

Synthetica

By

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1. INT. FRONT SEAT OF A CAR- EVENING

A young woman, CHRISTINE, sits in the front seat of her car, looking out at the traffic of New York City. The car sits still at an intersection, waiting for its moment. The light ahead is red, and reflects onto the rain on the windshield, casting a slight red on Christine's face. The car's radio tinnily recites Metric's "Help, I'm Alive."

CLOSE UP

on her eyes, flicking restlessly from vehicle to vehicle.

ZOOM OUT

slightly, to her entire face. The red shadow snaps to green, and the car lurches forward, ambling.

2. EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET- EVENING

An exterior shot of the car as it passes through the intersection. Its progress is unchallenged, until a truck barrels from down another street, speeding uncontrollably into the intersection. The vehicle collides stupendously with Christine's car, and she flies through the windshield. The camera follows her as she flies through the air, pulled like a puppet without strings. Her body crashes unceremoniously to the ground in a hail of steel and glass, Metric blaring all the while. The camera

pulls up

to an overhead shot of Christine lying on the hard ground, mingled rain and shattered glass shimmering around her. An ambulance's banshee wail is heard distantly, growing nearer. But more pressingly is the sound of the heartbeat of a dying woman: a desperate charge against the gathering darkness. The heartbeat fades with the music as the ambulance grows louder, and as the screen

FADES OUT.

3. INT. HOSPITAL WARD- NIGHT

FADE IN

with the sharp inhale of breath.

CLOSE UP

on Christine's eyes, as they force themselves open. She looks

around wildly at her surroundings, like an animal in a trap. She tries to stand, but falters.

PAN LEFT

to a DOCTOR, KAREL ROSSUM. Rossum leans against a desk, listlessly turning over a pencil in his hand and talking with a nurse. He hears the lurch of Christine's continued efforts to stand, and runs over to her. She buckles again, and nearly falls into the bed. Rossum arrives in time to ease her down.

CHRISTINE

My heart's stopped beating.

ROSSUM

I know... lie down, you've had a hard day.

CHRISTINE

My heart's stopped beating.

Rossum seems to hear her the second time.

ROSSUM

What?

Christine offers her arm, inviting him to take her pulse. Rossum obliges, and his brow furrows with deepening concern. He looks up at her, perplexed.

ROSSUM

Your heart's stopped beating.

Rossum reaches for his stethoscope, and puts it to her Christine's chest. Still nothing, evident from his expression.

CHRISTINE

I know. Were you the doctor who admitted me?

ROSSUM

No... that was Haines. He was called away, I took over his caseload. How long...?

CHRISTINE

Since I've been awake.

ROSSUM

We need to get you a scan.

CUT TO

4. INT. MRI ROOM- NIGHT

Christine lies on a table and breathes deeply. Her heart remains still and silent. The table draws into an MRI machine, which whirs with its own mechanical heartbeat.

PAN

to across the room, where Rossum stands behind glass, watching the scanner pensively. A technician, DECKARD, operates the scanner indifferently.

5. INT. MRI CONTROL ROOM- NIGHT

The lights in the control room are down, and Rossum and Deckard are illuminated only by the soft lights of their machines. Rossum looks uneasily at the scanner, and then more uneasily at Deckard.

ROSSUM

How long will this take?

DECKARD

(shrugs) Call it an hour.

Deckard pats Rossum on the shoulder.

DECKARD

Get yourself a coffee, we could be here for a while. It'd help me if I knew what we were looking for.

ROSSUM

I'm not sure yet.

CLOSE

shot of the screen of a computer, gradually becoming etched with Christine's scans.

6. INT. MRI SCANNER- NIGHT

Christine lies on the table, breathing shallow and looking up at the lights reflected off her eyes. The machine casts her in an eerie blue glow. As she breathes in,

CUT TO

7. INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY- NIGHT

Rossum standing in front of a coffee machine, wringing his face with his hands.

CLOSE UP

of the coffee machine, clicking and sputtering as it completes its ordained task. Afterward it settles, humming and vibrating before falling silent. Rossum's hand comes into frame, grabbing the cup.

