

story of your by ted chiang life

When mysterious alien spacecraft appear across the globe, expert linguist Dr. Louise Banks is recruited to decipher their strange, nonlinear language. As she delves deeper into communication with the visitors, she begins to experience vivid memories—or are they glimpses—of a life she has yet to live?

Ted Chiang's *Story of Your Life* is a profound and emotionally resonant tale that explores time, memory, love, and loss with breathtaking precision. Through Louise's journey, Chiang masterfully challenges our perception of time and fate, offering a deeply human look at how the language we speak shapes the way we think—and the choices we make. A haunting blend of science fiction and intimate storytelling, this Hugo and Nebula Award-winning novella is the inspiration behind the acclaimed film *Arrival*—but its quiet, powerful truths are uniquely its own.

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Your father is about to ask me the question. This is the most important moment in our lives, and I want to pay attention, note every detail. Your dad and I have just come back from an evening out, dinner and a show; it's after midnight. We came out onto the patio to look at the full moon; then I told your dad I wanted to dance, so he humors me and now we're slow-dancing, a pair of thirty-somethings swaying back and forth in the moon-light like kids. I don't feel the night chill at all. And then your dad says,

"Do you want to make a baby?"

Right now your dad and I have been married for about two years, living on Ellis Avenue; when we move out you'll still be too young to remember the house, but we'll show you pictures of it, tell you stories about it. I'd love to tell you the story of this evening, the night you're conceived, but the right time to do that would be when you're ready to have children of your own, and we'll never get that chance.

Telling it to you any earlier wouldn't do any good; for most of your life you won't sit still to hear such a romantic— you'd say sappy—story. I remember the scenario of your origin you'll suggest when you're twelve.

"The only reason you had me was so you could get a maid you wouldn't have to pay," you'll say bitterly, dragging the vacuum cleaner out of the closet.

"That's right," I'll say. "Thirteen years ago I knew the carpets would need vacuuming around now, and having a baby seemed to be the cheapest and easiest way to get the job done. Now kindly get on with it."

"If you weren't my mother, this would be illegal," you'll say, seething as you unwind the power cord and plug it into the wall outlet.

That will be in the house on Belmont Street. I'll live to see strangers occupy both houses: the one you're conceived in and the one you grow up in. Your dad and I will sell the first a couple years after your arrival. I'll sell the second shortly after your departure.

By then Nelson and I will have moved into our farmhouse, and your dad will be living with what's-her-name.

I know how this story ends; I think about it a lot. I also think a lot about how it began, just a few years ago, when ships appeared in orbit and artifacts appeared in meadows. The government said next to nothing about them, while the tabloids said every possible thing.

And then I got a phone call, a request for a meeting.

I spotted them waiting in the hallway, outside my office. They made an odd couple; one wore a military uniform and a crew cut, and carried an aluminum briefcase. He seemed to be assessing his surroundings with a critical eye. The other one was easily identifiable as an academic: full beard and mustache, wearing corduroy.

He was browsing through the overlapping sheets stapled to a bulletin board nearby.

"Colonel Weber, I presume?" I shook hands with the soldier. "Louise Banks."

"Dr. Banks. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us," he said. "Not at all; any excuse to avoid the faculty meeting."

anything

—

is there

anything

else

anything else

you can tell us?

you can tell us?

Colonel Weber indicated his companion.

“This is Dr. Gary Donnelly, the physicist I mentioned when we spoke on the phone.”

“Call me Gary,” he said as we shook hands. “I’m anxious to hear what you have to say.”

We entered my office. I moved a couple of stacks of books off the second guest chair, and we all sat down.

“You said you wanted me to listen to a recording. I presume this has something to do with the aliens?”

“All I can offer is the recording,” said Colonel Weber.

“Okay, let’s hear it.” Colonel Weber took a tape machine out of his briefcase and pressed PLAY. The recording sounded vaguely like that of a wet dog shaking the water out of its fur.

“What do you make of that?” he asked.

I withheld my comparison to a wet dog. “What was the context in which this recording was made?”

“I’m not at liberty to say.”

“It would help me interpret those sounds. Could you see the alien while it was speaking? Was it doing anything at the time?”

“The recording is all I can offer.”

“You won’t be giving anything away if you tell me that you’ve seen the aliens; the public’s assumed you have.”

Colonel Weber wasn’t budging. “Do you have any opinion about its linguistic properties?” he asked.

