

DAY 6 - THE LIGHT

Midnight brought Saturday night to Sunday morning.

Pacing the lobby of the theatre, I looked at the clock again. Heather had exchanged keys with me half an hour ago, and gone back to my flat. No one had arrived yet.

There was still another thirty minutes until the official start-time, but I was nervous.

Lanky and I had set up the stage and the lighting. We'd spoken beforehand about how the introduction should look. Part of me wanted to keep the lighting natural, emphasising the potential reality of my words. Eventually, however, we'd agreed that a more powerful, slightly daunting atmosphere would fit the experience more suitably. The situation, after all, was an unusual one.

Lanky was waiting on the balcony. I, on the other hand, was not as patient. Looking around, anxiously, I tried to calm my nerves by chewing gum and taking in my surroundings. The lobby was cathedral-large and smelt of wood. It was grand-looking, with royal red walls, red and gold carpets and high ceilings, like an old mansion. I looked at the reception-desk at which Heather spent most of her working life. Neat. Tidy. Sitting upon it, I took my notebook out of my pocket to stop it from digging into my thigh.

Looking closer at her workspace, I couldn't believe that her pens were lined up parallel to her red laminated folder. Even her promotional leaflets were aligned in such a perfectly straight stack that it looked as though she'd used a ruler. I appreciated her letting us borrow the keys for this place.

It was important that I'd warned Lanky not to get too excited about tonight, because I wasn't sure if anyone would even arrive. But suddenly, to my relief, the main entrance door opened and I looked up. In came Becka and her friends, smiling. I mirrored and stood up. In a flash, all nine of them paid their fee which I had almost forgotten about. Accepting the cash and forcing a smile, I asked them to enter the dark auditorium.

A draft of cold, as more people arrived. Most of them I'd never seen before – all forcing money into my hand as soon as I could request it. They didn't even know why they were here. But one thing was certain; they were curious.

At 1a.m, I exited the lobby, leaving the auditorium door open for anyone else to enter. Or leave. I passed through the red backstage room, took a deep breath and walked onto the stage. Lanky had arranged some refreshments on a table to the left of the stage. Milk, tea, coffee, fresh orange juice and some biscuits.

The curtain was raised but, due to the lack of light, no one could see me yet. I released my breath quietly and prepared myself mentally. This theatre was usually used for music concerts, rather than plays, so there were no seats. Just laminate flooring. I stared at the intimate crowd of about forty. Most people had chosen to sit fairly close to the stage. Others were scattered in various other positions, some standing up, less confident that what they were about to see or hear would make sense to them. Lanky was stood in the centre of the balcony at the back, watching excitedly. He put his thumb up to me. This was it.

Oddly, I didn't feel nervous, now. It reminded me of when I had held my first yoga class, a few months ago. Suddenly, the lights came alive – bright, intense and all on me.

I glanced around the large, traditional theatre. Blood-red walls, blood-red side-boxes and a blood-red ceiling, all with decorative gold trimmings, like a palace. The only release from such powerful colours was the earthy brown floor and the silver ball hanging from the ceiling.

It was a three-tiered theatre. The back of the room was dominated by a huge balcony – the lip – which hung about three metres above the ground and curved around all three walls that were not occupied by the stage. A further three metres above the lip were the side-boxes. Four on the left wall, four on the right – and another balcony, the circle, which filled the remainder of the back wall. Many acclaimed bands and solo artists had stood upon this stage and, for a moment, I felt honoured.

Then I blinked, realising that I needed to speak. For a long time, subconsciously, I had prepared a speech. Time to make it conscious.

(The very tall man stands downstage centre, illuminated by white spotlights. White floodlights illuminate tall black flats, upstage.)

Brenemen: *(Loudly and strongly)* I stand before you today because some of you, like myself, have an as-of-yet unspoken gift. For centuries, this gift has been hinted at in literature, poems and conversations. Never before, however, has it been thrust into full-view. For all of this time, the people whom have possessed it have felt that they were alone. Now we know differently. I call this gift 'The Light'.

