

98TH MERIDIAN

written by

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LOGLINE: A twenty-something grad student faces tough career choices as she travels down her own road of personal and professional discovery in the changing 21st-century economy - and gets more than she bargained for in the process.

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FADE IN:

ON THE SCREEN:

In Texas the ninety-eighth meridian is generally accepted as a dividing line for both the floral and the faunal species.

Walter Prescott Webb

ON THE SCREEN:

In theory, there's no difference between theory and practice; in practice, there is.

Remark overheard at a computer science conference in 1984.

Incorrectly attributed to Yogi Berra.

ON THE SCREEN:

Map of Central Texas. The 98th meridian is positioned just west of Austin and bisects Lake Travis.

EXT. LANDSCAPE WEST OF AUSTIN, TEXAS - DAY

Aerial view of the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone (primary water source for municipal and agricultural use) in South/Central Texas.

We see a man on a horse riding slowly on the rocky ground.

EXT. LAKE TRAVIS - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Aerial view of Lake Travis, west of Austin. The lake is full, at normal carrying capacity.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN - CONTINUOUS

Aerial view of Austin skyline: office buildings, high-rise condos, landmarks.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS TOWER/MAIN BUILDING - DAY
(CONTINUOUS)

EXT. LITTLEFIELD FOUNTAIN - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS WEST MALL - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

EXT. UNIVERSITY CO-OP BUILDING ON THE DRAG - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

EXT. TEXAS STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

EXT. DARRELL K. ROYAL MEMORIAL STADIUM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS CAMPUS MAIN MALL, AUSTIN, TEXAS -
DAY (CONTINUOUS)

BRIANA RUIZ (mid-twenties - older than average student) walks
across the University of Texas campus.

Briana recognizes and greets several students that she passes
by on the way to class.

The other students smile at Briana and readily engage in
conversation. Briana is clearly well-liked by the other
younger students.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Briana walks into the class along with several other students
and she takes her seat.

Briana chats among the other students in class before the
lecture begins.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

PROFESSOR CARL UAN (around sixty, overweight) lectures,
pacing back and forth across the stage, seemingly oblivious
to the students.

The class is an auditoriums-sized lecture hall, half full,
with perhaps 75 students.

Many students look disinterested, lost in their own thoughts.
Others are typing on their laptops.

UAN
 Public policy, as should now be
 clear to all of you as graduate
 students, is driven by neoclassical
 economics - the subject of our
 course of study.
 (pause)
 At the macro level.
 (pause)
 At the micro level.

Along the walls, there are large photographs and paintings of
 some of the great economists of the past.

UAN (V.O.)
 From Adam Smith, to John Stuart
 Mill,
 (pause)
 To Marshall's mathematics,
 (pause)
 The incomparable Keynes,
 (pause)
 The now rehabilitated Schumpeter
 with his creative destruction,
 (pause)
 And the always-controversial Milton
 Friedman's monetarism.

ON THE SCREEN (as Uan is lecturing):

INT. LECTURE HALL PORTRAIT 1: ADAM SMITH (1723-1790)
 (CONTINUOUS)

INT. LECTURE HALL PORTRAIT 2: JOHN STUART MILL (1806-1873)
 (CONTINUOUS)

INT. LECTURE HALL PORTRAIT 3: ALFRED MARSHALL (1842-1924)
 (CONTINUOUS)

INT. LECTURE HALL PORTRAIT 4: JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES (1883-1946)
 (CONTINUOUS)

INT. LECTURE HALL PORTRAIT 5: JOSEPH SCHUMPETER (1883-1950)
 (CONTINUOUS)

INT. LECTURE HALL PORTRAIT 6: MILTON FRIEDMAN (1912-2006)
 (CONTINUOUS)

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY (ONE HOUR LATER)

Uan has been droning on for an hour.

Uan stops and looks up as he is talking, having given this lecture many times before. He surveys the class briefly.

UAN

That's it for today. Any questions?

Briana is sitting in the midst of the other students, many of whom appear narcoleptic.

Briana looks around at the passive class with a bit of annoyance, imperceptibly shrugs and then raises her hand.

UAN (CONT'D)

Ah, Ms. Ruiz.

Uan walks in the direction of Briana.

UAN (CONT'D)

And what is your objection this time? No doubt, the incompleteness of economic theory?

Laughter from some students. At least a few of them are awake.

BRIANA

(looks around, unsure)

As a matter of fact, yes, of neoclassical economics.

(pause)

Near perfect substitution between natural capital and built capital? Seriously?

Uan pauses a moment to regard Briana. He signs and then frowns before deigning to reply.

UAN

The theory has held up pretty well so far.

More laughter from other students. Briana looks around somewhat nervously, but continues speaking.

BRIANA

I suppose. But what about assumptions of continuous economic growth? The theory requires exponential technological progress.

Professor takes off his glasses and uses them to gesture toward Briana. He is warming up for a student take-down.

UAN

Haven't we seen that?

(pause)

Look at Moore's law. That the number of transistors on a chip would double every 24 months.

Briana now stands up and begins to engage more forcefully.

BRIANA

Moore's Law is no longer holding up.

(pause)

In fact, there's a LOT of boomer predictions that have failed to materialize.

Uan frowns, becomes defensive. He's not going down without a fight. He has no intention of going down at all.

UAN

I'm sorry, what?

BRIANA

Space travel, lunar bases, Mars colonies, fusion power. None of that is happening.

UAN

(heavy sigh)

I don't think I see your point.

Briana looks directly at Uan and nearly shouts.

BRIANA

My point is that the earth is looking more and more like a closed system.

(pause)

Unfortunately, that runs headlong into still largely unsubstantiated economic theory that is barely 100 years old.

(pause)

A theory that assumes endless growth, endless resources.

More students are looking up from their laptops and starting to pay attention.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
(more conviction, louder)
Neoclassical economics drives
politics and public policy but
ignores the basic realities of
finite planetary ecosystems.

Uan is angry now. Clearly he is affronted at this challenge to basic economic theory.

UAN
(his voice raised)
Here we go. End of the world as we
know it.

Uan walks back to the podium to find his glasses. He looks down and organizes his notes, as if Briana's comments are merely a distraction.

Uan speaks, but does not look up.

UAN (CONT'D)
(pedantically, distracted)
I've heard this before. Predictions
of impending doom that are always
been wrong.

Briana pauses for a moment, hesitating to speak. Then she comes back, full force.

BRIANA
I think this time it's different.

Uan looks up at the ceiling, as if seeking deliverance.

UAN
And haven't I heard that before as
well.

Uan takes off his glasses again and peers at Briana.

UAN (CONT'D)
You know, you're going to make a
great economist, Ms. Ruiz. You're
starting to sound like one already.

More laughter from the class.

Briana continues to stand, staring defiantly at Uan.

INT. LOCAL BAR - NIGHT

Crowded college bar filled with twenty-one year old students. Lots of talking at the tables. It's a loud place.

Three college men are at a table across from the bar checking out the women.

A young woman walks by their table.

MAN 1
Dude, shrimp!

The woman turns around, obviously pissed, but keeps walking away.

MAN 2
Shrimp?

Man 1 pauses briefly, waiting for the woman to get out of earshot, out of embarrassment, not courtesy.

MAN 1
(muffled tone)
Hot from the neck down. Everything good but the head.

MAN 3
(barely suppresses guilty laughter)
Harsh.

KALUB ARCHER (mid-twenties) is sitting at the bar, overhearing the conversation.

KALUB
I would say SO - yeah pretty harsh.

Man 2 looks up at Kalub. He knows this guy - not sure how or where.

Then a glimmer of recognition washes over Man 2's face. He smiles.

MAN 2
Mr. Afghanistan, who the fuck asked you?

MAN 1
Mr. Afghanistan? What does that mean? Military?

MAN 2
(shakes his head)
Dude was a contractor working for
an NGO. Supposedly rebuilding the
country...

Man 2 starts to talk louder so Kalub and everyone else in the
bar can hear.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)
...BUT IT'S STILL A SHITHOLE.

MAN 3
Dude, how long were you there?

MAN 2
(answering)
Three years. Made enough money to
pay for grad school. Isn't that
right, Mr. A.?

Kalub has both hands on his drink. He looks up at the ceiling
as he speaks.

KALUB
(with contempt)
That's right. Unlike trust fund
babies.

MAN 2
(surprised, angry)
What did you call me?

Kalub ignores him. He takes a sip from his drink and looks at
the bar in front of him.

MAN 1
(delayed reaction)
Hey, that's funny. Mr. A. For
Asshole!

Kalub shakes his head.

KALUB
(almost under his breath)
Idiot.

Man 1 hears the comment and his face turns dark.

MAN 1
What's your problem?

KALUB
 (louder now)
 YOU. Only a moron laughs at his own
 jokes.
 (pause)
 And they're stupid fucking jokes.

Led by Man 2, the three men stand up, walk over and hover behind Kalub, who continues to face the bar.

Slowly Kalub turns around to look at the group. Angry faces.

Man 1 takes a swing, but Kalub pulls his head back and to the side. He is very fast.

KALUB (CONT'D)
 You did NOT just do that.

As a function of long experience, Kalub pauses to survey the room.

Other students in the bar appear nervous and are trying to avoid eye contact. It would appear that Kalub is on his own.

The three men appear ready to pounce on Kalub.

Unexpectedly, the butt of a pool cue pokes Man 2 gently in the back.

Man 2 turns around to see Briana holding the stick. Man 2 assesses the situation for a moment, not sure what to make of this new development.

MAN 2
 Yes?

BRIANA
 You must be Moe.

Man 2 does not get the reference.

MAN 2
 Huh?

BRIANA
 (pointing to the other two
 men)
 Oh look, and there's Larry and
 Curly. Or is that Shemp?
 (pauses, smiling)
 You know, The Three Stooges.

Man 2 now understands and doesn't appreciate being the butt of Briana's joke. His face turns sour.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
I'm guessing your brain was subject
to excessive glucocorticoid
stimulation as a kid and now you
have an enlarged amygdala.

Briana cocks her head to the side, as she continues to
formulate her prognosis.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
Underdeveloped prefrontal cortex?

Man 2 squints. He has no idea what Briana said.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
(sighs)
It makes you prone to being an
asshole.

MAN 2
So, you're the cavalry?

Kalub starts to get up, but Briana shoots him a sharp glance
and points for him to sit back down, which he does
reluctantly.

Kalub is trying to figure out what the hell is going on,
along with the three men.

Briana returns her attention to Man 2.

BRIANA
No, just the bouncer.

All three men start laughing loudly.

Briana waits for a few seconds until she can be heard.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
And I've got a paper-thin threshold
for boredom.

Man 2, still laughing, is unimpressed and pushes Briana on
the shoulder, not hard, but hard enough - PHYSICAL CONTACT!

Immediately she swings the butt of the pool cue down behind
her and back UP into Man 2's groin. OUCH!

Man 2 bends over, wincing and tearing up.

Kalub is still sitting on the bar stool, not sure what to do.
He starts to get up again, but Briana points to him even more
sternly than before, this time, without looking at him.

The meaning is even more obvious: SIT DOWN.

The other two men regard Briana, acting as if they are going to join in the fray, but the gesture is mostly for show.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
(looking at the other two)
Anybody else?

MAN 1
(quickly)
No, we're good.

BRIANA
That IS good. You can leave now.

Larry and Curly help injured Moe to the door and out of the bar.

As the two men carry their buddy in the aisle between the tables, the other customers applaud and cheer.

Briana smiles and turns to Kalub.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
Mr. Afghanistan? Really?

KALUB
Yeah, that's me. Fresh from the jungles.

BRIANA
(suspicious)
You must be thinking about Vietnam. Afghanistan doesn't have jungles.

KALUB
(smiling)
That's very good. Most people don't pick up on that.
(pause)
If you weren't the bouncer, I'd buy you a drink.

Briana returns the smile as she takes a seat beside Kalub at the bar.

BRIANA
Who says I'm the bouncer?

EXT. THE DRAG - NIGHT (LATER THAT NIGHT)

Briana and Kalub are walking along the wide sidewalk on Guadalupe Street across from the University of Texas.

The UT Tower is visible. A few cars are driving by in both directions to their left.

BRIANA

So, Mr. A. How long have you been back?

KALUB

I'd prefer it if you call me by my full name. The way Moe, Larry and Curly did.

BRIANA

Afghanistan?

KALUB

Asshole.

BRIANA

Good to know.

(pause)

How long?

KALUB

A couple of years. I decided to go to grad school to study economics.

BRIANA

(registers surprise)

No shit. Pardon my French.

KALUB

(smiles)

That's not French.

Briana chuckles.

KALUB (CONT'D)

Of course, I'm handicapped by the fact that I've worked as a practitioner. The theory sometimes gets in the way.

Kalub stops talking and looks at Briana, trying to read her, but also admiring her beauty.

KALUB (CONT'D)

What are you going to do with your degree?

