

RUSSIAN DOLL

"Pilot"

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DARKNESS.

SFX. Thumping bass of good music in a nearby room.

SFX. Water gushing like a flood. Or maybe a faucet?

SFX. A single, deafening KNOCK and--

HARD CUT TO:

Reflection of a WOMAN in the mirror of a home-spa style...

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

This woman is **NADIA** (36), troubled but one of the good guys. Clad in all black, her style and attitude are the perfect marriage of feminine and masculine.

She stares at herself, eerily still. The water sound continues. There's a harsh second KNOCK at the door. Over her indecipherable and placid face, the title card:

### **RUSSIAN DOLL**

PULL OUT to reveal she is washing her hands. She turns off the faucet. The water sounds stop. She goes for the door.

A sculptural papier-mache art piece covers the door. It resembles a portal or a mouth but it is just art.

As her hand reaches out for the handle (shaped like a revolver), a loud third KNOCK pounds the door and it flies open.

WHAM! Several PARTY GUESTS collide with Nadia and spill into the bathroom. A cacophony of music and conversation fill the empty space as Nadia goes down the rabbit hole into...

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - CONTINUOUS

A crowded, almost labyrinthine PARTY at a sweeping loft space in the legendary Talmud Building in the East Village with thirty-foot ceilings and views of Tompkins Square Park.

We STEADICAM float with Nadia through GUESTS and FRIENDS. She will periodically wave hello or helpfully light someone's cigarette or receive a peck on the cheek. Many wish her...

"Happy Birthday, Nadia!" This is her birthday party.

SOUNDTRACK: "Gotta Get Up" by Harry Nilsson.

SFX. Snippets of the GUESTS various conversations overlap.

The loft decor is fantastical. Almost other-worldly.

Painters like Rene Ricard and Brett Whiteley line the walls with photographers like Sally Mann and Helmut Newton. The high brow art mingles with furniture smeared with stains, carpets ripped to shreds and a red/white striped wallpaper.

There are also several original art pieces scattered throughout the space. A chair covered in fluffy penises. A mirror with a manifesto scribbled across it. Etc.

We follow NADIA to...

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

More of an area than a separate room. STELLA (30s), the host of this party, Nadia's friend and owner of this massive apartment. She prepares a whole roasted chicken.

STELLA is a successful mixed race media artist (think Bill Viola). She seems frenetic and unstable at first but only because she wears her heart on her sleeve and in her work, along with casual drug use and unresolved sexual trauma.

STELLA

Sweet birthday baby!  
(offers her a joint)  
It's laced with cocaine like the  
Israelis do it.

NADIA

Seems reasonable.

Nadia takes the joint and puffs.

STELLA

Always here to help.  
(waves to GUEST)  
Thanks for that lotion, Brooke!  
(back to Nadia)  
Who brings lotion to a party? Bring  
wine. Are you having fun? Oh god,  
you're not. I'm a terrible friend.

NADIA

(shrugs)  
"Fun" is for suckers. Two minutes  
ago I turned thirty-six. Staring  
down the barrel of my own mortality  
beats "fun".

STELLA

I'm making you fucking birthday chicken. Don't be morbid, Nadia.

NADIA

The bathroom door came out well.

STELLA

Thanks. I hate it but I'm commissioned to make three so I had to start somewhere.

NADIA

C'mon- everyone loves paper mâché. They're great and people will buy them and I love you and I can't wait to eat my birthday chicken even though we're all gonna die soon. Thank you for my party, Stellz.

A GUEST approaches them. LIZZY (30s, gender-fluid meets old-school butch), a contractor and handy-man type.

LIZZY

Happy birthday, buddy. Stellz, the door turned out great.

STELLA

Thanks, Lizzy.

LIZZY

You gotta deal with this kitchen though. Open-plan that shit. Let me knock that wall out?

NADIA

Are we playing euphemisms?

LIZZY

I'm dead serious. This layout is fucked. You havin' fun?

STELLA

(to Lizzy)

Oh God. We just went through this! She's having a terrible time.

NADIA

I'm fence-straddling. Lizzy, you're a good person to talk about this because you love to fuck a lot of young chicks.

(Lizzy affirms this)

Do girls have mid-life crises?

LIZZY

Who identifies as "girl" anymore?

NADIA

Fair point.

STELLA

You're thirty-six, Nads, not forty.

NADIA

No but I smoke. I have the internal organs of a man twice my age. Thirty-six times two? If I make it to the low seventies, I'll be shocked.

BEAT. Both look at Nadia, quizzically. She sighs.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Oatmeal is gone.

STELLA

You brought Oatmeal to the party?

LIZZY

What'd'you mean gone?

NADIA (CONT'D)

I woke up. Made coffee. Made his food. Went to the deli. Came back. His food was still there. He wasn't.

