

PATIENT ZERO

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EXT. ORPHANAGE, CHINA - DAY

Ten seconds into the future, a low-slung white building shimmers in a haze of heat.

JORIE CHESTER smokes nervously by the low wall of an empty playground. Jumps when a PARROT CAWS from a rusty cage.

Jorie is 33, a foreign correspondent -- a beautiful racehorse of a woman: elegant, incisive. Famous for not keeping still.

In her khakis and T-shirt, Jorie HACKS out a smoker's cough. Grunting with disgust, she stubs out her smoke on the wall.

Spots a mosquito feeding on her arm. SLAPS it. Blood smears.

Near her, in Chinese, is a sign with an English translation: HAPPY SUN ORPHANAGE. Jorie nerves herself to go back inside.

INT. ORPHANAGE, CHINA - DAY

CLOSE ON a table with hand disinfectant and Red Cross signs. Couples wait anxiously, leaning close on vinyl chairs.

Jorie comes in and looks around, growing panicked.

She accosts JIM LEEDOM, 37, a red-headed, sunburned Canadian. His arm is around his wife, JANIE, 40.

JORIE

You guys see where my sister went?

Leedom turns toward a door... and a toilet FLUSHES off. The door opens and KATY CHESTER, 28, comes out. She's spiky, wearing a nose ring, holding a toy-like neon iPhone.

Jorie apologizes to Leedom for her nerves:

JORIE (CONT'D)

It's been a long wait.

Leedom nods sympathetically, scratching a mosquito bite. Jorie and Katy lean against a nearby wall. Jorie HACKS.

KATY

You've really gotta quit.

Another door opens and Jorie goes taut. The Chinese ORPHANAGE DIRECTOR comes in. Behind her, a worker holds a baby girl.

ORPHANAGE DIRECTOR

Mr. Mrs. Jim Leedom.

Leedom turns teary-eyed with love.

He and his wife head over to take the baby, leaving with the worker. Jorie is barely able to stand the tension -- as a new worker brings in another baby girl.

ORPHANAGE DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
Miss Jo-ree...

JORIE
Jorie Chester. Here.

Jorie springs up to take LIN, 10 months, looking awestruck.

JORIE (CONT'D)
Hi, sweetie. Baby Lin.

Jorie melts. She gazes at her lovely new daughter...

...as Lin COUGHS hard. People edge away. Jorie looks worried.

ORPHANAGE DIRECTOR
Doctor says no problem. Just got a cold.

Nodding, teary, Jorie turns to Katy -- but speaks to Lin.

JORIE
That's your Auntie Katy.

Katy waves awkwardly, as if she's doing a bad impersonation of the Queen. She remembers the camera on her iPhone. CLICK.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, CHINA - EVENING

Bright plastic toys lie strewn on the dismal carpet. Jorie paces, trying to get a signal on her phone.

JORIE
Usually I get like super connected so they can listen in on me.

Katy awkwardly walks the baby. Lin COUGHS -- and Jorie HACKS.

KATY
You're not getting it, too?

Jorie gives up on her phone and reaches for Lin.

KATY (CONT'D)
I should be taking you guys to the clinic.

JORIE
So they stick us in quarantine and
she gets *really* sick.

Jorie HACKS sharply, startling the baby into CRYING.

JORIE (CONT'D)
Shh. It's okay sweetie. Shh.

As the baby WAILS...

KATY
Please Jo. What if we all get it?

JORIE
Sweetie, you *know* the doctors are
better at home.

Katy finally nods, giving in.

INT. PROVINCIAL AIRPORT, CHINA - DAY

A worker wearing a surgical mask works a broom past signs in Chinese. Exclamation marks and Red Crosses jump out.

Worries about health -- epidemics -- are at a boiling point.

A HUGE Red Cross marks a checkpoint staffed by white-coated medicos. Gun-toting guards scan the long line up.

Jorie reaches the front of the line, Lin in a sling on her chest, Katy hanging back. She makes flirty eyes at KEI WIN, 38, a handsome Chinese doctor, while handing him her papers.

Jorie HACKS as she clutches a pack of smokes.

KEI WIN
That's a bad habit.

Jorie holds out the smokes. The doctor takes one.

JORIE
Years ago I looked forward to
flying.

KEI WIN
You got a long trip.

Lin WHIMPERS. The doctor frowns, ready to take a closer look.

