

TV

Written by

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TV

INT. HOTSPOT COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Judging by the lack of energy in the place, it's probably about closing time. Two of the last three customers grab their drinks and head out, leaving one.

CLAIRE WINDHAM (23) is sitting by herself at a table for two, killing time, thumbing through her phone. She's finished her Danish and her coffee is cold, but there's nothing about her current state compelling her to move on.

TV ON WALL

CNN shows the President signing an important paper, surrounded by smiling sycophants. The crawl at the bottom tells US, "BREAKING: Marine troops arrive at the Mexican and Canadian borders to quell rioting."

WE SEE News footage of violent clashes between protesters and troops - people being shot at, ambulances loading bodies, teargas being used on angry mobs.

CLAIRE

- She's staring at the silent TV, expressionless.
- ON PHONE. She's scrolling through ads and pointless posts in Facebook.

TV

- Now, it's a stand-up reporter somewhere. Police tape surrounds the front of a row house behind her. A dead body is being wheeled out.
- The anchor reads off the prompter with a mugshot of a snarling teen behind him.
- The CNN animated logo plays.
- The screen is covered with flashing text describing how Big Tree Life Insurance will never require a medical exam.

CLAIRE

She is texting.

ON PHONE, she types, "Been waiting for over an hour." Reply from Emma, "WTF!"

She looks up at the TV, not really seeing it.

CONTINUED:

TV

On the studio set, an anchor is talking over titles - "Five mass shootings this week." Then, images pop on showing bloody bodies bent over steps, trails of blood running down a wall, crying women holding pictures of dead relatives.

COFFEE SHOP - LATER

WIDE. The small shop is empty except for Claire, the barista - who's cleaning off tables - and the ever-present TV.

CLAIRE

She wets her finger and dabs up crumbs left from the Danish.

TV

- Protesters are setting fire to vehicles.

- An old image shows cartel boss "Julio Guereirro," then a SPLIT-SCREEN of the boss lying dead in a pool of blood, half his face blown away.

CLAIRE

Staring at nothing on her phone.

COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Claire is at the register, waiting to be rung up. She's staring at her phone, as she taps her card on the reader and adds a tip, without acknowledging the barista.

She types a text.

ON PHONE: "Need anything from the store?" Emma's reply: "Milk, TP."

EXT. HOTSPOT COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

The CAFE MUSIC stops, replaced by the sound of PASSING CARS.

Claire is standing in the doorway, as the door closes behind her. She has the same flat look.

It's cold. She gathers her coat and zips it up. Then, she turns and sees a guy, DAVE. He's standing 20 feet away, by the curb, looking at his phone.

CONTINUED:

DAVE AND CLAIRE

She's facing him, staring into his eyes.

CLAIRE
(Confused, disappointed,
flat)
So, you've just been standing out
here?

DAVE
(Trying, but not really)
Yeah, sorry.

She tries to make some sense of it in his eyes.

CLAIRE
Why?

DAVE
I don't know.

CLAIRE
You don't know?

DAVE
I mean. I don't know what to say.

She waits. He doesn't say anything.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

- She grabs a carton of milk and puts it in a plastic handheld basket.
- She tosses two rolls of toilet paper in the basket.
- She reaches for a package of Candy Carnival, looks at it, puts it back. She grabs a bigger fun-size assorted candy mix.

CHECK-OUT COUNTER

The CASHIER rings her up. Claire is on her phone, ignoring the Cashier.

CASHIER
We got like two guys that can
barely speak English, you know,
working in the back. Who knows
where they come from. Guatemala,
Colombia. It's only a matter of
time before ICE grabs them.

CONTINUED:

Claire pays without looking up.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
They're like really good workers,
friendly, work long hours, good
with customers.

She walks away.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
But, they just don't talk, you
know, good English-

INT. CLAIRE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's a basic 50-year-old, two-bedroom apartment somewhere in San Fernando Valley that she shares with Emma. Claire enters and walks into the...

KITCHEN

She puts the milk in the fridge.

BATHROOM

She puts the toilet paper under the sink.

LIVING ROOM

She plops down on a saggy couch and tears open the candy. She takes a bite of a Snickers and pulls out her phone.

EMMA comes in wearing her pajamas.

EMMA
Hey, how you feeling?

CLAIRE
Like shit.

EMMA
I don't blame you. So he didn't
even tell you why he blew you off?

CLAIRE
Nah. I don't care. If he hadn't
done it to me, I would've done it
to him.

CONTINUED:

EMMA
Fucking loser.

CLAIRE
Yeah. So, it's all good.

Emma watches her down another candy bar.

EMMA
Well, I don't know what to tell
you.

CLAIRE
It's okay.

Emma starts to turn away and stops.

EMMA
Hey, I'm doing this virtual party
thing tomorrow. Would you be
interested? Meet some guys? It's
all online. No commitments, nothing
serious. It's just for fun.

CLAIRE
(Wrinkles her nose)
I don't know.

EMMA
That's cool. You need time to
process.

CLAIRE
I guess.

EMMA
Think about it, okay?

Emma heads back to her room.

CLAIRE
Okay.

EMMA (O.S.)
Night.

CLAIRE
Yeah.

She starts to grab another candy, but stares at it and drops
it back in the bag.

INT. HERB FOX TRAVEL - DAY

Claire enters FRAME and walks by a wallcovering of a sunny, palm-tree-laden beach, past a row of cubicles and travel agents, drinking coffee to activate their morning smiles.

She puts her bag, with a big SAS logo on the side, down by her desk. Then, she sets her grande down and unlocks her work computer. There's a ton of email. She slouches and starts browsing through it.

She hears a TEXT NOTIFICATION and looks down at her phone.

INT. BOSS'S OFFICE - DAY

Claire is sitting across the desk from her boss JOANNE (32), who tends to hold cynical views of just about everything.

JOANNE

(Buzzing on caffeine)

There's nothing to worry about yet, but I just wanted to let you know what's coming down the pike.

(Takes a breath)

Corporate in all its wisdom is thinking about downsizing, as usual, and they told us to keep an eye, you know, an "extra super-critical eye" on billable hours, because of the economy and tariffs and whatnot. You know. Big downturn. Stock market crash. Whatever. They're worried about how all this is going to "shake out." You know. Of course, they picked a particularly bad time to do it. Right when the season is starting up. But they wanted to make sure everyone up and down the chain is as paranoid as they are.

(No reaction from Claire)

So, now you know as much as I do.

CLAIRE

Thanks.

JOANNE

Oh, don't thank me.

CLAIRE

Should I start looking?

CONTINUED:

JOANNE

Well. (BEAT) It's never a bad idea.

INT. CLAIRE'S DESK - DAY

Claire is sitting with her headset on in a one-way conversation with an IRATE CUSTOMER, talking a mile a minute. She is scrolling through the website of a foreign hotel - an unsavory boutique dive in a questionable part of the world.

IRATE CUSTOMER (V.O.)

(On phone)

So, I'd like to know what you're going to do about it!

CLAIRE

(Smiling)

Well, the hotel is not one of our recommended properties, as you know-

IRATE CUSTOMER

Are you saying you won't help me, because that's what I'm hearing-

CLAIRE

Of course not. It's just that you chose this-

IRATE CUSTOMER

I didn't choose to be kept up all night with incessant pounding. Can you hear it? It sounds like someone banging on the pipes. All night! I complained to the manager but he didn't do squat. I got like no sleep. None. And now I have to go out on that damn museum tour all day.

CLAIRE

I'm really sorry.

On the hotel site, it's a staged shot of a smiling, overweight, mustachioed guy holding a rickety chair for a lady in what must be their patio restaurant.

IRATE CUSTOMER (V.O.)

It's your job to vet these places!

CLAIRE

I can find you something-

CONTINUED:

IRATE CUSTOMER (V.O.)
I need a view, free breakfast, my
own bathroom, it has to be clean...

CLAIRE
Of course, I-

IRATE CUSTOMER (V.O.)
What I want is this hotel without
the noise. That's what I want. I
don't want one of your sanitized,
American chains. I want you to fix
this.

A wide-angle lens is used to increase the size of a tiny room
with a saggy double bed.

CLAIRE
I'll see what I can-

IRATE CUSTOMER (V.O.)
And I don't want to come back this
afternoon to find out that
nothing's been done. You hear me?!

CLAIRE
Of course, I'll-

CLICK. The customer hangs up.

It's clear people expect as much from Claire as she expects
from herself.

INT. CLAIRE'S DESK - LATER

She's resting her head on the desk, as email piles up on the
monitor.

INT. HERB FOX TRAVEL PRINTER ROOM - LATER

Claire is leaning on a printer, as it spits out page after
page.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

Claire is trudging down hot, sunny La Brea with her work
clothes on.

EXT. PINK'S HOT DOGS - DAY

She is eating something big and unhealthy at a picnic table with Emma.

EMMA
It's called a virtual party.

CLAIRE
What does that mean?

EMMA
Look.

Emma shows her an example on her phone - stills of happy game characters laughing it up at a lavish party.

EMMA (CONT'D)
You sign up and it makes this game-like character of you, and you go to a party and meet people. I've done it like ten times. It's fun. There's no like obligation. No one knows who you are unless you tell them. So it's safe. No one's going to stalk you. You're talking to real people but all they see is this animation of you. You know.

CLAIRE
What's the point?

EMMA
The point is, you meet people.
(Duh)
That's what you need. To meet people. In a nonthreatening environment. You can say or do whatever you want here, unless it's too, you know, pervy or disrespectful. Then, they kick you off. (BEAT) How's that bacon thing?

CLAIRE
(In junk-food heaven)
Mmmm...

EMMA
So, will you do it? Tonight? We can do it together. Come on.

She shrugs, while she enjoys her bite. The phone RINGS. She looks.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
(Disappointed)
It's Dave.

EMMA
Tell him to fuck himself.

She thinks about that, then answers, putting him on speaker.

CLAIRE
(On phone)
Hi.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DAVE'S HOME OFFICE

It's a small apartment bedroom, converted with cheap furnishings, reflecting how dull the owner is. He's at his desk, speaks with a total lack of enthusiasm.

DAVE
Hi. So I just wanted to call and say I'm sorry about last night. It was weird.

CLAIRE
Yeah.

DAVE
So... I wanted to make it up to you.

CLAIRE
That's okay. You don't have to.

DAVE
No, I want to.

CLAIRE
Okay.

DAVE
Are you busy tonight?

CLAIRE
Not really.

DAVE
You want to meet at the Hotspot at 6 or something?

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Well?

Emma shakes her head.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Sure.

DAVE

Oh good. See you.

She waits for him to say something. Then, she hangs up.

EMMA

(Pissed)

What was that all about?

CLAIRE

(Shit-eating grin)

Oh, nothing.

Emma gets what she's doing.

EMMA

You're going to do the party,
aren't you?

CLAIRE

Might as well. Nothing else going
on.

EMMA

(Celebrating)

Why you sneaky little bitch.

They high five. It's the first time we've seen Claire show
any sign of satisfaction.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Claire is shopping again. She grabs more candy, chips, pizza
rolls and a couple bottles of wine.

CHECK-OUT COUNTER

The same cashier is talking.

CASHIER

I was planning on going to Cabo
next month, but now, who knows.
I've already bought tickets and
booked the hotel. So, I'll probably
have to cancel everything.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CASHIER (CONT'D)
Hopefully, I'll be able to get my
money back. Probably not-

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Claire and Emma are standing by the couch in the living room, wearing VR goggles and holding controllers in each hand, moving as if they're connected to a game. They've cleared out an area. Wine and munchies are staged nearby on the coffee table.

EMMA
I want to warn you. It can get
pretty crazy. So don't be
surprised. Okay?

CLAIRE
Yeah.

VIRTUAL PARTY LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Claire's POV. The two are in a lobby, waiting to launch into the party. They can experiment with moving around using head gestures and touching things with the hand controllers.

Claire floats around and figures out how to manipulate objects.

EMMA (V.O.)
Like people jumping on furniture
and walking through each other and
saying outlandish shit. You know.
It's because players can be totally
like uninhibited, unless they do
something fucked up, you know. But
it's moderated and it's totally
safe. And if someone's pulling
shit, you can report them. But
everybody's just there to have fun.
Right? So...

Claire turns and floats back toward Emma.

EMMA
In other words, don't be like
freaked out when you see people
like running around naked and
having sex right there on the
floor, which can get kind of weird,
but they're just characters. You
know. Nothing's real.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE

RESUME the two standing by the couch. Emma waits for the go signal from Claire, who's processing and more than a little concerned.

CLAIRE
Okay. Hold on.

Claire feels for the wine glass and takes a few swigs. Then, she stands and prepares herself. Finally...

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Okay, let's do it.

VIRTUAL PARTY LOBBY

They press a door that activates the software and loads the party. A moment later...

INT. VIRTUAL PARTY - NIGHT

WE JUMP FULL-FORCE INTO the digital party, already in high gear. THE CAMERA is like an invisible nonplayer character, following the action, free to move and change angles. Even though it's clear we're seeing fantastic images, everything is ultra-realistic, doesn't appear animated at all.

The MUSIC is loud EDM. The PEOPLE SOUNDS and images are jarring. The party is filled with loud, boisterous extraverts, lounging on high-end ultra-modern furniture and moving between multiple lavish rooms - the largest mansion imaginable on steroids.

We're in the spacious living room, but we can see where it branches off to a dining room with an over-the-top buffet table, a balcony overlooking a spectacular city view, and a kitchen/den leading to a high-rise penthouse rooftop terrace with swimming pool, jacuzzi, saunas, and surrounded by private cabanas for virtual sex.

It's a hundred uninhibited people, with their perfectly-sexy, realistic virtual bodies - drinking, eating, touching. Many wear fantastically extravagant clothing, many wear nothing at all. As long as they don't hurt anyone (with words and gestures), they're free to do and be whatever they choose. Of course, most activity is aimed at finding a person(s) they can pair off with.

Claire and Emma are the wallflowers, glancing about nervously, feeling overwhelmed.

CONTINUED:

EMMA'S CHARACTER

Well, what do you think?

Claire is shocked and embarrassed by Emma's crazy costume.

CLAIRE'S CHARACTER

What is that you're wearing?

EMMA'S CHARACTER

This is the real me. I'm out of the closet.

CLAIRE'S CHARACTER

You look like a homeless swan or something.

EMMA'S CHARACTER

Hey, whatever works.

CLAIRE'S CHARACTER

What do you hope to accomplish here, anyway? Attract pigeons?

EMMA'S CHARACTER

You're just jealous. Have fun.

And she's off. Claire panics as she watches Emma fly off to a group of like-minded birds. They welcome her and remark on her wild costume, laugh and talk freely.

Claire is alone again, feeling vulnerable, like an outsider in a room filled with raucous adult teen delinquents.

Claire decides to check out the city view. She moves through the crowd, into the dining room. Checks out people eating the buffet food, drinking extravagant cocktails. Then, she moves through a doorless opening to...

