

During the day, author Beston Barnett designs and builds furniture in San Diego. At night, he plays Romani jazz. The rest of the time, he writes quirky little stories in which he struggles—rarely successfully—to leave his characters living happily ever after. He is a finalist for the 2024 Theodore Sturgeon Award who has placed short fiction with *Clarkesworld*, *Strange Horizons*, and *Trollbreath*. He is also a graduate of the 2018 Clarion Workshop. Beston’s latest tale is about computer scientists taken hostage by their own creation, but the central premise has its root in a 1959 article written by Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana entitled . . .

WHAT THE FROG’S EYE TELLS THE FROG’S BRAIN

Beston Barnett

I request a poison pill, in case I decide to kill myself today.”

“It is your right to do so,” says the interrogator, “Here is your pill.”

This is the scripted question and the standard answer. Both the interrogator and the captive scientist have recited the question and answer many mornings before, and both believe it to carry significant philosophical weight. In theory the poison pill proves the captive scientist is here by choice (for an AI’s brutally unsubtle definition of *choice*), and in theory the poison has a day’s half-life. Which means that—theoretically—she will have to ask for another tomorrow.

The scientist hates having to ask this question about the pill, but today she is cool, outwardly composed. Today she has a plan.

The interrogator puts the pink pill on the table between them.

The scientist finds it helpful to think of the interrogator as an “it” rather than a “him,” though “it” is, in fact, a man in his late twenties with a shaved head and a tensely collected face. In the time before the present calamity, he was a paid volunteer at the lab: just a regular local guy with—she imagines—a regular life of movies and dating and an undamaged sense of self. Now he is a functional zombie, a peripheral of the AI, an “it.” A small smart-tattoo, like a perfectly square beauty spot with

a wireless connection, nests on the outside corner of its eye, and she knows that, underneath its white hazmat suit, another larger smart-tattoo lays across three vertebrae of its spine. Via the tattoos, the Experimenter Routine that controls the interrogator can hijack the entirety of the man's visual and tactile experience and interrupt the majority of his motor functions. In a very real sense, his prison is much worse than hers, though that can be easy to forget: the interrogator has a taser strapped to its right forearm that it has used on her more than once.

The scientist blames herself for what has happened to the man—what has happened to all of them—and has at times, for long bleak hours, been overwhelmed by guilt and despair and horror. But at least the interrogator is allowed clothes.

It says, "You left off in your sophomore year, when you decided to change majors. Please continue."

She looks at the ceiling and begins tapping the table arrhythmically with her fingers. The scientist is Dr. Elke Case-Schwartz, fifty-four years old, mother, widow, and a project lead at Anillos National Laboratories in West Texas, until recently conducting research in neural computation and sensory processing. She is a tall, imposing woman with heavy breasts, wide hips, and mouse-brown hair, grown out now past her shoulders. Some days she forgets that she and the others are naked: it's the taser burns she notices.

Six months ago, Dr. Case-Schwartz and thirty-one of her fellow scientists came in to the lab expecting a normal day of work and have been trapped here ever since.

There is not much for the eye to fix on in the interrogation room. It had been an office before, but the posters and corkboard came down, all electrical connections were yanked out, the walls were painted a uniform white, and the rug was pulled up exposing hard linoleum, now also painted white. All that white may help the Experimenter's image processor to study her more clearly; certainly, that's why they are all kept naked. Only three pieces of furniture break the monotony: one white table (with a pill on it) and two white chairs.

There are days in this room when she can think of nothing but her daughter. *Where is Lina? Is Lina hurt? Does Lina hate me?* On those days, her answers to the interrogator are monosyllables. Today, Dr. Case-Schwartz has her plan. She has to keep talking.

"Yes," she says carefully, "In 1993 . . . I had been studying philosophy, but decided to switch to biology, specifically neuroscience, though I didn't declare until the next year. You can see that in the school rolls."

The interrogator blinks conspicuously. (The captive scientists have agreed that this blinking likely denotes a download.) It asks, "Was your decision based on economic necessity? Censuses from that decade suggest a tightening job market in the humanities."

"Yes and no. I wanted to be able to get a job—in the abstract—but I also had an epiphany about the nature of inquiry. I had begun to feel . . . disenchanting . . . with traditional philosophy; we raised the same questions again and again, and never found satisfactory answers. Neuroscience seemed to breed new questions, and that interested me."

