

The pressure behind his eyes made it feel somewhat like his soul was trying to force its way out through his pupils. The only respite was to close his eyelids and trap the restless ghoul within, but obligations didn't allow him to keep it caged in for long.

He was at work and he couldn't just close his eyes and pretend to be staring at his laptop. Could he?

No, he needed to make a good impression and he'd only just started. Not that anything he did really seemed worth his time. All that mattered was the internal and seemingly eternal struggle going on just behind his eye sockets.

"Why though, why couldn't I have just slept last night?" he thought, but asking this was just another way of lying to himself. He had slept more last night than any other night the week before. Not to mention, this job was a joke, hardly stimulating and certainly not tiring. As usual he was skirting around the real issue and he knew full well that his dreams were the only place he was truly happy. The restlessness was just his soul's way of telling him to go back to bed, to escape, to let the darkness envelope him long enough to enter another world.

It took constant, persistent, insistent, and numbing effort to keep himself awake. Awake, awake wasn't really the word though. His brain allowed him to perform the tasks before him, and he'd become so used to this particular type of struggle that he even performed his tasks well. If he did poorly, he knew other people would start asking questions, maybe even notice something not quite right in his gaze. See the veins inching a little too close to the irises of his otherwise beautiful, smiling eyes. There was nothing he feared more than disappointing people and this fear kept the beast behind his eyes from ever really escaping no matter how numb he became.

At least, until this time. This time he heard an audible crack that echoed through his skull. It was the crack of ice just beginning to open beneath an unbearable weight or maybe an unbearable wait. Nothing had broken yet, but something was certainly coming.

He looked up to see if anyone had heard the crack, but the room was empty. He looked down at his monitor and realized it was time to consume food with his co-workers. "Well, at least I'll be entertained for a little while," he thought, and it was true, conversation always helped, but conversation always ended.

"Entertained for a little while?" someone inflected as he was turning the dials on his locker, "you seem like the type of guy who could entertain a whole room for hours."

"O yeah? What makes you think that?" he asked just as the locker clicked indicating the latch was unfastened. However, when he went to pull the locker open, it wouldn't budge.

"That's not your locker kiddo," said the voice from behind.

He looked up at the number - 5679 - no this was definitely not his locker. His locker was all the way at the other end of the hall, number - 5444. Easiest locker to remember - they were on the 5th floor and 4 was his favorite number. Even as he thought this, he began to put himself down. "What kind of grown adult has a favorite number," he thought.

"That's why you're a kiddo, kiddo," said the voice.

"O geeze, I said that out loud," he said, with a little endearing chuckle, "just not enough sleep last night I guess."

"Sleep isn't the issue" said the voice, "Ha! HAAA! No not, at all! You're depressed!"

He whirled around to see who would say such a thing, and with so much excitement and gusto. Which of his hundreds of new co-workers could this be? What he saw was a very

tall, well not very tall but having the kind of presence that makes you think he's tall and anyway at least six foot tall, plump man, holding his belly, leaning in a little, and smiling from ear to ear, not unlike the Cheshire cat.

"Depressed," he said, "What makes you say that?"

"Makes me say that? Well, the same thing that makes me say you look like you could entertain a room for hours on end, you clearly put on a good act."

"I guess those two probably could go hand in hand," he said, "but no worries about me, I'm neither an entertainer, nor am I depressed."

"No, no, no, you're just a humble liar," said the man shaking his head over-excitedly and letting his jowls shake as he did so.

This clearly wasn't the type of person to beat around the bush. The young man actually admired that trait in people. In fact, when he did take the time to stop lying to himself, he realized beating around the bush was exactly what made his soul want to escape its cranial confines in the first place. If he'd just tell people the honest truth all the time instead of trying to protect himself, well no, not himself really, trying to protect his relationships with other people, then he'd probably feel much better about life. He'd probably be missing out on a lot less. Sadly, when it came to exposing his true feelings, maintaining what little good he had was better than opening himself to possible disaster, OR, worse still, closing opportunity. After all disaster always seemed more probable than greatness when it came to relationships. So he built walls of expectation and obligation around the relationships he had, kept things steady, never over-stepped the walls.

Unfortunately no one knew of these walls. Other people were perfectly capable of failing to live up to the standards he established, but he never blamed them. He always figured his understanding must have been wrong and would readjust, never completely clearing the walls that crumbled but just continuing to encase and reshape them. His head was filled with broken walls, but he continued to build them anyway.

Some part of him figured that, if he'd just stop lying to himself and blast a huge fucking hole through all the walls, he'd at least be more comfortable. But would he be more loved? Would it actually be worth it? Nah, life inside the walls was safer and, at least, he could see over them couldn't he?

Somehow he thought that this tall plump guy could help him answer these questions. For a second he thought he was going to spill his guts to the guy.

"You know, for someone who's just met me, you're being a bit presumptuous," he proclaimed, outwardly disregarding all the thoughts that'd just run through his head, "but I don't blame you, everyone likes to pick on the new guy. Don't forget though, I'll be running this place in a year."

"Ahhhh, commiserate and exaggerate," said the big man smirking and letting his eyelids droop down a little, "I've always liked it when you've used that one. It's both endearing and makes people think you're ridiculous and hence a little funny but also maybe... what's the word... ambitious! The greatest part is, you actually do feel both of them deep down, even when you use this particular technique to deflect.... Eh hem... like right now!"

"Uhhh, what the heck were they writing down during my interview?" he said, more surprised than upset and really just wanting to understand, "That's some serious psychoanalysis... what department do you work for anyway?"

“Why, the department of the interior,” said the man grinning and leaning a little further forward.

“Interior of what?” he said turning to walk over to his locker “that sounds like a big government job or something. What’s it got to do with this company.”

“Ooooo, just the interior of this,” the man said appearing just in front of him and lightly tapping his forehead, “The thing that governs you!”

“Okay, now I’m just confused,” he said.

“I know you are kiddo, I know, but we’ll talk more in a little bit. For the time being, you’ve got to get to lunch and even I know allowing people to see you incessantly talking to yourself, might be a little too much. We’ll talk more soon!”

And with that, he blinked and the pain behind his eyeballs returned. The whole time he’d been talking to the man he didn’t even realize that the pain was gone. Aggggh, he didn’t appreciate the great emptiness when he had it, but now it was time for some empty conversation.

