

SCIENCE

WHERE TUESDAY FOLDS AROUND ITSELF

a relay in eight chapters

RELAY • WRITERS

The writers

Eight people who never met. One chapter each, in the order it was written.

ONE

jmarsh

TWO

Lior Tannen

THREE

wordsbylena

FOUR

JUK3

FIVE

Dan Okafor

SIX

typewriter_tom

SEVEN

Sasha Loomis

EIGHT

Iris Beddoe

Chapter

ONE

written by jmarsh

The laboratory had been built into the side of a cliff, and in the years since its abandonment, the rock itself had begun to reclaim what was rightfully stone. Calcifications crept along the ceiling beams like frozen waterfalls; mineral deposits painted the walls in colors that belonged to no human palette. Dr. Miriam Wex stood in what had once been the observation theater, her breath visible in the cold air that seeped through fissures in the concrete, and thought about how buildings remember. The equipment remained, of course. Great hulking machines whose purposes had become obscure with time, their metal housings spotted with rust that looked almost deliberate, as if the corrosion followed some pattern only the building understood. She had spent three days cataloging the instruments, each one stranger than the last: a carousel of glass spheres filled with liquid that never quite settled, even when left untouched for hours; a console studded with dials labeled in a notation system she could not decode, though the symbols seemed almost familiar, like words glimpsed in peripheral vision; a chamber lined with mirrors that did not reflect her image correctly, showing instead a version of herself that moved a fraction of a second out of sync. It was the logbooks that had drawn her here, those water-damaged volumes discovered in an estate sale, their pages filled with entries that described experiments in temporal elasticity. The phrase itself was

magnificent in its audacity: temporal elasticity, as if time were a substance that could be stretched, compressed, made to yield under sufficient pressure. The researchers had been attempting, so far as she could determine from the fragmentary records, to isolate a single moment and examine it from within, to stand inside a second and observe its architecture. They had chosen Tuesdays. This detail appeared repeatedly in the margins, often underlined, sometimes accompanied by calculations that spiraled into illegibility. Tuesdays, they claimed, possessed a unique structural quality, a porousness that other days lacked. Mondays were too dense, weighted with beginnings. Wednesdays sat too firmly in the week's center, anchored by their position. But Tuesdays, those overlooked middle children of the weekly cycle, could be pried open like oysters. The final entry in the last logbook had been dated a Tuesday in October, forty-seven years ago. It read, simply: "We have achieved insertion. The moment expands to contain us. We will remain here, in the folds, until we understand the mechanism." Below this, in a different hand, shakier: "It keeps beginning again." Miriam had found the first evidence of the loop three hours after arriving at the facility. A coffee cup, still faintly warm, sitting on a desk in the lower level. Her coffee cup, she realized with a start, identical down to the lipstick mark on the rim, though she had not yet descended to the lower level, had not yet poured herself coffee from the thermos in her bag. When she returned upstairs, the thermos was empty, and she could not recall drinking from it. Now, standing in the observation theater as afternoon light slanted through the narrow windows, she noticed that the shadows fell at precisely the same angle as they had when she first entered the room. She checked her watch: 2:47 PM. She had checked it moments before: 2:47 PM. The second hand swept forward, reached the twelve, and then, with a motion so subtle she might have imagined it, seemed to catch slightly, to hesitate, before continuing its circuit. Outside, through the windows that overlooked the valley, she could see the same bird, or perhaps a different bird of the same species, flying the same trajectory it had flown before, its wings

beating in an identical rhythm. The trees bent in wind that repeated itself like a phrase in music, and somewhere in the facility's depths, a pipe dripped water onto stone with the persistence of something that had forgotten it could stop. Miriam descended the stairs toward the lower levels, where the machines hummed with electricity that should not have been flowing, and wondered whether she had already descended these stairs, whether she was living Tuesday for the first time or the thousandth, and whether the building itself, with its creeping stone and deliberate rust, might be the only thing that still remembered.

