

A man walks up to a colleague's house and knocks on the door. The man is greeted by Dr. Richard Shamus.

Through a slightly cracked door, "I'm sorry sir, but any solicitation is unwelcome here. Unless you're fourth member from the member club and are searching for members." Shamus says.

"Please open the door Richard", the man says.

Richard sighs in grief, "ugh, you're no fun. Come on in." As he opens the door. "So what news brings you by today David?" As Richard offers him coffee after pouring a cup of his own.

"No thank you." David says, shrugging.

"Well, what is it that's so important that you have no time to catch up?"

David says, "I'm actually here on behalf of your wife. She's expressed her concern that you're going back to the workaholic Rick and she doesn't know if she can go through it all again."

"Go through it again? She knows what my work means to me. She knows that others get to reap the benefits from what I have sown. She has everything she needs or could ever ask for. And, she should know that you have a life and that you are not our relationship counselor. So why is she having you play messenger boy?" Rick says angrily.

David is shocked, "I don't understand what the problem is. Why is this so difficult? Haven't you achieved enough with work to stop for a while and take some time for your family." He stops himself and adjusts to a calmer tone. "I'm not here to tell you what to do. You know that, right? It's just that I'm the guy that's always been there for her. That's what she needs, someone who's there. What is wrong with you? Lauren took her first steps the other day and you express zero enthusiasm or care."

Rick replies shallowly, "News flash buddy, every single person that is capable of walking has made their first steps. It's not an achievement to be praised. Besides, her first steps are minuscule in comparison to the steps I'll be making for the scientific community. Once the device is finished, I'll be able to make her understand without having to say a word. Knowledge can be shared without any lectures, classrooms or training courses. Emotions can be more accurately conveyed, experiences can be practically experienced by the receiver. The mute can have a voice and the deaf will be able to hear."

"Is what you want to happen. So far, all your calculations show is that the user's brain waves expand into the ether and return. At this point, you can't say with any certainty that the waves carry information, thoughts, memories or emotions. Even if they do, you

don't even know if they can be absorbed or even experienced by the proximal recipient. I will say that you are on the verge of a breakthrough into the conscious psyche. It is a huge step in science and has astounding potential for medical and educational benefits. But your equations are only partial, not definitive. For all you know, you could possibly be entrapping the conscious self within itself, losing all motor or receptive functions. Stuck in your thoughts, with your physical self as a vegetable. Your math only leads you into a dark room. It will take time to find the light switch." David assertively states as he begins to make his way to the door. "Look, All I'm getting at is that none of your efforts will matter if you've shut out everyone who's willing to receive your insight. Can't your curiosity be applied to the lives of those that love you? Because it seems that you are only curious about the quantity of knowledge you can attain. If you can't restrain yourself from your own curiosities, no one will be curious about your findings. They will only see you as a sociopath, no matter how you explain yourself. I know what you're capable of achieving, but I don't know how long I can see this as a friendship worth keeping. Just think about all you have to lose by putting personal gain first." As he walks out the door defeated.

Richard sighs as he rubs the bridge of nose, frustrated. He goes to take a sip of coffee but withdrawals quickly, "son of a," he exclaims, wiping the drops from his face after discovering it's too hot. He exhales abruptly. He pulls out and reaches into a drawer of the desk. Pulling out a spherical device, he gazes out the window to see David nodding his head as he gets into his vehicle.

As the taillights of David's car disappear into the distance, Richard remains by the window, his grip tightening around the smooth, metallic surface of the device. The sphere fits perfectly in his hand, its cool texture calming yet ominous. He had spent countless sleepless nights perfecting this prototype, running simulations, testing theories, and calculating probabilities. But David's words had struck a nerve, one that he couldn't ignore no matter how much he wanted to.

He placed the sphere back on his desk and slumped into his chair. For a moment, the house was eerily silent, except for the faint ticking of the wall clock and the occasional creak of the floorboards. His gaze wandered to a photo on his desk—a candid snapshot of his wife, Sarah, laughing with their daughter, Lauren, on the front porch. The vibrant warmth in their smiles was a stark contrast to the cold, analytical chaos of his workspace.

Have I really become so detached? he thought. So consumed by my work that I can't even celebrate my own daughter's milestones?

He leaned back, rubbing his temples as David's parting words echoed in his mind: "None of your efforts will matter if you've shut out everyone who's willing to receive your insight."

Richard stood abruptly, pacing the room. He glanced at the blueprints pinned to the walls, the stacks of notebooks filled with equations, and the device itself—an object that held the culmination of his life’s work. It wasn’t just about knowledge or innovation; it was about legacy, about proving to the world—and to himself—that he could achieve something extraordinary. Yet, at what cost?

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps approaching from the hallway. Sarah stood at the doorway, her arms crossed and her expression a mix of concern and exhaustion.

“David came to see you, didn’t he?” she asked softly.

