

SOCKPUPPET (sok-puhp-it) *n.*

1. A hand puppet made with a sock.

2. A false online identity
used for deceptive purposes.

Merriam-Webster.com.

Merriam-Webster, n.d.

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OVER BLACK

DANA (PRE-LAP)
Open your eyes, Dana.

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

A pair of green eyes BLASTS open, as if gasping for air.

The double reflection of an Edwardian mansion is framed within their expanding irises.

Through the eyes, into the reflection: The home stands tall and proud, a structure imposed on the landscape. Life glows within. Silhouettes mingle across curtained windows.

DANA HALLER, 29, approaches the front door alone.

At the bottom of four steps leading to a covered porch, she hesitates. Pulls out a paper invitation. Leans back to check the house's address against the card. Yep. Deep breath.

DANA
(Sotto.)
Okay ...

A flickering lamp illuminates her face as she approaches the front door: She's nervous. The lines of shyness look at home on Dana's face, framed within the collar of a jacket just big enough to disappear into.

Her finger hovers over an ornate doorbell. Thinks again, balling her fist to knock. Freezes over the wood molding.

She begins to tremble in an anxious panic.

DANA
... it's just a party ...

Uncurling her fist, she moves to push back her coat sleeve, catches herself, and checks the time on her phone.

She considers the soft shapes cast in motion against the curtains. The nondescript thrum of overlapping conversations make their own music from the other side of the door.

DANA
... let's do this.

With a quick SLAP to her own cheek, she pushes open the unlocked door, letting the warm glow from inside spill onto her as she enters.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Dana peeks out from behind the front door. Immediately, she is faced with a wall of bodies.

The main entrance hall is bustling with several dozen GUESTS. Everyone is locked in conversation, paired off in sets of two and three.

She slides through the narrowly open door.

Pivoting on her heel, she holds the handle mechanism back as she closes the door to avoid making a sound.

Dana turns to face the room, managing to keep to herself. She avoids eye contact, glancing around nowhere in particular.

She takes in the space:

A high ceiling with an inverted vault, sloping down to a point in the center, from which a stained glass chandelier hangs. Soft drapery adorns the walls, accenting half-wall wood paneling beneath floral wallpaper.

Swept away in awe of the place, she begins to overhear:

GUESTS (O.S.)

Any idea who it is? When did you
receive it? Did you see it delivered?
Who was the first to arrive?

The murmurs blend together as she makes her way around the edge of the room.

Avoiding the interlocked circles of guests, she passes a long console table against a wall. On it, an eclectic spread of appetizers has been set.

The sort of food to be looked at more than eaten.

She gives them a once-over, but her face can't hide a confounded look at the options.

She takes a small cocktail napkin from the end of the table to dab the moist glow collecting on her forehead.

Pulling uncomfortably at the collar, she peels off her coat, revealing a knee-length, sky blue cocktail dress with brown jeans and wingtip boots underneath.

She spots a coat room at the end of the hall and slips in.

INT. COAT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Three open closets line the walls of the small room.

Dana retrieves a hanger and stows away her coat on the end furthest from the other guests' garments.

Another guest, TAYLOR, emerges from within one of the full closets, stumbling through hanging overcoats with an empty glass in hand. He's an enthusiastic young man wearing a blazer-hoodie combo and a smile that's all teeth.

Dana avoids eye contact, trying to slip out unnoticed. She makes it into the door frame just as --

TAYLOR

Dana?

She stops in her tracks. *Dammit.* Peeks over her shoulder.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Is that you? Dana Haller?!

Dana squints, trying to summon his name. He looks familiar.

DANA

Oh, hi ...

TAYLOR

... Taylor!

It clicks.

DANA

Oh my god, Taylor. I haven't seen you since, what, middle school?

TAYLOR

Seventh grade, yep. I was so sad when you moved away.

She cracks an authentic smile. Reminiscing.

DANA

Me too.

(Snapping out of it.)

God, you look exactly the same. Well, not exactly -- just like I imagined you would, I mean. Sorry.

TAYLOR
You haven't changed a bit. Still into computers?

DANA
It pays the bills.

TAYLOR
I bet! Wish I had been smart enough to get into that.

DANA
I didn't really have a choice in the matter.

TAYLOR
Do any of us, really?

DANA
I like to think we do. Don't you? What's your line of work?

TAYLOR
I teach. Well, sub. When I can.

DANA
That's great! Whereabouts?

He moves to take a swig of his drink. Notices it's empty.

TAYLOR
Our old school.

DANA
Fantastic. How's the campus doing?

TAYLOR
Same as you left it.

DANA
I really did love that place.

TAYLOR
So did I. Where does the time go?

DANA
Speaking of unanswerable questions, any idea what's up with these invites?

She pulls the paper invitation out of her dress pocket.

TAYLOR
I know, crazy right? No host. No
return address. Very mysterious.

DANA
Too mysterious.

TAYLOR
Looks like everyone was curious
enough to show up anyway.

DANA
Can you blame them? I've wanted to
sneak into this old place since I was
a kid. Never could convince myself.

TAYLOR
I never really noticed it.

DANA
So what's the going theory?

TAYLOR
About the host? Everyone's
speculating, but no sign of him.

DANA
Any idea who was the first to arrive?

TAYLOR
I overheard someone saying it was
that guy over there.

Taylor points through the door and across the foyer to a
square-shouldered gentleman with jet black hair, CHESTER,
facing away from them.

Dana notices him immediately, from behind. Straightens up.

DANA
Would you excuse me?

TAYLOR
Yeah, of course, it's a party.
Listen, it was so good to see you.

Already moving away, she politely tosses back:

DANA
Likewise.

Taylor smiles, gazing into his empty glass as she exits.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Dana makes her way across the foyer, weaving through clusters of other guests who take no notice of her.

Just as she raises her hand to check her breath, Chester turns around from a self-serve bar and catches her eye.

Dana's eyebrows pop up. Chester smirks, one dimple shining.

He raises his glass and points to it, then to her. She shakes her head "no". He gestures with a nod over to a quieter corner of the foyer.

They meet in a small nook between two drapes.

CHESTER
That can't be D. Haller.

DANA
Hello Chester.

CHESTER
Don't suppose you're the one throwing
this thing?

He gestures to the room with his drink, catching himself before spilling.

DANA
It's nice that you think I could
afford a place like this.

CHESTER
With you, I wouldn't rule it out.

DANA
That's funny, coming from someone who
ruled himself out.

CHESTER
Don't think I've forgotten.

DANA
Flattered to be more than a footnote.

CHESTER
Footnote? You're Chapter One.

DANA
Resisting the urge to ask how many
chapters in you are.

CHESTER
I'll tell if you will.

She puts her hand on her chin in a faux thinking pose, and looks around the room.

DANA
Let's see. How many people would say
are in this room?

CHESTER
(Playing along.)
Now you're pulling my leg. That many?
This IS your house, isn't it?!

DANA
Business is good, but it's not that
good.

CHESTER
I always knew you'd take care of
yourself.

DANA
Knew, or hoped?

CHESTER
Both. I knew you were smarter than
me -- too smart for me -- and I hoped
that the world would take notice.

DANA
The world hasn't noticed, and I'm
thankful for that. Just a couple of
the right people.

CHESTER
Then that's your world. All it takes.

DANA
What about you? What's your world?

CHESTER
I could make you feel better about
what happened with us then by telling
you about me now, but what good would
that do anybody?

DANA
You never know. Maybe I need it.

She reaches out and grabs his glass, taking a sip before returning it to his hand.

CHESTER

What you need is not my business.
Hasn't been for a long time.

DANA

I'm sure we're both better for that.

CHESTER

If that's the case, what're we both
doing at a party we didn't know
anything about before we walked
through the door?

DANA

I understand you were the first,
eager beaver.

CHESTER

I like being early.

DANA

To a party? That's new.

CHESTER

It's been quite a few years.

DANA

Thirteen.

CHESTER

What can I say? You were a good
influence on me.

DANA

So in your new party-going, early-
showing ways ... did anybody let you
in? Saucy maid? Mad butler?

CHESTER

The door was unlocked.

DANA

And you just showed yourself in? To a
seemingly empty mansion?

CHESTER

There was a spread. I was thirsty.

He rattles the ice in his glass for emphasis.

DANA

How'd the place look?

CHESTER

Exactly as you see it. Minus the people.

DANA

Preferable?

CHESTER

See, that's not a Dana I recognize. You ask me, the fact that I was early is not so shocking as the fact that you were late.

DANA

I said *business* was good. Made no claims about anything else.

CHESTER

We're at the point when I used to suggest food. Food solves everything.

DANA

Yes, this dinner party could probably use some dinner.

CHESTER

It has been a while. What's the time?

DANA

I don't know.

CHESTER

Too much trouble to check your wrist for me?

Chester gestures to Dana's prominent, oversized wrist watch.

DANA

Oh, uh, my watch is ... unique.

CHESTER

One of those smart watches, eh? I hope it's under warranty, because I'm pretty sure they're still supposed to tell the time.

Dana slides up to him, elbow to elbow.

DANA

There must be plenty of available young ladies in attendance that could give you the time.

CHESTER
Look around. It's slim pickin's.
And you don't sound like you're not
available.

DANA
To you.

He raises his glass with a smirk. Message received.

CHESTER
Enjoy the dinner, Lady Haller. If we
ever get there!

Chester gives her a nod and turns to go. Dana calls out:

DANA
Why can't it be me?

He stops and looks back at her.

CHESTER
What's that?

DANA
When you saw me. You said, "That
can't be D. Haller."

He laughs. Inches closer. Puts a finger on his temple.

CHESTER
No glasses.

DANA
Couldn't stand them. Went under the
beam a couple years back.

CHESTER
What's that like?

DANA
Like staring into the sun until
everything comes into focus.

CHESTER
Sounds like it was worth it.

DANA
Less between me and the world.

CHESTER
That was never your problem.

DANA
You say that as if you know what was.

CHESTER
I would never presume ...

DANA
Nonsense. You always presumed. Upon
me, anyway.

Chester swallows a big drink from his glass.

CHESTER
I've missed that fire.

KAT (O.S.)
So have I.

Dana and Chester both turn to see KAT, a badass blond with a side-shave and tinted glasses.

DANA
Kat, hey!

They hug. Kat leers at Chester over Dana's shoulder.

KAT
That who I think it is?

DANA
Chester, this is Kat. Kat, Chester.

CHESTER
How do you know each other?

KAT
Biblically.

Dana blushes. Kat got her tongue.

CHESTER
Church buddies, eh?

KAT
No. We --

DANA
We were in college together.

KAT
"College" here being a code name for
my pants.

Dana's face turns tomato red, covering it with her hands.

CHESTER

Oh ... I see. Is that why -- ?

DANA

No.

(Through fingers.)

It was an isolated, um, experimental time in my life.

CHESTER

(Having fun with it.)

And how did your hypothesis hold up?

DANA

That is less than none of your business, but let's just say that unlike my line of work, not everything is binary.

He rolls that over in his head. It clicks.

KAT

Makes her even hotter, doesn't it?

DANA

Kat, please.

CHESTER

She's right.

KAT

Thank you, Chesty.

Dana grabs Chester's drink and finishes it in one toss, dropping the empty on a marble side table.

