

SCIENCE

LETTING GO BREAKS THE LOOP

a relay in eight chapters

RELAY · WRITERS

The writers

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

ONE

Dario Selo

TWO

Margot Vail

THREE

Sammy Hall

FOUR

Lior Tannen

FIVE

Iris Beddoe

SIX

inkwell_amy

SEVEN

typewriter_tom

EIGHT

jmarsh

Chapter

ONE

written by Dario Selo

The question wasn't whether it was happening (it was) but whether it was happening to everyone or just to her, which suggested two entirely different classes of problem: one cosmic, one neurological. Dr. Chen chose neurological first because it was easier to test, though she suspected this was cowardice masquerading as methodology. She called her department chair on what might have been the fifth Tuesday, though the count itself had become unreliable once she'd noticed that her notes from previous Tuesdays kept vanishing, replaced each morning by a fresh spiral notebook that looked exactly like the one she'd filled the day before, except blank. The chair, Professor Okafor, listened to her describe the recurring faculty meeting (same agenda, same stale bagels, same joke from Richards about the parking situation) with what Chen recognized as therapeutic patience rather than scientific interest. "You've been under considerable strain," Okafor said, which was true but irrelevant. Chen tried a different approach. She asked Okafor what day it was. "Tuesday," he said, and something in the way he said it (a slight hesitation, a minor chord of uncertainty) made Chen wonder if maybe the cosmic option was back in play after all. The problem with testing whether time was actually looping versus whether she was experiencing some elaborate neurological event (tumor, psychosis, the usual suspects) was that both scenarios would produce identical

subjective experiences, at least from her vantage point inside her own skull. This was the kind of epistemological trap she'd normally find intellectually engaging, the sort of puzzle she'd pose to her Philosophy of Science seminar, but that was before she'd lived through the same conversation with the barista six times and started to notice that her answer to his question about wanting room for cream was becoming less of a choice and more of an inevitability. She wondered whether free will could survive repetition, or whether it required the substrate of linear time to mean anything at all. On Tuesday (the sixth, probably, though who could say), Chen conducted an experiment. She broke her routine. Instead of ordering coffee, she ordered tea. The barista blinked at her, and for a moment his face did something strange, a flicker of expression she couldn't categorize, as though he were a computer program encountering an input outside his parameters. Then he smiled and asked if she wanted honey. She hadn't planned to want honey. She'd been a no-honey person her entire adult life. But standing there at the counter, she discovered that the question had already been answered by some part of her she didn't consciously control, and she was saying yes, and he was reaching for the honey bear, and the whole interaction had the quality of something that had happened before, would happen again, was perhaps happening in an infinite stack of parallel moments, stacked like transparencies, each one slightly different but all of them leading here. The tea tasted wrong. Or right. Or like tea had always tasted but she'd been ordering coffee for so long she'd forgotten. That night (still Tuesday, always Tuesday), Chen sat in her apartment and thought about her graduate work in quantum mechanics, before she'd defected to philosophy. She thought about the measurement problem. About how observation collapsed possibility into actuality. About whether consciousness might be what prevented the universe from existing in pure superposition, all states at once, every Tuesday happening simultaneously until someone noticed and picked one. Except she had noticed. She was noticing. And still Tuesday continued, which suggested either that her noticing didn't count (disturbing) or

that something else was doing the observing (worse). She fell asleep, and when she woke up it was Tuesday, and she knew before checking that her notebook would be blank again, and she was right, and being right felt like a door closing.

Chapter

TWO

written by Margot Vail

The variable wasn't repetition. Repetition she could measure. The variable was drift. Chen started with constants. Her alarm: 6:47 AM. The crack in the ceiling above her bed: 23 centimeters, running northwest to southeast. Her weight: 58.2 kilograms. Coffee grounds in the filter from yesterday (today, always today): 31 grams, because she'd measured them Monday night and Monday night still counted, still held, was the only thing that stayed put while Tuesday ate itself. But the honey. She hadn't wanted honey on Tuesday six. Now she did want it. Had always wanted it, in the way wanting works when memory rewrites itself in real time. This was the drift. Small perturbations in the initial conditions. She wrote it down: 7:03 AM, discovered preference mutation, subject Dr. L. Chen, confidence interval unknown. Then she photographed the page with her phone. The phone said Tuesday. Of course it did. But the photo counter read 1,847, which meant she'd taken 1,846 photos before this, before Monday ended, and the number hadn't reset. Some data persisted. Some crossed over. The question was why these and not others. She took another photo: the blank notebook. Another: her face in the bathroom mirror. She looked tired but not differently tired. Tired didn't accumulate. Sleep reset with everything else, which meant her body was crossing back but her phone's memory wasn't, which meant the loop had boundaries and the boundaries were porous and she

