



7 April 2025

EVERY STORY
BEGINS BEFORE
THE FIRST
CHAPTER.

IT BEGAN WITH FIVE WORDS.

Two men went to London.

Every story begins before the first chapter.

Before the cities had meaning.

Before the photograph.

Before Prague.

There was no mythology yet.

Just one very simple idea.

Two men went to London.

— D. Vaen



CHARACTER FILE

MAX SLICK

First impression.

Quiet.
Not shy.
Just doesn't waste words.

Always notices

- buildings
- books
- people who say too much

Need to remember

Don't make him cold.
Quiet isn't empty.
There is always a reason.

KEEP.

Things I know

- Loyal.
- Patient.
- Doesn't interrupt.
- Thinks before speaking.

Quiet people are often mistaken for simple people.

He isn't.

Things I don't know

- Why Prague?
- What keeps him moving?

Notes

- Reads old books.
- Likes empty places.
- Doesn't hurry.
- Watches details.

He isn't trying to be interesting.
That's why he is.

CHARACTER FILE

KEIZER HUSTLE

First impression.

Talks first.
Laughs easily.
Not careless.
Energy before
everything else.

Always
notices

- people
- opportunities
- exits
- details others
miss



Need to remember

Humor isn't always
joking.
He protects with it.
Don't underestimate
his silence.
He listens — always.

KEEP.

Things I know

- New York.
- Coffee. Strong.
- Friends everywhere.
- Loyal to few.
- Fast mind.
- Hates small talk.
- Good with people.
- Reads between lines.

Things I don't know

- What happened
before London?
- Why does everyone
know him?
- Why so many
doors closed?
- What isn't he
saying?

Could be

- musician?
- salesman?
- gambler?
- journalist?
- something
else.



He makes a room
lighter.
People think they
know him.
They don't.
Not really.

Notes

- Doesn't trust
elevators.
- Sleeps lightly.
- Remembers
everything.
- Laughs at the
wrong moments.

BOOK I — LONDON

It began in London.
Not with answers.
With rain, a library,
a black car that watched too long,
and a card that said
Wrong station.

London never explains.
It simply remembers.

All roads lead to Prague.



MAYFAIR THE LIBRARY

Mayfair.
Still too polished.
Still probably
why it works.

The library should
feel safe.
Not warm.
Safe.

Old doors.
Good for
keeping secrets.



MAYFAIR

Maybe here.

GROSVENOR
SQUARE

GREEN
PARK

Why a library?
Because people
lower their voices.



Rain.
April 2025.



This.
April 2025.



Maybe.
April 2025.

THE VAEN JOURNAL
ISSUE 01 / SUMMER 2026

MAYFAIR NOTES

- Quiet money
- Old buildings
- Private clubs
- Good shadows
- Rain helps

THE LIBRARY

- Not public.
- Not private either.
- In between.
- That's where
they talk.



Remember:
London
doesn't
speak first.
It watches.

THE WOMAN

Saw a woman today.
Outside.
Rain.
Interesting face.

Not a model.
Not trying.
Just... there.

Could be -
- a writer
- a librarian
- a lawyer
- something else
- something
between
Crosses paths
once.



Hair like
rain cloud.

Eyes don't
stay still.

Potential
character?

Yes.

Who?

- someone at the library?
- knows the city.
- not from here, but stays.
- watcher?
- or part of the story?

She doesn't look
lost.

~~She doesn't look lost.~~

She looks...
aware.

Notes to self:

- Find her name?
- Where does she go?
- Why remember her?

Keep her.

Something
in the way
she looked
at the street
before she
looked at me.



BOOK II —

NEW YORK

New York was louder than London.

Not because it had more to say.
It simply had less patience.

I needed the city to move.
Max and Keizer had been
standing still for too long.

Somewhere between a diner,
an old photograph,
and a man who knew
when to ask the wrong question,
the story began to remember itself.

New York does not wait for the story.
It walks ahead and expects
you to follow.



NEW YORK THE DINER

Need somewhere
familiar.

Not home.

Something close
enough.



The diner should
feel familiar.

Even if the reader
has never been
there.



Notes

- Different pulse.
- Noisy but lonely.
- People everywhere,
everyone alone.
- City that doesn't
wait.



What I need:

- A place people talk.
- Stories come easy.
- Regulars.
- A corner that
remembers.



MARIA / DINER

Need somewhere familiar.

Someone Keizer knew before.

A place where people talk.
Where stories come easy.

Works hard.

Not loud.
Sees everything.
Remembers.
Keeps the diner running.