PAN UP

to Rossum, who puts the cup to his nose and breathes deeply. Behind him, a tall, perfectly quaffed man stands, waiting to be noticed. He wears sunglasses that hide his eyes, and leave little emotion to show through to his expression. He carries a briefcase. The man is called MOTHERSBAUGH, although even to the author, little else is known.

MOTHERSBAUGH
Doctor Karel Rossum?

Rossum is startled, and drops the coffee cup. It splatters on the ground, before rolling around emptily. Rossum lurches forward and spins around.

MOTHERSBAUGH
Doctor Karel Rossum?

ROSSUM
Yeah.

Rossum looks Mothersbaugh over, trying to assess a threat.

ROSSUM
Who are you?

MOTHERSBAUGH
Irrelevant. You were the doctor assigned to the patient admitted at 11:59 this evening?

ROSSUM
Yes, I am.

MOTHERSBAUGH
She is now in our charge.

Mothersbaugh hands Rossum a piece of paper from his

briefcase.

MOTHERSBAUGH

We thank you for your help.

CLOSE-UP

of the paper, and of the upper right-hand corner, embroidered with the insignia of "POLYBIUS ENTERPRISES."

ROSSUM

You can't just do this...

MOTHERSBAUGH

Contrarily, we can. Please read the paper, doctor Rossum. Good evening.

Mothersbaugh strides away down the hall. The camera follows him as he walks, before turning down a hallway where it loses him. The camera returns its attention to Rossum, who is still reading over the paper.

ROSSUM

The woman is property of Polybius Enterprises...?

Rossum crumples up the paper, throws it into a trash can adjacent to the coffee machine, and walks away.

PAN DOWN

to the empty coffee cup, still lying in a pool of its former contents, abandoned after failing in its only task on this Earth.

8. INT. MRI SCAN ROOM- NIGHT

Mothersbaugh stands in the doorway of the scan room. He casts a tall shadow in the dark room, cast a deep shade of blue by the reflective glow of medical instruments.

PAN RIGHT

to the control room, where Deckard has been replaced by a stern looking man in a suit identical to Mothersbaugh. A small, wiry man in a lab coat stands behind the replacement technician, hand on his chin, looking at the ground. The man is doctor WALTER HALEY. The technician has no name. The camera returns its focus to the scanner itself. With another sound of gliding metal, the table decouples from the scanner, bringing Christine out of her cocoon.

CLOSE UP

on her as she blinks owlshly, adjusting to the change in light. She draws a deep breath, and her heart remains quiet. Suddenly, her eyes widen.

PAN OUT

to her surroundings as she sits straight up. Mothersbaugh walks to her quickly, and she pushes him away.

CHRISTINE

Where is doctor Rossum?

MOTHERSBAUGH

Remain calm.

Mothersbaugh again reaches for Christine. She kicks his shin, and reflexively, he backs away. Haley has left the control room, leaving the door open behind him. Haley enters the MRI room, pushing Mothersbaugh out of his way.

HALEY

(to Mothersbaugh) I thought we agreed to let me handle this. (to Christine) Christine?

Christine nods.

CHRISTINE

Where is...?

HALEY

Doctor Rossum is no longer your doctor. I am. You're a special case, and we're specialists. Please trust me.

Haley offers Christine his hand. She takes it. His hand seems to shrink from hers slightly: she is cold to the touch.

9. INT. RADIOLOGY LAB- NIGHT

An MRI result sits on a computer screen. The screen is largely blank, except for numbers and data printed on the edges of the empty frame.

PAN OUT

to Deckard, sitting in front of the computer, and Rossum standing behind him.

ROSSUM
What am I looking at?

DECKARD
Nothing. It came back negative.

ROSSUM
I didn't tell you what we're scanning for.

DECKARD
Doesn't matter. It came back negative, Karel.

Deckard punches a button, and another scan in the sequence reveals itself. Nothing.

ROSSUM
How could this have happened?

DECKARD
I have no clue. Image degradation is characteristic of metal on the scanner... but for the image not to turn up at all, she'd have to be made of nothing but metal.

