

BLACK MIRROR

"THE MULE"

written by

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INT. GRADE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - MORNING

ECU: A young girl's iris. Blue. Piercing. Perfect. *Too perfect.* Digital images reflect off its glazed surface.

This is CLAIRE (12). Her eyes track animated images of cells, genes, and DNA sequences as they dance across a curved glass screen. She reclines in a padded chair - an Eames Chair cranked to 11.

Claire's eyes are not the only thing about her that's perfect. She has fine blonde hair, immaculate white skin, and her features are exactly in proportion with one another.

She touches a gene sequence on her screen. BZZZZZZT. The gene sequence glows RED. *Wrong answer.* Claire furrows her brow, agitated. Guess she's not perfect after all.

She presses another image. It glows GOLD and plays a pleasing CHIRP - *right answer.*

Her correct answer triggers the next part of the lesson.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Well done, Claire! This is an imperfect strand of DNA. Now can you explain why it's imperfect? You'll receive extra marks for using today's key word, "nucleotide" in your answer.

A BAR appears on the screen that measures the strength of Claire's answer. The bar fills up and changes from red to green as her answer strengthens - like a website illustrating a password's strength.

CLAIRE

The strand of DNA is imperfect because there are no cuts. Perfect DNA has marks where you can see where the bad parts have been removed...

(re: progress bar wavering at yellow)

...in the nucleotide.

The bar jumps to green.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Great answer, Claire! You've completed the lesson. It's now time for your 30 minute recess.

(MORE)

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE (CONT'D)

Remember, play time is essential
for a healthy mind. Get out there
and have some fun! You deserve it.

The screen fades. Claire sits up from her chair. Other STUDENTS in the classroom also leave their seats.

All the students wear navy blue uniforms that look like prep-school-meets-Lulu-Lemon. And every single student is flawless. Not a redheaded cousin in the bunch. It's uncanny.

The students obediently file out of the classroom. Girls in one line, boys in another - like base pairs of DNA.

Several GIRLS jockey their way into line together. One of the girls, VANESSA (12), waves for Claire to join them. Claire, disarmed, cautiously moves into their orbit.

INT. PLAYGROUND - MOMENTS LATER

An artificial sun shines from the domed ceiling - it provides absolutely zero harmful UV rays. The computer-generated clouds are a dead ringer for the real deal. Fake grass carpets the padded foam soil. You'd have to really struggle to break a bone in here.

Boys climb on a set of classic playground equipment. Several students digitally paint and draw on the glass 'scenery wall'. Other children kick a soccer ball around.

Vanessa, several other distinctly MEAN GIRLS, and Claire sit in a circle together. Vanessa holds court as the Queen Bee.

VANESSA

My parents don't think people
should be allowed to give birth to
imps anymore. They think it's
irresponsible. My dad says it
lowers the whole bottom line for
humanity.

All but Claire nod in quiet acquiescence.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Because if there are *more* imps then
they can give birth to even *more*
imps. And then--

CLAIRE

(cutting her off)
You're not supposed to use that
word.

Oh snap! The mean girls gape at Claire.

VANESSA

What? Imps? Imps imps imps imps
imps. What are you going to do?
Tattle on me?

CLAIRE

It's just not nice.

VANESSA

You *would* think that.

(beat)

If you like imps so much then why
don't you go play with them
instead? They have an *outside*
playground. I drove past it with my
parents. It looked so... sad. It
was like, rusting. So dated.

CLAIRE

That's not what I mean.

VANESSA

Oh my gosh. I just had a great
idea. Why don't we all go there
after school? You guys *have* to see
it. The imps are so ugly.

The mean girls nod excitedly. Claire gulps.

CLAIRE

Won't that be a restricted area?

Vanessa holds up her wrist. She's wearing a fancy WATCH (aka
an AURA). In fact, all of the students are wearing them.

VANESSA

(re: Aura)

My parents gave me all access. We
can all pool together in my car.
Whaddya say, Claire? You in?

CLAIRE

I'm supposed to go straight home
after school. My parents will know
if I don't.

VANESSA

Just tell them you're staying late
to practice violin or do Mathletes
or something. *Your* parents would
love that, wouldn't they?

The mean girls eye Claire. Peer pressure is a bitch.

CLAIRE

Fine. Whatever. I'll go.

EXT. GRADE SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Students rush out of the school. Though they look different than regular kids, they still act like every other child when school lets out. Like animals escaping their zoo enclosures.

A row of AUTOMATED CARS with colored, glowing windows line the road. Each student's Aura GLOWS a matching color. The students dash to their respective cars. They TAP their Auras against the doors. The doors slide open. An electric HUM sounds as the cars zip away.

Vanessa TAPS her Aura against the matching car door. It slides open and all of the girls pile into...

INT. VANESSA'S AUTOMATED CAR - CONTINUOUS

The interior of the car is oval-shaped with curved bench seating and a table in the middle.

VANESSA

Play Vanessa's Slumber Party
Playlist in Club Mode!

A DIGITAL POP SONG blares out of the sound system. The main lights dim and colored strobe lights flash on. It's a straight up club in this car.

The girls SHRIEK in excitement. They SING ALONG with the sugary, synth-driven, K-Pop inspired song. These are tween girls in their most primal form.

Claire, emboldened by the silliness, JUMPS out of her seat and WAILS like a diva for the chorus.

It does not have its intended effect. The air goes out of the car. Vanessa and the mean girls gawk at her. Claire's pale cheeks flush with color. After a long beat--

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Oh my gosh, Claire, that was
amazing. You're hilarious!

Phew. Everyone JOINS IN and WAILS along with Claire.

EXT. OUTSIDE PLAYGROUND - LATER

Vanessa's automated car pulls up to the "outside playground". The girls spill out of the car.

The outside playground is enclosed by a tall, chain-link fence. Sure enough, the chain links are rusty. So is the jungle gym equipment. This playground hasn't been remodeled for many years - maybe even pre-2000.

KIDS play all across the outside playground. Some boys climb on the jungle gym, some draw in the dirt, some kick around a soccer ball, and some girls sit in a circle. Sound familiar?

The glaring difference, aside from the rust, is that all these kids look utterly *normal*. Buck teeth. Big ears. Scrawny. Mousy hair.

The girls are awe-struck. JANIE, one of the mean girls, is the first to break the silence.

JANIE

Can you imagine? Are they just full of diseases?

VANESSA

Of course they are, Janie. That's why they're called imps. They're *imperfect*.

(beat)

That's also why they're so ugly. I mean just look at them.

The mean girls stare through the fence like visitors at a zoo. Claire reconnoiters the scene. She clocks all the individual activities happening around the playground. Finally her gaze lands on the soccer field.

TAMAL (12), a thick-haired Pakistani boy with an even thicker pair of GLASSES, dribbles hard up the field. He outpaces the defenders. He JUKES the GOALIE and SCORES.

GOALIE

You were offsides!

TAMAL

You always say that!

GOALIE

Because you always are!

TAMAL

Whatever. You're just a bad goalie.

The goalie scowls. He rips the ball out of the back of the net, steps around the goal post, and dropkicks the ball over the chain link fence. The ball bounces near Claire and the mean girls.

GOALIE

You'd better go and get that.

Claire, clocking the whole exchange, chases after the ball. She finds it near a tree. She scoops it up.

VANESSA

Ew, Claire, don't touch it!

Tamal stands at the fence. His sweaty, dirt-streaked hands cling to the chain links. He watches Claire return.

CLAIRE

Here. I got your ball for you.

Tamal is stricken silent.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I guess I'll throw it over to you?

TAMAL

You're... you're really pretty.

CLAIRE

... thanks?

Tamal SNEEZES. Claire reflexively jumps backward.

TAMAL

Sorry. Allergies.

CLAIRE

Allergies?

TAMAL

Yeah. You know. Like pollen in the air and stuff. It makes me sneeze.

CLAIRE

Oh. I'm sorry. I think my dad is allergic to dogs.

TAMAL

It's OK. It's mostly just annoying.
(beat)
Not infectious or anything.

Vanessa and the mean girls clock the interaction. They TITTER and GOSSIP in hushed, hurried voices. Claire seems to have inadvertently stolen the spotlight. Vanessa folds her arms.

VANESSA

Oh my gosh. Wouldn't it be so funny if we, like, left Claire here? It would be so funny.

JANIE

I don't know...

VANESSA

She clearly doesn't want to hang out with us anyway. Look, she's having fun with that imp. So let's let her have fun.

