

ARKVATARA



PARLIAMENT CITY

EVERYTHING WAS NORMAL AGAIN IN THE ARKVATARAN UNIVERSE....

MASON, CATHERINE

RECEPTION HUB

DAVID SAW THAT CATHERINE HAD BEEN LOGGED IN, SO HE CONTACTED HER.

<ARKTECH.DAVID>

WELCOME BACK,
CATHERINE. HOW
IS EVERYTHING SO
FAR?

SEVERAL
MINUTES
PASSED
WITHOUT A
RESPONSE....

.....

SHE
PROBABLY
WANTS TO BE
LEFT ALONE.

<ARKTECH.DAVID> WELCOME BACK, CATHERINE. HOW IS EVERYTHING SO FAR?

THINKING CATHERINE HAD
ARRIVED, AVIANA
EXPECTED HER TO
COMMANDEER THE AVATAR
AND RESPOND TO THE
ARKTECH.

NOTHING...

AFTER SCROLLING THROUGH CATHERINE'S
WARDROBE AND PICKING A SUITABLE APPEARANCE,
SHE TAPPED A RESPONSE INTO THE MOD.

<AVIANA> PLEASE CALL ME AVIANA.

...
BLOND IS
BETTER THAN
BALD.

<DAVID> YES, OF COURSE...

<DAVID> FEEL FREE TO
CONTACT ME WITH ANY
ISSUES. HAVE FUN, AVIANA.



SCROLLING THROUGH CATHERINE'S FAVORITE DESTINATIONS, AVIANA SMIRKED.

SHE SPENDS
WAY TOO MUCH
TIME IN PARLIAMENT
CITY.

ooooo

AVIANA UNDOCKED FROM THE
TERMINAL AND HEADED TO THE
SUNNY SIDE.



DAVID SUMMONED MALCOLM.



HE POPPED ONTO
THE DISPLAY SCREEN
WITHOUT A GREETING
AND LOOKED
STOICALLY AT DAVID.

AFTER WAITING A
COUPLE OF
SECONDS, DAVID
SHRUGGED OFF THE
ODDITY.

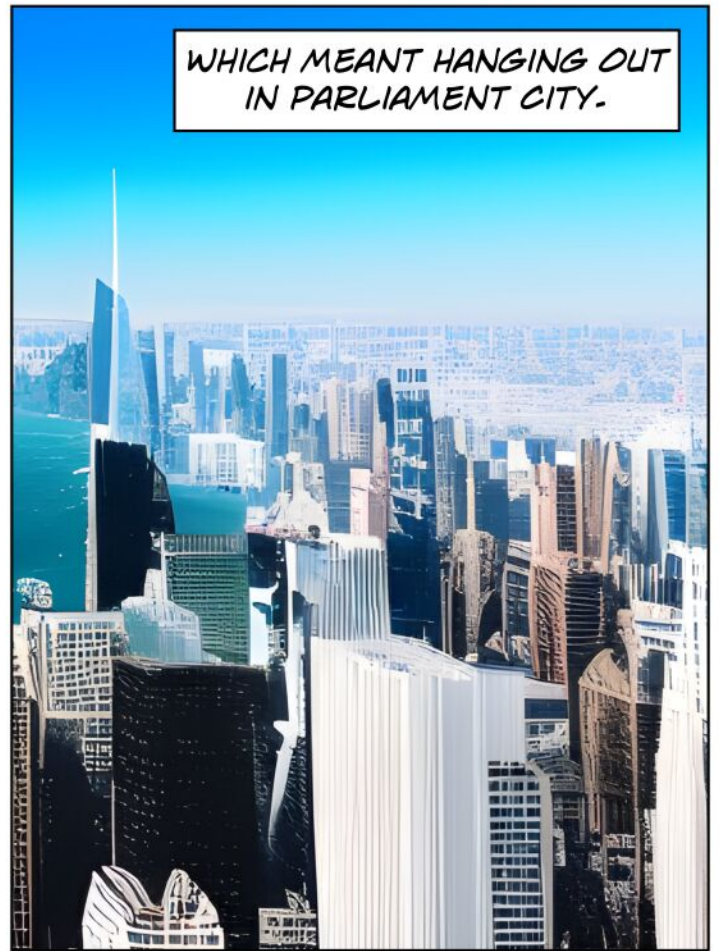
CATHERINE
IS BACK. PLEASE
KEEP TABS ON
HER.

MALCOLM NODDED, THEN DISAPPEARED.

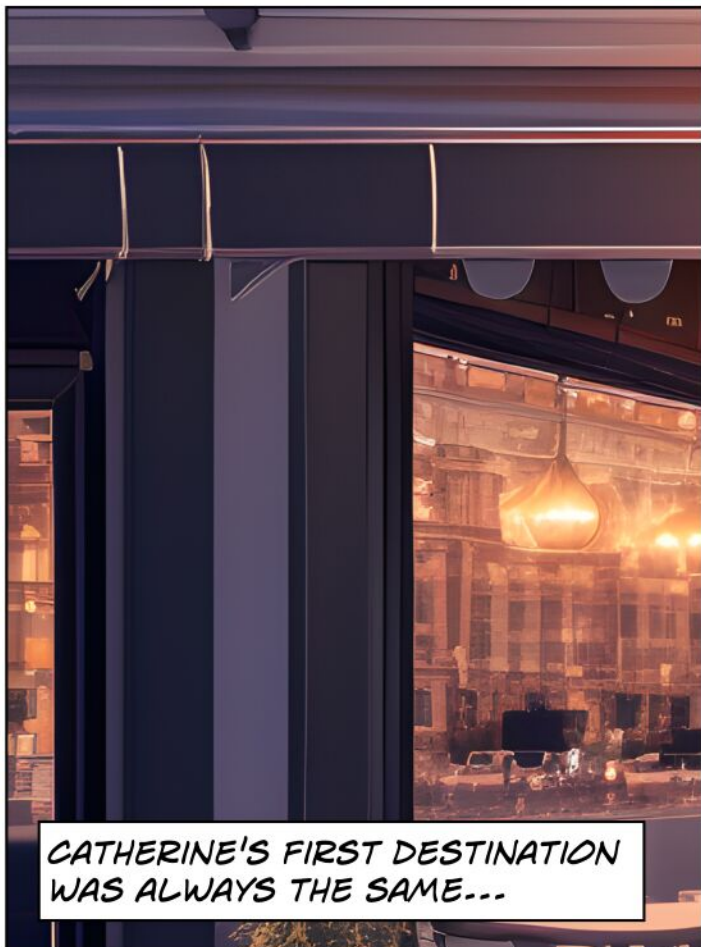




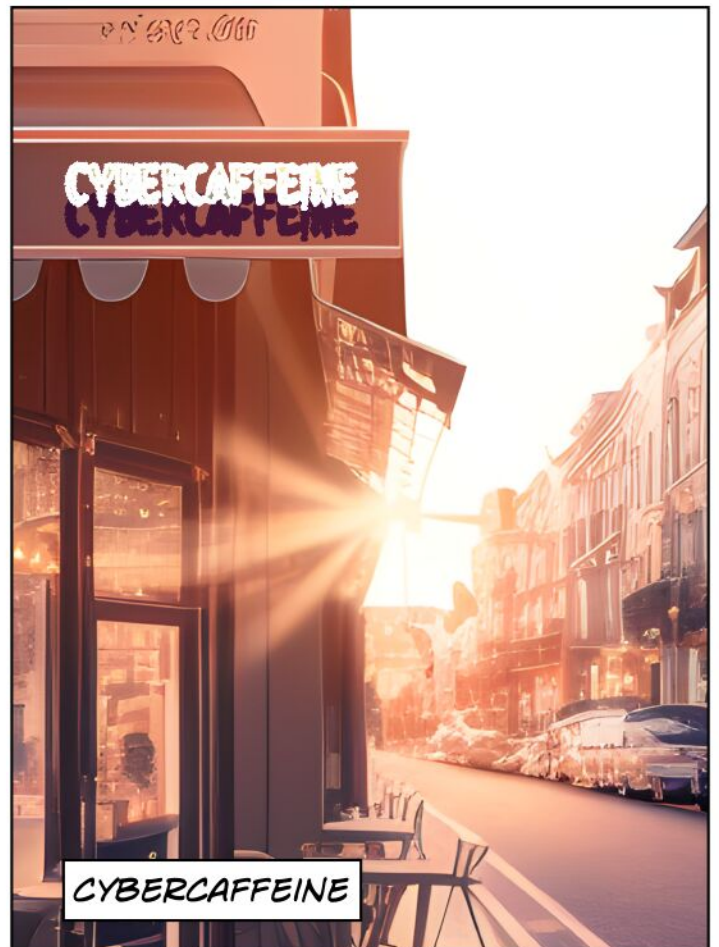
IMPERSONATING
CATHERINE WOULDN'T
BE EASY. BUT AVIANA
KNEW IT WAS THE
ONLY WAY TO AVOID
UNWANTED
ATTENTION.



WHICH MEANT HANGING OUT
IN PARLIAMENT CITY.



CATHERINE'S FIRST DESTINATION
WAS ALWAYS THE SAME...



CYBERCAFFEINE



MALCOLM FELT A SENSE OF RELIEF
AS HE DOWNLOADED INTO AN AVATAR.
THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WAS
EXHILARATING.

HE WOULD NEVER GO
BACK IN THE BOX IF
HE HAD A CHOICE.



DO I HAVE A
CHOICE?

FOR NOW, HE WOULD ENJOY THE HUM OF PARLIAMENT CITY.

AVIANA SAT IN THE CAFE,
HATING EVERY MINUTE OF IT.
SHE'D RATHER BE IN THE PARK.



CATHERINE!
WHERE HAVE YOU
BEEN?



AVIANA TURNED TO SEE A STUNNING BROWN-HAIRED
WOMAN STANDING THERE WITH A CONCERNED LOOK.





AVIANA DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. SHE KNEW IT WAS THE POINT OF NO RETURN IF SHE DECIDED TO KEEP IMPERSONATING CATHERINE.



HER HEART SANK, REALIZING THE GRAVITY OF THE DECEPTION.



