

THE BEAR

by James Ryan

(With special thanks to Sara Williamson,
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3-12 Players

They have journeyed back at the cost of great pain and personal sacrifice from a world after the war that ended everything. They seek knowledge of this past. They must know the cause, for to know the cause is to alter their own dismal present. Somewhere here, there are answers. They know this, for they have already discovered some clues, scraps drawn from the mouths of prisoners as they died from the drug. The Bear. Every prisoner spoke of it -- the last words from their dry, blackened lips. Someone here will lead them to it. If they can know The Bear, they will own the future.

DESCRIPTION

The Bear is a freeform role playing game based on the film *La Jetée* by Chris Marker. The game is designed to be played in a public space. Players will either be time travelers from a post-apocalyptic future or citizens of the past who unknowingly face a nuclear holocaust just a few days ahead. Players of characters from the past will invent a piece of knowledge based on one or more key words. This knowledge will relate to some special and intimate detail of their character's life; it will in no way be obviously connected to an impending catastrophic nuclear war. Players of characters from the future are desperate to gain this knowledge, and will attempt to discover it through spying and conversation.

THE GC

Playing *The Bear* requires one player to be a Game Coordinator. This player will take on the role of one of the Camp Police in the game, will make certain decisions, and will explain the game to the players. To play *The Bear*, you will need: 3 to 8 players (including you), player sheets for each player (see the chart), a public location, a designated meetup point at that location, and a means of tracking the time.

Players will belong to one of three factions: Prisoners, Camp Police, or The Dead. The table below shows how many of which type of player sheet to print out for the number of players in your group.

| Number of Players | Prisoners | Camp Police | The Dead |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------|----------|
| 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 7 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 7 (alternate) | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| 8 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| 9 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 10 | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| 11 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| 12 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

LOCATION

Before play, you'll need to know where you are going to playing and what the parameters are of the play space. You may choose any public space you like in which you can perform the actions of the game. Prisoners and The Dead will be pairing up for conversation. They may want to sit together or they may want to stroll around. You want a place where a couple of people getting to know one another might go to chat. Because the Camp Police will be spying on these couples, and one Police might have to surveil more than one couple, it will be important that couples do not wander outside of the designated location.

The location should allow Camp Police to get close to players without appearing unnatural. Camp Police need to try to overhear the conversations of players, and they need to do so without drawing attention to themselves. A park is not always good in this respect: it allows players to wander, but in some parks at least it will be obvious and awkward if Camp Police get too close. A cafe is better, but it fails in another way: all a Camp Police has to do is sit at the table near a couple to hear everything they say. A museum, however, is a perfect match for these requirements: players can walk freely, and Camp Police can approach players nonchalantly, listening in on their conversations while pretending to pay attention to the museum's collection. A shopping mall is another good location like this. So is a supermarket. Or a flea market. Or an amusement park. Or a county fair. Particularly appropriate would be either a zoo or a museum of natural history with a bear exhibit.

While it would take some additional pre-game planning, you could choose to make use of a route rather than a location, as long as all players travel in the same direction along the route during play. For example, all players could start on a subway platform, ride the train together, and then get off at the same stop to walk around a museum.

Whatever the location, you will need an "meetup point," a point in the location where you will begin the game, and where all players will meet at the end of act one. You will prep for the game and play the second act at the meetup point, so it should have enough space for Camp Police and The Dead to meet as a group and talk without being overheard by the Prisoners, who will be waiting nearby.

As GC, your job is to pick the location (or the route) and the meetup point and explain these clearly to the players when it is time to play.