(beat)

Come on. I'm leaving.

Vanessa climbs back into the automated car. Janie and the other girls GIGGLE at their wickedness. The door closes. The car HUMS away.

The boys on the soccer field grow impatient.

BOY

Tamal! Stop talking to your girlfriend and let's play! We're down 1 nil!

TAMAL

Oh. Um. Yeah. The ball?

Claire uses all her might to heave the ball into the air. It clears the fence on her first try.

TAMAL (CONT'D)

Nice throw! I'm Tamal, by the way.

CLAIRE

I'm Claire.

TAMAL

Hey, isn't that your friend's car?

Sure enough, Vanessa's car ZIPS past her down the road. Claire bolts after it.

CLAIRE

Hey! Wait! Vanessa!

Vanessa and the other girls LAUGH through the rear glass as Claire tries to catch up. Only Janie shows a hint of remorse.

Claire stops running, defeated. She holds up her Aura.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Call Vanessa.

The Aura CHIMES a few times. No answer.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Call Vanessa!

Rinse. Repeat.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Set pickup location.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE
I'm sorry, Claire. You're in a
restricted area. Parental approval
required. Shall I call mom?

CLAIRE
No! Don't call mom.

TAMAL
Everything OK?

CLAIRE
No, everything's not OK. My friends
abandoned me!

TAMAL
Did you want to play with us? We're
a player short.

CLAIRE
I want to go home.
(beat, idea)
Wait. Can you call me a car?

Tamal holds up his wrist. Naked.

TAMAL
My mum and da' have 'em. But they
can't afford one for me.
(beat)
You could come with me and my mum
when she gets out of work. If it's
not too far.

CLAIRE
Oh. Um. No. No that's all right.

BOY
Tamal! Hurry up, ya bellend.

TAMAL

I've gotta go. Will you be OK?

CLAIRE

I'll be fine. I'll just be in trouble.

TAMAL

OK. See you around?

CLAIRE

Sure. See you around.

Tamal scampers away. Claire holds up her wrist. She gulps.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Call mom.

A beat while the connection locks. Then, surprisingly, Claire SPEAKS in perfect MANDARIN.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Wèi mama.

(bursting into tears)

Ni néng lái jiē wǒ ma?

(Hi mom. Can you pick me up?)

HARD CUT TO:

INT. THE ZHOU'S APARTMENT - EVENING

CU: Claire's face. Her eyes are puffy from crying. She hangs her head in shame.

Claire's mother, LI ZHOU (50), scolds her.

Throughout the script Yang, Li, and Claire will speak to each other in Mandarin unless otherwise noted.

LI ZHOU (O.S.)

You could have been killed! Or worse! What were you thinking? Do you want to ruin your future?

CLAIRE

I'm sorry...

We now see Claire's parents and the apartment for the first time. Her parents are Chinese. Claire's father, YANG ZHOU (52), shakes his head in disappointment.

YANG ZHOU

I'm very disappointed in you.

LI ZHOU

We all know you're smarter than this! Do you have any idea what we went through to get to this position? We escaped poverty. We moved to a new country. We used all of our money so that you would have everything you needed to be successful.

CLAIRE

Yes. I know. I'm sorry. But I'm fine. It's fine.

LI ZHOU

I'll show you sorry. You're grounded. Do not come out of your room until you understand why this is so important.

INT. CLAIRE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Claire's bedroom is compact and neatly organized. No space is wasted. Her possessions are shiny and sleek. A perfect little aquarium of a room.

Claire stews in bed.

CLAIRE

Play a game.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Sorry. That activity is restricted.

Claire SIGHS. A muffled SOUND resonates from the other side of her bedroom wall. She presses her ear to the wall.

Her parents are SPEAKING in sharp, hushed bursts.

LI ZHOU (O.S.)

... this behavior.

YANG ZHOU (O.S.)

She's still young. The children in this country are not as well-behaved. We knew that when we moved here.

LI ZHOU (O.S.)

We've sacrificed so much for her. And this is how she repays us.

YANG ZHOU (O.S.)
Someday she'll understand.

A long beat. Claire presses closer to the wall.

LI ZHOU (O.S.)
There are times when I can't look
at her. And I think... is she truly
our child? Or is she just a *child*?
When I look into her eyes I see
nothing of myself. I only see--

YANG ZHOU (O.S.)
(cutting her off)
Enough! It is not healthy to speak
of such things.

Claire rolls over. She CRIES into her pillow.

INT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON

CU: A BRIDE'S veiled face.

Two dark hands pinch the veil and lift it over the bride's
face to reveal...

... Claire. She's older but her porcelain features and
crystal blue eyes are unmistakable. Opposite her is TAMAL,
looking handsome as can be - even though his bespectacled
eyes aren't exactly proportional.

The small church is an extremely contemporary space: exposed
steel arches, glossy concrete flooring, massive skylights.

Yang and Li sit in the front row of the bride's side of the
aisle with grim expressions. A smattering of guests sit
behind them - not nearly enough to fill all the seats.

The other side of the aisle is a different story - all of the
seats are taken. TAMAL'S MOTHER SOBS in the front row.

We breeze through the ceremony. It's a wedding - we get it.

Tamal and Claire kiss. CHEERS! Li and Yang, still stone-
faced, politely CLAP.

INT. RECEPTION HALL - LATER

It's a reception! Equal parts boisterous and sincere. We see
the classic beats play out in a musical montage: speeches, a
first dance, the bouquet toss.

Claire and Tamal are arm-in-arm. Tamal's family surrounds them. Tamal's mother rubs Claire's stomach.

TAMAL'S MOTHER

Now when can we expect a child?! I want a grandchild!

The group LAUGHS. Tamal turns bright red.

TAMAL

Mom! We've been married for two hours! And that's not how this works anymore.

TAMAL'S MOTHER

I know I know. I'm just so excited! You two take your time - but not too much time.

Claire clocks her parents as they EXIT.

CLAIRE

Excuse me.

Claire hurries after them.

INT. ELEVATOR BANK - MOMENTS LATER

Yang and Li await an elevator car. Claire ENTERS.

CLAIRE

Mom! Dad! Are you leaving?

LI ZHOU

You know how tired I get these days.

CLAIRE

You didn't even say goodbye.

LI ZHOU

You were busy. We did not want to bother you.

CLAIRE

Could you at least pretend to be happy for me? For one day?

YANG ZHOU

We only want the best for you, Claire. It's all we've ever wanted.

CLAIRE

I'm in love. Isn't that what's best
for me?

LI ZHOU

We gave you a gift. And you have
never appreciated it. You have
wasted it. This is not how it was
supposed to be. You are selfish.

Oomph. That cuts deep. Claire's eyes water.

DING!

The elevator doors open. Li steps onto the elevator. Yang reaches for Claire's hands. Claire pulls away. She storms off. Yang boards the elevator. The doors close.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - NIGHT - MOS

We see Claire through a large portrait window. She holds a steaming cup of tea and gazes out into the growing darkness.

Tamal ENTERS frame. He attempts a romantic "swoop". Claire spills some tea. They LAUGH. Then they embrace. Claire melts in Tamal's arms. They leave the window.

INT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Heavy BREATHING. Clothes fly off. Feet stumble toward the bed. Tangled bodies fall into bed. GIGGLING at the clumsy fall into bed. Kissing, grabbing, wrapping...

... pulling apart? Tamal gets up.

CLAIRE

Where are you going?

TAMAL

I left the condoms in my suitcase.

ZIP. Tamal rifles through his suitcase.

CLAIRE

Oh. I wasn't sure we'd... now that
we're married...

TAMAL

Married people still use condoms.
If they didn't there would be a lot
more imps running around.

CLAIRE

Don't use that word. You're not an imp. You're my husband.

(beat)

It feels good to call you my husband after all these years.

TAMAL

Hello, wife.

(playfully shuddering)

I just had flashbacks to my childhood. It'll take me a bit to get used to that.

(beat, re: condom)

Ah, here we are!

Tamal returns to bed.

CLAIRE

When we decide that we do... want to stop using condoms... I think I'd prefer it that way.

TAMAL

Really? Well let's hope that's a long way away. For now I want you all to myself. Because I'm selfish.

Claire winces at the word "selfish".

TAMAL (CONT'D)

But you. You're perfect.

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Claire dashes around the apartment. She clasps on earrings, puts on makeup, slinks into a black dress, puts on her shoes, etc etc etc. All the while Tamal sits in the same spot on the sofa. The honeymoon is definitely over.

