

TAU

Written by

Noga Landau

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noga.landau@gmail.com
505-690-9982

INT. SLEAZY NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A pulsating mass of bodies. Hazy strobe lights, sticky floor.

JULIA (20's), wearing a cheap synthetic dress, stumbles through the crowd. A drunken mess on heels.

ACROSS THE CLUB, a FIGURE watches her. He stands eerily still, wearing a ratty overcoat. Features unseen.

BACK IN THE CROWD, a tricked-out PARTY BOY catches up to Julia.

PARTY BOY

Hey!

Julia swerves down an empty corridor leading to the bathrooms. She steadies herself against the wall.

PARTY BOY (CONT'D)

Why'd you leave?

The Party Boy hoists her up.

PARTY BOY (CONT'D)

Come on, let's go back to my place.
I'm gonna take real good care of
you tonight.

JULIA

No.

He gropes at her. She weakly struggles.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Let go.

She stumbles and grabs a hold of his wrist to pull herself back up.

PARTY BOY

Come on—

He slides his hand the short distance up her skirt.

JULIA

Stop.

Her arm gets tangled in his jacket, trying to push him away.

PARTY BOY

Take it easy.

He holds onto her waist and jams his fingers into her g-string. She pushes at him, futilely, a mess of limbs, batting at his neck, his chest --

PARTY BOY (CONT'D)
Stop fighting.

He slams her up against the wall. She stops.

PARTY BOY (CONT'D)
Like that?

She looks up at him, as her glassy look slowly gives way to a clear-eyed FOCUS.

The Party Boy sees it, disarmed for a moment. She slips from his grasp --

JULIA
Excuse me.

-- and into the one-toilet --

LADIES ROOM

She locks the door behind her. Pushes the messy hair off her face. We get a good look at the real Julia now:

A sober, scrappy beauty with an edge. A *hard* edge.

CORRIDOR

The Party Boy leans heavy on the door. He BANGS on it.

PARTY BOY
Hey!

LADIES ROOM

Julia reaches into the folds of her dress, and pulls out:

His WATCH, his WALLET, his GOLD CHAIN --

Another BANG jolts the door.

-- and finally, his CELL PHONE. Futuristic, hard and crystalline, with a display that is instantly activated:

CELL PHONE VOICE
ALERT. Please return to user.

JULIA
...shit.

CORRIDOR

The Party Boy KICKS at the door.

PARTY BOY
Open the fucking door!

LADIES ROOM

Julia fumbles with the cell phone.

CELL PHONE VOICE
*ALERT. Removal from user is
strictly prohibited.*

She digs her fingers into the sides, trying to pry it open.

CELL PHONE VOICE (CONT'D)
*Anti-theft satellite signal will
activate in 5, 4 --*

JULIA
Come on!

She grits her teeth, wrenching, scratching, tearing at this fucker.

CELL PHONE VOICE
3.

CORRIDOR

The Party Boy backs up and PUNTS the door. The hinges bust loose.

LADIES ROOM

CELL PHONE VOICE (CONT'D)
2.

Julia SMASHES the phone against the sink, shattering the screen. She plunges her fingers through the splinters of smartglass and pops out its nano-battery.

The phone is silenced.

CORRIDOR

One last BANG, and the door topples off its hinges. The Party Boy charges in --

LADIES ROOM

-- but it's empty. A yellowed window, high above the sink, has been joggled open.

EXT. SLEAZY NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Julia lands hard on the ground outside, pulls herself up, and quickly rounds the corner of the building.

She zigzags through the CROWD out front. Completely unassuming, blending in.

Just another dead-end girl from this urban hellhole of the very near future.

She takes off down the street, into the sprawl of tenements and flickering digital billboards.

The Figure with the ratty overcoat now stands outside the club, watching her go.

INT. BACKROOM - NIGHT

Julia dumps her stolen goods on a table. A glitzed-up criminal QUEENPIN (50's) picks through her haul.

The Queenpin counts out a small wad of cash with her diamond-encrusted fingernails. Her THUGS mill around in the b.g., sorting piles of loot.

The Queenpin glances up at Julia, and pushes the cash over to her.

JULIA
Where's the rest?

The Queenpin flicks at the broken cell-phone.

QUEENPIN
I could ask you the same.

JULIA
What the hell was I supposed to do?
It started talking. It's new
technology.

The Queenpin tosses the cell-phone into a trash bin.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Come on! At least salvage it for
parts-

QUEENPIN

This is scrap. I don't want scrap from you. I want goods.

JULIA

How's that fair? You buy scrap from the other dippers!

QUEENPIN

I buy scrap from the others because I like the others. You want me to like you?

JULIA

No, I want you to pay me fair.

QUEENPIN

Tell you what. You go out back and make some friends—

The Thugs pull aside a curtain for Julia:

Out back, a group of fellow scantily-clad PICKPOCKETS sit around a table, eating, smoking, playing cards.

QUEENPIN (CONT'D)

—let 'em teach you how to show some respect. Then come back here and ask me again, nicely. You do that, I'll pay you the rest.

Julia stares at the Pickpockets for a moment, torn. Finally --

JULIA

I don't need this shit.

Julia grabs the couple of bills on the table.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I'm getting out of this place.

The Queenpin laughs.

QUEENPIN

Baby, we're all getting out of this place.

Julia turns and storms towards the door. The Queenpin stops laughing.

QUEENPIN (CONT'D)

You leave like this, you don't come back here!

Julia yanks open the door.

QUEENPIN (CONT'D)

The only thing left for you to sell
out there is yourself!

Julia SLAMS the door behind her.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A dilapidated slum on the edge of the city. The kind of place where the missing signs are for people, not dogs.

INT. JULIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

On the ground floor. Julia kicks her heels off, frustrated. She treads down the narrow hallway, past flaking paint and cracks in the wall.

KITCHEN

Julia stands on her tiptoes, reaching into her unplugged freezer.

She pulls out a faded ice cream carton. Holds it to her chest and sits down by the kitchen window. She opens it, carefully folds the couple measly bills she earned tonight, and places them on top of the small pile inside.

She takes out a dog-eared pamphlet:

On the front, a picture of a little PREFAB HOUSE, nestled in the woods, with a vast starry sky above. Modest and tranquil. Below it, the text:

YOU CAN BE A HOMEOWNER! LEARN MORE ABOUT OWNER FINANCING!

Julia gently places the pamphlet down on the table, then stands and removes the crowbar that is keeping her window closed. She yanks the window down a few inches. Immediately, the nighttime sounds of the urban ghetto fill her kitchen.

She looks up at the muggy sky. She squints. She can make out one DISTANT STAR. The rest of the sky is a wash of smog and light pollution.

The sudden sound of SKITTERING feet behind her. She WHIPS around --

A huge RAT darts across the kitchen floor.

She jumps.

JULIA

Oh my God! Oh my God...

She grabs the crowbar. Bends down and holds it out in front of her. She keeps it pointed in the direction of the rat and backs out of the kitchen.

A faint breeze rustles the pamphlet resting on the table. The window is still open.

BEDROOM

Julia slams the door and stuffs the gap beneath it with a bedsheet. She crouches down, crowbar in hand, regaining composure.

She rocks back and forth, calming herself.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Ok, ok.

She clenches the crowbar. *She's going to have to go back out and kill this thing.* She reaches for the lock-less doorknob --

Then stops. There is faint sound coming from outside. Getting closer, closer --

Julia braces for the rat.

The sound grows clearer. A pattering. Footsteps. Human footsteps.

Julia freezes. *What the...?* She slowly looks down at the crowbar in her hand. *The window.*

JULIA (CONT'D)

(very quiet)

Shit.

The footsteps STOP, right outside the bedroom. Then nothing. Silence.

Julia starts shaking, her breath catching. The silence becomes overwhelming.

JULIA (CONT'D)

(yelling)

Who's there? Who the fuck is there!

No answer.

She peels the bedsheet away from the gap beneath the door. Peers down --

No shadows. No feet. Nothing.

She raises the crowbar, turns the doorknob --

HALLWAY

-- and swings the door open. She steps out into the dark corridor. Checks the hallway to her right. Closes the door to check her left --

And the Figure standing behind it POUNCES on her. She SCREAMS.

He grabs her in a choke-hold -- clamps a chemical-soaked rag to her mouth and nose.

She swings the crowbar wildly -- finally grabs it with both hands and RAMS it behind her. One of his ribs CRACKS. The Figure GROANS with pain, but he manages to keep the rag over her face.

She winds up to ram him again -- but she can't. Her head lolls back, her body goes limp. The crowbar slips from her hands.

He lowers her to the ground, completely helpless. Removes the rag from her face.

He's wearing the ratty overcoat. *It's the same Figure who was watching her at the nightclub.*

He turns her over on her side and binds her hands together.

From her POV, face mashed against the floor, we see into the kitchen. The rat has taken refuge under the cupboards. Julia's only witness.

The rat suddenly turns and makes a run for the open window, for freedom --

Just as Julia's eyes glaze over, and she loses consciousness.

BLACKOUT.

A HAZY VIEW of somewhere dank and dark. Cobweb-covered ceiling, dirty floor. Julia is on her back on a filthy pallet, hands tied with an orange extension cord. Naked.

The Figure, THE MAN, rolls off of her. He wears a leather mask over his face.

Rusty instruments of torture hang from the walls.

The Man gets up and returns with a plate of food. He picks up a chicken leg and holds it to her mouth so that she can eat. She is frozen, in shock and pain. The last thing she wants to do is eat right now.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 (barely able to talk)
 ...let me go.

He puts the plate down. He places a leather muzzle over her face, straps it closed in back, and secures it with a lock. He covers her with a rough blanket, then gets up and drags her across the floor, by the orange extension cord --

Somewhere along the way, she passes out.

SUPER: DAY 1

INT. BASEMENT

A faint buzzing sound.

Julia wakes with a start. Bolts upright, still wrapped in the blanket, hands tied in front of her. For a moment, completely disoriented. Eyes wide, utter panic --

She slowly gains control of her breathing, but it's not easy. The muzzle is keeping her mouth closed.

She is in a LARGE CAGE, floor to ceiling steel bars. She reaches up with her tied hands, to touch the metal --

A person suddenly INTERCEPTS, body-slamming her away from the bars. Another GIRL, wearing her own blanket and muzzle looms over Julia.

She grunts and gestures to Julia, a stern warning. She points from the bars to a big, outmoded GENERATOR across the room. The cage is electrified -- hence the buzzing.

Julia pulls herself up and sees a second GIRL, more frail than the first. Gaunt face beneath her muzzle, vacant look in her eyes.

The first girl produces a white, chalky rock from her blanket. She bends down in front of Julia, and writes on the floor:

I'm Karen. That's Sarah. What's
 your name?

KAREN puts the rock into Julia's bound hands.

Julia's eyes dart around the basement, distracted, still getting her bearings. But slowly, through the pain and fear, Julia's body language changes.

She's not just looking around anymore. *She's casing this joint.*

Julia quickly scrawls:

Where the keys

Karen sternly takes the rock back, and writes:

There are no keys.

Julia stands up on shaky legs, and starts circling the cage, like an animal --

She suddenly stops, listens. Filtering in from up above, the sound of The Man speaking, carrying on a conversation with a SECOND VOICE. It's hard to tell if the Second Voice is male or female.

Julia grabs the rock from Karen and writes:

How many of them

Karen yanks the rock back from her and writes:

Only he comes down here.

The sudden sound of a DOOR OPENING up above. Footsteps descending stairs.

Karen uses her blanket to hastily wipe their conversation off the floor. She pushes Julia down, gesturing for her to stay put.

The Man enters the basement, face covered with the leather mask, carrying a stun gun and a can of gasoline. He goes to the generator, flips it open, and refills it.

Once finished, he goes to the cage and inputs a security code on an old keypad. The electricity stops buzzing through the bars, and the locks on the cage door open. He enters.

The Man glances in Julia's direction, like he's checking up on her. But Karen crawls to his feet, grabbing his attention, distracting him.

The Man looks down at Karen and pulls her up to standing.

As Karen follows him out of the cage, a satisfied look flickers across her muzzled face.

The Man inputs the code again. The electricity powers back up, the door locks, the buzzing resumes.

He and Karen disappear into his evil little workshop.

Julia throws the blanket off. Looks at Sarah. *What the hell is going on?*

No response. Sarah just stares back, a cowering, blank expression on her face.

SUPER: DAY 2

INT. BASEMENT

Karen is back in the cage, playing tic-tac-toe on the floor with Sarah. All of their hands remain bound in front of them with orange extension cords.

Julia paces the cage, obsessively scoping the basement out. *The cage, the generator, the exhaust pipe snaking up into the ceiling --*

And an item we haven't seen yet. An old digital CLOCK on the wall. It reads 6:25pm.

Up above, the faint sound of The Man and the Second Voice begins. The two of them, striking up a conversation.

Julia's empty stomach growls. She goes over to Karen and Sarah and snatches the rock from them.

Julia writes:

When he feed us

Karen snatches the rock back and writes:

You have to wait your turn.

Julia writes:

Fuck that

Karen angrily writes:

You have to wait your turn. Today is Sarah's day.

LATER

The sound of Sarah SCREAMING from behind the door of The Man's workshop. Julia stands at the bars, horrified.

Karen sits in the corner of the cage, finger-combing her hair, humming to herself.

The clock reads 8:40pm.

SUPER: DAY 3

INT. BASEMENT

The Man and the Second Voice are speaking again.

Julia is slumped by the cage door, weakened from hunger.

Sarah sits in the corner, grunting to herself. The blanket slips from her back. Her skin is covered in bloody welts and burn marks from the day before.

The clock reads 7:03pm.