TIME

The Bear is played in two acts. Each act is timed, and one of the primary tasks of the GC is to make sure that acts end on time. In the first act, pairs of players will be dispersed over the play area, with Camp Police roaming and monitoring them. You may want to arrange ahead of time to have the phone numbers of Camp Police. This way, you can send them all a text at the end of the first act. Without cell phones, you might simply walk through the play area, informing Camp Police and pairings that act one is over. When notifying pairings, Camp Police should simply walk up to them and say: "Now." If they have read their player sheets well, the players will know that The Dead should remain in

place for five to ten minutes while the Prisoner walks silently to the meetup point. In act two, Camp Police speak individually with each Prisoner. GC should make sure no Prisoner speaks longer than their allotted time. When the individual conversations with Prisoners are complete, it will be time to debrief as a group.

PREPPING A GROUP

If you have picked your location and meetup point, have printed out the appropriate number and type of character sheets for your group, and have assembled your players at the location, you are ready to prep the group for play.

Start by a general description of the type of game you are about to play. Players should already know that they are getting themselves into a free form roleplaying game, so it should be enough to remind them that this type of game can sometimes touch on sensitive parts of our psyches. Players may experience strong emotions during play. Please do tell players that if they should feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed at any time during the game, they are free to take a break or excuse themselves from the game. Players should understand that they have your support to do whatever they need to practice appropriate self-care, and all players should understand that the expectation is that they will respect the emotional needs of other players. If someone needs a break, or to excuse themselves, other players should know not to ask for an explanation. Quiet respect is the appropriate response. Further, while this is a dramatic game, players should know that ordinary rules of human interaction should be respected. Players ought to respect the physical space of other players. No player should touch another without their clear consent.

Once you've had the emotional safety talk, proceed by explaining the limits of the play area. Point out the exit point and explain its function. Explain that players will receive character sheets that will place them into one of three types of characters. They should not talk to any other players when they are reading their sheets and should keep their information secret. Tell players that if they have questions, they should raise their hand and you will speak to them privately.

Pass out character sheets and ask players to separate by character type. Give each of The Dead a memory sheet, which will explain their secret memory. Important: *the GC should not read*

memory sheets in advance. This is secret information only for The Dead. Give players time to read their sheets and ask you questions. Don't let The Dead tell you what is on their memory sheets.

Split Prisoners and The Dead into pairs. Let them tell each other their names, but nothing else. Send The Dead into the play area, asking them to separate from each other so that no pair will be too close to the others. Have Prisoners sit still with eyes closed for five to ten minutes. When The Dead are at a fair distance, ask the Prisoners to think about life in the Camp. If you like, you can talk them through some of the details. You might even provide a guided visualization of the harsh realities of Camp life. When you are ready, ask the Prisoners to open their eyes and seek out their friends. Send them one at a time, staggered by about 10 seconds.

ACT I: THE CONVERSATION

The play time for act one is 45 minutes. That is the longest that any character from the future can stay submerged in the chemical state that allows them access to the past. During this act, pairs of players will be having their individual conversations. The Dead will each have a personal secret related to the word "Bear" and one of these other key words: "Chord," "Light," "Solution," "Minute." They will not know that the Prisoner is from the future, or that they are about to die in a nuclear war. The Prisoners will know they are from the future, and that The Dead are aptly named, but they will not know the secret carried by The Dead they are paired with. Each player will attempt to get information from the other during their talk, and each will have reasons to withhold information from the other.

During these conversations, Camp Police will be assigned to monitor the pairs and to spy on them. They will want to discover the secrets of The Dead as well, and will also want to find out if the Prisoners "contaminate" the location by either A) speaking one of the key words or B) telling The Dead that they are from the future. Camp Police will be taking notes and preparing for the interrogation of Prisoners in act two. Over the course of two acts, Camp Police must discover the link between the personal secrets of The Dead and the onset of nuclear war.

While the Prisoners are finding and introducing themselves to The Dead, Camp Police should talk about how to coordinate their surveillance efforts. Once the pairings have had a few minutes to get acquainted, Camp Police should move into the play area.

If there are more Camp Police than pairings, the GC should hang back and watch the game as a whole, collecting information from the other Police, rather than surveilling pairings directly. Alternately, Camp Police could rotate so each pairing has one Camp Police spying on them at a time.

