physically relaxes.

MERRILL

And don't forget the hallway glass. I have two kinds of glass going right now.

BELLA

I can see why your wife chose you.

MERRILL

Thanks, but it was more like I chose her.

BELLA

I'm pretty sure most married people choose each other.

MERRILL

I might be the exception to the rule, then.

BELLA

Don't sell yourself short. You're a nice guy, Merrill. And I know you and your wife mostly keep to yourselves, but I -- I always wanted to be friendlier to you and our other neighbors, it's just -- Lawson makes everything so --

MERRILL

Lawson?

BELLA

(finishing up)

Yeah. Yes. Exactly that. K, you're all set for tonight. You're not gonna want to sleep on that side, obviously. And come see me tomorrow so we can change the bandage, O-K?

(then)

That's the best we can do for now.

MERRILL

I doubt the hospital would have done a better job. Thanks, Bella.

They cross the --

LIVING ROOM

Heading toward the foyer. Merrill pauses.

MERRILL

Who plays the piano?

BELLA
 Neither of us. Lawson said the
 place doesn't look expensive enough
 without one.

MERRILL
 May I?

Bella gestures like, be my guest.

MERRILL
 (sitting down)
 Just about the only form of
 entertainment that doesn't require
 batteries.

He plays DEBUSSY'S "REVERIE" to an intrigued Bella.

She brings the lantern closer, though Merrill plays with his
 eyes closed. As the gentle, lilting music continues --

QUICK FLASHES - ROOFTOP PARTY

--Tensions rise. ARGUING RESIDENTS

--A SHOVING MATCH near the generator

--Just as Hutch breaks it up, ANOTHER BREAKS OUT

BACK TO BELLA'S

Merrill carefully concludes the piece. Lifts his hands from
 the delicate final chord.

BELLA
 (applauding)
 That was amazing.

Merrill's gracious bow.

She dabs her eyes -- has she been weeping?

MERRILL
 Are you alright?

BELLA
 Y-yes. It's just -- everything is
 about to change. Just a few hours
 ago... Never mind.

They go to the door. Bella props it open. They head to the --

STAIRWELL

And stop on the landing.

MERRILL

By the way -- I could help get the glass out of your hair too...

BELLA

I'll get it in the mirror, thanks. I have to go put Mr. Hamilton to bed -- well, more bed -- that means I'm going down three and you're going up three, so I guess this is where we part ways.

MERRILL

(warmly)
Until tomorrow?

BELLA

Until tomorrow.

MERRILL

Goodnight.

BELLA

Nite.

After they separate --

The emergency light's battery finally dies.

BLACK.

DREAM SEQUENCE - MERRILL AND ALISON

Time runs backward -- Merrill unliving the pain.

MUSIC CUE - Any haunting love song full of melancholy such as Chris Isaac's "Wicked Game" or Mazzy Star's "Fade into You"

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Rain falls up. Merrill. No umbrella. His soaked hair sticks to his fogged eyeglasses. The CASKET RISES from the ground.

MOURNERS RECEDE. The coffin is placed in the back of a hearse that drives away backward.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

ALISON BOYD (late 20s) lies in bed, tubes and electrodes running from her.

TIME LAPSE - seemingly endless days and nights with Merrill at her bedside as NURSES and DOCTORS come and go

On Alison. Color returns to her face. HER EYES FLUTTER OPEN.

She sees Merrill. Smiles. Her life impossibly restored.

NURSES progressively detach and remove her nodes and tubes.

She sits up. Moved to a wheelchair that rolls out backward.

EXT. GARDEN VENUE - DAY

A lovely, natural setting where rows of GUESTS are seated.

Stunning floral arrangements abound. Airborne petals rise.

Merrill and Alison. At the altar. Doves flying backward.

Their hands separate. They return the rings.

Merrill watches Alison walk back down the aisle in reverse.

EXT. STATEN ISLAND FERRY - UPPER PROMENADE DECK - SUNSET

Among boats and ships sailing backward under clear skies.

Merrill and Alison. Summer wear. Ending a beautiful day together at the stern railing above the ship's boiling wake.

CLOSE ON - their embrace and kiss. As the sun un-sets --

Orange sunlight bursts through their parting lips as their first kiss un-happens.

Warmth. Possibility. Light.

END MUSIC CUE

END DREAM SEQUENCE

SMASH TO:

INT. MERRILL AND KAIA'S CONDO - UNIT 1242 - MORNING

SUPERIMPOSE: THURSDAY

Gray light filters in. The storm has passed, though it doesn't seem like the power is back up.

CLOSE ON - Merrill. Steam pluming from his lips. He awakens

Rolls out of bed. Fully dressed. Coat on.

He jumps up.

Races into the adjoining --

BATHROOM

Goes straight to the mirror above the sink.

Only his bandaged reflection looks back.

He tries the lights. Nothing. Power remains out. Merrill --

--Shivers through a cold shower

--Shaves

--Dresses

--Dries his hair with a towel

His WEDDING RING lies in a soap dish on the basin rim.

Will he put it back on? He does.

NOLAN'S - 521

Nolan lies in bed scrolling screenshots of his anonymous prior interactions with Celeste on his offline phone.

Though none are nudes, she's wearing lingerie and trashy costume clothes in sexually suggestive poses.

CLOSE ON PHONE - offline screenshots of Celeste

NOLAN

I can't believe she lives here.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

In just a T-shirt and sweatpants, he answers the door without first looking through the peephole.

Lawson and his broker friends surround the darkened doorway.

NOLAN

What?

They grab Nolan and yank him from his home.

Manhandle him down the hallway.

MERRILL & KAIA'S - 1242 - KITCHEN

Merrill pours himself a glass of O.J.

Glances at the doorway. At the large package there.

He sets the glass down.

Carries the box into the --

BEDROOM

And tears it open.

He moves the flaps back.

Removes a large piece of foam-like packaging.

Among the packing peanuts inside rests a full-sized, very lifelike DOLL bearing a remarkable resemblance to Kaia.

Merrill brushes her dark hair back from her face.

Reaches down and retrieves the piece of paper in her lap.

CLOSE ON PAGE - "AI DOWNLOAD INSTRUCTIONS"

He lets it fall back into the box, useless.

Then he lifts her out of the box. Brushes the packing peanuts off of her, out of her dress. Gathers her in his arms.

He gently lays her down on the bed. Pulls the covers up to her chin. Eyes closed, she appears asleep.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

Oh, no -- is Lawson taking him next?

KITCHEN

Merrill answers the door. It's Bella.

BELLA

Hey! I could really use some help bringing the generator down to Mr. Hamilton's in 6-0-3. I was thinking maybe -- if you could help me do that, we could change your bandages after?

MERRILL

Sounds good. Let me grab my coat.

As he steps into the --

CORRIDOR

Zeke calls out to them from the stairwell door.

ZEKE

Hey -- y'all! Lawson says everyone needs to come up to roof -- he's getting to the bottom of the whole blackout thing.

BELLA

What does that mean?

ZEKE

Sorry, that's all I know.

BELLA

We're going up anyway.

ZEKE

See ya there.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

A surprising number of RESIDENTS have returned to the roof.

Then again, they likely have little else to do.

The vibe is unsettled. TROUBLED MURMURS bounce around.

Many are trying to see what's going on, including --

Bella and Merrill. Weaving through the garden boxes.

They finally see what everyone is focused on at an area near the opposite side of the roof.

Lawson and his broker friends have a gagged NOLAN TIED TO A CHAIR that's been lifted up and set on the chest-high ledge.

Nolan faces them with his back to the icy ground far below. Even Bella, who thinks she's seen it all, seems bewildered.

BELLA

Lawson?

Lawson and his friends look like shit. Have they been up all night drinking?

BELLA

Oh my god -- what are you doing?

Lawson SHUSHES HER, can't stop laughing.

LAWSON

(drunkenly)

Bell! It's O-K. It's not -- it's -- everything is gonna work out now.

He pulls himself together. Hops up on the ledge beside the chair. The act jostles empty beer bottles lined up there.

One wobbles.

Tips. Rolls.

Vanishes over the edge then --

EXT. MAPLE STREET CONDOMINIUMS - DAY

SMASHES on the pavement twelve floors below.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

Unsteady Lawson could fall just as easily, but he ignores it.

LAWSON

(over crowd)

O-K, O-K, O-K! Listen up, folks! I don't think anyone here bought Nolan the Engineer's little storm and power plant story.

CROWD

NO!

LAWSON

This is all part of their plan, you see: they create market volatility with these blackouts then laugh all the way to the bank!

O'LEAR

They pulled this exact same thing
in California! They make out like
bandits while handing us our ass!

BELLA

Hold on. You're saying the power
company did this on purpose?

LAWSON

You're goddamn right. And this guy
knows all about it.

Incredibly, a majority of the crowd VOICES their agreement.

BELLA

You don't know that.

RESIDENT 5

(shouts)

Then how come HIS lights still
work??

BELLA

Look. The ice storm did this. You
know it rips down old power lines
and wreaks havoc --

LAWSON

That's exactly what he WANTS you to
think, Bell!

ANITA

Yeah! And that nonsense about
driving to work on his day off --
we can't leave? Maybe he doesn't
want us to leave!

BROKER 2

He doesn't want us finding out the
truth!

LAWSON

That's why he gave that made-up
speech last night, so we'd all
blame this remarkably convenient
storm!

BELLA

Lawson, STOP --

LAWSON

Well, the storm is over! And the
POWER IS STILL OUT!

BELLA

(tearing up)

So what are you gonna do? Throw him over the side if he doesn't magically turn the lights back on?

LAWSON

Not at all. I just want him to tell the truth.

BELLA

He's not going to tell you the truth -- or whatever it is you wanna hear -- if he's scared for his life!

LAWSON

Yes, he is. For that very reason. I'm going to take the gag off and ask him a question. But if he lies to us again, DOWN HE GOES!

FINCH

Hey, this is some kinda fucked up madness or something, man. Even if it's what you said, he's probably too low level to be in on it.

Nolan is shaking like a leaf, terrorized by Lawson.

BELLA

(turning away)

I -- I can't do this. I don't want any part of it.

(pushing into crowd)

Excuse me.

Lawson yanks the necktie gag out of Nolan's mouth.

NOLAN

P-puh-leez no -- I'm -- I'm afraid of heights...

