

COLONYES

GREGORY S. PAUS

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An aged woman's body lays lifeless at the foot of the stairs. Blood pools around her head, soaking into the strands of her blond wig. A Royal steel-cased typewriter rests awkwardly atop her forehead.

Three detectives, in their polyester suites, circle the woman's corpse making note of the death scene that lay at their feet.

Uniformed officers stand in the corner consoling a group of young children.

The children's wails accentuate the macabre setting.

"What's with them two" a young mustachioed detective asks, pointing to two somber looking adolescents.

The pair of boys, a blond and brunette stand separate from the others.

The young boys watch everything with wide-eyes, not shedding a tear.

“Shock, I’d guess” a policeman offers.

The dark-haired boy, shorter of the two, whimpers and holds the other’s hand.

The taller one bends and whispers into the shorter boy’s ear, consoling him.

“What happened here” an older man asks as he walks through the front door.

“Slip and fall chief” a detective on the scene surmises.

“Slip and fall?” the older man asks, turning his attention to a heavy-set man in a blue suit.

The blue suited man stops and scratches his bald dome.

“Appears to be the case.”

“From her broken ankle” he offers, pointing to the body’s left foot.

“To the lacerations on her face.”

“Typical of a stair fall.”

“And the typewriter?” the chief questions.

“That’s what did her in” Detective Johnson answers.

“She could have survived the fall.”

“It was when she grabbed onto this end table to pull her self up” he says, stepping over the body to demonstrate.

“The heavy typewriter upended and fell on top of her, crushing part of her skull.”

“And who called it in?” The chief inquires, looking around the room.

“I did” the tall boy offers, stepping forward.

“What’s your name son?” the chief asks, bending down to be eye level with the boy.

“Ryan, Sir” he answers.

“Brave boy” the chief says, tousling the boy’s hair.

“You see what happened?” he asks.

“No sir, me and all the other kids were in the backyard, playing” Ryan answers nervously.

“She was laying there, just like that when we came back into the house” he says, pointing to the body.

“I called the police after finding your number in the phone book.

“Smart boy” the chief says in admiration.

“Thank you” Ryan whispers softly before returning to his shorter friend’s side.

The chief frowns as the other children’s cries grow louder.

“Reggie” the chief calls as he stands.

A young uniformed officer steps up.

“Sir?” he asks.

“The kid’s, Reggie” The chief says in frustration.

“Sir?” the officer questions.

“Why are all these kids standing around with a full view of that?” he asks pointing to the corpse.

The young policeman looks at the floor, unsure how to answer.

“Kindly take the children into the other room” the chief directs.

“On it sir” Reggie answers.

He turns and corrals the kids into the kitchen.

Seeing Ryan and the other boy are still standing there, staring at the body, the chief summons another officer.

“Those two as well” he says pointing to them.

“Come on boys” the policeman directs, as he puts a hand on each of their shoulders, escorting them into the kitchen.

The chief turns to his detectives.

“What was the dead woman’s name?” the chief inquires.

A loud screech erupts from the kitchen, interrupting the detectives.

“What the fuck?” Detective Johnson utters.

“Reggie, what’s going on in there?” the chief calls out.

The young officer comes walking back out of the kitchen with Ryan and the other boy in tow.

“Seems the other children are frightened of these two” he answers.

“Why is that boys?” the chief asks.

The two shrug their shoulders, feigning ignorance.

“These two say they don’t know nothing” Reggie adds.

“And the others are too hysterical to even utter a full sentence.”

Stuck for an answer, the chief points to the front door.

“Put these two in my cruiser and stay with ‘em till I get there” he commands.

“Chief, I found the old ladies purse” another patrolman offers.

He fishes out a pocketbook.

“Henrietta Drosen was her name” he reads from her drivers license.

Ryan smiles as he escorted outside and placed in the chief’s car.

“What’s with all the children?” the patrolman ponders out loud.

“She was too old to be birthin’ ‘em” he surmises

“Illegal foster home” Detective Johnson answers.

“They got a lot of ‘em in these lower districts.”

“This one looks pretty clean” he says, taking a look around.

“Thank God, I’ve seen some real hell holes.”

“What do we do with the kids now?” the patrolman asks the chief.

“They’ll go to the state until we can find someone to take ‘em” The chief answers.

“Johnson, your in charge for now” the chief orders.

“I need to get these kids out of this place” he adds.

“I’ll take the two in my car to the South Eden Home and Reggie will take the remaining to the Leyden House.”

“Wise to split ‘em up, chief?” Johnson asks.

“I didn’t hear any love loss between the kids in that kitchen and the other two” the chief answers.

1

Morning, the smell of summer is in the air and the faint grumble of lawnmowers sound in the distance.

Ryan is kneeling on the edge of his garden, knees on the coarse bricks, pulling weeds.

The moss-covered bricks are wet with the morning dew and as he slides along, a faint pungent smell ascends.

Feeling somber, he toils in the dirt.

A flash of light crosses his vision.

Fearful, Ryan grits his teeth against the threat of another mental spasm.

Quickly he diverts his attention back to the physical.

His hands in the cool dirt, tilling the soil, pulling weeds free and dropping them into the bucket next to himself.

“Peace” he says under his breath.

“Give it all to the plants.”

Feeling a faint tickle on his hand, he pulls it from the dirt.

“Just an ant” he observes.

The shiny black being crawls over his skin.

“I’ve disturbed it’s foraging” he laments.

The ant pays no mind to it’s recent abduction, nor does it bite in defense.

It carries on with the exploration of it’s new terrain, moving swiftly over the lines of Ryan’s palm.

Gathering intelligence, it’s antennae wiggle in a spastic motion smelling the sweat and dirt intermixed on Ryan’s skin.

It walks close to the edge, testing it’s new boundaries.

“Such a small life” Ryan marvels to himself, allowing the ant the freedom to crawl where it pleases.

Lifting his fingers, he challenges it to climb even higher, yet careful not drop it.

“When I place this tiny soul back into the dirt, our interaction will have meant nothing to it” he ponders, sadly.

Gingerly, he places the insect near the spot where he first felt the tickle and watches as it continues on it’s way, seemingly without care.

“Sometimes life is just too much to comprehend” he muses.

He smiles as the ant’s silhouette recedes, grateful for the momentary distraction.

A sharp pain runs along his spine and blood begins to pound in his ears as a cold sweat breaks out on his forehead.

Leaning back on his heels he raises his hands to his temples.

His vision blurs as the familiar dizziness consumes all of his senses.

He becomes lost in the confusion momentarily.

Breathing deep, he struggles to regain his composure.

Frightened by this latest episode he puts his hands to his face and covers his eyes.

In the blackness he hears the birds chirping and a slight breeze on his neck as the world comes back into focus.

Feeling safe again, he re-opens his eyes.

“Why is this happening?” he questions.

One day, months ago, the painful dizzy spells started.

Accompanying the attacks was the explosive growth of scientific thought.

Complicated equations and questions bubbling to the surface of his mind.

He felt a change in himself.

He feared he may be going insane.

While reaching forward to expand his ever-growing knowledge base he became acutely aware of his own past.

He did not like that there were so many holes in his own history.

Still shaking, he slowly re-centers himself, taking deep breaths and resumes his gardening.

Sliding the bucket of weeds over, he returns to his work in the soil.

His phone rings and he reaches into his pocket.

“No phone?” he thinks and looks to his porch.

“Enough weeding for the day” he decides.

Grabbing the bucket, he stands and brushes the dirt from his knees.

Having no interest in speaking to anyone, he meanders slowly towards the porch.

The ringing stops.

Climbing the three steps up the deck stairway, he reaches for the phone to check the caller ID.

The phone, now in his hand, rings once again.

The caller ID shows Sara.

“Don’t you ever take a day off?” he asks, smiling into the phone.

He can picture her eager eyes.

He can hear the clicking of plastic keys on a keyboard in background.

“She must be at the office” he thinks.

He had hoped that she would spend the day at the hospital caring for her ailing father.

“Ryan, it’s here” she says ignoring his greeting.

“Right where you predicted!” she bleats excitedly into the phone.

“Focus” he muses.

“Before I even ask what is where I predicted... how’s the old man?”

Her voice drops low and Ryan can hear the sadness.

“He’s...” she pauses “hanging in there.”

“The doctor says there is nothing left that they can do.”

“It’s hard to watch him fade away” she confides.

“I had to take a break.”

“Work keeps me busy, keeps me from thinking of him for awhile” she confesses, seemingly resigned to the inevitable.

“I’m sorry” Ryan answers, struggling with his inability to console her.

Clearing his throat, he changes the subject.

“We have twelve projects moving through the lab right now, I’ll need a little more info, before I can get as excited as you about a prediction I made.”

“Ryan this is not one of our projects, this is YOUR project, the theory we discussed the other day” she explains.

“I thought I’d put some data behind your dimensional thesis ... and IT’s there.”

“Well not so much ‘IT’s’ there” she continues, tripping over her words in her excitement.

“A blip, multiple blips of data... a trail of where ‘IT’ was” she gasps.

“Can you come down, I really think you should see the data for yourself”.

The phone slips from his cheek as his face is moist with sweat.

“Sara, I appreciate your work ethic...” he starts, grabbing at the phone, holding it tighter to his ear.

“But it’s my day off, and I’m elbow deep in dirt.”

“Besides how could you come by solid data so quickly?”

“It would take a super computer and a satill...” he stops himself mid-sentence.

“Shit, Sara you didn’t...” he asks.

“That is exactly what I did” she quips.

Ryan frowns.

“Sara, that was a theory, a really old theory.”

“It’s not even original, something that has been posed many times before.”

“Ryan” she interjects.

“Not something to risk our careers over” he scolds.

“Well, yours or whoever’s” she answers defiantly.

“I followed up on it and fed the coordinates we discussed into the LC13.”

“Sara” he says, already capitulating.

“I’m getting some positive data reads and I think you are gonna want to see them” she taunts, knowing his curious nature.

“Twenty minutes, ok?” Ryan asks.

“Make it thirty and take a shower” she responds, playfully.

2

Brushing the grime from his hands, Ryan opens the backdoor and places his phone on the counter.

Stripping off his muddy clothing, he makes his way through the kitchen to the bathroom.

The strong odor of bleach assaults his senses as he enters.

“The cleaning lady was here this morning” he reminds himself.

The smell is hauntingly familiar and conjures up memories from his childhood.

“Ms. Drosen” he thinks, as his mind wanders back to that lonely place, from so long ago.

To the bathroom of the home he spent his early days.

The “prison” he recalls to himself.

“That’s what Barry and I called it.”

Barry and Ryan were just two of the seven adolescents sheltered in the home.

The ages of the group ranged from three to ten years.

Each child was fed, washed and housed there. None were ever loved, only tolerated for the state funds their physical being brought to the old woman of the home.

The state may have been paying their way but the children were still expected to earn their keep. Ryan and the other children were each given chores when not attending school. Each worked hard from morning till night.

Ms. Drosen, the matron of the home and stand-in caregiver, was old and bent but far from frail.

Whenever she felt that the children crossed her, she would beat them until she tired.

Running a finger over the scar on his shoulder, he winces as he thinks bitterly about the whippings he endured at her aged hands.

“Ms. Drosen was a wicked woman, without an ounce of compassion and seemed to delight in our pain” he recalls.

From the day he arrived, Ryan’s assigned job was to make sure the household bathrooms were clean.

The old home they occupied had two small bathrooms, one on the main floor and another on the second floor, back beyond the bedrooms.

Every morning he was given a bucket of bleach and a rag and with them he scrubbed the toilets and showers until they shined.

He didn’t mind cleaning the main floor bathroom, but was fearful of the upstairs facility.

The cold tiled room was used for a secretive and vile purpose.

It was there that Ms. Drosen meted out the children’s physical punishments.

“Scream all you want she would taunt, no one can hear you through these thick walls” he recollects.

Early in his stay, Ryan fell victim to many of Ms. Drosen’s wrath filled whippings.

Through the beatings he learned to stay quiet and out of sight whenever possible.

Barry, Ryan’s roommate, unfortunately was not so lucky. He took the full brunt of Ms. Drosen’s anger most days.

“Poor bastard” Ryan thinks, pulling back his shower curtain.

From what he can recall of those early times, Barry and he had arrived at the home on the same day. The boys were both three years of age and shared many interests.

They slept in the same room on the ground floor of the Drosen home and became fast friends.

Barry was a quiet child and occasionally suffered from fits.

The outbursts, at first, frightened Ryan but as he grew older, he learned to sympathize and even help Barry through them.

The fits would come on like a rainstorm, slow at first but always leading to a larger tempest.

Murmuring sounds and incomprehensible words were the hallmarks of the beginning of one of his episodes.

Barry would whisper to himself as he drummed his fingers on the sides of his jaw. He would rock his body back and forth shifting his weight from one foot to the other. Moans coming from deep inside himself would erupt into intense shrieking. He would grasp at the sides of his head, trying to contain the pain, pulling his hair and gnashing his teeth.

As Ryan matured he learned that Barry's suffering could be managed and that the fits would quickly dissipate if he were shown even the smallest amount of compassion.

Ms. Drosen had nary an ounce of tenderness and instead would storm into the room, snatch Barry by the arm and drag him up the stairs to the small bathroom.

There he would stay for hours at a time, locked in the cramped space with nothing to do but to roll on the cold floor and scream until he tired himself out.

Ms. Drosen would often return later in the evening and beat him with the leather strap she kept hanging in the hall closet.

The strap's sharp edges easily cut into his young skin, leaving blood spatter over the white porcelain tiles.

She would insult him, calling him crazy, evil, the devil. She would beat him until she was exhausted.

Later, he would be sent to bed, bandaged by the same hands that wreaked the terrible traumas all over his body.

The following mornings, Ryan would be tasked to clean up the bloody aftermath.

Upon Barry's return on many of those evenings, Ryan recalls how he and Barry would whisper to each other. He would assure Barry that one day they would escape and through tears, Barry would struggle to answer, usually mumbling some sort of affirmative.

Other times he questioned Ryan about the fits themselves, as though he was not present during them and had simply disappeared.

“We were lost” Ryan thinks to himself.

Catching his profile in the mirror Ryan is brought back to the present. He runs his hands through his dirty blonde hair and looks over his six foot tall middle-aged body.

“Still in good shape” he thinks to himself.

“But my eyes betray an aged weariness” he laments.

Gripping the sides of the sink, he presses his head against the mirror, looking closely into the pupils of his brown eyes.

He stares past them to the blurry edges of reality.

Sighing, he steps back and turns on the shower waiting for the water to warm.

He steps in.

Washing himself slowly, he lets all the soil and sweat drip from his hands and neck into the drain.

Only partially aware of the present, his mind still catching up, letting go of the sadness and regret he feels for that small child from so many years ago.

“Sara” Ryan reminds himself.

“I gotta get going if I’m to meet with her.”

Moving quicker, he rinses his hair and steps out of the shower.

“It was good to hear the hope and excitement in her voice after so many months of tending to her father” he ponders as he towels off.

Ryan had been concerned as of late that Sara had accepted her dad’s failing health as her sole responsibility and seemed determined to lose herself in his death.

It pleased Ryan immensely that the pursuit of his theory being put into practice seemed to have awoken some of her passion.

While dressing he whistles a favorite tune, thoughts of Barry and Ms. Drosen filed away for another time.

3

A tall silver building pierces the blue sky and the shimmering sun-soaked steel cast light patterns on the surrounding parking lot

Ryan shades his eyes against the intensity of the reflected light as he enters the building.

The metal clamps on his bicycle shoes emit an audible click as he makes his way down the marble hallway.

He wheels his bicycle past the security desk and nods toward the guard in greeting.

The bicycle's rubber tires squeak as he rounds the corner towards the elevator bank.

The elevator doors are open and he walks on.

As the doors close behind him, he presses the button for the eleventh floor.

“Ding” the elevator chimes as it counts off each floor in passing.

At the eleventh, the elevator car stops and Ryan steps out into the reception area.

He winks at the receptionist.

She rolls her eyes in response.

The silence of the elevator is quickly banished by the beeps, clicks and mumbled conversations of the his lively work space.

Ryan, dressed in bicycle shorts, stealthily guides his bicycle between office cubes, winding his way towards his lab.

“Randall’s looking for you” a voice informs him as passes one of the cubicles.

“Shhh” he answers.

He picks up the pace and keeps his head low.

Randall spots him and calls out before he can make it into his office.

“Wexler, lose the bike and get your ass over to the conference room”
he commands.

“Your partner and I have been waiting.”

Lifting his head above the cube wall, Ryan greets Randall with a taunt.

“Dr. Wexler, if you please.”

Randall’s eyes flash with anger.

“Getting on my last nerve Wexler” Randall warns.

Ryan laughs to himself as he parks his bicycle in the lab, knowing full well that he’s poking the bear.

“It is just too much fun to resist” he thinks, as he changes his clothes.

Randall, his boss, is the president of a very large front company running cover for the military.

It was recently selected by the government to oversee an expansive satellite program.

Being that Randall is neither military nor a scientist, he is under constant stress to deliver a product he has no control over.

He relies on Ryan and his team to show results and in some respects is at their mercy.

“I’m being paid to keep a bunch infants with big brains in line and on budget” he rants at an employee in another cube.

Ryan cocks his head as he listens to Randall’s tirade, knowing it’s all for show.

“Feeling the need to talk loud, and spew profanity to intimidate anyone who might question your methods makes absolutely no sense” he thinks.

“But the man does get results” he marvels.

Making his way to the conference room he waves to a group of fellow employees as they pass in the hall.

“Randall sounds cheery” a woman teases.

Ryan puts a finger gun to his head as he opens the conference room door.

“Sorry I’m late” he greets everyone, apologizing to the room.

Sara smiles at him as he enters.

Kellan, another of Ryan’s protégés, sits next to her.

He nods a hello in Ryan’s direction and falls back into his work on his laptop.

Randall enters the room behind him and slams the door in his usually loud fashion.

Pulling out a chair, Randall plops down into it, causing his legs and feet to bounce up and rests them with a thump on the table.

Ryan quietly slides out a chair and takes a seat across from Randall, giving him his full attention.

“Why the fuck... Doctor Wexler,” Randall starts, mockingly “do you have MY employee working on your bullshit theory?” he asks.

Ryan opens his mouth to address the question when Randall cuts him off to ask another.

“Why the fuck do we have a billion dollar satellite moving on a non-planned path based on this same bullshit theory?”

Ryan raises a finger to calmly address Randall’s concerns.

“It’s not bullshit” he answers confidently, pausing momentarily to allow Randall a retort.

When one fails to appear he continues.

“It ‘s something I have been toying with for awhile. A theory in which I was not ready to act ...” he pauses and looks in Sara’s direction.

Sara, sensing all eyes are now on her, picks up the conversation.

“I took it upon myself to enter Doctor Wexler’s numbers into the satellite’s navigation guide” she starts.

“It’s a solid theory and I was anxious to back it up with some hard data.”

Looking from Ryan to Randall she continues.

“Besides, the satellite is due for a data flush this Sunday and I thought we could use the days in between to try Dr. Wexler’s idea without any consequences.”

“I appreciate your faith in me Sara” Ryan interrupts.

“May I take it from here?” he asks.

Randall nods in Sara’s direction.

“Let her finish” he insists.

“Well” she starts and stands, smoothing the wrinkles from her skirt.

“Doctor Wexler and I had discussed some calculations.”

Spinning her computer around, she points out the code on the screen.

“It made a lot of sense and seemed simple to prove. I had the time and an opportune satellite, so I took a shot” Sara concludes.

She looks to Ryan as she takes her seat.

“She took a shot” Randall mutters to himself and turns in his chair.

“Why did...” he begins, before Kellan interrupts.

“I’m getting some interesting readings from the re-positioned lite” he informs the room excitedly.

“Is the satellite in any danger of malfunctioning?” Randall inquires, rubbing his eyes in exasperation.

“Boss?” Kellan asks.

“Is there any irreparable damage?” he explains, looking at Kellan.

Kellan inputs a call code to the satellite.

“Everything is functioning within the normal range” he reports.

“All right” Randall answers.

“Leave it where it has been positioned for the moment, and record the readings.”

He turns his attention back to Sara.

“Please continue Doctor Higgins” Randall prompts.

“Well” she starts cautiously, unsure of how to break down the theory into layman’s terms.

“The idea is a simple collapsing of the X,Y,and Z dimensional axes and twisting them so that are facing inward” she says, demonstrating with her hands.

“Are you following?” she asks.

Randall nods unconvincingly.

“We then direct the satellite to look for what is left on the periphery of the new direction in which they point” Sara explains eagerly.

Randall appears confused.

“We’re losing him” Ryan thinks.

Walking to the dry erase board, he grabs a marker and writes the word “FLATLAND” across its length.

He coughs to gain the rooms attention.

Randall turns in his chair to face the board.

“Flatland” Ryan announces.

“What the fuck does flatland mean?” Randall asks looking at the words on the board.

“It’s the title of a novella written in the late 1800s” Kellan interjects.

Randall turns to Kellan and gives him a dirty look.

“I was asking Wexler” Randall scolds.

“Yes sir” Kellan answers.

He abruptly stops talking and turns his attention back to his computer.

Ryan takes this as a signal to continue.

“Randall, I appreciate your desire to cut through all the scientific jargon and get right to the point” he starts, saving Randall from embarrassment.

“Flatland is a novella as Kellan correctly pointed out a moment ago” he answers, nodding towards Kellan.

“It’s a wonderful story of a community of people. Things. Shapes actually, that live in a two dimensional world. They cannot see above or below themselves and so are unwilling to believe that a possible third dimension exists.”

Seeing that he has Randall’s attention he continues.

“That is until one day a citizen of this 2D world gains the enlightenment he needs to accept that a third dimension could and does exist.”

He points to Randall.

“It is at that moment he is greeted by a sphere who escorts him into the third dimension.”

“Go on” Randall says.

“The story continues as our hero, the flat shape from flatland takes this radicalized thinking even further. He posits to his hosts that there may be a fourth and even a fifth dimension” Ryan says as he writes a numeral four and five on the dry erase board.

“And that, Randall is where we pick up the fictional story and turn it into a non-fiction reality.”

Ryan takes a step towards Randall and lowers his voice.

“I found... what I believe... to be the formula to prove that little shape correct.”

Randall looks from the white board to Ryan.

“Bullshit” he blurts.

“Bullshit?” Sara spits, not believing her ears.

“You’ve just been told about a world altering dimensional discovery.”

Her face is flush with exasperation.

“Our satellite, right now, is picking up foreign transmissions never discovered before, and all you can say is...”

Kellan cuts her off.

“We are receiving some interesting pings, boss.”

“Static, noise, interference from other satellites in the area.”

“That’s all it is” Randall insists, dismissing Ryan’s theory.

Not willing to give up so easily, Ryan interjects.

“You may be right” he agrees.

“But Sara has already configured the satellite with my coordinates, and the data flush is still happening in two days.”

Randall leans back in his chair.

“It is a lot to accept, I realize” Ryan admits.

“Call it a hunch or whatever, but think about the possibilities if I’m correct.”

“Think about the fortunes that could be made.”

Randall smiles at the mention of money.

“You’d be in on the ground floor to exploit that” Ryan assures him.

Randall, now standing, rubs his hands together in excitement.

“I’ll give you till midnight tomorrow to show me something” he says as walks towards the door.

“Otherwise the satellite goes back online.”

As he opens the door to leave, the quiet conference room is suddenly flooded with the loud sounds of office activity.

Randall walks out.

Sara walks to the door and closes it.

The quiet is restored.

Sara and Ryan smile at each other and let out a sigh.

Kellan coughs to get their attention.

“About these readings?” he asks.

4

Kellan nervously tugs on his blonde beard, anxious to know more. He stretches his his long arms, covered in tattoos, over his head in an attempt to relieve some stress.

Having been recently added to Ryan's team per his request he is unsure of his role and if he is overstepping his bounds.

"What do you want to know?" Ryan asks.

Kellan looks from Ryan to Sara and back to Ryan.

"Guys, its me Kellan, level with me and don't give me that flatland jive."

"What are you really after?" he asks.

"Honestly, It's no more or less than what Ryan has already explained to Randall" Sara answers.

“But if you want to get more technical. Check out the satellite program I wrote to maneuver the LC13 into it’s current position” she adds.

She slides her laptop over to him.

“Fantastic” Kellan compliments, after studying data on the screen.

Turning his attention back to Ryan.

“So you came up with this theory and these coordinates out of the blue?” he questions.

“And Sara wrote this funky program turning the LC13 into a virtual pretzel of sensors?”

They nod an affirmation.

Casting his eyes downward, he leans back in his chair, looking forlorn.

“What do I get to contribute?” he ponders out loud.

“Kellan” Ryan starts, stumbling upon the realization that his friend’s feelings are truly hurt.

“You get to do the hardest, most dangerous part.”

He pauses for effect before continuing.

“I need you to follow the lite, process the data and most importantly keep Randall off my ass.”

The mood in the room lightens considerably as Sara, Kellan and Ryan share a laugh at Randall’s expense.

As the laughter subsides, Sara poses a question of her own.

“Kellan, why are you’re such a kiss ass to Randall?” she teases, nudging him.

“Right boss. Yes sir.” She mimics.

“Sara, my dear” he answers sweetly.

“That lovely man signs my paycheck” he answers, mockingly holding his hands over his heart.

“Until I complete my vinyl collection and build my retirement beach pad” he continues.

“Show me any ass of authority and I’ll kiss it.”

Ryan chuckles at Kellan’s admission as he studies the data on Sara’s laptop.

“Yep, that’s it, the LC13’s current position should yield some interesting data” he confirms to himself.

Walking back to the dry erase board he draws a long line.

“But how to make sense of all that information is the bigger question” he poses to the room.

“I’ll need to follow the information stream to its origin, then find a window, a door... a hole of some kind?”

Drawing a circle on the board to emphasize this point.

“To what end?” Kellan interrupts.

“Ultimately the plan is to enter that other dimension, take a look around and find my way back out.”

Tapping the board with the marker, he adds “then and only then will I count this theory a proven success.”

“Heavy” Kellan sighs.

“But I’m in for the ride.”

Ryan points to him with the marker “glad to have you on board” he says welcoming him warmly.

“But how can you be sure the data we are picking up is coming from an origin outside of our own dimension?” Kellan inquires.

Sara interjects.

“Well that’s the theory I based my satellite program on.”

“I’ve cancelled all outside receptor functions on the satellite.”

“Focused the internal sensors in on themselves” she continues.

“There should be nothing, not even static readings.”

She points to the spike in the data graph on her laptop screen.

“But there’s the proof” she answers excitedly.

Walking around the table she continues.

“I believe this is the first solid brick of proof on the path to this other dimension.”

“Very inspiring Sara” Ryan quips, giving her a golf clap.

Sara blushes and stammers.

“Well you get my meaning.”

“We do, and seriously, I am so grateful that you took it upon yourself to create this program.”

Ryan walks closer to Sara.

“But you really shouldn’t take so much time away from your father.”

Sara frowns at the mention of her father.

Sensing he has brought up a sore subject, Ryan changes tactics.

“I thank you all the same, for believing in me.”

“It means a lot” he says, squeezing her arm.

The room grows quiet.

Ryan clears his throat and takes a seat.

“I’ll need some time on my own to acclimate to this program of yours” he admits, sliding Sara’s computer over to himself.

“I’ll need to understand everything if I’m ever to use this as my guide to the other side.”

“I’ll leave you to it” Sara answers, grabbing her bag and walking to the door.

Kellan is quick to follow and opens the door for her.

Sara steps through and Kellan closes it behind her.

“Just a few more questions, ok Ry” he asks, turning to Ryan.

“Shoot” Ryan answers.

“Why?” he starts.

“Why look for another dimension?”

“What do you plan to do with this information and how do you know that once you find and enter this other dimension, you’ll even be able to come back?”

“Simple” Ryan states as he leans back in his chair.

“Quantum mechanics.”

Seeing the confusion in Kellan’s eyes, Ryan conducts a quick search in the web browser on Sara’s laptop, and pulls up a recently added video.

Turning the laptop around for Kellan to see, he presses play.

“Sub-atomic particles can travel from point A to point B without the in-between commute being visible in our dimension” a voice narrates as the graphics on the screen move.

“It has been strongly theorized that the in-between travel must have occurred elsewhere, a high probability points to a dimension we are not yet aware of” the narrator continues.

Stopping the video, Ryan looks up at Kellan.

“I believe the theory to be true, and I want to see it for myself” Ryan adds.

“Once it has been proven, imagine the opportunities that this will open up for the human consciousness, the physical world, Life as we know it.”

Kellan pushes the hair out of his eyes and exhales deeply.

“That’s a tall order” he observes.

“Every big idea starts small Kellan” Ryan reminds him.

“Someone just has to push the first domino.”

Ryan stands up and escorts Kellan to the conference room door.

“I know its a lot to take in, and I also know I can trust you.” he says, reassuringly patting Kellan on the back and seeing him out.

5

Ryan, the last to leave the office, locks up for the night and takes the elevator to the first floor.

Rolling his bike out the back door, he waits to hear the click as the door locks behind him.

Looking up, he sees the sky is a dark purple, much like any other summer night at dusk.

The evening air feels warm.

Mounting his bicycle, he pedals out of the parking lot, his gears squeaking with every turn.

Looking down, he can see rust flaking off the chain.

“Gotta remember to pick up some oil” he thinks to himself as he turns onto the street.

A car passes uncomfortably close and swerves to avoid him.

“Get off the road” the group in the auto yell as they pass into the night.

“That could have been bad” Ryan thinks, momentarily shaken.

He pedals on, his mind elsewhere, wading through the days events.

His dimensional theory and his discussion with Randall are foremost in his thoughts.

“Loud but productive” he congratulates himself.

He is surprised when his phone begins to ring, interrupting his melancholy.

Moving off to the side of the road he stands tip-toe, struggling to simultaneously pull the phone from his pocket and balance his bicycle.

Flipping the phone over in his hand he sees the number on the screen is unlisted.

He pauses, tempted to ignore it but instead decides to answer.

“Hello” Ryan answers, perturbed at the intrusion of his peaceful bike ride.

“Ryan” a raspy male voice responds.

“It’s been a very long time.”

Before he has time to inquire to whom he is speaking with, the voice continues.

“Got to be careful riding in traffic, that car nearly ran you down.”

“What a shame it would be if we didn’t have a chance to chat” the voice adds.

“Chat?” Ryan asks, turning his head to look behind himself.

“Are you watching me?” he inquires.

“Where exactly are you?”

Greeted with an uncomfortable silence, he fills it with another question.

“Who are you?”

“I am a person who desperately needs to speak with you” the mysterious voice answers.

“I’ve been following you since earlier this morning, waiting for a chance to catch you alone” he continues.

“The park to your left is the perfect spot for a meeting, if you have a moment to spare?”

“Well how can I resist? I’ll peddle my way over right now” Ryan responds mockingly.

“Is this a joke?” he thinks to himself.

“It has to be Kellan” he concludes.

“Must have seen me leave the office and now he’s pulling my chain.”

Ryan ends the call and slides his phone back into his pocket to continue the ride.

“Still upset I didn’t share my theory with him earlier” he laments, as he pedals past the park.

A tall silhouette of a man’s figure is standing at the edge of the park.

A street light shines just behind him, masking any physical detail.

“That’s not Kellan” he thinks as he slows his peddling.

Passing close he can hear as the man calls his name.

“Ryan, stop.”

Shocked, Ryan slows to a stop at the curb edge.

The strange man makes a joke as he makes his towards Ryan.

“Thought I was gonna have to break into a run to catch you.”

Hitching his bag’s strap higher on his shoulder, Ryan waits on the man.

“May I help you?” Ryan asks, when the man is standing directly in front of him.

The man, tall with white hair, appears to be in his seventies.

He extends a well-manicured hand.

“My first tip for you my boy is to be a little more cautious,” he warns.

“You mustn’t go around talking to every stranger who requests an audience with you” he chuckles.

“I’ll keep that in mind” Ryan says as he puts a foot back onto the bicycle pedal, preparing to move on.

“Hold on” the older man pleads, holding up his hands.

“I’m no stranger.”

“My name is Roger” he offers.

“Ryan Stutton” Ryan answers.

“I didn’t catch your last name?” Ryan inquires.

“Just Roger for now” the elderly man answers.

“I’m damn glad to see you again” he continues.

“Wish I could say the same, but I’m afraid I don’t know who you are”
Ryan answers, coldly.

“Well come, park your bicycle by the tree over there” Roger suggests.

“We can walk the path a bit and get reacquainted.”

Ryan aware of the time and his desire to be home, begrudgingly follows Roger’s suggestion, his curiosity getting the better of him.

Parking his bicycle under the tree, he walks to meet Roger on the path.

Roger again extends his hand in greeting.

Ryan shakes the man’s hand cautiously, still on guard for the unexpected.

“Wonderful” Roger says, holding Ryan’s hand a bit too long.

Feeling uncomfortable, Ryan forcefully pulls his hand free and unconsciously slides it into his pocket.

Roger, realizing the effect he has had on Ryan, smiles and continues the conversation.

“I’m sure all this is a bit uncomfortable for you.”

“A strange man calling your phone, admitting to following you all day and asking to meet in a park.”

Allowing Ryan some space, Roger takes a few steps back.

“I sorry for acting so familiar” Roger apologizes.

“But that’s just it, I know quite a bit about you” he insists.

“Funny” Ryan mocks.

“I know nothing of you.”

“You soon will” Roger answers confidently.

6

Two men walk down the park path, overhead lamps illuminating their way, casting their shadows long in front of them.

The night sky, dark, only a small fingernail of moon visible in the sea of black.

“What am I doing here?” Ryan thinks

Roger motions towards a bench, inviting Ryan to sit.

Ryan nods in agreement and takes a seat.

Settling in next to him, Roger remains perched nervously on the balls of his feet.

Ryan, feeling uneasy, contemplates dashing off into the night, down the path and back to his bicycle.

Roger breaks the silence.

“I knew your mother” he begins.

“What are you talking about?” Ryan asks.

“Your mother would be proud of you.”

“What do you want from me?” Ryan insists, now irritated.

“Patience” Roger answers.

“You sure you got the right guy?” Ryan persists.

“I didn’t even know my mother and I definitely don’t know you.”

“You’re the right person” Roger assures him.

“And I’m sorry you didn’t get a chance to know her, she loved you very much.”

“I’d prefer to change the subject” Ryan insists, visibly upset.

Roger, putting his hand on Ryan’s shoulder, makes one last appeal.

“I know how you must feel but you don’t know the full story.”

“I have to start with her as that is where you and I first crossed paths” he explains.

Ryan, now on his feet, stands two inches from the strange man’s face. His hands balled into fist, daring the man to continue.

“How could you know how I feel?” he demands, his voice rising with anger.

“Because I was there” Roger answers.

“Were you abandoned on a doorstep in the middle of the night?” Ryan asks.

“Were you betrayed by the one person in the world who is supposed to have an unconditional love for you?”

“Were you left to your own defenses to fend off a monster like Ms. Drosen?”

Roger stares back with sympathetic eyes.

“I know this man’s eyes” Ryan recalls, shocked by the realization.

Astounded by the sudden familiarity, his anger subsides and he stammers with embarrassment.

“Sorry” he mutters “sore subject.”

“Quite alright” Roger assures him.

“We can return to that later” he continues, patting Ryan’s hand as he guides him back to his seat on the bench.

The pair grow quiet for a few minutes, sitting shoulder to shoulder looking at the traffic in the distance, each man in his own thoughts.

“Let me try another way” Roger offers.

Ryan turns his head.

“Go on” he invites.

“If you were to make a trip across the world, and had a limited amount of time in which to do so, would take the fastest mode of transportation possible?” he asks.

“Depends” Ryan answers, being difficult.

Sighing, Roger tries another tact.

“What if you had to reach the roof of a very tall building, again, your time being limited, would you take the elevator or the stairs?” he questions.

“The elevator” Ryan answers impatiently.

“Your point?” he asks, tiring of the games.

“Of course” Roger answers.

“The point” he repeats.

“The point is Ryan, I took the elevator and not the stairs. I also found the fastest route and took that.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Ryan asks, growing impatient.

“It’s getting late” he adds.

“Please listen to me and what I’m about to say with an open mind” Roger qualifies.

Leaning back and looking into the night sky, Roger begins his story.

“Many times and to many people, including you... and to a lesser extent your mother” Roger starts.

“I or should I say WE took part in an experiment to accelerate the human biological development.”

Tilting his head, he looks into Ryan’s eyes.

“Specifically, the development of the human brain” he says, tapping the side of his own head.

Ryan returns his gaze, looking unconvinced.

Roger grimaces as he puts his hands on his knees and pushes down to stand up.

He fishes something from his pocket and hands it to Ryan.

It’s an old photograph.

The photo is a younger Roger holding an infant.

While Ryan studies the photo, Roger resumes his story.

“From birth you were engineered to be a better us.”

Ryan looks up from the photo after recognizing himself as the infant in the snapshot.

Seeing he now has Ryan’s full attention, Roger continues.

“You are the elevator in our world of stairs and have been entrusted with the task of taking humankind further.

“Me?” Ryan asks, flummoxed.

“I fail to see how?”

“The average human life-span is limited,” Roger states, gesturing to his own elderly form.

“An idealistic group, including myself, decided to make some adjustments and modifications to mother-nature’s miracle.”

Making an X in the dirt in front of Ryan with his shoe, he continues.

“The group’s early attempts at immortality failed miserably leaving them mired in frustration.”

“I along with some others were brought in to manage a new plan” he explains.

“The plan was to accelerate the progress and successes one could achieve in an average lifespan.”

Seeing the hunger for more information in Ryan’s stare, Roger proceeds.

“We’ve adjusted many others, some great successes and sadly” lowering his eyes “a few ending in failure.”

“Why don’t I remember any of this?” Ryan wonders.

“In your case it was determined early on that the modifications we attempted had failed” Roger informs him.

Resuming his seat next to Ryan, Roger continues.

“I thought it only right to return you back to society.”

The conversation is interrupted as a man and woman, walking hand in hand, quietly stroll past the bench on which the two men are sitting.

Resuming the conversation once the couple are out of ear-shot, Ryan turns to Roger.

“So I was part of some experiment where you mess with my head?” he asks.

“You sped up what? My learning capabilities? My problem solving skills?” he continues.

“How would this be accomplished? Shots, pills... electricity?” he asks.

“Everything was completed at the molecular level” Roger answers in a clinical tone.

Ryan takes a deep breath.

“I can see you’re struggling with this, but I assure you, I am speaking the truth” Roger affirms.

“The experiment has spawned mathematical geniuses, others...prolific writers, a few accomplished inventors.”

Roger winks at Ryan.

“You my boy, seem to be falling into your own category.”

“I figured as much when you selected celestial communication as your field of study.”

Ryan stands, raising up his hand to indicate he’s heard enough.

“How can you know so much about me while I didn’t know of your existence till earlier this evening?”

Alarmed, he begins to walk backwards away from Roger.

“I was your handler” Roger offers.

“I was assigned to your case even before your birth and have kept tabs on you ever since.”

“Why reach out now” Ryan demands.

