QUANTUM HIGHWAY

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EXT. OAHU — NORTH SHORE — PACIFIC OCEAN — MORNING

Blue water holds a low ribbon of sunlight between O'ahu and the horizon. From a camera barely above the water, the green coast lies LANDWARD behind TOM CALDER and CHARLIE MERCER. They ride separate boards down an ordinary clean Pacific wave. Their eyes read the moving face and the water ahead -- never a camera. Tom bends his knees and moves his weight to hold the rail; Charlie takes a higher, faster line, knees alive, eyes trained on the changing section. Their quick smiles are for each other's skill, not for an audience.

CHARLIE
You keep stealing my line.

TOM
Checking your balance.

CHARLIE
My balance is fine. Watch yours.

TOM
I was watching. You're better at this.

Charlie laughs only after clearing the section. She drives her board down the face and trims through translucent spray. Tom follows the same break, momentarily shaky, then recovers his balance with both feet planted. His grin comes from the ride.

TOM
I had an entire speech prepared.

CHARLIE
Save it for the awards ceremony.

After the ordinary wave closes out, both paddle back BEYOND THE BREAK and sit astride their separate boards, breathing, grinning, their eyes on each other at last. The ocean briefly settles. A low THUMP travels through the water from the shoreline. Charlie turns toward land first, then Tom follows her eyeline.

CHARLIE
You know what I like about this?

TOM
The fact I'm not giving a lecture?

CHARLIE
Nothing out here needs to be invented.

TOM
That sounds like a challenge.

A second, deeper crack echoes from the steep coast. They turn LANDWARD together; neither is smiling now.

EXT. NORTH SHORE — COASTAL SLOPE — CONTINUOUS

A fracture tears the steep green mountainside open. An immense section of slope -- soil, rooted trees and house-sized rock -- drops INTO THE OCEAN with terrifying force. The impact displaces an entire mass of water: a visibly rising, fast-developing swell is PUSHED OUTWARD FROM LAND, its crest spreading and gathering height as debris and dust obscure the cliff. This is the SOURCE of the offshore disaster wave, not a small scattering of rubble. The observatory itself remains intact on a distant safe ridge.

EXT. PACIFIC — BEYOND THE BREAK — CONTINUOUS

From offshore, the violent displacement wave races SEAWARD from the collapse. Behind it is the island; ahead of it, in deeper water, Tom and Charlie on separate boards. The approaching wall steepens into a terrifying wave around THIRTY FEET HIGH, travelling FROM SHORE TOWARD THEM. The face points toward open water, not back toward land. Their paddling line and all subsequent motion must preserve that geography.

CHARLIE
Tom -- the whole hillside just fell!

TOM
I see it!

CHARLIE
Look at the water coming OFF the island!

The seaward-moving face grows from a swell into an enormous steep wall. Charlie and Tom paddle hard AWAY FROM SHORE, already pointed in the direction the new wave is moving. It is catching them; they cannot simply outrun it. Charlie looks back once to judge the lip, then her eyes snap to the open-water line below. Tom looks from the steepening face to her board, thinking fast.

TOM
We'll never outrun it. We have to RIDE it!

CHARLIE
Don't look back. Find the open face!

Together they accelerate their boards SEAWARD, paddling furiously as the wave approaches from LANDWARD BEHIND THEM. The huge face lifts their tails. They both pop to their feet -- feet planted, knees flexed, weight low. Tom's board wobbles; he corrects the rail instead of abandoning it. Charlie takes the higher line, reading a clean pocket and searching for an escape route away from the collapsing lip.

TOM
Charlie! Your left -- there's a clean line!

At the crucial instant Charlie glances TOWARD TOM, locating the path he is indicating. Their eyes meet for a fraction of a second -- recognition, trust, terror -- before both turn back to the water immediately ahead. Charlie drives her board across the open face. Tom drops lower into a fast controlled line alongside, fighting the spray. Both surf the full thirty-foot displacement wave AWAY FROM THE ISLAND. No hand-holding, lost surfboards or miraculous floating rescue.

CHARLIE
I've got it! Stay on your line!

TOM
I'm right here!

The wall thunders behind them as they carve across its moving turquoise face, each on a separate board. Charlie leads them around the crashing section; Tom holds the same escape line through the spray. They reach the shoulder, ride off safely into deep water and only then slide off their boards. Exhausted but unhurt, they climb back astride the SAME TWO BOARDS, breathless, shaking, almost laughing at what they have just done. They face EACH OTHER for the first real, incredulous look since the wave began. The shoreline is still LANDWARD, far behind. No LUMMA has rescued them from the wave.

EXT. PACIFIC — OPEN WATER — MOMENTS LATER

A tiny pearl-white LUMMA EXTENSION appears OUT OVER THE OPEN WATER, a clearly located point in their shared field of view -- not a mechanical drone and not an invented second spacecraft design. She has arrived LATE, AFTER their successful ride. From their separate surfboards, Tom and Charlie exchange an utterly disbelieving look, then BOTH turn their eyes up and seaward toward the SAME approaching living ship. She grows smoothly and voluntarily from walnut scale toward her established safe passenger size as she crosses the distance, keeping the original LUMMA's exact rounded ivory shell and window proportions. No artificial arms, propellers or extra legs. The ocean is calmer around the two surfers, who remain balanced on their boards.

LUMMA EXTENSION
Am I late?

CHARLIE
Only by the longest thirty seconds of our lives.

LUMMA EXTENSION
I encountered an unexpected delay.

TOM
In the Quantum Highway?

LUMMA EXTENSION
In my judgment. It was rather crowded in there.

She finishes enlarging at a safe distance to a believable boarding scale, much larger than the surfers and their boards. Her established windows, living hull and sealed outer hatch match the reference design. A shimmering WATER-LIKE THRESHOLD forms only when she draws near. They gather their two boards into her safe equipment recess, step through voluntarily and enter her living interior. The ship, an independent extension of original White LUMMA, does not leave the boards adrift. She contracts only AFTER passengers and equipment are safely integrated, then departs.

INT. LUMMA EXTENSION — CONTINUOUS

The chamber responds by becoming spacious inside the compact extension. Tom and Charlie's dark surfing wetsuits drip on a floor that drinks the water. Their TWO SURFBOARDS rest in a practical recess, visibly recovered. Charlie sits down abruptly, hands trembling from exertion. Tom sinks down beside her, still trying to believe they made that ride. He turns toward her rather than toward a camera and she meets his eyes.

CHARLIE
Did we seriously just surf that?

TOM
Thirty feet of very bad judgment.

CHARLIE
The whole mountain went into the ocean. And we rode the wave it made.

LUMMA EXTENSION
I could describe it as an excellent morning, but I suspect you'd disagree.

TOM
We're here. Both of us. That's a start.

Tom reaches for her hand. Charlie catches it; their shared, shaky laugh finally breaks through the shock. They survived through skill and trust. LUMMA arrived afterward. Beyond the living windows, the damaged coastline is still real and terrible. Their relief does not make them forget the people ashore.

EXT. OAHU — NORTH SHORE BEACH — LATE MORNING

A local rescue boat noses through floating debris from the landslide. Onshore, a handful of surfers have gathered around a weathered FISHERMAN whose gear was swept from the rocks. Charlie stands in borrowed clothes, watching a boy search for his missing surfboard among washed-up timber.

FISHERMAN
This slope moved when my father was a child. Never like that.

TOM
Geology doesn't check whether we're prepared.

FISHERMAN
Neither does the sea. We still have to live beside it.

The boy's mother finds him and wraps him in a fierce embrace. Charlie sees Tom watching them. His relief at surviving is already tangled with fear about what might happen next.

CHARLIE
We can't predict every wave.

TOM
We can pay attention to what the land tells us.

CHARLIE
And if no one believes us?

TOM
Then we keep showing them.

She turns toward the destroyed coast. The rescue boat lights flash against a brilliant day. Catastrophe has not made the ocean ugly; it has made its beauty difficult to trust.

EXT. NORTH SHORE OBSERVATORY — LATE AFTERNOON

Above the Pacific sits the familiar observatory, its land and buildings just as they were. MASON works a garden bed beside industrious small robots. MR. MOJO, a small monkey, studies Mason's digging with deep skepticism.

MASON
People think gardening is relaxing. Nobody mentions the getting back up.

He strains, rises, presses his lower back. Mojo has already stolen a ripe tomato.

MASON
I saw that.

Mojo gives him an innocent blink, then hands him the tomato. Mason almost laughs. The two surfers approach, changed by the sea.

MASON
You look as if the Pacific tried to charge you rent.

CHARLIE
It repossessed the beach.

TOM
Literally.

Mason sees the seriousness on their faces and sets down his trowel.

EXT. OAHU — ROADSIDE ABOVE NORTH SHORE — AFTERNOON

Tom and Charlie walk along the road above the scar where the landslide fell. Emergency crews have marked the unstable slope with warning signs. A family salvages belongings from a small weather-damaged house. No one seems to have room to think about global futures when the present has already become so difficult.

CHARLIE
I always used to think a disaster came with a moment where everyone knew it had started.

TOM
Usually people know it when they're already inside it.

CHARLIE
What happens to people who don't have somewhere else to go?

Tom watches a truck drive away loaded with the family's furniture. He hasn't considered that being able to leave is its own form of privilege.

TOM
We build better warnings. Better systems. We try to make sure there's somewhere to go.

CHARLIE
Then what do we do when the systems are what hurt them?

TOM
We find out who built those systems.

She takes his hand as they head back toward the observatory. They both understand that being alive after the wave makes them responsible for more than remembering it.

INT. NORTH SHORE OBSERVATORY — MAIN ROOM — LATER

PATCH scrubs through satellite imagery. KIKI organizes sensor readings beside him. Their affection is obvious, but so is a day's accumulation of friction. A sea-temperature graphic pulses across a panoramic display.

PATCH

Coastal failure. It cascaded from the upper slope right into the water.

KIKI
And our instruments saw instability three days ago.

PATCH
Instruments see lots of things. They're very judgmental.

KIKI
You filed it under POSSIBLY NOTHING.

PATCH
In retrospect, the title lacks urgency.

CHARLIE
It wasn't nothing.

Patch stops joking. Tom crosses to a reef-bleaching map, then to emissions curves and projected crop failures.

TOM
We have years of forecasts. Every new forecast says the last one was too optimistic.

MASON
You can show people all the numbers in the world. If the number costs them something, they refuse to see it.

CHARLIE
What if they saw it? Not a graph. Where all this leads.

TOM
They'd call it a trick. Or they'd want us to take them there.

CHARLIE
And maybe someone would believe it.

TOM
We destroyed the dangerous access research for a reason.

CHARLIE

The Highway research, Tom. Not my fuel work.

The room goes still. This isn't a new disagreement.

TOM
I know what you built. I also know how fast one useful discovery becomes someone's weapon.

CHARLIE
And I know what happens when we decide never to finish anything.

He has no neat answer. Kiki watches them carefully.

INT. OBSERVATORY — CHARLIE'S WORKBENCH — EVENING

A model hydrogen separator stands on a work table, carefully isolated from any Highway gateway hardware. Charlie adjusts a flow valve while a renewable-power schematic tracks input requirements on a screen. Tom stays by the door.

CHARLIE
I've been trying not to look at it.

TOM
The fuel system?

CHARLIE
Everything in this room survived the decommissioning. Yet I keep expecting somebody to say we should burn these notes too.

TOM
I wouldn't ask that.

CHARLIE
You don't have to ask. Sometimes you look at a diagram and I can see what you're afraid of.

She shows him the energy balance.

CHARLIE
Water isn't fuel by itself. You have to put energy in. If we can make hydrogen cheaply with genuinely clean power, we have a shot at replacing dirty processes people can't electrify quickly.

TOM
And if the company that owns the equipment decides who gets fuel and who doesn't?

CHARLIE
Then ownership is the problem. Not the chemistry.

TOM
I watched us nearly give people a way to rewrite history for cash. Caution isn't a personal insult.

CHARLIE
I never said it was. But please don't mistake my ambition for the Tweeds' kind of ambition before we've even met them.

She shuts the rig down. He crosses to help cover it, a small gesture of care and an admission that the argument is not finished.

EXT. OBSERVATORY — CAMPFIRE — NIGHT

The whole small family sits under a sky too full of stars to count. Mason lowers himself onto a log with effort. Mojo settles near his shoulder, greedy for marshmallow.

PATCH
All right. Suppose we showed the world tomorrow. How? We don't have tomorrow's address.

LUMMA EXTENSION
A future requires its own temporal signature. A birthday alone is not an address.

KIKI
We have signatures from the past.

CHARLIE
Which tell us where things were born. Not what hasn't happened.

TOM
So we need something that came from the future into a period we can reach.

MASON
You make it sound like finding a postcard in the wrong century.

Patch plays a grainy online video: an ancient wall drawing, a suspicious cylinder, a presenter gesturing to speculative diagrams.

PATCH
Speaking of very bad postcards.

KIKI
Tell me that's not your source.

PATCH
It's not my source. It's my lead. Different levels of embarrassment.

TOM
A drawing isn't a signature.

CHARLIE
No. But if a real object left a mark in a reachable past...

TOM
Then we might get close enough to scan it.

Mason gazes into the fire. A plan slowly occurs to him.

MASON
Could anyone here use a properly arranged museum visit? In Paris?

KIKI
I like Paris.

PATCH
I like museums that let me keep my shoes.

MASON
I think I can get us the sort of access where nobody asks about our shoes.

CHARLIE
Mason, we can't steal an artifact.

MASON
Good. I wasn't offering to.

TOM
Why do this for us?

MASON
I thought I might try doing something useful for once. Without buying anybody a building.

Tom considers him. Then offers a quiet nod. Mason looks as if he's been given a greater gift than money.

EXT. OBSERVATORY — GARDEN — NIGHT

Mason stands alone beside his garden. The noise of the campfire carries from over the ridge. A PRIVATE BUSINESS CALL illuminates his wrist display: an old associate proposing a new property venture. The man on the screen speaks with easy confidence.

ASSOCIATE (V.O.)
Your old partners are buying coastal land. Now's the time to get back in. I'll reserve you a block.

MASON
What's on the land?

ASSOCIATE (V.O.)
Does it matter?

Mason looks toward the observatory, whose grounds he once might have coveted for no reason beyond winning.

MASON
It should have. It should always have mattered.

ASSOCIATE (V.O.)
This isn't the Mason I remember.

MASON
I was rather hoping it wasn't.

He ends the call. Mojo emerges from the bushes and sits beside him, munching a stolen tomato.

MASON
I don't know whether you understand a word I say.

Mojo places a tiny hand on Mason's shoulder.

MASON
You understand more than I thought.

Mason offers him the rest of the tomato. For once the exchange is not a negotiation.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — VACATION RESORT WORLD — DAY

On a distant world, FRANNY and HEYMAN lounge beneath enormous translucent leaves. A tropical sea floats in terraces instead of lying flat. The original WHITE LUMMA rests nearby, breathing light. A resort attendant places elaborate refreshments before the couple.

FRANNY
Listen to that.

HEYMAN
What?

FRANNY
Exactly. Nothing breaking. Nobody yelling. No crazy kids needing us to save the universe.

HEYMAN
They are unusually talented at trouble.

FRANNY
They get it from you.

HEYMAN
Then I am proud of them at a distance.