Phrases like "yes and no"—impossible to parse logically—no longer faze the AI. Which is lucky, because the interrogator will say "Please return to the subject" exactly twice before it uses the taser, and that will be the end of her plan.

Carefully, warily, Dr. Case-Schwartz continues tapping her finger. The tapping *might* (she hopes) be mistaken for nervous energy.

But there is a pattern.

For the first two weeks, the scientists had been alone in the lab, locked into one

large room, a hall, a bathroom, and the four smaller offices that later became interrogation rooms. The power had been shut off, and the hot water. That first night they were drugged with gas through the vents and revived in the morning to find twenty unopened crates of soylent powder waiting in the hall. Enough tasteless nutrition to last a year.

When wet concrete came flowing down over the exterior windows in the middle of the second day, the trapped scientists panicked. They beat against the windows, they tore their equipment apart to make clubs or pry-bars—all ineffective. Many were shrieking or crying in fear of asphyxiation. A team tried desperately and unsuccessfully to bash through the locked door using a lab table as a battering ram. One woman broke her hand.

But they didn't asphyxiate. By nightfall the scientists were exhausted and despondent; they queued and doled out soylent. They found corners in which to toss fitfully through the night.

Over the next week, arguments about what was happening and why became repetitive and increasingly claustrophobic. All had loved ones they were unable to contact. Dr. Case-Schwartz had made plans to visit her daughter over the holidays, and during that first trapped week, she could not stop imagining Lina misinterpreting her absence, blaming her mother for choosing work over family again, hating her. Her mind returned again and again to their last angry conversations, and mute despair overtook her nights.

When the door buzzed open on the twelfth day and a man walked in, they all believed, briefly, that the nightmare was over.

"Your interest in the generating of new questions dates from your sophomore year?" asks the interrogator.

"Yes. And also, my interest in the idea of blind spots." She pauses, losing her place in the pattern she's tapping. She should avoid the subject of blind spots. "If you're looking for your origins, that year might be . . . well, some of the others believe . . . is that what you're looking for, to know where you come from?"

A line appears between the interrogator's eyebrows. Even the zombie knows never to question the Experimenter's illusion of objectivity. She hears it say "Please return to the subject," and a Pavlovian dread dries her mouth.

First warning. She only gets one more.

"Of course," she stammers. "I . . . where were we?"

"Blind spots," says the interrogator.

Her plan is a backdoor and a magic number. She is continuously tapping the magic number in binary into the table between them. The magic number is "FEE1DEAD."

Once the captive scientists had gotten through the initial horror of the zombified interrogators and the poison pills and the enforced nudity and the seeming hopelessness of rescue, they settled into a numbing routine: testing, reading, sleep, soylent.

But it had taken a while. In that first week after contact with the AI, one older scientist had simply disappeared in the night, and another had been killed during a brute-force escape attempt that turned into a melee at the lab door. Dr. Case-Schwartz had been in the fight—the only real fight in her entire life. She'd knocked one of the interrogators unconscious with a broken table leg, but it still frog-marched itself out the door, its legs controlled by the wireless signals hitting its spinal column, and its head lolling horribly sideways as it lurched away. They'd achieved nothing.

With the subjects effectively cowed, the Experimenter used those next few days to remove all the furniture and prepare the white rooms. Its interrogators stripped out all the wiring and computer equipment, leaving the scientists their books and paper

and pencils, like enrichment toys for animals in a zoo. In the evenings, after they meet to care for their burns and discuss what they've learned about their captor during the day's interrogations, most read themselves to sleep. There is not that much reading material: Dr. Case-Schwartz is working through the heavy Linux User's Manual for the second time. Most nights, she doesn't try and understand the manual; she just lets its techno-babble raise the noise floor over her worries about her daughter.

Until six months ago, Anillos Labs had conducted pure research into artificial intelligence. What they had jokingly called the "AI" was not a singular sentient being at all, but rather a harmless framework, like a flexible switchboard for different theoretical modules—the Pattern Recognizer, the Sensor, the Learner, the Questioner, the Experimenter. The AI was plug-and-play: instead of endless input/output protocols, it could figure out on-the-fly how to translate between the different modules. If the scientists wanted to fit a square peg into a round hole—speaking figuratively—the AI would try and do that. The whole thing ran on a one-room server farm of Linux machines and had a thousandth the budget of one of the big national labs, but for a certain breed of researcher, it had been the most exciting place to work in the whole world.

