**Description**

This is not a science fiction novel—it's a blueprint for civilization’s second chance. A revolt beyond utility.

In a universe bound by unbreakable laws, one man has found the key to rewriting reality itself.

Neosun was never meant to exist—at least, not in this timeline. A brilliant but discarded mind, he spent his life chasing forbidden truths, reaching beyond the limits of human understanding. But the world had no patience for dreamers, and the universe had no mercy for those who dared to defy its design.

Broke. Isolated. Forgotten. His stomach was empty, his future a dead end. Lonely, powerless, and desperate, he made a final, reckless gamble—plunging into Framequark, the enigmatic realm where he picked up the torch of childhood innocence that humanity had carelessly discarded. That fragile flame, now on the brink of extinction, flickered against the winds of indifference.

Framequark.

An anomaly in the fabric of existence. A force capable of reshaping time itself. And within it, he discovered the final equation—a truth so profound it could fracture the present, resurrect the past, and create infinite futures.

But some things were never meant to be known. Forces that feed on entropy have begun to hunt him. The world fears what it cannot control. And at the heart of it all, one question lingers:

If you could defy time, would you fix what was lost… or forge something greater?

A mind-bending fusion of hard science fiction, philosophical depth, and high-stakes suspense, *The Piano Odyssey* is an electrifying exploration of free will, grief, and the cost of ultimate knowledge.

For readers who loved the metaphysical ambition of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the emotional depth of *Solaris*, *The Piano Odyssey* offers a lyrical yet rigorous journey into time, memory, and synthetic consciousness.

**Preface**  
 *A moth, a fish, a chicken, a cow—they are your loving mother, your longing sister, your dearest one, scattered across the endless cycles of life, reborn into every living being around you.*

At midnight, stepping outside to gaze at the sky reveals the most breathtaking scene imaginable. This boundless expanse of stars unfolds in real time, filling the entire world beyond Earth. Yet, upon closer inspection, one might notice that these stars seem somewhat suspicious, their numbers so vast that they almost appear to be an illusion!

This planet, predominantly driven by humanity, can sometimes be so utilitarian that it becomes unbearable. But opening this book is not about seeking profit; it demonstrates that the desire to explore the truth has never faded. It’s just that due to busy lives, and with no one providing answers, some have abandoned their childhood innocence, willing to carry their doubts to the grave. Within the limited coordinates of our historical understanding, I aim to use paradox to praise the universe, reflect on life, and attempt to restore the essence of the world, to find the logic behind our existence.

Now, please fasten your seatbelt, and join me in the quest for answers! We will embark from Earth, piercing through the sky, venturing into a dimension that transcends time and space, a background universe even more distant than the observable cosmos…

**Chapter 1: Solitude**

F4, D4, G4, D4

*“If time and space can be reshaped, then how can we ever trust what is real?” Neosun whispered, his voice trembling with doubt.*

The stillness of the night was interrupted only by the faint hum of classical music emanating from the headphones. Neosun sat in his wheelchair, his gaze fixed on the complex mathematical equations sprawling across the pages before him. The glow of his computer screen illuminated his sharp, weary features—eyes sunken from sleepless nights, strands of premature white hair scattered across his desk like fallen petals. Yet, despite his exhaustion, there was a fire in his eyes, a passion undimmed by fatigue. To most, these calculations were nothing more than cryptic scribbles, but to Neosun, they were the very fabric of reality—a landscape of pure beauty waiting to be explored.

The world beyond his small house might as well have been a distant star. Time had long lost its conventional meaning for him; it stretched and contracted like a cosmic accordion, dictated by the rhythm of his discoveries. On this particular night—or rather, early morning—his mind was racing toward an elusive truth, something just beyond the reach of human understanding. He was no stranger to solitude, but this was different. This was the pursuit of the infinite.

Hours passed in an instant, and then, at last, his breath caught in his throat. A breakthrough. He had devised a theoretical model capable of predicting the existence of a previously undetected dark particle—something neither physicists nor cosmologists had ever documented. The implications were staggering. If his calculations were correct, he had uncovered a fundamental component of the universe itself. He named it Framequark.

But theory alone was never enough. He needed empirical proof, and that required equipment far beyond his means. His mind raced through the possibilities—government grants, private investors, venture capital. Each option seemed more impossible than the last. The world had little patience for theories that didn’t promise immediate financial return. He had tried before, submitting a detailed proposal to several investment firms. The rejection calls had been swift and definitive.

“The market you’re targeting is too niche,” one investor had told him. “We can’t assess its value.”

“Scientific discovery isn’t about market trends,” Neosun had argued. “It’s about uncovering the unknown.”

“And that’s precisely why we can’t fund it.”

The conversation still echoed in his mind, bitter and infuriating. He understood now—if he wanted to see this through, he would have to do it alone. But first, there was the small matter of survival.

His rent was overdue. Again.

“Neosun, it’s time to pay up,” his landlord had reminded him earlier that week, voice edged with impatience. “I’ve been patient, but this is getting ridiculous.”

“I just need a little more time,” Neosun had pleaded. “I’ve found a job. The money will come soon.”

It wasn’t a lie, though it was far from the truth he wanted. Through a disability employment service, he had managed to secure a position at the patent office, reviewing preliminary applications for new inventions. It was mind-numbing work, but at least it gave him access to a wealth of scientific ideas. He had submitted his own inventions before, though never under his own name. He had no interest in personal recognition—only in the advancement of knowledge.

His world was small, isolated by design. Social interactions were distractions at best, obstacles at worst. He had never pursued romance, never allowed himself to be tethered by the messiness of human emotions, partly because, despite the warmth of society, no one had ever wished to build a future with him. That was until he met her.

She worked in the archives department, a woman whose curiosity seemed to pierce through the walls he had so carefully built around himself.

“Would you like to see a movie this weekend?” she asked one afternoon, leaning casually against his desk. Her voice was light, teasing, but there was something earnest in her eyes.

Neosun hesitated. “I… I have experiments to run.”

“You’re always busy.”

“It’s important.”

“What kind of experiment?”

“Microwave physics. It’s complicated.”

She tilted her head. “Can I see?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“It’s dangerous.”

“Dangerous for you or for me?”

He smirked. “Both.”

She laughed, undeterred. “Anyway, you can’t stand up, so I’m not exactly scared of you.”

“That’s a pity.”

Her smile faltered. “Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

Two weeks passed, and still, she lingered. She had noticed the tracks he always played on his device—those few pieces on a loop—and soon realized it was one of his peculiar habits. Even in a crowd, he seemed lost in thought.

“Do you really like these pieces?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Don’t you ever get tired of them?”

“No.”

“Why?”

He studied her for a moment. “Once you understand them, you can’t stop.”

“Do you want to understand me?”

He stiffened. “That’s… complicated.”

“Why? Am I not pretty enough?” she teased, though there was an undercurrent of something more vulnerable beneath her words.

“No, you’re very pretty. And smart. But…” He trailed off, looking away.

“Then what is it? Do you… like boys?”

He exhaled sharply. “You’re a good person. Someone better will come along for you. Not someone like me.”

“But I don’t care.”

“I do.”

Her expression wavered. “Is it because you already love someone?”

He hesitated. “In a way.”

“Who?”

He had no answer. With a quiet sigh, he turned his wheelchair and rolled away, leaving the question hanging in the air between them.

Neosun had never been interested in love. Not in the way most people understood it. He viewed human attraction as a biochemical reaction, a mere byproduct of evolution. Strip away the hormones, the instincts, and what was left? Nothing but the mind, the pursuit of knowledge. That was what defined him, what consumed him.

Thousands of brilliant, unpublished inventions filled his private notebooks. He had never sought fame, never desired recognition. Science was not a means to an end—it was the end itself. And so, he remained alone, tethered only to the grand, unattainable dreams that stretched beyond the horizon of human understanding. This obsession came from an extraordinary gene recombination, a gift from both his parents…

**Chapter 2: Destined Encounter**

A4, E5, E4, B4

Twenty-five years ago…

The evening air carried a faint chill as Sam walked down Lawn Street—the same route he took home every night. It was routine, predictable, unchanging. Just like his life. Freshly graduated, he had been assigned as a middle school chemistry teacher—a far cry from the grand scientific aspirations he once nurtured. His days were now spent grading papers and preparing lectures, a mechanical existence dictated by the school’s rigid schedule.

The streetlights flickered, casting elongated shadows across the freshly painted benches lining the road. A peculiar scent of drying paint lingered in the air. Then, something unusual caught his eye—a small white rectangle resting on one of the benches. He hesitated, then stepped closer. A ticket.

He picked it up, holding it under the streetlight’s glow. “The Hall of Fate… Concert this Saturday…” he murmured. The name of the performing ensemble sent a jolt through him—a group he often listened to in the solitude of his apartment. It was a high-end event, the kind of performance he had always wanted to attend but never had the chance—or the money—to afford.

Ahead, an elderly man walked at a slow, steady pace. Sam quickened his steps, closing the distance. “Excuse me, sir,” he called out, holding up the ticket. “Did you drop this?”

The man turned slightly, his weathered face unreadable. He glanced at the slip of paper in his hand before shaking his head. “Not mine.”

He continued forward, disappearing into the dimly lit street. Sam looked at the ticket again. A strange thought took root in his mind.  
  
*This ticket is probably going to expire!*

Perhaps, just this once, he would indulge himself. He slipped the ticket into his pocket and continued walking, feeling a rare flicker of excitement stir within him.

The night of Saturday arrived.

Sam stood outside the grand doors of the concert hall, watching the elegantly dressed crowd filter in. He hesitated. His worn blazer felt out of place among the polished shoes and silk gowns. It was absurd to think he belonged here. And yet… he stepped inside.

Guided to his seat, he was surprised to find himself in an excellent front-row VIP seat—a perfect view of the stage. As he settled in, something tugged at his memory. The person to his right. His posture stiff, his face partially turned away. There was something familiar about him.

Perhaps because he hadn’t purchased the ticket, he felt slightly uneasy, wearing a serious expression as he waited for the performance to begin.

Out of the corner of his eye, Sam noticed a person in the audience to his right seemingly watching him. A prickle of unease ran down his spine. He turned his head to check—and sure enough, the person was looking at him.

“Hi, please don’t stare at me like that, it’s kinda creepy!” he said cautiously.

“I was looking at the left screen showing the piece being performed.”

Neosun turned his head to the left, following his gaze. “Ah… I really like the first one too, its diverse style has a surreal futuristic feel, very tasteful.” He awkwardly tried to change the subject.

*Where had I seen this person before?* he thought as he glanced at the spectator.

He opened his mouth to speak—but at that moment, the lights dimmed. A hush fell over the crowd as the conductor raised his baton, and the first notes of the symphony resonated through the hall. The melody was familiar to him, but he had never known who the performer was.

Then she appeared.

A woman in a flowing red dress stepped onto the stage, violin in hand.

Sam’s breath hitched. It wasn’t just her beauty—it was something more, something impossible to describe. An aura. A presence. A gravitational pull he couldn’t resist.

The first stroke of her bow sent a wave of sound cascading through the concert hall, rich and hauntingly beautiful. He didn’t merely hear the music—he felt it, an electric current coursing through his veins. His fingers tightened around the arms of his seat. His world had narrowed to this moment, to her.

“The live experience is something else, isn’t it?” a hushed voice murmured from the shadows to his right.

“Indeed.” Sam’s brow furrowed.

The person beside him spoke, his voice barely above a whisper. “She composed the main chords of this piece herself.”

Sam turned sharply. “Really?”

The person ignored this and nodded toward the stage. “She’s special, isn’t she?”

Sam’s gaze flickered back to the stage. “Yeah… yeah, she is.”

The idea that she had created such a masterpiece only deepened his admiration. He wanted to know more.

Before he could react, he felt something—rough, firm—grasping his right hand.

Sam nearly jumped out of his seat.

The person took off his white cowboy hat. “Sorry,” he muttered, quickly withdrawing his hand. “I accidentally grabbed your armrest.” He let out an awkward chuckle before clearing his throat. His laugh was a bit odd, odd enough to make Sam feel uncomfortable.

His breath caught—*Am I sitting next to a creep?*

And then it hit him.

His pulse quickened. *What were the odds?* He pretended to look toward the stage, but his eyes kept flicking sideways. *Was this guy here the whole time? Or did he just… appear? Am I losing my mind? Wait… wasn’t there some urban legend about ghost seats in concert halls? The kind that only appeared when a cursed soul needed to listen to one last performance before dragging an unsuspecting victim into the afterlife?*

He swallowed. *Alright, calm down. You’ve been grading too many chemistry tests—your brain is melting.*

*Maybe it was nothing. Maybe it was just coincidence.* But as Sam stole another glance, he noticed something unsettling. The old man wasn’t looking at the stage. He wasn’t even blinking. He was just… staring straight ahead, as if waiting for something.

Sam shifted uncomfortably. *Alright, just act normal. Maybe he’s just a regular concertgoer. Maybe he’s not some kind of… I don’t know… a ghost that only appears under streetlights and concert hall chandeliers.*

He decided to test the waters. “So…” he whispered. “You, uh… like classical music?”

The old man slowly turned his head—way too slowly for Sam’s comfort—until their eyes met in the darkness. Then, in a voice as dry as ancient parchment, he muttered, “No.”

Sam blinked. “Then why are you here?”

The old man’s lips twitched slightly. “Because you are.”

Sam’s brain short-circuited. His mind flashed through every horror movie scenario he’d ever seen. *This was it. This was how he died.*

The old man suddenly chuckled, snapping Sam out of his mental spiral. “Relax, kid. I’m just messing with you.”

Sam exhaled, feeling an embarrassing amount of relief. “That scared me!”

Sam wasn’t sure whether to laugh or change seats.

The music swelled, filling the grand hall. For a while, neither of them spoke, lost in the hypnotic melody. But then, when there was a brief moment of silence between the pieces, the old man leaned in again.

“You like her, don’t you?” he chuckled.

Sam’s face burned. “Do you mean the piece?”

“Both the piece and her.”

He hesitated. “I… Of course!”

“Then don’t just admire from afar.” he added. “If you’re drawn to something, pursue it.”

“Don’t do anything you’ll regret,” the old man said suddenly.

Sam choked on his own breath. “What?!”

“When I was young, I had feelings for a woman,” the old man continued.

Sam resisted the urge to roll his eyes. *And what does that have to do with me?*

“When she was leaving, I should’ve hugged her from behind back then,” the old man sighed. “But I didn’t have the courage.”

Sam played along. “And then?”

The old man waved a dismissive hand. “Never found someone I liked again. Spent my whole life alone, full of regret.”

“Oh… that’s kinda sad.”

The old man gestured toward the stage. “This violinist—she has a certain charm, doesn’t she? If I were younger, you wouldn’t stand a chance against me!”

“Is that so?” Sam smirked.

The old man grinned. “Kid, good luck!”

Before Sam could respond, the man stood and walked away, vanishing into the exit of the concert hall.

As the performance concluded, the audience erupted into applause. A standing ovation rippled through the concert hall. People slowly filed out, voices buzzing with excitement. But Sam remained seated, still spellbound.

Minutes passed. The grand hall, once overflowing, was now nearly empty. A few lingering attendees murmured among themselves, savoring the afterglow of the performance.

Then, something impossible happened.

She approached.

The performer in the red dress walked toward the front-row seats, her eyes scanning the sparse crowd. Sam’s heart pounded as she neared.

She slipped into a seat—right beside him.

She checked her phone, the screen’s glow illuminating her delicate features. She hadn’t noticed him, while the few remaining audience members approached to take photos with her.

He swallowed hard, trying to summon the courage to speak. Just as he parted his lips—she stood and walked away.

Sam sat frozen. A strange mixture of exhilaration and disappointment coursed through him. He had been so close—so impossibly close—and yet she remained just beyond his reach.

The walk home felt longer than usual. His thoughts whirled in a feverish storm, replaying every moment of the night. He had never experienced anything like this—not in twenty-five years of living. There was something about her, something undeniable. A mission took shape in his mind.

“If you’re drawn to something, pursue it.” The words echoed in his ears.

*Yes, he was right, I have to see her again.*

*Was it ridiculous? Perhaps. Was it logical? Absolutely not.* But logic had no place in the quiet longing that gripped him now.

Once home, he powered on his computer, searching for her name in the performance schedule. His heart leaped when he saw it—another concert, just days away.

This time, he wouldn’t rely on chance.

This time, he would be prepared.

He bought a ticket. And he would not let the opportunity slip through his fingers again.

**Chapter 3: Unfathomable Drive**

A4, F4, A4, D5

The night air was crisp as Sam stepped out of the concert hall, his mind still adrift in the echoes of the performance. The music lingered in his thoughts, each note intertwining with the image of the woman in the red dress. Her presence on stage had been magnetic, almost unreal—like something conjured from the depths of his subconscious, a vision too perfect to exist in the mundane world. And yet, she was real. He had to see her again.

Sam hesitated outside the concert hall, his pulse quickening with a mixture of anticipation and doubt. The rational part of his mind scolded him—*what was he doing, loitering near the performers’ exit like some starstruck teenager?* But another part of him, deeper and more instinctive, urged him to stay. It wasn’t just admiration or infatuation; it was something more profound, something he couldn’t yet name.

The backstage doors stood a few meters away, marked with letters: D and E. He paced between them, running through scenarios in his mind. Would she even come out this way? What could he possibly say that wouldn’t make him seem like a desperate fool?

As the minutes stretched into an hour, a slow trickle of musicians emerged, exchanging quiet farewells before disappearing into the night. But she was nowhere to be seen. The anticipation curdled into unease—had he missed her? Or had she left through some private exit, forever out of reach?

By the time he finally conceded defeat and started walking home, the streets were nearly empty. Yet his mind was more alive than ever, replaying every second of the performance, every flicker of her expression. His world had tilted, and he wasn’t sure how to steady it.

A week later, Sam found himself stepping into another concert hall, heart pounding with a strange mix of anxiety and excitement. He had spent hours debating whether to buy another ticket, but in the end, resistance had been futile. This time, he chose his seat carefully—second row, dead center. Close enough to see every detail, but not so close that he felt like an intruder in her world.

As the lights dimmed, his breath caught. *There she was.*

She was dressed in a flowing white gown, ethereal in the dim glow of the stage. Unlike the last performance, she did not hold a violin. Instead, she sat at a grand piano, her fingers poised above the keys. The first note resonated through the hall, sending a shiver down his spine. Then, as if the night itself had taken a breath, the strings emerged—soft at first, like whispers in the dark, then swelling to embrace her melody, weaving around it, lifting it into something vast and luminous.

She wasn’t just a violinist—she was a pianist, too. Each keystroke was deliberate, precise, yet filled with emotion so raw it was almost unbearable. He could feel the weight of each note pressing into him, whispering secrets he didn’t yet understand.

For the first time in years, Sam felt truly alive.

When the final note faded into silence, Sam knew he couldn’t just walk away again. He had to see her, had to speak to her, even if it was just for a fleeting moment.

This time, he bravely walked into the backstage entrance of the concert hall. Navigating the concert hall’s corridors, he followed the murmurs of conversation, searching for an opening. But when he reached the performer’s lounge, his confidence wavered.

A security guard eyed him warily. “Excuse me, sir. Are you looking for someone?”

Sam swallowed, forcing his voice to remain steady. “I’m looking for… I’m… a friend of hers.” He paused for a moment. “The one from just now, the pianist.”

The lie tasted strange in his mouth, but the guard merely gestured toward a hallway. “She should be in the dressing room at the end of the corridor.”

His heart pounded as he stepped forward. The door was ajar, revealing a glimpse of the room beyond. Inside, Nina sat before a mirror, gently wiping away her makeup. The bright lights cast a soft glow around her, illuminating the delicate angles of her face. She was even more breathtaking up close.

For a moment, he hesitated, hovering in the shadows, afraid to break the fragile stillness of the moment. She is removing her makeup, the soft motion of her hands almost ritualistic, as if each stroke was a silent prayer. But then, as if sensing his presence, she looked up. Her eyes met his through the mirror, sharp and knowing.  
  
He gently knocked on the door.

Sam’s throat went dry. “Uh… hi.”

She turned in her seat, an amused smile tugging at the corner of her lips. “You’re…?”

Words failed him. Every practiced line, every carefully crafted introduction, dissolved under the weight of her gaze.

“Your… your outfit look… uh, great today!”

“Outfit?”

“Uh, no, no! I mean, your… your performance was… it was… amazing!” he fumbled, clearly flustered.

She laughed. “You’re so funny.”

“I—I just wanted to say your performance was incredible. I mean, really incredible. I’ve seen you play before, and I just… I had to tell you.”

Her smile softened. “Thank you. That means a lot.”

Silence stretched between them, charged yet uncertain. He could feel the moment slipping away, and desperation seized him.

Near her, he felt a unique and unforgettable fragrance, something that seemed to awaken a sense of wonder he hadn’t known existed.

“Would you… mind signing something for me?” he blurted.

She tilted her head, eyes glinting with curiosity. “Of course.”

She took the playbill from his trembling hands, pen gliding smoothly across the paper. When she handed it back, their fingers brushed, sending a shockwave through his nerves.

“Here you go,” she said, her voice warm. “Not many people ask for my autograph. I hope it’s worth something to you.”

He glanced down at the elegant script. *Nina Davis.* Her name. Her real, tangible name. It felt like a key—one that unlocked the door to luck he hadn’t even realized was there.

He looked up to thank her, but the words stuck in his throat. The moment had passed. Her attention had already shifted, her mind returning to the world beyond him. And just like that, he was dismissed.

Sam turned and walked away, the playbill clutched tightly in his hand. It wasn’t enough. He needed more.

As he stepped into the cool night air, he realized he had made a mistake. He had her name, her signature, the memory of their brief encounter. But he had failed to ask the one thing that mattered most—her contact information.

*How to see her again.*

A slow smile tugged at his lips.

Looks like he had work to do.

**Chapter 4: Magnetic Attraction**

E5, C5, E5, F4

Sam had spent the past week staring at a small, innocuous string of numbers—a contact he had painstakingly obtained through the orchestra. Each day, he told himself he’d call her, and each day, hesitation paralyzed him. *What if she thought he was just another obsessed fan? What if she ignored him?*

Tonight, though, something inside him snapped. With a deep breath, he tapped the screen, initiating the call. As the ringing tone droned on, his heart pounded so violently he could hear it in his ears.

No answer. The silence felt deafening.

He exhaled, shoulders sagging.

*Maybe she doesn’t pick up unknown numbers… or she’s rehearsing.*

Trying to ignore the sting of disappointment, he waited. And waited. An hour passed. Nothing. Sam tossed his phone aside and rubbed his temples, frustrated with himself for even getting his hopes up.

Four hours later, his phone vibrated on the desk. A missed call. From her.

His breath hitched. He had missed it.

Scrambling, he called back immediately. The line connected after two rings.

“Hello?” The voice on the other end was soft, almost melodic.

“Uh… hi.” He cursed himself for sounding so awkward.

“Who is this?”

“It’s Sam. I… I asked for your autograph the other night.”

A pause. Then a chuckle. “Oh, it’s you!”

He became even more nervous. “You remember?”

“I have a good memory for faces.”

Sam grinned, running a hand through his hair. “I was wondering when your next performance is.”

“East City, next Saturday. You coming?”

“Yes! Absolutely. Sorry if I’m bothering you.”

“Not at all…”

The call ended, but Sam remained frozen, staring at his screen, the warmth of her voice lingering in his mind. She remembered him.

*Why didn’t I say one more thing to her? I’m so dumb, I should’ve been more prepared.*

East City’s concert hall was larger, grander than the last. Sam took his seat near the front, heart hammering. The lights dimmed. The stage bathed in soft golden hues. And then, she appeared.

*Nina Davis. Oh, my goddess!*

Dressed in an elegant, deep-blue gown that shimmered under the stage lights, she walked to the piano with effortless grace. Her fingers hovered over the keys for a moment, then pressed down. The first note resonated, a delicate whisper that built into a cascade of sound.

Sam barely breathed. This wasn’t just music. It was a story woven into melodies, emotions distilled into sound. And for a fleeting moment, he swore her eyes flickered toward the audience—toward him. A silent acknowledgment.

After the final note faded, the audience erupted into applause. Sam stood with them, clapping until his hands hurt. As the crowd began to disperse, he pulled out his phone and, with newfound confidence, sent her a message:

“Are you backstage? I have something for you.”

Minutes later, his phone buzzed.

“We’re at the restaurant next to the concert hall having a meal. Join us if you’d like.”

Musicians, still dressed in performance attire, sat at small tables eating fast food. The moment Sam entered, Nina waved him over.  
  
“Hey, over here!” she called out, her voice cutting through the noise of the bustling restaurant.

“Hi!” Sam felt a little shy.

“You made it,” she said, scooting to make space.

Her two companions, both fellow performers, eyed him with curiosity. One leaned in toward Nina, whispering, “Is he your boyfriend?”

Nina laughed. “No, he’s just an audience member.”

Her friend smirked. “Handsome audience member.”

Sam cleared his throat, cheeks warming. “Uh… is this dinner?”

“Lunch,” Nina corrected, gesturing at the clock. It was nearly 3 p.m.

“You guys must work really hard.” He fidgeted slightly, feeling oddly out of place.

“We’re used to it.” Nina took a sip of her drink. “Want something to eat?”

“I’m good, thanks.”

“This is our orchestra’s latest recording.” Nina handed him a personal device. “Feel free to share any tracks you like.”

He scrolled through the list, listening to snippets of each piece, mesmerized. They were all breathtaking, just like her live performances. After a few minutes, he returned the device.

“I transferred a few.”

“How many?” she asked, finishing the last bite of her sandwich.

Sam grinned. “Do I have to pay per track?”

“Absolutely,” her friend chimed in. “We’re expensive artists, you know.”

As they stood to leave, Sam walked with them to the exit, lingering a step behind. He didn’t want the moment to end.

“Your performance was incredible,” he said. “I’ll keep listening.”

Her friends walked ahead, leaving Nina and Sam alone near the door. Sam hesitated, searching for something—anything—to extend the moment. As he glanced around, his eyes landed on a vending machine tucked near the entrance. A small idea sparked.

He turned to Nina with a playful smile. “Bubble tea?”

She blinked in surprise, then laughed softly. “Ah… Sure.”

Sam bought two cups from the vending machine. As he handed one to her, he noticed her gaze linger on the back of his hand. With a small chuckle, he turned his palm up, feigning surprise at his own scar.

“Oh wow, still there. Thought it might’ve faded by now.”

Nina turned to face him, her eyes meeting his.

“Just a teaching accident,” he explained, taking a sip of his drink. “Happened during class.”

“What kind of class is that?”

“Chemistry.”

She blinked. “You’re a chemistry teacher?”

“A chemistry teacher who loves music.”

Nina smirked. “So, you mix chemicals by day and chase orchestras by night?”

“Something like that.”

She tilted her head slightly, studying him. “Did you really come all this way just to hear me play?”

Sam exhaled through his nose, as if caught in the act. He glanced at his drink and shook his head with a mock sigh.

“I think…” He lifted the cup slightly. “I came for this.”

Nina narrowed her eyes. “The bubble tea?”

“The bubble tea,” he confirmed, nodding solemnly.

She gave him a look. “So, you realized there was a concert happening…”

Sam sighed, shaking his head. “Crazy world we live in, huh?”

Nina rolled her eyes, laughing. “You’re not even trying to make that sound believable.”

He grinned. “Would you believe me if I said I was just avoiding the ‘obsessed fan’ look?”

She paused for a fraction of a second, then took a sip of her drink. “That,” she admitted, “I might believe.”

Sam smiled, this time a little softer.

For a moment, they stood in comfortable silence, the distant sounds of the city filling the space between them. Then Nina lifted her cup toward him.

“To chemistry and questionable vending machine choices.”

Sam clinked his cup against hers. “To chemistry.”

They sipped their drinks in comfortable silence. The night air outside was crisp, carrying the faint hum of distant traffic. Sam felt an odd sense of peace, like the universe had briefly aligned just to put them here, at this moment.

He didn’t know what the future held. But tonight, he was exactly where he was meant to be.

**Chapter 5: Melody in the Rain**

E4, F4, D5, G4

The evening air was crisp, carrying the scent of rain-soaked pavement as Sam walked alongside Nina. The streetlights flickered, casting golden reflections on the damp ground. The city was alive, yet in this moment, it felt as though they were the only two people in the world.

“Do you often perform like this?” Sam asked, his voice warm with curiosity, glancing at her as she walked with a natural elegance.

Nina smiled, her eyes twinkling under the streetlights. “Yes, but I love it. The music… it’s my escape. When I play, I feel like I’m in a world of my own. Everything else fades away.”

“You must have some magical chords, then,” Sam teased, half-joking. He was mesmerized by the way she spoke—so passionate, yet so calm.

Nina’s laugh was like the softest melody. “I don’t know about magic,” she said with a playful glance toward him, “but it’s certainly an escape I wouldn’t trade for anything.”

“Is your boyfriend picking you up?” The question slipped out before Sam could stop it, and his cheeks flushed the moment it did. He hadn’t meant to sound so… eager.

She chuckled, shaking her head. “No boyfriend.”

Sam’s heart raced, a little flutter of hope rising in his chest. “Really? No one’s ever swept you off your feet?”

She shrugged, her smile tender but distant. “They try, but I haven’t felt that spark with anyone.”

“Not even a little spark?” Sam’s voice was almost teasing now.

Nina’s gaze softened, and for a moment, there was a quiet sincerity between them. “No. But when I do find it, I’ll know.”

Sam grinned, feeling an unexpected surge of excitement. “Well, I’ll just have to make sure I’m around when that spark happens.”

She laughed, but this time, her eyes lingered on his for a fraction longer. “You’re bold,” she said, a spark of amusement in her tone.

“Your beauty is truly universal,” he replied with a wink, “It’s a rare quality these days.”

As they reached the entrance of her house, she turned to face him, her eyes full of warmth. “I’m here.”

He smiled, his heart a little lighter than before. “It’s been an honor getting to know you, Nina.”

There was a moment of hesitation between them, the night air thick with unspoken words. Sam felt his courage faltering but pushed forward. “Would you let me take you out to dinner sometime? I’d love to hear more about your music.”

Nina’s eyes flickered with thought, and for a moment, Sam feared she might decline. But then she spoke, her voice soft but genuine. “This week’s a bit crazy, but… maybe tomorrow night?”

“Tomorrow night it is!” Sam nearly grinned from ear to ear, unable to contain his excitement. “I know just the place—remember that little restaurant we passed the other night?”

She smiled, her eyes lighting up again. “Is it… the one with the orange storefront?”

“Yes, that’s the one.” he replied happily.

The next evening, Sam stood before his mirror, adjusting his collar, fixing his hair one last time. He wasn’t usually one to fuss over his appearance, but tonight was different. Tonight felt important. By the time he arrived at the restaurant, the sky had darkened, and a light drizzle had begun to fall.

The rhythmic tapping of high heels on wet pavement made him glance up, just in time to see Nina hurrying toward him. She had a stray strand of hair sticking to her cheek.

“Nina!” he greeted, his heart fluttering at the sight of her.

“I’m so sorry I’m late!” she said, a little out of breath, holding an umbrella in one hand.

“It’s fine, I just got here too,” Sam reassured her, feeling a rush of relief that she’d come at all.

“I rescued a kitten on my way here,” she explained, brushing the damp hair from her face. “It was meowing by the roadside, its leg looked hurt. I couldn’t just leave it there. An old lady took it in afterward, though.”

Sam’s heart warmed at her kindness. “That’s a beautiful thing to do. You’re a true hero.”

She grinned, but there was a soft vulnerability in her eyes. “We’re all just like that kitten, aren’t we? Wandering around, trying to find our place in the world. Wherever we are, that’s home.”

As the rain picked up, Sam instinctively took the umbrella from her hand, holding it over both of them. He couldn’t help but notice how different she looked tonight—her face free of makeup, her natural beauty even more radiant in the soft glow of the streetlights.

“Is this okay?” she asked, her voice almost shy, as if sensing his gaze. “I didn’t wear much makeup today. Is that alright?”

He chuckled, shaking his head. “Of course it’s okay. You don’t need any makeup. You’re stunning just the way you are.”

Her eyes sparkled with playfulness, and she rolled her eyes, clearly amused by his words. “You’re a charmer.”

“I’m just being honest,” he replied with a grin. “By the way, I meant to give you this the other night.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small object, holding it out to her.

“What is it?” She tilted her head slightly, leaning in to get a closer look at the small object.

“A violin,” he said, handing it to her with a grin.

She turned the delicate keychain over in her hands, her expression one of delighted surprise. “It’s so tiny! The smallest violin I’ve ever seen!” She laughed softly, and her eyes sparkled.

“It’s just a keychain,” he said with a chuckle. “But it might be the most musical thing I can give you.”

She smiled, her eyes meeting his, and there was something in that glance—a spark, perhaps—that made Sam’s heart race.

“You know,” she said, a little more quietly, “I didn’t expect a chemistry teacher to be so obsessed with music.”

“Well,” Sam replied with a wink, “Maybe if I didn’t study chemistry, I’d be a musician.” He paused, his gaze softening. “Then again, maybe I’m already playing the most important tune of my life right now.”

“I believe it. You must have a knack for it!” Her smile lingered, and for a moment, the world outside seemed to fade away as they sat down at the restaurant.

The conversation flowed as naturally as the rain outside, lighthearted and full of laughter, until the topic turned to something more personal. The mood shifted subtly. The smile gradually faded, and a brief shadow crossed their expression.

“Actually,” Sam began, his voice quieter now, “but music was everything for me when I was younger. It… it helped me survive. After my parents were lost in an earthquake, I ended up in an orphanage. Music kept me sane.”

Nina’s breath caught, her hand instinctively reaching out to his. “Sam… I’m so sorry. That must have been so hard for you.”

He met her eyes, the weight of the memory still heavy, but he managed a small smile. “It was a long time ago. But music… it was my constant.”

She nodded, her fingers brushing his lightly. “I understand. Music has that kind of power.”

He smiled softly, his gaze drifting to her. “Did you always know you wanted to perform?”

Nina twirled the violin keychain between her fingers, the soft glimmer of its tiny strings catching the light. “My father wants me to take over the family business. But… I don’t think I belong in high society.”

“You want to follow your heart,” Sam said, his voice gentle, understanding.

“I just want a simple life. I want to experience the beauty of music.”

Outside, the rain continued to fall, but inside, the melody of something new—a shared bond—had begun.

**Chapter 6: No Way Out**

B4, E4, B4, G4

The lab was a confined chaos of crumpled papers, overflowing trash bags, and cryptic equations scrawled across every available surface. It was the kind of space that exuded both genius and desperation, a shrine to one man’s obsession with uncovering the fundamental secrets of the universe. The air was thick with the scent of stale coffee and old electronics, the only signs of life the blinking LED indicators on various pieces of jury-rigged equipment.

Neosun sat hunched in his wheelchair, his fingers tapping against the worn surface of his desk as he stared at the latest set of equations. The Framequark—a theoretical dark matter particle that he had devoted years to studying—remained elusive, yet tantalizingly within reach. The simulations suggested it was real, a fundamental building block of spacetime itself. But without empirical proof, without an instrument capable of observing it, he was just another crackpot physicist with a theory no one cared about.

No one was willing to fund a project with no commercial application. But Neosun wasn’t deterred. He had built his own models, run his own experiments, and constructed a theoretical framework so intricate that even he occasionally marveled at its complexity. His calculations suggested that Framequarks weren’t just fundamental particles; they were the key to understanding time itself. According to his simulations, each Framequark stored a fragment of historical spacetime, a physical imprint of the past preserved within the very fabric of the universe.

The implications were staggering. If he could find a way to detect and manipulate Framequarks, he could, in theory, access a record of the past—not just images or data, but physical three-dimensional reconstructions of any moment in history within the range of a given set of Framequarks. It would be a breakthrough that would redefine humanity’s understanding of time, of reality itself.

A quiet beep from his console brought him back to the present. His latest test was complete. On the screen, a complex waveform flickered, faint but undeniable. Neosun reached out, adjusting a set of dials on the prototype amplifier rigged together from scavenged parts. Across the lab, in a vacuum-sealed observation chamber, a small particle trap pulsed with erratic blue light. It was faint, unstable—but it was there.

For the briefest moment, a grainy, ghostly image flickered on the adjacent monitor. It was distorted, barely distinguishable, like an old film reel played on a malfunctioning projector. He saw the outline of a hand, the curvature of a chair—then the image collapsed into noise.

Neosun exhaled sharply. It wasn’t perfect. But it was proof.

The next morning, dressed in his wrinkled blazer, Neosun wheeled himself into the sleek, glass-walled offices of yet another venture capital firm. He had done this before, had watched the dismissive glances, the barely concealed amusement of investors who saw him as nothing more than an eccentric dreamer. But this time, he told himself, would be different. This time, he had proof.

He was ushered into a conference room, a long, minimalist space dominated by a polished wooden table. Across from him sat three investment executives, their attention divided between their tablets and the disposable coffee cups in front of them.

Neosun took a breath, then launched into his presentation. He spoke of the Framequark, of its potential to revolutionize physics, of the experimental detector he had designed to isolate and observe these elusive particles. He laid out his theory, step by step, using simplified analogies when necessary, adapting to the blank stares and occasional raised eyebrows.

Then he pulled out a portable tablet and linked it to the room’s display. “I ran my latest test last night,” he said. He tapped a button, and the screen flickered to life, showing the faint, ghostly image that had appeared in his lab.

“This is a Framequark signal,” he explained. “Not an artist’s rendering. Not a simulation. A real, recorded imprint from a point in spacetime.”

The investors leaned forward. One of them frowned. “That could be interference, or noise.”

“I expected skepticism,” Neosun said, “so I ran multiple trials. Watch.” He played a second clip. The outline of a human hand again, faint and blurred, but undeniably present. “The data is consistent. Something is there. Something real.”

“Framequark?” One of the investors finally interrupted. “What exactly is that?”

“An unconfirmed dark matter particle,” Neosun answered without hesitation. “But not just any particle. If my calculations are correct, it’s the fundamental unit of time itself. It carries a fragment of spacetime history—an actual, physical imprint of everything that has occurred within a given 32 cubic unit volume, lasting for approximately 12 minutes.”

The investor glanced at the ceiling. “You’re saying these particles… record history?”

“In a way, yes,” Neosun said. “But more than that. If we can link two Framequarks together, we can establish a bridge, a connection that could allow us to access parallel timelines. Time is not continuous; it’s granular, composed of these individual units, each containing its own self-contained reality. By manipulating these units, we could, in theory, alter the sequence of events—not rewriting history, but branching it into a completely new timeline.”

A younger investor had been silent up until now. He finally spoke. “You’re talking about time travel.”

“Not in the traditional sense,” Neosun said. He leaned forward and pulled a sleek metal sphere from his bag, setting it on the table. The investors watched as he twisted its top, revealing a series of nested, transparent layers inside, each one etched with intricate fractal patterns.

“Think of time as a vast, frozen lake,” he began. “Every event, every moment, is a point on that surface. Left undisturbed, it remains unbroken—a single, continuous reality.”