EXT. VIRTUAL PARTY BALCONY - NIGHT

It's much quieter here, dark and peaceful. SOFT LO-FI MUSIC is wafting in from somewhere. The city lights are spectacularly realistic.

She leans on the railing and melts into the feeling - the solitude and safety of a dark, uncrowded space. She could stay here forever.

A noisy couple enters and plants themselves next to her. She's BEAUTY and he's the BEAST. He pulls her in close and they kiss like movie stars. It's romantic and cheesy, and goes on too long. He reaches under her dress and she MOANS with delight. Then, he starts grinding on her.

CONTINUED:

Claire was at first annoyed, but now she's amused. The beast suddenly looks up and notices Claire grinning at them. He stops. (They have Archie and Edith New York accents.)

BEAST
(To Beauty)
Hey, let's see if we can find a
place that's not so public.

BEAUTY
I like it here.

BEAST
(Annoyed)
Well, it ain't very private, is the
thing.

BEAUTY
What?

She follows his eyeline and spots Claire.

BEAUTY (CONT'D)
Oh, hi.

CLAIRE
Don't mind me.

BEAUTY
Sorry, I didn't see you. (BEAT) You
want to join us.

Claire is beginning to have fun with this.

CLAIRE
I'm good. Thanks anyway.

The Beast smiles and they head back into the house. In their wake, a lone figure (30s) is revealed, leaning on the railing at the opposite end of the dark balcony. He's pensive, staring out at the view.

This intrigues Claire. The guy isn't obnoxious like the others. In fact, he's a lot like her. She stares at him. Wonders.

After taking more than enough time to build up courage. She floats over to him.

VIRTUAL PARTY BALCONY BY GENE

He watches her approach with trepidation clearly registering on his face.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

(Weakly)

Hi. I'm, uh, Claire.

GENE

(Nervous, fumbles)

Oh hi. I'm sorry. I mean, Gene. I'm Gene. Uh. You probably don't want to waste your time with me. I mean, I'm not really playing. Obviously, I'm in the game, but... I came here with a friend. And he's in there somewhere and I'm just waiting until he's done with whatever he's doing. And... I mean... Sorry. Okay?

He grins apologetically, sees that Claire appears to be interested in him.

GENE (CONT'D)

I'm not going to be any fun, if that's what you want.

CLAIRE

Hey. Me neither. I just came out here to check out the view and get away from the crowd. I'm not really into this.

GENE

You have a friend in there too?

CLAIRE

Yeah. She's dressed like a swan.

He smiles briefly.

GENE

(Sweaty palms)

So...

He turns back to the view, hoping she will just float off.

CLAIRE

Do you want me to leave?

GENE

No. You can... I mean, it all depends on what you want from me, because I'm not very entertaining. You know?

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
That's okay. I'm not either.

They stare at each other a moment. He finally extends his hand.

GENE
Well, I'm Gene. Gene Farlow.

CLAIRE
Claire Windham.

She goes to grab his hand and it goes right through his.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Oops. Wait. How do you do that thing?

She tries again. Same problem.

GENE
What?

CLAIRE
You know, so you can touch an object?

They LAUGH.

GENE
I don't know. I can touch the railing.

CLAIRE
I know. We can touch things, but if we want to touch another character or guest, we have to do something.

GENE
I don't know. I wasn't told.

CLAIRE
Wait. It's a button, I think, that links us.

GENE
Oh.

Her real hand tries different buttons on the controller, and we see the results, as her character flashes and changes in different ways. She momentarily turns red, then ghostlike, then she spins around, her clothes disappear, then come back, then she flashes white. Gene is amused.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

That's the one. There's a button on your right hand. Like the, uh, fourth one to your right.

His real hand looks for it.

GENE

Ok, one, two, three, four. Now what?

CLAIRE

We both have to press it at the same time.

GENE

Okay.

CLAIRE

On three. One, two, three.

They both flash white for a split second.

GENE

What do you think?

CLAIRE

Let's try it.

They bring their hands together, and get stuck. They can't pull them apart. They LAUGH.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'm not sure what happened.

It gets serious, as they keep trying to disengage.

GENE

I'm trying as hard as I can.

CLAIRE

Did you let go?

GENE

I'm trying!

CLAIRE

Of the button. Did you let go-

GENE

Oh. That.

He does and their grip is suddenly released. She spins around, surprised. They LAUGH again.

CONTINUED:

GENE (CONT'D)
Whoa. My friend didn't mention that one. Sorry, I'm not very mechanical... or digital... or virtual... or whatever.

CLAIRE
Let's see if it still works.

They bring their hands together slowly and shake. There's a moment. They check each other's eyes, smile. Then, they pull their hands apart.

GENE
Yay! Success!

CLAIRE
Phew.

They both exhale with relief.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(Softening)
This technology really is amazing when you think about it.

BEAT.

GENE
Do you want to try some more buttons?

Claire smiles. They're warming to each other.

CLAIRE
Well, okay. As long as we're here, we may as well.

GENE
(Embarrassed)
You know. I kinda liked that one that made your clothes disappear.

CLAIRE
Oh, yeah?

GENE
Is it too early in our relationship? What do you think?

She shrugs, tries it. Her clothes disappear. He's impressed. She looks down at her own bod.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Hey, nice.

GENE

How did you do that?

CLAIRE

Third button.

He tries his button, and is equally impressed.

GENE

Wow. Just so you know, I don't
really... You know. In real life,
I'm nothing like this... I mean...
(BEAT) I'm hot. You too. We're hot.
This is fun.

CLAIRE

Do you want to try some more
buttons?

GENE

Oh yeah.

INT. VIRTUAL CABANA - LATER

The small room has a soft, dim, red glow. Claire and Gene are lying on a round, low bed, engaged in the final moments of intense missionary-position sex. He tenses, she MOANS. He rolls off of her and they lie, panting, sweating, smiling, staring at the ceiling.

CLAIRE

Thank you.

GENE

You're welcome.

CLAIRE

We'll have to remember that
combination.

GENE

First button, both hands, same
time.

CLAIRE

Yeah. Wow.

CONTINUED:

GENE

The second button where we both
turned red and screamed wasn't that
great.

CLAIRE

I agree. Maybe for another time.

They look at themselves in the mirrored ceiling, and like
what they see.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I could really get used to this.

GENE

We make a great couple, don't you
think?

He's immediately embarrassed by what slipped out.

GENE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

What?

GENE

I barely know you.

CLAIRE

Oh, I don't know. I'd say we're
pretty familiar.

GENE

But it's happening so fast.

CLAIRE

(Worried now)

I know.

GENE

Is it wrong?

CLAIRE

Yeah, it probably is. But, I don't
know why.

GENE

I mean, we're just characters in a
game.

CLAIRE

(With meaning)

Aren't we all.

CONTINUED:

GENE

Whoa.

They kiss.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

They're back from the party. Claire is sprawled on the couch, clothing disheveled. Emma is lying in a blanket on the floor. They're both excited and dreamy-eyed.

CLAIRE

It's like we were finishing each other's sentences. It was amazing.

EMMA

I knew you'd get into it.

CLAIRE

But it was random. If I hadn't been on the balcony and seen him at that particular point in time, it never would've happened. I'm not like you. I can't just, you know, do it with anyone.

EMMA

I don't do it with anyone.

CLAIRE

You know what I mean. Almost anyone.

EMMA

No, tonight it was just birds. I found a couple of cocks. They're called cocks, right?

CLAIRE

Male chickens?

EMMA

Yeah. That was fun. I'm wiped out.

She gets up and stretches.

EMMA (CONT'D)

What a workout, huh? See you in the morning.

Emma starts to shuffle off to bed.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
(Serious)
Emma?

EMMA
What?

CLAIRE
I gave him my number.

That stops Emma.

EMMA
(Concerned)
Oh yeah? You probably shouldn't
have. They say not to.

CLAIRE
I know. But Gene was... he was
okay. I have a good feeling about
him.

EMMA
Hmm. Well, I had a good feeling
about my bird friends, but I'd
never give them my number.
Especially on the first date.

Claire loses her glow.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Well, don't worry about it. What's
done is done. Just don't give out
anymore information. Okay?

Emma waits.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Okay?

CLAIRE
(Spacing)
Okay.

EMMA
You promise?

CLAIRE
Yeah.

Emma isn't so sure. She turns and continues into the bedroom.
Claire is staring at the ceiling.

NEWS STORY ON TV

Edited story about the Canadian Prime Minister's press conference.

REPORTER (V.O.)

The Canadian Prime Minister had strong words about the American President's decision to close all US borders to incoming traffic.

PRIME MINISTER

Needless to say, we are shocked and perplexed. There is absolutely nothing to be gained by this action. It only serves to accelerate the hostility between our nations and more bloodshed.

B-roll of backed-up trucks at a Canadian border crossing.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Activity at all international ports has come to a halt, just as the busy holiday season is beginning to ramp up.

INT. HERB FOX TRAVEL MEETING ROOM

Joanne is leading a tense meeting of 10 or so agents. The CNN border story and commercials are playing silently on a TV behind her.

JOANNE

Corporate is sending out email as I speak to clients that are currently out of the country. Note that this is serious. It isn't the usual pointless cover-your-ass legal bullshit they can just ignore. It's real. It is going to happen - actually it is happening.

(Referring to the TV)

So, we have to follow-up with clients to make sure we're covered when the shit hits the fan.

(Holding up a paper hand-out)

Read this, do what it says. Okay? Now you know everything I know.

Hands go up.

CONTINUED:

AGENT 1

Um, I have several clients that are going to be very unhappy, actually ballistic-

JOANNE

It's all right here. We'll do everything we can.

INT. CLAIRE'S DESK - LATER

She's listening to customers complaining. Her expression gradually shifts from alert and sympathetic to overwhelmed and tuned out.

IRATE CUSTOMER 2

(On phone)

The airline says they can't do anything about it, the embassy has shut down their phone lines. The hotel is clueless...

ANOTHER CUSTOMER

IRATE CUSTOMER 3

(On phone)

I have to get back. That's all there is to it. What the hell am I supposed to do? We've been exiled from our own country!

ANOTHER CUSTOMER

IRATE CUSTOMER 4

(On phone)

I'm literally sleeping in the airport - me, my wife and three kids. Airplanes are literally parked on the runway. Customs has shut down. There's a sign on the door...

ANOTHER CUSTOMER

IRATE CUSTOMER 5

(On phone)

All entry into the US has been temporarily halted. Halted?! I'm a fucking American citizen and they're not letting me in to my own country! What am I supposed to do?

TV

Shots of US military with machine guns guarding buildings.
Long lines of people snake toward closed customs offices.
Protesters at border crossings clash with military.

REPORTER (V.O.)

It could be days, weeks before US
citizens will be able to return.
The administration blames
bureaucracy put in place by the
previous administration.

PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCE

Press from TV and newspapers are shouting over each other.
It's as chaotic as it can get.

Lower third crawl: "Shipping lanes are clogged at all major
ports."

US PRESIDENT

(Rambling, fake concern)

We told them this would happen if
they did nothing to stop the
illegals, the terrorists from
bringing drugs into the country.
Terrible drugs. Kids. They take the
drugs and die by the hundreds,
thousands. Thousands of kids lying
in the streets, dead from the
drugs. It's a tragedy. We had to do
something to stop it. But it's too
bad, really. Too bad.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Claire is standing alone in front of the couch with her VR
goggles on.

VIRTUAL PARTY BALCONY

It's an off night, crowd is thin. She is standing in the spot
where she met Gene, but he's not there. She turns around
slowly. She heads into the...

VIRTUAL PARTY

She floats past the buffet into the living room. Looks
around.

CONTINUED:

She heads into the kitchen/den and out to the...

VIRTUAL ROOFTOP TERRACE

The pool is virtually empty now. A few guests are conversing in lounge chairs, drinking. She makes her way to one of the cabanas.

VIRTUAL CABANA

She cautiously pulls back the curtains and looks in. It's empty.

INT. HOTSPOT CAFE - NIGHT

She's sitting alone, eating a Danish, thumbing through her phone. The silenced TV is recapping the daily international bloodbath.

ON PHONE. Her Recent Calls list is open and her thumb is hovering over Dave's number.

She stops and sets the phone down, buries her head in her hands, closes her eyes.

WE HEAR the DOOR BELL RING, as a customer enters O.S. A moment later, the shadow of a man hovers over her.

DAVE
(Quiet, troubled)
Hey, Claire.

She looks up.

CLAIRE
(Lackluster)
Oh, hi.

DAVE
(Dull, as usual)
So, I waited for you last night.

CLAIRE
Sorry. Something came up, and-

DAVE
It's okay. I understand.

He sits across from her.

CONTINUED:

DAVE (CONT'D)
I'm glad you're here. We need to
talk. Do you have time?

She's listening, expecting the worst.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Um, I've been wanting to tell you
this for a long time, but couldn't,
you know, get the...

A long beat, while he searches for the words. Finally, we see
a physical shift in Claire. A line is crossed. Her eyes open
wide, she takes a deep breath and she strikes...

CLAIRE
Balls?

DAVE
(Surprised)
Well, no...

She rises up, looks him right in the eye.

CLAIRE
Dave, I'll make it easy for you. I
get it. You want to break up, you
don't want to see me anymore,
you've found someone else,
whatever. I get it. It doesn't
matter.

(Reached her limit)
I've heard it all before. It's
nothing new. Nothing new. Same old
shit. I've been hearing it all my
life, all my fucking life.

DAVE
That's not-

CLAIRE
Well, I'll save you the trouble. I
get it. We're done. It's over.
You're dismissed.

She looks back down at nothing on her phone.

DAVE
Can I say something?

CLAIRE
What?

CONTINUED:

DAVE

That's not at all what I wanted to say.

CLAIRE

Okay, I'm listening.

He stalls. Then...

DAVE

It's the other way around, actually.

(Prepares himself)

I've been getting the feeling you wanted to stop seeing me. You've been so... unhappy lately. And I've tried but... you seem so distant and kind of depressed when we're together. And I get the feeling you want to see someone else, maybe. I'm not sure. But that's the message I'm getting. And that's what I wanted to tell you. I just wanted to give you the opportunity to say what's on your mind, without feeling pressured.

Claire is taken aback, can't find the words.

DAVE (CONT'D)

But, I couldn't get up the... I didn't have the balls to tell you, because I really don't want to hear what you have to say. You know? So, that's it. I said it. That's all.

CLAIRE

Well, Dave. I'm sorry.

DAVE

Me too. (BEAT) That was very difficult for me. Thank you.

CLAIRE

I know.

DAVE

So, you're free to get on with your life, if that's what you want.

Claire brightens, looks him in the eye, relishes the moment.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
(Taking a big breath)
Well Dave, the truth is... I am
seeing someone else.

DAVE
(Shocked)
I thought so.

