CHAPTER 03 — SEVENTY PERCENT OF A LIFE

Expanded English reconstruction; not a recovered verbatim original

01 — Awakening

Roy opened his eyes to a familiar sort of medical ceiling and an unfamiliar response from his own body. Six hours had passed. NIL-11R was stable, his power reserve nearly full, his peak motor output exactly seventy percent of the former specification. Rachel would not call the interval a death or a guaranteed continuity of awareness. His neural activity had not reached zero; that fact answered less than Roy wished.

The awakening was gentler than Roy expected. The new regulator announced stability with confidence his own memories could not match. He tested each finger, each joint, each small intention translated into motion. Nothing was visibly missing. Then he tried to rise too quickly and met a resistance so slight an ordinary person might never have noticed. Roy noticed. For a body that had once answered instantly, a fraction of hesitation could feel like an entirely different life.

The medical bay smelled faintly of sterilizing fluid and damp concrete carried through the air system from the reservoir beyond. Roy tried to determine whether the previous six hours had passed for him at all. Rachel explained that detectable neural processes had continued during the transfer, but those measurements could not prove what he had experienced while cognition was isolated. He was accustomed to mechanical precision and found the limits of that precision infuriating. A man could be reconstructed

according to a thousand verified specifications while the question of who had awakened remained unanswered. Rachel had learned not to promise more than the instruments could establish. She told him that he was stable, then waited for the next question. It was about time, as she had expected: not what the clock showed, but how much time the replacement could grant.

02 — Helium

The original regulator depended on high-purity helium under constraints the government controlled. Rachel's alternate circuit traded exceptional peak cooling performance for practical independence. It was not a reservoir of new years. The old irreversible wear remained. Roy asked for a life expectancy; she refused to invent one. He liked the refusal better than the confident promises of technicians who had once described a four-year lifespan as sufficient.

Rachel showed him the old helium-based thermal architecture and the substitute she had designed from materials that could be obtained without asking the Ministry for permission. The alternative worked, but its heat capacity demanded a hard ceiling on peak output. Roy called that a weakness. Rachel called it independence. Neither description was complete. Their argument ended when he asked how much time had been restored by the surgery. Rachel answered that the dangerous immediate failure had been averted, not the already-spent portion of his lifespan replaced.

03 — A Failed Dodge

In the training room Roy caught falling targets easily, then failed when the machine arms accelerated. He had selected a movement suited to yesterday's body. The strike landed before he arrived at safety. He made the same error twice before laughing at himself. Rachel demanded rest. Roy

demanded the same exercise, slower, so he could discover where judgment might replace lost speed.

He first approached the training machine as if nothing fundamental had changed. The arm approached, he chose an evasion that his previous body would have completed, and metal struck his shoulder before his motion arrived. He tried again and failed again. The humiliation was almost comic. After all he had survived, an ordinary controlled training device had shown him the limit of an old habit. He lay on the padded floor for a moment, then laughed at himself instead of at the machine.

Roy's first failed movement came with an almost insulting lack of drama. A padded mechanical arm touched his shoulder where he had expected empty air. The training computer marked the impact and reset. On the second attempt, he tried to make the old movement faster. The body could not provide the missing acceleration. The familiar instinct to dominate the apparatus through output was a memory of a former machine, not a realistic plan for this one. Rachel nearly stopped the exercise when he fell, but she saw him beginning to smile. Roy had begun to understand that the machine was not humiliating him. It was providing an accurate description of the body he now possessed. He asked for the same test again and committed himself to learning without demanding that the equipment pretend he was unchanged.

04 — Precision

On the next run he stepped into the mechanism’s movement and redirected it rather than attempting to outrun it. One machine arm disabled another. Peak output dropped below half his old capacity. The lesson was uncomfortable but useful: former strength had allowed him to correct mistakes after making them. Now he must avoid making them, or turn an

adversary’s energy to his own purpose.

The next attempt took less force. Rather than moving away from the arm's full acceleration, Roy stepped inside its path and let the joint's own momentum carry it past him. Two machines collided while his output remained comfortably below the ceiling. Rachel looked at the result and realized the replacement had not merely removed capability. It was forcing Roy to make finer distinctions between speed, timing, and necessity. The body's new limitation could become a strategy that his pursuers had never rehearsed.

05 — The Minister and the Child

Elsewhere Chronos watched laboratory clocks diverge while a suspended metal sphere occupied incompatible apparent positions. The Minister called it an instrument problem and demanded greater obedience. Chronos replied that the problem might lie in the Minister’s definition of a reliable measurement. When ordered to retrieve Roy, he said he wished to see what Rachel had changed. The Minister did not appreciate curiosity in an operative.

Chronos met the Minister in an instrument room where atomic clocks were supposed to agree. They did not. The child moved a silver sphere without changing the surrounding magnetic field and seemed more interested in the failure of the measurement than in the movement itself. When the Minister spoke of obedience, Chronos asked which authority had decided that the room's clocks told the truth. The question was playful on its surface and disobedient in its substance. The Minister found himself stepping backward from something much smaller than he was.

