

RUSSIAN DOLL

Episode 101
"Nothing In This World Is Easy"

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DARKNESS.

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

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

SFX. A single, deafening KNOCK and--

HARD CUT TO:

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

1 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - BATHROOM - NIGHT - (LOOP A) 1

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

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

RUSSIAN DOLL

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

A sculptural art piece covers the door. It resembles a portal or a mouth but it is just art. As she reaches out for the door handle (shaped like a revolver), another KNOCK pounds the door and it flies open.

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

2 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - CONTINUOUS - (LOOP A) 2

9PM. Sunday. A crowded, almost labyrinthine PARTY at a sweeping loft space in the East Village. We STEADICAM float with Nadia through GUESTS and FRIENDS (including the ATTRACTIVE LADY who is annoyed at her BOYFRIEND featured in ep. 103). She periodically waves hello or receives a peck on the cheek. Many wish her... "Happy Birthday, Nadia!" This is her birthday party.

SOUNDTRACK: "Gotta Get Up" by Harry Nilsson.

SFX. Snippets of the GUESTS various conversations overlap.

The loft decor is fantastical. Almost other-worldly.

Painters like Rene Ricard and Brett Whiteley line the walls
with photographers like Sally Mann and Helmut Newton.

The high-brow art mingles with furniture smeared with stains, carpets ripped to shreds, and a red/white striped wallpaper. There are also several original art pieces scattered throughout the space. A chair covered in fluffy penises. A mirror with a manifesto scribbled across it. Etc.

We follow NADIA to...

3 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - KITCHEN - NIGHT - (LOOP A) 3

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

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

MAXINE

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

Nadia takes the joint and puffs. She seems a little down.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

(notices Nadia's demeanor)
Are you having fun?

NADIA

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

MAXINE

Don't be morbid. It's your party and
I made a fucking birthday chicken!

NADIA

And I do appreciate your efforts but
I've never been good around
concentrated affection from others.
I love it. I hate it. It's my
struggle. Thank you.

MAXINE

You're welcome.

LIZZY (30s, lesbian, strong look with a sly smile), approaches. A contractor/fabricator who works with Maxine.

LIZZY

Hey, Max, the bathroom door turned out so killer. That revolver door handle? Straight fire.

NADIA

You made that door?

LIZZY

She made it.

MAXINE

She built it.

NADIA

Congrats! It's terrifying.

LIZZY

Yeah. Guns are terrifying. Havin' fun, birthday buddy?

NADIA

I'm fence-straddling. Lizzy, you're a good person to ask: Do ladies have mid-life crises?

LIZZY

Cuz I'm dating a younger woman?

NADIA

Younger?

MAXINE

Dating?

LIZZY

Fine. Fucking a twenty-two year old.

NADIA

Does she know what 9/11 is?

LIZZY

Does anyone?

(hits joint)

Aren't you a little young for a mid-life crisis?

NADIA

I have the internal organs of a man twice my age. If I make it to the low seventies, I'll be shocked.

BEAT. Both look at Nadia. Why is she so heavy? She sighs.

NADIA (CONT'D)

My cat's gone.

MAXINE

Oatmeal? No!

LIZZY

What'd'you mean "gone"?

NADIA

He's not "gone" gone but it's been three days. Usually, if he wanders off, he's back at my place or at the deli, after forty-eight hours max.

MAXINE

Do you think he's okay?

NADIA

Fundamentally, sure, he's a deli cat. Ferran found him in a trash-can in Seward Park. He has survived more than the three of us can imagine.

Maxine gets distracted by GUESTS. Lizzy and Nadia walk further into the party.

LIZZY

Maybe you should consider taking the leap and making Oatmeal a strictly indoor cat. Just to be safe.

NADIA

I don't believe in dictating the boundaries of a sentient being's existence. For you, it's safety. For Oatmeal and me? It's a prison.

LIZZY

However old you feel, Nads, you definitely sound twenty-two.

