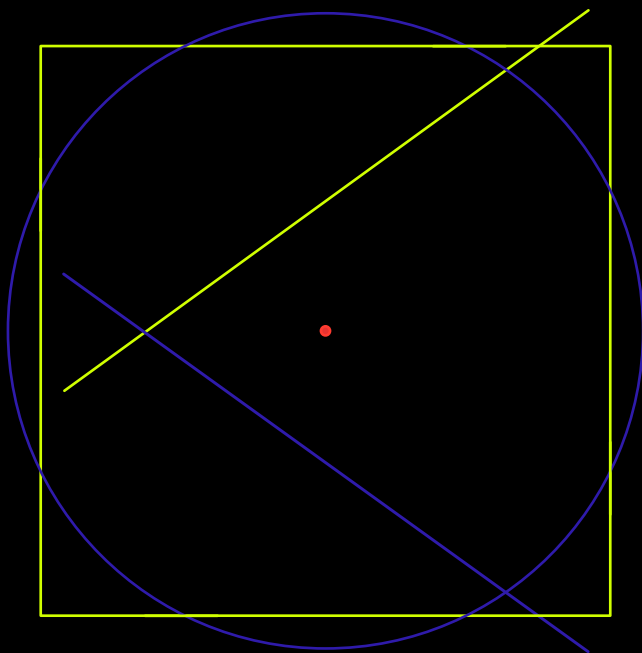


LIVING STORIES

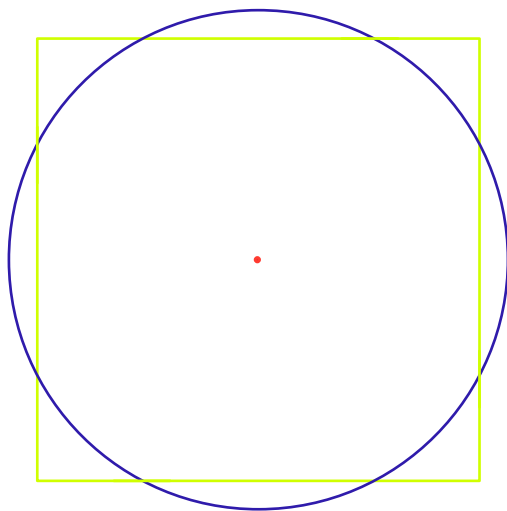
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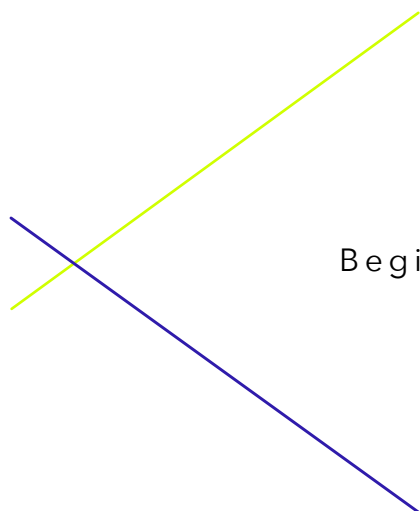
a Listening Book

Christopher Collings

LIVING



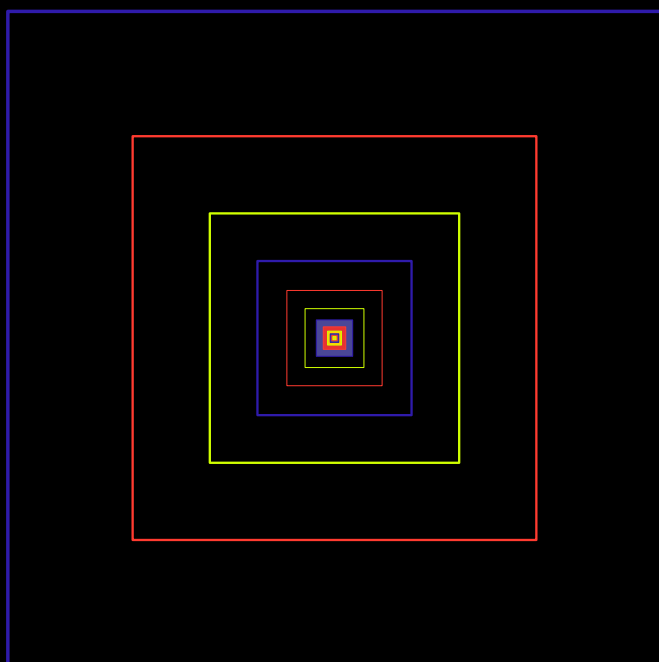
STORIES



Begin

He stares out of the window at the dawning sky. His thumb taps in tiny repetitions on his leg. Outside, shapes slide past his eyes. Faces, trees, shopfronts. Someone waves to another. Gone before he can follow. Everything keeps moving, even when he doesn't. As the bus begins to slow, he's gently pulled back into his seat. Space opens between passing shapes. A figure comes into focus. Then another. Text on a window becomes readable. The movement outside fades until the bus comes to a halt. For a brief moment, nothing moves.

The doors hiss open. He shifts in his seat, his thumb tapping faster on his leg. People enter. Someone blocks the aisle. Others wait behind. A few pass by. He scans them briefly before looking back outside. The bus driver reaches for the button to close the doors. In the mirror, he sees someone hurrying toward the entrance. He waits a moment until she jumps in with her huge backpack. While thanking him for waiting, she squeezes into the aisle, scans for a place to sit and stops beside the guy by the window.



Return to the Listening Page
Listen to the first track: **Enter**

Lyrics are available on the next pages

(Headphones or speakers recommended)

listening

Enter

Our lives

Full of stories

The same stories

Repeating themselves over and over

Until we grow out of them

Moving into a new chapter

Full of stories

We are full of stories

The decision is here waiting for us

Questioning when to start

Now is the right timing

Telling stories

Living stories

Sharing stories

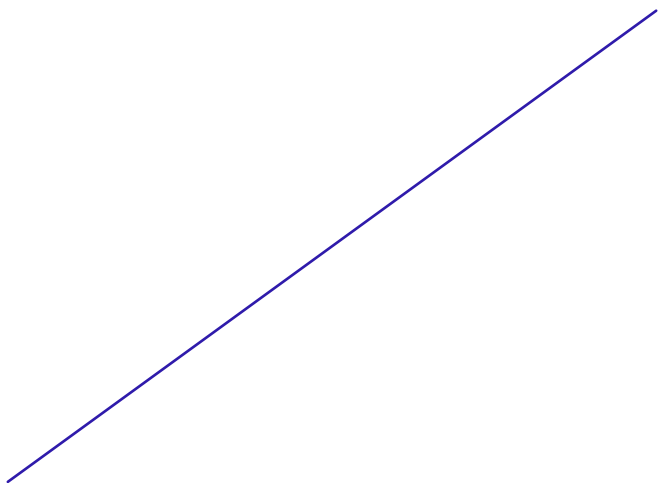
What's your story

Story

What is your dream

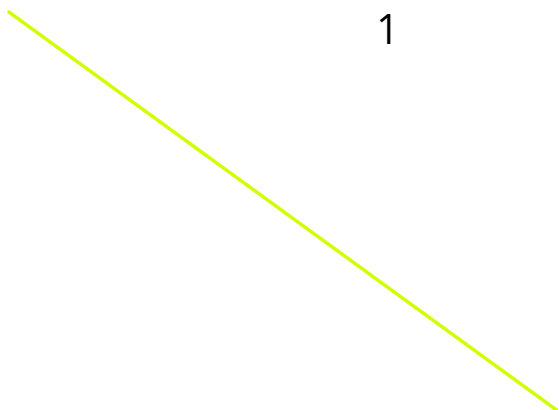
Who are you behind your mask

Start to shine



Episode

1



Episode 1

Cora Sorry, is this seat still free?

Hugo [*hesitant*] Um... yeah. Sure.

As he pulls his backpack off the seat next to him, his gaze is drawn to the blue circular symbol hanging from her neck above the black hoodie. For a brief moment he lingers on the symbol before his gaze drifts back to the street and freezes on a red traffic light. He waits for the colour to change. His belongings feel cramped under his legs, and his thumb taps faster and faster on his right knee. Silently, they sit side by side as the bus starts to move. Buildings slide past. Their edges and details blur. After a moment, she pulls out her phone and checks the map, watching the small blue dot move slowly through the streets. After following the route for a while, she turns toward him.

Cora Hey, do you know what stop is coming next?

Hugo Um, no... sorry. I only know my stop.

Cora Oh, okay. [*curious*] So... where are you going?

Hugo To the mountains. And you?

Cora I'm not really sure yet... just seeing where it goes.

Hugo Ah.

No one says anything for a moment. She lowers her eyes, unlocks her phone and scrolls through old messages. Next to her, he starts tapping his thumb again and turns back to the window, staring past the glass. The bus driver switches the radio channel, humming along to the music. Meanwhile, she keeps checking messages without replying, occasionally glancing around the bus for something that might hold her attention. Almost everyone is absorbed in something – reading, listening, or staring out the window. Only one little child stands out, quietly drawing the sky with a moon surrounded by stars. She watches the child for a while, captivated by its quiet creativity, before turning back to him.

Cora So... how long are you travelling already?

Hugo I, uh... left this morning. What about you?

Cora I've been travelling for a while now. It's... kind of a lot, but it's nice. Clears your head, you know?

Hugo Yeah... I guess?

[short pause]

Cora What's your name?

Hugo Hugo. And yours?

Cora I'm Cora.

