

In Suspension

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We begin on black, then flickers of atmosphere start to appear. Glints of light on glassware, swirling dust, bodies without faces sliding in and out of existence.

HER (VO)

Overcrowding was the problem. The Prism was the solution, dividing the population into ten strata, ten layers of reality where we can all coexist... comfortably.

HIM (VO)

Is that what they call it?

HER (VO)

Everything's about control. That's what I've learned, working there. If you can only see up, you've got something to aspire to. Reason to be good. It's a perfect system.

HIM (VO)

You really think that?

HER (VO)

I think it works... when there are no exceptions.

HIM (VO)

Isn't this one?

Two EYES, in focus, shift, looking to their right. Someone is there, a faceless shadow.

HER (VO)

Not if I forget you when I leave.

HIM (VO)

Then don't leave.

A body brushes past a set of shelves, sending dust particles from each layer spinning into the air.

HER (VO)

We can't stay here forever. It's already late.

Lights shine through glasses of alcohol, glittering off ice cubes, casting rainbows on the table.

(CONTINUED)

HIM (VO)  
I love you, Lydia.

She turns to look at him, but light suddenly consumes her.

2 INT. LYDIA'S BEDROOM - MORNING 2

The eyes open into the bright light of morning. Automated curtains lift as the clock strikes 7.

The owner of the eyes is LYDIA (23). For a fleeting moment, the dream replays itself behind her eyes. She looks to her right, but there is only a vacant pillow.

Clutching the silver NECKLACE she wears, Lydia looks back at the ceiling, pushing away the thought that anyone would have been there. She sits up and gets out of bed.

3 INT. LYDIA'S KITCHEN - MORNING 3

Lydia enters the kitchen, pulling her hair into a tight bun. She's wearing professional attire, looking just as pristine as her living space. It's an airy apartment, perhaps too much for one girl living alone.

As she pours a mug of coffee, her CarbonAssist, a digital assistant, activates.

CARBON (VO)  
Good morning, Lydia.

LYDIA  
Morning, Carbon. Any updates?

CARBON (VO)  
You have seventeen new emails,  
thirty-four new matches on Valence,  
and one missed call from Evvie.

Lydia grabs her bag and coat as she listens. The last notification makes her pause.

LYDIA  
Thanks, Carbon, I'll review those  
later.

Lydia checks herself in the mirror, then exits.

4 EXT. STREET BY OFFICE - DAY

4

Lydia walks down a clean city street populated by other pedestrians. She is visibly more well-off than those around her, in a colorful coat and heels.

On the wall behind her is the number **4**. As we pass behind a pedestrian, we travel through an almost invisible barrier, like a membrane. Now there are slightly fewer people walking, and the number **5** is on the wall.

Lydia walks through the crowd as if she doesn't see them, but they step out of her way. Traveling behind a final pole, we see the world as she sees it- no other people in the street, **6** on the wall.

5 INT. LYDIA'S OFFICE - DAY - LATER

5

Lydia sits at her desk, scrolling through a spreadsheet containing Application for Stratum Promotion (A.S.P) confirmation numbers. She begins to write something down, but her pen runs out of ink.

Lydia digs for a new pen in her bag. She pauses as her hand brushes something unexpected. Lydia pulls out a napkin with a logo on it, and her own handwriting.

NOTE

*Your dreams are here.*

Lydia's eyes lose focus as a few images return- shadowy memories of the dream. Momentarily ensnared by the writing, Lydia doesn't notice as her coworker BRANDON sticks his head into the office with a bittersweet smile.

BRANDON

Hey, Lydia. Don't forget to deliver the last round of assessments.

LYDIA

Oh, Brandon, I'm sorry, I-

BRANDON

Don't.

Brandon leaves without another word. Lydia tosses the napkin aside, grabs a stack of papers, and gets up.

6 INT. ALICE'S OFFICE - DAY - MINUTES LATER

6

Lydia enters the office to find her coworker ALICE (45) standing in front of her desk, organizing papers.

LYDIA

Hey, I've got the A.S.P. assessments for... Alice?

Lydia reaches out a hand to tap Alice, but passes right through her shoulder. Lydia freezes as she realizes what has happened- Alice is no longer in her stratum.

