

THE ANTIDOTE

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FADE IN:

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

A test tube is held with extreme care by a gloved hand. The greenish-blue contents are poured into a flask containing a clear liquid.

As the substances mix together, the resulting mixture turns a dark brown.

DR. FRANZ HAMMER, dressed in a hazmat suit, stands back and considers the reaction.

HAMMER

Strange. Very strange.

Nearby, his ASSISTANT, in a similar suit, watches through a camcorder positioned on a tripod.

ASSISTANT

What's strange about it?

HAMMER

This should have changed to orange upon mixing. I wonder...

He takes an eyedropper and sucks up a small amount of the new concoction, then walks gingerly over to a cage containing a pair of rats.

The Assistant moves the camcorder to get a better angle.

Hammer releases a single drop onto one of the rats. Almost instantaneously, the rodent begins SCREECHING and contorting horrifically.

It bumps into the other rat, who begins behaving the same. Within seconds, they're both dead, and decay rapidly.

HAMMER (CONT'D)

Oh my God.

The Assistant picks up the tripod and moves closer to the cage, but she gets tangled in the legs of the tripod and falls forward, crashing against the lab table.

In the fall, she bumps up against the flask containing the brown liquid, and it CRASHES on the floor. The liquid flies everywhere, including onto Dr. Hammer's suit.

His horrified eyes peer through the mask as the liquid BURNS through the suit. Immediately, he drops to the floor, convulsing. The mask fills with a white foam.

He gasps for air. Hisses at the Assistant.

HAMMER (CONT'D)
Get... Berkus...

He goes limp. The Assistant rushes away from the room.

INT. LABORATORY / CORRIDOR - DAY

The Assistant runs frantically down the hall. Stops at an intercom. Weakly presses the button. She, too, is feeling the effect of the toxic spill.

ASSISTANT
Toxic spill... Berkus...

INT. GUARD STATION - DAY

A GUARD listens to the intercom, watches the ASSISTANT collapse in a heap on the corridor floor.

The Guard immediately grabs a phone.

EXT. DESERT AREA / UTAH - DAY

The landscape could easily be confused for the surface of Mars. Barren, red dirt, rocky. Nothing for miles. Sun baked.

Except, though, for a large, sprawling campus that sits at the end of a one-lane road, surrounded by an eight-foot high chain link fence topped by razor wire.

The building is nondescript, with the exception of a sign by the front gate, which reads: "NO UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS".

It's still. Quiet. Until:

The front gate slides open and an SUV BURSTS through. It races at high speed down the road away from the campus.

INT. SUV - DAY

Inside are Special Agents ERIKA COOPER and JAVIER TORRES, 30'S. They look grim and focused.

As Cooper drives, Torres stabs at his cell phone. Checks his service weapon as he listens. Cooper looks at him curiously.

TORRES

Like to keep my options open.

He hangs up.

TORRES (CONT'D)

Still no answer.

COOPER

God help us if we can't find him.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

The SUV disappears into the bleak horizon.

EXT. RESIDENCE - DAY

It's a nicely-kept middle class home. Wood paneling, neatly trimmed shrubs, a rocking chair on the porch.

INT. RESIDENCE / BEDROOM - DAY

C/U on a NOTE. Handwritten. The words "sorry" and "goodbye" seem to stand out.

The note is placed by a hand on a dresser next to a picture of a YOUNG WOMAN.

NATE BERKUS, 33, a nerdish beanpole with hair as neatly coiffed as his front yard, sits on his bed.

In his lap rests a Smith & Wesson pistol.

He gazes sadly at the picture. The melancholy of the moment is overwhelming.

His hand grips the pistol with a purpose. He steadies himself, ready to commit to the wave of despair, until:

BAM BAM BAM. DING DONG. A banging on the door alternates with the ringing door bell.

Berkus gazes in the direction of the door, but doesn't yield to the knock. He slowly raises the pistol to his mouth.

