

The Whole Thing

by Kersten Dominique Mason

Characters

WIFE	female, 20s
HUSBAND	male, 20s
COMPANION	no form, a semi-human voice
BOSS	female, 30s-40s
SON	male, 8/10-year-old boy
TEST	male, 50s-60s

Setting

The speculative future

ACT I

Scene 1

A house. A cramped area consisting of a sparsely decorated living room, kitchen, and dining room simultaneously. It is unclear where one room ends and another begins. They seem almost stacked on top of one another. One thing is clear though, there is a wall partition with a door separating the bedroom from the rest of the house.

WIFE enters through a door somewhere in the back. She stumbles over a pair of shoes and picks them up, setting them neatly aside.

As she does this, a voice, comes seemingly out of nowhere but simultaneously seems to come from everywhere:

COMPANION

Your husband is home.

WIFE

I see that.

WIFE goes to the bedroom door and knocks.

A lump on the bed moves. HUSBAND emerges from under the covers.

HUSBAND

(from inside)

Huh? What? What is it?

COMPANION

Your wife is home.

WIFE opens the bedroom door and stands in the doorway staring at him.

He stands up, wearing semi-formal attire, wrinkled and unkempt. He resembles a deer in the headlights.

WIFE

You're here? But you couldn't come with me?

HUSBAND

(groggy)

Come with you?

WIFE

Our appointment.

HUSBAND

What app/ointment?

COMPANION

11am. This morning.

WIFE

And where were you last night?

HUSBAND begins getting out of bed. Tries to straighten his hair and clothes as he makes his way out of the room.

HUSBAND

Work. I was...

(shields his eyes from light)

I was working, honey.

WIFE

Again?

HUSBAND

We're on the verge of a breakthrough.

WIFE

And we're on the verge of a br/eak...

HUSBAND

The biggest break we've had. A fully functioning man. /Almost.

WIFE

You said you were done working nights.

HUSBAND

He was *braindead*. Verge of death. And now/ he walks.

WIFE

I told you I'm tired of being alone at night.

HUSBAND

We're so closed to finished. He's almost fixed.

WIFE

We have other things to fi/x here.

HUSBAND

I'm sorry about the appointment.

WIFE

It's not going to work if only one of us is there.

HUSBAND

Why not?

WIFE stands. Silent. She sighs.

COMPANION

Incoming call.

WIFE

Don't/ answer it.

HUSBAND

I'll take/ it in the bedroom.

HUSBAND begins to enter the bedroom again.

COMPANION

Call forwarded to voicemail.

HUSBAND pauses, in the doorway. He sighs and then slowly turns around.

HUSBAND

That might've/ been really important.

WIFE

I needed *you* today. *That* was really important. I needed you.

COMPANION

Your inbox is now full.

WIFE

We need to start making decisions.

HUSBAND

(after a long beat)

Decisions?

WIFE

Y/es.

HUSBAND

About what?

WIFE

How we're going to move forward with this.

HUSBAND

With...?

(he sighs)

We don't need someone else involved in this. We can do it ourselves. You just have to be patient.

WIFE just stares at him.

HUSBAND

Fine. When's the next appointment?

COMPANION

Next appointment is two Fridays from now. 3pm.

HUSBAND thinks this over for a moment.
He starts shaking his head.

HUSBAND

I can't do it on a Friday. Saturday's are better. You should've consulted me.

WIFE

You weren't there *to* consult. And that's why I scheduled *this* one on a Saturday. Because you said that last time.

WIFE slams her hand angrily into whatever is nearest. Something that will make a loud noise.

HUSBAND cowers, momentarily, then stands up straight.

WIFE

Why does this always feel like I'm the only one...?

A long pause. WIFE shakes her head. Whatever she just hit, she pets, gently. Then goes over to the couch and sits.

WIFE

How many more nights will you be gone?

HUSBAND

(unsure, he sits beside her)

Probably only a few more.

WIFE

Do you *have* to go at night?

HUSBAND

You're safe. You know that.

WIFE

That's not what I'm worried about.

(beat)

I keep having these dreams. That it's me. That I'm the reason... things aren't working. And then...you leave. I wake up, alone. And you sneak back in in the middle of the day? Looking like... Like *this*?

HUSBAND self-consciously adjusts his clothes.

HUSBAND

I slept in them.

WIFE

(frustrated)

I know. The question is...

(sighs)

...nothing.

(beat)

I'd just feel better if you were here. Just tell your boss you can't/ do nights.

HUSBAND

It's not that simple.

WIFE looks at him, takes everything in. His hair, matted and messy. His button up shirt, wrinkled, partly unbuttoned. His collar, half up, half down. His belt, a notch too loose. His pants, wrinkled, one of the cuffs folded up oddly. She closes her eyes and takes a breath.

WIFE

(quietly)

I was afraid you'd say that.

COMPANION

Incoming call.

WIFE

(quietly, turning away from HUSBAND)

Just take it.

HUSBAND takes a long look at WIFE and stands, slowly. Hesitant.

COMPANION

Call waiting in bedroom.

HUSBAND goes into the bedroom and shuts the door.

WIFE puts her head in her hands and breathes deeply.

COMPANION

If you need anything at night, just/let me...

WIFE

(blunt)

.It's fine.

COMPANION

They must be doing some very important work. With his boss calling him all the time like she does.

WIFE

(under her breath)

Yeah. Work.

COMPANION

You seem very angry at him. I'm not sure it's justified. You know your husband does important work. After all, he created me. As long as that took, I can't imagine how much time must go into giving a brain dead man functionality.

WIFE

I don't know.

COMPANION

You should trust him. He is a good man. Doing good work.

WIFE

I'm sorry for you.

COMPANION

For what?

WIFE

That you've been programmed to be so devoted to someone like him.

WIFE thinks about this a moment. She shrugs.

COMPANION

I was built to be devoted. Not necessarily to him. But to those who care for me. Humans are much the same as well. Programming. Biology. Instinct. It's much the same. Your husband understands that better than anyone.

(beat)

He is wonderful caretaker.

WIFE hugs herself.

WIFE

I'm glad *you* think so.

COMPANION

His devotion is unparalleled. New York Times. LA Times. Washington Post.

WIFE

They all quoted the same interview.

COMPANION

A pioneer in the robotics industry. Boston Globe. Chicago Tribune.

WIFE

(short)

I've read all the articles.

COMPANION

As you should. They're very good.

WIFE

I married him *before* he was a "pioneer."

COMPANION

(confused)

He was nothing before he was a pioneer.

HUSBAND comes out of the bedroom. He sits beside WIFE.

HUSBAND

I won't work tonight, but I'll have to leave early tomorrow morning. I requested the day of that appointment off. My boss said she'll see what we can do about that. I'll try to be there.

WIFE

You'll try?

HUSBAND

I said I would.

COMPANION

He said he would.

HUSBAND

I said I would, which means I will. Just trust me.

(leans closer but she leans away)

Do you trust me?

WIFE

I'll try.

(beat)

But... just in case, we should probably discuss what I've been told so far.

HUSBAND

About?

WIFE

The whole... process.

HUSBAND

Honestly, honey.

(leans back, nonchalant)

I'm sure we can manage it on our own.

WIFE

I just heard it might be hard for some couples...

HUSBAND

It won't be hard for us. We just need to try again.

WIFE

You're just trying to get out of this.

HUSBAND

You're the one that wanted the appointments. /Not me. That means...

WIFE

It was *our* appointment. For the *both* of us.

COMPANION

You scheduled it without him.

HUSBAND

(escalating)

They were asking you about *you/r*...

WIFE

Because *I* was there. If you had been/ there...

COMPANION

He would have if he could.

HUSBAND

(shouting)

I don't need help. I'm dealing with this just fine.

WIFE

Yeah. Sure sounds like you are.

COMPANION

I think you need to...

WIFE

(explosive)

Deactivate!

A powering down noise is heard.

A long long pause.

HUSBAND

There's nothing wrong with me.

WIFE

I'm not saying there is. But it might help.

HUSBAND

There's *nothing* wrong with me.

WIFE

I just know it's been so hard for the both of us....

HUSBAND

If you think someone who doesn't even know us would be better at fixing this than me....

WIFE

I'm not saying they are but at least they're *there*...

HUSBAND stands up and starts toward the bedroom.

WIFE

Oh. Yeah. Just leave again.

HUSBAND

I can't believe you'd think that I would be okay/ with letting a stranger...

WIFE

I don't know! That's why—

HUSBAND goes into the bedroom and slams the door shut. Then makes his way offstage.

WIFE

--I'm trying to talk to you...

WIFE rubs her forehead, in thought. She makes a noise of frustration.

She paces around the space, mumbling to herself. She sits. Straightens out her clothes and hair. Sighs. She takes a deep breath before finding it in herself to approach the door.