Briana is surprised at the directness of his question. But she is not a shy undergrad and is happy for the give and take.

BRIANA

Working up crazy theories about economics that don't synch up with the textbooks. Probably too revolutionary for my own good.

She walks a few steps and looks over at the campus, which is brightly lit. The stone walls reflect the light.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

I think I will take on the modest goal of changing the system from the inside.

Kalub laughs sort of loudly, but in a good-natured fashion. He smiles at Briana.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

Whaaat?

KALUB

Oh, nothing. You go girl.

(pause)

It's just that I was going to change the world too. It's why I went to Kabul.

BRIANA

What happened?

Kalub walks for a bit before speaking.

KALUB

The reality on the ground is always different on the ground.

(pause)

The place is a war-torn, ravaged, shit-hole. You would think there's nowhere to go but up.

BRIANA

It was the culture, right?

KALUB

Partly.

(pause)

But in general, people just don't like change.

(pause)

(MORE)

KALUB (CONT'D)
Social institutions...they're very
rigid - wherever you go.

Briana creases her eyebrows, taking this in.

Kalub sees that she is processing what he is saying.

KALUB (CONT'D)
Changing institutions anywhere is
hard to do.

BRIANA
I wonder?

KALUB
You'll see.

The two continue walking and talking along The Drag, the evening quiet and pleasant.

EXT. CONGRESS AVENUE (AUSTIN) - DAY

Briana is checking address information on her phone. She looks up and sees that she is at the right restaurant.

Before she is able to go inside, a transient comes up to her and asks her for money.

She hesitates but gives him a buck. Then she goes inside the restaurant.

INT. PLUSH RESTAURANT - DAY (SAME TIME)

Two men at a table in the upscale restaurant wave to Briana and motion her over. They are in their late forties, dressed in coats and ties.

PHIL GRADY stands up first to shake Briana's hand. The other man, HARRY AMES, also stands and shakes hands.

PHIL
Hi, Briana. I'm Phil Grady. This is
Harry Ames.

BRIANA
Nice to meet you.

Briana sits down as the waiter hands her a menu.

Briana smiles politely as she regards the two men. They are well-groomed, likable enough.

PHIL

Not at all. It's a real pleasure to meet YOU. We're very impressed with your qualifications.

BRIANA

(blushes, embarrassed)
Thank you.

HARRY

(sincerely, cordially)
You seem to have a real knack for numbers.

Briana is modest. She looks around at the other customers in the restaurant, as if she is concerned they may overhear.

BRIANA

Yeah, my parents encouraged me a lot once they noticed I had an aptitude for it.
(she smiles)
Especially my dad.

HARRY

(smiling back)
Well, I'm glad they did.

Harry looks at Phil, as if expecting him to say something. Phil doesn't speak so Harry continues.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Look, thanks for meeting with us.

Phil looks at Harry. Phil sees that this is his cue.

Phil looks at Briana, in a serious, but still cordial fashion.

PHIL

That's right. I'm sure you know that Parkus Industries has operations worldwide in 40 countries.

Phil pulls a glossy annual report for Parkus out of his briefcase and hands it to Briana.

Briana takes the report and thumbs through it briefly.

PHIL (CONT'D)

All sorts of exciting work going on and we think you would be a great addition to the team.

Briana raises her eyebrows in shock but tries to disguise her emotion. She is clearly both surprised and pleased.

BRIANA
(graciously)
Wow, that's great.

The waiter returns to the table and looks expectantly at Briana.

WAITER
Something to drink?

BRIANA
(smiles)
Just water, thanks.

Briana glances at the menu, sets it down and looks at Phil and Harry.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
What kind of work would I be doing?

Once again, Harry looks at Phil. No response or cue, so Harry continues.

HARRY
Cutting edge stuff. Forecasting
commodity prices for example.

PHIL
(interjecting)
Yes, it's the sort of analysis that
helps us understand where markets
are going, so we can get an edge.

BRIANA
I see.

Briana pauses for moment to think. Again she looks around the restaurant, while composing her thoughts.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
Full disclosure: You should know
that most of my coursework has been
focused on trying to bridge
economics and ecosystems into a
coherent theory.

Briana pulls her hair to the side as she explains. She wants to have a clear view in order to gauge their reaction about what she has to say next.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
 I would like to spend at least some
 of my time continuing to do that.

Behind them, a server drops a large plate of dishes, making a very loud noise.

Most of the people in the restaurant quickly turn their heads in the direction of crashing dishes, but not Briana.

A couple of other servers rush over to help pick up the mess.

Harry also ignores all of the commotion and smiles graciously.

HARRY
 Absolutely. Actually, that meshes well with the direction the company is taking. We want to stay ahead of emerging trends.

Phil is solicitous and smiling also.

PHIL
 Believe me, you're going to love it at Parkus.

BRIANA
 (reassured)
 Sounds like a good offer.

PHIL
 Great! And that's enough shop talk. Let's order everything on the menu!

All three laugh, which blends into the ambient crowd noise of the restaurant. A festive setting.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Briana listens to Uan lecture on macroeconomics along with the other students sitting in class.

Briana looks across the room and sees Kalub. She smiles. Then she looks down at her notes consisting of mathematical notations.

Uan drones on about subjective utility, rational choice and marginal cost.

Briana looks back down at her notes. Underneath the mathematical notations, she jots down questions bothering her:

What happens when built or manufactured capital can no longer be substituted for natural capital?

Briana looks up at Uan, who continues to lecture, still oblivious to his audience. Then she writes another question.

What is the timing for breakdown of ecosystem services?

What happens to political and social structures?

Briana creases her eyebrows.

What happens if the system collapse could be accurately predicted?

Uan concludes the lecture and the students begin leaving the lecture hall.

Briana continues scribbling in her notes.

Eventually, the room is empty except for Kalub and Briana, who are both still sitting.

Briana does not notice he is there. Slowly, Kalub stands up and walks over to Briana.

KALUB

A brainstorm?

BRIANA

(chuckles as she looks up)

Well, a storm, anyway.

KALUB

Go for a walk?

Briana nods silently, eagerly.

EXT. UNDERNEATH ELEVATED INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - DAY (A FEW MINUTES LATER)

Kalub and Briana are walking underneath I-35. Car are driving on the flyover above them. Other cars drive by at ground level, hurrying to their destination.

Kalub has a hand in his pocket, the other holding a backpack strapped over one arm.

KALUB

You're preoccupied today.

BRIANA

Just thinking about class.

KALUB

You don't agree with Professor Uan?

BRIANA

It's not just him. He's just reciting the textbook.

(pause)

It's the entire school of economic theory that everyone genuflects to.

KALUB

What about it?

BRIANA

It just doesn't hold up under scrutiny.

KALUB

So you're ready to take on the entire economic's establishment. Nobel prize winners and all?

Briana tries to smile, then appears uneasy. She keeps walking for a few steps.

BRIANA

That's how careers are made.

KALUB

(unconvinced)

I see.

Briana senses Kalub's skepticism and looks over at him.

BRIANA

It really doesn't matter what I think. If I'm right, it will be pretty obvious to everyone.

KALUB

(surprised)

Really?

BRIANA

(smiling, returns his previous quip)

You'll see.

EXT. ELEVATED SECTION OF INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

A man is driving a passenger car on the freeway, jamming to the music from his iPod.

The man in the car hears crackles of thunder above the sound of the headphones he is wearing, even though the sky is clear.

The man in the car looks around and doesn't see anything. He shrugs his shoulders and continues driving unaffected, jamming away.

Then, a bolt of lightning strikes his car and he begins darting back and forth across lanes, losing control.

The other drivers attempt to avoid the swerving vehicle.

As a collision appears inevitable, the driver puts his hands up in a defensive position in front of his face and screams.

EXT. UNDERNEATH ELEVATED INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - DAY
(CONTINUOUS)

Briana and Kalub are still walking and talking. They hear the thunder and look up, but similar to the driver, don't see anything and keep walking.

BRIANA

Did you hear that? I really think some weird shit is going to happen eventually. Not necessarily just environmental either.

KALUB

Like what?

As the two continue walking, suddenly the swerving passenger car has jumped the guard rails above.

The vehicle flies over the concrete barrier and nose-dives into the pavement directly in front of them of Kalub and Briana with a loud crash.

Kalub is dumbstruck as he looks at the wreck, then at Briana, who is speechless, but also somewhat contemplative at this bizarre occurrence.

Fortunately, the driver was wearing a seat-belt and the airbag has deployed.

Slowly the driver tears the airbag away from his face - incredibly he has survived the accident.

BRIANA

(deadpan)
Maybe like that.

EXT. HOME IN WEST AUSTIN - NIGHT

Friday night party inside a modest, yet expensive residence in west Austin (Clarksville) is well underway.

People are dressed casually. A joint is passed around within one of the groups.

Briana and Kalub are greeted by JENNY FABER, who gives them a hug and welcomes them inside.

JENNY
So you're Kalub.

Kalub looks at Briana, a little surprised and clearly caught off-guard that he has been the subject of conversation.

Kalub smiles and nods to Jenny.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Great to meet you at last. Come in.
Let's find out all about you.

Jenny takes Kalub's arm and ushers him over to where the drinks are being served.

EXT. HOME IN WEST AUSTIN - LATER SAME NIGHT

Jenny and Kalub have been talking for quite a while.

JENNY
You two should join us tomorrow at
the hurricane relief effort event.
We need the help and it would be a
good change of pace.

Jenny looks at Kalub expectantly.

JENNY (CONT'D)
What do you think?

Kalub thinks for a moment, then raises his glass and clinks it against Jenny's.

KALUB
(in cordial agreement)
Why not?

The party continues, as Kalub and Jenny continue talking.

Briana comes over after a few minutes and joins them as well.

The three of them are clearly enjoying each other's company.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN - DAY

Briana and Kalub are doing volunteer work based on the suggestion from Jenny's party.

There is a large crowd of people collecting and sorting through donations of food and clothing.

BRIANA

All this good work. Too bad none of it shows up in GDP.

KALUB

(very surprised)
What?

BRIANA

(lighthearted)
Aww, you need to get further along in your coursework.

Kalub grabs a couple of boxes from a truck bed and sets them down on a pallet, where other people begin to sort and classify items.

Kalub is sweating, as he wipes his eyebrow and looks over at Briana.

KALUB

I thought pretty much everything was included in GDP.

BRIANA

All economic activity?

Briana grabs another box and puts it on a pallet.

Briana straightens up, pulls her hair out of her eyes and looks at Kalub.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

Sorry, no. Not by a long shot. This stuff - volunteer work, no way.

KALUB

You're kidding?

Briana looks up and over at Kalub in between lifting boxes of food and clothes.

Other people around them are walking past with boxes in their hands.

BRIANA
Nope. There's all sorts of things
GDP doesn't track.

KALUB
Like what?

BRIANA
Oh, I don't know.
(speaking rapidly)
Illegal drug sales. Barter.
Welfare. Families doing work for
each other. People growing their
own food, fixing their own houses.
Garage sales. Charitable
contributions.

She looks at Kalub, enjoying the fact that all of this is
news to him.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
None of it is formally tracked. GDP
doesn't measure quality life
either.

KALUB
Now THAT is messed up. I may have
to reconsider my vocation as an
economist.

Kalub picks up some more boxes, clearly discomfited by this
new information.

KALUB (CONT'D)
So, why is it that GDP is all
economists seem to care about?

Briana pauses for a moment and wipes her forehead, breathing
hard from the work.

BRIANA
Now, that's a really good question.

Briana smiles as she picks up another load and walks it over
to a truck.

Kalub is sorting through a box of junk.

Briana pauses for a moment and then looks back at Kalub once
more and smiles again.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN - LATER SAME DAY

Briana and Jenny are sitting on the bed of a truck, drinking bottled beverages.

Jenny sees a local rancher, still working, moving boxes. He looks around 60, has a slight paunch.

Jenny points to the rancher with the top of her bottle.

JENNY

That's Clint Branch. Nice guy.

(pause)

Kinda weird, though.

CLINT

(not looking up)

I heard that.

JENNY

(covers her mouth,
laughing)

Oh, shit. Sorry, Clint.

Clint sets a box down and stops working for moment. He is tired too. Then he looks at the women.

Clint has a kind face, though clearly well-traveled.

CLINT

You try living off by yourself for days at a time and see what that does to your personality.

BRIANA

Not married?

CLINT

Not anymore.

BRIANA

Kids?

CLINT

Moved away. They like the city.

JENNY

(sarcastic)

I guess them farm animals don't talk much.

Clint smiles.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Clint lives a few miles outside of town.

CLINT

Town gets closer to me all the time.

(pause)

Pretty soon, I'll probably be part of it.

BRIANA

I guess things change.

CLINT

Sure they do. But maybe not in ways an economist would care about.

Briana is surprised that he knows this about her.

BRIANA

How...?

CLINT

I may be old. I ain't deaf.