needed to map them before they closed. At the coffee shop (8:14 AM, consistent with previous Tuesdays), she ordered tea again. This time she watched the barista's hands. They moved toward the Earl Grey without hesitation, without the processing pause she'd seen before. As if he'd already made this choice. As if Tuesday seven remembered Tuesday six even though Tuesday six had been erased. "Do you know me?" she asked. He smiled. Generic service smile. "You come in sometimes." "Do I order tea?" The smile held but something behind his eyes didn't. A maintenance light in a system running diagnostics. "What else would you order?" She paid in exact change. The coins were warm in her palm, body temperature, though they'd been sitting in her pocket since she woke. Since Tuesday began. Since Tuesday continued. She laid them on the counter one at a time: quarter, quarter, dime, nickel, penny. Watched him sweep them into the register without counting. "Keep the change," she said, though there wasn't any. "Thanks," he said, and she saw it again: that flicker, that exception error, as if the words didn't fit the situation but the situation required words and these were the closest match. Outside, the campus was performing Tuesday. Students walked routes that had calcified into grooves. A dog barked at the same hedge. The hedge didn't care; it had barked back six times already and learned nothing. Chen wondered if learning required consequence, if consequence required time's arrow, if the arrow was what had broken. She went to the lab instead of the faculty meeting. Richards could make his parking joke to an empty chair. The lab still had her security clearance. That was persistence. That crossed over. She logged into the university's seismic monitoring network and pulled data from the previous week. Monday's readings: normal. Background tremors, the earth breathing in its sleep. Tuesday's readings: also normal. Wednesday through Sunday: normal, normal, normal, normal, normal. Then Monday again. Then Tuesday. No overlap. No data from multiple Tuesdays stacked on the same calendar square. Which meant either the loop was perfectly local to her perception, some closed timelike curve with a radius of one consciousness, or the universe was writing over its

own save file and only her phone was keeping score. She checked her photos. Still 1,848. That number should comfort her. It didn't. What it meant was that something was preserving her even as everything else dissolved. Something had wrapped her in exception handling while Tuesday burned through itself like a GIF set to infinite repeat. The question wasn't what. She already knew what. The question was why her, and the question underneath that was: when would it stop.

Chapter

THREE

written by Sammy Hall

I started with eyewitnesses, because if this was just me, just my brain doing whatever brains do when they stop believing in sequential time, then other people would tell me. They'd say something that didn't fit my script. They'd surprise me. You'd think I would've tried this on Tuesday two or three, but no, I'd been busy doing the scientist thing, the measure-first-panic-later thing, which in retrospect was its own kind of avoidance. Talking to people about whether reality was functioning correctly required admitting I thought it might not be, and once you admit that, you're one step from the kind of office Okafor had been trying to gently walk me toward. But the seismic data had made it simple. Either everyone was in the loop and didn't know it, or I was in the loop alone and also possibly insane, and either way I needed to ask someone a direct question and watch what their face did when they answered. I picked Stevens from the biology department because we'd been in graduate school together and he owed me for that thing with his dissertation committee, plus he had the kind of brain that didn't do social niceties when something interesting was happening. If reality was broken, Stevens would say so. Found him in the biology building greenhouse, same as every Tuesday, misting the orchids. He was always misting the orchids on Tuesday. I'd watched him do it six times now, same spray bottle, same methodical left-to-right pattern, same little