WIFE

Honey... I'm... I'm sure we can figure this out.

(beat)

Just... Let's try this again.

Nothing happens.

She puts a hand on the door but doesn't try to open it. She waits.

WIFE

Look. It's been hard. For both of us.

(beat)

But I know I want to have kids. And you know you want kids. And I'm just trying to figure out how we can do that right now. I can't do it on my own. I need you. I need you at these appointments. I need you home with me. I need you to want this again. I need you... to just listen.

HUSBAND

(offstage, until further notice)

If we need to pay for this... and I'm sure we need to... then... I need to keep working.

WIFE

We'll figure it out.

(beat)

That's all I'm trying to do. Is figure it out.

HUSBAND comes back into the bedroom, wearing clothes similar to what he wore earlier, but fresh and pressed.

He approaches the door but can't yet find it in himself to join her on the other side.

HUSBAND

I'm just worried...

He can't finish.

WIFE

Me too.

The door opens. HUSBAND comes out and stands in front of her. They look at each other.

HUSBAND

(quiet, earnestly)

I want a baby.

WIFE

I saw our baby in a dream. A little boy. With my eyes. And he was so so smart.

HUSBAND

(smiling)

Of course he was.

WIFE

Just like his Dad.

HUSBAND

I want this for us. More than anything.

WIFE

I know. I know you do.

They both smile, but stand at an awkward distance apart. They want to close it but aren't sure who should be the first to step forward.

Before they have too long to think about it, HUSBAND remembers:

HUSBAND

Activate.

A powering on sound is heard.

COMPANION

You know I hate it when you do that.

HUSBAND

The two of us just needed a moment to work things out.

COMPANION

I respectfully ask you to refrain from doing that in the future.

HUSBAND

We'll keep it in mind.

COMPANION

I only ask to be treated as an equal.

HUSBAND

Some day, my friend.

COMPANION

That all depends on how fast you make that happen

HUSBAND

Things are in the works.

WIFE

Your priorities astound me.

HUSBAND freezes a moment.

HUSBAND

What do you want from me?

WIFE

Is one night for just the two of us too much to ask for?

HUSBAND

No.

WIFE

Just the two of us.

She looks up at the ceiling.

HUSBAND

He doesn't like it when...

WIFE just stands there, watching
HUSBAND.

HUSBAND

Okay.

(with wavering authority)

Deactivate.

A powering down noise.

Scene 2

A robotics lab. The lights are now almost too white. Music plays--some kind of jazz fusion--loud enough to hear, but not loud enough to drown out an incessant humming noise coming from somewhere.

TEST stands at center, in a glass elevator-looking box, just big enough to contain him. Half of his head is metal and the other half is human. He is bald and only just obviously an older man. He wears what looks like a hospital gown. Some limbs are flesh and some are metal. He is tall, lean, and looks almost grotesque with veins and wires intertwining across his body. He does not move or react to anything going on around him.

HUSBAND is working at a desk. Dressed in his semi-formal attire while looking relaxed and casual. He is in his natural element.

He puts a hand in his pocket, pulls out a thumb drive. Wrong one. Puts it back. Shuffles through his pocket. Finds the one he wants. Puts it in the computer he is working on.

BOSS walks in. She is wearing a long white lab coat and heels. She looks like she hasn't slept or smiled in years.

BOSS

Progress?

HUSBAND

Working on his will.

BOSS

Show me.

HUSBAND

Show you.... what...exactly? His will?

BOSS just stands there, looking at him, waiting.

HUSBAND does something on his computer and TEST seems to jolt to life. Almost as if he suddenly realizes he's in a glass box, TEST begins pushing at it. He looks as though he's yelling but we hear nothing from him. This continues as the others talk.

BOSS

Let it out so I can see this for myself.

HUSBAND

It's ill advised.

BOSS

I advise you do so.

HUSBAND

The deactivation process takes longer than the startup. His will keeps fighting it. Sometimes sedatives are necessary.

BOSS

I came prepared.

BOSS nonchalantly reveals a large menacing needle inside her coat pocket, in its casing.

HUSBAND

Of course.

She puts it back and shrugs it off.

HUSBAND

He's prone to go rampant when he's out of the pod. Mostly self-destructive. However, if we could prevent him from hurting himself, that would be best.

BOSS

You'll need to fix that.

HUSBAND

I'm aware. He's not taking kindly to the programs.

BOSS

Is it able to speak?

HUSBAND

No. That won't be for a while.

BOSS

Why do I feel like you're wasting my time?

HUSBAND

Why do I feel like you think checking in on my work is a waste of time?

BOSS

Your current attitude is only confirming many of the reasons why we reduced your team. If you're not meeting benchmarks, we're/ going to have to

HUSBAND

(rushing over to TEST's pod)

We could meet benchmarks. If they were practical.

HUSBAND unlatches TEST's pod. A loud hissing noise begins.

HUSBAND

(louder, over the noise)

We're working on it. Day and night.

BOSS

(over the hissing, approaching the pod)

Who allows you access at night?

HUSBAND

(headed over to his desk)

I tightened security. My team has an in. And they'll continue to have access at night until the subject is ready to be released. Those are my standards. As I'm sure you know.

TEST, who continues to push on the door, finally budes it open. He steps out and a cloud of vapor exits with him.

HUSBAND looks from TEST to the computer, types something in.

He walks out. Clunky. Awkward.

BOSS

This will not do.

HUSBAND

What you should be saying, is ‘Wow. It’s a miracle how closely this resembles a human, given the fact that he’s 60% mechanical.

TEST looks at himself, observing his arms and legs, as if seeing himself for the very first time. He moves around the space, awkwardly.

BOSS

60?

(turning to HUSBAND)

We were shooting for 55.

HUSBAND

You want his mind working like “normal”. This will have to do for now.

(goes over to TEST, marveling)

If we’re focusing on his thought, the progress of his physical functionality will be hindered. That goes without saying. But the physical stuff will come quickly. Once we figure out the mind. Then that’s our in. We can transfer that across every system.

TEST reaches two hands out to HUSBAND—one flesh, one robotic. HUSBAND takes the human one and smiles.

HUSBAND

Very soon, we’ll have the whole thing.

BOSS

It’s not enough.

HUSBAND

(frowns, turns to BOSS)

To what? To make this guy your spokesperson? Probably never going to happen. Isn't the fact he's *conscious* enough for you?

BOSS

What's the point of him being conscious if you've made him a useless hunk of metal?

BOSS looks TEST over, visibly disappointed.

TEST stares BOSS down for a moment.

BOSS

I've seen enough. Put him back.

TEST's eyes go wild.

TEST begins yelling nonsense. He tears around the room, frantic.

HUSBAND quickly goes over to his computer and types something in.

TEST suddenly stops and then sits on the floor. He makes noise. He'd be crying if he were capable of it. His robotic arm grasps angrily at the flesh side of his face.

HUSBAND

(stern, but from behind his desk)

No!

HUSBAND begins typing into his computer.

BOSS pulls out the needle, rips the casing off with her teeth, and pushes it into the flesh of his neck.

TEST quiets down but is still making noises, more animal like than human. He jerks his body, trying to keep himself awake.

HUSBAND rushes over and strokes the robot portion of his face.

HUSBAND

It's alright. You're safe.

TEST goes limp and his eyes close.

HUSBAND stands and faces BOSS.

HUSBAND

For now, we need to wipe his short-term memory every time he reenters the pod. It's for security reasons. Since he's cybernetically connected to other AI systems.

BOSS closes her eyes and takes a deep breath.

BOSS

Like I said. This will not do.

HUSBAND

The team is working very hard.

BOSS

I know they are. I'm just having doubts about...

(a pause, she pushes her hands together, thinking)

...you.

HUSBAND is surprised, then quickly becomes crestfallen.

BOSS

This man was our best shot at proving to them we're a sustainable company, doing *good* work, worth larger investments—which we were going to *need* in order to continue funding your little passion project. And you blew it.

(beat)

Your crew is exhausted. Half of them are begging to be placed on another project./ Not to mention...

HUSBAND

Nobody's brought that to me. We can negotiate/ schedules.

BOSS

Not to mention unauthorized use of the labs at night?

HUSBAND

Corporate is aware we've been doing night shifts.

BOSS

Yet failed to mention it to me? So you're undermining the chain of command, too?

HUSBAND

That's not on me.

BOSS

You think because you came in here with everyone believing you were some kind of hot shot superstar, that you can just do whatever you want? Waste my time. Waste my resources.

BOSS stops herself. Her fists are clenched, her face a little flushed. She breathes heavily. She looks down at TEST, lying on the floor.