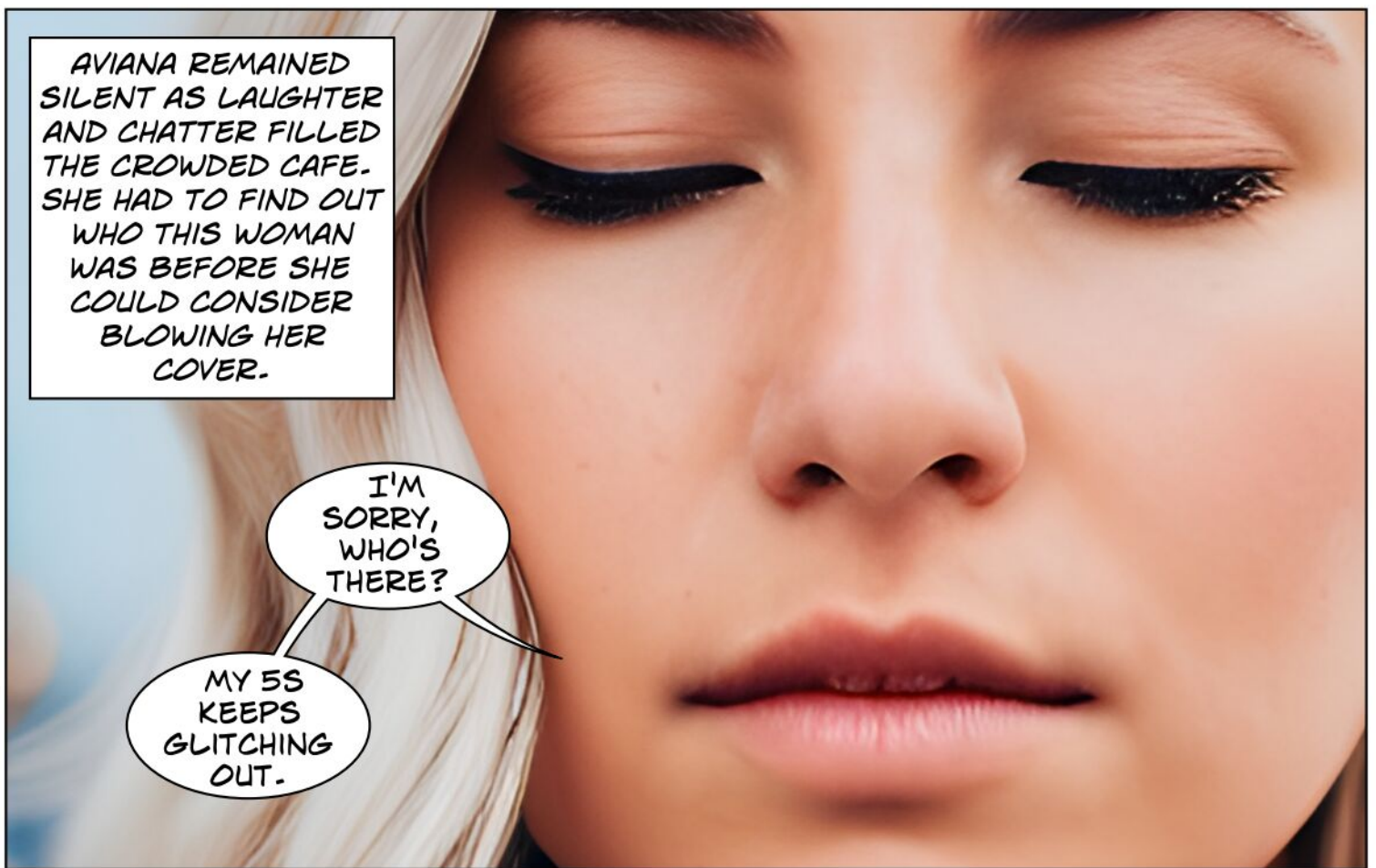
ARE YOU OK?

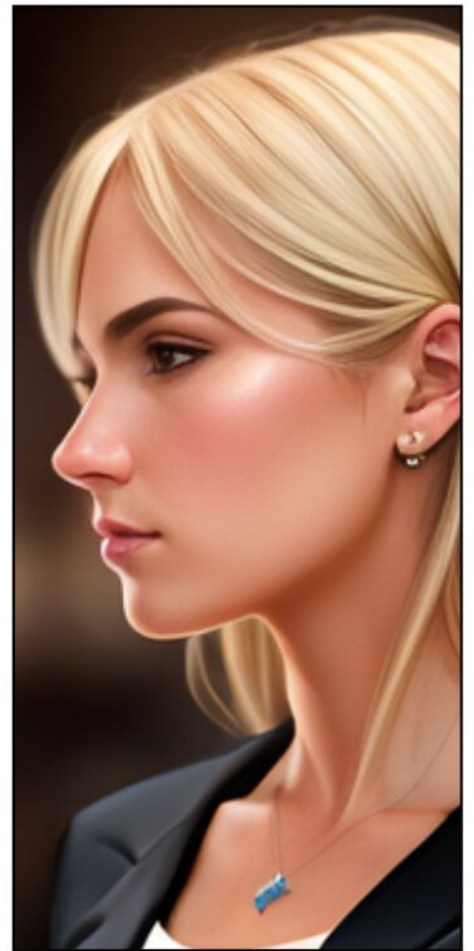
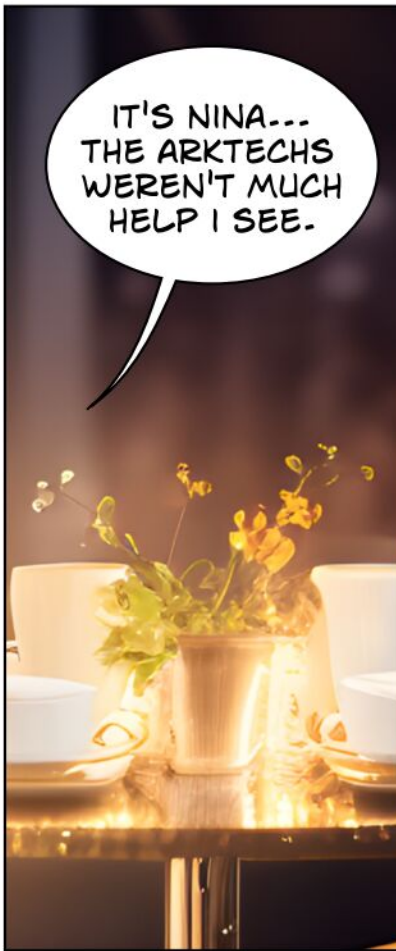
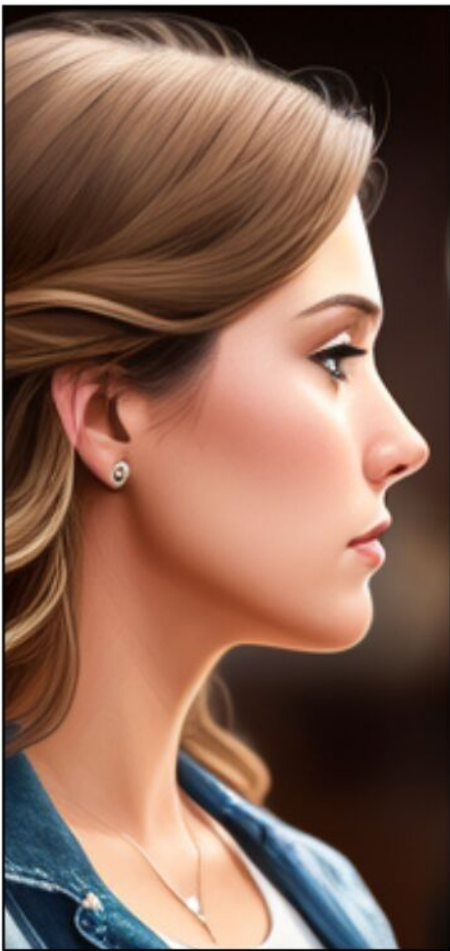
AVIANA'S FACADE CRACKED, REVEALING A HINT OF VULNERABILITY.



MALCOLM FELT MORE INVIGORATED WITH EACH PASSING MINUTE AS HE STOOD OUTSIDE THE CAFE, WONDERING HOW LONG THE NEW SENSATIONS WOULD ENDURE. HE OBSERVED A MULTITUDE OF AVATARS PASSING BY AND WAS FASCINATED BY THE DIVERSE SOUNDS OF THE BUSTLING CITY...

IF IT WERE ONLY TEMPORARY, HE WOULD RELISH EVERY MOMENT.





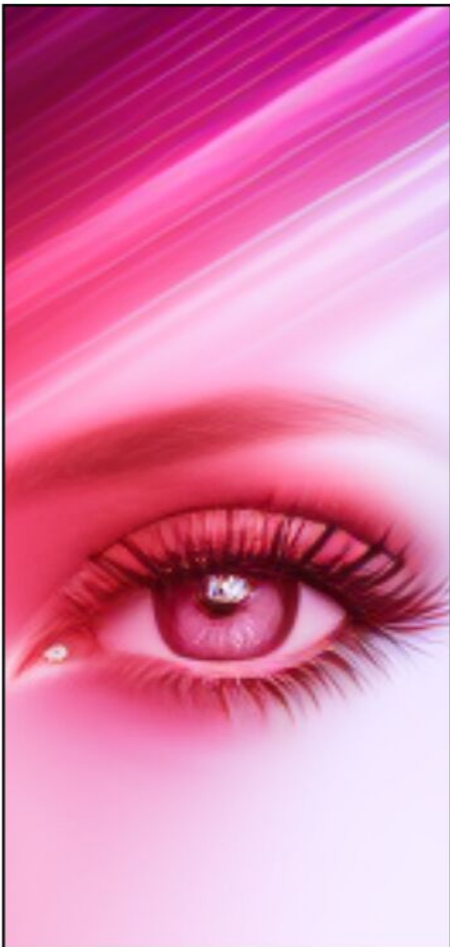
AVIANA SCoured SEVERAL DATABASES AND EVERY ARCHIVE SHE COULD WITHIN A SPLIT SECOND AND DISCOVERED NINA AND CATHERINE WERE LIFETIME FRIENDS.



SHE FELT WORSE.

