

THE SMALL MULTIPLE

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INT. BASEMENT/FLASHBACK - DAY

CUT TO WHITE - AN ELECTRICAL BUZZ

The air is full of light. It begins to fade, revealing that it has been emanating from a STRANGE METAL OBJECT on a workbench, connected to thick power cables and bundles of electronics. The buzzing sound fades out.

A CLASSIC ROCK TUNE plays on a radio nearby.

Next to the workbench, CATHY (40) stands embracing FRANK (40). She pulls away from him, looks around.

CATHY

Nothing happened. No, the radio. The music changed.

FRANK

A lot of things have changed. Look.

Frank picks up a newspaper. It's dated May 18, 2008. The headline reads NYC TOURISM BOOMS; a photo of lower Manhattan shows the Twin Towers standing tall and proud.

CATHY

Oh my God...

Cathy looks at Frank. Her eyes well up, and she throws her arms around him. He laughs and hugs her.

INT. BASEMENT/PRESENT - DAY

DUST covers the strange metal object. The basement is full of clutter: open cans of food, dirty dishes, tools and clothing. The only light is from a ground-level window. Flies buzz against the glass.

Frank shuffles in carrying a bottle of whiskey, and picks up a dirty glass. He looks bad: unshaven, dirty, burned out.

FRANK (V.O.)

I wanted a different future, that's all. I wanted the one they told me to expect when I was 18. That's why I built the Selector.

Frank pours whiskey, pondering the object. He slumps into a chair near the workbench.

FRANK (V.O.)

It's a quantum processor that manipulates 11-dimensional geometry. It can fold space/time like an origami crane. I built it to reach through infinite possibilities and choose one specific universe, the one where Cathy and I would live. The Small Multiple showed me how.

INT. BASEMENT/PRESENT - LATER

Frank carries in a CAR BATTERY and puts it on the floor near a PILE OF CAR BATTERIES. He connects the battery to some cables, throws a switch.

A light winks on. The radio emits a hiss of STATIC.

Frank boots a COMPUTER, which soon displays an image matrix: hundreds of PHOTOS OF CATHY. They span decades.

FRANK (V.O.)

A Small Multiple: a series of consistent, comparative images showing the same subject at different times. It can track the healing of broken bones, trends in the stock market, the birth of a tornado, or the death of a rain forest.

Frank begins printing the photos of Cathy. A nearby PRINTER hums to life.

INT. BASEMENT/FLASHBACK - DAY

A happier Frank sings along with the radio, tinkering with the Selector. It's still a work in progress.

FRANK (V.O.)

A small multiple shows only truth, but it must be read very carefully.

Cathy enters, on her way to work. She's dressed neat/casual, a backpack slung over one shoulder.

CATHY

Don't forget your interview.

FRANK

I won't have time.

CATHY

We can't make it on my salary,
Frank! And they're expecting more
layoffs. What if I get cut next
month?

FRANK

(smiles)

By next month, everything will be
fine.

CATHY

(a glimmer of hope)

You talked to the dean? You worked
it out?

FRANK

I punched out the head of the
physics department, Cath. Not much
to work out.

CATHY

We can't live like this!

FRANK

No, we can't! So I'm taking us
somewhere else.

CATHY

(weary)

Frank, not this...

FRANK

Cathy, I can't give us the future we
want, not in this world. But I can
take us to a better one.

Frank turns back to his work. Cathy is near tears, her face
shows both grief and anger. She turns and walks out.

Frank glances down at a newspaper. The headline reads NEW
TERROR THREAT LOOMS, with a photo of New York's ground zero.

INT. BASEMENT/PRESENT - CONTINUING

Frank is cutting up the printouts: each page holds 8 photos.
He's piling up snapshots showing Cathy in dozens of settings.

FRANK (V.O.)

The images were so ordinary.

INT. BASEMENT/FLASHBACK - DAY

Frank is sitting near his workbench, drinking a BEER, looking at photos of Cathy on a LAPTOP. The workbench is bare.

