



BY:

JUSTIN JAY GLADSTONE  
& NITSUJ YAJ ENOTSDALG

ILLUSTRATED BY: IMAGINESTO & OTSENIGAMI



JUSTIN JAY GLADSTONE | NITSUJ  
YAJ ENOTSDALG

The Other Side I: Remastered  
[Preview]

*A Sample*



*Copyright © 2023 by Justin Jay Gladstone / Nitsuj Yaj  
Enotsdalg*

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.*

*This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.*

*First edition*

*Editing by Nitsuj Yaj Enotsdalg*

*This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.*

*Find out more at [reedsy.com](https://reedsy.com)*

# Contents

A Letter from the Author(s)	1
TRIGGER WARNING	7
Crucial Keys	8
Chapter 1: Forgotten Names & Faces	10
Chapter 2: The Voice In My Mind	13
Chapter 3: Marks of The Chosen	21
Chapter 4: A Forgotten Moonlit Night	43
Chapter 5: Man In The Mirror	51
Chapter 6: A Second Birthday	69
THE END (FOR NOW)	92



## A Letter from the Author(s)

**A** Letter from The Author(s):  
You might be wondering, what is *The Other Side: Remastered*?

Well, it's all in the title. I came up with this book series when I was very young. At fourteen years old (2008), in fact. And when I did, it was initially supposed to be one book. I wrote as much as I could, from beginning to end.

And that story is what you hold in your hands now.

But of course, when writing this story, my many questions inspired new plot elements. Eventually, they spanned past the original *book* I had in mind. Suddenly there were ideas for a second book. A third. A fifth. To thirteen books that follow the same narrative.

While the narrative and the overall goal have remained the same, the execution of this story has changed.

When I started this, I had no money to my name and a low-paying job. I was literally at the bottom. But I was blessed by finding people and being found by those who would see this

vision as a promise. And indeed, this story, by God's grace, has opened doors for me. I taught myself many things, such as graphic design, marketing, and other ways to improve my writing.

I made two successful fundraisers. One is ongoing, and I implore you to investigate it if you're interested in seeing this grow even more.

I published this story about *three* different times and learned a lot through each publication. The *first* time, I realized that one should not release a book without having beta readers. "One man is not a neighborhood." I was a fool not to work without others giving me their feedback. The *second* is to not release a story without being fully satisfied as the writer. The *third* is not moving forward with publication if the will is down to pressure. I'd get lots of questions, like *when is the book coming out?* I used to think people gave up on me because of the extra time I needed. Even that version was incomplete for many reasons. My impatience did not help.

But this time, things are different. When reading the last version of this book, people certainly enjoyed it, but it took them one to two months to read. That was no one's fault other than my own. I was young, a first-time author who was afraid of publishing. I was so worried about my book. I thought things like *Would this have enough description? Did I describe the environment well enough? How will I introduce this element to the story? What will my family think?* I remember going on Google and looking things up, like *How to write a scary scene*. You can see how this process would overwhelm someone. But the first thing I knew hurt my story was my learning process. I am a



visual learner. Something I realized over the years as I enjoyed video games and movies alike. I also love looking at character artwork. Things from JRPGs to anime have inspired me a lot over the years.

I realized that I could not write my characters because of my lack of artwork of them. Some characters, you'll notice in the older versions, were written better than others. It was because they'd been drawn by an artist who lent me their talent and time at one point or another. But sadly, many of my other characters were not drawn. So, they were nothing but floating question marks in my head. They did not receive the same love until I was working on my second book.

But now, I own artwork for almost all sixty-plus characters in this series. And those numbers are growing by the month.

And on top of that, I had accrued (at the time) ninety ratings for *The Other Side I*, leaving it at a 3.75 average. That was pretty good, considering how flawed it was.

Thanks to all the opinions and reviews that went to my first book, *The Other Side II* was written with ease. All the flaws that my first book had were nonexistent in the second.

The biggest flaw? When they read the first book, everyone would say *Hey, I got your book! I'm trying to get through it.* The word *trying* stood out to me. And it only did because when people read my second book, they all said the opposite: *I can't put it down.* Not to mention, book II was always finished by readers in less than a month. I remember one person finished

it in just a few days.

And then I realized.

The series had a problem.

If I were to move on and publish books in the future, how could I count on people just trusting that the series would get better after the first? What if the first was the book they gave up on?

And thus, I took a path that I thought I wouldn't take for, say, twenty years from now.

I decided to make this, *The Other Side: Remastered*.

So, you might be wondering, what's the difference?

### FAQ:

**Q:** Will the story be different?

**A:** No. While my execution in *how* I tell this story will change, the continuity, the timeline, and the main events will be the same. You might notice that though the dialogue has been altered, many of the words used in the previous installments have remained the same.

**Q:** This book is a lot smaller. Is the page count different?

**A:** Yes! The original book was 608 pages. The reason why this is decreasing is because I removed a lot of scenes that I found

pointless or just fluff that I wrote out of sheer nervousness.

**Q:** What exactly is being changed?

**A:** Pace. As I mentioned earlier, I was very afraid of disappointing my readers, so I wasn't sure of *how long* I should make certain scenes. As a result, some things dragged out way longer than they needed to be.

**Q:** Are you happy with this?

**A:** The word *happy* does not do the feeling justice. Believe it or not, this is *The Other Side* in its truest, most genuine form. Over the years, I have gone through a lot of struggles. Toxic relationships. Living situations. I was a slave to things that were not *God*. I was battling back and forth with addictions. Nothing extreme, just caffeine and whatnot. And so, the story was always very inconsistent because *I* was inconsistent. I recall a person once reading the books and stating that *it felt like multiple people wrote this book*. I wholeheartedly agree.

I had a lot of original ideas that I wanted in here that I scrapped because I was afraid they wouldn't be well received. Now that my current self has rejoined with my past self, they have all come to be this completed version. I love this version as much as I do the future books.

You'll notice that this book may have more expansive points to unanswered questions. You may notice that characters who were put off to the side have good reason to receive more page time here. There's so much to see. I hope you enjoy this. Thank

you for your support.

Every other version of this book was what Satan took from me, and this is Jesus' gift back.

This would not be possible without our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you for anointing me to remaster not only my life but also this precious story.

Revelation 7:12

## TRIGGER WARNING

*This book will include readings and discussion around topics that may be sensitive to some readers such as: mental disorders, sexual assault, substance abuse and addiction, domestic violence, suicide, imprisonment, and physical violence.*

*I acknowledge that this content may be difficult to read. I also encourage you to care for your safety and well-being. Please also note that I did not write about these things as an outsider. I have plenty of personal experience. 'Experience with what?' you ask.*

**There's only one way to find out.**

# Crucial Keys

## CRUCIAL KEYS (I)

**T** here will be moments where you see text that may seem ...ldbnnu

Only by holding this ebook to a mirror, will you decipher the words of wonder. Try it on the page prior to this one...

## CRUCIAL KEYS (II)

These symbols will represent the progression of time throughout the story.

□ □ □

These symbols will represent the regression of time throughout the story.

⌋ \_\_\_\_ ⌋ \_\_\_\_ ⌋

### Crucial Keys (III)

The paperback version of *The Other Side I: Remastered* contains QR codes that allows readers to scan and see lore, character artwork, and much more. Fear not! Even though you're reading this on an electronic device, I made an alternative experience that should still make things fun for you.

Instead of having QR codes to scan, you will see a text that might say:

'See what \_\_\_\_ sees.'

OR

You might notice a characters name is highlighted.

Click/touch the link and it will bring you to the same exact place that the paperback would have brought you to.

**Have fun!**

# Chapter 1: Forgotten Names & Faces

☾\_\_\_\_☾\_\_\_\_☾

ɛ:l zizənəθ

© © ©

December 9, 2009 (Wednesday)

The Earthshine Facility /\ Therapist's Office

7:10 a.m.

**W**hy must we go through this every single time you come here, [Allie](#)? I'm not going to hurt you. Not *physically*, at least. All I need you to do is tell me about that boy." This is said by a brown-skinned therapist in a white button-up t-shirt tucked into a purple business skirt. As for what her face looks like, Allie looks away to prevent more of her fear from rising. From Allie's peripheral vision, she can feel cold brown eyes covered in eyeshadow and wrinkles leering at her.

"*Allie Reincath*," Dr. Allure Igor the therapist says firmly, glaring at the teenage girl in front of her with a maroon shirt and shoulder-length hair, "tell me about. Leon. Granttley—"

"—PLEASE DON'T SAY HIS NAME!" Allie cries out, covering her eyes, trembling.

"Ah. I must've touched a soft spot," Allure says with a grin.



“You’d think *you* were a patient here for your PTSD. In which case, it can be arranged if you don’t start talking...” Allure lets out a little cackle and flips the page on her clipboard.

Tears well up in Allie’s eyes, and to this, Allure adds, “Allie dearest. I know he hurt you. I know what he did to you was horrible. What I need to know from you is whether or not he’s accepted what he’s done to you...”

“You know he hasn’t. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be here today.”

“You will not have an attitude with me!” Allure bales as Allie looks down to the low carpet and away to the bookshelf on her right. “Hmph,” Allure utters, “as of today, Leon is a Bishop. And he will not become a Knight so long as you, his friends, and family say he isn’t meant to leave this rank. You’re the last of the bunch I needed to speak with.”

“I don’t think he should graduate.”

“And why is that?”

“Because if you asked if whether or not he...*molested me*, he wouldn’t admit it. He’ll again say it wasn’t him or that *some voice* in his mind took over. He *really* thinks it’s someone else. And until he can admit it, he shouldn’t become a Knight. He should stay in this facility *forever*.”

“How fortunate for Leon, then.”

“*Fortunate?*” Allie questions.

“Yes. What I forgot to tell you, Allie, is that regardless of how many of the patient’s friends say that he’s not ready to graduate, it’s the patient’s word against all of yours.”

“What?” Allie blurts, “But you just said—h—how does that make any sense?”

“Because so long as none of you see what’s in his mind, none of you would *ever* say he’s ready to graduate. Doesn’t it make more sense to leave this up to us professionals?”

“Are *we all* suddenly crazy then? What’s the point in even asking us?”

“That is none of your concern, Allie,” Allure replies, smirking.

“What? Why bring me here then—this doesn’t make any—” Allure interrupts Allie by handing over a necklace with a mirror on the front. “What’s—” Allie asks.

“—You are to give this to *him* before December eleventh, do you understand?”

“You want *me* to give something to him? Dr. Igor, this isn’t right. I haven’t even recovered—”

“—The best type of therapy, Allie, is exposure therapy. Believe me, I would know.”

To these words, Allie’s face turns red. She is trembling from anger. She tries snatching the necklace from Allure who draws her hand away in time.

“Take it respectfully, Ms. Reincath.”

Allie reaches out with a shaking hand, takes the necklace slowly, and asks in a quivering tone, “Can I please go?”

“Absolutely. You’ve fulfilled your role today.”

Allie bursts outside through Allure Igor’s door, covering her face as best as she can while she runs to the bathroom.

Allure stands and shakes her head, shutting her door, then looks at her clipboard. “Well, Leon, you and five others are one step closer to being a Knight...” She coos while glowering down at the picture of the brown-

skinned boy on her clipboard.

## Chapter 2: The Voice In My Mind

**D** [ear Aron and Nora \(I\)](#)

*If you are reading this, then chances are my other and I are long gone. However, that does not mean everything we've gone through will go to waste.*

*Yes, you two have read the previous chapter correctly.*

*What you just read between Allure and Allie is the seed of this series. Everything going forward from hereon in is the water. You'll see exactly **what** brought Earth and Heart to their final days.*

*The one writing this letter is the same person who Allure and Allie spoke so negatively of.*

***I am Leon J. Granttley.***

*With all my writing, you will see and listen to my story as I watch it unfold once again...*

*I can only pray you two will become the burgeoning force that saves the universe. Use what you learn throughout these books to create your destiny for all of time and space.*

*The lies first came from the horrible therapists in that Earthshine Facility. They diagnosed me with dissociative identity disorder. DID for short. In your time, they probably still call it split personality.*

*Don't worry, it's nothing to be afraid of. I have control of it now. But back then...It ran me and my life. On occasion I would switch*

*into another person's identity—becoming someone else.*

*This disorder was a lot like sleepwalking. My body would be present for events that my mind could not recall. And as a result, it got me into a lot of trouble.*

*Society's solution to my disorder was to force me into The Earthshine Facility. There were three ranks in this institution: **Pawns, Bishops, and Knights**; Knights being the highest.*

*Unfortunately for me, there were many things that happened that I don't recall being a part of. Everyone who knew me would say otherwise. They'd say I lost my mind simply for not going with their narrative. And they were right.*

*But there was one thing back then that we had all wondered: What would it take to become a Knight? What did becoming a Knight mean? Would becoming a Knight mean that I could finally know the truth about this voice in my mind?*

*To my dismay, no one could tell me the answers to any of those questions. It was something I needed to find out for myself...it was the first of many of our mistakes to come.*

***Now. Come and witness the start of this tragedy with me.***

*From what I can see now, my story starts above the skies of a mountainous area filled with snow. A city is here. A suburban area is here. Ah yes. Of course. This is the city of Aurorae County, located in the state of Colorado. I assume that the year is 2009...*

*It's almost just as I remembered... This is an area flourishing with new developments...one such as the Earthshine Facility. The place that's said to reflect the sun's light onto the dim faces of its doomed people.*

*Despite the sun's bright light, I see a blight ruling over it. A ruler of the airs. A ruler of the darkness that shall shine above this place...*

*I'm watching now as crows fly over the city of Aurorae. Many are perched atop buildings, street posts, cars, and houses. There isn't a place where these crows are not. I now see black feathers falling all around this place. Almost like they're leaving a trail. And where does this trail lead back to? I wonder.*

*Hmm. No surprise. It all points back to the Earthshine Facility.*

*What is to be wrong with this city, this world, the universe, begins in this section of Aurorae. It is here that the supposed shine within the Earthshine Facility would blind the world.*

*This is the source of everything. I've been told many times by my therapist, Stefano Giro, that in time, everything would make sense. I never believed him.*

*Even now, as I watch this again, I'm still learning. These crows fly onto the roof of a two-story, three-bedroom house. They peck at the window. Some peck at one another as a few ominous black vans drive by outside.*

*Long ago, Stefano, my old therapist, asked me this time and time again.*

*"Do you regret having split personality disorder?"*

*When he asked this, a voice in my mind would laugh.*

—Leon J. Granttley

© © ©

December 10, 2009 (Thursday)

Colorado /\ Aurorae

Leon's Residence

6:35 a.m.

