

BOOMSTICK

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INT. RENTAL APARTMENT HALLWAY - EVENING

A long, deserted hallway in a run-down apartment building. We see a beat-up entrance door to one of the units. The camera slowly zooms in on the door.

POV: A man's hand reaches out to the door and knocks three times.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

In a dimly lit living room, the apartment owner, a man (40) and our VICTIM #1, is lounging on the couch in front of the TV. Hearing the knock, he reaches for the remote and pauses the movie. He listens intently.

The knock repeats.

Female voice from the kitchen: "Honey! Door!"

Victim #1 gets up and heads to the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Victim #1 stops in front of the door.

VICTIM #1

Who is it?

Male voice from behind the door:

VOICE

Delivery!

The man furrows his brow. He leans in to peek through the peephole and...

..COLLAPSES to the floor like a ton of bricks! He lies motionless on his back, like a discarded puppet, dead eyes staring at the ceiling.

Female voice from the kitchen: "Sam? Babe?"

CUT TO:

INT. ANOTHER LIVING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

We're at the same moment, but in a different apartment. In a brightly lit living room, a young girl (17), VICTIM #2, wearing leggings and a tight top, is stretching her leg in a vertical split on a Pilates mat spread out on the floor.

SUDDENLY, her raised leg SNAPS down like a released catapult, viciously kicking out her supporting leg. She slams onto the mat with her whole body.

It might seem like an accident, and she's about to get up, but no - she's not moving, not breathing. She's dead as a doornail.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING BALCONY - SIMULTANEOUS

The moment continues, and we're at a third location. An elderly woman (70), our VICTIM #3, is on the balcony of yet another high-rise rental. She's taking her sweet time smoking a cigarette, leaning on the low railing.

Almost imperceptibly, VICTIM #3 topples over the railing, her upper body dangling lifelessly. Her head hangs down, framed by wisps of gray hair floating in the breeze. The cigarette slowly slips from her lips, her wrinkled mouth gapes open, and following the cigarette, her dentures smoothly slide out...

CUT TO:

INT. "INSIDER" NEWSPAPER OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

We're inside the cramped, cluttered office of APRIL FOGARTY (40s), an investigative journalist for the "Insider" newspaper. She's hunched over her desk, surrounded by scattered papers and photos of recent "victims." A laptop is open in front of her, and she frequently sips from an oversized coffee mug. On the wall behind her, a large corkboard is pinned with a city map.

April is reading the autopsy report of VICTIM #1.

CLOSE UP: (lines from the report)

*"Samuel Black, male, 42 years old,"*

*"No signs of violent death,"*

*"Head: no visible cranial injuries, no external signs of trauma,"*

*"Brain: autopsy reveals diffuse, nonspecific damage to the gray matter,"*

*"No hemorrhaging,"*

*"Possible exposure to an unidentified external factor."*

April sets aside the first report and pulls out another folder - VICTIM #2.

CLOSE UP: (lines from the second report, repeating)

*"No external or internal signs of violent death,"*

*"Diffuse, nonspecific brain damage,"*

*"Cause of death remains undetermined,"*

*"Further investigation required."*

Her cellphone rings on the desk, buzzing for a while. Reluctantly, April pulls her attention away from the report and looks at the screen. She answers the call on speakerphone.

APRIL  
Hello, John.

The caller is JOHN WHITMORE (50s), a retired U.S. Army Colonel, former military intelligence officer, and long-time friend, sometimes a "source" for April.

JOHN (O.S.)  
April... Burning the midnight oil?

APRIL  
As usual.

JOHN  
Hey, word on the street – well, from some NYC cabbies – is that you're digging into the mysterious deaths of three civilians. "Nonspecific brain damage, cause of death remains unclear," sound familiar?"

April glances at the autopsy report she was just reading – John's words echo the text. She looks around uneasily, as if searching for a hidden camera.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
So how's the investigation going?

APRIL  
New York cabbies talk too much.

John chuckles.

APRIL (CONT'D)  
Are you spying on me?

JOHN  
I think I've got a lead for you on this one. It could be big. Even by our standards.

APRIL  
Is the lead solid?

JOHN  
The perp.