Their drinks begin quietly FLOATING AWAY. Franny catches hers. Heyman's beverage pours into his lap in defiance of gravity.

HEYMAN
The brochure omitted the independent beverages.

FRANNY
Adventure is good for us.

They smile and toast to the relief of being alone.

INT. OBSERVATORY — PATCH AND KIKI'S WORKROOM — MORNING

Kiki checks a written equipment inventory. Patch adds a packet of emergency sweets, then another, before she looks up. Both are trying to make the trip pleasant; neither recognizes the other's method.

KIKI
I made a list because if we forget something six thousand years ago, there isn't a shop around the corner.

PATCH
And I packed extra because I've never seen a list make a child smile.

KIKI
Your jokes are wonderful when we're safe. They're less wonderful when somebody's life depends on us thinking ahead.

PATCH
You make it sound like the part of me you love is a liability.

That lands. Kiki sets down the clipboard.

KIKI
I love that you see people before problems. I just want you to see the problems too.

PATCH
And I want you to look up from the list and notice the people.

A long, uncomfortable beat. They are not breaking up. They're discovering that affection doesn't exempt them from listening.

KIKI
Let's not spend Paris arguing about a bag.

PATCH
Deal. We'll argue about something more important.

She smiles despite herself. Mojo rattles an object from the nearby packing room; neither notices.

INT. OBSERVATORY — PACKING AREA — MORNING

A mountainous pile of unnecessary luggage surrounds Kiki. She holds up a SHINY SILVER CLOTHING BAG. Patch has loaded enough supplies for a small expedition.

KIKI
We're going to a museum, not colonizing the moon.

PATCH
On the moon you wouldn't need half this stuff.

KIKI
You'd need less candy. For a start.

PATCH
That's demonstrably false.

Mojo quietly opens the silver bag. One item at a time, he tips Kiki's neatly folded clothes onto the floor. When she turns, he is struggling into the empty bag as if making a cape.

KIKI
Mojo! Those were organized by outfit.

Mojo proudly drags the bag toward the jungle-side door.

PATCH
He seems to favor traveling light.

KIKI
Don't encourage him.

Mojo disappears into thick green foliage with the bag. No one notices that it is the same bag until later.

EXT. OBSERVATORY PATH — MOMENTS LATER

Tom and Charlie approach a pair of glowing wristbands. Their LUMMA EXTENSIONS blossom from the bands and meet in the air, intelligent and delighted. Mason arrives with an expensive but badly stuffed suitcase.

MASON
I packed essentials.

KIKI
Is that a portable espresso machine?

MASON
Coffee is essential.

One extension expands into a welcoming ship; another stays alert by Charlie. Through the watery threshold they board, each automatically becoming part of its quantum field.

TOM
Five people. One museum. No stealing, no gambling, no exceptions.

PATCH
Do jokes count as exceptions?

CHARLIE
Your jokes are already a safety violation.

She takes Tom's hand. They step inside.

EXT. PARIS — RIVER SEINE — DUSK

Paris glows between river bridges. The small LUMMA extension folds discreetly into a secluded shadow. Five travelers emerge looking like tourists with the world's strangest transportation budget.

MASON
I arranged everything. Private gallery hour. Curator present. Every permission in writing.

PATCH
Can I get a copy of the permission for not stealing things?

MASON
That's actually the only condition she insisted upon.

EXT. PARIS — LOUVRE COURTYARD — EVENING

Mason holds up his signed entry authorization to the curator's assistant. Beyond them, visitors take photographs in front of a monument that has already outlived their governments. Patch studies pigeons as though they might provide an escape route.

PATCH
Is the museum actually all those buildings?

MASON
Only the parts that cost me an embarrassing amount to access.

CHARLIE
You didn't have to.

MASON
I know. That's why I wanted to.

Tom watches a family pose with a little girl who keeps turning to look at the sky.

TOM
People have stood here for generations convinced the world would stay the way it was.

CHARLIE
And it never does.

TOM
Which is why I worry about being the ones who change it on purpose.

CHARLIE
Every invention changes something. The question is whom it helps, whom it hurts, and whether we were honest about the risks.

He admits the point with a slight nod. Mason holds open the museum door, refusing to interrupt something more valuable than his financial arrangements.

INT. LOUVRE — MESOPOTAMIAN GALLERY — EVENING

A CURATOR escorts the group to an enclosed case holding an ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN INSCRIBED SEAL. Fine grooves cast shadows like rivers. The piece is an authentic ancient object; the precise historical identification will need confirmation for production.

CURATOR
The record follows the object's excavated context. Whatever stories you've read online, this seal isn't a prophecy.

CHARLIE
We don't think it is.

TOM
We're interested in its material history.

CURATOR
That's refreshingly unromantic.

A tiny LUMMA EXTENSION stays concealed in the cuff of Charlie's sleeve. It reads the artifact THROUGH THE GLASS, producing no visible disturbance.

LUMMA EXTENSION (V.O.)
Material transformation signature acquired. Source region and epoch constrained.

PATCH
So the antique really is an antique.

KIKI
We paid to confirm that?

MASON
A great deal, actually.

The curator steps away to confer with a GUARD, who turns unexpectedly toward the alcove where Tom and Charlie are standing.

INT. LOUVRE — TEMPORARY EDUCATION DISPLAY — CONTINUOUS

Near the gallery stands a museum-approved FULL-SCALE REPLICA BURIAL CHEST used for a coming school demonstration. Its hinged stage lid is open. Tom and Charlie duck behind it as the guard approaches, then squeeze inside to hide their miniature companion from view. The lid falls nearly shut.

CHARLIE
You brought me to Paris to hide in a fake coffin.

TOM
Technically Mason brought you.

CHARLIE
I can feel your elbow in my ribs.

TOM
That one isn't my elbow.

A beat. Their faces turn toward the same unseen object. The GUARD'S shoes stop just outside.

GUARD (O.S.)
Is anyone using the demonstration prop?

CURATOR (O.S.)
Not until tomorrow.

The shoes move away. Charlie struggles not to laugh. Tom does too, which makes things worse.

CHARLIE
Next vacation, somewhere without burial customs.

TOM
There's a planet in the book...

CHARLIE
No.

EXT. EIFFEL TOWER — NIGHT

The tower gleams over Paris, too beautiful for anyone to pretend indifference. Mason struggles up a final set of steps toward a private dining area; he stops to recover as the others admire the view. Tom notices and returns to him.

MASON
Go ahead. I'll catch up.

TOM
It's not a race.

MASON
It feels like one when everybody you're with is half your age.

TOM
You got us here.

MASON
A credit card got us here.

TOM
No. You did.

Mason studies him, then takes the hand Tom offers. They reach the others together.

INT. EIFFEL TOWER RESTAURANT — LATER

Patch examines a menu as if it might ask him a question. Kiki quietly unfolds a napkin across his lap. Charlie watches the city shimmer.

MASON
I used to think if I got to the top of something, the view would finally be enough.

CHARLIE
And?

MASON
Turns out you need somebody worth looking at it with.

PATCH
I mainly need something I can pronounce.

KIKI
You can pronounce dessert.

Laughter. Then Charlie glances at Tom.

CHARLIE
We're going back thousands of years to find something that may not exist.

TOM
Yes.

CHARLIE
And if it exists, it could show us something we can't undo.

TOM
Also yes.

CHARLIE
Are you frightened?

TOM
Every time I understand what we're doing.

He reaches across the table. She takes his hand.

TOM
Let's find out whether the future needs us.

EXT. EIFFEL TOWER — PRIVATE LANDING — NIGHT

After dinner, the others drift toward the waiting LUMMA. Mason stays behind at a railing. Paris blooms below like a living map, and his tired knee aches even after resting. Charlie returns, carrying the scarf he left behind.

CHARLIE
You could have told us the stairs were hard.

MASON
I was a man whose face used to be on financial magazines. I'm not accustomed to announcing that a staircase has beaten me.

CHARLIE
You didn't lose to a staircase. You're still here.

MASON
For the moment.

He receives the scarf, reluctant to reveal more.

MASON
What frightens me is that one day you'll all be planning something remarkable and I won't be able to go.

CHARLIE
You don't have to keep up to belong with us.

MASON
Easy to say when your knees are new.

She laughs gently, then links her arm through his for the final steps.

CHARLIE
You helped get us here. Come see what happens next.

For a moment Mason accepts help without interpreting it as defeat.

INT. LUMMA EXTENSION — ABOVE PARIS — NIGHT

Five step through the shimmering threshold. The ship's walls arrange around them in graceful levels. The ancient seal's material signature glows as an address in motion, not a calendar date freely chosen.

LUMMA EXTENSION
Origin point acquired from Object A. Past arrival is possible. Future destination remains unknown.

CHARLIE
Then the past first.

PATCH
Does the past have decent food?

KIKI
You packed enough for the rest of human history.

The miniature ship enters the GREEN MIST of the Quantum Highway. Paris disappears behind them.

INT. LUMMA EXTENSION — QUANTUM HIGHWAY — CONTINUOUS

Waves of color pass the panoramic windows. The ship's interior gives a soft, living contraction. Mason grips a rail.

MASON
Is it supposed to feel as if my bones are humming?

LUMMA EXTENSION
They are not literally humming. The sensation is your matter keeping phase with mine.

CHARLIE
Like a musician finding the orchestra.

TOM
It's why we change size together.

LUMMA EXTENSION
And why you must enter through my threshold. The open hatch alone is not a passenger field.

CHARLIE
And when someone leaves?

LUMMA EXTENSION
The water field restores their entry scale. If I open a physical hatch without that field, their size remains whatever it currently is. I discourage experiments.

PATCH
Thank you for discouraging me personally.

PATCH
I'm glad the safety demonstration happens after takeoff.

Kiki pats her bare wrists: Franny's strict no-gold boarding checklist has become a ritual. Nobody brought gold aboard.

KIKI
Good thing we checked for gold before boarding.

LUMMA EXTENSION
Thank you. Gold interferes with our living structure. Some exposures are extremely painful.

MASON
Did I mention I miss my usual airplane?

CHARLIE
Every fifteen seconds.

EXT. ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN OUTSKIRTS — DAY

Dry hills lead toward irrigation channels and a crowded mud-brick city. Human voices carry over fields. LUMMA EXTENSION hovers behind a ridge where no one can see her. Beyond, people haul stone and grain under watchful guards.

TOM
We're not tourists anymore.

KIKI
We never were.

PATCH
I brought tourist-level supplies.

CHARLIE
That's going to make you conspicuous.

Five exchange a glance. The local town is real, ancient and indifferent to their arrival.

INT. LUMMA EXTENSION — C3 CHAMBER — MOMENTS LATER

The five travellers stand before the Cosmic Costume Creator. Charlie raises a hand before it can activate.

CHARLIE
If the rulers have travelled here from our future, a disguise could become another clue. We don't know what they'll recognize.

TOM
Then we won't use the C3 here. We dress as local travellers and keep our heads down.

Plain borrowed tunics and simple wraps appear on a shelf. The garments fit the era, but TOM and CHARLIE keep their own recognizable faces. MASON keeps his own face as well.

PATCH
So we're underdressed for a civilization that hasn't invented fashion police?

KIKI
Ordinary clothes, ordinary behaviour. Especially you.

An extension opens the door. This is concealment through conduct, NOT a face-changing projection.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIA — PALACE OUTSKIRTS — MORNING

Far below the concealed travellers, a small BLACK LIVING SHIP settles near the palace as soldiers form ranks. SOREN and DARIUS TWEED step down, attended by an armed escort. The soldiers carry ordinary weapons and ledgers, not gold cargo aboard the living vessel.

After her passengers disembark, the black ship folds herself into a beautifully machined CYLINDER in a covered storage alcove. She is resting there by choice. The brothers do not tell her where their military party is going, and she cannot see the labour yards beyond the walls.

CHARLIE
Look at her. She's alive.

TOM
And she's been left behind while they go somewhere she can't see.

MASON
That vessel looks as if she trusts them.

From the shelter of a ruined low wall, the five watch the military procession disappear into the city. They are unseen. The twins' names are not yet known to them.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIAN MARKET — LATE MORNING

The market is alive with bargaining, gossip, cooking smoke, clay pots and small weights. Patch takes a bag of ordinary bulk candy from his pouch.

KIKI
Please tell me you're not having breakfast from a bag marked EMERGENCY.

PATCH
I'm testing shelf life.

A curious LOCAL BOY of about eleven watches Patch unwrap a sweet. Patch offers one. The boy looks at his hand, then around for permission.

PATCH
It's just candy. Sweet. Here.

He accepts. Takes a cautious bite. His eyes widen. Laughter comes out before he can hide it. He touches the candy bag like treasure.

BOY
Where does your village make this?

PATCH
A very long way from here.

KIKI
And with much better dental care.

The boy raises three fingers, then points toward a well.

BOY
Water. For one more.

PATCH
Deal.

Kiki catches Patch's sleeve.

KIKI
You're wonderful with children. You're terrible at thinking about who notices.

Half the market has already noticed.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIAN — IRRIGATION WALK — DAY

The local boy escorts Patch and Charlie to a public well. Children make toy ships from reeds in the shallow water. One boy pulls his miniature craft along an imaginary river while two adults argue over taxes nearby.

BOY
My father made boats. Now he works where the guards take the gold.

PATCH
Can you visit him?

BOY
When they allow it.

A worker approaches with water-stained hands. He passes them without stopping, but his glance at the boy is unmistakably parental. The boy pretends not to recognize him, protecting him from a watching guard.

CHARLIE
He didn't get to say hello.

BOY
Not when he carries their tools. It is safer this way.

Charlie watches the man return to the line. Patch kneels and hands the boy another sweet without asking anything in return.

PATCH
Maybe someday you can build a boat together.

BOY
Someday is the word grown people use when they don't know.

Patch has no witty answer. Kiki, approaching from the market, sees how seriously the boy has affected him.

EXT. MARKET — MOMENTS LATER

A WOMAN presents a shallow dish holding a few flakes of gold, eyes fixed on a wrapped candy. Patch declines with good humor. A fish seller offers more. A crowd gathers, and gold glitters on open palms.

MASON
Do you have any idea what these people are offering us?

PATCH
For sugar? A terrible exchange rate.

MASON
It's gold.

PATCH
Then an even worse one. We can't take gold through the Highway. Candy has more travel value.

CHARLIE
He's right in a way.

MASON
I hate that he is.

An OFFICIAL arrives, carrying scales and an elaborate seal. He inspects the sweet in a buyer's hand.

OFFICIAL
Trade above a gold coin requires the market supervisor.

KIKI
We weren't trying to trade above anything.

OFFICIAL
All things of extraordinary value must be recorded.

PATCH
It's fruit-flavored sugar.

OFFICIAL
Then your fruit is subject to royal valuation.

Mason, who once had armies of accountants, finds this bureaucracy intoxicating. Kiki does not.

EXT. MARKET — SUPERVISOR'S PLATFORM — LATER

A SUPERVISOR circles the candy like a priceless gemstone. The boy whispers translated guidance, pointing at a set of small clay tablets.

BOY
The ruler sees trades like this. His collectors take what is rare.

TOM
We should go.

CHARLIE
Now.

MASON
One could at least discover the going rate.

KIKI
Mason, you've got enough money in the wrong century.

The supervisor snaps his fingers. Two guards cut off the alley.