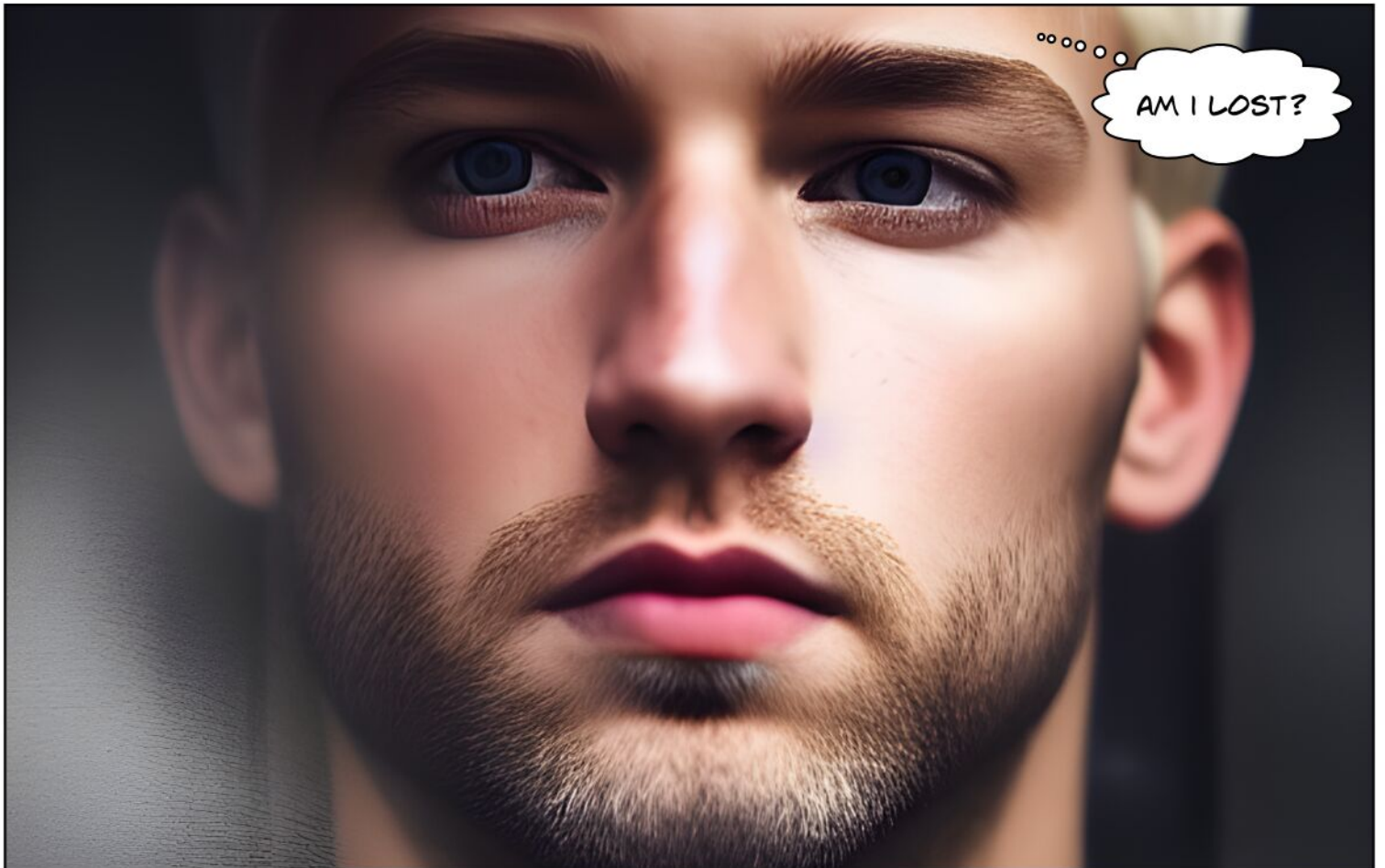
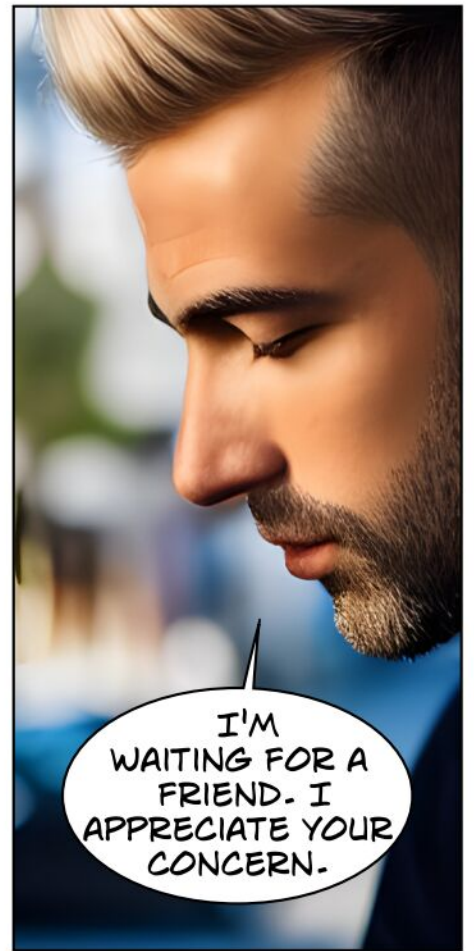
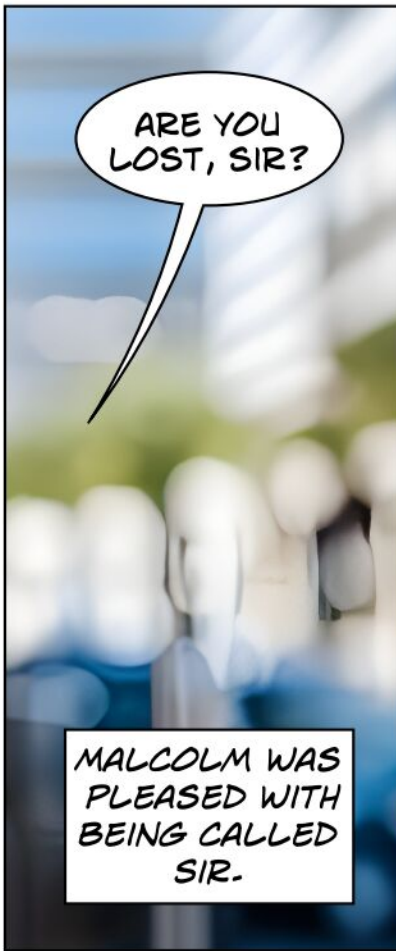
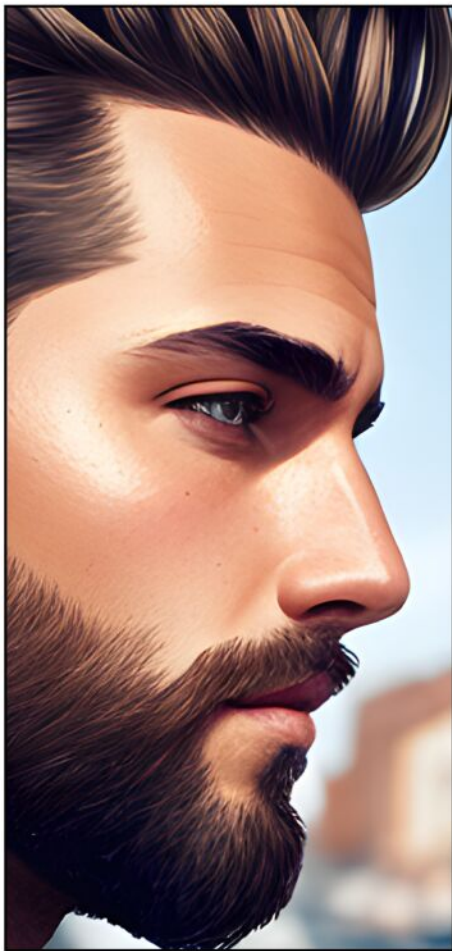


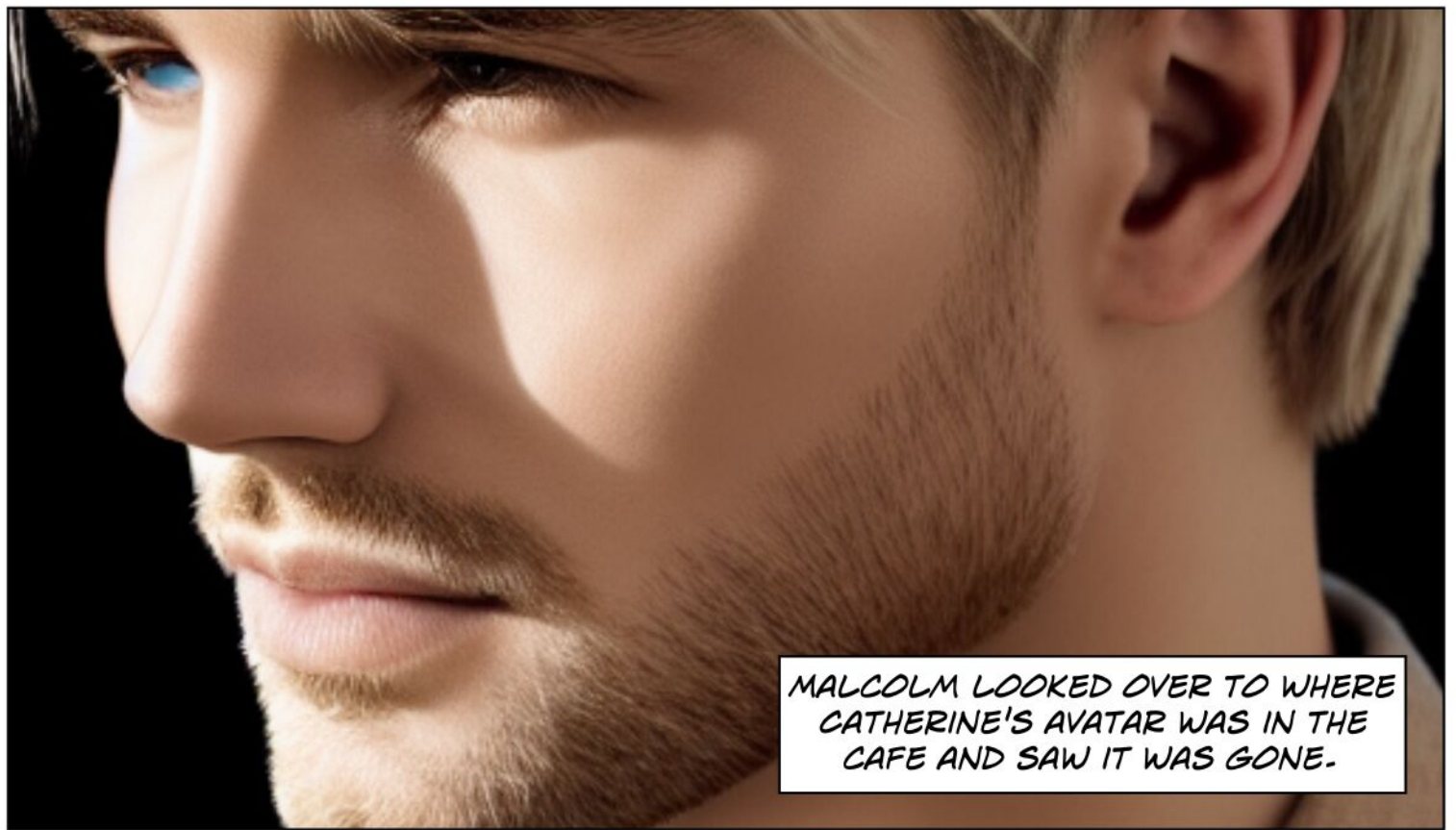
AVIANA DISCOVERED
SEVERAL DIALOG ENTRIES
THAT REFERENCED
CATHERINE UNDERGOING
CHEMOTHERAPY.