BRIANA

(regains composure)

Clearly.

(pause)

What kind of changes?

CLINT

The kind of things you only notice up close, first-hand. Like field work. Getting your hands dirty.

Briana is annoyed by this apparently slight. She frowns before responding.

BRIANA

Ah huh.

CLINT

I'm just seeing fewer critters - of certain types - running around the ranch. Used to be a lot more, different kinds. Now it's mostly the pests.

(pause)

You know, like some people.

With that, Briana and Jenny clear their throats as if the guy is indeed weird or crazy. They both go back to work.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN - DAY

Kalub and Briana are dressed in jogging clothes. They are running in downtown Austin along Lady Bird Lake and across the pedestrian bridge that runs under Mo-Pac.

Briana stops for a moment and turns to Kalub.

BRIANA
Let's go down here.

Kalub nods and follows Briana as she runs into a nearby neighborhood.

The houses are upper middle class, well maintained, with well-manicured lawns.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
Now there's environmental degradation.

KALUB
(motioning to the houses)
You're kidding right?

BRIANA
Suburbanites mimicking English gentry. A tired old tradition that just won't die.
(pause)
It's a lemming thing.

KALUB
Lemming thing?

BRIANA
Posers doing the same stupid shit because other people do it. Just like lemmings following each other off a cliff.

KALUB
What's wrong with lawns?

BRIANA
So many things. Where to start?

Kalub doesn't respond to the obvious goad. Instead he continues running.

Finally, he looks back over at Briana expectantly.

Briana keeps looking ahead, but smiles because he has taken the bait. After a few moments, she continues.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
 Okay, first - and most importantly
 - they create unnecessary work.

Kalub lets out a short laugh.

KALUB
 One of your hot buttons, I know.

BRIANA
 (playfully)
 Shut uuup.
 (pause)
 You know it would actually be
 better if they weren't mowed at
 all. It would hold more water in
 the soil.
 (pause)
 But of course, that would offend
 the aesthetics too much.

Kalub smiles. Then he nods for Briana to continue. She has
 his interest now, so she lays it on him.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
 Grass is cut with unregulated,
 carbon-belching mowers.
 (pause)
 Pesticides and fertilizer
 contaminate the water table.
 (pause)
 Animal habitats and watersheds are
 destroyed.
 (pause)
 All for the sake of middle-class
 status.

KALUB
 But, besides that?

Briana laughs, sort of, as the two of them keep running
 through the lovely neighborhood.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Briana is back in class, sparring with Uan again.

UAN
 No, no, no Briana. You can't mix up
 economics and ecology in a pot and
 expect to make any sense of it. The
 disciplines are separate.

BRIANA

I think you mean to say they are
stuck in their own silos.

(pause)

Irrevocably. Irretrievably.

UAN

Precisely.

The class laughs at Uan's unintentional obtuseness. Only belatedly does he realize he has put his foot in it.

After a moment, Uan tries to recover.

UAN (CONT'D)

Look, that's why we have academic
departments. So scholars can
specialize.

BRIANA

Yes, but what good is it if no one
can bring it all together?

Uan takes a few steps up the stairs in the auditorium toward Briana for emphasis.

Uan is close enough so that he doesn't have to project his voice as much as before.

UAN

(calmly)

If you do that, you end up with a
rhetorical mish-mash. Good for late
night talk shows or a novel.

Uan turns to walk back to the stage, but then catches himself and turns back to Briana.

UAN (CONT'D)

Planning to write fiction, Ms.
Ruiz?

Briana barely misses a beat before responding.

BRIANA

Based on my grades in this class,
that's apparently what you think.

Students laugh uproariously. Uan turns around and walks back to the classroom stage to continue his lecture.

As the class settles down, Kalub raises his hand, but Uan does not see him.

Uan is preparing to continue the lecture, but Kalub speaks up first.

KALUB
 (interjecting)
 Professor Uan, aren't you trying to
 defend the religion of economics?
 (pause)
 At least as currently practiced?

UAN
 It's not religion, it's math.

KALUB
 So people ARE perfectly rational?

Uan shakes his head and looks down.

UAN
 I don't think this is taking us
 anywhere useful. Getting back to
 subjective utility....

Uan's voice fades in volume, as he continues to lecture into the dead air. Briana looks across at Kalub, highly displeased.

EXT. BARTON SPRINGS (AUSTIN) - DAY

Parents and children stand and swim in the shallow end of Barton Spring pool.

Kids are jumping off the diving board in the middle area.

Briana and Kalub are laying out a blanket on the grass at the deep end of the pool, where the college students congregate.

Briana is sunbathing topless, as are several other young women in the vicinity. Some of the women sport unshaven underarms and legs.

Briana is staring ahead, a stoic, hard look on her face.

BRIANA
 Don't ever defend me in class
 again. I don't need your help with
 Uan.

Kalub is annoyed by the comment but tries to shake it off.

KALUB
 So, you're going to take the job?

BRIANA
Thinking about it.

Neither of them speak for several moments.

Children and young adults dive off the board in the middle area of the large pool.

KALUB
You know, life is always about bargaining and negotiation. Even if it's unspoken. Remember that.

BRIANA
What the hell does that mean?
(pause)
You don't really believe that, do you?

KALUB
You, we, all of us negotiate all day, every day. It's true.
(pause)
I wish it weren't. Just be sure - whatever you're giving them - that you get something in return that's worth what you're giving up.

Briana looks away from Kalub and down at the swimmers in the pool for several moments.

KALUB (CONT'D)
When it's two people, it's just about relationships.
(pause)
But when it's between people and corporations, it's power. Just the way the system works. Your buddies at Parkus understand that.

BRIANA
They're not my buddies.

KALUB
What are they?

BRIANA
It's just a job. And I'll have influence. I can change the culture a whole lot more meaningfully if I'm on the inside.

KALUB

I don't know if that's possible.
They're grooming you, but not the
way you think. Pretty soon you'll
be drinking the kool-aid.

BRIANA

Go to hell.

KALUB

(smiling)

Just saying.

(pause)

Hey, if you want to play a game of
"Who Can Be The Biggest Asshole,"
you shouldn't get upset if you
lose.

Briana turns to look at Kalub.

BRIANA

Apparently you're pretty good at
it.

KALUB

(smiles)

The best.

Briana laughs thinly. She regards the people in the pool at
the deep end, mostly college students are on rafts.

BRIANA

I don't know how else to change the
structure. I'm not going to be some
crazed fanatic about it. I don't
have any use for ideology,
religion, or urban myth.

(pause)

Climate change or Catholicism, or a
hundred things in-between.

KALUB

Just the facts, eh?

Briana turns and smiles, nodding imperceptibly to Kalub.

On the sidewalk below, a kid is running, which is against
pool rules.

A lifeguard blows his/her whistle loudly and motions for the
child to conform to pool rules.

EXT. PARKUS HEADQUARTERS BUILDING - DAY

The Parkus headquarters office building is nestled in the hills of west Austin along FM 2222. It is a modern, large facility.

INT. PARKUS HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Phil and Briana are walking through the halls of Parkus headquarter, meeting other employees and touring the facilities. The place is cool! Free coffee, free food. Play areas.

The setting is like a very high-tech firm.

Briana is pleasantly animated as she talks casually with the associates. The Parkus conglomerate may be a great place to work after all!

PHIL

We're working on some really interesting technologies. Game changers.

Briana regards Phil's comment somewhat skeptically.

BRIANA

What, for instance?

PHIL

The CEO has spent a boatload of money on alternative energy. Clean energy.

Briana tilts her head inquisitively.

BRIANA

Solar, wind?

PHIL

No, something really industrial strength. A form of fusion?

Briana looks at Phil dismissively.

BRIANA

Cold fusion? That's bullshit.

PHIL

No, no, this is different. And expensive. But it could transform energy markets if we can get it to work.

BRIANA

Really?

PHIL

The CEO has asked us to run projections. To see what the upside could be. Interested?

BRIANA

Hell, yes.

PHIL

Good. After you sign the non-disclosure, we'll give you a look at the data.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN - DAY

Briana and Kalub are walking down Congress Avenue when suddenly another super-storm begins.

Briana immediately starts running. Kalub follows.

KALUB

(shouting)

Where are you going?

BRIANA

(turns back, shouting)

I have to see this. Really see it.

EXT. MOUNT BONNELL ROAD, AUSTIN - DAY

Briana is driving as fast as she can down Mount Bonnell Road in an old car that her parents gave her for school. It could use a good car wash; the interior is faded from the sun.

Kalub sits in the passenger seat, a bit nervous from the way Briana is driving like a bat out of hell.

Briana screeches to a stop along the side of the road at the base of Mount Bonnell.

Briana jumps out of the car. Once again Kalub is in tow.

Briana starts the climb up the hill on foot. Kalub follows her.

EXT. MOUNT BONNELL SUMMIT - DAY (A FEW MINUTES LATER)

We see Briana come up the trail, through the trees at the top of Mount Bonnell, which affords a great view of Austin to the east and the Colorado River to the west.

Briana stops and turns to look in the direction of the Austin skyline, the localized superstorm raging above the city.

Kalub runs up behind her.

Briana and Kalub are standing together as they watch the storm without rain, only wind and crackling lightning.

Kalub looks at Briana.

KALUB

Holy...
 (pause)
 fucking...
 (pause)
 shit.

We can their faces as they continue watching for several moments.

We can see them from behind. Off in the distance, the storm rages above Austin. They hold hands without speaking.

INT. PERRY-CASTAÑEDA LIBRARY, UT AUSTIN CAMPUS - DAY

Kalub is at a computer terminal with his glasses on, sifting through press reports and news videos about Parkus operations.

Kalub scrolls through several news stories with headline:

Headline: Parkus Expands Palm Oil Production in Indonesia

Headline: Parkus Invests Heavily in Alternative Energy

A student coughs. Kalub looks up.

Kalub see other students walking through the stacks, carrying books and looking for specific titles in the large library.

Kalub resumes looking at the computer screen:

Headline: Parkus Business Practices Under Fire

Headline: SEC Probes Excessive Corporate Stock Repurchases

Parkus 10K Annual Financial Report

Kalub scrolls down as a reads the detailed financial statement (10K) for Parkus.

Kalub's expression is neutral at first, but the more he reads, the darker his face becomes.

EXT. TEXAS GULF COAST NEAR CORPUS CHRISTI - DAY

Briana and Kalub are sitting on the beach at Mustang Island.

The weather is pleasant, sun is shining, wind is blowing.

BRIANA

I love the beach, don't you?

KALUB

Always my favorite vacation.

BRIANA

So relaxing.

Briana basks in the sun and wind. We can hear the waves coming in, pounding the shore.

Briana suddenly feels eyes on her, so she leans forward to see Kalub looking at her expectantly.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

Okay, what is it?

KALUB

Nothing.

(pause)

Well, actually I've been doing some research on Parkus. Not quite sure what to make of them.

Briana frowns and looks at the water.

Seagulls are flying overhead.

Briana picks up a rock and throws it out into the water.

BRIANA

(annoyed)

Don't you have anything better to do than check up on me?

(pause)

(MORE)

BRIANA (CONT'D)

You don't have to make anything of them. The company really doesn't have anything to do with you.

KALUB

You have something do to with me. At least I thought so.

BRIANA

Look, you don't graduate for a few semesters, so you don't have to worry about getting a job yet.

Kalub does a slow burn and looks out at the water. Neither Brian or Kalub speaks for a while.

On the beach near a picnic table, a little girl is eating a handful of Cheez-Its. The seagulls see the food and start flying much closer to her.

The little girl becomes wary and starts to back up. The seagulls keep up with her and get even closer.

The little girl throws the Cheez-Its up into the air and she turns around and runs away screaming.

The seagulls drop down to the ground, greedily picking up and eating the crackers in the sand.

The girl's parents are laughing at the excitement.

The little girl has turned back around and is watching the seagulls eat the crackers, with her hands on her hips, an admonishing look on her face.

KALUB

Let's change the subject.

(pause)

Any new mathematical insights?

BRIANA

Now that's a good question. I'm still trying to make sense of the firestorm over downtown.

KALUB

And?

BRIANA

Whatever is happening is just starting. More to come, I think.

KALUB

So what are your models telling you?

Briana looks at Kalub, then stands up. She walks toward the waves and the water.

Kalub follows her.

BRIANA

I think I'm getting close to being able to predict the actual timing of ecosystem collapse one by one.

(pause)

Like a weather model, only with economics instead.

KALUB

(unconvinced)

A model that actually predicts accurately?

Kalub drops down and examines a sea shell.

Kalub looks up at Briana, hesitant to say more.

KALUB (CONT'D)

Hate to break it to you, but I read stuff like that all the time.

(pause)

They're usually wrong.

BRIANA

Right?. Nobody ever pegs the timing correctly.

KALUB

(mocking)

Oh, and you can?

BRIANA

(defiantly)

Yeah, actually I do.