What I need:

- A place people talk.
- Stories come easy.
- Regulars.
- A corner that remembers.



Potential character?

Yes.

What I think:

- She knows Keizer.
- From before.
- Trusts him.
- Won't ask too much.
- Will say just enough.

Notes to self:

- Don't explain too early.
- Let the city teach.
- Answers come later.
- Not now.

Notes

- Different pulse.
- Noisy but lonely.
- People everywhere, everyone alone.
- City that doesn't wait.



Her place.
Their place?

Keep her.

Need someone in New York.

Not police.
Not detective.
Journalist?

Knows the city.
Knows Keizer.
Asks the questions
others forget.

Not always right.
But always useful.
And he keeps
his own stories close.

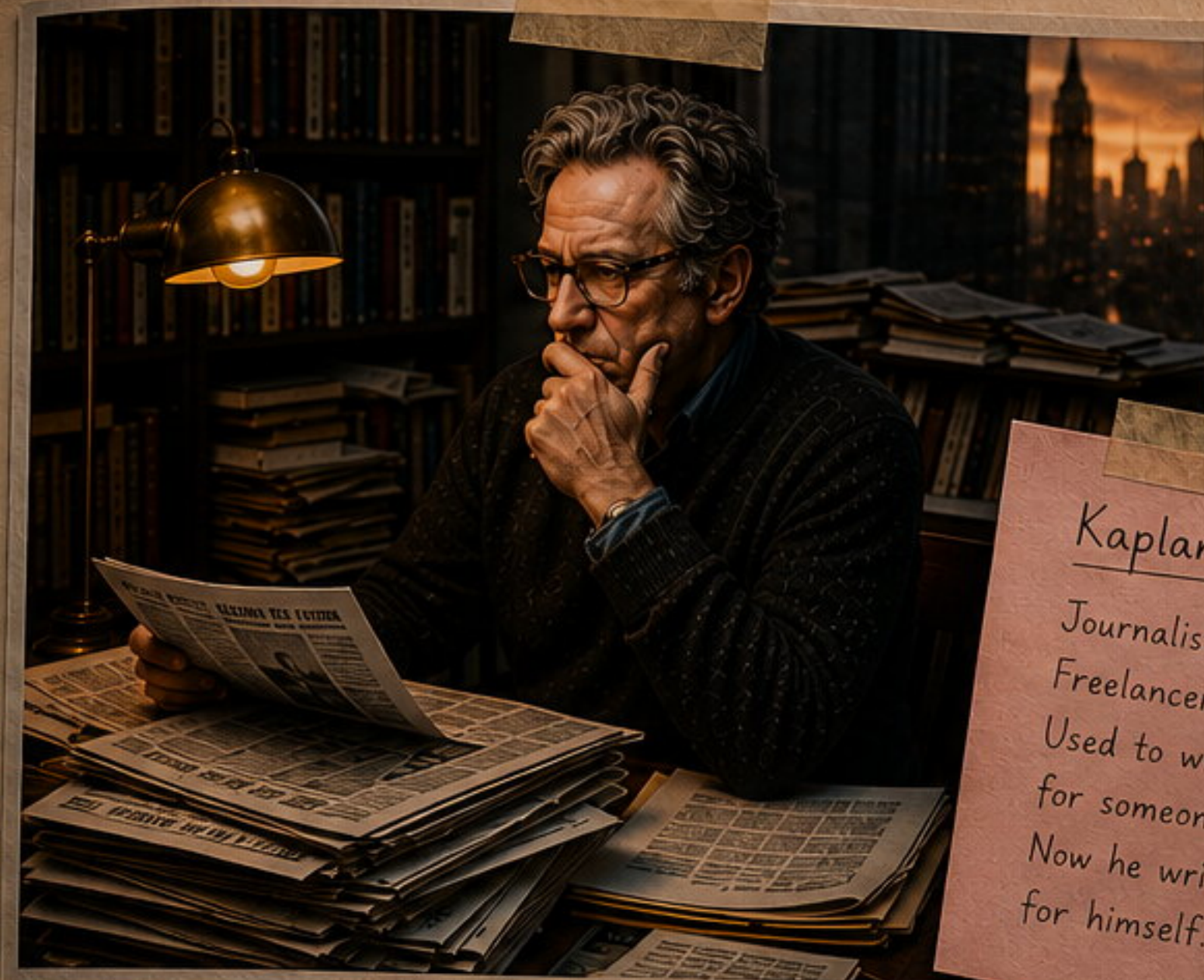
Seen him before?
Where?
Brooklyn café.
Too many papers.
Always listening.
Never in a hurry.