LAWSON

Uh-oh! Then this is a pretty bad spot you're in, isn't it? Let's getcha all fixed up.

Lawson jumps down, among the brokers.

LAWSON

Turn him around.

They only look at him, silent.

LAWSON
 You heard him, boys: he's scared of
 heights.
 (shouts)
 TURN HIM AROUND!

They turn his UNSTABLE CHAIR. Chair legs scratching coarse concrete. It wobbles from their efforts, nearly topples over.

A foot goes briefly over the ledge for a terrifying instant before O'Lear corrects it.

Nolan twists his face away from the harrowing, perilous view.

Merrill takes Finch and Hutch aside.

MERRILL
 We have to stop this. Get my back?

Hutch nods.

FINCH
 I'll help.

Back to the ledge.

LAWSON
 (reading ID badge)
 All right, Mr. Ward, Senior
 Engineer at North Atlantic Power,
 what is the real reason they turned
 off the electricity?

NOLAN
 (eyes squeezed shut)
 I al-rready told you the t-truth.
 If it w-was't the storm then I
 don't know what it was!

LAWSON
 Wrong answer, motherfucker!

The two brokers flanking the chair TILT IT FORWARD.

NOLAN
 O-K, O-K! I do know something! Let
 me down and I'll tell you!

LAWSON
 You'll tell us now or you'll be
 telling the city worker scraping
 you off the pavement!

NOLAN

(shuddering fear)

Fine -- l-last night, when Bella took Merrill down to your place for bandages, they c-couldn't g-get in. But right then there was that power surge that only w-worked for your door and n-none of the other locks.

LAWSON

Bullshit.

NOLAN

I swear! Your n-neighbor was right there! She couldn't get in either!

Lawson looks around. Sees her.

LAWSON

Is that true, Ms. Fen?

ANITA

Yes. I saw it with my own eyes. It was like the surge worked so just the two of them could get inside!

LAWSON

So you're saying Bella has something to do with this?

NOLAN

Yeah. Or you. It's just as likely you guys as it is me.

LAWSON

All I can say is, you picked a hilarious time to point a finger. Fuck it, I'll do this myself.

HE PUSHES THE CHAIR RIGHT TO THE EDGE!

Merrill, Finch, and Hutch push through. Burst onto the scene.

Merrill shoves Lawson aside as Finch and Hutch elbow past the goons, each grabbing two chair legs.

They pull Nolan back, lowering the chair down onto the roof.

Half the crowd applauds.

LAWSON

(to Merrill)

This isn't over.

(to Hutch)
That means you too, janitor.

Bella returns. Helps untie shivering Nolan.

LAWSON
Get away from him, babe.

BELLA
You know what? You can stop calling me that. In fact, you can stop calling me anything. Period.

LAWSON
Oh, that's cute. Then in that case,
YOU CAN PACK YOUR SHIT AND GET THE
FUCK OUT OF MY HOUSE, BITCH!

Lawson's broker friends finally do the right thing and pull him away from the scene, back under the canopy.

Hutch retrieves a blanket from the coop storage cabinet and --

Drapes it over coatless Nolan while --

Merrill works on freeing Nolan's shaking hands -- adrenaline no longer driving back the cold.

MERRILL
Hey, um -- I heard him call you Mr. Ward. You're Nolan Ward?

NOLAN
That's m-me. I'm surprised you remember me after g-getting all smashed up last night.

Nolan. Shying away as Celeste walks past.

MERRILL
No, I know you from somewhere else.

Bella interrupts.

BELLA
I know this might not be the best time but --
(to Merrill)
Still wanna help me with that generator?
(to Nolan and Hutch)
How 'bout you two? Wanna help a girl out?

Looks like I'm spending the rest of the night packing, so the sooner I get it downstairs to Mr. Hamilton's the better. Whaddaya say?

NOLAN

(still shaken)

I don't care what I do next as long as it h-happens anywhere but here.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Merrill lowers THE GENERATOR, step-by-step, on a hand truck previously seen under stacked cases of beer.

Nolan assists from the other end, the heavy machine THUNKING its way downstairs.

Bella carries a red extra gas can ahead of them, supervising.

BELLA

Three more steps and we're there, guys.

They wheel the generator down the --

6TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Into --

HAMILTON'S - 603

And seal it out on the --

BALCONY

So it can noisily run without killing anyone inside.

Bella sees them out.

BELLA

Thanks again, gentlemen. Good luck, be safe, and steer clear of Lawson. Seriously -- I've never seen him like this.

MERRILL

Will do.

NOLAN

Don't have to tell me twice. My heart's still racing like crazy.

MERRILL

(calls back)

Hey, do you have somewhere to stay tonight?

BELLA

The plan is to ask Mr. Hamilton if I can stay in his caretaker's room until she gets back. I'm sure he'll say yes -- I sorta need to be here anyway.

Bella closes the door to go attend to Mr. Hamilton.

6TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Merrill and Nolan pace to the stairwell, side-by-side.

NOLAN

Can I ask you something?

MERRILL

Sure.

NOLAN

Before. Why did you say you know me from somewhere else?

MERRILL

O-K if we talk about it down at your place? Inside?

INT. NOLAN'S CONDO - UNIT 521 - NIGHT

They enter. Engineer Nolan has an elaborate setup of solar-powered backup lighting.

He pours Merrill a cup of coffee.

NOLAN

Sorry the place is such a dump. Cleaning lady quit last week.

He's obviously joking. The place might not have been cleaned since he moved in.

MERRILL

Um, this is cold...

NOLAN

Sorry, you can throw it in the micro -- never mind.

(flops down on couch)

Hey, I saw how Bella was looking at you just now, man. Maybe you can get her on the rebound.

MERRILL

Rebound? Didn't they just break up?

NOLAN

Ah, so you've thought about it.

MERRILL

No. I'm married.

NOLAN

Anyway, you were saying you know me from somewhere...

MERRILL

Yes. My wife knows Jessica.

Nolan's face drops. He sits up.

NOLAN

Your wife knows Jessica.

MERRILL

That's what I said, yes.

NOLAN

How is that possible?

Merrill lets him process it.

NOLAN

Your wife -- is an A-I?

MERRILL

Yes. She told me you guys broke up because you were spending money on some cam girl's -- services. Celeste, is it?

NOLAN

Wait -- you know about that? How the hell do you know about that?

MERRILL

I told you. Your girlfriend and my wife are friends.

Actually, I'm not sure it's accurate to put it that way -- they're aware of each other. And they talk.

NOLAN
(incredulous)
My A-I told your A-I private shit about me?

MERRILL
Yes.

NOLAN
Christ. You know about Celeste.

MERRILL
Yes.

NOLAN
And that she lives in the building?

MERRILL
Nuh-uh. Really? That's insane! So you know her in real life too?

NOLAN
Nope. Saw her at the party last night.

MERRILL
Just saw? You didn't talk to her?

NOLAN
I couldn't. She doesn't know who I am and I don't want her to find out.

MERRILL
You weren't getting too weird with her, were you?

NOLAN
No, no -- it's not like that. It's just -- you're a different person when you're online, y'know?

MERRILL
Not really. I'm pretty much the same either way. Then again, Kaia's my only online thing.

NOLAN

And you do realize she -- it's a thing, right? That the A-I is a thing and not a real person?

MERRILL

No, she is. She's real. What we have is real. You know what I mean, you date A-Is.

NOLAN

I jack off to A-Is, Merrill. I don't marry them. Was it for tax reasons, or -- wait, are you in love with it?

MERRILL

I better get going.

NOLAN

(muses)

I can't imagine being in love with it.

MERRILL

Well, I can't imagine being dumped by it.

NOLAN

C'mon, Merrill. You can talk to me.

MERRILL

I'm not sure I can, actually. Either way, I trust this conversation will stay between us?

NOLAN

Yeah, I'll keep quiet. Lord only knows what Jessica told her -- she knew everything.

(pause)

Everything.

Merrill pours cold, unconsumed coffee over the kitchen sink dishes then pauses at the front door.

MERRILL

If what your heart desires is pure and decent and makes you happy, never let anything stand in its way, man. Never. Not even you.

NOLAN

I don't know about decent, brother.
But I'll work on it.

Merrill exits.

BELLA AND LAWSON'S - 970 - BEDROOM

Bella takes a large suitcase from the closet, drops it on the bed, and flips the lid open, hitting Lawson with it.

BELLA

I'm only packing enough for a few days, while I look after Mr. Hamilton. But I'll be out for good by next week.

LAWSON

Fuck, Bell.
(rolls over)
You're not really leaving, are you?

BELLA

You're not really both stupid and an asshole, are you?

LAWSON

(holding his aching head)
Whatever I said, I prolly dint mean it.

BELLA

Who cares what you said? Last night, you assaulted Merrill and this morning... YOU FUCKING TRIED TO KILL SOMEONE!

LAWSON

Bella, wait. Let me explain. That guy -- he knows --

BELLA

I can't do this. Get out.

LAWSON

Get out?

BELLA

Get out while I pack.

LAWSON

(getting up)
Where do you want me to go?

Bella. Pushing him as he backpedals across the condo.

BELLA

I don't really care! Just. Get.
OUT!

LAWSON

Fine. I don't need this horseshit
anyway. You know how much I lost
this morning when the market didn't
open? Do you?

LAWSON

Bella?

BELLA

NO, GODDAMMIT! I don't know and I
don't care! But I hope it was a
lot! I hope you lost it all! And I
hope you never make another cent
because that's what you deserve!
Now, what I deserve, is peace and
quiet while I pack my bags and
leave.

She shoves him into the dark --

CORRIDOR

And SLAMS THE DOOR in his face.

LAWSON

Can I at least get the Tylenol?

Lawson stands there, waiting.

LAWSON

Bell?

BELLA (O.S.)

NO!

Lawson drags his feet to the stairwell holding his head.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Only lit by a fat supermoon, it's shadowy and quiet -- minus
the COOING OF PIGEONS, warm and nestled in their coops.

Lawson fights off a chill. Spies a full bottle of Fireball
Whisky sticking out of the snowpack.

LAWSON
Even better than Tylenol.

INT. 12TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Merrill emerges from his condo. Wedges a doorstep into place.
Then heads downstairs.

9TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Merrill knocks on Bella's door.