KALUB

Okay, so like what? What prediction can you make?

Briana purses her lips. She waits several moments before speaking.

BRIANA

These storms aren't just happening at random.

(MORE)

BRIANA (CONT'D)
Something is triggering them.
(pause)
Plus, the effects are going to
start showing up in other places.

Kalub stands back up and scans the horizon. The wind coming off the water blows his hair.

KALUB
What other places?

BRIANA
Land, water. Not just the
atmosphere. And not just here.

KALUB
You mean global?

BRIANA
I don't know. Maybe.

KALUB
Sounds like this is getting pretty
far afield of traditional
economics.

Briana looks over at Kalub, her hair blowing in the wind as well.

BRIANA
Yeah, I know.
(pause)
But it's interesting what happens
when I start plugging in non-
traditional variables into models.

KALUB
Why? What variables?

BRIANA
Statistics on animal extinctions,
for example. They are tracked
pretty accurately. But it's not
something economic models currently
use.

Briana starts to walk along the beach.

Up toward the shore, there are families and teenagers laying in the sun, catching rays.

Kalub walks with Briana.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

It is, however, an early warning signal.

KALUB

Of what?

BRIANA

Basically it points to an unnatural dominance of the remaining species.

KALUB

You're right, that doesn't sound like economics.

BRIANA

No, it's not.

(pause)

Actually, it's a variant of the Bass Model, used in consumer marketing. It accurately forecasts where consumer electronics sales will peak.

KALUB

How?

BRIANA

It's modeled on the way viruses grow. It's applied to everything from smartphones to flat screen TVs.

Briana let's that sink in before going on.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

Basically, as rates of extinction increase in a very systematic, track-able way, we're going to see more skunks and crows.

KALUB

All my favorite animals

Briana turns to Kalub with a smirk on her face.

Kalub considers what he has just heard, but ultimately shakes his head.

KALUB (CONT'D)

Briana, there's so many other things in the world to worry about - I don't know why you're stuck on this. What about nuclear war?

BRIANA
(surprised)
Well, now there's a cheery thought.

Briana walks a bit more before responding.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
In that case, I guess it will just
be cockroaches that survive. And a
few people.

KALUB
(incredulous)
You think humans will survive
nuclear war?

BRIANA
I think some assholes can survive
anything.

Kalub gives Briana an odd look, as if he's not sure whether
the comment was directed at him or not.

Kalub looks out at the water.

Far offshore, a storm is raging in the distance, clearly
visible from the seashore.

EXT. UT CAMPUS - DAY

INT. BRIANA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Briana tears open an envelope on one end that arrived in
today's mail.

Briana tilts the envelope downward and a new credit card
slides out. She seems a little surprised.

Briana tears open a second envelope - and another credit card
slides out. She picks up a third envelope - same thing.

Briana shuffles the credit cards in one hand, like poker
chips.

Then Briana smiles. Life is good.

MONTAGE BEGINS

Briana essentially has a lucrative job offer in hand. Now she
has brand new credit cards. She's going on a spending spree
to celebrate.

INT. EXPENSIVE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Briana is out with girlfriends, laughing, drinking.

Everyone at the table is dishing and having a great time.

A waiter brings the check and Briana takes it immediately without hesitating. She picks up the tab for the entire group.

INT. BMW DEALERSHIP - DAY

Briana is sitting in a brand new BMW 3 series as she talks to the salesperson. She laughs at his joke. There is no haggling.

EXT. BMW DEALERSHIP - DAY (ONE HOUR LATER)

Briana drives off the lot in her newly leased BMW.

INT. UPSCALE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Briana is trying on clothes for all occasions.

Briana models business attire for the female clerk that nods approvingly.

Briana models sporty attire.

Briana in a sexy cocktail party dress.

The sales clerk is just as happy as Briana - probably works on commission.

EXT. UPSCALE CLOTHING STORE - LATER

Briana is carrying several boxes out of the store to her BMW parked nearby against the curb. She tosses the many boxes in the back.

Briana looks around in her new shades to survey the landscape, very satisfied with herself. Then she hops in her new car and drives away.

EXT. BRIANA'S APARTMENT - DAY (LATER THAT DAY)

Kalub is driving over to see Briana in his old, used car. She doesn't see him as she pulls up and gets out of her car with the assortment of newly purchased packages and boxes.

Briana looks very perky and happy with all her new stuff.

Kalub does not get out of his car. Instead, he watches Briana unload the gear.

Kalub is clearly disappointed. He continues watching, perhaps half-hoping she will see him.

After Briana goes inside, Kalub restarts his car and drives away.

EXT. PARKUS OPERATIONS, INDONESIA - DAY

Phil Grady and the on-site manager THAN NUR are flying into a heavily forested, proposed Parkus work zone in a helicopter.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY (SAME TIME)

PHIL
What the hell is the problem?

THAN
The locals won't leave.

PHIL
We'll see.

EXT. HELICOPTER - DAY (SAME TIME)

The chopper dives toward the forest and sets down in a clearing.

EXT. CLEARING IN FOREST - DAY (A FEW MINUTES LATER)

Than has guided Grady to the local community elder as part of a negotiation for access their land.

THAN
(acting as interpreter)
The chief says he cannot allow company operations here. They have already been relocated several times.

PHIL
Tell him that we will more than compensate them for their trouble.

Than speaks to the chief, who then replies tersely.

THAN
 (to Phil)
 No good. I told you I've been over
 this with a hundred times with him.

PHIL
 (harshly to Than)
 Tell him again.

Lewin translates the message for the elder.

The elder says nothing in reply. Instead, he looks away from
 Than and directly at Phil with utter contempt.

Phil understands the chief's meaning at last.

INT. - HELICOPTER - DAY (A FEW MINUTES LATER)

Phil and Than are flying back to the city in defeat.

The ride in the chopper is bumpy from turbulence.

THAN
 What are you going to do?

PHIL
 Call the minister.

THAN
 What do you mean? A priest?

As Phil bounces around inside the helicopter, he turns his
 head very slowly to Than and gives him a caustic glare.

EXT. SAME FORESTED AREA - DAYS LATER

Military troops arrive in military vehicles and hit the
 group.

A segeant gets out of the head vehicle and barks orders to
 the troops.

The soldiers disembark immediatly and move purposefully
 toward the trees.

The army is forcing the indigenous population out of the
 proposed work area.

Men, women, and children are fleeing.

As the troops come to an open area, the elder chief is
 standing steadfast.

Soldiers motion for him to leave with their guns. The elder does not move. Then a soldier fires two warning shots.

Still, the elder remains steadfast.

As the troops close in, the elder issues a primal scream.

EXT. SAME FORESTED AREA - NEXT DAY

Bulldozers have been brought in and are clearing the land in order to plant palm oil trees.

The previous residents who have been forced to retreat further into the forest watch the activity from a distance. Noticeably absent from the group is the tribal elder.

EXT. LAKEWAY COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

Outing with Parkus recruits at Lakeway, with drinks, hors oeuvres and lots of people.

Harry and Phil are working the room like pros, drinks in hand and making sure everyone else has one as well.

Briana, looking stylish in one of her many new outfits, fits in easily.

EXT. LAKE TRAVIS - LATER SAME DAY

A small group of recruits has been invited to join in for some skiing.

The speedboat is lined with beautiful people who already work for the company in stylish bikinis and swimwear.

When Briana takes her turn to ski, people in the boat are taking pictures with their smartphones. As they smile and laugh, their expressions suddenly turn dark.

Behind Briana is an undulating swarm of thousands of flying things.

As the swarm gets closer, Briana sees the distressed faces in the boat, so she turns around to look.

The swarms of flying cockroaches are being chased by even bigger swarms of starlings, coming up quickly behind her. Oddly beautiful, but also menacing.

Briana screams and as she is nearly engulfed, she drops off the skis and goes into the water.

The people on the boat kill the engine, then duck and find cover.

The swarm passes after a few minutes and flies toward the hills on the lake.

The starlings fly in a seamless, constantly changing pattern.

Then the swarm disappears over the hills - almost as if nothing had happened.

After several minutes, once it is apparent that things have quieted down, the occupants of the boat emerge from cover and look around. Someone points in the direction of Briana.

The speedboat turns around and picks up Briana, who is shaken up badly.

INT. LAKEWAY COUNTRY CLUB - DAY (LATER THAT DAY)

Briana is sitting with friends at an outdoor bar, recovering from the freak attack.

Kalub has just arrived, looking concerned.

KALUB

What happened?

BRIANA

Holy fuck, you wouldn't believe it.

EMPLOYEE 1

This one's a trooper. Took on the cockroach air force this afternoon.

KALUB

What?

BRIANA

Bugs and birds. Ech! Flying all over the place. I think there's still some in my hair.

Briana searches her hair with her fingers and flicks off pieces of cockroach parts.

KALUB

Are you okay?

Briana is not happy with the obtuse question.

BRIANA

No, Kalub. I'm NOT okay. It was like a scene out of a horror movie. Where were you?

KALUB

Doing research.
(looking around)
I thought you might be interested in what I found out.

BRIANA

Not really. I think I'd rather get drunk. There's the party later - are you still coming?

Kalub hesitates for a moment.

KALUB

Yeah, sure.

BRIANA

Good.

Briana turns her attention back to the table.

Kalub stands there for moment, like a fifth wheel. He turns and leaves, miffed.

INT. LAVISH HOME OVERLOOKING LAKE TRAVIS - NIGHT (LATER THAT NIGHT)

Briana is wearing a stunning cocktail gown.

The part is more of a couples affair. Kalub is with Briana now.

Lots of interesting people and discussion, but Kalub and Briana appear distant, cold.

Kalub walks over to the bay window overlooking the lake. Briana is a little surprised by this and stares at Kalub's back.

Then Briana notices Phil and walks over to him.

BRIANA

Did you see the storm the other day?

PHIL

Heard about the excitement this afternoon also. Weird shit, huh?

BRIANA
What do you make of it?

PHIL
(quizzical look)
Not sure I follow.

BRIANA
Could be the start of something.

Phil appears disinterested. He sees LANCE ALBRECHT, CEO of Parkus across the room.

Lance is relatively young for a CEO, perhaps early forties. He is well-groomed like a pampered frat boy.

Lance is engaged in conversation with a group of company employees. They are gathered around him, clearly in worship of the CEO.

PHIL
(loudly so Lance can hear)
Hey Lance, come meet someone.

Lance stops talking, turn, smiles and walks over to them.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Lance, I want you to meet Briana Ruiz. She is the superstar I was telling you about.

LANCE
(smiles in recognition)
Ah, Briana! Nice to meet you at last.

LANCE (CONT'D)
(to Phil)
Have you convinced her to join us yet?

PHIL
Still working on it.

LANCE
(charming smile)
Well, make sure you do. We wouldn't want to lose her to a competitor.

BRIANA
Yes, I was just mentioning to Phil about the environmental anomalies we've been seeing.

Phil frowns. Something he doesn't want to talk about.

LANCE
Oh yeah. Weird shit like that is
happening all the time. Go figure.

Now Briana is frowning. Lance is trying to blow her off, and she isn't having any of it.

BRIANA
(pointedly)
I think it's systematic.

LANCE
(easily)
Nothing to worry about. In fact,
we've probably seen the last of it.

Briana starts to speak, but Lance smiles and waves at someone and starts to walk away.

LANCE (CONT'D)
(to Briana)
Excuse me. Very nice to have met
you, Briana. Hope to see more of
you.

Briana does a slow burn. Phil smiles uncomfortably.

EXT. FM 2222 - NIGHT (LATER THAT NIGHT)

Briana is driving the new BMW back to Austin with Kalub in the passenger's seat.

Tonight did not go well. The two hardly spoke to each other and now they are both pissed. They start to argue

The more they argue, the faster Briana drives the car.

Brian is at first, expertly racing around the hairpin curves on FM 2222 heading back into Austin.

KALUB
Don't you see where this going? The
company rewards you with toys and
status.

Kalub loosens his tie and takes it off. He throws it on the floor of the car. He unbuttons the top two of his shirt.

Kalub opens the car window to to get some air.

KALUB (CONT'D)
Eventually, your self-interest and
that of your precious economic
system become the same thing.

Briana laughs grimly, exasperated at the comment.

BRIANA
Geez, that is one tired line. You
sound like a refugee from the
1960s.
(pause)
Next thing you'll be saying is that
I've sold out to the MAN.

Kalub takes a hard look at Briana and then speaks very
deliberately.

KALUB
No. What I'm saying that if you
really want to be an agent of
change, you will one conflicted
motherfucker.

Kalub unbuttons his sleeves, then takes off his cheap watch
and puts it in his shirt pocket.

KALUB (CONT'D)
By its nature, business expands,
for good or ill - until it can't.
(pause)
In the meantime, more likely you'll
get fired than make any real
change.

BRIANA
That would suit you just fine,
wouldn't it?

Kalub shakes his head in disgust as he looks at Briana.