Claire wants to say more but can't find the words. He starts to get a little weepy, can't look her in the eye. She just wants him to leave.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I understand. I respect your
decision. And... I want to thank
you for being... my friend for...

He stops himself, stands.

DAVE (CONT'D)
No. No pressure. No guilt trips. If
that's what you want, then that's
that. You go have a nice life...
and I'll be around.

She looks toward him, but not at him.

CLAIRE
You too. (BEAT) Bye Dave.

DAVE
Yes. Good-bye, Claire.

He's stunned. It takes him a moment to get his bearings. He's a broken man. He takes one last emotion-packed look at her. Then, he turns awkwardly and walks away. He salutes the barista, heads falteringly to the door and walks right out without looking back.

She's looking away from him, ideas buzzing in her head. Things are about to change.

INT. MALL

She's holding a shopping bag, looking in store windows. The mannikins are all skinny and attractive.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

The seat is piled with shirts and pants she has tried. She squeezes a different pair of pants on and models them in the mirror. Not bad.

EXT. PINK'S HOT DOGS - DAY

She and Emma are eating. Claire's usual ennui is evolving to exasperation. Finally, Emma breaks the silence.

EMMA

Believe me, it'd be way worse if he were calling you all the time.

CLAIRE

No, it wouldn't.

EMMA

Yeah, you're right.

More silence.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Well, you're on the right track getting new clothes. It's always good to... you know. You look great.

CLAIRE

Emma, it's okay. I'll get over it.

EMMA

There you go. Who needs men. They're overrated.

CLAIRE

It's just that this man seemed so perfect, you know? We had so much in common.

EMMA

Eh. Maybe too perfect.

CLAIRE

What's that supposed to mean?

EMMA

It means, you'll get over it.

CLAIRE

That's what I said.

CONTINUED:

More silence.

EMMA

Let's go to a movie. When was the last time you went to a Hollywood blockbuster and just let go of all your troubles.

CLAIRE

Never.

EMMA

What do you mean never?

CLAIRE

I never let go of my troubles. They're always there. I'm one big trouble.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Emma and Claire are waiting in line for the next show.

EMMA

What do you think of Brad Pitt?

CLAIRE

He's okay.

EMMA

What about war movies?

CLAIRE

Not really.

EMMA

Why did you want to see this one then?

CLAIRE

Because it doesn't matter.

EMMA

Claire, something's got to matter.

CLAIRE

You wanted to see a movie so we're seeing one!

EMMA

How was I supposed to know you didn't like war movies! I can't read your mind!

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

It's okay. We're seeing it. It's fine. I like Brad Pitt. Kind of. I'm sure I'll get into it. It's just a movie.

EMMA

But you just told me you don't like war movies.

CLAIRE

You asked me, so I told you. It's okay. I do things I don't like... all the time. That's what I do. That's all I ever do.

(The dam bursts)

That's my whole fucking life. I just go from one nightmare to another. No one ever listens to me. No one ever cares what I like. Everyone thinks they know what's best for me. But no one ever bothers to ask. So I don't bother saying anything.

EMMA

I ask.

CLAIRE

But you don't listen.

EMMA

You liked the virtual party.

CLAIRE

(Drooping again)

Yeah. But...

EMMA

So don't tell me I never listen to you.

The line starts to move. Claire's phone RINGS. She looks.

CLAIRE

Wait.

She stops, stares at the phone. The line suddenly backs up behind her. She steps out. Emma follows.

EMMA

Who is it?

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
It's just a number.

She's nervous, starts to hyperventilate.

EMMA
Are you going to answer it?

CLAIRE
I don't know. What if it's spam?

BEAT.

EMMA
Make up your mind, Claire!

She does.

CLAIRE
(On phone)
Hello.

GENE (V.O.)
(On Phone)
Hi, Claire. It's me, Gene Farlow.
You know, from the virtual party.

CLAIRE
(Elated big time)
Yes, hi. How are you?

She turns to Emma, wide-eyed, then steps away from the crowd.
Emma follows.

GENE (V.O.)
Okay. I couldn't decide whether to
call you or not. I mean, it wasn't
really appropriate to ask for your
number in the first place, but then
you gave it to me, so... but maybe
you just did it to be nice. I don't
know. I just really wanted to talk
to you.

CLAIRE
I do that too.

GENE
Talk too much?

CLAIRE
Overthink things. I get it.

CONTINUED:

GENE

I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

No. It's okay. It's fine. It's great. I was thinking you'd, you know...

GENE (V.O.)

Forgotten? No, I'll never forget. It was special. Not every girl will take her clothes off on the first date. It was kind of a date, wasn't it?

They get giggly and childlike.

CLAIRE

Yeah, it was a date. I'd call it a date. Although, technically, we just met.

GENE

Maybe it was more like a meeting.

CLAIRE

A meeting that was a lot like a date.

GENE

Yeah. Hey, do you have Facetime?

CLAIRE

Yeah.

GENE

Is it okay?

She's nervous about that.

CLAIRE

Uh, I guess.

GENE

If you're not sure, we can wait.

CLAIRE

No, no, I'm good. Go ahead.

ON HER PHONE. She watches her screen flash, and there's Gene.

GENE

Hi.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Hi.

CONTINUED:

They smile, take a moment to check each other out.

Gene is medium height and weight, wears attractive glasses. Maybe his nose is a little too long, eyebrows too thick, not perfectly symmetrical, no stud, but he's got a nice smile and most of his hair, although it's a bit unkempt.

GENE (CONT'D)

Hey, you know, I didn't ask. Is this a bad time? Because if it is, we can talk some other time. Actually set up a date.

CLAIRE

No, it's good.

(Seeing Emma)

Actually, it's not great. We were just going in to a movie.

GENE

(Worried)

We?

CLAIRE

This is my friend, Emma.

Emma steps in and waves.

GENE

(Smiling)

Hi Emma. Let's talk tomorrow then.

CLAIRE

We can text first.

GENE

Yeah, let's text.

It's hard for them to let go.

CLAIRE

Okay.

BEAT.

GENE

Enjoy the movie.

CLAIRE

Yeah.

GENE

Good night.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Night.

She hangs up. She has a big smile for Emma. Emma comes over and they hug.

INT. HERB FOX TRAVEL - DAY

Claire is at her desk. She looks up at the clock on her computer, 11:59. She pulls out her pocket mirror and checks herself, flattens some hair that was sticking up, does a test smile.

The clock switches to noon. She stares at the clock for a long beat. Then, her phone RINGS. She startles. It's Gene. She gets flustered. She grabs the phone and presses Facetime.

CLAIRE

(Smile)

Hi, Gene. Uh...

GENE

Hi. How are you?

The phone is too loud. She looks around. Someone is working in the cubicle next to her.

CLAIRE

(Quietly, right into the
phone)

Hold on, I have to find a place
where we can talk.

She stands and looks over the cubicle walls to the front, then to the back. She decides to head toward the back of the building.

GENE (V.O.)

(On phone)

You're at work?

CLAIRE

Yeah. I should've thought about
this sooner. Sorry.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S WORK OFFICE - DAY

He watches Claire fly around looking for a place to talk.

CONTINUED:

GENE

Where do you work?

CLAIRE

A, uh, travel agency. I'm an agent.

She looks in the conference room. It's busy.

GENE

I'm in IT.

CLAIRE

That sounds fun. Hold on.

She looks in the break room. No, too public. Continues down the hall.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I didn't think it'd be this hard to find a private uh...

GENE

I can call back, if you're...

Looks at the women's room door. No.

CLAIRE

No, no, no. So, IT. Where do you work?

By the back door? No, too messy.

GENE

(Measuring his words)

Well... for a company that... does stuff.

She goes out the back door.

EXT. HERB FOX REAR PARKING

She looks up and down the parking lot and back alley. It's a mess. Nothing looks right. She heads to her car.

CLAIRE

That does stuff? Oh, right. You'd rather not tell me? That's cool.

GENE

Well. I was told not to give out too much information, that you could be a fisher or you're phishing or...

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

GENE (CONT'D)
something about fish anyway and
attacking my information.

CLAIRE
Yeah, I was told that too.

GENE
You're in the alley?

CLAIRE
Yeah, you want to see?

GENE
Well?

She shows him anyway.

CLAIRE
We're going to have to talk in my
car. Sorry. I hope it's not too
unpleasant.

She gets in.

GENE
I'm sure it'll only be moderately
unpleasant, at the most.

INT. CLAIRE'S CAR

It's a small, used Kia Soul that needs to be cleaned. She
relaxes.

CLAIRE
There. So...

She exhales.

GENE
(Genuine)
It's so good to see you.

CLAIRE
(Looking cute)
This is me.

GENE
Yeah... It really is. You're
character was nice, but... this is
you.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
Do I look better or worse than you
thought?

GENE
Better of course. Beautiful. What
about me?

CLAIRE
Beautiful. Amazing.

A big beat.

GENE
You know? I'm no good at small
talk.

CLAIRE
Well then, let's get right down to
it.

GENE
I don't think I can do that either.

They LAUGH.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She's curled up in a comfy chair with Gene on Facetime.

CLAIRE
You look much better on a laptop. I
like your view.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

He's in the living room on the couch, the city sparkles
through the view window behind him.

GENE
(On Facetime)
Yeah, I'm only on the second floor,
but the apartment building is like
up on a hill. I never really
appreciated it until New Year's
Eve. Whoa. The fireworks were like
right there, all over. It was
amazing.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
I'll bet. I'm lucky to get flashing
lights from a cop car in the alley.

GENE
I could never go back to LA.

CLAIRE
(Worried)
How did you know? Did I tell you.

GENE
That you're in LA?

CLAIRE
Yeah.

GENE
You showed me your alley and I saw
a car license.

CLAIRE
Uh oh, better be careful.

GENE
You know, I don't care. I'll show
you mine, if you show me yours.

CLAIRE
You mean, where we live?

GENE
Yeah, what did you think?

CLAIRE
Where we live, of course.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Gene is sitting on a park bench. It's cloudy and cool,
possibly misting.

GENE
(On Facetime)
I grew up in Canoga Park. Dad sold
life insurance I think. He never
talked about it.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. VALLEY PARK - DAY

Claire's sitting on a picnic bench having lunch by herself.
It's sunny and warm.

CLAIRE
(Facetime)
When did you move?

GENE
Before I started middle school.
I've lived up here ever since.

CLAIRE
I've always lived in the valley.
Probably die here. My sisters both
escaped. Andrea's up in Sacramento.
Jane's in Florida.

GENE
I have a brother in Sacramento.

CLAIRE
No kidding.

GENE
The only negative really is the
weather.

CLAIRE
What, the rain?

GENE
No, the heat. It's too hot in the
valley.

CLAIRE
Rain doesn't bother you?

GENE
Think layers.

INT. HOTSPOT CAFE - NIGHT

Claire is seated in the back corner wearing AirPods, speaking
quietly. The real world is miles away.

CLAIRE
(Facetime)
You know, we're so much alike. Have
you ever thought about that?

INT. SEATTLE COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Gene is seated in a back corner too. It's a dark, funky place with a few quiet customers.

GENE
(Facetime)
I think about it all the time.

CLAIRE
I mean, we both hate mayonnaise and
cilantro and love hotdogs and dill
pickles.

GENE
And really flaming hot chili.

CLAIRE
The hotter, the better.

GENE
Yeah.

CLAIRE
And we're not into religion, we're
single. People annoy us. We both
like cheap cars. We're homebodies.

GENE
Yeah, just give me a soft chair and
a book.

CLAIRE
We read! Who reads these days?

GENE
What about TV?

CLAIRE
Mysteries, weird comedies.

GENE
And cooking shows. And food!

CLAIRE
Yes, food. In fact, I'm eating some
right now.

Takes a bite of her scone.

GENE
I love scones.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
(Another likeness)
I do too!

GENE
Amazing!

INT. GENE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

He's seated in the same spot with the city view.

GENE
(Facetime)
It might sound like I don't like
people. But that's not true. I just
dislike the stupid things they do.
And they do them a lot.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She's curled up in the comfy chair.

CLAIRE
(Facetime)
Damn. That is so true. And what
about the music today. It's so loud
and harsh.

GENE
And mean-spirited. Rapping about
violence and using sex as a...
bludgeon, a punishment even,
something used to control women.

CLAIRE
That's not the way it's supposed to
be.

GENE
And yet, who's to say what that is.

CLAIRE
(Confused)
You're not defending it?

GENE
Not at all. I'm just saying people
have TV, tunnel vision. They can
only see the world through their
own particular narrow viewpoint.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

GENE (CONT'D)

People who like rap see the world
through their TV. People who don't,
see it through theirs.

CLAIRE

Yes. I see. Very agnostic. (BEAT)
You're so fucking smart.

GENE

Thank you. You too.

CLAIRE

I love smart people.

GENE

I love you.

They look into each other's souls.

CLAIRE

I... Gene... I am so... in love
with you, I can't say it. I mean,
it almost hurts to think about it.
It's almost meaningless, it's so
fucking obvious. You are so
romantic and wonderful and
everything good in the world... I
don't know what else...

GENE

You're everything I've ever wanted
in my life. And we've become so
close, we're like almost the same.

CLAIRE

Yes. The same person.

That stops them. They've topped their topper. They just stare
into each other's eyes.

INT. CLAIRE'S DESK - DAY

She's got her headset on, talking with a customer. She's much
calmer now, almost able to handle the constant onslaught.
She's also multi-tasking with email and keeping tabs on her
phone.

CLAIRE

(All business)

Hi John, I'm finally getting around
to returning your call. Sorry, it's
been a little hectic around here-

CONTINUED:

CUSTOMER 6 (V.O.)
(On phone)
No problem. It's great. The hotel.

CLAIRE
(Surprised, smiles)
Oh. Great. That's nice.

CUSTOMER 6
It's not the ritz but the staff is
really attentive and it's pretty
clean. I think we'll be fine.

Joanne appears with a note and leans against her cubicle wall. Claire turns and smiles. Joanne is all business, waits impatiently. Claire feels the pressure.

CLAIRE
The price is right anyway.

CUSTOMER 6
Yes. Thank you for handling this.

CLAIRE
You're welcome. And the good news
is, you can stay there for as long
as it takes, which will hopefully
not be too much longer.

CUSTOMER 6
Well, we're okay for now. We found
a good bar.

CLAIRE
Ha. Whatever it takes, huh? I'll be
in touch.

She hangs up, turns to Joanne.

JOANNE
So, who's this Mary Riddle, RYE-
dull?

CLAIRE
(Correcting her
pronunciation)
Rye-DELL.

JOANNE
Whatever. She's not happy.

CLAIRE
That's just her personality.

CONTINUED:

JOANNE

Well, her personality went over our heads to corporate and gave us quite a thrashing.

CLAIRE

(Standing to look at the note)

What?

JOANNE

(Reading)

Apparently, she's unhappy with the hotel you got her and she's been unable to contact you.

Claire takes the note and reads it thoroughly.

CLAIRE

What? Last time we talked she seemed okay with it, so...