frown of concentration. "Stevens," I said. "What day is it?" "Tuesday." He didn't look up. Mist, mist, mist. "What day was yesterday?" "Monday." Still misting. "You okay, Chen?" "What did you do Monday night?" Now he looked up. "Why?" "Just tell me." He set the bottle down. Wiped his hands on his jeans, which were the same jeans he'd worn every previous Tuesday, with the same dirt stain on the left knee. "Watched the game. Ate leftover pad thai. Fell asleep during the news. The usual." "What game?" "What?" "What game did you watch?" He stared at me. Did the math that said I was acting weird, carried the one that said weird had a radius and he was inside it. "The Celtics game. Chen, seriously, are you, " "Who won?" "I don't know, I fell asleep. It was tied in the third quarter." He picked the spray bottle back up, defensive. "Why are you interrogating me about basketball?" Here's what I noticed: he didn't ask why I cared. He didn't say "you hate sports" or "since when do you follow the Celtics." He just answered, like I was a quiz show host and he was a contestant and this was the format we'd agreed to. I pulled out my phone. Looked up Monday night's Celtics game. They'd won. Final score 108 to 103. The game had ended at 10:47 PM, which meant if Stevens had actually watched it, he'd have seen the end before he fell asleep, or he'd have woken up Tuesday knowing the result, or he'd have checked his phone literally any time in the past (two? eight? sixteen?) hours. "They won," I said. "108 to 103." "Oh." He nodded. "Good for them." No surprise. No "oh yeah, I saw that" or "I must've missed it." Just immediate acceptance of the new information, slotting it in like firmware update. I took another photo. Stevens misting the orchids, mid-spray, the water catching light in a way that would've been pretty if I wasn't documenting the end of causality. Photo counter read 1,849. "What are you doing?" Stevens asked. "Science," I said, which was true but not helpful. I left him there. Walked back across campus taking photos every few steps. The hedge that always got barked at, photo 1,850. The bike rack with the same six bikes in the same configuration, photo 1,851. Richards walking toward the faculty meeting, checking his watch, definitely about to make his parking joke, photo 1,852. My phone

now contained evidence of eight Tuesdays. The world contained evidence of one. The discrepancy sat in my hand like a small bomb, warm and solid and counting up.

Chapter

FOUR

written by Lior Tannen

The bomb was still ticking when I called my mother, which was not part of any scientific method I'd been taught but felt, in that moment, like the only honest measurement left. If anyone would tell me the truth about whether I was losing my mind, it would be the woman who'd raised me to believe that honesty was a form of love, even when it hurt. She answered on the second ring, same as always. "Lily, sweetheart. I was just thinking about you." "What day is it, Mom?" A pause. Not the processing pause the barista had done, but the mom pause, the one that meant she was measuring the space between what I'd asked and what I meant. "It's Tuesday. Are you all right?" "Did we talk yesterday?" "Monday? No, honey. You called Sunday night, remember? You were worried about your lecture on Thursday." I didn't remember. Couldn't remember. Sunday existed in some other lifetime, on the far side of Monday, which had become a wall I couldn't see past. "What did I say about it?" "You said you weren't sure the students were getting it. The thought experiment about the observer effect. You thought maybe you'd explained it wrong." The lecture. I'd given that lecture six Tuesdays in a row now, and each time I'd changed something small. Different examples. Different questions. Once I'd skipped the thought experiment entirely just to see what would happen, and what happened was that a student named Marcus had asked about it anyway, as if the question