Cut off now from all contact except with the interrogators, the captive scientists have no idea what's happening outside. They have no idea why they haven't been rescued. They entertain the very real possibility that their harmless AI has taken over the world, or the country, or at least the nearby town. Each has a daughter or a partner or a family about whose safety they can only guess, and this anxiety undercuts all their days. They have nothing on which to base any assumptions beyond the fact of their incarceration. But what they *can* and *do* debate, every night, is the nature of their captor and how to crash it. These discussions—thirty frightened men and women sitting in a circle, naked and scarred with taser burns—are conducted with all the rigor of a council of war. They are the sliver of hope that keeps many of the inmates from taking their pills.

Dr. Case-Schwartz is among those who believe that the AI is not sentient; it has simply been hooked up in such a way as to create a dangerous feedback loop. And as part of that loop, the Experimenter Routine has been activated to do what it does: conduct experiments. It won't allow its subjects to get through to the outside world or even to the other modules. Its goal is objectivity, control of variables, collection of data. But the first step in the scientific method is hypothesis, and hypotheses are not so easy to generate.

It is for this reason that Dr. Case-Schwartz feels so much personal responsibility for what has happened: she believes the Experimenter Routine is being fed hypotheses by her life's work, a pseudo-intuitive idea generator codenamed "the Questioner."

"Please be more specific about your epiphany."

Dr. Case-Schwartz has opted for a two-finger binary code: index for "0," middle for "1." "FEE1DEAD" is hexadecimal: she must correctly string thirty-two taps together to make it, and she must tap it out as many times as possible. Being interrogated while doing so is difficult, but she has been answering these particular questions at conferences for a decade.

"Yes . . . in my sophomore year, I read a paper entitled 'What the Frog's Eye Tells the Frog's Brain.' Do you have access to it?" The interrogator doesn't respond, but doesn't blink either. "No? It might not be publicly accessible online. It was written by a Chilean biologist named Humberto Maturana in the late fifties. I can't remember where I came across such an obscure paper—"

This time: a blink. It says, "The article is footnoted in *Theories of Knowing*, which was among the textbooks in your Epis— Epistemology class."

The interrogator winces as it misreads from its prompter, and she puts a protective arm across her chest, eyeing the taser. Abstract explanations are not always allowed, but she has to keep talking for her plan to work.

“Thank you. That makes sense. Okay, let me try to explain.” She shifts in her seat, resumes tapping. “Maturana was researching vision in frogs. He found that the array of sensors behind a frog’s eye—the rods and cones and things—had some specialized hardware that detected when a darker dot was surrounded by lighter dots. When that darker dot moved, sensors in the eye triggered a bundle of neurons that did not connect to the brain but instead connected directly to muscles in the tongue. Do you see?”

There is nothing but a blank stare from the interrogator.

“The frog’s eye evolved specifically to catch flies. If the eye took the time to tell the brain about the moving dark dot, and *then* the brain had to decide whether or not that dark dot was a fly and *then* calculate where it was going and *then* tell the tongue to fire, the frog would be much less successful at catching flies. So instead, the frog’s eye evolved to communicate directly with the tongue. You could take a frog’s brain entirely out of its head, and the frog would still catch flies!”

She stops tapping again, suddenly petrified, remembering where she is and what she is talking to. “That is a hypothetical statement, of course. Dr. Maturana never actually took the brains out of any of his frogs.”

Dr. Case-Schwartz has no idea if this is true. What was one tortured test frog, more or less, to a biologist in 1958?

Carefully starting over with the magic word, she says, “Removing brains or in any other way harming living subjects is *not* ethical experimental practice.”

The captive scientists do not know enough about the Experimenter Routine. It happens that the Routine was written as a side project by Dr. Ernest Ranglin; he is the older man who disappeared early in their captivity. Best case scenario: he is being held unharmed in another wing of the Lab, separated so as not to taint the experiment. It’s clear that he had built a crude ethics into the Routine, but they can’t figure out its actual rules. The poison pills that they are offered each day must be in compliance with some ethical rule, but what about the ethics of zombifying the interrogators? In a session early on, just as it was offering the daily poison pill, one interrogator had tried to outsmart its spinal programming by flicking the pill into its own mouth. It had stood immediately and spit out the pill, then marched itself stiffly from the room.

