

Unraveled.

By Scott Tolksdorf

"Allow me to repeat myself," a darkened figure mumbled. His gaze fell upon the center of what seemed to be an ordinary wooden room. A gas lit lantern poured light like a cone of incandescence on top of the head of a kneeling young man, his face emotionless staring at the mahogany paneled floor.

"Your actions performed over the last few days have been examined and deemed an act of treason against the Queen." The words fell like a guillotine. All the young man could do was cringe his face and squeeze his elegant pocket watch buried in his right hand.

"But I haven't done anything yet!" he screamed. "You won't even tell me what I'm going to do!" Immediately he felt the cold butt of a gun bash the side of his face, knocking him to the ground. The leather satchel he was wearing spilled its contents onto the floor.

"We haven't granted you permission to speak yet, felon. As an offender of treason," the figure continued, "it has been decided that you shall be hung. We cannot allow those opposing the Queen to be poisoning others' thoughts." The man slowly pulled himself back up to his knees, careful to avoid another beating. Face still burning from the after-pain, he noticed all of his articles upon the floor and began picking them back up. Fine gears, vacuum tubes, and dozens of yellowed papers tickled with the workings of engineering and advanced mathematica carpeted the floor to his right. Suddenly he noticed his blueprint that depicted, in full detail, the pocket-watch he held so dearly. He made a quick move to try and cover the paper.

"Constable! Detain this man!" The figure moved further into the light, looking down at the mess. His monocle glared into the prisoner's horrified eyes. "Please gather the transgressor's articles of treason, and file them for further documentation." The man spun on foot, very telling of military training. The prisoner's watch started to warm up and tick at an alarmingly increasing volume.

"Sir! Please!" The felon spoke, "You do not understand!" The watch now began to burn in his hand.

"Oh, I understand very well Professor Mulligan!" The Professor ripped his arm free from the constable. "The might of the Empire scares you," the man continued. Mulligan looked at the watch as the struggle with his detainer began. "You are afraid that it is a threat to your freedoms!" The watch displayed 4:13. The second hand was now spinning around at a violent pace. The ticking echoed frantic chills into his spine.

"No sir! It is far more complicated than that!" The watch was now getting so hot that he had to drop it into his pocket. Letting go completely would be madness. "You don't understand what the Queen is going to--"

"You think very hard before you finish that sentence, boy." The brilliance from the watch could be seen through the Professor's pocket. "If you speak heresy against the Queen..." A young man in uniform stepped out of the darkness and whispered something to the man. Suddenly the man faced Mulligan and glared. The ticking was very loud. "Constable! Retrieve Mr. Mulligan's watch immediately!"

"I'm sorry!" cried out the Professor as he finally got loose and leapt back

from the Constable. Stumbling back into a wall, Professor Mulligan fell to his hands and knees as the ticking stopped and the brilliant glow from his pocket disappeared. Looking up to the man with the monocle, he whispered, "There's nothing I can do..." and vanished.

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"He hasn't done anything!" screamed Lidia as she tugged at the policeman's arm. Throwing her aside, he continued to detain the professor alongside another officer. She collapsed to the ground and was about to pick herself back up when the officers got the professor, Lidia's uncle, to the ground beside her.

"Run away," he muttered to her. "Get away from all of this. Don't worry about me!" Trusting her uncle, Lidia got to her feet and bolted into the park, running as fast as she could. Suddenly she heard a rustling in some bushes as she past. Stopping, she took a step closer, but was startled by a man falling out.

Bruised and battered, he stumbled to her legs and cried out, "Stop! Help me!" She realized that it was her uncle, Professor Mulligan.

"Uncle Arthur! How did you--?" She looked up just in time to watch the police officers throw her uncle into their police carriage as the horses began to slowly pull it away. She turned back to her battered "uncle". Looking him up and down her shock grew. Same glasses, same chin, same brilliant look in his eyes. Save for a few days growth on his cheeks and a small trickle of blood from his left temple, this man is her uncle! "B-but how?! I just--"

"Lidia!" Arthur grabbed her shoulders. "You need to listen to me; something horrible is going to happen."

"What?! I just saw you get thrown into that carriage! Uncle, ple-" Tears startled to swell in his young niece's eyes.

"You have to calm down, you need to listen," his eyes ignited with a desperate passion. "I have to give you instructions, you need to pay attention!" She broke eye contact as the tears began to pour. He shook her. "Lidia! Lidia! look at me!"

"Uncle? Where's Dad? What happened to him?" She made out through the sobbings. Arthur Mulligan's face went solemn, his eyes dropped and the passion turned to melancholy. A few seconds he held this way, still holding his dear niece tight.

"I-I'm just sorry. I can't explain now, but just remember that I'm sorry." His pocket began tick. Panicking, he looked down. "No! No! Not so soon!"

"What is it Uncle? Whats that sound?"

"Lidia, I need you to do something before its too late. You need to trust me." Tearing into his jacket, he procured a patch of parchment.

Tick tock. Tick tock.

"Follow this," he said, shoving the paper into her small hand. "Follow this exactly. If it says you jump: you jump. If it says to go to the store: go to

the store. If it says to kill me..." He looked back to her. "Well, you understand."

"Uncle! K-kill you?"

TICK TOCK. TICK TOCK.

"Now, Lidia, I'm leaving. I might not be coming back. I need you to follow these instructions. I will fix this. I promise." He broke away from her, running deeper into the park.

"Uncle!" Lidia bolted after him, following his footsteps in the deep snow.

"Lidia, leave me!" He yelled looking back. Arthur pulled out his now white-hot watch. 11:12. "Oh no, no...." He stopped, turning around to meet his niece's eyes.

Tick.

"Just remember that I'm sorry."

Tock.