

ANIARA

a screenplay

working draft -- not for distribution

written by Flyxion

Ordinary Rounds

FADE IN:

INT. ARCHIVE STATION -- HABITATION DECK -- DAY

Close on a hand moving across a worn control surface -- not sleek, not futuristic-clean. Polished by decades of the same motion. Fingers know it without looking.

Pull back to reveal SELA (30s), archive technician, mid-shift, three tickets deep in a queue that never empties. She works with the unhurried competence of someone who has done this so many times the job has stopped requiring her full attention -- and the specific, plain confidence of someone who knows exactly how a system is supposed to feel.

A soft chime. Ticket resolves. She doesn't watch it finish -- she's already moving to the next.

SELA
(not looking up, to
no one)
There you go.

She glances at ticket two. Something in her posture changes -- not alarm, just a small recalibration, the way you'd shift your grip on a doorknob that stuck yesterday.

SELA (CONT'D)
Okay.

INT. HABITATION CORRIDOR -- DECK 14 -- CONTINUOUS

A door. Ordinary. Number plate: 14-C-009.

A MAN (60s, TAM) stands in front of it, arms crossed, radiating the specific patience of someone who has already complained once and is deciding whether to complain again.

Sela arrives, satchel of tools she will not need slung over one shoulder -- this is, on its face, a software problem, and they both know it.

TAM
It's not letting me in.

SELA

Since when?

TAM

Since this morning. I went to get bread, came back, it's asking me who I am.

SELA

(already interfacing
with the panel beside
the door)

It's not asking who you are. It's asking who's supposed to be here. Different question.

TAM

Feels the same from out here.

She works. We're close on her face now -- this is the first time we really look at her. Focused, dry, unbothered. A woman who finds other people's panic mildly funny and never says so.

SELA

When did the reallocation go through -- the one that moved the Ostrenko family off this deck?

TAM

Month ago? Five weeks?

SELA

And you've lived here how long?

TAM

Eleven years.

SELA

(mostly to herself)

So it's not confused about now.
It's confused about which now.

TAM

Is that bad?

SELA

It's Tuesday.

He doesn't find this reassuring. She's not entirely joking.

**INT. 14-C-009 -- INTERIOR VIEW (ARCHIVE OVERLAY) --
CONTINUOUS**

We drop, briefly, into Sela's working view -- not a dramatic HUD, nothing alien. Just the ordinary texture of her job: a record resolving itself in front of her. Layers of habitation history for this address, stacking, aligning.

Everything checks out. Origin allocation. The reassignment five weeks ago. Tam's residency, confirmed, timestamped, witnessed by two maintenance visits and one water-use log that couldn't belong to anyone else.

And yet -- layered underneath, faint, contradictory -- a second claim. Also complete. Also confirmed. Also perfectly internally consistent. A woman's name we don't catch. A different weight of water use. A different Tuesday.

SELA (V.O.)
(quiet, to herself,
not to Tam)
Where did you come from.

She's not asking the man in the hallway. She's asking the record.

INT. HABITATION CORRIDOR -- DECK 14 -- CONTINUOUS

Sela steps back from the panel. Something has resolved. Tam watches her face for the verdict the way people watch weather.

SELA
You're you. It's fixed.

TAM
That's it?

SELA
That's it.

The door, behind him, chimes softly and opens on its own, as if slightly embarrassed.

TAM
(already losing
interest, already
halfway inside)
Thank you.

He goes in. Door closes. Ordinary sound of an ordinary door.

Sela remains a beat too long, looking at the closed door -- not worried. Just running something back.

Down the corridor, at the far end where it bends out of sight, a figure crosses -- there and gone in under a second. Dirt on her forearms. Merit's particular unhurried walk.

Sela almost lifts a hand. Doesn't.

It's nothing. Merit works three decks from here. Sela doesn't think about it again -- not consciously, not yet -- and neither, for now, should we. It plays exactly as long as a glance, and no longer.

INT. ARCHIVE STATION -- MOMENTS LATER

Back at her station. She's not filing the ticket yet. She's sitting with it.

A COLLEAGUE, DEV (40s, dry, unbothered by anything, ever) passes with a cup of something hot, glances at her screen in passing.

DEV
Ghost record?

SELA
Sort of.

DEV
Reallocation ones always throw a shadow for a week or two. System's just slow to let go of the last tenant.

SELA
It wasn't the last tenant.

DEV
(not really
listening, already
walking away)
Then the one before that.

SELA
(to herself, once
he's gone)
Maybe.

She looks at the resolved ticket a moment longer.
Everything about it was correct. That's the part that's
bothering her, though she couldn't yet say why in a sentence
that would mean anything to Dev, or to anyone.

She was expecting a fight. A contradiction that pushed
back. Two claims arguing with each other long enough that
she'd have to actually decide between them.

Instead: it simply agreed with itself. Smoothly.
Immediately. Like water finding the lowest point without
ever having to choose a direction.

She flags the ticket -- not urgent, not escalated. Just:
watch. A private note, not a report.

She moves to the next ticket in the queue. The queue does
not care. It never does.

CUT TO:

INT. HYDROPONIC FOREST -- LATER

Green light. Real light, or close enough -- filtered,
angled, warm in a way the corridors aren't. Trees that have
been here longer than anyone currently alive.

Sela walks a path she clearly knows without looking at it.
Not sightseeing. A shortcut she's taken ten thousand times.

A WOMAN (30s, MERIT, dirt on her forearms to the elbow)
is kneeling by a low bed of something small and green,
unremarkable, fussing over it with the specific tenderness
people usually reserve for something that isn't a plant.

Sela slows without quite stopping.

SELA

Still alive?

MERIT

(not looking up)

Barely. Always barely. That's the whole trick of it.

SELA

Command still wants it gone?

MERIT

Command wants efficiency. This isn't efficient. It's just --

(finally looks up,

half a smile)

-- it's just from somewhere. That still means something to me, even if it doesn't mean anything on a spec sheet.

Sela crouches, looks at it. Nothing special to look at.

SELA

What is it, again?

MERIT

You've asked me this four times.

SELA

And I'll ask again next month.

MERIT

(standing, wiping

hands on her knees)

That's the nicest thing anyone's said to me all week.

Sela laughs -- the first real, unguarded sound from her in the sequence. This is a friendship with history. We don't need to be told that; we can hear it.

They fall into step together, walking on.

INT. FABRICATION MESS -- CONTINUOUS (LATER)

Louder. Metal underfoot instead of soil. A communal eating space bolted directly onto the edge of a working shop -- the smell of hot metal and food sharing the same air.

Sela and Merit sit across from a MAN (50s, HENZO, fabrication, forearms like the machinery he runs) mid-meal.

HENZO

(gesturing with a
fork)
-- so I tell them, you can't
recycle the manifold housing AND
keep the backup intact, pick one,
and they pick both, like wanting it
doesn't change the mass.

MERIT

Did they pick?

HENZO

Eventually. Badly. Everyone
always picks badly and then acts
surprised.

SELA

Comforting.

HENZO

(shrugs, entirely
sincere)
It's not a complaint. It's a
description.

A beat. Children's voices, distant, sing-song, drift through from somewhere down the corridor -- a classroom, doors open for the ventilation. We catch fragments, overlapping with the table conversation, never foregrounded:

CHILDREN (O.S.)

(reciting, singsong,
half-bored)
...boundary, maintain an inside...
cycle, recover what is used...
differentiation...

HENZO
(not even glancing
that way, mouth full)
Every year, that generation.

MERIT
Every year, every generation.

Nobody comments further. It's wallpaper to them. To us,
it's the first time we've heard the doctrine stated plainly
-- and it arrives as background noise, competing with lunch.

INT. COMMAND ANTEROOM -- LATER

Quieter here. More light, better maintained, the hush of a
room used to being taken seriously.

