

**'An epic feat of imagination.
You will live in this world.'**
JUSTIN CRONIN,
author of *The Passage*

**SOME SECRETS SHOULD
REMAIN BURIED.**

SHIFT

H U G H

H O W E Y

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *WOOL*

Shift

Hugh Howey



For all those who find themselves well and truly alone.

What would you do

If you were forced to survive,
when everyone you cared about was dead.

And the only place you could live

was deep below ground,
built for the end of the world.

This is the start of the Silo.

This is the first SHIFT.

IN 2007, THE Center for Automation in Nanobiotech (CAN) outlined the hardware and software platforms that would one day allow robots smaller than human cells to make medical diagnoses, conduct repairs and even self-propagate.

That same year, CBS re-aired a programme about the effects of propranolol on sufferers of extreme trauma. A simple pill, it had been discovered, could wipe out the memory of any traumatic event.

At almost the same moment in humanity's broad history, mankind had discovered the means for bringing about its utter downfall. And the ability to forget it ever happened.

FIRST SHIFT – LEGACY

Prologue

2110

Beneath the hills of Fulton County, Georgia

TROY RETURNED TO the living and found himself inside a tomb. He awoke to a world of confinement, a thick sheet of frosted glass pressed near to his face.

Dark shapes stirred on the other side of the icy murk. He tried to lift his arms, to beat on the glass, but his muscles were too weak. He attempted to scream – but could only cough. The taste in his mouth was foul. His ears rang with the clank of heavy locks opening, the hiss of air, the squeak of hinges long dormant.

The lights overhead were bright, the hands on him warm. They helped him sit while he continued to cough, his breath clouding the chill air. Someone had water. Pills to take. The water was cool, the pills bitter. Troy fought down a few gulps. He was unable to hold the glass without help. His hands trembled as memories flooded back, scenes from long nightmares. The feeling of deep time and yesterdays mingled. He shivered.

A paper gown. The sting of tape removed. A tug on his arm, a tube pulled from his groin. Two men dressed in white helped him out of the coffin. Steam rose all around him, air condensing and dispersing.

Sitting up and blinking against the glare, exercising lids long shut, Troy looked down the rows of coffins full of the living that stretched towards the distant and curved walls. The ceiling felt low; the suffocating press of dirt stacked high above. And the years. So many had passed. Anyone he cared about would be gone.

Everything was gone.

The pills stung his throat. He tried to swallow. Memories faded like dreams upon waking, and he felt his grip loosen on everything he'd known.

He collapsed backwards – but the men in the white overalls saw this coming. They caught him and lowered him to the ground, a paper gown rustling on shivering skin.

Images returned; recollections rained down like bombs and then were gone.

The pills would only do so much. It would take time to destroy the past.

Troy began to sob into his palms, a sympathetic hand resting on his head. The two men in white allowed him this moment. They didn't rush the process. Here was a courtesy passed from one waking soul to the next, something all the men sleeping in their coffins would one day rise to discover.

And eventually . . . forget.

2049 Washington, DC

THE TALL GLASS trophy cabinets had once served as bookshelves. There were hints. Hardware on the shelves dated back centuries, while the hinges and the tiny locks on the glass doors went back mere decades. The framing around the glass was cherry, but the cases had been built of oak. Someone had attempted to remedy this with a few coats of stain, but the grain didn't match. The colour wasn't perfect. To trained eyes, details such as these were glaring.

Congressman Donald Keene gathered these clues without meaning to. He simply saw that long ago there had been a great purge, a making of space. At some point in the past, the Senator's waiting room had been stripped of its obligatory law books until only a handful remained. These tomes sat silently in the dim corners of the glass cabinets. They were shut in, their spines laced with cracks, old leather flaking off like sunburned skin.

A handful of Keene's fellow freshmen filled the waiting room, pacing and stirring, their terms of service newly begun. Like Donald, they were young and still hopelessly optimistic. They were bringing change to Capitol Hill. They hoped to deliver where their similarly naive predecessors had not.

While they waited their turns to meet with the great Senator Thurman from their home state of Georgia, they chatted nervously among themselves. They were a gaggle of priests, Donald imagined, all lined up to meet the Pope, to kiss his ring. He let out a heavy breath and focused on the contents of the case, lost himself in the treasures behind the glass while a fellow representative from Georgia prattled on about his district's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

'—and they have this detailed guide on their website, this response and readiness manual in case of, okay, get this – a zombie invasion. Can you believe that? Fucking zombies. Like even the CDC thinks something could go wrong and suddenly we'd all be *eating* each other—'

Donald stifled a smile, fearful its reflection would be caught in the glass. He turned and looked over a collection of photographs on the walls, one each

of the Senator with the last four presidents. It was the same pose and handshake in each shot, the same background of windless flags and fancy oversized seals. The Senator hardly seemed to change as the presidents came and went. His hair started white and stayed white; he seemed perfectly unfazed by the passing of decades.