JUMP CUTS: Dancing guests. Talking guests. Drunk and destructive guests. BACK ON: Nadia soaks in the crowd.

NADIA

All right. Let's make some choices.

4

INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - BEDROOM - NIGHT - (LOOP A)

4

10PM. Separated from the PARTY by a partition. Decor same. Noise of revelry. Large exotic fish in a huge lit-up tank. Nadia looks at them while she cruises...

MIKE (30s/40s), a divorcé, almost professorial in his style. We get the feeling this is not Nadia's first rodeo with a cute, over-educated, talkative single man.

MIKE

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

NADIA

You got kids?

MIKE

That's your pick-up line?

NADIA

Hasn't failed me yet.

MIKE

Yes. A son. His mom and I broke up last year.

NADIA

Naw. I got a cat.

Nadia reflects on this: Does she still have a cat? She had said it out of habit but the statement now seems like a lie. Mike's phone BLIPS. He responds to a text.

MIKE

(without looking)
Your place is incredible.

NADIA

I don't live here. It's just my party. You know it used to be a school for Jews.

MIKE

(as if this were a joke)
Right.

NADIA

Seriously. Yeshiva students used to read the Talmud right where you're standing. It gives this whole place a feeling of--

MIKE

History?

NADIA

Creepiness?

She gets closer to him, leaning into him. She touches him. Mike tries to slow her down. Backs away maybe.

MIKE

What do you do?

NADIA

Software engineer. I freelance. I used to be at Rock-N-Roll Games.

MIKE

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

NADIA

I don't play.

MIKE

You don't play.

She puts his hand down her pants.

NADIA

My place is just a few blocks away.

MIKE

Jesus, you're wet.

NADIA

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

MIKE

Gotta say Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes was not my favorite--

NADIA

Because she burned down that dude's house?

MIKE (CONT'D)

--because she burned down that dude's house.

They both smile. Nice sexual tension between them. It's on.

5

INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - ENTRANCE - NIGHT - (LOOP A)

5

11PM. Over the course of her interaction with Mike, the party has transformed. More of a seedier scene.

(**Note:** This is a good moment to establish ATTRACTIVE LADY having a fight with her BOYFRIEND from 103.)

Nadia, on her way out, grabs her coat from a rack. Just as... RUTH (60/70s) enters, a therapist and Nadia's godmother. She sounds like Harvey Fierstein (thanks to a lifetime of chain-smoking Carltons) and acts like she knows your life story.

RUTH

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

NADIA

Hey, Ruth.

RUTH

Happy Birthday, pumpkin.

They embrace. Ruth reads Nadia's body language.

RUTH (CONT'D)

You're leaving? You can't ghost your own birthday. It's only--
(checks watch)
--Eleven. Ish. What's going on with you? The oppressive love of your friends? The march of time?

NADIA

Ruth, you're a great shrink but you're not MY shrink. I caught some tail and I'm gonna split. No need to **read into** this.

RUTH

Fair but I expect a kiss on the cheek and a promise you'll come over for coffee this week.

NADIA

(kisses her cheek)
Enjoy the party.

RUTH

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

ANGLE ON: Ruth's POV of the party. Maxine and Lizzy in the crowd. Mike enters, on his phone again, responding to a text.

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

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

(Mike joins them)

Hello...

NADIA

Mike, Ruth. Ruth, Mike.

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

RUTH

Excellent work, Nadia.

MIKE

I'm sorry?

RUTH

(takes his hand)

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

(to Nadia; in her ear)

Only our natural capacity for love can master sadistic destruction.

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

MIKE

Is that your mom?

NADIA

No. It's complicated.

Nadia grabs her coat, gloves, and iPhone. She exits.