It is dark out as it is an early winter morning.

Crows caw outside Leon's frosted window. But none of their sounds awaken him. No. Leon has an even *better* alarm clock.

*You're late, The Voice in Leon's mind says, by five minutes. You don't want to miss your bus again, do you?*

Leon groggily opens his eyes while lying on his bed. He angrily stares at the white ceiling above him. This isn't the first time his *alarm clock* has awoken him, and with *his mind*, it certainly won't be the last. He brushes his teeth, places his school uniform on, blue cardigan over a simple white button-up with khaki dress pants and black dress shoes, and then...glances into his bathroom mirror. He swears that for a second, the reflection smirks at him. He shakes his head and then walks away.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

"Leon?" His sister, [Amy](#), calls from outside the bathroom door, "Are you finished staring at yourself?"

"I'm not staring at myself. I'm just leaving," he lies, swinging open the door. The Voice in Leon's mind is deep and gruff. When it speaks, it echoes. It chuckles at his lie as he brushes past Amy, who has a hanger in hand with a purple hoodie and silver pants.

As Leon returns to his bedroom to retrieve his satchel, Amy screams. Leon opens the bathroom door as quickly as he can, and Amy says, "I thought," she chuckles nervously, "I thought you were playing a prank on me."

"Huh?"

"I saw your face in the mirror," she pants, catching her breath. "I just... For a second, I thought you were in the bathroom with me."

Leon shakes his head. "I guess the Earthshine Facility could use more mental patients," he says, lightly chuckling and shutting the door as Amy sarcastically says, *ha-ha*.

Many of Leon's friends say that he and Amy resemble one

another. She has his face, certainly, but much longer hair running past her shoulders. She's best known for having a bright smile on her face.

Leon's parents' door is just across from his in the hallway. His father, Nero, leaves for work around three each morning. So, no snoring from him at this time unless it was the weekend. His mother, Silvia, on the other hand, is asleep to white noise.

*Hurry, Leon, The Voice in his mind says, the bus will be out there any second.*

Leon rolls his eyes and glances out the window. *Should be fine.* He says in thought, "I think I can get myself something quick to—

And then suddenly, the roar of a school bus alarms Leon. He glances outside with wide eyes and charges out onto the driveway for it—but the bus leaves him behind. It barely gave him any time now.

*Looks like you're walking to school again, The Voice says.*

Leon sighs and walks up the sidewalk as The Voice laughs at him. Across the street are [four familiar faces](#) in the same school uniform. Jason, a tanned boy in red with a short buzz cut, Jacaline, a girl with white skin and blonde hair, and Deen, a boy with pale skin and long black hair covering his eyes. There is one other girl there—one who makes Leon not even want to look over in their direction. Allie Reincath. A girl whose default expression is anger.

*Why don't you go walk with them?* The Voice asks.

*You know why,* Leon thinks in response to The Voice.

*I know. I just like remembering why. She hates you for what you did, you know.*

*Yes. I know.*

Only one of these four people can call Leon his real friend. That person is Jason. As for Jacaline and Deen, they detest Leon for what he did to Allie two years ago. Deen enjoys having Leon to pick on, and Jacaline enjoys pitying him. Leon hears footsteps approaching and glances over to see that Jason, the boy with the buzz cut, is crossing the street over to him.

“Hey, buddy,” Jason says, approaching Leon while Deen and Jacaline are glaring from the far distance. Allie continues facing forward, grumbling to herself.

“Hey,” Leon says flatly.

“You looked like you were in your head just now. Figured I’d come by.”

Leon chuckles. “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t. You guys missed the bus too?”

“Yeah.” He then whispers, “*Allie got a gift for you and was trying to get us to give it to you. Lotta back and forth between us.*”

“What? *She got me a gift?*”

“Well. It’s something from the facility. But for some reason, they were making her do it. I don’t get it either.”

Leon can’t help it, but he smiles while Jason responds firmly, “I wouldn’t get too excited. She’s not thinking about talking to you anytime soon, dude. After all, you still won’t admit to what you did.”

“Because I know I didn’t do it, Jason,” Leon snaps.

*You sure you didn’t?* The Voice in Leon’s mind asks. *Everyone else seems to think so.*

“Shut up!” Leon blurts while Jason stares at Leon curiously. Jacaline and Deen across the street look over at Leon. Allie does too, but only for a second.

“No,” Leon says, shaking his head. “I’m sorry, I was—”

“—Responding to The Voice. I know,” Jason says solemnly.



*See what you did?* Leon thinks angrily.

Jason clears his throat. “Mind if I ask a question?”

“Sure.”

“Allie was given that gift because she was told you were graduating...that you’d be becoming a Knight soon. But. As your friend, I’m not sure if you’re ready...especially after seeing that outburst.”

Leon stops walking and says, “Jason, I’m getting out of that facility one way or another. I’m becoming a Knight.”

“But how will you if you don’t accept what you did? How can you if you’re still arguing with that voice?”

Leon swallows. “Everyone in the facility says I should accept The Voice. But everyone on the outside says to ignore it. I have to accept that it’s real and living...otherwise... I’ll never move on. Somehow, they also want me to accept what I did to Allie. And I can lie to everyone but myself. I know I didn’t do anything. The Voice says I did, but I remember where I was that day.” Leon stares at Jason and adds, “And as far as I know, I won’t graduate if I don’t lie to them. If I leave that stupid facility...it’ll be the best birthday gift that I can get.”

“Your therapists are supposed to help you. I don’t think you should *want* to leave so soon.”

Leon rolls his eyes. “Jason—*you’re* not the therapist in charge, okay? They put me through a lot. I’m ready for this to be done with.”

Jason places his hands in his pockets. “..You’re right. I’m sorry. I know it’s been rough. I remember when you were a Pawn...they locked you away for a few months. We all thought you were never coming back. And then when you did come back, it was like you hadn’t eaten in months.”

Leon shakes his head. “I don’t want to think back to those

times.”

*I do, The Voice in Leon’s mind thinks.*

*Mind your business, devil.*

“Anyway, Leon,” Jason adds, placing his hand on Leon’s shoulder as the two of them stop walking, “all I’m saying is...just think about what everyone’s been telling you. You have a criminal record now. Your parents know, our school knows, it’s just time you accept it. I don’t think you’d deserve that graduation any other way.”

Leon brushes Jason’s hand off and retorts by walking away.

He can hear Jason say from afar, “It’s not just for *you*, Leon!”

“Thanks, but no thanks. I’ll see you in school,” Leon says, walking forward, leaving Jason behind who rushes back across the street to Jacaline, Deen, and Allie.

## Chapter 3: Marks of The Chosen

CCC

December 10, 2009 (Thursday)

Colorado /\ Aurorae

Maleon High School

7:45 a.m.

The first bell rings just as Leon enters the school. He's a bit late for his first class. To his sides are the narrow green lockers that he is used to being pressed against by his bullies. Thankfully for him, none of his three bullies are anywhere to be found.

Leon creeps through the hallway, passing a boy with brown skin and brown curly hair. The curly-haired boy is shyly watching a tall white-skinned girl who is at her locker and is wearing a blue scarf with a strange symbol. Suddenly the boy with curly hair is shoved against some green lockers. He rubs his aching head as a tall, wide football player charges up to him, lifting him in the air by his collar, saying, "Well. If it ain't *Miles Lee*."

This bully is tall with dark brown skin, has short hair, and is wearing the same school uniform but with a blue cardigan.

School rules declare that one must wear these cardigans with each of the buttons fastened. This bully that just shoved Miles into the locker, however, doesn't care for this rule. Neither do his [two assailants](#).

"What do you want...Etay?" strains Miles, the boy with curly hair.

"Nothing. Just wanted to say hello. Heard you were graduating tomorrow."

"Maybe?" Miles replies. "I don't know for sure!"

"You're right. Yer too damn crazy to figure that out, aren't you?"

Leon sees this and creeps away from this interaction, but a boy with a white winter hat and indigo hair tightly grabs his arm. This boy is much taller than Leon. He's shorter than Etay and stands at least 5'9. Etay stands firmly at 6'4, while Leon is merely 5'5.

"Ha. Hey Etay. Look who just tried to sneak by!" says Hades, the boy with baggy khakis, while Leon struggles to break free.

"Get off of me!"

"Hold on to you? Absolutely..." A short girl with choppy red hair snickers, holding onto Leon's other arm tightly with both of hers. She has a red electric guitar strapped to her back.

"Guys!" Leon cries out, "I'm late for English class!"

Etay hears Leon's shout and drops Miles back onto his feet, who backs away, cowers, and runs far off into the hallway. The tall girl that Miles was watching also scurries off.

"Well, well, well," Etay says, "if it ain't my second favorite Earthshine patient. Leon Granny."

"Who's the first?" Hades asks in his slow-speaking voice.

"The curly-haired freak that just ran away," Etay says flatly.

Leon glowers up toward Etay who punches him straight in

the gut and then says, “That’s one.”

Leon wishes he could rub his stomach to ease his pain, but with Alecia and Hades tightly holding onto his arms, he cannot help his urges.

“One for...what...” Leon utters, sweat forming on his face.

“Tomorrow’s your birthday, ain’t it?” Etay says. “You’re turning seventeen.”

Alecia giggles. “And rumor has it, you’re *also* graduating tomorrow.”

Hades chimes in, “And that means...seventeen plus seventeen punches...”

Etay shakes his head. “Yes, Hades, I’m glad you can still add. So, thirty-four in total. You’ll get your first seventeen now and the other seventeen later.”

Leon looks down to the ground, accepting his fate. He tightens his stomach as best as he can, but what he doesn’t expect is Etay to punch him first in the face, then kick his shin to catch him off guard. Leon cries out as a few teachers walking in the hallway chuckle in the distance.

Jason, Allie, Jacaline, and Deen also pass by as this occurs. Leon is more focused on his pain than on his *friends*.

The celebratory punches have been delivered. Leon is released by his two captors and falls onto his knees.

“Good,” Etay says, dusting his fists and clothes off. “Happy pre-graduation, Granny.”

“It’s...Granttley... My last name is Granttley. Not. *Granny*...”

“Is that backtalk I hear?” Alecia asks with a devious smirk.

The three bullies spit on him and shove him into a set of lockers before they leave him behind. Leon rushes for the bathroom as quickly as he can to see his face. He quickly washes their saliva off his arms and neck. Thankfully, no serious bruises

are on his face. But his stomach is as sore as can be. And to think. Seventeen more punches are on the way? Leon fixes his wrinkly clothes and charges straight for his English class. The day passes by swiftly as he segues through each of these classes.

© © ©

December 10, 2009 (Thursday)

11:30 a.m.

The sixth bell rings. Each of the students from grades eight to twelve is switching into their next class, with a four-minute window in between. Leon infuses with a tsunami of students who flood the hallway. Few are meeting with their peers and lockers, and some go directly to class. Leon tries to blend in with the students as best as possible, but Etay, Hades, and Alecia spot him like a sore thumb. Could they have found Leon so quickly because of the symbol of the Bishop on his cardigan and white button-up shirt? Miles has one too.

Etay drifts over to Leon. Hades and Alecia walk next to their leader. Etay says, “Leon Granny. I was worried I wouldn’t find you again. Look. I won’t be here for the next few weeks. The football team’s got a league-off in a few states starting tomorrow, so I won’t be around to give you your gift.”

Leon swallows and speedily walks ahead. Etay doesn’t give up the chase. Etay, Hades, and Alecia step straight in front of Leon, and the crowd moves around the four.

“I’m also in need of some more lunch money,” Etay adds. “I hear they’re serving pizza. And I want extra.”

“I don’t have any lunch money for you,” Leon says, walking forward. “My next class is in a couple of minutes—”

Etay steps on the tip of Leon’s dress shoe, ceasing his momentum, “Then you’ll pay me now with the remaining

punches I owe ya.” Etay snatches Leon’s satchel strap from his shoulder and drops it on the ground. This time, however, Etay’s friends join in the ambush. Etay opens his locker, shoves Leon inside, and the three cut loose on him once again.

What Etay didn’t tell Leon was that they *each* would give him seventeen punches. Etay draws back, glances around, and sees a hall monitor walking by. Etay glowers at the bald man and whispers, “Guys. We got someone comin’. We gotta bounce.”

Etay and his two friends disperse. Etay, in the distance, shouts, “Next time, bring your *other half* out to play! Hades says he’s got witty remarks!”

Leon struggles to get out of the locker and sees a bald monitor with glasses staring him down with pity.

“Let me guess,” the hall monitor says, “were you telling them what the voice in your head was saying again?”

“No?” Leon says with confusion, “Did you not just see what they did to me?”

“I think you might’ve imagined it. I’m sure it wasn’t unprovoked. Because I do seem to recall you saying you’d make them suffer, before.”

“That time, it wasn’t me,” Leon says, fully slipping out of the locker, “I...just said what I heard in my head.”

“Right...do I need to contact your facility about this voice again? I just had Miles Lee taken away for his sudden outburst.”

“No.”

“Good. Then get to class. You have less than thirty seconds.” Leon turns to run, but the monitor grabs his arm.

“What’re you doing?” Leon shouts, struggling to break away from the man’s firm grip.

“Twenty-five...twenty...think you can make it in less than eighteen seconds?” The bald monitor releases Leon’s arm,

leaving him to push forward and fall on the ground.

Leon frustratingly sighs, grabs his dusty satchel, and makes his way to the stairwell. He walks up the stairs.

*You should have hit him and those bullies,* The Voice in Leon's mind jeers.

*You know what'd happen if I did. Then it's back to medication and basically living at the facility.*

*I'd take that over whatever the hell you went through just now.*

*Like you'd have a choice.* Leon replies back in thought.

The Voice ends this mental conversation with a cackle.

Leon exits the stairwell, and his history class is merely a couple of doors away. Of all his classes, Leon hates this one the most. This is the only teacher that paid Leon any mind, and of course, with negative attention. He'd rather be ignored. Mr. Nert is his teacher, a fifty-year-old man balding from the back and front of his head. Leon pushes the creaking wooden door open, just to get his satchel caught in the door.

*This would happen now, of all times,* Leon thinks to himself as he yanks the black bag into the room.

"Ah. And as usual, we have our late Earthshine Facility patient. Your seat is reserved for you in the back," Mr. Nert says, pointing to an isolated chair all the way in the back of the room.

"Just a chair? Where's the table?" Leon asks, looking at the students with chairs attached to their small desks.

"We're out of them. Plus, you'll fall asleep with one anyway."

