

NEUROTRANSMISSION

written by

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EXT. INTERDIMENSIONAL STORM

An eerie HUM buzzes.

Thick, roiling swirls of purple and blue clouds, studded with arcs of white-hot LIGHTNING.

The hum gradually grows into an unearthly SCREAM, like a massive swarm of cicadas filtered through a vocal effects pedal.

As the sound reaches its crescendo, a jagged flash of lightning lingers as it flashes across the clouds.

The clouds and dissonant shrieking fade away.

The arc of lightning remains, fading into the shape of a CRACK in dingy tile.

We are now in--

INT. CHICAGO TRANSIT AUTHORITY TRANSFER TUNNEL - DAY

--the transfer tunnel between the CTA Red and Blue Line subway stops at Jackson Boulevard in downtown Chicago.

A parade of feet march past the crack, which sits slightly above a discarded bag of chips and a puddle of what is probably urine.

Fluorescent lights on the windowless walls cast a sickly glow on the throng of rush-hour commuters bustling through.

RUBY (mid 20s) navigates the crowd skillfully with a small rolling suitcase in tow. She might be considered hipster-fashionable if her disheveled appearance wasn't so obviously unintentional.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHICAGO - DAY

The Chicago skyline, bathed in a golden late-afternoon glow.

An "L" train rumbles past on elevated tracks.

INT. CTA RAIL CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ruby sits on a crowded Blue Line train, suitcase tucked between her legs.

DING!

A text alert. She pulls out her phone - there is a notification from MEL:

MEL (TEXT)
Just got home. You almost here?

Ruby types a reply:

RUBY (TEXT)
Yup, should be there in 15

Mel's response is immediate:

MEL (TEXT)
Yay! Can't wait to see you <3

Ruby sighs softly and puts her phone away. She leans forward in the seat, picking at her fingernails as her brow creases in worry.

She fidgets with the sleeve of her hoodie, briefly revealing a bandaged wrist.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Ruby approaches the front door of a small, brick apartment building. Squinting at the buzzer, she zeroes in on "2WS - Melissa Bradley".

Taking a deep breath, she presses the button. A mechanical BZZT sounds out.

After a moment--

MEL (O.S.)
(garbled through the
speaker)
Hello?

RUBY
Let me in, bitch!

Mel squeals through the speaker. The front door BUZZES as it unlocks.

Ruby picks up her suitcase and heads inside.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

MEL (mid 20s, tattooed with bright hair) stands in her open apartment doorway, bouncing with excitement as she hears Ruby trudge up the flight of stairs.

As Ruby reaches the top of the stairs, Mel shrieks and runs to her, nearly knocking her over with a powerful hug. The women laugh.

RUBY
Whoa! Hi!

MEL
Hi!

Mel pulls back from the embrace, holding Ruby by the shoulders and studying her intently.

MEL (cont'd)
It's so good to see you. You look--

RUBY
Like shit, I know.

Mel rolls her eyes.

MEL
Oh come on, don't--

RUBY
I know, I know. I'm kidding.

Ruby laughs halfheartedly.

MEL
Well, let's get you settled!

She strides into the apartment. Ruby picks up her suitcase and follows her in.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mel's apartment. Cozy and well-lit, with a hodge-podge of decor from a combination of thrift stores and alleyways.

A doorless entryway leading to a connected room has been draped with sheets.

Mel approaches the sheets, beckoning Ruby to join her. She pulls back the sheets with a dramatic flourish.

MEL
Voila!

A small, makeshift bedroom. A futon, side table, lamp, and rolling rack with hangers. Strings of lights twinkle around the window.

Ruby's jaw drops.

RUBY
What! This is so cool!

She rushes in and immediately flops onto the futon.

After a moment she props herself up on her elbows, eyebrows furrowed.

RUBY (cont'd)
Wait-- wasn't this your studio?
Where's all your art shit?

MEL
Oh, I got rid of some stuff in the
kitchen and moved it all in there.

RUBY
Wow. I mean, I was fully prepared to
sleep on the air mattress again. I
wasn't expecting such luxury!

Mel laughs and wheels Ruby's suitcase into the "bedroom",
letting the sheet fall behind her.

MEL
Well, you gave me a little bit of
warning this time, so I figured I'd
at least make things cozy.

She sinks gently onto the futon next to Ruby. Ruby sighs
contentedly and lays on her back.

MEL (cont'd)
(concerned)
How are you?

RUBY
Oh, you know. Living the dream.

Mel clicks her tongue.

MEL
Come on. Seriously.

RUBY
What? Art school drop-out, psych ward
stay, kicked out of your parents'
house? I mean, if you had asked me
five years ago where I saw myself in
five years, I would have said-- well,
basically this.

MEL

Hey, you didn't drop out. You--

RUBY

Fine, I got kicked out. Drop-kicked, I guess.

MEL

Shut up! It's just a leave of absence until you get back on your feet. Jesus, you're an asshole sometimes.

Ruby props herself up on her elbows and grins.

RUBY

But you love me!

Mel rolls her eyes, but wears a small smile.

MEL

Whatever, I guess.

Ruby sits up and fidgets with the cuff of her hoodie. She stares at her lap.

RUBY

I-- I'm okay, though. Like, I'm bad and I feel like shit. But I'm better, really.

Mel smiles sadly and puts a hand on Ruby's shoulder.

MEL

Well listen, I'm glad you're still here, okay?

RUBY

Ugh, gross.

Mel scoffs and shoves her playfully.

MEL

I'm trying to be serious!

RUBY

I know! I hate it! Tell me what an asshole I am again.

Mel glares at her, faux-serious.

MEL

You are such a fucking asshole.

RUBY

Thank you. That's my love language.

They laugh. Ruby collapses back on the futon again.

RUBY (cont'd)

For real though, Mel-- thank you for this. Seriously. I won't be in your hair too long-- I'll get a job, find my own place, all of that "stable adult" stuff. Maybe re-enroll eventually.

MEL

Hey, you can take as long as you need. Just like last time.

RUBY

And the time before that. And the time--

MEL

I'm always here for you, okay?
Always.

She grabs Ruby's hand and squeezes it affectionately, then stands up.

MEL (cont'd)

I'll let you get unpacked. Think about what you want to do for dinner!

Mel exits, checking to make sure the sheet closes fully behind her.

Ruby looks around the room, taking it in slowly. Her eyes fall on a FRAMED PHOTO propped on the side table. She shifts across the futon and picks it up to look at it more closely.

It's a photo of her and Mel, embracing tightly. Different hair colors and fewer tattoos indicate that this was not taken recently.

Mel wears a graduation cap and gown.

