

REDUCER EP. 2

By

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"REDUCER EP. 2"

FADE IN:

Black screen.

OPERATOR (V.O)  
Why didn't you kill him?

WOMAN (V.O)  
Personal policy.

INT. DINER - DAY

The yellowed, sunbleached walls of a diner help silhouette a woman facing away from us, leaning against a pillar in the middle of the room and looking out the window, holding an old wall-mounted phone to her ear. The room is awash with sunlight, and the quiet, casual murmurings of a slow, relaxed clientele underline the positively lazy scene. A clock on wall ticks to 7 AM.

WOMAN  
Had to fill out the quota. He didn't fit into it. No time to clean. No time to plan. If it's sloppy, it's not worth doing.

OPERATOR (V.O)  
Why did you destroy your commpiece?

LEAH, a woman in her 30s, turns around, facing away from the window; her short, chopped mess of brown hair swings behind her head. A dead expression is on her face, and she's wearing jeans and a rugged travel jacket with a few meaningless pins.

LEAH  
Don't know how he found me. Burned what might be compromised, buried it off the 55. Vehicle's disposed of. Could use a bump in per diem for this.

OPERATOR (V.O)  
Estimated time to destination?

LEAH  
Two hours.

OPERATOR (V.O)  
Hospital on Madison. Eastern wing.  
Quota: one hundred and forty.

Leah shuts her eyes for a moment. A passing waitress in the background behind her gives her a look before dishing out some pancakes to a nearby table, but the sound around her is muted in this moment.

LEAH

Protest a week ago...it'll be full.  
Upwards of two hundred people, let's  
say one seventy five targets total.  
Thirty two hours. Need to double down  
on emergency response suppression.

OPERATOR (V.O)

You will have a Second for this one,  
Reducer. Fresh off the row.

Leah's eyebrows contract momentarily. She tucks one arm into the other.

LEAH

(doubtful)

Understood. Meeting point?

OPERATOR (V.O)

Table nine. I will look into a boosted  
per diem.

We barely hear the second half of the Operator's words as Leah suddenly turns her head away from the phone's earpiece to scan the diner. Sure enough, she clocks the STRANGE GIRL immediately- a decade younger, tweed blazer, oversized glasses, braided hair, sipping a coffee. Making direct eye contact. She raises the coffee with a smile, and Leah's jaw tightens.

LEAH

Thanks, Mom. Leah out.

The phone gets hung up in half a second as Leah throws a backpack over her shoulder, moving to the strange girl's booth and sitting across from her, shoving the backpack into the seat next to her. The girl has the gall to wink at her.

GIRL

Worst kind of work gets done in the  
dark. What people can't see...

LEAH

(direct, disapproving)

Let me make something completely  
clear.

The girl is taken aback; she frowns, sets down her coffee, as Leah leans in, waving at the waitress holding a fresh pot.

LEAH

You are not part of some kind of privileged secret society. You are not here for the fun of passing coded messages and using secret pass phrases. You got pulled off of death row to do something nobody else would be willing to do. This is a job. Act like it.

The coffee gets delivered. Leah picks out a pack of artificial sweetener from the side of the table as the girl processes this.

GIRL

Right. I wasn't trying to-

LEAH

And don't let yourself get intimidated out of hearing the other half of our greeting. We do not exist...only reduce.

The girl lets out a breath. Leah sizes her up as she sips the coffee. Unimpressed.

LEAH

I'd like your name. I'd also like to know how a kid like you ended up a Reducer.

CASS

(fidgeting)

Cass is fine. And I'm nearly twenty three. I...messed up. Poisoned the entirety of advanced molecular chemistry.

LEAH

They don't put you on death row for mistakes. And they definitely don't make you a Reducer for it. I don't know who you're trying to convince of that. Besides.

Leah sets down her coffee. Looks the suddenly-attentive Cass dead in the eye.

LEAH

You'll be reducing a lot more than  
your college class in two days.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The ROAR of a semi-truck and the blinding light of its high beams dominates a long highway with the ends shrouded in darkness. In the passenger seat sits an uncomfortable-looking and hesitant Cass, and in the driver's seat is a heavysset TRUCK DRIVER, a friendly smile visible even in his beard as he glances momentarily at his incidental cargo.

