

321 Lumina Dot Com presents

The Last Fast Train to the Past

Episode 3



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Episode Three

World 47310 · Spring 1656 & Fall 1952

Eli was looking at the valley when Ramona said, "There's a portal six feet to your left."

He stepped sideways instinctively, then stopped. "Where?"

"Right where you were standing."

He looked at the empty air. Nothing. "I don't see anything."

"Nobody does at first. Most people never do." She sat down in the grass. "Sit down."

He sat.

"Portals are everywhere," she said. "Always open. You've walked through a hundred of them in your life without knowing it. Most people walk through them and nothing happens because they don't know where they want to go. The portal doesn't care. It just sits there."

Eli looked at the spot where he'd been standing. Still nothing.

"Three things tell you one is there," Ramona said. "The pineal notices it first. Not a sound, not a sight — just a change. Something that says this spot is different from the spot next to it. The thyroid checks — is this normal? It isn't. And the hypothalamus tells you how close." She looked at him. "You've felt all three before. You just didn't know what you were feeling."

Eli thought about it. "The fountain. On World 5839. Before I even sat down."

"That was ours. You felt it and thought it was nothing."



He was quiet for a moment. Then he looked around the hill — not searching, just paying attention. The way you pay attention when you think you heard something in the next room.

"The two stones," he said. "Behind us."

"That's the one we came through."

"And the one to my left?"

"Goes somewhere cold. I wouldn't use it today."

Thad smiled and said nothing.

"The tools tell you where to get off," Ramona continued. "World, time — you set that before you go through. Without the tools you're stepping through a door with no idea what's on the other side." She held up the not-a-compact. "This reads the portal and lets me set the destination. That's the other half of it."

Eli nodded slowly, still looking at the empty air six feet away.

Then Thad's wrist went warm.

Three short pulses. One long.

He checked the device. Read the message. Looked at Ramona.

"It's your father."

She went still.

"He's all right," Thad said. "But he needs help. Same world, different time. Fall, 1952."

"What's he doing on 47310?"

"He found Marcus."

Ramona stood. Her face didn't change much but everything behind it did. Her uncle Marcus. Two years since the Keepers took him. Two years of not knowing where.



"The virus?" she said.

"Yes. Pete went in after him. There's a portal in the prison yard." He paused. "He can't get Marcus out alone."

"Marcus doesn't know him anymore," she said quietly.

"No."

Eli was already on his feet. Thad looked at him, then at Ramona. She was already working the not-a-compact, reading the hill around them.

"Same portal we came through," she said. "I can set it for 1952." She walked thirty feet south along the hill and stopped. "Here. This is the other end of the yard portal. We go in here, we come up inside."

Thad looked at the fence below, the watchtowers, the grey buildings. Then he turned to Ramona and Eli.

"I have to go in alone," he said. "Cloaked, nobody can see me. Pete is already in there cloaked. I won't be able to see him either. My only option is to get Marcus into this portal. That's it. That's the whole plan."

"And us?" Ramona said.

"You and Eli wait inside the portal. When Marcus comes through you'll be there."

Ramona looked at Thad the way she sometimes looked at him — the expression he still couldn't fully read, though he was getting better at it.

"Don't be long," she said.

Thad took the cloaking device from his satchel. Checked it. Looked at Eli. "Stay with her. Do what she says."

Eli nodded.



Ramona set the not-a-compact. She and Eli stepped into the portal and were gone.

Thad stood alone on the hill for a moment. The river moved below and the bridge sat solid across it and beyond the fence the grey buildings held whatever they held.

He activated the cloak and stepped through.

The prison yard was cold and grey and smelled of coal smoke and wet concrete. 1952 on World 47310 had not been kind to this particular piece of it. The yard was enclosed on all sides — fence, buildings, watchtowers — and a dozen men moved through it in the slow disconnected way of people who had forgotten they were supposed to want something.

Thad stood still and looked at them.

One of them was Marcus Clark.

He found him by the far fence, sitting on a concrete step, staring at nothing. He had Pete's jaw, Ramona's eyes. He looked sixty years old. He wasn't.

No sign of Pete but Pete was here somewhere, cloaked and invisible.

Thad moved close to Marcus and stood there. He didn't speak. He didn't reach for him. He just settled into the quiet around the man and waited.

The virus had taken a great deal. But not everything. Not yet. Somewhere inside Marcus Clark there was still a thread — the remnant of someone who had spent a lifetime knowing where portals were without being told.

Thad simply stood at the edge of that thread and waited.

Marcus's head came up.



He looked at nothing in particular. Then he stood.

He walked. Slow, unsteady, but he walked — across the yard toward the northeast corner, toward something he couldn't name but couldn't ignore. Thad stayed beside him. The guards didn't turn. The watchtower didn't move.

Ten feet from the portal Marcus slowed.

Thad waited.

Marcus took the last ten feet on his own.

He stepped through and was gone.

Thad followed. And from somewhere at his left shoulder, close enough that Thad could feel the displacement in the air, Pete Clark followed too.

Ramona was there.

Marcus came through first and she caught him — both hands, steady, the way you catch someone who doesn't know they're falling. She said his name once. He looked at her with emptied eyes and then something moved in them, the way light moves when a cloud shifts, and he said her name back like a word he'd almost lost.

Thad uncloaked.

Beside him Pete Clark uncloaked.

For a moment nobody said anything. Pete looked at his brother and his brother looked at Ramona and Ramona held on.

Eli stood to one side, very still, watching all of it.

Pete looked at Thad.

"Took you long enough," he said.

"You're welcome, Pete," Thad said.



About the Time Keepers Universe

A multiverse of countless worlds. Portals between them, small and rare and often hidden. Most people walk past portals without ever knowing they were there. A few find them.

Thaddeus Templeton is a Traveler. Ramona Clark is a Finder. Eli is learning. The Clarks have been doing this work for generations.

The Keeper Police would prefer they didn't.

Each Episode of The Last Fast Train to the Past is a stop along the way. Some are quick. Some are rescues. All of them are real.

Welcome to World 47310. Welcome aboard.

Coming Next

Episode 4

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