

# BURN RATE

Written by

Michael A. Richards

RichardsMA@me.com  
RichardsMA.blog  
551-200-0768

FADE IN:

**EXT. BLOCKWAVE BUILDING - MIDTOWN NYC - NIGHT**

A colossal glass monolith. Sign reads BLOCKWAVE EXCHANGE.

**INT. FLASHY BLOCKWAVE OFFICE - SAME**

The 25 million dollar office is being vacuumed by a \$25k/year cleaner. The lights are down. Everyone else is at home but--

**INT. EVAN POLUS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

--VERA GLEAN, late 30s, sits facing Rothko's painting Orange, Red, Yellow, that's hung prominently behind the tech billionaire's desk.

Slim and poised, Vera exudes an effortless confidence. When she steps into a room she can read it like a spreadsheet--analyzing every detail to get to her goal.

She's not alone. Beside is the square-jawed security expert MARK GRANT, watching her while they wait.

EVAN POLUS blusters into the room with the insufferable aura of a thirty year old tech bro. The sound of the vacuum carries in behind him as he immediately begins speaking.

EVAN  
Because we're on wave 3 of a  
secular 15 wave supercycle.

Vera's head snaps around to follow him into the room.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
Others worry about the vicissitudes  
of the market, but I see the  
harmonic structure behind it. The  
data is pure Riemann.  
(waving phone at Vera)  
To answer your question.

VERA  
So the price is going up?  
  
*It's a simple question.*

EVAN  
You read Mandlebrot? Fractal  
geometry?  
  
*Ugh! It'll be a long answer.*

EVAN (CONT'D)

We're seeing recursion across multiple timeframes. It's basically predictive analytics meets theoretical physics.

VERA

So the price is going up?

EVAN

We're talking about asymmetric upside with limited downside exposure. This is alpha generation through mathematical arbitrage. I tell you the trend is up and you can take that to the bank.

VERA

You want me to take his money to your exchange, not a bank.

EVAN

Legacy banking infrastructure is basically mainframe technology from the Carter administration. We're building on distributed ledger architecture with cryptographic proofs. It's like comparing carrier pigeons to quantum communication.

VERA

But at the end of the day, all the company's data--the money--is stored on computers.

Behind, the cleaner is wiping down the desks and polishing the unattended computers.

GRANT

We're insulated from outside intruders. Anyone hacking our system would need physical access.

Vera gives a mischievous smile.

VERA

And how many visitors does your office get each week? Couldn't any of them sneak in an MZ sniffer, like this.

She holds up a USB stick and inserts it into Evan's computer.

Grant springs into action and within two seconds he's removed it and stands looming over Vera.

VERA (CONT'D)  
It's just an empty thumb drive.

EVAN  
And hours of work for Grant to ensure it's nothing else.

GRANT  
We scan for bugs every week. I'll catch anything that comes in here.

Gesturing at the USB key in his hand--

VERA  
Maybe you should start screening every day.

Evan approves.

EVAN  
(to Grant)  
Make it so.

VERA  
I think I've got all I need from you. I'll go back to my client.  
(nodding toward painting)  
He'll be happy to learn you're also a collector.

It takes Evan a second to click.

EVAN  
Yes! This cost 100 million. Well, the real one did. This is just a replica.

VERA  
You don't have the real thing here. That tracks.

POLUS  
(smiling faintly)  
It's not about ownership. It's about meaning. That's Rothko, 1954-- the deeper you look, the quieter it gets.

**EXT. BLOCKWAVE BUILDING - LATER**

Vera's leaning against her car as she watches a helicopter take off from the roof and head to the Hamptons.

At street level, the cleaner leaves the building and strikes up a cigarette. Vera spots her and walks over.

Wordlessly, the cleaner hands over a USB device and Vera passes her an envelope of cash. Then she gets back in her car, the helicopter flashing in the distance.

**INT. PANORAMA CAPITAL, CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING**

Vera's typing at her computer, stacks of papers covering the conference room table. Behind, a whiteboard is covered in an array of figures and data on company performance. To the right is a list of five companies.