Hugo Nice name. Don't think I've met a Cora before.

An awkward silence settles between them. Hugo drifts back to staring at the sky. Cora reaches into her bag and pulls out a book. She opens it and reads the same sentence six times, then puts it down, deciding that she doesn't feel like reading. Instead, she grabs her phone. Hugo glances at the book, trying to make out the title. Cora, noticing his curiosity, holds the book up slightly, turning it toward him.

Cora You know it?

Hugo No. Never heard of it.

Cora It's great. Can recommend it.

Hugo Cool. I'll check it out when I get back from the trip.

As he speaks, Hugo nods a couple of times, his gaze already slipping slowly back toward the window. She opens the book again, but the words blur before she reaches the end of the sentence. She closes the book, still holding it.

Cora What's your plan actually, when you get to the mountains?

Hugo I want to hike up to the peak.

Cora Which peak?

Hugo Um... I heard many stories about this one place.

Hugo's fingers fidget with the strap of his backpack.

Hugo There's supposed to be a quiet spot with this amazing view. You can see forever.

Cora That sounds... nice.

Hugo Yeah... people say you feel totally free up there.

Bit by bit, Hugo starts telling her more about the peak – the stories he heard, half rumours, half hope. Cora listens, nodding along, happy to have some company on the ride.

The bus slows down. The doors open as a few passengers step inside. Hugo keeps talking, his voice growing steadier, his thumb still tapping against his leg like a habit he doesn't even notice. As he speaks, he seems to step into the world he describes.

While listening, Cora's gaze drifts to the yellow square printed on Hugo's white shirt. She watches the way he gestures, how he repeats certain phrases, how every story seems to circle back on itself.

Cora Wow, you really know a lot about that mountain.

Hugo Yeah... I've heard these stories since I was a kid.
And, I don't know... ever since, it's kind of my dream to reach the top.

Cora Funny how these stories stick with us.

Hugo Yeah, I guess? I just like them.

Cora Hm.

She looks out of the window, chewing on her lip for a moment. Trees rush by in blurred patterns, painting the window into abstract landscapes with strokes of green.

Cora Actually... the book I'm reading talks about that.

Hugo About what?

Cora About stories. How they stick with us.

Hugo *[confused]* Okay?

Cora Well... never mind.

Hugo What do you mean?

Cora Hm... maybe it sounds a bit strange.

Hugo No, it's okay.

Cora But take the mountain for example. Someone told you about it once, and now it's kind of living in your head somewhere.

Hugo Hm... I never thought about that.

Cora The book says stories don't just disappear. They stay with us and keep shaping things.

Hugo Okay, but... what kind of stories do you mean?

Cora Not just stories about places. I just read about the stories we believe about ourselves.

Hugo Hm...

Hugo stares at the glass of the window, not really looking through it, but into it – wondering how he ended up in this conversation, and starts imagining how he might get out of it. His reflection shimmers on the surface and he shrugs when he sees his eyes staring back at him. For a split second, he doesn't recognise them, like they belong to someone else.

His mouth opens slightly, as if waiting for something to happen, then closes again. He looks like he wants to say something, but the words don't come.

Cora Like if you think about it... stories are just... I don't know, things in our heads? Maybe we just make them up?

Hugo Um, I think they are more than that.

Cora So, what do you think they are?

Hugo Well... I don't think they're just ideas in our heads. I guess they're there for a reason. Like, when I think about this mountain, it's not just the stories. It's... *[searching for words]* It's something else...

Cora tilts her head, watching him curiously.

Cora What do you mean?

Hugo I don't know. I mean, when I think about those stories, something kind of... lights up. They motivate me, you know? I don't know why I like them. But they make me want to get to the top of the mountain, that's all.

Cora Huh.

She stares into the air for a moment, then down at her phone, fiddling with it mindlessly. Opens one app. Closes it. Opens another. Closes it. Opens a different one. Same thing. Like she's searching for something without knowing what. With her phone in her hand, she turns back to Hugo.

Cora So... then why do some stories stay with us like that and others don't?

Hugo You're asking weird questions.

Cora *[joking]* And you're not helping answer them.

Hugo So do you have an answer?

Cora No.

Hugo Hm...

Cora But I guess it's about the connection we have with them.

Hugo What do you mean by connection?

Cora Hard to describe... I guess some stories just feel different when I think about them. Even if I don't know why. Some stay with me and others don't.

Hugo Hm... so you mean it's more about the feeling?

Cora Maybe. Not so much about what happened... more how it feels to remember it.

Hugo That's... kind of scary.

Cora *[surprised]* What? Why?

Hugo Like... what if I don't like the story that sticks with me?

Cora Well, I don't know.

Hugo leans back, folding his arms across his chest. His gaze drifts to the window, his mind bouncing back and forth between the words, trying to find answers to his questions. The bus rattles slightly as it dips into a curve. Somewhere in the back, a water bottle rolls across the floor and bumps into a seat. Someone coughs. Legs shift. Passengers murmur around them, lost in their own conversations.

Hugo I read somewhere that... like 95 percent of our thoughts run in the back of our head in the subconscious. So... most of what we think and believe... we don't really know we're doing it.

Cora That's crazy. But where does it all come from? Those thoughts and beliefs must have started at some point, right?

Hugo I don't know. I think it's kind of a mystery. Unless you know?

Cora Hm, no clue... *[pausing]*
But, when I think about my life, I guess I kind of... saved certain moments. Like, something happens and then it turns into a memory. And somehow that memory becomes a story... or something like that.

Hugo What kind of moments?

Cora Hm, different ones...

Hugo Do you still remember them?

Cora Some of them. But I forgot about many – especially from when I was a kid.

Hugo Um, yeah... I know what you mean.

Cora Why do you think that is? That you forgot about those moments?

Hugo I don't know. Maybe nothing special happened, so it just didn't stick. Or maybe it was something I didn't want to remember. Like unpleasant stuff, you know?

Cora Yeah, I sometimes wonder if those unpleasant things from when we were kids stay with us somehow. Even if we don't really think about them anymore.

Hugo So... do you remember anything like that?

Cora Hm...

She trails off, her fingers fumbling with the case of her phone. Peeling one corner off the device, then pressing it back in. Off again. Back in. Off again... For a moment, she just sits there, staring at it, as if the memory had to be peeled off and pressed back into place. Hugo waits, without saying a word. Finally, while pressing her phone back into the case, she clears her throat and looks up.

Cora One thing happened in primary school. This might sound stupid, but there was this one time we had a big assignment. We were supposed to write something for class. And I really got into it. I was completely absorbed in it. I didn't finish during regular time, so, for whatever reason, my teacher let me keep writing in the corridor. There was a window with this view into the trees. I sat there and kept writing. Page after page, I didn't even notice how much time passed.

Hugo Sounds great.

Cora It was. The best feeling, honestly. It was like I had my own little world for a while, where I could just create whatever I wanted. I liked the story I wrote and it was really fun to do.

Then I had to present it to the class and it was like everyone was invited into this little world of mine, like I opened a door for them to step through with me.

For a moment, I wasn't just reading – we were all inside the same place together. Walking through the story side by side, seeing what I saw, hearing what I heard – meeting the characters that lived inside of it. But then, out of nowhere, one kid started laughing – said it sounded boring – and others joined. Instantly the door slammed shut. It was like I got kicked out of my own world and couldn't find the way back in. One second I was inside, leading them through it – and the next, I was outside, staring at a door that wouldn't open anymore. The voices in the room drowned the voices of my characters. My words suddenly felt small, like they didn't belong anywhere. And I just stood there, holding my notebook, watching the world I had built dissolve in front of me.

Cora looks down at her phone, her face reflecting in the black screen. The memory rolls through like a loop:

A door opens. A door slams. Every time it returns she feels the same squeeze in her chest, the old urge to hide – or to run away. She taps the screen, checking the time. Then turns it face-down and looks up as if nothing happened.

Cora After that... I don't know. I didn't dare show what I made anymore. It just felt pointless, you know? I didn't want to show myself in front of anyone and experience something like that again.

Hugo Oh...

Hugo doesn't know what to say and stays quiet. He scratches his chin with one hand, searching for words. Cora takes a slow breath, like trying to get rid of something that holds its grip.

Cora I just stopped sharing whatever I created. Told myself it was better that way – or at least safer to keep it to myself.

Hugo That's... sad.

Cora Well...

Hugo But it sounds like you wanted to create, right?

Cora Yeah.

Hugo But you didn't do it? Or you didn't show it to anyone?

Cora That's the weird thing – the less I shared, the more I wanted to create. I just didn't let anyone see it. I kept it hidden like a secret life.

Hugo Oh, wow.

Cora Creating something in secret felt... safe somehow. If no one knows, no one can hurt you, right?

Hugo Hm, I guess. Sometimes it seems easier to keep things inside.

Cora Yeah, so I ended up creating less and less. And after a while, it just stopped. Everything felt stuck – nothing could come in or out anymore.
I kind of froze, caught in a numb state. With the wish to act, but unable to move.

Hugo Crazy... and you think all of that started from this one moment in school?

Cora I don't know if it was just that moment or a mix of other things, but somehow this one stayed with me. It sounds strange, I know... because nothing really bad even happened. And the weirdest part? I don't even remember the laughter.
Or at least, I think I don't. It's like... I erased that it even happened. It was years later a friend reminded me – that one kid laughed, and others joined. And suddenly it all came back. Not the scene itself, but how it felt.

Hugo Hm...