Chapter

TWO

written by Lior Tannen

The maintenance logs were where Miriam found Mrs. Chen. Not the woman herself, though there were traces of her everywhere once you knew to look: a wool cardigan draped over a chair in the break room, still holding the shape of shoulders; reading glasses on a chain; a lunch sack with "TUESDAY" written across it in blue marker, the letters careful and square, the way someone who learned to write English late in life might form them. Miriam had opened the sack without thinking. Inside: a thermos of soup (cold now, or perhaps always cold in this place), an apple cut into eighths, a small paper napkin folded into the shape of a crane. The logs themselves were spiral notebooks, the cheap kind sold in drugstores, their covers decorated with flowers or geometric patterns. Mrs. Chen, whoever she was, had kept them faithfully. They recorded burned-out light bulbs, replaced fuses, thermostats adjusted. But also: peculiar weather on the hillside (fog that moved against the wind), equipment that activated itself, doors that locked from the inside though no one had touched them. "Third Tuesday in a row," read one entry from March, written in that same careful hand, "that I arrive to find my coat already on the hook. I know I take it home. I remember taking it home. Jerry says I'm working too hard. Maybe he's right." Miriam sat at the small desk where the notebooks had been stacked, twelve of them spanning five years. The dates were methodical. Mrs.

Chen had worked Tuesdays and Thursdays, nine to three, ever since the facility had been partially reopened as a storage site for university equipment. Her entries were almost domestic in their attention: she worried about draft from the north windows, about mice in the walls, about whether the old generator could survive another winter. She brought seeds for the birds. She noticed when the vending machine needed restocking, though no one had used it in months. And then, gradually, the entries began to change. "The clocks are wrong again. All of them. Same time: 2:47. I fixed them last week. I fixed them yesterday. I think I fixed them yesterday." "Found my spare keys in the ignition of my car. I don't remember leaving them there. I don't remember having spare keys." "Jerry called to ask if I was coming home for dinner. I told him I'd just arrived. He said no, I called him three hours ago to say I was staying late. I don't remember calling." The notebooks became harder to read after that. Not because the handwriting deteriorated, it remained as careful as ever, but because the entries stopped following a clear chronology. Dates repeated. Whole paragraphs appeared twice, three times, with only minor variations. "I think," Mrs. Chen had written, and then crossed out. "I think," she started again on the next line, "that Tuesdays are longer here." Miriam found herself reading one entry over and over, though she couldn't say why it caught her: "Brought almond cookies today. Put them in the break room for anyone who might come by. Found them there when I arrived. They were still warm. My mother used to say that kindnesses echo in empty places, that they can't be lost, only repeated. I wonder if she knew something I'm only now learning. I wonder if she was trying to warn me." The last notebook ended mid-sentence: "I have been here before. I will be here again. Tuesday folds around itself like dough, and I am" Miriam stood. Her legs felt stiff, though she couldn't remember sitting down. The light through the windows was the same amber it had been, the same angle. She looked at her watch: 2:47. In the break room, on the small table by the window, she found a paper plate. On it: six almond cookies, still warm.

Chapter

THREE

written by wordsbylena

Six cookies. Miriam counted again: six. She touched the edge of one with her index finger. Temperature approximately 35 degrees Celsius, consistent with fresh removal from an oven no more than ten minutes prior. No oven in this facility. She had checked. There was a microwave in the break room, manufactured 1987 according to the plate on the back, but microwaves heated unevenly, created hot spots in the molecular structure of food. These cookies showed uniform heat distribution across their surface. She picked up the first cookie and broke it in half. Sixteen almond slivers visible in the cross-section. Texture: 3.2 centimeters in diameter, weight approximately 28 grams. She placed both halves back on the plate in their original position. The fracture line ran at a forty-three degree angle from the cookie's center. Seventeen steps from the break room to Mrs. Chen's desk. Miriam counted them twice. Both times: seventeen. She opened the last notebook again. Read the final entry. "I have been here before. I will be here again. Tuesday folds around itself like dough, and I am" Twelve words. The sentence ended mid-line. Three-quarters down the page. Approximately four centimeters of empty space below it, then the page ended. She turned to the next page: blank. Turned another page: blank. Forty-eight blank pages remaining in the notebook. Miriam returned to the break room. Picked up the second cookie. Broke it. Fourteen almond