The students snicker at this.

Mr. Nert returns to his domain in the back of his room, meeting with his favorite snack: macadamia nuts. As he leans onto the back of his chair, he announces, "Moving forward, class—continue your read-through of *Adolf Hitler* so that we can discuss him and his story at the end of class. Afterwards,



we'll focus on the dehumanization of people that came from the Nazis... Then during Christmas break, you'll have to write an eight-page report on *World War Two*." The students groan at this.

"I'm impressed," Mr. Nert says, glancing at Leon who's nodding in and out, even without the table to lean on, "and what kept you up at night this time? That little voice in your head?"

Leon releases a sigh as now The Voice in his mind says, *I'm sure you'd rather talk to me than him. So, I'll bother you some more.*

Leon releases a loud sigh before zoning out into yet another mental argument.

© © ©

December 10, 2009 (Thursday)

Colorado /\ Aurorae

Maleon High School /\ The Main Hallway

11:36 a.m.

The seventh bell rings, dismissing everyone. The students in the classroom simultaneously rise from their blue plastic chairs. Leon waits until they all walk out so that he can avoid eye contact with them. Someone taps him on the back of his left shoulder.

"Hey, bud."

Leon faces the sound of Jason's friendly voice.

Jason asks, "How's today going for you? Anything from The Voice?"

"There's always something from him."

"You mean *it*," Jason replies coolly.

“Sure,” Leon adds an eye roll.

Jason looks at Leon’s torn blue cardigan, his wrinkled shirt, and says, “I’m guessing you ran into Etay today.”

“What tipped you off?” Leon snaps, remembering that his friends watched and walked away.

“Sorry. I guess you’re not in the talking mood.”

Leon heavily sighs. “No, I’m sorry. I’m just having a bad day. Feels like the bullies have gotten even worse.”

Jason adjusts his book bag. “Etay tends to get like this before graduations. It’s not just you. And I don’t mean that to minimize your pain.”

“I know you don’t.”

Jason puts his hands in his pockets. “I guess it really doesn’t help since the school makes you wear that symbol on your clothes.”

“Nope. Just makes us easier to spot. By Everyone.”

“I used to think he only picked on guys. But I saw him pick on another Earthshine patient earlier. That new girl—*Ombretta*.”

“Whoops. I got nosy,” Deen says, slamming his locker and flipping his hair. He pushes Leon to the side and stands in his place while Leon veers off to his left

Deen says, “So, what am I hearing about this new girl?”

Jason shakes his head. “I was talking about how she was bullied by Etay.”

“Oh,” Deen says, flipping his hair again, “the chick who got home-schooled. Yeah, she’s cute. But too tall for me.”

“Not what we were talking about,” Jason replies.

“Too weird for me either way,” Deen chortles. “She’s always staring at people. Surprised that they haven’t taken her away yet.” Deen elbows Leon. “Be careful. Your DID disorder’s gonna get you in trouble again!”

“Stop it, Deen,” Jason replies angrily.

*What took him so long to defend you? I was beginning to worry you didn't have any friends...* The Voice in Leon's mind jeers as Leon replies with a silent but annoyed expression.

Leon doesn't make eye contact with either of the two. They continue treading down the hallway with one another to the lunchroom.

The three along with of hundreds of other students arrive in the giant lunchroom. Jason sighs, staring at the sign ahead of him which says *free or reduced lunch*, a program designed for those who can't afford a meal, despite him having two jobs at sixteen years old.

Jason takes his place in line, embarrassed, and plays with his hands. Meanwhile Deen stands in the normal line despite having to return home to a trailer park. Outside of Deen's school uniform, one would glance at his wardrobe and think that he could afford luxurious outfits.

Leon takes a seat at their usual circular table. Across from him are Allie and Jacaline who both refuse to acknowledge him. Leon sets his satchel on the table then places his head atop it as if it were a pillow. While shutting his eyes, he slowly takes deep breaths to slow his heart rate. He gently drifts into a noise filled slumber both inside and outside his head.

From afar, he hears Allie's soothingly soft voice. It brings him shivers and butterflies. Being in Allie's presence is bittersweet. She is only at the table by her friends' pleading. Sitting by Leon is a trigger to her buried memories. She sneaks a few glares in Leon's direction.

Leon dozes off into darkness.

Something from his right-side crashes onto the table. Jason and Deen arrive to the table. Deen slams his fist in front of

Leon's head. Leon's eyes crack open. In anger, Leon stomps his foot on the ground then lazily lifts his head upward.

"Mornin', princess," Deen grins toward Leon while he stuffs his face with a slice of pepperoni pizza. Leon turns his face away and returns to darkness.

"What, can't afford a slice of pizza?" Deen says while taking a bite.

Jason takes offense to this joke and shouts, "Knock it off, Deen! You were just complaining about your mom giving you chump change, so I don't wanna hear it."

With a mouthful of his pizza, Deen retaliates, "That's what I've got little ol' Leon here for. Am I right, sleepyhead?"

"Leave me alone, Deen. I'm not in the mood today," Leon says firmly. Jason smiles at this. Leon doesn't normally stand up for himself.

"Or what?"

Leon turns his head, and Jason's proud smile turns into a frown.

The Voice in Leon's mind whispers, *I suppose you have friends after all. You need all that you can get. Hold onto them, Leon.*

Allie, who is eavesdropping, fails in hiding her smirk from Deen's direction. From afar, Etay and his two partners in crime have their rectangular table filled with a mix of football players, soccer players, and cheerleaders. Etay is bragging about how he will score five touchdowns for tomorrow's game and how he gave Leon thirty-four punches. Some of the listeners laugh, one snorts milk out from their nose, and others give a menacing scowl toward Leon, who is completely unaware of their malevolent presence.

Allie continues her conversation with Jacaline.

*Ugh. I give up. There's no way I can sleep through this noise, Leon*

thinks.

He opens his eyes to see that Jason is sliding over a slice of pizza. "Take mine. It's on the house."

Leon cracks a smile and grabs the warm slice to delve right in. "Thanks..." Leon intones, accidentally looking at Allie who is staring at him.

She quickly faces Jacaline after the awkward gawk. Leon's head turns to the right of the floor beside him.

Jacaline waves her hands in front of Allie. "Hello?"

"Hmm? What?" Allie says, snapping back into focus.

Jacaline says, "I answered your question, but you never responded."

"Sorry. I was...distracted... Anyway, how did it go?"

"Oh. Well, it was awful. Jason and Deen want *you* to give him the gift," Jacaline says with a sigh.

"Me?" Allie glares at Jason and Deen who nervously wave back to her.

Allie leans closer to Jacaline and harshly whispers, "*They can't do me one favor? They seriously want me to give Leon that stupid amulet? After what he did?*"

"I know!" And then Jacaline whispers, "*That's what I was telling them. But you know Deen...he said you probably made the whole thing up and that you were asking for it.*"

Allie rolls her eyes; her way of saying, *of course he did.*

Jacaline continues whispering, "*And then Jason said that there's probably a reason why they gave you the stupid thing.*"

Allie glances down at her tuna salad. "*He's lucky he's not even in jail. I seriously can't believe those two are pushing it back onto me.*"

"Right? It was tough enough just getting you to sit with us again."

"Well. You guys are all he has," Allie says coolly.

Jacaline rears her head and brushes her hair. “Please don’t lump me in with those two. Let alone Deen. Leon’s lucky to have *anyone* to sit near.” Jacaline glances at Leon then leans even closer to Allie to whisper, “*It’s almost like they’re trying to get you to relive your trauma.*”

Allie replies, “Or preserve it. Anyway...” She adjusts her collar then reaches into her tote bag to feel for the pendant that is cold to the touch. [The silver pendant](#) is roughly the size of her palm. She angrily stares into the mirror then opens it, revealing two halves. An analog clock is on the left, and on the right half are nine moon phases. A compass rose sits in the center of the displayed moons.

“Whoa,” Jacaline’s eyes pop. “*Maybe you shouldn’t give him that. He’ll probably think you like him again.*”

“Whatever,” Allie says loudly. “If he owned up to it, I might’ve forgiven him.” Allie looks down toward the sleeping boy. “But he had the nerve to act like a tough guy during it all.”

“This is what they all do, Allie. And then when we report it, we get no justice. They treat us like we’re crazy... Hmm. Maybe you can push back and make someone else do it?”

“Yeah, well Dr. Igor—”

Leon hears the name *Igor*, and paranoia consumes him. He lifts his head from the table with disoriented vision. A tray full of food hurtles toward him, breaking his focus. Unfortunately for the culprit, the tray misses his head. It lands face down near Leon’s feet with potato residue pouring off the sides. The clatter of the tray renders the noisy cafeteria into silence.

All eyes are on Leon, who swiftly raises from his chair and yells, “ARGH! I’VE HAD IT!”

Leon looks left toward Etay’s section of the cafeteria. He sees

his bullies are each glaring, but all still have their trays of food in front of them. Leon looks around to see that not one person has a missing tray. So where did it come from?

Leon's words of frustration echo throughout the cafeteria. "What do you all want from me?" No one owning up to the toss frustrates Leon. He blindly snatches Deen's tray and whips it across the cafeteria. Deen drops the crust of his pizza in shock. The tray spins like a frisbee until it hits the wall, shattering into small pieces.

"Is it because I'm not normal? Must be nice being the way you are! Must be perfect for you all!"

Allie buries her face into her arms.

*Bravo Leon, The Voice says. I didn't think you had it in you. Hahaha, maybe you did molest Allie after all.*

Leon falls back to his seat, defeated and weary. Jason stares around the silent cafeteria to see if the culprit is around. The perpetrator remains anonymous.

Slowly, students revive the cafeteria's usual chatter. The same tall bald monitor from earlier rushes toward Leon's table. "I'm contacting Dr. Giro."

Tears leak from Leon's eyes. He turns away from the bald man. "Please don't."

The instructor fixes his glasses. "No can do. You ignored my warning from earlier today. I'll be surprised if they still let you graduate."

Leon doesn't respond but instead thinks, *If I don't graduate... then... I'm stuck as a Bishop for another year...and then...more sessions. More torture. No! I can't go back.*

Jason faces the bald man. "Give 'em a break, Mr. Levi. Tomorrow's his birthday, *and* it's his graduation. If he gets in trouble now, he won't get to leave the facility."

The hall monitor shakes his head to Leon whose head is hanging in shame.

The bald man says, “If I help him, then *every* time there’s an outburst from one of these troubled kids, I’ll be forced to give them *all* a second chance. Is that what you want me to do?”

Jason argues, “If they choose to lock him in that facility again... Then he’s going to be forced to repeat his junior year... It almost happened when we were freshmen.”

The man points directly at Leon, saying, “You’d better get a hold of yourself and that wild behavior. It’s getting out of hand again. You don’t want to end up like *Miles Lee*.”

Leon’s voice cracks as he says, “T—thanks, Jason,” before he shyly lowers his head onto his arms.

“Don’t mention it... But Leon, you really need to control your temper. I won’t be able to save you every time. Have you been practicing those breathing exercises that they taught you?”

Leon turns to the side, and he sees that Jason is speaking, but his mind wanders away from Jason’s advice. From afar, the monitor can tell something is still off.

*Why don’t you tell Jason the truth? Let him know just how crazy you really are.*

© © ©

December 10, 2009 (Thursday)

Colorado / \ Aurorae

Earthshine Facility / \ Courtyard

4:23 p.m.

The Earthshine Facility is now standing proudly in front of Leon at four stories high. More than sixty rooms await patients who are desperate to cure their minds. Leon enters the



courtyard and from afar can see the same therapist who had interviewed Allie two days earlier, Dr. Allure Igor. He passes a running fountain, green, luscious, and low grass to his sides. Some parts of the courtyard are covered by snow.

There are many patients in the yard—all wearing clothing with various symbols on their chests. None of them look happy. Some are drained, others are sobbing, and others...completely blank.

The automatic sliding doors open for Miles who walks out with his hands in his pockets. He lets out a heavy sigh as Allure snickers at him.

“Hello, Leon Granttley,” Dr. Igor says. Miles turns around and watches the two for a split second.

“Hey, Dr. Igor...” Leon timidly reaches forward to shake her cold, bony hand. “Is Dr. Giro back by any chance?”

“I’ve told you already. Dr. Giro is still on vacation.”

*Great*, Leon thinks.

© © ©

December 10, 2009 (Thursday)

Colorado /\ Aurorae

The Earthshine Facility /\ Dr. Igor’s Office

4:40 p.m.

Dr. Allure Igor sits prim and proper with her hands set on her lap, her body stable and stiff. Light from outside is blotted by her curtains. While raising one of her sharp eyebrows, she glances beneath her glasses toward Leon from across her desk.

“As you know, Mr. Granttley, you’re subject to graduate and become a Knight...given that you’d meet the criteria. But first, we have a few boxes we must check off.” Allure grabs a manila folder from the right of her desk and opens it.

Leon takes a deep breath.

“Now... What was that girl’s name?” Allure perches the piercing pen atop her ear. “Ah. Allie Reincath, such a lovely name. How could I ever forget?” Allure holds a photo of someone’s reddened neck up toward him. “Remember this?” Allure asks while Leon flinches at the sight of the photo.

“I’m not comfortable speaking about her—”

“—Leon,” she growls, lowering her tone and the photo.

“I’ll talk about anything else, just not her. Please,” he begs before he shifts his vision to the picture frame placed face down near the therapist.

“How many times now have you told me about your childhood abuse? Now that girl’s name tears you to shreds? Do I need to diagnose you with PTSD as well?”

Leon takes a deep breath. “Dr. Igor—”

“—Oh, what? Is this the part where you pretend you’re uncomfortable with me again? Every therapist here bears the same credentials. Just like how you’re like every little patient. NOW PLAY YOUR PART! You’d be wise to agree.”

“What do you want me to say?”

“Watch that attitude, Mr. Granttley...that’s strike one for today...”

Leon deeply exhales. “Yes. I remember the photos. I remember what she took after I...”

“Good. Now keep going!” Allure shouts, slamming her fist on the table. The shockwave knocks a book off the shelf on Leon’s right. The Bishop cowers, then eludes all eye contact

with Allure.

Suddenly, there are screaming and shouting sounds in the hallway. Screams from Scott, who everyone in the Earthshine Facility calls, The Screaming Man.

“Maybe we should check on him...”

“You are not going ANYWHERE until I hear from the beginning to the end, Leon Granttley. Do I make myself clear? Now as punishment, you’ll start explaining how you got DID and will explain where it’s gotten you today!”