TORRES (O.S.)
 Nate Berkus!! This is the FBI!
 Please open the door immediately!
 It's an emergency!

Berkus now looks more irritated than sad.

BAM BAM BAM!!

TORRES (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Dr. Berkus, open the door! We need
 your help! There's been an incident
 at the laboratory!

The gun moves away from his mouth for just for a moment.

Silence. Berkus moves the gun back in position, when:

WHAM!

The door opens violently from a kick by Torres. Through the
 bedroom doorway, Berkus watches Torres and Cooper spill into
 the house, guns drawn.

Cooper spots Berkus on his bed, gun in hand. It's tense. The
 agents race to just outside Berkus' bedroom door and peer in.

Berkus leaps up from the bed, backs himself into a corner,
 unsure whether to point the gun at the agents or himself.

Rather than a heated reaction, Cooper tries a calm approach
 to the situation.

COOPER
 Dr. Berkus. I'm FBI Special Agent
 Cooper. Sorry about the door.

Berkus just stares at the two agents.

COOPER (CONT'D)
 Dr. Berkus?

BERKUS
 (shrugs)
 Not gonna need it anyway.

COOPER
 Listen, I can only guess at what's
 going on here, but you think you
 can put the gun down for just a
 second? Got something really
 important we need to discuss. It's
 a matter of national -- actually,
 world -- security.

TORRES

More like world extinction.

Berkus cocks his head. Lowers the gun slightly. Cooper steps into the door, which gets Berkus all jittery again. She raises her hands.

COOPER

Not gonna hurt you, sir.

BERKUS

Wouldn't matter.

COOPER

Let's start again. There's been a serious incident at the lab.

BERKUS

Dr. Hammer.

TORRES

Apparently, some experiment he was working on went haywire. People are dropping left and right in the lab campus. Twenty-three dead so far.

BERKUS

Got what was coming to him, if you ask me.

COOPER

Maybe he did, but there are a lot of innocent people dying in there. We had to quarantine the building to keep it from spreading.

BERKUS

(angrily)

There's no one innocent in there. Everyone knew the risks of working on experiments involving germ warfare. And you can't quarantine the building.

Now Torres appears in the room. Berkus points the pistol in his direction. Cooper immediately steps in front of Torres, which somewhat calms the situation.

COOPER

What do you mean we can't?

Berkus sighs. The weight of the world on his shoulder.

BERKUS

It's likely an airborne virus.
It'll be out in the public in a
matter of hours. Will spread across
the globe in days. Still, doesn't
affect me. So if you don't mind
leaving me...

TORRES

Maybe there's a way to stop it
before it spreads. Before she died,
Hammer's assistant mentioned your
name. Any reason why?

BERKUS

They probably think I have the
antidote. I don't. Sorry.

Cooper and Torres exchange concerned looks. The gun goes to
the mouth.

COOPER

STOP! PLEASE!

(pleads)

Maybe this is what you want. But I
don't want to die. I don't... I
have two young girls...

Berkus looks at Cooper with sad, faraway eyes.

BERKUS

We all have to die sometime.

TORRES

It's about a girl, isn't it?

COOPER

Oscar!

TORRES

It's always a girl.

BERKUS

He's right. Somewhat.

Berkus stares across the room at the dresser. Cooper follows
his gaze to the picture.

COOPER

This her?

(off Berkus' nod)

What happened?

BERKUS

She got pregnant. Left me for the baby's father.

An awkward pause.

TORRES

Want us to kill him? We can do that. No one would ever know.

Berkus almost smiles. Almost.

BERKUS

I think the virus will take care of him soon enough.

Cooper cautiously moves towards Berkus.

BERKUS (CONT'D)

Stop. Don't come any closer.
(to Torres)
You. Move to the doorway.

Torres does as he's told.

TORRES

Nate. Is she worth dying over?
Worth the entire planet dying over?