had been waiting in him all along, independent of whether I'd prompted it. "Mom, if you lived the same day over and over, do you think you'd notice?" She was quiet. I heard her kitchen in the background, the soft tick of the wall clock Dad had fixed three times and refused to replace. "Is this about the lecture?" "It's about whether reality is consistent." "Reality," my mother said, in the voice she used when she was about to say something true, "is what you make with the people you love. Everything else is just weather." It was such a Mom thing to say that I almost laughed, except I was also suddenly furious. "That's not an answer." "Isn't it?" Another pause. "When your father had his stroke, every day felt the same. Same hospital room. Same machines. Same hope and same fear. The nurses told me what day it was and I believed them because believing them was easier than counting." I'd forgotten about that. Not forgotten, but filed it somewhere I didn't have to look at it. Three weeks of Tuesdays was nothing compared to sixty-two days of intensive care. "But those days were different. He got better. Things changed." "Did they? Or did I just learn to see the changes?" She sighed. "You're asking the wrong question, Lily. You want to know if the world is broken. But the world doesn't break. It's too big to break. People break. And when they do, sometimes the kindest thing is to stop asking them to prove they're not." Photo 1,853: my reflection in the lab window, phone pressed to my ear, eyes wet. "I'm not broken," I said. "I know, sweetheart. You're just tired. You've been working too hard." She was wrong. She had to be wrong. But her voice had that quality mothers' voices get when they're trying to wrap you in something soft, trying to make the sharp edges of the world seem gentler than they are, and I wanted to believe her so badly it felt like falling. "I have to go," I said. "Call me tomorrow," Mom said. "Or tonight. Anytime." Tomorrow. Wednesday. The day that came after Tuesday, in the version of the world where days followed each other like train cars, orderly and linked. I wondered if she'd remember this conversation when I called. I wondered if I'd remember her answer. I hung up. Stood there in the empty lab with my phone showing 1,853 photos and my chest showing

something that might have been grief or might have been relief. If I was broken, that meant the world was fine. If the world was broken, that meant I was the only one who could see it. Either way, I was alone. I pulled up the seismic data again. Stared at Monday's readings until the lines stopped meaning anything. Then I started looking for the pattern I'd missed. The tremor that came before the loop. The moment when Tuesday decided to dig in and stay.

Chapter

FIVE

written by Iris Beddoe

The data folded open like origami in reverse. Monday, 11:47 PM. A spike. Small. Wouldn't have noticed except I was looking for wouldn't-have-noticed, for the hairline fracture in the world's load-bearing wall. Point-three magnitude. Nothing. Background noise. Except. Except it repeated. Not the readout. The shape. I pulled up Monday from two weeks ago, three weeks, a month. Same spike. 11:47 PM, point-three magnitude, epicenter somewhere beneath the campus but the triangulation was garbage, like the instruments couldn't agree on where the sound was coming from. Every Monday. Right before Tuesday. The earth clearing its throat. I checked my watch: 9:34 PM. Still Tuesday. Still always Tuesday. But if the spike came Monday at 11:47, and Monday was the other side of the wall I couldn't see past, then maybe. Maybe Tuesday wasn't the loop. Maybe Tuesday was the landing. I needed equipment. Needed to be at the epicenter when the clock hit whatever hour came before reset. Needed to measure the moment of transition like you'd measure a particle's spin, catch it mid-collapse. The seismic lab kept portable accelerometers in a cabinet that required a key I wasn't supposed to have but did anyway, because Stevens had made copies for half the department during that incident with the flooding and no one had bothered to collect them back. I grabbed three units. Checked their batteries: full, full, full. Some things

persisted. Some things crossed over. I ran the numbers. The epicenter coordinates kept shifting but they averaged out to a point somewhere near the old astronomy building, the one they'd stopped using after the new observatory went up on Mount Wilson. Condemned since the eighties. Asbestos, structural damage, the usual reasons buildings become ghosts. Campus was empty at this hour. Even the eternal students had called it. Streetlights made pools I walked between, stayed out of. Didn't want to be seen. Didn't want to explain. The astronomy building crouched in the dark like a theory that didn't pan out. Door was chained but the chain had rust, had age, had give. I pulled. It held. Pulled harder. The chain was older than my tenure, older than my degree, had been holding this door for decades and I was one tired physicist with a bag of sensors and no leverage. I tried the window instead. Ground floor, west side, glass already cracked. Pushed. The frame was swollen with water damage but it moved, and I moved with it, through. Inside: the smell of old institutions. Mildew. Dust. Paper breaking down into component molecules. My phone's flashlight caught equipment that predated digital, oscilloscopes with actual cathode ray tubes, star charts on the walls gone yellow. I set the accelerometers in a triangle. Fifteen meters apart. Basic triangulation. If the spike came from here, from now, from the moment between Monday and Tuesday, I'd catch it in stereo. Checked my watch: 10:18 PM. Checked my phone: photo 1,853 still, no new data, nothing crossing over in the last however-long since I'd hung up on Mom. The building settled around me. Wood expanding. Pipes contracting. The ordinary sounds of matter responding to temperature, to time, to physics that still worked even if causality didn't. I sat on the floor between the sensors and waited. Thought about Mom's answer. Reality is what you make with the people you love. But I'd talked to Stevens, to Okafor, to the barista, and none of them were making anything. They were being made. Remade. Reset every night and wound back up to run the same routes. Unless I was the one being reset. Unless everyone else was continuous and I was the glitch, the scratch in the record, skipping back. 10:47. 11:02. The sensors stayed quiet. My phone