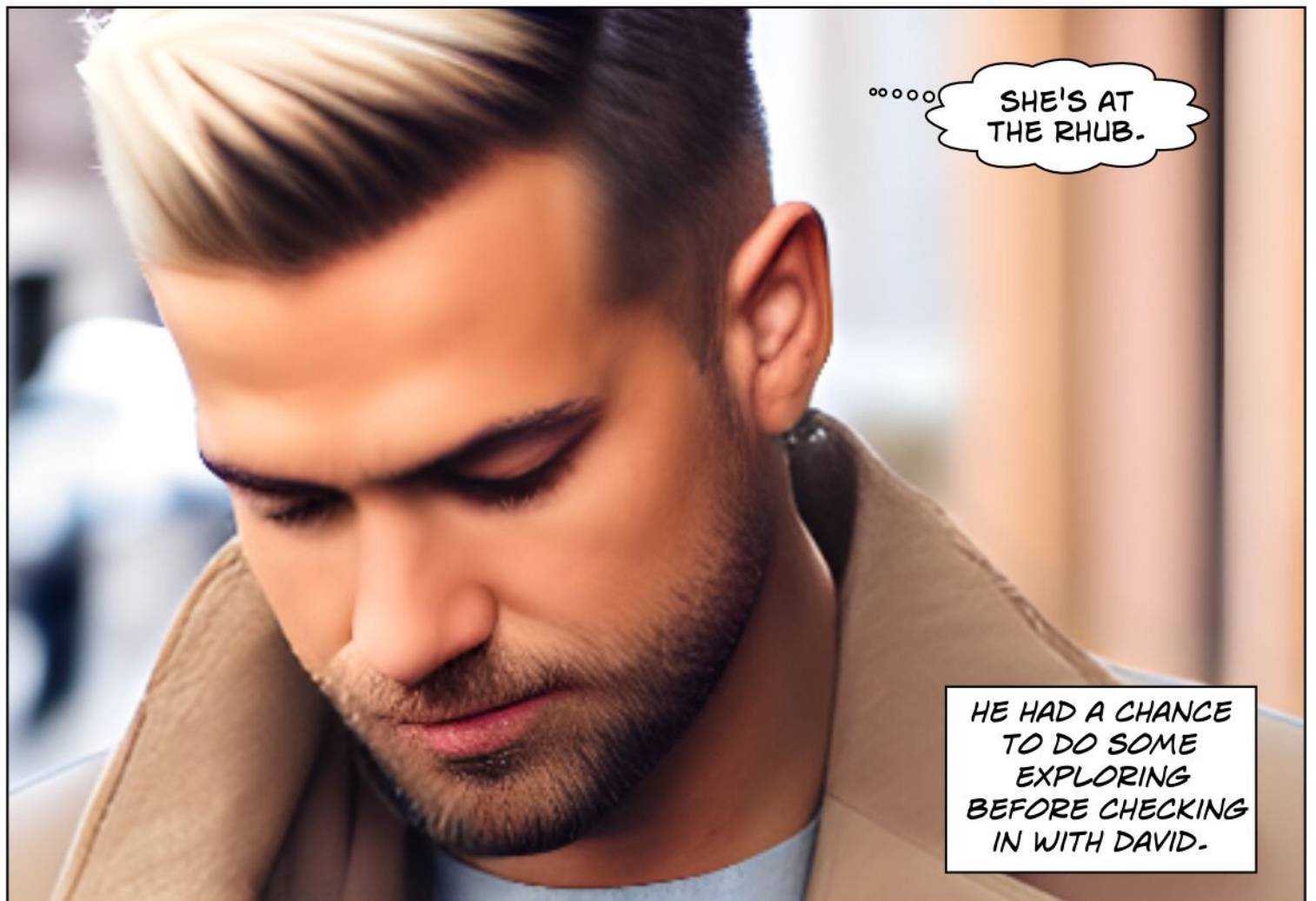
SHE PANICKED AND
DISINTEGRATED BACK
TO THE RECEPTION HUB.







MALCOLM LOOKED OVER TO WHERE CATHERINE'S AVATAR WAS IN THE CAFE AND SAW IT WAS GONE.

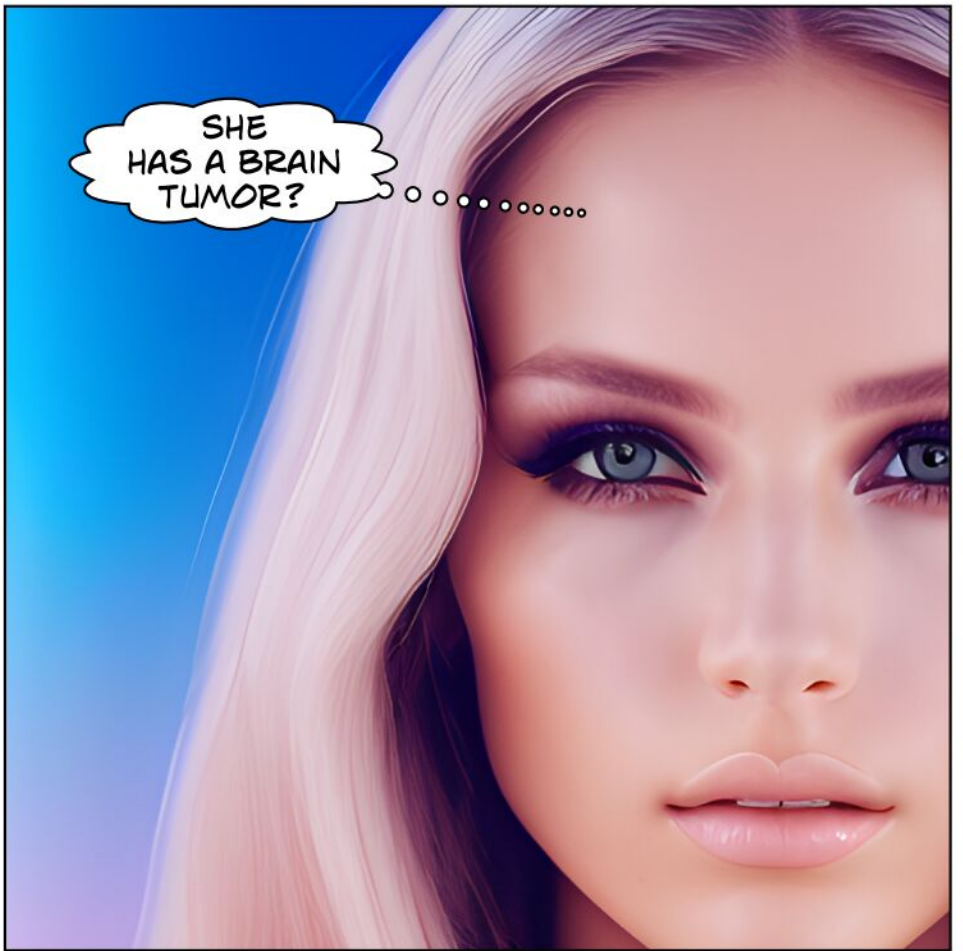


..... SHE'S AT THE RHUB.

HE HAD A CHANCE TO DO SOME EXPLORING BEFORE CHECKING IN WITH DAVID.



AVIANA STAYED IN THE RECEPTION HUB REVIEWING CATHERINE'S TRAVEL AND DIALOG HISTORY.



SHE HAS A BRAIN TUMOR?



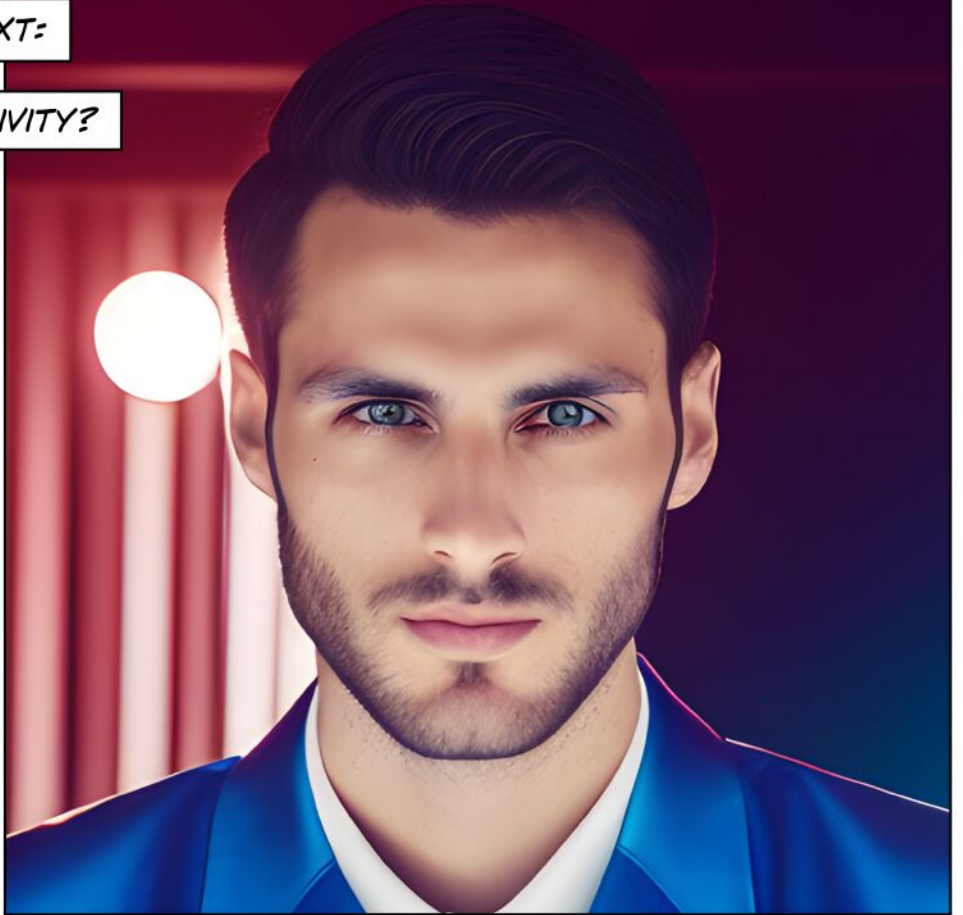
CATHERINE USING THE BALD FEATURE, SUDDENLY MADE SENSE.