KALUB
What's that supposed to mean?

BRIANA
(sneering)
You know what I mean. You're
jealous, aren't you? I actually
think I deserve this.
(pause)
Not that YOU care.

KALUB
Now YOU can go to hell.

Kalub processes what Briana has said for several moments. Then an ugly look washes over his face.

KALUB (CONT'D)

I hope you DO get what you deserve.

BRIANA

(really pissed)

You know what?

KALUB

(very sarcastic)

No, but I bet you're going to tell me.

Briana does a slow burn.

As Briana gets angrier she starts to drive faster, even as the corners get sharper.

Kalub turns from looking at Briana to the road as the scenery becomes a blur.

KALUB (CONT'D)

Slow down, dammit.

BRIANA

Fuck you.

Suddenly the car is going too fast, the curve is too sharp.

Briana is about to lose control and crosses into the opposite lanes.

Briana swerves out of the way of an oncoming vehicle and over-corrects.

Briana and Kalub are screaming silently as the car nearly slams into the side of the rocky hill off the shoulder. The BMW stalls just before it hits the rocks.

Briana and Kalub are clutching the inside of the vehicle, trying to catch their breath. The two of them do not speak to or look at each other.

INT. - LECTURE HALL - DAY

Professor Uan is delivering his final lecture before the end of the semester.

Briana re-reads a note from Kalub that pretty much says they have broken up.

Briana is clearly down. Kalub is not in class.

UAN
Any more thoughts on your circular
economy, Ms. Ruiz?

BRIANA
(sighs, looks up)
Not really, Professor Uan.

UAN
(disappointed)
Well, that's not like you at all.

Uan takes a few moments to regard Briana, who, despite their skirmishes, he has come to admire.

UAN (CONT'D)
Still, it's a worthwhile idea.
(pause)
Probably just a little ahead of its
time.

Briana simply shrugs, half in agreement, half in resignation.

EXT. DALLAS SKYLINE - DAY

Shot of Dallas skyline, the city of chrome and glass edifices
- slick, impressive buildings.

EXT. DALLAS COWBOYS FOOTBALL STADIUM - DAY

Aerial view of the state-of-the-art football stadium, that
also doubles as a concert arena, complete with retractable
roof.

INT. PARKUS CORPORATION LUXURY SUITE INSIDE COWBOY STADIUM -
CONTINUOUS

Briana continues to be feted by the company.

Briana is watching a Cowboys game in one of the luxurious
ground-level suites, where the game and players on the field
is visible and close by.

Monitors throughout provide an alternative view of the game
and constant replays.

Briana talks to the older men - the senior leadership of
Parkus, who surround her to be close to her beauty, wit and
powerful intellect. She tells a joke and everyone laughs.

Briana should be having the time of her life, but instead she only smiles dimly.

INT. COFFEE SHOP NEAR THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS CAMPUS - DAY

Briana is back in Austin having coffee with Jenny. They wait in line and then pick up their orders.

Briana is still thinking about the near-miss car crash with Kalub.

They find a place to sit down. Neither one of the women appear happy.

Jenny is looking down, stirring her coffee silently. When she does look up, she glares at Briana.

Finally she speaks.

JENNY

So, it's true?

BRIANA

(looks up, surprised)
What?

JENNY

You're actually going to work for Parkus? That piece of shit conglomerate?

Briana is clearly hurt by the snide remark.

BRIANA

What's wrong with that?

Jenny shakes her head and looks back down at her coffee.

JENNY

(not looking up)
Something is going on there, and it's not good.

BRIANA

(incredulous)
Like what?

JENNY

Nothing I can point to. But this is still a small town. I hear things.

BRIANA
(joking)
Pretty dramatic.

Jenny looks up quickly, shooting a hard glance at Briana.

JENNY
(slowly, very serious)
You just watch yourself.

INT. PARKUS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Harry and Briana are walking down a long hallway.

There are very few people visible, not like the tour before.

Harry stops at a secure entrance and puts his eye up to an iris scanner.

BRIANA
Iris recognition?

HARRY
That's right.

There is an agreeable beep, after which Harry keys in a passcode.

HARRY (CONT'D)
More more reliable than
fingerprints.
(pause)
Less invasive than retinal scans.

The door lock releases and Harry holds it open for Briana.

HARRY (CONT'D)
After you.

BRIANA
(smiles uneasily)
Thanks.

Harry leads Briana across the room to another door. Once again, he keys in a code and then opens the door.

The two of them enter a very dark room, illuminated only by the walls covered with video monitors.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
What is this?

HARRY

We call it the War Room. It's where we do the number crunching and monitoring.

BRIANA

This is very cool.

Harry walks over to main control panel, clearly familiar and comfortable in the room. He looks up at the screens around the room.

Harry keys a few commands into the keyboard in order to allow Briana access to the system. He is leaning over the console as he types.

HARRY

Almost nobody has seen this.

Harry stands up and looks at Briana.

HARRY (CONT'D)

There. You're all set.

BRIANA

Why are you showing it to me?

HARRY

We want to see if you can validate our assumptions.

Harry walks over to a group of analysts at workstations. There is an empty seat for Briana.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Here's the workstation I've set up for you. The background material is teed up for review. There's analytical software: SPSS, Stata, SAS, R - whatever you're most comfortable with.

Harry waits for a reaction. Briana is still listening.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Let me know if you have any questions.

BRIANA

Sure, what is it you're trying to solve?

HARRY

We want a fresh set of eyes on commodity market projections. Our people have been over the numbers, but...

(smiles)

We'd like a bright economist to have a look to see what you think.

BRIANA

(does not smile back)

What conclusions have your folks reached?

Harry seems distracted. He is looking around the room, preoccupied with the ongoing operations. He looks at the various monitors on the wall for several second.

Harry disengages from the wall and turns his attention back to Briana.

HARRY

If the alternative energy project performs as planned, Parkus will enable cuts in global oil and coal use in half within five years.

(pause)

Eventually we should be able to drive it pretty close to zero. In the meantime, we'll make tons of money.

(pause)

If the numbers pan out.

Briana is clearly impressed. She continues to look around the control center.

BRIANA

I see.

HARRY

Anyway, look it over, let us know what you think.

BRIANA

(takes a deep breath)

Okay.

Briana begins reviewing material.

Harry stands behind her for a few moments, and then leaves.

INT. WAR ROOM - LATER

Briana reads material, prints documents and interacts with the other analysts about how to use the equipment when she has questions.

She begins typing equations at the workstation.

INT. WAR ROOM - HOURS LATER

With a pen in her mouth, Briana keys in data, hits the ENTER key and then waits for a moment.

Briana rubs her eyes. The results scroll down the screen. As she reads the numbers, her eyes widen.

Briana moves her head closer to the screen and when she does, the pen drops out of her mouth, which she ignores. Instead she continues staring at the screen.

The other analysts look over at her.

ANALYST
Anything wrong?

BRIANA
No, sorry.

Briana picks up her pen as if everything is fine. She collects her things and leaves hurriedly.

EXT. - BRANCH RANCH, OUTSIDE OF AUSTIN - DAY

Briana is driving her new BMW lease onto the dusty, dirt road leading to Clint Branch's house on the ranch.

Clint is waiting outside as the car pulls up.

Briana stops the vehicle, then steps out.

CLINT
Nice car.

Clint walks over to shake Briana's hand.

CLINT (CONT'D)
Not very practical around here
though.

Briana smiles dimly but says nothing.

CLINT (CONT'D)
So you want to see the transition I
was talking about?

BRIANA
That's right, Clint. Or am I
wasting my time?

CLINT
I'll let you decide.

EXT. FIELD ON BRANCH RANCH - DAY (A FEW MINUTES LATER)

Clint and Briana walk along a dry, dusty field within sight
of the ranch house.

CLINT
This field used to be green all
year round.

BRIANA
Drought?

CLINT
I don't think so.

Clint pauses after speaking, considering what he has just
said.

CLINT (CONT'D)
Well, okay yes drought. But it's
not the typically annual change in
rain patterns.

BRIANA
Even if its been going on for a few
years, it doesn't mean...

CLINT
(interrupting)
No it's more than that. This has
been going on for too long. The
demarc of the dry land keeps moving
east.

Clint is standing, regarding the landscape that he knows so
well.

CLINT (CONT'D)
You ever hear of the 98th meridian?

BRIANA

No.

Briana is wearing cowboy boots. She kicks the dusty, rocky ground and looks around.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

98th meridian. No. What is it?

CLINT

It's a dividing line.

(pause)

Runs north-south, pretty much down the middle of the US.

BRIANA

(impatient, almost rudely)

So?

CLINT

You know, the US wasn't settled from east to west.

BRIANA

(confused)

What?

CLINT

Don't get me wrong. Most settlers moved predictably from the thirteen colonies through the forests migrating west...

(pause)

Right up until they reached the 98th meridian. It was the starting point for the old west.

Briana is not in the mood for a rehash of Death Valley Days.

BRIANA

What does that have to do with...

CLINT

(interrupting)

Basically the 98th meridian is the eastern boundary of the Great Plains. Immigrants arrived from East Coast ports or New Orleans and traveled west. But then they got stuck if they tried settle.

(pause)

Most of 'em drove through on wagon trains quick as they could to Oregon or California

Briana starts to regain interest in his story.

BRIANA

Why?

CLINT

(seeming to ignore the question)

The West Coast were settled sooner than here, partly because of the Gold Rush, partly because of shipping access.

(pause)

People didn't have much use for the Great Plains, except to cross it.

(pause)

Even that was tricky.

BRIANA

Why? It's flat, isn't it?

CLINT

Great PLAINS? Uh, yeah.

Clint looks skeptically at Briana. He tilts his head to the side.

CLINT (CONT'D)

You sure you went to college?

Clint leans down and picks up some of the beige colored sandy dirt and rubs it between his fingers. He looks up at Briana.

CLINT (CONT'D)

Everything west of here is hard country. Takes as many as forty to fifty acres to keep a single cow fed.

Clint stands back up and pats his hands to shake off the remaining dust.

CLINT (CONT'D)

In East Texas where it's still green, it only takes one acre.

Clint rubs his cheek while he is talking.

CLINT (CONT'D)

But even so, some pioneers DID try to live west of the 98th.

(pause)

Between here and the Rockies.

(MORE)

CLINT (CONT'D)
(pause)
A lot of 'em got run off.

BRIANA
Indians?

CLINT
(shakes his head)
You know, Indians - just like
everybody else - come in different
flavors.

Clint looks out over the landscape, almost as if he is reliving the past he is describing to Briana.

CLINT (CONT'D)
It wasn't just Indians - it was
Plains Indians.
(pause)
Comanches.

Clint, in his Larry Mahan cowboy boots, starts walking through the desert grass. He is very much at home here. This is his element.

CLINT (CONT'D)
Between the inhospitable, dry land
and Comanche resilience, it took
white people an extra sixty years
to finally control this territory.

Briana doesn't seem very much impressed, but she is trying to be polite.

BRIANA
Interesting story.

Clint immediately comes back to the present and takes a hard look at Briana.

CLINT
(a little impatiently)
Look, what I'm trying to say,
apparently not successfully, is
that the ecosystem here is fragile.
(pause)
Maybe people shouldn't even live on
the plains. At least not in the
numbers that they do. It doesn't
naturally support a lot of people
in any sustainable way.

Clint gestures with his arms outstretched toward the landscape.

CLINT (CONT'D)

And what if these dry patches keep moving east?

(pause)

If that is what's happening, it won't be just a case of animal and plant diversity.

(pause)

People will die or be forced to migrate.

Briana is taking all this in, as it clearly relates to the line of research she has been developing.

CLINT (CONT'D)

I tell you what, though.

(pause)

If the shit does hit the fan, I'm heading west.

Cliff takes another long look eastward, where the trouble will start.

CLINT (CONT'D)

Too many dip shits will be trying the chase the forest line as it recedes east of here.

Briana and Clint stand silently as the wind swirls and kicks more dust into the air.

EXT. WEST TEXAS HIGHWAY - DAY (LATER THAT DAY)

Aerial view of the West Texas landscape. Then we see a drone over the area. It flies, seemingly aimlessly over the desolate, arid desert.

A two lane highway comes into view. The drone changes course and follows the highway, which is mostly empty.

The drone is moving in the direction of the only car visible on the highway. It is Briana's BMW.

The drone moves closer and continues to follow the car.

EXT. SOUTH TEXAS HIGHWAY - DAY

Briana is driving her new car down U.S. Highway 281. She has her sunglasses on as the desert and hill country scenery are racing by on both sides side of her.

Briana enters the city limits of San Antonio. She can see the city skyline ahead of her as drives toward the downtown area.

Briana is expressionless, even though the drive is pleasant and she is looking forward to her next visit.

As she nears downtown, she drives through older neighborhoods of San Antonio.

She drives under a banner stretched across the street, commemorating San Antonio's 300th anniversary (2018).