Lydia sighs, puts the papers on Alice's table, and leaves. After a moment, Lydia's stack of papers phases into 7. Alice notices as they appear and picks up the stack.

7 INT. LYDIA'S OFFICE - DAY - MINUTES LATER

7

Lydia returns to her office to find her friend EVVIE (24) sitting on the desk, apparently waiting. She doesn't look happy. Lydia looks away as she enters.

LYDIA

Hey, Evvie. Did you know Alice got promoted?

EVVIE

Yes. Last week.

LYDIA

I hope she's happy up in 7, I'll miss her.

Lydia notices the note, dangerously close to Evvie's seat.

EVVIE

So how was your date last night? With Brandon?

LYDIA

Evvie, I'm so sorry, I-

EVVIE

I can't believe you stood him up. And on top of that, I had to hear it from *him*!

Lydia stiffens, trying to come up with an excuse.

LYDIA

I just-

(CONTINUED)

EVVIE

Honey, what's going on with you?  
You've said no to every guy I've  
set you up with this month.  
Remember, you asked *me* for dating  
help. And now you won't talk to me.

LYDIA

I'm sorry. It's almost the end of  
promotion season, there's just a  
lot going on...

EVVIE

Sure, at work. But you clearly had  
the time to go to Anomaly Bar.

LYDIA

You know it?

EVVIE

It's literally my job to keep track  
of illegal suspensions, that one  
included.

LYDIA

You're not going to-

EVVIE

Of course not, you're my best  
friend. But you're the last person  
I thought would be mixing with the  
other strata.

LYDIA

Look, I just go for the drinks.

EVVIE

Oh, so you're drinking alone now?

LYDIA

It helps me sleep.

EVVIE

And dream?

Evvie slides the note back to the center of the table.

LYDIA

I guess so.

EVVIE

About someone in the bar. You've  
got time for them, huh?

(CONTINUED)

LYDIA  
I don't know, I don't remember  
meeting anyone.

EVVIE  
Well, you might not. If he's...

Evvie makes a downward motion.

LYDIA  
That would be a violation.

Evvie holds up the note.

EVVIE  
This already is.

Evvie lets the note fall onto the desk.

LYDIA  
No. He's not real, he can't be.  
He's just a dream.

EVVIE  
Okay then. Problem solved.

Evvie gets up off the table.

EVVIE (CONT.)  
Next time you're drinking  
"alone", at least invite one of  
your Valence matches. Two birds...

Evvie leaves without finishing the idiom. Lydia looks down at the note and exhales, surprised to find herself more disappointed than relieved.

8 INT. LYDIA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

8

That evening, Lydia lounges in her apartment with a glass of wine. It's painfully quiet in the room; only a ticking clock. Lydia takes a sip, then looks down at her hand, and the silver diamond TATTOO on it.

In a flash, an image from a past dream comes back, still hazy. His hand wrapped around hers, gently, intimately.

We return to Lydia's empty hand lying on the table. She stares at it for a moment, then gets up and grabs a coat.

CUT TO:

9 EXT. ANOMALY BAR - NIGHT

9

Lydia's fist stops inches from the door to the bar, then retracts. After a steeling breath, Lydia knocks on the door, which opens. A murmur comes from within.

10 INT. ANOMALY BAR - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

10

As Lydia crosses the threshold into the bar, she passes through the near-invisible wall of her reality and into suspension. Flashes of memories flood back to her at once-every time she'd been here before, she hadn't been alone.

Lydia undoes her tight bun, letting her hair fall loose. She looks across the bar, which is now louder and more populated with couples and groups.

Her eyes fall on a YOUNG MAN seated by himself at a table, rolling a little BOUNCY BALL between his fingers. His name comes to her lips as a soft exhale.

LYDIA

Sam...

Lydia quickly walks to his table, and Sam stands to greet her with an embrace.

SAM

I love your smile when you remember me.

LYDIA

You say that every time.

SAM

Because it's true.

They kiss and sit down at the table.

LYDIA

I found the note again. This might actually work. You were able to-

SAM

Yeah. Got the confirmation today. My A.S.P is up for review next week. Here, I wrote down the application number.

Sam places a SLIP OF PAPER into her hand, and lingers there.