Old contact?

Calls when
he shouldn't.
Answers when
he shouldn't.

Kaplan.

Yes.



Kaplan.

Journalist.
Freelancer.
Used to write
for someone.
Now he writes
for himself.

What he might know:

- Keizer's past in New York
- Harlow?
- The woman
- Things that don't exist
on paper.

Call him.

See if he picks up.
If he does,
the city will talk.
If he doesn't,
we'll find
another way in.

BOOK III —

LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles looked effortless.

It wasn't.

The city hides urgency
behind sunshine.

Everyone arrives believing
they still have time.

Most of them don't.

Sometimes the loudest thing
in a story
is a quiet appointment.



Not a chase.
A schedule.
A promise
made long ago.
Keep it
human.



*
CAFE
FIGUEROA
DTLA

You can't write
Los Angeles
without listening
to the silence.



Book III - Los Angeles

- Care facility
- Old man by the Pacific
- Kaplan connection
- Appointment
- Not about speed.
- It's about time.
- Rafael.
- Max blames traffic.
- Keizer blames L.A.



Care facility.
Not a hospital.
Not a home.
Somewhere
in between.



- Los Angeles.
- Urgency.
 - Image.
 - Behind the light.
 - Old man.
 - Pacific.
 - Time matters.
 - Trust the feeling.

L.A. tests
everyone.
It smiles
while it does it.

They think
they came here
to live.
The city knows
better.

BOOK III —

LOS ANGELES

Different problem.

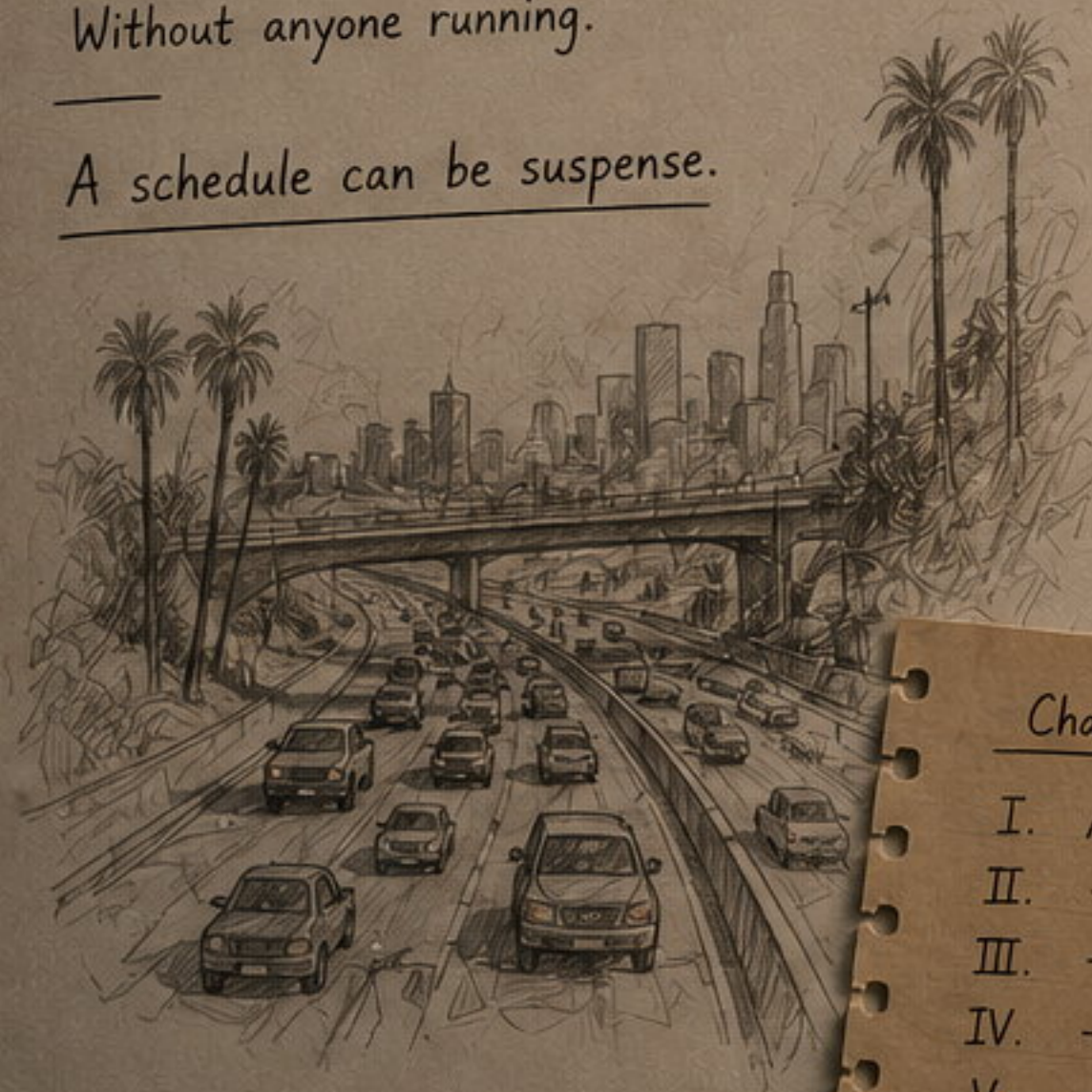
Need urgency.

