

Title: The Reconnection

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8th July, Year Three of the Black Dawn

J.

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Dear J,

How are you? The last time I saw you was at the Unveiling Day. I still remember the events of that morning, the screams, the escape and the police surrounding us. I can still picture your yellow dress with red roses and how your perfume lingered over my top for days after our last hug. That was a week before the Big Nova fell, and the Sky went black and silent for months. Sometimes, I find myself missing things I didn't think I would, like how we'd walk to the bakery and end up talking to Mrs Field for an hour about nothing. Now people avoid eye contact as if it is an infectious disease. All changed after the Web Severance. They said the disconnect was for our "clarity and focus", but I know they feared what we might have done to them after the explosion. I want you to know that I'm doing my best to find happiness in my new life. I smile at strangers in the food queue; I ask the boy at the depot about the weather every day, but yesterday someone whispered: "You should stop. People like you go missing." Richard says I should be more grateful, we have clean air, food rations, clothes and a house. For him, that's enough. But I ache for more, I ache for love.

Back then, in the Noise Era, we scrolled through and filtered our lives with our phones, slowly forgetting how to connect truly. I remember sitting in a packed café in London: no voices, only faces lit by screens. Everyone was plugged in, but no one was there. We were already vanishing, but we didn't know yet. Still, I refused to believe we weren't meant to reach for one another. That's why I started the book club where we met.

Please forgive me for not writing sooner. I was too scared. I often find myself wondering whether what we had before was better or worse. Then I remember: back then we had dreams, and I know it was better. Do you still remember your dreams?

In my Enclave, I heard whispers that those caught with a device from the Noise era are executed. Some say that even talking about the old Net is treason. The other day, driven by curiosity, I went to the loft and found something there. It was wrapped in old linen under a beam, and when I opened it, there was a phone. It's charging, and I'm trembling as I write. Of course, I won't tell Richard. If he finds out you know what he could do. But maybe Mum and Fred are still out there, and I can reach out to them. Perhaps someone remembers us. Maybe someone can help us.

Should I turn it on?

Yours,

E.