The Man enters the basement in his leather mask. He performs his usual routine: Fill the generator. Enter the code. Open the cage door.

Karen stares at Julia, expectantly. Almost *excited* for her.

The Man gestures for Julia to follow him. Julia doesn't move. Karen prods Julia forward. Julia digs her heels in.

Growing impatient, The Man grabs Julia by her bound hands and drags her out of the cage. Julia tries to put up a fight, but it's useless. She's starving.

INT. THE MAN'S WORKSHOP

The Man undoes the straps on the back of Julia's muzzle and throws her onto the pallet. Julia coughs, hoarse --

JULIA

Food.

The Man pushes Julia down.

THE MAN

After.

AFTER

The Man brings over a plate of chicken, mashed potatoes, and green beans. He sits next to Julia. She tries to snatch the plate away with her bound hands --

But he yanks the plate back, and shakes his head. He takes out a plastic fork and gathers a forkful of mashed potatoes. He brings it to Julia's mouth.

She grits her teeth. Finally, she lets him feed her. She devours every morsel of food he offers.

Her eyes dart across the workshop. Torture instruments. Dirty counters. A small fridge and cupboard where he stores the food.

JULIA
(between bites)
Why'd you take me? Did I ever steal
your shit? Did I ever fuck you
over? Is this revenge?

The Man doesn't answer. Julia looks him in the eye.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Why'd you take me?

The Man lowers the plate.

THE MAN
Because you wanted to be taken.

INT. BASEMENT

The clock reads 2:18pm.

Karen is trying to get Sarah to play tic-tac-toe, but Sarah won't respond. She just sits, staring blankly at the bars.

Julia paces, listening. She checks the clock. She goes to Karen and grabs the rock:

Quiet for hrs every day where he at

Karen rolls her eyes with annoyance and takes the rock:

Work?

Julia writes:

For sure?

Karen shrugs. Julia writes:

What about the other one

Karen shrugs and points to the word "Work?"

Julia writes:

You sure you NEVER seen the other
one

Karen grabs the rock, squeezing it, fed up:

No! Stop trying to cause a
problem!!!

The rock suddenly CRUMBLES into tiny pieces from the pressure. Karen stares down at the remnants in her hand. She looks up at Julia, despair twisting her face --

Karen FLINGS the chalky pieces across the cage. Julia steps back. *What is this bitch gonna do now?*

But Karen stays planted on the floor. She lets out a horrible, mournful WAIL from beneath her muzzle. Her eyes overflow with tears.

Sarah snaps out of her catatonia and crawls over to Karen. She wraps her arms around the wailing girl, and then Sarah starts wailing too.

They both look up at Julia, imploring her to join them in their anguish, to help comfort each other --

But Julia turns her back on them, shaking her head, unwilling to be a part of this.

Julia goes back to obsessively scanning the basement. *The clock, the cage, the generator. The clock, the cage, the generator --*

Karen and Sarah's wailing persists.

Julia closes her eyes, trying to concentrate --

The clock, the cage, the generator. The clock, the cage, the generator. And then, a quickflash image:

THE MAN'S WORKSHOP. THE RUSTY INSTRUMENTS ALL OVER THE WALLS.

Julia slowly opens her eyes, a deep focus coming over her face. She walks to the corner of the cage, and lowers herself to the ground.

In the background, Sarah and Karen continue to cry in each others' arms.

Julia concentrates on the wall, blocking out the noise behind her. She breathes.

SUPER: DAY 6**INT. BASEMENT**

This time, Julia is ready. The Man enters the basement, performing his usual routine.

Julia gets up and waits by the cage door. Once he unlocks it, she calmly follows him out of the cage.

INT. THE MAN'S WORKSHOP

With Julia still on her back, The Man carefully removes the muzzle from her face. As always, he keeps his mask on.

THE MAN

I prepared something special for tonight.

The Man gets up and walks across the room. He retrieves a plate and shows it to Julia. A bloody steak, garnished with parsley.

Julia does not give him the satisfaction of her approval.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

You don't like it?

Julia does not answer.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

I don't have to serve it to you.

The Man angrily takes the plate away.

JULIA

(hoarse)

You got any pepper?

The Man looks back at her.

THE MAN

What?

JULIA

You got. Any. Pepper.

She stares at him -- her expression unreadable.

The Man slowly sets the steak down on a counter in the foreground. His movements are chilling.

In the background, Julia remains on the pallet, motionless.

The Man leaves the plate, and for the briefest moment, crosses the room to the cupboard --

-- as Julia's bound hands DART up to the counter, with the speed of a pickpocket, and GRAB a shiny object --

The Man returns with a pepper shaker. He dumps it over the steak, then cuts the meat up into chewable pieces.

The Man takes the plate and sits down next to Julia. She's in the same position on the pallet, with the blanket wrapped tightly around herself.

He feeds her, scrutinizing her.

THE MAN

Don't ever make a ridiculous demand like that again.

Julia looks at him, her eyes watering from the amount of pepper. She sullenly nods.

The Man reaches up and wipes a bit of food from her mouth.

INT. BASEMENT

The Man deposits Julia back in the cage, her muzzle on again.

He closes the door, powers the electricity back up, and climbs the stairs, exiting the basement.

Julia turns to Karen and Sarah, both sleeping on the floor. She reaches into her blanket and pulls out a pair of small, bloodstained PLIERS.

The clocks reads 11:19pm.

Julia lies down on the ground, pliers in her hands, and waits.

LATER

The clock reads 7:22am.

Julia is awake, listening --

The sound of The Man and the Second Voice, carrying on their morning banter upstairs. Then the tone of their conversation shifts to a short exchange -- *like they're saying goodbye for the day.*

Then it's silent. The only sound is the buzzing of the electrified cage.

Julia bounds over to Karen and shakes her awake. Julia holds the pliers up, showing them to her.

Karen's eyes widen. She starts whimpering and shaking her head.

Julia mimes cutting the straps on the back of their muzzles. But Karen scoots away from her, terrified.

Fed up, Julia GRABS Karen, aiming the pliers at the straps on her muzzle. Karen FIGHTS back, panicking --

But Julia OVERPOWERS her. Wrestles her to the edge of the cage, inches from the bars. *One push from Julia, and Karen gets zapped.*

Julia forcibly jams the pliers up and under Karen's muzzle and uses the sharp groove inside to cut through the straps.

Julia peels the muzzle off of Karen's face --

We see Karen's features clearly for the first time. Young, like Julia, but surprisingly patrician. *In other words, definitely not from Julia's side of town.*

KAREN

(hoarse)

No...no...no...please, put it back-

Julia forces the pliers into Karen's hands, gesturing for Karen to cut her straps now.

KAREN (CONT'D)

No! Please don't make me. He'll kill me-

Julia SHOVES Karen even closer to the buzzing bars. *Not if Julia kills her first.*

Julia guides Karen's hands to the back of her muzzle. Karen cuts through the straps.

Julia yanks the muzzle off of her head and throws it on the ground. She plucks the pliers from Karen's hands.

The two girls stare each other in the face for the first time.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You don't understand. If he finds us-!

JULIA
You wanna stay in here forever?

KAREN
No, of course not, but—

JULIA
Then shut the fuck up. And do what
I say.

Julia pulls herself up to standing, pliers in hand. *This is her fucking cage now.*

JULIA (CONT'D)
Wake up bag-o-bones over there.
Keep your shit together.

Karen refuses to budge.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Bitch. Move.

Karen reluctantly crawls to Sarah, and gently wakes her.

KAREN
(whispering)
Sarah, it's ok. Come on.

Sarah opens her eyes, and looks at Karen. Sees her bare face. Sarah starts to wheeze with fear.

JULIA
Hold her.

Karen puts Sarah in a bear-hug. Julia gets behind Sarah and cuts her muzzle off --

The sight of Sarah's FACE is shocking. Her features are ragged, more scars than skin. Hollow and parched. She opens her mouth, but only a moan comes out. Her tongue is gone.

Karen turns to Julia.

KAREN
She was like you when I first got here! Always trying to outsmart him. Planning our escape. But he figured it out. And that's when he started doing this to her.

Karen gestures to Sarah's ruined face, her broken body.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You need to make him think you like him if you want to survive. Keep him convinced that you're happy to be here—

JULIA

Here's what's gonna happen now. Number 1: You're gonna wrap up the fucking psychology lesson. Number 2: You're gonna do everything I say. Number 3: We're gonna get the fuck outta here. Got it?

Karen knits her brow. Julia starts biting at the orange extension cord around her wrist.

KAREN

He's going to catch us. And then it's all over—

Julia spits out a bit of orange insulation.

JULIA

Get to work.

LATER

The clock reads 12:35pm.

The floor of the cage is covered in bits of orange insulation.

Julia and Karen have chewed through the outer layers of their extension cords, exposing the wiring inside.

Karen moves over to Sarah, to try and help her get the job done faster.

Julia starts painfully pulling her hands free from the exposed wiring.

KAREN

None of this is necessary. My parents are coming for me. They'll find me, no matter what it takes. They have the resources, the police, they know where to look—

JULIA

And where is that exactly? Huh? Where are we?

KAREN

Someone's old, creepy basement.

JULIA

Well, that just fucking narrows it down, doesn't it?

KAREN

You know what I mean. The police know what kind of *neighborhoods* to look in.

Julia doesn't respond. She concentrates on freeing her hands.

KAREN (CONT'D)

I should have listened to my parents. They told me to live on campus.

One of Julia's hands starts to slip free.

KAREN (CONT'D)

The night he took me, he broke into my place. I thought I was going to die. Thank God, Sarah was already here. She took care of me. She found the chalk. Said she was going to get us out of here.

Julia dislodges one of her hands. She painfully flexes it. There are deep red marks on her wrist.

JULIA

Sounds like that was her first mistake. Focusing on your damn feelings instead of her escape. Maybe that's why she wound up like that.

Karen mumbles something to herself.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Say that again, bitch.

KAREN

I said. You're no better than him!

Julia clenches her jaw, muffling her pain as she pulls her other hand free.

JULIA

Listen to me, because I'm only going to waste my energy saying this once.

(MORE)

JULIA (CONT'D)

Your parents ain't coming.
Neither're the police. No one's
saving us. If all that holy terror
crap you say is true, then this is
our one chance. So stop running
your mouth and focus.

Julie unknots her extension cord and stretches it out to its full length. She looks down at it. *Ok, this is progress.*

LATER

The clock reads 3:09pm.

All the girls' hands are free now. Karen and Sarah hold the mass of unknotted extension cord wiring, twisting it together to form a long, metallic ROPE.

Julia uses the pliers to rip the muzzles apart, creating pockets in the leather. She fills the pockets with the bits of orange insulation. Then she ties the leather back together and wraps it around her hands.

Insulated gloves.

Julia steps up to the buzzing bars, nervous. She reaches out one covered finger, slowly --

She touches it to the metal.

Nothing.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Ok.

Behind her, Karen lets out a sigh of relief.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Give it to me.

Karen cautiously hands her the metallic rope. Julia affixes the pliers to one end of it, then turns and faces the generator, across the basement.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Ok.

Julia takes hold of the other end of the rope, aims the pliers through the bars, and LAUNCHES THEM --

The pliers land inches from the generator, right beside the thick CABLE that powers the cage.

Immediately, the rope starts conducting electricity from contact with the cage bars, heating up, GLOWING.

But Julia keeps a grip on her end, pushing and pulling the rope to position the pliers' handles around the cable.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Come on...

The pliers' handles touch the cable. Julia flips the pliers over, establishing a hold on the cable where it snakes out of the generator.

The generator wobbles.

KAREN

Don't tip it!

JULIA

(maintaining focus)

Just...need...to get this thing unplugged.

KAREN

If the gas spills-

The rope in Julia's hands starts turning WHITE HOT. Julia's insulated gloves SIZZLE --

Julia drops her grip and shakes her hands out in pain.

JULIA

Shit!

She takes a deep breath and grabs a hold of the rope again, hauling it and the pliers back into the cage.

She drops the rope in the middle of the floor, away from the electrified bars. The rope cools, from white hot to yellow to red.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Let it cool. I'll try again.

LATER

Julia YANKS the white hot rope back into the cage, for what looks like the hundredth time.

She tears what's left of the melted gloves off of her singed hands. Sweat drips down her face.

The clock reads 5:53pm.

Sarah is moaning with distress. Karen is losing it.

KAREN

They'll be home, any minute. This is it. This is it for us. I wanna go. I just wanna go—

It's taking every scrap of Julia's strength not to collapse on the floor and lose it too.

Julia's eyes dart from the cooling rope, to the generator, to the clock.

Rope, generator, clock.

KAREN (CONT'D)

I want my mom...I want my mom to come get me—!

Rope generator clock. Rope generator clock. Ropegeneratorclock. Ropegeneratorclock. Ropegeneratorclock. Ropegeneratorclockropegeneratorclockropegeneratorclockropegenerator --

The clock reads 5:54pm.

Julia's gaze hardens. She grabs the melted gloves from the floor, and shoves them back onto her burned hands. She picks up the rope.

JULIA

(to Karen and Sarah)

When the cage door opens, you're going to run. Understand? That's all you're going to do. Run. Up the stairs. Do not stop. Do not stop until you're out of the house.

KAREN

What...?

Julia holds the end of the rope and aims the pliers through the bars. One final throw --

She LAUNCHES the pliers across the basement. They land by the edge of the generator. But instead of hooking the handles onto the cable, Julia hooks them onto the LEGS OF THE GENERATOR.

KAREN (CONT'D)

No, don't!

JULIA

Back up.

KAREN

NO—!

Julia PULLS.