Sela waits at a low counter with a document slate. Through
an open doorway behind the counter we glimpse COMMAND proper
-- softly lit instruments, a few people at quiet work,
nothing dramatic.

THE NAVIGATOR (70s, upright, precise without being stiff)
enters from that inner room, unhurried. He carries himself
like a man who has never once been late and never once been
in a hurry, which are not the same thing.

NAVIGATOR
Archive?

SELA
Signature. Routine.

He takes the slate without sitting, reads it properly rather
than skimming -- the way a man reads something he intends to
be accountable for.

NAVIGATOR
(as he reads)
Reallocation records again?

SELA
Deck fourteen. Nothing exciting.

NAVIGATOR

(a small, dry
almost-smile)

Nothing ever is, until it is.

He signs. Hands the slate back. For a moment he looks at her -- not searching, just looking, the way you'd look at someone you've watched do a job for years without ever quite deciding what you think of them yet.

NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

How's the queue?

SELA

Endless. As advertised.

NAVIGATOR

Good.

He turns to go. On a side wall, unremarkable, half in shadow, a small display: a stylized star field, a marked point, a number -- the destination. No push-in. No held frame. Merit crosses underneath it a moment later, arms full of something from the forest, on her way somewhere else entirely, and doesn't look up at it either. The camera happens to be pointed that way. That's all.

NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

(already leaving,
half over his
shoulder)

Tell Merit her weed is still
winning.

MERIT (O.S.)

(from down the
corridor, without
missing a beat)

It's not a weed!

He's already gone. The exchange cost him nothing. It's clearly not the first time he's made the joke, and clearly not the last.

INT. ARCHIVE STATION -- LATER

Back where we started. Sela at her station, the day nearly spent. The queue, true to the navigator's word, has not emptied and will not.

She logs the deck-fourteen ticket properly now -- routine, closed, no flag visible to anyone but her. Her earlier private note sits underneath it, unresolved, unescalated. Watch.

She pauses for exactly one beat before moving to the next ticket -- not doubt, not yet. Just the small, private attentiveness of someone filing something away rather than putting it down.

Then she moves on. The queue does not care. It never does.

FADE OUT.

The Chair**INT. MERIT'S QUARTERS -- HABITATION DECK -- EVENING**

Small, warm, lived-in. Plants on every surface that will hold one, most of them cuttings, none of them precious. Merit is on the floor, cross-legged, holding a chair leg that is very obviously not the same wood as the rest of the chair.

Sela leans in the doorway, arms crossed, watching this like it's the most normal thing in the world. Because it is.

SELA

You said "quick fix."

MERIT

(not looking up)

This is quick. I'm almost done
being wrong about it.

SELA

You said that an hour ago too.

Henzo is there as well, sprawled sideways across an actual functioning chair, eating something out of a tin, entirely unbothered by any of this.

HENZO

Throw it out. I'll bring you a new one Tuesday. Better one.

MERIT

It's not about whether it's better.

HENZO

It's a chair.

MERIT

It's my grandmother's chair.

HENZO

(gesturing with the
fork, counting)
Leg's from repair stock. Back
rail's from repair stock. Seat's
been recovered -- what, three
times? Four?

MERIT

Five.

HENZO

So what's left of your
grandmother's chair?

MERIT

(finally looking up,
entirely serious,
entirely unbothered
by the question)
The part that's still the chair.

HENZO

(to Sela, mouth full,
delighted)
Do you hear this?

SELA

(dry)
I live here too, Henzo.

MERIT

(back to the leg,
muttering)

It's not a hard question. You keep
replacing what breaks. It's still
the same thing. Nobody looks at
their own hands and worries they're
not the hands they were born with.

HENZO

Hands grow. That's different.

MERIT

Is it?

Henzo opens his mouth. Closes it. Genuinely doesn't have
an answer ready, which delights him more than having one
would.

HENZO

(giving up, pointing
the fork at her)

You're insufferable.

MERIT

(sweetly)

I know.

Sela, still in the doorway, watching the two of them,
laughing despite herself -- not at the argument, at how
completely neither of them notices they're having it. This
isn't a scene about continuation. It's two friends being
annoying at each other over a chair, and it will stay
exactly that size for the whole film.

SELA

I have to go.

MERIT

(not looking up)

You always have to go.

SELA

Someone has to keep the archive
from collapsing.

MERIT

(finally glancing
over, warm, teasing)
It's fine without you for one
evening. It was fine for two
hundred years before you were born.

Sela doesn't have a comeback for that. She just smiles,
grabs her jacket, goes.

INT. HABITATION DECK -- MAIN CONCOURSE -- CONTINUOUS

Sela cuts across the deck's central open space -- usually
busy at this hour, market stalls, people crossing in every
direction.

Tonight it's emptying fast. Shutters coming down on a food
stall. A woman folding a table in on itself with practiced
speed. The overhead lighting shifts half a register cooler,
almost imperceptibly.

A MAINTENANCE WORKER passes Sela going the other way, nods
at her, keeps moving with purpose.

MAINTENANCE WORKER

(not stopping)

Fifteen minutes to shift change, if
you're staying.

SELA

Not staying.

She isn't being told anything alarming. This is just what
the deck does at this hour -- a room that belongs to a use,
changing hands to the next use, the way it does every night
of her life and every night of everyone else's.

She takes her usual route out. Doesn't look back at the
deck emptying behind her. No reason to.

INT. SPINE JUNCTION -- LIFT BANK -- CONTINUOUS

Three lifts. Sela heads for the middle one out of habit -- then, without breaking stride, redirects to the one on the left instead.

DEV (from Sequence I, passing the other way with an empty cup) clocks this and can't resist.

DEV

You skipped the good one again.

SELA

It smells like something died in it.

DEV

Maintenance says there's nothing wrong with it.

SELA

Maintenance is wrong.

DEV

Maintenance is never wrong. That's the whole problem with Maintenance.

He laughs at his own joke, more than it deserves, and keeps going. Sela steps into the left-hand lift instead -- perfectly fine, unremarkable, smells like nothing at all.

Nobody in the history of Aniara has ever found anything wrong with the middle lift. People still don't take it. Nobody remembers exactly when that started. It will never come up again.

The doors close.

FADE OUT.

The Second Merit

INT. SPINE CORRIDOR -- WATER STRATUM ACCESS -- NIGHT-CYCLE

Quieter hour. Lighting dimmed to the ship's version of late. Sela is walking fast, tired, a data slate under one arm -- she's been at this longer than her shift technically allows.

Ahead, through a cross-junction, she catches a figure moving along the perpendicular corridor. Same walk. Same dirt-to-the-elbow economy of motion.

SELA
 (calling out, not
 stopping)
 Merit -- hey --

The figure doesn't turn. Keeps walking. Gone around the bend before Sela reaches the junction.

Sela stands there a second. Looks down the empty corridor. Not alarmed yet -- mildly stung, the specific small hurt of being ignored by a friend.

SELA (CONT'D)
 (to herself, half a
 laugh)
 Rude.

She keeps moving toward her own stop.

INT. WATER STRATUM -- GALLERY LANDING -- CONTINUOUS

Sela comes down a short stair onto the gallery above the circulation channels -- the low light, the sound of moving water that has, for years, meant nothing more to her than white noise she likes.

Merit is already there. Sitting on the rail edge, legs hanging, turning something small over in her hands. She's been here a while -- a half-eaten something beside her, cold.

MERIT
 (not looking up)
 You're late.

SELA
 (stopped dead in the
 doorway)
 ...How long have you been sitting
 here?

MERIT
 Twenty minutes? Since my shift
 ended. Why?

Sela doesn't answer right away. She's doing arithmetic she doesn't want to be doing -- the corridor, the junction, the walk down here. There isn't enough time in it. There was never enough time in it.

