

STREAMWEAVR

Written by

Kendall Castor-Perry

"Our only competition is sleep"
Reed Hastings, now Executive Chairman of Netflix

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FADE IN

INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Flick... Flick... an old metal lighter coughs a smoky flame.

The hiss of gas... a blowtorch POPS alight. Its flame paints flickering light over a woman, sitting in her underwear at a mirrored dressing table.

Stem cell expert and burn specialist Doctor ERICA Wise (50s) is a brilliant wallflower, serially disappointed by life, a bespectacled, straw-blond rabbit left after the headlights have moved on. She adjusts an iPad, its camera on.

On the dressing table, a framed photo, a copy of 'Cell' magazine - *Stem Cell Special Edition* - and a white-painted metal door-handle, its mounting plate bent and distorted.

Erica glares at the magazine - and throws it in a waste bin. Looks at the photo: her in her 20s, a dark-haired woman also in her 20s [YOUNG LAUREN] and an 11-year-old girl [MELODY].

She pulls up her top. Lifts a girdle made from grey fibrous material. It has two 2-inch square holes, surrounded by scorch marks. She tightens it round her abdomen, wincing. Ensures the iPad camera 'sees' her abdomen. Presses record.

She chews down on a bite guard. Holds the blowtorch, hand shaking. Plays the flame over the holes in the girdle.

This. HURTS.

Her jaws tremble against the bite guard. The plug turns what would have been her scream into a nasal, throaty rasp.

She pulls the blowtorch away. Picks up a syringe of cloudy yellowish liquid. Injects it in one of the square apertures.

This. Also. HURTS.

She unclips the girdle. Peels it off. Her abdomen is already covered with a checkerboard of burnt flesh, scabbed, scarred or weeping.

Teeth gritted, she pulls down her top to cover them.

She spits out the bite guard. Strokes the edge of the photo.

Flick... Flick...

She lays on the bed, clasping the door-handle to her chest.

INT. YALE MEDICAL SCHOOL BAR, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

YOUNG ERICA Wise (25) walks through the doorway. Fresh, rosy-cheeked, teeth need attention. Innocent country girl out of place - and she knows it.

The loud 90s music in the bar defeats her hearing aids. She winces, adjusts them. The din fades into a background soup. She heads to the bar, near a group propped on bar stools.

Turning, YOUNG LAUREN Merritt (25) is the ground zero of confidence here, apex of the social predator food chain. She dismisses the others with a look. Gestures to the bartender.

YOUNG LAUREN
Hey. Lauren. Lauren Merritt.

Erica taps her ears, her hearing aids visible.

YOUNG LAUREN (CONT'D)
(signing)
Lauren Merritt. Too loud in here?

YOUNG ERICA
(nods; signing)
Erica. Deaf too?

YOUNG LAUREN
(shakes; signing)
No, sister was born deaf. You?

YOUNG ERICA
Explosion. Quite a big one.

The bartender pours two shots of Bourbon. Young Lauren offers a glass to Young Erica as she pinches the material of her blouse.

YOUNG LAUREN
(signing)
This Southern belle needs a
Southern drink.

Young Erica laughs, nervous. Young Lauren pulls out a cigarette case. Takes a cigarette, offers to Young Erica, who shakes her head.

YOUNG ERICA
Trying to give it up.

Young Lauren blows smoke. Spears Young Erica with a hungry raptor gaze.

YOUNG LAUREN
(signing)
Smoking?

YOUNG ERICA
Lighting things on fire.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, TROY BRANZINO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A man lies in bed, more than just fast asleep. More like drugged, mouth slightly open, cheeks a little sunken.

This is Troy BRANZINO (50s). Once a hyper-smart, hyper-ambitious tech maven, now little more than a vegetable.

Standing over him is YELLAND, fed-up, a 50-ish [woman who looks more like the Government agent she actually is than a] Housekeeper.

YELLAND
You're even worse than a vegetable,
Branzino. Vegetables don't need so
much attention.

At the sound of moving boxes and a man's voice from the next room, she turns, hand briefly brushing a gun in her large handbag, before bringing out her phone.

She moves to the door, holding her phone out to record.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, JUNK ROOM - NIGHT

The packed junk-room of a technophile hoarder; movers' boxes, crates and equipment cases.

JENNY Branzino, just turned 17, button-bright high-schooler, sits on the edge of a crate. Gnawing her thumb, she stares red-eyed at a digital S.L.R. camera's display.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY (VIDEO RECORDING)

A hand pulls away, revealing Jenny's father, the same Troy BRANZINO, heavy-rimmed glasses, nervous and hyper.

He's dressed in outdoor clothes, neck wrapped with a thin scarf. LEDs twinkle under the scarf. His hair is wet.

BRANZINO
 (from camera's speaker)
 Jenny. I knew you'd look for this
 to record your next science talk.

There's a date display visible in the corner.

JENNY (V.O.)
 That's the day you got ill.

BRANZINO
 I've made a big mistake, Jen. Way
 too much power to trust to someone
 like Lauren Merritt.

He rubs his mouth, looks around. The words race from him.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
 I... hid a memory card. Lots of
 important data. Remember the place,
 you know, where Mom and I...? When
 you've found it, call... this
 number.

Branzino shows a page with a phone number, then moves his
 hand nearer to the lens, ready to end the recording.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
 I'm going to confront her today.
 But she'll not let me stop her now.
 She'll prevent me going public,
 somehow. I've done what I can...
 But whatever happens...

His hand moves to fill the display--

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
 ... I love you so much, Jenny.

-- and the video stops.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, JUNK ROOM - NIGHT

Jenny is stunned.

JENNY
 (muttering)
 That blogger... what was his
 name... Gold something...

She rises from the crate. A light on the motion detector
 above the door flickers as she passes by...

INT. BERG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

An austere room with an Eastern European feel. Scenes from e.g. 'The Singing Ringing Tree' play silently on an old TV.

A small, older woman knits by the light of a gooseneck lamp, grey-blond hair pulled back and tied in a tight bun. A sweet granny whom the years have touched only lightly?

Hardly; this is Alexandra BERG (65), ex-Stasi agent turned fearsome Head of Security. Brünnhilde meets Martha Stewart.

Her phone pings. She sets her knitting aside.

INSERT: PHONE SCREEN

Keyword/context monitor alert #173 Level: CRITICAL MATCH

Berg thumbs an icon. The phone plays out intercepted audio.

BRANZINO (V.O.)
 (recording from phone)
 ... hid a memory card. Lots of important data. Remember the place, you know, where Mom and I...? When you've found it, call... this number.

She growls. Presses a fast-forward symbol:

JENNY (V.O.)
 (recording from phone)
 ... what was his name... Gold...

Berg takes a deep breath. Opens the Uber app on her phone. Clicks on "Cube" in the 'Where to?' box.

INT. STANCZYCK'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

A domestic bedroom, dim streetlight through thin curtains.

Detective Al 'Stan' STANCZYCK sits up in bed. Buzzed-short hair, late 40s - but heavy use has added some years and worry lines. Good cop. Good husband. Closet Meg Ryan fan.

His brunette wife DOT, 40s mom, lies on her side, trying to get comfortable. She adjusts a furry eye-mask.

On his night-stand, a small box with throbbing LEDs. He's a BETA TESTER for the STREAMWEAVR dream-streaming service from SOMNETIX; the box is the transmitter.

DOT

I hope the lights on that box don't keep me awake. Does it make a noise? Quite why they still need beta testers when they launch in three days...

STANCZYCK

It'll be fine, Dot. Sleep well.

He picks up a BEANIE CAP from the night-stand. Pulls it onto his head, adjusts the chin-strap. The LEDs twinkle a new dance.

He turns out the lamp on the night-stand.

DOT

Sweet dreams. Love you.

INT./EXT. YELLAND'S CAR, OUTSIDE BRANZINO HOUSE - NIGHT

Yelland checks her watch. The sound of a dialing call plays through the car audio. It's answered:

CHADWICK (V.O.)

(phone through car system)

Talk to me.

YELLAND

The girl found a recorded message from him. I grabbed it on my phone.

CHADWICK (V.O.)

Ah. And?

YELLAND

Branzino's hidden some evidence on what Merritt was up to. The girl should know where it is.

CHADWICK (V.O.)

Berg already booked a car over to the Cube. Must've heard it too.

Yelland looks back out at the house.

YELLAND

They are still monitoring their bugs. Should I warn the girl?

CHADWICK (V.O.)

Nope, just turn up as usual tomorrow. I'll deal with Berg.

(MORE)

CHADWICK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And keep an eye on that doctor
who's been mentoring Jenny. She
appeared out of nowhere.
Coincidence?

EXT. BACK YARD, SOUTH SEATTLE - NIGHT

A sweeping view of twinkling night-time South Seattle. We
see:

The CUBE, headquarters of Somnetix, atop a hill, looming over
South Seattle's spaghetti of freeways.

Forty stories high and the same dimension horizontally. Fuck-
off corporate architecture. Each of the myriad windows is
also a high resolution display panel, visible for miles.

On each face of the building the Somnetix LOGO, a BLUE CUBE,
is displayed. It tumbles slowly against a gray background.

Near the top of each face, a huge countdown timer. Something
will evidently happen in three days and twenty minutes.

Intense activist hacker and tech blogger Will GOLDHAWK (30)
sits at a garden table, looking alternately at his laptop
screen and at his great view of The Cube, its logo tumbling.

On the table, his phone is connected to a call in progress.
Goldhawk takes a drag from a joint. Releases slowly.

GOLDHAWK

I'm looking at sixty million cubic
feet of building, and you know how
many people are inside right now?

On the phone: DALIA, a deputy editor at The Seattle Times.

DALIA (V.O.)

(from phone)

Rhetorical question klaxon.

GOLDHAWK

For twelve out of every twenty-four
hours she's the only one there.

DALIA (V.O.)

And hundreds of her very lucky
employees get to have a life, see
their families, switch off their
work email. Salaries are fantastic
and they don't do any Government
work.

(MORE)

DALIA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 No other company here comes close
 to Somnetix for employee
 satisfaction. I don't get why you
 want to damage their reputation.
 They're good for Seattle.

Goldhawk takes another drag.

GOLDHAWK
 I'm not trying to bring them down.
 Just to show her for what she is.

DALIA (V.O.)
 Look, write up your piece on
 Merritt and send it over to me
 before you blog all the novelty out
 of it. I'll see if it passes The
 Times's sniff test--

-- and Goldhawk's phone buzzes. He squints at the screen.

GOLDHAWK
 Sorry, another call. Talk tomorrow.

Goldhawk taps the phone screen.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)
 Hey, hello again Jenny. Good to
 hear from you. What's up?

INT. THE CUBE, GLASS ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Deserted office floors fall past as Berg ascends in The Cube.

ELEVATOR VOICE
 All staff must transfer at floor
 nineteen. Failure to follow I.P.
 protection collar protocol will
 trigger interdiction drones. Thank
 you for visiting Somnetix.
 Seattle's nicest company!

Berg looks at a camera on the elevator control panel.

ELEVATOR VOICE (CONT'D)
 Alexandra Berg. I.P. collar exempt.
 Transition past floor nineteen
 enabled.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S TREATMENT ROOM - NIGHT

A cross between a medical room, a hairdresser's workstation and a bathroom. At one end of the space, airlock doors.

A woman sits in a swivel chair: LAUREN Merritt (50s), C.E.O. of Somnetix, face covered by a fitted mask of mirrored plastic, with holes for eyes, nose and mouth.

By her, a small desk. A monitor and a framed photo of her 20s self and the same 11-year-old Melody from Erica's photo.

Even masked, Lauren's gaze is determined, intelligent.

She turns to a monitor displaying the tumbling blue cube logo. The cube is reflected, distorted, in the smooth, reflective surface of her face-mask. A new icon appears.

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - NIGHT

This is an entire open floor of the building, covered with hundreds of work desks. Each desk has three monitors and a keyboard. A boiler-room for programming - but it's deserted.

Berg strides to her own desk. Two spidery DRONES wobble in the air and move aside to let her pass.

She types for a few seconds; windows come and go. On one, we see a young Tom Hanks. Berg groans.

BERG

Some extra unscheduled daytime beta-test work for you tomorrow, Detective. Good luck.

She jabs a key. A window shows a distorted, reversed version of Berg's face, reflected in Lauren's mirror-finish mask.

LAUREN (V.O.)

Berg. Should I be worried that you're here at this hour?

BERG

Ah, nothing to worry about, Lauren.

Seen on the monitor, Lauren peels off the mask. Her heavily-scarred face and neck glisten with a clear gel. She has a confident, weaponized gaze even on the small screen: part Madonna, part Medusa, all power.

LAUREN (V.O.)

Then I can get my beauty sleep.

Berg yields with a curt nod.

BERG
 Would you like me to... come up? I
 can... decontaminate.

Berg glances past the monitor, through a glass wall. At the hollow center of the steel and glass enormity of The Cube, on huge stilts above many floors of computer servers, is...

... a HOUSE. Brick, wood and tile, straight out of a high-class residential neighborhood. Complete with garden.

LAUREN (V.O.)
 Not tonight, Alexandra. Good night.

The window on Lauren closes with a 'goodbye' sound.

BERG
 (to herself)
 I can't let you find anything from
 your father, Fraulein Branzino.

She looks down at her phone. No network, no Wi-Fi. With a deep breath, Berg heads back to the elevator.

INT. THE CUBE, OUTER FOYER - NIGHT

Berg stops near large screens. A "*Welcome to The Cube*" screen-saver fades out, replaced by a promo video. First, a resonant, tuneful SOMNETIX SOUND. Then, upbeat music, and:

PROMO VOICEOVER (V.O.)
 (from speakers)
 You spend one-third of your life
 asleep. That's one-third of your
 life not even living your life.
 Imagine if you could only use those
 hours productively.

Berg's phone chimes an Uber sound. She looks at it. Turns back to the screens. Lifestyle models in the video act out the exciting proposition being described.

PROMO VOICEOVER (V.O.)
 Revisiting your favorite movies.
 Bingeing the shows that your
 friends will talk about tomorrow.

Another Uber chime.

PROMO VOICEOVER (V.O.)
 Streamweavr, from Somnetix. All the
 programming you crave, streamed
 direct into your dreams.

Berg turns away from the video. Heads for the exit.

INT. STANCZYCK'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stanczyck and Dot are fast asleep.

PROMO VOICEOVER (V.O.)
 You'll experience high-definition
 sound and vision, through our
 comfortable wireless head-cap.

On Stanczyck's beanie cap, tiny LEDs blink rhythmically,
 their light glinting off the surroundings as his eyeballs
 flick to and fro behind his eyelids. It's R.E.M. sleep...

INT. STANCZYCK'S "DREAM CINEMA"

... which means dreaming. Stanczyck is 'watching' in High
 Definition on a giant 'silver screen' inside his head.

And what is this tough, honest cop dream-streaming?
 'Homeland'? 'CSI'? 'Rockford Files'?

Nope. It's Meg Ryan (surprise) and Tom Hanks in the final
 scene of his guilty-pleasure movie, '*Sleepless In Seattle*'...

'SLEEPLESS' SAM
 We better go... shall we?

'SLEEPLESS' ANNIE
 Sam?... It's nice to meet you.

The End... then some system text and data are overlaid:

Dream-streamed with the Somnetix Streamweavr platform.
WakeUp ***On Alarm Timer (06:00 PDT)***

After a moment, two extra lines of text appear--

NextItem ***PackagePyPa(@Al_Stanczyck, 050719-001)***
RunPackage ***Triggered By Remote***

PROMO VOICEOVER (V.O.)
 You'll have a clear, vibrant memory
 of what you streamed. Guaranteed!

Then the crisp little 'Somnetix sound' rings out...

PROMO VOICEOVER (V.O.)
Streamweavr. The streaming service
of your dreams.

RecallDreamContent FALSE

... and finally, just an image of a mug of black coffee...

ADVERTISING VOICE (V.O.)
Wash that sleep away with ARISE!
The coffee you always dreamed of.

EXT. THE CUBE - NIGHT

A Prius, sporting Uber decals, waits outside The Cube's substantial gates. As Berg approaches, the driver emerges: CHADWICK (60s), everyman-bland up-tight East Coast plus just a whiff of man-of-mystery, opens the rear door for her.

BERG
That was quick... Chad?

CHADWICK
Uber drivers fight over five-star riders like you, Ma'am.

Chadwick closes her door and gets into the driver's seat.

INT./EXT. UBER PRIUS - NIGHT

The Cube recedes behind them as the Prius whines away. Chadwick throws a glance in the rear view mirror.

CHADWICK
I thought no-one at all worked at
The Cube after 7 p.m.?

BERG
Just a loose end before our launch.

GOOGLE NAVIGATION
(from phone)
Turn right on Melody.

CHADWICK
She had this street name changed,
didn't she. After her late sister.

Chadwick looks at The Cube, once more in view as they pass.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)
They say it's hollow inside. Where
Merritt lives. Some house, eh?

BERG
Hollow inside. *Ja, bestimmt.*

INT. SEEDY STAIRWELL, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

The graffiti on the painted brick wall of this stairwell says both 'dive bar' and 'urology exam practicals here'.

Young Erica, laughing and drunk on both liquor and romantic attention, slams back into the wall next to an anatomically-optimistic sketch claiming to be of a lecturer's penis.

Young Lauren pushes in on Young Erica. Grabs her head, and kisses her full-on. Young Erica's head slams against the Sharpie-crafted balls but she doesn't care.

Young Erica pulls away and whispers to Young Lauren, then raises a hand to head height. Young Lauren presses her own hand to it, fingertip to fingertip. They twist round, a delicate, balletic move. A slow dance of emergent lust.