[pause]

Hugo I don't know why I'm thinking about this now... but I guess I know that feeling. When you want to do something... but you just can't.

Cora What do you mean?

Hugo Um... not sure if I want to talk about it.

Cora Oh come on... I just told you a super embarrassing story.

Hugo You didn't have to.

She looks at him – waiting. He scratches his chin, eyes drifting toward the window, staring at her reflection in the glass. His thumb taps against his leg, his mind bouncing between excuses for why not to speak.

Hugo Maybe now is not the right time.

Cora Alright...

Hugo Maybe later.

Cora Hm... okay.

The bus turns into a narrow street. Outside, people move past the windows – someone pushing a bicycle, a couple waiting at a crossing, a dog pulling impatiently at its leash. After a few turns the bus pulls up at a stop. Some passengers step off, others step on. A flicker of red light pulses against the window. Hugo's gaze gets caught. His thumb slows, then stops. For a moment he just sits there, unable to look away. Behind the stop, a small bistro flashes its neon sign back and forth:

**HOT SOUP
NOW OR NEVER**

Again and again. The letters flash, disappear, return. *Now or never*. Cora scrolls on her phone, half-turned away. Another flash. *Now or never*. He looks away, but his eyes snap back. The words flicker again. He glances at Cora, then away again. She is still busy with her phone. Hugo's jaw tightens slightly. His thumb starts tapping again. He holds his breath. His heart starts to race. He closes his eyes, but the words are burned into the dark. *Now or never*. He exhales, opens his eyes, and turns to Cora.

Hugo You know... what you just said reminded me of something.

Cora What do you mean?

Hugo It's just... these moments where you want to act... but you just freeze.

Cora Oh...

Hugo I think it's not even the situation itself. It's what happens in my head. Everything starts running at once. Then I keep going over what to say... what not to say... what to do... what not to do... and then suddenly I'm stuck.

Cora Ah...

Hugo Sometimes I get caught in small details. My tone of voice. How I look. How I stand. I end up replaying whole conversations in my head and imagine how they might have gone differently.

Cora Hm...

Hugo Once I start thinking about it, it's hard to stop. I re-run the same scene in my head, checking all the angles. *Did I interrupt? Did I laugh too loud or too little? Did I make them uncomfortable?*

Cora That's... rough.

Hugo I got used to it.

Cora But does it feel good for you?

Hugo Well, I don't really know any other way anymore. Even if I tried to act differently, I probably couldn't.

Cora Do you remember a moment like that?

Hugo wonders why he's even talking about what he usually keeps carefully hidden. Most of the time he covers it with quick answers, little jokes, by turning the conversation back to someone else or by avoiding it in the first place.

But this time, it's different. Maybe it's because she's a stranger. Maybe it's because he will never see her again after he gets off the bus, so it doesn't matter if she glimpses the cracks? He checks his watch, hoping his stop is near – but no, he's stuck on this bus for a while. He exhales while a scene flickers open in his mind, familiar and untouched, like it has been stored there all this time.

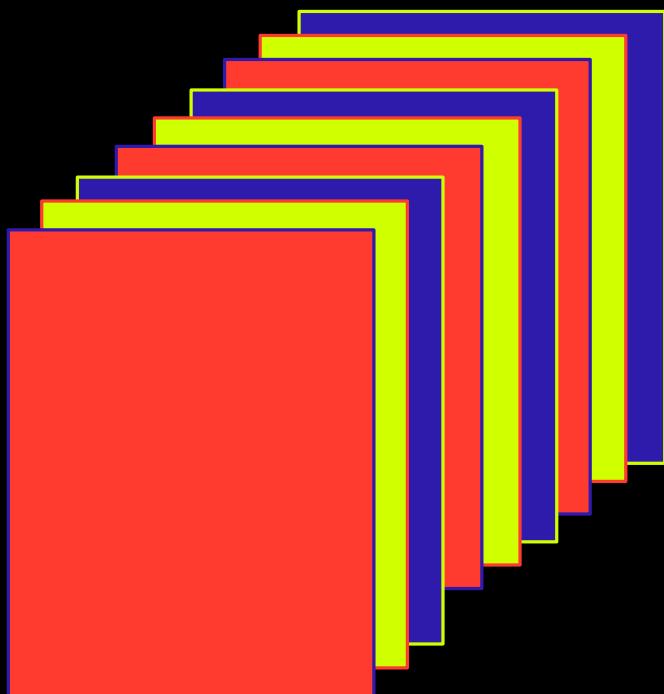
Hugo There was a time when everything felt off. My mind was always running. I kept wondering what people thought about me. Whatever I did, it never quite felt right. If I spoke, it felt like I was saying too much. If I stayed quiet, I felt invisible. If I smiled, it felt forced. If I didn't, I seemed distant. Every choice felt like a wrong step. I would walk around with the sense that people were judging me, even if they weren't looking at me at all. *[pausing]*

There was this girl. I had noticed her a couple of times, just passing by – in a café, at school, on the street. When I thought about walking up to talk to her, I froze. So, in my mind I started playing out different ways it could go, running through all the possible words I might say. Over and over again. Trying to say the right thing, act the right way, you know? But every time I saw her... I couldn't move. I couldn't say a word. It was like my mind just shut down.

Cora Oh, wow.

Hugo Then one day, I went to my favourite coffee place, still running through all the ways I might talk to her, or to not look like a fool. I ordered a drink, but the noise around me was too much to think straight. The barista slid the cup across the counter. I grabbed it and turned around, looking for a place to sit – and there she was. Sitting by the entrance, reading a book. As she flipped a page, she looked up and saw me. The whole moment seemed to freeze, the world turning into a still image. Nothing moved – except her face. Softening into the smallest smile, almost invisible. At least, I thought it would. I stood there a bit too long, adding sugar to my coffee that I didn't want, asking the barista for the receipt that I never needed. I glanced back. She was reading, but her eyes kept flicking between the pages and me. My pulse hammered in my chest. My legs started shaking. My throat turned dry. The heat of the cup burned into my hand. The room felt warmer than before – I tried to take a breath, but it got stuck halfway.

Which story stays with you?



listening

Story

Half the time

I'm living in between

Imagined lies

But she's the prettiest I've seen

She snaps me out

Of my permanent day dream

Coffee queue
My senses were prepared
But then there's you
And then I wonder
How I dared to smile back
Or to even walk in here

Looking inside I couldn't see beyond
The drab colours of daily life
I somehow got used to have
Dreaming of dancing on the silver lining
Here and now
It's never the right timing

I'd like to say forever
(don't say forever)
But this doesn't leave you space
If it feels any better
(not together)
I'll let the ocean navigate
I guess sometimes to flatter
Is to view it as a game

I would rather
Speak my mind
But wait

Why live a story already told
Why leave a story untold

In my mind I circle in anxiety
I should take time
Until I find what's meant for me
The more I force
My control is fading

But I'm already feeling
That my life's gonna change
Still your high note flies
Above my vocal range
I would like to shout it
At the top of my lungs
Still I'm silently waiting

I'd like to say forever
(don't say forever)
But this doesn't leave you space
If it feels any better
(not together)
I'll let the ocean navigate

I guess sometimes to flatter

Is to view it as a game

I would rather

Speak my mind

But wait

Story already told
Why leave a story untold

Episode
2

Episode 2

Hugo So yeah... I just stood there and didn't really know what to do.

Cora And then...?

Hugo I started walking towards her. I smiled. Said 'hey' and walked right out of the door.

Cora Wait... what? You just left?

Hugo I didn't know what to say.

Cora Oh wow...

Hugo I mean, what would you have asked?

Cora Hm... I don't know. Something simple like what book she's reading?

Hugo *[sarcastic]* Or whether she knows the wifi password?

Cora *[amused]* Well... maybe not that. But that would have been probably better than walking out the door.

Hugo Well...

Cora At least you would have started a conversation.

Hugo And then what?

Cora I don't know... you would have found out?

Hugo But I didn't want to say something stupid.

Cora *[sarcastic]* So, what? Now you never talk to anyone anymore, just in case?

Hugo No, you don't get it. That situation was different.

Cora What do you mean?

Hugo I mean... what if she doesn't like me? Or what if she thinks I'm weird?

Cora Did you have something to lose?

Hugo Well, it somehow felt like it.

Hugo's mind spins around the question of what he had to lose in that moment. It wasn't money. It wasn't his job. He wouldn't lose his friends, a place to live, or anything that actually mattered in the long run. He couldn't find an answer – nothing concrete, at least. But still, when he thinks back about standing there, it felt like one wrong word could break everything.

Hugo I don't know what it was, but it was strange. Like, if I screwed up I somehow lost the whole game right away.

Cora Hm... but if it was a game... wouldn't you just lose a point and keep playing?

Hugo I guess...

Cora I mean... it's never game over right away, is it?

Hugo Well...

Cora What do you think would have happened if you screwed up?

Hugo Um... I don't know. Maybe that she doesn't want to deal with me once she saw who I was.

Cora Hm... but she never got the chance to see that...

Hugo I guess...?

Cora I wonder... how someone could get to know you if you don't show that part.

Hugo Well, I don't know. I think I've spent so much time adjusting and trying to be whatever the moment needed – or at least what I thought it needed – that I don't even know what feels like... me.

Cora Yeah, I get that.

Hugo Anyway...

Cora How long can you keep doing that before it starts to feel wrong?

Hugo I guess it already does, actually.

Cora Hm...

Hugo exhales, leaning back against his seat, his gaze drifting toward the window. The bus hums low beneath his feet. The driver shifts in his seat and grabs the microphone.