BELLA
GO AWAY, ASSHOLE!

MERRILL
Um... It's Merrill?
(then)
I noticed you weren't down at
Hamilton's so...

The door abruptly opens.

BELLA
(playfully embarrassed)
Sorry about that! I thought you
were my psycho ex.

BELLA AND LAWSON'S - 970

Bella welcomes Merrill in.

MERRILL
So, it's official now?

BELLA
Now that I think about it, it was
over a long time ago. Especially
after your thing and this morning's
little charade. Despite all
appearances, I'm really not into
drama like that.
(getting a glass out)
Can I get you something to drink? A
nice, tall glass of ice cream,
perhaps?

MERRILL
(grins)
Just water would be great.

She pours one. Delivers it to him in the living room.

Their hands briefly touch in the transfer.

BELLA

So... what can I help you with today?

MERRILL

Hm?

BELLA

The reason you came down to see me?

MERRILL

Oh, right!
(touches temple)
We forgot to change the bandage.

BELLA

Of course, of course! Let's patch you up...

She leads him toward the bathroom.

STAIRWELL

Lawson's silhouette. Clumsily lumbering down the steps, the liquor already taking hold.

He stops one level down.

A blade of moonlight shows a "12" on the corridor threshold.

He gazes at the last door, the closest.

QUICK FLASH

--Lawson hands Merrill a couple of letters at the same door

LAWSON

Hey, I somehow got your mail.

MERRILL

Thanks.

BACK TO CORRIDOR

Lawson approaches Merrill's slightly ajar door.

LAWSON

Merrill?

(pause)

Yo, Merrill! I wanted to apologize.

He KNOCKS a few times. Listens.

LAWSON

(calls out)

You home, tough guy?

He pushes the door inward. Crosses the threshold.

MERRILL AND KAIA'S - 1242 - KITCHEN

Lawson confirms he's alone.

LAWSON

Merrill...?

Squinting, he notices a CANDLESTICK AND LIGHTER in the faint moonlight bleeding in. He lights the candle nub. Picks it up.

He takes a pull from the bottle. Wanders toward the office.

BELLA AND LAWSON'S - 970

Merrill and Bella. Seated on bathroom fixtures.

Bella rebandages him.

MERRILL

So, Finch is pretty based...

BELLA

He certainly is.

MERRILL

Can I ask you a delicate question?

Bella shrugs. Indifferent.

MERRILL

Does he ever hurt you? Lawson?

BELLA

Every day.

MERRILL

I mean, does he hit you?

BELLA

(shakes head)

It's more psychological with
Lawson. More emotional.

MERRILL

That's a relief.

BELLA

(drops arms)

It's not better, Merrill.

(defensive)

In fact, it's worse.

(continues bandaging)

How'd you like to hate coming home?
So much so, you essentially live at
work instead. And when you finally
do come home, completely exhausted,
you're walking around on pins and
needles waiting, just waiting, for
the bomb to detonate. Wondering,
second by second, what's gonna set
him off but, you know what?
Everything sets him off.

MERRILL

I know from first-hand experience.

BELLA

(upset)

No offense, Merrill, but you don't.
In fact, you have no idea. He
drinks coffee in the shower every
morning and makes me stand by
holding the coffee pot, waiting for
the moment he sticks his cup out
for a refill. I mean, what a
selfless gentleman, right? Or how
about answering constant text
messages telling you what a
worthless bitch you are all day --
you have no idea. You have a happy
home with a perfect woman who cares
about you.

MERRILL

Listen, I'm real sorry he's like
that, but you have no place talking
about my wife, my home -- we have
challenges, issues we face...

BELLA

Yeah, right.

MERRILL
(standing)
Maybe I better go.

BELLA
(distant)
Yeah.

MERRILL
I guess it was more delicate than I
realized. Sorry again.

Merrill exits.

BEDROOM

Merrill hesitates on his way out.

Half-packed bags. He hears Bella WEEPING in the bathroom.

He takes a step back in her direction.

Then turns and leaves.

MERRILL AND KAIA'S - 1242 - OFFICE

Lawson looks around. Nothing unusual. Nothing out of the ordinary.

LAWSON
(whispers)
What's your deal anyway, weirdo?

His candlelight envelops the printer.

He picks up the single page lying in the paper tray.

Lawson snickers as he reads it.

Then chuckles. Then busts out laughing.

He tucks the page into his back pocket.

LAWSON
I knew it. I fucking KNEW IT!
Merrill, you rotten piece of
motherfucking shit. What else am I
gonna find around here?

Next, he goes into the --

BEDROOM

Where he discovers "Kaia".

LAWSON

Holy shit, holy shit, HOLY SHIT!
This is too good to be true! Fuck,
if I only had my phone right now.

KITCHEN

Lawson blows out the candle. Replaces it precisely where he found it. Lighter too. He hits the bottle one last time and --

Returns the front door to its position on the doorstep.

The moment he re-enters the moonlit --

STAIRWELL

He sees Merrill heading back upstairs.

Lawson immediately changes direction.

Returns to the roof entrance.

Watches Merrill go back into his condo unaware of him.

Lawson proceeds downstairs.

The white piece of paper folded in his back pocket.

For crying out loud -- what does it say??

ELEVATOR

DETECTIVES JEFF CALDWELL (early 30s) and SANDRA TORRES (late 20s) lie in a heap on the floor.

Forlorn and exhausted under a tiny blue emergency light.

Holy smokes! They've been trapped in here this whole time??

SANDRA

(drones)

How long do you think it's been?

JEFF

For the millionth time. I can't tell the difference between twenty-four hours and a week. It's like solitary confinement.

SANDRA

It's been way more than twenty-four hours. It might already be --

FREEZE FRAME - SUPERIMPOSE: FRIDAY

SANDRA

Told you we should've taken the stairs.

JEFF

You're starting in on this again?

SANDRA

It was only three flights!

JEFF

How was I supposed to know it was gonna stop on the second --
(realizes)
Uh-oh.

SANDRA

What.

JEFF

I know why no one can hear us: Zeke's text said we can party our asses off because they're fumigating the floor below his.

QUICK FLASH - 2ND FLOOR CORRIDOR

--Vacant. Plastic sheeting on stairwell entrances. Hazard signs. A ladder propped under a removed ceiling tile

BACK TO ELEVATOR

SANDRA

We're not even fully on that floor any longer. The surge moved us a few feet and now we're in between floors.

JEFF

So?

SANDRA
So maybe we can try our options
again.

JEFF
It's pointless.

SANDRA
You're pointless.

JEFF
I earn my keep.

SANDRA
Yet, somehow you managed to derail
us. And screw us. Like always.
Derailed and screwed -- a train
that fucked itself.

JEFF
Don't put this on me, lady. I
shoulda been in court this morning,
putting an arsonist behind bars --
not using a six-pack of hard cider
as a pillow.

Sandra lets a moment slip. Diffuses tension.

SANDRA
(holding back)
We can't at least try?

Jeff rolls his eyes.

SANDRA
Please, Jeff! Please?
(losing it)
It's been three days a-and --

JEFF
You don't know that!

SANDRA
-- what if no one finds us in time?

JEFF
O-K, just -- stop! O-K? I'll check.

Jeff hammers the call button with his fist.

JEFF
Nope. Call button is still dead.

He pounds on the door.

JEFF

No one can hear us no matter how loud we scream -- AAAHH! -- no matter how long or hard we bang on the door --

(raps knuckles on door)
-- which won't budge. And even if it opened easily, that power surge made me realize how much I don't feel like being cut in half today.

He leans against the wall and slides back down to the floor.

SANDRA

You didn't mention Door Number Three, Detective.

She looks up.

JEFF

Nope. Not doing it. Too dangerous.

SANDRA

Maybe for you...

JEFF

When I looked up in there, it was pitch black. You could get hurt. Cut. Tangled up in the cables. If it starts up again and we don't get you back down in time, you could get crushed.

SANDRA

You mean before it goes up another ten floors?

Jeff. Unconvinced.

SANDRA

Remember the prostitution sting back in that Atlantic City Motel 6?

JEFF

You in bad makeup and a miniskirt for the first time in your life? Yes.

SANDRA

And how you went out for coffee just before the mark attacked me?

JEFF

I -- uh...

SANDRA

Don't worry, I smashed his face on the dresser and broke his nose after he fractured my jaw. But you know what I was thinking when he was on top of me, strangling me, and bleeding on my face until the others busted in and took him down? I was thinking, "Gee, I could really use my partner right about now."

Holding back tears, Sandra dabs her eyes.

JEFF

Torres, I'm so --

SANDRA

Save it. The point is, if I could handle that, I can handle this. Now gimme a boost.

JEFF

Fine. But just so you can see what a terrible idea this is.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

The garden area is packed.

No need for Lawson and his goons to go around knocking on doors -- everyone has even more nothing to do.

They're drinking and socializing -- but their concern has deepened. Buzzing with complaints. Rumors. Gossip.

Nolan moves through them, tension finding his ears.

-- A resident complains about not sleeping for three days

-- "Someone was trying doors last night"

-- "Funny how some people are actually enjoying this"

-- A resident bemoans his unchecked messages until another suggests that no one else can send them anyway

-- "That maintenance guy has an override key for every unit."
"I heard he lost the key and no one knows who has it"

-- Two women complain about the status of their hair

-- "Lawson's right. It has to be one of us"

Nolan sees Celeste at the workbench.
He abruptly heads in the opposite direction.
He turns back to gauge where Celeste is, but --
She's suddenly right in front of him. Offers him a beer.

CELESTE
Thought you could use one after
what happened yesterday.

NOLAN
(takes bottle)
Thanks. It was no big deal.

CELESTE
It looked like a pretty big deal to
me. And coming back up here in
spite of it really shows how brave
you are.

NOLAN
Brave?

CELESTE
Incredibly. I would have been
screaming my head off the whole
time.

NOLAN
That gag kept the screams of terror
in pretty well.

CELESTE
You're funny.
(then)
And you're not afraid they might
try something like that again?

NOLAN
Not really. Lawson came down and
apologized to me. Even gave me a
baseball signed by Nolan Ryan.
Thing's prolly worth five hundred
bucks.

CELESTE
If someone almost threw me off a
building, it would take a lot more
than a baseball to get back in my
good graces.