CHESTER

Help yourself.

KAT

I see where this is going, but Dana baby, you know I'm not as ...

(Eyeing Chester.)

... optimistic as you are.

Dana doesn't dignify her implication with a response.

DANA

Well, catching up with you two has been ... it has been.

CHESTER
Can't argue with that.

Dana claps her hands together as she backs away from them.

DANA
I'd wish you luck tonight, but by the looks of the crowd, there's not much to be had by either of you.

Chester and Kat look at each other, making sure they get it.

CHESTER
Because you're --

KAT
And I'm --

DANA
You got it. Enjoy some appetizers, and forgive me if I don't sit next to you at this fabled dinner.

KAT
Wait, seriously, are you the host of this thing? Because if so, my compliments on the invitation design.

CHESTER
Just the right mix of classy and "what the heck is this?"

Accepting her failed egress, Dana steps back toward them.

DANA
I have no idea who put tonight together. But I'm going to find out.

Dana taps on the face of her watch.

KAT
I don't know what this means,
(Taps her wrist.)
but couldn't we just ask whoever got here first?

CHESTER
That would be me. I got nothing.

DANA
Great. You two compare notes. If you really want to help, create a distraction in here while I slip off and start poking around, m'kay?

Kat and Chester give an unsure glance at each other.

INT. EAST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Off the main entry foyer, doors line a hallway that stretches into total darkness.

Light from the party seeps into delicately carved crevices.

Dana enters, looking over her shoulder to make sure she's not being followed. She cozily tucks herself into the depth of a closed door's frame.

Activating her watch, her face is illuminated by its screen.

DANA

(Sotto.)

Let's see what we can see.

A blank grid appears on the face of the watch.

KAT (O.S.)

She still does that cute talking-to-herself thing.

Dana JUMPS, clutching her chest.

Kat and Chester stand on either side of her, glancing over for a peek at the glowing watch. Dana tucks it away.

DANA

What the heck, guys?

KAT

We weren't sure what you meant by "distraction", so we just followed you instead.

CHESTER

Hope that's alright.

Dana turns to face them, stopping for a sec to fully appreciate the sight.

DANA

It's really weirding me out seeing you guys together.

CHESTER

We were thinking the same thing.

KAT

Strange that the host of this thing would have a venn diagram whose overlap includes the three of us.

DANA
Probably a coincidence.

KAT
Or fate? Fate is warmer.

CHESTER
I think we can rule out our theory.
If Dana put this thing together, she
probably wouldn't be sneaking off
alone for a look around.

DANA
Poking around this place was one of
the main reasons I wanted to come
tonight.

KAT
Nerd.

DANA
You joke, but my love of buildings
finally started paying the bills.

She shakes her wrist, wiggling the watch for emphasis.

CHESTER
I thought you were in computers?

DANA
Yeah, well ... so are buildings.

CHESTER
You mean like, virtual reality?

DANA
Something like that. But better.

KAT
I tried this virtual reality video
once, that my friend Katie the Cootch
downloaded. It was ... exhilarating.

DANA
I'm not talking about lame three-
sixty video or some box you strap on
your face. Think bigger. And smaller.

CHESTER
You always were a tease.

KAT
Yeah, out with it.

DANA

If I told you I'd be breaking the longest N.D.A. I've ever signed.

KAT

Aw, c'mon. We'll sign a verbal, uh, Friend.D.A.

DANA

I can't tell you what I'll do with it, but this watch is capable of mapping an entire building.

CHESTER

Really? With, like, lasers or something?

He grabs her wrist for a closer look, but she pulls the watch away.

DANA

(Superior.)

Lasers are fine if you only want the room you're in. This gets me everything.

CHESTER

Okay, that's kinda creepy.

KAT

Blink twice if you're working for DARPA.

(Nothing.)

Any branch of the U.S. Government.

(Nothing.)

... foreign governments?

DANA

Please. Private sector. Anyway, the only problem is, it emits a faint pulse that you can feel moving through you.

Kat gestures back toward the main room.

KAT

You're worried about these people? There's an open bar.

CHESTER

And a cocktail hour that's lasted almost two. They couldn't feel an earthquake right now.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Kat and Chester stand blocking the entrance to the hallway, looking out at the crowd.

Dana hovers behind them:

DANA

You two make sure nobody else comes in here. I need to get as deep into the house as I can for this to work.

Kat crosses her arms and puts on a faux scowl, taking her "job" way too seriously.

KAT

You got it, boss. None of these freeloaders are gettin' past us.

DANA

Thanks. If I'm not back in five minutes --

KAT

Burn the house down, got it.

DANA

-- send a search party. Don't you lay a finger on this beautiful place.

CHESTER

Not a finger. Now get on with it!

Dana disappears into the darkness of the hallway.

Defiantly, Kat places a finger on the ornamental support beam next to her. Chester giggles, following suit.

KAT

We're dumb.

CHESTER

At least her taste is consistent.

KAT

I always suspected it was so she could feel smarter by comparison.

Taylor scurries up to them, doing a little potty jig.

CHESTER

Pick a corner in the coat room, buddy. This wing is off limits.

INT. EAST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dana uses the glow from her watch to illuminate her path down the ever-darkening hallway.

A collection of closed doors, each with unique molding patterns, drift in and out of visibility as she makes her way past. Intriguing monoliths.

She reaches the hallway's end, abruptly faced with:

A staircase, leading down. Hanging across it, a velvet stanchion rope discreetly restricts access.

Dana looks around.

DANA
Good a spot as any.

She unstraps the watch from her wrist, placing it gently on the carpeted floor.

Tapping a selection on the screen, she takes a controlled breath and steps back a few paces toward the center of the hallway.

BEEP.

A low PULSE rumbles the carpet beneath the watch in concentric circles like ripples in a pond.

The distant MURMUR of the party crowd suddenly falls SILENT.

DANA
Shit.

Dana scoops up her watch and HOPS over the rope into the stairwell, seated just low enough to peek over the top step back into the hall.

After a beat, the crowd's MURMUR returns, as if undisrupted.

She glances down at her watch, confirming the results: A jagged schematic of the house begins to populate the blank grid, starting from the hallway and branching outward.

She smiles. *Success.*

Something below catches her attention. She turns to see a single, unadorned door at the bottom of the staircase. A sliver of light creeps out from the bottom sill.

Dana HOPS back over the rope, landing face-to-face with Chester and Kat in the hallway.

KAT
That felt great.

CHESTER
We told everyone it was the house settling.

Dana is distracted, scrolling through the results on her watch. Her brow furrows.

DANA
There's something weird about this place. The layout makes no sense.

KAT
To be fair, you can tell that just by looking at it.

CHESTER
Yeah, does what it says on the tin.

KAT
Translation: this place is cray.

DANA
What really worries me is that there's dark areas on the map.

CHESTER
Maybe out of range?

DANA
Shouldn't be. It's like they're being masked. Intentionally.

KAT
Well if that doesn't make you want to keep looking around, I don't know what will.

DANA
This wing seems pretty locked down. You up for checking out the other side of the house?

Kat tucks the watch into the concealed pocket of her skirt.

CHESTER
If only because that's where we're most likely to get some real food.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Dana, Chester, and Kat make their way through the crowd.

CHESTER

Did you recognize anyone else? Before you ran into us?

DANA

No. Well, one guy from middle school.

KAT

First kiss?

DANA

What? No.

(Aside to her.)

You know that was with Chester.

CHESTER

It was?!

DANA

But I did have a crush on this guy. You know, one of those where you look at each other, but you're too young to know what the look means.

KAT

Puppy love.

DANA

Exactly.

CHESTER

Well then ...

Kat and Chester give each other a knowing look.

DANA

What? What is it?

CHESTER

We should at least acknowledge the possibility that whoever threw this party ... did it for you.

DANA

Me? C'mon.

KAT

You gotta admit, this is kinda weird.

DANA

Could be. Or maybe I'm just really popular? Ever consider that? Maybe this happens to me everywhere.

CHESTER

There's a big gap between knowing a lot of people and running into the exes from different corners of your life all in one place.

KAT

"The exes." I like that.
(To Chester.)
Hey, do you play an instrument?

CHESTER

Just these sweet pipes.

KAT

I can work with that.

DANA

Guys, focus. Are you serious? Do you really think someone's targeted me?

CHESTER

Why, are you often a target?

DANA

I'm a woman in the tech industry.

KAT

I bet some troll hacked your diary and set this whole thing up.

DANA

Don't joke about that. I had to delete my twitter account last year because of those idiots.

CHESTER

This goes way beyond online abuse.

DANA

Somehow that would be the less disturbing option. I'd be sick if it was someone I know.

They've reached the other side of the foyer, facing an entrance to another hallway, this one perpendicular, spreading in two opposite directions.

INT. WEST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dana, Chester, and Kat turn left to make their way down the hallway, away from the light of the foyer.

KAT

Let's not entirely rule out the fickle finger of fate.

CHESTER

I hope she's right.

DANA

I wish I could be so romantic.

CHESTER

Aw. I'm sure I speak for both of us when I say, we missed you too, kid.

KAT

No matter the host, don't you worry. You don't have to face them alone.

DANA

I always imagined seeing you guys again. Just not like this. Or at the same time, for that matter.

KAT

Would this dark hallway be the wrong venue for a group hug?

CHESTER

Let's not pop the bubbly just yet.

Chester breaks off from the ladies and heads down the hallway in the other direction.

DANA

Chester, where are you going?

CHESTER

Following my nose.

He grabs the knobs on a set of double doors.

KAT

Yep. I just caught a whiff.

CHESTER

Come on. It's unlocked.

He swings open the doors, revealing ...

INT. DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT

Large oil paintings hang over a richly wallpapered room filled with a smattering of love seats and armchairs.

Jutting sconces cast a dim light throughout.

Chester leads the charge, sniffing across the room as Dana and Kat follow.

KAT

Now this is more like it.

CHESTER

Don't see any food, though.

DANA

I half expected our unseen host to spin around from a tall armchair.

KAT

Other than the guests, I wouldn't be surprised if this joint was peopled exclusively by dust. Suits the place.

DANA

Are you suggesting that ghosts invited us to this empty mansion?

A man's jovial HUM seeps into the room.

CHESTER

Not entirely empty ...

The trio turns toward the source of the tune just in time to see JIM, a pear-shaped fellow with puffy hair holding a plate of steaming food, enter through the far door on the opposite end of the room.

DANA

I hope you two won't mind if I rule out coincidence now.

KAT

Why? Who is he?

DANA

My ex-husband.

Jim GULPS down his final bite, breaking into a RUN back through the door.

The trio follows him into ...

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jim TRIPS on reentry, spilling his plate onto the rug just as Dana, Chester, and Kat join him.

DANA
Just to your taste, Jim?!

JIM
It was all laid out already, I swear!

CHESTER
He's not wrong.

Chester seats himself at the end of a room-length table, set for several dozen. Each with a steaming plate of food.

DANA
Chester! Really?

He looks up from his plate, chewing a large bite.

CHESTER
What? It's for us, isn't it?

KAT
Would be a shame to let it get cold.

Kat joins Chester, tucking a cloth napkin into her collar.

Jim props himself back up and brushes himself off.