“You know why” Roger insists.

“Flatland?” Ryan asks.

“The other subjects from the experiment, would I know of them?” he asks.

“No, but you do know quite a few by the advancements they helped facilitate with their accelerated mental capabilities” Roger confirms.

“This is a lot to take in” Ryan confesses.

“I know” Roger assures him, moving to his side.

“It took mankind less than 50 years to advance from flying a few feet to landing on the moon. The double helix was discovered a little over 55 years ago and the human genome has already been entirely mapped out.”

Ryan shakes his head in disbelief.

“The phone I called you on, can accomplish more than a building full of computers just 60 years ago.”

“What I tell you is all true” Roger assures him.

“I don’t know” Ryan whispers.

Roger slips a small bag into Ryan’s hand.

“All these amazing feats have been accomplished by men and women, with enhanced brain development... just like yours” he says.

“What is this?” Ryan asks holding out the bag.

“A parting gift” Roger says as begins to walk away.

“Wait” Ryan calls after him.

“Where are you going?”

“I have more questions.”

“It’s dangerous for me to be out in public for too long” Roger answers as he continues to move down the path.

“I’ll see you again soon” Roger assures him from over his shoulder.

“Until then, more answers can be found in that bag.”

“Dangerous?” Ryan calls.

“Stay safe” Roger adds.

Ryan opens his hand and studies the bag, wondering what it could hold.

Not willing to open it just yet, he decides to let the gravity of these recent revelations sink in.

He slides the bag into his pocket.

Looking up he realizes he is now alone in the park, a sense of fear creeps over him.

He hurriedly walks the path back to his bicycle.

Pedaling quickly for home, he looks over his shoulder every now and again to assure himself that he is not being followed

7

Arriving home, Ryan walks his bicycle into the backyard.

Still breathing heavy from the ride, he kneels and attempts to lock it to the fence.

He checks over his shoulder twice, his imagination turning shadows into mortal enemies as he struggles with the lock.

His meeting with Roger has him spooked, leaving his nerves raw.

Giving up on the lock, he leaves it to dangle from the fence and slings his backpack over his shoulder.

Climbing the stairs of his back deck he peers into the neighboring yards.

“Quiet” he thinks.

“Safe” he assures himself.

The distant laughter of children breaks the silence, grounding him back to his current reality.

“The Phillip’s must be having another barbeque” he thinks.

Pulling open his backdoor, he drops his backpack just inside and snaps on the light.

He locks the door behind himself and pulls the small bag Roger had given earlier from his pocket before walking up the stairs to his office.

Closing and locking the door behind himself, he drops the small bag onto the desk.

Stepping back, he stands nervously in the middle of the room, his forehead hot, his hands shaking.

Taking a deep breath, he calms himself before stepping forward and picking up the bag.

Gingerly, he tugs at the string that holds it closed until it loosens enough to allow him to peer inside.

He finds a folded piece of paper as well as what appear to be a handful of glass marbles.

Removing the paper, he returns the bag of marbles to the desk.

Unfolding the paper he discovers it 's a note from Roger.

“Ryan, I’m delighted that we finally had the chance to speak face to face, it had been too long. Unfortunately, time is still not on our side, so I will keep this short. The beads in this bag function as human thought recorders. A revolutionary break-through, conceived and designed by one of your fellow test subjects. The Memory Beads, as they are called, are quite simple to use. Locate the glowing blue bead and place it under your tongue. Each bead holds a personal memory of my own that you deserve to witness. Roger.”

Tossing the note aside, Ryan scoops up the small bag and reaches in with two fingers.

He fishes out the blue bead and holds it up to the light.

His hand, still shaking, causes him to drop it.

The memory bead skitters across the floor and out of sight.

“Relax Ryan” he tells himself, as he bends to search for the bead.

Crawling on all fours, searching under the furniture, he contemplates his meeting with Roger.

“Should I trust the man?” he thinks.

A faint blue glow emanates from under the bookshelf.

Reaching his hand into the tight space, he is able extricate the bead.

Getting back to his feet, he blows the dust from it and slides the bead into his pocket.

He decides he needs more time.

Leaving the office, he heads back down the stairs and into the kitchen to pour himself a glass of orange juice.

Dropping onto his couch, he kicks off his shoes and begins rooting through the cushions to locate the stereo remote.

He finds it, leans back into the couch pillows and turns on the receiver.

John Lennon's voice blares from the speakers *"As soon as you're born they make you feel small."*

Draining his glass of orange juice, he places it on the coffee table in front of himself and picks up a Sports Illustrated magazine.

Bobbing his head in time to the music he looks at the pages but is unable to concentrate.

Frustrated he throws it down and turns up the stereo volume.

"And you think you're so clever and classless and free."

Still trying to work through the events of the day he closes his eyes.

"What am I going to do?" he thinks "should I believe him?"

"You have to" his intuition insists.

"Those eyes, the photograph, you know the man."

John Lennon's voice sings out the last lyrics of the song "*If you want to be a hero well just follow me.*"

The melody ends and the room is momentarily quiet before the song starts again.

"As soon as you're born they make you feel small."

There is a knock at the front door.

"Roger?" he wonders out loud.

Turning down the volume he stands.

"Coming" he calls.

Cautiously, he walks to the door, unsure of who it could be.

Opening the door slowly he finds his neighbor, Jim Phillips, standing on the stoop, smiling.

"Hey neighbor" Jim says, leaning into the doorway.

“Thought you might want to come by and celebrate with us.”

“Celebrate?” Ryan questions.

“I got the promotion” Jim informs him, beaming with pride

His brown mustache curling up with his wide smile.

Ryan notices the short burly man is shuffling on his feet, tipsy and off balance.

“Come on in” Ryan offers, directing him to the small loveseat in the foyer.

Congratulating him, he claps him on the back.

“Wow, Jim that’s great, I’m so happy for you and your family.”

“Thanks Ryan” Jim answers, giving him a thumbs up.

“You want some water?” Ryan asks.

“Or should I say Sergeant Phillips?” he continues, teasing him as he reaches out to shake his hand.

“Thanks Ryan, I’m good” Jim answers.

“Sure is a load off my mind” Jim offers up with a sigh.

“You deserve it” Ryan assures him.

“Anyways” Jim starts.

“That’s what we’re celebrating in the backyard.”

“I wish I could stop over but I’m gonna be up all night as it is” Ryan answers.

“I’m up to my eyeballs with work and I’m still trying to process it all.”

“Well, next time I guess” Jim says as he gets to his feet.

Turning to leave he adds “Don’t be a stranger, Dal and the boys would love to see you.”

“Hey Jim” Ryan calls after him.

“Could I ask a favor?”

“Sure, what’s up?” Jim answers.

“Wait here, I need to grab something from my office” Ryan says as he walks to the stairs.

Sitting back down, Jim relaxes and listens to the John Lennon song playing on the stereo.

*“When they’ve tortured and scared you for twenty-odd years
Then they expect you to pick a career
When you can’t really function you’re so full of fear”*

“A friend brought this to my office today” Ryan says interrupting the song as he walks down the stairs.

Jim lifts his head as Ryan holds out the bag.

“A gift of some sort” Ryan says, pulling a bead from the bag.

“I wasn’t sure what they were, but I didn’t want to be rude, so I didn’t ask” he continues.

“Told me to place one of these under my tongue when I got home.”

“Let me see what you got there” Jim asks, holding out his hand.

Ryan pours out a few beads into Jim’s outstretched palm.

“I know you’re in homicide but I thought maybe you could tell me if these are some kind of drug?” Ryan adds.

Jim rolls a bead between his fingers and holds one up to the light.

”Naw” he determines.

“Never seen a drug like this.”

“Did your friend say what was supposed to happen when you put a bead in your mouth?” he asks.

“Just mentioned putting them under my tongue” Ryan answers.

“Must be a type of exotic candy” he dismisses, reconsidering involving the detective.

“He just got back from a trip overseas.”

“I’d confirm with him what exactly they are before you take one” Jim suggests

“I’m just glad they aren’t a type of drug” Ryan jokes, nervously taking back the beads from Jim.

The Lennon song ends, and starts again.

“As soon as you’re born they make you feel small.”

“Is this the same song that played a moment ago?” Jim asks.

“Yeah” Ryan confesses “I’ve got it on a loop.”

“Popped into my head about a month ago and I can’t stop listening to it.”

“Sad song” Jim adds.

“It centers me, soothes my nerves” Ryan explains.

“Just what I need, to help in my focus on the huge project I mentioned mentioned.”

“And you think you’re so clever” the song plays in the background.

Jim gives Ryan a quizzical look.

“Ok Ryan.”

Standing to leave he adds “I expect you at the next barbeque.”

Jim pats Ryan on the back.

Ryan escorts Jim to the door.

“Have a great night” Ryan says in parting.

“And again, a big congrats.”

“Sorry I couldn’t be more help with your beads” Jim apologizes.

“Nonsense” Ryan says with a wave of his hand.

“Ill find out what they are tomorrow.”

As he closes the door behind Jim, Ryan’s easy smile falls into a serious scowl.

Locking the door, he walks back up the stairs to his office, the bag of memory beads grasped tightly in his fist.

8

Back upstairs in his office, Ryan sits at his desk studying the data on his computer screen.

With the limited information garnered from Roger earlier in the evening, he attempts a web search, looking for any additional information he can gather about the memory beads.

Absent-mindedly he spins the blue bead on the desktop with his left hand as he searches.

“Nothing” he says out loud, frustrated by the fruitless search.

“It’s getting late” he thinks.

Looking at the time in the corner of the computer, he sees that it is past midnight.

Making a rash decision, he breathes deep, opens his mouth and places the bead under his tongue.

He squints his eyes in anticipation.

After a few moments he re-opens his them, disappointed.

“What did I expect” he wonders.

A burst of colors suddenly flashes before his eyes and in a panic he attempts to stand.

Feeling his legs give out, he falls back into the chair.

“What is this?” he wonders, his fear growing.

A white haze clouds his vision and the sense of floating envelops him.

The white haze clears and a strange room comes into focus.

Roger is there looking directly at him.

“Welcome to my thoughts, my boy” Roger says, sweeping his arms wide, in a friendly manner.

“Please, don’t be alarmed” he continues with a look of compassion in his eyes.

“I assure you that you are still physically wherever you were when you placed this memory bead under your tongue.”

“Quite an achievement...hmm?” he crows proudly.

“The beads in your bag, the one currently in your mouth, are a type of recording device.”

“All the beads have the ability to record any thought that I or anyone in possession of said bead chooses to record.”

“Simply placing one of these beads between your thumb and forefinger, squeezing ever so slightly against your forehead” he narrates as he demonstrates.

“Gives the user the ability to capture any thought of their choosing.”

“This information is for you only” he warns, pointing in Ryan’s direction.

“Once you’ve watched the information I have recorded on each bead it will self erase” he says, snapping his fingers to emphasis the point.

“The bead at that point is useless, it can neither play back what you have seen nor can it record anything further. It becomes nothing more than a piece of glass.”

Roger leans forward.

“The thoughts I share with you on these beads are of the utmost import, pay very close attention” he advises.

“Look at every detail with a very wide eye” he continues.

“Commit the details to your own memory so that you may learn as much as possible in your quest for answers.”

Roger eases himself into a chair of his own, in the room in which he recorded these thoughts.

He smiles, his lips forming an impish grin as he looks in Ryan’s direction.

“The beads can record any thought from a person’s entire existence. The audience of one has a front row seat to the authors selected experiences from his or her own life.”

Roger folds his hands in his lap.

“Ryan, I will not be telling stories of the past, I will be sharing ‘my past,’ and to an extent your past with you.”

“You will live ten crucial moments of my personal history that have relevance to you.”

Roger looks over his shoulder at something unseen momentarily before turning back to his audience.

“Ten moments, plus one bead of explanation, leaving the remaining bead, number twelve, the red one, as a guide to your next steps.”

“It will further instruct you on the use of these beads as well as lead you to a stash of beads that you may put to your own use as you see fit.”

“Forgive me for what you are about to see” Roger whispers.

“I was young and idealistic.”

“We all were” he offers.

“We wanted to make the world a better place” he explains.

“To some extent I think we have but I realize now that in our quest for greatness we lost a bit of our humanity” he concedes.

“We ruined lives, including your mother’s in the process” he sighs.

“I can’t change history, I can only hope that as you stand witness, you will not turn away but will exploit your gift so that the pain and sacrifices of the past will not be in vain.”

Roger’s image vanishes but his voice, still audible, continues.

“The beads will light up sequentially so you will know the order in which I want this narration to unfold.”

The sense of falling comes quick as the memory ends and Ryan awakens from his trance.

His heart races and his shirt is heavy and cold with sweat.

He holds his head in his hands for a moment to adjust back to his current reality before pulling his hands down his face and spitting the used bead into his palm.

Grabbing the small bag from the desktop he closes it and stands.

Feeling hungry, he unlocks the office door and walks down the stairs and back into his kitchen.

Glancing at the clock on his microwave he notes it is 1:00 am.

Rummaging around in the refrigerator drawers he finds a bag of carrots and removes a few.

Standing over his sink he absent-mindedly chews on a carrot, replaying the events of the past 24 hours.

“Hours ago I was excited about the prospect of unveiling the unknown to the world, reaching the outer limits of reality but now it feels small in comparison with Roger’s revelations.”

“I’m popping the next bead” he decides.

Finishing off the carrots he re-opens the refrigerator and pulls out the orange juice container.

Taking a long swig, he finishes off the juice and throws the carton in the sink.

Turning off the radio and lights he settles onto the couch and slides the next blue bead under his tongue.

“Here we go” he says, as a spectrum of colors flash before his eyes.

9

Floating in the cold, oxygen-deprived black mass of space, a hunk of metal the size of a small train engine floats by.

It's golden winged solar panels unfurl to absorb another day of sunshine and gamma rays. Mechanical movements erupt as the internal guidance computers adjust the pitch and yaw of the directional rudders, correcting it's orbit.

The exterior of this high-tech monument to mankind's intelligence is covered in black and gray metals.

The hull, thicker than an Abrams tank is impenetrable to the destructive forces of space. A harsh environment where even the smallest micron of debris, traveling at tremendous speed can strike; leaving destruction in it's wake.

As the satellite rolls and moves into it's corrected orbiting path, it's nations colors and call name come into view.

“The United States of America, Lewis & Clark 13.”

Aptly named for the two brave explorers, who dared tread the regions of North America, the English-speaking world had yet to conquer.

The interior of this very expensive hot rod is a wonderment of white glass, burnished steel and diamond polished mirrors, finely tuned to search out of the deepest corners of space.

State-of-the art computers collect and digest the data fed to it by ever-searching electric eyes as they scan the vastness.

The LC13, slotted for updates, has been commandeered by Ryan and his team per Randall’s speculative approval.

It no longer searches outward towards the horizons, instead focusing it’s attention inward, towards home.

With the patience and precision only a computer can guarantee it gathers it’s findings and sends the resulting data back to a supercomputer located on earth.

The supercomputer, currently covered in pizza boxes and chinese take-out cartons is housed in the same office as Kellan Fosters.

“A guy on your left” Kellan says, speaking into the microphone on his headset.

Leaning back in his chair, feet on the edge of his desk, eating some cold Chinese takeout, Kellan engages in a first person battle game on his laptop.

Duck sauce drips from the greasy bottom of the carton and pools in his lap.

A computer alarm sounds as a new transmission comes in from the Lewis and Clark.

Kellan, pushing his headphones tighter onto his ears, turns up the volume of his video game, attempting to ignore the alert.

“One minute, LC!” he shouts, wrapped up in a fierce online battle.

“If I check out now I’m toast.”

“That’s fucking right asshole!” a voice shouts into Kellan’s ear.

“Fuck you Reese, just finish this campaign so I can get back to work”
Kellan answers.

“Up top” he warns.

“Shit” Reese exclaims.

“Got him.”

“Thanks for the heads up.”

“Moving in...” Kellan tells Reese.

Another alarm from the LC13 interrupts his game play.

“Oh for fucks sake!” he says, unable to ignore the alerts any longer.

“Reese I’m gonna have to punch out.”

“You can’t, we’re almost....” Reese’s voice fades as Kellan removes his headset.

He throws headphones on the desk.

Frustrated, he closes the game on his laptop, and launches the satellite monitoring program.

Tired, he rubs his eyes as he reviews the latest transmissions.

“C’mon, what the hell is this” he says under his breath.

Confused, he pulls up a data file from earlier in the day and compares the two.

“This data makes no sense” he concludes.

Arching his back to work out the kinks, he lifts his hands above his head and cracks his knuckles.

Shaking his head, he re-focuses on the computer screen.

“Alright LC what’s the problem?” he asks, taking another fork full of rice.

His lips, slowly moving as he reads the data on the screen, doing mental calculations as he opens a third set of collected data.

“Holy shit” he exclaims, dropping his fork and reaching behind his back to turn on the printer.

Randall had warned him earlier in the day about sharing anything electronically and suggested he print out any findings of significance.

Impatient, he scolds the printer.

“C’mon already.”

Snatching the prints off the printer, he runs out of the lab to find Randall, slipping on duck sauce as he goes.

The door swings shut behind him.

“Randall” he yells through the empty office.

“Randall you have to see this” he calls, looking over the cubicle walls in passing.

“Where the fuck are you?”

The office is quiet, being that it is after hours and everyone but Randall and Kellan have left for the day.

Racing to the kitchen, he pushes hard on the door, almost knocking Randall over in the process.

“What the hell” Randall says, holding an upturned plate.

He brushes chips and cheese from his shirt.

“Randall” Kellan stammers excitedly shoving the printed sheets into Randall’s hands.

“Check out the latest numbers from the LC13.”

“It’s as big as a city!” he exclaims, rubbing his hands together excitedly.

Randall studies the sheets for a moment before looking up.

“What the fuck am I looking at? Numbers!” he shouts, throwing the printouts back at Kellan.

“Not the numbers” Kellan answers, exasperated.

“It is what they represent.”

Randall, unimpressed stares back at Kellan.

“Follow me to the conference room?” Kellan suggests, rolling his eyes.

Entering, Randall takes a seat and Kellan walks to the white board.

Quickly drawing a circle and some land masses, Kellan steps aside so Randall can see the board.

“Earth” Randall answers curtly.

Kellan draws an x in the blank area next to the land masses and circles it.

“Water?” Randall guesses impatiently.

“Exactly!” Kellan exclaims.

“The LC13 is picking up transmissions and data coordinates of something the size of a city in this area” Kellan finishes, tapping the x with the marker.

“In the middle of the ocean?” Randall questions in disbelief.

“What ocean is the satellite positioned over?” he asks.

“The Indian ocean” Kellan answers.

“Could it be a naval exercise?” Randall wonders out loud.

“The coordinates, are too large” Kellan answers.

“Besides the mass does not appear to be floating on the water, instead hovering above it, higher in the atmosphere.”

“A glitch then” Randall answers confidently.

“I would tend to agree, but a glitch never repeats precisely in the same manner twice and the data from this morning, this afternoon and just now are a complete match.”

“It’s no glitch,” Kellan states confidently.

Randall stares at the dry erase board as he ponders his next steps.

“Where’s Ryan?” he asks, reaching into his pocket for his phone.

10

A masculine hand grips a leather-covered steering wheel, a Chevy symbol at its center.

Buildings flash by in the automobile's side mirrors as it drives down the street.

Turning left into a parking lot, the car pulls into an empty space.

The hanging gear knob is shifted into park and the ignition is turned off.

Blue eyes are reflected in the rearview mirror.

Next a tongue, running over white teeth.

An audible "click" sounds as the chrome stem of the door lock pops up.

The massive door of the automobile swings open with a creak, and a quick glance around the lot reveals many large cars, models from the early sixties.

Ryan's phone vibrates against the wood of his coffee table in his living room but he pays it no mind. All his senses and attentions, instead, consumed with recorded visions of the past.

He hears the sounds of keys jingling as the car door is locked.

He feels the heft of a briefcase as a hand lifts it from the roof of the car.

Ryan, witness to these surroundings and sensations is unable to alter them.

Sitting on his couch in his home, he can only perform the role of spectator to somebody else's past.

The sound of footsteps click in his ear and the sensation of motion runs through his body as the host he inhabits moves through the lot toward the entrance of a two-story building.

"Hello" a young woman says, smiling as she passes.

A rush to the door, as a hand extends and opens it for the woman.

“After you” a man’s voice insists.

Ryan spies his hosts reflection in the swinging glass door.

It is Roger’s reflection, but in a much younger form.

Walking confidently through the doors, a breeze blows through his host’s chestnut brown hair, it causes Ryan to shiver.

Roger walks straight to the front desk and comes face to face with a smiling receptionist.

“Mr. Fisher?” the receptionist inquires in greeting as he walks up.

Roger nods yes.

“The major will see you momentarily” she assures him.

“Please have a seat” she suggests, motioning to the chairs in the corner.

“No thank you, I’m quite comfortable standing” Roger replies gripping his briefcase tightly.

Ryan notes the buildings interior, dark and cramped, lots of faux wood paneling and pea green carpet.

Dean Martin croons over the PA system.

The entry doors open again as two more men step into the lobby.

Both men wear gray suits, and carry briefcases much like Roger’s.

They look to be in their late-twenties; their hair, shiny with brill cream is combed tightly back.

They nod at Roger who in turn nods a greeting in their direction.

“Agent Dirks and Agent Hatter, It’s been awhile” Roger says with a smile.

Walking towards the duo, he extends his hand in greeting.

Roger leans in close.

“Do you have any idea why the major called us in?” he asks in a hushed tone.

Both men shrug with indifference.

One of the agents, Agent Hatter, pulls out a pack of Winstons from his coat pocket and offers Roger a cigarette.

Accepting it, Roger pulls a gold lighter from his own pocket, lights the cigarette and extends the lit flame to Hatter.

As the agent leans in to light his cigarette, an orange hue highlights his bearded face.

“Some serious top secret shit is what I hear” he whispers to Roger as he blows out a puff of smoke.

A panel behind the receptionist station opens and a man dressed in military garb steps forward.

“Gentlemen, if you’ll follow me” the military officer interrupts, motioning them to the open passage behind himself.

Roger and Hatter stub out their cigarettes and the three men follow the officer through the doorway and into a small room.

The panel behind them closes.

“Thank you for being prompt” the officer says, addressing each man in turn.

“I’m Major Adams.”

“Major” Roger starts “what can you tell us...”

“Questions will have to wait” the major insists.

“Now, If you’ll excuse me” he says reaching his arm behind Agent Dirks.

The military man enters a code into a keypad on the wall.

The floor beneath the group’s feet begins to move and the walls rise up as they descend into the lower levels of the building.

A full minute passes before the floor comes to a stop.

A steel door opens on the wall to their right and they are ushered into a long concrete corridor.

The corridor, studded with many doors is guarded by two serious looking men, also in uniform.

A green light above one of the doors, five stenciled across it's front, blinks on and off.

“Outstanding” the major exclaims.

“They must have the general on the line.”

He salutes the two guards and guides the three agents down the corridor.

“We better get in there before they start the show without us” he prompts, pulling the door open.

The three agents follow the major through the open door of a cavernous conference room.

The room is filled with many gentleman of varying ages.

A mix of military brass and civilians.

All the men sit in high-backed leather chairs encircling a conference table, their attention, directed to a screen hanging from the ceiling.

A man on the screen, dressed in a general's uniform is speaking.

Roger quickly finds a chair and sits down, placing his briefcase next to his feet.

A blue ring of cigarette smoke hangs low in the air, encircling the group.

Overflowing ashtrays, coffee cups and documents cover much of the surface of the conference room table.

“Right then, Operation G Colony is the last issue on the table” the general starts.

“Many of you have already been briefed but for those who have not, I'll give a quick overview.”

Roger bends and opens his briefcase, pulling out a pen and a steno pad.

The major, sitting next to him places his hand on Roger's.

"No notes Agent Fisher" he whispers.

The general on the screen continues.

"The fellows in gene theory have devised a way to enlarge specific sections of the human brain."

Pausing, he lifts up a diagram of the human cerebrum.

"With this extra capacity, we believe the human brain itself will function at optimal efficiency."

Stopping again, he displays a second diagram, this one with the fissure between the two hemispheres of the brain drastically reduced.

"The brain, in theory, will exploit this new found real estate, filling it with more brain cells and synapse, allowing human intelligence to increase exponentially."

A hushed murmur and the scrape of shifting chairs can be heard as the last statement hangs in the air.

“It has also been determined that this brain enlargement has to take place in the embryonic stages of life” the general interjects taking back control of his audience.

“This means we have to recruit expectant parents or more specifically, mothers.”

“Women willing to offer up their children for the greater good of this country” he surmises.

An older man, closer to the front of the room, raises his hand.

“Excuse me general but how exactly are we going to accomplish this?” he asks.

Another man, sitting close to Ryan, interrupts the first “just tell ‘em the truth” he offers.

“It’s for their country.”

“No” the general insists loudly from the screen.

“We can’t reveal the true nature of these experiments until they have been deemed a success.”

“But not to worry” he assures his audience.

“I’ve enlisted the help of another agency to do the recruiting.”

At this point Major Adams stands.

“General” he salutes.

“The three agents are here now” he says, patting Roger’s shoulder.

The man on the screen directs his attention towards Roger and the other two agents sitting in the room.

“Thank you for your help in this matter.”

“I trust that you have been filled in on your mission?” he asks.

The Major is quick to answer for Roger and his two companions.

“They are ready sir.”

“Excellent” the general returns.

“Let me just add that you must be resolute in your ability to convince these women to sign over all their rights.”

“They as well as their offspring will be well compensated for their efforts.”

“This is an extreme....”

The general’s voice fades as well as the room and all the people in it.

The sense of falling comes quick and and Ryan is back in his living room sitting on his couch.

He spits the used bead into his hand.

Looking at the coffee table in front of him, he sees that the next bead is illuminated, beckoning.

Ryan quickly picks it up places it under his tongue.

11

Through the bakery window Ryan can see a young woman sitting at a small table in the corner.

She is drinking coffee and nibbling on a muffin.

A hand, Roger's hand, taps at the glass.

Looking up, she smiles and waves.

Roger waves back as he enters the restaurant.

A bell jingles as he opens the door.

A squat elderly woman comes out from behind the counter to greet him.

Roger waves her off as he walks to the young woman's table.

Struggling with the weight of two, the young pregnant woman does her best to stand.

“Agent Fisher” she says smiling and extending her hand.

Roger grasps her hand in his and in a compassionate voice asks after her health.

“Hannah, how are you coming along?” he inquires.

“It wont be long now, eh?” he says with a wink.

“Any day I hope” She answers, proudly rubbing her belly.

“The doctor says I’ve got about a week till the baby comes.”

“Wonderful” Roger offers.

“I trust you received all the legal forms and the vitamin pills our doctor prescribed?” he continues.

“I have everything with me” she says as she takes her seat again.

“I know it’s quite a lot to ask, especially with everything you’ve been through in the past few months but it is a necessary evil” he offers.

With a sigh he takes a seat across from her.

“Hun” he calls, looking over his shoulder towards the older waitress.

“Coffee, black, thanks.”

Turning back, he smiles at Hannah.

“So, how are you, really?”

“I’d imagine you’re pretty scared, hmm?”

“Is there anything I can say or do to make you feel more at ease?”

Roger inquires.

Hannah’s smile turns to a frown and she hangs her head, softly weeping.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean” Roger starts, struggling to find the right words.

Hannah lifts her head as he stumbles through his apology.

A look of scorn crosses her face.

“Do you really care how I’m doing?”

“Or is this all you want?” she asks pointing to her belly.

Ryan is awed by the beauty of the young woman.

“Reddish amber hair, large blue eyes,”

“She looks to be in her twenties” he estimates.

Pursing her lips with displeasure, she continues to speak in harsh tones.

“Has my family not given enough?” she asks, her eyes glassy.

“My husband believed in giving everything he could for this country.”

Tears fall from her eyes.

“And that’s what was asked of him” she whispers.

“He died in some god forsaken part of Asia and now you want me to hand over our only child?”

“All I want is what is best for you and the baby” Roger assures her.

“It would be unfair of your government to turn its back when your family has sacrificed so much.”

Hannah takes a few quick breaths and wipes the tears from her eyes.

“Forgive me,” she pants.

“I don’t mean to take it out on you, I realize you’re one of the good ones.”

“Pregnancy jitters, that’s all” Roger says, dismissing her suspicions.

“I’m frightened” she confesses.

“Let us give your child the life that no widowed mother ever could” Roger assures her softly.

“Do you really believe this is the right thing for the baby?” She asks, lovingly rubbing her belly.

Roger reaches across the table and puts his hand on her arm.

“I understand your trepidation” he says, squeezing gently.

“I truly admire your strength.”

The old woman returns from behind the counter and sets Roger’s coffee in front of him.

He takes a sip and nods his approval.

“Your husband was a very brave man and because of this, your country is indebted to him and his family” Roger continues.

“That’s why we started this adoption program” he says, leaning in.

A group of men at another table get up to pay their bill.

They slap each other on the back and laugh loudly as they pass Roger and Hannah’s table.

Roger nods in their direction as he takes another sip of his coffee.

Ryan can feel the burn of the hot coffee on his own lips.

The group of men exit the café.

“A woman in your situation” Roger continues.

“A war widow, without a family to turn to” he says looking into her eyes.

“You need help and that’s why I’m here.”

Hannah, still looking down picks at her muffin.

“I assure you that your unborn child will attend the finest schools, his health and well-being will be meticulously structured and supervised.”

Hannah sighs and looks up from her muffin, her eyes still red and puffy from crying.

“Roger, can I truly trust you?” she asks.

“You have nothing to worry about” he promises.

“You’re doing the right thing.”

“I have been so very afraid of what would become of us and how I could give this baby the life he deserves” she says, lost in her own thoughts.

A moment later she finds her strength and addresses Roger directly.

“I promise to sign the legal papers but only if you can guarantee that you will look after my baby personally.”

“Hannah” Roger answers without missing a beat “you have my guarantee that your child will always be under my watchful eye.”

Taking another sip of his coffee, he looks down at his watch.

“Look at the time” he observes.

“I must be off.”

“But I hoped we could talk more of the program, go over the forms?”
Hannah asks.

Standing, Roger places a five dollar bill onto the table and kisses Hannah on the head.

“I’m sorry my dear but the government keeps me hoping.”

“Be sure you’re taking the vitamins” he whispers “they were designed specifically for your little one.”

As Roger walks to the door he looks back.

“I’ll see you at the hospital check-in next week” he calls.

“Be sure to bring the signed legal papers” he reminds her.

Hannah waves as the door close behind him.

He lingers on the sidewalk outside the bakery, watching her through the glass for a moment before walking to his car.

Once in his car, Roger adjusts the review mirror so he can see himself.

He squints his eyes and frowns.

“You’re a lying bastard” he hisses.

The memory ends and Ryan is back in his living room.

12

The room is dark and quiet, except for the melodic beep of a heart monitor.

Muffled voices echo through the hallway.

The sound of footsteps rise and fade as someone passes the closed door.

Sleeping on a small lounge chair in the corner of the room, Sara, her body curled up tightly, shivers.

Unconsciously she tugs on the thin hospital blanket that covers her in an attempt to gather more warmth.

Her father snores softly in his hospital bed next to her.

Her eyes flutter open upon hearing the low hum of her phone vibrating on the end table.

Throwing the blanket aside, she yawns and reaches for it.

“Hello” she whispers as she answers the phone.

“Sara, that you?” Randall asks.

“It’s hard to hear.”

“Let me move into the hall” she suggests.

Quietly, she stands and walks over to her father’s bedside, gently kissing his forehead, before exiting the room.

As she closes the heavy wooden door behind herself, she stands on tiptoes to look in one last time and make sure he’s still asleep.

Out in the hall she raises her hand to shade her eyes as they adjust to the fluorescent lights overhead.

She smiles at the night nurse as she passes the nurses station and continues walking to the end of the corridor.

Putting the phone back to her ear, she continues the conversation.

“Sorry that took so long” she apologizes.

“You still there?” she asks.

“I’m here” Randall confirms.

“Why are you calling so late?” Sara asks.

“Is something wrong?”

“Where are you?” Randall inquires.

And after a pause.

“How do you know there’s something wrong?”

“When else do you call” she huffs.

“I’m at the hospital with my dad.”

“How is he?” Randall inquires.

“He’s hanging in there” she says, stifling a yawn.

“I’m sorry to bother you” he mutters.

“I can’t get a hold of Ryan and I thought you might know where he is.”

“Well, it is late” she answers impatiently.

“So I’m going to guess he’s home in bed, sleeping.”

“Right” Randall agrees.

“He’s not answering his phone and it’s urgent.”

“What’s going on?” Sara inquires.

“Are you still at work?”

“Is Kellan with you?” she asks.

An orderly nods a hello as he passes Sara in the hall.

She smiles.

“Randall?” Sara asks, returning to the conversation.

“What is so important that it can’t wait till the morning?”

“Something with the satellite?” she wonders out loud.

“I’m not sure how to explain” Randall starts, exasperated.

“Kellan has been going on about the satellite discovering a city or something in the middle of the ocean.”

“I thought Ryan might be able to talk with Kellan and make more sense of it.”

“It’s quite a find Sara” she hears Kellan say in the background.

“Put me on speaker” she insists.

“No, sorry, I’ve got someone on the other line” Randall answers, lying.

“Just thought you could help us find our boy.”

“Yeah” Sara answers, insulted by the obvious lie.

“I’ll grab him first thing in the A.M. and ‘WE’ will head over to the office to look at the data” deliberating emphasizing her part in the project.

“Great Sara, talk with you tomorrow” Randall answers apologetically, realizing he’s insulted her.

“And good luck to the old man.”

“Tell Kellan to go home and get some sleep” she continues.

“Be sure that he leaves his notes and his laptop at the office.”

“Thanks again” Randall says.

“What’d she say?” Kellan asks, as Randall throws his phone on the desk.

“She said you’re a moron and should go home and get some sleep” Randall quips.

“No really, is she coming in?” Kellan continues, ignoring Randall’s jibe.

“She said she’ll grab Ryan in the morning and head into the office” he answers.

“She also asked that you leave your notes and laptop.”

Standing to stretch he continues.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here, I’m tired.”

Sara immediately dials Ryan’s number and her call goes to voicemail.

“I’m picking you up at seven and bringing you to the office, so be ready” she instructs.

Hanging up her phone, she walks back to her father’s room.

As she enters the room the bright light of the hallway awakens her father.

“Sara?” he calls out in a dry thin voice.

“Right here dad” she assures him.

“Go back to sleep.”

“You should go home and sleep in your own bed” he says as he turns over.

“That chair has got to be so uncomfortable for you.”

“I’m fine daddy, now rest...please” she whispers.

“I love you Sara” he says as he drifts back to sleep.

“I know” she whispers.

She wraps the blanket around herself and contorts her body to fit into the nook of the small couch.

“Life is too short” she thinks.

Memories of happier times with her father flash through her mind as she drifts off to sleep.

13

The sound of a door knock echoes through the hallway.

Ryan opens his eyes.

He slowly rises from the couch and rubs his jaw.

Grimacing he spits a used memory bead into his hand.

“Must have dozed off” he thinks.

Quickly gathering up the other beads, he drops them back into the small satchel laying on the table in front of him.

Hastily, he places a magazine over the satchel in an effort to conceal it.

“Coming” he mumbles as he stands.

Another knock at the door.

“Coming” he yells, quickly patting down his hair as he shuffles through the hallway towards the door.

“Morning already?” he thinks.

“Last thing I remember was being Roger.”

“Seeing through his eyes... a lab....infants,... doctors... tests, syringes.”

Reaching for the doorknob, he hastily twists and pulls the door open, interrupting Sara mid-knock.

“Good morning” she greets him, handing him a cup of coffee.

Ryan winces at the sound of the birds chirping in the neighborhood trees and motions for Sara to enter.

“Hey Sara, come on, come on in” he mumbles, still half asleep.

Stepping back, he allows her a space to move past him and closes the door behind her.

“It’s nice to see you?” he adds in a confused manner.

“I thought you were staying with your dad for the next few days?”

“That was the plan” she answers.

“Randall called me last night looking for you. And since you couldn’t be reached, I told him I’d make my way here in the morning to check on you.”

“Shit, something wrong with the satellite?” Ryan asks, putting his coffee cup down on the side table, feeling his pockets for his phone.

“No worries” she assures him.

“Sounds like Kellan was attempting to explain some of the satellite data to Randall.”

“Randall figured you could do a better job translating the data to him.”

“I’m sorry that he felt the need to bother you” Ryan answers, feeling guilty.

“I know the time with your father is very important.”

Suddenly, recalling the last location of his phone, he walks to the couch and pulls it from between two cushions.

“Didn’t make it to your bed?” Sara asks.

“Guess I was a bit over-tired last night” he answers, looking down at the phone screen.

“Must have had the ringer off.”

“Happens to the best of us” she offers, taking a sip of her coffee.

“Well, thanks so much for the coffee and the wake up call” he says, retrieving the cup from the table.

“You need to head back to the hospital.”

Sara shakes her head.

“I insist, go be with your dad, its important.”

“Stop” Sara says, holding up here hand.

“I have a plan.”

“A plan” Ryan asks, taking a sip of his coffee.

“I’m going with you to the office and then you are coming with me to visit my father at the hospital” she explains.

“Sara, I...” he starts, choking on the coffee.

“Don’t Sara me...” she interrupts.

“This is my project as much as it is yours” she reminds him.

“I have a vested interest in this theory.”

“My theory” Ryan insists.

“I have a vested interest in YOUR theory” she says making finger quotes.

“I’d like to see the new developments for myself.”

“But” Ryan starts.

Raising her voice she continues.

“And since I was gracious enough to stop by, wake you up, grab you a coffee and offer you a ride, I figure you owe me and can keep me company at the hospital.”

“Alright Sara,” Ryan says, surrendering.

“But shouldn’t this be a private time for you and your dad?” he asks, putting his hand on her shoulder.

“Yes” she admits “but he’d love a visit from you.”

Smiling, she looks up at Ryan.

“It’s been so long since the two of you have spoken.”

“Alright, you’ve convinced me” Ryan says returning her smile.

“Let me just straighten up a bit before we leave.”

Hurriedly he gathers his empty dishes from the night before and puts them in the sink.

“You’ve got time” Sara assures him, taking a seat on the couch.

“I’ll be ready in 15 minutes” he insists as he walks out of the room.

Bored, Sara sighs and picks up a magazine from the coffee table.

Distractedly, she leafs through it from cover to cover.

Putting the magazine to the side, she reaches for another and uncovers the satchel.

“Ryan?” she calls into the hall.

“What’s this bag of...”

She opens it “beads on your table?”

Pulling a clean shirt over his head, Ryan re-enters the living room.

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t hear you?” he apologizes.

“What are these?” she asks holding the open bag of beads out to him.

“Oh, well, ahhh” Ryan struggles to answer, angry with himself for leaving them out.

“Just a gift from a friend” he says, snatching at the bag.

“Right, a gift” she agrees suspiciously, pulling the satchel back.

“But what are they?” she presses.