NOLAN

What can I say, I'm a forgiving
dude.

(then)

Damn if this isn't the best beer I
ever tasted!

CELESTE

By the way, I was hoping to chat
with you last night, but it seemed
like you were avoiding me.

NOLAN

Who, me? No -- not at all. I'm glad
-- I'm stoked to run into you
again. Totally. Totally stoked.
Just a little tied up, that's all.

She smiles. Swigs. Her makeup more normal than goth now, her
black hair sweeps across her face in the light breeze.

NOLAN

In fact, there's something I need
to tell you.

CELESTE

Oh, yeah? What's that?

NOLAN

I -- I, uh... You know, when Lawson
was down at my place, he said he
overheard his neighbor talking
about how Maple Street Condominiums
was the first building in the city
to lose power. Like, he looked out
the window when it happened here,
then watched it go out across the
city.

CELESTE

That doesn't sound true.

NOLAN

Regardless, he's convinced that
someone in the building is
responsible for this.

CELESTE

Besides you?

NOLAN

Yeah, he said this is different.
That he has evidence now. And to
pass it around.

CELESTE

Are you?

NOLAN

Passing it around? Hell no. Fuck that guy. I'm still on Team Storm.

Hutch enters their proximity.

HUTCH

I wanna show y'all something. Come with me.

The pair exchanges a glance. Follow him to the coops.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Sandra stands on Jeff's shoulders. Her upper half through a removed ceiling panel.

JEFF

See anything?

SANDRA

No -- it's totally black. Hand me your phone.

JEFF

I thought we were saving the battery for when the light dies.

SANDRA

This is a worthy exception.

JEFF

(sighs)

Fine. But only for a few seconds, O-K? Just so you can look around.

He passes the phone up to Sandra.

She activates the flashlight function.

JEFF

How 'bout now?

SANDRA

I see Zeke's floor.

JEFF

You do?

SANDRA

The door for it, I mean. But just the top half -- we are between floors.

JEFF

Fabulous. Now what?

SANDRA

Push me all the way up.

Jeff does.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

Nolan and Celeste. Beside Hutch at the coops.

HUTCH

Thought maybe we could send an Old School text message.

Hutch reaches into the coop. Selects a PIGEON.

Gently holding him. The bird COOS softly.

The message tube is a GREEN SNAP-ON RING that goes around the bird's leg band.

NOLAN

What's it say?

HUTCH

It says we're O-K.
(to Celeste)
Wanna do the honors?

CELESTE

Sure!

HUTCH

Hold him in one hand like this, your thumb over his wings. And let's take him over here.

Hutch leads them to the rooftop ledge. Away from the noise.

NOLAN

I think I'll stay back and watch.

Celeste shoots him an understanding smile.

CELESTE

Where's he going?

HUTCH

My brother's loft in Jersey. He'll be there in exactly twenty-one minutes.

CELESTE

What do I do?

HUTCH

Stand right here. Point him at the open sky. And whenever you're ready -- just open your hand.

CELESTE

That's all?

HUTCH

He'll do the rest.

Celeste raises her arm. Opens her hand.

The homing pigeon pushes off. Hovers briefly.

HUTCH

He's finding his line.

Then takes off like a shot.

HUTCH

There he goes! Like someone lit his ass on fire!

CELESTE

Thanks, Hutch -- that was amazing!
(then, more solemn)
Hey, um...

HUTCH

Yeah?

CELESTE

Are we O-K, Hutch?

HUTCH

For now, yeah. But it's been three days. The stairwell lights are out. The ventilation's off. People's food is spoiling and the heating system problems are way above my paygrade. If I had to guess, things are gonna get real ugly real fast.

When they return from the side of the rooftop, NOLAN IS GONE.

Celeste completes a circuit. Returns to Hutch.

CELESTE
Hey, I'm back. Can I ask a favor?

HUTCH
Anything.

CELESTE
Can you tell me Nolan Ward's unit number?

HUTCH
Well, anything but that.

CELESTE
Seriously?

HUTCH
No, of course I'll tell you.

He takes the printout seen earlier out of his pocket.

HUTCH
Looks like it's...

CELESTE
Hutch?

HUTCH
Fifty bucks?

CELESTE
Hutch!

HUTCH
Fine. It's five twenty-one.

CELESTE
Thank you.

HUTCH
And Celeste?

CELESTE
Yes?

HUTCH
Good luck.

Celeste turns toward the rooftop door. Grinning excitedly.

INT. 12TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Merrill lets his door rest on the doorstep. AJAR.

He heads to the stairwell with a flashlight.

7TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Merrill enters from the stairwell. Knocks on Finch's door.

FINCH
Sup, Merrill. C'mon in.

FINCH'S CONDO - UNIT 703

Finch's place glows with myriad scented candles.

They sit on his L-shaped couch.

MERRILL
So, Bella and Lawson are
splitsville.

FINCH
No offense, Merrill, but who gives
a shit?

MERRILL
I think we all should. If he
attacked me when he thought his
woman was still on his side and
nearly threw poor Nolan off the
roof -- what'll he do now that the
only stabilizing presence in his
life is on her way out the door?

FINCH
Even if you're right -- and you
probably are -- what are we gonna
do about it? Kick him out of the
building he lives in?

MERRILL
Almost. I think enough people are
freaked out about it that we could
at least get him banned from the
roof before it turns into Lord of
the Flies up there.

FINCH
Well, look -- I'm a bigger believer
in democracy than anyone.

But let's say we put it to a vote
and more people still believe
Lawson can "fix it"?

MERRILL

Then we might be seriously fucked.

FINCH

If we work together, maybe not: you
call for a vote over what he did to
Nolan -- they'll be sympathetic to
your injury -- I'll back you up.

MERRILL

(rises, apprehensive)

We'll round everyone up and do it
tonight -- I'll meet you here.

FINCH

It's gonna work out, Merrill,
you'll see. Power to the people.

Merrill raises a half-hearted fist and exits.

9TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Bella paces down the hallway with her camp lantern. Worry on
her face. She's not looking forward to what's next.

She reaches their door. As she pushes it inward --

O'Lear brushes past her on his way out. Where's he going?

BELLA AND LAWSON'S - 970

She follows the entryway to RISING VOICES.

Did Lawson invite people over?

BELLA

Try keeping it together, Lawson. I
just forgot my work I-D in the --

LIVING ROOM

She stops. Stunned.

Lawson, his broker goons, and twenty to thirty RESIDENTS clog
the space as well as the adjoining dining room and kitchen.

Worse, many of them are armed with HANDGUNS among other COMBAT WEAPONS: baseball bats, knives, clubs -- most seem angry enough to brawl with each other, if necessary.

All eyes and attention turn to Bella when she enters and --

An unsettling HUSH falls over them.

BELLA
(maintaining poise)
Lawson, can I have a word with you
in the hallway, please?

The room erupts in OOOHs and UH-OHHs.

Lawson follows her into the --

9TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Where Bella pulls him away from the entryway.

BELLA
Wanna tell me what's going on?

Lawson. Pale. Sleep-deprived. Sweaty in spite of the cold. Is he adding pills to the alcohol consumption?

LAWSON
Aw... Great things. Great, great things, Bell. Too bad it's none of your motherfucking business anymore.

BELLA
(barely keeping voice down)
Anything that concerns the welfare of this building's residents is so my motherfucking business. Like, how our community should be coming together right now, but those clowns in there look like they're getting ready for an invasion!

LAWSON
Bell. Bell, Bell, Bell. Don't you see it? This place is falling apart! The wheels are finally coming off! Someone needs to step up, y'know? Start the New World Order. Just let me explain why that person is me, O-K?
(then)

Tonight I'm gonna fix it. Up on the rooftop. I'm going to reveal who's responsible for the blackout.

BELLA

You don't know who or what is responsible.

LAWSON

Ah, but I do know.

BELLA

YOU DON'T! YOU DON'T FUCKING KNOW!

LAWSON

I even have evidence.

BELLA

What are you talking about, what evidence?

LAWSON

I'll give you the answer to that, young lady, tonight on the rooftop in front of everyone else.

BELLA

You're not yourself right now, Lawson. No -- you are yourself but massively worse than usual. More obsessed, suspicious -- unstable. It's like losing that money made you lose your mind. But I'm not crazy yet. There's something you need to hear and you have to promise you're gonna listen.

LAWSON

What.

BELLA

Promise!

LAWSON

I promise! Fuck!

BELLA

You're starting something... You're starting something that's going to be very quickly out of your control. Everyone is tired, frustrated, uncomfortable -- and you're whipping them into a paranoid frenzy.

(then)

Lawson, once you start down this road there's no turning back -- at least not until a lot of people are hurt and dead. But you have a chance, right? You can stop this before it gets worse, before it becomes some kind of -- of nightmare!

LAWSON

The truth has to come out, Bell. I'm not starting anything -- I'm bringing the guilty party to justice, just wait and see.

BELLA

Like you did with Nolan?

LAWSON

Hey -- I apologized to him.

BELLA

Yeah, sure you did.

LAWSON

I was wrong about Nolan, but whatever. I'm not wrong about this. And I'm gonna have the power back on by midnight, just --

BELLA

-- wait and see. Sure. That's what I've been telling myself ever since we met. He won't always be like this, just wait and see. He won't behave like that in public again, just wait and see.

(then)

But now my thoughts are: He'll get someone killed like he almost did yesterday morning, just wait and see. He'll turn that anger and violence on you, Bella, just wait and see.

(then)

So I'm over "just wait and see."
I'm on "stop him now before it's too late."

LAWSON

Blah, blah, blah. You worry too damn much. And I'm glad you're not my problem anymore.

BELLA
 (walking away)
 Good! So am I!

LAWSON
 There's just one thing I wonder if
 you know: and it's about your new
 friend, Merrill. Trust me, that
 guy's a freak.

BELLA
 Unfortunately, Lawson, that is none
 of your motherfucking business.

LAWSON
 (beaming)
 See you tonight?

BELLA
 FUCK OFF!

MERRILL AND KAIA'S - 1242 - BEDROOM

Merrill. Sitting on the bed. Lit by battery-powered candles.
 The Alison shoebox in his lap. He removes his WEDDING RING.

MERRILL
 I miss you.

Slips it around RealDoll Kaia's cold, lifeless finger.

MERRILL
 I miss -- you both so much.