6

EXT. MAXINE'S LOFT - NIGHT - (LOOP A)

6

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

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

ANGLE ON: Nadia's POV. HORSE (30s) a very handsome and apparently homeless oddball. He's not wearing shoes. The kind of gutterpunk you see panhandling with a one-legged German Shepard in a bandana. He has a fair amount of face tattoos. He makes eye contact with Nadia. She doesn't know him but his stare unnerves her. Mike notices:

MIKE

You okay?

NADIA

Always. Let's get some provisions.

7

INT. DELI - NIGHT - (LOOP A)

7

ANGLE ON: Wall clock. 11:30 PM. ANGLE ON: Rows of brightly packaged cat food and litter. REVERSE ON: Nadia contemplates them. At the front of the deli, Mike hovers near the cashier, debating which type of condom to buy. He decides on *sheepskin* then notices there's no one behind the counter. He looks:

His POV: The DELI PATRONS are appropriately weird for the neighborhood and the hour. An ancient OLD MAN with multiple used shopping bags. An intense WOMAN shakes plastic containers of nuts. Three WALL STREET TYPES stock up on nitrous oxide siphons from whipped cream canisters.

Nadia joins Mike, tosses cash and her items onto the counter: cottage cheese, crackers, prosciutto, plus the cat food.

NADIA

(notices Mike's condoms)

Nice choice. I'm allergic to latex.

MIKE

Where's the guy--

Almost on cue, FERRAN (20s), nice guy, rabidly introspective, enters and rushes behind the counter. His FRIEND stumbled in with FERRAN but immediately splits to the back of the deli.

NADIA

There he is. Ferran, how are you?

FERRAN

I've been better.

(in English)

Smokes?

NADIA

(nods)

You seen Oatmeal?

FERRAN

Not for awhile. I always leave the
Meow Mix by the Post, but nothing--

There's a small CRASH from off-screen. Nadia turns to look.
Her POV: Ferran's FRIEND, obscured by an aisle or his own
movement, picks up the products he knocked over.

NADIA

(to Ferran)

What's up with your friend?

FERRAN

He had a rough night.

There's something about this comment that makes Nadia pause.
She turns and walks toward the FRIEND. During the following,
Mike buys all their stuff from Ferran. Back to her POV: Is he
crying? Is he shaking? More drama than she wants to deal with
right now. Then, a WALL STREET GUY calls out to her.

WALL STREET #1

Hey, shortie, where's Clockwork Bar?

NADIA

Take a left at Disneyland.

WALL STREET #2

(tries to diffuse)

Come on, we're new to the
neighborhood. Where can we party?

NADIA

Avenue D and Eighth.

They thank her and exit. The Friend is gone. She turns back
to Mike, who holds a plastic bag full of their stuff.

MIKE

Where'd you send them?

NADIA

Hardware store that closed in 1996.

FERRAN

(notices Friend is gone)

Oh shit.

Ferran goes after him. Nadia turns to Mike.

NADIA

Let's get out of here before I end up
with another cat.

8

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - (LOOP A)

8

1:00AM. Early Monday. Much like Maxine's, Nadia's apartment is another historic-turned-residential building in the East Village. Only Nadia's is a small one bedroom/one bath.

Unlike the open space of Maxine's loft, Nadia's space is very limited. The walls feel like they're caving in with overstuffed bookshelves. Overflowing ashtrays litter every surface. Her computer, with multiple monitors and keyboards, sits like a shrine on a corner desk. Many programs running. On the wall, a poster of William Burroughs with the phrase:

LIFE'S A KILLER

Nadia, post-coital, types and swipes on her iPhone. Mike enters, typing on his phone.

MIKE

I don't know why anal play is still so taboo for straight males. It seems almost parodic at this point. But it's like I tell my students--

Mike notices untouched bowl of cat food and her slightly open window.

MIKE (CONT'D)

He got out through the window?

NADIA

Bold to assume my cat is male. I get it. I'm single and choose to foster an animal so it must be a pathetic attempt to fill the hole in my soul that would otherwise be filled by what? A penis? No thanks, I'm full.

