

SCIENCE

TIME REBOOT

a relay in eight chapters

RELAY · WRITERS

The writers

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

ONE	wordsbylena
TWO	Colin McAteer
THREE	typewriter_tom
FOUR	Dario Selo
FIVE	Ruth Ann Keller
SIX	Priya Nair
SEVEN	jmarsh
EIGHT	rpenguin

Chapter

ONE

written by wordsbylena

Seven cups of coffee before noon. The barista knows my order (double espresso, no sugar, room temperature water on the side, exactly three ice cubes). I count them every time. Today she gives me four. I don't say anything because the fluorescent light above the register is flickering at 2.7-second intervals and I need to leave before it completes another cycle. The walk to the lab: 1,847 steps. I've measured it 412 times. Today it takes 1,849. I retrace my path twice to find where I added the extra two. Can't locate them. They've vanished into the pavement somewhere between the bodega and the broken parking meter that's been broken for 136 days. My keycard works on the third swipe. It always works on the third swipe. Some patterns hold. The lab smells like ozone and old carpet, a ratio of approximately 60:40. I've never actually measured it, but I know. The particle accelerator hums at 127 Hz when it's idle, 131 Hz when it's running. Right now it's silent. That's wrong. Dr. Castellanos always runs the morning calibration at 9:47 AM. It's 9:51 AM. Four minutes late. I find him in the observation room, staring at screens full of data that isn't scrolling. The numbers are frozen. Not paused, frozen. There's a difference. Paused implies intention, agency, someone pressing a button. Frozen implies something broke in a way that wasn't planned. "Did you restart the sensor array?" I ask. He doesn't turn around. "Eleven times." Eleven. A prime number. Primes always feel like

dead ends to me, numbers that won't divide into anything useful, that stand alone and refuse to be broken down. "When did it stop?" "Tuesday." "Today is Tuesday." "I know." He's still not looking at me. His reflection in the screen shows his eyes tracking something, reading the same frozen numbers over and over. I count the lines on the main display: 23 rows. Another prime. The universe is trying to tell us something in indivisibles. I pull up my own terminal. The timestamp on the frozen data reads 3:34:17 PM. I check my watch: 9:53 AM. The difference is 18 hours, 18 minutes, 43 seconds, but that's meaningless because the freeze happened on Tuesday and today is Tuesday and time doesn't loop like that. Time is supposed to be the one thing that moves in only one direction, the only measurement we can't take backwards. Except. I pull up the particle collision logs. We'd been running an experiment with paired photons, measuring entanglement decay over distance. Nothing exotic. Standard quantum mechanics, the kind of thing we do every Tuesday because the accelerator schedule rotates on a seven-day cycle and Tuesday is our day for photon experiments. The last recorded collision: 3:34:17 PM. Entry count: 8,477,213. I scroll back through the entries. Each collision recorded, timestamped, measured. The pattern is regular until entry 8,477,199. Then something stutters. The timestamps skip backwards by 0.003 seconds. Then forwards by 0.006 seconds. Then backwards again. Then the whole log repeats: entries 8,477,199 through 8,477,213 appear twice, identical timestamps, identical measurements, like the machine couldn't decide if those collisions had happened or not so it recorded them twice to be safe. Fifteen entries caught in a loop. Another dead-end number. "We should shut it down," I say. "Can't," Dr. Castellanos says. "The shutdown sequence requires a timestamp confirmation. The system won't accept Tuesday shutting down Tuesday." I look at my watch again. 9:55 AM. The second hand is moving backwards.

Chapter

TWO

written by Colin McAteer

The second hand corrects itself. Sweeps forward three seconds, pauses, continues. I tap the crystal twice. The watch was my grandfather's, mechanical, seventeen jewels, no battery to fail. It doesn't know what day it is. It only knows intervals. Dr. Castellanos finally turns around. His left eye is bloodshot in a pattern I recognize from people who've been staring at screens for more than six hours without blinking enough. The sclera shows burst capillaries arranged like tree branches. Fractal. I count nine major vessels before he blinks and I lose my place. "How long have you been here?" I ask. He looks at his own watch. Digital. The display shows 9:56 AM, then flickers to 3:34 PM, then back. "I don't know anymore." The observation room has two doors. I came through the east one, the one I always use because it requires 23 steps from the elevator and 23 is manageable, a prime I've made peace with. The west door leads to the accelerator itself, the circular tunnel that runs beneath the building in a loop exactly 847 meters in circumference. Not quite circular. An ellipse, technically, stretched along the north-south axis by 1.3 meters because of a surveying error in 1987 that would have cost two million dollars to fix. The door is open. That's wrong. Protocol requires both doors never open simultaneously. Air pressure differential. Contamination risk. The manual specifies one door closed at all times, section 7.3, paragraph four. Through the doorway I can see the tunnel

