

XI.
WERNICKE'S
AREA

“WHEN A WORD is written, it's fast asleep. It's tucked beneath the covers of a book and resting there silently.”

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“That's the difference between written and spoken words. Spoken are meant for somebody *who's there*. But written are silent, waiting for someone who isn't there, someone who will read them later, but who knows where, and who knows if ever. A book is always sleeping, always waiting for someone who isn't there.”



“I've been here for many years now, in this library, tending to the books and stacks. Every day I scan the rows and check to make

sure everything is in order. That each book is in the right place, and that its spine and lining haven't begun to deteriorate."



"Sometimes I find notes tucked between the pages of books. Secret messages passed between strangers, and whenever I find such a note, I make sure to remove it, to throw it away. My job is to maintain the integrity of the collection here, which, as you can see, is quite large in scale."



"And every now and again, when time permits, I'll slip open the pages of a book and begin to read it. I consider this part of my job as well. Though it may seem unnecessary, I find that opening the pages of books helps maintain their longevity. For whatever reason, I find that the act of opening a book actually prolongs its life."



"A month ago, I was in the stacks, and I opened a book as I tend to do, and I noticed something different with one of the pages. I placed it back and opened another book, and then another, and I noticed the same peculiarity that I'd noticed in the first. It was subtle, so I couldn't quite make sense of it at the time, but as my mind came around to it, I realized that the words, the ones I'd read, no longer made any sense.

I would read a sentence of language, and at the end of it, I'd have nothing in my head. I'd have no thought whatsoever, no way to piece back the logic of the line."



"Mind you, the words were still there on the page. The same letters as before, the same arrangement. But suddenly none of them meant anything. None of them added up. It was as if each word had been plucked of its meaning. Just shapes on a page pointing nowhere."



"So I continued to read the books. I'd flip them open and scan through, because of course, this is my job. To maintain the collection. And I figure, as long as the books are being opened, their spines will stay intact, their linings straight and sturdy. But each day, I noticed the same phenomenon. That the words only worked as shapes. And I read them that way, as abstract figures, as a language that could only communicate through form."



"The running motion of the river *r*, the dotted *i* and valley *v*. When I came across the word *s-u-n*, it stared me straight between the eyes. Only reason I knew the word was in fact *sun* was because I drew it with my hand. This is where it starts to get strange."



“As I read these books, I began drawing on a pad of notepaper next to them. I’d draw with my left hand as my eyes scanned the page, and to my surprise, I’d look over and see what I’d scribbled. If the word *b-i-r-d* appeared in a book, I’d look over and see a *bird* drawn on the notebook paper. Another word, I’d look over and see I’d scribbled it there, to my surprise. So somehow, on a certain level, I was aware of what the words were pointing to. But my active mind, the one scanning the page, had no clue what any of the words meant. They were just shapes, lines suggesting a form but nothing beyond it.”

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DAVID CONNOR

“When the word *s-u-n* appeared, I looked over at the pad and saw that I’d drawn a *sun* there. That my left hand had recognized the word and rendered it apart from the book. This struck me, because I hadn’t seen the sun in days then, not even in a drawing. There were no images of the sun that had crossed me since it disappeared, until this moment, until I saw that I’d scribbled it next to me on paper.”



“*What could it mean?* I thought. That my mind could no longer render the word *s-u-n* but that my left hand had. That it had known what my eyes had seen, even though my mind

had no clue whatsoever. It led me to suspect that maybe the sun was still hidden somewhere, but that the path to it was out of my control. That the sun could still be found, but that the only way towards it would be circuitous.”



“So I kept doing this, reading the senseless words and drawing them with my left hand. And eventually, I’d filled the entire pad with drawings and moved on to a new one. But the drawing of the sun lingered in my head. Even when I left the library at night, to go home and sleep, I’d see its image as I closed my eyes for bed. I’d see it there, and when I woke up in the morning, it would be there again. Something about the drawing was trying to communicate a message to me, but I couldn’t figure it out. I couldn’t understand what the drawing was trying to say. Until just a few days ago, it dawned on me that the drawing of the sun was pointing somewhere, to some part of *the Mind* the sun had disappeared to.”



“Of course, the sun had disappeared from memory. I couldn’t remember it. And it had disappeared from language. Words no longer meant anything. But the *image* of the sun was still somewhere, it must have been, because my hand had remembered how to draw it. So then I realized, it was *vision*. The sun must be hidden somewhere it could be *seen*. Even though

I couldn't remember it, or read the word on a page, the image still made sense."

A library materializes out of nothing, like eyesight flickering on. From the rafters, a stack of books comes staggering down into its shadow, and everywhere the library extends, the walls are papered over in rows of books. Rows and stackings of books and encyclopedias in various stages of wear.