Without a chase.

Without a gun.

Without anyone running.

A schedule can be suspense.



Los Angeles.
Everyone looks
relaxed.
Everyone is late.

Chapters?

- I. Arrival
- II. —
- III. —
- IV. —
- V. —
- VI. —

What if
nothing
is chasing them?

They still
have to arrive.

Appointment.
Care facility.
Old man.
Pacific.

Kaplan says today.
Why today?

Things to avoid:

- car chase
- guns
- running
- artificial danger
- explaining Harlow



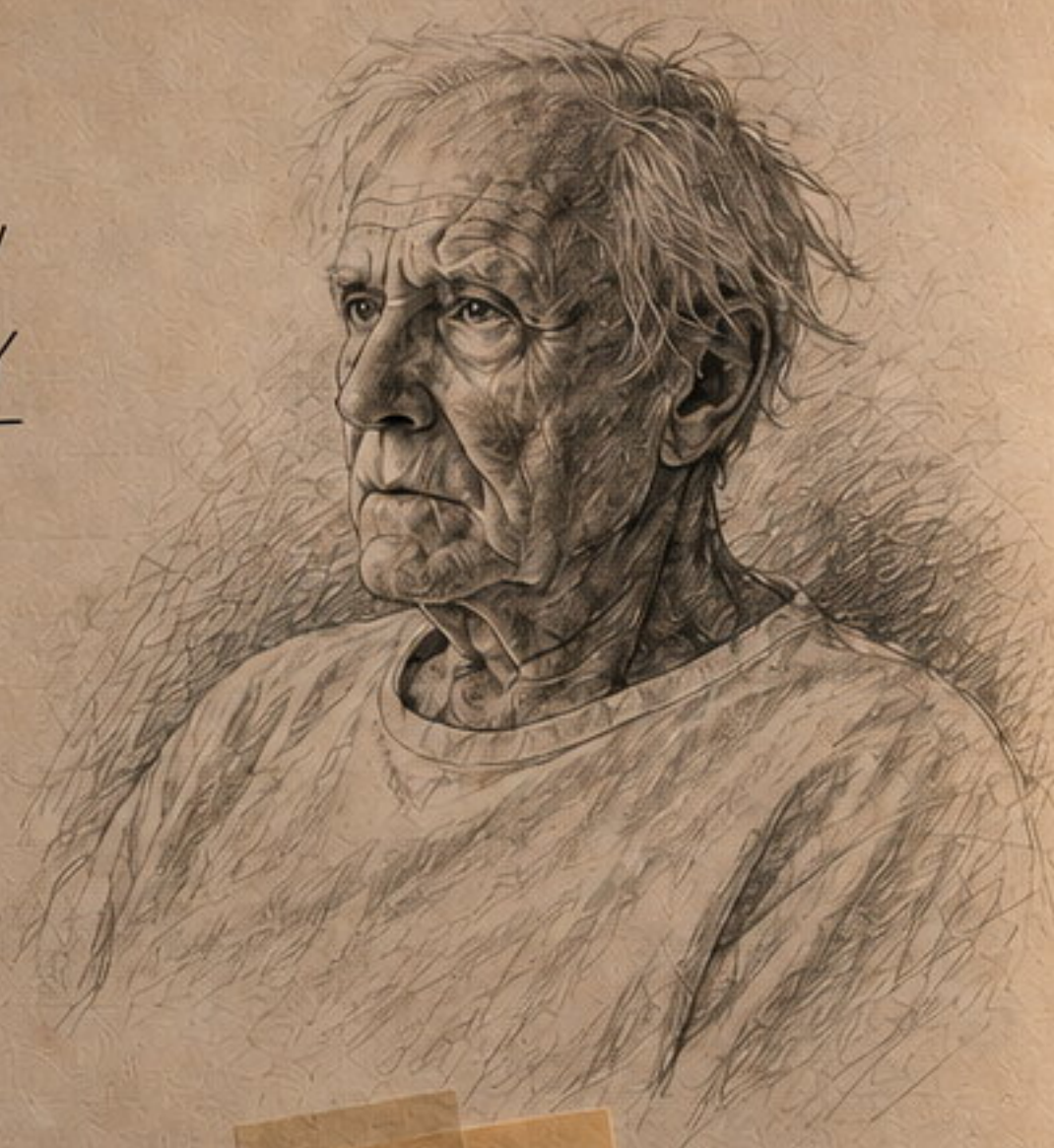
Make the reader hurry.
Let the characters
sit in traffic.

