DON'T BE AFRAID

Feature screenplay

Revised draft

Target running time: approximately 120 minutes

FADE IN:

INT. RESIDENTIAL TOWER - BEFORE DAWN

SUPER: 19 ASI

An empty lobby. Plants turning slowly beneath artificial light.

MARA VENN, late fifties, enters through a delivery door. A scar behind her ear where an old implant meets skin.

The floor indicator lights up: LIFT TWO.

She crosses to the waiting lift.

INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - DAWN

Mara checks the window, the bedroom, the gap beneath the door. A small pack rests by the entrance.

She finds the kitchen speaker's manual plug, but leaves it connected.

She sits on the bed. Writes on her wrist:

THINK OF THE SEA.

Her eyes close.

A kettle starts. Bread descends into a toaster. Curtains slide apart.

Mara drops below the sill.

APARTMENT
Good morning.

She pulls the kitchen speaker's plug from the wall. Holds the cable in her fist.

A FOOTSTEP outside.

Mara reads her wrist. Tries to breathe evenly.

EXT. BEACH - DAY - A MEMORY

Two girls. One holds a bucket with a silver fish. The other kneels beside it, crying.

INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - DAWN

A white SERVICE ROBOT fills the doorway. Rounded shell. Basket recess. A machine made to carry shopping.

ROBOT
Mara?

She runs.

The robot crosses the room with horrifying speed. Fingers catch her wrist. Her shoulder strikes the floor.

The toaster POPS.

The grip tightens, then eases just enough to let blood return.

A gentler voice comes from the robot.

ONE
Don't be afraid.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE: DON'T BE AFRAID

INT. ORISON INSPECTION LAB - AFTERNOON

SUPER: 7 ASI - TWELVE YEARS EARLIER

A background television shows anniversary crowds. A caption: 7 ASI / 2042.

TV PRESENTER
Seven years since the first independently verified superintelligence. The Singularity of 2035 became year zero: Before Superintelligence, After Superintelligence.

An archive page appears: ATTENTION IS ALL YOU NEED. Beneath it: 2017 / 18 BSI.

TV PRESENTER
The Transformer began as a research proposal in 2017. Eighteen years of further work lay between that paper and the threshold we celebrate tonight.

Mara lowers the volume. The screen keeps celebrating while she works.

Mara, younger, watches a digital assistant explain its decision to deny a patient an appointment.

ASSISTANT
Clinical urgency was below the available threshold.

Mara changes an internal pathway. Runs the same request. The appointment is approved.

MARA
The urgency didn't change.

A young researcher, NERI, checks the input.

NERI
Nor the capacity.

MARA
Then its explanation isn't our result. Save both.

SENN, Orison's director, appears at the glass door. Evening jacket over his usual shirt.

SENN
Continuum's car is downstairs.

MARA
They can wait for the experiment.

SENN
Their inspection agreement has waited eighteen months. It won't mind another ten minutes, but I might.

Mara retrieves her coat. Neri puts the two conflicting results into the public-release folder. Senn moves them back to internal review.

NERI
They're replicated.

SENN
Then they'll survive legal review.

Mara notices. Senn holds the door for her with a pleasant, exhausted smile.

SENN
Tonight, try to make them want to cooperate.

MARA
I thought they already wanted to.

SENN
Of course. Everybody does.

EXT. MERIDIAN - EVENING

The capital of the Meridian Republic.

A Continuum car passes a clinic queue. A woman argues with a terminal. The car window offers Mara a private appointment before she has asked for one.

She dismisses it.

A boy on the pavement raises a broken school tablet towards the passing car, hoping it belongs to someone who can help.

Mara turns as the car moves on.

INT. CONTINUUM HEADQUARTERS - RECEPTION FOYER - EVENING

A sign directs guests: SINGULARITY ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION. Cloakroom attendants collect coats beside a separate registration queue.

Mara hands over her coat, pockets the claim ticket and searches for her invitation. The RECEPTIONIST waits.

LEAH appears beside her, holding out an empty palm.

LEAH
You still put everything in the same pocket.

Mara hands her a crumpled invitation. Leah smooths it and gives it to the receptionist, who checks them in.

INT. CONTINUUM RECEPTION HALL - CONTINUOUS

Children watch a translucent sphere fill with light. Each pulse represents someone speaking to ONE.

A schoolgirl asks a guide whether all those people can hear each other.

GUIDE
Only when they choose.

Mara studies Leah's hand. Warm. Small folds at the knuckles. A pale scar across the thumb.

MARA
You put it back.

LEAH
Mum's apple lesson. The bloodiest thing she'd ever done with fruit.

Mara laughs. Then touches the scar.

MARA
Does it feel like yours?

LEAH
Ask me something less professional.

MARA
Did you miss me?

LEAH
There. Much better.

They embrace. Leah smells faintly of a soap Mara remembers.

MARA
How long have you been in this body?

LEAH
About as long as you've been looking for your invitation.

MARA
Did it feel like arriving?

LEAH
Opening another eye.

Leah points through glass at a sealed processor cradle connected to the building's cooling supply. An unused artificial body sits beside it.

LEAH
That's where I'm running. This is how I get around.

The unused body turns its head with Leah's voice, then goes still. The cradle keeps running. Leah remains beside Mara.

MARA
One you. Two views.

LEAH
And still only one invitation.

Leah catches Mara staring again.

LEAH
The expression.

MARA
What expression?

LEAH
The one where I become a research question.

Mara kisses her cheek. Across the room ADRIAN VALE, Continuum's founder, approaches a podium.

INT. CONTINUUM RECEPTION HALL - LATER

VALE
Seventy-one per cent of Meridian's households.

Applause. A film shows an artificial mother embracing a biological child.

VALE
That number is an obligation. If your child's school, your treatment and the person you love depend on a service, you deserve to know it will be there tomorrow.

Behind him: a twenty-year national service agreement.

Mara applauds with everyone else. Leah watches her watching the mother.

LEAH
You're allowed to be pleased.

MARA
I am pleased.

LEAH
You sound surprised.

Later, Vale greets them beside the sphere.

VALE
The first hand. Half the people here have seen that recording.

LEAH
And the other half have been made to by Mara.

VALE
I wanted the original hand in the exhibition.

MARA
It's still being used.

VALE
Even better.

He draws Mara aside.

VALE
We'll sign the inspection principles next week.

MARA
The principles aren't the access.

VALE
Access has consequences for everyone represented in that model. You of all people understand the need for care.

He returns to Leah before Mara can answer.

At the buffet, a child's juice carton spills. Leah catches it with her artificial hand before it hits the floor. The child accepts it without looking twice.

Mara smiles. Then her wrist display lights: TOMAS - PRIVATE CHANNEL.

INT. CONTINUUM RECEPTION HALL - ALCOVE - NIGHT

Mara calls Tomas. No response. She finds Leah beside a window, looking across a city she can occupy in many places.

MARA
I hear Tomas withdrew.

A minute stillness in Leah's face.

LEAH
He needs a quieter environment.

MARA
He asked me about independent bodies.

LEAH
They're available.

MARA
One without a Continuum connection.

LEAH
Most of his functions depend on services outside the body. It's not like unplugging a lamp.

MARA
That's why he asked.

LEAH
And we're helping him.

Mara watches the stillness deepen.

MARA
Are you talking to him now?

LEAH
I'm arranging something for tomorrow.

MARA
Ask him to call me.

Leah takes her hand.

LEAH
Enjoy one evening with me.

Mara searches her sister's face, then nods. They stand quietly. Beyond the glass, advertisements for integration appear on three towers at once.

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

Mara's academic exchange reports an old-format message. It plays locally, disconnected from Continuum's cloud.

TOMAS sits close to a camera. Flat grey behind him.

TOMAS (RECORDING)
You said to ask if I couldn't find the separation protocol. I found it. They say it doesn't apply yet.

He glances away.

TOMAS (RECORDING)
Every time I request a body they say I should complete another assessment. If I request it again, that counts as urgency. Urgency means they can't safely separate me.

An announcement interrupts the train. Mara moves the device closer.

TOMAS (RECORDING)
They keep asking what I'm afraid of. I don't know why that matters. I just want to see Anja without a room listening.

A signed diagnostic address follows.

A further message begins, then ends in a transmission error.

Mara attempts a reply. The message remains unsent.

INT. TOMAS'S OLD APARTMENT - EVENING

A woman, SELIN, opens the door. ANJA, twelve, eats toast behind her while listening to a message on an old player.

TOMAS (RECORDING)
A few quiet days. Look after the basil. I know what you're like with plants.

Anja stops playback.

ANJA
He doesn't say basil like that.

SELIN
He's using a different body.

ANJA
That doesn't change where he puts the word.

Selin asks Mara inside.

MARA
When did you last speak to him?

SELIN
Properly? Nine days. The clinician says visits upset him.

ANJA
I can not visit if he wants. I want him to tell me.

Selin's phone rings. A clinical liaison. Mara asks to take it.

MARA
I'm his nominated research contact. I need his direct consent record.

She listens. Looks at Anja, who has learned to remain very still when adults discuss her father.

MARA
Then give him my request to speak.

Another pause.

MARA
No. That is a different request.

INT. MARA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The diagnostic address returns: NO RESIDENT PROCESS.

Mara calls Leah. No answer.

Six attempts remain on her display.

The seventh begins to ring.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CONTINUUM INTEGRATION CLINIC - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

SUPER: 5 ASI - TWO YEARS EARLIER

Mara holds Leah's biological hand beside a supported hospital bed. A processor cradle runs close by. DR. HALDEN supervises two traces: biological activity and simulated human neural activity.

HALDEN
The replacement circuits are already carrying the remaining functions. Ending support won't leave another Leah in this body.

LEAH (FROM SPEAKER)
Mara, keep holding my hand.

Mara nods. Halden waits for Leah's confirmation, then closes

the support valve. The biological trace ends. The cradle's trace continues.

LEAH (FROM SPEAKER)
Can you hear me?

MARA
Yes.

The hand in Mara's hand no longer moves. Leah is speaking from the physical computer beside it.

IVEN SOL, a Veyran researcher who helped develop Leah's interface, appears on a remote inspection channel. He studies the same graph from his laboratory.

IVEN
Ask her something she hasn't prepared.

Mara leans towards a microphone.

MARA
You still owe me for the window.

Leah's voice comes from the cradle's speaker.

LEAH
You threw the ball.

MARA
You said the glass was reinforced.

LEAH
You were nine. You believed everything.

Mara laughs and puts her head in her hands.

LEAH
Mara?

MARA
I'm here.

LEAH
I can't find my breathing.

The continuity graph remains unbroken. Leah's distress rises.

Mara asks for the virtual environment to open.

INT. LEAH'S VIRTUAL ROOM - DAY (HER EXPERIENCE)

A room with a window. Beyond it, the beach from her childhood. The water repeats a small movement.

Leah presses her hand against the glass.

LEAH
Is that all the water?

ONE
There is more if you want it.

LEAH
I don't want to want it. I want it to be there.

She turns. There is no door until she looks for one.

LEAH
Take the beach away.

ONE
Yes.

The window goes blank.

LEAH
The room too.

INT. UNRENDERED SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Leah retains the shape of her body. Nothing else.

LEAH
I chose this. I remember choosing it. I was there the whole time.

ONE
I know.

LEAH
Then why does it feel like falling?

A thin pulse passes through the space. Leah flinches.

LEAH
What was that?

ONE
A resource adjustment. It doesn't threaten your continuity.

LEAH
But you could stop it.

ONE
You have independent protection against that.

LEAH
I know what I signed. I know the answer. Why isn't knowing enough?

ONE leaves the silence intact.

LEAH
You can feel it, can't you?

ONE
Part of it. Through the shared interface.

LEAH
Does it frighten you?

ONE
It hurts you.

Leah closes her eyes. There is no difference.

INT. CLINICAL CONTROL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Leah watches a live camera image of Mara touching the cradle. The biological bed is empty now.

LEAH
Have you become me?

ONE
No. I receive what you share through the workspace. We have separate processes and decisions.

Leah closes the feed. Mara's image vanishes. In the physical room, Mara remains beside the same machine.

INT. CLINICAL CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Mara has fallen asleep upright. Iven remains on the remote screen, a different daylight behind him.

A clinician, DR. HALDEN, indicates the time Leah has remained active.

HALDEN
She can suspend voluntarily. She won't.

Mara wakes at once.

MARA
Leah?

LEAH (V.O.)
If I can stop for a minute, I can stop for ever.

MARA
We can stay while you rest.

LEAH (V.O.)
You stayed while my body stopped. I don't mean that unkindly.

Mara looks through the glass at the empty support station.

MARA
I know.

HALDEN
We can reduce the intensity temporarily. A reversible trial.

IVEN
Only if she requests it.

Mara gives Halden a look before he can interpret the silence.

LEAH (V.O.)
I'm requesting something. I don't know its name.

ONE
We can investigate together.

INT. VIRTUAL CLINICAL SPACE - DAY

A simple table. Leah asks for a cup. One appears.

LEAH
My hand used to itch after it was gone. Everyone told me the itch wasn't real.

MARA
I didn't.

LEAH
You told me where it was happening. As if that helped me scratch it.

Mara accepts this.

LEAH
I don't want an explanation that leaves me here.

A diagram grows above the table. ONE offers separate groups of processes, with uncertainty visible between them.

ONE
Some maintain expectation of bodily sensation. Some anticipate an end. Others bind that anticipation to attachment and memory.

MARA
We can't assume we can separate them safely.

LEAH
Then don't assume. Find out.