APRIL  
The perp?..

JOHN

Those three didn't die of natural causes. They were helped along. This was murder.

APRIL

Is this another wild goose chase, or is there something concrete?

JOHN

Let's just say it's more of a "wake-up call". You should take it seriously, but it's not a sure thing. There's an 90% chance this is the real deal.

APRIL

There's nothing linking the victims - except that all three died at the same time.

JOHN

There is more. Plot their locations on a map. Do it now.

April grabs the victims' files and moves to the map on the corkboard.

POV: April's hand pins three colored markers into the map at different locations.

April steps back, staring at the map, confused.

JOHN (CONT'D)

All three were on the same line of coordinates at the time of death, straight as a ruler. And there's an explanation for it.

APRIL

Okay, you've got my attention. Care to share the details?

JOHN

Not over the phone. Can we meet?

EXT. CITY BOULEVARD - EVENING

The city is settling into its evening lull.

A man of distinguished appearance, BRUCE RILEY (40s), strides confidently across a busy boulevard. He's dressed in an elegant suit, carrying a briefcase. Bruce is the Vice President of Marketing at Lockheed Martin. Along with a sharp mind and keen intuition, Bruce has extensive connections in the Department of Defense and DARPA.

Bruce enters the lobby of a luxurious condo. Through the glass façade, we see him nod politely to the concierge before heading toward the elevators.

INT. BRUCE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Bruce, now in a stylish casual outfit, is on the couch with a glass of wine, reading a book. He's interrupted by a knock at the door.

Bruce sets down the book and goes to...

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

..the front door, peers through the peephole... After a brief pause, he opens the door.

Standing there is JOHN WHITMORE, a tall, solidly-built Black man with military posture and the composed face of a seasoned veteran.

BRUCE  
(surprised)  
John?

JOHN  
Sorry for dropping by unannounced.  
Mind if I come in?

BRUCE  
Of course, come on in.

John enters the apartment. A tense pause hangs in the air.

BRUCE  
What brings you here?

JOHN  
I have a matter to discuss. Won't  
take much of your time.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Bruce and John sit on stools at the kitchen island, each with a glass of whiskey on the rocks. The alcohol has eased the tension, and both men appear a bit more relaxed.

BRUCE  
(smiling)  
This isn't like you, that's all I'm  
saying.

JOHN

You know me - once military, always military. I gave 30 years to intelligence, strategic analysis, and national security ops, and I'm telling you - there's potential here. I can feel it in my gut.

BRUCE

So what's the story? Did some old contact from the DoD reach out and ask you to check this out?

JOHN

(waving it off)

Nah... I consult for the government and private military companies, but off the books, just to keep sharp. This lead isn't from them.

BRUCE

Then where?

JOHN

Sorry, can't say. But it involves a product that could potentially revolutionize the U.S. arms industry. And for that, I need the two cents of Uncle Sam's best marketing guru.

Bruce rolls his eyes, as if to say, "Flattery won't work on me."

JOHN (CONT'D)

So, what do you say? Just take a look - that's all I'm asking.

BRUCE

Something doesn't add up here. If it's all so hush-hush, why is April involved? "Investigative journalist" and "top-secret information" don't exactly belong in the same sentence..

JOHN

That was his condition for the meeting: a marketing hotshot, a muckraker, and a military man. All high-ranking. Don't ask me why, 'cause I don't know.

(shrugs)

Sorry, I don't make the rules here. Not yet, anyway. But if this is legit - I'll make sure April keeps her mouth shut, that's on me.

BRUCE  
 (smiling)  
 And is this legit?

JOHN  
 Damn right it is! My gut says this  
 is the real deal.

FADE IN:  
*The sound of a relentless bicycle pump hissing  
 rhythmically.*

FADE FROM BLACK:

INT. INVENTOR'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

*The sound of the pumping continues without pause  
 from this moment forward.*

The living room, bathed in the dim amber glow of a single vintage floor lamp with a soot-stained shade, looks like a bizarre mix between a workshop and a junkyard. It's exactly what the Mad Hatter's home might look like if you dropped him into a cheap 21st-century rental and forced him to live on unemployment checks.