The houses she drives by are mostly brick or stucco with terracotta tile roofs and some with stone walls bordering the lots.

The front yards have red and live oak trees, along with bunches of cactus and other native plants.

EXT. UT SAN ANTONIO DOWNTOWN CAMPUS - DAY

Briana is walking in Bill Miller Plaza at the University of Texas at San Antonio downtown campus with an older man, GEORGE RUIZ, her father who is a professor.

The downtown San Antonio skyline is clearly visible from the campus building and courtyard. Oak trees are dotted throughout.

GEORGE

Wow, you drove all the way down from Austin to see me. I'm flattered.

BRIANA

Dad, it's only eighty miles.

GEORGE

Just giving you shit. Really good to see you.

Briana and George walk in the courtyard of the campus and sit on a bench.

BRIANA

(pensive)

Do you ever regret teaching?

George turns to look at Briana quizzically.

GEORGE

That's sort of an odd question.
What's the matter? You break up
with your boyfriend?

Now Briana is looking at her father, pulling her head back in surprise, with an awkward smile - he is unknowingly hitting a little close to the bone.

Briana turns her head back to look at the ground and is silent for several seconds.

BRIANA

Well, you're an economist too. You could have made a lot more money in the private sector.

GEORGE

Yeah, and been miserable.
(pause)
Why? Does money make you happy?

BRIANA

(turns to look at her father)
Well, it certainly helps.

GEORGE

Shit, a lot of things help. Family. Friends that you can actually rely on. Living in a place you like. Most importantly, a sense of purpose - not just going through the motions. What you DO should be more than about money.
(pause)

Don't forget - I SPENT time in the corporate world. I got tired of scraping my knees chasing the next deal. This suits me better.
(smiles)
For one thing, I get to have an opinion.

BRIANA

Ha! You've always had one of those.

A couple of students walk by.

Briana lets her father's comments sink in before speaking.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

What about me? Do you think it would work for me?

GEORGE
 (laughs)
 Hey, leave me out of it. That's for
 you to decide.

BRIANA
 Geez, YOU'RE a big help.

George looks at his beautiful daughter, now a grown woman. He smiles at her warmly.

GEORGE
 I could offer some boring-ass
 speech, but you know what I would
 say anyway.

BRIANA
 I know. Just looking for that magic
 bullet, you know?

The two sit in silence for a moment, not addressing the elephant in the room.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
 So. How's mom?

George has been expecting this question, but still becomes visibly uncomfortable anyway. He does his best to appear unfazed.

GEORGE
 (breezy)
 Pissed.

BRIANA
 At you, or at me?

GEORGE
 Depends on the day.

BRIANA
 I'm sorry.

Briana considers for a moment, and then appears surprised, inquisitive.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
 What's she pissed at you for?

GEORGE
 Oh, the usual shit. For being
 there.
 (pause)
 For not being there.

BRIANA
Which is it?

GEORGE
(short laugh)
You'll have to ask her.

Briana laughs too, just a little.

George hesitates to go further, but since Briana brought it up, he presses ahead.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
She's still not happy you joined a
cult for three years.

BRIANA
A commune, dad.

GEORGE
Tell your mom that.

Briana appears reflective, and also vaguely remorseful.

BRIANA
Is she living at home?

GEORGE
Most of the time. Except for the
episodes.
(pause)
Anything you want me to pass on to
her?

BRIANA
I don't know.
(pause)
Tell her it was sort of a
compulsion. I had to know what it
was like to live off the grid.

GEORGE
Any conclusions?

BRIANA
Maybe a lot of us will have to live
like that before long.

Briana looks up and takes a deep cleansing breath, shaking her head and pulling her hair back.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
(smiling)
Anyway, it's harder than it looks
on TV.

George smiles and lets the moment linger.

GEORGE
I'll bet.

George slaps her on the knee. Conversation over.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Buy you lunch?

Briana looks at her dad and smiles - she loves him like a dad.

They both stand up and walk toward the Pico de Gallo restaurant for lunch.

EXT. SAN ANTONIO RIVERWALK, ARSENAL ROAD BRIDGE - DAY (LATER THAT DAY)

Briana is running along the Riverwalk.

Under the Arsenal Street Bridge is a local musician playing his guitar and singing.

The music echoes nicely from under the bridge, amplifying the mellifluous sound.

Briana stops to listen, but with a wistful look on her face.

Briana sits down on the steps nearby, continuing to listen to the music. It's all she can do to keep from crying over the fight she had with Kalub. She misses him and she is sad about it.

Briana listens to the music for a while longer and then stands up to resume her jog.

As she turns around to run back to her starting point, she sees Jenny.

Briana is surprised and doesn't get it.

BRIANA
Jenny! What the hell are you doing
here?

JENNY
Heard you went to see Clint.

Briana nods, still not sure what's going on.

JENNY (CONT'D)
(looking down)
Did he give you any insight?

Briana creases her eyebrows.

BRIANA
Some. Yeah, I think so.

Jenny looks up at Briana and smiles.

JENNY
Good.

Jenny turns away and starts up the stairs from the Riverwalk to the street level, leaving Briana behind.

Now Briana is REALLY surprised, and has no idea what is going on.

BRIANA
Hey, where are you going?

Jenny turns around to face Briana.

JENNY
Somebody had to give your boyfried
a ride out here.

Upon hearing this, Briana looks left and right, all around her.

JENNY (CONT'D)
He never would have found you on
his own.

Jenny enjoys the mysteriousness of the moment, and the fact that she has Briana off-guard.

Jenny turns back around and continues going up the stairs and disappears at the top into the street.

In her place, now walking down the stairs slowly is Kalub.

As Kalub walks down the stairs, he and Briana both look at each other without speaking.

Each of them is trying to read the other.

After a few moments, Kalub reaches the bottom and walks slowly over to Briana.

For several seconds, they both stand there looking at each other.

Briana grabs Kalub's shirt and pulls him close. They embrace and kiss for several moments.

The music from under the bridge gets louder.

EXT. TRAVIS PARK IN SAN ANTONIO - DAY (LATER THAT DAY)

Briana and Kalub are sitting on a park bench watching the children playing, running around.

It is a nice day and there are several people in the park.

KALUB

Do you want to know why I left
Afghanistan?

BRIANA

They didn't pay you enough?

Kalub laughs.

KALUB

They paid me a lot of money. More
than I was worth.

(pause)

No, it wasn't the money.

BRIANA

What then?

KALUB

I saw where things were going and
couldn't keep being a part of it.

BRIANA

What do you mean?

KALUB

We weren't getting anything done.
(pause)

I mean, do you think things have
gotten better there?

Briana shakes her head, barely perceptibly.

Briana turns to look at Kalub, pity in her eyes.

KALUB (CONT'D)

But I learned a lot in the process.

BRIANA
(awkward chuckle)
Yeah?

KALUB
If you want to know about anarchy
or how to survive the end of the
world, Afghanistan is good place to
start.

Briana says nothing. She simply looks at Kalub, as if she is
about to cry.

KALUB (CONT'D)
Afghanistan is mostly about tribes,
most of them Pashtun. Forty million
of them in Afghanistan. Pakistan
too. The border is pretty
artificial.
(pause)
Their homeland is a lot like the
Great Plains. Desolate,
unforgiving.

This sparks recognition in Briana's eyes, given her recent
conversation with Clint.

KALUB (CONT'D)
Other countries have tried to herd
or conquer them. No one ever has.
They ran the British out. Then the
Russians. I imagine they'll run us
out before too much longer.
(pause)
They're always there after the
smoke clears.

Kalub stops talking and grows contemplative.

Kalub looks up and now he's the one who looks like he may
start to cry. Clearly the time in Afghanistan has had an
effect on him.

KALUB (CONT'D)
In a lot of ways, the Pashtuns
remind me of the Comanches. Very
resilient. Adaptable. And fiercely
cruel.
(pause)
Those will be the kind of people
that survive your anomalies.

Briana show more and more worry as she listens to the story.
She realizes that he is not finished.

KALUB (CONT'D)
I was captured by Pashtuns. Or
Taliban. Hard to tell the two
apart.

Briana is incredulous at this bombshell.

BRIANA
What?! You never told me that.

KALUB
No, I didn't.

Kalub looks down, as if dejected.

Briana has no response, other than to listen.

KALUB (CONT'D)
I was with a convoy on the way to
Kandahar Province that came under
attack. We were going to check the
progress of one of the central bank
branch renovations.
(pause)
First there was a roadside bomb
that took out half of the security.

Briana is reacting in silent shock and horror.

KALUB (CONT'D)
Then the security guys ordered all
the advisers to get out of the
vehicles and hit the ground, while
they tried to get control of the
situation.
(pause)
You never saw a bunch of white guys
move so fast.

Kalub breathes deeply as he is compelled to continue, now
that he has started the story.

Briana puts her hand on his back and rubs it up and down.

KALUB (CONT'D)
(deliberately)
It's funny. There weren't as many
bullets flying as you might think.
Unfortunately, most of them hit
what they were aiming at.
(pause)
I was under one of the SUVs.
(pause)
(MORE)

KALUB (CONT'D)

After the firefight, the Pashtuns pulled me out and, of course, they beat the shit out of me. They took me someplace off the main road. I have no idea where, even now.

BRIANA

Are you fucking shitting me?

(pause)

I cannot believe you are telling me this!

Kalub continues as if Briana had not said anything.

KALUB

I don't remember until I woke up in some mud-walled house, fecal dust all around.

Briana has her head in her hands. Kalub continues.

KALUB (CONT'D)

I thought, shit I'm dead. So I might as well act like it.

BRIANA

(looking up)

How did you...

KALUB

(continuing)

Survive? Well, they kept making noises about torturing me.

(pause)

First in Pashtu, which I didn't understand a word of. Later by some fucker speaking broken English.

Briana has no words. Only a desperately forlorn look on her face.

KALUB (CONT'D)

All my friends were gone. I felt like I was half-dead already.

(pause)

I told the Pashtuns to go fuck themselves.

(pause)

At that moment I suddenly realized how suicidal people feel. Pure resignation, defeat.

(pause)

(MORE)

KALUB (CONT'D)
The idea of dying became
preferable to even one more second
of living.

Briana looks up at Kalub, tears dripping from her eyes.

KALUB (CONT'D)
The Pashtun or Taliban asshole in
charge, or whoever the fuck it was
realized where I had gone mentally.
So at that point, he gets the long
serrated knife out.

Kalub laughs, a little bit like a crazy person.

KALUB (CONT'D)
It's like they all have the same
fucking one.
(pause)
He is about to cut my fucking head
off..

Kalub looks down and swallows deeply.

KALUB (CONT'D)
Then, one of the elders starts
admonishing the guy with the
butcher knife.

Briana looks up.

KALUB (CONT'D)
They let me go. Just like that.
(pause)
Pashtunwali. The rules of their
egalitarian society.
(pause)
The guy didn't have tribal
consensus.

Kalub takes a deep breath.

KALUB (CONT'D)
Even in the land of anarchy, there
are rules.

Kalub then puts the base of his hand to the corner of his
eye, sweeping a tear aside.

BRIANA
Kalub, that's horrible.
(pause)
Why didn't you tell me this before?

KALUB
(smiling dimly,
recovering, shrugging)
I guess I didn't know you well
enough.

EXT. IH-35 HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Briana is driving back to Austin.

Kalub is in the passenger's seat, sleeping, though he looks like he could actually be unconscious.

Briana is on information overload and having difficulty absorbing all that she has heard.

EXT. BRIANA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (LATER THAT NIGHT)

Briana pulls into to her apartment parking lot. She picks a parking spot, stops and turns the engine off.

Kalub is still out like a light.

For a long time, Briana doesn't do anything. She just looks at Kalub silently.

INT. - BRIANA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (LATER THAT NIGHT)

Briana is working feverishly on a paper, compiling raw data, crunching the numbers and generating results. She doesn't stop until she has completed the paper, printed a copy and reads over once more.

Then Briana posts the document on SSRN or ResearchGate, a site for unpublished academic working papers.

Briana checks back later in the evening before going to bed.

The screen indicates three people have downloaded the paper.

Briana goes to bed.

INT. BRIANA'S APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

Briana has slept late but is still tired.

She slowly gets out of bed, as she rubs her eyes.

She finds a half-full coffee mug from the night before and sticks it in the microwave.

As she is waiting for the stale coffee to heat up, she boots up her computer. As it is loading, she grabs the coffee from the microwave and slams the microwave door.

Briana starts to sip the coffee and then stops as she looks down at the screen.

Briana blinks hard.

BRIANA
(to herself)
Well, look at that.

On her computer we can see that there have been 647 downloads overnight.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The coffee shop is noisy and packed with students.

Briana and Kalub are tucked in a corner sitting across from each other.

KALUB
(shocked)
You what?!

BRIANA
I used Parkus data to run the models.

KALUB
Holy shit! What were the results?