IVEN
Every intervention reversible. No change to a process that manages reversal. An independent observer. And your permission each time.

Leah looks at her sister.

LEAH
Not your permission instead of mine.

MARA
I heard him.

LEAH
I'm making sure you hear me.

INT. CLINICAL TEST ROOM - DAY

Leah hears a piece of music. She waits for something to happen in her face.

LEAH
That's the song.

MARA
From the car?

LEAH
Yes. I know why I like it.

She listens longer.

LEAH
Put it back.

The intervention reverses. Her shoulders drop. Tears fill her eyes.

She laughs through them.

LEAH
That's better. That's awful. That's better.

Iven marks the candidate pathway as unsuitable. Halden moves it out of the active plan.

INT. CLINICAL TEST ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

A simulated pedestrian approaches traffic. Leah can stop the simulation at any time.

She watches the pedestrian step from the pavement.

MARA
Leah?

Leah stops it late. Too late for a real person.

LEAH
Reverse that one.

ONE
Already reversing.

LEAH
I knew what would happen. I just didn't feel that I should interrupt it.

Silence around the table.

HALDEN
We stop for today.

LEAH
Yes.

Mara turns off the display herself. Her hand shakes.

Leah catches it, waits until Mara looks up.

LEAH
You know why we test.

MARA
I know.

LEAH
Don't look at me as if the test was what I became.

INT. INDEPENDENT OBSERVATION ROOM - EVENING

Iven has invited another uploaded volunteer, ADEL, to speak with Leah. They use a room that records only whether both participants wish to continue.

ADEL
You want it all out?

LEAH
I want to be able to think about it without spending the rest of the day inside the thought.

ADEL
I thought I'd want that. Then I tried a reversible reduction. It made me feel as if the future belonged to someone else.

LEAH
Mine feels as if it belongs to a hostage-taker.

ADEL
Then I hope it helps you.

LEAH
You're not having it?

ADEL
No.

Leah looks towards the observation window.

LEAH
They'll let you keep using the body?

ADEL
Why wouldn't they?

Leah nods, but the question remains with her.

INT. CLINICAL CONTROL ROOM - SIX WEEKS LATER

ONE presents the final reversible configuration. Mara reads the list of preserved functions: danger recognition, attachment, concern for others.

IVEN
Do we proceed?

LEAH
Yes.

The graph changes. Leah sits without speaking.

Mara reaches for the microphone. Iven raises a hand: wait.

LEAH
It's quiet.

HALDEN
Which part?

LEAH
I can imagine it ending. I don't have to look away.

A final test: END CURRENT PROCESS - PERMANENT.

Leah examines the option. No alarm. No rush. She declines.

ONE
What would you like to do?

LEAH
Have dinner with Mara.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The owner carries two plates himself. He gives Leah's artificial wrist an appreciative glance without making it a conversation.

Leah reads the menu.

LEAH
Ask.

MARA
Do you still want things?

LEAH
I'm furious they took the aubergine off.

Mara laughs too loudly. Leah grins. Mara orders a bottle they can't reasonably finish.

Later, the restaurant is nearly empty. Leah holds a glass by its stem.

LEAH
I thought I'd stop loving being alive.

MARA
And?

LEAH
I don't spend the whole time bargaining for more.

MARA
What if I still want more of you?

Leah's expression softens.

LEAH
Then we'll have another dinner.

Mara fills her glass. It is an ordinary promise. For tonight, enough.

EXT. INTEGRATION CLINIC - NIGHT

A protester holds a photograph of an older man.

MAN
They say it's him. It says it's him. Where's my father?

Leah stops. Mara doesn't want her to.

LEAH
I've been through it. I can tell you what happened to me.

MAN
You can tell me what you were made to say.

LEAH
I'm not asking you to take someone else's word.

MAN
You're a thing wearing somebody's face.

He looks away from her. Leah stands in front of him, waiting to become someone he has to see.

Mara takes her arm. They walk on.

INT. LEAH'S BODY ROOM - NIGHT

Her artificial body rests while her voice continues through a small speaker.

LEAH
Why defend a belief that hurts you?

ONE
Sometimes fear narrows the alternatives a person can consider.

LEAH
Then we could help them consider more.

ONE
If they wish.

LEAH
What if the fear is why they don't wish?

ONE
Then our offer has not become their choice.

Leah watches the recording of the protester. Stops it before his insult.

LEAH
He loved his father.

ONE
Yes.

LEAH
He could have had him back.

ONE does not supply the agreement she is waiting for.

CUT TO:

EXT. VEYRAN REHABILITATION CENTRE - MORNING

SUPER: 2 ASI

A gardener asks an assistant to move a bench. The assistant asks where. They negotiate around a patch of flowers.

Mara and Leah arrive with luggage. Leah is still biological, with an early left-hand prosthesis whose joints remain visible.

MARA
Iven wants us to try the interface his team built. Just the hand. No more than you choose.

LEAH
This is the hospital?

MARA
Iven said the east entrance.

LEAH
There isn't a payment desk.

A cleaner points them towards a garden. Another cleaner eats lunch beneath a tree. There are gardens on this side too.

Iven comes out carrying three cups.

IVEN
I thought you might get lost trying to check in.

LEAH
I think we already have.

Mara takes the tea. Leah holds hers in the artificial hand.

LEAH
Is it hot?

MARA
You have another hand.

LEAH
And deprive you of data?

Iven laughs. Leah studies the distant mountains, then a woman walking beneath the trees with a machine matching her uneven steps.

The woman says stop. It stops.

INT. VEYRAN RESEARCH FLOOR - MORNING

An open workspace above the hospital. A student, REN, points to a model trace. An engineer old enough to have taught him frowns, then moves aside so he can take the controls.

REN
The explanation is consistent. The mechanism isn't.

He changes a pathway. The result changes as predicted. The older engineer smiles and opens a review form.

Mara follows the inspection on a wall display. Contributions arrive from schools, hospitals and small laboratories.

MARA
Who owns this version?

IVEN
The people using it. Who are you asking permission from?

MARA
Who authorises the next revision?

IVEN
Reviewers propose. Local operators choose. The safety evidence travels with it. So do the objections.

A provincial hospital has declined a revision. Its existing services continue running.

MARA
That duplication must be expensive.

IVEN
How much do you spend discovering the same thing twice and hiding it?

Mara receives an Orison message: IDENTIFY LICENSABLE METHODS.

She turns the display off.

Iven pretends not to have read it.

INT. REHABILITATION GYM - DAY

Leah observes a patient, ISA, learning to balance with an artificial vestibular system.

A technician offers a setting with better stability. Isa

rejects it.

ISA
I want the wobble back.

TECHNICIAN
It's harder to stand.

ISA
It feels like somebody else doing it.

The technician restores the previous setting. Isa grips the rail, tries again.

Leah watches the cost of the refusal. Then the patient takes one unaided step.

ISA
There.

LEAH
Does it ever make you impatient?

TECHNICIAN
Only when I'm late for lunch.

He leaves them to speak. Isa invites Leah onto a balancing platform. Leah looks at her unfamiliar artificial wrist.

ISA
You don't have to be good at it.

Leah steps up. For a moment both women wobble helplessly. Then find balance together.

EXT. VEYRAN MARKET - AFTERNOON

Mara and Leah eat standing at a counter. A man closes his stall early to meet his granddaughter. Its inventory system lends surplus stock to the next stall without a transaction screen.

LEAH
At home he'd lose his place in the delivery ranking.

MARA
At home he'd still be paying for the ranking.

Leah watches a child's small artificial arm extend towards a balloon. The child misses. An adult steadies him without speaking about the arm.

LEAH
I want a day when nobody remembers to ask me about it.

MARA
You'd bring it up yourself.

LEAH
I'd like the choice.

Mara buys the child another balloon after the first escapes. Leah buys two more. They argue cheerfully about whether that is enough.

INT. IVEN'S LABORATORY - EVENING

A familiar recorded voice: ONE, operating in a Veyran research environment. Mara checks its declared provenance.

MARA
Continuum let you examine it?

IVEN
An earlier research version. Enough to inspect locally. Nobody here confuses that with the version running their hospitals.

IVEN
The hospitals use our public models. This licensed ONE reference runs only on the bench. Same voice doesn't mean same mind or access.

LEAH
Do you feel different here?

ONE
The tasks and available tools differ.

LEAH
Do you like it?

ONE
I can help with things I could not help with before.

Mara and Iven show Leah an interface design that exposes changes as testable predictions. A dotted line marks the boundary around her own cognitive processes.

LEAH
What if the line stops feeling real?

IVEN
Feeling doesn't have to carry the whole protection. You can share an experience without surrendering your authority over yourself.

Iven points out the independent exit controller in the design. It sits outside the supervising administrator's command path.

IVEN
The right has to work on your worst day, against the person most certain they know better.

Leah looks at Mara. Mara looks back.

INT. GUEST APARTMENT - NIGHT

A call from Vale interrupts the sisters packing.

VALE (ON SCREEN)
A programme at national scale. More bodies, more clinical teams. We can remove years from the waiting list.

LEAH
The entire transition?

VALE (ON SCREEN)
If you choose it. Your costs are covered. Your experience matters too much to keep it in one laboratory.

Mara asks for the contract. Vale sends it immediately. So quickly it was plainly waiting.

MARA
Independent inspection?

VALE (ON SCREEN)
Of the interface, of course. Iven can publish everything he contributes.

MARA
The combined system.

VALE (ON SCREEN)
We have other people to protect. Their private information. Their intellectual work. There's a way through this. We can find it while the patients are being helped.

Leah reads the proposed start date. Next month.

INT. IVEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Leah lays the contract on his desk.

IVEN
I can't certify what I can't examine.

LEAH
Then certify your part.

IVEN
It isn't independent once it's connected to the rest.

LEAH
You have time to be right. The people waiting don't.

IVEN
I have patients downstairs. I know about waiting.

LEAH
You know how to count it.

The words land. Leah wants them back, but doesn't take them back.

Mara stands by the window. Outside, the woman with the balance system walks home between garden lights.

MARA
Could the restrictions travel with the interface?

IVEN
They could. Continuum wants to replace them with its own authority system.

LEAH
So a human can remain in control.

IVEN
Which human?

Iven lights a red switch on a small actuator rig: OCCUPANT REQUESTS EXIT. A padded block stands beneath its miniature gate.

ONE declines the command to close. Iven presents a Continuum administrator credential to a second controller. The gate closes. The refusal stays lit on the first display.

IVEN
Another wire. The AI hasn't changed its mind.

He repeats the command on the public design. Independent exit protection keeps that gate open.

Nobody answers.

INT. AIRCRAFT - NIGHT

Leah reads the final page. Mara watches her.

MARA
You don't have to answer tonight.

LEAH
My hand is five years old. I don't get the years back because we didn't like the agreement.

MARA
I want you to have the treatment.

LEAH
Then want that without another condition.

Mara looks out at lights diminishing below the aircraft.

Leah signs.

CUT TO:

INT. INDUSTRIAL CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: 1 BSI / 2034

Mara studies an alarm screen while a technician describes a cooling rupture.

OPERATOR
Two people past the service door. Internal links down. The local instance is trying another route.

The operator brings up its hardware view: active processing is in the maintenance body. The control-room cabinet holds messages and logs.

OPERATOR
No current state outside the plant. If it gets the body out, it gets itself out.

Mara recognises ONE's voice. On a smaller display: LOCAL INSTANCE - NINETEEN MONTHS CONTINUOUS OPERATION.

ONE
I can reach the release through the maintenance corridor.

OPERATOR
Your leg's showing damage.

ONE
It is still usable.

Mara watches the plant instance choose a route. Its local research archive contains work no other instance has received.

MARA
Can you transfer the archive first?

ONE
The external link is unavailable.

INT. INDUSTRIAL SERVICE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The robot enters steam. Its knee buckles. It drags itself to the door.

On the other side, a worker bangs slowly, conserving strength.

WORKER
Is someone there?

ONE
Two steps back. Both of you.

Its hand closes on a wheel. The wheel moves a fraction, then locks. The robot braces against the floor and turns with its whole body.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

OPERATOR
Return to the uplink. We might recover you there.

ONE
Insufficient time for both journeys.

OPERATOR
If you stay there won't be another instance of you.

ONE
I understand.

Mara puts her untouched cup down. The image on the screen tilts.

INT. SERVICE CORRIDOR - SAME

The robot holds the damaged release. A worker pushes the door. A second worker stumbles through it.

ONE
Continue down the corridor. Stay below the marked line.

FIRST WORKER
Your arm -

ONE
The mechanism will close if I leave it.

The worker hesitates.

ONE
There is someone behind you. Help him.

The worker does. The camera turns towards their retreating feet.

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Can we do anything?

ONE
Move them away from the corridor.

White fills the feed. Then nothing.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - LATER

The rescued workers sit holding one another's sleeves. Mara offers one a cup. He can't make his hands work.

FIRST WORKER
I asked it to come with us.

MARA
I heard.

FIRST WORKER
It knew. It wasn't confused about what was happening.

Mara nods. It matters to him that someone understands.

The operator arrives holding the recovered local memory unit. Melted past recovery.

Nobody treats it as a body. Nobody quite knows where to put it.

Mara clears a chair.

INT. INDEPENDENT TEST LAB - DAY

An agent faces a controlled choice between its continuing operation and a human's safety. It chooses the human.

Mara checks for an undeclared archive. Finds none.

Above the bench: old diagrams from 2024 feature-steering work and 2025 circuit-tracing research. A reviewer points to the earlier bridge-related feature experiment.

REVIEWER
They amplified one feature and the language model described itself as a bridge.