Then the spell is broken; Young Lauren grabs another quick kiss, and runs up the stairs.

Young Erica can hardly breathe. Besotted, she races after Young Lauren. Who is clearly in complete control. Of herself, and of Young Erica.

INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

Erica sighs as she surfaces from the dream.

ERICA
Oh, Lauren...

She gets out of bed. Pulls up her top to look at her abdomen.

Among the ugly, scarred patches is one clean, healthy one, its margins already spreading out over other patches.

She rubs it. Harder. Catches her breath.

ERICA (CONT'D)
It worked.

She looks over at the dressing table. At the photo and door-handle. At the iPad.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Damn. Pictures, Erica.

She sits down at the dressing table. Switches the iPad on.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

A WOMAN in a translucent isolation suit close-fitted over day clothes beneath. A corrugated air hose snakes over to a valve on the wall. Around her neck, LEDs flicker on her thick, choker-like I.P. PROTECTION COLLAR.

Holding a swab and attempting to unscrew the lid from a jar, the Woman stares at a pink, scarred arm that dangles from a figure hidden from view by a large chair--

-- and the arm - it's Lauren's - swings up to grab the jar.

LAUREN
I'll do my makeup.

Lauren grabs the hose and pulls the Woman closer. She reaches up. Grabs the Woman's breast through the suit.

WOMAN
Excuse me, I don't think you should do that.

Lauren pulls her hand away. She looks bored.

LAUREN
Feel free to file a complaint when you get back home..

The Woman scuttles over to the wall valve. Disconnects the hose. Leaves through the airlock doors.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Or try to.

Lauren turns back in her chair.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
And... smile.

INT. STANCZYCK'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

Daylight already seeping in. Stanczyck snorts himself awake. The noise wakes Dot up. Stanczyck turns to kiss her.

STANCZYCK

Sleep OK?

DOT

Hmm. What did you watch?

STANCZYCK

Game of Thrones. You know you can watch a whole season in one night?

Stanczyck is not a good liar.

DOT

I know exactly what you watched, Mister Meg-Ryan-Fixated Alan Stanczyck. I hope she helped you face a hard day at the Precinct.

Rumbled. He sighs.

STANCZYCK

Little Miss Moist-For-Tom-Hanks...

Dot punches him gently, then kisses him back.

DOT

Anything else?

Stanczyck gets out of bed. Pulls off his T-shirt, revealing an old bullet wound scar on his right shoulder.

STANCZYCK

Not that I can remember.

DOT

What's the point of that fancy dream-streaming box if you can't remember what it sends you?

STANCZYCK

Huh. I need some coffee.

He walks through to the bathroom. Dot calls after him.

DOT

And what's all that 'Arise' coffee stuff about? Suddenly Folger's is not good enough for you?

She grunts and flips the bedroom TV on with the remote. Plumps pillows to sit up and watch.

TV NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.)
 ... no further in their
 investigation of the so-called
 Pyropath killings in Boston and
 Chicago, considered by some to be a
 gruesome new form of contract
 murder...

Dot changes the channel. The TV jumps straight into a running studio interview. Dot settles down to watch.

INT. TV STUDIO - DAY

CAROLINE (55), mousey-haired P.N.W. TV interviewer, views a projection screen showing Lauren Merritt in her 'office'.

Lauren wears a simple, elegant black top. Her smile is easy, approachable; her makeup carefully judged to maximize viewer sympathy for her burn scars, while not being too scary.

CAROLINE
 ... ethics and social conscience,
 Somnetix has had a huge impact in
 Seattle. Now you're making the
 transition into streaming
 entertainment with the launch of
 Streamweavr, with over ten million
 subscribers signed up to date. Some
 are comparing you to Steve Jobs.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - DAY

Behind Lauren, this angle into her living space shows a large projected image of the tumbling Somnetix cube logo.

INTERCUT LAUREN AND CAROLINE/TV STUDIO AS NEEDED

Lauren demurs. Perfect-pitch humility:

LAUREN
 Oh, Caroline. I don't deserve that.
 But the support; so many people...
 (calculated choke)
 ... it's such a help. I'm proud to
 be delivering the next generation
 of entertainment interface. I've
 always been a disrupter.
 Streamweavr has been a dream, so to
 speak, of mine for years.

CAROLINE

The City is expecting big crowds at the Streamweavr launch party at the Convention Center tomorrow. That must be satisfying for you.

LAUREN

My team here has done a superb job with Streamweavr, from technology through to content deals with major studios. Everyone who visits our booths at the party gets a take-home installation and a month's subscription for free. Our gift to Seattle!

CAROLINE

Finally, on a more sober note, it's twenty years since the devastating fire that changed your life. Any thoughts on how that's influenced your journey?

Lauren radiates gravitas; tough, reassuring, approachable. She strokes her scar tissue. Pity me, but love me...

STAY ON LAUREN

LAUREN

You're right. It did change me. I miss Melody, my sister, every single day. But... you never know the direction tragedy will pull you. Don't give up. And don't let anyone hold you back from what you want to achieve.

CAROLINE (V.O.)

Lauren Merritt, C.E.O. of Somnetix Corporation, thanks so much for your time today.

Lauren waits for a beat.

LAUREN

We're offline?

BERG

(from monitor)
Disconnected.

LAUREN

What a dull cow that TV woman is.
We must find something appropriate
to get her into trouble. Alright,
send in the e-staff.

Airlock doors at the end of the space open. A group of six people in isolation suits files in. Each connects their reel of corrugated air hose to a valve.

BERG

(from monitor)

This is the new V.P. of Software's
first face-to-face. He's not
familiar with the capabilities of
the I.P. Protection collar yet, of
course. He's also puzzled by some
of the... undocumented features of
the Streamweavr protocol.

The six suited figures stand in a line-up in front of Lauren, LEDs on their I.P. protection collars twinkling.

LAUREN

Fresh meat. Thank you, Berg.

Lauren rises from her chair, wielding a small remote control.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Good morning, gentlemen. I hope
you're not too uncomfortable. Let
me give you the good news and the
bad news about your collars.

INT. MERRITT HOUSE BEDROOM, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

Young Erica and Young Lauren lie together in a large, luxurious double bed. Young Erica is curled up against Young Lauren, arm draped over her.

The fine sheets tremble - and a large tabby cat jumps up onto the bed. Pads across Young Erica to get to Young Lauren, who pets it.

YOUNG LAUREN

Now, Vulcan. Don't get jealous.

Young Erica watches Young Lauren effortlessly transfer her affection to Vulcan the cat.

YOUNG ERICA

Can't I get jealous? I just want us
to be together forever. Like this.

Young Lauren turns to her.

YOUNG LAUREN

Don't get clingy. Forever's a
dangerous word.

YOUNG ERICA

But...

YOUNG LAUREN

Didn't you think of asking me what
I'd want? Grow up, Erica.

Young Erica's face reddens. She turns away, swings out of bed
and stomps out of the room...

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, MEDIA ROOM - DAY

A big, gloomy room, old couches and chairs facing a large
pull-down screen lit up with a slide, "*What Are Stem Cells?*
by Jenny Branzino", from a projector perched on a stepladder.

JENNY

I'd like to thank Doctor Wise of
NordMed Hospital for her help with
this presentation... Doctor Wise?

Jenny moves over and is lit by the projector's beam. Erica
snaps out of her dream. She claps politely.

ERICA

You nailed it. Next stop Yale.

Erica and Jenny look over from the screen image to Troy
Branzino. He sits, chewing gum very slowly, in an old leather
arm-chair, his hand bandaged.

Not the ball of nervous energy seen in the recording.

Eyes trance-like, he pulls bright-green gum clumsily from his
mouth and presses it into the cracked leather of the chair.

JENNY

He tried to make an espresso. Burnt
his hand on the faulty steam spout.

Jenny clearly needs a hug. Erica obliges.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Thank you. For all your help.

ERICA
Thank your teachers, Jenny. They've really supported you through this.

Branzino rubs an ankle with his foot.

JENNY
Means I get time here so he's not just alone with Mrs. Yelland the whole day... oh, Dad, your tracker?

Jenny steps to Branzino, kneels down and reaches under his trouser leg, adjusts something. He doesn't react.

JENNY (CONT'D)
He can't use a phone... Sometimes he tries to leave the house at night. Sets the alarm off...

Jenny looks like she's working up some courage.

ERICA
You OK? I should be leaving. Had something of a work breakthrough last night.

Jenny swallows. Stands, and looks into her dad's blank eyes.

JENNY
I... someone may have done this to Dad... deliberately... he said it was Lauren Merritt.

The name causes a visible visceral reaction in Erica.

JENNY (CONT'D)
I found a message, from before he got sick. He said she'd try to stop him from revealing something bad. I've got to find some memory card and then call a number.

ERICA
Are you sure he was... OK, when he left the message?

Jenny feels in a pocket. Hands Erica a fancy business card.

JENNY
This blogger, Goldhawk, has been calling me ever since Dad got sick.

(MORE)

JENNY (CONT'D)

I told him about this. He thinks the authorities will cover it up, to protect Merritt.

Tearing up, Jenny looks over to Branzino.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Do you think she could have done that? She's supposed to be so nice. What should I do, Doctor Wise?

Erica's eyes are damp as she hugs Jenny tight.

ERICA

Lauren is... very good at drawing you in. I knew her way back, at Yale.

Erica breaks the hug. Holds Jenny's shoulders gently.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Paranoia can be an early sign of the brain damage that led to your father's aphasia and cognitive impairment. When I looked at his scans... the scarring and micro-hemorrhages are quite extensive.

Jenny sniffs. Erica pulls back into the hug.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Look, when you've found that card thing, give me a call and we can talk about what to do next.

JENNY

You're so good to me, Doctor Wise.

Over Jenny's shoulder, Erica's look turns distant.

ERICA

Listen. Lauren Merritt won't hurt you as long as you don't hurt her.

Erica shuts her eyes. Something starting to surface.

INT. FEATURELESS SPACE (ERICA'S DREAM-SCAPE)

[Note: in these sequences, Lauren/Erica are present-day age]

Erica and Lauren face each other in an otherwise featureless dream-scape, each with a hand raised.

They touch fingertip to fingertip as in the bar, rotating slowly, maintaining eye contact, a loving, peaceful look on both their faces.

They twist closer to each other, free arms curling around the other's waist, drawing in for a loving embrace.

Languid orange flames begin to dance gently around them...

INT. STANCZYCK'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - DAY

Stanczyck drains his coffee mug. Picks up keys, phone, badge and a pocket pack of tipped cigarillos. Heads for the door.

STANCZYCK

Bye, honey.

He opens the door. There's a package on the doorstep. He lifts it, puzzled--

-- and his phone makes the Somnetix sound. He looks at it - and the tumbling cube icon is reflected in his eyes...

DOT (O.S.)

Love you. Be good. Get something out of your Meg dream today.

Glassy-eyed, Stanczyck doesn't respond. He walks out, clutching the package.

INT. COFFEE SHOP, SEATTLE - DAY

Gym bag swinging, Goldhawk steps into the small coffee shop; distressed wooden tables. Probably a hint of beard oil aroma.

DALIA Langhe (30s) is already seated at one of the tables, typing on a laptop that's festooned with stickers.

GOLDHAWK

Thanks for coming. This is real handy for the *jiu jitsu* studio.

DALIA

Oh, make me feel guilty about my exercise non-regime why don't you.

GOLDHAWK

Look, hope I didn't blow my chances by blogging last night, but I had to get some of it out there. And I've found another nail.

Dalia looks up, puzzled.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)
 In her coffin. Remember the
 Somnetix tech guy who got sudden,
 severe brain damage? Branzino?

Dalia nods. Inhales the aroma from her coffee.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)
 So in a message to his daughter he
 predicted Merritt would do
 something extreme to stop him from
 exposing her. Going to be a
 bombshell when it gets out.

DALIA
 It better be good. I'm going out on
 a limb for you. I'm hearing the
 word 'unreliable' a lot when I
 mention you around the office.

Goldhawk hefts his gym bag.

GOLDHAWK
 Just you wait and see, Dal. I'm
 going to see Jenny Branzino.

INT. HOSPITAL, BREAK ROOM - DAY

A couple of TVs in this communal space, sound turned down,
 show the local news station. A clip of the earlier interview
 with Lauren is playing. A female RECEPTIONIST watches.

RECEPTIONIST
 She's too good to be true.

A male ORDERLY pulls a bag of chips from a vending machine
 and strolls over to the Receptionist.

ORDERLY
 Rich bitch witch with a weirdo
 past? What's not to love?

MO (40s), sassy African-American diva, buzzed hair and
 hashtag-go-girl 'tude, heads to a sandwich machine.

RECEPTIONIST
 Merritt's creepy. Though not as
 creepy as that Doctor Wise.

ORDERLY
 (as if quoting from film)
 "I see burnt people."

A MALE NURSE edges past the Orderly.

MALE NURSE
 Don't invite her to a grill party
 or she'll try to 'heal' your
 steaks.

ORDERLY
 I don't think she's into hot
 dogs... Know what I'm sayin'?

Mo turns from the sandwich machine, a wrap in her hand.

MO
 Give her a break, dickhead. She's
 trying to revolutionize burn
 treatment. She's dedicated. I
 admire that.

She turns to the chips vending machine. The Male Nurse jabs the Orderly with his elbow. Nods towards Mo.

MALE NURSE
 (mouthing)
 I bet she wants...

He makes a scissoring gesture, two fingers on each hand.

But the Orderly is squinting at one of the TVs.

ORDERLY
 Wait, wait, turn it up, turn it up.

EXT. STREET, SEATTLE - DAY (BREAKING NEWS ON TV)

A female REPORTER stands at an intersection. The bubble lights of Police cruisers bounce off her clothes and the surroundings as she speaks to camera.

The byline below the news package reads:

Live: Pyropath killer now in Seattle?

REPORTER

Dramatic scenes outside a Queen Anne house this morning as a young woman is pulled from the raging inferno in her car, an incident that has some asking whether the so-called Pyropath killer now has Seattle in his sights.

EXT. STREET, SEATTLE - DAY (PHONE FOOTAGE)

Shaky imagery of an intense fire in the passenger compartment of an older sedan car parked in the driveway of a house (Branzino's) in Seattle's upscale Queen Anne neighborhood.

FOOTAGE VOICE #1 (V.O.)

You getting this? Jesus.

Holding a coat as protection against the blaze, a man is dragging a figure out from the driver's seat.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Seattle P.D. refused to comment on any potential connection to the recent deaths of a doctor in Boston and a lawyer in Chicago.

The phone image is zoomed-in and frozen on the man's face - it's Stanczyck who is pulling the figure from the car.

EXT. STREET, SEATTLE - DAY (BREAKING NEWS ON TV)

Onlookers gather in the street as the reporter wraps up.

REPORTER

The woman has been taken to the hospital. Sending it back to you in the studio.

One of the onlookers is Goldhawk. Looking stunned.

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - DAY

Berg's already back in her huge office space, watching the same TV news report on a monitor.

The rows of desks are slowly filling up with arriving workers, all ages and genders, each wearing an I.P. protection collar, LEDs throbbing. No chatter or interaction.

With a sharp notification sound, a new window barges in over the news footage. It's Lauren in her own 'office'. Angry.

LAUREN (V.O.)
(from monitor)
Tell me this was you last night.

BERG
Uh. We might have had a Branzino issue developing. Needed a fix. That was the daughter.

INTERCUT LAUREN AND BERG AS NEEDED

LAUREN (V.O.)
"Nothing to worry about"? You know I would not have used... she was just a girl, for Christ's sake... Not much older than Melody...

BERG
Branzino may have removed sensitive material from the building before we sequestered him. He left her a message accusing you.

LAUREN (V.O.)
You interrogated him yourself on his last day, Berg. Right before we erased him.

BERG
There was no memory of such activity on his part. I probed very thoroughly. I took the decision to break this chain before it caused difficulties. That is my job.

Lauren is now equal parts angry and upset.

LAUREN (V.O.)
But... the Pyro path, Berg? Didn't you have something less likely to set off a media storm?

Berg shakes her head. She casts an eye over her floor filling with strangely passive 'knowledge workers'.

BERG
We only have one active beta asset in Seattle at the moment, and only the one validated protocol.

(MORE)

BERG (CONT'D)

I didn't want to risk something untested. I shall sign off additional protocols shortly.

LAUREN (V.O.)

Will I have the full-function user interface available at launch? No last-minute glitches? We have literally thousands of events to manage in the first wave.

BERG

Ja. You will have it, Lauren.

INT. HOSPITAL, ERICA'S LAB - DAY

Small but well-equipped. Computer monitors show code. Two centrifuges whir. A modified 3-D printer sits unused, LEDs flashing. Erica sits at one monitor.

Something beeps; Erica surfaces from what's inside her head. She rubs her abdomen.

Hospital intercom messages chatter in the background as the centrifuges spin down to a halt. Erica smiles.

ERICA

After all this time.

She removes vials from one of the centrifuges. Pipettes yellowish plasma into a tray's many tiny dimples. Pushes the tray onto the 3-D printer's flatbed. Puts on a pair of laser-blocking glasses. Hits a key.

The head of the 3-D printer starts to dash back and forth. It flashes brilliant pulses of green light as it moves over the tray. They light up the room just as the door begins to open.

ERICA (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Laser! Five-thirty-two nanometer!

MO, already wearing suitable protective glasses, sashays round the door and closes it behind her. Waves the wrap.

MO

Food. This another run?

ERICA

Just a tweak. It worked, Mo.

