

DELIRIOUS IN NEW YORK

written by

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Narrative Short

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There is no dialogue in this film. Human voice occurs only as ambient sound. A greeting half heard across a lobby. A laugh from another table. A busker. A gate announcement. Nothing is addressed to us and nothing carries information.

FADE IN:

BLACK

No image. Only sound, and the sound is enormous.

Manhattan at street level. Horns stacked on horns. A man shouting at another man. A bus exhaling. A siren coming up from somewhere behind us.

Underneath all of it, a scrape of metal. A bicycle bell. One short flat crack.

Silence. Hold it longer than is comfortable.

A seam of light opens at the bottom of frame and widens. It has a shape. It is not a horizon.

It is the gap between two hotel curtains.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Two hands come into frame and take a curtain each. They pull.

Light floods the room.

MIRA, 22, stands in the window with Manhattan twenty floors below her. The grid. The water towers. The yellow rivers of traffic. She has waited most of her life for this and it is all on her face.

She holds a small hardbound NOTEBOOK against her chest.

Her reflection stands in the window glass, laid over the city. Whole. Unbroken. The two of them look out together.

Mira turns, tosses the notebook onto the bed and walks out of frame.

The camera does not follow her. It moves to the bed instead. Down, and in.

The notebook has fallen open.

INSERT. A handwritten page. The ink is of different ages. Some lines were added years after others. At the top, in

careful capitals:

NEW YORK CHECKLIST

Beneath it, eleven items with empty boxes. The first is in the oldest and palest ink. 1. TRAVEL ALONE. Then THE MET. CENTRAL PARK. TIMES SQUARE AT NIGHT. A BAGEL. THE SUBWAY. Others below, smaller.

Eleven boxes and not one of them ticked.

These are the brightest colours in the film. Nothing will be this saturated again.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The mirror is clean and dry and perfect, a plain rectangle of silver.

Mira steps into it.

And there she is.

Whole and centred and undivided. She looks at herself the way you look at yourself on the first morning of something, and holds it, and then grins and does a small idiotic shimmy of private joy and points at her own reflection like it owes her money.

She goes.

The camera stays.

Steam from the shower she has just left begins to climb the glass. It closes over her from the bottom up. The shimmy, the grin, all of her, taken by fog.

In eight seconds the mirror is blind.

She is already out of the door. She does not see it happen.

CUT TO:

EXT. WEST 30TH STREET - MORNING

Mira comes out into the noise and moves into it happily with the notebook under her arm.

She passes a run of shopfronts and her reflection travels with her, window to window, jumping the gaps, keeping pace.

Whole in every one of them.

She glances across and grins at it.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY STATION - PLATFORM - MORNING

Mira comes down the stairs two at a time, delighted by the tile and the smell and the busker sawing away at something.

The train is at the platform with its doors open. She breaks into a run.

Twenty feet. Fifteen.

The doors close.

She arrives against them and puts a hand flat on the glass, winded, laughing at herself. This is still funny.

The train begins to move.

Her reflection tears away along the window glass, carriage after carriage, faster, stretching, breaking across the gaps between cars.

The last carriage clears the platform. A stone chip in its glass throws out a single white crack four inches long.

And there she is.

Her face in the departing window, split once from top to bottom. Two seconds, and the tunnel takes it.

Mira alone on the platform. She checks the notebook and puts it away. There is another train.

CUT TO:

EXT. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART - TICKET WINDOW - DAY

The great staircase behind her, packed with people eating and photographing each other.

Mira in the line, waiting, shifting her weight. Second from the front. Then first.

She opens her mouth.

The window slams shut. A card drops into the slot. CLOSED.

Mira stands there with her mouth still open.

PUSH IN on the ticket glass. It is old and scratched to hell by ten thousand transactions, a dense grey web of it at hand height.

And there she is.

Her face behind the scratches, in the dark of the empty booth, scored across by a decade of other people's hands.

CUT TO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - BETHESDA TERRACE - DAY

Better. Much better.

Mira on the low wall with the notebook open on her knee, drawing. The arcade, the fountain, a woman with three dogs.

CLOSE on the hand and the pencil. She is good at this. She knows she is good at this, and for the first time in two hours she is enjoying herself.

The drawing is nearly finished when a shadow crosses the page.

A bird hits it. Dead centre.

Mira does not move. She looks at the sky, then back down at the page.

A long beat while a person decides how to feel.

CUT TO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - PATH - MOMENTS LATER

Mira walking with the notebook shut under her arm. She is not crying. She is working very hard at not crying, which is worse to watch.

She stops.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP on her face. The eyes go, once.

LOW ANGLE on a puddle. The trees in it, and the sky, and her.