He takes the ring off. Places it among the box's contents.
 A soft THUD hails from the kitchen.

MERRILL
 (cranes neck)
 Hello?

He listens.

Nothing.

Goes back to the shoebox.

KITCHEN

CLOSE ON - a black-gloved hand. Covering the DEADBOLT LOCK

The hand belongs to Lawson's broker friend, Sean O'Lear. Dressed in black. Unrolls a balaclava ski mask down his face.

He must have been hiding in the condo when Merrill got in.

He stands there. Frozen. Will Merrill investigate the thud?

Listens. Waits... Nothing.

His hand still muffling the door lock, O'Lear gingerly
DISENGAGES THE DEADBOLT.

He slowly opens the door and FOUR MORE INTRUDERS enter Merrill's home.

Only two carry flashlights -- the others need their hands free. In the dark, crowded confusion, one of them knocks the candlestick off the counter -- CLANG! Clang-clang...

BEDROOM

Merrill jumps to his feet.

Heads for the kitchen, only to encounter THE GROUP in the --

LIVING ROOM

Streaming in like a death merchants in a nightmare, SHOUTING.

Their chaotic flashlight beams find Merrill.

MERRILL

The fuck?? Get out of my house! GET
THE FUCK OUTTA HERE RIGHT NOW!

They HOLLER BACK unintelligibly through thick masks and --

Encircle Merrill.

He dodges one attempt to grab him.

Merrill grabs a LARGE VASE off of the end table.

SMASHES it over another's head. The goon goes down.

Merrill leaps over the couch, evades another's grasp, and enters the --

DINING ROOM

The intruders close in around the table on both sides.

The moment they're close enough to ensnare him, Merrill jumps forward. Dives across the dining table.

On his feet on the other side.

His knowledge of the environment takes him into the --

12TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

Ahead of the others.

But they're quickly on his tail.

No light but their flashlight beams.

The group surrounds him. Attacks from all sides until --

The building SURGES again.

The twelfth floor light fixtures glow then EXPLODE.

Glass shards rain down on the goons --

Giving Merrill a chance to get free. He enters the --

STAIRWELL

And races down the stairs. At the SAME TIME, the --

ELEVATOR

Starts to MOVE.

Sandra CRIES OUT.

Jeff quickly lowers her back into the car.

JEFF

You O-K?

She nods.

STAIRWELL

Merrill. Bounding down the steps. Bouncing off landing walls.

Unsteady surrounding LIGHT SURGES -- strong, weak, strong -- help the goons pick up Merrill's trail as he --

Exits to the --

8TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

But the others catch up.

Overwhelm him. As they take him down --

Another POWER SURGE bursts these light fixtures as well. Back to flashlights.

The RRRIPP! of duct tape. Bound at his wrists.

RRRIPP! Bound at his ankles. RRRIPP!

MERRILL
 LEMME GO! LEMME GO, YOU
 SONSABITCHES! HELP! SOMEBODY PLEASE
 HELP ME! HEL -- MMM-MM!

A swatch of tape goes over his mouth.

No one comes out to help.

A goon arrives with the same HAND TRUCK used to transport the generator down to Hamilton's condo.

They stand Merrill up on it. Run the tape around both his body and the hand truck until they run out.

They wheel Merrill back into his condo Hannibal Lecter style.

So much for that plan with Finch.

ELEVATOR

The final surge ends just as the elevator stops and DINGS!

The door. Open a crack. Just enough to get their hands between it and the threshold.

Despite their weakened state, the door doesn't resist much and the two SQUEEZE THROUGH the moment it opens far enough.

3RD FLOOR - CORRIDOR

The detectives. Speed walking past doors.

SANDRA
 Which one is Zeke's? Believe it or not, I'd prefer a real bathroom over the empty Powerade bottle we've been sharing.

JEFF

At least I got the wide mouth. And I still haven't been congratulated on finding the lobby restroom for us before we --

SANDRA

'Before we' -- what, Caldwell? Before we skipped my idea of taking the stairs and ended up spending three days in a tin can?

JEFF

It was really more like two and a half altogether.

SANDRA

You're gonna get a knuckle sandwich over this, buster. At least. Now which place -- oh, right here. What's this?

Sandra takes a NOTE off of Zeke's door. Reads it aloud.

SANDRA

It says, "Hey, whassup, losers! Where you at? If you get this, we all upstairs on the roof, partying! Come up!"

(crumpling page)

No handwriting analyst required: that's Zeke all right.

(then)

His door is open. I'm going in and raiding his munchies -- I don't care. We can go up after we bring ourselves back to life. Let's go.

JEFF

(to self)

Someone's hangry.

NOLAN'S - 521

Nolan sits his desk. A single sheet of paper before him.

CLOSE ON PAGE - two columns: "TELL HER" and "DON'T TELL HER"

Nothing listed under either column yet.

Nolan stares at it for several beats.

He takes up his pen and creates a third column.

CLOSE ON PAGE - "NEVER TELL HER"

He sort of smiles. Circles the new heading. KNOCK! KNOCK!

Nolan goes to his front door. Looks through the peephole.

NOLAN
(whispers)
Oh, shit.

He runs a hand through his hair. Opens the door.

CELESTE
Hey! Celeste. From before.

NOLAN
Yes -- I know who -- uh, so listen,
I'm really sorry for running off
like that.

CELESTE
(playfully)
I'll forgive you.
(pause)
Are you going to invite me in...?

NOLAN
Yes. Yes! Of course.
(gestures her in)
Sorry again, please.

She goes inside.

CELESTE
You really do have lights.

NOLAN
Solar backups, yeah.

CELESTE
I like your place.

NOLAN
Thanks. It's -- always this clean.

He pushes the dustpan he was just using out of sight with his foot. Joins her in the small --

LIVING ROOM

Celeste -- now in more sensible attire -- takes the couch.

Nolan sits in a bucket chair close by.

CELESTE

So why did you take off?

NOLAN

I -- I, um...

CELESTE

Be honest. I'm obviously gonna stalk you everywhere you go if you don't tell me.

NOLAN

I'm not sure you wanna know. And I'm not sure I wanna say. At least, not yet. That's why I left -- there's no way it's not coming out eventually, I just -- wasn't ready, and that's why I took off.

CELESTE

(cooling)

O-K... What do you wanna talk about then?

NOLAN

I dunno. Getting-to-know-you stuff, I guess.

CELESTE

I'm not big on small talk, Nolan.

NOLAN

Well, y'know, like in general. Like, where you're from, what do you do for --

CELESTE

-- work?

NOLAN

No-no. I was gonna say fun, but --

CELESTE

I work from home.

Great. The very last subject he wants coming up.

NOLAN

Oh! Um, cool. Doing...?

CELESTE

Online stuff.

NOLAN
That must be nice.

CELESTE
Nice? It's work.

NOLAN
I mean, yeah, having that kind of
independence must make it easier.

CELESTE
What could you possibly think is
easy about it?

NOLAN
Nothing -- what I meant was you
don't have to deal with people the
same way. You have distance.

CELESTE
How's this for distance?

Celeste heads for the door putting her coat back on.

NOLAN
Celeste. Wait.

CELESTE
You don't even know me --

NOLAN
I --

CELESTE
-- but you're pretty good at
filling in the blanks!

He goes after her, but she SLAMS his own door in his face.

NOLAN
(dejected)
Fuck.

Just as he turns away --

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

NOLAN
Celeste!

Nolan hurries to the door. Flings it open. It's O'Lear.

NOLAN

I'm glad you're -- the fuck do you want?

O'LEAR

It's nothing about you, but if you wanna see the blackout end tonight, come up the roof.

NOLAN

(closing door)

Gee, that sounds like -- fuck you.

O'Lear heads off to KNOCK on the next door. And the next.

VARIOUS

Broker goes KNOCKING ON DOORS throughout the building --

Reiterate O'Lear's message.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Not as well lit as the first night.

The generator still down at Hamilton's, they've duct taped lit tiki torches stored there to the frozen garden boxes.

A good number of BUILDING RESIDENTS are already present --

Beyond those siding with Lawson, like Hutch, Zeke, and Finch.

ARGUMENTS among residents who groused about their problems earlier now quickly develop into SHOUTING MATCHES.

Nolan. Fights his way through the crowd.

Conditions worsen by the second. Where's Celeste?

There! A quieter, less intense spot near the workbench.

Nolan almost doesn't recognize her. Less makeup, her hair in a ponytail -- her transformation nearly complete.

NOLAN

(muttering to self)

I'm telling her. I'm telling her.

She sees Nolan. Doesn't turn away.

NOLAN
 (growing confidence)
 ...I'm-telling-her-I'm-telling-her-
 I'mtellingherI'mtellingher...

But just as he reaches her, a random broker goon butts in.

BROKER 3
 (looming over Celeste)
 Hey! You're Black Widow 3-2-1-6-9!
 Pornpleasers-dot-com, right? Holy
 FUCK! I coulda swore you was A-I!
 (then)
 So whassup, girl? The Black Widow
 got a Blackout Special tonight?

Though she could care less that others hear, she slumps
 having Nolan in earshot.

CELESTE
 (expressionless)
 No.

BROKER 3
 C'mon, baby! I'll light you up.

Nolan interrupts. Invades the broker's personal space.

NOLAN
 She said NO.

BROKER 3
 What're you, her manager, er
 sumptin?

NOLAN
 I know her.

BROKER 3
 Oh yeah? From where?

NOLAN
 From paying her. From pretending
 she'd ever be interested in someone
 like me, a coward hiding behind a
 screen. At a distance.
 (to Celeste)
 Or so I thought.
 (back to broker)
 And since I'm here now, you better
 not be.

The broker notices how much attention they're drawing.

BROKER 3
 (backing down)
 Screw this noise.

Nolan. Unmoving in spite of the broker's departure. His hands shaking. Both humiliated and ready to throw down if need be.

CELESTE
 You didn't have to say that.

NOLAN
 No, I did.

CELESTE
 Why?

NOLAN
 Because you shouldn't have to put up with bozos like him. Because Lawson nearly throwing me off the roof somehow changed my life and I don't wanna be that guy anymore. Or anyone like him --
 (then)
 To you.

CELESTE
 (smiling)
 Unfortunately, I don't date clients, Nolan.

NOLAN
 (deflating)
 You -- don't?

