

Chapter One

"The job is fairly simple."

They were in a room lit with warm lights overhead. The walls were white. The desk was white. In fact, most of the room was white except for an orange sofa chair in the corner. Eva was seated at the desk. She picked up a thin metallic card from a box marked with gray, and installed it onto a rack on the desk. The rack looked like one of those old eye-testing machines to Mitch. Eva leaned into the soft foam and rested her chin there. She adjusted its height by twisting a knob until her forehead lined up perfectly with the suspended card.

"You put your forehead up to the film like this, close your eyes, take a deep breathe, and just give it a good feel." She did exactly what she described. A moment later, she leaned back and opened her eyes. Mitch wasn't sure if he had just caught a

glimpse of a tear, or it was just a reflection. Eva smiled.

"We put good ones in the box marked with green and bad ones in the boxes marked with red. This was good one! And to take the film out, a simple click here and voila, just like that."

Eva put the card in the green box and it went click. She continued, "A lot of people would ask what to do if they feel unsure about a film, which is totally fair, some films simply have less strong of a feeling contained within them than others. From my experience, always go with your instincts. If your immediate reaction tells you it's good, then it's good. Don't doubt it! The films are diluted so well that it's almost impossible for mistakes. And even if, in the very rare case, that some of the bad ones snuck through by accident, the sheer amount of positive memons in the rest of the good ones would make mistakes negligible once it's sent out to the Ring. So there's really no need for concerns at all. The key is: don't doubt your feelings."

Eva got up from the desk and signaled for Mitch to take the seat. "Here, now you try it."

Mitch nodded. He sat down and followed Eva's instructions. He put his own chin on the foam, he grabbed a new card from the box, installed it on the rack, adjusted the height, and leaned in.

"Remember, don't doubt!" Eva added once again.

Mitch closed his eyes and breathed in.

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I count 12 lights on the street in front of the house;

48 more from the apartments down the road;

1000 more dance beyond the horizon;

And a single more alone in the sky.

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"So? What do you feel?" Eva asked eagerly.

"Well, I... don't think it's good?"

"Then it goes into the red box."

Mitch obliged, putting the card into the red box.

"Although it is impossible to discern the original memory contained within each film, the feelings they trigger are always specifically tied to the original memory. A sort of deja vu if you will. Did you see anything? Hear or smell anything? "

Mitch thought for a moment and said: "I saw, no, felt a moon above a city at night, sort of. But, this may sound stupid, somehow I just knew the moon was lonely. It just..."

"Felt that way?"

"For the lack of a better word, I guess, yeah."

"You are exactly right! If that imagery of the lonely moon felt bad to you, that your decision of putting it in the red box

is correct!"

Mitch nodded: "It's interesting. How can I be the judge of whether or not what I felt would be deemed as 'good' or 'bad'?" He air-quoted with his fingers, "Like the memory itself... it's pretty vague. I get that they are different each time, but even if we take the same 'scene' that I saw and described to you, wouldn't you or someone else may have a different reading on how 'good' or 'bad' it is to you?"

"That's a very good observation, Mitch. Yes, purely based your description of the scene: a moon above a city at night, I'd say it's kind of peaceful and calm. However, that's also where the magic of the human mind comes in." Eva got Mitch out of the chair so she could sit back down. She pulled the same card back out and waved it in front of him.

"You see, what you feel in this is unique to you. You mentioned the word 'lonely' in your description, didn't you? Why? Did that feeling of loneliness stood out to you? Is that why you categorized it as a bad memory? Now, say if I tried the same film."

Eva installed the card again and put her own forehead against it. She closed her eyes, and just for a moment, her eyebrows squeezed. It was barely noticeable, but Mitch caught it, again. She opened her eyes again.

"Fascinating, isn't it? I also saw a city at night! But in mine, a street lamp was flickering, and it triggered..." Eva paused, and corrected herself, "well, it left me a sense of uneasiness and creepiness. I would definitely judge this as a 'bad' memory too, but out of creepiness from your loneliness. See how that works?"

"Does everyone 'see' things from these?" Mitch found himself using the air-quotes a lot today.

"Oh no no, that fully depends on the person. Some of your sense are simply more attuned than the others. But many people do see or smell things, as those are often the most common triggers for memories. And a few of the luckier ones could even hear, taste, or physically feel out of these films. Personally, I envy those who hear."

"Why is that?"

Eva chuckled, "I just love music. Simple as that. It would make this job so much easier for me. I'd be able to do at least 10 boxes a day. Plus, imagine what kinds of sounds or music these memons would come up with, you know? I bet it'd be a symphony of chaos and noise, but somehow still with some melodies coming through." She looked to the window. Moon dust was flickering in the sun. A drop of melancholy fills her eyes, but she quickly blinked it away. She went back to her smile.

"Why would it be chaotic?" Mitch asked.

"I don't know. Maybe that's how I imagine what a stranger's faded memory would be, or maybe that's just how I like my music."

Mitch gave a polite chuckle as Eva stood from the chair. She was getting ready to leave. "But alas, I'm a seer like you, Mr. Butter. And it's not bad at all. Trust me, you'll soon learn to love this job."

Mitch pondered at this. Mitch didn't think he saw the lonely moon, rather, that imagery came to him like a poem.

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Other memorable films from day 1. What they showed Mitch, and where Mitch put them.

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I whisper the words: "I love you" to the wind

As she passes by my open window

I hope she travels far beyond the sea

Above the fields and flowers

Over the asphalt and towers

Gracing gently through your hair

Landing safely on your pillow

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Bad, red box.

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The lighthouse sings quietly on the cliff
His songs reach far and wide across the sea
It pierces deep into the depths
Scattering a school of sardines before arriving at a
sinking whale
The whale listens and does not speak
For he knows a lonesome melody needs no harmonies

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Good, green box.

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