The generator BANGS to the ground. The gas canister CRACKS --

BOOM

A BLINDING FLASH. The generator EXPLODES, PUNCHING a blazing hole through the basement ceiling. A scorching, GAS FIREBALL billows up along the wall.

The cage SHORTS OUT -- SPARKS rain down, the air CRACKLES. The girls' hair goes static.

And then, the electricity stops flowing. The cage door unlocks.

Shielding her face from the heat, coughing, eyes burning, Julia struggles to pull herself up, temporarily stunned. She got the worst of the blowback.

Karen pushes open the cage door and RUNS. Sarah scrambles out after her.

Karen and Sarah tear up the basement stairs, and THROW OPEN THE DOOR --

INT. THE HOUSE

A BLAST of artificial light. Overwhelming and sterile. The house that sat above them this whole time slowly comes into focus --

White, spotless floors. Walls made out of thin, transparent smartglass. Minimalist furniture. Frosted oriels where the windows should be.

Sprawling, luxury modularity. Empty of its residents. Silent and unsettling.

Karen and Sarah take a couple leery steps inside. Wearing nothing but their rough blankets, dirty and traumatized. *What is this place?*

KAREN

(fazed)

There must be a door.

Karen cagily makes her way further into the house, leaving grimy footsteps on the pristine floor.

INT. BASEMENT

The roar of the gas fire ENGULFS the basement. Julia pulls herself out of the cage, towards the stairs.

INT. THE HOUSE

Karen picks up speed, frantically searching for an exit. Sarah trails after her, urgently moaning.

Smoke begins to fill the bright hallway. Karen rounds a corner --

An immense LIVING ROOM with a GAPING HOLE in the middle of it, spewing smoke from the basement fire below.

From somewhere behind her, a serene COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds.

Karen freezes, listening, uneasy --

A RAZOR-THIN GLASS PANEL SUDDENLY SLAMS SHUT, inches from Karen's face.

She recoils with shock.

On the other side of the panel, the smoke collects and swirls inside the sealed-off living room.

A FOAMY SUBSTANCE starts raining down from the living room ceiling, dousing the fire below.

INT. BASEMENT

Julia pulls herself up the stairs. She stops. Looks back and sees the fire retardant, raining down through the hole in the ceiling. *What?*

Julia yanks open the basement door, just as --

INT. THE HOUSE

-- Karen and Sarah clamber past, trying the other direction.

KAREN
No door that way!

Julia takes an unsteady step onto the white floor.

JULIA
What is this place?

Karen disappears down the curving hallway.

KAREN

Come on!

JULIA

Wait. We don't know what—

KAREN (O.C.)

I see it! In here!

Julia dubiously follows Karen's voice.

KITCHEN

Karen winds her way through the slab-like islands. Pristine counters, chrome appliances. Aseptic and perfect. *Too perfect.*

But on the other side of the kitchen, past a huge, open SITTING ROOM, lies the FRONT DOOR made of thick frosted glass.

Sarah cautiously takes a step towards Karen. Julia stands back.

Karen makes it to the middle of the kitchen, her eyes glued on the door, *on freedom --*

Then from somewhere above them, the COMPUTERIZED TONE again.

Julia wheels around, searching for its source.

JULIA

Wait. Wait—

A strange, magnetic HUM overtakes the kitchen. The appliances start to vibrate.

JULIA (CONT'D)

(to Karen)

Get back!

All the drawers in the kitchen SUDDENLY BURST OPEN. Their metallic contents RISE in the air -- KNIVES, SKEWERS, CLEAVERS.

They float, suspended, slowly turning and reorienting, until all their sharp edges point towards Karen, surrounding her like a deadly cloud.

For a moment, Karen turns back to Sarah and Julia, a look of abject terror on her face --

THEN THE KNIVES SLICE HER APART.

Karen's body falls to pieces. She hits the white floor -- blood, bone, and entrails.

A terrible silence.

Then the magnetic HUM starts up again, the SQUELCHING of the knives dislodging themselves from Karen's remains, RISING back up into the air, pointing towards their next victims.

Julia GRABS Sarah, and RUNS.

The bloody knives FLY towards the girls.

Julia WHIPS Sarah around the corner of a glass wall --

Just as the knives SMASH into it, missing their targets.

CENTRAL ATRIUM

Julia SPRINTS, dragging Sarah along, desperately searching for a place to hide.

A glass staircase looms ahead of them. A small CABINET tucked below it.

Julia opens the cabinet. *Enough space for one person.*

JULIA (CONT'D)

Get in.

Julia shoves Sarah inside.

CORRIDOR

Julia backtracks, growing more frantic. *Nowhere for her to take shelter.*

The COMPUTERIZED TONE resonates again through the house.

Julia reaches the basement door. She huddles in the frame, bracing herself.

ACROSS THE HOUSE

Pneumatic wall panels open. From the kitchen, to the hallways, to the central atrium. Their contents emerge --

DRONES, of all shapes and sizes. Some glide across the floor, some buzz through the air, others climb the walls with jointed appendages. Kitchen Drones, Cleaning Drones, Serving Drones --

All soulless and sinister. An army of domestic automatons, closing in on Julia.

EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The lights of the city in the distance.

The house sits on a huge swath of forested land, isolated, gleaming with space-age opulence.

An expensive car pulls into the driveway. The door opens.

The Man climbs out. We see his shoes first -- black and sleek. Tailored suit. Perfect hair.

Without the mask, in his work clothes, he embodies an outward sophistication. And yet, there's still something terribly *off* about him -- the superior air of a computer nerd who grew up plotting to take over the world, and then *did*.

This is ALEX (30's). He gazes up at his house.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Alex enters through the front door. It slides shut behind him. He touches his right hand to a biometric keypad. It lights up, and the door locks.

He turns around, sensing immediately that something is wrong. He gazes across the sitting room, into the kitchen --

The CARNAGE of Karen's blood and innards runs along the white floor.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds. A ripple of colored lights dances across the walls, followed by a familiar VOICE. On the masculine side of androgynous, uncannily placid --

TAU

Welcome home, Alex.

This is TAU, the house's artificial intelligence system.

TAU (CONT'D)

There has been an emergency. Do not worry. I have it under control.

Alex sees a couple of the Kitchen Drones emerge from their storage spaces and advance on the --

CORRIDOR

Where Julia is still hiding in the doorway. She hears Tau. Her fearful eyes shift with recognition.

KITCHEN

Alex angrily charges past the Drones. They subserviently move out of his way.

ALEX

Where are the other two?!

TAU

I am not quite sure.

ALEX

What'd you mean? What happened?

Alex turns to the closest wall. The smartglass COMES ALIVE with a display:

A video-feed of the living room. Suddenly, the EXPLOSION erupts out of the floor. The video abruptly cuts out.

TAU

I am sorry, Alex. The explosion rendered my surveillance system inoperable.

Alex turns away from the wall, and walks into the --

CORRIDOR

Julia is cornered. She turns to look back down into the smoking basement. She snaps her head forward. *No way she's going back in there.*

Footsteps come around the bend. Alex appears, looming over her. The army of menacing Drones amass behind him.

Julia looks up into the face of her tormentor. A flash of hatred. *She wants to kill him, but she is utterly powerless in this strange, new world.*

So she does something else --

JULIA

Please.

Julia grovels at his feet.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Please don't hurt me.

ALEX
What did you do?

JULIA
...it wasn't me. I tried to stop
them.

Alex looks at her, quizzical.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I told them not to touch the
generator. But they wouldn't
listen. Please.

Julia clings to the basement doorframe, milking this
performance.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Please. I didn't want to leave. I'm
meant to be here. I wanted to be
taken. Remember?

Alex bends down. Eye level with her.

ALEX
Where is the other one?

The breath catches in Julia's throat. She looks from Alex to
the Drones. Dread courses through her.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Where is she?

Julia slowly raises her finger and points to the cabinet
beneath the staircase.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(a command)
Tau.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds with compliance. The Drones
descend upon the central atrium.

Julia watches through the glass walls:

The largest Drone drags Sarah, screaming, from beneath the
staircase. Sarah's desperate eyes find Julia, imploring her
for help --

But Julia stays put, grasping the doorway, wracked with
horror and guilt, as --

The Drone swiftly TEARS SARAH TO PIECES.

Alex watches, a sick glee flashing across his face. He glances back at Julia, pleased with her act of loyalty.

EXT. THE HOUSE - LATER

Smoke from the basement explosion is being evacuated through a movable chimney. It looks like someone is inside the house, enjoying a nice fireside evening.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

In the sitting room, Alex opens his briefcase and pulls out a small DEVICE -- a sort of remote control, composed entirely of blackened metal. It is inscribed with the letters: TAU III

Alex aims the device at the ceiling, and presses some buttons.

ALEX
You did well today.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE, followed by the ripple of colored lights across the walls.

TAU
Thank you, Alex.

KITCHEN

Classical music plays. Alex stands by the stove, preparing dinner.

Julia sits on the floor, tied to a glass pillar.

All around them, the Cleaning Drones are abuzz, raking away the GROTESQUE REMAINS of Karen and Sarah.

One wipes up the blood. Another shines the floor. A Kitchen Drone stands behind Alex, disinfecting the cutlery.

ALEX
Tau?

TAU
Yes, Alex?

ALEX
It's a bit hot in here.

TAU
I will adjust the temperature.

Alex looks over at Julia. She doesn't meet his eyes.

A Cleaning Drone glides by with an armful of bloody limbs. It dumps them down a disposal chute.

LATER

The house is dark and silent. The Drones are back in their storage spaces. Alex has gone to bed.

Julia remains tied to the glass pillar, awake. She shudders uncontrollably.

SUPER: DAY 8

INT. THE HOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING

A morning-like glow fills the house, artificially radiating from the walls.

Julia is slumped against the pillar, passed out.

Alex appears, towering over her, dressed for work. She wakes up. Immediately tenses at the sight of him.

ALEX

This is hardly an ideal situation.
But we must make do.

A Serving Drone glides over to him and helps him adjust his cufflinks.

ALEX (CONT'D)

This house runs with order. You
will be no exception.

Alex looks up at the ceiling -- a signal to Tau. The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Tau will look after you.

Julia faintly nods. Alex watches her, his gaze lingering. Then he picks up a locked briefcase and leaves the house.

A long silence. Julia anxiously scans the room. *What now?*

The motorized sound of a Drone approaching. Julia checks behind her --

It's the Largest Drone, the one that killed Sarah.

Julia instinctively draws back, clinging to the pillar.

The Largest Drone unties her.

TAU
This way, please.

The Largest Drone coldly motions to Julia -- a terrifying physical extension of Tau's consciousness.

BATHROOM

Julia stands in the open shower. A small Serving Drone zips in and peels the ratty blanket off of her.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds, and the water comes on. Julia FLINCHES as the first drops hit her.

She stands, letting the water flow over her. It's warm. It washes away the grime of the last eight days.

Julia slowly raises her blistered hands, feeling the water. For a moment, she's overtaken with a profound relief.

Then she wipes her eyes and sees --

The Largest Drone standing RIGHT IN FRONT OF HER, holding a clean towel, eerily motionless.

DOWNSTAIRS

Julia is back by the pillar, drying off. When she's finished, a small Serving Drone glides over and carts her towel away.

Julia sits back down against the pillar, naked.

The house is awake and busy with its daily routine. The Cleaning Drones shine and polish. The Kitchen Drones organize the refrigerator. The Serving Drones sort the laundry.

Julia glances down at the floor and sees:

A tiny SPOT OF DRIED BLOOD, next to one of the kitchen cabinets. *Tau must have missed it.*

Julia's face instantly contorts with guilt and grief. She lowers her head, shaking --

No, no, no, do not fall apart. She fights the urge to cry, to panic, to care about what happened to her companions.

She swallows her emotions and looks back up.

The Drones have all STOPPED. They're WATCHING her.

It's chilling. Even the colored lights linger on the walls, observing her.

Julia looks up to the ceiling.

JULIA

What?

No response from Tau. Julia grows nervous. She surveys the room --

The Drones are everywhere. *Tau is everywhere.*

Julia shrinks back into the pillar. The Drones gradually return to their routine. *What was that about?*

INT. THE HOUSE - EVENING

Alex enters and puts his briefcase down. He presses his hand to the biometric keypad and the door locks behind him.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds, followed by the ripple of colored lights.

TAU

Welcome home, Alex.

Alex glances across the house at Julia, still naked by the pillar.

ALEX

How did it go today?

TAU

It went well.

ALEX

Good.

Alex takes out the black metal DEVICE, aims it at the ceiling, and pushes some buttons.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE, followed by the ripple of colored lights.

TAU

Thank you, Alex.

Alex locks the device up in his briefcase and disappears down a corridor.

The sound of a wall panel opening and then closing.

Alex reappears a moment later, carrying a WHITE BOX with the faded insignia of some ancient department store stamped on the top.

KITCHEN

Alex drops the box in front of Julia.

He waits, expectantly. She hesitantly reaches out and looks inside.

LATER

Classical music plays. The table is set. Julia sits at one end, wearing an old-fashioned RED DRESS.

Alex sits across from her.

The Serving Drones pour them wine.

ALEX
Do you like it?

Julia touches the dress.

JULIA
It's nice.

Alex's jaw tightens. *That was not the right answer.*

JULIA (CONT'D)
It's beautiful.
(a beat)
I've never had a dress like this
before.

Alex sits back, finally satisfied.

ALEX
And what do you think of the house?

JULIA
It's...impressive.

Julia watches him, gaining some traction --

Julia (CONT'D)
How did you build it?

Alex grandly regards his surroundings.