The dirty carpet is barely visible beneath a chaotic layer of food scraps, empty cans, used napkins, and an assortment of electronic parts and circuit boards. In the middle of it all sits a burnt-out ELECTRIC PUMP, looking worse for wear.

Bookshelves groan under the weight of scientific journals, messy notebooks, and scattered erotic magazines, with strange gadgets and glass jars containing unidentifiable objects strewn about. In the far corner, a poorly tossed blanket barely hides the upper half of a blow-up sex doll.

On a sagging, worn-out leather couch sit April and John, flanked by Bruce and a scruffy, mangy cat named Schrödinger in two equally destroyed armchairs. The guests look as defeated as they are confused, watching the INVENTOR(50s), who is perched on a foldable chair.

The host looks like a street bum with mild cognitive impairment and a alcoholic liver cirrhosis, the kind of guy who was abducted by aliens from Alpha Centauri last weekend, subjected to twisted sexual experiments, and then sent back to Earth. Upon returning, he quit drinking, switched to green oolong tea, and developed a taste for magic mushrooms.

His face, like a flag in a windstorm, never stays still - twitches, grimaces, and micro-convulsions flare up and disappear without warning, completely disconnected from anything happening around him.

In his hands, he clutches an ordinary bicycle pump connected to a strange silver, metallic, phallic object lying on his lap, resembling a hollow cigar. With impressive rhythm, the Inventor pumps the device, casting each of his guests a scrutinizing glance, his eyes wide with the wonder of a baby discovering the loud, chaotic world for the first time.

INVENTOR  
(nodding at the cat)  
Schrödinger.

APRIL  
Clever. And what should we call you?

The Inventor, ignoring her question, unabashedly stares at April, his gaze drifting to her hands.

CLOSE UP: April's fingers (no rings).

INVENTOR  
(to April)  
Single?

APRIL  
(ignoring the question)  
Why the pump?

The Inventor's tongue, like a pink eel too thick and slimy to fit comfortably in his mouth, keeps darting out, wetting his chapped lips. At this moment, it quite unambiguously peeks out to wave at April, as if saying "How's it hangin'?"

INVENTOR  
Pressure. Building it up.  
(nods at the electric pump)  
The electric one burned out in the line of duty, so for the last six... no, seven, seven, seven and a quarter days, I've been pumping by hand.  
(winking at April)  
I can pump more than just air, you know.

April leans back in disgust, her eyes catching sight of the blow-up doll in the corner of the room.

JOHN  
So... we've got your setup here:  
April Fogart, Insider journalist.  
She's covered big stuff - Rachel Johns' murder, the 'Red Rose' syndicate, Belkovsky clan, all that.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Then we have Bruce Riley, VP of Marketing at Lockheed Martin, previously with Raytheon and Northrop Grumman. And yours truly, John Whitmore, retired colonel, U.S. Army intelligence.

(pointing to himself)

Now, fulfill my condition. Explain how, two weeks ago, three unrelated individuals, located miles apart, died at the exact same time, down to the second, from still unexplained causes. We're here. We're all ears.

INVENTOR

All three died in my experiment. The first one was a direct hit. The other two... collateral damage.

JOHN

Experiment with what? We need details.

INVENTOR

(glances down at his lap)

Boomstick. That's what I call it.

CLOSE UP: The weird metallic gadget on his lap.

He pauses pumping for a second to take a deep breath, then resumes, and with the rhythm of a rap beat (complete with matching facial expressions), he lets loose a fast, non-stop stream of words:

INVENTOR

The device is a compact particle accelerator, using ultra-high pressure, released through a magnetic coil to accelerate charged particles to near-light speeds. The key element is a superconductive compression valve that holds pressure levels beyond those found in the core of Betelgeuse. The system converts any substance in the chamber into a high-energy particle beam that breaks atomic bonds on impact. A vacuum resonator stabilizes the beam, minimizing energy loss and ensuring high energy density over long distances.

A silent beat. Everyone stares at the Inventor, their faces frozen in confusion. April, who has belatedly pulled out a notebook and pen, clicks the pen to extend the tip.

INVENTOR

You all look like I just rapped in another language! Love it! Love it! Love it!