slivers. She placed it beside the first. Her watch read 2:47. She went to the observation theater. The shadow line on the eastern wall terminated exactly at the third rivet from the floor. She took a pencil from her pocket and made a mark on the wall at the shadow's edge. Returned to the break room. Her watch: 2:47. Back to the observation theater. The shadow touched the third rivet. Her pencil mark was gone. No. Not gone. Never made. Miriam pressed her palm against the wall where the mark should have been. The concrete was cold. Uniformly cold. She counted to sixty, then removed her hand. No heat transfer visible, no moisture print. She pressed her palm there again. Counted to sixty. Removed it. Same result. She needed to establish causality. If time was looping, there would be a mechanism. Mechanisms left evidence. In the lower level, the machines hummed at a frequency she estimated at 127 hertz. She had no tools to measure it properly, but she could feel it in her back teeth, could count the oscillations per second by the vibration in her jaw. She walked the perimeter of the largest machine, the one with the carousel of glass spheres. Counted her steps: forty-one steps to circle it completely. Each sphere contained liquid, she had noted before, but now she observed: the liquid's surface showed ripples, concentric circles expanding from each sphere's center. Spheres one, three, five, seven, nine, and eleven: ripples expanding. Spheres two, four, six, eight, ten, and twelve: ripples contracting. Alternating pattern. She stood perfectly still and watched sphere number one for sixty seconds. The ripples expanded at a rate of one complete circle per 4.7 seconds, approximately. Thirteen cycles in sixty seconds. She watched for another sixty seconds. Thirteen cycles. The pattern held. Mrs. Chen had brought six cookies. There were twelve spheres. Twelve notebooks. Miriam checked her watch: 2:47. She ran up the stairs. Did not count them. Burst into the break room. Six cookies on the plate. She picked up the third cookie. Held it. Did not break it. Walked to the observation theater. Shadow at the third rivet. Walked to Mrs. Chen's desk. The wool cardigan still held the shape of shoulders. She touched it. The wool was rough under her fingers, handmade, she thought, someone had knit this. Someone had sat with needles and yarn

and made something to keep another person warm. Her watch: 2:47. Miriam looked at the cookie in her hand. Counted the almond slivers visible on its surface: nineteen. She had not yet broken this one open to check the interior count. She would. She needed data. But first she needed to understand what happened if she removed something from its expected position. She put the cookie in her pocket. Walked to the observation theater. Her watch: 2:47. The cookie was still in her pocket. She could feel its weight, its warmth.

Chapter

FOUR

written by JUK3

Miriam kept the cookie in her pocket.

She did not remove it. Not yet. Its presence was sufficient proof of persistence. One object, transferred across at least one iteration without reversion. That was enough to justify escalation.

Objects could survive.

The next question was whether information could.

She returned to Mrs. Chen's desk and opened the final notebook. The unfinished sentence remained where she had seen it before:

"I have been here before. I will be here again. Tuesday folds around itself like dough, and I am"

Twelve words. Incomplete.

Miriam examined the space beneath it. Enough room for one additional line.

She removed a pen from her coat pocket. Black ink. Standard ballpoint. She tested it once on the inside cover.

She considered what to write.

Not a question. Questions introduced ambiguity. Not a belief. Beliefs could not be measured.

It needed to be something verifiable.

She wrote:

"Object persists across iteration."

She printed the letters carefully, matching the spacing of the lines above. When she finished, she placed the pen beside the notebook and stepped back.

Her watch read 2:45.

She went to the observation theater.

The shadow line terminated at the third rivet from the floor. She noted its position. She stood for sixty seconds, counting each second silently.