MIKE

(game for a debate)

You want me to call you a "sad cat lady" so you can say you aren't one?

NADIA

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

MIKE

So you think the standard sexual narrative: pair bonding, marriage or formal partnerships--

NADIA

--are just futile ways to stave off death and are destined to fail.

MIKE

Kinda harsh.

NADIA

'The One' in practical application, means 'The One I'm Going to Die With'. To take care of me when you're infirm and shit. So my move is gonna be to wait 'til I'm in, like, my late sixties then seal the deal. This is assuming I don't die in between then and now.

MIKE

(turned on)

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

NADIA

I thought you wanted me for my body.

MIKE

Would you sit on my face right now?

NADIA

I would...

Her phone makes a noise. She holds it up to show him:

NADIA (CONT'D)

...but I called you an Uber.

HARD CUT TO:

9

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - (LOOP A)

9

Later. 1:30AM. Nadia, now alone, sits at her computer. She writes code, listens to her headphones, and pounds Red Bull.

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

Nadia pulls her last cigarette out of her pack. She searches for more. She crushes the empty pack. Thinks. She forgot to get them at the deli. She was distracted by Ferran's FRIEND. She sighs, then layers up to go out.

10 EXT. STREET - FOUR WAY STOP - NIGHT - (LOOP A) 10

Avenue B. WHOOSH! A yellow cab whizzes by Nadia as she starts down the street back toward the deli.

SFX. A cat mewing. Meow! Meow!

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

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

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

NADIA

Hey there, my little one.

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

WHAM! A car slams into her.

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

PUSH IN on: Nadia's corpse. ECU: Nadia's eye. Glassy. Dead.

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

SOUNDTRACK: "Gotta Get Up" by Harry Nilsson.

11 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - BATHROOM - NIGHT - (LOOP B) 11

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

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

Nadia turns off the faucet. Another KNOCK pounds the door. She goes for the door. Then she stops. The door is the same as it was. Still a sculptural portal. Which is still just an art piece.

CLOSE ON: Nadia's face. She registers this moment as significant. Maybe that she's done this before?

Maybe she's concerned with what's on the other side? With a rush of anxiety, she flings the door open.

SFX. A cacophony of Sounds and Music.

12 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - KITCHEN - NIGHT - (LOOP B) 12

A few minutes later. Maxine prepares her chicken. Nadia across from her. It's all exactly as it was before. Maxine, in the same outfit, same spirits, same actions.

MAXINE

Sweet Birthday Baby! Havin' fun?

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

MAXINE (CONT'D)

(offering a joint)

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

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

Nadia takes the joint from her. Looks at it.

NADIA

Max--

MAXINE

Are you not having fun? You hate your party--

NADIA

What was I just doing?

MAXINE

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

NADIA

Does it ever freak you out? Partying here? In an old Yeshiva School?

She hands the joint back to Maxine without smoking it.

MAXINE

Why would that freak me out?

NADIA

It doesn't bother you that this was once, I guess, a sacred place?

MAXINE

It's New York. Real estate is sacred. What's up with you?

NADIA

(remembers)

Oatmeal. He's gone.

MAXINE

Gone? No. He always comes back.

NADIA

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

MAXINE

(appalled; hands covered
in dead chicken)

Animals have souls, Nadia. Jesus.

NADIA

Oh, yeah? Like chickens?

She exits just as Lizzy joins.

MAXINE

(to Nadia)

Fuck you, it's cage-free!

LIZZY

What's up with the baby?

MAXINE

I don't know. If nobody eats my chicken I'm going to fucking kill myself.

13

INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - BEDROOM - NIGHT - (LOOP B)

13

Later. Nadia and Mike. Fish tank. Mike, in the same outfit, same spirits, prattles as he did before. Nadia listens but absent-mindedly. A little like someone going through the motions. As she stares into the fish-tank, wondering if fish have souls. She's been listening to Mike longer so he is a little further along than last time.

