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## An excerpt from the 3<sup>rd</sup> book in the Matt Turner Series: Return

UPenn’s main auditorium could seat 1,259 people, according to the event coordinator, and though Cameron Langley’s seminar hadn’t quite sold out, it sure as hell looked like it had. Standing behind a cherry wood lectern on the right side of the stage, wearing his second favorite suit, Cameron felt goddamned *distinguished*. And the audience? Goddamned *rapt*, if he said so himself.

“... or as Hardy referred to it, ‘object-aided telepathy’. This rubber band on my wrist—you folks in the back can’t see this, but trust me, there’s a rubber band.” Cameron snapped the band against his skin a few times, close to the lapel mic. “Ouch.” Sporadic chuckles from the audience. “All right, so a few minutes from now, or a week from now, or even a century or more, a skilled psychometrist holding this rubber band could see all of *you* through *my* eyes—like a head-mounted camera—but *more* ...” He tapped his temple with an index finger. “In my head, I was thinking about my notes, and the slide after this one, and the next items I plan to share with you; I felt a churn in my stomach, wondered what’s good around here for lunch; felt the rubber band between my fingertips, and, of course, felt it snapping against my wrist.” Cameron paused for effect. “Psychometry.”

He waited for the applause he’d received in Tucson at that point in the presentation, but the audience simply nodded, wide-eyed.

*Oh well. Moving on.*

He clicked the remote to switch to the next slide, glancing back at the massive screen where the illustrated profile of Dr. Buchanan shone from the projector. A bit pixely at such a size, but it was the only picture Cameron could find with Google.

He went on. “Now, though such powers have been reported and observed all throughout human history, the term ‘psychometry’ was actually not coined until the Nineteenth Century by this man, Joseph Rodes Buchanan.”

He clicked to the next slide, a sepia-toned photograph of Mrs. Buchanan. “Dr. Buchanan’s wife, seen here in this photograph, is who I’d consider the very first *documented* psychometrist, and was the subject of decades of research performed with her husband, and outlined in his 1885 treatise, *The Manual of Psychometry: The Dawn of a New Civilization*.”

Cameron once more took in the faces of the audience.

*Captivated still, but they’re just waiting for me to discuss the ‘star’ of the show. Not just yet.*

Blaring light suddenly poured in from the back of the auditorium—a late arrival entering from the lobby, and the goddamned ushers didn’t hold him until the first break. Cameron made it obvious he was waiting as his gaze chastised the back of the room. The door swung shut and a bearded man in shorts waved his blundering apologies before slipping into the back row.

Cameron forced a forgiving smile and turned his focus back to his notes.

*Right. Buchanan.*

He glanced back at the screen, and the photo of Mrs. Buchanan. “Dr. Buchanan was a bit of a grumpy old fart.” The audience chuckled on cue. “In most of his speeches—delivered to fascinated, rapt audiences, not unlike you wonderful people—he’d digress into ranting diatribes against the ignorant medical establishment, skeptical editorialists, and pretty much anyone that questioned his research. Given a modern publicist and skilled team of handlers, Dr. Buchanan might have, in his time, made ‘psychometry’ the household word it is today. Said handlers would’ve most certainly had Buchanan bring his wife and other test subjects onto the stage with

him.” Cameron pointed to the screen. “Why? Because thirty years into his research, Buchanan and his assistants had confirmed over *one hundred* psychometrists of varying skill levels.”

He paused for effect. The sparse academics in the audience scrawled notes. Casual spectators merely gawked as they always gawked.

“Demonstrations are always more impactful than talking heads on a stage, right? Perhaps Dr. Buchanan enjoyed the sound of his own ranting voice. However, in his writing, we find a much more elegant, focused scientist, and one more than capable of expressing a compelling case to those with the open mind required in his day.”

The house lights dimmed as Cameron clicked the remote to start the video: a dramatic, music-backed, sixty-second slideshow of Buchanan related images. Recorded back when he was still pinching pennies, Cameron had paid the aging narrator twenty bucks to do the voiceover.

He stepped back from the lectern and watched in silence.