MERIT (CONT'D)
 (finally looking up,
 reading her face)
 What.

SELA
 (too casual, failing
 at it)
 Nothing. I thought I saw you.
 Upstairs. A minute ago.

MERIT
 (shrugs, entirely
 unbothered)
 Wasn't me.

SELA
 I know. I'm -- yeah. I know.

She sits beside Merit anyway, close, the water sound underneath them both. She doesn't say anything else about it. Neither do we. The scene simply continues being an ordinary evening between two people who are tired and glad to see each other -- except that for a few seconds Sela's hand, resting on the rail, is gripping it slightly harder than it needs to.

Merit doesn't notice. Or doesn't say if she does.

MERIT (CONT'D)

(back to turning the
small object over in
her hands)

Command sent another notice about
the bed. Said the water draw's
inefficient for the yield.

SELA

(grateful for the
subject change,
taking it fully)

What'd you tell them?

MERIT

That the yield isn't the point.

SELA

That'll go well.

MERIT

It never does.

She almost smiles. Sela almost does too. For a moment
the earlier corridor is simply gone from the scene -- not
resolved, not forgotten, just set down, the way a person
sets down something they intend to pick back up later and
don't quite manage to.

The water keeps moving beneath them, exactly the rhythm it
has always kept.

FADE OUT.

The Corrections Don't Converge

INT. OPTICAL DECK -- SMALL OBSERVATION BAY -- NIGHT-CYCLE

A cramped, unglamorous room off the edge of Command, easy
to miss if you didn't know it was here. An old optical
instrument dominates it -- heavy, well-kept, clearly
maintained by someone who loves maintaining things. Star
field beyond the port, unhurried, indifferent.

THE NAVIGATOR sits at the eyepiece, exactly as we've seen
him before. Two logs open beside him -- one automated, one

handwritten, in a hand that has clearly been doing this for decades.

Sela enters without knocking. She's not here for a signature this time. She's carrying a slate, and she's carrying it the way you carry something you've been rehearsing how to say.

NAVIGATOR

(not turning around)

You don't usually come up here.

SELA

I don't usually have a reason to.

He finishes a reading. Writes it in the handwritten log first. Only then does he turn.

NAVIGATOR

Go on, then.

She sets the slate down. He doesn't reach for it immediately.

SELA

The correction from eleven days ago. The one Command logged as routine.

NAVIGATOR

I remember it.

SELA

I pulled the ten before it. And the ten before those.

NAVIGATOR

(a beat, something in
him going very still
and very careful)

And?

SELA

They converge on a course. A real one. I can show you the math, but you already know the math.

(beat)

They don't converge on the destination.

He doesn't look at the slate. He looks at her for a long moment -- not surprised. Something closer to recognizing weather he's seen come in before.

NAVIGATOR

No.

SELA

Then we're not going there.

NAVIGATOR

I didn't say we were.

SELA

(the ground briefly
not where she
expected it)
You-- how long have you--

NAVIGATOR

(mild, not unkind)
Longer than you've been alive to
ask me that question.

She doesn't have anywhere to put that yet. She sits, uninvited, on the stool at the edge of the room -- not because he offered it, because her legs have decided for her.

SELA

Why do you need us to?

NAVIGATOR

(quiet correction)
I asked you that.

SELA

Then why do you.

He turns back to the instrument. Doesn't take a reading.
Just rests a hand on it, the way you'd rest a hand on
something that had earned it.

NAVIGATOR

I wrote a report once. Younger
than you. Better handwriting.

(small, dry, almost
to himself)

I was very proud of the math.

SELA

What happened to it?

NAVIGATOR

Nothing happened to it. That's
the part nobody believes when I
tell them. Nobody buried it.
Nobody called me in and told me
to be quiet. My superior read
it. Checked it. Agreed with every
figure.

SELA

And then?

NAVIGATOR

And then I asked her what we were
going to tell people.

(beat)

She asked me what, exactly.

Sela opens her mouth. Doesn't have the sentence yet.

NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

Go on. Finish it for her. What
were we going to tell them.

SELA

(confident,
immediate)

Tell everyone we're not going to
arrive.

NAVIGATOR

And then?

SELA

We--

She stops. Not because he's stopped her. Because she's heard what the next word would need to hold up, and it doesn't.

He doesn't wait for her to find it. Doesn't smile, doesn't press. Just goes on, already past it.

NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

That's forty years, right there,
in your face right now. I've had
considerably longer to sit with it
and I'm no closer to an answer than
you are to a sentence.

SELA

(recovering, and not
conceding anything)
That's not the same as a reason to
do nothing.

NAVIGATOR

I didn't do nothing.

(gestures faintly at
the instrument, the
two logs)

I did this. Every day. Same as you're about to start
doing, whether you decide to or not.

He finally picks up her slate. Reads the correction
figures properly -- the way he reads everything, like a man
intending to be accountable for it.

NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

This is good work.

SELA

People built lives on that
destination. Somebody should have
known.

NAVIGATOR

(handing the slate

back, not unkindly)

I know. That part doesn't go away
either.

He returns to the eyepiece. Takes a reading -- the ordinary, practiced motion. Logs it in the automated system. Then, in the handwritten log, beside it, exactly as always.

For a moment, pen still on the page, he pauses -- something in the figure catching him sideways. Looks at it a second longer than the motion usually takes.

NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

(quiet, mostly to the

instrument)

Huh.

Sela glances over. He doesn't offer anything. A beat -- then he finishes the line, unbothered, and moves on to the next reading.

Sela doesn't ask. Neither do we.

FADE OUT.

Hibernation

INT. RETREAT SPACE -- MIMA CORE -- INDETERMINATE

Not a room, exactly. The augmented retreat at rest -- the closest thing to a visual signature the Mima has. What was once elaborate, populated, chosen by thousands of people over generations, is now still. Half-built environments frozen mid-render. A shoreline that goes flat and grey at the edge of its own generation radius. A door that was never given anywhere to lead.

We drift through it. Nothing is spectacular. If anything it looks tired -- a stage after the show, worked too many times, slightly threadbare in ways nobody notices during the performance.

INT. WATER STRATUM -- GALLERY LANDING -- CONTINUOUS (MEMORY)

We are, without any visible cut, at the water stratum landing -- the same one Sela and Iska sit at throughout the film. Familiar. Present tense. Ordinary.

A YOUNG WOMAN sits on the rail where Sela always sits. Not Sela. Twenty years younger than anyone we've met, in clothes half a fashion-cycle out of date in ways too subtle to place consciously.

She's laughing at something. We don't hear what. A MAN beside her, also unfamiliar, says something back -- we catch only a fragment, unimportant, and it doesn't matter that we don't catch it.

Cut --

-- and the rail is empty. Same landing. Same water sound. Nobody there.

INT. HYDROPONIC FOREST -- PATH -- CONTINUOUS (MEMORY)

The path Merit and Sela always walk. Fewer trees. Noticeably fewer -- the space reads younger, sparser, more recently planted than it will become.

A CHILD, maybe six, runs full-tilt down the path, delighted about nothing in particular, being chased by someone we don't see the face of -- just a hand, reaching, laughing, not quite catching them.

Cut --

-- to the same path, now the forest we know, dense and old. Nobody running. A woman we recognize as MERIT, present-day, walks it alone, unhurried, carrying something for the plant bed.

The memory and the present have simply continued into each other. Nothing announces which is which.

INT. FABRICATION MESS -- CONTINUOUS (MEMORY)

The table where Sela, Merit and Henzo eat. Older uniforms on the people seated at it -- a cut we clock only because the insignia is wrong, subtly, for anyone who'd know to look.

An OLDER WOMAN reaches across the table, takes something off someone else's plate without asking. He swats her hand away, not seriously. They're both laughing before the swat even lands -- this is clearly a routine, run a thousand times before.