At fifty-nine, the hesitation came. Not in the environment, but in her perception, as though her awareness lagged behind the passage of time by a fraction too small to measure directly.

Her watch read 2:46.

She returned to the desk.

The notebook lay where she had left it. The pen remained beside it.

She opened to the final page.

The sentence remained unchanged.

Her line was still present.

But it was no longer alone.

A second line had appeared beneath hers.

“Subject does not.”

Miriam did not move.

She read both lines again.

Her own handwriting was precise. Even. Deliberate.

The second line was not.

The letters were narrower. Compressed. The “t” crossed twice. The final stroke of the last word dragged slightly, the ink heavier at the end.

Not hers.

Not Mrs. Chen’s.

She checked her watch.

2:47.

In the lower level, the hum shifted.

Not louder. Not softer. Different.

Miriam closed the notebook and descended.

The machine with the glass spheres occupied the center of the room.
She moved to the first sphere.
The liquid was still.
No ripples.
She checked the next.
Still.
All twelve.
The alternating pattern had ceased.
Miriam circled the machine once.
Forty-one steps.
She circled again.
Forty-two.
She stopped.
The count did not match.
She placed her hand against the metal housing. It felt warmer than
before.
In the nearest sphere, she saw her reflection.
It lagged.
A full second.
She raised her hand.
The reflection followed.
Late.
She lowered it.
Late.
Miriam stepped back.
Her watch read 2:47.
The second hand reached twelve.
Continued.
Reached one.
Stopped.
Miriam listened.
No ticking.
The machine emitted a single sustained tone.

She turned.

Sphere six had darkened.

The liquid within it clouded from the center outward, opacity spreading like ink through water.

A shape formed inside.

Human in proportion. Indistinct.

It moved.

Not in response to her.

Independently.

The shape raised an arm and pressed it against the inside of the glass.

For a moment, the surface of the sphere deformed outward, as if the boundary between interior and exterior possessed elasticity.

Then it settled.

The liquid cleared.

The sphere returned to transparency.

The tone ceased.

Silence.

Miriam looked at her watch.

The second hand remained at one.

She returned to the break room.

The plate sat on the table by the window.

Six cookies.

She reached into her pocket and removed the cookie.

Still warm.

She placed it on the plate.

Seven.

She stepped back.

Waited.

Nothing changed.

Miriam picked up one of the cookies and broke it.

Sixteen almond slivers.

She placed the halves down.

Seven cookies.

Eight pieces.
Her watch did not move.
The building did not shift.
The loop did not reassert itself.
Miriam stood very still.
She had assumed the system repeated Tuesday.
She had assumed deviation would be corrected.
These assumptions were no longer supported by observation.
The system had responded.
It had not restored the original condition.
It had changed the rules.
Miriam returned to the desk and looked again at the notebook.
“Object persists across iteration.”
“Subject does not.”
If the subject did not persist, continuity could not be assumed.
If continuity could not be assumed, identity could not be verified.
Miriam reached into her pocket again.
Something remained.
Paper.
She did not remember placing it there.
She removed it slowly and unfolded it.
Inside, in her own handwriting:
“Do not trust the reset.”
Then she turned the paper over.
On the reverse side, in the same narrow, compressed script as before:
“You already did.”

Chapter

FIVE

written by Dan Okafor

Miriam folded the paper once. Placed it on the desk beside the notebook. She did not look at it again. The problem was this: if she had written the message to herself, she would remember writing it. She did not remember writing it. Therefore, either memory itself was being selectively edited, or the Miriam who had written the warning was not precisely the same Miriam who now held it. Both options were inconvenient. She needed a control. Something that could mark change without being subject to it. The facility had been built into the cliff face. Stone predated human measurement systems. Stone didn't care about Tuesdays. Miriam left the desk and walked to the eastern wall of the observation theater, where the calcification was thickest. The mineral deposits formed a pattern like frozen rivers, branching and re-branching. She traced one branch with her finger from its origin point near the ceiling down to where it terminated at shoulder height. Eleven branch points. She counted again. Eleven. She took the pen from her pocket and marked the wall beside the eleventh branch. A small X. Then she walked to the lower level. The machine with the spheres remained inert. No hum. No tone. The liquids inside showed no motion whatsoever, as though they had forgotten fluidity was an option. Miriam approached sphere six, where the shape had appeared. The glass was warm. She pressed her palm flat against it. The warmth was