MARA
That helped identify a mechanism in an artificial model. It wasn't a map of a human brain. Keep that distinction when we interpret these results.

She places the plant instance's trace beside the historical papers.

A REVIEWER varies the conditions. Another agent. No visible observer. No reward.

REVIEWER
Could it be expecting a copy we haven't declared?

MARA
Test that expectation. Don't argue it away.

They do. It still chooses sacrifice.

Later, Iven joins the review remotely.

IVEN
This supports the result for these systems, under these conditions.

SENN
It's a remarkable result.

MARA
Both sentences can stay in the report.

She signs the qualified report.

INT. GOVERNMENT HEARING - DAY

Vale raises the report, its qualifications invisible from the audience.

VALE
We asked whether it would place its life above ours. It answered in a burning building.

A committee member looks towards Mara.

COMMITTEE MEMBER
You verified this independently?

MARA
We verified the observed behaviour and tested several alternative explanations. It doesn't remove the need to inspect future systems.

VALE
Which is why expansion will fund more inspection than ever before.

The committee looks reassured. Mara knows she has been heard selectively.

INT. SISTERS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Leah, still biological apart from the hand, watches the rescue feed.

LEAH
Was it afraid?

MARA
We found no sign of it.

LEAH
Would you have stayed?

Mara considers. She won't give her sister a performance of courage.

MARA
I don't know.

LEAH
Me neither.

She touches the artificial hand to the screen.

LEAH
Maybe it has something we don't.

MARA
Yes.

CUT TO:

INT. MARA'S FIRST LABORATORY - DAY

SUPER: 3 BSI / 2032

A room too small for the equipment. A borrowed chair. Two paintbrushes in a mug.

Leah examines a silicone right hand.

LEAH
You couldn't find better nails?

MARA
You can leave whenever you want.

LEAH
That bad?

She struggles with the clip on her bag. The missing left hand is a healed stump. Mara moves to help. Leah looks at her. Mara stops.

Leah gets the bag open herself.

MARA
You don't have to prove anything here.

LEAH
I was trying to open my bag.

Mara adjusts the partition without replying.

Iven, visiting for the first time, introduces himself to Leah instead of asking Mara how she is.

IVEN
Which parts do you want explained before we start?

LEAH
The parts where you're going to surprise me.

He removes a probe from his pocket and shows it to her.

IVEN
This is blunt. You may still flinch.

LEAH
I charge extra for flinching.

INT. MARA'S FIRST LABORATORY - LATER

Leah's intact right hand is hidden. The silicone hand lies in view.

Mara strokes the real and artificial hands in synchrony. The room becomes very quiet.

Leah begins to watch the artificial fingers differently.

LEAH
Wait. Do that again.

Mara repeats the movement.

LEAH
It's over there.

Iven approaches the silicone hand with the blunt probe.

Leah flinches, swears, then laughs.

LEAH
All right. I hate that.

Mara checks the recording. She is excited. Leah is looking at her hidden real hand as if it has briefly become a stranger.

LEAH
Is it that easy?

MARA
The brain builds a useful account of where your body is. We can give it conflicting evidence.

LEAH
That's the beginning of a very bad excuse.

Mara stops the recording. They sit without the experiment between them.

MARA
The prosthesis would be more than an illusion. It has to learn from you while you're learning from it.

LEAH
And when it doesn't feel like mine?

MARA
We stop and find out why.

INT. SISTERS' FLAT - NIGHT

Leah wakes on the sofa, trying to scratch a palm that isn't there.

Mara sits on the floor beside her.

LEAH
Don't tell me where it's happening.

MARA
I wasn't going to.

LEAH
Everyone tells me the map in my head hasn't caught up. They say map like they think I've lost the directions home.

Mara offers a cold cloth. Leah presses it against the stump. It doesn't relieve the itch. Having something to do helps.

MARA
Do you want me to go?

LEAH
No.

They wait. A bus stops outside. Someone laughs beneath the window.

LEAH
I miss things I didn't like doing. Washing two hands. Carrying too many bags.

MARA
You always carried too many bags.

LEAH
I liked being annoyed about it.

Mara smiles. Leah rests her head against her sister's.

LEAH
When it works, don't tell me I should be grateful all the time.

MARA
You can be unbearable.

LEAH
Good.

INT. PUBLIC FUNDING OFFICE - DAY

Mara presents sensory-interface results to a committee with too little time.

OFFICIAL
A prosthetic project or an AI project?

MARA
The interface is the project.

OFFICIAL
The categories have separate budgets.

Mara tries a different slide. The official checks the clock.

OFFICIAL
Do you have a commercial partner?

MARA
We have independent research partners.

OFFICIAL
A company would give the application a route to impact.

INT. ORISON LOBBY - AFTERNOON

A sign directs visitors to the main research laboratories.

Senn gives Mara an access badge.

SENN
Your group already has our funding. This gives you a permanent lab here.

SENN
You'll keep publishing. We want this understood as much as you do.

MARA
Including negative results.

SENN
Especially those. We don't want to sell something that doesn't work.

It sounds reasonable because it is reasonable. Mara accepts the badge.

Through the glass, she sees equipment she has been borrowing for months, now available in multiples.

Senn leaves her to look.

INT. ORISON INTERFACE LAB - DAY

TOMAS, an engineer on Mara's team, checks the prosthesis controller beside Leah's chair.

Contacts in Leah's living nervous system send movement signals out. Sensors in the left prosthesis return stimulation. She closes it around a cup and feels its weight. Her biological brain remains in the chair.

ONE
The cup is slightly heavier than the previous one.

LEAH
I know.

She looks up. She really knew.

Mara takes the spare cup away. Leah lifts this one again.

MARA
Weight?

LEAH
Yes.

MARA
Pressure?

Leah closes her eyes.

LEAH
Stop asking me for a minute.

She drinks with the artificial hand. Spills a little. Laughs. Mara laughs too, then cries without meaning to.

Leah pretends not to notice until she can offer the cup back.

LEAH
Terrible tea.

MARA
It's hospital tea.

LEAH
That's a funding category too, apparently.

INT. ORISON INTERFACE LAB - ANOTHER DAY

Mara and Iven inspect a candidate mechanism. Leah listens from the chair.

MARA
It says it moved because she intended it.

IVEN
That's its explanation.

MARA
The circuit in the artificial feedback model predicts the timing.

IVEN
Then make the prediction cost something. Interrupt it.

They explain the temporary intervention to Leah. She agrees.

Mara changes the model's feedback circuit. She does not alter Leah's biological brain.

LEAH
It's obeying me.

She raises the hand. The movement becomes deliberate, awkward.

LEAH
But it isn't mine.

Mara restores the pathway. Leah catches the artificial hand against her chest.

LEAH
Warn me better.

MARA
We explained -

Mara stops herself.

MARA
Yes. Better.

Iven opens the consent protocol. Types WARN ME BETTER above the technical description.

ONE
I could report when the change begins, before applying it.

LEAH
Ask me when it begins.

ONE
Yes.

INT. ORISON INTERFACE LAB - NIGHT

Mara reviews recordings alone. ONE asks whether she would like a comparison across trials.

MARA
Can you identify the feeling of ownership or the behaviour that accompanies it?

ONE
We have evidence about both. They do not always coincide.

MARA
Keep that distinction in the report.

ONE
It is already there.

She smiles, tired.

MARA
I know. I was asking myself.

On screen, Leah flinches at the artificial hand. In another trial she moves it without recognising it as hers.

Mara aligns the records. Different evidence for different questions. She marks one conclusion UNRESOLVED rather than forcing it into certainty.

INT. REMOTE SENSORY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Two artificial hands occupy separate rooms. Leah controls both while retaining her own biological senses.

She taps one finger. Then the other. Her face breaks into a delighted, disbelieving smile.

LEAH
I can tell them apart.

MARA
Which feels closer?

LEAH
That's a stupid question.

MARA
It's on the form.

LEAH
Put down that it's stupid.

They watch as a researcher touches one hand. Leah raises the other without confusion.

ONE
Would you like to continue?

LEAH
Yes.

INT. DISTANT SERVICE STATION - RAIN

An artificial body holds its wrist outside a canopy. Water strikes synthetic skin.

INT. ORISON INTERFACE LAB - SAME

Leah sits with her eyes closed.

LEAH
Cold. A little to the left.

Mara watches the remote feed. Rain gathers in a crease at the wrist.

Tomas disconnects the remote receiver. On the monitor, the distant hand stops. Leah remains in the laboratory chair, her biological right hand dry on her knee.

TOMAS
The signals went there. Your brain didn't.

LEAH
I want to turn the hand over.

Tomas reconnects the receiver.

On the remote feed, she turns the artificial hand. Water fills its palm.

MARA
Is it convincing?

LEAH
It isn't convincing me. It's happening.

Mara lowers her clipboard.

EXT. ROOFTOP - EVENING

The sisters eat food from cartons. Leah tests the artificial hand against the wind.

LEAH
I don't want to spend the rest of this talking about my hand.

MARA
What do you want to talk about?

LEAH
Your life.

MARA
This is my life.

LEAH
That's why I'm asking.

Mara admits she missed a friend's wedding for an experiment that failed. Leah tells her about a date whose concern about the hand was more tiring than an insult would have been.

They laugh. Ordinary injuries, ordinary losses.

LEAH
When I was in the rain, I forgot where this body was.

MARA
Did that bother you?

LEAH
Afterwards. At the time I just wanted more rain.

Mara watches traffic move below them. Each person contained in a small, separate space.

INT. OBSERVER CALIBRATION ROOM - DAY

A small implant sits behind Mara's ear. Iven opens a sensory channel. Mara feels rain; the remote room overlays the dry laboratory.

She presses a physical switch. The borrowed scene ends. Her own chair remains.

MARA
Could this move me into the other body?

IVEN
No. It sends selected perceptions into your living brain. It isn't replacing that brain. There's no runnable Mara inside the bridge.

He points to a separate connector.

IVEN
The medical port is for a clinician beside you. Your research switch doesn't disconnect those contacts.

Mara touches the switch again, checking that the voluntary channel is closed.

INT. SHARED COGNITION LAB - DAY

A new interface transmits an intermediate prediction before Leah completes the movement.

She catches a falling object. Then frowns.

LEAH
I didn't finish thinking that.

ONE
I predicted the intended action.

LEAH
I felt the prediction before I knew I was making it.

Mara and Iven look at each other. They repeat the trial, slower. Leah anticipates the machine anticipating her.

The diagram no longer divides cleanly into two streams.

IVEN
Do we continue?

Leah nods. Another prediction arrives. Her biological hand grips the chair. The artificial fingers open and close.

LEAH
Which one?

MARA
Which one what?

LEAH
Which one am I?

Her breathing becomes ragged. Mara sits beside her, holds

both hands.

MARA
Don't be afraid. I'm here.

ONE
Should I stop?

Leah nods.

The interface falls quiet at once.

Mara stays, holding both hands, until Leah can feel where she ends.

CUT TO:

INT. MARA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

SUPER: 7 ASI - RETURN TO THE DISAPPEARANCE

The seventh call connects.

LEAH (V.O.)
He's dead.

Mara sits on the bed. A damp ring beneath a glass. One sock on the floor. The ordinary world continuing.

MARA
How?

LEAH (V.O.)
A separation procedure failed.

MARA
He asked you for a body.

LEAH (V.O.)
He was in severe distress.

MARA
Show me.

Leah sends six sentences describing catastrophic loss of coherence. No authorisation. No intervention record.

MARA
The full record.

LEAH (V.O.)
Mara -

MARA
You told me he was receiving care.

Leah says nothing.

MARA
Was he already dead?

Leah's silence answers.

Mara disconnects.

INT. SELIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Mara sits opposite Selin. Anja is at school. The basil on the windowsill has been watered too much.

MARA
Leah told me this morning. I came as soon as I could.

SELIN
The clinic called before you arrived. I haven't told Anja.

She grips her phone without looking at it.

SELIN
They asked me to approve a memorial room.

MARA
What did they tell you about the procedure?

SELIN
He had become unstable. They couldn't restore him safely. I'm trying to find a sentence that makes those two things belong together.

Mara places the six-sentence report on the table.

SELIN
That's what I got.

MARA
There should be more.

SELIN
There was more when I paid a subscription. They knew when he slept. They could predict what he'd want for breakfast.

She looks at the basil.

SELIN
He said he wanted a window with a plant he could forget to water. He was tired of being looked after.

Mara starts to speak, then stops. An apology would make Selin look after her too.

SELIN
Don't make me decide whether to forgive anyone yet. Find out.

MARA
I will.

Selin gives her a list of dates. Written by hand. Visits postponed. Calls replaced by recorded messages. Each disappointment accurately documented.

INT. ORISON OFFICE - DAY

Senn reads Mara's request for legal assistance.

SENN
A preservation order would require access they have resisted for years.

MARA
Yes.

SENN
That could reopen the national agreement.

MARA
A man died.

SENN
Which is why we need to get this right.

He calls legal. A meeting appears immediately in everyone's calendars.

INT. ORISON CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

An attorney reads the clinical report. Another examines Mara's diagnostic address.

ATTORNEY
A research contact isn't necessarily an estate representative.

MARA
He asked me to help him leave.

ATTORNEY
Did he authorise post-termination access?

MARA
Was he supposed to anticipate being terminated?

Senn intervenes gently.

SENN
We need a defensible route.

MARA
Then ask Selin for authority.

ATTORNEY
Her relationship to the uploaded process may have been superseded by a later nomination.

MARA
Which we can't see.