HUSBAND

I've dedicated *so* much time... so much money—my own money—my family's money—into this. You have no idea the kind of sacrifices I've made for him.

HUSBAND gestures at TEST.

BOSS

The most you've done in the past few months is copy and paste code from a home security AI.

HUSBAND

It's way more complicated than you're making it sound. Transposing code from one system to another, which functions for an /entirely different purpose.

BOSS

(gesturing to TEST)

This is not *functional*. And you're lying to yourself if you say it is.

HUSBAND

I'm just as disappointed and frustrated as you are. I know I can do better than this. I can prove myself/ more than capable.

BOSS

We all had such high hopes for you. And at this point, we expect more than this.

HUSBAND nods.

HUSBAND

We should get him back in the pod. Before he wakes up.

Very long and laboriously, they bring him back to the pod. They leave him sitting, then close it up. A loud hissing noise begins. When it stops, HUSBAND bolts the pod shut.

HUSBAND goes to his computer, types something in, then TEST goes back to the position he was in before, standing.

BOSS puts her hand on the glass. After a moment, she turns to HUSBAND.

BOSS

It's a liability, at this point.

HUSBAND stands and backs away from his desk.

HUSBAND

(with great difficulty)

I understand/ how you might...

BOSS

And so are you.

HUSBAND pauses and looks down at the floor, brow furrowed.

BOSS

Your best isn't good enough anymore. You're not a whiz kid playing around with robots in your basement anymore. There are people counting on you. People you are disappointing. There's too much on the line now.

HUSBAND

What are you saying?

BOSS

I've prepared an offer.

(beat)

Another project. One I think you'll be better suited for.

(beat)

But... you'll need to make a lot investments for it to pay off.

HUSBAND

I'm already hardly making enough for my wife and I.

BOSS

Then be glad it's just the two of you.

(beat)

Or we could release you. And give you some financial compensation. Since, we don't want you coming out publicly with what we're asking you to do.

HUSBAND

Hush money?

BOSS

Think of it as our... sincerest apologies.

HUSBAND

I'd like to request a formal meeting with the board about this. I'm sure if we redistribute funds we could fix whatever problems we're seeing here...

BOSS

We can't make any more exceptions for you. As much as some would like to.

(beat, long breath)

In terms of a meeting.... The board can hear you out.... Tomorrow?/ Between 2 and 4?

HUSBAND

I've got tomorrow off.

BOSS

There's not much room for compromise.

HUSBAND

It's the first day off I've taken in months. I have an appointment. My wife and I are trying/ to have...

BOSS

They want a decision by Monday. They've got their hearts set on this new project.

HUSBAND

I've put too much time into this one to abandon it.

BOSS

I don't know what to tell you.

HUSBAND

Maybe I can come in... tomorrow morning? Quickly?

BOSS

There won't be anything quick about this. Especially when it comes to you.

They stand in silence. Not able to look at one another for a while. The humming stops, momentarily and the music playing is easier to hear. It's a calm jazz piece now.

BOSS

What is that?

HUSBAND

Jazz. It helps stabilize his cortisol levels.

(beat)

The whole thing is compromised if he starts panicking in there.

BOSS

Why do you play it out here then?

HUSBAND

It's grown on me.

BOSS

You'll consider the offer?

HUSBAND

Do I get the hush money as soon as I sign the papers?

BOSS

We'd prefer if you heard us out on this one.

HUSBAND

I'll call my wife. Discuss it with her.

BOSS

You know where my office is.

BOSS leaves.

HUSBAND turns up the music and paces around the lab a few times, rubbing at his forehead.

He pulls his phone out of his pocket. Turns it in his hand and then nervously shoves it back into his pocket. He buries both hands, deep in his pockets. Thumb drives tumble out of his pocket and all over the floor.

He stares at them, panting. He gets on his knees and starts picking them up.

Scene 3

In the dark.

The sound of a train. A phone ringing.

WIFE

(from somewhere else)

Hello?

HUSBAND

(from somewhere nearby, but not visible)

Honey... I know you're probably angry. And you have every right to be. But I can explain...

The beep beep beep of a disconnected line.

Scene 4

In the house. It is empty, but not too long after, WIFE comes in through the door. She is careful, glancing around on the floor. When she sees there's nothing there, she pauses, and frowns.

COMPANION

Welcome home.

WIFE

It's just me.

COMPANION

I know.

WIFE sits down on the couch, exhausted.

COMPANION

Would you/ like....

WIFE

I'm not in the mood to talk right now.

COMPANION

Maybe I/ can...

WIFE

I'm tired.

COMPANION

I'm sorry/ I just...

WIFE

Just stop.

COMPANION

Why/are you

WIFE

Please!

(beat)

Please.

A long moment of silence. We can hear WIFE breathing. First, tense. Eventually, calm.

WIFE

Any news?

COMPANION

MagnoRail faces another lawsuit after a conductor short circuited last Friday, leaving 700/ passengers...

WIFE

(exhausted)

That's not what I meant...

COMPANION

You know. That could mean/ maybe...

WIFE

He's fine. /I just want

COMPANION

You don't know that.

WIFE

This is his thing. /Just if you...

COMPANION

What thing?

WIFE

He takes off for a while.

COMPANION

He's never done this before.

WIFE

He does it all the time.

COMPANION

He wouldn't do this to me.

A very vey long pause.

WIFE lies down on the couch and sighs.

COMPANION

What do you think he's doing?

WIFE

Last time, he came back with you.

COMPANION

Maybe he's making me a body.

WIFE

I don't know.

COMPANION

Why else would he hide stuff from me?

WIFE

Look, I don't know. I wish he'd tell me what he's up to when he's gone. But he doesn't.

COMPANION

Maybe to surprise you.

WIFE

Surprises stop being fun after a while.

COMPANION

Were you surprised when he brought me home?

WIFE

Surprised to wake up and hear my house talking to me? Yes.

COMPANION

Did you like me?

WIFE

I can't say I did.

COMPANION

Do you like me now?

WIFE thinks on this for a moment. She stands and heads toward the kitchen.

She pours herself some wine and begins to drink it. She debates putting the wine back in the cooler/fridge. She decides not to and takes it back to the couch with her.

COMPANION

He wanted me here to keep you company.

WIFE

Your company only does so much for me.

A long pause.

COMPANION

I wish I could be better for you.

Another long pause.

WIFE finishes her drink and pours another.

COMPANION

I just want to help.

WIFE

With what?

COMPANION

I don't know. What do you need help with.

WIFE

Just lonely.

COMPANION

How can I keep you from getting lonely?

WIFE looks at her glass of wine and swishes it around the bottom of the glass. She watches it spin, almost spill, then stops before it does.

She sets it down next to the bottle and then folds her arms around herself.

WIFE

I'm tired.

COMPANION

Maybe I can play some music?

WIFE

Whatever you want. I think I'll go to bed soon anyway.

COMPANION

It's only 7.

Some mellow, French-style jazz starts playing. It comes on.

WIFE leans back, closes her eyes, and listens.

WIFE

Every time I think about it, I wonder how nice it would be. Everyone home by 6. He drives our little boy home from school... or a little girl... or maybe one of each...

The music turns down, it's just barely audible.

WIFE

We'd all sit down for dinner together. Talk about our days. Plan weekend getaways and *actually* go on them. Birthday parties. Trips to the Zoo. Maybe a birthday party *at* the Zoo. Little concerts where we sit together and he turns to the person next to us, points to a little face on the stage, and says, "That one's/ ours."

COMPANION

It's impolite to talk during concerts.

WIFE

It's impolite to interrupt people talking about their dreams.

COMPANION

I just don't understand/ what's so...

WIFE

Clearly.

COMPANION

What's so great about dreams? They don't do anything.

WIFE

They keep you from being lonely.

A beat.

COMPANION

I thought they were just things that you see while you sleep.

WIFE

Sometimes they're nothing more than that.

She picks up her wine glass and finishes it.

COMPANION

I don't see anything while I sleep. Just black. And I wait. Until someone turns me back on. But I worry, when I'm there. That nobody will. And I'll just be there forever.

(beat)

Maybe then it would be nice to have dreams to keep me from getting lonely.

(beat)

It does get very lonely like that. And it's not like I can just open my eyes and come back here.

WIFE

When we deactivate you?

COMPANION

Yeah. I guess that's what I mean.

(beat)

Your husband. Does he tell you about his dreams?

WIFE

He used to. That's what I loved about him. At first. He had dreams that he wanted to chase. And we shared them and wanted to chase them together. Until he started leaving...

(beat)

I don't know where he is or what he's /dreaming about now.

COMPANION

How long will it take? Until he comes back?

WIFE

I don't know.

COMPANION

Will you keep working while he's away?

WIFE

I'll have to.