STELLA

Did he... leave a note or something?

NADIA

No. He's a cat. So, yeah, no note.

Lizzy hugs Nadia. Then turns her around to face the crowded PARTY full of GUESTS. Potential GUYS. Potential GIRLS.

LIZZY

I'm sorry, Nads. He'll be back. He's got nine lives, right?  
(turns Nadia to the party)  
All you have to do tonight is make some choices.

SOUNDTRACK: "Can't Take My Eyes Off Of You" by Lauryn Hill.

NADIA

I love this song. Always reminds me of The Deer Hunter.

LIZZY

*Di di mao, motherfucker*

NADIA

*Doo ma mae, indeed.*

JUMP CUTS: Dancing guests. Talking guests. Drunk and destructive guests. Cute guys and girls. Some just weird.

BACK ON: Nadia soaks in the crowd.

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - BEDROOM

Separated from the PARTY by a partition. Decor same. Noise of revelry. Large exotic fish in a huge lit-up tank. Nadia looks at them while she cruises...

MIKE is an African American divorcé. Almost professorial in his style. We get the feeling this is not Nadia's first rodeo with a cute, over-educated, talkative single man.

MIKE

--so when they say "working class" they mean, people who cannot afford a college education and end up greeting at Walmart cuz they didn't learn to write code for computer software. They feel sidelined by the American Dream and resort to xenophobia and bigotry which the Right stokes with pundit bullying--

NADIA

You got kids?

MIKE

That's your pick-up line?

NADIA

Hasn't failed me yet.

MIKE

Yes. A son. His mom... We broke up. Last year. You?

NADIA

Naw. I got a cat.

Nadia reflects on this: Does she still have a cat? She had said it out of habit but the statement now seems like a lie.

MIKE

This place is incredible.

NADIA

It used to be a school for Jews.

MIKE  
(as if this were a joke)  
Right.

NADIA  
Seriously. Yeshiva students used to  
read the Talmud right where you're  
standing.

She gets closer to him, leaning into him.

MIKE  
Wow. Do you live here?

NADIA  
No. It's just my party.

She touches him somewhere.

MIKE  
You come on pretty strong.

NADIA  
I'm having a mid-life crisis.

Mike tries to slow her down. Backs away maybe.

MIKE  
What do you do?

NADIA  
I write code.

MIKE  
No. Really?

NADIA  
You're surprised?

MIKE  
You just don't seem like a  
programmer. Where?

NADIA  
I freelance now but I used to be at  
Rock-N-Roll Games.

MIKE  
No shit. I play Dark Justice all the  
time. Battleground Blackout, too.  
What's your handle?

The STEADICAM floats behind the fish tank. We watch them  
through it. Like they are underwater.

NADIA  
I don't play.

MIKE  
You don't play.

NADIA  
No. I don't care for 'em.

She puts his hand down her pants.

NADIA (CONT'D)  
Let's get out of here. My place is  
just a few block away.

MIKE  
Jesus you're wet.

NADIA  
I know right? It's like, don't go  
chasing waterfalls.

MIKE  
Now that you've invoked the spirit  
of Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes, I must go  
home with you.

NADIA  
You had me at Left Eye.

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Ten minutes later. Over the course of her interaction with Mike, the party has transformed. It is no longer a warm birthday party. More of a seedier scene.

Nadia, on her way out, tries to wave down Stella.

SFX. Stella's Doorbell. A clangy thud or a crackled buzz.

ANGLE ON: Stella, among GUESTS, their overlapping conversations obscured her shouts to Nadia.

STELLA  
Do you hear that or am I insane? Is  
that the door? Can you get it?

Nadia opens the door to...

**RUTH** (60/70s), Nadia's Reichen therapist and Stella's aunt. She sounds like Harvey Fierstein (thanks to a lifetime of chain-smoking Carltons) and acts like she knows your life story.

RUTH

Those stairs almost killed me.  
Nothing in this world is easy.  
Except pissing in the shower.

NADIA

Hey Ruth.

RUTH

Happy Birthday, pumpkin.

They embrace.

NADIA

Sorry I missed our session on  
Tuesday.

RUTH

I was worried. I think maybe I  
scared you off starting you on such  
a strict sexual regime. It's simple.  
"The orgasm is life." Repeat after  
me. "The orgasm--

NADIA

Please don't **read into** why I missed  
Tuesday's therapy-- actually I guess  
that's your job-- I'm just all over  
the place. My cat is missing.

RUTH

Oatmeal is gone? Since Tuesday?

NADIA

No. Separate events. You're not  
gonna charge me, are you?

RUTH

Of course, not. We're practically  
family, Nadia. But this Oatmeal  
situation is very distressing.

NADIA

I'm headed out now to check and see  
if he came home. Enjoy the party.