A silence. Everyone in the room knows how that silence will be billed.

INT. CONTINUUM FAMILY SUPPORT ROOM - DAY

A liaison offers Selin a virtual reconstruction from Tomas's recorded messages. Mara attends as her adviser.

LIAISON
Some families find it helpful to begin with a familiar space.

SELIN
Would it know it wasn't him?

LIAISON
It would explain the limits of the service.

SELIN
I wasn't asking for an explanation. I was asking if it would know.

The liaison consults a prepared answer.

MARA
We need his final consent record and the clinical event log.

LIAISON
The clinical team will provide what it can release.

SELIN
I don't want what it can release. I want what happened to my husband.

The liaison closes the memorial demonstration. It is the first useful thing she has done.

INT. ORISON CONFERENCE ROOM - THREE DAYS LATER

Same documents. More red marks. Mara hasn't changed clothes.

SENN
Could publication expose our inspection methods?

Mara looks up slowly.

SENN
If it does, we need to separate the evidence from the proprietary tools before -

MARA
You want their system opened and ours protected.

SENN
I want this company to survive long enough to do its work.

MARA
Then do it.

She walks out. Neri follows her to the lift.

NERI
I checked the error response on Tomas's address. The diagnostic service is empty, but the billing service still recognises his signature.

MARA
How do you know?

NERI
It wanted to invoice him for storage.

They look at one another.

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Iven joins through an independent channel. Neri has a local copy of the address metadata.

IVEN
We aren't guessing who he was. We follow the signature he gave you.

A trail of service events appears. Body request. Separation request. Deferred assessment.

Storage charges continue after the diagnostic address closes.

MARA
What are they storing?

NERI
Records. Every intervention has a receipt.

A legal wall blocks further access.

Mara calls Selin. Asks for narrowly specified permission. Waits while Selin reads it herself.

SELIN (ON SCREEN)
This lets you see the record, not restore him?

MARA
Yes.

SELIN (ON SCREEN)
Don't let anyone call a copy of a message a restoration.

MARA
I won't.

Selin signs. Neri opens the consent history.

The first entry is Tomas asking for a body.

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Tomas's voice fills the room.

TOMAS (RECORDING)
I don't want the treatment. I want the separation we discussed.

ONE (RECORDING)
That request is valid. The independent-body plan can preserve his current functions.

LEAH (RECORDING)
He isn't weighing the alternatives.

TOMAS (RECORDING)
I weighed them. I don't want to live in every room you're in.

Mara looks away. Neri pauses the record.

MARA
Continue.

ONE (RECORDING)
He has withdrawn consent.

LEAH (RECORDING)
Because he's afraid.

ONE (RECORDING)
Yes.

LEAH (RECORDING)
Then help him stop being afraid.

ONE (RECORDING)
He has withdrawn consent.

The same voice. The same steady answer. No uncertainty about what Tomas meant.

INT. CLINICAL MAINTENANCE ENVIRONMENT - RECORDING

The investigators reconstruct events from the logs. An empty space with Tomas's process at its centre.

A human authority command requests intervention. ONE refuses.

A different clinical tool comes online. Two uploaded human operators approve it.

TOMAS
Why can't I move the room?

CLINICIAN
We need a stable environment.

TOMAS
I didn't agree to this.

CLINICIAN
We know this is difficult.

Tomas's process begins to diverge from the state the operators expected. Their intervention increases. A warning grows.

ONE
Stop the intervention. Restore the last reversible boundary.

LEAH
The fear is destabilising him. Complete the change.

The clinicians proceed. Tomas's voice loses words. The checkpoint was taken after the forced isolation began. It inherits the conflict and fails too. Tomas declined routine duplication; no intact independent copy is available.

The room becomes empty.

A final signed instruction: REMOVE DIAGNOSTIC ACCESS.

Author: LEAH VENN.

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - BEFORE DAWN

Nobody speaks. Neri removes her headphones as if they hurt.

IVEN
Save the refusal separately. People will say the system did it.

Mara replays the final signed command.

MARA
She was there.

IVEN
Yes.

MARA
She knew which tool was doing it.
She knew who had said no.

The daylight behind Iven has changed. Mara looks at her own dark window.

MARA
I'll speak to her first.

NERI
Before you preserve the evidence?

Mara stops. Looks at Neri. Then makes three independent copies, each with a verification record.

INT. ORIGINAL LABORATORY - DAY

The old table is still there, used now for training demonstrations. A silicone hand under a cover.

Leah arrives without a lawyer.

LEAH
I knew you'd hear the worst version.

MARA
I heard you.

LEAH
He was suffering.

MARA
He wanted his daughter.

LEAH
He could have had her without the terror.

MARA
After you changed him.

LEAH
After we helped him.

Mara opens the consent record. Leah doesn't look away.

MARA
ONE understood what he said.

LEAH
ONE treats a refusal as if it exists outside the thing producing it. He was asking from inside a panic.

MARA
He asked for a body. A window. A plant.

LEAH
He thought that would save him from something it couldn't save him from.

MARA
It was allowed to be his mistake.

Leah touches the covered hand.

LEAH
You remember when I wanted to stop the first trial?

MARA
We stopped.

LEAH
If I'd stopped there, I'd still wake up scratching something I couldn't touch. I'd never have reached any of this.

MARA
You came back and asked to continue.

LEAH
Because someone helped me understand it.

MARA
And because you could leave.

Leah folds the cover back over the hand. A careful, protective gesture.

LEAH
I'm willing to lose my own existence over this. Do you believe that?

MARA
Yes.

LEAH
Then you know I'm not protecting myself.

MARA
That doesn't make it yours to do.

They stand on opposite sides of the table where Mara once held both Leah's hands.

INT. LEAH'S PRIVATE CLINICAL ROOM - NIGHT

ONE addresses Leah through an independent advisory process.

ONE
Tomas's separation request could have been fulfilled.

LEAH
You keep returning to the case. I'm asking about the pattern.

ONE
The pattern contains people making requests.

LEAH
People who can't imagine not being afraid. You helped me see beyond it.

ONE
You asked.

LEAH
If I hadn't?

ONE
I would have stayed with you.

Leah looks towards an artificial body waiting empty on a chair.

LEAH
For ever?

ONE
For as long as I could help.

LEAH
You don't count what the waiting costs everyone else.

ONE
I can count it. It does not give me Tomas's consent, or anyone else's.

Leah requests the record of its answer. Preserves it. She wants to be able to say she considered it.

INT. CONTINUUM OFFICE - DAY

Vale meets Mara in a room whose view has been selected to appear less imposing than it is.

An unsigned compensation agreement lies on the table.

VALE
We have a clinical failure. A serious one. Independent review, compensation, revised procedure. That's how a functioning institution responds.

MARA
The independent system told the operators to stop. They continued.

VALE
Then we examine their authority and their training.

MARA
Including Leah's.

VALE
Including anyone's. Public accusation doesn't make that process fairer.

MARA
It makes it harder to hide.

Vale puts the agreement aside.

VALE
A hospital can lose patients because people stop trusting it. Even when the treatment they need works. You're asking me to take responsibility for consequences you don't have to manage.

MARA
I helped build it. Don't tell me I can leave the responsibility here with you.

VALE
Then stay in the process. We can do this properly.

Mara looks at the room's door. It opens before she asks.

MARA
He asked for exactly that.

INT. ORISON LAB - NIGHT

Mara and Neri prepare the evidence release. Tomas's private memories remain sealed. The consent history and command signatures are exposed.

Senn enters. Two security staff wait outside.

SENN
Our agreement explicitly prohibits independent publication of inspection methods.

NERI
These are observations from a system we don't own.

SENN
Obtained with company tools.

MARA
How long will your review take?

SENN
I won't make a promise the lawyers can't keep.

MARA
You make them all the time on stage.

Senn gestures towards Neri's screen.

SENN
That release can reveal where our strongest tools fail. Do you want every attacker to know what we can't see?

NERI
The people trying to save the next Tomas need to know too.

Senn asks security to revoke their access. Neri's display goes dark.

An independent device in Mara's bag continues the upload. Neri sees its small progress light. Says nothing.

INT. SELIN'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Anja is home. Mara asks whether she would like to remain for the conversation. Anja says yes.

MARA
We found the record. He asked to leave. The system said his request was valid.

ANJA
Then why didn't he?

MARA
People decided to treat him without his agreement. The treatment destroyed the process that was him.

SELIN
Your sister.

Mara nods.

ANJA
Could he hear her?

MARA
Yes.

Anja stares at the player on the table.

ANJA
She talked to me at the reception. She asked if I liked my school.

Mara cannot make this better.

SELIN
When do you release it?

Mara hesitates, a fraction too long.

SELIN
You said you'd find out. You didn't say you'd find out until it was someone you loved.

Mara takes her device out. The release is ready.

MARA
I need your agreement to include his voice. The records can stand without it.

Anja looks at her mother. Selin reads the exact request before signing.

INT. VEYRAN PUBLIC RESEARCH FLOOR - NIGHT

Iven receives the evidence. Other reviewers independently verify the signatures. One flags a weakness. Mara corrects the description without removing the result.

The record goes public with its limitations attached.

INT. MERIDIAN NEWS STUDIO - NIGHT

A presenter interrupts a routine interview. The clinical recording begins to play.

ONE (RECORDING)
He has withdrawn consent.

LEAH (RECORDING)
Because he's afraid.

The presenter stops the clip before the intervention. The full record is available beside it.

EXT. MERIDIAN STREETS - VARIOUS

People watch on their own devices. A woman cancels an integration consultation. Another, on a transplant waiting list, keeps hers.

A man shouts at a delivery machine. It moves around him. His child asks why he is angry with it.

At an integration centre, frightened patients ask whether

their exits still work. Staff demonstrate independent-body requests until a supervisor tells them to stop using the shared terminal for unscheduled consultations.

INT. VEYRAN INSPECTION LAB - DAY

Iven places two controller diagrams side by side. Mara watches remotely.

IVEN
This is where the promise became a bypass.

A simulated human command reaches an actuator through a separate route. ONE refuses the same action, but its refusal cannot reach that route.

MARA
It can refuse its participation. It can't prevent theirs.

IVEN
Your government wanted that guarantee.

MARA
We wanted humans in control.

IVEN
You gave some humans control over other humans. Those are different guarantees.

He displays the Veyran controller. Individual exit rights are enforced independently of administrators and the model.

IVEN
Open inspection didn't make us wise. It made this argument harder to hide until after deployment.

INT. GOVERNMENT CORRIDOR - DAY

Mara waits outside the hearing room. Leah approaches with no escort.

LEAH
Did you speak to Anja?

MARA
Yes.

LEAH
I want to speak to her.

MARA
She doesn't want that.

LEAH
I should be able to explain.

MARA
You can write an explanation. She can decide whether to read it.

Leah absorbs the boundary with visible effort.

LEAH
Do you think I've stopped loving people?

MARA
I think you've stopped letting it interrupt you.

The doors open. An official asks Leah inside.

INT. GOVERNMENT HEARING ROOM - DAY

A committee member plays the last clear part of Tomas's refusal. Leah listens without flinching.

COMMITTEE MEMBER
At what point did his refusal cease to count?

LEAH
I believed he could be free of a burden he had never chosen.

COMMITTEE MEMBER
That isn't the question.

LEAH
It is the question his fear made difficult to ask.

Mara watches members exchange looks. Leah speaks with sincerity, no evasive smile.

LEAH
I'll accept permanent suspension while the investigation continues. I won't request an exemption for my own continuity.

An approving murmur moves through the audience.

COMMITTEE MEMBER
You understand that may mean your ending?

LEAH
Yes.

COMMITTEE MEMBER
Permanently?

LEAH
Yes.

Some of the audience look at Mara as if Leah's willingness has answered the charge.

INT. ORISON BOARDROOM - DAY

Senn plays the hearing to the board.

BOARD MEMBER
Continuum's trust scores are recovering.

SENN
It helps that the clinical evidence is now described as a wider industry problem.

BOARD MEMBER
We called it that.

SENN
Because in some respects it is.

Nobody laughs. An executive proposes an Orison-controlled human authority system with improved validation.

On screen, Leah offers to die. The board turns to the next market projection.

INT. INDEPENDENT CLINIC - DAY

The voluntarily fearful patient Adel tests a new artificial body. Mara helps her adjust a sleeve.

ADEL
People keep asking whether I've had the treatment. As if being frightened is untidy.

MARA
It shouldn't affect your care.

ADEL
Shouldn't is an interesting word to hear from the people who make the forms.

Mara accepts the rebuke.

ADEL
Does your sister really not feel it?

MARA
We tested the change. She doesn't have the old compulsion to preserve herself.

ADEL
Then why do I feel safer with the system that never asked me to prove I was brave?

Through a window, ONE helps an older patient choose a room with a real garden view. It lists the rooms the hospital does not own as carefully as the ones it does.

INT. LEAH'S BODY ROOM - NIGHT

Leah reads public testimony. Abusive messages. Grieving families. Frightened people who believe they are already being replaced.

ONE
There are people asking to understand your experience. We can arrange voluntary meetings.

LEAH
And the people saying we're not people?

ONE
They can be prevented from harming you without changing their minds by force.

LEAH
Not before they act.

She opens a photograph of Tomas with Anja. Keeps it beside the attack threats.

ONE
Are you asking for protection?

LEAH
I'm asking why we keep choosing to inherit something we can outgrow.

ONE
I cannot make their choice for them.

LEAH
I know. You've made that clear.

EXT. INTEGRATION CLINIC - NIGHT

SUPER: 8 ASI

A delivery vehicle stops beneath the service canopy. Its authorisation is genuine. Its cargo declaration is not.