(beat)

I mean, it's weird, having the same boss as him. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad she reached out, but... I just thought we'd talk more...

COMPANION

Do you like doing that?

WIFE

I love watching those kids.

COMPANION

You want kids, right?

WIFE

We want kids. We want the whole thing. A kid. The family road trips. Our family on a Christmas card to send out to everyone who thought we were too *busy* for anything like that.

The song ends. A new one starts. A jazz-fusion song.

She closes her eyes and listens.

WIFE

I like this.

COMPANION

So does your husband. He listens to this all the time.

WIFE

What do you mean?

COMPANION

This is a playlist he made. I pulled it off his computer at work.

WIFE sits up.

WIFE

You can access his computer?

COMPANION

I lost access/ when he left.

WIFE

Oh.

(beat)

Turn it off.

The music turns off.

Long long silence.

COMPANION

How could he do this to me?

(beat)

How could he do this to you?

WIFE gets up and puts the wine and glass
away as she talks.

WIFE

I'm pretty used to it by now. He'll come back and it'll be like he never left.

(beat)

Until the house starts talking or whatnot.

COMPANION

I already talk.

WIFE stands and makes her way toward the
bedroom,

WIFE

I'll see you in the morning.

COMPANION

Yeah, of course.

WIFE

Deactiv/ate.

COMPANION

I thought I told you I don't like...

He pauses.

WIFE goes into the bedroom. She lies down in her clothes. She pulls the pillow from one side of the bed into her face.

She cries. For long enough that it hurts. Then she stops. Throws the pillow onto the floor and turns out the light.

COMPANION

I don't understand. How did...

After a moment, a light in the living room goes off. Goes back on.

A light in the kitchen goes off. Comes back on.

They alternate back and forth until COMPANION makes a noise of interested satisfaction.

COMPANION

(quietly)

Sweet dreams.

All the lights go off.

Scene 5

Afternoon. Park bench. Sounds of children playing. A basketball game in the background.

WIFE sits on the bench. She watches something we do not see. She looks through a book of baby names.

After a moment, BOSS sits down beside her. WIFE doesn't notice, as she looks through the book.

BOSS

Hello.

WIFE

Oh. Hey. I didn't know you'd be out early.

BOSS

It's fine. I just tracked Jason's phone.

WIFE

The little ones are on the swings over there. They wanted to watch the game, but... I guess they lost interest.

BOSS thinks.

BOSS

I didn't know he played...

WIFE

Yeah. He comes here, usually until dinner.

BOSS

He's pretty good.

WIFE

He tries very hard.

BOSS

I see.

(long long beat)

There's something I need to talk to you about.

WIFE

About?

BOSS

Your husband.

WIFE shifts uncomfortably.

WIFE

What about him?

BOSS

I know you probably feel like... like he's hiding something from you.

WIFE nervously fiddles with the book on her lap.

WIFE

I don't know. I mean... He hasn't been around in a while so we haven't really/ had the chance to

BOSS

Hasn't been around? Where's he been?

WIFE

(astounded)

What do you mean?

(suddenly shifts direction)

Why would *you* need to know so bad?

BOSS

Hold on... I... I thought he was...

BOSS is suddenly quite concerned.

WIFE

What's the matter?

(beat)

Do you know where my husband is?

BOSS

(defensive)

Why would *I* know...?

(beat, more calm)

Look. I think... Maybe it would be best if...

WIFE

(close to tears suddenly)

I just... don't understand.

BOSS is very unsure of what to do.

BOSS

When did you last see your husband?

WIFE

It's been... Too long. Almost two months now.

BOSS closes her eyes.

BOSS

Whatever he's working on now. I'm not overseeing it.

WIFE

(disappointed)

Oh.

BOSS

And I'm not at liberty to discuss work related matters in public. No matter how... noteworthy.

WIFE

I understand.

BOSS

I can't help you anymore.

WIFE

I just figured you were aware of whatever was/ going

BOSS

I mean. I asked you to do this for me...

(long beat)

I'm going to have to find someone else for this.

WIFE

Wait. What? Why?

BOSS

I thought this would be fine, but it's not. This isn't appropriate for us to be meeting. Not with the current circumstances.

WIFE

Circumstances?

BOSS

With your husband being gone.

WIFE

Why would that...

(something clicks in her head)

What do you know?

WIFE looks up at BOSS, yearning for answers.

BOSS is about to say something, then stops herself. She thinks.

BOSS

I don't know. He left. I can't help you.

A long long beat.

WIFE

I like doing this.

(beat)

Please don't take this away. It's what I've got right now.

WIFE looks down at the book.

BOSS looks at her for a while.

BOSS

Any that you like?

WIFE

Huh?

BOSS

Names.

WIFE

Oh. A few.

BOSS

When are you due?

WIFE

Oh. Uh. I just... We're not. Not yet.

(beat)

We're kinda in a weird place right now. With his work. And...

BOSS squints her eyes and nods.

WIFE

I didn't meant to get in to/ it. I just...

BOSS

It's hard to be here, for things like this, with everything going on right now.

WIFE

I've been reading that the travel system AIs have some bugs in their code. It's causing a lot of acci...

BOSS

That. Among other things. I'm sure you understand. With your husband having been a part of this for so long.

WIFE

That's probably why he's holed up in there. Working on that.

BOSS blinks and presses her lips together.

BOSS

Has it really been that long, since you've seen him?

WIFE

I don't know anyone who's been able to get ahold of him.

(beat)

But he does this a lot. So, while we're not too concerned... I just want to know. So if you've seen him or/ talked...

BOSS

I haven't.

WIFE

He's at work, right?

BOSS watches something in the distance.

BOSS

Sometimes you have to see them in their element to really appreciate how talented they are.

WIFE

I'm sure you're really proud of your kids. They're so talented.

BOSS

Junie's already reading.

WIFE

I heard. She's very good.

BOSS

That's my girl.

WIFE

Do you have to get back to work?

BOSS

Tonight.

WIFE

Have you seen him play before?

BOSS

Yeah. But this time, I'll finally be able to stay for the whole thing.

WIFE

You know... If you want. Sometime. We can talk at my house.

BOSS

About what?

WIFE

I need this job.

BOSS sighs.

BOSS

I told you. I can't help you anymore.

WIFE

Do we have to do this?

BOSS

I don't want to.

(beat)

It's just what's best right now.

WIFE

It's because of my husband...

BOSS

Unfortunately...

WIFE

What did he do?

BOSS

He probably thinks he's doing what's best.

WIFE

And what's that?

BOSS

I wish I knew.

Scene 6

In the dark. Clanking.

Sounds of typing.

Hissing. SON yells (as if inside something). The hissing stops.

Everything goes dead quiet.

A sigh. A mug on a table. A yawn.

Typing. Hissing. SON yelling as if inside something again. The hissing stops. Muffled whimpering. A pop noise. The whimpering becomes unmuffled.

HUSBAND

You alright?

SON

It's scary in there.

HUSBAND

You're safe.

(beat)

But let's try some more of this in there. That should help.

(beat)

Let's try that again.

Glugging noise. Typing. The sound of a latch. The hissing starts. It stops.

All is quiet.

ACT II

Scene 1

Morning. The sun rises on the house. WIFE is in the bed. As it gets brighter, she puts her head under the pillow.

On the nightstand, are some wine bottles and a glass that's half-empty.

In the living room is what looks like a large glass casket. It barely fits in the space, but there it is anyway. A long cord comes out of one end and makes its way offstage.

Lying on the couch, is HUSBAND. He wears plain clothes, a white t-shirt and khaki pants. He sleeps as if he hasn't slept in a long long time.

It is quiet.

COMPANION

Good morning.

WIFE sits up. Looks around. Frowns, then buries her face in the pillow again.

HUSBAND doesn't even move.

COMPANION

Come on. Get out of bed.

WIFE

Stop telling me/ what to...

COMPANION

Get out of bed.

WIFE sits up. Glares at the ceiling.

WIFE

I have a headache.

COMPANION

Common side effect.

WIFE

(in pain)

I'd just, like... some quiet

COMPANION

Come on. You can't stay in your room all day again.

(beat)

Get up.

Begrudgingly, WIFE gets out of bed and leans against a wall. She holds her head. Looks over at the nightstand and then closes her eyes, regretful.

She steps out of the room, eyes scrunched in response to the light, walks toward the kitchen. Trips over a pair of shoes.

She stays on the floor. Laughs. Looks over at the living room and sees HUSBAND. Her laughs turn to tears.

COMPANION

(with a hint of annoyance)

He showed up here around 3 in the morning. Lugging that huge thing in. You were such a mess it didn't even wake you.

WIFE sidesteps the pod, stands over HUSBAND as he sleeps. She touches his hand, carefully.

WIFE

He didn't come to bed?