JORIE
(to distract him)
I started to use nicotine patches.
(MORE)

JORIE (CONT'D)

Sort of like a vibrator, ya know?
Gets the job done.

Kei Win thinks she's hot. Stamps the papers, pointing --

KEI WIN

That's my name. Kei Win. You want
another Chinese baby -- maybe I can
help.

Jorie grins at him and waves Katy through the checkpoint,
following. Jorie looks back at the doctor regretfully.

A SHRIEK. At the checkpoint, a Chinese Grandma BEGS as an
armed guard drags her away. Her family PLEADS, following...

Katy looks back, terrified. Jorie nudges her to keep walking.

INT. AIRPORT DEPARTURE LOUNGE, CHINA - DAY

HACKING, Jorie walks FRETFUL Lin. The TV news plays above.

JORIE

Shh. Shh sweetie.

The airline crew comes in, paying no attention to Jorie...

...but passengers whisper, glancing at her. Leedom scratches
inflamed red mosquito bites on his arm. He frets to his wife:

LEEDOM

She didn't even take the baby to a
clinic.

The PILOT overhears Leedom and glances at Lin. Other crew
members keep going, joking off. The Pilot heads over.

PILOT

That baby shouldn't be travelling.

JORIE

She's just got a cold.

PILOT

I don't know why they let her past
the checkpoint.

The Pilot tries to catch the eye of a bored guard. The guard
is looking away. Yawns LOUDLY. Jorie half smiles.

JORIE

If you've got any problems with security, you might wanna give me a quote.

The Pilot glances up at the TV, recognition dawning.

PILOT

You're Jorie Chester.
(thumb pointing at the TV)
You people. Jesus.

The Pilot heads resentfully off.

The baby GURGLES. Looking down, Jorie sees Lin smiling up at her. She melts with mother love.

EXT. CANADIAN AIRPORT - AFTERNOON

A plane lands. The sign says TORONTO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

INT. AIRPORT IMMIGRATION ROOM - AFTERNOON

More Red Cross posters. Passengers fill the room. Lined up, shuffling forward slowly. Armed guards watch alertly.

A sense of heightened fear and caution.

Adoptive father Leedom and his wife carry their baby inside ...and Janie GROANS at the crowd. Leedom buttonholes a guard.

LEEDOM

We've got a connecting flight to Ottawa in less than an hour.

Jorie comes in, holding Lin. Katy juggles the carry-on. Jorie catches Leedom's eye on the way past.

JORIE

Good luck, you guys.

Jorie and Katy get into line. Baby Lin COUGHS. A returning Canadian does a double-take at Lin and walks off nervously.

Jorie COUGHS HARD... shoving the baby at Katy.

An immigration officer pulls up a white mask and strides over. Jorie manages to shove out their Canadian passports.

Then keels over in a dead faint.

INT. LABORATORIES, THE FACILITY/CONTINUOUS - EVENING

Punky lesbian DR. ILONA MARKICH, 29, does a jerky hand-held run through the Facility -- a warren of crowded, windowless laboratories off a maze-like corridor. Equipment everywhere.

Ilona runs holding a slide. She's creative, iconoclastic. Touches other researchers, speaking in a Balkans accent.

ILONA

Where's Will... You seen Will?

Ilona passes scientists working with pipettes. A centrifuge.

ILONA (CONT'D)

Where's Will Brennan?

Looking up mildly at his messy desk is DR. WILL BRENNAN, 36, the centre of the storm. He's brilliant, affectionate, rumpled and radically mischievous, with a boyish smile.

ILONA (CONT'D)

We got something good.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAMINATION ROOM - NIGHT

Katy slumps in a chair. Lin sleeps on the high bed -- as a RESIDENT in scrubs strides in.

RESIDENT

It's okay, you can go. You're fine, and the baby's just got bronchitis.

He slings into a chair and scrawls a prescription.

KATY

Just?! I mean, I guess it depends what you compare it with... What about my sister?

RESIDENT

We need to finish checking her out. I'm afraid you've gotta lock yourself and the baby up in quarantine.

The resident offers Katy the prescription.

KATY

But it's her goddamn baby!... That came out wrong.

RESIDENT

Guess I could keep her here.

KATY

It's all set up at her place. My
sister's got like *everything*.

(worried)

Is it the cough?

