

Larry's Last Stand



Larry's Last Stand

For Lou

(The best dog ever.)

by Exe

Copyright

Larry's Last Stand is an original work of fiction that was inspired by real people and events.

Please Note: This work may not be reproduced and/or distributed in any form, in-full or in-part, without the prior written consent of Raena Exe.

For permissions contact: raenaexe@gmail.com

© Copyright 2021-2024 Raena Exe

Cover Art by: RockMo

© Copyright 2021-2024 RockMo/Exe

Intended for Adult Audiences Only:

*Violence

*Adult Content

*Language

Table of Contents

Contents

Chapter 1 - Snot Worth It
Chapter 2 - T'Challa Lives
Chapter 3 - Your People
Interlude No. 1 – Treasured Item #1
Chapter 4 - Dodger Knows Best
Interlude No. 2 - Treasured Item #2
Chapter 5 - WTF
Chapter 6 - Dingle Dangle
Chapter 7 - Jesus Christ Larry
Chapter 8 - Old Friends
Chapter 9 - Tell-Tale Heart
Chapter 10 - Bitches Be Crazy
Chapter 11 - Justice - Not Murder
Interlude No. 3 - Treasured Items #3 & #4
Chapter 12 - A Cluster of Fucks
Chapter 13 - Mortal Enemies
Chapter 14- Everyday Ordinary Hero
Chapter 15 - Auf Wiedersehen, Goodnight
Chapter 16 - Rebel Yell
Epilogue – Treasured Item #5
Appendix

Chapter 1 - Snot Worth It

*“But I’d be disappointed in myself if I didn’t speak up.
Especially for fear of some monetary repercussion or career damage -
that just feels really gross to me.”*

Chris Evans

There were exactly eight things that Larry Carmichael loved more than anything in this entire world... and they were ordered thusly; first and foremost, he loved his family, then... his dog and best friend, Dodger. Then came the five treasures he always kept hidden safely in the right front pocket of his jeans, and then, finally... Chris Evans (AKA Captain America).

Unfortunately, the last one was banned entirely from his home, on account of his mom being totally nuts.

However, from what his two much-older brothers told him (quite frequently, in fact) *nuts* was pretty normal for the fifty-nine-year-old single mother of three.

And so, because she still hadn’t yet come to see reason, the clever six-and-a-half-year-old still had to hide his secret hoard of superhero paraphernalia in his middle brother’s abandoned tree house.

High over the detached garage, the small structure loomed, as it swayed mercilessly in the tall, thin branches of the Aspen it was built in.

Larry... though... was not scared.

Because Larry had learned, very early on, that heroes can’t be scared of anything – let alone a child’s treehouse. Even if it was thirty-feet in the air and was held together with little more than finishing nails and a few angel prayers.

(Thankfully, God is notorious for watching out for fools, drunks, and little kids.)

So, there he was, crouched like a tiny dragon over his hoard, which included; an old Captain America lunch pail that used to be Ian’s, and an Avengers T-shirt that Larry had mysteriously found in the laundry one day. It was an XXL, but it had all of the Marvel heroes that were technically banned from his home, so the size didn’t really matter that much.

There were other things as well, like all of the movies that he’d rescued before his mother had gotten a chance to throw them out as well.

Sadly though, Larry didn’t actually have a way to play them, as the treehouse didn’t technically have electricity.

Though, there was a slightly-sparking extension cord one could use... if it was an emergency – but it was best not to use it for more than a couple minutes. Or so at least his brother Ian had advised.

However, the real treasure in this little boy's hoard, hands-down, just had to be the deeply loved plastic shield he'd gotten as a secret Christmas present from his oldest brother Elijah. Whom, of all of them, seemed to understand Larry the best; Larry and his dedication to the man behind the shield.

Because Elijah was a fan too.

Though, technically, in a totally different way.

And then, there was the thing that had started the whole mess, the notorious bag of Hershey's Kisses that had Captain America and his shield plastered all over the front.

Larry had been given the package of chocolate morsels last summer, at a birthday party for Travis Witley, the undersized boy who ate his boogers and wet his pants, way too frequently.

And it hadn't even been his idea to go to the stupid party in the first place. It had been his mom's bright idea – which Larry liked to remind himself late-late at night when all the world seemed so much more unfair.

Anyway, when his mother had seen the bag... well...

to be honest, she threw a royal fit.

You see, Larry's mom, Jamie Lee Baker, was an ecology professor up at the local community college, and she'd just been telling her student's, that week in fact, about how Hershey's (and other cheap chocolate manufacturers) all use African child slaves to harvest their cocoa pods, and here was her six-year-old's cherished hero - selling it as if it were **cruelty free**.

And oh-boy, could Jamie Lee Baker throw a fit. I mean, it really was something spectacular to behold – Larry had to admit.

In fact, she'd been so upset over it, she'd needed to pull the car over to calm down. And that's when she'd tossed the entire package of Hershey's chocolate right out the window. Right there, as they sat parked in in her Subaru station wagon out in front of little Sabrina Spellcrafter's house.

Thankfully, it was only been a couple blocks from their place, and so Larry had been able to retrieve the mostly undamaged bag an hour after dinner, just before his bath.

And that's when he had moved all of his other 'hero' things too. Better that, he thought, than risking them going into the trash, just like all the unused Captain America wrapping paper she'd found a few weeks later.

No, either his mom was confused, Larry thought, or perhaps Mr. Evans just didn't know. I mean, no one Larry ever told about it thought it could be true. That someone as rich and famous as Mr. Evans could let a children's hero sell child slave chocolate to kids.

“Give it up,” Ian had told him, however, when Larry had begged his middle brother to intercede.

He'd asked Ian, because everyone knew that Ian was their mother's favorite.

Even the twin's father knew it was true. Larry was sure of it, sure that's why he had bought Elijah all that expensive film equipment, and had even sent him to film school the previous summer.

I mean, Ian had never gotten anything like that from their father. All he'd gotten was a broken-down motorbike and a dirty looking jacket that smelled like a dead cat.

Which, at the thought, reminded Larry of why he was up in the treehouse in the first place. Because he'd just seen the neighbor lady, Mrs. Clarkson, eat the Henderson's cat.

And, well... Larry was fairly sure he was gonna need a hero for something as big as this.

If only my dad was still alive, the traumatized, and yet still very determined boy thought, as he scanned his odd mix of treasures for anything that might be useful.

And then, once again, the small boy wished that like his Irish-twin brothers, he too had a dad.

But unlike his brothers, the much younger Larry only had stories of a father who had died long before he'd even been born.

Then again, Larry recalled that his father had been an actual real-life honest-to-God hero. And the twin's dad was just a dentist from Middleton.

No, Larry reminded himself, again. *It's a special thing to have an actual hero for a father, even if he is dead.*

But in truth though, Larry's father hadn't been a hero at all. And he certainly wasn't dead – though, for all practical purposes he might as well be – for all good he was to anyone.

No, the truth is, Larry's real father was nothing more than a random screw in the toilets at the Victoria Albert Lounge. The scummier one, on the lower-east-end of town.

And as neither his mother nor the strange man she'd picked up that night had used their real names, or phone numbers, let's just say... that's why Larry's mom had been a bit sensitive that day – regarding her son's *so-called-choice* of heroes.

Because Jamie Lee Baker knew a fake-hero-father was enough of a lie for the precarious, yet profoundly innocent, six-and-a-half-year-old to handle.

Thank you very much.

And the way she saw it, was that she certainly didn't need Larry idolizing a man that would sell out African children in exchange for an American political career.

I mean, Jamie Lee Baker just wasn't gonna have it. No Sir. Not for her son.

(Because if anyone was gonna lie to her kid, by-God, it was gonna be the one person that shoved him out of her vagina.)

Because the truth was, Jamie Baker was a decent person, just trying to do the decent thing by her fatherless son.

And more than anything, because of that ever-compounding lie, she felt the need to make certain her highly impressionable son truly understood the meaning of the word *hero*.

However, all Larry knew was that his father had been some famous surgeon with 'Doctors Without Boundaries', and one day he'd been gunned down by a group of bad men while he'd been attempting to rescue a trapped child from a flooding storm drain.

(Because the truth is, Jamie Lee Baker liked to drink wine, and watch reruns of ER, and she never once learned how to tell a decent lie.)

Anyhoo, standing there in the rickety treehouse, that threatened to dump him out at any moment, Larry knew that even if the world throws a curveball at you, the only thing a real man can do is stand up and face it, like a man.

And so, that was exactly why Larry was high up in his brother's treehouse. He was fetching his Captain America shield, and anything else that would help him fight the alien that had taken over Mrs. Clarkson's ginormous body.

“The projects that I end up doing, that I want to be involved with in any way, have always been projects that will be impactful, for the most part, to my people - to black people.” Chadwick Boseman

Chapter 1 - Snot Worth It Part 2

“If I'm acting at all, it's going to be under Marvel contract,
or I'm going to be directing.
I can't see myself pursuing acting
strictly outside of what I'm contractually obligated to do.”

Chris Evans

With his feet safely back on the ground, Larry quickly decided his first and best option was Ian; his eighteen-year-old middle brother. He chose Ian, over his older brother Elijah, because Larry had once seen Ian break an entire tree limb in half, just by stomping on it. And Larry was pretty sure the smaller and softer Elijah couldn't do anything like that.

Besides, in a way, it had made Larry think of Chris (or Captain America, as it were) ripping that firewood apart.

I mean, maybe Ian was just a smaller, younger, and dumber version of his favorite superhero. Larry couldn't be sure, until he looked into it further.

At the base of the tree, he found Dodger, Larry's most trusted companion.

Larry had tied him to the base of the tree before going up because about a year ago, Larry had decided to carry the medium-sized dog up the ladder, and into the treehouse. But the energetic dog had gotten so excited at his new surroundings, he'd nearly fallen out of the flimsy door – to his death.

So, that's when Larry had decided Dodger was better suited to pulling guard duty on the ground.

With Dodger now in tow, the two quickly made their way around the house until they were both snuggled safely within the confines one of their regular hiding spots. This one was a small pocket they'd created within an Indian Hawthorn bush just outside of Ian's bedroom.

Larry had his regular rounds, you see, of protecting the house and all of his family, from the bad guys he often heard about on the evening news.

Of course, you can only protect people you can see. And since Ian had a strict rule about no-one under the age of fifteen being allowed in his room, Larry had been forced to stand guard outside.

But today Larry was there for another reason entirely. He was there because he was looking for a hero, or at least someone to help him understand how Mrs. Clarkson's mouth had opened up to the size of the Henderson's cat – and then in one gulp she'd eaten that cat. Right there in front of his eyes.

Of course, Mrs. Clarkson had no clue that Larry had been 'standing guard' outside of her kitchen window when she'd done it.

But upon seeing the whole thing, up close, Larry had decided right then and there that he was in way over his head.

So, that's why he was standing in the bushes outside of his middle brother's bedroom. He needed to be sure he could trust him not to be a cat-eater too. I mean, if nice, old, Mrs. Clarkson could secretly be a horrendous monster, perhaps other people could be too.

And to be honest, it would certainly explain why Ian was never very nice to him.

But when Larry pressed his tiny nose to the window all he could see was Ian making nasty with his older girlfriend.

With a blast of sudden revolt, upon seeing the two nearly naked teens rolling around an unmade bed, Larry turned to leave at once. Only, his plastic Captain America shield banged loudly against the window as he turned to go.

And an instant later Larry and Ian were in a sort of eye-lock death-stare through the window.

And then, before Larry even knew what was happening, the window was thrown open and suddenly he was being pulled through the narrow opening.

"What do you think you're doing, you little pervert?" Ian asked, as he loomed nakedly over his much smaller brother, while his girlfriend scrambled to get dressed.

"Nothing!" Larry managed to yell before his brother grabbed him in a headlock and began giving him a very painful noogie.

"Ouch!" Larry screamed, knowing no one would hear.

That's because Ian's bedroom was in the basement, far away from everyone else, just like he liked it. Which, for Larry, was another reason he suspected him first, of all his family, of being an alien, because he was just so strange.

"I didn't spy!" Larry confessed, to no avail.

"Oh yeah? That's not what it looked like from here, little man," Ian told him truthfully, as Dodger barked and growled at the much-older boy, from outside the window.

"Let me go! I came to ask for help," Larry finished lamely, just as his brother was releasing him from his iron-like grip.

At least he didn't try to eat me, Larry thought, as he contemplated telling Ian what he'd just seen.

"Mrs. Clarkson ate the Henderson's cat, and I think she might be an alien," he confessed in a rush, just as his big brother was opening his bedroom door and shoving him out.

"Oh, yeah?" Ian asked, clearly not interested in Larry's answer. Because before Larry could answer Ian was shutting the door in his face.

But not before he tossed out the red and blue plastic shield – narrowly missing Larry's forehead in the process.

“And I wouldn’t let mom catch you with that. Unless you want to see it go in the trash along with the rest of your fake hero stuff,” Ian warned his brother, most helpfully, just as he shut the door and locked it.

With a huff, Larry got back to his feet, and then made his way back out to the yard, and the waiting Dodger. After a small detour... into the garage, that is.

“Don’t worry Dodge,” he told his trustworthy friend.

“I let all the air out of his bike tires, and then hid the nozzle to the air-compressor,” Larry told him with a slight giggle.

Cuz the best thing about having older brothers is the wealth of knowledge they freely share, when they don’t suspect it’ll be used against them.

You see, Larry was the son of a hero - a real hero - and they don’t take shit from anybody.

“Come on Dodge... let’s go see about Elijah.”

And like that, the two comrades were off, once again...

in search of a hero.

Chapter 2 - T'Challa Lives

" You have to live in the truth."

Chadwick Boseman

"I don't know what to tell you, kiddo," the eighteen-year-old Elijah told his littlest brother.

"Are you sure she really ate it, and you weren't just seeing it wrong?" he asked, hoping there was going to be a punchline in there somewhere.

Larry had never quite gotten the hang of telling jokes, and Elijah hoped that this was just one of those times.

I mean, because the alternative was his little brother was going stark-raving-mad.

"I told you already, she ate it right there in front of both me and Dodger."

Larry looked down at his stalwart companion and then back to his brother, as if that settled everything.

"Still..." Elijah said, stalling for time, as he tried to find an escape hatch.

"We can't really call the police and tell them you saw fat, old Mrs. Clarkson eating the Henderson's cat. You know they're not going to believe you for a second. Hell, I'm your brother and I don't even really believe you."

Larry kicked Elijah in the shin, but only a little, because he still needed help, and Elijah seemed to be his last best option.

"Ouch! You little shit! I'm trying to help you," the older, and yet not much bigger boy said, as he hopped around on one foot.

"Isn't there anyone that we can ask for help?" Larry asked then, with such a sincere look of hope in his eyes that his well-meaning sibling couldn't help but open his bedroom door and let him in.

"But that mangy dog stays out here," he told them both, in a huff.

But Larry didn't mind, not really. Because when Dodger had been just a pup he'd gotten into Elijah's room and had eaten a bunch of Elijah's plastic mushroom collection.

Though... to be fair, Larry didn't quite understand what the little *toys* meant to his oldest brother.

In fact, at just the thought, Larry jammed his right hand into his front pocket, just to make sure his five most valued treasures were all still there.

Which, of course, they were.

So, with a sigh, Larry turned to Dodge.

“You sit guard out here, while I go in and find us some help. Okay?”

With a single yip, the dog answered the stout boy, and then settled in for a good ass-licking.

“Gross,” Elijah said, “are you coming in, or not?”

Inside Elijah’s room, Larry did his absolute best not to look at the wall behind Elijah’s bed.

In fact, under any other circumstance Larry would have avoided his oldest brother’s room like the black plague - on account of the giant nudie of Chris Evans that was hanging on the wall just above his headboard.

“Does it have to be the naked one?” the flabbergasted boy inquired, yet again, while at the same time trying his best to shield his eyes with his left hand.

Because his right hand was still jammed deep inside the right front pocket of his jeans, as his most-cherished items always gave him strength when he needed it.

“Look, you’re the one who wanted my help. Remember?”

Larry nodded twice, and then turned to look at Elijah’s computer.

“Didn’t mom say that all of the superheroes are on Twitter?” Larry asked, a sudden idea bursting into his still-forming mind.

“Yeah, but... I don’t think...” Elijah began, as he swiped a long strand of hair out of his eyes.

Then, with a sigh, the older boy put both hands on his little brother’s shoulders and then spun him around so that they were looking eye-to-eye.

“Remember that petition mom sent around? When she tried to get people to help her save two million child-slaves from being tortured every single day of their lives? Do you remember how nobody cared? So do you really think they’re gonna pay any attention to you now... about a fat old lady eating a cat?”

Larry had to swallow hard on that one, because he did remember his mom’s failed petition to get the Superheroes to stop letting child slavers use their heroes to sell crappy candy to his friends. In fact, they’d eaten take-out every night for over two weeks as she’d sent out email after email to all the different churches around the country.

But it had all been for nothing. Because in the end, despite all of her efforts, nothing changed.

In fact, his mom had only gotten a dozen signatures... to save millions of kids lives.

So, what were his chances... really?

“Look, Larry, I wanna help. I really do. But until you have proof, I just don’t think anyone is gonna listen.”

It was the truth. Larry knew the ring of it when he heard it, sure enough. Even if he was only just six-and-a-half-years-old.

“But could you at least take that picture down?” Larry asked, one more time. Just in case.

However, this time, instead of just saying, ‘No’, and then pushing him out the door, Larry’s brother grabbed him up by the waist and then sat him down the end of his bed. And then he kneeled down in front of his half-brother.

“You know I’m a pretty big deal on Instagram, right?” his brother asked him.

Larry looked around the bedazzled room, at all of the flashy lights, and posters, and things.

And too, he looked at the camera set-up the twin’s father had bought him, and the lighting rings that could light up the room in every color.

And so Larry nodded.

Because he didn’t know anyone else with so much stuff. So, it was probably true. Whatever Instagram was.

“Well, I am,” Elijah said with a satisfied smile.

“And even I have never posted a naked picture of myself. And do you wanna know why?”

Larry definitely didn’t want to know why, because Larry... really didn’t have any idea what was going on.

And so, Larry kept his mouth shut. But he did give Elijah a look that said. “I’m trying to understand,” and so Elijah went on.

“People like Chris Evans, or Captain America, are only on Instagram and Twitter so that they can create an image. You can tell by what they post, who they follow, and what they like. And your buddy Chris is the worst. I’m sorry... but he just is. He only follows blue-checkmark people, and he’s never even liked a post – not one in his entire life. And that’s just not normal. The truth is... Larry, the man is all about his image. So, do you really think he could have done it on accident? I mean, he can’t even ‘like’ a post on accident.”

Elijah finished his little rant about the true vacuity of Larry’s hero, but by the look in his little brother’s eyes he didn’t really think it had done any good, sadly.

“Larry, you’re just going to have to learn, people are never what they seem. And your hero, Chris Evans, is no different. No different than Mrs. Clarkson.”

Larry puckered his lips in anger at that, but otherwise said nothing... because honestly... he still did not understand any of what had been said.

“Look, I’m going live online at six. So, you need to skedaddle.”

And like that... little Larry was being tossed out on his ear, once again.

Only this time, his shield was waiting outside the door, with Dodger.

“Come on boy,” he told his most-trusted companion.

“We’re not gonna find any help here.”

Chapter 2 - T'Challa Lives Part 2

*"You're not free unless you can show the good and the bad,
all sides of them.
So to me, when I play a character,
it's important that I can show every aspect of them."*

Chadwick Boseman

Giving up wasn't something heroes did. Larry knew this, as he took a seat on the curb next to the mailbox.

And... he wasn't giving up, exactly. He just didn't know what to do next, except give a quick scratch behind Dodger's left ear.

And while he sat there distracted with the best dog ever, a strange man snuck up behind him, all ninja like.

"Why so glum, little man?" he asked, with a flash of a smile Larry always found reassuring.

"Nobody ever listens to me, or takes me serious," Larry said, laying a dejected chin in the palm of an upturned hand, while his elbow rested, somewhat forlornly, on a patched knee.

"Nobody... huh?" the man with the loud socks and even louder earbuds asked. And then he smiled down on the boy he'd come to talk with on a somewhat-regular basis; deep philosophical discussions, as it so happens.