CLAIRE

I really don't want to be late.

TAMAL

(distracted)

It'll be fine.

CLAIRE

Nothing's ever *fine* with this group. It's either perfect or--

Claire stops short of saying "imperfect". Tamal doesn't notice. He's too busy playing with his new Aura.

Tamal points his Aura toward a LAMP. A swish of his finger across the Aura dims the bulb. Another swish brightens it.

TAMAL

Hey Claire! Take a look at this. I got the lights connected to my Aura.

(off her silence)

Come on, Claire. It's brilliant. Take a look.

Claire obediently stops to watch Tamal's trick. He swishes his finger. The light dims. He turns to Claire expectantly.

CLAIRE

Yes, that's very neat.

TAMAL

Not everyone grew up with an Aura, you know. Some of us still think they're pretty cool.

CLAIRE

You've had one for years! This just happens to be the fancy new one. It's practically the same as the one you already had.

TAMAL

Practically the same?! This new one is way better. They've made loads of improvements to the latency, the UI, and... it's just better.

CLAIRE

What was wrong with your old one?

TAMAL

It was so slow! It couldn't handle the new updates.

CLAIRE

They do it on purpose. "Planned obsolescence." Slow the old one down so you've gotta get a new one.

TAMAL

Don't be cynical. It doesn't suit you.

CLAIRE

(re: the lamp)

How long ago was the lightbulb invented?

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

After all this time do you think we can't make a lightbulb that lasts more than a year? Of course we can. But there's no money in that.

(beat, playful)

And ours might last longer if you didn't play with them so much.

Like an unruly kid Tamal rapidly dims and brightens the lamp.

TAMAL

Like this?

CLAIRE

Yes, like that.

(beat)

Now put a nice shirt on. We're already late.

TAMAL

I am wearing a nice shirt.

CLAIRE

You're wearing that one? What about that new one I picked out for you?

TAMAL

It's so formal! Do I really need to dress up? It's not like it'll do much good.

CLAIRE

Don't you want to look nice? I want you to look nice.

TAMAL

Do you want me to look nice or do you want me to look like I belong?

(beat)

I'm never going to magically look more like them if I put on a crisp new shirt.

CLAIRE

You don't need to look like them. You just need to look nicer. This is a party. People dress up.

TAMAL

Me dressing up's just lipstick on a pig as far as they're concerned.

CLAIRE

Tamal. For the thousandth time.
These are your friends, too. That's
not what they think. That's what
you think they think. It's
projection.

(beat)

But I do have some lipstick here if
you'd like some.

Claire kisses him on the lips.

EXT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Claire and Tamal walk toward the sidewalk. Tamal is now
wearing a nicer shirt.

TAMAL

I'll call a communal.

CLAIRE

Maybe we should take a private.

TAMAL

It'll cost a fortune to take a
private all the way out there.
Don't worry, they won't see what we
arrive in.

(re: Claire's hesitation)

You're always on people about not
taking communals more often.

CLAIRE

Oh all right. Go ahead and call it.
We don't have time to argue anyway.

INT. AUTOMATED BUS - CONTINUOUS

The interior design of the automated bus is similar to
Vanessa's automated car. However, the atmosphere is rather
different - this is public transit not a BMW.

Claire and Tamal squeeze into a row of seats. The other
PASSENGERS are quiet, bundled up, and haggard. They are
cloaked in a general malaise of illness and poverty. A
passenger SNEEZES. Another SNIFFLES and then BLOWS his nose.

Claire sticks out like a sore thumb. An OLD WOMAN sneers at
the sight of Tamal and Claire holding hands.

INT. JANIE'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Claire and Tamal hurry down the hallway. Tamal clutches a bottle of wine.

TAMAL

Have you ever been to one of these?

CLAIRE

I think you'd know if I had.

TAMAL

Right. I've heard they make you play weird games.

They arrive at a door. 23C. A light blue balloon is tied to the doorknob. Claire KNOCKS.

CLAIRE

I'm sure you won't have to play anything you don't want to play.

(beat)

Should we establish a safe word?

TAMAL

How about if I say, "this is fucking weird" then we--

The door opens. Janie, older but identifiable with her sharp black bangs, greets them.

JANIE

Claire! Tamal! So glad you could make it. Come in come in.

CLAIRE

Congratulations! So exciting!

JANIE

I know! Can you believe it?

TAMAL

(re: wine)

We brought a bottle for you.

JANIE

Thanks! I don't recognize the label. What is it?

TAMAL

It's a red blend. Supposed to be quite good.

JANIE

(polite but condescending)
Well, I look forward to trying it.
(beat, cutting the tension)
Thank God it's not like the old
days. Can you imagine not drinking
for 9 months? I'd go mad!

Janie leads them in.

TAMAL

(whispering to Claire)
Guess I should have known they
wouldn't appreciate a blended wine.

Claire playfully elbows him in the ribs.

INT. JANIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The apartment screams wealth. You'd need a microscope to find any dust. The wall of windows provides a stunning city view.

There are about eight other happy COUPLES already milling about. Like Claire and Janie, all the other guests are among the most beautiful people you've ever seen.

JANIE

All right, everyone! Claire and Tamal are here. I'm sure most of you have met, but if you haven't then this is Claire and Tamal. And Claire and Tamal this is everyone.

Nods, raised glasses, cordial greetings.

JANIE (CONT'D)

(to Claire and Tamal)
Let me get you two some drinks.
Then we can start the games!

Claire and Tamal share a knowing look.

Janie's husband, STAN (35), approaches. He saunters over like he owns the place. Which he does. And he knows it.

STAN

Hey, you two. Thanks for making it!
(re: immaculate apartment)
Sorry for the mess. We just did a
major remodeling project. Gotta
baby-proof the place and all that.

CLAIRE

Good to see you again. The place looks great!

TAMAL

Congratulations. I imagine this is all very exciting.

STAN

Oh yes. We're very excited.

(beat, leaning in)

Tamal, I must warn you. Janie's going to try to make you drink one of her girly drinks. If you want something a little stiffer just let me know.

TAMAL

Oh I'm sure whatever Janie brings will be just fine.

On cue Janie reappears with two cocktails. The drinks are bright blue and they're served in erlenmeyer flasks. Clearly a playful "baby theme" drink from some mommy blog.

CLAIRE

Thanks! These look fun.

JANIE

Aren't they?! As you may have guessed, they're blue because we've decided to have a boy!

CLAIRE

That's wonderful!

JANIE

(raising glass)

Cheers!

CLINK!

INT. JANIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Everyone sits in the living room. They are all loosely organized for a game. Janie and Stan preside.

STAN

The game's called "Ugly Duckling". Each couple will be competing to create the most absurd looking baby that they can. Each of you will shake your Aura to roll the dice.

(MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)

Combine the roll with your partner's roll and voila! You get your baby's first trait. Once everyone is finished we'll anonymously submit our grotesque little angels to the judging panel--
 (pointing to himself and Janie)
 -- for our final verdict.
 Understand?

JANIE

It'll make sense once we get going.
 (beat)
 On your mark. Get set. Make a baby!

Claire and Tamal eye each other incredulously.

TAMAL

OK. This is fucking weird.

CLAIRE

This reminds me of her bachelorette party. She made us do some very, very--
 (off Tamal's raised eyebrow)
 -- you don't need to know the details.

TAMAL

Please. I'm all ears.

CLAIRE

That doesn't bode well for our baby.
 (beat, holding up Aura)
 You ready to do this?

They both SHAKE their Auras and then put their wrists together.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Gender - male.

They shake again.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE (CONT'D)

Ethnicity - white.

TAMAL

Ouch. Off to a rough start. Our baby's going to end up being beautiful instead of ugly.

CLAIRE

There are plenty of ugly white people.

They shake several more times.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Hair - red, wavy. Eyes - brown.
Nose - bulbous.

TAMAL

I'm sorry. Did it just say "bulbous"? Our beautiful baby boy is going to have a bulbous nose? Unacceptable. Can we call this one a mulligan and start over?

CLAIRE

He does have red hair. Mulligan would be a great name for him.

TAMAL

How many more of these traits are there anyway?

CLAIRE

Only one way to find out.

They shake.

LATER

JANIE

OK! All the submissions have been entered. Let's see how they look!

STAN

All right. First up! Let's see this genetic monstrosity.