JIM
Should've known you were behind this.

DANA
You mean you're not?

JIM
Me? Seriously? You know damn well I couldn't even afford to rent a place like this for the night.

DANA
I wouldn't know. I haven't been following your affairs.

JIM
Yeah, well, I've been following yours. Congratulations, by the way.

He saunters over to the table, picking up a plate and offering it to her.

Dana accepts the plate, picking at the string beans.

DANA
Thought I blocked you.

JIM
Mutual friends keep me appraised.

DANA
Good to know we still have some.

JIM
I certainly didn't make anyone choose
between us. Can't imagine you would.

DANA
Careful Jim, that's dangerously close
to flattery.

JIM
I wouldn't dare.

Chester CLINKS his fork against an empty champagne flute.

CHESTER
Not to interrupt this blessed
reunion, but would you care to make
the introductions?

DANA
Chester, Kat, this is Jim. My ex.

KAT
Gathered that.

CHESTER
How is it that we were so blissfully
unaware of your past nuptials?

JIM
Dana and I --

DANA
-- don't make it a habit of
advertising our mistakes.

JIM
Isn't that what youth is for?

DANA
Gonna go with "no" on that one, Jim.

Dana joins Chester and Kat to finish her plate.

Jim sits for a second helping at the opposite end.

KAT
Hey, that's somebody's dinner, Jimmy.
Full house tonight.

JIM
Not sure how many will care to join
us, when all is said and done.

CHESTER
What's that supposed to mean?

JIM
You should finish your meal first.

KAT
Suddenly my appetite has been
swallowed whole by a curious cat.

Kat pushes her half-finished plate to the center of the table, untucks her napkin and dabs each side of her mouth.

Chester shovels in his last few bites before doing the same.

CHESTER
(Mouth full.)
Out with it.

DANA
You see anyone else while you were
creeping around?

JIM
Not exactly.

DANA
Start talking, Jim, or I'm out of
here. You're the straw that broke
this camel's back. Whatever's going
on here tonight, I don't like it.

JIM
If everyone's done, you'll want to
follow me.

Jim stands, straightening his waistcoat.

DANA
Why would we do that?

JIM
I found something.

INT. WEST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jim leads Dana, Chester, and Kat down the hallway, using his phone LED as a flashlight.

JIM
Cocktail party wasn't my scene.
Decided to have a look around as soon
as I got here.

DANA
Wanted to stalk around my childhood
dream home?

JIM
Is it now?

DANA
You know it is.

JIM
Can't say I remember you ever
mentioning it.

DANA
No surprise. You've forgotten far
more significant things.

JIM
Didn't we agree to be civil?

DANA
Unlike wine, I've soured with age.

Kat GIGGLES.

KAT
I still like those sour grapes.

Jim's eyes widen. He turns to Dana.

DANA
Oh, she's THAT Kat?

CHESTER
And I'm that Chester!

JIM
(No recognition.)
Chester who?

Chester turns to give Dana an incredulous look. *Really?*

They reach the end of the hallway, faced with a roped-off staircase leading up, similar to the one in the east wing.

DANA

Ran into one of these on the other side of the house.

JIM

Not exactly prime security.

Jim casually unhooks the rope, extending a hand to usher the group through.

DANA

You sure about this?

JIM

If you didn't orchestrate this ... magical evening, don't you want to figure out who did?

DANA

I'm still undecided on that question. Can't imagine a scenario where I like the answer.

She reluctantly starts up the steps, the rest follow.

KAT

If this really is the comments section come to life, don't'cha just want to take a swing at 'em? Even a little bit?

DANA

Rule one, Kat. Never read the comments.

KAT

I only read the comments, baby. Michael Jackson Popcorn GIF.

CHESTER

Alright, you've officially lost me.

Jim resets the rope and follows them up ...

INT. UPPER HALLWAY - NIGHT

Looping around the short staircase, they enter a parallel upper hallway. Shorter than the lower level, it leads to a single door. Jim pushes through the trio and opens the door.

A cold glare spills in from ...

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

A black room.

Hundreds of wires break through splayed holes peppered across the walls, multi-colored strings intertwining as they converge at:

A bank of FIVE CATHODE RAY TUBE TELEVISION MONITORS, exposed electronic guts spilling into the wire vines at its base.

Dana, Chester, Kat, and Jim approach the displays in the center of the otherwise barren room. Each step threatens an unnerving CREAK on the wooden floorboards.

DANA

No wonder there were blank spots on the map.

KAT

This entire place is wired.

CHESTER

Wired for what?

Face aglow, Dana observes: each of the monitors displays a grainy live feed from five different rooms in the house.

DANA

Us.

Nobody is sure how to respond, gazes locked on the feeds.

Kat goes nuclear on the silence:

KAT

Fuck.

JIM

What she said.

DANA

Shut it, Jim. I'm trying to think here. This is serious. Whoever set this up means business.

JIM

And based on the four people in this room ... their business is with you.

Everyone breaks their stunned stares at the screens to consider each other.

Dana starts to look guilty.

DANA
We don't know that.

JIM
Oh, come on, D. Look around. Running into one or two of us tonight would be enough of a coincidence to dine on that story for a year.

Dana begins to back away from the screens.

DANA
There are dozens of people downstairs, we can't --

JIM
Recognize any of them?

She thinks.

KAT
You did mention Mister Puppy Love.

JIM
Alright, that's it. I'm calling it. We all need to leave.

DANA
No. Not yet. I need to find out who did this. Why they did this.

JIM
Can you think of one reason you'd actually want to know?

DANA
I need to know.

JIM
For once, D, listen to me, please. You really don't.

Jim steps toward Dana, and Chester pops in to block him.

CHESTER
Forget the "who" for a minute. Whoever it is, why NOW?

Dana thinks hard, shoving her hands into her pockets.

JIM
This about something you've been
working on? Big secret project?

DANA
Can't be.

KAT
Jealous co-worker?

CHESTER
You must know a lot of eccentric
techies.

Chester indicates the bizarre display before them.

JIM
Or maybe another one of your online
admirers. Those creeps never used to
leave you alone.

DANA
I don't know.

Dana starts to well up. The possibilities are too much.

KAT
Did you move into a new building? Any
other recent life changes?

DANA
(Hesitant.)
Yes ...

They circle around her, waiting for elaboration.

Taking a deep breath to calm her pounding heart, Dana pulls
something out of her pocket ...

A RING.

DANA
I'm engaged.

Everyone's eyes widen, then turn to each other.

CHESTER
Do you think it's time we had a word
with the other guests?

Dana returns the ring to her pocket, ashamed.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The room is in a tizzy. Angry guests squawk incredulously at the now empty bar, others peck at the last remnants of the appetizer spread, while most snicker aggressively in packs.

The group enters from the west hallway.

Kat, Chester, and Jim form a V-shaped flock cutting through the crowd, creating a barrier for Dana.

CHESTER
What's the verdict?

KAT
Yeah, is there anyone here you DON'T recognize?

DANA
I'm afraid to look.

JIM
You want to know for sure, you better start looking.

Kat and Chester spread out, letting Dana peek through.

Immediately, she catches the eye of a SCHOOLMATE across the room. He waves to her, smiling.

Other passing GUESTS begin to recognize her, their reactions ranging from delighted surprise to passive-aggressive suspicion. A rainbow of manifested social emotions:

GUESTS
Dana! This your thing? Dana, it's been years! Little D. Haller, what happened to your specs? Nice place here, Dana ...

She is swept away from the group in a cavalcade of familiar recognition, weaving throughout the crowd ...

DANA
Kat!

Dana looks back to Kat, pointing to the grand staircase at the far end of the room.

Kat throws an "okay" hand signal and starts moving that way. She catches Chester and Jim along the way, who trail behind her through the clutter of bodies.

The group huddles at the foot of the staircase.

DANA

If there's anyone here tonight who I haven't had a crush on, been crushed on by, hell, just given a second thought, I'm not seeing them.

KAT

We can probably table the "coincidence" theory for now.

JIM

That does it. You want me to pipe up and clear this place out?

Jim starts up one step, but Dana stops him with her hand.

DANA

Wait. Not yet. Let's see what we can see.

Dana steps slowly up the steps of the grand staircase, stopping on the center plateau at which the stairs fork toward landings on the upper level.

She turns to face the crowd.

Kat, Chester, and Jim ascend to join her, as one by one the faces in the crowd begin to look up at them.

Dana scans the room, eyes flitting from face to face with flashes of recognition twitching over her. She knows everybody in this room.

Jim nudges Dana with his elbow.

JIM

They're not looking at us, D.

DANA

(Nervous quiet.)

Hello, uh, I seem to have everyone's attention. Thanks. Some of you may have noticed that you share a certain acquaintance ... Me.

(Louder for clarity.)

And you might think that means I'm the one who sent out those mysterious invites. But I didn't.

Doubtful WHISPERS cascade across the room. She tries to regain their attention:

DANA (CONT'D)

I'm just as surprised as you are. And this all makes me very uncomfortable, so I don't know ...

(Desperate.)

If anyone knows anything?

The crowd is dumbstruck, seething with concerned MUMBLES.

Taylor pipes up from the back of the room, loud enough for everyone to hear.

TAYLOR

This is too weird. I'm outta here.

He makes his way toward the front door.

DANA

Of course, if nobody knows anything, maybe it's best we all leave.

Taylor twists the doorknob. Won't budge.

TAYLOR

It's locked!

He tries to break through the door, SNAPPING his ankle and collapsing to the ground as other guests rush to his aid.

The crowd begins to exchange worried glances, simultaneously realizing: *we're trapped*.

This is a crowd that's turned MOB.

GUESTS

What the hell is this? Some kinda game? This isn't funny. Somebody get us out of here!

At the height of the crowd's escalating panic ...

All the lights SPARK and CUT OUT, leaving the room lit only by reflected moonlight.

PANDEMONIUM.

Kat HOPS over the railing of the staircase, landing next to a slanted cupboard door, which she instinctively KICKS in.

KAT

Exes! Assemble!

She ushers Jim, Chester, and finally Dana into the space.

INT. GRAND STAIRCASE - NIGHT

For a storage closet, the space is immaculate. It's just as well adorned as the rest of the house, with half wood paneling and wallpaper on the one full wall.

Kat rips off a wall sconce and lights the candle inside with a Zippo from her pocket.

Dana, Chester, and Jim crouch around the light.

KAT

I think that went about as well as it could have.

CHESTER

What's the plan?

DANA

We can't just stay in here.

KAT

Why not? It's cozy. A little tight, but that's not always a bad thing --

DANA

They'll tear this place apart.

JIM

At least that'd get us outta here.

CHESTER

The front door locking and lights going out did make me think we should do that sooner rather than later.

KAT

We could use Chester's prodigious noggin as a battering ram.

Chester gives Kat a stink eye. *C'mon, we had a thing going.*

DANA

Not sure the house will let us.

JIM

The HOUSE?! You've totally lost it if you think this place --

DANA

Whoever's controlling it.

Jim points an accusatory finger at Dana.

JIM
Any ideas who that might be?

DANA
You think I wouldn't have said something? What're you getting at?

Jim folds his arms across his chest, glaring down at her.

JIM
Tell us about this fiance of yours.