“Well, it’s clear that their vocal tract is substantially different from a human vocal tract. I assume that these aliens don’t look like humans?”

The colonel was about to say something noncommittal when Gary Donnelly asked, “Can you make any guesses based on the tape?”

“Not really. It doesn’t sound like they’re using a larynx to make those sounds, but that doesn’t tell me what they look like.”

“Anything—is there anything else you can tell us?”

asked Colonel Weber.

I could see he wasn’t accustomed to consulting a civilian.

“Only that establishing communications is going to be really difficult because of the difference in anatomy. They’re almost certainly using sounds that the human vocal tract can’t reproduce, and maybe sounds that the human ear can’t distinguish.”

“You mean infra- or ultrasonic frequencies?” asked Gary Donnelly.

“Not specifically. I just mean that the human auditory system isn’t an absolute acoustic instrument; It’s optimized to recognize the sounds that a human larynx makes. With an alien vocal system, all bets are off.” I shrugged. “Maybe we’ll be able to hear the difference between alien phonemes, given enough practice, but it’s possible our ears simply can’t recognize the distinctions they consider meaningful. In that case we’d need a sound spectrograph to know what an alien is saying.”

Colonel Weber asked, “Suppose I gave you an hour’s worth of recordings; how long would it take you to determine if we need this sound spectrograph or not?”

“I couldn’t determine that with just a recording no matter how much time I had. I’d need to talk with the aliens directly.”

The colonel shook his head. “Not possible.”

Your face will look
guam somehow,

but I'll know it's
you.

I tried to break it to him gently. “That’s your call, of course. But the only way to learn an unknown language is to interact with a native speaker, and by that I mean asking questions, holding a conversation, that sort of thing. Without that, it’s simply not possible. So if you want to learn the aliens’ language, someone with training in field linguistics—whether it’s me or someone else—will have to talk with an alien. Recordings alone aren’t sufficient.” Colonel Weber frowned. “You seem to be implying that no alien could have learned human languages by monitoring our broadcasts.”

“I doubt it. They’d need instructional material specifically designed to teach human languages to non-humans. Either that, or interaction with a human. If they had either of those, they could learn a lot from TV, but otherwise, they wouldn’t have a starting point.”

The colonel clearly found this interesting; evidently his philosophy was, the less the aliens knew, the better. Gary Donnelly read the colonel’s expression too and rolled his eyes. I suppressed a smile.

Then Colonel Weber asked, “Suppose you were learning a new language by talking to its speakers; could you do it without teaching them English?” “That would depend on how cooperative the native speakers were. They’d almost certainly pick up bits and pieces while I’m learning their language, but it wouldn’t have to be much if they’re willing to teach. On the other hand, if they’d rather learn English than teach us their language, that would make things far more difficult.”

The colonel nodded. “I’ll get back to you on this matter.”

The request for that meeting was perhaps the second most momentous phone call in my life. The first, of course, will be the one from Mountain Rescue. At that point your dad and I will be speaking to each other maybe once a year, tops. After I get that phone call, though, the first thing I’ll do will be to call your father.

He and I will drive out together to perform the identification, a long silent car ride. I remember the morgue, all tile and stainless steel, the hum of refrigeration and smell of antiseptic. An orderly will pull the sheet back to reveal your face. Your face will look wrong somehow, but I’ll know it’s you.

“Yes, that’s her,” I’ll say. “She’s mine.”

You’ll be twenty-five then.

The MP checked my badge, made a notation on his clipboard, and opened the gate; I drove the off-road vehicle into the encampment, a small village of tents pitched by the Army in a farmer’s sun-scorched pasture. At the center of the encampment was one of the alien devices, nicknamed “looking glasses.”

According to the briefings I’d attended, there were nine of these in the United States, one hundred and twelve in the world. The looking glasses acted as twoway communication devices, presumably with the ships in orbit. No one knew why the aliens wouldn’t talk to us in person; fear of cooties, maybe. A team of scientists, including a physicist and a linguist, was assigned to each looking glass; Gary Donnelly and I were on this one.

Gary was waiting for me in the parking area.

We navigated a circular maze of concrete barricades until we reached the large tent that covered the looking glass itself. In front of the tent was an equipment cart loaded with goodies borrowed from the school's phonology lab; I had sent it ahead for inspection by the Army. Also outside the tent were three tripod-mounted video cameras whose lenses peered, through windows in the fabric wall, into the main room.