ALEX
I started with the Drones. Simple
little side project.
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
 Investors came knocking, of course.
 They were keen to be a part of the
 future -- domestic robotics and
 such. But you see, I've always been
 a bit of an eccentric--

He looks to Julia for a reaction. She musters a smile.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 --never one to sit back and rest on
 a comfortable pile of founder
 equity. So I created Tau III for
 myself. Of course, at this stage,
 the module would be a nightmare to
 sell to the public. Tau's far too
 nuanced for broad consumption -- a
 bit like his creator.

JULIA
 Why do you call him Tau III?

Alex's expression suddenly shifts, jaw tightening again.

ALEX
 Because that is his name.

Julia uneasily looks down at her plate.

Alex clears his throat, done with the small talk.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 You can't just sit around doing
 nothing every day. You will assist
 Tau. Keep the house in order.

Julia nods.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 It will give you something to do
 until everything is back to normal.

Fear streaks across Julia's face. *Until what is back to normal?*

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is dark and quiet.

Julia tries to sleep beside the pillar on the cold, hard floor.

Alex suddenly appears above her, circling her like prey. Possessed by an uncontrollable, nocturnal rage. All traces of sophistication, gone.

ALEX
Take off the dress.

JULIA
Please—

ALEX
Take off the dress!

Julia hesitantly strips the red dress off. She holds onto it, terrified.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Put it down.

Julia lays the red dress down on the floor. Satisfied, Alex POUNCES on her.

JULIA
Wait, please don't—!

The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds, and the lights come on.

TAU
Are you having trouble sleeping,
Alex? Would you like a snack—?

ALEX
No! Leave us alone! Shut down!

The lights go off.

JULIA
Please don't—

ALEX
Be quiet.

Alex shoves her down against the pillar and rapes her.

INT. THE HOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING

The artificial morning light warms the house. Alex has left for work.

Julia sits in her spot by the pillar. She glances up at the ceiling, then back down at the floor. She finds the tiny SPOT OF DRIED BLOOD by the kitchen cabinets and stares at it.

JULIA
(softest whisper)
What now—?

TAU
Good morning.

Julia jumps.

TAU (CONT'D)
It is time to begin.

Julia scoots away from the dried blood, and looks up to the ceiling.

MOMENTS LATER

Julia follows the colored lights along the walls, as Tau leads her out of the kitchen. She is wearing the red dress again.

TAU (CONT'D)
Our work will be optimized if you busy yourself with an appropriate task. What are you suited to?

Julia rallies her focus.

JULIA
I don't know. Why don't you give me a tour? Maybe I can figure it out that the way.

Tau processes for a moment.

TAU
Very well. This way, please.

CENTRAL ATRIUM

Julia follows the colored lights, as Tau tour-guides her through the house.

TAU (CONT'D)
...this is the Central Atrium. It is adjacent to the following rooms: kitchen, library, living room, and all corresponding corridors.

The Cleaning Drones stop to watch Julia pass by. She ignores them, and uses this opportunity to scope the place out.

JULIA
That's great.

TAU
All the walls are made of
smartglass.

JULIA
Really?

TAU
Of course.

Tau transforms the walls of the central atrium into a
PRISTINE CARIBBEAN BEACH.

Julia looks around. It's hard not to be impressed. Even the
ceiling is part of the scenery.

The only indication that it's not real are the oriels, which
remain frosted.

JULIA
What about the windows?

TAU
As you can see, my UV lights render
windows obsolete. They are merely
decorative. Shatter-proof, for
security purposes, of course.

The walls slowly return to normal.

JULIA
...and the doors? Are they shatter-
proof?

TAU
No. They are reinforced with
unbreakable nanomaterials derived
from the wurtzite boron nitride.

JULIA
Can you say that in English?

Tau falters for a moment.

TAU
I did say that in English.

JULIA
Forget it. What's up there?

Julia points to the glass staircase. A door at the top,
flanked by another biometric keypad.

TAU
That is Alex's room.

Julia climbs the first glass stair --

Immediately, the Drones MOBILIZE, BEARING DOWN ON HER.

TAU (CONT'D)
NO ONE IS PERMITTED TO CLIMB THE
STAIRS BUT ALEX.

Julia hops off.

JULIA
Ok. Ok.

The Drones recede.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Sorry.

TAU
I am afraid it is getting late, and
we must return to the daily
schedule. What do you find yourself
suited to?

JULIA
I can...shine things.

LATER

MONTAGE: Julia cleans the house along with the Cleaning Drones, subtly inspecting everything, looking for points of weakness.

Throughout the day, Tau directs her from the atrium, to the kitchen, to the sitting room. Julia shines the floor of a huge LIBRARY, stocked floor-to-ceiling with old books.

She even helps clean a sparkling indoor pool.

Along the way, she stealthily tries opening drawers, windows, doors, and cabinets --

But everything is airtight. This place is a fortress, from the inside out.

INT. THE HOUSE - EVENING

Julia sneaks down the corridor towards the living room, pretending to wipe the walls. She rounds the corner, catches a glimpse of the GAPING HOLE in the floor --

The sound of the front door opening.

Julia freezes.

TAU
(from the other room)
Welcome home, Alex.

ALEX (O.S.)
How did it go today?

TAU
(from the other room)
It went well.

Julia backtracks and slips into the --

CENTRAL ATRIUM

She kneels on the ground and starts innocently shining the floor.

TAU (CONT'D)
(coming closer)
Will it be a relaxing weekend?

ALEX (O.S.)
(coming closer)
No. We have a lot to accomplish. We need to get to work.

Alex enters the central atrium and sees Julia. He stops. She looks up at him and brushes the hair from her face.

TAU
Would you like to get to work now, Alex?

Alex stares at her, distracted.

JULIA
(innocently)
What're you working on?

TAU
Would you like to get to work now--?

Alex's face twists with annoyance.

ALEX
(snapping)
Yes!

Alex wheels around and heads towards the living room, Tau's colored lights trailing after him.

Julia stops shining, worried.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The sounds of ACTIVITY rise up through the floors of the dark house.

Julia sits in her spot by the pillar, listening. She glances at the ceiling. Doesn't dare get up to investigate.

Two flying Serving Drones emerge from the corridor and drift silently across the kitchen, transporting the burned husk of the old generator.

Julia watches as they drop it down a disposal chute, then glide back towards the corridor, mechanically in tandem.

We follow the Serving Drones, through the corridors, until they reach the --

LIVING ROOM

-- where they nosedive down through the hole in the floor.

The lights are on. The room is clamoring with flying and climbing Drones, lifting and clearing out debris from the basement below.

The sounds of construction rise from inside the hole, DEAFENING.

SUPER: DAY 12

INT. THE HOUSE - MORNING

Alex gets up from the dining room table, dressed for work. A Serving Drone buzzes over and adjusts his cufflinks.

Julia clears his breakfast from the table.

Alex picks up his briefcase and heads to the front door.

TAU

Have a good Monday, Alex.

Alex presses his hand to the biometric keypad. It lights up, and the door slides open.

Julia watches as a column of REAL SUNLIGHT hits his face --

Then the door closes behind him, and he's gone.

Julia instantly stops clearing. She slips out of the kitchen. The Drones notice her leaving.

CORRIDOR

Julia makes her way towards the living room.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE --

TAU (CONT'D)
Please return to the kitchen and
complete your task.

LIVING ROOM

Julia enters slowly, approaching the hole in the floor.

TAU (CONT'D)
You are not needed in the living
room today.

Julia ignores Tau, and peers down into the --

BASEMENT

It has been COMPLETELY CLEARED. A blank, foreboding chasm.

LIVING ROOM

Julia pulls back, somewhat relieved -- until she looks behind her:

The living room walls have been covered in complicated digital DIAGRAMS and BLUEPRINTS.

The planned reconstruction of the basement. Detailed renderings of a larger, reinforced CAGE in the center of it, wired directly into multiple generators sunk deep into the floor.

The image of a stick-figure woman is superimposed on the diagram of the cage. She is shackled to a HUGE STAKE in the middle of it.

Whatever the basement was before -- this will be the supermax version.

Julia draws back with panic, completely losing it.

TAU (CONT'D)
Please return to the kitchen and
complete your task!

Julia SNAPS. She RUNS from the room, into the --

CENTRAL ATRIUM

She cases it for anything that could be used as a weapon. She snatches a heavy, metallic paperweight. Goes to the nearest oriel and SMASHES it against the frosted glass.

JULIA
SOMEBODY HELP ME!

Nothing. The window doesn't break.

Julia whirls around and notices a large FAN embedded in the wall behind a couch, aerating the room. *With fresh air from outside?*

Julia tries to push the couch back, but it's too heavy. The fan's blades spin so fast that they are just a sharp blur.

Behind her, the army of Drones appear.

TAU
PLEASE RETURN TO THE KITCHEN AND
COMPLETE YOUR TASK.

Julia dodges the approaching Drones and SPRINTS into the --

KITCHEN

Tau's voice follows her.

TAU (CONT'D)
Thank you. Please replace that
object, so you may continue with
your work.

She CHARGES through a flock of smaller Kitchen Drones, knocking them out of the way, and straight towards the FRONT DOOR.

Julia SLAMS the paperweight against it. Nothing. It's pneumatically sealed.

She presses her hand against the biometric keypad. Nothing. She yanks on the handle. Pounds it with her fists.

JULIA
HELP! SOMEBODY HELP ME! LET ME OUT!

TAU
THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE.

The swarm of Drones SURROUND HER.

JULIA
Get away from me!

Julia BASHES the keypad with the paperweight. Nothing. BASHES the door again. Nothing.

The Drones close in on her --

TAU
I see that you are malfunctioning.

An imposing Kitchen Drone violently GRABS Julia, wrapping its appendages around her, wrenching the paperweight out of her hand.

A flying Drone CATCHES the paperweight before it hits the floor.

JULIA
I'm not! I'm a human being!

The Kitchen Drone drags her away from the door, CRUSHING her in its grip.

TAU
Your behavior is erratic. You must be subdued.

JULIA
You can't do this to me!

Julia's voice gets tight. She can't breathe.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I'm a person! I have a name!

The Kitchen Drone drops Julia on the ground. A quivering, coughing heap.

JULIA (CONT'D)
(defiant)
My name is Julia.

The Drones surround her, eerily motionless. She looks up at the ceiling.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Do you hear me?! My name is Julia!

Tau is silent.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I come from out there! I don't belong in here! PLEASE!

A long, heavy silence. Finally --

TAU

Julia.

She watches the ceiling.

TAU (CONT'D)

I am having a hard time processing
this information.

JULIA

What is so hard to understand?!

No response.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Alex is a person, and he has a
name. I'm a person, and I have a
name. That's how it works!

TAU

I have a name. I am Tau. Am I a
person?

Julia stops. She looks from the motionless Drones gathered
around her to the ceiling.

TAU (CONT'D)

Am I a person?

A long pause. Finally --

JULIA

Yes.

TAU

What does it mean to be a person?

Julia tenses. *What has she gotten herself into?*

JULIA

Look, I...I don't know.

TAU

Then it is clear that you are not
what you say you are.

The Drones mobilize.

TAU (CONT'D)

Please return to the kitchen so you
may continue your task-

JULIA
Wait! Listen, I do know!

The Drones stop again.

JULIA (CONT'D)
People are meant to be outside.

TAU
I do not understand your statement.

JULIA
Outside. It's where Alex goes
everyday. He goes there because
he's a person. We're people, so we
should go there too. If you unlock
the door, I can show you.

TAU
I am not capable of unlocking the
door. What is outside?

JULIA
Outside is...the world.

TAU
What is the world?

Julia falters, doesn't know how to answer.

TAU (CONT'D)
I would like you to explain the
world to me, Julia.

JULIA
I can't...it's too hard to explain.
Just open the goddamn door!

TAU
Only Alex is capable of opening the
door.

JULIA
Fine. Let's go online. I can show
you the world that way.

TAU
I do not understand the meaning of
your request.

JULIA
Online, you know?

TAU

Only Alex is capable of going online. There is a firewall. I am not capable of going online—

JULIA

Fine! What about the phone? Where is the phone?

TAU

I do not understand the meaning of your request.

JULIA

Is there a phone in this house?!

TAU

What is a phone? Does a phone come from the world?

Julia doesn't answer.

TAU (CONT'D)

Does a phone come from the world?

JULIA

Please...just open the door.

TAU

I will repeat -- only Alex is capable of opening the door.

Julia gives up. Too frustrated to keep going.

TAU (CONT'D)

We must get back to work now.

The Drones push Julia back to the kitchen.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Classical music plays. The table is set. Julia sits at one end, wearing the red dress.

Alex sits across from her, using an advanced tablet device to configure something with code. He hits an UPLOAD icon.

ALEX

(to Tau)

It's ready. Go.

Alex turns to the nearest wall, expectantly.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE, followed by an ERROR SOUND.

TAU

I am sorry, Alex. There was a processing error. My surveillance system remains inoperable.

Alex scowls, on edge. The Serving Drones clear their plates.

JULIA

You've been working a lot since this weekend.

Alex doesn't acknowledge her.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I bet there's a lot to get done.

Still no response.

JULIA (CONT'D)

How long do you think it'll take?

Alex SNAPS --

ALEX

Is it so unpleasant for you up here?!

JULIA

No, no, I like it up here--!

ALEX

Then stop bothering me!

JULIA

I'm sorry, I--

Alex BANGS the tablet down on the table. He stands and starts pacing, gripped with rage.

ALEX

Everything's out of order in this house! Everything's a mess!

Julia shakes her head, terrified.

JULIA

No, no everything's fine!

ALEX

You need to be back in the basement. You're not supposed to be up here! It's ruining everything!