And there she is.

Whole for one second, upside down, calm.

The tear lands. The ring goes out and her face comes apart into rings and does not reassemble.

CUT TO:

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - CROSSWALK - AFTERNOON

She comes up into it and it is too much.

Mira stops in the middle of the crosswalk. Everything else is speed. Bodies, cabs, a cyclist, all of it smeared to streaks. She is the only sharp object in frame.

Above her and around her, twelve storeys of screens and mirrored glass and polished stone.

And there she is.

Forty times, in forty surfaces, cut into forty unequal pieces across forty different planes. No two the same size. No two facing the same way. Not one of them whole.

The signal turns to DON'T WALK. She has not moved.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE - LOWER EAST SIDE - LATE AFTERNOON

Mira at a corner table with her hair fixed and her face fixed and the notebook squared in front of her. She is going to salvage this day.

She is watching the door.

The door opens.

Mira lights up and lifts her hand to wave.

In the midground a WAITER crosses with a tray of water glasses. His hip catches a chair.

The tray goes. An enormous ringing collapse of glass and the whole room turns to look.

Through the standing wreckage of it, at the door, Mira's FRIEND. Behind the friend, with a hand at her back, the EX.

Mira's hand is still up. It stays up a second too long. It comes down.

She slides low in her seat. The friend has not seen her.

FLOOR LEVEL. A field of broken glass across the tile, every piece holding a fragment of the ceiling.

And there she is.

In eleven separate shards at eleven angles. An eye here, a mouth there. No two pieces agreeing.

She turns her phone face down on the table without looking at it and leaves by the other door.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE - EVENING

Blue hour. Mira arrives at the stairs at speed.

Plywood. Orange netting. A laminated sign. STATION CLOSED FOR REPAIRS.

She stops, and laughs. One short disbelieving note. It is the only sound she makes all day.

Behind the barrier two CONSTRUCTION WORKERS are lowering a large glass pane. It slips six inches and taps the scaffold.

A fracture goes across it corner to corner and branches twice. The workers swear cheerfully at each other and carry on.

And there she is.

Her face in the pane, divided into four unequal pieces. The largest of them holds one eye.

She looks at it for a long time.

We see the exact moment she decides this is a pattern. That it means something. That it is being done to her.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - EVENING

Mira lets the strap slide off her shoulder. The bag hits the pavement and she stands over it.

CUTAWAY. A line of dominoes going over, end to end, black on white.

Two seconds. Gone.

CUT TO:

INT. TAXI - MOVING - NIGHT

Mira in the back with the bag on her knees.

Her phone shows a boarding pass. 8:00 PM. JFK to SFO. The clock in the corner reads 7:14.

The cab slows, and slows, and stops.

Ahead of them the brake lights run red all the way down.

7:22.

7:31.

She does not shout or cry or tear anything up. She watches the numbers change, because there is nothing else available to her.

7:48.

She puts the phone face down on her knee and turns her head to the open window and the wing mirror on the passenger side.

CLOSE-UP.

And there she is.

Small and exact in the frame of it, the city sliding behind her. Quiet. Emptied out. Finally still. The last whole reflection left in her day.

A bicycle bell.

A CYCLIST clips the taxi.

The wing mirror shatters, and it is the sound from the first frame of the film arriving where it always lived.

Mira's hand goes out through the window, fast and reflexive, trying to catch it.

She catches nothing. The pieces go under the wheels of the traffic behind and are ground to grit.

She looks at the mounting where the mirror was. An empty bracket. Bare metal. A stub of grey plastic.

And there is nothing there at all.

She sits with her arm still out of the window. The cyclist is long gone. The driver is already swearing. The world has already moved on to other business.

CUT TO:

INT. JFK - DEPARTURES - NIGHT

The board, rows of white text. Her flight is not on it.

Mira at a counter. A card goes across. A new boarding pass comes back. She does not argue. She has nothing left to argue with.

WIDE. Mira crossing an enormous polished floor toward the gate, and beneath her, upside down in the shine of it, a second Mira walking the other way.

She does not look down at it. She has stopped checking.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRCRAFT - CABIN - NIGHT

Boarding. The aisle jammed.

Mira edges to her row, takes the window seat, puts her head back and closes her eyes. There is nowhere else to be and nothing left to catch. The seatbelt sign is the only instruction left in her life.

Beside her in the middle seat, a STRANGER. Thirties. Unremarkable. A person.

Across the aisle a FATHER, forties, tired in a good shirt, and his DAUGHTER, six, standing on her seat because standing on the seat is better.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AIRCRAFT - CABIN - LATER

Cruise. Half the lights down.