The coffee table has a holographic panel built into the surface. A CARTOON BABY appears over the display. It's a black girl with long blonde hair, freckles, buck teeth, and green eyes. The cartoon baby flips its hair back and winks.

The group LAUGHS. Claire and Tamal are the only ones not laughing. They look deeply uncomfortable.

STAN (CONT'D)

It's certainly ugly. But I'm not sure it's quite ugly *enough*. The blonde hair is actually quite fetching. What do you think, love? Would you be happy with this baby?

JANIE

Mhmm. I know what you mean. I actually like her freckles, too. I could do without the glasses, though. Pretty ridiculous in this day and age, don't you think?

Janie clocks Tamal and his thick pair of glasses.

JANIE (CONT'D)

Not that glasses are ridiculous. But... on a baby? Now *that's* silly.

TAMAL

(quietly to Claire)
Good save...

JANIE

OK let's see what's next, shall we?

Another CARTOON BABY pops up onto the display. It's a white boy with wavy red hair and a bulbous nose. Mulligan! He does a back flip. People LAUGH.

JANIE (CONT'D)

Look at those moves! And look at that nose!

STAN

On the bright side he'll be able to sniff out the best truffles for us.

LAUGHTER.

JANIE

And red hair. You almost never see that anymore.

STAN

By the looks of him I'd say that's for the best.

Claire stares at Mulligan on the holographic display. He rotates like he's on an auto show platform.

The SOUND FADES into background noise. Claire is completely focused on the image of Mulligan. Mulligan performs a variety of silly gestures. As he rotates to face Claire he does a "cool guy" "double gun point" move in her direction.

Claire chugs the rest of her cocktail.

INT. JANIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Claire, Janie, and SAM (35) chat together.

CLAIRE

Have you talked about the name yet?

JANIE

We've tossed around some ideas.
Stan wants to name him something
epic and heroic like Zeus.

CLAIRE

Zeus?!

SAM

Ghastly. Absolutely ghastly.

JANIE

I think he's joking, but he brings
it up an awful lot. He got the idea
when we were at Mt. Olympus
choosing packages.

(beat)

I was thinking something
traditional like Jonathan.

SAM

Then again, Zeus is nothing if not
traditional.

JANIE

Can you imagine? There's no way I'm
calling my child Zeus.

CLAIRE

(joking)

Well if you're not going to use the
name Zeus can Tamal and I take it?
Now that I've heard it a few times
I find that I've taken a bit of a
shine to it.

SAM

I can see it now. *"That's enough
biscuits before dinner, Zeus."* *"No,
you can't steal that woman and
father a bastard with her, Zeus."*
It's cute!

The three LAUGH.

JANIE

So. Think you can just slip that one by me, eh, Claire?

CLAIRE

What?

JANIE

You and Tamal. Thinking of having a kid?

CLAIRE

I mean. We've talked about it.

JANIE

Well now's a great time to go through the system. We had considered doing it years ago but Stan and I were worried that we'd be jumping the gun. You know how they always release new updates to the system every year or so. But at a certain point the updates are pretty marginal.

(beat)

If Stan had his way we'd still be waiting. According to him there's always some huge new update to the system just around the corner. He's always saying that we don't want to be "early adopters". Not like that means anything anymore. We're not our parents.

CLAIRE

Did you ever think about going natural?

JANIE

God no. Have you seen pregnant women? That's a nightmare.

(beat)

And at a certain point it's a bit unethical, don't you think?

CLAIRE

Unethical? How's that?

JANIE

If we can stop our children from getting hereditary diseases then I'd say it's a bit of a moral imperative to do it.

(MORE)

JANIE (CONT'D)

I mean, that was the whole point of the system when it started.

SAM

(playful)

Do... do you like hereditary diseases, Claire?

CLAIRE

No no. Of course not. But we've already gone through the system, haven't we? The diseases are gone from our DNA.

(beat)

So do we really need the system anymore?

The conversation pauses. Everyone contemplates this point as if the thought has never occurred to them.

JANIE

But pregnancy. That's a nightmare!

They LAUGH.

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Claire and Tamal ENTER the bedroom. Tamal swipes his Aura. The lights flash on. Tamal trudges toward the bed and melodramatically falls onto the mattress face first.

TAMAL

(muffled by the bed)

I'm so tired.

Claire dismantles herself.

CLAIRE

What was that, honey? I couldn't hear you through that pathetic moaning.

TAMAL

(raising head)

I'm. So. Tired.

(beat)

And that was fucking weird.

CLAIRE

It wasn't that bad.

TAMAL

Do you think Stan's parents bumped up his douche bag genes or do you think that was more on the nurture end of the nature-nurture spectrum?

CLAIRE

All right, all right. That's enough out of you. Keep talking like that and I'm not going to want to have sex with you tonight.

TAMAL

You've still got enough energy left for sex? My God. You're a super woman.

(beat)

OK. I'm getting up. Here we go.

Tamal rolls out of bed. He climbs to his feet and approaches Claire. Tamal wraps his arms around her as she takes out her earrings. Claire nudges him with her elbow.

CLAIRE

Give me a minute, will you?

TAMAL

Nope. Window's closing.

Tamal kisses her neck. Claire relents.

Things heat up quickly. In a few moments they're on the bed. Tamal pulls away. He gets to his feet.

TAMAL (CONT'D)

Hold on.

Tamal swipes his Aura. The lights dim. Claire rolls her eyes.

CLAIRE

That's not the only thing you're turning off by doing that.

(beat, re: Tamal rummaging)

What are you looking for?

TAMAL

A condom.

CLAIRE

No. No condom. Not tonight.

TAMAL

Are you sure? I know we've been talking about it but--

CLAIRE
 (playfully cutting him off)
 Window's closing!

TAMAL
 OK! Don't need to tell me twice.

Tamal leaps back into bed. They GIGGLE as they embrace.

CHYRON UP: Six months later

INT. CLAIRE'S OFFICE - BATHROOM - DAY

Claire sits in a stall. We hear the TRICKLE as she pees.

Claire lifts her hand. She holds a small, flexible, transparent screen. It's a PREGNANCY TEST. A "loading" icon whirls in circles. After a few seconds the screen GLOWS RED.

Claire EXITS the stall, drops the pregnancy test into a trash bin, and washes her hands. The bathroom door opens.

A CUSTODIAN (35) with a cleaning cart ENTERS. The custodian is a Chinese woman.

CUSTODIAN
 Sorry. I'll come back in five minutes.

CLAIRE
 No. It's fine. I'm almost done.

Claire watches through the reflection in the bathroom mirror as the custodian starts her cleaning regimen.

EXT. HELIX SYSTEMS - MORNING

Claire EXITS an automated car in front of a looming skyscraper. The animated sign on the building reads "HELIX SYSTEMS". Animated images of DNA strands, babies, and happy families flicker over the glass exterior of the building.

A small group of PROTESTERS are massed behind a police barricade. Bored COPS stand sentry in front of the barricade. The protesters wield signs and HOLLER at Claire.

PROTESTERS
 System babies have no souls! / God
 doesn't love system babies!

Claire looks at a cop for his reaction. He simply shrugs his shoulders and lets Claire pass.

INT. HELIX SYSTEMS - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

The lobby is a buzzing beehive of activity. The space is airy and impressive. Immaculately-carved statues in the Greek style strike important poses in the center of an ornate fountain. Each statue a David in its own right.

Claire approaches a check-in desk. A gorgeous clerk, TABITHA (24), sits behind the desk.

TABITHA

Good morning! Welcome to Helix Systems!

CLAIRE

Hi. Thanks. I, um, made an appointment?

TABITHA

Yes, go ahead and place your Aura on the screen there and we'll get you checked in.

CLAIRE

Right. I should have realized that.

TABITHA

Not to worry. Most people have nervous jitters when they come here for the first time.

Claire places her Aura onto a digital screen above the desk. The screen GLOWS GREEN.

TABITHA (CONT'D)

(reading her screen)

I see here that you're a Gen 1. That's wonderful. Welcome back to Helix Systems! We've made lots of exciting developments since Gen 1. I think you're going to be very pleased with our newest packages.

CLAIRE

I'm actually not here for that.

TABITHA

My apologies! Looks like you'll be meeting with Dr. Huang. You can take a seat over there and someone will be down for you in a jiff.

CLAIRE

Thanks.

