

THE RESULTS

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Ethan stepped up to one of several elevators of a high-rise of medical offices and clinics and promptly indicated he wanted to go up with the corresponding button. He only had to wait a few moments before the elevator made the expected dinging sound that traditionally accompanies its arrival before the door to the elevator opened before him as if welcoming its latest guest with open arms. After stepping in and selecting the button for the fifth floor, the door of the elevator quickly closed and subsequently began to climb upward as directed. The building did not seem to have a soul within, Ethan noted, besides the security officer sitting behind the reception desk on the first floor. As he moved down the empty hallway toward his destination his footsteps almost created an echo as he walked.

When Ethan finally found the door to the clinic at which he had an appointment, he paused. His hesitation was only momentary but was enough to make Ethan feel embarrassed by the cautionary impulse. *You're being ridiculous.* Almost to overcompensate, he stepped into the clinic waiting room as if his arrival were somehow greatly anticipated, only to find two other guests looking up uninterestedly at him from their seats. Ethan took a few awkward steps up to an electronic interface screen on the other side of the small room.

Approaching the display in the wall triggered a series of electronic noises from the device before a surprisingly life-like female voice sounded. "Welcome. Please place your right wrist face down over the biometric scanner. This process may take several seconds. Do not lift your wrist from the

screen until directed to do so. If you have any questions or require assistance, press the 'Help' button."

Ethan pulled the sleeve of his shirt covering his right arm a bit to his forearm and promptly placed his wrist down upon the small glass screen as instructed. A bluish-green light moved quickly back and forth under the glass, flashing as it did, indicating the device was reading the identification chip just under the surface of his skin.

After a couple of seconds, the woman's voice returned. "Welcome, Mr. Malvic. You are now checked in for your appointment. Please take a seat, and your name will be called shortly."

Pulling his sleeve back over his wrist, Ethan turned and took a seat along the side of the wall a few chairs away from one of the other two patients, exchanging a compulsory smile and nod as he did. He remembered from his initial visit just how thoroughly clean and sterilized the clinic was maintained, with a hint of

disinfectant lingering in the air. *Or, perhaps they pump something in through the ventilation system.* Either way, all he knew for sure was this was a level of cleanliness impossible for a person to achieve. *They are clearly using a humanoid service.*

There would only be a few minutes at the most to wait. One of the benefits of the advent of automated medical services over the past century was the addition of increased efficiencies, one of which was that appointments started and ended with remarkable precision with physicians, nurses, and reception staff being replaced by AI systems. There was also the



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added anonymity of sensitive information as well. Patients entered through one automatic door and were ushered out another when finished. What Ethan could not reason was, however, with all of the tremendous advancements that had been made, why there was still a lingering necessity to ever physically visit a clinic just to receive the results of a set of lab tests. Ethan's profession, that of a school teacher, he reasoned, had long since migrated online for virtual or asynchronous lessons. In his short six years as a teacher, he never had, and would never meet any of his pupils face-to-face. *If I can collect assignments from home, I can certainly get these lab results sent to me digitally.*

Eventually finding himself alone after the other two patients were called in for their appointments, Ethan had a quick moment to himself in silence before the automated voice came over a speaker to announce his turn. "Mr. Malvic, please step forward and enter. Room 5 has been prepared for you."

Stepping forward as requested, Ethan walked up to a door that led into a back hallway which then led into a series of small spaces. When he was standing directly under the door, a sensor was triggered and the door slid open, allowing him to enter. Ethan walked about halfway down the hallway until he found the entrance to the room labeled with five, and the door to the cubicle opened immediately revealing a small capsule with a single chair facing a computer interface.

Ethan took one step forward to the chair but stopped, and just stared down, the door closing behind him. He slowly, gingerly, moved toward the chair, reaching out to grab the back of it as if to pull it away and sit, before pausing again. *You wanted this. Remember that you wanted this.*

Finally sitting down, Ethan faced the screen and adjusted himself in the seat, almost squirming as he did. Electronic beeps sounded from the interface before the AI-generated voice spoke to him. "Mr. Malvic, Please place your right wrist face down over the biometric scanner. This process

may take several seconds. Do not lift your wrist from the screen until directed to do so. If you have any questions or require assistance, press the 'Help' button."

Much more reluctant this time, Ethan reached forward to rest his right wrist upon the glass biometric scanning screen. He noticed the anxiety rising within him. After quickly having his identity verified, Ethan waited for the interface to respond.

"Mr. Malvic, thank you. The results of the examination you requested are now available. A printout of that result is forthcoming. There are eight minutes and twenty-eight seconds of time remaining for your appointment. Feel free to use the remaining time to review your exam results. We know you have alternative service provider options, so thank you for trusting us with your business. Should you have additional needs in the future we hope that you will consider our services again."

When the AI-generated voice had concluded its message, a

brief whirring sound came from within the interface before a small piece of paper was released from a slip in the device. Ethan did not immediately reach for the exam results, but rather, sat back in the chair, leaning and stretching backward, slouching a bit. He turned his face to look up at the tiles of the ceiling and closed his eyes, taking slow, deep breaths. Ethan felt his heart pounding in his chest. Several more long breaths passed in and out before Ethan sat forward again to face the wall monitor. He sighed, then extended his hand to take the slip of paper sticking out of the module. *Just take it.*

Forcing himself to look at what was printed on the paper, Ethan read,

*5 years, 3 months, 2 days,
6 hours, and 24 minutes*