(winks at John)

Yo, how was that flow, homie?!

John and Bruce exchange glances. April clears her throat.

APRIL

Uh... Could you go over that again, slower--

INVENTOR

(cutting her off)

Slower? So it's crystal clear for every soccer mom out there? Sure. Ever heard of the LHC?

APRIL

The Large Hadron Collider?

INVENTOR

Oh! A mom who podcasts while vacuuming! Yeah, that's right. The LHC's purpose is to accelerate particles to near-light speeds, then smash them together. Elementary particles - those itty-bitty things make up boys and girls, sugar and spice, and everything nice. The smashing isn't our focus today. What matters is the particle acceleration. The LHC has a 17-mile circular tunnel, but I've got a tube smaller than the reproductive organs of at least two people in this room... and I'm one of them.

(winks at April)

The Boomstick. It fires a beam of elementary particles traveling at near-light speed.

(to April)

That's super, super fast, like whoosh-whoosh-whoosh. The particles interact with matter but don't get absorbed by it. Think of it like leaving micro-damage along their flight path. Pew-pew-pew! No bunker can save you, and even Neo couldn't dodge this one.

(smirking)

The whole key is my unique locking valve, just like the one in your vacuum cleaner.

(MORE)

INVENTOR (CONT'D)

Only mine can hold colossal pressure, converting anything you shove into the Boomstick's barrel - sand, water, chip crumbs - into pure energy.

(to April)

Take notes, sweetheart, take notes. This is a little more complex than vacuuming; you won't remember it all.

April reluctantly scribbles a few quick notes in her notepad, then pulls out a pack of cigarettes and lights one up.

INVENTOR

This is a "no smoking" zone, you know.

Ignoring him, April smokes in short, tense drags. The Inventor pulls a mock-offended face.

INVENTOR (CONT'D)

This time, I loaded the Boomstick with Schrödinger's sublimated poop. Circle of life: energy-crap-energy.

The Inventor shudders with self-satisfied giggles. April dramatically covers her eyes with her hand. John and Bruce exchange looks again.

JOHN

How exactly did you pull this off? The experiment, I mean...

INVENTOR

Simple. Knocked on my neighbor's door, waited for him to peek through the peephole - then boom, pulled the trigger on the Boomstick. The energy beam ripped right through the door, straight into his dumbass skull - no more Netflix at full blast till 3 a.m., ha-ha!- and on its way, it took out the heads of two other poor saps in the buildings down the block along the particle trajectory, before shooting off into space.

The Inventor keeps pumping the bicycle pump. April half-heartedly jots down notes. Bruce watches the pump's movements intently.

BRUCE

So, you killed them.

INVENTOR

Ugh, "killed"? Come on, man, we don't use words like that. You should know better, we're selling solutions here, right? I prefer "conducted a field test." Sounds way more on-brand, don't you think?

BRUCE

(rolling his eyes)  
How much longer do you need to pump?

INVENTOR

In a hurry?

BRUCE

Well, actually, yes...

INVENTOR

Oh, please. You've got all the time in the world to pitch another government contract for eco-friendly electric tanks. But this beauty right here...

(pumping faster)

...this tech? Priceless. And totally eco-friendly.

CLOSE UP: The Boomstick gleams in the dim light on the Inventor's lap.

INVENTOR (CONT'D)

Silent, invisible, flying at the speed of light, no deviations, and the best part - if you keep it quiet - non-invasive. A bullet that kills without a trace. The perfect murder weapon. Elizabeth Bathory bathed in virgin blood to stay young. Now, I'm not saying it'll keep your whole body young, but you'll sure as hell keep your asshole nice and tight, wiping it with all the blood money you'll make for the rest of your life.

BRUCE

You got me wrong, pal. I don't make a dime off blood money.

The Inventor EXPLODES into a high-pitched, hysterical laugh, his whole body shaking. The pump jumps in his hands.

JOHN

Enough!

The Inventor instantly falls silent, barely holding back his laughter, inflating and hiccupping, lips twisting into a grin, but keeping them tightly shut.

JOHN

Enough of this crap! We don't even know if this thing works. How much longer do we have to wait?