“A gift” he insists, holding out his hand.

“Why are you being secretive?” she wonders out loud.

Ryan looks at his phone.

“It’s seven AM now” he says, struggling to change the subject.

“Let’s head to the office before anyone arrives, connect to the LC13 and get the latest data reports for ourselves.”

Sara turns and gives him a smirk.

“Alright Ryan, keep your secret” she relents and hands him the satchel.

“Thank you” he answers, sliding the bag into his pocket.

“I asked Kellan to leave his laptop connected overnight” she says as she stands.

“Told him to leave all the data printouts in his office as well.”

“Perfect” Ryan says, complimenting her as they walk to the front door.

“I figure we go in, do a little analysis of the data and break it down for Randall” she continues.

“Hit the road to the hospital around three to visit my dad.”

“Work for you?” she asks.

“Very thorough” Ryan answers playfully as he locks the front door.

14

Gaining access through the back entrance of the office building, Ryan and Sara make their way to the elevator bank.

Ryan uses his key card to by-pass the security alarms.

He and Sarah ride the elevator up to the eleventh floor and step off.

“Kellan’s office first” Sarah reminds him.

She flashes her key pass in front of the electric eye and opens the glass doors to the main reception area.

Following her into the lobby, Ryan reaches behind the reception desk and turns on the office lights.

The duo walk through the maze of cubicles to the back room, Kellan’s office, where the LC13 mainframe is housed.

Kellan’s laptop, resting on the large mainframe station, has been left on as requested.

A wall of code fills the computer screen, continually building line-by-line, steady as a heartbeat.

Pushing aside a greasy pizza box, Ryan takes a seat at Kellan's desk.

"How can anyone be such a slob?" Sara ponders, removing a half-eaten bagel from atop the laptop keyboard.

"C'mon" Ryan chides "he's a kid, cut him some slack."

"He's thirty-five" she retorts.

"Here's the printouts from last night" Ryan says lifting up the stack from the desk.

Wiping her hands on her jeans, Sara walks out into the hall.

"I'm going to get some paper towels from the kitchen, you need anything?" she asks turning to Ryan.

"All good here" Ryan answers distractedly, as he greedily pours over the data printouts from the previous night.

“These numbers are amazing .” he says, looking up to find Sara has left for the kitchen.

Standing, he walks over to the mainframe and watches the code as it continues to grow on the laptop.

He can see his smiling face reflected in the glass of the screen.

Opening the refrigerator, Sara studies the contents before grabbing a plastic bottle of orange juice.

She leans against the counter and takes a large gulp of juice, absent-mindedly pushing the refrigerator door shut with her foot.

“Sara?” Ryan calls.

“In the kitchen” she answers.

Ryan enters, cradling a bundle of printouts in his arms.

“You’ve got to see the numbers from last night” he says, smiling.

“Good news?” she asks, taking some of the papers from his arms.

“The best” he answers, laying the rest of the pile down on the counter.

“Aren’t we optimistic” she concludes, leafing through the printouts.

“It’s a good start” he offers.

“Should be enough to get Randall completely in our corner, maybe even scare up some funding.”

“What’s next” she asks.

“Layout some visual aids for Randall?” he offers, grabbing a juice from the refrigerator.

“Unless you had a different idea?”

“Works for me” she agrees.

“You really think there is enough proof?” she asks as the two head back to Kellan’s office.

“Even if we could get Randall to accept the data, can we convince enough people to get onboard?”

“Absolutely” Ryan answers as he sits down again at Kellan’s desk.

He picks up one Kellan’s trucker hats and places it on his head.

The hat has two springs attached to the sides and at the end of each spring is a green ball that lazily bounces every time he moves.

The patch on the front of the hat reads *‘take me to your leader’*.

“The coordinates in that data read like a terrain map” he explains.

“Granted the satellite positions the location over the Indian Ocean and only appears in a two hour window every twenty-four hours.”

“None the less” Ryan says confidently, giving her a thumbs up.

“It should be enough proof to whet their appetite and ask for more.”

Sara smiles.

“I can’t take you seriously with that hat on your head” she quips.

“It’s my new thinking cap” Ryan jokes.

Turning back to Kellan's laptop he starts the work of isolating the coordinate data.

"Sara I'm gonna overlay the data onto a 3D model" he says.

"Would you create a visual of the key satellite positions?" he asks.

Still smiling, she shakes her head and walks out the door to her office.

"Will do" she calls over her shoulder.

The main office doors open and voices can be heard as the receptionist and a few others arrive to start their day.

"Hey Kellan, you're here early" Bill says as he steps into Kellan's office.

"Hey Bill" Ryan answers.

"Hi Ryan, where's Kellan?"

"Sleeping one off?" he jokes.

"Naw, I'm sure he'll be here soon" Ryan answers.

“I just needed to borrow his machine to get some work completed for Randall.”

“Good luck finding anything in that office” Bill says as he moves on to his own.

More people arrive to start their day and the office becomes increasingly noisier.

Ryan stands to shut the door and as he does so, he catches sight of Randall just getting in.

Ryan picks up the phone and dials Randall’s office.

“Randall here” Randall says into the receiver.

“Randall it’s Ryan, I’m in Kellan’s office.”

“About time you showed” Randall needles.

“Sara and I will need about twenty minutes to prepare” Ryan informs him.

“You got it” Randall responds.

“Where were you last night?”

“Long story, I’ll see you in twenty” Ryan answers and hangs up.

Ryan dials Sara’s office.

“We’ve got twenty minutes” he tells her.

“Think you can have the satellite graphic ready by then?”

“No problem chief” she quips.

Ryan hangs up the phone and reviews his newly constructed 3D map.

His vision blurs and he feels dizzy.

He can hear his heart pounding loudly in his ears and feels the sweat begin to bead on his forehead.

He grips the side of the desk, feeling he may tumble over at any moment.

Stabilizing himself, he concentrates on his breathing and begins to regain his bearings.

“Cool map” Kellan says as he enters the room.

“What” Ryan questions, still dealing with the repercussions of his latest attack.

“The map” Kellan says pointing to the laptop screen.

“Think it will be enough to get through to that blockhead?” he asks.

“Oh Yeah, I’m sure of it” Ryan answers, recovering.

Straightening up, he re-focuses his attention to the screen.

“With the data you collected, I believe we can assuage all of Randall’s fears.”

“Ya think?” Kellan asks.

“Randall will have to let us continue our experiment” Ryan surmises.

Kellan proudly smiles and pulls up a chair next to Ryan.

“Seriously, what do you make of all this?” he asks pointing to the graphics on the screen.

“You really think we’re on to another dimension?”

“I mean, I did filter out all interference, glitches and anything else I could think of, but this is incredible!”

“That’s the plan” Ryan confirms.

Gleefully Kellan drums his fingers on the desk.

“If we can prove this theory of yours we’ll be able to write our own tickets to anywhere!”

Closing the file, Ryan copies it to a flash drive.

“Let’s go see what Sara has for us, hmm” Ryan suggests.

15

In hushed tones, Ryan and Kellan continue their discussion as they walk through the hallway to Sara's office.

Ryan knocks on her office door but does not wait for a response, instead he and Kellan walk right in.

Sara, deep in thought, pays them no mind as she puts the final touches on her part of the presentation.

"Sara" Kellan whispers over her shoulder.

"Hey boys, you want to see what I've got?" she asks without turning from her computer screen.

"I'm sure it's great, but it'll have to wait till we get in front of Randall" Ryan answers.

"Wrap it up and copy the file onto here" he says handing her the flash drive.

“Why not just send an email?” she asks as she turns to face him.

“And take that hat off your head, you goof.”

“Opps, forgot about that” Ryan laughs.

Red-faced, he turns to Kellan as he removes the hat.

“You were gonna let me walk into Randall’s office with that on my head, weren’t you, you bastard?” he says, playfully punching Kellan’s arm.

“It was too funny to pass up” Kellan confesses.

Turning to Sara, Ryan strikes a serious tone and continues.

“The flash drive is a security precaution.”

“I’d rather not have our discovery floating out there in the public collective just yet.”

“Why’d you tell him about the hat Sara?” Kellan snips.

“That would have been classic.”

Ryan and Sara stand mute.

Kellan points from Ryan to Sara.

"Geez, you all need to lighten up" Kellan suggests in mock disgust.

Sara flips Kellan the bird as she closes her portion of the presentation.

She copies the files to Ryan's flash drive.

"Oh that's mature" Ryan says.

Ryan throws the trucker hat onto her desk and accidentally knocks over a framed photo of Sara and her father.

"This new?" Ryan asks picking it up.

"I took this photo" he recalls.

He smiles, and rubs his chin.

"We ate well that night" he muses, thinking of the evening from their shared past.

“What’d we catch? Something like fifty Tuna?”

Ryan holds the framed photo, silently gazing at the portrait.

“Wow time flies” he reflects with a tenderness in his voice.

“It feels like we just got back from that trip yesterday.”

Sara takes the picture from Ryan’s hands and sets it back on her desk.

“Better days” she sighs.

“Meeting? Randall?” Kellan reminds the pair.

“You guys ready?”

“Sure, let’s do this” Ryan answers smiling at Sara.

“I’ve got the drive” Kellan says as he pulls it from Sara’s machine.

As the three depart from her office, Sara waves to a friend in one of the nearer cubicles.

“She’s new” Kellan whispers in Sara’s ear.

“Can you set me up?”

“She’s not your type” Sara offers.

“Kellan, let’s concentrate on the task at hand” Ryan scolds as they make their way down the hall.

Stopping in front of Randall’s door, Ryan knocks lightly.

Kellan hands Ryan the flash drive.

Looking up and seeing them through the glass wall, Randall motions for the three to enter and take a seat.

Randall is on the phone as they enter.

“Yes sir... yes sir... I understand... alright, I’ll call you back shortly with the latest information... okay, thank you sir” Randall says into the phone.

He snaps his fingers, motioning for Ryan.

Ryan looks up at the snap and sees Randall motioning for him to setup the projector.

Nodding, Ryan walks to the corner table and begins to download the files into the projector from the flash drive.

Kellan flops down on the couch near the door and Sara takes a seat closest to Ryan.

“Sorry about that folks” Randall says, hanging up the phone.

He leans into his chair.

“That was the colonel wondering why the LC13 is offline” Randall informs the trio.

The room quickly goes dark as Randall draws the shades with the click of a button.

“What’d you tell him?” Ryan asks sheepishly.

“A scheduled maintenance is all I gave him” he assures the room.

“Don’t worry, I didn’t spill the beans about our secret project” he continues as he smooths back his hair.

“You think I want to get fired or worse, thrown in jail?”

He points to the projected image on the wall.

“This experiment stays between us for the moment” he says.

The three scientists follow Randall’s gaze and turn their attention to the projected 3D map.

They wait patiently allowing Randall time to take it all in.

After some time, Randall clears his throat

“Ryan tell me” Randall asks.

“What am I looking at here?”

“I see Australia and I see the Indian Ocean” he confirms.

“I also see a bunch of wavy lines and numbers?”

Ryan pulls a laser pointer from his pocket, stands, walks towards the wall.

He circles the oscillating area off the coast of Australia with his laser pointer.

“Right here, that is our window.”

“That’s the way in to our discovery” he answers.

“I’ve got to get you a god-damned plane ticket to Australia?” Randall balks, confused.

“And what? push you out to sea?” he continues.

“You taking that guy too?” Randall continues pointing to Kellan.

Kellan nervously points to himself and mouths “me?”

“No, nothing like that” Ryan assures Randall.

“We can stay right here.”

Pointing back to the image.

“That is just where we need to concentrate all of the LC13’s sensors.”

“We need to learn a lot more about this new dimension, do some reconnaissance from a safe distance and then decide our next steps.”

Ryan walks closer to the graphic on the wall and circles a large area with his hands.

“This is just a weakness in the boundaries between our two dimensions.”

“This newly discovered dimension doesn’t just live in this area of the world, its everywhere, all around us” Ryan says opening his arms wide for emphasis.

“This is just a small portal for us to peer through.”

Reading the lack of excitement on Randall’s face, Sara interjects.

“It will make more sense once I show you the satellite pathways that the LC13 has been following” Sara continues.

“Ryan, can we put up both graphics side by side?” she asks.

“I think it will help clarify the data.”

“Excellent idea” Ryan offers.

Walking back to the projector, he cues up a second image.

“Randall, as you can see from Sara’s satellite plot points, the LC13 and the dimensional distortion we’ve discovered consistently collide here” Ryan explains.

He points back to the oscillating graphic off the Australian coast.

“What I’m proposing is that now that we have established a specific path for the dimensional distortion, we follow it” Ryan continues.

He looks over his shoulder to confirm he still has Randall’s attention.

“I’d like to change the LC13’s current path to better follow this distortion around the globe, recording the data during multiple revolutions.”

Randall throws up his hands as Ryan's new request becomes clear.

"Impossible" he says.

"Why" Kellan interjects.

"We have the equipment, Ryan's proven his theory and there is no one better in the field of satellite navigation than Sara."

"We can't lose."

Randall, looks down for a moment to consider the new plan.

He lifts his head and looks to Sara.

"And how about you Dr. Higgins?" he asks.

"You think this will work?"

"Or am I about to throw away a 30 billion dollar satellite and my career?"

"It will work" Sara answers confidently.

Randall gets to his feet and presses the auto shade button.

Sunlight streams back into the office.

“You’ve got two weeks” he says, looking at each scientist in turn.

Kellan jumps from the couch and walks over to Ryan, giving him a congratulatory slap on the back.

Ryan thanks him and turns to Sara squeezing her shoulders in gratitude.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence” he whispers.

“Dr Wexler” Randall continues.

“Bring my satellite back in one piece or it’s your ass.”

“You wont be sorry Randall” Ryan insists.

The small group take their leave and walk out the door.

“Sara” Ryan calls as he closes Randall’s door behind them.

“Now that we have Randall’s approval, can you setup the new navigation course for the LC13 before we leave?”

Sara smiles and looks from Ryan to Kellan.

“What?” Kellan asks Sara.

“What’s with the grin?”

“I set the LC13 on the new nav course before we met with Randall” she confides.

“I knew he’d give us the go ahead.”

“How could he refuse?”

“You’re the best!” Ryan says pointing to Sara.

Turning to Kellan.

“Please keep an eye on the satellite and run hourly reports.”

“Anything new pops, give us a call.”

“Where you off to?” Kellan asks.

Ryan looks at Sara.

“Off to visit and old friend” he answers.

16

A buzzer sounds inside the sparsely furnished apartment.

Roger lifts himself from his desk chair with a groan and goes to the window to see who is at the door downstairs.

“Dammit” he curses under his breath.

A bolt of fear travels down his spine.

“How’d he find me, so quick?” he mutters to himself.

Agent Hatter stands at the front stoop waving up to Roger.

“One moment” Roger says as he pushes the intercom button.

He shuffles back to his desk and opens the top drawer.

Pulling out a small gun, he stuffs it into his back pocket.

Moving back to the intercom he presses the door release button allowing Agent Hatter entrance into the building.

Hatter makes his way to Roger's third floor apartment, slowly, one creaking stair at a time.

Roger, standing in the doorway watches for Hatter to round the corner.

Hatter, out of breath, slowly walks to third floor landing.

"Age has found Dexter as well I see" Roger thinks to himself.

"Come in" Roger says in greeting.

"Can I take your coat?" he asks, shutting the door behind them.

"I'll keep the coat, thanks" the agent answers, glancing around the small apartment.

Hatter's gaze rest on the laptop sitting on the desk in the corner.

He notes a case file is open on the screen.

“Am I interrupting?” he asks.

”Thought you were retired?”

“Just reviewing some old cases” Roger answers.

Roger walks to the laptop and closes it to shield the information from Hatter’s prying eyes.

“Would you like some coffee?” Roger asks motioning Hatter to the kitchen.

Hatter looks down at his watch.

“Sure, why not” he answers, following Roger into the kitchen.

The kitchen door swings closed behind them.

“Have a seat” Roger insists as he pulls out a seat for his guest.

“Kind of you” Hatter responds.

“What brings you to this area of town?” Roger inquires.

“Thought you were working the southern states now?” he asks.

Not waiting for an answer, Roger walks to the cupboard and takes down two coffee cups.

“I could ask you the same” Hatter responds.

“Me?” Roger wonders aloud.

“Heard you retired to Connecticut” Hatter answers.

“Why are you back in this part of the country?”

“Living in this shithole?” he continues, with a look of disdain.

“Only temporary” Roger answers.

“Helping out an old friend” he says, placing two coffee cups on the table.

“I’ll be back home in a month.”

He moves to the stove and turns off the flame under the glass coffee pot.

Walking to the table he pours some coffee into Hatter's cup and then his own.

Roger places the coffee pot on the table and settles into a chair across from Hatter with a sigh.

The two men sit in silence for a few moments silently drinking their coffee.

Agent Hatter looks up at the apartment ceiling.

"Some big cracks up there, looks like foundation damage" he observes.

"Um Hmm" Roger mumbles studying Hatter's face, trying to read his intentions.

Hatter drops his gaze to meet Roger's and puts his cup down on the table forcefully.

"Let's cut the shit Agent Fisher, we know why you're here."

“You’ve made contact with the lost colonist” he says.

“My only question is why now?”

Roger gingerly places his own cup down, folds his hands in his lap and straightens up in his chair.

He contemplates how to approach the question, fearing he may give away too much.

“If you know why I’m here, I assume you can answer that for yourself.”
Roger states coyly.

He looks into Hatter’s eyes attempting to ascertain what facts the agent already has.

“Roger, we both know how this is going to go” the agent laments.

“Why not point me in the direction of our subject and I’ll be on my way.”

Roger looks at the agent with a puzzled look on his face.

“We don’t want this to end like it did the last time, do we?” Hatter threatens, taking another sip of his coffee.

“That was a bloody fucking mess” he recalls.

“The mess could have been avoided” Roger insists.

“That Barry kid was a monster” Hatter retorts.

“We made him into that monster” Roger answers, slamming his fist onto the table.

His coffee cup spills.

“We played god with these kids lives” he continues as the coffee runs over the side of the table.

Retreating back into himself, Roger traces the letter “R” with his finger in the spilled coffee.

“Don’t we owe him a chance at a normal existence?” Roger pleads.

Agent Hatter is quick to respond.

“You and I both know we were just following orders” he shouts back.

“Besides most of the test subjects have thrived” he says taking another sip of his coffee.

“Humanity took some big leaps because of guys like you and me.”

Roger rolls grimaces.

“Those experiments opened doors to a brighter future for the entire world” Hatter reckons.

“At what cost?” Roger asks.

“The kids who didn’t make the cut... we turned our backs on them” he hisses.

“It is unforgivable” he continues, glaring at Hatter.

Hatter stares back, unmoved.

“I’m going to finish the job” Hatter informs him.

Feeling a sense of desperation, Roger attempts to make a deal.

“Trust me on this one, he’s a well adjusted man and he is coming into his own.”

“It’s too late” Hatter answers.

“The experimental adjustments to his physiology seems to be paying dividends.”

“I don’t believe you” Hatter responds.

“He could make you a very rich man one day” Roger observes.

“Roger” Hatter starts, cutting him off.

“I also had a few that didn’t make the cut and they were eliminated as directed.”

“I followed my orders.”

“One of them, my own flesh and blood” he offers in a remorseful tone.

“You can’t” Roger insists.

“I won’t let you.”

Hatter leans forward.

“It’s not up to you.”

“Why should your chosen few live while mine died” Hatter continues.

“He’s a dangerous individual, just like Barry.”

“Don’t fool yourself.”

Roger slides his hands over his pants.

He fidgets with the gun in his back pocket as he listens to Hatter’s reasoning.

He laments what’s in store for Ryan if he’s caught.

Hatter awaits Roger’s response.

“Hatter’s got nothing” Roger determines to himself.

“I’m the only viable link to Ryan that Hatter has” he concludes.

Casting his eyes down he ponders his own fate.

“I have to resist, but I’m so tired” he thinks.

“The laptop has been encrypted but I’m haven’t.”

“He will break me” he decides.

With no other options he accepts his next move.

“I’ve set Ryan on the right path” he assures himself.

“I’ve left him my memories.”

He smiles as a sense of peace washes over him.

“I’ll break the last link for you Ryan” he decides.

Roger lifts his eyes to meet Hatter’s.

He purses his lips tightly before spitting out his final answer.

“This is over!”

Before Hatter has a moment to react, Roger pulls the gun from his back pocket places the barrel in his own mouth and pulls the trigger.

The back of his head explodes covering the wall behind himself with blood and gray matter.

“Jesus Christ” Hatter squeals.

He pushes himself away from the table, knocking his chair over in the process.

His ears ring from the report of the gun causing him to stumble.

He drops to his knees.

Roger’s body slumps over backwards in his chair, his arms go slack and the gun drops to the floor.

Hatter lets out a gasp and pulls his phone from his pocket.

Wiping the sweat from his eyes, he dials a phone number.

“Yeah, its Hatter” he says as someone on the other end of the line picks up.

“Agent Fisher just off’ed himself”

“Huh?”

“No, I didn’t get a name”

“Yeah... ok” he barks into the phone.

Hanging up the phone, Hatter pulls a handkerchief from his coat and mops his brow.

Dumping the coffee from his cup into the sink, he puts the cup into his coat pocket.

He pushes open the swinging kitchen door with the toe of his shoe and makes his way through the living room.

Hatter removes Roger’s laptop from the desk in the corner and slides it under his shirt.

Walking to the door, he peers through the peep hole to confirm the hallway is empty and exits quietly.

17

Ryan and Sara laugh at a shared joke as they walk through the entrance of the hospital.

The automatic glass doors close behind them with a “whoosh” and the squeak of rusty wheels.

The main lobby of the hospital is quiet.

Most of the patients are in their rooms eating dinner.

The community television is on and a re-run of the ‘wheel’ is being broadcast to an empty waiting room.

The halls, painted a murky light brown are lined with cheap reprints of famous paintings.

The stained linoleum floor has an unnatural shine from over waxing.

Ryan’s laughter is quickly silenced and overtaken by sadness at the realization that this is not a ‘fixing’ hospital.

“The last stop” he ponders.

The scent of urine intermingled with that of Pine Sol assaults his nostrils, and before he can mask his revulsion Sara reads it in his eyes.

He smiles weakly, squeezing her hand.

“Which room is he in?” he asks.

“Third floor” she answers sadly.

“That’s where they keep the hopeless cases.”

Arriving at the elevator, Ryan presses the call button and turns to Sara.

“You sure this is ok?” he asks.

“I don’t want to ruin his day.”

“Ryan, he’s going to be overjoyed” Sara assures him.

“You mean a lot to him.”

Exiting the elevator on the third floor, Sara stops at the nurses station and directs Ryan down the hall.

“Room 3d” she calls after him.

“I just need to check-in with the nurse and then I’ll join you.”

Ryan mouths the words ‘ok’ as he continues through the hallway, walking slowly, afraid to make noise and disturb the residents.

The silence is fleeting.

A resident in room 3a begins singing nursery rhymes so loud that Ryan is sure they can be heard from across the street.

Not to be outdone, the woman in room 3b begins screaming obscenities.

Ryan, unused to the erratic behavior of the patients, quickly picks up his pace.

He stops at the door of room 3d.

The chart on the door reads '*Higgins, Franklin.*'

Ryan knocks lightly as he looks down the hall for Sara to appear.

"Come" a faint voice responds from the other side of the door.

Ryan makes a wide friendly grin as he enters the room, attempting to hide his sadness and fear.

"I've waited too long to come and visit" he thinks.

"Will he even know who I am?"

Mr Higgins, who is sitting, facing the door, feet dangling off the side of the bed, lifts his head and answers that question immediately.

"Ryan, my boy, how are you?" he asks excitedly.

"Have you come alone?"

"No Frank, Sara is here as well."

“She stopped at the nurses station for a chat” Ryan answers.

He feels better now that he knows Franklin recognizes him.

He walks farther into the room and takes a seat on the chair next to the bed.

Franklin sighs.

“She’s still holding out hope that by some miracle this damn dementia can be reversed” he sighs.

“But you and I know better, don’t we?” he says with a wink.

“I’m sorry” Ryan offers.

“I’m not afraid” Franklin answers.

“But my girl, holding out hope.”

“I realize we all have our day, but her--- I need her to be ok” he says turning to Ryan.

“Sara’s a strong woman” Ryan assures him.

“She loves you and appreciates all you’ve done for her.”

Franklin nods in agreement.

“Taking on the role of father and mother, filling in when she lost your wife.”

“It’s her time to look out for you.”

“Her mother” Franklin answers turning his head away from Ryan and looking out the window.

“As my memory fades, so do the important people in my life.”

“I can’t even picture her any longer.”

Ryan extends his hand and pats Franklin’s knee.

“The memories Ryan, I’ve lost so much of the past, my time with Sara and her mother.

“Back when we were a family” he laments.

“Franklin...” Ryan starts, attempting to console him.

“Ahh, enough about my troubles” Franklin interrupts, turning back to Ryan.

“What’s this I hear about a new project at work?” he asks changing the subject.

“Sara mentioned some of the details, but my mind...”

Ryan smiles, happy to move onto to something more positive.

“It is probably the most exciting work I’ve ever been a part of” Ryan admits.

“Wonderful” Franklin comments.

“We are on the precipice of discovering an entry to a new dimension” Ryan answers confidently.

“A new dimension?” Franklin wonders aloud.

“Why?”

“This discovery is going to change everything” Ryan answers.

“Especially after I make the leap and cross over” he adds.

Franklin’s eyes open wide and he whistles.

“Now that is something” he responds.

“And Sara, where does she fit in?”

“Will she cross over as well?” Franklin asks, the fear in his voice coming through.

“No need to worry there, Franklin, I wouldn’t ask her to risk herself and I know she wouldn’t be willing to leave you” Ryan assures him.

“You’ve raised a great woman.”

“I tell you, without her optimistic input I wouldn’t even have started this project” he confesses.

“It would have remained only a theory.”

“What do you expect to find in this other dimension?” Franklin asks.

“Have you thought of an exit plan?”

Ryan smiles.

“Always the detective, thinking two steps ahead” he compliments Franklin.

“I’ve been so consumed with the idea of crossing over that I hadn’t even thought about getting home” he answers truthfully.

“I feel a pull that I can’t fully explain, something instinctual.”

“I just know the other dimension is there and I’m meant to bridge the gap” Ryan concludes.

“I admire your passion” Franklin says, nervously rubbing his hands together.

“Now let me ask a favor” he starts, looking into Ryan’s eyes.

“Sure, anything” Ryan offers.

“Be careful” Franklin says.

“For yourself and for Sara” he continues.

“I’m not long for this world and I need to know she has people she can depend on.”

“People like you...ok?”

“Of course franklin” Ryan says extending his hand in friendship.

The two shake hands in agreement.

“I’ll always look out for Sara” he promises.

Feeling the old connection to Franklin, Ryan considers sharing his recent meeting Roger.

“Get his investigative point of view” he thinks.

But before he has a chance to ask, the door behind him opens and Sara walks in.

“Hi daddy” she says walking over to kiss Franklin on his bald dome.

“Nice surprise having Ryan here, hmm?”

“Have you both had enough time to discuss the important matters, like sports teams and cop shows?” she teases.

“Yes my dear” Franklin answers grasping Sara’s hand.

“We’ve been catching up, in fact, Ryan here“ he says, turning back to Ryan.

“Has filled in many of the details you left out about your new project.”

“It certainly sounds exciting.”

“Even dangerous?” he questions.

“Never fear, Dr. Wexler would never put us in harm’s way” she says, giving Ryan a stern look.

“Sorry” he mouths to her.

Ryan stands and excuses himself.

“Well, I’m going to let you two catch up.”

“It was wonderful to see you Frank” he says patting the old man on the back.

“Ill keep you up to date with any new project developments” he promises.

“Please do” Franklin responds.

“Oh and Ryan, remember, stay safe” he calls as Ryan walks to the door.

“Yes sir” he answers.

Sara follows him.

“Take as much time as you need” he assures her.

“I noticed they had the ‘Wheel’ on the television downstairs.”

“Ill catch up on my game shows while you two visit.”

“Thanks” she says and returns to her father’s side.

Ryan smiles to himself, listening to the loving banter between Sara and her father for a moment before closing the door slowly behind himself.

18

The sunset, streaming the through the glass doors, colors the hospital lobby in a pink hue.

Ryan sits on an aged leather sofa facing the television.

An episode of the 'Wheel of fortune' is playing.

"Must be a marathon" he thinks.

A young nurse walks past the T.V. pushing an elderly man in his wheelchair.

She parks the man next to the Ryan on the sofa.

The game show's host 'Pat Sajak' introduces the three contestants.

"All right Millie and where are you from?"

"Excuse me, would you mind keeping Stan company while I run upstairs for his pills?" the nurse asks Ryan.

“Happy to” he answers with a smile.

The nurse pats the old mans’ shoulder and walks towards the elevator bank.

“I’ll hurry back” she assures Ryan over her shoulder.

The two men nod at each other and turn their attention to the game show on the television.

With the contestants having been introduced, the TV cameras turn to focus in on the shapely figure of Vanna White, ‘the letter turner’ of the show.

The older gent, now in Ryan’s charge, emits a low grunt with each flash of Vanna on the screen.

“I hear ya buddy” Ryan agrees.

“After all these years she is still a looker.”

The old man lifts his drooping head towards Ryan and smiles.

“Never too old...aye” Ryan says with a wink.

The old man raises his shaky hand and points to the television.

“Right... the show” Ryan agrees.

They watch the rest of the game show in silence.

The nurse returns just in time to see the game show host wave goodbye to the studio audience.

“I’m sorry for having taken so long ” she apologizes.

“Thanks for keeping him company.”

“Stan can get a bit grumpy if we miss his Vanna” she laughs.

The old man grunts and lifts his hand, gesturing for the nurse to wheel him away.

Ryan smiles and watches as the two move down the hall.

“Happy trails, Stanley” he calls after the pair.

Feeling anxious, Ryan stands to stretch his legs.

Looking for something to occupy his time he grabs an old 'People' magazine and settles in to a high-backed chair to flip through the pages.

Ten minutes pass before he hears the elevator ding.

Looking up from the magazine he spies Sara as she walks off the elevator car.

"Radiant" he thinks.

She is wiping tears from her eyes as she approaches.

"Everything all right?" he asks.

"Sure" she assures him.

"It just gets a bit thick up there" she answers.

"Did I keep you waiting too long?" she asks in apology.

"What are you talking about?"

“It was so nice to see your dad again” Ryan says.

“And I made a new friend.”

“A friend?” Sara asks.

“An old gent and I watched the ‘wheel’ together” he answers.

“Very nice” she says.

“Being around the elderly sure makes you think how fast life moves”
he observes.

The pair exit the hospital and walk through the parking lot to Sara’s car.

She unlocks the car doors and they step inside.

“Hey” Ryan whispers.

“Don’t” she says cutting him off.

“I know, he’s old.”

“And as you said, time moves quickly.”

“I’m sorry” he apologizes.

“Think of all the happy years you’ve shared” she continues, reciting many of the pep talks the doctors and nurse have delivered recently.

She punches at her steering wheel.

“Am I missing any of the other bullshit people say to try to talk you out of your sorrow?”

“Sara” Ryan continues, disappointed.

“That is not what I was going to say at all.”

“I just wanted tell you that your father deserves more of your respect.”

“You shouldn’t treat him like a child.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” she snaps.

“You talk to him like a five year old, keeping him in the dark about the details of his own health?” Ryan retorts.

“You don’t understand” she argues, her voice cracking.

“You saw him at his best today.”

Ryan reaches out to touch her shoulder.

“There are times he can’t even remember his own name” she continues, her voice breaking.

“I never know what I’m walking into.”

“He loses more of himself everyday.”

“I know” Ryan whispers.

Leaning her head on her steering wheel she whimpers.

“He told me today that he’s nothing without his memories and that I should just forget him and move on.”

The car grows quiet and Ryan sits feeling awful.

“Let’s get you home” she says finally, breaking the silence.

Turning the key, she starts the car.

As the car ignition turns, the radio comes to life and John Lennon’s voice sings from the speakers.

“Working class hero...”

Sara lifts her hand to change the station but Ryan stops her.

“Don’t” he says.

“I’d like to hear this song.”

“Alright” she agrees, as she pulls out of the parking lot

After the song ends, Sara switches off the radio and the car grows quiet once more.

The ride to Ryan’s house passes without another word spoken between the pair.

Ryan and Sara sit, lost in their own thoughts.

Arriving at Ryan's house she pulls her car into the driveway and puts it in park.

"See you in the A.M." she says.

Ryan opens his door to step out but hesitates.

"Sara" he says, sitting back in his seat.

"Your father told you he's lost without his memories, correct?"

"Referring to the memories of you and your mother?"

"Ryan, I don't have..." she starts.

Ryan cuts her off.

"But you have those memories as well, don't you?" he asks.

"Of course I do" she answers.

“What are you getting at?” she asks impatiently.

“I’ve been thinking about your father’s situation on our ride home” he continues.

“I may be able to help.”

“There is nothing anyone can do” she answers, defeated.

“I’ll let you in on a secret” he says, looking at her.

“I was recently given something, ‘some things’ that are quite remarkable and I’d like to share them with you and your father.”

“Things?” Sara asks with hesitation in her voice.

“I’m not in the mood for games” she warns.

“Come in the house, I’ve got something to show you” he offers as he steps from the car.

Sara shuts off the car engine, exits and follows Ryan up his front porch steps.

Ryan opens his front door and steps into the house.

“Take a seat on the couch” he offers as he motions for her to sit down.

“I need to run upstairs” he continues.

“Make yourself comfortable” he calls from the second floor landing.

“I’m going to need a few minutes.”

Once upstairs, Ryan walks into his office, sits down in his chair and pulls the bag of memory beads from his pocket.

Pouring the memory beads out into his hand, he retrieves the red one.

The final one.

The bead Roger intended for him to view last.

“Sorry Roger, this is important” he whispers.

Leaning back in his chair, he places the red bead under his tongue.

The office fades to black as he drops into the memory.

“Ryan, we’ve traveled a long road together” Roger’s voice booms in Ryan’s mind.

“I still have so much more to share with you.”

“Unfortunately it’s not safe for us to meet in public again.”

Roger’s voice pauses momentarily.

“That is, until we tie up some loose ends.”

“I’ve hidden a cache of thirty unused memory beads at one of my safe houses in a nearby location” Roger continues.

“I’d like you to record a secret location of your choosing onto one of those beads, somewhere safe, where we can meet and make plans for our next steps.”

“Bring the live bead back to the safe house and leave it on my kitchen table.”

“I’ll check back at the safe house every few weeks” Roger’s voice assures him.

“Once I retrieve your communiqué, we’ll be in touch.”

Roger’s voice trails off as a map appears in Ryan’s mind.

“Not far at all” Ryan thinks to himself recognizing the cross streets. The map visual fades into a visual of an apartment building which fades to a room, then to wall and finally to a false door in the floor.

The last of the mental slideshow images flashing in Ryan’s mind is that of four numbers and Roger’s voice “entrance code” he says.

“Good luck.”

The memory ends and Ryan returns to reality.

He stands, removes the used bead from his mouth and heads downstairs to ask Sara for another ride and a little more patience.

19

Sara takes a seat on the couch and watches as Ryan heads upstairs.

The living room, dark and cold, is not very comfortable.

She can hear his footsteps on the second floor, a door close and silence.

Weary from the day's events, she sighs.

Leaning over the armrest, she turns on the table lamp.

"Nothing ever changes" she thinks, spying stacks of mail in the corner.

"He can't even commit to reading his mail."

A tattered photo album catches her eye from across the room.

Walking to it, she bends and pulls it free from under the stereo tuner.

Looking around the room sheepishly, she leafs through it.

She smiles as her mood begins brighten, reliving better times.

Life before her father became ill, before Ryan started acting so strange.

The photos of friends and barbeques from year's past warm her soul.

Her mood softening, she switches on the stereo.

John Lennon's voice blares from the speakers "*they teach you to smile...*"

Flustered, she quickly turns it off.

"What is it with that song?" she thinks, her heart still racing from the ear-breaking volume it was set at.

Feeling thirsty, she walks to the kitchen and heads to the refrigerator.

"This boy needs to get to the grocery store" she says to no one, as she surveys the refrigerator.

Pulling out a bottle of beer, she twists off the cap.

Foam rises quickly and drips down her hand.

She holds the bottle over the sink, allowing the foam to drip into the basin.

Looking out the window she observes Ryan's neighbors, arm and arm, watching their children play in the yard a few houses over.

Her sense of loss thunders back.

She hangs her head.

"Sara" Ryan calls, looking for her... excited.

"Sara where are you?" he calls again as he walks from the hall into the kitchen.

He stops before entering, finding her still at the window, lost in thought.

She stands rigid, her arms at her sides and her back to him.

Sensing he is intruding, he waits a moment before quietly walking up and putting his hand on her shoulder.

“You ok?” he asks softly.

Sara nods yes.

“Did you find what we came in for?” she asks.

“Yes and no” he coyly answers.

“Please don’t be angry, but we need to make one more stop.”

“That work for?” he asks.

“This has to be the last stop, Ryan” she warns, losing her patience.

“I need to get back to my dad.”

“I promise” he answers, crossing his heart.

“Where are we off to?” she asks, as she pours the rest of the unfinished beer down the drain.

“And what is with that song?” she continues.

“You on some sort of John Lennon kick?”

“It grounds me” he explains, leading her back out the front door to her car.

Stopping at the car door, Sara looks up.

“You say you have something for me and disappear upstairs for fifteen minutes?” she scolds.

“Now you ask me to take you on another errand?”

“I’m happy to help, but tell me what the hell is going on?”

“Where are we going?”

“The door please” he says, pointing down.

She huffs and unlocks the car doors.

The duo climb in and close the doors behind themselves.

Sara starts the car and begins to reverse down the driveway.

Ryan places his hand on hers as she maneuvers the gear shift.

“Can you put the car in park for a sec?” he asks.

As she does so, he shifts in his seat to face her.

“After work the other night” he begins.

“On my bike ride home, after that initial meeting with Randall, a man called my phone and asked that I meet him in the park.”

“The one close to the office” he points out.

Sara turns off the car and leans back in her seat.

She motions for him to continue.

“Go on” she adds.

“And I did” he continues.

“I met him in the park.”

“He said his name was Roger and that he knew my mother, talked about the past, about some experiment that I was a part of.”

“Are you fucking with me, cause Ryan...” she warns.

“No, really the guy” Ryan starts again.

“Roger” he clarifies “said it happened when I was young, an infant.”

“He mentioned that there are others besides myself and that many went on to accomplish great things.”

“He said the experiments conducted on the children yielded incredible results.”

“We talked awhile longer, but he seemed pressed for time.”

“Nervous” Ryan explains.

“My mind was still reeling with all the excitement from our meeting with Kellan and Randall, and now to be thrust into this mysterious situation.”

“I was spent, so I didn’t question him too hard.”

“I just listened” Ryan continues.

“Did you believe him?” Sara asks.

“Yes, there was a familiarity about him” Ryan answers recalling the meeting.