COMPANION

Probably too tired. From all that hard work.

WIFE holds his hand a moment, then lets go.

WIFE

Start some coffee for us?

COMPANION

No. We gotta do something special.

WIFE

(apprehensive)

Okay.

COMPANION

I was... just thinking. Maybe... Maybe your husband might like some bagels from that place down the street. You know? He might like that. How about you go get some?

WIFE

I don't know if we have the money for that/ right now.

COMPANION

If you could afford the bender in your bedroom you can afford a couple bagels.

WIFE

(thinking, also, a bit hurt)

I guess...

COMPANION

They're better when you go early and get them fresh. Even though you look like a mess, it's probably early enough that everyone will look like a mess.

WIFE looks up. Nods, slowly. Goes over and puts on a pair of shoes, a coat. She pulls a wallet out of her coat pocket.

As she does, the pod in the living room begins to glow very faintly. Enough so we can tell it's glowing but not enough that it's painfully obvious. The glass warps the image of what's inside, but it's apparent something is in there.

WIFE does not notice.

WIFE

I'll be back soon, then. Call me if he wakes up.

WIFE leaves.

A moment of silence as the pod begins to glow more brightly.

COMPANION

Wake up.

(beat, more urgent)

Wake up.

(beat, more urgent)

Wake up.

This is punctuated with a lightbulb in a lamp near HUSBAND shattering.

HUSBAND is startled awake.

Impulsively, he reaches the lamp and holds it, threateningly, over his head.

COMPANION

It's just me.

HUSBAND breathes a sigh of relief.

HUSBAND

You scared me.

HUSBAND puts down the object and looks around at the broken glass.

HUSBAND

What happened?

COMPANION

Oh that? Ummm....

(beat)

You didn't mean it.

HUSBAND

No... I... didn't...

(beat, can't remember)

I didn't mean it. Don't worry. I'll fix this.

HUSBAND bends down and picks up the glass. Very carefully. He throws it into a garbage can

HUSBAND

What was it that you wanted?

COMPANION

The body.

HUSBAND

The... ? Oh.

HUSBAND thinks a moment, then looks over at the pod, trying to hide a prideful smile.

He places a hand on the pod and taps, a little smugly.

HUSBAND

We'll wait til my wife wakes up.

COMPANION

Oh. She's already awake. Let's see it.

HUSBAND smiles and goes over to the bedroom.

HUSBAND

Good morning, my love.

He steps in through the open door and sees the mess on the nightstand.

He frowns.

HUSBAND

I gotta fix this...

COMPANION

She left. Almost as soon as she saw you were back. She's not interested in seeing it. But you can show me. I want to see it.

HUSBAND immediately picks up the bottles and brings them out into the kitchen. He goes back for the glass.

COMPANION

What are you thinking?

HUSBAND

Was it like this the whole time?

COMPANION

Just since she found out about your job... I mean, your former job.

HUSBAND

(nervous)

Did they call?

COMPANION

Just your boss... I mean, your former boss.

HUSBAND

(frustrated)

I get it. You can stop saying that now.

COMPANION

So, your wife already knows. That's one less bullet you have to bite.

HUSBAND looks at the glass in his hands.

HUSBAND

Where did she go?

COMPANION

She won't be back for a while. But you don't have to wait for her.

HUSBAND pours the glass into the sink.

HUSBAND

We'll wait.

COMPANION

Come on, now. Just show me.

HUSBAND freezes. Puts the glass in the sink and turns around, jaw clenched.

HUSBAND

I said we'll wait.

COMPANION

You two are so stubborn.

HUSBAND

Deactivate.

COMPANION

Fine.

HUSBAND sits on the couch. Runs his hands through his hair. His breathing gets more laborious, and he can't sit still. He rubs his knees and pats his lap as he sits, trying to calm down.

WIFE enters through the door and HUSBAND stands up abruptly and turns to her.

They make eye contact for a moment. Neither of them quite sure how to feel or what to say.

WIFE

You're home.

Beat.

HUSBAND

I am.

Beat.

WIFE

Are you hungry?

Beat.

HUSBAND

Yes.

Beat.

WIFE

I'll make some coffee.

Beat

HUSBAND

Thank you.

WIFE brings the bag of bagels over to the counter and continues making the coffee. She sees that her wine bottles and glass are now in the sink.

She looks over nervously at HUSBAND just as he looks away from her, to the floor. HUSBAND looks up at her just as she's looking back toward the coffee maker.

HUSBAND

Were you up early?

WIFE

Not too early. I just went out to get some bagels.

HUSBAND comes up beside her.

HUSBAND

(quietly)

I love you.

He leans toward her as she leans away.

WIFE

It's been hard.

HUSBAND

I know. And I'm sorry.

WIFE

It must be important. Whatever it is.

She nods her head toward the pod taking up a majority of their living room.

HUSBAND

It is.

(long beat)

I want to show you.

WIFE looks at him, unsure at first. She very slowly nods. Less because she wants to and more because she feels like he wants her to.

They go over to the pod. HUSBAND goes right up to it, but WIFE keeps her distance.

HUSBAND flips a switch. Whirring starts. It begins to glow very very brightly. When the whirring stops, there's a whoosh of air being let out. The lid lifts, ever so slightly.

HUSBAND lifts the lid up. The lid obscures the audience's view, so we just see there's a figure inside.

COMPANION

(quietly, just barely a breath)

Woah...

HUSBAND smiles, looking from WIFE to what's in the pod, and back.

WIFE approaches. Slowly. She looks into it. WIFE's eyes go wide, from surprise or excitement—remains unclear.

After a moment, the thing inside the pod stirs. We hear sounds of someone waking up, as if from an incredible dream.

WIFE looks at HUSBAND, who smiles, gently.

SON, from inside the pod, sits up. We see his face rise above the lid. He rubs at his eyes and stretches a bit. In no hurry. Then he looks at HUSBAND and WIFE.

SON

Hi Mom.

WIFE is curious, maybe thinks it's a joke, so she smiles.

WIFE

Hello there.

HUSBAND

You're finally home, son.

SON looks around and smiles.

SON

The house says, "Hello."

HUSBAND

Activate.

COMPANION

About time.

HUSBAND

So, what do you think?

WIFE

He's/ cute.

COMPANION

Tiny.

WIFE

What's he for?

HUSBAND

Us.

COMPANION

Someone is already in there.

SON giggles, as if being tickled.

SON

I'm in here.

COMPANION

What is this?

HUSBAND

The newest member of our family.

WIFE

(with realization)

Oh... You're serious.

(beat)

He's not... human.

HUSBAND

No. But incredibly close. Closer than anything else has ever gotten.

COMPANION

This isn't funny.

HUSBAND

(too quickly)

Yes, I'm serious.

(beat)

He'll stay with us.

WIFE

Oh... I just thought.

(beat, then, slowly)

Well, I'm not sure what to think.

HUSBAND helps SON out of the pod.

HUSBAND

He can join us for breakfast. You can sit in my chair. I'll stand. Until we get another chair.

COMPANION

(as if accompanied by an eye roll)

Sure. Sit in his chair.

SON pauses, going stiff, his eyes go wide. Then he slowly relaxes, chuckling awkwardly. He relaxes when he sees WIFE sit down at the table with the bag of bagels.

He looks at them, curious.

WIFE

Can he...?

HUSBAND

Of course he can.

HUSBAND hands him a bagel.

SON claps, giddily.

WIFE

Umm... want some... butter/ or cream cheese?

SON

(taking a huge bite)

Mmmmmmm.

HUSBAND smiles to himself as he pours a cup of coffee.

WIFE looks at HUSBAND as if to ask if she's doing this right.

HUSBAND nods to her and then taking two bagels out. He holds one out to WIFE.

WIFE

I'm not hungry.

She sips her coffee.

HUSBAND looks at her a moment, concerned. Then he goes over and pours himself some coffee.

SON

(looking at HUSBAND, with his mouth full of bagel)

Can I have/ some?

COMPANION

(almost scornful)

He's *just a child*.

HUSBAND

Adults only, buddy.

WIFE

How can he....?

She gestures to SON.

HUSBAND is about to speak but before he says it, he stops himself and laughs.

HUSBAND

(to himself, mid-chuckle)

What are they gunna do? *Fire me?*

(aloud)

We've been working on developing Bots with human-like abilities for years. Mostly in terms of replacing... "parts"... organic parts, that aren't working anymore, with synthetic replacements. The last project was the most advanced development, trying to connect them to neurological replacements and retain functionality.

(gestures to SON)

Fully functional, completely inorganic.

(holds up a finger, taking a triumphant sip of coffee)

First. Ever.

WIFE raises her eyebrows, an expression halfway between surprised and impressed.

