

FAILSAFE

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FADE IN

INT. STUDIO – NIGHT

DIRECT TO CAMERA

MAYA (20s, band t-shirt, headphones around neck), lit only by the faint green spill of her monitor, stares directly into the lens.

MAYA

(quietly)

There's a rule in system design.

Every loop needs a failsafe — something that stops it running forever.

Most people think that's about code.

It's not.

(beat)

Sometimes you build walls so thick you forget what's inside them.

You tell yourself you're keeping the error contained.

But containment isn't the same as healing.

Her eyes flick between the camera and the unseen screen — a glitch of thought.

MAYA (soft smile)

Anyway... watch closely.

I'm still trying to work it out.

She slips on her headphones. The hum of a CRT fills the silence.

MAYA hunches over a retro SNES. Eyes locked on screen.

On monitor: a retro platformer. GAME GIRL — an 16-bit sprite — slams repeatedly against invisible walls in a deteriorating digital room.

Text flickers: “FAILSAFE – BUILD 0.8”

Maya types in a second window:

```
// failsafe mechanism - if player trapped > 30 sec  
// trigger escape protocol  
// CURRENTLY DISABLED - debug mode
```

Game Girl glitches through the floor. Respawns. Falls again.

MAYA

(muttering)

Come on... why won't you let her out...

Video call from Maya's laptop. She ignores it. Flashes up again. And again.

She answers without looking away from the screen.

MAYA

(distracted)

Hey.

INTERCUT – VIDEO CALL

ASIA (20s, Polish, beautiful even through pixelated video) sprawls on her bed.

ASIA

Maya! Moja Droga... it's past midnight!

MAYA

(still playing)

Just trying to fix this one mechanic.

ASIA

Let me see your masterpiece.

Maya angles the phone. Game Girl continues her desperate loop.

ASIA (CONT'D)

Wait — is that supposed to be me?

MAYA

(small smile)

You, but sixteen-bit. It's you, but 1992 you.

ASIA

Why make something so ancient?

MAYA

Because nobody has in thirty years. Retro is the new new. People fucking love nostalgia.

ASIA

(teasing)

So you're hipster-coding. Very Shoreditch.

Beat. Asia's expression shifts.

ASIA (CONT'D)

Had my agency shoot today.

MAYA

(finally looking at phone)

Yeah? How'd it go?

ASIA

Photographer kept... adjusting me. Every five seconds, hands on my waist, my shoulders.

Breathing on my neck. Real creepy energy.

Maya's fingers tighten on the controller. Something flickers in her eyes.

MAYA

Did you say something?

ASIA

To who? He's best mates with the owner.

(brightening)

But the photos came out beautiful! Just posted them. Tell me what you think?

MAYA

Of course. You're going to get that gig.

ASIA

Love you, weirdo. Don't stay too late.

The call ends but the video window remains open — Asia frozen mid-wave.

INT. STUDIO – CONTINUOUS

Maya opens Instagram. Asia's photos — radiant, professional, alive.

She types: "So proud of you. You're on 🔥. x"

A DM notification slides down.

CHRIS: Good to see you smile again. Remember what we agreed. C x

Maya's breath catches.

Behind her, barely visible — a single bare LIGHT BULB flickers once in a desk lamp.

She looks back at her laptop screen.

THE GLITCH

Asia still frozen on the video call screen.

Then — GLITCH.

Asia JUMP-CUTS to standing position. No transition. Her face flickers — half flesh, half pixels.

ASIA

(voice corrupting)

Maya?

GLITCH. Asia's sitting again but at wrong angle. Face now 70% pixelated, mouth moving out of sync.

ASIA (CONT'D)

(16-bit distortion)

Why won't you let me out?

GLITCH. Extreme close-up. Just an 16-bit sprite with Asia's human eyes staring out.

ASIA (CONT'D)

(Game Girl's damage sound)

Help... me...

Maya SLAMS the laptop shut. Breathing hard.

The 16-bit music from her game warps, slowing.

FLASH VISION 1

Split-second insert:

Asia in an abandoned room mimicking the game, trying to claw her way out.

