

DEATH, AS A MEANS TO SURVIVE

By

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## ABSTRACT

*Death, as a means to survive* is a fictional story about the internal ramblings and preoccupations of people that are all interconnected in one way or another, whether that is because of their thoughts, their physical relation with each other, or just the fact that they are all humans. This is a story where the author challenged himself to explore the minds of troubled individuals and, by doing so, created a world full of either hopeless people, delusional people, or just people that believe in the transformative power of life. The author's motivation for this story was his endless quest to understand human emotions, as well as the desire to construct a narrative that comprises different points-of-view and different ways to understand the reasons we exist. The author has always been fascinated with approaching his fiction with a psychological and surrealist point-of-view, and thus, this story reflects his desires to do something for which not only he could connect to, but a bigger part of the audience could as well. Themes of the story include depression, anxiety, existentialism, romance, religion, psychological warfare, and the questions of mortality that plague every person head once in a while. This is a work that comes from the heart and soul of someone obsessed with humanity.

“Josephine Mayer died.”

Those were the words that pierced through his heart on a chill night in June.

He couldn't believe it. Josephine was the professor that first inspired him to truly feel something. To truly understand what the purpose behind his dreams were. The last time they talked, he wanted to show her his newest story.

Of course, that never happened.

And it is then, at that moment, where he started to think about the past. Did he feel proud, accomplished, or anything at all? He didn't know.

His hairy legs were tired and hurt, his eyes could barely see anything that was shown in the portable computer, his hands were craving for a softer touch, and all the while, this guy named Jeff Buckley was shouting in his ears.

*“It's you I've searched so hard for  
Don't want to weep for you  
I don't want to know  
I'm blind and tortured  
The white horses flow  
The memories fire  
The rhythms fall slow  
Black beauty, I love you so”*

It seemed like all he had loved up until that point was all some sort of black beauty.



Oliver Mayer was born to a middle class family. His mom settled in a small suburban city in the middle of Oregon, which was the same city she grew up in. His dad had no option but to move to that same city, because he very dearly loved Ms. Oliver.

They had a name though. Oliver's mom was named Josephine and his dad was named Francis.

When Oliver was a young kid, he always despised the weather, which he would come to love. He never thought of the future, nor the past, nor the very same present he was going through. Young Oliver was just a little boy in suburban Oregon and that was all there was to it.

He remembers these times very foggily, though, as he never focused on saving a single memory, like his mother had taught him. He remembers vividly the words his mother used to always tell him.

“You hear me, Oli?”, she used to always say. “Please see the present for what it is and value it. I know this might all seem hard for you to get. But it truly never gets better than this.”

Little Oliver was always confused by those words, just exactly how his mother expected him to be. He never thought of anything beyond what his apparent truth was. What his low, unqualified vision permitted him to process. On those hazy days of 2008, he does recall a certain thing that forever changed him.

Daddy would always take them to visit his family during the summer and the winter. It was like a tradition for them. Daddy’s family lived in coastal Georgia, which meant that the trip was a long one that Oliver had to swiftly endure every time. It was made easier due to how enjoyable he found the sky to be. He loved looking at the clouds, eating a bag of chips that his dad had hastily bought. He always complained about it.

Something about the clouds means something to little Oliver. He loved the different shapes they had, their foginnes or how transparent they sometimes seemed. He always wondered what one of those clouds tasted like. He didn’t know what they were made of and never even bothered to question that to an adult. For him, clouds were like angels, always on top of the world and protecting them from anything that might come from the outside. At that point, he saw clouds as his guardian. He found comfort in them. So much that he always said that he wouldn’t have any issues living in a cloud for the rest of his life.

In the summer of 2008, when Oliver was just five years old, on a trip to daddy’s old house, he vividly recalls a memory where he saw his daddy watching TV on the couch. Someone was doing long jumps on the TV, and Oliver was entranced by it. Just watching adults fly, like they were capable of getting anywhere with those jumps, made his eyes be glued onto the screen of the televisor. His dad caught him a few seconds later. Oliver was so little he could pass alongside someone without them seeing him. His dad grabbed him from the waist and put him on his right leg.

“What, Oliver, you want to become an athlete in the future?”

Oliver didn't know what an athlete was. His father had to explain it to him.