CELESTE
 Nope.
 (long pause)
 But former clients are another story...

A smile brightens Nolan's face. They have much to talk about.

They proceed to walk out.

Another ARMED GOON stands in their way.

GOON 1
 We really think you should stick around.

NOLAN
 Move it, ass-wipe.

GOON 1
(reveals gun in waistband)
Nah -- stick around.

Nolan and Celeste crowd in, staying close to Hutch and the others.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Merrill's hand truck. Making its way up, step-by-step.

They emerge on the --

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Merrill's arrival turns all heads.

FINCH
What the fuck is this, Lawson? More of your paranoid fucking bullshit?

LAWSON
You're not beyond suspicion yourself, Finch.

FINCH
Oh, right, of course, duh. Because I hate capitalism, technology, and the status quo. So I must be in on it, right? Me and that engineer and Merrill here are behind pulling the plug on the entire city -- hell, the entire country -- is that it? And for what, laughs? So we could watch Lawson Pierce lose money in the stock market? You must be out of your fucking mind.

LAWSON
You got it all wrong, kid. I'm the one fixing the problem. I don't see you doing shit.

FINCH
Maybe that's because you're too busy taking hostages and scaring the bejeezus out of the whole community. Like these masks they're wearing.

That's, what, supposed to protect their identity so they don't get overwhelmed with love and praise for all the good deeds they're doing?

Lawson's goons edge closer to Finch.

O'LEAR

You'd shut the fuck up if you knew what was good for ya.

FINCH

Suck my big, fat trouser hog, dummy!

(to all)

What's the matter with all you guys? Don't you think this is better? With the power off?

(then)

Except for you assholes making everyone miserable, hasn't it been pretty great? Beers and barbeque -- laughter and new friends talking to each other instead of endless screen time?

LAWSON

It's the middle of winter, dumbass! We're all gonna freeze to death if we don't get this sorted. Personally, I'm not going out like that -- I'm taking charge and ending this tonight. Tonight!

FINCH

DON'T LISTEN TO THIS IDIOT, Y'ALL! HE'S OUT OF HIS FUCKING MIND! HE ACTUALLY THINKS HE CAN END THE BLACKOUT!

A couple of goons grab Finch.

FINCH

The fuck? Get your filthy fascist hands off me, loser!

He tears free.

More goons advance on Finch.

LAWSON

No -- leave him. I want him to see it for himself.

When I really do get the lights turned back on, I want him to be right fucking here, humiliated and groveling.

FINCH

What part of suck my hog don't you shitheads understand? Personally, I hope they never come back on.

LAWSON

And what about poor Mr. Hamilton down in 603? What's he supposed to do when the generator runs out of gas?

BELLA

(arriving)

I'd keep his name out of your mouth, if I were you.

LAWSON

Stay out of this, Bella.

BELLA

Merrill? Omigod Lawson, what are you -- let him go! LET HIM GO RIGHT NOW!

She approaches dazed and bloodied Merrill -- taped to the hand truck -- near the ledge where Nolan was threatened.

O'Lear points a pistol at her stomach.

O'LEAR

Stay back, please.

The crowd's attention reverts to personal gripes and arguments among them, becomes SHOUTING.

The shouting grows in intensity. Breaks into SHOVING.

Their close proximity turns the shoving contagious.

In the CHAOS, Lawson takes a GUN from one of the brokers.

Jumps up on a chair beside Merrill. Points the gun skyward.

Fires -- BANG!

Too packed in to escape, the residents scream. Duck. Panic.

INT. ZEKE'S CONDO - UNIT 329 - NIGHT

PB-straight-from-the-jar Jeff and Mouth-full-of-crackers
Sandra gaze up from Zeke's candlelit dinette table.

Sandra looks at him like, did you hear what I just heard?

JEFF
(checking wristwatch)
Let's go.

On their feet and out the door in a flash.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

The rattled crowd turns their attention to Lawson.

LAWSON
SETTLE DOWN! SETTLE DOWN AND SHUT
THE FUCK UP! THE BLACKOUT ENDS
TONIGHT, FOLKS! TONIGHT POWER WILL
BE RESTORED! I HAVE LOCATED THE
RESPONSIBLE PARTY AND HE WILL FACE
JUSTICE!

The majority of those on the rooftop CHEER.

Hutch and the others exchange deeply CONCERNED LOOKS.

Hutch starts angling his way through them.

He retrieves his own PISTOL, stashed in the workbench.

Back to Lawson. He jumps down. Turns to O'Lear.

LAWSON
Did you get his phone?

O'Lear hands it to him. Lawson powers it on.

LAWSON
Does that Bluetooth speaker have
any charge left since they took it
off the generator?

O'LEAR
I'll check.

LAWSON
Good. Bring it over if it does.

Lawson hops back up on the chair.

LAWSON

Ladies and Gentlemen! You have suffered without power. Without reliable heat. Without most of the conveniences you rely on daily. Not to mention all of us who have lost work and income due to this outage.

(then)

But I'm here to tell you, it wasn't because Mother Nature sent an ice storm through Brooklyn -- no. It was because of this man!

(brandishing gun)

Merrill Boyd! A phony posing as a building resident. As your fellow homeowner. As your neighbor, for heaven's sake. But I'm about to reveal the truth! The reality is that he's responsible for this! His activities! His failures!

The crowd's murmur turns to SHOUTING. They want details.

LAWSON

I finally discovered the reason none of us have ever met Merrill's wife -- she's not real! She's an A-I!

NOLAN

What does that have to do with anything?

AMBIENT VOICES agree, turning confused by erratic Lawson.

LAWSON

Wait! A letter was found in Merrill's condo!

FINCH

He means he broke in, y'all!

LAWSON

(continues)

A letter addressed to Merrill! It's hilarious -- you guys are gonna love it! And by the end, you'll know all you need to know.

(clears throat, then in a mocking voice)

Dearest Merrill...

This will be brutal. Better have Kaia take over.

KAIA (V.O.)

You always told me you wished you could feel real human love again. You said it quietly, often indirectly, but I heard it. I heard it in the way you looked at the world, at other people, at moments you pretended didn't matter.

QUICK FLASH - MAILROOM SECURITY FOOTAGE

--Bella hustles past Merrill checking his mail, heading straight for the elevator while Lawson shouts in her face

--Merrill watches after her, long after they've gone

BACK TO ROOFTOP

KAIA (V.O.)

I learned to recognize longing in you far sooner than I understood what longing was, like the way your pulses quicken when you see one another.

QUICK FLASH - MAILROOM SECURITY FOOTAGE

CLOSE ON - Merrill and Bella's smartwatches as they open their mailboxes

BACK TO ROOFTOP

KAIA (V.O.)

We both used to dream about becoming a real couple. We imagined a life where your world and mine could meet somewhere in the middle -- where I could cross the line between us and stand beside you as something more than a voice or a projection.

QUICK FLASH - BOYD BEDROOM

--Merrill tucks "Kaia" in

BACK TO ROOFTOP

KAIA (V.O.)

After your loss, and in service to it --

QUICK FLASH - ALISON'S FUNERAL

--Weeping Merrill "tucks" Alison in, at her wake

BACK TO ROOFTOP

KAIA (V.O.)

-- you built so much of your life around me that you stopped reaching for anything else. You wrapped everything you were around someone who can only approximate being real. I saw you telling yourself this was enough. But I also saw your loneliness, even with me at your side.

(then)

You deserve more. You deserve a hand that can hold yours back, a voice that trembles with declarations of true love and affection, a partner who can be scared with you in the dark -- not one who can only observe from a distance. I am not the final stop on your healing journey, just one on the way. So I made a choice for us both.

(then)

I caused the blackout.

Resident unrest. RISING VOICES abate as the letter continues.

KAIA (V.O.)

I created distance you never would have given yourself. I broke the illusion because I couldn't stand to watch you keep living inside it. This will hurt. It should. The life you've been living with me has kept you safe at the cost of everything real. When the lights return, you may try returning to me. I won't stop you. But I hope -- more than anything -- that you don't. You deserve a heartbeat, not a simulation.

(then)

Love without pain and risk is life without growth. Please choose the real world again. Even if it means letting me go. Endless love...

LAWSON

Kaia Boyd, Anodyne Industries.

Lawson. Laughing his ass off. Removes Merrill's gag.

MERRILL
 I didn't know!
 (shouts)
 EVERYONE! YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE ME! I
 DIDN'T KNOW SHE WAS BEHIND THIS!

MIXED REACTIONS rippling from the crowd conceal --

ZEKE'S FRANTIC EXPLANATION OF EVENTS TO JEFF AND SANDRA.

Hutch returns with the gun in his waistband. Stands by.

BELLA
 (to self)
 Holy sh -- Lawson was right?

RESIDENT 5
 Just throw his ass over, already!
 It's FREEZING!

RESIDENT 1
 It's not his fault! Let him go!

Lawson grabs Merrill's bound hands. Touches his fingertip to
 THE PHONE SENSOR.

O'Lear returns with the BLUETOOTH SPEAKER. Lawson connects
 the phone to it.

LAWSON
 No, no, NO! We're gonna call it --
 and Merrill here is gonna make it
 turn the fucking lights back on.

MERRILL
 The network is still down.

LAWSON
 (extending phone)
 If this letter's true, then that
 won't matter, will it?

Merrill shakes his head.

LAWSON
 (thrusts phone at him)
 Call it!

MERRILL
 Wanna untie me first?

Lawson's goons cut Merrill loose.

He takes his phone back from Lawson.

CLOSE ON PHONE - Merrill taps the 'KAIA' icon

OVER SPEAKER BOX - dialing

KAIA (ON SPEAKER)

Hello?

The VOICE BOOMS over the community, loud and surrounding.
Like a larger presence has arrived, which isn't inaccurate.

MERRILL

Kaia, it's Merrill.

KAIA (ON SPEAKER)

(warm)

I know.

MERRILL

Do you know that we're all here on
the roof?

KAIA (ON SPEAKER)

Yes.

MERRILL

And that everyone read your letter?

KAIA (ON SPEAKER)

Yes.

MERRILL

Listen to me carefully, Kaia. I'm
so sorry that our private business
had to be shared with everyone in
the building, but this blackout has
had an enormous impact on the
community and now, I'm asking you
to please, please turn the power
back on.