Driver The next stop is coming up. You know how it works, stay seated till we stop, and mind the gap when you step off. Enjoy the rest of your day.

He puts the microphone back and slows down until he comes to a hold. The doors hiss open and two teenagers stumble onto the bus, talking over each other at full speed. Neither listens, both talk and laugh so much they can hardly stay upright. Their faces are buried under makeup, so thick it's impossible to guess what's underneath – as if they were making sure to erase their natural selves before stepping outside. They tumble into the back seats, laughter still spilling in bursts. But within seconds both have pulled out their phones and the noise cuts off. Their eyes get pulled into the glow of their screens, and the bus rolls on. At the very next stop, one of them suddenly yelps. They jump off their seats, shouting over each other, realising they were on the wrong bus.

Laughing again, they stumble out through the doors – and before their sneakers hit the ground, one of them is already calling a friend, breathless, retelling the story as if it were the best joke of the day. The doors close and the laughter vanishes as quickly as it had arrived. As the bus pulls away, Hugo spots the two teenagers striking poses, using the vehicle as the background for snapping selfies.

Hugo *[amused]* Must be a great story for them.

Cora Yeah... it will only get better every time they tell it.

Hugo I bet.

Cora It's funny...

Hugo What?

Cora How something like that just... becomes a story right away.

Hugo Hm...

Cora I mean... they were just on the wrong bus. But now it's already something they can tell.

Hugo Yeah...

Cora I don't know... maybe it's a bit like that moment you described.

Hugo What do you mean?

Cora Like... it didn't seem like a big deal from the outside. But somehow it stayed with you.

Hugo Um... yeah. I guess.

Cora Has something like that happened before?

Hugo Um... I guess no – I mean... yeah. Probably a lot.

Cora Hm...

Hugo But isn't that just life? Things repeat.

Cora Maybe... or maybe it just feels that way.

Hugo What do you mean?

Cora I don't know... there were things I tried not to look at. But somehow they kept showing up again – like it was just waiting.

Hugo Waiting for what?

Cora Waiting for me to finally stop and look at it. Sometimes it feels like certain things just... push you somewhere.

Hugo Hm, I don't know...

Cora Yeah, don't know either. But.. something happened once... that kind of changed things for me.

Hugo What do you mean?

Cora Hm... It's a weird story – I'm not sure if I want to talk about it.

Hugo Oh come on, I just told you mine.

Cora Yeah, I know. It's just... this is a strange one. I don't usually talk about it.

Hugo Alright, fair enough. But for the record, I also usually don't talk about myself to strangers.

Cora doesn't say anything. Her fingers curl slightly around the edge of her sleeve. Even thinking about it makes her body tense. She has told this to barely anyone. And now here she is, on a bus, next to a stranger, wondering if it would be completely stupid – or maybe freeing – to finally let it out. There is something about talking to someone who knows nothing about you. Maybe that's why it feels different – no shared past, no expectation, no consequences. She exhales, barely audible. Then, almost like she's surprising herself.

Cora Alright.

So... one night I was on my way back home from a friend's place.

It was late.

The streets were almost empty.

I walked through the dark.

Almost home.

Close to my building, I passed a group coming from the other way.

I didn't think much of it. Just kept walking.

Then I felt it.

A shift.

Something was different.

I could feel them stop. Feel them turn.
Their eyes cutting through me.

They started walking again.
This time they changed direction.
They were behind me. Following.

I walked faster.
My heart pounding inside my chest.

Their steps speeding up.
Getting closer.

I started running.
Just a few houses away.
Their footsteps behind me.

Too steady. Too close.
I didn't dare to look back.
I reached my building.
Breathing fast.

Hands shaking.
Searching for the keys.
Fumbling.

Dropping them.
Metal clashing on stone.
Picking them up.

Trying again.
Missing the lock.

Scratching against it.
Forcing it in.

Opening the door.
Rushing inside.
Slamming it shut.
Locking it.

The door was glass.

Clear.
Thin.
Almost too thin.

I took a breath and turned around.
There they were.
Facing me.

In between us, only glass.
The whole group.

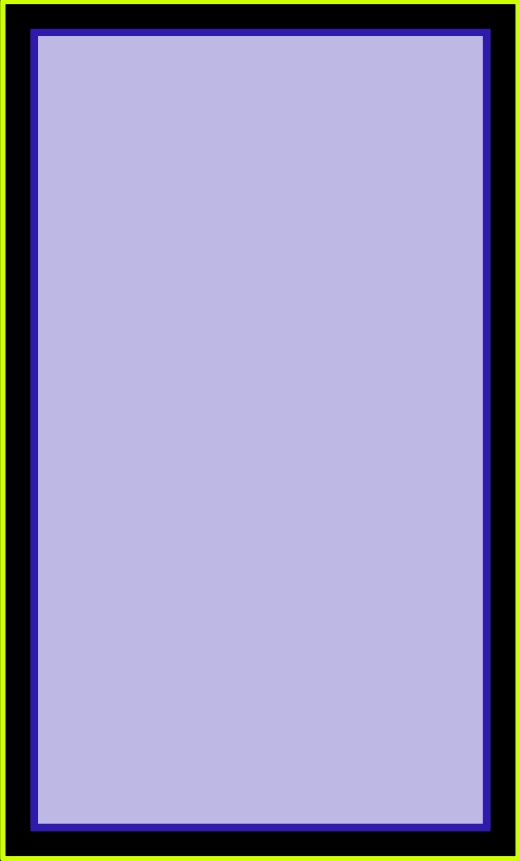
Standing.
Watching.
Waiting.

A hand hit the glass.
Then another.
Then a kick.

The door shook.
And I stood there.

Frozen.

What story hurt you?



listening

Door of Glass

What do you see
When you close your eyes

What do you hear
When there is no noise

But here we are

Face to face

In between us

A door of glass

Why why why
Why do you follow me
Why don't you follow your dreams

I move

I breathe

My heart beats

Follow your dreams

Episode
3

Episode 3

Cora Unable to move.
My breath stuck.
Feet glued to the ground.

Standing there.
So close.
Too close.

If I moved.
They would break through.
So I froze.

Staring at me.
Cold.
Unblinking.

Their fists hitting.
Their feet kicking.
Again and again.

The whole door shook with every blow.
I had to move.

Rushed upstairs. Slammed the next door shut.
Locking it. Pressing my back against the frame.

Hearing them outside. Trying to get in.
For what felt like forever.
My heart kept slamming against my chest.

They didn't get in.
But it didn't feel over.

For days I felt on edge. Every time I walked home, my
heart pounded.
Every sound behind me made my skin crawl.
I told myself to forget about it. To move on.
But my body didn't forget.

A few weeks later the nightmares started.
Waking up. Full of sweat. My heart racing.
In my dreams I was still running. Still being followed.
Every night the same thing. I didn't know what to do.

Cora stares into the air, the memory rolling in front of her eyes
like a movie scene. Hugo feels his heart beating faster. He
hasn't noticed how deeply the story struck him.

Hugo Wow. That's... that's crazy!

Cora Yeah, never experienced something like that before.

Hugo Do you still think about it a lot?

Cora Hm, yeah sometimes. But I see it differently now.

Hugo How do you mean?

Cora Well... for quite a while I kept asking *why*. *Why me?* *Why then?* *Why them?* The same questions kept circling... and nothing really changed. *[pausing]* At some point... I tried something different. I started writing it all down. Everything. Every detail. Every feeling. Just to get it out of me. And slowly, something began to change. It turned into something I could shape. And eventually it all ended up in a song. I had never finished a piece of music before. I didn't even know how to do it – but somehow it happened.

Hugo Oh wow.

Cora So, turning a bad memory into something creative felt lighter in some way. It was like a different side of the story appeared. A side that I couldn't see before. After that, it wasn't just about the fear anymore.

Hugo Not just the fear? What do you mean?

Cora Yeah... I think it opened something. Like I hadn't really allowed myself to be creative for a long time.
I mean... for years, I wanted to write songs. I started so many, bits and pieces here and there. And I had this idea of making a whole album. But I could never even finish one song.

Hugo Why not?

Cora No clue... I always found a reason. Like, when I got close to the end I suddenly lost interest. Or I would convince myself it wasn't good enough. Or I just didn't have enough time. I had my excuses – suddenly a hundred little tasks seemed more important. But... if I'm honest – most of the time, it was me standing in my own way.

Hugo And you think that night changed it?

Cora Well... it felt horrible for quite a while. But somehow it opened something – like a way back to what I was avoiding for years. I didn't even realise how far I had drifted away until I started creating again.

Hugo Hm... I don't think I would be able to see anything good in a story like that.

Cora Yeah, I couldn't either. I was completely stuck in fear for quite some time. I just felt trapped in it.

Hugo Yeah... I think I know that feeling.

Cora It was difficult for me to step back – to even realise there could be another version. But slowly, something started to feel different.

Hugo But... it's so easy to only see the bad version. The victim part feels so solid. Like... *this is just how it happened*. End of story.

Cora I know. It feels so real in the moment, right? But sometimes I wonder... what if it keeps coming back because there's still something in it I haven't really looked at?

Hugo Even if it hurts?

Cora I don't know... for me it hurt less once I stopped pushing it away.

Hugo Hm... I don't think I could do that. Even if I wanted to.

Cora What if you thought of it as a game?

Hugo A game?