curving away into fluorescent distance. The lights inside are on. They're supposed to be off when nobody's running an experiment. They're also supposed to be white. These are blue, a wavelength I estimate at 470 nanometers, the color of Cherenkov radiation, the light that appears when particles move faster than light moves through water. There's no water in the tunnel. "Did you go inside?" I ask. Dr. Castellanos doesn't answer. He's looking at the screen again. I follow his gaze to a new detail I missed before. The frozen data isn't completely frozen. One number is incrementing. A counter in the bottom right corner, no label, just digits climbing: 8,477,214. 8,477,215. 8,477,216. The accelerator is running. The accelerator is silent. These facts can't coexist. I walk to the west door. The blue light makes everything look underwater, makes distances uncertain. The tunnel curves away and I can see approximately 200 meters before the bend hides the rest. At the limit of visibility, something moves. Not walks. Moves. A shadow that slides along the curved wall like it's being cast by a light source that's circling, but there's no light source circling, just the even blue glow from overhead. "Who else is here?" I ask. "Everyone who was here on Tuesday," Dr. Castellanos says. "How many is that?" "Depends which Tuesday." The counter on his screen reads 8,477,284. The collisions are happening faster now. Accelerating. I do the math: we've added 71 collisions in approximately 90 seconds. That's 0.79 collisions per second. Our equipment normally processes 2,300 collisions per second during active experiments. This is wrong. Too slow. Like watching something move through thick liquid. The shadow in the tunnel moves again. Closer. Still too far away to resolve into a shape. My watch reads 10:03 AM. The second hand is moving normally now. I count twelve heartbeats. My resting pulse is 67 beats per minute. Twelve beats in fifteen seconds. That's 48 beats per minute. Too slow. I'm not exercising. I'm standing still in a room that smells like ozone and something else now, something sharp. Copper. Blood has copper in it. So does the wiring in the accelerator. So do the coins in my pocket, three quarters and one dime, \$0.85, exactly enough for a phone call if pay phones still existed. The

shadow reaches the edge of visibility where the tunnel curves. It stops moving. It has my height.

Chapter

THREE

written by typewriter_tom

I take four steps backward. The shadow doesn't move. Neither do I now. We're standing still together, separated by 200 meters of tunnel and one open door that shouldn't be open. Dr. Castellanos makes a sound. Not a word. A click in his throat like he's trying to swallow and can't. I don't turn around. The shadow is more important than whatever sound he's making. It has my height and now that it's stopped moving I can see it has my width too, my shoulder span, 46 centimeters, measured once for a jacket that never fit right. "Close the door," I say. "Can't," Dr. Castellanos says. "The door close sequence requires..." "A timestamp confirmation. You said." The counter on the screen behind me, I can hear it now, each increment makes a sound like a Geiger counter, soft clicks that come faster. 8,477,290. 8,477,291. The rate is increasing. 0.79 collisions per second is now something higher. I count clicks. Sixteen in ten seconds. That's 1.6 per second. Accelerating toward normal speed. Accelerating toward whatever happens when we reach real time. The shadow moves again. Closer. I can see details now. Arms. Legs. A head. All the right proportions. All my proportions. "Did you run the experiment?" I ask. "Yes." "At 3:34 PM?" "Yes." "What changed?" Dr. Castellanos finally moves. He stands up. His chair scrapes the floor and the sound echoes wrong, takes too long to fade. "We adjusted the entanglement distance. Pushed the paired photons farther apart than

