

Blindsided

Act I

While visiting a college friend, Rachel is reminded of how her marriage used to be.

After months of neglect, Rachel leaves Alex to his basement obsession and goes to visit Jessica. While convalescing in the calm of friendship, Jessica brings up a story from their college days that sends them into hysterics again and reminds Rachel of how much she and Alex used to laugh. It's why you married him, Jessica comments, to which Rachel says she'd have to live in the past to find that now. "Funny," Jessica muses, "how relationships become memories."

Meanwhile, Alex finishes his time machine.

After months of compulsive and reclusive work on his current project, a small time machine based on a microwave, Alex finishes it the day before his Rachel is due back from visiting an old college friend, a visit he dimly remembers is due in part to the strain his behavior has put on her marriage.

In the disgusting kitchen, Alex finds the perfect object for his first test—a moldy plate of eggs and...something fuzzy. He takes it downstairs, pausing by a calendar where he is reminded that Rachel is due back today. His face clouds as he continues downstairs to where a modified microwave sits on a workbench. He programs a date and sends the food back in time, producing a fresh plate of hot toast and eggs. He takes a tentative bite, then another. The food is good, and he smiles, some of his obsession dissipating. He realizes he needs to get to work. At the door on the way out he flashes on another exit—a sullen Rachel leaving.

Alex molds the minds of tomorrow with Nina.

In his office at LearnTech Educational Corporation, Alex realizes he needs help, and he calls on Nina, his coworker and friend. They brainstorm ideas for real-world high school reading activities involving insurance forms, such as lightning strikes drawn by excessive body studs and having breast implants removed. Dr. Corman, the president of the company stops by to see if Alex has anything for him to take to his meeting of the President's Council on Ignorance. He lies and says the prototype on insurance will be done shortly, but promises a better section on prenuptial agreements next week. Corman agrees and leaves. Nina calls Alex on his paranoid-ish lie. She knows something is troubling Alex, and she invites him out to lunch to find out what.

Ignoring is not bliss.

Alex is preoccupied at lunch until Nina prods him into admitting that he and Rachel have had some problems, "you know, normal married problems." Nina doesn't know; she has young single problems. What does he have? He admits to probably ignoring Rachel, who left for a few weeks to visit a friend, claiming she needed space. "More space," Nina chimes, "the final frontier," and continues to depress him further by reminding him that many relationships improve when people don't see each other.

Rachel returns to claim baggage.

Rachel emerges from the jetway to find no Alex waiting for her. Upset, she proceeds to baggage claim where she retrieves her bag amid a crush of fellow travelers. She pops out of the scrum to find Alex standing there. He says he's glad she's back, and she

compliments him coolly for noticing she was gone. He tries to explain but she cuts him off with “not here,” and “where are you parked?” “Short-term,” he answers presciently.

Picking up where they left off.

As Alex drives, Rachel studies him, noticing how strained he looks. She asks if he's getting enough sleep. He counters by saying he's been working hard and has finished his unified field modulator. That's nice, she says; she knows how much it means to him. She used to mean that much to him. Does he remember? They used to laugh a lot. It all stopped when he disappeared into the basement. Yes, he says excitedly, where I finished it! “Yes,” Rachel responds. “Your project. The one that kept you in the basement for months. While I used our season tickets to the theater, alone, and made excuses for you at parties, and Miles' funeral.” Alex is momentarily set back by hearing of the death of Miles, Nina's brother, by fast food poisoning, but he quickly goes on about his machine, until he takes offense at Rachel's questioning and falls silent. She asks if they can put their relationship in it. It's small enough.

The light at the end of the banana.

At home in the kitchen Alex drops her bags and exclaims “The bananas are rotten.” Rachel thinks they can probably wait a few minutes longer than while she unpacks. Not true. She makes them each a drink and gives him one, hoping to calm him, which he ignores while he rummages around in the fridge. He finally produces a black shriveled banana, announcing proudly “It's perfect.” Rachel says she's not and she's going to lie down. He forces her to describe her perfect banana and then he takes her downstairs, where she explodes when she sees that he's butchered her new \$800 microwave with auto-defrost, speed cook, convection, and crisping! Alex runs the banana back in time. The machine completes its cycle with a mobile phone ringtone, and he removes a ripe banana and gives it to her. She tastes it. It's good. He basks in his success.

But...