Ruby sighs and sets the frame back down. As she does so, she notices a sheet of NOTEBOOK PAPER on the table. In colorful pen, surrounded by doodles of hearts and stars, the first line reads:

PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN PSYCHIATRISTS

Followed by a list of names, phone numbers, and addresses.

Ruby chews on her lower lip as she scans the list.

At the top:

DR. J. CHURCHWELL
312-555-1234
333 N. MICHIGAN AVE

INT. DR. CHURCHWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

A sleek, minimalistic psychiatrist's office. A plant on a windowsill, a tidy bookshelf, a ticking clock, a diploma hanging on the wall.

Ruby is perched on the edge of an uncomfortable-looking sofa. She picks at her fingernails absently.

DR. CHURCHWELL (40s, blandly pleasant) is behind his desk, typing rapidly as Ruby speaks.

RUBY
Lexapro, Celexa, Zoloft. Uh...
Wellbutrin. Cymbalta. Prozac. Ativan.
What else... Xanax, for a little bit.
And I've been on lithium for a few
weeks.

DR. CHURCHWELL
How are you tolerating the lithium?

RUBY
It sucks. I hate it.

Dr. Churchwell raises his eyebrows.

DR. CHURCHWELL
I see. What side effects are you
experiencing?

Ruby groans loudly and leans forward onto her knees.

RUBY
Honestly it feels like it would
almost be easier to list the side
effects I'm not experiencing, you
know? I'm tired all the time, like
constantly. No matter how much I
sleep, it's never enough. Um, I can't
focus. I'm nauseous most of the time.
Sometimes I get really dizzy, like
out of nowhere. And, Jesus, I have
been having the weirdest fucking--

She stops herself and puts a hand over her mouth. Dr. Churchwell shakes his head - "don't worry about it".

Ruby smiles sheepishly.

RUBY (cont'd)
My dreams have been just fucking
bizarre. But mostly... I don't know.
I feel like a zombie or something.

Dr. Churchwell makes note of all of this.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Who prescribed you the lithium?

RUBY
Oh. The doctors at the psych ward.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Ah. Is that where you received the
bipolar diagnosis?

Ruby sighs heavily.

RUBY
Yup. Turns out my brain is even more
broken than everyone initially
thought.

Dr. Churchwell laughs lightly.

DR. CHURCHWELL
I don't know if "more broken" is very
fair. Your brain is just
malfunctioning in a different way
than anyone realized. That's why you
never had any success with that list
of antidepressants you mentioned-- it
was never depression.

RUBY
I guess that makes sense.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Can you tell me what happened leading
up to your hospital stay?

Ruby's face drops.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - FLASHBACK

Bright and harsh with vivid colors. Everything is slightly
out of focus.

Ruby paces and gestures erratically, wild-eyed. She screams, but everything is unintelligible, as if hearing it from underwater.

Her father, TIM (50s) stands blocking the door. Her mother, JANET (50s) stands off to the side with her hand over her mouth, weeping quietly.

Tim speaks gently to Ruby, though it is still garbled.

For a moment, Ruby freezes, nostrils flared. Then, in a flash, she lunges at Tim, trying to shove her way past him.

Tim grabs her by the waist. Ruby thrashes violently, her elbow connecting with his nose.

Blood pours out like a faucet.

INT. DR. CHURCHWELL'S OFFICE - BACK TO PRESENT

Ruby inhales sharply. She dabs her eyes with her shirt sleeve, trying to stop the tears from spilling over.

RUBY

Um, honestly I don't really remember much of it.

Dr. Churchwell nods. He slides a box of tissues towards the end of the desk, which Ruby takes and places on her lap.

RUBY (cont'd)

Thanks. I guess what I do remember is that everything felt, like-- tight, I guess? Like, my skin felt too tight. And my brain was just moving so fast, my body couldn't keep up.

She sighs.

RUBY (cont'd)

Whenever I heard anyone talk about bipolar disorder before, I always thought it was like-- happy, sad, happy, sad, you know? I didn't know mania could be so...

She trails off.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Dysphoric?

Ruby nods.

RUBY
Yeah. Exactly.

DR. CHURCHWELL
That's a really common misconception.
I'm sorry you had to learn about it
firsthand.

Ruby nods again, her gaze dropping to her lap. Then, she begins to chuckle to herself softly.

Dr. Churchwell tilts his head, brows knit together

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
What's funny?

Ruby looks back up at him.

RUBY
I'm sorry. It's not really "funny"
funny, I guess. I'm just thinking
about all the weird things my brain
tricked me into believing. Like, for
a minute there I thought I had
superpowers. Like I was one of the X-
men or something.

DR. CHURCHWELL
That's not uncommon during a manic
episode. What kind of powers did you
believe you had?

RUBY
Oh, all kinds of shit.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - FLASHBACK

Back in the disorienting bright blur and garbled soundscape.

Tim lets go of Ruby to instinctively put a hand to his
broken nose. She takes this opportunity to shove him,
sending him clear across the room.

RUBY (V.O.)
Super strength.

Janet rushes to her husband, who lays in a collapsed heap.
In a blur of motion too fast to process, Ruby dashes into
the--

HALLWAY

--finding what Tim was working to block her from: a set of CAR KEYS hanging from a wall hook.

RUBY (V.O.)

Speed.

She runs to the front door, and with a wave of her hand it slams open.

RUBY (V.O.) (cont'd)

Telekinesis.

As Ruby rushes out the door, Janet's voice breaks through the garbled white noise as she screams:

JANET (O.S.)

Ruby, no!

INT. DR. CHURCHWELL'S OFFICE - BACK TO PRESENT

Ruby shakes her head.

RUBY

Stupid.

DR. CHURCHWELL

It's not stupid. Irrational? Sure. But it's just like you said-- your brain tricked you. And the important thing now is that you're well enough to recognize that.

RUBY

Yeah, I guess.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Here's what I'm thinking. I'd like to get you off of the lithium.

RUBY

Hell yeah. As soon as possible.

DR. CHURCHWELL

It'll have to happen gradually - quitting cold turkey will give you withdrawal symptoms.

(MORE)

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
While you're doing that, I'll start you on a very low dose of a different mood stabilizer that we'll ramp up as we lower the lithium. I'll write up a taper schedule.

He types hurriedly as he speaks.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
I'd like you to come in next week for a follow-up. We can monitor how you're feeling, and see if we need to taper more slowly. How does that sound?

RUBY
I mean, I'll be honest, I'm not really looking forward to more drugs.

DR. CHURCHWELL
I understand. Starting yet another pill must be intimidating. I think we can make some real progress once we figure out the right balance for you. This is just a matter of getting your brain to make the right chemicals. My goal is to get you feeling functional on the lowest level of medication possible. Okay?