When 45 minutes have passed, Camp Police should approach each pairing, say the word “Now,” and then prepare for act two.

ACT TWO: DYING WORDS

When the Prisoners return, the chemicals that took them to the past now take their lives. Camp Police have only a few precious moments to gain as much information as they can from each Prisoner. As a rule, Prisoners will only be able to speak for five minutes before they join The Dead.

As Prisoners return, they should gather together silently at the meetup point. They should sit together with their eyes closed.

When The Dead arrive, they should group around Camp Police and stand as silent witnesses to the interrogations.

While players are arriving, Camp Police should consult about what they’ve gathered through surveillance and what questions they want to ask of each Prisoner.

Camp Police should pull one Prisoner at a time away from their group to a space just out of earshot of the other Prisoners. During each interrogation, Camp Police should seek to discover the meanings assigned to as many of the key words as they can and the secret memory of each of The Dead. Camp Police should also seek to get Prisoners to confess to any contamination they may be guilty of. Each Camp Police should pay close attention and ask any questions they may have. Your task as Police is to assemble a narrative of what happened during this moment and what connection it might have to the war.

When a Prisoner’s five minutes is up, inform them that they have died and must now join The Dead. They should stand as silent witnesses to further interrogations. Once all interrogations are done, Camp Police should compare notes for ten minutes. Ten minutes is all they have, for the drugs will take their lives too. Their goal is to leave behind directions for other Camp Police who can travel back and stop the war. The other players will stand silently and watch these deliberations. When ten minutes is up, Camp Police, too, join The Dead and can announce their findings to the other players. Were they able

to learn enough that other members of the Camp might alter the past and save the world? Once this announcement is complete, the game is over, and players may debrief the game as a group.

GC RULES OVERVIEW

You Need:

1. A location with a meetup point
2. Three to twelve players, including you
3. A way to tell the time.

Prep:

1. Start at the meetup point
2. Have a safety talk
3. Explain
 - a) the limits of the play space
 - b) that the game is played in two acts and that players should return to the meetup point when act one is over
 - c) that you will hand out sheets that assign them to one of three factions
4. Pass out sheets
5. Give The Dead memory sheets (Don't read these in advance, GC)
6. Give them all time to read and consider their roles
7. Pair up Prisoners with The Dead

Act One:

1. Send out The Dead, asking them to separate in the play space
2. Prisoners wait with eyes closed for 5 minutes, thinking about the Camp
3. Send Prisoners into play, staggering them by 10 seconds
4. Set timer for 45 minutes
5. Consult with other Camp Police, if any
6. Surveil pairings: can you discover
 - a) the meaning of key words: Bear, Chord, Light, Solution, Minute
 - b) if Prisoners contaminate the location by saying key words or speaking of the future
7. When time is up, Camp Police say "Now" to each pairing.

Act Two:

1. Make sure Prisoners group together silently, and that The Dead stand silently with Camp Police.
2. Consult with Camp Police while you wait for The Dead to arrive.
3. Interrogate each Prisoner for exactly 5 minutes. Ask:
 - a) about the meaning of key words
 - b) about the secret memory of The Dead they were paired with
 - c) if they will admit to contaminating the site by admitting they were from the future
 - d) whatever else you think will be helpful
4. Tell each Prisoner they have died and should join The Dead and remain silent
5. After last interrogation, Camp Police have exactly 10 minutes to find a connection between the war and the information they've gathered from Prisoners. You want to know:
 - a) the cause of the war
 - b) what can be done to stop it
6. After 10 minutes, Camp Police die and join The Dead, announcing their findings, even if they have found nothing.
7. The End. Players may now talk freely about their experience of the game.