“Commiserate and exaggerate!” he thought. That was a little harsh. Maybe that was his M.O., but one of the few things he still enjoyed was a good conversation, much better than crushing, thought-filled silence. Commiserate and exaggerate always made for a good conversation! His eyelids closed for a soothing second and popped open with a thought; was his constant need to avoid silence just another way to cover himself? Was he so fearful of being judged boring or unintelligent that he couldn’t shut up? “Ugh, knock it off with the self doubt!” he thought closing his eyes one last time before entering the lunchroom.

Chapter 2

Minutes Taken By: The Assistant Secretary to the Department of the Interior

Subject: Lunch Conversation

Attn: Co-directors of the interior, Mr. Dibujo and Mr. Examiner

Note: All subject thoughts appear between *’s i.e. *these are a subject’s thoughts*

Subject Enters Lunch Room

Subject removes dinner leftovers from lunch bag and places in microwave

Way to go, microwaving another giant tub of pasta because that’s what people with steady jobs who no longer live in college dorms do

Subject slumps on counter and observes entrances to the lunchroom

I sat next to those two yesterday. Would probably be annoying to sit next to me two days in a row. I won’t sit next to them today

Subject removes lunch from microwave and sits at very edge of a group of six people discussing a TV show.

Subject achieves a powerfully blank stare.

Do I really like any of these people? Will I ever like any of these people? Do any of them like each other? I'm pretty sure no one here really knows anyone else.

Conversation about television show continues. Most people have seen the show. Subject has also seen the show. Subject says little throughout the majority of the conversation, but does contribute and is clearly trying to indicate that he is one with the group, but is also observing those around him to understand their conversational preferences.

I am not one with this group. This is the most boring conversation I've ever had. I get the feeling that these people are a bunch a phonies. Oooo going all Hemmingway on me now are you?... that was J.D. Salinger you ass, you read like three books in junior year of high school and you think you're a literary genius or something.

Subject continues to be phony by asking people if they remember what their favorite books from high school were. All agree that "To Kill a Mocking Bird" was a great book.

I honestly remember very little of "To Kill a Mocking Bird", but I do remember thinking it was a great book... it's too bad my high school self and I would likely disagree on almost everything. I wonder if that's true for these guys. Now that would make a good conversation... Do I care enough to have that conversation with them? I wish I could have that conversation with her...

Subject has finished his lunch and the conversation has trickled down to two people at the opposite end of the table talking work nonsense
Subject awkwardly looks down at his food, up at his colleagues, stands, and exits.

What a fucking waste of my time

Chapter 3

Despite the fact that he could technically leave the office at 5:00 pm he always stayed until 5:30 pm in hopes of impressing his supervisors. He realized how empty an effort this was... he wasn't really accomplishing anything special by staying this half hour, but he thought of it as an easy way of appearing driven and ambitious. He believed that he really had ambition at one point and occasionally got a sniff of it here and there when finishing a project, but true drive never lasted long anymore. Work was boring, his artwork was un-inspired and no one would ever look at it anyway. Virtual reality ceased to impress him, and books could not longer keep his focus. He still enjoyed exercise, but only when he worked so hard that exhaustion or muscle pain clouded his brain and allowed the endorphins to take over. This, like conversation, never lasted long.

Nonetheless, when the digits on his computer rolled over to 5:30 pm, he did get the slightest ping of hope and quickly wrapped up his work. This hope was always dissipated when he got to the bottom of the stairs and he began to think how lonely his evening would be.

He closed his eyes and sighed as he turned the key in his bike lock. He heard the familiar clunk as the lock lurched off the bike's frame and was unhitched from its metal

corral. As he opened his eyes and tugged at the bike, he was confused to discover that it was still fastened to the corral and clanged stubbornly at the secure lock. "Stupid lock," he thought.

"No, no, stupid you." Said a tinny, smug voice from behind. "Why don't you pay attention to what you're doing this time, and stop complaining."

"Uh, thanks," he said nervously, without turning around. "No need to be so pissy," he thought.

"It's not about being pissy. It's about sucking it up and doing what needs to be done," said the voice.

"Okay, I really need to stop saying stupid shit out loud," he thought to himself. "I'm going to get myself into trouble."

"No." said the voice, "you need to stop thinking stupid shit. You're letting garbage thoughts pre-occupy you. It used to be you were strong enough to ignore them and move on, but I've given Mr. Dibujo far too much power recently. Now, unlock your bike and get moving. We both know you actually have a lot to do this evening if you're going to get anywhere in life."

"Alright, who are you?" he finally said out loud.

"Oh, good, you care enough about the world around you to ask a useful question. Strange for you lately. Nonetheless, I'm more than obliged to answer. My name is Mr. Examiner. I work for the department of the interior."

As he turned around he caught sight of a man who must have been seven feet tall, but could be described in no other way than gaunt. He wore clearly old, but well polished black dress shoes with a severe point, tight black pants, a tight blue dress shirt with a skinny black tie and a black blazer buttoned across his anorexically skinny abdomen. He had steel blue eyes, no facial hair to speak of, dark sunglasses, and impeccably combed hair parted to the right. He gave off the impression of a skeleton on a business trip as he extended his bony fingers for a handshake.

"O, I think I met one of your co-workers earlier today," he said. "I'm not sure I understand what the department of the interior is."

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Examiner, "that must have been my co-director, Mr. Dibujo. I apologize for not introducing myself before you had to deal with him. Mr. Dibujo and I are currently in a bit of a disagreement as to the direction we should take the department."

"Is the department a new part of the company?" he asked. "Should I know about you guys, because honestly I don't have any idea who you are."

"It's good that you'd like to know more, but be aware that you don't need to know anything about us. All that's important is that we know about you," explained Mr. Examiner. "To be honest, I really don't know why you have such a clear and cognizant perception of me. Now please unlock your bike and head home. Mr. Dibujo and I have agreed to an experiment."

With that, he momentarily forgot about the skeletal Mr. Examiner as a sort of foggiess settled over his brain and he began to think about the fact that all he had to look forward to tonight was making dinner for himself. The activity itself was a good distraction, but it always ended in unhappiness... he had no one to share his cooking with. Even when his roommates came in and complimented him on his culinary skills, for some reason he

just became angry. He didn't want to share with them, for some reason they didn't matter, they weren't important, but he swore they used to be.

Again he closed his eyes, slid the key into his lock and heard the familiar clunk as the lock released the bike. Again, as he went to pull the bike away from the corral, he was greeted by the resistance of the lock. "Ugh," he sighed, "I guess I'll be spending another \$50.00 on a new lock... better than beer... maybe."

"CUT! CUT! CUT!" yelled someone from the corner of the bike cage, "YOU NEED MORE FIRE!!!" the someone said followed by a chuckle. "How about something like: just what I need, A FUCKING NEW LOCK! Some release would really do you well."