Ruby's mouth twists into a skeptical scowl, but she nods.

RUBY
Okay.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Good.

Dr. Churchwell hits a button on his computer and begins to print a document. He stands, gets the sheet from the printer, and walks to Ruby.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
Here's the taper schedule. Please call me if you have any questions, or if you're experiencing any of the withdrawal side effects I listed here. Go check in with Sylvia on the way out, she'll get you scheduled for next week.

Ruby takes the paperwork and tucks it into her purse. She rises and gathers her things.

Dr. Churchwell opens the door and extends his hand.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
It was good to meet you, Ruby.

RUBY
Thanks, you too.

Ruby reaches out to accept the handshake, and--

BANG!

Dr. Churchwell's eyes widen as we flash to-

EXT. INTERDIMENSIONAL STORM

--a swirl of thick purple clouds, studded with arcs of lightning.

The familiar, glowing shape of the CRACK from the transfer tunnel stretches across, lingering a bit longer than the other flashes.

INT. DR. CHURCHWELL'S OFFICE - BACK TO SCENE

Ruby winces and recoils, drawing her hand away quickly.

RUBY
Ow! Sorry, it's that time of year.

Dr. Churchwell stares at her, shell-shocked.

DR. CHURCHWELL
I-- um, I'm sorry, what?

RUBY
Static shock? It's getting so dry outside.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Oh. Yes, of course.

Dr. Churchwell puts a hand to his forehead. Ruby's eyebrows furrow with concern.

RUBY
Okay, well-- I'll see you next week.

Dr. Churchwell shakes his head a bit, as if to clear it. He smiles.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Yes, see you next week.

Ruby exits. Dr. Churchwell closes the door behind her and immediately slumps against it, worry and confusion etched on his face.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
Huh.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

SYLVIA (50s), the stern receptionist, sits at her desk. Her phone RINGS - she answers it immediately.

SYLVIA
Windy City Counseling Services, how
may I help you? Sure. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Churchwell staggers into the waiting area, distracted and distant.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Sylvia?

SYLVIA
I'm sorry, can you hold for just a
moment? Thank you.

Sylvia presses a button and rests the receiver on her shoulder.

SYLVIA (cont'd)
Yes, Doctor Ch--

Her eyes widen when she sees him.

SYLVIA (cont'd)
Jasper, what's wrong?

DR. CHURCHWELL
When is my next appointment?

Sylvia checks the computer.

SYLVIA
In an hour.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Great. Cancel it. Cancel the rest of
my day. I'm-- I'm not feeling well.

With that, Dr. Churchwell wanders back towards his office. Sylvia's brow creases with concern. She presses a button on the phone, bringing the receiver back to her ear.

SYLVIA

Thank you for holding, I'm so sorry about that. You wanted an intake appointment, is that correct?

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ruby enters the apartment, carrying a small pharmacy bag. She pulls back the curtain to her "bedroom" and dumps her things on the floor in an unceremonious heap.

MEL (O.S.)

Hey!

RUBY

Hey.

MEL (O.S.)

Come look at this!

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

In an offshoot of the kitchen that could have been a breakfast nook, Mel sits at an easel, painting. Her work is vivid and abstract.

Ruby enters partially, leaning against the door frame.

MEL

What do you think?

She slides back on her stool, showing off the painting.

RUBY

Oh. It's nice, I like it.

Mel rolls her eyes.

MEL

Come on, you can do better than that. You have, like, seventy-five percent of an art degree.

RUBY

Whatever. Um, I guess I like the-- the movement of it? It's really dynamic.

Mel smiles.

MEL

Thanks. Oh! Just a heads up, I won't be home tonight. I'm going out with Yvonne.

Ruby gasps excitedly.

RUBY

Ooh, Yvonne? Who's Yvonne?

Mel beams shyly.

MEL

Just a girl I've been seeing.

RUBY

That's great! How long?

MEL

Four months.

RUBY

Wow, and no U-Hauls have been rented yet?

Mel laughs.

MEL

No, not yet.

RUBY

Well hey, I hope I get to meet her soon.

MEL

Oh yeah, definitely.

A beat.

MEL (cont'd)

So, how was it today?

RUBY

Oh. It was fine. He didn't suck.

MEL

Honestly, with your track record that's pretty great news.

RUBY

Yeah, I guess.

MEL

Well, speaking of great news...

She does a dramatic drum roll on her lap.

MEL (cont'd)

I think I got you a job!

Ruby's eyebrows shoot up, then knit together in confusion.

RUBY

Oh! What?

MEL

My friend Jonah has this really cool bar, and he mentioned that he's short-staffed and needs a bar back! I thought of you right away. I told him you could come by tomorrow at two.

RUBY

Wait, tomorrow? Really? You didn't even ask--

MEL

(laughing)

What? It's not like you have anything else going on.

RUBY

Ouch!

Mel sighs.

MEL

Sorry. It's just-- I don't know, all you've done for the last week is sit around or sleep.

RUBY

Hey, don't forget all the TV I watch.

Mel rolls her eyes.

MEL

I'm just saying, it would be good for you to get out of the house. Have something consistent.

Ruby takes a long slug from her beer bottle.

Mel turns back to her painting.

MEL (cont'd)
I don't know about this. I think it's
missing something.

Ruby hops off the counter and holds out her partially empty
beer.

RUBY
Do you want the rest of this? I'm
tired, I think I'm gonna lay down for
a little bit.

MEL
No thanks. It's almost six, isn't
that a little late for a nap?

Ruby drains her beer and puts the bottle in the recycling
bin. She exits without another word.

Frustrated, Mel rolls her eyes and turns back to her
painting.

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ruby is seated on her futon, the contents of her pharmacy
bag in front of her: two bottles of PILLS, the TAPER
SCHEDULE, and a PILL CUTTER.

She grabs the pill cutter and plays with it, snapping it
open and closed. Putting that aside, she picks up the taper
schedule and reads it closely.

She pours one lithium pill into her palm, examining it
closely before placing it in the pill cutter. After cutting
it she pops one half in her mouth, grimacing as she swallows
it dry.

Nodding to herself, she folds up the taper schedule and sets
it on her side table, along with her pills and pill-cutter.
With a sigh, she leans back on the futon and closes her
eyes.

INT. BISTRO - NIGHT

A cozy, trendy restaurant. Mel sits across from YVONNE (mid-
20s, alternative cool) at a small table tucked away in the
corner. Candlelight flickers on their faces.

A WAITER drops off two elaborately garnished craft
cocktails.

MEL

Thank you.

WAITER

Of course. I'll be back in a moment
to take your order.

He walks away briskly. Mel and Yvonne raise their glasses to
each other.

YVONNE

Cheers!