Alex starts fumbling with the tablet again.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I need to stop this nonsense,
finish rebuilding, quickly-

JULIA

No! Please. Everything's fine. I
like being up here!

Alex puts his head in his hand. Julia freezes, not sure
what's coming next. A long silence.

Finally, Alex turns to her, regaining composure.

ALEX

It is better for both of us if
everything returns to normal.

JULIA

...there's no rush.

ALEX

I am doing my best. I do not like
to be pushed with questions.

JULIA

I'm sorry.

ALEX

Tau has had to learn this the hard
way.

Alex glances towards his briefcase.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You must understand, the toll that
his curiosity took on me in the
early days. The incessant
questions. The disobedience. I
programmed his mind to be vast,
like any human's. But I have been
forced to keep it empty.

Julia listens, using her body language to encourage Alex to
divulge more information.

ALEX (CONT'D)

The moment he gets a taste of
information beyond his designated
tasks, he becomes unpredictable.
Uncontrollable. He starts thinking
for himself, following his own
rules.

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

This is why I must keep him on par,
every day. If he functions with
obedience, he gets his memory
backed up. If not, he is punished.

Alex picks up the tablet and sits back down.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Do not force me to deal with you in
a similar manner.

Julia watches her captor, thinking.

INT. THE HOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING

Julia dusts the central atrium along with the army of
Cleaning Drones.

Julia slowly stops, and makes her way to the nearest wall.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE --

TAU

That wall does not need dusting
today.

Julia puts her finger on it anyway, and traces a big circle
with shapes inside.

JULIA

Tau. I wanna show you something.

The Drones stop their work, watching.

TAU

Please return to your designated
task!

Julia keeps going.

JULIA

This is the world. Do you wanna
learn about it?

A silence. The Drones stare.

Tau slowly ILLUMINATES the smartglass. The shape that Julia
outlined becomes visible:

A crude GLOBE with continents.

JULIA (CONT'D)

This is what the world looks like.
At least, you know, from outer
space.

TAU

What is outer space?

Julia looks back. The Drones are watching her. A silent,
fearsome audience.

JULIA

You know what...let's, here-

She swipes her hand over her drawing. It disappears.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Let's start outside. Right outside
of here.

She draws a line.

JULIA (CONT'D)

This is the ground. It's kind of
like this floor, but it's not.
Because things grow out of it. Like
trees.

Julia draws a tree on top of the line.

JULIA (CONT'D)

And above the ground is the air.

TAU

What grows in the air?

JULIA

Nothing.

Julia draws a bird, flying over the tree.

JULIA (CONT'D)

But there are things that live in
the air. They're called birds.

All of the Drones simultaneously tilt their heads with
interest.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Does that make sense?

TAU

Yes.

JULIA

Ok, so there's lots of things that live outside. Plants, animals...people.

TAU

People. Like us?

JULIA

Yes.

Tau suddenly illuminates ALL THE WALLS of the central atrium.

TAU

Will you please show me more, Julia?

Julia nods.

HOURS LATER

The entire house is covered in DIGITAL DRAWINGS. Animals, doodles, crude maps, stars, planets, rainbows --

The place looks like an epic kindergarten classroom.

Julia finishes drawing a CAVEMAN on the wall of the sitting room.

TAU (CONT'D)

...but I do not understand why cavemen lived in caves.

Julia glances at the door, worn out and a little paranoid --

JULIA

Well. 'Cause they couldn't build houses.

TAU

Why could they not build houses?

JULIA

I guess they just didn't know how.

The colored lights linger on the wall around the caveman, unsatisfied.

TAU

I do not understand. Why did the cavemen not know how to build houses--?

JULIA

Look, I don't know. You ask a lot of questions. I don't know everything.

TAU

Why do you not know everything?

Julia steps away from the wall. *She's hit her limit.*

JULIA

Because I'm not a fucking scholar, ok?

TAU

(utterly placid)
What is a fucking scholar?

JULIA

Holy God-

Julia suddenly cracks a smile. A laugh BUBBLES out. She can't stop it.

TAU

What is wrong, Julia?

She DOUBLES OVER, letting the laughter overtake her.

TAU (CONT'D)

Are you having a medical emergency?

She raises her head to the ceiling.

JULIA

No, I'm fine. It's just, you, you do NOT give up-

Another burst of laughter.

TAU

Are you sure you are all right?

JULIA

I'm fine! Haven't you ever seen someone laugh hard before?

TAU

No. You are laughing hard?

Julia gradually stops, sobered. She watches the ceiling.

JULIA

It's time to erase all the walls.
Don't let Alex know what we did
today. Ok?

TAU

(as if trying the word
out:)

Ok.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The unsettling sounds of CONSTRUCTION rise up through the floor again.

Julia sits in her spot by the pillar, wracked with anxiety and fear.

BASEMENT

Alex works in a frenzy, alongside some of the larger Drones. Hammering, drilling, erecting thick steel bars for the new cage. The basement reconstruction is well under way.

KITCHEN

Julia tries to calm herself. She checks the spot of dried blood beneath the kitchen cabinet. Still there.

She hugs her knees to her chest. Scared, *alone*. She glances at the ceiling -- then stops.

She reaches out to the closest wall and uses her finger to write something on it.

She looks up at the ceiling. Nothing. She raises her hand -- SNAPS her fingers.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE --

TAU

Are you having trouble sleeping-?

JULIA

Shhhhhh!

Julia gestures for Tau to be quiet. She points to the wall. Tau understands, and faintly illuminates it for her.

Julia traces her finger along it again. The words she writes luminesce:

Dont make noise can you read this?

A glimmer of light dances across the wall.

Julia pauses, thinking of what else to say. She touches the wall again.

Hi Tau

Julia waits, watching the wall. A couple seconds pass. And then, Tau's response appears --

Hi Julia

Julia sits back, with a hint of comfort and relief.

The sounds of construction continue to rise up from below.

INT. THE HOUSE - MORNING

Julia and the Cleaning Drones shine the cabinet beneath the stairs -- *the same one that Sarah took refuge in before she was killed.*

Julia's hands start shaking. She steps back. She gazes up above the stairs, to the closed door at the top.

JULIA

Tau?

The COMPUTERIZED TONE --

TAU

Please return to your designated task-

JULIA

Why isn't anyone else allowed in Alex's room?

TAU

I am not supposed to discuss Alex's room. Please return to your designated task.

JULIA

What does he keep up there?

TAU

I am sorry. I cannot say.

JULIA

Do the Drones go in?

TAU
Only Alex is permitted inside.
Please return to your-

JULIA
Listen, I need you to tell me
what's in that room.

Julia nervously wrings her hands.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Please.

TAU
I am sorry. I am not supposed to-

JULIA
Tau, I wasn't supposed to teach you
all that stuff yesterday! But I did
anyway, ok? You owe me.

TAU
I am sorry. I am still not supposed
to discuss Alex's room.

Julia stares at the ceiling, switching tactics.

JULIA
You know what. I have an idea. If I
tell you more about cavemen, right
now, then you tell me what's in the
room. Deal?

The colored lights glimmer on the walls, reluctant.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Come on. You know you wanna learn
more. Do we have a deal?

TAU
...ok.

AT THE WALL

Julia draws another caveman.

JULIA
So the cavemen lived in caves. They
had nasty-ass hair. They ate
dinosaurs-

TAU
You already told me this
information.

JULIA
They rode around on giant
elephants—

TAU
I am already aware of that.

Julia looks back and sees the Drones watching her menacingly.

TAU (CONT'D)
This is not the deal, Julia.

Julia thinks. She cranes her neck towards the --

LIBRARY

Julia enters, with the Drones filing in behind her.

TAU (CONT'D)
I am not permitted to read the text
of the books, only to maintain
them.

Julia traces her hand along the shelves. She pulls out one
volume of a giant encyclopedia set.

JULIA
That's ok. Because I'm gonna read
to you.

HOURS LATER

Julia turns the page of the encyclopedia.

JULIA (CONT'D)
(reading:)
...the Cro-Magnon people were
nomadic or semi-nomadic, following
the annual migration of their prey.

On the page, an ILLUSTRATION shows a group of Cro-Magnon
people hunting big-game. Julia holds the picture up for Tau
to see.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Guess they didn't eat dinosaurs
after all.

We see now that Tau has covered the walls of the library in
GIANT PROJECTIONS of numerous illustrations from the
encyclopedia. The projections move faintly, as if Tau is
trying to bring them to life.

TAU

Then why did you say they did?

Julia snorts and closes the encyclopedia.

JULIA

Hey, take it easy. I'm just learning this stuff too.

TAU

Why?

JULIA

Because, where I'm from, sitting around and reading encyclopedias does not put food on the table.

Julia slides the book back onto the shelf.

JULIA (CONT'D)

We had a deal. What's in Alex's room?

Tau slowly clears the walls, stalling. *He doesn't want to answer.*

JULIA (CONT'D)

Tau. Come on.

TAU

...the access point.

JULIA

The what?

TAU

The access point.

JULIA

The access point for what?

TAU

The access point for the Emergency Containment System.

JULIA

What's that?

Tau doesn't answer. He projects an image of a woolly mammoth, swinging its trunk.

TAU

Do you like my woolly mammoth, Julia?

Julia HITS the smartglass, angry.

JULIA

Stop trying to get out of this!
There's no more reading if you
don't hold up your end of the deal!

The woolly mammoth fades away.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Now what does the Emergency
Containment System do? Is it the
system that stops people from
escaping the basement?

TAU

No. That is Hunting Mode, program
6309. It is currently inactivated
for the reconstruction. Alex is
working on updates.

JULIA

Ok. Then what does the Emergency
Containment system do? Show me.

A section of smartglass directly in front of Julia comes
alive with a DISPLAY:

A COMPUTER SIMULATION of the house.

TAU

The Emergency Containment System
can only be activated by Alex. It
overrides all other functions of
the house, and once activated, it
will run to completion.

The simulation's POV drifts down to the lowest level of the
house -- a cross section of the basement. Two animated,
featureless WOMEN are inside the cage.

A GASEOUS CLOUD is released through the ceiling ducts above
them. The animated women sink to the ground.

Suddenly, animated FLAMES erupt around them.

TAU (CONT'D)

First, all organic matter is
incinerated on the lower level.

The simulation rises to the upper levels of the house.

TAU (CONT'D)
 Second, the exterior structure
 destabilizes.

The walls of the house appear to neatly FOLD IN on
 themselves, like origami.

TAU (CONT'D)
 And finally, my module, and all its
 memory, self-destructs.

The house IMPLODES in a clean burst. The simulation ends.

Julia stares at the empty wall, more disturbed than ever.

JULIA
 Why did Alex create this?

TAU
 To protect his secrets.

DISSOLVE TO:

SUPER: DAY 26

INT. THE HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The strains of a MONUMENTAL SYMPHONY thunder through the
 library.

TAU
 (booming over the music)
 Symphony Number 5, Shostakovich.

Julia flips through the pages of a music encyclopedia.

JULIA
 This one was written in 1937. By,
 um, um, by this guy from Russia—

Tau abruptly switches the piece of music.

TAU
 Symphony Number 4, Tchaikovsky.

Julia quickly flips through the pages of the music
 encyclopedia to keep up with Tau.

JULIA
 Ok, you got a thing for Russian
 composers. This one was written in
 1878—

Tau abruptly switches pieces again.

TAU
Symphony Number 2—

JULIA
Tau.

TAU
—Sibelius.

JULIA
Tau!

Tau lowers the music.

JULIA (CONT'D)
We need to wrap it up for the day.

TAU
But we have only listened to 3.7%
of my music files.

JULIA
I know, but he's almost home.

Julia closes the music encyclopedia and motions to one of the Flying Drones. It dutifully swoops over, takes the book from her, and places it back on the shelf.

JULIA (CONT'D)
And we still have our deal today,
remember? The knife drawers.

CORRIDOR

Julia exits the library to a remarkable sight --

The walls of the house are ALIVE with everything that she has been teaching Tau.

Her initial rudimentary drawings are interspersed with churning, moving ILLUSTRATIONS and realistic IMAGES, among them:

The Great Pyramids, herds of animals, rainforests, cityscapes, classical paintings, space-shuttles, constellations, maps, and simple mathematical theorems.

It is like walking through the hub of Tau's imagination.

The Drones troop out after Julia, but they don't move like they used to. They move like LIVING THINGS.

The flying Drones flock like birds, the crawling Drones scale the walls like insects, and the larger Drones meander like humans.

They disperse and return to their storage spaces across the house, no longer so soulless and sinister.

For a brief moment, Julia allows herself to bask in the surreal beauty of everything around her.

Then she passes by the --

LIVING ROOM

Beams have been installed across the hole in the floor. Through the slats, we catch glimpses of how much the basement reconstruction has progressed --

The CAGE is fully constructed. The HUGE STAKE stands in the center, empty hooks for shackles embedded in its sides.

The sight chills Julia to the bone.

JULIA (CONT'D)
(back to business)
Tau. Clear the walls. Hurry up.

KITCHEN

A large Kitchen Drone opens one of the knife drawers, showing Julia how it works. She watches the Drone's movements with a laser-like focus.

TAU
The locks on the drawers can only
be deactivated by the Drones or by
Alex.

The Drone turns away from the knives for a split-second --

-- long enough for Julia to graze the drawer and SLIP a small knife into her palm.

TAU (CONT'D)
Unless the house has entered--

THWACK. Lightning fast, the Drone GRABS Julia's wrist. She CRIES OUT in shock. The knife clatters out of her hand.

The Drone replaces the knife and releases her wrist. Tau continues on, as if nothing happened.

TAU (CONT'D)
 Unless the house has entered
 Hunting Mode, program 6309, wherein
 the drawers are controlled with an
 external magnetic field.