Rossum stops listening to Deckard. Gears are clearly turning in his head. Rossum stands up straighter, and moves to leave the room. He drifts out, and Deckard watches him go, baffled.

DECKARD
Karel? Karel? What's the big idea...
oh, forget it.

Deckard changes tabs, and begins to play poker.

10. INT. HOSPITAL WARD- NIGHT

Christine is back in bed. Haley stands beside the bed, holding a needle. He goes to inject her, she stops him.

CHRISTINE
What is that?

HALEY
Sedative.

CHRISTINE
Why?

HALEY

We're transferring you to our private facility.

CHRISTINE

Could you answer a question first?

HALEY

Sure.

CHRISTINE

Why can't I feel my heartbeat? Doctor Rossum couldn't either.

HALEY

I'll tell you when we get there.

Haley leans down to inject Christine. She flinches, and the needle misses her.

HALEY

Christine...

Christine slams her head into Haley's, knocking him unconscious. He slumps to the ground, and she stands up. Christine runs out of the ward.

11. EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING STRUCTURE- NIGHT

WIDE SHOT

Christine walks through down the harshly lit concrete of the hospital's parking structure, toward the camera. Her footfalls make a heavy, rhythmic sound. In one of her hands is an object, not visible from the camera's distance to her.

CUT TO

the far end of the parking structure, where Rossum is unlocking his car. He opens the door, and is about to get in when he stops.

PAN LEFT

to behind him, where Christine stands, holding a syringe to his neck.

ROSSUM

Hello, Christine. Good to see you up.
What's in the syringe?

CHRISTINE

I don't know, but I'm guessing it won't be good for you. Give me the car.

ROSSUM

Where were you planning on taking it?

CHRISTINE

Polybius. I want answers.

ROSSUM

Do you know where that is?

CHRISTINE

No.

ROSSUM

I do. Get in the car.

12. INT. ROSSUM'S CAR- NIGHT

The car's windshield twinkles with city lights. Rossum concentrates on the road, but glances occasionally at Christine. She is focused completely on looking out the window.

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry. You were going home, weren't you?

ROSSUM

As it happens, I was on my way to Polybius.

Rossum reaches into his lab coat's pocket, and produces the printed MRI scans. He gives them to Christine. She flips through them, and we see that each one is blank. She stops on the last picture. There is a single bright point, on her forearm.

CHRISTINE

This one's not blank.

ROSSUM

What?

Rossum briefly looks over at the picture, before correcting himself and focusing on the road.

ROSSUM
What can you see?

CHRISTINE
Just a word: synthetica. It's in me...

CLOSE UP

of the picture, and of the word SYNTHETICA, white against the black of the rest of the image.

FADE OUT

on the word.

12. EXT. POLYBIUS ENTERPRISES- NIGHT

FADE IN

as Rossum's car pulls in front of the silent, towering Polybius building.

13. INT. ROSSUM'S CAR- NIGHT

Rossum and Christine look up at the building, stretching into the clouds and dark, and then look at each other.

ROSSUM
Did you have a plan?

CHRISTINE
I hadn't gotten that far.

ROSSUM
Terrific.

Rossum and Christine get out of the car.

14. EXT. POLYBIUS ENTERPRISES- NIGHT

The pair walk to the door of the building, and find it is unlocked, and that a light is on. Rossum pulls the door open, and looks around nervously.

CHRISTINE
Why would it be unlocked at this time of night?

ROSSUM
Maybe someone's burning the midnight oil.

They enter the lobby.

15. INT. POLYBIUS ENTERPRISES LOBBY- NIGHT

The building's lobby is empty, with a faint light from an unoccupied front desk illuminating the rest of the room. Rossum walks to the desk and finds a directory. He gestures to Christine, who walks gingerly to him.

ROSSUM
Synthetica. Room 194.

CHRISTINE
What do you want to do?

ROSSUM
You go, I'll watch the lobby.

Christine walks off down a darkened hallway toward her destiny in room 194. The camera then cuts to Rossum, looking toward the door, his face cast in obscure shadows by the front desk's light.