They clink glasses and take a drink.

YVONNE (cont'd)

So how's your new roommate?

MEL

Oh, she's doing okay. Still settling
in. It's good to have her around, I
missed her a lot.

YVONNE

Hmm.

Mel arches an eyebrow.

MEL

What?

YVONNE

Should I be worried?

Mel cackles.

MEL

No way! No. Absolutely not. First of
all, Ruby isn't even into women. And
more importantly, she's basically my
sister. So, ew, you're gross for even
implying that.

Yvonne smiles.

YVONNE

Okay, okay. I get it. It's hard not
to be a little jealous, though. My
lease is up next month, it would have
been the perfect time to move in
together.

MEL

I know. I'm sorry.

YVONNE

It just feels a little bit like you
got cold feet.

Mel sighs and reaches across the table for Yvonne's hand.

MEL

Of course not. Look, it's just-- Ruby
has never really been able to take
care of herself, you know? And right
now she doesn't have anyone else.
She's frustrating sometimes, but I'd
rather be frustrated with her than
lose my best friend completely.

YVONNE

You're a better friend than I am.

Mel laughs softly.

YVONNE (cont'd)

For real, though! I couldn't handle
being someone's caregiver like that.
Not even if it was my actual sister.

MEL

I wouldn't say I'm her "caregiver".

YVONNE

Call it what you want. I just know I
would need to feel like she was
pulling her own weight, or at least
trying.

MEL

Sure, but--

YVONNE

You can only help her so much if she
isn't trying to help herself.

The waiter approaches, notepad in hand.

WAITER

Are you ready to order, ladies?

Mel and Yvonne nod and reach for their menus.

A WHITE SPACE - DREAM

A white void, filled with shifting amorphous gray shapes.
Everything is slightly out of focus. There is a low hum and
a dull, pulsing sound.

After a few moments of this, there is a loud CRASH! and the sound of BREAKING GLASS.

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ruby startles awake with a short gasp.

It's dark - several hours have passed, and the sun has fully set.

She looks around, disoriented. The side table has toppled over, bringing the lamp and Ruby's bottles of pills with it.

The picture frame lays face down on the floor. Ruby lifts it up, revealing that the glass has shattered.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ruby has retrieved a broom and dustpan, carrying them as she approaches her bedroom "door".

She stops short - there's a POST-IT NOTE stuck to the sheets.

"MEET JONAH AT INTERROBANG - 2PM!"

She rolls her eyes and snatches the note off of the sheet.

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ruby gets to work sweeping up the broken glass. After brushing the shards into the trash and lifting the side table back into place, she sinks onto the futon.

Frowning in confusion, Ruby stares at the side table for a moment.

Settling back onto the futon, she spots Mel's post-it note. With a sigh, she sticks it to the side table before laying back to go to sleep.

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sunlight streams in through the window, and a cell phone alarm blares loudly. Ruby struggles to open her eyes and winces at how bright it is.

She drags herself off of the futon to find the source of the noise, still wearing yesterday's clothes.

Rummaging through her purse, she eventually finds her cell phone. The time and the name of the alert flash brightly:

"9am - Wake up!"

She quickly hits SNOOZE, and notices her battery is almost dead. Throwing it on a charger, she goes to set it down on the side table when she notices the POST-IT.

She grumbles softly, lays back down, and closes her eyes.

In quick succession, a continued series of alarms ring out. Each time, she dismisses it and rolls back over.

Another goes off. Ruby goes to dismiss it, but hesitates-- the display shows that it's 1:30pm.

A quick glance to the post-it note. 2pm.

She sits up, rubbing yesterday's makeup out of her eyes. Groaning miserably, she flings off her blanket and swings her feet onto the floor.

INT. INTERROBANG - DAY

A no-frills cocktail bar, dim despite the afternoon sun. Exposed brick, a photo booth, some board games available for patrons to play.

The only customers are a hip-looking COUPLE quietly chatting and nursing their cocktails in the corner.

JONAH (early 30s), the broad and bearded owner, is behind the bar. He checks his phone - 2:15pm.

The door swings open and Ruby enters, briefly silhouetted by the bright sunlight. While she did manage to put on clean clothes, her hair is a greasy mess, and what little makeup she has on appears to have been applied over yesterday's.

She trudges towards the bar.

RUBY

Hi, are you Jonah?

JONAH

Yeah. Are you Mel's friend?

RUBY

Yup, I'm Ruby.

She extends a hand towards him. He rolls his eyes.

JONAH

You're late.

Ruby drops her hand awkwardly.

RUBY

Oh. Yeah, sorry. I got a little turned around trying to find the place.

JONAH

Whatever. Don't let it happen again.

LORETTA (40s, tough but sweet) enters from the back room and joins Jonah behind the bar.

JONAH (cont'd)

Oh, Loretta. This is Ruby, your trainee for the day.

Loretta smiles warmly and extends a hand to Ruby across the bar. Ruby accepts the handshake, grateful for the kind welcome.

LORETTA

Nice to meet you, darlin'. You ever done this before?

RUBY

Nope. But I, uh-- I learn fast, I think?

LORETTA

Well that's all you need. This'll be fun.

She looks at Jonah.

LORETTA (cont'd)

Now scoot, you can leave us to it up here.

JONAH

Alright, I gotta work on next week's schedule. I'll be in the office.

Jonah exits. Loretta turns back to Ruby.

LORETTA

He's a little gruff on the outside, but inside he's a big teddy bear. Now c'mon, let's get you started.

INT. INTERROBANG - LATER

Several hours have passed, and the bar is significantly more crowded. Loretta has been joined by BRADEN (20s, androgynous glam), and they sling drinks with ease.

Ruby darts behind them, struggling to keep up. She stumbles, nearly dropping the stack of glasses she's carrying.

Braden snorts.

BRADEN

You alright back there, girl?

RUBY

Um, yeah, I think so.

Ruby exits with the dirty glasses. Loretta smacks Braden lightly on the arm.

LORETTA

Now c'mon, you be nice to her. As I recall, someone here got so overwhelmed on his first day that he had to take an extra break to go cry in the bathroom, and it sure wasn't me.

Braden rolls his eyes.

BRADEN

Whatever. This is different, she's not even taking orders or making drinks.

Ruby re-enters. Loretta gives Braden a stern look. He scowls back and begins pouring a beer.

BRADEN (cont'd)

Hey, Ruby?

Ruby looks at him, panicked.

RUBY

Yeah?

BRADEN

I need more limes, please.

He gives her a forced smile.

RUBY

Limes, right.

She exits once more. Braden turns to Loretta as he hands the beer to a waiting CUSTOMER.

BRADEN
See? I can be nice.