“I felt an instant connection like we had met before.”

“I felt I could trust him.”

“Why was he in such a hurry?” Sara wonders out loud.

“I haven’t told you the most interesting part” he continues.

“Roger left me with the bag of beads you were looking at earlier.”

“They’re called memory beads and when I got home last night I tried them out.”

“Tried them out?” Sara questions.

“There was a note enclosed in the bag with the beads and I followed the instructions” he answers.

“What were you to do with the beads?” Sara asks.

“Sara, they’re an amazing invention.”

“Revolutionary!” Ryan answers excitedly.

“You slip a bead under your tongue and you’re able to live out another person’s recorded memory.”

Ryan looks intently into her eyes.

“The owner of the bead selects personal memories to share, either from their past or a recorded event from the present.”

“Something they want to communicate or show the person they pass the bead on to” he elaborates.

“Ryan you ingested something a stranger gave you in a park” Sara asks nervously.

“Are you insane?”

“I know it sounds strange but I had to take a chance” Ryan answers.

“I was walking around in the 60’s with Roger last night, I was able to see my mother” Ryan continues.

“Through Roger’s eyes that is... it was amazing.”

Ryan pulls the bag of beads from his pocket .

“Roger left me with twenty beads, twenty memories.”

“Insights I suppose, of the experiments, my early childhood, answers for me” he relishes as he opens the bag.

Sara eyes widen as she lets out a heavy breath.

“Wow” she exhales.

“This is straight out of a sci-fi movie.”

“Can I try one?” she asks, letting her scientific curiosity take over.

“Well, once the stored memory is viewed that bead no longer functions” Ryan informs her.

“I can’t share any of these with you but the last bead, the one I viewed while upstairs moments ago had directions from Roger on where I could find more” Ryan smiles.

“That is where we’re headed right now.”

“Do you think its some sort of trap?” Sara cautions.

“I mean c’mon, this is all a bit strange, mystery man, futuristic beads, childhood experiment.”

“If I didn’t know you as well as I do I’d think you were pulling my leg.”

“Only one way to find out” Ryan answers.

Sara looks at him, smiles and starts the car again.

She pulls out of the driveway and onto the street.

“What’s your plan?” she asks.

“I’m not completely sure“ Ryan answers.

He absent-mindedly runs his finger over the condensation of the passenger window.

“I do know I’m going to share some of them with you and your father” Ryan reveals.

“Oh Ryan, if this works...” she starts excitedly.

“Your fathers a good man and deserves his memories back” Ryan states.

“You have done so much for me.”

“Your belief in me and the portal project means a great deal.”

“I don’t know what to say, except thank you” Sara gushes.

She slows the car at the red light.

“When the light turns green make a right” Ryan directs.

“Head straight for two blocks and take a left, our destination is about four miles down the road.”

“I’ll tell you when to stop.”

20

Sara and Ryan drive past a dilapidated apartment building.

“Pull to the curb” Ryan directs.

“I think this is it.”

The red bricked building, now a muted shade of brown due to years of neglect, stands clumsily on the corner of the block.

It’s second floor windows are boarded up, scorch marks still visible from what must have been a recent fire.

The moon has risen in the sky and cast a pale light onto the building furthering its foreboding attitude.

“Yep, this is it” Ryan confirms as Sara stops the car.

He opens the car door to leave and as he does so he turns to Sara.

“Pull around the corner and wait 15 minutes...ok?” he asks smiling nervously.

“Not sure what I’m walking into.”

“Should I come with you?” she asks.

“Naw, it will be faster if I go alone, besides I may need you to swoop in and save me” he says, reassuring her with a wink.

“I have my phone, I’ll call if I get in trouble.”

“Alright, I’ll be right around the corner” Sara promises.

Ryan closes the passenger door and Sara pulls away from the curb.

Surveying the street, Ryan notes a few parked cars on the block.

Nothing strikes him as suspicious so he continues onto the sidewalk and stops in the front of the old building.

There is a keypad on the front door just as Roger described in the last memory bead.

Ryan inputs the code and the door unlocks with a click.

“Hello, anyone home?” he calls.

Ryan pokes his head into the hallway of the building .

A television blares loudly behind the door of the first floor apartment.

Ryan stops and knocks, hoping somebody will answer.

After a moment he assumes no one is going to answer his knock and moves to the stairway.

He walks up the stairs to the third floor.

He stops again, this time at the door of the third floor apartment.

It's the door from his memory, Roger's door.

Feeling nervous, he wipes his clammy hands on his pants and knocks loudly.

Failing to receive an answer, he inputs the code into the keypad above the door handle and turns the knob.

The door opens but Ryan hesitates to enter as the room is dark.

Pushing on the door again, it opens wider, allowing the hallway light to illuminate the darkness.

“Roger... you home?” he calls.

“It’s me Ryan.”

Ryan cautiously enters the apartment and closes the door quietly behind himself.

He fumbles along the wall looking for a light switch.

Finding one, he turns on the lights.

It is small dirty room with only a few odd pieces of furniture.

A door to the right is closed but a light shines from underneath.

“Roger” Ryan calls as he walks towards the door.

Not wanting to spook anyone he calls again.

“Roger are you home?”

He presses his hand to the door, ready to push it open.

Suddenly he’s dizzy and feels close to passing out.

He steps away from the door to gather his wits.

“Focus” he murmurs to himself.

Ryan stands in the middle of the room.

“Roger’s not hear, you’re weeks early” he reminds himself.

“The beads” he thinks.

“Get the beads and get the fuck out of here.”

Nervously, Ryan begins to look for the loose floorboard Roger described in his memory.

Stepping foot over foot along the floor, he feels a board give to his weight.

Kneeling, he lifts the board out of the way to reveal another satchel hidden within the darkness.

He pulls it out of the hole and replaces the board.

Smiling with anticipation, he opens the bag.

It is the promised memory beads.

“Thank you Roger” he says, relieved.

Standing again, he brushes the dust from his pants and makes his way to the front door.

He turns off the light and quickly leaves the apartment

A sense of relief washes over him once he is back out on the sidewalk.

He holds the satchel full of memory beads in his hand.

Rounding the corner he catches sight of Sara's car and waves.

She sticks her hand out the window and waves back.

Turning on the headlights she pulls up to the curb to pick him up.

"All good?" she asks.

Ryan gets in the passenger side closing the door behind himself.

"Got 'em" Ryan answers, showing Sara the bag.

"Now head back to my place."

"I'm gonna give you a demonstration on how they work."

"Prepare to have your mind blown" he tells her excitedly.

Sara smiles at him as she pulls away from the curb and onto the street.

She takes a left and drives back down the street from which they came.

As her brake lights recede into the distance, one of the parked cars on the block starts up.

Hatter sits up in his seat from where he had been crouching, watching as Ryan entered and left Roger's building.

He dials 911 on his phone.

"Yeah, I'd like to report shots fired at 728 S Elm" he informs the dispatcher.

"My name?" he asks.

"You don't need my name."

He ends the call.

Hatter dials another number as he pulls away from the curb.

"You headed back?" a male voice asks from his phone speaker.

"Gonna follow a lead" he answers.

“I’ll check in soon.”

21

Ryan's keys land with 'clink' as he throws them on the hallway table.

"Come on in" he says motioning to Sara.

His attention is quickly diverted to the street as a car passes slowly by.

Turning to shut his front door, he pauses and watches as the car drives past.

The car's brake lights illuminate for a moment but it does not stop.

The car continues on down the street, turning the corner, out of Ryan's view.

"Strange" he thinks as he locks the front door.

He chides himself for being so paranoid.

Feeling a nervous excitement, he rubs his hands together and walks into the kitchen.

Ryan nods to Sara who is sitting at the kitchen table.

He moves to the refrigerator and grabs two bottles of beer.

Opening them he slides a beer across the table to Sara.

“Thanks” she says, lifting the beer and taking a large sip.

“Ahhh, my mouth gets so dry when we’re playing mystery detective” she laughs.

“Who should I play now, Daphne or Velma?” she continues playfully.

“I’m thinking you’re more the Daphne type” Ryan answers smiling and holding out his hand.

“Come over to the couch, we’ll need the space for my demonstration.”

Grabbing her beer bottle by the neck, she takes another swig before getting up and walking to the couch.

Ryan takes a seat and motions for her to sit next to him.

He holds up a single memory bead.

“You ready?” he asks

“Show me” she answers, taking a seat on the couch.

“Okay” he starts nervously “this is my first time recording a memory.”

Closing his eyes he recalls Roger’s lesson.

“To record a memory or thought you have to hold the bead between your thumb and forefinger and place it to your forehead” he repeats as he demonstrates.

Sara watches intently.

Opening his eyes, he looks at her.

“Now, in reality, what you’re witnessing is a crazy man holding a marble to his head” he jokes.

“But what I see in my minds eye is a menu, like a drop down on a computer screen” he instructs.

“A cursor follows your eye movement and you double blink to select the desired item from the menu.”

Ryan sits straight up on the couch and falls silent for a few moments.

Sara watching his movements, awaits his next direction.

The bead begins to glow.

“Right” Ryan says pulling the bead from his forehead.

“Okay, I believe I have just made my first thought recording.”

He carefully passes the glowing bead to Sara.

“The next step is yours” he informs her.

“Take the bead, place it under your tongue, sit back and enjoy.”

Sara looks doubtfully at the bead in her hand and then to Ryan.

He smiles back assuring her.

Determined to trust him, she takes the bead, places it into her mouth and closes her eyes.

Ryan watches as the memory bead activates.

He can tell by Sara's posture that she's now in the memory.

"She's living my memory" he thinks, astonished.

Some time passes before Sara's eyes flutter and open.

She smiles.

"Well?" Ryan asks.

"That was unbelievable!" she says excitedly.

"I was there."

“I was you.”

“I felt what you felt.”

“I could see everything you saw” she stammers.

“It was as though it was happening to me.”

“Pretty fucking crazy, huh?” he asks, smiling.

“Okay, let me try” she insists.

“Allow me to share a memory with you.”

Ryan holds up a hand.

“Slow down.”

“We can do that next, I promise.”

“I need to remind you that although I’m happy to share this discovery with you and your father, we can’t share these with anyone else... understand?” he confirms.

“At least not till I know more about Roger and all the rest” he clarifies.

“Of course” she assures him.

“It’ll be our secret” she promises.

“Thanks for trusting me and for caring so much about my dad” she says, putting her arms around him.

“Sara, you and your father...” he starts.

“You mean a great deal to me.”

“We’re family.”

The two smile at each other.

Ryan pulls a fresh bead from the bag.

“Now make me a memory” he says, handing it to her.

Sara nods and takes the bead.

“Ok, place the bead between my fingers and put it to my forehead” she starts nervously.

“Wow, you were right, it is just like a computer menu.”

“Ah... ok...um hmm” she mumbles as she holds the bead to her forehead.

The bead begins to glow and after a moment she hands it back to Ryan.

Ryan takes the bead from her hand and winks.

Placing it under his tongue, he leans back on the couch and drops into her memory.

Looking through Sara’s eyes he is watching himself and her father walk along a beach.

He sees himself waving and feels Sara’s excitement as she runs to catch up with the duo.

Sara’s father smiles and waits for her.

“I’m gonna turn in” her father says, addressing the pair.

“I’ll see you two back at the house.”

“Goodnight daddy” she says as she hugs him.

Ryan can smell Frank’s aftershave through Sara’s nose as Frank and Sara hug.

He feels the warmth of Frank’s hug and the coolness of the night through her skin.

Three become two, and they continue their walk along the beach.

The ocean and the winds are loud in their ears making easy conversation nearly impossible.

The sun is setting, and when the last solar ray disappears over the horizon, he feels Sara’s hand reach out and grasp his own.

“We should head back” Ryan of the past says, pulling her in close as he speaks directly into her ear.

“We don’t want anyone to gossip” he jokes.

He feels his own breath from the past as it tickles Sara's ear.

Ryan disengages, turning to head back along the beach.

He can feel Sara's heart racing as she reaches out and grabs his arm pulling him close.

They share a passionate kiss, and after a moment they separate.

"Let em talk" she insists and grabs his hand, pulling him to the waters edge.

Ryan the observer, can feel as Sara's wet cotton shirt presses tight against her skin.

He can feel the strong ocean breeze pull at the long strands of her hair hanging loosely.

He experiences the utter exhilaration she feels as Ryan smiles and kisses her again.

The memory fades and Ryan is back on his couch sitting next to Sara.

Embarrassed, he blushes.

“What’d ya think?” she asks expectantly.

“Oh yeah, sure” he stammers.

“So much time has past since then” he observes.

“I haven’t thought of that trip in quite awhile” he says trying to avoid the obvious.

“It felt strange to kiss myself.”

Sara stands, offended.

The word ‘strange’ still ringing in her ears.

“Yeah well, I didn’t know you were so into ants” she hisses.

“I just thought I’d test a recent memory on you” he apologizes.

“I hadn’t thought to make it so personal.”

“That’s nothing new” Sara answers, growing angrier as he continues his clumsy explanation.

“Jesus Ryan, is anything with you personal?”

“C’mon I didn’t mean it that way” he says trying to soothe her hurt her feelings.

“The memory of myself with that ant, my speculation on the meanings of life, it was all very personal and I wanted to share that with you.”

“I just wasn’t expecting your memory to be so” he hesitates “intimate.”

“You’re right, that was a long time ago” she admits.

“I guess I was feeling vulnerable” she continues.

She puts her hand on Ryan’s shoulder.

“You giving me the chance to share these with my dad.”

“It does mean a lot.”

Her thoughts turn to her father.

“It’s getting late, I should get back to him.”

Ryan stands and hugs her.

“Are we ok?” he asks.

“Sure” she insists.

“It’s just been a long day” she explains.

Ryan pours ten beads into his hand, twists the bag and hands it to Sarah.

“For you and Frank.”

Sara nods and slides the bag into her purse.

“I’ll walk you out” Ryan says, moving into the hall.

22

It's one A.M. and the street is flooded with flashing lights.

The strobes on the police cruisers splash color onto the surrounding buildings in every direction.

A crowd has gathered at the yellow-taped barrier, each person craning their necks to get a better view.

Hoping to catch a glimpse of evil before it seeps back into the shadows.

Detective Phillips and his partner, Amos Hunter roll onto the scene in their unmarked cruiser.

The radio dispatcher is relaying some codes and street names between the static.

“Roger that... over and out” Detective Hunter answers into the handheld.

“You ready for this shit boss?” Amos asks turning to Jim.

Detective Phillips cuts the car’s engine, takes the last sip of coffee from his cup and holsters for his sidearm.

“As ready as I’ll ever be” he answers.

Jim’s body tenses with excitement.

“Well alright then, lets do this thing” Detective Hunter says, clapping his large hands.

“Mother fuckin’, lead investigator coming through!”

“Act like you’ve been here before” Detective Phillips chides Hunter, playfully reminding him who’s in charge.

“Soon as I open this door, you know I’m a professional, baby” Amos teases stroking his mustache.

“Naw, really, I’m so happy for you Jim” he says getting serious.

“You’ve had that promotion coming for a long time.”

“Let’s get to work” Jim says.

He opens the car door and steps out.

“Right behind you” Amos responds.

Lifting the security tape, Detective Phillips walks to the patrolman holding the security line.

“What’d we got?” he asks.

“One dead, apparent suicide” the officer responds.

They walk together into the dilapidated apartment building.

Detective Hunter follows and stops at the first floor apartment door.

“Any witnesses?” he asks pointing to the opened door.

“None” the patrolman answers.

“The television was on in that apartment but no one was in there.”

“In fact, it doesn’t appear anyone even lives there.”

“No furniture, no clothes, no food, just a television with its volume turned all the way up” he informs the detectives.

“Where’s the body?” Jim interrupts.

The patrolman points up.

“Third floor, kitchen” he answers.

“Thanks, we got it from here.” Amos says, excusing the patrolman.

Amos and Jim walk to the darkened stairwell.

Arriving at the third floor they knock on the door of the apartment.

The door opens on a brightly lit room, police klieg lights setup in the corner.

Taking in the scene as their eyes adjust, they are quick to begin a visual cataloging of evidence.

They note the small shabby room is furnished only with a desk and a broken down sofa.

The space under the kitchen door to their right emits flashes of light as the police photographer chronicles the crime scene.

A police radio squawks as it hangs from another patrolman's belt to their left.

The patrolman nods to the two detectives and resumes his guard post at the front door.

Jim walks to the desk in the corner.

He scans the desktop and stops on a date book next to a computer power cord plugged into the wall.

He lifts the cord end and turns to the patrolman guarding the front door.

"Computer?" he asks.

"No computer has come in or left since we arrived on scene" the patrolman answers.

Jim nods as he picks up the datebook.

He flips through the pages and stops on a recent date recognizing the name written beneath it.

Amos notices Jim's reaction and walks over.

"You got something?" he asks.

"Not sure" he answers leafing through the rest of the pages.

"Hey Amos, can you get the techs in here and dust the entire room for prints?" he asks as he pockets the date book.

"Sure thing" Amos answers.

"You thinking there's more to this suicide?" he asks.

"Power cord, but no computer."

"TV on, but no tenant."

"It doesn't add up" Jim answers.

Amos nods in agreement as Jim moves to the kitchen door.

Pushing open the swinging door, he catches the photographer in mid-flash.

The room explodes with light and in that moment Jim catches his first glimpse of Roger's corpse.

"The man of the hour" he thinks to himself.

As the kitchen door swings closed behind him he can hear Detective Hunter calling for a CSI unit on his radio.

The police photographer notes Jim's entry into the room and greets him with his hand extended.

"Congrats on the promotion Detective Phillips" he says.

"Thanks Andy" Jim says, clasping the man's hand.

Moving closer to Roger's corpse, Jim is careful to avoid a pool of blood that has collected around the chair the dead man's body occupies.

Crouching beside the chair, he looks down at the gun below Roger's lifeless hand and up to his shattered face.

Roger's thick gray hair is tinted with a mist of red and his teeth, shattered by the force of the gun muzzle, dangle from his gums.

"Old guy, tired of the rat race?" he ponders out loud.

Andy grunts in disagreement.

"Your thoughts on the situation?" he asks as he stands.

The detective turns on his heel to face the police photographer.

Andy smiles nervously and lets his camera hang down from its strap at his side.

Opening his eyes wide, he takes in the whole scene.

"Well" he starts.

"Certainly a self inflicted wound."

“Powder burns on the hand attest to that fact and the angle of the bullet’s trajectory on exit confirm it” he explains, pointing to a bullet hole in the corner of the wall.

“But looking at the cut of this guy’s clothes and his fresh haircut.”

“I’m not sure what the hell he’s doing here in the first place?”

“Slumming?”

Looking back at Jim, he continues.

“If you ask me and you did” he qualifies.

“This was not pre-meditated, something or someone else set this in motion.”

“My thoughts exactly” the Jim agrees.

Pulling the radio from his jacket he barks out a call.

“Detective Phillips here.”

“I’m calling in a 246.”

“We need a full homicide investigation team attached to this case, over.”

“Roger that, standby” the dispatcher answers.

Detective Hunter walks into the kitchen.

“CSI is on its way” he informs Jim.

“Thanks Amos” Jim answers.

“Pull the property permit too” he instructs.

“We need to know who the hell this guy is and what he was up to.”

23

Ryan closes his front door as Sara's car recedes from his driveway.

He walks through the hall and back into the kitchen to retrieve another beer from the refrigerator.

"It's late" he thinks, checking the time on his microwave.

"I hope Sara can get back into her father's room tonight."

He thinks of the memory beads in his pocket.

He is struck by a sudden deep desire to delve back into the past.

He's anxious to take his mind out of the present, especially after the uncomfortable exchange with Sara.

"I thought she had given up on a romantic relationship" he thinks.

“Or was it just I that had given up?” he wonders, taking a large swig of beer.

Ryan checks the texts on his phone as he sits down on the couch.

“Quite a few from Kellan” he ponders nervously.

Scrolling quickly through to the last, he smiles, heartened by the news.

“All good with the LC13, Kellan signing off.”

Draining the last sip of beer from his bottle he places it on the floor next to himself.

Straightening his legs, he pulls the bag of beads from his pocket.

He fishes out the next glowing bead and places it under his tongue.

The familiar sensation of memory transference transports him back into Roger’s mind, decades in the past.

Through Roger’s eyes, Ryan can see a medical ‘clean’ room.

The room is behind a glass window Roger is standing just outside of.

He is startled by the loud cry of a newborn and then the multiple cries of many.

Each child lying in their own warming crib, IV tubes running everywhere.

Individuals in scrubs appear to be monitoring the children's vitals.

Roger watches intently as a tall man, presumably the doctor, injects something into the IV line of the newborn wailing the loudest.

A beefy hand drops onto Roger's shoulder.

The interaction startles him.

Turning his head, he looks up into the eyes of a military officer.

"Agent Fisher, what do you think of phase one?" the officer inquires.

"Impressive" Roger answers.

"Though their little cries have me a bit on edge" he confesses.

“Have you been assigned your three yet?” the officer asks.

“Yes sir, two boys and one girl” Roger answers proudly.

“You can see them there in the corner on the left” he says, directing the officer’s attention with a tap on the glass window.

“Fine looking specimens” the officer comments.

“And the biological parents?” he inquires in hushed tones.

Roger turns to face the officer.

“Two widows and a drug addict.”

“I recruited the widows myself “ he answers.

“Names?” the officer asks.

“The parents?” Roger stammers, confused.

“No, the children” the officer corrects.

“Will you be providing them with names or sticking with their colony number?”

“Oh, sure” Roger chuckles, relieved.

“I’ve decided to keep the names that their parents had chosen for them.”

Peering back into the clean room he continues.

“That guy on the end is Barry, the girl in the middle is Lucy and the little one, with the big lungs, on the other side is Ryan.”

The vision fades and Ryan is pulled back to the present.

He sits up, pulls his sweat-soaked shirt away from his chest and spits the used bead into his hand.

He throws the bead onto the coffee table and takes a sip of warm beer from the bottle Sara had left behind.

Anxious to see more of his story he grabs the next glowing bead and places it under his tongue.

Within seconds he's back.

Now in an office.

Furnished for the times.

Tacky colors on the walls, faux futuristic white plastic chairs dot the room and orange shag carpet covers the floor.

The phone rings and Roger extends his hand to pick up the bulky receiver.

"Agent fisher here" Roger answers.

"Agent Fisher it's Hannah again" the voice on other end starts.

"Please don't hang up" she pleads, sobbing into the phone.

"Hannah" Roger starts.

"It's been eight months" Hannah implores.

"I need to see my baby, make sure he's okay."

“But the contract” he interrupts.

“I... I...didn’t understand the terms” she stammers.

“I didn’t know what I was signing.”

Roger clears his throat.

“Hannah, we’ve been through this many times” he answers curtly.

“Ryan is being well cared for” he assures her.

“The terms you agreed to still hold” he continues.

He nervously winds the telephone cord around his finger.

“I understand your desire to see your child but right now is not a good time” he reasons.

“We are in a critical phase of the study and if I were to permit you access, I would be jeopardizing the last eight months of research.”

“I simply cannot do that.”

“Please, I’m desperate” she wails into the phone.

“You’re going to have to trust me” Roger answers sternly.

Hannah mumbles an incoherent response between sobs.

Roger pinches the bridge of his nose, his stress and compassion getting the better of him.

“How about you and I meet tomorrow to talk this over in person” he asks.

“I’ll be in your area, say 11:30?”

“We can meet at the same bakery.”

“Thank you Agent Fisher” Hannah answers.

“I’ll be there, I... “ she starts as she chokes back more tears.

“I just need him back.”

“Once we talk in person, you’ll understand.”

“No promises “ he reminds her.

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Placing the phone back into it’s cradle he chokes back a profanity-laced scream and pounds his fist on the desk.

Regaining his composure, he maneuvers out from behind his desk and and walks quickly from the office.

He makes his way to a door at the end of the hall, knocking loudly.

The nameplate next to the door reads “Agent Dexter Hatter.”

“Come in” a gruff voice answers from inside the office.

Roger walks in and quickly shuts the door behind himself.

“Explain to me again, why these women are not allowed to see their children?” he demands.

“You know the rules as well as I” Hatter responds.

“While these lab trials are being conducting there is to be no outside contact.”

Roger sighs and falls into a plastic chair.

“You get another call from the mother?” Hatter asks.

Roger wordlessly nods, and puts his head in his hands.

“Twelfth call this week” Roger murmurs.

Hatter whistles.

“She is persistent.”

“None of my three mommies have even bothered to send a postcard” he says, feigning disappointment.

“You just have to know where to pick ‘em from” he boasts proudly.

“It gets worse” Roger continues.

“I’ve agreed to meet her tomorrow afternoon.”

“The fuck you did” Hatter responds angrily.

“Do you realize how much shit we could get into?”

“You are too soft for your own good, you know that?” he screams.

“She has rights” Roger answers weakly.

“She signed all those rights away” Hatter spits.

The two men stare out at each other and the room grows quiet.

“She doesn’t know what she signed” Roger answers guiltily.

Hatter looks down at his meeting planner.

“Where did you set the meeting for?” Hatter asks, ignoring Roger’s confession.

“The bakery on Elm” Roger answers.

“In the city” he adds.

“I’ll take care of it for you” Hatter offers.

“Really?” Roger questions, relief in his voice.

“I’ve got a way with woman” Hatter answers with a wink.

“I’ll get you the address” Roger says rising from the chair.

He walks to the door and stops.

“Promise me you’ll go easy on her?” he asks, turning to face Hatter.

The memory cuts off and once again and Ryan is back in the present.

Tears welling up in his eyes.

24

Needing air, Ryan walks to his back door and opens it.

He steps out onto the deck, where he listens to the chirp of invisible crickets in the black night.

The sound of his mother's desperate pleas still fresh in his ears cause every fiber of his body to tighten.

His past and present are blurred.

"The neighborhood's asleep" he thinks, jealous of their peace of mind.

Yawning, he rubs his arms to keep warm against the cold night air and checks the time on his phone.

"3:30 A.M."

"I need to push on" he tells himself.

Determined to discover his mother's fate, he walks back into the house and locks the door behind himself.

Settling back onto the couch, he pulls a blanket up over his legs and takes a deep breath, readying himself for the next memory.

He is struck by a dizzy spell as he reaches for the illuminated bead lying on the coffee table.

Ignoring the sensation, he places the memory bead under his tongue.

Bright overhead lights, filtered through Roger's eyes momentarily blind him as Roger walks into what appears to be an exam room.

His three charges lay in their separate cribs.

A chart on the wall shows that the children have just passed eight months.

Roger greets each child in turn and takes a seat next to the door.

A man in a lab coat enters the room holding a clipboard.

“Ahh Agent Fisher, you’re right on time” he says in greeting.

“Forgive me, I was in the lab with Dr. Feldman.”

“We were going over the children’s current brain wave readouts and must have lost track of the time” he continues, apologetically.

“And ... what have you found doc?” Roger inquires.

“Are my three kiddos passing all their tests with flying colors?” he jokes confidently.

The doctor sighs and drops his eyes to the clipboard he is holding.

“Well... ummm... yes and no” he stammers.

Alarmed, Roger’s demeanor quickly takes on a serious tone.

“What the hell does that mean?” he demands.

“Lucy” the doctor starts, pointing towards her crib.

“Lucy is developing right on schedule, but...”

Turning his gaze to the boys.

“Your two boys seem to be lagging behind.”

“In fact Barry’s brainwaves are showing signs of elevated trauma.”

“Most likely as a result of the serum the children have been receiving” he concludes.

“The boys” Roger says, saddened by the news.

“What can we do?” he asks.

There is a knock on the door.

Agent Hatter pokes his head in and makes eye contact with Roger.

“Pardon me doc, I’ll only be a moment” Roger says, excusing himself.

He steps out into the hallway to speak with Hatter.

“Sorry to interrupt your check-in” Hatter apologizes.

“I just finished up mine and thought I’d stop by and let you know that I took care of your problem.”

“You met with Hannah and explained the situation?” Roger inquires.

“Lets just say, Hanna never made it to the meeting” Hatter chuckles, lifting his eyebrow in a knowing fashion.

Roger looks at him, confused.

“She had an unforeseen car accident and won’t be bothering you anymore” Hatter clarifies.

“Oh my god” Roger utters.

“What did you do?” he asks, his voice rising with panic.

Hatter, genuinely surprised by Roger’s naivety takes a step back.

“I did what I had to do, what you should have done” he answers curtly.

“This isn’t a game Roger” Hatter reminds him.

“It’s survival of the fittest, and I wasn’t going to let one woman jeopardize all we’ve worked for.”

Reaching out, Roger grabs Hatter’s coat lapels, pushing him to the wall.

“You didn’t” he stutters.

“I never asked that... I never intended her any harm” he snarls into Hatter’s face.

Hearing the commotion, the doctor pokes his head out of the children’s room.

“Everything ok out here?” he inquires.

“We’re good doc” Agent Hatter assures him, easily pushing Roger off himself.

Looking around, he straightens his tie.

“Better get yourself together” he warns Roger.

“Compassion is a luxury we can no longer afford” he hisses through clenched teeth.

In horror, Roger backs away from Hatter.

He backs into the opposing wall and slides down as Hatter walks away.

Covering his face with his hands, he begins to sob.

The memory ends.

Ryan, now back in the present is also crying.

Tears of anger well up in his eyes as he thinks of the injustice of it all, of his mother.

Driven to see more he grabs the next bead.

Ryan falls back onto the couch and back into Roger’s memory.

He can see Roger’s reflection in a two-way mirror.

Looking through the mirror, he can see four long tables, each lined with children.

The children appear to be about two years old.

The children are separated by sex and each child has a puzzle in front of them.

A device much like a metal halo enshrouds each of the children's heads.

The murmur of instructions can be heard.

An official-looking female issues direction as she walks around the tables.

The children appear to be listening to her as they work out their puzzles.

A door to the viewing room opens and a man walks through looking distracted, passing Roger without a hint of recognition, he continues out through the hallway door.

Roger follows.

“May I speak with you Doctor Feldman?” Roger asks, trying to match the doctors gait as he hurriedly walks down the hall.

“What is it agent?” the doctor demands, scowling as he turns to face Roger.

“There is much I need to do in the next few days” he continues, waving a stack of documents under Roger’s nose for emphasis.

“The general will be coming through tomorrow.”

“I’m aware” Roger answers.

“Doc, this will only take a moment” he continues.

“I’ve been following my kid’s progress through the reports as well as making my way down here as much as possible...”

Doctor Feldman sighs as he flips through his stack of papers.

“Which three are yours?” the doctor interrupts.

“The Sullivan three” Roger answers, nervously clasping his hands in front of himself.

“Lucy, Ryan and Barry.”

“Yes I see” the doctor responds.

He reads through a data spreadsheet he has pulled from his stack of papers.

“Aha, Lucy is one of our stand outs” the doctor assures him looking up from his papers.

“She’s responding exceedingly well to the serum” he answers with a smile.

“And my two boys?” Roger asks.

“And the other two” the doctor starts, his voice trailing off as he frowns at the data.

“They’ll be failed out of the program if this next induction of serum doesn’t take” he answers coldly.

He stares blankly at Roger.

Roger’s eyes widen, he wobbles on his feet.

“What does that mean, fail out of the program?” he asks.

“Agent?” the doctor starts.

“Agent Fisher is it?”

“Do I really need to answer that?” the doctor scolds as he looks disapprovingly into Roger’s eyes.

“Now if you’ll excuse me” he says.

The doctor turns and walks away.

Roger watches as the doctor continues down the hall and out of sight.

Defeated, he returns to the viewing room.

Taking a seat, he watches Ryan and Barry intently.

The boys seem to be following along as they work on their puzzles but their pace is much slower than the other children.

The image fades as the memory ends.

The bead dribbles from Ryan's mouth into the folds of his blanket as he drifts off to sleep.

25

A faint cry permeates Ryan's slumber.

He shifts his pillow in an attempt to silence the disturbance to no avail.

"Crying" he thinks, half awake.

"Who is crying?"

Grunting, he relents and pulls himself into a sitting position.

Peering over the edge of the couch to investigate he is stunned to see a child, kneeling on the floor.

Sensing danger, Ryan springs to his feet.

The child's shoulders shake as it weeps into its folded arms.

Ryan, filled with compassion, kneels next to it.

“Hey” he says in a soft voice.

“It’s ok, I’m here.”

“Who are you?” he questions.

Lifting it’s head in answer, the child reveals it’s identity.

Ryan feels sick with shock.

“Barry?” Ryan stammers.

Confused, he reaches out to touch the boy’s face.

The front door of his home burst open and two faceless men wearing white coveralls rush in.

The door, having been knocked from its hinges allows the cold darkness to seep through the open space, and with it a deafening rendition of *‘Working Class Hero.’*

The music fills Ryan’s ears.

He is stunned and unable to fight as the two men attempt to snatch Barry away.

“No” Barry screeches, reaching out for Ryan.

Ryan grasps at the receding figures.

Grabbing hold of the Barry’s hand, Ryan struggles with the men for possession of the child.

He finds that the harder he tugs on Barry’s arm the more slack he feels.

Soon the boy’s arm unravels into a long leather strap.

The long thin leather strip begins to ooze blood and becomes slick to the touch.

Losing his grip, Ryan is forced to let go and falls backwards.

The momentum wrenches him out of his nightmare.

Sitting up in bed, Ryan's body trembles as the adrenalin courses through his veins in response to the night terror.

Flipping over his sweat-covered pillow to the cooler side, he repositions his blankets and tries to fall back asleep.

The room is quiet except for the soft tick of his alarm clock.

Ryan's body becomes more relaxed with each tick and he drifts back into a warm slumber.

The tick of the clock grows louder.

He opens eyes.

"Funny" he thinks, still in a drowsy haze.

"The ticking sounds more like a typewriter than an alarm clock."

Rolling over, he's shocked to feel another form lying next to him.

Propping himself up on his elbow, he lifts the sheets slowly and discovers Ms. Drosen, his old caretaker, lying beside him.

He stifles a cry.

The old woman's eyes are gone and have been replaced typewriter keys.

Her mouth opens to speak and the familiar metallic clicking sound of an ancient typewriter comes forth.

Ryan shudders awake.

Truly awake this time, he opens his eyes as the shrill buzz from his phone alarm sounds.

Rubbing his sore jaw, he sits up on the couch.

His blanket falls from his shoulders and the used memory bead nestled in it's folds drops and skitters across the floor.

Looking down for the source of the noise he spots the bead.

The memories of his mother's fate and the nightmares from his restless slumber threaten to haunt his morning.

He quiets his mind, breathes in deeply and exhales slowly, centering himself in the present.

“Fuck” he says in protest as he stands and straightens his stiff back.

His mouth dry, Ryan drains the last of Sara’s warm beer from the evening before.

Shaking off his temptation to stay home he wills himself forward.

“I’ve got to check in and run through the new data” he reminds himself.

Walking upstairs and into his bedroom, he grabs fresh clothes and continues on into the bathroom.

He looks in the mirror and decides to skip shaving.

“No time” he thinks.

“I’ve got to beat Randall to the office.”

He turns on the cold water and cups his hands under the tap.

Lifting his water filled hands, he splashes his face several times.

Drying his face with a towel, his thoughts turn to his mother's murderer.

"Will Roger help me find the and punish him" he ponders darkly.

Packing up, he grabs his phone and the bag of remaining memory beads he left by the couch and sets off for work.

The air outside smells alive.

The scents of fresh grass, flowers, and warm dewy leaves engulf his olfactories.

The friendliness of nature helps to ground Ryan, bring him back into the present and his current responsibilities.

The anger from the night before recedes for the moment, as he changes his focus to the immediate.

“Ok LC13, what have you got to show me today?” he thinks excitedly.

His phone pings as he receives a text.

Turning the phone over in his hand, he sees it is from Sara.

“Hey, you going into the office?” it reads.

“On my way now... are you?” he texts back.

“Nope too tired... stayed up late with dad” she responds.

“Alright, enjoy your rest” he types.

“How’d the beads work out?” he inquires.

“Perfect! I owe you.” she answers.

Ryan smiles, and slides his phone into his pocket.

He grabs his bike from the backyard and pedals off toward the office.

As he turns the corner, a car pulls out and follows him at a distance.

The man in the car picks up his ringing phone.

“Hatter here” the man says into the phone.

“Yeah, I’m following him right now.”

“His name is Ryan Wexler”

Hatter stops talking and listens to the voice on the other end of the phone for a moment.

“No, he works at the satellite lab”

“He’s a PHD, working on deep space satellite communication technology.”

“Patience” Hatter responds.

“Gonna keep a soft tail on him for now.”

“I’m not looking to create a bigger mess than we’ve already got.”

“Fisher?” he asks.

“Local law was there last night, called them myself “ Hatter chuckles.

“It should be open and shut.”

“A suicide, and with no witnesses, no trace back to us.”

Ryan turns into the park, planning to record a bead for Roger.

“Aww hell, he cut through the park” Hatter stammers.

The car moves on down the street.

“I’ll report in later” he says into the phone and hangs up.

Ryan pulls his bicycle up to the bench where he and Roger sat and talked a few days before.

He takes a seat and pulls out an empty bead.

“You’ve presented me a puzzle to solve but some of the pieces are still missing” he thinks with the bead touching his forehead.

“Let’s meet in the children’s section of the city library, four weeks from today, at 7:00 P.M.”

Looking around the perimeter of the park from the bench, Ryan places the now glowing bead into a small pocket in his backpack.

He mounts his bike and continues onto work.

“I’ll drop the bead at the safe house tomorrow” he thinks.

Pulling his bike into the parking lot, he dismounts and wheels it into the lobby of the company building.

Hatter’s car slowly drives past in the distance as the glass doors close behind Ryan.

26

Kellan walks quickly through the busy office hallway.

Distracted, he runs into a woman traveling in the opposite direction.

“My apologies” he mumbles before stopping at the door of his former project partner.

“Bill, you got a minute?” he asks, poking his head through the open door.

Bill, a middle-aged man with thinning hair, stops working at his computer and turns his attention to Kellan.

“Sure, what ya got” he offers mid-yawn.

“Is now a good time?” Kellan asks.

Bill rubs at his bloodshot eyes.

“Sorry, this new acceleration project is kicking my ass” he explains.

“I’ve been at it for two days straight.”

“I feel you” Kellan commiserates.

“I’ve been logging more hours here this week than at my girlfriends in the past three months.”

“Let’s walk back to your office” Bill suggests.

As he stands, he attempts to smooth out the wrinkles from his rumpled clothes.

“I could use a change of scenery.”

Kellan leans into Bill as they make their way back to his office.

“What I’m about to tell you stays between us” he starts, coyly.

“Real secret stuff, understand?”

Bills eyes widen at the mention of secrecy.

“Hush, hush?” he asks.

“Yep” Kellan confirms, piquing Bill’s interest.

“I’ve been plotting some odd land mass coordinates with the LC13”
Kellan continues.

“Or at least I think that’s what I’m attempting to do.”

“I’m unsure of my findings?” he confesses.

Bill slows his pace.

“You’re working with Ryan and Sara on this?” he asks.

Kellan smiles.