Leon closes his eyes and takes one great deep breath. “From my understanding... My disorder came from the childhood abuse I endured. Particularly when my dad used to drink. I didn’t really enjoy being around him or the abuse, so I separated myself from reality by forming conversations with myself. Or at least, it was who I thought it was: myself.”

“Continue.”

“I thought at first it was *something*. But over time, I had reason to believe that it was *someone*. I couldn’t sleep at night because every time I closed my eyes, his voice was there. Mocking me in every way possible.”

“What would it taunt you about?” Dr. Igor asks, not even trying to hide her grin.

Leon’s eyes water. “He would make fun of my height, my hair. Even the way I acted. Every time I had something positive to think about, it would show or tell me something negative. Then one day, he told me that my only escape would be death.”

Leon’s mind reverts to a glimpse of this tragic memory, a younger him with much shorter hair. The younger Leon rushed to the bedroom window without hesitation. Impulse left him too rushed to unhinge the window’s locks. The frustration pent up inside of him caused him to break through the window.

Gravity left him falling quickly toward the grass beneath, with his head facing the ground.

Allure smirks and writes, *All it took was a couple of empty threats.*

“After that, I was told that my mom saved me. And since then...I’ve been watched by you guys.”

Allure smiles. “And like the devil you are, years later, you ruthlessly attacked Allie.”

He stands up with his fist balled. “I didn’t,” he says, clenching his teeth.

“Oh, and yet so quick to get defensive.” Dr. Igor writes, *suicide attempt at the age of five*, then circles it and places the sharp pen back onto her right ear. “Sit down, you’re not scaring anyone.” She rolls her eyes. “Why do you keep running from it? Just accept what you did and move on.”

Leon’s forehead begins to sweat. *I hate you so much*, he thinks.

Leon sits back onto the seat. “Dr. Igor, you have to understand. I’ve known Allie since I was in kindergarten. Her...and Jason.”

“Yes, I do remember meeting with your friend Jason not too long ago. He had much to say about you.”

Leon sighs. “Jason moved one day, then it was just me and Allie. Then one day, Allie left. Out of the blue... Without any friends, I didn’t know who to go to.”

“Oh, I’m well aware. Your family said you wouldn’t even open up to them,” Dr. Igor says.

“Because I knew they wouldn’t accept or understand me. So, I kept *The Voice* a secret. When everyone learned about *The Voice*, they all eventually told me to ignore it.”

“So, if I understand correctly, all you had was *The Voice*.”

“Yes,” Leon says, as he wipes his sweaty palms on his khaki

pants and continues, “and then when I left the city to come here, I found Jason and Allie. Our reunion brought the three of us even closer.” Dr. Igor tilts her head to the side with a still and blank expression.

Leon adds, “That’s why it tears me apart when everyone tells me that I molested her. I care a lot about her... I could never...”

“I’ll tell you why, Leon.” Dr. Igor wears a paralyzing grin. “That voice in your mind. You and *IT* grew a bond while your two closest friends weren’t there for you. You know what that tells me?”

Leon gulps and she continues. “*It* tells me that The Voice—that person in your head—was jealous of their return. *IT* compelled you to act on *ITS* jealousy!”

“That’s not true!” Leon shouts.

Dr. Igor softens her voice, “Ah. Now we’re *finally* getting somewhere.” She shrugs. “Shall I read the notes that you provided Dr. Giro with months ago? It might help to convince you.”

Dr. Igor reaches into Leon’s folder for a few papers and peers through her glasses as she reads, “*For a while I referred to him as The Devil. It was what my parents wanted me to call him. It was because of all the negativity he would feed me. However, he didn’t want to be called that. He wanted an identity, a reason to live.*”

Dr. Igor’s eyes quickly meet with Leon’s. “Keep listening,” she says as she clears her throat. “*This made me think that it couldn’t have been an imaginary friend. Since normally people would create the dialogue with their imaginary friends.*

“*This voice would provide me with intelligent responses—real conversations like the ones you and I are having right now. Trivial questions, bets on certain things that’d happen throughout the day, and even prompts on what actions to take.*”

Leon takes a slow, shaky breath.

Dr. Igor turns the page and continues reading, *“However, the more I conversed with this entity, the more he spoke about Allie. He began to act very obsessive, and—”* She pauses and shifts her focus from the files to Leon once more, then continues, *“—according to everyone here, my home, and school, I attacked her. I put her in danger. My word doesn’t matter. No matter how many times I deny it, I still get penalized. So, what’s the point in fighting? Might as well give up.”*

Dr. Allure Igor slams the manila folder shut. “See? It had to have happened, Leon. Close friends don’t randomly call assault for the fun of it. To become a *Knight* and graduate from the Earthshine Facility is to accept the unacceptable. I’ve lost count of how many times we’ve gone over this.”

The office is silent, her cold words graze his skin bringing goose bumps to his arms. Aside from her exhalation of satisfaction, the only other audible sound is Scott, the screaming man in the other room. He is crying for his wife who has been deceased for nine years.

Dr. Igor smiles. “Well. It doesn’t sound like you want to become a *Knight* so—”

“—Alright... Alright... I...I molested her...”

“Aww. See, that wasn’t so hard, was it?” Dr. Igor coos, as she scribbles onto her clipboard. “And how exactly did you cope with this incident and its punishment?”

“I...used the mirror as you all instructed for therapeutic release. I talked with The Voice that echoed through it. I talked more with the one in my head too. But you know...that reminds me of something I’d been thinking about.”

Dr. Igor massages her temples. “What is it now, Mr. Granttley?”

“Why should I listen to a voice that I know nothing of? Why does the voice in my head sound exactly like the one in the mirror?”

“Leon...the voice is just a figment of your imagination, silly boy. The whole point in those conversations is so that you gain a better perspective of who you really are. It was an old method once prescribed by a famous philosopher. *Socrates*, I think. Many people have reaped a plenty from this form of release. Your case is no different.”

Leon squints with a puzzled look.

“Well, since you’ve *finally* and *truthfully* accepted that you molested Allie, I proudly welcome you to Knighthood, Leon.”

Leon’s eyes widen. “W—wait, what?”

Dr. Igor stands and retrieves a certificate from the second shelf in her cabinet.

“That’s right,” she says, “you get to graduate.”

“But that didn’t answer my questions. I still don’t understand who or what this voice is. Why does everyone inside the facility say to listen to The Voice, while everyone outside this facility tells me to ignore it?”

“Well, Mr. Granttley. Luckily for you, Knighthood is all about finding out what the voice is. Now that you have become a Knight, you will find out what it all means, how it started, and where it comes from. You will travel through the deepest depths of your memory and heart for the true answer.”

Sighing from relief, she reluctantly hands him the [certificate](#).

“Congratulations, Leon Granttley. And if I’m not mistaken, tomorrow is your seventeenth birthday as well, no?”

Leon nods.

“Stop by tomorrow to receive your *other* gift. Dr. Giro will be expecting you.”

“Alright...” Leon says, eagerly exiting her office.

“COME BACK HERE AND CLOSE THE DOOR!” Dr. Igor shouts as Leon returns immediately to fulfill her demand.



## Chapter 4: A Forgotten Moonlit Night

CCC

December 10, 2009 (Thursday)

Colorado /\ Aurorae

Keystone Circle

Leon's Home /\ His bedroom

7:46 p.m.

**C**hina Jr. is Leon's thirteen-year-old tuxedo cat with a black goatee facing slightly to the side. She is sitting atop his shoulder, her tail wrapping gently around Leon's neck. He strokes her back as she purrs loudly. Leon lays on his bed, and she leaps atop him, then starts kneading.

After this, she jumps off to the floor. She wanders near his laundry basket which, believe it or not, is the place where her mother, China, gave birth to her and one other kitten. The other kitten was pitch black. Leon's younger self was dismayed to find that the black cat had mysteriously disappeared.

Something suddenly strikes the window. It must be a rock.

"Oh, come on, Jason. Do you have any idea how late it is?" He groans and walks over to look through the window, seeing Jason there. "Plus, I *just* got ready for bed."

Leon lazily places on a pair of boots, black skinny jeans, and his blue hoodie to counter the cool air. He exits through his front door, walks across the driveway passing his dad's white van, and meets with Jason who is standing patiently on the sidewalk. Jason is wearing a red golf cap and a polo shirt which is tucked into his khaki pants. This is his work uniform for *McDonald's*.

"Hey. I know it's late. But I'm off to work. I wanted to talk to you before tomorrow—in case I didn't get to see you."

Leon crosses his arms. "You picked a good time. I won't be at school."

Jason nods. "Oh good. That means you'll be graduating. Walk with me."

Leon shakes his head. The Voice in Leon's mind says, *I can already tell you what this will be about. Wait for it. He's gonna ask if you accepted what you did to Allie. Watch.*

"So. What's up?" Leon asks as the two walk side by side down the sidewalk.

"I'm just gonna come out and ask. Leon, wouldn't you remember hurting someone? Someone you cared about?"

Leon shakes his head, and The Voice responds, *I knew it. Have fun with this talk. Make the most of it.*

Leon replies, "Yes, I would. And I would admit it, too."

"You admitted it to the Earthshine Facility...but not to Allie herself."

"Because—"

"—you didn't do it. Right..."

Leon frustratingly groans as Jason continues, "I'm just here to appeal to your conscience. I know you're gonna graduate. But you're doing it on false pretenses. You're gonna accept something you don't deserve. And. I can't respect that. I can't

respect you lying to yourself and everyone including the person YOU hurt just for your own comfort. What does that say about her feelings? Her memories?"

"I'm going home, Jason," Leon says, turning around while walking away.

"Just think about Allie! Don't you have feelings for her? Didn't you? Don't do this for me, do it for her!"

"Goodnight, Jason," Leon says as a crow flies atop a streetlight near him.

"Leon, just listen to what I have to say, and then you'll never hear from me again."

Leon stomps and turns around to face his pleading friend.

"Isn't that what DID is?" Jason asks. "Aren't patients with that disorder people who go through amnesiac states? Because... Well, it'd make perfect sense why you wouldn't remember."

"Jason, I don't have a vendetta against any of you. I really liked Allie, as a friend and..."

The Voice in Leon's mind adds, *and a lover.*

Leon shakes his head and continues, "So—I wouldn't ever touch her like that. Okay?"

Jason turns his face away. "Look, Leon, I'll be straight with you. Allie showed me the pictures...the police sorted through ten of them. Ten of them! The details are what brought you to a behavioral psychologist. If they didn't think you were fit for amnesia, you wouldn't be there. But you are. So, we all kind of have to take Allie's side." He takes a breath. "I'll ask again—Wouldn't you want the same justice?"

"Why did I even bother coming outside?"

A murder of crows now flies around the area. Many roost on top of the electrical posts and a few on the pine trees' branches. Jason walks closer to Leon and asks, "Well, where were you on

that day?”

Leon turns to the side. “I don’t remember. *I* say that *I* was at therapy. But **THEY**, as in the cops and Allie, say that *I* was at my house.”

Jason crosses his arms. “Was your family home?”

“No.”

Jason paces in small semicircles around Leon to keep his focus. “Do you remember what the weather was like? What you were wearing?”

Leon looks up toward the stars for relief. “If I knew, I would’ve told them. That day is just one big blur to me.”

Jason crosses his arms. “It was two years ago... On *December eleventh*... And to be honest, I remember Allie saying she was giving you a chance to be her boyfriend. But Leon, I can’t tell you any more than what you can tell yourself. You might not remember, but your vessel somewhere inside carries the answer. One day you’ll find it... And when you do, you’ll feel better.”

The Voice speaks, *No matter what you’ve told him, time and time again your supposed best friend has told you that you’ve done it. Now what, Leon?*

Leon wipes the cold sweat off his forehead. “You still think I did it. I can’t believe it. After everything we’ve been through.”

Photographs of a bruised leg and arm flash through Jason’s mind. He shudders, remembering the marks on Allie’s neck. He ceases his momentum to face Leon. “Like I said, I’d love to say you didn’t do it, but I don’t want to lie to anyone. I still think you’re just having trouble accepting it.”

Leon thinks, *You and everyone else say the same thing.*

Jason walks over and pats his back. “Well, I’ve done what I can. If you won’t accept it, then I won’t accept you. See you, Leon. And. Happy early birthday.”

With a broken heart, Leon thinks, *I thought out of all people you would trust me. It's one thing when your own family doesn't understand but this...*

The Voice chimes in, *This is priceless. He didn't even congratulate you on your graduation. I almost pity you.*

CCC

The Next Day

December 11, 2009 (Friday)

Colorado /\ Aurorae

Leon's Home /\ The Kitchen

10:11 a.m.

"Leaving so soon?" Leon's father says from the kitchen, seeing Leon at the front door with his blue hoodie, black jeans, and shoes on.

Leon swallows and walks around the corner to see his dad in the kitchen, standing against the counter. He shrugs and looks away from his father. "Yeah. I figured I'd get this over with as soon as possible."

Leon's father is tall and lean. He has a maturing hairline, unlike his son. His hair is as tall and straight as his, if not slightly more. If his father were to shave his beard and mustache, the father and son would look even more alike. Especially if Leon were to gain the same forehead wrinkles and frown lines.

"I took today off so that we could celebrate your birthday," Nero says firmly in his deep voice.

The Voice in Leon's mind tempts him by saying, *Ask him if they plan on celebrating your graduation.*

*No. You're full of bad ideas, Leon replies.*

*Aren't you curious about why there's only a birthday cake on the counter?*

*How do you see—oh right.*

*You forget. We share the same eyes. Now. Satisfy your curiosity.*  
The Voice says.

Leon shakes his head, and his father speaks. “That little head shake you did is why we’re *only* celebrating your birthday.”

“What? I was just—”

“—I know what you were doing. You do that every time you speak to The Voice. Or. When it speaks to you. Leon, don’t take this the wrong way but—are you sure you’re fit to graduate?”

“Yes?”

“I’m not going to get in the way of your development as a person, but. If you ask me—”

Leon and his father can hear knocking on Leon’s shut bedroom door upstairs.

“Leon!” Amy calls out, then says to her mother, “I don’t think he’s up here.”

A set of footsteps trample down the stairs and find Leon and his father in the kitchen.

“Are we late to the happy birthdays?” Amy says, shyly creeping into the kitchen as her mother, Silvia, shows up behind her. [The mother and daughter](#) look very alike, but Silvia has more wrinkles.

Silvia gives Nero a quick kiss, then grabs a knife from the drawer for the cake. “What did we get in the middle of?” she asks, as everyone is now quiet.