We don't know either of them. We will not see them again.

Cut --

-- to the same table, empty, mid-afternoon, chairs slightly askew from the last people who used it.

INT. CORRIDOR -- DECK UNSPECIFIED -- CONTINUOUS (MEMORY)

A long corridor. Destination display visible at the far end -- the same fixture, but the unit around it is unfamiliar, older-looking, a design generation prior to the one we know.

Sunlight -- or something rendered convincingly enough to be mistaken for it -- falls across the corridor floor in a long angled bar.

There is no source for that light anywhere aboard Aniara.

The image holds a moment too long, just long enough for the impossibility to surface without being pointed at.

Cut --

-- to the same corridor, the light gone, the display's housing the newer model we recognize. Ordinary fluorescence. Nothing remarkable.

INT. RETREAT SPACE -- MIMA CORE -- CONTINUOUS

Back in the stillness. The frozen shoreline. The unfinished door.

Something that isn't quite sound moves through the space -- the ordinary vibration of Aniara's own circulation, distant, constant, the pulse we've been hearing under every scene in the film without being told to listen for it.

For a moment the abandoned shoreline and the ship's actual, physical hum become impossible to separate. The retreat's dead ocean and Aniara's real machinery breathing in the same frame, indistinguishable.

**INT. STORAGE ALCOVE -- HABITATION DECK -- CONTINUOUS
(MEMORY)**

Cramped. Two people -- a woman of similar age and bearing to the one at the water stratum, but not her -- wrestling an ordinary piece of furniture, some kind of low cabinet, through a doorway it very clearly does not fit through. A different MAN with her this time, unseen face, same easy unhurried physicality as the one from the forest path.

They turn it one way. It catches on the frame. They turn it the other way. It catches again. Neither of them is remotely distressed about this. They're both laughing too hard to be efficient about it, which is presumably why it's taking so long.

She braces one end. He lifts wrong, deliberately, to make her laugh harder. It works.

Cut directly --

INT. STORAGE ALCOVE -- HABITATION DECK -- CONTINUOUS

-- to the same doorway. Decades later, unmistakably. Dark. Empty. Nothing being carried through it. Nobody there to carry anything.

No music. No lingering. The image simply ends.

FADE OUT.

The Reading

INT. OPTICAL DECK -- SMALL OBSERVATION BAY -- NIGHT-CYCLE

Same room. Same instrument. The navigator at the eyepiece, same practiced motion we've watched him perform since the film began.

Sela enters -- quieter than her first visit here, none of the rehearsed nerve she had bringing him the corrections. This time she's not building an argument. She's just tired, and she has something she doesn't fully understand yet.

NAVIGATOR

(not turning,
mid-reading)
Queue again?

SELA

Nearly gone.

NAVIGATOR

(a small, dry
almost-smile, still
not turning)
Congratulations.

SELA

There are almost no unresolved
cases anymore. Three weeks ago
there were forty-one. Yesterday
there were two.

He finishes the reading. Logs it -- automated first, then the handwritten line, unhurried, exactly as always.

NAVIGATOR

An empty queue would worry me more.

SELA

That's what I thought you'd say.

NAVIGATOR

(finally turning,
faint, genuine warmth
under the dryness)
Then I've taught you something.

SELA

You taught me that certainty about
an unreachable place doesn't mean
the place stopped mattering. I
don't think that's what this is.

NAVIGATOR

(settling back,
patient, already
forming the response
he's given some
version of before)
Discrepancy doesn't resolve itself,
Sela. Somebody resolves it.
Sometimes badly. Sometimes by
force. You've found an institution
getting better at agreeing with
itself. I found the same thing
forty years ago. It has a name.
It's called exhaustion.

SELA

I thought that too. For a while.

She sets her slate down, screen up, and doesn't say anything
else yet. Lets him look.

He does -- the same way he reads everything, intending to be
accountable for it. This time it takes longer.

NAVIGATOR

(scanning, half to
himself)
This isn't a destination record.

SELA

No.

NAVIGATOR

This is a maintenance log. A
housing reallocation. A --

(stops, scrolls,
reads again)
-- a birth record.

SELA

All three closed out the same way.
No new observation. No branch.
No flagged uncertainty. Just --
resolved. Smoothly. Like there
was never a question.

NAVIGATOR

(still looking at
the slate, not yet
at her)
That's not exhaustion.

SELA

No.

NAVIGATOR

Exhaustion has a reason. This has
a --

He doesn't finish it. Hands the slate back. Turns to
the eyepiece, more out of habit than intention, and takes
another reading -- the ordinary motion, thousands of times
performed.

Logs it in the automated system.

Turns to the handwritten log.

Pen down.

He doesn't write.

SELA

(quiet, watching)

What.

NAVIGATOR

(not answering -- not
deflecting either,
just genuinely
occupied with
something)

Give me a moment.

He takes another reading. The same star, presumably, or one near enough. Checks it against the first. Writes nothing.

Takes a third.

The room is very quiet. The water-sound isn't here, wasn't ever here -- this room has always been silent in a different way, just starlight and the small mechanical patience of the instrument. Tonight the silence has a different weight to it, though nothing about the room has changed to produce that.

Sela doesn't prompt him again. She's learned that much from him, if nothing else.

Finally, he sets the pen down. Doesn't finish the entry. Doesn't close the log. Just sits with the instrument, hands loosely folded, looking at nothing in particular.

NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

(very quiet, and very
small -- smaller
than anything the
audience has already
understood watching
him get here)

I don't think I've seen this
before.

That's all. No further explanation. No reframing of forty years of accommodation. Just a man who has just discovered that one of his oldest certainties -- that he already knows the shape of every way an institution fails -- was wrong about this particular shape.

SELA
(gently, not
triumphant)
I know.

They sit there. Neither moves toward the door. The stars keep doing whatever stars do, indifferent, unbothered, exactly as available to observation as they were an hour ago and exactly as useless for settling what either of them has just understood.

FADE OUT.

Healing and Calling It Damage

INT. LOWER HULL -- ACCESS GALLERY -- DAY-CYCLE (SHIP TIME)

Deep. The air changes down here -- heavier, warmer, faint mineral smell. Overhead lighting gives way to work-lamps, hand-rigged, angled by whoever needed light exactly there and nowhere else.

The hull itself is visible along one whole wall of the gallery -- not sleek plating, something closer to a cross-section of bark, or bone, or scar tissue, all three at once. Old repairs sit in visible layers, different eras, different textures, like rings.

Sela descends a narrow stair, slate in hand, a printed deviation report folded into it. She's here to confirm what she already believes: informational deterioration, now showing up structurally too. She's not looking for an argument. She's looking for confirmation.

A WOMAN (50s, WREN, sleeves rolled to the shoulder, hands permanently stained the color of the hull itself) is crouched against the wall, palm flat against a wide patch of new growth -- paler than the surrounding material, faintly ridged, clearly recent.

She doesn't look up as Sela approaches. She's listening to something, or feeling for something, with her whole hand.

SELA

Wren?

WREN

(still not looking
up)

Mm.

SELA

I've got a deviation report.
Sector nine-through-eleven, lower
hull. Growth outside spec, three
consecutive cycles. Fabrication
logged it as damage progression.

WREN

Fabrication logs everything as
damage progression. It's the only
column on their form.

SELA

(pressing, gently)

I need to know if it's accurate.

Wren finally looks up. Not unfriendly. Assessing -- the way you'd look at someone who's asked you a question in the wrong language and is waiting for you to answer it in that language anyway.

WREN

Come here.

Sela hesitates, then crosses to her, crouches beside her at the wall. Wren takes Sela's hand -- no ceremony about it, entirely practical -- and presses it flat against the pale patch.

WREN (CONT'D)

Feel that?