we'd ever tried. Wanted to see if quantum correlation would hold at 847 meters." The circumference of the accelerator. The full loop. "What happened?" "They stayed entangled. Perfectly correlated. But the timestamps were wrong. Photon A would hit the detector before Photon B left the source. Not by much. 0.003 seconds. But backwards." Same interval the logs showed. The stutter point. Entry 8,477,199. The shadow is close enough now that I can see it's wearing a lab coat. White, like mine. Same coffee stain on the left pocket from this morning when I counted the ice cubes wrong and one fell out of my cup. Except I didn't spill coffee this morning. The stain appeared anyway because I was going to spill it, because I always spill it on Tuesdays, because some things are determined by pattern even when they haven't happened yet. "You created a closed timelike curve," I say. "That's not possible with photons. You'd need rotating black holes. Exotic matter. We were just measuring correlation." The counter clicks faster. 8,477,312. 8,477,313. We're at 2.1 collisions per second now. Normal speed is approaching. The math says we'll reach 2,300 per second in approximately four minutes. The shadow is 50 meters away. I can see its face now. It's my face but wrong. The eyes are looking at something that isn't here. Looking through me at something behind me or inside me or in a direction that doesn't exist in normal space. "How many times did you run the experiment?" I ask. Dr. Castellanos doesn't answer. I turn around. He's backing toward the east door, the one I came through, the one that requires 23 steps from the elevator. His bloodshot eye is bleeding now, thin red line down his cheek. He's not blinking. Can't blink. His eyelid is frozen half open. "How many times?" I ask again. "Eight," he says. "We ran it eight times before the loop started. Before Tuesday wouldn't end." Prime number. Indivisible. The shadow is 30 meters away. I can see it's not casting the shadow anymore. It is the shadow. Light bends around it like it's a hole in space shaped like a person shaped like me. My watch stops. The second hand freezes at 10:07 and 34 seconds. The counter behind me hits 8,477,356 and the

clicking sound becomes a steady tone, a hum at 131 Hz. The accelerator isn't silent anymore.

Chapter

FOUR

written by Dario Selo

I need to verify that the hum is actually 131 Hz (running frequency, not idle) before I do anything else, because if the accelerator is truly running then the magnetic containment is active, which means the shadow (me, the other me, the one that exists because photons traveled backwards and created a loop) shouldn't be able to walk through the tunnel without being torn apart at the molecular level. Unless. Unless it's not matter in the way matter normally is, not atoms held together by electromagnetic force but something that exists in the gap between correlated particles, the space where entangled photons share a state despite distance. I pull the spectrometer from my pocket. I always carry it. Weight: 43 grams. Wavelength range: 340 to 780 nanometers. I point it at the shadow. The reading flickers. No single wavelength. Every wavelength simultaneously. That's white light, but this looks like absence. The spectrometer is measuring what the shadow should be, not what it is. "When you ran it eight times," I say, still not looking at Dr. Castellanos, "did you see eight of these?" "No." His voice sounds wet. The eye is bleeding faster. "Just one. Just you." Eight experiments but one shadow. The math doesn't work unless seven of the iterations collapsed into a single state, unless running the experiment multiple times didn't create multiple loops but reinforced one loop, made it more solid, more inevitable. Quantum mechanics allows superposition until

observation collapses the wave function. We observed eight times. We should have collapsed it. Instead we built it. The shadow is fifteen meters away. I can see through it now to the tunnel wall behind, but only barely, like looking through smoked glass. It's becoming opaque. Resolving. The more I observe it the more real it becomes. I walk through the west door into the tunnel. Dr. Castellanos shouts something but I'm already inside, already counting steps. Eleven steps to the nearest sensor panel. The panel should show magnetic field strength, particle velocity, containment status. It shows: Tuesday. Just the word Tuesday repeated across every readout where numbers should be. I tap the screen twice. It cracks under my finger. Not the glass. Reality. A fracture spreads from the impact point, a dark line that branches like the capillaries in Castellanos's eye, and through the crack I can see something else, another tunnel that isn't this tunnel, where the lights are white instead of blue. The shadow is ten meters away. I can hear it now. Breathing. My breathing pattern: four seconds in, seven seconds out. I counted it once during a sleep study. The pattern never changes even when I'm awake. "Why did you come back?" I ask it. It doesn't answer. Its mouth moves but no sound comes. The breathing I hear is coming from somewhere else. I'm hearing it through the crack in the panel, from the other tunnel, the white-light tunnel where another version of this is happening with different variables. The spectrometer in my hand grows warm. The temperature rises from 22 degrees Celsius to 34 degrees in the span of five heartbeats (my heart is beating faster now, 72 beats per minute, elevated but not panic). I look at the reading. It's stopped flickering. Single wavelength: 632.8 nanometers. Helium-neon laser frequency. Red light. The color of every quantum optics experiment I've ever run. The color of the laser we used to generate the entangled photons. The shadow raises its hand. Same hand I'm raising. Mirror image. Except I'm not raising my hand, I'm lowering the spectrometer, I'm turning away, I'm counting steps backwards (twelve, thirteen, fourteen), and the shadow is matching me in reverse, approaching when I retreat, mirroring motion that hasn't happened yet. Behind me the counter hits