There are two types of people in the world. Those who have the Light, and those who don't. The Light is an energy. Those of us who possess it know that we are a force separate to certain others, because our minds are

more in touch with the world in which we live. We are more special. More curious, creative and contemplative.

The Light is only inside a small portion of people, but inhabits a wide range of us. It's in the girl who writes poetry on the train. It's in the old man who can light up a room with his stories. It's in the woman who's fashion-sense looks like it came from the future. It's in the person who sprayed that impressive graffiti on that wall. It's in the boy who leaves random notes on park benches. It's in the man who inserts his spare change into vending machines but buys nothing. It's in the stranger who started the first conversation in that long queue. It's in the homeless person who thought of an inventive way to ask for money.

We are artists. We are poets. We are punks.

We (*Pause*) are the Light-bearers.

Our aim is to share the Light with one another, through creativity and deep conversation. That is why we are here today. To expand our minds, and one another's. To discuss deep ideas and philosophies.

Our ultimate target is not simply to share the Light, but to harness it in its purest form. We will expand our minds so fully that we will reach a climax. A state of mind – an enlightenment – beyond hate or love. The extremist extreme. The most power and most emotion that it is possible to feel. This is the Light, and this is our goal.

I know that, for most of you, this idea will sound strange. But I promise you, the Light does exist. It has been reached before, and it will be reached again. It has been kept hidden for hundreds of years; secretly handed down through generations and experienced only by a lucky few.

If anyone wishes to speak with me about the Light, or anything else, feel free. Or if, for any reason, anyone wishes to leave – go now. In a few moments, the doors will be locked and the rest of us will form small groups, and we will begin our first session. The sessions will continue every week for as long as it takes for us to reach

this climax.

Outside of this theatre, we will live our usual lives, keeping these gatherings secret. But if, in the outside world, we find anyone who should be here with us, we will spread the word. Share the Light.

(Fade to black)

Lanky turned the main house lights on with a boom.

Everyone looked at me for a moment. Some nodding, some smiling. About half of the group had departed. After a few moments of looking around nervously, the remainder all began to do as I had instructed, speaking to one another in pairs or groups of no more than about five.

I was more-or-less happy with the speech I'd given, if it was a bit pretentious. But I wasn't sure how clear I'd made it, and I also wasn't sure how believable I'd made the Light sound.

Reached before, and reached again?

I wondered if they'd swallowed that one.

Handed down through generations?

Maybe that was a bit too far.

As I walked around the theatre, I listened in to the various conversations. A few groups spoke about God. Others spoke about the wonders of science and the ethical issues that come with it. One group seemed to be talking about aliens. The rest were asking various open-ended questions, that they had often thought about.

The constellation of people reminded me of a campsite. Dotted on the floor in a naturally-chosen arrangement, conversing among themselves. After a few minutes, I decided to join a group on the left, near

to the stage. They were sitting in a triangle, which I formed into a diamond.

“May I join?” I spoke.

The two men and one woman looked at me, and seemed slightly daunted. One of the men nodded.

“What are you guys talking about?” I asked.

The female, about twenty-five, wore multi-coloured beads in her red hair and a purple hooded top. She was the first to speak to me. Her accent was Scottish, and each sentence she spoke began with her eyes pointed at her hands, and ended by looking into mine.

“Um... I’m Kyle and I was just saying to Charlie, here, how we can always learn more about the world, but there are some things we’ll never be able to answer.”

“Like paradoxes,” finished Charlie, confidently. He was tall and good looking, with dark skin and a friendly face. His head was shaved, with unusually blue eyes and a masculine jaw-line. Underneath his tight, casual shirt I could sense firm muscles, and possibly a tattoo or two.

“A paradox I always remember,” he continued, “Could God create a rock so heavy that even he can't lift it?”

I looked at him. Pause.

Then he said, “because he must be able to create one, because he’s God. He can do anything. But then he wouldn’t be able to lift it. But he’s God, so he-”

I nodded, and Charlie stopped talking.

“It’s strange, isn’t it?” spoke the other man. He was older than the rest of our group. Dark hair, and a broad, bony face. “How can a logical sentence make no sense? That paradox proves that there’s no God.”