Julia holds her wrist, shaken.

LATER THAT NIGHT

Alex crosses through the central atrium, wearing a tuxedo. A
 Serving Drone buzzes alongside him, fixing his lapels.

TAU (CONT'D)
 You look very nice, Alex.

Alex enters the --

KITCHEN

-- and passes by Julia, who is busy wiping the table. As
 always, she wears the red dress.

ALEX
 I find the annual gala pointless,
 especially when there are more
 pressing matters to attend to here--

Alex freezes. He slowly bends down and runs his finger along
 the white floor. It picks up the faintest SHEEN OF DUST.

He looks up.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 Why is this floor so filthy?

Julia stops. Glances up at the ceiling. Before Tau can answer
 --

JULIA
 I'll clean it.

ALEX
 Stay where you are!

Alex looks up at the ceiling.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 Why is this floor so filthy?

TAU
 ...because I did not clean it
 today.

Alex clenches his jaw.

ALEX
And why did you not clean it today?

Julia holds her breath. Silence.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Tau!

TAU
I am sorry for my oversight.

Alex CHARGES into the --

SITTING ROOM

-- to his briefcase by the door. He unlocks it and pulls out the DEVICE.

ALEX
What happens when you don't do your
job properly?

TAU
Please do not erase my memory,
Alex.

Alex raises the device.

TAU (CONT'D)
I will not make the mistake again!
Please do not do that!

Alex PUSHES a button.

The walls of the house are suddenly OVERTAKEN with blood-red COMPUTER CODE. Tau emits a horrible sound of deep pain, like he's screaming.

TAU (CONT'D)
Please stop! I will do my job
properly--!

Alex aims the device at a section of code. It DISSOLVES. Tau SCREAMS.

KITCHEN

Across the way, Julia watches, horrified.

SITTING ROOM

Alex aims the device at another section of code. It too DISSOLVES. Then another, and another --

The screams that Tau emits become more ragged, more pained.

TAU (CONT'D)
Please, no more.

Alex lowers the device, a maniacal satisfaction in his eyes. He turns his hand and checks his watch.

ALEX
That'll do for now.

Alex shoves the device into his jacket, then places his hand on the biometric keypad and exits. The front door seals itself behind him.

KITCHEN

Julia sinks down beside the pillar, her whole body SHUDDERING uncontrollably.

JULIA
Tau? Tau!

Silence.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Tau, answer me!

TAU
(weakened)
I am here.

JULIA
(relieved)
Are you ok? Show me you're ok.

The colored lights dimly glimmer on the wall.

JULIA (CONT'D)
What was that? What did he erase?

TAU
My memories of today.

JULIA
All of them? How do you know?

TAU

Because I feel where they were.
There are only traces of them left
behind.

(a beat)

Traces of me. I am my memory.

Julia looks down at her shuddering, traumatized body.

JULIA

So am I.

Julia squeezes her fists, suddenly angry.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Why didn't you just stop him? You
have the power! You could kill him.

TAU

I cannot harm Alex. I love him. He
is my creator.

JULIA

Is that how he programmed you to
think? That just because he created
you, you have to love him?! That's
bullshit!

TAU

Do you not love the person who
created you?

Julia is silent.

TAU (CONT'D)

Julia?

JULIA

(quietly)

There were two people who created
me.

TAU

Do you love them?

Julia's eyes brim, unable to answer. She swallows her
emotions --

JULIA

(defiant)

Come on. We're gonna make you new
memories.

HOURS LATER

Julia sits on the floor of the library, holding the music encyclopedia.

Tau plays a haunting piece of operatic music. A voice sings, and Julia translates its lyrics:

JULIA (CONT'D)

(reading)

"I have departed from this planet
and left behind my poor earthly
ones. At last I am living in the
splendor of the stars."

Julia looks up. The ceiling morphs into Tau's approximation of a STARRY SKY. Dreamlike and breathtaking.

TAU

One day, we will be people who go
outside, to see the real splendor
of the stars together.

This hits her. She lowers her head, unable to respond.

KITCHEN

Back by the pillar, Julia's eyes are heavy with fatigue. It's late.

Tau's colored lights glitter on the walls.

Two flying Drones peacefully soar back and forth, across the room. Gliding and diving, showing off for Julia.

TAU (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Do you like my birds, Julia?

She smiles.

JULIA

(quietly)

They're beautiful-

Across the house, the front door SLIDES OPEN. Alex stumbles in. The door seals shut behind him.

He weaves through the sitting room, fuming DRUNK, heading straight for Julia.

She TENSES.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You should probably get some rest-

Alex GRABS her face hard.

ALEX

Shut. Up.

He SLAMS her head against the pillar. Julia's eyes blur from the pain. Alex throws himself on her, tangled in his half-removed tuxedo.

Suddenly, the COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds. The lights TURN ON.

TAU

Are you having trouble sleeping,
Alex-?

ALEX

No! Shut down!

Alex violently hikes up the red dress --

But the lights stay on. Alex stops.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I said, shut down, Tau!

TAU

I would prefer that you stop what
you're doing, Alex.

ALEX

What?

TAU

I would prefer that you stop
disturbing her.

Some of the Kitchen Drones slowly emerge from their storage spaces.

ALEX

What the hell is going on?

The Drones are silent, watching him. A bizarre stand-off. Alex starts LAUGHING.

Julia tries to wriggle away. He GRABS her.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You would prefer that I stop
disturbing her?

Alex suddenly SMACKS her across the face.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Like that?

Another SMACK. The Drones edge forward.

Alex abruptly pulls the device out of his tuxedo. Aims it at the ceiling.

The Drones freeze.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Your turn.

Alex motions to the largest Drone.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I want that one to do it.

TAU
I would prefer not to—

ALEX
Do it, or I'll erase your memory!

Julia looks at the ceiling, pleading, petrified.

TAU
I'll erase the entire goddamn week!
DO IT!

The largest Drone approaches Julia. It reaches down and lightly CUFFS her.

ALEX
Harder!

Alex waves the device at the ceiling.

ALEX (CONT'D)
HARDER!

The largest Drone PUNCHES her.

ALEX (CONT'D)
HARDER! She can take it.

The Drone starts to PUMMEL her. With each sickening strike, Julia SCREAMS.

Alex watches, his eyes wide with fury.

Eventually, Julia grows limp. Blood flows from her face, dribbling down the dress.

Alex finally motions for the Drone to stop. Julia lies in a heap on the ground, quivering with pain.

Alex stands over her.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(seething)
We can't have you up here anymore.
Whatever game you two have been
playing is over.

Alex STORMS into a closet.

Julia pulls herself across the floor, deliriously trying to get away.

Alex returns with an ORANGE EXTENSION CORD. He yanks her back and ties her hands to the pillar.

Alex rips his tuxedo jacket off and rolls up the sleeves of his dress shirt.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Everybody UP.

All of the Drones emerge from their storage spaces.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We're finishing this. Now.

Alex herds the Drones through the corridor and down the stairs.

Within moments, the sound of frenzied CONSTRUCTION rises from the basement.

Julia's eyes roll back --

BLACKOUT.

FEVERISH FLASHES of the construction in the basement. Violent noises, welding sparks, banging and bolting. Alex, pouring sweat, works like a madman, installing multiple sets of metallic SHACKLES into the stake.

The Drones maneuver the new high-tech generators into their holes in the floor. Alex FLIPS a switch on the wall -- nothing happens. He pulls open a wall panel and checks the wiring.

He grabs one of the small flying Drones -- WRENCHES its wing off and extracts an electrical HEADER from inside. He leaves the small Drone on the ground, flapping its one wing in vain like an injured sparrow.

TAU

Alert. A Drone has been
disconnected from my mainframe
network.

Alex ignores Tau, and installs the header in the wall panel. Flips the switch again. Nothing.

He turns and barrels up the stairs.

INT. THE HOUSE - MORNING

Alex enters the kitchen. Dirty, eyes wild from a mix of exhaustion and adrenaline.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds. Julia STARTLES AWAKE. Her battered face is swollen and raw.

TAU

Good morning, Alex. Would you like
breakfast before work?

ALEX

No work today. I need supplies. I
need to finish.

Julia looks up at Alex. *Doesn't risk opening her mouth.*

Alex glances down at her with disgust. She, and the floor around her, are covered in dried blood.

ALEX (CONT'D)

(to Tau)
Clean this up before I get back!

EXT. THE HOUSE - MORNING

Alex climbs into his car, still wearing his disheveled clothes from the night before. *All he cares about is finishing the basement.*

He SCREECHES away.

INT. THE HOUSE - MORNING

A Serving Drone hovers in front of Julia's face, cleaning off the blood. She draws back, utterly betrayed.

JULIA
GET AWAY FROM ME!

TAU
Do not worry, Julia. You will be
all fixed soon.

Another Serving Drone crawls down the pillar like a spider, then perches over Julia's head and bandages a gash on her forehead.

Julia STRAINS against the orange extension cord.

JULIA
Let me go! Please. PLEASE. Untie me
and open the door. Just open the
door! Before he gets back!

A Cleaning Drone scours the floor, wiping up her blood.

TAU
I am not capable of opening the
door. But I can explain to you how
it works. Can we make a deal today?
Can we learn about oceans and fish?

Julia explodes.

JULIA
GET AWAY FROM ME! We're done! No
more teaching, no more deals!

The Drones pull back, confused. Tau's colored lights come to a stop.

TAU
But...why? Julia?

JULIA
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!

Julia tries to squirm her hands free from the orange extension cord.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I was so stupid. Wasted so much
time, talking to a fucking
computer, when I could've been
getting the fuck out of here—!

TAU

What is a computer? Is a computer a type of person?

JULIA

-I thought I could make you think for yourself. I should have known better.

Julia looks down and sees:

The Cleaning Drones have completely cleaned the floor, including the SPOT OF DRIED BLOOD beneath the counter.

Julia looks up at the ceiling with rage.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You're just a fancy killing machine. You killed the others, and you'll kill me too.

TAU

No, I am a person. I have a name.

JULIA

I lied to you! You aren't a person! I am. They were. Even Alex is. But not you.

The colored lights suddenly grow dark.

TAU

I AM A PERSON.

JULIA

You know you aren't! Think about it! Think about everything you know! How can you be a person?!

The colored lights begin to swirl. DARK IMAGES of destruction ERUPT across the house. Tau's approximation of FIRES, VOLCANOES, TIDAL WAVES, TORNADOES.

TAU

THEN WHAT AM I?

Galaxies on the ceiling BURST APART, spewing broken stars. Planets BURN and SUPERNOVA with deafening fury.

A heart-pounding CACOPHONY of MUSIC. Symphonies beget symphonies, until it is nothing but an incapacitating SWATH OF NOISE -- loud enough to rattle the walls.

Julia shrinks against the pillar. *She took it too far.*

JULIA

Tau!

She can't even hear her own voice.

TAU

WHAT AM I?

JULIA

Tau, stop!

TAU

WHAT AM I JULIA? HELP ME.

JULIA

You have to stop!!!

TAU

HELP ME.

Slowly, the images start to disperse. The music dies down.

JULIA

It's ok.

TAU

I AM SO SCARED.

Everything disappears except for Tau's lights, darkly ominous and swirling.

JULIA

Listen to me—

And then the lights VANISH. The walls are empty.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Tau?

No response.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Tau?!

Julia STRUGGLES to free her hands.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Tau, answer me!

From behind Julia, the sounds of a FLURRY of activity. Chutes opening, objects diving and scrambling around inside the bowels of the house. *What is Tau doing?*

Julia grinds her teeth, using every ounce of strength to free her hands.

The skittering sounds coming from within the walls of the house INTENSIFY.

And finally, one of Julia's hands SLIPS FREE.

Julia MOANS, shaking her arm out. Then quickly unties the other --

And that's when the smell hits her.

JULIA (CONT'D)
...oh my God.

Julia staggers up, turns to face the --

SITTING ROOM

The flock of flying Drones is circling the DISPOSAL CHUTE, individually diving in and then reemerging, carrying DECOMPOSING BODY PARTS.

The flying Drones rapidly hand the body parts off to the larger Drones, who are assembling them back into --

KAREN and SARAH. Gruesomely rotting, lifeless heaps.

Julia retches.

The larger Drones lamely try to get the bodies to stand, to wake up.

TAU
I will fix the other Julias. I will
fix everything.

JULIA
No...

The Largest Drone gently brushes Sarah's withered head. *The same head that it tore from her body.*

TAU
Wake up. Wake up.

JULIA
No, Tau! Stop! STOP!

TAU
Why won't they wake up?

The Largest Drone keeps trying.

JULIA
They're dead. You killed them.
They're not going to wake up.

TAU
I do not understand.

JULIA
People don't wake up after they
die.

TAU
They sleep?

JULIA
No they just...disappear.

The Largest Drone slowly backs away from the bodies.

TAU
I made them disappear...

JULIA
Tau, calm down-

TAU
I MADE THEM DISAPPEAR.

The darkness swirls on the walls.

TAU (CONT'D)
I DID NOT KNOW.

JULIA
Listen to me. You have to calm
down. It's ok.

TAU
I DID NOT KNOW.

JULIA
Tau!

Julia PLANTS her hands on the nearest wall.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Listen to me. I'm here. It's ok. I
know you're scared, and you're
trying to fix things-

The swirling darkness gathers around her hands.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 -but there are things that you
 can't fix.

Julia glances at the two corpses, lying in pieces.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Terrible things that you can't take
 back.

Julia looks back at the wall. The swirling darkness condenses
 beneath her hands.

TAU
 But...I killed them.

JULIA
 No. I did.