In fact, out there on the curb, at least once or twice a week the two amateur philosophers would discuss any number of topics, but mostly their conversations ranged around the stuff that came and went with the evening post.

"Do you know what a tribe is, boy?" the mailman asked Larry then, as he took a seat next to him on the curb.

But Larry was too upset to answer, and so he just shook his head, and then swiped at the snot running from his left nostril with the back of his left hand.

With a small, but knowing chuckle, the mailman put a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"A tribe is what we used to live in," the mailman said, and then he handed Larry their latest copy of 'National Geographic'.

On the cover was what could only be described as the fiercest looking boy Larry had ever seen.

At once Larry's back straightened, as the look of sheer determination on the boy's face sank into every fiber of Larry's being; giving him gooseflesh and raising the hairs on his arms.

"In a tribe, boy... everyone belongs," the mailman went on, as he was very happy to once again find a willing set of ears.

"And," he continued, "in a tribe everyone is given a space to speak their mind on things that matter to them. Why, in the best tribes, there's not one person more important than any other. In those, they recognize that everyone plays a significant part, even if that part isn't readily apparent."

Larry looked up at the dark-skinned man with the brilliant smile and dazzling eyes, and thought that he probably knew everything there was to know.

And sometimes, he liked to make-believe that the man was secretly King T'Challa, only... before he was king, when he was still learning about the world.

"Here's a story for you, from a land far-far away; about a little girl that listened to nobody. Whooo boy! That girl could not help herself - I tell you. She was always wandering off instead of doing her chores, and she never did learn to weave or sew, or even to cook. And one day, when her sisters had grown tired of her never having to do chores like they did, they complained to the wise elder."

Larry nodded at this point, because Ian never had to do chores either, even though both him and Elijah had complained many times.

"But all the old woman would say was... 'Someday you'll understand', which only made the sisters more upset, and so, when no one was looking they were often cruel, even vicious, to the little girl."

Again, Larry nodded, because he understood the viciousness of siblings well enough.

"Then, one day, the strange little girl came running to the elder woman, and told her that a great flood was on its way, a flood greater than any of them could even imagine. And the elder woman knew it was true, knew that this was why the girl had been born. And was why she'd learned to speak to the animals, and to the trees, instead learning to sew and to weave. So that one day she could receive this message - they all desperately needed to hear."

Larry couldn't help the frog in his throat, nor the tears, so he swiped them away too, with the snot.

"Did they listen to her? Did she save them? Did she save everyone she loves?" Larry asked, with such an earnest longing in his eyes it almost made the mailman choke up.

"They sure did. Because, in her tribe they recognized not everyone was gonna be good at the same things, and that some people's gifts just take a bit longer to flower."

Larry swallowed hard, and for a second, he kinda thought Dodger did too.

"Here now," the mailman said, handing over a second magazine, this one had Larry's familiar heroes on it. Only... they weren't really... they were just the actors that played his heroes on TV.

Larry looked at the picture of Robert Downey Jr, Chris Hemsworth, Gal Gadot, Ben Affleck, Paul Bettany, Tom Holland, Henry Cavill, Jason Momoa, and Chris Evans.

And he knew them all by their real names. Because he'd memorized them, before his mother had told him they'd all sold out their integrity for cash.

Still, Larry did not want to believe they would let their kid's heroes be used to sell slave candy. He just didn't think it could be true.

I mean... if his heroes were truly that terrible... what did that mean for everyone else?

"I respect your mom for what she's trying to do, banning these guys from your house," the mailman told him then, as he once again placed a comforting hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Not many people have stood up for my kind, especially in Hollywood. Not beyond the typical hashtags and timely memes, that then get forgotten a week later, just as soon as a project of theirs needs promoting. That's even if it gets mentioned at all."

Larry looked up at the mailman then, with a kind of shock twisting his belly.

Was that true? Was someone as important as his mailman someone that got overlooked too?

The mailman smiled so big then, Larry almost thought he'd read his mind.

"It takes an uncommon strength to go against everything you've grown accustomed to, whether you know it's wrong or not. I mean, honestly, how many of these men here have refused to take acting roles in films that didn't include people of color, or women? None. That's how many. And that's why things never change."

The mailman stood up then, and then dusted off his trousers.

Then, after giving Larry a hand up, he said, "Those people there... they live in troops where only people like them are considered. Those aren't your people, Larry. Your people will listen to you and respect you from the start. You won't have to convince them. Just don't give up. Because you will find them, Larry. I promise. You will find your people."

And then there was a fist-bump and another dazzling smile, and then Larry and Dodger were left standing on the curb, alone.

"Come on Dodger, I've got a plan," Larry said, with a new found feeling of enthusiasm coursing through his little body.

His people... that's what the mailman had said. Larry needed to find *his people*, and he was pretty sure he could do that. But first... he just had one little side-trip to make.

Five minutes later, his oldest brother Elijah was running screaming from the house, "You little shit! You won't get away with this! You did this before. You can't fool me again!"

And it was true, Larry had once gain unhooked the internet from the cable box outside, just as his oldest brother was about to start one of his famous 'live' Instagram posts - about all things 'boy toy', whatever that meant.

Anyhoo, just because a trick worked before, don't mean it won't work again, with a bit of tweaking... Larry thought, as he ducked into his oldest brother's room, while he was out - hooking the internet back up.

And just like that, before Elijah could make it back into his bedroom - Larry had smacked a teeny-tiny Hello Kitty sticker right over Chris Evans' exposed ding-dong.

Such a small sticker, in fact, that Larry had been quite shocked (yet pleased) it had actually covered.

Snickering to himself, the six-and-a-half-year-old raced back outside to his waiting dog, and shield, before Elijah had any clue as to what had just transpired.

Of course, a few minutes later Larry knew Elijah had figured it out, when he screamed, "You fucking brat, I'm gonna kill you!"

To which, both Larry and Dodger just snickered.

"I hung out with the jocks." Chris Evans

Chapter 3 - Your People

“The only difference between a hero and the villain is that the villain chooses to use that power in a way that is selfish and hurts other people.”

Chadwick Boseman

‘Find your people’, that’s what the mailman had said.

And that’s exactly what Larry intended to do.

Just as soon as he figured out who exactly they were.

Of course, he was thinking that just as Clive Blagden rode up on his fancy new BMX bike.

“How do you like it? My dad got it for me, from his work. What did your dad get you? Oh, that’s right, you don’t even have a dad,” the arrogant asshole said, just before he swiped a dirty hand through his greasy black hair.

Clive was exactly two years older than Larry, and yet, Larry had always felt like he understood the world a little bit better than the eight-and-a-half-year-old.

So, Larry told him quite truthfully (as kids his age are so often wont to do), “My dad gave me brain cells, which is more than yours was capable of.”

Clive though just scrunched up his nose and snorted.

“Did you hear? Mrs. Clarkson almost bit the head off the garbage man earlier today,” Clive went on, as if the two hadn’t just exchanged brutal insults.

“What? When?” Larry asked, suddenly tossing all of his indignation out the proverbial window.

“Yeah, they spilled her recycling and didn’t bother picking it back up, you shoulda seen her out on the street yelling and cursing them out. I thought for sure someone was gonna die,” Clive said, just before he pulled a half-eaten fruit roll-up out of his pocket and started gnawing on it.

“Oh,” Larry said, letting all of the disappointment he felt color his one-syllable response.

“What’s your problem?” Clive asked then, with more sincerity than Larry had even thought possible, and so he looked at the boy for a second, sizing him up, trying to figure out if he was worth the truth or not, because honestly... the two boys had a rather dicey history.

“Mrs. Clarkson do anything else, weird?” Larry asked, with a single eyebrow raised to show his interest.

“I don’t know. What do you mean weird?” the rather smarmy kid asked, as he tossed the wrapper to his fruit snack into a near-by storm drain.

“You shouldn’t litter, Clive,” Larry told him at once, and even folded his arms across his chest to prove he was quite serious.

“What? That’s what they’re for, to catch our garbage. Gosh, no wonder you don’t know anything... you don’t have a dad,”

No, I don’t have a dad, but at least I know when something’s not right, he thought, but quite intelligently kept to himself.

And suddenly, there he was, again, six months before... like the memory wasn’t even a memory at all, but rather some sort of movie clip that played all too regularly in his mind.

You see, just six months prior the two boys had snuck into Ian’s bedroom and were having a bit of a look around when Clive had spotted a Spider Man comic sitting under a stack of things in Ian’s closet.

“It looks old, let’s take it and go read it. From the looks of it he’ll never be able to tell.”

Clive had older brothers as well, you see, but they both kept their comics in plastic, which they regularly examined for fingerprints, and chocolate leavings.

“I don’t know... Ian isn’t the most forgivable...” Larry had started to say in protest, but it was too late. Before he knew what was happening, the two boys were racing up the ladder to the teetering treehouse out behind the garage.

“What’s it say?” Larry had asked the older boy then, but the kid that sorta resembled the Count from Sesame Street just shrugged his shoulders and said, “Iunknow.”

So, together the two boys began flipping through the brightly colored comic. And, to be fair, there wasn’t a lot of need for reading, as the pictures quickly painted a pretty gruesome image of what was happening.

And what was happening felt *all kinds of wrong* to Larry.

Because to him, what he saw in that Spider Man comic made him feel bad.

Like, real bad. Because even at six, Larry knew it was horrible, what was happening to the pretty blonde woman with the enormous boobs, and it made Larry sick, quite literally.

In fact, to this day Larry still got a sick feeling in his tummy whenever he saw Spider Man – or even Tom Holland, who played the web-slinging hero in all the movies Larry secretly owned.

“If it bothers you so much, go and get it,” Clive said then, with a snarl, as he popped his butt back onto the seat of his knew bike and rode off.

For which Larry was eternally grateful. Because no matter how desperate he was for help, he wasn’t that desperate.

And besides, the mailman (who reminded Larry an awful lot of a great and noble King) had told him he needed to *find his people*, and Larry knew for a fact that anyone who was okay with evil things like what he saw in that comic, was never gonna be one of *his people*.

Chapter 3 - Your People Part 2

*“My mum fought for feminism in her day
so instilled in me the importance of equality.
She taught me so much about women.”*

Chris Evans

“What’s wrong, peanut,” Jamie Lee Baker asked of her youngest son, as she came to sit next to him on the worn-out patio furniture that sat on their less-used second deck.

“Mailman said I need to find my people,” Larry confessed to his mother, though he didn’t really want to. It was just... she had a way of making him feel all smooshy inside. And there’s just no fighting smooshy; I mean, not when it’s your mom.

“Oh yeah,” Jamie Lee said, not really sure what her young son was on about, just certain he needed a hair-tussle and a forehead kiss, for starters.

And then she thought she really needed to learn the postal carriers name, if nothing else, so at least her son wouldn’t sound so sexist when he talked.

“Yeah, I need help with a problem...” Larry began, but then Dodger barked out of nowhere, almost as if to say, ‘maybe not her’.

But it was too late, the fifty-nine-year-old single mom had caught the scent, and there would be no shaking her after that, at least not without a smidge of a story to placate her thirst, to be of use.

“Well,” Larry began, suddenly glad he’d had the mind to toss the forbidden Captain America shield into the shed before plopping down next to the broken-down grill.

“You told me there’s no such thing as real heroes anymore, but... what do you do if you need one?” he asked then, in such a sudden rush it took Jamie Lee Baker a second to sort out his question.

And then she turned a much-more-critical eye on her son.

“Are you okay? Is somebody hurting you? Did somebody touch you, inappropriately?” she asked, suddenly lurching forward in her seat opposite from him, and taking him into her vice-like-grip and shaking him for a good, long second.

Terror, clear as day on her face.

“Ummm no,” Larry blurted out, just as soon as he could.

“It’s just,” he began, when the woman who perpetually smelled of wine let him go, “I just need someone really super-strong, to help me fix the treehouse.”

Larry had finished so lamely here, that anyone worth their salt would’ve noticed he was filling-in the truth with a wee-bit of fluff.

But sadly, the woman who was perennially chasing that next over-due bill, was already thinking about dinner, and the meat that wasn’t defrosted, and the pest control guy who would be around in the morning, and still... she didn’t have that stimulus check, that everyone else seemed to be getting.

Larry could see it in her eyes, she was long gone. And for a moment he wondered what Chris’ mom was like, as he fingered his pocket full of treasures, testing each one, to make sure they were all still there, all still his.

“Super strong, huh?” Jamie Lee said, sorta half-way paying attention. Sorta like she did with gran, Larry thought, as he recalled how gran had been left to sit in wet clothes for days on end until someone had finally taken her away to an old-folks home.

Larry loved his mom, he really did, but as he watched her face slide from one internal thought to the next, he knew he was all but invisible to her. And that there would always be a thousand other things that were much more important – than him.

And so, he promised himself, right then and there, he would NEVER be that kind of parent to his kids.

Never.

Interlude No. 1 – Treasured Item #1

“Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward.
They may be beaten, but they may start a winning game.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Within Larry's pocket are five treasures, each as valuable as the next. And right now, I'm going to tell you about one.

One item that little Larry Carmichael liked to keep in his pocket (that coincidentally, I too keep in my pocket):

A Knight

A small, cold, stone knight the color of the earth itself, after you've just turned it up hunting for worms.

Larry had first gotten the chess piece a year-or-so back. And at the time, it had been about the size of his thumb. Now, however, it was nearly half the size.

Which made Larry smile, quite often; at the thought that in his pocket was his very own growth marker. A concrete way for him to tell just how much he'd grown, when so very often it didn't feel like he'd really grown at all.

Yet, that's not why Larry treasured the knight in his pocket, perhaps more than anything else.

No. The truth is, Larry loved it because it had been one of the few things his father had left behind.

And also, because one night Ian had taught him how a knight moves.

"Knights are the most special piece on the field, if you ask me," his second oldest, and definitely most handsome brother had told him. "Unlike all the other pieces in the back, this one... JUST THIS ONE... can play first."

Larry had cocked his eyebrow up at that, because honestly - he didn't quite grasp what that meant. At least not until he'd seen Ian use it as an opener that had positively destroyed his oldest brother, Elijah.

"But, that's not why I love the piece so much," his stoic brother had gone on.

"No, you see... a knight protects the royal family, and everyone else, except for the castle, because it's the castle's job to protect the knight."

Ian held up the castle then, but it didn't seem nearly as impressive as the horse, with its flowing mane and flared nostrils.

And at that thought Larry had giggled, because it had made him think of Mr. Clarkson's flared nostrils whenever Larry had got caught stealing carrots from the man's immaculate garden.

But in all actuality, Larry knew, despite the fake-rage-filled outbursts, Mr. Clarkson was really the softest bear in the whole dog-gone neighborhood. And if you caught him in just the right mood, he'd happily fill your pockets with some of the hard candy he liked to keep in a dish by his chair.

He'd also merrily fill your ears with stories about giants, and magical fairy princes... all gallivanting about.

"But it's how they move, that really does it for me," Ian had told him, as he continued the rare lesson.

"Watch here," the teenage boy said, in an excited tone, as he moved the piece over first one pawn, and then another.

"It's the only piece on the board that can hop-skip-and-jump all over the other pieces; easy as you please."

'Easy as you please.'

Those had been the words that had tumbled around in Larry's head ever since that fateful lesson, every time he'd reached inside his pocket to count his treasures.

Larry fingered the little knight then, as he sat there on his back deck.

That's what I need now, he thought to himself as a sudden hint of inspiration colored his voice, *an easy-as-you-please-solution to my problem.*

Larry leaned his head back onto the torn fabric of the lawn furniture, and smiled a rather content smile, in fact, for a six-and-a-half-year-old boy.

"Everything that Marvel does, it's a chess move. Nothing is by accident." Chris Evans

Chapter 4 - Dodger Knows Best

"I wish you could see some of the girls I have genuinely had crushes on in my life.
They're not the girls you would assume."

Chris Evans

"I need a superhero."

"Why don't you call the police?"

Larry considered the question, and whether or not he should answer truthfully, that his entire family had forbidden him from calling (or even trusting) the police, after the last time they'd come to his house... on account of Ian's bad temper.

"Do you want to get your brother shot?" Jamie Lee Baker had asked her youngest son, who had been just five-and-three-quarters at the time.

Dodger had shaken his head *no* at that, though. And so, Larry had been quick to answer. Though, if his mom asked the same question now, Larry wasn't so sure he'd give the same answer.

Because the sad truth was, Ian often had run-ins with the police, because he was a complete nut job.

And the one-time Larry had called the cops was because Ian had been threatening his mom with a giant kitchen knife.

"You've seen the news. You know what cops do," Larry told the girl instead, because another cop had just shot another kid, just the night before; it had been all over the evening news.

"Yeah, one time my cousin even got molested by one," Sabrina told the boy, who was standing in front of her house, though she wasn't entirely sure what 'molested' meant.

And by the quizzical look on Larry's face, she wasn't entirely sure Larry knew what it meant either.

However, both kids had enough experience to know... it was probably super bad, and so they just nodded in agreement – that the police were just bad guys – with permission to kill.

Sigh.

Anyway...

"My mom said that if you want to find a real hero you have to go to a Third World Country, cuz they all went there, cuz all the fake ones are running the show here."

“My mom says Silicone Valley is to blame. Cuz they’re drinking kid’s blood to stay young, just like vampires. She says it’ll turn them all into real vampires too,” Sabrina informed Larry, with a somewhat haunted look in her eyes.

Sabrina Spellcaster had been named by a single mother (on disability for mental issues), who had a mild addiction to the WB and YouTube, or so at least said the normally semi-drunk Jamie Lee Baker, who was addicted to her own brand of numbing agents (CNN and Pinot, to name two).

Sigh.

Larry looked down on his dog, Dodger, and wondered again if this had been a good idea.

Because when the mailman had told him to find *his people*, and then he realized he didn’t have any *people*, the young-boy figured the next-best-thing would be to find someone that at least believed in aliens.

And to Larry’s mind, if you believed in Big Foot and vampires, you probably believed in aliens too, and so... he figured Sabrina Spellcaster had to be the next-best choice.

“Anyway... I was wondering...” Larry began again, slowly, trying to draw out the conversation until all the right words magically popped into his head.

Sabrina though, just chewed on the side of her retainer and watched the boy struggle for coherency.

But all Larry could suddenly think about was that the girl, who was two-and-a-half-years older than him, and had more freckles than face.

I mean, he’d never noticed that before.

“Wondering what?” Sabrina finally snapped, as she looked first from the stammering Larry, and then to his stalwart dog, who was sitting silently by his side.

“Anyway... do you believe in aliens?” Larry finally blurted-out of nowhere.

“Yeah, why?” Sabrina asked, suddenly narrowing her eyes on the boy that was standing in front of her.

“Well, I saw one,” Larry confessed.

“Oh yeah?” Sabrina asked, cocking a single eyebrow to show the depth of her skepticism.

“Yeah. I saw it eat Blackjack, the Henderson’s cat,” Larry told her, leaving out the most important detail... just in case.

“In one bite.”

“Oh my god. I was wondering what happened to that cat.”

“So, you believe me?” Larry asked, completely shocked things were suddenly progressing.

“About the alien?” Sabrina asked with a chuckle, “no”.

“Oh.”

Larry looked around the block and wondered where else he could go for help. But then, he remembered it was almost dinnertime and he really didn't want Ian to come looking for him, again.

"Okay," he told the nine-year-old with a faint smile. "I gotta go have dinner anyway," he said, and then he turned and left.

But for a second, just a second, his faithful dog Dodger stayed behind... looking straight up at the girl.

And then, the girl would have sworn, he winked up at her.

And then, the medium sized dog with the larger-than-life presence turned and followed after the best boy in the whole entire world.

*"I'm not really interested in being a superhero. That's not a box I've been trying to check off."
Chadwick Boseman*

Chapter 4 - Dodger Knows Best Part 2

"It was brown and looked delicious,
and I was like, 'That looks safe.'
It wasn't."

Chris Evans

Larry Carmichael hated vegetable curry. I mean he hated it, with a passion. Like... if there was anything on earth that was a bigger punishment, he did not want to know about it. Because vegetable curry was hell enough. At least the way his mom made it.

"You're not eating the vegetables," his mother accused him, "you're just pushing them around your plate, don't think I don't see you."

Larry knew the woman could see him. I mean, she had her narrow little eyes glued to his plate most dinners. As if it was her one and only moral imperative, that her youngest son eats all his goddamn veggies.