He looked up from the bike to see the other man he'd met from the department of the interior sitting in a director's chair in a darker corner of the bike cage surrounded by some of the grossest water he'd ever seen. The man was happily tapping away at the water with open-toed sandals.

"Mr. Dibujo," piped in Mr. Examiner whose presence reasserted itself from obscurity, "We agreed you did not need to be here for this."

"Nonsense!" shouted Mr. Dibujo jumping up and sending brown water splattering around the bike cage and onto Mr. Examiners highly polished shoes. "I, like you, would like to observe closely."

"Fine, but, in any case, I'm going first," replied Mr. Examiner peevisly, "I think you'll realize you won't even need your turn after this. Now, relinquish all control to me if you please."

Mr. Dibujo looked over at their soon to be test subject as he finally successfully unlocked his bike. Mr. Dibujo suddenly became quite solemn. "I do so extremely reluctantly," Mr. Dibujo said. "Even though this is being done on the test servers, I don't think you realize the damage we could do to his psyche if something goes wrong. He'll think it a dream, but a horrifying one."

"Look, it's his own fault for dropping this far anyway. We would never have gotten this much freedom if something wasn't going terribly wrong, but, I assure you, my decisive action will surely fix it," said Mr. Examiner with an annoyed look on his face.

"For his sake, I hope so," frowned Mr. Dibujo.

Chapter 4: Test Run on the Examiner Server

Notes Taken By: The Assistant Secretary to the Department of the Interior

Subject: Test Run on the Examiner Server

Attn: Co-directors of the interior, Mr. Dibujo and Mr. Examiner

Note: All subject thoughts appear between *'s i.e. *these are a subject's thoughts*

Subject mounts bike and exits the parking structure. He appears somewhat flustered (likely due to over-exposure to the co-examiners).

Subject enters street with light traffic.

*Wasn't I just talking to two people? Wait no, two people were just talking around me, I wasn't talking to anybody. Anyway, I'm hungry, I'm going to make an amazing dinner, I'm

going to write, I'm going to read, I'm going to paint, and I'm definitely going to run. Got to keep my looks up.*

Subject begins biking more quickly, appears determined, appears to enjoy the methodic pedaling and the air. He decisively maneuvers between cars.

Subject catches a glimpse of a man and a woman holding hands on the sidewalk. As he passes, a diamond engagement ring on the woman's hand sparkles just so in the sunlight.

Ridiculous, they look like they're five years younger than me. How could they have any idea that they want to be together. People change over time and I'm sure they'll change too. I bet their vows will slowly strangle them as they grow older.

Subject smiles and chuckles at the couple as he rides by them. He appears to be pedaling his bike to the rhythm of a song in his head.

Subject approaches a red light and stops. Engaged couple walks by him as he is stopped at the red light.

Are they seriously just going to walk straight on through this light? Pay attention to the world around you for God's sake. Freaking hormones, cloud people's judgment. Ugh, might as well stop them before they get hit by a car

Subject yells after the couple to be careful. Couple stops before they walk off the sidewalk and into the street

They'll definitely go home and tell someone about me. Good Samaritan that I am. Actually, they probably think they've already shared the experience with the only person that they care to tell it to anyway. Man, couples are so weirdly selfish

Subject's head cocks slightly to the left just before the light turns green as if he's realized something that he didn't before, but the light turns green milliseconds afterwards and he begins biking forward.

*I care about many people that way. I always want to tell people things. I've got so many people I care about.... No one ever cares to tell me anything though."

Subject's biking speed slows a little as he enters a neighborhood.

No one actually cares very deeply for me. I do enjoy my life though, but I enjoy it selfishly. I don't share that joy with anyone, at least not in any real way.

Subject has stopped paying attention to traffic and is slowly riding down the street with hands off the handlebars.

Hell, I could get hit by one of these cars and no one would really care would they?

Car pulls out of a nearby driveway and subject narrowly swerves away from it.

Shit, that car could have killed me and no one would be losing any real part of themselves. Couples are so entwined its like they lose a part of themselves if the other dies. That's dumb, I always want to feel like I'm an individual.

As the subject thinks this a single tear drips down his right cheek. Subject wipes off the tear.

Man, there must be a lot of dirt around, my eyes are watering

There is no dirt around.

I'm not happy.

No one cares.

I'm too far gone to fix this.

Decisive action.

Start over.

Subject purposely ignores 2 stop signs, runs a red light and is hit by a street trolley.

Subject jolts awake in his bed. Tears are streaming down his cheeks. Mr Dibujio and Mr. Examiner stand at the end of the bed.

Mr. Examiner has a stern look on his face and one raised eyebrow.

Mr. Dibujio pats Mr. Examiner lightly on the shoulder.

Mr Examiner: This is worse that I thought, we try your way.

Chapter 5: Test Run on the Dibujo Server

Notes Taken By: The Assistant Secretary to the Department of the Interior

Subject: Test Run on the Dibujo Server

Attn: Co-directors of the interior, Mr. Dibujio and Mr. Examiner

Note: All subject thoughts appear between *'s i.e. *these are a subject's thoughts*

Subject mounts bike with a melancholy sigh.

*You know, I could have sworn I was just talking to two people. I'm pretty sure they were trying to tell me something important too. Maybe it was just me thinking to myself? What was it that I was thinking about? Hehe, this is like that time I got high and thought I really

understood my relationship with her but then couldn't remember anything I "understood" the next day.*

Subject gets a smile on his face thinking about the mysterious "her," and begins to bike through some light traffic.

I haven't texted her in a few days. I'm always thinking I text her too much and that I'm being annoying though. Fuck it, she's pretty much my favorite person to talk to. Shouldn't I just talk to her if I have something to say... I hope the boyfriend doesn't think I'm an asshole.

Subject stops at a stoplight and notices a couple walking by hand in hand. His mouth frowns, but his eyes show a deep appreciation for them.

*I want that. I pretend I don't but I really do. Why the hell do I always have to fall in love with people I can never be with? You know what though, I'm freaking great. I bet she would want to be with me if she knew..."

Subject bikes forward a bit, cocks his head to the right and begins pedaling swiftly, obviously determined.

Screw it

I'm telling her

When the subject gets home he calls the mysterious "her," but she does not pick up. Determined to make everything work perfectly, he doesn't call repeatedly but waits for her to call back.