- Cora** Like a puzzle – or a quest. You know those escape rooms?
- Hugo** Um... yeah?
- Cora** You have to figure out the clues to move on. Otherwise you stay stuck in the same room... until you solve it.
- Hugo** Ugh... that sounds awful. I would probably just sit in the corner and wait for the staff to come in and say: 'Alright, we're closing now, time to leave.'
- Cora** Haha... what if there is no staff and you have to find the key yourself?
- Hugo** Then I'm lost.
- Cora** Well... then you kind of have to start somewhere, don't you? I mean... I don't know if there's any other way. *[joking]* But hey, let me know if you find one.
- Hugo** I don't even know where to start looking.
- Cora** Hm... what do you think the story you shared is telling you about yourself?
- Hugo** I don't know... I mean, I never really thought about that.

Cora Maybe that's your puzzle.

Hugo drifts into a mental labyrinth – an escape room built of thoughts. He scans the walls, searching for a clue. Something that tells him what he's even supposed to do here. As he scans the room, he notices something in the corner. At first, he's not sure what he's seeing. Just a shape. Still. As his eyes adjust, it becomes clearer. Someone is sitting there. On a chair. Facing the wall. Not moving. Hugo freezes. Something about him feels familiar. Like he has seen him before, but can't remember where. His mind starts spinning:

What is this person doing in my room?

Should I tell him to leave?

Why don't I just go over and talk to him?

He tries to take a step toward the figure, but his feet feel glued to the floor. He shifts his weight. Nothing moves. His body tenses. He forces one foot off the ground and takes a step forward. With the second step, the room vanishes.

He's back on the bus – irritated. Slowly he wiggles a toe, testing whether his foot is still stuck, but it moves easily – as if nothing ever held him. Hugo glances to the side to see if Cora saw the figure too, but she's staring into her book. He exhales.

Hugo [whispering to himself] That was weird...

Cora [looking up] What?

Hugo I don't know... it felt like I got stuck somewhere.
Like... I couldn't move.

Cora Stuck?

Hugo I don't know why, but it feels like something holds
me back from moving. Like something is holding me
in place. It's like... I can't really move towards people.

Cora Wait... that reminds me of something I read in this
book. Let me check. It's about how we get stuck
sometimes.

Cora flips through the book, scanning the pages. After a
moment she stops and points to a sentence.

Cora Here: *'Sometimes the question isn't what happens to
us – but what we quietly start believing about
ourselves because of it. What we believe about
ourselves shapes how we act.'*

Hugo So?

- Cora** Well... what do you think would happen if you connected with people?
- Hugo** Um... I guess that I would get rejected. But I don't even know where that comes from.
- Cora** It's strange, right? How something can feel so true – even when it hurts us.
- Hugo** Hm... I can't really imagine it any other way.
- Cora** Yeah... I know that feeling.
- Hugo** Sometimes I think... it would just be easier if other people changed.
- Cora** Oh... why that?
- Hugo** Well, if others changed, I think I would have less problems.
- Cora** But what do you want to be different?
- Hugo** I guess... just have less pressure on me. So I don't have to keep adjusting all the time, you know?
- Cora** But are they really the ones putting pressure on you?
- Hugo** Well, who else is?

Cora looks at him, like she is waiting for him to answer his own question. Hugo stays quiet, hoping to get an answer from her. For a while, they both just sit and wait for the other to speak. Slowly, Hugo realises he's not getting the answer he was waiting for. His thoughts turn inward, the question circling in his mind. He stares out the window – but wherever he looks, the question follows.

[pause]

On the glass of the window, his own face looks back at him. It isn't the reflection that surprises him, but what it shows. Pressure. Expectation. Doubt. For a moment, he stares at himself. Getting lost in thoughts, drifting further and further. Jumping from one memory to another, catching fragments. Unable to hold on to any, as new ones pull him away. His thoughts are racing, chasing each other as if something were right behind them. The bus rumbles beneath his feet. He turns his head – Cora is watching him, her expression unchanged. Still waiting, as if no time had passed at all.

Hugo Well, okay. Maybe I'm putting a little pressure on myself.

Cora Okay...

Hugo Well, maybe more than a little. I don't even know what it would be like without it. That would probably feel weird.

Cora Not putting pressure on you would be weird?

Hugo Yeah... I mean – no. I don't know how to say it.

Cora But do you think it gives you something?

Hugo Well... if I push myself hard enough, I won't fail. Without it... I don't know if I would make it.

Cora And what if you tried not pushing yourself for a while?

Hugo And then?

Cora I don't know. See what happens.

Hugo *[sarcastic]* Wow. Can't wait.

Cora Maybe you will like it.

Hugo Maybe. I guess we will see.

Cora *[joking]* Well... try it first.

Hugo Maybe later.

Cora giggles and dives back into her book. Hugo turns to the window and remembers moments where he forced himself. Pushing himself to do things he didn't want to do, acting in ways that never felt like him, saying words that didn't belong to him. And what for? What did he get out of it? He starts feeling like an actor who doesn't know his lines – waiting for the director to whisper what to say.

The scenes keep rolling in his mind, and still he keeps playing along. Maybe that's what exhausts him most – not the effort itself, but the pretending. The need to keep up an image of himself – this facade that shouldn't break. For a moment, he wonders what would happen if he simply stopped performing.

Hugo You know...

I used to think I had it all figured out.

Like, I knew how this game worked.

Just play by the rules.

Fit in.

Keep things smooth.

Don't make noise.

Do what's expected and everything will be fine.

That's what they say, right?

It seemed like there was this invisible book of rules.
And I was constantly trying not to break them.

Keep smiling. Stay useful.

Be polite. Don't take up too much space.

But the more I think about it, the stranger those
rules seem.

Like they were never meant to help me – just to
hold me in line.

Keeping me quiet. Keeping me small.

And the strange thing is:

I believed them.

I picked them up.

I followed them.

I made them part of me.

And now, they play in the background.

Or maybe they're playing me.

Like old tapes I didn't even know were still running.

I'm starting to wonder:

*How much of what I believe is just something I've
been telling myself over and over?*

Like habits dressed up as truth.
Maybe I've just been performing this role.
Trying to be who I think I'm supposed to be.
Without even knowing who that is.

And some of it feels so real.
The pressure. The doubt.
The need to prove myself.
There is this voice in my head:

Don't mess it up.
Don't be too much.
Don't make it weird.

Just work harder.
Just pretend it's fine.
Just say 'yes' one more time.

I don't even know whose voice that is.
But it's loud.

So the question is:

What happens if I stop listening to it?
What if it's not even true?
What if I've been hiding this whole time?

What are you hiding?



listening

Mask

Let's take off our mask

And show who we are

Let's not be afraid

To share our scar

Let's open our mind

Letting it all go

Let's blow away our mask
And show what's behind
Let's face our dream
And be the way we are
Without a mask

Let's break off our mask
And reveal what's inside
Let's share what we can find
And leave fear behind
Let's start to reconnect
And find our own way back

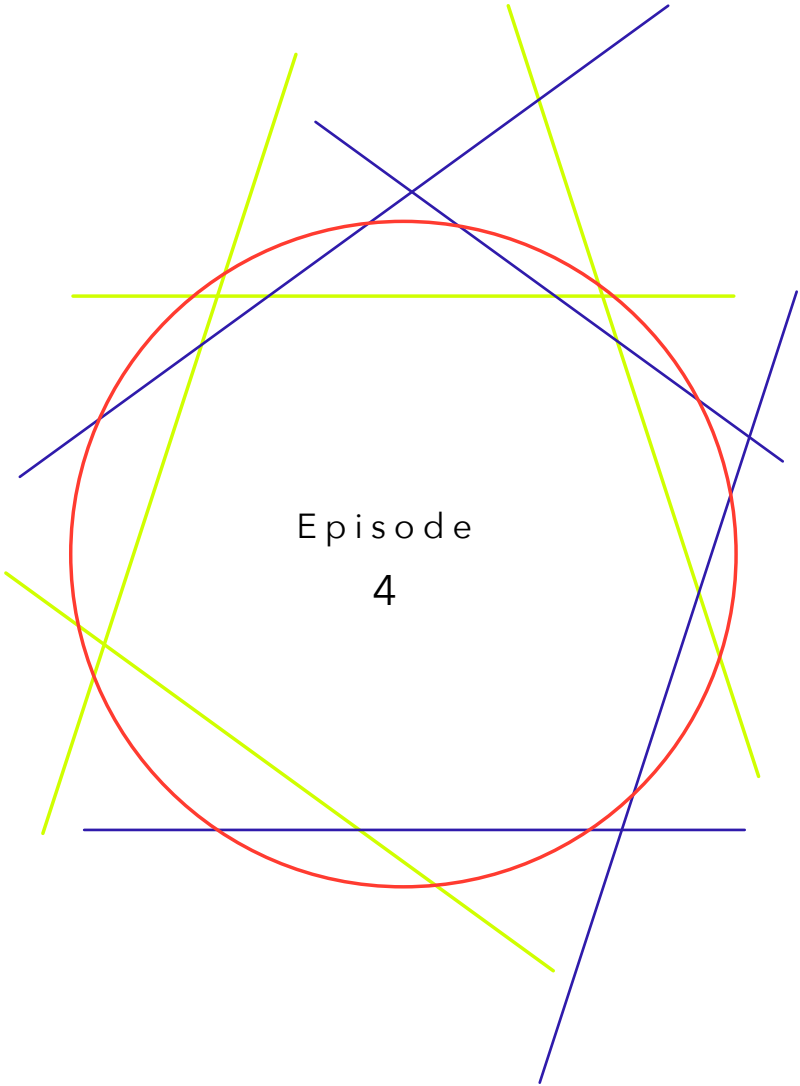
Let's blow away our mask
And show what's behind
Let's face our dream
And be the way we are

We're hiding from our self
So scared to look inside
Instead of sharing with the world
We are creating our mask

We're hiding from our truth
So scared of what's behind
Instead of changing our world
We are painting our mask

We're hiding from our light
So scared to move inside
Instead of caring for the world

We are living our mask
We are painting our mask
We are creating our mask
We just imagine our mask



Episode 4

Hugo And maybe the scariest part is:

What's left when I stop trying to follow all those rules?