MIKE

(mid-monologue)

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

NADIA

(absent-mindedly)

You got kids?

MIKE

That's your pick-up line?

There's a pause. Nadia stares at Mike, surprised. She remembers this dialogue. Mike does not have any sense that this has happened before. Mike's phone BLIPS. He responds to a text.

NADIA

A son. You've got a son.

MIKE

Have we met before?

NADIA

I think I have amnesia.

MIKE

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

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

NADIA

(re: the fish)

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

MIKE

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

NADIA

But we don't.

MIKE

Huh?

NADIA

Human memories don't serve evolutionary purposes.

MIKE

Fire. Ouch. Next time fire. No thanks.

NADIA

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

MIKE

(pause, really thinks)
They don't.

NADIA

Exactly, deja vu is something to be ignored.

Nadia puts his hand down her pants like she did earlier.

MIKE

Whoa.

NADIA

Like this feels wrong but also right, you know?

He nods, enthusiastically. They make out.

14

INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - ENTRANCE - NIGHT - (LOOP B)

14

Later. Nadia prepares to leave with Mike as she did in her previous loop. She passes Maxine who hands her the cocaine-laced joint again. Feeling a little better, post-Mike, she takes a hit. The joint, having burned down more, is shorter.

Just as she gets her coat, Ruth enters as before...

RUTH

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

NADIA

Hey, Ruth.

RUTH
Happy Birthday, pumpkin.
(she hugs Nadia)
You're leaving? You can't be
ghosting your birthday. It's only--
(checks time)
Eleven. Ish.

NADIA
(suddenly scared)
I don't know what I'm doing.

RUTH
What's up, muffin?

NADIA
I was gonna go home and fuck this
guy but now I feel profoundly empty.
When does menopause start?

The joint burns her fingers. She drops it.

NADIA (CONT'D)
Fire. Ouch.

RUTH
Let's sit crooked and talk straight.

They pass Mike. He looks up to see Nadia re-entering the party. He can take a hint. His phone BLIPS again. He responds to a text. He moves to the exit.

15 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - (LOOP B) 15

12:00AM. RUTH, who is mid-story, holds court with several GUESTS including Nadia. Everyone eats Maxine's roast chicken.

RUTH
--so Nadia is nine years old. It's her birthday party. There are no nine year olds at this party. It's all adults. Me, her mother and all our friends. And at one point, my cousin Jimmy Weinstock says to her "How come you don't have any friends your own age?" And she says: "Jim, I don't believe in friends."

Everyone bursts out laughing. Nadia listens with a soft smile. This is obviously a story Ruth tells every year. This year though, it affects differently than before.

NADIA

Every time that story gets better.
Every time I wish it were true.

RUTH

I embellish. I'm allowed.

Conversations spring up around them as Ruth and Nadia sidebar. Ruth lights up a cigarette. Nadia downs her drink.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Are you feeling better?

NADIA

I was having this really intense
deja vu. Like I had done all this
already. This night. This party.

RUTH

This conversation?

NADIA

No. This is new which makes me feel
like I might be okay? I'm probably
emotional because--

RUTH

This was always going to be a tough
birthday, Nadia.

Nadia is reluctant to talk about this. She sighs and downs her drink. Ruth touches the gold necklace Nadia wears. It's a long chain with a Krugerrand at the end of it.

NADIA

Not everything is about Mom.

RUTH

She would've been proud you made it
to thirty-six.

NADIA

I don't know. She was pretty
competitive. She might just be happy
I'm finally older than she ever was.

Maxine approaches, happy everyone is eating the chicken.

MAXINE

I'll make another chicken. Will you
guys eat another chicken?

A GUEST, three-piece suit and surprising facial hair, holds up an almost archaic-looking slide or video projector.

SUITED GUEST

Hey Maxine, what's this?

MAXINE

Oh, I found this antiquing upstate and created some new projections for it. It's geeky but you guys might be into it. Yeah? Fine. Let's get it going. I'm looking for a communal experience not a solo performance. This is a safe space.