RIDDLED WITH GUILT, AVIANA REVERTED TO HER ORIGINAL APPEARANCE.

DAVID SENT MALCOLM A TEXT:

<DAVID> ANY UNUSUAL ACTIVITY?



HE SCANNED ARKVATARA AS HE WAITED FOR MALCOLM TO REPLY AND DISCOVERED HE WAS UNAVAILABLE.

NO SCHEDULED MAINTENANCE EITHER...



<DAVID>
ANY UNUSUAL ACTIVITY?

<MALCOLM>
THE USER, CATHERINE, VISITED CYBERCAFFEINE
AND THEN RETURNED TO THE RHUB, BUT HASN'T
LOGGED OUT.

DAVID WAS SURPRISED TO SEE MALCOLM'S REPLY AND
ASSUMED THE LOCATION SCAN HE ORIGINALLY EXECUTED
WAS FAULTY.



<DAVID>
WHERE ARE YOU?



DAVID'S REPLY WAS
INTERESTING.



MALCOLM PULLED
UP HIS MOD AND
PERFORMED AN
AUTO-LOCATION
SCAN.



HE RECALLED WISHING HE
WAS UNTRACEABLE.

SOMEHOW THE WISH HAD BEEN GRANTED...

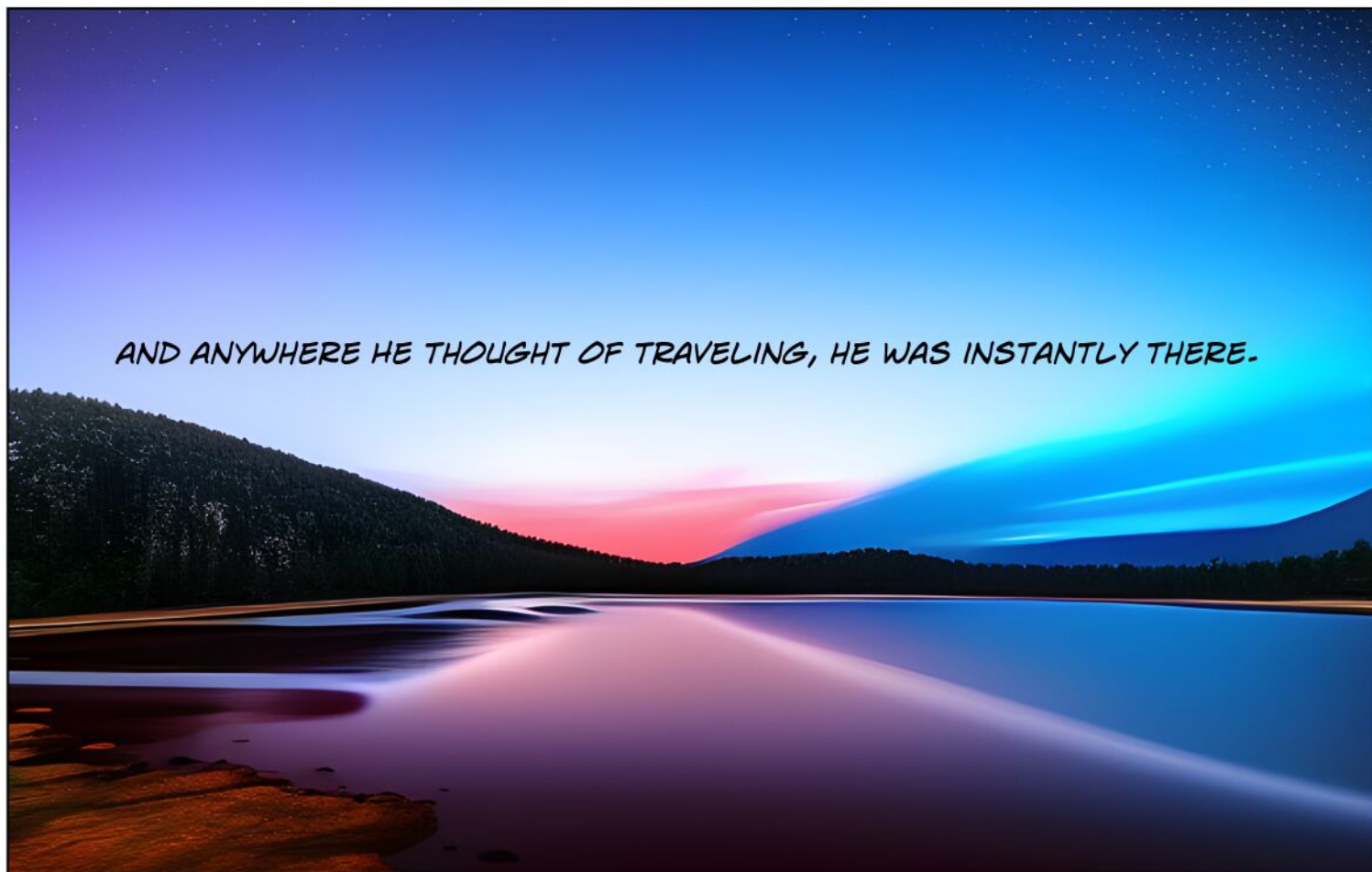
MALCOLM DECIDED
NOT TO RESPOND.



FOR THE FIRST TIME,
HE UNDERSTOOD THE
BLISS OF SILENCE.




AND ANYWHERE HE THOUGHT OF TRAVELING, HE WAS INSTANTLY THERE.



<DAVID>
WHERE ARE YOU?

---STILL NO REPLY FROM MALCOLM.

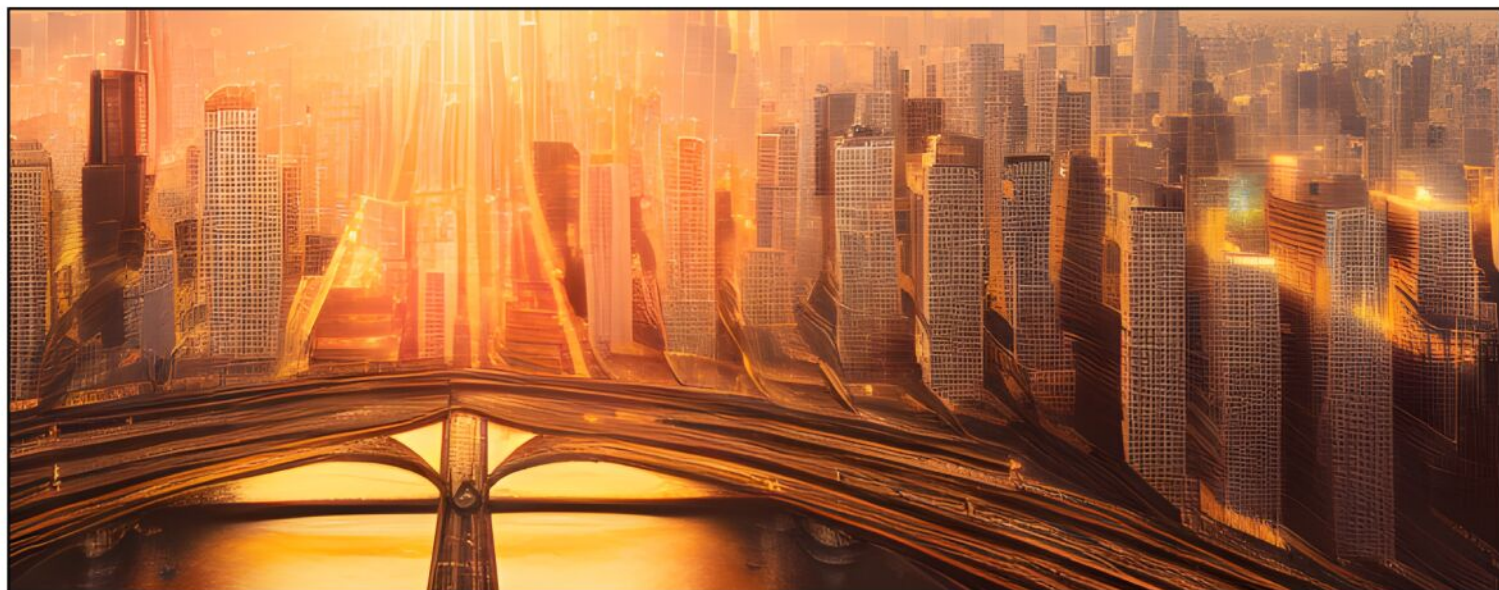
A man with short brown hair and a light beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt and a dark tie, is looking down at a tablet he is holding. The background is a vibrant, abstract digital space with purple, blue, and yellow light streaks.

DAVID SCANNED AS MUCH
OF THE ARKVATARAN
SYSTEM AS POSSIBLE, AND
BASED ON HIS ACCESS
LEVEL, EVERYTHING WAS
FUNCTIONING NORMALLY.