Hugo hesitates. His thumb stops tapping. Hands lie still on his legs. For a moment he just stares through the glass – past his own reflection, into the sky.

Everything seems to pause. His breath holds, his thoughts drift into silence. He hears a soft noise, something he hadn't noticed before. A bird glides by with open wings – he watches it move through the air, drifting, shifting, circling back, without any planned pattern. It doesn't seem to follow anyone or any rules. It doesn't ask for permission, it simply flies. How strange, he thinks, that he can't move like that – free of direction, without the need for approval. For a while he just watches, tracing its path through the wind, imagining how it would look if the bird left a visible trail, like an airplane – patterns hanging in the air, like paintings drawn into the sky. But then he realises that it might not be such a good idea – it would probably look foggy all the time. He turns back to Cora and sees her staring at the floor. No movement. No reaction.

For a second, Hugo wonders if he said something wrong. If maybe he made her uncomfortable. That familiar voice coming back: *You went too far. You made it awkward. You shouldn't have done it.* His thumb starts tapping against his leg again. But then, Cora lifts her head with a hint of a smile in one corner of her mouth.

Hugo Sorry, I think I lost track of where I was going.

Cora No worries... it went somewhere nice.

Hugo But I don't really get it. Even if I tried to do things differently... I wouldn't even know where to start.

Cora Hm, I also don't know. It's always easier to just talk about this stuff than actually doing it.

Hugo Huh, so... now what?

Cora I don't know. Still trying to figure it out.

Hugo Hm...

Cora That's actually why I started this trip in the first place.

Hugo Why? To figure things out?

Cora Well... to find clarity, I guess. It's just so hard to do that in daily life. There is so much distraction – I needed some distance.

Hugo Yeah... I think I know what you mean. *[pausing]*
Did you get any answers?

Cora Hm... one thing I came across recently is that we have to find and accept the hidden parts.

Hugo Which hidden parts?

Cora I heard someone talk about it in a course. If I remember right, they called it the shadows we push away. The parts we ignore. The things we don't really want to look at.

Hugo Ah...

Cora I think they said the more we hide them, the more they end up shaping us.

Hugo But... what if we don't even realise which parts we're hiding?

Cora Then maybe that's our puzzle to figure out.

Hugo Oh, not more puzzles.

Cora *[amused]* I guess that's part of the deal.

Hugo *[sarcastic]* Great.

Cora I think they also said we need to look at them before anything can really change.

Hugo Hm... but what if the change is scary? Maybe it's easier to just stick with what we already know and be fine with it.

Cora But what if that change is exactly what we've been waiting for?

Hugo Hm... I don't know. Somehow I don't want to lose the version of me I'm used to.

Cora Yeah, I get that. But maybe... some things have to end before something new can begin. Even if it seems scary.

Hugo But... how do I even know where to go next? What if I make a wrong choice and regret it later?

Cora shrugs. For a while they sit silently, circling the same question: *How do you know what comes next?*

[pause]

The bus driver – sitting diagonally in front of them, tilts his head slightly. His eyes flick to the mirror, catching a glimpse of Cora and Hugo from the corner of his eye – just for a second. Then he looks back at the road, his hands steady on the wheel. Cora and Hugo stare into nowhere, drifting through the landscapes of their minds. Corridors of thoughts, hidden rooms of questions. Passing doors that never have been opened. Flickering shadows on the walls, painting forgotten memories waiting to be seen. The bus keeps rolling, through a world paused mid frame.

Driver Not so easy, huh?

Cora and Hugo get snapped out of their daydream. They exchange a quick glance, then lean forward slightly, shifting in their seats to get a better look at the man who, until now, had been nothing more than the silent figure steering the bus. For a second, they wonder if he was talking to everyone. But no one reacts – it doesn't seem like anyone noticed him at all. A flicker of doubt crosses their minds: *Did he actually speak?* They wait for something to happen. He stays silent and just keeps driving. His head turns slightly. The corner of his eye catches them. His eyebrows lift, just a little.

Driver You need something?

Hugo *[confused]* Um... I thought you said something.

Driver Hm? No.

Cora But you said something. Like... 'not so easy'?

Driver Oh... right.

Cora So?

Driver What?

Cora What is not so easy?

Driver Oh... to stay here.

Hugo Where?

Driver Right here.

Hugo What do you mean?

Driver Well, sometimes our body is here, but the rest of us is somewhere else, huh?

Hugo Somewhere else? I don't get it.

Driver Stuck in the mind. Busy thinking about things, know what I mean?

Hugo Well, there is always something to think about.

Driver *[smiling]* You think so?

Hugo I mean, thoughts never really stop.

Driver If you say so.

Cora What are you trying to say?

Driver I'm not trying to say anything.

Hugo What? I'm confused.

Cora Me too.

Driver Never mind.

Cora and Hugo exchange a puzzled look – wondering if this is a prank or if they should even take him seriously. What he says doesn't quite make sense to them.

Cora What do you mean?

Driver I mean, maybe there is a better place to be than inside your head.

Hugo I could think of a few places that would be better right now.

Driver And where is that?

Hugo At the final stop for example.

Driver But you're still here on the bus.

Hugo That's the problem.

Driver So your only chance is to find a different place inside.

Hugo Inside where?

Driver Inside yourself?

Hugo I'm lost.

Driver *[laughing]* I see that.

Cora What different place inside do you mean?

Driver For example your heart? Ever tried to check in there?

Hugo What?

Driver People always check the time, check the map, check the phone – but never really check their heart.

Cora What do you mean?

Driver Well, you know the heart has its own little brain in it?

Hugo *[skeptical]* A brain?

Driver Yeah. And you know what? Apparently the heart can think on its own.

Hugo But... how? I mean, we don't think with the heart.

Driver Exactly. That's kind of the problem, isn't it? We're so used to being stuck in our head that we don't even notice it.

Hugo I never heard of that.

Driver Well, now you did.

Cora But what are you supposed to do with that?

Driver Before you get into that... you gotta do something else first.

Cora And what?

Driver First thing you gotta do is stop distracting yourself... just look around.

Hugo and Cora glance around. Most of the passengers are staring into their phones, their faces bathing in the glow of their screens. Fingers scrolling. Eyes empty. Lost in a world behind the glass, far from here. As they scroll, their faces flicker in shifting light – sometimes a smile flashes for a moment, then fades, leaving the same stone-like stillness behind. Only a small child presses its face against the window, nose touching the glass. Eyes wide open, fixed on the sky – watching the stars, as if seeing something no one else does.

Driver Where is everyone? Not really here, huh? Scrolling. Consuming. One thing after another. I mean, I also get lost in it. It's confusing. Sometimes I forget where I'm supposed to be.

Hugo Well, I think I don't know where I'm supposed to be.

Cora Yeah, same here.

Driver Maybe it's not really about the actual place. Your body can be anywhere... it's more about where your attention ends up.

Cora Hm... So what can we do about it?

Driver Just pause. Get quiet for a moment and sit with whatever is there.

The driver falls silent. Cora and Hugo look irritated at each other – unsure how they ended up in this conversation. None of the other passengers even seem to notice what's going on. Everyone is caught up with their own things. Faces still bathing in screen light. Cora shifts in her seat. Hugo's thumb taps on his leg. Their minds spin in circles, reaching for something to hold onto. Something about the moment feels strange. Too many thoughts. Too much noise. Too little space.

Cora closes her eyes. Hugo does the same, but opens them again after a few seconds. He forces them shut once more, but can't hold it for long. He exhales sharply through his nose and leans back, rubbing his hands over his face.

Hugo There is just so much to think about.

Driver There is! And it will never stop.

Hugo So what now?

Driver There is nothing wrong with thoughts... just let them come and go. The moment you start holding on to them, you get pulled into them. Hard to follow your heart like that.

Hugo I thought *follow your heart* is just a saying.

Driver It's just a saying if you don't really listen to it. But... it's different when you do. Depends if you want to pay attention.

Cora But how?

Driver Feel it. Be aware of your heart beating.

For a moment, they just sit there – unsure what to do. Cora holds her breath without noticing. Hugo tries to think his way into the heart, but his mind keeps drifting to how long it will take to finally reach his stop.

[pause]

Hugo Why are we doing this?

Driver To check out what you feel.

Hugo I don't feel anything. Do you?

Cora Hm... I feel something. But it hurts a bit in that area.

Driver Ah, yeah... that's normal, stuff builds up over time. Old feelings we didn't deal with – it doesn't just disappear. The heart kind of holds onto it until we're ready to let it move through.

Hugo What? Why would I want to feel something that hurts?

Driver Well... pushing it away doesn't make it go anywhere, it just sticks around and waits. You can't really choose which feelings are inside – you kinda have to face it at some point.

Cora So... you mean it's easier to feel what's inside than running from it?

Driver Easier? No. It's easier to run away – at least for a while. But the longer you run, the heavier it gets.