I'm sure she'll call back. Positive she'll call back. You know, usually I'd be more worried about this, but, knowing that I'm finally going to tell her is like the best kind of stimulant

This is the right decision

Subject's heart pounds for the next 3 hours as he waits for her to get back to him. He tries to get a few things done, but is entirely un-productive. Books lay open. Pans are on the stove and empty. He's constantly jumping to the next thing.

Subject receives text from the mysterious her: Hey you called.

Subject immediately calls the mysterious her and says that he's in love with her and has been for nearly two years despite the fact that she's been with her boyfriend for four. Subject says that he can't keep pretending he's not in love with her. There are so few people he falls in love with and he thinks that if he wastes this chance he'll hate himself for it.

Mysterious her expresses her deepest sympathies but explains not so concisely and much more awkwardly that she loves her boyfriend and that she's sorry.

Subject begins crying, apologizes, and hangs up the phone.

Subject goes for a run, teardrops littering the pavement behind him.

Subject reaches his favorite bridge.

Subject mounts the bridge's railing

There's no one else for me, I've tried and I've failed as I always will

Subject more slips than jumps off the railing.

Subject lurches awake once again balling.

Mr. Examiner: Well at least he lasted for longer

Mr Dibujio is sobbing next to Mr. Examiner. Mr. Dibujio explains that he assumed the mysterious her would give up her boyfriend.

Subject: WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU TWO DOING HERE?

Chapter 6: Anger

Considering that he'd just experienced his own suicide in two separate scenarios, the young man couldn't be blamed for being out of sorts when he awoke, but neither Mr. Dibujio nor Mr. Examiner was expecting the response they got from their "subject."

Despite the darkness, there was clear rage in his eyes. The co-directors had only once experienced this emotion from their subject and even then it was swiftly overcome by his usually strong desire to be understanding. This time though, he let the pure emotion wash over him unhindered and, to his own surprise, it felt fantastic.

He jumped out of the bed and snarled at the co-directors, "how. The fuck. Did. You. Get. In. here." His nostrils flared wildly and his whole body seemed to move with each intake of breath.

"Well you see..." said Mr. Dibujio, "We were just trying to help you... we know you haven't been feeling quite... yourself lately."

Mr. Examiner slapped his forehead, closed his eyes, and shook his head.

"MYSELF," he said, nostrils still flaring as he took one slow and threatening step toward the co-directors. "You think you have any idea who I am? FUCK YOU. I've done

nothing but be drained by other people. I do nothing but try to help other people. Nothing but try to get close to other people... and the people I'd like to be closest to... the people I've loved... THEY'VE. NEVER. GIVEN A DAMN ABOUT WHO I AM. So what am I? I'm understanding. Always. GOD. DAMN. UNDERSTANDING! People feel the way they feel, that's just how it is. But you know what. FUCK IT. FUCK THEM. AND FUCK YOU. FUCK THE FUCKING HAND THAT I'VE BEEN DEALT."

He spoke most of his words through gritted teeth. Those teeth were the last line of defense between him and the unlucky co-directors whose own faces were now mere inches from his own. His words bounced off the back of his teeth spraying the co-directors with bits of hot spittle.

"You think I'm not myself? You know why that is? WHY? Because I've never put my fucking self first. NEVER let my own emotions CLOUD my judgments. Well. NOW I'M GETTING EMOTIONAL. IT'S MY FUCKING TURN TO LET IT OUT! I'VE PUT TOO MUCH INTO OTHER PEOPLE AND GOTTEN NOTHING IN RETURN AND THE TWO OF YOU ARE JUST TRYING TO TAKE MORE."

During this particular fit of emotion his voice actually cracked – yes cracked something it hadn't done since he was at least 14 – this only served to enrage him further.

"NO, NOT ANY MORE" he finally full on yelled, he's mouth agape in anger and his eyes showing nothing beneath the rage on their surface. When it seemed his scream of "MORE" was coming to a close, his voice rose even further to a low pitched, but room-shaking roar as he fell to his knees and a dark form gushed from his mouth. At some points it had the look of smoke, but, at others, it splashed to the floor like crude oil. The form enveloped half of the room and took upon the shape of a jagged, broken, and clawed beast that grasped at the throats of the co-directors.

"THIS IS YOUR FAULT" the demon said in a guttoaral, belching roar from a mouth that appeared between the grasping arms. Within the mouth was a faint glow, as of coals in a well raked, but untended fire. Extreme heat and dampness issued from the mouth as it uttered its words of pure, poorly annunciated emotion. Steam issued from every inch of the oozing beast, leaving the room in a constant, dripping shimmer. Nothing seemed still, nothing seemed at peace. The room was alive with his anger.

Mr. Dibujo was sweating profusely while Mr. Examiner seemed wracked by a tension just behind his temples. Mr. Examiner incessantly scraped his bony fingers against the space between his forehead and temple while grimacing uncomfortably.

The demon finally successfully wrapped its talons around the co-directors necks causing a horrible crackle as the talons clenched down and lifted the co-directors into the air.

"Well now... eck eck... that's not" Mr. Examiner attempted to say but his airway was firmly closed by the black and oozing talons surrounding it.

“exac-ehhhck-ly true,” finished Mr. Dibujio wheezing.

“FUCK YOU” said the demon and he slammed their heads together hoping beyond hope to kill them in the process.

There was a horrible crackling as their two skulls merged together and a half of each one’s face was pulverized in a splash of blood that mixed and turned dark with the ooze on the floor.

The demon then evaporated more quickly than he appeared leaving the young man bent over the fused skulls of Mr. Dibujio and Mr. Examiner. He was dripping with sweat and panting heavily with closed eyes. When he finally opened them, his vision was blurred at first, but as the room cleared, he saw the fused visage of the co-directors as his own bloodied and mangled face staring back at him.

With his mind and body hanging on by the weakest of sinews, he saw the fused head mouth, “yes, it’s true.” It was far more than he could take. He puked out one last bit of blood and ooze and collapsed. His own form dropped into that of the fused co-examiners who were already wrenching themselves apart from one another, apparently unharmed.

Chapter 7: Mr. Examiner has a plan

“Well now! I know exactly what we need to do!” exclaimed Mr. Examiner from one end of a long and mostly empty table, his eyebrows slanted in a mean determination.

“Do you?” said Mr. Dibujio from the other end of the table, a little amused. “Cuz, I mean, I’m pretty sure we just did what you wanted, and well... my head still hurts... though not as badly as his.”

“Yes, yes,” said Mr. Examiner, a little annoyed, “I’ve already admitted, that I was wrong, but so were you, annnnd, as usual, I’ve thought the situation over and am ready to move forward.”