"Oh, well, it's exactly those people!" his dad said, pointing at the screen. "They are people that can perform things normal people like us couldn't do."

Little Oliver didn't get that last part. His innocence, voluntarily or not, blinded him from any possibility other than truth he had already understood.

"Why, of course, Oliver! Your dad can do those jumps! I don't want to do them, though. I prefer staying here with you and your mommy. Dad loves you two so much that he doesn't want to be away from you two!"

Oliver knew it. His daddy could do anything in the world!

Then, the screen got into commercials. Oliver always enjoyed that part because those little videos were all very ridiculous but they were like small movies he could see while waiting for the main dish. He really enjoyed them!

A commercial, whatever, is what marked him forever. It was a weird commercial where it seemed like a red figure with horns and a trident was talking to him. He was saying something about antioxidants, but little Oliver had no idea what that was. Rather, he was focused on the mysterious figure that had his eyes locked on him. In a way, it scared him, but he looked at his dad, who was just laughing at the commercial. Oliver didn't know if it was funny or not, but that figure really made him question things for the first time. Something that, at that point, was a concept unheard of. He looked at his dad, who then glanced over him.

"Oh, Oliver, don't you think it's funny? What's with that face? Look at the stupid things the Devil is saying!"

The Devil? Oliver didn't understand concepts like that. He had never heard of a word like that. He had more questions now, which overwhelmed him a little bit. What were all these questions there was no answer for? Was there something such as a question with no answer? An idea with nothing to accompany it? He looked at his dad again. After all, he knew the answers to everything.

"Well, you see, Oliver, the Devil is like the counterpart to God. You know God, right? The guy that takes care of us all up there, in the clouds. He is a good dude that you can always talk to. He will listen to you. He will understand your sorrows. And most important, he will be there on the final judgment", said daddy, before he took Oliver out of his

leg and walked away as he heard mommy start yelling. Little Oliver then heard daddy yell even louder and so on and forth, but he didn't care about those noises at that point.

He simply thought of what his daddy told him: God. Clouds.

There is something in the clouds?

Better say, *someone?*!

That was Oliver's first real question. That was the first time he ever wondered something. That he ever really thought about anything beyond the imaginary walls built around him. He wanted to ask daddy more about it but he saw him still talking very loudly with mommy, so he instead sat down where his dad was and kept watching the television. Eventually, the jumpers were back and Oliver thought that, if he found a way to jump as high as them, he would be able to maybe fly some day.

And then, he could go to the clouds.

And *then*, he could meet God. And ask him questions about anything!

They could become friends!

Oliver giggled as he first thought of those things, and was interested in learning more about that someone that was in the clouds. How did he make it up there? How could he make it up there? His curiosity sparkled.

And a new human was born that night.



WHEN MARIAH WOKE UP, SHE HAD FORGOTTEN EVERYTHING THAT HAD HAPPENED UP UNTIL THAT POINT. IT WAS A VERY SUNNY MORNING AND THE FEELING OF THE BED WHERE SHE HAD JUST WOKEN UP WASN'T THE ONE SHE WAS USED TO. SHE SCRUBBED HER EYES AND REALIZED SHE WAS IN HER COUSIN EMMA'S ROOM. SHE WAS WEARING A BLACK SHIRT THAT WAS PROBABLY BORROWED FROM EMMA'S BROTHER, AND DIDN'T EVEN BOTHER TO TOUCH HER HAIR. SHE BLUSHED, NOW ASSUMING WHOSE SHIRT THAT WAS.

SHE STOOD UP AND REALIZED SHE HAD A HUGE HEADACHE. THE FINE TEXTURE OF THE CARPET WAS SOFT AND ENOUGH TO EASE HER WORRIES AT LEAST FOR A FEW SECONDS. QUESTIONS REGARDING HER PRESENT INVADDED HER MIND.

AS SHE WALKED OUT, SHE SAW EMMA WITH A TOWEL ON HER HEAD, AS SHE WAS TALKING ON THE PHONE WITH SOMEONE.

"CAN YOU NOT BUY THEM FOR ME?" SHE ASKED, EFFUSIVELY. "GERALD, DON'T BE A DICK ABOUT THIS. I ALREADY TOLD YOU WHAT HAPPENED. SO PLEASE, JUST BUY THE-"

AS EMMA TURNED AROUND, SHE SAW MARIAH JUST LOOKING AT HER AND WAS ASTOUNDED. IT SEEMED LIKE, FOR A BRIEF MINUTE, THAT NOT EVEN EMMA COULD EXPLAIN WHY OR HOW MARIAH ENDED UP BEING AT HER HOUSE.