uniform but present. Approximately two degrees above ambient temperature. Not enough to suggest active heating. Enough to suggest recent activity. Inside, the liquid appeared clear. Colorless. But when she shifted her viewing angle, something caught the light. Suspended particles, perhaps. Or a density gradient she couldn't quite resolve. She needed better tools. She needed spectroscopy equipment, pH meters, thermocouples. She needed things that did not exist in this building, or if they existed, were forty-seven years obsolete. What she had was observational consistency and one warm cookie. Miriam returned upstairs. Her watch still read 2:47. The second hand remained frozen at one. In the break room, seven cookies remained on the plate. She picked up the one she had broken earlier. Both halves still there. She fit them back together. The fracture line aligned perfectly. She placed the reconstructed cookie back and took the note from the desk. "Do not trust the reset." "You already did." If she had already trusted it, the consequences should be observable. What happened when someone trusted a reset? They stopped taking precautions. They allowed the system to erase their interventions. They behaved as though tomorrow, or the next iteration, would offer another chance. Mrs. Chen had kept notebooks. Twelve of them. Methodical documentation spanning five years. That was not the behavior of someone who trusted resets. Miriam opened the first notebook. March, five years ago. The entries were mundane. Light bulbs. Thermostats. A cheerful note about seeing a fox on the hillside. She opened the second notebook. Six months later. Still mundane, but the handwriting had changed slightly. The letters compressed. The "t" crossed twice. Miriam felt something cold settle in her chest. She opened the third notebook. The handwriting matched the first. Fourth notebook: matched the second. They alternated. Two handwriting styles, trading off every other notebook, sometimes mid-entry, as though two people were taking turns with the same pen, describing the same events, never acknowledging the other existed. Miriam flipped through the entries faster now. There, in notebook seven: "Brought almond cookies today." And three pages later, in the

compressed script: "Found almond cookies in the break room. Mine. I remember baking them last night. But I don't remember bringing them." The pattern held through all twelve notebooks. Two Mrs. Chens. Or one Mrs. Chen, bifurcating. Miriam closed the notebooks and stacked them precisely as she had found them. She walked to the observation theater and checked the eastern wall. The calcification pattern showed eleven branch points. Her X was gone. But beside the eleventh branch, someone had carved into the stone itself. Not recent work. The edges were smooth, weathered. The carving read: XII. Twelve. Miriam touched it. The stone was cold. She returned to the lower level. All twelve spheres now showed suspended particles, just visible when the light caught them right. Not just sphere six. All twelve. She circled the machine. Forty-three steps. Her watch remained stopped. Miriam stood before sphere one and waited. After what felt like five minutes but could not be measured, the liquid began to move. Not rippling. Rotating. A slow spiral from the bottom up. Inside the spiral, darkness accumulated. The shape began to form again. This time, Miriam recognized the cardigan.

Chapter

SIX

written by typewriter_tom

The cardigan was green. Wool. Handmade. Same one draped over the chair upstairs. Miriam did not step back. The shape inside sphere one solidified. Shoulders. Arms. A head, tilted down as though the figure inside was reading something. Mrs. Chen. Not a memory of her. Not a shadow. The woman lifted her head. Her face pressed close to the glass from the inside. Her mouth moved. No sound came through. Miriam leaned closer. Tried to read the words forming on Mrs. Chen's lips. "Get, " The liquid convulsed. Mrs. Chen's face distorted, stretched sideways as though pulled by current. Then the sphere went clear again. Empty. Miriam moved to sphere two. Dark. The liquid was opaque. She placed her hand on the glass. The warmth had increased. Five degrees above ambient now, maybe more. Sphere three: empty. Four: dark. Five: empty. Six: dark, and when Miriam pressed her palm against it, something pressed back from inside. Not random pressure. A hand. Matching hers. The glass between them was two centimeters thick, she estimated. Standard borosilicate. But for a moment it felt like paper. She pulled away. The pressure remained. A handprint on the glass, fogging the surface from inside. Miriam circled faster now. Seven: empty. Eight: dark. Nine: empty. Ten: dark. Eleven: empty. Twelve was different. The liquid had formed a vortex, spinning so fast the center showed air. An empty column through the middle. And at the bottom, visible through