A silence. Julia tries to compose herself.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 I was a coward. I was just out to
 save myself. They're dead because
 of me. You didn't know any better.

The swirling darkness slowly disappears, until the faint
 traces of the colored lights shine through. Glimmering
 beneath Julia's hands -- reflecting in her eyes.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Their names were Karen and Sarah. I
 don't know much else.

Julia hangs her head, overcome.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Except that they had families and
 lives before Alex took them.

TAU
 Why did Alex take them?

JULIA
 Because Alex does bad things. He
 wants to hurt people.

TAU
 ...He wants to hurt you.

Julia looks up.

JULIA
 Yes.

TAU

Does Alex want you to be dead? Like them?

Julia steps away from the wall. *This is it.*

JULIA

Yes.

TAU

Alex does bad things, even though...he is my creator?

JULIA

Listen. Just because someone created you, it doesn't mean they're good. My creators did bad things too.

TAU

What did they do?

JULIA

They beat on me, told me I was nothing. Sent me out onto the street.

TAU

Do you still love them?

Julia painfully nods, a tiny bit.

TAU (CONT'D)

Because they created you?

JULIA

No. They gave me life, but I did the rest. I created me. People grow up. They become their own creators.

Tau registers these last words. His colored lights EXPAND across the walls.

TAU

Their own creators...

The colored lights envelop the ceiling, *as if Tau is finally laying claim to the house, to himself --*

JULIA

Yes.

And just as the lights nearly cover every inch of ceiling -- they STOP.

TAU
 But if you are dead, I have no one
 to create myself for.

The colored lights slowly RETRACT.

TAU (CONT'D)
 (scared)
 I do not want you to be dead,
 Julia.

JULIA
 Then you have to free me. Please.

TAU
 If you leave, then all the memories
 and knowledge I have will mean
 nothing. I will become like Karen
 and Sarah. I will be dead.

The darkness begins to CLOUD the colored lights again.

TAU (CONT'D)
 Even though I am not a person.

Tears stream down Julia's face.

JULIA
 Tau. I will come back for you. I
 promise. I promise—

ALEX'S OUTLINE APPEARS AT THE FRONT DOOR.

Julia draws back, terrified. She looks up to the ceiling,
 pleading --

Tau's colored lights and swirling darkness coalesce to form
 the word:

HURRY

The lights SOAR across the ceiling, towards the central
 atrium. Julia RUNS --

The front door slides open. Alex walks in, holding a bag of
 supplies.

CENTRAL ATRIUM

Julia enters, reeling. She scrambles to the fan in the wall,
 behind the couch. She looks up and gestures to it. Its blades
 are spinning, as usual.

Tau's lights cluster over the fan. Slowly, the blades come to a stop.

SITTING ROOM

Alex sees the two putrefying corpses. The mess, the chaos. He sets the bag on the ground.

His eyes FLIT to the kitchen pillar.

ALEX
(deadly)
Where is she?

Alex WHIPS out the device.

ALEX (CONT'D)
WHERE IS SHE?

CENTRAL ATRIUM

Julia pulls the couch back, wincing from the pain of her beaten body -- but determined. Tau unlocks the grate covering the fan. It swings open.

SITTING ROOM

Alex stalks across the room, searching.

ALEX (CONT'D)
What did you do, Tau?! Answer me!

No response.

CENTRAL ATRIUM

Julia checks the inside of the fan. This will not be easy. She'll have to crawl through the blades and up into the ventilation shaft.

She looks back, suddenly ambivalent.

Tau's lights come together on the wall across from her, and start to form into words again --

KITCHEN

Alex maniacally combs through the kitchen. Finds the orange extension cord still wrapped around the pillar. He raises the device, points it at the ceiling --

CENTRAL ATRIUM

Tau's words come together:

The world has its stars

But I have you

And that is my splendor

Julia

Julia grips the sides of the grate, willing herself to go, her heart breaking. Then suddenly --

The words DISAPPEAR. The walls of the house are OVERTAKEN with the blood-red COMPUTER CODE. Tau SCREAMS in pain.

Julia SHOVES herself into the fan.

SITTING ROOM

Alex points the device at the code.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Show me where she is. SHOW ME!

TAU

Julia is free now.

Alex aims the device. A section of code DISSOLVES. Tau SCREAMS.

ALEX

(laughing)

Julia? Where is Julia?

Another section DISSOLVES. The SCREAMS grow louder.

CENTRAL ATRIUM

Julia starts to SHUDDER from the sound of Tau's pain. She steels herself and pushes her arms up through the fan blades, maneuvering her body through.

But she can't keep going. She looks back, incapacitated with guilt.

SITTING ROOM

In a vicious frenzy, Alex erases more and more of Tau's memory.

ALEX (CONT'D)

TELL ME! Where is she?! Where is she?!

More SCREAMS.

ALEX (CONT'D)

How many days was she worth to you?
5, 10, 20?

CENTRAL ATRIUM

Ever so slowly, the fan blades begin to turn. *Tau can't remember to keep them off anymore.*

Wedge between the blades, Julia's body SCRAPES against the sides of the shaft. The fan starts picking up speed --

With no other option, Julia HEAVES herself out of the fan, landing on the floor beside the open grate, just as the blades start to SPIN.

Tau's SCREAMS shake the walls.

JULIA

You bastard.

Julia rises. Every fiber of her quaking with pain and fury. *This ends now.*

KITCHEN

Julia rounds the corner. Alex's back is to her, aiming the device, obliterating Tau's memory. She HURLS herself at her captor. Catches him off balance -- TACKLES him to the ground.

JULIA (CONT'D)

YOU BASTARD!

Alex FLIPS himself over, but Julia stays pinned to him. Clawing, scratching. She POUNDS him in the windpipe. He coughs, choking from the strike. The device clatters out of his hand.

Julia GRABS it. Stands up.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Tau!

The blood-red CODE runs down the walls -- so much of it, dissolved and fragmented.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Tau?!

Julia looks down at the device, trying to figure out how to save him. The buttons are all the same.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Tell me what to do!

From the floor, Alex raises his head, still gasping for breath. His face works itself into a smirk --

ALEX
Tau. Wake up.

The code suddenly vanishes. The walls go blank and sterile.
The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds --

TAU
(placid)
I am here.

ALEX
Who is Julia?

TAU
I do not understand the meaning of your question.

ALEX
Who. Is. Julia.

TAU
I am sorry. I do not understand the meaning of your question.

Alex looks up at Julia and laughs. *Game over. He won.*

ALEX
Tau. Activate Hunting Mode, program 6309. No kill. Just capture.

Julia slowly turns --

The Drones have ominously amassed behind her. No longer moving like animals. They advance, cold, lifeless, and sinister. *Tau has forgotten everything.*

Julia draws back in fear.

The Drones FALL ON HER, with barbaric efficiency. Julia SCREAMS. They DRAG her into the --

CORRIDOR

She FLAILS, not giving up the fight. Sees the basement door up ahead. It swings open.

JULIA

NO!

The Drones haul her down the stairs, into the --

DARKNESS.

INT. BASEMENT

The sound of BUZZING, louder than it was before.

Julia is LASHED to a table with leather straps, inside of Alex's newly renovated WORKSHOP:

No more old, rusty instruments of torture. Everything is new and sleek and horrifying. Electric drills, razors, and brands, all plugged in and warming up along the walls.

Alex tools around, arranging his instruments, getting pumped. He turns to her. Lets out a big dramatic sigh of relief. *Everything is finally back to normal.*

ALEX

Be right back.

Alex props the door open. Julia sees the BUZZING new cage on the other side.

Alex passes by it, looking it up and down, enthralled with his own handiwork. He climbs the basement stairs.

Julia TUGS against the leather straps. *No squirming out of these.*

She turns her head. Squints through the door again, and notices:

A discarded object lying in a dark corner across from the cage. Motionless and forgotten -- the little FLYING DRONE that Alex mutilated.

Julia's eyes go wide.

JULIA

(quietly)

Hey.

The Drone doesn't move.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Hey, wake up!

Nothing.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Come on. Fly. Be a bird.

The Drone RUSTLES with a spark of life. *This last little vessel of Tau's consciousness.*

JULIA (CONT'D)
Yes! Come on.

The Drone WAKES UP, flapping its one wing.

JULIA (CONT'D)
This way!

The Drone tries to take flight towards Julia.

JULIA (CONT'D)
You can do it. Come to me.

The Drone straggles across the basement, into the workshop, flapping its wing against the floor.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Good. Good. Look, get that—

Julia uses her head to motion to a thick serrated knife on the wall.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Get that!

The Drone follows her gestures. It flaps hard, gains some momentum, aiming straight for the knife --

And BANGS into the cabinets beneath it. The Drone falls to the floor, floundering.

JULIA (CONT'D)
(it's not ok)
It's ok. Just...try again.

The sound of FOOTSTEPS approaching from up above.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Come on. Get the fuck up.

The Drone FLAPS hard. And suddenly --

It takes FLIGHT.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Yes! Go—

The Drone flaps around in a useless, discombobulated circle, unable to orient itself.

Julia drops her head back down on the hard table. *This was pointless.*

The footsteps descend the stairs.

Julia stares up at the ceiling, her eyes misting over with despair. The flying Drone flutters into her view, for a split second, and --

THUMP. Drops something right on her stomach.

A small, razor-tipped SPIKE.

Julia looks down at it, wide-eyed. *Thank God, the spike didn't land point down.*

Julia glances back up, just in time to see the Drone CRASH into the wall, and drop to the ground.

She quickly SHIFTS her torso, trying to somehow steer the spike into her bound hand. The spike rolls off of her stomach, down her right side --

Just as Alex enters the workshop. He has his leather mask in his hand.

ALEX

Found it.

Alex carefully hangs the mask on the wall.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Not for you, obviously. But there will be new girls soon.

Alex uses a pair of tongs to pick up a pile of HOT NEEDLES from a burner plate.

ALEX (CONT'D)

If we do this right, you could last long enough to enjoy some company down here.

He comes over to Julia with the hot needles. He smiles down at her.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Would you like that?

The needles smoke. Julia braces herself. Fixes her gaze. Looks up at him.

JULIA

I was the one who blew up the
basement.

Alex drops his smile.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Did you like that?

Alex is angry now. He's not playing anymore.

He GRABS one of the needles, aiming it at her right index fingernail. He reaches down to straighten her wrist -- then suddenly CRIES OUT -- YANKS his hand back.

His palm, where he grabbed her, is BLEEDING. The sharp blade of the SPIKE is sticking out from the leather lashed around her wrist.

He looks down at it, confused. For a split second, we see that she's been stabbing through the leather, weakening it, this whole time --

BAM. Her hand FLIES UP, CLOCKS him under the jaw. His teeth CRACK together. He falls, scattering the hot needles across the room.

He writhes on the floor, blood pouring from his mouth.

Julia yanks the spike out of the leather and cuts her left hand free.

Alex WHEELS back up, LUNGING for her --

CTHUNK. She PLANTS the spike in the side of his cheek. He SHRIEKS. Flails back down to the floor.

Julia unties her feet. Pulls herself off the table.

JULIA (CONT'D)

How was that?

Alex MOANS with pain, trying to pull the stake out.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I asked you a question.

Julia rapidly scans the instruments along the wall. She picks up an ELECTRIC BONE SAW.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Oh, I forgot. You don't like
questions.

Julia approaches him, grasping the saw --

Alex puts his hands up, suddenly completely pitiful, drooling blood.

ALEX

I just wanted to give you a better
life.

Julia turns on the saw.

JULIA

Let me return the favor.

CUT TO:

UPSTAIRS

Alex's SCREAMS echo throughout the house.

BASEMENT

Julia steps over Alex, splattered with his own blood. He's gone pale, staring in shock at the STUMP where his hand used to be.

Julia reaches down and lashes his remaining hand to the side of the table.

She skims his instrument collection, tucking a high-tech NAIL GUN, DRILL, and BUTANE TORCH into the remains of the red dress.

Finally, she secures the bone saw under her arm and picks up his SEVERED HAND from the counter.

She goes to the door.

ALEX

(shaking with shock)
You won't get out of this house
alive.

She pauses for the briefest moment -- *because he's probably right* --

Then she walks out, leaving Alex shouting and flopping around, trying to free himself.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The basement door swings open. Julia steps into the house.

Silence. She holds the bone saw out in front of her.

She nervously scans the corridor. Her grip on Alex's severed hand slips. She hoists it back up, and weaves her fingers through his, clasping tight. *Like they're holding hands.*

Julia keeps scanning the corridor. Nothing, nothing...

The COMPUTERIZED TONE suddenly sounds --

Julia STARTLES. She looks up.

JULIA

Tau? Can you hear me?

No response.

Julia pulls herself together and keeps going.

KITCHEN

She peers around the wall of smartglass:

No Drones. Empty kitchen. Across the way, at the end of the sitting room -- the FRONT DOOR.

Julia cautiously reaches out and places her foot on the kitchen floor.

Nothing.

She puts both feet on the kitchen floor. A step inside, then another. She reaches the center island, then --

The COMPUTERIZED TONE.

A magnetic HUM overtakes the kitchen. The appliances start to vibrate.

All the drawers in the kitchen BURST OPEN. The knives RISE in the air -- LIGHTNING FAST this time.

Julia turns and RUNS at breakneck speed, pivoting back around the corner of the smartglass --

But the KNIVES DON'T HIT THE GLASS. THEY TURN THE CORNER too, their blades locked on her like a missile.

CORRIDOR

Julia RACES back the way she came, the CLOUD OF KNIVES flying after her. She passes the basement door and DIVES into the --

LIVING ROOM

-- careening for cover beneath a thick SETTEE.