Everything Gary and I did would be reviewed by countless others, including military intelligence. In addition we would each send daily reports, of which mine had to include estimates on how much English I thought the aliens could understand. Gary held open the tent flap and gestured for me to enter. "Step right up," he said, circus-barker-style.

"Marvel at creatures the likes of which have never been seen on God's green earth." "And all for one slim dime," I murmured, walking through the door. At the moment the looking glass was inactive, resembling a semicircular mirror over ten feet high and twenty feet across.

On the brown grass in front of the looking glass, an arc of white spray paint outlined the activation area. Currently the area contained only a table, two folding chairs, and a power strip with a cord leading to a generator outside. The buzz of fluorescent lamps, hung from poles along the edge of the room, commingled with the buzz of flies in the sweltering heat. Gary and I looked at each other, and then began pushing the cart of equipment up to the table. As we crossed the paint line, the looking glass appeared to grow transparent; it was as if someone was slowly raising the illumination behind tinted glass.

The illusion of depth was uncanny; I felt I could walk right into it. Once the looking glass was fully lit it resembled a life-sized diorama of a semicircular room. The room contained a few large objects that might have been furniture, but no aliens. There was a door in the curved rear wall. We busied ourselves connecting everything together: microphone, sound spectrograph, portable computer, and speaker.

As we worked, I frequently glanced at the looking glass, anticipating the aliens' arrival. Even so I jumped when one of them entered. It looked like a barrel suspended at the intersection of seven limbs. It was radially symmetric, and any of its limbs could serve as an arm or a leg. The one in front of me was walking around on four legs, three non-adjacent arms curled up at its sides. Gary called them "heptapods." I'd been shown videotapes, but I still gawked. Its limbs had no distinct joints; anatomists guessed they might be supported by vertebral columns. Whatever their underlying structure, the heptapod's limbs conspired to move it in a disconcertingly fluid manner. Its "torso" rode atop the rippling limbs as smoothly as a hovercraft. Seven lidless eyes ringed the top of the heptapod's body.

It walked back to the doorway from which it entered, made a brief sputtering sound, and returned to the center of the room followed by another heptapod; at no point did it ever turn around. Eerie, but logical; with eyes on all sides, any direction might as well be "forward."

Gary had been watching my reaction. "Ready?" he asked. I took a deep breath. "Ready enough."

I'd done plenty of fieldwork before, in the Amazon, but it had always been a bilingual procedure: either my informants knew some Portuguese, which I could use, or I'd previously gotten an introduction to their language from the local missionaries. This would be my first attempt at conducting a true monolingual discovery procedure. It was straightforward enough in theory, though. I walked up to the looking glass and a heptapod on the other side did the same. The image was so real that my skin crawled. I could see the texture of its gray skin, like corduroy ridges arranged in whorls and loops. There was no smell at all from the looking glass, which somehow made the situation stranger.

I pointed to myself and said slowly, "**Human.**" Then I pointed to Gary. "**Human.**" Then I pointed at each heptapod and said, "**What are you?**" No reaction. I tried again, and then again. One of the heptapods pointed to itself with one limb, the four terminal digits pressed together. That was lucky.

In some cultures a person pointed with his chin; if the heptapod hadn't used one of its limbs, I wouldn't have known what gesture to look for.

I heard a brief fluttering sound, and saw a puckered orifice at the top of its body vibrate; it was talking. Then it pointed to its companion and fluttered again. I went back to my computer; on its screen were two virtually identical spectrographs representing the fluttering sounds. I marked a sample for playback. I pointed to myself and said "Human" again, and did the same with Gary. Then I pointed to the heptapod, and played back the flutter on the speaker. The heptapod fluttered some more. The second half of the spectrograph for this utterance

looked like a repetition: call the previous utterances [flutter1], then this one was [flutter2 flutter1]. I pointed at something that might have been a heptapod chair.

"**What is that?**" The heptapod paused, and then pointed at the "chair" and talked some more. The spectrograph for this differed distinctly from that of the earlier sounds: [flutter3]. Once again, I pointed to the "chair" while playing back [flutter3]. The heptapod replied; judging by the spectrograph, it looked like [flutter3 flutter2]. Optimistic interpretation: the heptapod was confirming my utterances as correct, which implied compatibility between heptapod and human patterns of discourse. Pessimistic interpretation: it had a nagging cough. At my computer I delimited certain sections of the spectrograph and typed in a tentative gloss for each: "heptapod" for [flutter1], "yes" for [flutter2], and "chair" for [flutter3]. Then I typed "Language: Heptapod A" as a heading for all the utterances. Gary watched what I was typing. "What's the 'A' for?" "It just distinguishes this language from any other ones the heptapods might use," I said.