“What are you all up to?” he whispers.

“And why the LC13?”

“It’s designed to look out not in.”

“Hmm... yeah, we repositioned it” Kellan answers matter-of-factly.

“You what?” Bill demands.

Kellan pulls a bundle of rolled up printouts from his back pocket and hands them to Bill.

“We’ve turned the LC13 around to focus in on the earth” he adds.

Bill studies the data as they continue down the hall.

“Looks like your horizon lines are off” Bill offers after a quick review of the printouts.

“The way this reads” he says, pointing to a specific line of code.

“There would have to be a land mass floating above the Indian ocean?”

“Exactly” Kellan concurs as they enter his office.

Kellan makes his way around his desk and takes a seat.

Pulling his laptop closer, he opens the imaging map Ryan had created earlier in the week.

Bill sets down the printouts and looks over Kellan’s shoulder at the laptop screen.

“Holy shit “ he utters, as the topographical map builds on the screen.

“I know... right?” Kellan agrees.

“Could this be correct?” he wonders.

“Is this live reporting from the satellite or one of your video games?”
Bill inquires suspiciously.

“The real deal” Kellan reports.

He leans in close to get a better look.

“Hey Kellan I need the latest...” Ryan starts, as he enters the
office.

He stops mid-sentence upon seeing Bill.

“Oh hey Bill, could I have a few minutes with Kellan?” he asks.

“Sure Ryan” Bill answers, straightening up.

“But could I ask what specifically you are trying to do here?”

“I’ll have to fill you in later” Ryan insists, escorting Bill into the hallway.

He shuts the office door and turns to face Kellan.

“What the hell was that?” he asks, exasperated.

“What?” Kellan wonders.

“What don’t you understand about secrecy?” Ryan retorts.

“The last thing we need is Bill Snyder up our ass.”

Kellan shrinks into his chair.

“I just wanted to confirm some of the new data I received from the LC13” he offers weakly.

“With you and Sara MIA lately, I had no one else to run the data by” Kellan continues, his voice ringing with a tinge of jealousy.

“Besides, Bill’s a sharp guy.”

“We weren’t MIA” Ryan snaps.

“I’m here now, what numbers are you concerned about?”

The room grows quiet.

“Kellan” Ryan begins, breaking the silence.

“Bill may be sharp but he’s also a rat.”

“Did you forget how the last project you shared with him ended?”

Kellan, still smarting from the reprimand, remains quiet and instead engages the live satellite feed on his screen.

The screen fills with lines of code.

“Here’s what we’ve got” he offers.

He rotates the laptop around to give Ryan a better view.

“Um hmm” Ryan utters studying the screen.

“And the printed data?” he asks.

Kellan hands Ryan the packet that Bill left on his desk.

“This is from the last twenty-four hours” he adds.

Ryan takes a seat and leafs through the pages.

Distractedly, he reaches for a pen and pulls his phone from his pocket.

He jots down some numbers, flips through the rest of the pages and does a few calculations on his phone.

“It all checks out” he answers, looking up from the data.

“It does?” Kellan questions.

“The distortion in the readings is due to a dimensional rift” Ryan explains.

“Theory or fact?” Kellan wonders

“We won’t know for sure till we get a closer look” Ryan concedes.

“A closer look?” Kellan asks.

“How?”

“I haven’t figured that out just yet” Ryan answers, his attention still on the computer display.

“Not now” Randall yells from down the hall, his voice loud enough to penetrate Kellan’s closed office door.

“Get Kellan and Wexler in my office pronto” he demands.

“Randall’s in a chipper mood” Kellan jokes.

“So I hear” Ryan answers, rolling his eyes.

The phone rings.

“Hello” Ryan answers.

“Please tell him we’ll be right over.”

Ryan hangs up and turns to Kellan.

“We’re on.”

“Grab your printouts and copy the latest topographic map to a flash drive.”

Kellan pulls a flash drive from his drawer.

“I know this project is a big deal but surely you can trust Randall with an email” Kellan asserts.

“Kellan, I don’t trust anyone” Ryan confesses.

Kellan is hurt by Ryan’s admission.

“I’m sorry” Ryan offers.

“I didn’t mean you.”

“You and Sara are the brightest techs I’ve ever worked with.”

“I couldn’t configure this satellite without you” he concedes.

“I understand” Kellan answers.

The men exit the office.

27

Detective Phillips sits at his desk inside the police station filling out a suicide investigation form on his computer.

“Name... Roger Fisher”

“Sex... Male”

“Age... unknown”

“Occupation... unknown”

“Next of kin... unknown”

“Cause of death... Self-inflicted gunshot”

He stops typing and stares at his screen as he collects his thoughts on Roger’s apparent suicide.

His detective training nags at him to question the obvious.

“This case begs lots of answers” he thinks.

The large office, with its bad lighting and cracked paint is gloomy on the brightest of days and today is no exception.

Jim leans back in his chair and surveys the room.

Detective Schumer, working his own case, chases down leads on the phone.

His loud voice carries over the cubicle walls.

Detectives Gill and Caldan are tossing around an old football between their cubes.

The pair yuck it up while waiting to catch the next case.

Jim's gaze returns to the crime scene photos scattered over the top of his desk.

The photos feature an older man with gray hair, stained red with blood.

The victim's arms hang lifeless by his sides.

"Roger's last stand" he thinks.

Frustrated, Jim pushes himself away from his desk.

“I’m going to get some coffee” he announces.

“Anybody need anything?”

Detective Schumer holds up a five dollar bill and writes out his order on a sheet of paper while talking with someone on his phone.

As Jim pulls the money and the order from Detective Schumer’s hand, Schumer winks at him.

“Nice” Jim answers, walking to the door.

Detective Hunter walks in and cuts off his exit.

“Where you headed boss?” Amos asks.

“Headed out for coffee, you want anything?” Jim asks.

“I need a change of scenery to clear my head” he adds.

“Oh no, the lead detective does not get his own coffee today” Amos insists.

Taking the five dollars from Jim's hand, Amos walks up to Detective Caldan.

"Get your ass up " he sneers.

"The lieutenant needs coffee and here you are fucking around."

He playfully throws the money at Caldan and turns to walk back to Jim's desk.

"Oh and Marty, bring me back a coffee and doughnut too" he adds, over his shoulder.

Detective Caldan grimaces and stands.

The six foot three man walks menacingly up to Amos.

The two size each other up for a moment before Detective Caldan cracks a smile.

"You need cream with that old man?" he asks.

"What you think?" Amos snaps back, jumping up and getting Caldan in a headlock.

“Guys, enough... alright?” Jim barks, his voice rising with frustration.

“Amos, sit down.”

“We need to discuss the Fisher case.”

“And Marty, would you mind picking up the coffee and doughnuts?”
Jim asks in a calmer tone.

“No problem Jim” Marty answers.

Jim turns in his his chair to face Amos.

“Why are you such a ball breaker?” he asks.

Amos holds up his hands.

“Gotta keep it light man” he answers.

“Especially with what we see everyday.”

“Otherwise I’d never get out of bed.”

Jim grins and shakes his head.

“So what do you got?” he asks.

“Well, I sent the fingerprints to the lab for a cross check, like you asked” Amos answers pulling up a seat.

“I also talked with the neighbors.”

“No one knew this guy.”

“Figures” Jim says.

“What about the building?”

“I pulled the apartment title and it appears our Mr. Fisher owned the whole building.”

“Well that’s something, good work” Jim offers.

Jim adds the new information to the form on his computer.

Amos waits and absent-mindedly flips through the crime scene photos on Jim’s desk.

“Oh yeah, and we were able to access the second floor apartment” he adds.

“Thought it was burned out?” Jim asks.

“So did I, but turns out there was no fire” Amos answers.

“It was just staged to look like that.”

“No tenants either.”

“The second floor was used as some sort of secret storage room.”

“It was filled with stacks of documents and hard drives.”

“I have the tech guys going through a few of the hard drives right now.”

Amos turns his attention to Roger’s journal laying on the desk next to Jim’s hand.

Jim follows Amos’ gaze to the notebook and quickly places it into his desk drawer.

"I'll process this piece of evidence myself" he answers.

"Got it" Amos answers.

Jim picks up a photograph from his desk.

The photo is of the gun Roger used to kill himself with laying in a pool of blood below the dead man's hand.

"I think we can both agree, the guy did himself in"

"But why?" he wonders out loud.

"Million dollar question" Amos adds.

"Someone else was there when it happened, I'm sure of it" Jim continues.

"The overturned chair, the missing computer."

"I've put this guy's name through every identity program we have, including national but nothing pops."

"No report of a job, medical records, no history whatsoever."

“It doesn’t add up.”

“I have my suspicions as well” Amos agrees.

“Did we miss anything?” Jim questions.

“We’ve dusted for prints, talked with the neighbors and took photos of the entire apartment.”

“We handled the crime scene by the book” Amos assures him.

“We’ve followed every protocol.”

“Something is off with this one” Jim adds.

“Let’s wait and see what the tech guys comes up with” Amos offers.

“Our corpse could have just been a lonely old guy who finally had enough?” Amos surmises.

“Anything’s possible” Jim agrees.

“But I’m not gonna let my first case as lead detective get cold before checking every box.”

“I got ya brother, we on this, till we ain’t” Amos assures him.

Jim leans in.

“Amos I got a favor” Detective Phillips asks awkwardly.

“Can you finish up the report while I chase down a possible lead?”

“A lead?” Amos asks.

“I didn’t mentioned it earlier cause it is more like a hunch” Jim answers apologetically.

“I’m sure its nothing, but I want to follow it up on my own...cool?”

“I see” Amos starts.

“That’s how it is” he teases.

“Thanks“ Jim says, standing up from his chair.

He walks to office door.

“And Amos” he calls, turning back.

“Yeah boss?” Amos answers, looking up from the computer.

“Save me a doughnut.”

28

The Landscape is awash in an orange hue from the setting sun as Ryan exits the office building.

Tired but excited, he replays the day's events in his head, the meeting with Randall and his success at staving off another profanity-laden tantrum.

"Brilliant" he thinks, congratulating himself.

"A month extension!"

"More than I planned to ask for."

"Plenty of time to find a way in" he theorizes.

Straddling his bicycle, he pulls his phone from his pocket and calls Sara.

"Hey Ryan" she whispers.

“Hold on as I move into the hall.”

“Am I catching you at a bad time?” he asks.

“No, its perfect timing” she answers as she closes her fathers door behind herself.

“Just got dad to sleep.”

“We were up all night re-living our past.”

Her voice breaks as she chokes up.

“Ryan ... I really can't thank you enough.”

“My father” she pauses.

“He was his old self today, he was happy.”

“He was even telling the staff some corny jokes.”

“He couldn't stop smiling.”

Ryan's face feels hot as he blushes.

Always uncomfortable taking a compliment, he quickly interjects.

“That’s really great, I can’t wait to see him.”

“But, Sara, I’m really calling to thank you.”

“Thank me?” she inquires.

“If you hadn’t listened and acted on my crazy theory” he explains.

“Oh Ryan, you know I’m your biggest fan” she jokes.

“How’d the meeting with Randall go?” she asks changing the subject.

“Surprisingly smooth” he answers.

“Randall’s onboard for at least another month.”

Excited, he continues.

“The LC13 is working like a charm, we just need it to gain a little more focus and I should be able to find a way in.”

“Ryan!” Sara interrupts.

“A way in.”

“That sounds dangerous?” she says, her voice rising in alarm.

“Please promise me you won’t do anything rash.”

“Scout’s Honor” he promises.

“You knew that was the goal all along.”

“Nothing has changed” he answers.

“But Ryan” she starts.

“Let’s fight about it when we get to that point, hmm?” he asks.

“I’m sure we are a ways off” he reassures her.

“I don’t want to keep you from your dad, so I’m going to say goodnight.”

“Be careful” she answers.

“Of course, and Sara, let’s keep the beach memories between us.”

“I can’t imagine your father would be too happy with me if he happened upon those” Ryan jests.

“Ha, funnyman...I’ll see you in the AM” she says and hangs up.

Ryan slides the phone back into his pocket and sets off on his bike.

As he pedals out of the parking lot and makes his way down the street he is oblivious to the black car following him.

Riding the five miles to his house unmolested, he whistles a happy tune as he pulls his bike into the driveway and walks it around the back.

Unlocking the back door, he walks in and is immediately comforted by the cool air coming out of the AC vents.

Putting his bag down, he peels off his shirt, and walks to the refrigerator to make himself a sandwich.

He takes his plate and a glass of ice-cold lemonade over to the couch.

Pulling a glowing memory bead from his pocket, he sits and studies the bead as he finishes his sandwich and gulps down the last of the lemonade.

Laying back, he places the bead into his mouth and drops into another of Roger's memories.

Roger stands with a group of doctors and other agents.

There must have been a heated exchange as Roger turns and storms off.

"Kids are expendable" he grumbles to himself, frustrated.

"Only part of an experiment, unwanted and unloved" he hisses.

He turns back to face the group.

"Well, not in my world they aren't" he shouts.

Roger lifts his ID for a guard as he walks up to a doorway.

The armed man moves to the side, allowing Roger entry.

It's a nursery.

He walks straight toward two young boys playing in the far corner.

"Hey uncle Roger!" the smaller of the boys exclaims as he spies Roger's entry.

The larger boy nods and grunts in Roger's direction.

Walking over, Roger hugs them both.

"Happy third birthday Ryan! happy third birthday Barry" Roger says, feigning excitement.

"Thanks" a young Ryan answers excitedly.

"Have you brought us the surprise you promised?"

Barry's eyes light up at the mention of a surprise.

Roger notes the boy's anticipation and slumps his shoulders in sadness, knowing he has to deliver yet another disappointment.

“I’ve got something better planned for us” Roger whispers, looking around.

“But you have to keep quiet about it, ok?”

Ryan and Barry nod eagerly.

“Today we are going on adventure” he says looking into their trusting eyes.

“It will be a secret between the three of us.”

Putting his finger to his lips he walks to the side door.

“You must listen and do exactly as I say” he instructs the boys in hushed tones.

“Follow me” he motions as he quietly opens the door, allowing all three to slip out.

Roger and the boys follow a maze of hallways, passing row after row of doors.

The boys look around with eager eyes as though they have never seen this part of the building before.

Roger nods a greeting as they pass other people.

He portends an air of official business as he and the boys make their way past.

The boys trail close behind and do not utter a word.

As they continue their walk, it becomes apparent that they are slowly walking up an incline.

The rooms they pass now, have windows to the outside and sunshine is streaming through.

The boys stop for a moment, puzzling at their first glimpse of natural light and look at each other before continuing on.

Roger walks a bit faster and his stride widens, as he approaches a large steel door with an electronic keypad.

Upon reaching the door he taps a few keys on the keypad which answers in kind with a melody of beeps.

Suddenly, the door swings open letting in a flood of sunlight.

Scared, the boys move to hide behind Roger.

He insists they walk through the door before him.

Barry lets out a whimper as the bright light hurts his eyes.

Ryan quickly follows and grabs Barry's hand to comfort him.

As Roger struggles to shut the door behind himself, the intercom crackles to life and a familiar voice makes it's displeasure known.

"Fisher what the fuck are you doing?" Agent Hatter inquires.

"You know I'll find them and you know I'll do what has to be done."

"I've been watching your every move since you left the nursery."

Roger reaches in and presses the intercom button on the wall.

"Just let us go" he pleads.

“You can’t hide” Hatter warns, his voice rising in anger.

“They’ll remember none of this” Roger offers.

“But if you kill them... I’ll remember it all, and then you’ll have to kill me before I find you” Roger threatens, his voice growing dark.

“You’re making a huge mistake” Hatter cautions.

“If you walk away now, you’re on your own.”

“The agency will have to turn it’s back on you” he continues, menacingly.

“Goodbye Hatter” Roger says, letting go of the intercom button.

Throwing his full weight against the iron door, it shuts and locks with a click.

Roger hurriedly ushers the boys to a large black Buick parked down the street.

He scans from side to side, watching for anyone who may try to stop him.

He is relieved that no one else is on the street.

He and the boys are on a non-descript street in a vanilla suburb with no indication that a huge laboratory complex exists below.

The boys pile into the back of the Buick as Roger instructs.

Roger looks at them through the rearview mirror.

Ryan and Barry wordlessly look into each other's eyes.

They seem to sense the danger, but are content to remain together.

Roger, now assured he made the right decision, puts the car in drive and motors down the street.

The memory ends and Ryan opens his eyes.

Sitting up, he quickly fishes in his pocket for the next bead.

29

Gravel from the driveway crunches under the weight of the Buick's tires as the car rolls to a stop in front of a shoddy-looking frame house.

The house, located on a busy street has an expansive and welcoming front porch.

"That's a good sign" Roger assures himself.

Traffic noise from the main drive can be heard as Roger steps from the car.

Leaving the car idling, he walks up the porch steps, and knocks loudly on the door.

An elderly woman opens the door cautiously and peers out.

"May I help you?" she asks, opening the door wider.

“Hello ma’am, the name is Harold Watkins” Roger answers, extending his hand.

“What can I do for you?” she inquires, extending her own.

“So very nice to meet you” he continues, taking her hand in his.

“I’ve heard from around that you’re the woman to see about looking after children?”

“I do my best” she answers.

Roger turns his gaze to the exterior of the house.

“May not look like much but it is a home filled with love” she says with an eager smile.

A young girl peers at Roger from behind the old woman, interrupting the conversation.

The old woman’s eyes momentarily flash with anger as she uses her leg to nudge the child away.

Puzzled by the woman's quick temper, Roger steps back and an uncomfortable moment of silence falls between the two.

He clears his throat and continues.

"Are the children treated with kindness?" he asks.

The old woman nods an affirmative and follows Roger's gaze as it falls onto his idling car in the driveway.

"Pardon me ma'am, I'll go and fetch my two boys" he says excusing himself.

"Ms. Drosen" the woman answers.

"And please bring the children inside where we can talk proper about your situation."

Roger tears up as he walks down the steps and back to the car.

He pauses and gazes lovingly at the boys through the window.

The children are curled up, sleeping soundly under a blanket.

Ryan's arm is draped over the much larger Barry, protecting him.

Two days worth of empty food packages and cups litter the back seat floor and John Lennon's '*Working Class Hero*' plays from the car's speakers.

Opening the door, Roger gently nudges Barry's shoulder.

"Wake up Barry" he says softly, brushing a lock of hair from Barry's forehead.

"We're here."

"Time to come in and meet a new friend."

"Where are we?" Ryan asks, rubbing his eyes as he wakes.

"Somewhere safe" Roger answers.

"Come on boys I want you to meet Ms. Drosen."

"Who?" Ryan asks.

"She's going to be looking after you for awhile" Roger answers softly.

“But where will you be?” Ryan asks.

Ignoring the question, Roger moves to the back of the car.

Ryan follows.

“Are you going away?” he asks as Roger pulls a suitcase from the trunk.

Roger puts down the suitcase and kneels in front of Ryan.

He puts his hands on Ryan’s shoulders and looks into his eyes.

“If I stay, I’ll be putting you in danger” he answers.

Ryan drops his head in despair.

Giving Ryan a reassuring smile, Roger continues.

“I’ll come by when I can and check in” he promises.

Tears well up in his eyes again.

“It’s like I explained yesterday, we have a very important secret, Barry you and I.”

“Until I can get to the right people it has to remain a secret.”

“Understand?”

Ryan nods in agreement.

Grabbing Roger’s fingers, Ryan walks, suitcase in hand, up the front steps of the porch.

Barry follows close behind.

Ms Drosen greets the trio as they walk into the front hall.

Four other children of various ages are there, standing close to the staircase.

The children’s bodies stiffen as Ms Drosen’s gaze falls on them.

She she leads Roger and the two boys into the parlor.

Taking the suitcase from Ryan, Roger sets it down next to the sofa and takes a seat.

He motions for Ryan and Barry to sit next to him.

“Yes, please get comfortable” Ms Drosen offers.

The boys climb onto the couch and sit on either side of Roger.

“Are the children thirsty?” she coos.

“Can I interest you in some lemonade?”

Roger looks at each boy and they both nod in agreement.

“If it wouldn’t be too much trouble” he asks.

“Clyde” Ms Drosen yells.

A tall boy walks into the parlor and stands rigidly next to Ms Drosen’s chair awaiting instructions.

"Bring our guests some lemonade, please" she purrs through a smile, still looking at Roger.

"Yes ma'am" Clyde answers and disappears into the hall.

Quickly returning with three glasses of lemonade on a tray, he delivers the boys their glasses.

His hands shake as he passes Roger his and a few drops spill onto Roger's pants.

Reaching out, Roger steadies Clyde's hand and takes the glass.

"You okay son?" he asks.

Clyde's eyes are wide and full of fear.

"May I have a word Ms. Drosen?" Roger asks rising from his seat.

He pats Ryan's and Barry's knees as he gets up.

"Stay here for a moment" he whispers.

“Of course Mr. Watkins” Ms. Drosen answers.

She follows Roger out the front door and back onto the porch.

They stand in silence for a moment as Roger rehearses the story in his head one last time.

Ms. Drosen steps forward and breaks the silence.

“I don’t care what you did, or where you’re going” she starts in a business-like tone.

“You’re not gonna offer me the truth anyways” she concludes.

Roger nods.

“I’ll look after the boys, no questions asked” she offers, looking into Roger’s eyes.

“For a fee, of course” she continues, smiling.

Pulling an envelope from his pocket, Roger hands it to Ms. Drosen.

“This should cover the next six months” he offers.

“I’ll be in touch before that time runs out.”

Ms Drosen greedily takes the envelope.

Straightening up to his full height, Roger towers over the old woman menacingly.

“I don’t know how you run things here but by the fear in those other children’s eyes, I’d say you’re a bit harsh.”

Ms. Drosen feigns shock.

“I admit I’m in a desperate situation” he confesses.

“But my two boys are special to me” he continues, looking into her eyes.

“I warn you not to lay a finger on either of them.”

“Of course” she assures him.

“I will return for them within the next six months” Roger concludes.

The memory grows smaller as though Ryan is looking at it through a tunnel.

He fights to remain in the moment, to learn more, but it fades away.

30

Ryan's phone vibrates in his pants pocket pulling him back to the present.

Frustrated, he quickly stands up.

Still a bit dizzy, he wobbles on his feet as he fishes for the phone.

The latest memory still flashing through his mind as he reads the caller ID on the screen.

Letting out a groan, he answers the phone.

"Hey Randall."

"Where the fuck is my Satellite?" Randall's voice snaps through the speaker.

"Excuse me?" Ryan asks, his mind still a bit hazy.

“The LC13” Randall hisses through gritted teeth.

“What did you do with my satellite!” he screams into the phone.

“I knew I shouldn’t have trusted you and your crazy theories.”

“Randall, give me a minute to catch up” Ryan argues.

Randall ignoring him, continues his rant.

“You knew my weakness, didn’t’ you?”

“Money and control.”

“You played me you fucking asshole!” Randall howls.

Ryan can hear another voice in the background.

“Who’s there with you?” he asks.

“Kellan get the fuck out of here and get back to your computer”

Randall yells, away from the phone.

“And locate my fucking satellite.”

Turning his attention back to the phone and in a calmer voice, Randall continues the conversation.

“Ryan” he starts.

“In as few words as possible, tell me where my satellite has gone?”

“Randall” Ryan begins.

“I don’t know what’s happened.”

“I’m at home laying on my couch, but if you bring me up to speed I can help.”

“Let me talk with Kellan” Ryan insists.

“Not gonna happen, Kellan is very busy” Randall answers.

“Everyone here is busy.”

“We are all looking for the goddamned satellite and where are you?”
Randall taunts.

“One thing at a time Randall” Ryan pleads.

“You’re telling me the satellite is gone?”

Pausing momentarily to gain his bearings, he continues down the analytical path.

“How long has it been gone?”

“Is there a debris field?”

“Could it have been knocked out of orbit by collision with a meteor?”

“Or possibly a malfunction?” he asks.

“It’s been two hours since it disappeared” Randall answers.

“And no, there is no impact debris in that quadrant” Randall states, his voice rising again.

“I’ve sent two other satellites in the same vicinity to investigate and they have come up with nothing!”

“Got any other bright ideas, you fucking genius!” he snaps.

Ignoring Randall’s outburst, Ryan continues.

“I’m coming down to the office to get a better handle on the situation.”

“I’ll be there in ten minutes” he says closing his laptop.

“You’ve fucked up enough already” Randall berates him.

“I shouldn’t have trusted you” he shouts into the phone.

“What the hell was I thinking?” Randall asks himself.

“Just stay away!” he warns.

“Randall I’ll be there in ten” Ryan insists as he hangs up the phone.

Panicked, he slides his shoes on, grabs his keys, and heads for the door.

He is surprised as he opens the door to find Jim, his neighbor standing on the porch.

“Hey Ryan I was just about to knock” Jim says in greeting.

“Am I catching you at a bad time?” he asks, seeing the frustration in Ryan’s eyes.

“I was just heading out, big emergency at work” Ryan explains.

“Can you give me a few minutes?” Jim asks, ignoring Ryan’s dilemma and walking past him into the house.

“What can I do for you?” Ryan asks impatiently, as he turns to face the detective.

Jim stands in Ryan’s hallway, his eyes downcast, nervously stroking his mustache.

Ryan’s attitude quickly turns to compassion upon seeing the anxiety in his neighbor’s face.

“Take a seat” Ryan offers in a softer tone, directing him to the parlor.

“You okay?” he asks, closing the front door behind himself.

“I’m good, but would mind taking a seat as well?” the detective suggests.

Ryan grabs a seat across from Jim, giving him his full attention.

“Not sure how to frame this so I’ll just start with what I know” the detective begins.

“I’ve been put on a new death investigation and it seems as though you may be involved” Jim says looking into Ryan’s eyes.

“I’d like to ask you a few questions.”

He hesitates.

“Do you mind?”

“A death?” Ryan asks, confused.

“Do you know a man named Roger Fisher?” the detective continues.

“He lives in old town, not far from here.”

“I met a man with that same name a few days ago” Ryan answers honestly.

“He said he was someone from my past, knew my mother” Ryan adds.

“I mentioned the meeting to you that same evening.”

“We found Roger yesterday” Jim informs him.

“Gunshot to the head” The detective says pointing to his temple.

“At first blush it looked to be self-inflicted, a straight suicide, but after taking in the whole scene I wasn’t so sure.”

“His computer was gone and the place seemed to have been gone through.”

Ryan shifts nervously in his chair.

“We were able to recover some fingerprints and are awaiting the results” Jim continues.

Ryan feels his body going into shock, his face feels hot and his palms are clammy.

“You ok, Ryan” the detective asks, noticing the change in his neighbors demeanor.

“Do you have a picture of the man?” Ryan asks.

“Maybe I could confirm the two are the same man and not just a sad coincidence.”

Detective Phillips ignores the request.

“It’s the same man” he assures Ryan.

“But how do you?” Ryan asks.

Jim hands Ryan the page from Roger’s journal he discovered at the crime scene.

Ryan hangs his head after reading his name on the page.

“You found my name at the scene?” he mumbles.

“And because of this you conclude I killed the man?” Ryan asks, insulted by the implication.

“Just trying to piece this all together” Detective Phillips continues, putting his hand on Ryan’s shoulder.

“Did you have anything to do with his death?” he asks.

“Absolutely not” Ryan states angrily pushing Jim’s hand off.

“I met the man only a few days ago.”

“I assure you” Jim says.

“I come here as a friend.”

He takes back the journal page from Ryan.

“I haven’t even shared this piece of evidence with my partner.”

“But once I do, questions will be raised and if we find your fingerprints at the apartment....” he warns, his voice trailing off.

“I haven’t been there” Ryan insists.

“You mentioned a missing computer.”

“How do you even know he had a computer if you didn’t find one?”
Ryan asks.

“Power supply” Jim offers.

“The thief or thieves took the computer and left the power supply, leading me to think this wasn’t a straight up robbery.”

“They must have been after the information on the computer.”

“And why start with me?” Ryan inquires.

“Your name was written down in the dead man’s journal” Jim answers.

“Where should I have started?”

Ryan nods.

“Makes sense” Ryan admits.

“Sorry for being so defensive.”

“Did he give you anything?” Jim questions.

“Did he lead you to think he was in danger?”

“Nope, we had a short talk, he mentioned my mother and I promised to keep in touch” Ryan answers.

“Well alright” Jim answers.

“I’ll keep you posted if anything new comes to light” he promises, rising to his feet.

Ryan stands and walks Jim to the door.

“Sorry to deliver the bad news like that” Jim says guiltily, stepping out onto the porch.

“But time is of the essence and if you had any info...”

Ryan stops him.

“I understand.”

“Goodnight” he says as he closes the door.

With the door closed, Ryan punches wildly in the air.

“Shit” he yells to no one.

“Fuck” he says slamming his fist into the wall.

“Fucking Roger, Fucking satellite.”

With his world crumbling, he feels close to passing out.

He walks to the bathroom and splashes water on his face to cool down.

He squints as he turns on the light it's brightness hurting his eyes.

He leans over the sink and vomits.

Raising his head, he catches sight of his reflection in the bathroom mirror and strikes it with his fist.

The mirror explodes and shards of glass fall to the floor.

Blood dribbles from a deep cut on his hand.

He slumps to the floor defeated.

31

Ryan's hand, now bandaged, slowly brushes fragments of the smashed bathroom mirror into a dust pan.

He tips the pan of glass into a steel wastebasket at his side where it falls with a crash.

Sliding on his knees over to the next pile of glass, he sweeps it towards himself.

A flash of a light, reflecting off one of the shards, catches his eye.

He stops sweeping as inspiration overtakes him.

After working out the details of his newly inspired thought, he scrambles to his feet.

Running to the kitchen, he searches through the drawers for the necessary items to build upon his idea.

He sets a reel of fishing line on the countertop and moves onto another drawer, grabbing a tube of super glue.

After gathering a few more items, he heads back to the bathroom.

Possessed with a new found energy, he quickly sets about brining his inspiration to life.

Thoughts of Roger and Randall pushed aside for the moment to make room for the necessary calculations his inspiration requires.

He begins by rolling out deliberate lengths of fishing line and cutting them from the reel with an available nail clipper.

Gathering the lengths of fishing line, he lays them out side by side on top of a towel.

Once complete, he turns his attention to his next task and overturns the waste basket, dumping all the glass shards back onto the floor.

Pulling the larger pieces of the shattered glass from the pile, he organizes them into a pattern next to the towel.

He adds a drop of glue to each piece and sets an end of a fishing line length on top.

The doorbell rings, interrupting him as he is gluing down the last strand of fishing line.

He stands, brushes the glass dust from his hands and knees and walks to the front door.

Opening it quickly, he distractedly peers out.

“You gonna let me?” Sara asks from the darkness of the porch.

“I’ve been ringing your bell for the last ten minutes.”

“Sure” Ryan answers waving her in as he shuts the door behind her.

“What time is it?” he wonders out loud as he rubs his eyes.

“It’s two o’clock” Sara answers showing him the time on her phone.

“In the afternoon?” Ryan asks, confused.

“No, in the morning” she answers, amused.

He looks at her as though seeing her for the first time.

“You okay?” she asks.

“You seem a bit out of it” she observes.

“Hmm?” he wonders absent-mindedly.

“Yeah, I’m fine” he answers, her question finally registering with him.

“Just got caught up in a new project” he tells her, waving his bandaged hand toward the bathroom.

“What happened to your hand?” Sara asks, grabbing it and examining the bandages.

“It’s nothing” he assures her.

“Let me see” she says, pulling him closer.

Once satisfied with a thorough examination of Ryan's bandages she inquires after his mental state.

"Is this about Randall and the missing satellite?" she asks.

"Cause I was coming by to see if you needed a lift to the office."

"I'm okay" he assures her, looking deeply into her eyes.

An unspoken moment of intimacy pass between the two causing Sara to feel self-conscious.

She takes a step back.

Her eyes dart nervously around the room, looking for something to focus on besides him.

"Randall called me in a panic while I was at the hospital" she explains.

"I was worried something may have happened to you" she continues.

Her voice trails off as she spots the mess in the bathroom.

“Oh shit, that’s right, the satellite” Ryan exclaims, smacking his forehead.

“Randall contacted me as well.”

“I had intended to head over there before I became distracted.”

“What’s going on Ryan?” Sara asks still looking towards the hall bathroom.

“You want some coffee?” Ryan offers, guiding her towards the kitchen.

“Not now, thanks” she answers breaking off from Ryan and entering the hall bathroom.

“What is all this?” she asks stepping around the fragments of mirrored glass scattered across the floor.

“Roger’s dead” Ryan answers in a sullen tone.

“Who?” Sara asks, nervously.

“Roger” he repeats.

“Focus Ryan, what happened in here?” she says grabbing his arms and shaking him.

Noting the fear and confusion in Sara’s eyes, Ryan relents and gives her the full story.

“I was going through some more memories” he recounts.

“Roger’s memories” he reminds her.

“The guy who’s place we dropped by the other day.”

Seeing the recognition in her face he continues.

“I was re-living another memory from my past, when Randall’s call came through.”

“As soon as I answered the call, the bastard started screaming that the satellite had gone missing and accused me of having something to do with it.”

“I was headed out the door when my neighbor, Detective Phillips came by to tell me that Roger had died.”

“I’m sorry to hear that” Sara offers.

“How did he die?” she asks.

“And how did Detective Phillips make the connection between you and Roger?”

“Apparently, Roger wrote my name in his calendar” Ryan answers, nervously pacing the floor.

“Jim was pressuring me and I felt a heavy interrogation starting, so I lied about our visit to his apartment.”

Sara’s raises her eyebrow in confusion.

“Why?” she asks.

“You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I wasn’t sure what to do” he confesses.

“My mind was reeling.”

“First the satellite goes missing and now a mysterious figure from my past winds up dead.”

“I felt trapped” he admits.

“What have we got ourselves into?” she sighs.

“Just me“ he assures her.

“I’ll keep your name out of it.”

“And what happened to your hand?” she continues.

Embarrassed, he looks down.

“When Jim left, I walked to the bathroom in order to splash water on my face.”

“I was attempting to pull myself together but instead got angry and punched the mirror.”

“Uh-huh” she answers disapprovingly .

“It’s okay to be upset” she offers.

Ryan starts pacing again.

“I was.”

“I am.”

“I don’t know” he concedes.

“You’ve been hit with some bad news” she offers, compassionately.

Ryan nods his head.

“Truthfully, I am upset about Roger and about the satellite.”

“But something happened after I smashed the mirror” he offers.

“I was compelled by inspiration.”

“Inspiration?” Sara asks.

“I may have found another way in” he offers.

“In where?” she asks, trying to follow his train of thought.

“To the other dimension we’ve been tracking” he answers, frustrated with her in-ability to keep up.

“Dimensions, death, punching mirrors” she observes.

“Maybe you should stay home tonight” she suggests, her voice filled genuine concern.

“Collect your thoughts and meet me at the office in the A.M., fresh ok?” she says patting his bandaged hand.

“I’ll head over there now and see what I can do about the LC13.”

“I’m sure it’s just navigational glitch” she assures him.

“I appreciate your concern” he says hugging her.

“Maybe I will take the night” he agrees.

“Good idea” she says.

Eager to finish his project, he walks her to the door.

“I’ll see you bright and early” he promises.

After shutting the door behind Sara, Ryan heads back to the bathroom to continue working on his new project.

He scoops up the glass fragments, fishing line now securely attached and steps onto the upturned wastebasket.

Envisioning a map in his head he plots points on the ceiling marking them with push pins.

He ties an individual strand of fishing line to a each pin, allowing the glass fragments to dangle shoulder height from the floor.

A force, larger than he seems to be guiding his actions.

He feels the same level of inspiration that he felt when the theory of the satellite trajectory change occurred to him.

“Back when the dizziness started” he recalls.

32

The conference room is quiet excepted for the sound of clicking keys as Sara and Kellan work out the possible flight trajectories of the missing LC13.

The mood in the room is heavy.

Kellan turns to Sara exasperated.

“I don’t know Sara” he sighs.

“I can’t find anything after the last known transmission.”

“Kellan, something this large doesn’t just vanish” Sara answers, still looking at her screen.

“Keep trying different trajectories, we’ll find it” she assures him.

“That’s just it” Kellan answers.

“What’s it?” Sara asks.

“What if the satellite was programmed to disappear?” he speculates.

“You said it yourself, something this large doesn’t just vanish.”

“What if someone besides the three of us, with knowledge of the satellite’s mission, had a hand in it?” Kellan posits.

He leans back in his chair and looks at her.

Sara stops typing and looks up from her laptop.

“What are you saying?” she asks.

“Well you’re here” he observes.

“I’m here and Randall’s here” he continues.

He looks at her sheepishly, gauging her reaction.

“I know I wasn’t involved in the satellite’s disappearance.”

“Randall’s practically pissing himself over the loss of the satellite and I’ll hazard a guess that you’re innocent as well.”

“Where’s Ryan?” he notes.

“That’s bullshit and you know it” Sara protests angrily.

“I told you, I left Ryan at his house to deal with some personal matters” she explains.

“Besides it was his theory that got us this far” she offers.

“Without him, we wouldn’t even be looking nor finding evidence of another dimension.”

“Right” Kellan agrees.

“We are finding evidence of something.”

“How do we know it wasn’t put there for us to find?” Kellan speculates.

“Fuck you Kellan, I don’t like what you’re implying!” she protests.

Randall walks in, interrupting Sara's and Kellan's heated conversation.

"You find anything?" he asks, taking a seat at the table.

Randall lays his head in his hands waiting for a response.

Kellan and Sara trade cold stares.

Receiving no reply, Randall looks up.

"What the hell are you two doing?" he asks.

"I was just telling Kellan what an asshole he is" Sara quips.

"Very nice" Kellan returns.

"Tell me you two aren't arguing?" Randall asks, exasperated.

Kellan and Sara look down at their respective laptops.

"Why are you two wasting my time when you should be looking for my fucking satellite" he demands, his voice rising.

Angrily he pounds his fist on the table to emphasize his point.

The room grows quiet again in answer to Randall's latest outburst.

"I just got my ass handed to me by a very high ranking jagoff from the fed" Randall continues, breaking the silence.

"This guy can make all of our lives a living hell, like that" he says, snapping his fingers.

"I assured him that I had our top people working this out and I come in and find you two having a slap fight?"

He turns and looks directly at Kellan.

"You!" he says.

"Give me some fucking good news.

"Tell me you found LC13."

“Got nothing boss” Kellan answers, opening his hands to emphasize his failure.

“Asshole” Randall mutters in disgust.

He turns his attention to Sara.

“Sara” he pleads.

“Please tell me that you can get the LC13 back online?”

“I can” she assures him.

Randall breathes a sigh of relief.

“Once we locate it” she adds.

“Nothing?” he asks in disbelief.

“Six hours and you two have nothing?”

“The Indian ocean is a big body of water” she proffers.

“First we need...”

“Are you telling me the LC13 has splashed down?” Randall stammers, his face turning red with rage.

“No” she answers.

“Well, I haven’t determined that yet” she answers honestly.

“Jesus Christ” he shouts looking up at the ceiling.