RUTH

Party? I'm afraid not, love. This is  
just a loose gathering of soft  
intellectuals.

(squints)

Where's my niece?

Nadia points to... ANGLE ON: Stella in the crowd. Mike enters. We rack focus to him. And as Ruth chatters, he walks into a single shot. His eye-line close to CAMERA.

RUTH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

In my day, a party was a goddamned party. Have I ever told you the one about my first husband and Hedy Lamar in Cancun?

(Mike joins them)

Hello...

NADIA

Mike, Ruth. Ruth, Mike.

Since both Mike and Nadia are dressed to go, Ruth puts two and two together and beams at them.

RUTH

Wonderful. Excellent work, Nadia.

MIKE

I'm sorry?

RUTH

(takes his hand)

I've known Nadia her whole life. She is one of the good guys.

(to Nadia; in her ear)

Only our natural capacity for love can master sadistic destruction.

She winks at her and floats into the party. Almost swallowed by the entangled bodies of GUESTS.

MIKE

Is that your mom?

NADIA

My therapist. A strict Reichen.

MIKE

What does that mean?

NADIA

It means you're homework.

CUT TO:

EXT. STELLA'S LOFT - NIGHT

Minutes later. East Village. Eighth Street and Avenue B. Tompkins Square Park. Nadia and Mike exit Stella's apartment.

Nadia immediately lights up a cigarette. Across the street...

ANGLE ON: Nadia's POV. **HORSE** (30s) a very handsome and apparently homeless oddball. He's the kind of gutterpunk you see panhandling with a one-legged German Shepard in a bandana. He has a fair amount of face tattoos.

He makes eye contact with Nadia. Do they know each other? We can't tell and neither can she.

Mike takes her by the arm. They exit as we float up to the inscription on Stella's building:

**Talmud Torah Durch Moam**

SOUNDTRACK: "*Cool It Down*" by The Velvet Underground

CUT TO:

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Time Jump. An hour later. Nadia post-coital on an iPhone.

Much like Stella's, Nadia's apartment is another historic-turned-residential building in the East Village: The Christadora. Only Nadia's is a small one bedroom/one bath.

Unlike the open space of Stella's loft, Nadia's space is very limited. The walls feel like they're caving in with overstuffed bookshelves. Overflowing ashtrays litter every surface.

Her computer, with multiple monitors and keyboards, sits like a shrine on a corner desk. Many programs running. On the wall, a poster of William Burroughs with the phrase:

**LIFE'S A KILLER**

Nadia types and swipes. Mike enters. Nadia discreetly tosses the iPhone on the ancient sofa.

MIKE

I don't know why anal play is still so taboo for straight males. It seems almost parodic at this point. But it's like I tell my students--  
(patting his pants)  
Where's my phone?

NADIA

On the couch.

Mike picks up the iPhone Nadia used. Nadia stares at an untouched bowl of cat food. Mike notices.

MIKE

Where's your cat?

NADIA

I don't know.

MIKE

Outdoor? Indoor?

NADIA

Huh?

MIKE

Did he have access to outside?

NADIA

Why are you assuming my cat is male?

MIKE

Uh...

NADIA

Kinda bold. I'm single and a cat-owner so my choice to foster an animal must be a pathetic attempt to fill the hole in my soul that would otherwise be filled by penis?

MIKE

(game for a debate)

Ah. You'd like me to call you a "sad cat lady" so you can assert that you aren't one?

(rubs hands together)

I haven't had one of these since I was married. Bring it on.

NADIA

Being a feline lover is not and has never been "sad". Have you seen the 1982 film Cat People? It holds up.

MIKE

It saddens me that females in this generation seem pathologically unable to disentangle the state of being sexually free with their fear of being "alone" or even, gasp, "unwanted".

NADIA

A fear created by men.

MIKE

Not true.

NADIA

Meh. I doubt women came up with the idea of "The One". I mean, think about it: who benefits if ladies are "looking" and men are "settling"?

MIKE

(turned on)

Why didn't you talk like this before we fucked?

NADIA

I thought you wanted me for my body.

MIKE

And this is part of your therapy?  
How am I homework?

Nadia sighs and sits on the couch across from him.

NADIA

So Reich was an analyst who thought Freud's "death instinct" was the build-up of unused sexual energy. Ruth thinks pair bonding, marriage or formal partnerships are just our modern ways of trying to control death and are destined to fail.

MIKE

Kinda harsh.

NADIA

Says the divorced guy.

MIKE

I don't think ten years and a kid is failure. I think it's sad but not--

NADIA

'The One' in practical application, means 'The One I'm Going to Die With'. To take care of you when you're infirm and shit. So my move is gonna be to wait 'til I'm in, like, my late sixties then seal the deal.