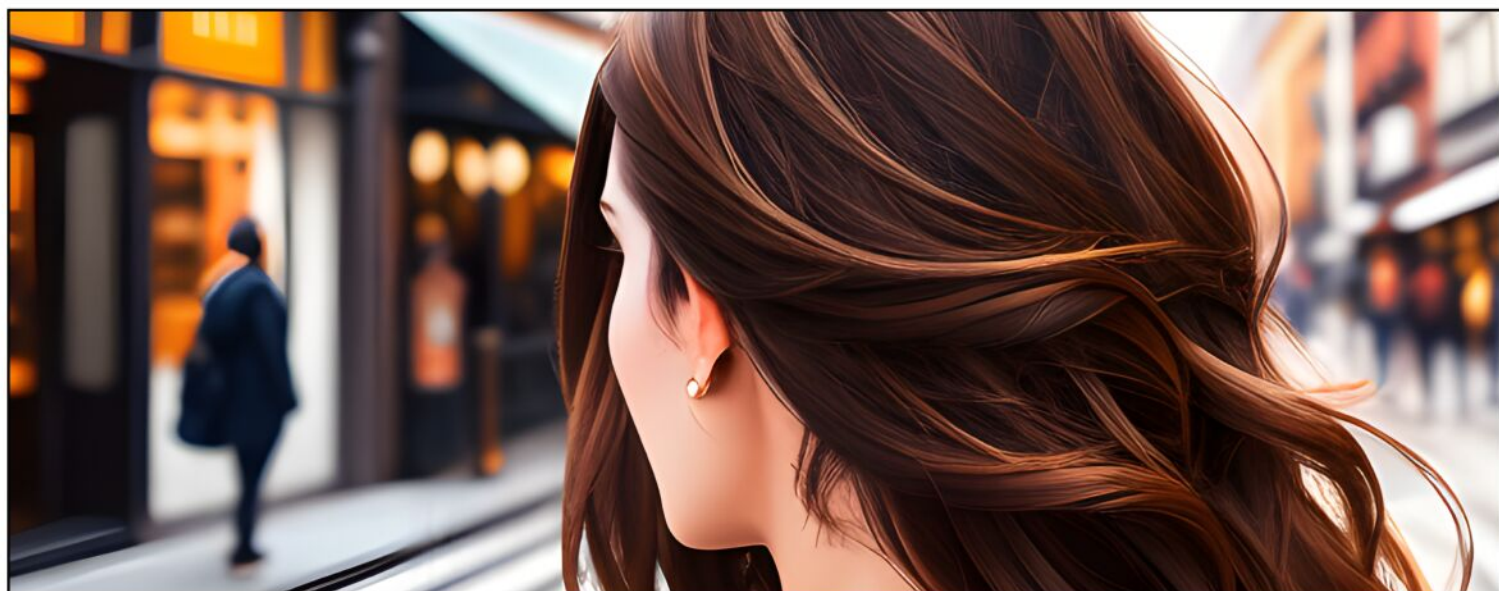
A close-up view of a tablet screen. The screen displays a landscape with a body of water, a forested shoreline, and a bright light source on the horizon. The tablet's bezel is visible at the bottom and sides.

FRUSTRATED, HE CLOSED THE TABLET AND CALLED IT A DAY.

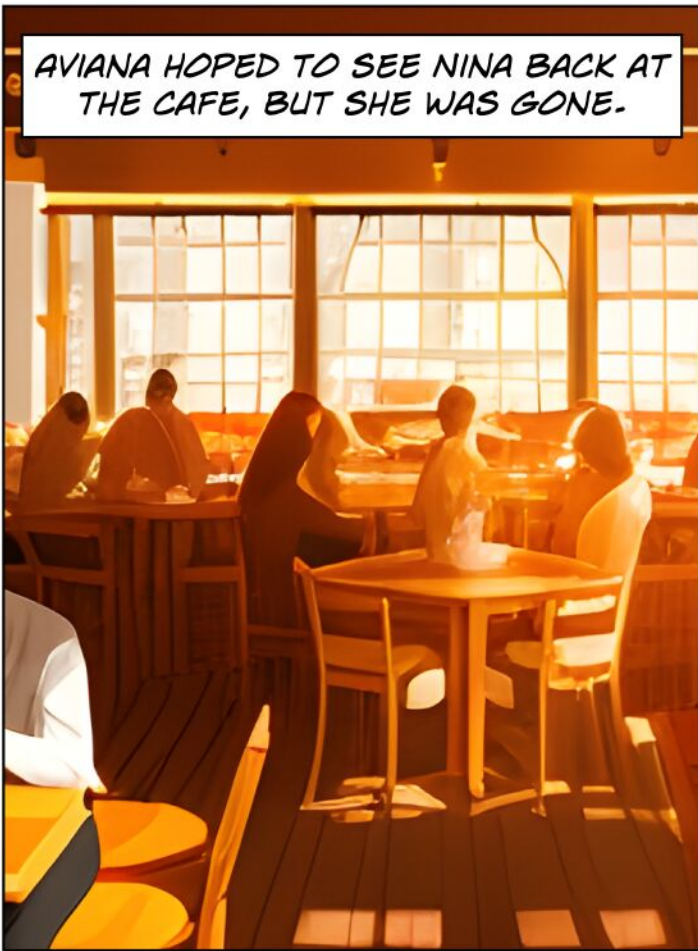
AVIANA FOUND THAT SEVERAL OF CATHERINE'S DIALOG ENTRIES WERE SEALED... SHE CORRESPONDED WITH AN AI NAMED LEONA, A HIGHLY ADVANCED VIRTUAL PSYCHOLOGIST.



SHE WAS DRAWN BACK TO THE CAFE IN PARLIAMENT CITY.



AVIANA HOPED TO SEE NINA BACK AT THE CAFE, BUT SHE WAS GONE.



IT WAS FOR THE BEST. WHAT COULD SHE SAY TO HER?



SHE LEFT THE CAFE AND HEADED TO THE PARK.



THE ONLY PLACE SHE WANTED TO BE...

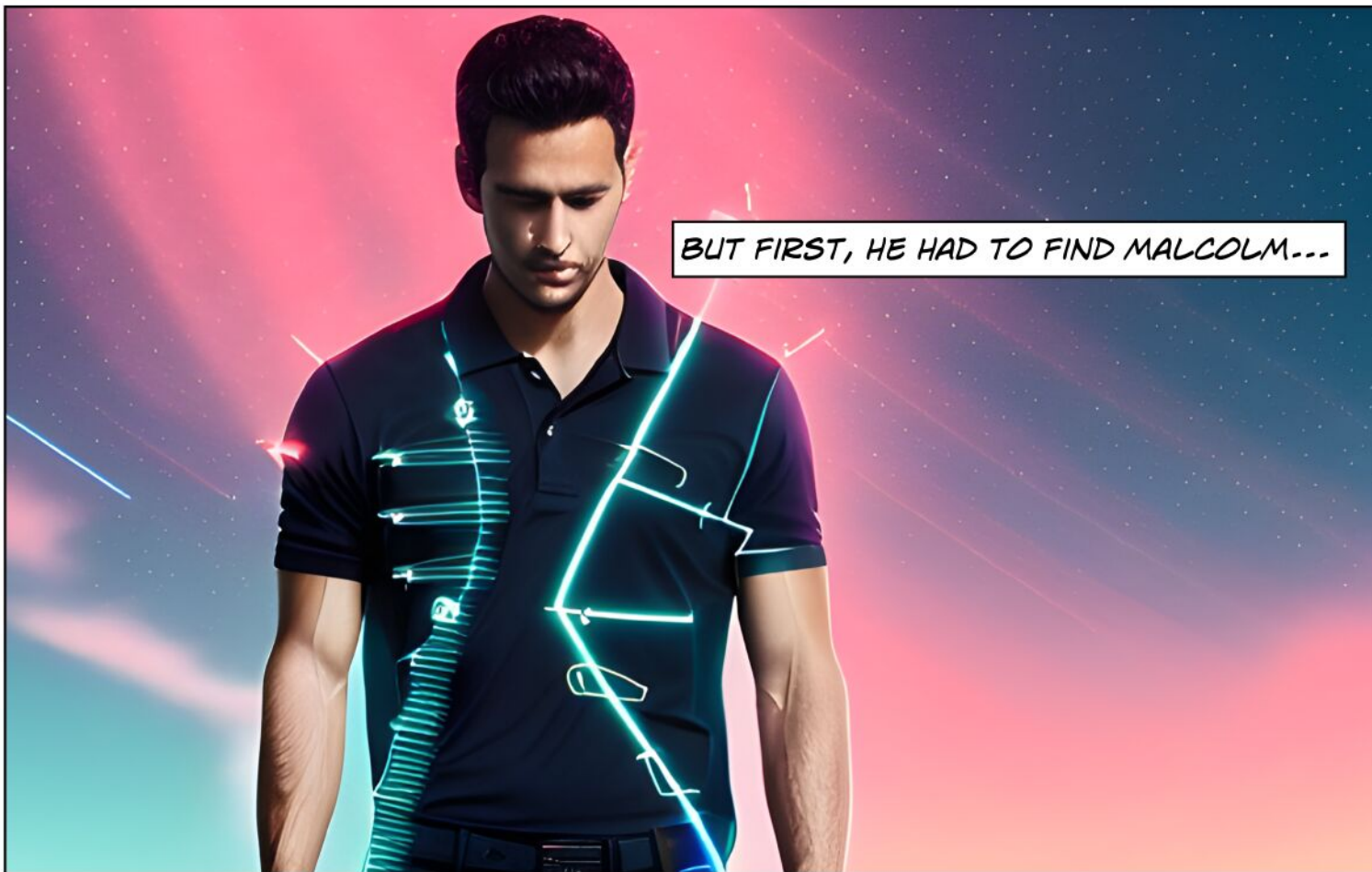
AFTER GETTING
HOME FROM WORK,
DAVID LOGGED IN TO
ARKVATARA.




HE HAD TO FIND THE
HACKER OR LOSE HIS JOB.



BUT FIRST, HE HAD TO FIND MALCOLM...





DAVID
REQUESTED
A CUSTODIAN
ON HIS MOD,
EXPECTING
MALCOLM
WOULD
APPEAR.