When she asks if he's going to patent his machine and comments on its worth, his paranoia resurfaces and he demands secrecy and is suspicious of her motives, accusing her of thinking only about money. She counters by explaining they're broke because of it. She's not asking him to put it on Facebook, and even the Chinese probably get patents these days. But noting his unstable state, she drops the subject and says they should celebrate. She asks him how did it, and says she'll listen this time.

A moment out of time with Tesla, Einstein, and an alien who worked with Spielberg.

Upstairs by the fire, they muse about what they could do with a full-size time machine. Alex wants to watch the capstone be set on the Great Pyramid at Giza. Rachel wants to see *Hamlet* on the first night and be able to invest without worrying if past performance is an indication of future potential, which sets Alex off again, so she asks him how he created the machine. He explains he watched a show about channeling on TV, “you know, spirits talking through people. The Oracle at Delphi, Edgar Cayce, Psychic Friends, Meryl Streep.” That night he woke up with voices in his head—Tesla, Einstein, and an alien who worked with Steven Spielberg on *Close Encounters*—telling him how to build a time machine. Rachel asks who she's talking to now, and Alex says the voices have gone. Rachel rues having missed a chance to talk to someone who worked with Spielberg because just was such an asshole. They laugh, and Rachel puts on some music. They

dance to an old college song, and when the next song is slow, they rock slowly to the music. "I remember times like this," Alex says. "When time didn't exist," Rachel finishes.

The sun rises on a castle and sets on a house of cards.

The next morning a cheery Alex is off to work while Rachel stays home, not being due back to work until the next day. She goes through the mail that Alex has ignored, and finds something disturbing that leads her to the bank for answers. A banker named Jane Doe brings up their account, and things begin to unravel.

When Alex gets home, he finds a distressed Rachel in the den. "We need to talk," she says in that we-need-to-talk tone all women have. "Already?" he replies. She informs him they have less than no money. He's emptied their savings, maxed out his credit cards, taken out and spent two home equity loans she didn't know about, and stopped paying the mortgage! She had to put three payments on her credit card. He says he couldn't stop, and he couldn't tell her, as if his possession were an explanation. She says that's the way he always is when he goes off on one of his mental benders, like when he built the "ultimate food processor."

Rachel runs their checkbook back to when they had money, and has money.

Rachel has an idea. She wants to put their joint checkbook in the machine. She stops Alex before he can protest, and downstairs he shows her how it works. She sets a date and runs the checkbook back two weeks to when their paychecks were deposited, when they had money. They both get a bit dizzy as the machine runs, but it passes. Rachel checks the account balance on her smartphone, and they have money. Alex can't understand how. Rachel doesn't care. It makes as much sense as anything else. More disturbing to Alex is Rachel's appearance. She has a birthmark on her face (and her hair is a different color, but he doesn't notice). She denies anything is different than it has ever been. Rachel goes shopping to buy essentials Alex hasn't while she was gone. After she leaves, he looks in the mirror to see what's different. His eyes are, but he doesn't notice.

Yes, there are side effects.

While she's out he experiments with some wilted lettuce and experience no dizziness. He considers the lettuce and his checkbook, and then he gets a mortgage agreement that has both their names on it and runs it briefly in the machine. He gets dizzy as the machine runs and simultaneously hears the sound of squealing tires, the snap of a mailbox post, and a metal box bounding up the driveway. (See end for machine op rules.)

And more side effects...

Outside Rachel is walking up to the house, picking up scattered items of mail. Alex meets her at the door, and she stares at his mustache. He notices her noticing and asks if he is different. She asks if he got a haircut. She deposits her things in the kitchen and goes to the bathroom to check herself. Alex comes in with one of the envelopes, an overdue notice for the mortgage that Rachel had just paid.

Unnerved by what's happening, Alex says she has to run her checkbook back again. She grudgingly agrees. Alex and Rachel nearly pass out, and the machine ends its cycle with a different ringtone. They both notices changes in the other but not themselves.

Alex wants to stop and dismantle the machine, afraid the changes may be more than superficial—a birthmark might become a hunchback or third eye. Rachel counters with what if the changes are only cosmetic? Or there aren't any changes, really? Besides, if

they don't make some money from it, they'll become the first homeless couple with their own time machine. They can steal electricity and turn other's people's garbage into leftovers and invite their homeless friends to eat with them under the freeway. Is that what he wants?