"LOOK, JUST BUY THE PILLS, YES? I NEED TO GO" EMMA SAID, BEFORE HANGING UP ON THE PHONE. "MARIAH, WH- WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

MARIAH COULDN'T REALLY FIND AN ANSWER FOR EMMA. SHE MUMBLED SOME WORDS AND TRIED LOOKING FOR SOME SORT OF REASONING BEHIND HER PRESENCE THERE. AFTER ALL, INSIDE OF MARIAH'S HEAD, THERE WAS A REASON BEHIND WHY THINGS HAPPEN.

SHE WAS THERE FOR A REASON.

GOD HAD BROUGHT THEM THERE FOR A REASON.

GOD NEVER MAKES MISTAKES.

"I SEE. WELL, MOM'S DOING BREAKFAST DOWNSTAIRS. MAYBE EATING SOMETHING WILL MAKE US BOTH REMEMBER YESTERDAY, RIGHT?"

AS THE BOTH GRABBED HANDS AND WENT DOWNSTAIRS, THE USUAL SMELL OF BUTTER THAT EMANATED FROM EMMA'S HOME WAS VERY WELL PRESENT IN MARIAH'S NASAL SENSES. THEIR CARPET COVERED THE ENTIRE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE SO IT DIDN'T EVEN MATTER THAT SHE WAS WEARING NOTHING TO COVER HER FEET. AS THEY ENTERED THE KITCHEN, MARIAH SAW HIM.

OLIVER.

HE WAS WEARING THOSE ROUND GLASSES HE WAS FORCED TO WEAR SINCE HE WAS EIGHT. THAT CURLY HAIR THAT REACHED JUST BY THE MIDDLE OF HIS BACK NECK. THAT ROUND NOSE AND THOSE BRIGHT CARAMEL EYES THAT HID UNDER THE SHINY GLASSES. OH, THOSE GLASSES. THERE WAS SOME CHARM IN THEM.

HOWEVER, OLIVER WAS HER GUILTY PLEASURE. IT'S JUST THAT SHE DIDN'T REALIZE HOW GUILTY SHE WAS OF HAVING THAT PLEASURE.

"MARIAH! GOOD MORNING!" SAID AUNT JO, EMMA AND OLIVER'S MOM, WITH HER BRIGHT SMILE CAPABLE OF SHINING AN ENTIRE ROOM FULL OF POSITIVITY. SHE WAS A RAY OF BEAMING LIGHT IN THE DARK WORLD IN WHICH MARIAH HAD TO GROW UP. BEING WITH AUNT JO WAS EVERYTHING TO HER. BECAUSE OF THAT, EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD NO IDEA HOW SHE WOKE UP IN EMMA'S ROOM, IT WAS ENOUGH FOR HER TO KNOW THAT, ULTIMATELY, THAT WAS AUNT JO'S HOUSE.

"GOOD MORNING, MOM," SAID EMMA, WITH A LESS ENTHUSIASTIC TONE. SHE SOUNDED TIRED, MORE THAN ANYTHING. THE CHANGE OF TONE WAS EVIDENT. "WHAT DO WE HAVE FOR BREAKFAST THIS MORNING?"

"WELL, THE USUAL PANCAKES. DAD LEFT A FEW MINUTES AGO. HE FORGOT HIS PHONE, AGAIN."

SILENCE.

THIS GAVE MARIAH SOME WELL-EARNED TIME TO THINK ABOUT HER SITUATION. PENNILESS, AT HER COUSIN'S HOME, SHE DOESN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING FROM THE PREVIOUS NIGHT, AND LOOKING WITH WEIRD EYES AT HER COUSIN.

DID SHE EVER FEEL DIRTY?

"MOM, ARE YOU OKAY IF I GO TO BARNES & NOBLE A BIT?" ASKED OLIVER WITH HIS USUAL NONCHALANT VOICE.

"SURE. IT'S SUNDAY, SO IF ANYTHING, IT MIGHT BE BUSY TODAY. JUST TAKE THAT INTO CONSIDERATION."