“Does it?” I asked provocatively, looking around the small group, “Or does it prove that there is a God? A logical sentence, but incomprehensible to the human

mind. And yet the question continues to exist. Innocent, logical and worthy of an answer. An answer which we know that we can never find, and yet we know must exist. Only fit for a God to answer.”

Whether any of us believed in God or not, was unimportant. All that mattered was the actual questioning, and Kyle laughed a ‘I’d never thought of it that way’ kind of laugh.

“My name’s Travis E. Brenemen, by the way,” I said, “I add the ‘E’ because it makes me sound more important.”

I could sense members of the other groups looking at me, wondering if I would be coming over to them, too. For now, I stayed at this one.

“I’m Pat,” spoke the older man, “nice to meet you, Travis.”

Charlie and Kyle repeated the greeting.

“Do you believe in God, Kyle?” I asked.

Pause.

“I don’t know, really,” she blushed, “the scientific part of me says not to, but the artistic and spiritual part of me wants to – I guess it’s a comfort thing, really.”

“I can understand that,” said Pat, “but I think I’d have to trust science on that one.”

“How about you, Charlie? Do you believe in some kind of God?”

“No,” he said.

“Any reason?”

“Too many anti-miracles. Used to be in the army, and I’ve seen things that prove to me that there’s no God.”

I was waiting for someone to use the cliché ‘God works in mysterious ways’, but no one did, and I was glad. Anti-miracles? That was interesting.

“How about you, Travis?” spoke Pat, politely.

“Me? Yeah. People often ask ‘if God created the universe, who created God?’ The answer is ‘us’. Humans created God. So, what does that make *us*? I believe that we all have the potential to be Gods within our own minds. Absolute feeling, knowledge and control.”

“Really?”

I nodded, “That’s the reason we’re here, ultimately.”

“Here in the theatre, today?” asked Kyle.

“If you like.”

While the three of them continued their conversation, I glanced around for Lanky. He was sat in a pentagon at the opposite end of the theatre's floor and seemed to be getting on perfectly. He was beside blonde-haired Becka who was talking and laughing with him. Inside, I was smiling.

The science and art contrast had interested me. It reminded me of the Indirect-Abstract and Direct-Abstract types of curiosity I’d written about yesterday. I had assumed that the Light was a force revolving around art and creativity – but science, I realised, was equally as important. Science teachers give their students a collection of materials and tell them to discover their meaning. Art teachers give their students a collection of materials and tell them to *give* them a meaning. We would be attempting to do both of these, mutually. By experiencing the Light, we would fully experience the meaning that we, ourselves, have given to life.

“How about you, Travis?” asked Pat. I looked up. I hadn’t been listening.

“Sorry?”

“Do you believe in fate?”

“Yes,” I said.

“I didn’t think you would,” said Charlie, and I asked why not. “Because people like us want control. Control

of life. What makes you believe in fate?”

“I don’t believe in ‘destiny’ in the mystical, romantic sense of the word. I just believe – in a fourth dimensional sense – that we cannot change the future. These words I’m speaking *right now*,” I began, as an example, “are they ‘past’, ‘present’ or ‘future’?”

“Present,” said Kyle.

“But I’ve already said them, now,” I replied, “so they’re past, as well. Simultaneously. And a few minutes ago they were my words of the future. Correct?”

“Yes,” they all said.

“Therefore, you must agree that my words of the future are also my words of the present and past, at the same time. Right ‘now’, people are living perfectly happy lives in the Victorian times, in ancient Egypt, and in the distant future. It is naïve and autistic to assume that the universe’s focus is on *our* present, alone. Why would it be? Only *we* follow our own present, because we are *us*. Just because we are not *there*, doesn’t mean that it isn’t existing as we speak. All of time has already been decided. The universe has ended – we’re just not there yet.

My point is that whatever we decide to *do* is what we were *fated* to do. But this doesn’t mean that we don’t have any control of our lives. All of our decisions, past and future, have already been made. But they have been made by *us*. We are not writing a book; we are reading one that we have already written.”

Pause.