SELA

It's... warm.

WREN

It's supposed to be warm. Damage isn't warm. Damage is either cold, because nothing's moving through it, or it's hot, because something's fighting an infection. This isn't either.

SELA

Then what is it.

WREN

(matter-of-fact, not
performing wisdom,
just stating a fact
she's sure of)
It's working.

Sela pulls her hand back slightly -- not rejecting the answer, just needing distance to argue with it.

SELA

Working at what? It's outside every structural tolerance we have on file.

WREN

Every tolerance we have on file was written against a hull that was smaller. Younger. Fewer decades of damage behind it. You want to know if today's Aniara matches yesterday's specification.

(beat)

It doesn't. That's not the same question as whether it's dying.

SELA

Everything I've spent the last two months looking at says the ship is losing the ability to tell the difference between a real answer and an old one it's comfortable with.

WREN

(unbothered, still
watching the growth,
not Sela)
I believe you. About the archive.
I don't know anything about that.
I know this.

(taps the wall,
gently, almost
affectionate)
And this isn't confused. This is doing something on
purpose.

SELA

Nothing on this ship does anything
on purpose. That's the whole
point.

WREN

(finally, precisely,
without raising her
voice at all)
No. You're looking at healing and
calling it damage.

A long beat. Sela doesn't have a rebuttal ready. She
looks at the growth again -- the same pale ridged material,
unchanged by anything either of them has just said, entirely
indifferent to which of them is right.

WREN (CONT'D)

(standing, wiping
her hands on her
trousers, done with
the conversation
as far as she's
concerned)
Tell Fabrication to stop cutting it
back. Whatever it's doing, it's
not finished, and it doesn't do
it twice the same way if you keep
interrupting it.

SELA

(still crouched,
still looking at the
wall)
Has Command seen this?

WREN

(already walking off
down the gallery, not
turning around)
Command's seen a deviation report.
That's not the same thing as seeing
this.

Sela remains where she is a moment longer. Reaches out,
on her own this time, and rests her palm flat against the
growth again. Holds it there.

It's still warm.

She doesn't know what that means.

FADE OUT.

Has That Always Done That

INT. WATER STRATUM -- GALLERY LANDING -- EVENING

The same landing from earlier in the film. Low light, the
sound of moving water underneath everything -- a sound we've
heard enough times by now that we've stopped consciously
hearing it too, the same way Sela has.

ISKA (30s, sleeves pushed up, a sample kit open beside
her, mid-task) is logging readings from a line of small
collection vials. Unhurried, competent, entirely undramatic
about it -- this is simply what her evening looks like most
evenings.

Sela comes down the short stair. Doesn't say anything right
away. Sits on the rail edge where she always sits.

ISKA

(not looking up from
the vials)
Long day?

SELA

Long something.

ISKA
(still working,
unbothered)
Wren finally let you down into the
gallery?

SELA
How did you know that?

ISKA
You smell like the lower hull.
Everyone who's been down there
smells like the lower hull for
about a day. It's not subtle.

Sela almost laughs. Doesn't quite get there. Iska glances over, reads something in her face, decides not to push it -- finishes capping a vial instead, sets it in its rack.

A comfortable quiet settles. Under it, low and constant: the water. Two layered rhythms, one slightly offset from the other, the way it's sounded in every scene at this location -- present, unremarked, exactly the kind of thing you stop hearing once you've heard it enough times.

Iska finishes the last vial, stretches, sits beside Sela on the rail, shoulder to shoulder.

ISKA
Merit says the stratum coordinator
is finally moving the Dassen family
off nine. Which means their old
allocation opens up.

SELA
Good for them.

ISKA

(casual, already
thinking two steps
ahead, the way people
do about ordinary
futures)
Bigger unit. Better light. If we
ever --

(shrugs, not
finishing the thought
because it doesn't
need finishing, to
her)
-- it'd be a good one to put in for. Before somebody else
does.

Sela doesn't answer right away. Not because the sentence
alarmed her. Because she notices, distinctly, that Iska
said "if we ever" the way you'd say it about something
assumed, not something decided -- a future casually built
into an ordinary Tuesday remark about square footage.

And Sela realizes, in the same instant, that she can no
longer say the sentence back the same way. Not because
she's decided against it. Because somewhere in the last two
months, "if we ever" quietly turned into a claim requiring
evidence, and she didn't notice it happening until just now.

SELA

(carefully neutral)
Sure. Before somebody else does.

She's been idly coiling a length of tie-cord from Iska's kit
as they talk -- something to do with her hands. On the word
"does," her hands stop. Half a second. Then finish the
coil, set it down, exactly as if nothing happened.

Iska doesn't catch anything in it. Why would she -- it was
a completely ordinary thing to say, delivered completely
ordinarily.

They sit. The water keeps its rhythm, layered, underneath
them, the way it apparently always has.

FADE OUT.

Sign-Off

INT. ARCHIVE STATION -- HABITATION DECK -- DAY

Ordinary daylight-cycle bustle. Sela at her station, queue open -- shorter than it used to be, and she's stopped finding that comforting.

HENZO leans on the counter beside her, a manifest slate in hand, entirely uninterested in anything but getting through his afternoon.

HENZO

Batch of nine-through-fourteen
storage housings, deck six annex.
Archive's got them flagged
superseded -- duplicate capacity,
cleared for reclamation. I just
need your sign-off so I can melt
them down before end of shift.

SELA

(not yet looking,
still typing
something else)
One second.

HENZO

(checking a chrono on
his wrist)
I've got a furnace booked in forty
minutes. Whoever's after me gets
it if I'm not there.

She pulls up the manifest. Scans it -- routine, practiced, the way she's read a thousand of these. Reaches the precedent citation at the bottom: SUPERSEDED -- DECK 6 REALLOCATION, REF. AUTO-RESOLVED. No linked observation. No secondary confirmation. Closed out clean.

It has the shape. She knows the shape now.

She sits with it half a second too long.

HENZO (CONT'D)

Problem?

SELA
(carefully even)

No.

She doesn't have anything to point to. No contradiction. No missing person, no impossible timeline, nothing she could put in front of anyone and be taken seriously. Just the shape -- and the shape isn't evidence. She learned that from watching someone else insist it was, weeks ago, in a small room full of starlight, and be wrong about what it meant.

Nine storage housings. Not a person. Not a record of a life. Containers.

She approves it.

The manifest updates. Sign-off logged, timestamped, ordinary.

HENZO
(already pocketing
the slate, relieved,
moving)
You're a lifesaver. See you at
Merit's Thursday?

SELA
Wouldn't miss it.

He's gone, already thinking about his furnace booking, already three tasks ahead. This cost him nothing and meant nothing to him, which is exactly right -- it shouldn't.

The next ticket loads. A water-pressure adjustment request for somebody's plant bed, deck nineteen. Sela reads it, approves it, moves on. Ordinary. Competent. Exactly like every other ticket in the queue today.

FADE OUT.

Place of Origin

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE COUNTER -- HABITATION DECK -- DAY

Unrelated to anything around it. A small counter window, the kind of bureaucratic corner nobody photographs. A CLERK (any age, entirely unbothered by his job) sits behind an old terminal. A YOUNG MAN (20s, GAREL, mildly irritated in the way people get irritated by forms, not by fate) stands at the window filling one out.

We don't know either of them. We will likely never see them again. That's fine.

GAREL
 (typing, or writing
 -- whichever the
 interface wants)
 Place of origin.

He types something. A beat. The terminal rejects it -- a small, unremarkable error tone, the kind that happens forty times a day at this counter and means nothing.

CLERK
 (not even looking up)
 It wants a planet.

GAREL
 (already mildly
 annoyed, in the way
 of someone re-doing
 a form, not the way
 of someone having a
 revelation)
 I haven't got one.