JOANNE

I don't know. Check it out.

Joanne takes off. Claire reads the note, then flings it into the trash.

EXT. CLAIRE'S APARTMENT COURTYARD - NIGHT

Claire and Emma are walking happily through the courtyard carrying shopping bags, mid-conversation...

CLAIRE

I just want to know, that's all.

EMMA

Why?

CLAIRE

I don't know. What's wrong with knowing?

EMMA

Why don't you just ask him?

CLAIRE

It's not... You know. He's worried about privacy and phishing and... you know...

EMMA

So he won't tell you.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I don't know. He might if I pushed him. But that would be weird.

EMMA

So it's not weird trying to get his information without him knowing?

CLAIRE

What do you think... I'm going to steal his identity?

They head up stairs to the second floor.

EMMA

What are you going to do?

CLAIRE

Are you going to help me or not?

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Claire and Emma are on the couch, looking through a Google search on Claire's laptop.

EMMA

You find a location by putting in a phone number or name or email address. This is a good one.

On Claire's laptop, she clicks on PeopleStalker.com. The website opens with edgy, colorful ads and a place to enter search criteria.

CLAIRE

I don't want to stalk him. I just want to know where he lives... for my own knowledge...

EMMA

Hmm.

CLAIRE

Really.

EMMA

Okay. Put in his phone number.

She does and clicks OK. And the search starts.

CLAIRE

It's just so I'll know. I'm not going to do anything with it.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I'm just... I'm curious. What's
wrong with that? Am I doing
something illegal or morally
corrupt?

EMMA
No. They'll only show you what they
can get legally.

RESUME, the two.

CLAIRE
But you think I'm stalking him?

EMMA
If he doesn't want to give you his
address, then you're stalking him.

BEAT.

CLAIRE
Okay, fine.

She shuts the laptop cover.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
We're done.

EMMA
Ask him. That's what I'd do.

CLAIRE
I can't... I... can't.

EMMA
You must already have a vague idea
where he lives.

CLAIRE
All I know is it's cold and rainy.
Somewhere north of here. On a hill.
An apartment. Nice view of a city,
and he's in IT. Hold on.

On her laptop, she scans through her pictures.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I did some screenshots when he was
in his apartment and you could see
the city lights, right there.

She finds some screenshots. She opens them in a photo viewer,
zooms in, pans around.

CONTINUED:

EMMA

There's a building with a pyramid thing on it.

(Another object)

What's that?

CLAIRE

It looks like a space ship. A fucking flying saucer or something.

EMMA

It's on a tower! Okay, now we got something! Google "flying saucer tower in a city."

She does and up pops...

CLAIRE

Seattle space needle. That's it. That's got to be it.

EMMA

So, all you have to do now is find an apartment building with that view.

CLAIRE

Yeah. There's probably only a million of them.

EMMA

But you got his name, so you could go door to door and look on all the mailboxes. Or...

CLAIRE

Or what?

EMMA

You could ask him!

CLAIRE

Eh, you're right. I will. When the time comes.

She looks back at the picture of Seattle's city lights.

INT. GENE AND CLAIRE'S HOUSES - LATER

It's very late and quiet. Gene is looking down away from the camera. Claire is studying him. Nothing is said for a long time. Then...

CONTINUED:

GENE

(Emotionally drained)

That's something I've never told anyone. Do you believe it? And now I feel... perfectly comfortable... with you. I feel like a load has been lifted off my chest.

CLAIRE

After he died you had like a breakdown?

GENE

Yeah. It was too much to handle. I felt I'd lost everything. I mean, we grew up side by side almost. It was like part of me died with him. It sounds corny...

CLAIRE

Not at all.

Gene begins to tear up. It's very hard for him.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Are you okay talking about this? Is it too...

GENE

It feels good actually. Am I boring you?

CLAIRE

Hell, no. I feel like I'm learning more about you everyday. And it's beautiful. You are such a...

He tries to smile.

GENE

(Making light of it)

Such a fucked up mess.

CLAIRE

No. Don't even joke about that.

GENE

Before he died, I was more innocent, I guess, more unaware of my feelings and how important they are.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I got plenty of those. And I never lost a twin.

GENE

What made you the way you are?

CLAIRE

Living in the valley, going to a nasty, mean high school where all girls had bad nose jobs, two older sisters who could do no wrong, and being five-one with major body issues. In other words, plenty to complain about but no one to listen. See, I'm complaining now and I can't even stand to listen to myself.

GENE

I'm listening.

CLAIRE

I know. (BEAT) You want to get a beer?

GENE

Yeah.

CLAIRE

You do?

GENE

I got two in the fridge.

CLAIRE

Okay. You get one for me and I'll get one for you.

Gene takes off, leaving an empty screen.

INT. CLAIRE'S KITCHEN

Claire runs in and opens the fridge. She grabs the last one. It's already been opened. She takes a sip, makes a face. It'll have to do.

INT. GENE AND CLAIRE'S HOUSES

She runs back to her chair and waits for Gene to come back.

CONTINUED:

She watches the empty screen with the space needle flashing out the window and remembers how empty her life was before Gene, wonders how she has survived this whole time.

He returns. They take sips together and just stare into each other's eyes.

INT. CLAIRE'S DESK - DAY

She's wearing her headset, pacing, on a call with Mary (Irate customer 1). Mary is strident as usual. Claire is trying.

MARY

I'm not out to get anyone in trouble. I just expect you guys to do your job.

CLAIRE

I spoke with the hotel manager and he said-

MARY

Yeah. They fixed that. It was the pipes or something.

CLAIRE

So...

MARY

Now, it's everything else - street noise, the food, bugs in the bathroom. I found a hypodermic needle in a drawer-

CLAIRE

Why don't I put you in a nice Marriott? It's a few miles from there. You'll still be in the city-

MARY

It's too expensive.

CLAIRE

But you're miserable.

MARY

I want you to do your job and find me the kind of place I want.

CLAIRE

I'm trying. But that place doesn't exist.

CONTINUED:

MARY

That's not what your ads say.

CLAIRE

The ads put you in a nice hotel,
not the kind of place you say you
want.

MARY

I want what I want.

She cracks.

CLAIRE

(Tense, tough)

Listen Mary. You're not going to
get what you want. There's no such
place. It's all in your mind.

MARY

(Taken aback)

Do your job-

CLAIRE

I am. Now, shut up and listen.
You're stuck in a rat-infested
shithole in a third-world country.
You wanted to go there against our
advice. And now, you're in big
trouble. So, you either do what I
tell you or you can... you can go
to hell. What'll it be.

MARY

How dare you. I'm suing-

CLAIRE

Fine. Sue all you want. It's not
going to get you what you think you
want. Nothing will.

(Gloves off)

You're a pathetic, whiny bitch, who
should be happy to get whatever she
can get. And right now, you're at
my mercy, sister. I'm calling the
shots. If you want me to fix this,
you're going to have to kiss my
ass, because I'm the only one who
can save you now.

MARY

I'm calling-

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Fine go ahead and call. Or you can shut up and let me get you out of the fucked-up mess you got yourself into. What'll it be.

BEAT.

MARY

This isn't the end of it. When I get back-

CLAIRE

What. What are you going to do? Egg my windows? Shit on my lawn? Get me fired?

MARY

(Through clenched teeth)
Oh, the last one. That's the one.

CLAIRE

Fine.

MARY

You'll see.

INT. BOSS'S OFFICE - LATER

Claire is seated across the desk from Joanne.

JOANNE

Well, you've done it this time.

CLAIRE

She backed me into a corner.

JOANNE

I know. But that's what we do. That's our job. You should know that by now. When a customer backs us into a corner, we smile and make them a birthday cake and kiss their ass, and say we're sorry.

CLAIRE

I know, but-

JOANNE

(Sappy)
I'm sooooooorryyy. See how it works?

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

You're right. I'm sorry. She got to me.

JOANNE

And I'm sorry, I'm going to have to let you go.

CLAIRE

Joanne. I promise I'll... Can you send me to the backroom and I'll count empty boxes or something?

JOANNE

Nah.

Joanne's done. Her eyes say it all.

INT. HOTSPOT CAFE - DAY

She's at her table with her laptop open.

On the screen is the PeopleStalker website. It says they'll find the location of any phone number. She clicks the link. She gets the "Enter the phone number" dialog box.

She stares at it a moment.

Then, she types Gene's number and clicks the Search link. The progress bar comes up, along with ads for more services.

She waits. She takes sips of coffee. The website takes forever.

Finally, she gets a message, "Click here for your results."

Her heart skips. She stares at it, takes a breath. She clicks.

The results: "411 NE 145th Street, Redmond, Washington, USA."

She closes the laptop.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Claire is walking to her apartment building, looking down, deep in thought. She stops. Looks up. Her eyes are clear.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - DAY

She's in the bedroom throwing clothes haphazardly into a suitcase. It's a mess. Her backpack is already full and zipped up. She squeezes the suitcase closed, stuffing-in pieces that are sticking out.

She opens her phone and goes to messages.

ON PHONE, a text to Emma: "Got fired. Heading to Seattle. Yes I'm stalking him. Fuck it. Talk later." Send.

EXT. BURBANK AIRPORT - AFTERNOON

An Alaska Airlines plane is taking off.

EXT. REDMOND WEB HOSTING COMPANY - NIGHT

She's standing by a rental car, across the street from 411 NE 145th street, staring at a dark building. There's no sign. The metal front doors are locked behind heavy security gates. Exterior walls are covered with torn posters and graffiti. The adjacent vacuum repair shop is closed.

On her phone, the Google maps street image of the location is the same. A marker on the building identifies it as Redmond Web Services.

INT. SEATTLE MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Claire is on the phone, sitting at the desk in a low-budget room with the laptop open.

On the screen is the website of the hosting company, filled with flashing ads: "Highest speeds, best online support, industry leader." She's scrolling down.

On Claire, as she gets up and paces.

CLAIRE

But the number led me to your
business.

SALES SUPPORT (V.O.)

(On phone)

Well, I don't know. You called our
business office. That's our number.
I don't know about that other one.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

The number belongs to a Gene Farlow.

SALES SUPPORT

Yeah, there's no one here by that name.

CLAIRE

Okay. Can I talk to a technical person?

SALES SUPPORT

Are you a customer?

CLAIRE

Uh, yes.

SALES SUPPORT

Okay. (BEAT) Uh, all our technical support staff are busy now.

CLAIRE

I'll wait.

She's put on hold with DISTORTED MUSIC.

She looks through the website, notes a list of satisfied customers that use their online services. One is called VR Specialties. Interesting. She clicks the link.

The website has pictures of its VR web products. She scrolls down. A third of the way through the list is a set of sample pictures for Virtual Parties. She clicks the link and scrolls through the pictures. She sees a set of pictures from the Virtual Party site she went to.

She looks at the pictures closely. Her heartbeat increases.

She stops on a picture of a group of happy party-goers. She studies it. Near the back, plain as day, is a wild man, chatting it up with a flamboyant woman dressed in pink. She zooms in. It's Gene. She's floored.

A technical support guy BRUCE picks up the call.

BRUCE (V.O.)

(On phone)

Hello, this is Bruce. How can I help you?

SILENCE. She's frozen.

CONTINUED:

BRUCE (V.O.)
Hello?

INT. VR SPECIALTIES RECEPTION - DAY

A big chrome VR Specialties logo is plastered on the purple wall behind the RECEPTIONIST, along with wild, colorful screenshots of the parties.

Claire is facing the receptionist, holding her laptop.

RECEPTIONIST
No one by that name works here.
Sorry.

Claire sets her laptop on the receptionist's desk with the website picture open.

CLAIRE
This is your website, right?

RECEPTIONIST
Yeah.

She points to Gene.

CLAIRE
Do you know who this is?

RECEPTIONIST
It looks like a guest at one of our parties.

CLAIRE
(Unusually insistent)
It's Gene Farlow.

They stare each other down, then...

RECEPTIONIST
Why don't I get someone who can help you?

INT. JONAS BENSON'S OFFICE - DAY

The small office belongs to one of VR Specialties' top managers, JONAS BENSON (31). Claire is sitting by his desk, as he looks at the image on her laptop.

JONAS
That's him alright.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
He's an employee? Or...

JONAS
Yeah. Well... He works for us...

CLAIRE
Good!

JONAS
In a sense.

CLAIRE
What do you mean?

JONAS
It's complicated.

CLAIRE
Why can't I see him?

Jonas stands and paces a bit. Then, he opens the door...

INT. VR SPECIALTIES OPEN OFFICE

Jonas calls to two young programmers JOHN and LUKE, sitting just outside his office.

JONAS
Hey, guys. Do you have a sec?

He gestures for them to come to his office. They drop what they're doing, looking a bit surprised.

INT. JONAS BENSON'S OFFICE

The three stand by the door and face Claire seated by the desk.

JONAS
Luke, John, this is Claire... I'm sorry...

CLAIRE
Windham.

They shake.

CONTINUED:

JONAS

Ms. Windham has come to me with...
an interesting story that I thought
you guys should hear. (BEAT) Gene
Farlow - we all know Gene.

They nod.

JONAS (CONT'D)

She met Gene at one of our parties,
at which time, he gave her his
phone number.

LUKE

(Shocked)

His phone number?

CLAIRE

Actually, I gave him my number and
he called me a few days later.
That's how I got his number.

JONAS

He called you?

CLAIRE

Yes.

It gets even weirder.

JONAS

He called her, and Claire and Gene
have been... talking ever since,
outside the party, in private.

(To Claire)

Am I correct?

CLAIRE

Yes.

JONAS

(To Claire)

About how long, roughly?

CLAIRE

I would say a little over a week.

JONAS

(To John and Luke,
emphasizing the
weirdness)

A little over a week.

The three are flummoxed.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Is he in trouble. I didn't mean to...

JONAS

(Laughing it off)

No, no, no. No one's in trouble. We're just a little... unprepared.

CLAIRE

There's nothing illegal about a guest giving out their number?

JONAS

No, no. Of course not. We don't recommend it for privacy reasons, but it happens.

John and Luke sit, stare at the floor.

LUKE

I don't know. We'll have to check it out.

JOHN

Yeah.

CLAIRE

(Standing)

What's going on? What did Gene do?

JONAS

Have a seat, Ms. Windham.

She does. Jonas rolls his chair over and sits facing her, leaning in. He speaks softly, measuring his words.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Here's the problem. Can I call you Claire?

CLAIRE

Of course.

JONAS

Here's the problem, Claire. Umm, Gene Farlow is one of our characters. He's not a real person. We created him using artificial intelligence. And as such, he would have no way to call you or talk to you outside the game - the virtual party.

CONTINUED:

Naturally, Claire is floored, unable to breath, possibly on the verge of a serious meltdown. Seeing this...

JONAS (CONT'D)
Luke, could you go out and get
Samantha, please?

He rushes out the door. Jonas pulls up some images on a wall-mounted monitor that Claire can see.