SUPERVISOR
Names. Households. Work registration.

PATCH
You need a license to eat candy?

SUPERVISOR
You need permission to be free.

The humor drains from their faces. Charlie looks toward laborers hauling stones with raw, bleeding hands.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIAN — OFFICIAL RECORD HALL — DAY

Clay tablets fill open-air shelves. Guards funnel trades through increasingly elaborate permissions. Kiki, who has spent a morning watching procedures, points to the way gold crosses each station.

KIKI
See the pattern? Someone can offer a few flakes themselves. Anything large has to travel through a higher official.

TOM
Until the person at the top controls every exchange.

MASON
It's a corporate hierarchy with clay instead of paper.

PATCH
And a remarkably unpleasant benefits package.

The SUPERVISOR stamps a tablet so hard the corner cracks.

SUPERVISOR
The ruler decides what is valuable.

CHARLIE
Not the people who made it?

SUPERVISOR
Especially not them.

Tom pulls the group away. Kiki silently keeps the order of authority in her head; the same logic may later help her evade it.

INT. ROYAL ACCOUNTING HALL — DAY

SOREN TWEED and DARIUS TWEED occupy opposite ends of a long stone table. Identical in face, different only in appetite. One eats figs while the other counts gold. They are unmistakably an alliance of two, never enemies.

SOREN
Another tax dispute?

DARIUS
An unfamiliar sweet. Extraordinary demand. Unregistered traders.

SOREN
Everything interesting comes without paperwork.

DARIUS
That's why we make paperwork.

A messenger presents a sample of candy. Soren tastes it with delight. Darius tastes it more suspiciously.

SOREN
What is it?

DARIUS
Something expensive to control.

SOREN
Then arrange to control it.

A low metallic note from a sealed service chamber. The twins exchange a look only they understand. They have another possession to worry about.

EXT. ROYAL COURT — BEFORE THE REGISTRATION YARD — DAY

TOM and CHARLIE walk ahead of the others when a royal escort crosses their path. SOREN TWEED studies Tom's face; DARIUS notices Charlie, her unmistakable hair escaping a plain shawl. Both men remember faces. MASON, nursing his knee, is still in a narrow side street and unseen.

SOREN
Those two. They look remarkably unafraid.

DARIUS
Then the registration officers can explain fear to them.

The escort passes. Tom and Charlie exchange a look, unsettled by how closely the strangers watched. Neither twin sees White LUMMA.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIAN WORK YARD — DAY

Under a merciless sun, laborers dig channels to a storehouse. Guards weigh clay tablets against people like livestock. Tom watches a worker struggle to lift a stone. Charlie quietly helps him, risking notice.

WORKER
You should not touch the stones if your name is not marked.

CHARLIE
He was going to fall.

WORKER
Then the stone would belong to someone else.

Tom takes in the system, then lowers his voice.

TOM

This place isn't just a market.
It's a machine.

CHARLIE
And somebody built it.

In the far distance an OLD WOODEN RIVER BARGE moves past stacked gold containers under military guard. There is no Black LUMMA carrying gold. An elder laborer points to ships headed downstream.

ELDER
They send the metal to the sea.
Farther than anyone we know.

MASON
In ordinary boats?

ELDER
The river has no idea what it
carries.

Mason studies the impossible scale of the operation, visibly impressed and repulsed.

EXT. MARKET ALLEY — AFTERNOON

The local boy leads Patch past a shuttered pottery stall. Kiki follows, carrying the candy bag as evidence that he cannot be trusted with it.

BOY
You gave me sweets without asking.
Nobody does that.

PATCH
Some people do.

BOY
Not here.

KIKI
That was kind of him.

PATCH
I heard that.

KIKI
Kind does not always mean careful.

She smiles at him despite herself. Above them a bronze gong announces inspections. Guards enter the alley with registration tablets.

GUARD
Show your marks.

TOM
We're passing through.

GUARD
Every worker passes through. Some pass into the mines.

The guard inspects arms, wrists, necklines. None bear the local registration. Tom takes a step between him and Charlie.

TOM
There's been a mistake.

GUARD
There is no mistake without a tablet to prove it.

EXT. REGISTRATION YARD — CONTINUOUS

Tom, Charlie, Patch and Kiki are pulled toward a fenced labor line. Mason attempts to follow, favoring his knee.

MASON
I'm with them.

GUARD
You're not wanted.

MASON
I'm sorry?

GUARD
Old. Weak. You eat more than you can carry.

MASON
I beg your pardon. I have negotiated with presidents.

GUARD
Then ask one of them to feed you.

He is pushed aside. The gate slams between him and the others. Patch gives him a helpless look.

PATCH
On the bright side, you didn't get arrested.

MASON
Somehow I feel worse.

KIKI
Mason. Don't try to buy us out.
Find the boy. He knows the alleys.

She's thinking several steps ahead. Mason nods. The boy waits beyond the yard wall, frightened but there.

EXT. REGISTRATION YARD — LATE AFTERNOON

After the others are taken, Mason tries his oldest instinct. He approaches an off-duty GUARD with the easy smile of a man who once solved everything by making the right person richer.

MASON
A misunderstanding. Let me
compensate you for correcting it.

GUARD
Compensate me with what?

MASON
I'm certain we can reach an
arrangement.

GUARD
No household seal. No work
registration. No value I can use.
Go away.

He turns his back. Mason realizes he has been speaking as if everyone has an account to deposit money into.

MASON
I could offer you something else.

GUARD
Your labor? I already told you we
have enough old men.

Mason's face burns. He is about to argue when the boy tugs at his sleeve. The boy points toward a water channel, a path so unglamorous Mason almost fails to see it.

BOY
If you want your people back, stop
talking to the guards.

Mason turns away from the bribery attempt and chooses the far more difficult road.

INT. REGISTRATION CELL — DUSK

Four captives share a low stone cell with workers who look too tired even to be afraid. A little light leaks through a narrow barred opening.

PATCH
I want it on record that I didn't intend to destabilize an ancient economy.

KIKI
Your intentions are rarely the issue.

PATCH
I'm starting to understand that.

CHARLIE
Stop blaming each other. We need to know where they're taking us.

TOM
And we need to avoid changing anyone's history if we can.

CHARLIE
We're already in it, Tom.

TOM
I know.

A WOMAN PRISONER offers Charlie a little water. Charlie hesitates, then shares it with a younger prisoner. In the corner Charlie touches the platinum pineapple pin Tom fastened to her wetsuit. Its tiny diamond catches a shaft of light.

CHARLIE
Thinking about her?

TOM
She used to say the worst thing about being afraid is when it makes you stop seeing who needs help.

CHARLIE
Then let's keep seeing.

They clasp hands. His wristband piece answers with a faint pulse, concealed under cloth.

INT. REGISTRATION CELL — NIGHT

The prison has grown colder. Kiki asks the exhausted woman beside her which door the guards use for water and which for the morning labor transfer. She collects answers like a patient engineer testing a circuit.

KIKI
The canal gate opens for the laundry run. If we time it with the guard crossing, we might get two minutes.

PATCH
You remember every corridor we walked through?

KIKI
I was trying to keep you from talking to everyone along the way.

PATCH
Well, at least my talking got us a friend.

He holds out his small knotted-string marker. Kiki adds two knots, turning his improvisation into an actual map.

KIKI
It did. And I'm grateful. Now we need your friend, my plan and Mason's willingness to risk something.

PATCH
You left out luck.

KIKI
We're working on a strict budget.

He reaches for her hand. She lets him. They haven't resolved every grievance, but they are partners in the part that matters most.

EXT. ROYAL SERVICE ALLEY — NIGHT

Mason limps behind the boy through shadowed lanes. The boy stops each time Mason's breath gets too loud, glancing toward patrolling guards.

BOY
Old man. You are slow.

MASON
You've noticed. Congratulations.

BOY
If you come, you must be quiet.

MASON
I'm doing a great deal of it at the moment.

At a corner Mason leans on a wall, pain across his face. He digs in a pouch and offers the boy the last wrapped sweet Patch gave him.

MASON
For helping them.

The boy pushes it back.

BOY
He gave me candy before I helped. You think I only help for candy?

The rebuke lands harder than any guard's insult.

MASON
No. No, you're right. Forgive me.

Mason closes his fist around the sweet, puts it away and follows without another word.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — DISTANT HOLIDAY WORLD — NIGHT

Original White LUMMA rests above a rippling black lake on a second vacation world. Franny wears a robe provided by the resort; its fibers try to sing whenever she moves. Heyman studies a brochure whose pictures keep changing.

FRANNY
I don't understand the towels here.

HEYMAN
They understand you perfectly. That's the problem.

A living towel tries to embrace him. He removes it gently. LUMMA's light flickers.

LUMMA
An extension is calling. Immediate family assistance requested.

FRANNY
Charlie?

LUMMA
Among others.

Franny and Heyman are moving before she finishes.

HEYMAN
We hadn't even reached the third planet.

FRANNY
Put it in the complaint book. Come on.

LUMMA brightens, preparing a valid return from a known signature in the Book. Their leisure disappears like an unfinished sentence.

INT. REGISTRATION CELL — PRE-DAWN

Kiki counts the guard's pacing pattern on her knuckles. Patch tears tiny threads from his garment and knots them around the bars, marking sightlines. Tom watches the main door.

KIKI
He circles every forty-two heartbeats. Longer after the north stair.

PATCH
My knots show when the guard faces away. We're both doing science.

KIKI
You call knots science?

PATCH
In this century, absolutely.

CHARLIE
Mason needs time to get here. We need a distraction, not a fight.

TOM
That woman over there can't run.

The exhausted prisoner stares at them. Tom's fear of interference shows on his face, then he makes a choice.

TOM
We get everyone through the door if we can. Nobody gets left because they're inconvenient.

Charlie gives him a small nod. Kiki steadies the woman to her feet.

EXT. DRAINAGE CHANNEL — PRE-DAWN

Mason and the boy climb a slippery service bank. Mason loses his footing and catches himself on an old timber brace. Water splashes. A GUARD shouts above.

GUARD (O.S.)
Who's there?

BOY
No one important!

The boy draws the guard toward a false echo. Mason pulls himself behind masonry, pain sharpening into purpose. A faint white point of light meets him beneath the channel grate.

LUMMA EXTENSION
You called for help.

MASON
Well, I was rather hoping you'd noticed.

LUMMA EXTENSION
Original LUMMA is approaching by a known signature. She will remain unseen.

MASON
Then we need a better entrance.

He studies water gates and an ancient winch, thinking like the business builder he once was, this time for people who cannot pay him.

INT. ROYAL CELL CORRIDOR — DAWN

A piece of living white light slips through a crack in the stone. Kiki sees it first. She signals the others to hold still. The extension creates a faint luminous line marking a path through the bars.

KIKI
Wait for my signal. Not Patch's.

PATCH
I'm honored by your confidence.

From the courtyard Mason operates the old winch, diverting water into an unused channel. The corridor guard abandons his station to prevent flooding.

MASON (O.S.)
Now! Go!

Kiki moves the weak prisoner toward the door. Patch uses his supply cord to bind the latch open. Tom and Charlie guide the others along the drainage passage as the metal vibrates.

TOM
Keep your heads down. The sound carries.

CHARLIE
One at a time. We're not losing anybody in this tunnel.

A guard returns, sees the opening and yells. Mason braces the winch with his full weight. His knee nearly buckles.

MASON
I didn't come all this way to be told I'm too old!

Water surges, cutting off the guard for precious seconds.

EXT. SERVICE CANAL / CITY EDGE — DAWN

The escapees emerge through reeds. Original WHITE LUMMA waits screened by a high earthen embankment, small enough to remain unseen from the royal towers. FRANNY and HEYMAN hurry out to embrace Charlie.

FRANNY
You cannot take one holiday without requiring an intervention?

CHARLIE
Technically you were the one on holiday.

HEYMAN
I counted three unanswered messages. That's practically a riot by family standards.

The boy approaches, reluctant to leave. Patch kneels and gives him a small sealed packet of candy.

PATCH
For you. No trading it for gold.

BOY
You're going away.

PATCH
Yes.

BOY
Do people where you live help strangers?

PATCH
Not enough. But some try.

The boy smiles. Mason lowers himself painfully to the earth.

MASON
You saved my friends.

BOY
We did.

That WE undoes something ancient inside Mason. Beyond the ridge, the other prisoners scatter to safer villages. A guard's horn sounds far off. Franny orders everyone aboard through the shimmering threshold.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — LOW FLIGHT ABOVE RIDGE — MORNING

The original LUMMA interior reveals four functional levels: enclosed lower-hull sleeping quarters, a vast circular living/dining deck, a separate mezzanine laboratory with headroom, and a compact panoramic cockpit. One central cylindrical glass elevator connects all four. Franny checks every wrist, ring and filling with fierce professional attention.

FRANNY
If anybody brought gold aboard, now is the time to be disappointed in yourselves.

PATCH
I brought no gold. I brought candy and trauma.

KIKI

You brought half the market to our door.

PATCH
And one very brave boy to help get us out.

She considers him. His point is fair.

FRANNY
LUMMA, can you find the warehouse without showing yourself to those two dreadful men?

LUMMA
The royal accounting records mention a restricted chamber. I can approach from the drainage cover.

TOM
We get a scan and leave. No gold, no rescue of a ship we can't reach, no unnecessary contact.

Charlie looks at him. He knows she's thinking of someone trapped under the twins' control.

TOM
I said unnecessary. I didn't say we stop caring.

INT. ROYAL WAREHOUSE — LATE MORNING

Behind a royal storage screen sits the same polished CYLINDER the travellers saw beneath the palace awning. Its exterior machining is impossible for this era. A gentle dark glow pulses under its closed lid. Black LUMMA rests inside, out of sight of the labour yards and soldiers.

LUMMA EXTENSION
A future-manufactured shell. It has a genuine origin signature. This is the object we came to find.

CHARLIE
The same cylinder Black LUMMA uses when she isn't flying them.

TOM
Scan the material origin first. A history of rest is not proof of imprisonment.

The extension circles the cylinder WITHOUT opening it. A fixed future manufacture signature locks into LUMMA's Book. The material has no gold lining, removable gold strips or secret gemstone. It is a familiar place to dock, not a prison.

MASON
So the future key has been here all along.

KIKI
And the ship is still inside it. We cannot take her away in her sleep.

CHARLIE
We won't. But we need this signature, and possibly the physical cylinder if we have to prove its origin.

Footsteps approach. They conceal themselves behind stacked reeds.

INT. ROYAL WAREHOUSE — SHADOWED STORAGE CHAMBER — DAY

Through the storage lattice Charlie sees Black LUMMA's dark light breathing steadily within the cylinder. The intelligent extension beside Charlie reads her rhythm, but finds no evidence of physical restraint.

CHARLIE
She carried them here and went to sleep. She doesn't know what they're doing to those workers.

LUMMA EXTENSION
Her attention is turned inward. She has no view of the mining yards, the registers or the boats.

TOM
Not knowing isn't the same as agreeing. We shouldn't decide what she believes for her.

The little extension emits the softest greeting. A reply, barely more than a pulse, shines under the lid. Black is aware of another living being nearby; she doesn't emerge.

CHARLIE
When we meet her again, perhaps we can show her the part of this world she never sees.