The silver test sphere hung motionless in the center of the Minister's instrument chamber. Chronos changed the way it appeared to occupy space

while the magnetic sensors reported no corresponding force. One clock lost nearly a second. Another gained a fraction. The researchers stared at their graphs as though the contradictions were a personal insult. Chronos studied their faces instead. He had discovered long ago that adults were willing to record the most improbable observations as long as the observations did not challenge their right to issue orders. When an effect implied that their own authority could be measured and found wanting, they called it deviance. The Minister spoke of procedures and obedience, but the boy could see the familiar fear behind the voice. It was the same fear he remembered from the first time he had asked a question outside the approved list.

06 — Old Technology

Rachel led Roy to an isolated archive behind a physical lock. It contained obsolete media that modern infrastructure could not remotely overwrite. One label read RB / CONTINUITY / 11. Its authentication required Adrian Tyrell’s original MagicGate reader, not a modern imitation. Roy asked why his supposed absence had an archive. Rachel said the eleven years might not have been empty even though his present consciousness held no memory of them.

Below Rachel's laboratories stood an archive designed for a world before universal network identities. The access door required a physical key. Nothing behind it could be reached through a routine administrative search. Roy was surprised by the primitive objects: sealed cabinets, isolated terminals, and removable media whose connectors belonged to another century. Then he recognized an index bearing his initials and the word continuity. Its number was eleven. Rachel told him the number measured years rather than generations.

07 — C-05

An index entry named a secondary observer: C-05. Rachel recognized the code and reluctantly associated it with Chronos. He had appeared in research records from before the current Minister’s appointment. His extraordinary measurement anomalies were not an approved weapon from a neat government development schedule; they were an unresolved consequence of older work.

The index did not identify an uninterrupted consciousness. It identified a subject and an observer. The observer code was C-05. Rachel's reluctance changed the shape of the discovery. An archive that should have been a passive account of research seemed to connect directly to a child who could make modern sensors disagree about the length of a corridor. Roy asked whether the child had known him in those lost years. Rachel answered that he had appeared in the records, but what he was then remained unclear.

Roy examined the old media as if the physical plastic might reveal a history that the encrypted data could not. It was external storage, ordinary enough to fit between his fingers, and had never been part of his living anatomy. That distinction mattered. The government had treated his head and core as the only valuable repositories of truth; here was evidence preserved precisely because it could be detached, hidden, and carried without his body. Rachel explained that the necessary reader had belonged to the old Tyrell generation and relied on physical authentication. Adrian might still own a working unit. The implication was unsettling: an answer to the question of Roy's identity could depend on obsolete components that survived only because someone had cared enough not to discard them.

08 — The Woman’s Silence

Roy asked whether he had been alive during the missing years. Rachel answered with care: his present body had not been active, yet records

existed concerning entities or systems bearing his identity. An archive could prove a procedure had occurred; it could not grant him personal memories of that procedure. The distinction felt like another kind of wound.

Rachel admitted that the reconstruction attempts had not all been performed on the same body or under the same technical assumptions. Fragments of memory could be preserved while the person who remembered them remained absent. Roy found that possibility more disturbing than the reduction in his strength. The language of research promised continuity, but the archive contained no proof that one subject had lived through every stage. He asked her not to protect him from the question merely because the answer might injure him.

09 — A Visit Through Glass

Chronos appeared as a reflection where no child stood. A wall seemed farther away than its construction allowed. He asked Roy whether he remembered the white room. Roy recognized an image and a voice but could not identify their origin. Rachel called the child C-05; Chronos disliked the designation. Before disappearing, he said someone had waited a long time for Roy to remember.

The child's reflection appeared in a pane of glass while the room behind Roy remained empty. It asked whether he remembered a white room. He saw a flash of pale walls and a closed door, not enough to know whether it was memory, suggestion, or a recording imported by some old procedure. Rachel reacted before Roy did. The archive's observer had found them, and the encounter left her with a fear she was unwilling to disguise behind scientific language.

The image of the white room arrived without context. Roy saw a closed door, a smooth ceiling, and a child whose question felt familiar without

attaching itself to a personal memory. It could have been a fragment imported by an experiment, a suggestion induced by Chronos, or a genuine trace of an experience nobody had documented openly. Rachel refused to assign it a meaning. Roy grew angry at that caution until he recognized that haste was what had made the experiments dangerous in the first place. Someone had assumed that enough matching memories settled the existence of a continuing person. Now he was being asked to live with the opposite discipline: evidence first, identity claim later. He returned to the training room to practice moving in a body whose limits, at least, could be measured.

10 — Learning a Smaller Body

Roy returned to training and completed complex sequences at low thermal load. He had become less spectacular and more exact. He told Rachel he wanted every record of the missing years, even if the answer destroyed the simple identity he had accepted. She warned him that there might be no answer. Roy said that uncertainty already belonged to him; he would at least decide what to do with it. — END OF CHAPTER —

Roy returned to the training floor after the apparition was gone. In the silence he worked through a series of attacks without trying to reach the old maximum. His successes were quieter and his failures more informative. He could not decide whether an earlier Roy had truly lived during the eleven missing years. He could decide how the present Roy would use the time available. That distinction did not solve the case, but it gave him a place to begin.