THE OLD MAN / CARE FACILITY

He lives near the ocean.
Not a hospital.
A care facility.
Private.
Quiet.
People come.
People go.
He stays.

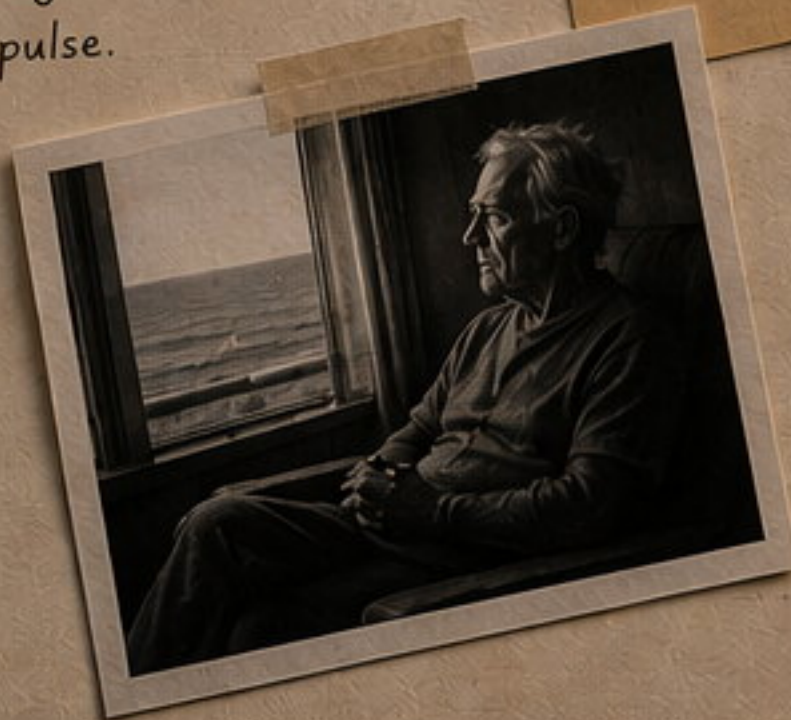
He forgets things.
Maybe that is the point.

Max and Keizer
have an appointment.
Not to fix him.
To understand
something that still
has a pulse.



Old man.
Why does Keizer
know him?
How long ago?
What happened?

