

dywerverse.com

Full manuscript about 118,500 words

THE VOLITION DIRECTIVE

MK Dywen

0.

They huddle in the dark and can feel each other's hands, knees, feet.

He takes and squeezes her fingers and she slides around the cramped alcove so she can be right up against him.

He pulls her even closer and presses his chin to her forehead.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

“I love Peanut, too. Little Alice.”

“Little baby Alice...”

“She will have everything.”

“She can be difficult already. She's not taking it very easy on her mother.”

“Nothing worth having is easy.”

“No?” she says.

“That is what 'They' always say. She will be very beautiful and intelligent. Just like her mother.”

“She will be stubborn, certainly.”

“Yes, that part is inescapable.”

“She will have her father's integrity. His toughness.”

“I would rather her be soft. Gentle and sheltered. Open. Trusting. Loved to rottenness,” he says.

“She will be. If she knows everything that is coming, she can always keep herself safe, can’t she? We know what our parents did wrong to us, right?”

She says this and then laughs.

“Absolutely,” he says.

She tries to exhale her fear.

“Please tell me more,” she says. “Tell me how you feel about us.”

“You’re always wanting to embarrass me.”

“Absolutely yes.”

“Well I don’t care about shame. Pride is for cowards,” he says.

She laughs and feels his face in the dark and he is smiling, too.

He responds in a whisper, against her ear: “I am engulfed. That is an ugly sounding word. Consumed. I know nothing else matters. I have no fear,” he says.

“Hmmm.”

“I want to be with you and Alice both. That is my life’s only remaining mission. I want to spoil you with love.”

“You already have. Don’t stop, though.”

“She will never want for anything. Will she?”

“No. We will ensure it together,” she says.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

“Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized...” he says.

“Ha! Wow. Shakes. Don't stop.”

Outside the enormous rumbling begins.

“I am afeard. Being in night, all this is but a dream, Too flattering-sweet to be substantial'...”

The portal cranks open and a red light shines in.

She finds his eyes glittering in the dim and now she recites, in a whisper, so no one else can

hear:

“My bounty is as boundless as the sea,

My love as deep; the more I give to thee,

the more I have, for both are infinite.”

1.

Listing gently, Olive is buoyancy. Like an inflated ball on water; a tumbling omniscience.

A warm breeze is turning things out, gently, like water lapping the side of a boat.

She feels a prickling cat's lick. A small kitten, first glance cute. Then mostly eyes in an alien's skull.

Olive sees snapshot images: a burning tanker spills fire over a highway onramp, in Denver. A child's vomit on a school floor. Hospital lights, in a hallway, reflecting on bleached linoleum. The Earth, glowing from sunlight, outside her capsule window.

None of it makes sense.

She is dreaming. She's dreaming or she's dead. She is dying. She's suffered some kind of horrible accident. Part of a mission. It was very important.

Impossible. An impossible mission.

She settles on it: there's been an accident.

I've been in an accident, she thinks. On a mission.

I've been burned alive.

Olive has a left hand but she can't locate it with her brain. Her consciousness is like spilled jelly, broken open -- dashed, more like -- across a mosaic of these memories.

She has a right foot. She knows her toes, even if she can't locate or move them, but the ones on her left foot are gone; they were completely burned off. That's not easily accepted by her mind -- just known logically, like a string of words. How do I no longer have toes on one foot?

If Olive is a bundle of different things, the binding's snapped and come apart. One piece is all panic -- a little girl screaming outside a house fire. But another part, a much bigger part, is still slowly, gracefully, turning.

Like their capsule did, up above Earth.

She's got more order and structure: I was on a mission. I was in outer space. We traversed the Anomaly. We came back down to Earth. We sought to defy natural progression.

The feeling of a kitten's licks -- that alone is persistent. Kneading with front paws, left right, left right, left right, eyes half open, licking, licking, licking her. It thinks Olive is its mother? It's consumed by animal impulse.

But that's not a cat. It's some kind of machine. Working on her.

Olive's got questions now: Am I in a hospital? Is this the year 1912?

No, definitely not 1912. It was only supposed to be 1912. They left from 2032. They were supposed to have traveled in time. A ridiculous ambition. It should have been obvious. Impossible. And for what end?

Olive's got more snapshot memories hitting her now: yellow farmhouse. Her cousin Callum's chortle. A windy day. Holding Joey, her son.

"He's dead," Olive says.

It's very important that this fact sticks, regardless. This is critically important. Joseph Arthur Hoffmann, Olive's boy, died on June 2nd, 2027. Repeat: Joseph Arthur Hoffmann deceased June 2nd, 2027. Repeat...

"No, I don't need to do that anymore," she says.

Though Olive's spoken, she can feel no physical lips, so it must have just been imagined. It had to be.

No, she does have lips -- *I have lips*, she thinks! She asserts. She just can't move them.

If this is death, will she meet Joey? Her father and grandparents? Her great aunt, the center of so much of her historical research. Can this be it? She's in heaven or some clearing house of massed personalities -- a holdover, maybe just for the failures, a place for your accrued personality to finally be scratched away at, like rust, before getting primed and re-painted.

More facts come: Olive remembers -- she knows -- she's inside a big, silver-faced structure like a skyscraper. In something like a hospital suite. This is medical attention she's getting. They're giving it to her. In a private room. And inside the room, she is inside some kind of fabric, like a cocoon. Her with what feels just like a dozen kittens. They lick and knead at her, all of them.

No. That is just the medical machine, working. And her confusion's probably just the anesthesia.

"I am the mission's historical officer," Olive says.

Again, without lips and voice; without air she can push or use, it's doubtful she's actually speaking, but it sure feels like she is.