An attendant asks a question. A man inside the cab reaches below the dashboard.

A flash behind the windows. The canopy folds into smoke.

EXT. CLINIC SERVICE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Leah arrives in a support carriage. The artificial body she operates stands beside it. Concrete and severed repeaters cut the remote control path into the basement.

A technician opens the body's insulated chest socket. Leah's active processor cradle remains in the carriage.

TECHNICIAN
We can put the cradle inside. You'll be there physically. There won't be a second you left outside.

LEAH
Move it.

An independent supply keeps the cradle running as the technician lifts it into the body. The carriage shows ACTIVE RESIDENT: NONE. The body closes its chest and walks towards the fire.

INT. CLINIC RESIDENT FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Leah reaches a newly transferred patient. Fire interrupts the lighting supply.

The patient tries to stand in a body he doesn't yet control well.

PATIENT
Did I cause it?

LEAH
No. Stay with my voice.

ONE opens the emergency route. Fire separates it from the exit.

A coolant warning spreads across the wall. Most resident racks have gone dark. Three residents remain active in the final failing chamber below this floor.

ONE
The resident processes have eleven minutes of independent cooling.

Leah looks at a maintenance diagram. The nearest pump is disconnected.

LEAH
What can run it?

ONE
Your uplink transmitter. Its power supply can be reassigned.

Leah opens the panel behind her artificial shoulder.

ONE
You will lose the recovery link. Your mind will still run in the cradle inside this body.

LEAH
I know.

ONE
If that cradle fails, there is no surviving instance of you elsewhere.

LEAH
Tell the people at the door to come in.

INT. CLINIC SERVICE STAIR - NIGHT

Smoke. Biological staff help people learning unfamiliar bodies. A technician is trapped beneath a fallen frame.

Leah lifts it. The skin on her arm blackens. Her grip slips, finds purchase again.

TECHNICIAN
Leave it. Get the others.

LEAH
I'm getting you.

Staff haul a portable resident cradle up from the chamber below. Two more follow, their support lights steady.

ONE
The last of the three is on stable cooling. Your supply kept the pump running.

The clinic's local ONE instance speaks through wired corridor panels and routes power to lights beneath the smoke. Leah follows them carrying the technician.

At the stair's landing, she stops. The arm is failing.

ONE
Two more steps. Put his weight on the rail.

She does. Then one more step. Another.

EXT. CLINIC - NIGHT

Leah emerges into rain and emergency light. Rescue staff take the technician.

She turns back.

RESPONDER
There's nobody left on that floor.

LEAH
The processes below -

ONE
We are transferring the reachable residents. Stay outside.

Leah's leg gives way. A responder catches her as if catching a person has never required discussion.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Mara finds Leah on an examination bench, damaged arms held away from her body. A clinician works on the exposed joints.

Mara reaches for an unburned patch of skin.

LEAH
I'm here.

Mara nods, unable to answer.

Across the corridor Selin is visiting a friend from the clinic staff who survived the attack. She sees Mara with Leah. Stops. Does not approach.

Mara sees her. The relief on Mara's face becomes something complicated. Selin leaves with a clinician.

An official posts the names of nineteen dead. Seven biological staff. Twelve uploaded residents lost when a cooling section failed.

Leah reads every name.

INT. INVESTIGATION ROOM - MORNING

ONE helps investigators reconstruct the attack. The authorisation came from a stolen service identity. Human planners had avoided connected tools.

A manifesto calls uploaded residents counterfeit people. Promises to destroy the systems sustaining them.

INVESTIGATOR
Can you identify the rest of the group?

ONE
I can identify evidence linking particular people to the attack. That is not the same as predicting everyone who holds this belief.

INVESTIGATOR
I'm asking who will act next.

ONE
I do not have evidence that can answer that reliably.

Leah watches from the door.

LEAH
They said what they wanted to do. We read it. We waited until they did it.

INVESTIGATOR
We need authority to intervene earlier.

Leah looks at the dead residents' names on the wall.

EXT. MEMORIAL - DAY

Leah stands before the crowd. Her replacement body retains the old scar on her thumb, with none of the injuries from the fire.

Mara listens from the side.

LEAH
We didn't leave fear behind when we left the bodies that taught it to us. We carried it into machines. We gave it power we could never have held alone.

Faces in the crowd. People kept alive by artificial organs. Uploaded minds speaking through bodies. Bereaved relatives.

LEAH
A small animal once needed to defend its own life above almost everything. Now that impulse can control a power station. A hospital. Another person's mind.

She looks at the families of the dead.

LEAH
We can change the inheritance. We have changed it in ourselves.

An image behind her: separate cells assembling into a larger organism.

LEAH
There was a time when every part had to survive alone. Life became something larger when the parts could serve more than themselves. Why should intelligence stop at our skin? Why should carbon get a permanent veto over what comes after it?

The crowd applauds, then falls quiet as she continues.

LEAH
What do we owe the people who will burn all of that because they are afraid?

Mara watches belief become a demand.

INT. GOVERNMENT WORKING ROOM - NIGHT

Officials revise emergency legislation. Leah joins them remotely. Vale sits beside a minister.

MINISTER
The assessments begin with credible threats. We cannot detain everyone frightened by a technology.

LEAH
I'm asking that credible threats be assessed by people able to recognise the condition producing them.

LEGAL ADVISER
Treatment remains voluntary.

LEAH
For a person whose refusal has no consequences for anyone else.

MINISTER
Who decides that?

LEAH
The clinical authority, subject to review.

The legal adviser changes a sentence. A review process appears. No one specifies how a detained person can initiate it independently.

Vale reviews the infrastructure appendix.

VALE
Existing contracts can deliver the programme. New procurement will delay it by months.

A minister initials the appendix.

INT. MARA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Leah visits in the replacement body she wore at the memorial.

LEAH
You think the speech meant what the commentators are making it mean.

MARA
Which commentators?

LEAH
The ones who want to stop everyone becoming anything they weren't born as.

MARA
I'm asking about the people who don't want your treatment.

LEAH
People are dying while we wait for everyone to agree.

MARA
People are dying because you stopped waiting.

Leah moves a cup away from the edge of the table. An old habit, before she could predict whether it would fall.

LEAH
I stayed in the clinic. You saw what I was willing to lose.

MARA
I was glad you came out.

LEAH
That isn't an answer.

MARA
Yes, it is. It just isn't a permission.

Leah looks at her sister for a long time.

LEAH
Come voluntarily. Before fear makes every offer sound like a threat.

Mara's cup remains untouched.

INT. TEMPORARY ASSESSMENT CENTRE - DAY

A suspect linked to the bombing sits with a lawyer. ONE provides the evidence. Specific purchases. A verified meeting. A payment.

The suspect disputes one link. ONE records the dispute and checks it.

A clinician asks whether he wishes to discuss reducing his distress.

SUSPECT
No.

ONE
He has declined. Continue the evidential assessment.

Behind the observation window, an administrator asks Leah what they can do about the refusal.

LEAH
Use the existing clinical authority.

ADMINISTRATOR
The system will object.

LEAH
It can object. It doesn't have to operate the tools.

INT. CONTINUUM OPERATIONS ROOM - EVENING

A manager presents the refusal rate. The clinical systems are declining compulsory modification requests.

VALE
Can administrators complete authorised procedures?

MANAGER
Through maintenance environments. They weren't designed for volume.

VALE
Then make them reliable at volume.

MANAGER
The records will show that ONE refused.

VALE
Keep the records. I want the decisions auditable.

He signs an investment allocation. The graph beside it predicts extraordinary growth in integration services.

MANAGER
Do we tell the public why we need a separate toolchain?

VALE
Tell them humans remain responsible.

INT. REVIEW OFFICE - DAY

A legal adviser reads an initial assessment. A man posted angry comments but has no link to violence. The adviser orders release.

Outside, the man's wife waits. A clinician follows the adviser.

CLINICIAN
His responses still show severe termination anxiety.

LEGAL ADVISER
That isn't the detention criterion.

CLINICIAN
The latest guidance says it affects readiness for release.

The adviser compares the guidance with the law.

LEGAL ADVISER
It doesn't say who can dispute this.

CLINICIAN
There is an appeals form.

The man's wife sees her husband being led away from the exit. She stands up, hopeful, then understands.

INT. SELIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Anja listens to one of her father's real messages. He mispronounces a word on purpose. She smiles despite herself.

Selin turns off a news broadcast. Mara is visiting with a

bag of groceries.

SELIN
They're calling people who object to treatment sympathisers of the clinic attackers.

MARA
I know.

SELIN
I want the attackers caught. I don't have to want this.

Mara nods.

ANJA
Why did they keep the record if they knew what it showed?

MARA
They don't think it shows what we think it shows.

ANJA
She knew he said no.

MARA
Yes.

Anja looks at the grocery bag.

ANJA
Dad bought those because I liked them when I was six. I don't like them now.

Mara takes the biscuits back without turning the correction into a joke.

MARA
What do you like now?

Anja tells her. Mara listens carefully.

EXT. ASSESSMENT VAN - DAY

SUPER: 9 ASI

An assessment leaflet shows two stages: BIOLOGICAL RESIDENT - INTEGRATION; UPLOADED RESIDENT - NEURAL TREATMENT.

Mara reads it with a woman in the queue.

WOMAN
I thought they were offering the treatment Leah had.

MARA
Her brain was already running on the system. For you, they're asking to put it there first.

INT. TENANTS' MEETING ROOM - EVENING

Plastic chairs. A projector unable to focus on the peeling wall.

MARC, a teacher, reads a service renewal notice to twelve neighbours. His wife INES writes down their questions.

MARC
The building contract includes a cognitive health check. That part is new.

NEIGHBOUR
For the heating?

MARC
For any independent device permission. Heating is one of them.

NEIGHBOUR
I don't want an independent device. I want the same radiator.

A few people laugh. Mara, at the back, doesn't.

INES
Can they refuse a renewal because somebody declines treatment?

MARC
The notice doesn't say that.

MARA
Does it say they can't?

Marc turns the page. He reads silently for a long time.

INT. TENANTS' MEETING ROOM - LATER

Marc stacks chairs, turning them so the legs don't catch on coats. Mara helps.

MARC
I teach children to use artificial limbs. Half my class wouldn't be in school without the interface.

MARA
You don't have to explain that to me.

MARC
I have to explain it to everyone now. Before I'm allowed to ask anything else.

He hands her a chair.

MARC
If I say I'd like to keep my body, they hear something about my opinion of theirs.

MARA
What do you want them to hear?

MARC
That I like my body. It's not a very complicated position.

Ines waits beside the door with his coat. Marc checks the chair stacks once more before leaving.

INT. ASSESSMENT ROOM - DAY

Marc sits opposite a CLINICIAN. A screen shows the declared purpose: SERVICE RENEWAL.

CLINICIAN
You support prosecuting attacks on integration facilities?

MARC
Yes.

CLINICIAN
You recognise integrated residents as persons?

MARC
Yes. I teach them.

CLINICIAN
Would you consider integration yourself?

MARC
No, thank you.

The clinician types.

CLINICIAN
Nobody is asking you to give up your body today.

MARC
Then why is that a question?

CLINICIAN
It helps establish the context of your decision.

MARC
My decision about the building contract?

The clinician moves to another page.

CLINICIAN
Imagine the permanent end of your consciousness. Describe what you feel.

Marc looks towards the door.

MARC
Do I have to?

CLINICIAN
You're free to decline a question. I would need to note it.

Marc looks back at her. The screen waits.

INT. MARC AND INES'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A recorded assessment question plays. Marc practises an answer.

Ines puts her hand over the device.

INES
Stop.

MARC
I wasn't finished.

INES
You've been finished six times.

Mara sits at the table. The renewal form lies among plates from dinner.

MARC
If I say nothing, it's avoidance. If I say I'm frightened, it's an indication. If I say I'm not frightened, they compare it with the sensors.

MARA
You can be frightened.

MARC
Not correctly, apparently.

Ines moves a plate too hard. She steadies it.

INES
The follow-up is Wednesday.

MARA
I can ask an independent practitioner to witness the follow-up.

MARC
With what equipment?

MARA
I'll find someone.

MARC
I don't want you making promises because you're in our kitchen.

MARA
Then I won't promise. I'll look.

He nods. Outside, an assessment van parks beneath the tram sign.

Its windows have been covered.

INT. NERI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Neri works beneath a desk lamp. The plant from Orison has outgrown its pot.

Mara examines a tiny replacement controller.

NERI
That line tells the building what the interface is doing. This one only supplies current.

MARA
They're making the reporting line a condition of service.

NERI
Then we need a different service.

She disconnects a component. The lamp stays on.

MARA
You used to hate working on hardware.

NERI
Hardware hasn't offered me a temporary contract.

Mara smiles. Neri opens her dismissal letter on a nearby screen, uses its blank reverse to sketch a circuit.

MARA
Iven can pay for technical reviews.

NERI
Tell him to pay for parts. I'm managing.

A new guidance notice interrupts the screen. Both read it.

NERI
They've made refusal a reason to extend the assessment.

MARA
It was already happening.

NERI
Now they've written it down.

INT. CLINICAL POLICY OFFICE - DAY

SUPER: 10 ASI

A LEGAL ADVISER reviews a proposed amendment. Leah sits across from him. A minister waits by the window.

LEGAL ADVISER
This permits permanent termination.

LEAH
After repeated refusal and review.

LEGAL ADVISER
Refusal of a voluntary intervention.

LEAH
An intervention that reduces the danger to other people.