*"The past is entombed in the present, the world is its own enduring monument; and that which is true of its physical is likewise true of its mental career. The discoveries of psychometry will enable us to explore the history of man, as those of geology enable us to explore the history of the earth. There are mental fossils for psychologists as well as mineral fossils for the geologists, and I believe that hereafter the psychologist and the geologist will go hand in hand—the one investigating the earth, its animals and its vegetation, while the other explores the human beings who have roamed over its surface in the shadows. Aye, the mental telescope is now discovered which may pierce the depths of the past and bring us in full view of the grand and tragic passages of ancient history. ... Joseph Rodes Buchanan."*

The lights brightened as Cameron returned to the lectern with an earnest air. “I only wish he could be here today to witness firsthand the world he foresaw. You see, Dr. Buchanan believed, as I do, that psychometry is not some supernatural gift bestowed upon a lucky few. The human mind is a magnificent computer, and the same wondrous gray matter that has given us quantum mechanics, the worlds of Tolkien, the great pyramids, and antibiotics is more than capable of *learning* a new sense. Without taking away from some of the greats discussed here today—in essence, that is all we are talking about: a sense.”

Cameron glanced down to his script and read the penciled reminder added in Minneapolis: ***PACE HERE***. He put his hands behind his back and began a slow stroll across the stage.

“Imagine with me for a moment a thirteen year old boy in a cave. This cave is deep below ground and has no light source whatsoever. Perfect pitch black. The young man was born in this cave and has lived there his whole life, never having used his eyes.” A few *awww*’s arose from the audience. Cameron flashed a smile. “None of that, now! Caveboy is purely hypothetical.” Laughs. He resumed, “Living there alone, he isn’t even aware of the *concept* of sight. He uses his other senses to get around, and this is perfectly acceptable to him. He knows no other way. One day, a miner breaks down a wall and daylight streams into the cave. Now, doctors know from a few sad cases that patients who have lived entirely in darkness for a great length of time do not simply *see* when exposed to light. Some, in fact, are never able to see more than faint blobs of color or shades, if that. But for others—those who are able to *train* their inert sensory organs—well ... what they see is nothing short of *magical*.”

He clicked through the series of beautiful landscape photographs, allowing several seconds for each to marinate. The onlookers loved him; they loved everything he had to say or show them. He clicked to the blank spacer slide and returned to the lectern. Sated exhales and murmurs

of approval.

*Nonchalance time.*

“Let’s talk about Matthew Turner.”

Postures stiffened and eyes widened. Sporadic applause. This was what they’d all come for, that which had loosed the minimum sixty-five dollar entry fee from each of their bank accounts. But after the last forty-five minutes of material, now it’d be gravy to them. Expectations more than exceeded. He’d sell and sign *many* books after the show.

Cameron advanced to the next slide, the iconic photo of Matthew Turner on the deck of a ship with tousled hair and a toothy grin. Before him, and the crowd of men and women at his overdressed sides, sat the archetypal wooden treasure chest of silver coins, the silver that had made him a multimillionaire at twenty-four.

“We’ve all seen this photograph,” Cameron said. “One of a very few images of Matthew, and of particular importance in terms of life events, right?” Next slide. “Equally familiar, we have the shot of a surely-sweltering Matthew in Kenya with a few archaeologists, holding the shovel he’d only moments before used to unearth the first of hundreds of metal domes—unequivocal evidence of a pre-human civilization of intelligent beings dubbed ‘Narok People’. For those who’ve read *A Field of Domes* by Matthew and his late friend and mentor, Dr. Jon Meier, you may know this society by their real name: *Pwin-T* People.”

Photos of the fully excavated sites and visitors’ center, the woven metal armor on the mannequin of a giant-eyed Pwin-T man, an unopened metal sarcophagus, a re-assembled glass light tube filled with blue liquid, weapons, tools.

“Certainly hundreds of dedicated individuals have contributed to the knowledge we now enjoy of our humanoid predecessors, but everyone knows who deserves all the credit. Without Matthew, this fantastic past—and many others now added to the history books—would’ve remained forever buried.”

Cameron reached another penciled footnote on his script. He continued to the next slide and turned with *deep sorrow* to observe the slowly zooming image.

“But not without a cost.”