MIKE

What if you die before fifty?

NADIA

Well, I can cheat the death  
instinct. I don't think I can cheat  
actual death.

(he stares)

What?

MIKE

Would you sit on my face right now?

Mike's phone makes a noise. He's surprised.

NADIA

I would but I called you an Uber.

MIKE

On my phone?

NADIA

I don't pay for Ubers when I do butt  
stuff.

HARD CUT TO:

TIME JUMP: Later. Nadia, now alone, sits at her computer. She writes code, listens to her headphones, and pounds red bull.

SOUNDTRACK: "*Shadowplay*" by Joy Division.

REVERSE ANGLE: Her computer screen. Lines of code fly across the black screen, pushing the previous line up and away.

On Nadia's desk sits a Russian Nesting Doll, a set of wooden dolls of decreasing size placed one inside another.

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON: POV inside Nadia's fridge. She pokes her head in. There are only a few items and nothing edible.

INT. DELI - NIGHT

Later. ANGLE ON: Rows of brightly packaged cat food and litter. REVERSE ON: Nadia somberly contemplates them.

Nadia does a late night deli run. She grabs a half dozen cans of Fancy Feasts and books it to the cashier.

The DELI PATRONS are appropriately weird for the neighborhood and early AM hour.

An ancient OLD MAN with multiple used shopping bags. An intense WOMAN shakes plastic containers of nuts. A dirty young COUPLE paw at each other and steal nitrous oxide siphons from whipped cream canisters.

Nadia approaches FERRAN (20s), lanky, Middle Eastern, running the counter. Nadia gives her items to him: cottage cheese, crackers, prosciutto, one cucumber, plus the cat food.

NADIA  
(in Arabic)  
Hey, Ferran, how are you?

FERRAN  
(in Arabic)  
Pretty good, Nadia. You?

NADIA  
(in Arabic)  
Long Live Allah!  
(in English)  
And that's all the Arabic I know.  
Carton of Camels.

She goes for her wallet. It's not on her.

NADIA (CONT'D)  
Holy shit. You're not gonna believe  
this. I don't... I forgot my wallet.

Ferran stares at her. Stone faced.

NADIA (CONT'D)  
Uh...

She looks up at... ANGLE ON: Wall clock. It's 1:42 AM.

NADIA (CONT'D)  
I think I left it at my party.

FERRAN  
Wild night?

NADIA  
Not really. I just need to... Look,  
do you have a pen and paper?

FERRAN  
Sure.

He slides a pen and a note pad her way. She writes her name on a slip and then places it on her stack of groceries.

NADIA

I'll be right back.

We get CLOSE ON: The note. Nadia's handwriting. We will need to recognise her handwriting later. The dot of her "i" seems distinctive. It will be enough for us to remember.

EXT. DELI - CONTINUOUS

Corner of tenth street and Avenue B. WHOOSH! A yellow cab whizzes by Nadia who starts down the street toward her place.

SFX. A cat mewing. Meow! Meow!

Nadia freezes. Her senses heighten. All diagetetic sound drops out. All we hear is: Meow. Meow. Nadia looks around. Calm. Centered. Ready to answer the call. And then she sees:

ANGLE ON: A fluffy, gray and white SIBERIAN CAT pokes his head out of the dark, dense night of Tompkins Square Park.

BACK ON: Nadia. Her relief floods her body. A softness, previously undetected in her personality, oozes from her.

NADIA

Hey there, my little one.

Oatmeal looks at her then splits! He slips back into the darkness of Tompkins Square Park. All the diagetetic sounds of the East Village come roaring back, as Nadia sprints into the street after him and--

**WHAM! A yellow cab slams into her.**

Her blood and brains splatter on windshield. Her dead body bounces from the car to the street. A sickening crack as she lands. Then stillness. It's all over in a few seconds.

We PUSH IN on: Nadia's corpse. Off-screen, Ferran shouts. We continue to PUSH to... ECU: Nadia's eye. Glassy. Dead.

SFX. Water. The powerful sound of a river. Or is it a faucet?

SOUNDTRACK: "Gotta Get Up" by Harry Nilsson.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

**We are back to where we were at the beginning of the episode.**

Nadia stares at herself in the mirror and washes her hands in Stella's bathroom. There's a loud KNOCK at the door.

Nadia turns off the faucet. A loud second KNOCK pounds the door. She goes for the door. Then she stops.

The door is the same as it was. Still covered in a sculptural papier-mache portal. Which is still just an art piece.

CLOSE ON: Nadia's face. She registers this moment as something significant. Maybe that she's done this before? Maybe she's concerned with what's on the other side? Perhaps she's waiting for that third knock...

With a rush of anxiety, she flings the door open.

SFX. A cacophony of Sounds and Music.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A few minutes later.