Larry was a bit hot under the collar about this particular topic, especially on vegetable curry night when there was little else than soggy squash and mushy peas to satisfy the rumblings of his tiny tummy.

But rumble it did, as he continued to push the lump of brown sludge around his plate.

What made it worse, was he'd actually eaten a proper curry once, when he'd eaten dinner at the Murtagh's, the night his mother had been taken to the hospital for stomach pains.

And my god, it had been heaven. Not at all a stinky mess like this.

"Shhh" his mom said then, just as her favorite Anderson Cooper show was coming on.

"Get me another bottle, this one was almost empty," she told the table at large.

So, of course Ian just sat there shoveling the nasty curry into his pie-hole like he'd never seen solid food before.

Slow down chug. Larry had been tempted to say, before he recalled the lumps Ian liked to leave - even when he was being nice.

And Elijah... well, he just looked at Larry and smiled. One of those - *I'm gonna get you when nobody is lookin'* - smiles.

So, Larry knew Elijah was still plenty worked up about the tiny Hello Kitty sticker he'd strategically placed on top of Chris Evan's exposed penis.

He could tell, by the way Elijah was sorta frothing at the mouth, and breathing heavily out of his nose.

So, Larry decided to go and fetch the wine without complaint, after all.

But that's exactly when the news happened - while Larry was out of the room. So, all he heard was the loud exclamations from the rest of his family as it was being broadcast.

"Holy fuck!" Elijah shouted. ***Loud enough maybe for the alien neighbor next door to hear,*** Larry thought.

And then Ian hollered, "No fucking way!"

Even his mother seemed to be beyond belief, as he heard her exclaim, "I fucking can't believe it!"

"What?" Larry asked the room, as he reentered with a bottle of wine and the wine opener.

"I fucking can't believe it," Ian said, only in his regular voice this time.

And none of them seemed to have heard Larry's question at all. No, instead, all of their eyes and ears were still glued to the large flat-screen TV.

"Seen here entering the White House are two of the alien representatives, on their way to a meeting with the president. So, there you have it, folks, our first confirmed meeting with an extra-terrestrial species. I guess the answer to the next question, 'do they come in peace?', will hopefully be the next one to get answered. For now, this is Anderson Cooper, and The Sunset Tribune, signing off."

"Holy cow, I still can't believe it," Elijah said then, turning his attention back towards the table and his family.

"Hey, maybe this is a good thing for you E," Ian told his his slightly older brother, in a suddenly boisterous manner.

“Why would you say that?” Elijah asked, of his much larger Irish-twin.

“You know... aliens just love a good butt probe, just like someone else I can think of.”

Elijah leveled a look on Ian then that made Larry positive his small infraction with the sticker was the last thing on Elijah's mind just then.

Larry sighed. And then smiled, despite knowing that a knuckle sandwich was probably waiting for him the next time Elijah noticed it.

And maybe even many more after that.

But it was worth it. At least to Larry's mind. To at least attempt to rescue the poor man's dignity.

“You fucking take that back, you sick shit,” Elijah said then, picking up his butter knife and pointing it at his brother.

“Settle down, you two, this is serious. We don't know what they want, or what is going to happen, but I do know you two falling out isn't gonna help anything,” Jamie Lee Baker told her two oldest boys, with a look in her eyes that made Larry think she was scared.

And to be honest, it was pretty easy to be scared of Ian, and his temper.

But that's when the doorbell rang, and everything changed – yet again.

“Hello,” his mother said as she pulled open the door on what appeared to be a large gathering of the neighborhood.

“Did you hear?” Mr. Potter asked, as he was the one who'd done the ringing.

“About the aliens, you mean?” Jamie Lee clarified, probably because she was already almost a full bottle of wine into the conversation.

“Yes, about the aliens. What did you think?” Ian blurted out then, as he came up behind his mother, and then threw the front door open the rest of the way open.

“We don't know what they want,” Mr. Potter continued, after a rather sharp look to Ian – the known neighborhood troublemaker.

“But we do know we need to be prepared, even if our government isn't.”

A few minutes later, all three Bakers and the one Carmichael were all standing in the middle of the street among a crowd of neighbors. All of them taking onboard everything the nervous people were saying. And asking.

“Did anyone think to ask the Standens if they want to be part of this conversation?”

It was David Pickle that had asked, the only bachelor on the street, and the newest member to their block.

“Ummm no,” Mrs. Potter said then, and no one bothered to ask why.

“So, this is it? We’re being invaded?” Mr. Kleven asked, of the group at large.

“I don’t believe so, according to the DOD these visitors have been coming here for hundreds, maybe thousands of years, if they’d have wanted to do something they would have by now,” someone said, though Larry didn’t hear who.

And then someone else in the crowd added, “Plus, if they wanted to do us harm, they wouldn’t have announced their arrival, they’d be sneakier... try to blend in, so they could better learn our ways first.”

Larry’s little heart froze then. When he heard those words. Because just as he was listening to them his eyes caught sight of Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson.

“You’re right,” Mr. Clarkson said then. And Mrs. Clarkson smiled.

Larry sighed, and then looked around at the crowd of familiar strangers, and wondered how he was ever going to tell who was really human and who wasn’t.

I mean, he couldn’t really blurt it out here, that Mrs. Clarkson was clearly an alien, and that her husband possibly was one too... when in all actuality... they all could be aliens... and this could all just be some horrible nightmare he’d had the misfortune to be born into.

It was then that the six-year-old boy slipped away from the crowd.

Around back, he collected his dog, Dodger, who had been chained up by the garage, on account of Larry always trying to feed him his curry under the table, and the last time he did so the poor dog had the shits for days.

“Sorry Dodger, it was curry night, again,” the rather tall boy said, as he gave the best dog ever a decent scratch behind the ear.

“But tonight... you’re coming into the treehouse with me, because things just got way more serious. Way-way more serious indeed,” he told his canine best friend.

“Well, okay Larry. But this time I wanna climb up on my own.”

“Neighbors bring food with death and flowers with sickness and little things in between.” Harper Lee

Interlude No. 2 - Treasured Item #2

“I like girls who aren't so la-di-da.”

Chris Evans

Sorry to interrupt the story, just when we got to the talking dog part.

But... context always helps.

And right about now, I figure, would be the perfect time to tell you about a second treasure that little Larry Carmichael (first of his name) liked to carry around in his pocket.

It was a small, folded Valentine from Danny Harris. And he really wasn't sure why he had carried it around in his pocket ever since he'd gotten it in preschool, two years before, only that every time Larry touched it - he felt safe.

And by the time this was all happening, it was so worn out and faded from all his touching and rubbing, it was nearly in shreds.

But that didn't matter to little Larry as he silently climbed the ladder to the treehouse, all the while knowing his dog was following up behind him - all by himself.

Because all that really mattered to Larry was that just as soon as he was at the top of the ladder (from hell that always threatened to dump him on the branch-strewn-roof of their dilapidated garage) he was going to get to hold his most-treasured-Valentine once again.

Goddamn this fucking ladder... Larry thought, just before reaching the top.

But when he finally got to the top, and his fingers were finally able to once again brush the comforting fibers of his favorite Valentine, Larry suddenly didn't seem so worried, about the ladder-climbing talking dog – that is.

I mean, he'd always gotten the same feeling from his dog that he gotten from Danny's Valentine, so he figured strange didn't necessarily have to mean *bad*.

Except in the case of Mrs. Clarkson, who ate the Henderson's cat - Blackjack. I mean, that was definitely BAD.

So, Larry left the door of the treehouse ajar for his favorite canine companion, and very best friend in the whole wide world, even though he could suddenly talk – and climb ladders.

Though, to be fair, he did reckon the dog certainly had some serious explaining to do.

Chapter 5 - WTF

“Happiness is a warm puppy.”

Charles M. Schulz

“So how come you didn’t tell me you could talk?” Larry asked his dog, as his opening question, because honestly, the fact Dodger hadn’t mentioned it before now kinda hurt.

“Cuz I didn’t want my head opened up, and part of my brain removed out of me,” the brown and white dog said, as he panted up at the boy he loved every bit as much as food. But in a totally different way, I might add.

Larry nodded down at his dog, as this seemed to make sense.

I mean, Larry had seen the movie ET, after all, and so he knew exactly what grownups were all about.

“That makes sense,” he told his dog before he took a seat next to him on the dusty wood-plank floor.

“But... I wouldn’t have told anybody,” Larry said, after he’d given the topic a bit more thought.

“It’s not that,” Dodger said, before he took a second to swipe a paw at some trespassing fleas.

“I’m just really bad at stealth stuff, and I was afraid someone would overhear, and then we’d both be in a world of trouble.”

Again, Larry nodded because this too made sense. As he often didn’t lie, just because he’d found he was actually pretty terrible at it.

‘Best to keep your goddamn mouth shut when you can’, Elijah had offered as advice on more than one occasion.

Ian on the other hand, had always preferred the *in-your-face* approach to life. But, then again, Ian had the muscles to back up his huge mouth. That, and a rather long cruelty streak.

“But Larry, we really should talk about what’s going on out there, not what’s going on in here. That’s why I decided to say something. Because you were right. Things have gotten way-way more serious.”

Larry sighed, and then kicked off his chucks, and settled in for what he could tell was going to be a long talk.

“You see, we’ve been here... us aliens, all along. We just kept quiet about it. Kinda like that ‘Men in Black’ movie, actually. Anyway, too many of us are coming in too-fast now, to hide the incoming ships, and... well...”

“And what?” Larry asked, just as the hackles on the back of his neck raised the highest they’d ever been, as if his body could feel what was coming next.

“And some of the bad ones are slipping through the nets.”

“Like Mrs. Clarkson?” Larry asked, after a sizeable gulp.

“Only, she’s not Mrs. Clarkson now. You get that, right? Once the shapeshifters take them, they’re gone.”

“So, they can become anyone?”

Larry had seen a ‘Supernatural’ episode where one of the creatures the Winchester brother’s hunted turned into Dean. And so, he gulped again.

“Yup. But once they take over a body, they can’t become someone else. But don’t worry Larry. I can sniff ‘em out. Cuz they smell different to my kind.”

“Oh yeah?” Larry asked now, his mood suddenly brightening at the prospect of learning another new fact about his old friend.

“Yeah,” the dog said, now almost wishing he’d kept his goddamn mouth shut, just like Elijah had so often suggested he do.

“How do they smell?” Larry asked, innocently enough.

Dodger got up then, and wagged his tail - low and slow, before he answered the boy he would never lie to.

“Like death.”

“A confused mind is one that is open to the possibility of change.” Eric Weiner

Chapter 5 - What the Fuck Part 2

*“I don't know any form of art or entertainment that can affect people
the way movies can. I know it sounds ridiculous,
but they can change your world.
They can change your views.”*

Chris Evans

“What the fuck, Larry! Watch where you’re stepping, why don’t ya!” Dodger hollered up at his boy; a bit too loudly, concerning their desperate need for secrecy just then.

Larry supposed it was gonna take him some time to get used to the fact that Dodger-dog could talk. But still, he didn’t like being yelled at by him.

“I’m sorry.” he told his dog in a loud whisper, as the two made their way around behind the Clarkson’s detached garage.

“See? I told you. I am absolute crap at this stealth shit,” the dog confessed with a shake of his head.

“Why do we have to go to the Clarkson’s to make the call again?” Larry asked, still a bit fuzzy on the details.

“Because you don’t want the cops showing up at your house, do you?”

Larry shook his head in a dead-honest answer.

“Then, we call 911 from their phone, and then run. But, let me do the talking, okay?”

Larry looked down on the brown and white dog and nodded, as he felt pretty darn certain the dog was way smarter than he was.

“But why do we want the cops again?”

“Because we need a ride.”

“Oh, yeah... that’s right.”

A few moments later Larry was standing all alone watching the back of the house, just as Dodger had told him to do. But he couldn’t see anything cuz all the curtains were closed. Still, he was more than happy when he saw his loyal bud round the corner and come running up to him.

“It’s all clear,” the spry dog said hardly panting at all.

“They’re both in the front room watching The Boys on TV. You know, I wonder why they never think to add a Super Dog? I mean, I’d put a Super Dog on any Super Hero show I made. I mean, who wouldn’t love to see that? A dog... who’s a friggin hero. Am I right? I mean, ya just couldn’t get a better show than that?”

“Are you done yet?”

“What?”

“So how do we get in?”

“Through the dog door, how else?”

Larry scratched his head at that, and then asked, “You don’t suppose that’s really how Rusty died, do you? You don’t suppose the new Mrs. Clarkson ate him?”

But Dodger didn't have to answer that question aloud as his tail did all the answering for him.

"Oh man, Rusty was a damn good dog too," Larry said, shaking his bowed head in much the same way Dodger was shaking his tail.

"The Bettany are a disgusting species. They'll eat anything. But that's not what makes them so dangerous."

Larry looked at his dog sideways now, because he couldn't think of anything worse than being eaten whole like she'd done with the Henderson's cat.

"Seriously," his dog said. "They're like ants, and most of what they consume they take back to the queen. And by the smell of it, there are enough of them here to feed a rather large queen. And once a queen takes root on a planet it's nearly impossible to get them out, as they literally bore to the core and live there, with only their workers coming and going from the surface. AND once a queen gets nesting on the molten core - she'll begin to reproduce. And THAT'S why they're called 'World Destroyers'. Because the only way to stop them then is to blow up the entire planet."

"Sheesh," Larry said, swiping a hand across his suddenly sweaty brow.

"I guess that is worse."

"What we need to do is to find the place where they're digging. That's where we'll find the queen. That'll be our only chance to stop this."

"We?"

Larry's eyes were about as large as they got, as he stood there listening to his dog tell him how they were the only ones that could save the entire planet.

"Dodge, I don't think. I'm just a boy. I've never. We need to find someone to help us."

Larry said these things in quick succession, and with each one he saw his dog's face grow more and more stubborn.

"Look Larry, you tried talking to the adults, and no one believed you then, I honestly don't think they'll believe you now."

"But they just announced aliens are real, on the news!" Larry said in a loud voice that made them both cringe at once.

"Sorry," he whispered in a hurry, and then the two ran back around behind the detached garage and waited, for what felt like hours.

But no lights came on at the back of the house, so both of them figured they were still safe.

"Geeze, that was close. Sorry. But... they just announced aliens are real, don't you think they'll believe us now?"

Dodger sat back on his rear end, and then swiped a back paw at a few annoying fleas, and then he said, quite frankly, "You're a six-and-a-half-year-old boy and I'm a talking dog. The first thing any of them are

going to do is put you into bed, and then they're going to give me over to the authorities. No matter what either of us says."

Larry didn't always like hearing the truth, but he was old enough to know the ring of it when he heard it. And what Dodger was saying definitely had the ring of truth to it. Technically it was already past his bedtime, and the only reason no one had come looking for them was because they were all too distracted talking about the news.

"Look Larry, the way I figure it, this is our one and only shot to save everyone we love. Are you with me?"

Larry took a deep breath, to steady his tiny trembling heart, and then he let it all out through his nose.

And then he said, "I'm with you. What do you need me to do?"

"After we crawl in through the dog door, I need you to grab something out of the fridge while I make the call to 911."

"What are you gonna tell them?"

"You'll see."

"Okay," Larry said shrugging his shoulders, because he was a bit disappointed.

"So, what do you need me to grab out of the fridge?"

"Ketchup."

Chapter 6 - Dingle Dangle

“All my good movies, nobody sees.”

Chris Evans

“Shit, Larry,” the medium dog said to his owner.

“I forgot, you got thumbs.”

Larry looked down at his two hands and then wiggled his thumbs. And sure enough, he had to agree. And so, he looked at Dodger-dog and smiled, and then gave him two thumbs up.

“Go back to your place, and get one of your high-powered squirt guns, ya? And... And... And...” the dog said, in quick succession, sorta like a studder, only this was the simple glee of a plan coming together.

“And get some of those water balloons. But, make sure nobody sees. And check to see where everyone’s at. We don’t need Ian coming to look for us again.”

Larry nodded his head and then crawled quickly out the dog-door.

“Alexa, call nine-one-one,” the dog said into the Amazon dot on the kitchen counter, the moment the dog-door stopped flapping.

“What’s your emergency?” the operator asked.

“It’s my wife, she’s gone mad. She slaughtered our dog right on the front lawn, and now she’s threatening me with the same knife. She’s out of her mind!” the dog hollered into the dot, just as loudly as he thought he could without the Clarkson’s hearing in the next room.

And then he yanked the power-cord from the wall with his mouth, and smiled at his own geniusness. That and the realization that technology was finally making life a bit easier for those of his kind.

And then Dodger settled in to wait.

Thankfully, a few quick minutes later the tenacious boy climbed back through the dog-door. This time with an enormous squirt-gun in hand.

“Well? Where is everybody?” the dog asked, quite anxious to know the whereabouts of the middle brother in particular.

“Everyone is still in the middle of the street. Well, everyone from our family that is. Most of the old folks, like the Clarkson’s here, have gone back to their homes.”

Dodger thought for a second and then settled on the notion that it made sense for the ant-like Bettany's to transform all the old folks first. While on the outside they would still appear weak, and fragile, they'd actually be incredibly strong. Also, the old folks would have the most free-uninterrupted-time to do their queen's bidding.

"Okay, hurry, the cops will be here any second."

"Hurry, what?" Larry asked, as he was still not in possession of mind-reading skills.

"Oh, sorry. I swear that's why I never get any cool missions," Dodger said, to the boy that was technically one of his missions. And then he smiled, quite a guilty smile.

"Fill up that monstrosity, and as many of those balloons as you can, with some vinegar and water. And hurry."

"But I don't know where the vinegar is!" the boy hissed at his dog, who was clearly thinking he was partnered with someone else.

"Oh, shit. Yeah, well... start looking."

And together they started searching for the vinegar.

"Found it," Larry said, sounding bitterly disappointed.

"How are we ever going to reach it in time?" he asked his dog, who was a heck of a lot shorter than him.

"Let me climb up on your shoulders," the dog offered.

"But you don't have any thumbs, remember?" Larry asked, as he wagged his two opposable appendages at his less-fortunate dog.

"Then climb on, and hurry! I can hear the sirens. They're getting closer," Dodge told the boy reluctantly.

And thankfully, Larry knew Dodge could often hear things before he could, so he didn't waste any time before he jumped up on his dog's back, and reached for the almost-full bottle of vinegar that was at the back of one of the upper-most cupboards.

And that's right when Mr. Clarkson walked in.

Chapter 6 - Dingle Dangle Part 2

"The characters I play do a lot of that heavy lifting.
If people knew me — I'm just an asshole."

Chris Evans

As soon as Mr. Clarkson saw the duo, four things happened at once; he screamed, Dodger ran for the door, Larry fell from his back, and the bottle of vinegar went flying.

“Jesus Christ, Dodge!” Larry yelled, as he landed on his bottom with a hard THUD.

“Jesus Christ!” Mr. Clarkson yelled, as the bottle of vinegar hit the center island and exploded, splashing both him and Mrs. Clarkson, who had just walked into the kitchen behind her husband.

“ARRRGG!” the old woman yelled, as the vinegar hit her exposed skin and instantly began to burn her exposed flesh.

Mr. Clarkson, who appeared to be unaffected by the vinegar (and so, still human), just watched as his wife seemed to go insane from the contact with the vinegar, which was quickly spreading all around her feet.

“ARRGGG!” she continued to wail, until she finally had enough and decided to go after the boy who was causing all of her suffering.

Turning two red eyes on her enemy, the woman let out another awful wail, and then she threw herself at the boy, who took a moment to assess the insanity in front of him, and then quickly ran for it.

And as he ran, Larry grabbed up his super-rocket water-gun and the bottle of ketchup, and then made for the back door.

This time though, he didn't even bother with the dog door, instead, he threw open the back door and raced after his dog, who was already rounding the corner of the house.

And already Larry could hear the sirens wailing, as he sped around to the front yard.

“Quick!” Dodger hollered at the boy, “Squirt me with some of that ketchup!”

Larry just looked at his dog for a second, with a rather blank look on his face. And then he looked back to the center of their block, where his entire family still stood huddled in the middle of the street with the rest of the neighbors that had come to talk about the aliens.

“Larry, squirt me with that ketchup, then get out of sight! Now!”