FRANK (V.O.)

After I lost my job, I started spending hours looking at them, sorting, arranging, comparing. Then it clicked.

Realization dawns on Frank's face. He leans back.

FRANK (V.O.)

It was a Small Multiple, one with a story to tell. And when data starts whispering to me, I listen. The emotions on Cathy's face were a code, a calculus describing the quantum neural network we carry in our heads all our lives.

MONTAGE: Frank is swept up in the energy of a new discovery. He pulls books off a shelf, pages through - he paces the basement, full of energy - he talks on the phone, waving an arm in the air - he pulls up web sites on quantum theory, string theory, cosmology, the screen filling with obscure mathematics - he sketches in a notebook, creating the first schematic of the Selector.

FRANK (V.O.)

It came faster, emotions pointing to quantum states pointing to locations in N-space and finally to a master key that could unlock every door in the multiverse. Two weeks later I was building the first prototype.

INT. BASEMENT/FLASHBACK - DAY

It's months later. Frank sits at the workbench, a different tune on the radio.

FRANK

Here goes...

He flips a switch. The Selector glows, buzzes. There's a flash, and Frank is gone. A second later he reappears in exactly the same position. A big grin spreads over his face.

FRANK

Ha Ha! Yeah baby!
(grabs a beer to toast)
The future!

Frank begins making adjustments on the Selector.

FRANK (V.O.)

The test was flawless. As far as it went, anyway.

INT. BASEMENT/PRESENT - CONTINUING

Frank is taping up the photos of Cathy in one long, uneven line. It winds around the basement like a strand of DNA. Frank is half drunk, unsteady on his feet.

FRANK (V.O.)

I saw no reason to wait. I wanted out. The sooner the better.

INT. BASEMENT/FLASHBACK - DAY

Frank and Cathy stand next to the work bench, in the middle of a screaming argument.

FRANK

I don't need "help," I just need you to trust me!

CATHY

You've blown off five appointments, you won't take your meds, you--

FRANK

None of that matters! Cathy, look, baby, right now I need you to trust me, just for a few seconds. Five minutes from now, if you still want me to see Dr. Freiburg, I will.

CATHY

(giving up)
Okay, where's this thing supposed to send us?

Frank smiles, powers up the Selector, makes a few adjustments.

FRANK

We don't really go anywhere. It's more like the universe we want comes to us. It's like, like standing next to a carousel, watching it turn past you. When you see the horse you like, you just get on.

CATHY

And you've already picked the horse?

FRANK

Yeah.

CATHY

Fine. Just do it. Jesus.

FRANK

Stand here.

Taking Cathy by the hand, Frank pulls her close to the workbench. He flips a switch, then embraces her. The Glow fills the room.

They both disappear. Frank reappears, alone. He panics.

FRANK

Cathy... CATHY!

INT. BASEMENT/PRESENT - CONTINUING

Frank tapes the last photo of Cathy to the wall, completing a drunken ring around the workbench. He slumps into a chair.

FRANK (V.O.)

If I had done all the math, I might have noticed that my test was a one-shot deal. Once home, I couldn't leave again. But Cathy could. Everybody could.

INT. BASEMENT/FLASHBACK - CONTINUING

Cathy is embracing Frank... the other Frank. He drops the newspaper, and squeezes her with both arms.

FRANK (V.O.)

She's with me now. Another me, in another place. She's safe. And she'll never know what happened.

Happy Frank opens a beer for Cathy, picks up his own.

FRANK

A toast.

FRANK (V.O.)

She'll never know that when she stepped onto the carousel, so did everyone else on earth. Everyone but me.

FRANK

The Future!

CATHY
The Future!

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUING

Burned out Frank raises his whiskey glass, his face grim.

FRANK
The future.

Frank drinks, alone, surrounded by the small multiple. He turns up the static on the radio.

THE END