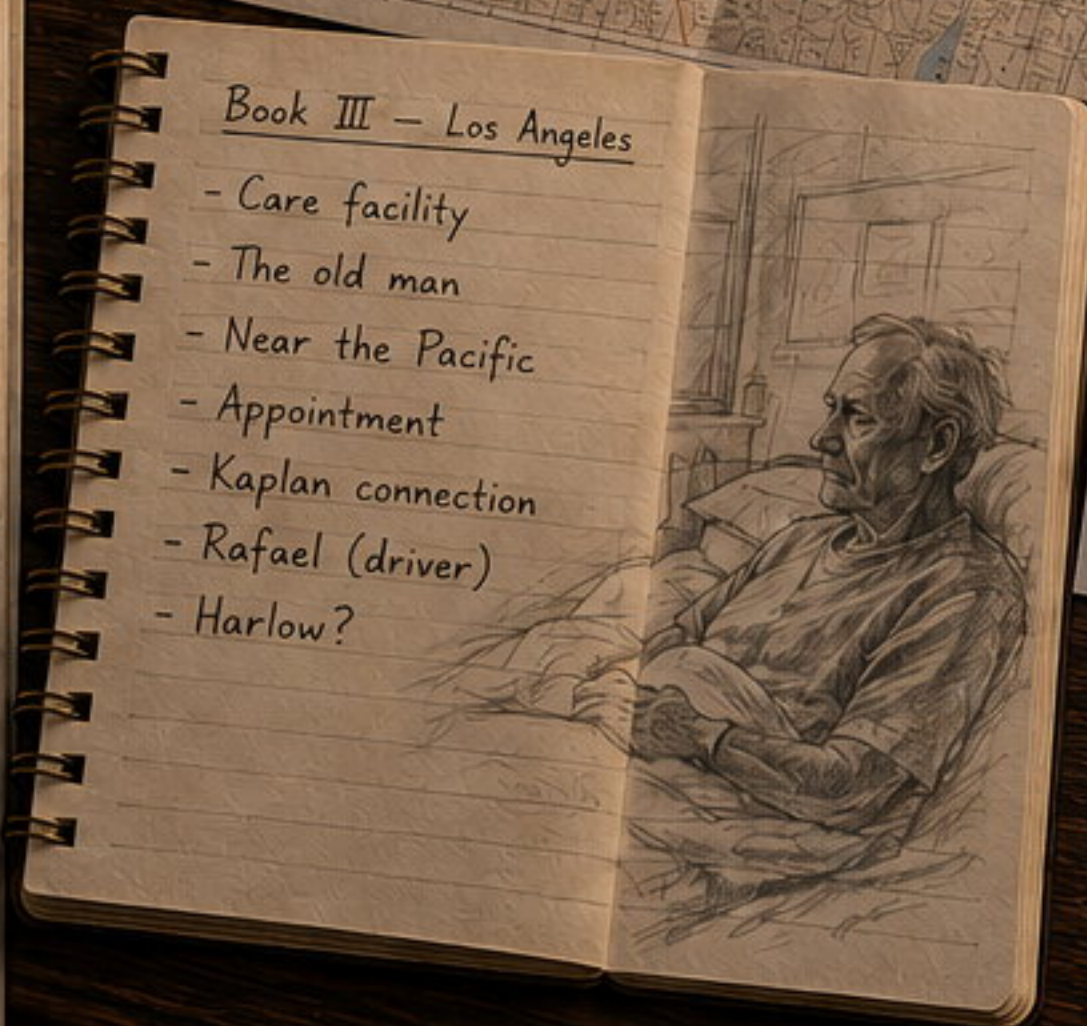
Harlow?
Seen him
before?
Where?



Kaplan connection.
He sends them?
Or knows
the place?



To ask.
- How is his memory?
- What does he
remember?
- What does he
forget?
- What matters
to him now?



BOOK IV —

THE PHOTOGRAPH

I thought the photograph
was a detail.

Something on a wall.
Something old enough
to feel true.

Two men laughing.

Younger.
Lighter.

Before London.
Before New York,
Before the story
I thought I was writing.

Then I made the mistake
of looking at it again.

The photograph was not
part of the story.

It was where the story
had been hiding.

I had to go back.



BEFORE.

Before the photograph.
Before Prague meant anything.
Before the questions became
heavier than the answers.

They were younger.

I knew that.

What I had forgotten
was that they had once
been happy.

Not uncomplicated.
Not innocent.

Just happy.

There is a difference.



MAX

Before.
Laughs
more.



KEIZER

Worries
less.



Important:

Don't write them
as younger versions
of who they become.

They don't know yet.

Max laughs more.
Keizer worries less.

Keep that.

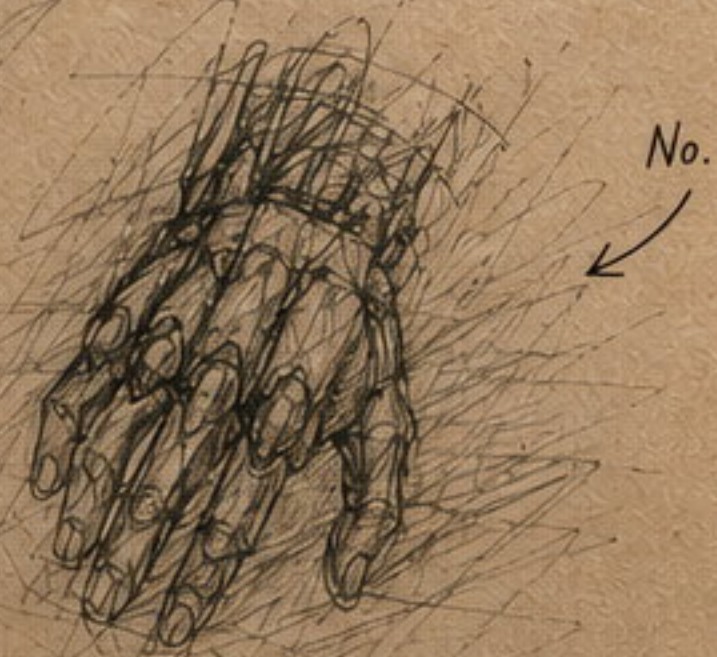


HANDS.