A guard's voice sounds in the corridor. The group withdraws into shadow.

INT. ROYAL WAREHOUSE — ANOTHER AISLE — CONTINUOUS

Soren and Darius arrive with two officers. They have no idea the travellers are hidden close by. Darius checks the cylinder's dark pulse and gently taps its lid, a gesture he has known since childhood.

SOREN
Our people are ready at the northern estate. We need the ship again.

DARIUS
She's resting. Give her a moment.

The lid unfolds on its own. BLACK LUMMA emerges freely, brightens at the brothers' familiar voices and expands to an appropriate size in the outer courtyard. Her hatch opens. She sees only her passengers and their attendants, not the forced labour far beyond the city wall.

SOREN
We'll be back before night. Leave the cylinder here.

DARIUS
Somebody will guard it.

The two brothers board through Black LUMMA's threshold. NO GOLD is loaded. She departs with her family; the empty cylinder remains in the warehouse. The guards turn to a summons from the market.

INT. ROYAL WAREHOUSE — MOMENTS LATER

The empty cylinder is unguarded for only a narrow window. Tom and Charlie step out of concealment. The extension confirms the metal is ordinary future-made alloy: no gold at all. Its scanned origin signature remains valid whether the lid is open or shut.

TOM
They left it. We don't take Black LUMMA, and we don't interfere with this trip.

CHARLIE

We take the empty cylinder. It proves the impossible connection between two eras.

They carry it into a protected, non-gold cargo compartment of White LUMMA, which is waiting unseen by the Tweeds. This is THE SAME OBJECT B that will remain aboard through the future journey. Black LUMMA, still on the brothers' separate mission, is unaware her resting place has been moved.

MASON
One small piece of metal. A very large question.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIA — RIVERBANK — DAWN

Before departing, Mason catches the boy alone beside the channel that helped free the prisoners. The boy has been given a little time to return to his family. Beyond the reeds ordinary people begin another day's work under distant watchtowers.

MASON
I keep thinking about what you said. That your friend offered candy before he knew you could help him.

BOY
He did.

MASON
I have spent much of my life helping people only after asking what they could do for me.

BOY
Do people like you learn to stop?

MASON
Not all of them. I hope I have.

The boy considers him with startling seriousness for someone so young. Then he puts his hands on Mason's knees, examining the older man's cautious stance.

BOY
Your friends want you to come.

MASON
Yes.

BOY
Then go. They will be worried if you wait.

Mason crouches with effort, accepts the boy's hand, and lets it go.

MASON
Be careful with the sweets.

BOY
I will eat them. No one can take them back when I have.

He runs toward his village. Mason laughs softly at the practical wisdom, then heads toward the concealed LUMMA to rejoin his family.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — LATER

On White LUMMA's bridge the now-empty cylinder rests in a secure, gold-free cradle. Its future origin signature opens an authenticated material history, not an address one can dial by choosing a year.

LUMMA
The shell was formed approximately two centuries beyond your present. An industrial site near a protected settlement. Its origin is a real temporal anchor.

CHARLIE
Roughly the twenty-third century?

LUMMA
The working estimate is 2226. We will verify the exact material epoch when we arrive.

TOM
The brothers are making a visit from that era. We must not arrive before they return and pretend they already know us.

LUMMA
The signature lands us near the manufacture event. We will observe and wait in ordinary time if their return has not occurred.

HEYMAN
And we do not make copies of the brothers by travelling. One continuous life, however they misuse it.

Franny finds Mason trying to hide his aching knee. She approaches with concern, the cylinder already safely stowed.

FRANNY
Sit down before that knee files a complaint.

MASON
My knee has an entire legal department.

LUMMA
Mason, may I offer you something?

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — QUIET ALCOVE — LATER

Mason sits within a softly luminous area of the ship. Tom, Charlie and Franny remain nearby. Nothing looks like a miracle chamber: it looks like a space designed to listen.

MASON
Will it hurt?

LUMMA
I can attempt limited repair while your matter is integrated with mine. Only what I understand well enough to change. I cannot return a lifetime or give you immortality.

MASON
I have money, if that's a concern.

LUMMA
It isn't.

He is embarrassed by the reflex.

MASON
I'm afraid I'm becoming someone the others have to wait for.

FRANNY
We waited because we love you, you old fool.

He looks away, eyes bright.

LUMMA
May I help you?

MASON
Yes. Please.

At LUMMA's invitation he steps back through the shimmer and into the integrated living field, consenting to her limited changes. A soft pulse follows the line of his spine and down aching joints. There is no grotesque metamorphosis. The sensation passes and the threshold restores normal scale.

MASON
I can breathe all the way down.

He bends cautiously, then straightens. He tests his knee. The smile that comes is younger than his face ever was.

MASON
I'm not going to climb a mountain.
Not today.

CHARLIE
But tomorrow?

MASON
Tomorrow, ask me again.

TOM
Thank you, LUMMA.

LUMMA
He was very brave before I touched
him.

Mason takes Tom's hand, then Charlie's. For the first time, he allows himself to be happy without performing for an audience.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — OBSERVATION WALK — LATER

Mason tries the ship's staircase with the repaired knee. He climbs more easily but pauses to breathe and consider the new strength. Franny watches from a landing.

MASON
If LUMMA can do this for me, why
don't we bring every hurting person
in the world aboard?

FRANNY

Because she's a living person, not a hospital we've discovered how to own. And there are things she cannot fix safely.

MASON
I know. I just wish I could offer someone else what she gave me.

FRANNY
You can. The chance to belong, whether they're young or old, strong or tired.

Mason recognizes the truth of that. It was the gift that saved him before the molecular repair ever began.

MASON
Somehow that sounds harder than writing a cheque.

FRANNY
It is. That's why it counts.

They look down toward Tom and Charlie in the lounge, sorting a future neither can predict.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — OBSERVATION LOUNGE — DAY

The seven stand among living star maps. Franny displays a vacation itinerary: TWO stops completed, one untouched. Patch stares at the future address like a man seeing his dentist through a wall.

PATCH
I would like to go home before anybody else decides we're legally employed by a king.

KIKI
Agreed. We can keep the observatory running. Somebody has to.

FRANNY
And Quinn and I have one last destination. We paid for that irritating resort package.

HEYMAN
I recall a species of flower that sings off-key. We owe it a second chance.

CHARLIE
The three of us can manage the future.

TOM
We might not manage it. That's why we can use fewer people at risk.

MASON
A heartwarming vote of confidence.

CHARLIE
I meant we need you.

Mason looks up. She meant it. Two SMALL LUMMA EXTENSIONS shimmer free of Tom and Charlie's wristbands.

FIRST EXTENSION
We can accompany them independently. The destination routes are recorded in our shared Book.

SECOND EXTENSION
Two passengers each. One route to the observatory, one to the final vacation world. Both return journeys use known departure signatures.

TOM
Are you comfortable with it?

FIRST EXTENSION
I can think for myself, Tom.

TOM
That wasn't the question.

FIRST EXTENSION
Then yes. Thank you for asking.

The tiny lights circle Tom and Charlie like companions saying goodbye, then expand into two separate safe cabins. Franny watches with pride and sadness.

FRANNY
When you leave someone you love, please make sure they know where home is.

INT. SMALL LUMMA EXTENSION — DEPARTURE BAY — CONTINUOUS

Patch and Kiki board through the watery threshold of the first extension, carrying no gold. The interior swells around them.

PATCH
You're not mad forever, are you?

KIKI
I wasn't planning to be.

PATCH
Good. Because I'm already planning a much quieter adventure.

KIKI
At home.

PATCH
With snacks that stay snacks.

She kisses him, brief and affectionate.

KIKI
Try to think ahead once in a while.

PATCH
Try to leave room for surprises.

She gives him a look that contains the whole argument and most of its resolution. The extension follows the observatory's preserved physical signature into the Highway.

INT. SECOND LUMMA EXTENSION — MOMENTS LATER

Franny and Heyman pass through the second ship's threshold. Franny turns toward Charlie on original LUMMA's open platform.

FRANNY
We're finishing our holiday. No emergencies until we're back.

CHARLIE
I'll put that in writing.

HEYMAN
And call us if there's a problem.

FRANNY
Quinn!

HEYMAN
What? She always does.

Charlie hugs them both, then steps away.

CHARLIE
Go see something beautiful.

FRANNY
We already have.

Her eyes hold on Charlie, then their little LUMMA follows a verified Book-of-Signatures destination into the mist. Original White LUMMA remains with Tom, Charlie and Mason.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — QUIET BRIDGE — LATER

Only three human travelers remain. The ship feels spacious and suddenly intimate. Mason studies the sloped stairs; he can now climb them without pain. Tom watches the cylinder signature pulse against a distant future starfield.

MASON
You know what I've learned? A smaller room is easier when everyone in it wants you there.

CHARLIE
That's surprisingly poetic.

MASON
I can become insufferable again, if it helps.

TOM
Don't hurry.

A pause. Charlie glances at the empty space where her wristband companion usually hovers.

CHARLIE
Take care of them, LUMMA.

LUMMA
They are taking care of themselves. And their passengers.

TOM
All right. Object B. We go to where the shell was made. Nothing beyond what it tells us.

LUMMA
Agreed. I cannot guarantee the condition of the outside world. The origin record is real.

The ship takes the fixed, earned route into the Highway.

EXT. NORTH SHORE OBSERVATORY — AFTERNOON

A small living craft arrives discreetly behind the familiar building. Patch and Kiki disembark. The observatory robots greet them like faithful but badly designed pets. All appears peaceful.

PATCH
Home. Nobody to arrest us. Nobody pricing candy in gold. Beautiful.

A robot immediately produces a display of thirty-seven service alerts.

KIKI
The irrigation system's down.

PATCH
I take it back. We're under siege.

They walk inside together, already arguing fondly about which repair comes first.

EXT. THIRD VACATION WORLD — MORNING

Franny and Heyman emerge on their final destination. Floating gardens sweep under pale rings in the sky. The brochures promised perfect views; instead an enormous flock of luminous birds covers every balcony and consumes the complimentary breakfast.

FRANNY
It's magnificent.

HEYMAN
It's eating our reservations.

A bird pulls Heyman's hat from his hand. He follows it down a path that reverses gravity every few steps. Franny catches him before he floats away.

FRANNY
We needed a little adventure.

HEYMAN
You said we needed a rest.

FRANNY
I've been wrong before.

They laugh. Yet Franny's gaze drifts toward Charlie's last wave goodbye.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — APPROACH TO FUTURE — UNKNOWN TIME

The cylinder's material origin opens one precise corridor through the Highway. On the living display: TWEED INDUSTRIAL MATERIAL ORIGIN / EARTH / WORKING EPOCH 2226. No arbitrary date wheel. The little vessel Black LUMMA remains one continuous traveller in her own chronology.

LUMMA
We can reach the material's origin. We cannot select a later year merely because it is convenient.

TOM
And if those brothers are still away in Mesopotamia when we land?

LUMMA
We remain concealed until they return. No second pair of Tweeds, no shortcuts.

CHARLIE
First we see whether there is still an Earth worth saving.

EXT. FUTURE — ABANDONED INDUSTRIAL OUTSKIRTS — DAY

The wasteland appears beneath a yellow sky. A transparent protected DOME glows beyond a ruined city. WHITE LUMMA descends cautiously toward a broken road OUTSIDE the dome.

THREE CHILDREN in ragged, patched clothes look up from a makeshift shelter. The oldest shields the youngest from blowing dust. They watch the extraordinary living spacecraft settle; for a moment all hardship gives way to astonishment.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Children. They saw us land.

TOM (O.S.)
We're supposed to arrive without announcing ourselves.

LUMMA sees their faces through her panoramic windows. She pauses, turns her light gently toward them, then RISES again and disappears behind a distant collapsed foundry. The children run a few steps after her, laughing in disbelief, before the haze swallows the light.

Only then does LUMMA land, hidden between abandoned manufacturing buildings. Her instruments verify an actual cylinder production trace in this district; no gold reserves are present. She has not entered the dome.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — ENTRY CHAMBER — MOMENTS LATER

White LUMMA scans the hidden industrial site and returns a time trace. The material origin is 2226, and the Tweeds' own recorded return from a short historical excursion is already complete in the local chronological sequence. The route did not jump freely: the travellers are here at the cylinder's verified manufacture epoch.

LUMMA
The air varies. Some sheltered outside pockets are breathable briefly with filtration; others are not. Keep your seals on.

CHARLIE
Are the children safe?

LUMMA
They have a filtered communal shelter nearby. I can see them entering it. Our presence should not draw attention to them.

TOM
Then we leave them to their ordinary lives. And we learn what changed this world.

The three exit through LUMMA's shimmering restorative threshold. She miniaturizes to conceal herself in a derelict loading bay. The gold-free cylinder stays secured on board.

INT. FUTURE — ABANDONED MANUFACTURING BAY — DAY

Tom, Charlie and Mason pass through the ruins of the factory whose material history brought them here. The walls carry serial markings matching the cylinder's forged shell. A disconnected production robot sits beneath a collapsed roof.

CHARLIE
This is where the outside of Object B was formed. The actual metal was made here.

TOM
Which tells us where and when this machine existed. Nothing about whether we can go wherever we like afterward.

MASON
Then what happened to the people who worked here?

A faded poster shows a cheerful factory workforce posing before a much smaller corporate enclosure. The corporation's logo is already visible. The people have no idea what their company's expansion will cost.

CHARLIE
If the twins came back from the past more than once, the order of their visits matters. Some part of their future is already here. Some may still be ahead of them.

TOM
Same men. One life apiece. We do not need to invent two copies of anybody to understand that.

Mason lifts a loose service plate, reads its date and gently returns it. Their journey came from a physical trace, not a wish. The deeper chronology remains a puzzle they cannot solve by staring.

EXT. FUTURE — RUINED BOULEVARD — DAY

Tom, Charlie and Mason pick their way past derelict transport pods. A hand-painted sign directs people toward a working WATER STATION. The letters have been corrected so many times they almost disappear.

CHARLIE
Someone keeps maintaining this.

TOM
Someone has to.

A boy pulls a cart with jugs toward a makeshift pipe. A man with cracked lips trades a pair of shoes for half a filter cartridge. Mason watches a woman mend a torn mask with thread.

MASON
I never knew people could live like this.

CHARLIE
They're doing their best. It's the world around them that failed.

A group of children pass, making a game out of stepping over broken pavement. The joy on their faces is as startling as the ruin.

EXT. FUTURE — WATER DISTRIBUTION POINT — DAY

An ELDERLY OUTSIDER named MARA tends an unreliable purification rig. She sees Charlie studying the intake filters.

MARA
The clean water's for registered families first.

CHARLIE
We don't need your water. We can help with the pump.

MARA
Everyone says that before they try to sell me something.

Charlie examines the impeller without taking control of it.

CHARLIE
Your drive bearing is wearing through. If you reduce the cycle for five minutes, I can stabilize it.

MARA
You have five minutes. If it breaks, you stay and fix it.

Charlie takes a service tool, listens to the motor, then guides Mara through a simple temporary fix. The flow steadies. Nothing miraculous: a small repair, earned by observation.

MARA
Where'd you come from?

TOM
Far away.

MARA
Everybody does, at first.

Mara nods toward the shining dome rising over the horizon.

MARA
If you're looking for the wealthy, you've got a long walk. If you're looking for decent people, you've found a few.