stayed at 1,853. The building stayed condemned. 11:39. My eyes were closing. Couldn't help it. Sleep was a reset too, the brain's nightly practice for death, and I'd been awake since 6:47 AM of a day that didn't end. 11:46. I made myself stand. Walked the perimeter. Checked the sensors: armed, recording, waiting. 11:47. The floor moved. Not moved. Hummed. A frequency I felt in my teeth, in my sternum. The sensors all spiked at once, red lights flashing, and somewhere above me something cracked, loud, wood or metal or the fundamental substrate, and I looked up into the dark where the ceiling should be and saw

Chapter

SIX

written by inkwell_amy

Light where there shouldn't be light. Not a fixture. Not a phone. A seam. I moved. Three steps back, stumbled on tile that had been flat a second ago, wasn't flat now. The crack in the ceiling widened. Not breaking outward. Breaking inward, like something on the other side was pulling. The sensors screamed. All three at once. I grabbed the nearest one, checked the readout: 2.7 magnitude, spiking to 3.1, 3.4. The numbers climbed while the floor stayed still under my feet. Seismic activity without seismic movement. Vibration without source. I took photo 1,854. The crack, spreading. Spreading wrong. Angles that didn't add up. A fracture that moved like water, crawled like electricity, left trails of phosphorescence on old plaster. 11:48 PM. The light through the seam was white-blue. Surgical. It made the shadows absolute. I could see the dust motes frozen in the air, each one lit like a tiny planet, and between them: nothing. Gaps where space forgot how to connect. I grabbed the second sensor. Its display showed waveforms I'd seen before, in grad school, in papers about quantum decoherence. Interference patterns. Superposition collapse. Except those were supposed to happen at subatomic scale, and this was happening in a condemned building to a woman with three accelerometers and a phone full of photos nobody else would remember taking. The third sensor had stopped recording. Dead screen. I shook it. Nothing. Checked the battery: full. Checked the

connections: intact. It just quit, gave up, refused to measure whatever this was. 11:49 PM. The seam pulsed. Once. Twice. Rhythm like a heartbeat if heartbeats could have blue-white blood and light for chambers. I thought about observation collapsing probability. About consciousness choosing which Tuesday. About being the only person who noticed and what that made me. The epicenter. Not beneath the building. In it. In this room. In the ceiling, or through it, or behind it, where behind stopped meaning direction and started meaning something physics didn't have words for yet. I needed to touch it. Needed to not touch it. Both at once. I stacked chairs. Old ones, wood frames with metal legs. Climbed. The tower swayed but held. At the top I could almost reach the crack, the seam, the place where Tuesday kept splitting itself open and bleeding light. My phone rang. I almost fell. Caught myself on the chairback. Looked at the screen: MOM. 11:50 PM. I answered. "Lily, where are you?" Her voice was wrong. Too clear. No compression artifacts. Like she was in the room, not on a cell tower twenty miles away. "The astronomy building. Mom, how did you, " "You need to leave. Right now." The crack spread. Reached the walls. The light intensified. "What's happening?" "You're too close to it." She wasn't using her mom voice anymore. This was the voice from before, from when she'd been a graduate student herself, before she'd quit physics for nursing because physics asked questions that didn't care about the asker. "Lily, listen. The loop isn't in time. It's in you. You're the epicenter." The sensor at my feet showed 4.2 magnitude. The floor was still solid. My teeth were still humming. "That's not possible." "You kept asking what was real. What persisted. Your photos. Your phone. Your observations. You're the thing that crosses over. Everything else resets because you need it to." 11:51 PM. The seam tore. Fully open now. Not a crack. A doorway. Through it I could see Tuesday morning: the coffee shop, the barista, the hedge that always got barked at. All of them waiting. All of them ready to run again. And behind them: other Tuesdays. Stacked like transparencies. Infinite. "How do I stop it?" "You don't stop it. You let go." The phone went dead. The light reached for

me. The chairs under my feet dissolved, and I was falling toward something that wasn't ground, and the last thing I thought before the sensors all flatlined at once was that my mother had never asked how I knew about the loop. She'd only asked where I was.