Click! Maxine's projector lights up and shines her work onto a wall. Nadia, Ruth and the rest look at...

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

BACK ON: Nadia. She turns away from the wall. All diegetic sound out. She is lost. Disconnected. The night sky reflected on her face. Intrusive memories of her previous loop appear.

16 INT/EXT. VARIOUS - NIGHT - FLASHBACK - (LOOP A) 16

Quick cuts. Nadia and Mike chat with Ferran. Nadia is distracted by the FRIEND. Nadia and Mike make love. Nadia looks for cigarettes. Nadia killed in a car accident.

BACK TO:

17 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - NIGHT - (LOOP B) 17

Nadia snaps out of it. She gets up suddenly and stumbles into the projector. It falls over and the Night Sky disappears.

NADIA

I'm sorry. I-- I think I'm gonna--

She exits to the bathroom. Ruth and Maxine watch her go.

18 OMITTED 18

19 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS - (LOOP B) 19

Nadia bursts into the bathroom. Panting. Disoriented. It's almost eerie how real and tactile it all is. A LESBIAN COUPLE make out near the sink. It is LIZZY and her twenty-year-old "girlfriend", JORDANA. (NOTE: Jordana wears a scarf that will play in 108.)

LIZZY

What the Fu-- Hey, Nads.

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

NADIA

I think I might throw up.

LIZZY

You okay?

NADIA

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

LIZZY

I mean, besides the shitty commercial fillers trying to patch a leaky U-joint it's a nice bathroom?

(takes in Nadia)

You drank too much?

JORDANA

(playfully)

Me too.

NADIA

No. No. No more than usual.

LIZZY

Smoked too much then.

NADIA

I can't remember the last time I ate but other things are so clear it's like they already happened and I'm doing them again. I think I'm dead.

JORDANA

We're all dead.

LIZZY

(cute gesture to Jordana)

Sees a Fellini film once.

JOHN (O.S.)

Hey. You all right in here?

JOHN (mid 40s), handsome and truly adult, inherently balanced with an inconvenient romantic streak.

LIZZY

Hey John. All good. Nads is feelin' a little under the weather.

JOHN

I can take a hint.

NADIA

No. I'm okay. I'm okay.

ANGLE ON: Lizzy and Nadia share a look. Nadia nods like "I'm okay. You can leave me with him." BRIDGETTE pokes her head into the door.

BRIDGETTE

Are you kidding? People are hopping up and down on one leg out here!

LIZZY

Well, she's the birthday girl and he's her ex so if I were you I'd find a backup plan.

(to Nadia/John)

If you guys aren't out in twenty, I'll tell the line to wait longer.

Lizzy rolls out with her GIRL, closing the door behind them. There's a connection with John that immediately springs up. Nadia's demeanor changes. She feels more safe.

JOHN

Hi.

NADIA

Hi.

JOHN

Happy Birthday.

NADIA

Thanks.

JOHN

I thought you were ignoring me.

NADIA

I didn't know you were here.

JOHN

Even worse.

NADIA

Well, I didn't invite you. We haven't talked in six months.

JOHN

I know. Maxine did.

NADIA

She's a good friend.

JOHN

Oh yeah?

NADIA

She knew I'd need a pick-me-up.

They are close to each other. Nadia puts his hand on her.

JOHN

Jesus, you're wet.

NADIA

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

(then)

Sorry I don't know why I said that.

JOHN

You had me at Left Eye.

They kiss. It gets heavy. They're not going to have sex in the bathroom but they will probably get each other off.

20 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - (LOOP B) 20

12:45AM. The party rages on. John and Nadia smoke cigarettes out a window. John contemplates something Nadia just said.

NADIA

Honestly I'll feel better if you just tell me I sound crazy.

JOHN

I'm just trying to understand. So you think you were hit by a car when you were chasing your cat and now you're reliving your birthday.