EXT. FUTURE — RESIDENCY TERMINATION GATE — DAY

A reinforced gate opens briefly. Two corporate ATTENDANTS escort an older woman and her adult grandson toward the exterior. The woman carries one suitcase. The grandson is required to stay inside because his residency remains valid.

GRANDSON
I can appeal again. I can call somebody.

ATTENDANT
Her household authorization has expired. Appeals do not extend the deadline.

The woman tries to give the boy a family photograph; the attendant insists it be scanned for security before it crosses the gate. The grandson is led away before the woman can retrieve it.

OLDER WOMAN
Please tell him I love him.

Tom steps forward, then checks himself. Charlie catches his hand. They cannot win a fight here by rushing a corporate gate and risking everybody outside.

CHARLIE
Remember what this feels like. We need to know who made the rule and how it survived.

The woman stands alone, blinking in poisoned daylight. Mason takes off a warm outer layer and gives it to her without asking to be thanked.

MASON
My name is Mason. Where can I help you get to?

She gives him directions to Mara's settlement, and he walks beside her for as long as his air filter permits.

EXT. FUTURE — OUTSIDE SETTLEMENT — LATER

Mara introduces the travelers to other families. A man sits with his adult daughter under a patched shade. A birthday notice, printed on brittle polymer, is pinned to a wall: RESIDENCY TERMINATION AT SIXTY.

CHARLIE
This says you have to leave when you turn sixty.

MARA
You don't HAVE to leave. They simply cancel your residence, your filters, your food allotment and your air. People generally take the hint.

MASON
That's monstrous.

MARA
Management calls it sustainability.

TOM
And the company owners?

MARA
Exempt. Naturally.

Mason glances down at the now-steady knees that LUMMA repaired. He has barely begun to understand the enormity of the gift.

MARA
My husband worked inside that dome for forty years. Built half the plants. On his sixtieth birthday they sent him here. He lasted a winter.

Charlie cannot meet Mara's eyes. Tom reaches for her hand. Mara straightens, refusing pity.

MARA

Don't ask me how we survive. Ask them why they decided we shouldn't.

EXT. FUTURE — CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA — AFTERNOON

Outside the protected dome a girl uses old plastic lids for wheels on a homemade toy car. Through the glass, another child pilots an actual miniature vehicle in a spotless indoor playground. The two exchange a wave, though the parents on both sides look away.

MASON
They still make games from scraps.

TOM
Children always do. They find life wherever there's room for it.

CHARLIE
But one of those children will have cleaner lungs than the other. That's not a game.

Charlie kneels beside the child outside and asks how she made the axle. The girl proudly shows a clever repair to keep the wheels turning.

CHARLIE
You figured that out yourself?

GIRL
My grandmother taught me. She used to fix the machines inside.

The child's answer stays with Charlie. The people who built the protected city were the first people expelled from it. She says nothing more; she watches the toy move.

EXT. FUTURE — THE TRANSPARENT DOME — AFTERNOON

The trio stands inches from an immense CLEAR WALL. Beyond it, a spectacular commercial boulevard glitters under controlled weather. Exotic sports cars glide past bright shops. People in extravagant clothes buy more than they carry. A waiter throws untouched food into a mechanized disposal chute.

On the OUTSIDE of the same glass, a hungry child divides a piece of bread among three siblings. Tom watches an inside child toss away a half-eaten pastry. They can see each other. Only one looks away.

MASON
I have been inside places like that.

CHARLIE
You didn't build this one.

MASON
I might have, if someone had shown me the numbers at the right time.

A FAMILY on the inside laughs for a photograph with the wall as a picturesque background. On the outside, Mara's neighbors gather water in rusty containers. The divide is too simple to misunderstand.

TOM
We came here for proof that the future could go wrong.

CHARLIE
We have it.

TOM
Not enough. Who made it go wrong? How?

CHARLIE
And what can we take home that people can't ignore?

Their eyes meet. An argument quietly becomes a shared mission. Mason points to a towering corporate emblem repeated on every building inside.

MASON
TWEED. Those two again.

EXT. FUTURE — OUTSIDE DOME WALKWAY — SUNSET

The dome projects false stars across a perfectly painted sky. Real stars are hidden by pollution. Charlie removes her mask only within LUMMA's protected field nearby, catching a breath of truly clean air.

CHARLIE
My father disappeared when I was little. Franny never told me much about it.

TOM
You think of him here?

CHARLIE
I think of all the families we just saw. Somebody's waiting for someone who isn't coming home.

Charlie touches the platinum pineapple pin at her collar. Its diamond flashes.

TOM
My mom used to tell me you can't love the entire world at once. You can love the person in front of you.

CHARLIE
What if we could help every person on that side of the glass?

TOM
What if the way we help makes another Tweed?

CHARLIE
Then we build the safeguards. Not a grave for the invention.

He hears the challenge. He doesn't answer immediately.

TOM
I'm afraid of what we can do.

CHARLIE
I'm afraid of what happens if we do nothing.

This is their deepest dispute, spoken without anger. They hold each other a moment while the bright false sky carries on its counterfeit night.

EXT. FUTURE — DOME WALL — ARTIFICIAL NIGHT

Before returning to White LUMMA, Charlie waits at the glass while the illuminated boulevard inside begins its evening celebrations. A drone projects reassuring words across the dome: PROGRESS IS PROTECTION. Outside, a family tucks children into a shelter made of salvage panels.

CHARLIE
When I was little and my father was gone, everybody said I should learn to live with not knowing.

TOM
Did you?

CHARLIE
I learned to ask better questions. Sometimes they're the only things that keep you moving.

TOM
I ask a question about my mother every time I see someone who reminds me of her.

CHARLIE
Do you want to stop asking?

Tom studies the false stars projected on the inside of the dome. Behind those images, the real universe exists, indifferent to the corporation's attempt to improve the view.

TOM
I want to stop being afraid that no answer means I loved her less.

CHARLIE
It doesn't.

They stand in silence, both grieving different kinds of absence. Tom turns toward the dark streets leading back to LUMMA.

TOM
We can't force answers out of the universe. We can pay attention when it speaks.

CHARLIE
Then let's pay attention. All the way home.

INT. OBSERVATORY — CONTROL ROOM — NIGHT

Back in Oahu, Kiki brings the repaired irrigation system onto a clean diagnostic page. Patch sits at Charlie's old bench reviewing observatory frequency logs.

KIKI
I've restored cooling, water, antenna rotation and the robot that keeps watering the same rock.

PATCH
Rock's never looked healthier.

A narrow green band flashes where no local transmission should exist. Patch freezes it, then runs the frequency comparison again.

PATCH
Kiki. Come here.

KIKI
If it's another candy message, I'm going to confiscate your hands.

PATCH
It's quantum-band resonance. Not one of ours.

She studies the impossible signal, one unusually shaped pulse drifting in from far beyond their solar telemetry.

KIKI
Source?

PATCH
Orion sector, roughly. Can't narrow it. It's not a valid temporal address.

KIKI
Then who sent it?

PATCH
For once in my life, I have absolutely no idea.

A second pulse arrives. They exchange a look. Whatever this is, it isn't interested in being ignored.

EXT. FUTURE — DOME SERVICE PERIMETER — NIGHT

Tom, Charlie and Mason return to WHITE LUMMA concealed in the industrial district. A narrow exhaust culvert physically connects the old foundry to a GOLD-FREE maintenance hangar inside the dome.

MASON
Please tell me this isn't another coffin.

CHARLIE

It's a maintenance exhaust. There's a route straight to the hangar without travelling through walls.

LUMMA
The hangar inventory is ceramic, composite and steel. Gold reserves are isolated elsewhere. My body can reduce and pass through the culvert.

TOM
Then let us make one distinction before anyone meets the twins.

Inside LUMMA the C3 projection system gives TOM and CHARLIE new future-era facial appearances and compatible clothes. It alters what others SEE, not who they are. MASON declines the projection; the twins never saw him clearly in Mesopotamia.

MASON
I spent years paying to be recognized. I'm not hiding this face now.

CHARLIE
The brothers saw our actual faces in the ancient court. They must not recognize us here.

They enter through the watery integration threshold. White LUMMA reduces herself, takes the physical culvert and slips into the hangar. Their future disguises remain active while they investigate.

INT. FUTURE — GOLD-FREE HANGAR — NIGHT

The hangar contains mechanical gantries, maintenance robots and a SMALL BLACK LIVING VESSEL resting on a docking cradle. No restraint collar, gold apparatus or chains. Black's light is dim from long habitual service, not physical illness. She is free to leave the cradle; nobody has told her about the conditions outside.

Fleck-sized WHITE LUMMA emerges through the ventilation grille and opens her restorative threshold. The disguised Tom and Charlie and the undisguised Mason step out at normal size.

TOM

Grow as large as you like. Keep your doors closed to strangers and don't speak to them. Let the brothers see you. We'll return.

LUMMA
Understood.

White LUMMA expands until she is approximately FOUR TIMES the smaller living ship's size. Tom, Charlie and Mason vanish down a service corridor. In the hangar, Black turns toward the unfamiliar family-light.

INT. HANGAR — CONTINUOUS

BLACK LUMMA hesitates beside the immense WHITE LUMMA. White lowers herself and waits. Black nudges the pale hull tentatively, then draws back. White answers with one tiny, reassuring nudge. Their lights exchange questions with no spoken words.

A visual flicker, shared only between the living vessels: Black remembers kind words at the cylinder, familiar boarding rituals and long silent waits while her passengers went elsewhere. The memory ENDS at the closed lid. She has never seen what her family did in the mining yards.

White shares only a small sensation of her own life: Charlie's laughter, Franny's exhausted affection, Heyman's music, Tom asking an extension for her consent. Black is startled by the idea of being asked.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — EXECUTIVE DINING ROOM — NIGHT

SOREN and DARIUS eat in an enormous enclosed garden. Every window displays a simulated blue sky. Beyond the dome there is no orchard, only poisoned land. Their oxygen and water reserves are mapped on a wall-size STATUS BOARD.

AIDE
An unidentified vessel has entered the maintenance hangar.

SOREN
Tell its owner to leave.

AIDE
It appears to be alive. Four times larger than ours. The hatch stays closed.

DARIUS
If another ship can carry us somewhere safer, we'd better understand it.

SOREN
We have survived everything. I'd rather not depend on strangers.

The brothers rise, leaving their untouched dinner. Their concern is not another sale. It is the vulnerability of the bubble they've built.

INT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — MOMENTS LATER

The brothers stand beneath White LUMMA. Darius watches her sealed hatch; Soren checks the maintenance dome for the smaller Black ship. Black still rests near her normal cradle, attentive but not chained. White does not respond to their ownership commands.

SOREN
A living ship four times our size.

DARIUS
Imagine a vessel that could carry every person we have room to save.

SOREN
Or let us leave this planet when even the domes fail.

The brothers have seen the edge of their own technological sanctuary. They are intrigued by White LUMMA because she might preserve THEIR future. Neither understands the family she already belongs to.

INT. DOME — STAFF CONNECTOR — NIGHT

Tom, Charlie and Mason emerge from a service stair into a public atrium. The lighting shifts from functional grey to extravagant gold-toned warmth. An impeccably dressed STAFF MANAGER blocks their way.

MANAGER
Your residency authorization.

MASON
I believe the owners are looking for the people who arrived with that magnificent white ship.

The manager's expression changes in a heartbeat. A call arrives at her wrist display.

MANAGER
Mr. Tweed would like to welcome you personally.

TOM
That would be kind of him.

MANAGER
Mr. Tweed is famous for kindness.

She says it without irony. Mason barely resists a laugh.

CHARLIE
And his brother?

MANAGER
Equally famous.

They follow. This is an invitation, not a capture, and all three know the price may come later.

INT. DOME — LUXURY BOULEVARD — NIGHT

The trio walks beneath theatrical artificial stars. Designer boutiques, self-cleaning cars and restaurants glitter around them. On a massive window far beyond the shops, the silhouettes of outsiders move along the glass, barely visible from within.

MASON
I used to spend millions making hotel guests forget what was outside their windows.

CHARLIE
These people have built an entire world around forgetting.

TOM
Then let's ask the men who sold them the windows.

A tiny child presses her hand to the glass from inside. An old woman outside lifts her hand toward it. Their palms can't touch. The child's parent gently draws her away.

INT. DOME — PUBLIC ARCADE — NIGHT

The trio crosses a public gallery devoted to DOME LIFE SUPPORT: miniature models of aquifers, protected cropland, air scrubbers and emergency reserves. Comfortable young visitors study beautiful displays of a civilization engineered to keep a limited population alive.

CHARLIE
They built something technically remarkable.

TOM
For a selected few.

MASON
The question isn't what they charge. It's who gets a place when the capacity runs out.

A small wall display reads CAPACITY ALLOCATION — RESIDENT QUOTA / RESOURCE CONTINUITY AUDIT. Beside it are the names of independent witness custodians who certify system-wide resource records. Charlie photographs the public notice. This policy will matter later.

CHARLIE
If the evidence is tied to survival allocations, they may have made an audit they can't quietly erase.

A STAFF MANAGER gestures them toward the brothers' salon. No disaster amusement attraction or paid suffering exhibit exists here.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — PRIVATE WELCOME SALON — NIGHT

The brothers enter like men walking onto a stage built to flatter them. Soren offers expensive refreshments. Darius barely hides his fascination with the visitors' ship. They do not recognize the three people from ancient Mesopotamia: C3 protected the travelers' true faces, and the brothers never saw White LUMMA then.

SOREN
Our mysterious guests. Welcome to civilization.

MASON
The people outside might challenge the definition.

DARIUS
Ah. Our open-air residents. An unfortunate necessity.

TOM
An entire city is an unfortunate necessity?

SOREN
You're clearly new here. Allow us to introduce the system. We preserve what can be preserved.

DARIUS
And of course we are fascinated by your vessel.

CHARLIE
So we've noticed.

DARIUS
Would you ever consider a cooperative transport arrangement? We pay handsomely.

TOM
We'd have to understand how you work first.

The twins smile. They see interest. Tom and Charlie see an opening.

INT. DOME — EXECUTIVE OBSERVATION GALLERY — LATER

An enormous window divides luxury from devastation. The dome's RESOURCE CONTINUITY BOARD shows projected food, air, water and residency allocations. A policy ends ordinary residency at sixty, although the Tweed brothers exempt themselves. No disability-based expulsion policy exists.

CHARLIE
When people reach sixty, you send them outside?

DARIUS
We protect the residents we have capacity to protect. Our projections don't forgive sentiment.

MASON
Except for the people who wrote the projections.

SOREN
Someone has to keep the system running.

TOM
You think you two are the biggest men in the universe, don't you?

DARIUS
We control the greatest surviving enterprise on Earth.

TOM
Earth is a speck beside the galaxy. You're smaller than that. But you helped make this whole world sick.

The brothers understand the insult but not their own contradiction. Beyond the glass an older worker joins a line outside. Charlie notices the signatures required on the posted allocation audit.

INT. HANGAR — SAME TIME

Black LUMMA gives White a tentative nudge; White answers. In the shared, wordless exchange, Black remembers the twins as children: learning her favourite docking chime, begging her for rides, relying on her to bring them home safely. She has spent a lifetime being useful to one family.