1. Pedestal
2. BlockWave Exchange
3. DrivenForth
4. Laminar Capital
5. Roadhouse Construction

Beneath BlockWave are details of her investigation:

- Transaction dates circled in red: "March 15 - \$847M" "April 3 - \$1.2B"
- A subsidiary company name: "Crypto Solutions Ltd - Cayman Islands"
- A handwritten note: "Customer deposits ≠ reported reserves"

A knock at the door. CHASE BECKER, 40s, a handsome go-getter and bit of a work husband, peeks his head in.

BECKER

Morning, superstar. Quick favor-- need you to meet our new analyst. Good optics for the client-facing team.

He steps into the room holding the door open for TOMAS-- youthful and undiplomatic--to follow. Vera stands and shakes his hand.

As they talk, Becker's eyes drift to the whiteboard behind Vera.

TOMAS

Woah! You've really been Beautiful  
Minding in here.

BECKER

Vera specializes in... let's call  
it "downside opportunity  
identification." She finds  
structural weaknesses in overvalued  
assets.

TOMAS

So, what metrics do you use make  
your bear case? EPS? Dividends?  
Corporate leadership?

VERA

Fraud.

She lets that hang in the air for a moment.

VERA (CONT'D)

I look for companies that break the  
law and are going to get caught.

Becker's eyes are now fixed on a specific line on the  
whiteboard: "Crypto Solutions Ltd - Cayman Islands"

BECKER

She makes sure of that.  
(forced casualness)  
She's got quite the success rate.  
This your current pipeline?  
Interesting mix of targets.

VERA

That's my shit list. Something  
doesn't add up for each of them.

TOMAS

BlockWave, huh? Becker even  
mentioned them in my interview.  
(to Becker)  
...some big crypto merger back in  
2020.

BECKER

That was in 2020...

VERA

I'm just working on suspicions  
right now.

TOMAS

How do you find the answers?

Becker's eyes flick briefly to the Cayman Islands line--then away. He forces a tight smile.

VERA

Proprietary reports, unpublished records, phone logs of everyone who enters an office. When it comes down to it, though, you can sit opposite someone and tell whether they're full of shit.

Becker shifts uncomfortably at the thought.

TOMAS

You can really tell?

FLASHBACK to Evan's opening line but from Vera's POV.

EVAN

...we're on wave 3 of a secular 15 wave supercycle...

END FLASHBACK

VERA

Yeah, you can tell.

Becker is discomfited by this conversation. She's days away from exposing everything so he tries to shift the focus.

BECKER

Hey, let's table the forensic accounting for now. Team dinner? That new omakase place--my treat.

**EXT. VERA'S STATEN ISLAND HOME - LATER**

A large 4 bedroom Todt Hill house with driveway and well kept lawn out front and out back, leading to woods behind.

**INT. VERA'S HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Vera's husband, DANIEL (40s), peels garlic at a dark marble island. Dad bod; no kids, though. He pours himself a glass from a half empty bottle of wine.

**MONTAGE**

- Vera, Becker, and Tomas get led into a restaurant past waiting guests. Three sakes.
- Daniel cuts a stick of frozen butter in half and puts it into the microwave. He spots his reflection in the microwave door and touches his double chin disapprovingly.
- The sushi chef extravagantly uses a blowtorch to sear the fish. The three are awed. More sake.
- Daniel stands at the marble island eating spaghetti alone as he finishes the last of the wine.
- The three leave the restaurant and Vera hops in an Uber. Destination: Staten Island.

**END MONTAGE**

Daniel is washing dishes when the headlights from Vera's taxi flash through the kitchen window.

Vera enters in a bubbly mood. She plonks her bag down.

DANIEL  
There's spaghetti.

VERA  
Thanks, hon. I'll put it in the  
fridge for tomorrow. I had sushi  
tonight.

Daniel's disappointed.

VERA (CONT'D)  
What?

DANIEL  
I wish you'd tell me when you're  
gonna be late.

VERA  
It'll still be good tomorrow.

DANIEL  
Not as good as it used to be.

Vera goes to pour herself a glass of wine, but it's empty.  
She lets out an exasperated sigh.