16. INT. POLYBIUS HALLWAY- NIGHT

CLOSE UP

on an elevator door. The door slides open, revealing Christine. The camera pulls back, moving away from her as she walks from the elevator down the hall. The hall is in a state of disuse, tarps cover half-empty shipping containers, and a thin layer of dust permeates all. Christine reaches the end of the hallway, and a room: 194. The sign is dust-covered, but beneath it is legible: SYNTHETICA. Christine tries the door, and finds it opens automatically. Timidly, she steps inside.

17. INT. POLYBIUS ROOM 194- NIGHT

The lights come up as Christine enters, revealing a spacious, high-tech laboratory. The camera follows Christine,

CLOSE

as she makes her way across the room. All along the far wall are pods, with faintly outlined human beings within through a frosty glass front. Christine approaches the pods slowly, and wipes the frost and condensation from the window. As she does, a face on the other side reveals itself: it is Christine's own face, staring at her from behind the glass. She gasps, and steps back. The camera pulls back, and we see

another figure standing behind her, an older man, called MARTIN STEIN. His face worn with lines, and his hair is a stark white. He puts a hand on her shoulder as she nearly walks into him. Christine jumps, and turns to face Stein.

CHRISTINE

Who are you?

STEIN

My name is doctor Martin Stein, and I can't imagine the day you've had, Christine.

CHRISTINE

My heart stopped beating.

STEIN

And I know why.

Christine glances at her duplicate behind the glass.

CHRISTINE

What am I?

STEIN

Synthetica.

Stein steps forward, and Christine steps back. She has braced herself against a pod, and runs a hand along its side.

CHRISTINE

Synthetica?

STEIN

Polybius's greatest triumph. Androids, Christine. Built by the Polybius.

CHRISTINE

Why?

STEIN

(shrugs) To see if we could, I suppose. Only trouble is that they pulled the plug. (frowns) Ethical qualms. But I had already made you... and you already showed vital signs.

CHRISTINE

Vital signs?

STEIN

In every sense Christine, you were,
and are, alive. Just no heartbeat. So,
I let you loose on the world with a
head full of artificial memories. And
now, I suppose, Polybius would like
you out of the equation before it
becomes apparent they built you.

CHRISTINE

So what happens to them?

Christine has turned around now, and is regarding her
"sisters" in the pods. Stein shrugs indifferently.

STEIN

I'll have to kill them, if they were
ever alive to begin with.

Christine turns to face Stein, clearly disturbed by this
statement. She is about to say something to him, when Rossum
enters.

ROSSUM

Christine, we should get a move on...
a car just passed, the police are
bound to be here... (looks around)
what is this place?

STEIN

You're a smart boy, Rossum, you figure
it out.

ROSSUM

Christine...

CHRISTINE

No.

ROSSUM

What?

CHRISTINE

There's something I need to do first.

Christine turns around, and puts her hand on the pod's glass.
She looks at Stein and Rossum.

CHRISTINE

I want them to live.

Stein nods. Rossum stands rooted in place: his surroundings seem beyond him. Stein makes his way across the room, and boots up a long-dormant computer atop a desk.

STEIN

I'll do what can be done.

ROSSUM

What are they...?

CHRISTINE

They're me, Rossum.

Rossum makes his way up to another of the pods, and looks through the glass. He then looks to Christine. Stein enters a final keystroke, and the pods begin to hum and vibrate. Their movement and noise becomes rhythmic, pulsing as electricity courses in and out through them. The frost on the pod before Christine begins to fade, and the pod hisses.

CUT TO

the pod's interior, and the android within, CHRISTINE II. She lays motionless in the pod.

CLOSE UP

on her hand, as it begins to twitch. The camera draws up her arm, from her shoulder to her neck to her face. Christine II's eyes flicker open, and she inhales sharply. There is a sound within her chest that could be mistaken for a heartbeat. The pod doors open, and Christine II looks out onto the world for the first time. She sees her sister looking at her from outside the pod.

CHRISTINE II

What am I?

CHRISTINE

You're alive.

Christine offers her sister her hand.

CLOSE UP

on her hand as Christine II takes it. Around them, the dull roar of the other pods grows louder.

FADE OUT with the sound of a heartbeat. END.