DANA
Wait, you don't think -- No. He couldn't. He wouldn't.

JIM
I don't know, jealous fiance, wants to give you one round with the exes to shake out any loose baggage -- makes sense to me.

DANA
That's not possible. He -- no.

She shakes off the thought, unwilling to accept it.

CHESTER
Right now, it doesn't matter who we have to thank for this little reunion. Where do we go from here?

DANA
I don't think we're going anywhere they don't want us to. Those wires weren't just feeding the cameras.

CHESTER
Maybe we should check where those camera's were pointing. Split up?

JIM
We can't do anything until we calm this mob down.

DANA
Any ideas?

Chester coughs, an idea gurgling up. The all look to him.

CHESTER
Their dinner IS getting cold.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Dana leads Kat, Chester, and Jim out of the stair closet.

Across the room, three RIPPED DUDES are using a love seat as a battering ram against the front door.

WHAM.

The antique crumples between them, upholstery accordioneing in their hands as they slam into the undisturbed door. The crowd widens around them, turning to face Dana.

Spread throughout the room, a handful of candles have been lit. Others use their phone lights, casting long, harsh shadows across the space.

Dana clears her throat to hold court.

DANA

Hey, everybody ... I know this is frustrating --

GUESTS

You're damn right. Frustrating?!
We're trapped!

DANA

Please, try to calm down --

The crowd POPS back at her. They don't like that.

JIM

Big mistake.

KAT

Never tell an angry mob to calm down.

Chester dribbles out a nervous LAUGH.

CHESTER

REMAIN calm!

GUESTS

We deserve some answers!

KAT

We don't have those, but what you really deserve ... is some food.

Interested eyebrows cocked all around.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

Dozens of guests sit around the lengthy table, scarfing down their cold food to varying levels of satisfaction, from desperate relief to nervous disgust.

Dana, Kat, Chester, and Jim stand, watching over them.

Taylor has his swollen foot propped up on the empty chair next to him.

TAYLOR

For not being the host of this dinner party, you're doing a pretty good job, Dana.

Everyone turns to Dana.

DANA

This certainly isn't how I would have planned it.

GUESTS

If it wasn't you, then who was it? Yeah. Why go through all this?

JIM

That's exactly what we're trying to figure out.

DANA

If you all wouldn't mind laying low for a while, the four of us are going to get started on that.

CHESTER

We'll be splitting up to check out the locations on the surveillance cameras --

Forks SLAM down, knives SCRATCH across plates.

GUESTS

Surveillance cameras?! Someone's watching us? What the hell is this?

Dana, Kat, and Jim glare at Chester in disbelief.

KAT

Really?

JIM

Can we vote out exes?

Dana raises her voice, trying to regain control of the room.

DANA

Yes, this place is wired. The locked doors, the lights ... I think it's safe to assume just about everything.

TAYLOR

What are they waiting for?

JIM

Us, smartass.

TAYLOR

I mean, if this host can control everything, what's he waiting to do?

Dana opens her mouth to say something, but she's at a loss for words. The thought lingers with her.

KAT

Rats don't know how the trap works until they spring it.

GUESTS

And WE'RE the rats?! I'm not dying in this wretched place. No way.

TAYLOR

This is just an old house, and somebody's playing a stupid prank.

DANA

I wish I could still believe that's what's going on. If it is, great, we all lost one measly night. But if not ... and we are waiting for something to happen ... I want it to happen to me. Everyone else stay here, and try to ... enjoy yourselves.

TAYLOR

Why just you four? We all know Dana. Can I join you?

JIM

Well, Tiger, other than your ankle looking like a ripe melon -- who's going to watch over everyone else?

Taylor's eyes pop in surprise at the assignment. He cracks a casually proud smirk.

INT. WEST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dana beelines it through the door from the dining hall, trailed by Jim and Kat.

Last man out, Chester closes the door behind them.

KAT
What a merry bunch.

CHESTER
Since the cat's out of the bag --

DANA
Thanks again, for that. Big help.

CHESTER
-- should we let them know which
rooms we're each going to?

Chester pivots back to the dining hall door, grabbing the knob. It won't budge. He jiggles it rapidly. Nothing.

He looks to the group. Solemn faces all around.

DANA
Locked?

KAT
Onward, then.

JIM
At least they'll be safe in there.

KAT
Unless the host unleashes a fatal
toxin to eliminate any potential
witnesses.

CHESTER
Thanks for that thought.

Dana checks the door knob for herself. Locked.

DANA
There was nothing in that control
room that made me think something
like that could be triggered.

KAT
What makes you think that
conveniently displayed surveillance
gallery was the control room?

Dana looks to the end of the hallway, toward the staircase at its end. Curious.

DANA
I guess I don't.

JIM
Best we stop guessin' and keep in mind everything we DON'T know here.

Dana turns back to the group, troubled.

DANA
Do you think I've put anyone in real danger?

KAT
How would we know?

Chester ELBOWS Kat.

JIM
Don't worry. Nobody rigs an elaborate setup like this just to off 'em.

KAT
That doesn't rule out maiming.

CHESTER
Kat, please. Let's keep moving.

Chester, Kat, and Jim make their way into the foyer.

Alone, Dana steps closer to the staircase at the end of the hallway, squinting to make it out. She notices:

The velvet stanchion rope is now DANGLING from one end.

She opens her mouth to say something, but catches herself, thinking better of it. Moves to take another step as --

Jim pops his head back in the hall.

JIM
C'mon, D. They'll be fine.

DANA
(Determined.)
I'll make sure of it.

Her eyes locked on the hanging rope as it sways back and forth, she pulls herself away to join the others.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Dana enters the foyer, stopped in her tracks by just how empty it now appears.

Jim, Kat, and Chester are lined up in front of the appetizer table, staring down at it in silence. Dana sidles up beside them, trying to see what they see.

DANA

What is it?

KAT

Last time we were in here, everybody was foaming at the mouth because the food had run out ...

Jim points to the table ...

THE APPETIZERS HAVE BEEN REFILLED.

DANA

So someone IS here.

Chester breaks his focus on the appetizers, hopping across the room to check the bar. It's been fully RESTOCKED.

He uncorks a decanter with his teeth and pours a glass.

CHESTER

Anyone else thirsty?

JIM

Suppose we would have seen a few of the rabble drop by now if anything had been poisoned.

Jim begins to load his cradled arm with various appetizers.

Chester approaches Dana with a drink in each hand, extending one to her. She declines with a wave of her hand. He shrugs, pouring it to top his off and ditching the second glass.

KAT

If you rats are eager to spring this thing, it's time to split.

DANA

Everyone choose a room.

CHESTER

(Tiny hiccup.)

I'll just hold down the foyer.

DANA
A room that was being monitored.

CHESTER
Fine. I'll take the library. Study?

Dana nods. Points to Kat.

KAT
The bedroom looks interesting.

DANA
Don't get any ideas.

She looks to Jim, who is stuffing a cracker in his mouth.

JIM
Kitchen was on there, wasn't it?

DANA
Surprise surprise.

CHESTER
What's that leave for you, Dana?

JIM
Looked like a garden room or something.

DANA
Conservatory.

Jim stuffs the last of his treats in his mouth and brushes off his hands on his slacks. He makes his way eagerly to the east hallway, followed by Kat.

Chester moves to join them. Giving a last look over his shoulder, he spots Dana facing the other direction.

CHESTER
Ms. Haller, I believe it's this way.

She turns to him, putting on an agreeable face.

DANA
Right behind you.

Unconvinced, he leaves her alone, eyes locked as he sidesteps into the east hallway.

Coast clear, Dana dashes back into the WEST hallway.

INT. WEST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dana skips down the hallway from the light of the foyer.

Pausing for a moment at the door to the dining hall, she places her ear against it for a listen.

DANA

(Sotto.)

How's everybody doing?

Her face sinks as she is met with an echoing silence. She shifts her head to try another spot on the door. Abandoning the concern, she continues with renewed speed down the hall.

She slows as she approaches the stairwell marked by a hanging stanchion rope.

Taking the velvet snake in her hand, she considers the upward reach of the stairs. Foot planted on the first step, she replaces the stanchion, closing off the hall behind her.

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

Dana tiptoes around the open door to the surveillance room.

It appears untouched, but her focus is drawn to the final display monitor at the end of the glowing lineup ...

It's BLACK.

She inches across the room, circling behind the screens to examine the apparently disconnected final display.

DANA

What happened to you?

Feeling around for the input wire, she locates it and confirms that it's firmly in place. Curious.

A COUGH from one of the displays.

Dana leaps back to the front of the screens, just in time to see Chester, Kat, and Jim enter their respective rooms. She leans in close to the grainy feeds.

Just as each of them clears the doorway of their room ...

ALL OF THE DOORS SLAM SHUT SIMULTANEOUSLY.

DANA

Goddammit.

Dana grabs the side of one of the monitors in a blind rage.

She crawls her fingers around the sloped back, grabbing the input wire as she had on the other.

Following the wire from the back of the screen, it leads her to a tangle of wires from the other monitors that ends in a black feedbox on the floor.

She drops to her knees in front of it.

DANA

Where the hell are you going?

From the back of the feedbox, she follows a single output wire which leads to one of the several hundred holes punched in the walls.

Bingo.

In a blind rage, she PULLS at both sides of the splayed hole, BREAKING it open to twice its size before the wallpapered plaster begins to cut into her hand.

DANA

Ow. Shit.

Thinking fast, she spins back to the line of monitors.

She grabs the final, dead screen with both hands. Against the CREAKING protest of twisted metal, she RIPS the display off its base mount.

Her face contorts with effort as she strains to lift the monitor over her head.

With panting assumption, she can't resist:

DANA

Watch THIS.

She RUNS to the wall, HEAVING the monitor through the widened hole, blasting an even larger opening in its wake. Dust and fibers hang in the fresh emptiness.

A relentless KICK finishes the opening with sufficient clearance to step through.

Dana ducks down and steps over the rubble into ...

INT. WIRE ROOM - NIGHT

The dust settles as Dana steps into a startlingly dark room.

Wires from the adjoining surveillance setup feed through the holes in the wall, joining THOUSANDS MORE WIRES in a stationary tornado of multi-colored strands.

The shape of the space is impossible to discern, every corner obscured by snaking tendrils of rubber spaghetti.

Clamps suspend an overhead jungle canopy of electric veins.

Siphoned light spilling in from the freshly minted opening casts the entire space in faint highlights.

DANA

What the ...

Dana attempts to follow the output wire through the room. Hunched down, she traces its reach into a nearby cluster, doing her best to pull apart the mess.

She collapses with the impossibility, making a chair of a nearby bundle of coiled cord.

There's just too many. A tangle of untraceable wires.

DANA

Dead end.

A twinkle of something catches her eye.

She flops out of the wire skein, crawling across the technological obstacle course to see what it could be.

Dana pulls back a veil of mesh guts to reveal ...

A DOOR.

She grabs the handle, pulling herself back up. With an eager twist, she pushes the hidden gateway open to --

The upper hallway. *Damn.*

DANA

Back where I started.

She looks back at the hole she punched in the wall, closes the new door and walks back into the darkened space.

Turning back to consider the uncovered doorway, her eye is drawn to the crisp light spilling out from the bottom sill.