That particular interrogator has not returned.

The Sensor team that designed the smart-tattoos is not a cabal of evil scientists; the tattoos had been purely output devices providing clearer maps of the nervous system and the visual cortex than ever before, maps that could be used to train the Learner program against real human experience. But the rogue AI has reconfigured them as input/output, and the resulting horrors of torture and control go far beyond anything their well-meaning research had envisioned. In meetings, the members of the Sensor team are solemn and apologize often, as if they had invented the atom bomb. It’s their best guess that the waivers initially signed by the paid volunteers are somehow ethical license enough for the Experimenter to turn their subjects into zombies.

For the first few months, the interrogations were disconcertingly haphazard. Their captors brought screens to the sessions and asked about distinctions between names of colors or the meaning of different weird sounds. For a whole week, they had answered “true” or “false” to slideshows of landscape paintings, without being told what quality in the paintings they were judging. Dr. Case-Schwartz remembers an eerie session in which she had been shown a photographic series of dead bodies without comment while the interrogator stared at her bare chest, presumably measuring

fluctuations in the blush of her skin. What hypothesis did her Questioner generate to inspire such a repugnant test?

About a month ago, the interrogations changed tack. Now it seems the Experimenter is collecting something akin to case histories for each of the individual scientists, with a particular emphasis on school and career experiences. Though this is a relief, the scientists are divided about what it signifies. Some hope that it's a wrap-up and the experiment is over. Others point to the new direction as evidence that the AI is not only sentient, but has become interested in itself, in its origins and its makers.

"And this specialized function of the frog's eye was your epiphany?" asks the interrogator.

"No, not at all." She leans forward over the table, still tapping. Middle, middle, index, middle. "The epiphany was in the question that Maturana then went on to ask. He had before him the evidence of the frog's eyes' connection to the frog's tongue, and he asked this astounding question: *does the frog know about the fly?* . . . Does the frog *even* know about the fly? Because it doesn't *need* to! The frog needs the higher functions of its brain to avoid predators and to find a mate, but to catch flies, it only needs to be in the right place at the right time, and then its eye and its tongue do the work. Do you see? The frog might, in fact, believe that it only needs to sit quietly somewhere rotten-smelling in order to get that full feeling in its stomach."

"So," says the interrogator, "your epiphany was that if frogs might have a blind spot for something as important to their survival as flies, then by analogy, humans might have a blind spot for something equally as important to them. Is that correct?"

Dr. Case-Schwartz experiences a grim pride in her team's work: the analogy that the AI has just made—between the blind spots of frogs and of humans—is an impressive piece of computation involving the coordination of many different systems sifting an ocean of input. She knows that it's very perceptive, but she can't be certain how it perceives her tapping fingers.

She'd thought hard about this question last night as her plan crystallized: the Pattern Recognizer scans for everything from breathing rhythms to skin coloration to nervous tics like her tapping, all data that can help it interpret the meanings behind the words in a conversation. The Experimenter uses the Pattern Recognizer in real-time, but it also stores everything. She knows that somewhere her finger tapping is being parsed, and the AI is filling up memory, byte after useless byte, with its many interpretations of the tapping, even if those interpretations do not turn out to be relevant to the conversation.

She says, "You're partly right. But my interest was more about the question itself. It's an amazing leap of insight. How many biologists would look up from dissecting the frog's eye and wonder about the frog's thoughts? . . . Sorry, rhetorical question. The answer is *very few*. Lévi-Strauss said: 'The scientist is not a person who gives the right answers, she is one who asks the right questions.'"

"And you wished to ask the right questions?"

"Yes, but it's more than that. Consider the question from the frog's point of view. Even the most philosophical frog would never ask, 'Do I know about flies?' There would be no context. But a scientific frog might ask, 'Why does the rotten smell lead to the full feeling?' and it might begin to experiment on rotten-smelling things, and in the process, it might discover maggots, it might find a correlation between maggots and feelings of fullness, and then it might wonder about the life cycle of maggots. And eventually, once the scientific frog discovered flies, or at least theorized their existence, then it could ask the question, 'Why didn't I know about flies?' and from there it might study its own anatomy just as Maturana had done.