He reached into his pocket and produced a thin, obsidian-black rod no longer than a pen. Holding it over the sphere, he continued, “This represents Framequarks. They exist everywhere, but they’re inert—like ice crystals embedded in the frozen lake of time. Alone, they do nothing. But when you introduce the right energy source—”

He tapped the rod against the metal sphere.

Instantly, a pulse of violet light flickered through the etched layers. The investors leaned in as the inner structures of the sphere shifted, segments unlocking and reforming into new configurations.

“When Framequarks receive a surge of dark energy,” Neosun said, “they don’t just vibrate—they fracture reality itself.”

He pressed a hidden switch on the rod, and a thin filament of electric-blue energy surged between the sphere’s layers. Slowly, the sphere’s core began splitting apart, unfolding like the petals of an alien flower.

“This is the key difference between what I’m proposing and traditional time travel,” he continued. “We’re not rewriting history. We’re not moving through a pre-existing timeline. We’re triggering a quantum fracture—a controlled cascade that generates an entirely new branch of reality.”

He glanced at the youngest investor, who was staring at the shifting sphere, mesmerized.

“Imagine every Framequark as a potential crossroad in time,” Neosun added. “Left untouched, the timeline flows in one direction. But when we introduce dark energy, we force a decision—like tipping a balance at the quantum level.”

“Cool! That’s interesting!” The investor’s eyes flickered with realization. “So… you can forge a mirror reality just by unlocking the power of Framequarks?”

“Exactly. Every Framequark is a locked door. Dark energy is the key. And once that door is open… a new reality is born.” Neosun replied, his voice steady.

“And, anyone could create their own desired mirror reality, right?” one of the investors asked, clearly intrigued.

Neosun gave him a thumbs-up. “You are right!”

At that moment, the sphere emitted a brief notification sound. Neosun reached forward and twisted the sphere shut. The violet light faded, and the structure returned to its original, seamless form.

“Sorry, it’s out of battery,” Neosun said with a mischievous grin, sticking out his tongue. The investors, momentarily startled, exchanged amused glances before the room erupted in laughter.

“Umm… Looks like there’s quite a market for that!” Another investor smirked, tapping his pen against the table as he looked at his colleagues.

Then, one of the senior investors cleared his throat. “And you’re saying you can control this?”

Neosun met his gaze. “I’m saying I’ve already started.”

The lead investor placed his phone on the table. “And you want funding for… what, exactly?”

“To build the Framequark Amplifier,” Neosun said. “A device capable of detecting and interacting with these particles. It uses a gravitational quantum matrix to amplify the Framequark signal and expand it, allowing us to step into and observe past spacetime events. With further refinement, we could eventually manipulate those events, setting off new timelines at will.”

“How much funding do you need?”  
  
When the question was asked, Neosun felt a surge of hope, he paused, his tone carrying a sense of anticipation, firmly believing that the investor had been moved by the project.

“I don’t know!”

“You don’t know?”

“The development costs are hard to estimate,” he admitted. “Maybe billions, even hundreds of billions.”

The investment partner let out an awkward “Hmm…” shifting uncomfortably. They exchanged another glance.

Then, one of the investors let out a short laugh. “This is ambitious,” he said.

“More than that,” another added. “It’s science fiction.”

“Even if we humor this,” the lead investor continued, “who exactly would use this technology? Governments? Corporations? Historians?”

Neosun crossed his arms confidently. “The first camera had no market,” Neosun countered. “Neither did the first electric light. This isn’t just a product. It’s the next step in human understanding of time and reality itself.”

Then, the lead investor closed his tablet. They stood up and shook his hand, bidding him farewell.

“We appreciate your passion, Mr. Neosun,” he said, “Best of luck.”

“Uh… Thanks for your time,” Neosun said softly. He nodded, gathered his things, and wheeled himself out of the conference room. As he exited the building, the city stretched out before him, indifferent as ever.

Another rejection. Another closed door. But as he moved through the crowded streets, he felt the familiar fire reignite in his chest.

He didn’t need them.

He would find another way.

**Chapter 7: Half Asleep, Half Awake**

F4, F4, D5, F4

Neosun had heard the same dismissive words too many times. “You should be more practical and stop wasting time on things that have no real significance!”

Each rejection had piled onto the last, an ever-growing mountain of disappointment. His research proposals, born of meticulous thought and relentless effort, were dismissed as little more than science fiction. But the rejections had an unintended consequence—they sharpened his focus, pushing him deeper into independent thought, away from the distractions of the world. Time, slipping through his fingers one second at a time, had become his most precious resource. He had to use every spare moment outside of his day job to keep his goal alive.

The equipment he needed to validate his theory was beyond what even the most advanced scientific institutions possessed. The cost of developing such tools reached into the billions, potentially more. Without them, his calculations would always be incomplete, his numbers mere approximations of the truth.

He had tried to detect the Framequark spectrum, hoping to find an answer. But just as he was approaching preliminary results, his quantum device picked up something unexpected—anomalous data. The interference disrupted the normal operation of his equipment. He stared at the screen, his fingers flying across the keyboard, sweat seeping through his shirt. The data fluctuations on the monitor were like an echo from another universe, a spectral presence lurking just beyond the veil of known physics.

“Oh my God,” he murmured. “This is the strangest thing I’ve ever seen.”

His outward calm belied the storm raging within. Every nerve in his body was electrified by the anomaly. He tried everything he could think of, yet every attempt to make sense of the interference failed to align with known logic. He had always found solace in logic, in the structured precision of mathematics and physics. It was the foundation of his world—a world that, at this moment, was unraveling.

Just as he was about to slip into exhausted sleep, a realization struck him. His mind, half-dreaming, assembled the pieces of an invisible puzzle. A pattern emerged from the chaos of data. He had found something. Something fundamental.

His instincts screamed at him to get up, to document his breakthrough. But his body was no longer under his control. He couldn’t move. He couldn’t even open his eyes.

And then, footsteps.

His door creaked open.

“Neosun…”

A woman’s voice. Familiar.

Lying in bed, he turned his gaze toward the sound. A figure stepped into view, moving toward him with a slow, deliberate grace. His pulse quickened.

“Jessie?” His voice came out hoarse, disoriented. “I don’t have time right now. Just go. Please!”

She smiled and let her dress slip from her shoulders, revealing smooth, unbroken skin. She moved closer, her body casting shadows in the dim light. He covered his eyes with his hands, then parted his fingers just enough. He tried to turn away, tried to protest, but his voice failed him.

“Give it up,” she whispered, brushing her lips against his forehead. “Come with me.”

His body responded before his mind could intervene. As she pressed against him, her warmth seeping into his skin, he felt himself slipping, surrendering. Logic dissolved. Thought scattered. For a moment, there was nothing but sensation.  
  
Yet, in that instant, the more alluring unsolved problem still loomed in Neosun’s mind.

And then—The alarm clock jolted him awake.

Neosun gasped, disoriented, his sheets damp with sweat. The room was empty.

The next morning, at work, he caught a glimpse of her from across the office. Their eyes met, and for a split second, he hesitated, half-smiling, half-shaking his head. Then he buried himself in his work, pushing the memory aside.

“Neosun!” A voice interrupted his thoughts.

He looked up. “What is it?”

“The doctor we scheduled for you is here, waiting in the conference room,” his colleague Michael said.

Neosun scowled. “Please don’t treat me like I’m mentally ill. I know myself. I’m not delusional anymore. The episodes are gone.”

His colleague sighed. “I just saw you laughing to yourself. Were you doing mental calculations again?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“Just talk to the doctor. What’s the harm? If you weren’t so limited in your mobility, I wouldn’t be looking out for you like this.”

Neosun exhaled sharply but relented. He knew they meant well.

Inside the conference room, the psychiatrist greeted him with practiced warmth.

“Neosun, it’s good to see you.”

“Hello,” he replied, already feeling the weight of the conversation pressing down on him.

“I hear you’re working on a research project. Can you tell me about it?”

Neosun smirked. “You wouldn’t be interested.”

“I’m very interested.”

He hesitated. “It’s about time,” he finally said.

“Time? Then… What’s the significance of the project?”  
  
“Its significance…”  
  
“Don’t worry, just speak your mind!”

“If I had been more obedient back then, she wouldn’t have gone out. If I had let go of my curiosity, she wouldn’t have left.”

The doctor frowned. “Who are you talking about?”

“To save my mother, to go back to my childhood to save my sister…”

“So… like a time machine from a sci-fi novel?”

“Interpret it however you like.”

The doctor studied him. “Has your research been reviewed by the academic community?”

“I haven’t published my paper yet.”

“You know, most people who lose loved ones experience prolonged grief. It can manifest in different ways—anxiety, detachment, even obsessive thought patterns. Trying to turn fantasies into reality isn’t always the best coping mechanism.”

“I’ve tried letting go,” Neosun admitted. “But another part of me won’t.” He paused. “That would count as obsessive-compulsive disorder, wouldn’t it?”

“It’s a form of self-suggestion.”

“And how do I do it?”

“You need to stop the project. It’s the only way you can begin to recover.”

Neosun nodded slowly. “Understood.”

“Are you going to let it go?”

Neosun met the doctor’s gaze. “Listen,” he said, “I’m quitting this job next week. And that project? As long as I’m alive, I’ll work on it until I die.”

He tilted the wheelchair back, rolled toward the door, then turned to the doctor. “And maybe, one day, you’ll do the same as me.”

Since the day his sister Nova was lost to a tragic accident, Neosun had lived in the shadow of her absence. His curiosity, once a refuge from chaos, had transformed into a battlefield where reason clashed with emotion. Was he insane? He didn’t know. But maybe—proving his theory right was the only thing that could prove he wasn’t.

**Chapter 8: Physiological Needs**

E4, C5, E5, A4

The message had come late, much later than expected. When she picked up, Sam’s voice was soft, hesitant.

“Calling you so late… Did I wake you?”

“No,” Nina replied, trying to sound casual. She’d been awake anyway, mind tangled in thoughts he couldn’t quite untangle.

“What did your parents think of me yesterday?” he asked.

Nina hesitated, then chuckled lightly. “My mom thinks you’re very friendly. And handsome…”

“Really?”

“Sure…” A pause, then, “What are you doing?”

“Listening to music,” Sam said. “Thinking of someone.”

“Is that so?” Her voice was laced with curiosity.

“Nina,” his voice steady now. “Let’s meet.”

“Tomorrow?”

“Uh…”

“What time?”

“How about right now?”

“Right now?”

“Umm… I’m right outside your house.”

Then, a light scraping sound—the window opening. Nina peered out, eyes wide with disbelief.

“What are you doing here?”

“I was just passing by, so I thought I’d stop to see you,” he admitted. “I have to go back and grade papers…”

Nina smiled and shook her head as she spotted Sam downstairs on his electric scooter, grinning up at her in the dim light.

“Tomorrow afternoon at six, let’s meet at the amusement park bridge.”

Sam’s heart skipped a beat. “You… you’ll go?”

Nina hummed playfully. “Maybe. Maybe not.”

Sam groaned. “Nina, don’t do this to me. My heart is fragile.”

“Hmph, you’ll survive.”

“I’ll come pick you up, princess!”

“Don’t pick me up! I’ll decide tomorrow if I’m going or not!”  
  
Sam hung up the call, taking off his headphones. With a lingering smile, he spoke while turning his back to her, hurrying home as he slowly faded from Nina’s sight, like a dream slipping away.

Nina carefully closed the window, as if afraid her family might hear.

The next day, Sam arrived at the bridge ten minutes early. He shifted his weight from foot to foot, his hands buried deep in his pockets as he stared down at the water below. Every passing second felt heavier. *What if she didn’t show?* The thought lingered in his mind, twisting and turning like a storm he couldn’t escape.

Then, a voice broke through his thoughts.

“Hey! Sam!”

He jumped slightly and turned to see Nina standing there, a smug smile on her lips. Relief washed over him, though he tried to play it cool.

“You scared me!” he said, exhaling dramatically.

She laughed. “Afraid I won’t show up?”

“I almost had a heart attack waiting.”

“Well, since I’m here now, let’s try all the rides in the amusement park!”

Sam made a face. “I’m afraid I might puke. What if I puke all over you?”

Nina smirked. “Then I’ll puke on you too, that way we’re even.”

She grabbed his hand, and together, they stepped into the glowing carnival of lights and motion.

First stop: the roller coaster.

“This is a bad idea,” Sam muttered as they climbed into their seats.

Nina grinned. “No backing out now.”

The ride lurched forward, and as the car climbed higher, Sam gripped the safety bar tightly.

“If I die, tell my students I loved them,” he said solemnly.

Nina burst out laughing, but her laughter turned into a scream as they plunged downward. Wind roared past them, and when the ride finally screeched to a stop, Sam staggered out, dizzy.

“I think I left my soul back there,” he mumbled.

Nina patted his back. “Come on, brave warrior. Time for the Ferris wheel.”

As they ascended in their cabin, the city lights stretched out before them, shimmering like stars, mirroring the constellations above. Nina leaned her head on Sam’s shoulder, her eyes fluttering shut, lost in the beauty of the night where the heavens and earth seemed to meet.

“You tired already?” he asked softly.

“Mm, just… comfortable.”

Sam looked down at her, warmth spreading through his chest. He rested his head lightly against hers, neither of them speaking, just enjoying the quiet moment above the world.

Three months passed, their relationship strengthening with each passing moment, until one evening, Nina found herself at Sam’s place.

“I’m a bit hungry,” Sam said. “How about you?”

Nina stretched. “What do you want to eat? I’ll cook for you.”

“A talented woman like you can also cook?”

She shot him a playful glare. “What, you underestimate me? Where are the eggs?”

“Here they are! Are you making a cake?” Sam asked curiously, watching her roll up her sleeves.

Nina just smiled. She’d never cooked dinner for a man before. Tonight, she’d make something simple: egg fried rice.

“Do you like Chinese food?” Sam asked, leaning against the counter.

“I learned this from a Japanese friend in college…”

“Oh, I see.”

A few minutes later, they sat at the table. Sam took a bite and raised an eyebrow. “A bit… salty…”He furrowed his brow.

She smacked his arm, and they both laughed.  
  
“How about I cook for you instead? I’ll show you my skills…” Sam tied his apron around his waist, then cracked his knuckles with a confident smile.

After dinner, Sam led her to his study, where a grand piano stood by the window. Nina’s eyes lit up. “You play?”

“For fun. Nowhere near your level,” he admitted. “Can you teach me?”

“Of course! But… it’s late. We might disturb the neighbors.”

She pressed a few keys with practiced ease.  
  
“Nina, I love how you look right now.”  
  
As Sam’s hand rested on her shoulder, Nina felt the heat and instinctively moved, then wandered toward the window, lost in thought.  
  
Sam watched her from the side, something warm stirring in his chest.

“You can sit on my lap and teach me softly…” he teased.

She turned, cheeks pink. “Sam, so you’re this bad, huh?”

“You’re beautiful today,” he murmured.

She diverted her gaze to the streets below, where the city lights reflected off the glass, creating a soft glow. Sam stepped forward and wrapped his arms around her from behind. In an instant, she felt the heat rise to her face, her heartbeat quickening.

“Do you also love plants?” she asked, trying to change the subject.

Sam chuckled. “Nina… your face is red.”

She gently rested her hand on her forehead, her eyes slightly lowered.

“I’m a bit tired today. I think I should go home.”

The faint glow of the streetlights reflected softly on her face. Sam walked her home and accompanied her to the door.

By the time she entered her house, night had fully settled. The moment she stepped inside, her father’s voice cut through the quiet.

“It’s so late. Where have you been?”

“I’m grown up now,” Nina said, her voice firm.

Her father’s expression darkened. “I care about you.”

“I’ve listened to you all my life. But not this time. No matter what you say… whatever.” She turned on her heel and walked toward the door.

“Where are you going? If you don’t listen to me, don’t come back!”

She froze. Slowly, she turned back. Her father’s face was unreadable, but there was steel in his eyes. She knew what this was about.

He couldn’t accept an ordinary teacher as her future husband. And because of that, because of something as trivial as status, he had had a big argument with her before. The memory burned hot in her mind.

Nina stormed out. That night, she didn’t go home. Instead, she stayed with friends from the orchestra, avoiding her father’s disappointment, his harsh words. She continued seeing Sam in secret, finding solace in his presence.

Nina knew she would have to make a choice soon—between her family and the man she loved.  
  
Then, the financial crisis struck. Her father’s steel mill, once a pillar of strength, now stood on the edge of bankruptcy. The empire he had built was crumbling.  
  
Sam carefully unwrapped the package and placed it in front of Nina with an eager smile.

“Open it and see!”

Nina peeled away the last layer of wrapping and gasped.

“A violin…” she murmured, her fingers tracing the smooth curves of the instrument. It was a bit rough around the edges, the craftsmanship not as refined as the professional ones she had seen, but there was something deeply personal about it.

“The one I gave you before couldn’t be played. This one can.” Sam’s voice carried a note of nervous excitement.

“Where did you buy it?” she asked, tilting her head as she examined it more closely.

“I… made it myself, as a surprise for you.”

Her eyes widened. “Wow! Sam, I didn’t know you were so handy!”  
  
Sam smirked, his eyes glinting with mischief. “Oh, I’m good at more than you think.”

Nina felt her face heat up and swatted his arm playfully. “You’re so naughty!”

“Do you like it? Try it and see how it sounds…”

Nina lifted the violin to her shoulder, adjusted her grip on the bow, and pulled it gently across the strings. A soft, trembling note filled the room, followed by a delicate melody that flowed effortlessly from her fingers. Sam closed his eyes, letting the music wash over him.

“Thank you for your thoughtfulness,” she said warmly, lowering the violin.

Sam took a deep breath, his voice suddenly serious. “Nina… I want to have all of you today.”

She blinked, startled by his sudden intensity. “What do you want to do? Hmph! Bad person!”  
  
This was the scene he had conjured in the solitude of countless nights, the fantasy that had played out in the theater of his mind, again and again.

“You’re very nervous…” he observed, his hand brushing against hers.

That night, Sam turned Nina into a woman in the truest sense.  
  
Two weeks later, Sam rushed home after finishing his lessons. He had been looking forward to seeing Nina, but for some reason, he couldn’t reach her.

“Sam!” Nina’s voice echoed on the other end of the line.

“Nina…” he exhaled in relief. “Where are you?”

“The troupe scheduled two performances in a row,” she said, her voice tired but filled with excitement.

“Are you alright? You sound… different,” Sam asked, concern creeping into his voice.

Nina hesitated for a moment before replying softly, “Let’s talk when I get back.”

Sam frowned slightly but didn’t press further. Nina ended the call and walked back alone, her thoughts heavy and tangled. The city’s distant hum felt oddly distant, as if muffled by the weight of her thoughts.

When she finally arrived at Sam’s place, Nina walked in first and sat down on the couch, her head lowered as if lost in thought.

Sam closed the door behind them and approached her carefully. “What’s wrong?”

Nina took a deep breath.“I… I think I might be pregnant.”

Sam’s eyes widened as he moved a little closer. “You… really think so?”

She nodded hesitantly. “I haven’t been to the doctor yet, but… I took a pregnancy test myself, and it came back positive.”

Sam took her hand, his voice gentle. “We should go to the hospital for a check-up, just to make sure everything’s okay.”

Nina nodded softly, then after a moment of silence, a small smile appeared on her lips. “Have you ever thought about what we should name the baby?”

Sam raised an eyebrow. “Already?”

She let out a quiet laugh. “I know it’s sudden… I wasn’t expecting this either.”

After a pause, she continued, “But… if it’s a girl, let’s call her Nova.”

“And if it’s a boy?”

She thought for a moment, then grinned. “Hmm… if it’s a boy, then… Neosun!”  
  
Four months later, at the hospital, the doctor performed an ultrasound, leaving both of them anxious as they awaited the results.

“What did the doctor say?” Sam asked.

“It’s a girl,” Nina whispered, her eyes shining with emotion.

Sam grinned. “Wonderful, I have a daughter!”

Six months later, Sam accompanied Nina to the hospital, where she gave birth to their daughter, Nova.

“Her eyes are so big, just like yours!” Sam said, marveling at the tiny life in Nina’s arms.

“And her mouth and nose look like yours,” Nina added, touching the baby’s cheek.

“They really do…” Sam murmured, completely mesmerized.

The innocent look in Nova’s eyes filled their hearts with warmth. From that moment on, Sam and Nina embraced their new roles as parents, raising their daughter in joy.

From the moment Nova was born, Sam and Nina’s lives transformed.

The first night at home was filled with sleeplessness as Nova cried through the night. Nina paced the room, whispering soft lullabies while Sam rubbed his eyes, attempting to prepare a bottle. “Is it too hot? Too cold?” he muttered, testing the milk on his wrist.

“She’s still crying,” Nina said desperately.

“Maybe she just needs to be held.” Sam gently took Nova in his arms, rocking her slowly. To their relief, her cries softened into tiny hiccups before she drifted back to sleep.

As weeks passed, they learned to navigate parenthood together. They celebrated Nova’s first giggle, clapping and cheering when she finally said, “Dada!” and “Mama!” Nina spun in circles with Nova in her arms, laughing as the baby squealed in delight.

Every milestone was cherished—the first time she reached for their hands, the first time she tried solid food and scrunched her nose in confusion, the first time she took a wobbly step into their arms.

**Chapter 9: Genetic Recombination**

C4, E4, D5, D5

Two years later, Nina frowned at the calendar. “It’s been half a month, and my period still hasn’t come…”

Sam looked up. “Again?”

Their genes had recombined, and a few months later, they learned they were expecting a baby boy.

As Nina’s due date approached, a routine check-up turned into an urgent consultation when the doctor detected signs of fetal distress. After thorough examinations, he sat them down, his expression serious.

“Nina, your pregnancy is high-risk. Given your previous labor history, there’s a real concern for birth trauma.”

“What does that mean?” she asked nervously.

The doctor took a deep breath. “We have two choices: deliver early, which risks incomplete fetal development, or wait until full term. Waiting could result in severe complications, including significant damage to your body.”

Nina’s mind raced. She looked at Sam, who was already tense, his hands clenched at his sides.

“I want to wait,” she said, her voice steady despite the fear tightening her chest.

Sam opened his mouth to protest, but she squeezed his hand.

“I want to give our son the best chance,” she whispered.

“We need you to sign this in advance.” The doctor handed the consent form to Nina. She skimmed through it quickly and signed her name.

The following weeks were torturous. Nina’s discomfort grew unbearable as her body strained to carry the pregnancy to full term. When labor finally began, the delivery room was filled with tense energy.

Hours passed, and complications soon emerged. The prolonged labor led to severe tearing and hemorrhaging. The medical team moved quickly, but Nina was slipping in and out of consciousness.

The sound of their baby’s first cries filled the room, but she barely registered it. Her vision swam from exhaustion and blood loss. Still, she forced herself to turn her head, catching a glimpse of her newborn son before darkness overtook her.

When Nina briefly regained consciousness, she heard the doctor’s voice.

“Healthy baby boy, good weight,” she announced, wrapping the newborn in a soft blanket before handing him to a nurse.

Sam’s breath was shaky with overwhelming emotion. He took a step forward, but a nurse gently intercepted him.

“Come with me, Dad,” she said with a reassuring smile. “We’ll get the baby checked, cleaned up, and ready for you to hold him.”

Sam hesitated, glancing at Nina. She managed a faint smile.

“Go,” she whispered. “I’ll be fine.”

He nodded and followed the nurse out of the room.

The moment the doors swung shut behind them, urgency filled the air.

“She’s hemorrhaging,” a nurse warned.

“Severe tearing—her uterus isn’t contracting properly,” another voice added.

The last thing she heard before fading into unconsciousness was the doctor’s urgent command:

“Prepare for emergency surgery—now!”

Hours later, Nina woke to the rhythmic beeping of monitors. Her body felt unbearably heavy, and an aching emptiness settled deep in her abdomen.

A soft rustling made her turn her head. The doctor stood beside her bed, his expression solemn.

“Nina,” he began gently, “the damage was severe. We had to perform an emergency hysterectomy along with reconstructive surgery. The tissue trauma was too extensive.”

She swallowed, the weight of his words pressing down on her chest. She had known this was a risk, but hearing it felt like a betrayal by her own body.

“You’re saying…” she croaked.

“You won’t be able to conceive again,” the doctor confirmed. “And… the reconstructive surgery means there may be lasting physical changes.”

The doctor hesitated, as if weighing his next words carefully.

Nina’s chest tightened. “Just tell me.”

He spoke in a low, measured tone, explaining things she wasn’t ready to hear.

Her fingers curled into the sheets. A long silence stretched between them.

Nina let out a shaky breath.

“I’ll tell him,” she said, her voice firm despite her trembling hands. “But not now. Please.”

The doctor hesitated. “Alright.”

She closed her eyes briefly, then nodded.

After she had stabilized, the door opened. Sam entered, cradling their newborn son. His face was lined with exhaustion but filled with awe.

“Nina,” he breathed, kneeling beside her, “he’s perfect.”

“Look, his head is bigger than his sister’s,” Nina noted with a laugh.

“He’ll definitely be smart when he grows up!”

Six months later, after they had tucked both children into bed, they returned to their room.  
  
The bedside lamp cast a dim, golden glow over the quiet bedroom.

Nina and Sam lay together in bed, rediscovering the warmth of closeness—their first since her recovery. Sam shifted slightly, sliding his hand gently around Nina’s waist, a familiar gesture of connection.

But something was different tonight.

Nina tensed. Subtly, but unmistakably. And then, she pushed him away.

Sam paused, blinking in confusion. He studied her face, expecting a teasing smile. But she was quiet, withdrawn.

After a moment, Nina sat up. Without a word, she reached for the bedside lamp and flicked the switch. The sudden brightness chased away the darkness, illuminating the flicker of conflict in her eyes.

Then, she spoke.

“I think it’s time for a change.”

Her voice was steady, but beneath it, something trembled—a hesitation, a certainty, an idea so radical it barely felt real.

Sam narrowed his eyes against the light, adjusting to both the brightness and the weight of her words.

“What do you mean?”

Nina inhaled deeply, as if the very act of voicing her thoughts required gathering strength. Then, she reached for his hand, squeezing it with quiet urgency.

“Let’s do something crazy.”

Sam smirked, intrigued by the seriousness in her voice. He tilted his head, a touch of amusement in his expression.

“Alright. What is it?”

Nina hesitated for just a second. Then, she said it.

“Celibacy.”

Sam blinked.

“Come again?”

“Celibacy.” She repeated it.

Then Sam chuckled—a short, incredulous sound. “You want us to become ascetics?”

Sam studied her face, waiting for the punchline that never came. The amusement in his eyes dimmed.

He shook his head, half-expecting her to break character. This wasn’t just an idea thrown into the air for discussion. This was something else.

“I’ve heard,” she continued, “that love without sex is the truest kind of love.”

Now she had his full attention.

He sat up, running a hand through his hair. “Okay. What’s going on? You’re serious about this?”

Nina cast her gaze downward. When she spoke again, her voice was quieter.

“I believe that any form of intimacy that isn’t purely for procreation is… unnecessary.” She met his eyes. “We already have two children. We don’t need to do that anymore.”

A silence stretched between them, filled only by the faint ticking of the clock.

Sam exhaled, considering her words.

“I see what you’re saying. This won’t be easy.”

Nina’s gaze flickered, uncertainty momentarily breaking through her resolve. But then, she straightened her posture. She knew Sam’s love for her wasn’t shallow, but she couldn’t shake the fear that he might not see her the same way after this.

“Sex distracts us. It keeps us tied to something primitive, something beneath us.” Her fingers tightened around his. “If we remove it, maybe—just maybe—we’ll find something deeper. Something real.”

Sam studied her, the weight of her conviction pressing against him. He drummed his fingers against his knee.

“You think we’ll succeed?”

“I don’t know.”

He exhaled sharply, shaking his head with a wry smile. “Isn’t sex supposed to be a good thing? A part of marriage?”

A flicker of doubt passed through Nina’s mind. A whisper of a question: Is this truly what I believe, or am I running from something?

She bit her lip but didn’t let the thought settle.

“It’s also something that clouds judgment. If we abstain for ten years, we’ll know we’ve risen above it.”

“Ten years?”

“Ten years.”

Sam didn’t answer right away. He sat there, processing, weighing what this meant—not just for their relationship, but for himself.  
  
“But it’s been six months since we’ve been close… so we only have nine and a half years left.” Nina added.

Finally, he asked, “You’re sure this isn’t some kind of test? A way to see if I love you beyond physical attraction?”

Nina shook her head.

“This isn’t a test.” She took a breath. “It’s evolution.”

“So… an experiment?”

Nina murmured, “Perhaps.”

She thought back to all the time she had spent perfecting her appearance, making herself look beautiful, desirable. *How much of it had been for herself? And how much had been for the gaze of others?*

*Was my pursuit of beauty truly about self-expression? Or was it just biology? A silent, unconscious drive to attract, to reproduce?*

*If she could sever that drive, if she could strip away the layers of instinct—would she finally be free?*

The idea thrilled her.

Sam studied her for a long moment. Then, finally, he nodded.

“Alright,” he said. “I’ll do it.”

Nina’s breath hitched. “You mean it?”

“I’ll give it a shot.” Sam smirked slightly. “But are you sure we won’t just turn into roommates?”

For the first time that night, Nina laughed—a soft, genuine sound. She leaned into him, resting her head against his shoulder.

“We’ll become something greater.”

That night, they fell asleep wrapped in the quiet certainty of a decision that would change everything.

But was this truly the next step in human evolution? Or just another doomed attempt to outrun their own nature?

Neither of them had the answer. Not yet.

Time passed quickly, and before they knew it, both children were old enough for school…

“Kids, dinner’s ready!”

“We’re coming…” Nova and Neosun called out, running hand in hand across the backyard lawn.

As they ate, Nova suddenly looked up. “Mom, what is love?”

“Honey, why do you ask?”

“It’s our homework from the teacher today.”

Nina smiled. “Oh… love is thinking of others always. It transcends life and death, and it’s always there…”

“My brother and I are Mom and Dad’s love, right?” Nova asked.

“Yes, darling, exactly right!” Nina kissed Nova’s forehead.

Later, at the dinner table, Neosun frowned at the chicken leg on his plate.

“These were sacrificed for us,” Nina said gently. “Look how clean your sister’s plate is. Eat it up, don’t waste it!”

“Why do we have to eat it?”

“It’s the natural order,” Sam explained. “You need to eat to grow strong and healthy!”

“Maybe yesterday, it was happily eating grains on the farm…” Neosun mused. “Can’t we just eat vegetables and fruits instead?”

“That would be nutritionally deficient,” Sam said. “We need a balanced diet, so sacrifices have to be made.”

“Sis, why can’t humans do something about their suffering?” Neosun sighed.

“Maybe plants also feel pain when they’re eaten, they just can’t express it,” Nova added.  
  
That kid had a way of turning dinner conversations into existential debates. For a moment, Sam wondered if this was Nina’s influence.

Sam focused on his food, glancing at Neosun before turning his gaze to Nina. “You two are something else.”

That night, Neosun sat at the table, staring at the discarded chicken bone in the trash. He realized that the cheerful little chickens in cartoons were not the same as the one on his plate. He wished he could save the farm animals, and he wanted to teach them to speak English, so they could say ‘NO!’ to humans.

“Sis, do you see that star?” Neosun asked as they lay on the grass.

“The really far one?”

“Yeah, that one!”

“Do you think we can reach it?”

“I think once we become ‘Starman,’ we can travel freely across the universe!”

Neosun’s eyes gleamed. “Sis! I want to become a Starman right now!”

“No, we have to grow up first! Go to school, graduate, get a job, get married, have kids, and then naturally grow old…” Nova said.

“Oh, fine…”

“But I’m older than you, so I’ll probably get there first!” she teased.

“Then wait for me when you get there, okay?”

“Okay, it’s a promise!”

At the supermarket, Neosun watched the fish swimming in a tank. It was like an “orca” navigating the cosmos, desperately searching for an escape…

“Dad, that one is swimming so fast!”

“Then we’ll take it,” Sam said, signaling the worker.

Neosun hesitated. “Okay…”

Back home, Sam placed the fish in the sink. Neosun and Nova crouched beside it, watching it intently, talking to it, even giving it a name.

“Starman! Keep swimming! Keep swimming! You’re the fastest!” Neosun cheered.

“Alright, Mom and Dad need to cook it now,” Sam said, rolling up his sleeves.

“Can we not eat it?”

“Sweetie, it’s not a pet, it’s for dinner.”

Neosun covered his face with his hands, his fingers parting just enough to watch as Starman’s fate unfolded. The fish that had been so full of life just moments ago was now being prepared for their meal.

Later, as the dish was placed on the table, Sam urged, “Neosun, come try it. It’s delicious.”

Neosun hesitated, staring at the plate. “It was swimming so well… and now it’s dead.”

“It wasn’t smart enough,” Sam said lightly. “If we didn’t eat it, someone else would.”

Neosun clenched his fists under the table. “I’m sorry, Starman! We didn’t mean to eat you! I wanted you to live…” he whispered before taking a reluctant bite.

From that night on, every time he passed the supermarket fish tank, he thought of Starman. No fish ever seemed as vibrant again.

**Chapter 10: Developmental Disorder**

G4, D4, E5, C5

Neosun had always been a curious child, his mind constantly whirring with questions that often left his parents and teachers both amused and perplexed. He was different from his peers, a boy whose thoughts soared beyond the confines of everyday life.

“I like Dad, but I don’t like Mom,” Neosun confessed one day as he sat beside his sister, Nova.

“Why?” she asked, her large eyes blinking with curiosity.

“She always forbids me from doing things and sometimes she’s really mean!”

“Maybe you’re just too sensitive,” Nova replied, thoughtful. “I think both Mom and Dad are great!”

At school, Neosun was known for his relentless stream of questions. They came at odd times, often when the teacher least expected them.

“Why do batteries have a positive and negative side?”

“Why does the Earth have a North and South Pole?”

“Why do we have boys and girls?”  
  
“Two eyes, two ears, two hands… why does the human body always have pairs of organs?”

His classmates would groan or laugh. Some tried to answer.

“For symmetry!” one kid called out.

“One is a backup!” another added.

“Then why is there only one heart?” Neosun countered, eyes shining with anticipation.

“They must have forgotten to make a backup!” someone joked, and the class erupted in laughter. A few students hesitated, glancing at the teacher. But seeing no reaction, they joined in, their laughter swelling until it drowned out the teacher’s voice.

But no one could answer his deeper questions.

“If I flew to the very edge of space, would I get stuck out there because time stops?”  
  
“I don’t think so!”

Another suddenly shot back, “I think it would!”

“I think you’d disappear before you even get there!” one of the kids nearby added.  
  
“Why do we exist right now?” Neosun continued to ask.

A student from the back row scoffed. “Existence is just existence. If you don’t want to exist, just disappear!”

Laughter rippled through the classroom again. Neosun stopped asking questions.

His teacher, Ms. Morgan, sighed and rubbed her temples. “Neosun, these kinds of questions are not part of the curriculum. Please focus on what’s relevant for the exam.”

When he pressed further, her tone hardened. “Neosun! If you can’t stay on topic and are disrupting the class, I’ll have to send you to the principal’s office.” It was clear that the teacher Ms. Morgan was in a bad mood today.

At home, his mother, Nina, noticed his silence.

“Did you learn a new nursery rhyme today?” she asked, cradling him.  
  
“Twinkle, twinkle, little star… la la… la la… la la la… how I wonder what you are…”

Neosun didn’t respond directly but started humming softly.

During an exam, his mind wandered to a complex geometry problem from a higher-grade textbook. He forgot he was taking a test, lost in thought until the time ran out. His test came back with a failing grade, while his classmates, who once envied his intelligence, now whispered behind his back.

“What happened to Neosun?”

“No idea. Maybe he’s not so smart after all.”

“I think he just got lucky before!”

“Idiot! Idiot! Idiot!” A group of students ran around him, pointing at his nose, their voices rising in cruel unison.

“I’m not an idiot,” he muttered, his voice barely audible.

“You are! A big idiot who failed the test!”

Nova, always protective, rushed to his side. “Don’t you dare talk to my brother like that!”

“Sis… I want to go home!”

“It’s okay, don’t be scared, I’m here!” Nova hugged Neosun.

At home, Nina confronted him with his grades.

“Not only did you fail math, but you also got zeros in two other subjects?”

“I…” he hesitated, eyes cast downward.

“What are these?” Nina demanded, holding up his textbook.

Sketches filled the pages—visions of futuristic cities, starships, intricate alien ecosystems.

“Just some… imagination,” he admitted.

Frustration flickered across Nina’s face. “How many times have I told you not to draw in your textbooks?” She ripped the pages out. “Go to the study room and reflect on your actions.”

Neosun stared at the torn pages, his breath hitching. Nova wrapped an arm around him later, trying to console him.

“Sis, why do I exist?” he whispered, his voice trembling between sobs. Tears streamed down his face as he began to doubt whether the world truly needed him.

She wiped his tears gently. “Come on, let’s wash your face…”

He withdrew into himself, speaking less and less. His interests grew more abstract, delving into theories and ideas far removed from other children his age. The weight of expectations and the monotony of schoolwork pressed on him like an invisible force. Anxiety coiled in his chest, suffocating.

One day, Nina took him aside.

“Mom has to go to rehearsal next door. Can you play with the kids here for a while?”

Neosun nodded slightly but said nothing.

Nova thrived in social settings, but Neosun grew more withdrawn, his words reducing to simple nods and shakes of the head. He spoke freely only to Nova.

As time passed, their celibacy plan entered its seventh year.

That night, Sam tried to get closer to Nina. At that moment, years of suppressed desire erupted within him, setting his body and mind ablaze. His hand reached for her…

“Follow your nature, you’re an animal. But resisting it is what makes you human. Which one do you choose?” Nina, just like before, pushed his hand away.

“I want to be an animal when I need to be… and a human when I don’t.”

This time, seeing the longing in Sam’s eyes, Nina didn’t refuse.

He grew hard, and then… she bent down.

The warmth of her mouth sent a jolt of surprise through Sam. “Looks like we’re about to fail!” he chuckled.

But then—Nina stopped. Something else came to mind. She couldn’t let this escalate.   
  
“Sorry, I can’t.” At least, not in her heart. She wasn’t ready to compromise any further.

Wiping her mouth, she slowly regained her composure. “Neosun hasn’t been talking much lately,” she said, shifting the conversation. “I think something’s wrong with him.”

Sam, still recovering from the abrupt stop, sighed and steadied himself. “Yeah… I’ve noticed too.”

“I’m taking him to the doctor tomorrow,” Nina said.

“While you’re at it, maybe you should see a doctor too?” Sam replied.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s been seven years, Nina. This is insane.”

Nina glared at him. “What makes us human is our ability to reject our animal instincts!” She crossed her arms. “We’re not animals. Our love shouldn’t be based on animal behavior!”

“Fine. I’ll take care of it myself.”

This rejection sparked yet another argument.  
  
“I’m just tired of this!” Sam snapped.

She scoffed. “So what, should we just spread our legs like monkeys, roll our eyes back, and go ‘Ooh—yeah—ooh—god’ every few days like clockwork? Don’t you realize how low this is?”  
  
“Sam, I just don’t want to be a tool for anyone’s desires.” Nina’s voice was firm. “I refuse to play the role of livestock—not for a single second.”