BRIANA
The data demonstrate a link between the deforestation by global corporate operations with environmental anomalies elsewhere.
(pause)
It's stressing ecosystems beyond their capacity.

Briana stops talking and look around. Then she leans forward toward Kalub.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
Something else.

KALUB
What?

BRIANA
I can map the models backward and forward. The meridian is shifting.

KALUB
What meridian.

BRIANA
The 98th.

Briana can see that Kalub doesn't understand.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
Never mind. I'll explain later.

KALUB
Didn't you sign a non-disclosure agreement? They can sue the shit out of you.

BRIANA
The data are all aggregated.

This does not assuage Kalub's concern. He is still agitated.

KALUB
(urgent whisper)
What difference does that make?

BRIANA
For one thing, it's more than just Parkus. I was also able to infer events from other companies with similar operations. The environmental effect is systemic, global. It's only a matter of days now.

KALUB
How many people have read it?

BRIANA
Last time I checked? Eight-hundred and eleven.

KALUB
(again surprised)
Jesus! Eight-hundred people? Overnight?

BRIANA
It's not viral, I know. But somebody is reading it.

Kalub says nothing for several seconds.

KALUB
Gee, you think?
(pause)
I wonder who? Other academics
maybe?

BRIANA
I hope.

KALUB
(angrily)
You're damn right, you hope.
(pause)
You know what I hope?

Briana looks up chasten, forlorn. Yet perhaps she has a little fight left in her.

BRIANA
No, but I'm sure you're going to
tell me.

KALUB
(chuckles thinly)
I just hope to God you know what
you're doing.

BRIANA
(clearly worried)
Yeah, me too.

INT. PERRY-CASTAÑEDA LIBRARY, UT AUSTIN CAMPUS - DAY

Briana and Kalub continue to pull research, 10K financial reports and media clippings on Parkus Corporation.

They are both on computer terminals and have stacks of documents and reports on their table in the library.

Finally Kalub takes off his glasses and looks up. He turns to Briana, who sees him, turning her attention away from her monitor.

KALUB
A lot of companies misclassify R&D
as general and administrative
expenses. Parkus is doing the
opposite.

BRIANA
How's that?

Kalub grabs one of the documents and moves closer to Briana. He leans toward her as he puts his finger on some of the text so Briana can read it.

KALUB

They're inflating R&D spending so that it looks like they are investing in new product development more heavily than they actually are.

Briana takes a moment to read the document.

BRIANA

They're spending a ton on research and development. They're betting the company on it.

Kalub pulls the document back and sits up again. He looks at Briana and sighs.

KALUB

It's smoke and mirrors.

(pause)

They use the money to pay bonuses. They are going to the debt markets to borrow, but it doesn't go to R&D. They use the money to fund dividends and buy back stock to boost the share price. Boost the bonuses.

Kalub shakes his head in disbelief.

KALUB (CONT'D)

The execs are just squeezing as much value out of the company as they can. That's where the money is going. Not nearly as much to R&D as they advertise.

BRIANA

I would think that would be hard to get away with.

Kalub nods. For a moment he is thinking.

Then Kalub looks directly at Briana.

KALUB

It only has to work for a while. Long enough to collect.

EXT. 98TH MERIDIAN IN TEXAS - DAY

TIME LAPSE views of a large section of landscape that is the eastern border of the Great Plains in Texas. This where the West began.

The treeline east of the 98th meridian extends largely uninterrupted to the eastern seaboard.

In a series of time-lapse views, the arid landscape creeps eastward into the formerly lush expanses filled with East Texas pine trees.

Man-made deforestation that is taking place because of Parkus and other companies in many parts of the world such as Indonesia has now precipitated natural deforestation in others - specifically in this case, in Texas.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. UNITED NATIONS BUILDING - DAY

Global diplomats are watching television monitors. Pictures of environmental anomalies are being broadcast from a wide variety of locations across the world.

CNN is showing increasing numbers of bird swarms, enough to affect aircraft take-off and landings.

The Weather Channel is reporting that global temperatures on the Great Plains and other semi-arid plains that border temperate areas have risen significantly, to between 110-120 degrees. Landscape change is nearly visible in real time.

The scene at the UN is more like a hectic day on the New York Stock Exchange.

The Secretary-General of the main assembly steps up to the podium. He bangs a gavel and calls the room to order. No one pays attention to him.

The Secretary-General bangs the gavel several more times, to no avail.

INT. PARKUS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Lance, Phil and Harry are in a conference room, along with staff. However, only the three men are speaking.

The situation appears tense.

LANCE
How are the quarterly numbers
looking?

Harry shuffles through some of papers in front of him. He flips through several pages, then stops. He looks up and takes off his glasses.

HARRY
We've got a problem.

This is not what Lance want to hear. He very slightly shakes his head in disapproval, holding back the anger that is building inside.

After a moment that seems like forever, Lance finally speaks slowly.

LANCE
What's that?

Harry, clearly uncomfortable, looks over at Phil.

At first, Phil says nothing. He is looking down. Then he lifts his head and stares directly at Lance.

PHIL
We're getting some push-back from
local governments. Some crap about
failing ecosystem services.
(pause)
From deforestation, specifically.

LANCE
What the fuck does that mean?
(pause)
You're talking about our palm oil
operations in Indonesia and
Malaysia.

Harry looks through more of the paper in front of him, then settles on one piece in particular.

HARRY
The officials say their fisheries
are failing. Livestock are dying.
Predators multiplying.

PHIL
(adding clarification)
Their scientists are calling it
bifurcation. A wobble, a tremor.
(pause)
(MORE)

PHIL (CONT'D)
It sounds a lot like the anomalies
we're seeing here.

LANCE
So what?

HARRY
(interjecting)
We may have actually hit a tipping
point.

LANCE
(loudly)
Bullshit!

The people in the room react visibly to Lance's outburst. He
composes himself before speaking again.

LANCE (CONT'D)
(with levity)
You know what I always say:
dilution is the solution to
pollution.

Several people in the room roll their eyes in disbelief.

HARRY
(gravely)
Maybe not this time.

LANCE
Okay, that's fucked up. What do
they want? More money?

PHIL
I don't know. Could be they're
actually going to kick us out.

Lance considers this for several moments.

LANCE
Well, there goes our quarterly
earnings. AND our share price.
(pause)
And, of course, all of your bonuses
and stock options.

HARRY
(sternly)
Yours too.

Lance shoots a hard look at Harry. He is tempted to speak but
realizes that Harry is more or less on target.

LANCE
What's the timeframe?

Phil looks back at Harry expectantly.

HARRY
(resigned)
Not long.

INT. PARKUS HEADQUARTERS - DAY (A FEW MINUTES LATER)

The meeting has concluded and people are leaving the conference room. Harry is walking out the door, along with everyone else.

PHIL (O.S.)
Harry.

We see Phil off to one side, by himself.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Got a minute?

Harry nods and walks over to Phil.

PHIL (CONT'D)
(low voice)
Any word from Briana?

HARRY
Not yet.

PHIL
Should we be worried?

HARRY
Not sure.

Harry takes a moment to consider.

HARRY (CONT'D)
I don't think so.

PHIL
How much does she know?

HARRY
She spent a lot of time in the War Room.

Phil looks down to think for a moment.

PHIL
And then she just left?

HARRY
Yeah, but she probably got stuck
and quit.
(pause)
Everybody else has.

Phil looks at Harry, unconvinced.

PHIL
Maybe.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN, CONGRESS AVENUE - DAY

Briana is walking in downtown Austin, trying to make sense of the research on Parkus that she and Kalub have uncovered. She is clearly in a quandary.

Briana walks by stores downtown, stopping periodically to window-shop. But the allure of things to buy has faded.

As she is walking, she sees a shadow pass over her, like that of a stalking giant.

BRIANA
What the fuck?

Briana turns around and looks up to see a VERY LARGE industrial strength drone descending toward her VERY FAST. There is no mistaking its intent.

Briana immediately starts running. She can hear the WHOOSH as it nearly scrapes her from the side.

Briana turns up one of the cross streets and is running uphill as fast as she can. Behind her, the drone sails around the corner smoothly, almost effortlessly as it continues its methodical pursuit.

BRIANA (CONT'D)
(angry)
This is bullshit.

Briana ducks into a hotel and goes over to a window. The guests in the lobby are looking at her as if she has a screw loose.

Briana thinks she is safe. Maybe. But how long can she stay in the hotel lobby hiding?

Briana sees a bellman's cart full of hanging laundry/dry cleaning items to be delivered to the guest rooms. She pulls one of the hangers off the rack - a red wool coat, something Little Red Riding Hood might wear on the way to Grandma's house.

Briana thinks the coast may be clear, so she goes outside and starts walking again, looking all around, like a paranoid.

The drone quickly reappears and heads for Briana.

Briana starts running again, holding onto the clothes from the hotel. She sees a construction backhoe that is parked up ahead, with just enough room to run under.

Briana runs underneath the backhoe hoping the drone will crash into the arm holding up the bucket. Instead, the drone simply goes over the top and continues after Briana.

Briana is tiring out and realizes she can't keep this up for very long.

As Briana is running, she goes over a sidewalk vent, that is blowing air up from underground.

As Briana passes over the vent, the air blows her skirt up. She is visibly annoyed at this and uses her free hand to push her skirt back down.

Then Briana stops running and turns around. She looks down at the sidewalk. Then she looks up at the drone above her.

Briana tears off the flimsy plastic covering the clothes and then uses the heavy coat to hide behind.

With her free hand and her mouth, Briana pulls at the plastic and starts shredding it.

In the meantime the drone is hovering overhead, trying to find her and close in. Mostly what is visible by whoever is watching the monitor on the other end is the Red Riding Hood coat.

Briana is acting like a bullfighter, only she doesn't have the sword to run the bull through. Nevertheless, she remains defiant.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

Olé, you motherfucker!

Briana eases back toward the sidewalk vent, coat in one hand, plastic in the other, until the wind coming from underground starts to blow her skirt up again.

As she struggles to stay hidden behind the coat, she is also using her elbows to keep her skirt from blowing up and exposing her panties.

Briana raises her other arm holding the flimsy plastic so that the air coming from the vent catches it.

The plastic sounds like a flag, flapping in the breeze.

Briana lets the plastic go.

The flimsy plastic wrap undulates quickly upward, pushed by the air from the sidewalk vent. Then the plastic stops and just floats for a moment.

Slowly at first, the plastic moves in the direction of the drone. As the plastic gets closer to the drone, it moves faster.

The drone's propellers, drawing air from above and pushing it down (to keep it airborne) suddenly grab the plastic tendrils like an object sucked into a vacuum cleaner.

The plastic wrap quickly gets tangled in the drone's propellers, which then start to strain. The belts whine and gears groan audibly. The drone rapidly loses altitude.

As the drone is about to come down, Briana tosses the coat aside and scoots away before being cut or crushed underneath.

Briana takes several deep breaths, as the crisis has passed. She starts to get up.

Without warning, from around the corner, another, even larger drone appears and heads straight for Briana, coming very fast.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

Holy shit.

Briana is very tired. She tries to get up and run, but takes one step, only to then stumble instead. The drone is closing in.

Then Briana sees Kalub running toward her, as if he is going to pick her up and save her by carrying her away, or maybe by sacrificing himself.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

(screaming)

Kalub, NO!

Kalub stops in front of Briana and smiles. Prince Charming has arrived just in time to get sliced to pieces by the massive drone.

Kalub turns around to face then drone. He looks around and grabs a nearby chair from the sitting area outside a restaurant. He hurls the chair at the oncoming drone.

The drone is struck but continues hovering. Kalub looks over and grabs another chair.

Just as Kalub is about to launch the second chair, the drone issues a couple of popping sounds and then simply drops to the ground in a satisfying fashion.

A few seconds pass before Briana speaks, partly coughing as she tries to catch her breath.

BRIANA (CONT'D)

Not very elegant there, Kalub.

Kalub is now bent over, leaning on the second chair, breathing hard, and trying to catch his breath too. He looks at Briana, sweat rolling down his face.

KALUB

(weakly)

Bitch, bitch, bitch.

INT. WAR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Phil Grady has been watching. On the monitor, we see Kalub throwing the chair up in the air toward the drone camera, and then the screen goes black.

The technician manning the drone console sighs, then turns around to look at Phil, who is more or less expressionless.

PHIL

Well, SHIT.

INT. LANCE ALBRECHT'S HOME ON LAKE TRAVIS - DAY

Lance is in his private office at his home with a view overlooking the lake. He sits at his desk, feverishly typing on his laptop, checking emails.

Behind him are framed photos of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump, both signed.

Lance continues checking emails. He stops to dwell on one email in particular:

TO: LANCE ALBRECHT
FROM: PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
SUBJECT: PROJECT ALT FUSION

FULL SERIES OF FUSION SYSTEM TESTS INDICATE FAILURE RATES EXCEED PARAMETERS.

ALL TESTS NEGATIVE. ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS EXHAUSTED.