Seeing the photographs side by side devalued each of them somehow. They looked staged. Phoney. It was as if this collection of the world's most powerful men had each begged for the opportunity to stand and pose with a cardboard cut-out, a roadside attraction.

Donald laughed, and the congressman from Atlanta joined him.

'I know, right? Zombies. It's hilarious. But think about it, okay? Why would the CDC even *have* this field manual unless—'

Donald wanted to correct his fellow congressman, to tell him what he'd really been laughing about. *Look at the smiles*, he wanted to say. They were on the faces of the *presidents*. The Senator looked as if he'd rather be anywhere else. It looked as if each in this succession of commanders-in-chief knew who the more powerful man was, who would be there long after they had come and gone.

'—it's advice like, everyone should have a baseball bat with their flashlights and candles, right? Just in case. You know, for bashing brains.'

Donald pulled out his phone and checked the time. He glanced at the door leading off the waiting room and wondered how much longer he'd have to wait. Putting the phone away, he turned back to the cabinet and studied a shelf where a military uniform had been carefully arranged like a delicate work of origami. The left breast of the jacket featured a wall of medals; the sleeves were folded over and pinned to highlight the gold braids sewn along the cuffs. In front of the uniform, a collection of decorative coins rested in a custom wooden rack, tokens of appreciation from men and women serving overseas.

The two arrangements spoke volumes: the uniform from the past and the coins from those currently deployed, bookends on a pair of wars. One that the Senator had fought in as a youth. The other, a war he had battled to prevent as an older and wiser man.

'—yeah, it sounds crazy, I know, but do you know what rabies does to a dog? I mean, what it *really* does, the biological—'

Donald leaned in closer to study the decorative coins. The number and slogan on each one represented a deployed group. Or was it a battalion? He couldn't remember. His sister Charlotte would know. She was over there somewhere, out in the field.

‘Hey, aren’t you even a little nervous about this?’

Donald realised the question had been aimed at him. He turned and faced the talkative congressman. He must’ve been in his mid-thirties, around Donald’s age. In him, Donald could see his own thinning hair, his own beginnings of a gut, that uncomfortable slide to middle age.

‘Am I nervous about zombies?’ Donald laughed. ‘No. Can’t say that I am.’

The congressman stepped up beside Donald, his eyes drifting towards the imposing uniform that stood propped up as if a warrior’s chest remained inside. ‘No,’ the man said. ‘About meeting *him*.’

The door to the reception area opened, bleeps from the phones on the other side leaking out.

‘Congressman Keene?’

An elderly receptionist stood in the doorway, her white blouse and black skirt highlighting a thin and athletic frame.

‘Senator Thurman will see you now,’ she said.

Donald patted the congressman from Atlanta on the shoulder as he stepped past.

‘Hey, good luck,’ the gentleman stammered after him.

Donald smiled. He fought the temptation to turn and tell the man that he knew the Senator well enough, that he had been bounced on his knee back when he was a child. Only – Donald was too busy hiding his own nerves to bother.

He stepped through the deeply panelled door of rich hardwoods and entered the Senator’s inner sanctum. This wasn’t like passing through a foyer to pick up a man’s daughter for a date. This was different. This was the pressure of meeting as colleagues when Donald still felt like that same young child.

‘Through here,’ the receptionist said. She guided Donald between pairs of wide and busy desks, a dozen phones chirping in short bursts. Young men and women in suits and crisp blouses double-fisted receivers. Their bored expressions suggested that this was a normal workload for a weekday morning.

Donald reached out a hand as he passed one of the desks, brushing the wood with his fingertips. Mahogany. The aides here had desks nicer than his own. And the decor: the plush carpet, the broad and ancient crown cornicing, the antique tile ceiling, the dangling light fixtures that may have been actual crystal.

At the end of the buzzing and bleeping room, a panelled door opened and disgorged Congressman Mick Webb, just finished with his meeting. Mick

didn't notice Donald, was too absorbed by the open folder he held in front of him.