CHARACTER SHEETS

Print a number of sheets appropriate to the number of players
according to the table on page 2

YOU ARE A PRISONER

You remember the world as it was. You were a child then. You remember real food, real beds. Parents. Playgrounds. School. Then there was the war, and everything ended. They brought you to the caves, and you didn't see the light again. Rat meat and mushrooms. The water is never clean. No one to speak to. You were left alone in the dark with your memories, memories that steadily grow stronger and more elaborate. With each passing year, you live more frequently and more deeply in them. Today the Camp Police come to you with a candle and tell you that you have been picked for a special task. Your memories will now become real, they say. You can go to the past. You can meet someone and speak to them. They will be happy to see you, they say.

They handed you a scrap of paper and a cup of water. This water is dark and thick. It smells worse than normal. The paper has five words on it. One is "Bear." It is written in big red letters. The others are "Chord," "Light," "Solution," and "Minute." They are written smaller and in black. "You must discover what these words mean," they say. "Talk to your friend so that they say these words. We will be watching you. *We need to know The Bear.*"

Something about their tone tells you that you are expendable. They don't need you and would just as soon see you dead. They need only the information.

But you drank the water and now you are here. Really here. Not just in your cell remembering. This is the world before the war. These are the sounds and smells. This is the air and the light. Time travel has made you feel unwell. Your side aches. Your feel a bit dizzy. But to be here is an amazing gift. Everything is so beautiful and sacred to you. The Camp Police will follow you soon, and this makes you nervous.

Your friend is somewhere near. Go speak to your friend. See what you can learn.

HOW TO PLAY

Act One:

You will be paired with another player. That player will be your friend from the happy past. Your job is to talk with them casually. Get to know them. They have a personal memory that involves the word "Bear" and one of the other words on your list (Chord, Light, Solution, and Minute), but you don't know which one. Do not ask them directly about these words, and do not say these words

yourself. Ask your friend questions about their life and let them speak naturally about themselves. The meaning of these words is something personal, so you will want to get to know them well. If your friend asks you about yourself, be careful what you say. The Camp Police will not be happy if you tell the truth. Drop hints. Hope that your friend guesses the secret: that you are from the future.

The Camp Police are following you and listening. Try not to let your friend see you worrying about them, and try not to let them hear the secret of The Bear. You are convinced that their lack of information is the only thing keeping you alive. Once they know The Bear, they won't need you anymore.

Act Two:

When a Camp Police approaches you and says "Now," get up immediately, without another word. Turn your back on The Dead and walk directly to the meetup point. Wait silently at the meetup point with the other prisoners. Close your eyes and keep them closed. Do not speak to The Dead when they arrive. The Camp Police will call you and ask you questions. Answer them honestly or not, as you wish. Follow their instructions when the questioning is done.

YOU ARE THE DEAD

Something is wrong, but you don't know what. Life seems fine. Everything is normal. And something unspeakably bad is about to happen. You're sure of it. You haven't been sleeping because you're up all night thinking about the big terrible unknown thing that is on its way. You feel crazy. You can't tell anyone: *What would they say?* And what if they found out the whole truth? Deep down, you know that, whatever this awful thing is, it's all your fault. The Big Terrible Thing is somehow related to something you've done. Something in your memory.

But now you've met someone. Someone special. It's hard to say exactly why, but you have a feeling that this person will understand you. "Feeling" is too vague a word. You *know* they will understand. Something about them is different from anyone you've ever met. You're sure that the answer to your trouble is in the hands of your new friend. You've both agreed to meet up today to get to know each other better. Somehow you know: if you can understand this person, you will also understand your fate. So enjoy your conversation. Get to know them. This is going to be a good thing. It's the first bit of hope you've felt in a long time.

All the same, this is really the first time you've ever talked to your friend in any depth. You are hopeful, yes, but you feel vulnerable, too. Your new friend wants to know you. But how can you tell if they are trustworthy? You've only just met. Play it safe. Don't let out too much of yourself until you are sure that your feelings are right.

HOW TO PLAY

Act One:

You have been given a memory sheet. Read it. It contains your most important memory. This memory is not the kind of thing you would ever talk about in casual conversation, but it would definitely come up if someone takes the time to get to know you well. When you get really close with someone, they learn about this memory because it is such a big part of who you are.