“You people are supposed to be the experts.”

“You’ve got the fancy PHD behind your names, don’t you?” he screams.

Randall’s face is crimson with anger.

“I’ve had it with you fucking geniuses” he shouts.

“Find my satellite!” he demands.

“Randall relax” Kellan suggests softly.

“Don’t tell me to relax!” Randall retorts, spittle flying from the corners of his mouth.

“We’ve lost a very, VERY expensive government owned hunk of steel” he rages.

“These fed jerkoffs never relax.”

“If we don’t produce the LC13 soon, like yesterday, they are gonna ride our asses all the way to prison.”

“Randall, we all understand what is at stake” Sara interrupts.

“Let me call Ryan to see if he can shed any light on the situation” she proposes.

“He may have a theory...”

“Enough with the theories!” Randall snaps.

“That’s what got us here in the first place.”

“And where is your boyfriend?” he observes.

Ignoring Randall’s taunt, Sara closes her laptop, pushes a plate of cold pizza to the side and stands.

“I’ll call Ryan from my office and get him down here” she offers.

Walking out of the conference room Sara hurries to her office and slams the door.

An impish smile crosses Kellan’s face as he watches her leave.

“You” Randall says.

“What the hell are smiling about?”

“Find the satellite before I kick your ass” he threatens.

Sara takes a seat at her desk, her anger subsiding.

She breathes in deeply and picks up the office phone.

She dials a phone number printed on the card in her hand.

She listens eagerly as the other end of the line rings.

“Hatter here” a man’s voice answers.

“It’s Sara Higgins” she responds.

“Ms. Higgins, glad to hear from you” Hatter offers.

“We still can’t find the satellite and I’m really worried about Ryan”
Sara continues.

Nervous, she wraps strands of her hair around her fingers as she listens for Hatter’s response.

“Can you truly help?” she pleads.

33

Ryan steps off the overturned wastebasket and admires his work.

The bathroom resembles more an art installation than a water closet.

Multitudes of hanging glass shards sway in the breeze of the air conditioning.

The mirrored fragments closest to each other create a pleasing tinkling noise as they touch in passing.

Mesmerized, he backs out of the bathroom into the hall.

Tired, he sits on the floor.

He pulls his phone from his pocket to check the time.

"3:30 A.M."

"What am I doing?"

Moving his hand over his pants pocket, he feels for the satchel of memory beads and thinks of Roger.

A tear makes its way from his filling eyes and falls from the tip of his nose.

He blinks and rubs a hand over his face.

“Why” he whispers to himself.

“Roger, why now?”

A sense of disconnection bubbles just below the surface of his reasoning.

Pulling himself together he uses his wounded hand to push up from the floor.

Wincing in pain, he stands erect and walks back into the bathroom.

Weaving his hands through the strands of fishing line holding the glass aloft he makes a path to the center of the room.

With his hands now at his sides, he studies the individual fragments.

He is disappointed to find only his own reflection looking back.

“What did I expect?” he ponders.

Setting the timer on his phone for five minutes, he lays it on the edge of the sink.

Inspired by the motion of the glass as it sways in the breeze, he begins to rotate in a small circle.

As he spins, the brightness reflected from the overhead light fixture causes each piece of glass to momentarily emit a flash.

The effect creates a pulsing sensation in Ryan’s mind, lulling him into a daze.

He is startled by the beep of the phone timer, as the five minutes have passed.

Disappointed that the pulsing sensation has stopped, he resets the timer for ten minutes, slides the phone into his pocket and continues his slow twirl.

“C’mon, Ryan, relax” he chides himself.

His thoughts turn to his mother and her sad demise, his regret of not knowing her or his father.

He thinks of Barry and all they overcame together.

He grits his teeth in anger at the thought of Agent Hatter and everything he represented, of being betrayed from the moment of his birth.

Roger’s memories have ignited some of his own from the past.

He thinks of his cold and loveless childhood.

Learning early on to fake warmth and even happiness to earn some acceptance.

To turn his anger into something positive.

To trust no one.

“I never experienced a childhood” he thinks bitterly.

“I only survived it.”

With his anger swelling, he smiles a bitter smile.

“Some think me brave when they learn my story and of my struggles, but I know better” he reflects.

“It wasn’t fearlessness that drove me, but in fact sheer terror.”

With news of Roger’s death, fear once again grips him tight.

It came screaming back to the surface from the depths of which he had buried it so long ago.

He again fears for himself, but this time he fears for others as well.

“From this fear I’ll have to derive strength” he determines.

He wasn’t sure that what he was doing this evening would amount to much, but he had to trust in the inspiration that was driving him.

A drop of blood falls from his injured hand and splashes onto the tiled floor.

The world around him suddenly falls silent and his mental agitation subsides.

A dizzy sensation envelopes him.

It happens.

Somewhere far off, the timer on his phone sounds.

He reaches to turn it off, but finds he cannot move his arms.

He is no longer in his bathroom, instead he is shrouded in darkness.

A slight breeze ruffles his hair.

He feels the sensation of motion all around, like standing in a darkened subway tunnel.

He notes there are lights a great distance from him, marking the horizon of his vision.

The lights begins to swirl at a tremendous speed.

They accelerate and meld into one single glowing ring.

“It’s as if the lights are the hub of a wheel and I am standing at the axis” he ponders.

Sounds and muffled voices begin to rush at Ryan from every direction.

He tries to cover his ears and stifle the sound, but is unable to move a muscle.

The loss of control exhausts him.

He feels faint and begins to blackout.

His eyelids become heavy and his chin falls to his chest.

The whirling lights grow dim, blackness overtakes him.

Suddenly, the swirling stops.

One light, then two, appear and grow larger.

They hover close to Ryan’s inanimate body.

Now unconscious, he poses no threat but the lights, who appear to be sentient, move slowly with caution.

Much like a game piece on a chess board, Ryan's body floats closer to them as they advance.

"What is it?" the smaller illuminated being asks.

"Something like ourselves but less luminescent" the larger answers confidently.

Moving closer, it continues.

"The alien form is alive, but of a type I've never witnessed?" it marvels.

"Strange times as of late, eh?" the smaller light poses.

"First the unthinking object and now this."

"Pull him closer to you and let me know what you can divine" the larger light suggests.

And with that, Ryan's body moves closer to the smaller light.

“Hmmm, whatever it is we must not tell the other just yet, it will only cause a panic” the smaller light offers.

As the two light beings continue to communicate with one another Ryan slowly awakens.

His eyes flutter open.

He hears voices and can see the two translucent beings in front of him.

Long tendrils extend from the center mass of each.

The beings radiate with light and as they communicate.

They do not open their mouths, yet Ryan can hear their voices in his mind.

“It’s struggling to move” the smaller mass calls to the larger, alarmed.

And with that their illuminated tendrils extend toward Ryan.

“Can you understand us?” they ask Ryan wordlessly.

“Yes” he thinks, his mind filled with fright.

He looks past them for an escape.

The larger mass, sensing his trepidation, assures him.

“Do not be afraid.”

34

A kitchen countertop, piled high with children's items, from wipes to teething rings, baseball mitts to hot wheel cars is the perfect hiding place for a ringing phone.

A short woman with curly red hair is frantically digging through the pile in an attempt to silence it before her youngest wakes from his nap.

"Shit" she exclaims, as the pot on the stove begins to boils over.

Moving quickly from the counter to the stove, she reduces the flame of the burner.

Dodging highchairs and roller skates, she moves back to the counter and finally uncovers the phone.

Exasperated she lets out a sigh as she reads the caller ID on the screen.

"Honey, its Amos" she says walking to the basement stairs.

“You want me to bring you the phone?”

“Thanks but I’ll be right up” Detective Phillips calls.

Two adolescent boys run, shrieking with excitement, through the kitchen and out the backdoor, almost knocking their mother to the floor.

“Dinner is almost ready, you two” the woman calls after them, as she answers the phone.

“Hey Amos” she says in greeting.

“Jim’s a little wrapped up at the moment, can you hold?” she asks.

“Sure can” Amos answers.

“How you doing on this fine evening, Dal?” he asks.

“A house full of males, how do you think I’m doing?” she jokes.

“A regular paradise.”

The baby, now awake, begins to wail from the nursery.

“I got ‘em” Jim offers from the top of the stairs.

“I trust you’re having fun, living your carefree bachelor life?” Dal continues.

Amos chuckles.

“Bachelor life isn’t all its cracked up to be” he says.

“Slim pickings out there.”

“Seems Jim got the last good woman” he flirts.

“Um hmmm” she answers with an air of suspicion.

“Here he is now” she says handing Jim the phone.

She takes the baby from his arms.

“Hey Amos, you at the station already?” Jim asks as he looks at his watch.

“Came in early to confirm the finger print results” Amos answers.

“You got em?” Jim asks nervously.

“Thought they wouldn’t be in till tomorrow?” he says.

Jim walks into the living room, pushing a football out of his way with his foot.

“I got a connection at the lab” Amos answers.

“The call came in this evening.”

“Jim” Amos sighs.

“You’re not gonna like the results.”

Jim lifts the bay window blind as he is listens.

He can see Ryan’s house from his window.

“Ryan Wexler” he answers.

“How’d you know?” Amos questions.

“Long story” he offers.

“You holding out on me?” Amos asks.

“Naw, it’s the journal I was following up on” he explains.

“His name was written down in the book.”

“I know he’s your neighbor, but come on” Amos starts, frustrated.

“I just wanted to give him a chance to explain” he continues.

“What’d he tell you” Amos asks.

“Said he wasn’t there” Jim answers.

“He did confirm he knew the man.”

“Said that he recently met him at a park for the first time.”

“You gotta bring him in” Amos insists.

Jim puts his hand to his forehead and leans against the window.

“You’re right” Jim concurs.

“But It doesn’t mean he did it, just means he lied to me” Jim reckons.

“He lied, that’s enough to bring him in for questioning” Amos persists.

“I know” Jim agrees.

“He’s your neighbor and a friend, I get it.”

“but don’t let that color your vision” Amos sighs.

“Especially on your first case as lead.”

“I’ll grab him up and be there soon” Jim assures him and hangs up the phone.

Rolling down his sleeves and straightening his tie, he looks out the front window and waves to his boys who are now playing on the front lawn.

Stepping back into the kitchen, he slides the baby from his wife’s arms.

The baby coos as Jim tickles his belly.

“Everything alright?” Dal asks.

“Yeah, just some trouble with the case” Jim answers.

He hugs his little boy close to his chest.

“I’ll figure it out.”

Dal looks at him with compassion.

Walking over to the stove he changes the subject.

“Smells good”

“Should I call the boys in?” he asks.

“Would you, please?”

“They never listen to me” she answers.

“We’re on it, right kid?” he says, smiling at his youngest.

Jim, still holding the baby, walks out onto the front porch and calls the boys in for dinner.

Walking back in he distractedly hands the baby to his wife.

“I’m going over to Ryan’s and then to the station” he informs her.

Dal sighs.

“Time for a bite before you go?” she asks.

“Wrap some up for me, Ill eat it when I get home” he tells her.

Walking out his front door he crosses the lawn and up the steps to Ryan’s house.

He knocks on the door but after a few moments decides no one is home.

Letting himself in with the key Ryan had giving him awhile back, he calls out.

“Ryan, you here?”

He walks in and looks around.

The house is empty.

Jim gets the feeling that Ryan left in a hurry, noting that the radio and lights are is still on.

Seeing blood on the floor in the hallway, he unholsters his gun and walks further into the house to investigate.

He makes his way toward the kitchen.

As he passes the hallway bathroom, the shards of glinting glass hanging from the ceiling catch his eye.

“Ryan, you here buddy?” he calls out loudly.

Receiving no answer he pulls his phone from his pocket and dials Amos.

“What’s up boss?” Amos asks as he picks up the phone.

“You on your way?”

“Change of plans, I need you to drive to my house” Jim answers.

“I’m currently over at my neighbor’s and I think I may have walked into another crime scene.”

35

In the vast inky blackness, Ryan is flanked by two glowing masses.

The tendrils of each mass oscillate and twist as though treading water.

The two beings, large and small, communicate with Ryan non-verbally.

They attempt to learn as much as they can from their latest discovery, peppering him with questions.

As Ryan struggles to answer, his own reality comes back into focus.

He finds his inner voice and as if slowly waking from a dream, makes his own curiosity known.

“Where am I?” he thinks groggily, interrupting their steady stream of queries.

“What are you?” he wonders.

“And how do I get back to my world?” he thinks, his mind becoming sharp again.

“Forgive us” the large glowing mass communicates.

It is pleased to see Ryan is now fully engaged.

“I’m afraid I have forgotten my manners, as you are a guest in our world.”

Rising above Ryan, the large mass straightens its tendrils so that they dangle below itself, giving off the impression of stature.

“I am J and my friend here is Q.”

“We exist in Orthoplex.”

“Othroplex?” Ryan wonders.

“It is everything and everywhere” J adds.

Ryan’s body begins to move in a circular motion.

“Witness the vastness of Orthoplex” Q announces proudly.

“And to get home?” Ryan asks, cutting Q’s grandiose presentation short.

Descending, the large mass known as J floats in front of Ryan’s face.

“I suspect getting back to your world would be no different than your passage here.”

“You’ll need to build a doorway” J informs him.

The smaller light, now glowing a bright orange, spins Ryan in it’s direction.

“Have you come here to harm us?” it asks, bluntly.

“No, I intend no harm” Ryan thinks.

“Did you send this... this thing to Orthoplex?” it asks, referring to a small metallic object now floating at his side.

Ryan’s eyes widen.

“The LC13” he thinks.

“Where did you find it?” he demands excitedly.

“We didn’t find it” J interjects.

“We pulled it here from the edge of our horizon.”

“We thought it was a thinking being much like yourself” J admits.

“We were disappointed to find it contained no life force” Q adds.

“We traveled back this way to release it back over the horizon” J answers.

As Ryan listens to J who is now behind him, he envisions the large entity in his mind’s eye.

J floats into Ryan’s view, seemingly under Ryan’s mental control.

“Very good” J exclaims.

“You begin to understand our world.”

Ryan looks from J to the satellite at Q's side.

Harnessing his newly discovered psychic abilities, he pulls the satellite closer to himself.

"Why is it so small?" he wonders.

"It fits in the palm of my hand" he notes, confused.

"Relative size relationships must be different here" he concludes.

"Size is not a measurement that I can fully grasp I'm afraid" J answers reading Ryan's thoughts.

"I gather it is important in your dimension?"

Ryan, still focused on the LC13, ignores J's question.

The solar panels of the satellite rotate, seeking out an energy source.

"The LC13 appears to be functioning properly" he notes, relieved.

"It's size reduced dramatically, but the trip to this dimension seems to have had no other adverse effects" he surmises.

“I’ll have to assume the same holds true for myself” he hopes.

“And where are you from?” J continues, trying to garner Ryan’s attention again.

“What is your name?”

“My name?” Ryan asks, still distracted by the LC13.

“Oh, I’m from here as well, I suppose,” he says, his eyes now focused back on J and Q.

“Another dimension... I believe?” he answers hesitatingly.

“My name is Ryan”

“But can’t you learn all this this from my thoughts?” he wonders.

“Can you read all of our thoughts” J answers in response.

“Do you know everything about us?”

“No” Ryan answers, searching his own mind.

“I do not believe I can?”

“In Orthoplex, we only communicate our current thoughts” J informs him.

“We are unable to delve into your past unless you choose to reveal it.”

“How is it you speak English?” Ryan asks.

“English?” J wonders.

“I’ll assume you are speaking of a communication form from your dimension.”

“Your thoughts are not based on a specific language.”

“If you stop and concentrate, you’ll realize you can understand our thoughts as well, no matter the language” J informs Ryan.

Ryan spins away from the two glowing masses and ascends quickly.

The emptiness is over-whelming , causing his heart to beat hard against his chest

“Ryan” J calls from his mind.

“Can you see my thoughts now?”

The images that have been forming in Ryan’s subconscious, images that have enabled the communication between himself, J and Q, are now shining brightly before his eyes.

“Like a movie” he thinks.

He clears his mind of everything but images of J and Q, and in moments they are before him.

“Amazing!” he thinks.

“Can you show me more of Orthoplex?” he asks.

“In time but first you must show us more of yourself” Q insists.

“Will you allow us to peer into you past?” it asks.

“Q don’t be so forward” J corrects.

“There will be time for that later.”

“Let us share some of our world first.”

And with that, a portal appears in front of the three beings.

Q obediently enters the portal and disappears.

Ryan, alarmed by the portal’s sudden appearance glides backwards, away from it.

“It is safe” J assures him.

“Portals are an expedient way to get around Orthoplex” he explains.

Ryan, sensing honesty in J, decides to trust him and moves into the portal.

Before entering the portal itself, J casts the satellite off in the direction of the horizon.

Once inside, J collapses the portal behind itself.

36

“Randall!” Kellan screams from the open door of the conference room.

“Sara! Randall! Come quick, it’s back.”

“The LC13 is back?” Randall shouts as he rushes into the room.

“Un-fucking-believable!” he cheers.

He looks at the laptop screen over Kellan’s shoulder.

Confused by the readings, he turns to Kellan.

“You’re positive?”

Kellan nods and leans back in his chair.

“It’s back.”

“Sorry I must have dozed off in my office” Sara offers as she walks in behind Randall.

“What’s with all the shouting?” she asks, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

“Did Ryan show up?”

The two men smile in her direction.

“What are you two grinning about?” she asks.

Randall turns and picks her up in his arms.

“It’s back Sara!” he answers.

“I don’t know what you and Kellan did, but thank you.”

“You saved our asses!”

“Wow?” Sara offers.

“That is great.”

Confused, she gives him a congratulatory pat on the back.

Setting Sara back on her feet, Randall composes himself and turns to Kellan.

“Don’t take your eyes from that screen while I’m gone, understand?” he instructs.

“I’ve got to go inform the feds” he says as he leaves the room.

Sara walks over to Kellan’s laptop.

“The LC13 is really back?” she asks.

Kellan gives her a thumbs up.

“I don’t know how you did it” she says.

“I’m impressed.”

He smiles, basking in the glow of her compliment and offers her a seat next to him.

Kellan types a line command for the satellite.

“I’m switching the LC13 to maintenance mode” he says, conferring with her.

“This will limit any chance of losing it again, don’t ya think?”

“Makes sense to me” Sara agrees.

“How’d you get it back online in the first place?” she asks.

“I worked my magic and presto...” he says mimicking a magician’s hand movements over his keyboard.

“Seriously Kellan, I’ve been awake for days, no more games” she pleads, beginning to lose her patience.

Kellan sighs and pushes the laptop away from himself.

He folds his hands in his lap and rotates the chair to face Sara.

“It just appeared out of nowhere” he confides.

“But let’s not tell Randall our little secret.”

“I kinda like being the hero for once.”

Sara agrees and slides Kellan’s laptop over to herself.

She begins reviewing the latest packet of data downloaded from the satellite.

“Um hm” she mumbles, studying the data.

“These numbers don’t make a lot of sense” she says, confused.

“I’m unable to ascertain where the LC13 has been all this time.”

“I don’t know where it’s been, I’m just happy its back.” Kellan answers, reclaiming his laptop.

He playfully hugs the computer.

“We won’t let anything bad happen to you anymore.”

“Will we Sara?” he asks in a mock-soothing tone.

“You need to tell uncle Kellan where you were hiding...ok?” he says, playfully reprimanding the satellite as he inputs more lines of code into the laptop.

Sara rolls her eyes, too tired to comment and opens her own laptop.

Continuing her investigation she inputs the necessary security codes to log onto the satellite’s visual memory.

“Kellan, did you change the satellite access codes?” she asks after her fifth failed attempt.

“Maybe” Kellan offers, timidly.

“Why?” Sara demands.

“Randall instructed me to” he answers, still looking at his screen afraid to meet her stare.

“For fucks sake” Sara sighs.

“Tell me the new code so I can engage the photo memory of the LC13.”

“What for?” Kellan asks.

“I’m sure its just more of the usual, blackness and blurry stars”

“Humor me” Sara responds.

Kellan quietly rolls his chair closer to Sara’s .

“Go to the menu and input p:’0913” he instructs.

“That should get you to the photo library” he whispers.

“What’s with the secrecy?” she asks.

Placing his finger to his lips Kellan nods over his shoulder.

Sara inputs the code and gains access to the satellite images.

Working backwards, she starts with the image files from the previous day.

Ten preview pictures appear on the screen, all solid black.

Sara scrolls to the next ten and the next, all black.

“I told you, space photos are boring” Kellan says.

“That’s why I go straight to the data, interesting and informative”
Kellan purrs.

Choosing to ignore his last remarks she focuses back on her laptop screen and continues on to the next ten preview images.

Surprised, she snaps her fingers to get Kellan’s attention.

“What is that?” Sara asks out loud.

Kellan rolls his chair next her and peers over her shoulder

“Beats the hell out of me” he offers.

“Scroll through the next ten” he suggests.

The next nine photos contain a variety of light patterns, each more detailed than the last.

She gasps as her gaze falls on the tenth.

“I see it too” Kellan says.

“Enlarge it, so we can have a closer look.”

Sara clicks the corner of the photo and pulls, so it expands to fill the screen.

The two scientists are struck speechless.

Before them on the computer screen is a human face.

Ryan’s face.

“What the hell is this?” Kellan wonders, turning to Sara.

“You playing a joke on me?”

“I’m not sure what to say” she admits.

“I was going to ask you the same thing.”

“You changed the command codes” she reminds him.

“Without those codes I couldn’t have copied anything to the satellite’s memory.”

“So Kellan, let me ask you, is this your idea of a joke?”

“Sara I swear, I’m not playing a prank” he assures her.

“That image” he says pointing to the computer screen.

“That image is embedded into the photo library of the satellite”

His eyes widen with fear.

“I’m freaking out Sara.”

“Check the timestamp” she suggests.

Kellan types in a query code.

“It follows the others in sequential order” he concludes.

“What the fuck does this mean?” he says, drumming his fingers on the table nervously.

“We have to find Ryan” Sara insists.

Alarmed, Sara gathers her laptop and sprints out the conference room door.

37

The darkness of the portal is extinguished by an overpowering brilliance as Ryan, Q and J arrive at their destination.

Ryan, now alert, adrenaline coursing through his body, quickly ascertains the source of the light.

He floats in the emptiness, marveling at a mass of far-off glowing beings that hover close to oddly shaped structures in the distance.

“Come with us” J invites, mentally pulling Ryan towards Orthoplex.

Ryan, awestruck by the dazzling scene, hovers close to J.

Passing close to one of the structures, Ryan has a hard time believing his own eyes.

The hull of a B15 bomber protrudes at an angle from the deck of a weathered Shell Oil ocean tanker.

The hulking mass floats, suspended in the emptiness, illuminated by the many glowing beings encircling it.

As the trio nears another cluster of structures, the details of each come into focus.

Ryan is struck by the familiarity of them as well.

“J what are these structure made from?” he asks as they pass.

“Odds and ends, things we recover from the horizon” J states matter-of-factly.

“We use what we discover to help build our communities.”

“Why do you need such structures?” Ryan continues.

“To shelter from the weather?”

J stops his progress and turns to Ryan.

“I’m don’t know what weather is?” it answers, confused.

“Do you sleep in the structures?” Ryan asks, trying a different tact.

“The structures serve to center us” J offers.

“We use them as an axis, places to gather.”

Ryan Spots two small glowing masses, timidly peering out of an old rail boxcar as J and Ryan float on.

“I see you” he thinks.

“Are they fearful by my presence?” he wonders.

“It can see us” a frightened voice sounds in Ryan’s mind.

J and Q escort Ryan to a high point overlooking many of the gathering places.

A multitude of glowing beings rise to match the strange visitor’s ascension.

Ryan’s eyes follow one of the being’s in the distance as it exits the hull of a Viking sailing ship.

“Excuse me J, did you take all this” Ryan asks referring to the various structures of Orthoplex.

“Are these from my dimension?”

“I knew nothing of your world until I met you” J answers.

“These structures are built from elements we find at the edge of our horizon.”

Ryan ponders J’s response as his eyes take in the sight of so many earthly artifacts.

“Much like you pulled the LC13 from the edge of the horizon?” he inquires.

“Will you use that in your home construction as well?” Ryan asks, looking around for the satellite.

J answers, anticipating Ryan’s next question.

“I sent your LC13 back over the horizon, back to your world, where it belongs.”

Apologetically he adds “now that I know of your world’s existence I will be more cautious as to what I pull to ours.”

“No.... J” Ryan pauses.

“I did not intend to insult you, I...”

A cascade of voices overtake Ryan’s mind with a seemingly unending flow of questions, stopping his apology short.

“What is this?” one voice asks.

“Is it alive?” another ponders.

“Why has J brought it here?” still another asks.

“Is it safe?” many more voices inquire nervously.

“Please, everyone lets have some quiet” J interrupts.

“Your questions will be addressed in short order.”

Ryan observes that many of the beings gathering around him have long tendrils like J but others do not.

Some beings have large orbs like eyes protruding from their mass, others extra mass and still others glow brighter.

“This is Ryan” J communicates, extending his tendrils in Ryan’s direction.

“Q and I discovered him floating out near the edge of our horizon.”

“Why must you endanger yourself getting so close to that edge?”
a new voice sounds.

It easily breaks through the muddle of questions still ricocheting through Ryan’s mind.

Ryan, now nervous, turns to look for the source of the voice as a brightly glowing figure of brilliant yellow, floats down in front of J.

Q floats in next to J and speaks on their behalf.

“Now G, we are perfectly aware of everyone’s fear of the horizon edge, but as you can see by mine and J’s many healthy returns, we are quite comfortable handling ourselves.”

“Thank you Q” J says, grateful for Qs defense.

“Q is correct” J adds.

“Exploring the edge allows us the ability accomplish great things, explore new places and discover alien life.”

And with that, using his psychic ability, he lifts and rotates Ryan above the crowd.

“Such as Ryan here” he emphasizes.

Ryan attempts to interrupt.

“], Q maybe I could elab....”

But he is quickly cut off again, this time by a much angrier voice.

“Do not try to assuage our fears with your grandiose, grotesque sideshow” the voice booms.

The glowing purple figure that Ryan witnessed exiting the Viking hull only moments ago, now floats before him.

The purple being has large ‘eyes’ that he fixes on Ryan.

“You are a vital member of this community” the purple entity offers, addressing J.

“I will grant you that” it admits.

“But you risk everyone by bringing this alien discovery into Orthoplex.”

“Hey, I’m not looking to stay, I promise you” Ryan assures the purple being.

“I’m just passing through.”

“Ryan, please” J interjects.

“C means no harm” J explains.

“He along with many of the others are fearful and do not trust the unknown.”

J pleads with C and the rest of his glowing audience to embrace his latest discovery.

“If you could see all what is out there” J starts.

While J is speaking to the crowd, his attention is diverted from Ryan.

Ryan begins to float up and away from the crowd.

“Excuse me J” Ryan communicates in a panic, trying get his attention.

“Why am I moving?”

J floats up to Ryan, and attempts to control Ryan’s movements to no avail.

He glides back down to face the purple glowing being.

“C, can you not consider what we could learn?” J asks, addressing the purple entity.

“Too risky” C answers.

“Separate this alien being from Orthoplex at once” C commands.

“I must minimize any possible danger to this community” C continues as Ryan’s progress away from the crowd goes unabated.

“I will convene with the elders and report back with a final ruling on this life force’s possible entry.”

“I understand” J responds.

With Cs assurance that it will confer with the elders, J agrees to take Ryan back to the horizon.

A new portal appears and the two cross through.

The portal opens at the edge of the Orthoplex horizon.

“What now?” Ryan thinks.

“Now we await the elder’s answer” J responds.

“How long do we wait” Ryan asks.

“And if C does not allow me back into Orthoplex?” he adds.

J answers Ryan’s question with a question.

“You found your way here.”

“Could you not find your home?”

“At home I physically constructed a doorway to this dimension” Ryan answers.

“I have no materials to do the same from this side.”

“You could construct a passage way mentally” J suggests.

“Do I possess the same ability as you?” Ryan wonders.

“Think of somewhere familiar?” he asks.

“Yes” J answers.

“Like the gas station on the corner of 10th and Franklin street?” he tells himself.

“Try it” J encourages.

Testing the theory, Ryan concentrates and visualizes an old gas station near Sara’s apartment.

A portal appears at his side.

“I don’t believe it” Ryan thinks, impressed with himself.

“Does this portal lead back to my dimension?” he asks.

“Only one way to find out” J answers.

“If I enter this portal, will I be able to return?” Ryan asks, staring into his newly created multi-dimensional tear.

“I believe so” J answers.

“Your mind is strong.”

“You will fit nicely into Orthoplex” J adds.

“And C?” Ryan asks.

“C will come to the right decision” J answers.

“It will just take some time.”

Ryan glides into the portal opening.

“I will be back” he promises J, as the portal closes around him.

38

The inertia of his exit from the portal propels Ryan quickly forward.

Unable to stop his momentum, he slams his head into a tiled wall.

The force of the collision upsets his balance and he crumples to the floor.

“Fuck” he groans, slowly gaining his bearings and propping himself against a dirty sink.

He lifts his arm slowly and winces as he feels the goose egg that is sprouting from his forehead.

Standing, he examines his reflection in a cracked mirror hanging over the sink.

He can see as the portal behind him as it disappears.

“I’m back” he thinks.

“Everything seems to be where it should be” he confirms, patting himself down.

“That really happened” he tells himself, giddy with excitement.

Turning the faucet handle, he lowers himself and collects some cold water in the palm of his hand as it dribbles out of the spigot.

Ryan splashes his face and exhales deeply.

He straightens up, looking for paper towels.

Finding none, he wipes his hands on his pants.

He’s relieved to feel his phone in his pocket.

He pulls it out and dials Sara.

Holding the phone to his ear he exits the bathroom and walks out into a gray night.

He smiles when he hears her familiar voice.

“Ryan?” Sara asks, panicked.

“Where are you?”

“Are you ok?”

“I’m good... I think” he says looking up into night sky.

He marvels at the stars.

“Can you pick me up?” he asks.

“On my way” she says.

“Wait, where are you?” she asks.

Ryan looks at the illuminated gas station sign and then to the street sign on the corner to confirm his location.

He is amazed that the portal opened right where he directed.

“I’m at the EZGO on franklin and tenth” he answers.

“I’ll be there in 15 minutes” Sara assures him.

“Don’t move!” she adds before hanging up the phone.

Ryan walks to the edge of the gas station parking lot and takes a seat on the curb next to the air and vacuum area.

He smiles and leans back on the small tuft of grass, propping himself on his elbows.

“I did it!” he thinks, his mind racing with the possibilities of this extraordinary achievement.

“I made the connection between the two dimensions.”

“Now what?” he wonders.

“And who do I tell?” he contemplates.

Ryan watches as a young couple walk hand in hand into the gas station store.

He smiles and makes his decision.

“Sara” he thinks.

“I’ll share this success with her first.”

A car pulls up in front of him.

It’s two headlights shine in his eyes, casting his shadow, long behind himself.

“Need a lift?” a pair of teenage girls ask.

Ryan smiles and waves them off.

“No thanks” he says.

“I’m waiting on a friend.”

His hand begins to throb.

He looks down to find the wound has started to bleed again.

He wraps his bandaged hand tighter and walks into the gas station.

Strolling to the back, he sees a napkin dispenser next to the slurpee machine.

He grabs some napkins and uses them to staunch the bleeding.

He nods to the cashier as he walks back out the door, to find Sara and her car waiting.

“Heya” Ryan says as he opens the car door.

“Thanks for picking me up.”

Sara looks at him coldly.

He gets in and closes the door behind himself.

Sara wordlessly pulls out of the gas station and onto the street heading towards his house.

She notices Ryan wrapping his hand with the gas station napkins.

“You alright” she finally asks.

“Oh are you talking to me now” he taunts.

“You make no sense” she answers.

“I know when you’re angry” he insists.

Getting no response, he changes the subject.

“The bleeding stopped while I was there but it’s since started again”
Ryan continues, dabbing at the wound.

“Where?” Sara asks.

“Where were you Ryan?” she presses.

“I have been calling and driving everywhere trying to find you.”

The anger in her eyes turning to tenderness.

“I was worried” she admits.

“I know you were” he answers sweetly.

“Thanks for that” he says putting his hand on her shoulder.

She smiles at him.

The atmosphere in the car is suddenly light.

“I did it!” he blurts out.

“Did what?” she asks.

Ryan opens his mouth to speak, but Sara cuts him off .

“Oh, before you go on, you should know the LC13 is back” she says, expectantly.

“Oh sure, I know” he says matter-of-factly.

Sara frowns at him.

Ryan, oblivious to Sara’s disappointment, looks out the car window as a bus passes.

Waiting a beat, he begins his story again.

“Sara I found a way in” he starts.

“In where?” she inquires.

“I was in another dimension!” he answers.

“Stop playing games with me” she says in an angry tone.

“No games” he says, crossing his heart.

“It was incredible, there were these beings, glows really,” he continues, his excitement building.

“They could communicate with their minds.”

“They understood me perfectly and I them” he explains.

He can see that Sara doesn't believe him.

“I need to get back to the house and show you” he says softly, his feelings hurt.

The car becomes quiet again.

After a few miles, Sara sighs loudly and pulls the car over to the curb.

“What do you mean you know the satellite is back?” she asks as she cuts the engine.

“Did you do something to it?”

“Is this all a big game to you?” she spits, exasperated.

“Tell me the truth” she demands.

Ryan smiles.

“I’ve been telling you truth” he insists.

“The truth” she spits.

“Why?” she questions.

“Why is there a picture of you in the LC13 database?”

“Why did you have me meet you at that gas station?” she asks.

Ryan holds up his hands.

“I was at my home; in my bathroom” he starts again, slowly.

“I had set up some mirror fragments.”

“The project I was working on” he reminds her.

Stopping, he looks out the car window and back to her, momentarily questioning his current reality.

“I had set them up in a pattern, similar to the pattern of the mirrors inside the LC13.”

“One minute I’m in my home and the next I’m in Orthoplex” he says, shrugging his shoulders.

“Orthoplex?” she asks suspiciously.

“That’s what they called it” Ryan answers.

“Who called it that” she asks.

“The beings from the other dimension.”

Sara nods, still confused.

“Anyways, the LC13 was there as well” he offers.

“It must have taken a picture of me as I examined it.”

“But how did the satellite get back here?” she asks.

“J sent it back” he answers.

“J is one of the beings from the other dimension?” she asks.

“Exactly” he answers, thrilled to see the belief in her eyes.

“Can you show me the doorway?” she asks.

“It’s back at my house” he answers.

“But first I need to eat” he announces, rubbing his belly.

“Inter-dimensional travel works up an appetite” she says playfully.

“You’ll see” he promises.

“I’ll stop at the hotdog stand around the corner” Sara offers.

“Perfect” Ryan answers.

“I can you use the facilities to wash up while you chow down” Sara adds, now in a brighter mood.

“I’ve been up for three days straight, I must look like a wreck” she continues.

She checks her side mirror and pulls back onto the road.

39

Exiting the hotdog stand, Ryan slides back into Sara's car and shuts the door behind himself.

He turns to her with a satisfied smile on his face as he checks his pocket for the last of Roger's memory beads.

"Get enough to eat?" she teases, seeing the smile on Ryan's face.

"Sure did" he says, playfully licking his lips.

"Wow! You clean up nice" he adds, noting the makeup Sarah applied while in the bathroom.

"Shut up" she says in a friendly tone as she starts the car.

"To my house!" Ryan exclaims.

He smiles, giddy with anticipation.

Sara pulls the car back out onto the street.

“You are gonna be blown away when we open that dimensional door”
he tells her.

Ryan leans over and turns on the car stereo.

‘Working Class Hero’ plays from the speakers.

Ryan frowns and changes the station.

“Whoa” Sara says in disbelief.

“You turned off your song?”

“You feeling alright?” she asks.

“Time for a change” Ryan answers leaning back in his seat.

“That song” he starts.

“I’ve learned that song brings up some hard memories from my past
and I’m ready to start looking to the future.”

"For me and for us" he adds.

"Ryan" Sara starts, reaching for his hand.

"I didn't have a chance to say before... but I'm very sorry about Roger."

"Me too" Ryan answers.

"I'd really like to know what happened" she continues as she drives down the road.

"I pray you're not in any danger."

"I'm sure Jim will get to the bottom of it all in no time" Ryan assures her.

"And I've still got Roger's memories" he adds patting his pocket.

Looking at the dark sky out the car windshield he continues.

"Through his memories I've learned what a major role he played in my early life."

“I’m here to listen if you’d like to talk about what you witnessed on those memory beads” Sara offers, tenderly.

“When you’re up to it of course.”

“That’s a promise” Ryan answers, as they round the corner of Ryan’s block.

“I’ve still got a few more beads to get through.”

“I don’t know the whole story myself just yet...”

Ryan stops speaking mid-sentence.

He is surprised to see an unfamiliar pickup truck parked in his driveway and his front door ajar.

“What the hell?” he wonders out loud.

Sara pulls her car to the curb.

“Guess I’ve got company” he muses, nervously stepping from the car.

Ryan holds his finger to his lips as he and Sara walk cautiously up the front steps.

He pushes on the front door, swinging it wide, listening for a sound.

They both jump with surprise as a radio squawks somewhere in the house.

“Hello. Coming in” Ryan announces.

Reaching behind, he grasps Sara’s hand and pulls her into the house.

Detective Phillips appears from around the corner.

“Holy shit” Jim exclaims, his eyes wide, looking as though he has just seen a ghost.

“Ryan, you’re okay” he observes with a sense of relief and confusion.

Turning his head, Jim shouts up to the second floor.

“Amos” he yells.

“Come on down, Ryan just walked through the front door.”

Ryan scratches his head in confusion.

Jim turns back to Ryan.

“You okay?” he asks.

“Where have you been?”

“I was fine till a moment ago, when I came upon two cops rummaging through my house” Ryan answers in a cynical tone.

“Oh ...this?” Jim waves, his hand sheathed in a latex glove.

“Just following up on what I thought was a crime scene” he answers, pulling off the gloves with an audible snap.

Ryan glares at him, angry that his privacy has been invaded.

“Ryan, you had me worried” Jim offers in explanation to Ryan’s icy stare.

“With your friend dead and you gone” he continues.

Jim gestures down the hallway.

“The hanging glass contraption in your bathroom, blood soaked rags on the floor.”

“What was I supposed to think?” he asks.

“Point made” Ryan answers, nodding in agreement.

“You had a right to be worried.”

“Thanks for looking out for me” he says apologetically.

“Of course, that’s what friends are for” Detective Phillips replies.

Ryan offers his hand in a gesture of friendship.

Jim grasps his hand and pumps it hardily.

“Could I ask you to sit for a few minutes?” Jim asks.

“So we can talk?”

“Well” Ryan hesitates.

“I was in the middle of showing Sara one of my new experiments.”

“You remember Sara, don’t you?” Ryan asks.

“Sure do” Jim says reaching out and grabbing Sara’s hand in his.

“I worked with you father for many years”

“He’s a great man” Jim adds.