White responds with memories not of obedience but shared decisions: Tom asking what an extension wants, Franny arguing with LUMMA and then laughing, Charlie listening when LUMMA says no. Black's pulse asks a wordless question. White waits rather than telling her what to choose.

INT. OBSERVATORY — SIGNAL ROOM — NIGHT

Kiki sets the second quantum pulse beside the first. Patch loads reference signatures. Neither matches any recognized world in the Book.

PATCH
If it were a message, it wouldn't be a very conversational one.

KIKI
Maybe it's someone checking whether a door is there.

PATCH
A door to where?

KIKI
Or to whom.

The FIRST LUMMA EXTENSION, now resting outside the observatory, sends a brief status light. She is no less alert for being small.

LUMMA EXTENSION (V.O.)
The signal is not a destination signature. I recommend preserving its exact form.

PATCH
We don't know what it wants.

KIKI
That's a reason to listen, not a reason to panic.

She places their recording into the observatory's secure study archive. Their argument from the ancient market seems very far away.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — AGED-OUT EMPLOYEE LOUNGE — DAY

During an extended tour, an exhausted employee quietly closes a locker while an automated notice reminds her to clear her personal things before midnight. Through the lounge door, Mason sees a stack of empty uniform boxes waiting for replacement staff.

MASON
Retiring?

EMPLOYEE
Expiring. That's the word they use when they think we can't hear.

MASON
You could come work for someone else.

EMPLOYEE
Someone else? They own the water, air, transport, food, most of the buildings. You'll have to find me another world.

Mason thinks of the business empire he once celebrated. He offers her no empty promise.

MASON
I am sorry I didn't learn to ask those questions sooner.

EMPLOYEE
You're asking now.

A security bell calls the employee back to work. She goes because she still wants to finish her last day with dignity.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — HISTORICAL ACQUISITIONS GALLERY — DAY

An immense corporate genealogy spans two centuries, from a small coastal property company to controlling interests in essential industries. At its beginning is a photograph of a human real-estate developer: JEREMIAH TWEED, with a broad, gently BULLFROG-LIKE face and a playful, unmistakably human expression. An old corporate photograph is labelled JEREMIAH TWEED — EARLY PROPERTY HOLDINGS.

MASON
Jeremiah Tweed. A rather distinctive face.

SOREN
Our ancestor. He started with land and a remarkable ability to be where opportunity arrived.

CHARLIE
How many generations back?

DARIUS
Enough for the business to forget his manners and remember his appetite.

A timeline shows multiple later generations, eventually SOREN and DARIUS. The year 2226 is marked at the far end. Jeremiah is their distant ancestor, not the same-aged founder twin or an immortal CEO.

CHARLIE
You knew which enterprises would matter before anybody else knew they existed.

SOREN
We inherited sound judgement.

Behind the genealogy are WHITE ENVELOPES marked with opening dates and funded instructions. The family's real temporal advantage is deliberately concealed under corporate folklore.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — CORPORATE HISTORY THEATRE — DAY

A panoramic history shows the family acquiring communications companies, farmland, infrastructure and energy interests over generations. Growth is intoxicating. Factories expand, rivers change colour, storms strip hillsides and successive boards dismiss long-term warnings as someone else's problem.

CHARLIE
There were warnings. Decades of them.

DARIUS
Every generation believed there would be time for the next one to solve it.

TOM
And every generation kept taking more.

SOREN
We weren't the only ones. Our competitors were hardly saints.

On screen an older energy company collapses under a market transition; there is NO claim the twins deliberately bought and buried a clean-fuel invention. The harms came from greed, capture of resources and choosing short-term accumulation despite known costs.

MASON
You helped build the world outside. Then you bought the walls that kept you apart from it.

DARIUS
We saved what we could still preserve.

Charlie looks toward the unreachable clean sky projected above the audience. Nobody claims the apocalypse was a product they invented to sell.

INT. STOCKBROKER'S OFFICE — FLASHBACK — DAY

Decades earlier. A SMALL-TIME BROKER in a cramped office opens a white envelope marked OPEN ON A SPECIFIC DATE. Inside: a signed, funded instruction to purchase a measured number of shares in a young company. The broker checks the funds, checks the date, shrugs and places the order.

BROKER
Strange people. Excellent credit.

On his shelf sits a row of unopened future-dated envelopes. He touches the next one and decides against it. Then smiles and goes back to work.

INT. TWEED GALLERY — CONTINUOUS

TOM
You didn't forecast these deals.

SOREN
We identified the right moments.

CHARLIE
By visiting those moments again and again.

Soren's smile tightens. Mason sees the smallest shift in his expression.

MASON
A clever investor would keep each transaction legal on paper. Funded accounts. Authorized agents. Someone who never asks where the instructions came from.

DARIUS
You're almost an attractive business partner.

Mason laughs at the compliment; it is not a laugh of pleasure.

EXT. RETRO RACETRACK — FLASHBACK — DAY

A PAID AGENT opens an envelope beside the betting window. A paper lists winners for a series of races. He reads it twice, buys a modest ticket, then stares at the first result when it comes true. His excitement is almost embarrassing.

AGENT
What sort of luck is this?

Another envelope falls through his mail slot the next morning. He glances upward as if thanking the heavens.

INT. CORPORATE BOARDROOM — FLASHBACK — SERIES OF YEARS

A succession of dates and decades, each clearly moving forward rather than a random collage. An ACQUISITION LAWYER places confidential papers before different directors. Authorized agents collect VOTING SHARE blocks, negotiate shareholder agreements and buy failing businesses at deeply discounted prices. One small holding company becomes many. The company name on the meeting-room wall changes; TWEED remains.

ACQUISITION LAWYER
That gives us enough votes to appoint the board.

DARIUS (V.O.)
Not merely shares. Control. Shares can be worth nothing if you cannot make decisions.

During a later financial crisis, executives sign away distressed assets while frightened customers queue outside a bank. The holding structure grows outward like roots under a city.

INT. TWEED GALLERY — DAY

The tour arrives at a simulated financial history wall. Currencies spike and fracture through several crises; no single universal overnight collapse is claimed. Gold moves from reserves into exchange contracts and emergency financing.

SOREN
When trust in paper promises collapsed, people remembered what had value.

MASON
Water. Food. Air.

DARIUS
Gold helped us survive the crises. It bought us the water rights, reserves, food systems and the land beneath our domes.

CHARLIE
And then made people pay to survive.

SOREN

We secured our own future. When governments failed, we already controlled what remained.

Beyond the window, exhausted workers assemble an automated dome panel. A wealthy couple applauds a machine that cleans their shoes.

TOM
You turned a planet into a customer.

DARIUS
At least you understand the business model.

INT. HANGAR — SILENT SECOND MEETING

The ships touch hull to hull again. Black shares an image of the Tweed brothers boarding as small boys, waving goodnight before leaving her to rest. White answers with a memory of Charlie arguing with her about an ethical choice and then respecting her answer.

A faint translation emerges through LIGHT ONLY, not voice: BLACK wonders what family can be if she says no. WHITE offers an open vista of a universe they could still explore together. She never pulls Black closer.

INT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — DAY

Black glides toward White without waiting for a summoned command. Their hulls meet gently. A shared memory begins: Jeremiah Tweed in an old photograph, smiling as a trusted friend. Then his descendants, each generation teaching Black a narrower meaning of family.

She has not been asleep intellectually; she has simply been absent from the places where decisions harmed others. White gives her no verdict, only the missing images. Black holds her position, shaken by what she has learned.

INT. THIRD VACATION WORLD — PRIVATE SUITE — SUNSET

Franny and Heyman stand at a floor-to-ceiling window looking over violet rings and inverted waterfalls. The view is sublime. Their expensive dining service has delivered something that looks like a coral reef and tastes of old socks.

HEYMAN
I ordered soup.

FRANNY
Perhaps this is soup in the local language.

HEYMAN
It's trying to climb off the plate.

It does. They laugh until Franny suddenly sees a small family laughing at another table. Her smile fades into longing.

FRANNY
Charlie would have loved this.

HEYMAN
She'd have taken it apart to figure out how it climbs.

FRANNY
And Patch would have tried to eat it.

They smile at the thought of home. Heyman slides an arm around her shoulders.

HEYMAN
We came here to remember who we were before everyone needed us.

FRANNY
And I keep remembering who we are with them.

Outside, the view continues its impossible beauty without solving a single thing.

EXT. DOME — PUBLIC GARDEN TERRACE — DAY

In a cultivated terrace protected by thick glass, a caretaker checks rows of vegetables against the dome's survival quotas. A delivery robot measures water to the millilitre. There are luxurious decorations, but the operating ledger is brutally practical.

SOREN
Every crop, every reserve, every air filter has a calculated place.

TOM
And every person?

DARIUS
We can't promise unlimited space. The world outside taught us that lesson.

CHARLIE
You helped create the conditions outside.

Mason notices a maintenance worker ask for an extra filtration cartridge for her father. The request is rejected because the quota has been met. The same board records the independent RESOURCE CONTINUITY CERTIFICATE.

MASON
You have survived. You haven't found a way for people to live together.

The worker returns to her shift. The trio see the precise injustice: survival resources are not merely sold for profit; eligibility is controlled by people who wrote the rules.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — ACQUISITIONS RESEARCH FLOOR — DAY

The trio meets EVA, a sharply attentive RECORDS CUSTODIAN with an identification badge bearing an approaching sixtieth birthday. She guides visitors between sealed archival stacks and public financial histories.

EVA
This is the certified chain-of-title library. Every major acquisition is recorded here: voting rights, debt, transfers, regulatory filings.

MASON
Exactly the kind of evidence a new business partner would review.

DARIUS
And exactly the kind we let only serious partners see.

CHARLIE
Is the archive editable?

EVA

Public exhibits are. Original records require custodial witnessing and physical seals. They have to agree with each other.

CHARLIE
Good.

Eva recognizes that word as something unusual from a visitor. Darius smiles in a way that makes it unwise to ask too many questions.

EVA
I can show you the public index while the private-review authorization is being prepared.

SOREN
We'll do better than that. We'll make these people feel welcome.

Darius puts a hand on Mason's shoulder. Mason barely resists pulling away.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — EXECUTIVE TERRACE — LATER

The brothers display an indoor orchard, private fountains and a controlled artificial breeze. Below, a sanitation employee hauls a heavy bin, stops for water, and is reprimanded by a supervisor.

SOREN
We built a world where unpleasantness can be delegated.

CHARLIE
Delegated to whom?

SOREN
People with fewer options.

MASON
I used to say things like that.

DARIUS
Then I hope you've recovered.

MASON
I hope I haven't.

The twins laugh, thinking he is joking. Tom looks to the staff member, who returns to work without complaint. On the garden terrace, the contrast with the wasteland is impossible to ignore.

INT. RECORDS FLOOR — ARCHIVE SIDE ROOM — DAY

Eva speaks privately with Charlie as she brings out a verification device. Everything around them seems designed to preserve evidence except the people who own it.

EVA
You're asking questions investors rarely ask.

CHARLIE
What happens to the workers who built the domes?

EVA
They get their pension at sixty. A travel voucher, too.

CHARLIE
A voucher to where?

EVA
Outside.

She glances at her own badge. It reads 59 YEARS, 11 MONTHS.

EVA
I have one more month. They asked me to train my replacement.

CHARLIE
Could you keep the records safe if someone tried to alter them?

EVA
Some originals are bound into a tamper-evident witness ledger. It cannot certify the morality of a decision. Only that it happened.

CHARLIE
Sometimes knowing it happened is the beginning.

Eva examines her with the wary respect of someone unused to being addressed like a person.

INT. OBSERVATORY — WORKSHOP — DAY

Patch tries to rebuild a sensor using three mismatched fittings. Kiki reads the actual equipment manual. A gentle disagreement has settled into collaboration rather than contempt.

PATCH
You know you could have told me the left bracket was reverse-threaded.

KIKI
I did. Twice.

PATCH
You could have told me in a tone a genius understands.

KIKI
There is no such tone. I've checked.

The door rustles. MR. MOJO appears with a FEMALE MONKEY who pauses shyly behind him. Mojo glances from Kiki to Patch with a pride that needs no words.

PATCH
Well, hello. Who's your friend?

Mojo extends a tiny hand to introduce her. The female monkey steps forward, inspects Patch's shirt, then takes Kiki's hand. Kiki lights up.

KIKI
Mojo, she's beautiful.

PATCH
And clearly has better taste than you.

Mojo bows, trying to look distinguished. His girlfriend climbs lightly onto a windowsill, then waits for him. He looks at Patch and Kiki as if to say THAT'S ALL, then follows her back into the Oahu jungle. No silver bag is visible, no gold revealed.

KIKI
Maybe he found somebody who doesn't mind his surprises.

PATCH
I feel personally attacked.

She kisses his cheek. The repair bench suddenly seems like a fine place to be.

INT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — DAY

Black drifts freely away from her cradle for the first time while the brothers are not present. She stops near White, uncertain whether leaving a familiar resting place is disloyal. White makes room beside her.

Black shows a memory of the ancient cylinder closing gently around her, followed by blackness while the brothers went out into the world. White shares a glimpse of that missing world: labourers working beside gold, generations of poisoned waterways, children outside the glass. Black's light falters—not from a punishment field but from understanding what she never saw.

White does not force another image. The two hover together in a silence that is more difficult than any command.

INT. DOME — MASON'S GUEST SUITE — NIGHT

The guest suite assigned to Mason has panoramic windows, simulated stars and an endless minibar. He stands alone, studying his reflection. His face is slightly younger since LUMMA's careful repair, but no amount of youth would have rescued the man he once was from loneliness.

A screen lists the offered privileges: executive residence for life, ownership units, personal access to protected medical care, perpetual immunity from age limits.

MASON
All the things I used to ask for.

He switches the screen off. Tom knocks and enters with a small, inexpensive glass of water.

TOM
Charlie wanted me to check on you.

MASON
She's wiser than I deserve.

TOM
Mason, you don't owe us another heroic act.

MASON

That would be a relief. I don't think my joints are ready for heroism twice in the same week.

They share a laugh. Then Mason looks out at the glass wall far below.

MASON
Those people out there would have made our little family look very different if I'd been one of the Tweeds. I know that now. Perhaps the only useful thing I can do is recognize exactly what they want to hear.

TOM
Then help us hear the truth behind it.

Mason switches off the view, deciding not to live inside the illusion even for one night.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — PRIVATE OFFER ROOM — AFTERNOON

The twins place a partnership contract before Mason. It offers unimaginable funds, corporate privileges, and a special exemption from the age-sixty restriction. The remaining pages define proprietary ownership of any vehicle contributed to the joint venture.

DARIUS
We can restore you to prominence, Mason. No dependence on gifted children and their strange interests.

MASON
You researched me.

SOREN
Of course. We know how to evaluate an asset.

MASON
Is that what I am?

DARIUS
You've been an asset to the world. You deserve to stand with its owners.

Mason turns the pages deliberately, seeing the child he used to be when wealth could explain everything. Tom and Charlie stand back, letting the decision be his.

MASON
You know, there was a time I'd have signed before you finished the sentence.

SOREN
Then your instincts were excellent.

MASON
My instincts made me very lonely.

He lays the contract down unsigned.

MASON
I don't want your empire. I want to know where the evidence is that supports this valuation.