Larry looked back at the charging Mrs. Clarkson, and figured the dog knew better than he did, and so he took aim and sprayed his dog with enough ketchup to make him look like a decent snack for the rather rotund woman.

But just as the woman reached him, Dodger dropped to the ground and played dead.

And that's when the cops drove up. Two patrol cars, with two different police officers, pulled up to the curb just a few feet away.

Mrs. Clarkson, still howling in rage at the burns the vinegar had caused, quickly came to a stunned halt when she saw the two officers get out of their vehicles.

“Ma’am,” the male officer said. “We would just like a word with you, if you don’t mind.”

Both officers had their hands up, demonstrating they meant no harm to the deranged woman. But as both of them glanced at the dog lying motionless in the grass, they both placed a hand on their sidearm.

And that’s when Mrs. Clarkson, sensing the threat of exposure, ran. And boy-howdy could that fat old lady run. One of the police officers even remarked so, as both of them took off around the house after the mad woman.

And that’s when Dodger jumped up and said, “Hurry Larry! Now’s our chance.”

And at that, Larry bolted from his hiding spot and over to Dodger.

“Who’s gonna drive?” Larry asked, thinking now that he should’ve clarified this part of the plan earlier.

“We both are! Now, get in!” the dog barked at his owner, and together they climbed inside the closest cop car, with Dodger sitting on top of Larry’s lap in the driver’s seat.

“You do the peddles, I’ll take the wheel,” Dodge instructed him.

“Now, how do I make it go?” the dog asked, as they both turned to witness a sudden commotion coming from the front room of the Clarkson’s home.

“I think it’s that dingle-dangle thing,” Larry told him.

“Gas!” Dodger hollered the second he got the stick into reverse.

“Brake!” the dog hollered, as the cop car suddenly bolted backwards, and directly towards the mob of people gathered in the middle of the street.

“Gas!” Dodger hollered again, though he needn’t really, since his mouth was just inches away from the boy’s excellent ears. Still... adrenaline and the thrill of an adventure will do that to you.

“Larry?” Ian asked, as he looked over to the cop car that seemed to be lurching about the place.

But it was too late, the car was in drive, and Larry had the peddle pressed all the way to the floor.

“So, where are we going?” Larry asked, still fuzzy on most of the details of this plan, to be quite honest.

“We’re headed to where the smell is the strongest. We need to stop the queen before she can get to the core.”

“Oh yeah,” Larry said, nodding his head as Dodger stuck his head out the window to catch a better scent.

And that’s when the second cop car fell into hot pursuit.

“Dodge,” Larry said, after he spied the flashing lights in the rear-view mirror.

“Yeah,” Dodge said, taking the next left at a much faster speed than God ever intended.

“I think we better go faster.”

“We ran as if to meet the moon.” Robert Frost

Chapter 7 - Jesus Christ Larry

“It starts with little compromises and justifications, and before you know it . . .”

Chris Evans

Larry had gone just about as far as he could without screaming, and so, the moment the second cop car looked to be gaining on them, Larry let loose.

“Arrrrggghh! What do we do now?” he asked his dog in a mad rush, though sadly Dodger-dog didn’t know either.

Fortunately for both of them, they just happened to be racing past the Standen’s street while having this particular part of their conversation.

And also, fortunately for the both of them, the two Standen boys had been sitting in their Toyota pickup eating fried chicken just as the two cop cars had raced up the side street towards them.

You see, both of these boys were well aware of the on-going alien infestation, as their alcoholic-single-father had just recently been turned into one.

They’d also worked out that most of the old people in the neighborhood had already been turned into the powerful, yet seemingly mindless aliens. Though to be fair, their day-time criminal activity should take partial credit for this bit of wisdom.

Anyhow, because of this, and the fact that both of the boys had a general dislike of people, the police in particular, it didn’t take either of them much convincing to add their two cents into this on-going and rapidly changing equation.

And so, when the grimy, dim-witted, and yet still dangerously sexy Standen boys saw Larry and Dodger speed past their block in a cop car, with another cop car in hot pursuit, it didn’t take them long to decide that the boy and his dog were in desperate need of their help.

And so, with a look to his slightly younger and slightly less retarded brother, the seventeen-year-old Ronald slammed his Toyota pickup into drive, and then hit the gas about as hard as it would go.

Now, fortunately for the two half-wits, a combination of things happened in the next few moments that allowed them to not only play the heroes in this situation, but they also got to get away with it scott-free - on account of blaming it all on a bucket of Mama Rancid’s Southern fried chicken, which had gone flying the second Ronald had slammed his foot down onto the gas.

“Jesus Christ, Ronald,” the younger Standen yelled, with a look that clarified he hadn’t actually been praying.

Because just then their 20-year-old mid-sized pickup slammed into the front passenger-side door of the pursuing police cruiser, pushing the entire vehicle off the road it had been traveling on, and on down the side street the boys lived on. By ten feet at least.

“Jesus Christ. You think anyone’s gonna believe it were an accident?” the older brother asked of his sixteen-year-old brother.

“All’s I can say; is it’s a damn good thing weren’t nobody in that passenger seat,” the younger brother quipped, though... to be fair, I plum forget his name.

“What in the hell?” the police officer yelled the second he exited his side of the vehicle.

But Ronald just threw two greasy hands out his open window and hollered, “I dropped my bucket of fried chicken and it done and got itself lodged between the brake and the gas.”

And it was true, the officer noticed, as he slowly approached the two boys with his weapon drawn.

There was in fact a bucket of fried chicken stomped all over the front floor-boards of that red Toyota pickup.

“I tried to veer off, officer. I swear! But Mama Rancid’s chicken is just too damn greasy. I couldn’t get a grip of the wheel,” he exclaimed with a bright smile, the second he realized the pure serendipity of the moment.

Because that was true as well, the steering wheel was covered in grease, along with a great deal of tiny bits of the sweet-corn-breading Mama Rancid always preferred.

“I swear to god, I never should have said it was, ‘To die for’,” Ronald quipped, with a Machiavellian grin, and then watched as the stolen police car (that carried the young boy and his trusty dog) raced off into the distance.

Chapter 7 - Jesus Christ Larry Part 2

“Act in such a way that you treat humanity,
whether in your own person or in the person of any other,
never merely as a means to an end,
but always at the same time as an end.”

Immanuel Kant

“Jesus Christ, Larry, I didn’t know you could walk on water.”

“Me neither,” the six-and-a-half-year-old boy exclaimed, as he shook a bit of water from his ears.

But I’m getting a bit ahead of myself here. So, let me back up about four minutes and fourteen seconds.

To just after Ian had spotted his little brother driving away in a stolen police car.

“Jesus Christ, did you just see that?” he asked of his now somewhat sober mother.

“See what?” she asked, because truly an elephant could sneak up on this woman unnoticed, so long as it didn’t have a bottle of pinot strapped to its ass.

“That was Larry and Dodge driving away in that cop car!” Ian yelled, right into her face, but his mother just snorted derisively and shook her head.

“Fucking swear to god, it was him, driving away just now,” he said. And that’s just when the second cop car sped off after the first one.

“Are you sure?” his mother asked, now a bit more wary of the details.

“Fucking right I’m sure. But don’t worry, I’ll go get him,” the middle son, and favorite of his mother said, as he raced off towards their garage.

But a moment later all anyone heard from Ian was, “Jesus Christ, Larry! You had to let the air out of my tires!”

And then it was too late, the boy, his dog, and their stolen police automobile were long gone.

However, it should be pondered upon... whether Larry had instinctively known he needed to let all the air out of his overzealous brother’s tires, or if it had just been one of those ‘happy coincidences’.

But on went the stolen car with the boy and his alien-dog-friend, and so on-too this story must go...

“Did you see that?” Dodger asked, a second after the Standen boy’s pickup had slammed into the police cruiser that was chasing them.

“Oh wow! Why do ya think they gone and done that?” Larry asked, as he turned for a moment and peeked over the front seat, back at the two entangled vehicles left smoking in the distance.

“Who knows, but step on it. I don’t like what I’m smelling,” the dog said with a degree of worry in his voice that Larry didn’t particularly like.

And so, the boy pressed the gas pedal down as hard as it would go, despite the fact he couldn’t see anything behind Dodger’s giant-ass head.

“You think you could move a bit?” Larry was beginning to ask, just as Dodger spied the trap.

You see, a strip of nails and been laid across the road ahead, and they were speeding right towards it.

“Brake!” Dodger yelled, as he tried his best, with his rather tiny paws, to steer the vehicle around the trap.

But it was all too late, the stolen police car sailed right over the strip and in the process popped all four of its tires, which... didn't quite have the effect anyone was expecting. Least of all the four police officers that were all standing around, hoping to stop the stolen vehicle, and whatever dangerous criminal who'd stolen it.

However, as the back tire on the passenger side blew it caused the vehicle, which was traveling at a ridiculously fast speed, to flip up into the air.

And it was on its second complete summersault that both the boy and his dog were ejected from the driver's side window.

Dodger, for his part landed rather safely in the nearby fishing nets of an old trolley that had been docked at the harbor master's for inspection.

Larry, on the other hand, was a different story all-together, as his tiny body was thrown clear of the harbor and the boats and out into the deep; dark and incredibly cold water from the canal.

"Oh no!" Dodger yelled, before he realized what he was doing – and in front of four police officers no less.

Thankfully, however, all eyes were locked on the bit of water where Larry's body had made a rather large splash upon entry.

"Did you see what it was?" one of the officers asked.

"Looked kinda like a kid," another said, as they all searched the water.

The oldest looking cop grabbed a life-preserver then, but as he didn't know quite where to throw it – he just held onto it as another officer went to search the remains of the cop car, which was now nothing more than a pile of twisted and smoking metal.

"It don't look like anyone else was with him, whoever he was," he told the three still gathered on the dock, staring down into the dark water.

And that's when one of them let out a low whistle through his teeth and said, "Jesus Christ. Will you look at that?"

Because just then Larry rose up out of the water, much like Jesus Christ might have done, Dodger thought, as the boy's erect body rose from the water until it looked like he was standing on top of it.

And then he did the craziest thing... he looked up at all the waiting police officers on the dock and then back towards the shore on the opposite side of the canal... and then he simply started walking that way – on top of the water.

But after he'd taken just a few steps he suddenly stopped and turned, and then whistled, and hollered, "Come on Dodger, come on boy!"

To which Dodger wagged his tail and then merrily hopped into the water, and started swimming after his boy.

When they had reached the other side, Dodger looked up at his boy and said, "Jesus Christ, Larry. I didn't know you could walk on water."

To which his boy simply replied, “Me neither.”

And that’s when two spectacular things happened at once. A large naked alien woman walked out of the water after them, and a large limo pulled up alongside the shore.

“Need a ride?” A tall and elegantly dressed man asked, though he didn’t appear to be much older than his late twenties.

“Certainly,” the naked alien-woman said, as she walked past the dog and the boy, who were both now looking rather agape at her super long tail.

“How about you two? Want some help fighting those aliens?” the man with the dark hair and devilish grin asked, and Larry instantly liked him.

But it was Dodger... in the end... who gave it all away.

“Larry!” the dog yelled, as he ran with a most excited grin spreading quickly across his canine face.

“You won’t believe what we’ve found!” Dodger told the young man as he nipped at his upper thigh.

“Oh, I bet I will,” the older Larry Carmichael said, just before he threw a warm blanket around his six-and-a-half-year-old self.

“But how? How did you get here?” Dodger finally asked, just as the limo was pulling way.

“Time, my old friend, is nothing like we thought. But unfortunately... we’re all running out of it, so I best explain on our way.”

“Momentum is a real fallacy, in my opinion,” Chris Evans

Chapter 8 - Old Friends

“You know, I’ve chilled out on weed,”

Chris Evans

“I’m so happy you got my message,” the older Larry said to a young, dark-haired, and kinda angry looking woman who was already standing in the mostly empty hanger when their limo arrived.

“Sending a ghost to relay your message was clever, but how did you know I’d even believe her?” Tricky Tuesday asked of the man she couldn’t help but instantly feel attracted to.

“Oh, Sophie Anne can be quite persuasive... when she wants be,” the man said then, with a bit of a sad smile that hinted at more than a ghost of a back-story that clearly wasn’t going to be told just now.

“Yes, she was most definitely that... persuasive,” Tricky told the man, as she handed him an odd-looking headset of sorts. “I hope you have better luck with it than we did, that guy is confused, to say the least.”

“Well, at least he got you here,” Larry told the woman, as he took the small white and chrome device, that he handled like some sort of priceless ancient relic.

“I miss that old sense of humor,” he said, laughing at some joke no one standing around them even heard.

And when he looked up to their puzzled faces, all of them, especially little Larry, was surprised to see tears rolling down the older Larry’s face.

“Time holds us all prisoners, each in our own way, and once and a while if we’re very lucky we get to break the rules just enough to hold a piece of time in the palm of our hands.”

“Okay, but why are we here?” a cantankerous looking redheaded woman asked then, as she entered from a side door.

Which made the older Larry laugh, a genuine laugh that rose up from his belly, all the way, until it lit his dark brown eyes.

“Hadley, why... you have never been one to beat about the bush, now have you?”

“Do I even know you?” Hadley asked the man who had summoned her by way of a henchmen on a motorbike. Of course, he had been a tall, dark, and broodingly handsome henchman, and had been riding a brand-new Indian Scout... so... of course... she’d come. After all, old Larry here had chosen his messenger quite appropriately.

“His name is Larry,” the dog said then, causing everyone to take a pause to reassess the situation.

“So, the dog can talk?” Hadley asked, as she took a half-step back away from the group.

“He can, and he’s my dog,” little Larry said by way of defense, cuz he hadn’t quite made up his mind yet on the redhead. The dark-haired goth girl on the other hand he liked just fine. Larry suspected that was because of her general lack of enthusiasm... which they both shared.

“According to history,” the older Larry began, once everyone seemed settled again. “At least my history, which is technically all of your... near-futures, anyhow... according to the official records, the Bettany reach the core in just under ten hours from now,” he told the group.

To which, none of them said a word.

“That’s where we come in. Last time, when it was just Dodger, me, and Hadley here. We were only able to destroy the queen. That left a hundred thousand soldiers to be scooped up by the next villain – which in my time is a Drake.”

At that, the alien with the row-upon-row of needle teeth and the super-long tail yawned, and then stretched out on the floor of the hanger for a quick nap.

Thankfully, at least for little Larry, the woman had found some clothes in the limo to put on, and she was now dressed in a tight-fitting black jumpsuit.

“Just one?” Tricky asked, shocking the man from the future who hadn’t expected anyone to fully comprehend what he was saying.

“Why, yes. As far as we can tell,” he told her with a quizzical look that invited her to explain.

However, Tricky was not one to offer details until probed.

“How...” the man began, but then didn’t get to finish, because before he could get the next word out a giant bird like thing flew in the open hanger door.

“What is that?” little Larry asked, with a great deal of awe coloring his voice.

“I am a Casson, little human,” the bird-like man told the boy, with a rather regal bow.

“Wow, you’re really pretty,” the boy told him, trying not to stare, but still staring anyhow.

“Thank you. And you look like a meal worm with hair, young one. I am happy to know this is something that you grow out of,” the Casson told the boy, and then turned to his older version.

“The army is in place, though we number only a hundred.”

“An army?” Hadley asked, her face growing bright at the thought of a real adventure.

“Yes, an army of visitors,” the older Larry said, with a weak smile.

“Alien visitors?” Hadley clarified, because to her (and most of the public) the alien presence was still almost entirely in space.

“Yes, we have fourteen different races willing to fight. Because if we don’t, then we’ll all be homeless too,” the Casson said, his dark blue feathered brow ruffling just like Larry’s did whenever he was worried.

“What do we have to do?” little Larry asked then, understanding he’d finally done like the mailman had told him to do – he’d found his people. Only, his people turned out to be a talking dog, two aliens, an older version of himself, and a couple of angry young women he’d never even met before.

But it didn’t much matter, because they believed in him, and together they were going to do something none of them could have done alone. Something totally epic.

“We need to kill the queen and all of her soldiers,” the older Larry instructed the group.

“And how do you plan to do that?” Tricky asked, though she said it with a smile that implied she already knew.

“We’re going to blow them up,” the older Larry said with a smile.

“Without blowing up the core?” Hadley asked, catching onto the scenario quicker than even the older Larry had expected.

“And just how are we going to do that?” she asked, just like her typical busy-body annoying-self, that Larry just adored.

“The military plans to implode the dig site and burry them beneath the rubble.”

“But the Bettany are diggers, they can’t think collapsing the earth on top I going to actually kill them, can they?”

In the original time-line the would-be reporter (and corporate spy) had stumbled upon the Bettany dig-site after researching a story about the missing elderly in her area, for her community college newspaper.

Actually, the young woman had done a lot more than just research the missing elderly. In fact, she’d also broken into a military database and had found top-secret information on the suspected Bettany population and just what their suspected motives were.

However, the older Larry never bothered to call Hadley out on this particular point-of-fact. Rather, instead, he came to utilize her astute sense of industriousness for his own ends. Which was a big part of the reason he’d been able to make this trip back in time in order to stop the destruction of their entire world.

The problem was that inn the original time-line they hadn’t understood the threat leaving the Bettany army intact would impose later on. And so, they’d been allowed to escape. After which they made a pact with a very dangerous alien that basically ate worlds.

“What do the Bettany get out of it anyway? Why work for a Drake when a drake will just eventually kill the planet?”

“The Bettany always kill planets,” the older Larry corrected his soon-to-be friend.

“Yeah, well not as quickly as Drake’s do,” she reminded him.

“But a Drake will always find a new home before he’s finishes a world.”

“But are both forgetting something rather important,” Tricky chimed in then.

“Yes?” the older Larry asked, curious to see how much this young woman could possibly know.

“There’s always a male and a female. There’s always two,” she told them.

“And you know this how?” the older Larry asked, not at all happy to be challenged without data to back up the claim.

“Because your friend there told me so,” she said, pointing to the odd headset device that the older Larry still held in his hands.

And that’s when grown-up Larry looked down on little Larry and asked, “I need you to do something super scary and pretty dangerous for me, in order to save the entire world, do you think you could give it a try?”

To which little Larry just smiled and shrugged and said, “Hell yes. I was born for this.”

Chapter 8 - Old Friends

Part 2

*“Getting the [Captain America] offer felt to me like the epitome of temptation.
The ultimate job offer, on the biggest scale.”*

Chris Evans

“You don’t remember it, because for you it hasn’t happened yet, but you’re the one Larry, you’re the one that killed the queen last time.”

“Really?” the six-and-a-half-year-old boy asked, his voice making it sound as if no matter the answer he was still gonna have a hard time believing what he’d just heard.

“It’s true, Larry. Only you have the right kind of gift,” the older Larry told his younger self, with such compassion everyone looking on smiled.

“Last time, with my alien friend’s help, you were able to drive the queen into a magma chamber the Bettany had been using as a heat source. You were able to kill her, when no one else could’ve.”

“But how?” little Larry asked, suddenly feeling like he normally did right before a spelling quiz, he knew he hadn’t studied for.

“Because you can talk to this guy,” the older Larry said, handing the boy the white and chrome headset.

Larry didn't hesitate in taking the device, and the moment he touched it he let out a whopper of a laugh.

And then he smiled, and then he put on the headset. And then he smiled again, laughed again, and then he plopped himself down, cross-legged style, right there in the middle of the hanger.

"It's going to take him a minute to get aquatinted," the older Larry told the group at large.

"Last time we didn't have the device, and last time we didn't have you," he said to Tricky, the girl who had brought them the alien that lived only as machine code.

"How did you get Carl then?" Tricky asked, suddenly not sure she wanted to know the answer.

"He came by way of a Navy Seal that had been deployed to help stop the Bettany army from reaching the core," the older Larry said, with a smile he knew gave too much away, but still he smiled it anyhow.

But Tricky just smiled her own sad smile, and then nodded once.

"It's possible for some folks to communicate with Carl without the device, but it takes a long time to adjust to it, and in the meantime a lot of miscommunications can happen," the older Larry explained.

"Is that what happened last time," the Casson named Timothy asked.

"Yes," the older Larry answered with a soft sigh. "We had just met, and our method of speaking to each other in pictures wasn't always helpful, as I didn't always have the right images to work with, being just six-years-old.

"Six-and-a-half," Dodger corrected, but nobody seemed to notice.