Donald stopped and waited for his colleague and old college friend to approach. 'So,' he asked, 'how did it go?'

Mick looked up and snapped the folder shut. He tucked it under his arm and nodded. 'Yeah, yeah. It went great.' He smiled. 'Sorry if we ran long. The old man couldn't get enough of me.'

Donald laughed. He believed that. Mick had swept into office with ease. He had the charisma and confidence that went along with being tall and handsome. Donald used to joke that if his friend wasn't so shit with names, he'd be president someday. 'No problem,' Donald said. He jabbed a thumb over his shoulder. 'I was making new friends.'

Mick grinned. 'I bet.'

'Yeah, well, I'll see you back at the ranch.'

'Sure thing.' Mick slapped him on the arm with the folder and headed for the exit. Donald caught the glare from the Senator's receptionist and hurried over. She waved him through to the dimly lit office and pulled the door shut behind him.

'Congressman Keene.'

Senator Paul Thurman stood from behind his desk and stretched out a hand. He flashed a familiar smile, one Donald had come to recognise as much from photos and TV as from his childhood. Despite Thurman's age – he had to be pushing seventy if he wasn't already there – the Senator was trim and fit. His Oxford shirt hugged a military frame; a thick neck bulged out of his knotted tie; his white hair remained as crisp and orderly as an enlisted man's.

Donald crossed the dark room and shook the Senator's hand.

'Good to see you, sir.'

'Please, sit.' Thurman released Donald's hand and gestured to one of the chairs across from his desk. Donald lowered himself into the bright red leather, the gold grommets along the arm like sturdy rivets in a steel beam.

'How's Helen?'

'Helen?' Donald straightened his tie. 'She's great. She's back in Savannah. She really enjoyed seeing you at the reception.'

'She's a beautiful woman, your wife.'

'Thank you, sir.' Donald fought to relax, which didn't help. The office had the pall of dusk, even with the overhead lights on. The clouds outside had turned nasty – low and dark. If it rained, he would have to take the underpass back to his office. He hated being down there. They could carpet it and hang those little chandeliers at intervals, but he could still tell he was

below ground. The tunnels in Washington made him feel like a rat scurrying through a sewer. It always seemed as if the roof was about to cave in.

‘How’s the job treating you so far?’

‘The job’s good. Busy, but good.’

He started to ask the Senator how Anna was doing, but the door behind him opened before he could. The receptionist entered and delivered two bottles of water. Donald thanked her, twisted the cap on his and saw that it had been pre-opened.

‘I hope you’re not too busy to work on something for me.’ Senator Thurman raised an eyebrow. Donald took a sip of water and wondered if that was a skill one could master, that eyebrow lift. It made him want to jump to attention and salute.

‘I’m sure I can make the time,’ he said. ‘After all the stumping you did for me? I doubt I would’ve made it past the primaries.’ He fiddled with the water bottle in his lap.

‘You and Mick Webb go back, right? Both Bulldogs.’

It took Donald a moment to realise the Senator was referring to their college mascot. He hadn’t spent a lot of time at Georgia following sports. ‘Yessir. Go Dawgs.’

He hoped that was right.

The Senator smiled. He leaned forward so that his face caught the soft light raining down on his desk. Donald watched as shadows grew in wrinkles otherwise easy to miss. Thurman’s lean face and square chin made him look younger head-on than he did in profile. Here was a man who got places by approaching others directly rather than in ambush.

‘You studied architecture at Georgia.’

Donald nodded. It was easy to forget that he knew Thurman better than the Senator knew him. One of them grabbed far more newspaper headlines than the other.

‘That’s right. For my undergrad. I went into planning for my master’s. I figured I could do more good governing people than I could drawing boxes to put them in.’

He winced to hear himself deliver the line. It was a pat phrase from grad school, something he should have left behind with crushing beer cans on his forehead and ogling asses in skirts. He wondered for the dozenth time why he and the other congressional newcomers had been summoned. When he first got the invite, he thought it was a social visit. Then Mick had bragged about his own appointment, and Donald figured it was some kind of formality or tradition. But now he wondered if this was a power play, a

chance to butter up the representatives from Georgia for those times when Thurman would need a particular vote in the lower and *lesser* house.

‘Tell me, Donny, how good are you at keeping secrets?’

Donald’s blood ran cold. He forced himself to laugh off the sudden flush of nerves.

‘I got elected, didn’t I?’