“What about time travel?” asked Charlie, “do you think it’s possible?”

“Yes,” I began, “but not as we’d expect. I don’t think we’d be able to travel back in time and interact with the past. Instead, I think we’d only be able to observe. To retrieve the light of the past, and watch it like

television. If we were to travel faster than the speed of light to a planet one light-year away, and then look at Earth through an incredibly powerful telescope, we'd be watching events of at least one year ago. As for travelling *forward* in time – this is much more to ask. To see what *supposedly* hasn't happened yet. The question, really, is that if time travel is ever to be invented, why hasn't any one come back to boast about it?"

The session stretched far into Sunday morning, and the hall was still engrossed in conversation. I'd sat with a few different groups during our time together, and eventually realised that no one was going to leave until I told them to – much like my yoga sessions. After a short 'thank you' speech from the stage, including a promise of another gathering at the same time on the following Sunday, I unlocked the door to the lobby. My eyes took a moment to adjust from the white light of the auditorium to the blue glow of this room. Standing beside Heather's desk and glancing through the shiny glass, I could see that it was still dark outside.

As people began to leave, a few of them thanked me, and even more assured me that they'd return next time. One thing which had amazed me was that they'd all arrived on their own. Not with a friend. Not with family. All individual.

What amazed me more was the fact that – although I'd simply invented the 'reaching a mental climax' idea – I was starting to believe it myself.

I've always thought that a small percentage of people are some-how more 'spiritually advanced' than others. We now call it 'having the Light'. But as for this *climax*, this goal, of *harnessing* the Light and

experiencing it as a form of ultimately intense enlightenment...

As we were talking, tonight, I'd felt a glimpse of something. Something powerful, and special. Like a wave inside me. I had goosebumps. And, what's more, I know that we all felt it. It was in the atmosphere. We were sharing something deep, caused by the conversations that we were having.

Maybe this *was* the Light, in a very mild form. Maybe if we pushed ourselves even further, we could heighten this experience and achieve this absolute, extreme feeling.

"Travis," spoke a voice, and I turned around.

"Charlie," I smiled. "What's up?"

Despite his masculine face, his sky-blue eyes were wide with slight anxiety, so I stopped smiling. He scratched the back of his dark shaved head, and when he spoke, it was unusually abrupt.

"I won't be attending the next session."

I was relieved that his words hadn't been worse, but still felt that I should treat them with respect because of his obvious concern. Putting my hand on his strong arm, I took him aside for a moment while more people began to leave. I looked down into his eyes.

"Didn't you enjoy it?"

"Nah, it's not that. Thought the session was great, but I'm only in London for the weekend. I was wondering," he began, "if we could set up a similar organisation in Bristol, because I *know* that I can gather more people like us."

I raised my eyebrows, impressed that he'd been influenced so promptly.

"Sounds great," I said, straight-faced.

"That's not all. I thought that we could set up a camera, here in London, to film you at the start of each session. We could stream it live on a screen in Bristol."

I released a half-laugh, realising what he'd been worrying about.

"See you next week, Travis. Share the Light," said Kyle. I returned the gesture, without taking my eyes from Charlie.

"I'm not sure if that's necessary," I said to him, "I'm sure that you can take my place at your own venue."

He shook his shaven head, immediately, "Wouldn't be the same."

"How do you mean?"

"One of the things that makes this organisation work is you. You've got that confidence, and you know where we're headed, and how to get there."

"Think about it," he said, politely, handing me a slip of paper with his large brown hand. I nodded, and he left. I looked down at the white business card in my hand. *Charlie Quade: Construction and Destruction* with a black silhouette of a crane and wrecking-ball.

Many more people told me they'd see me next week, before they exited. Apart from those few words, the departure had been fairly silent. No one seemed to want to talk about the conversations they'd had inside the theatre, keeping their feelings close to their chest and, before long, everyone had left.

Once Lanky had finished returning the lights and equipment back to how they were, we stepped into the cool, starlit street, and he locked the entrance doors. For the first time, I noticed that Becka was still with him. They were holding hands.

"We're gonna go home now," he said, "It's six in the morning, I need to change into some fresh clothes and stuff."