"So, what is the plan?" Hadley asked, well aware the military had already launched their assault on the invading horde.

"Once Larry and Carl are on good speaking terms, we're going to blow the queen and her army into another dimension."

"Pardon me?" Hadley asked.

"Yeah, what she said," Tricky chimed in.

"Hadley, last time you found your way to the shaft following your military leads, did you read anything else in those files, perhaps about dense space?"

"Holy shit," Tricky said, though that caused the older Larry to startle somewhat, as she certainly shouldn't have known about dense space.

"Yeah, but only that it exists, and that some things live there," Hadley told the man, with a single eyebrow raised as high as it could go.

"Well, soon the Bettanys and their queen will live there," he said with another killer smile, that seemed to hint at some deep unresolved sadness.

“And you need Larry to do this?” Tricky asked, with one of her own eyebrows cocked, loaded, and ready to go.

“And you. And Sophie Ann,” he said, knowing he was asking a lot from a girl who had already gone through so much.

With a deep sigh, one of total resignation, Tricky simply replied, “I guess should have figured as much.”

“It takes a powerful psychic to open a door into dense space, but it takes a few to shove an entire army through,” the older Larry told them all, just as little Larry rejoined the group.

“So, now you’ve met Carl,” the older Larry said to his younger self.

“Oh, his name isn’t Carl,” little Larry quickly corrected his older self.

“Oh?” the older version asked, a degree of fear now shading his voice.

“He said his name is Henry. And he knows what you all have planned, and he said he will stop you, no matter the cost.”

The group stared down at the six-and-a-half-year-old boy, all of them totally speechless.

All of them, except for his dog.

“What the fuck Larry? Aren’t you and Carl here supposed to save the entire world? Or something?” Dodger asked, as he looked up at the boy who was still smiling.

“Henry said that if we don’t let the Bettany do what they’re gonna do then he’ll stop us.”

“But why?” the older copy asked, now totally lost as to what was transpiring.

“Because if we don’t, an even bigger threat will come and enslave us all.”

“Rules for happiness: something to do, someone to love, something to hope for.” Immanuel Kant

Chapter 9 - Tell-Tale Heart

“To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.”

Socrates

“Jesus Christ, Larry,” Dodge said, looking at his boy now with as much confusion as his little canine face would allow.

“Hey, Dodge,” the older Larry said then, with a gentle nudge to his best friend. “You know, a kid can start to get a complex, you keep saying that.”

“Saying what?” Dodger asked, both ears perked in puzzled curiosity.

“You know... ‘Jesus Christ’,” the young man with the perpetual look of deep concern said, with a weak smile.

“Really?” Dodger asked, tilting his head, first this way, then that. “You got a complex or something?” he asked, with real concern.

“No, Dodge. It’s just...”

The older Larry stopped then, and then shook his head. “You know what, let’s just forget I said anything. Ya?”

Dodger smiled up at the tall man, and then winked, and said, “Sure thing, Larry. Sure thing.”

But Dodger was a dog, not stupid. So, what he really meant was... ‘I’m gonna dig into this (quietly) until I figure out what in the bloody hell is going on’.

“Thanks,” the man said, and then he looked at his younger self, who seemed still mostly engrossed in whatever was taking place between him and the alien AI headset he had on, and frowned.

“Larry,” he began. “Can you take that off a second, and tell us in your own words what’s going on?”

“Sure thing,” Larry told his older self, just as Katrine, the leonine Dedenti who had been napping on the floor in the corner, suddenly stretched, yawned, and then rejoined the group.

Larry removed the white and chrome device, and then set it on the only table, and then he sat down on the wheel-housing to a large air compressor unit.

“It’s like this,” little Larry began. “We have to let the queen get to the core and mark it. Once she’s marked it then we can take her out. If we don’t, then...”

Larry paused for a moment to take a look around the group. I mean, really take a look around the odd assortment of people (and non-people) that had suddenly become his... tactical team. And then he sighed.

“If we don’t let the queen claim the core, then a drake will come in twenty-three years and enslave us all. Or, enslave the ones that don’t get butchered,” the six-and-a-half-year-old told them, his face dark and serious.

“Yes, I have seen that scenario,” Katrine said then, nodding her head.

This caused the older Larry a moment’s pause.

“Why is letting the Bettany queen at the core the deciding factor here? What’s she going to do to it?”

It was the young redheaded college reporter who asked the question, as she stepped forward, as if suddenly she and the younger Larry were the only two people in the large hanger.

“Good question,” the Casson named Timothy told her, as they all turned to the little guy for his answer.

“She’s gonna lay her eggs, and we’re gonna let her.”

The boy said the words as if he were speaking of a great and terrible doom that suddenly lay upon them all – because he basically was.

“You can’t be serious,” Dodger told his boy, the one he’d give his life for.

“I am, Dodge,” the boy said, as he gave his alien-canine-best-friend a good scratch behind the ear.

“It will buy us the time we need.”

Hadley though, just then, was paying more attention to the older Larry, who suddenly seemed to be looking at his younger self as if he had no clue what was going on.

“Didn’t you say that’s why we’re doing all of this in the first place, to stop the drake in your time from getting to the core?” she asked him.

The older Larry blinked twice, and then a third time. “Yes, in my timeline they never made it to the core and the Drake needed to land the Bettany soldiers to get him there.

“And had he? Landed them?” Hadley asked, both eyebrows under strict control not to show too much interest in the question – no matter how pivotal she thought it might be.

“Some. Yes, I believe, but not many – before I left,” the older Larry told them, told them all, as they all now seemed to be looking directly at him.

“But that’s why we’re here,” he went on, his voice regaining most of its prior conviction.

“If we can stop them all now – before they get to the core, the drake will just pass this planet by. Then my time-line doesn’t matter,” he said, as though that was enough to halt the other line of discussion all-together.

“But Henry said there’s another way to the core. The drake doesn’t need the Bettany at all. If he learns of it,” little Larry explained.

“Henry? Who is this 'Henry' you keep talking about? That AI's name is Carl.”

The older Larry's voice was suddenly sharp and biting, and his eyes were narrowed intensely on the boy.

“Henry was Carl before, but that was the different time-line. In this time-line we have to call him Henry.”

There was an audible sound just then, as the older Larry exhaled a huge breath, as he suddenly seemed to relax by a million miles.

“Okay, so... this is information he learned after the time-divergence?”

Little Larry nodded, and then smiled, the smile he typically reserved for his brother Ian, and the kids peering out the windows of the short bus.

“Okay, so, what you're saying is that the drake in my time will learn of this other way to the core – once it's gotten hold of the information Carl... I mean Henry, has? So, my plan is... pointless. Okay, whew. I seriously don't like monkeying with time, you had me scared there for a minute,” he told his younger self.

And then he turned to the Casson and pulled him aside for a quick word.

“I've gotta pee,” little Larry announced to the room then. And then he looked up at Hadley and asked, “Will you take me?”

“Sure thing,” Hadley told him.

“Follow me.”

A couple minutes later the three of them, Larry, Hadley and Dodger, were all standing in a small meadow out behind the hanger.

Larry quickly positioned himself behind a tree, out of sight, but close enough he knew the fiery redhead could still hear him easily enough.

“I need your help,” he told the young woman.

“I kinda figured,” she replied, as she chewed on the end of a long bit of grass.

“I mean it's not like finding a tree was all that difficult.”

Little Larry smiled, and then started to urinate. Because he really did have to pee.

This made Hadley smile. And then Dodge, seeing as the woman smelled okay, decided to mark a few spots as well.

“We can't trust him,” the boy said after a spell, while he was still behind the tree.

“Who?”

“The older me,” he told her, his voice as solemn as the grave.

“Why?” Hadley asked, her voice full of all the shock she suddenly felt.

“Cuz he’s working with the drake.”

Chapter 9 - Tell-Tale Heart Part 2

*“Is adult amusement killing our children,
or is killing our children amusing adults?”*

Marilyn Manson

“So, what do you propose we do?”

“I think we have to kill him,” the young boy said, with a voice that belonged to someone much older.

Taken aback, Hadley blinked twice and then said, “You can’t be serious.”

“Henry said we should tie him up, and keep him prisoner somewhere. But...”

Larry came around from behind the tree, looked up at the young woman, and said, “But I know me, and the truth is... I can get out of anything, if I put my mind to it, that is. If I want it bad enough. Always been lucky that way, I guess.”

Hadley looked down at the boy who was probably already smarter than she was and smiled, because she knew he was just being honest, and not trying to brag.

“We can’t let him get back to his time, and allow him to tell the drake about the alternative route to the core. And we can’t hold him here. I mean, where would we? Do you think that alien lady with the scary teeth will want to keep him locked up for the rest of his life? That’s if we can even trust her. These are people he picked, and he hand-picked them all for a reason. To help him with his real mission.”

Hadley thought about getting ‘hand-picked’ herself – for a half-tick, and then pocketed that thought for re-evaluation later on, when she had more time and fewer pressing matters to attend to.

“Real mission?” Hadley asked, as she bent down and pretended to tie her shoe, just in case someone from the hanger was watching out the back door.

“The drake doesn’t want the planet, he wants the sun. He plans to come here in 23 years, clear any threats, and then bring in his female – when he’s certain it’s safe. Then together they’ll set up a nest on the core. But she’ll lay her eggs on the sun.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me...” Hadley said then, switching shoes, and then slowly pretending to tie those laces too.

“There are shrimp right here on Earth that live in sulfuric-acid. It’s no different, really, just some creatures need oxygen and some need ten-thousand degrees to hatch an egg,” little Larry told her, as if it was all so perfectly normal.

“It was one of the red flags, actually. Old Larry didn’t much like talking about the female drake. And he tried to brush it off just as fast as he could - when it came up.”

“What were the other red flags?” the ever-inquisitive reporter inquired of the six-and-a-half-year-old boy.

But just then a girl named Tricky Tuesday stuck her head out the back door to the hanger and yelled, “You guys about done out here? Cuz the marines just stormed the bunker.”

“I can’t explain now,” little Larry told her, “you’ll just have to trust me. We need to kill me - the older me - sooner than later.”

Hadley looked at the boy but had no words, and so she just asked, “Are you coming?”

“Just a sec,” he told her. “I wanna throw a stick a couple times for Dodger first. He might not get to run later,” he explained. Though, to be fair, they both knew it was a lie, and they both knew they both knew she knew it too.

However, Hadley and little Larry had clicked from the moment they’d first seen each other, so it didn’t bother her in the slightest. In fact, it was the same sorta lie Hadley woulda told herself – had she needed to.

It was after Hadley rejoined the group in the hanger, that little Larry finally turned to the fifteen-year-old girl with dark hair and long dark eyelashes and asked, “Did you understand all of that?”

Sophie Anne looked meaningfully at the boy, and then said, “I think so.”

“And you’re absolutely positive?” he asked, still not a hundred-percent on all of the details the young ghost had shared.

“Yes, I’m certain. I was just there. I saw it with my own eyes.”

“Do you really think the reporter lady will do it?” she asked, after a pensive moment, her face equally as pensive (because she knew the boy’s answer would only be the lesser of two mighty-large evils).

“I do,” little Larry replied, his own face a mask of sadness.

“It’s a hard thing you’re doing. But, it’s the right thing,” the teenage ghost counseled him, though she’d never been much of the counseling type.

“If she doesn’t though... you’re going to have to do it,” the little boy told her, as he tossed a rather large stick into the tall grass for his dog.

“I was afraid you were going to say that,” the ghost from eighteen-eighty-five replied with a heavy sigh.

“You’re the only one he won’t see coming,” little Larry told her rather sardonically.

“Not if I don’t want him to,” she confessed, with a weak smile that spoke of a not-entirely-willing submission to his plan.

“And then what? What will you do with his alien army?” the teenage ghost asked him.

“I think I’m going to have to lead them.”

“The marines have already stormed the bunker where the worker Bettanys have been digging. And according to my sources within the Pentagon, they’re just minutes away from using a gravity-bomb down the shaft, in the hope the concussive force will kill as many of them as possible, if not all of them,” the older Larry was telling everyone when little Larry walked back into the hanger.

“Are we supposed to stop them? The entire military?” Hadley asked the younger version, instead of the man who’d just been talking.

“No,” the young boy said, with a shake to his head. “There’s nothing they can do except get the queen mad. And using anything more powerful than a gravity-bomb would risk the core, and that’s against military protocol.”

“How do you know all of this?” Timothy asked with a bite to his voice, his feathers clearly ruffled over needing to listen to a hatchling.

“Henry. He knows all about physics, and stuff,” little Larry explained, not at all upset he needed to defend himself – as that was a daily necessity at his house.

“The plan is to let the military do whatever it’s going to do. Then, once the queen has had time to deposit her eggs on the core – the workers will start streaming out. That’s when they’re the most dangerous.”

Little Larry walked over to the table where the headset with Henry (the alien AI) sat, and he put his hand on top of it.

“Once they’re set free to forage – that’s when we’ll kill them,” he told the room at large.

“But, how?” Tricky asked, not liking the direction any of this was heading.

“We’ll use old-Larry here’s plan. We’re going to get inside their heads. I reckon there’s enough psychics in this room alone to take control of the queen and her horde.”

“Isn’t that what you had planned... all along?” little Larry asked, turning to look at the older version of himself – without a lick of trust anywhere on the little-man’s face.

Because kids are almost always blatant with their emotions.

“Yes, to take control of their minds at the same time the military dropped their gravity bomb – which is really a subspace window they’re opening up. We’d use the concussive force to push them all into dense space.”

“Well, that’s what we’re going to do. Only Hadley here is going to help you steal one of the Military’s gravity-bombs first.”

“I am?” Hadley asked then, rather sharply, because this was the first she’d heard of it.

“Yes, with Henry’s help. He’s going to show you where you can go to get one, without any trouble.”

“Really?” the older Larry asked then, his eyes alight with fire.

“Really,” the younger copy said, in that sinister way that would’ve tipped anyone paying attention off.

But the older Larry was a million miles away in thought, as he stared down at the headset sitting on the lone table.

He’s terrified to put it on, little Larry thought to himself, as he watched the older version of himself stare blankly at Henry.

“You could just tell us where it is,” the older Larry said then, as he took a giant step back from the table.

“No, it’s better this way,” little Larry told the young man, as he picked up the headset and handed to the feisty redhead.

“Here, you put it on, Hadley. That way Henry doesn’t get confused about who is who,” little Larry told the young woman, with such a meaningful look all thought of protest immediately fled from her mind.

“Her?” the older Larry asked, with open disdain. Which didn’t sit well with the twenty-two-year-old Hadley.

Little Larry looked up at the handsome man who was technically him... in another time-line, and smiled, a genuinely fake smile.

“Her.”

Hadley took a second to swallow, a couple times, and then she set the lightweight headset on top of her head. And then she laughed, and then she smiled, and then she laughed some more.

“I’ve got it,” she told the older Larry. “It’s not far, but we should leave now. Just the two of us.”

“So, what about the alien army? What are we to do?” Timothy asked then, suddenly worried his status as General was being usurped right in front of his eyes.

“Oh, we’ll still need your help. Just not to blow up the tunnel.”

“Oh, yes,” Katrine said. “And what would the young leader have us do instead?”

“You’re going to invade.”

“Invade?” the Casson, who was technically a large blue-and-black birdman, asked – rather indignantly.

“Yes, invade,” little Larry told him, without a smirk or a smile.

“Invade what?” the avian alien asked, with wide – almost terrified – eyes.

“The earth, of course” little Larry told them all, as if every single one of them held tickets for the short bus.

“But, why?”

“Because this lie has gone on quite long enough.”

Chapter 10 - Bitches Be Crazy

*“The only way to deal with an unfree world
is to become so absolutely free
that your very existence is an act of rebellion.”*

Albert Camus

“Um... Larry. Can I talk to you and Dodge outside, for a second?” Hadley asked from the side door of the hanger.

Larry looked down at Dodge, but he just shrugged his big flappy ears.

“Sure,” he said.

“Um... Larry. Why is your older-self tied up in the backseat of this woman’s Jeep?” Dodger asked the second they were outside of the hanger.

“Oh, you know Dodge, bitches be crazy,” little Larry remarked flippantly, using a phrase he’d often heard his older brother Ian use. And then he turned his wide eyes on the smiling young woman, and asked, “What is going on? I thought we had a plan.”

“Get in, Mr. Plan,” Hadley told the little boy.

“We need to talk.”

Larry looked one more time at Dodge, who just shrugged his ears again, and then the two of them climbed (well, Larry climbed, Dodge was more like thrown) into the vehicle’s front passenger seat.

“Buckle up, and hold onto Dodge, there. We don’t have time to go slow,” Hadley told them both as she backed the Jeep out of the parking spot.

“Where are we going?” little Larry asked, now suddenly nervous he’d decided to come along.

“First,” the redhead with the mad curls began, “we’re going someplace to talk. Just the five of us. Then, we’re going to actually go and get that gravity bomb you suggested.”

Little Larry looked at the woman, and then he looked at the headset in her handbag. He hadn’t realized she’d brought Henry along.

“I thought that was still on the table, back in the Hanger. I saw you take it off and put it there,” he told her.

“Yeah,” Hadley said with a smirk. “People often see what they want to see, or what they’re afraid to see – based on their natural inclinations. What you saw was an old set of aviation headphones tucked half-way under a map the Casson was using to show everyone the location of the bunker.”

Little Larry tried hard to think back to the last time he’d checked to make sure the AI device was safely within reach, and he honestly couldn’t recall the details. Only that he’d been certain it had still been sitting there when Hadley and his older-self had left to retrieve the gravity bomb.

Only, they hadn’t really left. Hadley had just knocked the older Larry out, then hogtied him and threw him in the back of the Jeep.

“I thought we’d decided the only way was for you to kill him,” little Larry whispered, over the loud road noise.

To which, Hadley smiled, but then she looked into the rear-view mirror and noticed his older-self must have heard, because just then he was staring in wide-eyed-disbelief at his six-and-a-half-year-old self.

“No, Larry. We didn’t decide anything. You just told me what you thought should happen. And now I’m telling you; taking a life just to make things easier isn’t how decent people act. That’s how monsters act. And I never fight on the side of monsters.”

Chapter 10 - Bitches Be Crazy Part 2

*“At times you have to leave the city of your comfort
and go into the wilderness of your intuition.
What you’ll discover will be wonderful.
What you’ll discover is yourself.”*

Alan Alda

“You’re a smart kid, Larry. There’s no doubt about that. Everyone here agrees.”

Larry looked around him, and then back up to Hadley.

“But you are not a wise man. You’re a smart little boy. And there’s a huge difference,” she told him, as she came to kneel in front of him and Dodger, who was almost always by the boy’s side.

“And that difference is - time. And experience.”

This time it was Hadley’s turn to look about, but she mostly concentrated her gaze on the older Larry, who was muffled in the corner.

“Larry, do you want to know why your mom banned fake heroes like Captain America and Batman from your house?”

Little Larry looked sharply at the young woman, with a single dark brow peeked in a look of dark suspicion.

“Oh, relax,” she told him, with a chuckle.

“I googled you and found her Facebook page,” she explained. “I mean, we did just meet, and you did just tell me to kill someone for you. So, I figured I should do a little research... which something I tend to do whenever I’m confused,” the reporter went on.

“And I found her petition to stop men like Chris Evans and Ben Affleck from promoting organizations that profit from child slavery.”

Larry’s face relaxed at that, a bit. But still, he was suspicious of this strange, yet oddly-comforting woman.

“Anyway, Larry. The whole point of her trying to keep those fake heroes out of your house is because in real life the only thing that matters to them - is the march of the ‘greater good’ towards an ‘ideal version’ of life only they and those of their kind hold. And they are more than willing to use other people’s lives as barter and fodder to build this new ideal life. Because as they see it... the ends always justify the means. And that’s what you wanted me to do. You wanted me to justify killing a man I don’t know, for a crime I have not witnessed, all because of your ‘greater good’. And Larry, that’s what tyrants and evil people do. And I really don’t think that’s who you are. Are you, Larry... are you really a Tyrant?”

Little Larry’s eyes were wide when they suddenly filled with tears, but it was Dodge who burst first.

“It’s me. I told him to do it. I told him it’s what a pack would do. If they found a traitor. It’s all my fault,” Dodge wailed into his boy’s pantleg.