Game Girl mirrors every movement exactly on the CRT monitor.

Both rock back and forth on the floor of the room.

BACK TO SCENE

Maya grips her head. The pain passes.

She stands, unsteady.

INT. OFFICE BATHROOM – NIGHT

Maya is sitting on the loo with her head in her hands.

The game music hums faintly through the cubicle walls.

A WET SQUEAK.

She freezes.

Another SQUEAK — like a palm sliding down glass.

She pulls her trousers up and slowly opens the door anxiously.

BLOODY HANDPRINTS streak the glass.

She backs away into the cubicle, puts her head back against the wall to make herself small and takes a breath.

Plucking up the courage, she steps back out and towards the mirror.

Her reflection doesn't move immediately. Then it does — a half-second delay.

When Maya frowns, the reflection smiles.

She can't get out of the bathroom fast enough.

INT. STAIRWELL – CCTV FEED – NIGHT

A grainy, black-and-white image.

Timestamp flickers: 00:47:32.

MAYA barefoot, in her nightdress — ascends the stairwell, clutching the handrail.

Each step is deliberate, mechanical, as if guided by an unseen rhythm.

On the bottom corner of the CCTV screen, a digital controller overlay appears

a crude joystick graphic flicking upward with every step she takes.

A beat of static.

She pauses mid-stair, glances up toward the camera.

The controller freezes.

Maya's pupils catch the infrared light, two bright, inhuman dots staring straight at us.

Then the joystick twitches on its own.

Maya's head turns.

She resumes climbing.

INT. OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

Every monitor now shows the game.

Game Girl trapped in shrinking boxes, health bar depleting.

The PRINTER whirs. Pages cascade out — covered in repeating handprint patterns.

The 16-bit music continues to decay, like a music box winding down.

Maya runs for the stairs.

INT. OFFICE CORRIDOR – CCTV FEED – NIGHT

Wide fisheye lens. Fluorescent buzz.

Maya moves slowly down the corridor, arms limp at her sides.

Her bare feet whisper across the tiles.

A corner ahead.

She turns and passes herself coming the other way.

Both versions flicker with mild digital lag, each a frame out of sync.

They don't react.

No shock.

Just passing through one another like ghosts in a corrupted render.

The feed glitches the timestamp jumps backwards two seconds.

They pass again.

Then again.

Each loop decays further until only one remains,

walking toward the lens eyes black, skin pixelated.

The screen whites out.

INT. STAIRWELL – NIGHT

Maya sits on cold concrete, knees drawn up.

Calls Asia. Straight to voicemail — but the voicemail greeting glitches, Asia's voice cutting between normal and 16-bit tones.

MAYA

(whispered)

Just... checking you got home safe. Call me.

Maya holds her head as she feels an intense pain once again.

FLASH VISION 2

Asia, mesmerised, is following a light bulb swing in the centre of the room.

Game Girl's health bar blinks critical.

INT. CORRIDOR – NIGHT

Fluorescents hum. The hallway stretches impossibly long.

At the far end — a door ajar. Darkness beyond.

Maya walks back into the hallway and turns her head toward it, as if pulled.

INT. DIM ROOM – NIGHT

Sudden transition. An office interview space.

Table. Two chairs.

The INTERVIEWER (30s/40s, suit, unsettlingly calm) sits waiting.

INTERVIEWER

Please, sit.

Maya sits, trying to compose herself.

INTERVIEWER

So. Tell me why you want to work here.

MAYA

(automatic)

I... I like building worlds. Worlds that people can spend time living in.

INTERVIEWER

Or hiding in?

Maya slightly furrows her brow.

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)

What are you building now?

MAYA

A game. Retro platformer. Every level has a failsafe — a way out if you're trapped.

INTERVIEWER

That's thoughtful.

MAYA

I... there was a bug in the code. I isolated it. Built a container around it.

INTERVIEWER

You can't have both — a container stops the failsafe from ever triggering.

Beat. The room feels smaller.

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)

Maya. Do you know where you are?

MAYA

The interview... the office...

INTERVIEWER

No. Look again.