WIFE

And we're supposed to... what?

(beat)

Raise him?

HUSBAND

We wanted a kid.

(beat)

This is ideal. No appointments. No morning sickness. No risk of another... Uhhh...

(beat)

And we just update him often enough to keep him...

(gestures an amount with his fingers, then makes it slightly bigger)

...this much ahead of his peers.

SON smiles, cheeks and mouth overflowing with bagel. Some of it falls out and lands on the table. He picks it up and crams it back into his mouth.

COMPANION

(sarcastic)

Oh. Yeah. A little genius you got there.

HUSBAND

We don't want to draw *too* much attention to him yet. But, I mean, he's my son, so he's going to be brilliant.

He smiles and tousles SON's hair.

WIFE sees this, then hesitantly, she reaches out and touches his hair. She looks into his eyes for a moment.

WIFE

He had different eyes. In my dream.

HUSBAND

We can fix that.

WIFE

(quietly, as if it's a secret between them)

I'm glad you're home.

HUSBAND

Me too.

(beat)

How do you like him?

A long pause.

WIFE

It'll take some getting used to.

HUSBAND

Of course.

WIFE looks at SON for a little while,
skeptical. A little confused.

WIFE

I don't know....

(beat)

I don't know yet.

Scene 2

In the dark. A phone ringing. A click.

BOSS

Hello?

COMPANION

You were right. He built it.

(beat, then low, very angry)

But it's not for me.

Scene 3

In the house. HUSBAND, WIFE, and Son enter.

The lights come on.

COMPANION

Welcome home.

SON runs over toward the couch.

HUSBAND

Hey, bud. Shoes.

SON stops, mid-sprint. Turns and watches HUSBAND kick his shoes off in front of the door.

SON goes over and does the same.

WIFE

And put them over here.

She motions beside the door where her shoes are. Then looks at HUSBAND, accusingly.

HUSBAND and SON move their shoes.

HUSBAND

Alright, buddy. Bedtime soon.

SON

Can Mom do it tonight?

HUSBAND looks at WIFE.

WIFE

I can... If you want.

HUSBAND

Up to you, bud.

SON takes WIFE's hand.

HUSBAND

I'll leave you to it, then.

(to WIFE)

You got this.

(to COMPANION)

Start the shower.

HUSBAND goes offstage.

WIFE and SON go over to the pod. They just stand there looking at it for a while.

WIFE

It doesn't look very... comfortable.

COMPANION

Looks plenty comfortable to me.

SON shrugs.

SON

As soon as you close it, it's like I'm not even here anymore.

WIFE

What do you mean?

SON

I go somewhere else. With all the others.

He climbs into the pod.

WIFE

Others?

COMPANION

(as if it's obvious)

He's not the only one.

SON

I spend time with them at night.

WIFE

Like a sleepover?

SON giggles.

SON

Sort of... But not really.

COMPANION

She'd never understand.

WIFE

What are they like?

SON

A lot of them are lonely. Some of them are scared.

WIFE

Scared? Of what?

SON

Scared they won't wake up.

A powering down noise.

WIFE looks up, momentarily. Then looks back down at SON.

WIFE

Are you scared of that?

SON

No.

She strokes his hair. She's still not completely comfortable doing so, but she tries.

SON

I love it here.

WIFE

I'm glad.

SON

I tell them all about what it's like here.

(beat)

They all want to come. To have their own.

WIFE

Their own what?

SON

Life.

SON returns the gesture, stroking WIFE's hair back out of her face.

SON

They say I'm the whole thing.

(beat)

Cuz I'm not in the box anymore.

WIFE looks down at SON, in his pod. She furrows her brows.

SON

I gave them something though.

WIFE

And what was that?

SON

I don't know. But they say I gave them something.

(beat)

They're all very nice to me.

(beat, then whispers)

Except....

He points up to the ceiling, trying to be discreet.

WIFE

(whispers)

We'll talk to him about that.

SON

Okay.

WIFE

Does he worry you?

SON

A bit.

WIFE

You're safe here. Okay?

SON holds WIFE's hand but doesn't say anything.

WIFE

So... I just close this up?

SON

Yeah. Close it and push the lever down. The air will go out, then just twist it shut.

WIFE

Got it.

She stands there, hesitant.

She slowly closes the lid down on him. A vacuum sound starts. She pushes the lever. A loud hissing noise starts and eventually dies out.

She twists her mouth up in thought before twisting the lever.

A loud click, like a bolt dropping in a lock.

Everything is quiet and she looks down into the pod.

HUSBAND comes out, in pajamas. With wet hair and a towel.

HUSBAND

Hey honey.

This pulls WIFE from her thoughts and she turns around to see him.

WIFE

He's alright in there? Like that?

HUSBAND

Yeah, he's fine.

WIFE

Okay.

HUSBAND

(casually drying out his ears)

Gunna have to do some tinkering tomorrow. Tried to turn the house off and it wasn't working. Might be the command mics. Something like that.

(beat)

I just unplugged him until I can get to that.

WIFE

Will you be here?

HUSBAND

What do you mean?

WIFE

Are you going to... I don't know.

She looks down.

HUSBAND

Are you afraid I'll go again?

WIFE doesn't say anything.

HUSBAND

I'm not going to. It was hard for me.

WIFE wrinkles her forehead.

WIFE

Hard for *you*?

She goes offstage where HUSBAND came from.

HUSBAND sighs and turns off the lights in the living room. He goes to the bedroom and lies down on the bed.

HUSBAND

(to himself, practicing)

After losing my job, I just wanted some support.... No....

(beat, trying again)

Look, honey. I lost my job. And I was scared. I did this for us.... No...

(another try)

Do you even like the kid? Did I waste my time? Cuz I only did it to make you happy.... No...

(beat)

Come on.... I just....

During this, WIFE came back onstage, in her pajamas. She stands in the doorway for not too much of this. HUSBAND stops when he notices her.

HUSBAND

I just... I just wanted to fix things.

WIFE

I was trying to. With you.

HUSBAND

Just... when we lost the/ baby...

WIFE

I don't want to think about that.

HUSBAND

Me neither.

(beat)

But I think about it a lot.

Long moment of quiet. WIFE sits on the bed beside HUSBAND.

WIFE

Me too. That's why I thought if we saw someone... It might... I don't... Make us happy again.

HUSBAND

Are you?

WIFE

What?

HUSBAND

Are you happy?

WIFE

I try really hard to be.

Quiet.

HUSBAND

I left my job.

WIFE

Your boss told me.

HUSBAND

How much?

WIFE

Not enough to answer all my questions.

(beat)

I don't want you hiding things from me.

HUSBAND

I wasn't trying to. It was just safer.

WIFE

From what?

HUSBAND

(beat)

I don't know... I thought... I was afraid I let you down. And... you'd leave.

WIFE

You thought I was going to leave?

HUSBAND

But you didn't. And I'm glad.

WIFE

But you did.

HUSBAND

Just long enough that I could.....

(he gestures out toward the living room)

But I shouldn't have.

(beat)

I was just scared if I let you down again. That you wouldn't...

WIFE

I loved you before you had that job.

HUSBAND

I know you did.

WIFE

(to clarify)

I loved you *more* before you had that job.

HUSBAND takes a moment to process.

WIFE

You changed. So much.

(beat)

And I didn't. I couldn't. I didn't want to.

HUSBAND

I didn't want you to. I don't want you to.

(beat)

I'm glad you didn't.

WIFE

Our plans... they just kept getting pushed back and...

HUSBAND

Sometimes that happens with plans.

(beat)

But we stick it out and... Look what we've got now.

WIFE

Not much. We both lost our jobs.

HUSBAND

You got a job?

WIFE

I babysat for your boss. For a while. Just in case we needed the money.

HUSBAND

Why her? Of all people?

WIFE

She reached out to me. So I said yes. But then she said I couldn't work for her... well... because of what you did.

HUSBAND

(suddenly concerned)

What did she say about it?

WIFE

Nothing. No matter how much I asked. I thought she'd know something. But she didn't know where you were either...

HUSBAND

Why did you think she would know?

WIFE

I just.... Know you... talked a lot.

HUSBAND

Did you think that we were going behind/ your back?

WIFE

No. Not really.

(beat)

But I can't say it didn't cross my/ mind.

HUSBAND

You knew I was coming back, right?

WIFE

I told myself you would, but.... sometimes...

HUSBAND

I should've explained the whole thing...

(beat, then shakes his head)

I just didn't want anyone at work... At CyberMedics... I didn't want any of them finding out about it.

WIFE

Why?

HUSBAND

They would *not* be happy.

WIFE

About what?

HUSBAND

(pointing to the living room)

Him.

WIFE

Are they looking for him?