“It’s okay, Dodge. Nobody died. But do you see, Larry. Easy answers never work because they don’t take into account what really matters.”

“And what’s that?” Larry asked, swiping away snot and tears with the underside of his T-shirt.

“Our hearts, Larry.”

Hadley took the tall boy by the shoulders and spun him until he was looking at his older-self, who sat hogtied in a dark corner.

“What does your heart tell you, Larry, about him? Look at him, and ask your heart what is going on? Ask it... why would he do what he’s doing? Why would you do it, if it was you? What’s the best possible reason you can think of?”

Little Larry cried some more, but as his eyes filled and then emptied with tears, over and over, he also took note of what the woman said.

“I don’t think I’d ever do anything to hurt Dodge. No matter what,” little Larry finally said, after a time, as he looked down on the best dog ever.

And that’s when a loud muffled cry of anguish sounded from the corner

Chapter 11 - Justice - Not Murder

*“I have no idea what's awaiting me,
or what will happen when this all ends.
For the moment I know this:
there are sick people
and they need curing.”*

Albert Camus

“Larry, we have a few problems that we need to deal with really fast. Do you think we can decide what to do with the older-you later?” Hadley asked the six-and-a-half-year-old, as he stood there staring at the older version of himself, he very nearly had killed.

“I think you were right, Larry. I think your older-self hand-picked everyone on our team for a very specific reason. And I think he did it so that we could do what I’m about to propose now.”

“So, why didn’t he just come out and say so in the first place?” the fifteen-year-old ghost asked.

“You know, you coulda just told me you were working with her,” Larry told Sophie Anne then, with a bit of a snarl. But Sophie Anne never really liked kids, so it didn’t much bother her.

“I think he couldn’t tell us. Not out-right anyway. But we’ll get into that later. First, let’s consider something else, for just one second.”

All of them; little Larry, Dodger (the alien canine), Sophie Anne (the fifteen-year-old ghost from Southern Louisiana), and the older Larry (who was still bound and gagged in the corner) all stared at Hadley as if she were about to lead them all to their utter demise.

“What if the plan isn’t to kill any of them? What if the plan is to instead get all of our grandmas and grandpas back? I mean, that’s why I started looking into this case in the first place, because I was worried about my gran. She’s been missing, and nobody is looking for her. In fact, I bet she’s down in that shaft digging right now. She was one of the first taken, so she’s probably in there. And I don’t want to see her die.”

Nobody, least of all little Larry, had been expecting that from the cut-throat looking woman in the green flannel and black motorcycle boots.

“I just really want to get my gran back, and I think there might be a way.”

“Truly?” little Larry asked, his face brightening at the prospect of returning to hero status.

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?” Sophie Anne asked, seemingly annoyed that the plan kept changing. But Hadley could see the pain in the girl’s eyes clear enough, as well as the faint smile playing around her pretty

pink lips. So, Hadley knew the girl was all bluster, just trying to cover some pretty big wounds. (Wounds that were binding her to a life that somehow felt unfinished.)

“Older Larry’s plan was to use psychic neuro-connectivity to redirect the workers, right? Well, what if we can sever their tie to the queen completely? What if we can free their minds long enough to separate them from her?”

“You’re forgetting, they’ve been changed, biologically. They’re not the same critters, as before,” Dodger told the young woman, even though he very much didn’t want to.

“No, I’m not forgetting. That’s why we need the gravity bomb.”

“Beg pardon?” Dodger asked, his head tilted to one side, one ear perked about as high as it could go.

“Time and space are a symptom of our perception. If we can jump time-space to just before all of this happened – the moment they’re separated - it just might work. That is, if Sophie Anne here is a good example of the tenacity of the human consciousness.”

Hadley looked at Sophie Anne and winked an ‘atta-girl’ wink, which thankfully the ever-mercurial-girl took as it was meant, and smiled.

“How does a gravity bomb shift everyone in time-space? And, wouldn’t we all lose six months?”

“Yes, to answer your last question,” Hadley replied with a bit of a grimace at the end, and then a pause.

“And it doesn’t, entirely. We’ll still need someone at the core – a powerful someone who can plug all of our psychic energy into the core of the planet. It’s the only way.”

“And I’m assuming that fella, the one that plugs everyone into the core... I suppose his chances of survival ain’t so great. I mean, there’s the queen, the workers, the military, and the core... all to deal with. That’s even if he makes it to the core,” Dodger said, as he stared at Larry’s shoes.

Again, there was a loud groan of misery from the corner.

“I’ll do it,” little Larry said then, after having taken the time in his mind to weigh the pros and cons of being the man for the mission.

Hadley smiled, a great-big-smile at that, but then said, “No, I don’t think this part of the plan is for you, Larry. There’s another part that needs you more. No, there’s someone else that’s more suited to this part of the plan,” Hadley told the group at large.

“I knew it,” Dodger said then, as he sniffed the ground of the abandoned garage that they were having their clandestine conversation in.

“I’ll do it on one condition; if you promise to get this boy another dog

Chapter 11 - Justice - Not Murder Part 2

*“The truth is, everyone is going to hurt you.
You just got to find the ones worth suffering for.”*

Bob Marley

“You know Dodge, as much as I really appreciate the offer. I think there’s someone else, who can slip in undetected,” the twenty-two-year-old Hadley Parker told the alien canine as she bent down to give him a good scratch behind an ear.

And then she looked meaningfully from him to the fifteen-year-old ghost from Louisiana.

Though, Sophie Anne for her part, just rolled her eyes and then said, “I shoulda known.”

“It makes the most sense. When you stop to think about it,” Hadley told her, with a soft look that told the girl, more than anything else... that she could still say no, if she wanted to.

“Oh, why not? I’ve got nothing better to do,” Sophie Anne said then, as she watched the young six-and-a-half-year-old’s look of complete terror turn into utter relief.

“Don’t get too excited,” Hadley told them both, when she noticed the look on little Larry’s face.

“I’ve got a hard-jobs for both of you.”

Dodger looked at the young woman full of wild ambition and wondered quietly how she was suddenly in charge.

“What do you need us to do?” the smart boy with the ginormous heart asked, still ready to be a team player in the fight for everyone’s lives.

“You and Dodger are going to help me steal a gravity bomb. And then, you’re going to convince everyone back at the hanger to go along with our new plan.”

“And the alien invasion?” Larry asked, suddenly no longer sure about that part of his original plan, either.

“Actually, Larry,” Hadley said, squatting down next to him and his dog. “I think that was your best idea yet.”

“Really?” Larry asked, with wide eyes, and a shocked feeling that made his tummy do a couple flip-flops.

“Really. I think your natural instinct to end all of the lying, for everyone’s safety, is the best plan. Then again,” the student reporter replied with a bit of a wry smirk, “the truth is always the best policy. I don’t care what the stakes are. People ought to know the truth.”

“Do you think they’ll do it? The aliens?” little Larry asked then, of both his dog and his new friend.

“I do. Because they all know it has to happen sooner or later, and so long as they are kept hidden in the shadows, they make for easy prey - for those that would take advantage of their misfortune, and general lack of understanding our ways.”

Little Larry could tell Hadley had been through a lot already.

I mean, a person would have had to have gone through a ton to be as smart as she was, at her young age. Even Larry – who was only smart, not wise – knew enough to know that.

“Honestly, I think the only way any of us have a real chance, is if we all start being honest, and we all start learning to trust one another.”

“You sound like my mailman,” little Larry told her then, just before they all sat down on the floor, cross-legged style, and began making their plans.

Interlude No. 3 - Treasured Items #3 & #4

*“The beauty of genuine brotherhood and peace
is more precious than diamonds or silver or gold.”*

Martin Luther King Jr.

There’s a thing about ‘impending doom’ – when you live with it long enough, it ceases to hold much meaning.

I guess that’s why our little six-and-a-half-year-old friend had been able to volunteer so easily for the dangerous and most likely lethal mission.

Because every time Larry had reached his little hand into the right front pocket of his jeans to feel the reassuring presence of his five secret treasures, he was reminded of what would happen if Ian ever found them.

Well... found two of them, anyway.

Because two of the hidden treasures little Larry liked to keep in the front pocket of his jeans were pieces to Ian’s favorite toy.

It had broken after Larry had snuck in and liberated it from Ian’s room one afternoon, while he’d been away at school.

Only... there’d been an accident, and it had gotten stepped on, and now the only two remaining pieces were its head and left arm.

You see, Ian had painted the tiny toy warrior himself, and he’d taken a great deal of pride in his one-and-only attempt at art. In fact, he’d often put it in Elijah’s face, and said that anyone could be an artist - if they put their mind to it.

Personally though, Larry had never thought it was all that great. I mean, the eyes were lopsided and irregularly shaped, and the teeth all were distinctly pointed, and menacing looking – to say the least.

But none of that had mattered to Ian, or to Larry, really. Because Larry had simply wanted to touch and play with the one thing he knew should be totally out of his reach.

However, nothing was really out of reach for Larry. And so, the five-year-old had picked the lock on the glass trophy cabinet where Ian stored all of his most treasured items, and he’d taken it for himself. To play with.

Only, that’s when it had fallen, and then was stepped on, and broken into too many pieces to fix.

So, that's when Larry had pocketed the two largest pieces - that were sure to give him away, if Ian ever discovered them.

In a way, I guess, that's why Larry had kept them, because it had always felt a little like revenge every-time he put his hand into his pocket.

But too, it also felt dangerous and exhilarating, knowing that he carried around with him his own doom – wherever he went. (Lest Ian find them, and exact his own brutal form of revenge.)

But none of that mattered now, now that Larry was staring at a potentially world-ending disaster.

Because every time Larry had put his hand into his pocket, ever since that day, he'd been reminded that even though he was smaller, and weaker, and way-less-powerful – little Larry was still brave enough to laugh in the face of the biggest monster he knew.

Chapter 12 - A Cluster of Fucks

*“The funny thing about wishes.
Sometimes all it took to make them come true was a first step.”*

T.J. Klune

Hadley had hacked the military’s short-wave radio signal months before, when her gran had first gone missing. And then, she had broken into their regional headquarters and had installed a cellphone she’d bought on the cheap, on their internal mail server. So now, her MailZap account was literally full of memos and orders being passed back and forth thru military command.

“They’ve just dropped two of the four gravity bombs they brought with them,” she informed her small band of rebel fighters.

“So, you’ll have to wait until they’ve been detonated to go in,” Hadley explained to the ghost with the flowing dark-black hair.

“How long will that take?” the girl asked, in an almost bored fashion. Despite this literally being a fight for all of humanity. Which of course made Hadley smile a genuine smile.

“The bombs will temporarily open a subspace window – which increases gravity by around sixty-seven-hundred percent of normal. However, it only lasts for a micro-second. Just long enough to crush everything within a quarter-mile radius. They’re similar to peace bombs, but on a much larger scale.”

Little Larry just looked at her, and then looked into the back of her Jeep where his older-self was still bound and gagged – only this time he was stuffed onto the floor, with a moving blanket thrown over the top of him.

“It’s the best we can do, buddy. It’s better to bring him with us,” Hadley explained to the nervous looking boy.

“All military personnel are falling back, until after detonation. Once they move in, after the explosion, that’s when we’ll have our chance to sneak into the tent with the two remaining gravity bombs.”

“Did you ask Henry? About any of this?” little Larry asked then, as he happened to glance at part of the white and chrome headset peeking out from Hadley’s handbag.

“Look, Larry. You and I are gonna need to have a discussion about what, or rather... who, you think that is. Because, I think we all got it wrong. I don’t think Henry, or Carl... is what we think he is.”

Larry’s eyebrow crept part-way up his large forehead, but he didn’t ask any more questions. As he really was quite an intelligent boy.

“What if there are men guarding the remaining bombs?” the bored teenage ghost asked, as she sat perched comfortably in back, on top of the reclined body of the older Larry.

“Oh, I’m sure they’ll be at least one guard. But that’s why I have my team,” Hadley said, as she beamed at the boy and his dog, and for a second, they looked confused, until they both realized (almost as one) that she’d meant them. And then they beamed too.

“You mean us?” little Larry asked.

“Yes, I mean you, little man,” Hadley said, this time tussling the boy’s hair instead of the dog’s.

“Remember what you’re to do?”

“Act confused, like we’re lost, and keep them looking away as long as possible.”

“Correct,” Hadley said, as she swallowed a mouthful of bile that had crept up at the thought of using a six-year-old to fight her battles.

But then she reminded herself it wasn’t just her battle, other people (aliens actually) had started it, and she was merely doing the only thing she could think to do... to save everyone that she loves.

“If it looks like they’re gonna hurt you, or try to grab you, both of you - run – they’ll chase you, but they won’t shoot. They won’t shoot a boy and his dog,” she told them both – though... to be honest, she was more telling herself. Like a prayer of sorts. Or a wish she desperately needed to be granted.

Chapter 12 - A Cluster of Fucks

Part 2

*“If there are no dogs in Heaven,
then when I die I want to go where they went.”*

Will Rogers

“Keep pressure on it! Keep pressure on it!” Hadley was screaming, as she grabbed the medium-sized dog and thrust him into the small child’s hands.

“Hurry! Oh my god, I’m so sorry! I’m so sorry!” Hadley screamed as a spray of hot blood shot across her face.

There were two men chasing them, both with guns, but so far neither had taken a shot.

“I should have expected they’d use an alien visitor to watch the bombs. I should have anticipated more resistance,” she was saying, mostly to herself, as she helped the boy who held the lifeless form of his dog in his arms into the front passenger-seat of her Jeep.

“What?” she asked in a panic when she glanced into the back, where the older Larry should have been.

“Where?” she began, as she suddenly looked up at the two armed-men that were now too close to make a get-a-way.

“I’m gonna have to fight,” Hadley had just enough time to tell the boy, before she pushed her palm into the forerunner’s face, instantly bloodying his nose.

They never see that coming, the girl had time to think, just before she shoved the barrel of the second man’s gun away, and then clobbered him her own Glock .45.

She knew the soldiers would have shot already, if they’d been cleared to use deadly force, and so it hadn’t taken much courage, or thought really, for her to make the move – but when the soldier’s fat fist came down on top of her head, it took Hadley more than she’d bargained for to remain standing.

“Larry, run!” she told the boy, who was still cradling a dog that was losing too much blood.

But then the man in front of her fell. Like a lead weight.

“What?” Hadley asked, more confused than ever.

And then the second soldier, who was still dealing with a gusher of a bloody nose, suddenly went down too. As if he’d been rendered instantaneously unconscious.

“They took the older Larry into that flimsy looking building,” a naked Katrine said then, as she suddenly materialized out of nowhere.

“Where did you come from?” Hadley asked, still totally stunned at what she’d just witnessed.

“Don’t worry,” the strange naked alien with the long tail and the sharp teeth told them.

“I used just enough to knock them out. I assume that’s why you didn’t fire your weapon. You didn’t want to kill them?” the woman asked as she strode around the Jeep and then pulled a moving blanket from the back, and then wrapped herself in it.

“No. I don’t want to kill anyone I don’t have to,” Hadley told the strange woman.

“Then, why don’t you let me go and fetch your fella for you?” the woman said with a wink, before she dropped the blanket, and once again disappeared.

A few moments later there was a loud scuffling sound from inside a nearby trailer, and then a moment later the naked alien appeared again, this time carrying the still bound and gagged Larry.

“They’ll sleep like babies,” the woman said, as she gently set the older Larry in the backseat of the Jeep, and then once-again donned the moving blanket as her garb.

“I think we should be leaving though,” the alien remarked with a look, as she climbed into the back.

“You’re right,” Hadley, who was typically good with making rapid-fire adjustments to plans on the fly, told the woman as she threw her backpack into the back, and then hopped into the driver’s seat and started up the engine.

“I’m sorry,” the strange alien lady said then, to little Larry, just as they sped out onto the road.

“That doesn’t look good.”

Chapter 13 - Mortal Enemies

“If you have enemies, good that means you stood up for something.”

Eminem

Few things are as terrifying to a Canina (the species of alien Dodger just happens to be) as a goddamn Periplaneta.

Periplanetas are human-sized cockroaches with razor-sharp fore legs. And originally, they were the scourge of the system of planets where Dodger originated from. That is, before they'd all been ousted by a new threat, that indiscriminately saw them all as fodder.

And so, when Dodger had spied the wicked looking creature standing guard in front of the large packing crates that housed the two remaining gravity bombs, all he could do at first was stare. And then growl.

“This isn't good,” he said, as he used his teeth to pull Hadley's sleeve.

“Get behind me,” he'd told them both. “This is going to get ugly.”

And ugly it had gotten – and fast.

Without hesitation, the medium-sized dog launched himself at the large insect.

Of course, the fast-thinking Hadley used the diversion to open one of the crates and snatch out one of the bombs, just prior to two armed soldiers storming the small tent.

“What do you think...” one of the soldiers began, as he stared directly into Hadley's verdant eyes.

But Hadley didn't give him time to finish his question. Instead, she gave him a severe uppercut – using her now full backpack. The man, staggered backwards, falling into the soldier who stood close behind him in the cramped quarters.

And that's when they heard Dodger cry out in a plaintive yelp, and then they saw him go down in a spray of blood.

Hadley threw her backpack onto her back, grabbed up the dog, and shoved Larry out of the tent in front of her, but it was only a fraction of a second later that the two soldiers were after them.

“Thank god for Katrine's rescue,” Hadley told the group, as they filled everyone in back at the hanger.

Katrine just smiled and beamed at this, but remained silent.

“I'm so sorry,” Hadley said then to little Larry, as she looked down at the boy who still cradled his dog in his arms.

“I’m afraid there’s nothing any of us can do,” she told him, her face a solemn mask of regret.

“I know. It’s just…” the boy began, but then he sighed and hung his head.

“It’s okay, Larry,” Dodger told him then, from his lap.

“Lots of dogs don’t have a tail,” he informed his boy, as he hopped up and turned around to better examine the stitching the girl named Tricky had done.

“There’s a bit of a tail there,” Hadley said with a smile, as she watched Dodger try to wag his tiny little stump.

“Give it time, little one. Everything heals in time,” Katrine said then, with just a whisper of a smile playing around her lips.

“So, is everyone up to speed on what we’ve got to do, if we’re to get everyone’s nanas back and save the planet?” Hadley asked of the group at large; as the time for chit-chat was over.

“Good, because we’re only going to get one shot at this. And if we get it wrong…”

“If we get it wrong, we could obliterate this time-line all-together,” Katrine finished for her brightly.

“Yeah, or something like that,” Hadley told them, as she gathered up her stuff.

And then she looked at little Larry, who still seemed very concerned about Dodger amputated tail.

“Don’t worry, little man. There’s worse things than losing a tail.”

“That’s what I’m worried about,” little Larry replied with a wry grin, and then he looked at Hadley and said, “Henry is missing. Unless you hid him somewhere. He’s not in your bag.”

Hadley’s eyes went saucer-wide at that, and then she grabbed her handbag, where Henry had last been. Then she upended it right there on the hanger floor.

“Oh, no!” she replied loudly, putting her fingers over her mouth as she did.

“Oh my god,” she replied again, as she realized they must have taken him when they took the older Larry out of her Jeep.

“There’s no time to go back now,” Katrine told the distraught twenty-two-year-old. “We have to move forward. Perhaps there will be time to rescue him once this is all done.”

“You don’t understand,” Hadley began, but then she looked up into the face of the alien Dedenti, and noticed an odd smile playing around the woman’s watery eyes – one that didn’t touch her lips.

“Once we reset the time-line there is no coming back.”

Chapter 13 - Mortal Enemies Part 2

“Peace cannot be achieved through violence, it can only be attained through understanding.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“We’re only gonna get one chance at this,” Hadley explained to the group.

“Are you sure we can even do it?” the Casson named Timothy asked, in a tone that implied he didn’t think they could.

“Our physical reality is only a symptom of our conscious state,” Hadley explained, for the tenth and final time.

“So long as we can get enough juice, and with twelve powerful psychics, combined with the power of the core – thanks to Sophie Anne – and the gravity bomb – which Katrine has thankfully modified for us – we’ll have more than enough juice to jump everyone back six months.”

“Where were you six months ago?” Tricky asked Hadley, then, and in the asking implied her jump back six months wasn’t going to be a piece of cake.

“I was just starting my winter break from school,” Hadley said, suddenly feeling a bit guilty.