Senator Thurman smiled. ‘And so you probably learned the best lesson there is about secrets.’ He picked up and raised his water bottle in salute. ‘*Denial.*’

Donald nodded and took a sip of his own water. He wasn’t sure where this was going, but he already felt uneasy. He sensed some of the back-room dealings coming on that he’d promised his constituents he’d root out if elected.

The Senator leaned back in his chair.

‘Denial is the secret sauce in this town,’ he said. ‘It’s the flavour that holds all the other ingredients together. Here’s what I tell the newly elected: the truth is going to get out – it always does – but it’s going to blend in with all the *lies.*’ The Senator twirled a hand in the air. ‘You have to deny each lie and every truth with the same vinegar. Let those websites and blowhards who bitch about cover-ups confuse the public *for* you.’

‘Uh, yessir.’ Donald didn’t know what else to say so he drank another mouthful of water instead.

The Senator lifted an eyebrow again. He remained frozen for a pause, and then asked, out of nowhere: ‘Do you believe in aliens, Donny?’

Donald nearly lost the water out of his nose. He covered his mouth with his hand, coughed, had to wipe his chin. The Senator didn’t budge.

‘Aliens?’ Donald shook his head and wiped his wet palm on his thigh. ‘No, sir. I mean, not the abducting kind. Why?’

He wondered if this was some kind of debriefing. Why had the Senator asked him if he could keep a secret? Was this a security initiation? The Senator remained silent.

‘They’re not real,’ Donald finally said. He watched for any twitch or hint. ‘Are they?’

The old man cracked a smile. ‘That’s the thing,’ he said. ‘If they are or they aren’t, the chatter out there would be the same. Would you be surprised if I told you they’re very much real?’

‘Hell, yeah, I’d be surprised.’

‘Good.’ The Senator slid a folder across the desk.

Donald eyed it and held up a hand. 'Wait. Are they real or aren't they? What're you trying to tell me?'

Senator Thurman laughed. 'Of course they're not real.' He took his hand off the folder and propped his elbows on the desk. 'Have you seen how much NASA wants from us so they can fly to Mars and back? We're not getting to another star. Ever. And nobody's coming here. Hell, why would they?'

Donald didn't know *what* to think, which was a far cry from how he'd felt less than a minute ago. He saw what the Senator meant, how truth and lies seemed black and white, but mixed together they made everything grey and confusing. He glanced down at the folder. It looked similar to the one Mick had been carrying. It reminded him of the government's fondness for all things outdated.

'This is denial, right?' He studied the Senator. 'That's what you're doing right now. You're trying to throw me off.'

'No. This is me telling you to stop watching so many science fiction flicks. In fact, why do you think those eggheads are always dreaming of colonising some other planet? You have any idea what would be involved? It's ludicrous. Not cost-effective.'

Donald shrugged. He didn't think it was ludicrous. He twisted the cap back onto his water. 'It's in our nature to dream of open space,' he said. 'To find room to spread out in. Isn't that how we ended up here?'

'Here? In America?' The Senator laughed. 'We didn't come here and find open space. We got a bunch of people sick, killed them and *made* space.' Thurman pointed at the folder. 'Which brings me to this. I've got something I'd like you to work on.'

Donald placed his bottle on the leather inlay of the formidable desk and took the folder.

'Is this something coming through committee?'

He tried to temper his hopes. It was alluring to think of co-authoring a bill in his first year in office. He opened the folder and tilted it towards the window. Outside, storms were gathering.

'No, nothing like that. This is about CAD-FAC.'

Donald nodded. *Of course*. The preamble about secrets and conspiracies suddenly made perfect sense, as did the gathering of Georgia congressmen outside. This was about the Containment and Disposal Facility, nicknamed CAD-FAC, at the heart of the Senator's new energy bill, the complex that would one day house most of the world's spent nuclear fuel. Or, according to the websites Thurman had alluded to, it was going to be the next Area 51, or the site where a new-and-improved superbomb was being built, or a secure

holding facility for libertarians who had purchased one too many guns. Take your pick. There was enough noise out there to hide *any* truth.

‘Yeah,’ Donald said, deflated. ‘I’ve been getting some entertaining calls from my district.’ He didn’t dare mention the one about the lizard people. ‘I want you to know, sir, that privately I’m behind the facility one hundred per cent.’ He looked up at the Senator. ‘I’m glad I didn’t have to vote on it publicly, of course, but it was about time someone offered up their backyard, right?’

‘Precisely. For the common good.’ Senator Thurman took a long pull from his water, leaned back in his chair and cleared his throat. ‘You’re a sharp young man, Donny. Not everyone sees what a boon to our state this’ll be. A real lifesaver.’ He smiled. ‘I’m sorry, you *are* still going by Donny, right? Or is it Donald now?’

‘Either’s fine,’ Donald lied. He no longer enjoyed being called Donny, but changing names in the middle of one’s life was practically impossible. He returned to the folder and flipped the cover letter over. There was a drawing underneath that struck him as being out of place. It was . . . too familiar. Familiar, and yet it didn’t belong there – it was from another life.

‘Have you seen the economic reports?’ Thurman asked. ‘Do you know how many jobs this bill created overnight?’ He snapped his fingers. ‘Forty thousand, just like that. And that’s only from Georgia. A lot will be from your district, a lot of shipping, a lot of stevedores. Of course, now that it’s passed, our less nimble colleagues are grumbling that *they* should’ve had a chance to bid—’

‘I drew this,’ Donald interrupted, pulling out the sheet of paper. He showed it to Thurman as if the Senator would be surprised to see that it had snuck into the folder. Donald wondered if this was the Senator’s daughter’s doing, some kind of a joke or a hello and a wink from Anna.

Thurman nodded. ‘Yes, well, it needs more detail, wouldn’t you say?’

Donald studied the architectural illustration and wondered what sort of test this was. He remembered the drawing. It was a last-minute project for his biotecture class in his senior year. There was nothing unusual or amazing about it, just a large cylindrical building a hundred or so storeys tall ringed with glass and concrete, balconies burgeoning with gardens, one side cut away to reveal interspersed levels for housing, working and shopping. The structure was spare where he remembered other classmates being bold, utilitarian where he could’ve taken risks. Green tufts jutted up from the flat roof – a horrible cliché, a nod to carbon neutrality.

In sum, it was drab and boring. Donald couldn't imagine a design so bare rising from the deserts of Dubai alongside the great new breed of self-sustaining skyscrapers. He certainly couldn't see what the Senator wanted with it.

'More detail,' he murmured, repeating the Senator's words. He flipped through the rest of the folder, looking for hints, for context.

'Wait.' Donald studied a list of requirements written up as if by a prospective client. 'This looks like a design proposal.' Words he had forgotten he'd ever learned caught his eye: *interior traffic flow, block plan, HVAC, hydroponics*—

'You'll have to lose the sunlight.' Senator Thurman's chair squeaked as he leaned over his desk.

'I'm sorry?' Donald held the folder up. 'What exactly are you wanting me to do?'

'I would suggest those lights like my wife uses.' He cupped his hand into a tiny circle and pointed at the centre. 'She gets these tiny seeds to sprout in the winter, uses bulbs that cost me a goddamned fortune.'

'You mean grow lights.'

Thurman snapped his fingers again. 'And don't worry about the cost. Whatever you need. I'm also going to get you some help with the mechanical stuff. An engineer. An entire team.'

Donald flipped through more of the folder. 'What is this *for*? And why me?'

'This is what we call a *just-in-case* building. Probably'll never get used, but they won't let us store the fuel rods out there unless we put this bugger nearby. It's like this window in my basement I had to lower before our house could pass inspection. It was for . . . what do you call it . . . ?'

'Egress,' Donald said, the word flowing back unaided.

'Yes. Egress.' He pointed to the folder. 'This building is like that window, something we've gotta build so the rest will pass inspection. This will be where – in the unlikely event of an attack or a leak – facility employees can go. A shelter. And it needs to be *perfect* or this project will be shut down faster than a tick's wink. Just because our bill passed and got signed doesn't mean we're home free, Donny. There was that project out west that got okayed decades ago, scored funding. Eventually, it fell through.'

Donald knew the one he was talking about. A containment facility buried under a mountain. The buzz on the Hill was that the Georgia project had the same chances of success. The folder suddenly tripled in weight as he

considered this. He was being asked to be a part of this future failure. He would be staking his newly won office on it.

‘I’ve got Mick Webb working on something related. Logistics and planning. You two will need to collaborate on a few things. And Anna is taking leave from her post at MIT to lend a hand.’

‘*Anna?*’ Donald fumbled for his water, his hand shaking.

‘Of course. She’ll be your lead engineer on this project. There are details in there on what she’ll need, space-wise.’

Donald took a gulp of water and forced himself to swallow.