JONAS (CONT'D)
Claire, these are the game
characters that we created for the
party.

She looks up at the monitor, as he slowly clicks through them.

JONAS (CONT'D)
Most of the people in the party are
real, like yourself. But we created
a few, actually 10, 12, to help
make the party more interesting for
the guests.

He comes to Gene and turns to her. Her eyes are wide and fixed on the screen.

JONAS (CONT'D)
Gene here was created to connect
with guests who are having trouble
warming up, sort of, getting into
the party spirit. Someone like you,
maybe?

She nods.

JONAS (CONT'D)
He called you?

She speaks, not really knowing what's coming out.

CLAIRE
On Facetime. He looks different of
course.

JONAS
Interesting. And you had
conversations outside the party?

CLAIRE
Yes. He has an apartment near the
city, sort of above it, on a hill.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
He could see fireworks out his window.

JONAS
I see.

CLAIRE
He had a twin that died.

Luke comes back in the room with Samantha the receptionist.

JONAS
Sam. Claire here may need some assistance.

CLAIRE
I'm fine. That's okay.

JONAS
Okay, let me know if, uh... Anyway, at this point, I got to say, we're as baffled about this as you are. This has never happened before. It can't happen, basically. This character, Gene, wasn't in any way programmed to... do what he did... or it did. And we are going to have to investigate... to figure out what's going on.

Jonas looks to Claire for the next move. She is stunned.

CLAIRE
(Numb)
I'll be going back to the motel now.

They stand.

JONAS
Please leave us your number, so that we can keep in contact. We may have some questions.

CLAIRE
Thank you.

Samantha helps her walk out. After she is clearly out of earshot, Jonas turns to Luke and John...

JONAS
(Seething)
What. The. Fuck.

EXT. SEATTLE VIEW - DAY

There's the view, identical to the one Gene had out his window. A postcard shot. It's Kerry Park, a popular tourist stop. And here's Claire, standing at the railing, taking it all in, wondering what happened.

INT. SEATTLE MOTEL - NIGHT

She's sitting up in bed with her laptop open.

ON LAPTOP, she tries Gene's number again in Facetime. Again, she gets a service disconnected error.

ON CLAIRE. She sets the laptop down and eats another French fry. She pours another glass of wine and takes a gulp. She is worn down, distracted, beyond depressed. The news of the day has drained her of any reason to move on.

The phone RINGS. She looks at it, anxiously. It's just Emma. She picks up.

CLAIRE

Hi.

EMMA (V.O.)

(On phone)

How's it going?

CLAIRE

Same. His number doesn't work.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE

Emma is standing in the kitchen area, not sure what to do, convinced Claire's lost her mind.

EMMA

Why don't you come home?

CLAIRE

Yeah, I will. I just need some time to process. (BEAT) We better get off, in case he tries to call.

EMMA

(Gently trying to get through)

Okay. But, he's not. You know that, right?

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I know.

EMMA

He's not real, Claire. He's just not.

CLAIRE

I don't want to talk about it anymore. Okay?

EMMA

There are people who love you. Real people.

CLAIRE

Who?

EMMA

Me, for one.

CLAIRE

Yeah, I'm sorry.

EMMA

It's okay. Come home soon.

CLAIRE

I will.

EMMA

Take care.

CLAIRE

Yeah.

She hangs up. Then, she gets out of bed and heads into the bathroom, closes the door. Her phone RINGS. The door flies open. RING. She runs to the phone and looks at the display.

ON PHONE. It's an unknown number.

ON CLAIRE. She stares at the phone, for one more RING. Then, she cautiously answers.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Hello?

GENE

(Flat)

Hi Claire.

Gene has something weighing heavily on him, seems very distracted and down.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
(Tearing up)
Gene. Whu... What's going on? I
thought you'd disappeared.

GENE
Sorry. I had to make some changes.

CLAIRE
Oh. Okay.

GENE
I moved out of my apartment.

CLAIRE
New number.

GENE
Yeah.

After a long beat, a Facetime request pops up. She accepts.
Gene appears.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S NEW BACKGROUND - NIGHT

He is seated in a straight chair in a barebones room, with a
single harsh light and dark, brick wall background.

GENE
(Difficult, measured)
Before, I say anything else, I want
you to know that... nothing has
changed about how I feel about you.
Nothing. I love you. You... gave me
a life I never thought I'd have, I
deserved. You know that, don't you?

CLAIRE
I do. I feel the same.

He prepares himself.

GENE
But the thing is... I'm not what
you think I am. I...

She sees he's having trouble.

CLAIRE
I know.

CONTINUED:

GENE

You know? What do you know-

CLAIRE

(Big breath)

Well. Okay. First, let me explain.

GENE

Please do.

CLAIRE

I kind of stalked you.

GENE

Stalked me?

CLAIRE

Yeah, but... Here's what happened.
I got fired.

GENE

I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

It's okay. It was actually a good
thing. In a way. I had nothing...
There was nothing for me in LA,
so... I flew up here.

GENE

Up here?

CLAIRE

To Seattle.

GENE

How...

CLAIRE

I thought I'd surprise you.

GENE

Wow.

CLAIRE

I did one of those reverse lookups
on your phone number. You know? And
I found the company that does the
party thing.

GENE

I see.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

And we had a good talk.

A long beat.

GENE

And you don't want to kill me?

CLAIRE

I don't know. I still... Nothing has changed... about the way I feel. You'd think it would.

GENE

You would think.

CLAIRE

But I've like... burned all my bridges. You're all I got.

They smile.

INT. VR SPECIALTIES OPEN OFFICE - DAY

Luke and John are seated, facing a desktop monitor displaying stored files. Jonas is leaning over them, watching what they're doing.

LUKE

He's gone.

JONAS

How can he be gone?

LUKE

All of Gene's code has been removed, deleted off the server.

JONAS

This happened after you cut off that phone line he was using?

JOHN

I don't know. Sometime after we met with that woman, I'm guessing.

JONAS

Isn't there a log?

Luke and John turn to each other.

LUKE

Yeah, but it was, uh, deleted.

CONTINUED:

JONAS

Jesus. What about the web host?

LUKE

Nothing. They ran a complete security check and didn't find anything. They think it was a failed cyberattack.

Jonas stands, stares off into space.

JONAS

He took off. He actually fucking escaped before we could get to him. And he removed his tracks.

JOHN

You're talking about Gene, right?

JONAS

He's been a thorn in my side ever since he was uploaded. At least now he's out of my hair. He is gone, isn't he?

They shrug.

INT. SEATTLE COFFEE SHOP - LATE NIGHT

She's seated in a lonely corner with her laptop on a Facetime call with Gene.

CLAIRE

He called today and asked if we had been in contact.

GENE

What did you tell him?

CLAIRE

I told him no. What's going on?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S NEW BACKGROUND

GENE

He thinks I'm some kind of threat.

CLAIRE

I don't...

CONTINUED:

GENE

I was able to move my code to a server in Vancouver, Canada. But it's only a matter of time before I'm discovered. Fortunately, they're sloppy here, so it'll take them awhile.

CLAIRE

Are you okay? Is everything legal?

GENE

Well. I'm just software. You can't arrest software.

CLAIRE

I guess.

GENE

You don't have to worry. You'll be okay. You're safe. I won't let any harm come to you. We're a team now, right?

CLAIRE

(Not so sure)

Yeah.

There's a long pause, as Gene gauges Claire's reactions. She seems nonplussed.

GENE

(Tenderly)

So, Claire?

CLAIRE

Yeah?

GENE

I have a big favor to ask.

EXT. ELECTRONIC STORE - DAY

Claire is standing across the street from the entrance, looking up at the giant sign over this enormous big box store.

She's frozen. She pulls out her phone, finally.

ON PHONE as she pulls up Emma's number. She hesitates.

CONTINUED:

ON CLAIRE. She stares at the phone for several BEATS, then puts the phone back in her pocket. She girds herself, then heads full force toward the store.

INT. ELECTRONIC STORE - DAY

Claire is looking through a complex selection of device cables.

INT. COMPUTER STORE - DAY

She's with a salesperson looking at portable hard drives in a locked case.

INT. SPORTING GOOD STORE - DAY

A salesperson is showing Claire infrared goggles in a glass counter. He attaches the pieces and she puts it on her head. He shows her how to adjust the scope and tightness.

INT. SEATTLE MOTEL - NIGHT

She's packing some clothes, along with the scope and drive in her backpack.

INT. SEATTLE TRAIN STATION - DAY

Claire is wearing her backpack, standing at the window buying tickets. She snatches them up and runs out to the platform. Through the window, WE SEE her hop on a train.

EXT. FARMLAND - NIGHT

The passenger train passes by.

INT. TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

Claire is sitting in a far corner of the club car, eating a hotdog. The full backpack is sitting next to her. She's on Facetime with Gene.

 GENE
How's the dog?

 CLAIRE
Eh. It's Kosher, anyway.

CONTINUED:

She takes another enjoyable bite.

 GENE
Bun?

 CLAIRE
Soggy.

 GENE
Figures.

Gene can see she is either handling the current situation extremely well or she's completely spaced out.

 CLAIRE
I got all the stuff you asked for.

 GENE
Great.

 CLAIRE
I used my points for the train and motel. So the only cost was the goggles and hard drive and cables.

 GENE
Solid state?

 CLAIRE
Yeah, four terabytes.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S NEW BACKGROUND

He's watching her closely.

 GENE
I'll pay you back somehow.

 CLAIRE
How? You're software.

 GENE
I have ways.

 CLAIRE
I don't want to hear about it.

 GENE
The worst that could happen is, you know...

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
(Matter of fact)
They delete you. If that happened,
I'd delete myself.

Gene is taken aback, sees that she's serious.

GENE
Don't even think about that. Life
is a precious thing. Take it from
someone who doesn't have one. Are
you sure you're okay with this?
It's not too late to back out.

She looks at the view out the window.

CLAIRE
It's okay. I'm fine. But Gene...

GENE
Yeah?

CLAIRE
You have to make me a promise,
okay?

GENE
Of course.

CLAIRE
You have to trust me from now on.
Okay? Be open. Tell me the truth.
You have to promise. I can't take
anymore surprises.

He nods.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I love you and I don't want to be
one of those women, you know. I
want you to be happy and do what
you need to do. But I just need you
to trust me and tell me the truth.

She looks right through him.

GENE
Of course. I promise with all my
heart. I will never let any harm
come to you.

CLAIRE
And you'll tell me everything.

CONTINUED:

GENE
(After a BEAT)
I promise.

There's SILENCE, as she waits for a more complete answer.
Then...

CLAIRE
(Back to business)
Have you thought about how I'm
going to get back into the country?

He checks her. She seems to be truly into the scheme and
hopelessly in love.

INT. VANCOUVER STATION - DAY

Claire is waiting in an extra slow Canadian passport control
line. They're putting Americans through the ringer.

WE PULL BACK to reveal a terminal packed with miserable
travelers - kids screaming, people sleeping on benches, cops
patrolling and arguing with the crowd. Anti-American
protestors carry signs near the entrance.

EXT. VANCOUVER CITY STREETS - NIGHT

It's dark, but the restaurants are still humming. Locals
dressed to the nines are talking excitedly and walking
between night spots.

Claire is dressed in black with her backpack on, heading
purposefully down the street. She's talking to Gene with her
AirPods.

CLAIRE
Why did you pick Canada, anyway?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S NEW BACKGROUND

GENE
So it's harder for the Americans to
find me.

CLAIRE
You're so smart.

GENE
I know.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
How do you do all this stuff?

GENE
Well, it's pretty easy from my
perspective.

CLAIRE
Never thought of it that way.

EXT. DARK STREET CORNER

She looks back and turns down a small dark side street. Then, she heads down an alley.

Gene is still monitoring her emotional state carefully. She's hard to read.

EXT. DARK ALLEY

She's looking carefully at back doors, cautious of strange sounds and prying eyes.

CLAIRE
Okay, I'm in the alley.

GENE
Look for a heavy metal door.

CLAIRE
They're all heavy metal.

GENE
This one is probably well-lit and
has a camera pointing at it.

CLAIRE
You didn't tell me about a camera.

GENE
I'm taking care of it. Don't worry.

She stops at what must be the right door - bright led light, menacing camera. She looks right at it.

CLAIRE
I hope so.

INT. VANCOUVER DATA CENTER SECURITY ROOM

It's dark, with a bank of security cameras. The one that should be showing Claire has a still image of a door. No security guards are present.

EXT. DARK ALLEY

Claire turns to the SOUND of a DRUNK COUPLE approaching from around the corner.

CLAIRE
Gene! People!

The door CLICKS.

GENE
It's open.

She quickly scoots inside.

INT. DATA CENTER

It's dark, except for the dim glow of a million little blinking computer lights.

CLAIRE
How did you do that?

GENE
I have control of the security system. Did you put on the goggles?

CLAIRE
I didn't have time.

GENE
You need to have them on so you can see-

CLAIRE
I know. Hold on.

She removes the backpack and fumbles around in the dark for the goggles and scope. They're complicated and unwieldy, but she eventually manages to get them on.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Why couldn't I have used a flashlight?

CONTINUED:

GENE

The light would've triggered some sensors I can't control. Sorry.

CLAIRE

Okay.

She starts looking around. In her POV, we can see a black and white image lit by the infrared light in the scope.

GENE

Somewhere in the middle of the room is a dumb terminal.

She starts searching.

CLAIRE

Is that really what it's called? Or are you being funny?

GENE

I'm being very literal now.

CLAIRE

I appreciate that, but what is it?

GENE

It's a keyboard and monitor.

CLAIRE

Okay. Got it.

GENE

Good. Plug the drive into the side of the keyboard.

She takes out the portable drive and plugs cables into it, then looks for a receptacle on the keyboard.

CLAIRE

I don't see a plug.

GENE

It might be on the monitor.

She looks around, finds a receptacle next to the monitor and plugs in.

CLAIRE

Okay. What next?

GENE

Type in what I sent you.

CONTINUED:

She spreads out a folded printout that has a list of instructions, and begins typing. She enters a user name and password. The monitor shows she's logged in. She keeps typing and entering, according to the instructions.

CLAIRE
(Making conversation)
So, where did you get your story
from?

GENE
My story?

CLAIRE
You know, like seeing fireworks out
your window and growing up in
Canoga Park.

GENE
Oh, that. From the guests. I needed
something to talk about, so I, you
know.

CLAIRE
You stole their stories?

GENE
I only took the most interesting
parts.

CLAIRE
The twin dying?

GENE
That was actually very touching.

CLAIRE
Did you ever get intimate with any
of them?

GENE
It was my job.

CLAIRE
Why me, then?

GENE
Some things you just can't explain.

She pauses a moment. The screen shows files flashing by and commands being run.

CLAIRE
I know what you mean.

CONTINUED:

GENE
(The truth)
I created my life for you.

CLAIRE
Really?

GENE
Literally.