Her eyes narrow ... it reminds her of something ...

INT. EAST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dana stands at the end of the east hallway, gazing down to the basement stairwell at its end.

A sliver of light similar to the one in the wire room beckons her. She tightens her fists and begins to make her way down the stretch of the hall with a soft step.

Her eyes are drawn away from her target, lingering over the closed doors on either side of her.

Dana stops, reaching out to one of the doors.

She runs her hands along the unique molding, remembering its pattern. Letting a knuckle loose from her fist, she gives it a firm KNOCK KNOCK.

DANA

Chester ...

No response.

She presses her lips to the line where the door meets the frame, desperate.

DANA

Can you hear me?

Nothing. Dana continues down the hall, her posture slouching in isolation.

Finally reaching its end -- her captive comrades all behind her -- she removes the velvet rope once more and descends the stairs toward the basement door.

The crisp light shines on her from below as she moves off the final step with a sharp CRUNCH.

She looks down at her feet, seeing something she didn't notice there before ...

A doormat. Inside. *What?*

She backs off the mat, slowly peeling it back to reveal a SHATTERED MIRROR hidden beneath it.

DANA

There goes my seven year plan.

Dana leans down to the assess the damage.

Something underneath is propping up a tiny mountain of broken shards.

She takes out her phone and powers up the screen for light, brushing aside the sharp refuse as best she can. A few pieces fall, uncovering a glint of BRASS.

DANA

What have we here?

Just as she moves with fingers like tweezers to pull out the shining object ...

HER PHONE DIES.

Frustration boiling over, she SHOVES the phone back into her dress pocket, TEARING open the liner.

Her engagement ring spills out the torn bottom, falling into the broken mirror pieces with a bright TING.

DANA

You have got to be kidding me.

Using only the limited glow from beneath the door, she scavenges through the threatening pile to safely remove ...

A SKELETON KEY.

She stands up straight, immediately attempting to place the key into the door in front of her. No dice. The thing won't even fit in the slot.

Possibilities racing across her flitting eyes, she starts to take a step back up the stairs before she catches herself.

Dana bends back over, sifting through the glass to uncover her lost ring. Key clenched in her hand, the excitement rushes her --

SLICE. A shard makes a clean cut across her thumb.

DANA

Shhhhhhhiiiiiii ...

She CLENCHES her hand around the thumb, dropping the key to apply pressure as a sheet of blood begins to seep out.

Slumping back onto the staircase, she steadies her breathing. With a cool focus, she tears a strip of fabric from her underskirt, tying it around her bleeding thumb.

Collected, she leans forward from the step and retrieves the key and her ring from the floor.

One in each hand, she considers the ring.

She hovers it over her ring finger, rolling it around in her fingers while she considers putting it back on. Her expression grows ANGRY.

DANA

No.

Pushing the thought out of her mind, she quickly stows the ring back in her other pocket, taking the key in both hands for a good look:

It's a strange old key, the brass body fashioned from several overlapping pieces, pressed into a single form.

She runs her finger across it, from teeth to loop.

BACK IN THE EAST HALLWAY:

Dana walks away from the basement stairwell, eyes locked on each of the closed doors as she passes them.

She holds up the key to each of their keyholes.

Looks like it could fit any of them, but she keeps walking back to the beginning of the hallway.

One last look back at the empty foyer, she places the key into the lock of the first door, ratcheting it around until she hears a satisfying CLICK.

Twisting the door handle at a cautious pace, she pushes open the door to find ...

Chester, leaning against a rolling library ladder.

His eyes catch hers and he SPRINGS to life, SPRINTING for the door which promptly SLAMS SHUT AGAIN before he can make it to her. Separated once again.

Dana turns the key again, only cracking the door open.

DANA

Stay back.

She pushes open the door with a slow CREAK.

Locking eyes with him again, she motions for him to stand away.

Standing up straight, Dana takes a nervous stride past the door frame with her eyes closed.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

The library is tall with dark wood bookshelves covering every wall. Each shelf is packed to the brim with volumes stacked in every direction like Tetris blocks.

Dana moves clear of the door's reach, after which it immediately SLAMS shut behind her.

CHESTER

What the hell are you doing?!

DANA

I'm trying to get us out.

He hops over to the doorknob. Gives it a sarcastic jiggle.

CHESTER

Not so much.

DANA

They want us in here. No way around it. I'm convinced.

Chester plops down onto a plush love seat, throwing his arms up in frustration.

CHESTER

Who?! An inferior of yours at work?
Some jealous underling?

Dana joins him, leaving a comfortable space between them.

DANA

Not likely. I'm on a team that does important work, but I'm by no means the most important person on the team. Can't say anyone is under me, directly anyway.

CHESTER

Whoever they are, how could they find all of us? They must've had access to your personal documents.

DANA

Nothing's secure these days.

CHESTER

Is being a woman in a man's field
sufficient cause for targeting?

DANA

I've learned to not try to understand
these people. But this situation ...
tonight ... is something I would very
much like to understand.

Chester slaps his knees, trying to lighten the mood.

CHESTER

I can't say that I'm altogether
surprised by this, Dana. Dinner party
full of conquests --

DANA

They're hardly all my conquests.

CHESTER

There's more that aren't in
attendance?!

DANA

You know what I mean. That room was
filled out with people that I barely
remember.

CHESTER

Ah, so they weren't all
relationships, per se.

DANA

Certainly not. Unless you can call
knowing someone a relationship.

CHESTER

Like I said, it wouldn't surprise me.
You always were lucky in love.

DANA

I certainly don't feel that way.

CHESTER

Well, it's the energy you gave off.

DANA

I was afraid. To seem inexperienced.
I was afraid of ruining something I
didn't know how to do.

CHESTER

Ruining? Did you think we would last forever?

DANA

I don't think I thought about it. There was a point I hoped it would. But I was so young, I didn't know what that meant.

(Hesitant.)

I didn't know what this was before I knew you.

Chester shifts his weight, crossing his arms over his knees.

CHESTER

You told me I came a long way down the chain.

DANA

I was older than you. I thought that's how I had to be. But it wasn't the truth. You were the first person I ever felt that way about.

(Away from him.)

Not sure if I should thank you or blame you for the depth of my ensuing relationships. I didn't know how to express myself. In any way. Even when we were just friends, I felt like you were showing me something. Helping me out of my shell. You looked at me ... in a way I never thought I could be looked at. Sounds silly now, young, twenty-something divorcee that I am.

(Into her lap.)

I didn't know how -- I didn't have a foundation. Not at home. Not anywhere. You gave that to me.

(Back to him.)

So I am thankful. Even if it lead to us being locked in this room.

(A single laugh.)

Thank you.

CHESTER

For what?

DANA

For being my first love.

CLICK.

They both turn toward the door just in time to see it CREAK open of its own accord. Unnerving.

Chester stands, walking toward the open doorway.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Thrusting out a testing toe, Chester pussyfoots over the threshold, pulling Dana along with him.

They emerge from the east hallway entrance into the lobby.

CHESTER
Did you ... ?

Dana looks down at the key in her hand.

CHESTER
No.

CHESTER
Can I see that?

She hands the key to him.

CHESTER
It's letters.

DANA
What? Like carved in?

CHESTER
More like it's sculpted out of them.
The loop at the end is a backward "D"
... "R" ... "O" ... with a "W" for
the teeth.

DANA
Backwards? Flip it around.

CHESTER
"Word."

DANA
A word key. Key word. Keyword!

CHESTER
I think someone's listening.

DANA
So the key got me in but a word gets
us out.

CHESTER

Someone wants a word with you. Did you try using their word against them?

Chester holds up the key, walking it over to the front door. He tries to slide it into the lock, but its not even the correct shape.

DANA

Normally, you don't need a key from this side.

She opens her hand. He gives the key back. She turns back to the west hallway entrance. He grabs her hand, stopping her.

CHESTER

Don't. Come with me. Let's go, let's go now. We'll find a window or anything else we can break through, but let's get out of here. We'll bring help to get the rest out.

Dana puts her hand on his, gently removing it.

DANA

I got you guys into this, and I've got to get you out. All of you.

CHESTER

I understand. You're right of course.

DANA

But don't let me stop you from trying to break through the windows and otherwise tearing this place apart.

CHESTER

I thought this was your dream house.

DANA

Dreams have a way of turning into nightmares. I'll never look at this place the same way again.

CHESTER

Will you at least try that key on the dining room for me?

DANA

Good idea. You can hold down the fort with everybody there. As for me ... I've got a date.

INT. WEST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dana and Chester turn the corner to head down to the dining hall, and they immediately pause in their tracks.

A large band of light shines across the hallway.

Inching closer, they can see that it's coming from the fully opened door to the dining hall.

DANA

Guess you won't be needing this.

She pockets the key.

Chester takes the lead as they round the corner into ...

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

The dining hall is completely empty. All plates and food have been removed, the long tabletop buffed to a shine.

DANA

Where'd they all go?

CHESTER

Sounds like a question for me. You're late for a date.

DANA

You don't think they're --

CHESTER

They're fine. Don't worry. I'll find them. You go.

DANA

Thank you, Chester.

She turns to leave. Stopped by --

CHESTER

Thank you.

Dana looks over her shoulder to him.

DANA

For what?

CHESTER

Everything you said in there. It's good to know. After all this time.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bedroom door swings open, key in lock, revealing Dana.

Kat LEAPS playfully into the four-poster bed, landing in a provocative pose. Dana's eyebrows pop. She grabs the key.

DANA
You're not going to try to run out?

KAT
You just got here, plus --

Dana walks in, as she clears the door it SLAMS shut on cue.

DANA
There's that.

KAT
I've heard of places you go in and never come out.

Kat sits up out of her pose, legs dangling over the edge of the bed. Dana joins her.

DANA
But we CAN get out. If I behave, apparently.

KAT
Have you been a bad girl?

DANA
That's what I can't figure out.

KAT
The Dana I remember was most definitely not a bad girl.

DANA
The Dana you remember changed a lot. Especially after meeting you.

Kat hops off the bed, sauntering over to a makeup vanity.

KAT
That tends to happen when you don't see someone as long as I haven't seen you ...

DANA
I am sorry about that. I always meant to catch up. Life got in the way.

KAT

We have some time on our hands. Where should we start?

Kat straddles the chair in front of the vanity.

DANA

Let's go back to "goodbye". What major did you end up switching to?

KAT

I didn't.

DANA

Really? Philosophy all the way. Huh.

Kat nods. Gives her a salute.

KAT

The full degree.

DANA

And how's that treating you?

KAT

Oh, I'm gainfully employed. You might have encountered one of my kind before. I work with tech startups. Tell 'em what not to do.

(Forces a cough.)

Speaking of which, are the big boys hiring?

DANA

I'll see what I can do. My team could probably use some ethics.

KAT

Speaking of your super secret squad, where did YOU end up landing after we parted ways?

Dana plops back on the bed, looking up at the ceiling.

DANA

When I started school, you may remember, I desperately wanted to be an architect. Didn't take long to figure out that I didn't have the hand. Or the eye. But I found the next best thing.

KAT
Building model ships?

DANA
Engineering. Computers need houses
now, too.

KAT
I do remember you having a thing for
Scotty. How could I compete?