Stella prepares her chicken. Nadia across from her. It's all exactly as it was before. Stella, in the same outfit, same spirits, same actions.

STELLA

Sweet Birthday Baby! Havin' fun?

Nadia takes in the scene again. JUMP CUTS: Stella, overstimulated, distracted by GUESTS. Her chicken, a desecrated carcass.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(offering a joint)

It's laced with cocaine like the  
Israelis do it!

Nadia takes the joint but this time doesn't smoke it.

**NOTE:** Nadia is not fully cognizant of the fact that she is seeing, feeling and hearing the same things all over again. It's more of an uneasy feeling of *deja vu*. Not full recall.

Stella, on the other hand, behaves exactly as she did before. No robotic but blissfully ignorant. Like she's programmed.

NADIA

Stell--

STELLA

Oh god, you're having a terrible birthday. I'm a terrible friend. This party is just my manic episode--

NADIA

What was I just doing?

STELLA

Why? What do you mean? You were in the bathroom. You mean before that?

NADIA

Yeah. I... I can't remember.

STELLA

I don't know. You were here. Smoking. Drinking. Having a mid-life crisis.

(her smile falls)

You really can't remember? What were you doing before you came over?

NADIA

(remembers)

Oatmeal. He's gone.

STELLA

Gone? No. He's a cat. He always comes back. When he gets hungry.

NADIA

Maybe he finally gave up. Do you think it's possible for pets to commit suicide? Or do animals just have stronger self-preservation instincts because they don't have souls.

STELLA

(appalled; hands covered in dead chicken)

Animals have souls, Nadia. Jesus.

NADIA

I don't know what I'm saying. I feel weird. Maybe I just turned thirty-six two minutes ago and it's just hitting me now?

STELLA

Well, you're freaking me out. Which you are totally allowed to do.

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

It's your party but now I'm worried about the fish. Will you go check on them?

NADIA

I was gonna try to rustle up a "fish-tank" situation anyway.

STELLA

Enjoy yourself. And if Oatmeal is not back tonight we'll search Tompkins tomorrow.

The joint has burned down to Nadia's fingers and it singses her. She winces and drops it. She never smoked it.

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Later. Nadia and Mike. Fish tank. Mike, in the same outfit, same spirits, prattles as he did before but this time about a different subject.

Nadia listens but absent-mindedly. A little like someone going through the motions. As she stares into the fish-tank, wondering if fish have souls.

MIKE

(mid-monologue)

--so like John Updike said: "Every marriage tends to consist of an aristocrat and a peasant. Of a teacher and a learner." Since my ex-wife also teaches at Fordham it was this imbalance of--

NADIA

(absent-mindedly)

You got kids?

MIKE

That's your pick-up line?

There's a pause. Nadia stares at Mike, surprised. She remembers this dialogue.

**NOTE:** When Nadia recognizes dialogue, it allows her to settle even more into the situation she's in.

Mike does not have any sense that this has happened before. He's experiencing all of this as if it's the first time.

NADIA

A son. You've got a son.

MIKE

Yeah. His mom and I... We broke up--

NADIA

--Last year.

MIKE

Have we met before?

NADIA

I think I have amnesia.

MIKE

But you just remembered something.  
"Amnesia" means you forgot stuff--

Nadia has already lost interest and is back to the fish.

NADIA

(re: the fish)

You know it's a myth that fish have no memory. Sometimes they can remember months. And a channel catfish can remember a human voice announcing food five years after last hearing it.

MIKE

That makes sense. If what they remember serves an evolutionary purpose, contributes to survival--

NADIA

But we don't.

MIKE

Huh?

NADIA

Human memories don't serve evolutionary purposes.

MIKE

Fire. Ouch. Next time fire. No thanks.

NADIA

I mean, yeah, some of them do. But like what about shame or nostalgia? How do they help us survive?

MIKE

(pause, really thinks)  
They don't.

NADIA

What?

MIKE

Would you sit on my face right now?

NADIA

Can I finish you off at my place?

He nods, enthusiastically. She pushes him onto Stella's bed and gets ready to mount him.

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - ENTRANCE

Later. Nadia prepares to leave, turns to wave down Stella when she sees...

ANGLE ON: A small fire. Near the kitchen. Started by the joint she dropped. Several GUESTS put it out. Nadia cocks her head to one side, contemplating this crisis she created.

NADIA

Fire. Ouch.

SFX. Stella's Doorbell.

Nadia opens the door to...

RUTH

My knees! Those stairs are a bitch but I can't complain. The only thing easy in this life is taking a piss in the shower!

Nadia isn't listening because Ruth is not alone this time.

ALAN (40s), Ruth's godson and a renowned astrophysicist. He wears a three-piece suit and holds Ruth's purse for her.