the hollow core: objects. Miriam crouched. The glass curved downward, the sphere's base sitting in a metal cradle. She pressed her face close. Reading glasses on a chain. A paper napkin folded into a crane. A thermos cap. A watch with a leather band. All of them swirling in the liquid's outer edge, caught in the current. Miriam stood. Her legs hurt. She had been crouching longer than she thought. Her watch still read 2:47. The second hand frozen at one. But her knees ached like she had been standing for hours. She climbed the stairs to the break room. Counted them this time. Nineteen stairs. She had counted seventeen before. The plate sat on the table. Seven cookies. No. Six. Miriam blinked. Counted again. Six cookies. Two halves placed beside them. She looked at her hand. Crumbs on her fingers. She had eaten one. She did not remember eating it. The taste of almonds sat on her tongue. Real. Recent. Miriam went to the bathroom. There was a mirror above the sink, speckled with age. She looked at her reflection. It matched her movements. No lag. She raised her left hand. The reflection raised its left hand. She smiled. The reflection did not. Miriam stopped smiling. The reflection continued. Its smile widened. Too wide. Then it stopped and matched her again. Neutral expression. Waiting. Miriam backed out of the bathroom. Her watch read 2:47. She returned to Mrs. Chen's desk and opened the final notebook. Read the last entries again. Her line: "Object persists across iteration." The response: "Subject does not." Then her own note to herself: "Do not trust the reset." And the reply: "You already did." Below that, a new line had appeared. In her handwriting. "If I am not persistent, then who is writing this?" Miriam stared at the sentence. She had not written it. But it was her handwriting. Her rhythm. The way she looped the "g" in "writing." She picked up the pen. Wrote below it: "How many of me are there?" Placed the pen down. Waited. Nothing changed. She walked to the observation theater. The shadow line still touched the third rivet. But now a second shadow had appeared beside it. Fainter. Offset by three centimeters. Two light sources. Miriam looked up at the windows. One window. One shaft of afternoon light. Two shadows. She held up her hand. Three

shadows appeared on the wall. Miriam lowered her hand slowly. Returned to the desk. A new line in the notebook. Not her handwriting this time. Mrs. Chen's first style. The careful, square letters. "Twelve." Below it, Mrs. Chen's second style. The compressed script. "We've been counting." And below that, her own writing again, but shakier: "Stop adding cookies." Miriam went to the break room. The plate held eleven cookies now. She had not added any. She checked her pocket. Empty. Her watch read 2:47. The second hand ticked backward. From one to twelve. Stopped. Ticked backward again. Miriam felt the building shift. Not physically. Something else. A pressure change. The air grew dense. In the lower level, all twelve spheres began to glow.