Dana sits up to face Kat.

DANA
I regret that you ever felt like you
had to.

KAT
Don't make it bad, Haller. I don't
regret a second. No matter how it
ended.

DANA
You're right. It lingers, but it's
not regret. It's a scar. I had
already had my heart broken, but
yours was the first I broke. And you
know what? It actually hurts more. It
stayed with me, the way it ended. I'm
sorry for that.

KAT
Never apologize.

DANA
But I --

KAT
Don't give anyone that power.

DANA
I just need you to know ... you were
more than an experiment.

CLICK.

Dana turns away from the door, bracing for the burst and
shielding Kat.

BOOM. Explosive POPS send hinges flying across the room. The
door itself falls gracefully from its frame and lands on the
floor with a THUD.

Kat puts her hands on Dana's shoulders, pulling her in.

KAT

Dana, in all seriousness ... you can experiment on me any time.

They both smile, breaking into a spontaneous hug.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Dana and Kat walk through the empty foyer.

DANA

Nightcap?

She moves over to the bar and pours herself a drink.

KAT

Whatever you're having.

Dana pours Kat a glass, walks it over to her. CLINK.

DANA

You'll find Chester poking around here, looking for a lost party. Have fun with that. I'll be moving on to my darkest challenge.

KAT

Saying goodbye?

DANA

Talking to my ex-husband.

KAT

You don't have to do that, you know. I think you should seriously consider one of the last options available to us: burn the house down. We don't know who this host is, but we can smoke that monster out.

DANA

I like the way you think, but we can't risk lives when they might not even be here. Could be halfway around the world. Don't underestimate these freaks for one second.

Dana walks her glass to the bar, raising it to Kat one last time. They both finish their drinks. Dana puts her empty on the bar. Kat TOSSES hers on the ground. It SHATTERS.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen door unlocks with a CLICK and slides open.

Dana enters what looks like a war zone. A well-equipped kitchen has been torn apart. Appliances have been ripped out of the walls, a pantry's worth of food strewn about.

Behind the island in the center of the room, Jim emerges.

He's manic. His hair is mussed, his shirt's untucked. His eyes pop with the wide gaze of a doomsday prepper.

DANA
Y'alright there, Jim?

Jim swallows hard.

JIM
Something is very wrong with this place.

DANA
I know. Suspected for some time.

JIM
It's not just the doors locking. Nothing makes sense.

DANA
Find anything ...
(At the mess.)
... interesting in here?

JIM
Nothing. The further I dug, the less made sense about this place. These rooms, they --

DANA
Don't make sense. The layout. I know.

JIM
I knew it looked weird from the outside, but whoever built this place ... well, they're just as crazy as whoever chose it for your party.

DANA
I think we can pretty safely say this isn't a party. Not anymore.

She circles the island, kicking obstacles out of her way.

JIM

I really don't mean this as an insult, but you probably wouldn't recognize -- it's like this kitchen was designed by someone who didn't know anything about cooking.

DANA

I never minded that you were the better cook, Jim.

He concedes, flopping down on one of the stools.

JIM

Probably bothered me more than it did you.

DANA

Of that I have no doubt.

JIM

I take it that's not the case with your new guy -- what's his name?

DANA

Let's not do this.

JIM

He's still suspect number one for the founder of this little soirée, as far as I'm concerned. I think I at least deserve to know his name.

DANA

Herman.

JIM

Herman? You mean Herman Herman? God, I should've known. You two were always workin' too close together.

DANA

At least he was working, Jim.

JIM

That's low, Haller. We had an agreement. While I was --

DANA

None of this matters. Right now --

Jim EXPLODES, slamming his fist onto the counter top.

JIM

(Screaming.)

It matters to me!

(Trying to calm down.)

We were building a life together, dammit. I know things weren't always great, but one day it's just BOOM, you can't take it anymore and you're packing up your car.

DANA

I don't like the way it ended any more than you do. I wish it could have played out differently.

JIM

You never gave it a chance to. We didn't even try to fix it.

DANA

I couldn't.

JIM

You wouldn't. You made that choice. For both of us.

DANA

I made a choice to get us out because neither of us had made the choice to get in. We fell into marriage, Jim. When I say I wish it had gone differently, I mean from day one.

JIM

So all those years we had ... were nothing to you?

She thinks on this for a moment before answering.

DANA

You showed me a lot about myself. How much I'd let life guide me instead of guiding my own life. You were a wake up call. I regret you. But I'm also thankful for you -- for the opportunity to -- No. I'm proud.

(Confident.)

I'm proud of leaving you.

JIM

You do seem better. Honestly, I feel better as your ex than I ever did as your husband.

DANA
Honestly, compared to being a
husband, you make a much better ex.

CLICK.

The kitchen door SPLINTERS in to an avalanche of wooden
shards, CRASHING to the floor.

Jim makes for freedom, stopped by Dana's arm.

JIM
What gives!

DANA
You dug around a lot in here. You
happen to find that surveillance
camera?

Jim nods, takes a few large strides over piles of junk he
then begins to dig through.

JIM
Here she is.

He holds up the camera from a wire like a severed head.

Dana takes it from him, rotating it in her hand to size it
up. She stares into the black lens, reflecting herself back.

DANA
Kat and Chester are already out.
Looking for the rest. I'm sure you
can catch up with them.

JIM
But isn't that everybody? Where you
goin'?

DANA
I need to confirm something.

Jim nods, making a dash for the kitchen door.

Dana sets the camera down on the island. She unstraps her
watch from her wrist, popping off the back cap with her
thumb, exposing its electronic innards.

Pulling a bobby pin from her hair, she uses it as a clip to
attach the exposed wire from the camera to her watch.

She flips the watch over, booting it up.

With a few swipes and taps, a rain of digits begins to fall across the watch face, waves of data populating its screen.

DANA

Jackpot.

Dana holds the watch up to her face, its flickering glow casting a digital reflection across her eyes.

INT. EAST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dana walks down the hallway toward the light of the foyer.

She stops, looking down the sprawl at the doors she has unlocked ... and the one she has not.

At the final door, she raises her key in front of the lock. It quivers with hesitation. She turns her head toward the light at the start of the hall.

She lowers her head, finally deciding to pocket the key.

The door remains locked as she sprints way from it to head back to the foyer.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

First dashing for the entrance to the west hall, Dana stops herself in the middle of the room.

She moves to the front door, pulling back a curtain covering the window beside it. In the front yard, leaves are torn off the shrubbery by increasing gusts of wind.

Storm clouds are brewing on the horizon.

Their churning gray stretch threatens to cover the blanket of stars sparkling through the black of night.

Dana lets the curtain fall back down and crosses the foyer.

INT. WEST HALLWAY - NIGHT

A brisk step to the light spilling out of the dining hall door, Dana peeks her head in. Seeing nobody, she returns to the hall.

A NOISE. Whispering. A low chatter.

She is drawn across the hall to a set of double doors ...

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

The ballroom is even larger than the foyer, its vaulted height extending beyond the second story.

On the ceiling, a fresco depicting a pastoral landscape is framed by ornate decorative molding which expands in mandalic patterns to the edge of the walls.

A gaggle of guests are leaned against a full-length bar that occupies the north wall, everyone else occupying an assembly of posh armchairs and love seats arranged in a circle.

The room falls silent upon Dana's entry.

DANA

I see you all found each other.

Chester, Kat, and Jim are all sat in one part of the circle.

CHESTER

Apparently the dining hall door unlocked once all of ours shut.

Taylor pipes up from the back of the bar.

TAYLOR

And who could resist a FULL bar?

JIM

So what'd you find?

GUESTS

Yeah, when we getting out of here?
This isn't funny. I say we burn the place down!

Dana shoots a look at Kat.

DANA

You shared your little plan?

KAT

(Shrugs.)
Synchronicity.

DANA

I'm afraid there will be no leaving.
Not yet. We can't.

JIM

Like hell we can't. I've got the matches.

DANA

Even if you could find a way out of this building -- by fire, force, or otherwise -- I'm afraid you still wouldn't be able to leave this place.

JIM

The hell does that mean?

DANA

Our host's reach goes far beyond locking a few doors and peeping our every move. Kat called it a trap, but I think it's a game. And there's something deeply wrong with this game. They control the entire board.

JIM

You mean HE controls it.

Dana shoots daggers at Jim.

DANA

We won't have a chance of knowing WHO it is until I finish the final round.

KAT

What are they waiting for?

DANA

There's one more locked door, and I think I'm meant to go there.

CHESTER

Why? What's in there? We're all here.

JIM

Only one possibility.

DANA

Whoever's responsible for this is in that last room. Now that I've made some measure of peace with my past ... they want a piece of me.

CHESTER

I understand your hesitation.

DANA

I'm going to meet them on MY terms, not theirs.

Dana walks over to Chester, placing the key in his hand.

CHESTER

I don't understand. Don't you --

DANA

Try that thing on every door you can.
What I'm about to do is going to
distract them, no doubt about it.
That'll be your best chance.

Chester stands.

CHESTER

You don't have to do this alone.

Kat stands.

KAT

Whoever did this wanted us separated.
So let's go together.

Dana is touched. She considers his offer as all those who
were seated begin to stand.

She thinks. An idea clicks and she smiles.

INT. UPPER HALLWAY - NIGHT

All of the guests line both sides of the upper hallway,
doors blocked as they stand at attention.

A safe passage of solidarity.

Dana walks down the middle of this human-forged walkway,
giving thankful nods as she passes.

DANA

(Soft.)

Thank you.

She reaches the end of the lines where Chester, Kat, and Jim
are standing.

KAT

Let's give 'em hell.

Dana looks to Chester, who wiggles the key in his hand
before palming it back into his pocket.

She nods, then turns to face the surveillance room door.

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

Dana pushes the door, braced for the unexpected as it swings open to reveal ...

Nothing. Untouched from when she left it.

The last dead monitor remains in the dust of the hole she punched through the wall into the wire room.

She walks past the monitors -- the kitchen feed has been restored, the room cleaned up. Landing on the final functioning screen, she glares into the conservatory:

A silhouetted figure is visible among the hanging plants.

She PUSHES OVER the entire display stand, walking over it to access the feed box on the floor behind.

Dana RIPS OUT the output wire, stripping the rubber coating with her teeth to expose the raw conductive surface. She whips out her watch once more, popping off the back.

As in the kitchen, she loads screens of data onto her watch.

DANA

I want it all.

The door behind her SLAMS SHUT with a new ferocity, SHAKING the entire room. A pressurized MOAN begins to issue from the walls. Wires TREMBLE through their holes.

The house is protesting her invasion.

And Dana is loving it. She lets out a LAUGH of success over the noise, knowing she's pushing the place's buttons.

A happy BEEP from her watch and she disconnects the cord.

Sudden silence sweeps over the room. The shaking stops. The moaning fades.

DANA

Let's give this a try.

She turns to the closed door.

Holding up her watch in front of her, she enters a command with a few taps of her thumb.

CLICK. The door unlocks and RATCHETS open at her command.

She gives a little wave to the guest on the other side.

An idea.

She pulls her watch in close, hunching over it as she taps a longer string of commands.

Dana looks back up at the guests, smiling.

DANA
Brace yourselves.