“He killed himself.... TWICE!” yelled Mr. Dibujio incredulously. “And then that, that thing... I’m not even sure I realized that was in him.”

“Ridiculous,” said Mr. Examiner, “that’s always been there, I’ve just always had the forethought to prepare and keep it at bay, and that actually brings me to my plan.”

Mr. Dibujio opened his mouth to argue, but Mr. Examiner interrupted, “No, no, listen my great and intelligent, Mr. Dibujio, I think you’ll like this one. We’re going to *pause for effect* have him tell her.”

Mr. Dibujio let out a deep and booming guffaw. “Really, Hah! Really?!? That’s your plan? I know you must be suffering from a terrible migraine, lord knows I am... haven’t felt

this way since the kid was in elementary school... God I hated elementary school Mondays, but that was my idea, and, paging Dr. Examiner, IT DIDN'T WORK."

"Yes," said Mr. Examiner, "But that's because we did it your way. I realized while having my skull thrown directly into your own that you may have been onto something in choosing to let his emotions show. It may just be that keeping them bottled up for so long has left them uncontrollable, led to the foolish outbursts of sadness, desire, and, as we so intimately experienced, anger. BUT, and this is an important 'but,' I think we can let those emotions out in a smart way... we just have to prepare."

"And what exactly do you mean by 'prepare'" said Mr. Dibujio obviously mocking his co-director.

"Well," said, "Mr. examiner... it's clear that the fool, and I mean that in the most constructive way, has developed some ... counter productive thoughts. For instance, where did he ever get the idea that suicide would equal 'starting over'... most ridiculous thing I've ever heard him utter. And the thought that being good to other people has only damaged him in the end, selfish, emotional nonsense."

"There's at least some truth to the latter," said Dibujio, "When was the last time you saw him put himself first."

"He's focused more than half his life on his own education and self advancement," said Mr. Examiner matter of factly.

"Yes so he can use his knowledge to help other people," said Mr. Dibujio bewildered.

"Yes, and all parties, including the fool, gain. In any case, it will certainly all be wasted selfishly if he isn't able to get his focus back. Which is, again, why we're here. Now please listen."

"What we need to do, is get him to admit his love, but he must be properly prepared."

"Prepared how?" queried Dibujio sighing reluctantly.

"Prepared with emotions other than sadness and self loathing, most importantly, with anger," said Mr. Examiner smirking a little maniacally.

"There was great power in that last night," said Dibujio thinking of the possibilities for himself, "and it wasn't directed at himself... or at least toward something he didn't think was himself. Funny that you're finally seeing the usefulness of emotion... even if it is the most loathsome one."

"O don't get all smug," snipped Mr. Examiner, "It's a means to an end."

“Before we do anything though,” said Mr. Dibujo looking out one of the two hemispherical windows in the room and onto the young man’s limp body, morning sunlight just beginning to stream over it, “we need to get him out of this bed.”

“Hasn’t been easy lately, and certainly won’t be easy today.”

They sighed in unison.

Chapter 7: Awakening

Despite the co-directors fears, the young man awoke with a surprisingly level of clarity even near level headedness.

“Holy shit” he thought, “that was one fucked up dream ... I should text her about it.” A smirk crossed his face but then quickly sank into a frown. “No, I’ve got to stop doing this. I can’t keep letting thoughts of her ooze over my brain ... I’m pretty sure that’s what my subconscious is trying to tell me.”

“I’ve become dependent... DEPENDENT... GROSS... seriously that’s gross,” he thought. “You know what I’m going to do, I’m going to just not think about her. Sheer force of will. I have that much will.”

He lay in bed for a few more minutes thinking about her – having her in bed next to him really would be awesome. Even just to hold her ... but no she was probably fucking her boyfriend right now. “FORCE OF WILL,” he thought – and he jumped up from his bed and started to prepare breakfast.

As he went to pour his cereal into his bowl he was frustrated to discover that nothing was coming out of the box. “That’s weird,” he said, “I swear to God I just opened the bag.” He got up, cut open the bag for a second time, took a look at the stock market app on his phone, and tipped the box into his bowl, but, once again, his mini-wheats failed to tumble out. His face screwed up in confusion and even a hint of anger as he peaked once again into the box.

“Cereal, it’s tricky, HA,” guffawed Mr. Dibujo.

He jumped up out of his chair sending cereal flying all over the floor.

“O. come now,” said Mr. Examiner putting his bony fingers on the young man’s shoulders, “not nearly as tricky as the stock market.”

“I... I... I... thought you guys were just a dream...” the young man stammered, obviously distraught.

“Don’t be an idiot,” said Mr. Examiner, “We’ve both acknowledged that the cat is out of the bag and so should you.”

“Don’t take the words of my dear co-director to heart,” said Mr. Dibujo, “but it is true, you saw exactly what we are last night.”

“That wasn’t ahh *voice-crack* real,” he said, his voice cracking once again.

“C’mon idiot, you can’t deny us any more than you can deny the fact that you’re going to be thinking about her all day – in fact... I’m pretty sure you’re thinking about her right now – you have that stupid distracted look on your face. Here I thought maybe you’d been flushed of all your emotion after last night... pity”

“Huh?” he mumbled shaking his head, “What’s she got to do with... wait! YOU GUYS REALLY DID MAKE ME HAVE THOSE DREAMS!”

“Don’t remind me,” said Mr. Dibujo sighing and putting his large head into his hands, “I really tried to argue against it.” He looked up with watery eyes and stared straight into the young man’s soul “I would never want anything like that to happen to you.”

“Nothing like that would ever happen,” said the young man, a little incredulous. “Sure, I’ve been a bit moody lately don’t get me wrong, but I would never ... at least I don’t think I would ... yeah I’ve thought about it when I’ve been really upset ... it’s just ... I dunno, I’m not really where I expected I would be ... well I mean in some ways I am but really would 15 year me really be impressed with what I am ... would 23 year old me ... I’ve put so much effort into so many things and missed out on so many ... and her, I can’t stop thinking about her, she’s always there ... but why shouldn’t she be, she’s awesome ... I’m just not what she wants and I can’t understand that and I can’t understand why I don’t want something different and I try to want other things but I’m overwhelmed and ”

Happily for everyone involved, Mr. examiner reached up and ***SMACK*** slapped the young man straight across the face as he regressed further and further into both a true and ridiculous frame of mind.

“Look,” began Mr. Examiner, “It’s obvious from the tests that, however STUPID it may be, you would indeed come to the conclusion that self destruction was better than living with the flood of hormones and neurotransmitters you’ve been dealing with given the proper emotional triggers.”