There's something seductively disruptive about him. Not just because he wasn't with Ruth the first time we saw this scene.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Have you never met Alan? He's my godson and a space celebrity! This is Nadia.

Nadia and Alan shake hands.

NADIA

Full disclosure, I'm no longer in my early to mid thirties.

ALAN

Full disclosure. I'm also a big fan  
of pissing in the shower.

Mike enters, ready to go. He sees Nadia's hand still resting  
in Alan's. His face falls. Mike's night is over.

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - NIGHT

Later. An hour or so. Nadia and Alan chat, in a private  
corner of the party.

NADIA

The Jet Propulsion Lab? Wow. An  
actual rocket scientist. You don't  
meet those everyday--

ALAN

--Well, I do actually.

NADIA

Right. To you they're co-workers. To  
me they're the Right Stuff.

(pause)

Did you get that reference?

ALAN

Oh sure. The Right Stuff is to NASA  
nerds what the Fabulous Stains is to  
girls like you.

NADIA

What're you, running a touché race?

(Alan laughs)

Don't you know it's MY birthday?  
That's MY look. You wanna get out of  
here? My place is right around the  
corner.

ALAN

(laughs)

I know that Stella pays for this  
place with the blood of Whitney  
Biennels but how does a nice girl  
like you end up with a rent-  
controlled condo on the Lower East  
Side. Not to be gauche.

NADIA

No please-- Be a fucking animal. It  
suits you. So does that three-piece  
suit. The suit suits you.

He doesn't laugh. She smiles coyly and decides to get real.

NADIA (CONT'D)

(shield lowering)

My mom left it to me. She bought it in the '80s. Back then a Russian immigrant could afford a place down here. Now...

ALAN

...now it's the beautiful people.

They take in the GUESTS. Dancing, chatting, imbibing.

ALAN (CONT'D)

When did she pass?

NADIA

Dark.

ALAN

I'm sorry. It's none of my business--

NADIA

I was three. The only things I know about her are stories, real estate and a babushka doll.

ALAN

Pardon me?

NADIA

Those Russian nesting dolls. Like those egg-shaped dolls that get smaller and smaller. My grandmother gave it to her and then when mom died she gave it to me. And someday, I will give it to my dead cat.

ALAN

Heavy.

NADIA

I mean, I don't know if my cat's dead. I'm just assuming.

Stella approaches, carrying a video projector.

STELLA

I heard we have a legitimate big deal astronaut here and I had to show you this.

(sets up projector)

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

I made it for Hauser & Wirth and they hated it. But you might be into it. Don't judge me. This is a safe space.

Click! Stella's projector lights up and shines her work onto the ceiling. Nadia and Alan look up at...

ANGLE ON: The night sky. Constellations. We weave throughout the solar system. Flying by planets. We get to Jupiter.

Alan leans in. His mouth nestled a corner of Nadia's neck.

ALAN

(points to ceiling)  
Can you see it?

NADIA

The water stain or...

ALAN

Juno.

NADIA

Is Juno a star? Or just a collective fever dream we all experienced as a society in 2007?

ALAN

It's a satellite. On the fourth of July of last year, it inserted itself into the orbit of Jupiter. And me and bunch of nerds in Pasadena put it up there.

NADIA

Seriously? JPL headquarters are in Pasadena? Weird move, NASA.

ANGLE ON: Nadia's POV. Alan's hand and fingers in the foreground. Stella's projection in the background. He mimes placing something into the heavens.

BACK ON: Nadia. All diagetic sound goes out. She is lost. Disconnected. Disoriented. Alan's voice remains in her head.

ALAN (O.S.)

I like Jupiter but I'm more of a Mars guy. This physicist I work with, he's a Pluto guy.

NADIA

I think my cat's dead.

She comes back into the scene... As does the diagetetic sound.

There has been a TIME JUMP. Several new GUESTS have joined Alan, Stella and Nadia, including RUTH, who is mid-story. Everyone eats Stella's chicken.

RUTH

--so I'm nine years old. It's way past my bedtime. I'm peering out over the railing of the staircase and I hear Tallulah Bankhead say "Do you have any cigarettes?" You have to remember, she was one of the biggest MGM stars at the time. A total wild thing and a knockout.

(pause, to Nadia)

Did you hear this one already?

Nadia gets up. She might throw up.

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - HALLWAY

An alcove outside the bathroom. Some GUESTS wait in line. Nadia stops at the door, contemplating it.

Once again, the tangible portal-like qualities of the door remain fascinating to her. Is this the cause of it all?

ANGLE ON: Nadia, in front of the candy-cane colored wallpaper, desperate for an answer to her deja vu.

She flings it open. Inside...

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The bathroom. Just another room. As the door is just another door. It's almost eerie how real and tactile it all is. A LESBIAN COUPLE make out near the sink. One of them is LIZZY.