TRUCKER

Any word back from the towin' people?

CASS

No, sorry. Not yet, I-I'm sure they'll  
get to it. Shitty car anyway...

TRUCKER

(chuckling)

I'll say. Never seen damage like that  
before. Well, once we get into  
Memphis, sure you'll be able to get  
things sorted out. Y'know, I've got a  
son in Jackson, husband's actually a  
mechanic, so if you-

CASS

(pointing)

Wait, there's something in the road.

Further out on the road, there's a clunker of a pick-up stopped diagonally in the middle of both lanes, skid marks visible behind it. Squinting, the trucker frowns, easing down on the brakes. With a hiss, the truck comes to a stop; he unbuckles.

TRUCKER

Hey, keep your hand on your phone,  
huh? I don't see anyone around,  
somethin's lookin' fishy here. Lock  
the door behind me.

CASS

(paralyzed, tense)

Yeah...um...thanks for everything,  
Mister Dowling.

TRUCKER

You got it, miss. Back in a jiff.

He slams the door shut behind him as he climbs down from his rig, approaching the car with hands on his belt. Inside, face white, Cass silently slides into the driver's seat, then ducks underneath it, sliding a screwdriver out of her purse and digging around for a panel.

Outside, the trucker gets within a dozen feet or so of the car. The high beams behind him cast his long shadow on the pickup as he clears his throat.

TRUCKER

(loudly)

'Scuse me! You, uh, look like you're in a tough spot here! Anything I can do?

There's no response. No movement from the pickup. The trucker pulls off his hat, scratches his beard. Smashes a mosquito against the side of his neck.

Inside the cab, Cass winces as she fiddles with the open interior of the vehicle's panel, digging around with both hands until she pulls out an electronic brick of some sort into which many wires are plugged. Slicing one's insulation open, she pulls out the copper filaments from either end.

After a few seconds pass, he turns, shrugging one shoulder up at the cab of his rig- but before he can say anything, a humanoid shape whips around from the bushes beside a road sign. He doesn't notice and can't react as the shape flies into him with incredible momentum, and the pair go flying off the side of the highway and rolling into the rocky bushes opposite the shape's origin.

Cass looks up as she hears a single, choked cry, then silence. Exhaling, she shoves the assembly back into the panel- there's a new, slick white device spliced into the wire she cut open, visible for just a few moments before she screws the panel back in. She climbs out of the rig, walking down the steps and towards the area where the trucker disappeared. Her hands tuck into her blazer's pockets, and she barely has to reach the edge of the asphalt before coming to a complete halt.

Leah's back is to Cass and the highway as she crouches over the prone body of the trucker. It's too hard for Cass or us to see what kind of state he's in. She pulls his hat off, does something with it that neither us nor Cass can see.

LEAH  
Problems?

CASS  
No. No, I got it done. Truck's GPS  
should be synced to the pickup now.

LEAH  
Good.

Leah stands up, turns around. She's holding the trucker's hat, drenched with blood, and a suspiciously pristine knife that she takes a moment to fold and tuck into her boot. Without missing a bit, she tosses a set of bulky keys to Cass, who, fumbling, very nearly misses the catch.

LEAH  
Go open the back, just wave the fob  
around in front of the reader. Find  
the dimethyl-

CASS  
(interrupting)  
Dichloromethylphosphane.

LEAH  
-and get it out- I'll help load it  
once I'm done with this. You remember  
where to take the pickup?

CASS  
(eyes closed, nodding)  
Yeah. Swing by the chemical depot,  
disable my GPS, then proceed to  
dropoff. Where are you taking the  
semi?

LEAH  
You let me worry about that. Get it  
done, Reducer.

Cass looks down at the keys in her hands and nods. She turns to go back to the semi-truck.

LEAH  
(faux-casual)  
Hey. Some free advice from your First.  
Get a taste for this.

CASS  
 (turning, disoriented)  
 What?

LEAH  
 (intensified)  
 I said get a taste for this. One day  
 it's offing a nobody on the side of  
 the road. The next it's a controlled  
 explosion at the local gas station.  
 Then you're cutting brakes in some  
 mom's SUV as a distraction. This grave  
 only gets deeper.  
 (beat)

CASS  
 Do you enjoy it?