CLERK
 (reaching over,
 tapping something on
 the screen, entirely
 bored)
 Put the old default. Everybody
 does.

Garel does. The terminal accepts it instantly, satisfied. Garel takes his receipt, goes.

The clerk is already calling the next number.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Next.

CUT TO: [next scene]

The Verdict

INT. MERIT'S QUARTERS -- HABITATION DECK -- EVENING

The chair again -- further along now, propped upside down on a low table, Henzo crouched over it with a tool Sela doesn't recognize. Merit stands with her arms crossed, radiating a very specific, very personal outrage that has nothing to do with engineering.

Sela is in the doorway again, jacket still on, clearly having walked into the middle of something.

SELA

I was gone four days.

MERIT

(not looking at her,
entirely focused on
Henzo)
He replaced the joint block.

SELA

Okay.

MERIT

The joint block, Sela.

SELA

I don't know what that is.

MERIT

It's the --

(pointing, furious)

-- it's the one piece! The one piece I have been pointing to for three years! "This is original, this is my grandmother's, this came off the ship she--" and he just --

HENZO

(not looking up
from his work,
infuriatingly calm)
It was cracked. It was going to
fail. I fixed it eight months ago.

MERIT

Eight months!

HENZO

I didn't think it needed a formal
announcement.

MERIT

You let me tell people! I told the
deck coordinator! I told Wren!

HENZO

(finally looking up,
genuinely baffled by
the scale of this)
Why does Wren know about your
chair?

MERIT

That's not the point!

Sela has not moved from the doorway. She looks, briefly,
directly at camera-adjacent nothing -- the universal
expression of someone recalculating how tired she actually
is.

SELA

Why am I here for this.

MERIT

(rounding on her,
entirely serious)
Because you're fair.

SELA

I'm not fair. I'm tired.

MERIT

You're fair-adjacent. It's close
enough. Tell him he should have
said something.

SELA

(sighing, sitting
down uninvited on
the nearest available
surface, resigned to
her role)

Henzo. You should have said
something.

HENZO

(delighted, pointing
the tool at her)

Thank you.

SELA

(continuing, deadpan,
to Merit)

And you should stop asking people
to adjudicate your furniture.

MERIT

(genuinely wounded)

That's not a verdict. That's just
being mean to both of us equally.

SELA

That's the only kind of verdict I
have energy for tonight.

A beat. Henzo, satisfied, goes back to work on the chair.
Merit, still radiating grievance, drops into the one other
functional chair in the room, arms still crossed, unwilling
to let it go but out of ammunition.

MERIT

(muttering, mostly to
herself)

Eight months.

HENZO

(not looking up)

It's a good joint block. You're
welcome.

MERIT

I didn't ask for gratitude, I
asked for the truth for three years
running.

Sela closes her eyes, leans her head back against the
wall, smiling despite herself. This is not a scene about
anything. It is only, gloriously, itself.

FADE OUT.

Lineage Field

INT. HABITATION QUARTERS -- DECK 22 -- AFTERNOON

Small, orderly, decades of accumulated life organized into
a space that never got any bigger to hold it. THEA (80s,
sharp, entirely unsentimental about her own age) sits across
a low table from Sela, who has her slate out -- this is
routine archive work, oral-history intake, the kind of
ticket that comes up maybe twice a month.

SELA

(reading from the
form, half by rote)
Household record, continuing.
Born?

THEA

Deck nineteen. Before they
renumbered it.

SELA

Parents?

THEA

Both crew. Mother in fabrication,
before it was fabrication -- they
called it manufacture then. Father
kept the old irrigation lines
before the forest expansion ate
that job.

SELA
(typing, unremarkable
pace)
Grandparents?

THEA
(without missing a
beat)
My grandmother ran a school out
of deck fourteen before there was
a real school. My grandfather I
never knew. Died in the pressure
fault, the bad one, before the
reinforcement program.

Sela types. Ordinary work. Ordinary rhythm to it -- the
same practiced unhurriedness we've watched her bring to a
hundred small tickets already.

SELA
Great-grandparents.

THEA
(a small shrug,
genuinely unbothered)
That's where it gets thin.
Somebody remembers a name. Nobody
remembers a face.

SELA
That's fine. We just need what's
known.

She reaches the bottom of the intake form. A field, older
than the rest of the interface, formatted differently
-- LINEAGE OF ORIGIN. A blank waiting to be filled with
something the form was clearly built to expect and the room
was clearly not built to supply.

Sela's hand hesitates over it for a half-second -- not
confusion, just the small friction of a familiar dead end.

THEA (CONT'D)
(watching her,
entirely unbothered,
almost amused)
You can skip that one. Everybody
skips that one.

SELA
(already moving past
it, matter-of-fact,
no reaction)
I know.

She fills it with something quick and standard -- we don't see what, and it doesn't matter -- and closes out the record.

SELA (CONT'D)
That's everything on my end. Thank
you.

THEA
(waving a
hand, already
onto something
else, entirely
unceremonious about
the whole exchange)
It's what I'm for, apparently.

INT. HABITATION CORRIDOR -- DECK 22 -- CONTINUOUS

Sela walks out, slate under her arm, same unhurried pace as always. Nothing about her step changes.

But she slows, very slightly, at the junction -- not stopping, just a half-beat break in rhythm, the kind that wouldn't read as anything if you weren't watching for it.

She's thinking about a field on a form that nobody fills in. About an old man's unfinished sentence in a small observation room. About a shrug at a water stratum rail -- if we ever -- said the way you'd say it about the weather.

None of these things connect to each other in any way she could defend on paper.

She keeps walking.

FADE OUT.

The Proof

INT. QUARTERS -- SELA AND ISKA'S -- NIGHT

Small, warm, thoroughly lived-in -- plants that have migrated here from Merit's cuttings over the years, water-stratum sample vials repurposed as cups. Ordinary domestic mess.

Iska is folding laundry on the bed, unhurried. Sela stands by the small table, a printed report in her hands -- the completed version of what she showed the navigator weeks ago, now finished, formal, correct.

She's been building up to this for several minutes. Iska hasn't noticed, or has noticed and is giving her room.

SELA

I finished it. The correction data. Twelve years of readings, all the way back.

ISKA

(folding, not looking up)
Finished what, exactly?

SELA

The course doesn't go where they say it goes. It hasn't for a long time. I can show you the math, but the math isn't really the point anymore. The point is it's certain.

Iska keeps folding. One beat too long before she answers -- not shock, something else.

ISKA

Okay.

SELA

(thrown, slightly, by how little that landed)
Iska. We're not going to arrive.

ISKA

(setting down what
she's folding,
finally looking at
her, gently, not
unkindly)

I know.

SELA

You--

ISKA

Not the math. I don't have your
math. I mean I know the way
everybody knows. The way you know
your own street's going to flood in
a bad storm before anyone posts a
notice.

SELA

That's not the same as proof.

ISKA

No. But I stopped needing the
proof a while ago. I don't know
when. It's not a day I could point
to.

Sela sets the report down. It suddenly looks smaller than
it did five minutes ago.

SELA

Then why does it feel like I'm the
only one who--

ISKA

(not unkindly, but
with an edge starting
to surface)

Because you needed it to be certain
before you'd let yourself believe
it. Some of us just started living
like it was true and never bothered
waiting for the paperwork.

A silence. Sela sits, finally, across from her.

SELA

(quieter)

I keep thinking -- if I'd told you this six months ago, before any of it, would you have said the same thing?

ISKA

Probably not. I'd have said something about not letting it change anything. I believe that less now.

SELA

Why?

ISKA

(this costs her

something to say)

Because you started treating our own future like a hypothesis. The room. The -- everything we talk about like it's ordinary. You went quiet every time it came up, and I told myself it was work. It wasn't work.

Sela doesn't have a defense ready. She doesn't try to build one.

