

Synopsis:

Unable to resolve their clients' struggles with poverty wages and skyrocketing rent, therapist-in-training Ian Chalmers is facing down their insignificance. Then, a nonprofit called Klini□ offers Ian a job using time travel to eradicate domestic violence. Though Ian questions how a nonprofit could afford such advanced technology, they can't ignore Klini□'s radical potential.

After a month spent saving kids from neglect and partners from assault, Ian is mistakenly asked to revise a moment from their own past. Reading the brief causes Ian to enter an incredibly immersive flashback. Inside the memory, Ian is an invisible third party, helpless to stop the abuse from happening. But, before the night ends, they discover a way to comfort their past self. Upon their return to the present, Ian finds glowing fissures have overtaken the apartment where the scene took place.

To understand what happened, Ian reproduces the fissures using another memory. But their progress stalls when Klini□ vows to kill their friend if they continue exploring. Now convinced Klini□ is hiding something nefarious, Ian commits to uncovering the organization's real reasons for revising the past.

Representation: trans/nonbinary, neurodivergent, physical disability, POC

Content warnings: suicidal ideation, domestic violence

Sample:

A Conjuring

On the morning of, I will open the window to listen to the breaking waves I cannot see. I will assure myself that, for a few final hours, they are still there under their quilt of fog. Because as hard as we've been working toward leaving, I cannot go without a proper goodbye.

"You're letting all the heat out of the house," Bea will say, startling me from behind. I will close the door in a hurry and turn to see her scooping coffee grounds into a paper filter. "Do you want me to make extra for you?"

Normally, I would say yes, but on this day my nerves will already be jittering out through my fingertips. I will try to steady them against the countertop, with little success. "No thanks," I'll respond. As the machine heats and hisses steam, we'll watch the fog turn from matte to luster under the first rays of sunlight. Sometimes, still, this world manages to offer us beauty.

With the rich sour smell permeating the kitchen, I will wonder how long it will take the others to stir. Are they wrapped up in a deep slumber or simply chasing a few more restless minutes of half-consciousness before facing the day?

"How are you feeling, Viv?" Bea will ask me.

I will need a moment to consider what small portion of my emotions I want to address. In reply, I will offer my own question. "Do you ever worry that it won't work, that it'll all lead to nothing?"

"Of course," Bea will answer. "Doubt weighs on everyone sometimes, I think."

"Then how is it that you keep believing?" I will let myself ask.

By this time, Bea and I will only have known each other for a little over a year, but I will seek her comfort as if we are the oldest of friends. “I have this scene that I picture,” Bea will begin. “Thousands of feet up, there’s a pilot flying a tiny propeller plane. I see everything from their perspective. Below, the farm fields are cast in the golden glow of the setting sun. To the east, the mountains turn shadowy violet. At the horizon, a clump of skyscrapers reflects the light.” Bea will extend her arm out over the counter, embodying her vision.

She will continue, “Everything seems peaceful, normal. Until, suddenly, the pilot sees the ground slice open. They’re unable to look away as this first crack grows to create a thousand glowing branches, reaching the mountains and the city, and leaving no farm field untouched. There comes a moment of stillness, and the pilot thinks the process—whatever it is—might be done.

“Then, at each edge, the outermost layer of the Earth begins pulling away like an orange peel from its fruit. It’s too bright to make out what is underneath, and before the pilot can burn their corneas staring, their plane enters the middle of a dense cloud. It only takes a few seconds to fly out the other side, but by the time they emerge, there’s a completely new scene below.”

Bea will sip her coffee and let the pilot’s point of view linger. From their perspective, I’ll picture what we will have discussed many times already: borders porous and dissolving, hillsides reforested, prisons collapsed to rubble. Lighting candles with pages ripped from our passports. The potential a sweet blip on the back of my tongue, gone as soon as it appears.

A few moments later, Bea will conclude, “While I’m picturing this story, none of my doubts matter. Sometime, for someone, it’s already come true.”

“Hmm,” I will mutter, my mind caught up on the apparent ease with which Bea fills the gaps in our knowledge. We still don’t know how completely the world may transform under our plan, or at what speed. Assuming it makes any difference at all.

With a purse of her lips, Bea will set her mug aside on the counter and turn from the window to face me. “Let me say it like this: Imagining alone can’t change anything, but failing to do so will ensure that nothing ever does.”

I will hold Bea’s gaze as I ask myself, not for the first time, if I believe or simply wish I did. Either will serve, I’ll decide, and this will be true enough.

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Chapter 1

Ian's Journal¹

January 14

“Lately I’ve just been feeling more and more lonely,” Ben managed between stifled sobs. He was my sixth client of ten today, and I was doing my best to stay fully attentive. I shifted in my chair and twirled my pen as he continued. “I’ve been trying so hard to meet people this month. I’ve been to all the BudStep meetings I can afford. Then there’s mister twister, Can of Worms, Adult Playground: you name the online platform, I’m on it. Some of my dates have been nice enough, but I can tell that none of them have seen anything special in me. No one’s texted me back afterward, not a single person out of ten. It’s just... I can’t help thinking that they’re right to pass me by. What good would I be to them? Look at me, I’m a mess!”

I waited for the words to settle before replying. Ben pulled a tissue from the box and blew his nose with a muted honk. “Do you remember just a couple of months ago, when you were saying similar things about your career?” I asked. “You knew—”

“That’s—” Ben interjected, but I wasn’t done making my point.

“You knew you finally needed to get away from working in the surveillance sector, and yet your applications weren’t getting any responses. You were convinced you were going to be stuck in that job forever. Then, boom! Aquifervor called you to schedule an interview, and it was a great match. They offered you a job right away!” I checked my notes quickly. “As a Digital Water Allocator, right? Now, I think what happened then can tell us a lot about your relationship catastrophizing: I’m not sure it’s a very helpful, or true, way of looking at the world.”

¹ Selections from Ian’s journal have been revised and expanded by the editorial team for the purposes of this book.

Ben tossed the tissue aside on the couch as he waited for me to finish. He looked down as he spoke. “Well, uh, it’s funny that you mention work. That’s the other thing I wanted to tell you about. I got fired from my new job yesterday. For channeling too much water to south-end residential and not enough to downtown commercial during a supply interruption. Turns out, they’re no better than the last company I worked for.” When Ben met my eyes, I saw through his despair a small sparkle of satisfaction for so easily defusing my point. The clock on my bookshelf told me thirty minutes of the appointment remained. I wiggled my toes inside my boots and hoped no outward signs of frustration showed through.

“Do you want to talk about it?” I asked.