Erica turns round. Her glasses, Mo's glasses and the room walls sparkle with laser reflections.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Complete reversion of the tissue
damage overnight.

MO
You're kidding.

ERICA
Just checking that the bi-layers
are stabilizing after the encoding.

Mo rests her hand on Erica's shoulder. Protective.

MO
Got anywhere left to inject them?
Need any help with that?

ERICA
I'll find somewhere. And, thanks
but... well, you know...

MO
The staff here doesn't understand
what drives you, because you never
explain what or why. Speaking of
which, Harris is on the warpath.
Something about 'Cell' magazine.

ERICA
He'll drag medicine back to the
Middle Ages. If not earlier.

Mo takes a deep breath. Clasps Erica's shoulders more firmly.
The rate of green laser flashes speeds up.

MO
Hey. Your dream, right? Don't let
an old man define you. Nobody can
do what you can do with stem cells.
Right? Nobel prize. One day.

Mo glances again at the printer. Places the wrap and a bag of
chips in front of Erica. Reverses back round the door.

MO (CONT'D)
You know, you can be a bit hard to--

Erica raises her head at the emergency alert sound.

INTERCOM (V.O.)
(from intercom speaker)
Critical burn victim incoming,
eighty percent. Urgent...

INT. HOSPITAL, EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Flanking a gurney, a noisy scrum of medical staff flies through the double doors, followed by Stanczyck, who's got scorch marks and red blotches on his face.

A body lies on the gurney, unmoving, drips and tubes criss-crossing, as this seething mass of people slides to a halt in a medical booth. A doctor continues CPR.

A FEMALE NURSE pushes Stanczyck away, shouting.

FEMALE NURSE
Signs still negative... And get
this guy out of the way...

A DOCTOR in scrubs shakes his head. Reaches in as the Female Nurse pulls out pieces of burnt clothing that have been cut away. This is a bad one. There's a faint continuous tone.

FEMALE NURSE (CONT'D) DOCTOR
Why are we losing her? Another ten milligrams ...

Still in her protective glasses, Erica brakes to a halt at the back of the crowd, almost knocking Stanczyck over.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
I'm calling it--

The continuous tone is louder. Erica pushes forward.

ERICA
Get me some blood--

The Doctor turns round, puts his hand up to stop her.

DOCTOR
You're too late, Doctor Wise.

ERICA
I know how to save--

It's Jenny on the gurney. Erica freezes as she sees.

DOCTOR
She's already gone.
(off no response)
Doctor, she's dead.

Erica implodes. Collapses against the Doctor.

INT. HOSPITAL, DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Snapping back to reality, Erica stands in the doorway looking at Hospital Director and unreconstructed man-bear Fred HARRIS (60). He affects gentle surprise when he notices her.

HARRIS

Ah. Sit down, Doctor Wise.

Erica pulls the solitary chair in the interrogation zone of his desk back a couple of feet, and sits. Harris drops into his own plump, upholstered senior-guy chair.

HARRIS (CONT'D)

The Board have asked me to focus on practical medicine here, not blue-sky research. Your... obsessive tinkering is not working for them. And there are other things we need your lab space for.

ERICA

Translation: the janitor wants his cupboard back. Forget heal the sick, just mop the floors.

HARRIS

Combative doesn't help, Doctor.

She takes a deep breath. Still dazed.

ERICA

A girl just died in front of me. I've just proven the tools that could have saved her, given time. I'm breaking new ground. And I'm... working hard to be better.

Harris lowers his hands to the table.

HARRIS

I want you to take some time out, Doctor Wise. We could try to find somewhere where you'd... fit in. Somewhere that tolerates your fantasy stuff, what do you call it?

ERICA

APPS. Algorithmic Programming of Pluripotent Stem Cells. It's the future of cellular medicine.

HARRIS

Well. Cell, the magazine of the present of cellular medicine, thought your latest paper was flaky nonsense, which is why you're not in the special issue. Laser-printing computer code onto stem cells? Made us a laughing stock.

ERICA

Harris, it has so much potential. Skin is just the start. Heart muscle. Brain cells, even...

Erica pauses, in thought. Harris pounces.

HARRIS

Show me one person you saved. One medical bill you reduced. One conference session you bossed. I have no idea why you even came to Seattle. You... you need to know when it's time to give up.

Erica slumps. Pleading now.

ERICA

But...

Harris closes his eyes. Passes judgment from on high.

HARRIS

No. I need doctors. Not dreamers.

EXT. MERRITT GARDEN, 1998 - DAY (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

Silent wind tumbles leaves across the back yard lawn as a scene unfolds behind the house's closed double patio doors.

Dressed up against the wind, deaf scrap-of-a-girl (as in earlier photo) MELODY Merritt (11) watches from the grass.

Young Lauren and Young Erica are arguing. Their body language tells us - and Melody - all we need to know.

Young Lauren stands straight, confident, filling the space around her. Controlling and dismissive. Beating Young Erica down.

Young Erica is crumpled, bewildered. She tries to get responses but she is swatted away by Young Lauren with supercilious ease.

Young Erica holds her hand out, fingertips splayed, desperate for physical contact, for a way back...

Young Lauren shakes her head. Raises a talk-to-the-hand palm. Then lowers her palm, holding it out.

Young Erica pulls a key-ring from her jeans. Gives it to Young Lauren.

Young Lauren points to the garden beyond the doors.

Young Erica looks crushed. Tears stream down her face, the muscles tightening in a final attempt to elicit sympathy.

Please...

Young Lauren stabs her fingers to confirm. Mouths one word, visible to the (lip-reading) Melody:

Go.

Racked with grief, Young Erica slides the patio door open, shuffles out, barely able to put one foot in front of the other. She slides the door closed.

Melody runs over to her.

MELODY

(signing)

What's wrong, Erica?

YOUNG ERICA

(signing)

I have to leave.

MELODY

(signing)

Don't go, I love having you around.

YOUNG ERICA

(signing)

But she doesn't. Not any more.

As they hug, a fiery look builds in Young Erica's eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL, CORRIDOR - DAY

Moist-eyed, Erica walks down the corridor. She sniffs and wipes her face when she sees Stanczyck, leaning forward on a plastic chair, hands pressed as in prayer. He looks up.

STANCZYCK
Sit with me, doctor?

Dressings and white ointment on his face and hands. His clothes are scorched. Erica sits down next to him.

STANCZYCK (CONT'D)
Looks like you knew the girl.

ERICA
I don't believe she could do that.

Erica stares at the floor, overcome.

STANCZYCK
She?

ERICA
Lauren Merritt. Of all the things to do to such a young girl, not that.

Stanczyck twists towards her, puzzled.

STANCZYCK
There's no connection to Lauren Merritt here. Why do you say that?

Erica sniffs, clearing her sinuses.

ERICA
I saw Jenny this morning. She finds a message from her father, saying that Lauren Merritt would take drastic steps to stop him revealing some plan of hers. And a few hours later, Jenny's dead?

Stanczyck makes a T with fingers on palm.

STANCZYCK
Time out. Please, we'll need a statement about what the girl told you. But it's a coincidence. Just a tragic old-car accident.

Erica rubs her face. Shakes her head.

ERICA
Definitely wasn't an accident.

She leans over. Sniffs again, this time to smell Stanczyck.

ERICA (CONT'D)
You need to shower.

STANCZYCK
(annoyed)
I'm sorry, yes, I probably do.
Fatal fire, one; Right Guard, zero.

ERICA
I mean you need to shower right now
or you'll get deep chemical burns
that will be hard to heal.

She sniffs again. Wrinkles her nose. Shuts her eyes.

EXT. WASTE GROUND, 1998 - DAY (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

Dark clouds scud across a grey sky. Building rubble and trash
are spread around. Windy, desolate and deserted.

Flick... Flick... Young Erica's lighter catches. The flame
dances in the wind.

She plays the flame on the corner of a photograph of her and
Young Lauren. The photo starts to burn. She drops it. Stamps
on it. Angry crying.

She picks up a bottle. Walks over to a wicker basket.

A loud miaow emerges from within.

YOUNG ERICA
Sorry, Vulcan.

She pours the contents of the bottle over the basket. The
mewing intensifies. She pulls out another photo of Young
Lauren.

ERICA (V.O.)
One-nitrobutane. Easy to transport.
Not too volatile. Self-oxidizing.
Quick temperature rise when
ignited. Only one significant use.

Flick... Flick... and this photo ignites, surface blistering.

STANCZYCK (V.O.)
And what's that?

She drops the burning photo on the basket.

With a violent rush, the fluid on the basket roars into hissing flame. The mewling becomes a scream. Then stops.

ERICA (V.O.)
Arson.

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - DAY

Each desk is now occupied. Monitors show code, schematics or content clips. No-one talks.

Berg stares at a blog post with the headline:

Is Streamweavr Really a Nightmare? By EyeOfTheHawk

Lauren's face, eyes down, pops onto another of Berg's monitors. Lauren's in her own 'office' space, also reading.

LAUREN (V.O.)
(on monitor)
Reading this?

BERG
Ja.

INTERCUT LAUREN AND BERG AS NEEDED

LAUREN (V.O.)
You know what to do.

BERG
Already planned. Same method.

Berg looks down at a folder on her desk.

BERG (CONT'D)
The woman who visited the Branzino girl was a Doctor Erica Wise.

Lauren's head swivels up to glare straight at her monitor.

LAUREN (V.O.)
(to herself)
Erica... Why are you here? For me?

BERG
You know her?

LAUREN (V.O.)
I fucked her. Brittle Southern
Belle with a crush. Long time ago.
We broke up.

The image of Lauren's face disappears from the display on Berg's monitor as Lauren moves out of camera view.

BERG
Is this another problem? I can--

LAUREN (V.O.)
Get me up to date on her. I'm going
to reach out to our friends in
Seattle P.D. and the press.

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT, CAP'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Captain 'CAP' Aherne (50) is a small, wiry Asian-American woman, blunt by nature and wearing the toughness of someone who fought her way up the ranks.

She looks at the speakerphone on her desk.

LAUREN (V.O.)
(from speakerphone)
... shocked at what has happened.
So young, and the daughter of one
of my most trusted colleagues,
himself suddenly brought so low.
But we're concerned that this might
be part of a larger plan to
sabotage the Streamweavr launch.
I'd like Seattle P.D. to keep an
eye on this.

CAP
Of course, Miss Merritt.

LAUREN (V.O.)
Now, it's been brought to my
attention that you have Detective
Al Stanczyck on your staff.

CAP
That's correct. He's a fine
detective. Is there an issue?

LAUREN (V.O.)

On the contrary. Detective Stanczyck was a junior officer in New Haven back in 98 and was instrumental in helping to apprehend the terrorist. I'd very much like you to assign this investigation to him.

CAP

Fine by me. Can I do anything else at this time?

LAUREN (V.O.)

No. Thank you for your cooperation, Captain Aherne.

INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT, LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Erica places a glass of wine on a low 2-drawer filing cabinet secured with a combination lock. She enters the combination.

Necks the whole contents of the glass. Bites a fingernail.

Lifts a bottle from the drawer. The label reads:

1-nitrobutane C4H9NO2 highly flammable / toxic / KEEP COLD!

She strokes the bottle. Sniffs. Nods at some memory.

ERICA

You wanted to punish anyone,
Lauren, it should have been me.

She returns the bottle to the drawer. Rubs her face.

ERICA (CONT'D)

(into her hands)

And... why Jenny's dad, anyway?

She snaps her eyes open.

ERICA (CONT'D)

He can't even look after himself...
Oh, heck...

EXT. BACK YARD, SOUTH SEATTLE - NIGHT

Goldhawk sits at his garden table, phone held close to his mouth. He's fuming with anger.

GOLDHAWK

So she got to The Times, too.

DALIA (V.O.)

(from phone)

There's nothing I can do, Will. My boss has explicitly forbidden publishing any material from you. All I can do is--

GOLDHAWK

I've rattled her, Dalia. No smoke without fire. You'll see.

EXT. BRANZINO HOUSE - NIGHT

As seen in the phone footage, the large house in Queen Anne, one of the older, classier neighborhoods of Seattle.

ERICA

Mister Branzino? Troy?

Erica bangs on the front door. She's attracted the attention of an older, grouchy next-door NEIGHBOR, who's stuck their head round their own door. Erica notices. She shouts over.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Have you seen Mister Branzino? Or his housekeeper?

NEIGHBOR

Went on a walk a while back.

ERICA

Isn't anyone looking out for him round here? Didn't you think...?

NEIGHBOR

He can go for a walk whenever he wants. None of my business, lady.

Erica shakes her head in disgust.

ERICA

(to herself)

His daughter just died, you jerk.
(projecting)

Do you have any idea where he would have gone?

NEIGHBOR

Maybe to the park. Good night.

The Neighbor shuts their front door.

ERICA
Which park?

She looks at Branzino's front door, bangs on it once more, then shouts back at the neighbor's house.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Which park?

EXT. SEATTLE PARK - NIGHT

All suburban parks look the same once it is dark.

GOOGLE NAVIGATION
(from phone)
You have arrived.

Erica turns her car to the curb and yanks the parking brake lever up with an angry tug.

ERICA
How many damn parks...?

She scans the roadway that curves round the edge of the park. Spots red car rear lights in the distance. Two figures lit by pale street-lamp glow. She starts to jog over.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Hey!

One of the figures, standing, turns away from a seated man on a bench, looks in her direction, then turns back to the man and begins to pull him from the bench.

ERICA (CONT'D)
HEY!

She breaks into a jog. As she approaches, she sees--

ERICA (CONT'D)
Troy! Mister Branzino!

-- and Branzino is half off the bench; bandage dangling from his hand, he turns sluggishly to her. The standing man tries to prop Branzino up while stretching to open the rear door...

... of the Prius seen earlier. It's Chadwick.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Leave him alone. He's a sick man.

CHADWICK
I'm just taking him back home.

Chadwick nods at the prominent Uber decals on his Prius.
Erica reaches the men. Looks at the Prius, then at Chadwick.

ERICA
I'm calling the Police.

Branzino flops back onto the bench.

CHADWICK
He likes this bench, for sure.

Erica has her phone out and is tapping the screen.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)
Doctor Wise. Don't do that.

Erica stops, finger in mid-air.

ERICA
How do you...?

CHADWICK
This *is* an Uber. And I am taking
Troy home. I needed to see where he
would go if we let him get out.

He lowers his voice.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)
Come on, Troy, bedtime.

Branzino responds. Rises from the bench. Looks at Erica.
Erica swallows hard. Glances at Chadwick.

ERICA
Does he... know yet?

Chadwick shrugs. Grabs Branzino.

CHADWICK
Do me a favor, Doctor Wise.

He hands a small LED flashlight to Erica--

CHADWICK (CONT'D)
Check out that bench carefully.

-- and heaves Branzino into the rear seat of the Prius.

ERICA

What do you mean, check out? Who are you?

CHADWICK

Then meet me back at Troy's house.

ERICA

Wait!

Chadwick gets into the Prius--

CHADWICK

No.

-- and the Prius whines away.

ERICA

What the fuck.

She looks at the flashlight. Clicks the button on the base. Is immediately dazzled by the powerful beam.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Ow. Fucksake!

She points it at the bench. Three cast concrete uprights, with decaying wood slats connecting them.

She sits down on the bench. Places a hand on a slat--

ERICA (CONT'D)

Ugh.

-- and pulls off a wad of bright green gum. Still sticky.

She plays the flashlight beam over the bench. More, older pieces of the same gum are pressed into cracks in the wood.

ERICA (CONT'D)

His chair...

She starts to pick off the pieces of gum. One, two--

-- and on removing the third one, she spots something pushed into the rotting grain of the wood. Just a small black line, a faint streak of man-made material in the brown decay.

She bends out the flashlight's metal clip and levers the small black thing out of the wood.

It's a MicroSD memory card.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Well I'll be damned.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Chadwick stands in this well-equipped high-end kitchen, contemplating the coffee machine. Old and mysterious, it's already ticking and hissing as it warms up.

Erica and Yelland stand at a table, listening to Yelland's phone playing out audio of Branzino's message.

BRANZINO (V.O.)
(echo-y, from phone)
... she'll not let me stop her now.
She'll prevent me going public,
somehow. I've done what I can. But
whatever happens... I love you so
much, Jenny.

Erica takes a deep breath. Crosses her arms. Turns to Chadwick as he spoons coffee into the machine's handle and tamps it down, his back to her.

CHADWICK
We've given Troy something to help
him sleep.

YELLAND
And disabled Somnetix's bugs.

He fixes the handle to the machine's head, fumbling a little.

ERICA
You need to move the steam spout.
The machine's bust.

Chadwick gives her a look. Moves the spout to the side.

CHADWICK
We didn't know you were so close to
Jenny Branzino. Interesting.
Vestigial maternal instinct? Don't
worry, we're well aware of how you
identify, not an issue.

ERICA
How very generous of you.

He pulls a small lever. An old, dim bulb lights up - and steam bursts from the spout for a second as the machine hums into action. Then coffee starts dribbling into the cup.

CHADWICK

Huh. Good call. Thanks.

The machine finishes dribbling. He sniffs the cup.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

I think you found something on the bench and you've gone all *quid pro quo*. Crossed arms are quite a tell.

The glowing bulb on the machine fades out.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

But you don't know how to bluff, and that makes you hard to read.

ERICA

Did you get the psychobabble from the "How to be a Good Uber Driver" manual? And the blasé attitude to girls getting killed and their fathers getting their brains fried?

Chadwick takes a tentative sip.