Suddenly Maya is standing up, the interviewer behind her. She's now looking down at a bed with herself lying in it, mascara marks running down her cheeks from. Barely moving, shallow breathing.

Standing Maya's breathing quickens.

MAYA

This is where it...

INTERVIEWER

No. This is where you put it after.

The camera pulls out and we see the room is now floating in a void of code.

We pull out further and we realise the scene is now playing on the CRT monitor back in the studio.

Maya is back behind her desk and the interviewer is sat across the room from her.

Her phone buzzes. Chris's message appears again: "Remember what we agreed. C x"

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)

He sent that tonight. What did you agree to?

MAYA

(barely audible)

Not to tell ...anyone.

Maya is now sat behind her desk but now in a vast dark space facing a giant wall of CRT monitors with the version of Maya lying in bed on the screens.

Maya behind the desk is desperately tapping a games controller.

MAYA

(Desperate)

Why isn't she moving? She needs to get up!

A health bar is depleting on every screen.

INTERVIEWER

You can't have control if you let them take your power Maya.

The interviewer looks over at the screens where a version of Asia is trapped in the real life game room.

Someone else knows now. Asia saw it in you. When she described the photographer.

Maya's tears start.

MAYA

(Through tears)

I didn't know how to...

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)

You trapped it here. But also trapped her. In your game. In your silence. Rooms inside more rooms.

Above them — a single LIGHT BULB hangs from a cord.

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)

(gentle)

The failsafe has been here all along.

The Interviewer fades. The room darkens.

Maya stares at the bulb. Reaches for it.

Her hand trembles an inch from the cord.

She pulls back.

MAYA

(breaking)

I can't. I can't, I can't...

She collapses to her knees. Head in hands.

For the first time, we see her truly sob — not pretty tears but raw, ugly crying.

The 16-bit music fades to complete silence.

Just her breathing. Ragged. Human.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(through tears)

I'm sorry, Asia. I'm so fucking sorry.

She rocks slightly, arms wrapped around herself.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(whispered)

I should have said something. When it happened to me.

(beat)

Before it could happen to you. To anyone.

The space grows colder. Darker. Only the bulb provides light now — a small circle of illumination in vast blackness.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(to the darkness)

He said no one would believe me. Said I wanted it.

Said I was smiling.

(beat)

I wasn't smiling. I was frozen.

Long beat. Her tears slow. Breathing steadies.

She looks up at the bulb through red eyes.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(exhausted)

I'm so tired of carrying this.

She stands. Wipes her face.

Takes a deep breath.

Reaches for the cord again. This time, her hand is steady.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(whispered)

Failsafe.

(under her breath)

Failsafe enabled.

She PULLS.

FLASH VISION 3 – FINAL

Asia screams into the camera.

A door of light forms.

Game Girl finds an exit portal, glowing white.

Both waiting.

WHITEOUT SEQUENCE

On the CRT — a one-frame compass overlay flickers between the flood of white:

- N: EXIT VECTOR FOUND
- S: DEBUG MODE — USER
- W: INTEGRITY WARNING
- E: COMMUNITY NOTE PINNED

Then the UI dissolves in the light.

Light floods everything.

Asia steps through her door.

Game Girl ascends into pixels of light.

The room dissolves.

INT. OFFICE – NIGHT

Normal. Quiet. Real.

Maya at her desk. Tear tracks still visible on her face, but breathing steady.

The game screen: “LEVEL COMPLETE — NEW GAME+ UNLOCKED”

Her phone vibrates. Message from Asia:

“Thanks for the comment. Love you, always. Get some sleep. x”

Maya wipes her eyes.

Opens her laptop browser.

Chris’s message notification appears again.

She deletes it without reading.

Types: "I need to report a sexual assault"

Search results load.

She clicks the first link. Reads.

Opens a message to Asia. Types:

"Asia — need to tell you something. Can we talk tomorrow? It's important."

Hovers over send. Breathes. Clicks SEND.

A long quiet. No music. Just her breathing — steady now, no longer trapped.

Behind her, the game continues.

Game Girl explores a new level — doors everywhere, all of them open.

FADE OUT.

THE END