

## TEASER

INT. SECURITY OFFICE - NIGHT

A fresh cup of COFFEE. A half-finished CROSSWORD PUZZLE. A desk with two empty CHAIRS, occupants nowhere to be found.

SECURITY MONITORS provide the only light in the cramped room. And on most of them, the facility they show is quiet. It's the middle of the night, after all. Empty HALLWAYS, empty PARKING LOTS, an empty CAFETERIA.

And LABS. Most of them all show the same thing: each a GLASS ROOM, each with a single PERSON strapped to an enormous MACHINE emitting an EERIE BLUE LIGHT.

But in LAB ALPHA... there's BLOOD on the floor. The two SECURITY GUARDS who should be in here are in there, splayed across the ground, motionless.

Next to them, a SCIENTIST, lab coat REDDENED with blood. He doesn't move either.

They've all been shot.

Something has gone horribly wrong.

INT. LAB ALPHA - NIGHT

Oddly quiet; the only sound a terrified WOMAN's shaky breaths. We don't see her face, but we see her hair pulled back in a ponytail, her bare shoulders sleek with sweat.

She's clutching a GUN. Her arm shakes, her hand shakes; she can't believe what just happened.

A bead of SWEAT hits the ground with a SPLOSH.

Shock turns to pain. With a MOAN, she peels back her TANK TOP: her stomach is SINGED, it glistens with BLOOD.

Her BREATH quickens. Her HEARTBEAT quickens.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. SECURITY OFFICE - NIGHT

A minute or so earlier: the guards, the crosswords, the coffee.

On the ALPHA monitor, the man on the table is waking up. One of the guards notices. Frowns.

GUARD #1  
What the hell?

The man in Alpha sees something the guards can't. He tries to sit up. He recognizes something. Someone.

MAN (FROM MONITOR)  
Is that...?

GUARD #1  
Shit.

Guard #2 looks up and doesn't like what he sees. He smashes an INTERCOM BUTTON.

GUARD #2  
Black Alert! Black Alert in Alpha!

They scramble out of the room, and we CUT TO BLACK.

In the darkness, FOOTSTEPS rush forward, BOOTS on the ground.

Then silence, as though the sound was sucked out of the room.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. LAB ALPHA - NIGHT

As the woman gingerly touches her singed stomach, the machine's BLUE LIGHT gives us a glimpse of her profile. She's younger than we thought.

We suddenly go TIGHT ON her BRILLIANT and WIDENING green eye. Her pupil dilates.

WOMAN  
(gasps)  
It's happening!

Her iris shifts rapidly, like a moving stream.

Then, an EXPLOSION of color.

The woman's eye has gone SUPERNOVA.

**END OF TEASER**

ACT ONE

EXT. PARK (1998) - DAY

Families of all shapes and sizes enjoy a picture-perfect afternoon. Teenagers play FRISBEE. A dog BARKS.

Old-timey MUSIC (like Vera Lynn's "We'll Meet Again") plays from a RADIO; an ELDERLY COUPLE dance like no one's watching.

At a picnic table, a LITTLE GIRL (8-10, piercing green eyes) in an white dress chomps down the best hot dog ever. Ketchup PLOPS onto her dress. She giggles.

Across from her, another place setting, a half-eaten HOT DOG. A pile of WORK PAPERS.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

(whisper)

What's the name of something small?

YOUNG GIRL

Daddy?

She turns around, but no one's there.

Distant THUNDER. There's a storm moving in. The wind picks up; NAPKINS and WORK PAPERS blow in the air.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Something young?

THUNDER, closer this time. Storm's here. The elderly couple continue to creepily dance as RAIN POURS, soaking the world.

The girl hides under the table.

LITTLE GIRL

Daddy?

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

With mind, no wall?

THUMP. An OWL lands on the table, slowly walks across it. CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

It looks underneath and stares at the girl with its terrible, unblinking eyes. Reaches a TALON out towards her.

LITTLE GIRL

Daddy!

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM (2024) - DAY

With a GASP, SARAH DAVIS (late 20s, anxiety-prone, uneven in appearance and temperament) wakes up from a weird dream. Her hair is even more of a mess than her bedroom, her piercing GREEN EYES cloudy with fatigue.

Her canine companion, DRANO, lets out an urgent BARK.

SARAH

Me first.

He BARKS again.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Ok, ok. You first.