(CONTINUED)



SAM

Hey, so, I've been thinking- I've been building up my merit score for a while now, and it's getting close to the threshold for promotion...

LYDIA

What are you saying?

SAM

I just- I don't want to put you in any sort of danger. It could happen on its own. But if I don't make it, you could always, you know... come down.

For a moment, Lydia looks horrified by the thought.

SAM (CONT.)

It's not as bad as you think...

Lydia brushes off the suggestion.

LYDIA

I want to do this for you. So you can have a better life. Don't you want that?

Sam thinks for a moment, then smiles.

SAM

Of course I do.

Lydia beams.

LYDIA

I can't wait to see you. Out there.

Sam leans over to kiss her.

SAM

Neither can I. But right now, let me grab you a drink.

Lydia nods, pockets the paper, then pulls out a pen. She looks around cautiously and starts to write another note.

11 INT. ANOMALY BAR DOORWAY - LATER 11

At the end of the night, Lydia and Sam walk together to the door, his arm around her, tipsy and giggling. Just before the threshold, Lydia stops, halting Sam beside her. She turns to him, now serious, and unclasps her necklace.

LYDIA

One more thing for tomorrow- when we meet, pass me this. It was a gift from my best friend. There's no other way you could have it.

Lydia drops the necklace into Sam's hand.

SAM

If this doesn't work, if you never come back-

Lydia silences him with a smile.

LYDIA

If I can fall for you once, it can happen again.

Sam kisses Lydia, and they step through the doorway together. He vanishes from sight, necklace in hand. Instantly Lydia is swept by an invisible wave, washing the memory of Sam away.

Lydia sways, then stabilizes herself against a wall, blinking. She looks back at the bar. How many drinks did she have? She shakes her head and heads home.

12 INT. LYDIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 12

That night, Lydia sleeps softly. Faint fragments of memories from the bar filter through her dreams. Hazy images of Sam, still unrecognizable without a face. Whispers of conversations, Sam's name. Drinking, laughing. Lydia's hand, writing letters on another napkin.

13 INT. LYDIA'S BEDROOM - MORNING 13

Lydia gasps awake, then winces- a headache. She looks over at the clock on her side table. It's nearly 10am. She reaches instinctively for her necklace, but it's gone. Lydia pushes herself out of bed.

14 INT. LYDIA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

14

In the kitchen are the remnants of last night: her shoes, kicked off; her jacket, tossed over the back of a chair; her bag, sagging on the table.

Lydia makes a beeline for the bag and opens it up. Instead of her necklace, there's another note- this time with a small drawing of a map.

NOTE

*Bohr Park at 2. Sam will be there.*

Lydia lets the note fall onto the counter, then leans against the table. She mouths a curse.

After a moment, she goes to the counter and starts to prepare herself a coffee. She stares at the cup, rubs her aching temple, and grabs a bottle of whiskey.

There's a knock on the door. Lydia freezes, then walks over and looks through the peephole. She opens the door to a beaming Evvie.

EVVIE

So reservation for brunch is at 2.  
I scheduled mani-pedis for us at  
that place on 5th so you can look  
*pristine* when they give you Alice's  
old job...

Evvie notices Lydia's expression.

LYDIA

Oh, crap... Evvie-

EVVIE (CONT.)

Did you seriously forget?

LYDIA

I can't do it today.

EVVIE

What? You're seriously flaking on  
me again? And after Brandon...

Lydia tries to block Evvie from going into the kitchen.

LYDIA

I know, I'm sorry, but something's  
come up.

(CONTINUED)

EVVIE

I hope it's something good. A  
Valence date?

LYDIA

No, I'm just supposed to meet up  
with someone...

Evvie brushes past Lydia and picks up the note.

EVVIE

You went back.

LYDIA

I'm gonna take care of it.

EVVIE

So his name is Sam, huh?

Lydia doesn't respond.

EVVIE (CONT.)

How long has this been going on?

LYDIA

I don't know. I can't remember.

EVVIE

But somehow you remember him.

A beat.

LYDIA

It's just a glitch. I'll report it.

EVVIE

No you won't. I know you. And this  
is just delusional. Why keep going  
back?

LYDIA

This is the last time. I'm going to  
end it.