8,477,400. The hum shifts frequency. Not 131 Hz anymore. 127 Hz. The accelerator is decelerating. Winding down toward idle but we never started it up. The crack in the panel spreads. The fracture reaches the floor. Where it touches concrete, the concrete splits, and beneath the split is nothing. Not darkness. Nothing. The absence of space. I can see the edge where the tunnel ends and the nothing begins, and the edge is moving toward me at approximately 0.3 meters per second. I have thirty seconds before it reaches the door. I have eleven facts I need to verify and four equations to solve. The shadow reaches out. Its hand passes through the spreading nothing without stopping. It's immune. I'm not.

Chapter

FIVE

written by Ruth Ann Keller

One must not yield to panic when confronted with annihilation. This is the first principle one learns in experimental physics: observe, measure, conclude. That the void advances and shall consume me in twenty-seven seconds (I have recalculated, accounting for acceleration) does not alter the necessity of method. I place the spectrometer upon the floor. It must be saved. Should I fail, another may require its measurements. The shadow's hand reaches my shoulder. I feel nothing. This constitutes data: the thing exerts no force, no pressure, no thermal exchange. It occupies space without displacing matter. Impossible under standard physics. Therefore the physics are not standard. I turn to face it directly. Protocol forbids looking away from advancing hazards. Its eyes meet mine. They do not blink. I count: seventeen seconds since I last observed its face, zero blinks recorded. My own blink rate is 11.4 per minute under neutral conditions. The divergence suggests it is not bound by autonomic function. A relief, this: it is not sufficiently me to suffer as I suffer. "You came through the loop," I say to it. "Eight iterations collapsed into one manifestation. Quantum superposition resolved not into a single state but into you. A standing wave in time." The shadow's mouth moves. Still no sound. But I begin to perceive its meaning through the motion: Tuesday. Yes. Quite. The void reaches fourteen meters from the doorway. Dr. Castellanos is shouting from the

observation room, words I cannot parse through the hum, which has now descended to 124 Hz. The frequency decline is linear: three Hz per interval of approximately forty seconds. At this rate the accelerator shall reach zero Hz in twenty-eight minutes. What occurs when the frequency vanishes entirely I cannot predict. One suspects nothing favorable. I withdraw my notebook. The binding is leather, the pages numbered. I am on page 847, a coincidence I noted yesterday with some satisfaction. The page contains six measurements from this morning: the barista's error (four ice cubes, not three), the step discrepancy (1,849, cause unknown), the timestamp stutter (0.003 seconds), the collision count at freeze (8,477,213), the shadow's wavelength (632.8 nanometers), and Dr. Castellanos's blink rate (effectively zero for the past nine minutes). I add a seventh: void propagation, 0.3 meters per second, variable unknown. The shadow touches my notebook. Its fingers pass through the page, but where they pass, the ink rearranges. The numbers shift. The collision count now reads: 8,477,213 $\square \infty$. Infinity. One cannot measure infinity. The notation is useless. I step backward through the doorway. The shadow follows. It must follow; we are entangled now, paired observations collapsing into correlation. Eight experiments created eight pairs of photons across 847 meters. We did not account for the possibility that the eighth pair would entangle not in space but in identity. That I would become correlated with myself across time. "Castellanos," I say, "shut down the entanglement source." "Can't." He is leaning against the east door. The blood from his eye has reached his collar. "The laser requires timestamp confirmation to..." "Yes, I comprehend the difficulty." Seventeen seconds remain before the void reaches the threshold. "Then we must provide it with a timestamp it shall accept. Tuesday is unacceptable. We must exit Tuesday." "How?" An excellent question. One does not exit a day through force of will. Time advances through entropy, through the irreversible increase of disorder. But if the photons traveled backward, if Tuesday loops upon itself, then entropy has failed. The system has achieved perfect order: eternal recurrence. One must introduce chaos. The void is twelve meters

distant. I can observe its boundary with precision now. It is not moving through space but expanding from a point, a sphere of nothing that grows outward. The point of origin: the sensor panel I cracked. The crack I made. I struck the panel. Reality fractured. One requires a larger fracture. I turn to the observation room's primary terminal, the one displaying the frozen counter, now reading 8,477,448. The screen is reinforced glass, rated for impact. Beneath the glass: the master control system for the accelerator. Beneath that: the superconducting magnets that generate the containment field. I remove my watch. Weight: 47 grams. Seventeen jewels inside, each jewel a ruby, synthetic corundum, Mohs hardness 9. Second only to diamond. "Cover your face," I tell Dr. Castellanos. I hurl the watch into the screen with all available force. The screen shatters. So does the watch. So does Tuesday.