Nero grabs his mug that says, *Worlds worst dad*, takes a sip of his black coffee, and speaks. “I was just telling Leon that...well, would you rather tell them, son?”

Leon blows air through his nostrils, “I..”

He looks at the three of them, but his mother interrupts his pause to shout, “Happy birthday!”

Amy and Nero both look at his mother with confusion written on their faces.

“What?” Leon’s mother asks. “Stop looking at me like that. Today is his special day. Regardless of what he wants to do with it, it’s his decision.”

Amy snorts. “Still haven’t accepted it, I presume.”

Leon grits his teeth. “I’m out of here,” he says, charging for the door as his father yells, “Leon! Don’t disrespect your mother like that!”

Leon turns around at the front door and proclaims, “Thank you for the happy birthdays. You’re right. It is my decision. And one day, I’m gonna find the truth and prove you all wrong! I didn’t molest Allie! Okay?”

Leon and his sister have both been spanked as children. Their parents understand the art of discipline very well. Leon knows this and, despite his fear of his possible punishment, opens the door and slams it. But then...he’s startled by the sight of Allie who is standing at the top of his driveway in her school uniform.

The two stare at each other. Leon can hear his father shouting in rage behind him. He’s not too far off.

Leon presses forward, shouting, “Allie!”

Allie takes two steps back. She blinks, and Leon’s hoodie suddenly turns red. She sees a black leather jacket over his hoodie. And then startles upon the sight of his face. A smirk forms on Leon’s lips. She blinks once more, and these *new* features leave as quickly as they came.

Allie’s heart pounds. “Get back! Why’re you running toward me!” She takes the amulet in her pocket, throws it, and it smacks

him straight in the forehead.

“Happy...birthday!” Allie cries in a sob while running away back toward her neighborhood. “Are you happy now, Dr. Igor?”

Leon rubs his forehead and lifts the mysterious amulet. “Ow...”

Leon’s mother opens the door and shouts, “Leon, you’re still here? You better not let your father see you! Catch!” She tosses a square shaped device into his hands. “You haven’t been carrying your beeper lately. We have to keep track of you, remember?”

“Yeah. I remember.”

“Okay,” his mother says. “Do you want me to throw away your journals now that you’re graduating?”

“No,” Leon replies. “Keep the notebooks I didn’t write in either. I might need them in the future.”

His mother nods as Leon places the amulet around his neck, then under his blue hoodie.

Leon turns his back and starts walking toward the Earthshine Facility, but in the distance his mother yells, “Congratulations on your graduation!” This brings a smile to his face, as well as a few tears. Finally. Someone who believes him.



## Chapter 5: Man In The Mirror

CCC

December 11, 2009 (Friday)

Colorado /\ Aurorae

The Earthshine Facility /\ The Courtyard

11:20 a.m.

Leon walks toward the automatic moving doors in the front of the facility. Sadly for him, they stay shut. “Is it closed? No, that can’t be right. Dr. Igor literally told me to come today.”

*Try the back entrance, The Voice says.*

“Great. It’s you again,” Leon mutters. “Sucks that you just might be right.”

*I always am. Hurry up.*

Leon makes his way to the back entrance of the facility. Then after pushing through the two doors, he marches for the office area, passing by the waiting room, through a long dim hallway, bringing him to the opposite side of the entrance where he had previously met Dr. Igor.

He walks down this next hallway, watching the lights dance with shadows that move along the floor and walls. Chills crawl

down Leon's spine, the tiny hairs on his arms erect. He opens the fourth door on his right, cracking it slowly to find his appointed therapist.

"Why are you doing that? Come in," a thick and deep voice demands.

The door whines as Leon fully opens it. He leans in.

"Sorry. I thought that the facility was closed today."

Dr. Stefano Giro is a tall dark-skinned silver fox. He looks a bit different from how Leon remembers him. Instead of the blue sweater and khaki pants he normally wears, he is now wearing a dark green business suit with suns for buttons. It seems that Dr. Giro has grown weary of his beard and has instead trimmed it down to a bushy mustache. His hair is silver and neatly slicked back. His eyes are stern and focused intensely on Leon.

"Sit down," Dr. Giro says, looking toward Leon who obediently sits in the left seat. There is a glass of grapefruit juice next to him.

Stefano Giro takes a sip of his bitter drink and stares intensely at Leon, not saying a single word. Leon looks at everything but the old man.

Stefano then says, "Wait a moment... I remember you. You're that boy who thinks he's innocent...aren't you?"

"That's not true," Leon says, looking away. "I know what I did to her."

"A change of heart. How ironic. I suppose you are like the rest, then. But sadly for you, your hellish fate remains the same." The man starts reaching for his coat pockets.

"*Hellish fate?*" Leon asks, watching the old man struggle to find whatever he needs.

*Hey. You had questions that none of these therapists could answer,*

*didn't you? Hurry and ask them,* The Voice says.

Leon narrows his eyes and thinks, *I do, but...how did you—*  
—*Hurry up and ask him,* The Voice in Leon's mind urges.

"W—Wait," Leon says, "I've had a question that I've been meaning to ask for a very long time."

Dr. Giro wears a look of disgust. "You have thirty seconds... speak."

"I...I don't know what I'm getting into." Leon's brain is hit by many thoughts. He has so many questions. And now here he is, in front of the founder who brought him into this facility. The very one who groomed him to understand the little that he does now. What should he ask first? Leon's brain ponders this while his mouth blabbers.

Leon repeats, "This Knight's program, I'm not sure what I'll be doing. I wanna know about The Voice. I wanna know about everything."

*Do this correctly, and I won't have to take over.*

"It truly doesn't matter," Dr. Giro replies coolly.

"I'm begging you, Dr. Giro. I've been asking this for years. And no one's been able to answer these for me. I have to know."

"Which question? You've asked many."

"The one about the voice in my head. I wanna know why you kept having me talk with it. You knew it said bad things. Everyone on the outside knew that too, yet *they* suggested I should stop talking with it. I want to hear the truth from you."

The man suddenly screams out while holding his head. Startled, Leon gasps, "Are you okay?"

The man stands up from his seat and shouts even louder. "Of course!" the old man blurts, then in a lighter and smoother voice, "I've waited far too long for this day!" The man ruffles his gray hair. He ruins the combover and makes it messy.

Dr. Giro grins then sits back down. He leans his arm on the table, and a button within his sleeve clicks. Suddenly a skinny blade appears from out his sleeve. “Oops. Since when did I start carrying these?” the old man asks, examining the blade.

“Hey, get back!” Leon cries out while standing up. He grabs his chair by its handles to point its legs toward the therapist.

Dr. Giro opens his dark green amulet, reads the time, and then puts his hands behind his back. “Leon Granttley. Would you believe that out of all the patients we’ve had here, *you’re* actually the first person to ever ask those questions?”

“What do you mean? Why wouldn’t anyone else ask?” Leon asks loudly, shaking with the chair in hand.

“Because people are usually content with what society gives them. But not you. No. Because if I were to ask you what you did to that girl, you’d say that you did—nothing, correct?”

Leon says nothing but knows Dr. Giro is correct. He angrily stares up at the old man.

“You don’t have to answer that. I know what you *really* think. But what I *will* say is that you have done well in treading against the grain, Leon Granttley. If you truly do not believe that you touched her—then accept that wholeheartedly. Live that *fantasy* out until your final days. But do so proudly.”

Leon is frozen in place—still holding the chair so that its legs face his supposed old friend...

Dr. Giro continues, “It takes a lot of force to get people to do what you want to do. And to their demise, the poor patients have swallowed the lies we created. They’ll reconstruct their own memories just to fit the narrative. But you. You’re different. You, Leon, can fulfill your true purpose for me. For them. As of today, you are a Knight. And no lie shall pierce your armor.”

“You’re freaking me out...Dr. Giro.”

“Well, consider this an unorthodox graduation! Even if you’ve boldly lied to our faces and told us what we wanted to hear.”

Leon draws back in shock as Dr. Giro continues, “Did you think I didn’t know what you’ve been telling your friends and family? We’ve spoken to each of them independently. And each of their reports conclude that you are in denial. But why does what *they* think matter? I’ve just complimented you on your stubbornness, haven’t I?”

“Nothing you’re saying is making any sense...” Leon utters, slightly lowering the chair.

Dr. Giro chuckles to himself. “At this moment in time, nothing I say will bring you relief... Ah, but in the *future*.”

Suddenly, footsteps trail toward the door. The door flies open, swinging straight into Leon, sending him AND the chair into the wall. Leon falls flatly to the ground. His chest moves only for a few short breaths.

Leon’s body has left a dent in the white wall. Two mysterious masked figures enter the room. These tall brutes are wearing masks with a devilish sun and moon. They are wearing dark green armor, similar colors to Dr. Giro’s new suit, and have maroon-like fabric underneath the armor that represents muscle and sinew.

“It appears I’ve run out of time,” the old man says to himself.

“Sir,” one of the male guards says. “Elder Laither is set to drive. We have all the other Bishops locked and secured. Is this Bishop ready?”

“That he is.”

One of the two masked figures grabs Leon’s body and runs outside to the black vehicle in the parking lot.

“One day, you’ll understand what I mean, Leon. In the end, it is your

skepticism that we all need to move forward. *Project Earth-shine* begins now.” Dr. Giro says.

[See the Knight symbol and the masked people...](#)



The dark, unsettling ground causes Leon’s body to convulse and shake. His face and senses are numb. Through his hoodie, he feels something next to him, but he can’t tell what. The way the environment is shaking...it feels as if there are bumps in the road. Of course. Leon is in a vehicle. His arms and legs are restrained by metal cuffs. Thankfully, he isn’t alone. He can hear whimpers far behind him.

“*It’s gonna be fine, Ombretta,*” Miles, the boy with brown curls, whispers comfortingly to her. “*We’re gonna be okay.*”

“*But...*” Ombretta whispers back in her soft voice, “*I’m squished back here. I’m seeing shadows and...they’re following this van...they took me without letting me bring my meds. I have to go back!*”

“*Shh!*” Miles harshly whispers. “*They’ll hear you...*”

Ombretta covers her mouth, “*Sorry,*” she whispers apologetically.

*How they managed to cram us both back here with three others is beyond me,* Miles thinks, [looking to his sides](#) to see an unfamiliar trembling middle-aged woman, the old man named Scott—the screaming patient, and another frightened person with long hair whom he does not recognize.

“Miles!” Ombretta shouts at the sight of this supposed shadow that she sees.

“HEY! WHAT’S GOING ON BACK THERE?” a voice in front

of Leon shouts. The person that yelled must be sitting in the front passenger seat. He is quite the large figure.

The only things brightening this dark drive are the blue lanterns poised out on the sides of the road. This giant figure points a flashlight right into Leon's eyes. Leon squints and turns away.

The giant points the light onto himself, shocking Leon and his fellow prisoners in the back. This figure has just revealed his face. No. This too is a mask. And it is much creepier than the ones that knocked Leon unconscious earlier. This man's mask looks like a large blue sun with two crescent moons for horns.

You can say that the spikes it has, or the rays of its sun, can even act like more horns. He has four thorns poking out from his shoulders. They seem to be bending to adjust to the height of the vehicle. These thorns—it's almost like they're living and breathing. Or is that just the motion of the vehicle?

The large figure in the front shines the light on the person at Leon's right. This isn't a prisoner. This is *also* a person wearing a mask.

"You'd better not be sleeping back there, Noire," the deep voice says, pronouncing the name, *Noo-war*.

"I'm not! I got plenty of sleep!" the whiny yet mischievous voice to the right of Leon shouts back.

"Good," the voice in the front says, "because if you do, there won't be any food for you when we get back."

"Empty threats, all of 'em. I've got all these people in here to eat," he says, slowly turning over to face Leon. "Ain't that right..."

Leon gulps, and his heart starts pounding. Is this man's smile that wide, or is this, too, his mask? It appears to be a red sun

with a blue moon attached to it.

“Noire,” a hoarse elder woman’s voice to the left of Leon says. “We have ten minutes before we get there. Simmer down.”

They arrive at an area with fewer trees where now the moon’s pale light can shine freely in the area. The light shines through the windows, and Leon sees the gruesome person to his left. This woman’s mask is shaped to be like a...crescent moon and Ouija board.

This mask, just like Noire’s, gives Leon the creeps. Goose-bumps flare on Leon’s arm as she adjusts herself in her seat. Despite how old her voice sounds, her figure surprisingly reveals a young and well toned body.

“I’m just excited,” Noire shouts. “We’ve got so many heads tonight. *And we’ve got three potential Sitio’s.*”

“Don’t you have enough?” the woman to the left of Leon asks.

“You can never have too much,” Noire adds with a pout in his voice. “Not unless you like runnin’ your own errands.”

A pale crescent moon shines its brilliant tint of blue light past the dark clouds, brightening the road ahead.

Leon hears rustling behind him.

“Y—your name is Miles...right?” The screaming man named Scott asks the boy with curly hair.

“*Keep it down,*” Miles whispers, trying to sound polite. “*But yes. That’s me.*”

“I want to get out of here. Help me.”

“*I can’t do that for any of us.*”

“You don’t understand, *Mona’s out there.* My wife. I need her back.”

Miles sighs, *I shouldn’t have entertained this...his wife has been dead for years.*

The woman next to Scott is shaking in place. “I’m...I’m



terrified of the moonlight...yet...it's shining on us right now...  
And if there's birds...I'm gonna lose it..."

The unfamiliar long-haired man next to Scott whispers, "I'm scared of people, so I don't like being here any more than you guys..."

"I...can't stand the sunlight," the old woman says, "so thankfully only the moon's out..."

Miles whispers harshly, "Guys, please keep your voices down..."

Leon in the front thinks, *You really have a way of working, devil. Now, of all times, you're silent. No ideas, no taunts. Nothing. What's wrong with me... Am I asking for you to be around now? Say something!*

"Aye! KEEP IT DOWN BACK THERE!" Noire shouts.

"Jackal, calm yourself," the voice in the front booms.

"He's right," the hoarse voice to Leon's left adds, "you're smarter than them. At least sometimes I like to think so. Don't let their actions beget you."

"Don't call me Jackal!" Noire screams. "I didn't do anything wrong! I'm doing my job. You know how they get when they scream this early." He detaches his seatbelt and turns to face Miles, Ombretta, and the others in the back. "You're lucky I won't feed you to my dogs back home!"

"Jackal," the voice from the front of the van bellows, "What did *Faviané* just say?"

Noire says, "You know how *Festano* feels about negative attention. If they scream now, who knows what they'll do later." He lashes the seat with his fist. "Now all of you—shut up!"