Lydia pulls the note from Evvie's hands. She goes over to  
the door and holds it open, inviting Evvie to leave.

EVVIE

Good.

Evvie walks out, then pauses and turns.

(CONTINUED)

EVVIE (CONT.)

Maybe Prism should be looking into that bar after all. I wouldn't want anyone getting tempted to do something they'll regret.

Lydia is stunned. She closes the door as Evvie leaves.

15

EXT. BOHR PARK - DAY

15

The park is almost empty as Lydia strolls to the designated meeting spot. Lydia arrives at a wall, then stops and looks at the map on the note. The drawn arrow points near to where she is now.

Lydia notices a security camera hidden in a tree. She goes to the spot along the wall, just out of sight, and waits for an interaction. After several moments, Lydia shakes her head and starts to walk off. Then she hears the sound of a bouncing ball.

Lydia turns to see a small BOUNCY BALL rolling to a stop at the edge of the sidewalk. She takes a few steps towards it, then speaks to the air.

LYDIA

Sam? Are you Sam?

Silence, as expected. Lydia turns around as she waits for some reply. As her back is turned, the sound of the bouncing ball comes again. She whips back around to face it, then picks up the ball.

LYDIA

Look, I don't know what I said to you at the bar, but...

Lydia's conviction falters as the empty wind rattles leaves around her, making her feel more alone than ever.

LYDIA

I don't know you. I don't think you know me, either. Whatever you think we have, nothing good can come of it. You should probably just go before someone catches us. I'm sorry it didn't-

The sound of a small piece of metal dropping to the ground cuts her off. Lydia's necklace. She lifts it up, then touches her own empty neck.

(CONTINUED)

LYDIA

How did you...

Suddenly, a flash of memory hits her- last night's dream. Dropping the necklace into an anonymous hand. Lips pressing together. For a moment, she can't say anything.

LYDIA

What do you want me to do?

Lydia looks around until she sees Sam's next message- a little glass PRISM, sitting on a rock. Lydia starts stepping backwards.

LYDIA

No, I can't do that. Sorry.

She quickly walks off.

16 INT. LYDIA'S KITCHEN - EVENING

16

Lydia bursts into her apartment, distraught. She slings her bag onto the table, grabs a wine bottle and a glass.

She instinctively pulls out the cork and positions the bottle to pour, but freezes, suddenly aware. The top of the bottle grazes the edge of the glass.

Lydia puts the cork back into the bottle, then puts the glass and the bottle into a cabinet. She closes it, hands lingering on the knobs for a moment before letting go.

LYDIA

This is too much...

CARBON (VO)

Is everything alright, Lydia?

Lydia leans against the table, resting her head in her hands. With a thought, she looks up and quickly walks over to her medicine cabinet. She digs until she finds a bottle labelled Melatonin. She reads the label pensively.

LYDIA

Everything's fine.

The CarbonAssist says nothing as Lydia opens the bottle.

17 INT. LYDIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 17

Lydia tucks herself into bed and shuts the light. She closes her eyes and waits to fall asleep. After a while, it works. But then the dreams begin.

ON BLACK:

SAM (VO)

Do you remember the first time we met?

18 INT. ANOMALY BAR - FLASHBACK (DREAM) 18

Lydia stands nervously at the bar, looking at Valence on her phone. Someone approaches her, a young man whose face we can't see.

SAM

Are you waiting for someone?

LYDIA

I thought so, but it doesn't seem like he's coming. Or I'm at the wrong bar.

SAM

So you're not a regular.

LYDIA

Are you?

SAM

Most are. It's hard to resist coming back to a place like this.

LYDIA

So it's true. I shouldn't be here.

Lydia puts down her drink and moves to leave, but Sam puts his hand on her arm to stop her.

SAM

Please, stay.

Lydia looks down at his hand, noticing his rough skin, and the lack of a silver tattoo.

LYDIA

You're-

(CONTINUED)

SAM  
A carpenter.

LYDIA  
-in five.

Sam stops, removing his hand and waiting for her response. Lydia looks into his eyes, into the face we can't see.

LYDIA  
Okay.

She smiles a bit and turns back to look at him, but the bar dissolves back to black.

ON BLACK:

SAM (VO)  
What made you stay?