“Will you be okay?” Hadley asked, honestly concerned about the girl she’d just met, and willing to do anything she could to help her out.

“Depends,” Tricky told her, as she pulled her long black hair back into a tight bun.

“Do I get to keep my memories from these past six months, along with all of this? Along with what’s happening now?”

Hadley smiled, but it was Katrine that answered.

“Yes, darling. Everyone connected to our team of psychics will retain all memories of what has transpired.”

Tricky smiled at the woman in the jet-black cat suit, and then asked, “Do we get to take anything back with us? Physical stuff?”

“Why do you ask, darling?” Katrine asked then, in such a way as to imply she was deeply curious.

“There’s someone’s life I’d like to save,” Tricky told the alien quite honestly, as she suspected the strangely beautiful woman could read her mind anyhow.

“Yes,” the Dedenti said, with an almost cat-like growl.

“What did you want to take back?” Hadley asked, though she knew what the answer would be before she’d said a thing.

“Henry. Or, Carl. I want to take him back with me, so that I can use him to help me save someone I care deeply about. Save him from dying a horrible death.”

“I don’t know how to tell you this,” Hadley began, “but, we can’t find Henry.”

Tricky looked at Hadley for a moment, and then she closed her eyes and asked, “What about Sophie Anne? Can’t she find out who has him?”

“Sophie Anne is down at the core. And she can’t leave. It’s not easy projecting a consciousness that close to the core of a planet. She’s doing her best just to hold on.”

Hadley said the words, said the words that were true – and weren’t – in the fact they were missing a lot of important details the others might have wanted to know.

And for a moment, based on the slight wince and then frown on the Dedenti’s face, Hadley suspected Katrine already knew.

“Look, I don’t know who has Henry, but it’s important I tell you something about him anyway,” Hadley began, as she pulled the woman who was only slightly younger than her by the elbow into the dark corner where the older Larry was still bound and gagged.

“I think you need to hear this too. And you, come here,” she told the younger version of the man, as he came over with his dog to investigate what was going on.

“Look, everyone,” Hadley said, kinda under her breath because she didn’t want the Casson and his team to overhear.

“Henry is not some all-knowing mechanical device. He’s an alien that exists as binary coding, sure, but he’s actually just a little kid – like our little Larry here,” she said, looking down at the boy by her side with a heart-warming smile.

“Henry, or Carl, whatever he’s called – when I had him on, and I could really talk to him, I knew right away he wasn’t working with an adult mindset. He thinks in pictures and in patterns like a child, and after they plugged him into that CIA mainframe... well... he just wasn’t the same as before. Certainly not the Carl you knew,” she said, as she gently kicked the man she instinctively liked, even though she didn’t trust him enough to untie him.

“Once he had all of that very questionable reasoning set in, well... he changed. And his priorities and his mission changed. And now, with no other way to say it... he’s another beast entirely. So, whomever has him, whomever stole him and thinks they can use him the same way Larry did during the first time-line – well... it’s not gonna turn out for them like it did for Larry here.”

“How did it turn out for Larry here?” Tricky asked, as she was still in the dark as to most of what was going on.

“In the original time-line little Larry here kept Carl, after they’d killed the Bettany queen, and had driven out the Bettany army. And because of that, because he had secret use of the little alien AI, people thought

he was an incredibly powerful psychic. And ultimately it made him one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the world, all by the time he was in his mid-twenties.”

Tricky looked again at the man lying on the ground and thought how strange it was to feel so comfortable with someone you’d just met, and didn’t even trust.

“This time though, Carl is different, loaded with his own agenda – from what I can tell, and we all need to be worried about what kind of hands he’s fallen into.”

“But we don’t have time,” the Casson named Timothy said just then, as he walked up to the huddled group.

“The military has pulled back again, as a large wave of workers has erupted out of the shaft. It looks like their gravity bombs did nothing except piss them off.”

Hadley sighed, because there were still so many things she needed to discuss with her fellow coconspirators, but she understood well enough – there just wouldn’t be enough time.

So, instead, she turned to her group and said, “Well folks, this is it. Now or never.”

Chapter 14- Everyday Ordinary Hero

*“If you build the guts to do something, anything,
then you better save enough to face the consequences.”*

Criss Jami

After everyone had received their instructions, little Larry turned to Hadley and tugged on her sleeve.

And when she looked down, he pulled her into the corner where his older version still sat, still bound and gagged and looking incredibly disgruntled.

“What’s gonna happen to him? You said everyone will jump back six months, except he wasn’t here six months ago? Will he jump forward instead? Back to his time?”

Hadley bent down and ungagged the older version of the boy she already considered as family.

“Why don’t you explain to your younger-self here what’s about to happen?”

Hadley knew the man understood well enough, the hole he’d dug for himself, so why not let him try to explain it.

“Can you untie me too? Because I desperately need to pee,” the older Larry asked, just as soon as his mouth was free.

“I suppose. Not much you can do to change things now,” Hadley said with a wry grin on her face that spoke of a disappointment she would probably never be able to properly articulate.

“I did it to save everyone,” the tall, handsome man said, to Hadley. And then he looked down at his younger self, and the best dog ever, and explained as best he could, as Hadley began cutting his bindings.

“A Drake can read minds, so I had to try to convince myself I was working for him, all the while setting up a team I knew could do what needed to be done without me, one that would be smart enough to figure it out on their own.”

Once he was free of the bindings, the man instantly began to rub the circulation back into his limbs.

As he did so he went on, “I’m not going to jump at all. My time-line doesn’t exist anymore, and once you go back this one won’t either.”

“So, what happens to you?” Dodger asked then, as he blinked the gathering tears out of his big brown eyes.

“I just go away,” the older Larry said, now kneeling down so he could look himself, and his dog, square in the eye.

“But the Drake is still connected to me. So, he knows his plan has been thwarted. Expect him to act - to take this planet, one way or the other, for himself and his mate.”

“But you said that time-line doesn’t exist anymore,” little Larry whined just like a six-year-old might; reminding both the older version and Hadley just how young the boy really was.

“Drakes don’t live in the same time-space reality that we do, little man,” Hadley told him truthfully, hoping the small genius could wrap his mind around the odd concept rather quickly.

“We don’t have much time. Say your goodbyes now, then do what you need to do,” Hadley told them both, as she gave the man a significant look as he hopped around on the spot.

“And then – we do this. Consequences be damned.”

Chapter 14 - Everyday Ordinary Hero Part 2

*“But practically I know men and recognize them
by their behavior, by the totality of their deeds,
by the consequences caused in life by their presence.”*

Albert Camus

“Psychic energy isn’t as hoo-ha as it sounds. In fact, the more we understand the way frequencies and signals work – the more we realize psychic phenomenon is as normal as apple pie on the fourth of July,” Hadley told the group that was half alien and therefore had no idea what the fuck she was even rambling on about.

But still, she rambled. Because there was an awful guilt eating her up at the moment.

And it was Katrine, who called it out and named it – right there – for everyone to see.

“What is your plan for the queen?” the leonine-like alien with the wicked needle teeth and long whip-like tail asked, with a narrowed look of suspicion clouding her normally sanguine face.

Hadley swallowed, and then tossed a shallow smile at the group – but none of them caught it.

And so, she explained, as best she could – as the Casson and his team of flying aliens delivered the gravity bomb to the site.

“There was no other way we could think of, to take her off the board permanently. To stop her from repeating what she did here, once we all go back.”

Hadley knew they only had seconds, and part of her wished they didn't even have that, so she wouldn't have to say these next words.

"What are you going to do?" little Larry asked, as he felt a wave of sadness hit his heart.

"Once the bomb is away – Sophie Anne – and all of us will connect mentally to each other. And just like we said, we'll all focus on where we were six months ago. We'll all keep that image in our mind and in our hearts – just as we all promised to," Hadley said, re-explaining the plan to the group in order to buy herself more time.

"And Sophie Anne?" Katrine prompted, knowing exactly what the young redheaded reporter was attempting to do.

"Sophie Anne is a ghost, so she doesn't exactly have an anchor – to six months ago. Plus, given her proximity to the queen. And the fact she's already dead..." Hadley's voice trailed off, just as the Casson Timothy radioed that they were less than a minute out from the target.

"She's not dead-dead, though, is she?" Katrine asked, with one eyebrow raised just slightly more than the other.

"Sophie Anne is going to kill the queen," Hadley told the woman, whom she knew already knew, and was just asking so that everyone else would too.

"Sophie Anne is going to pull the queen into the core at the same time we jump. It should be enough to kill her."

"Kill the queen, or Sophie Anne?" Tricky asked, her face a mask of unexpressed anger.

"It will most likely kill both of them," Hadley told everyone, but she made sure to avoid all of their eyes.

"Now, let's do this. We've got one shot, and if we don't take it then Sophie Anne dies for nothing."

"Like, die – die?" little Larry asked, as he joined the group sitting in a larger circle in the middle of the hanger.

"Yes, little man. I mean die-die," Hadley told him, as she pushed the guilt from her mind.

I mean, nobody had asked her if she wanted this fucking war, this war had come to her, and she was doing the bloody best she could – and if nobody else could see that... then...

"I see it. And you're doing just fine," Katrine told her, as she placed a comforting hand on Hadley's back.

"This is not your fault. None of it is. It's just how the cosmos crumbles."

Chapter 15 - Auf Wiedersehen, Goodnight

*“Screw the rules, damn the consequences, and just love.
Love until it kills you, because there's nothing better worth dying for.”*

Karen Amanda Hooper

Fifty-two-seconds. That's how long it took for everything on earth to change. For everyone.

And all because one fifteen-year-old ghost from Southern Louisiana was brave enough to sacrifice everything, in order to save everyone that she loves.

But for the record, Sophie Anne had never once in her life imagined she'd one day be staring into the face of a Bettany Queen, or any other alien for that matter.

And yet, here she was, just a simple girl who always seemed to find herself at the heart of the matter.

Because much like before, when the lynching party had come to her father's sugarcane plantation to hang the man she loved more than life itself, she knew... she was the only person that could do something to help.

“Man,” she said to herself just then, “you'd think I'd at least get a trophy, or something.”

And those were the very last words our beautiful young ghost ever said. Because a moment later, just as the gravity bomb was descending into the shaft the alien army had dug – Sophie Anne enveloped the large ant-like creature and pushed her into the molten core of the planet.

“Goodbye,” Hadley breathed, just as a large whooshing-feeling erupted from the middle of her frontal lobe.

And when she opened her eyes again, she was sprawled across her bed in the small apartment she rented over a pizzeria.

Instantly, the twenty-two-year-old sprang up and dashed over to the window. There was a light blanket of snow covering the ground.

And then half a moment later there were sirens and a loud announcement came over the archaic emergency speaker system her town only used for inclement weather drills.

“Take shelter at once,” the crackling voice announced. “We are under attack by what appears to be an invading alien force. All citizens are ordered to shelter in place until further notice.”

“Oh, crap,” Hadley sighed, as she pulled a knit cap down over her wild red curls.

“I knew this wasn't gonna be a cake-walk, but what the fuck is happening now?”

Chapter 15 - Auf Wiedersehen, Goodnight Part 2

“There are no dress rehearsals in life.”

Frank Sonnenberg

“I didn’t know you had an alien army, Larry,” Sabrina Spellcaster said, as she stared up at the boy who was sitting on a large bird-man’s back.

“Me neither,” Larry told the girl that lived down the block from him.

“Does your mom know? Cuz she was just looking for you,” Sabrina told him, from behind a thick cloud of freckles.

“They’re sorta new,” Larry told her, as an army of more than a hundred assorted aliens continued to move down the block, towards the large open field at the end.

“I guess we’re going to have to make our stand here,” Larry told the Casson named Timothy.

“And what is your plan for when your military arrives, little one?” the large feathered man asked, as he cocked his long neck around to look at the boy.

But it was Dodger, who was running at his side, that spoke first, “I could go and speak to them, Larry. I mean... I might be the least offensive. No offense,” he added the last to the large bird-man, just in case he had ruffled any of his bright blue feathers.

I mean, from the size of the bird-man’s feet and the huge claw-like-things on the back of his legs, well... it seemed pretty obvious that no one would willingly ruffle a Casson’s feathers – without meaning to.

“I think we’ll just have to wing it,” Larry said, as already he could hear the sirens.

“Larry, what the hell are you doing!” his brother Ian hollered from the back of his motorbike just then.

“Not really sure!” Larry hollered back down at his middle-brother.

“But, can you tell mom I won’t be home in time for dinner?”

“Won’t be home in time for dinner?” Ian asked back, his face a blank slate of utter confusion.

“Larry, are they forcing you do this?” the average-sized boy with the enormous-sized temper asked.

“No!” Larry hollered back towards his brother, as the alien horde had left the street and was now moving quickly into the large tree-lined park.

“I’ve finally found my friends!”

Chapter 16 - Rebel Yell

*“A leader takes people where they want to go.
A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go,
but ought to be.”*

Rosalynn Carter

“Young man, we’re going to need to speak to your mother.”

Larry looked down at his dog, but did not laugh.

“What? I bet that’s the first thing that guy’s gonna say when he gets over here,” Dodger told him, as together they stood and watched as a man in green fatigues slowly approach the group of four.

Though, technically, only Larry and Dodger knew that Katrine was present, because at the moment she was invisible. Which meant she was naked, without her clothes on, which – quite honestly – made Larry feel a bit wonky in the tummy.

“Oh, and Larry, did you notice anything different about me?”

Larry scrunched up his face and then wrinkled his nose, but try as he might he just couldn’t figure out what Dodger was on about.

“My tail,” his spry dog remarked gleefully, as he hopped around in a circle wagging his full-and-healthy tail.

“Holy cow, Dodger. You got your tail back. How?”

But they couldn’t speak on the subject further, just then, as the approaching soldier had finally made it over to them.

“Hello, I’m Lieutenant Colonel Haas, and I’d like to talk to you, and your group here, about what’s going on,” the man with the short crop of tight blonde curls said, as he looked from the large bird-man to the small boy.

“We’ve come to your planet as refugees,” Timothy told the man, in as regal a voice as Larry had ever heard him use.

“And where is it y’all come from?” the man asked, in what Larry thought was a Texas accent.

“All over,” the large Casson told the man he stood a good two-and-a-half-feet taller than.

The seasoned warrior though, just took it all in stride, however, and smiled as he continued with his questions.

“So, who’s in charge here? Who can speak for all of you?”

The man directed his question at the large feathered alien this time, but it was the dog that answered.

“Larry is in charge of this army.”

The man stared down at the dog with wide eyes, and then opened his mouth to speak. And then he closed his mouth, and thought about things for a second.

And then he cocked his head to one side, scratched at his bare chin, and then looked back up to the bird-man and asked, “Your name’s Larry?”

“No, my name’s Larry,” the six-year-old-boy at the Casson's side said, with complete and utter confidence.

“You’re Larry?” the soldier asked the boy.

“Yes,” the boy answered, rather brightly.

“And this is your... army?” the man asked, adding enough emphasis on the last word to let them all know he felt it was a rather significant part of the equation.

“Yes,” Larry answered, again rather brightly, as though he had absolutely nothing to hide. Not even the talking dog at his side.

“And your dog can talk?” the soldier asked, looking back down at the dog, as if he just realized it hadn’t been a hallucination after all; the dog really had spoken.

“Sure, cuz I’m not a dog, I’m a Canina, and an alien, just like the rest of these blokes,” Dodger said, with a flip of his medium-sized head back towards the large crowd of diverse aliens that were gathered behind them.

The medium-sized man sighed, and then asked, “Aliens, huh?”

“Yes,” the Casson said, as if he’d already grown quite bored of the conversation.

“And what is it you guys are looking for?” the man asked, this time directing his question towards the small boy – because the man hadn’t made Lieutenant Colonel by not catching on rather quickly.

“Sanctuary,” Larry told the man, with a proud smile, because he had remembered the word correctly.

“Sanctuary,” the soldier repeated back, as if he’d been trained to.

“In exchange for sanctuary, my army is willing to provide our planet with knowledge and help in fighting the threat that’s right now on its way.”

The soldier sighed again, and then scratched at his chin again, as the whole ‘my army’ thing hadn’t sat so well with the man trained to follow just one leader.

“There are more aliens on the way, are there?” the soldier asked, and then silently hoped he’d be replaced before his feet hit the asphalt.

“Just one,” the Casson said, in such a deep tone it made the man, who had been breast-fed patriarchy his whole entire life, swallow a large lump of concern.

“Just one, huh,” the soldier said, again repeating what he’d just been told.

“Yeah, just one big nasty one,” Larry said, as he narrowed his eyes on the man he was beginning to suspect wasn’t so bright.

But just then a loud helicopter swooped overhead and startled the jumpier aliens. Some of which acted in defense, and in a matter of moments the helicopter was pulled from the air and smashed onto the ground – by what looked like an invisible hand.

Fortunately, the damage was minimal and the three passengers were able to flee the wreckage of the chopper before it burst into flames.

“We will set up a perimeter around the park that will not be breached by any of your kind, for your own protection. Is this understood?” the Casson asked with authority, which made Larry feel pretty good. Because quite frankly, he’d already forgotten that part.

“Yes, I think we can work something like that out,” the medium-sized man with the large sense of caution said, as he looked back towards the gathering military forces, back on the street.

“Why don’t you let me go and talk to them, make sure we don’t have any more misunderstandings. I’ll be right back,” he said, and then he turned and left, without bothering to wait for an answer.

“Do you think they’ll try anything?” Larry asked the Casson, whom he assumed had some pretty serious military experience since he was the leader of all the aliens, I mean... besides Larry – that is.

“No. Not right away. And not so long as we’re a source of information.”

“The more important question, Larry, is: will they believe us?” Dodger told the best boy in the entire world quite truthfully, because they’d both been here before.

“But... we have an entire alien army this time!” the boy yelled, because even pleasant little boys just get fed up sometimes with the bullshit hoops one has to go through to be considered a valued part of this society.

“Yup, an entire army of strange aliens who probably all have ulterior motives,” Dodger replied with a rather wry grin for such a naturally happy dog.

“You mean like Katrina?” Larry whispered to his dog, as he bent down to give him a good scratch behind the ear.

“You felt it too?” Dodger asked, as he sniffed into the air to see if he could detect where the little naked lady had gone.

“Felt it?” Larry asked, again scrunching up his nose in confusion.

“No,” he told his dog, as he put both arms around him to give him a good hug. “I stole Henry back from her, when she wasn’t looking.”

Chapter 16 - Rebel Yell Part 2

“You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.”

Woodrow Wilson

“Hey kiddo,” Hadley said as she walked up to the small group sitting in the middle of the large mass of aliens.

“How did you get in?” Larry asked the lady he felt sure had been his mom in a previous life.

“Oh, you know me, kiddo. I got my ways,” Hadley said, brushing the top of his head with a small kiss she would pretend never happened if anyone had asked.

“So, I thought we were going to wait six months before the invasion,” she told him and the Casson, as she sat down in-between the two.

“Couldn’t. We all materialized with Larry here, right in the middle of his street.”

“I couldn’t remember where I was six months ago, so I just concentrated on my house, on the outside of my house, and when I opened my eyes, there I was, staring at it. And all these guys were standing right behind me.”

“I thought you were all here six-months ago - or... now. Didn’t you all have an anchor you should have been pulled back to?”

Hadley had a sinking feeling that the missing link in this chain had been the responsible party here.

“Where is Katrine? Have you seen her since you jumped?”

“Not... seen,” Larry said, rather delicately, as he didn’t know quite how to put it.

At once, Dodger put his nose in the air and sniffed for her presence and then he shook his head at his boy.

“Come, let’s walk,” Larry told the redheaded college reporter, as he grabbed her by the sleeve.

And a few minutes later the three of them were about as far from the group of aliens as they could get without getting uncomfortably close to the patrolling Marines.

“I hid Henry in the bushes on my street,” the little boy blurted out just as soon as he felt it was safe to.

“I saw Katrine grab a funny looking bag, just before we all disappeared. And then, when I opened my eyes again, and I saw my house, and all of the aliens, I knew stuff went wrong... and... well, I noticed the bushes

moving across the street. So, when everyone was busy talking about what we should do next, I slipped in and found her clothes and a bag with Henry in it. Anyway, I grabbed Henry, and then hid him in a different bush. One in front of Sabrina Spellcaster's house."

"Jesus Christ, you really are a genius, aren't you?" Hadley asked, causing the boy's dog to positively beam with pride.