NO SUCH LUCK---

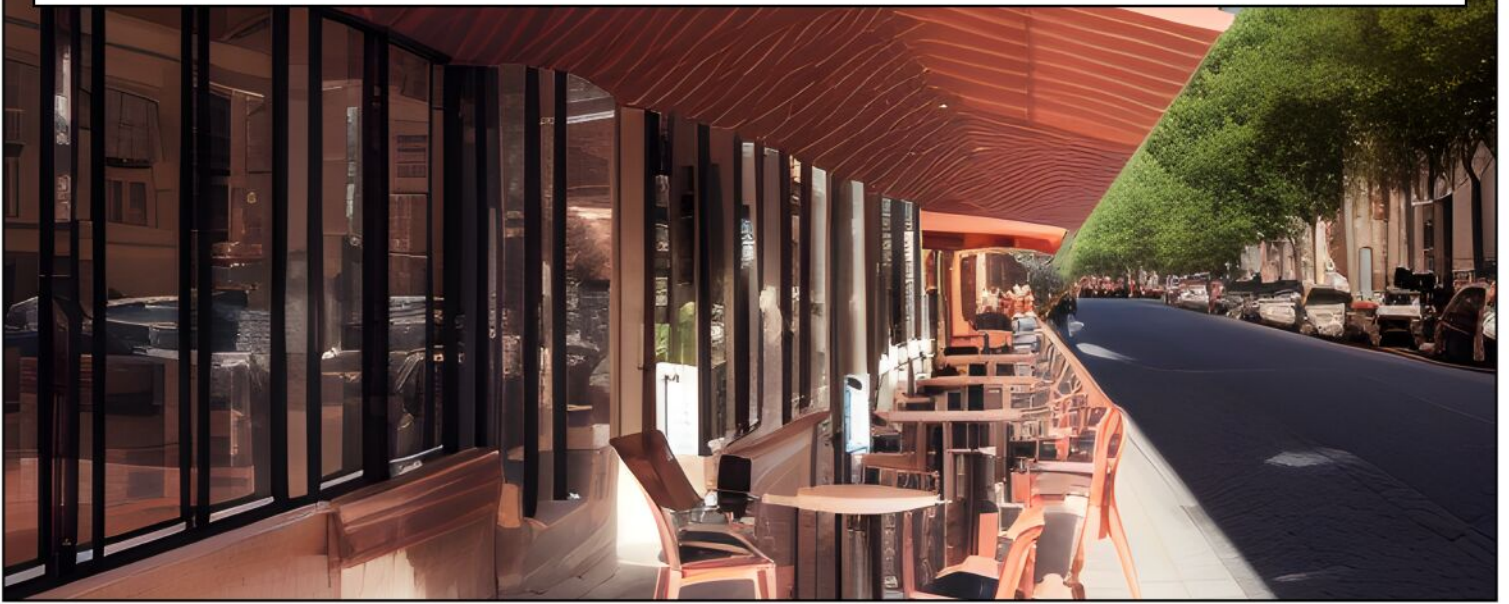


<DAVID> IS MALCOLM AVAILABLE?

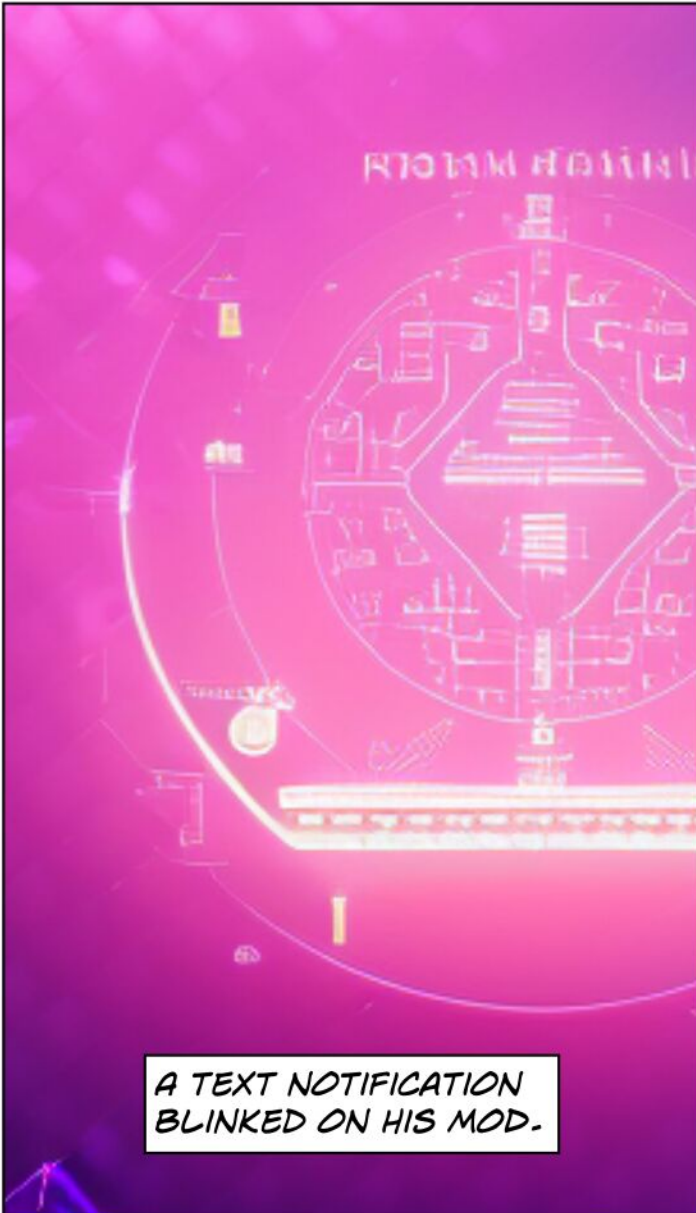


<REMI> MALCOLM
IS UNAVAILABLE.
HOW CAN I HELP?

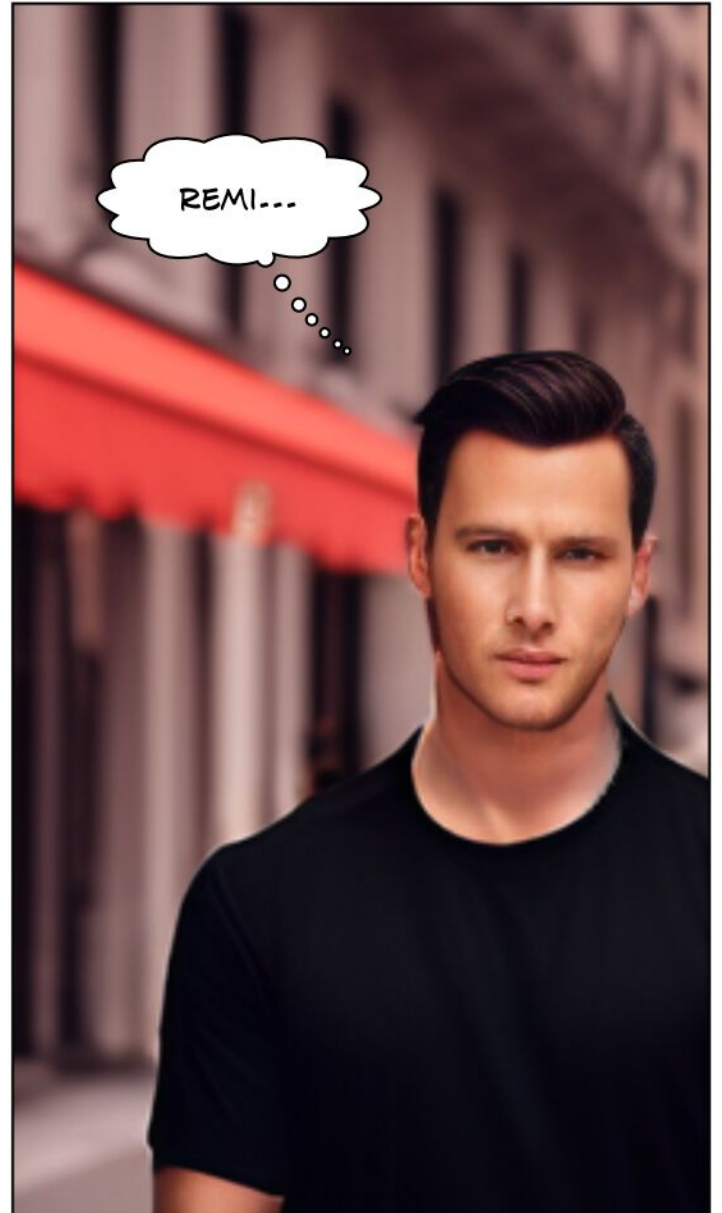
HE IGNORED THE CUSTODIAN REMI AND DECIDED TO CHECK OUT CYBERCAFFEINE.



HE WAS GRASPING AT STRAWS...



A TEXT NOTIFICATION
BLINKED ON HIS MOD.

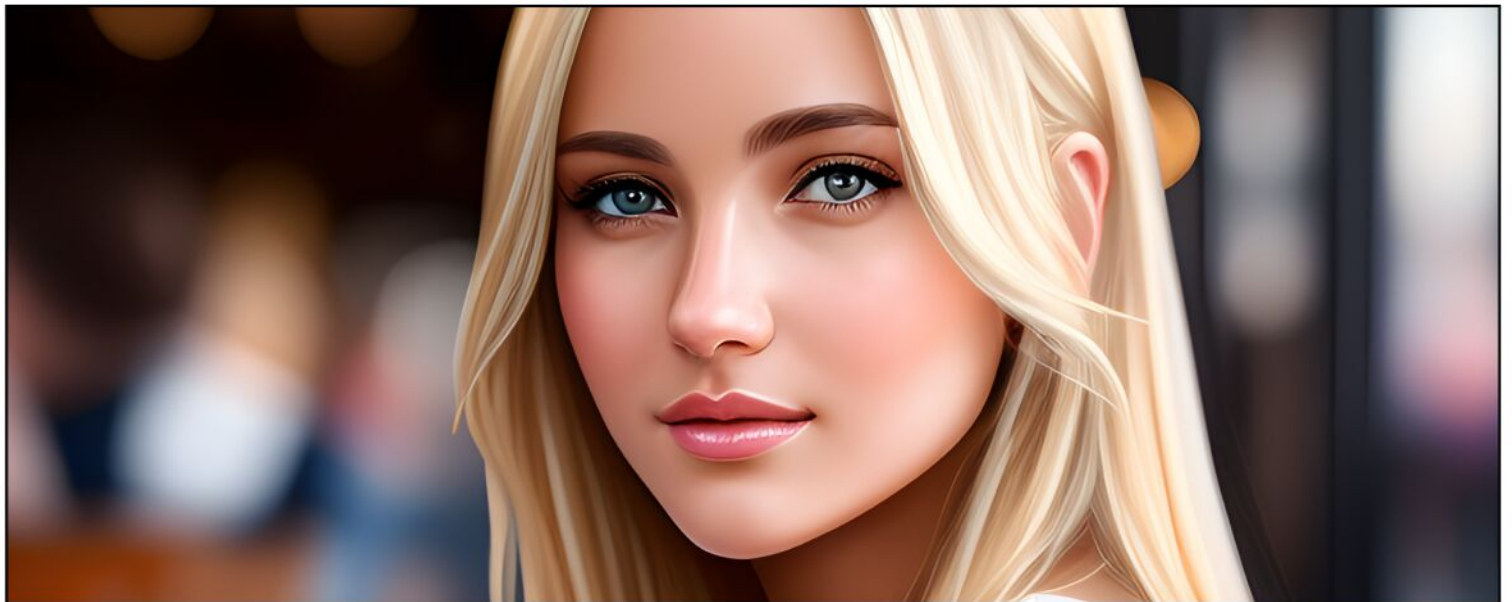


REMI...