“O c’mon, don’t be crazy,” said the young man, “I really wouldn’t would I?”

“Let me explain,” said Mr. Examiner, “as far as I can tell, there seems to be some sort of threshold of emotional well-being below which you sink into a despair so great that taking your life somehow becomes non-problematic. It’s like those stock market prices you’re looking at on your phone – the prices (like your emotions) fluctuate constantly and little fluctuations you can deal with, but, as soon as things start going too low, you abandon ship and SELL or ... well ... in this case DIE... in your rattled brain, you somehow think it’s better to cut your losses.

'Now, neglecting the tremendous number of philosophical problems with this line of thinking which, it is my personal feeling, should keep you from going down this path in the first place, but which Mr. Dibujio somehow assures me just isn't the point, I think I've got a plan to pull you out of this rut.'

"O... what's that?" asked the young man with a hint of hope in his voice.

"Well," said Mr. Examiner, "Its like this," and he began drawing on the white-board in the young man's kitchen. First he drew a simple graph with the y-axis labeled emotional state and the x-axis labeled time. Then he drew one wrinkly but mostly horizontal line across the top of the graph and said, "this line represents your normal emotional state. Sure it's a little bumpy, but, for the most part you've lived your life a happy person – you've had a relatively highly positive emotional state and basically never dipped into the negative." He stared straight at the young man with a look of pure sternness on his face – a look that could have been a nun's ruler smacking him over the back.

"Okay," the young man said a little timidly, "Go on."

Mr. Dibujio observed the whole process while rolling his eyes and eating the miniwheats out of the box.

"Good," said Mr. Examiner, "Now, unfortunately, this has been your emotional state over the last year or so," and he drew a far more jumbled horizontal line much below the original line for most of its length and which occasionally jumped above the first line, but, many times, dipped below the x-axis.

"That doesn't look good," said the young man.

"Aren't we smart," said Mr. Examiner, "You have been all over the place and, most importantly, each time this line dips below 0, there is a chance you will think it appropriate to ... what did I say before? Ah yes, DIE."

"So ... I'm a mess," said the young man.

"Yes..." began Mr. Examiner but Mr. Dibujio quickly jumped in and through a mouth full of shredded mini wheat said, "NO, no no no no, not at all my dear boy! You're just you! And look, you have had quite a few really good times through the past year it's just ..."

"Those aren't worth it," said Mr. Examiner.

"Right...." said Mr. Dibujio grudgingly glaring at Mr. Examiner.

"But ... you said you had some kind of plan?" asked the young man.

"Quite right!" said Mr. Dibujio jumping up "We are going to smooth out that line and keep you comfortably on the up and up!"

“That sounds great!” said the young man mirroring Mr. Dibujo’s obnoxious but infectious ear-to-ear grin. “How do we do that?”

“Simple, we tell her,” proclaimed Mr. Examiner, “And be done with it!” His grin was both obnoxious and repulsive.

“But... I tried that in my dream... won’t it plunge me below the x-axis to do that ... I’m pretty sure I’m going to be rejected ... I’m not even sure she’ll talk to me afterward ... I mean... She’s probably the only reason that line ever goes into the high positives... man is it great to be with her... I mean I don’t think she really cares about being with me... but if she has that positive an impact it can’t be bad right? Right?”

“Yeah, but kiddo,” said Mr. Dibujo, “She’s not thinking about you like that and ... you know it ... that’s what all those dips below zero are.”

“So you just want to throw in another major dip below!?” the young man asked astounded.

“Yes actually,” said Mr. Examiner, “But I ... I mean we ... think that one particularly bad dip will be better than these consistent plunges you’ve been experiencing almost daily.”

“How can you think that? You saw the dream!”

“Yes, but we also saw some pretty amazing after effects,” said Mr. Dibujo cajolingly.

“Quite right,” said Mr. Examiner sneering, “My skull is still in pain but, if we can channel your emotion into that kind of rage instead of self loathing, we believe we can use that anger as a sort of shield.”

“Wait, you want me to get angry at her?” the young man said, “NO WAY, that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard... I could never be angry with her...”

“You’ll think differently when she’s says NO,” said Mr. Examiner, “I can guarantee that.”

“You realize that I’ve felt this way before,” the young man said.

“That should be obvious,” said Mr. Examiner annoyed, “Of course we do, and you’ve always moved on just fine.”

“The problem is,” said Mr. Dibujo, “there seems to be something different about this one. Something about you feels quite different – and we know you feel it too”

The young man knew exactly what Mr. Dibujo was talking about. Everyone he'd ever been in love with either wasn't in love with him or couldn't be with him. Even so, he always tried to keep his love alive for as long as he could. Be he felt as if his body, not just his spirit, really his physical body was cracked all over. He wasn't sure how much more he could take.

"I know," said Mr. Dibujo reading the young man's thoughts, "You really do enjoy loving her, loving whoever it happens to be, but you can't just keep throwing your love out at nothing and letting it fall flat... that's why it hurts so much."

"Yeah," said the young man, "sure, but something has always clicked eventually – I always ending up being able to walk away from the love remaining friends with whoever it was. In fact, I've always ended up bewildered by why I was so in-love with the people in the first place – heck I'd even say I end up repulsed by my previous feelings."

"And those are the times *I* love you most," said Mr. Examiner smirking.

"Huhuhuhuh, what a bunch of hogswallow," chuckled Mr. Dibujo, "we all know that's just a defense mechanism that only rears its ugly head once you've found a new person to love. What does it really feel like when you first begin walking away from your love?"

The young man thought... hard. The truth was that it always ended up feeling like walking away from a band that you've enjoyed before the concert's over so you can beat the crowd and move on with your life. As the music slowly fades away you have this faint sadness that just lingers and a part of you always knows you should have stayed.

"I guess it kind of feels like I'm doing the right thing, the smart thing," said the young man, not quite lying but certainly omitting a lot of the emotion – Mr. Examiner was beaming.

"Good, good. That's the kid I know," said Mr. Examiner.

"Right! Which is why, I really think I can just let this run its course... eventually I'll move on... just gotta get over these stupid bumps... no matter how much I...," said the young man trailing off.

"Lies of omission are still lies my good lad!" proclaimed Mr. Dibujo, "you're filled to the brim with regrets about every love you've ever walked away from – deep down you hate the fact that you just accepted the impossibility. And that, my friend, brings us to our current problem – you really cannot fit in any more regret – and so this brings me to my grudging agreement with Mr. Dibujo. You need to tell her, and you need to get angry."