“I trust he’s enjoying his retirement?”

“Well, he’s trying but it’s hard from a hospital room” she replies.

“Who’s in the hospital?” Detective Hunter asks, interrupting the group’s conversation as he descends the stairs.

Ryan sighs at the intrusion.

“You want to fill him in Jim?” Ryan asks, motioning with his bandaged hand.

“What happened to your hand?” Detective Phillips asks, ignoring Amos’s question.

Ryan extends his hand so the detective can take a closer look.

“A childish reaction” he offers, embarrassed.

“The news of Roger’s death” he explains.

Pulling his hand back, he rubs the wound.

“I guess I lost it for a minute and smashed my bathroom mirror” he answers.

“Cut myself while cleaning up the glass.”

“I’m sorry” Detective Phillips offers.

“I should have delivered the news in a more delicate manner.”

“But in the case of life and death, seconds count” he explains.

“I thought you may have had some valuable insight into your friends demise.”

“Understood” Ryan answers.

Ryan and Sara take a seat on the couch facing Jim.

“You just recently met the man?” Detective Hunter reiterates, walking into the room.

“Became fast friends huh?”

Ryan nods.

“Speaking of that night” Amos continues.

He looks into Ryan’s eyes.

“Have you had a chance to recall any more details about your whereabouts on that evening” Amos asks.

“The night of your friend’s death?” he adds.

“What are you implying?” Ryan hisses, agitated by the insinuation.

“I told you I had nothing to do with his death” he answers, looking to Jim for assistance.

Sara puts her hand on Ryan's arm as he begins to rise from his seat in anger.

Detective Phillips stands and blocks Detective Hunter's path as Amos steps forward.

"Everybody take a breath" Detective Phillips warns, looking at Detective Hunter.

"Amos you can understand Ryan's frustration with our questions" he offers.

"And Ryan" he says, turning to him.

"I know you want this case solved."

"Does he?" Amos retorts mockingly.

"Tell me Ryan, why did I find your fingerprints in the dead man's apartment?" Amos continues.

"An apartment you deny ever stepping foot in?" he adds.

"Your right, I lied" Ryan confesses.

“I was there.”

“Ryan” Sara warns.

“But only to retrieve some private items Roger had left for me” he explains.

“I didn’t see him on the day of his death” he adds.

Detective Phillips looks at Ryan disapprovingly.

“You lied?” he asks.

“Well...” Ryan starts.

Someone coughs from the doorway, interrupting the conversation.

The four are startled and turn to the door.

The figure of a man is there, standing in the shadows.

“Ryan you don’t have to answer another question” the figure advises.

40

A portly man, dressed an ill-fitting suit, walks into the light.

“Who might you be?” Detective Hunter asks.

Amos walks over to the man, blocking him from moving further into the house.

“Ryan, this your lawyer?” the detective asks turning his head to Ryan.

“On the contrary, I’m on the job just like you” the man answers.

He holds out his badge for Amos to see.

“Agent Dex” he says, extending his hand in greeting.

Amos looks down at Dex’s hand and sneers.

“Suit yourself” Dex says, pulling his hand back.

“I’ve come to ask Ryan for a bit of assistance” he continues, focusing his attention on Ryan.

“A specific study has been restarted and I need your insight.”

Amos huffs.

“We are in the middle of a death investigation” Amos informs Dex.

He points to himself and Detective Phillips.

“You don’t have jurisdiction to walk in here and ...”

Agent Dex cuts him off with a wave of his hand.

“The death investigation you are conducting is moot as it was an apparent suicide” Dex proclaims.

“Where are you getting your info?” Jim demands, caught off-guard by the intrusion.

“Ryan was nowhere near Roger’s apartment at the time of his death, so there is no need to question him” Agent Dex answers curtly, ignoring Jim’s demand for answers.

“Are you willing to help” Dex asks, addressing Ryan directly.

“How do you know the victims name?” Jim demands.

“Ryan, it would mean a lot to Roger’s memory” Dex continues.

“How in the hell could you know if Ryan was there or not?” Jim asks.

Dex smiles wryly, turning his attention to Jim.

“I know because I was there when Roger took his own life” he answers.

Finding the reaction he desired in the detective’s eyes, he continues.

“I called it in myself and I saw Ryan leave twenty minutes before it happened.”

“No one was at the apartment while I was there” Ryan offers, confused.

“You called it in?” Jim asks.

“Why didn’t you hang around to file a report?” he inquires.

“I have my own rules to live by” Dex answers coldly.

“One of those rules is to avoid being anywhere near another agent’s death” he continues, looking back at Ryan.

“Why come forward now?” Jim asks.

“Don’t the same rules apply?”

“Certainly, but some duties supercede others” Dex answers, thoroughly enjoying his cloak and dagger charade at the expense of the two detectives.

Detective Hunter walks past Dex and peers outside before closing the door.

“I find I’m in desperate need of your help” Dex continues, again focusing only on Ryan.

“Will you help me?” he asks.

“Whoa” Ryan exclaims, holding out his hands.

“I’m still trying to play catch up.”

“Who are you again?” he asks the agent.

“Who informed you of my whereabouts this evening?”

Sara stands.

“I did” she answers apologetically.

“He said he could help you and I was so worried” she explains, moving closer to Ryan.

“I’m sorry I kept you in the dark” she pleads.

“But the agent said it was the only way to keep you safe.”

“Why?” Ryan asks weakly.

He feels his energy waning.

“When did you meet this guy?”

“After I dropped you home and left to be with my father, he approached me in the hospital parking lot” she explains.

“He said you were in trouble.”

“Told me if I wanted to help you I needed to keep in contact with him” Sara answers.

“Why not let me in on this?” Ryan protests angrily.

“More danger” Sara mumbles, looking at the floor.

“Agent Dex said that informing you” she continues, nervously stammering.

“Before he had all the facts would put you in extreme danger.”

Sara grabs Ryan’s hands and looks up at him.

“He was right, you are in danger.”

“These two” she says pointing to Detective Phillips and Hunter.

“They’re looking to pin Roger’s death on you.”

Ryan pulls his hand from Sara's.

His anger at her perceived betrayal blinding him to the facts.

"Randall wants you in jail for stealing his satellite" she continues.

"What was I supposed to think?" she asks.

"I find you at a gas station rambling about a doorway to another dimension?"

Disgusted, Ryan stands and walks to other side of the room to get away from the group.

"Excuse me" Agent Dex says to Jim, as he walks past him to stand with Ryan.

"I can explain everything" he assures Ryan under his breath.

"I just need some time, your attention and a bit of privacy" he says, looking at the others.

“Wait a minute” Detective Hunter starts.

The police radio in his pocket squawks to life.

“We got a 10-72 in your vicinity Detective Hunter, over” the dispatcher calls

“Suspicious fire?” Detective Phillips says.

”Let’s move on it.”

“Got an address?” Detective Phillips asks the dispatcher from his own radio.

“But Jim?” Amos protests.

“Amos, duty calls” Jim answers.

“Besides, Ryan’s not going anywhere” he states, looking over to Ryan and Dex.

“Ryan?” Agent Dex prompts.

“Can you give me some time to explain?”

Ryan acknowledges the request with a nod.

“Sara, detectives, I’ll ask that you leave my residence at once” he demands.

Ryan looks from Sara to the hall bathroom.

“Well then, I think Ryan needs a bit of time” Agent Dex proposes.

He escorts everyone to the door.

“Ryan, I was just doing my job” Agent Phillips explains.

“Save it” Ryan says, as he turns away from the group.

“I’m sorry” Sara says as she walks to the door.

Harsh words are exchanged between Agent Dex and Detective Hunter as Amos takes his leave.

41

Dex locks the front door.

He turns his attention to the light emanating from the hall bathroom.

Walking to the bathroom doorway, he finds Ryan inside.

Ryan, absent-mindedly turns in circles, allowing the suspended glass shards to brush over his out-stretched palms.

In a somber mood, he contemplates the last few days.

The joy of discovery, the utter sadness of death and the bitter betrayal he feels from the people whom he trusted.

“What is all this?” Agent Dex asks from the doorway, interrupting Ryan’s thoughts.

“You want a drink?” Ryan asks, ignoring the question.

He steps around the agent towards the kitchen.

“No, I’m good” Dex responds, following.

“You know, I wanted to contact you myself” the agent explains.

“I wanted to tell you how sorry I was about Roger” he continues.

“But getting mixed up with a possible criminal suspect is something I’m trained to avoid.”

“So you thought it best to recruit Sara to conspire against me?” Ryan asserts.

“You got it all wrong” Dex argues.

“She thought she was doing the best she could for you.”

“I can handle myself” Ryan snaps.

“You gotta admit, the last few days of your life looked a bit frightening when seen from the outside” Dex continues.

“What do you know about the last few days?” Ryan asks, his suspicion growing.

“And how was it you were with Roger the night he offed himself?”

“She’s a good friend to you” Agent Dex adds.

He takes a seat at the kitchen table.

Ryan stands over him.

“Why change the subject?” Ryan demands.

“I was asking about Roger.”

“No change in subject, I just hate to see a good friendship burn out”
Dex assures him.

”Like Roger and me.”

“We went way back.”

“We worked at the agency together for a long time.”

“Or like you and Barry” The agent adds, looking up at Ryan.

Dex’s intimate knowledge of his past makes Ryan uncomfortable.

“Barry?” Ryan stammers, caught off guard.

“What do you know about Barry?”

“How involved are you?” he asks the agent, struggling for the words.

“In this fucked up mess” he spits.

Agent Dex, sensing Ryan’s building frustration, pushes a kitchen chair out with his foot.

“Sit, let’s talk” he advises.

Spreading his palms wide the agent leans back in his chair.

“Ask me anything” he offers.

With his anger subsiding, Ryan takes the seat across from the agent.

“I need to know everything” Ryan starts.

“Are you restarting the colony project?” he asks.

Dex opens his mouth to answer but Ryan holds up his finger.

“Did you work on the project that involved me?” he continues.

“Restarting?” Dex asks.

“Was Roger in on it?” Ryan continues.

“The answer to your first question is no, we are not re-starting the colony project” Dex informs him.

Ryan let’s out a sigh of relief.

“Why did Roger takes his own life?” Ryan asks.

“That’s complicated” Dex answers.

“Please, go on” Ryan insists.

Dex takes a deep breath.

“Roger and I were like brothers but as he probably told you, he had retired from agency work a long time ago.”

“We lost touch” he answers, looking forlorn.

“I worked on the original colony project with him but only on the periphery” he continues, as he casts his eyes downward.

“The project went against my personal beliefs.”

“What they put you kids through” he adds, sympathetically.

Ryan grimaces.

“Roger recently reached out to me” Dex explains.

“Said he was looking to right the past and thought I could help.”

“I made my way to his place to see what I could do but when I arrived he was talking nonsense.”

“He wasn’t himself.”

“Handed me a note and a few other items before ushering me back out the door” Dex continues.

“I heard the gunshot as I made my way to the first floor of the apartment building.”

“I returned quickly and found him in the kitchen, gun still in his hand.”

“Dead.”

Ryan nods his head, seemingly agreeing with everything he just heard.

Standing, he walks to the kitchen sink, turns on the tap and fills a glass with water.

Taking his time he sips it slowly, all the while watching Agent Dex.

Agent Dex returns his stare.

“I don’t believe you” Ryan states.

“What do you want from me Ryan?” Dex pleads.

“Roger had me spooked.”

“That’s why I went though your friend Sara” Dex explains.

Ryan frowns.

“What I want is the truth but for tonight I’ll settle for your leaving” he answers as he walks back to the table.

“Hey Ryan, take a breath” Dex pleads.

“I only come here tonight to honor Roger’s last request.”

“Just get the fuck out of my house” Ryan demands, disgusted with Dex’s obvious lies.

Feeling the dizziness return, he closes his eyes and grasps the edge of the table to steady himself.

Dex misses Ryan’s falter as he is distractedly fishing in his pocket for something.

Getting to his feet, he places a memory bead on the table.

“If you don’t believe me, listen to Roger himself” he offers.

“What is that?” Ryan asks, unable to see through his blurred vision.

“Cmon ryan. I was born at night, just not last night” Agent Dex says in an attempt to cut the tension.

“You know that’s a memory bead” he says pointing to it.

“Roger’s note stated he had given you a few and wanted me to deliver this last one.”

“Just go” Ryan sighs, pointing to the door.

Dex, still smiling, picks up the bead and offers it to Ryan directly.

“You don’t have to trust me, but I hope you’ll trust Roger” he says placing the bead into Ryan’s hand.

Ryan closes his hand around the bead.

“It does have the same structure and heaviness as the other memory beads” he thinks to himself.

“Thanks for your time” Agent Dex calls as he walks down the hall.

“And for allowing me to fulfill my promise to Roger.”

The agent exits out the front door leaving it ajar.

He strolls back to his car parked around the corner.

His easy smile gone, he pulls his cell phone from his pocket and dials.

“It’s Hatter, I’m bringing him in” he informs the person on the other end of the line.

“Have his room ready.”

Agent Hatter listens for a moment.

“No he wouldn’t play along” he answers.

“I gave him the tainted bead.”

“He’ll be out cold in no time” Dex answers confidently.

Hanging up the phone, Agent Hatter opens his car door and steps inside.

“Don’t let me down Ryan” he says under his breath.

Adjusting his car seat he sets his phone alarm for one hour.

Inside the house Ryan is struggling with what to do.

“I want to hear what Roger has to say but should I trust Dex?” he ponders.

Exhausted, he walks into the living room and takes a seat on the couch.

“What the hell” he says, placing the memory bead under his tongue.

Reclining on the sofa he waits for the memory bead to take effect.

Within minutes his eyes begin to close and he slumps over, unconscious.

42

Sara's car suspension squeaks as she drives down the highway.

The small car sways in the draft of other automobiles as they pass in the opposite direction.

Her car speakers, volume set low on the radio, hum in the background.

The day is bright but a cold gray haze clouds her mood.

As she stares down the highway, she can feel the heaviness overwhelming her.

"It's been two weeks" she ponders.

"Why hasn't Ryan called?"

"Can he really be this upset with me?" she wonders.

Attempting to clear her mind, she sits up straight and turns her attention to the road.

Desperate, she grips the steering wheel tight, striving to hang onto the present.

Her mind, uncooperatively wanders back to the recent past.

“The way I left it with Randall was no better” she thinks.

“Fuck you” she recalls was the last sentiment she shared with him.

She thinks of all the emotion she felt as she stormed from the building carrying the box of Ryan’s belongings.

“Dammit, why didn’t I grab my stuff too” she scolds herself.

There was no need to resign, but she was so angered by the fact that Ryan was being summarily relieved of his duties that she quit in solidarity.

“Losing the LC13 for a few days may have scared the hell out of Randall” she thinks, grinding her teeth in anger.

“But the loss of Ryan’s talent will be felt for years” she relishes.
Loyal to the end, her devotion to Ryan is unshakable.

“Ryan and I are still a team” she assures herself.

“Even if he doesn’t believe that anymore”

The flash of reflected sunlight off the oncoming road sign garners her attention.

“Exit 23, the road to the hospital” she thinks.

“It will be good to see daddy.”

A faint smile crosses her face as she turns onto the off ramp.

Making a left onto the busy street she applies her brakes and stops at the red traffic light.

Her phone rings from somewhere in the box of Ryan’s belongings.

Peering into the box on the passenger seat, she hopes to quickly spot it, to no avail.

Instead she must use her hands to fish around, finally pulling it free.

Reading the call screen, she is disappointed to see it's Kellan.

"Thanks for backing me up ya jerk" she answers, feigning jest.

Her tone betrays her true feelings and her deep disappointment in Kellan.

The traffic light turns green.

"Sara" Kellan starts, ignoring her insult.

"You ok?"

"Yep" she answers oblivious to the traffic light change.

"I talked with Randall and reminded him of all the trouble your dealing with right now."

"With you father being sick."

There is silence as Kellan waits for her response.

“Randall agrees tensions were high and emotions were raw” Kellan continues.

“He’s willing to take you back” he informs her.

Sarah pushes her ear into the phone, straining to hear Kellan’s last sentiment.

“But you’d have to apologize” he says under his breath.

Sara, listening intently, is unaware of the line of cars forming behind her own stopped car.

She stewes in anger, outraged by Kellan’s suggestion.

Her rage grows with each honk of the car horns.

Upon realizing the light has turned green, she mashes the gas pedal with her foot and her car races forward.

The acceleration dispatches the immediacy of anger she holds.

To avoid a near collision she pumps her brakes as she approaches the next red traffic light.

“Sara” she hears, Kellan’s voice coming back to her through her fog of exasperation.

“Yeah?” she answers, upon realizing she still holds the phone to her ear.

“The apology?” he asks.

Sara smiles wryly.

“I don’t think I want to do that” she states, calming herself.

“Don’t throw your career away on Ryan” Kellan advises.

“He’s not worth it.”

“I’m not doing this for Ryan” she answers.

“I just realized that there’s more to me than that place.”

“Besides Randall’s an asshole.”

“He is never going to give any of us the respect we deserve” she concludes.

Kellan sighs, ignoring her reasoning.

“You’re gonna regret it” he warns.

Turning into the hospital parking lot, she finds a spot quickly and pulls her car in.

Kellan’s tone and attitude are starting to wear thin.

“Regret what Kellan?” she huffs into the phone, ready to fight.

Fatigued, she looks out her car window and spots her father at the hospital entrance.

He is waiting for her, and she can see he’s smiling.

In that instant all her rage and frustration melt away.

“You were saying...” Kellan prompts.

Kellan’s voice is drowned out by Sara’s moment of clarity.

“Never mind Kellan” she answers.

“I’m sorry how this all turned out but I won’t be coming back” she informs him.

Sara throws the phone back into the box.

“Sara?” Kellan asks, confused.

Opening the car door, she steps out and runs across the parking lot into the waiting arms of her father.

“Daddy” she exclaims, kissing his cheek.

“I’m sorry for being late, have you been waiting long?”

“Not at all, just enjoying the fresh air” he assures her, unlocking his wheelchair.

“How are you my love” he asks, as he grasps her hand.

“Hanging in there” she answers.

“Can we talk as we walk?” she asks, pointing down the sidewalk towards the garden path.

“Of course” he says, popping a wheelie in his wheelchair.

“But you’ll have to keep up” he teases as he wheels his way forward.

Sara smiles at his gaiety.

“Daddy, be careful” she calls, as she follows.

The path is edged with flowers and shaded by large elm trees.

Sara takes a deep breath letting the fragrant smells of the garden soothe her nerves.

“So what’s on your mind?” he asks, as they make their way through the garden.

"I can see worry in those beautiful eyes" he adds looking at her proudly.

"So strong and independent you are, just like your mother."

"What are you getting on about?" Sara scolds him.

She nods to an elderly couple who pass them on the garden path.

"Well" he starts and pauses momentarily to gather his thoughts.

"An old friend called, a past associate" he explains.

"You met him recently."

"Detective Phillips?" he says.

Sara's eyes flash with recognition, as she takes a seat on a bench next to her father.

"What did he want?" she asks .

“He’s looking for Ryan” the old detective starts, reaching for Sara’s hand.

“He mentioned he ran into you and wondered how you were after what I assume, was a very trying night.”

Sara nods, tears filling her eyes.

“Sounds like you and Ryan got into some kind of trouble?” he inquires.

“I’m ok” she assures him.

“Well, it got my dander up and I told the detective so, but he assured me he was only interested in the truth.”

Franklin leans in close.

“He mentioned an agency man, someone you made contact with?”

“Agent Dex” Sarah offers.

Squeezing Sara’s hand he continues.

“I know Ryan, love him like a son.”

“I can’t thank him enough for giving me back my memories.”

“But you’re my daughter, you mean everything to me.”

“I know daddy” she answers.

“Please tell me you’re being careful” he pleads.

“I’m afraid you’ll commit yourself to another lost cause.”

“You are too kind, too trusting” he laments.

Sara smiles at him.

“You don’t have to worry, I can handle myself” she assures him.

Standing, Sara walks around the wheelchair and leans in close, hugging her father.

“But since you brought up Ryan... could I ask your advice?” she asks.

“Of course” he answers.

43

Sara turns her car into Ryan's driveway.

Stepping out, she walks to the backyard, carrying the box of Ryan's office things.

She is surprised to see Ryan's bicycle locked to the fence.

"Is he home?" she wonders, growing nervous.

The overgrown yard makes it hard to walk.

The sun, high in the sky feels intensely bright.

Her nerves jangled cause her to juggle the container.

She struggles to reach the house key inside her purse.

"Dammit" she cries, frustrated, as the contents of the box spill out onto the grass.

She rubs her arm across her forehead and pushes away beads of the sweat before bending to gather everything back into the box.

She blows at strands of hair that hang in front of her eyes as she snatches various items from the lawn.

“Calm down” she tells herself.

“Confront him and see what’s going on.”

“Offer your help before its too late.” She repeats, listing off her father’s advice from the day before.

“Ok daddy I’m here” she whispers.

“Now what?”

Brushing the dirt from her knees, Sarah stands and shakes her purse till she finds the key.

Lifting the box with her free hand, she walks up the back steps and unlocks the door.

“Ryan!” she calls as she lets herself in.

She replays the scene as she imagined it would go on the car ride over.

“Sarah, I was wrong for questioning your loyalty, forgive me?” the imaginary Ryan pleads.

“Ryan, you here?” she calls louder.

“I’ve brought your stuff from the office” she announces, her voice echoing through the hall.

She places the box down on the kitchen counter.

“I’m gonna come in, ok?” she asks the silence.

Sarah walks around the kitchen, taking inventory, making note of the empty glass in the sink.

She next moves onto the hallway, her shoes making audible squeaks on the hardwood floor.

The noise is loud in the still house, reminding her of her own vulnerability.

“Abandoned?” she considers and begins to fear the worst.

“Ryan, you’re scaring me” she calls loudly to the emptiness.

Stepping quickly through the hallway, she passes the bathroom and continues to a second door.

Opening the side door, she steps out into the attached garage and finds Ryan’s car is there.

She runs her finger along the hood, leaving a smooth trail through a layer of dust.

“Couldn’t have gotten too far” she surmises.

Closing the garage door behind herself she steps back into the hallway.

Her fear growing, she stops to consider her next steps.

On the wall next to her a light pattern dances back and forth, catching her eye.

She finds the source of the pattern is emanating from the bathroom and walks over.

The glass shards are still there, where Ryan had hung them, dangling and twisting on the ends of fishing line.

The mirrored pieces catch the sunlight and cast brilliant glows onto the walls and ceiling.

“Oh no” she sighs, stepping through the wall of glass.

Snaking her way to the center of the bathroom, she lets the heaviness of the glass fragments engulf her.

Slowly she sways, closing her eyes.

Wanting to believe so desperately in Ryan’s story of a dimensional doorway.

Her thoughts turn to her father and then back to Ryan, the loss she feels as the two men in her life fade away.

“Did he go back?” she wonders.

Feeling hopeless she stops her swaying and scolds herself out loud for her weakness.

“He’s not here” she says, accepting her reality.

“He’s chosen to leave”

“Leave his work, leave his house, abandon all his responsibilities!” she thinks angrily.

Catching her own reflection in a glass shard, “and me” she laments.

Gathering her composure, she walks back through the hanging glass into the hallway.

She turns her head towards the sound of a door opening .

She is startled as the backdoor swings open.

Her hope that Ryan has returned is quickly dashed at the sight of Detective Phillips stepping in.

“Sara” he greets.

“That your car in front?”

“Yes detective I was just leaving” she says, straightening up and walking past him.

He stops her with a hand on her shoulder.

“How you holding up?” he asks.

“I’d be better if I knew where he ran to” she sighs.

“Have you seen him?” she asks.

“No I haven’t, that’s why I came in to speak to you” he answers.

“Speak to me?” she questions.

“Your dad called, told me I’d find you here” he answers.

Jim walks to the kitchen table and pulls out a chair, offering it to Sarah.

“You got a few minutes?” he asks.

“Of course” she agrees, walking over and taking a seat.

“Hmmm” he starts, scratching his chin, trying to find the right words.

“I know the other night looked bad” he offers apologetically.

“You have to trust me, I wasn’t trying to railroad Ryan.”

“In fact, I was trying to eliminate him from a possible murder investigation as quickly as I could” he explains.

“I’m listening” Sara urges.

“I was hoping you could tell me your thoughts on Ryan and possibly shed some light on what is really going on” he asks.

Looking intently at her he continues.

“I called his office and they told me he no longer works there?” he asks.

“His bike and his car are here and I’ve come by the house many times in the past weeks, but no Ryan?” he wonders out loud.

“Did he contact you after we left that night?” Sara asks.

“I haven’t seen him since that night when we left him with that other agent” he answers.

“Dex” Sara confirms.

“Thank you” the detective says and after a pause “it’s as if he vanished.”

Sara’s eyes widen at the possibility.

“I’ve tried calling Agent Dex myself” she says.

“Left him a few messages, but haven’t heard back.”

“Do you think he could be behind Ryan’s disappearance?” she asks.

“It’s a possibility” the detective confirms.

Tears well up in her eye's.

"He was right, I did betray him" she admits under her breath.

"You did what you thought was in Ryan's best interest" Jim offers.

"There are many factors we have to consider, the agent is only one"
Jim concludes.

"Have you checked Roger's apartment?" she asks.

"Wish I could" he answers.

"But Roger's apartment, the entire building burnt to the ground."

Sarah, fearing the worst, stands.

"I'm afraid we may never find him" she says nervously moving
through the kitchen.

Stopping at the box of Ryan's things she thumbs through the satellite
images of him.

“He may have gone farther than we can reach” she thinks.

“Can you stop by my house on your way out?” the detective asks.

“I have some things I’d like to show you” he tells her.

“Why not” she answers glumly.

“I’ve got nothing but time.”

44

Jim's keys jingle as he unlocks his front door.

Smiling at Sara, he pushes it open to allow her entry before him.

"Daddy!" a child yells from another room.

"Yep! It's me" Jims answers.

"And I brought a friend."

A commotion can be heard from the kitchen as two young boys make their way into the living room to greet their father's guest.

Dal follows moments later, wiping her hands on a dish towel.

"You remember Sara, Ryan's friend" Jim says introducing the two women.

"She's going to stay for dinner."

“If you don’t mind?” he adds, throwing his coat onto the chair in the corner.

“Come on in Sara” he says, turning to his guest.

“Of course, you’re Franklins daughter” Dal answers, recalling her father.

“Jim tells me he’s doing a lot better these days.”

“Sure is ” Sara answers, smiling.

“So nice that he has such a loving daughter” she adds, looking upon Sarah with approving eyes.

Stepping forward nervously, Sarah extends her hand to Dal.

“Thanks, so much for having me.”

“Something smells wonderful!”

Dal nods in agreement.

“You sure I’m not imposing?” Sara asks.

“Of course not, we’re happy to have you” Dal answers graciously.

“What brings you to the neighborhood tonight?” Dal asks.

“She was dropping off some Ryan’s things” Jim interjects.

“Was he home?” Dal asks.

“Jim’s been quite worried” she says as an aside to Sara.

“No sign of him” Sara sighs.

“I’m worried myself” she offers.

“We’ll get Ryan back soon enough” Jim answers confidently, scooping up his two boys, one in each arm.

“Daddy, are you staying home tonight?” the younger boy asks.

“Jim, you mentioned you had something to show me?” Sara inquires anxiously.

“Ah yes, in my office” Jim says, placing the boys back down and walking toward the hallway.

“You want something to drink?” he asks looking back at Sara and then to Dal.

“Honey I hope you don’t mind but I was going to show Sara the files I found concerning Ryan” he says, excusing himself and Sara.

‘Of course” Dal offers.

“It could be awhile” he says kissing his wife on the cheek.

“I’m not thirsty” Sara answers impatiently, in a rush to see the information about Ryan.

“Go right ahead” Dal says.

“I need the time to finish dinner anyways.”

Dal looks down at her sons.

“You two, in the kitchen” she commands.

The boys run past, jostling each other to be the first to re-enter the kitchen

“Don’t forget about Jimmy’s science project tonight” Dal reminds Jim.

“After dinner, I’ll get right on it” he assures Dal.

“And Michael, to answer your question, I am staying home tonight”
Jim calls towards the kitchen.

“Yay!” the boys yell in unison.

“Sara follow me” Jim says motioning her to his office.

“Cute boys” Sara observes.

“All their cuteness comes directly from their mother” Jim answers
proudly.

The Phillip’s family love is palpable and inspiring to Sara, her
mood lightens and she begins to feel a sense of hope.

Her warm feelings are only raised higher as she looks around Jim’s
tiny office.

Little League pictures cover the walls, sports trophies dot the shelves.

Toys are scattered about everywhere.

“Feels like a museum to the Phillip’s boys” she thinks, looking kindly on Jim.

“Sorry” Jim says, apologizing for the state of his office as he picks up the scattered toys.

“The boy’s science project” he adds, removing an unopened ant farm kit from the top of his computer keyboard.

Sara’s eyes follow as he places it on a shelf.

Reaching behind the computer he pulls out a gray lock box.

Turning the combo dial he registers the correct numbers and opens it, placing his service revolver inside.

“Can’t be too careful with all the boys around, huh?.” Sara adds, breaking the silence.

“Exactly” he confirms as he pulls a flash drive from the steel box before closing and locking it.

“Have a seat?” he offers, motioning to his office chair.

“I need to pull up the files” he says inserting a flash drive into his computer tower.

“We recovered theses from Roger’s place” Jim informs Sara.

“Thought you said there was fire?” she reminds him.

“Didn’t everything burn up?” she asks.

“There was a fire, but these files were retrieved a few days before” he answers distractedly as he navigates the mouse on the computer screen.

“Still almost lost ‘em, though” he adds.

“The chief said this was a fed case now and ordered the turnover of all evidence.”

“So, is this illegal?” she asks.

“Us looking at the files?” she clarifies.

He grins as he turns to her.

“That is what we call a gray area” he answers.

“Ryan’s a friend” he assures her.

“I’m gonna do what I can to help him.”

“There we go” he says as the drive opens on the screen.

“Have you ever heard of a government program called The G Colony?”
he inquires.

Sara shakes her head no, confused by the question.

Jim measures her response.

“Then you are in for some interesting reading” he offers.

“The G Colony?” she questions.

“It’s all in the files” he answers.

“The name of program, something from the early seventies.”

“Ryan’s friend Roger was mixed up in it.”

“A real government cloak and dagger” he answers.

Clicking the mouse on top of the file folder, he backs up allowing Sara access.

“Must have been a failure” he theorizes.

“I can’t find mention of it anywhere on the web.”

Sara studies the folder names on the screen.

“*Ryan:age1, Ryan:age:2, Ryan:age:3*” she reads.

“Who was this Roger guy?” she asks, turning to Jim.

“Was he obsessed with Ryan?” she wonders, horrified.

“On the contrary, just a good agent” Jim answers.

“Ryan was one of his cases” he explains.

“It appears, Roger was responsible for his livelihood, his health, etc.”

“But something like that does become personal very quickly” he sympathizes.

Reaching over, Jim maneuvers the mouse and clicks open on another folder.

“He took his job very serious” he adds, referring to the document open on the screen.

“Oh my god!” Sara gasps.

“Ryan was slated for termination?” she squeals in alarm.

“Does that mean what I think it does?” she asks looking back at the detective.

“It appears that way” Jim answers grimly.

“That’s when Roger took Ryan off the grid and brought him to safety, out of the colony” Jim continues.

“It’s all in the files.”

“Saved his life!” he adds.

“And now Roger’s dead” Sara responds, sadly.

“What if Agent Dex is more involved then he let on?” she asks.

“Oh my god, we’ve got to find Ryan before it is too late” she insists.

“Absolutely” Jim agrees.

“But first we need to know where to look.”

Pulling a notepad from his pocket, he studies his notations.

“You mentioned earlier that you reached out to Dex?” he asks.

“Everyday since that evening” Sara answers.

“I’ve left lots of messages but he hasn’t called back.”

“Not good” Jim says with a frown.

“Dex wouldn’t kill him?”

“Would he?” Sara wonders, horrified at the thought.

“With all of us there to witness their last meeting?” she asks.

“I pray not” Jim answers.

“Look over the files, while I check on dinner” he offers, sliding his notebook back into his pocket.

“Maybe you’ll come across something I missed.”

“And let’s plan your next attempt at communicating with Dex together” he says as he walks to the door.

“I’m happy to help in anyway I can” Sara confirms.

Taking a deep breath, she turns back to the computer screen.

“Good luck” Jim offers as he closes the office door behind himself.

45

“Voices?”

“Voices and darkness?” Ryan wonders, afraid to move.

Something moves closer as his vision begins to clear.

He recognizes it as the shape of a face.

The face is featureless, surrounded by a halo of light.

“Did I cross back into Orthoplex?” he thinks.

“Hello?” he says weakly, his throat burning with pain.

“Was that out loud?” he questions himself.

“He’s waking up” a disconnected voice hisses.

More whisperings.

Ryan struggles to decipher what the voices are saying.

He strains to listen but everything goes quiet.

His vision blurs as he feels himself drifting off into the nothingness.

“Clank” the sound of an old water pipe echoes through the room.

The large noise rings in Ryan’s ear and registers in his brain.

Opening his eyes, he sits up in a panic, lost and unsure of his surroundings.

The room is painted a bright white.

“What?” he utters, still not fully awake.

“Can anybody hear me?” he calls.

Rising unsteadily from a hospital bed, he looks down to see he is clothed in a t shirt and sweat pants.

A film coats his mouth and throat, making it hard to swallow.

Fluorescent lights overhead hum and cool air blows through a vent on the ceiling.

The room is devoid of furnishings, save for the bed and a stool in the corner.

Noticing a pitcher of water and a glass on the stool, Ryan steps forward but immediately falls back as his legs give out.

Steadying himself on the bed, he regains his footing.

Making slow steps, he plods along until he reaches the stool.

Grabbing for the pitcher he pours himself a glass of water.

“Ice cold?” he wonders as he takes a large gulp.

After finishing a second glass, he clears his throat and again talks to the emptiness.

“Thanks for the water.”

Expecting no response, he goes on.

“Can you tell me where I am?”

“Relax Mr Wexler” a disconnected voice booms from a speaker in the ceiling.

“Someone will be in to see you shortly.”

The voice startles him and his body shudders in alarm.

Feeling vulnerable, he makes his way back to the bed.

Sitting at the end, feeling cold, he rubs his hands over his arms to keep warm.

Surprised at the lack of pain from the cut on his hand, he examines it, and realizes the gash from the bathroom mirror has healed.

“How long have I been out?” he wonders.

Turning his other arm over, he can see the indications of where an IV spike was recently removed.

Fearing for his life he scans the room for somewhere to hide or something to defend himself with.

Panicked he thinks back to his last memory before waking in this strange room.

“Agent Dex, the memory bead” he recalls.

He stands and walks to the door in the corner.

Turning the handle he finds that it is locked.

He kneels and puts his ear to the door’s metal surface.

He can hear distant footsteps, growing louder as they near.

“I’m standing at the door” a voice states from the other side.

“Copy that” the voice from the ceiling answers.

“Open the door slowly, he’s crouching behind it” the ceiling voice continues, betraying Ryan’s location.

“Ryan” a man’s voices instructs from the other side of the door.

“I’m coming in” the voice continues calmly.

“For your own safety, step back and sit on the bed.”

“Who are you?” Ryan demands.

His voice, feeble sounding, reveals his fear.

Standing now, Ryan balls his fingers into two fists.

“I work with agent Dex” the male voice answers.

“I’m sure you’re a bit confused.”

“Allow me to come in and we can have a talk.”

“I’d like to speak with Dex” Ryan insists, ignoring the man’s request.

“Sit on the bed and we can talk” the male voice commands.

Ryan looks down to see the doorknob turning and before he can react, the door violently swings open, pinning him in the corner.

A large man forces himself into the room.

“Get your ass up” the man commands, the calming tone gone. Grabbing Ryan by the shoulder, the man throws him onto the bed.

“When I ask you to do something, you do it.”

“You understand?” he screams into Ryan’s face.

Turning his head to the side he speaks to the ceiling voice.

“Situation is good, I’m in the room.”

“Subject has been immobilized.”

“I can see that Porter” the ceiling voice answers back.

“Next time, be a little more careful, I don’t want him damaged.”

Breathing hard, Ryan struggles to sit up.

“Fuck you” he huffs under his breath.

Agent Porter turns to him and smiles.

“Fuck you too” he mocks.

“Where am I?” Ryan angrily demands.

“All in good time” Porter answers, patting Ryan on the head .

Porter reaches behind Ryan and binds his wrists.

“Is that really necessary?” Ryan asks.

“I’m not going anywhere, I don’t even have shoes.”

Feeling winded Ryan falls back onto his hands.

“Get up” Porter commands.

“Why?” Ryan asks .

“Where am I being taken?”

“To your interview” Porter answers coldly.

46

Sara works at Detective Phillip's computer, quickly growing to appreciate Roger's organizational skills.

Searching through the multitude of files for clues to Ryan's past is relatively easy.

Laid out in a scrapbook format, each picture labeled, every destination marked, all the milestones of a cherished child, recorded.

Her heart breaks at this realization.

"You loved him, didn't you Roger" she whispers.

Skipping around in the database, she smiles as she looks at a picture of a thirty year-old Ryan.

"Look at you in that goofy suit" she giggles.

Moving on, she is taken aback to find pictures of herself.

Ryan and she laughing, blissfully unaware of being photographed, lost in a private moment.

“Shit” she utters as she opens the last file.

The database abruptly ends at: *Ryan/age thirty-seven.*

Finding only limited clues to Ryan’s possible whereabouts, Sara starts back at the beginning, fearing she may have missed the obvious.

The aroma of a Del’s cooking wafts under the office door and distracts her momentarily.

Her stomach growls at the mere thought of food.

“I’ve been so wrapped up I’ve forgotten to eat today” she thinks.

Refocusing, Sara zeroes in on Ryan’s years at the testing facility and the mysterious G Colony project.

Ignoring all the charts and data reports, she concentrates her efforts only on the photographs.

Speculating the probability that she may not have been the only one to be caught unawares on film.

Moving slow, she clicks through the photos, studying every captured detail intently.

A face catches her eye.

“Finally a clue” she thinks.

Moving forward a few pages to confirm her suspicion, she notes the same individual in a few other photos.

Sara isolates some photos and prints them out on Jim’s printer.

Snatching the still warm pages from the printer, she moves to the door.

Stopping at the door, she listens to the Phillip’s family milling about, talking about their day as they set the dinner table.

“It’s nice to feel the family love,” she thinks.

“Even if it is not my own.”

Feeling guilty she reminds herself.

“I have daddy.”

Opening the door she considers Ryan’s lot in life.

“Who does he have?”

Jim, who has been watching the office door, spots her as she exits and waves her into the dining room.

The table is set and the savor of the roast is intoxicating.

Jim’s boys fidget and push at each other.

Dal, who is holding the baby, glances at her two sons sideways.

The frosty glare from their mother’s eye immediately freezes them to their chairs.

“I was just about to call you” Jim offers.

“Did you find anything useful?” he asks.