A FLIGHT ATTENDANT comes up the aisle with a tray of water bottles.

The plane drops an inch. The tray tips and six bottles come off it at once.

Mira flinches. Her whole body braces and both hands come up,

certain that this one is for her too.

She catches nothing. The bottles hit the aisle and roll away in six directions under six rows of seats.

The Stranger has caught exactly one out of the air without appearing to try.

He looks at the bottle in his hand. He looks down the aisle at the other five, disappearing.

He shrugs. One shoulder, barely. He hands the bottle to the flight attendant and goes back to his magazine, and that is the entire event of his evening.

Mira is staring at him. She is looking at a man who has just watched five things go wrong and has built nothing at all out of it.

He feels the look, glances up, gives her a small polite nod and returns to the magazine. He has no idea he has done anything.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRCRAFT - CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Across the aisle the Father has a coffee balanced on his tray while he cuts up a bread roll for his daughter. It is not something a person needs help with, but she asked, and it is the middle of the night in his body, and he is doing it anyway.

One bump. Nothing.

The coffee goes over the lip of the cup, across the tray, into his lap and down onto the carpet.

He looks at himself. Brown from the sternum to the knee.

A beat. And he laughs.

It is not a brave laugh or a laugh for anybody's benefit. It is the laugh of a man who has run out of any other response.

The Daughter laughs because he laughed, enormously, with her whole face.

They mop at it with two small napkins and make it worse.

The flight attendant arrives with a fistful of napkins, hands them over and moves on. She has done this eleven thousand times.

Nobody is angry. Nobody is watching.

HOLD ON MIRA.

Her face does almost nothing. The corner of her mouth goes once and she catches it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AIRCRAFT - CABIN - LATER STILL

Deep in the flight. The cabin dark.

The Father asleep with his mouth open and a blanket over the stain.

The Daughter is not asleep. Her tray table is down with a small tin open on it and she is standing dominoes on end in a wobbly line across the plastic.

She is not good at it. She gets four up and the fifth knocks the fourth and the whole line goes over.

She does not sigh or scowl or give up. She sets them up again.

Setting them up is the game. The falling over is also the game. There is no version of this in which she is losing.

Mira watches her through the gap between the seats.

This time she does not catch the smile.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRCRAFT - MIRA'S SEAT - NIGHT

Mira takes the notebook from the seat pocket and opens it.

INSERT. NEW YORK CHECKLIST. Eleven items and eleven empty boxes. The Met. Central Park. Times Square at night. A bagel. The subway.

She got none of them.

She takes out a pen and goes to the top of the list, to the line written before all the others in the oldest and palest ink.

1. TRAVEL ALONE

She puts one small check in the box. Only that one.

She closes the book.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRCRAFT - WINDOW - NIGHT

Mira turns to the window.

It is not a mirror. It is a plain oval of scratched acrylic, a hundred hairline scuffs and crazing in the corners, the wear of a thousand flights. Nothing about it is beautiful.

Along its lower edge, condensation, climbing.

It is the fog from the hotel bathroom seventeen hours ago, arriving again somewhere else entirely.

She watches it come. Then she lifts her hand and wipes it away with the cuff of her sleeve.

One pass, absent and automatic. She is not thinking about it at all.

The glass clears.

And she does not look for her face.

For the first time in the film, Mira looks at a reflective surface and does not search it for herself. She looks through it.

Outside, the black earth, and at the far edge of it the first grey line of morning.

The scratches are all still there and were always going to be. They sit across the view like a hundred small distortions and she is not looking at them.

Then the cold begins to work at the edges of the oval.

Frost.

It comes in from the corners in feathers, then in ferns, then in whole branching crystal structures, growing across the acrylic while we watch. It follows the scratches. It uses them. It needs them, because that is what ice requires in order to begin.

The flaws are not covered over. The flaws are the reason it is beautiful.

Mira watches it grow.

The frost rings the oval and leaves the centre clear, and through the clear centre the light comes up.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRCRAFT - HIGH ALTITUDE - DAWN

Outside now, and silent. The immense cold blue.

Fuselage. Rivets. A row of oval windows with most of the shades down.

One of them open.

We move to it slowly.

Through the oval, ringed in white crystal, Mira. Half lit. Looking out at us and past us.

Laid over her in the glass, the reflection of the horizon. The long clean line where the dark earth meets the coming light.

It crosses her face and settles.

For one held moment the reflection and the world beyond it are the same thing, at the same level, exactly aligned.

Her face and the horizon. Together. Whole.

HOLD.

CUT TO:

BLACK

Silence.

Then, over black, the small wooden clatter of a line of dominoes going over.

And a child, laughing.

FADE OUT.

THE END