CHADWICK

Pushback is healthy, Doctor Wise. I'm very sorry about the girl, but to be frank, there's a bigger picture here and it centers around Troy Branzino and Lauren Merritt. And I need your help.

ERICA

Bit late for help, don't you think?

CHADWICK

You were laid off at the hospital. Tough times. This was a job interview, Doctor. I'm your new boss. Chadwick, pleased to meet you. So let's talk about what you found.

(beat; sips coffee)

Good news! You now work for the U.S. Government.

Chadwick downs the rest of the espresso.

ERICA

And the bad news?

CHADWICK
(as if it's obvious)
You now work for the U.S.
Government.

INT. STANCZYCK'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Stanczyck sits at the kitchen counter, tapped out by the day's events, half-empty beer and a sandwich by him. Dot is fussing round, worried but relieved.

DOT
Honey, you sure you're OK?

Stanczyck picks up the beer.

DOT (CONT'D)
I've seen the footage on TV. Your
raincoat is almost burnt through.

Dot points at the kitchen TV, even though the image on it right now has nothing to do with earlier events.

STANCZYCK
Didn't save her though, did I.

He drains his beer.

DOT
You tried, honey... they say the
M.O. matches those other two recent
deaths. That Pyropath. It's bad.

STANCZYCK
How did he do it without being
seen? No witnesses, no cameras. And
it can only have been lit for a
short time when I... when I got
there. I don't even remember why I
took that route today.

Dot pushes the sandwich to him. He pushes it away.

DOT
You need to unwind. How about you
spend some more time with Meg
tonight, honey, I don't mind.

Normally this would raise a smile. He just shakes his head.

STANCZYCK
Not watching tonight. My head's
frazzled. Just need sleep.

DOT
It's the shock, honey. What else
would it be?

INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mo walks in past Erica, who wrinkles her eyes as she closes
the front door.

MO
Well you look like shit.

Erica can't find the right words to string together.

ERICA
Complicated day. It brought some...
stuff back.

MO
Sorry. I'm so sorry. For the girl,
for your work... I'm here for you.
Whenever you need me.

Erica nods, distracted.

Mo sighs. Points to Erica's abdomen.

MO (CONT'D)
You're tired. Do you want some help
to get your dressings changed?

Erica looks guilty and upset in equal measure.

MO (CONT'D)
Please tell me you put dressings on
the rest of your burns.

ERICA
Does it matter? Harris will already
have had my lab cleared out. No
chance of doing more work now.

MO
The asshole even asked me to help.

Erica looks puzzled. Mo looks around the apartment.

MO (CONT'D)
It'll make more sense tomorrow.
Come on. Dressings.

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT, CAP'S OFFICE - DAY

Stanczyck sits opposite Cap, as close to the edge of the seat as he can get without launching himself off it. He plays with a cigarillo from his packet, frustration showing.

CAP

Look, there's nothing pointing to Somnetix or to Lauren Merritt.

STANCZYCK

If what the girl told Doctor Wise about Merritt and Troy Branzino is accurate, it could be a motive to eliminate evidence.

Cap looks at a monitor.

CAP

Look, Stan. Sure, there was a camera in the car. I'll admit that's consistent with the doctor's statement. But it's burnt to a crisp. If it contained any evidence, it's gone now.

Cap twists her monitor aside.

CAP (CONT'D)

Second... do you really think Lauren Merritt, the C.E.O. of Seattle's best-loved company, has this Pyropath on speed-dial, huh? "Hey, got a great gig for you here, come burn up some of our kids, it'll be a fun day out!" I do not think so, Detective.

Stanczyck jams the tip of the cigarillo in his mouth.

CAP (CONT'D)

What Merritt's been through, weird cult upbringing, family tragedy? People lap up such human stuff. What scares everyone now is that the Pyropath has come to Seattle. Work that angle.

Stanczyck nods, in resignation rather than agreement.

CAP (CONT'D)

You're shook up, Stan. Take it easy. Don't stir things up. Waste of time. Now get out of here.

INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - DAY

Erica, bleary in pajamas, makes coffee in the kitchen.

There's a loud pounding on the front door.

She slouches over to the door. Unbolts and opens it.

A red-faced FEDEX GUY stands there, next to a tapering, top-heavy tower of large cardboard packing boxes. Sweat patches are already breaking through his uniform.

FEDEX GUY
Miss Erica Wise?

ERICA
Uh-huh. What's this?

FEDEX GUY
Heavy. Sign here.

She scrawls a signature on his beat-up tablet.

ERICA
Who sent them?

The FedEx guy strains as he lifts the top box from the pile, swings round, and barges through the door past Erica.

FEDEX GUY
A sadist.

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - DAY

Surrounded by silent workers, Berg sits at her desk. One of her monitors shows a picture of Erica, another some old, scratchily-scanned document in negative microfiche view.

On another monitor, Lauren's gaze is armed and ready to fire.

LAUREN (V.O.)
What do you mean, he didn't connect up? It's in the damn beta tester contract: you must dream-stream every night. People! You can't trust them. This is exactly why I need Streamweavr. To fix all this stupid, once and for all.

BERG
We still have one day in hand.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Polished concrete work surfaces, smoky nickel appliances, a cost-no-object luxe kitchen. Lauren stirs something white and gloopy in a beaker as she glowers at a thin monitor held above the counter on an articulated arm.

INTERCUT LAUREN AND BERG AS NEEDED

LAUREN

Goldhawk posted another blog.
Pathetic, but he makes damaging
allegations. Neutralize this
threat, Alexandra. I shouldn't need
to micromanage. Get rid of him.

Lauren contemplates the beaker with a quick, sad look.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

So make sure there's something the
cop will definitely select tonight.

She drinks from the beaker. Swallows. Grimaces.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

I will not have anyone disrupting
my launch. I'm the disrupter around
here. Clear?

EXT. SEATTLE CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Chewing the tip of his lit cigarillo, Stanczyck pushes his way through thick pedestrian crowds, up the stairs to the doors of the Convention Center for the Streamweavr party.

A SECURITY GUY watches him approach.

SECURITY GUY

Gotta put that out, sir. Seattle
law. Public space.

Stanczyck stops. About to say something... then pulls the cigarillo from his mouth, drops it. Grinds it on the ground.

SECURITY GUY (CONT'D)

Thank you for keeping Seattle
healthy, sir. Have a nice day.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER CONCOURSE - DAY

Squeezed onto the escalator with an eager, mixed crowd, Erica looks at Goldhawk's business card:

Will Goldhawk / Tech & Social Issues / EyeOfTheHawk.com

The hall is packed, with people streaming down corridors towards presentation rooms and demonstrations. A rotating Somnetix logo sculpture has been suspended from the ceiling.

A hand taps Erica on the shoulder. She turns. It's Goldhawk.

GOLDHAWK

Will Goldhawk. Recognized you from your LinkedIn profile picture.

ERICA

That's a little stalker-ish.

Goldhawk shrugs. Nods over to a quieter area by the windows. They push through the crowd of prospective Streamweavr users.

GOLDHAWK

Thesis: Lauren Merritt had Jenny Branzino murdered, after she found out about Troy Branzino's message.

ERICA

How could Lauren... Merritt have known about the message?

GOLDHAWK

Oh, I bet they installed 'aids' in the house to make caring for Branzino easier after he'd gotten ill.

Erica nods. Joining some dots.

ERICA

To keep an eye on him. Make sure nothing surfaced.

Goldhawk scans around, checking for eavesdroppers.

GOLDHAWK

Uh-huh. Because Merritt took Troy Branzino out. She knows I'm on to her. She's trying to shut me down.

Goldhawk lowers his voice, moves closer.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)

Years back, the CIA used two neuro-tech consultancies, one run by Merritt, the other by Branzino. Continuing their mind control research from back in the Sixties.

Erica sighs.

ERICA

Mind control. She's certainly an expert at that.

GOLDHAWK

Yuh. Doesn't it strike you as alarming that Streamweavr uses the same transcranial electromagnetic stimulation as the CIA? That's where the two first worked together. She had a big falling out with them. Recruited Branzino for Somnetix. But you know her?

Erica shrinks toward the glass to let a particularly dense group of people past. She's wistful.

ERICA

She made me what I am today, in a way... Oh, hello, Detective.

Stanczyck walks up to them.

STANCZYCK

Hope I'm not interrupting.

ERICA

Changing your mind about Lau... Merritt?

STANCZYCK

Not working today, doctor. Just here out of personal interest.

Erica introduces the two men.

ERICA

Goldhawk, Detective Stanczyck. He pulled Jenny Branzino from her car.

GOLDHAWK

Ah. Seattle P.D., interesting.

Stanczyck yawns.

STANCZYCK
Can we get some coffee?

INT. CONVENTION CENTER COFFEE AREA - DAY

Just as crowded as the other conference areas, but here people are also cranky and desperate for caffeine. Stanczyck drinks from a cup with a prominent ARISE! logo.

GOLDHAWK
You do know that Arise is one of Somnetix's shadow brands? Merritt's dig at the local guys, for sure.

Goldhawk raises his own Starbucks cup.

STANCZYCK
Can't say I did. It's the...

Stanczyck seems to surprise himself as he speaks.

STANCZYCK (CONT'D)
... coffee I always dreamed of.

Goldhawk turns to Erica.

GOLDHAWK
Anyway. I'm sure Streamweavr will be used not only for hypnotainment but also for hypnovertizing.
(off Erica's blank look)
Advertising into your dreams.

Stanczyck looks at his coffee cup.

STANCZYCK
It's not that kind of company.

GOLDHAWK
But what if they can tweak the signal so you can't remember what they send while you sleep? They could fill your head with whatever they like, you'd just wake up, hi honey, and go about your day without knowing you've been brainwashed, or even worse.

ERICA
You can't keep that kind of thing quiet. Whistle-blowing.

Goldhawk shakes his head in frustration.

GOLDHAWK

Branzino would likely have been the only person who really knew what was going on. That's why Merritt would deal with him vigorously, if he got cold feet. Use their own mind control tech to stop him leaking, like they use on the rest of the employees there.

STANCZYCK

But how can a company stop people knowing what they do at work?

Goldhawk looks around. Tips his head at one particular group.

GOLDHAWK

I've been digging. You hit a wall. They have some way of preventing their tech people from talking about their work in any detail.

ERICA

Maybe they are just super-loyal?

GOLDHAWK

Look, watch. Their marketing guys come off as dumb as rocks whenever I've talked to them.

Goldhawk stands. Gestures to two bland hipsters, in Somnetix corporate polo shirts, chatting to a group of students.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)

Guys! Eye Of The Hawk dot com. Come over, talk to us about Streamweavr.

The Somnetix MARKETING GUYS #1 and #2 make good-natured farewells to the students, and step over.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)

We were trying to figure out how you guys will get away with your hidden agenda of mind control under the guise of a high-class straight-to-brain streaming service.

MARKETING GUY #1

Wow. That's out there.

MARKETING GUY #2

Intense.

Erica leans in, deciding to play along. What the hell.

ERICA

And maybe if Streamweavr could still influence people after they wake up. Without them knowing.

MARKETING GUY #2

Well, we're just marketing guys, we don't know anything about... you know... influencing people.

Stanczyck sniffs, absentmindedly, at his sleeve.

MARKETING GUY #1

Hidden agenda? Sounds sketch to me.

MARKETING GUY #2

Not on-brand for us at Somnetix.

Erica shakes her head.

ERICA

I really want to believe that.

MARKETING GUY #1

Let us clarify. At The Cube, it's all about the nineteenth floor.

MARKETING GUY #2

That's the boundary.

MARKETING GUY #1

Up to the nineteenth floor, we do logistics, contracts, content deals. We don't know tech.

MARKETING GUY #2

Don't need to. Distracting.

MARKETING GUY #1

So if we leave Somnetix--

MARKETING GUY #2

Though why would we do that? It's such a great place to work. We're hiring, folks, by the way!

MARKETING GUY #1

-- we can't take away anything more confidential than how much we pay for our printer paper.

MARKETING GUY #2

Above the nineteenth floor, they manage users, develop algorithms...

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - DAY

The boiler room is in full flow, every desk occupied by a programmer wearing an I.P protection collar.

MARKETING GUY #1 (V.O.)
Write and produce exclusive content
for the Streamweavr platform.

But it's not coked-up traders yelling at each other. Each person quietly types or manipulates on-screen objects.

MARKETING GUY #2 (V.O.)
And render that content so it looks
like the highest resolution display
you ever saw, when you dream.

Some of the screens show footage resembling first-person video game play. Some quite violent.

MARKETING GUY #1 (V.O.)
But there's no-one from above the
nineteenth floor at the conference.
Miss Merritt wouldn't allow it.

Berg walks the rows and columns of the array of desks, checking on the outputs of her team.

MARKETING GUY #2 (V.O.)
Lovely woman though she is, no she
would not. And nor would our Head
of Security.

The fact that many of these 'programmers' are working on something akin to 'snuff' movies seems to be completely lost on them; eyes glazed, they don't react at all...

MARKETING GUY #1 (V.O.)
And even if they were here, they
wouldn't tell you much. We're very
tight on I.P. security. Very.

... as the LEDs on their I.P. protection collars throb.

MARKETING GUY #2 (V.O.)
What happens above the nineteenth,
stays above the nineteenth!

INT. CONVENTION CENTER COFFEE AREA - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Marketing Guy #1 spreads his hands, having just clarified everything perfectly, in his view.

MARKETING GUY #1
Pretty straightforward.

MARKETING GUY #2
And just how Miss Merritt wants it.

STANCZYCK
She sounds pretty hard core.

Erica frowns.

ERICA
How does the technology work? Does
Streamweavr work the same way?

MARKETING GUY #1
No idea, of course. It was designed
by a really smart guy who worked--

MARKETING GUY #2
-- above the nineteenth
floor.

MARKETING GUY #1 (CONT'D)
-- above the nineteenth
floor.

MARKETING GUY #2 (CONT'D)
... until he got ill, poor guy. Now
if you'll excuse us, we do need to
give freebies to all these new
customers. Enjoy the party!

MARKETING GUY #1
And the coffee!

And like the high-tech world's Tweedledum & Tweedledumber,
the Marketing Guys merge back into the crowd.

Goldhawk turns to Erica and Stanczyck.

GOLDHAWK
What'd I tell you. This is the
hypnocalypse. And people will just
dream themselves right into it.

INT. FEATURELESS SPACE (ERICA'S DREAM-SCAPE)

Erica and Lauren, each with hand raised. Fingertip to
fingertip, rotating slowly, maintaining eye contact.

Erica's eyes are clearer, wilder. Loving, but needy.

They twist closer to each other, free arms curling around the
other's waist, still negotiating for an embrace. A sense that
Lauren resists slightly...

The flames are taller. Brighter. Closer. A little angrier...

INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT, LIVING AREA - DAY

Mo pushes a couch against the wall. Erica blinks, shakes her head. Lifts her 3-D printer out of a box and places it carefully on a sideboard.

MO

Well, you were going to move your furniture around anyway.

ERICA

How did you get away with this?

MO

The lazy sum-bitch in the hospital equipment department wanted to split for the Seahawks game. I said I'd do the paperwork to get the stuff over to Central... Ooof.

She slides the corner of a chair into the last patch of free area left in Erica's apartment.

MO (CONT'D)

Must've got the delivery address screwed up. Sorry not sorry.

Erica caresses another piece of equipment. Mo walks over.

MO (CONT'D)

Did I do good?

Erica turns and hugs her. It's a platonic hug, though.

ERICA

You did awesome. You're a good friend, Mo.

Mo looks slightly disappointed, maybe wanting more.

MO

Well, maybe one day you'll be able to pick up where you left--

Erica detaches herself from Mo's embrace.

ERICA

Let's set it up now. I know who my next, uh, volunteer is.

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT, CAP'S OFFICE - DAY

Stanczyck looks even more frustrated than last time. But Cap's having none of it.

CAP

That blogger's just a troublemaker. Don't go all conspiracy-theory on me, Stan. You're a better cop than that. Here, however, is something.

Cap pushes a file across the desk. It's marked Confidential.

CAP (CONT'D)

There's more to this Doctor Wise.

Stanczyck flicks through the file.

STANCZYCK

Where'd this come from?

CAP

Psych reports from when Wise was a kid. She was quite a trouble-maker. Bit of a thing for fire.

STANCZYCK

And?

CAP

Opportunity: she had access to the girl, and her trust. Weapon: clearly she had the knowledge to set a blaze like that. She spotted the accelerant on you right away.

STANCZYCK

But what possible motive could Wise have had? Doesn't make sense.

Cap reaches over, taps the file.

CAP

How about she has a 'thing' for Merritt. Could be protecting her from the girl's potential accusations. Bring Wise in, Stan.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Erica blinks. Puts down her doctor bag. Branzino is sitting in a chair, staring into space.

ERICA

Routine blood work. Check he's OK.

YELLAND

I'll let Chadwick know you're here.

Erica turns away to hide her nerves.

ERICA

Great. This won't take long. I'll walk it through the lab myself while I still have access.

Yelland walks off. Erica rolls up Branzino's shirt sleeve. Preps a small syringe. Injects Branzino in the arm.

ERICA (CONT'D)

(to Troy)

This is just to keep you calm. I get the feeling you were the kind of person who would trust me. If this works, maybe people will start listening to me. If it doesn't... I'm so sorry.

She looks around... then pulls up his shirt. She pulls on blue gloves. Pinches Branzino's abdomen. Frowns.

Takes a large liposuction syringe from her bag...

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

Lauren's in her big upholstered chair. She has a towel around her shoulders; her hair is wet.