LATER

Claire sits in a nearby chair idly flipping through her Aura. She looks back at Tabitha. Tabitha is TALKING into her Aura. Tabitha looks up and locks eyes with Claire. She quickly turns away. *Is she talking about Claire?*

NURSE (O.S.)

Claire?

Claire turns to the nurse.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Dr. Huang is ready for you now.

INT. HELIX SYSTEMS - DR. HUANG'S OFFICE

Claire stares out the large window of Dr. Huang's contemporary office. She checks her Aura.

DR. HUANG (O.S.)

They don't call it Mt. Olympus for nothing.

Claire jumps. She turns to DR. HUANG (60). He has a face full of wrinkles and a lopsided smile. A potent combination of age and gravity conspire to bend his posture into a hunch.

DR. HUANG (CONT'D)

Sorry! Didn't meant to spook you.

CLAIRE

It's all right. I didn't hear you come in.

DR. HUANG

Please. Have a seat.

Claire sits at Dr. Huang's desk.

DR. HUANG (CONT'D)

Feels a bit strange, doesn't it?

CLAIRE

What's that?

DR. HUANG

Being in a doctor's office! When's the last time you were in a doctor's office?

CLAIRE

When I was about 14. I broke my arm.

DR. HUANG

14 years old and a broken arm. Sounds like someone was a bit of a mischief maker.

CLAIRE

Strict parents and a zero-tolerance policy will do that to a kid. I tried climbing out of my window.

DR. HUANG

What's the saying? When God closes a door He opens a window.

CLAIRE

Well next time He should also provide a ladder.

Dr. Huang LAUGHS.

DR. HUANG

I do apologize about the broken arm. Increased bone strength didn't arrive until our third iteration. But it'll be a great story for the grandkids some day. They won't believe bones used to break!

(beat)

And that's just one of the countless advantages to the system.

Claire shifts uncomfortably in her chair. Dr. Huang notices.

DR. HUANG (CONT'D)

You're not here for that, are you?

CLAIRE

No. Not exactly. You see, it's just that... well, my husband and I are considering a... natural birth. And it's, well, it's a bit awkward to talk about. But we've been trying now for a few months and... it's not really working. And now I'm worried there might be something wrong. With me.

DR. HUANG

Something wrong with you? There's nothing wrong with you. You're perfect. Genetically flawless.

CLAIRE

But there's nothing wrong with my husband. They did the tests. So that only leaves one other person.

DR. HUANG

The tests? Did you husband not go through the system?

CLAIRE

No. He's... normal.

DR. HUANG

I understand. I've seen this before with mixed couples.

(beat)

Would you consider your husband a proud man?

CLAIRE

Tamal? Not at all. If anything he's too humble for his own good.

DR. HUANG

Yet he's determined to pass on his weak genes to his child through a natural birth. As you say, that's *normal* behavior. It's our instinct as animals. Our genetic imperative. Normal.

(beat)

But we've surpassed normal. We're elevated.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry but I don't appreciate the way you're talking about my husband. He's a good man. He's not pressuring me into anything. A natural birth was my idea.

DR. HUANG

I apologize. I meant no offense. If it's a financial issue then we do have our basic packages. Financial aid programs. Payment plans. There's really no excuse not to use the system anymore. It's for everyone.

CLAIRE

What? No. It has nothing to do with that. I just want a natural birth.

DR. HUANG

Did you know that before the system was introduced there were 1,000 deaths per day related to pregnancy and birth? Pregnancy is one of the most dangerous situations you can put yourself in. They system changed all that. The system is safe. For you and your child.

CLAIRE

Yes. I know that. I was raised in the system. I know all about it. And I don't think it's the right choice for my family. That's all.

DR. HUANG

I don't think you understand, Claire. We can't help you with that. It's a violation of our ethical code.

CLAIRE

What? What are you talking about?

DR. HUANG

We cannot ethically administer medical treatments that endanger the lives of our patients. Pregnancy endangers your life. It endangers the life of your unborn child. We cannot in good faith provide a service that might cause harm to the patient.

CLAIRE

I don't understand. You're saying you won't help me?

DR. HUANG

I'm saying we can't help you. With that. But we can help you have a child through the system. That's what we do here, Claire.

CLAIRE

Don't you have a hippocratic oath or something? Don't you have to help me?

DR. HUANG

Actually the oath says quite the opposite. Prevention is always preferable to treatment. That's the entire reason the system exists.

(beat)

This is not a bad thing. You are proof that the system works! Don't you want to provide your child with the same good health and the same opportunities that you had growing up?

CLAIRE

No. I want to *prevent* the mistakes of my childhood.

INT. HELIX SYSTEMS - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Claire storms through the lobby toward the exit.

TABITHA

Claire! Hey! Claire!

Tabitha chases after Claire. She catches up to her at the doors. She grabs Claire's arm.

CLAIRE

What? What do you want?

TABITHA

We like to offer a free ride home to our visitors.

CLAIRE

I don't need a free ride home. I don't need anything from this place.

TABITHA

(thinly-coded)

Then perhaps you need a ride *somewhere else*. I think you might want to take this ride.

Tabitha taps her Aura to Claire's. Claire's Aura GLOWS GREEN.

TABITHA (CONT'D)

It will be outside if you want it.

EXT. HELIX SYSTEMS - MOMENTS LATER

Claire walks toward the curb. Sure enough, an automated car with a GLOWING GREEN window is waiting.

PROTESTER

A system baby is a dead baby!

Claire casually flips off the protesters as she passes by. A cop CHUCKLES.

She marches to the automated car. She hesitates for a beat. Then she grabs the handle, opens the door, and ENTERS.

EXT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - AFTERNOON

Claire EXITS the automated car. She looks up at the concrete block of a building with the sign "U-Store It" emblazoned over the entrance. She looks back at the automated car.

CLAIRE

You sure about this?

INT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Claire ENTERS. The room, like the exterior of the building, is essentially a concrete box. A single door is on the far side of the room. Claire approaches it.

A hand-written sign is taped to the wall next to the door. It reads: *Scan Aura for entry*

An arrow on the sign points down to a scanner. Claire places her Aura under the scanner. After a beat... CHIRP!

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Access to storage unit 233 granted.

CLICK. The door OPENS.

INT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Claire wanders the labyrinthine hallways of the storage center. The first few rows are filled with small lockers. The next rows feature larger storage cells.

CLAIRE

(sotto)

This place is creepy as fuck.

She raises her Aura.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Send message to Tamal - I'm at this weird U-Store It place. If I'm not home in a couple hours I've been murdered.

BEEP BEEP.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Message failed to send. Would you like to try again?

CLAIRE

Yes. Try again.

BEEP BEEP.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Message failed to send. Increase signal strength to send your message.

CLAIRE

Yep. Definitely going to get murdered.

MOMENTS LATER

Claire stands outside a door marked "UNIT 233".

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(sotto)

This is so dumb. What are you even doing here?

Claire reaches her hand toward the doorknob when...

... the door OPENS. Claire jumps back in surprise.

A couple, SEBASTIAN and ALLISON (20s), emerge from the room. Allison is visibly pregnant. Another woman, DR. ELIZABETH (30s) is behind them. All three of them have the beauty of system babies. And they're all smiles.

SEBASTIAN

Thanks again, doctor.

DR. ELIZABETH

Of course, Sebastian! And Allison, remember to keep that iron level high, OK?

Allison flashes a shy smile at Claire. She and Sebastian walk down the hallway, hand in hand. Sebastian leans in and kisses her on the forehead.

Dr. Elizabeth is white with a weave of curly black hair. She turns to Claire.

DR. ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

And you must be Claire. Looks like you found the place OK. I know it can be a bit of a labyrinth. Hope you left a trail of string or bread crumbs to find your way back out. It took me weeks before I could make it to the office without getting lost.

(beat)

Come on in. I prefer to work out of my office, not the hallway.

She leads Claire into...

INT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - UNIT 233 - CONTINUOUS

The office isn't much to look at. Concrete floor. Concrete walls. Cheap LED ceiling panels. Metal shelves with glass jars. A doctor's table and a desk.

CLAIRE

You... you're expecting me?

DR. ELIZABETH

Oh yes. Tabitha sent over your info. Great girl. Very bright. But I suppose that's to be expected. Gen 5 was when the system really found its groove. No offense. You and I are still amazing modern marvels, but they certainly had some kinks to work out.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry. Who are you? What is this place?

DR. ELIZABETH

Did Tabitha not give you all the details?

(beat, gesturing to table)

Please, take a seat.