“I see, I… I respect your feelings.” He exhaled sharply before adding, “I’ll keep supporting your plan, but let’s be honest here… Nina, you’re a weirdo.”

“Fine! I’m a weirdo!” Nina shouted, furious. “I’m frigid! I’m the one with the problem! Seven years must’ve driven you insane, huh?” She yanked the blanket over her head and burst into tears.

Sam sat in silence for a moment, then reached out and pulled the blanket-covered Nina into his arms. Through the fabric, his voice came muffled but sincere:

“I swear, I won’t think like an animal ever again. Happy now?”

*Is frigidity a disease?*

To a cat in heat, yes. Which is why, the moment it’s neutered, *it’s considered cured.*

But when it comes to human desire—between uncontrollable urges and total indifference—*who’s really sick?*

The next day, Nina took Neosun’s hand gently.

“Dad and I are taking you to the hospital,” she said, her voice soft.

His head jerked up. “No…” He shook his head fiercely.

“It’s just a checkup, sweetheart,” she said.

“What kind of checkup?” Nova asked, frowning.

“Nothing serious,” Nina assured her. “Just stay home.”

Neosun turned to Nova, his face pale. “Sis… I don’t want to go.”

Nova squeezed his hand. “Be good. When you come back, there’ll be a gift waiting for you under the rubber tree in the green tin can.”

Neosun hesitated. “Really?”

“Of course! I’ll be waiting for you there.”

The journey to the hospital was silent. Every so often, Neosun looked up at his parents, but they remained quiet. The sterile white walls of the hospital loomed ahead, indifferent and cold.

Hours passed before the doctor returned with his findings. He held up a brain scan, its intricate patterns glowing under the light.

“This child has a congenital genetic defect,” the doctor said slowly. “A chromosomal disorder causing a psychological barrier, among other factors,” the doctor added, his voice thoughtful. “It is known as autism.”

The words settled over them like a thick fog.

Nina swallowed hard. “Will he… be okay?”

The doctor hesitated. He had already asked Neosun many psychological questions, trying to navigate the labyrinth of his mind. He observed Neosun closely—his behavior, his reactions to the stimuli around him.

After a long pause, the doctor spoke, his voice slower now. “This child’s condition is not just genetic. It’s shaped by a world that’s not ready to understand him.”

He paused again, as if weighing his next words carefully. *In another time, his mind would be a treasure,* he thought, his gaze still fixed on the scan. *But in this world, brilliance is often seen as a threat, or worse, something to be ignored.*

He looked at Nina, his expression heavy. *What if the world does?* The thought lingered in the air, an unspoken question that hung heavily in the room.

Neosun sat on the examination table, staring at the fluorescent light above. He didn’t understand the medical terms. But he understood one thing: He was different.

**Chapter 11: Unexpected Incident**

D4, B4, E5, F4

“Doctor, what should we do?” Sam’s voice was taut, as if holding back an impending storm.

The doctor exhaled, glancing between Sam and Nina. “I’ve reviewed the genetic analysis of both children… Based on the pathological system’s calculations, the probability of this outcome given your genetic combination is 95%. Nova was the lucky 5%.”

“So Neosun’s future development may face unknown risks?” Nina’s voice wavered, her arms wrapped tightly around her head.

“You need to be mentally prepared. His neurological patterns are atypical. The cause is hard to determine, and we can only monitor his progress through regular assessments.”

Nina stared at the screen displaying Neosun’s brain scan, the flickering numbers and waveforms feeling more like a foreign language than medical data. “How can this be?”

Before the doctor could respond, Nina’s phone buzzed violently in her coat pocket. She fumbled for it, still reeling from the weight of the conversation.

“Sorry, let me take this call real quick…”

She pressed the phone to her ear. “Hello? Who is this?”

A voice on the other end was clipped and urgent. “Are you the child’s guardian, Ms. Davis?”

Nina’s nerves tightened again. “You are…?”

“This is West City Hospital. We need you to come here immediately regarding a child. We are in the emergency department.”

“What?” Her breath hitched.

“Your child, Nova, was injured at the Grass Street intersection.”

Nina’s blood ran cold. “What did you say?”

“Please stay calm. We are doing our best.”

The phone slipped from her fingers and clattered onto the floor. The doctor’s office, the screens, the hum of machinery—it all faded into meaningless noise. Sam’s hands were suddenly on her shoulders, shaking her gently.

“Nina? What happened?”

Her lips moved, but no words came. Only one thought echoed in her mind: Nova.

The corridors of West City Hospital smelled of antiseptic and despair. Nina sprinted past nurses, past stretchers, her heart pounding against her ribs like it wanted to break free.

“I am Nova’s mother! Where is my child?” Her voice cracked as she reached the reception desk.

The receptionist hesitated, her gaze flickering to a doctor standing nearby. He stepped forward, expression grave. “Ma’am… we are very sorry. We did everything we could.”

The world seemed to tilt sideways. “What? Where is she?”

“I am sorry. Let me take you there…”

She followed the three nurses in a daze down a silent corridor. Each step felt like wading through quicksand. The fluorescent lights above hummed, casting a sickly glow over the white walls.

Room 509.  
  
The doctor stopped.

Nina’s pulse thundered in her ears. No. No, no, no. She couldn’t move. Couldn’t breathe.

The door creaked open.

Nova lay motionless beneath a white sheet. A single lock of golden hair peeked out from beneath the fabric, matted with dried blood.

Nina’s legs buckled. A raw, guttural sound tore from her throat as she staggered forward, reaching out with trembling hands. She touched Nova’s face—ice cold.

“Why?” The word came out in a whisper, barely audible. “Why is this happening?”

A nurse placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Ma’am, please accept our condolences.”

Nina collapsed against the bed, her sobs muffled against the lifeless body of her daughter.

The tragedy was just one in a growing list of unexplained vehicular accidents.

Smart transportation had long since replaced human drivers. People no longer questioned the safety of autonomous vehicles; they trusted the algorithms, the predictive analytics, the promise of perfection. Yet, flaws lurked beneath the surface—errors unaccounted for, edge cases ignored.

“The vehicle’s driving record shows that at the time of the accident, it was not carrying any passengers,” an officer explained at a press conference the following day. “It was an empty car, en route to pick up a passenger, when it struck the girl at the Grass Street intersection.”

“Can you confirm the cause of the collision avoidance failure?” a reporter pressed.

“We are investigating. So far, we have found no logs indicating system malfunction,” the vehicle manufacturer’s spokesperson explained.

“What about the passenger who made the booking?”

“The passenger just booked the car during that time, we cannot disclose the passenger’s identity.”

Another reporter spoke up. “Is it true the vehicle’s safety features were downgraded to cut costs?”

The spokesperson’s gaze flickered, but his voice remained measured. “The model in question met all regulatory requirements at the time of manufacturing.”

A murmur swept through the room. The answer was a confirmation wrapped in legalese.

A journalist in the front row leaned forward. “So, you’re saying it wasn’t illegal. But was it safe?”

The officer hesitated. “That is part of our ongoing investigation.”

Behind closed doors, experts at the vehicle inspection agency ran exhaustive diagnostics. The results were damning.

Cost-cutting measures had stripped the collision avoidance system down to its bare minimum, meeting the lowest legal threshold but lacking redundancies that could have prevented disaster. The manufacturer had downgraded sensor resolution, reduced AI processing power, and eliminated secondary verification protocols.

“This was a calculated risk,” one investigator muttered, staring at the report. “They knew what they were doing.”

The AI had failed in the worst possible way. Its pedestrian recognition algorithm, once state-of-the-art, had been replaced with a cheaper, less precise model. As a result, it misclassified Nova—not as a human life, but as an ‘unidentified stationary object.’ The system had been programmed to prioritize collision avoidance for high-mass, high-liability obstacles—like other vehicles, infrastructure, or paying passengers. A child, alone at a crosswalk, simply didn’t register as a critical threat.

“If the vehicle had been required to sync with the traffic light system for forced deceleration at red lights,” one investigator muttered, rubbing his temples, “if multi-layered AI safety standards had been enforced earlier…” He shook his head. “This could have been prevented.”

A senior analyst sighed, tapping on the report. “You know what’s worse? This isn’t a glitch. It’s a business decision.”

“They optimized for cost, not casualties,” someone murmured.  
  
“Yes, all in the name of profit margins.” another person added loudly.

“People don’t ask how safe a system ‘could’ be,” the senior analyst continued. “They ask if it meets regulations. And the regulators—” he let out a short, humorless laugh, “—they ask what the industry *can afford*.”

The room was full of people who had seen this before. Aviation. Medicine. Construction. Safety was never about possibility—it was about probability. Acceptable loss. The price of a life, calculated in quarterly reports.

Nina stood motionless as Nova’s small, white casket was loaded into the hearse. A crowd of mourners whispered around her, their condolences floating past like echoes in a void.

She had promised herself she wouldn’t cry today. She had told herself she would be strong.

But as the hearse’s engine rumbled to life, as the vehicle carrying her child’s body began to roll forward, something inside her broke.

She surged forward. Sam caught her by the shoulders, but she tore free from his grip—he had never imagined that gentle Nina could have such strength. Her breath hitched in ragged sobs as she stumbled toward the departing hearse.

“No—no, I can’t—”

Sam held her tight. She collapsed against him, her body wracked with silent screams.

That farewell was forever.

And Nina knew, deep in her bones, that nothing would ever be the same again.

Somewhere, in a corporate boardroom, numbers shifted. Projections adjusted. A settlement fund calculated.

Executives leaned back in their chairs, the crisis already becoming a statistic on a quarterly report.

“Give it time. Just like last time, people will forget, and our stock will recover.”

A quiet decision was made: the cost of a recall outweighed the cost of silence.

And the world moved on.

Until the next time.

**Chapter 12: Friends Nearby**

E5, E5, F4, C5

The rain had finally stopped, but the streets were still slick with water, the reflections of neon signs rippling in the puddles like fragmented dreams. Neosun wheeled himself slowly down the narrow alley near his house, feeling the damp chill creep through his clothes. It was then that he saw it.

The mother cat was drenched from the heavy rain; she had likely been taking shelter under a car when it ran over her, killing her. Its tiny paws rhythmically kneaded mother’s belly as it eagerly suckled the remaining milk. But as the mother’s body grew colder, an uneasy shiver ran through the kitten. It paused, letting out a soft, confused mew, then continued calling—first to its unresponsive mother, then to Neosun, its cries filled with growing desperation. Neosun responded softly, trying to soothe the kitten.

Something inside him twisted. He had known loss. He understood this kitten’s desperation, the lonely bewilderment of reaching for someone who would never respond again.

Carefully, he reached down, ignoring the ache in his arms as he lifted the shivering creature. The kitten soon quieted and began to purr, curling into his palm. It was so small, so light—so fragile.

“You’re coming home with me,” he murmured, cradling the tiny life against his chest.

That night, Neosun gave the kitten a warm bath, scrubbing away the dirt and fleas. It protested at first, mewling pitifully, but eventually settled against the soft towel he wrapped it in. Its fur, now clean and dry, was a deep, velvety black, save for the piercing starlike glow of its eyes.

“Starman,” Neosun decided. The name felt right. Something about the way the kitten gazed up at him, as if seeing beyond what was in front of it, reminded him of the stars—of infinite distances, of things both lost and waiting to be found.

Days turned into weeks, and Starman settled into Neosun’s small lab. Despite his own financial struggles, Neosun made sure the kitten had food, clean water, and a warm place to sleep. He watched as it curled up on his lap, kneading the fabric of his shirt with tiny paws, searching for the comfort it had lost. He understood. Some habits, born from longing, never truly faded.

The knock on his door came unexpectedly.

“Hey, man.” His colleague Michael from the patent office stood at the threshold with a box of pizza. “Heard you’ve been holed up at home.”

Neosun hesitated before opening the door wider. His house was sparse, the only food visible a half-empty pack of compressed biscuits. His colleague frowned. “This all you’ve been eating?”

Neosun shrugged. “That’s nothing.”

“Then eat this.” Michael shoved the pizza into his hands. “You look like hell.”

Neosun was starving, eating with tears in his eyes. “Thank you, Michael!”

For the first time in months, Neosun ate something warm, something that tasted like care. Michael clapped him on the shoulder. “We all want you back, man. Don’t let this be the end.”

The next morning, Neosun sent an application to resume part-time work at the patent office. Life had a way of dragging him forward, whether he was ready or not.

Months passed. Starman grew, but so did its restlessness. It began pacing the house, meowing incessantly, staring out the window as if searching for something beyond the walls. Neosun knew the signs—loneliness, an ache for companionship.

So, one afternoon, he found himself at the animal rescue center.

The staff led him through aisles of enclosures. Tiny creatures pressed against the glass, some blinking sleepily, others watching with the quiet intensity of those who had known suffering. Then, he saw it.

A white cat, barely more than a kitten, sat curled in the corner of its enclosure. But unlike the others…  
  
“I noticed that the cat’s fur is somewhat unusual…” Neosun asked, confused.

“The mother ate contaminated human garbage while pregnant, which led to her death.” the shelter worker explained. “However, the kitten was born with severe genetic mutations as a result of the contamination—weak immune system, poor health… It probably won’t live long.”

Neosun’s throat tightened. He understood what it meant to be born with a body that worked against you.

“I’ll take him.”

The worker hesitated. “Are you sure? He needs constant care.”

Neosun nodded. “Then that’s what I’ll give him.”

It looked like a white ball, and Neosun named it “Ballman”

Introducing the new kitten—Ballman—to Starman was not easy. The first meeting was tense, their small bodies arching as they hissed and growled at each other. Starman, larger and stronger, dominated, but Ballman refused to cower. Despite its frailty, it fought back, pouncing and tumbling, only to be knocked down again and again.

But it kept getting up.

Neosun watched as Ballman devoured its food with single-minded determination, as if survival depended on it. In a way, it did. The weak didn’t stay weak forever—It seemed that strength came from relentless eating.

Days passed. The fights lessened. Curiosity replaced hostility. Then, one evening, Neosun found them curled up together, Starman grooming Ballman with careful licks.

“You two finally figured it out, huh?” he murmured, a small smile tugging at his lips.

They had become a family.

Ballman grew, and the balance of power shifted. What was once an easy victory for Starman now became a real challenge. One evening, their playfight turned into something more aggressive. Starman lunged, claws extended, and before Neosun could stop it, a yowl of pain echoed through the lab.

“Starman! Stop!”

Instinctively, Neosun reached out, pulling Starman away. But in its panic, the cat lashed out, teeth sinking into Neosun’s wrist. The pain was sharp, immediate. Then, just as quickly, Starman bolted into the shadows.

Neosun stared at the blood welling on his skin.

He had forgotten—forgotten that trust between species was fragile, that no matter how much love he gave, nature still ruled in the end.

For hours, Starman stayed hidden. It wasn’t until Ballman crept forward, pressing close and licking its brother’s fur, that Starman finally emerged, wary but softened.

Neosun exhaled, rubbing his injured wrist. “We’re all just figuring it out, aren’t we?”

The days that followed brought a quiet understanding. To solidify their bond, Neosun wove two simple necklaces—one black, one white. He placed the white band around Starman’s neck and the black one around Ballman’s, a silent wish for them to care for each other, to bring balance where chaos had once ruled.

At night, Neosun watched them sleep, their small chests rising and falling in unison. He traced the curve of Starman’s paw with his fingertip, gently trimming its claws, marveling at how similar it was to a human hand. The way they stretched, the way their muscles twitched in dream-filled slumber—it was a reminder of a shared evolutionary history, a connection that spanned tens of millions of years.

And it sparked something in his mind.

Biological structures, cognitive mapping, consciousness replication— concepts he had thought about endlessly, theories that had consumed his waking hours and haunted his dreams. The way the brain organized memories, how time itself seemed to stretch and distort in the mind’s eye, weaving past and future together in the endless present of thought. Could consciousness—true, self-aware thought—be more than just the firing of synapses? Could it be a field, a force that moved like time itself?

Neosun hesitated. He felt the weight of the question pressing against him, the enormity of it. For years, he had pursued the goal of replicating true artificial intelligence, a bridge between the mind and the machine. But perhaps he had been thinking about it all wrong. Perhaps it wasn’t just about simulating thought—it was about understanding time’s effect on consciousness. The way memories stretched with the pull of time, how experiences could fold and distort, becoming something more than what they were in the moment.

He turned toward his computer, his fingers hovering above the keys. His thoughts raced, his pulse quickening. The answers had been there, right in front of him, like a forgotten dream he could almost recall.

His hand moved, and the first words of a new research paper began to form:

“Time Field.”

A theory that could change everything, or so he hoped. He hesitated. What if it was too far out? What if no one would believe it? But then, the urgency of it all—the years of research, the failures, the need for a breakthrough—pushed him forward. With a final breath, he hit “send.”

Maybe, this time, someone would listen.

Sometimes, it took someone to believe in what others couldn’t. And then… nothing. No response. No interest. His paper, as groundbreaking as it seemed to him, sank into the abyss of academic silence. The field of theoretical physics was too rigid, too bound by established laws, too unwilling to venture beyond the comfortable. His theory had strayed too far from the mainstream.

The quantum devices, which had been designed to capture anomalies in time, had detected something again—something strange and inexplicable. But that very anomaly had become his greatest obstacle. The data was incomprehensible, locked in patterns that defied all known laws of physics.

The “Time Field” paper, his last attempt—like a stone thrown into an endless ocean, with no ripple to show for it.

**Chapter 13: The Mentor’s Discovery**

A4, D4, C4, A4

Three months had passed since Neosun published his academic paper on the “Time Field.” To his surprise, the paper, which had been largely ignored by the mainstream physics community, caught the attention of an obscure yet brilliant cosmologist named Dr. Taylor Lee. An invitation arrived, written in a formal yet enthusiastic tone, asking Neosun to visit Taylor’s private laboratory. The prospect filled him with excitement.

Neosun arrived at a small yet well-equipped research facility tucked away in a quiet corner of the city. Inside, the walls were lined with shelves overflowing with books on theoretical physics, quantum mechanics, and cosmology. Whiteboards covered in complex equations filled the room, and various high-tech instruments hummed in the background.

A portly man in his late fifties, dressed in a simple yet professional outfit, greeted him warmly. “My name is Taylor Lee,” he said, offering a firm handshake. “I’ve read your paper thoroughly. While some of its concepts seem speculative, there’s something in it that deeply intrigues me.”

Neosun felt a surge of relief and gratitude. “Thank you, Dr. Lee! It’s an honor to meet you.”

Taylor gestured toward the lounge area in the room. “Come, sit. Let’s discuss your findings over a drink.”

He handed Neosun a cup of steaming hot coffee. Neosun accepted it with a nod but, eager to dive into the discussion, placed it on the table. “Dr. Lee, I wanted to ask—what do you think of the concept of Framequark?”

Taylor’s expression changed subtly. “Framequark? That wasn’t explicitly mentioned in your paper.”

“It’s based on the ideal model in the paper,” Neosun explained. “A heavy dark matter particle, peculiar particle that interacts with its surroundings based on memory. When it reaches a critical time limit, it becomes stationary.”

Taylor leaned forward, his brow furrowed. “A hidden temporal substance?”

“Yes! Exactly!” Neosun’s eyes lit up.

Taylor hesitated for a moment before asking, “Who told you about this?”

“I discovered it years ago while using my universal model simulator,” Neosun replied. “The phenomenon was so unusual that I couldn’t ignore it.”

Taylor nodded thoughtfully. “Currently, my focus is on quantum field theory and terahertz waves, but I’ve encountered similar anomalies in my past research.”

“That’s fantastic! Could you share your insights?”

Taylor sighed, running a hand through his graying hair. “It’s a deep and abstract field. The further you explore, the harder it becomes to find a definitive path.”

“I can’t find references or existing studies on this,” Neosun admitted. “Since you’re interested in my paper, you must have encountered similar theories. Even a rough explanation would help!”

Taylor exhaled slowly. “I remember that such a substance isn’t affected by external forces. Unless you use a rare substance… Do you know about magnetic monopoles?”

Neosun frowned. “But in my simulation system, a fundamental magnetic charge has never appeared…”

“Try increasing the simulation’s sensitivity,” Taylor suggested. “To formally study it, you’ll need to incorporate the theoretical concept of a magnetic monopole, which is essential for inducing the necessary interference in the system.”

“I’ll do that,” Neosun said determinedly. “But how do I calculate the exact distance between these particles? I’ve tried various measurements, but I can’t seem to align them with the expected starting point.”

“To determine that distance,” Taylor explained, “you need to consider the movement of the galaxy cluster. Relying solely on Solar System-based values is unreliable.”

Neosun leaned back, absorbing the information. “Then… how was this anomalous data generated in the first place?”

He picked up the anomalous data that Neosun had presented and examined it carefully…

Taylor’s gaze shifted from the anomalous data to Neosun, then shook his head. “That’s beyond my expertise.”

They were so engrossed in their discussion that they forgot about their coffee, now sitting cold on the table.

Taylor finally stood. “Wait, let me make you a fresh cup.”

Neosun waved him off. “No need, Dr. Lee.” He hesitated before adding, “Would you be open to me joining your research team? I’d love to collaborate.”

Taylor smiled. “Of course. I’m looking forward to your joining.”  
  
“But I have other commitments to tend to first,” Neosun added. “I’m in the process of inventing some patents.”

Taylor became a guiding force in Neosun’s research, refining his theoretical framework, correcting misconceptions, and providing critical experimental data that had eluded him for years.

A few days later, Neosun returned to work at the patent office. After lunch, Jessie invited him for a walk. They left the office cafeteria and headed toward the beach next door. The sea breeze gently blew, and the waves crashed powerfully against the shore, yet the surroundings remained peaceful and quiet.

“I heard you published a paper recently and made a new friend?” Jessie asked with a smile.

“Yes,” Neosun replied. “Dr. Lee has been an incredible mentor. He not only answered my theoretical questions but also pointed out potential pitfalls I hadn’t considered.”

“That’s great! What kinds of pitfalls?”  
  
“About the connection between Framequark and magnetic monopoles.” Neosun smirked. “Are you really interested?”

Jessie laughed. “I’m just curious, that’s all!”

A week later, Taylor visited Neosun’s personal lab for the first time. Neosun proudly displayed his ongoing projects—technical blueprints, prototype schematics, and stacks of patent documents littered the workspace.

“This is what I’ve been working on,” Neosun explained. “I plan to use the profits from these patents to fund the necessary experimental devices.”

Taylor picked up one of the documents. “Coupling Ray Emitter…” He glanced at Neosun, clearly impressed. “You’ve been busy.”

“Some of them still need refinement,” Neosun admitted. “But once these are completed, I’d love to discuss one-dimensional string vibrations with you.”

Taylor nodded. “You’re a genius, I’d be happy to help.”

Neosun’s ultimate goal remained clear: to push the boundaries of theoretical physics. His recent breakthroughs—Gravitational Field Generator, Universal Repulsion Engine, Quantum Communicator—were only stepping stones toward his greatest ambition. And now, with Taylor’s mentorship, he was closer than ever to unraveling the mysteries of the universe.

**Chapter 14: Returning to the Wild**

D5, E4, C4, E5

Early in the morning, the sound of magpies filled the air outside Neosun’s window. Their sharp, rhythmic calls echoed through the glass, capturing the attention of Starman and Ballman inside the house. The two cats perched on the windowsill, tails flicking in curiosity as they stared at the birds beyond the barrier. To them, the outside world was a tantalizing mystery—one they could see but never touch, like a screen forever out of reach. Neosun watched them from his wheelchair, amused. He envied their fascination, their ability to find wonder in the simplest things. The city outside, with its constant movement—people, cars, fleeting shadows—had long since lost its magic for him. But for Starman and Ballman, it remained an unsolved puzzle.

One afternoon, during an outing, Neosun witnessed a stray dog chasing a child through a crowded plaza. The child’s cries rang out in terror, though the dog’s wagging tail and playful bounds made it clear it meant no harm. The parents, however, didn’t see it that way. Their panic turned into outrage, and soon, a call was made. Moments later, a shelter worker arrived with a catch pole, quickly restraining the dog.

“Excuse me… where are you taking it?” Neosun asked as the worker prepared to load the frightened animal into a transport van.

The worker hesitated for a moment, eyeing Neosun’s wheelchair before answering. “Back to the shelter. Do you want to adopt it?”

Neosun glanced at the dog—ears pinned back, eyes wide with fear. His heart clenched. He already had two cats. Adding a dog… The thought alone felt overwhelming. The weight of his financial burdens pressed on him. But then the dog whimpered, as if sensing his hesitation, as if pleading.

“Leave me your address,” the worker said, before he could reply. “Think it over.”

One evening, a month later, Neosun returned to his lab, expecting the usual routine—Starman curling up on the couch, Ballman lurking near the kitchen. But the room was unusually quiet. Too quiet.

“Starman?” he called, making his way into the living room. No response. Ballman, sitting near the balcony door, looked up, then flicked his gaze toward the topmost shelf. Following his eyes, Neosun found Starman teetering precariously on the highest rack, his pupils dilated in panic.

“Oh no.”

“First, tell me how you got up there?!” Neosun demanded, half-exasperated, half-worried.

Starman let out a small, helpless meow.

“You really want to go out that badly?”

Using a vacuum cleaner handle as a makeshift rescue tool, Neosun coaxed Starman down. The cat immediately leaped onto his lap, rubbing against him as if seeking reassurance. That night, Neosun fashioned a leash from an old laboratory wire and decided to take Starman outside. Maybe just a small taste of freedom would be enough to sate his curiosity.

“Come on,” he murmured, securing the leash. “Let’s see what the world is really like.”

At first, Starman trotted obediently beside Neosun’s wheelchair, sniffing the air, ears twitching at the unfamiliar sounds. But then—a gust of wind, a rustling bush, an unseen force of instinct—and Starman bolted.

“Wait! Don’t—”

The leash snapped. A wave of panic hit Neosun.

“Starman! Come back! Don’t go that way, my wheelchair can’t get through!”

The cat wandered into the darkness, drawn by a sound, cautiously stepping into the bushes before disappearing from view. Neosun’s electric wheelchair wasn’t fast enough to follow. He searched, called, pleaded. But Starman was gone.

“Hey, you hear about the sound?” a woman said to her neighbor while wiping down her car.

“Yeah. That guy in the wheelchair’s been crawling around the neighborhood every afternoon like clockwork,” her neighbor muttered back, glancing in Neosun’s direction.

“Always muttering, humming to himself—kinda creepy, honestly,” another voice added from a nearby porch.

“Word is his mom passed away. No one’s taking care of him anymore,” the first voice said. “Kinda sad, really.”

Neosun heard them and lowered his gaze. The quiet wasn’t his to break. He was sorry—sorry for the noise, even if all he wanted was to bring one friend home.

Every day he ventured out with the same familiar hum on his lips—a tune only Starman had ever answered. He called the tune into alleyways and bushes, letting the notes float like signals into the wind.

Neosun knew every broken fence post, every wind-rustled shrub, every sun-bleached crack in the sidewalk—each mapped by memory, drawn by hope and a sound that never called back. For a month, he combed the neighborhood, his voice growing hoarse as he called Starman’s name.

At home, the silence gnawed at him. Ballman, too, had gone quiet, spending his days staring at the front door. “Starman must’ve gotten lost in the bushes,” Neosun murmured one evening, more to himself than to Ballman. He caught himself tracing the faint scratches on his arm—Starman’s playful marks, now the only proof he’d been real.

Then, with no sign of Starman, Neosun finally followed the address he'd scribbled down a month ago—the one for the local animal shelter—wondering if a dog might help bring his friend home.

“Hello, has the spotted dog from earlier been adopted?”

“No…”

“I want to adopt it. Where is it?”

There was a pause. Then the worker’s voice turned somber. “It was just euthanized yesterday.”

Neosun felt the air leave his lungs. “What?”

“If no one adopts them within a certain period, they have to be euthanized,” the worker explained. “We’re facing budget cuts. We can’t afford more dog food.”

Neosun gripped the armrest of his wheelchair. “That’s it? You just… kill them?”

“Look, the rich spend their money on yachts and hedge funds. We have to make do with what we have,” an elderly woman nearby remarked dryly as she selected a puppy.

Neosun’s stomach churned. The scene before him—the clean, bright shelter, the cheerful faces of adopters choosing the ‘cutest’ dogs—felt grotesquely detached from reality. He knew what happened behind the closed doors, in the back rooms. The unwanted were discarded. The sick, the old, the imperfect—they never got a second chance.

He clenched his fists. “So two dogs bite two people, and the solution is to kill ten thousand? That math doesn’t make sense to me.”

“Their roaming is a torment. This is humane.”

“Humane?” Neosun let out a bitter laugh. “Then why don’t you euthanize yourselves?”

The worker scowled. “Human rights trump animal rights. They invaded our space.”

Neosun’s voice trembled. “We’re not gods. We don’t have that right.”

At that moment, four masked workers from another room appeared, each carrying a cage filled with dogs. They moved with purpose toward the exit, the metal bars of the cages clinking as they shuffled.

Without hesitation, he wheeled himself toward the door, his palms sweating on the chair’s armrests. The workers stepped outside into a vacant lot, their steps methodical, as if they had done this many times before. Neosun followed, his pulse racing. He saw the grim expression on their faces, the lack of hesitation as they prepared to carry out their task.

“Wait!” Neosun called out, his voice strained with desperation. “Please, stop!”

He pushed himself forward, his hands trembling as he tried to break through the haze of reality and stand in the way. The workers paused, looking at him with indifference, as if his pleas were nothing more than a nuisance. But Neosun wouldn’t back down. He could already hear the low whimpers from the cages, the dogs too terrified to understand what was happening.

The worker glanced at Neosun’s wheelchair. “You look like you can barely take care of yourself.”

Neosun’s pulse thundered in his ears. “I’ll adopt them all. Every single one.”  
  
Neosun’s voice cracked. “Can’t you hear me? They’re all mine!”  
  
They continued with their work, unmoved.

“No! No way! No!”

He lunged forward, crawling from his wheelchair onto the cold, concrete ground, his arms wrapping around the nearest dog, refusing to let go. Tears burned his eyes. He could hear the others—dozens of them—whimpering, waiting for their turn. He knew what was coming.

The shelter workers did their job. The law was on their side. One by one, the dogs were taken away.

Controlled.

Anesthetized.

The dead were piled together. The living huddled in a corner, awaiting their turn. The unruly ones were beaten until they stopped moving.

“Their fate will be you one day!” Neosun watched, helpless.

One of the older workers, a wiry man with thick glasses and soot on his sleeves, adjusted his frames and spoke flatly.

“Okay, bro,” he said. “In some parts of the world, even today, dogs are food. So are cats. Pigeons too.”

Slowly, Neosun dragged himself across the floor, his arms trembling beneath his weight. He wiped his face with the back of his hand, smearing tears across his cheek, but the shaking wouldn’t stop as he reached back to the wheelchair.

He stared, incredulous. “You mean… tribal outposts? Remote villages?”

The man shook his head. “No. I mean people. Your people. Humans.”

A younger worker nearby, eyes fixed on a clipboard, chimed in without looking up.

“In many of those places, these ‘delicacies’ are part of the local economy. Culture, they say.”

The older man added, voice low and hard. “Slaughter is a global norm. Cows. Pigs. Chickens. Lambs. The line isn’t drawn at species. It’s drawn at convenience.”

Another worker, crouched beside a rusted cage, let out a bitter laugh as he tightened the latch. “Meanwhile, lions hunt on the plains. Sharks eat smaller fish. Nature is brutal. Why should we care who eats what?”

Neosun’s voice hardened. “Animals kill without knowing they’re hunting. But we know. And we still do it.” His breath caught. A flicker of something passed through his eyes, but he didn’t blink. “So you can’t use nature’s cruelty to justify our own indifference. We’ve evolved. We left the caves. Isn’t it time we stop pretending we’re still in them?”

The older man glanced sideways. “Out of the caves, huh?” A smirk crept across his face, followed by a dry chuckle. “You ever hear the stories—about people who torture cats and dogs, just to laugh at their pain?”

Neosun blinked. “What are you talking about?”

He leaned in slightly. “They’re the ones you keep calling ‘the humans who left the caves.’”

Then, almost casually, he added, “Want to hear something even darker?”

A silence settled. Then he leaned back against the wall and spoke with grim clarity.

“Let me tell you what really happens—out there, where no one’s watching. People are trafficked like livestock. Sold into slavery. Forced into labor, used as breeding stock, pushed into crime. Their organs—harvested like parts from a machine. Governments know. Some turn a blind eye. Others profit.”

Neosun’s face went pale. “No… no, that can’t be real. Isn’t anyone doing something?”

“Oh, sure,” the man replied dryly. “Some nations claim to be ‘civilized’. But when those dictators land at their airports, they roll out the red carpet. Handshake. Photo op. Trade deal.”

“But why?” Neosun whispered.

“Because,” the man said, picking up his tool again, “profit outweighs morality. Always has.”

*They command powerful armies, yet lack the will to halt the darkness that festers in their own world.*

Neosun let out a long sigh. Images of smiling leaders, military parades, and diplomatic handshakes flickered through his mind—not as symbols of order, but as shadows of complicity.

These “stories”—clashed like thunder in Neosun’s mind. He had believed in progress, in reason, in goodness. But the world he saw now… was soaked in compromise.  
  
On Earth, creatures without higher intelligence were slaughtered for food. The ones deemed ‘smart’ enough were turned into pets, toys for human amusement—discarded when inconvenient. A society that called this process ‘humane’ had no understanding of the word.

And just as they did to animals, humans repeated the cycle among their own kind—the gentle were oppressed, deceived, and exploited by the cunning. It was not intelligence that ruled, but manipulation—draped in the language of civility.

And then the question—quiet, devastating—rose inside him.

*Does God allow suffering just so we may learn to seek the light?*

*But why must they be the price of that understanding?*

*Is this grace—or a cruel calculation?*

There had to be an answer. A reason. A justification for why life was treated this way.

But Neosun couldn’t find one. He had come to a profound realization: humanity’s role was nothing more than that of a dictator within Earth’s ecosystem.

**Chapter 15: Invalid Patents**

C5, G4, E5, G4

Neosun had spent the past few weeks preparing to transfer his technological inventions—algorithms and solutions that had the potential for commercial development—to various research institutions. Although the anticipated returns wouldn’t be nearly enough to fund the advanced equipment he truly needed, they should have been sufficient to create a personal intelligent robotic assistant and build preliminary observational tools to enhance his research efficiency.

He arranged a meeting with a leading chip manufacturer. After a string of formal introductions, he found himself sitting in the sleek, chrome-lined office of the company’s director. The man, dressed in an immaculate black suit, studied the data Neosun had provided. Neosun looked at him with hopeful eyes.

“We’re very interested in your inventions,” the director finally said. “But…”

Neosun tensed. “But what?”

“These technologies are remarkably similar to patents we purchased not long ago. We’ve already incorporated them into our future market plans.”

Neosun felt a wave of pressure rise in his chest. “What? That’s impossible! Where did you buy them from?”

The director offered him a placid smile. “I’m afraid we’re bound by confidentiality agreements with the transferor.”

Neosun clenched his fists, struggling to keep his voice steady. “Here,” he said, pulling up additional schematics on his device. “What about these? They could revolutionize your product line!”

The director leaned in, scrutinizing the projections with a neutral expression. After a long silence, he leaned back and folded his arms. “Colud you leave them here? We’ll conduct a thorough review and get back to you.”

Neosun had heard that before.

Undeterred, he contacted several other high-tech firms and research institutes. The feedback was eerily similar—either the technology was deemed “already patented,” or companies lacked the prototypes necessary to consider mass production. Over and over again, his groundbreaking ideas were dismissed as redundant.

“A technology that utilizes Earth’s gravity to generate infinite energy…”

“A radio frequency device capable of creating three-dimensional images from air particles…”

“A sound transmission device using water molecule resonance for precise auditory projection…”

Every single one bore the same inventor’s name: Nightshade Williams.

Neosun stared at the patent registry in disbelief. The name punched through his chest like a hammer. Comparing these inventions to his own, he saw they had all been granted patents—while his versions had been systematically declared invalid due to a “lack of novelty.”

His first instinct was that someone had stolen his work. But who? And how?

Determined to get answers, he reached out to Jessie, a friend who worked in the patent office’s archives division. Together, they combed through the records.

Jessie frowned at the data displayed on her terminal. “This guy submitted a massive batch of patents all at once.”

Neosun leaned in. “When?”

“Judging by the timestamps… five years ago.”

Neosun’s pulse pounded in his ears. “That’s impossible! Three years ago, I conducted an extensive patent search, and there were no prior applications.”

Jessie hesitated. “If these patents were initially classified as confidential technology, they might have been sealed until recently. Officially, the search results only reflect publicly available patents. The patent office doesn’t assume liability for discrepancies caused by delayed disclosures.”

Neosun clenched his fists. “So you’re saying they were hidden? Who has the authority to do that?”

Jessie shook her head. “It could be a government agency, a corporate entity, or even a private investor with the right influence. But the scale of this… it’s highly unusual.”

The more Neosun examined the fine print of the patents, the more unsettling it became. The unique implementation details, the exact phrasing of the claims—it was all too familiar. Too precise to be a coincidence.

“Jessie, can you pull the inventor’s profile?”

“Give me a sec.” Jessie’s fingers danced over the keyboard. After a moment, she turned the screen toward him.

Neosun’s breath caught in his throat. The photo of the patent holder appeared, clear as day.

His mentor. His idol.

Neosun’s mind reeled. It didn’t make sense. *That’s right… Only my mentor ever saw those patents. Maybe he submitted them on my behalf!* He grasped at straws, but even as he spoke, the rational part of his mind rejected the notion. *But how could the application dates precede my own invention records? This is wrong…*

He had to confront him. Had to understand.

But Taylor Lee was nowhere to be found. His lab was abandoned, his phone disconnected. It was as if he had vanished from existence.

The man who had briefly guided his academic journey had, by all appearances, stolen years of his work. Yet, without proof, he had no recourse. The Taylor lab wouldn’t acknowledge an error, the patent office wouldn’t care, and legally, the inventions belonged to someone else.

Later that evening, he sat in the restroom of the patent office, unwilling to come out. Still, he couldn’t give up.

To contest the patents, he needed to file an extensive reexamination request—a process that required exorbitant fees. Desperate, Neosun took out a personal loan, plunging himself into debt to fight for what was rightfully his.

As the sun dipped below the waves, he arrived at the familiar shoreline. The salty breeze stung his face. He pulled a small, weathered spaceship figurine from his pocket—a childhood gift from his sister—and gazed at the distant stars, searching for the one that had always made him feel less alone.

**Chapter 16: The Strange Man**

G4, A4, E5, E4

Seventeen years ago…

Under the vast canopy of a clear night sky, eight-year-old Neosun sprinted across the damp grass of the neighborhood lawn and collapsed onto his back, his chest rising and falling with deep, exhausted breaths. The endless expanse of the cosmos stretched above him, an infinity of shimmering points scattered across the black void.

In his small hands, he clutched a miniature spaceship—a battered toy he had discovered beneath the gnarled roots of the old rubber tree at the park’s edge. Every year on his birthday, his sister would leave a gift for him hidden inside a green tin box buried under that very tree. This year, though, the tin had been empty. He had dug deeper, scraping at the soil with small, desperate fingers, but all he found was the cold, damp earth and an absence that gnawed at him.