APRIL

John, I think all of this--

JOHN

(cutting her off)

I know what you think, but I brought you here, and I'm seeing this play through to the end.

(to the Inventor)

I've got two questions. Two. First: how much longer?

The Inventor pumps faster.

INVENTOR

Almost there, general.

JOHN

And second: What do you want from us?

INVENTOR

Well... I brought you three here to catch the eye of the public, the sales guys, or the military - whoever bites first. See, I've got this tiny little secret wish. I either want to be famous, rich, or, you know, serve my country.

JOHN

Pff... Serve your country, right...

INVENTOR

My invention's lightyears ahead of anything we've got now. For decades, it'll be wiping out our enemies from here to the other side of the planet - and hell, even in space if we need to! For that kind of service, I deserve a medal. Big, shiny, with my name on it. "Medal of Honor" or a "Congressional Medal", nothing less.

BRUCE

And you're willing to admit to killing three people for that?

INVENTOR

(pulling a face)

Ugh, I told you, we don't say the K-word here, alright?

(turning serious)

I'll sell the patent only if the president himself guarantees full immunity from prosecution. For me and Schrödinger. And I want it in writing, signed in blood - science demands sacrifice, right? Oh, and I want a very, very fat check. Plus, I expect royalties for life.

APRIL

Oh my god...

INVENTOR

If Ninja Turtles' sidekick over here decides to write an article about me, my real name stays out of it. I'll take a pseudonym. As for you military and sales types, you guys deal in corpses every day, so in a way, we're all colleagues. One of us, right? And the medals - I'm good with receiving them behind closed doors, no fanfare.

(pause)

If we can't make a deal, no one's gonna believe you anyway. And I'll deny this meeting ever happened. So... what's it gonna be? Are we making a deal?

After a brief, stunned silence, April speaks up first.

APRIL

If you're so desperate for fame and medals, you should've hit up someone in the science community, not an investigative journalist. Your invention sounds like it belongs in Nature, not Insider.

INVENTOR

A Nobel medal's not happening for me. Those liberal, pacifist, european fags on the committee wouldn't even consider it.

(pauses)

Besides, I gotta admit, I didn't come up with all of it on my own.

APRIL

What do you mean?

INVENTOR

Last year... THEY took me.

JOHN

They? Took you?

INVENTOR

Aliens. From planet B in the Trappist-1 system. For the past 20 years, they've been coming here on research missions, taking samples from our biosphere. Including humans. Some get sent back with their memories intact, others... not so much. Some choose to stay, and some... well, they don't come back. I was one of the lucky ones. They took me right off Times Square, during the final countdown on New Year's Eve 2019, and brought me back a month later... with a few blueprints I managed to snatch.

A long pause, filled only by the rhythmic sound of the pump. The whole scene feels like a twisted Mad Hatter's tea party. April scribbles something in her notebook, then subtly nudges John, who glances over.

CLOSE UP: The notebook's pages, from left to right, show April's notes morphing from factual to emotional:

"experiment resulting in three deaths," "LHC - Large Hadron Collider," "portable accelerator," "beam of penetrating particles," "organic damage," "racist!" "high-pressure valve," "cat shit?" "fucking vacuum cleaner!" "misogynist!" "sexist!" "wants immunity, avoiding prosecution," "delusions of grandeur!" "fucking aliens?!" "WHAT THE FUCK, JOHN????!! 90%???"

CLOSE UP: Focus on the last two notes.

John throws a regretful look at April: "I'm so, so sorry."

APRIL

Uh... Well... I'm not sure this material's gonna make it into a story.

The Inventor pulls a mock "ouch" face, clearly not buying her response.

APRIL (CONT'D)

I mean, this whole thing sounds way too insane. Even if everything you said turns out to be true... aliens, cat shit? My editor's gonna think I've lost my damn mind.

(MORE)

APRIL (CONT'D)

The story will get canned before it even makes it past the first draft.

INVENTOR

I could've had you, you know.

APRIL

Excuse me, WHAT?

INVENTOR

I mean, we could've done it together. The article, I mean.

APRIL

Oh my fucking god...