Loretta shakes her head and laughs.

BACK ROOM

With trembling hands, Ruby slices LIMES on a cutting board. Her hand slips and nicks her finger, producing a surprising amount of blood.

RUBY
(shouting)
Fuck!

She drops the knife and draws her injured hand away instinctively, knocking the limes from the counter.

Inspecting her bleeding finger closely, her eyes widen as she watches the cut close up before her very eyes.

RUBY (cont'd)
What the--

She trails off as she looks away from her hand and notices the LIMES suspended in mid-air.

RUBY (cont'd)
Oh no. No, no no no no no.

She buries her face in her hands and whispers to herself.

RUBY (cont'd)
This isn't real, this isn't real,
this isn't real, this isn't--

THUMP. The limes drop to the floor. Ruby removes her hands from her face and walks towards the limes cautiously, as if they're skittish animals that might run away.

Jonah pokes his head around the corner.

JONAH
Everything okay back here? I heard
yelling.

Ruby looks at him, shaken.

RUBY

Oh, yeah. Sorry. I thought I cut myself, but I guess--

She looks at her hand.

RUBY (cont'd)

--I didn't.

Jonah cocks an eyebrow, eyes her for a beat.

JONAH

Oh. Glad you're okay.

With that, he ducks back out of the room. Ruby exhales a shaky breath and begins to pick up the fallen limes.

INT. HIGH-RISE LOBBY - NIGHT

An ultra-modern entryway, all glass and steel. A half-interested SECURITY GUARD eyes a bank of monitors behind his desk.

Dr. Churchwell enters, clutching a file folder. He smiles meekly and gives the guard a small wave.

SECURITY GUARD

Evening, doc.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Good evening, Charles.

Dr. Churchwell crosses to the elevators and reaches for the call button.

ZAP!

From inches away, electricity arcs between the button and his finger. Dr. Churchwell exclaims and draws his hand away.

BING!

The elevator door opens.

INT. DR. CHURCHWELL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Top-of-the-line appliances, open concept, trendy lighting - this apartment is clearly expensive, but hardly lived-in. Drab furniture, solely utilitarian in nature. The bare minimum.

Dr. Churchwell enters and hangs his coat by the door. He crosses to the--

LIVING ROOM

--and plops onto the sofa, holding the file folder tightly. He lays it on the coffee table, revealing the label:

"WILCOX, RUBY"

He stares at it for a moment before opening it gingerly. Inside are printed notes from his first session with Ruby. His eyes scan the pages, searching for something he may have missed.

A low HUM begins.

With a startled gasp, Dr. Churchwell leaps to his feet. Scrambling, he turns the TV on, cranking the volume all the way up. He dashes for the blinds, making sure everything is closed.

All of this is accomplished just in time as he collapses to his knees, overcome as several BEAMS OF LIGHT shoot out of his mouth and eyes.

The room fills with flashing, nebulous swirls of light.

Dr. Churchwell speaks, but it is not his voice - this VOICE is a low, haunting howl, as if a whale somehow learned to speak.

VOICE
(through Churchwell)
Tell us about the girl.

EXT. HIGH-RISE - CONTINUOUS

A variety of activity level. Some units are dark, some are fully lit with silhouettes moving within, and several are dim with the flashing, shifting colors of computer screens and televisions.

One window - Dr. Churchwell's - flashes brighter and faster than the rest.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The door slams open, and Ruby barely makes it three steps inside before slowly falling to the floor. She has been trying to keep her composure since leaving the bar, and it's all falling apart now.

Dropping her things next to her, she buries her face in her hands and lets out a deep, painful scream of frustration.

MEL (O.S.)

Ruby??

Mel rushes in, wearing pajamas. She closes the front door and crouches on the floor next to Ruby.

MEL

Hey, hey, what happened? What's wrong?

Ruby looks at her, panic in her eyes.

RUBY

I can't do it, Mel, I can't do it.

MEL

What? The job?

RUBY

It's too much. I can't keep up.

MEL

Oh come on, it couldn't have been that bad.

RUBY

I don't know. I think something's really wrong.

Mel tilts her head, concerned.

MEL

What do you mean?

Tears begin to flow over Ruby's cheeks.

RUBY

I know that I only started changing my medication last night, but I feel different. I--

She hesitates.

RUBY (cont'd)

I can't explain it. I don't want this to happen again. I can't handle this again.

Ruby tips over and lays on the floor, curled into a ball. Her shoulders shake with sobs.

Mel rubs her back.

MEL

Hey, it's going to be okay. You have a new pill to try, right?

RUBY

Yeah. I'm supposed to start it tomorrow.

MEL

I'm sure that'll help. You said this psychiatrist seems like he knows what he's doing, right?

RUBY

I guess.

MEL

Then you should trust him. Can you call and push your appointment up? See him sooner?

RUBY

Probably. Ugh.

Ruby rolls onto her stomach and sprawls out, face down. She groans loudly into the carpet. Mel smiles and stifles a laugh.

MEL

Alright, here's what we're gonna do. It just so happens that your best friend is a perfect, beautiful genius and bought some ice cream on the way home from work. How about I go get that, and we watch some garbage TV for a little bit?

Ruby nods.

MEL (cont'd)

Okay, I'll be right back.

She picks up Ruby's coat and purse from the floor, and hangs them on the back of a chair before exiting to the kitchen.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Mel and Ruby are seated on the couch, watching a trashy reality dating show on Mel's laptop.

Empty ice cream bowls sit on the coffee table, and the women share a family-sized bag of Doritos between them.

Ruby has changed into her pajamas and sits cocooned in a blanket.

Mel reaches into the bag of Doritos and realizes it's nearly empty. She offers it to Ruby.

MEL

Do you want the rest of this?

Ruby shakes her head. Mel tips her head back and shakes the contents of the bag into her mouth.

MEL (cont'd)

I need to get to sleep. Are you feeling better?

RUBY

Yeah, I am. This helped a lot, Mel. Thank you.

MEL

I'm glad.

Mel starts to get up, but hesitates. She sits and faces Ruby.

MEL (cont'd)

Listen, I-- this is hard to say.

Ruby frowns.

RUBY

What?

MEL

It's just-- it's really important that you keep up with your medication, okay?

RUBY

(offended)

I know that.

MEL

I know. I know you know, I'm sorry. And, um-- it's important to me that you at least try to stick with this job. I can't help you if you aren't trying to help yourself.

Ruby stares at her lap and nods.

MEL (cont'd)
Promise me you'll go to bed too?

RUBY
Sure, I promise.

MEL
Okay, good.

She reaches out for Ruby's hand and squeezes it affectionately.

Mel rises from the couch, closes her laptop, and starts to clear the bowls from the table.