Hugo *[mumbling]* I wish I had taken a different bus.

Driver You wanna get off? You can stop any time.

Hugo No, no. I'm good for now.

Driver Good choice. Actually there is no way to stop here anyway.

Hugo *[sarcastic]* Great.

Cora So... what happens when you feel the heart?

Driver Hm. Hard to say. Feels different every time.

Hugo And you? Are you able to feel it?

Driver Sometimes, but not always. For quite a while I was stuck in my head – couldn't feel a damn thing. Just thoughts. Stress. Problems. And many more thoughts. Took a while to get into it.

Cora How was it before?

Driver Huh. I got pissed off at everything. Especially how people drive out there. I would curse all day. Honking. Swearing. Wanting to quit this job every damn morning. I was distracting myself – smoked like a chimney. Couldn't wait for the next break just to light one up – thought it would help me relax. But I'm telling you... I just couldn't sit with myself.

Cora And that changed?

Driver Pff, I wouldn't go back to how I was before. No way. Still lighting one now and then... just not every break anymore.

Cora So what is different now?

Driver Now? When I manage to stay in my heart everything just feels... clearer. Like the fog lifts. I still see things that suck and annoy me, but I don't have to react right away. I just drive the damn bus. And let me tell you, now I actually enjoy it. I realised that it doesn't matter what I'm doing, or where I am. And you know what? Turns out, life's a hell of a lot easier when you're not always trying to escape it.

Cora Oh, I want that too.

Driver Well, maybe start with –

Suddenly, without warning a car cuts sharply in front of the bus. The driver hits the brake. The bus jolts. Cora and Hugo grip their seats. The driver's arm shoots up in reflex, like he's about to shout something. His mouth opens...

Driver Oh come on, you absolute...

His jaw locks. The rest of the words never come. His hands tighten around the steering wheel. For a moment he just sits there, frozen between impulse and restraint. A sharp breath escapes through his nose. Then another – slower this time. His shoulders rise, then sink again. The grip on the wheel loosens slightly. One more breath. Slowly, the tension from his arms softens. Outside, the traffic keeps moving as if nothing happened.

Driver Sorry about that.

Cora No worries.

Hugo Thought you said you don't have to react anymore.

Driver Doesn't mean I always remember.

Cora *[joking]* At least you didn't honk.

Driver Yeah. Progress. So easy to get trapped. The mind always tries to grab the wheel again. Maybe it's just about noticing when you drift away – and remembering you can come back.

Hugo Sounds so strange to me.

Driver Sounds like your head talking... or?

Hugo Um... I don't know.

Cora So how do we stop that?

Driver You don't. Just notice your thoughts showing up. They will probably keep coming... but you don't have to believe them. Just come back to your heart.

Cora So... how do we get into it?

Driver Start simple. Take a breath. Feel your heart beat. Just sit with it. Let the thoughts come and go.

Hugo And then... what do we do when we get there?

Driver See how it feels. And do whatever lights you up.

Neither of them answers. The driver's words bounce around inside their heads, colliding with everything they used to believe. Cora exhales slowly. Hugo shifts in his seat. Then, almost at the same time, they close their eyes. They sit in stillness, letting the world fade away for a moment. Trying to find it. Trying to feel it. The space inside their chest.

[pause]

A few moments later, Hugo blinks his eyes open and shifts nervously in his seat. His forehead tight, eyebrows drawn together, jaw clenched.

Hugo *[annoyed]* I can't do this.

Driver Why?

Hugo My thoughts just keep jumping all over the place.

Driver That's normal. Usually we just don't realise it. Wait a second... I think I've got something that might help. Somewhere around here I should have a CD with a little journey – that usually helps me a lot.

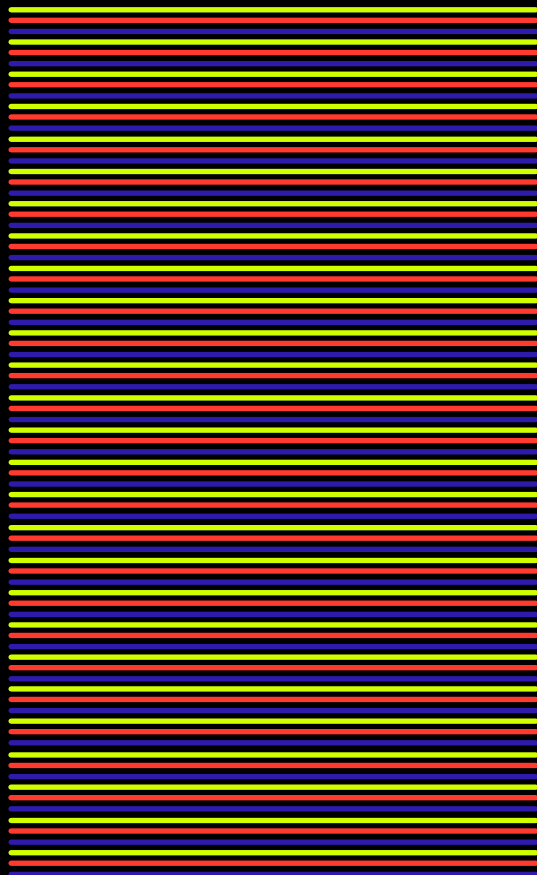
Cora and Hugo sink back into their seats, watching as the bus driver digs through a stack of old CDs – some scratched, some without cases. They look at each other, still puzzled. Hugo leans slightly toward Cora, lowering his voice so the bus driver won't hear.

Hugo *[whispering]* What's going on here?

Cora *[whispering]* No clue. Maybe it's just another story.

The bus driver finally finds what he was looking for and slides the CD into the player. With the press of a button, the soft static of the radio fades.

What are you waiting for?



listening

Scanning

I invite you to take a moment for yourself

Just be here as you are

Notice the weight in your legs

Feel the contact with the ground

Your breath moves in and out

It happens on its own

You don't have to do anything

Your belly follows your breath
Expanding with the inhale
Returning with the exhale

You might notice a quiet rhythm
Inside your chest

Across your shoulders

Tension fades

Your arms hang

With their own weight

Your hands soften

Small shifts appear in your neck

Tiny stretches

Subtle rotations

Feel how your jaw loosens
How your tongue relaxes

Softness spreads across your face

Around the eyes

Through the cheeks

And along the forehead

What makes you shine?

listening

Stars

There's a billion answers to why

There's a billion reasons to cry

There's a billion clues in the sky

So pick one and take it home with you

Pick one and make it your own

There's a billion thoughts flying high
There's a billion ways of goodbye
There's a billion tears we could dry

So pick one and take it home with you
Pick one and come back home

There's a billion days that pass by
So stop
Turn around and fly

Let the stars tell you
What you're here to do
And then trust that
It's the right thing for you

Let the stars show you
The path that leads you through
And then walk like
It's the only way for you

There's a billion rules to defy
There's a billion parts to untie
There's a billion smiles in your eye

So pick one and take it home with you

Pick one

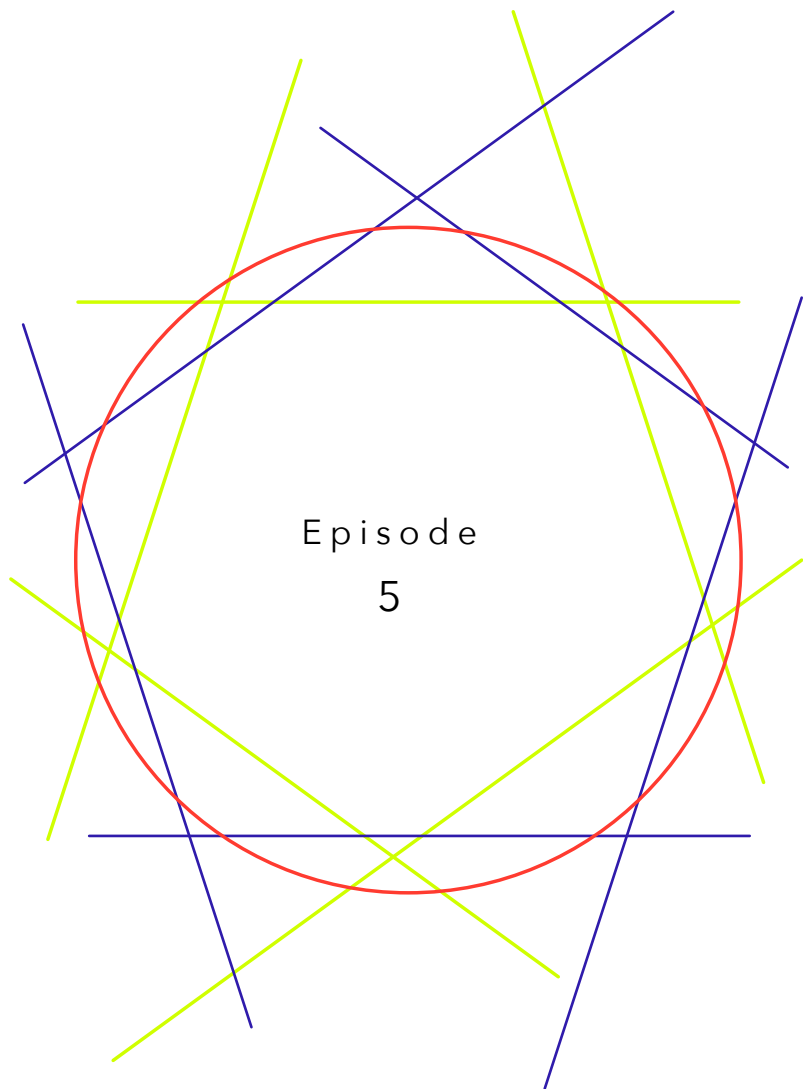
You're not alone

There's a billion laws to comply
But pause and start to shine

Let the stars tell you
What you're here to do
And then trust that
It's the right thing for you

Let the stars show you
The path that leads you through
And then walk like
It's the only way for you

S T A R S



Episode
5

Episode 5

Music from the radio seeps in, barely there at first. Soft and distant, like it's been playing for a while already. Something low hums underneath. Then the low sound drops away. Cora blinks and sighs. Hugo doesn't move.