INT. JORIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

In the barebones examination room, efficient DR. DINI KHANNA,
36, takes a medical history from Jorie, who's even hoarser:

JORIE

I was doing a big bunch of travel
before the baby. I've got this iron
constitution, but there was a bit
of stomach in Russia. Fever up the
Amazon. The cold in China...

Jorie loses it, COUGHING... then gets it together.

JORIE (CONT'D)

You're sure my baby's just got a
cold?

DINI

Your baby's symptoms are perfectly
normal.

Jorie shoots her a reporter's look, sensing something wrong.

DINI (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What about sexually transmitted
diseases?

JORIE

Why aren't my symptoms normal?

DINI

Maybe they are.

JORIE

(getting it)

I'm not HIV. I was with my husband
forever. After he was killed, 18
months ago now... in Afghanistan...

Jorie gets lost in memories of her guy.

DINI

Anti-depressants?

JORIE
It's called overwork.

They share a wry smile. Then Jorie turns vulnerable:

JORIE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
I know I've gotta change for the
baby.

INT. SCANNING ELECTRON MICROSCOPE FIELD

Fluorescent cells morph in a kaleidoscopic field. A virus.

WILL (V.O.)
(to the slide)
You're brand new.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL - WILL AND DINI

In a high-tech microscope lab, Will reaches for the landline.

Dini's mobile BUZZES as she leaves Jorie's room.

WILL
I've never seen this one before,
Dini... You said she's got a cough?

DINI
I don't think there's any airborne
transmission. The sister's clear.

WILL
We can't take a chance.

INT. MICROSCOPE LAB, THE FACILITY - NIGHT

As Will hangs up, Ilona is tense. The technician who mans the microscope stares at Will, who's taut with nerves.

A sense of dark emergency: this is BIG. Ilona, mordant:

ILONA
The plague! The plague!

WILL
Come on, Ilona. She's real sick.

ILONA
She's real tough, I think. She
wears these butch fatigues on TV...
(MORE)

ILONA (CONT'D)
 I tell Helen, pretend you're Jorie
 Chester. *Investigate me.*

Will is amused, but also in a rush. He heads out...

EXT. THE FACILITY - NIGHT

... and we see a low-slung building, one wing still under construction... an ultra-secure Infectious Diseases Facility.

A light flicks on in one corner. In the window, pick up Will's silhouette. His Nobel trajectory gives Will a major scientific status symbol: a lab with windows.

I/E. JORIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON violent bruises on Jorie's arm -- coming out even as she watches. She touches them, awestruck.

Goes to open her door. Locked! Jorie RATTLES it.

Outside the door, we're shocked to see army uniforms. A SERGEANT, 32, and Private exchange a glance but don't move.

JORIE (O.C.)
 You can't lock me in here! Why?!

No answer. Controlling herself, Jorie pulls out her mobile.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

A panel of dignitaries sits at a table on a raised platform. A banner: HUMAN RIGHTS INTERNATIONAL. BRAVE THE NEW WORLD!

There's APPLAUSE... as name cards identify celebrities from film and human rights... including BASIL MARKHAM, 35. He's an incisive black lawyer whose mobile VIBRATES in his pocket.

As he stands to speak, Basil turns off his mobile.

INT. JORIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Jorie clenches her fist around her phone, frustrated.

EXT. THE FACILITY - NIGHT

A door opens. Will comes out, ruffled, in sweats...

...as BARKING guards dogs race up.

Recognizing Will, they turn into puppy dogs, happily wagging their tails. Will pats them affectionately and pulls out his mobile.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL -- WILL AND NADINE

DR. NADINE LOGAN, 38, is on the phone in front of her laptop in their condo. Will's sexy wife talks in a teasing voice, yet never stops typing or scanning her screen.

NADINE

I don't believe these scares any more. It's probably just another atypical pneumonia.

WILL

I wish I could say that, Nadine.

NADINE

What you're really saying is that you're not coming home for dinner.

Behind Will we see the Facility wing under construction. The rutted earth, the back hoes, the piles of lumber.

WILL

It's actually a relief after so much time on the expansion. I'm so goddamn sick of plumbing.

Nadine checks figures. Leans forward, spotting something.

NADINE

I'm too busy for dinner anyhow.

Will listens to Nadine hang up. He grins, much in love with his sexy, elusive wife... and starts his run, heading away.