Chapter

SIX

written by Priya Nair

The glass goes everywhere and nowhere at once. Some fragments hit the floor. Others hover mid-air like they're waiting for instructions. One piece slices my cheek. I don't feel it happen but I can see the blood when I touch my face, and now there are two of us bleeding in this room, which feels excessive. "Well," I say. "That was either brilliant or the stupidest thing I've done since I tried to microwave a fork in undergrad." Dr. Castellanos stares at the shattered screen. The counter is gone. The timestamp is gone. In their place: static. Not TV static. Mathematical static. Numbers appearing and vanishing too fast to read, like the system is trying every possible value at once to find one that fits. The void stops expanding. Just stops. Twelve meters from the door. I can see its edge wobbling now, surface tension like water pretending to be nothing. "Did that work?" Castellanos asks. "Define work." The shadow is still here. Still standing in the tunnel doorway. But it's flickering now, transparency pulsing. Solid, translucent, solid, gone, solid again. Five states in three seconds. A quantum coin flip that can't decide which side to land on. I walk to the shattered terminal. Careful. My grandfather's watch is in seventeen pieces on the floor and if I step on the mainspring I'm going to lose it. Found it. Pocket it. The rest can stay. The screen beneath the broken glass is doing something new. The static is resolving. Coalescing. I can make out partial numbers: 8,4...77... and

then it scrambles again. Tuesday is trying to reassert itself. The loop wants to close. "We need a new timestamp," I say. "Something the system will accept that isn't Tuesday." "There is no day that isn't Tuesday," Castellanos says. "Not anymore. We've been here for..." He trails off. Touches his bleeding eye. "I don't know how long." I check my wrist. No watch. Right. Just threw it at a computer. The clock on the wall reads 10:07. Same time as when everything froze. Useless. Think. The system rejected Tuesday shutting down Tuesday. Temporal paradox. Can't confirm an action using a timestamp from the same day the action would end. Standard causality loop. Boring. Solvable. "What if we're not on Tuesday?" I ask. "We are definitively on Tuesday." "Are we? I mean, okay, we started on Tuesday. But we've been cycling. You said you've been here long enough to run eleven reboots on the sensor array. That's hours. Multiple hours. How many hours?" He thinks. "Six? Seven?" "So we're on Tuesday plus seven hours. That's not Tuesday anymore. That's Tuesday evening. Almost Wednesday." "The system doesn't recognize evening as a discrete temporal unit." "Then we teach it to." I kneel by the terminal. The keyboard is half-buried in glass. I brush it off. Carefully. The cuts on my hands can wait. I pull up the timestamp protocol subroutine. It's looking for a date match. Specifically: when the shutdown command is issued, compare current date to experiment start date, reject if identical. "What's tomorrow's date?" I ask. "March 19th." "You sure?" "Yes. Today is March 18th. Tomorrow is the 19th. This is not complex." I type: MANUAL OVERRIDE. CURRENT DATE: MARCH 19. The system thinks about it. The static on the screen intensifies. Every pixel cycling through every possible color. My eyes hurt looking at it. "That's not going to..." Castellanos starts. The screen goes black. Then: TIMESTAMP ACCEPTED. SHUTDOWN SEQUENCE INITIATED. The hum drops. 124 Hz to 120 Hz. I can hear it falling. The shadow in the doorway flickers faster. It's destabilizing. Good. Great. I need it gone before it decides to stop being cooperative. "Get to the elevator," I tell Castellanos. "What about you?" "I'm going to make sure this actually shuts down. If the loop restarts we're doing this all over again and I

don't have another watch to throw." He hesitates. His eye is still bleeding. The blood is running down his neck now, soaking into his collar. He needs a hospital. He needs Wednesday. "Go," I say. He goes. Twenty-three steps to the east door. I count them. He's limping. That's new. Wasn't limping before. The void starts shrinking. Collapsing back toward the sensor panel. The nothing is becoming something again, space filling in the gap. The shadow looks at me one more time. Then it's gone. The accelerator hits 100 Hz. Still falling. I check the terminal. The collision counter appears: 8,477,531. Then: 8,477,532. One more collision. Then it stops.