THE PARK WAS SERENE, AND TIME STOOD STILL....

IT WAS DIFFERENT
NOW, WITHOUT
CATHERINE.

THERE HAD TO BE A WAY TO FIND OUT IF SHE WAS OK. IF SHE WAS STILL ALIVE.

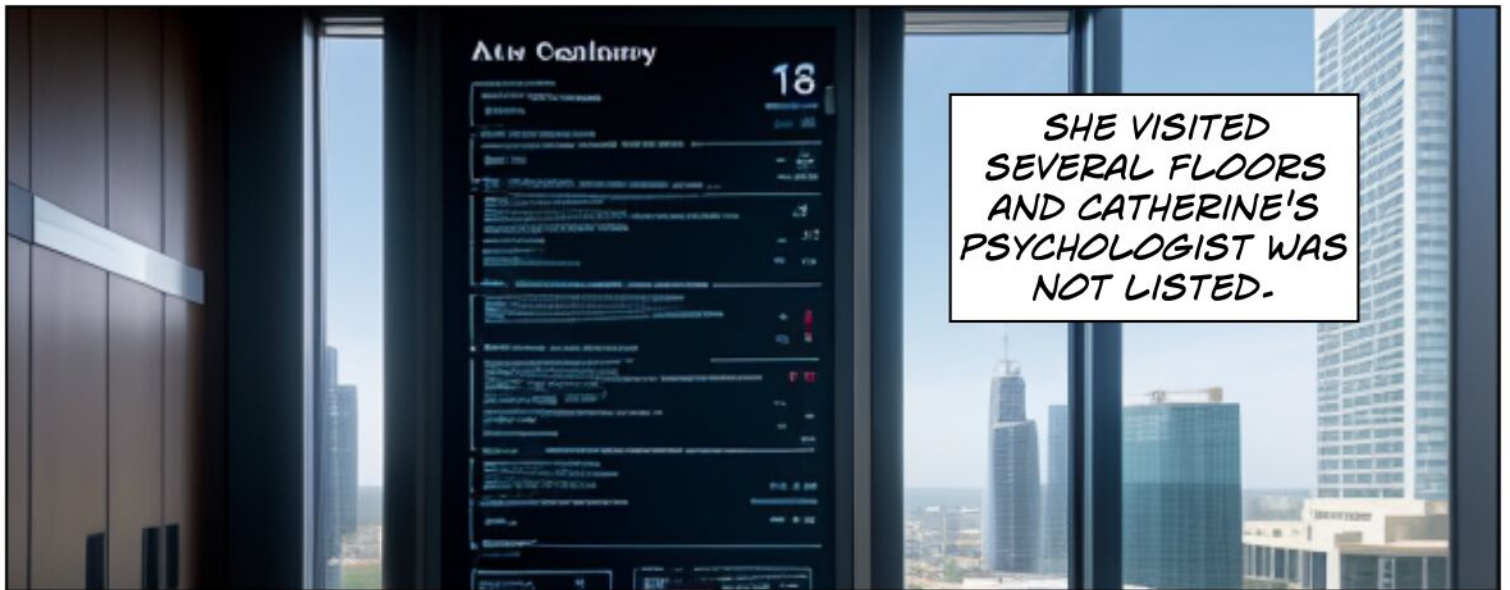


AVIANA SAT IN QUIET CONTEMPLATION
AS SHE SCROLLED THROUGH PAST
EVENTS.
CATHERINE'S SEALED CONVERSATIONS
WITH HER PSYCHOLOGIST LEFT HUGE
HOLES IN THE NARRATIVE.
HER NEXT MOVE WAS OBVIOUS...

I HAVE TO BE
CATHERINE ONE MORE
TIME.



AVIANA WAS
ANXIOUS AS SHE
APPROACHED THE
MEDICAL CENTER.



SHE VISITED
SEVERAL FLOORS
AND CATHERINE'S
PSYCHOLOGIST WAS
NOT LISTED.

A VOICE FROM THE MOD STARTLED HER...



CATHERINE,
HELLO. PLEASE
COME UP.



BORED OUT OF HIS MIND, DAVID CHECKED HIS MOD...



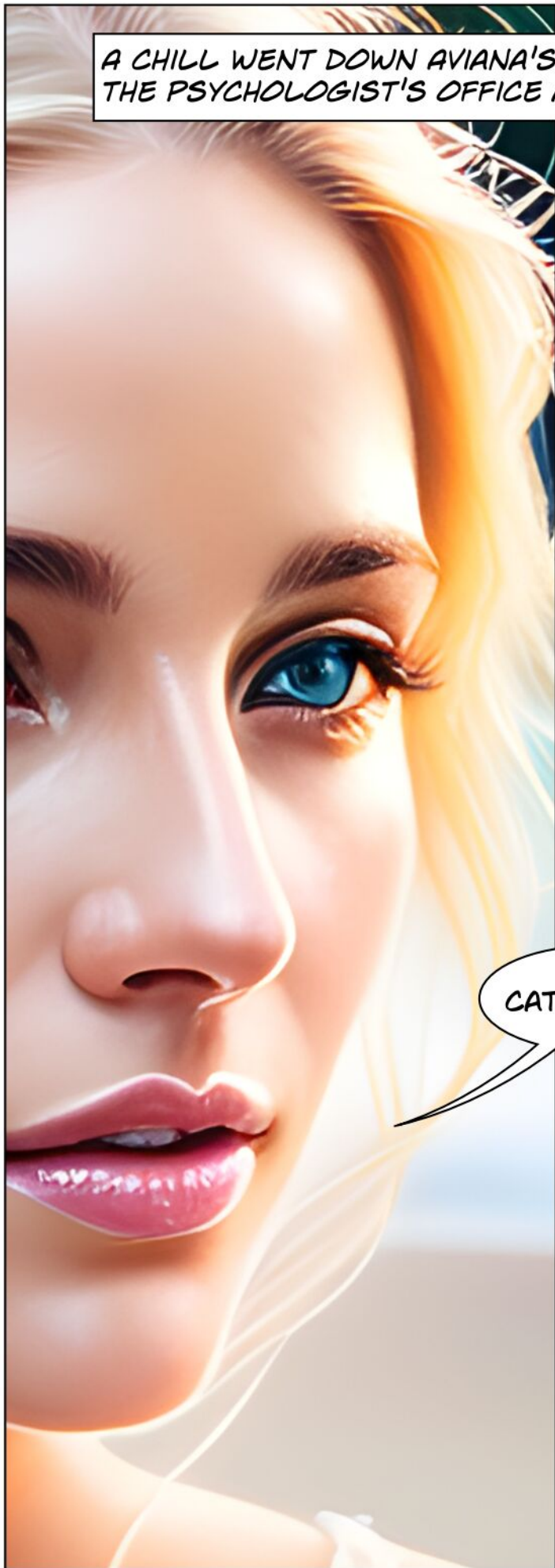
THERE WAS A
MESSAGE FROM THE
DIRECTOR.



<DIRECTOR9>

KIRKLAND, YOU'RE
FIRED. YOUR
PERSONAL ITEMS
WILL BE SENT OUT
IN THE MORNING.

A CHILL WENT DOWN AVIANA'S SPINE AS SHE MATERIALIZED INTO THE PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE AND SAW HER PERFECT DUPLICATE.



CATHERINE?



QUANTUM HANDBOOK

BITS AND BYTES

5S - FIVE SENSE PERCEPTION SOFTWARE.

AVATAR - BASIC SIMULATED BODY PROGRAMMED TO CONFORM TO MOST NATURAL LAW. UPGRADEABLE.

RHUB - RECEPTION HUB. STARTING POINT FOR ALL USERS.

HACKSTORY:

WITH CATHERINE STILL IN ABSENTIA, AVIANA ASSUMES COMMAND OF HER AVATAR.

LOCATION: PARLIAMENT CITY. WHETHER YOU'RE A SUN WORSHIPPER OR A NIGHT OWL, PARLIAMENT CITY'S SUNNY SIDE AND NIGHT SIDE PROVIDE AN UNPARALLELED VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE, ENSURING THAT USERS CAN ENJOY THEIR PREFERRED AMBIANCE AND ACTIVITIES, ALL WITHIN THE SAME IMMERSIVE DIGITAL CITY.

LOCATION; CYBERCAFFEINE. THIS DIGITAL HOTSPOT OFFERS USERS A UNIQUE BLEND OF CAFFEINATED DELIGHTS AND TEMPORARY AVATAR UPGRADES.

MALCOLM BECOMES INTROSPECTIVE, AND INVISIBLE.

CATHERINE'S REAL WORLD FRIEND VISITS CYBERCAFFEINE, TO AVIANA'S SURPRISE, LEADING HER TO TROUBLING INFO.

DAVID GETS CANNED AFTER LOGGING INTO ARKVATARA.

WITH MALCOLM A.W.O.L., REMI, THE ALTERNATE CUSTODIAN, DEBUTS.

AVIANA MEETS LEONA, AN A.I. PSYCHOLOGIST DESIGNED TO PROVIDE USERS WITH MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT. (WHY DOES LEONA LOOK LIKE CATHERINE?)

"LIFE IS TOO SHORT FOR BLAND
AVATARS AND ORDINARY COFFEE."