"Yeah, well... what are we going to do?" Larry asked, hoping Hadley had a good plan for getting them all out of this mess, again.

"I think you're going to go meet with the president. Tomorrow."

"What?" Dodger asked, suddenly more excited than if you'd told him tonight was meatloaf night.

"I heard it on the military short-wave as I drove into town. You're the official leader, Larry. From now on it's you in charge. That means meetings with important people. Probably important people from all over the world.

"Oh gosh. I wonder what my mom will say," Larry said, and then he remembered how she had told him that real heroes didn't exist anymore. They'd all sold out or moved to third-world-countries where they could still shine.

"Well," Larry said, as he took the bottle of water Hadley offered him, "here's one hero that's not going anywhere."

"Beg your pardon?" Hadley asked, when his words caught her off guard.

"My dad was a real hero. It's in my blood. If they need me to meet the president, then that's what I'll do," he told her.

"And what about Henry?" the girl asked, wondering if she should let the little boy have access to something that contained all of the information the CIA had to offer.

"You said he's just a little kid, right?" Larry asked, his voice suddenly sounding very serious.

"Yes, that's right. I don't think he's any older than you are. Not in mental age, anyway. And you're pretty bright, Larry. He might not even be as old as you are."

"Well, I was thinking, that's why he needs me. It's like when Ian got into all those bad Internet things, and the preacher from our church had to take him aside and tell him why those things were bad, and how hurting people on TV is as bad as hurting people in real life – because the heart don't know the difference."

"So, you think you can help explain to Henry that what he learned from the CIA mainframe wasn't all good?" Hadley asked, a single brow raised in both curiosity and concern.

"I don't think there's anyone better to explain it to him. Do you?" Larry asked.

And then he quickly added, "And besides, if I'm going to lead an entire army aren't I going to need all the help I can get?"

Hadley had to admit the kid was smart – and not just clever smart, but emotionally smart. He was the kind of kid that would run his decisions past his heart first, before he decided to act upon them.

And so, she nodded, and then she smiled. “I’ll go and get him, and bring him to you.”

“Thanks, Hadley,” little Larry told her. And then he asked, “What do you think Katrine will do? Do you think she’ll fight me for him?”

Hadley looked all around, and then she looked off into the distance – off towards where the military had set up their command.

“I think the older you added her to the team for a reason. And I don’t think he would have trusted someone with her capabilities if he hadn’t been absolutely certain,” she told him, quite truthfully.

Though, truth be told, Hadley still had some reservations about the alien whose very nature was that of a predator.

“If she shows up, you call me. You remember how?”

Larry nodded, and then looked down at the phone he’d gotten just the week before for his birthday, and then smiled, because he finally had a number to call on it.

“Thanks, Hadley,” the boys said again, as he scratched at his dog’s ear.

“I think it’s all going to be okay now,” he told her.

“Cuz I think I finally found my people.”

The End.

Epilogue – Treasured Item #5

*“Lead from the back -
and let others believe they are in front.”*

Nelson Mandela

Larry couldn't help but fidget some, as he sat squished between the large bird-man Timothy, and a shorter version of the Hulk, or so at least the large greenish alien seemed to him.

Which reminded Larry of his pocket full of treasures.

He'd forgotten about them entirely over the past few days, as he'd been whisked first from one important meeting to another.

And so, just for old time's sake, Larry plunged his hand into the right front pocket of his trousers, and fished them all out.

And oddly enough, all of them still felt just as important as before the alien invasion, even though he hadn't really needed them much lately.

Well... all of them, except for one.

The six-year-old Larry looked down on a crumpled photo of Chris Evans, and thought again about what his mailman friend had said. About fake heroes, and real heroes, and how the very first thing someone's gotta do is figure out what kind they're gonna be.

“What's that?” the little AI named Henry, who only existed now as part of Larry's inner mental workings, asked.

“It's a picture of someone I used to think was a hero,” Larry answered – but only by thinking about it inside his head.

“Oh, what happened?”

“I realized you can't help people you can't even see. Just like no one wanted to help me before, cuz no one could really see me. And no one wanted to see the alien invasion either, even though it was happening right under all their noses.”

Little Larry squirmed again in his seat, and then thought about the naked Katrine, who he knew was at that very moment riding up front with the limo driver – only the limo driver didn't know it.

But both Henry and Larry could see her now, even when she was invisible, now that they'd joined permanently.

Yet they both had agreed the strange alien was only there to protect them, to make sure none of the folks she cared about were harmed.

And that's how Larry felt he could explain it best.

“Just because someone says they want to help, or even think they can... unless they're willing to roll up their sleeves and get a little dirty, as my mom would say, they're not really part of the team.”

Larry looked down on the small picture he'd kept in his pocket since the first time he was six-years-old, and then crumpled it in the palm of his small hand, and then he threw it onto the floor of the limo.

“And people like Chris Evans, and all of them fake heroes, they aren't down here in the trenches with any of us. Heck, he couldn't even bother to read my mom's petition to stop Captain America from selling child slave labor chocolate.”

Larry smiled, and then he looked around at all of his strange new friends. All of them just searching for a better life, a bit of safety, and a chance to be happy.

And he knew none of that was going to happen so long as it was okay to disregard some folks, so long as it was okay to think some folks weren't entitled to justice.

“Well, I'm going to be a hero that fights for everyone,” Larry told his little internal friend, who already knew more secrets than the president himself.

“Me too Larry, Me too.”

Appendix

The Ethics of Chris Evans

At least according to me.

As a storyteller, I am often inspired by real-life current events. And honestly, nothing seems more inspiring right now, than our current media-entertainment-politics mash-up that's been happening for years, across every form of media that there is.

Which brings me to the thespian Chris Evans, and his recent attempts to launch an American political career.

You see, after I found out about Marvel and DC using their children's heroes to promote Hershey's African child slave labor chocolate – I did a bit of research into the different children's 'heroes' who are silently letting it happen.

And well, Chris Evans stood out in a big way for many reasons - many of which I will outline below.

And, it is because of this year-long observation of his online social media presence, that I now feel I can adequately outline some very serious concerns – we should all have, about not only this man's agenda, but also the agenda of the people who are pulling his proverbial strings.

However, since I don't know the man - and can't attest to any of his personal motives - I'm basing this entire article on the very observable actions Chris Evans has, and hasn't, taken. And nothing more.

Yet; I believe it's quite enough to get a clear picture of the man, and just what he stands for, at least in my opinion.

Here are some observable facts:

Mr. Evans has had his personal Twitter account since May of 2012 and in all of that time he has 'liked' zero tweets. (People generally 'like' Tweets that make them *feel* good.)

Also, since May of 2012 Mr. Evans has found only seven hundred, or so, accounts he deems worthy of his time and attention. Despite the fact that there are more than 150 million Twitter users worldwide. And despite the fact he is personally followed by over 15 million folks.

And, of the seven hundred, or so, accounts that Mr. Evans has deemed worthy of a follow – the clear majority have been verified (BV), and have a blue checkmark.

On Twitter, he identifies himself in his bio with only the name of his political website – which is loaded with tracking cookies, BTW.

And his Twitter avi... well, at the time of printing... it's still just a cold and impersonal plea to get you to vote.

Of course, he used Dodger as his banner, because there is no better way to humanize the empty face-plate of a public persona than through the use of a dog. I mean, who doesn't just love a good dog, right?

So, who is Chris Evans?

Well, I have no friggen clue, as it turns out. And neither will anyone else who is only given his social media to figure it out.

However, it is possible – through viewing his social media to figure out what he is not.

Therefore, the ethics of Chris Evans is not all that hard to extrapolate, in my opinion.

Especially when you consider the fact: **People Front That Which Is Most Important to Them.**

You see, Chris is not personal. Nor is he open, or sharing of his inner thought processes. He is closed down and restricted in all areas of his personal life. So, again, I looked at what he isn't.

For starters, Chris isn't fighting for equality within his own industry. In fact, during his twenty-five-year working history in Hollywood there has been no evidence he has actively made a difference in the numbers of working females, POC, or LGBT. And all of this - in the most sexist and racist industry in the world.

In fact, during his time in this industry we've seen it actually stagnate for those already marginalized individuals. While at the same time the increases in pay for people that look just like him (the white-male-majority) skyrocketed.

“Everything that Marvel does, it's a chess move. Nothing is by accident.”

Chris Evans

Nor is he standing up for the type and quality of stories being offered to women or any marginalized group.

In fact, he was more than happy to use a hundred-year-old mother of three as a prop in his movie “Knives Out”. Go ahead, ask him who was looking after Nana. Ask him why she was left to sit alone all night, ask him why nobody gave a shit about Nana.

Then ask Jamie Lee Curtis, Daniel Craig, Ana de Armas, and Rian Johnson – because they all overlooked a hundred-year-old woman in order to tell a story about her son.

I mean... literally overlooked her entire character as if being a woman made that alright. As if no one would even notice, or ask about the old woman sitting in the window at two am. (*Because they were right – no one except me seems bothered by the fact that womanhood – even motherhood marks someone out as being inconsequential to a story.*)

But the simple truth is... people don't write and tell these kinds of stories – where women (and 100-year-old mothers) are used purely as props – unless they don't actually acknowledge ‘certain’ people as humans.

Let's call this the ‘**disease of indifference**’. (A disease that has clearly infected the majority of our ‘social elites’.)

Please note: for the sake of this article, I'll be using Brenda Morales' definition of indifference:

"Indifference is the complete opposite of social commitment. A person becomes indifferent to another because the feeling of responsibility and respect towards humanity doesn't mean anything to him anymore."

Chris didn't have an issue with the great-grandmother of his character being seen as an object, because her needs didn't mean anything to him. Because when you really think about it, the meat and metal of what being a real woman is, was rendered valueless and totally invisible by everyone who participated in the "Knives Out" movie.

Here's another example of Chris' indifference:

"I think diamonds represent luxury, indulgence, and class."

Chris Evans

*"What do I geek out about? What am I? Hmmm.
I love movies. I watch movies. I like big, sweeping epics,
like Ed Zwick stuff: 'The Last Samurai,' 'Legends of the Fall,'
'Blood Diamond,' 'Glory.'"*

Chris Evans

Chris knows diamonds are purely the product of slavery, and yet he doesn't equate a loss of luxury, or value, or meaning of class to them because of it.

Just like he knows Captain America has been used for years to sell candy that was only made possible through the slavery of millions of African children. Chris knows his children's hero is being used to sell African-child-slave-labor chocolate to your kids – and still... *he isn't speaking up about it.*

"The simple fact that they have to be elected to stay in office. People want to say, 'I'm going to go to D. C. to be a politician, and I'm going to live by my morals and principles, and everything will be okay.' But once you're there, you have to start playing this weird game of chess; you have to start measuring whether the juice is worth the squeeze. It starts with little compromises and justifications, and before you know it..."

Chris Evans

Chris Evans knows his industry is corrupt, he just doesn't care – that's why he keeps pointing his long finger OVER THERE. *"Look at all those troubles over there – that I didn't cause, that I'm not silently partaking in, that I'm not benefiting by the millions from."* He might as well be saying.

"If I'm acting at all, it's going to be under Marvel contract, or I'm going to be directing. I can't see myself pursuing acting strictly outside of what I'm contractually obligated to do."

Chris Evans

He just wants to be your next Senator.

**It's important to keep in mind who pays Chris' wages.*

He also wants to use the credentials of a fake hero to get there.

And yet, has anyone seen the man genuinely act heroically? I mean, he continues to benefit from the most sexist and racist industry in the world, and yet he openly preaches 'equality'.

But let's just face it... THAT kind of HYPOCRISY is something we all have to stop overlooking.

**"I don't know any form of art or entertainment
that can affect people the way movies can.
I know it sounds ridiculous,
but they can change your world.
They can change your views."**

Chris Evans

The truth is, the media is blending entertainment - with news - with politics - in a way that's never happened before.

And through doing this the NEW MEDIA validates false credentials, and empowers based on outside appearances and 'social hits'.

Think about it this way, by showing us the opinions of Mark Ruffalo and Chris Evans in equal measure with global policy makers and leaders, we are being artificially 'trained' to hear their voices with the same weight.

And that's because the media conglomerates have a vested interest in creating celebrities that can promote *and even manufacture* a product for mass consumption.

And sometimes that 'product' is the 'truth' as they want you to see it.

This is done through celebrity gossip, as well as overtly commercial ventures. This way they control both sides of the celebrity's public image; though both are false narratives, that only represent a snapshot of the brand at any given time - as this fluctuates with the needs of the buyer of the celebrity's services.

And that's why we have a very public ranking system for our celebrities (A-list, B-list, etc.).

Because the media needs to have a way to keep the 'merit-making' celebrities in control.

But once they have an A-list celeb willing to be '*squeezed*' - they use that celebrity to create, and reinforce a very harsh class-system within our society.

And celebrities like Chris Evans participate in this wholeheartedly, because they've bought into the idea that they are somehow more relevant, more educated, more talented, more proper, and therefore more deserving... because they have garnered more attention. One way or the other.

Unfortunately (and the media is well aware of this BTW), 'celebrity' and 'fame' is how today's youth create their basic value-forming ideals.

Just talk to any kid - and they'll tell you. They know all of the famous people – and hardly any actual heroes. Odd that... considering our society's current fascination with the ***hero concept***. Anyhoo...

There is no other vehicle in the world where one can rise to such a viable status of power and authority than via 'fame'.

And yet, there is no talent, intelligence or industriousness required these days to attain fame.

I mean, what are Chris' actual credentials for informing our young college students on politics? Other than his willingness to play ball like a politician?

Value-formation is actually a super tender subject when it comes to kids, especially the girls in our society – especially given their marginalized history in the stories that have come out of Hollywood. I mean, a female actress is more likely to get ***pretend-raped*** now – than at any other time in history.

And yet... Chris Evans is not sending supportive value-forming messages to our females.

And this can be proven by his total disregard for those people who don't have a blue checkmark (BV).

Because the hard-fact is that most women today, especially young women, are in service-oriented jobs, and therefore unlikely to have a blue checkmark, and therefore unlikely to be followed by Chris.

In fact, judging by those he does choose to follow, it is highly unlikely Chris follows many (if any) people outside of his own socio-economic group.

And as far as I'm concerned, ***this is just more proof that he is not interested in gaining a greater awareness***, as he does not expand his own learning horizons to those he has deemed as 'underserving' of his time and attention.

And when you really look at it – it's easy to see that all of his supposed '***moral outrage***' is, in-truth limited only to the things he knows he can't control.

Things he isn't secretly benefiting from, like the blatant sexism, and racism in his own industry. Or, Marvel's deal with Hershey's – which utilizes millions of African Child Slaves to harvest their cocoa.

In fact, we only hear Mr. Evans complain if the message will reinforce his perceived social class and position of authority.

**“But one thing I'm really trying
to stay away from is declaring,
'This is what's wrong with today.'”**

Chris Evans

In my opinion, Mr. Evans use of his social media platforms strictly to promote a political agenda, is proof enough that his true desire is to claim a position of authority.

And yet, these *'celebrity professionals'* are a huge problem, because their voices are often amplified (by the money-drenched and heavily biased media) to such an extent as to drown out the opinions of more educated and more independently thinking people.

Just like the movie industry keeps hiring the same three black guys for all the token black roles.

(Sorry Samuel L. Jackson – if the truth hurts – but if you hadn't been so eager to take every single job offered to you – they might have had to introduce more black faces, thereby making it easier for them to get roles later on. But you got the money and the fame. And the people who pay you got to limit the impact of black voices – for the past forty years.)

The hard truth of the matter is this: if it's not part of the *media-branded message* then it now gets lost in the sea of noise that is the internet. And only *'branded messages'*, that are constantly being reaffirmed by the *bought-and-paid-for celebrity endorsers* are heard by the masses.

But make no mistake, these 'celebrities' are just fodder for their bosses. As their bodies and souls are cut up and auctioned off bit-by-bit with each role, each endorsement, and each compromise they make.

So, they are certainly not going to be *personal winners*, which I define as someone who can claim self-actualization. Because in-truth, these celebrity 'merit-makers' live in a constant state of fear that their 'value' will change.

That's why Mr. Evans can't 'like' a tweet. (At least in my opinion.)

Because he lives in a constant state of fear that he will say or do the wrong thing, make the wrong association, be seen in a different light – and then suddenly his value will change.

Sadly, this wouldn't (couldn't) happen if he valued the ordinary human condition – instead of seeing it as a state of 'lesser-than', to be risen above, or to be looked down upon and made fun of.

This is also why celebrities like Mr. Evans continue to participate in what I call *'Top-Down Charity'* – whereby they (the upper-class celebrities) get to exploit problems affecting 'normal people' – while at the same time holding a position of total indifference regarding the social injustices they continue to personally benefit from within their own industry.

(Like taking Hershey's child slave money.)

By forcing their 'fan base' to focus on 'helping some poor less fortunate' they change the narrative away from 'I'm taking advantage of the women and POC in my industry - all of the time – in order to make vastly larger sums of money than they do', to 'Let's all focus on these poor black kids in Africa' (Sound about right Ben Affleck?)

These perverse 'Top-Down Charities' also have the effect of creating a *'benevolent celebrity class'* – and by placing themselves into this different class – this 'controlling class' – the celebrities now feel they have further reason to distance themselves, and to judge the so-called 'normal people'.

'Fan Culture' is another name for it. When a person believes their community is made up of just 'peers' and 'fans'.

'Fan Culture' allows for extreme excesses within the 'celebrity realm' and routinely makes excuses for their shitty-ass behavior.

'Fan culture' is a tool used by narcissistic overlords who attempt to maintain a false sense of control through the manipulation of 'social class' via their use of power.

Celebrities wield this power by choosing whom to acknowledge with legitimacy, and whom to deem beneath them.

This also reinforces the 'celebrity class structure' that artificially inflates their opinions on grander issues, even though their actions may be (and often are) in direct opposition to their words.'

And still... we take them at their word. (Such a disgusting pattern.)

And let's just face it, celebrity culture is ubiquitous with social media – because that is how they demonstrate their 'value' as it pertains to the rest of society – the rest of us.

And Mr. Evans clearly utilizes his social media to express a great deal of contempt without explanation, or example, especially from his own life.

And, quite frankly, he doesn't feel any need to 'put up - or shut up' - because the media has given him the credentials to not have to do so.

And so... Mr. Evans feels entitled to judge – not only because the media emboldens him - but because they also endorse him. Endorse him based on fake credentials and opinions - that he's not been asked to back up with any real action.

And around and around we go.

But make no mistake, though his allegiances and judgments are communicated passively, and with a great deal of care and consideration, he continues to make them time-and again. Again and again, reinforcing his choice of a meritocracy-based society. Reinforcing again and again - that 'celebrity' means more than 'non-celebrity'.

Because through his use of his social media platforms, Mr. Evans continues to contribute to the formation of a 'social class hierarchy', and a system whereby some people are deemed more deserving than others, and where some people have more credit when it comes to speaking up, for not only themselves but for others as well.

He continues to reinforce that some peoples' time is more 'valuable' because they have become false whitewashed versions of themselves - versions which are more palatable for mass consumption. (Which basically means they can never offer any real threat to the status quo.)

And honestly, I don't think people like Mr. Evans, who can use a hundred-year-old great-grandmother as a movie prop (where her entire life was rendered basically meaningless), can see the value in himself, or in you.

Because he is a merit-based human, where merit equals value. And the merits he holds dear are the superficial ones of wealth, formal education, status, and materialism. And in that hierarchy, there's simply no place for grandmas or mothers who only ever raised children.

People like Mr. Evans say they 'see your value', and yet... they simply don't demonstrate holding value for the common man and woman.

They say they 'believe in morals', but often they act in direct opposition to those morals on a very regular basis.

And quite honestly, the fact is Mr. Evans continues to work and make his money in the most racist and sexist industry in the United States – and THAT should be regarded as a primary red flag.

Because until he spends more time cleaning up his own industry than he does trying to use a false hero's credentials to worm his way into a political career, nothing he says should be taken seriously.

I mean... you simply can't continue to benefit from inequality, while at the same time saying you stand for equality.

At least not anymore.

*“The bar is so low that literally I did a normal thing,
like on par with saying ‘God bless you’ when somebody sneezes,
and people thought it was—I don’t know.”*

Chris Evans