She leaves him pondering their state while she goes out to move the car off the lawn. When she places the mailbox back near the curb, another letter falls out: "First Foreclosure Warning." Alex's funk deepens. "It's ok, honey," she tells him. "You're you. The you I love. I'm me, the same old me. We're still us, mostly, I'm sure, and we've got each other, whoever we are."

Act II

Alex decides secrecy isn't that important.

An overwrought Alex confides in Nina, explaining how he's invented a time machine and using it has had some unforeseen effects. She can't believe he's invented a time machine and is still writing children's stories about insurance forms. It's clear she doesn't believe him. "I'm not supposed to, am I?" she asks. He takes her home and demonstrates it to her, using another banana. He explains how when a personal item is run in the machine, he and Rachel change. But to him, only Rachel has changed, and to Rachel, only he has changed. Nina suggests he's describing marriage, not time travel. Maybe if he had loved the banana, he would have noticed changes in it too. Her zaniness makes him smile a little. He apologizes for missing Miles' service.

A black SUV drives up and drives a stake in.

Alex and Nina leave to go back to work, and right after a black SUV drives up. A man gets out and walks to the door and attaches a foreclosure notice.

Ivana, a neighbor who lives across the street, notices calls Rachel at work.

Rachel has the answer, but a change isn't as good as a holiday.

Rachel rushes home in a panic and rips the notice off the door. Inside she bounces off the walls until she has a brainstorm. She calls Alex at work, but he's just stepped out of his office, right after loaning his baseball hat to Bob, who's dressed like Alex today in the way in-tune men sometimes do. Bob goes out past the receptionist, who thinks it's Alex, and stretches out on the grass in the sun. Alex's call rolls over to the receptionist, who tells Rachel that Alex is sleeping on the grass. Perfect.

Alex returns to his office as Rachel begins running the checkbook forward, payday to payday. Alex slumps on his desk, stands and then falls back and flips over out of his chair. He realizes what's happening and bolts for home. The next time he's driving and nearly has an accident. He passes out in front of a police officer and is taken off in an ambulance. Rachel keeps running the machine, payday to payday, until it stops. Blistered paint hangs off the side of the machine, and a trickle of smoke rises from it.

Rasputin Alex.

Hours and Alex's later, a dark-eyed bearded, angry Alex arrives home and confronts Rachel, or a Rachel-like spouse. He tells her how's she's changed, that he can see. She doesn't care. He demands that she tell him what's different about himself, and she does, but counters him with "you still feel just like you, don't you." He does, but that's not the point. He asks what she did, and she says she ran their checkbook forward, payday to payday, until it stopped changing, after five paydays. Incriminations fly (Did you get

enough money yet? Did I miss your pledge drive?) Alex threatens her should she use the machine again. This Alex scares her, and she retreats.

All my friends are different, but I'm still the same.

The next night Alex comes home to a raucous party at his house of people he doesn't recognize. He pushes his way through to the kitchen and finds Rachel, equally at a loss. She says someone said they were invited months ago. Alex tells everyone to leave, but after a brief pause they resume partying. He goes into the bedroom and gets his baseball bat from the closet, but sees something else surprising, an over and under shotgun.

Alex, in Rasputin-Eastwood mode, enters the living room and gets on a chair with the shotgun. He screams and gets everyone's attention. A woman screams "He has a gun!" Alex thanks them for their attention and says not to worry. It's not loaded. He breaks it open to show them, and two shells pop out onto the floor. He asks the woman to pick them up, but she says she has to go and flees. He asks another guest to pick them up for him, and that person leaves. A third guest pockets the shells and suggests that Alex put the gun down. "Look," Alex says, "I have more," and takes two more shells from his pocket. The man says maybe the party is over, and Alex agrees that maybe it is. All the guests stream out. Only he and Rachel are left. He looks at her and at the gun. "Yours?" She shakes her head, and he looks puzzled.

Rachel accuses him of terrifying the people, to which he agrees. She says he scared her too and she's going to sleep in the spare room. The next morning, Rachel tells Alex that the Alex she knew would never have done anything like last night. He says he's thought about things like that before. Had he really changed that much? Rachel says enough that she doesn't want to find out more. She's sorry for what she did. She's going to visit Jessica, ok? Alex says again? Rachel's response suggests she hasn't seen her recently.

Days without Rachel.