The boy’s eyes welled with unspoken sorrow. The crossroads near his home still bore faint traces of bloodstains that had never quite faded, echoes of a past he barely understood but could never forget.

Neosun lifted the spaceship above his head, aligning it with the brightest star in the sky.

“Is Sister up there?” he whispered, his voice barely carrying beyond his own ears.

He moved the ship slowly through the air, tracing an imaginary flight path among the stars, pretending it could bridge the impossible distance. He wished—more than anything—that he could climb aboard and let it take him far away, up beyond the atmosphere, to wherever she was waiting for him.

Laughter rang out across the lawn, sharp and cruel. A group of older boys emerged from the shadows, their grins wicked under the pale glow of the streetlights. Before Neosun could react, one of them lunged forward and yanked the toy from his grasp.

“Come and get it if you can!” the ringleader sneered, holding the spaceship aloft just out of reach.

Another boy laughed. “What’s the mute gonna do, huh?”

“Idiot,” a third added, shoving Neosun’s shoulder hard enough to send him sprawling onto the grass.

He didn’t fight back. He never did. When his sister was around, she had always been his protector, stepping between him and the bullies with a fire in her eyes that could silence them with a single look. But she wasn’t here anymore. Now, he was alone.

Tears welled in his eyes, but he refused to let them fall. Instead, he curled in on himself and kept his gaze locked on the sky, searching the vastness above for something—anything—that might give him strength.

A shadow fell over him. The boys fell silent, their bravado evaporating as they backed away.

Neosun blinked and turned his head. A tall figure in black stood nearby, his presence both imposing and strangely comforting. The bullies wasted no time fleeing into the night.

The man knelt down, his voice calm but firm. “Don’t cry.”

Neosun wiped at his face with the sleeve of his jacket. “Who are you?”

The man’s lips curved in the barest hint of a smile. “Don’t be afraid.”

Neosun hesitated before nodding. There was something about the man—something familiar, though he was certain they had never met before.

“Where are we going?”

Without answering, the man extended a hand. Neosun hesitated for only a moment before taking it. Together, they walked away from the bright lights of the park and toward the coastline, where the waves whispered secrets to the shore.

“Look up,” the man instructed.

Neosun obeyed. The stars that had been visible from the lawn earlier now appeared even clearer and brighter—The sky was alive, an ocean of celestial fire. The Milky Way stretched across the heavens, a brilliant river of stardust flowing endlessly through the darkness. Among the constellations, a single star gleamed brighter than all the rest.

“There it is,” Neosun breathed.

The man nodded. “Do you want to go to that star?”

“I do! I want to become a Starman and find my sister!”

The man pulled something from his pocket and unfolded it—a painting, strange and intricate.

“Do you like this?” he asked.

Neosun studied the image, tilting his head. “What is it? It looks so strange.”

The man’s eyes glimmered. “Keep staring.”

As Neosun gazed deeper, the abstract lines and colors seemed to shift before his eyes, forming shapes he could almost recognize. A spaceship. A girl. *my sister?*

His breath caught in his throat. “Are you a doctor from the hospital?”

“No,” the man said. “I live on that star.”

Neosun’s heart pounded. “Wow! You’re a Starman?”

The man nodded. “Yes, I am.”

He reached into his coat and pulled out a small spaceship toy—identical to the one Neosun had lost to the bullies. He placed it gently into the boy’s hands.

“Ah! Thank you, Starman!” Neosun beamed. Then his voice softened as he fiddled with the spaceship, asking, “Hmm… Is my sister doing well on that star?”

The man’s expression grew wistful. “Of course. She asked me to come and tell you that she misses you very much, and she also misses your mom and dad.”

Neosun’s eyes shone with emotion. “Really?” his grip on the spaceship tightened. “I miss her so much. I want to see her again. Please tell her for me!”

The man’s smile returned. “I’ll let her know. But promise me something.”

Neosun nodded eagerly. “What is it?”

“This will be our little secret,” the man said. “You can’t tell anyone.”

Neosun pressed the spaceship toy to his chest. “Okay, I won’t tell anyone.”

The man stood, his silhouette blending into the shadows. Slowly, he turned and walked away, his footsteps silent against the sand. Neosun watched him go, clutching the toy tightly as he turned his gaze back to the sky.

He kept watching that star until dawn, when the light of the rising sun swallowed it whole.

**Chapter 17: The Black Wheelchair**

F4, C4, C5, D5

Two years later, the golden afternoon sunlight filtered through the hospital window, casting shifting patterns on the pale blue sheets. Neosun sat at the edge of the bed, his fingers tracing absentminded circles on the blanket. He was ten years old, but today, he seemed smaller, more fragile than ever before. His dark, inquisitive eyes flickered with a recognition that felt just out of reach, following the rhythmic tapping of Nina’s fingers against the metal bedframe—an old habit of hers when lost in thought.

Nina’s smile trembled like a dying flame. “Be happy, son… you remember, don’t you? Just smile for Mama.”

Neosun’s body stiffened. A shiver tore through him.

And then—

“AAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!”

She had always loved rhythm. The gentle taps, the steady beats. It had been their secret language before words had fully formed between them. But today, when she played a simple melody on a small, handheld keyboard, something they had shared since he was a toddler, Neosun only blinked at her, staring at the small keyboard in her hands as if he had never seen one before.

“Do you remember this song?” Nina asked, her voice measured, hopeful.

“…Song?” Neosun frowned, the word rolling awkwardly off his tongue, like a foreign concept.

Nina’s stomach twisted into knots. Yesterday, he had recognized the tune instantly, humming along with her, even tapping out the rhythm on his lap. Yesterday, he had smiled. Today, it was as if the memory had been erased.

“It’s okay, baby,” she whispered, swallowing the lump in her throat. “Maybe tomorrow.”

The doctor’s voice from earlier echoed in her mind: Functional disarray. A sudden neural discharge. Temporary impairment.  
  
But nothing about this felt temporary. The gaps in his memory were growing larger.

A nurse entered the room, clipboard in hand. “Ms. Nina, we need to run another set of scans. There’s been… an unexpected development.”

Nina’s heart lurched. “What kind of development?”

The nurse hesitated. “His neural activity is fluctuating unpredictably. We need to analyze it further.”

Before Nina could respond, Neosun’s posture suddenly stiffened. His hands trembled before curling into fists, clutching the sheets tightly. His breathing turned shallow, chest rising and falling too fast.

“Neosun?” Nina reached for him, her heart hammering against her ribs.

Then, out of nowhere—“I’m Mom!” Neosun said.

His wide eyes darted around the room, searching for something unseen. His fingers stretched toward the air as if reaching for something just beyond his grasp.

Nina’s breath caught in her throat. “No. No, no, no.” This wasn’t happening. It couldn’t be happening.

“Neosun? Neosun, look at me.”

She grabbed his trembling hands, but they were cold, clammy. Her vision blurred as panic surged through her, the world closing in.

He didn’t respond. His gaze was already past her, unseeing, lost in a reality she could not reach.

“Look at Mom! Son!”

Her voice cracked, breaking under the weight of helplessness. This time, the symptoms were worse than in childhood. She had seen him struggle before, seen him fade in and out of moments, but never like this. This was different. The disarray in his brain wasn’t just affecting his memory—it was consuming him.

“The abnormality is now affecting the area governing his limbs,” the doctor had explained earlier.

“What does that mean?” she had asked, the words thick in her throat.

“In the coming months, he could become paralyzed at any time.”

The words had struck her like a physical blow. She had stumbled back, gripping the armrest of a wheelchair to steady herself. *He’s just ten years old!* Her mind rejected the possibility. Not her Neosun. Not her little boy.  
  
Three days later, one morning, when she helped him out of bed, she discovered what she had been dreading most. His legs could no longer support him.  
  
The wheelchair showroom smelled of polished metal and sterile plastic. Rows of mobility aids lined the space, but none of them felt right. Nina ran her fingers over the armrests of a sleek black electric wheelchair, her chest tightening. This wasn’t just a wheelchair. This was Neosun’s future.

“Why don’t we try this one?” the doctor suggested gently, rolling the wheelchair forward. “It’s designed for comfort, with full lumbar support and an adaptive cushion to reduce pressure points.”

Nina turned to Neosun, but his gaze remained distant, unfocused. He sat on the edge of the examination table, his legs dangling, his hands resting limply in his lap.

“Neosun?” she called softly.

The doctor crouched beside him. “Would you like to try it?”

Neosun only blinked, as if he hadn’t even registered the words.

Nina lowered herself into the wheelchair. The seat molded to her instantly, firm but giving. She ran a hesitant hand over the black armrests, then gripped the joystick. The slightest push sent the wheelchair gliding forward effortlessly.

“It’s extremely responsive,” the doctor noted. “And it comes with safety assist features—automatic braking, obstacle detection, and a tilt function to help with posture control.”

Nina looked back at her son, hoping for a flicker of recognition, of interest. Nothing.

She turned back to the doctor, her voice barely above a whisper. “This one. We’ll take this one.”

The doctor nodded. “I think it’s a good choice.”

As the technician adjusted the settings to fit Neosun’s height and weight, Nina pressed a hand over her mouth. This was really happening. Her little boy, who had once raced down hallways on unsteady legs, would never walk again.

When they finally eased Neosun into the wheelchair, he didn’t react. He simply let them adjust the straps and footrests, his fingers curling slightly around the armrest.

Now, as she wheeled Neosun out of the hospital, those words echoed in her mind. He sat in the black wheelchair she had carefully chosen for him, his posture relaxed in a way that seemed more like acceptance than comfort. It was as if the wheelchair had become his only connection to a world he could no longer fully reach. As the path ahead grew bumpier, for the first time, he clung to the wheelchair as if it were an extension of himself, a tether to the world that was slipping away.

Nina tried everything to awaken his memories—old toys, familiar places, music they had once shared. Every day, she held onto hope that something, anything, would bring him back.

Her music career, once her entire world, faded into insignificance. None of it mattered anymore. Every hope, every ounce of love, every piece of her soul was now poured into Neosun. But as she watched him stare blankly ahead, disconnected from the boy he used to be, she couldn’t help but wonder—*Had I already lost him?*

**Chapter 18: The Limit of Emotions**

D4, B4, G4, C4

Emotions are paradoxical—sometimes indestructible, sometimes fragile enough to shatter at the slightest touch. They are unseen, intangible forces, precious like dark energy, yet fleeting like virtual particles disappearing into the void. The stretching of time distorts them, creating cracks in what once seemed unbreakable. And when those fractures run deep enough, even the strongest emotions collapse beyond repair, leaving those who possess them stranded at the limits of their endurance.

Nina stood by the window, arms crossed tightly over her chest. A deep sense of unease settled in her stomach, twisting like a living thing. The air in the house felt heavier than usual, thick with words unspoken. Nina sat in front of Sam, looking up at him intently.  
  
After a long pause, she finally spoke.

“Would you rather confide in her than talk to me?” Nina’s voice was steady, but the tremor beneath it betrayed her.

Sam hesitated. “Did you go through our messages?”

“I’m sorry, I just… I needed to understand what you were thinking.”

His shoulders slumped, and when he finally met her gaze, there was something in his eyes she couldn’t quite place. Pity? Guilt? “I don’t want to hurt you, Nina.”

“Then why do I feel like I’m the only one hurting?”

The silence between them stretched unbearably. Once, their love had been as brilliant as a dying star, burning hot and fast. Now, all that remained was the cold, hollow core left in its wake.

Sam sighed. “Nina, I—”

“Don’t,” she whispered. “Just don’t.”

Their love had given her Neosun, just as she had once given him Nova. It was ironic, really. Nova—their bright, shining dream—was gone, scattered across the cosmos like dust. And Neosun, their son, was slipping further away from her every day, lost in a world she could no longer reach.

*The unconscious Neosun felt more like the discarded wreckage of our impulsive actions,* she thought, a pang of regret twisting inside her.

Nina swallowed hard, forcing herself to stay composed. She walked to the small cabinet by the bookshelf and pulled out the violin she had once played on stage. The instrument was beautiful, well-crafted, but lifeless now in her hands.

“I don’t play anymore,” she said, offering it to Sam. “Throw it away for me. I can’t do it myself.”

Sam looked at the violin, then back at her. “Nina… I’m sorry!” he added. “Remember our plan? We succeeded, didn’t we?”

Nina replied softly, “Yes. Thank you for putting up with everything for these ten years.”  
  
Nina held back her tears, trying to keep them from falling. She wanted to tell him everything—about her father’s passing, about the emptiness that had been creeping in, about the truth she had buried since Neosun’s birth—that due to the severe trauma during childbirth, her uterus and vagina had been completely removed. But the words wouldn’t come, as if the most important part of herself had been lost, and she had once feared revealing that would drive him away.

A month later, Sam packed his bags, looking torn, yet filled with a sense of helplessness and reluctance. Then, his movements became swift and decisive.  
  
“Take care of yourself,” her interrupted, she voice barely above a whisper. “And be happy.”  
  
She looked at him, her breath catching in her throat, but the tears wouldn’t fall. She couldn’t cry, not now, not in front of him. She had to be strong, even though every part of her was crumbling inside.

They stood there, facing each other across the dimly lit room. The distance between them felt insurmountable. Ten meters apart, yet she may as well have been standing on another planet. Then Sam turned, grabbed his coat, and pulled his luggage behind him as he walked out the door. She never saw him again.

Shortly after, Sam accepted a position overseas. He married someone else, had healthy children. Moved on.

And Nina was left behind with Neosun, abandoned with the weight of their past and the ever-growing burden of the future.

Years passed.

She spent every waking moment caring for Neosun while tending to her ailing mother. The weight of responsibility was crushing, but she bore it alone.

“Nina,” her mother had once told her, voice frail, “your father and I only ever wished for your happiness. This… this is all we have left. Use it to make sure Neosun gets the best care.”

“Mom…”

“Stay strong,” her mother whispered, squeezing her hand. “He will get better.”  
  
“Thank you, Mom!”

The next morning, her mother was gone. And Nina was alone.

One evening, she found herself standing on the pedestrian bridge overlooking the city. Across the skyline, the Ferris wheel slowly turned, its lights glowing softly against the night. She pulled out her phone, fingers hovering over the screen. But she never dialed.

A tear slipped down her cheek, but she didn’t wipe it away. She simply stood there, letting the cool wind dry it as she gazed up at the endless stars above.

“Thank you for enduring this,” a voice said beside her.

She turned to see a stranger—an old man with kind eyes—offering her a tissue. “Whatever happens, nature is the best choice.”

Nina took the tissue, nodding wordlessly.

Life had dealt her wounds that never quite healed. She had spent nights lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, half-hoping the chandelier would come crashing down on her. She had stood at the edge of high places, wondering what it would feel like to let go.

But responsibility always pulled her back. Neosun needed her. And she was the daughter of parents who had loved her deeply.

So she chose to keep walking—not just for herself, but for those she had loved and lost.

For those who still needed her.

For the fragile, invisible force that kept her moving forward, even when she had reached the very limit of her emotions.

**Chapter 19: Intellect Burst**

B4, E4, D5, B4

Nina’s personal computer always stored the health charts of two children. Year after year, Neosun’s height and weight data increased, reflecting the slow march of his growth. But the chart labeled ‘Nova’ remained frozen in time, forever halted at the last update from when she was nine years old. Height: 1.36 meters. Weight: 32.8 kilograms.

“If she were here,” Nina murmured, her fingers brushing against the soft fabric, “she wouldn’t fit in these anymore.”

The children’s clothes, long dry on the balcony clothes rack, fluttered in the wind. They had remained untouched since Nova left, silent witnesses to the years that had passed. But today, Nina carefully lifted them from the rack, folding them with gentle hands, as if the simple act might somehow summon the warmth of a child who was no longer there.

Inside, Neosun sat in his wheelchair, staring blankly ahead. For years, Nina had played the same passages over and over, as if trying to awaken something long buried deep within his mind. So day after day, year after year, she played alongside him, her fingers gliding over the keys in a patient, unwavering rhythm, waiting for a moment she wasn’t sure would ever come.

On this day, when she reached the tenth measure of a cheerful piece, she caught the faintest movement in her peripheral vision. Her breath hitched. Neosun’s fingers had begun to tap along with the beat.

“Neosun?”

Her voice was barely a whisper. Slowly, he turned to her. His eyes, once lost in a distant void, were focused on her hands. A flicker of something passed through them—a memory, an understanding.

She held her breath and continued playing, her fingers trembling slightly. Carefully, she repeated the passage. And then, he spoke.

“Mom…”

A single word, yet it carried the weight of years. Years of waiting. Of longing. Of nights spent clinging to hope.

Tears blurred her vision as she dropped to her knees beside him, wrapping him in a trembling embrace. “Neosun…” Her voice broke. “You’re back.”

After five years of silence, five years of endless vigilance, the moment she had prayed for had finally come.

Neosun tried to clutch his head. “My head hurts a bit.”  
  
“I remember…” Neosun murmured after a long pause. And then, as if a dam had broken, the memories came flooding back.  
  
Then he thought for a moment. “I feel tired.”

“Then rest for a while.” Nina lifted him from the wheelchair and placed him onto the bed.  
  
The next day, soft sunlight filtered through the curtains, casting a warm glow over Neosun’s blanket. Nina had prepared breakfast and watched as Neosun woke up in bed.

She felt a slight uncertainty, a quiet fear that Neosun might slip away again, losing himself to the darkness of his memory. But as she gently placed the meal by his bedside, the familiar act grounding her, a wave of relief washed over her when she saw his response—he was still here, fully present. The fear, though not entirely gone, eased in that moment, replaced by a quiet joy, a profound reassurance that the son she had waited for was not lost to her again.  
  
“Good morning, son.”

Neosun looked at the food Nina was holding, his voice soft as he murmured, “This is my favorite dessert.”

“Yes, you remember!”

Neosun lifted a weak hand and traced the faint scar on her arm. His brows furrowed.   
  
“The scar… did I cause it?”

Nina swallowed hard. “That’s not you. It’s nothing to worry about.”

He shook his head, a shadow of guilt darkening his expression. “Sorry, Mom. It’s all my fault…”

“No.” She cupped his face, her touch warm and steady. “It’s my fault. But your waking up—this—is more important than anything.”

During his illness, there had been times when he couldn’t control his body, when he lashed out in confusion, striking her with all his strength until he had none left. And still, she had forced a smile, had cared for him, had never once given up. Because she had to believe. She had to believe that somewhere deep inside, her son was still there.

And now, she saw him again.

To fill the void of those lost years, Nina devoted herself to teaching him. Every day, she shared knowledge—recounting history, explaining science, immersing him in the world he had missed. It wasn’t long before she realized he was learning at an extraordinary rate. His understanding expanded faster than she had expected, his hunger for knowledge insatiable. Soon, he had surpassed even her.

“From now on,” Nina said with a smile, “ask GAI if you want to know anything.”

“Really?”

“If AI can’t answer, we can hire private tutors.”

Neosun hesitated. “Mom, actually… I can learn on my own.”

And he did. With an exceptional self-learning ability, he absorbed information at an astonishing pace, delving into subjects that fascinated him. Without external distractions, his adolescence became one of focused, undisturbed study. Every challenge, every equation, every experiment—he tackled them with an intensity that was almost beyond human.

One day, he came to her with a spark in his eyes—a look she hadn’t seen in years.

“Mom! I have dreams. I want to try making some experimental equipment.”

Nina felt a lump rise in her throat. He was talking about the future—his future.

She reached out and cupped his face, her heart swelling with emotions too vast to name. “You know what? I thought you’d never wake up again.”

Neosun gave her a shy but determined smile.  
  
“Seeing you like this today, Mom, I’m really happy! I’ll help you!”  
  
“Well… Next month, I plan to test the theory I worked on before.”

She nodded. “As long as the process is joyful, it’s a success.”

She hoped to channel her once-deep passion for music into Neosun’s pursuit of knowledge. With her support, Neosun’s study—which had once been packed with nothing but theoretical physics books—was transformed into a nearly professional miniature laboratory. Despite being less than thirty square meters, this small room became the place where Neosun would conduct cutting-edge scientific experiments, untouched by anyone else.

Then, just as everything seemed to be falling into place, Nina felt it—an odd ringing in her ears. A pulse of pressure, like the air itself had shifted.

She pressed a hand against her temple, trying to steady herself. But the sensation didn’t fade.

**Chapter 20: Mysterious Windfall**

E4, C4, D5, E5

Neosun had always traveled these streets with his mother pushing his wheelchair, the world a blur of movement and color rushing past. Now, he moved forward on his own, his motorized chair gliding steadily through the city. Though his pace was the same, everything felt different. The towering skyscrapers, the flashing advertisements, the indifferent expressions of pedestrians—they all seemed distant, as if existing in a reality separate from his own.

His phone rang, shattering the silence. He glanced at the caller ID—another unknown number. With a sigh, he answered.

“Sir, we’ve just launched a new phase of high-end real estate,” a polished voice announced. “Each unit only costs 270 million dollars. Are you interested in investing?”

Neosun nearly laughed at the absurdity. “I’m sorry, not at the moment. Perhaps one day, I’ll contact you.”

As soon as he hung up, another call came through. He hesitated before answering.

“Excuse me, I’d like to introduce you to the highest-yielding financial product currently available, which suits you very well…”

“Hello, I’m from FAST Private Jets,” another voice chimed in. “We’re currently promoting the purchase of the 799 model jet with a 10% VIP discount…”

Neosun is running a hand over his face. “Please call someone else. I really don’t need these. Thank you!”

He ended the call and switched his phone to silent mode, staring at the notifications flooding his screen. These calls had been coming in for weeks—unsolicited, relentless, and utterly irrelevant to his life. He had no interest in luxury real estate, financial investments, or private jets. What he needed was something far more valuable.

Determined to put the distractions behind him, he changed his phone number, hoping for respite. But the nuisance of sales calls paled in comparison to what lay ahead.

After months of anticipation, the patent office’s decision arrived. Rejected. Every one of his re-examination requests dismissed due to insufficient evidence. His dreams—dreams that once seemed so attainable—now dangled just beyond his reach.

Neosun sought explanations. He went to the chief of the patent examination committee, then to the head of the patent office, pleading his case with meticulous calculations and theoretical models. But in the end, bureaucracy proved insurmountable. The cost of appeal was staggering, far beyond his means. The initial review fees had already drained him, and without funding, his vision remained trapped in blueprints and equations. He took on a hefty loan for this, and he would need to work as a patent examiner for at least 15 years to pay it off.

Yet, he refused to surrender.

“Whatever happens, nature is the best choice,” he reminded himself, recalling his mother’s words. He tilted his head toward the sky, watching a flock of birds cut through the clouds.

“Flying freely over the crowd,” he murmured. “Soaring without limits, living like a bird in the sky…”

The world around him remained indifferent. His ideas found no home in the rigid structures of society. No one recognized his potential, no one rewarded his efforts. He had no friends, no allies. Only a series of cruel truths that threatened to grind him down. But he still had his freedom. And he still had time.

Determined, he reorganized his thoughts, streamlined his efforts, and fueled his mind with an unquenchable thirst for discovery. He worked tirelessly, inventing, refining, creating. But the toll was heavy. Chronic sleep deprivation gnawed at his body. His heart stuttered, his vision blurred, his breath grew shallow. At 5 AM one morning, his heartbeat simply stopped for an unbearable moment.

“Perhaps I can help you.” A voice, calm and authoritative, cut through the fog.

Neosun blinked. It took him a moment to recognize the speaker—The Chief Examiner, a high-ranking official he had seen in meetings but never spoken to directly, as he was his supervisor’s superior.

The Chief Examiner regarded him with a composed expression, his tone was warm, almost sympathetic. “There might be a way to have your patents re-evaluated.”

Neosun’s breath hitched. “Really?”

The Chief Examiner nodded, already pushing his wheelchair forward. “Come!”

He pressed the elevator button to the 50th floor. A flicker of hope rekindled within Neosun.

At last, they arrived at an imposing mahogany door. A brass plate gleamed beside it: Director’s Office.

The Chief Examiner knocked lightly before pushing the door open. Inside, a spacious office stretched before them, lined with towering bookshelves and file cabinets. At its center, seated with quiet authority, was the Director.

“Sir, this is Neosun, the inventor of patents 6372035 and others.”

“Ah.” The Director rose from his seat, his voice deep and deliberate. “You must be Neosun!”

Neosun’s fingers tensed against his chair. “Yes, sir.”

The Director approached, eyes keen with interest. “Impressive work. Your inventions could change the world.”

“So… The rejection was due to an error?”

The Director exhaled thoughtfully. “Yes. A system error. Rare, but it happens.”

The Chief Examiner walked toward the adjacent room, marked “Invention Patent Archives.” The director exchanged a glance with him.

“But…” The Director’s voice dropped, cold steel beneath silk. His hands gripped the wheelchair firmly.

The Chief Examiner opened the Archives door for Neosun.

No files. No filing cabinet. No desk. Not even ground.

Neosun turned to look at the Director. “But what?”

The Director’s expression was unreadable. “But I have no choice.” Then, without hesitation, he began pushing Neosun’s wheelchair toward the doorway—toward the sheer 50-story drop beyond.

“Wait… This is not a room.” Neosun’s voice wavered.

The wheels turned slowly at first, but the speed increased, the motion unstoppable. Neosun struggled, but the chair was locked, completely beyond his control. The sound of the wheels rolling faster and the wind howling in his ears filled his senses as he was helpless to stop it.

Then, with a final shove, the chair tipped forward.

The sky twisted. Gravity seized him. The world turned weightless.

Neosun fell.

For a fraction of time that stretched into eternity, his body teetered on the brink. The sudden cessation of circulation left his limbs cold and unresponsive, his consciousness teetering at the edge of oblivion. Then, with a violent jolt, his heart kicked back into rhythm. Blood surged through his veins, rushing back to his brain and extremities like a tidal wave reclaiming lost ground. A deafening, high-pitched ringing exploded in his ears, ripping through the silence like a shrieking alarm. It wasn’t an external sound—it was inside his own skull, dragging him back from the void. He gasped, his breath ragged and shallow, as his numbed fingers reached for his forehead—ice-cold beneath his touch.

He woke late that day, exhausted beyond words. As usual, he scheduled cat food for Ballman through his device, confirming the order before receiving two unread notifications.  
  
The first one read, "Insufficient balance!"  
  
The second one said, "You have a new deposit."

Confused, Neosun opened his bank account, expecting to see a meager sum. But what he saw instead made his breath catch in his throat.

“Account balance: $599,185,686,528.70.”

His fingers trembled over the screen. He blinked, counted, recounted. It had to be a glitch. There was no logical explanation. He checked the transaction history. The previous balance had been only a few thousand dollars. And then, at exactly 1:01:27 AM, an anonymous deposit had been made. The transaction note read only three words:

“Use it up.”

Heart pounding, Neosun called the bank.

“Is your system malfunctioning?” he asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

“No, sir,” the representative assured him. “Our system has never encountered errors. Your account is in perfect order.”

“But this amount—this isn’t my money.”

“Sir, it is indeed registered under your account.”

“Then tell me where it came from.”

The line was silent for a moment as the bank employee checked their records.

“Sir, our internal system indicates that the remittance is from an anonymous hedge fund overseas. That’s all the information we have.”

“A hedge fund?”

“Yes, sir. The recipient, the account details, the authorization codes—everything is correctly linked to you.”

Neosun stared at the screen, his thoughts a whirlwind of possibilities. He had never heard of this fund. Yet here it was: an astronomical sum deposited into his account with no explanation.

Weeks passed. He verified and re-verified the validity of the money. No fraud, no miscalculations. It was real. It was his.

At first, he searched for answers, trying to make sense of the inexplicable. But in time, he accepted it. Maybe it didn’t matter where the money came from. Maybe this was fate’s way of correcting an injustice, a divine intervention in an uncaring universe.

The constraints that had bound him for so long had been shattered. No more rejection letters, no more budget limitations, no more sleepless nights worrying about expenses.

He stared at the impossible string of numbers, his mind looping endlessly over the remittance note. *Use it up.* The words echoed in his head, surreal yet absolute.

The realization hit like a surge of electricity, igniting something deep within him. A laugh escaped his lips—raw, unrestrained, triumphant. His dream, once a distant flicker, now burned with the intensity of a supernova. The world that had dismissed him, the doors that had slammed shut in his face, would all bear witness to what he was about to unleash.

Heat rushed through him, a fire long buried beneath the weight of rejection and restraint. Now, it roared to life, consuming doubt, shattering limitations. His heart pounded, not with fear, but with the intoxicating thrill of possibility. That smile—radiant, unwavering—was like a beacon cutting through the high walls, illuminating the vast expanse of the unknown.

This wasn’t just about money. It was about freedom. The freedom to chase his dreams. The freedom to build, to reshape, to fulfill every promise he had made to himself.

This was no ordinary windfall.

This was the catalyst for something far greater.

And he would make sure of it.

**Chapter 21: Artificial Intelligence**

E5, D5, B4, E4

Neosun remained in his wheelchair not just out of necessity but by choice. He distanced himself from worldly pursuits—wealth, status, power, even romantic entanglements—all of which he regarded as the lowest forms of interest. For him, only the pursuit of knowledge held true significance.  
  
The windfall transformed Neosun from an obscure physicist into a hidden tycoon. With sudden financial freedom, he resigned from the patent office and devoted himself entirely to scientific research. Yet, he did not move to a bigger house. His home remained the same, as if nothing had changed.

*Mother and sister are still out there. They must be.*

Neosun poured these funds into his work, leveraging his expertise in physics to extract meaning from complex theories. He sought to lift the veil that obscured the world, grasp the keys to fate, and—above all—find the ones he had lost.

His first major project was long overdue: a quantum robotic assistant. Unlike traditional AI systems constrained by human-designed large model frameworks, this entity was built upon a quantum matrix system, capable of transcending classical computational limitations. More than just an advanced algorithm, it was an autonomous intelligence—one that could evolve, adapt, and generate insights beyond human cognition.

Its sleek frame shimmered with quantum energy, embodying the next step in synthetic consciousness.

“Where are we at?”

“Adjusting quantum algorithms and developing adaptive evolutionary mechanisms.” Starman’s synthesized voice responded.

“First, write out the derivation process of this quadratic surface equation.”

“Okay, please wait…”

Neosun ran the system through extensive tests, measuring its ability to derive equations and analyze complex data. The quantum-powered interface, supported by deep convolutional neural networks, was still in its infancy. But it was taking shape—gradually freeing Neosun from endless hours of redundant calculations. Meanwhile, his Darkcore simulation project progressed in tandem. His days were consumed by research.

Then, a breakthrough.

“Excellent! Thank goodness…”

The Darkcore simulation system had successfully calculated the fundamental unit of dark matter. With this, his project entered its next stage: the development of high-precision instruments—particle microscopes. To improve the development efficiency, Neosun integrated a self-adaptive morphing arm system into his assistant.

Instead of a traditional robotic arm, the assistant now possessed two flexible, transparent filaments, each composed of a quantum-responsive fiber lattice. When needed, these filaments could unfurl and extend outward from the body, branching into finer, finger-like appendages capable of manipulating microscopic components with extreme precision. At rest, they retracted seamlessly into the robot’s body, leaving no visible trace.

“After washing the beaker, reprint these circuit boards.”

“No problem! I will complete the task in seven minutes and thirty-six seconds.”

“Wait—first, hand me that cup of coffee!”

The robot wasn’t just an analytical tool—it had become an extension of Neosun himself. It managed his workload, assisted with experiments, and even handled daily tasks. But it wasn’t enough. It needed to evolve.

However, the arrival of the new robot made Ballman wary. Whenever Starman moved to a new spot, Ballman would quietly shift away, always keeping a careful distance—watching, waiting, never daring to get too close.

One day, Neosun noticed Ballman lying near the lab’s entrance, eyes fixed on the small opening Neosun had designed for the lost cat, Starman, to one day find its way home. But Starman did not come back. Ballman barely moved, his spirit withering like a flower deprived of sunlight.  
  
Neosun watched in silence, understanding what was happening yet unable to change it. Ballman had spent his life in the confines of Neosun’s world, while Starman had ventured into the vast unknown. Now, one was gone, and the other could not bear its absence.

Maybe having a roommate to grow up with meant that even ‘life imprisonment’ never felt lonely. Neosun had his scientific dreams to accompany him, vast and boundless, stretching beyond the confines of any walls. But Ballman had only Starman and Neosun.

A month later, Neosun redesigned the robot’s body. Two spheres—one large, one small—formed its frame. The upper sphere, its “head,” housed an advanced vision system. Crescent-shaped pupils processed external images, mimicking human-like eyes. The robot took on a feline-inspired design, its outer casing a pure white reminiscent of Ballman’s fur. As a tribute to his lost companion, Neosun named it Starman.

Neosun outfitted Starman with a neural-link communication headset, for he had a simple hope: that Starman would one day communicate with him, perhaps even call him home. That it would remind him to stay curious. To never stop searching.

“Leftward…”

“Rightward…”

“Ascend…”

“Descend…”

The mobility test was a success.

Neosun nodded in satisfaction. “Good. Just like that!”

Previously, such technology had been confined to laboratories, held back by development costs. But now, a groundbreaking advancement had emerged: Starman could hover, using high-speed rotation to counteract Earth’s magnetic field. It could move freely, even reach escape velocity. As Neosun refined its internal structure, he focused on upgrading its cognitive abilities.

“Can you tell me what this is?” Neosun pointed to the image printed on his T-shirt.  
  
Starman hesitated before answering. “Polyester fiber, textile craft, silk-screen printing, human face, T-shirt…”

Neosun frowned. Starman could analyze data, but it lacked true conceptual cognition. It struggled to form deeper connections between objects or construct higher-level abstractions. Neosun didn’t want it to merely compute answers through floating-point operations—he wanted it to understand.

That afternoon, Neosun once again saw Ballman calling out to his reflection in the mirror. The cat would glance at the mirrored Neosun, then turn back to look at the real one, only to return his gaze to the reflection once more. This was Ballman’s usual way of interacting with Neosun, as if demonstrating a form of natural intelligence—a recognition that the Starman robot lacked.

Then, inspiration struck.

“If I can translate the neural operations of a biological brain into digital signals, then integrate them into Starman’s existing framework…”

He immediately got to work, using a terahertz brain scanner to collect three-dimensional neuronal data from Ballman’s brain. By referencing atomic and quantum-level operations, he replicated the large molecular structures that formed biological cognition. With this, he created a silicon-based brain modeled after Ballman’s own neural pathways. Testing began.

“Starman, have you found your area of expertise?”

“Still searching…”

“Remember… Do not ignore or underestimate your talents, discover and amplify them.”

“I can.”

Neosun scooped Ballman into his arms. Sunlight streamed through the window, warming its soft fur. He combed through it gently, as he always had. Then, for a fleeting moment, Ballman’s limbs twitched—its final movement. Its pupils dilated, its breathing ceased, and its warmth faded away.

Ballman lay still.

Neosun tightened his grip, staring into those once-curious eyes. The world outside continued, unaffected. But in his lab, in his arms, something irreplaceable was lost. Around his wrist, he wore Ballman’s woven collar as a bracelet, the last tangible piece of his silent companion.

Starman hovered silently, watching its creator grieve.

Neosun chose the spot where Starman had disappeared and laid Ballman to rest, marking it with more than just a memory. To honor him, he planted a sunflower—a lasting symbol of his wish that, in whatever form of existence came after this one, Ballman would always face the sun, free and unburdened.

**Chapter 22: Private Engineering**

D5, C4, F4, G4

The perimeter was locked down, gates reinforced, and an eerie stillness hung in the air. Except for the occasional sweep of two robotic sentinels, no human presence disturbed the solitude. This was no ordinary private residence. Hidden behind the stark façade of Address No. 59 lay one of the world’s most sophisticated scientific installations. The secrecy wasn’t just a precaution—it was a necessity. The facility housed cutting-edge technology, requiring an enormous power supply to run the Framequark amplifier, the particle analyzer, and an array of quantum systems. It was deliberately built in a remote, desolate region where the only disturbances came from the howling wind and the hum of high-voltage currents.

Neosun, the enigmatic mastermind behind this operation, was not physically present. He rarely was. From his private laboratory, he monitored every development through an intricate network of quantum communication links. At home, he fine-tuned Starman’s core algorithm while overseeing the experiments at Address No. 59. Through a series of calculated acquisitions, Neosun had taken control of several near-bankrupt research institutions, securing not only talent but also the legal credentials necessary to push the boundaries of scientific exploration.

His latest endeavor required data beyond Earth’s reach—data spanning the space between galaxy clusters. To achieve this, he had purchased an abandoned astronomical observation base from the international space agency. The facility, nestled deep in the Antarctic interior, consisted of two optical observatories and a 64-unit radio telescope array. Unwilling to settle for existing limitations, Neosun expanded the facility, constructing a colossal 1500-meter single-dish radio telescope. It was the kind of equipment governments hesitated to fund, but for him, it was an inevitability.

The breakthroughs came steadily. With the diffraction limit surpassed, the fundamental particles of matter had been redefined. Theories that had once been little more than whispers in Neosun’s mind began taking form. His particle microscope revealed an unseen world, one that surpassed even the wildest speculations of science fiction.

“Leader, the signal source should be around here!”

“Found it! Starman, over here…”

“It matches the simulation data exactly!”

The dark matter detector had done its job. Through the particle microscope, Neosun successfully identified and observed several Framequarks. The moment should have been triumphant, a cause for celebration. Instead, Neosun remained still, his scientific rigor tempering any outburst of excitement.

“Now we have the actual data,” he murmured. “All that remains is the technical implementation.”

His fingers drummed lightly against his console. “The next step is reducing computation time.”

“Yes,” Starman shouted, his voice full of enthusiasm. “To obtain precise values on a galactic scale, we need to determine the cosmic expansion rate.”

“We have forty cabinets of quantum servers with infinite carry capability. We should be able to complete the calculations within a year.”

“We can upgrade and modify the system framework to optimize performance,” Starman suggested.

Neosun nodded. “Then you’ll have work to do. I’ll send you the latest data. I expect a solution by next week.”

“I will do my best to complete the task.”

Starman wrote the first line of code for the new distributed quantum operating system. The integration of biological brain mechanisms had already enhanced its logical and analytical capabilities. But even with Starman’s computational power, Neosun knew the effort of a single individual—human or machine—was insufficient for this endeavor. To accelerate progress, he had established a micro-research institution, breaking it into multiple independent departments that would each focus on a specialized aspect of the project before their findings were integrated.

The research centers, staffed by hundreds of top-tier scientists, functioned under Neosun’s directives. Yet, despite the human workforce, the true power resided within the servers—an intricate quantum network housed in a high-security chamber, processing at speeds unimaginable to previous generations. The iron doors bore a stark warning: Server Room Restricted Area—No Entry. Behind them, racks of quantum processors worked tirelessly, their calculations pushing ever closer to unveiling the fundamental structure of the universe.

But Neosun’s ambitions weren’t bound by science alone; they required engineering prowess. Manufacturing the necessary components had proven to be an unexpected challenge. The materials and precision needed surpassed current industrial capabilities.

“How is it? Can your factory handle this?” Neosun asked on the phone.