The Inventor speeds up the pumping, now looking over at Bruce.

BRUCE

Umm... Maybe my dick's not as big as you think, but I sure as hell know more about sales. And this weapon...  
(points at the Boomstick)  
...will never get licensed for private use, ownership, or retail. The collateral damage risk is through the roof. If that beam goes off and, on its way from the target, kills a mother of three, a cop, or even the First Lady, we'll be locked up for life. I'm not about to ruin my career trying to sell this shit.

INVENTOR

Small balls to go with that small dick, huh?

BRUCE

This thing will never fly! And you...

(points at the Inventor)

...you should be rotting in prison, my friend. Honestly, I don't even believe that piece of junk on your lap actually works.

The Inventor pumps the piston faster, like a sewing machine, the rapid thumping of the pump adding to the tension. His eyes shift to John, as if he's his last hope.

JOHN

I'm not sure the military's gonna bite, buddy. This thing's a couple hundred years out of date.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hell, it reminds me of the muskets our ancestors used in the 17th century – takes forever to load, and for what? A single shot.

The Inventor's face twitches with anger. John's hit a sore spot: his precious technology.

INVENTOR

(under his breath)

Your ancestors in the 17th century were shooting arrows and throwing spears. Some still are--

JOHN

(not listening)

It's way too inefficient. Why pick off one guy at a time when we've got drones and missiles that can take out a whole squad with the IFV's in one strike? You should've stuck around with the aliens a bit longer, maybe figured out how to make that valve of yours do something actually useful.

APRIL

Maybe he should pitch it to Dyson? At least they know how to make something that sucks work.

JOHN

I think I'm with Mr. Riley on this one. I don't believe this hunk of junk even works.

The Inventor glares at all three of them, his pumping so fast now the sounds practically blur together.

INVENTOR

You hypocritical bastards! You know what this thing can do. You know damn well how it can be used. You just don't have the balls to say it out loud, to admit it to yourselves! Right? "Knock knock!" "Who's there?" "Room service, Mr. President!" You're all just a bunch of fucking cowards!

April smashes out her cigarette on the frayed armrest of the couch and stands.

APRIL

I'm done.

(MORE)

APRIL (CONT'D)

(to John)

Thanks for wasting my Saturday night – because I've got so many of those to burn. And for the delightful company.

(as she heads for the door)

Don't bother calling me anytime soon.

The door slams shut, leaving the Inventor, John, Bruce, and Schrödinger in the room.

BRUCE

Well, I think that's my cue...

Bruce and John stand up almost at the same time. They start walking slowly toward the exit. The Inventor, still pumping frantically, jumps up and blocks their way.

INVENTOR

Wait! Just give me a little more time! It's almost ready!

Bruce and John keep moving toward the door, unbothered.

JOHN

Time's up. You had plenty of time to get this ready.

INVENTOR

I'm telling you, the electric pump burned out!

BRUCE

Too bad your alien buddies didn't leave you a repair manual for electric pumps.

The three of them step into the hallway. Schrödinger hops off the chair and follows them.

INT. INVENTOR'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

In the narrow, cluttered hallway, the Inventor, pushed by John and Bruce, suddenly freezes and yells out:

INVENTOR

Stop! Listen!

The pumping noise finally stops. In the silence, the Boomstick emits a soft ding, like a microwave finishing a cycle.

JOHN

It's ready?

INVENTOR

Yeah! The Boomstick's ready!

Schrödinger saunters into the hallway.

BRUCE

So now what? How do we even know it works?

INVENTOR

We have to test it.

BRUCE

Oh yeah? And who do you plan on testing it on, genius? Gonna go shoot up the neighbors again? Not with me around.

The Inventor's face falls as the flaw in his plan hits him – he hadn't thought of that.

JOHN

You've gotta be fucking kidding me!  
(spotting Schrödinger)  
Shoot the cat. Go on, shoot it in the head.

The Inventor's eyes flash with rage.

INVENTOR

There is NO fucking way I'm killing Schrödinger! No fucking way!

JOHN

(fuming)  
You didn't blink when you killed three people, but the damn cat's off-limits? Shoot the damn cat in the head, or get the hell out of my way!