Rasputin Alex is still mostly Alex, and he regrets where he is and what's happened. Days at work pass with little change until one day he finds himself looking at a snapshot of himself and Rachel looking happy at a party at Mike and Jessica's.

Nina pokes her head in the door and says what's new? Alex says nothing, then admits Rachel is on vacation again. "Again?" replies Nina. They talk, and Nina suggests maybe it isn't the machine that has messed up his marriage. That, unfortunately, gives Alex an idea. He shows her the picture. They were happy then. Nina can see the wheels turning and says he and Rachel should just go to another party and have fun. She gets Alex to promise not to do anything stupid without at least talking to someone first.

A day with Rachel.

Rachel returns, and to her, Alex is now like the opposite pole of a magnet. If he moves toward her, she can't help but wince and pull back. The best he can do is promise not to do anything. She says the same. He says he's not that different. Rachel says maybe not; maybe she is. He follows her to the bedroom, and when he moves toward the closet, she screams. He explains that he was going to show her the gun is gone. She says she couldn't help herself. He says he'll sleep in the spare bedroom, and he leaves.

Alex ends his marriage, and Rachel.

Late that night Alex goes to the bedroom and sees that Rachel is asleep. Then he goes to the basement with a stack of papers—birth certificates, marriage license, house deed, mortgage papers, car registration, insurance, Greenpeace, Sierra Club, Arthur Murray. He decides on just the marriage certificate, and Arthur Murray, so they can learn to dance again. He enters the date on the back of the photo, when they were happy. He pulls a chair over by the workbench and sits down, pushes the start the button. The machine hums and shrieks and he passes out. Later a more normal looking Alex awakens and finds no sign of Rachel in the house, nothing to suggest she was ever there. He has no wedding ring on. No papers have her name on them.

He understands why the checkbook went forward only five paydays.

Nina meets a single guy.

Time passes and Alex struggles. He finally seeks help in Nina, who remembers he built a time machine. He explains that he was married for nine years, and Rachel is now gone. Nina says it must have been before they met. “Consensus is you're barely dating material, but I like your sense of humor. Want to go out tonight? Prove everyone wrong.” He tries to convince her, but she says you can only stretch a rubber band so far.

Alex figures it out!

While standing at his workbench staring at his machine, Alex notices something important on the workbench—the picture of him and Rachel. It still exists! Because they weren't married when the picture was taken. She's not dead!

Alex quickly gets a number for Rachel's father, Bill, and calls him. Does he remember Alex? He dated his daughter in college? Bill does and reminds Alex that he had long hair and a trashy sports car and once brought his daughter home stoned. Glad she dumped him. Alex says he's a short-haired neurosurgeon now and asks for her number. Bill declines but takes his. When Alex asks why he can't have her number, Bill says his daughter is dead. Died a month ago.

In a distant house, far far away.

Rachel sits at the counter of hers and Mike's house. Jessica knocks and comes in, getting herself a cup of coffee. She notices a piece of paper on the counter that says “Alex Burdick” with a phone number. Jessica explains that Alex called her dad trying to find her. Odd, because she was recently wondering what ever happened to him. Jessica remembers the Mountain House scene and they talk about it and laugh. Jessica asks if Rachel is going to call, and Rachel says no. She needs to let the past go. Well, Jessica suggests, maybe he'll call you. Rachel explains that her father said she was dead, something he still does to protect her from all the guys he thinks don't measure up. She goes on to say she once thought she wanted to marry Alex.

Nina to the rescue.

Alex invites Nina over to talk because he isn't coming to grips with things. She comes over with a bag of food and wine and after some small talk, Alex begins to talk in detail about what happened with his machine, and Nina says that's the stupidest thing she's ever heard. He's sincere, though, so she tells him to start at the beginning. They drink

and talk and what was serious seems funny now with wine and Nina's laughing so hard at it. The mailbox, the flipping over in his office, the party.

When Alex gets to the last quivering Rachel, Nina quips "Well, didn't she make the Alex that made her that way? Welcome to Survivor: Marriage. You're Fired!" But when Alex gets choked up, she sees his pain is real. She's concerned and leans over and kisses him, kisses him a little more, and he kisses back. Then Nina pulls back, recognizing that those are "rebound kisses." It helps Alex to finally have someone believe him, and he decides he has to find out what he's done. He gets up and goes downstairs, and she knows he going to do something stupid with the machine.