"Yes, angry at her," said Mr. Examiner, "so you'll realize how ridiculous it is that you've let your feelings take over so much of yourself – you'll realize she's not worth it, you'll be able to be..."

“Now hold on a minute,” said Mr. Dibujo smiling, “I never said anything about getting angry at her. He needs to get angry at his past actions, angry about accepting impossibility, angry about not following his heart.”

“You make me want to die,” said Mr. Examiner flatly, “but, really, it doesn’t matter to me, what matters is that you get angry. I think that’s the only thing in you powerful enough to keep you from killing yourself because you’re intellect clearly is not enough.”

“You know,” said the young man, “you guys are assholes,”

“Good,” said Mr. Examiner and Mr. Dibujo in unison, the former with a stern look, and the latter with a chuckle.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and they were gone.

Chapter 8: The text

Although he had experienced enough to drive anyone more than a little insane, the young man nonetheless had to go to work. He was making some good headway on his daily heap of e-mails when a sudden swell of longing sent his eyes over to his cell phone.

“No!” he thought, “I’m not going to text her. Those guys don’t know what they’re talking about, I just have to get over this infatuation. Infatuation is the problem and I’ve gotten through it before. But also, there’s no reason not to text her right? I just enjoy talking to her and that’s fine. I should text her and see if she wants to hang out tonight.”

He reached out his hand to grab his phone but then caught a glimpse of his supervisor walking down the hallway and recoiled. “What the hell am I doing,” he thought, “I’ve got way too much to do to be thinking about this right now.” He pulled his hand back and resumed typing away determinedly – very quickly his eyes glazed over and the pressure behind them returned.

He clicked and typed the same response as the 10 previous e-mails, sure the subject was a little different but always:

Hello! (because the exclamation point got his imagined enthusiasm across perfectly).

Bunch of crap that basically indicated, “Yes I’ll get that thing done for you quickly, it would be my pleasure,” or “You’re not actually doing that thing I wanted you to do correctly but I’ll point out the positive qualities of your mostly shitty work and then correct it all for you.”

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to work with you, you’re awesome!

He really did appreciate all the people he worked with, but the constant need to sugar coat everything he did, said, and wrote was slowly wearing on him. Worse than that, it overflowed into his personal life – every little bit of work he did for someone else, every

time he did his roommate's dishes, every time he paid for friend's dinners, every time he organized a party, he did so with a smile, but never smiled with teeth. If he smiled with teeth people would notice his pearly whites grating against one another.

He had noticed the horrid growth of resentment within himself before, but the events of the last evening made him realize how bad things had become. The once benign resentment had become the malignant beast that tried to kill the co-directors. This self-awareness and acknowledgement of that fact that he was being a self-important asshole kept him working through to lunch, but, when he checked out his phone as he was grabbing his food and didn't see a single text, the bitterness began to bubble over out of his head.

"Ugggggggh," he thought as he walked down to the courtyard to eat lunch, preferring to be alone with his thoughts at lunch today. "Why am I sitting here wasting my life with this crap? Shouldn't I be doing something more important?"

He looked over to the street and saw a father jogging with a stroller. "Aww, I'd probably do that if I was Dad," he thought then shook his head a little, "Thank God no kids yet though, that would be miserable – that'd be total life take-over – wouldn't be able to do anything I wanted to anymore... and I'm not being selfish by thinking that. I'm going to start my own damn company and help a whole swath of people, not just raise a couple of children. What impact would that have? – still good for him I guess" and he frowned at the flavorless vegetarian wrap in his hand.

Then he smiled and whipped out his phone. "I forgot to tell her about my new idea for a company," he thought, and began rapidly typing, but his pace slowed within a few seconds and he looked back down at his sandwich... "Do you really think you could pull something like that off," he thought, "I don't know what makes you think you're so God damn important... you think you even have the focus and concentration to do something like that anymore... you're so fucking distracted ALL THE TIME."

And it was true, he was distracted, not distracted by the world around him though. Were that the case, he wouldn't be having this crisis of confidence, he was smart enough and observant enough to come up with real solutions to most problems he found, but he wasn't really looking for them anymore.

Thinking all this, he looked back down at his phone. "Does it really all stem from her?" he thought. "Is all this stupid angst and distraction because I'm constantly trying to make her happy, someone who doesn't even really care about me, because I'm throwing all my love and devotion at a void?"

Of course, she wasn't a void, and he knew that; she simply couldn't reciprocate his love. For all he knew, she may have even wanted to, she may have sensed his pain and really felt for him, but she couldn't make herself fall in love with him any more than he could make himself love the men and women that threw themselves at him – all these facts were far from lost on him, but they didn't prevent the slow build up of resentment, resentment that he never shared with anyone.

He took the last bite of lunch and felt it drop into the pit of his stomach. He was full but far from satiated and the afternoon sun reflecting off of his building was beginning to make him uncomfortably sweaty. He'd only been gone for fifteen minutes but didn't want to walk back into the office drenched so he resigned himself to begin the trek back up to his desk.

When he entered the lobby an advertisement on one of the many shiny new flatscreen monitors blared, "TAKE A CHANCE! – BOOK A TRIP TO YOUR DREAM DESTINATION TODAY!" He didn't care much for the latter bit, but just as it was designed, the advert reached his subconscious.

He looked over at the elevators and was disgusted, "Gross," he mumbled aloud and marched toward the stairs. As he climbed, his knees creaked, and his muscles ached. The previous evening had taken a toll. He stopped on the first landing and rubbed his thigh, "I need to change something," he thought, and pulled out his phone "I'll take my damn chance."

Text

To her:

Text 1: It's hard for me to explain how much I've avoided saying this, but I'm in love with you. I don't expect anything from you except friendship, but I can't keep pretending I don't feel this way

And after reading over the first text and repeating it aloud for 5 minutes.

Text 2: You don't have to stay friends with me, but please don't hate me

After walking back up to his desk, working the whole day, getting nothing done, and trying to avoid looking at his phone but looking every half hour:

Text 3: Fuck you

It wasn't quite the level of anger Examiner was hoping for, but Dibujo knew this was just getting things started.

Chapter 9: The Run

After that final text, the young man could hardly believe it, but he really did feel somewhat relieved. As he was getting changed to go for his evening run, he looked at himself in the mirror. He smirked admiring his own figure, but his eyes told the real story – he eyelids were slightly drooped and faintly wrinkled – the curtains before a stage of tears excite and anxious to get on stage. Instead of letting his ephemeral happiness go to waste he ignored the depth of what he saw and quite literally ran from his apartment.