Richard nodded, unable to meet her gaze.

“You know, Rick, I didn’t ask him to come. But I’m glad he did.” She walked into the room, her eyes scanning the clutter in his workspace. “You’ve been shutting us out for months. I’ve tried to be patient, to understand, but... I’m not sure how much longer I can do this.”

He looked at her, the weight of her words pressing down on him. “I thought you understood why this is important,” he said, his voice tinged with frustration. “This isn’t just for me. It’s for everyone. For you, for Lauren. Imagine a world where we can truly understand each other, where we can share our thoughts, our feelings—”

“But we don’t understand you, Richard,” she interrupted, her voice rising slightly. “Not anymore. You’ve buried yourself so deep in this work that you’ve forgotten what it means to be here, with us. I don’t need your inventions or breakthroughs. I need you. We need you.”

Her words hit him like a punch to the gut. He opened his mouth to respond but found himself at a loss. For all his intelligence, for all his grand ideas, he had no answer for her.

“I need to get Lauren ready for bed,” Sarah said after a long silence. She turned to leave but paused at the doorway. “I hope you’ll think about what David said. And what I’ve been trying to say for months now.”

As she walked away, Richard sat back down. For the first time in years, he felt uncertain—about his work, his priorities, and the man he had become. After a moment he reaches for the top drawer of the desk—grabbing the device.

He picked up the sphere and held it up to the light, its metallic surface gleaming in the dim glow of his desk lamp. The possibilities it represented were endless, but so were the risks. Both to himself and to those he loved.

Richard takes a deep breathe and exhales slowly with closed eyes. He turns his attention back to the device. “Screw it” he says and begins the sequence of dials in the

corresponding order. Red up, orange over, yellow down and locked. The device begins to make a low noise as it activates, illuminating the bright green button near his thumb.

Another breath, then he presses the button. The device clicks and whooshes. He inhales deeply as he looks towards the clock. He begins to hear his steady heart beat as he glances upward. The ticking of the second hand in near synchronicity with the contractions. Lines of airwaves begin to distort his vision as they appear to be moving out of one pole and into the other on the device. His heartbeat and the tick of the clock slow progressively. His view of the room distorts as if viewed from a fisheye lens as the now extremely slow tick of the clock makes another drawn out tick. As his ventricle compresses, his vision is drawn back, into his eyeballs. As if he were a parasite in the retina of his own eye, he sees his living room through the semi murky vitreous fluids and the lens as another pump begins. As his heart compresses again, his view is drawn further back through the optic nerve and he can now see the synapses as they occur between brain cells. The sounds of his blood flowing through his body is almost deafening. Another contraction. His vision jolts inward towards one of the brain cells. As his sight rushes forward he soars into a single cell, only to penetrate its wall and reveal what appears to be an entire universe. He passes through space dust and past galaxies. Everything's appearing to pass by at an unobtainable speed. Rapidly approaching a planet, he begins to enter through the back of another set of eyes. Now back in first person sight, he sees his right hand holding a device. His left holding the back of a young woman's head. The woman peers up at him through the one eye that is still in its socket. The other being drawn out by the device in his other hand. Terrified, he releases the device and throws himself backwards.

"What the fuck" is what he tries to say but instead hears unfamiliar words from his tongue, "J'mil l'mu sahg?! J'mil l'mu sahg?!"

He hits the wall behind him, frightened. "J'mil l'mu sahg?!" He turns his head to see an eyeball soaking in a water like fluid in something resembling a Petri dish. He shuffles to his left, tripping over the stool he had knocked over during the initial startling. He falls to the floor unscathed by the pain inflicted on his left knee and elbow, he shuffles backwards until he is stopped by a wall. "J'mil l'mu sahg, j'mil l'mu sahg?!"

Across the room, Richard notices a man standing at a table, mixing fluids. Wearing a hood, face mask and reflective goggles, his face was completely obstructed. As Richard struggles to gain his composure, the man calmly turns off the faucet that he was using to fill one of the bottles he was working on and walks over to the woman.

He speaks at Richard "J'mil mip kyllub ebly oya? Imep ebyl l'mu letu syn l dibeh illihg"(What has gotten into you? This is not the time to have a panic attack)he says with a frustrated tone.

The man returns his attention back to the woman and gently grabs the mechanism from her nervous grasp. The man mutters more unfamiliar words under his breath. He then pulls a lever and twists the mechanism, causing the woman's eyeball to become completely detached. He then walks over to the table where the other eye was soaking. He places one device down and picks up another. Even with the man's face completely covered, Richard could feel the man's glare as he looked at him briefly before using the

new tool to remove the eyeball from the petri dish. He returns to woman and places the tool near the empty socket of the woman's face. With the push of a button and pull of a lever, the tool grabs the loose optic nerve and automatically attaches it to the nerve on the eye harnessed by the tool. He thrusts the end of the device into the socket. She shuts her eyes forcefully as several tears drip down her face and reopens them, swinging her sight around the room.