You will be paired with another player. They are your new friend. Do not tell your friend your memory unless you are able to get to know them well enough to trust them and their motives for getting to know you. See what you can learn about them, and let them get to know you if you feel that they can be trusted.

Act Two:

When a Camp Police player walks up to you and says “Now,” your friend will get up and walk away. Don’t try to talk to them. In fact, ignore them while they walk away. Spend five to ten minutes alone, thinking about your conversation. What have you learned about them? What have you learned about yourself? What questions do you still have?

When you are ready, walk back to the meetup point. Do not speak to the Prisoners. Gather with the rest of The Dead and stand silently near the Game Coordinator and his or her team. Watch what they do and listen to what they say. They will be asking questions of the Prisoners. Think about their questions and what these might mean about your circumstances. What are they trying to learn? Try to piece together everything you have discovered during act one to see if you can determine who you are and where you are. Will a Big Terrible Thing happen? If so what is it? If not, why have you been so distraught? Who were the Prisoners? What were they trying to do? And what about the other players? What was their goal? How much of the puzzle can you solve? Think about these questions as you watch the proceedings in silence.

YOU ARE CAMP POLICE

The experiments have gone remarkably well. Dedication and discipline have paid off. Living underground after the war that wiped human civilization from the face of the earth, you have managed to survive. Not only that, but with only a small band of survivors and very few resources you have torn a doorway into the fabric of time. The drug works perfectly now. Of course, the costs of time travel are high, but these prisoners are expendable. It is the future of the human race that matters, not these sickly creatures in your cave. You are willing to sacrifice your own life, too. You have also taken the drug, so you can travel back to monitor the subjects. Discovering the right information in the past will change everything, and it will be as if this horrid present were only a bad dream. It *is* a dream. That's all it is. And so it doesn't matter who you kill or if you die or how painful it is to wake up from the drug. Once we finally correct the past, this will all go away.

After sending many prisoners back, all of whom eventually died from high dosages of the drug, you have been able to trace the root of the apocalypse back to a single point in time. Somewhere in the space of this hour at this location, there exists the final clue you need to understand the cause the end of the world. What was it? You only have scraps of information. A riddle. The word "Bear" is important, you know that. And these words, too: "Chord," "Light," "Solution," and "Minute." These come up over and over again in the dying words of the prisoners, but what do they mean? Soon, you expect to have the answers. Perhaps this journey back will be the last, and you'll be able to save us, once and for all.

Watch the Prisoners. Make sure they do not spoil the experiment by speaking the keywords themselves or disclosing their identity.

HOW TO PLAY

Act One:

One or more pairs of prisoners and players from the past will be talking and getting to know each other. Your job is to spy on them. You want to learn the meaning of these keywords: Bear, Chord, Light, Solution, Minute. You also want to determine if the Prisoners contaminate the past by letting The Dead know that they are from the future, or by speaking any of the keywords out loud.

Act casually. Don't let the player from the past suspect what you are up to. If possible, remain near enough to hear, but out of sight of the prisoner. If there are more than one Camp Police in the game, you will want to coordinate your efforts.

When act one is over, approach the pairs of players and say the word "Now." The Prisoners will immediately get up and move to the meetup point where they will wait in silence with eyes closed. The Dead will follow shortly after. While you wait for players to arrive, consult with other Camp Police, if any, about the questions you will ask in act two.

Act Two:

When all players have arrived at the meetup point, it is time to interrogate the Prisoners. Bring them over to you, one at a time, and spend exactly five minutes asking them what they have learned about the past. Have they heard any of the keywords? How many? Which ones? What do they mean? Did they contaminate the location by admitting they were from the future or by speaking the keywords aloud? If so, they must confess. What else did they learn that might be of value to your efforts? What connection did The Dead they spoke with have to the end of the world? What secrets did their memories hold?