"Sure," I said, happily sarcastic. "I'm sure you two need plenty of sleep."

As they left, I took a deep breath, held it for a few seconds and released it. I hadn't realised how long

we'd been in the theatre. Leaning against the building's wall and looking across the street, I had a small sense of achievement. I knew, however, that the five hours that the group of us had spent together were not even beginning to scratch the surface of reaching our absolute.

The street was still glistening from a recent rain fall and, on the other side of the road, a camera crew were filming something to do with Christmas. It seemed strange that they would shoot at this time of the day, but they must have wanted an empty, snowy street. Pushing my cold hands into my warm pockets, I began to head for my flat. I looked forward to climbing into my comfortable bed, despite not feeling particularly tired.

Suddenly, my heart sank and I stopped walking as I realised I'd left my notebook in the theatre. Instinct led my hands to my pockets but I soon remembered that Lanky had the keys. If anyone found that book, we'd be in a lot of trouble. It explained everything, and Lanky was out of sight. I swore, and thought for a moment. Turning around, I headed down the long alley-way beside the theatre. Perhaps there was a back door left open or a window slightly ajar. I couldn't believe my carelessness. My sieve-like memory.

As my steps clipped off of the concrete I had a slight premonition, which took a few seconds to come into full focus. The last time I'd been down an alley, near here, I'd been attacked.

Before I could turn around, someone behind me forced me against the wall. I breathed hard, struggling, but the strength of the attacker was overwhelming. He used his right hand to pin my right arm behind my back while his left hand grabbed my collar, pushing my cheek into my teeth.

"Don't even think about yelling. You'll have a bullet

in your back before you can say ‘Charter Arms’.”

It was a different voice this time. Hoarse, and higher-pitched. Disguised.

“Just take the money,” I hissed through gritted teeth, pulling the wad from my pocket.

“Listen to me,” the attacker said, releasing the hand from my collar and producing a gun. The weapon was not in my shoulder-blades this time. Instead, the gunman chose to wedge the barrel into the back of my lower jaw, pushing against a pressure point. I could feel my pulse against the cold metal.

“You’ve been very dangerous tonight,” croaked the voice, “Hold another session like that, and you’re dead.”

With that, they rammed my head into the bricks and I was out-cold.

When I awoke in a pile of cardboard boxes and old newspapers in an alley-way, I knew it was going to be a bad day. I released a long, dizzy groan.

I could tell that I’d been unconscious for at least half an hour, because the bruised blue sky had begun to bleed with the muskiness of dawn. Standing up, using the wall for support, I held my head in my hand. A trickle of blood through my fingers, and a bump like the ball of a foot. Throbbing. Sickly light-headedness.

Walking slowly into the quiet and empty city, I concentrated to get my bearings and began to stagger to my apartment. I was concussed.

Step by step, I felt as though I was sleepwalking. Shapes in front of me fading in and out of focus. Buildings, a fence, a tree. A few metres from my flat, a young male in his twenties asked if I was okay. I was fine, I lied. I appreciated his concern, I lied.

Eventually, I staggered to the door and struggled with the lock for an eternity before entering the tiny hallway. An Everest of a staircase led me to my room, which was already unlocked. Collapsing onto my springy, blanketed summit, I passed out again.

The next time I awoke was to the sound of Lanky barging through my door.

“You,” I growled, jumping to my feet.

“I’m back,” he began.

“You,” I said again and pushed him up against the wall, causing my furniture to bounce an inch away from the plaster-board. “Do you think I’m *stupid*?”

His face was one of shock and his hands were in the air as though I was holding a gun against his throat.

“Twice you’ve mugged me, you little punk. Twice you’ve walked away from me, and two minutes later you’re threatening me.”

Lanky was taken aback.

“What are you *talking* about?”

“You know what I’m talking about,” I hissed, pointing to the cut on my head.

The boy was shaking as he pulled his best confused face. As an unseen attacker, he was invisible. As Lanky, he was nothing.

“Who *are* you, anyway?” I asked him, sickened, “I don’t even know you. And you don’t know me. So how about you stay out of my flat? And don’t you dare do anything like this to me again.”