19 INT. PRISM OFFICE - DAY 19

Lydia walks into work the next day, hair pulled into a ponytail, face looking stern. The dreams are here to stay.

On the way to her office, Lydia notices a commotion nearby. The WOMAN FROM 9, an older lady in elegant clothing, walks into the Prism Room.

Lydia watches for a moment, then pulls Sam's slip of paper from her pocket. She keeps walking.

20 INT. PRISM OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 20

At the door to the Prism Room is a lock; Lydia holds her silver tattoo up to the sensor, but it blinks red. She steps back, hoping no one saw, to formulate a new plan.

Alice emerges from her office with a digital tablet and goes past Lydia to the Prism Room door. She uses her own tattoo to unlock the door and walk inside.

Lydia watches the door slowly close. As Alice moves away, it returns to general space. Lydia reaches out a hand to stop it from shutting all the way.

Lydia looks out into the office and sees Evvie with Brandon; she chats with him easily, flirtatiously. With a last look of apology, Lydia enters the Prism Room.



21 INT. PRISM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

21

Lydia steps quietly into the dimly-lit room. A yellow line stretches across the empty floor ahead of her, with large letters reading REGULATED ZONE OF SUSPENSION-DO NOT CROSS.

The woman from 9 operates the Prism terminal. Lydia can see the screen over the woman's shoulder; names and faces appear for a few moments, then a tap decides their fate.

Alice gives the tablet to the Woman from 9, then turns back to leave, unknowingly passing Lydia again. The names continue to flick by. Lydia hesitates and steps back, preparing to leave, but as she starts to turn, she takes one last look back at the monitor. A new application appears on the screen.

Lydia freezes as Sam's face stares back at her, his name and number clearly visible on screen. The man with no face now has one.

As Lydia starts to move forward, the Woman from 9 moves towards the button Reject. Lydia steps over the line and up to the monitor. She reaches for the screen and-

A hand grabs Lydia's wrist, stopping her midair. She looks to see the Woman from 9 glaring, threatening. Lydia hesitates, then reaches forward and clicks Accept. Sam's application is replaced by the next candidate.

WOMAN FROM 9

Such a shame.

A SECURITY OFFICER appears from behind. He grabs her and sticks a small device to her back. It activates.

CUT TO:

22 INT. OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

22

Outside, Evvie is sitting down at her desk when a strange sensation comes over her, a daze in her eyes. After a little shiver, she resumes her work, the moment forgotten.

BACK TO:

23 INT. PRISM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

23

As Lydia steps back, she collapses to the ground. Lydia's gaze lands on a beam of light above her, swirling with dust. Her eyes close as she loses consciousness.

24 INT. LYDIA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

24

Lydia wakes up in her bed. The room is dark, dirtier than she left it. But then she realizes- she remembers.

LYDIA  
Sam... It worked? Hey Carbon, call  
Evvie!

There is no response.

LYDIA  
Hey, Carbon, are you there?

A different voice has replaced her virtual assistant. A slightly lower voice.

BERYL (VO)  
Hello Lydia, I couldn't find anyone  
in your contacts named Evvie.

Lydia looks down and notices her hand. Her tattoo is gone. She takes a moment to realize what has happened.

LYDIA  
No...

She leaps out of bed to face her new reality.

25 EXT. BOHR PARK - DAY

25

As Lydia frantically searches the park, we see there are more people there, staring at the out-of-place woman.

Finally, she spots Sam- sitting on a bench. Lydia dashes up to him with a grin, but he doesn't notice her approach.

LYDIA  
Sam!

He doesn't appear to hear her.

LYDIA  
Sam?

We circle around him; passing behind his head, we are in a higher stratum, and suddenly Lydia is gone. We pass behind another object to return to her perspective.

Stunned, Lydia can only stare at the man she loves. After a moment, she steps forward and takes the handwriting-covered napkin, the first note, from her pocket. She places it on the bench next to him.

(CONTINUED)

LYDIA

See you in suspension.

Lydia reaches out to touch him, passing through, then walks away into her new life, passing by the number **4**.

The napkin soon phases into Sam's stratum. Sam looks down at the napkin, not remembering this piece of his old life. He picks it up and looks at the logo. It is a mystery he'll have to solve.

CUT TO BLACK