NADIA

I don't "think". I'm pretty sure it really happened.

JOHN

Okay. Well, let's say you were actually hit by a car. Look at you. You're not hurt. You're not suffering any consequences. So even if it did happen it didn't actually affect you.

NADIA

Hmm, I smell a metaphor for our relationship creeping up on me.

JOHN

My point is: you're okay.

NADIA

Well, I did smoke one of Maxine's joints. Me and coke are like oil and vinegar. I don't have the best track record with mixing substances.

JOHN

Or metaphors.

NADIA

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

JOHN

What're you running a touché race?

NADIA

(smiles)
How are you?

JOHN

You really want to know? My divorce is straight-up harrowing at this point. The last six months have been a onslaught of my own failure and other people's misery.

NADIA

How's Lucy?

JOHN

She'll be okay. I miss you.

NADIA

Don't use your kid to guilt me into getting back together.

JOHN

Don't use my kid as a pick up line.

This is, of course, very similar to the conversation she had with Mike in her first loop. This unnerves Nadia.

NADIA

I lost my cat.

JOHN

Wait what happened to Oatmeal?

NADIA

I feel like that might be the thing
I need to do. Find him.

JOHN

Doesn't he go out though? Into the
park? The deli?

NADIA

It's been three days.

JOHN

Do you want to go look for him?

NADIA

Right now? Oh my god. That's all I
want to do! Let's blow this joint.

21 OMITTED

21

21A EXT. STREET - NIGHT - (LOOP B)

21A

JOHN

So you wanna start on this side of
the park? Or should we go to the--

He continues talking. Nadia stops listening. She stares
across the street at Horse, the attractive/homeless guy. He
smiles, Cheshire-like. Seeing him unnerves Nadia this time.

NADIA

I feel like I know that guy.
(yells at Horse)
Do I KNOW you?!

HORSE

WHAT?!

NADIA

DO WE KNOW EACH OTHER?

HORSE

FUCK OFF!

JOHN

(shrugs to Nadia)
Sounds like you two have a lot in
common.

Nadia suddenly stops. She finds herself at...

22 EXT. STREET - FOUR WAY STOP - NIGHT - (LOOP B) 22

...the corner where she was hit by a car. She's flooded with deja vu. Nadia looks for something across the street and there he is: Oatmeal. She goes after him.

JOHN

Hey!

He stops her. VROOM! The car that hit her before passes them, clearing her this time.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Nadia. You were almost hit by that--
(putting it together)
--car. Fuck. That's creepy. Is this
some sort of prank or something?

NADIA

Of course! You know how much I love
the movie The Game so I orchestrated
a complex and terrifying prank for
you for my birthday. I just saw
Oatmeal. Let's go--

*
*

JOHN

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

NADIA

I just saw him. You're not going to
help me now?

JOHN

Honestly? I thought Oatmeal was just
a line to get me to go home with
you.

NADIA

You think I need a line to do that?

JOHN

Of course. Because this is you we're
talking about. If Maxine hadn't
texted me, I wouldn't've even known
you were having a birthday party.

NADIA

You know who gets mad about not
being invited to birthdays? Little
girls. Grow up.

She dashes into the park. John calls after her but she's gone.

23 EXT. TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK - NIGHT - (LOOP B) 23

JUMP CUTS: Nadia looks for Oatmeal. She mutters to herself. It's deadly cold. She grows more and more concerned for him. Finally, she finds him (snuggling with a girl cat).

NADIA
You fucking slut.

She snuggles him. He's placid and unfeeling. Like a cat.

24 EXT. EAST RIVER - NIGHT - (LOOP B) 24

3:30/4AM. Between the Manhattan and Williamsburg bridges. The sky is purple with a creeping dawn. Nadia sits on the railing above the East River. Oatmeal in her lap. The sight of the sun coming up fills her with some relief.