ISKA (CONT'D)

(sharper now,

the hurt finally

surfacing as anger)

We're the hundred-and-seventh generation on this ship, Sela.

SELA

I know.

ISKA

So?

SELA

So what?

ISKA

So how many generations does
somewhere have to keep us alive
before you stop calling it nowhere?

Silence. The line lands and neither of them softens it.

SELA

(very quietly)

I don't call it nowhere.

ISKA

You've been living like it is one.
For months. I just didn't have the
word for it until right now.

Sela looks at the report again -- the finished proof, twelve years of readings, months of work, entirely correct, sitting on the table between them and doing absolutely nothing to help either of them right now.

And something shifts in her, not about the destination -- about everyone around it. Iska. Thea's shrug. Garel's form, if she'd ever known about it. A whole population that stopped waiting long before she found the proof that they were right not to.

She doesn't say any of that. There's no version of saying it out loud that wouldn't sound like she'd just discovered something everyone else already lived inside.

SELA

(all she has)

I'm sorry.

ISKA

(not cruel, just
honest, and tired)

I don't think that's the part that
needs fixing.

Neither of them moves to close the distance. The report stays on the table between them, closed, unread by anyone but her.

FADE OUT.

Harvest

INT. HYDROPONIC FOREST -- LOWER TERRACE -- DAY

Bright, green, ordinary -- except for a cordon of temporary tape across one section, and two FABRICATION TECHNICIANS consulting a manifest at its edge. Beyond the tape: growing beds, irrigation lines, and Merit's small unimportant plant among them, easy to miss if you didn't know to look for it.

Merit stands just inside the cordon, arms crossed, not moving. Henzo stands just outside it, manifest slate in hand, radiating the specific misery of someone doing his job and hating it.

HENZO

It's not the whole terrace. It's the irrigation trunk and the bed frames on this side. Command wants the material reallocated to the lower hull effort.

MERIT

The effort that Wren told you to stop cutting into.

HENZO

Wren told Fabrication to stop cutting into the growth. This isn't the growth. This is the bed frame six centimeters away from the growth, which Command says is now structurally adjacent and needs to come out for access.

MERIT

That bed frame is holding up a plant that's been alive since before either of us.

HENZO

(quietly, not
enjoying this at all)
I know what the bed's holding up,
Merit.

MERIT

Then say no.

HENZO

I don't get to say no. I get to
say when, and I've already pushed
it back twice.

Sela arrives, having heard about this secondhand, still
catching up. She takes in the tape, the manifest, Merit's
face.

SELA

What's actually happening here?

HENZO

(relieved to have
someone to explain
it to)
Command logged the hull growth
as a structural defect. Ordered
containment and reclamation on
anything in the affected radius.
This terrace is in the radius.
That's it. That's the whole
reason.

SELA

Wren said it wasn't damage.

HENZO

Wren said it to you. Command's
working off the deviation report,
not off Wren standing there with
her hand on it. I believe Wren. I
also have a manifest with my name
on it.

A THIRD PERSON -- an older FABRICATION WORKER, unhurried,
not introduced, clearly just passing through on other
business -- glances at the cordon on her way past.

OLDER WORKER

(not stopping, mostly
to herself, entirely
unbothered)

Funny. Looks like it's growing
toward something. Damage doesn't
usually know where it's going.

Nobody responds to this. She's already gone, on to whatever
she was doing. It was not offered as an argument. It will
not return.

MERIT

(to Henzo, not
backing down)

You replaced my grandmother's chair
leg without telling me for eight
months because you thought it was
kinder than asking.

HENZO

That's not the same thing.

MERIT

It's exactly the same thing. You
decide what's allowed to keep
existing and you do it quietly so
nobody has to watch.

HENZO

(finally sharp,
something real
underneath it)

I don't want to do this one, Merit.
I've said that twice now. Nobody
up the chain is listening to me
either.

A beat. Merit hears it -- really hears it, the anger
draining slightly, replaced by something closer to grief.

MERIT

(quiet)

Then what happens to it.

HENZO

(not meeting her
eyes)

I don't know yet. I've got until
end of week.

Sela looks past them both, at the plant -- small,
unremarkable, exactly as it's always been, entirely unaware
that anyone is arguing about it.

SELA

(to Henzo, careful)

Can you get me the manifest? The
precedent citation, whatever
Command's working from.

HENZO

(already knows what
she's asking, and
why)

Sela. It's not going to look any
different than the storage housings
did.

SELA

I know.

(beat)

I want to see it anyway.

He hands it over without further argument. She doesn't open
it yet. Just holds it.

Merit is still looking at the cordoned bed, at the plant she
can't get to now, saying nothing else. Nobody has a plan.
Nothing gets resolved. The tape stays up.

FADE OUT.

The Filing

INT. OPTICAL DECK -- SMALL OBSERVATION BAY -- NIGHT-CYCLE

Same room. The navigator at the eyepiece. Sela enters --
this time not with a slate she needs him to read, just the
fact of having finished something.

SELA

It's done. I'm filing it tomorrow.
Full submission, all twelve years,
the corrections, the archive
material, everything.

He doesn't turn around right away. Finishes a reading.
Logs it.

NAVIGATOR

Filing it where.

SELA

Command review. The proper
channel. The one you'd have used.

NAVIGATOR

(finally turning,
not surprised, not
proud, something
more complicated than
either)

Why.

SELA

Because it's true, and it should be
on the record as true.

NAVIGATOR

It'll be true whether or not anyone
signs it.

SELA

(steady, she's had
this argument with
herself already)

Why do you need us to?

A beat. He almost smiles -- recognizing his own question
handed back to him, sharpened.

NAVIGATOR

(quiet)

Fair.

He doesn't answer it. Turns back to the instrument instead
-- not dismissively, just because he genuinely doesn't have
a better one than the one she's already given herself.

NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

File it, then.

SELA

That's it? No warning about what happens after?

NAVIGATOR

(the closest thing to
warmth he's shown all
film)

You already know what happens
after. You've been telling me for
months.

The door slides. A WOMAN (40s, ORNE, brisk, carrying a
slate, clearly mid-errand) steps in without ceremony.

ORNE

(not even glancing
at Sela, entirely
businesslike)

Da, I need the override on the
annex signature -- the one from
Tuesday you never closed out.

NAVIGATOR

(already reaching for
it, barely looking
up)

Second drawer.

She finds it, signs something against it, and is gone again
almost before the door finishes opening. The whole exchange
takes perhaps five seconds. Nobody remarks on it. Sela
doesn't react to it either -- she has no reason to.

She almost laughs. Doesn't quite. Turns to go -- then
stops in the doorway.

SELA

Did you ever file yours?

NAVIGATOR

(not turning around)

I told you. I wrote it. My
superior read it and agreed with
every figure.

SELA

That's not the same as filing it.

NAVIGATOR

(a long pause; when
he answers, it's
smaller than the
question)

No. It isn't.

He doesn't elaborate. She doesn't ask him to. She leaves.

INT. COMMAND ARCHIVE OFFICE -- DAY

Ordinary institutional room, better lit than the archive station, worse lit than the anteroom. A younger CLERK-ADMINISTRATOR takes the physical submission from Sela -- printed, sealed, old-fashioned in a way the ship apparently still requires for anything this size -- and logs it.

CLERK-ADMINISTRATOR

Full navigational reassessment,
twelve-year dataset. This'll go
to Review before it goes anywhere
else.

SELA

How long does Review usually take?

CLERK-ADMINISTRATOR

Depends who's reading it.

INT. COMMAND -- REVIEW OFFICE -- DAY (LATER)

The same ORNE from the observation bay, though nothing in the scene marks that connection. She sits with Sela's report open in front of her -- not skimming. Reading properly.

She reaches the final page. Sets it down precisely, squared to the desk edge.