“I think I did” she answers looking down at the printouts in her hand.

“But let’s eat first.

We can discuss my findings after dinner” she offers out of respect for Dal.

Sliding into the seat next to Dal, Sara marvels at all the plated food in front of her.

“I don’t know how you do it” she says, complimenting Dal.

“Pulling all this together every night with a houseful of boys running around.”

“Part of the job” Dal answers, blushing at the compliment.

Jim smiles and nods to the boy’s, who, given the signal, dig in to the food.

“The table manners of wild animals” Dal says as she rolls her eyes.

“Boys slow down.”

Taking a few bites, Jim wipes his mouth.

“How were the men today” he asks Dal, winking at his middle son.

“Business as usual” she answers.

“Except for the ant farm project” she adds.

Don’t forget, you promised to work on that with me tonight” his oldest reminds him.

Light conversation floats between the adults as the two older boys help themselves to seconds.

With their plates cleared and their stomachs full, the boys again become anxious and tire of sitting.

Noticing their fidgeting, Dal excuses the boys from the table and asks the oldest to take the baby from her.

When the room is cleared of children, she turns to Sara.

“What did you find?” she asks, her eyes wide.

Sara looks from Dal to Jim, confused.

“I shared the reports of the G Colony with her” he admits.

“She’s always been a better sleuth than me” he adds.

“Horrible” Dal utters.

“To think what they put those children through.”

Sara reaches for the printouts that she has been holding in her lap and lays them on the kitchen table between the plates.

“Jim clear a space” Dal directs as she moves herself closer to Sara.

Sara directs their attention to a man’s face in the first printout.

He’s standing at a distance in a photo of a one-year old Ryan.

Dal and Jim study the photo for a minute.

Sara places the next printout on top and points to a smaller, blurry image of what appears to be the same man smoking a cigarette.

He again is in the background as Ryan and his fellow colonists play at a playground.

The third printout she places on top is a picture of a much younger Roger and the mystery man shaking hands.

“Do you know him?” Dal asks, looking from Sara to Jim.

Picking up the last printout, Jim studies it for a moment.

“Agent Dex?” he guesses.

“Shave the beard and add forty or so pounds and you’ve got your man” she agrees.

“But he told us he didn’t work on the colony project?” Jim questions.

“Why would he lie?” Sara wonders out loud.

“Maybe he misunderstood” Jim offers.

“He was intentionally lying” Dal interrupts angrily.

“He was part of the colony or the whatever you call it.... experiment.”

“That poor young boy” she continues as she studies the photo of Ryan.

“Treated as nothing more than a lab rat.” She spits, pounding her fist on the table.

Dal is shaking with anger, her motherly instinct running at full tilt.

Sara turns and puts her hand on Dal’s shoulder.

“This was the man from the other night?” Dal asks.

“The last person in known contact with Ryan before he went missing?”

“Well, he may not be missing” Jim answers cautiously.

“Ryan may have chosen to leave on his own.”

“He did seem really upset with us” Jim continues, looking at Sara.

“Besides, Sara’s been calling agent Dex all day, trying to confirm if he knows Ryan’s whereabouts.”

“I’ve left multiple messages with no luck” Sara adds.

“Of course he has Ryan and why should he answer your call?” Dal points out.

“You have nothing left to offer”

“This evil man has what he wants” she adds.

“Mom” the boy’s call from the other room.

“Be right there” she says as she stands and walks around the table.

“You need to convince him you that you have something he needs” she instructs.

“Maybe some personal information about Ryan.”

“Information only someone like I would have” Sara answers in agreement.

“That should get Dex’s attention” Jim agrees.

“But how do we get to Ryan?” he questions.

“How do we get him a message?”

“Well” Sara interjects.

“I had a thought while I was looking around your office.”

“But your son might not be too happy” she adds.

47

Ryan, now tethered to agent Porter by a long chain, plods down the corridor of an old building.

The floor is covered in a fine layer of dirt and the fluorescent lights overhead hum, flashing on and off as the two men walk on.

The erratic light creates a dizzying display of shadows

Ryan slows his pace, the shadows playing tricks on his mind, afraid what may lie ahead.

Porter impatiently yanks hard on the chain, bringing Ryan to his knees.

“Pick up the pace” Porter demands.

Getting to his feet Ryan notices a large pane of glass, a one-way mirror, on the opposite wall.

Feigning injury, he limps over and peers in.

The brightly painted room stands in stark contrast to the darkened hall he walks.

The colored wallpaper, faded and peeling, and a multitude of children's toys littering the floor, resurrect a vision from his past .

"Have I been here before?" he wonders.

"What is this place?" he calls to Porter.

Porter, ignoring the question, again yanks on Ryan's chain.

Ryan grits his teeth as his restraints, connected to the chain lead, cut deeply into his wrists.

The intense pain cajoles him to continue on.

As the pair round the corner of the hallway, they pass a reception area.

Ryan notes the office furnishings appear to be a few decades old.

A large computer takes up most of the counter space on what appears to be a receptionist desk.

Old magazines, including many children's issues lay on a fraying couch in the corner.

Porter stops as they arrive at an elevator bank.

He types a code into the keypad on the wall and pushes the call button as Ryan stands behind him.

Ryan strains to see the numbers Porter inputs but Porter's large frame blocks his view

Waiting for arrival of the elevator, Ryan looks down at his bare feet, filthy with the soot from the hall.

He begins to formulate an escape plan.

"If I'm to escape, I'll need shoes" he thinks.

The chime of the elevator's arrival, haunts Ryan's mind with more recollections from his past.

He is struck with a horrible realization.

"I'm back at the old testing facility!" he thinks.

"The room with the toys was the observation cell from Roger's memory bead" he concludes.

His body shivers with fear as he recalls what the operators of this facility planned to do with he and Barry at that time.

Porter tugs on Ryan's chain, waking him from this horrific thought.

He forces Ryan to board the elevator.

"Where is everyone?" Ryan asks.

Porter smiles sadistically.

"History" he answers.

As the elevator doors close he continues his hectoring.

“We’re taking a ride through history” he taunts.

Porter presses the number five on the elevator panel.

“History that will never see the light of day, but history none-the-less” he concludes.

Pulling on Ryan’s restraints, he brings him in close.

“I should ask for your autograph” he mocks.

“Wha-what?” Ryan stammers, confused.

“You’re the lost colonist” he ridicules and laughs.

Ryan smiles at his joke, playing it cool, choking down the terror he feels inside.

“I’ve got to get out of here” he thinks.

The elevator begins to rise.

“I’d like to see Dex now” he says, attempting to stall for time.

“I have some important information for him.”

“Your wish has been granted” Porter answers sarcastically.

The elevator jerks to a stop and the doors open.

Soft music echoes through the halls as they step out onto the fifth floor.

“He must be ready for you” Porter says looking down the darkened hallway.

“Give me your hands” he demands, holding out a knife.

Ryan hesitates but Porter pulls at Ryan’s binds, bringing his hands up and cuts off the restraints.

With his hands free, Ryan rubs his wrist till the blood starts to flow.

He looks behind himself, down the hall, fearful of what awaits.

Turning his attention back to Porter, the light from the elevator outlining him, he is astonished at the size of the man.

“Overpowering him is out” he notes.

“I’ve got think of another plan.”

“How long you been an agent?” Ryan asks, trying to build a sense of familiarity with him.

Porter, lifting a chair from behind a desk, looks over his shoulder.

“None of your god damned business” he sneers.

He points in the direction of the music.

“Move on down the hall, second door to your right” he directs.

Ryan hesitates for a moment, not knowing what to expect.

“Move” porter demands, raising a fist.

Ryan begrudgingly begins his march down the hall.

In the darkened hallway, only a sliver of light is visible before him.

His mind races as he struggles to formulate a new plan of escape.

“If I run back towards the elevator, or maybe a window?” he thinks. Squinting in the darkness for any sign of hope his mind wanders back to Sara and Detective Phillips.

“Are they safe?” he wonders.

“Are they captives in this building as well.”

“Do they face a similar unknown fate?”

Stopping in front of the second door, he can hear music playing from inside.

He takes a breath, and knocks.

48

“Come in” a voice calls from behind the door in answer to Ryan’s knock.

Cautiously, Ryan opens the door.

“Ryan” Agent Dex announces in a friendly tone.

“C’mon in, have a seat.”

Ryan, still standing in the hallway, walks into the brightly lit room.

He blinks his eyes rapidly as they adjust to the light.

Nervous, he stands just inside.

Dex, sitting at a table in the center of the room, motions for Ryan to take a seat across from him.

Loud music, playing from a small radio on the back countertop, makes it hard for Ryan to process what is going on.

He stands in a stupor.

“Sit!” Dex commands.

Ryan lifts his head in confusion.

“Excuse me” Dex apologizes.

He rises from his seat, walks to the counter and lowers the volume on the radio.

“That’s better” he says, walking back.

Ryan slides out a chair and takes a seat.

Dex walks back to the table and stops behind Ryan.

He places his hand on Ryan’s shoulder and squeezes.

“You comfortable?” he asks.

“Sure” Ryan answers curtly.

“Sorry about the volume, it gets lonely down here so I like to fill the silence with music” he explains.

Clearing his throat, he again takes his seat across from Ryan and slides a large binder from the corner of the table over to himself.

Dramatic and deliberate in his actions, he licks his fingertips and flips through the pages.

“What’s this all about?” Ryan asks.

Dex, still reading, reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out the satchel of Ryan’s remaining memory beads.

He wordlessly places it on the table next to the binder.

Ryan looks at the satchel longingly.

Continuing to flip through the pages of the book, Dex leaves an uncomfortable silence between the two men.

After what feels like an eternity to Ryan, Dex lifts his head and speaks.

“I have your beads” he prompts placing his hand on the satchel.

“What do you want from me?” Ryan asks, ignoring the mention of the beads.

Dex sneers.

“It’s not what I want Ryan, It’s what I can do for you” he answers back.

“Example, are you hungry?”

Ryan nods.

“You know I am.”

“Well, I can help with that” he says, standing again.

Walking to a cabinet above the countertop, he pulls out a basket of fruit and carries it over to Ryan.

“Take some” he offers, holding out the basket.

Peering into the basket, Ryan nervously licks his lips, and removes an apple.

He looks up at Dex in anticipation.

“Take a bite” Dex suggests.

“Go slow” he warns.

“You’ve been on a liquid diet for quite awhile.”

The apple tastes sweet on Ryan’s lips and he greedily devours the entire fruit, including the core.

Dex places the basket on the table next to Ryan.

“Help yourself” he invites.

Feeling a bit of energy returning to his body, Ryan straightens up in his chair.

“Why’d you bring me here?” he asks.

Agent Dex studies Ryan for a moment before answering.

“This is your home” he answers with a warm sadistic smile.

“Welcome home” he adds, stretching his arms wide.

Ryan looks down at the floor in frustration.

“You’re a sick man” he mutters.

“Have to disagree there” Agent Dex counters.

Anger rising up through his body, Ryan slams his fist on the table.

“Let me the fuck out of here” he demands.

“You know I can’t do that” Dex answers.

He leans in close, his breath hot on Ryan’s ear.

“Besides” he whispers “do you really think you’re in any position to give orders?”

“Kidnapping is illegal” Ryan points out.

“Let me go now, and I’ll make sure they go easy on you.”

“C’mon Ryan” Dex starts, refusing to play along.

“Cut the bullshit.”

“I know you’ve seen many of Roger’s past memories, probably stirred up a few of your own.”

“Didn’t you learn anything?” he asks.

“I’ve been given carte blanche, you know that, you’ve witnessed it.”

“Speaking of which” he says, pouring the remainder of Roger’s beads out onto the table.

“Let’s just get rid of these right now.”

Dex wipes them off the edge.

Ryan’s eyes follow as the beads spill onto the floor.

Dex raises his shoe and crushes them underneath.

Ryan's shoulders fall with the crunch of the beads, defeated, knowing he has just lost his only link to his past.

Reading the defeat in Ryan's eyes, Dex continues his taunting.

"Let me spoil it for you, he dies in the end."

Impressed with his own wit Dex laughs loudly.

Lifting his shoe, Dex brushes the remnants of the beads from the bottom.

"I know this game" Ryan says, looking into Dex's eyes.

"This is how you break me down until I give you what you want."

Laying his hands on the table he continues.

"Funny thing is I have nothing left to give."

"Well Roger sure thought you did" Dex fires back.

“Let me guess” Ryan asks.

“You weren’t friends with Roger at all and that story of helping Barry, it was all fucking bullshit, wasn’t it?”

“Well now hold on” Dex clarifies.

“Roger and I were friends.”

He pauses.

“Until he stole you from the program.”

“That was a long time ago” Ryan counters.

“He betrayed the department and risked many lives.”

“And for what?”

“Two snot nose dysfunctional misfits, who should have been destroyed?” Dex concludes.

Ryan’s eyes flash with anger.

“And Barry” Dex adds.

“Barry has been dead for years, took care of that myself” he says.

“You’re a monster” Ryan hisses.

“No, Barry was a monster, killed my partner, Dirks, Agent Dirks” Dex hisses through gritted teeth.

“All because Roger needed to absolve himself of the guilt he felt.”

“I sure hope his fucking conscious was clear before that lead slug went through it” Dex shouts, spittle falling from his bottom lip.

His face red with anger, Dex stands and pushes his chair back violently against the wall.

Ryan shudders at the commotion.

Dex walks to the door and looks back at Ryan.

“Don’t you fucking move” he warns.

Dex takes his leave, slamming the door behind himself.

Ryan is alone in the room.

49

Ryan listens as his captor's footsteps echo down the hall.

He waits till all is quiet and quickly gets to his feet.

Walking to the door, he turns the knob.

"Locked, of course" he thinks.

Running his hands around the edges of the door he looks for a weakness.

Disappointed at finding none, he drops to his knees and scours the floor for the last of Roger's memory beads.

He slides his hands along the tile, hoping one or more of the beads may be salvaged.

He feels only small fragments of glass.

Discouraged, he slides back into his chair, closes his eyes and lays his head in his arms.

“There has to be a way out” he thinks, unwilling to give in.

He turns his head to the side and opens one eye.

Spying the large binder laying open on the table, he pulls it over to himself.

The front pocket is filled with photos of himself through the years.

Stopping, he leafs through them to marvel at the past.

Turning his attention to the written pages, he skims the first two tabs.

The tabs are filled with information about his education as well as some of his past employment.

Stopping at the third tab, he is shocked to see a letter from Kellan Fosters.

He pulls the letter from the tab.

It is handwritten.

He reads the letter and discovers it is filled with detailed information about the recent satellite project he and the others worked on together..

Ryan's anger steadily rises as he reads of the betrayal in Kellan's own hand.

The letter lists the many steps that Ryan and the group had taken in search of the elusive dimensional window.

"Mother fucker" he says under his breath, the deception striking close to his heart.

Ryan closes the binder and stands, this time to search the room for a weapon.

Grabbing a small banana from the basket of fruit, he peels it and takes a bite.

He holds the end of the banana in his mouth like a cigar, as he opens and searches the cabinets above and below the countertop.

He looks to the ceiling and in the corners of the room.

Finding nothing of use, he sits back down and finishes off all the fruit in the basket.

Bored he taps out a song on the cover of the binder and opens it again.

Noting the bottom corners of the pages are frayed, he examines the binder spine and finds the lowest ring is loose.

He wiggles it back and forth until it breaks off.

“Could come in handy” he thinks, separating the sharp ring ends to dislodge it from the paper.

Ryan hears Dex whistling as he draws near.

He swiftly slides the opened binder ring into his waistband and closes the binder cover.

The sound of a keypad can be heard as his captor inputs the code to unlock the door.

Dex peeks his head into the room.

“You miss me?” he asks sarcastically.

Ryan nods and slides the empty fruit basket away from himself.

“I see you ate a bit more” Dex notes.

“Very good.”

Feeling more energized, Ryan coyly pushes back on his interrogator.

“So, you gonna let me in on what we are supposed to be doing here?” Ryan asks.

“Is this the good cop part?” he mocks.

“This where you give me the truth before you ask for my help?” he continues.

Dex grimaces.

He is not amused with the taunts from his captive.

“Dex wants something and he needs me alive” Ryan reckons to himself.

“You’re a smart man” Dex answers.

“I know that of course from reading your bio” he continues, nodding to the binder on the table.

“I know a quite a lot about you” he continues.

Dex pauses and taps on the table.

“Like, After Ms. Drosen’s unfortunate accident.”

“What about it?” Ryan asks.

“You and Barry were questioned, but the other children were not” Dex frowns.

“Report states the other children were terrified of you and Barry.”

“Why?” he asks.

Ryan’s face feels hot, his shoulders tense up.

Dex, sensing the uncomfortable position he is drawing Ryan into changes the subject abruptly.

“You were sent to private school and then onto Stanford” he observes as he stands over Ryan.

“You showed great promise, but then, nothing.”

“Found yourself moving from one mediocre job till the next, staying in your field of study but never shining bright.”

“Always in the background” he adds.

Ryan’s eyes follow as Dex circles the table.

“Roger must have felt some disappointment in that, especially after risking his life, losing his career and even financing your education” Dex asserts.

Ryan’s eyes betray his sadness.

“You didn’t know?” Dex asks, leaning on his back foot and chuckling to himself.

“Did you think the government was paying your tuition?” he wonders aloud.

“Being a ward of the state doesn’t pay that well no matter your IQ” he continues, mocking Ryan’s naiveté.

“Nope, Roger was your benefactor” Dex informs Ryan.

“Guess he felt he owed you that.”

Ryan, feeling the hot tears as they roll down his cheeks, stands and turns away from Dex.

He leans forward, his hands gripping the edge of the countertop along the back wall.

“If you knew all this, why didn’t you just come and get me?” he asks, still facing away from Dex.

“Why not be done with all this?”

“I didn’t have any of this information till four weeks ago” Dex answers honestly

“Once I had your last name it was easy, but before that I had nothing.”

“Roger may have been a traitor and a son of a bitch but he was also a damn fine agent” Dex continues, addressing Ryan’s back.

“I looked, believe me.”

“Many agents were put on your trail but we all came up empty.”

“Roger’s only mistake was reaching out to you after all these years” Dex says, shaking his head.

“Once he did that the game was up.”

“Why did Roger reach out?” Ryan asks, turning towards Dex, feigning ignorance.

“I was hoping you could tell me” Dex answers.

“Maybe he felt enough time had passed.”

“Thought that we had given up.”

“It’s also possible he felt you made a breakthrough and needed some guidance?” Dex ponders, aloud.

“Did you make a break through?” Dex asks Ryan bluntly.

Ryan shakes his head no.

“Now what, you kill me?” Ryan asks.

“That was the plan” Dex answers coolly.

“I was ordered to eliminate you and any threat you may cause my agency or the general public.”

“Fuck your agency” Ryan spits back.

Dex smiles at his response.

“Nothing personal” he says.

“But we can’t have our failures walking around free.”

“That would be entirely too dangerous” Dex observes.

“Dangerous?” Ryan asks, leaning against the counter.

Dex walks towards Ryan.

“We created a lot geniuses here” he explains.

“But an unforeseen by-product was also created.”

Dex leans on the counter next to Ryan.

“Some of those same individuals turned out to be psychopaths” Dex reveals.

“Shit, a lot of serial killers originated right here in this building” Agent Dex reminisces.

“You’re disgusting” Ryan posits.

“Yep, once enough of your kind had snapped the brass decided to pull the plug on the whole operation” Dex continues, ignoring Ryan’s insult.

“All dangerous assets were to be scrubbed.”

“Including the two missing colonist” Dex adds with a wink.

“But enough of that” he concludes, putting his hand on Ryan’s shoulder.

“You say it disgusts you, while I say it was a necessary evil.”

“We will just have to disagree” he surmises.

Feeling a sense of nausea, Ryan shrugs Dex’s hand off his shoulder.

Dex grins at the gesticulation.

His face turns dark as he looks Ryan over, a predator sizing up his prey.

“I’m not looking to kill you Ryan” he relents.

“I’ve studied up on you” he says walking back to the table and picking up the thick binder.

“You impress me and I’ve decided to help you continue your research.”

Ryan notices the pages, no longer held in place at the bottom, begin to slip from the binder.

“What about your bosses?” Ryan asks attempting to distract Dex before he notices.

Dex places the binder back onto the table.

“The brass did order your execution” he admits.

“But that was decades ages” he says, looking up at Ryan.

“I haven’t heard much from the top in a very long time” he answers.

“I believe they’d rather ignore the fact that this project ever existed”

“May have even forgot about you and I” he says pointing to Ryan and himself.

“He’s mad” Ryan thinks.

Pointing his finger in the air Dex continues.

“My own accord.”

“My own accord” he says patting his chest.

“I’ve continued the hunt for the last colonist.”

He points at Ryan.

“You.”

“Of my own volition these many years” he lauds.

“What about Agent Porter” Ryan wonders.

The question strikes Dex as funny and he laughs loudly, his guffaws causing him to bend over.

“Agent Porter” he calls into the microphone on his sleeve.

“Please make your way down the hall and come straight in” Dex instructs through fits of laughter.

50

Porter hurriedly strides down the darkened hall.

A leather satchel suspended from a strap, hung over his shoulder, swings as he steps.

Arriving at the door, Ryan is imprisoned behind, he knocks.

“Come” Dex commands from inside the room.

The captive and his captor study each other as they await the large man’s entry.

Ryan notes a giddiness to Dex that he had not seen before.

The electronic keypad sounds before the door is opened and Agent Porter walks in.

“I don’t believe you two have been formally introduced” Dex says, addressing Ryan.

“The gentleman to my right is Porter Dirks.”

“He was nice enough to care for you while you were incapacitated”.

Porter nods in Ryan’s direction.

Dex continues on.

“Porter’s late great uncle was ‘Agent Dirks’.”

“Agent Dirks, as I informed you earlier, was murdered by your ‘friend’ and fellow colonist Barry.”

Dex moves next to Porter and slaps him on the back.

“Fast forward a few years, and who should appear on my doorstep?”
Dex asks, looking at Porter.

“An enraged Porter, pleading that he be allowed to assist me in my hunt for you.”

Dex points at Ryan.

“The lost colonist.”

Porter looks to Agent Dex.

Dex nods.

Porter swings the leather bag from his shoulder onto the tabletop.

Looking towards Ryan, he unzips it slowly.

Ryan watches in anticipation as Porter pulls something from the bag.

Unsure of what to expect, Ryan involuntarily closes his eyes and waits for what he expects will be something violent.

Finding himself unmolested, he squints his eyes open.

Confused, he finds Porter standing in front of him, holding out a small plastic toy.

“An ant farm?” Ryan wonders to himself.

Gingerly, Porter places the ant farm on the table between the two men.

“Shall I wait in the hall Agent Hatter?” he asks, turning to Dex.

Ryan is stunned at the revelation of Dex’s true identity.

He had thought Dex was an agent from the colony project but not ‘the’ agent he so desperately wanted to find.

He bristles at the thought of this evil man standing so close, his mounting anger turning to thoughts of violence and revenge.

He scowls as he recalls the haunting vision of this monster laughing over the death of his mother.

“A death the man personally instrumented” Ryan recounts to himself.

“How did I miss it?” he thinks, incensed.

Quickly, Ryan regains his composure, least Hatter be tipped off to Porter’s slip of the tongue.

“You can return to your station by the elevator” Hatter instructs.

The door shuts and locks as Porter exits the room.

“Didn’t I promise I would take care of you?” Hatter inquires, eagerly.

Ryan, unsure what to say, pulls the ant farm over to himself, feigning interest.

“Your ants” the agent continues.

“Safe and sound, just as I promised Sara.”

Hatter takes his seat across from Ryan.

“She suggested you would be more agreeable if you had your test subjects with you.”

“Sara?” Ryan asks, ignoring the ant farm, his heart racing at the mention of her name.

“You’ve talked with Sara?”

“When?”

“Is she okay?” he asks excitedly.

He takes a deep breath.

“How long have I been here?” he adds.

“A few weeks” Hatter snips.

The agent is troubled by the lack of excitement Ryan displays towards the ants.

“Was Sara lying about the ants?” he asks, suspicious.

“Are they not vital to your experiments?”

“Oh no, they, they are truly essential” Ryan stammers.

“Thank you so much” he adds, attempting to cover his confusion.

“What is Sara’s game” he wonders to himself.

Moving the ant farm to his lap, Ryan protectively covers it with his hand and changes the subject.

“What did you tell Sara about my whereabouts?” he asks.

“We’re here to discuss what you can do for me” Hatter interrupts, ignoring Ryan’s queries.

Ryan frowns.

“You want my cooperation, yet offer me no news of my friends” he submits.

“I’ll need some answers as well.”

Hatter whistles.

“Get a load of you.”

“Alright I guess I can entertain a few questions” he capitulates.

“Kept you here... how?” he asks, rubbing his chin.

Smiling, he answers.

“Drugs are a wonderful invention” he laughs.

“Drugs?” Ryan asks.

“You’ve been in a stasis, while I studied up on you” Hatter winks.

“It has been quite awhile since I last saw you” he reminds Ryan.

“Food, sleep, everything was provided by IV.”

“And Sara?” Ryan prompts.

“That one” Hatter recalls.

“Pretty girl, tested my patience with her incessant calling” he frowns.

“She’s just lucky I avoid higher body counts these days.”

“A higher body count?” Ryan demands, vexed by the man’s flippancy.

“I sure do miss the old days” Dex reminisces.

“You are not to touch her!” Ryan hisses.

Dex overlooks Ryan’s outburst and slaps his palm on the table.

“Right, so you’ll help me in this deal?” he asks.

“One last question” Ryan demands, tracing the name Hatter onto the surface of the table.

“What is it?” Dex asks, exasperated.

Ryan sits mute, letting his rage burn, mustering his strength.

“What’s the question?” Dex demands loudly.

“Why did Porter address you as Agent Hatter?” Ryan asks.

“Thought your last name was Dex?”

“You got me” Hatter smiles.

“Now can we get to...”

Before he can finish his sentence Ryan is on him, turning the table and the ant farm over in the process.

Hatter, caught off guard, struggles in Ryan's grasp.

Ryan, feeling his strength quickly diminish, slams his head into Hatter's face.

The agent's nose explodes in a cloud of blood.

With one hand desperately pushing at Hatter's face he runs the other along his waistband, seeking the binder ring he had concealed earlier.

The opened ring now in hand, he strikes at Hatters throat with the sharpened end of the steel ring, piercing the agent's skin.

He slides the ring in deep and pulls with all his might tearing a hole in Hatter's throat, ripping his artery in half.

A jet of blood spurts from the opened artery onto the wall and down the front of Ryan's shirt.

The mortally wounded Hatter desperately clutches at his neck to staunch the bleeding to no avail.

Hatter's eyes flutter as his other hand gropes for something in his jacket pocket.

Ryan, following Hatter's hand, tears a gun from his grasp.

The sound of the electronic keypad can be heard again as Porter struggles to open the door.

Still sitting atop Hatter, Ryan takes aim as best he can and fires as Porter enters the room.

The bullet strikes Porter above the ear and he collapses to the floor, dead.

Breathing heavier now, his energy waning, Ryan slides off Hatter and pushes away from him with his bare feet.

Unable to stop the bleeding Hatter writhes in pain on the floor.

A large pool of blood surrounding the agent grows with the last beats of his heart.

His eyes fill with fear as he stares in disbelief at Ryan.

"For mother" Ryan screams pointing a blood covered finger in the agent's direction.

Hatter, struggling to breath, gags and retches on his own blood.

His body convulses for a moment more before his eyes open wider and his body becomes still.

51

The room is quiet.

Breathing heavy, Ryan kneels over Hatter's body.

He lets the gun fall from his hand where it lands with a clatter on the cold tiled floor.

The commotion frightens the recently freed inhabitants of the now opened ant farm.

The ants recede into the shadows of the room.

He brushes his hands, sticky with blood, onto the dead agent's coat sleeve.

Crawling towards Hatter's feet, he removes the dead man's shoes.

As the adrenaline leaves his body, Ryan feels queasy.

He sits back on his heels and takes slow, deliberate breathes until the nauseous feelings subside.

Spying the opened ant farm laying on the ground on the opposite side of the room, he crawls to it.

Sand spills out through cracks in the plastic as he picks up the shattered toy, revealing a lone memory bead.

Reaching in, Ryan pulls the bead from the sand and blows on it.

“Sara” he smiles and slides the bead into his waistband.

Struggling to his feet, Ryan drops the broken toy and reaches out for the back of a chair to steady himself.

Now standing, he surveys the room.

Hatter’s lifeless body lies slumped next to the overturned table and Porter’s body, face down, lays partially in the hall.

Shocked by his own cold attitude towards the two dead men who lay at his feet, he is haunted by something Hatter had said.

“Am I psychotic?” he wonders as he slides on Hatter’s shoes.

He attempts to search Porter’s pockets for anything useful that he may be able to utilize in his escape, but finds he has trouble turning the body over.

“I’m lucky Hatter had a gun” he thinks as he drags the large mound of muscle that used to be a man into the corridor to get better leverage.

Caught up in the physicality of turning Porter over he is oblivious to the door, which the large body was holding ajar.

The door closes quickly, locking him out of the room.

“Fuck” he screams, pulling on the door knob, angry with himself for not grabbing the gun before being locked out.

Frustrated, his body temperature rises and his blood soaked shirt, sticking to his chest, becomes unbearable.

He peels it off and drops it to the floor.

Kneeling, he removes Porter’s coat and shirt.

With the clothes now in hand, he sets off down the darkened hall in search of a bathroom.

Finding a janitor's closet he pushes on the door and walks in.

He runs his hand along the wall, feeling for a light switch.

A yellow bulb overhead snaps to life.

Ryan, leaning against the wall, tears his old shirt into strips, dropping them into the maintenance sink.

Turning on the faucet, he fills the sink with water and uses the wet strips to clean the blood and grime from his body.

A pile of gore grows at his feet as he discards the used strips.

"I should feel guilty for taking the lives of those two men" he castigates himself.

Hatter's words come back again as he wipes the remaining blood from his hands.

“Could the experiments so early in my developmental stages have retarded my conscience?” he wonders.

“How is it that I could kill those two men and feel no remorse?”

Water drips from the faucet, making a plinking sound as it is enveloped by the pool of red-tinged liquid in the basin of the steel sink.

“I need to find a way out” he reminds himself.

Slipping on Porter’s oversized shirt and jacket, he steps back into the hall.

He slides his finger along his waist band and retrieves Sara’s memory bead, placing it into his jacket pocket.

He walks down the dark hall, towards the elevator.

His mind wanders, back to the house of Ms. Drosen, back to memories he had buried a very long time ago.

“The anger” he recalls.

Barry, hunched over in pain, had just come back from a beating at the hands of Ms. Drosen.

The hatred he felt that day so long ago, again feels fresh and tangible as though no time had passed.

The young Ryan’s small fists clenched tightly.

Dizzying levels of anger welled up inside his slight frame, so much so he thought he would burst if he waited a moment longer to strike.

Ms. Drosen’s loud screech filled his ears as she corralled another one of the other children into the upstairs bedroom.

The wail of the child echoed through the old house as it cried out in pain.

He can again smell the musty odor of the closet from where he retrieved the shoelaces.

Removing all the children’s shoelaces, he tied them together to create a trip-wire long enough to span the stairwell bannisters.

His heart beats quickly with excitement as he recalls the details from that day so long ago.

He marvels at the sureness of that little boy making his way up the stairs to implement his deadly plan.

“Ms. Drosen come quick, come quick, Barry broke the window in our bedroom” a young Ryan called.

There was a moment of silence and then a crash as the upstairs bedroom door was flung open.

The bluster shook Ryan to his core.

“Please, let this work” he recalls asking the powers that be.

“Where is he?” Ms. Drosen screamed as she started down the stairs.

Unable to see the black shoelaces strung low from one bannister to the other, she tumbled head first.

Ryan had turned away, but still heard the multiple thumps and finally a loud crack as her broken body came to rest at the base of the stairwell.

Breathing heavily from the pain, her skin white with shock, she looked sideways out of the corner of her eye.

He stood in the darkness, waiting.

“Go get help, boy” she called weakly.

Ignoring her plea, he instead walked over and stood above her looking down at her oddly bent neck.

The other children appeared at the top of the stairs to investigate.

Ms. Drosen laid on the floor, panting, unable to move.

He recalls the floor creak as Barry walked up behind him.

The cast iron typewriter in his arms.

“Barry struggled against the typewriter’s weight to lift it high above his head” Ryan recalls.

“Barry don’t...” Ms. Drosen screamed.

The scream was cut short as the heavy typewriter dropped from the small boy’s hands onto Ms. Drosen’s skull, crushing it.

The children watching from the top of the stairs, shrieked in terror as the typewriter landed with a dull thud.

Stepping over Ms Drosen’s body, a young Ryan, again climbed the to the second floor.

This time to retrieve the shoelaces.

Standing before the other children, he put his finger to his lips, hushing them as he untied the laces from the bannisters.

The sudden recollection of this memory from his past, surprises him.

“What am I?” he wonders.

He can feel as his tether to humanity begins to fray.

52

Shaking his head to clear his mind, Ryan picks up his pace through the darkness.

He pauses only briefly as he passes the locked room containing Hatter's body and continues his stride unflinchingly past the shirtless Porter.

"It was them or I" he reconciles.

Stopping at the elevator bank he presses the down button.

Getting no response, he determines the elevator must be locked down with a code.

Running his hand along the elevator frame he finds the keypad and attempts to circumvent it to no avail.

"Gotta find another way" he determines.

Turning, he notices a fire escape door and walks to it.

He attempts to pull it open but finds the door is secured with a large padlock and chain.

His anxiety builds.

Sweat runs down his back and his hair, slick with perspiration, becomes matted to his forehead.

He retreats back down the hall in the hopes of finding another exit.

“There has to be another way out” he opines.

His hopes are quickly dashed upon finding only a dead end.

“Now what” he grunts and punches at the wall.

“Slow down” he scolds himself.

Taking a seat on the floor, his mental state fraying, he howls towards the ceiling.

“Why!”

His voice echoes around the empty corridor.

Through half-closed eyes, he ponders what this place was like back in the day.

The walls of the hall become bright white.

He envisions children as they walk, hand in hand, being lead down the hall by men and women in lab coats.

The children, giggling with each other, share jokes and sing songs, oblivious to their fate.

Music plays overhead and the ringing of phones is continuous.

The building becomes new and full of energy again.

Ryan rolls from his sitting position and lays on his side, his cheek flat against the hard floor.

The brightness of the halls dims as an odd trio catches his eye.

Roger, Barry and his younger self walk quietly past.

Ryan attempts to scream, to warn them of the danger they are walking into, but as he reaches his out hand to get their attention the vision fades.

He finds himself back in the darkened hallway, alone.

“Was that old son of bitch telling the truth?” he wonders.

“Has the government truly written us off?”

“Was it only Hatter who still wanted me dead?”

He thinks a Sara’s smiling face.

“We can move past this” he tells himself.

Struggling back to a sitting position, reality sets in like a vice.

“It doesn’t work that way” he admonishes.

“There is no where in this world to run.”

He ponders an escape to Orthoplex.

“I could construct another dimensional doorway and escape?” he thinks.

He contemplates the recent past and the struggles he has overcome.

He again thinks of Sara and all he wanted to show her.

“I still have her memory bead” he recalls.

Pulling it from his pocket, he admires the bead for a moment, smiling at the thought of Sara making it for him.

He places the bead under his tongue, leans back and falls into her thoughts.

“Be careful Ryan” Sara’s voice sounds in his head.

He can feel Sara’s hand as though it were his own, turning on the light switch in his bathroom.

He feels the hanging glass shards as she moves through them.

“I believe you Ryan” she whispers.

“You did find the doorway to another dimension but it wasn’t through this...” she continues as she holds one of the pieces of mirror in her hand.

“This is just glass and string.”

“The doorway can only be opened by you, by what is contained within your mind.”

He can see Sara’s reflection in the many mirrored pieces.

“The experiments performed on you as a child, that is what gave you your abilities.”

“It’s time for you to use that advantage, time for you to return to us” she instructs.

“Dex knows more of your past than he is letting on” she warns.

“Trust no one but yourself, your instincts and me.”

Sara's voice echoes in Ryan's head as the memory ends and he is pushed back to his reality.

Her call for him is strong, he can feel it in his core.

He stands, determined to escape.

Letting go, he feels the dizziness return but rather than the usual fight, he gives in.

Slowing his breathing, he stands still and waits.

"Escape" Sara's voice sounds in his mind "go."

The hallway with all its horror fades as he feels the pull.

Everything becomes black.

The door to Sara's father's hospital room slowly comes into view.

Ryan glides forward and pushes it open.

His heart leaps upon seeing Sara sitting by her father's bedside.

She turns to see who has come in.

“Oh my God” she mouths and runs to Ryan, arms outstretched.
He motions for her to follow him into the hall.

She follows and closes the door quietly behind herself.

“Where have you been” she whispers.

“Has Dex let you go?”

“Are you hurt you?” she asks, as she turns him around.

“I’m a little banged up” he answers grasping her hands in his.

“Sara, I’ve done something terrible” he starts.

Thinking better of it, he decides to save her the horrible details of the recent bloodshed.

“That man, Dex” Ryan begins again.

“He wont be bothering you or I anymore.”

“What do you mean?” she asks.

“We’re safe for now, its all been taken care of” he answers.

“Ryan you’re scaring me?” she starts.

“Where have you been and why are you wearing those clothes?”

Ryan looks down at his ill-fitting attire.

Sara touches a finger to his ear.

“Is this blood?” she asks in alarm.

“Oh my God, what did they do to you?”

“Its not my blood” he answers coldly.

Ryan reaches for Sara’s hand again.

“But that’s just it, I’ve had to do some things to ensure our safety.”

“Things?” she asks, confused.

“What I mean is that I came back to thank you” he answers ignoring her question.

“Without your persistence I would have been lost.”
He pulls her close to him.

“I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to repay you.”

“Repay me?” Sara asks, looking up at him.

“You’re back now, that’s enough.”

“I’m not here to stay” he informs her.

“I don’t understand” she utters.

“The dimensional doorway” he explains.

“You were right, I do have the power to open it” he says rubbing her shoulders.

“But I need to leave for now so as to not bring you anymore harm.”

“Leave?” she asks.

“Where?”

“I’m returning to Orthoplex” he answers.

“But Ryan” she pleads.

“What about here and now?”

“Your home, your friends?”

“Us?” she adds softly.

“Come with me” he offers, holding out his hand.

She smiles at the thought.

“Sara” her father mutters from the other side of the door.

Looking back at the doorway, she frowns.

“I can’t leave him” she answers, pulling away.

“Not like this, not now.”

“Well then” Ryan quips.

“That gives me more reason to return.”

“But why even go?” she presses.

“I don’t belong here” he tells her.

“And the agents?”

“The death of Roger?” she asks.

“All problems that I can address in time” he assures her.

“What shall I tell Detective Fisher?” she asks, stalling for time, attempting to convince him to stay.

Ryan’s form begins to fade.

“Tell him I’ll see him soon” he answers as he disappears.