The audience buzzed quietly at the dramatic telephoto-captured image of a gaunt, ruined Matthew Turner outside his North Carolina home. A black turtleneck does little to hide his pointy frame, nor the blue jeans that presumably fit him sometime long ago. Caught taking a bag of trash to his garbage bins, Matthew glares at the photographer with exhausted eyes. The dark circles, the sunken cheeks and wrinkles—all would seem better suited on a homeless, forty-something meth addict.

“This is the last known photo of Matthew Turner, snapped outside his home nearly three years ago. Since then, he’s continued to live a hermitic life, cut off from the world. The clothing which protected his skin from unwanted psychometric energies eventually proved ineffective. Matthew has never been able to *turn off* his sense—a tragic consequence of extremely high sensitivity to imprints. After the death of his father in Cuba, a devastated Matthew has avoided using his ability at all. He has groceries delivered weekly by a private service, and when they are asked how he’s doing, the couriers always reply with the same rehearsed line: ‘Our client values his privacy’. During this most recent phase of his life, and prior to the death of coauthor Dr. Meier, Matthew released three books: first *Southland*, then *Pharoah*, and finally *Domes*, all of which will be available in the lobby after the presentation. But before we get there, let me share with you the parts of Matthew that aren’t already known to the public, not accessible via a simple Google search, and actually,” he put a hand beside his mouth and mock whispered, “not found in

my book, *Psychometry and Matthew Turner*, also available later. Autographed, if so desired. After Matthew, I'll introduce you to today's special guest, someone from Mr. Turner's past. And finally, I'll bring one of *you* up onto *this* stage to psychometrically *read* an object!"

Applause, whistles. If there were an anticipation meter in the crowd, the needle would be pointed to max.

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Cameron returned to the stage after the final break, stepping behind the lectern. As the house lights slowly dimmed, the last few attendees re-found their seats. The din hushed to silence.

"More than two decades ago, a young girl of only eight years named Joss Lynn was walking home from her New Jersey daycare. She carried her backpack and her favorite lunchbox, and was humming a summer camp song she'd learned a few weeks earlier. A car pulled up, someone she knew but hadn't seen in a while—a family friend. 'Don't talk to strangers' didn't seem to apply here, and she got in the car. An hour later, instead of being in her home, she sat on the side of this person's bed and watched with confusion as they packed for what appeared to be a long journey. Fifteen minutes later, the kidnapper was dead, police were talking to Joss Lynn's traumatized parents, and she was holding hands outside with a kid her age—a strange boy named Matty Turner. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to Joss Lynn Leland."

Joss's childhood photos played on the big screen as Joss strode from side-stage, waving and smiling at the applauding audience. She wore one of her nice conservative dresses with short heels, her bleach-blonde hair ironed and curved into a bob. Cameron handed her a microphone.

"Thank you for taking the time to be with us today."

"Thank you," she said, squinting and shielding the stage lights with one hand to see the audience. A charming, humanizing display, Cameron thought. "It's an honor."

"The honor is ours, am I right, people?"

Joss shrunk and smiled bashfully at the ovation.

Cameron knit his brow into earnest mode and lowered his voice. "How're you holding up these days?" He touched her shoulder.

"Oh, I'm good, real good!" she said. "I just feel so lucky to be here, and I think about Matthew Turner every day. He gave me the gift of a normal life."

"That's great to hear. If it's not too traumatic, would you mind taking us through that day?"

Joss nodded and looked toward the audience. Her face turned somber. "Of course."

*So brave ...* Cameron snickered inside.

As Joss Lynn spoke, Cameron watched her from the side, gazing from her ankles, slowly past her well-toned calves, and up. So utterly engrossed was he with her pleasing form, Cameron failed to notice the theater's back door swing open as an attendee walked out.

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The final cluster of guests left through the lobby's glass doors, each carrying at least one autographed book. Cameron sighed and slid his last box of books out from under the table. He counted six empty boxes, and began tallying sales in his head. Not the strongest of the tour, but far from the slowest day.

He gathered his pens and mailing list clipboard, depositing them into his laptop bag, along with the tablet he used for credit card processing. One of these days he'd get a merch person to handle the transactions. He wondered if it came off unprofessional or down-to-earth, him running the table solo. He didn't like the idea of having to pay someone, though. Perhaps he

could—

“Are you able to sign one more?” A man’s voice startled Cameron.