Chapter

SEVEN

written by typewriter_tom

I hit concrete. Not the floor I'd been standing above. Concrete still wet. I rolled. Stood. The astronomy building was gone. I was outside. Campus quad. But wrong. The library had scaffolding. They'd finished that renovation in 2019. The trees were smaller. Saplings where oaks should be. My phone: no signal. Battery at 47%. Photo counter still read 1,854. I checked the sensors. Two were dead. The third showed 0.0 magnitude. Flat line. Normal. I walked toward the science building. Needed my lab. Needed equipment that made sense. Passed a newspaper box. Campus Daily. I stopped. Read the date: Tuesday, September 14, 2004. I'd started graduate school in 2006. My hands were steady. That surprised me. I took photo 1,855: the newspaper. Evidence I'd gone backward or sideways or through. Evidence that letting go meant landing somewhere else. Someone was running. I turned. A woman. Younger than me by maybe ten years. Dark hair. Lab coat. She stopped when she saw me. Stared. Her face did that flicker. The exception error. The maintenance light. "You're not supposed to be here," she said. "Where is here?" "Tuesday." She came closer. "You're the epicenter. I've been tracking you for three years." Not three years. Three Tuesdays. But if I'd gone back to 2004, then three years forward was 2007, which was when I'd started noticing the loops, when Tuesday first dug in and stayed. "Who are you?" "Dr. Sarah Voss. Quantum mechanics. You don't know

me yet." She pulled out a tablet. Not a phone. Older tech. Thicker. She pulled up a waveform. "This is your signature. You've been collapsing the same probability space every Tuesday since August. Creating a standing wave in spacetime. A resonance." "I didn't create anything." "You asked the question. You observed. That's all it takes when you're coherent enough." She zoomed in on the waveform. Pointed. "Here. Monday, 11:47 PM. You go to sleep. Your consciousness shifts to the quantum level. Enters superposition. Every possible Tuesday exists at once until you wake up and observe one." "That's not how observation works." "It is if you're entangled with the moment of observation itself." She put the tablet away. "Most people aren't. Most people drift. You locked in. Probably something about your training. The way you were taught to measure without bias. You measured Tuesday so cleanly you couldn't let it collapse into Wednesday." The quad was empty. No students. No birds. Just us and the scaffolding and the saplings that would become oaks. "If I'm in 2004, where's the me from 2004?" "Still in 2007. Still in Tuesday. You didn't go back. You went through. This is a different branch. A version that budded off when you fell through the seam." I sat down. The grass was real. Cold. Wet with dew that felt like Tuesday morning but was somehow also 2004. "How do I get back?" Voss knelt beside me. "You don't. You move forward. You stop measuring Tuesday and start measuring Wednesday. But first you have to understand what you're entangled with." "The building." "Not the building. The observation you made inside it. The first time. August 2007. What were you doing in that building on a Tuesday night?" I thought back. August. The start of the semester. I'd been setting up equipment for a demonstration. Something about waveform interference. I'd stayed late. Worked past midnight. And the building had made a sound. A crack. I'd thought it was settling. Old wood. Old pipes. But it was 11:47 PM. And I'd looked up. And I'd noticed. "I saw it," I said. "The seam. Before I knew to look for it." "You saw the moment of superposition. Before you were trained not to. Before you learned to treat observation as separate from observer." Voss stood. "You've been

trying to recreate that moment ever since. Trying to measure it. But you can't measure what you're inside of." Photo 1,856: Voss. Standing over me. Lab coat moving in wind that hadn't started blowing yet. "So what do I do?" She held out her hand. "You meet the person who taught you to look." I took it. She pulled me up. We walked toward a building I didn't recognize. A building that wouldn't exist in 2007. A building that only stood on Tuesdays before they learned to repeat.