CLAIRE

(sitting)

No. Tabitha did not give me all the details. Tabitha gave me a free ride and a cryptic message.

DR. ELIZABETH

Well in that case I apologize. I'm Dr. Elizabeth. That's not my real name, of course, but that's what you can call me. And this is my special office. And to answer your next question, Tabitha sent you here because you want to have a natural birth but they ran you out of Hellish Systems like you were a rat in a pantry. That sum it up?

CLAIRE

Um. Yeah. Yeah that sums it up.

DR. ELIZABETH

Well I'm here to tell you that they're full of shit.

(beat)

Sit tight for just a moment. I'm going to take a look at your medical history.

Dr. Elizabeth sits at her desk and reads information off a holographic monitor.

Claire's eyes wander around the room. She swings her hanging feet back and forth. There's a generic, hotel style PAINTING on the wall. Claire eyes it. Dr. Elizabeth clocks this.

DR. ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

(re: painting)

Every doctor's office has to have one bad painting. It's a law.

(gesturing to the room)

And as you can see, I'm nothing if not above board.

(off Claire's silence)

That was a joke. You can relax.

CLAIRE

(unconvincingly)

I'm relaxed.

Dr. Elizabeth returns to her reading.

DR. ELIZABETH

Looks like you and I have something
in common.

CLAIRE

What's that?

DR. ELIZABETH

My parents were black.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry? My parents are Chinese.

DR. ELIZABETH

Sure. But don't you find that you
have a certain, oh I don't know,
burden of shame that you carry
around with you? A confusion of
identity? I do. Most post-racers
do.

(beat)

At least your parents went all in.
My parents made me white but gave
me my mother's hair. Thanks mom and
dad! Do you know how much harder it
is to maintain African hair than it
is to deal with that straight
blonde hair of yours? I'm *this*
close to shaving it all off.

Dr. Elizabeth stands. She walks over to Claire.

DR. ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

All right, let's get a look at you.

Dr. Elizabeth inspects Claire's features.

CLAIRE

You think you can actually help me?

DR. ELIZABETH

Of course! Otherwise this'd be an
awful silly way to spend my time.

CLAIRE

But my husband and I have been
trying for 6 months... and, well...
it hasn't been working.

DR. ELIZABETH

And let me guess. The *doctors* at
Hellish Systems shamed you into
thinking you were a monster for
even considering a natural birth?

CLAIRE

More or less...

DR. ELIZABETH

That's their trick. They scare you into changing your mind. It works most of the time, too.

(beat)

It's all a lie, of course. They shame you and they scare you so that when you do decide to use the system it feels like it was your choice. But you never actually had a choice. Not truly.

CLAIRE

What choice?

DR. ELIZABETH

To have a natural birth.

CLAIRE

Wait. What are you saying? That I can't have a natural birth?

DR. ELIZABETH

Yes. That's exactly what I'm saying.

(beat)

Excuse the term, but you're what we call a "mule". You see, a mule is the offspring of a male donkey and a female horse. But mules themselves are infertile. They can't make new mules on their own. That's because--

CLAIRE

(cutting her off)

Stop. Just stop for a second.

Claire stands. She's dizzy.

DR. ELIZABETH

I'm sorry. I've been told my bedside manner is... abrasive. And usually by the time patients get to me they already have all of this information. Presented in a more digestible way.

CLAIRE

I'm infertile? The system... are we all infertile? Doesn't anyone care?

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Isn't that a pretty glaring design flaw in the system?

DR. ELIZABETH

To you and I it's a flaw. To them it's a feature.

CLAIRE

(understanding, sotto)
Like buying new light bulbs.
(working it out)
It's planned obsolescence. They designed the system so that people would have to keep using it no matter what. And nobody cares because they want to use it.
(beat, to Dr. Elizabeth)
That's really fucked up.

DR. ELIZABETH

Pretty smart, really. Technically giving birth is free. It was only a matter of time before someone figured out a way to commodify it. It's fucked up. And I'm here to help un-fuck it.

CLAIRE

But how? You said I'm infertile.

DR. ELIZABETH

The funny thing about mules is that 100% of the males are infertile. But a female mule *can* become pregnant and give birth if mated with a purebred horse. So we just need a purebred horse and...
(holding up a SYRINGE)
...a little bit of fertilizer.

CLAIRE

A purebred horse?

DR. ELIZABETH

Someone outside the system. I have lots of donated samples here that you can choose from. Most of--

CLAIRE

(cutting her off)
My husband! He didn't go through the system.

DR. ELIZABETH

Well look at you, Miss Progressive.
Guess we won't be needing to browse
through the catalog.

(beat)

Unless you want to.

CLAIRE

No. Just tell me what I need to do.

(beat)

Is it safe?

DR. ELIZABETH

I wouldn't still be here if it
wasn't. But I do have one question
that I have to ask all my patients
before we proceed.

(beat)

Why do you want to have a natural
birth?

CLAIRE

Isn't it obvious?

DR. ELIZABETH

You'd be surprised. I don't want
patients doing this on a whim. I
need to know they're serious. That
they're in this for the long haul.

CLAIRE

I want this.

(off Elizabeth's silence)

I want this because I love my
husband. And I want our child to be
a reflection of us. My parents... I
was a mistake. A lifelong regret.
No child deserves to feel like an
outsider in their own home.

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - LATER

Claire bursts through the door. Tamal rushes over to her.

TAMAL

Claire! I've been trying to reach
you for hours. Where have you been?
I was worried sick. How'd things go
at Helix Systems? Did they--

Claire kisses him. Tamal is surprised but quickly embraces
the passion of the moment. He kisses her back.

TAMAL (CONT'D)
 (in between kisses)
 Can you go to Helix every day?

CLAIRE
 That's enough talking. Bedroom.

TAMAL
 Yes ma'am.

They stumble to the bedroom. Tamal tries to take her top off.

CLAIRE
 Not yet.

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Claire pushes Tamal onto the bed.

CLAIRE
 Wait here.

TAMAL
 No objections, your honor.

Claire ENTERS the...

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Claire holds up the SYRINGE from Dr. Elizabeth's office.

Claire stares at herself in the mirror. She removes her shirt. A black 'X' is drawn on her porcelain white stomach. We notice for the first time that Claire has no belly button.

Claire POPS the lid off the syringe. She closes her eyes, takes a breath, and...

... INJECTS herself with the syringe.

Claire washes the black 'X' off of her stomach.

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Claire opens the bathroom door. She leans against the door jamb seductively. She's only wearing a bra and panties.

TAMAL
 Damn.

The sex is fiery, passionate, and... quick.

LATER

Tamal gently SNORES. Claire lies awake. She stares at the ceiling.

FADE OUT

CHYRON UP: One month later

INT. CLAIRE'S OFFICE - BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

We see the scene from outside the stall. Claire PEES. The TRICKLE stops. Claire GASPS then lets out a little YELP.

INT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - HALLWAY - EVENING

Dr. Elizabeth opens the door. Claire stands in the hallway with a goofy grin plastered on her face.

DR. ELIZABETH

I know that look. I suspect
congratulations are in order.

INT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - UNIT 233 - MOMENTS LATER

Claire sits on the doctor's table. Dr. Elizabeth looks at a holographic image of Claire's uterus.

DR. ELIZABETH

Everything looks normal.

CLAIRE

Normal.

DR. ELIZABETH

Normal is good. Very good.

CLAIRE

Then I'm truly pregnant? That's it?

DR. ELIZABETH

Getting pregnant is the first step. You're luckier than most having it happen so quickly. Certainly promising. I find that it's easier for earlier Gens. Hellish Systems hadn't quite figured out just how evil they wanted to be yet. The kids being made now... I have no idea if it will be possible for them to have a natural birth.

CLAIRE

I can't thank you enough for what you're doing.

DR. ELIZABETH

Don't thank me yet. There's still a long way to go.

CLAIRE

But your system. It works.

DR. ELIZABETH

Yes. But it's a delicate system. You're not coded the same way people used to be. The female body undergoes natural changes during pregnancy. Yours will not. The truth is that your body will treat your pregnancy like a virus. Something to be terminated.

(beat)

But on the up side your Immune System is terrible. Your genetic perfection means that your Immune System hasn't ever had the chance to learn how to kill viruses.

CLAIRE

OK. I guess that's a good thing.