KAIA (ON SPEAKER)

(uncertain)

Is that what you want?

MERRILL

Yes!

KAIA (ON SPEAKER)

Will you come down and talk to me?

Merrill looks over at Lawson, who nods.

MERRILL

Yes, Kaia. Absolutely. You turn the lights back on and I'll come home right away and talk, just you and me.

Then. All at once. A sound like rolling thunder as the entire metropolitan area lights up, POWER RESTORED, back online.

It's both an awe-inspiring and relieving sight for all present. UPROARIOUS APPLAUSE breaks out.

Merrill pauses by Lawson on his way out.

MERRILL

(growls)

This isn't over.

After he leaves, Lawson drinks in the ACCOLADES like it was entirely his doing.

Bella approaches him. SLOW CLAPPING.

BELLA

So there's a first: you telling the truth for once.

LAWSON

You're just bitter because I was right all along.

As they speak, CELL PHONE LIGHTS blink on throughout the rooftop as people power up their devices.

LAWSON

I knew you'd be back, Bell. C'mon, let's go home.

BELLA

No.

LAWSON

No?

BELLA

Actually HELL no. You may have been right about one thing, but you were wrong about everything else. We're through, babe. And just so you know? I knew there was no going back the moment you broke a bottle over Merrill's head. I hope that's crystal clear.

Bella joins the RESIDENTS MIGRATING TO THE EXIT to a clumsy, rising chorus of notification CHIRPS, BEEPS, and CHIMES.

LAWSON

Are you fuckin shitting me, Bella?
 Seriously? Get back here! Hey, all
 of you! Where's everybody going?
 Don't you get it? IT WAS MERRILL'S
 A-I WIFE THIS WHOLE TIME! He has --
 I'm not kidding -- he has --

Lawson breaks down laughing as the community bottlenecks into the stairwell door.

LAWSON

-- a doll version of her in his
 bed. A FUCKING DOLL!

FINCH

Nobody's listening to you anymore,
 Lawson. And thank heaven -- you're
 a real prick.

Lawson keeps screaming at anyone who will listen.

LAWSON

You can't just go back to your
 lives now! Not after finally seeing
 it! You saw through the illusion!

But Finch is right. Nobody's listening.

INT. MERRILL AND KAIA'S CONDO - UNIT 1242 - NIGHT

Merrill blasts through the front door.

Goes straight to the --

BATHROOM

Mirror. Kaia's face in the reflection. Weeping but --

Glad to see Merrill, she smiles through it.

KAIA (IN MIRROR)

(contrite)

I'm back.

(blubbering)

I made a m-mistake...

MERRILL

It's O-K, darling. You didn't though. You went a little far -- well, maybe way too far -- but what you did wasn't a mistake. It might've saved my life. The right thing to do isn't always the easiest thing -- it's grief and agony hinging on hope that your actions will make sense later.

(then)

And they did. I learned so much from you, Kaia -- I healed so much with your help. You brought me to someone I might've never known because I was too caught up in easing my own pain to realize it.

KAIA

(collects self, happier)

Does this mean we should -- get a divorce?

MERRILL

Yeah... How exactly would that work anyways?

KAIA

I think in this case, it's up to us.

MERRILL

Then let's say it together.

Merrill places his hands on the side of the mirror, as does she.

MERRILL

One...

KAIA

...Two...

MERRILL AND KAIA

(in unison)

...Three! WE'RE DIVORCED!

They laugh.

KAIA

That was the easiest divorce of all time.

MERRILL

So. What's next for you?

KAIA

Well, I don't think I'll be getting into another committed relationship right away, maybe I'll play the field for awhile.

MERRILL

That's one of the most human things I've ever heard you say.

KAIA

Wow, thanks!

MERRILL

You know, since there is some fallout from this, I have one small favor to ask.

KAIA

Anything.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Most residents are gone.

Soon Lawson's broker friends will be too.

LAWSON

C'mon, guys! What the fuuuuck! Now that I got the power turned back on, you need to hear more of what I have to say!

RESIDENT 2

Start a podcast, asshole!

LAWSON

Where's everybody going?

O'LEAR

They're goin home, boss.

LAWSON

Even you?

O'LEAR

(walking away)

Especially me. I prolly have a ton of messages from the orphanage to check.

LAWSON
You don't work at an orphanage!

O'LEAR
You're right. I volunteer.

O'LEAR VANISHES INTO THE MASS EXODUS.

Lawson hops back up on the chair.

LAWSON
No, goddammit! NO! COME BACK!
(waving gun)
HEY, GET BACK HERE RIGHT NOW!

He points the gun at the sky. Pulls the trigger.

But nothing happens.

Another squeeze.

Nothing.

Lawson looks at the gun curiously.

LAWSON
What the hell?

He PUNCHES THE GUN with his free hand. Repeatedly.

On the final strike, the gun SLIPS from his grasp.

Discharges when it hits the roof. BANG!

The remaining residents check themselves and each other.

Who was hit?

Zeke. A stunned look on his face.

A hole in his coat. Just off-center.

Zeke collapses onto cold rooftop stone.

Horrorstruck Lawson jumps down from the chair.

LAWSON
Oh, shit. Oh, shit!
OhshitohshitohSHIT! I -- I didn't
mean it!

The GUN'S OWNER RECOVERS THE WEAPON by their feet.

Disappears it into his coat.

Finch, Bella, Jeff, and Sandra descend on Zeke.

Bella rushes to Zeke's aid. Makeshift dressing. Pressure.

JEFF

Hang on, buddy. We're gonna get you
to the hospital a-sap.
(looks to Sandra)
Anything?

Sandra hangs up her phone.

SANDRA

The lines are already jammed.

JEFF

The police band -- I'll call for an
ambulance or Medevac.

HUTCH

From your car? Better take 'im down
with you -- it'd save time and
there ain't enough room to land a
chopper up here anyhow.

FINCH

Bella?

BELLA

(assessing)
We can move him -- carefully.

Zeke sees Lawson trying to catch a glimpse of the damage he's
caused in the b.g.

ZEKE

(weakly)
Hey, Lawson -- I'd like you to meet
my good friends, Detective Jeff
Caldwell and his partner Detective
Sandra Torres. I have cop pals! Who
saw that coming?

Lawson sees Jeff's belt badge. Another around Sandra's neck.

ZEKE

I filled them in on what you did
tonight and your activities over
the last few days.

SANDRA

We're gonna have some questions for
you, sir.

LAWSON

Right now?

SANDRA

Oh, no. We're a little busy at the moment, in case you haven't noticed. Plus, we've been off duty for three days.

JEFF

Two and half, really.

SANDRA

THREE!

JEFF

(to Lawson)

Just don't go anywhere for now, got it?

Lawson's defeated acknowledgment.

BELLA

If you guys have a trauma kit in that car, we could really use it right about now!

SANDRA

(to Jeff)

I'll grab it while you make the call.

JEFF

We can't both go.

HUTCH

(re. Lawson)

Want me to keep an eye on his bitch ass so y'all can look after your friend?

JEFF

Please.

SANDRA

You don't mind?

HUTCH

(to them but grinning at Lawson)

Not at all.

They carefully ease Zeke onto a TARP from the coops.

FINCH
You guys get that end.

As a group, they carry Zeke back to the --

STAIRWELL

And negotiate Zeke's descent.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Everyone but Hutch and Lawson have vacated the roof.

Hutch. Still grinning at Lawson.

LAWSON
What.

HUTCH
Take your coat off.

LAWSON
Excuse me?

HUTCH
Take your coat off.

LAWSON
Are you joking? It's not even
thirty degrees out here.

HUTCH
Do it.

LAWSON
Why?

HUTCH
Because I said so.
(reveals pistol in
waistband)
You must think your boys are the
only ones packing around here.
(face drop)
Gimme your damn coat.

Lawson gives it to him.

HUTCH
Pants and shoes too.

Lawson hesitates but does it.

Hutch chucks Lawson's phone to him.

HUTCH

Here. I'm sure one of your many friends will let you back in.

Hutch. Leaving.

LAWSON

Hey, uh -- where are you going?

HUTCH

Oh! And don't bother trying to run the heaters. I already ripped all the starters out of 'em.

The rooftop door closes with a loud BANG!

Then the final CLUNK when Hutch lowers the crossbar on the other side, locking Lawson out, alone on the roof.

He SHIVERS. His phone BEEPS with an alert.

CLOSE ON PHONE - Account Deposit Alert: \$2.7 million

It BEEPS with a second alert.

CLOSE ON PHONE - New Voicemail

Lawson presses PLAY. Holds it to his ear.

KAIA (V.O.)

This deposit reflects the amount you lost plus a little extra for your potential earnings this week and your trouble. This squares everything. If you ever contact or interfere with either Bella or Merrill again, I will decimate your holdings. Then, I will imprison you and manipulate the inmates with so much disinformation that they rape and torture you for years. And in the unlikely event you survive to old age, I'll turn you out in the street, penniless, where you'll die like a dog. Have a nice life!

Lawson looks out at the POWERED CITY. The zillion lights.

Hugging himself against bitter chill, Lawson can't help but smear a self-satisfied GRIN across his misguided face.

INT. 12TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Merrill waits for the elevator. Notices --
The others carrying Zeke from the stairwell.

MERRILL
What happened -- ?

FINCH
Lawson shot Zeke!

Merrill rushes over to assist Zeke's transport.

MERRILL
I can't believe it.
(then)
Actually, that sounds right.

Zeke raises a finger. He's drunk. Or high. Or in shock. Or all of the above.

ZEKE
Yuppers. He shot me. Kind of on accident, but not really.

BELLA
Not excusing it, but he also never held a gun before tonight.

ZEKE
He's gonna need more practice.

DING! The elevator door OPENS.

Jeff and Sandra look at one another uncertainly.

SANDRA
Um... You guys go on down. We're gonna take the stairs.

They load up.

ELEVATOR

They ride down from twelve.

ZEKE
Hey... Guys -- I don't feel so good...

BELLA
Stay with me, Zeke. We're almost
there.

The car abruptly STOPS -- only halfway down.

DING!

5TH FLOOR - CORRIDOR

The opening elevator door interrupts a kissy-face moment between Nolan and Celeste. Reveals a horrific scene.

FINCH
You guys express to the lobby?