After five minutes of questions, inform the Prisoner that he or she has died and must join The Dead without speaking to the other Prisoners. When you have interrogated all Prisoners, spend exactly ten minutes synthesising all the information you have gained. Why did the world end? What can be done to prevent it? Have you discovered enough information? You want to leave behind a note for other Camp Police, so that they can save the world. If you cannot do so, your mission will have failed.

When ten minutes are up, you have died. Go and join the dead. Make an announcement about your findings, even if what you have discovered is that you know nothing.

MEMORY SHEETS

GC PRINT THESE BUT ***DO NOT READ***

THERE ARE **FOUR PAGES** FOLLOWING THIS ONE

PRINT SINGLE SIDED

FOLD THEM IN HALF WITHOUT READING

HAND THEM OUT RANDOMLY TO THE DEAD WHEN PREPPING FOR THE GAME

UNUSED MEMORY SHEETS SHOULD BE DESTROYED UNREAD

MEMORY

On the morning of your eighth birthday, your father told you that he was taking you to the zoo. He was a busy man, a scientist who worked for the government, and so spending time with him was a rare opportunity for you. He walked you to the bear exhibit and stood there, staring silently for an hour at the lone brown bear owned by the zoo.

You held his hand. "I want to tell you about my job, but I can't," he said. "So I want you to remember this bear." There was a popping sound like a firecracker and your father crumbled to the ground. You turned and saw a man holding a gun. The man was in the shadows under a tree. He took two steps backward into the light and disappeared. Literally. He walked into the light and dematerialized.

There was a lot of noise and screaming around you. There were sirens, police and an ambulance. Men in uniform took you away. Eventually, they brought you to your mother. She didn't believe you about the man. She said people don't just disappear. "We'll find the person who did this," she said, but no one ever did.

When you spoke again about the man who walked into the light, your mother called you a liar. When you persisted, she became angry. She spoke in her other voice, the mean one. She said someone shot your father because he worked for the government. She told you never to speak of the disappearing man ever again. So you haven't. Not even to your therapists. It has remained your most important secret, a memory that is with you always. It is why you got your tattoos. On your right ankle, you have a tattoo of a bear. On your left ankle, you have a tattoo of the sun.

The bear. The light. These are your personal symbols. They are sacred to you. They remind you of your dad.

MEMORY

As far back as you can remember, your mom has dated a younger guy named Steve. It wasn't exactly a steady relationship. They were off and on throughout your childhood, but your mom never dated anyone else. She often spoke of Steve as if they were still together even when he wasn't around. Steve's appearances were irregular, sporadic. You wouldn't see him for a week, a month, and then suddenly, he'd be there, in the kitchen making dinner. After dinner, he'd disappear, and you wouldn't know when you might see him again. Somehow, these comings and goings didn't seem to bother your mom. You loved Steve. He was kind to you and to your mother. He always seemed genuinely happy to be with you. He was the only father figure you ever had.

Every single time Steve appeared in your life, he promised to teach you to play the guitar. You had an old acoustic that your mom picked up at a yard sale just so Steve could show you how to play. And every time Steve was around, he taught you the same chord, the F chord. It was the first chord of "Hey Jude," he said. He said that every time. "Practice that, and next time I'll teach you the next chord," he said always. One day, after your "lesson," Steve said that he was not going to be able to come back. You'd have to learn the rest of the chords on your own, he said. He gave you a teddy bear. You never saw him again. You slept with that bear every night.

It's been years since you've lived at home. Your mom's health has been not too good. You recently had to transition her into an assisted living facility. She's been forgetting things. When you last visited her, a man walked out of her room, saw you, and then hurried away. You had to do a double take: He looked exactly like Steve. It couldn't have been Steve. The man you saw in the hallway was still very young, and Steve must be a lot older by now. But when you talked to your mother, she insisted that she had just spent the last hour with Steve. On your mother's bedside was a card addressed to you. Inside were the chords and lyrics to "Hey Jude."