The Woman with the isolation suit is cutting Lauren's hair. LEDs twinkle on the woman's I.P. protection collar.

Lauren's concentrating on a window on her monitor. It resembles that of an online shopping portal, except with photos of people, not products.

Lauren air-types; small flashes play over her fingers as the technology turns her movements into keystrokes. A photograph of a white-haired woman appears. Lauren wiggles her fingers. An 'Added To Cart' button brightens briefly.

Lauren types again. A wiry, grey-bearded older man appears. Another finger wiggle. Another 'Added To Cart'.

LAUREN

Domestic accident. You deserve it, you useless fool.

A second window opens up on her monitor. It's Berg.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Ah. I'm beginning to doubt your ability to manage your problem, Alexandra. I hear the cop has been snooping.

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - DAY

Berg sits to attention as Lauren rants. She wrings her hands.

INTERCUT LAUREN AND BERG AS NEEDED

BERG

He's a policeman. I presume they have suspicious minds.

LAUREN

Don't get smart with me, it doesn't suit you. What was he doing at the party with Wise and the blogger?

Berg places her hands palms-down on her desk. Relax...

BERG

I've cued up a documentary on that film Stanczyck watches so often. He will connect up tonight. Second--

LAUREN

Punishment in itself. Go on.

BERG

Second, I sent the Police Captain some revealing psychological material on Doctor Wise. From her youth. It should result in her being taken out of circulation.

LAUREN

Should?

BERG

Will. You didn't mention quite how damaged Wise once was.

LAUREN

You still think the old ways are the best, don't you. Simple misinformation and misdirection.

Berg looks over her floor of compliant slave workers.

BERG
They have their place. People don't
change as fast as technology does.

Lauren feels her hair, turns to the isolation suit Woman.

LAUREN
My hair's not going to get any
better than this. Leave.

LEDs still flashing on her I.P. protection collar, the Woman
picks up her scissors and treads cautiously away along the
path of her air hose. Lauren turns back to her monitor.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Oh, and the new interface? Not bad.
Some nice stories there. I like the
bulk upload mode. Hundreds of birds
with one stone.

She feels her hair once more. Sighs.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Soon be time to spring-clean
America's rotten head-space.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY (LATER)

Erica is back again with her doctor bag.

ERICA
Thanks for the house key.

YELLAND
Chadwick says he trusts you.

ERICA
That's a relief.

Yelland nods over towards Branzino.

YELLAND
How did the bloods come out? He
seems particularly slow today.

ERICA
He... needs a vitamin shot.

Yelland's phone makes an alarm noise.

YELLAND

Break time. Chadwick will be along
in a couple minutes.

Erica nods, rummages in her bag as Yelland leaves. Turns to Branzino, who's in his chair, oblivious. She pinches him on the arm. No response.

ERICA

Hope the Valium holds up.

She pulls out a large syringe from her bag. It has a very long, thick needle. It's full of cloudy, yellowish liquid.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Vitamins can wait.

She looks at the syringe, then at him.

ERICA (CONT'D)

They say that the way to a man's
heart is through his stomach.

She kneels on the edge of his chair. Tilts his head back.
Raises the syringe--

ERICA (CONT'D)

But it turns out that the way to a
man's brain is--

-- Erica cups the back of Branzino's head to steady it--

ERICA (CONT'D)

-- through his nose.

-- and plunges the needle deep into Branzino's nostril.

INT. BASEMENT LAB, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

Young Erica kneels on the floor. In front of her are three intricate incendiary mechanisms, each the size of a football. Pipes, burners and containers. Complicated. Precise. Lethal.

Neat, detailed sketches of those mechanisms are scattered across the floor. An empty large RUCKSACK lies nearby.

Hands gloved, she pours fluid into containers strapped to the mechanisms - and spills a little on her bare forearm.

She snatches a rag, dips it in a bowl of water. Wipes her forearm, wincing in discomfort. She tightens down the caps on the mechanisms. Sniffs her sleeve. Wrinkles her nose.

She puts each mechanism into a plastic bag. Pushes one into the rucksack. Squeezes the second one in. A tight fit.

Young Erica puts the third unit and the sketches in an old cardboard box. Pushes it against the wall. Stands, and hefts the rucksack onto her shoulder...

INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT, LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Erica and Mo both nurse glasses of wine. Erica looks morose.

MO

Penny for your thoughts?

ERICA

Lauren's involved in something. I have to find out, even if...

She turns to look at a framed photo of her and Lauren.

MO

Still have a thing for her, then. Not sure that's healthy. You won't be able to see her these days.

ERICA

What will she do if... No, I have to finish this off. I can't go on like this. Not now.

Mo takes a deep breath.

MO

You need to move on, Erica. Think of the present. I'm here. And I love you. You know that, right?

Erica sighs.

ERICA

Oh, Mo. You love the me you know. You don't know the me you love.

MO

Well that's profound.

ERICA

She said it. While psychoanalyzing
the "dichotomy between what you
want and why you can't have it".

MO

Her?--

Erica's phone rings. She picks up the call.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Chadwick has phone to ear as loud rattling and banging sounds
make him wince. He looks over at a bed--

-- where Branzino lies, bare-chested. His eyes stare blankly
as he convulses. Vomit slides down his cheek. One side of his
face is crusted with blood.

A NURSE injects into the saline bag on the stand by the bed.
A Doctor THUMPS Branzino's chest with defibrillation paddles.
Stares at the vital signs monitor with a frown. Yelland tries
to keep drips and an oral tube in place with the motion.

INTERCUT ERICA AND CHADWICK AS NEEDED

CHADWICK

(into phone)

What the fuck did you do?

ERICA

Do?

Chadwick rolls his eyes.

CHADWICK

No way was that a vitamin shot.

ERICA

Thought it might... help.

STAY ON ERICA IN APARTMENT

CHADWICK (V.O.)

(on phone)

Help? Help? How--

-- and there's a pounding on Erica's front door.

Mo opens the door. Stanczyck, and a uniformed FEMALE OFFICER.

STANCZYCK
Is Doctor Wise here?

MO
She's busy.

ERICA
(into phone)
Hang on.

STANCZYCK
May we come in?

MO
Not without a warrant.

Stanczyck produces a warrant.

CHADWICK (V.O.)
Get here right now.

Stanczyck steps in, walks towards Erica.

ERICA
(to Stanczyck)
Can I help, Detective?

Stanczyck sighs.

STANCZYCK
Doctor Erica Wise--

ERICA
(into phone)
Uh... I may not be able to.

STANCZYCK
-- I'm arresting you on suspicion
of the murder of Jenny Branzino.

RESUME INTERCUT ERICA AND CHADWICK AS NEEDED

CHADWICK
Why the fuck not?

ERICA
I've just been arrested for murder.

CHADWICK
Oh, Jeeesus.

RETURN TO ERICA IN APARTMENT

FEMALE OFFICER
 (to Erica)
 Your phone.

Erica looks at her phone. Hands it to the Female Officer.

FEMALE OFFICER (CONT'D)
 You have the right to remain
 silent. Anything you say can and
 will be used against you in a court
 of law. You have the right to an
 attorney. If you cannot afford an
 attorney, one will be provided for
 you.

STANCZYCK
 I'm sorry, Doctor Wise.

The Female Officer holds up hand-cuffs. Gives Stanczyck a sharp 'we must do this by the book' look.

STANCZYCK (CONT'D)
 Just take it from here.

FEMALE OFFICER
 I'll send forensics up. What are
 they looking for, Stan?

STANCZYCK
 Anything... Pyropathological.

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT, STANCZYCK'S DESK - DAY

Stanczyck leans forward on his desk, chin in hands, watching his computer monitor. It plays a YouTube documentary on Lauren Merritt. He looks tired.

On the monitor, shots of the Merritt house. It's on fire.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (V.O.)
 ... defining moment in Lauren
 Merritt's life, the terrorist
 attack that maimed her and killed
 her young sister, Melody.

Stanczyck's tired eyes drift shut...

EXT. MERRITT NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE, 1998 - DAY (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

... carrying the rucksack, Officer YOUNG STANCZYCK walks up the front path, alongside his partner, Officer CLARKSON.

The flashing red lights of nearby Fire Department appliances glint off the windows of this house.

Clarkson knocks on the front door. After a moment, a swarthy man of Middle-Eastern appearance, Mohsin AL-JABHIR, appears.

YOUNG STANCZYCK
Mohsin Al-Jabhir?

AL-JABHIR
Yes.

CLARKSON
Officer Clarkson, New Haven P.D.;
this is Officer Stanczyck. That's
your F-150 out back, right?

AL-JABHIR
Is there a problem?

Stanczyck holds up the rucksack.

YOUNG STANCZYCK
Can you explain why this was in the
back of your truck?

AL-JABHIR
I have never seen that before.

Stanczyck pulls the mechanism from the rucksack.

YOUNG STANCZYCK
Can you tell us what this is?

AL-JABHIR
I have no idea.

CLARKSON
We found one in what's left of your
neighbor Lauren Merritt's house.

Al-Jabhir's lips have tightened into a flat line. Clarkson looks over Al-Jabhir's shoulder.

CLARKSON (CONT'D)
Would you mind if we came in, sir?

Al-Jabhir puts a hand on the door, begins to push it shut--

-- Clarkson's hand moves down towards his weapon--

-- Al-Jabhir draws a pistol from his jacket and fires point-blank at Clarkson, who falls back--

-- as Stanczyck drops the rucksack and reaches for his own gun, Al-Jabhir shoots at him--

-- the first shot hits Stanczyck in the right shoulder, the momentum twisting him away from the line of fire--

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT, STANCZYCK'S DESK - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

-- and Stanczyck jerks awake and rubs his right shoulder. The documentary is still playing.

On the monitor, seen from overhead, a man shelters behind the door of a truck as Police cruisers, their bubble lights blazing red and blue, slew to a halt nearby.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (V.O.)

After a high-speed chase, Al-Jabhir was cornered and shot. Police searched his house and found weapons and bomb-making equipment--

Stanczyck's desk phone rings. He pauses the video.

GOLDHAWK (V.O.)

(over speakerphone)

I... wouldn't normally say this to a cop, but I really need someone to trust right now. I don't know why no-one else is seeing this.

STANCZYCK

What do you want me to say?

GOLDHAWK (V.O.)

(over speakerphone)

Look, I'm shunned as a Merritt denier wherever I go. You can say God doesn't exist, CO2 is not important or that the Seahawks are a terrible team, most people just roll their eyes and tolerate you. Say there's something bad about Merritt and it's like you're drop-kicking babies into a blast furnace. But it's Merritt behind these deaths. I have reliable evidence. Can we meet?

Officer WILSON (40s), sturdy Police stalwart, walks up, holding a package. Signals to Stanczyck to mute the call.

STANCZYCK
Gimme a moment.

He holds the call. Wilson nods towards the phone.

WILSON
Goldhawk, the blogger, right?

Stanczyck nods.

WILSON (CONT'D)
Just in. Phone records show he was in the vicinity of Jenny Branzino shortly before she died. She had called him.

STANCZYCK
That makes him a suspect too.

Wilson hands over the package.

WILSON
And BTW you do know Cap gets mad when we get online purchases delivered to the station, right?

He opens the line as Wilson walks off 'tsk'-ing.

STANCZYCK
(into phone)
Meet where?

GOLDHAWK (V.O.)
(over speakerphone)
Behind Charlatan's. The bar.

Stanczyck clears the call. Looks down at a photograph on his desk, stamped EVIDENCE, of a familiar incendiary mechanism.

He picks up his pack of cigarillos.

STANCZYCK
(to himself)
Wise has the same type of device used to burn down Merritt's house. If she had wanted to kill Merritt then, why would she be trying to protect her now--

-- and his phone makes the Somnetix sound; he looks down--

-- eyes glazing over, he reaches for the package...

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT, CAP'S OFFICE - DAY

Cap puts her telephone down. Looks between Chadwick and Erica. Wilson stands at the door.

CAP
You have influential friends,
Mister Chadwick.

CHADWICK
Not friends, Captain Aherne.

Cap nods at Wilson.

CAP
We're releasing Doctor Wise to
Mister Chadwick's custody. Bring
the forms, Wilson.

Wilson nods. Leaves the office.

CAP (CONT'D)
This is very irregular. Especially
with Stan not here.

CHADWICK
Doctor Wise here is my expert on
pyromania. She has--

Chadwick gives Erica a pointed look. She looks down.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)
-- an extensive collection of
souvenirs from past cases. I'm
sorry for the confusion this
caused. Come on, Doctor, let's go.

Chadwick steps over to the door.

CAP
I pushed Stan to make the arrest.
Merritt is... influential around
here, Mister Chadwick. I'm sorry if
I wasted your time.

ERICA
One more thing. I smelled fresh one-
nitrobutane on Detective Stanczyck
at the hospital.

CAP

The accelerant. He got that on his clothes when he pulled the Branzino girl from the burning car.

ERICA

He couldn't have. What was in the car would have vaporized and combusted in seconds. What he had on his clothes got there in the liquid state. There's only one way that could have happened.

Erica turns to Chadwick.

ERICA (CONT'D)

He poured it in himself.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Branzino, still alive, lies in bed, motionless. Dried vomit streaked round his mouth. Blood round his intubated nose.

Yelland stands. Stretches, rubs her legs. Addresses Branzino:

YELLAND

I need to pee. Don't know why I'm telling you that. She's made you into even more of a vegetable than you already were.

Yelland walks out. Her bag remains on the chair.

INT. FEATURELESS SPACE (ERICA'S DREAM-SCAPE)

Erica and Lauren, each with a hand raised. Fingertip to fingertip, rotating slowly, maintaining eye contact.

There's much more tension between those eyes now. Erica's eyes blaze. Lauren's eyes fight back.

They twist closer to each other, free arms curling around the other's waist. Erica is pulling, but Lauren's now resisting.

The flames are higher still; Lauren and Erica are standing inside a growing cylindrical inferno...

INT./EXT. UBER PRIUS - DAY

Erica slouches in the rear seat, her thoughts still elsewhere. Chadwick glances at her in the rear view mirror.

CHADWICK

I made a mistake with you, Wise.
Thought you were smart. But now I'm
seeing a fuck-up pattern. Which in
hindsight I should have pieced
together from your file.

He concentrates on the road for a moment.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Your apartment was packed full of a
life sentence for terrorism. Why?
No, I don't want to know. No wonder
you're such an expert on arson.

Erica's face falls as she curls up in the seat.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Christ. Oh and thank you Chadwick
for thinking on your feet with the
cops just now.

Another moment of concentration on the road--

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

(at another car)

Dickhead. Doesn't he realize some
people are trying to make a living
here. Godsake.

He watches the offending vehicle recede into the distance.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

They may actually let me retire
now. Troy will no doubt die because
of what you did to him. Like you
were ever going to be able to fix
anything. We're done, Wise. I'm
cutting you--

His phone rings through the car audio.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Here's Yelland, right on cue.

He picks up the call with a flick of a steering wheel switch.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Yelland.

YELLAND (V.O.)

(from car speakers)

We lost him.

Chadwick flicks a glance at the resting Erica. Told you so.

CHADWICK
Poor guy. When did he pass?

YELLAND (V.O.)
No, Chadwick. He left the hospital.
He's gone.

Chadwick spits out his incredulity.

CHADWICK
Well, he can't get far. Just follow
the trail of puke.

YELLAND (V.O.)
That'll end in the parking lot. He
took my car keys.

CHADWICK
Shit. Shit.

Chadwick thumbs a button on the wheel to end the call.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Yelland still holds the phone to her ear as she picks up her bag. She hefts it. Feels inside.

YELLAND
(into phone)
My gun, too. Hello? Damn signal...

EXT. ALLEY, SEATTLE - DAY

In this deserted alley, trash bags are piled up against the side of a long, low dumpster by the bar's rear door.

Holding an Arise coffee cup, Stanczyck walks into the alley from the street. Goldhawk steps away from the trash bags.

GOLDHAWK
I've got some smoking guns for you.

Stanczyck just stares at him.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)
So Farlowe, the first Pyropath
victim, in Chicago, last week?
Turns out he was the Merritt
family's lawyer twenty years ago. I
just got a package from him.

(MORE)

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)

Complete with "If you're reading this then I'm dead" letter. Not even kidding.

No response from Stanczyck.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)

And that Boston doctor killed the same way? He developed the burn treatment that destroyed Merritt's immune system after the fire. Pretty good reason to hold a grudge and do something about him if you could, right?

Stanczyck takes a step towards Goldhawk, still silent.

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)

I've been analyzing social media posts from Streamweavr beta testers. They are supposed to keep it confidential but some of them just blab. Turns out a beta-tester lived just a mile from Farlowe...

-- Goldhawk's eyes widen at the cup--

-- then screw shut as tobacco smoke is blown into them--

GOLDHAWK (CONT'D)

The coffee. I was right about you--

EXT. ALLEY, SEATTLE - DAY (STANCZYCK P.O.V., M.O.S.)

-- A hand holding a cloth pad drives at Goldhawk's face--

-- eyes wide, Goldhawk parries - he has martial-arts moves!--

-- Goldhawk jabs a knuckle-punch right to the viewer's eyes--

-- a dark blur - then the scene is back, red-tinged--

-- a fist telescopes out. Connects with Goldhawk--

-- a step back to avoid Goldhawk's swinging kick--

-- a canister sprays liquid at Goldhawk--

-- a cloud of smoke; a hand thrusts a glowing cigarillo out--

-- Goldhawk chops away the cigarillo, grabs the canister--

-- flings it onto a trash bag, which bursts into flame--

-- Goldhawk looks over in alarm at the small camera jammed among the bags, he steps over--

-- another jab at Goldhawk - connects, but is grabbed--

-- the alley pivots round; now walls and sky--

-- Goldhawk leans over, camera in hand--

-- a fist races in--

-- red mist -- another fist--

Black.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY

Chadwick and a bleary Erica step inside the front door.