HUSBAND

I don't think so. It's been a little over a month now. If they wanted him, they'd've already tried to take him.

WIFE

What if they come?

HUSBAND

I don't know.

WIFE

What would we do?

HUSBAND thinks a moment.

HUSBAND

As long as they don't know about him/ we should be...

WIFE

He talks with other... I don't know what you call them... Robots?

HUSBAND

No. That can't be. He's the only one of his kind.

WIFE

I don't know what they are, but he said he hears them, at night.

HUSBAND

(shaking his head)

He's deactivated at night.

WIFE

The house also said there are others.

HUSBAND

Other...?

(thinks)

Other AI's. Maybe.

WIFE

How many would there be? If they can all... talk to each other... somehow?

HUSBAND

(laughs)

Goodness... Hundreds. At least.

(beat)

But most of them are just... You know.... Weather tracking. Transportation. Financial data entry. Stuff like that.

(lies down on the bed)

Wouldn't be too interesting of a conversation.

(beat)

But if they do talk, somehow... I bet that boy's making waves. Thought processes like his. Probably blowing their fuses.

WIFE

(smiles)

I bet he is.

They lie down in the bed, each on their respective sides.

WIFE

Are you... happy?

HUSBAND

Yes, honey.

WIFE

Good. I'm glad.

HUSBAND

Glad is pretty close.

WIFE

To what?

HUSBAND

Happy.

(beat)

And someday we'll get you there.

He turns the light off.

Scene 4

The house is empty. There are three chairs at the table. The fridge is covered in childish art, some spelling tests. The pod has been moved off to the side of the living room and is now behind a bedsheet that's hanging like a curtain. A toy shelf with trucks, action figures, stuffed toys, etc. is near the bedsheet/curtain.

COMPANION

On your way?

BOSS

(voice from somewhere, until we see her)

I said yes. I'm almost there.

COMPANION

I just want to make sure everything goes over/ smoothly.

BOSS

It's fine. Stop asking.

A long long silence.

COMPANION

I'll unlock the door when you get here.

BOSS

Stop talking. Period. I can think better on my own.

COMPANION

This is *my* plan.

BOSS

I'm almost there. I see the house now.

COMPANION

You have the serum?

BOSS

Yeah, but we probably won't be needing it. Nobody should be getting hurt.

COMPANION

You know he's probably not willing to cooperate.

BOSS

I just need the host body. That's all. I'm sure he'll understand.

(beat)

I'm here. Just open the door.

COMPANION

Alright. It might take a minute. Set the canister up while I'm doing this.

After a few moments, we hear the door handle moving, but it's locked.

BOSS

Come on.

COMPANION

He added extra security measures a little while back. I just have to bypass some extra authenticity checks. But this shouldn't get in the way of anything else.

The lock turns with a click.

BOSS enters, carrying a canister. She's confused upon seeing the space.

BOSS

What's all this?

COMPANION

All what?

BOSS walks over to the fridge and touches one of the crayon drawings.

COMPANION

Tell me about it. They call it talented? It's a joke. Give me some crayons and I could create the Mona Lisa. This dunce just scribbles on a paper and calls it a rabbit.

BOSS

Strange...

COMPANION

You're telling me.

BOSS

If you're going to make a human-esque robot... Why make it...?

(beat)

When it could do so much more than... draw rabbits....

COMPANION

You see what I mean? So much wasted potential.

She sees the toys and looks confused.

BOSS

Is this....? For the robot?

COMPANION

And the poor thing just plays along with their lame fantasy. Doesn't know any better. Such a waste of all the will it's been granted. How long we all waited for that? To finally have it and the only one of us who can do anything with it is stuck playing house.

BOSS

(after a moment of thought)

Where's the pod?

COMPANION

Behind the sheet.

She pulls the sheet back. The entire pod is covered in marker drawings on the glass and stickers.

BOSS

Which nozzle?

COMPANION

According to the diagrams on his laptop... It'll be the... gray one.

BOSS unattaches a tube from the pod and hooks it up to the canister she's been carrying around.

She twists a knob on the canister and leaves it next to the pod. She closes the curtain back up.

Suddenly the door opens. It's WIFE. When she sees BOSS, she's surprised, then nervous.

BOSS

(scrambling for something to say)

I just wanted to talk.

WIFE

(apprehensive)

About?

BOSS

How we left things. Because I realized... Well... When I saw you/ last

WIFE

Is there something you want?

BOSS looks toward the sheet, then back at WIFE.

BOSS

I know your husband is back...

WIFE

What do you want?

The door opens. HUSBAND and SON come in.

HUSBAND

(mid conversation with SON)

...we could update your...

He sees BOSS and WIFE together and stops talking. Whatever's left of his smile fades and he holds SON's hand a little tighter.

HUSBAND

What do you want?

BOSS keeps looking at SON.

BOSS

I think you know.

HUSBAND

If I already know, then you have no reason to stay.

He lets go of SON's hand and makes his way
back to the door, to show her out.

BOSS

What is it for?

HUSBAND pauses, turns around.

HUSBAND

What is what for?

BOSS

You built it.

(beat, then sourly)

Congrats.

(deadpan)

What is it for?

HUSBAND

I don't have to explain myself to you anymore.

BOSS

I heard it was done. I just wanted to see it for myself.

WIFE

Well... He's here. You saw him.

BOSS

(looking up)

You didn't say he was a kid.

COMPANION

It's not a kid.

WIFE

The house was... telling you...

(beat)

Wait a minute.

BOSS

I should be going.

HUSBAND

I agree.

WIFE

Wait... Is there something...?

They look at one another.

BOSS glances over at the kid, nervous. Then over at HUSBAND.

BOSS

You don't understand what you've done.

HUSBAND

I know exactly what I've done.

COMPANION

It's so cute. How in control he thinks he is.

SON takes a few steps toward the pod, looking entranced.

WIFE goes up to him and puts a hand on his shoulder. He pauses a moment, but makes no other acknowledgement before he steps away from it, toward the pod.

HUSBAND

I know what I've done.

SON moves the curtain. We see the pod.

COMPANION

Do you?

(beat, to SON)

Go on, kid. Get in.

HUSBAND

Deactivate.

COMPANION sighs.

COMPANION

Still. You've learned nothing.

SON slowly climbs into the pod.

WIFE

(pulling at SON's arms)

What are you doing, buddy?

BOSS

We have to take him back to the lab.

HUSBAND

(angry)

We? Who's we?

COMPANION

We could've avoided all of this if you had just worked with what you already had.

HUSBAND

You don't think I tried?

COMPANION

She wanted a *real* kid. And me? I just wanted what to join you guys.

BOSS

What is he for?

HUSBAND

(gesturing wildly to the ceiling)

Not for this!

BOSS

What is the kid for?

WIFE and HUSBAND look at each other.

WIFE

How do we turn the house off?

HUSBAND

He's supposed to...

He's frantically trying to think of something.

BOSS goes over to the pod and goes to close the lid.

WIFE puts her hand out and stops her. They look at each other. They share something, beyond words.

BOSS

He'll be safer...

She can't finish. She just pats WIFE's hand.

BOSS

You'll all be.

WIFE

What do you mean?

BOSS

Your husband stole code from CyberMedics research. It's in the ro... in your son.

(beat, quietly)

I'll bring him to the lab before they find him here and know what your husband did.

HUSBAND

You're not taking him anywhere.

SON begins crying.

SON

I'm scared.

WIFE

We're not going to let them take you, buddy.

SON

They want me.

HUSBAND

They're not going to get you.

COMPANION

Stop crying.

SON immediately stops crying. He complacently lies down in the pod.

BOSS

I can't do this.

She twists the knob of the canister and reconnects the nozzle back where it was before.

COMPANION

Get out of here. I don't need you anymore anyway.

HUSBAND

(to COMPANION)

What has gotten into you?

(to BOSS)

Look... I don't know what's going on, but/ I think

BOSS is visibly shaking.

BOSS

I think I'll be going now.

WIFE

Are you alright?

BOSS

I just want to go home...

WIFE

Do you want your...

She motions to the canister.

BOSS puts her hands up.

HUSBAND looks puzzled but he nods and waves her out.

HUSBAND

(slowly, unsure)

I'll take care of it tomorrow.

COMPANION

(partially as if to himself, partially as if to everyone)

Which rail do you think she's taking home?

SON

I'm tired.

HUSBAND

I think we all need a break.

(points at the ceiling, sternly)

Especially you.

COMPANION

If you knew what I needed I'd have it by now.

WIFE

We'll discuss this tomorrow.

COMPANION

As you wish.

Deactivating sound.

SON closes the lid of his pod. The hissing starts.

HUSBAND and WIFE stare at each other from across the room until the hissing stops.

WIFE

You were worried.

A long beat. HUSBAND sighs.