Cameron looked up to see a fit, bearded man in cargo shorts and thin, button-down flannel with the sleeves rolled up. He was flipping through a paperback copy of *Psychometry*.

“Didn’t see you there,” Cameron said, continuing to pack up his things. “Thought everyone had gone. I closed out my register, but if you have cash—”

The man cut him off. “Yes, I have cash. Do you sign the other books, too?” He gestured at the stacks of Meier/Turner books at the edge of the table.

Cameron thought, *Hmm, five more books would be a nice way to finish out the day.*

“Generally not—I mean, I obviously didn’t write them—but if you want to bundle all of the books together, I suppose I could sign them, if you wish. I may even have a couple more hardcovers of my two.”

“Perfect. I’ll take them all.” The man dropped a crisp hundred dollar bill on the table.

“Great. There’s actually sales tax on top of that. I think it works out to one-eleven and change, but let me start getting these signed for you. I do have to get out of here. Would you like these dedicated, or only signed?”

“Dedicated would be great,” the man said as he placed the rest of the cash on the table. “Just put ‘Dear Matt,’ and then whatever you’d like to say.”

Cameron snorted and began to write the salutation, trying to think of some clever line about the name. He paused after the second *t*.

Staring at what he’d written, he began writhing a little in the chair. His neck and back felt as though a heating lamp had just switched on behind him. His eyes rose until they found the man’s face, a small smile peeking from behind the light-brown beard.

“Whatever you want to say there,” Matt said. “Doesn’t have to be fancy. Or remorseful. Or pleading. Or a longwinded explanation. Really, anything.”

Cameron closed the book and slid his chair back to put some distance between them. He could see it now, even with the longer hair and beard. The bright eyes, the shape of his ears, the facial structure. Matthew Turner was actually standing a few feet away from him. And he looked goddamned *huge*—not remotely the withering skeleton from the photo. “You’re—”

“Doing much better, yes. Listen, while you’re signing my books, could you answer some questions for me?”

Cameron peered around for another soul, but they were the only two in the echoing lobby. Through the glass doors he could see students walking across the grassy court, but no sign of campus security. What would he do if he were attacked? Was that a possibility? If Turner wanted him hurt, couldn’t he just pay someone else to handle it? Actually, would that be preferable?

“Questions?” was all Cameron could come up with. He needed water. His mouth was like left-out bread. He stacked the books in front of him as if building a wall of protection. Was Turner truly buying these books? Did he really want him to write in them? Surely a lawsuit was in the works.

“Yes. In the book with my name plastered across the cover in such a way as to suggest that *I* wrote a book called *Psychometry*, you mentioned communicating with the First Lady of Kenya, my ex-girlfriend, Tuni. Was that true?”

Cameron’s mouth and hand stuttered in sync as he tried to write *Dear Matt* inside a copy of the book in question. “Well, the wording ... It doesn’t *precisely* state that an exchange of words took place, so much as *express* what *must* be her feelings on—”

“Okay, so it wasn’t true. A simple yes or no will suffice for the rest of these questions.”

“Cam?” Joss called from the ticket office door at the far end of the lobby. Cameron sighed relief. “Can I come out?”

“Yes, of course!” Cameron blurted. “You can help me pack all this up.” Joss began walking toward them. “And look who’s here, Joss! Mr. Turner, you remember Joss Leland, right?”

Joss’s face lit up. “Are you kidding me?” She rushed toward Turner. “Is it really—Are you really ... *you*?”

Turner appeared happy to see her, but thrown off, awkward. She went to hug him but stopped herself. “Oh, sorry! It’s just so great to see you!”

Turner shrugged and put his arms out with a smile. “It’s fine, actually. And I’m doing well.”

They hugged and Cameron watched Joss’s sleeve graze Turner’s arm skin. Her hoop earring touched his cheek. No reaction. They separated and just smiled at each other, searching for what else to say.

“I like the beard,” Joss offered, her eyes trying to take in all of him at once. “And you’re so ... healthy.”

“Can we talk a minute, Joss?” Turner took her gently by the arm, then glanced back to Cameron. “You can keep signing all those books. Remember, ‘Dear Matt,’ okay? I’m looking forward to reading whatever strikes you.”

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**Continued in RETURN (Book 3 of the Matt Turner Series)**

Coming soon...