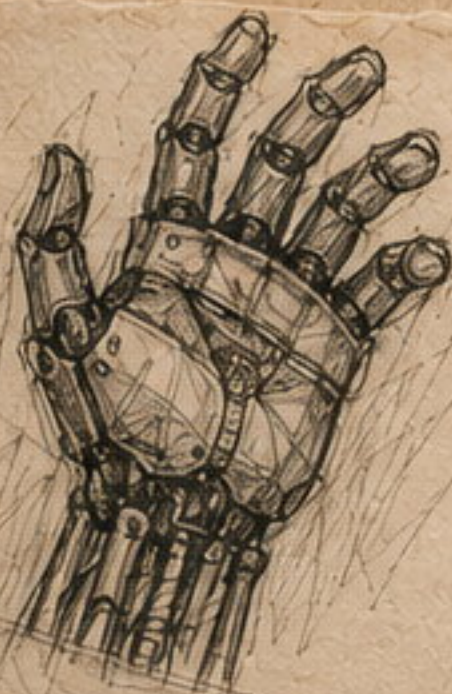
Something happened.
I know that much.
The hands are different.
Why?
Don't know yet.
Maybe I don't need to.

Not weapons.
Important.

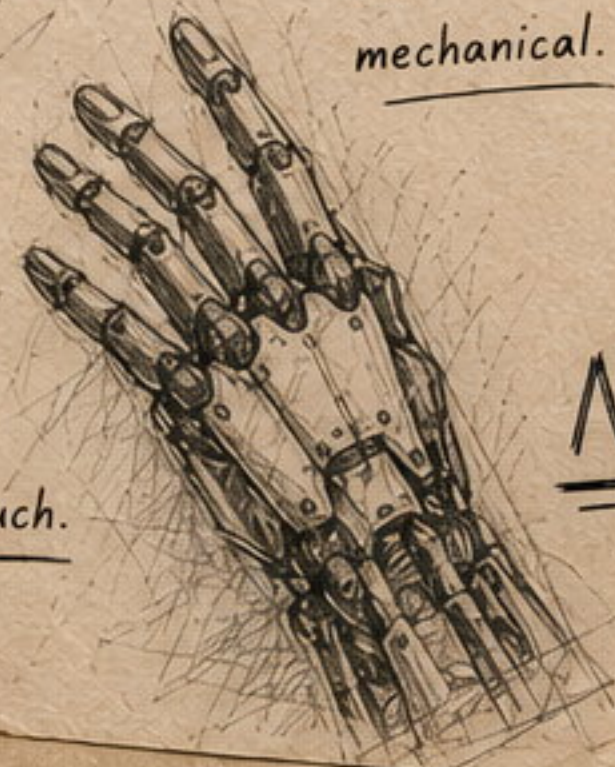
Do they feel
pain?
Do they forget?
Do they
remember?



No.



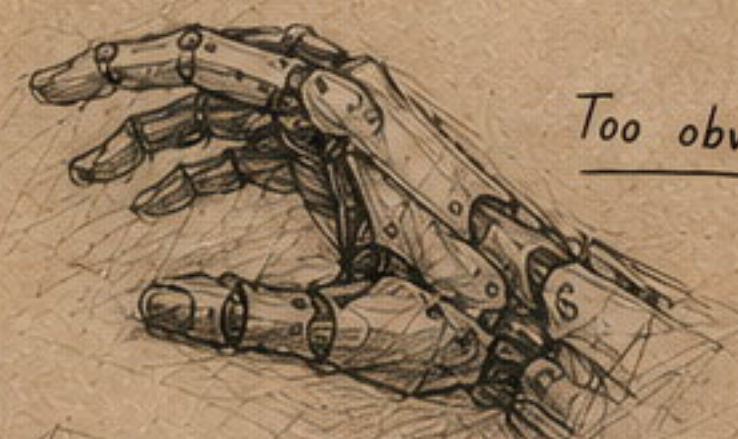
Too
mechanical.