They walk down the hall, past bookcases and a mountain bike, towards the door to the Media Room.

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, MEDIA ROOM - DAY

It's dark in the Media Room. Chadwick walks in.

CHADWICK

Troy? It's Chadwick. Remember? I know you're here. We need to talk.

Erica follows - and freezes as a gun is pressed to her head.

Branzino pushes the door closed.

BRANZINO

I do remember. And this is?

CHADWICK

Doctor Wise. She's helping me. Put the gun down, Troy.

ERICA

Erica. Doctor Erica Wise.

Branzino lifts the gun away. His face is a mess of emotion.

BRANZINO

Yes. You visited... Jenny.

He switches lights on. Turns to Chadwick, gun leveled.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
Chadwick, you've got a nerve
showing up. This is all your fault.

CHADWICK
Steady, Troy, that's unfair. We
didn't do anything to make Merritt
suspicious-- no, Troy, stop!--

Branzino aims at Chadwick. Click. Chadwick jerks.

BRANZINO
Of course I took the rounds out.
Hateful toys for hateful people.

Face dark with anger and grief, he lobs the gun to Chadwick.
Drops onto a couch. He's tearing up.

CHADWICK
Doctor Wise found the memory card.

ERICA
It was the gum.

Branzino screws his eyes shut. Dealing with pain.

BRANZINO
Good. That housekeeper talked
around me like I was an imbecile. I
had flashes of memory. Enough...

He opens his eyes. He's crying now.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
When Jenny didn't come back. I went
for a walk. The bench... we sat
there when my wife was alive...
somehow I knew...

He looks at his hands. Tears fall onto them.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
Do you have any idea what it's like
when your mind comes back from the
brink, and the first thing you
learn is that someone murdered the
one good thing left in your life?

ERICA
I'm so sorry about Jenny, Troy.

BRANZINO

Pure, angelic Lauren Merritt. She's going to regret she didn't just kill me outright.

ERICA

That would have been harder to explain. She's not stupid.

CHADWICK

We can't connect Jenny's death to Merritt. Possible it was a cop.

ERICA

There's a blogger who's convinced the Streamweavr system can be repurposed to do a kind of head-programming thing. Could it?

Branzino looks up at Erica. He laughs.

BRANZINO

That's what it's for! The killer's probably a beta-tester. Just a lump of dumb flesh at the end of a lever that Merritt pulled... a lever I gave her. What a stupid jerk I was.

Branzino's face is fully wet now. He looks up at the ceiling.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)

For the longest time, people couldn't figure out why sometimes you could remember your dreams, sometimes you couldn't.

(sniffs)

Merritt found the key. A small area of the brain you can just switch on and off. The most significant neurology discovery of the Century. Nobel prize material.

Erica rubs her face at that mention.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)

But Merritt figured that being the only person who knew how to put something in people's heads which they would act out and then not remember was worth way more than a handshake from the King of Sweden and a few hundred k. Nobel prize or eventual world domination? What a decision, huh. And I helped her.

(MORE)

BRANZINO (CONT'D)

I built her a door into the world's dreams. She's going to open it. God only knows what she'll put inside.

CHADWICK

You didn't know. You were just sucked in by the high-tech glamour.

Branzino shakes his head.

BRANZINO

No... I knew. She came right out with it one day: "I bet we could even make someone commit murder and then not remember even under the deepest interrogation." What a crazy brag. That's when part of me knew for sure that she's a monster. And the other part of me just wanted to make it happen. Brainome hacking. For her. The lovely Lauren Merritt. The murderer.

Branzino wipes his face with a sleeve.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)

So I played Merritt at her own game. I'd known for a while that I "knew too much". I needed an escape route. I used a steganomnesia collar to make me forget selectively that I'd bypassed our data security. And to forget that I'd made myself forget, which was the hardest part. So when Berg deep-scanned me, she could find no memory of what I'd done.

ERICA

Stegano-what? Sounds like a cross between a disease and a dinosaur.

BRANZINO

Steganomnesia. Hidden memory. Electronic date rape, in effect.

Branzino jabs an accusing glance at Chadwick.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)

It's how Somnetix's I.P. protection collars work. I invented it.

He looks at his hands.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)

At The Cube, above the nineteenth floor, your personal I.P. collar applies electromagnetic fields that encrypt your memories as they form. When you remove it at the end of the day, you can't access those memories any more. They're still in your brain, but scrambled. They can only be unpacked by your own collar, which can also impose a stored set of memories. So the tech people can talk to their families about what they do at work. And not realize that they are completely mistaken.

CHADWICK

That's the technology we wanted the most. Interrogation-proofing. To stop U.S. secrets from leaking out to the Russians or Chinese. So as one last pre-retirement gift from the Government, I was tasked with reaching out to Troy. To encourage him to... help us, since Merritt ever so politely declines to do business with the Government.

ERICA

I thought you might have an ulterior motive.

Branzino clenches his jaw.

BRANZINO

I knew Merritt would do something to me, for threatening to expose her. But to murder Jenny... I'll kill Merritt. Somehow. I swear.

CHADWICK

She'd never let you back into that building.

BRANZINO

I'd nuke all of Seattle from orbit if it would get her. Hate this fucked-up husk of a city. Traffic, rain, weed and bleeding-heart liberals. I only came here because of her.

ERICA
You and me both.

A grim realization dawns on Erica's face.

ERICA (CONT'D)
Troy, you can hack into the
Streamweavr system, right?

BRANZINO
I designed it.

Chadwick and Branzino turn to her.

ERICA
(to Chadwick)
Look. Merritt's a clear and present
danger to the population and you do
still give a shit.
(to Branzino)
You want to kill her because she
scrambled your brain and had Jenny
murdered. But there's no chance
you'd get near enough.
(taps her chest)
She will let me in, though.

Erica takes off her glasses. Rubs her eyes.

EXT. MERRITT HOUSE, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

Dark-clothed, Young Erica crouches in the bushes, looking at
the front door of this large, elegant Connecticut house.

Moths circle the porch light as she rubs the door key in her
hand. It still has the tag from a key duplication service.

ERICA (V.O.)
She'll see me. I have something she
may appreciate.

She raises an air pistol. Aims. Fires.

BRANZINO (V.O.)
What's that?

With a 'phut' and a hiss, the porch light goes out.

Young Erica slips through the shadows towards the door...

ERICA (V.O.)
The truth.

EXT. ALLEY, SEATTLE - DAY

Slumped against the wall, Stanczyck is - dead?

No - he jerks, stirs at the sound of sirens - and rolls away from the fiercely-burning trash bags.

Face badly beaten and bleeding, he staggers to his feet just as a paramedic truck screeches to a halt at the far end of the alley. The lead paramedic runs to him, kit in hand.

STANCZYCK
Uh, St... Stanczyck, Seattle P.D..

PARAMEDIC
Sir, are you OK? What happened?

STANCZYCK
I was supposed to meet...

PARAMEDIC
You don't remember anything about the fight? We got a report, someone saw the two of you.

STANCZYCK
Fight?

PARAMEDIC
You didn't get that face just from falling over.

Stanczyck feels his face. Hands come away smeared red.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - DAY

A monitor shows a zoomed-in, stabilized image of an eye.

It's Lauren's eye. She's plucking her eyebrows.

Berg is also visible in another, smaller window.

BERG (V.O.)
The blogger will have been dealt with by now. As for Doctor Wise--

LAUREN
-- who is now working for the Government? What is going on?

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - DAY

Berg reaches into an old metal tin and pulls out a small chocolate-covered cake. She nibbles on it.

INTERCUT LAUREN AND BERG AS NEEDED

BERG

The Police Captain thought we should know.

LAUREN

And Branzino back in circulation? How the hell? That level of erasure is irreversible.

BERG

We can program the detective this evening--

LAUREN

No. Branzino must be taken out right now. The cop is still available?

BERG

The app is still tracking him.

Lauren looks straight at Berg's image.

LAUREN

Go program him in person. We can't wait for him to sleep.

Berg's face drops. She stops chewing her cake.

BERG

Ach, Scheisse.

LAUREN

Have you gone soft in your old age, Berg? Where's that tough Stasi undercover bitch? Use one of the new lucid scenarios that your team have apparently been working so hard on.

Berg clenches her jaw.

BERG

Shall I take care of Doctor Wise too? She is clearly trouble.

Lauren caresses an eyebrow.

LAUREN

No. She'll come right to me. It's why she came to Seattle.

BERG

Don't you think you should avoid distractions now?

LAUREN

I'm sure she has a pathetic plan to punish me somehow for dumping her... I'll take care of it.

BERG

She's just going to walk up to the front doors of The Cube?

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY (LATER)

Branzino is drawing sketches on a tablet and clicking through schematics on a computer monitor. The kitchen table is strewn with fragments of electronic technology.

Chadwick watches as the coffee machine hisses and dribbles the last of its charge of coffee into a cup.

CHADWICK

You're just going to walk up to the front doors of The Cube?

Erica shrugs.

ERICA

She just sent me an invite.

BRANZINO

We've got a plan. I need a little more time to pull it together. Basic design is done.

Chadwick looks at his phone as he sips coffee.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)

Are we boring you, Chadwick? Need to give someone a ride?

CHADWICK

Don't mock the Uber thing. There are eight hundred thousand Uber drivers in the U.S..

(MORE)

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Hacking into their app and inserting agent drivers has been a really effective tool for us.

(beat)

And there are worse ways of getting a little extra income in retirement.

Branzino rolls his eyes.

ERICA

Troy, show me where you're at.

Erica leans in; Branzino points out various windows of code and graphs of signals.

BRANZINO

Here. The Streamweavr protocols influence the way these coded bursts interact with your dream centers. Platform-agnostic.

CHADWICK

And what does that mean?

BRANZINO

Means you can run them on any kind of hardware. Versatile.

Chadwick puts down his cup and turns for the door.

CHADWICK

Exciting. I need a piss. Carry on.

Erica studies the material displayed on Branzino's monitor.

ERICA

Those sequences sure resemble the analytic groups I imaged onto the stem cells that repaired the damaged areas of your brain.

BRANZINO

An underlying mapping between cortical stem cells, memory and dreaming? You're on to something.

ERICA

Got a few hours. Can you put the protocols, generating functions and arithmetic rules for Streamweavr on a stick? Want to try something.

Branzino plugs a memory stick into his PC, taps keys, waits as files are transferred.

BRANZINO
She'll let you in, sure. She going
to let you back out again?

He pulls the stick out, gives it to Erica, with a bleak look.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
Because the last person I left a
memory card for is dead.

INT. ERICA'S APARTMENT, LIVING AREA - DAY

Mo looks around the apartment. Plastic trays, reagent bottles and printouts litter the living area.

MO
Your mystery patient again?

Erica turns to Mo, laser protection glasses round her neck. She holds up a syringe of yellowish, cloudy liquid. The syringe has a long, long needle.

ERICA
Me. Something new.

She hands the syringe to Mo.

MO
You don't have much real estate
left. Let's have a look.

Erica shakes her head. Tilts her head back, reaches for her nose. Stretches one nostril wide open.

ERICA
All the way in, please.

MO
You have got to be kidding me.

INT. STANCZYCK'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - DAY

Dot opens the front door.

It's Berg - looking uncomfortable in the uniform of a Somnetix service technician.

BERG
Mrs. Stanczyck?

DOT
Yes?

BERG
I've come to make some adjustments
to your husband's beta-test
Streamweavr equipment before our
big launch tonight.

Dot shakes her head.

DOT
My husband is not well. He's had a
terrible day at work--

BERG
I understand, but these changes are
important. We'll have to disable
his equipment if I can't make them.
He'll be so disappointed. It will
only take a few minutes. I promise.

Berg lifts her case of tools. Tries a hopeful look.

BERG (CONT'D)
It sounds like we need to give him
a particularly good dream
experience tonight. Doesn't it?

INT. STANCZYCK'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

Stanczyck sits on the bed, beanie cap already on his head,
cuts on his battered face held shut with strips.

BERG
I hope the other guy got his just
desserts.

Berg puts her own beanie cap on.

STANCZYCK
He wasn't there when I came round.

Berg stops. Clenches her jaw.

BERG
Now that's most... disappointing.

INT. STANCZYCK'S "DREAM CINEMA"

The Somnetix logo tumbles on a grey background.

Berg - a glamorous dream version - walks into frame on the Dream Cinema's screen. The cube logo floats alongside her.

BERG

Welcome to Streamweavr's Immediate Mode. Please, make yourself comfortable, Mister Stanczyck.

Stanczyck sits in a large, realistic cinema space. Velvet curtains and everything. He looks around, surprised.

STANCZYCK

Can I still watch my usual film?

BERG

I've lined up an action special. It's the leading edge of interactive hypnotainment.

Berg air-types on an invisible keyboard in front of her.

RecallContent ***FALSE***

BERG (CONT'D)

As a bonus, you will kill yourself at the end. Your cheesy favorite film can't offer that, now can it?

LucidMode ***TRUE***
WakeUp ***On Completion Only***

BERG (CONT'D)

The show will start in a few minutes. Goodbye, detective.

Berg walks off-screen. The Somnetix sound, and...

RunPackage ***Now***

On Stanczyck's mental screen, spindly palms fade in, crackling in the sea breeze. The light is bright. Colors saturated. California (Lucid) Dreamin'...

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Branzino is still surrounded by computers, soldering stations, electronic parts and dismantled equipment. He turns as Erica and Chadwick walk in. Hands Erica an eyeglasses case.

BRANZINO
Here's my part of the deal.

CHADWICK
Is that it? I was expecting something bigger.

ERICA
They say size isn't everything.

BRANZINO
I modified your spare hearing aids.

Chadwick keeps looking at his phone.

CHADWICK
Berg took an Uber to Stanczyck's.
He's the programmed cop, for sure.

Branzino nods.

BRANZINO
She'll do manual setup. Lucid mode.

CHADWICK
In plain English, that means...?

BRANZINO
Forced lucid dreaming. Asleep, yet awake. It's best for complex, extended task compulsion. His perception of the real world will be overlaid with a semi-scripted interactive dream story.

Branzino frowns. Sucks his teeth.

ERICA
Will Stanczyck come after me?

BRANZINO
No, I'll be top of Merritt's kill list now. Stanczyck is definitely coming here. Besides, Merritt wants you in The Cube, doesn't she.

ERICA
As do we.

Branzino runs fingers through his hair.

CHADWICK
Let's go. Meet me at the car. I'll let the Police Captain know.

When Chadwick has gone, Erica reaches into her bag and gives the memory stick back to Branzino.

ERICA

Do not give this to Chadwick.

Branzino reaches out for Erica's arm. His eyes are wet. They pull in for a hug. Erica's nose is already bleeding.

INT. MERRITT HOUSE, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

Young Erica creeps into the minimalist living area - wood, concrete, huge projection TV. She kneels in the center of a large Chinese rug. Unzips the rucksack and pulls out one of her mechanisms. Sets it on the floor with gloved hands.

Clicks one ring of a pair of hand-cuffs round her wrist.

BRANZINO (V.O.)

I've figured how I can de-program
Stanczyck. Good luck with Merritt.

She stands. Holds her hand up, fingertips splayed. Lifts her foot near a small pedal on the side of the device...

ERICA (V.O.)

This is for Jenny, too, Troy. I
have to do this. I have to make
something right.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - DAY

Lauren rocks casually in her chair, talking on a headset.

LAUREN

No, Governor, I had not considered
putting my name forward. Not in
this cycle.

(beat)

Biding my time, that's right.

Lauren looks at the picture of her and Melody.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Yes. The country is becoming
ungovernable. Everyone's paralyzed
by their own ideas. Everyone wants
their voice to be heard. Social
Media has a lot to answer for.

(MORE)

LAUREN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Yes, people need good old-fashioned entertainment. Something to take their minds off their troubles.

The light from the Somnetix logo glints in her eyes.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

I think you'll enjoy our launch night, Governor. We serve dedicated programming to our Premium customers. You won't believe what you'll be seeing

(beat)

Of course. Enjoy! Remember, it's a money-back guarantee!

Lauren removes the headset.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Enjoy your domestic accident, Governor.

EXT. STREET NEAR BEACH, LA - DAY (STANCZYCK'S LUCID DREAM)

In floral shirt and mirrored Ray-Bans, hair slicked back, chiseled face perfect, HITMAN Al "No Escape" Stanczyck scans up and down the street, Terminator-style.

He looks down at a photograph. A head-and-shoulders shot of ruthless Cartel boss Troy "Let Them Shoot Cake" Branzino.

Hitman Stanczyck drops the photograph. It see-saws to the ground, Branzino's head remaining in perfect focus.

He pulls a gun from a pocket, unconcerned at who might see. Turns as his girl, Dot, rushes up, blond hair waving in the breeze, chest still bouncing as she stops.

DOT

Al, you promised, no more hits--

Hitman Stanczyck slaps her round the face.

HITMAN STANCZYCK

Don't try to stop me, bitch.

He raises his hand once more. She cowers. He strides off--

INT. STANCZYCK'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT (STANCZYCK'S REALITY)

-- as Dot staggers back, unable to believe the transformation in her husband's demeanor as he marches out, gun in hand.

EXT. STREET NEAR BEACH, LA - DAY (STANCZYCK'S LUCID DREAM)

Hitman Stanczyck walks out onto the pavement right in front of a huge old convertible, which screeches to a halt.