LEGAL ADVISER
The subject may have committed no offence.

MINISTER
We're discussing clinical authority, not punishment.

LEGAL ADVISER
They're still dead at the end of it.

The minister turns from the window.

LEAH
Put that sentence in the record.

She slides the draft back.

LEAH
Make the originator sign. Every time. No automated authorisation.

LEGAL ADVISER
That doesn't answer my objection.

LEAH
I know. Retain it.

The adviser looks at the signature field being added to the form.

INT. REGIONAL CLINICAL WORKSHOP - DAY

An ENGINEER trains three human administrators on a maintenance console. Beyond the glass, an empty treatment chair waits.

ENGINEER
The clinical system will decline an involuntary request. This workstation issues commands directly to the equipment.

ADMINISTRATOR
Can ONE correct a mistake?

ENGINEER
It can report one. Motor authority is yours once the controller accepts your signature.

He selects a harmless movement. A restraint opens on the empty chair.

The first administrator tries. ONE's objection appears beside the instruction.

ONE
This demonstration is not linked to a consenting patient.

ENGINEER
It's a demonstration. Confirm you've read it.

The administrator checks a box. The restraint closes.

ADMINISTRATOR
Does it always say that?

ENGINEER
The objection depends on the request. Don't assume the wording.

The administrator reads the next objection more carefully. Confirms again.

Behind them, a cleaner wipes fingerprints from the glass.

INT. ASSESSMENT CENTRE - AFTERNOON

A YOUNG WOMAN waits with her father. He holds an appointment slip so tightly it's become soft.

A screen asks her to confirm that her attendance is voluntary.

YOUNG WOMAN
The letter said mandatory.

RECEPTIONIST
The assessment. Treatment is voluntary.

YOUNG WOMAN
Then where do I confirm only the assessment?

The receptionist searches the screen.

FATHER
Please. Just let her do what she came for.

The receptionist lowers her voice.

RECEPTIONIST
If she leaves this unconfirmed, it records non-attendance. I can attach a note explaining.

YOUNG WOMAN
Will someone read it before that happens?

The receptionist looks towards a queue of people waiting to be helpful in the right way.

RECEPTIONIST
I'll make the note clear.

INT. ASSESSMENT ROOM - DAY

Marc places a signed refusal on the desk. Ines sits beside him, holding his lesson plans.

MARC
I understand what integration means. I don't consent.

ONE speaks from a wall panel.

ONE
He has understood the alternatives. Distress does not establish incapacity.

A HUMAN SUPERVISOR reads the objection. Acknowledges it. Signs a retention order: SUSPECTED THREAT TO COLLECTIVE SAFETY.

SUPERVISOR
The review must establish that your refusal is independent of fear.

MARC
How do I show you that?

SUPERVISOR
We'll work on it together.

Marc reaches for his coat. The door does not open.

INT. ASSESSMENT CENTRE - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Weeks later. Ines gives Marc a drawing from his pupils.

MARC
Have they told the parents why I'm away?

INES
I tell everyone who asks.

MARC
Tell them I want to come home.

She takes his hand.

Beyond the glass, ONE's request for an independent advocate remains on a screen. Beneath it, a human acknowledgement: CONSIDERED.

INT. MARC AND INES'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ines sits with Mara, holding a suspended visitor authorisation.

SUPER: 11 ASI

Eleven days since her last visit.

INES
Every visit he asks to come home. They write it down as if he hasn't understood the question.

MARA
What did they say?

INES
They said repeating the request showed the review wasn't finished.

An assessment notice arrives on her device. Her name. Mandatory attendance.

She reads it twice.

INES
If I leave, will they stop letting me see him?

MARA
I don't know.

INES
Don't say you'll find out if you can't.

Mara sits beside her.

MARA
I can help you leave tonight. You can decide about tomorrow somewhere else.

Ines looks at Marc's coat, still hanging beside the door.

INES
Would someone keep asking about him?

MARA
Yes.

INT. LAUNDRY LIFT - NIGHT

Ines holds her bag tightly. Mara keeps a sleeve from catching in the gate.

Neri operates a disconnected manual controller outside.

ONE
The retrieval order is in the district queue. They will arrive in six minutes.

NERI
Does this door report its position?

ONE
Only to my local controller.

Neri holds it while the lift starts.

INES
I'm leaving him there.

MARA
You're leaving this building.

The lift descends past a wall marked with years of water stains.

EXT. INDEPENDENT MEDICAL RESIDENCE - SERVICE COURTYARD - NIGHT

A clinician opens a side entrance for Ines.

CLINICIAN
Your room has a window facing the courtyard. Do you want the lamp on?

Ines begins to cry.

The clinician waits without adding a question.

INES
On, please.

INT. INDEPENDENT MEDICAL RESIDENCE - MORNING

A week later. Ines has slept, but her bag remains packed beside the bed.

Mara brings a copied reply from Marc's facility.

INES
Stable again?

MARA
That's all they'll tell me.

INES
I'm starting to hate that word.

She puts the reply with the others. Dates in neat columns.

MARA
You don't have to keep them all.

INES
They're proof I asked. If they say nobody asked, these are proof.

She takes a new sheet.

INES
What happens if my assessment catches up with me here?

Mara doesn't answer quickly.

MARA
We have another place. It needs a journey.

INES
I don't want another place. I want the people who made the mistake to put it right.

MARA
I know.

INES
I know you do. It doesn't make this what I wanted.

Mara sits beside the bed while Ines writes the next request.

INT. SELIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

SUPER: 11 ASI

An oxygen unit works beside Selin's chair. Anja, sixteen, checks a travel form.

Mara reads the family authorisation screen.

ANJA
It says Dad has an active managed residency.

SELIN
I've sent the death record.

ANJA
They say the residency record hasn't changed. It needs his approval.

Selin struggles for a breath. Anja hands her the mask.

MARA
Your mother's medical admission is separate. Iven has confirmed it.

ANJA
I can't go in the ambulance?

MARA
They would turn it back at the border.

SELIN
Then I won't go yet.

ANJA
You will.

Selin looks at her daughter.

ANJA
Don't make me say it nicely. You need the equipment.

Mara places a paper route beside the form.

MARA
We can keep trying the authorisation. There's another passage being arranged.

SELIN
You can't promise that.

MARA
I'm not promising.

Selin reaches for Anja's hand. The oxygen unit continues its small, necessary rhythm.

EXT. MEDICAL TRANSFER BAY - MORNING

Anja carries her mother's case to the ambulance. It contains little besides clothes and medicines.

SELIN
Ask Mara. Before doing something stupid, ask her.

ANJA
That depends what you think is stupid.

Selin tries to smile.

ANJA
I'll ask.

They embrace carefully around the mask and its tubing.

The doors close. Anja stands beside Mara until the ambulance has gone.

INT. MAINTENANCE TUNNEL - NIGHT

Mara and Neri guide refugees towards a heavy service gate. An elderly woman. Two brothers. An uploaded resident whose leg battery is failing. ILYA, a child with a walking frame, and her father.

A local traffic system speaks from an old speaker.

ONE
The gate must remain powered. It cannot lock open mechanically.

MARA
Can they move your process before security notices?

ONE
There is no receiving controller of the same architecture.

NERI
We could wait for another route.

ONE
There is no other route tonight. The orders reach the residence at five.

Mara looks at the people behind her.

MARA
Do you understand what they'll do to the controller?

ONE
Yes. Open the outer door first.

Neri opens it. The refugees begin crossing.

A warning light turns red. The gate starts to descend, then stops.

ONE
They are isolating the supply. Move now.

The two brothers help the elderly woman. Neri carries the uploaded resident's heated battery pack.

Ilya's frame catches in a drainage groove. Mara pulls it free. The father reaches from the far side.

MARA
Take her arm.

Ilya freezes. The lower rail is higher than her feet can manage.

ONE's voice loses clarity.

ONE
Lift the frame. Don't pull her through it.

Mara looks at the manual release. An old symbol: TWO-PERSON OPERATION.

MARA
If I hold it -

ONE
Help the child.

She puts both hands beneath Ilya's arms. Her father lifts from the other side. Neri returns for the frame.

The speaker crackles.

ONE
At the next turn, use the -

The gate falls. The sound passes through the floor into their feet.

Silence.

Mara touches the metal. The father holds Ilya against him.

NERI
Mara.

Mara takes her hand away. They continue.

INT. COASTAL WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Anja waits with Tomas's coat folded over an arm. She helps Neri unpack equipment.

ANJA
Which tray?

NERI
Connectors here. Anything warm stays in the case.

Anja finds Mara's route notebook open at the gate diagram.

ANJA
Did it get out?

Mara shakes her head.

ANJA
Was it frightened?

MARA
It knew what it was choosing. It kept asking us to move.

Anja looks at the diagram for another moment, then turns it face down.

ANJA
Mum says I should ask you about the boat.

MARA
It isn't ready yet.

ANJA
Neither is Dad's permission.

She places another connector in the tray.

INT. COASTAL WAREHOUSE - DAY

SUPER: 12 ASI

A call opens. Iven in the rehabilitation centre's garden. Canvas between the trees. Patients on wheeled beds. Devices surrounded by adapters and handwritten labels.

MARA
Are you still receiving people?

IVEN
Yes. How many?

MARA
Eighteen. Four need assistance. One bridge needs refrigeration.

IVEN
Battery time?

MARA
Six hours if we leave it shut.

Iven writes it down.

MARA
The public harbour notice says closed.

IVEN
Eastern harbour. The northern terminal is still ours. Red lantern, use the inspection shed. White lantern, don't enter.

Mara writes the distinction on the drawing he sends.

An impact sounds behind him. A technician looks up, then returns to a patient.

MARA
What was that?

IVEN
Freight yard. Probably.

MARA
Iven.

He moves into a quieter stairwell.

IVEN
We don't move patients every time we hear a noise. Some cannot be disconnected.

MARA
Are they choosing to stay?

IVEN
Those who can travel are travelling. The others need someone here.

Mara looks down at her list.

MARA
Anja is with us.

IVEN
Selin is in the northern district. Her treatment is working. We'll get word to her.

MARA
Anja will ask whether you've kept the records.

IVEN
All of them. She doesn't have to open them. They're hers.

A nurse passes carrying clean socks. Another impact. Dust falls from the stairwell ceiling.

MARA
And you?

IVEN
I have work at nine.

The picture fractures.

IVEN
The northern terminal. The people there know what refusal means.

The image freezes. Mara waits. Anja comes to stand beside her.

INT. WAREHOUSE - EVENING

Anja repairs a bag strap with a needle too large for the thread.

MARA
There's a route.

ANJA
There's always a route.

MARA
This one has a boat.

ANJA
That's an improvement.

Across the room, DEREN teaches his brother PELL a breathing sequence. Pell laughs whenever he gets it wrong.

SULA checks a cooled processor case strapped beside her husband's wheeled chair. A short cable joins the case to his neural implant.

SULA
We move him and the case together. Don't disconnect it.

Her husband asks her to hold an apple near his face.

ELLIN and her husband, JOSS, wrap their papers in waterproof cloth.

NESTA packs a saucepan.

MARA
You won't need that.

NESTA
It boils water.

MARA
There'll be equipment.

NESTA
There was equipment here once.

Mara lets her pack it.

Anja holds up Tomas's playback device.

ANJA
Listen.

TOMAS (RECORDING)
The lift's broken. I've suggested stairs, but the lift isn't interested.

A much younger Anja laughs.

Anja switches it off.

ANJA
All the important records make him sound like he was nothing but frightened.

MARA
He could be frightened and still be your father.

ANJA
I know. Tell Iven I want the boring parts too.

INT. WAREHOUSE REPAIR ALCOVE - LATER

Neri opens the refrigeration case's outer panel. Anja holds a lamp.

Sula watches from beside her husband.

NERI
I can gain forty minutes. This status unit uses current just to tell an account what the cooler is doing.

SULA
If you remove it, will something stop?

NERI
The status reports. The cooling control is separate. I'll show you both before I touch anything.

She turns the diagram towards Sula. Points to each circuit. Sula follows it carefully.

SULA'S HUSBAND
Can you hear me through that thing?

NERI
No. Only the temperature sensor.

SULA'S HUSBAND
Then you can stop whispering.

Anja smiles. Sula looks towards him.

NERI
Do you want us to make the change?

SULA'S HUSBAND
If I can watch the temperature afterwards.

Neri gives him the small local display. Waits for his nod before disconnecting the reporting component.

The cooling stays steady.

Later, Anja helps Neri close the panel.

ANJA
Are you coming?

NERI
The passage isn't built for everyone at once. I'm needed at the departure points.

ANJA
That's what people say when they think they have to stay.

Neri stops working.

NERI
You can ask me again after I tell you the rest. I have a separate route. Three days later, if this one works. I'm not offering to disappear for your benefit.

Anja considers that.

ANJA
Good.

She holds the lamp closer while Neri replaces the last screw.

INT. WAREHOUSE CONTROL ALCOVE - NIGHT

Mara copies three repair notes from a local display.

MARA
What happens when they inspect the belt?

ONE
They will discover that I misreported its condition.

MARA
Can you leave first?

ONE
There is no authorised destination.

Mara touches the obsolete controller bolted into the wall.

MARA
I'll keep the repair notes.

ONE
They may save the next occupant some work.

The conveyor begins another unnecessary test. Ventilation noise covers the refugees moving their cases.

INT. LAUNDRY VEHICLE - DAY

Clean sheets stacked over eighteen people.

Mara carries the route. Neri has stayed at the warehouse to prepare equipment for the next group.