ORNE

(matter-of-fact, no
drama in it at all)
This is correct.

SELA
 (almost thrown by how
 simply that lands)
 You're certain?

ORNE
 I checked the method twice. It's
 correct.

A beat.

SELA
 Then what happens now?

ORNE
 (entirely her own,
 no attribution, no
 weight placed on it)
 Now I have to decide what we tell
 people.

SELA
 (a chill of
 recognition she can't
 yet source)
 That's a strange way to put it.

ORNE
 (already moving on,
 brisk)
 Leave it with me, Archivist. Thank
 you for your work.

Sela leaves. If the phrasing meant anything beyond the
 obvious, it doesn't show on her face. The scene doesn't ask
 us to notice either.

FADE OUT.

Absorption

INT. DECK 22 -- THEA'S QUARTERS -- DAY

Thea, older still, sits with a different archivist now --
 not Sela -- going through the same kind of intake we watched
 once before. The new archivist reaches the same old LINEAGE
 OF ORIGIN field.

THEA

(before he can even
ask)

Skip that one. Everybody skips
that one.

He does, without comment, already moving to the next question. Thea has said this before. She will say it again. Nothing about the world has changed for her today.

INT. HYDROPONIC FOREST -- LOWER TERRACE -- DAY

The cordon tape is gone. The bed frames are gone too -- cleanly removed, the gap already softened by new planting on either side. Merit crouches there, working soil that used to hold something else, hands busy, face unreadable.

Henzo approaches, says nothing, crouches down beside her, and starts pulling weeds from the next row over without being asked. Neither of them speaks. This is apparently how they've settled it, or how they haven't, and are living inside anyway.

INT. LOWER HULL -- ACCESS GALLERY -- DAY (SHIP TIME)

Wren, alone, palm flat against the growth -- larger now, noticeably, though no one remarks on that either. She's not arguing with anyone. Just working. The growth is warm under her hand, same as always.

INT. FABRICATION MESS -- DAY

A new group of children, younger than the ones we heard in Sequence I, recite the five principles in the same singsong cadence, half-bored, exactly as before. Nobody at the surrounding tables looks up. It is wallpaper, as it always was.

CHILDREN (O.S.)

...boundary, maintain an inside...
cycle, recover what is used...

INT. COMMAND ANTEROOM -- DAY

The destination display on the side wall. Someone crosses in front of it, carrying something, not looking. Same as it's always been. Nothing about the number has changed, though everyone with clearance to know now knows it means something different than it used to.

Nobody has told the deck coordinators to stop planning around it. Nobody will.

INT. WATER STRATUM -- GALLERY LANDING -- EVENING

Sela sits alone on the rail -- the same rail, the same spot -- for the first time in the film without Iska beside her. She's not doing anything. Just sitting. Just listening.

The water sound underneath her, layered, familiar, exactly as it has been in every scene at this location.

And then -- nothing dramatic, nothing pointed at -- a pause. About two seconds, where the second rhythm simply isn't there.

Sela doesn't react. Doesn't tilt her head this time. If she notices, we don't see it.

The pump returns. The rhythm resumes, precisely where it left off, as though it never stopped.

She sits a moment longer. Then stands, and leaves the frame.

The water keeps moving. The rail stays empty behind her.

The sound of it does not stop. It carries straight through the cut.

The Pull-Back

INT. WATER STRATUM -- GALLERY LANDING -- CONTINUOUS

The empty rail. The water, moving. Nothing has changed since Sela left the frame.

The camera begins to withdraw -- not a cut, a retreat. The landing recedes. The gallery's low light gives way to the darker spine corridor beyond it, water sound thinning without ever quite vanishing.

INT. SPINE CORRIDOR -- CONTINUOUS

We rise, or the ship falls away beneath us. Habitation decks pass: a door closing somewhere, ordinary light under it. The archive station, unstaffed at this hour, queue still open, waiting for tomorrow's shift the way it always has.

INT. HYDROPONIC FOREST -- CONTINUOUS

The forest canopy, dense, old, unbothered by anything that has happened inside it. The gap where the bed frames used to be has already closed over with new growth. From this height it is indistinguishable from the rest of the terrace.

INT. LOWER HULL -- ACCESS GALLERY -- CONTINUOUS

The growth. Still exactly where it has always been, still continuous with the surrounding tissue -- no visible seam, no visible boundary, nothing to suggest today is different from any other day this section of hull has been photographed in this film.

We do not linger on it any longer than we lingered on the forest, or the corridor, or the empty rail. It is simply next in the retreat.

EXT. ANIARA -- CLOSE ON THE HULL -- CONTINUOUS

Now outside. The hull's outer surface, layered, scarred, the pale growth visible from without for the first time -- texture we've only felt through Wren's hand until now, seen at last, and it tells us nothing more than her hand already did.

No alarm. No light change anywhere on the hull. No mechanism reaching toward it, retracting from it, sealing around it. The ship does not appear to know, or to care, or to have decided anything about what is happening to it.

EXT. ANIARA -- WIDENING -- CONTINUOUS

Distance increases. The growth's edge -- where hull becomes growth becomes hull again -- was never sharply defined even up close. At this distance it stops being resolvable as an edge at all.

We keep pulling back.

There is an interval -- we could not say how long, and the film does not mark it -- during which the boundary in question simply passes below whatever threshold of resolution the shot can register. This is not withheld from us. It was never available to be shown.

EXT. ANIARA -- GREATER DISTANCE -- CONTINUOUS

At this new distance: two forms.

Aniara -- whale-shaped, dark, continuing along its unhurried line through the field, entirely unchanged in bearing, unchanged in course, giving no indication that anything about it is different from the ship we have watched all film.

And, separate from it now, something smaller.

We hold on it as it rotates, slowly, against the star field.

From one angle: a fragment. Torn, irregular, an edge that could be damage.

The rotation continues.

Along one face, a curvature persists -- the same interval,

the same seam-spacing we have seen in the hull's own layered plating all film. Nothing about that face contradicts where it came from.

The rotation continues.

Elsewhere on the same form: a continuous, unbroken curve running through where a joint should be -- exactly the kind of transition Fabrication's modular units, established throughout this film, cannot produce without a seam. Nobody aboard Aniara builds anything that way.

The rotation continues. Both properties remain true of the same object at once. No fourth angle arrives to settle which one matters more.

Its motion relative to Aniara reads, at first, exactly like debris -- falling away, indifferent, governed by nothing but momentum and the shapes involved. But it does not fall away cleanly. For longer than debris should, it maintains something like a relation to the ship -- not a tether, nothing so legible as that, but a persistence, a reluctance to simply diverge.

Then, gradually, indifferently, even that relation fails. It drifts. Nothing about the drift resembles propulsion. Nothing about it resembles release, either. It is simply now doing what unpowered things do at this scale, which is very little, very slowly, for a very long time.

EXT. DEEP FIELD -- CONTINUOUS

We do not stop pulling back when the smaller form becomes difficult to see.

The pull-back continues. Past the distance at which either form can be reliably identified.

At sufficient distance, Aniara itself stops being legible as a ship. It becomes a shape. Then a darker patch within a dark field. Then one of several points of absence against the star-field, indistinguishable in kind from the smaller form still drifting somewhere near it, both now equally reduced to the same visual problem: something is there, and something is not, and the difference between them is no longer something the image is prepared to answer.

Everything we know about which of those two points used to be a world, and which used to be six kilometres of contested material, exists now only because we were there before the distance became this large.

The stars do not rearrange themselves for this. They were never going to.

CUT TO BLACK.

NO TITLE CARD. NO TEXT. NO FINAL SCORE CUE MARKED HERE -- SILENCE OR SOUND DESIGN TO BE DETERMINED IN POST, BUT NOT MUSIC THAT RESOLVES.