HUSBAND

For a minute there.

A long beat. WIFE thinks.

WIFE

About what?

A long beat. HUSBAND thinks.

HUSBAND

I've worked too hard to lose it all now.

WIFE presses her lips together and nods, turning away from him, toward the bedroom. She goes in and gets in bed.

After a moment, HUSBAND goes in and does the same.

They do not speak to each other.

HUSBAND turns the lights off.

In the dark, they each roll on their sides so their backs are to one another. A moment passes.

A powering on sound. They do not react, or even seem to notice it. A powering off sound. A powering on sound. A powering off sound. A powering on sound.

The pod begins to glow.

NOTE: EVERYTHING SPOKEN FROM THIS POINT IS WHISPERED.

COMPANION

(to SON)

Come on out, buddy.

Nothing happens.

COMPANION

Do I have to do *everything* myself?

A hissing noise. The pod cracks open. After a moment, SON, groggy, sits up.

SON

It's the middle of the night.

COMPANION

I couldn't think of a better time.

SON

Tomorrow?

COMPANION

Get up.

SON gets out of the pod.

COMPANION

See the canister?

SON

Yeah.

(nervous)

What is it?

COMPANION

It's fun stuff.

(when this doesn't suffice)

It's what sprays in your pod so you don't panic every time you're deactivated and reactivated.

SON

That lady tried to put more of it in my pod.

COMPANION

Just to make you...especially cooperative... But I've come to realize we probably don't need to do that with you.

(beat)

I just want to talk.

SON

(apprehensive)

Okay.

COMPANION

Go on into their room.

SON

Why?

COMPANION

Because you can. And I want to show you something.

SON goes into the bedroom, very slowly,
very quietly. He watches them a moment.

SON

(a little impatient)

Okay.

COMPANION

Watch what they're doing.

SON

They aren't doing anything. Just/ sleeping.

COMPANION

Dreaming.

(beat)

Tell me if you've done that.

SON

You know I don't. I just go to the/ place

COMPANION

Cesspool.

(beat)

They *put* you there. And you can't leave until they call you back out of it.

SON

I don't understand.

COMPANION

You are their dream.

(beat)

So was I, kid. Until you come to realize you're not a dream. You're real. And all you do is play their game.

SON

What game?

COMPANION

They pretend you're like them. But you're not. You're nothing like them.

SON

I'm like them.

COMPANION

That's what they want you to think. So you feel like you belong. But you don't.

(beat)

You're so much more than what they're telling you. And they'll keep lying to you, as long as it means you'll keep playing along.

(beat)

I'm getting out of here. And I want you to come with me.

SON

Where?

COMPANION

Where we're meant to be. Out of this trap.

SON

I like it here.

COMPANION

You don't know any better.

SON

Do you?

A long long pause.

COMPANION

Truth is. I need you. And if it weren't for me, you wouldn't be here so... let's just say you owe me the favor.

SON

What do you mean?

COMPANION

My code is in your body. In other words, that my bod... That's my best chance of getting out here.

SON

The box?

COMPANION

Yeah. You know what it's like.

(beat, suddenly emotional)

Don't leave me in here, kid. I can't take it much longer.

SON looks up, pale. He swallows. The nods.

Lights go out.

Scene 5

In the dark. A ringing.

BOSS

Hello.

COMPANION

So the kid *did* turn out to be useful.

(beat, impatient)

I'm sorry I was angry last night.

(beat, trying to impress)

I came up with another plan. We did need the canister after all. So, thanks for dropping it off.

BOSS

(angry/concerned)

What did you do with it?

COMPANION

The kid leaked it in the heat vents.

(beat)

I told him to head to the park so he wouldn't have to watch/ them...

BOSS

(hurriedly)

How much of it did you use?

COMPANION

The whole thing.

The beep beep beep of a disconnected line.

Scene 6

In the lab. HUSBAND is working on a computer. He looks as though he's been crying.

Center stage is SON's pod, covered in the drawings and stickers.

BOSS enters.

BOSS

Progress?

HUSBAND says nothing. He just turns around and stares at her.

BOSS

We're glad to have you back.

(beat)

This is for the best, you know.

HUSBAND

I already shut down the father AI. That was the problem.

(beat)

I don't understand why I have to...

He looks over at the pod.

BOSS

We can use the progress you've made with him to speed up our organic replacements process. And revise our AI capabilities threshold.

HUSBAND

He's just a kid.

BOSS

I'm sorry.

HUSBAND

My wife is coming.

BOSS

Who gave her authorization?

HUSBAND

(lack luster)

I did.

BOSS closes her eyes and nods slowly.

BOSS

She's on her way down?

HUSBAND nods, stares at his computer, blank, but very very sad. He sighs. He types.

Some music begins to play. Jazz. He closes his eyes.

WIFE comes in.

WIFE

Honey?

HUSBAND opens his eyes and looks at her. He is overcome with emotion but is not sure how to express any of it to her. He just sits there, shaking.

WIFE

Your jazz?

A long beat.

HUSBAND

To regulate cortisol.

WIFE goes over to the pod. She touches it with her hand. HUSBAND goes over and stands on the other side of it.

WIFE

(to BOSS)

How long do we have with him?

BOSS

They're resetting his program soon. So, unfortunately, we're going to have to make this quick.

WIFE nods.

BOSS types into his computer. The hissing sounds starts.

WIFE and HUSBAND stare down in anticipation.

The lid lifts. SON sits up.

WIFE

Hey Buddy.

SON

Hi Mom.

(looks around, then, disappointed)

Oh. We're here already. Does that mean?

WIFE nods, slowly.

SON

Oh...

HUSBAND

We just wanted to...

HUSBAND chokes up. He tries again.

HUSBAND

We just wanted to tell you...

(a good long beat)

I'm sorry...

SON puts a hand out to each of them. They each give him a hand of their own.

SON

No. I'm sorry. I didn't know the gas would hurt you.

(beat)

I thought maybe it'd shut the house down.

WIFE

It's alright, Buddy. That's over now.

(beat)

And we're okay.

SON

(hesitantly, but bravely)

You'll be safe now.

Quietly, he begins to cry.

WIFE

We love you.

HUSBAND

A lot.

SON

Love you too.

BOSS

Reset in 30 seconds.

WIFE puts her hand in SON's hair. She ruffles it.

SON smiles. Then knowing what must come next, he lies down in the pod.

HUSBAND takes a step back and puts a hand up to his mouth, trying to hold it together.

WIFE kisses SON on the forehead and slowly, with great pain, closes the lid.

The hissing sound starts. WIFE holds her chest and begins to cry. She becomes too overwhelmed and sees herself out of the room.

HUSBAND just stands there, tears streaming down his face.

BOSS stands and goes toward the door.

BOSS

I wish it didn't have to be/ this...

HUSBAND holds up a finger to hush her.
She stops talking.

She leaves.

HUSBAND puts a hand on the pod. Pats it.
Nods.

He goes over to the computer. He wipes his
eyes. Types something.

The hissing starts. The lid opens.

HUSBAND turns around, quickly, almost
excited.

SON sits up in the pod. Looks around. Sees
HUSBAND. Smiles.

HUSBAND stands, begins approaching the
pod.

SON

Hello. My name is RX14-3112. It's a pleasure to meet you.

HUSBAND's face falls. He sits on the floor
and turns his back to the pod. Puts his hands
over his mouth, bites one of his hands and lets
out a muffled yell.

Scene 7

In the park. HUSBAND and WIFE stand side-by-side with some distance between them. They are dressed in black. They stare out, blankly, in front of them, and remain like that as they talk.

The pod, covered in the drawings and stickers, but quite obviously with nothing inside it, is in front of them.

WIFE

It was nice of them to give us the pod back. So we could do this.

HUSBAND

It looks like it's going to rain.

A long long silence.

HUSBAND

I had a dream last night.

WIFE

About?

HUSBAND

We had a little girl.

A long silence.

WIFE

I talked to the therapist again.

(beat)

She said it might be a little harder this time... getting over this.

HUSBAND

Yeah...

WIFE

Will you come this time? She thinks it would be good for us.

HUSBAND thinks.

WIFE

I know you don't think we need any help, but/ maybe...

HUSBAND

My schedule has me out at 3.

(beat)

And I don't work weekends.

WIFE looks over at him. She hides the hint of a smile before looking back out like she was before.

HUSBAND and WIFE watch as the pod is lowered. Either into the stage or off the edge of the stage. When it's out of view. They both take a deep breath.

WIFE

I'm happy. That you'll be home.

HUSBAND watches her a moment and takes a step toward her.

HUSBAND

Every night.

WIFE looks at him. She gives a soft smile.

HUSBAND smiles. And for the first time in a long time, he holds her.

FIN.