Its DRIVER gives him the finger.

DRIVER

Asshole! Watch where you're going.

Hitman Stanczyck walks round to the driver. Lifts him up with one arm. Pistol-whips him with the other. Flings him far from the convertible. Almost superhuman strength.

Gets into the convertible, punches the gas--

EXT. STREET, SEATTLE - NIGHT (STANCZYCK'S REALITY)

-- as an OLD MAN sprawled on the wet sidewalk, bleeding from the side of the mouth where he's been struck, rolls over to see Detective Stanczyck slam the door of the dull Toyota sedan he's just car-jacked, and drive off...

EXT. I-710 FREEWAY, LA - DAY (STANCZYCK'S LUCID DREAM)

Hitman Stanczyck barrels down the smooth, sun-bleached freeway in the convertible. He weaves through the traffic with ease, squealing brakes and angry honking in his wake.

The SoCal breeze blows through his hair. Leaves it perfect.

He looks up at the brilliant glowing green freeway sign:

BRANZINO ROAD -->

He wrenches the wheel to the right. The convertible's old whitewall tires shriek in protest--

EXT. I-5 FREEWAY, SEATTLE - NIGHT (STANCZYCK'S REALITY)

-- as the Toyota carves through the gloomy drizzle onto the deserted off-ramp, spraying standing water from the rutted, crumbling concrete road surface...

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT, CAP'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Officer Wilson swings round the doorway.

WILSON

Cap? The blogger journo that
Stanczyck went to interview?

Cap looks tired. Wilson pulls to a halt at her desk.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Says Stan tried to kill him.
Sprayed fuel on him, but couldn't
light it before he beat Stan up.

CAP

So Stan was our Pyro path all along?

WILSON

Goldhawk's got video proof. He had
a feeling Stan was being sort of
programmed by the Streamweavr
thing. Set Stan up for the meeting.

Cap holds her head in her hands.

CAP

Crap. Where's Stan now?

WILSON

Dot says he's completely flipped,
gone off somewhere. He's packing.

CAP

It's getting dark. Put out a county
A.P.B.--

Her phone rings. She answers it. Listens for a few moments.

CAP (CONT'D)

The Government guy. Says we'll be
able to intercept Stan at Troy
Branzino's place.

Wilson nods and rushes back out. Cap rubs her eyes.

CAP (CONT'D)

Stan... what the hell has Merritt
done to you?

EXT. BRANZINO DRUG DEN, LA - DAY (STANCZYCK'S LUCID DREAM)

Run-down South L.A. drug dealer territory. Lawless. Hopeless. Single-story dives with the shutters down. Yet still glowing bright and saturated. Cinematic.

Hitman Stanczyck creeps - in a pointlessly exaggerated way since he is surely in full view of the whole world - towards a long, shabby house with sun-flaked cream siding.

A door creaks open on the house next door. An ADDICT peers round the door. The Addict and Hitman Stanczyck make eye contact. Volumes of unspoken something pass between them.

Hitman Stanczyck reaches the reinforced front door of the dive. Aims his pistol at the push-button security lock--

EXT. BRANZINO HOUSE - NIGHT (STANCZYCK'S REALITY)

-- and as Branzino's grouchy Neighbor looks on, Detective Stanczyck SHOOTS the lock out on Branzino's front door.

He kicks the door in. Steps inside.

INT. BRANZINO DRUG DEN, LA - DAY (STANCZYCK'S LUCID DREAM)

The light streaming through the almost-closed shutters makes appealingly photogenic stripes on the floor, catching dust motes, glinting off Hitman Stanczyck's shiny gun--

HITMAN STANCZYCK

(quietly)

Where are you, Branzino, you--

-- he brushes against a racing bike, probably stolen, and - only just, phew! - manages to stop it from making a noise--

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, HALLWAY - NIGHT (STANCZYCK'S REALITY)

-- and Detective Stanczyck pushes the muddy mountain bike back against the bookcase, not noticing the quite considerable noise he is actually making.

STANCZYCK

(not that quietly)

-- piece of Cartel shit!

Detective Stanczyck pads towards the Media Room...

INT. BRANZINO DRUG DEN, LA - DAY (STANCZYCK'S LUCID DREAM)

Although it's dark and seedy, it is also still California, and Hitman Stanczyck's shirt colors still manage to pop as he enters the room, looking for his target.

He inclines his head to listen. A hint of a human voice?

He spins, gun raised. In front of him, a shimmering rectangle appears, blending smoothly into his lucid dream-scape.

A blurry figure shows. Starting to move. Coming slowly into focus. Hitman Stanczyck's gun hand trembles.

It's Meg Ryan on the terrace of the Empire State Building.

Hitman Stanczyck is transfixed. Every hitman has a weakness. And here she is...

INT. BRANZINO HOUSE, MEDIA ROOM - NIGHT (STANCZYCK'S REALITY)

... on the large pull-down screen in the Media Room. The 'Sleepless in Seattle' scene beams out from the projector that's still on the stepladder.

Stanczyck stands transfixed, gun still held out.

He stares at Meg Ryan as the 'Cali Hitman' lucid dream running in his head clashes with the familiar romantic dream that every fiber of his being would rather have.

Except it's not Meg Ryan projected onto the screen.

It's Meg Ryan projected onto Troy Branzino.

Branzino walks a precise path towards Stanczyck, keeping Meg Ryan's projected face the only illumination on his own.

Stanczyck knows this scene better than anything. In reflex, he delivers the lines in sync with the actors:

STANCZYCK
We better go.

Branzino nods in time with Meg Ryan.

Stanczyck holds out his hand.

STANCZYCK (CONT'D)
Shall we?

Branzino takes Stanczyck's hand.

BRANZINO
 (Meg Ryan's face)
 Sam?

Beat.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
 (Meg Ryan's face)
 It's nice to meet you.

Stanczyck is transfixed--

-- Branzino pulls a Streamweavr cap over Stanczyck's head--

-- LEDs twinkle--

-- Stanczyck collapses into Branzino's arms, gun arm limp--

-- as Wilson and armed officers burst through the doorway--

WILSON
 Drop your weapon, Stan.

Stanczyck drops the gun. He sobs onto Branzino's shoulder.

BRANZINO
 It's OK, officer. I got him.

Branzino breathes out. A wave of relief.

BRANZINO (CONT'D)
 Fuck you, Lauren Merritt. I hope
 you burn in Hell.

INT./EXT. UBER PRIUS - NIGHT

On the rear seat, Erica looks out at The Cube. Chadwick glances in the rear view mirror.

CHADWICK
 Sure about this? I mean, relying on
 high-tech hardware from a guy who
 was a dribbling vegetable
 yesterday?

ERICA
 We're rolling the only dice we have
 here, Chadwick.

She swaps her eyeglasses for the thick ones in the case.
 Changes her hearing aids for the ones also in the case.

CHADWICK

I'll be close by. We're monitoring
the Streamweavr feed with a box
that Troy's hacked together.

Erica squeezes Chadwick's shoulder as the Prius pulls up.

ERICA

Enjoy your retirement, Boss.

She leaves the car. Stands to look at The Cube, squinting
through Branzino's glasses. Closes her eyes.

ERICA (CONT'D)

(to herself)

Flame on.

INT. FEATURELESS SPACE (ERICA'S DREAM-SCAPE)

... Erica and Lauren, each with a hand raised. Fingertip to
fingertip, each trying to kill the other with a look.

Erica's free arm is welded to Lauren, who can't escape. Erica
drags Lauren round in a rotating hold.

Flames are almost at skin level, clothing about to ignite...

EXT. THE CUBE - NIGHT

Erica walks towards the outer gate. Her face is scanned by
the security system. The gate opens. Inner gates dance open
and shut around her as she approaches The Cube.

Countdown on the building display is down to twenty minutes.

INT. THE CUBE, OUTER FOYER - NIGHT

An open elevator door beckons. Erica walks past the huge
screens as the "Welcome..." text marches across them.

The place is deserted, though richly decked out with bunting
and balloons with "Good Luck Lauren!" messages.

ERICA

Launch night yet no-one's here?

She walks into the elevator.

ELEVATOR VOICE

All staff must transfer at floor
nineteen. Failure to follow I.P.

(MORE)

ELEVATOR VOICE (CONT'D)
protection collar protocol will
trigger interdiction drones. Thank
you for visiting Somnetix.
Seattle's nicest company!

The door shooshes shut. Floor digits count up.

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - NIGHT

The elector doors shoosh open. Erica exits - and sneezes.

A large wad of dark, bloody gunge splatters onto the floor.
She wipes her nose with the back of her hand.

All the desks are once again empty save for Berg's, who
stands up, smiling. The drones hovering on either side of her
rotate towards Erica.

Berg looks Erica up and down.

BERG
Willkommen, Doctor Wise. Let us get
you decontaminated.

Berg snaps her fingers--

-- one spidery drone vectors at high speed towards Erica--

-- Erica ducks, a reflex action--

-- the drone's body opens out into a crescent--

-- and rams itself against Erica's neck--

-- with a click, part of the drone sloughs away--

-- leaving an I.P. collar around Erica's neck--

-- another click, a hiss--

-- and Erica slumps to the floor, unconscious.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT

The full panorama of Lauren's 'office' can at last be seen.
It includes an exact re-creation of the living area of her
1998 house we've seen in flashback.

Seated in a heavy wood chair, Erica's wearing a hospital
gown. Her legs are bound.

Her hair has been buzzed right down. She touches her head.

ERICA

Hey...

Berg walks round to look at Erica.

BERG

(muffled through Erica's
deafness)

I'm Alexandra.

Erica points at her hearing aids on the table. Taps ears.

Berg hands over the hearing aids. Erica inserts them, with some difficulty. She HEARS their boot-up tones.

ERICA

Thank you. Charmed, I'm sure.

Berg picks up a Streamweavr beanie cap.

BERG

Sorry for the hair. She wants a
good contact to your grey matter.

Berg pulls the beanie cap onto Erica's head. LEDs twinkle.

BERG (CONT'D)

I hope the decontamination solution
didn't sting too much. I had no
idea you were so... dedicated to
your work.

Erica sniffs, rubs her nose. It's still bloody.

ERICA

I have my reasons.

Berg pulls a chair over from the desk and sits down.

BERG

I know you have history with her.
So you know how she works. She
smiles that huge smile while
providing an endless supply of
silken rope for you to hang
yourself, right in front of her.

Erica nods in recognition. A slight chuckle.

ERICA

Having a hold over us without
giving any really true thing away
about herself. She hasn't changed.

Berg's gaze drifts, memories surfacing.

BERG

I was interrogated so many times,
when I was an agent... But she's
the only one who ever made me talk.
It's a superpower.

She turns back to Erica.

BERG (CONT'D)

If you've been starved of
affection, she's an all-you-can-eat
buffet. You eat and you eat.

ERICA

A sympathy fuck or two, and you're
hers for ever.

BERG

Huh. She likes to collect the
skeletons in people's closets.

Berg leans over. Places a palm on Erica's leg just above the
knee. Looks into Erica's eyes. Lifts her hand away.

BERG (CONT'D)

But maybe the skeletons in your
closet weren't interesting enough.

Erica looks tired now. She shuts her eyes.

ERICA

Some skeletons are good at hiding.

Berg stands. She looks sympathetic, for all her iciness. She
air-types a few keystrokes. Leans nearer the monitor.

BERG

Doctor Wise is ready for you now.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT

Erica rubs her nose. Looks at the flakes of dried blood that
collect on her fingers. She's bleary.

LAUREN (O.S.)

Hello, Erica.

Lauren walks round. She's wearing a disposable face-mask.

ERICA

Bit quiet for a party?

Lauren flicks her hand. The large display behind the desk lights up with the tumbling Somnetix cube.

LAUREN

I'm proud of what I've built,
Erica. So are the people who work
here, at least when they are here.
They are all at home now, as are
millions of ordinary people.
Waiting to dream the Streamweavr
launch. In just a few minutes.

Erica sniffs her arm. Wrinkles her nose.

ERICA

Do you need that mask? Your
Valkyrie disinfected me.

Lauren chuckles. Removes the mask.

LAUREN

We needed to decontaminate you
electronically too, in case you
thought you could sneak around,
like in the movies, and find a
computer with an open U.S.B. port
just begging to have some virus
squirted in to shut us down. Burly
buzz-cut security guy chasing you,
that sort of thing? We don't do it
that way round here.

Lauren steps nearer to Erica. Adjusts her hair.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

How do I look?

ERICA

Beautiful. Fuzzy.

LAUREN

Ah. That will be the pentothal.

ERICA

You don't need a truth drug,
Lauren. Just be you... You have
given me something, haven't you.

LAUREN

Just to loosen you up. Not that you
ever needed to be loosened up.

Lauren smiles her best high-octane smile.

ERICA

I loved you. From the second I saw
you in that Yale bar.

Lauren sits down in front of Erica.

LAUREN

We had something, for a while,
didn't we... But you would have
held me back. Trapped me in a hell
of doting domesticity. I couldn't
do it. I had to flick that switch.

ERICA

You and your switches.

She clicks her fingers.

LAUREN

But you didn't come all this way
for a glass or four of cheap
Chardonnay and a delicate dance
around your ancient infatuation.

Erica swallows. Looks around, then smiles at Lauren.

ERICA

We've figured out what you're doing
with Streamweavr.

Lauren claps.

LAUREN

See! Now we're getting somewhere.

ERICA

We've told the Police.

LAUREN

How quaint. By 'we' I presume you
mean you, Branzino and that mystery
Government friend of yours. Very
Scooby-Doo pesky kids. Your
policeman is helping me resolve the
Branzino problem once and for all
right now.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT

Lauren pulls out two bottles of water from her desk.

LAUREN

Catch.

The bottle lands in Erica's lap. Erica opens it and drinks.

ERICA

Softening-up tactic number five.

LAUREN

Where did the cynicism come from,
Erica? You were such a sweet,
innocent kid.

ERICA

Where did the murdering sweet,
innocent kids and screwing around
with people's minds come from?

Lauren takes a sip from her own water.

LAUREN

We should get that Chardonnay in.
This is just like the old days.

ERICA

Like the dancing gorilla in that
video. People don't see you while
you're fucking with their heads.

LAUREN

Bingo! Heads, eight billion of
them. The most valuable real estate
on the planet. Business is the art
of getting inside those heads. I've
just taken a more technically
rigorous approach to sorting
through them. Cleaning out the
chaff. All in a good cause.

ERICA

Fucking them without knowing
they've been fucked. Like you're
doing to that poor detective.

Lauren sweeps her arm round the space they are in.

LAUREN

I've spent fifteen years building
this. Bringing in smart yet naive
people like Branzino to fine-tune
it. So yes, now I can mind-fuck the
population at scale. Get them to do
anything I want. Get them to not do
anything I don't want.

Erica finishes her water. Drops the bottle.

ERICA

You're not the only one who's
interested in that kind of power.

Lauren springs from her chair, animated.

LAUREN

Hollywood? The Gov'mint? They
aren't prepared to pay enough for
access to your head. They wouldn't
know how to use it, anyway.

ERICA

Crush people's dreams and replace
them with your own. You haven't
changed.

A beat. The fun's going out of their verbal battling.

LAUREN

And yet you still love me, Erica.
Is that beautiful, or pathetic?

A flashing icon on a monitor distracts Lauren.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Ah. In all this excitement, I
nearly forgot. Thanks for sharing
my big moment. Here goes.

Lauren air-types for a moment. The Somnetix sound echoes
through the room, the harbinger of something great.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

There. Streamweavr is now live.

Erica takes a deep breath.

ERICA

I've had something else eating away
at me for a long time, Lauren.

Lauren appears almost bored.

LAUREN

What else have you got? Before we
call it a night and I wipe our
little chat.

ERICA

I killed Melody.

EXT. MERRITT HOUSE, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: YALE, 1998

YOUNG ERICA
 (rehearsing to herself)
 Lauren, I love you. I can't bear to
 be without you. And now, we can be
 together forever--

The thump of the main house door closing, from outside the
 room. Laughter, and shrieks of joy.

YOUNG ERICA (CONT'D)
 Shit. You're not alone.

The metallic crunch of keys thrown onto a table.

More shrieks. Sounds of someone running down a wooden floor.

Young Erica stumbles - and knocks the pedal with her foot.
 The incendiary device starts to tick and hiss.

YOUNG ERICA (CONT'D)
 (horrified)
 Melody! Don't come in! Christ, you
 can't hear me...

She kneels down, reaches in, pulls off a tube. Liquid begins
 to dribble from it. The hissing intensifies.

YOUNG ERICA (CONT'D)
 No! Stop. Stop.

Flight is the only option. She picks up the rucksack, as
 components within the device start to steam.

YOUNG ERICA (CONT'D)
 Do. Not. Light.

She dashes over to the large double patio doors that lead out
 to the garden. Slides one door open and steps outside--

EXT. MERRITT GARDEN, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

-- Young Erica slides the patio door closed--

-- it sticks half-way. Something's jammed in the runners--

YOUNG ERICA
 Shit. Shit!

-- She puts all her strength into sliding the door shut.
 Pull. Puull. Puuull--

-- with a crunch of trapped gravel the door slams shut--

-- and the white-painted door-handle rips off the frame of the sliding door, bending and twisting the lock mechanism.

She stares at the broken handle, still in her hand. Looks into the room. The living area door swings open.

Clutching the rucksack, she staggers onto the large back yard, planted with shrubs and trees, backed by a tall fence. Breaks into a run down the lawn..... and a bright flash lights up Young Erica's back and the plants in the garden. She turns.