DR. ELIZABETH

For now. I'll need to closely monitor you. You'll need injections every two weeks to keep your body from killing the fetus. And these aren't the take home style. They will be painful. You might be tempted to go to a hospital. Don't. They won't know how to treat you. Only I will. If you go to a hospital they will kill the fetus.

(beat)

We'll start with the first treatment today.

CLAIRE

Yes. I understand.

DR. ELIZABETH

Good. The first treatments will be 50,000 pounds. As the treatments become more complex they'll be more expensive.

Claire's jaw drops.

CLAIRE

50... thousand pounds? Per treatment? I thought you said it would cost as much as going through the system.

DR. ELIZABETH

That is what it costs to go through the system.

CLAIRE

One time! Not every two weeks! I already paid you 10,000 pounds for that first shot!

DR. ELIZABETH

I thought you understood.

CLAIRE

No. Don't bullshit me. You knew that I wouldn't have agreed if I had known. This is extortion.

DR. ELIZABETH

I'm sorry you feel that way. Most of my patients are willing to do whatever it takes to have a natural birth.

CLAIRE

And that's exactly what you're counting on, isn't it?

DR. ELIZABETH

No one's holding a gun to your head. You don't have to take any of the treatments. Of course, you'll lose the pregnancy. But I'm sure they'll be happy to have you come crawling back to Hellish Systems.

CLAIRE

You're right. You're not holding a gun to my head. What you're doing is worse. You're holding a gun to my baby's head.

DR. ELIZABETH

I'm not the one who commodified pregnancy. I'm just a natural result of the free market. I'm simply offering a service.

(MORE)

DR. ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You can choose whether you want to use it or not.

A long beat. Claire's anger subsides into defeat.

CLAIRE

I can't afford it.

DR. ELIZABETH

You're a smart girl. You'll find a way. Everyone always does.

INT. THE ZHOU'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Claire, Li, and Yang sit in the living room. A traditional English tea-time spread is on the coffee table.

The silence is palpable. It is only interrupted by the occasional SIPPING of tea.

YANG ZHOU

How is work?

CLAIRE

It's good. I find it very rewarding.

YANG ZHOU

Social work is a very... honorable career.

More silence.

CLAIRE

The house looks nice. I notice you've gotten rid of some furniture.

LI ZHOU

Yes. That was five years ago. You'd know that if you cared to visit.

CLAIRE

I'd come visit if I were invited.

LI ZHOU

Your Mandarin is rusty.

CLAIRE

Are you surprised?

YANG ZHOU

Please. Let us not bicker.

(beat)

You said on the phone that you had news for us?

CLAIRE

I do. It's actually very exciting. And scary.

(beat)

I'm pregnant.

CLATTER. Li clumsily sets her teacup in its saucer.

YANG ZHOU

This is wonderful news.

LI ZHOU

This is not wonderful! This is not how it is done anymore. You are supposed to go through the system. This is reckless. And selfish.

YANG ZHOU

Li!

LI ZHOU

No. I will have my say.

(to Claire)

You have always been selfish. You have never cared what your father and I wanted. Never respected what we went through to give you the best opportunities in life. You did not try hard in school. You married a poor immigrant. You got a low-paying job.

(beat)

And now you ruin the DNA we worked so hard to give you by getting pregnant with an imp?! It is unacceptable.

CLAIRE

(speaking English)

You have tried to make me feel guilty my entire life for something I had absolutely no control over. You're the one who chose to make me like this! You want to call me selfish? Fine. At least I'm not ashamed of who I am.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I can't imagine the amount of shame someone has to feel to make their child look absolutely nothing like them.

(beat)

You wanted me to have a better life. You wanted me to integrate. You didn't want me to feel like a foreigner. And I never did. Unless I was at home. With you. Looking at me like... like I was a goddamn crooked painting or something!

(beat)

You never wanted a child. You wanted a do-over for yourself.

YANG ZHOU

Enough! I will not have the two of you at each others' throats like dogs. We are a family.

CLAIRE

We've never been a family. Families support each other. They don't blame each other for their mistakes.

LI ZHOU

I want you to leave. I do not recognize you as my daughter.

YANG ZHOU

Li. You do not mean that.

LI ZHOU

I'm going to the bedroom. I want her gone when I get back.

Li EXITS. Yang sits next to Claire. They SPEAK in English.

YANG ZHOU

Your mother does not hate you. She's worried about you.

CLAIRE

She has a funny way of showing it. She hates me.

YANG ZHOU

No. Never hate. Perhaps frustration. But never hate. Did you ever wonder why your mother and I used the system?

CLAIRE

I know why you did it. You wanted better social status. You wanted to belong in the western world.

YANG ZHOU

I will not deny that those were benefits. But that is not why.

(beat)

Your mother and I moved to England for Helix Systems. We spent a small fortune to go through the system. Because we had no other choice. We wanted a baby together. And the system was our only choice.

CLAIRE

Only choice?

YANG ZHOU

We tried to have a baby for many years. Every pregnancy ended the same way. The doctors called it Recurrent Pregnancy Loss. But it was more than that. She had a genetic disorder.

(beat)

Your mother nearly killed herself trying to have a baby. When we learned about the system we jumped at the chance.

CLAIRE

If she cared so much about having me then why didn't she care about me after I was born?

YANG ZHOU

Please do not ask me such things. I love you, Claire. We love you. We want what's best for you. And the baby. We will help you with anything you need.

CLAIRE

Anything?

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Claire and Tamal walk toward their apartment. Claire waddles ahead of Tamal, her visibly-pregnant belly indicating that several months have passed. She moves as quick as she can.

CLAIRE
I've gotta pee so bad.

TAMAL
Think you can hold it?

CLAIRE
I've *been* holding it.

TAMAL
Think you can hold it a little longer?

CLAIRE
Why?

TAMAL
No reason.

Claire TAPS her Aura to their doorknob. The door OPENS...

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The lights automatically fade up and...

PARTY GUESTS
SURPRISE!

PARTY GUESTS pop up out of every corner of the room. A banner that reads "Congratulations" hangs from the ceiling.

CLAIRE
Jesus! Are you trying to scare the baby out of me?

The party guests LAUGH.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(quietly to Tamal)
Well I don't have to pee anymore.
But I do have to change my pants.

Familiar faces fill the room: Janie and Stan, Tamal's mother, several other guests from the wedding. But no Li and Yang.

Montage:

- Presents are unwrapped and admired. LAUGHTER. Drinking. Belly touching. It's nice. It's a warm contrast to the baby shower at Janie and Stan's.

LATER

Tamal sees the last guest out.

TAMAL

Take care! Get home safe.

He closes the door.

CLAIRE

I know you love me and your heart
was in the right place, but...
never surprise me like that again.

TAMAL

You loved it.

CLAIRE

(edge in her voice)

No. I didn't. I'm a good sport.

TAMAL

OK I'm sorry. I wanted to do
something nice for you. You're
carrying our child and I feel like
I'm not doing anything. You don't
let me go to your doctor's visits.
You don't let me help pay for any
of the costs. I want to be a part
of this.

CLAIRE

Well this didn't fucking help.

(beat)

Now can we please go to sleep?

LATER

Claire tosses and turns in a fitful sleep.

INT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - UNIT 233 - SIMULTANEOUS

Dr. Elizabeth closes up shop for the night. The door OPENS.
Dr. Elizabeth turns and sees a silhouette in the doorway.

DR. ELIZABETH

Sebastian? Is that you? What are
you doing here?

It *is* Sebastian. And he has something in his hand. A GUN.

SEBASTIAN

(crazed)

You did this. It's your fault. You
did this.

DR. ELIZABETH
 Sebastian. Put the gun down. What happened? Is Allison OK? The baby?

CARL
 They're dead. They're both dead.
 Because of you.

DR. ELIZABETH
 Sebastian. Don't point that at me.
 Put it away before you do something stupid.
 (beat)
 What happened?

CARL
 I found him. In the bathtub.
 Floating. And Allison. She was...
 it's your fault. You did this.

DR. ELIZABETH
 Sebastian I'm so--

BANG.

Dr. Elizabeth falls to the ground. BANG BANG BANG.

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM

Claire jolts awake. She rushes into the...

INT. CLAIRE AND TAMAL'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM

She clutches her pregnant belly. Pain contorts her face. She looks into the mirror. She inhales deeply. Then exhales. She fights against the pain.

INT. CLAIRE'S OFFICE - DAY

Claire sits at her digital work desk. A surge of pain. She holds her stomach. She clenches her teeth. She lifts her Aura to speak into it.