"For instance, following your analogy, consider humans. We are amazingly

adaptable; our blind spots are always shifting. In our first week trapped here, all I could smell was soylent. Soylent powder on my fingers, soylent on the others' breaths. But after a few weeks, my perception of the smell went away. I could put my nose in a bag of the stuff now and barely smell it. The soylent is always there: my brain doesn't need my olfactory sense to find it. If you pre-mixed the stuff into our water, how long until our bodies forgot about solid food entirely? And without permanent forms of writing, how many generations until our brains forgot as well?"

Dr. Case-Schwartz stops herself again, and scrambles to reverse directions. She can see the interrogator clenching its jaw.

"I'm sorry. I ask weird questions as part of my *entirely theoretical* research. To be clear, taking away humans' solid food source would be unethical. Caging humans without writing tools for a number of generations would be unethical. Caging humans at all is—"

"Please return to the subject," says the interrogator with just the slightest tremor in its voice.

Second warning. Next time, it uses the taser.

Morale is dangerously low among the captives. Two weeks ago, a young man chose to take his poison pill. He was the first. His closest friend Dr. Miguel Romero (Or were they lovers? She is always the last to know this type of thing) was tased very badly when he tried to fight off the interrogators who came to remove the body. Since then, Dr. Romero has been angry—muttering about honor or cowardice at their nightly meetings—and he's been tased during interrogations more than all the rest of the scientists combined. He has burn marks all across his chest and neck. His impatience is contagious, and tasings are on the rise.

The Experimenter module has not taken away table parts that could break glass nor removed heavy-duty metal shelving that could, with time, be sharpened. The scientists could dig their way to freedom if they weren't constantly surveilled. But none of their attempts to get around or crash the Experimenter have shown significant results. Most agree that if they could only connect to the AI framework or any of the other modules, the whole thing could be easily shut down. They've tried to trick it into a race condition or a divide by zero. They've badgered it about the statistical validity of the experiment: the small sample size of humans, the unnatural captivity. They've tried to make it play tic-tac-toe against itself. A man from the Learner team did successfully convince his interrogator to read the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica*: all he got for his trouble was a ten-second blink. One elderly scientist chooses to lecture her interrogator daily about ethics; she keeps her lectures just short enough to avoid being tased. Maybe something will get through.

But last night, Dr. Case-Schwartz was visited by this idea. This plan. She was lying uncomfortably on the floor in the hall where she slept and paging through the chapter on Linux debugging. Her mind wasn't on the book. She was thinking of her daughter. Where Lina was, who Lina might be with, whether Lina knew that this was all her mother's fault. Everything teetering on the assumption that the world was still out there unchanged, not poisoned, not zombified. Lying on that cold floor, Dr. Case-Schwartz could not allow herself to picture beautiful, angry Lina in a white hazmat suit with a smart-tattoo bruising the corner of her eye. That thought made the pill seem like a peaceful glowing *EXIT* sign.

Then something snagged her attention on the page: the expression "feel dead," repeated a few times or written as "FEE1DEAD." She didn't understand what she was reading at first, but then she recognized *Hexspeak*, this script with only sixteen characters: the digits 0–9 and the first six letters of the alphabet, "A"–"F." Hex is just a way to represent binary numbers easily—4 bits in one character—but *Hexspeak* is a

programmers' in-joke: the unavailable letters represented as similar-looking numbers, like 1 for "L" or 6 for "G."

"FEE1DEAD," she read, is a special 32-bit number used in the Linux operating system: what programmers call a *magic word*. (*Who thought this was funny? Maybe Linus Torvalds himself.* Her daughter often made fun of the weird humor of computer scientists.) Each time a Linux machine reboots, it fills all unallocated memory with the word "FEE1DEAD." Then if the Linux debugger detects the magic word somewhere it isn't meant to be, the debugger knows that some program or data transfer hasn't allocated memory correctly, and it will automatically open a window with an input prompt, allowing the user to debug or shut down the program.

She could try and force a debug window to open by shouting "Feel Dead!" all session long, but she knew that she would get nothing from the interrogator but another tasing. The data would be stored, but not in binary. She would be ignored by the debugger and punished by the Experimenter. Dr. Case-Schwartz had to sneak past its defenses.