I pushed him through the door and slammed it shut before he could utter a word.

Calming down and hearing Lanky’s footsteps fade through the corridor, I looked at the clock with a sigh. It was 9:25. In the rooms to my left and right, people were only just awaking and showering, preparing for their unproductive Sundays. I, on the other hand,

pulled a folded wad of notes from my pocket as thick as a deck of cards. For a moment, I just looked at the money.

I wasn't proud of myself. Not happy. Just slightly richer.

I tossed the wad on the top of the television and pulled my thin black jumper off over my head, shaking my hair loose like a black lion's mane. Scratching the back of my neck, I plodded to the kitchen where I yawned and moistened a cloth to put on my bump. I was nocturnal, now. The night's sky would be my daytime. The moon; my sun. I would continue this venture without Lang. I'd thought he'd had potential, but I was wrong, and I was disappointed. Why had he threatened me? Why had he told me not to hold any more sessions?

Pressing the cold, damp rag against my forehead and left temple, I approached my bed. I was prepared to be on my own for a long time, now. Lang was the closest I'd come to having a friend in years, but he'd back-stabbed me.

After a stretch, I yawned once more before lying down on the bed and pulling the blankets over my body. Suddenly, something grabbed my arm from behind. I flinched and spun around, ready to strike.

"Oh, it's you," I said to Heather.

"What's going on?" she asked, sleepily, "I heard shouting. Have you two fallen out?"

"Yes."

"Don't be silly, go and make up with him."

I shook my head and told her that I couldn't. I told her not to ask why, so she didn't and, as she sat up, her eyes suddenly widened.

"Oh my God, look at your head!" she cried.

"I know," I said, "It's okay."

Immediately, she began dabbing the damp cloth

against my bruise and cut.

“Stop it,” I fussed, “I’m fine.”

“No you’re not, look at it.”

“How can I look at it?”

She seemed to enjoy mothering me, so after a short while I let her continue without complaining. Luci had always been the same.

When I’d boarded the train, after parting with my parents to leave for university, I’d felt a great relief, as though I’d been holding my breath all my life. I was an only child, and my parents had always been a very suffocating couple. I never felt as though I could talk to them about anything personal, especially to my Father. He was an old-fashioned man’s man, and what he lacked in size, he made up for in oppression.

They were both safety freaks. Constantly quoting statistics of household disasters and death-rates. It had all stemmed from my mother’s occupation as a coroner. At the point of me leaving for university, the obsession had spiralled out of control and it had taken a great deal of effort for them to even leave the house.

They had always taught me ‘savour the luxuries’. And for them – being rich – that meant ‘savour everything’.

Doors and windows were locked and boarded up. Bubble-wrap was taped to floors, walls, and banisters. Stairs were out-of-bounds. ‘Sharp’ wasn’t in their dictionary. Each day, my mother would reluctantly leave the house for work. My Father had all food and toiletries delivered directly to the house.

Thankfully, they had sent me to a boarding school. I only had to put up with their antics for a few weeks in the summer and around Christmas. They’d send me an

old-fashioned hand-written letter every month, and I was sure that they would do the same while I was at university. They were very traditional. And I was glad to leave.

The train arrived on time, and I boarded, looking for a place to sit. And that's when I saw her. The only person I thought I could ever love. She looked up at me, smiling politely.

I mirrored the expression as she moved her bags from the seat next to her, onto her lap and I sat down.

Long, straight hair. Dark ginger, like autumn. Stick-thin limbs and a tiny waist. She was wearing earthly colours. Muddy greens and greys. Grass-coloured eyes which matched mine. Marble-white skin. She looked like the queen of a forest.

Her name was Lucy and I'd known her before. We'd had a short relationship at boarding school when we were both thirteen, but now – six years later – she didn't seem to recognise me. To avoid embarrassment, I introduced myself again.

“Hi, I'm Travis,” I said, somewhat louder than I had intended.

“I'm Luci,” she replied, smiling sweetly, “I spell it with an 'i' because it makes me feel more important.”