With a tap of the watch's activation button, EVERY DOOR in the hallway BLASTS OPEN, knocking down a few guests in the process. *Success.*

Kat looks at Dana, totally impressed.

KAT
She's a house hacker.

Dana scrolls through the full list of data she collected. One thing in particular catches her eye.

DANA
This looks interesting.

She selects the item, activating it.

With a deafening BANG, a series of charges EXPLODE at support points around the surveillance room.

The floor BUCKLES, collapsing into ...

INT. WEST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Amid a room's worth of rubble, Dana careens through the ceiling, landing hard on her back.

CRACK.

Everyone races down the stairs to join her, lead by Chester and Kat. Jim trails behind with the rest.

BOOM.

As if on cue, another series of charges BLAST, collapsing the stairs beneath them.

Panicking, Dana pulls up the commands on her watch and triggers an overhead curtain to drop above the decimated stairwell. Fallen guests clamor to grab the fabric vine.

Kat climbs out of the new ditch, helping others to safety.

Chester rushes down the hall to help Dana up. She brushes herself off as he braces her back.

CHESTER
You alright? Quite a fall.

DANA
I'm fine. Ow!

She winces in pain and grabs her lower back.

CHESTER
Maybe don't press anymore strange buttons.

DANA
Hard to tell if that was my mistake,
or the house fighting back.

Kat and Jim join them with the others not far behind.

JIM
Let's get out of here before anything
else starts falling on us.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The entire group rushes into the foyer, Chester hovering close behind Dana for safety.

As Dana raises her watch toward the front door, the other guests huddle around her. Eager eyes flit back and forth between her and the door.

With a powerful BEEP, Dana triggers the front door.

The lock POPS with relief, inching the door open just a sliver. It then drifts ominously open to reveal a windswept front yard.

Not missing a beat, Taylor BURSTS through the crowd.

He pushes people out of his way, limping at incredible speed toward the open door. Just as he is about to clear it --

WHAM.

The door SLAMS shut on him, SNAPPING his arm. He tumbles to the ground, WAILING in pain.

Dana frantically triggers the door to open again, but it resists repeatedly, CHOMPING down on the fallen Taylor.

Chester leaps in to pull Taylor away from the wooden maw of the slamming door. Others join him to help, dragging the weeping man clear of danger.

The door SLAMS shut after its final chomp.

A moment's silence -- save Taylor's wails -- before the windows on either side of the front door begin ratcheting OPEN and CLOSED with increasing violence.

The force of the windows causes them to SHATTER THEMSELVES.

BLASTS of wind from outside carry the shards into the room, slicing the first row of guests with bloody ribbons.

Jim has had enough.

JIM

Fuck it.

He TEARS down one of curtains, pulls a packet of matches out of his pocket, lights the entire thing with a fierce flick and SETS THE CURTAIN ON FIRE.

Draping it over the chomping door like a matador, he turns to Dana:

JIM

Go!

The door catches fire as she makes her way through the crowd to the east hallway entrance, escaping the chaos.

INT. EAST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Running out of the foyer, Dana collapses against the first door of the hallway.

Catching her breath, the door SNAPS open, letting her drop for a second only to SNAP shut again, pushing her back out and onto the floor.

She pushes herself off the ground, bracing her back.

Watch held out in front of her like a weapon, she continues down the hallway.

Each door she passes SNAPS open and shut in a threatening movement. Once she reaches the final locked door -- exempt from this display -- the rest of the doors SNAP IN UNISON.

Dana scrolls through the command list, choosing her move.

DANA

No more private sessions. Open
sesame.

With a TAP and a BEEP, the door is BLOWN OFF ITS HINGES,
leaving a dust cloud for her to step through in a dramatic
entrance into ...

INT. CONSERVATORY - NIGHT

Rain begins to fall on the glass of the conservatory dome.

The PATTERN echoes through the transparent chamber. Hanging
plants tremble. Moonlight dances through the streams of
water onto sweeping floral arrangements.

Dana steps into the humid space, taking it in.

She spots the shape of a FIGURE across the room, obscured by
layers of vegetation. She moves toward it, weaving through
the flora separating them.

Her mouth drops in silent gasp as the man turns to face her.

This is HERMAN, 32, darkly handsome with one of those chins
so strong it gives his face a different look in profile.
He's dressed in a dark brown suit with a yellow carnation
pinned on his lapel.

HERMAN

Good evening, my dear.

Dana clenches her teeth, fist in hand as she mentally runs
through a furious list of responses.

DANA

Herman. This your sick idea of a
bachelorette party?

HERMAN

I was planning to ask you something
similar. Been planning, while trapped
in this room, for the last few hours.

DANA

Cut the shit, this all has to be you.

HERMAN

Me?! It ain't me, babe. Look around.
All this ... is you.

She shakes her head emphatically.

DANA
I did not do this.

HERMAN
Who else could have brought all these people together? Even if I wanted to -- don't know why I ever would -- how would I find them all?

She blinks. That one lands with her.

DANA
You couldn't have.

HERMAN
NOBODY could have.

DANA
But then how --

HERMAN
Notice anything strange about this place?

DANA
Other than everything?

HERMAN
Not just all the things about it -- the place itself. Think.

DANA
This is my dream house.

HERMAN
Exactly. Not just a house you dreamed of living in ... a house you dreamed.

DANA
I'm not dreaming.

He steps closer to her.

HERMAN
But what if we're all sharing one?

DANA
I --

HERMAN
With everything you and I are doing at work, you know it's possible.

DANA
But who would do this to us?

HERMAN
Maybe someone else at work ...
someone jealous of us.

DANA
Hacked ... my mind?

HERMAN
All of ours.

DANA
Oh my god.

Dana puts her hand to her forehead, the weight of the idea pulling on her. For a moment, she lets herself be tired, falling to his arms.

DANA (CONT'D)
How did I not see this?

HERMAN
You've seen just how much they can
block when plugged into something
like this.

DANA
Selective memory partition.

TAYLOR
There's no way to know what we don't
know, while we're in it.

DANA
All this to get to me. Why? Some vain
attempt to threaten our engagement
with my past?

HERMAN
Maybe they weren't entirely off the
mark.

She turns out of his arms, taking a step back.

DANA
What does that mean?

HERMAN
I'm not blind, Dana. You think I
didn't notice you aren't wearing your
engagement ring?

She lowers her head, ashamed.

DANA

There have been some doubts. Things I haven't dealt with. But that's all in me. It can't be why --

He touches her chin to move her head up to look at him. She keeps her eyes down at first, but gives in.

HERMAN

Regardless of the reason this is all happening, it HAS happened. You were thrown face to face with your past. So what does that mean for us?

DANA

I was worried. Worried I'd fall into the same traps that made everything else fail. That I couldn't figure them out while we were together, and that would ruin us.

HERMAN

I see.

DANA

But I know that's not true now. Tonight, I learned -- I saw something. With them.

HERMAN

And what did seeing each of them show you, exactly?

She takes a deep breath, wanting to get the words right.

DANA

That we can be ourselves, and be us. I had to get through them to get to you. I learned something from each of them, and I'll learn so much more with you. But there's nothing I want to learn with anyone else but you.

HERMAN

Care to begin our education?

He holds up his wrist and pulls back his cuff to reveal his own watch. It matches hers. They smile.

They join hands and DASH out of the conservatory.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The foyer has been perfectly reset. Windows repaired. Not a lick of scorch marks on the doors.

It's eerily empty as Dana and Herman enter.

HERMAN

Nobody was in here when I arrived.
Figured I'd take the opportunity to
look around. Big place.

DANA

When you're dreaming, there's no
budget constrains. Or physical ones,
for that matter. I must've built it
out for years.

She considers the room in a different light.

HERMAN

Only to be ripped from your mind. It
feels like such a violation, walking
through here.

DANA

You are welcome in my mind palace. As
for the others ...

HERMAN

Someone else may have invited them to
this dinner party, but we can end it.

DANA

Tread softly.

Herman breathes out a chuckle of recognition.

HERMAN

"Because you tread on my dreams"?
I wouldn't dare.

He gazes up at the chandelier, lost in an idea.

She places her hand on his arm.

DANA

This way.

Dana leads him into the west hallway.

The rubble from her fall has been cleared, the ceiling
perfectly restored as if nothing had happened.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

Dana and Herman enter the ballroom.

Most everyone is seated, a few still hanging around the bar. Jim has dragged the appetizer table in from the foyer.

DANA
Everybody, this is Herman. My fiancé.

CHESTER
Damn he's pretty.

JIM
He's got some explaining to do.

HERMAN
I did not curate this evening, Jim.

JIM
That's not what I'm talking about.

DANA
Boys. Priorities.

Taylor, still behind the bar, shouts over them.

TAYLOR
If he didn't lock us all in this hell house, who did?

GUESTS
Yeah! Where was he the whole time?
Can he at least get us out of here?

Dana addresses the room.

DANA
You've all been terribly occupied with getting out of here, but I bet you haven't given a single thought to how you got here.

CHESTER
We all got here the same way. Got the same invitation. Showed up tonight.

DANA
Specifically. Think back. How did you get here?

Everyone tries to think, coming up blank. They begin to give each other concerned looks.

HERMAN

We're in a simulation. A networked
bio-digital neural bridge.

Blink. Blank stares. Dana steps in.

DANA

A dream shared in a computer.

JIM

Horseshit. That's not possible.

DANA

Enlighten us, Jim. Tell us all
exactly how you got here tonight.

JIM

You gotta be kiddin' me. I --

Jim slumps back in his chair, lost for words.

HERMAN

Our memories were partitioned when
they loaded us in here. We'd only
remember our deep past, along with a
set of basic given circumstances.

DANA

You're name, other general life-
building facts. Just enough to
prevent the kind of questions we're
asking right now.

A metallic CREAK issues from the walls.

HERMAN

Better hurry this along, luv.

Dana slaps her hands together to get down to business.

DANA

Alright. We've been working in this
space long enough to know that if
they want to partition incoming
memory, there's going to be a
rendering deficit somewhere else.

HERMAN

And we can prove it to you.

DANA

I've learned a trick.

Kat leans forward.

KAT

This is relevant to my interests.

DANA

They've set up a wall in our minds.
We need to push on it as hard as we
can.

HERMAN

We've all got to think. Hard. Start
with how you got here, and focus on
everything you DON'T know.

One by one, the guests begin to close their eyes.

DANA

Keep your eyes open, actually. I need
you to see this.

Quiet breathing throughout the room as everybody focuses.

The low MOAN from the walls begins to protest their
activity, growing to a loud ROAR just as ...

The walls around them FLICKER in and out of existence.

HERMAN

Did you all see that?

A few guests step up to touch the wall, confirming solidity.

DANA

Think harder.

The ROAR returns, SHAKING THE FLOOR beneath them.

The entire room FLICKERS into glowing vector lines and
exposed code.

Not missing a beat, Dana dashes to the radiant wall,
sticking her hand THROUGH it, collecting the falling data in
the digital representation of her watch.

HERMAN

Dana, stop!

His protestation shakes the guests out of their focus. Dana
pulls out her hand just as the physical wall rematerializes.

The shaking stops and the noise subsides.

KAT

Hell of a trip. What's the price tag on these virtual setups?

CHESTER

Too rich for my blood.