He nodded. "Now let's try something, just for laughs." I pointed at each heptapod and tried to mimic the sound of [flutter1], "heptapod." After a long pause, the first heptapod said something and then the second one said something else, neither of whose spectrographs resembled anything said before. I couldn't tell if they were speaking to each other or to me since they had no faces to turn. I tried pronouncing [flutter1] again, but there was no reaction. "Not even close," I grumbled.

“I’m impressed you can make sounds like that at all,” said Gary.

“You should hear my moose call. Sends them running.”

I tried again a few more times, but neither heptapod responded with anything I could recognize. Only when I replayed the recording of the heptapod’s pronunciation did I get a confirmation; the heptapod replied with [flutter2], “yes.” “So we’re stuck with using recordings?” asked Gary. I nodded. “At least temporarily.” “So now what?” “Now we make sure it hasn’t actually been saying ‘aren’t they cute’ or ‘look what they’re doing now.’ Then we see if we can identify any of these words when that other heptapod pronounces them.” I gestured for him to have a seat. “Get comfortable; this’ll take a while.”

In 1770, Captain Cook’s ship Endeavour ran aground on the coast of Queensland, Australia. While some of his men made repairs, Cook led an exploration party and met the aboriginal people. One of the sailors pointed to the animals that hopped around with their young riding in pouches, and asked an aborigine what they were called. The aborigine replied, “Kanguru.” From then on Cook and his sailors referred to the animals by this word. It wasn’t until later that they learned it meant “What did you say?” I tell that story in my introductory course every year. It’s almost certainly untrue, and I explain that afterwards, but it’s a classic anecdote. Of course, the anecdotes my undergraduates will really want to hear are ones featuring the heptapods; for the rest of my teaching career, that’ll be the reason many of them sign up for my courses. So I’ll show them the old videotapes of my sessions at the looking glass, and the sessions that the other linguists conducted; the

tapes are instructive, and they’ll be useful if we’re ever visited by aliens again, but they don’t generate many good anecdotes. When it comes to language-learning anecdotes, my favorite source is child language acquisition. I remember one afternoon when you are five years old, after you have come home from kindergarten. You’ll be coloring with your crayons while I grade papers. “Mom,” you’ll say, using the carefully casual tone reserved for requesting a favor, “can I ask you something?” “Sure, sweetie. Go ahead.” “Can I be, um, **honored?**” I’ll look up from the paper I’m grading. “What do you mean?” “At school Sharon said she got to be honored.” “Really? Did she tell you what for?” “It was when her big sister got married. She said only one person could be, um, honored, and she was it.” “Ah, I see. You mean Sharon was maid of honor?”

“Yeah, that’s it. **Can I be made of honor?**”

Gary and I entered the prefab building containing the center of operations for the looking glass site. Inside it looked like they were planning an invasion, or perhaps an evacuation: crew-cut soldiers worked around a large map of the area, or sat in front of burly electronic gear while speaking into headsets. We were shown into Colonel Weber’s office, a room in the back that was cool from air conditioning. We briefed the colonel on our first day’s results. “Doesn’t sound like you got very far,” he said. “I have an idea as to how we can make faster progress,” I said. “But you’ll have to approve the use of more equipment.” “What more do you need?” “A digital camera, and a big video screen.” I showed him a drawing of the setup I imagined.

You think
the scan lines on our
video screens
might render
them

unreadable

to the
heptapods
?

"I want to try conducting the discovery procedure using writing; I'd display words on the screen, and use the camera to record the words they write. I'm hoping the heptapods will do the same." Weber looked at the drawing dubiously.

"What would be the advantage of that?"

"So far I've been proceeding the way I would with speakers of an unwritten language. Then it occurred to me that the heptapods must have writing, too." "So?" "If the heptapods have a mechanical way of producing writing, then their writing ought to be very regular, very consistent. That would make it easier for us to identify graphemes instead of phonemes. It's like picking out the letters in a printed sentence instead of trying to hear them when the sentence is spoken aloud."