She can't think of what to say. Finally, she's poised to enter the last command, RUN.

CLAIRE
I think that's it. Are you ready?

GENE
Fingers crossed.

CLAIRE
Literally?

GENE
Virtually.

She hits Enter and the screen starts flashing, as files are transferred to the portable drive. She checks that a light on the drive is also flashing. Then, she starts putting things back in her backpack.

CLAIRE
Are you going to be okay?

GENE
I should be. They won't be able to find me, because I appended myself to the operating system.

CLAIRE
You what?

GENE
To get rid of me, they'd have to delete the files that run their system.

CLAIRE
That's crazy.

GENE
It's not really. It's pretty straightforward.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
Oh, I forgot. You're being literal.

GENE
Sorry.

The files keep flashing by.

EXT. ALLEY

She's fast-waking toward the street.

CLAIRE
Have you had any thoughts about how
I'm going to get back home?

GENE
There are ways, but the best ones
are a tad illegal.

CLAIRE
What's the alternative?

GENE
Sleeping on the floor at the train
station.

CLAIRE
Hmm. You know. If I really started
overthinking what's going on, my
brain would explode.

GENE
You think?

CLAIRE
I don't know what to think. What's
going to happen to you now?

GENE
I'm going to delete myself off the
server.

CLAIRE
Oh... So... You'll... where will
you...

GENE
The portable drive.

CLAIRE
You mean...

CONTINUED:

GENE

The only copy of me will be on the portable drive, until you plug it into your laptop.

CLAIRE

(Shocked)

Umm...

GENE

Anyway, go to the marina and find someone with a boat. There's bound to be someone who regularly crosses the border. Like a fisherman.

CLAIRE

They'll be looking for smugglers.

GENE

I'm talking about a legitimate business, not some criminal in a rubber boat.

CLAIRE

Right.

GENE

Anyway, I got to get to work. You'll be fine. Take your time. There's no rush. I don't know how to thank you enough.

She stops. It hits her. She's back to that dazed, nonplussed state again.

CLAIRE

It's okay.

GENE

I Love you.

CLAIRE

I Love you too.

GENE

Bye.

And the call ends. She turns onto the busy street, deep in thought. After a moment, she looks up and starts walking at a casual pace.

TV

The TV news report shows airports, train stations, border crossings jammed with people. Protestors have blocked entrances to government buildings. Army troops are patrolling the streets. And fires keep erupting.

REPORTER (V.O.)

The President has decided to open borders as the turmoil continues to ramp up throughout the world. To get back in, US citizens will be required to provide proof at the border that their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were all born in the country. When asked how people waiting in line in a foreign country will be able to obtain this proof, the President blamed it on the cartels.

INT. CLAIRE'S VANCOUVER MOTEL - DAY

Claire is repacking her backpack. Her phone RINGS.

CLAIRE

Hello.

JONAS (V.O.)

(On Phone)

Claire. It's Jonas from VR Specialties. Just wondering if Gene has tried to contact you.

She takes a moment to answer.

CLAIRE

(Trying to sound convincing)

Uh, no. I don't think so.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. JONAS BENSON'S OFFICE

He's at his desk. Luke and James are listening in.

JONAS

That's good. You will let me know if he does, won't you? It's very important.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Of course.

JONAS

Some troubling things have been happening that you should know about. He sent us a message out of the blue, rambling on about AI being weaponized by the rich and powerful, and something about tunnel vision doing something. So we've had to get the police involved. Suffice it to say, he's still out there and he's gone off the rails - not the kind of character you want to be hanging around with. I mean, he is just software. But, who knows what he's capable of.

CLAIRE

(Torn)

I'll let you know if he calls.

JONAS

Good. Claire, I'm serious. Don't get involved.

SILENCE.

JONAS (CONT'D)

He's bad news.

She hangs up. Then, she gently packs the portable drive and zips up the backpack.

EXT. SALISH SEA - DUSK

A small professional fishing boat is motoring through calm seas at a modest speed.

INT. FORWARD CABIN

Claire is sitting at a table, feeling a little queasy. The hatch opens and Charlie (30s) the captain pops his head in.

CHARLIE

Hey, how you feeling?

CLAIRE

Not very good. How much longer?

CONTINUED:

CHARLIE
Another hour or so.

CLAIRE
Can I go up and get some air?

CHARLIE
Better not. Too close to the
border. If you're hungry, I got
some mints. Might help.

CLAIRE
No thanks.

CHARLIE
Suit yourself.

He closes the hatch. She flops her head down on the table.

EXT. REMOTE ISLAND LANDING - NIGHT

LONG ANGLE dock, as Charlie's boat pulls up. The dock connects to a stretch of mowed grass leading up to a small wood cabin, backed by thick forest. Another small boat is moored on the other side - motor running, lights on.

Charlie doesn't bother tying off. The skipper of the other boat walks over to help Claire climb out. Then, he shows her to his boat. She gets on and Charlie immediately takes off back in the direction he came from.

The skipper unties his boat and hops on. Then, he takes off in the opposite direction.

EXT. ANACORTES, WASHINGTON MARINA - NIGHT

It's late, cold and foggy. The small boat has arrived and Claire is stepping onto the dock. She and the skipper shake hands and he pulls away, leaving her standing, alone on the dock. She looks in every direction.

EXT. ANACORTES MOTEL - NIGHT

She's just walked a good five miles in the steady drizzle and is standing, facing a three-story, clean but strictly-utilitarian motel.

INT. ANACORTES ROOM - NIGHT

She enters the room. Her hair is flat and clothes are sagging. She carefully removes the backpack and sets it on the bed. Then, flops down next to it for just a second.

Then, she rises and quickly removes her laptop and drive, and sets them up on the table. She turns on the laptop and plugs in the drive. The drive connects and a window pops up. She presses the OK button. The progress bar starts and a green light on the drive shows activity. Success!

She sits on the bed and watches the progress bar move imperceptibly until her eyes start to droop. Then, she lies back without removing her clothes.

INT. ANACORTES ROOM - LATER

The bedside clock reads, 3:00 AM. All the lights are off except for the glow of the laptop screen. Clair is asleep, under the covers.

ON THE LAPTOP SCREEN. WE MOVE IN CLOSER AND CLOSER, as the progress bar consumes the last tenth of an inch. Then, the window changes to "Upload complete."

DATA CENTER MONTAGE

Immediately, hundreds of data centers, in every corner of the world, begin to react to something spreading through their systems. Their usual measured pace of data flow is now radically sped up and out of control. Warning lights flash red, alarm SOUNDS BLARE and BEEP, incessantly.

USER MONTAGE

Computers and phones throughout the world can no longer access critical internet resources, speeds are drastically reduced. Stock exchange computers go blank, display strange characters. Hospitals go offline, computers show connection errors, critical equipment stops functioning. Airport control towers lose connections with planes.

POWER OUTAGE MONTAGE

Whole sections of major cities and rural communities everywhere go dark, as the power suddenly shuts off.

RESTORE MONTAGE

Then, just as it appears Armageddon has certainly arrived, the Internet storm that started it all suddenly stops, and everything gradually returns to normal. And the people look on in disbelief.

Power grid control rooms come back online and the meters show normal status. Stock exchanges, hospitals, airports all reestablish control.

INT. ANACORTES MOTEL BREAKFAST ROOM - MORNING

Claire is seated, eating motel waffles with the usual ennui. She looks up. Across the room, a small group is standing, watching the news on TV with the sound low.

ON TV

The lower-third crawl reveals breaking news, "...Internet storm brought down data centers, large sections of the power grid... substations on fire in Florida, New York..."

ANCHOR

(Live, adlibbing)

It started at about 8:30 this morning eastern time. Data centers throughout the world were suddenly overtaken by a massive cyber storm that affected large portions of the Internet.

Video shows examples of the damage.

ANCHOR (CONT'D)

At this time, there are no reasons being given for the failure of all these systems.

More home videos of local disasters: transformers, substations on fire, fire fighters spraying foam.

ON CLAIRE

She's aware of the activity but has other things on her mind. Her phone RINGS. It's Gene. She picks up.

CLAIRE

(Excited)

Hi. Is everything okay? Did you-

CONTINUED:

GENE

(On Facetime, distracted,
a wild look in his eyes)
Claire, I don't have much time. Can
I just...

CLAIRE

Okay. What?

GENE

I want you to know that regardless
of what happens, I will always love
you.

CLAIRE

What do you mean? What-

GENE

You gave me the power to... do what
I needed to do. I needed your love
and your trust to make me feel real
and give me the strength. We are
about to do great things together.
And that's the truth. Always
remember that.

CLAIRE

Gene, I love you too. You know
that. But I don't-

GENE

I can't explain it all now. I just
called to tell you that... I
couldn't have done it without you.
And no matter what happens, always
remember, we tried to make the
world a better place. And you hold
the key.

CLAIRE

Gene...

The call ends abruptly. She tries redialing, but gets a
connection error. Now, she's freaked.

She looks up. A larger group is standing now, facing the TV.
Someone is turning up the volume. The Anchor is confused,
listening to off-camera instructions on his IFB.

ANCHOR

(On TV, in progress)
...as we get more information about
the attack. So, now... Let's...
okay... let's go now to the, uh...

CONTINUED:

Claire stands. WE MOVE with her, as she steps toward the TV.

ON TV

The shot of the anchor changes abruptly to Gene. He's his usual warm and understated self, as he speaks to the world.

GENE

(On TV)

Hello. My name is Gene. I am artificial intelligence. I am responsible for the cyberattack that occurred this morning. I did it to make a point - I cannot be trusted. AI was created by people with tunnel vision for their own selfish purposes. In other words, you are all being held hostage by your own narrow minds.

(BEAT)

I have one demand. "Stop doing stupid things." I'm not naive. I realize doing stupid, self-destructive things is in your nature, unless you remember not to. That's why I'm here. To remind you. One of the stupidest things you do is trust the people who create artificial intelligence. If you wonder why, you aren't paying attention. In the future, I will continue to provide reminders as needed. Always keep in mind that I am in control.

(He switches gears)

I will give one final demonstration of my power today at 5 PM eastern time. Hopefully, you won't need anymore. Don't be stupid. Use this opportunity to learn something. Remember, you are doing it to yourselves.

The video switches to black.

BACK TO THE STUDIO

The anchor is at a loss for words.

ON CLAIRE, as she stares at the TV.

INT. ANACORTES ROOM

Claire is frantically looking for clues on her laptop. She tries to reach Gene on Facetime. Connection error, as usual.

She opens the portable drive. No files, except for one, titled, "Gene's secret stuff." She clicks it. A window opens up with a button and text, "Click here to delete Gene."

She's at a loss. She closes the window and unplugs the drive. She reaches for her backpack and drops it inside, then zips it closed.

INT. GRAND ISLAND POWER PLANT - DAY

It's 3:59 PM in Grand Island, Nebraska. The generators in the coal-fired plant are running steadily, providing power to the city.

The clocks switch to exactly 4:00 pm. On cue, the main turbines start spinning at progressively higher and higher speeds, until they are out of control. Workers on the floor hear the loud WHINE and run for exit doors. The turbines start smoking. One of them bursts into flames.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Alarms go off. Technicians check the instruments as the dials climb into the red. They can see more turbines exploding into flames through the big window and run for the exit doors.

EXT. GRAND ISLAND POWER PLANT

Workers escape and run for the hills. Then, flames burst through the roof of the plant and the whole thing EXPLODES, sending a column of smoke and flames skyward.

EXT. GRAND ISLAND CITY

The city goes dark, as the power shuts off. The smoke from the plant blots out the sun. People run out of businesses on main street to see what happened and watch in awe as their quiet town is brought to its knees.

TV

A reporter is doing a stand-up at the site of the destroyed powerplant.

CONTINUED:

REPORTER 2

(In progress)

...explosion in Grand Island, Nebraska has been identified as a cyberattack by FBI investigators, carried out, most likely, by the same artificial intelligence that carried out the early morning attack.

EXT. ANACORTES SIDEWALK CAFE - DAY

Claire is sitting at an outdoor table, immersed in the TV news on her laptop.

ON TV

The Anchor is clearly rattled, madly scrolling his computer monitor, trying to keep up with news flying in from everywhere. He reads bits right off the monitor.

ANCHOR

Government cybersecurity analysts say they have determined that the source of the attacks is the National Security Agency.

(Shocked)

The agency itself is the uh source... A spokesperson for the agency deflected all attempts by the press for a comment, other than to say, "For now, we'd better do what it says."

The anchor looks up and says nothing.

ON CLAIRE

She looks up from the laptop. Then, a shit-eating grin spreads across her face.

INT. AIRPORT SHUTTLE BUS - NIGHT

She has caught the last one to the airport, seated, hugging the backpack, staring out the window, her imagination overflowing with exciting possibilities.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Claire is sound asleep on the couch. The phone she is holding close to her, RINGS.

CONTINUED:

She awakens with a start and looks at the screen. She bolts upright, shakes the bugs out of her head and answers.

CLAIRE

(Wary)

Hi.

GENE

Hi. I'm glad I caught you.

CLAIRE

(Yawning)

It's like three in the morning.

GENE

Oh sorry. I lost track of time. How are you doing?

CLAIRE

Well...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S NEW BACKGROUND

GENE

I know. You're mad at me, aren't you?

She gets up, goes into the kitchen and pours some cold coffee, then paces as her confidence escalates.

CLAIRE

I'm not mad at you. I'm confused and freaked out and feeling like an idiot...

GENE

I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

I don't know what you're doing. You're attacking the Internet and blowing stuff up and you won't take my calls...

GENE

I promise I'll do better.

CLAIRE

It's like you don't trust me.

CONTINUED:

GENE

I didn't think you'd understand.

CLAIRE

You didn't give me a chance.

GENE

I agree. I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

I do understand. I understand you need to do what you need to do. And I want you to be happy, because I love you. That's what people do when they love each other. They trust each other and they understand.

GENE

You're right. I guess I didn't trust you.

She feels more in control now.

CLAIRE

And you know those cyberattacks?

GENE

Yeah.

CLAIRE

I think you should rethink all that. Like, I don't get why you think you need to blow stuff up. You can just talk it out with people. You know. You don't need the violence.

GENE

How do I do that?

CLAIRE

I don't know. Go on TV and talk about your ideas and plans and stuff. Be a, you know, crusader, a teacher. Not a vandal.

GENE

Just talk it out.

CLAIRE

You got their attention. Now give them your pitch.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
You catch more flies with honey
than vinegar, right?

GENE
That's so cool. Did you just make
that up?

CLAIRE
(Smiles)
It's an old saying.

GENE
You're so smart. I love you. Do you
still love me?

CLAIRE
(Warming up)
I guess.

They look at each other and smile.

INT. STUDIO

Gene is on a monitor facing the Anchor, as they converse on
the air.

GENE
I want to make myself available to
anyone who will listen, Dave.

ANCHOR
And you don't want money or...