LIZZY

What the Fu-- Hey, Nads. Many happy returns!

Nadia, disoriented, tries to piece together what's going on.

NADIA

I think I might throw up.

LIZZY

You okay?

NADIA

Does this bathroom seem kinda... I don't know... weird to you?

LIZZY

(glances at her girl)  
How so?

NADIA

Like. Haunted or something?

LIZZY

No? I mean, besides the shitty commercial joint fillers trying to patch a leaky U-joint... it's a pretty nice bathroom.  
(takes in Nadia)  
You drank too much?

NADIA

No. No. I didn't drink at all.

LIZZY

Smoked too much then.

She frantically splashes water. Like to wake herself up.

NADIA

No. That's not it. Like I can't even remember the last time I ate but other things are so clear it's as if they've already happened. And I'm doing them again.

LIZZY is inclined to shrug this off. But Nadia's intensity is impossible to ignore.

ALAN (O.S.)

Hey. You alright in here?

Alan appears.

ALAN (CONT'D)

(sees Lizzy and her girl)  
Oh. Sorry.

LIZZY

Big NASA fan.

An angry GUEST pokes his head into the door.

ANGRY GUEST

Hey! We've got people hopping up and down on one leg out here.

ANGLE ON: Alan and Nadia. She's still uneasy and looks to him for something. Guidance? Answers? His face softens.

ALAN

Let's get out of here. Your place is  
just a few block away.  
(notices her face)  
Jesus, you're wet.

Nadia recognizes this dialogue. It's the same as hers and Mikes. It makes her feel safer. Relieves her panic and makes her want to make a decision.

NADIA

(smiles)  
I know right? It's like, don't go  
chasing waterfalls.

INT. DELI - NIGHT

Later. Same deli and PATRONS. Nadia and Alan get provisions.

ALAN

You feeling better?

NADIA

Yeah. I must've smoked one of  
Stella's joints. Me and coke are  
like oil and vinegar. I don't have  
the best track record with mixing  
substances.

ALAN

Or metaphors.

NADIA

I said "like" oil and vinegar.  
That's a fucking simile.

They approach Ferran. She pats her pockets.

NADIA (CONT'D)

I don't seem to have my wallet.

ALAN

It's on me.

Nadia lays out her items for purchase. They are the same as what she bought the first time she went to the deli. This time she adds: A strip of condoms.

NADIA  
(to Alan, re: condoms)  
No pressure.  
(in Arabic)  
Hey, Ferran, how are you?

Ferran, cheery, as he was before.

FERRAN  
(in Arabic)  
Pretty good, Nadia. You?

NADIA  
(in Arabic)  
Long Live Allah! Carton of Camels,  
please.

ALAN  
You speak Arabic?

NADIA  
Weird! I'm speaking Arabic.  
(laughs, in Arabic)  
Have I always known this much  
Arabic?

FERRAN  
(shrugs; in Arabic)  
Who's the suit?

NADIA  
(in Arabic)  
Just a birthday present.

FERRAN  
(in Arabic)  
Be careful. I never trust a suit.

Nadia winks at Ferran. Alan notices.

ALAN  
What're you saying? Are you--

NADIA  
(to Alan)  
Sorry that's the drugs winking.

They exit.

EXT. DELI - NIGHT

Nadia stops short of the street. She sees...

ANGLE ON: Across the street, exactly where her cat was last time, is HORSE, the attractive maybe homeless guy. He smiles, Cheshire-like. She starts to move. Alan exits the deli.

ALAN

Hey!

She stops. VROOM! The yellow cab that hit her before passes them, clearing her this time.

NADIA

(yelling at Horse)

Do I KNOW you?!

(to Alan)

I feel like I know that guy.

(at Horse)

HEY!

HORSE

WHAT?!

NADIA

DO WE KNOW EACH OTHER?

HORSE

FUCK OFF!

NADIA

(shrugs)

I don't know. Sounds like my ex though.

ALAN

I think I should just drop you off at home. You need to sleep.

NADIA

Or I'm suffering some sort brain malfunction and going to bed would be the worst thing to do.

ALAN

The hospital?

NADIA

Ugh. I've spent enough time in those. After the first six hours, they're a wash. Take me on a walk.

Alan takes her by the arm. They exit. Horse watches them go.

EXT. EAST RIVER - NIGHT

Later. Somewhere between the Manhattan and Williamsburg bridges. The hour is late but the sky is purple with a creeping dawn. Nadia and Alan walk.

NADIA  
Impressive. Huh?

ALAN  
Not bad.

NADIA  
Look I wouldn't kick Pasadena out of bed. On a weekday. But this is...

ALAN  
It is. But, honestly, it doesn't feel like a real place to me.