I/E JORIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

...as Jorie paces forward. COUGHS. Tasting blood, she stops. Sees it in her bloody lips reflected in a small mirror.

Jorie BANGS the door.

JORIE

I'm bleeding! Please: I need help!

Outside her door, the Sergeant answers in a Quebecois accent:

SERGEANT

One minute.

Inside, Jorie COUGHS and wipes her mouth with one hand. Blood AND bruises. Scared, she pulls out her mobile.

INT. JORIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lin HOWLS. Katy SOBS with self-pity as she walks her.

They're in Jorie's decorator nursery: a zoo mural, a fully decked crib, a menagerie of stuffed toys.

The baby is LOUD. Katy doesn't hear her iPhone RING.

KATY

Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck...

I/E JORIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

In her room, Jorie listens impatiently to the endless RING.

Outside, Dini pulls a white mask over her nose and mouth. The army guys are behind her, ready to block Jorie from leaving.

Dini walks inside. Seeing Jorie's mobile, Dini grabs it.

JORIE

Hey! No way!

COUGHING, Jorie tries to grab the phone back. They wrestle. Dini flips the phone to the Sergeant, who steps back.

JORIE (CONT'D)

You can't do that!

Still struggling for her mobile, Jorie knocks Dini's mask aside -- just as she COUGHS BLOOD in Dini's face!

Both stop, shocked. Dini wipes her face, speaking dryly:

DINI

I hear you're bleeding.

JORIE

What if my baby has this?

DINI

Your baby doesn't have...

Dini goes wide-eyed. Grabs her lab coat at the neck.

JORIE

Are you okay?

The Private -- still just inside the room -- looks confused.

Dini WHEEZES. The Private steps forward. Wrong move. Dini COUGHS BLOOD in the Private's face!

JORIE (CONT'D)

Oh my God.

The Sergeant shoves the Private inside and SLAMS the door.

Dini is COUGHING and HACKING, WHEEZING horribly. Breathless.

Blood gushes from the Private's nose. He starts COUGHING too.

JORIE (CONT'D)

I don't understand.

Jorie takes Dini's shoulder, horrified. Sees Dini's face -- blood pouring out her nose and mouth, choking her.

Bloody red tears flow from Dini's eyes. She wrenches away from Jorie, blinded, wracked with pain. Falling to her knees.

JORIE (CONT'D)

No. Please.

In the corner, the Private collapses against the wall and slips slowly down -- leaving a smear of blood on the wall.

On his knees, he VOMITS BLOOD -- then collapses into it.

Dini kneels on the floor, quivering. She tries to crawl through a pool of her own blood. Jorie is in shock.

JORIE (CONT'D)

Please, don't. Please, no.

(yelling)

FOR GOD'S SAKE THEY NEED HELP!!!!

EXT. JORIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Back to us, the Quebecois Sergeant cracks open the door... and SLAMS it, terrified. Fumbles for his walkie-talkie.

EXT. THE FACILITY - NIGHT

Will is on his run, sweaty, surrounded by dogs. His mobile RINGS and he answers.

WILL

WHAT?! Christ... *Pull her in!!!*

INT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE/CORRIDORS - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

In quick, handheld action, a squad of armed soldiers in camouflage fatigues and ventilators BURSTS in an entrance.

They race through the corridors -- a hazard team in containment suits behind them.

INT. JORIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Jorie cowers far back from the carnage. Both Dini and the soldier lie in pools of blood. Drained, bruised, dead.

A containment team bursts in. Dressed in hazard suits, two figures grab Jorie, struggling to shove her into a clear plastic containment bubble.

Jorie SOBS, fighting them to grab her LAPTOP from the bed.

JORIE
Where's my baby?! What's
happening?! Please!!!

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDORS - NIGHT

The team rushes Jorie's bubble through the deserted hallways.

IN THE BUBBLE she clutches her laptop. SOBBING:

JORIE
I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Containment suits shove Jorie's bubble into an army vehicle. Doors SLAM. It takes off.

MONTAGE - EMERGENCY MEDICAL LOCKDOWN - NIGHT

-- Back inside the hospital, tough-looking soldiers herd medical personnel into a room, locking the door.

-- Terrified medicos shy away from each other.

-- The Quebecois Sergeant sits alone. He makes himself COUGH into his hand and looks for blood. None.

-- Exhausted Katy opens the door of Jorie's apartment. What she sees outside makes her jaw drop.