INT. DR. CHURCHWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Churchwell paces the room, whispering to himself unintelligibly. His eyes are red, and his previously clean-shaven face is now sprinkled with stubble.

The phone on his desk RINGS - he bolts for the phone and answers immediately.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Yes? Excellent. You can send her back.

He hangs up and buries his face in his hands for a moment, then rubs his eyes. Exhaling sharply, he resumes his walk around the room, muttering to himself.

There is a faint KNOCK at the door.

He scrambles to open it, revealing Ruby on the other side.

RUBY
Hey, Dr. Churchwell. I--

Her eyes widen as she fully takes him in.

RUBY (cont'd)
Whoa, are you okay?

Dr. Churchwell gestures for her to enter.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Come in, come in.

She does, albeit cautiously. He closes the door behind her quickly and rushes to his desk.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
Please sit.

Sinking into the sofa, Ruby stares at him with growing concern in her eyes.

RUBY
Uh, what's up?

Churchwell is fidgety and restless - a near 180 from the calm and collected man she met a few days ago.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Nothing, I'm fine. Or, I will be fine. Don't worry. That's not important though-- how are you? I wasn't supposed to see you for a few more days, is everything okay?

Ruby sighs.

RUBY
I don't know. I'm mostly okay, but--

DR. CHURCHWELL
Have you stopped the lithium?

Ruby arches an eyebrow.

RUBY
I mean, I'm taking less of it. You told me it would be a few weeks before I could stop taking it completely, right?

DR. CHURCHWELL
Right. Of course, of course. How are you feeling on the lower dose? I know it's only been a few days.

RUBY
That's kind of why I called. I feel like it shouldn't be making much of a difference, but I feel-- weird, I guess. Like it's happening again.

DR. CHURCHWELL
"It"?

RUBY
The mania. I don't know, maybe it never went completely away in the first place.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Hmm.

Dr. Churchwell is still agitated, but concerned. He goes to his computer and clicks a few times.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)

How are you sleeping?

RUBY

Okay, I guess. I'm still really tired a lot of the time.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Any racing thoughts?

RUBY

No, not really.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Do you feel very irritable, or on edge?

RUBY

No.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Have you been spending money excessively?

RUBY

Nope.

Dr. Churchwell types some notes.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Ruby, I have to say that I don't understand why you think you might be manic again. You aren't experiencing any of the key symptoms right now.

Ruby groans, frustrated.

RUBY

I just-- something is wrong, okay?

DR. CHURCHWELL

Okay, okay. I hear you. What's concerning you?

Ruby picks at her fingernails.

RUBY
I-- god, this sounds so fucking
stupid.

She sighs.

RUBY (cont'd)
I've noticed that I-- my powers,
abilities that I thought I had
before-- it seems like they're back.

A grin spreads across Dr. Churchwell's face.

RUBY (cont'd)
I know it's not real, I know that,
but I just--

DR. CHURCHWELL
Tell me about them.

RUBY
What? Why?

DR. CHURCHWELL
I'm curious.

RUBY
Um, I thought I sliced my finger at
work, but then it healed up. Like,
while I was staring at it. And then,
um-- these limes I dropped, they were
just, like, hanging in the air.
Frozen.

Dr. Churchwell lets out a short bark of a laugh, thrilled to
hear this. Ruby recoils.

RUBY (cont'd)
What the fuck, dude? Are you making
fun of me?

DR. CHURCHWELL
No, no, of course not. I'm so sorry,
Ruby, I didn't mean to laugh. It's
just-- could you try to use your
powers, right now?

Ruby frowns at him.

RUBY
Why?

DR. CHURCHWELL
An experiment. Why don't you try to--
oh, I don't know-- turn the lights
off?

He sits back in his chair expectantly.

Ruby's eyes fill with embarrassed tears. She jumps to her feet abruptly, scrambling to gather her things.

Dr. Churchwell leaps to his feet.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
Hang on, Ruby, I--

RUBY
This isn't funny, Dr. Churchwell.

DR. CHURCHWELL
I know, I'm not trying--

RUBY
I came here to get help, and you're
just laughing at me like an asshole.

She rushes for the door, but Dr. Churchwell springs forward, reaching for her arm.

DR. CHURCHWELL
Ruby, wait, I--

BANG!

The moment he touches her wrist - a FLASH of pure white light.

MONTAGE

EXT. INTERGALACTIC STORM

The same COSMIC TUMULT as before, unearthly SHRIEKS pulse wildly.

For an instant, a blinding WHITE SPACE, then--

INT. CHICAGO TRANSIT AUTHORITY TRANSFER TUNNEL

The crack in the wall throbs with brilliant light.

EXT. CHICAGO SKYLINE - NIGHT

The city burns - hues of oranges and reds ignite the night sky.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. DR. CHURCHWELL'S OFFICE

The shrieks cut off abruptly, and Ruby is crumpled in a heap next to the door. She looks up, disoriented.

RUBY
(mumbled)
What the--

Her eyes land on Dr. Churchwell, who lies on the floor across the room.

RUBY (cont'd)
Shit.

She rushes over to him, nudging him slightly. He is unresponsive.

RUBY (cont'd)
Fuck. Fuck, fuck fuck.

Dr. Churchwell stirs, his eyes blinking open.

RUBY (cont'd)
Are you okay? What was that?

DR. CHURCHWELL
Good, you saw it too! I was so worried you wouldn't see it.

He shifts, grimacing slightly in pain. He gestures to the couch.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
Please, sit.

Ruby crosses to the couch and sinks into it slowly, eyes wide with confusion. Moving slowly, Dr. Churchwell returns to his desk.

RUBY
I don't understand. That storm, the city-- you saw that, too?

Dr. Churchwell nods.

DR. CHURCHWELL
I did. Ruby, it is absolutely vital
that you understand that this is
real. Your powers, everything-- it's
all real.

Ruby shakes her head slightly.

RUBY
No. No, no, that can't--

DR. CHURCHWELL
Here. Let me show you.

He looks around his desk for a moment before landing on a
BOX OF TISSUES. With a wave of his hand, the box begins to
levitate.

Ruby puts a trembling hand to her mouth.

Dr. Churchwell grins, then flicks his wrist slightly,
sending the box hurtling towards Ruby. She lifts her hands
up reflexively, stopping the box in mid-air.

It remains suspended, spinning slowly.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
There's so much to explain, but you
were brought here for a reason. To
me.

He takes a deep breath.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
I canceled the rest of my
appointments for the day. We have a
lot to talk about.

Ruby drops her hands and stares at him, mouth agape.

The box of tissues falls to the floor with a soft THUMP.

INT. MUSEUM - DAY

The Museum of Science and Industry. A quiet, tucked-away
exhibit on radio transmissions with minimal foot traffic.

