

Imagination Station

CW: Initial programming

TW: drugs

The Colonel

2 years old

I'm going with daddy to work today. It's very exciting. I love my daddy. he doesn't spend much time with me, so I'm glad he's taking me to work.

It's a long car ride. Daddy keeps me entertained by playing music and singing along, but it's still early. I fall asleep in my car seat pretty soon.

It's bright outside when we get there. A chain-link fence blocks us, and daddy rolls down the window to say hi to a man in a uniform. The man opens the gate for us. Daddy drives up to a red brick building. There are a few other buildings here, but it's mostly grass between us and the fence.

We go inside where daddy greets a receptionist. I hold his hand and look over everything: pictures and a smooth floor and not many people. The girl behind the desk gives daddy a pass, and he leads me through the double door behind her. He picks me up so I don't slow him down and pins a visitor's pass to his chest. He passes people in uniforms and suits.

Soon, we go into a medium-sized room. There's a play area in one corner with a train set and town on a table, very out of place in the industrial-looking room. When daddy puts me down, I go over there because I love trains. Mommy and daddy got me a train ornament last Christmas cause of it.

A man in a suit is talking with daddy in a corner. He has graying black hair and a smile I don't like. Daddy gives him a folder that he looks over. Once he's done, they come over to me. My daddy is quiet while the man crouches beside the train set.

"Hello there, (legal name here). It's nice to meet you," he says. "My name is (the Colonel's legal name). You can call me Mr. A. We're going to play together while your dad works."

When I look at him, daddy looks a little upset, but he smiles and nods.

"I see you like our train set," the man says. "Have you ever watched Mr. Roger's Neighborhood before? Well today, we're going to play in Imagination Station, just like he does. Doesn't that sound fun?"

It does! I'm excited while dad kisses me goodbye and leaves.

Mr. A and I play for a while. He tells me about a lot of things, but I don't remember much of it now.

The room was very tall with exposed rafters and girders. Two walls with a flat ceiling blocked off one corner.

"Would you like to visit Imagination Station?" Mr. A asks.

When I say yes, he takes me through a door into the closed-off corner. It's darker in here with equipment I don't recognize all over the place. There's a chair in the middle, facing a blank wall.

Mr. A has me sit in the chair. He pastes things to my head, below the hairline. We watch a projected movie of going into Mr. Roger's Neighborhood on repeat. He has us drink some syrupy gross thing that makes us a little sleepy. Every time we stop watching, Mr. A pinches us and reminds us that we're going to Imagination Station.

After a while, we get a little shot of something that makes everything go floaty. We're not afraid of it because we've had a lot of shots by now.

Mr. A talks to us.

Imagination Station is going to be a place just for me and him. No one else can know about it, not even my Family, or the magic will be ruined. I can go there when he's nearby, and he'll show me the way. We have to take a train through the tunnel in the mountains until we get there. In our game, Imagination Station will be underground. While we're there, I'll learn all sorts of fun things, but I have to keep it a secret, or it will disappear.

He asks me what Imagination Station will look like when it's underground, and I tell him about a train station and the magnificent train that will take us there. He tells me about how imaginative I am, the perfect fit for Imagination Station. He says we'll need secret names while we're there. He'll be Mr. Rogers, and I'll be Lilith. (Later, when I get confused because of the Family and Coven's boy-and-girl divide, he'll rename her, and I'll be me, the boy side of this subsystem.)

We go back to the train set, and Mr. Rogers has me practice going to Imagination Station with the train. The game gets more detailed with every repeat.

When daddy comes back, Mr. Rogers tells us we're back home, and we have to use our real names because of our secret. He goes to daddy and talks to him while I play. He gives daddy the folder back. (After I grow up and am allowed to look at my file, I'll learn he also gave our U.S. father instructions for what to do with me until I could come back.)

Daddy comes to get me. Mr. A tells me goodbye and that he had fun playing today. I hide in daddy's neck because I'm tired and a little shy.

Daddy thanks Mr. A, and we go to the car. We go home.

While I'm not certain about the details of these memories, I do know that I knew 'Mr. A' and that he did train me in some way. In 2023, I had a full-on, lost in the past, couldn't see or understand the present flashback that involved him. At times, I can discount other types of flashbacks, but these fully immersed in the memory ones are impossible to ignore ore dismiss.

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