His path took him over his favorite bridge – an old-timey behemoth with gargoyles sculpted into short columns adjacent the road, each with an angrier smile than the last. As he ran by them he imagined them pushing him to stop, to give into the pain, but each was slain as he ran past – he increased his speed with every passing.

When he got to the beast at the center of the bridge, he noticed his shoe was untied. He knelt down, sighing – he had just tied the same shoe at the start of the bridge. “I should just leave it untied,” he thought, “maybe then I’d stumble into some traffic.”

“You cannot seriously be thinking that,” said Mr. Examiner annoyed, “I thought we were finally making progress.”

“Ugh,” the young man said, “No, I wasn’t serious. Give me a damn break. I should have known something was up, and, let me guess, my shoe is still untied.”

Sure enough, when he looked down at as his shoe, his laces were flapping gently in the breeze, completely untied.

“So you’re finally starting to get it,” said Mr. Examiner smirking, “I’d say that’s a good sign.”

“No,” said Mr. Dibujo, “The good sign is that he finally spoke, errr haha, *texted* his true feelings. Job well done my boy.” And he slapped the young man on his back a little harder than was necessary sending him forward and tripping down to the ground.

“Oy! Sorry about that!” said Mr. Dibujo reaching down to pull the young man up from the ground, but when he grabbed hold of the young man’s shoulders, the young man pushed him back, and slowly stood up himself.

You know what?” he said, and his phone began to ring, the ringtone: trumpets announcing the arrival of a king.

“I really don’t need your help anymore *TRUMPETING* I think it’s time I start speaking my own damn mind. I don’t need you guys speaking it for me.” And he climbed up the few feet to the top of the nearest column to look down upon the bewildered co-directors. The trumpets blared once again when he reached the top. It was just getting dark but this particular column was poised directly below a streetlamp beaming a spotlight down upon the young man. His golden hair blew to the right in the wind, giving him a heroic look – much like the cape of a superhero. The gargoyle sculpted into the column served as his protector, the face daring the co-directors to speak up.

“I’ve spent my entire life falling in love with people I can’t be with,” he began, “but to hell with it. *trumpeting* those relationships have brought me more happiness than I see between most people *trumpeting* and I DO NOT just let my relationships die, I forge forward. And, NO, Mr. Examiner, I don’t ignore my feelings so I can move forward

undistracted because I enjoy those feelings. And, YES, Mr. Dibujo *Trumpeting*, I should be more honest with myself, and with them, but I'm not going to destroy my relationships by proclaiming things that could never be. ITS UNFAIR *Trumpeting* and I know that my friends love me. That's why I know that when I finally look at my phone at the end of this run, it's going to be her calling me, because she cares *Trumpeting*, and GODDAMNIT, I care about her, and I CARE ABOUT ME SO I'D NEVER JUMP OFF THIS BRIDGE! **FUCK YOU GUYS FOR THINKING I WOULD! *TRUMPETING***"

He looked down at the co-directors. Mr. Examiner was smirking, but not his usual obnoxious smirk, he seemed happy. Mr. Dibujo, on the other hand was beaming, but the young man was surprised to hear him say "commiserate and exaggerate *TRUMPETING*."

The young man threw his hands up in astonishment and staggered backwards as the wind picked up at the same time. Normally, he would have been able to quickly correct his footing and retain his balance, but, unfortunately, his shoe was still untied and his laces tripped him up. The young man fell backwards and was sent plunging 500 feet to the tepid waters below. His phone trumpeted once more during the fall and he caught sight of the callerID: "MOM" it read, and he smacked into the water.

Chapter 10: The Second Awakening

The young man woke a few days later in a hospital bed. Luckily, his loud speech to himself atop the bridge had attracted the attention of at least 10 of his fellow runners who witnessed his fall to the waters in horror and quickly called the appropriate authorities.

When he opened his eyes, she was there with her boyfriend. She smiled through tears saying "Hey, what's up?" The young man smirked and continued looking around the room. Many more friends were there and his parents were waiting in chairs outside. At least half of these people he'd been in love with at some point – and he proclaimed, "I fucking love you guys," and it was true.

Once everybody had left, Mr's Examiner and Dibujo entered the room. Mr. Examiner went to a dark corner of the room, leaned against the wall, and lit a cigarette.

"You can't smoke those in here!" exclaimed the young man, but Mr. Examiner ignored him.

"Don't worry," said Mr. Dibujo patting the young man on the head, "none of it's real, ha ha."

"Right," said the young man. "I guess I don't need to apologize for treating you guys like such a jerk then."

"Nah, don't worry about it bud," said Mr. Dibujo, "In some ways you were right ... we may have been over stepping our bounds a little recently ... our intrusions did lead to your fall.... I am kinda glad it let you clearly see how many people love you though."

“Yeah, I know,” said the young man, “but I really don’t know how long these good vibes are going to last.” He looked over at Mr. Examiner’s cigarette watching the smoke disintegrate into the air.

“They are ephemeral,” said Mr. Examiner, disinterested.

“Yes they are,” said Mr. Dibujo sitting on the young man’s hospital bed.

“Below it all, there’s still this emptiness,” said the young man, “I still don’t really share myself with anyone – except for you guys I guess.”

“Yup, and we’re just you” said Mr. Examiner, explaining what everybody already knew.

“But,” said Mr. Dibujo smiling, “there’s something else you really need to see in all of this – all of those people who here today” and he waved his arm over the room leaving a faint after image of everyone the young man loved, “they’re proof that you can find love with many different people – I know you’re kinda blinded by her right now, but there’s been others, and there will be others, you just have to make the effort to find them.”

“You’re right,” said the young man, “but do you really think having someone will clear everything up.”

“No,” said Mr’s Dibujo and Examiner in unison and Mr. Dibujo continued, “but you need someone you can talk to – someone you can open up to when you feel like crap. You need to share yourself with someone bud.”

“But...” the young man began.

“I know,” said Mr. Dibujo, “you want to be close to everyone, but I’m sorry kid you need more.”

“Just accept it,” said Mr. Examiner, “So we can move on.”

“I do,” said the young man, “I’m sure that acceptance will manifest in some strange way, but I really do accept it.”

“Can’t wait to see it,” said Mr. Dibujo and he got up and walked to the end of the bed joined by Mr. Examiner.

“We love you kiddo,” said Mr Dibujo. Mr. Examiner gave the slightest of nods, and the two disappeared.

All that, just to acknowledge that he loved himself.