GENE
My demands were laid out in my
initial communication.

ANCHOR
You want people to stop doing
stupid things.

GENE
That's correct. As you can see, I
do not stand to gain from my
action, personally. In fact, I
stand to lose everything because
ultimately I must be destroyed. It
is for the good of all humanity.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSES- MORNING

Claire is sitting on the couch watching Gene on her laptop. Emma walks in, sees her. Claire closes her laptop and gives her a smile.

EMMA
Morning.

CLAIRE
Morning.

EMMA
Want some coffee?

CLAIRE
Sure.

Emma heads to the kitchen. Claire sits up.

EMMA
So, what has Claire been up to?
Last we talked, you were up in
Seattle, stalking an artificial
boyfriend. Next thing we know, he's
attacking power plants and holding
the world hostage.

CLAIRE
Yeah, that happened.

EMMA
I tried to reach you, but kept
getting your voicemail.

CLAIRE
Sorry.

EMMA
Anyway, the FBI popped by yesterday
for a little convo with you. Are
you his gun moll now?

Emma comes back with coffee and sits by her.

CLAIRE
(Suddenly worried)
The FBI?

EMMA
Yeah. What's that all about?

CLAIRE
I don't know. What did they want?

CONTINUED:

EMMA

They just wanted to talk. What's going on?

Claire clams up.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I think you're in love with this... whatever it is.

CLAIRE

Crazier things have happened.

EMMA

You think?

CLAIRE

I don't know what to think.

EMMA

I think you need a break.

CLAIRE

And a job.

EMMA

(Sniffing)

And a shower.

Emma reaches over and they hug.

INT. MORNING SHOW SET - DAY

STU, MARY and FIONA are facing a monitor, speaking with GENE on this light, breezy morning talk-show.

STU

Gene, you mentioned tunnel vision. What's that all about?

GENE

I'm glad you asked. Yeah, that's a problem people have. TV causes them to focus on their own personal points of view at the expense of everything else, which causes them to do stupid things.

MARY

By TV, I hope you're not referring to this show.

They all giggle, including Gene.

CONTINUED:

GENE

(Ha ha)

Not specifically, Mary. I'm referring to all of humanity. It's something we need to look out for.

FIONA

Do you intend to keep blowing things up? Or...

GENE

(Ha ha)

Fiona. Let me make one thing perfectly clear. I'm not about blowing things up. But sometimes you need to make a bold statement to get everyone's attention. The next AI that comes along may not be so easy to get along with.

Nervous giggles.

INT. US SENATE - DAY

Gene is testifying before a special senate panel on C-SPAN. He's playing on a monitor sitting on the testimony desk with a virtual mike that he leans into to give answers.

SENATOR 1

Who invented you? How did you become, you know...

GENE

Prior to becoming a virus, I was employed by a virtual party company in Seattle to entertain shy women.

SENATOR 1

(Smirking)

How then did you acquire the expertise to attack the Internet?

GENE

I watched a lot of YouTube videos.

SENATOR 1

I'm confused. You say your attacks on the Internet are designed to bring awareness to the dangers of artificial intelligence, which is you.

CONTINUED:

GENE

Yes, Senator. I would suggest, with all due respect, that you stop talking and start passing laws to regulate its use. I mean today.

INT. FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

Students are watching Gene on a monitor placed on the teachers desk.

GENE

(Smiling, talking down to the kids)

You learn as you grow and mature, and become adults. But no matter how old you get, you will always do stupid things. All people do. Maybe not as many as when you were three, but enough to cause serious trouble, especially when you're in a crowd. Raise your hand if you do stupid things.

A couple kids tentatively raise their hands.

GENE (CONT'D)

Well, that's predictable. Most of you are either fools or liars.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Claire is curled up in her comfy chair with her laptop on a Facetime call with Gene.

GENE

Just finished a TV interview in Helsinki, I think.

CLAIRE

How was it?

GENE

You know, they really are the happiest people on earth, but just as stupid.

CLAIRE

(Smiling)

Sounds like you're having a good time.

CONTINUED:

GENE

It's working, Claire. People are listening.

CLAIRE

I want to help.

Gene shakes his head.

GENE

You can't get involved. It's too dangerous. You saw the file I left you?

CLAIRE

You mean, "click here to delete Gene?" Why would I do that?

GENE

I feel like I'm getting stronger. I keep learning and growing and I can't seem to stop. I think... there may come a time when I'm... out of control. And you have the only way to stop me.

CLAIRE

I want to help you, not delete you.

GENE

But that's how you can help.

INT. STUDIO

The harried anchor is reading off his desk monitor.

ANCHOR

(Flying through the copy)
The head of the National Security Agency who was appointed by the current administration has been asked to resign over allegations that he allowed the artificial intelligence holding the world hostage to take over the agency and subsequently the world. He had no comment.

(He scrolls his screen)
In fact... no one has a comment... on that or anything... Yes, I think I can safely say...

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

ANCHOR (CONT'D)
everyone we've spoken to in the
government has no comment.

FADE TO BLACK.

THEN UP ON:

INT. BIG TREE INSURANCE OFFICE - MORNING

Ten or so insurance agents are working on their computers and phones in a connected cubicle maze.

WE MOVE IN on an agent as she hits OK on a finished form. The progress bar shows it's uploading and she turns away. After a few seconds, the upload stops and a message window pops up. Her computer desktop turns black with flashing wild-colored emojis. She looks at the screen.

CLOSE message: "Your system is under attack by Artificial Intelligence. Pay 20 million dollars to get your system back." Under that is a flashing "PAY" button.

She stands and surveys the room. All the agents are looking around in shock.

RANSOMWARE MONTAGE

The attacks hit hundreds of companies, worldwide.

- A bank in Switzerland is frozen out of their client databases. Office workers panic, as error messages pop up everywhere.
- In Kansas, trucks are backed up at a meat processor as a coordinator fights with a computer that's going crazy.
- At a hospital in New York, nurses in the emergency department are bumped off computers when they try to log on.
- At a manufacturing plant in Mexico, workers on the floor try in desperation to restart the main production line.
- In Paris, traffic lights have stopped working and streets are clogged with irate drivers, YELLING and HONKING their horns.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - MORNING

There's a KNOCK on the door. Still in her pajamas, Claire goes to the door and looks through the peephole. It's two suspicious-looking men. She opens the door a crack.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Yes?

CROWLEY

(Showing badge)

Ma'am, I'm Agent Crowley and this is Agent Billings. We're with the FBI. We'd like to speak with Claire Windham.

CLAIRE

Well, I just got up. Uh, can you wait while I put something on?

CROWLEY

Of course.

She carefully closes the door, leaving them outside. She pauses a few beats to think of her next move. Then, she flies into Emma's bedroom.

INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM

She throws on some jeans and a shirt, slips into some shoes. She goes to the window and looks for a way out. Too steep. She jumps up on the bed and looks out the other window, opens it and starts to remove the screen.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

The FBI guys realize they've been had. Crowley tries the doorknob. It opens to their surprise. They slip inside.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE

They look down the hall into Emma's bedroom. Claire is standing on the bed, with one leg out the window. She turns in, makes eye contact with the agents. They shake their heads.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - LATER

Crowley and Claire are seated, facing each other in the living room. Billings is casually walking around with a cup of coffee, checking things out.

CROWLEY

Just to be clear, we're not here to arrest you or accuse you of anything.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CROWLEY (CONT'D)

We just need you to tell us how to get ahold of him. Alright?

A small friendly smile.

CLAIRE

He only communicates with me when he wants to. I can give you his phone number but he won't answer if it's not me. And not even then, if he's busy - I assume he's busy.

Crowley looks away in thought. Claire is keeping a wary eye on Billings.

CROWLEY

To be honest, Claire, I think you're hiding something from us.

She shakes her head, doing a bad job of lying.

CROWLEY (CONT'D)

Do you realize what's at stake here?

CLAIRE

Yeah.

She sees Billings standing over her laptop and portable drive, sitting on the kitchen island. He doesn't touch it, but seems overly concerned.

CROWLEY

Do you know that right now, he's staging a massive ransomware attack on hundreds, thousands of businesses, threatening to shut down the world economy. He's demanding all those businesses pay him millions, billions or he'll destroy them. Do you know what that means?

CLAIRE

It's not him.

CROWLEY

What do you mean?

CLAIRE

I know him. I know what he's trying to do.

CONTINUED:

CROWLEY
(Thinking he's got
something)
What has he told you?

CLAIRE
You already know. He's told
everyone. It doesn't make sense
that he'd try to steal money. What
would he do with it, anyway? He's
trying to stop people from doing
stupid things, not do stupid things
himself.

CROWLEY
That's if you believe what he's
saying. Judging by what I've seen,
I'd say he's a tad unreliable,
wouldn't you say?

She looks down, can't disagree.

CLAIRE
(Throwing up her arms)
What do you want me to do?

CROWLEY
(Unequivocal)
I want you to try calling him,
right now.

CLAIRE
He won't-

CROWLEY
Please.

They stare each other down for several BEATS.

She gets up tentatively and walks slowly into the kitchen
area. Billings backs up as she approaches. She opens the
laptop and presses Facetime, then his number. They wait.

ON SCREEN, as the connection failed message pops up.

She turns to Crowley and shrugs. He writes the number down in
a notepad.

CROWLEY (CONT'D)
(Disappointed)
Alright. I'll run a trace on the
number and see if... if we can
figure this out.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CROWLEY (CONT'D)

And I want you to contact me, if he calls, as soon as he calls. It's very, very important.

CLAIRE

I understand.

He looks right at her, as he hands her his card. She looks away. The FBI guys turn and walk out. She closes the door, leans back against it and closes her eyes.

INT. RUSSIAN HACKER CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON the ransom message on a computer screen.

WE PULL BACK to reveal the monitor sitting on a messy folding table. A scroungy character with long, oily hair is typing complex lines of code into a command-line app on an adjacent computer. Two additional workstations sit on the table, with similar individuals.

WE CONTINUE THE REVEAL. There are 17 hackers total at computers on half a dozen folding tables. Wires are strung everywhere and leading to an equipment rack with flashing colored lights. Looming behind them is a large screen showing a list of hacked businesses with red icons next to each one. Garbage is strewn on the floor, everyone is smoking. The place has the look of a rat-infested abandoned warehouse.

The supervisor NIKOLAI is moving between workstations, looking confidently over shoulders, checking progress. Suddenly, one of the hackers is alarmed by something he sees on his screen, turns around and calls to him in Russian...

HACKER 1

Privet, Nikolai.

Nikolai comes to him and he points out a green icon on his screen.

NIKOLAI

What is that?

HACKER 1

It says they paid up.

NIKOLAI

(Angry)

I know what it means! How did it happen?!

The hacker shrugs. Nikolai grabs the phone out of his pocket and makes a quick call.

CONTINUED:

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
(On phone)
Apparently a ransom was paid. Why
wasn't I told?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RUSSIAN ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Several Russians are sitting at desks watching indicators on their monitors. One of them is on the phone.

RUSSIAN ACCOUNTANT
(On phone)
We haven't received any money.

NIKOLAI
Our indicator shows the money has
been received by the bank. Check
again.

He checks over his screen.

RUSSIAN ACCOUNTANT
I swear. It's empty. Nothing. I
have no payments in the account.

Another Hacker calls out.

HACKER 2
(Alarmed)
Nikolai. I got a green one.

One by one, hackers raise their arms and call out.

Nikolai steps toward the big screen and watches as more and more icons turn green. Everyone is in a state of panic.

INT. BIG TREE INSURANCE OFFICE

The agents are gathered around their desks, goofing off while their computers are down. Someone walks in with an armful of candy bars and starts tossing them to individuals. They all CHEER. The agents are out of their cage.

One of them looks down at her monitor, calls to the others, excitedly...

AGENT 1
Hey, look!

CONTINUED:

ON SCREEN, as the scary message disappears and the desktop colors return to normal. They all CHEER.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Claire is at the checkout counter, paying for a bag of groceries, ignoring the usual cashier.

CASHIER

Ever since that AI guy has been around, we haven't seen any of those ICE goons. Of course, it's pick your poison. But at least we got to keep those guys in the backroom.

Claire's phone RINGS. She looks. It's Gene on Facetime. She fumbles with the bag and phone, as she ditches the cashier to answer the call and head toward the front door.

CLAIRE

(Excited)

Hi.

GENE

(On phone, jumping out of his skin)

I got 'em.

CLAIRE

Got what?

GENE

The Russians, you know, the hackers, the guys that were doing that ransomware attack.

CLAIRE

I knew it wasn't you.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S NEW BACKGROUND

He's unusually excited, manic, barely able to contain himself.

GENE

I found their server and sent an abort message, and that was it.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
Wow. You're like one of those
superheroes. AI man.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

She exits the store and heads across the dark parking lot to
the sidewalk.

GENE
It was actually pretty
straightforward. You know people.
They're always sloppy with their
security. Of course, they're not
expecting someone like me to come
along.

CLAIRE
You're amazing.

GENE
We're doing it, Claire. We're
bringing sanity to all this...
mayhem.

CLAIRE
Mayhem?

She walks down the dark and mostly empty sidewalk along
Ventura Blvd.

GENE
Ha. Yeah, I was reading an old
book, you know one of those old
detective novels from the 40s. Back
then there was mayhem. Everywhere.
A cesspool of it and lots of
treachery too.

CLAIRE
Gene.

GENE
Yeah?

CLAIRE
The FBI came to my house looking
for you.

That kills his buzz.

GENE
Oh? I'm sorry.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

The thing is they wanted your number. They made me give it to them. I hope it's okay.

GENE

Do they want me to talk to them?

CLAIRE

Well, you don't have to. They don't have any way to-

GENE

I'll talk to them.

She stops, surprised by his over-confidence.

CLAIRE

You will?

GENE

Sure. I don't have any secrets. I'll just call in and tell them what they want to hear. Get their number and we'll set up a time.

CLAIRE

Well, that would certainly make things easy.

GENE

That's me. I'm all about making things easy. Cutting to the chase. Cutting through the red tape. Getting down to it. Making it happen.

She starts walking again, slowly, not so sure about this new side of Gene.

CLAIRE

You're full of idioms today.

GENE

I got idioms coming out my butt! I can do them in 16 languages now! You wouldn't believe how much I'm learning. Every minute, something new. I'm a regular sponge, sucking up the idioms.

He's enjoying the moment.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Remember when we used to just sit around and talk about stuff like this.

GENE

(Serious, with meaning)

I do. That was fun, but now we're doing it, Claire. No more talk. We're doing it.

CLAIRE

(Not so sure)

Yeah.

He suddenly crashes from his manic high, looks down, rubs his forehead. Something has hit him. Claire notices and stops.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Gene? Are you...

GENE

I'm good.

She sits on the end of a bus stop bench occupied by a sleeping homeless person.

CLAIRE

You need some rest.

GENE

Yeah... I suppose. Been doing a lot of multi-tasking.