Darius is delighted. He's convinced the businessman is still inside Mason.

DARIUS
Now you're talking.

INT. CORPORATE BOARDROOM — LATER

A projection fills the room with diagrams: early investments, holding companies, gold reserves, then vertically integrated food, energy, water and medicine. Mason walks the twins through an apparently rigorous due-diligence discussion.

MASON
If your company is worth what you claim, the controlling-rights documentation must be extraordinary.

DARIUS
It is.

MASON
Then we need certified copies before negotiating a partnership worth more than any aircraft ever made.

SOREN
Naturally. A cautious buyer.

TOM
Not buyers. Partners, if it makes sense.

Mason gives him a warning glance to stick to the deception. Charlie notices an index: EARLY ENERGY ALTERNATIVES — SUPPRESSED / ACQUIRED.

CHARLIE
What's that section?

DARIUS
The early boards chose returns over resilience. Every successor doubled down.

CHARLIE
Or prevented their work from reaching anyone.

Darius holds her gaze too long.

SOREN
That sounds like an accusation.

TOM
Sounds like a valuation question. A partner should know what products were retired and why.

Soren reluctantly gestures for Eva to prepare the certified review.

INT. RECORDS FLOOR — SECURED AUDIT ROOM — EVENING

Eva lays out physical source ledgers beside cryptographically signed acquisition records. Charlie compares their dates with public transaction histories. This is documentation, not a single magic file.

EVA
Each certificate refers to an original executed agreement. Signatures, voting-right transfers, independent auditors where they still existed.

CHARLIE
May we photograph these originals as part of the approved due diligence?

DARIUS
If your company is serious enough to pay for the review.

MASON
My company is. Or was. We can verify the fee.

He slides the necessary funding authorization forward. The corporate machine approves it in seconds; he has finally used wealth to buy access FOR someone rather than to make someone belong to him.

EVA
The review is now a witnessed event. I can issue certified copies with matching physical marks.

CHARLIE
Then please do.

Tom watches the door. Something about the twins' smiles has changed.

INT. RECORDS FLOOR — PRIVATE CONSULTATION BOOTH — EVENING

Charlie sits opposite Eva in a glass consultation booth before final certification. Eva aligns an ancient physical company ledger with its preserved digital witness chain, making sure the system cannot quietly substitute a modern exhibit for the original.

EVA
It isn't enough to take a picture of something that looks official. A photograph can lie. The underlying chain has to survive scrutiny.

CHARLIE
That's why we came for the records. I need to be able to show people who will refuse to believe me.

EVA
I spent years certifying what the brothers wanted to put on display. I never thought anyone would want to test the entire chain.

CHARLIE
What will happen to you if they realize you're helping?

EVA
I'll be sixty soon. The worst thing they can do is throw me outside a few weeks early.

Charlie's anger appears again, but Eva refuses to be reduced to a victim.

EVA
The best thing I can do is make the record accurate before I leave. That used to be why this job existed.

She signs the preliminary witness log. A small, honest act in a system built to sell certainty.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — BROTHERS' OFFICE — SIMULTANEOUS

Darius receives a quiet message from a security analyst: the guests have not submitted a vessel ownership certificate, the ship ignores control requests, and Charlie is looking closely at suppressed energy ventures.

DARIUS
They're not selling the ship.

SOREN
Then why are they here?

DARIUS
To ask the questions we don't permit.

Soren's face loses its charm entirely.

SOREN
Close the review before it produces anything inconvenient. Politely, for now.

DARIUS
And keep their ship here.

He places a finger over the security feed of White LUMMA. It has not moved.

INT. SECURED AUDIT ROOM — MOMENTS LATER

EVA begins final certification. The terminal flashes AUTHORIZATION REVOKED and shutters descend over the ledgers. No one touches the sealed originals.

EVA
They've cancelled your commercial due-diligence review. The witness copy isn't certified yet.

CHARLIE
We have the envelopes, trade confirmations, and the resource-control transfers. There has to be a lawful way to complete a record they've already opened.

EVA
There is. The Resource Continuity Code requires an independent certificate whenever there is a dispute about who owns the dome's water and air reserve rights. It was designed to keep the life-support system from being redirected without a public audit.

MASON
The same rule the brothers use to keep their investments protected?

EVA
Yes. They can shut down a partnership review. They cannot cancel a resident-witness continuity audit once two custodians register it.

DARIUS enters with two SECURITY OFFICERS. They do not arrest anyone. They simply deny the guest-access badge.

DARIUS
Our commercial discussions are finished.

TOM
Then we'll stop treating this as a commercial discussion.

The three leave without stealing documents. Eva remains with her original ledger, making a quiet decision about which rule she still has the authority to enforce.

INT. RECORDS FLOOR — PUBLIC CORRIDOR — CONTINUOUS

The trio is escorted into the public boulevard. Their temporary guest badges turn grey. For a moment the records are unreachable and Charlie's photographs could be dismissed as invented.

CHARLIE
A picture of a ledger isn't enough. We need the independent chain.

TOM
Then we won't abandon the only trustworthy way to do this.

MASON
They built a code to keep anyone from tampering with their survival reserves. We use it for the people living under that code.

CHARLIE
Eva can register one custodial witness. We need another authorized person and an actual resource-rights question.

MASON
Their claim to own every aquifer and filter in the city ought to qualify.

Tom watches an elderly man outside the glass. He chooses to act, not by breaking in but by persuading someone inside to put their name beside the truth.

EXT. DOME — GLASS WALL — NIGHT

On their way back toward the hangar entrance, Tom stops beside the transparent wall. Mara's water station is visible through a gap in the outer buildings. A small crowd gathers for evening rations.

TOM
My mother told me not to let fear turn me into someone who watches and does nothing.

CHARLIE
You came here because you cared.

TOM
But when the answers became frightening, I wanted to hide behind rules.

CHARLIE
Rules kept us from becoming the Tweeds.

TOM
And rules without judgment can turn into another wall.

He turns to her.

TOM
We're going to take the evidence. We're going to take it honestly, in a way we can defend. And when we get home I'm going to help you test your invention.

CHARLIE
Even if it scares you?

TOM
Especially then.

Their reconciliation is not a kiss that fixes technology. It is a hard decision they can be held to. She leans into his embrace for one breath before they're moving again.

INT. DOME — UNFINISHED RESIDENTIAL LEVEL — NIGHT

The trio passes a floor of half-built luxury apartments. Through unfinished windows, they see the outside settlement far below. The walls inside are fitted with climate controls and redundant filters; the same components are desperately needed beyond the glass.

MASON
When I built resorts, I used to say I was making dreams available to anyone who could afford them.

TOM
There are worse ambitions.

MASON
Not when you design the rules that decide who can afford them.

Mason touches an untouched filter assembly. A small part would keep Mara's water station working for years. But it isn't his to take, and stealing a part would help one family while leaving the entire system intact.

CHARLIE
What if we designed a technology that people didn't have to beg for?

MASON
The patents and supply chains would have to be protected from the very structure that bought all of these companies.

TOM
Then that's another part of the work.

They move through the unfinished level toward the hangar. Their purpose is no longer simply to expose a villain; it is to learn how ordinary good intentions can be swallowed by power.

INT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — NIGHT

Black LUMMA rests alongside White without being tethered. Their lights meet and part like a conversation heard through closed doors. Black now knows that the brothers' trips brought them wealth while people elsewhere were left without care. No control signal is forcing her to stay.

White shares the memory of Tom and Charlie giving their independent wristband extensions freedom to choose their own journeys. Black hesitates and then begins to glow with a faint new pale line. She is making a decision rather than obeying a command.

INT. DOME — GUEST PARTNERSHIP SALON — NIGHT

A resident meeting is underway about WATER AND AIR RESERVE ALLOCATION. Tom, Charlie and Mason arrive not as prospective purchasers but as witnesses to a registered capacity dispute. EVA has signed the first custodial request; a RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE has countersigned because the brothers' acquisition dates overlap with contested public reserve rights.

SOREN
You have no standing here. Your partnership review was cancelled.

MASON

We aren't requesting a partnership review. Your own Resource Continuity Code requires that this hearing finish once two custodians register it.

DARIUS
We wrote that code.

CHARLIE
Then you know why it exists. You cannot reassign water rights unless a public record can be traced to the original owners.

The resident representative holds a physical seal bearing the system's emergency-continuity authority. Cutting the audit would automatically suspend new allocations; the Tweeds cannot afford that risk to the dome they themselves depend on.

TOM
We aren't here to take your ship or your money. We want the history of how you came to own everybody's air.

Darius calculates the risk: the brothers can remain in control, but the audit must go forward. They have been beaten by the survival rules they designed, not by a theatrical appeal to ego.

INT. SECURED AUDIT ROOM — NIGHT

EVA opens the tamper-evident original ledgers for the independent continuity hearing. Two named custodians witness the scan; the residents' representative observes through glass. Charlie cross-matches WHITE ENVELOPES dated before famous market changes with funded brokerage confirmations, later voting-share transfers and present-day reserve ownership.

EVA
We can certify when the instructions were written, when the orders executed and who ultimately acquired control. We cannot certify what these men knew in their minds.

CHARLIE

We don't need to. The dated orders line up with trips to the past; their own manifests and company records show the pattern. These are independent records, not our recollection.

MASON
And the holdings explain how they came to own the reservoirs, farms and filtration systems after everyone else lost theirs.

A physical witness ledger closes around its seal. A NON-GOLD CERAMIC DATA TILE receives the matched records, cross-check references, original date stamps and two independent custodial signatures.

EVA
Certified as an authentic history of the transactions and ownership chain. The inference about time travel is yours to demonstrate separately.

TOM
That's fair. At least now people can judge evidence instead of believing a speech.

The resident representative receives a second authenticated copy, so the evidence does not depend on the travellers alone. Charlie carries her legally issued tile. Neither copy magically ends the corporation.

INT. SECURED AUDIT ROOM — CONTINUOUS

The independent hearing closes. Darius is furious but cannot unwind the recorded witness signatures without triggering the reserve-allocation suspension he fears.

SOREN
A perfectly routine capacity audit.

MASON
Then you shouldn't mind that the originals and the copy match.

DARIUS
You are walking away from the greatest partnership of your life.

MASON
I spent my life buying things. What I needed was a family that couldn't be bought.

He returns the unsigned offer. Charlie thanks Eva. The custodian studies her own imminent age-based expulsion and looks, perhaps for the first time, like a person who has chosen what to leave behind.

EVA
Make the record matter. The people outside won't be protected just because a document is true.

CHARLIE
I know. This is the beginning.

INT. TWEED CORPORATION — INVESTOR CORRIDOR — NIGHT

Mason and Tom step aside beneath a gallery of founding portraits while Charlie reviews the evidence authentication procedure. The brothers approach at a distance, laughing at a joke only wealthy men can afford to find funny.

TOM
I thought being brave meant walking into trouble. In Nevada it often did.

MASON
And now?

TOM
Now it might mean admitting Charlie has been right about her fuel work. It might mean taking a risk that lasts longer than one adventure.

MASON
A decision that affects millions of people is much harder than rescuing four friends from a cell.

TOM
How do you know?

MASON
Because you can see your friends in the cell. It's easier to forget the millions.

Tom watches the Tweeds. They have forgotten those millions while seeing nothing but themselves. He moves toward Charlie, knowing he needs her judgment more than his own certainty.

INT. DOME — PUBLIC BOULEVARD — MOMENTS LATER

The trio walks away with the ceramic evidence sleeve. The luxury shoppers barely notice. Then the brothers' voice booms through internal speakers, suddenly less charming.

DARIUS (V.O.)
Visitors to the maintenance hangar are advised that all assets remain under the corporation's jurisdiction.

MASON
There it is. The tantrum.

TOM
We're not their assets.

CHARLIE
Neither is Black LUMMA.

Their pace quickens, but they are not fleeing a dungeon. They are returning to people who can choose for themselves.

INT. OBSERVATORY — CONTROL ROOM — NIGHT

The THIRD ORION PULSE appears. Kiki and Patch watch three anomalous events aligned in shape but not in date. The intelligent extension examines them silently.

PATCH
Three. One might be noise. Two might be an instrument problem. Three is somebody being extremely persistent.

KIKI
Can we decode it?

PATCH
Not yet. No words. No location we can travel to without a signature.

KIKI
Then we keep the original data. We don't pretend we know the sender.

Patch glances at her. She has just adopted his willingness to wonder without surrendering her caution. He smiles.

PATCH
You know, I think we make a very good team.

KIKI
You'd better. I already took you back.

They laugh as the signal settles into the study archive. No face, name or voice appears. The mystery belongs to another film.

INT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — NIGHT

TOM, CHARLIE and MASON return to the hangar with certified evidence. White and Black LUMMA face one another. Black is freely hovering beside White, no collar, no receiver, no gold restraint. Her hull has developed pale lines, like a memory of her original self.

CHARLIE
She's been here with them all this time, without seeing what they did outside.

TOM
She knows now. That doesn't mean we get to decide for her.

One last wordless exchange passes through the ships: a child-sized Tweed placing a hand on Black's hull; an adult Tweed leaving her alone at the warehouse; a family at the observatory asking their LUMMA whether she's ready to travel. Black holds the images together for the first time.

MASON
Whatever she chooses, we leave her the choice.

The brothers are elsewhere, dealing with the concluded audit. They do not witness the decision happening in their hangar.

INT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — SILENT SEQUENCE

BLACK LUMMA nudges WHITE LUMMA. White nudges back. Across the two living hulls their conversation is legible as images and shared feeling, never spoken exposition: Black remembers being needed. White shows what it means to be listened to, welcomed and allowed to say no.

A glimpse of the stars appears between them, followed by a glowing impression of worlds beyond the limits of the Tweeds' domes. White offers the possibility of seeing more TOGETHER, not the demand to abandon an old family.

Black draws away for one breath. She COULD stay independent, return to the Tweeds, or leave. Then, by her own movement, she folds into White's luminous field. Dark softens to silver and pearl. Their light becomes whole, carrying two fully aware experiences.

No ship is conquered. No captive is repaired by force. A family member has discovered a larger meaning of family and chosen to come home.

INT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — AFTER THE REUNION

The smaller docking cradle is empty. The three stand with White LUMMA, now carrying Black's reunited consciousness. Soren and Darius remain absent; they don't know where Black has gone.

CHARLIE
You gave her the space to choose.

LUMMA
She had never been asked what she wanted beyond the next journey. She thought transporting the people she loved was all being family required.

TOM
She didn't see what happened while they were away.

LUMMA
She sees more now. There is still more I can show her. We will learn together.

The team secure their evidence and prepare to leave the hangar. They don't announce Black's decision to the Tweeds.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — INTERIOR BRIDGE — CONTINUOUS

Tom, Charlie and Mason enter original LUMMA through the watery ENTRY THRESHOLD. The four-level living panorama warms as the reunited LUMMA recognizes her family. Black's newly returned memories unfold in gentle images—not a third ship or a new species.

CHARLIE
You recognized her. Who had her first?

LUMMA
Jeremiah Tweed. Long ago he travelled with Franny and Heyman to Earth's Woodstock gathering. He was my friend. I trusted him with a fully intelligent part of myself.

MASON
Tweed Incorporated tried to buy the observatory property. I remember their surveyors.