NADIA
We made it through the night. We did
it. I did it. I knew I just had to
find you--

She looks down. Oatmeal has disappeared into thin air. Nadia
POV: Whip pans back and forth at the walkway/park.

NADIA (CONT'D)
Oatmeal?!

She stands up too quickly, twists her foot on the railing, loses her balance, falls, and plunges into...

25 EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS - (LOOP B) 25

... the cold water of the East River.

This sequence has a surreal feel to it. It's dark and we can't quite make out what's happening. Nadia struggles to fight her way through the garbage-filled East River up to the surface. Pumps her legs. Her gold necklace, tight around her neck, choking her as she tries to free herself or get to the surface. Whichever comes first but a plastic bag floats into her face. We hear...

SOUNDTRACK: "Gotta Get Up" by Harry Nilsson

CUT TO:

26 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - BATHROOM - NIGHT - (LOOP C) 26

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

Nadia washes her hands in Maxine's bathroom. CLOSE ON:
Nadia's face. Scared. Trying to piece together what's going
on. A loud KNOCK at the door. The same door.

NADIA
(to herself)
You saw that cat disappear, right?

She nods at her own reflection. With a rush of anxiety, she
flings the door open. GUESTS file in as she exits.

27 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - KITCHEN - NIGHT - (LOOP C) 27

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

Nadia enters. Less disoriented; more determined.

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

NADIA
The universe is fucking with me, and
I refuse to engage.
(to the Universe)
Do you hear me?! I WON'T DO IT! I
don't give a fuck if you disappeared
my cat!

MAXINE
Nadia... you're acting a little--

Nadia takes the joint, examines and does not smoke it.

NADIA
What's in this joint?

MAXINE
It's laced with cocaine like--

NADIA
No. I've tried cocaine many times.
It didn't fuck me up the way this
did.

MAXINE

But you haven't smoked it yet...

NADIA

If there is a chance, any chance at all, that there is something in this joint that isn't cocaine... I really need to know.

Maxine sees this is very serious for Nadia.

MAXINE

It was pre-rolled by my guy. He said it was laced with cocaine.

NADIA

Who's your guy? I need to talk to him.

MAXINE

Now I have to share my guy with you?

NADIA

If you're gonna roofie me, then fuck yeah, you have to share your guy!

MAXINE

Come on, Nads. Stop acting like such a victim. You're a cockroach.

NADIA

(shocked)

I am NOT a cockroach. Don't call me a cockroach. What does that even mean? A cockroach?

MAXINE

You can eat anything, take anything, do anything. It's impossible to destroy you. You'll never die.

NADIA

I'm dying constantly! OUCH!

The joint burns down to Nadia's fingers and singes her. Nadia holds up the joint and stares at it. CLOSE ON: The burn on her fingers. Fresh. Real.

MAXINE

Nads, if you're gonna act like this then why don't you just leave--

Nadia turns on her heel.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
(180 degrees)
Don't bail on my party for you!

NADIA
If I'm a cockroach, then that makes
you an exterminator!

She grabs her coat and is gone, taking the joint with her.
Maxine is upset/confused.

28 INT. MAXINE'S LOFT - STAIRWELL - NIGHT - (LOOP C) 28

Mike is on the stairs, on a call.

MIKE
(into phone)
I understand. I know. Look, I'm at a
work thing. I'll try to come over
after this. Okay. I love you too--

Nadia exits Maxine's loft and runs right into him. He saves
her from falling down the stairs.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Whoa. You almost took us both down.

NADIA
Thank you.

MIKE
(not gracious)
Be careful!

NADIA
Fuck you!

Off Mike's confused look...

29 EXT. MAXINE'S LOFT - NIGHT - (LOOP C) 29

Nadia spills out onto the street. She's breathing hard. New
York City. Shrouded in danger. Everything is a way to die.
Nadia's usual devil-may-care attitude severely impaired by
the circumstances.

NADIA
Be. Careful.

She heads off into the, to her, very dangerous night.

END OF EPISODE.