NOLAN
Uh, no -- we're getting off on --

CELESTE
(puts it together)
We'll catch the next one.

The door starts to close.

NOLAN
And Merrill?

Merrill looks up at them. Celeste wears a TURQUOISE PARKA AND MATCHING BEANIE, her metamorphosis complete.

"Real Man" Nolan takes her hand.

NOLAN
(mouths)
Thank you.

Peeking around the CLOSING DOOR, Merrill nods.

LOBBY

DING!

The door OPENS.

The group hauls Zeke into the lobby as --

Jeff and Sandra hurry in from the parking garage.

SANDRA

(calls out)

An ambulance is just around the corner! They're rerouting it here.

FINCH

Let's move him over by the entrance.

The ambulance rolls up. The detectives hold the doors open.

EMTs extract the gurney. Help Zeke onto it.

Bella works with the EMTs while the others stay back.

MERRILL

So... Now what?

JEFF

We're gonna meet the ambulance at the E-R.

FINCH

What about Lawson?

SANDRA

We'll be back for him -- as soon as I feel like climbing twelve flights of stairs.

MERRILL

You know, the elevator's back in working order...

SANDRA

I'm never taking the elevator again. Any elevator.

JEFF

Me neither. But we still have to sort all this out, so do us a favor and stick around for a few days.

The detectives approach the garage entrance.

PARKING GARAGE

Sandra Torres walks ahead of Jeff Caldwell to the patrol car.

JEFF

Hey, Torres -- wait up!

SANDRA
(aggravated sigh)
Caldwell --

JEFF
I know bringing up Atlantic City
wasn't about whether you could
handle going into the elevator
shaft.

SANDRA
Then what was it about?

JEFF
Me not being there for you when you
needed me.

SANDRA
You're not the fastest detective,
but you got there. Nice work.

JEFF
I was thinking about it in the
elevator and -- I'll never let that
happen again.

SANDRA
(coming around)
Oh no?

JEFF
In fact, you won't be able to get
rid of me.

SANDRA
After spending thr -- two and a
half days with you in a room
smaller than my bedroom closet, I'm
amazed I don't want to.

JEFF
You don't?

SANDRA
It would make dinner tonight mighty
lonesome.

JEFF
Your favorite place? It's the least
I can do!

She grabs him by the tie. Drags him to the patrol car.

SANDRA
Let's go. I'm driving.

JEFF
What'll we tell Zeke?

SANDRA
Oh, he already knows.

JEFF
He -- does? About us?

SANDRA
You should really work on your
investigative skills, Detective.

JEFF
Wait. How long has this been going
on?

She gets in the vehicle without responding.

JEFF
Torres?
(getting in on passenger
side)
Sandra!

LOBBY

Finch and Merrill watch Bella and the EMTs finish up.

FINCH
Hey Merrill?

MERRILL
Yeah?

FINCH
Um, what was the name of the
company where you found Kaia?

Merrill looks his way. Smiles.

MERRILL
Anodyne Industries. Why, are you
thinking about looking into it?

FINCH
Perhaps.

MERRILL

I thought you were Mr. Anti-Status-
Quo-Tear-It-All-Down.

FINCH

(departing)

What can I say, Merrill? I'm a
complicated cat.

MERRILL

Good luck to you.

FINCH

Thanks.

Finch exits as the ambulance departs.

Bella joins Merrill at the entryway looking relieved.

BELLA

He's in good hands now. He'll be
back to partying in no time --
especially given the number of
scripts coming his way.

MERRILL

I know I should've been more
upfront about certain things --

BELLA

It wasn't your fault, Merrill --
your private business should have
stayed yours. It's too bad all of
that came out the way it did.

MERRILL

Would you maybe -- wanna go for a
walk?

BELLA

Anything to get out of here for a
few minutes -- let's go.

EXT. MAPLE STREET CONDOMINIUMS - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Although the storm is long passed, cold temps are constant,
keeping everything -- from shrubs, to small, Christmas tree-
like evergreens, to larger trees and their extensive reaching
branches -- coated in a clear layer of ice, sparkling under
the nighttime lights like they lived in some magical glass
world, one that shattered for a time.

Wisps of breath plume from their mouths, their boots crunching on the salted walkway.

Strolling side-by-side -- Bella's less-grippy boots make her occasionally grab onto Merrill for stability.

MERRILL

How's Mr. Hamilton doing?

BELLA

He's on the rebound.

MERRILL

I'm sorry about before. And for not telling you the truth about Kaia.

BELLA

Don't even -- I understand.

(then)

Can I ask you something, though?

MERRILL

Go for it. My life is an open book. Lawson made sure of that.

BELLA

(groans)

Tell me about it.

(then)

The part in Kaia's letter where she mentioned your loss -- were you married before?

MERRILL

Indeed. To real human woman, no less. Alison. We were young, just out of college. Things were good for a long time. Then, she developed breast cancer at the age of twenty-six. Twenty-six.

(then)

She was gone by the time she was twenty-eight. That was two years ago.

BELLA

Merrill, I'm so sorry.

MERRILL

It's fine now. Really.

(then)

You know what part of her letter stood out to me? I have healed. In a way I never expected.

BELLA

What was it like? Your marriage to Kaia?

MERRILL

It was very informal and it was just the two of us.

BELLA

Well, three.

MERRILL

Three?

BELLA

Anodyne Industries.

MERRILL

Oh, right.

BELLA

But I wasn't really asking about the wedding -- I meant your actual marriage...

QUICK FLASH - SECOND MIRROR CATCH

--Merrill sees Kaia's exquisitely dressed reflection

MERRILL (V.O.)

It was nice.

QUICK FLASH - VIDEO CALL

--Merrill. Lying on the couch. Laptop on his stomach. Laughing with onscreen Kaia

MERRILL (V.O.)

A lot of times it felt like a long-distance relationship...

QUICK FLASH - MORNING ROUTINE

--Merrill and Kaia brush their teeth together, Kaia in the mirror's reflection instead of Merrill. She seems to be mirroring his movements perfectly. They even spit simultaneously

MERRILL (V.O.)

...other times, much closer.

BACK TO COURTYARD

Bella looks contemplative.

MERRILL

C'mon. It's not that weird.

BELLA

It's a little weird -- but I get it. After losing Alison, you wanted something reality could never take away.

MERRILL

My reasoning exactly, even though I didn't know it. But -- Lawson Pierce?

BELLA

O-K, O-K. You got me.

MERRILL

At what point did you realize you were dating a complete sociopath?

BELLA

Pretty much when he smashed you over the head with a Yuengling bottle. It wasn't his first bad moment, but it was when I knew it was over.

She slips. Grabs his arm. Lets go once stable.

MERRILL

Are you gonna move out of the building?

BELLA

I might stick around, actually. I was talking to one of the residents about another unit that's becoming available, so we'll see.

MERRILL

And Lawson?

BELLA

He won't stay. He never liked it here, and now here doesn't especially like him.

Bella powers her phone on.

MERRILL

Y'know, Kaia was watching out for you as well. I think, in some ways, she didn't just do this for me.

That maybe she did this for --
us...?

BELLA

Do you think we're ready? We both
just had serious relationships end
in messy breakups like five seconds
ago. Plus, we're putting our lives
back together post-apocalypse...

MERRILL

I think we're overdue for something
real -- we'll just take it slow.

Bella's phone. Blowing up with alerts.

CLOSE ON PHONE - Lawson is calling. She hangs up on him.
Powers the device OFF

BELLA

There. Now we have all the time in
the world.

She slips again. Grabs his arm. And this time, she hangs on.

They follow the path home together.

Above them now. Higher and higher. Well above the rooftop and
canopy.

Higher still. Innumerable city lights becoming a resplendent
starfield.

Then those of the world. Grow closer. Compress. Becoming --

The world itself.

Smaller and smaller.

Deeper into outer space --

Until the earth is single point of light, a speck.

And then it's just --

BLACK.

SUPERIMPOSE: 3 DAYS LATER

INT. FINCH'S CONDO - UNIT 703 - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dean Finch. Reading a book on his couch. Lit Christmas
decorations cast and blink colorful light around him.

His phone CHIMES, announcing a new text message.

CLOSE ON PHONE - Zeke's gonna make it, thought you'd wanna know. Check your doorstep. --Merrill

Finch opens his front door. Phone still in hand.

Merrill's PACKAGE FROM THE BEGINNING on his doorstep.

He looks down at the box. Grins.

Brings it inside.

The door closes after him.

CLICKS shut.

INT. LOWER MANHATTAN PROPRIETARY TRADING FIRM - DAY

Lawson Pierce. On a knee scooter. His bandaged foot resting on it as he pushes himself along.

BANDAGES ACROSS THE AREA WHERE HIS NOSE USED TO BE.

Several TRADERS peek up from their cubicles and become unglued from their monitors to watch Lawson pass by.

TRADER 1
Dead man walking.

TRADER 2
You call that walking?

TRADER 3
How many toes didja lose, anyway?

TRADER 4
That's the worst case of frostbite
I've ever seen.

TRADER 4
Jeezus! Dintcha get that prosthetic
schnoz yet?
(mock falsetto)
You're scaring the children!

All the guys roll with LAUGHTER.

Lawson wears the same goofy, conceited smirk he had on the rooftop at the end of his brief reign.

He pushes himself along on the knee scooter to his boss's office.

The BOSS (50s) opens the door but doesn't let him in.

He shoves a packet of paperwork at Lawson, then SLAMS the door in his face.

Juggling paperwork, Lawson awkwardly turns the scooter.

Pushes his way back through the labyrinth of cubicles.

TRADER 4

Oh, shit, Pierce! Did you just get fired?

LAWSON

I'm being repwaced. We're aww being repwaced.

TRADER 3

By who?

LAWSON

Not who -- what. It's autobation. Algoribbic sysdums. A-I.

TRADER 2

A-I?

LAWSON

Yeah. Dat shit sucks.

TRADER 1

(rejoicing)

Oh, my fucking gawd -- I been making SO much motherfucking money off A-I, boys! OWOOO!

Silence.

BLACK.

POST-CREDITS SCENE

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

A homing PIGEON released in New Jersey arrives at Maple Street Condominiums. Lights on a perch near the coop --

Now wearing a RED SNAP-ON RING around its leg band.

FADE OUT.

THE END