From a few feet away, the voice of the librarian carries towards me, and I see him standing there, an older man tucked into the waistline of his pants. He stares at me through a pair of wide-rimmed glasses, which turn his eyes the same size as his face.

"Can you see me?" he says, squinting forward, and I nod. The librarian adjusts his glasses and squints again.



"What are you doing?" he asks, and I mutter something. The librarian smiles and nods again. "It's the sun," he says, smiling. "You're after the sun, that's why you're here."

He turns and signals with his hand. *Follow me*, he mutters, and the two of us walk to the back of the library, then down a long flight of stairs twisting into the bowels of the basement. The stairs wind down and down further, much farther than I'd imagined the library could go, and by the time

we get to the bottom, the librarian opens the door to a room and we walk inside.

It's quiet in there, and when the librarian shuts the door, a wide hush falls over the entire space. I look around and dimly see a row of books wrap fully across the wall, forming an odd kind of soundproofing.

I start to speak but notice my voice get muffled immediately in the air, my words taken from the room and flattened into silent book letters. The librarian starts to speak as well, but his voice is muffled too, lost in the thickness of the air and gone silent. As he speaks, all I see is the movement of his mouth, his throat and tongue forming the shape of words, but most of them evade me.

Can you hear? he mutters silently, and I shake my head no. The librarian adjusts his glasses and repeats the question, still no sound.

After another back-and-forth, he nods to himself slightly, then turns to the wall and takes down a book, leaving it flat open on a table before me. He points to the cover page, and I look over his shoulder to see what's there, but the words are impossible to decipher. I look straight at them, but they appear as a foreign alphabet might.

An entire paragraph of nonsense, of letters shaped like arrows and holes—like knots and wires configured in arbitrary

loops. For a moment, a word resembles something I know, but with the movement of a line, it changes meaning completely.

What language is this? I ask.

Eventually the librarian shifts the page to something near the back, a diagram I can make sense of—a depiction of the solar system, with the planets orbiting around the middle, but in the very middle, there's nothing—there's a spot where the sun is missing. I look up at the librarian, and he mutters a word, but again, it's lost in the stacks.

Sun, I see him mutter, I think. *Sun*, he says, and then I look down and realize we're reading *Dr. Higley's* book.

This is in another language, I say. I read a line, but the words fall like wrong notes in a scale. I see a word, but as soon as my mind begins to process it, the word itself changes into something else. A word that looks like the word but means another thing entirely. *Sun. Sum. Son. Some.*

I flip back to the diagram and stare at it. I stare at the spot where the sun should be and see a small piece of silver foil there—a crinkled dot of foil—and I stare down at it, noticing something forming in the reflection. I stare down at the central dot, squinting my eyes and noticing the reflection of something shimmering back.

An eye, I mutter.

I look up at the librarian, but he's staring down too. He's staring at the diagram.

An eye, I mutter, leaning closer, and I see it there, a singular eye reflected back from the silver dot—a round iris and pupil staring up from the foil. *Whose eye is this?* I think, and continue to stare down at the silver reflection.

It's not my own, I know. It can't be, because no matter how far forward or backward I lean, the reflection of the eye remains the same. Even if I squint up close to the silver foil, the reflection of the eye maintains the same distance. As if someone were staring at me through the pages of the book.

What is this? I mutter, but the librarian remains focused on the page and doesn't look up. *What does this mean?* I say.

I try to read the caption below the diagram, but the words point me in no direction. Still the eye remains staring from the center of the page. Not my own, but an eye reflected up. *Could it be Dr. Higley's? But how?* And soon, the longer I think, the contents of my thoughts themselves become muted. I can hardly hear the words forming within my own head. The words form and become immediately dim, immediately harder to decipher, until all of them are nonsense, until none of them can be heard.

And soon, all I can see is the eye at the center, the solar

system circled around it. I squint down and bring my face even closer, as close as I can possibly go to the foil, until it's my entire field of vision, the silver foil and the eye reflected up. I get so close that the iris disappears and all I see is the reflection of the pupil, the black hole worming down into the depths of the page, the book descending into the folds of the cover. I see through the bottom of the reflection, lower and lower and lower, like the stairs down into the bowels of the basement, and eventually, after what feels like a minute, I lift my head up and look back at the page. I stare down at it, at the words there, which come suddenly into focus, which make sense to me all at once. But now, as I squint at the foil, I notice nothing is there—the eye is missing—only silver shimmering up.

What is this? I mutter, and hear my voice echo from the walls, which are cleared of books somehow. The shelves are empty, and soon I can hear myself clearly in the chambers of the room. “What is this?” I say, looking down at the diagram, and then up at the librarian.

But now the librarian stares at me with his glasses off. He stares at me and points to his eye. He points to his eye and mutters something.

“Go inside,” he says, pointing to his left eye and shutting it closed.

“Go inside,” he says, and without warning, I'm elsewhere in *the Mind*.