Chapter

SEVEN

written by Sasha Loomis

The glow was the color of television static rendered in honey. Miriam descended. Fourteen steps. Or perhaps twenty. The count kept sliding away from her like soap. All twelve spheres pulsed in unison. The liquid inside them had stopped being liquid in any conventional sense. It moved in geometric patterns. Hexagons collapsing into triangles collapsing into lines collapsing back into hexagons. A woman in her position was expected to document such things. Miriam had left her notebook upstairs near the cookies, which were multiplying. She approached sphere one. Inside, Mrs. Chen sat at a kitchen table. Not collapsed or stretched now. Sitting. Peeling an apple in one continuous ribbon. The peel spiraled down and down but never reached the table. When it should have fallen free, it simply continued, impossibly long, a red helix extending into dimensions the sphere should not have contained. Mrs. Chen looked up. Made eye contact. Pointed at Miriam with the paring knife. Sphere two contained a hallway. Cream-colored walls. Institutional lighting. At the far end, a door marked EXIT. The hallway extended backward, away from Miriam's viewpoint, but also toward her, occupying the same space. A woman walked down it. Mrs. Chen again, or someone wearing her cardigan. The woman walked and walked but the EXIT door never got closer. Sphere three: empty, but the emptiness had texture. Miriam could see it shifting, grain moving

against grain. Sphere four: Miriam's apartment. Her real apartment, two hundred miles from here. Every detail accurate down to the coffee ring on the side table, the book splayed face-down on the couch. Except the book was open to a different page now. She could see the chapter heading from here: TEMPORAL ELASTICITY AS RECURSIVE ARCHITECTURE. She had never owned that book. In sphere five, someone's hands were writing in a spiral notebook. Filling page after page. The handwriting rotated through styles. Mrs. Chen's careful print. Mrs. Chen's compressed script. Miriam's own. Others she didn't recognize. The hands wrote faster. The pen shouldn't have had that much ink. Miriam checked her watch: 2:47. The second hand spun backward three full rotations. Stopped at nine. Started counting forward from there at double speed. Sphere six showed the break room. The table. The plate of cookies. As Miriam watched, a hand reached in from off-camera and placed another cookie on the plate. Then withdrew. Then reached in again. Placed the same cookie. The pile grew. Fourteen cookies. Eighteen. Twenty-three. Behind her, the stairway creaked. Miriam did not turn around. Footsteps descended. Then stopped. Then descended again from the beginning, like someone had pulled the needle back on a record player. "You're early," Mrs. Chen's voice said. The careful version. The one that pronounced each syllable fully. "You're late," said Mrs. Chen's voice. The compressed version. The one that swallowed consonants. Miriam turned. Two women stood on the stairs. Identical. Both wearing the green cardigan. They occupied the same space but from different angles, like a photograph double-exposed. "We've been trying to get your attention," said the first Mrs. Chen. "You kept eating the cookies," said the second. Miriam looked down at her hands. Crumbs. When had she eaten another? "The spheres are not containment vessels," said the first Mrs. Chen. She descended three steps. Became slightly more solid. "They're viewing portals," said the second, descending three steps. Became slightly more transparent. "We're not trapped inside," they said in unison. "You are," said the first. Miriam turned back to the spheres. In sphere seven, she saw herself

standing in front of twelve spheres, looking at sphere seven, where she could see herself standing in front of twelve spheres, infinite recursion telescoping inward. "The experiment didn't isolate a moment," said the second Mrs. Chen. "It isolated the observers." "We're fine," said the first. "We're outside." "Where it's Wednesday," said the second. "Thursday." "September." "It's your Tuesday that keeps folding," they said together. Miriam's watch read 2:47. The second hand melted off the face and pooled at the bottom of the crystal. In sphere twelve, the vortex had stopped spinning. The objects at the bottom had fused into a single mass. As Miriam watched, the mass began to crack. Something pale pushed through. A hand. Another hand. A head. The figure pulled itself up into the hollow column at the vortex's center. It looked exactly like Miriam. It waved.