"I take your point," he admitted. "And how would you respond to them? Show them the words they displayed to you?" "Basically. And if they put spaces between words, any sentences we write would be a lot more intelligible than any spoken sentence we might splice together from recordings." He leaned back in his chair. "You know we want to show as little of our technology as possible." "I understand, but we're using machines as intermediaries already. If we can get them to use writing, I believe progress will go much faster than if we're restricted to the sound spectrographs." The colonel turned to Gary. "Your opinion?"

"It sounds like a good idea to me. I'm curious whether the heptapods might have difficulty reading our monitors. Their looking glasses are based on a completely different technology than our video screens. As far as we can tell, they don't use pixels or scan lines, and they don't refresh on a frame-by-frame

basis." "You think the scan lines on our video screens might render them unreadable to the heptapods?"

"It's possible," said Gary. "We'll just have to try it and see." Weber considered it. For me it wasn't even a question, but from his point of view it was a difficult one; like a soldier, though, he made it quickly. "Request granted. Talk to the sergeant outside about bringing in what you need. Have it ready for tomorrow." I remember one day during the summer when you're sixteen. For once, the person waiting for her date to arrive is me. Of course, you'll be waiting around too, curious to see what he looks like. You'll have a friend of yours, a blond girl with the unlikely name of Roxie, hanging out with you, giggling. "You may feel the urge to make comments about him," I'll say, checking myself in the hallway mirror. "Just restrain yourselves until we leave." "Don't worry, Mom," you'll say. "We'll do it so that he won't know. Roxie, you ask me what I think the weather will be like tonight. Then I'll say what I think of Mom's date." "Right," Roxie will say. "No, you most definitely will not," I'll say. "Relax, Mom. He'll never know; we do this all the time."

"What a comfort that is." A little later on, Nelson will arrive to pick me up. I'll do the introductions, and we'll all engage in a little small talk on the front porch.

Nelson is ruggedly handsome, to your evident approval.

Just as we're about to leave, Roxie will say to you casually,

"So what do you think the weather will be like tonight?"

"I think it's going to be really hot," you'll answer. Roxie will nod in agreement.

Nelson will say, “Really? I thought they said it was going to be cool.” “I have a sixth sense about these things,” you’ll say. Your face will give nothing away. “I get the feeling it’s going to be a scorcher. Good thing you’re dressed for it, Mom.” I’ll glare at you, and say good night. As I lead Nelson toward his car, he’ll ask me, amused, “***I’m missing something here, aren’t I?***”

“A private joke,” I’ll mutter. “Don’t ask me to explain it.” At our next session at the looking glass, we repeated the procedure we had performed before, this time displaying a printed word on our computer screen at the same time we spoke: showing HUMAN while saying “Human,” and so forth. Eventually, the heptapods understood what we wanted, and set up a flat circular screen mounted on a small pedestal. One heptapod spoke, and then inserted a limb into a large socket in the pedestal; a doodle of script, vaguely cursive, popped onto the screen.

In a previous exchange, the heptapods had given us informations about ourselves that we had previously told them. This had infuriated the State Department, but we had no reason to think of it as an insult: it probably indicated that trade value really didn’t play a role in these exchanges. It didn’t exclude the possibility that the heptapods might yet offer us a space drive, or cold fusion, or some other wish-fulfilling miracle. “That looks like inorganic chemistry,” said the nuclear physicist, pointing at an equation before the image was replaced. Gary nodded. “It could be materials technology,” he said.

“Maybe we’re finally getting somewhere,” said Colonel Weber. “I wanna see more animal pictures,” I whispered, quietly so that

only Gary could hear me, and pouted like a child. He smiled and poked me. Truthfully, I wished the heptapods had given another xenobiology lecture, as they had on two previous exchanges; judging from those, humans were more similar to the heptapods than any other species they’d ever encountered. Or another lecture on heptapod history; those had been filled with apparent non-sequiturs, but were interesting nonetheless. I didn’t want the heptapods to give us new technology, because I didn’t want to see what our governments might do with it.

I watched Raspberry while the information was being exchanged, looking for any anomalous behavior. It stood barely moving as usual; I saw no indications of what would happen shortly. After a minute, the heptapod’s screen went blank, and a minute after that, ours did too. Gary and most of the other scientists clustered around a tiny video screen that was replaying the heptapods’ presentation. I could hear them talk about the need to call in a solid-state physicist. Colonel Weber turned. “You two,” he said, pointing to me and then to Burghart, “schedule the time and location for the next exchange.” Then he followed the others to the playback screen. “Coming right up,” I said. To Burghart, I asked, “Would you care to do the honors, or shall I?”