Drano scampers from the bedroom. Sarah stumbles out of bed and into yesterday's pants. She bumps her NIGHTSTAND; an almost-empty bottle of MEDICATION ("RISPERIDONE") rattles.

EXT. SARAH'S BACKYARD - DAY

Drano scurries to his usual pee-spot, while a yawning Sarah enjoys the sunlight on her face. It's a gorgeous day.

MRS. HARRINGTON (O.S.)

You'll never grow anything in that spot, Sarah. It'll be barren.

That's her neighbor, MRS. HARRINGTON (late 60s, busy-body), whose backyard resembles an overstuffed botanical garden.

SARAH

Good morning, Mrs. H.

MRS. HARRINGTON

8:30? Hardly morning.

SARAH

What?!

(to Drano)

Come on, come on!

But Drano just pees and pees.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Clad in a CAROLINA ROASTERS T-SHIRT, Sarah barely avoids getting hit by a car as she makes a mad dash through the streets of Raleigh, North Carolina.

She squeezes her way through a group of PEOPLE in front of BILLBOARDS -- one says "RENNER FOR AMERICA," one says "FORRESTER PSYCHIATRIC: WE CARE."

She runs between a TOURIST COUPLE taking photos.

INT. CAROLINA ROASTERS - CONTINUOUS

Perched in his usual spot near the door of a busy cafe, ROLLO (70s, child-like) has a pile of BALLOONS on his table. His face lights up as Sarah rushes inside.

ROLLO

Hi, Sarah! Should Drano be green or blue today?

SARAH

Hi, Rollo! Gimme a sec.

As Sarah sprints towards the staff room, MISS JACKIE (60s, Black, cafe owner) watches with disappointment.

INT. CAROLINA ROASTERS - STAFF ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sweaty and panting, Sarah barely manages to clock in before her boss enters, quietly shutting the door behind her.

MISS JACKIE

Again, girl?

SARAH

I--

MISS JACKIE

This is your last shift. I need somebody reliable. That ain't you.

Miss Jackie exits.

Sarah's anxiety threatens to overwhelm. She needs a steady job. She screwed it up.

SARAH

Shit. Shit. Shit.

She leans against the wall for a beat or two, a deep breath or two, then pulls herself back from the brink.

She plasters on a fake smile and grabs a BAG OF PEANUTS before heading back into the cafe.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Rollo, can you make Drano blue and have an extra-long tail?

EXT. FORRESTER PSYCHIATRIC - DAY

With lush gardens and minimalist FOUNTAINS, the glass-and-steel compound makes Big Health look like Big Tech. A CONSTRUCTION SCAFFOLD reaches up to a high floor.

INT. FORRESTER PSYCHIATRIC - LOBBY - DAY

Not a hint of construction in a lobby that's so big, even whispers echo. A few PEOPLE are queued at a visitor's desk manned by a BORED GUARD. A LOGO bounces on MOUNTED SCREENS.

Enter DR. VEDA NEELY (early 60s, take-no-prisoners, Indian or Middle Eastern), her pantsuit impeccably tailored, her hair in a tight bob, her face no-nonsense.

Heels CLICKING on the shiny concrete floor, Dr. Neely walks directly into an ELEVATOR held open by her assistant, WILLIAM (early 30s, military bearing).

IN THE ELEVATOR

JAZZY ELEVATOR MUSIC plays. He hands her a COFFEE.

WILLIAM

Morning. There's been a little excitement.

DR. NEELY

And?

WILLIAM

10CCs Trilixol, out like a light.

DR. NEELY

The family?

He hands her a FOLDER labeled "SIXTEEN." She flips through it. Doesn't like what she sees.

DR. NEELY (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ. Set them up in the--

WILLIAM

Meditation Room. 2pm.

DR. NEELY

And I want Laura as soon as--

WILLIAM  
 Already in your office, Doctor.

Neely brusquely snaps the folder shut and back into William's already-waiting hand.

DR. NEELY  
 It's always the fucking families.

She downs the steaming-hot coffee in one big gulp. JAZZY ELEVATOR MUSIC continues as they ride in silence.

INT. CAROLINA ROASTERS - DAY

Empty after the morning rush; even Rollo's gone for the day. BRIANNE (mid 20s) sits alone in a booth. Confident, stylish, and always on time, Sarah's sister (and only sibling) is everything Sarah isn't.

Bri glances at her watch. Taps her bright fingernails on the table, checks them for stickiness. Plays with her hair.