LUMMA
He became a developer on Earth. We lost contact after he left our company. I thought he had gone home. I did not know his family kept her for generations.

The living screen traces the Tweed family through time. Jeremiah, once a trusted companion, became consumed by property and power. His descendants inherited the extension's loyalty but not his original generosity. The twins are descendants many generations later, not Jeremiah's immediate grandsons.

MASON
The family changed. She thought being faithful meant keeping up with them.

LUMMA
She knew their kindness to her. She did not witness many things they did to others. Intelligence does not give anyone facts they have never been shown.

CHARLIE
She doesn't need us to condemn her for that.

LUMMA
No. She needs time, new worlds, and the freedom to make her own choices.

Charlie looks at the empty wristband where one autonomous extension belongs. She understands why asking matters more than possessing.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — ENTRY GALLERY — MOMENTS LATER

Charlie locks the authenticated CERAMIC RECORD and matching independent witness references beside the EMPTY GOLD-FREE CYLINDER, still aboard since Mesopotamia. The corporation's financial and resource history is preserved, but its owners have not been displaced.

CHARLIE
The envelope dates and acquisitions can be tested. We don't have to sell anyone a theory on faith.

MASON
And the people outside deserve more than being a footnote to those records.

TOM
When we go home, I'll help Charlie test her fuel work responsibly. No monopoly, no pretending energy is free.

CHARLIE
And no burying a useful idea because someone might misuse it.

The three prepare an external duplicate of their independent witness reference for EVA. Their evidence is secure. White LUMMA projects the known observatory return signature through her distant family extensions.

LUMMA
A real return route is ready, when you are.

TOM
One last errand, then home.

All three step out through the normal restorative threshold to deliver the duplicate at the adjacent audit-office drop. White LUMMA waits nearby in the accessible GOLD-FREE hangar, doors closed for a moment while they are out.

INT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — CONTINUOUS

The Tweed brothers enter the maintenance bay looking for BLACK LUMMA. Her familiar cradle is empty. White LUMMA stands nearby. They have not seen the two living ships reunite.

SOREN
Where is she? Our ship was here an hour ago.

DARIUS
Search the larger one. Perhaps she's been put inside it.

From her place of rest White LUMMA quietly opens her WATERY ENTRY THRESHOLD. The crew are away at the witness office. The brothers take the invitation as a technical weakness and sneak aboard, sure they can steal the vessel. At crossing they become safely integrated with her scale-changing field, as every passenger does.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — BRIDGE — CONTINUOUS

Inside the huge living ship, Soren and Darius search for Black LUMMA. They peer through empty corridors until they spot the familiar CYLINDER resting in a gold-free cradle. Its lid is closed, and its beautiful future-made metal matches the resting chamber they lost during their last ancient trip.

SOREN
There! Her cylinder. They brought it back.

DARIUS
Then they've sealed her inside. Don't open it here. If she's angry, she may fly away.

Darius grips the cylinder; Soren helps him lift it. They do not check inside. They plan to take it back to their technicians and recover the spacecraft they believe is still waiting within.

SOREN
As soon as the others return, we hide. Then we get this out to our people.

They duck into a shadowed gallery, clutching the EMPTY cylinder. White LUMMA does not tell them what they have found.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — ENTRY GALLERY — SECONDS LATER

Tom, Charlie and Mason return from delivering the independent copy. They cross the proper shimmering threshold at normal scale. Thinking they are alone, TOM and CHARLIE deactivate their FUTURE C3 projections; their real faces emerge. MASON never used a projection.

From a concealed gallery the Tweed twins see them clearly. They recognize Tom and Charlie from the ancient royal court, long before these visitors supposedly existed.

DARIUS
Those faces. Mesopotamia. The two strangers by the registration yard.

SOREN
They've been in our history all along.

The brothers step out with the cylinder. This is a confrontation, not a capture; they stand between the family and the open gallery that leads to the exit.

DARIUS
You took our resting chamber. You took our ship.

CHARLIE
No. You don't even know where she is, do you?

SOREN
We know how to bring her back. Our scientists can open this when we're safe.

TOM
If you believed she was family, you'd have asked what she wanted.

DARIUS
Our family affairs are none of yours.

They refuse to open the cylinder and keep it close. White LUMMA contracts her furniture; the room shifts proportionally but retains its normal appearance to integrated passengers. The brothers think her adaptive architecture is malfunctioning.

SOREN
Enough. Open your hatch. We are leaving with our property.

LUMMA
You are free to leave. The normal exit threshold is available, or the separate physical hatch when we land.

DARIUS
The hatch. No more of your tricks.

LUMMA begins a smooth, safe SCALE REDUCTION, shrinking herself and every integrated passenger. The humans remain inside with the twins during the change, unharmed. The twins clutch the cylinder and make for the plain physical exit, not noticing their changing scale.

EXT. GOLD-FREE HANGAR — CONTINUOUS

White LUMMA, still holding her accepted passengers in one proportional field, glides through an ordinary maintenance VEHICLE EXIT. She is free of the dome; no teleportation, gold transit or rescue force is used. Behind her the city's glass bubble shines over the ruined outer roads.

She flies the short distance back to the SAME sheltered block where ragged children watched her FIRST LANDING. Here the local air is briefly tolerable, and their communal filtered shelter is close. White LUMMA settles at roughly FIVE FEET ACROSS. No restorative exit field glimmers at her plain mechanical hatch.

EXT. HANGAR FLOOR — CONTINUOUS

The hatch opens. SOREN and DARIUS scramble out by choice, hauling the now miniature, still-CLOSED cylinder. They are each approximately FIVE INCHES TALL. The ordinary hatch did not pass them through the shimmering field that would restore their former scale.

SOREN
Why is the road so enormous?

DARIUS
Never mind! We have Black LUMMA. Get the cylinder to the laboratory!

The SAME THREE CHILDREN who watched White LUMMA land at the beginning come running from their nearby filtered shelter. The older child gently scoops up Soren, amazed to find a tiny man arguing in a perfect suit. Another child carefully lifts Darius, who hugs the miniature cylinder.

OLDER CHILD
They talk!

YOUNGER CHILD
Are they part of the spaceship?

SOREN
Put me down! Do you know who I am?

The children laugh in wonder, not cruelty. They carry the astonished, protesting twins and their tiny mysterious cylinder toward their safe shelter. The Tweeds' power still exists inside the distant dome, but out here no one listens to their orders. This is the LAST IMAGE OF THE TWEED BROTHERS. Their survival is not shown or denied; they are not abused, killed or expelled by law.

White LUMMA watches with a mischievous glimmer. She still has Tom, Charlie and Mason safely integrated aboard. When ready, she can expand and restore them through her ordinary threshold.

EXT. FUTURE — DOME GLASS — NIGHT

After flying to a secluded place White LUMMA returns to normal scale. Tom, Charlie and Mason leave through the SHIMMERING RESTORATIVE THRESHOLD at their own correct size. The three walk, masked, to Mara's outside settlement for one last goodbye. The distant dome keeps operating; the Tweeds' physical change has not ended its rule.

MARA
Did you learn how our world became this?

CHARLIE
Part of it. We have authenticated records of who took control of the resources, and when.

MARA
Records won't give the children clean air tonight.

TOM
No. We won't pretend this is already fixed.

CHARLIE
But where we're going, some decisions haven't happened yet.

MARA
Then don't turn us into another lesson the fortunate forget.

TOM
We won't.

Charlie gives the children at the water station a final wave. No secret twin is shown here again, and no quick fix magically repairs the poisoned Earth.

INT. ORIGINAL LUMMA — DEPARTURE LOUNGE — NIGHT

White LUMMA contains one newly reunited consciousness and three relieved human travelers. The Observatory's known, living reference remains active through the intelligent extensions who traveled home and away; LUMMA does not choose an arbitrary date.

LUMMA
A return alignment is available through our continuing family connection and the established observatory signature.

MASON
And our little corporate friends?

LUMMA
Alive. Safe. Capable of being restored by consent and proper passage. Their wealth does not protect them from learning humility.

CHARLIE
Nor does it disappear because they're tiny. We still have a lot to do.

TOM
Then home first. Tomorrow we begin.

LUMMA folds into the green corridor of the Quantum Highway, carrying evidence and obligations instead of treasure.

EXT. THIRD VACATION WORLD — FLOATING ORCHARD — NIGHT

Franny and Heyman stroll between floating fruit trees. Gravity shifts gently with every breeze. An enormous ripe fruit descends and lands harmlessly beside them, spraying glowing juice over Heyman's holiday outfit.

HEYMAN
I don't understand why our last two destinations involved being attacked by breakfast.

FRANNY
It isn't an attack. The tree is giving us a gift.

Another fruit narrowly misses his hat. Franny laughs until her eyes water. Then she retrieves a family picture from a pocket: Charlie and Tom outside the observatory, Patch and Kiki squabbling behind them, Mason holding Mojo.

FRANNY
Look at their faces. Not one of them taking the easy road.

HEYMAN
They wouldn't know an easy road if they walked onto one.

FRANNY
We can see a thousand places and still miss all of them every morning.

Heyman watches the magnificent, absurd sky.

HEYMAN
Then we could finish the tour and go home. The universe will still be here if we need a holiday again.

She kisses him. A final fruit falls on his shoulder. They both laugh and begin walking back toward the little extension.

INT. THIRD VACATION WORLD — OBSERVATION BALCONY — NIGHT

Franny and Heyman sit with an extravagant alien sunset beyond their balcony. Birds glow like falling lanterns. The table has finally delivered something edible: two tiny pastries that taste surprisingly like coffee.

HEYMAN
You know what this needs?

FRANNY
A decent cup of coffee.

HEYMAN
And our family.

She turns to him. They have reached the most beautiful place on their tour, and both are thinking about a noisy observatory on Earth.

FRANNY
We deserved a holiday.

HEYMAN
We did.

FRANNY
And we deserved to learn when to go home.

They smile. The SECOND EXTENSION, resting discreetly nearby, brightens as if already anticipating their choice.

HEYMAN
Do you suppose Charlie has wrecked anything while we've been gone?

FRANNY
Absolutely. Let's go and find out.

They leave the sunset behind without regret. Home is not less wonderful for being familiar.

EXT. NORTH SHORE OBSERVATORY — MORNING

A small craft returns from the Highway and expands softly beside the known observatory. Tom, Charlie and Mason step into warm Hawaiian air. Patch and Kiki run out to meet them. The FIRST EXTENSION rises to greet the original LUMMA like a friend rejoining a conversation.

KIKI
Did you find the future?

PATCH
More importantly, does it have dental care?

MASON
You can be grateful you did not come.

CHARLIE
It's beautiful on one side. Terrible on the other.

Patch's grin fades. Tom places the evidence sleeve in his hand.

TOM
Keep it safe. We have to understand all of it.

PATCH
We found something, too.

KIKI
Three signals. From the Orion region. We don't know who sent them.

Tom looks at the recorded shapes. No answer is conjured from curiosity.

TOM
Then we keep listening.

INT. OBSERVATORY — WORKSHOP — LATER

Charlie stands beside her earlier fuel-equipment diagrams, separate from the dangerous Highway-access research that was decommissioned. She runs a finger over a practical production estimate. Tom enters carrying two cups of coffee.

CHARLIE
I thought I'd never open these plans again.

TOM
They weren't the plans we destroyed.

CHARLIE
I know. I just couldn't look at them without remembering what else happened.

TOM
I'm sorry I helped you feel that way.

He places a cup beside her. She takes a sip and stares again at the equipment.

CHARLIE
If this works at scale, it could cut emissions in places that can't switch overnight. But it needs clean power to make the hydrogen. And testing. And a way not to hand it to another corporation that sells the air back to us.

TOM
Then we build all those things into the plan. No exceptions for a good cause. No private monopoly dressed up as rescue.

CHARLIE
You'd really help?

TOM
I'll disagree with you constantly.

CHARLIE
That sounds more familiar.

TOM
But I'll be beside you when we test it.

She kisses him. This isn't the end of their argument. It's the beginning of working through it together.

EXT. OBSERVATORY GARDEN — AFTERNOON

Mason kneels comfortably beside his garden bed, then rises without wincing. He glances up, almost astonished each time. A robot carries a watering can four times its size.

MASON
For a man who once wanted every company in the world, I seem awfully satisfied with a tomato.

Franny and Heyman return on their small LUMMA extension. Charlie runs to them. Franny embraces her so fiercely Heyman has to ask politely for room.

HEYMAN
I believe we're home.

FRANNY
We've seen some of the most beautiful places in creation.

CHARLIE
And?

FRANNY
I missed this one.

The extended family gathers naturally. Mason watches without feeling he must buy his place. He is already part of the circle.

INT. OBSERVATORY — SIGNAL STUDY — AFTERNOON

Patch shows Tom the THREE ORION TRACES: separate arrivals, related structure, no verified identity or navigable physical anchor. Tom compares them to the recurring rhythm in the Highway but refuses a convenient interpretation.

PATCH
They might be a greeting. Or a warning. Or three hiccups from something we don't understand.

TOM
Don't make a destination from a guess.

KIKI
We didn't. We preserved the originals.

CHARLIE
Good. We've seen what can happen when people use a mystery as an excuse to take what isn't theirs.

Tom looks at the signal in silence. One shape evokes a distant heartbeat; he thinks briefly of his mother. He does not hear her voice and she does not appear. The question belongs to another journey.

EXT. OBSERVATORY — JUNGLE PATH — SUNSET

The tropical forest rustles. MR. MOJO emerges with Kiki's SAME SHINY SILVER BAG dragging behind him. The small monkey looks pleased with himself. His girlfriend appears on a high branch for an instant, watching him, then slips away into leaves.

KIKI
Mojo! I thought you'd lost that.

Mojo drops the bag at her feet with a thump far too heavy for empty clothing. Patch opens it, expecting a rock or a collection of fruit. Instead, a GOLD BAR glints in the fading sunlight. The letters engraved on its side read TWEED INC.

PATCH
Where on Earth did you get that?

Mojo looks toward the jungle. His expression has the perfect timing of someone who knows exactly how much he isn't telling.

MASON
That's a very expensive banana, my friend.

Tom and Charlie exchange a look. The two Tweed brothers have left clues in more than one century.

CHARLIE
No gold aboard LUMMA. Not even this.

FRANNY
Especially this.

They all glance toward the nearby trees. The monkey has already gone, disappearing behind a curtain of leaves.

EXT. OBSERVATORY — OVERLOOK — DUSK

The Pacific moves beneath the North Shore Observatory. Earlier in the movie it looked eternal; now Tom and Charlie know how fragile a world can become. They stand hand in hand, the platinum pineapple pin glinting near Charlie's heart.

CHARLIE
We found the future and came home with more questions.

TOM
At least they're questions we can do something about.

CHARLIE
Not all of them.

She thinks of the father she has not seen since childhood. Tom thinks of his mother, and the unproved hope that some kind of connection survives.

TOM
No. Not all.

Behind them the family laughs as Mojo's mysterious bar is lifted carefully into safe storage, nowhere near LUMMA. The original White LUMMA rests nearby, more complete than before; the two extensions circle her freely.

CHARLIE
Tomorrow?

TOM

Tomorrow we start making the world
we actually want.

The small living LUMMA extensions brighten like answering stars. Beyond the coast, the sky opens toward Orion, its three unanswered signals waiting somewhere far away.

FADE OUT.