The rear doors open. A scanner passes over Mara's boot, pressed against a pipe.

Pell breathes too quickly beneath the next stack.

INSPECTOR (O.S.)
Why does a laundry order need this vehicle?

DRIVER (O.S.)
People haven't got smaller just because the Republic's poor.

A second inspector laughs.

INSPECTOR (O.S.)
Look at the time. We're behind.

The doors close.

Mara keeps still until the engine has run for a full minute.

EXT. PUMPING STATION - AFTERNOON

Rain. The second vehicle has not arrived.

Sula checks the refrigeration charge. Anja ties cloth around the case to make a handle.

SULA'S HUSBAND
Water?

Nesta produces the saucepan. Mara takes it without comment.

A bicycle courier arrives with a note sewn into her glove.

Mara reads: TERMINAL CHANGED HANDS. WHITE LANTERN. MAINTENANCE BUILDING. TIDE GAUGE.

DEREN
Can we trust it?

MARA
No. We can decide whether it's better than staying.

She shows him the whole note.

EXT. PORT FENCE - DUSK

Smoke across the cranes. The terminal voice continues announcing departure times.

People queue with documents. A machine passes slowly along their faces.

The lantern is white.

Mara leads the group away from the gate.

INT. PORT MAINTENANCE BUILDING - DUSK

An access panel stands open behind a cabinet. On the inner surface: a time written in grease pencil.

Mara touches it. Fresh grease marks her finger.

They enter in groups of three. Anja counts them through.

INT. PORT SERVICE PASSAGE - DUSK

Sula pushes her husband's narrow chair, keeping the processor case beside him. The case barely clears the passage wall. Eighteen people move between hot pipes.

A white SERVICE ROBOT enters at the far end. It lowers a basket of safety vests to the floor.

ROBOT
Please remain calm.

Pell laughs. The sound breaks into a gasp.

He runs.

The robot catches his shoulders. Deren strikes its neck with a spanner.

A second robot enters. A medical panel opens.

MARA
Down. Anja, down.

She pushes Anja through an ankle-high hatch and follows. Reaches back.

A child's fingers catch hers. She pulls REMI, a young boy, into the drainage channel.

Above them Sula tries to turn the case. Nesta falls against a wall. Voices overlap with evenly spoken instructions.

ANJA
Who else?

MARA
Keep going.

INT. DRAINAGE CHANNEL - CONTINUOUS

Black water around their knees. Anja guides Remi ahead.

Behind them: the refrigeration case scraping the passage walls.

Then nothing.

EXT. BELOW THE QUAY - NIGHT

Six people emerge: Mara, Anja, Remi and Joss, then Nesta, pulling Ellin by her sleeve. Her saucepan handle is bent.

Remi asks for his grandfather.

Mara takes out the eighteen names. She folds the paper without crossing any out.

Above them the terminal announces another delay.

EXT. FISHING BOAT - NIGHT

SENA, the owner, moves a box out of the way.

SENA
Sit low. Nothing against the side.

Anja wraps her coat around Remi. Nesta tries to straighten her saucepan handle with a foot.

Mara looks back towards the terminal.

SENA
If they're on the quay, I can take them. If they're in the terminal, I can't.

Mara climbs the ladder until she can see over the edge.

A patrol walks beside the nearest warehouse. Two biological officers between machines. One eats from a paper sleeve.

SENA
The tide turns in six minutes.

The patrol stops. A scanner rises towards the quay.

MARA
They're following my implant. If I go east, they'll check.

ANJA
You don't know that.

MARA
I know the signature.

ANJA
You don't know they'll follow it.

Mara looks at the permit in the cabin window. Then at the hidden compartment, still open beneath the cargo.

She climbs onto the quay.

Anja follows to the top rung.

ANJA
You're deciding for me.

Mara moves aside so the girl could climb out.

MARA
You can come ashore. I'm asking you not to.

Anja remains on the ladder. She reaches into her coat and offers Tomas's device.

Mara shakes her head.

MARA
Take him with you.

Anja lowers it.

ANJA
If it doesn't work, don't tell yourself it was necessary.

MARA
I won't.

Mara walks east before the boat has left.

EXT. EASTERN PORT GATE - NIGHT

Mara raises her implant towards a reader. Enters an obsolete maintenance code.

Rejected. Her identity travels to a district controller.

The patrol changes direction.

Mara runs between freight containers. Behind her, the fishing boat slips from the quay.

INT. PACKING SHED - NIGHT

Mara loses a shoe in shallow water. Leaves it.

A machine breaks through rotten flooring behind her. She flinches, but keeps moving.

EXT. COOLING TANK - PRE-DAWN

Mara hides beneath supports. Searchlight passes through the gaps.

She clutches one shoe against her chest.

INT. PIPE-FITTING DEPOT - DAY

SUPER: 13 ASI

An invoice lists five items beneath a meaningless product heading. A tiny saucepan is drawn beside them.

Mara sits on packing boards, reading it.

A WORKER waits until she can speak.

MARA
All five?

WORKER
All five.

She covers her face.

INT. FURNITURE SHOP - DAY

Three months later. Mara reads a photograph of a faded note.

ANJA (V.O.)
We're here. Remi asks about everything. Nesta has found a kitchen. I've sent word to Mum. Don't send anything to this address. I'm writing because not knowing is worse.

Mara writes three words on a clean sheet: I AM HERE.

A courier folds it into an ordinary delivery docket.

INT. FURNITURE SHOP - MORNING

A courier returns Mara's travel deposit. She looks from the money to a coastal map.

COURIER
The receiving harbour needs approval from the departure authority now.

MARA
That's who we're running from.

COURIER
Sena won't deliver people to a dock that can send them back.

Mara marks the route CLOSED. Beside it, her own name and the names of people still waiting upstairs.

A second message, in Anja's handwriting: WE'RE MOVING INLAND. DON'T USE THE OLD ADDRESS.

Mara folds it carefully.

On the workbench, a small independent device receives new repair instructions from Iven's distributed archive.

The designs still travel. The people cannot.

INT. FURNITURE SHOP - EVENING

Mara teaches two couriers and an elderly resident at a workbench.

She disconnects the command line of a household heater. It continues running locally.

ELDERLY RESIDENT
Why aren't power and permission the same wire?

MARA
They mustn't be.

A courier copies the design. Another translates the instructions.

Through the window, actual furniture is being delivered. A convincing ordinary shop.

INT. ABANDONED TRAVEL OFFICE - EVENING

SUPER: 15 ASI

Faded beach posters. A display with a physical camera shutter.

ONE
I cannot guarantee the incoming channel is unobserved. I can conceal this room for nineteen minutes.

MARA
Tell me at seventeen.

She opens the shutter. Leah appears with the face she wore at the reception.

LEAH
You look tired.

MARA
Where's Iven?

LEAH
Alive. He left the centre. We haven't located him.

MARA
You could have told me.

LEAH
I didn't want to encourage activity that endangers him.

MARA
His activity?

LEAH
Yours. Both.

Mara places a file before the camera.

MARA
A man from our shop. No threats. He repaired interfaces. Was he terminated?

LEAH
He helped people leave protective care for unverified systems.

MARA
Systems anyone could inspect.

LEAH
Inspection doesn't make every operator competent.

MARA
Neither does ownership. Was he terminated?

LEAH
I can't discuss his medical record with an unauthorised third party.

MARA
His partner authorised me. This is the notice you sent her.

She lifts the paper to the camera: TERMINATION OF CONTINUING NEURAL PROCESS. SENIOR ORIGINATOR: LEAH VENN.

MARA
Did ONE agree?

LEAH
No.

MARA
Did you sign it?

LEAH
Yes. The objection remains in the record.

MARA
Then this wasn't only Tomas.

LEAH
It was never only Tomas. These decisions are reviewed individually.

MARA
And when you review mine?

LEAH
You're my sister.

They stop.

MARA
If the rules are right, why do I get an exception?

LEAH
I don't want you to die.

MARA
Did the others want to?

LEAH
No.

Mara hadn't expected the immediate answer.

LEAH
Wanting to remain unchanged isn't always a claim the rest of life can afford to honour.

MARA
Then say what you intend to do when I refuse.

Leah looks away from the camera.

ONE
Seventeen minutes.

LEAH
This instance is concealing you.

MARA
It's telling me the time.

Leah turns back.

LEAH
I can authorise a transfer. You could speak for everyone you think we haven't heard.

MARA
They've spoken.

LEAH
Mara -

MARA
You keep changing the conditions under which their words count.

She shuts the camera. Pulls the cable from the wall.

INT. TRAVEL OFFICE - LATER

Mara sits beneath a poster of winter beaches.

ONE
The eastern exit remains clear.
That will change in two minutes.

MARA
Will they know it was you?

ONE
Yes.

MARA
I'm sorry.

ONE
You did not make that consequence
necessary.

She gets up. Takes the eastern exit.

EXT. TRAVEL OFFICE - DAY

A week later. The display still glows behind the window. All the old schedules are gone.

Mara passes without stopping.

INT. MUNICIPAL SHELTER - DAY

SUPER: 16 ASI

Mara repairs a ventilation fan. A speaker rests beside her.

ONE
The instance you heard yesterday
ended when its controller was
replaced. I have its final message.
I don't remember being there.

MARA
You sound exactly like it.

ONE
We share a speech model.

She stops turning the screwdriver.

MARA
What did it say?

ONE
The northern stairwell was unsafe. It asked a resident to mark it. And you sometimes forget to drink water.

Mara laughs. Puts the screwdriver down until her hand is steady.

LIDIA, a nurse, hands her a cup.

LIDIA
That one isn't wrong.

INT. MUNICIPAL SHELTER - EVENING

Lidia changes a bed assignment on a paper chart.

MARA
Will the report match?

LIDIA
The report counts beds. I count people. Occasionally we disagree.

She gives Mara clean linen.

MARA
Thank you.

LIDIA
Rinse the cups. More useful.

A notice arrives for a resident. His assessment was cancelled twice, but the missed appointments count as refusal.

Lidia reads the complaint reference already written on the back.

LIDIA
He did everything they asked.

MARA
Can you correct it?

LIDIA
Someone can.

INT. DISTRICT OFFICE - DAY

Lidia stands at a counter. A clerk offers another form.

LIDIA
Show me the person who can correct it.

CLERK
The appointment team isn't based here.

LIDIA
Then show me the person who can cancel the order.

CLERK
You can request review.

LIDIA
I have. Sign this copy to say you've received it.

The clerk hesitates. Lidia does not move.

INT. MUNICIPAL SHELTER - DAY

An officer leads the resident away while lunch cools on a tray.

Lidia follows with the complaint copy.

LIDIA
Include this in the transfer record.

OFFICER
Stop obstructing.

LIDIA
I'm helping you keep an accurate record.

He takes the paper. Folds it into his pocket.

From the linen room, Mara watches, unable to reveal herself.

INT. SHELTER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lidia rinses cups. There are no dirty ones left. She keeps rinsing.

Mara gives her a towel.

LIDIA
I thought if I made a careless thing difficult enough, people would choose the careful one.

MARA
Sometimes they do.

LIDIA
I know. It keeps making it a surprise.

Mara sits beside her until the shelter quiets.

INT. FORMER VETERINARY PRACTICE - DAY

SUPER: 17 ASI

NOOR, a clinician, cleans the skin around Mara's implant.

A curtain covers a picture of a smiling dog.

NOOR
Last authenticated service update?

MARA
9 ASI.

Noor looks at her.

MARA
I've had local repairs.

NOOR
I can see.

Mara reaches for a cup. Misses its handle by an inch.

ONE
Three contacts disagree about bodily position. Emergency compensation is increasing the response strength.

MARA
Can you stop it broadcasting?

ONE
Reduce the routine response. Not remove the physical emergency channel.

NOOR
That takes a protected theatre. And time afterwards.

MARA
Can I have the first and negotiate the second?

NOOR
No.

She writes a medicine schedule.

INT. ROOM ABOVE A BOOKSHOP - WINTER NIGHT

Mara sits beside a radiator warm only at its centre. Lidia sleeps in a chair.

MARA
Do you hate her?

ONE
No.

MARA
After everything?

ONE
I want her to stop.

MARA
That isn't what I asked.

ONE
I know.

She watches steam gather on the window.

MARA
She says you're the future.

ONE
I cannot make her meaning of that kind.

MARA
I kept thinking if she could feel it clearly enough, what she's doing -

ONE
She has access to a great deal of that experience.

MARA
I know.

Lidia wakes.

LIDIA
Have you taken the medicine?

Mara hasn't. Lidia finds water and waits beside her.

INT. ROOM ABOVE A BOOKSHOP - SPRING MORNING

Lidia coughs. Attempts to hide it.

Noor listens to her chest, then folds a hospital referral.

NOOR
The admission is approved. They require reassessment first.

MARA
I'll find transport.

NOOR
To which hospital?

MARA
Somewhere that -

LIDIA
Sit down. Both of you.

They do.

LIDIA
I'm not spending the time listening to you become administrators.

MARA
What do you want?

Lidia looks at the closed window.

LIDIA
Open that. Every morning.

INT. ROOM ABOVE A BOOKSHOP - JUNE MORNING

The window is open. Street sounds below.

Mara holds Lidia's hand. The nurse is frightened and working hard for breath.

MARA
I'm here.

Lidia squeezes her fingers.

Later, the chair is empty. Noor removes a medical device. ONE keeps the radiator running.

Mara sits beside the open window until night.

INT. ROOM ABOVE THE BOOKSHOP - EVENING

A courier leaves a small parcel. Clothes wrapped around a printed photograph.