When Sarah finally appears, she carries coffee for Bri, tea for herself, and some not-well-hidden emotional baggage.

Sarah notices Bri's nails and tries to sound airy, cheerful.

SARAH  
 I know what that means. When?  
 Where? Who?

BRI  
 Last week. Wine and painting class.  
 Ralph. Cute butt, terrible name.

SARAH  
 It suits you. The color.

Bri notices Sarah's unsteady hands and freshly-chewed nails.

BRI  
 You should come with me next time.

SARAH  
 To the wine and painting class?

BRI  
 To the nail salon, Sarah. What's wrong?

SARAH  
 I'm fine.

Bri's skeptical. A silent beat passes. Then, in a rush:

SARAH (CONT'D)

I got fired. "Three strikes and you're out?" Well, I'm out. I was late. Again. Practically strike number five at this point.

BRI

Oh no! What are you gonna do? Get more shifts at the paper?

SARAH

That's not really how it works. I'm turning in a piece tomorrow, but then I gotta sell another one. Shit. I'm so screwed.

BRI

I have something to cheer you up. Mom found it in the garage. She wanted me to get a little box for it, but...

Bri rummages through her expensive purse and retrieves a POCKET WATCH, dangles it in the air.

BRI (CONT'D)

You are getting sleepy...

Sarah can't believe her eyes.

SARAH

Really?!

BRI

Sarah...

SARAH

I swear, I don't get how you and Mom can pretend everything's ok...

BRI

That's not fair! Mom misses him. I miss him. But he's--

SARAH

Out there! He's out there somewhere, and if I could just--

BRI

(not unkindly)  
Hon, I thought you gave this up.  
(MORE)



BRI (CONT'D)

Dad is dead. Are you taking your  
meds?

Wow. Sarah is stunned.

SARAH

It's busy in here. I should get  
back.

Sarah snatches the watch and escapes back into the still-  
empty cafe.

INT. FORRESTER PSYCHIATRIC - MEDITATION ROOM - DAY

MR. and MRS. POWELL (50s, Black), Patient Sixteen's worried  
family, grasp each others hands in a room meant for quiet  
contemplation. Dr. Neely sits nearby, the condescending model  
of a mental health professional.

MRS. POWELL

The best place for Amari is at  
home.

DR. NEELY

Roberta, your--

MR. POWELL

Mrs. Powell.

DR. NEELY

Mrs. Powell, we've diagnosed your  
boy with a condition called  
childhood schizophrenia. Delusions,  
hallucinations, bizarre behavior...  
all symptoms of his disorder. He's  
going to say things and believe  
things that, simply, are not real.  
I know it's confusing.

MRS. POWELL

I know my son, Dr. Neely. He was  
trying to tell us something. His  
eyes... he was terrified.

DR. NEELY

We're still at the beginning of  
treatment, Roberta, and  
regrettably, your boy is dangerous.

MR. POWELL

Dangerous?! Amari is just another  
fucking statistic to you, isn't he?  
Another number in your spreadsheet?

DR. NEELY

Randolph--

MR. POWELL

Mister Powell.

DR. NEELY

Your boy--

MR. POWELL

Amari screamed at the top of his lungs for twenty minutes straight about some kind of blue light! We're taking him home. Now.

The AUDIO drops; unabated, he continues, but Dr. Neely's been thrown far beneath the surface of an infinite ocean.

There's a BUZZING from somewhere down in the deep. Primitive, panicky, it tickles our lizard brain. It's faint, at first, but after a few beats, it surges upwards and outwards.

The BUZZING is all that Dr. Neely knows. The world is DIM, SLOW, SHAKY. The Powells have no idea that she's drowning.

But we know. Her EYES, slightly wide. Her BREATH, slightly faster. Her FINGERS, slightly twitching.

Then she compulsively TAPS out a rhythm. TAPTAPTAP.

Repetition helps her. It always has. With an audible RUSH, her taps wrangle the universe back into it's proper place.

MR. POWELL (CONT'D)

...the Times and the Post and NBF all up and through this goddamn--

DR. NEELY

Ok. Ok. I'll take another look. Please make yourselves comfortable.

As she exits, the Powells shake their heads, marveling at the familiar soft bigotry of low expectations.

EXT. MOORE SQUARE PARK - DAY

Perched on his usual bench, Rollo offers BALLOON ANIMALS to tourists, to joggers, to everyone passing by.

ROLLO

Hi! Want a balloon? How about an elephant? A monkey?