Richard tries to stand on his feet, but immediately falls back to the floor when his left hand fails to rest on his knee.

The man helps the woman to her feet, holds up his hand and moves it back and forth as he watches her face closely. He says to the woman, "E idycykefu ivyal to hyccuikaup tepmid. El cyyg ceogu e miwu I bauj dileibat ly illubar ly. L'mu dryhuranu jip I pahhupp. Rinebog Imep ybhu oya suuc dieb vukebabaebak ly nulanba. L'mu vinaepebak jecc ky riyjba eba I hyadcu riaop.(I apologize about my colleagues mishap, it looks like I have a new patient to attend to. The procedure was a success, just drink this once you feel the pain beginning to return. The bruising will go down in a couple days.) He walks with her towards a doorway that lead to a long corridor.

As the woman walks away, disappearing from view, the man begins to speak with his back still turned.

"As for you." He turns his head over his shoulder to look back to Richard. "You seem confused, lost. Is this true?" He turns and begins to walk towards Richard, focusing entirely on him. "Can you understand what I'm saying? He asks Richard.

Richard, now being able to understand some of the words being spoken, looks at the man, frightening and confused, but speechless.

The man continues, "I'll speak slowly to allow your conscience to tap into your new, temporary vessel." As he still approaches.

Richard frantically looks around the room. Muttering sounds, trying to make sense of the situation.

The man snaps his fingers aggressively as he says, "Hey, look at me, look at me!" He sighs as if coming to an unfortunate realization.

Richard's breathing begins to steady and the words, although still unfamiliar by sound, are beginning to be understood in his mind.

The man stands upright and glances around the room, then back down at the still shaken Richard. He says, "Well" he pauses, "you're obviously not an idiot because you're here. I'm going to guess that your calculations, although promising, we're not complete. Hmmm?" As he kicks Richard's feet. "I don't know what name you went by where you're from and I don't want ICTAMUS having a bunch of memories where I refer to him as anything else but that. So, get that name locked in to that database of consciousness of yours. Got it, ICTAMUS!?"

Ictamus nods his head and tries to get to his feet, only to have his hand slip of his knee and once again bring him back to the floor.

"Motor functions should return in the next couple minutes, the nausea should ware off in a couple hours and language coherence should be at 100% by then as well. My name is Deladeus, but you call me Del." Del proclaims as he begins to walk away. "You should get some sleep if you want speed up the process of getting back. I'll get you

whatever you need for materials and hands, but the work and assembly is on you. Don't expect to be back any time soon, you've got several months minimum before you can even begin building." Del states before disappearing out of view through another doorway.

Ictamus gets to his feet to pursue Del, "Hey wait! I ne..ne..need help here!" He speaks as if his tongue were numbed by anesthesia as he stumbles into the doorway.

Del stops, turns back to see Ictamus attempting to walk with rubber-like legs and laughs subtly and says, "This is me helping you. Like I said, motor functions should be back to normal soon, so try and keep up."

After walking down what seemed to be an endless curving hallway, Ictamus makes it through another doorway only to find that Del has led him in a circle back to the room in which he arrived. As he walks through the doorway, he is startled to see something coming at his face through the air. He raises his hands to block it and fumbles it around before it falls to the floor.

Del mutters, "hmmm" in a disappointing tone as Ictamus notices him sitting in the corner. "Motor function has improved but slower than it should be taking. You should have caught that."

"Why are you throwing things at me?"

"I'm helping you, like you wanted." Del says.

"That's not the help I'm wanting!" Ictamus says with frustration.

Del stands up and begins to quickly approach Ictamus, saying, "DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHERE YOU ARE? WHAT YOU'VE DONE? OR WHAT'S TO COME?"

Ictamus stumbles backwards into the corner where he struggled to gain his composure earlier.

Before he can answer, Del interjects, "THEN HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF HELP YOU NEED?" He swings his arm as if he is going to strike Ictamus. But Ictamus is able to block the incoming fist and he pushes Del away from him. Del, being a man of stature at around 6'7" and built like he can throw an anvil 10 yards, is barely fazed as he easily regains his balance after shuffling two steps backwards. "Good. That's more like the improvement I was looking for." He states as he returns to a calm demeanor. He picks up the pack he had thrown just moments ago and throws it even faster at Ictamus. Ictamus closes his eyes and diverts his head but finds that he was able to catch the pack.

"Better, much better." Del says. "Now change into that. We... I mean, you have a lot of work", he presses on a wall tile that slides a floor panel revealing a stairwell that he begins to descend, "but you need rest first. I won't tell you where your bed is, because you already have that information, so relax and get a bit more acquainted with your current-temporary-self."

Ictamus looks down at the pack in his arms and back to Del to watch his head disappear beneath the floor boards just before the panel slides shut