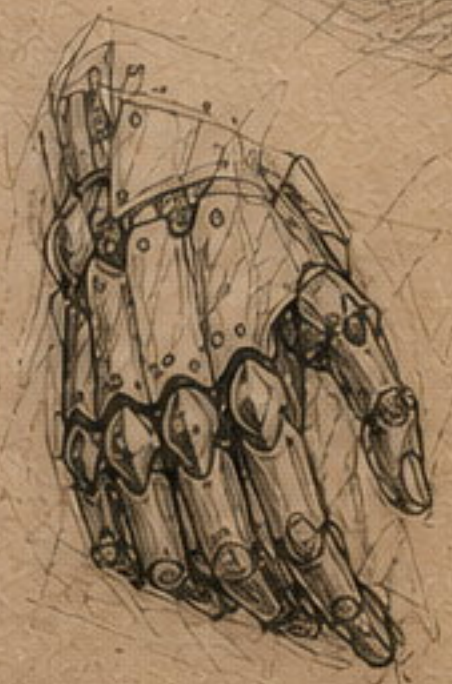
No.

Too much.

They must
still be able
to hold a
coffee cup.



Too obvious.



Still
human?



I will figure this out later.

BOOK V —

PRAGUE

Prague doesn't try
to impress you.

It just waits.

In the fog.

In the stone.

In the silence between
clock strikes.

Some cities speak.

Prague remembers.

And if you listen quietly
enough, it lets you
remember too.



BOOK V —

PRAGUE.

London asked the first question.
New York remembered the people.
Los Angeles remembered the time.

Twenty-three years earlier,
I found the photograph.

I thought Prague
was where the story ended.
It wasn't.

It was where
everything had been waiting.



All roads lead to Prague.



PRAGUE
May 2025



office - after dark
best view in the city.



café - mornings
Before the city wakes up.

Good places
don't need
to try.

Prague was never one place.

Ideas
don't come
when you
call them.
They come
when they
want.

streets - after rain.
The city breathes
different.



rain again.
always
cleans
something
you didn't
know was
dirty.



tram stop - movement
People come and go.
The city stays.

wait here.
Watch more
than you
think.



coffee.
obviously.

You can't write
a city.
You can only
listen.



Carlos



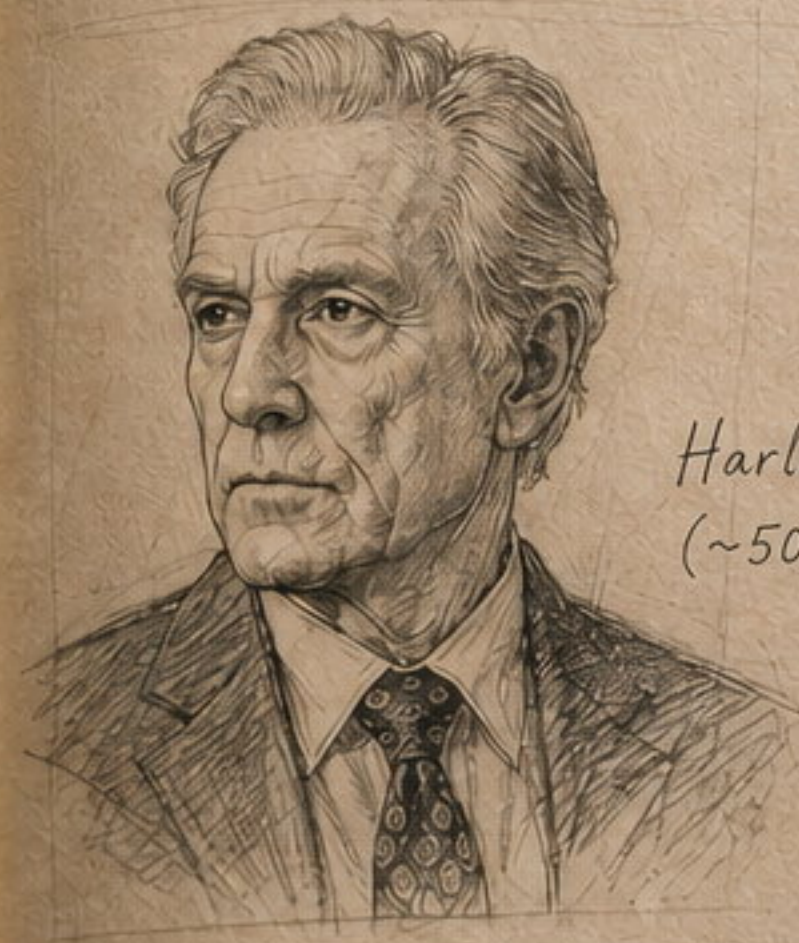
Nico



Eleanor
(young)



Harlow
(~50)







THE PRAGUE STORY IS COMPLETE.
SLICK & HUSTLE ARE NOT.