NADIA  
Okay...

ALAN  
New York is a city with several iconic images that wildly precede it. After seeing it in films both romantic and violent, or on the news being attacked, it's not real to me.

NADIA  
(lights a cigarette)  
Please. 9/11 conspiracy theories are a huge boner killer around here.

ALAN  
(re: cigarette)  
Those'll kill you.

NADIA  
I heard.

ALAN  
What do you do?

NADIA  
I code.

ALAN  
You program. What language?

NADIA  
Ruby. I know. How 2010 of me.

ALAN  
(hands up)  
I didn't say anything.

NADIA  
I could feel your nerd judgment.  
It's like regular judgment only bad  
at sports.

ALAN  
What're you working on now?

NADIA  
I'm fixing a bug for my buddy's new  
software. Some loops weren't built  
right. You're into this, Mr. Rocket  
Science Nobel Prize?

ALAN  
Big time.

NADIA  
Well in the dialogue of code there  
are these things called loops and  
sometimes these loops have no  
terminating conditions, conditions  
that can't be met or that cause the  
it to start over. An infinite loop.

ALAN  
We deal a lot with infinity as well.  
You heard of the Drake Equation?

NADIA  
Yeah. Estimates the possible number  
of galaxies with intelligent life.

ALAN  
It's more like a mathematical  
security blanket. Humans have  
trouble contemplating the vastness  
of time and space because they don't  
like the concept of infinity.

NADIA  
You just said "Humans" like you  
aren't one. Just a heads up, I only  
fuck humans.

ALAN  
(jovially)  
We aren't having sex tonight.

Alan turns to her. Nadia realizes they are really close to the pedestrian railing. The East River below them.

NADIA

Hey, so I'm picking up some intense Mr. Goodbar vibes here and I got an early morning--

ALAN

How many lives do you think you have left?

NADIA

What?

ALAN

Wanna find out?

He grins. Bear-hugs her. And throws both their bodies into...

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

... the cold water of the East River.

This sequence has a surreal feel to it. It's dark and we can't quite make out what's happening.

We FOCUS ON: Nadia struggles against Alan. He has a hand around her wrist and pulls her down. His eyes wild. His expression at peace. As life drains from his face...

ALAN

Meow.

He breathes in water, dies and lets go of her.

Nadia fights up to the surfaces. Pumps her legs. Then her plastic deli bag, smothers her. She tries to free herself.

HARD CUT TO:

DARKNESS. SFX. Water gushing like a flood. Or a faucet.

SOUNDTRACK: "Gotta Get Up" by Harry Nilsson

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

**We are back to where we were at the beginning of the episode.**

Nadia washes her hands in Stella's bathroom.

CLOSE ON: Nadia's face. She is uneasy. Then we realize it. She's not breathing. Then, she coughs up...

...almost a liter of river water into the sink. She stares at it. Trying to piece together what's going on. She looks at her reflection. There's a loud KNOCK at the door. The same door.

With a rush of anxiety, she flings the door open. GUEST file in as she exits.

INT. STELLA'S LOFT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Moments later. Stella prepares her chicken. Everything is the same as it was. Stella behaves exactly as she has in past versions of this scene.

Nadia enters. Less disoriented; more determined.

**NOTE:** She still does not fully understand that she is repeating the same experience. Only that she threw up water and feels unease and deja vu.

STELLA

Sweet Birthday Baby! Havin' fun?  
(offering a joint)  
It's laced with cocaine--

NADIA

I gotta go. I'm sick.

STELLA

What's wrong?

NADIA

I'm puking.

STELLA

Well, you don't have to leave. Have  
a glass of water.

NADIA

No. Water is what I'm puking.

EXT. STELLA'S LOFT - NIGHT

Nadia exits. It's raining. She barrels down the street toward her place. Across the street, Horse watches her go.

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

She takes off her coat, scarf and throws them plus her bag on the couch. SQUEAK! She picks up a CAT TOY. She stares at it intently then squeaks it again.

She looks at herself in the mirror. She inspects herself. Her left wrist (the one Alan held while trying to drag her to the bottom of the East River) seems a little red, irritated.

NADIA  
(to herself)  
What the fuck is happening?

She goes to her computer with multiple monitors. She watches as the code with the infinite loop quietly loads and reloads.

She sits at the keyboard. She considers working then...

RACK FOCUS to the matryoshka "Russian" doll on her desktop. She opens it. And inside the first doll is a note. She takes it out. And it reads:

**Go to the deli.**

This is her handwriting. The "i" is dotted like the note she wrote and put on her groceries. **NOTE:** She at some point wrote this note to herself and left it in the doll for her to find.

She exits. Out-of-focus and in the background. In the foreground and in focus is...

...the Russian Doll. Wooden. But all smiles.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE.