

## The Coma Club

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## Introduction

To the waking world, time is a rigid, unforgiving architecture. It is measured in the sharp, metallic ticking of wall clocks, the cold, blue-light glare of digital alarms, and the relentless, rhythmic *beep... beep... beep* of hospital heart monitors. We trust the seconds. We rely on their steady, predictable march to build our ordinary lives.

But a human heartbeat is not a continuous line. Between the *lub* and the *dub*—between the surge of blood and the moment of rest—there is a microscopic fraction of absolute silence. It is a space of

crackling static electricity, a dark, quiet void where the rules of waking physics simply cease to exist.

For most of us, that space is nothing. But for a brain plunged into the sudden, terrifying darkness of a coma—starved of oxygen, flooded with trauma, and suppressed by heavy, chemical sedatives tasting of iodine and cold copper—that microscopic space between seconds can become an entire, sprawling universe.

When the body violently fails, the mind refuses to surrender to the void. Instead, it detonates. It builds impossible, hyper-saturated empires out of memories, regrets, and unspoken desires. While the physical body lies motionless under blinding, mercilessly white fluorescent lights, smelling of bleach, sterilized plastic, and floor wax, the trapped consciousness sprints marathons across galaxies.

This is the story of twelve ordinary strangers: Baristas, accountants, mechanics, and librarians. Their waking lives were painted in muted, polite shades of beige and grey. But when their bodies broke, they were thrown into a grand, absurd exile. They did not simply dream; they lived full, exhausting, magnificent lifetimes. They smelled the sharp tang of nebula-dust and the comforting warmth of baking bread. They felt the freezing, architectural weight of solid shadows and the shocking, electrical kiss of a living storm cloud. They ruled empires of sentient furniture, conducted symphonies of rusted iron, and birthed children made of riddles and starlight.

In the sterile, quiet wards of Marseille, Lyon, and Paris, their families sat in uncomfortable plastic chairs, weeping, counting the agonizing days on a calendar. Five days. Three weeks. A month.

But inside the dark, the math was different. A week became a decade. A day became an epoch.

When the sedatives finally cleared, leaving the bitter taste of medical tubing in their throats, these twelve strangers woke up. They opened their eyes to a world that suddenly felt too quiet, too harsh, and devastatingly empty. They were diagnosed with "delirium" and "narrative transference." They were told they were healed.

But how do you explain to the waking world that you are grieving a child who never drew breath? How do you mourn a wooden galleon that sailed on solar winds, or an empire of talking velvet? How do you return to the quiet, scentless beige of an ordinary Tuesday when your soul is still stained with the brilliant, agonizing colors of infinity?

This is a chronicle of their impossible journeys, and the beautiful, heavy ghosts they carried back into the light.

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## Chapter 1: The Phantom Triplets

Elara Fontaine was twenty-one, a barista in a cramped but beloved café in Marseille where she spent her mornings sketching impossible cityscapes on the backs of curling receipt paper. Her waking life was defined by sensory overload: the rich, dark aroma of roasting arabica beans that settled into her clothes, the aggressive hiss of the espresso steam wand, and the golden, syrupy hue of perfect crema pouring into porcelain cups. She loved the chaotic symphony of the café, but her true solace came in the evenings. She spent them racing her battered, neon-green mountain bike along the jagged coastal trails. She lived for the feeling of the salty Mediterranean wind whipping her hair, tasting the brine on her lips,

and watching the evening sun turn the towering limestone cliffs into monuments of blazing, fiery gold.

On a suffocatingly warm June evening in 2025, the air thick with the scent of blooming jasmine and hot asphalt, everything changed. A loose patch of shale gravel, practically invisible in the fading violet twilight, betrayed her front tire. The world upended in a terrifying rush of motion. There was the deafening, metallic shriek of the bike frame scraping against stone, followed by a sickening crunch as her helmet met a jagged boulder. A blinding flash of pure, soundless white light erased the golden sunset, and the world went entirely black, silent, and numb before she even had the chance to register the agonizing pain in her skull.

Paramedics found her unconscious on the trail, her vitals crashing to the erratic, terrifying rhythm of a fading heartbeat. At the hospital, the atmosphere shifted to one of clinical desperation. The scents of sea salt and jasmine were violently replaced by the sharp, stinging odor of bleach, iodine, and rubbing alcohol. Beneath glaring, merciless fluorescent lights that hummed with a headache-inducing buzz, doctors induced a coma to allow her swelling, bruised brain to rest. Three weeks of chemically enforced darkness followed. Her body was tethered to a network of plastic tubes and humming machines that beeped like impatient, high-pitched metronomes, marking time she was no longer experiencing.

Inside that deep, artificially silent void, Elara lived an entirely different life.

It began the moment the heavy sedatives wrapped around her mind like warm, heavy silk. She didn't wake up in a hospital bed; she "woke" standing in the center of an impossibly large greenhouse. The light here was extraordinary—a dappled, honey-colored

luminescence that filtered through slightly foggy glass panes, casting emerald shadows from the sprawling ferns. The air was thick and intoxicating, smelling intensely of crushed lavender, the metallic tang of fresh motor oil, and the yeasty, comforting aroma of baking bread. The glass walls vibrated gently, humming with the low, rhythmic, soothing bass of distant ocean waves.

A midwife materialized from the foliage. She had shimmering silver hair that caught the honeyed light and fingers stained with deep blue ink. She handed Elara a heavy, squirming bundle wrapped in soft, buttermilk-colored cloth. "They're here," the woman whispered, her voice rustling like dry autumn leaves.

Elara felt the weight first—three tiny, radiating bodies pressed against her bare chest. They were no larger than loaves of bread, exuding a heat that smelled of baby powder and sweet milk. Incredibly, each infant was already humming their own private, harmonic theme song.

The first girl, Mila, had eyes the color of turbulent, slate-grey storm clouds. Before she even opened them fully, she babbled in soft, melodic syllables that formed coherent riddles: "What has roots that nobody sees, is taller than trees, up and up it goes, yet never grows?" Her voice sounded like tiny silver bells. Elara laughed, tasting the salt of tears she didn't know she could cry in a dream.

The second, Theo, squirmed with kinetic, boundless energy. His laughter was a bright, percussive sound, like a xylophone being struck playfully. Every time he giggled, the potted tulips surrounding them literally exploded into silent, dazzling fireworks of crimson, magenta, and spun gold, showering them in soft, harmless sparks that smelled faintly of burnt sugar.

The third, Liora, was the smallest. Her tiny fists clutched at the empty air until she let out a soft, breathy sigh. Instantly, the golden light of the greenhouse dimmed, shifting into a calming, deep violet glow that smelled of night-blooming jasmine.

The labor itself, remembered in reverse, had been a symphony of absurd agony and wonder. Elara recalled the contractions not as pain, but as rolling waves of an electric lavender scent that pulsed through her nervous system, each wave carrying a different, thunderous orchestral melody. She had pushed while the greenhouse ceiling miraculously parted, revealing a vast, indigo night sky where diamond-bright stars physically rearranged themselves to spell out ancient lullabies. When the triplets finally arrived, she felt the slick, warm dampness of their skin, the impossible, downy softness of their hair, and an immediate, bone-deep recognition that anchored her soul.

This dream stretched across seven full, vibrant years, compressing decades of ordinary wonder into the three real-world weeks her body lay motionless under the harsh hospital fluorescents. She raised her children in a ramshackle, sun-bleached cottage perched on a cliff that existed only in her mind. The wooden walls were painted with magical murals that physically shifted—swirling blues and greens when the children were calm, jagged reds and oranges when tantrums erupted.

Mila grew into a shy, observant philosopher who collected pearlescent seashells. By age four, she would sit on the porch, the wind rustling her dark hair, debating the ethics of imaginary friends in a voice as calm as a steady stream. Theo became a whirlwind of pure, loud energy. He smelled constantly of pine needles and dirt, building elaborate, clanking forts from rusted, recycled bicycle parts. He spent his afternoons teaching the neighborhood stray cats—who

meowed in perfect three-part harmony—how to juggle brightly painted wooden balls. Liora, the quietest, developed a heartbreaking habit of turning invisible when she was sad. She would literally fade into the air, leaving behind only the faint scent of rain and her laughter, which floated upward like iridescent, silver soap bubbles popping softly against the ceiling.

Elara remembered the sensory perfection of their skin-to-skin contact with crystal clarity. She would lie on a sun-warmed, patchwork quilt that smelled of old cotton and sunshine, the triplets nestled against her chest. She could feel their tiny hearts drumming a synchronized, triplet beat against her ribs. An overwhelming wave of love—a physical pressure so fierce and tight it felt like her chest might crack open—would wash over her. She whispered their names over and over, her breath tickling their foreheads. She sang them complex, multi-layered songs her own mother had never taught her, melodies that tasted like honey and felt like a warm embrace.

There were long walks along impossible, glittering obsidian beaches. The crashing waves sounded like a massive, breathing lung. Seagulls with glowing white wings would swoop down, delivering handwritten mail on thick parchment from future versions of Elara herself, the letters smelling of old wax and promises. Meals were shared at a heavy oak table that groaned and sprouted extra, carved wooden legs whenever someone needed more room, the air thick with the smell of roasting garlic and fresh tomatoes. Bedtime stories were cinematic marvels. As Elara spoke, the tales unfolded like living, breathing movies projected in luminous, shifting colors onto the bedroom ceiling—emerald green dragons that coughed up apologetic puffs of lilac smoke, and silver, clanking robots that shed glowing blue tears when they accidentally stepped on digital daisies.