Ruby and Dr. Churchwell meander along the outskirts of the
room. They speak in hushed tones.

RUBY
I still don't understand.

DR. CHURCHWELL

It's a lot, I know. You must have so many questions.

RUBY

Uh, yeah, let's see. Number one: what the fuck? Number two: what the hell? Number--

DR. CHURCHWELL

I get it, I get it.

He spots a bench near a corner and sits, patting the seat next to him. Ruby joins him.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)

Look, I'm still figuring a lot of this out myself. My hope is that, now that we've found each other, things will become more clear.

RUBY

Start again from the beginning?

Dr. Churchwell nods.

DR. CHURCHWELL

We-- you and I-- have been chosen by creatures from another planet to stop something terrible. Something catastrophic.

Ruby squints at him.

RUBY

Mm-hmm.

DR. CHURCHWELL

There's only so much that I know. That they've chosen to share with me, I suppose. It's sometimes difficult to extrapolate what they want, or what they mean.

He hops to his feet, wandering the exhibit aimlessly. Ruby follows.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)

For whatever reason, they are unable to travel to our planet themselves. I don't know if it's a physical limitation, or if they just haven't progressed that far technologically.

(MORE)

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
I know we certainly wouldn't be able
to go visit them if we wanted to!

He chuckles softly. Ruby stares at him, frowning with
furrowed eyebrows.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
Anyway. What I do know is that they
are able to send a sort of a
broadcast to us.

He pauses at a model of a radio tower.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
An interdimensional radio signal.
And, through that, they are able to
transmit their powers, their
abilities, to help us stop this
destructive force.

He looks to Ruby for questions. She stares back silently.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
We have been chosen as conduits for
these powers. I don't know why it had
to be us, but here we are. They've
been in contact with me for-- well, I
guess it's been a few months now.
They said there was another conduit
out there to help me, to amplify our
powers, but I was never able to track
them down. Until now.

He removes his glasses, rubbing his eyes.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)
And that's-- well, unfortunately
that's all I know. Again.

Ruby chews on her lip, lost in thought. Abruptly, she begins
to pace around the model of the radio tower.

Dr. Churchwell keeps his eyes on her, uncertain of her next
move.

RUBY
So like-- what do I need to do?

Dr. Churchwell smiles softly.

DR. CHURCHWELL

I'm not entirely sure. We need to figure out why they haven't been in contact with you the way they have with me. I have a theory.

RUBY

What is it?

DR. CHURCHWELL

I believe that your medications are disrupting the signal. That they're altering your brain chemistry in a way that doesn't allow the transmission to fully come through.

Ruby raises her eyebrows.

RUBY

Wow. So that means--

DR. CHURCHWELL

We need to get you off of all psychiatric medication as quickly as possible. Then you'll be able to receive everything correctly, and hopefully gain full control over your abilities.

RUBY

Huh.

DR. CHURCHWELL

The last time I saw you I gave you a taper schedule. Have you been following it?

RUBY

Yeah.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Excellent. Then we should have you fully off of the lithium in two weeks. Don't start the lamotrigine I initially prescribed-- we need your brain in its natural state.

Ruby fidgets with a strand of hair, brushing it behind her ear nervously.

RUBY

Okay. But hey, listen-- what if I don't like my brain in its natural state? I've had some bad experiences.

DR. CHURCHWELL

I suspect that a lot of your problems stem from the blocked transmission.

RUBY

No, I get that. But like, you've had these abilities for what, a couple of months? My shitty brain goes back way longer than that.

Dr. Churchwell massages his temple. His voice is sharper - he is getting frustrated.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Look, I know it's scary. You have to trust me, though. I have more experience with these beings, these powers. I'll continue to monitor you throughout this process.

Ruby fidgets with the hem of her sleeve.

RUBY

Okay. Sure. I'll stop my meds.

DR. CHURCHWELL

Excellent. This is exactly what we need.

A smile creeps onto his face.

DR. CHURCHWELL (cont'd)

Ruby, we're going to be heroes.

Ruby shifts uncomfortably.

TITLE CARD: TWO WEEKS LATER

INT. CTA BUS - NIGHT

Ruby stares vacantly out the window, watching the city lights whiz past. She jiggles her leg and rapidly clenches and unclenches her fist.

INT. INTERROBANG - NIGHT

A weeknight. A handful of customers, but not packed.

Loretta shakes a cocktail vigorously for a waiting CUSTOMER. Ruby stares intently at a string of lights, drumming her fingers against the bar.

LORETTA

What's wrong, you gotta sneeze or something?

RUBY

Huh?

LORETTA

That's what I always do when it feels like a sneeze is stuck. Stare at a light. It comes right out, not sure why.

Ruby turns to Loretta.

RUBY

Whoa, really?

LORETTA

Yup. Doesn't work for everyone, though.

RUBY

(mile-a-minute)

That's crazy, I've never heard of that. Why do you think that is? Is there, like, some kind of-- of-- of-- like nerve there? Like an optical nerve crossed with your, uh... nose nerves, or whatever??

Loretta shrugs and hands the finished cocktail to the customer.

RUBY (cont'd)

I think about stuff like that sometimes, all the wires in our bodies that can get crossed. We're basically made of electricity, or like water and meat and electricity I guess. It makes sense that the signals would get mixed up. Have you heard of synesthesia?

LORETTA

No, what's that?

RUBY

It's when people can, like, see music and shit. Or, um, feel-- feel colors, I don't know.

LORETTA

Back in my day we just called that tripping.

RUBY

That's the thing though, there's no drugs! They don't need drugs. Their brains just work like that.

LORETTA

(laughing)

I don't know, that sounds a lot like someone lying about being on drugs. People like to--

RUBY

No, ugh, whatever. It's complicated, okay? Brains are more complex than just "on drugs" or "not on drugs". We barely understand how brains work at all, period, end of sentence.

Loretta arches a confused eyebrow.

LORETTA

Alright, weirdo. I gotta piss, mind holding down the fort for a minute?

RUBY

What if someone comes up to order something?

LORETTA

Just tell 'em I'll be right back.

As Loretta walks away, Ruby turns back to the string of lights. She squints, and after a moment, the lights turn off. With a wave of her hand, she turns them back on.

She does this a few more times, and starts to laugh to herself before being interrupted by a man clearing his throat. She turns to find a FRAT BRO staring at her quizzically.

FRAT BRO

Can I get four Jager shots?

Ruby flashes a big customer-service smile.

RUBY

Oh, I'm sorry, the bartender will be back in a minute.

FRAT BRO
Uh, you're right here though.

RUBY
I'm just the bar back, I'm not
supposed to pour drinks.