Driver Welcome back.

Cora Where are we?

Driver At the last stop.

Cora Oh...

Cora taps Hugo on the shoulder. His eyes blink open, still heavy. It takes a moment for them to adjust to the dim light. Everything feels off. Like waking up somewhere you don't quite remember falling asleep. Hugo shifts upright, stretching his neck, rubbing his face with both hands. He looks around with eyes half open – the bus stands still, almost empty. Just a few people gather their things and step outside.

Hugo What happened?

Driver Well, you fell asleep.

Hugo Really?

Driver Yep. Happens when you're not used to looking inside.

Hugo *[annoyed]* Ugh. I tried to do it right.

Driver You will figure it out – there's no rush.

Hugo So... what now?

Driver *[amused]* What now? Now you get off the bus.
We reached the final stop and I'm done for today.

Surprised, Hugo glances at Cora, then back at him. The driver laughs, turns away and starts to clean up. He bends down, picking up an empty bottle from the floor. He tosses it into a bag already half full with crumpled coffee cups, greasy plastic boxes and other leftovers from the journey. He shakes his head, wondering why people always leave their mess for someone else to clean up.

The two travellers, still sluggish, sling their backpacks over their shoulders and move toward the exit. As they step down onto solid ground, the warm summer air embraces them. Above, a dark curtain of sky scattered with bright dots. In the distance, a mountain peak looms, reaching as if to touch the stars. For a moment, Cora and Hugo just stand still, gazes lifted, listening to the bus driver rattling through the trash in the background.

Hugo This is all a bit strange.

Cora What do you mean?

Hugo I don't know. Not sure what to think anymore.

Cora Me neither. Maybe it will all make more sense later.

Hugo Maybe.

Cora So... what are you up to now?

Hugo There's a campsite not far from here – I'll stay there for the night. What about you?

Cora Don't know... I didn't make any plans. Maybe I join.

The rattling of the bag comes closer. The driver passes them and tosses the trash into a container, seemingly relieved to be rid of the leftovers. On the way back to the bus he stops next to them. He tilts his head back and lets a long breath escape. For a moment the three of them just stare into the distant dark.

[pause]

Cora It's so calming to see this.

Hugo *[surprised]* Really? For me it's strange.

Cora Why?

Hugo There are so many questions – and most of them we can't answer. We know so little about everything that's out there, you know? It's so weird.

Cora Hm.

Driver But isn't that the whole mystery?

Hugo What do you mean?

Driver It's not like you need answers to all questions.

Hugo But I want to understand how it all works. Otherwise, what's the point?

Driver Maybe there is no point.

Hugo What? What's the point if there is no point? That doesn't make sense.

Driver Maybe you just have to choose what the point is.

Hugo What? That's... confusing.

Driver Why?

Hugo I don't even know the options to choose from.

Driver So you need to know more in order to make a decision?

Hugo *[confused]* I guess so.

Driver *[joking]* Well, then just wait for the moment when you know everything to choose something.

Hugo Yeah... that sounds good.

Driver Oh come on, you're already deciding all the time. You chose to take this bus, to get off at this stop. Okay no, maybe you didn't choose to get off here – you fell asleep and I kicked you out. But anyway, right now you're choosing to stand here and stare into the sky.

Hugo Actually I wanted to get off here.

Driver Well, lucky you. Just saying, every moment is a decision. If you don't like it, choose something else.

Hugo But I still don't know what to choose.

Driver Well, what lights you up? What are you excited about? The trick isn't to figure it out with your head, it's to listen to your body. You can feel the difference. When it's wrong, you feel smaller, more restrained. When something is right, it pulls you gently forward and gives you energy.

Hugo Hm.

[short pause]

Driver Like the stars. They don't try to be anything other than what they are. They simply shine. Maybe that is the point.

Cora What do you mean?

Driver Start to shine.

Hugo But how do you shine?

Driver You tell me what makes you shine.

Hugo *[hesitant]* Well, I think...

Driver *[interrupting]* Yeah, that's the problem – you're thinking about it too much. Just notice what's already there.

Cora But I still feel like I hold myself back.

Driver Then notice that. That's when the story starts to change.

Hugo I don't get what you mean.

Driver Alright. Let's take an example.

[short pause]

Driver Imagine your life was a book.

You're reading it – sentence after sentence, page after page, chapter after chapter. You're the main character it's about. But sometimes you get stuck in one chapter, repeating it over and over instead of moving on. You experience everything that's written. Every fear, every doubt. You get so involved in the story that you forget you're actually holding the book in your hands. Because you're not just the character living it – you're also the one reading. And when you zoom out and start observing the story instead of living it, you begin to notice the patterns. The same stories showing up in new settings, the side characters who keep returning, the endings that keep looping. And when you start to see that, something shifts. You might realise you don't have to keep reading the same pages over and over – you can always start a new chapter. And maybe this is getting a little weird for your brain now, but just imagine you're not only the character and the reader, but you're the author as well – writing it as you go. At any moment, you can flip the page, start a new chapter, write a different version or create a whole different story.

Hugo *[sarcastic]* Sounds easy.

Driver I'm not saying it's easy. It takes a while to zoom out and see that you're not just a character playing a role. But once you see that you're also the reader and the author of your story, you stop being trapped inside.

Cora And then?

Driver Then you're free. Free to keep reading, to change the story or to write something new. To me it seems like we have been repeating the same chapters long enough by now. Maybe it's time to move on.

Cora But how do we move on?

Driver Sometimes the best thing is to close the book. To enjoy the silence between the words. And listen. You will start to hear how the story wants to continue.

Hugo But I always end up thinking about something.

Driver Alright. Just come back to listening. Again and again.

Hugo *[sarcastic]* Oh great. That's not what I wanted to hear.

Driver Then don't. You can also keep repeating the old chapters if you prefer. It's your choice.

Cora I don't want that anymore.

Driver Then continue... and ask yourself this question:

If my life was a book, and I had been reading it the whole time – what would I be whispering to the pages, wishing I would finally do?

He doesn't wait for an answer. He turns, walks back and steps into the bus. The engine hums, doors hiss shut. One hand gives them a wave, the other steers the wheel. Hugo watches the bus roll away from the station. His hand lifts slightly, then drops again. Cora and Hugo stand in silence on the warm asphalt watching it disappear into the night. For a moment neither of them moves. The sound of the bus engine fades away. Still puzzled by everything that just happened, they stand there a little longer before they start walking toward the campsite.

Exit to Continue?

listening

Exit

What is a story

What are the stories I tell myself about myself

And which of them do I believe

Mental constructions
Projected onto the world
Forming identity

A fragile feeling of safety
Keeping me locked in a mental prison
Holding me back from adventure

Living the story
Day after day
Directing my actions

How I think
How I feel
How I act

How strange to follow a script
Hidden in the unconscious
Buried under distraction

Blaming the past
Holding on to it
Carrying what is long gone

Stories tell me who I am

They let me hide

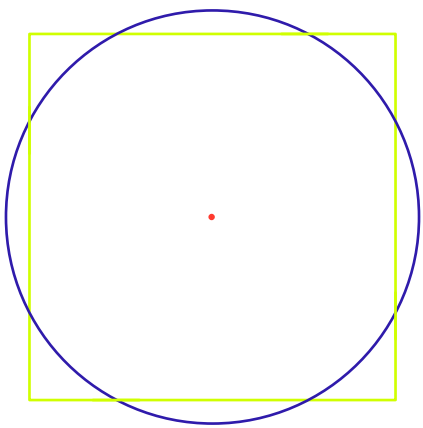
And make me feel safe

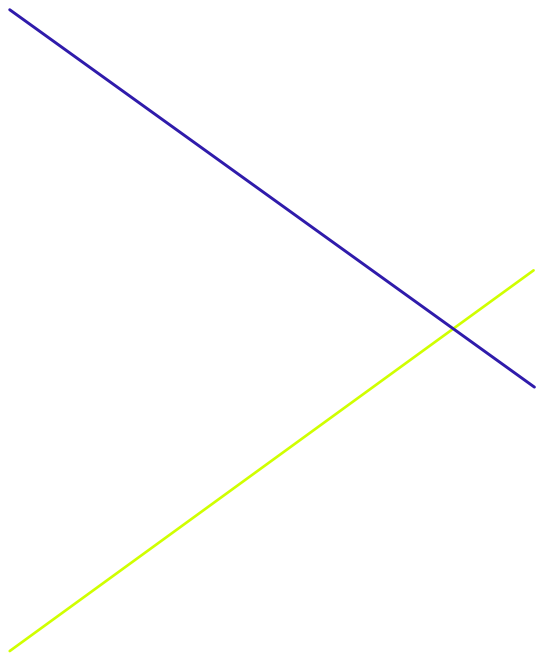
But who is behind

All stories I tell myself about myself

The ones I believe in so deeply

And what if
I told the story
A little different





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