DANIEL (CONT'D)  
You were late. I can open another  
one.



Vera's *joie de vie* has evaporated.

VERA

Forget it. I drank too much anyway.  
I'm just going to get some sleep.

Daniel finishes wiping the dishes and turns to Vera. Like shadows at dusk their marriage slipped an evening at a time.

DANIEL

OK. I'll be up later.

Vera grabs her bag from the counter. Now it's twice as heavy--  
laden with emotional weight. She goes to leave but notices  
Daniel's face scrutinizing something out the window.

VERA

What is it?

DANIEL

...I think I saw something.

VERA

Lock the door and forget about it.

Daniel approaches the back door and pushes it open revealing  
the inky black night. Vera can faintly descry his outline as  
Daniel reaches out his arm and flips on the porch light.

In a flash the yard is illuminated. Daniel falls back through  
the door into the kitchen. A broad man in hunting gear falls  
through on top.

In the commotion a gun skitters across the hard tile floor.

Daniel pulls the attacker close with his left and swings with  
his right.

Contact!

The attacker is disoriented for a second but the blow  
fractures Daniel's wrist.

Still beneath the attacker, Daniel reaches for the gun. The  
fight shifts in an instant as they scramble for the weapon.

Four hands clumsily grope the gun but none can secure it.

In the maelstrom someone pulls the trigger--

--BOOM.

A muffled shot.

Vera is shaken out of shock by the noise and vile odor of gunpowder and cauterized flesh.

Vera grabs the empty wine bottle by the neck--the dregs run down her arm--and she smashes it against the attacker's arm, who drops the gun.

It falls to Vera's feet. Pure luck.

The two clock the situation. Vera grabs the gun and fires off a shot that hits the doorframe. The attacker sprints off through the back yard.

She holds the gun pointed at the door until she feels safe. Her legs give way and she collapses over her husband's dead body, his blood seeping into her clothes.

#### **EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT**

Rain has begun to fall on the squat, brick building, a holdover from the 1970s with flickering fluorescent lights over the entrance and a flag snapping wetly in the wind.

A pair of tired officers smoke under a narrow awning. The glow of dispatch monitors pulses faintly through the rain-streaked windows.

#### **INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT**

An assortment of metal desks, paint peeling from the decades.

Clock: 3.15am.

All the detectives are diligently sorting through evidence. DETECTIVE MORGAN, 60, world-weary from a lot too many nights like this, peeks through his office window to see Vera sleeping on his couch.

He calls across the room to DSI STEPHANIE WATTS (40s):

MORGAN

Watts. Any physical evidence that puts the attacker in the kitchen?

WATTS

Footprints to the woods, but the rain washed them out. One partial print inside--could be the landscapers from last week. Gun's got no serial number.

MORGAN  
So we've got nothing concrete.

A voice from behind Detective Morgan:

READE (O.S.)  
Maybe there *is* nothing concrete.

Morgan spins around.

MORGAN  
Jesus, Reade. It's the middle of  
the night.

READE, (50), public prosecutor in an immaculate suit that  
conceals a flabby body. His hair is uniformly black; the lack  
of any grays belying his fastidious dying routine.

READE  
She has no injuries. She says there  
was an attacker, but there's no  
other evidence.

MORGAN  
Even without evidence of another  
attacker, there's no evidence  
pointing at Vera Glean.

READE  
At least you can place her at the  
scene of the crime.

MORGAN  
(deadpan)  
Yes, Reade. We tend to find all  
victims at the scene of the crime.

The sound of a door swinging open and hitting the wall breaks  
the tension. ELIJAH the boyish computer tech pushes through.

ELIJAH  
Detective Morgan, we finished the  
first pass through of the victim's  
phone. You should see this.

Morgan scrolls through the laptop Elijah hands him.

MORGAN  
Daniel Glean sent these messages?

ELIJAH  
We also found similar messages in  
archived chat logs from apps he  
deleted--maybe to cover his tracks.

Detective Morgan hands the laptop to Reade whose eyes light up as he reads the text exchanges.

READE

Motive!