Faviané tightens her fist. "Jackal. I hate repeating myself."

"That makes two of us," the voice in the front adds.

"Please," Ombretta in the back says, "I just want to know where we are. My anxiety is getting worse... I'm claustrophobic...and...and the shadows are all around me. I just need my

medicine..." she says, clutching her blue scarf.

The driver, wearing a grinning red sun mask like Noire's, unbuckles his seatbelt and veers to the right side of the road.

"Everyone, I'm afraid Noire is right," the old man behind the mask says, setting the large black van into *park*. "*Kranfly* I could deal with a little more quiet. Will you take care of it, *Thorne*?"

"Fine," the giant in the front passenger seat says, attaching his brass knuckles with golden spikes at the end. As he steps out of the vehicle, the thorns on his shoulder stiffen and stand tall. They're now moving around like live tentacles. Now that the light is shining brighter on them, Leon can see that these are spikes with gold spearheads. They appear to be attached to Thorne's outfit, each tentacle with a mind of its own.

Thorne opens the two doors at the back of the van, and Ombretta whimpers, "Please. Let us go back to our families. None of us will say a thing."

Thorne's gigantic figure eclipses the moonlight above as he walks toward her. "End your anxiety, or *I'll* end *you*," Thorne says, glowering directly at Ombretta.

He now leans close to Scott The Screaming Man, grabbing him by the hair of his receding hairline. As Scott cries out, Thorne shouts over him, "We're almost where we need to go! Pipe down for the rest of this, got it? Nod if you agree!"

Thorne releases the old man so harshly that he falls on his back, crying aloud. How Miles wishes he can help the old man up. But not only is he restrained, Thorne has not broken his stare from any of these five. In fact, with his mask on, it feels like he is staring at everyone at once. Miles, Ombretta, and the rest of the prisoners reluctantly nod.

Laither the driver, while only breathing through his mouth, walks over to Thorne with the help of his cane which also looks

like a shotgun... Is it really a cane? Hunched over, Laither limps to Thorne and says, "I just received a report from our fellow guards at the mirror. They say that the moonlight is fading in and out. We were on schedule before—but we cannot risk the clouds blocking it completely again."

Thorne backs away from the captors in the back of the van, growling. "Hmph."

He slams the doors on their faces as he and the old man make it back to their seats. The van starts moving, and Leon has an idea.

*Wait. That's it. My mom gave me a beeper. If I use that, I'll be able to get her to track me! Then I'll be saved.*

With Leon's arms and legs restrained, sadly he'll have to lean his elbow on the correct button to trigger the device to show his current location. The device is activated. Thankfully, it emits no sound. Though it does emit a tiny vibrating pulse. But then...

Noire turns to Leon and says, "Hey. You activate your beeper? What is that I'm feeling? Oh! Oh yeah! That's definitely a beeper!" Noire starts cackling loudly and Leon's jaw drops.

"What a classic!" Noire belts. "Hey Thorne!"

"Yes, Noire. So, I will save you an escapee's arm when we get back."

"And leg! You said an arm and a leg!" Noire cackles.

"I'm confused," Faviané says. "What bet did you two make now?"

Noire excitingly explains, "Every beeper that's turned on earns me a fresh bloody snack. Because—" Noire pushes his masked face so close to Leon's that they could kiss. Leon draws away, but Noire's creepy mask inches closer. "—fools like you think that *your parents* gave you those beepers! Those were ours

to begin with! No one's comin' to save you!"

Leon swallows and looks away as Noire laughs and returns to his normal sitting position. He starts laughing so hard that his insides start to hurt. For a slight second, he removes the mask to wipe some tears away.

Leon's fight or flight instincts are triggered. He needs to get out. But how? Maybe...by kicking Noire's armored shin. Sadly for Leon, his leg restraints stop him from pulling his legs back as much as he would like. He swings his foot into Noire's shin, cringing as his toes ache from the pain.

"I'll give you one more try. *One more*," Noire says.

Thorne in the front says slowly, "Jackal...I'm warning you. Nothing. Too. Much."

"Oh. I won't, alright. One more, Granttley. I'll give you one more shot!"

Leon swallows and tries to headbutt Noire's head, but even the mask itself is hard! Leon feels a bump growing on his forehead, but he can't tell for sure because his hands are restrained.

"Time's up!" Noire shouts, palming Leon's entire head.

Faviané is humming and staring out the window until Leon's face slams into it.

"JACKAL!" Faviané shouts. "C'mon! You couldn't do that on YOUR side of the van?"

Noire ignores her, the cracks in the window, and says, "There...that'll teach you to step up to me!"

Leon's seeing stars. His head is throbbing. His vision is so blurry that he can barely tell that he's in the van. Noire pulls Leon's head once more to slam into the window until Thorne yells, "ENOUGH, Jackal."

"But!"

“No. He needs to be able to think where he’s going. You know this.”

*I’m...I’m...going to live?*

“Meh,” Noire says, releasing Leon’s head.

Faviané holds out her hand, and a miniature mirror appears onto her lap. She is muttering curses angrily to herself, while suddenly...the cracks in the glass disappear.

“Faviané, I heard that,” Thorne at the front says. “No spirits in the van.”

“Oh, as if that was an actual order. It is not my fault you don’t believe in them...despite how many times they’ve saved you.”

“Enough. They never saved me.”

The mirror vanishes into thin air.

“Alright everyone,” the driver says, “we have arrived.”

“*Finally*,” Thorne says, as Laither steers them into a giant grassy field that is the size of a football field. There are trees surrounding each corner of this field, but unlike the rest of Aurorae County, there isn’t a drop of snow.

However, there *is* snow in the trees. Many of these ominous soldier-like figures are surrounding the area. If the hostages wanted to run, this would be their only chance, for the path that Laither drives them through is the only breach in this immense rectangular shaped field.

The moon continues casting its unique baby blue light down onto the field. It glistens and shines on the green armor of this organization. The van stops to the side.

“Alright everyone,” Laither says with a yawn, “we’re here. Everyone wake up.”

Thorne chortles. “You should retire, Laither. I don’t know how you still do this.”

“Eh. I like driving. It’s good to be with you youngsters. Keeps

me young.”

Thorne the giant shrugs. “I tried.” He then walks to the back of the vehicle and opens the two doors to see the frightened faces of Miles, Ombretta, Scott, and the other two sitting beside them. One by one with a pair of keys, he unlocks the restraints around their ankles. But not their hands.

“Out,” Thorne says firmly, and each of the patients obeys without a single word.

Faviané unlocks Leon’s ankle restraints, and then he follows her out from her side on the left. He did not want to go with Noire. Faviané and Noire stretch their legs while Thorne escorts this worried bunch to the field. Leon, Miles, Ombretta, Scott, and the other two patients follow behind Thorne. Faviané and Noire follow behind Leon and the others.

The grass feels strange beneath Leon’s feet. Has he felt this texture before? Perhaps in a miniature golf course? Leon looks at the boy with curly hair and thinks, *It’s him again.*

Leon looks at Ombretta with a confused look, *I think I’ve seen you before too...* Ombretta curiously glances at Leon while he looks away from her. Then she looks at something that is above his shoulders. Perhaps another one of the shadows that she sees?

Thorne glances up at the shining moon, looking around at a few approaching clouds. “We still have some time.” He then turns to Leon and the others and says, “You all, stand where I’m standing.”

Now it appears that they’re each in the dead center of this grassy field. There are guards who wear armor and masks similar to Thorne’s, Faviané’s, and Noire’s. It seems that the males have one set of armor and one type of mask while the females have another. They each have the same type of

weapons—a gun with spikes at the end—and a sickle blade attached to their waists.

Since there are many of [these guards](#), it's safe to assume that Thorne and his two teammates are the leaders of this organization. This is confirmed once one male guard meets Thorne halfway and says, "Commander Thorne."

Thorne replies, "Are you slow or just new? Where is your salute?"

The guard starts shaking and raises his left arm to the right side of his chest, using his index finger and thumb to make a C shape, or a crescent moon. To everyone watching, the C looks is backwards.

"Good. Now give me your report."

The male guard shaking in place says, "N—n—Detective Nivmar and Officer Milaw are late. But they did tell us they would be here—"

The guard stops talking once he sees two police cars show up next to Laither's van off in the distance. Laither is fast asleep in the driver's seat with his mask on. Leon and Ombretta both glance in excitement at the police cars. They're saved.

Two officers step out of the cars: one man with a jet black combover and brown skin and a woman with black hair, blonde highlights, and tanned skin. Both of their expressions are blank. The man is wearing a black leather jacket over his uniform. And he's wearing...a strange version of the American flag. So is the woman.

Leon's heart pounds in excitement, thinking, *Perfect! And now they just need to pull out their guns. Wait... Why only two officers for all these soldiers? Oh. Maybe they're decoys. Hmm. But they're not looking at the guards. Okay, wait! Why are they passing us!*

*Hey! We need help!*

Ombretta is practically thinking the same thing as Leon. Why didn't the officers stop to help? Miles doesn't bother looking at these officers. Not even once.

"You're both late," Thorne says, pointing to the clouds in the sky.

Detective Nivmar says, "Sorry," holding the same salute as the fearful guard earlier. Officer Milaw reluctantly does the same. Nivmar continues, "We were feeding the news stations with another scapegoat."

"And what did you pick this time?" Thorne asks.

"The Loch Ness Monster. I mean. We *are* by the lake."

Thorne tilts his head, and Detective Nivmar immediately corrects himself, looking up, then away from Thorne. "I meant that respectfully."

Thorne chuckles. "I was beginning to worry that money and whitemail was losing it's worth."

Officer Milaw responds with her arms crossed. "Believe me, it's working. We don't need more fear."

Thorne laughs once more, pointing to the policewoman. "I like her."

Faviané marches forward with Noire by her side. "Thorne, we're running out of time. Noire's been summoned by Allure. He's got runaways to deal with."

"Very well," Thorne says, "then let's all move off to the side so that we can get started." Thorne briefly glances at Leon's angry face. Leon looks away as soon as he's caught staring. Faviané, Noire, and the police officers follow Thorne off the center of the field.

"Did you see the look on Granttley's face?" Thorne asks to the others. "Good thing we're not in a world where thoughts can



kill.” Noire cackles loudly at this. Leon, Miles, Ombretta, Scott, and the other two patients stand helplessly in the center of this field. One guard walks to the center where the Earthshine patients are and, using his arms, nudges them to the side. As for why, they don’t know. But now they’re organized much differently. Leon, Miles, and Ombretta are each standing on one side. On the other is Scott The Screaming Man, the woman named Lisa who claimed to hate the sun, and the man named Obi who claimed to be afraid of people.

The six of them stand, confused about their division. The only patient who appears unfazed is Miles. Leon and Ombretta are experiencing anxiety that they never have before.

“LUNAE LUX! MARCH!” Thorne shouts from the top of his lungs. And just like this, each of the masked people marches in place, rhythmically to no beat. Just the beat of their own practiced drills. Thorne commands, “Weapons out!”

A single tear rolls out of Leon’s eye as he realizes what is about to happen. The pistols being aimed at them now—this is their execution. Yes. This is how it ends for them.

Leon shuts his eyes, waiting for the bullet to strike his body. He wonders what it will feel like.

A clamor shakes the ground. Everyone but the surrounding masked individuals and the police officers falls to their knees or flat on their buttocks. Is this earthquake coming from the marches of these soldiers?

In between the divided patients comes an even bigger division. The source of the rumbling. The ground itself splits and reveals darkness beneath. So, this is it. They are to fall into the pit and die. *This* is how it ends.

The ground continues to split open, and the darkness beneath is eradicated by the moonlight above. The moonlight shines

so bright that the light from the pit shines upward, making nearly all the air of the entire area white. The rumbling has not stopped yet, however.

Thorne roars, “Congratulations, Leon, Scott, Obi, Lisa, Ombretta, and Miles. Accept Lord Festano’s humbling welcome to *the other side*.”

“What?” Leon says. “What do you mean?”

“Other side?” Scott asks. “Will she be waiting there for me?”

“No!” Noire shouts. “But this blade’s been waiting for ya!” And with a tiny sickle blade, Noire carves a crescent moons shape onto Scott’s forehead.

The pain makes Scott live up to his nickname. Guards from behind each of these patients appear. Three of them with leg restraints in hand for Scott, Obi, and Lisa. The other guards bring keys for Leon, Miles, and Ombretta.

The guards use the keys to unlock their restraints. In confusion, the three rub their wrists—and suddenly—Miles watches Leon get kicked forward. Leon loses his balance and falls into the bright pit below. He screams and shouts and is swallowed by the blinding light and is seen no more.

## Chapter 6: A Second Birthday

CCC

???????? ???? , ??? (???????)

Colorado \ / Aurorae

Keystone Circle

Leon's Home \ / His bedroom

?:??

Leon screams, sorely jerking forward. He glances all around his bedroom. The first thing he notices is that he's sleeping on just a mattress, not his twin sized bed set. He doesn't even have a pillow. Leon looks around for his dresser. That is not here either. Not even the many posters of his favorite movies and video games. No. The wall is barren of all life and personality save for a few pictures of grungy rock, metal bands, and scribbles on the wall.

"I guess I deserve this," Leon says, looking all around the room once more. "If I were a parent, I would've taken my stuff away too." He yanks the sheet off himself and says, "But jeez, guys. A little excessive? I know I'm grounded but you took my dresser? How am I supposed to get dressed? Speaking of dressed..."

Leon looks down and notices he's wearing only a white t-shirt. He finds his blue hoodie and black skinny jeans hanging on his

closet door. But something is different about the placement of this closet door. No, what's weird isn't how this closet door slides open. Nor is it the fact that now this door has a hole in it. It's the fact that it's in a different location of the room.

"They...moved me to a different room?"

He looks around his feet. "China Jr?" Leon calls out for his cat while his eyes scramble all around the wooden floor.

"I guess she's in the basement...but...what happened to my carpet? Mom always said carpets were good against the winter weather."

Leon glances out his window and sees unfamiliar houses. He runs for the window and peers outside. Not a single flake of snow can be seen anywhere. In fact, it's almost so hot that Leon is grateful for not having slept with his blue hoodie.

"Where am I? Where are the Huey's? Where are my neighbors?" Leon asks, looking around at this strange neighborhood with unfamiliar houses. His socks are off to the side of the mattress. He slips them on and finds a calendar on the ground. He lifts it but finds that he can't read it. The words are there, and certain letters like *J* and *E* are detectable. His eyes are playing tricks on him. These letters are spinning around like they're weightless flower petals blown by the wind. He rubs his eyes and tries his hand again at reading, but still nothing.