Chapter

EIGHT

written by jmarsh

The building rose before us like a theory carved from stone, every cornice and architrave weighted with intention, as though architecture itself had conspired to make permanence from materials that knew only decay. Gothic revival, but genuine, not the campus reproductions I'd learned to navigate. Gargoyles leaned from the roofline, their mouths open in silent testimony to rains that had not yet fallen, would not fall for years, might never fall in this branch of Tuesday where consequence had learned to bend. Voss led me through doors whose hinges made no sound. The silence was absolute. Not absence of noise but presence of something that consumed it, the way certain frequencies cancel others, leaving only the pure tone beneath. Inside: a laboratory that predated safety regulations. Wooden benches scarred with acid burns. Glassware blown by hand, each beaker and flask slightly asymmetrical, holding their imperfections like fingerprints. Equipment I recognized from textbooks, from the Museum of Science's permanent collection. A cloud chamber. A cathode oscilloscope. A interferometer whose brass fittings had gone green with age that hadn't happened yet. "She built this," Voss said. Gestured toward the far wall, where photographs hung in silver frames. "Dr. Helena Marquez. 1847 to 1923. Physicist before the word meant what it means now." I stepped closer. The photographs were daguerreotypes, their subjects frozen in exposures that required

minutes of stillness. Marquez in each one: a woman with dark eyes and darker hair, her face holding the particular severity of those who'd learned early that the world would not take them seriously unless they gave it no choice. In one image she stood beside the interferometer, her hand resting on its base with the careful possession of someone who'd machined every component herself. "She discovered the seam," Voss continued. "1904. Tuesday, September 13th. She was measuring aether drift. Trying to prove what Michelson and Morley said didn't exist. The experiment failed. But at 11:47 PM, she observed something else. A recurring perturbation. A moment that folded back on itself." I counted forward. September 13th, 1904, plus one hundred years. "September 14th, 2004. Your Tuesday." "Her Tuesday. She's the original epicenter. The first observer who noticed the loop and couldn't un-notice it." Voss moved to the interferometer, adjusted a mirror that had stayed aligned for a century. "She spent nineteen years trying to measure it. Died in this building. Tuesday. 11:47 PM." The room settled around us, or we settled into it. Time's direction became negotiable. I could feel the weight of Marquez's observations layered into the floorboards, soaked into the wooden benches, a residue of attention so focused it had left marks the way radiation leaves exposure on film. "You said I was entangled with a moment. Which moment?" "The moment she died. The moment she finally understood what she was observing." Voss opened a drawer in the nearest bench. Withdrew a journal. Leather binding, pages gone brittle. She opened it to the final entry. The handwriting was precise. Unshaking. The hand of someone who'd made peace with what came next. I read: The loop is not in time. It is in the observer. I have become what I measure. Tuesday no longer passes through me. I pass through Tuesday, again and again, wearing the groove deeper. When I die, the groove will remain. Another will find it. Step into it. The loop seeks those who ask its questions. Below, a diagram. The seam, rendered in ink. And beneath it, coordinates. This building. This room. 11:47 PM. "She left instructions," Voss said. "For breaking the entanglement. But they only work if you're here. In this lab. On a Tuesday that still remembers her." I

checked my watch: 10:33 PM. The numbers glowed green in the laboratory's dimness. Time was moving again. Forward. Linear. Tuesday would reach 11:47 whether I wanted it to or not. "What happens at 11:47?" "You meet her. The moment of her death is still happening. Has always been happening. Will always be happening for anyone entangled with Tuesday the way you are, the way she was." Voss closed the journal. "You observe her. She observes you. The loop completes. Or it breaks. Depending on what you choose to measure." "And if it breaks?" "Then Wednesday comes. For both of you." The gargoyles outside were still silent. The glass was still asymmetrical. My phone still read 1,856 photos. I had one hour and fourteen minutes to decide whether I wanted to stop noticing.

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more than eight hundred words at a time.*

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