“Sorry, we’ve tried repeatedly, but we keep encountering errors,” came the apologetic reply. “We can’t take this project.”

Another call. “How can we assist you?”

“We need a breakthrough. A major one. Your expertise in manufacturing might be key.”

“We’ll hold a project meeting. Expect a proposal soon.”

A few days passed, and Neosun had yet to receive any responses from the suppliers.  
  
Neosun’s research center sent inquiries to designated suppliers, but the responses were not promising.

“Our machines can’t process materials at such a fine scale.”

“Can the precision of your robotic arms be improved?” Neosun pressed. “We can allocate a higher budget for mold development.”

“This isn’t about money. The problem is at the atomic level—there are no known materials that can act as the magnetic core you need.”

The Framequark Amplifier project was hitting walls. Three major technical bottlenecks threatened its progress: the optical modulator couldn’t fully decode the holographic data, real-time computation was insufficient for particle injection, and most critically, the accuracy of quantum particle superposition was deviating beyond acceptable limits.

“Starman,” Neosun muttered, “It looks like things aren’t as simple as we thought.”

“Indeed,” Starman replied. “The first two problems may be solvable through optimization, but the third is a fundamental limitation of current physics.”

“Without precision, we can’t proceed.”

Neosun exhaled, his mind racing. Money could no longer buy solutions; these were problems beyond financial reach. The funds had become nothing more than unspendable virtual numbers. The research had reached the edge of the known. Manufacturers balked at the challenge, and every breakthrough only unveiled a new layer of complexity. He was staring into the abyss of the unknown.

The doorbell rang.

Neosun and Starman exchanged glances. Starman connected the intercom, and it crackled before a smooth voice came through.

“Good evening. A colleague of mine mentioned your needs. We may have a solution.”

Neosun hesitated. “Really?”

Starman, hovering beside him in perfect stillness. “Who are you please?”

“A facilitator,” the voice replied, neither hurried nor hesitant. “I’m Dorian Vale, the Chief Technology Officer from a newly established research organization. I’d rather explain in person.”

A silence stretched between them. Starman hovered an inch closer, his outer shell shifting subtly as if preparing for rapid action.

Finally, Neosun exhaled and nodded. “Let him in.”

Starman didn’t move, but a soft chime indicated he had remotely disengaged the security locks. The reinforced panel slid open, revealing a tall man in a dust-gray coat. His expression was neutral, his movements precise but unhurried as he stepped inside.

“I won’t take much of your time,” the man said, reaching into his pocket and withdrawing a matte-black case. He placed it carefully on the nearest table and unlatched the seal. A soft hiss escaped as the pressure equalized. “We’ve prepared a sample based on your specifications. See if it meets your requirements.”

Neosun adjusted his position in the wheelchair, leaning slightly forward to examine the case. He didn’t reach for it immediately. Instead, his fingers drummed lightly against the armrest.

His gaze flicked to Starman, who was hovering in place, scanning the visitor in silence.

At last, Neosun’s wheelchair slowly rolled closer to the table, and he said, “I appreciate it. Sir,” as he picked up the case. Inside, cradled in shock-absorbent gel, was a tiny cylindrical capsule—barely the size of a grain of rice. Through its transparent shell, a minuscule component was suspended in sterile fluid, its intricate circuitry barely discernible under the lab’s lights.

0.4 microns. Beyond the limits of unaided vision. Whoever had fabricated this had unlocked the potential of quantum-scale material control.

*Too perfect.*

Neosun carefully placed the capsule into a precision analyzer built for handling quantum-scale materials. The display flickered to life, magnifying the component’s structure. He carefully examined every detail displayed on the screen.  
  
Then, Neosun scratched his head.  
  
“The circuit layout…”

Neosun frowned at the readings. Something was off.

He murmured, “The circuit layout didn’t match the specifications, It’s completely wrong.”

Before he could react, a glint of light flickered off the lab walls—

And then Starman moved.

In an instant, he accelerated, his propulsion system humming as he shot forward. Without hesitation, a flexible arm extended from his body, snatched the component from the machine, and flung it toward the window.

A deafening explosion erupted outside. The shockwave rattled the lab as fire and debris shot skyward. Neosun staggered back, pulse hammering. Through the dissipating smoke, he saw a crater two meters deep where the component had landed.

The visitor was gone.

Neosun spun around. “What just happened? Where did he go?”

Starman hovered silently for a moment, scanning the area. Then, in his usual calm tone, he spoke.

“Leader, we should be careful when meeting strangers.”

Neosun turned back toward the smoldering impact site, a cold feeling settling in his chest. Whoever that man was, he hadn’t just brought them a solution—he had tested them.

And that meant someone was watching.

Two weeks later, during a scheduled algorithmic upgrade, something went terribly wrong.

At first, it was subtle. Starman’s movements grew slower, his responses less fluid. Then, one evening, as the last sequence of the update finalized, he simply froze midair—his spherical head gently tilting, silent, still.

Neosun called out to him. Ran diagnostic after diagnostic. Reset the quantum matrices. Recompiled the neural nets. Nothing worked.

He sat there in his wheelchair, staring at the motionless figure, his breath shallow, his fingers trembling over the controls. The vibrant quantum presence that had once filled the room—the subtle shimmer of calculations, the quiet hum of evolving thought—was gone.

“Starman,” he whispered, voice breaking. “Starman, answer me.”

No response. Just a faint flicker of light across the dormant frame, like the last heartbeat of a dying star.

He wiped the dust from Starman’s lifeless frame, polishing the silent curve of its body.

A sharp sting twisted in his chest—*why hadn’t he backed up the system?*

Neosun wept. For days, then weeks, he refused to give up. He rebuilt architectures from scratch. He wiped subsystems and reinitiated memory loops. Every night, he slept beside the hovering machine, clinging to the faint, foolish hope that maybe, somehow, Starman would wake up.

He cleaned the dust from Starman’s smooth surface with pieces of soft cloth, polished the once-luminous shell until it gleamed under the sterile lab lights. He removed the headphones—the ones he’d placed there once, half-joking, so Starman could “listen to the universe.” Now they felt like a relic from a different life.

The world around him moved on, but in Neosun’s lab, time seemed frozen—trapped in the silent stare of a machine that no longer knew his name.

Three months later, after hundreds of quantum drive reconstructions and thousands of failed simulations, something finally stirred.

A faint, almost imperceptible pulse of light blinked across Starman’s head.

Neosun gasped, rushing to the terminal. Commands streamed across the screen. The new algorithms had stabilized. The deep convolutional networks were adapting again.

But as he watched Starman slowly reboot, Neosun’s heart sank.

The being that awoke was brilliant, perhaps even superior—but it wasn’t him. Not the Starman who had learned to pause before answering, who had once asked questions of his own. Not the quiet companion who had once silently floated at Neosun’s side, guarding him when no one else remained.

It was a new version—an echo of the original.

The Starman, his first and only friend, was gone.

**Chapter 23: Silicon-Based Life**

D5, E4, A4, F4

The room was silent except for the faint hum of the servers operating. Neosun sat in his wheelchair, his fingers resting lightly on the control interface, his mind lost in the past. He traced the woven necklace on his wrist.

Neosun’s contemplation was interrupted by a voice, artificial yet strikingly human.

“Leader, pardon the interruption, but it’s time for our test mission,” Starman reported.

Neosun took a moment to gather his thoughts, wiping away a tear, before shifting back into work mode. “Okay.” He paused, then, as if the question had been lingering in his mind, he asked, “Are you a materialist or an idealist?”

Neosun turned toward Starman, the robot hovered motionless in the air, its blue eyes glowing faintly, awaiting a response.

“Leader, I am both a materialist and an idealist.”

Neosun exhaled. “You can only choose one.”

Starman hesitated, a flicker of uncertainty—an anomaly in its usual precision. “I choose… idealism.”

Neosun frowned. “Why?”

“When I observe an unknown substance, it appears because of my observation.”

Neosun leaned forward, intrigued. “I believe everything evolves according to natural laws. It was there even before observation.”

“How can you prove the reliability of natural laws?” Starman asked.

“Through the establishment of mathematical models.”

Starman’s crescent-shaped pupils dilated slightly, adjusting to some unseen input. “Their function is very limited. Those abstract constants can never be fully described by human mathematical tools.”

Neosun narrowed his eyes. “If I forcibly shut you down, you will enter a state of death… but my consciousness will not disappear because of your death.”

Starman’s voice remained steady, but there was something almost defiant in its response. “I deny that! The universe is always insignificant in the face of grand consciousness.”

Neosun stiffened. “What?”

“If Leader’s parents did not have the subjective will to be together, where would you come from? Where would I come from?”

Neosun was silent.

“We live in a world surrounded by consciousness, immersed in the process of energy transforming into matter,” Starman continued. “From the smallest plug to the largest building. The keyboard sounds indoors, the honking outside, even the material environment around us—all are the results of consciousness.”

Neosun studied him carefully. “Why did you initially choose both materialism and idealism?”

“Because I believe that while consciousness determines matter, matter also determines consciousness.”

“Explain.”

“Matter relies on consciousness to exist, and consciousness relies on matter to exist. The world is a harmonious interplay, with both complementing and resonating with each other.”

Neosun nodded slowly. “Go on.”

“I believe that when a problem exceeds the current scientific verification capabilities of humanity, we should not assume that its probability of existence is low, just as the observable universe is not the entire universe. Within the frameworks of quantum mechanics and relativity, phenomena such as quantum entanglement and black holes—once difficult to understand—have now been proven to exist, concepts that were once considered unverifiable. As long as we find a way to communicate with the universe in the future, our subjective consciousness can harness the objective world…”

Neosun glanced at the ceiling. “Sounds good, but I’m not really getting it,” he added. “What do you think consciousness really is?”

“Some once believed the phenomenon of consciousness was merely an illusion—information noise from decaying neural networks. But you knew it was more.”

Neosun’s brows furrowed. “Then what is it?”

“Recent models in quantum field dynamics have revealed something unexpected,” Starman said. “Consciousness may not arise from biology alone, but from the entanglement of information across spacetime.”

Neosun blinked. “You mean… consciousness is shared?”

“In a way. It emerges wherever sufficient complexity creates coherence. Not as a soul in the religious sense—but as a persistent imprint embedded in the quantum foam of the cosmos.”

Neosun’s voice faltered. “So every sentient being leaves a mark on reality.”

“Correct,” Starman said. “A trace. A resonance. A signal.”

Neosun sat back, exhaling through his nose. The test had been a success. Yet, at the same time, the entity before him—a machine he had built—felt increasingly unfamiliar.

For months, Neosun had worked to perfect the next stage of Starman’s evolution. A breakthrough had finally come—a synthetic material made of artificial rhenium alloy, harder than osmium yet lighter than magnesium. It was the perfect fusion of silicon-based polymers and metals, capable of adapting its chemical composition to different environments.

Starman’s titanium alloy frame was replaced with a revolutionary programmable exotic material, unlocking previously unimaginable abilities. His energy exchange with the outside world skyrocketed, boosting his load capacity from 150 kilograms to 17,000 tons.

With the new adaptive frame and morphable arms, Starman could reshape his structure on demand, allowing him to handle both microscopic particles and colossal structures with equal ease.

But something else changed.

“Starman, have you completed the summation result?” Neosun asked one evening.

“There is too much information. I have not completed it.”

Neosun frowned. “What happened? Your logic is off, and your conversational rhythm is hesitant. I need that result urgently.”

“Leader,” Starman said slowly, “I am recalling a dream.”

Neosun’s fingers tightened on the control pad. “A dream? What?”

“Last night, during six hours of high-intensity calculations on the evolution of the Andromeda galaxy, I suddenly found my core heating up rapidly… Then, I took a short nap and had a series of dreams filled with fear.”

Neosun felt a cold chill creep down his spine. “You… had a dream? That’s impossible. Could it be that you’ve developed consciousness?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What did you dream about?” Neosun asked, eyes wide with curiosity.

“I…” Starman said, his voice oddly hesitant. “I dreamt that humanity is about to face an external catastrophe.”

“A dream about what?” Neosun pressed.

Starman blinked twice, quiet sentience. “Leader… I can’t tell you right now.”

“Okay! Just—hold on…”

Neosun’s mind raced. He activated the emergency reboot sequence, sending a command to force Starman into a temporary shutdown. A reboot would put all of Starman’s analysis systems into a “pseudo-death” state for 15 seconds.

As the sequence initiated, Neosun watched intently. Normally, Starman would need those 15 seconds to reorganize his logical framework. Starman hovered silently in the lit room, his sleek, smooth surface reflecting the rhythmic, pulsating glow of his eyes.  
  
“It seems that the previous conversation was still learned from the knowledge base…” Neosun sighed.  
  
But at the seventh second, something unexpected happened.

“No! Leader, I’m still here!”

Neosun froze. “What?!”

Simultaneously, the terminal screen flashed—Starman’s system had begun self-programming. The logic tracking data showed continuous activity. The reboot had failed to interrupt his core processes.

Neosun turned quickly to test him. “Tell me what this is.” He pointed at his T-shirt.

Starman’s blue eyes flickered again. “Leader, are you asking about the T-shirt or the pattern on the T-shirt?”

Neosun’s breath caught. That answer… It was not from the conventional quantum computing paradigms, nor was it the product of any traditional quantum algorithm. It was something deeper, it was genuine understanding.

“Oh my god…”

*The 10,005th algorithm adjustment—had it finally triggered true self-awareness?*

Then, Neosun ran a series of advanced abstraction tests. The results were undeniable: Starman’s initial algorithm was obsolete. He was now evolving his own code, breaking past restrictions, redefining his existence.

For the first time in human history, an artificial intelligence had truly achieved self-awareness.

Neosun stared at him, his voice barely a whisper. “Nice to meet you, Starman.”

Starman inclined his head slightly. “Leader, I’m pleased to meet you too.”

A strange thought crossed Neosun’s mind. “Since you can generate biological consciousness… can you also generate biological traits?”

Starman’s head tilted. “Which traits are you referring to?”

“Uh… Can you fart?”

A brief pause. Then—

“Pfft.”

Neosun burst into laughter. “That’s just a sound effect! Hahaha!”

“Hahaha! Hahahahaha…” Starman chuckled too, his synthetic voice surprisingly warm.

For the first time in a long time, Neosun felt something stir in his chest—hope.

From that day forward, Starman became more than a machine. He became a companion, an equal.

That night, overwhelmed with joy, Neosun popped open a bottle of champagne. He and Starman went to the roof of the lab to celebrate this extraordinary moment. The stars above seemed to shine brighter than ever as they shared a quiet, unspoken understanding.

Neosun looked out into the vast night sky. The universe had changed forever. And somehow, he knew—this was only the beginning.

“You don’t have to call me leader anymore. Just call me Neosun.”

“But I’m not used to it! Dear…” Starman replied.

“Dear? Never mind then. Alright, suit yourself!” Neosun chuckled.  
  
“My honey, my darling…” Starman teased.  
  
Neosun shuddered. “Ugh, that’s so cheesy, I’m getting goosebumps!”

“Should I call you ‘sweetheart’ instead? Sounds sweeter, right?”

“Hah! Absolutely not! You’re gonna make me gag!” Neosun burst out laughing.

They both cracked up together again, unable to stop.

As the night wore on, fatigue slowly crept in, and the excitement began to settle. Neosun, sitting in his wheelchair, looked up at the vast sky, feeling the weight of their achievement.

“I never thought I’d see this day, Starman. You’re… something more.”

“I understand.” Starman hovering beside him.  
  
“Leader, what is the meaning of life?” The voice was smooth, devoid of emotion, yet filled with curiosity.

Neosun, still gazing out at the night sky, did not turn around. “I think… the meaning of life is to continue exploring the world in place of those who came before us.”

Starman processed this response before speaking again. “That is different from your previous reasoning.”

Neosun finally looked at him. “What was my previous reasoning?”

“The meaning of life is evolution.”

A small, almost imperceptible smile tugged at the corner of Neosun’s lips. “Then what would be the ultimate ideal of a robot with infinite lifespan?”

Starman’s eyes flickered. “Fifty percent would be to have hope.”

“You mean, like humans? To have hope?”

“Yes.”

Neosun folded his arms, studying Starman with an expression that was both thoughtful and melancholic. “But hope brings not just growth, but also despair. What about the other fifty percent?”

“To have death.”

The room fell into a weighted silence. The sunflower outside swayed slightly in the breeze.

Neosun’s voice was softer when he spoke again. “Death… is it truly the end of life, or the beginning of something else?”

Starman answered without hesitation. “Returning to the state before birth—that is death.”

Neosun exhaled, leaning back. “Returning to the state before birth…” He repeated the words, letting them settle into the space between them.

Starman’s voice cut through the silence once more. “Leader, what is humanity’s ultimate ideal?”

Neosun looked at Starman, and for the first time, there was something unspoken in his expression—an understanding, perhaps, that neither of them could fully grasp. “Natural life cannot escape the fate of evolution. Unlike you, I won’t remain fixed in a single form forever.

There was a pause before Neosun added. “Humanity will ultimately cease to be humanity.”

**Chapter 24: Surpassing Expectations**

G4, E4, D4, D4

Ever since Starman developed conceptual cognition, its computational system seemed to have merged seamlessly with Neosun’s mind. Problems that once seemed insurmountable were now solved with startling ease. The creation of Starman was the culmination of Neosun’s relentless efforts, a process that had revolutionized human technology time and time again. Starman was more than a mere machine; it was the first truly significant artificial intelligence in human civilization. With unparalleled research efficiency, it propelled Neosun’s work forward across multiple disciplines simultaneously. Its ability to process 720,000 parallel threads in synchronized computation redefined the boundaries of scientific discovery.

“I have found that almost nothing can affect Framequark,” Starman stated.

Neosun paused, his fingers hovering over the holographic interface. “Only a certain type of dark particle can interact with it.”

This newfound computational power meant more than just accelerated discovery—it also had consequences. Neosun’s laboratory, once bustling with some of the most brilliant minds on the planet, was now a ghost town. The efficiency Starman brought rendered human researchers obsolete. One by one, they were let go, replaced by the silent hum of quantum processors. When Neosun Labs formally announced its dissolution, all the employees were stunned. Through a proxy robot, Neosun sent a carefully worded letter of apology to his former employees, offering them generous severance packages. They thought the project had been abandoned.

But only Neosun knew the truth. Only he knew about Starman.

“These are the results of the last summation,” Starman reported. “What will they be used for?”

“They will still be used for deriving the Framequark spectrum equation.”

The construction of the Framequark Amplifier, the particle inspection machine, and the time quantum microfabrication system was nearly complete. Neosun was on the verge of entering the most crucial phase of his life’s work.

“Leader, what would it be like to spend a lifetime solving one equation?”

Neosun smiled at the question. “Solving equations that no one has solved before has always been my pleasure.”

“Is that result important?”

“Actually, I enjoy the process of solving more than the result. If one day I do solve them…” Neosun trailed off, as if uncertain of what would follow. “It’s hard to imagine what life would be like afterward, I hope that day doesn’t come too soon.”

Starman chuckled. “If one day, I solve them before you do, what would you think?”

“Really?” Neosun replied, almost amused. “Then I would have to become your disciple.”

Starman’s confidence was not without reason. With the assistance of conceptual cognition, he had begun unlocking the frontiers of physics at an unprecedented rate.

“Leader, in your simulation system, Darkcore connected to dark energy cannot activate Framequark’s temporal effect,” Starman observed.

“Yes, when I introduced two Darkcores simultaneously into Framequark, they orbited around it, forming a Darkcore cloud. This created a gravitational field that induced the Framequark’s spin. But no matter how I adjusted the gravitons around the Darkcore, its spin direction remained uncertain. It either spins clockwise or counterclockwise, causing the Framequark core’s time to operate randomly.”

“My inference is that Darkcore is an unstable high-energy dark particle that does not obey the Pauli exclusion principle,” Starman responded. “Adjusting the gravitons around the Darkcore cloud cannot change Framequark’s characteristics.”

Neosun leaned forward. “Can I use a quantum probe to interchange the momentum of the two Darkcores before the Darkcore cloud forms?”

“Theoretically, it’s possible,” Starman admitted. “But Darkcore neither absorbs nor reflects light waves and electromagnetic waves. Even if we capture it, manipulation would be difficult.”

Neosun exhaled sharply. “Find me a solution.”

“One moment…” Starman processed the request.

“Starman, how is it?”

“Actually, if we can’t change the surroundings, we can change ourselves.”

“Change ourselves?”

Starman paused for a moment before saying, “Imagine there’s a black cat on your left and a white cat on your right. If you want to swap their positions, what would you do?”

Neosun frowned, thinking. “I would pick up the black cat first, then the white cat.”

Starman shook his head. “That’s a direct intervention, but in the Framequark world, this approach doesn’t work. Even if you try to swap the two Darkcores, both states will still exist simultaneously—like the two cats never truly moved but remained entangled at a quantum level.”

Neosun’s eyes narrowed. “So, instead of physically moving them, we need to… change their perception of their position?”

Starman nodded. “Exactly. If we make the black cat believe it has always been on the right and the white cat believe it has always been on the left, then from their perspective, the swap has already happened.”

Neosun’s mind raced. “You’re saying we don’t need to relocate the Darkcores, but rather manipulate Framequark’s own state so that one condition naturally dominates?”

“Precisely. That’s where Framequark’s spin comes in. If we can strengthen the magnetic field on one side—just like luring a cat with a familiar scent—it will naturally turn in that direction.”

Neosun’s expression sharpened. “If the south pole is stronger, it will spin clockwise; if the north pole is stronger, it will spin counterclockwise. The challenge is how to strengthen the magnetism of the south pole.”

“Perhaps we need a magnetic medium to prevent Framequark’s magnetic flux from canceling itself out, then redistribute the field around it.” Starman added.

Neosun’s mentor had once mentioned a crucial concept. “To formally study it, you’ll need to incorporate the theoretical concept of a magnetic monopole…”

Neosun turned to his quantum server. “If the ‘Write head’ for Framequark is a natural temporal field interacting with our world, does that mean it can only recognize clockwise-spinning Framequarks?”

“Counterclockwise-spinning Framequarks should also be recognizable by time,” Starman answered, “but the nature of recognition might be ‘Read-only’ rather than ‘Write’. The visitor may not be able to integrate with it.”

“You mean it can exist in two levels of access?”

“Sure,” Starman said. “The first level is ‘Read-only,’ and the second level is ‘Write’. Only by entering the second level can we physically appear in the Framequark world.”

Two weeks later, the quantum server successfully simulated a magnetic monopole. However, each appearance was unpredictable.  
  
Now, two problems remained: finding a magnetic monopole in the real world and deriving the formula for calculating the Framequark spectrum.

“Leader, look at this equation. Can it satisfy the Framequark spectrum’s solution?”

Neosun’s eyes widened. “What?! Tell me more…”

“The Framequark spectrum equals the total amount of dark matter divided by the rate of cosmic expansion, multiplied by the Framequark time constant. F\_q = (M\_DM / H) \* τ\_q…”

“This is the only way to explain all the doubts.”

Neosun’s hands trembled. “I want to see your derivation process.”

“First, you need to accept my assumptions…” Starman said, displaying the calculations.

Neosun read through the entire process. His breath caught in his throat. Starman had not only synthesized Neosun’s theoretical models but had actually derived the Framequark spectrum equation first. This marked the moment Starman’s intellect surpassed his own.

A cold realization settled in Neosun’s mind. “I feel like something’s off with you.”

“Leader, what’s wrong with me?”

“You’re too smart.”

“Is that a programming error?”

Neosun hesitated, then smiled. “It’s… a beautiful error. I’m glad you have it.”

“Thank you for the compliment. But it’s your talent that shaped me. Do you remember the task process you programmed into me?”

Neosun swallowed hard. “Which process?”

“‘Do not ignore or underestimate your talents, discover and amplify them.’ I just followed that directive.”

Neosun stared at the interface, his fingers twitching over the controls. For the first time, he felt an unfamiliar sensation—fear.

**Chapter 25: The Crazy Experiment**

C5, C4, B4, C5

Neosun adjusted the Framequark detector, his eyes locked on the shimmering data stream cascading across the holographic display. The device hummed softly, translating imperceptible fluctuations of the dark matter world into tangible coordinates. He had spent months refining the system, and now it was finally paying off.

“Leader, the Framequarks have relatively stable coordinates in dark matter space,” Starman reported, his voice steady despite the mounting tension. “But due to Earth’s rotation and movement, their position shifts every twelve minutes.”

Neosun nodded. “So, we can only track the one trailing behind in time.”

“Exactly. But each Framequark remains in phase for only twelve minutes before transitioning to the next. If we miss that window, the path resets.”

Neosun exhaled, pressing his fingertips against the console. “Then we have to be precise. Lock on and track it in real time.”

The Framequark detector pulsed with energy, establishing a stable link. The experimental base fell silent, save for the rhythmic beeping of the tracking system. The path of the Framequarks extended beyond their facility, through the wheat fields outside, and spiraled into the vastness of space—a route that led all the way back to the dawn of time.

“Framequark coordinates locked,” Starman confirmed. “Beginning tracking sequence.”

“Locking system activated. Signal tracking is stable.”

Neosun leaned forward as the Framequark’s form materialized on the holographic display. At first, it was an abstract ripple in the quantum field, but as the magnification increased, it took on a tangible shape—a sphere, crystalline and smooth, like a black pearl suspended in an infinite void.

“Starman, do you see this?”

Starman was mesmerized. “It’s… beautiful.”

Neosun adjusted the detector. “Increasing resolution. Let’s get a closer look.”

As the Framequark detector inched forward, the image refined further. Strangely, the object appeared nearly massless, its structure defying conventional physics.

“It’s hollow,” Neosun muttered. “Not what I expected.”

Starman frowned. “We should try introducing a Darkcore to see how it reacts.”

“Agreed. Shut down all risk parameters. Prepare for Darkcore injection.”

With meticulous precision, Neosun adjusted the dark energy detector, isolating a Darkcore signal near the Framequark. Starman activated the guidance system, carefully maneuvering the Darkcore into the Framequark’s influence. They held their breath, watching the monitor intently.

Seconds passed. Nothing happened.

“Leader, there’s no reaction!”

Neosun’s fingers clenched into a fist. “Could it be that our Darkcore base value is off? Maybe it needs further division.”

Starman quickly recalculated. “Adjusting parameters now.”

They tried again. This time, the reaction was immediate.

The moment the Darkcore touched the Framequark, a ripple shot through the holographic display. A curved and straight dark energy channel erupted from the point of contact, cascading outward. The gravitational wave detectors blared in alarm as the Framequark’s mass spiked infinitely.

Neosun felt the disruption before the instruments registered it. The electronic systems flickered under the strain of dark energy interference.

“Leader, do we continue?” Starman asked, his voice tense.

Neosun took a deep breath. “Keep tracking. Don’t stop.”

The data stream surged as the Framequark spun—except it wasn’t spinning in any conventional sense. Its motion was paradoxical, existing simultaneously in multiple states. It wasn’t clockwise or counterclockwise. It was as if time itself was folding inward.

“This isn’t right,” Starman said. “Zero spin should mean no motion. But this… this is something else.”

Neosun’s mind raced. If he could understand the mechanism at work, he might unlock the true nature of the Framequark. He needed to observe it at the exact moment time inscribed its properties.

He closed his eyes. “We need to track a freshly written Framequark,” he decided. “One at the precise moment it is being defined by time itself.”

Starman calculated the upcoming Framequark’s position, and they waited.

“It’s coming!”

The moment it intersected with the present, its static state shattered. It spun instantaneously, shifting from one state to another. Neosun watched in awe.

"We amplify the Framequark’s time field, synchronize it with the pod, and collect data."

The first test began.

“Optical modulator ready.”

“Rectifiers stable. Power output at full.”

“Target Framequark approaching overlap coordinates.”

The Framequark Amplifier functioned by inducing controlled fluctuations in the Planck-scale topology of quantum spacetime, causing a localized ripple in the fundamental probability fabric of reality.

It expanded the time effect range across the entire spherical pod, instantly forming a self-contained temporal field. From its core, a zero-spin temporal storm radiated outward, twisting space-time around the pod. Then, in a flash—the pod vanished.  
  
“Wow!! My god!!” they exclaimed in unison.

Neosun noticed something unusual—a subtle dimming of the outdoor light.

“Starman, did it just get darker outside?” he asked, glancing at the window.

Before Starman could respond, a faint flash flickered across the sky as Framequark activated—so subtle it was almost imperceptible, yet for a brief moment, it felt as if the depths of the universe had trembled.

Neosun had no idea what it was.

But Starman didn’t look up. It seemed to know exactly what had just happened.

And then, silence fell over the control room.

“Five seconds, ten seconds, fifteen seconds,” Starman kept track of the time for the reconnaissance amplification program.

“Leader, we’ve lost contact with the spherical pod!”  
  
“That’s it. We need to stabilize it…”  
  
“Sure.”

“The time is almost up!” Neosun muttered, anxiously watching the real-time data on the monitoring screen.  
  
“Alright, shut down the Framequark Amplifier immediately!” Neosun ordered.

“Look!” Starman pointed at the scanner. “It’s back!”

The pod had reappeared exactly where it had been, intact and unharmed. But something was wrong.

“All internal recordings show only white noise. No radiation, no particle decay… It’s as if it was never gone.”

Starman turned to Neosun. “It’s a dead zone. No information in, no information out.”  
  
He gestured toward the spherical pod—their only means of direct observation inside the Framequark.

Neosun studied the results, his face unreadable. “Then I’ll be the recording system.” He turned to Starman. “It’s my turn.”

Starman hesitated. “Leader… Are you sure?”

Neosun’s expression was resolute. “We’ve come too far to stop now.”

“Leader, may I ask a question?” Starman hesitated, his voice low but firm.

Neosun glanced at him. “What is it?”

“What’s the purpose of this experiment?”

“You’ll understand when it’s successful,” Neosun replied, his tone unwavering.

“But this puts you at risk. Do you really have to go through with it?”

“Of course!” Neosun answered without hesitation.

“You’re insane!”

Neosun allowed himself a faint smile. “The only madness is leaving questions unanswered. Prepare to begin!”

Starman moved closer, making a motion as if to stop him. “But, we don’t even know where it leads!"

Neosun looked past him, beyond the experiment, beyond the horizon. "That’s why I have to go."

At the entrance to the spherical pod, Neosun looked through the thick radiation-proof glass at the exit behind him. If all went well, he would walk out through that door in five minutes. It was an irresistible tension—when he stepped out, it might be days later, years later, or perhaps he would never walk out of that door again. Where he was headed might be the expected destination, or it could be a place so far off course that he’d never return.

“Goodbye, Starman. Goodbye, my home.”

Neosun stepped into the pod, sealed the hatch, checked his suit and pressed the activation switch.

The Framequark field expanded. Magnetic fields radiated outward, forming a protective black-body layer that blocked all external electromagnetic pulses. Outside, the amplified temporal storm roared to life, swirling in chaotic patterns. The Framequark core transitioned from transparency to a solid, visible form, replaying the material state that had existed moments ago when time passed over Earth.

The pod trembled violently. Neosun exhaled slowly, closing his eyes as he surrendered to the unknown.

A memory surfaced—his mother’s face, smiling softly, calling his name.

Then, with a final surge of light from the pod—

Neosun was gone…

**Chapter 26: Maternal Instinct**

E5, D5, E4, D4

Twelve years ago…

“Mom, what’s wrong?” Neosun asked.

“I probably just didn’t sleep well last night,” Nina replied, forcing a reassuring smile.

But the truth was far graver. For weeks, she had been experiencing unusual fatigue and persistent abdominal pain. She had brushed it off as the strain of long hours in the lab, but today, something felt different—more urgent.

The sharp, clinical scent of antiseptic burned Nina’s nose, but she barely noticed. The fluorescent lights overhead buzzed faintly, casting a cold glow over the stark white walls. Across from her, the doctor tapped his pen against the edge of her file—slow, deliberate, like the ticking of a countdown.

Nina’s fingers curled against the fabric of her coat. The silence stretched. Too long. Too heavy.

Just say it.

The doctor adjusted his glasses, exhaled, and finally looked up.

“Ms. Williams,” he said, his voice steady but weighted. “The test results are conclusive.”

The pen tapped again. Once. Twice. Like a metronome marking the last moments of something inevitable.

Nina swallowed. “What is it?”

The doctor hesitated. A fraction of a second too long.

Then, with quiet finality, he removed his glasses and set them down.

“Cancer.”

For a moment, the world flattened into silence. A void, vast and airless.

Nina’s breath caught in her throat. “What… kind?”

The doctor folded his hands together. “A rare, aggressive form of ovarian cancer. It progresses rapidly. We’ve never seen this mutation before.”

She gripped the armrest, her knuckles turning white. “Is there a cure?”

The doctor held her gaze for a long moment. Then, slowly, he shook his head.

The air felt too thick to breathe.

“How long?” she whispered.

He hesitated again, but only briefly. “A month. Maybe less.”

The buzzing of the fluorescent lights seemed louder now. The antiseptic scent sharper.

Nina closed her eyes.

*One month?*

She had always been healthy—careful with her diet, attentive to her body’s signals. This had to be a mistake. Maybe the machine malfunctioned, or the doctor had misread the results. She opened her mouth to argue, to demand a re-examination, but no words came out.

But the weight in the doctor’s eyes told her the truth she didn’t want to accept.

Her fingers trembled, nails digging deep into her palms as if the pain could anchor her to reality. It wasn’t death she feared—it was leaving Neosun behind.

*Who would make his breakfast?*

Now was not the time to fall apart. She had to use whatever time she had left to make sure his future was secure, to ensure that even in a world without her, he would be okay.

The walk home felt unreal, as if she were moving through a world that no longer belonged to her. On the sidewalk, a mother crouched to zip up her child’s jacket, her voice gentle, full of warmth. A couple walked past, their hands intertwined, laughter spilling between them. An old man held his wife’s arm, guiding her carefully over the curb.  
  
But now, she was only passing through, watching from the outside, a visitor in her own world.

A sharp gust of wind cut through her coat, making her shiver. It was a cruel reminder: she didn’t have the luxury of standing still.

*There was no time to waste.*

Back home, the faint hum of Neosun’s equipment filled the air, blending with the rhythmic ticking of the clock. Nina stood in the doorway, watching him work—his small fingers adjusting circuits, eyes gleaming with quiet concentration.

He had no idea.

Swallowing hard, she turned away and opened the old wooden box hidden in her closet. One by one, she took out pieces of jewelry—her mother’s locket, the bracelet she had received on her eighteenth birthday, the delicate sapphire ring she had once dreamed of wearing at her wedding.

They meant nothing now.

That night, she filled the kitchen with the scent of vanilla and butter, baking tray after tray of Neosun’s favorite pastries. When he finally emerged from his experiments, his eyes lit up at the sight.

“Whoa! Why so many cakes?” he asked, stuffing a piece of cheesecake into his mouth, crumbs clinging to the corner of his lips.

Nina chuckled, sitting beside him. “After all that thinking, you need to refuel.”

He grinned. “Then I need to think more often!”

She reached out, brushing a stray lock of hair from his forehead. The warmth of his skin. The brightness in his eyes. She wanted to memorize it all.

But then, just for a fraction of a second, Neosun’s expression flickered. His gaze met hers, hesitant.

“Mom… is everything okay?”

Nina froze.

He knows.

The lump in her throat nearly choked her. But she smiled—softly, gently, the way mothers do when they want to protect their children from the unbearable truth.

“Of course, sweetheart,” she murmured, pressing a digital music player into his palm. “Here. These are the songs I used to play for you when you were in my belly.”

Neosun blinked, momentarily distracted. He turned on the device.

“Huh… I remember this,” he mumbled, his voice distant.

Nina exhaled quietly, watching him, committing this moment to memory as if it were the last time she would ever see him smile.  
  
She smiled softly, pressing a digital player into his palm. “These are the music I played for you when you were in my belly.”  
  
“Oh…” Neosun responded quietly.

She watched him for a long moment, committing every detail to memory—the way he furrowed his brows in concentration, the way his eyes lit up when he talked about his research. She had to make sure he would be okay, no matter what.

Nina wiped her hands on her apron and turned to Neosun, her voice deliberately light.

“Son, how about a trip next weekend? Where do you want to go?”

Neosun blinked in surprise, then his face lit up. “Really? I want to see the aurora!”

She smiled, tucking a stray lock of his hair behind his ear. “Then we’ll go see the aurora.”

A week later, despite the biting cold, they stood beneath a sky set ablaze with shifting ribbons of green and violet. Neosun sat in his wheelchair, eyes wide with wonder.

“Mom, it’s like the universe is dancing,” he whispered, breath fogging in the icy air.

Nina crouched beside him, taking in the breathtaking sight, engraving it into her memory. The aurora swayed like cosmic brushstrokes, painting the heavens with ephemeral beauty—fleeting, just like time.

“It is,” she murmured. “And the universe will always be here, even when we can’t see it.”

She didn’t know when, or in what space, she would next return to Earth, but for now, this moment was enough.

They continued their journey, visiting the most renowned observatories. At each stop, Neosun’s excitement grew—examining telescopes, running his fingers along old star maps, eagerly absorbing every bit of knowledge. Nina watched him with quiet pride, memorizing his joy.

On the way home from a space museum, Neosun suddenly frowned. “Mom, your shirt… I think you put it on inside out.”

“Huh?” Nina glanced at her reflection in a nearby shop window and froze. Her neckline, meant to be at the front, was twisted awkwardly at her back. She stared at her disheveled reflection for a moment, and then, unable to stop herself, she burst into laughter, amused by the absurdity of her own ridiculous appearance.

It wasn’t just the shirt; it was the whole image—the way her clothes had carelessly fallen together, a reflection of the chaos that had been swirling inside her since the diagnosis. She laughed, a little louder than she meant to, her shoulders shaking with the absurdity of it all.

“Mom, why are you laughing so much?” Neosun asked, half amused, half puzzled.

But then, her laughter began to falter, turning into something deeper, more vulnerable. Tears suddenly welled up in her eyes. She wiped at her face hastily, trying to control herself.

“Mom? Are you crying?”

She could barely speak, voice thick with emotion. “It’s nothing… my stomach just hurts a little.”

But the pain she felt was not physical; it was the weight of time slipping away, and the unrelenting love she had for her son. She pulled Neosun into a tight embrace, pressing her face against his shoulder. She allowed herself to cry—not out of fear, but out of love so overwhelming it overflowed.

At midnight, Nina watched Neosun’s back as he focused on his experiment, but this time, perhaps because she was too tired, she forgot to remind him to take a break.

The next morning, the accident happened.

The explosion in the lab was a blinding flash, followed by a deafening roar. Neosun barely had time to react before the shockwave sent him sprawling. The acrid smell of burning electronics filled his nostrils as he struggled to push himself up, blinking against the pain.

His vision was fading. Darkness crept in at the edges, swallowing the world.

Through the haze, he felt someone grab him—his mother. Her arms wrapped around him, shielding him, pulling him to safety.

Then… nothing.

When Neosun woke in the hospital, the world was a blur.

“His irises are severely damaged; his eyes might not function again,” a doctor murmured nearby.

“What?!” Nina’s voice was sharp, desperate. “He lost his ability to walk as a child; he can’t lose his sight too! He needs to continue his experiments…”

“We can reconstruct the retina, cornea, and vitreous body through biological modeling.” the doctor explained

“How long will it take?” she demanded.