LEAH  
 I keep my eye on the numbers.  
 Population's not getting any smaller.  
 World's not getting any bigger.

Leah wipes her hands off, walks past Cass. Goes to the pickup, takes out a shovel, levers it onto her shoulder. Cass is gone by the time she heads back towards the trucker.

LEAH  
 (to herself)  
 ...Grave gets deeper every day.

#### MONTAGE

- In those same clothes, Leah waits around outside a packed fast food restaurant. A rail-thin man bumps into her, we barely see her react as she pushes her way out of the crowd, two paper bags in hand.

- Cass, in a maintenance uniform, stands on a ladder and alters some sort of device on the ceiling of a hospital room, deserted save for a similarly-uniformed Leah, who appears to be holding a cloth over her face and mixing various cleaning chemicals on a cart behind her.

- Leah empties one of the paper bags, containing a ziplock of tiny purple pills, onto a workbench. She rips the plastic off a bottle of painkillers, and empties it, too. The painkillers are large and white.

- Leah opens and walks into a deserted garage as the sun starts to rise. Cass is struggling to get a sealed container with visible warnings and a chemical formula plastered on it

out of the pickup. Leah throws a pair of maintenance uniforms on the hood.

- At the workbench, Leah crushes the painkillers and blends the dust into a strange liquid solvent. She does the same with the purple pills. The purple solution gets poured into makeshift molds comparable to the size of the painkillers.

- In the hospital room, Leah, now with a proper oxygen mask, mops the floor with the chemical cocktail. The cleaning cart is more or less emptied. Cass, also in a mask, loosens just about every bolt on the beds and machinery. We see every step she takes- careful and measured against a slick floor.

- Leah returns to the workbench. The purple pills are now the size of the painkillers; she extracts each from the mold, then painstakingly paints them with the white solution. They now look identical to the original painkillers, and she drops them one by one into the bottle.

- As Cass converses with a YOUNG HOSPITAL TECH in the employee lounge, Leah swipes the bottle of pills off the counter behind him, replacing it with her refilled bottle.

INT. LABORATORY - NIGHT

Leah stands at a window overlooking a fairly well-off street down below her, the second paper bag tight in one hand. We can't see her eyes through the sunglasses she wears, but we can see a hint of some pretty noticeable dark rings beneath them. The people beneath her move like oversized ants- not in size, but in formation, one after the other, so tightly packed it's like watching the conveyer belt of a factory. Such is the reflection we see in the lenses of her sunglasses as she stands in the foreground.

Behind her is a wide, open laboratory area, sterile whites and silver machinery looking almost untouched save for the obvious messes Cass is making. She's in a labcoat now, one two sizes too big for her as she shuffles around various machines- centrifuges, gas canisters, and the container they stole. It is open, empty, and two hazmat suits are now hanging from its edge. Cass looks intensely busy as she flits around the lab, synthesizing something. A large oxygen tank sits in front of the counter, but whatever's being pumped into it certainly isn't for breathing.

Now from Cass's perspective, the only thing behind her is Leah and the window. Her eyes are as bad as Leah's, but fully visible through protective eyewear. There is an obvious hollowness to her movements and to her expression. The

reflection of advanced monitors and chemical agents scattered on the counters is visible. The sudden CRINKLE of something breaks her out of a reverie; Leah has unfolded the paper bag and unwrapped a package inside it. We see her now holding a cold sandwich of some sort, staring out the window, eating in silence. Cass throws herself back into her work. The hollowness is gone- now there is only steel-eyed determination.

INT. HOSPITAL LOADING BAY - DAY

Leah, in maintenance uniform again, stands before a closed elevator. One hand rests on the handle of the large wheeled oxygen tank. She glances at her watch. 2:47 PM. When the elevator arrives, she's momentarily surprised to see a man and a woman in labcoats looking over a clipboard together. She doesn't show it, nor do they acknowledge her presence as she pushes the tank inside the elevator. It shuts behind her.

LEAH

(jokingly)

Few floors down past the intensive ward, docs.

MAN

(chuckling)

Sorry. Little engrossed.