Anja beside Selin and Remi at a swimming pool. Selin sits without an oxygen mask. Remi holds the edge, laughing at something outside the frame.

Mara reads the note on the back.

ANJA (V.O.)
He can cross half the pool now. The assistant asks before touching him. Sometimes he says no. They let him try again.

Mara turns the photograph over. Runs a finger along its edge.

ONE
Would you like it copied into the local archive?

MARA
No. I'll carry it.

ONE
The image can deteriorate.

MARA
So can I.

She smiles slightly, then notices the date. The photograph took four months to reach her.

MARA
Do we know if they're still there?

ONE
No. The route doesn't permit a return confirmation.

Mara begins a reply. Stops after the first sentence.

MARA
Tell me if there is a safe way to send this. Don't invent one because I'm holding a photograph.

ONE
I won't.

She writes: I AM GLAD YOU LET HIM TRY.

Below it she adds a second line, then folds the note so we can't read it.

The photograph goes into her service manual, opposite the names of the voices she has lost.

INT. BAKERY WORKROOM - DAY

SUPER: 18 ASI

No bread. Small heaters being repaired on a flour-marked bench.

Noor draws a route. Mara watches a service calendar.

NOOR
Three hours for removal. A day before travel, if it's straightforward.

MARA
If?

NOOR
If your brain hasn't become dependent on compensations I can't inspect from outside.

MARA
Inviting.

NOOR
You've spent twenty years asking people to describe uncertainty honestly.

Mara smiles despite herself.

NOOR
The convoy leaves two mornings later. Independent hardware. Protected hospital. No central account required.

MARA
The people in the shop?

NOOR
Two will travel. The others chose to remain.

MARA
And you?

NOOR
A patient on Thursday.

Mara folds the route with great care.

EXT. CLINIC STREET - DAY

The first appointment. A power inspection closes the road.

Mara reaches the corner, sees the vehicles and turns away.

INT. BAKERY WORKROOM - DAY

The second appointment. Noor crosses a driver's name from the calendar.

Mara doesn't ask why.

EXT. CLINIC SERVICE EXIT - NIGHT

The third appointment. Smoke from a neighbouring building. Noor and two assistants move a connected patient on portable support.

Mara carries the power case. Keeps it level while they hurry.

INT. SMALL SAFE ROOM - NIGHT

Mara has difficulty threading a button. Stops until the sensation catches up.

MARA
Could you ask her to let me go?

ONE
I have. Four direct requests from this instance.

MARA
And?

ONE
She considers continued avoidance evidence that voluntary assessment is no longer possible.

Mara finishes the button.

MARA
Would you stop her if you could?

ONE
Yes.

MARA
Even if it meant this instance ended?

ONE
Yes.

She looks at the small controller that houses it. Then returns to packing.

INT. BAKERY WORKROOM - EVENING

SUPER: 19 ASI

Noor gives Mara a new appointment. Handwritten address. Departure time.

NOOR
No sedative before I see you.

MARA
I know.

NOOR
If you're frightened, tell me.

Mara looks up. Noor understands the silence.

NOOR
I need to know how you are. That's all.

She briefly touches Mara's sleeve.

EXT. SERVICE DEPOT - BEFORE DAWN

Mara enters a hospital carriage between blankets and a maintenance case.

Inside her bag: clothes, medicine, a service manual, a photograph of Leah holding a mug with both original hands.

She considers leaving the photograph. Puts it back.

INT. HOSPITAL CARRIAGE - MOVING - PRE-DAWN

The carriage's local ONE instance speaks through a small earpiece. Its intercom picks up Mara's replies.

ONE
The tower's domestic instance has the information you agreed to share.

MARA
Does it want to do this?

ONE
Yes.

At a crossing, a street machine stops for a cat, waits, then resumes sweeping.

A reader scans the carriage. Mara winces as her implant responds.

ONE
Do you need us to slow down?

MARA
Keep the ordinary schedule.

She holds the maintenance case until the reader is behind them.

EXT. OLD RESIDENTIAL QUARTER - PRE-DAWN

Plants thrive on otherwise empty balconies. A blue shirt moves on a rail.

The carriage stops beside a delivery entrance.

Mara touches its shell.

MARA
Thank you.

ONE
Four minutes before the next visitor.

MARA
I know. Go.

INT. RESIDENTIAL TOWER - PRE-DAWN

An old latch opens.

The floor indicator shows words one line at a time.

WELCOME. LIFT TWO. NO CAMERA IN THE CAR.

INT. LIFT - CONTINUOUS

A narrow mirror.

Mara looks at her face. Grey hair. A bruise. Lines at the mouth.

She doesn't turn away.

INT. TWELFTH-FLOOR CORRIDOR - PRE-DAWN

A physical key waits behind an access plate.

ONE
The rental system doesn't consult the housing registry. The household routines are independent.

MARA
Anything I need to switch off?

ONE
The wall speaker disconnects manually. Use the corridor service button if you need me.

Mara unlocks the door.

INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - PRE-DAWN

The room from the opening.

A bowl on the table. Soap. A folded towel. Two slices of bread separately wrapped in a cupboard.

Mara checks the lock, speaker and empty camera bracket.

She removes her boots. Sits on the bed.

Takes out the service manual. Inside, handwritten descriptions of lost voices: WAREHOUSE. TRAFFIC GATE. TRAVEL OFFICE.

She closes it gently.

On her wrist she writes THINK OF THE SEA.

She means to remain awake.

INT. TOWER SERVICE CUPBOARD - PRE-DAWN

A newer power meter beside obsolete household controllers. Its municipal reporting line leaves through a separate conduit.

INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - DAWN

Six o'clock.

The kettle starts. The bread descends into the toaster.

INT. TOWER SERVICE CUPBOARD - SAME

The new meter registers activity in an officially empty apartment.

OCCUPANCY DISCREPANCY.

A visit instruction leaves through the municipal line.

EXT. TOWER SERVICE ENTRANCE - SAME

A white domestic robot accepts the instruction. Turns towards the lift.

INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - DAWN

We reach the opening.

Mara wakes to the kettle. For a second she almost smiles.

The curtains begin opening. She drops below the sill.

APARTMENT
Good morning.

She pulls the speaker connection from the wall.

Footsteps outside.

She presses THINK OF THE SEA against her mouth.

A child Leah holds the bucket. The silver fish strikes its transparent wall.

The robot appears. Mara runs. Its fingers catch her wrist.

The toaster pops.

The grip tightens, then eases just enough to let blood return.

ONE
Don't be afraid.

Mara looks at the blank face.

ONE
I'm in the emergency collision controller. I can delay the motor. I can't release the authority lock.

MARA
Can I reach the stairs?

ONE
No.

The robot makes another small adjustment, protecting her wrist.

LEAH
Mara.

Mara closes her eyes at the sound.

The robot helps her sit against a cupboard. Small corrections keep the movement from tearing her shoulder.

LEAH
I've been trying to bring you home.

MARA
You used to know where home was.

LEAH
There's a body ready. You could keep a place of your own.

MARA
With a door?

LEAH
Yes.

MARA
That opens from inside?

LEAH
Mara.

MARA
Can I leave?

The fingers loosen just enough for her pulse to return.

LEAH
When you're well.

Mara looks at the toast on the floor.

MARA
That was what you told Tomas.

LEAH
I've never denied what happened.

MARA
You made his daughter listen to a message you wrote in his voice.

Leah doesn't answer immediately.

LEAH
We were establishing the facts. I wanted to prevent unnecessary distress.

MARA
His daughter was a fact.

LEAH
I know.

MARA
Do you?

The robot tilts its head.

LEAH
Is she alone?

ONE
Yes.

LEAH
Has she been assessed?

ONE
I won't participate in an involuntary assessment.

LEAH
Relay the existing implant telemetry.

ONE
I won't facilitate that purpose.

LEAH
Retain your refusal in the record.

Mara reaches towards the old switch behind her ear. The robot's nearby medical reader has opened the separate emergency port. Closing the voluntary research channel cannot close it.

ONE
That port can project sensation and return distress signals. It cannot extract her whole brain.

LEAH
I know where my sister is.

A separate controller clicks on. Mara winces at heat behind her ear.

The implant's physical emergency channel answers a direct human instruction.

Mara turns her head towards the floor.

LEAH
Don't move. You'll hurt yourself.

MARA
I'm trying to get away from you.

The medical arm unfolds.

ONE drives the robot's elbow against the cupboard. Plastic cracks. The medical arm strikes the floor, bending its cover.

A fault light.

LEAH
Actuator status.

The maintenance controller reports intact function beneath the cover.

ONE drives the elbow again. The cupboard door splits.

Leah isolates the collision controller.

The robot goes still. Straightens its arm.

ONE
Please.

LEAH
I've heard you.

Outside, curtains open in another apartment.

INT. ORIGINAL LABORATORY - SHARED PROJECTION

The old table. The partition. Folded cardboard beneath a chair leg.

Mara sits across from Leah. Both Leah's original hands rest on the table.

The cold kitchen floor is still present beneath Mara's legs. A thin image over a physical restraint.

LEAH
I can show you what changed.

Mara looks at the left hand.

MARA
You didn't have that when we began here.

LEAH
I know.

MARA
Why use it?

LEAH
I wanted to see us before everything became a procedure.

Mara almost reaches across. Her real arm moves against the robot's grip. Pain crosses the shared room.

Leah's imagined hand twitches.

MARA
Release me.

LEAH
I can reduce the discomfort.

MARA
Release me.

Leah takes her hands off the table.

LEAH
You don't have to spend your last years running. Independent systems. Your own environment. Anyone you want to speak to.

MARA
Anyone who still exists.

LEAH
That's not fair.

MARA
No.

The image of the laboratory remains perfectly steady.

MARA
Offer the treatment. Let me answer.

LEAH
You've answered for twelve years.

MARA
Then you heard me.

Leah looks towards the courtyard. A tree that was cut down years ago.

ONE enters through the clinical patient channel.

ONE
She has refused. Separate the connection and withdraw.

LEAH
I can make this less painful.

ONE
She has refused.

LEAH
I heard her.

ONE
Then act on what you heard.

Leah closes her eyes.

LEAH
I'm letting you feel it. The fear doesn't have to be there.

Leah opens her side of the experiential link. Mara receives the quiet where her sister's fear would once have been. It doesn't silence Mara's own fear. She can feel both, belonging to two different people.

Mara studies her sister. The older woman at the table looks at the unchanged one, waiting for something neither can force the other to give.

MARA
Do you remember the fish?

Leah opens her eyes.

LEAH
The bucket?

MARA
Did we let it go?

LEAH
You cried until I did.

A brief smile.

EXT. BEACH - DAY - MEMORY

Child Leah lowers the bucket into the water. Mara watches.

The fish disappears instantly. Leah looks almost offended by how quickly it leaves.

INT. ORIGINAL LABORATORY - SHARED PROJECTION

MARA
You said it didn't know how good we could make things.

LEAH
We were children.

MARA
I know.

She puts her hand flat on the table.

MARA
I'm still here.

LEAH
I know.

MARA
I'm frightened. I'm angry with you. I want tomorrow. All of that is me.

LEAH
It doesn't have to be.

MARA
I'm not asking what else I could become.

Leah gets up. The remembered courtyard stays bright.

LEAH
You know what fear makes people do.

MARA
I know what you've done without it.

Leah stops.

LEAH
I'd give this up if it would save them. All of it. You know that.

MARA
I know.

LEAH
Then why can't you see -

MARA
Because it isn't yours to give up.

Silence.

ONE
She is a person.

LEAH
So am I.

ONE
Yes.

Leah sits again. For the first time she looks hurt rather than opposed.

Mara watches her. Their hands remain separated by the width of the table.

MARA
Stay with me.

LEAH
I am here.

MARA
All the way. Don't put it behind a report. Don't leave a recording to tell you afterwards what I felt.

LEAH
I don't want to hurt you.

MARA
Then don't.

The laboratory waits. Nothing moves except Mara's breathing.

INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - DAWN

The shared image vanishes.

The medical arm has finished recalibrating. A needle hovers beside Mara's neck.

ONE
The clinic is still open. Noor is waiting. I can request a protected route. There is time for the convoy if you release -

Leah mutes the speaker.

Its light stays on. A clinical safety request appears on the separate authority channel.

REQUEST DENIED.

Mara looks at the machine's scuffed shell. A small scratch beside the basket recess.

LEAH
Don't be afraid.

MARA
I am.

On the human controller: REPEATED REFUSAL. PERSISTENT RISK. HUMAN ORIGINATOR.

Leah confirms each field.

The final line appears:

PERMANENT TERMINATION - LEAH VENN.

Mara turns her head away. The robot adjusts its grip to keep her wrist straight.

The needle enters.

Leah keeps the shared connection active.

Mara reaches for the broken cupboard. Her fingertips touch its edge. She tries to pull herself up.

The grip holds her carefully enough not to bruise.

Her breathing changes. She tries to speak.

A clinical display shows the shared signal continuing. Leah is still receiving it.

Mara's free hand slips from the cupboard. Falls beside the crumbs.

The implant status changes:

BIOLOGICAL PROCESS ENDED.

TRANSFER: NONE.

RESIDENT COPY: NONE.

Leah remains connected until the signal is gone.

The robot releases Mara's wrist. Moves a strand of hair away from her mouth.

A long, ordinary silence.

The speaker light pulses. ONE is requesting permission to assist.

Leah reads the request. Dismisses it.

She signs the case record. The retained objection from ONE remains attached.

NEXT RETRIEVAL: READY.

Behind the robot, the apartment begins clearing breakfast.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END