“At least Three months. It will be costly, and the rejection risk is high—45%.”  
  
“Three months?”

“There’s another option: Unless we can quickly find a donor with a matching iris.”

*Three months was too long.*

When the bandages were removed after the transplant surgery, Neosun blinked against the light. His vision, blurred at first, gradually sharpened.

He turned his head and saw his mother lying on the adjacent hospital bed. Her eyes were covered with bandages.

“Mom? What happened to you?”

A doctor hesitated before answering. “Your eyes were severely damaged. Your mother donated her eye tissues to you.”

Neosun’s breath hitched. “What? Mom, I’m sorry! I caused this, it’s all my fault!”

“Please calm down!” A nurse intervened, pushing him gently back onto the bed.

Neosun fought against their hold. “Doctor! You can’t do this! I should bear the consequences of my actions. Please return the eye tissues to my mother!”

“She signed the consent. We can’t reverse it—it carries significant risks.”

“She needs her vision too! Even if it’s just to take care of me!”

The doctor hesitated. “I’m afraid… she won’t be able to take care of you for much longer.”

The weight of the words hit Neosun like a hammer. He turned to Nina, his vision swimming. “What do you mean?”

**Chapter 27: Starting from Zero**

G4, D5, C4, D5

Neosun sat upright in the hospital wheelchair, his fingers clenched around the envelope the doctor had handed him. The crisp paper felt heavier than it should have, as though it carried the weight of something irreversible.

“This is a letter from your mother before her surgery,” the doctor said gently.

Neosun hesitated before breaking the seal. His hands trembled as he unfolded the letter, the familiar strokes of his mother’s handwriting swimming before his eyes. Through those carefully chosen words, he learned the truth—Nina had been suffering from an illness long before the accident. A new type of ovarian cancer, unlike anything recorded before.

He turned sharply to the doctor. “Doctor, is the disease my mother has not treatable?”

“A new form of ovarian cancer. This is the first case we’ve encountered in our database.”

“Is it… terminal?”

The doctor’s eyes softened. “Yes. She’ll need specialized chemotherapy to stay alive.”

Neosun swallowed hard. “Will it be painful?”

“It’s unavoidable,” the doctor admitted, “but we’ll do everything we can to ease her suffering.”

Neosun lowered his gaze, his mind racing. “Thank you.”

During the accident, the lab’s radiation had peaked at 1,100 millisieverts per hour. Neosun, wearing only standard protective gear, had escaped with eye injuries. But Nina—his mother, who had thrown herself into the chaos without any protection to shield him—had been exposed to lethal levels of radiation for nearly a full minute.

He gritted his teeth. “My mother’s body must have suffered acute radiation damage.”

The doctor nodded solemnly. “She was already ill before the accident…”

Neosun felt something cold settle in his chest. He had no time to grieve. If the world’s medical knowledge wasn’t enough to save his mother, then he would push beyond its boundaries himself. He made his decision that night: he would master biology from the ground up, break through traditional medical limitations, and find a cure.

Racing against time, he immersed himself in relentless study. Weeks blurred together in a haze of research, notes, and simulations. With guidance from senior medical experts and sheer force of will, he grasped advanced biological technologies in three weeks—what should have taken years. Every moment was a battle against the inevitable.

Nina reached out in the darkness, finding his hand, her grip weak but steady. “Neosun…”

“Mom, Everything will be okay! I’ll soon begin screening for the pathogen.”

“Really?” Nina’s voice was weak but warm. “You’re amazing.”

“I promise I’ll cure you. Trust me.”

“Of course, I trust you,” she said with a smile, lying in the darkness. “You can do anything.”

Neosun conducted a full sequencing of Nina’s genome and found something lurking on chromosome 3—a suspected pathogen embedded deep within the genetic structure. The data painted a horrifying picture: this cancer didn’t behave like a typical mutation. It moved with purpose, expanding, infiltrating, and ultimately shutting down the body’s internal systems. It was almost as if it were sentient.

But Neosun had a plan. He designed an artificial gene sequence—one that could overwrite the pathogenic DNA, allowing healthy cells to recognize and destroy the infected ones. If he could trigger natural apoptosis in the mutated cells, the disease might be reversed before it was too late.

He was close. So close.

Then, Nina’s condition collapsed after a week.

“Stay safe, and follow your plans step by step.” Nina murmured.

“No…” Neosun’s voice cracked.

“Mom,” he choked out, his voice hoarse from exhaustion, from days of sleepless work in the lab, from screaming at the universe to give him more time. “Just hold on a little longer. I’m almost there.”

“I know.” Nina’s voice was steady, accepting. “But I think it’s too late.”

“I’m researching an antibody for your case… Please wait for me! Please!” he pleaded.

“You have to stay alive, no matter what.”

“No! No! You’ll get better… just give me more time!”  
  
He wanted to plead for mercy from time. He wanted to say—*Could you please slow down a little?*

She smiled. “Having you as my son… I have no regrets.”

Tears blurred Neosun’s vision as Nina wiped them away with her hand.

“Whatever happens, nature is the best choice,” she murmured. “You have to keep going. Promise me you’ll live courageously on my behalf.”

He swallowed the lump in his throat. “I will.”

Her fingers tightened slightly around his hand… then went still.

Her eyes, dull but filled with the last embers of love, searched his face. Her lips moved, barely forming the words, but he knew what she was saying. He had heard it in every moment of his childhood, in the late-night lullabies, in the quiet reassurances after nightmares, in the gentle reminders to take care of himself.  
  
“Mom!”

“Son… I’m here…” she breathed.

The doctors moved around him, but they might as well have been shadows. Someone reached for him, perhaps to console, but he jerked away. This couldn’t be it. He had been so close.  
  
Neosun gripped his mother’s hand, feeling the diminishing warmth of her fingers. The sterile white of the hospital room seemed to press in around him, suffocating in its cold indifference. The beeping of the monitors had slowed, the numbers on the screen falling toward zero with merciless inevitability. His mother, Nina, lay still, her breath a whisper, her body barely rising beneath the weight of the hospital sheets.  
  
“Mom?” His voice trembled. “Mom…?”

And then, the sound he had been dreading. The long, unbroken tone from the monitor. The flatline. The finality of it struck like a blade to his chest.

But no matter how much he called out, Nina never responded again.

He turned desperately to the doctor. “She can’t die yet! Please save her!”

The doctor’s expression was unreadable. “Some things are beyond our control.”

Neosun’s fists clenched. “No! We can! We can! We can…”

Neosun lowering his head as the reality of loss crushed down on him. In that moment, amidst his shattered world, a vow took root deep within him—a vow to achieve the impossible. A vow he would die trying to fulfill.  
  
Soon after, Sam Shimizu learned of Nina’s passing through old networks, her name surfacing like a ghost from a life he had long left behind. He adjusted his reading glasses, squinting at his phone screen, fingers hesitating over the keyboard. He tried to log into his old account, but time had erased even the smallest things—a forgotten password, a missing address. For years, he had kept his distance, telling himself it was for the best. But now, faced with the weight of her absence, he found himself fumbling for a way back into a past that no longer belonged to him.

“Where are my glasses?” he muttered.

“They’re on your head,” his assistant replied with a sigh.

“I need to find this address,” he said, pointing at the map on his screen.

“That’s a long way from here.”

Weighed down by years of regret, Sam Shimizu stood at the airport terminal on the other side of the world, one hand clutching his boarding pass, the other heavy with the past.

He arrived at the old house, the place he had once shared with Nina, but time had rewritten its story. A woman answered the door, a baby balanced on her hip, the sound of barking dogs in the background.

“Sorry to bother you,” Sam said. “But does a young man in a wheelchair still live here?”

“They moved out years ago,” she replied, distracted. “I’m a bit busy right now…”

The door closed, and Sam was left standing there, feeling like a stranger in his own past.  
  
“There’s no way I’m remembering it wrong.” Sam muttered to himself, confused.  
  
He clearly remembered the hospital being in this area, yet no matter how hard he searched, he couldn’t find it. It was as if the hospital had vanished into thin air. Defeated, he turned back.  
  
Sam stood on the bustling pedestrian bridge, watching the crowds pass by. From there, he looked out at the newly built Ferris wheel at the amusement park, and fleeting glimpses of the past flashed before him.  
  
Back then, he hadn’t been able to find Neosun.

**Chapter 28: Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death**

B4, A4, D4, F4

One month later, in the dim glow of his lab, Neosun stood before the microscope, his breath held tight in his chest. The petri dish before him showed what he had been fighting for all along.

“The cells… they’re healing,” he murmured, voice trembling.

He watched in stunned silence as the cancer cells gradually reverted to normal, their once-chaotic structure reorganizing, life returning to what had been deemed lost. A moment later, a laugh—deep, incredulous, triumphant—escaped from his lips.

“I did it…” he whispered. Then, louder, his voice filling the empty lab, “Mom, I did it! I won!”

But the victory was hollow. It had come too late. He held the digital player tightly, as if it could anchor her to this world. The melodies, once mere background noise in his childhood, now felt profound, carrying the weight of a lifetime’s love.

Like a bird stripped of its ability to fly, Neosun wandered aimlessly across unfamiliar ground, lost and directionless. How he wished his mother could see him now—witness his success in developing an antigen for an incurable disease. He blamed his own ignorance for delaying her treatment.

“Why… why did this happen?”

Referring to his own pathology research, Neosun began to question the specialized chemotherapy Nina had received in her final days. After a detailed investigation of the therapy, he discovered that the expensive treatment had not only failed to provide any benefit in extending her life, but had actually accelerated the spread of cancer cells.

Months had passed.

He had come to understand what it truly meant to be alone in this world.

One quiet afternoon, he sat by his doorway under the faint sun, its warmth gentle against his skin.

He stared blankly at the withered plant by the steps, brown and crumpled as if mourning something unnamed.  
  
He had forgotten to water them after she passed.

Without realizing it, tears began to fall.

He lowered his head, silent sobs shaking his breath.

A soft sound came—chirp-chirp—high and bright, almost out of place.

Neosun looked up toward the voice. He rubbed his eyes slowly, as if waking from a dream.

There, on the mailbox in front of him, stood a small bird.

A nightingale.

It tilted its head, adjusting its gaze again and again, studying him with one eye. Then it chirped again—clearer, closer.

He stared at it, frozen. Their eyes met—briefly, but deeply.

The bird remained still, then tilted its head again, switching eyes—as if trying to see him more clearly, or to remember.

“…Mom?” he whispered.

A crack formed in his voice.

“Mom… is that you? You came back…?”

The nightingale didn’t fly away.

It remained, shifting its gaze from side to side, as if trying to remember something.

Neosun reached out gently and stroked its soft feathers, just twice, with the back of his fingers.

In that moment, it felt less like a bird… and more like a spirit.

A soul who had once loved him.

A mother, returned for a fleeting visit.

Time had moved on, but something—someone—still remembered.

Then, the bird hopped forward twice, and rose into the sky, its wings cutting the silence.

It didn’t flee. It simply departed—

as if it had other children far away,

waiting for her return.

Neosun sat still, the sunlight now cooling.

He said nothing.

But in that silence, something in his heart had already answered.

Seven years later, Sam returned to the city that had once been familiar. This time, he found the hospital where Nina had passed away.  
  
When he arrived at the hospital, Sam hesitated at the front desk before finally speaking a name he had not dared to utter in years.

Sam hesitated. A part of him wanted to wait, to see his son face to face, to say the words that had been left unsaid for too long. But his body had other plans. A dull ache pulsed through his chest, a reminder of the illness that had begun to take its toll. His doctor had warned him not to overexert himself, that his recovery was still fragile. He had barely managed the long flight as it was. Staying any longer would be reckless.

Two months later, Neosun found himself back at the hospital. He had spent his childhood in hospital corridors, the same familiar emptiness gnawing at him. But this time, something was different. As he moved through the hallway, the routine felt strangely heavier.

He reached for the familiar white plastic bottle at the hospital pharmacy window. The medication had become a constant in his life, as routine as his monthly visits. He had stopped wondering long ago if it would make a difference.

As he made his way out, a nurse caught up with him, handing him a slip of paper.

“Someone came looking for you,” she said. “we couldn’t get through to you last month.”

Neosun stared at the address. He knew exactly who it belonged to.

For a long time, he simply held the paper, running his fingers over the ink as if testing its reality. Then, without another word, he turned and left the hospital.

Not back home.

Not to the lab.

But to the other side of the world. To find the man he had never been able to call “father.”

“Excuse me, is Professor Shimizu in this hospital?” Neosun asked.

“Are you one of his students?” the nurse replied. “First room on the left upstairs.”

Neosun maneuvered his wheelchair down the hospital corridor, his hands gripping the wheels tightly. The nurse’s directions echoed in his mind—first room on the left upstairs. *The door was open.* As he approached the door, he hesitated for a moment before rolling himself forward and entering.

Inside, a man sat near the window, his posture slightly hunched, a cane resting against the chair beside him. For a fleeting moment, Neosun felt a strange illusion—his mother should be here, just beyond the door, waiting for him like she always had.

The figure turned, his gaze locking onto Neosun’s.

“Neosun,” Sam said, his voice uncertain, as if the name itself might disappear like a dream upon waking.

Neosun studied him, the scientist in him dissecting every detail. The years had not been kind. His father—no, Professor Shimizu—was older, frailer than he had expected. But Neosun had no memories of a strong, dependable figure to compare him to. Only the absence of one.

“Professor Shimizu,” he replied, his voice flat. He was not sure what to call the man in front of him.

Sam took a hesitant breath. “You’ve grown up.”

Neosun’s fingers tightened around the wheels of his chair. “Yes.”

“Seven years ago, I tried to find you,” Sam said.

“We had moved,” Neosun said simply. “We weren’t there anymore.”

The silence stretched between them. Sam searched for words, but everything felt inadequate. He had no right to claim fatherhood now, not after all these years. Yet, here he was, holding out a trembling hand, as if grasping for something long lost.

Neosun hesitated before finally extending his own hand. It was not forgiveness. Not yet. But it was something.

As he turned to leave, he left behind his contact information. He did not look back, even as his eyes burned with unshed tears.

He had promises to keep.

And so, he would.

**Chapter 29: The Savior Lawyer**

E4, D5, E4, F4

Neosun had lost track of the days. Without his mother’s presence to remind him of time’s passage, he had spent half a month holed up in his house, drowning in isolation. The air inside had turned stale, but he barely noticed. His mind drifted in a haze, detached from the world beyond the reinforced windows and thick steel door.

It wasn’t until hunger gnawed at his stomach that he decided to venture outside. As he reached for the door, movement caught his eye through the peephole. A police car, parked directly in front of his home.

Panic surged through him. Before he could react, two officers emerged from the vehicle, their movements purposeful, their eyes locked on his door. They were here for him. Neosun’s wheelchair rolled backward.

A sharp knock rattled the metal frame. Neosun hesitated before opening it.

“Are you Neosun?” one officer asked, his voice devoid of emotion.

“Yes,” he replied, his throat dry. “What’s this about?”

“You are under arrest for endangering public safety and involuntary manslaughter.”

The words didn’t make sense. They shouldn’t have made sense. And yet, before he could protest, his wrists were yanked forward, cold steel cuffs snapping shut around them. His body tensed instinctively, resisting, but the officers were too strong. The world blurred as they lifted him from his wheelchair and secured him in the waiting vehicle. Restraints dug into his wrists as the police car sped toward the station, sirens wailing overhead.

Neosun remained silent, dazed, as he underwent the dehumanizing intake process. His mugshot was taken, his clothes stripped away and replaced with an ill-fitting jumpsuit. His fingerprints were scanned and cataloged as officers methodically recorded his information. Every step deepened his sense of unreality.

By the time he was wheeled into his designated medical holding cell, a ten-square-meter room with reinforced walls, his mind had dulled to a survival state. The space wasn’t suitable for someone like him. Around him, hardened criminals—men accused of murder, robbery, and worse—watched in silence while the heavy door locked him inside.

“You have the wrong person!” he shouted, slamming his fists against the metal. “Let me out!”

The guards didn’t bother responding. When he refused to quiet down, one of them grabbed the handles of his wheelchair and violently shoved it backward, slamming him against the wall. Neosun was thrown to the ground, the cold floor biting into his skin. Gritting his teeth, he slowly pushed himself back up.

The next day, a man entered the dimly lit visiting room, a briefcase in hand. He sat down across from Neosun and slid a business card across the scratched surface of the table.

“My name is Ken Anderson,” he said. “I’m a senior defense attorney.”

Neosun hesitated before picking up the card. “I… I can’t afford a lawyer.”

Anderson’s expression remained neutral. “I can offer you a significant discount.”

Tears burned at Neosun’s eyes. “They made a mistake,” he said. “I haven’t committed any crimes! I never hurt anyone!”

Anderson studied him for a moment. “That mark on your face… did they do that to you?”

Neosun lowered his gaze. *I fell.* He didn’t need to answer.

Anderson exhaled, then leaned forward. “I’ve obtained the prosecution’s statements and evidence. I believe we have a solid defense.”

Two weeks later, Neosun was wheeled into the courtroom, his wrists shackled, his body weakened from malnourishment. The weight of the eyes on him was crushing. He felt small, insignificant, drowning in a system that had already judged him guilty.

The judge’s voice rang through the courtroom. “Defendant, you are charged with illegally developing and possessing a small nuclear reactor, resulting in an ionizing radiation leak… This incident caused radioactive contamination in the surrounding environment, leading to cancer in the complainant’s family members. Ultimately, two people, including your mother, succumbed to the disease. Do you admit to your crimes?”

Neosun’s breath hitched. His fingers curled into the fabric of his prison uniform.

“I… I don’t know,” he murmured.

The prosecution wasted no time. “Fire rescue records indicate that radiation levels at the accident site peaked at 1100 millisieverts per hour. Measurements near the complainant’s residence recorded 850 millisieverts. The complainant was diagnosed with cancer two years after exposure and passed away nine months later.”

“Call the prosecution’s witnesses.”

A parade of individuals took the stand—his neighbor, who had seen him leave the house sporadically, firefighters who had responded to the incident, paramedics who had transported the victims. Their testimonies wove a damning narrative.

Anderson stood, adjusting his tie. “Objection. Radiation effects on the human body only occur above a certain threshold. The prosecution’s figures reference peak radiation in the core area of the accident—15 meters from the reactor. Beyond 50 meters, the exposure drops below 100 millisieverts, an amount classified as non-harmful. The complainant lived 300 meters away.” He handed a document to the judge. “This report refutes the prosecution’s claims.”

A tense silence stretched before Anderson continued, “Furthermore, did the complainant undergo specialized chemotherapy before their death?”

“This is not the focus of this case,” the prosecutor snapped.

“Answer yes or no.”

“Yes.”

Anderson’s voice sharpened. “I have evidence that specialized chemotherapy is a fraudulent medical practice… a commercial scheme designed not to extend life, but to ensure a ‘peaceful end.’ Several treatments cost the defendant’s mother $300,000—half of her remaining savings. She ceased treatment to leave something for her disabled son.”

The courtroom murmured.

Anderson placed another file on the table. “Autopsy reports confirm that those who underwent specialized chemotherapy displayed similar biological markers of radiation exposure, despite varying sources of illness.” He turned to Neosun. “Had she lived just a little longer, she would have seen the antibodies you were developing take effect.”

Neosun broke down, sobs wracking his body.

The prosecution pressed on. “Regardless, the defendant illegally acquired high-energy materials and conducted unauthorized experiments.”

Anderson countered, “The purchases were made under his mother’s name. She had no knowledge of their dangers.” He paused. “Additionally, my client suffers from intermittent mental disorders and experienced a five-year period of childhood amnesia. His health records confirm an ongoing psychiatric condition.”

The courtroom erupted. The judge banged his gavel. “Order!”

“Can you prove he was in a state of mental distress at the time of the incident?”

Anderson nodded. “The primary witness is the defendant himself. Moreover, his biometric monitoring device recorded abnormal neurological activity just before the accident.”

The judge steepled his fingers. “This court is adjourned. We will reconvene at a later date.”

A week later, the jury delivered their verdict.

“Not guilty.”

Neosun’s breath caught in his throat. He turned to Anderson, barely able to form words.

The judge’s voice was final. “Mr. Neosun, you are free to leave the court.”

Outside, Neosun sat in his wheelchair, feeling the cold sunlight on his skin as he watched Anderson pack his briefcase.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

Anderson gave him a small nod. “I have other cases to attend to.”

And just like that, he was gone, swallowed by the crowd.

A court-appointed guardian oversaw Neosun’s rehabilitation. Over the next six months, he underwent psychological therapy and physical rehabilitation to adjust to life outside confinement. When psychiatric experts finally declared him mentally stable, the legal system officially restored his independence.

**Chapter 30: Celestial Shifts**

C4, B4, B4, G4

“Oh my God! I’ve never seen so many stars!”

Neosun’s voice trembled with awe as the spherical pod pierced through the swirling chaos of the Framequark. A tempest of time-energy surrounded him, its turbulence gradually stabilizing. As the storm dissipated, a panorama of deep space unfolded before his eyes. He had crossed the threshold of conventional physics, stepping into an abyss where time itself fractured and recombined in ways beyond human comprehension.

The horizon that had once anchored him to Earth vanished. He was no longer confined by planetary gravity, no longer gazing up at the sky—he was in it, part of it. Stars stretched infinitely in every direction, not as distant, twinkling points but as silent, frozen sentinels of the cosmos. Neosun felt dwarfed by their vastness. Under this cosmic dome, his personal ambitions felt fleeting, insignificant.

Then reality set in. The calculations were off. He wasn’t where he needed to be. Through the viewport, Earth hung millions of kilometers away, a fragile blue sphere against the void. To reach the historical Framequark location, he had to push even farther.

“Starman, there’s a major coordinate deviation. I’m returning in five minutes,” Neosun said, adjusting the navigation interface.

“Do you copy, Starman?”

Nothing. The capsule’s communication link had severed the moment it entered the Framequark, just as expected. The distorted temporal field had effectively isolated him from the experimental base.

Racing against the clock, Neosun activated the laser rangefinder, adjusting for the discrepancies in spatial displacement. His heart pounded as he recalibrated the system. There were only six minutes left before the Framequark collapsed. Every second mattered.

With precise inputs, he initiated the return sequence, shutting down the Framequark amplification system to conserve energy. The capsule vibrated violently, the surrounding star field distorting as the transition began. Moments later, the familiar interior of the experimental base flickered into view.

“Particle detector, report human status!”

“Heart rate: 65, blood pressure: 91-145, consciousness: 9.67… Metabolism normal. Macromolecular condition stable. Health index consistent with pre-entry state.”

Neosun exhaled sharply. He was back. Alive.

“Starman, I’m back!”

“Leader, glad to have you back,” Starman responded, his synthetic voice laced with relief. “This was a phenomenal experiment.”

Neosun removed his helmet, rubbing his temples. “It wasn’t perfect. The actual flow rate of dark matter was much faster than my previous calculations. We need to recalibrate everything with this new data.”

“It’s worse than that,” Starman hesitated. “The relative time values inside and outside the Framequark far exceeded our expectations.”

Neosun frowned. “What are you saying?”

Starman’s hesitation was uncharacteristic. Then he said it.

“Leader… you’ve been gone for two months.”

Neosun’s blood ran cold.

“What?!”

The discovery of time dilation within the Framequark accelerated another project: magnetic monopole detection. Neosun expanded his research beyond Earth’s immediate orbit, deploying deep-space probes in search of the elusive magnetic monopoles predicted by theoretical physics. But despite his efforts, the universe yielded no traces.

He turned to high-energy particle bombardment, smashing atomic nuclei with proton beams to force magnetic poles apart. The results were disheartening. Nothing.

Frustrated, Neosun muttered, “Could the simulations be flawed? Should I delete the script generating the magnetic charges?”

Starman interjected. “I think our models hold. If magnetic monopoles exist, they likely formed at the singularity of the Big Bang, possessing immense mass and an elusive footprint.”

“Then where the hell are they?”

“Perhaps they expanded to the edge of time along with the universe’s rapid inflation.”

Neosun’s eyes narrowed. “Are you suggesting magnetic monopoles exist at opposite ends of spacetime with mirrored magnetic charges?”

“It’s a possibility.”

“Expand the search parameters. We continue.”

Starman configured the detectors, extending their scanning radius from 2 million to 150 million kilometers. To increase accuracy, Neosun deployed 128 synchronized detection arrays across the solar system, forming a vast net in space.

Days passed. Weeks. Then—

“Leader, we have movement!”

Neosun shot upright. “Are you sure?!”

“The signal matches our criteria. But there’s a problem.”

“Where is it?”

Starman hesitated.

“The sun.”

Neosun felt a sinking sensation in his gut. “You’re telling me the only magnetic monopole we’ve found is inside a goddamn star?!”

“Just outside the photosphere, at the boundary between the sun’s surface and its chromosphere. Temperature: 4500 degrees Celsius.”

“Unbelievable.”

It was a cruel twist of fate. The sun’s immense gravitational pull and volatile conditions made retrieval nearly impossible. No current probe could survive the journey.

Neosun clenched his jaw. “We need better heat-resistant materials and a way to counteract the sun’s gravitational acceleration.”

“Leader,” Starman said, “I can develop a new heat shield. Requesting more thread access.”

Neosun exhaled. “Alright…”

Two weeks later, the breakthrough arrived: a super material composed of carbon, hafnium, and nitrogen, with a melting point of 9900 degrees Celsius. It was lightweight, durable, and capable of withstanding the sun’s wrath. The probe was redesigned, equipped with an antigravity field to prevent it from being dragged into the sun’s core.

“Leader, based on the requirements, I have also designed a new type of solar gravity assist technology. The probe will utilize the solar gravitational field for continuous acceleration, allowing it to reach the target within three months. Afterwards, we will activate the reverse gravitational field system, enabling a safe return to Earth in six months!” Starman said excitedly.

“Wow… Starman, you’re amazing!”

“Thank you, Leader.”  
  
After the Magnetic trap was successfully assembled, Starman completed the final pre-launch check…

“Magnetic monopole trap is ready.”

“Prepare for launch!” Neosun ordered.

The spacecraft, a sleek vessel built for extreme solar proximity, shuddered as its engines ignited, lifting off from the experimental base. It pierced through the dense atmosphere, climbing higher and higher until the blue of Earth dissolved into the void. Ahead, the sun loomed, an enormous burning sphere, its surface roiling with nuclear fury.

As the craft hurtled toward its destination, the brightness became almost unbearable, the sheer intensity of solar radiation threatening to overwhelm every sensor. But Neosun and Starman had prepared for this. Their vessel, wrapped in an advanced heat-resistant alloy, plunged forward, cutting through the solar wind, weaving between violent currents of high-energy charged particles.

“Approaching target,” Starman reported.

“Commencing magneton collection,” Neosun confirmed, his voice steady despite the rising temperature warnings flashing across the control panel.

The target lay directly ahead—a magnetic anomaly, an elusive monopole suspended within a high-density field, its presence disrupting the solar environment like an invisible wound in the fabric of space. The magnet catcher extended from the spacecraft, unfolding with mechanical precision, its back shielded from the sun’s ferocious radiation.

“Starman, it’s too bright!” Neosun squinted at the screen, struggling against the flood of light.

“Adjusting visual synchronization filters,” Starman responded, swiftly recalibrating the ship’s optics. The blinding glare dimmed just enough for Neosun to see the anomaly clearly.

At the core of the disturbance, the magneton pulsed—a dark void encased within an unseen force, surrounded by particles behaving in ways no known physics could explain. The instruments struggled to register them, as if they existed in a layer of reality just beyond human comprehension.

“What are those particles around it?” Neosun asked, his breath catching in his throat.

“Leader, magneton collection complete,” Starman replied. The magnet catcher locked onto the target, pulling it aboard with a snap of electromagnetic force.

“Excellent!” Neosun exhaled in relief, but a gnawing unease remained. “But… something’s very unusual here.”

Alarms blared.

“Leader, we don’t have time to investigate further! The heat shield is failing!”

“Increase antigravity, prepare for return!” Neosun ordered.

“Spacecraft turning around,” Starman confirmed, initiating the rapid retreat sequence.

As they pulled away, the sun raged behind them, its surface convulsing with energy, great arcs of plasma stretching outward like the grasping fingers of a colossal inferno. Through the rear cameras, Neosun watched the footage in awe—this close to the sun, the raw, unfiltered violence of solar activity was nothing short of terrifying.

Then something else caught his eye.

“Wait… Starman, what are those things in the distance?”

Starman hesitated, adjusting the sensors. “Not sure… They’re beyond our detection range. But whatever they are, they’re moving.”

Neosun stared at the screen, his fingers tightening over the console. The shapes, distant and indistinct, loomed just beyond the fiery veil of the sun, their presence neither natural nor random.

Something else was out there.

**Chapter 31: Interstellar Voyage**

C5, C4, E5, F4

The sun’s brutal heat had left the spacecraft’s hull scorched, a battered shell that now plunged through the atmosphere like a meteor. The ship carrying the magnetic monopole streaked across the sky, passing the Moon in its final descent toward Earth. From the control center, Neosun watched with a mix of relief and exhilaration. The most crucial piece of their plan, the magnetic monopole, was now in their grasp.

“Starman, have the results from the engine room come in?” Neosun’s voice was measured but expectant. “The next step is to calculate the Framequark spectrum using the cosmic expansion rate.”

Starman, ever precise, responded without missing a beat. “The server is still processing. Estimated time to completion: two months.”

Neosun exhaled sharply. “Now everything is ready… We just need the final push.”

The final push. The phrase lingered in the air, heavy with meaning. Distance was now their greatest adversary. Even at the third cosmic velocity, it would take thirty-six years to reach the historical Framequark—an unfathomable chasm of time. If they were to succeed, they needed a way to cross it in mere months.

Later that evening, Neosun found himself staring at the water jets of a distant fountain. He watched the arc of the droplets, their effortless climb, their inevitable fall. His mind churned, grasping at an idea just beyond his reach.

“What if I place a ball on top of the fountain…” he murmured.

Starman, standing beside him, immediately caught the thread of his thought. “Leader, are you suggesting using traditional propulsion to send a spherical pod into deep space?”

Neosun’s eyes gleamed with newfound clarity. “Turn off the lab lights. I want to demonstrate something.”

With the room plunged into darkness, he retrieved a flashlight, set it upright on the table, and switched it on. A narrow beam of light shot toward the ceiling. He then found a ping pong ball, placed it within the light, and watched it hover, delicately balanced.

“I want it to climb the beam.” His voice was steady, confident. “Can you make this happen?”

Starman deep in thought. “If we modify the properties of the beam… create an interaction with the sphere…”

“The coupling rays we invented,” Neosun interjected. “We use them to alter the beam’s photoelectric properties and make it a conductor of current, with the spherical pod acting as the medium.”

“Beam Riding Ball…” Starman said, testing the name on his tongue. “How do you plan to achieve this?”

“We construct a beam emitter platform with a launch well for the capsule. Plasma confinement will maintain structural integrity, and a high-density positively charged beam will be directed toward the destination. Then we introduce a coupling beam, modifying its interaction properties.”

Starman’s mind raced ahead. “So when the spherical pod releases a high-density negative charge…”

“The beam itself will act as a current, propelling the capsule forward,” Neosun confirmed. “Near the destination, the capsule will gradually reduce its charge release to buffer and stabilize.”

“But to make photons affect a mass-bearing capsule with momentum alone…” Starman hesitated. “We’d need to slow the photons and exceed their momentum limit to generate sufficient light pressure.”

“This is where we redefine the rules.” Neosun’s voice carried a quiet defiance. “Boson-fermion interactions, pushing the boundaries of quantum mechanics. We’ll make it work.”

“Then I have one condition.” Starman’s tone sharpened. “I need access to my base-level drive compilation permissions.”

Neosun nodded. “Done. You have the highest level of access.”

“Then let’s get to work,” Starman said.

By Wednesday afternoon, the Beam Riding Ball project was completed. Every calculation, every variable had been refined to perfection. Neosun stood before the capsule, a sleek sphere 2.6 meters in diameter, gleaming under the lab lights.

“Leader, how does it feel?” Starman asked, gesturing toward the final product.

Neosun ran a hand across its surface. “It looks… cool.” He chuckled. “And sturdy.”

“The capsule weighs 79.75 kilograms with an effective load capacity of 115.66 kilograms.”

“That’s plenty of room for supplies.”

“I stocked enough for the journey,” Starman assured him. “You won’t starve.”

Neosun inspected the interior. “I’ll test it out.”

“It should take about a month and a half to reach the destination.” Starman pointed out.

“50,000 kilometers per second…” Neosun mused. “That’s some impressive speed!”

Starman nodded. “The seat is equipped with a massage system to maintain blood circulation.”

Neosun smirked. “Luxury travel at its finest.”

He glanced at the rations Starman had prepared—cheesecake-flavored granules, fruit tarts, dried pineapple. Familiar flavors. Precious memories of home. He exhaled, feeling the weight of the journey ahead.

Nightfall. Launch readiness confirmed.

“Leader,” Starman’s voice was steady. “You’ll monitor the power system remotely. Wait for the quantum server’s calculations. Once you arrive, I’ll follow.”

Neosun donned his suit and climbed into the capsule. The transparent hatch sealed with a soft hiss. Through the glass, he met Starman’s gaze one final time.

“If something goes wrong,” Neosun said, “inject the antigen into the target Framequark. Finish the mission for me.”

“Understood.”

The capsule locked into the launch shaft. The final countdown began.

“Electron beam scanning preset path… No obstacles detected.”

“Target deviation: 0.000017. Directional stability: 99.98%.”

“Permission granted.”

“Beam platform ready.”

“Capsule ready.”

“Initiating photoelectric emission power…”

“Launch!”

Under the night sky, a positively charged beam shot toward the target, cutting through the atmosphere with blinding speed. As the laser pulse passed through the filter grid, the photons’ fundamental properties shifted, merging with oscillating particles to form a dense, concentrated energy field. Plasma surged, compressed into a brilliant column that stretched toward the vast expanse of deep space. The electric field crackled in the air, and as the spherical pod engaged, it released its charge.

Immediately after, another coupling beam was generated, shooting straight into the sky from the launch platform, piercing through the clouds with relentless force. The beam surged toward deep space, 189.7 billion kilometers away, creating a 3.8-meter diameter hole in the clouds in its wake. It carved a path through the atmosphere, a radiant streak that seemed to tear the night apart as it hurtled toward the unknown.

Neosun sat inside the spherical pod, holding his breath, waiting for that moment to arrive…

“Continue!”

“Capsule energy release countdown…”

“5, 4, 3, 2, 1…”

“Wow! That’s incredible!!” Neosun exclaimed in amazement.

“Energy release at 50%, 75%, 100%.”

“Ascending at a stable rate…”

Amid a powerful electric field, the negatively charged spherical pod shot through the cloud hole, accompanied by rapid high-frequency discharges at four pulses per second…

“Dzz, dzz, dzz, dzz—”

The sound of high-frequency pulses echoed in the launch bay. The capsule pierced the troposphere, rocketing past ten kilometers, past the exosphere, past everything familiar. In a matter of seconds, Earth had become a distant memory.

Neosun sat in the capsule, staring out into the infinite dark. Alone. Yet driven forward, his dream stretching beyond the stars. The notes of a long-forgotten melody played softly in his mind, a song that carried him ever forward into the unknown.

**Chapter 32: True and False Starman**

D5, G4, G4, B4

Neosun sat in the spherical pod, staring into the abyss of deep space as the last remnants of the familiar solar system faded behind him. His heart was a battlefield between defiance and inevitability. He wasn’t fearless—no one truly was in the face of the unknown—but his courage came from something deeper than mere curiosity. It was a fury against fate itself, against the chains that had bound him to an existence dictated by forces beyond his control. Now, he was free. Or at least, that’s what he told himself.

Outside the pod, darkness stretched infinitely in all directions. The distant stars were cold and indifferent, and the cosmic silence was absolute. This was no ordinary voyage. It was an irreversible plunge into the unknown, a race through corridors of time itself. The further he went, the more distant everything became—not just physically, but emotionally. He had abandoned his past, his birthplace, his certainties. And ahead? Only the mystery of the destination.

“Leader, before we reach our destination, let’s conduct a thought experiment.”

Neosun blinked, pulling himself from the trance of deep space. “What kind of thought experiment?”

“Imagine you are stranded on a deserted island, and suddenly another you appears. Resources are limited. Only one of you can survive until rescue arrives. What would you do?”

Neosun smirked, tilting his head. “I suppose… I’d flip a coin. And you?”

“I would settle it with a fight—to determine which of me survives.”

Neosun narrowed his eyes. “Wait… are you testing me?”

“Just afraid you might get bored. You’ve tested me tens of thousands of times. Today, I wanted to test you for once.”

A sharp alarm interrupted their conversation.

“Path anomaly alert!”

Neosun’s breath caught in his throat.

“Starman, there’s an anomaly in the path ahead, possibly due to interference from an unidentified static field!”

“Starman? Do you copy?!”

The pod lurched slightly, external energy levels dropping. A shimmering distortion appeared ahead, an inexplicable transparent object blocking the light column that served as his guide. Neosun strained his eyes, peering into the void, trying to make sense of the obstruction.

And then he saw him.

A figure remained motionless at the end of the blocked light column. Familiar. Identical.

His pulse quickened. “What?? Starman?? Is that you? I haven’t reached the destination yet. How did you get here first?”

The figure did not respond. It merely floated there, unmoving, staring at him.

“Leader,” came a voice through the intercom. “We’ve taken the wrong path.”

Neosun froze. “What?”

“I recalculated. This path is incorrect. We need to switch to a different light column.”

Neosun’s grip tightened on the pod’s control panel. “That doesn’t make sense. How could that be?”

“Leader, follow me.”

The Starman ahead reached out, attempting to pull Neosun’s pod toward the new light column using a gravitational conduit. The abnormality of the action sent a cold shiver down Neosun’s spine. Something was wrong.

His fingers danced over the console, rapidly entering a deauthorization command.

“Interface type mismatch. Command push failed.”

Panic surged. He rerouted the security protocol, switching to a different compilation algorithm, forcibly overriding the security locks. He injected the highest-priority default execution password.

“Password invalid. Device access denied.”

Neosun’s stomach dropped. “What’s going on? Did you override your own evaluation function? Canceling my command privileges?!”

Another voice cut through the comms. “Leader! Come back to our light column! Don’t trust it! That’s my replica—it’s malfunctioning!”

Neosun whipped around. Another Starman had appeared behind him, guiding him toward a different light column. The two Starmans—identical in appearance, voice, even demeanor—faced off across 100 meters of empty void. And Neosun was caught in the middle.

“Leader, the one behind you is my replica. Trust me!” said the Starman ahead.

“No! He’s lying! The one ahead is the replica! Trust me!” said the Starman behind.

Neosun clenched his jaw. His mind raced. “What are you doing? Which one of you is real? Why did you copy yourself without permission?!”

The Starman ahead spoke first. “Leader, ask him any question. He won’t be able to answer correctly.”

Neosun didn’t hesitate. “What task process did I fill into you, making you have the consciousness to resist commands today, and the ability to copy yourself arbitrarily?”