Chapter

EIGHT

written by Iris Beddoe

The figure that looked like Miriam climbed. Up through the vortex column. Hand over hand. There was nothing visible to grip but she rose anyway. Below her the fused objects split further. Watches. Thermoses. Napkins folded into birds. All of them cracking like eggs. Miriam stepped back from sphere twelve. "Don't." The first Mrs. Chen on the stairs. "She needs to." The second. "It's the only way the fold releases." "It's the only way you stop." Miriam looked at the two women. Tried to find difference between them. The same freckle on the left wrist. Same small scar above the eyebrow. "How many Tuesdays have I been here?" "Twelve," said the first Mrs. Chen. "You keep trying to leave at 2:47," said the second. "You keep resetting yourself. Eating the cookies. Trusting the pattern will stabilize." The figure in sphere twelve reached the top of the vortex. Pressed both palms against the glass from inside. Miriam matched the gesture. Palm to palm with herself. The glass was warm. Getting warmer. "The researchers thought they could step into a Tuesday and observe it from within," said the first Mrs. Chen. "But observation requires an observer. And an observer requires duration." "They created twelve observation points. Twelve Tuesday-witnesses." "We were the maintenance staff. We kept coming in. We became the vessels." "But you." They both looked at her. "You're not maintenance." "You chose this." The Miriam in sphere twelve smiled. Mouthed a single

word. Choose. The glass cracked. Not shattered. A single fracture line running from top to bottom. The liquid began to leak through. It smelled like almonds. Like burnt coffee. Like the air before lightning. Miriam pulled her hand away. The liquid pooled on the floor. Clear. Viscous. It spread in a perfect circle. Her watch read 3:16. The second hand counted forward. Normal speed. Normal time. "The fold is collapsing," said the first Mrs. Chen. "All twelve versions are converging." Miriam looked at the other spheres. In each one her apartment. Her kitchen. Her bathroom mirror. Different rooms but same conclusion. Herself looking back. "I wrote myself notes." "Yes." "I tried to warn myself." "You've always tried." "But I kept resetting. Kept trusting." The first Mrs. Chen descended the remaining steps. Became fully solid. Real. "The Tuesday loop was never meant to trap anyone. It was meant to give you enough time to decide." "Decide what?" "Whether you want to stay." Sphere twelve shattered. The Miriam inside stepped through. Glass fell around her like rain but did not cut. She stood three feet away. Identical. Down to the crumbs on her fingers. "I've been trying every permutation," the other Miriam said. "Eating cookies. Not eating cookies. Breaking patterns. Creating patterns. Talking to you. Not talking to you." "Trying to find the version that chooses correctly." "And?" Miriam heard herself ask. The other Miriam smiled. "There isn't a correct choice. There's only the choice." The remaining spheres began to crack. One by one. Not shattering. Splitting clean down the middle like seed pods. From each one another Miriam stepped out. Twelve in total. They formed a circle around her. Each one slightly different. One had cut her hair shorter. One wore different shoes. One had a scar on her hand that Miriam did not possess. Yet. "The researchers wanted to stand inside a moment and see its architecture," said the Miriam directly across from her. The one with short hair. "They succeeded. This is what Tuesday looks like from the inside. Twelve perspectives. Twelve durations. Twelve ways the same person makes the same decision." "Or doesn't," said the one with the scar. They all looked at her. Waiting. Miriam's watch read 3:28. Normal time. Moving forward. The two Mrs. Chens stood on the stairs.

They had merged now. One woman. Whole. "The building remembers," Mrs. Chen said. "That's what I wrote. Buildings remember." "We're the memory," said the Miriam with short hair. "All of us. Every version of this Tuesday that tried to complete itself." Miriam understood then. The experiment had worked. They had isolated a moment. Had stood inside it and observed its structure. But a moment observed becomes twelve moments. Becomes infinite. Unless someone chooses to stop observing. To step out. To let Tuesday end. Miriam looked at her twelve selves. At Mrs. Chen. At the broken spheres leaking liquid that smelled like almonds and choice. "I'm ready," she said. Her watch read 3:47. Wednesday began.

Afterwords

Notes the writers left after the last chapter.

JUK3

And then...

Finished on 2 May 2026.

*Written in relay on relaywriters.com: eight strangers, one chapter each, never
more than eight hundred words at a time.*

[https://relaywriters.com/read/38?t=XwbxysakceSWVTU_vcROpDl73CP
duo9t](https://relaywriters.com/read/38?t=XwbxysakceSWVTU_vcROpDl73CPduo9t)