She follows him to the machine, picks up some wire cutters, and cuts the cable between an electronic thing and the machine and then cuts the 220V plug off and takes it. She tells Alex she'll be back in an hour with help and he's got to promise not to do anything. He does, and she rightfully doesn't believe him. She knocks him out with an empty bottle.

A scientist in a white coat.

Nina finds her a physicist help a bit under the influence because he had a bad day and has been drinking, something he's not very good at. He agrees to come with her. He doesn't think he's eaten, so she says they can stop on the way, and she'll fill him in.

Act III

The cavalry arrives.

Alex is just finishing splicing the cable and attaching another plug when Nina comes in with her pompous brother, Miles, carrying a bottle and fast food bag. Nina tells Alex he fell and hit his head and she went for help. Alex is doubtful but is more interested in Miles, who's full of himself and thinks Alex must be full of shit with his microwave time machine. Alex asks him why he isn't dead. Miles says he might as well be. He doesn't have a grant to look for a new particle he thinks he's found. "Smaller than anything known. Nearly hypothetical. Makes a tachyon look like yesterday's hot air balloon" he explains. Alex says he's probably used it already in his time machine, riling Miles.

Miles asks for a demonstration, and Alex renews a pencil stub from his pocket. Miles thinks it's a parlor trick and wants to see something else, something besides "sending popcorn into the future." Alex asks for his driver's license, but Nina intervenes. Alex then force feeds Miles some very bad cottage cheese, as a control, and then rejuvenates it, finally getting Miles attention. Miles says he can help, but he scoffs at the fact that Alex doesn't know how the thing works or how he built it. Tesla and Einstein incense him more.

Nina gets him focused on helping and he sits and starts making project notes about things they'll need—reverse engineering, a proposal for a grant, a paper for the technical journals—but no channeling crap—animated drawings, alumni impact studies, press releases, a Facebook page...until Alex yells stop, you can't help.

Miles protests, saying Alex has no idea what's he's done. Alex says he's ok with that now that he's seen Miles at work. Miles says there's more to science than one-off appliance wonders. He unwraps his hamburger and is about to take a bite when Alex grabs it from him and puts it in the modified blender on the workbench. "This," he says, "is an appliance!" He turns it on and the blender comes on at many thousands too many RPMs with a flash of light and blows the hamburger to particles. Miles stomps out.

Nina asks Alex if he's going to make things worse, to which Alex says he's going to try one more thing. She says "You're gonna make more ghosts and then complain about being haunted" and a few other pithy things, and leaves.

Once more...

Alex puts his birth certificate in the machine and sets it to just before he used the machine for the first time. He starts it and passes out and slumps to the floor as the machine hums and shrieks and then stops, slightly on fire and smoking heavily. The room fills with smoke as Alex groggily comes to but can't get up and out of the room. The fire grows.

Someone comes down the stairs and rips the paper off the window, letting light in and indistinctly in the smoke revealing a woman. She opens the refrigerator and find the milk carton and dowses the fire. She helps Alex up the stairs.

On the back porch, Alex fully regains consciousness, and sees that his neighbor Ivana has helped him. He thanks her and says he's fine and sees her out. He returns to the basement and rips the rest of the paper off the windows and opens them to let the smoke out.

He hears, distantly, a car door open and close. Then the front door, and footsteps, and footsteps coming down the stairs, and Rachel enters the room. He starts toward her but stops. She doesn't flinch. She looks calm. He looks at her hand and sees a ring, and one on his hand also.

With feeling.

He hugs her and kisses her and she compliments him for noticing she was gone. She says he's different and supposes she is too. He says he was only trying to change himself; he thought she was dead. Her father, she explains, and other things become clear, mostly that they both want the two of them to work out. "Nothing is quite the same, is it?" she says. "No," Alex replies, "but it's new." "Well, we can rediscover everything then," Rachel says.

The End

Rules of the Machine

1. Reality changes a little bit any time the machine is used. Not all changes are visible. Person is unaware of his/her own changes.
2. When a personal item is time-traveled, the changes are greater, and faintness occurs.
3. If a personal item is attached to two people, both are affected.
4. The machine overheats and smokes a little, depending on load.
5. Suggest always making minor adjustments to set/actor but don't draw attention to unless called for. Make a game for audience so Not Person becomes cult film.

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