Leon drops the calendar onto the ground and the air from the calendar whooshes a few grey and black flakes onto his feet. A strange smell comes from these tiny ashen flakes. "That smells gross. Almost like...cigarettes," he says looking around. "This definitely isn't my room. This is a mistake. I think my parents kicked me out and left me somewhere else. Nothings making sense."

He walks over to the closet, and he is only mildly shocked

to find that his clothes are all gone. While some can argue that Leon only likes the color blue, he can also be found in other colors like green, orange, purple, and even teal. But in this closet, nothing is found. Not a single jacket, hoodie, polo, t-shirt, v-neck, or pair of pants.

Leon looks up at the closet door where his blue hoodie is hung. “So, Mom and Dad really expect me to *just* wear this hoodie? He glances over to the mattress in disgust, taking one last look at the room.

Frustrated, he puts his pants on and the blue hoodie but rolls up the sleeves. As Leon approaches the door, he can hear loud sounds coming from outside his bedroom. He pushes his ear to the door to hear shouting.

“THAT WAS ONE FIFTY BILL’S WORTH OF WINE THAT YOU JUST FLUSHED!” his father shouts.

“Good! BECAUSE THEN MAYBE YOU’LL PUT OUR MONEY TO GOOD USE!” his mother replies.

“OUR MONEY? MOVE OUT THEN IF YOU DON’T LIKE IT!” his father screams.

“MAYBE I WILL!”

“Mom? Dad?” Leon asks in a worried tone.

“LET GO OF ME,” Silvia cries out.

“Oh no!” Leon shouts, reaching for the doorknob. But then he realizes that something is wrong with the doorknob. It’s not on the left like it normally would be. Confused once more, he reaches for the right side of the door’s knob, twists, and rushes into the hallway to help his mother. But instead of turning right like he normally would, he finds nothing but a blank wall. He exclaims so loudly that it stops the fighting.

“Where are the stairs!” Leon shouts angrily.

“*Néol?* Why’re you screaming like a girl?” he can hear his

father yell.

“Dad,” Leon mumbles. “Amy would lose her mind if she heard you say that,” he chuckles lightly. “Wait. *What* did you just call me?”

“Néol?” Nero shouts. “Answer my...*hiccup*...damn question!”

“I’m fine!” Leon shouts but mutters once more about his confusion with the new name.

A few glass objects strike the ground and shatter.

“HEY!” Nero bellows.

Leon rushes to his left, now, and down the wooden stairs to see what the commotion is about. But instead, the kitchen is now on the left. Leon steps into the kitchen with now differently colored cabinets and tries to assess the situation.

“Um. You guys oka—”

And suddenly a bottle is thrown straight at his head. Leon dodges just in time as his father says, “Didn’t. Didn’t I tell you. To take the trash. Out last. Night?”

Leon holds his nose. “Jeez Dad,” Leon says, looking at his father’s bloodshot eyes, his sloppy and stitched up orange sweater, receding hairline, and pudgy face. His pants have countless holes in them.

“Um. Dad. Are you okay?”

“No,” Leon’s mother says, rushing into the kitchen with a broom and dustpan, sweeping up piles of glass. “He’s not okay. Talk to him, *Néol*. He’s spending all of our rent money on booze again.”

“Oh,” Nero says, “and you know...*hiccups*...what you should do? Since... Since you’re the breadwinner! You should decide how we spend MY money!”

“Good idea! It might not all get blown away, then!” Leon’s

mother yells.

"I want you out. Tired of you," Nero mutters.

"You don't mean that," Silvia says coldly.

"You better. Hope I don't. Where would you go anyway?"

Leon's heart starts to crack. "Guys, isn't that a little harsh?"

"Wow," Leon's mother says, "I'm shocked you're getting in the middle this time." She starts to sweep up all the glass.

"Dad," Leon asks, "why are you drinking again? What about everything you did to quit?"

Silvia directs a quick glare to her husband, then Leon. "The longest your father has ever gone without a drink is two hours."

Nero walks right over and smacks Silvia right in the face. She nearly falls over. She stares at him in shock, as does Leon who then charges straight at him. But with one hand, his father pushes Leon's back straight into the kitchen counter.

"Don't you. EVER try to touch me again! *Hiccup*. Think you're a man? Protect her then!" his father shouts over Leon.

Silvia hits Nero on the head with a frying pan and shouts, "Néol! Get out!"

Fearing for what his father would do to him, Leon rushes straight for the front door. But he looks behind him to see his mother who is fearing for her life as well. She is shaking, walking away from his father who angrily stands up. Leon doesn't want to think about what can come next. He rushes back, grabs his mother's hand, and pulls her to the front door.

"I can't go! I have to stay!" his mother shouts.

"What are you talking about! We're going to Grandma's! She'll make sure you're safe there!"

"Neither of your grandmothers have their own home, you know that!"

"What?" Leon shouts back. "We just went there the other—"

“—*Néol*, you need to get out of here before he calls the cops. If you’re hit too hard, you’ll go back into a coma!”

“*Go back into a coma?* What are you—” Leon backs away. “A coma? What happened? For how long?”

“A few hours... Please go for your own good. Stay at your friends’. Or with your sister. Don’t worry about me.”

Leon’s mother opens the door and pushes him straight outside, as he stumbles from being pushed so harshly.

Leon grits his teeth. He is shaking. His fists are balled so tightly it feels like his knuckles will snap any second.

“I’m really getting tired of getting pushed around like this!” He takes a few deep breaths, then raises his head with shut eyes. Once his eyes open, he expects the blue sky but instead sees a ghastly mixture of green, yellow, and turquoise. The sky is by no means clear. It is wrapped thickly with smog. So much that one would spend hours just looking for the sun.

“Okay. Let’s backtrack. Apparently, I’ve been in a coma for a few hours. But it *looks* like it’s been a few months.” He looks up at the sky. “How did the sky go from blue to green? In a *few weeks* the climate changed this much? I think Mom’s wrong. How could so much change in just a few hours?”

Leon turns around to see his new home, and says, “Dad wouldn’t have let the grass grow this tall. All the flowers are dead. And I’m pretty sure I see cracks in the windows...” He shakes his head. “This is an entirely different house. Why are there only three bedrooms...” he says as he glances at the cracked driveway, “...and Amy’s purple car isn’t here. Wait. Whose red truck is that? It’s so run down... Dude. Did we become bankrupt or something? Did Dad lose his job?”

Leon looks at his hands. “I became...a Knight...didn’t I? Was that just a dream? What happened on my birthday?” he groans,



then turns around to the new neighborhood, shoulders sinking as he skulks to the main road. “Maybe if I find Jason, he can make sense of this. If he still wants to talk. But...if this is a new neighborhood, then how can I find him?” he asks himself.

Knowing that going back into his new home is dangerous, Leon makes his way for the unknown streets. He starts staring at the yards of his neighbors around him. Or. At least what is left.

Each of these homes is barricaded by wooden blocks. Their grass is untamed and yellow. Not a single car passes through this street. He tries to read the street sign, which should say, *Echoed Intersection*, but of course, these letters like before are—

“Unreadable. Of course!” Leon shouts, stomping the ground in anger. “What am I supposed to do?” He feels something cool move on his neck, then he shifts, and then he feels something on his chest.

“What’s this?” Leon says, grabbing the peculiar chain under his hoodie. “Uh.” And then he remembers what happened on his birthday. Allie was in front of his own house. She threw the necklace straight at his head. And he remembers how much it hurt.

Leon feels his head. “She did that, didn’t she. So then if I have this necklace... Then that means that day wasn’t a lie. What happened after that?”

Leon growls and thinks, *Well, Voice? Do you have an answer for this? You’ve been awfully quiet, you know. Damn it. Still nothing? C’mon! This is the one time you haven’t given me an idea!*

But still nothing appears in Leon’s mind. Leon wanders up and down a few streets as the sun scorches him. He takes off his hoodie and places it on his shoulder. How he thirsts for both water and answers. He wanders at least within ten different

neighborhoods...but each of these homes tells the same story.

All abandoned. All forgotten.

“Where is everyone?” Leon cries out to the green sky, now on his knees. “Jason. And I never thought I’d say this. But Deen. Jacaline. Allie. Where are you guys... Where is Amy? Where is anything?”

An engine’s roar approaches Leon. “There you are, *Néol*.”

Leon turns around, and his eyes water at the sight of his friend in a shiny two-door red sports car. “JASON!” Leon shouts.

“Who? Whatever. Get in,” Jason says.

Leon nearly trips over his two feet while running over to his friend. The friend that he thought hated him for his choice. But now, even after his graduation, has come to make amends. Jason, Leon’s only friend is here, now, to save him from this nightmare.

But before Leon gets in the red car—he notices that Jason’s driving from the right side of the vehicle.

“You coming in? Or what?”

Leon doesn’t know what to do. Be confused? Or embrace his friend.

“Jason,” Leon says desperately, rushing toward him and hugging him with one arm as Jason pushes him to the side.

“What the hell, dude?” he shouts, pushing Leon to the side. “You’re gonna mess up my flannel.”

Leon takes no offense to this. He lays his back on the seat and says, “Dude. I’m so happy to see you.” Leon looks at the future-like interior, then pokes his head to glance at the car’s exterior. “What model vehicle is this? Is this from the UK?”

Leon now notices that they’re even driving on the left side of the road.

“You definitely lost your mind in the hospital. That was some

coma.”

Leon’s face straightens. *You too with this coma thing? I’ll roll with it.*

“Yeah...” Leon trails off. “I just don’t know what’s going on. My mom and dad are fighting. I’m in a new house. Everything’s just really weird. The neighborhood’s changed.”

“Uh...your mom and dad fighting is old news, kid. They’ve always been doing that.”

Leon’s eyebrow raises. “Yeah? Maybe while I was in a coma, but not before then.”

“I oughta back hand you for acting like this.”

“What’s with you?”

“What’s with me? What’s with you—wandering around like you lost your mind.”

“Excuse me for trying to find my way around this area.”

Jason grabs a cigarette from his flannel pocket and lights it, and Leon’s jaw drops.

Jason puffs on the cigarette and blows the smoke straight into Leon’s face, making him cough. “Why’s your mom calling me, asking where you are? You know how that’s gonna make you look with your girl?”

Nothing Jason says makes sense. Nothing about how Jason looks resembles anything Leon knew.

Leon pauses and takes a good look at [Jason](#). He notices how long Jason’s hair is. It’s red, long, and spiky. Since when could he grow it so long? And his taste in fashion has changed. Jason always dressed conservatively—never with flashy colors or complicated patterns. But here he is in a flannel with asymmetrical tones. Even his ears are pierced.

Leon doesn’t say it aloud, but he does think, *What...happened to you?*

Leon faces forward in his seat. “Tell me about this coma, Jason.”

“I’m not telling you crap until you call me the right name,” he says, shifting the car’s gears, swinging Leon forward.

“Dude!” Leon cries out at Jason’s reckless driving. “Whatever you do, don’t take me home!”

“I’m not. I’m taking your ass to the facility. Ever since you went there weeks ago, you’ve been acting different.”

“What?” *Wait! That’s it! The facility! They’ll have all my answers!* Leon exclaims in thought. He sits back. *And if that’s the case, I get to save myself all the trouble of walking. Because he knows this new neighborhood better than I do. But what did he mean by...the right name? And he’s one to talk. He called me by a weird name too.*

© © ©

???????? ???? , ??? (???????)

Colorado / \ Aurorae

The Earthshine Facility / \ The Courtyard

Time: Unknown

It was an awkward car ride for Leon. Jason just puffed away on cigarettes while driving him to the facility. He took routes that Leon had never seen before. These were routes that Leon could not have imagined would bring him here. What a godsend to have been at the right place at the right time. They passed a bunch of foreclosed houses, many shut down restaurants, and arrived in front of a long-rusted fence spanning countless acres.

Leon is used to seeing a long courtyard filled with luscious grass or snow, depending on the time of year. But now... What Leon sees is literally... The opposite.

“This place cures depression, right?” Jason asks as Leon steps

out of the left side of the sports car. “Fix what you’ve got goin’ on, then we’ll talk. We need to go back out and bag us some girls.”

Leon tilts his head in confusion, *The last girl I talked to was Allie, Jason.*

Jason chuckles. “Still loyal to your group of girls, I see. I feel ya. Haha. Whatever man, just call me whenever your mind’s right. I’ll be waiting for you.” He revs the car up a few times, and Leon shouts, “Wait, Jason!”

“Not my name!” he shouts, speeding off into the distance.

Leon gives a long heavy sigh and faces the [Earthshine Facility](#) ahead of him. The building, unlike everything else Leon has seen today, looks similar. Not the same. But. Similar. But only in the aspects of its architecture. This building looks like it has been abandoned for years. Like a great fire overtook it and all its beloved paint. And then rain consumed it to bring all the rust he sees. There are also vines that have overtaken its many windows and doors, making it the graveyard it is now.

Leon places his hands in his pockets. “I forgot. Do I still have the beeper? My parents will track me down if I have it,” Leon says, looking in his pocket but finds nothing. Instead, he finds something on the ground.

“A lighter?” Leon leans down to the grass and picks up a red lighter. He examines it closely and flicks the flame which burns his thumb, causing him to drop it. He picks it up and puts it in his pocket.

“Something tells me I’m gonna need this...”

Leon walks past the lifeless, rusting fountain to the front doors which are not automatic like the ones he remembers, but instead there are two doors for him to pull open. He tries yanking them a few times and dust falls down on his head.

“Kinda wish I tried the back door like yesterday,” Leon says with narrowing eyes. He dusts the dust off himself and moves forward after pushing the heavy door open. It’s pitch-black inside the Earthshine Facility.

He grabs the lighter from his pocket and uses its light to try and see ahead of him. He shines the tiny flame on the wooden floor ahead to see random holes in the ground. These holes vary in size. Some big. Some wide. Some gigantic.

*It’s best not to fall into any of them.* He thinks.

He wanders forward for a bit, accidentally walking into a large cobweb, thick like a vine. Leon sees another light. Not a big one, but one shaped like a line, like it’s coming from a door.

Leon swallows. “I think I hear someone’s voice.”

With the red lighter acting as Leon’s little lantern, he wanders forward through the facility to the sound of an old man’s laughter.