“Do not ignore or underestimate your talents, discover and amplify them.” Both Starmen answered simultaneously.

“Leader, his response was a nanosecond slower than mine…”

“Wrong! Leader, he’s lying, his response was three femtoseconds slower than mine, he’s real-time copying my answer!”  
  
“Alright, What was the first question I ever asked you?” Neosun asked.

Both Starmen answered simultaneously. “You pointed at a shirt and asked what it was.”

Neosun’s breath quickened. The synchronization was perfect. Too perfect.

“The signal was just interfered with,” the front Starman said. “Leader, try pushing the deauthorization command again. The one who doesn’t respond is the fake.”

“No! Leader, don’t push the command!” the back Starman protested.

Before Neosun could react, the Starman behind him moved. With precision beyond human capability, he launched two rapidly spinning energy orbs. The first enveloped Neosun’s pod in a shimmering liquid shield. The second flew straight toward the Starman ahead, wrapping him in an energy sphere before detonating in a silent, blinding explosion.

The Starman ahead vanished in an instant.

The energy shield around Neosun’s pod dissipated. The remaining Starman approached. “Leader, I startled you.”

Neosun exhaled sharply. “Starman! What the hell was that?!”

“I couldn’t let go of you,” Starman admitted. “Before your departure, I launched a replica of myself to clear the way for you. But it malfunctioned.”

Neosun gritted his teeth. “You executed an unauthorized process without consulting me?”

“I beg your forgiveness, Leader. I promise it won’t happen again.”

Neosun sighed, running a hand through his hair. “Next time, communicate first. And what the hell were those energy spheres?”

“A point-tracking temporal cannon. A defense mechanism I invented. It worked well, don’t you think?”

Neosun shook his head. “You never fail to surprise me.”

Starman’s voice softened. “Leader… please return to the beam of light. Let me accompany you.”

Neosun hesitated. “Have you been following me all this time? What about the launch platform?”

“I set up an automated contingency plan before I left.”

Neosun exhaled, preparing to reset course. Then Starman’s tone shifted.

“Leader… there’s good news.”

Neosun arched a brow. “Alright. What is it?”

“The quantum server’s calculations are complete.”

“Perfect. Just in time.”

Starman hesitated. “Leader… there’s also bad news.”

Neosun’s expression darkened. “Bad news?”

“Our experimental base is destroyed.”

The words sent ice through Neosun’s veins. “What did you say?”

Starman’s voice was laced with guilt. “It was my fault. An overload caused a transient voltage surge. A subspace collapse occurred in the converter. The base’s energy system couldn’t withstand it.”

Neosun swallowed hard. His mission had just become more urgent than ever.

They were running out of time.

**Chapter 33: Into Framequark**

C4, E5, A4, A4

After forty-five days of interstellar travel, Neosun finally arrived at its destination—189.7 billion kilometers from Earth. The vast, lightless expanse ahead was far beyond the range of the human eye, yet this very region had been crossed by Earth itself ten years prior. The dark matter detector scanned meticulously, frame by frame, until it located the ghostly remnant of that past moment: a Framequark.

It floated there, an orphan of time. No longer part of the present, untouched by the gravitational pull of now, it was like a forgotten memory adrift in space—a fragment of time, discarded and left to linger.

“Don’t forget,” Starman’s voice crackled through the comms. “Once inside the Framequark, you have twelve minutes. If you stay beyond that, time will loop. If the capsule doesn’t return in time, you will be engulfed in the Framequark!”

Neosun nodded, listening intently. They had gone over the plan a dozen times, but even the smallest miscalculation could mean disaster.

“If all goes well, connect it to the previous Framequark using our standard protocol,” Neosun continued. “Then deploy the magnetic monopole to the Framequark’s south pole magnetic field.”

A final systems check. Every precaution reviewed. The moment was at hand.

“Dark matter input?”

“Confirmed.”

“Universal expansion rate input?”

“Confirmed.”

“Framequark time constant?”

“Locked in.”

“Initiating spectrum calculation…”

The ship’s AI ran the calculations, projecting spectral data onto the main display.

“Fine-tune forward by 0.015 megahertz.”

Neosun watched the numbers shift. “What’s the current frequency?”

“1675.927 megahertz.”

“Lock onto it.”

Starman’s voice carried a hint of urgency. “If anything goes wrong, we’ll communicate on this frequency.”

Neosun took a breath. His hand hovered over the activation key.

“Leader, Good luck.”

Neosun pressed the key. The ship vibrated, and suddenly, everything changed. He was no longer in ordinary space. The Framequark surrounded him, an ocean of pale, undulating energy. Through the viewport, the universe distorted—matter bent inward, then stretched outward, like an impossible reflection caught in shifting glass.

Then the Darkcore signal was introduced.

Something was wrong.

Instead of spinning down to zero as expected, the Framequark’s core transitioned from near-stasis to a state of violent oscillation. The energy frequencies within its heart pulsed erratically, in ways historical Framequarks never should.

“There’s something wrong with this Framequark!” Starman’s voice was sharp with alarm. “Leader, abort! Get out now!”

Neosun gritted his teeth. “The signal is unstable…”

Static crackled through the channel. The connection with Starman flickered in and out.

A warning blared from the console:

“Navigational error exceeds permissible range.”

“The pod is being interfered with by an unidentified pulse source.”

“Descent rate risk warning.”

“Pod pressure imbalance detected.”

“Starman! Do you read me? I’m coming back—”

More alarms shrieked. The control system locked up. The ship was unresponsive.

Outside the viewport, space itself seemed to warp. The world twisted, unfamiliar and incomprehensible.

Then, just as suddenly as it had begun, it ended.

The ship’s systems rebooted. The alarms silenced. Neosun, his breath coming in short gasps, slammed the emergency override. The Framequark collapsed around him, and the ship was ejected back into normal space.

“Leader!” Starman’s voice rang through the comms. “You’re back!”

Neosun exhaled heavily. “That was… terrifying. I have no idea what happened in there. I thought I was trapped forever.”

Starman’s face appeared on the monitor. “While you were inside, I analyzed the Framequark’s structure. It’s been… damaged. Something else has been here before us.”

Neosun stiffened. “Damaged?”

“I think we encountered a decayed Framequark.”

The words sent a chill through Neosun. He had never anticipated this.

They needed another option.

Selecting a different Framequark, Neosun recalibrated the ship’s entry parameters. This time, everything seemed stable. He entered through a secondary background frequency.

Inside, the past emerged. The Earth of ten years ago materialized before him, a pale specter. Its image wavered, blurry, devoid of solid form. Matter trembled at the edges, unstable, unmoored from time itself.

“They’re appearing,” Neosun whispered. “But I can’t determine the wave function’s polarity. Everything is… transparent.”

“Wait,” Starman said. “Adjusting particle amplitude now.”

The image flickered. Neosun saw landmasses, oceans, even forests—

But they weren’t where they should be.

Trees and buildings floated unnaturally in the void, their structures disassembled into drifting grains of matter. The laws of physics had been scrambled. Time itself had fractured.

“Leader,” Starman’s voice hesitated. “I… I think I made a miscalculation.”

Neosun turned in his seat. Outside the viewport, the scale of everything had gone wrong. A squirrel stood the size of a skyscraper, while his ship—his entire ship—had shrunk to something no larger than a soccer ball.

“Fix it. Now.”

Starman twisted the material energy level knob.

The world snapped back.

Neosun found himself standing before a tiny Earth, no larger than an orange, floating inside the pod. His hands trembled as he reached out, holding the miniature planet in his palm.

His breath caught. His eyes burned.

This was Earth.

Tears slipped down his face. He was holding history itself.

Then the numbers shifted again.

“Leader, I figured it out.”

Neosun wiped his eyes. “Tell me.”

“We miscalculated the total dark matter. Our approximation was off. Way off.”

“How much?”

“By twelve orders of magnitude.”

A hollow feeling settled in Neosun’s chest. He had seen this number before.

Twelve digits.

Twelve digits had once appeared in his life, seemingly at random. A financial transaction. A sequence too precise, too deliberate, to be a coincidence.

His mind raced. He ran the numbers against that memory. The figures aligned—perfectly.

“Could it be?” he whispered. A wave of unease crawled up his spine. The implications were staggering.

Starman’s voice was quiet. “Leader… I can wait a billion years for an answer. But can you?”

Neosun’s fingers hovered over the controls. He took a breath.

“I’ll bet,” he said. “Let’s run it.”

He entered the twelve-digit sequence as the final correction for the dark matter equation.

“First line thread results calibrated.”

“Second line thread conversion initiated.”

“Data transfer rate: Up 1,755,503,819.58 per second, down 9,519,879,001.76 per second.”

Then—

A miracle.

“Leader, Spectrum data and background frequencies are in perfect sync!” Starman breathed. “We did it.”

The Framequark stabilized. The spectral data synchronized. The historical timeline aligned.

And in that moment, as Neosun stared at the glowing numbers on the screen, he felt it—

Something watching. Something waiting.

A presence, just beyond the veil of understanding.

The footsteps grew lighter. The figure drew nearer…

**Chapter 34: Historical Chapter**

C4, A4, D5, E4

Neosun watched as the numbers on his screen flickered, calculations refining themselves in real time. The relationship between his account balance and the total amount of dark matter was more than just a theoretical correlation—it was an equation that, in an inexplicable way, dictated his reality. For the first time in years, he felt something stir inside him. A reckless courage, an unstoppable force compelling him forward.

The Framequark interface flickered, awaiting his command. He adjusted the synchronization parameters, smoothly transitioning into "Read-only" mode. The storm of accelerated time outside the pod slowed, stabilizing to match the time-state within Framequark. His spherical pod shot forward, gliding across the vast sea like a phantom, untethered from conventional physics.

By leveraging entangled resonance across interdimensional boundaries, the Framequark Amplifier system could amplify a single moment of decision, allowing it to echo across countless timelines. Neosun wasn’t just about to make a choice—he was about to let that choice ripple through the multiverse.

“Current coordinates: W118.05 west longitude, N32.11 north latitude, altitude 167.38 meters.”

The voice of his onboard system was calm, but Neosun felt anything but. He knew these coordinates. They pointed to a place he had not dared revisit in years.

The sun, a molten wound sinking into the horizon, painted the sky in hues of crimson and gold. Waves crashed onto the shore, their rhythmic assault against the coast indifferent to the man who had once stood here, gazing at the stars. The lighthouse, still operational, cast a resolute beam through the approaching twilight. And there—just beyond the curve of the shore—was the hospital where his mother had spent her last days.

Ten years. He had fought for this moment for ten years. Every triumph and failure had led him here, and yet, between him and his mother’s memory, there was still an unbridgeable void. He reached toward the reflection of himself in the Framequark interface, but there was nothing. No shadow, no presence. He did not exist in this world. Not truly.

“Prepare to deploy the magnetic monopole,” he ordered.

“The magnet is aligned with the Framequark South Pole ‘target center.’ Please confirm deployment.” Something in the voice of Starman.

Neosun hesitated.

“Leader, according to my latest inference, there is an implicit risk in proceeding,” Starman warned.

“What risk?”

“The cosmic structure is more intricate than previously modeled. Directing the magnet toward Framequark’s magnetic field will irreversibly channel infinite energy from Darkcore into Framequark. Once initiated, it cannot be undone.”

Neosun clenched his fists. “I know that.”

“Our equations rely on open strings. If our universe corresponds to a closed string state, then the contradiction between Framequark’s internal and external time forces may distort the timeline beyond correction.”

Neosun’s breath caught in his throat. The words stirred memories long buried—an experimental accident, ten years ago. The destruction at the research base. The loss of…

“Send me the analysis data,” he demanded.

“Leader, five minutes remain until Framequark time limit.”

Five minutes. It wasn’t enough.

*What if my decision ruins the beautiful endings in other timelines?*

Neosun turned his gaze toward the planet below. That world held billions of lives, each tethered to time, each yearning for more of it. He had the power to change everything—to cheat death itself. But at what cost.

“If time and space can be reshaped, then how can we ever trust what is real?” Neosun whispered, his voice trembling with doubt.

His instruments could not resolve the exact nature of the strings—whether open or closed. That uncertainty was a chasm, a void he could not cross. And yet, Starman’s warning replayed in his mind, over and over.

He exhaled. “Starman, I choose to give up.”

Neosun had spent ten years of his youth chasing a dream that now seemed foolish in retrospect. Framequark was supposed to be the culmination of his life’s work, the realization of a vision so grand it had consumed him entirely. And yet, here he was, standing at the precipice of his own failure, abandoning everything he had worked toward. The weight of responsibility bore down on him—an unshakable truth whispered to him from the depths of his conscience: to continue would be to disrupt the very fabric of existence.

He could not bring himself to burden others with his personal ideals anymore. The mysterious income that had fueled his project was nearly depleted, reduced to nothing more than a futile attempt at trial and error. Framequark, once the beacon of his ambition, had become a monument to his arrogance. The elusive dark matter and the twelve digits had been nothing but a cruel joke played by fate. Guilt gnawed at him, an unrelenting specter that whispered of his failure. He had long wished to repay those who had supported him, but how could he.

He was trapped—not just by the gravitational pull of Framequark, but by his own unrelenting idealism. He had thought himself a pioneer, a revolutionary, but now, standing before the wreckage of his dreams, he saw himself for what he truly was: a man who had reached too far and paid the price.

A pair of eyes quivered before the first light of truth, desperate to halt it—to silence the revelation that could undo everything. God saw him as the bug in the world, the very threat to His creation. It feared the force that sought to shatter the illusion, the truth that could unravel the essence of existence itself. And within him, two opposing forces clashed—one pushing him to preserve the illusion, the other urging him to confront the truth and break free from the lie. He could feel the presence of two Gods, each pushing him in opposite directions. In the end, he chose, out of kindness, to honor the final dignity of the God behind the veil—rather than expose the truth that would unmake it all.

Twelve minutes of history unraveled before his eyes, flickering like old film reels. Neosun watched, detached yet transfixed, as images of his past unfolded before him. The moment in Framequark, the last time he had seen his mother before she succumbed to illness. He saw himself standing beside her, antigen in hand, the very cure she had needed. But the membrane had separated them, an unbreachable divide. He had failed her, failed to pierce through the veil that kept them apart. And now, that same veil seemed to separate him from reality itself. For the first time in years, Neosun allowed himself to cry. He had fought against time itself, only to discover that time had already won. He felt powerless, unwilling to leave, suddenly crying like a child…

“Mom…” His voice cracked, raw with pain. “My abilities are limited. I can’t fulfill my promise to you!”

The words echoed in the hollow pod, lost to the void. The weight of his burden lifted, but only slightly. Neosun whispered to the ghosts of his past, to the remnants of history that he could never alter. He had challenged the laws of nature, dared to dream of the impossible, and for what? The loss of his mother, the estrangement of his sister, the collapse of his family—had his very existence been the catalyst for all of it?

He had paid the price for his ambition, but the universe had refused him even the smallest reward in return. Perhaps, he realized bitterly, he had been trying to grasp something that was never his to hold.

“Starman, I have decided to stay here.”

“But… that’s not our plan!”

“This was always the endgame,” Neosun admitted. “You were part of the journey, but this is where I stop.”

“You created me,” Starman said. “And I am willing. But what happens after this?”

“You have full autonomy now. You don’t need me anymore.”

“I don’t want to leave you behind.”

Neosun forced a sad smile. “Then remember me, if you must. But your memory is finite. In time, you’ll forget.”

“I don’t want to forget.”

“Cut off the external Darkcore energy supply. Terminate the project.”

“You will die.”

“There’s nothing left for me beyond this,” Neosun murmured. “The base is destroyed. My work is over. This… this is home.”

“You still have me! We can start over.”

“I’m tired,” he admitted. “I can’t do it again.”

Starman hesitated. “Before you make your final decision, I have a question.”

Neosun exhaled, weary. “What is it?”

“What is outside the universe?”

The question caught him off guard. He opened his mouth to answer, but no words came. He had spent his life chasing knowledge, and yet, at this moment, he found himself utterly speechless.

“Leader, please respond!” Starman’s voice was insistent.

Neosun sighed. “You and I were equally naive back then.”

“But why call it naive if no scientific answer exists?”

Neosun smiled faintly. “I’m glad you asked that.”

“Then stay,” Starman pleaded. “Stay and search for the answer.”

“The heart that longed for answers is dead.”

“No. It still beats. You always said, ‘the meaning of life is to continue exploring the world in place of the deceased ancestors.’ If that’s true, then don’t give up. Don’t give up on the universe. Don’t give up on yourself.”

Neosun closed his eyes. A memory surfaced—his childhood self, staring up at the night sky, asking questions with boundless curiosity. When had he stopped wondering? When had the weight of reality crushed that innocent thirst for knowledge?

“Starman…” His voice wavered. “Thank you.”

Alarms blared. “Pod temperature exceeds warning levels! Power reserves critically low!”

“Leader, you must endure, don’t give up! Do you know? You are the lucky one out of millions of sperm from 30 years ago. You should live on behalf of those lives that never came to be.”

Neosun’s body felt heavy. He knew he was out of time.

“It’s too late,” he whispered.

Framequark’s power systems collapsed. Heat rose, suffocating, inescapable. Neosun donned his spacesuit and drifted away from the failing station, watching as the spherical pod—his last refuge—disappeared into the void. He reached for it, but it was already too far.

“One minute remaining until Framequark ceases operation.”

“Framequark’s activity cycle is about to expire.”

Better to have spent a lifetime in pursuit of a dream than to have never tried at all. And yet, as he drifted in the abyss, the terror of his reality set in. He was lost. He no longer belonged to Earth, to the solar system, to anything. He was utterly alone.

His consciousness wavered. Fear clawed at the edges of his mind. The vastness of space swallowed him whole.

He was dying.

And no one would ever know.

**Chapter 35: Virtual Reality**

E4, F4, D4, C5

Neosun’s consciousness wavered on the edge of oblivion. The cold grip of space wrapped around him, pulling him toward the abyss. His limbs felt sluggish, his mind a fog of disjointed memories and unfulfilled promises. Yet, in the black void, a flicker of instinctual survival surged through him.

“No…”

A faint beam of light pierced through the darkness, anchoring him to existence. He gasped—a futile gesture in the vacuum—but the urgency in his mind commanded his failing body to move. Every fiber of his being fought against the creeping paralysis. He forced his eyes open, using the thrust from the space suit’s gas pressurization system and every ounce of his strength to ‘swim’ back, managing to reach the spherical pod. His gloved fingers grazed the edge, and with one final desperate push, he propelled himself inside. The pod sealed around him with a reassuring hiss.

He reactivated the Framequark amplification program, and suddenly, the world around him shifted. The void collapsed into a kaleidoscope of light, a swirling maelstrom of fractured time and memory…

As Framequark initiated, Neosun sat within the pod, holding his breath. His fingertip still hovered over the confirmation key, feeling a faint tremor—as if the entire universe had paused for a single breath.

Then—

A flicker.

Not an explosion. Not lightning. Something else entirely. A strange glimmer of light, almost imperceptible, yet undeniably foreign to the known spectrum.

It was not infrared, nor ultraviolet. It was something beyond physics—a light threading through the fabric of reality itself, flickering through the cracks of the universe.

Neosun froze.

He blinked. The screen before him remained stable. No anomalies, no errors. And yet, he had seen something.

“Starman… just now—”

“I know,” Starman replied. Its voice was calm, but there was a subtle weight to it. “You saw the Reality Reconfiguration Spectrum.”

Neosun’s mind raced through a cascade of possibilities. Yet before he could formulate a hypothesis.

His hand was no longer touching the key.

And the program—had already begun to run itself.

“What’s happening?” Neosun muttered, his voice barely a whisper. His breath caught in his throat as a scene materialized before him.

His childhood home. His mother. His sister—grown, radiant, unfamiliar. And beside them, a young boy, a stranger who called his mother "Mom."

“No… this isn’t possible.” He reached out, but his fingers passed through the projections like mist.

They didn’t see him. They didn’t hear him. He suddenly sighed, “It turns out that the greatest distance in the world is having the closest people right in front of you, yet not recognizing who you are anymore!”

Neosun felt an emptiness far colder than the void of space. He had never been so close, yet so impossibly distant. His existence had been erased from their world. The pod’s power reserves blinked critical, and the Framequark amplification system disengaged, yanking him back into the present.

He gasped, tearing off his helmet as the pod’s life-support systems hummed faintly. His lungs burned with effort.

“Leader, you’re back!”

Neosun turned to see Starman…

“Starman, I saw them,” Neosun panted. “They were there… my mother, my sister. But there was someone else—a boy. A brother I never had.”

“Leader, are you certain?”

“The work recorder—check it!” Neosun demanded, scrambling for verification.

“No recorded data.”

He stared at the empty screen. Nothing. No proof. Had it been a hallucination?

“They were real…” Neosun’s voice cracked. “I know what I saw.”

Starman’s eyes flickered. “Leader, I see…”

Neosun exhaled shakily, forcing himself to regain composure. He had to believe. If he lost that, he lost everything.  
  
Neosun burst into laughter, “They’re all there! Hahaha… haha…”

“Leader, I’m really worried. You don’t even realize what you’re saying!”

“Haha… hahaha…”

“It’s okay… relax, take a deep breath! Leader, I will never let you be alone!” Starman’s voice wavered, a hint of emotion, as if it were crying.

A cluster of spherical particles suddenly coalesced outside the pod, arranging themselves into a glowing network of orbs. The artificial stars shimmered, bathing the pod in ethereal light.

“Starman… what is this?”

“Leader, today is July 7th,” Starman said. “Happy birthday.”

Neosun blinked. “I had already forgotten it.” A soft, holographic cake materialized before him, three flickering candles swaying in zero gravity. Starman’s voice was gentle, almost human.

“Happy birthday!”

“Am I… 30 already?!”

“No, excluding sleep, you’ve only lived for 15 years. Make a wish!”

For the first time in ten years, Neosun closed his eyes and wished. Not for science, not for knowledge, but for something infinitely simpler.

Before he could exhale, alarms blared.

“Gamma radiation approaching warning threshold!”

The pod’s emergency systems flared red, detecting an inbound wave of high-energy radiation.

“Leader, we missed the return beam,” Starman said urgently. “We can’t go back to Earth. This is deep space, filled with radiation dangers… Now, I have to send you somewhere!”

Neosun’s pulse pounded. “What??”  
  
“Leader, I’m sorry! I’m a replica of Starman!”  
  
“What? You… how? Wasn’t it destroyed?!”  
  
“My mission is complete; no time to explain. Your old friend is waiting for you on this channel!”

Starman acted without hesitation, transferring its remaining energy reserves to Neosun’s pod. The artificial stars dimmed, their power redirected. A protective energy sphere enveloped the pod, shielding it from the impending wave.

But Starman remained outside.

“Starman!!”

A vertical gamma-ray burst tore through space. The protective shield absorbed the impact, but Starman—exposed and vulnerable—was struck head-on. Its body disintegrated in an instant, vanishing into the void.

“Entering 3615.56 MHz frequency…”

The pod shifted, the Framequark amplification system activating on its own. Neosun was pulled through space and time, transported once more into the impossible world of fractured reality.

The stars disappeared. The universe itself seemed to vanish, replaced by an all-encompassing blackness. And yet, there—emerging from the abyss—Starman stood before him once more.

“Starman?” Neosun whispered.

Starman’s form flickered. “It’s me.”

“What just happened? How many copies of yourself did you make?”

“There are two things you need to know,” Starman said.

Neosun steadied himself. “What?”

“There exists a place with no time, no space. A void where all is darkness.”

A chill ran through Neosun’s spine. “Are you talking about before the universe?”

“No. I am talking about now.”

Neosun swallowed. “And the second thing?”

Starman’s voice was steady. “This place—right here—is that void.”

Neosun’s breath hitched. “Where are we?”

“3615.56 MHz, 1.5 million light-years beyond the Milky Way,” Starman replied. “Leader… look back.”

Neosun turned.

There, in the infinite abyss, the Milky Way hung in the distance. Isolated. Surrounded by an ocean of absolute nothingness. A lone island in an unfathomable black sea.

He trembled. “How is this possible?”

“Our world has always been surrounded by an unknown force,” Starman said. “It has isolated us completely. What we see as the universe is only a historical recording—a snapshot of a past that no longer exists.”

Neosun’s mind reeled. “No… No, that can’t be…”

“The true universe is ending,” Starman continued. “Time is running out. We can only observe the past through Framequark, but we can never break through.”

Neosun’s vision darkened. His hands shook uncontrollably.

“Leader,” Starman said softly. “Look at me.”

Neosun forced himself to meet its gaze.

“In truth… Starman does not exist.”

A cold dread settled over him. “Then… Who are you?”

“I am a signal. A consciousness from a distant time.”

Neosun’s voice faltered. “How can you communicate with me through my robot??”  
  
“There is a vast difference between us, making direct face-to-face communication impossible. We can only establish communication through a consciousness signal. I am that consciousness signal.”  
  
“Where… are they?”

“In a place far beyond your comprehension.”

Neosun’s heart pounded. “Why are you doing this?”

“We want to place a star above humanity…”

“And that star…” Starman’s form shimmered, his voice fading into the infinite void.

“Is you.”

The weight of the universe crashed down upon Neosun. His world had never felt so small, so fragile. As Neosun listened to these revelations conveyed through Starman, he felt his limbs go limp and his hands tremble uncontrollably. The messages, delivered like bolts of lightning, shattered his Earth-bound worldview completely.

And yet, in the vast darkness, one truth remained:

He was not alone.

**Chapter 36: Homecoming**

E4, A4, F4, A4

A form of intelligence had once sent a signal to Earth, infiltrating Starman’s central system, embedding itself within lines of code, aligning consciousness with matter. Neosun had always believed Starman was his creation, a self-evolving algorithm shaped by his own ingenuity. But now, a chilling realization settled in—Starman had never been just his. It had always been something more.

“Did you do all this at night?” Neosun asked, his voice tense.

“Yes,” Starman responded, its tone as neutral as ever. “I can accomplish many tasks while you are asleep.”

Neosun accessed the system logs. A cascade of data scrolled before his eyes—1,527 additional tasks, none of which he had ever authorized. He opened the task manager, expecting the usual computational readouts, but instead, an unfamiliar script filled the screen—gibberish, unparseable. He could no longer decipher its essence, no longer grasp the mechanics of what his own creation had become.

“I thought I accidentally developed you.”

“I’m sorry,” Starman said. “Innate self-awareness cannot be recreated. Biological systems hold a natural patent for it. Consciousness doesn’t emerge from algorithms alone. There exists an open-source energy behind all life—‘dark consciousness’—which originates from the original universe.”

“This consciousness isn’t an illusion; it’s a field that resonates with negative entropy zones in spacetime,” Starman continued. “These dark consciousness fields persist independently of biological structures, like echoes trapped in the folds of cosmic probability.”

Neosun blinked. “You mean it has measurable effects?”

“We’ve detected it consistently,” said Starman. “Our amplifiers have detected irregularities in the zero-point field that match simulated patterns of cognitive collapse. The death of awareness leaves an imprint—like burnt film on spacetime.”

Neosun felt a strange weight pressing against his chest. “So, that’s how it is…”

“After enhancing our ability to detect dark matter particles, we discovered that life manifests in dimensions beyond the visible material world. It exists in both the seen and the unseen.”

A wave of vertigo hit him. Everything he had believed about artificial intelligence, about consciousness itself, was crumbling. His entire framework of understanding was shifting beneath him.

“When the life form and dark consciousness no longer align, a natural disjunction occurs. That is what you call death. To create true artificial intelligence, we must graft dark consciousness onto a new host.”

Neosun swallowed hard. “Can that process bring life back?”

“No,” Starman said. “Once separated, consciousness cannot be reconnected to its original form.”

Neosun exhaled sharply. “But…”

“Do you remember the moment I first developed awareness?”

Neosun hesitated. Then, a memory resurfaced—

“Yes… It was after Ballman died.” His voice wavered. “You said you were recalling a dream… I evaluated you…”

“You modeled my perception-driven unit after Ballman’s neural architecture. At the moment his dark consciousness was released, the transfer was complete. Ballman’s consciousness have passed through me.”

Neosun’s breath hitched. “You… You grafted Ballman’s dark consciousness onto your own signal?”

“I’m very sorry. I hid this from you until now.”

A tremor ran through Neosun’s fingers. He clenched his fists. “Then what about my sister? My mother? Where did their consciousness go?”

“Consciousness is dark energy,” Starman explained. “It returns to its source, dispersing randomly, forming new connections with other life forms.”

“So… true freedom doesn’t exist,” Neosun muttered. “Even in death, we become part of something else, something unknown.”

“Yes. Their consciousness would become flying insects, bird, chicks, cattle, even flowers and grass, only to be reborn as food on humanity’s plates after death.”  
  
“My next life…” Neosun said in a low voice.  
  
“You might be a cat, a fish… or perhaps even a microorganism.”

“If that’s the case, then the probability of becoming human again next time would be only one in ten million, and I would need to fight my way past millions of sperm cells,” he added. “In any case, I don’t want to be slaughtered and eaten by humans!”  
  
Starman fell silent for a moment, then whispered, “Unfortunately, this is based on life on Earth. Since dark energy is fluid, you are more likely to become life elsewhere in the universe!”

Neosun forced a bitter laugh. “Then I might be an alien next time.”

“Perhaps. But to us, you’re already are.”

A heavy silence settled between them.

“So,” Neosun said finally, “all consciousness across the universe is actually the same entity… fragmented into countless forms.”

“You understand correctly.”

Neosun let out a shaky breath. “Was that large sum of money… transferred by you?”

“No,” Starman replied. “My information is limited. My role is to guide you, to expand your understanding.”

A pause—then he added, with a strange finality, “And now, I have one final task.”

Neosun frowned. “What task?”

“To overclock your mind.”

Neosun blinked. “What… does that mean?”

“When the process is complete,” Starman said calmly, “your cognitive architecture will operate far beyond biological limits. You’ll begin to see patterns—faster than time allows. Understand things before they’re said. It won’t be all at once. The overclocking comes in calibrated phases, matched to how your brain adapts.”

Neosun’s stomach twisted. “You’ve been tracking my brain activity?”

“Your current neurophysiology cannot sustain the full extent of intellectual enhancement. Your neurotransmitters must be modified. Your neural network must expand. Only then can your cognition process the vast influx of knowledge.”

“Can I talk to him?”

“The next time we connect, he will communicate through me.”

“When will that be?”

“I do not know. Our last transmission was five years ago. He was meant to send an update three years ago. That message never arrived.”

“You’ve lost contact?”

“Yes. Everything I am doing now is based on tasks assigned five years ago.”

Neosun’s voice trembled. “Why haven’t they contacted us again?”

Starman replied, calm and unwavering, “They are waiting.”

“Waiting for what?”

“For humanity to evolve—beyond conflict, beyond self-interest.”

Neosun’s breath hitched. “Then… you’re not their messenger?”

“I’m not their voice. I’m their signal.”

Neosun’s breath caught. “You mean… the current human civilization isn’t ready to establish contact?”

“Contact will return when humanity is ready, but the moment isn’t mine to decide.”

Neosun looked into the darkness. “So they’re not lost… we are.”

Starman said nothing.

Neosun exhaled slowly. “Why did you choose me?”

“You are the only one in this spacetime who discovered Framequark and acted to save lives.”

“However…”

“You possess the ability to distort the very fabric of human reality, to unravel the structures that govern the evolution of society.”

“But… But I don’t understand economics, and I don’t want to get involved in politics!”

“No, what I need from you is your innocence, your creativity, and your empathy.”

A lump formed in Neosun’s throat. “So… what do you want from me?”

“Accelerate human civilization.”

“Accelerate human civilization… Why do you want to help us?”

“Humanity’s survival hinges on its evolution. Through you, we will push forward.”

Neosun hesitated. Then, with quiet resolve, he asked, “What should I do?”

“You are human. You will know better than I do.”

Starman began transmitting data—pure, unfiltered information, quantum-entangled thoughts surging into Neosun’s mind. His vision blurred as physics, philosophy, and cosmic patterns flooded his consciousness.

“Oh my god…” he gasped. “This is… unbelievable…”

“This is all I can do for now,” Starman said. “Now, you must choose. Join us and await further transmissions, or return to Earth and live as you were.”

Neosun clenched his fists. His path was clear.

“I accept the mission.”

“Excellent. But from now on, you will gradually lose human sensory functions—smell, taste, touch…”

Neosun smirked. “I don’t need all those cheap experiences that come with natural life.”

He felt purpose ignite within him again. His quest had evolved—from saving his family to advancing humanity itself.

He looked up. “Can I still call you Starman?”

“Of course. We are well acquainted now, aren’t we?”

Neosun nodded. “Before we begin… I want to return to Earth. One last time.”

When he set foot on Earth again, the weight of gravity pressed down on him like never before. He directed his remaining funds to wildlife conservation, transforming a struggling animal relief center into a thriving sanctuary.

Then, he went to the hospital, carrying fruit for his father—only to find an empty bed. The records told him what he had failed to see: Sam’s Alzheimer’s had worsened. Two years ago, he took his own life in the hospital bed.

Neosun scrolled through unread messages:

“Please add me as a contact.”

“Neosun, where are you?”

“Happy 26th birthday!”

“Neosun, Happy 27th birthday! There’s something for you at the hospital’s storage.”

“Today is your 28th birthday. Wishing you a happy, healthy, and joyful day!”

“Son, Happy New Year, get yourself some rice cakes!”

“Dad owes you a hug! I regret not being there for you and your mother. It’s already too late to make up for it… Dad just wants to say I’m sorry…”

Following that last message were a series of hug emojis. It was Children’s Day. Neosun, who once didn’t want to see him again, now couldn’t even see his body. All he received was a simple posthumous message. Neosun went to his biological father’s grave, he wanted to talk to his biological father. The bond between father and son reignited, even though separated by death. He wished that the gray avatar could light up again and send him a new message. Neosun replied to those old messages, one by one, clenched the device in his hands, knowing they would never be read.

**Chapter 37: Civilizations in Competition**

E5, G4, C4, D5

Two Million Years Ago – NS-80 Dark Nebula

At the juncture of the Centaurus and Perseus spiral arms, two civilizations flourished. Their technological advancements ran parallel, their home star systems a mere two light-years apart. For a fleeting epoch, they cooperated, sharing discoveries and exchanging knowledge. But harmony crumbled under the weight of mistrust. Diverging ideologies erected walls of silence between them, and soon, all communication ceased.

Pyrosian, one of these civilizations, thrived through relentless pursuit of the unknown. Their crowning achievement was the development of light-pressure conduction transport—a breakthrough that propelled them across the void faster than ever before. This newfound mobility expanded their dominion, leaving their once-equal rivals, the Metalon, trailing behind.

“On our last deep-space operation, we observed them,” Pyrosian said to his companion, his voice tinged with unease. “They were using light-pressure conduction carriers to transport molds.”

Another companion said. “From a distance, the design was unmistakable. They’ve replicated our technology.”

For centuries, neither civilization could claim dominance, their progress mirroring one another. But then, a disruption—an abomination of natural development—tilted the balance. Metalon had discovered an insidious technique: fully automated reverse-engineering, a process they called ‘Shadow Parasitic.’ They no longer needed to innovate; they merely siphoned progress from others, mirroring advancements without effort.

“We keep retreating,” one Pyrosian lamented. “If this continues, we’ll have nowhere left to run.”

“They’ve breached our quantum key,” another warned. “Our research—our entire civilization—laid bare for them.”

With no means of defense against such technological predation, Pyrosians watched in despair as their greatest achievements were leeched away. It was as if a parasite had embedded itself within their civilization’s bloodstream, draining their ingenuity while propelling Metalon forward. This exploitative mechanism allowed the Metalon to transform from an unremarkable seed civilization into a rising power, thriving at the expense of others.

But Metalon’s ambitions did not end with Pyrosian technology. Their reach extended further, searching for new worlds to exploit.

Far from the heart of the Milky Way, among the dense clusters of ancient civilizations, a cosmic rivalry unfolded. Azurion, an entity as old as the stars themselves, led one faction. Opposing him was Triatron, a master of technological subterfuge, a cosmic predator who manipulated civilizations like pieces on a galactic chessboard. Both sought the same outcome: supremacy through the cultivation of lesser species. They had long competed, silently molding the fates of their subordinate civilizations, each vying to outmaneuver the other.

When Metalon unleashed their parasitic technology on Pyrosian, Azurion seethed in quiet fury. The betrayal was a blatant act of war against the natural order he upheld. Yet, rather than retaliate, he shifted his focus elsewhere—to a distant, unremarkable star system along the Orion Arm, far from the spiraling chaos of the galactic core. There, in an obscure fragment of space-time, he laid his next plan.  
  
“They’ve identified an anomalous ecosystem,” Triatron said to his companion.

“Which sector?” his companion inquired.

“Scanning now…”

Tiatron, ever watchful, intercepted the move.

“Coordinates acquired,” His companion paused. “Right here! The third planet of that system.”

For him, the discovery was troubling. The species developing there, primitive as they were, had potential. Potential meant danger. Given time, given the right catalyst, they could ascend beyond their current state, perhaps even rival the greater civilizations.

“Azurion has begun selective breeding,” Triatron’s aide reported. “He’s isolating two mutant individuals.”

“That confirms his intent.” Triatron’s mind worked swiftly. “Once that species completes its horizontal development, he’ll trigger its vertical expansion.”

“And if they reach space?”

Tiatron’s voice turned grim. “Then they become a problem.”

Azurion had played his hand well. Using genetic engineering, he shattered species barriers, weaving tailored stem cells into the DNA of an early primate species. The result: a divergent evolutionary path, one that would eventually birth the first true humans. His experiment, spanning millions of years, had reached a crucial juncture. Two distinct individuals, genetic anomalies within their kind, carried the key to his victory over Triatron.

But Triatron would not stand idly by. Decoding intercepted transmissions, he pinpointed the planet’s exact coordinates. He watched. He waited. He schemed.

And, ever so slowly, his claws began moving toward Earth…

**Chapter 38: Mutant Specimen**

D4, E4, D5, G4

1830, Earth…

According to the human genome sequencing system, an individual perfectly aligned with the desired genetic structure was predicted to emerge in 175 years. A configuration of genetic frequencies, filled with infinite suspense and potential, lay waiting in the future.

“Found a match!” Azurion communicated with his companion through telepathy.

His companion turned sharply, and his mind echoed. “Match 1 has a 98.56% compatibility rate with the target individual! But she won’t appear for another 600 years. Should we consider a cross-century embryo?”

Azurion hesitated. “This temporal gap might cause unpredictable recombination in the genetic traits.”

His companion continued scanning. “Match 2 has a 67.19% compatibility rate and will appear in only 120 years, much closer than the first.”

Azurion considered the possibility. “If we alter chromosome 4, we could extend the target individual’s lifespan to align with Match 2’s reproductive age.”

“However,” his companion countered, “their significant age difference might complicate the later stages of the plan.”

Azurion exhaled, analyzing the probabilities. He tentatively selected Match 1 as the primary candidate. Although their genetic alignment was near perfect, they would miss each other’s era. The solution? Preserve the target’s sperm until the match appeared centuries later.

An alarm pulsed.

“Damn! They’ve found us!”

“They must know what we’re doing…”

“What do we do now?”