She grabs a towel and nervously heads towards the other end of the bar, wiping at an invisible spot.

The Frat Bro follows her.

FRAT BRO
What, are you stupid or something?
It's just four shots. It's not a hard
order.

Ruby's jaw clenches. Her forced smile borders on a grimace.

The lights FLICKER slightly.

RUBY
I can't help you, I'm sorry. I
promise it'll be just a minute.

She turns on her heel and starts to walk towards the back room.

FRAT BRO
Jesus, what a fucking idiot.

This stops Ruby in her tracks. Nostrils flaring, she wheels back around and takes two steps towards him before--

POP!

The lights and music in the entire bar shut off.

Several patrons gasp loudly. Others laugh and murmur to each other.

Startled, Ruby knocks into an empty glass. It shatters.

RUBY
Shit!

Ruby ducks into the--

BACK ROOM

--scrambling for a broom and dustpan.

She leans against the wall for a moment and closes her eyes, breathing heavily.

JONAH (O.S.)
What the hell?

Ruby's eyes pop open as Jonah enters. He crosses to the circuit breaker box and flips a few switches. The lights quickly come back on.

Jonah spots Ruby clutching the broom.

JONAH
Weird, huh?

RUBY
Yeah-- yeah, super weird.

JONAH
You okay?

RUBY
Oh! Yeah, I'm fine. I'm just, uh--
scared of the dark? Okay, bye.

She darts away. Jonah stares after her and frowns, confused.

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A hand stealthily draws back the hanging sheet acting as a "door", revealing Mel. She flips on the light and tiptoes into the room.

Chewing on her lip, her eyes comb the room until she finds what she's after - a BOTTLE OF PILLS on the nightstand.

She picks up the pills, eyes scanning the label:

WILCOX, RUBY. 100MG LAMOTRIGINE.

Unscrewing the bottle, she dumps the pills into her hand, counting quickly. She frowns.

The sound of FOOTSTEPS thundering up the stairs.

MEL
(whispered)
Shit.

She hurriedly dumps the pills back into the bottle, taking care to place it exactly where she found it. She turns off the lights, and darts back out into the--

LIVING ROOM

--just as Ruby enters, humming to herself loudly.

MEL

Hey! I thought you were supposed to close tonight?

RUBY

Oh, yeah, but it was super dead so Jonah let me go home early.

She snaps and gives Mel finger guns.

MEL

That's great. You've been working so many doubles lately, you must be exhausted.

RUBY

Nah, I'm good. I actually might go for a run, wanna come with?

Mel tilts her head, eyes wide.

MEL

Um... it's eleven o'clock at night.

RUBY

Oh, right. Probably not my best idea.

She cackles a little too loudly.

RUBY (cont'd)

Well, good night!

Ruby marches into her bedroom. Mel's forehead creases in concern.

MEL

Good night.

A WHITE SPACE - DREAM

The same blank void as before.

The gray shapes are slightly sharper, but still too fuzzy to identify. The dull, pulsing noise is still there, but it is significantly louder now.

Somewhere there is a hint of a voice coming through, like a whisper cutting through radio static. It's garbled, but then--

VOICE

Ruby!

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ruby startles awake. She checks the time on her phone - 4am.

She tries to lay back down, but after tossing and turning a few times she throws her blankets off and gets up.

After a moment, she starts to pace the room, clenching and unclenching her fists.

INT. MEL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mel is asleep in her bed. Muffled music plays elsewhere in the apartment.

She shifts slightly in her sleep, but a sudden metallic CRASH wakes her up with a start.

She checks her phone - 4:15am.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Mel slowly enters the kitchen, eyes wide. Every light is on, and half of the cabinets and drawers are open.

An avalanche of pans has fallen out of the lower cabinet and onto the floor - presumably the source of the crash we just heard.

Ruby is hunched over the kitchen counter, roughly chopping vegetables. There is a large pot on the stove. Loud music blasts from her laptop; she does not hear Mel approach.

MEL

Ruby?

No response.

MEL (cont'd)

(louder)

Hey, Ruby?

Ruby looks up in surprise. She blinks rapidly a few times, then breaks into a big smile.

RUBY

Mel! Hi!

Her smile collapses into a worried frown.

RUBY (cont'd)
Shit, did I wake you up?

MEL
Uh, yeah. Yeah, you did.

RUBY
Oh no, I'm so sorry!

She puts down her knife and runs her hands through her hair, leaving behind a vegetable scrap.

MEL
What are you doing, exactly?

RUBY
I'm making vegetable stock!

MEL
At four in the morning?

RUBY
(rapid-fire)
Yup! I couldn't sleep and then I remembered all the sad little leftover carrots in the fridge and that half an onion, do you remember that Twitter account, the half an onion in a bag? That was funny. Anyway, I just felt so bad for them and this old celery and I felt like I should give them a purpose in their life before they're too rotten and we throw them away. It's a lot like us, you know?

MEL
What are you even talk--

RUBY
A purpose! We all need a purpose, everyone does! Even if it's just getting boiled away for a few hours so your soul can merge with the delicious liquid souls of your little unwanted vegetable friends. Ooh, we should go to a sauna.

MEL
This is crazy. You need to go to sleep.

The lights flicker.

RUBY

Nah, I'm good. I got like four hours of sleep. Slip, slop. I'm good, I'm fine. I'll sleep when I'm dead!

She laughs and turns back to her vegetables, tossing them in the pot.

Mel rolls her eyes.

MEL

Whatever, can you at least let me sleep, then? Turn off this music.

RUBY

Okay!

Ruby goes to her laptop and attempts to turn off the music. Nothing happens.

RUBY (cont'd)

Um, nope!

MEL

What do you mean, "nope"? Just turn it off.

Ruby shrugs.

RUBY

It doesn't want to turn off.

MEL

That's bullshit. You're acting insane. Shut all of this off and go the fuck to sleep.

Mel flips the light switch. Nothing happens.

MEL (cont'd)

What the hell?

She flips it a few more times. Still nothing.

The music gets louder.

RUBY

I-- I can't--

Mel has stopped trying the light switch, but the lights begin flickering on their own.

Ruby puts her hands over her ears and squeezes her eyes shut. The volume of the music fluctuates.

MEL
(scared)
Ruby?

RUBY
(shouting)
Shut up, shut up, I can't, I--

The windows vibrate with the thumping bass line as the music gets louder.

The lights continue to flicker, faster and faster.

Still clutching her ears, Ruby screams, then--

BANG!

The microwave EXPLODES in a shower of sparks and shrapnel. Mel screams and ducks, shielding her head.

As Ruby collapses in a heap, the music and lights immediately shut off.

CUT TO BLACK