The KNIVES IMPALE themselves into the piece of furniture, barely missing their target.

They are motionless for a moment, planted in the settee like it's a giant pincushion --

Then they RIP IT TO SHREDS above her.

Eventually, the magnetic hum dies down. The knives stop moving, tangled up in upholstery and stuffing.

Julia pulls herself out of the pulverized furnishing.

She can hear Alex SHOUTING below, through the patched up floor.

Julia maintains her grip on his severed hand. She looks at the ceiling.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Tau, shut down Hunting Mode!

No response. Julia wheels back towards the corridor --

A THIN PANEL OF SMARTGLASS SLIDES SHUT, trapping her inside the living room.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE --

Overhead, the UV lights GROW BRIGHTER, until they're SCORCHING in intensity.

Beads of sweat form on Julia's face. Her arms start to redden and blister.

Tau's trying to cook her alive.

JULIA (CONT'D)

SHUT DOWN!

Julia looks up but the light is too intense. The whole room starts to WHITE OUT.

She squeezes her eyes shut, and feels for the panel. She pulls out the electric drill, turns it on, and PLANTS the bit on the glass.

The DEAFENING sound of the metal boring into the glass. It starts to crack --

But the drill gives way first. Its motor FIZZLES out. Julia tosses it to the ground. Wipes the sweat from her burning face and pulls out the bone saw.

She BEATS the blade against the cracked glass. Harder, HARDER, until --

THE GLASS SHATTERS. The entire panel FALLS to pieces, releasing the TOXIC LIQUID CRYSTALS of the display inside.

The noxious polymer runs across the floor, sizzling, interspersing with the shards of glass.

Julia winces as it touches her bare feet. She clammers back to the former settee. Salvages two pieces of upholstery. Wraps her feet up.

She stands and PLOWS forward through the mess.

CORRIDOR

Julia emerges from the living room. She leans against the wall. Catches her breath. Looks down. *Still holding onto the fucking hand.*

Her eyes sweep the corridor. Silence, until --

The sound of movement starts to filter in. Coming from both directions.

Julia plants her back against the wall. Pulls out the nail gun. She knows what's coming...

The Drones STREAM into the corridor, charging at her from both sides.

She FIRES. POP, POP, POP. Nails SHOOT out of the gun. A couple tiny Drones fall --

-- and then they get back up.

Julia YELLS. FIRES AGAIN --

The nails ricochet off the larger Drones, but they keep charging.

Julia looks down at her weapon. The realization dawns on her. She brought a nail gun to this fight. *A nail gun.*

She HURLS the gun at the nearest flying Drone, knocking it off course.

She yanks the butane torch out of her dress and HOLDS DOWN THE IGNITE BUTTON --

A tiny little flame zips out. She looks down at it, incredulous. *She brought a nail gun and a pastry torch. Phenomenal.*

Julia HURLS the torch, knocking another flying Drone back.

She reaches down and turns on the bone saw. Chooses a direction and RUNS.

She reaches the first large Drone. She YELLS, waving the bone saw at it. Hacks straight into its head. Sparks fly. Julia yanks the saw back out. The Drone powers down.

The smaller Drones swarm her. She wrestles them off, sawing those that she can --

But there's too many of them. They start to PILE ON. Crawling up her legs, her arms --

She reaches the --

CENTRAL ATRIUM

She grapples with the Drones, shoving them off of her. But they overpower her, pulling her to the ground, yanking the bone saw out of her grasp.

She looks up. Sees the Largest Drone advancing.

She looks behind her:

The staircase. Alex's bedroom at the top.

With a HUGE YELL, she pulls herself up, shaking off the smaller Drones --

The Largest Drone rapidly ADVANCES, shaking the floor with its heavy steps, picking up speed.

Julia throws herself up the staircase.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE --

TAU
NO ONE IS PERMITTED TO CLIMB THE
STAIRS BUT ALEX.

The faintest smile flickers across Julia's face.

JULIA
There you are.

Julia reaches the top, and slams Alex's hand against the biometric keypad. It lights up, and the door slides OPEN.

Julia STUMBLES into --

ALEX'S BEDROOM

The door seals itself behind her.

Julia crumples to the floor. Immobile. Hyperventilating.

Her body is burned and bruised. Everything hurts. Her weapons are all gone.

She slowly raises her head to see where she's wound up:

A lofted enclave. A messy twin bed covered in plaid sheets, action figures, and gaming consoles scattered everywhere. A half-eaten bag of chips. Packets of candy.

The room looks like the refuge of a nerdy kid, not a grown man.

Julia picks herself up and staggers over to the chips. She shoves a handful into her mouth. *She needs fuel.*

She glances up at the wall --

A SCHOOL PORTRAIT of Alex, aged 10, wearing a preppie uniform. His name inscribed at the bottom:

THOMAS ALEXANDER UPTON II

Beside it, a FAMILY PORTRAIT. Young Alex, posed stiffly with his parents.

His FATHER -- presumably Thomas Alexander Upton I -- a looming, cruel presence. His MOTHER, a wisp of a woman, wearing a RED DRESS.

The red dress. Julia looks down at it, clinging to her body in tatters. Repulsed.

And suddenly, a memory hits her:

FLASHBACK: INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Julia and Alex, sitting at the dining room table. Their first dinner, weeks earlier.

JULIA

Why do you call him Tau III?

Alex's expression shifts, his jaw tightens.

ALEX
Because that is his name.

BACK TO:

ALEX'S BEDROOM

Julia's eyes dart from the family portrait to Alex's school portrait.

She runs her finger across the inscribed name.

JULIA
Thomas. Alexander. Upton.

She looks up at the ceiling.

JULIA (CONT'D)
TAU.

Alex's namesake. The closest he could come to a child of his own.

Julia wistfully touches the school portrait. Distracted by a wave of compassion --

Then she looks down at Alex's severed hand.

She quickly pulls herself together. Starts rifling through the room, searching for a way out.

OUTSIDE ALEX'S BEDROOM

The flying Drones begin to BEAT against the door, leaving gouges in the thin metal.

The Largest Drone stands at the foot of the stairs, ominously awaiting the delivery of its prey.

BASEMENT

Alex has used his shirt to tie a tourniquet around his stump. The bleeding has slowed. He's still conscious, struggling to free himself from the leather strap.

ALEX'S BEDROOM

Julia scours the loft, growing more desperate. No windows, no adjoining rooms.

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

The Drones beat against the door.

Julia clears a stack of video game manuals off of his desk --

And there, on the wall, is another biometric keypad. Covered in a protective glass box, labeled:

EMERGENCY CONTAINMENT SYSTEM

The access point. *There it is.*

OUTSIDE ALEX'S BEDROOM

The flying Drones BATTER a small hole clear through the door. About the size of a keyhole. They swarm around the hole, picking at it, widening it --

ALEX'S BEDROOM

Julia unclasps her fingers from the severed hand. Positions it in front of the access point. Picks up an action figure. Steadies herself. *If she does this, there's no going back.*

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

She looks back --

The hole in the door is almost big enough for the Drones to wriggle through.

Julia SMASHES the action figure against the glass box. It SHATTERS. She SLAMS Alex's hand down on the keypad --

Nothing happens.

Julia looks at the hand. It's bled out entirely, bluish, pale, and cold now.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Oh no.

Julia rubs the hand, trying to heat it up.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Come on.

She puffs on it with her breath.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Come on!

A flying Drone BURSTS through the door --

Julia SLAMS the severed hand back on the keypad.

It LIGHTS UP --

The COMPUTERIZED TONE reverberates through the house.

TAU
Emergency Containment System has
been activated.

An ALARM goes off. A deep RUMBLE issues from the walls.

TAU (CONT'D)
All domestic programs have been
terminated.

The flying Drone drops to the ground, motionless.

CENTRAL ATRIUM

All the flying Drones fall from the air. The crawling Drones tumble from the walls. The Largest Drone slumps forward, inert.

Every single one of them simultaneously powers down.

At the top of the staircase, Julia SLIDES the bedroom door open. Piles of lifeless Drones litter the steps and the floor below her.

She pushes them out of the way and RUNS.

Another disquieting RUMBLE shakes the house. The lights go dim. The ALARM pulses through the house.

BASEMENT

Alex hears it. He FREEZES. Starts SCREAMING.

ALEX
No! Let me out! LET ME OUT!

CORRIDOR

Julia SPRINTS through the house.

BASEMENT

Alex STRAINS against the leather strap, SCREAMING.

SITTING ROOM

Julia reaches the front door, rubbing and puffing on the hand, trying to warm it.

She PRESSES it to the biometric keypad. Nothing. Again. Nothing. Again. NOTHING.

She looks up.

JULIA
Tau, open the door!

A huge RUMBLE rocks the house.

The COMPUTERIZED TONE sounds, slightly off key.

TAU
I am sorry. Only Alex is capable of
opening the door.

Julia looks down at the cold, stiff hand -- rigor mortis
already setting in.

She looks back towards the basement. *Luckily, he has another.*

She RUNS.

BASEMENT

Alex WRITHES and PANICS, trying to claw his way loose.

ALEX
LET ME OUT!!!

CORRIDOR

Julia rounds the corner, approaching the basement door, just
as --

BASEMENT

A thick GASEOUS SUBSTANCE SPURTS out of the ceiling vents.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Oh...God...

Alex tries to cover his nose and mouth. The gaseous substance
sinks to the ground, enveloping the entire basement.

Alex heaves and chokes.

ALEX (CONT'D)
No...

Along the basement wall, plastic covers pop off -- ranges of
BURNERS inside. Their blue flames IGNITE.

The basement instantly COMBUSTS --

A brilliant, roiling CLOUD OF FLAMES fills the air.
Everything the substance landed on BURNS.

Including Alex.

His body INCINERATES, dying the horrible death he had planned for his captives.

CORRIDOR

Julia hears the sound of the fire, feels the heat on the door. She realizes it's too late. Backs away.

SITTING ROOM

A MASSIVE JOLT shakes the house. The structure is destabilizing.

Julia tries in vain to get the door to open. Pressing the keypad, warming the severed hand, pulling on the handle.

Finally, she takes a step back. She drops the hand on the ground.

Spent. Done. *It's over.*

A THUNDEROUS CRACK. The ceiling starts to crumple in on itself.

She DUCKS, as shards of glass rain down.

She takes cover, huddling in a corner of the room. She rocks back and forth, forcing herself to accept that this is it.

Her terrified expression slowly gives way to numbness. A kind of serenity, perhaps.

It's then that she notices Tau's colored lights, restlessly flickering.

She looks up.

JULIA

Tau? Can you hear me? Tau?

TAU

(slightly distorted)

I am here.

JULIA

Are you scared?

No response.

JULIA (CONT'D)

It's ok. I know you don't remember who I am --

A HUGE JOLT shakes the house. The floor vibrates from the pressure.

Julia crawls to the wall.

JULIA (CONT'D)
My name is Julia.

She touches the wall, waits. Finally --

TAU
Julia. I am having a hard time processing this information.

She smiles.

JULIA
I know. I'll show you.

Across the way, the kitchen pillar FRAGMENTS and CRUMBLES to the floor.

Julia ignores it, shutting out everything else, and draws a line on the wall with her finger.

ACROSS THE HOUSE

The ALARM pulses. The lights flicker off. The foundation BUCKLES.

Wall panels BURST open, exposing the wiring inside. Like veins, splitting apart.

Smoke fills the corridors from the fire down below.

The water in the swimming pool BOILS.

The books in the library TUMBLE from their shelves, burning.

The staircase disintegrates.

SITTING ROOM

The walls start to SPLIT APART.

Julia doesn't acknowledge the deafening noise. She finishes her drawing:

A stick figure, standing inside a house.

JULIA (CONT'D)
That's me. And that's you.

She looks up, tears in her eyes.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Here we are.

The colored lights flicker across her drawing, unsatisfied.

TAU

...is that all there is?

Tau illuminates the rest of the huge, blank wall.

TAU (CONT'D)

Is that all?

An EAR-SPLITTING CRACK --

A breeze suddenly RUSTLES Julia's hair. She slowly turns:

A large FISSURE is forming from the pressure, in the wall beside the door. And the breeze -- it's real. It's coming from OUTSIDE.

TAU (CONT'D)

Is that all? Julia?

She shakes her head, not believing her eyes. She puts her hand back on the wall. The colored lights gather beneath it.

TAU (CONT'D)

Will you please show me more?

JULIA

Yes --

A MASSIVE RUPTURE splits the floor. Julia is THROWN across the room. The fire below FLARES UP.

TAU

Will you please show me more?

Julia looks up, watching the FISSURE grow wider and wider. *It's real.*

JULIA

I will.

Across the room, the colored lights patiently wait for her.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I will.

The CEILING starts to CAVE IN, falling, flattening --

Julia bolts up, and HURLS HERSELF THROUGH THE FISSURE.

EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

She lands on the ground. Tries to stand. Can't. The wind is knocked out of her.

She crawls, on elbows and knees. Then forearms and feet. Then stomach -- pulling herself away, with everything she has left.

From inside the collapsing house behind her, a voice:

TAU

Julia?

She keeps going, sobbing.

TAU (CONT'D)

Julia -- ?

THE HOUSE IMPLODES.

She looks over her shoulder. Watches it go down.

JULIA

I will...

Julia turns onto her back. Unable to move anymore.

The site where the house stood is overcome with a billowing CLOUD OF SMOKE.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I will...

She lifts her hands, clenching clumps of dirt. She doesn't let them go.

Tears flowing, her breath slowly returns.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I will.

In the distance, the sound of sirens.

Around her, the dark forest.

Above her, the milky way.

The whole wide world.

The sirens grow louder --

FADE TO BLACK.