‘There’s a lot of other people I could call in, sure, but this project can’t fail, you understand? It needs to be like *family*. That’s why I want to use people I know, people I can trust.’ Senator Thurman interlocked his fingers. ‘If this is the only thing you were elected to do, I want you to do it right. It’s why I stumped for you in the first place.’

‘Of course.’ Donald bobbed his head to hide his confusion. He had worried during the election that the Senator’s endorsement stemmed from old family ties. This was somehow worse. Donald hadn’t been using the Senator at all; it was the *other way around*. Studying the drawing in his lap, the newly elected congressman felt one job he was inadequately trained for melt away – only to be replaced by a *different* job that seemed equally daunting.

‘Wait,’ he said. ‘I still don’t get it.’ He studied the old drawing. ‘Why the grow lights?’

‘Because this building I want you to design for me – it’s going to go underground.’

2110
• Silo 1 •

TROY HELD HIS breath and tried to remain calm while the doctor pumped the rubber bulb. The inflatable band swelled around his bicep until it pinched his skin. He wasn't sure if slowing his breathing and steadying his pulse affected his blood pressure, but he had a strong urge to impress the man in the white overalls. He wanted his numbers to come back *normal*.

His arm throbbed a few beats while the needle bounced and the air hissed out.

'Eighty over fifty.' The band made a ripping sound as it was torn loose. Troy rubbed the spot where his skin had been pinched.

'Is that okay?'

The doctor made a note on his clipboard. 'It's low, but not outside the norm.' Behind him, his assistant labelled a cup of dark grey urine before placing it inside a small fridge. Troy caught sight of a half-eaten sandwich among the samples, not even wrapped.

He looked down at his bare knees sticking out of the blue paper gown. His legs were pale and seemed smaller than he remembered. Bony.

'I still can't make a fist,' he told the doctor, working his hand open and shut.

'That's perfectly normal. Your strength will return. Look into the light, please.'

Troy followed the bright beam and tried not to blink.

'How long have you been doing this?' he asked the doctor.

'You're my third coming out. I've put two under.' He lowered the light and smiled at Troy. 'I've only been out myself for a few weeks. I can tell you that the strength will return.'

Troy nodded. The doctor's assistant handed him another pill and a cup of water. Troy hesitated. He stared down at the little blue capsule nestled in his palm.

'A double dose this morning,' the doctor said, 'and then you'll be given one with breakfast and dinner. Please do not skip a treatment.'

Troy looked up. 'What happens if I don't take it?'

The doctor shook his head and frowned, but didn't say anything.

Troy popped the pill in his mouth and chased it with the water. A bitterness slid down his throat.

'One of my assistants will bring you some clothes and a fluid meal to kick-start your gut. If you have any dizziness or chills, you're to call me at once. Otherwise, we'll see you back here in six months.' The doctor made a note, then chuckled. 'Well, someone else will see you. My shift will be over.'

'Okay.' Troy shivered.

The doctor looked up from his clipboard. 'You're not cold, are you? I keep it a little extra warm in here.'

Troy hesitated before answering. 'No, doctor. I'm not cold. Not any more.'

Troy entered the lift at the end of the hall, his legs still weak, and studied an array of numbered buttons. The orders they'd given him included directions to his office, but he vaguely remembered how to get there. Much of his orientation had survived the decades of sleep. He remembered studying that same book over and over, thousands of men assigned to various shifts, tours of the facility before being put under like the women. The orientation felt like yesterday; it was older memories that seemed to be slipping away.

The doors to the lift closed automatically. His apartment was on thirty-seven; he remembered that. His office was on thirty-four. He reached for a button, intending to head straight to his desk, and instead found his hand sliding up to the very top. He still had a few minutes before he needed to be anywhere, and he felt some strange urge, some tug, to get as high as possible, to rise through the soil pressing in from all sides.

The lift hummed into life and accelerated up the shaft. There was a whooshing sound as another car or maybe the counterweight zoomed by. The round buttons flashed as the floors passed. There was an enormous spread of them, seventy in all. The centres of many were dull from years of rubbing. This didn't seem right. It seemed like just yesterday the buttons were shiny and new. Just yesterday, *everything* was.

The lift slowed. Troy palmed the wall for balance, his legs still uncertain.

The door dinged and slid open. Troy blinked at the bright lights in the hallway. He left the lift and followed a short walk towards a room that leaked chatter. His new boots were stiff on his feet, the generic grey overalls itchy. He tried to imagine waking up like this nine more times, feeling this weak and disoriented. Ten shifts of six months each. Ten shifts he hadn't