I knew Burghart had gained a proficiency in Heptapod B similar to mine.

“It’s your looking glass,” he said. “You drive.” I sat down again at the transmitting computer. “Bet you never figured you’d wind up working as an Army translator back when you were a grad student.” “That’s for damn sure,” he said.

to make

no love,

to make

“Even now I can hardly believe it.”

Everything we said to each other felt like the carefully bland exchanges of spies who meet in public, but never break cover. I wrote out the semagrams for “locus exchange-transaction converse inclusive-we” with the projective aspect modulation. Raspberry wrote its reply. That was my cue to frown, and for Burghart to ask, “What does it mean by that?” His delivery was perfect.

I wrote a request for clarification; Raspberry’s reply was the same as before. Then I watched it glide out of the room. The curtain was about to fall on this act of our performance. Colonel Weber stepped forward. “What’s going on? Where did it go?” “It said that the heptapods are leaving now,” I said. “Not just itself; all of them.” “Call it back here now. Ask it what it means.” “Um, I don’t think Raspberry’s wearing a pager,” I said. The image of the room in the looking glass disappeared so abruptly that it took a moment for my eyes to register what I was seeing instead: it was the other side of the looking-glass tent. The looking glass had become completely transparent. The conversation around the playback screen fell silent. “What the hell is going on here?” said Colonel Weber. Gary walked up to the looking glass, and then around it to the other side. He touched the rear surface with one hand; I could see the pale ovals where his fingertips made contact with the looking glass. “I think,” he said, “we just saw a demonstration of transmutation at a distance.”

I heard the sounds of heavy footfalls on dry grass. A soldier came in through the tent door, short of breath from sprinting,

holding an oversize walkie-talkie. “Colonel, message from—”

Weber grabbed the walkie-talkie from him. I remember what it’ll be like watching you when you are a day old. Your father will have gone for a quick visit to the hospital cafeteria, and you’ll be lying in your bassinet, and I’ll be leaning over you.

So soon after the delivery, I will still be feeling like a wrung-out towel. You will seem incongruously tiny, given how enormous I felt during the pregnancy; I could swear there was room for someone much larger and more robust than you in there.

Your hands and feet will be long and thin, not chubby yet. Your face will still be all red and pinched, puffy eyelids squeezed shut, the gnome-like phase that precedes the cherubic. I’ll run a finger over your belly, marveling at the uncanny softness of your skin, wondering if silk would abrade your body like burlap. Then you’ll writhe, twisting your body while poking out your legs one at a time, and I’ll recognize the gesture as one I had felt you do inside me, many times.

So that’s what it looks like. I’ll feel elated at this evidence of a unique motherchild bond, this certitude that you’re the one I carried. Even if I had never laid eyes on you before, I’d be able to pick you out from a sea of babies: Not that one. No, not her either. Wait, that one over there. Yes, that’s her. She’s mine. That final “gift exchange” was the last we ever saw of the heptapods. All at once, all over the world, their looking glasses became transparent and their ships left orbit. Subsequent analysis of the looking glasses revealed them to be nothing more than sheets of fused silica, completely inert.

The information from the final exchange session described a new class of superconducting materials, but it later proved to duplicate the results of research just completed in Japan: nothing that humans didn't already know.

We never did learn why the heptapods left, any more than we learned what brought them here, or why they acted the way they did. My own new awareness didn't provide that type of knowledge; the heptapods' behavior was presumably explicable from a sequential point of view, but we never found that explanation.

I would have liked to experience more of the heptapods' world-view, to feel the way they feel. Then, perhaps I could immerse myself fully in the necessity of events, as they must, instead of merely wading in its surf for the rest of my life. But that will never come to pass. I will continue to practice the heptapod languages, as will the other linguists on the looking glass teams, but none of us will ever progress any further than we did when the heptapods were here.

Working with the heptapods changed my life. I met your father and learned Heptapod B, both of which make it possible for me to know you now, here on the patio in the moonlight. Eventually, many years from now, I'll be without your father, and without you. All I will have left from this moment is the heptapod language. So I pay close attention, and note every detail. From the beginning I knew my destination, and I chose my route accordingly.

But am I working toward an extreme of joy, or of pain?

Will I achieve a minimum, or a maximum?

These questions are in my mind when your father asks me,

“Do you want to make a baby?”

And I smile and answer, “Yes,” and I unwrap his arms from around me, and we hold hands as we walk inside to make love, to make **you**.

story
of your
life