Seven or eight seconds pass. The woman looks up from the clipboard at Leah briefly. Leah doesn't react. They murmur to each other. The elevator opens twice more, each one boarded by people. Each time, the chatter grows. By the time she reaches her floor, there's half a dozen people inside with her, and a whole lot of conversations that will never have a chance to continue. It's silent as she disembarks, rolls the oxygen tank down the hallway, until she bumps into just the man she's looking for: the young hospital tech from the day before. But unlike before, he looks drained. Malnourished, even, and he's visibly trembling as Leah approaches, stands up the tank.

LEAH

Doc needs this taken to room 4119.  
Cleaned it myself yesterday, just needs a restock.

TECH

I-Isn't there any chance you could get...someone else t-to do it, I'm not feeling super...

LEAH

(frowning)

Yeah, good point. You're not looking too great...you might want to stick around here for a second, I can call a doctor. Did you take anything recently, or?...

TECH

(anxious)

N-N-No, no, please don't...that's not necessary. It wasn't- I-I don't even remember taking...I'm fine, r-really, I am. I can take care of this f-for you, this is a- a momentary lapse. Th-that's all.

Leah swivels the handle of the oxygen tank for him to grab. Her eyes follow his tremoring fingers as they wrap around it.

TECH

Don't...don't tell any of the docs about this, alright? I-It's not my fault. I'm just...I'm just under the weather.

He gives Leah a weak smile. She doesn't return it as she heads to the elevator.

LEAH

Don't worry. Nobody will hear about it.

INT. DINER - DAY

It's around sunset. The light that filters in from the diner's grimy windows is a deep orange now. Leah idly reads a newspaper with one hand, sipping a coffee with the other. Cass has her hands knitted tightly together, staring at a NEWS ANCHOR on a television set in the corner, like most of the patrons. The footage is plain. The hospital, emptied.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O)

...tragic accident, with the leak centered in the eastern wing. Recovery is still underway, but we have reason to believe as many as three hundred people may be missing-

LEAH  
(scoffing into her drink)  
They always round up.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O)  
-look towards a potential delivery  
mixup, resulting in the synthesis of  
an agent comparable to a chemical  
weapon. We'll continue to bring you  
updates as they appear.

The patrons of the diner all descend into low, quiet  
discussion. Cass looks down at the table in utter silence for  
a while. Leah watches her.

LEAH  
Regrets?

CASS  
Does that even matter?

LEAH  
Now you're catching on. Nothing you  
could possibly feel in your life is  
ever going to make it right. There's  
no guilt, no anything that'll make it  
go away or even out those lives.

CASS  
(looking up)  
How...long have you been doing this?

LEAH  
(sipping)  
As far as I like to think about, I'm  
doing humanity a favor. They don't  
have to face extinction in a few  
decades, because of what I do. Because  
of the reductions I make. I've been  
doing this long enough to shut out all  
the doubts. Does that answer your  
question?

CASS  
Yeah.

Leah sets down her drink.

LEAH  
Then I get one from you. Why did you  
lie about what you did to get put

here?

CASS

I thought you might think me  
unsuitable for the job if you knew the  
truth.

LEAH

(leaning back)

And what's that?

The smile comes back. The one Leah hadn't seen since they'd first met in this very booth two days ago. She hadn't seen how genuine it was. Not before. And it shows on her face.

CASS

That I enjoyed it. Every second of it.

Cass looks down at the stack of pancakes on her plate. Grabs a fork, and starts pulling apart bites.

CASS

And I've been looking forward to more.

EXT. DINER - DAY

Leah climbs into the driver's seat of her car, alone. From an envelope she pulls a new commpiece, sliding it into her ear. The modulated voice sounds instantly as she starts the car.

OPERATOR (V.O)

Report.

LEAH

It's done.

OPERATOR (V.O)

Acknowledged. The Second?

Leah grips the steering wheel with both hands. Her lips furl into a soundless snarl as she pulls out of the parking lot. Through the driver's side window we see a glimpse of Cass standing at the entrance to the diner. Waving. Smiling.

LEAH

Everything you could want out of a  
picture perfect Reducer.

(beat)

Scares the fuck out of me.

FADE OUT.