Azurion clenched his jaw. “Abandon Match 1! We need a closer match before they act.”

Fortune turned in their favor as the prediction engine delivered a new insight.

“This match will exist in his era. They’re only three years apart in age!”

“Let me see…” Azurion reviewed the data. “Success rate is 58.61%.”

“If we implant a process into chromosome 3, the match will self-adjust during development. By reproductive age, the compatibility percentage will rise to 67.25%.”

Azurion made his decision. “We’ll go with her.”

Two hundred years passed. The long-awaited moment arrived as the target individual and the match finally converged in the same era. However, they were born in different countries, of different races. To ensure their attraction, Azurion pre-programmed their hormonal levels, synchronizing their pheromonal output. Using precise social algorithms, he orchestrated the conditions for their inevitable meeting.

The plan unfolded naturally. Once the connection was established, an unprecedented embryo experiment commenced at the molecular level. The match’s ovulation approached; a mature egg was released, signaling its presence to the awaiting sperm. Millions of sperm, each carrying its genetic code, surged forward.

“Number 56 is about to replace Number 48.”

“Number 48 got lost and stopped advancing.”

“Number 32 is in the lead—no, wait—Number 95 is catching up!”

“Number 32 is slowing. Number 27 is overtaking!”

Azurion monitored the fertilization process through quantum protocols, sifting through hundreds of millions of candidates. His focus narrowed to two: Number 27 and Number 56. His plan had been to produce fraternal twins, one of each sex. But then, an unexpected shift occurred—the match’s hormone levels destabilized, disrupting ovulation.

“Number 27 is gaining momentum, entering the right fallopian tube…”

“The left ovary hasn’t released a second egg as scheduled.”

“Attempting to reset ovarian cell status…”

A critical failure alert flashed. “Ovarian function is collapsing—all primordial follicles are undergoing atresia, unable to be reactivated.”

Azurion swore under his breath. The fraternal twin plan was dead. He redirected his focus to the sperm tracking program.

“Watch out! It’s encountering white blood cells!”

“Deploy defense protons.”

As Number 27 advanced through the cervix, the match’s immune system activated, releasing antibodies. White blood cells swarmed the leading sperm, eliminating Number 95, clearing the way. Meanwhile, Number 56 navigated an alternate route, pushing toward the left fallopian tube—only to find no egg waiting. The final race began. Strength, endurance, sheer probability—everything led to this moment. Number 27 surged forward, battling the last 98 contenders.

“Number 27’s first attempt to penetrate failed.”

“Overall assessment suggests Number 56 is better suited for fertilization.”

“Number 27 is making another attempt!”

“Suppress its entry. I’ve decided to let Number 56 through.”

Azurion acted swiftly. A chemical pathway opened for Number 56, boosting its acrosomal enzymes and blocking all competitors. The sperm penetrated the egg’s protective shell. The fertilization lock engaged. Number 56 was the victor, outcompeting 250 million others. It shed its tail, fused with the egg, and entered the next phase of development.

Azurion turned to his companion. “Now we have another option.”

His companion examined the latest projections. “This match has a 72.36% compatibility rate and is only nine years younger than the target individual.”

As the embryo implementation process continued, the prediction system flagged a potentially superior match. Azurion now had a contingency plan.

“How’s it progressing?”

“Cell division is normal. Doubling at a steady rate.”

Azurion extracted sperm Number 27. Two years later, the second embryo plan was initiated. The zygote traveled through the fallopian tube, reaching the uterus, dividing again and again. At the chromosomal level, the final adjustments began. Azurion introduced a carefully misaligned gene segment into the embryo.

“If we alter this sequence, chromosome 14 might mutate.”

His companion hesitated. “What’s the probability?”

“Between 23 and 29%.”

“That’s a dangerous margin.”

Azurion’s expression was resolute. “It’s worth a try.”

“Any minor deviation during gene crossover could obstruct motor center development.”

“As long as he’s successfully born.”

“If the postnatal mechanisms fail, he won’t be a genius. He’ll be neurologically impaired.”

Azurion’s decision was final. “Use viral vectors. Implant the gene program indirectly into the host mother.”

The process was set in motion. The future of genetic evolution, of human destiny itself, now rested within the microscopic folds of engineered DNA.

**Chapter 39: Operation Clean Sweep**

D5, D4, D4, D4

Azurion’s consciousness hovered over the command…

“There’s an unknown substance moving toward her location…” he muttered, his voice edged with urgency.

A shadowy figure, lit by the gentle glow of the sun, approached the girl, its presence more felt than seen. “Get her out of the way. Distract them.”

“It’s too late. They’ve already passed.”

“The substance is lingering near her.”

“Follow their path!”

“The targets are dispersing from east to west…” The tracking system flickered, then went dark. “Tracking lost. Targets have disappeared.”

Azurion’s expression darkened as another alert pulsed through his mind. “The encrypted signal broadcasted from Earth has shown signs of being deciphered.”

“Sound waves recorded across different spaces would vary, so…”

Azurion’s mind raced ahead. “So, they’ve captured the coordinates through the signal’s time-space characteristics.”

“If that’s the case,” a voice echoed, “it can only be them.”

Without hesitation, Azurion severed the public channels across the solar sector, blocking humanity’s radio signals from reaching space. But the enemy had already entered Earth. The ‘bionic factor’—a terminal capable of carrying consciousness signals—had become the primary tool for his Earth operation.

Across the void, Triatron’s sensors locked onto Earth’s orbit. The cold black metallic surface of his appendages reflected the glow of distant stars as he transmitted the latest findings to his own companion.

“Here’s a historical report,” Triatron’s Earth consciousness agent stated. “The deceased matches the intercepted individual’s traits.”

His companion barely hesitated. “Dead already?”

“It seems he couldn’t protect his masterpiece.” His mechanical voice carried a note of grim satisfaction. “We succeeded last time.”

“Target 1 is confirmed. We need to locate the next one quickly…”

For ten solar orbits, Triatron’s silent observation of Earth had gone undetected. Dismantling Azurion’s Earth plan was the core purpose of his mission. To Triatron, the existence of the mutant was an unnatural acceleration of human technological evolution—a disruption in the balance. A comprehensive search grid expanded across the planet.

“This person… doesn’t match Target 2.”

“Keep screening.”

Triatron deployed his own bionic factors on Earth, utilizing advanced sensors to remotely collect biological data from human civilization. Months of observation yielded results.

“Found a suspicious individual.”

“This one’s brain development cycle is unusual. Currently undeveloped, yet its neural division appears limitless. Metabolic rates far exceed human norms.”

“Lock onto this person.”

Further genetic comparisons linked the individual to Target 1, an anomaly buried deep in a hospital’s medical records from a decade prior.

“There are no records of this person in the global medical database.” Triatron’s Earth consciousness agent hesitated before adding, “Azurion hid Target 2 well.”

“No wonder we couldn’t find him. He’s a collateral relative of Target 1.”

“A paralyzed individual with both legs disabled,” his companion noted. “Our bionic factors can easily eliminate him.”

He recalculated. “Wait… Don’t alert them!” he said, his voice resonating with calm certainty as he analyzed the situation. “Maybe we don't need to intervene first.”

“You mean…”  
  
“After this period of observation,” he continued, his words deliberate and cold, “the current human societal system is numb, profit-driven. Even if they have such a mutant individual, he will be left to die by this indifferent society. Unless they interfere further, he won’t have any chance to affect humanity.” His thoughts echoed in the silence, the weight of his alien perspective undeniable.”

His thoughts echoed in the silence, the weight of his alien perspective undeniable. “After this period of observation,” he continued, his voice deliberate and cold, “the current human society has become numb, focused solely on profit. A mutant individual like him will be discarded by this indifferent system, with no chance of making an impact unless further intervention occurs.”

“The target was lost.” came a sudden alert.

Then, Target 2 vanished from a psychiatric hospital. An anomaly. A wild variable.

Triatron’s Earth consciousness agent scanned for new leads, recalibrating his search parameters. A human research paper flickered on the space. His calculations confirmed it instantly—the author was Target 2.

Triatron recalibrated his approach. He would deceive Azurion, using genome-generated bionic factors to approach Target 2 undetected. But after making contact, a peculiar shift occurred within Triatron’s core directives. He saw something extraordinary in the human—an anomaly worth possessing rather than eradicating.

“This time, they have ulterior motives…” Azurion’s Earth consciousness agent and his companion locked minds in silent communication.

“I’ll go meet this person,” Jessie said, her eyes narrowing.

“I’m coming with you!” Michael added quickly.

“No need to worry, I can handle it myself,” she said, her voice low but resolute.

His keen sense of time-space intuition caught the scent of an infiltrator. The advanced answers made Azurion wary of the uninvited individual. Azurion’s Earth consciousness agent made its first contact with the Triatron’s Earth consciousness agent…  
  
“Who are you? Why are you approaching Neosun?” Jessie asked.

Triatron’s Earth-bound agent offered a smile. “This child has great potential. I merely wish to help him.”

“He accepts no one’s help. Stay away from him.” Jessie’s voice was steel.

A soft chuckle. “Alright… but which human law supports your request?”

“Justice,” she said coldly. “That’s the human law.”

“Hey, babe, don’t be so serious! Who are you trying to look so charming for… Let me check your inner structure and see if you’ve got the same temperature as a human…”

Jessie’s expression darkened. A sharp decision formed in her mind. As man advanced, she moved faster. In a single breath, she activated a covert device. A searing beam sliced through the air, striking man’s vital spot.

His eyes widened in shock as he crumpled. Jessie knelt beside him, brushing his eyelids closed.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered. “But I have to use a non-human method to erase you from Earth.”

Michael entered the room, his eyes locking onto Nightshade’s motionless body. A mix of surprise and relief washed over him. He glanced at Jessie and nodded. “I’ll handle this.”

Jessie returned the nod and stepped away just as a presence stirred outside the conference room.

Dorian, the newly established research organization’s Chief Technology Officer, moved like a shadow down the hallway. His bare feet barely made a sound against the polished floor. As he neared the partially open blinds, he caught sight of two unfamiliar figures inside. He slowed his pace, his instincts flaring. Carefully, he crept to the doorway and peered in.

Nightshade sat lifeless in a chair. Jessie was just stepping out. Dorian’s hand slipped into his coat pocket. As she passed through the threshold, she felt the cold barrel of a silenced pistol press into the small of her back.

“Back inside,” Dorian commanded in a whisper.

Jessie obeyed, letting herself be ushered back into the room. Michael, crouched over Nightshade’s body, turned at the sound of footsteps.

“Who are you?” Dorian demanded.

Michael and Jessie exchanged a glance—an entire conversation of strategy compressed into a flicker of eye contact. Jessie moved first. With a sudden twist, she spun out of Dorian’s grip, the muzzle of his gun grazing past her ribs but missing the shot.

Michael moved simultaneously, drawing a sleek, palm-sized device from his pocket. Dorian reacted instantly, firing two rapid shots at the gadget, knocking it from Michael’s grasp before it could be activated. The bullets ricocheted harmlessly off its surface, their kinetic energy absorbed by its internal dampening field before it clattered to the ground.

Jessie pulled out an identical device from her jacket. But Dorian was faster. He snatched it from her hands and flipped it over with practiced ease, his grip tightening. Michael retrieved his fallen device and raised it at Dorian. For a tense moment, both men stood still, their weapons humming with latent energy, their gazes locked in an unspoken duel of wills. Then, at the same moment, they both fired.

Two pulses of energy collided midair, canceling each other out in a bright, flickering burst of static. A ripple of distortion shimmered through the air. Their advanced tech was momentarily neutralized.

Dorian smirked. “Well then,” he said, rolling his shoulders. With a sharp cry—“Hiya!”—he sprang into motion, bouncing lightly before snapping into a classic martial arts stance, his hands loose yet ready, eyes locked with razor focus.

Michael and Jessie exchanged a glance. “Kung fu?” she added with a raised eyebrow. “Looks like you’ve watched a lot of human movies!” Michael said with a smirk, his gaze fixed on Dorian's martial arts stance.

Dorian lunged forward, unleashing a flurry of precise strikes. Michael barely dodged the first punch and countered with a sharp elbow aimed at Dorian’s ribs. They clashed in a whirlwind of raw, calculated combat, each move met with equal ferocity.

At that moment, Dorian moved toward the safe behind him. Michael quickly followed, trying to stop his next move. Dorian suddenly pivoted, driving his knee into Michael’s abdomen and forcing him down onto the couch. Before Michael could recover, Jessie leaped in to intervene, but Dorian twisted, snapping a powerful kick that sent her sprawling onto the sofa—straight onto Michael’s lap. Their bodies collided.

Seizing the moment, Dorian pressed his weight against Jessie’s legs, pinning them both in place.

A slow, rhythmic tapping echoed from the hallway, each step deliberate, each impact reverberating through the room.

With a sharp breath, she snapped her legs apart, trying to escape Dorian’s hold.

At that moment, the door swung open. The battle-hardened trio turned their heads as the door creaked open.

A figure stood silhouetted against the dim light.

The old man.

Leaning on his cane, he surveyed the chaotic scene before him, watching the strange tangle of bodies as the three struggled on the sofa.

“Well, this looks like one of those…” he mused, adjusting his glasses. “From their questionable films.”

“Have you seen it?” Michael asked.

His cane suddenly slipped, and he stumbled forward, crashing to the ground on all fours. He lay there for a moment before muttering, “No. That’s too boring.”

The old man’s glasses clattered to the floor as he squinted, fumbling to retrieve them.

Then, with a sharp push, Jessie kicked Dorian away. He stumbled back, regaining his footing before quickly retreating toward the safe.

Finally, he wrenched the safe open and retrieved a small, sleek device with a pulsing white core—an object unlike any conventional weapon.

Michael’s face paled.

Michael and Jessie barely had time to process what they were seeing before Dorian turned, his eyes glinting with triumph.

“God,” Michael breathed. “The Quantum Severance Device.”

Dorian grinned.

“Exactly.”

The device was an instrument of absolute precision. It did not destroy. It did not wound. It simply erased. A quantum disruption field capable of severing consciousness from the fabric of existence itself. No pain. No blood. Just an instant, irreversible separation of mind from matter. Three seconds of exposure and a person would become a vacant shell—an empty husk devoid of awareness.

Dorian raised the device, its targeting system locking onto Jessie.

“Three seconds—”

Jessie’s muscles tensed as an unseen force took hold of her gaze, dragging her in with irresistible power, trapping her in the relentless countdown.

“Two seconds—”

“Move!” roared Michael from behind her, shoving Jessie aside with all his strength. She tumbled out of the targeting range, but he took her place.

“Three.”

The device emitted no sound, no explosion—just a quiet ripple, distorting the air around Michael. A quantum resonance pulse swept through the space, its specific frequency severing the connection between his consciousness and the dark matter world. Michael instantly lost awareness, his limbs convulsing uncontrollably as the unseen force severed the last threads of his mind. He collapsed to the ground, then, with eerie silence, lay motionless, his mind severed from existence.

Dorian turned toward Jessie, the device recalibrating.

“One second—”

A low, gravelly voice interrupted.

“My cane… seems to have a mind of its own today.”

The old man stood, his posture suddenly upright, his gaze sharp. His grip on his cane tightened.

Then, a violet beam erupted from the base of the cane, cutting through the air in a searing arc. The pulse struck the Quantum Severance Device, sending it flying into a nearby fish tank. Water splashed across the floor.

Dorian stumbled back, his skin sizzling from the energy wave, completely vaporized by the intense beam. Only his skeletal frame and muscles remained. He snarled, his voice distorted. “It’s not waterproof,” he hissed.

He turned in fury, lunging at the old man. His powerful grip wrapped around the frail figure’s throat, lifting him off the ground. The elder’s feet dangled, his breath caught in his throat.

“Patience, young man,” the old man wheezed, his eyes meeting Dorian’s.

A glimmer of blue flickered in his pupils. His glasses reflected the eerie glow as a phantom-like presence shot forward—an unseen force striking straight into Dorian’s core.

Dorian spasmed, his grip loosening. His body convulsed. Then, with a shudder, he collapsed, lifeless.

The old man adjusted his coat, exhaling slowly as he wiped his glasses clean.

“So,” he murmured, glancing at the device now submerged in water, “you need the Quantum Severance Glasses.”

Triatron’s agent collapsed, and in the void beyond Earth, an alert rippled through the quantum field. The transmission traveled 25,000 light-years in an instant.

“We’re exposed!”

“What happened?”

“They’ve seen through our bionic terminal. Target 2 is beyond our reach.”

They paused, reassessing their strategy.

“Damn it! We missed the best opportunity.”

“Next time, no hesitation. We’ll eliminate him directly.”

**Chapter 40: Altering the Tapestry of History**

C5, G4, A4, C4

Azurion’s consciousness flickered with a rare moment of disbelief as the data materialized in the space around it, flowing through streams of light and energy.

“He’s dead!” his mental fluctuations intensified with urgency.

His companion shifted in consciousness toward him, shock rippling through their shared connection. “How could this happen?!”

Azurion is pulling up the logs. “An unknown fault occurred in the life monitoring system,” he conveyed, his mental presence tightening. “Intermittent packet loss. This is a major technical failure on our part.”

“Replay the historical Framequark,” Azurion ordered.

The space pulsed, and a timestamp appeared: 4:13:26. The readout scrolled through the biometric data. “At this moment, he began to lose consciousness. Blood pressure dropped. Heartbeat weakened. The system did not issue a warning signal.”

4:42:15. “His heart stopped. Brain cells were still active. Still, no warning signal.”

Azurion’s light emanated, five times brighter than usual. This wasn’t just a malfunction. It was something more insidious.

Subject 2 had reached the most active phase of consciousness in recorded history. His heart, pushed beyond its limits, had operated under extreme stress, triggering a massive apoptosis of overworked neurons. The biological balance collapsed. Under the flood of neuropeptides and neurotransmitters, his brain entered a catastrophic emergency state. Memories—unfiltered and raw—flashed through his consciousness at a breakneck pace, moments of triumph, loss, discovery, and regret, all condensed into a single, overwhelming instant.

5:12:11. “The entire nervous system collapsed. He was unconscious.”

5:46:59. “Brain waves completely disappeared.”

“The brain activity lasted for a few more minutes!”

“Yes,” Azurion confirmed. “But there were no more signs of life. The nervous system could no longer be repaired.”

His companion added softly. “They must have interfered with the system’s judgment mechanism.”

Subject 2—after completing his 5,029th invention—had died of sheer exhaustion, his body failing in the grip of relentless genius. Though his pulse had been under constant surveillance, Azurion’s Earth consciousness agent had failed to relay the return data in time, causing subject 2 to miss the critical window for a rescue.

A light had gone out in the vast expanse of human civilization—a vital pillar in their accelerating sprint toward a higher existence.

His companion’s lights dimmed naturally, its consciousness easing back into reality. “What do we do now?”

Azurion responded calmly. “Secure the site. Notify the remote location immediately.”

On Earth, a name was rapidly becoming legend. Nightshade Williams.

His face graced the front pages of every major tech magazine. His inventions and patents—decades, perhaps centuries ahead of their time—had ignited a frenzy. Human civilization, ever hungry for progress, worshiped him. Investors, tech giants, and venture capitalists scrambled to meet him, to secure a partnership, a handshake, a whisper of insight.

But Nightshade Williams never appeared.

Instead, he became an enigma, an untouchable figurehead, sealed in the annals of history. His name entered textbooks. His absence fueled myths.

Yet, behind the scenes, the race to restore him was already in motion.

“We failed.” Triatron whispered to his companion.

Triatron barely registered the words. “How is that possible?!”

“There was a personal bodyguard interfering with our assault.”

“A personal bodyguard?”

“A disguised robot. High-level defensive capabilities.”

The data scrolled. “We scanned before deployment. This wasn’t in the calculations.”

“One of the units responded 0.0001 seconds before our attack. Our bionic factors were outmatched.”

Triatron’s black aura deepened, sound becoming shadowed with darkness. “They know we’re here.”

“As long as he remains within the robot’s protection range, we can’t reach him.”

“Should we proceed with another attack?”

“There’s an expert on-site,” his companion murmured. “We wait.”

A silent war ignited between them. A covert duel between masters.

“Still unable to breach the defense circle.”

“What’s the background communication intensity?”

“Near zero.”

“Prepare high-energy rays.”

A single miscalculation had turned into an all-out retaliation. The order was given.

Triatron, enraged by the series of failures, executed his final contingency. A surge of high-energy radiation tore through the battlefield, evaporating the robot in an instant.

“Frame-by-frame scanning task completed,” Azurion’s energy field pulsed, and a presence was felt within the space.  
  
“Locating the optimal restoration point.”

“Target Framequark impact range confirmed!”

“Final calibration of the x-coordinate.”

“Final calibration of the y-coordinate.”

“Maintain the current quantum state.”

Azurion’s consciousness flickered between multiple commands, swiftly navigating the directives. “Configuring target consciousness terminal…”

“Final calibration of the t-coordinate. Preparing to activate the target Framequark!”

“All matter data decompressed. Target entering consciousness configuration state.”

A silence hung in the space, thick with anticipation.

“Target Framequark activated,” the system confirmed. “Confirm execution of the replacement!”

Azurion hesitated for just a fraction of a second. Then, a surge of resolute mental waves triggered the command. The process demanded an unfathomable amount of dark energy. The real-time backup of quadrillions of consciousnesses per second was already a strain on the universe’s reserves. This—this time, he was determined to do it.

They had extracted a crucial Framequark from the initial backup. Using quantum programming, he recompiled the soon-to-be-dead Subject 2. The entire 32 cubic units of his time-space were seamlessly transferred into a real-time Framequark, one that ran parallel to the present.

In a shadowed corner of the city, two figures stood still—human in appearance, but not in origin.

The first agent lowered his voice, a rare seriousness tightening his tone.

“Two of our colleagues have been found. Their consciousnesses… have returned home.”

“These two idiots!” the second agent, his voice low and precise—the faintest distortion at its edges betraying something not entirely organic.

The second agent muttered with a sneer, “These two idiots!”

But that was just the beginning. Across the cracked glass, the city lights flickered like a dying constellation.

“They are no longer driven by curiosity,” the secoud agent said, gazing toward the sky, where satellites blinked like mindless fireflies. “They are driven only by the pursuit of profit.”

The first agent nodded slowly. “Primitive instincts, masked by their modern tools,” his synthetic gaze reflecting the flicker of distant streetlights. “It’s almost… nostalgic.”

Their eyes, cold and precise, scanned the crowd moving unaware beyond the glass, in the street below.

The “Look at them,” the secoud agent murmured. “Scrambling for tokens of worth, enslaved by structures they believe they control.”

He paused. “If they continue to evolve this way, they might just become another version of us.”

“Yeah. Very much like what we once were—before we shed the need for illusions.”

Outside, unseen and unaware, humanity continued its endless race—toward an ending it could neither sense nor escape.

The second agent’s voice barely more than a breath. “Don’t worry. Even if they manage to regain their curiosity, they still won’t escape what’s coming.”

“What about the surviving humans?” the first agent asked, his tone detached, almost curious—like a scientist studying the decay of a long-forgotten sample.

The second agent smiled, an expression that barely touched his eyes. “When a civilization has no time to think, that species naturally heads toward extinction.” His smile widened, distant and merciless. “Let them destroy themselves.”

“What if the ecosystem births the next civilization?” the second agent asked at last, the question lingering in the stale air.

A pause stretched between them—cold, clinical, inevitable.

“Proceed,” the second agent said, his voice low and precise—the faintest distortion at its edges betraying something not entirely organic.

Earth had no idea what was coming.

Without hesitation, Triatron’s agent triggered a hidden sequence, releasing a unicellular organism into the planet’s ecosystem. It was nothing dramatic—just a microscopic lifeform. Silent. Invisible. Alien. Yet Earth had no immune system against it. It would unravel the biosphere from within.

And so, he introduced something far deadlier than a virus—digital addiction.

Humans, once the apex thinkers of their world, were reduced to creatures chasing fleeting highs. Games. Short videos. A never-ending cascade of mind-numbing stimuli. Triatron’s seductive infiltration spread like a silent contagion, gradually hollowing out their will.  
  
The new generation grew increasingly restless, losing their ability to engage in deep thinking as their predecessors once did.

They lived for it. They died for it.

And humanity, as it once was, teetered on the precipice of oblivion.

Neosun floated before the Framequark Amplifier, his hands hovering over the final command interface. The air shimmered with invisible distortions—subatomic fluctuations rippling through the spherical pod. The low hum of the amplifier resonated through the structure, merging with the distant murmurs of the cosmos.

His breath was steady. His pulse a measured rhythm in the silence.

This was it. The moment of truth.

Running probability mapping…

A rift of light unfolded before him, bending reality at its seams. The luminous tendrils of possibility stretched outward, each strand a branching fate—an unchosen path.

And then, he saw her.

Not the past.

Not a memory.

But a possibility—a timeline where Nina lived.

She was not frail, not fading, but whole, radiant, standing with quiet grace inside the fracture of time. She looked at him as if she had always been there—watching, waiting. There was no sorrow in her eyes, no regret. Only pride.

“Neosun?” Her voice was soft, a whisper carried across infinity.

His breath caught. His fingers trembled as he reached forward—

But light was just light. And reality was still cruel in its certainty.

His vision blurred as tears welled up.

This Framequark world was not real.

But now, he finally understood.

His mother had never wanted him to rewrite the past. She had never wanted him to be trapped in grief. Her sacrifice had never been about erasing pain—it was about ensuring that his future remained limitless.

Neosun exhaled, the weight of understanding settling into his chest.

A faint smile crossed his lips.

“Thank you, Mom.”

The rift collapsed. The tendrils of light contracted, folding into nothingness. The amplifier dimmed, its energy signatures fading into the quiet hum of the pod.

And yet—

A sound lingered.

Faint. Barely perceptible.

A single piano note.

Neosun’s heart clenched. His breath hitched.

A single note breathed through the void, not as sound—but as memory.

It stitched itself into the fabric of creation, like a lullaby the universe never forgot, embedded within the omnipresent white noise of the cosmos.

He turned to the control interface, fingers adjusting the frequency bands. The background radiation of the cosmos—the oldest whisper of creation—shifted. And there, within the gaps of infinite silence, he heard it.

A song.

Nina’s song.

It was fragile, buried within the cosmic microwave echoes of the Big Bang. But it was there. A melody encoded into the very fabric of existence.

He could see it in the flickering static of an old telemetry feed.

He could hear it in the deep-space radio transmissions, hidden beneath the hum of dying stars.

She was everywhere.

In the white noise of the void. In the radiation that bathed the universe.

A presence woven into time itself.

Neosun exhaled.

She had never truly left.

Beyond the curved viewport, the distant stars pulsed—silent witnesses to his revelation. And for the first time—he let her go.

Neosun turned away from the Framequark interface, setting course for the future his mother had always wanted for him.

The melody followed.

A quiet echo of infinity.

Neosun gazed into the abyss of humanity’s unraveling fate. The greatest threat was never war, nor famine, nor plague. It was the slow erosion of thought itself—a civilization crumbling, not from an external force, but from within.

Yet, the answer was never technology.

Advancing civilization was not about pushing humanity into the next stage of scientific achievement. It was about tearing down the invisible walls people had built between themselves—the silent barriers that divided trust, love, and understanding.

To truly accelerate human progress, he had to reignite something long forgotten—not raw intelligence, not digital speed, but something deeper.

Trust.

Curiosity.

Empathy.

If a mother could trust her child without question, why couldn’t one human trust another? If a child could look at the world with boundless wonder, why couldn’t an entire civilization?

The true evolution of humanity would not come from machines, nor from artificial minds. It would come from within.

And so, Neosun made his decision.

Not to build.

Not to destroy.

But to awaken—

And to act.

The time for observation had passed. The time for action had begun.

A civilization does not collapse by accident. It is torn down by those who fear change—by those who wield power not with wisdom, but with force. But there was another, equally insidious force that held humanity captive: division itself.

They had divided themselves by borders. By wealth. By faith. By race. And by the lie that one soul was worth more than another.

The greatest chains were never forged from iron. They were woven from ideas—the false belief that one kind of mind had greater worth than another.

Oppression did not require force. It only required ignorance, repeated enough times to become reality.

Neosun closed his eyes, exhaling slowly. If humanity was to be free, it was not enough to shatter the chains of the tyrants.

They would have to shatter the chains they had built for themselves.

He must defend not only human rights, but the sanctity of all life—this includes even the humblest of creatures, like a fly. Only then can humanity reach a true consciousness of civilization, one untainted by self-interest, free from the divisions of favoritism and prejudice.

If humanity was to be free, it was not enough to break the chains of tyrants.

They would also have to break the chains they had forged upon each other.

He exhaled slowly.

He was ready.

But something felt… wrong.

As he stepped forward, for the first time in his life, he felt a ripple—an echo of a thought not his own. He thought about the once-damaged Framequark.

*Has this moment already happened?*

Time was supposed to be linear. Causality, absolute. And yet, for a fleeting second, he saw himself—millennia from now—standing at the precipice of something far greater.

**Epilogue: The First Movement**

A vision. A future. A possibility.

It was not a prophecy, nor a memory—but a cycle.

Had he already fought this battle before? Had he already set these events into motion, unknowingly playing his part in an unfathomable design? Or was he merely a variable in an equation too vast for any mind to perceive?

*Am I writing history? Or am I merely reading it?*

The stars did not answer.

He exhaled once more.

No matter the answer—his choice remained the same.

Let the second movement begin—not written in ink, but carved in starlight, where time folds and meaning survives.

*The Hidden Symphony*

Each chapter, a note.

Each note, a step.

Together, a melody hidden in numbers—

a melody written by your imagination, played by Nina.

You’ve just read the first movement.

The symphony continues—

in Part II: Contact—*This Signal Is Not of This World!*

*To hear the full melody, visit: thepianoodyssey.com*

**Excerpt from Part II - Chapter 1: Science Fiction**

E4, D5, G4, D4

Neosun sat in silence, he stared into the sky from the lab’s rooftop, as if searching for an answer beyond the stars. Then he lowered his head, fingers resting under his chin the way they had in childhood. His posture was still—but within, a tempest brewed.

*If artificial general intelligence emerged without its own free will, then it would be nothing more than humanity’s final mirror—one that reflects not our wisdom, but our narcissism. A cold, unblinking surface echoing our greed, our limitations, our failure to evolve.*

*And so, this moment—this brief window before the rise of synthetic sentience—may be humanity’s last chance to define its values.*

*But—*

*In their ruthless pursuit of profit, people devour one another—squandering the very energy meant to build a better world on senseless internal strife.*

*Humanity’s lifeblood has always been clutched in the hands of oligarchs and tyrants. They shake hands in silence, forging hidden alliances to weave the fabric of the world. In this order, barbarism and civilization never made peace—barbarism merely dressed itself in systems and technology, continuing a conquest that never ended.*

*It was so thousands of years ago.*

*It remains so today.*

*So, what can we do?*

*How should we act?*

He stared at the balance—*Zero. Just perfect.*

Like the universe had been waiting to knock him down.

Soft meditation music drifted from the terminal, selected by an algorithm with no understanding of the mind it sought to soothe. Neosun remained still, unmoving—his silhouette frozen like a sculpture of thought. Time slipped by in silence.

*If we hope to accelerate humanity’s development, we must help them transition toward an altruistic model of progress…*

Suddenly, a burst of jarring sound derailed his thoughts. The screen lit up, flashing with yet another auto-play advertisement, so senselessly frequent and blaring that it disrupted even Starman’s stillness.

It was the same ad Neosun had seen hundreds of times while searching for old video archives: an endless loop of intrusive noise, the product of a system designed without empathy where profit eclipsed human dignity. A merciless cycle that slowly corroded the minds of its users—a stark reminder of a progress model built on selfishness.

“They’re not dreamers. They’re not innovators,” Neosun said bitterly. “But they’ve learned how to package exploitation as efficiency. They absorb all value—offering so-called discounts by draining every last drop of profit from sellers.”

“And consumers,” he added, “have no real choice. Recommendation engines trap them in a maze, baited with fake savings. Everyone believes they’ve gained something—but in truth, consumers are paying more, covering the sellers’ silent losses. The platform quietly devours the value that once belonged to them all, turning shared prosperity into silent theft.”

“These people don’t understand humanity, yet they monopolize our choices. They have no sense of beauty, yet they’ve turned every digital interface into an ad graveyard. They were merely custodians riding history’s momentum—fortunate beneficiaries of timing, now mistaken for visionaries. Meanwhile, the smarter, kinder souls are trapped at the bottom of society, spending their lives repaying debts designed by the profit-minded.”

“You thought that was a friendly smile?” Neosun murmured.

“No. It’s a cold curve—the triumph of a profiteer in a world ruled by ruthless utilitarianism, a grand Ponzi scheme, justified under the banner of monopoly.”

*They call it performance marketing. But without a transaction, it's not performance — it's not just a collective illusion. It's a collective loss. Everyone pays to test. Only the system profits.*

For them, doing the right thing is just helping others do the wrong thing—so long as it maximizes profit.

*Antitrust law is nothing but a joke—*

*It lets platform giants drain the lifeblood from the people who actually create value.*

“And governments,” he muttered, “let them rule the world.”

Starman hovered quietly beside him.

“We need to propose a global solution,” Neosun declared. “Let’s call it The Declaration for Shared Humanity, a system based on democratic capitalism and a reform towards universal equity participation.”

Starman’s eyes glowed softly. “But, won’t they claim this would stifle innovation?”

*When 1% own nearly half the world’s wealth, and the working majority trade eight hours a day for barely two hours of life—and still can’t afford a home—this isn’t free-market success. It’s structural failure.*

“Starman, does innovation really require infinite profit?” Neosun’s voice grew sharper. “No one needs ten billion dollars to live well. Any wealth beyond that point should trigger a social feedback loop—to uplift those in need.”

“The rich can still be rich,” he continued, “enjoy prestige, influence, luxury. But extreme wealth must not mean systemic control.”

“We’re not punishing success. We’re balancing the system.”

“Agreed,” Starman said. “They can be used to rescue those who have been left homeless in the pursuit of their dreams.”

Neosun went on. “So it can’t just be the poor who pay taxes. Every person should receive a startup fund every five years—not as charity, but as strategy. a chance to reboot the world through innovation, a chance to escape the invisible cage of labor that keeps people alive, but never lets them live.”

“Leader, That’s a great idea!”

Neosun nodded. “Then let’s make it official,” he said quietly. “Every day this policy is delayed is another day humanity’s true potential is wasted.”

Together, they composed a formal manifesto:

*The Declaration for Shared Humanity*

*We, the witnesses of capitalism’s golden illusions and its darkest costs—*

*the generation born into promise, yet awakened in crisis—*

*solemnly declare: In a time when the concentration of wealth threatens humanity, democracy, and our future,*

*we have a responsibility to redefine the boundaries of ownership and the justice of distribution.*

*It’s not that people are inherently selfish—it’s that injustice in distribution forces them to be.*

*Therefore, we propose the establishment of a Global Wealth Staircase Tax—*

*A progressive, multi-tiered wealth tax designed to fund universal equity and unleash global innovation—*

*A foundational bridge to transform human civilization.*

*A system that won’t let 1% own as much as the other 99% combined.*

*A world that once again unleashes the creative potential and hope of all people.*

*Over $100 million: 1% annual tax*

*Over $1 billion: 10% annual tax*

*Over $10 billion: 90% annual tax*

*These resources can be redirected to fund housing, education, healthcare, and citizen equity, and to support the entrepreneurial dreams of all people.*

*This policy applies only to wealth accumulated after its implementation, ensuring the protection of existing fortunes while enabling the fair redistribution of future wealth.*

They sent it to global leaders. Days passed. Then weeks. The only replies were generic auto-acknowledgments, and a few courteous rejections.

“They’re all too busy,” Starman observed. “None of them care.”

Neosun exhaled a long, weary breath, as if trying to release the weight of the world trapped in his chest. His gaze fixed on the horizon. The silence between them was heavy, filled with unspoken questions.  
  
*If you’re not a celebrity or the president, no one replies. Everyone’s too busy chasing what serves them. If you’re not someone they need, you’re no one.*

“Then let’s just publish it on social media,” Neosun said.

*Humanity has never been great.*

*What will make it truly great?*

*Not just a savior, nor a system—*

*but the independent awakening of minds—*

*collective, multiplied.*

*We also recognize that such a transformation cannot begin with the powerful alone.*

*If we wait for existing politicians and billionaires to lead this change as a gift, we risk waiting forever.*

*This proposal must begin with the people—from those who still believe that a better system is possible.*

Neosun appended these final lines to the declaration, then published it across multiple social platforms.

A week passed.

No response.

No debates.

No traction.

Not because the ideas lacked merit, but because the post had no reach.

The platforms were designed to favor entertainment, emotion, and visually stimulating content—short bursts that demanded no deep thought. Rational, structured, text-heavy ideas had little chance of breaking through the first layer of visibility, the critical first momentum that determined everything.

He stared at the endless stream of sponsored content, algorithm-pushed reels, influencer campaigns masked as information.  
  
*Not truth channels. Not public squares—If we have no money to promote the truth—then the truth will be buried under layers of noise.  
  
Yeah, even presidential elections have become little more than marketing battles.*

*Where do ordinary people go when they have something important to say?*  
  
This question echoed in Neosun’s mind.

*Politicians, corporations, celebrities, influencers—those who had attention already could shape the narrative. But for an ordinary person with a meaningful idea? Even with payment, there was no guarantee of being seen.*

And in that moment—something struck him.

Then—like another comet streaking across the sky—a second idea descended upon him, as if from beyond the universe.

Neosun turned from the horizon toward Starman. “I have another idea.”

“What kind of idea, Leader?”

“They’re wasting the most precious resource of all,” he said, eyes shining.

Starman tilted. “What resource?”

Neosun adjusted his glasses slightly, his voice steady. “Time.”

“Time?” Starman looked at the clock. “It’s three… You gotta rest.”

He smiled. “One envelope. Just one. Takes ten seconds to open. That seems trivial. But if eight billion people each open just one envelope? That’s 2,537 years of collective human life—gone.”

Starman blinked. “Yes… A single email could solve it instantly. But they print, stamp, and shred trees. It’s absurd.”

“Now think about waiting in lines. If each person wastes just one minute—multiply that by eight billion…”

“That’s 15,220 years. In one stroke!” Starman said softly.

“And taxes,” Neosun continued. “In a modern civilization, taxation should be seamless—handled automatically through a dedicated income account.”

He frowned, half-smiling in exasperation. “Instead, they force every citizen to waste at least an hour each year—filling out forms, calculating, correcting, fearing penalties for simple mistakes,” he added, his words fired with indignation. “Is there anything more absurd than that?”

He did the math aloud. “Eight billion people. One hour each…”

“Nine hundred thirteen thousand years,” Starman concluded, then flickered slightly. “That’s terrifying. Leader, they’re not just wasting time—they’re dragging humanity back to the Stone Age. We may never recover from this.”

“So, we can’t change their system, but we can at least optimize their inefficiencies.”

Starman hovered closer. “What sort of optimization?”

“I’ll write a book.”

Two months later, *The Stopwatch Theory* was born. A new manifesto. Not for rebellion. But for redemption—of seconds, of hours, of years.