As Leon gets a better understanding of his surroundings, he assumes that either a fight occurred in here, or there was an earthquake that shook the place so badly that the ground uprooted—collapsing pillars, columns, desks, and countless things. Leon thinks of this hallway as the *patches of black space*. Leon follows the sound, finally able to lean against a wall. He sees writing and tries to read it. This is what he sees:

ገፀገ ሰጠገጌጌ

“Still can’t tell what this says,” Leon says, annoyed. Leon feels around this space and finds a doorknob. He pushes it open to find a familiar face—Stefano Giro at his desk, chomping on vanilla frosted doughnuts while on his cellphone.

“Yes, haha. Of course, Miles. Tell *Selim* I say hello. Alright.

You two be safe now.”

Stefano slams his flip phone shut, then nearly falls back on his chair after seeing the boy in blue staring right at him.

“Good heavens above!”

“Ah!” Leon shouts. “Sorry!”

“I just. I wasn’t expecting to find you here so soon,” Stefano says, standing up and dusting his face and looking at the calendar on the wall.

“Leon. Happy Birthday,” he says, charging over, pulling him in tightly for a hug, “and congratulations on your graduation.”

Leon’s arms are stiff as the old man hugs him tightly, swinging him around, *He...he just called me...Leon...*

The old man with silver hair releases Leon, and he backs away from the old man.

“Dr. Giro. What is going on?”

Stefano tries to speak but Leon shouts, “Explain to me what’s going on, now! Why did you—why are you—” Leon’s eyes tear up. “What’s happening to me!”

Stefano backs away, crosses his arms, leans against his desk, and listens intently as Leon vents, and his shouts echo throughout the facility.

“What happened to my family? What happened to me becoming a Knight? What’s with my friends? My home? Why is everyone and YOU being so weird?!”

Leon leans against the bookshelf. “Nothing’s making sense anymore... Is this another dream? Am I in another coma?”

“You’re not in another coma. Nor is this a dream,” Stefano says soothingly.

“How do I know? The last thing I remember is—”

“—Falling into a mirror?”

Leon’s jaw drops. “Y—yeah...because of you! Yeah! You—well

not you, but you had those weird, masked people push me into one! And then. And then ever since then...things have changed.”

“And I to assume you’re also having issues with reading?”

“Ye—okay. How did you know that?”

Stefano raises his finger and smiles. “I have an idea. You write down three scenarios that you think are occurring. And then we’ll talk about what you’ve written.”

“Okay.”

Stefano retrieves a piece of paper and gives Leon the pen and paper so he can write.

“Now,” Stefano says, “turn it over so that none of us can see it. What did you write?”

“I wrote, *future*, *dream*, and *nightmare*.”

“So. What makes you believe that this is the future?”

Leon shakes his head. “You haven’t changed at all...”

“It’s more beneficial if you work for the answer rather than have me spoon-feed it to you. Now. Tell me about your theory on this *future*.”

“Well. The easiest thing is. Wait. Can I have a doughnut?”

“I thought you’d never ask,” Stefano says, grabbing one from the box and handing it to Leon with a napkin. There are seven more left.

“I’m sorry. I’m just starving. I don’t know when or what I ate last,” he says taking a bite. “Thanks.”

“Well, you came at a good time. I just returned from *Ear*—anyway carry on...”

“Right. The future. Well. From what I remember. It was just my birthday which is in the winter. But here and today—it’s the summer. Feels like it’s June, if anything.”

“Alright. Now tell me about the dream. Or. Nightmare, if you prefer.”



Leon finishes the rest of the doughnut, and Stefano says, “Have another.”

Leon giddily leans over for another with his same napkin.

“I guess it’s mostly just that,” Leon says. “Every bad thing you could think of happening to me is happening. Like. My dad’s drinking again. And I watched him hit my mom. He never did that before. Even when I was a kid. But my mom stood there like this wasn’t the first time. And. Everyone’s saying that I was in a coma, which *really* makes me worry about *what else* happened when I was asleep.”

“And then,” Stefano grabs another doughnut, “everyone is most likely calling you by a *certain* name.”

“Yeah,” Leon nods.

“Would you look at the paper you wrote on, please?”

“Okay. What the!”

ἔρημῆριπ, τῶρηϜ, ἔρηπ

“What kind of magic—how did I—” Leon shouts.

“—Not being able to read is one of the many side effects of one’s first time entering this dimension. All starts off as a foreign language you cannot decipher.”

“*Dimension?*”

“Take as many doughnuts as you need, Leon. You’re going to hear more than most Knights would during their first day of being *here*.”

“Where is *here*? Where did *you* bring me?”

Stefano stands up with his hands behind his back, and Leon recedes, grabbing the chair once more, aiming its legs to the therapist.

“Wait. I. Déjà vu... I did this already...” Leon looks up at Stefano, “...except...you...*you had a blade out*.”

Leon takes a good look at Stefano now, noticing major

differences in the old man.

Stefano looks exactly how Leon remembered him. He has a wild full gray beard and mustache. Longer but curlier silver hair on his head, and he's wearing his same blue sweater and khakis. On his sweater is a certain symbol. The symbol is neither Pawn, Bishop, nor Knight, however. No. Leon's never seen this before. Leon lowers his chair and sets it back down.

"I take no offense seeing how being around me makes you apprehensive. Believe me, if I were you, I would have done the same. I've seen many people in that same seat you held, do worse. The man you saw—the one who looks like me—he brought you *here*."

"Here. You mean to this neighborhood."

"*To this galaxy.*"

Leon blinks and rubs his eyes, and Stefano places his unbitten doughnut down onto the table.

"Leon," Stefano says, sitting back down, "you're probably wondering why all these things have changed in such a short time. I tell you with relief that this is *not* the future. It is also *not* a dream."

"So, it's real."

"Yes. Where you and I once lived was a galaxy known as the Milky Way. But here in this world—things have the chance to be the opposite. The man you met was my reflection. And his name was *Festano Igor* who brought you to *The Murky Way*."

Leon looks down at the doughnuts, then back at Stefano. "Were there drugs in those?"

Stefano bursts out laughing. "No, no. I'm serious, Leon."

"Were there drugs in mine?"

"No..."

"Okay. I think I've heard enough today," Leon says, heading

for the door.

Stefano asks, “Did he have a mustache? Green jacket and pants? A deep gruff voice?”

Leon grabs the doorknob, and Stefano adds, “Did a bunch of masked individuals pick you up from the Earthshine Facility?”

He now twists the knob, and Stefano continues, “Was there a boy with curly hair?”

Leon turns around. “Yes?”

“Yes, to all? Or just yes to one?”

“All.”

“That person with the mustache you saw, was my reflection.”

“And the boy I saw?”

“A boy who was also a patient at the Earthshine Facility. Someone you went to school with.”

“Dr. Giro, no offense, but do you hear how you sound right now?”

Stefano says nothing.

Leon continues, “A world that reflects ours? A multiverse? Don’t you think the future makes more sense than anything you just said? We’re six months ahead of our own time, Dr. Giro.”

“Do you have a better explanation as to why everyone has called you a different name?”

“What, *Neol* or whatever?”

Stefano grabs the same piece of paper and starts writing.

“I can’t read, remember?”

“Oh, right,” Stefano chuckles. “Alright then. Try and use the letters in your own name, and see if it matches what they’ve been calling you.”

“Alright,” Leon sits back down and talks aloud while writing, “*Noel*? No. *Lone*? That’s dumb. *Ne*—” He pauses. And suddenly everything comes together. His mother, his father, and his own

best friend have called him by the name—Néol.

“It’s...true...they have called me that.”

Stefano smiles, then grabs a photo from his wallet showing a picture of himself and the same man who Leon mistook for him.

“Is this the same man you saw?” Stefano asks, pointing to the angry [doppelgänger](#) next to him.

“Unbelievable...” Leon utters.

“If one thought created the universe, then who was the first to think? It is this thought which gives birth to the idea—that someone out there, somebody unknown to us, pondered... *What if there was a world that reflected ours?* That question, I believe, is what made this place... Or perhaps, even planet Earth.”

After this explanation, Stefano lets Leon digest what he can.

“Can I have another doughnut?” Leon asks, but this time in a sad tone.

“Absolutely.” Stefano hands him a brand-new doughnut with even a new napkin.

“I guess I have one question,” Leon says, taking a small bite.

Stefano nods.

“Earlier, you said I wasn’t supposed to be here so soon. What did you mean by that?”

“Oh. Well. Hmm. I’ll try to explain it without overwhelming you. But. It’s obvious, now, that you’ve been brought against your will, correct?”

Leon nods.

“Well. Normally when people are brought to this world, they normally don’t come and find me until a few days have passed. Sometimes a few weeks. I’ve had some show up even after

months. But. *Normally*. I would visit them in their new homes to try and break them into this new situation—and gently. You on the other hand, Leon, showed up maybe not what—a few hours after your *switch*?”

“Well, everyone here has been saying I was in a coma, so are you sure it’s not been a couple months?”

“Well, your switch took place on December eleventh. And. Today is June twelfth.”

Leon narrows his eyes. “But yet, we’re not in the future?”

Stefano shakes his head. “No. But we *are* six months ahead of our own time.”

“What?”

“You see, that is what I meant when I said I try to wean people onto these concepts slowly... Of course it’s going to be hard for you. You lived one way, knew your own concepts for so long that naturally all of this would overwhelm you. But yes. We are twelve hours ahead of time, and we are also six months ahead.”

Leon swallows. “You’re right. This *is* a lot to take in.”

“Well, you’ve always been a person who liked having the answers right away. Which. Isn’t necessarily a bad thing.”

“But also, isn’t always good. Because. You’re right. Sometimes I can be impatient.”

“But. You should see this as a benefit. You didn’t wait for things to come to you. You fought. And I think that makes you special.”

Leon fights a smile and asks, “So, why are *you* here? Did your reflection switch you too?”

“Well, I’m around to serve as everyone’s guide. So. When a Knight is switched here from Planet Earth, it is my job to walk them through everything. Otherwise—they’ll be vulnerable to the dangers of knowing nothing.”

“Like with me not being able to read.”

Stefano nods. “And there’s much worse than that. But. I digress. For people who’ve been switched to this world, I normally reach out to them. I would visit them in their new homes, tell them about this place, the rules, what to expect, etc.”

“Why do that for them, though?”

“To arm themselves with knowledge, with the hope that they will fight my reflection back.”

Leon yawns. “Sorry. It’s not you. I’m just. Wow. This was a lot.”

“But you kept up. I’m impressed.”

“So. What now? If I’m in this reflecting world, how do I get home?”

“Well...that’s not really easy for me to answer.”

“Oh?”

“We must first speak about *your* reflection, Leon. The boy named *Néol Yelltnarg*.”

Leon trembles at his name but continues listening.

“That boy was the supposed devil-voice in your mind. Has been. Always was. He had a life and under my reflection’s suggestion, switched you here to *Planet Heart*, for his gain.”

“But why? Why go through all of that? What do I have that he doesn’t?”

“I apologize ahead of time,” Stefano says, looking at the clock on his rust colored amulet, “but I’m short for speaking. I must be on my way. I’m visiting someone named *Ombretta* to see how she’s dealing with all of this. After her, I’ll be traveling to visit a few others who are also in your situation.”

“So, am I supposed to just go back to Neol’s house? I’m gonna be honest, I don’t really feel comfortable being there. My—I mean...his dad and I...well we almost fought. And while I’d like

to try and protect my—I mean...”

“Don’t worry, you’ll get used to it.”

Leon nods. “I’d like to protect my—I mean. His mom. But. I’d also like to prevent any more conflicts.”

“Hmm.” Stefano starts packing a few things into his briefcase. “There’s an option for people in your situation. Two, but *one* of those options isn’t available to you right now. Your one option is to stay *here* at the *Heartshine Facility*. At least for fifteen days.”

“Fifteen?”

“Yes. Stay here for fifteen days so that you can learn all that you need to about this world—as it takes fifteen days to be able to read and decipher words. But. Here at least, you’ll be safe. You’ll be safe from Néol’s unruly family, and you’ll be safe from anyone else that would figure out your *true* identity.”

“No offense, Dr. Giro, but this place is a trash heap.”

“Not all of it,” Stefano says with his briefcase in hand. “Come. I will show you to a room I made specifically for people in your shoes.”

And so, Leon follows Stefano outside the room. Stefano leads, turning on the lights inside as they both head up a broken staircase to the third floor. Stefano on occasion warns him about which of the steps are the faultiest.

Stefano brings Leon to an all-white room with a twin bed, a desk, and a stack of booklets titled, *Equilibrium & Chaos*. Leon walks over to the desk and grabs one of them. It is a book with what looks like two churches. Or. Two towers. The side on the left has doves perched atop a tall tower, and a murder of crows perched atop the tower on the right.

“You’re welcome to keep one of those. I made them for people who are switched here.”

Leon places it down onto the bed. “Thanks,” he says in a sad

tone.

“Inside that dresser over there are packs of granola bars, unsalted peanuts, and bottles of water. I stuffed all that I could in there.”

“Dr. Giro, after these fifteen days, how do I get home? Why was I brought here in the first place? I know you mentioned my reflection, but I feel like there’s more.”

“There’s a lot more. So much that I cannot explain in a day. What I suggest for now, though, is that you look through that booklet. I know you can’t read but look at the pictures. Let them be your visual aid.”

“Yes, but. How. Can. I. Get home. You’re not answering that.”

Stefano takes a long sigh. “I don’t know how to say this, Leon, but... You won’t be able to go home. Not for a long time.”

Leon’s heart shatters. “So if he switched me here, we can’t switch back?”

“You can...but the forces behind why you both switched are more nefarious than you could imagine. It’s a miracle you came here in one piece. Many people are not as fortunate as you. And believe me. I acknowledge the pain you’re feeling. Leon, my suggestion is that for now you stay in this facility, avoid bringing attention to yourself, and *do not* go wandering around outside. You make yourself a target for them and they’ll destroy you.”

Leon plops onto the bed. “I don’t believe this.”

“I’m sorry,” Stefano says, turning away. “I know this isn’t what you wanted to hear. But I promise. You will find your purpose in this. This isn’t an ending but can be a positive beginning. I’m late. I have to go, but I *will* be here for you during these fifteen days. At least. I’ll try my best to be. Goodbye, Leon. Be safe,” Stefano says, shutting the door to the white room.



“Yeah. You too.”

Leon glances at the booklet. He sits on his bed and opens it to the first page. He can't read it, but [here is what it shows:](#)

# THE END (FOR NOW)

Thanks so much for reading! I hope you enjoyed those last few chapters.

[See what others said about this story:](#)

If you would like to keep reading, then simply use this link to purchase:

[The Other Side I: Remastered](#)

[Check out all of our social media affiliates!](#)