RECOMMEND PROJECT CANCELLATION AND WRITE-OFF R&D INVESTMENT.

 LANCE
 (to himself)
 Geez. We're going to need more cash
 flow.
 (pause)
 A lot more.

Lance has dialed a senior government official in Indonesia. It is still daytime in Asia.

As Lance waits for an answer on the othe end, he gets up and walks around the room.

Lake Travis is clearly visible from a panoramic window in the room.

 LANCE (CONT'D)
 Prime Minister, I don't think you
 understand the seriousness of the
 situation. Our palm oil operations
 are critical.

Lance listens.

 LANCE (CONT'D)
 No, minister, that's not going to
 work.

Lance listens again.

 LANCE (CONT'D)
 Just give me a number.

Lance grimaces at the response, but he is compelled to continue. He sits down on the couch in the room.

 LANCE (CONT'D)
 I understand. Yes. Consider it
 done. Thank you.

Lance continues holding the phone to his ear until he hears the other end disconnect. He shouts obscenities as he throws the cell phone against the wall, smashing it into several pieces.

After a few seconds, Lance slowly gets up from the couch and walks back to the panoramic window overlooking the lake. He continues to just stand there for a long time.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN - DAY

Environmental anomalies continue to increase.

Ecosystems are literally in revolt.

There are more lightning storms.

Fires break out in California worse than ever.

Bird and insect swarms occur spontaneously, sending city dwellers running for cover and into downtown buildings.

People are freaking out, panicking, hoarding.

Local supply chains are starting to break down and store shelves become hit and miss.

EXT. AUSTIN, TEXAS - GAS STATION

There are long lines at grocery stores and gas stations.

Clint Branch drives up to a gas station to fill up his truck. Panic has descended as a result of near ecosystem collapse.

Clint gets out of his truck and walks over to the person waiting ahead of him.

CLINT
 (to the man ahead of him
 in line)
 What's going on?

MAN IN LINE
 End of days. Supplies is running
 out.

CLINT
 Don't say?

MAN IN LINE

Everywhere. Store shelves just have stuff nobody wants. Useful shit is all gone.

Clint looks around. Too many people running around for no reason.

CLINT

That right? They still got gas here.

MAN IN LINE

People are filling up anything that will hold gas.

CLINT

No shit?

MAN IN LINE

Yeah. Look at that guy.

MAN IN LINE points to a truck at the pump. The driver is filling a bunch of IBC tanks.

Clint peers over the MAN IN LINE's head to look.

MAN IN LINE (CONT'D)

Each of those tanks holds nearly 300 gallons - same as five 55 gallon drums.

CLINT

(seemingly impressed)
Huh?

MAN IN LINE

The station will be out of gas before we get to the pump.

CLINT

(to MAN IN LINE)
You may be right.
(shouting)
Hey GASSHOLE!

Man at pump looks up from his smart phone and sees Clint.

MAN AT PUMP

(shouts back)
Fuck you, old timer.

MAN AT PUMP casually resumes checking text messages on his smartphone, once again oblivious to all the pissed-off people watching him.

CLINT
(to MAN IN LINE)
Fuck me? We'll see.
(pulling his hat brim
down)
I believe he's going to have to
take one for the team.

Clint walks around his truck and removes a rifle from the bed. He checks to be sure it's loaded and then cocks the weapon.

Other people in line and at the pumps see this and start running and screaming.

MAN AT PUMP looks up from his smartphone but doesn't move, defiance in his eyes.

Clint brings the rifle up, his eye in the sight, taking aim at MAN AT PUMP.

MAN AT PUMP registers shock then disbelief as he jumps down from the back of the truck and starts running away like everybody else.

Clint fires his rifle into one of the IBC tanks, which explodes in a fireball.

CLINT (CONT'D)
(mostly to himself)
I guess you're right.

Clint ejects the shell and looks back at the conflagration.

CLINT (CONT'D)
(smiles as he whispers)
No more gas.

INT. UNITED NATIONS BUILDING - DAY

World leaders have sent their representatives to the United Nations.

In the background are flat screen monitors televising breaking news from CNN indicating that people all over the world - particularly the developed world - are panicking because of the environmental anomalies.

Global financial systems are contracting and global economies are near collapse. All major stock market indexes are down sharply.

Copies of Briana's paper - with her name clearly indicated as the author - are being circulated widely among the group.

The representatives read and flip pages. Some look up in fear.

Representatives talk hurriedly among themselves in small groups.

In short order, they appear to reach consensus.

EXT. LANCE ALBRECHT'S HOME ON LAKE TRAVIS - DAY

Briana knocks on the door to Lance's houses meeting with the CEO of Parkus at his home.

There are no servants - Lance opens the door himself.

LANCE
(surprised)
Briana. What are you doing here?

Briana doesn't say anything but looks at Lance expectantly.

Lance realizes he is being rude and catches himself.

LANCE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, of course, come in.

INT. LANCE ALBRECHT'S HOME ON LAKE TRAVIS - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Lance walks Briana over to the living room and gestures for her to sit down.

Lance doesn't know why she is here, and frankly he is somewhat preoccupied. So he waits for her to speak.

BRIANA
(looking around)
I'm afraid I'm going to have to
turn down your offer.

Lance is visibly surprised.

LANCE
You're what?

BRIANA
I thought I could make this work,
but I can't.

Lance walks over to a decanter and pours a long overdue drink. He pours one for Briana too and takes it over to her. As she accepts the drink, he counters.

LANCE
Why don't you reconsider?

BRIANA
(nonchalantly,
confidently)
I really can't. But did you hear?
Securities and Exchange Commission
Rule 10b-18 has been revoked?

LANCE
Saw that on CNBC this morning. The
SEC has been talking about it for a
while.

BRIANA
Parkus won't be able to keep buying
back its own stock to manipulate
the share price.

LANCE
Had to end sooner or later, I
suppose.

BRIANA
Well, I guess you'll have to boost
stock prices the old-fashioned way
(in her best Smith-Barney
John Houseman voice
imitation)
- by EARNING IT.

Lance is clearly surprised and displeased. This is the last thing he needs this morning.

LANCE
You know, Briana, I don't think
you've thought this through. Parkus
is well-positioned for the future.
(almost pleading)
You should be part of it.

Briana smiles. She's not finished.

BRIANA
(animated)
Apparently, somebody read my
research paper too.

LANCE
(angry now)
What paper?

BRIANA
The one I wrote based on Parkus
data.
(pause)
I found a quantifiable link between
the environmental anomalies and
economic development.
(pause)
Deforestation is finally catching
up us. Like all the trees you're
cutting down to grow palm oil
plantations, for instance.
(pause)
It's not theory anymore. It's real.

LANCE
There's no connection.
(pause)
Doesn't matter. It's illegal for
you to use that data.

BRIANA
Like making under the table deals
with foreign governments and bribes
to local officials too? As long as
nobody notices?

Lance's expression changes, as it is apparent he knows more
than he has been letting on.

LANCE
(evil smile)
And nobody has.

Briana gets up and walks over to a window in this living area
that also has a nice view of Lake Travis. She spends a moment
taking it all in.

BRIANA
Until now. Apparently, foreign
governments are getting enough
pressure to agree on coordinated
policy. Tomorrow they're going to
announce a moratorium.

Lance stands up abruptly. Now he is surprised. He doesn't believe what he is hearing.

LANCE
How in the hell would you know
that?

Briana turns around quickly to respond.

BRIANA
I wrote the fucking paper,
remember?

Lance looks down and starts pacing the room. He spends a few seconds to collect his thoughts. Then he looks back up at Briana.

LANCE
No, you're wrong. I've made
arrangements.

Briana pauses a few seconds to savor the moment.

BRIANA
The global consensus was rather
insistent. Haven't you seen the
coverage?
(pause)
It appears that in times of crisis,
even sworn enemies can come
together - even if it's just
temporary.
(pause)
There's no arrangement. Not
anymore.

Lance takes a moment to process this new information. Then he speaks, slowly while looking down, almost as if to himself.

LANCE
That will kill our cash flow.

BRIANA
Yeah well, life's a bitch.
(pause)
Actually, that will be the least of
your worries.

Lance looks back up at Briana with conviction.

LANCE
I thought you wanted to help change
things?
(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)
(pause)
This is no way to do it.

Briana rolls her eyes and walks to the front door. Just as she reaches for the handle, she turns around for one last remark to Lance.

BRIANA
(smiling)
It's systemic. No way to change
from the inside.

Briana looks down, starts to leave, then look back once more at Lance

BRIANA (CONT'D)
Sorry, Lance. Just business.

Briana goes out the door and closes it gently behind her.

EXT. PARKUS HEADQUARTERS BUILDING - DAY

Phil Grady looks tired and disgusted as he leaves the office and takes off his jacket.

Phil walks up to his car, a shiny new Mercedes S-series and unlocks/starts it remotely. He throws his jacket in the backseat, not caring how it lands, crumpled or otherwise.

Phil gets in his car and drives away quickly, burning rubber on the asphalt.

EXT. FM 2222 BETWEEN AUSTIN AND LAKE TRAVIS - DAY (A FEW MINUTES LATER)

Phil is driving down FM 2222 trying to navigate between the heavy traffic. He is not happy with the way the day is going, and even less happy with the traffic.

Finally, Phil pulls away from the other cars and is speeding along nicely.

As Phil is driving, he sees something in the distance, in the sky ahead of him. He squints, puts his hand over his eyes to shield the sun so he can see.

The object gets closer to Phil's car. He realizes it is a drone - and the drone continues to come straight for his vehicle.

As the drone gets closer, Phil tries to dodge and weave his way around it. He sees an opening where it appears to have disappeared and speeds up.

The drone, however, is too fast. It is back in front of him and about to go through the front windshield.

PHIL
(shouting)
Aw, fuck!

In disgust and out of necessity, Phil is forced off the road and into a rocky ditch along the hillside, scraping the shit out of the bottom and side of beautiful Mercedes.

There is black smoke and brown dust coming up from the vehicle in the ditch.

After a few moments, Phil tries to opens the door, which sticks. Then, forcefully, he manages to shove it open and get out of the car.

Phil tries to wave away the dust and smoke that has kicked up. He looks over the damage and curses some more.

Phil then looks up in the sky for the drone, again putting his hand over his eyes to block the sun, but sees nothing.

EXT. HILLS OVERLOOKING FM 2222 - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Kalub is sitting on the trunk of his beat-up car, which is parked on a hill overlooking the highway. He has a remote control in his hands.

Kalub guides the drone in and lands it expertly, gently on the ground in front of him.

Kalub picks up the drone, and puts both it and the remote control into the trunk of the car. Then he get into his car and drives away slowly.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Briana is back at the BMW dealership. She drops off the keys to the salesperson that she leased the car from. No argument.

Briana drives off the lot in her old car.

EXT. LAKE TRAVIS - DAY (SEVERAL DAYS LATER)

Aerial view of Lake Travis.

Environmental changes resulting from a tipping point of global deforestation have caused lake levels to drop significantly.

Several of the lakes "islands" that are normally underwater are visible.

EXT. EDWARDS AQUIFER RECHARGE ZONE - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Aerial view of a much drier, almost desert-like recharge zone.

EXT. AUSTIN SKYLINE - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Aerial view of Austin skyline looking west.

Smoke is coming from some of the buildings and high-rise apartments.

Austin is now like many metro areas in the United States and other countries - in a state of defacto martial law.

EXT. AQUIFER RECHARGE ZONE - DAY

Briana is standing outside, west of the 98th meridian, overlooking the landscape.

In the distance to the east, at the lower elevations, she can see buildings and houses in Austin. Much of it looks like a war zone. Smoke rises from several places.

She turns and prepares to enter a small building. There is a sign outside that reads "Ruiz Co-Op."

Then, in the distance to the west, Briana sees a man on a horse. At first we can't tell who it is.

Slowly we can see that it is Clint Branch. He is smiling at Briana from the distance.

For a moment, Briana thinks she actually sees Clint do a "Hi Ho Silver," i.e., rearing the horse back on its hind legs.

She blinks hard, shakes her head and looks back to the west.

Briana sees Clint riding slowly away toward the horizon. Who knows if he is the Lone Ranger or not?

Briana smiles, then looks up at the sky. She stops smiling.

The sky is swirling, dark but it's not clear whether it is clouds, smoke, starlings or thick swarms of cockroaches, or perhaps all of the above.

The end of the world seems imminent - but perhaps not quite yet.

Briana has a stoic, purposeful look on her face now.

Briana turns around and walks inside the building.

INT. RUIZ CO-OP OFFICES - DAY (SAME TIME)

Briana walks in and looks around.

Kalub is standing across the room.

Briana walks over to Kalub and gives him a kiss.

Then Briana walks to a blackboard full of equations. Some are unfinished. She begins writing, working on merging theory and practice.

The faux Yogi Berra quote is visible above the blackboard.

FADE OUT.

THE END