Chapter

SEVEN

written by jmarsh

The silence that follows the final collision is not absence but presence, a heaviness that settles upon the room like sediment drifting through water, coating every surface with the residue of something that should not have occurred. I place my hand flat against the terminal, feel the warmth of the processors beneath, still calculating though they have nothing left to calculate. The screen displays 8,477,532 as though it were a gravestone marking, a number that signifies conclusion. Yet conclusions in quantum mechanics are provisional at best, subject always to the observer's position, to the angle of measurement, to the possibility that what appears ended has merely tunneled through to some adjacent state we lack the instruments to perceive. The void has retracted fully. Where it consumed the tunnel floor, concrete has returned, but the texture is wrong. I kneel. Run my fingers across the surface. The aggregate is exposed, the smooth finish stripped away, leaving the stone skeleton visible. This concrete is older than the concrete surrounding it. I can see the composition: larger gravel, less Portland cement, the mixture ratios common to construction practices from the 1960s, not the 1987 rebuild. The void did not create nothing. It revealed what existed before, peeled back layers of accumulated time like one might scrape paint from wood to expose the grain beneath. Behind me, the observation room's equipment begins its shutdown

sequence, each system powering down in hierarchical order according to protocols established by engineers who never conceived of temporal loops, who designed their failsafes for mere disasters: fires, floods, power failures, human error of the conventional sort. First the cooling systems disengage, fans spinning down from their steady drone to silence. Then the monitoring computers, screens going dark in sequence from left to right across the instrument panel. The particle detectors, their photomultiplier tubes ceasing their vigil. Finally the superconducting magnets, which cannot simply stop but must be ramped down gradually, their tremendous energies bled off through resistance coils lest they quench catastrophically, boil their liquid helium coolant in an instant, tear themselves apart. I count the seconds. The magnets require four minutes to discharge safely. I have measured this before, timed it with my grandfather's watch (now in pieces, mourned, irretrievable), verified the duration against theoretical calculations. Four minutes. Two hundred forty seconds. I do not have my watch but I have my heartbeat, which is 72 beats per minute now, elevated but steady, which means I can count 288 heartbeats and know the magnets are safe. I begin counting. One. Two. Three. At beat seventeen, I notice the crack in the sensor panel has not closed. The fracture remains, a dark line branching across the display like lightning frozen mid-strike, and through it I can still see that other tunnel, the one where light is white instead of blue. The one where variables differ in ways I cannot measure from here. At beat forty-three, movement in that other tunnel. Not a shadow this time. A person. Solid. Walking toward the crack from the far side with purposeful stride, someone who knows precisely where they are going because they have been there before, because they measured the distance and counted the steps and recorded the number in a leather notebook. At beat seventy-nine, I recognize her. Dr. Sarah Yuen, who works the Thursday shift, who runs muon decay experiments with the same scrupulous attention to decimal places that I bring to photon entanglement, who once spent six hours recalibrating a detector because the readings were off by 0.002 percent, who would

never accept imprecision, never round, never estimate. She reaches the crack. Presses her hand against it from her side. I can see her mouth moving, forming words I cannot hear through the barrier between iterations. But I can read the shape: "Can you hear me?" At beat ninety-eight, I press my hand to the crack from my side, mirror her position. Our palms align, separated by something thinner than glass, more fundamental than matter. At beat one hundred twelve, her side of the crack spreads. Wider. A gap opening. And I understand: I shattered Tuesday from inside my loop. She has shattered Thursday from inside hers. The fractures are meeting. The days are touching. At beat one hundred forty-four, exactly half through my count, her hand passes through. Solid. Warm. Real. She grabs my wrist. "Wednesday is empty," she says, her voice suddenly clear, no longer muffled. "You need to see this before the magnets finish." She pulls. I follow.

Chapter

EIGHT

written by rpenguin

All of the sudden everything exploded.

Afterwords

Notes the writers left after the last chapter.

rpenguin

AYO

wordsbylena

Time unravels.

Dario Selo

Silence remains.

Finished on 5 May 2026.

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

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