You still have the bear he gave you, and you hold it when you are lonely. You still own that guitar, and still only know one chord.

The bear. The chord. These are deeply important touchstones for you. They symbolize "family" to you.

MEMORY

Aunt Patty was a bit of an eccentric. She was some kind of math wizard with a government job that he couldn't talk about. But when she came over for dinner, she would speak at length about all kinds of weird things: unlocking the secrets of human consciousness, clairvoyance, telepathy, wormholes, mysticism -- all kinds of things that didn't seem to have too much to do with math.

When the Rubix cube first came out, Aunt Patty gave you one for your birthday. It shouldn't be too hard, she said, and when you struggled to solve it, she promised to come up with an algorithm to help you.

One day she burst in the front door, unannounced, and said "I have it! I have the solution!" You thought she meant your Rubix cube algorithm, but apparently she was talking about something that involved her job. She and her dad sat at the dinner table all that afternoon and late into the night talking about things you didn't understand. The word "consciousness" came up a lot. You heard Aunt Patty say: "It's all inside the consciousness! It's memory! That's the key!"

After that day, Aunt Patty acted a lot more nervous when she came over. Always checking the blinds and looking around the house for "bugs," which didn't mean cockroaches. She thought someone was always listening to her. She seemed scared and sad all the time.

The last time you saw Aunt Patty, she gave you a ceramic bear and said, "I love you kiddo. The solution is within." It was another year before you realized the bear was a piggy bank with a rubber stopper in the bottom. You removed the stopper and found a scrap of paper rolled up within. The top half of the paper had five words on it: Bear, Light, Chord, Solution, Minute. The bottom half had the algorithm you needed to solve your Rubix cube. Odd, you thought, two of the words on that top sheet matched Aunt Patty's gift: Bear and Solution. The other words didn't quite make sense. You tore off the bottom half of the paper and got out your Rubix. You aren't sure what happened to the top half.

You still have the bear and the solution. They are important to you. They remind you of your favorite crazy aunt and of a mystery you never solved: Who was she afraid of?

MEMORY

You had a good friend who was abducted in front of a supermarket a couple years back. You were there. You saw it happen. Tina was her name, and she was a physics wiz with an interest in neurology. There were, like, twelve different colleges recruiting her because her science fair project was

a big deal. It won a national award and got her face on the cover of Time magazine. Something about human memory and Einstein's theories about spacetime or whatever. So she was famous. Like nerd famous. But when you guys hung out, it was just fun. You went to the market to get a brownie mix. You were going to bake brownies and watch old movies.

What happened next, though, was really weird. It must have been a glare off a car window or something? But you could swear that one second you were looking at the door of the grocery store, and the next second there was a guy standing there. He didn't walk there. He didn't come out through the door. He was just suddenly there. Without a sound or anything. Like he just teleported in. His breath smelled really bad, but Tina seemed to know him. Maybe he was a college recruiter?

"Wait here a minute," she said, and she handed you a quarter. Then she went with him around the corner of the store.

There was one of those kiddie rides in front of the store. It was a bear saddled like a horse. The bear was all angry and growling. Seemed pretty cool. The quarter Tina gave you was an Alaska quarter, the one with the picture of the grizzly bear on it, and that kind of weirded you out. What were the odds that she would give you a *bear* quarter for a *bear* ride? Maybe that was her telling a joke, but Tina wasn't usually very funny.

Then you heard the squeal of tires and saw the man driving away with Tina. She seemed calm enough. Maybe she was going to talk to more college people? But then a lady came out of the supermarket and said "That's my car!" Tina never came home after that. The police never found her. No one ever found the man even though you described him perfectly. They only found the lady's car the next day back in the parking lot right where she had parked it.

The bear. The minute. You keep the quarter in your pocket all the time. The phrase "wait a minute" is hard for you to hear. The bear is always with you. You feel like you've been waiting that same minute your whole life.