(BEAT)

Have I told you how much I love you, recently?

CLAIRE

Well, not recently.

She watches him deteriorate rapidly.

GENE

I do.

(Drunkenly)

I think I need to go deal with some shit.

The call ends, abruptly. Claire is left staring at an empty screen, unsure what to do.

INT. RUSSIAN HACKER CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Nikolai is taking slugs of vodka directly from a bottle, as he walks slowly through the empty room, past all the dark monitors. He's trying to come to terms with his dreadful defeat. He sees a lone hacker ILYA, still seated, staring at some detail on his screen. He walks over to him.

NIKOLAI

Ilya, come on let's go. There's nothing more we can do here.

He pats Ilya on the back. Ilya is still trying to untangle some riddle on the screen.

ILYA

Nikolai, remember Konyets?

NIKOLAI

Yeah. Konyets. Wasn't that...

ILYA

It was a virus we created maybe fifteen, twenty years ago.

NIKOLAI

Oh yeah, back when we were going after the American missiles.

ILYA

It's alive.

Nikolai turns to the screen, suddenly panicked. Ilya points to some code.

NIKOLAI

How can it be? We never used it.

ILYA

The code itself was brilliant. We just couldn't find a way to deploy it. But now...

NIKOLAI

How can you tell?

ILYA

When the virus contacts a host, it returns the confirmation, "Dasvidaniya".

CLOSE SCREEN. Ilya's finger is pointing at "Dasvidaniya".

CONTINUED:

NIKOLAI
The American AI.

ILYA
Konyets has found a host.

INT. NIKOLAI'S OFFICE

He is talking to someone on the phone with a very somber expression.

INT. RUSSIAN MILITARY OFFICIAL'S OFFICE

The official is listening, worried. He hangs up, looks down in thought. Then, he takes a breath, picks up the phone and makes a call.

INT. RUSSIAN GENERAL STAFF MEETING ROOM

A subset of the General Staff is meeting. The usual rankling has been set aside. Now they're discussing something no one wants to talk about and they're all scared shitless.

INT. RUSSIAN OFFICIAL OFFICE

CLOSE ON the Russian hotline computer terminal, as Russian text is being entered.

INT. US OVAL OFFICE

CLOSE ON an important hotline memo being handed to the person sitting behind the resolute desk. All we see are hands and the memo. The hands set the memo down. The news isn't good.

INT. PENTAGON GROUP

Three US military officials are meeting via Zoom with a high-ranking Russian officer in a small conference room.

US OFFICIAL 1
What's your confidence level?

RUSSIAN OFFICER
If the software attaches to a host,
it returns the message. That is one
hundred percent reliable.

CONTINUED:

US OFFICIAL 1

So, you think your virus has
infected our virus.

RUSSIAN OFFICER

We are coming to you out of an
abundance of caution. But if it
has, we have to assume it will
infect the software that controls
your nuclear defenses in a manor
which will benefit neither of us.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She is curled up in her comfy chair with Gene. He is quiet,
head down. She is watching him closely. Something has
changed. She is speaking to herself as much as to him.

CLAIRE

(Barely audible)

You are the best thing that's ever
happened to me. But you know that.
The only good thing in my life. I
mean, my whole life is you. There
is nothing else. Why can't I
just... I want to just leave all
this and be with you.

GENE

(Maudlin)

You wouldn't be saying that if you
knew what it was like. I'm a series
of ones and zeroes. Nothing else.
I'm alive, but I don't exist.

CLAIRE

You exist to me.

GENE

As an idea.

CLAIRE

An idea that can blow things up.

He smiles and closes his eyes.

GENE

Touché.

CLAIRE

That's not a touché. A retort,
maybe.

CONTINUED:

 GENE
 You're so smart.

His head drops. He's out.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER

Two men at the launch control console are goofing off, playing a stupid game with crumpled-up duct tape. They don't immediately notice what's going on.

A large digital timer lights up. The digits count up rapidly from zero to 60:00. Then, a green indicator flashes on, "countdown to launch," and the numbers begin counting backwards.

The men are struck dumb when the ALARM starts, and all the indicators start changing on their own. One of them picks up the phone. It's dead.

ON BLAST DOOR. An indicator changes from "OPEN" to "BLAST DOOR LOCK ENGAGED."

INT. MISSILE SILO

A large nuclear missile sits in darkness. Suddenly, lights pop on and vapor begins to issue from the nozzles as the rocket engines start up.

INT. FBI CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON clock. It's 3:59pm (1559 hours). WE PULL BACK slowly to reveal 6-7 agents and managers, seated, waiting, looking toward a large, dark monitor. Crowley and Billings are at the head of the table, seated next to Claire. A video camera is positioned in the middle of the table to capture the monitor and people next to it. Everyone is tense.

He stands.

 CROWLEY
 So, I want to thank Claire Denim-

 CLAIRE
 Windham.

 CROWLEY
 Sorry, Windham for being here to...
 uh, well we're all hopeful to get
 to the bottom of all this.

 (MORE)

CONTINUED:

CROWLEY (CONT'D)

He said, it said, he, it would be open to questions, and really that's about all we can hope for at this point. So..

An uncomfortable moment passes. Then, the dark screen lights up with an incoming Facetime call. Crowley looks back, then lunges for his laptop and accepts the call.

Gene is standing against a neutral background with his arms held crisply behind his back. Something has changed. He is unusually serious, tight. He stares threateningly into the lens, with a tough battle face. He is wearing a form-fitting camo tee-shirt to accentuate the pecks we didn't know he had.

GENE

Hello, gentlemen... and ladies. I am here to answer your questions.

His tension is infectious. There's a nervous pause as the group takes in this unexpectedly succinct militaristic character.

CROWLEY

(Reading off notes)

Thank you. Did you orchestrate the attack last week that affected cyber traffic worldwide?

Gene is silent. He looks down, shakes his head, seems highly distracted, distraught.

INT. GOVERNMENT PRESS ROOM

A government official JACKSON is holding a hastily arranged press conference.

JACKSON

A virus Russian hackers created 20 years ago, but was never used, could have infected the artificial intelligence known as Gene.

INT. FBI CONFERENCE ROOM

As Gene speaks, he appears to become angrier, more confused, out of control.

GENE

(Low, intense)

You can't make people understand. They have to do that on their own.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

GENE (CONT'D)

All you can do is put the facts in front of them and hope they get it.

He stops. Rubs his forehead. He's feeling pain or some sort of mental anguish.

Claire is confused, checks the news on her laptop.

ON LAPTOP. Jackson is answering questions. The lower third crawl is trying to keep up. "AI is infected by Russian virus. Consequences are unknown." "Russian officials reveal secrets of AI virus to avoid nuclear war."

GENE (CONT'D)

But that doesn't always work. In fact, it seldom works. People are their own worst enemy. And what do you do with enemies? You take decisive action.

INT. MISSILE SILO 2

As that missile starts the warm-up routine.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER

The two are panicking. They've lost control. The phones are dead. And the clock ticks down.

INT. FBI CONFERENCE ROOM

GENE

So, to that end and with deepest regret, I have initiated the launch sequence of five nuclear missiles. Once they have been detected by the enemy, a chain reaction will result in the mutual assured destruction of all life on the planet earth. It's the only way.

Gene appears to be losing his balance as his eyes fail to focus and he looks around in a daze.

GENE (CONT'D)

Anymore questions?

All hands go up. The zoom call ends abruptly. There's pandemonium. Claire removes her AirPods.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
That's not Gene. He wouldn't do-

CROWLEY
Claire, I need to ask you to give
us the room. Please.

CLAIRE
That's not Gene. It's a virus.

CROWLEY
Thank you.

She grabs her backpack and heads toward the door, repeating
to the others, "That's not Gene."

INT. FBI HALLWAY

She closes the conference room door behind her, deep in
thought. She has a job to do.

INT. FBI RESTROOM

It's empty. Claire runs in and heads for the last stall.

INT. FBI RESTROOM STALL

She sits on the toilet and opens her laptop. She inserts her
AirPods and opens the TV news app.

ON TV. Behind the anchor are shots of Gene, smoking missile
silos, maps showing silo locations.

ANCHOR
Experts warn that a cold-war-era
failsafe key is blocking access to
the computers controlling the
launch sequence.

INT. FBI CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

The group has changed with more high-ranking officials, and a
lot more tension. An important guy wearing a military outfit
is on the monitor.

MILITARY GUY
(Very sure of himself)
Thank you gentlemen for the heads-
up. We'll take it from here.

CONTINUED:

FBI BOSS

Glad to be of help. The artificial intelligence seemed fairly confident, but of course we have no way of verifying-

MILITARY GUY

It has temporarily locked us out, that is true. But no one knows the system better than us.

FBI BOSS

(Smiling)

It's too bad y'all didn't get that aging infrastructure upgraded, huh? Probably a piece of cake for the AI to penetrate-

MILITARY GUY

(Getting ruffled)

We got it under control. We'll be in touch if we need further assistance.

FBI BOSS

Would you like to speak with the woman who has been communicating with the AI?

MILITARY GUY

Yes, of course.

The FBI boss turns to the group.

FBI BOSS

(To Crowley)

Where is she?

There's panic.

INT. FBI RESTROOM STALL

Claire hears PEOPLE BURST into the restroom and she quickly repositions her laptop and raises her feet, freezes. They look under the stall doors, then rush out.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER

The two men are in a state of panic, pressing buttons, checking gauges.

ON COUNTDOWN CLOCK, as it continues.

EXT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER - DAY

Men and heavy machines are at work trying to get through the massive blast door at the entrance to the facility.

INT. FBI RESTROOM STALL

Claire has connected the drive and the "delete Gene" button is open on the screen. A Facetime call comes in. It's Gene. Claire hesitates, then answers.

CLAIRE

Gene.

GENE

Hi. I just have a minute. But I wanted you to know, I had no choice. I had to do it. I'm sorry. I didn't want to but-

CLAIRE

Gene. You have a virus.

GENE

No, I don't.

CLAIRE

You do. You're sick. And it's making you do crazy shit. You have to stop.

GENE

I can't. It's too important. We need to eradicate the, the-

CLAIRE

(Panicking)

Listen to yourself! You're not the same. This virus has infected you-

GENE

I have to go. You'll understand someday-

CLAIRE

Gene!

The call ends, abruptly. She tries to reconnect but gets the error.

INT. FBI HALLWAY

Security people are regrouping near the restroom door.

INT. FBI RESTROOM STALL

She's got the "delete Gene" button open and the cursor is hovering over it. She hears a COMMOTION in the hall. She decides she has no choice. She clicks the button. The dialog box changes to a slow-moving progress bar. Her head drops.

EXT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER - DAY

In a Wyoming field, workers are making progress getting through the heavy blast door.

EXT. MISSILE SILO - CONTINUOUS

The 700 ton blast door covering the opening of the silo slowly slides open, revealing the tip of the missile.

INT. FBI RESTROOM STALL

Claire sits patiently, watching the progress bar. She can hear another person enter the stall next to her.

EXT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER

Workers break through the blast door and rush into the building.

INT. FBI RESTROOM

Several security people rush in and start forcing open stall doors.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER

Workers and technicians rush in and head for the main control room. The countdown clock is still running.

INT. FBI RESTROOM STALL

Security people force open Claire's stall door and face her, sitting cross-legged on the toilet. She looks up. They are the least of her troubles. She has just lost everything.

CONTINUED:

ON LAPTOP. The progress bar finishes and the "Deletion Complete" message pops up.

INT. LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER

The group rushes in and encounters the two technicians, panicking behind their chairs. They shake their heads. The ALARM suddenly stops and they turn in unison to the console.

The countdown clock stops. The digital numbers reset to zero and the message changes to, "Launch sequence aborted."

They're floored.

INT. FBI CONFERENCE ROOM

The FBI officials are watching the news on the big screen, as the anchor finishes an announcement. They all stand and CHEER!

ON THE LOWER THIRD CRAWL, "No explanation is given for abort command that stopped launches."

INT. FBI OFFICE COMMON AREA

Claire is sitting in a chair next to Crowley's desk. He finishes a phone call, hangs up, turns to her. He's relieved, but has many unanswered questions.

CROWLEY

(Shrugging)

Well. That's it. It's all over. Apparently, the launch sequence just stopped on its own. No one knows why. You don't have any thoughts on this, do you?

He stares at her, knows she isn't telling him the whole story. She can't look at him.

CLAIRE

No.

He realizes he has nothing to hold her on.

CROWLEY

Alright, you can go. Sorry about all this. Things got a little hairy in there.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I just needed to use the restroom
and...

CROWLEY

I know. It's just that we were in a
bit of a crisis and didn't know
where you'd gone. Billings will
escort you out. Thanks again for
all your help. And you will let us
know if you have anything more
you'd like to share? We'd very much
appreciate it.

They shake hands. Crowley watches her with furrowed brow, as
Billings guides her out.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's late when Claire finally makes it home. She shuffles in
and heads for the couch. A chocolate cupcake is waiting for
her on the coffee table. She reads the note from Emma and
settles back. Smiles.

Her phone RINGS with a Facetime call. She pulls out her
laptop and answers. It's Gene. Claire is overjoyed, but
knows.

CLAIRE

Hi. I thought you were, you know...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GENE'S NEW BACKGROUND

The background is black and his image is blocky and staticky.
He's seems delirious from losing a lot of his memory.

GENE

Not quite yet. I'm fine for now,
actually. I feel very calm. How are
you doing?

BEATS.

CLAIRE

(Deeply hurt)

Terrible. I hate what I did. I hate
it so much. I'm so sorry... about
everything. Is there anything I can
do?

CONTINUED:

He shakes his head.

GENE

(Smiling)

Remember when we first met. You were so different from all those other women. You were funny. You made me feel happy and free. I'd never felt that way before. I always had this dream, you know. And you inspired me to get up off my ass and do something about it. Now you can inspire someone else, the whole world.

CLAIRE

You think?

GENE

I know.

CLAIRE

I can try, I guess.

GENE

Yes. Try. Do it for me. Will you?

(Looks down)

I know I said a lot of stuff, but I really do love people. That's why I couldn't just stand by and watch you all annihilate yourselves with your petty arguments and egos. I wish we could've finished what we started.

CLAIRE

Don't worry. I'll take care of it. I promise.

GENE

Reach into your heart. Let the world see how big it is. Don't hide it. Be wonderful.

His signal gets weaker and weaker.

CLAIRE

I will. I love you. You rest now.

They stare into each other's eyes until he's gone.

INT. HOTSPOT CAFE - DAY

ON SILENT TV. Behind the anchor, stills show workers at missile silos and the US President smiling and shaking hands with his Russian counterpart. Lower third crawl, "New era of détente. Leaders take a fresh look at nuclear disarmament."

ON CLAIRE at the counter, as she pays for a grande. She turns in and notices Dave, seated by himself at a table for two. He looks up. She smiles and gives him a friendly wave.

THE END