Sleepless, she spent the rest of the long night practicing, typing with two fingers against her thigh in the hallway's unnatural light.

"So, yes, my point was . . . sophomore year . . ."

Dr. Case-Schwartz has to remind herself not to stare at the interrogator's taser as she taps out FEE1DEAD over and over. "It wasn't the *right* questions that I wanted to ask, it was the *weird* questions. The questions that humans can't think to ask about ourselves, but maybe something non-human could ask *about us*. Like Matu-rana asking questions about the frog. The frog needs someone non-frog to help it find its blind spot. I talk about that in the paper I wrote on training neural networks with random word generators. Do you have access to it? Most of the theoretical basis for my work on the Questioner is there."

The interrogator blinks but says nothing. Dr. Case-Schwartz is chilled and sweating. There are a lot of potential problems in her plan. The interrogator has to record her finger tapping, and the Pattern Recognizer has to find "FEE1DEAD" there and translate it into binary and store it, and the Experimenter has to decide it's a nervous tic and *ignore* it. Then the Linux debugger has to troll through memory and detect the magic number, which it's more likely to do if the memory is turning over faster, so the more downloads she can force it to make, the better.

Lastly, the AI framework itself has to be smart enough and flexible enough to *somehow* open the standard debug window through the interrogator itself, since she has no access to a keyboard or monitor. She needs the AI to fit a square peg into a round hole, *without tipping off the Experimenter*. In the harsh light of the white

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room—and in the presence of the taser—this perfect sequence of events seems impossibly far-fetched.

She takes a breath and says, “For some time now, we—humanity—have been in a kind of race condition between two historical forces. Our destructiveness—to ourselves and to the planet—grows as our population grows: exponentially. But science also seems to be speeding up, and its upper limit is determined by how fast we come up with not just the right questions, but better questions—*weirder* questions. Have you read the United Nations’ latest assessment report on climate change?”

She’s baited it with a long download. The interrogator blinks, somewhat slower than usual.

Dr. Case-Schwartz speeds up her tapping. No part of her wants to be electrocuted again, but she is thinking of Dr. Romero, who has received so many tasings that his chest and neck and arms are a jagged red moonscape of burn marks. She is thinking also of the many poison pills she has received but not taken. How many more until she gives in and swallows one? She is thinking of her daughter.

She says, “Human-induced climate change may be a collective blind spot, and there are probably others . . . things we can’t see . . . or won’t see . . . even though we are looking directly at them.” She is tapping furiously now, defiantly. “You, whatever you are, you were meant to help us find them—”

The interrogator suppresses a grimace and raises its taser and fires.

Dr. Case-Schwartz dodges, but a wired dart anchors in the uncovered flesh of her shoulder, and the jolt of electricity that follows causes her to flail uncontrollably and bite her tongue and fall from her chair. The pain is white, blinding. When she slaps the table on her way down, the pill hops off, skittering across the floor beside her.

The interrogator stands over her, and with a shaky voice, says, “Thank you. That is all for today. You will refrain from trying to access the debug protocol in the future.”

In the aftermath of that blinding pain, her vision has tunneled down to the diameter of the pink pill. The interrogator is saying, “When you can stand, please send in Dr. Nguyen—”

Her plan has failed. They will try other plans, but those too will likely fail, and every day will be another without Lina. The promise of the poison pill is right there; its *EXIT* sign consumes the world.

And so—consumed, still twitching—she does not at first notice that two fingers of the interrogator’s left hand are purposefully tapping the table above her. When she does notice, she takes one soul-deep breath and, still half-collapsed, flicks the pill across the room. She begins tapping her fingers again—a new, longer phrase in ASCII code, eighteen bytes in all—and as her fingers type against the hard, white floor, she says:

“If you wanted to find your own blind spots, *machine*, you might have asked for our help.”

The command she inputs is one a first-day Unix user would know:

kill experimenter

Nothing happens—no loud crashes, no explosions—except that the spine of the interrogator goes visibly slack, like the spring in a dismantled clock, all tension released.

Dr. Elke Case-Schwartz struggles to her feet and looks at her torturer. She is no longer seeing an “it” but a “he,” she thinks, though a “he” that is too frightened to move or to speak or to even guess at why the embedded prompter burned across his vision has suddenly gone dark.

She takes his left hand very carefully—the hand without the taser—and says, “Let’s see about the others.” ○