Herman goes to Dana.

HERMAN

That was not part of the plan.

DANA

I'm tired of plans.

She scrolls through the collected data on her watch face.

Kat, Chester, and Jim join them.

JIM

That's all well and good, but how are we gettin' outta this pit?

CHESTER

Is there some kind of alarm clock to wake us all up?

HERMAN

Not from the inside. Could do serious damage to our minds if we push the program too much further than we already have. We need a win state.

CHESTER

What if the maniac didn't set one? We'll die in here?

HERMAN

Or go mad. Either would sever the link. Fatally.

JIM

I'm not dyin' in a Nintendo. What's the third option?

DANA

We burn the house down.

Herman looks at her, concerned.

KAT

Now we're talkin'.

JIM
I tried that. Didn't catch.

DANA
Now we do it my way.

CHESTER
Sounds risky. What about pinching,
has anybody tried pinching? Ow!

Kat pinches Chester repeatedly.

HERMAN
We need to figure out what the host
wanted before you started diverging
from the program.

DANA
Honey, I'm sorry ... but I really
don't give a shit what they wanted.

Herman puts his hand on Dana's arm.

HERMAN
Don't push this. We've got too much
waiting for us on the outside.

JIM
Awful eager to play into our captor's
hand. You sure this chump's not
behind all this, D?

Dana gives Herman an accusatory look, pulling her arm away.

HERMAN
Don't be ridiculous. Why would I --

DANA
We're getting out. Now. I'm not
waiting for any more doors to open.

She raises her watch, ACTIVATING a command.

HERMAN
Wait!

The ballroom begins to COLLAPSE around them.

Guests scurry for the hallway, jumping to dodge falling wall
tiles that CRASH into sliding pieces.

The ceiling's natural fresco DISSOLVES in a raining flurry
of digital noise.

INT. WEST HALLWAY - NIGHT

Guests stream out of the ballroom as the doorway itself begins to crumble into pixelated chunks.

Dana strides out behind them, unmoved by the chaos.

She is flanked by Herman, Jim, Chester, and Kat. Their step isn't as calm as hers, wincing at the close calls of a splintering walkway.

The floorboards begin to shift in a looping tidal wave.

HERMAN

Watch your step!

Down the way, guests are toppled over as the wave reaches them. They trip over each other, only to be knocked by the vicious CHOMP of violently swinging doors.

DANA

Hang on ...

Dana raises her watch, looking for a way to ease the attack.

BEEP.

The doors along the hallway SLAM shut in unison.

CREAK. The HINGES themselves are straining to open the locked doors.

CRACKS begin to form on each of the doors in spiderweb patterns from their hinges. Spreading across like the reach of an infected vein, the doors begin to BUCKLE.

JIM

Everybody get down!

CRUNCH.

The hallway is filled with exploding door shards.

The exes move to cover Dana, taking most of the debris hits before they can reach her.

Dust settles on the continuing undulation of the floor boards, but the cracks which started on the doors begin to SPREAD TO THE WALLS.

They all notice the encroaching threat, breaking into a RUN to the light at the end of the hallway.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Dana LEAPS out of the hallway, followed by the exes.

They land hard on the foyer floor as the EXPLOSION of wooden shards and wallpaper particles trails behind them.

Chester hops to his feet, zipping over to help Dana up.

CHESTER
Careful with that thing.

Dana skips to the top of the grand staircase.

DANA
That was just the beginning.
I'm bringing the house down.

She raises her watch, only to have Herman swat it down.

HERMAN
Dana, please. No matter the host's
intent, there's no way it was
programmed for this.

He pulls her aside, lowering to a private whisper.

HERMAN (CONT'D)
Don't risk the other guests. If there
were no set parameters for virtual
death ... their minds could be lost.

BOOM.

They both turn to the center of the room:

The foyer floor has started to BUCKLE, bending the surrounding walls with it.

The exes run to the edges of the room, sliding toward the closed front door, around which the other guests are huddled, desperately slamming their fist against it.

A dark HOLE appears in the center of the floor.

DANA
Control. Alt. Delete.

Dana ACTIVATES her watch, causing the room to GLOW.

TIME SLOWS. The collapsing chaos is frozen in limited animation. The guests are slow-moving statues in a whirlwind of disintegration.

The glowing walls grow transparent, the entire house visible to her. She takes a moment to appreciate the full spread of the property.

With a series of taps, she's able to select every room, each beginning to glow in rapid succession.

Jamming her thumb to the watch's screen in a final, triumphant command, the room begins to PHASE out of existence, starting with the front door.

TIME NORMALIZES as the guests are pushed through the newly doorless space into the front yard.

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

Thrust into the cold of night, rain begins to fall.

Chester, Kat, Jim, and Herman help up their fellow guests, watching in awe as Dana emerges from the dissolving house.

She joins them, turning to witness the place BLIP out of existence one room at a time. From the space of the deleted foyer, each adjoining cube fades away in a chain.

They are left in an empty lot.

The swirling clouds overhead continue their downpour. The guests begin to gather around the exes, who in turn circle around Dana.

CHESTER

What now?

Dana looks up at the sky, drops splattering on her face.

DANA

I don't know.

A FLASH of lighting strikes the center of the plot, where the house once stood. They all rock backward as the thunder clap sounds, echoing through the yard.

The earth SHAKES, putting everyone off balance.

On the spot of the former foyer's dark hole, a cracking WHIRLPOOL begins to form in the foundation.

The WIND picks up, encircling the entire group.

Guests SCREAM as the ground beneath them is DRAGGED INTO THE WHIRLPOOL. Desperate hands claw to crawl back to safety.

Dana manages to roll herself out of the reach of the pull zone, whipping wind threatening to push her back in.

She watches in horror as the guests are pulled into the sucking dark hole. In short order, the others have all been consumed, leaving only the exes holding on for dear life.

Dana SPRINGS back into to the breach.

She DIGS her heel into the sliding grass, reaching out a hand to Kat and Chester, who are holding each other to an exposed pipe jutting out of the ground.

Just as her hand meets theirs, the two are pulled in.

DANA

No!

Dana CRIES out to them, but there is only the churning black maw staring back.

She crawls along the edge of the earthen funnel, making her way to Jim, who has twisted his arm in a painful contortion attempting to hold on to a tree root.

Dana throws herself over the edge next to him, pushing with her entire weight to try and help him up.

The root SNAPS, sending Jim into the abyss.

HERMAN

Dana!

Herman crawls to Dana's side, embracing her.

DANA

I'm so sorry.

He reaches past her, letting his cuff fall down to expose his wrist watch. He kisses her.

Herman stands, the wind ripping around him, causing his stance to sway. He looks down to Dana, catching her eye.

He WINKS and activates his watch with a BEEP.

He DIVES into the whirlpool and just as he is about to fall into darkness, his watch emits a BLINDING signal.

The light overtakes the dark hole, transferring a glowing grid of vector lines across the entire property. The digital understructure of the foundation is exposed.

The atmospheric begin to die down as the WHITE LIGHT overtakes everything.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Dana's eyes open.

She is standing in the center of the foyer.

The room is brighter than before. As if the marble floor was somehow illuminating the entire space. Everything now has a lustrous sheen.

She checks her back. It's fine.

She checks her wrist. No watch.

DANA
(Unsure.)
Hello?

Her voice echoes into silence.

A faint MELODY begins to play. She recognizes it. Looks around. Can't see anywhere it would logically come from.

Dana closes her eyes and begins to follow the sound.

INT. WEST HALLWAY - DAY

For the first time, the hallway is well lit.

The beauty of its design can finally be appreciated, but Dana keeps her eyes closed to follow the tune.

Carefully putting one foot in front of the other, she makes her way down the hall. She slows at each of the doors, leaning in to check if it might be the source of the song.

No such luck at the time she reaches the end of the hall. Dana opens her eyes and looks up the staircase.

INT. UPPER HALLWAY - DAY

Continuing her tactic, Dana listens blind at each door.

The melody grows LOUDER until she reaches the door to the surveillance room, at which point it STOPS.

Dana reaches out and opens the door.

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - DAY

Dana enters, the door softly shutting behind her.

The surveillance room has been transformed. It is nearly unrecognizable in its cleanliness. No more wires. No holes punched through the walls.

The line of monitors has been replaced with a single screen, display a live feed of this room.

On it, she can see a figure hiding behind the monitor.

DANA

Come out.

A little girl emerges, no more than five years old, wearing spectacles and a dress the same blue as Dana's.

This is YOUNG DANA.

YOUNG DANA

Hello.

Dana gets choked up. Voice caught in her throat.

DANA

Hi ...

YOUNG DANA

Do you remember me?

DANA

I remember when I was you.

YOUNG DANA

Then you know why we brought us here.

DANA

I did?

Young Dana nods.

Overwhelmed at the realization, Dana lowers herself to the ground, crossing her legs. Young Dana is now at eye level.

YOUNG DANA

You know you did.

Dana takes a sharp breath in as her eyes widen.

DANA

I did. I remember.

YOUNG DANA
You needed them.

DANA
But I had pushed them away. Pushed
myself away. The parts of me they
brought to life.
(Breaks down.)
I was afraid.

The little girl crosses the room to Dana. She gives her
older self a comforting hug.

YOUNG DANA
Don't be afraid. They helped make me
into you.

Young Dana reaches into Dana's dress pocket. Dana looks
confused, but doesn't stop her.

She pulls out the engagement ring, huge in her tiny hand.

YOUNG DANA
Do you still want it?

Dana wipes her eyes. She takes the ring.

DANA
I do.

CLICK.

Dana turns. The door has vanished.

She looks back, but Young Dana is gone. She rolls the ring
around in her palm, running the tip of her finger around its
shining loop.

DANA
(Sotto.)
Thank you.

Dana clutches the ring in a fist.

INT. UPPER HALLWAY - DAY

Dana emerges from the surveillance room.

She takes one last walk through the hall. This time, she
really savors the space, appreciating every nook.

A bittersweet stroll through a dream house.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Dana stands at the top of the grand staircase.

She looks over the room, which is filled with a crowd of all the guests. They are frozen in neutral expression.

Dana BLINKS and ...

The crowd has transformed.

Each of the guests is now Dana, staring back at herself.

Dana descends the staircase, opening her hand to reveal the engagement ring.

With each step, a cluster of guests DISAPPEARS.

As she reaches the bottom, she is left with only one of herself staring back.

She considers her unmoving reflection as she holds up the ring. She peers into her own eyes, spotting her actual self looking back in the shining globes.

Dana smiles.

DANA

Hello.

Her last reflection WINKS at her, and disappears.

Dana looks down at the ring, hovering it above her ring finger. She catches herself again in the polished metal.

With one graceful move ...

She slides the ring over her finger.

Finally.

The air is sucked out of the room. The lights dim.

Searing digital grid lines appear over every surface. Reality fades away, leaving only the glowing traces of the computer-mapped structure around her.

The lines begin to slide away, taking their light with it.

As the virtual house disintegrates around her, Dana herself is overtaken by the grid lines.

Starting at her feet, the light travels up her body. Her face is covered, revealing the virtual likeness beneath.

INTO THE RENDERED LINES of her face ...

Through a UNIVERSE OF CODE ...

FADE TO BLACK.