CLOSE UP: Schrödinger's face, amber eyes fixed on the humans.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Kill the cat! Kill the cat! Kill the cat, you freak!

And then the Inventor snaps. In one swift motion, he points the Boomstick straight at John's head, ready to fire. But John, trained and experienced, reacts instantly – he grabs the Inventor's hand and jerks it upward just as the trigger is pulled.

A loud sound rips through the air, like someone just let out a massive fart – and the shot goes nowhere.

Furious from the attempt on his life, John winds up for a punch.

The Inventor, desperately trying to free his hand from John's grip:

INVENTOR

I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean it, I swear! I screwed up big time! I'm really, really sorry, man!

John hesitates, fist raised, frozen for a second.

And then, suddenly, the Inventor gathers as much spit as he can and HOCKS a huge, wet glob right in John's face!

The glob of spit lands in an impossibly large splatter across John's face.

The Inventor lets out a hiccup and bursts into wild laughter.

JOHN

(in a blind rage)

You motherfucker!

With one powerful right hook, John knocks the Inventor out cold. The Inventor's head slams against the corner of a shoe cabinet as he falls, cracking his skull. His lifeless body hits the floor with a dull thud, eyes staring blankly at the ceiling. A pool of blood starts spreading from the wound in his head.

Schrödinger watches for a moment, then quietly pads back into the living room.

John bends down and checks the Inventor's pulse.

JOHN

He's dead.

(standing up)

That crazy bastard tried to kill me!

BRUCE

What the fuck, John?! He's dead? Fuck, fuck, fuck!

JOHN

Hey, calm down! Just take a breath!

BRUCE

Calm down? How the fuck am I supposed to calm down? He's dead? Are you sure? Oh, fuck, man!

JOHN

He's dead! I'm sure! Bruce, snap out of it! Pull yourself together!

BRUCE

Jesus! Why did he do that? Why the hell did he spit on you, fucking lunatic? What the hell are we gonna do now?

John grabs Bruce's shoulders firmly, speaking with authority:

JOHN

Look at me. Hey, hey, look at me and listen to my voice, okay? You're not gonna do anything. Got it? I'll take care of everything. You're gonna go home and forget this ever happened. Understand?

BRUCE

Yeah... yeah... okay.

JOHN

We were never here. No one knows we were here. This psycho was a total loner - no one's gonna miss him for a good long while.

(pats Bruce's shoulders)

Leave it to me, okay? I've got people. I know how to handle this. It'll be squeaky clean, I promise. We good?

BRUCE

Yeah, John. Okay.

JOHN

Okay. Now get out of here, get in your car, and drive home. Go ahead. I'll leave in a bit. Don't want anyone seeing us together.

BRUCE

Okay.

John bends down to put on his shoes. The pool of blood is slowly creeping toward his expensive loafers. He quickly grabs them and starts putting them on. As he ties the laces, his eyes land on the Inventor's lifeless body once more. Finally, he stands up.

John gives Bruce an encouraging smile as a final gesture.

As Bruce leaves the apartment, he catches sight of John picking up the Boomstick from the Inventor's lifeless hand and slipping it into his pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. BRUCE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bruce sits alone in his living room, now in his casual clothes, holding a glass of wine. A laptop rests on his lap, and he reads something intently.

BRUCE

Oh my god...

CLOSE UP: The laptop screen shows Bruce on "The Insider" website. We see the headline and the opening paragraph of the lead article.

*Title: "The Insider Mourns Loss of April Fogarth"*

*The Insider newsroom is reeling from the shocking news of the sudden and tragic death of our beloved colleague, April Fogarth, a fearless investigative journalist whose tenacity and courage were the driving force behind countless impactful stories. April, a trusted voice in journalism for over twenty years, was most recently working on an investigation into a string of mysterious deaths – work that, tragically, may now remain unfinished.*

Bruce's reading is interrupted by a SUDDEN knock at the door. He startles, quickly closing the laptop, setting down his wine glass, and listening intently.

The knock comes again.

Bruce gets up and walks cautiously toward the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Bruce approaches the door with caution. He stares at the peephole for a long time, afraid to look through it.

THE END