Olive draws breath only with real difficulty and this gives the panicked side of her fuel: she is trapped inside some tube of cloth, RIGHT NOW, with some kind of clear veins – tubing – stuck down inside her making her breathe -- it is very difficult, and VERY claustrophobic.

“Nope,” Olive tells herself. “I’m not going to panic.”

The answer is in her memories, if she can just find the rest. It’s like her life is that pile of objects that have been dumped onto the floor of her mind.

What’s weird is she feels like a door’s been left open somewhere, like someone else is looking at them, too – no, a team of someones -- with flashlights.

Investigators. In her head.

Panic.

“No. Not yet.”

Olive is just hallucinating. This cannot be real.

She has an obligation to sort it out. So she will stay calm and she will organize.

Finally more memories come:

Falling over the planet’s surface. This is before everything went completely off.

Olive was actually out in outer space, weightless, above the Earth. She was in a spacesuit.

In a space capsule. With the mission team of four. SEA is the corporation. Her cousin Callum is the SEA CEO. He headed the mission. Callum Donan. It is his mad obsession.

Light so hot it liquefies you -- makes your skin snakes right off the muscle and bone beneath it in damp sheets.

Yes, that’s sickening but it’s right: a blue light burned her. Dr. Margaret Potter was also on the mission. Her friend.

Margaret's hurt, too.

"I'm going to panic." Olive reminds herself.

These are pretty close to actual words, because she hears them, too. Wheezing through the tubes and pushing against the machine. She actually is inside a sack, sealed in a cocoon.

Something *is* inside it with her. Is it really a medical machine? She can move parts of her body.

"I'm going to panic very soon." It can't be stalled forever.

Outside, she sees something move, darkening the cocoon's fabric.

Olive tries to swallow around the plastic object that chokes her; she wants to cry out; she is going to spasm and claw and shriek!

"Can you hear me?" a calm voice asks her.

It's a man's voice, coming through several layers, and Olive tries to nod but the thing down her throat prevents her.

"Help me! I am going to panic, do you understand?" she says, or tries to say.

Olive sees a window in the cocoon -- it is small and glossy -- and a man's face appears there. He is wearing a tight-fitting suit, black. He has curly dark hair. He is tall and has a square chin. He is handsome, with decent, smart, wide-set dark eyes and a thoughtful brow. His expression is frustrated or strained. His tie is tight and black.

I have seen him before! Olive thinks. Where do I know him from?

But he's not there in her memories.

"I am..." she tries to say.

He smiles, and the expression changes him. It makes him look like a different person, maybe kind, and this gives her a shudder and tears flood into her eyes.

“Please, do not attempt to speak,” he says.

He leans his face close to the window, with a warm smile -- a generosity. It bends his eyes -- it creases his cheeks and pits them with dimples.

“I want you to understand that you are going to be all right,” he says.

He speaks very formally. Is it English?

Then he addresses someone else. Someone she can't see through the window in the cocoon.

“Can she hear me? Can you hear me?”

He tries to speak more slowly, and loudly, and he has a foreign accent.

Olive tries to nod.

I must look a splattered mess, one of the loose parts of her brain thinks.

I am literally a splattered mess.

“If you can hear me, I want you to know that you are going to be just fine,” he says.

And when she looks into his eyes, for some reason she believes him.

“All right?” he says.

Olive tries to nod again. She tries to nod and there is suddenly a pathetic spasm in his brow, and this is how she realizes he's seen her movement of affirmation.

“I believe she has heard me!” he says.

The feeling of cats' licks has gotten so ferocious it's very unpleasant. Olive tries to kick them off of her -- maybe they aren't cats -- maybe rats -- Olive wants to look down but can't tip her head that far. It feels like they're now biting her.

“They are hurting me!” Olive says.

She tries to say this, but it's just a gurgling at the plastic, and the panic comes right back, but then she hears a fooshing noise – feels a flushing of air – it not unlike on the capsule, on the SEA spacecraft, when it pressurized -- and then the intensity of the bites goes away very very quickly, and Olive is smothered in a feeling like a very soft, deep, quilt.

The buoyancy returns, spreading out, like a single droplet of cream in coffee.

“Oh God, thank you,” Olive says.

Anesthetic. They've drugged her. More drugs, maybe.

But she remembers different hospital lights. The children's hospital. Sleeping on the folding chair against the window, woken up every time the nurses come in. Day and night, mixed together.

Nope, Olive pushes that one away. I am going to sleep.

But it comes back at her: Joey's in surgery, just after his first birthday. Premonition. She had a premonition, just before.

There are other memories. It's that weird snapshot thing happening again, some result of the drug working on her brain.

This time it's her wedding day. Fierce winds, black skies, no rain. She's divorced now.

Another, younger. Swinging off the face of the blacktop, on a swing, as a kid, going so high with her feet kicked out that she might sail up into space...

Up...

Down.

Up...

Down.

“Can you still hear me?” the kind man asks.

Up...

“... you should understand that you have been burned badly in an accident...”

Up...

“...you came into contact with a system that accidentally incinerated parts of your body. But we believe you can be entirely restored...”

Down.

She’s reaching for the ground.

Everything’s becoming translucent now. Insubstantial. Her consciousness starts dissipating like fog.

Yes, she thinks, at last, but then she has a jolt: No!

Olive must make a note. Scratch a mark. Leave some imprint. In case she dies like Joey did.

“Wait!” she tries to cry.

It has to matter that they have come here from another time or place at least. From 2032.

Someone has to know: even if this isn’t France, circa 1912. They’ve gone *somewhere*.

The world's first crewed time travel mission has failed.