BERKUS

If it were only just that.
(beat)
I was recently diagnosed with Stage Four pancreatic cancer. It's already spread to my liver and colon. Doctor said I had six months, tops, if I decided to aggressively fight it. But it would only prolong the inevitable. So you see, you're really not saving me from anything. I'll be dead from either the virus or the cancer, neither of which is a palatable way to go as far as I'm concerned. I'm taking the easy way out.

TORRES

That's the coward's way out.

BERKUS

A coward wouldn't be able to pull the trigger.

COOPER

I get it. But why make everyone else suffer the same fate as you?

Berkus isn't fazed by the question.

BERKUS

You want an antidote to the virus, but maybe the best antidote is to just hit reset on the entire human race. Put an end to all the wars and diseases and greed and crime and whatever else is bad out there. Let evolution take over and see if the next species can get it right.

COOPER

There's bad out there, for sure. But there's so much good, too. And you can be a force for that. You stop this virus, and your name will be remembered forever as the person who saved mankind.

Berkus sadly shakes his head. He's too far gone to reason with at this point.

BERKUS

I doubt it. More likely remembered as someone who worked for the agency that created the virus.

Torres has had enough.

TORRES

For God's sake, man! Think of someone other than yourself! We're running out of time here!

BERKUS

Go. To. Hell.

Torres rushes at Berkus, who reactively points the gun at the FBI agent's chest and FIRES. BOOM.

COOPER

OSCAR!!

Torres just misses falling on Berkus as he crashes to the floor. He stares up at Berkus. Coughs up blood as he whispers faintly to the scientist.

TORRES

Spare her...

The eyes go into a death stare. Torres is gone.

BERKUS

I'm sorry... but now I have to go through with this. Don't you see? I'm terminally ill and I've murdered someone.

Cooper kneels on the floor next to Berkus. Wipes tears from her eyes.

COOPER

Can you please just tell me how to get the antidote? Please? I'm begging you. Just tell me. And then I'll leave and if you want to kill yourself, I won't stop you.

She pulls out her weapon, hands it to Berkus.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Don't go out the wrong way. Do the right thing here, Dr. Berkus.

He studies the weapon, then Torres, then the picture of his girlfriend on the dresser. The emotions wash over him and he breaks down. The tears come in torrents.

Cooper is unsure whether to console him or just let him get it out. She speaks softly to him.

COOPER (CONT'D)

The antidote? Please?

Berkus' head bobs up and down as he fights with himself over what to do. He puts both hands to his head and groans loudly.

After what seems like an eternity:

BERKUS

In Dr. Hammer's office, there's a safe in the floor under his desk. Covered by a carpet. The formulas, and antidotes, to every experiment we ever worked on was in there.

Cooper hastily writes this information in a small pad.

BERKUS (CONT'D)

The code to the safe is digital... let's see... 69... 28...

COOPER

69... 28...

BERKUS

4733.

COOPER

4733. 69284733. You're certain about that?

BERKUS

Yes...

Cooper pulls out her cell phone. Starts to dial, then stops.

COOPER

Will you come with me? You could be very useful.

Berkus shakes his head. He sits back on the bed. Stares at the young woman's picture. Then at Torres.

Cooper dials the phone. Starts for the doorway.

COOPER (CONT'D)

(into phone)

It's Cooper. I have info about an antidote. It's in a safe.

As she reaches the front door, she looks back to Berkus.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Berkus doesn't acknowledge her. He just continues to stare vacantly into space.

EXT. RESIDENCE - DAY

Cooper exits the house. Pauses on the front porch to finish her call.

COOPER

The code to the safe is 69284733.
Formula for the antidote should be in there somewhere. I'm on my way.

Cooper takes a last glance towards the house. Can't decide whether to wait for the inevitable. After a moment, she reaches for the door handle, then reconsiders and pulls away.

She heads for the SUV, get in and speeds away. As the roar of the motor fades, all that's left is the sound of chirping birds and the wind whistling briskly through the trees.

FADE OUT.