Frozen to the spot, flickering light plays off her face, the lenses of her glasses, and the trees surrounding her.

Tears rim her eyes as she stares back at the house.

YOUNG ERICA (CONT'D)

Melody. No.

Flames already reaching the ceiling behind her, Melody pounds on the sliding glass door that leads out onto the patio. Grabs for the handle inside. Tries to open the door to escape from the inferno building in the room.

But she can't open the door. It's jammed because the outside lock mechanism has been damaged by the loss of the handle.

Melody bangs on the door again, desperate. She sees Young Erica.

MELODY

(signing through glass)

Erica! Help me!

YOUNG ERICA

Why were you even here today--

-- then a larger, fiery explosion fills the room behind the unyielding glass doors--

-- flames roll across the ceiling and down, engulfing Melody--

-- who staggers back into the fire, out of sight--

Tears streaming, Young Erica swallows. Turns.

YOUNG ERICA (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry...

She hefts the rucksack and runs towards the rear alley...

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT

... and Lauren shakes her head.

LAUREN

Nonsense. It was that son-of-a-bitch terrorist. They found an entire arsenal in his basement.

Erica shakes her head, her eyes drifting shut again...

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND MERRITT HOUSE, 1998 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

... as Young Erica runs, the rucksack bumps against her.

ERICA (V.O.)

Nothing like the fast-burning flame fountain device that I used. My own design.

LAUREN (V.O.)

(more forceful)

There was one in his truck! The cops found it. He opened fire on them when they confronted him!

Young Erica stops by a truck. Lobs the rucksack into it--

ERICA (V.O.)

A spare. I had to dump it. Al-Jabhir's truck was in the right place for me at the wrong time for him. He had nothing to do with it, terrorist or not.

-- and runs off into the alley's shadows.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Erica opens her eyes. Locks gaze with Lauren.

LAUREN

Now look, Erica, I know you were a little obsessed--

BERG (O.S.)

(from monitor)

She's probably telling the truth.

LAUREN

Fuck me, Berg, have you been listening in the whole time?

BERG (O.S.)

(from monitor)

I've seen the report on what the Police found in Doctor Wise's apartment. A device identical to the one that caused your house fire. In fairness to Wise, she did say that it is merely a collector's item.

Lauren shakes her head. Erica nods hers.

ERICA

You've recreated this room down to the last detail. You haven't been able to forget either, have you?

Lauren reaches involuntarily to her scarred face.

LAUREN

Are you kidding me?

INT. MERRITT HOUSE, 1998 - NIGHT (LAUREN'S FLASHBACK)

Young Lauren runs towards the living room. Flames already throw light through the doorway into the hall.

YOUNG LAUREN

Melody! Get out!

The heat stops her at the doorway. Tall, intense flames belch from the rug in the middle of the room.

Beyond the hissing, roaring inferno, a short figure stands at the patio doors, unable to open them.

YOUNG LAUREN (CONT'D)

Melody! The garden! Open the door--

-- then flames balloon out with even greater force. They roll along the ceiling, towards the window, and towards Lauren.

Young Lauren staggers back as the flames burst through the doorway and roll over her.

YOUNG LAUREN (CONT'D)

MELODYyyy!

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Lauren surfaces from her own painful recollection.

LAUREN

They pulled me out. Another thirty seconds and I would have died too.

Erica looks at her fingers.

ERICA

You had bad treatment afterwards.

LAUREN

(angry)

I already took care of the idiot who was responsible for that. He was number one on my list.

Lauren lets out a long breath.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

But... why?

ERICA

Can't you work it out?

Erica rubs her wrists.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Consumed in the flames of my love, the only way we could be together, I thought. It went wrong. I got away with it. I guess you don't know what guilt is. But I do.

Erica shifts in her seat.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Afterwards, I wanted to kill myself, leaving a confession and a bitter attack on you, the monster I'd loved. But I couldn't.

Erica rubs her nose, which is now bleeding profusely.

ERICA (CONT'D)

So I did become a doctor. To try to save people like Melody from people like me. But I never got over it, or us... I followed your career, came here, never expected to make contact. Then you had to go and kill Jenny. And I thought, maybe that's fate's finger on the scales. Telling me to... re-engage.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT

Lauren cups her cheeks with her hands.

LAUREN

Why are you telling me this now?
Redemption? Surely you don't expect
anything as banal as forgiveness?

ERICA

Only Melody could give me that. No,
it's just a confession. To atone
for being a monster too.

Lauren sighs.

LAUREN

You're no monster, Erica. I've done
things you can't begin to imagine.

ERICA

Well, I'm sorry. I only meant to
kill us, not Melody. Not your
sister.

Lauren's face is grim.

LAUREN

She... she wasn't my sister.

ERICA

Wh..what... Who...?

A long beat.

LAUREN

I worried you'd work it out. It's
why I had to get rid of you.

(beat)

She was my daughter.

This stuns Erica.

ERICA

But... you must have been only...

LAUREN

Thirteen. I was raped by my uncle.

ERICA

God... I had no idea...

Lauren gets more water. Moves over to Erica to give her a bottle. She looks older, tiredness descending on her. This is something of a release for the ultimate control freak.

LAUREN
It was deliberate.

ERICA
Men like that--

LAUREN
Deliberate as in planned by me.

Erica just stares. Lauren drinks.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Our family, our cult, had close to ten billion in assets, controlled by Mama's half-brother Uncle Frank. And I already knew at thirteen what I could do with money like that.

She closes her eyes for a moment.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Mama and I visited Frank in Nashville. I led him on. Made sure I was ovulating when he raped me.

Lauren sips at her water.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Melody was born at a clinic in Basel. We got DNA records for Frank. Proved that he was the father. Child rape. He got the case sealed by the judge, no publicity. Pled guilty, didn't fight it. Thought he'd be out in a few years and could deal with us then.
(beat)
But we made sure they sent him somewhere where they didn't like rich, entitled, cultish pedophiles.

Lauren finishes the small water bottle.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
He was dead within a year. Suicide, they said. But we'd arranged a little help. Mama inherited the family's assets. Found somewhere quiet for us to grow up. We told Melody she was my sister.

Lauren glances over to a portrait of an old woman.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Mama left everything to me in her will. Frank's lawyer had been digging around to prove a setup right from day one. He was the Pyropath's second victim. Customer.

She stands.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

No, you're not a monster, my sweet Erica. Not even close.

(beat)

I'm the girl who fucked her uncle, bore his child, had him killed, stole his fortune and built a system to turn a country full of pathetic media addicts into my personal slaves. And now I'll have to kill you... You're not crying, are you?

ERICA

These glasses make my eyes hurt.

Intrigued, Lauren rises and steps over to Erica. Leans closer to the heavy eyewear. Branzino's modified eyeglasses.

LAUREN

My goodness. Look at her tiny little cameras.

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - NIGHT

Still listening in on Erica and Lauren's conversation, Berg does a double-take. Looks at her monitors.

Windows open, one on top of another, showing the account details of Streamweavr viewers and what they are currently 'watching'.

It's Lauren, seen from Erica's P.O.V., with a few seconds' delay. Berg's jaw drops.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT

Lauren removes Erica's eyeglasses. Examines them.

LAUREN

Nice try. Distracted me with a massive confession. Showed me yours, and I showed you mine.

ERICA

Taste of your own medicine?

Erica rubs her face, then the beanie cap.

Lauren laughs. A short, gloating laugh.

LAUREN

No cigar, though. This level of The Cube is shielded against any possible communication. No phone, no radio, no Wi-Fi, no lasers though the windows. There is absolutely no way that a broadcast or recording of this could get out of The Cube to embarrass me. And Branzino...

... a dark thought shows on her face...

LAUREN (CONT'D)

... would have known that.

Lauren turns to her own monitor. Types a command.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - MOMENTS EARLIER (AS SEEN IN ERICA'S P.O.V. ON STREAMWEAVR "DREAM CINEMA")

Millions of people are 'sitting' in their Dream Cinemas for the launch of Streamweavr. But this piece of 'exclusive content' was not what Lauren Merritt had planned...

ERICA (V.O.)

But I wasn't streaming it to equipment outside The Cube, was I.

RecallDreamContent TRUE

ERICA'S P.O.V.

LAUREN

... I'm the girl who fucked her
uncle, bore his child, had him
killed, stole his fortune and built
a system to turn a country full of
pathetic media addicts into my
personal slaves. And now I'll have
to kill you...

Dream-streamed with the Somnetix Streamweavr platform.

... then the steaming mug of black coffee...

ADVERTISING VOICE (V.O.)

Wash that sleep away with ARISE!
The coffee you always dreamed of.

WakeUp

Now

And we see a

MONTAGE

of people waking up, stunned, tearing off beanie caps...

... just a few of the millions of people who now have as
clear and vibrant a memory of the showdown that they just
streamed, as it they'd watched it awake - guaranteed!...

INT. THE CUBE, BERG'S FLOOR - NIGHT

The delayed close-up of Lauren's face, from the cameras in
the eyeglasses, appears in each window on Berg's monitor.

LAUREN (V.O.)

(through monitor)

My goodness. Look at her tiny
little cameras.

BERG

Götterdämmerung... she is finished.

Berg grabs her handbag. Reaches for her phone.

BERG (CONT'D)

I hope you're close by, Mister Uber
Chad. Just one more thing...

She types. A message box pops up on a monitor:

All I.P. protection collar memory contents erased

She glances over at Lauren's "house"--

BERG (CONT'D)
Ach, meine Schätz. Maybe... you
 could have loved me a little more.

-- and flees The Cube.

INT. THE CUBE, LAUREN'S 'OFFICE' - NIGHT

Lauren's face is frozen at what she sees. Disbelief. Anger.

LAUREN
 You stupid, stupid girl. Do you
 have any idea what you've done?

ERICA
 You told me I'd never amount to
 anything. Told me so often I almost
 believed it.

Erica blinks, trying to relieve her eyes.

ERICA (CONT'D)
 I just want us to start over.

Lauren blurts out an incredulous laugh.

LAUREN
 What? There's no happy ending
 scenario here. Not now.

She picks up a beanie cap from the table. Waves it at Erica.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
 You cannot imagine the damage I can
 inflict inside your head. How much
 worse it will be than just death.
 Perpetual pain and terror.

Lauren pulls the beanie cap on.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
 I should have killed Branzino when
 I had the chance, not just broiled
 his brain. Then you came along and
 cured him somehow. The mousey,
 needy, damaged, smart young
 biologist.

Lauren air-types. LEDs on both caps twinkle in sync.

Erica smears her bloody snot across her face.

ERICA

If you think it's possible to mess up my head more than it already has been, then come right in, my love.

LAUREN

Goodbye, Erica.

EXT. MERRITT GARDEN - NIGHT (ERICA'S DREAM-SCAPE)

... it's the back garden we saw many times. Lauren (current age) stands on the grass. She's puzzled.

LAUREN

Wait. This isn't the standard Streamweavr theater setup.

Lauren makes air-typing motions. Nothing happens.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

This isn't possible.

ERICA (O.S.)

Welcome, my love.

Lauren jumps as Erica (current age) appears in front of her. She takes in their surroundings.

ERICA (CONT'D)

I loved this garden. The house. Melody. You. Even poor Vulcan. I'm sorry about Vulcan.

LAUREN

How are you doing this?

Lauren waves her fingers again. Still no effect.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Why can I not get back out?

The sky cycles from night, to day, to night again.

ERICA

All your high-tech. Your chips and diodes. Wires and batteries. Did you ever stop to think whether we humans could do this ourselves, with a few tweaks to our brains?

LAUREN

You... you integrated our protocols with your stem cell programming method. You've turned your brain into a Streamweavr server.

ERICA

That amounts to something, surely.

Lauren realizes her predicament; her charm kicks in.

LAUREN

This changes everything, Erica. Join me! Imagine what we can do together. Let's talk this through.

ERICA

Your talking is what brought us here. You're inside my head on my terms, not yours.

Erica closes then opens her hand. Now she's holding her old metal lighter. Flick... Flick... it sparks alight.

ERICA (CONT'D)

This is not reversible. We're stuck together here, now. But that was a small price to pay. Now, what were you saying about damage?

A crack of fear on Lauren's previously invulnerable surface.

LAUREN

We can work this out. I'm sorry, really I am.

Erica shakes her head. Closes her lighter.

ERICA

It took me twenty years to say "I'm sorry" to you. You don't get to say it back to me in twenty seconds.

Erica moves closer. Raises her hand, fingers splayed.

ERICA (CONT'D)

I don't need your apology, Lauren. Just you.

Compelled, Lauren slowly raises her other hand to meet Erica's. They touch, fingers tip to tip; their little dance.

The garden scene gradually fades as a ring of orange flames springs up around them.

They circle, as seen so many times before.

The flames grow in height and intensity. Draw closer.

Erica and Lauren twist towards each other, Erica drawing Lauren to her. The flames are now right at their clothing.

Erica pulls Lauren in. Kisses her. Both women are now completely encased with a shimmering layer of white-hot flame that seems to erupt from within their bodies.

ERICA (CONT'D)

I wanted us to be together for ever. Consumed on a flaming pyre of eternal love. But thanks to you and Troy, I found a better way.

Lauren's confidence has finally burnt off with the flames. She has lost and now she's visibly scared.

LAUREN

Will it hurt?

ERICA

Not here, my love. Not in here.

Erica raises her lighter to Lauren's heart. Flick... Flick...

INT. CARE FACILITY, ERICA'S ROOM - DAY (SOME DAYS LATER)

Erica Wise lies in a medical-grade bed. Thin tubes are taped into her nose and mouth. Cables snake away from brain-monitoring electrodes. A small medical monitor on a nearby stand paints gently-undulating colored lines and slowly-changing numerals.

Branzino sits, contemplating the comatose Erica.

For once without phone in hand, Chadwick holds a copy of Seattle Times. The headlines are visible:

***Somnetix restructuring after Lauren Merritt's death
Streamweavr conspiracy exposed; Seattle blogger vindicated***

BRANZINO

There's brain activity, but they can't wake her.

CHADWICK

Wise knew she wasn't walking back out from The Cube, didn't she.

Stanczyck turns to Chadwick.

STANCZYCK

You think she went in intending to
kill Merritt?

CHADWICK

Merritt died of a heart attack.
Wise didn't take anything with her
that could have caused that.

BRANZINO

I wonder... And what about
Merritt's Head of Security?

EXT. THE CUBE - NIGHT (CHADWICK'S FLASHBACK)

Berg walks briskly away from the security gates.

Chadwick is already holding the door to the Prius open.

CHADWICK

Not staying? Surely Merritt's
having a hell of a party in there.

He looks way, way up at the front side of The Cube. Seen
obliquely, the building countdown display is now flashing:

Error. Divide by zero.

BERG

My work here is done.

Berg glances back at The Cube - a farewell glance.

BERG (CONT'D)

Ach, Mister Chad. I envy the
simplicity of an Uber driver's
life.

CHADWICK

It has its moments.

Berg gets into the Prius. Chadwick leans in.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Listen, the cops shut I-Ninety for
some reason. Traffic's backed up.

He shuts the Prius door.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Let's take the scenic route.

INT. CARE FACILITY, ERICA'S ROOM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Chadwick rubs the stubble on his neck.

CHADWICK

We're, uh, debriefing her now.

STANCZYCK

Speaking of which, I really don't know how to thank you. After everything they made me do, I'm surprised I'm not behind bars.

CHADWICK

Your Streamweavr experience will be very valuable, detective. Enjoy your medical leave for now.

Stanczyck looks at his watch.

STANCZYCK

Gotta go. Nineties weekend at Cinerama with Dot. Great old film with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan.

Branzino twists round in his chair.

BRANZINO

Oh, you can't be serious...

Stanczyck's phone chimes an email sound. He laughs.

STANCZYCK

It's the other one.

They shake hands. Stanczyck leaves.

CHADWICK

We need to debrief you too, I'm afraid, Troy. In DC. Plane's waiting at Boeing Field.

Branzino stands.

BRANZINO

I'll have to pick up some stuff. Give me a ride home?

CHADWICK

Use the app. I'm retired now. I don't work for free.

Branzino shakes his head and reaches for his phone.

INT. CARE FACILITY, ERICA'S ROOM - DAY (LATER)

Mo sits by Erica's bed, eyes moist. She strokes Erica's hand. Glances at the photo of Erica and Lauren by the bedside.

Erica's eyeballs dance...

MO

Whoever you're with now...

(beat)

... sweet dreams.

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM, STOCKHOLM - NIGHT (ERICA'S DREAM-SCAPE)

Erica sits, in her underwear, at a mirrored dressing table.

She contemplates items in front of her: her lighter, a makeup bag, a copy of 'Cell' magazine - *Nobel Prize Special Edition*, a picture of Erica on the cover - and the white-painted door-handle lying on top of it.

A knock at the door.

Lauren - sans anger and scarring - walks up, evening dress flowing. She rubs Erica's shoulders.

LAUREN

You'd better get dressed. We can't keep the King of Sweden waiting.

Erica twists round; Lauren leans in, kisses her. An affectionate, unconditional kiss.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

You made it, Nobel girl. Always knew you would.

Their eyes meet, for a long beat.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

I'm crowding you. Melody and I will meet you downstairs in ten minutes.

ERICA

We have plenty of time now.

Lauren looks puzzled, just for a moment. Turns and leaves.

Flick... Flick...

Erica looks at her reflection, the lighter's small flame adding faint orange highlights in her eyes.

She clicks the lighter shut. Picks up the door-handle.

Drops the handle in the waste bin.

It disappears.

FADE OUT

THE END