CLAIRE
 (quietly)
 Send message to Dr. Elizabeth.
 "Severe pain. I need to see you."

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE
 Unable to send message. Recipient's
 signal not found.

INT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - HALLWAY - LATER

Claire staggers down the hallway. She pauses to lean against the wall in an attempt to stifle her pain.

INT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - UNIT 233 - MOMENTS LATER

The door OPENS. Claire takes a step inside and immediately GAGS. She covers her mouth. Too late. She vomits.

Dr. Elizabeth's body lies cold, drained, and ripened on the concrete floor.

The rest of the room is a mess: broken glass, overturned furniture, paintings askew, etc.

CLAIRE

Oh God. Oh God oh God oh God.

Claire takes a few deep breaths. She steels herself. She approaches Dr. Elizabeth's body. She uses her foot to roll the body over. She clocks the gunshot wounds.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Fuck.

Stabbing pain. Claire recoils.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Fuck fuck fuck! What the fuck is going on?

Another stab of pain. Claire doubles over. She steadies herself on the doctor's table.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Ok. You'll be OK. Just think. Where does she keep the medicine?

Claire searches the nearby wreck of the shelving unit. Broken glass everywhere. Nothing is intact.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Claire rifles through every drawer in the desk. She opens every cabinet. Nothing. Everything is destroyed.

Claire clocks the hotel style PAINTING on the wall. It's crooked. *And there's something on the wall behind it.*

Claire lifts the painting off the wall. There's a WALL SAFE. It has an attached Aura scanner.

Claire looks at Dr. Elizabeth's corpse. Her Aura is still attached to her dead wrist. Claire crosses to the corpse, bends down, and inspects Dr. Elizabeth's Aura.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Please. Please have enough life
left in you for this to work.

Claire drags Dr. Elizabeth's corpse across the room. It's a challenge. She lifts the dead arm as close to the scanner as it can get. It's still too far away. Claire bends all the way down and dead-lifts the corpse higher.

Claire presses Dr. Elizabeth's Aura against the scanner. Nothing.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Come on. Goddammit.

Claire SLAMS the Aura against the scanner. And again. And again.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Come on!

CHIRP. The scanner accepts the Aura. The wall safe CLICKS open. Claire drops the corpse with a THUD.

Claire looks inside the safe. *No medicine*. But there is a small, circular GLASS DISK. It's the same size as an Aura watch face.

Claire lifts the glass disk out of the safe. She places it on top of her Aura.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

User not recognized. Access denied.

Claire looks at Dr. Elizabeth's Aura. She bends down and places the glass disk on it.

A holographic display flickers to life above the Aura. It shows a FILE DIRECTORY with file names like "Trial 1", "Trial 2", etc.

Claire clicks on Trial 1. A video file PLAYS.

TRIAL 1 VIDEO FILE: *Dr. Elizabeth delivers a baby. It's bloody. Too bloody.*

TABITHA (O.S.)

*Her pulse is weakening. She's
losing too much blood. We need--*

The holographic display dies.

CLAIRE

No. No no no. Come on.

Claire pushes the Aura further up Dr. Elizabeth's wrist. She takes her own hands and rubs them back and forth on the corpse's wrist. She's trying to generate heat on the skin. She slides the Aura back into place. It flickers to life.

Claire clicks on Trial 2.

TRIAL 2 VIDEO FILE: *More of the same. A bloody birth.*

Claire clicks on Trial 6.

TRIAL 6 VIDEO FILE: *Dr. Elizabeth talks to the camera.*

DR. ELIZABETH

After a successful birth the mother is experiencing extreme postpartum depression. Mother has expressed feelings of anger and exhibits violent tendencies. Will continue to monitor this behavior. The baby, while healthy, is afflicted with--

The holographic display dies. Claire rubs Dr. Elizabeth's wrist. Nothing. Out of juice.

EXT. U STORE IT STORAGE CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Claire, clutching her belly and wincing in pain, EXITS the U Store It Storage Center. She grabs the railing of the stairs with a white-knuckling intensity. She raises her Aura.

CLAIRE

Call a car. Please.

FRIENDLY COMPUTERIZED VOICE

Car inbound. What's your destination?

CLAIRE

The hospital.

(beat, remembering)

No. Cancel that. Not the hospital.

Fuck.

(beat, wince of pain)

Mom and dad's. Take me to mom and dad's house.

INT. THE ZHOU'S APARTMENT - LATER

BANG BANG BANG.

CLAIRE (O.S.)
Dad! Mom! I know you're in there.
Please. Let me in.

Li stands near the front door. She hesitates.

CLAIRE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Please! I need your help.

Li finally crosses and OPENS the door. Claire spills into the room, nearly losing her footing.

LI ZHOU
Claire! What's the matter?

CLAIRE
The baby. It's coming. And I think there's something wrong with it.

LI ZHOU
You need to go to the hospital!

CLAIRE
NO! No hospitals. They'll kill the baby. I can't lose it. Not after everything I've been through.

LI ZHOU
What have you done?

CLAIRE
Will you help me or not?

INT. THE ZHOU'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - LATER

Claire is naked in the bathtub. Her round belly breaks the surface like a tortoise shell. Li hands Claire a cup of tea.

LI ZHOU
Drink this. It will relax you.

CLAIRE
Mom. It really hurts.

LI ZHOU
You will be OK. You're strong. Like my mother.
(beat)
This is how she gave birth to me.

INT. THE ZHOU'S APARTMENT - LATER

Yang OPENS the front door. Tamal bursts in.

TAMAL

Where is she? Is she OK?

YANG ZHOU

Yes. She's OK. She's with her mother in the bathroom.

TAMAL

Why isn't she at the hospital?

YANG ZHOU

(hesitating)

That wasn't an option.

TAMAL

What do you mean?

YANG ZHOU

She didn't tell you? About the pregnancy?

TAMAL

What are you talking about?! I want to see her!

YANG ZHOU

Everything is OK. I'll explain. But she is under a great deal of stress. Let's talk and calm ourselves. Then we can see her.

Tamal reluctantly nods.

INT. THE ZHOU'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - LATER

Claire SCREAMS in pain. Li holds Claire's hand.

Tamal ENTERS. He kneels down beside Claire. He brushes the hair out of her eyes.

CLAIRE

Tamal. You're here.

(beat)

It's coming.

TAMAL

I know. Your father told me everything.

(beat, frustrated)

(MORE)

TAMAL (CONT'D)

You should have told me. I could have helped. I could have--

Li shoots daggers at Tamal. Tamal gets the message and softens.

TAMAL (CONT'D)

How are you feeling?

CLAIRE

Like someone's pulsing a blender inside me. But otherwise OK.

TAMAL

I see your colorful humor's still intact.

(beat)

Is there anything I can do for you?

CLAIRE

Just be with me. It's almost--

Claire SCREAMS again. The bath water takes on a pink shade. *Blood in the water.* Tamal and Li share a knowing look.

TAMAL

You're doing great, Claire. You're doing great.

LATER

Claire SCREAMS. The bath water is red with blood. Yang is now with them in the bathroom.

LI ZHOU

I see the head. Keep pushing.

Claire gives one final, heaving SCREAM. Li reaches into the water and lifts the BABY out. The baby CRIES. It's a raspy, animalistic WAILING. Inhuman. **We never see the baby.**

Tamal and Yang see the baby. Tamal GASPS. Yang closes his eyes. Li hurriedly wraps the baby in a towel.

CLAIRE

Is it OK? Is it OK?

TAMAL

(panicky)

Everything's fine, honey. You were great.

CLAIRE

I want to see it.

YANG ZHOU

Not yet. You need to rest. Let your mother clean it up for you first.

CLAIRE

Is something wrong?! I want to see it! I want to see my baby!

Yang and Li share a look. The baby CRIES and CRIES. Yang nods to Li. Li carries the towel-wrapped baby over to Claire. Claire sits up to accept the bundle.

Yang taps Tamal on the shoulder. He gestures for them to leave. Tamal nods. They EXIT.

Claire holds the baby. Li sits next to her. Claire bursts into tears at the sight of the baby.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(through her tears)

Shhh. Shhh. It's OK. I'm here.
Mom's here for you.

Li puts her hand on Claire's shoulder. Claire SOBS violently.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(for her own benefit)

It's not your fault. It's my fault.
You're perfect. You're perfect just
the way you are. Everything's going
to be OK. It'll all be OK...

THE END