THEN IT HIT MARIAH. SHE WAS GONNA MISS SUNDAY MASS.



The moment he got in the taxi cab, he realized he had forgotten his phone. A common mistake at that point, but a crucial thing that could determine just how focused he would be for the rest of the day. How could he focus though,

really? Life was being too much and even the knowledge of him forgetting his phone made him angry, miserable, despicable.

“Hey! Chill out back there, this ain’t no jungle for you to just go wild” said the cab driver, with a very angry tone and transpiring through every word he muttered.

Now he had a dilemma. Should I explain it to him? Is this a good moment to vent my frustrations with words instead of punches? Should I find in this random stranger a way to feel comfort?

Francis wasn’t homeless, but he knew there was not much time left before he had to embark on life by himself.

“Don’t apologize, I understand it. Everyone has their own shit going on, I know. Just... don’t hit the car, right?”

He liked the view of the city. Big buildings meant big dreams. Big dreams meant big aspirations. And big aspirations meant a bigger compromise with life. After all, what else did life need from him? He had a beautiful wife, a beautiful family, and a beautiful house, yet, it is that imminent feeling of everything crumbling down that shocked him to the core. He wasn’t ready to let go, and he wasn’t ready to change. He enjoyed mundanity.

So then, why was change such a consistency in his life?

“So you’re a journalist, huh? How is that?”

Francis hated his job. It had brought him money, but he was miserable. He felt an obligation to be honest and transparent, but how could he be all that when he kept lying to himself? He liked imagining he had a good life, a good family, a good, stable income, and maybe it all was true. Maybe he did have some good cards but was extremely ungrateful. The problem was that he knew how close everything was to the end. What even was the point of pretending? He was aware life isn’t a game of pretending, but what if it was?

“I bet, I bet. I assume you work at The \*\*\*\*\* Times, huh? I mean, after all, that’s where we’re heading, so y’know..”

Why did he have to lie? What did he win from lying? Why not simply be honest and admit that he always put that direction so that every cab driver that gets him thinks he’s some sort of powerful person? Francis knew the answer, yet refused to acknowledge it even internally. He knew he needed to feel that euphoria that comes with being someone in life. He could feel the blood rapidly moving through his veins everytime his mouth threw a fake truth. He loved that feeling. It was like a drug that kept him on edge, making him believe that

something was actually worth it. Before he knew it, he simply had closed his eyes and imagined having all that power.

Would that actually stop the unstoppable?

Or would the fall be worse?

"We're here. The payment was already done through the app, but the tipping, well, that you could-"

After the door slam, Francis walked to the entrance of the building where the offices of The \*\*\*\*\* Times was located at. After entering, he turned around and saw that the cab driver had finally left, so he took his chance and left. Walking down the stairs, that constant feeling of failure and embarrassment invaded his body once again. It was his daily reminder that he never quite reached the glory he once dreamed of.

That was it.

That was his life.

Just a bunch of 'what ifs'.

The first thing he saw entering his actual building was, ironically enough, Jerry. If anyone in the whole wide world could be more miserable than him, it was Jerry. Oh, what a guy! Francis never wanted for anyone to mistake him - he liked Jerry, in fact, he liked him so much he often considered him one of his best friends. However good he was trying to look with that ostensibly horrendous tie, it was complemented with those baggy eyes of his that always looked so tired and depressed.

"Hey, Francis! How are you?" said Jerry, with a smile on his face.



A fake and forced smile.

What did he do that he was forced to look at *that* face every day?

How fucking hilarious did God think he was doing that to him?

He went to mass, he prayed every night, he even made his son a devout Catholic and yet, he was there, looking at Francis *fucking* Mayer once again.

AA  
AA  
AA  
AA  
AA  
AA  
AA

“I’m doing good Jerry, thanks for asking,” said Francis with a smirk.

That disgusting smirk.

He really wanted to simply sucker punch him. Just how lucky was he? He had a beautiful family, a beautiful house, and above everything, a beautiful wife.

Oh, Josephine, thought Jerry every day, lamenting himself over telling her he needed to explore his options 27 years ago. He was a dumb kid, whose horny temperament and his personality issues prevented him from having a special life. One he could feel proud of. One that didn’t feel forced, or that was a constant lie to himself.

For the past 27 years of his life he had been trying to convince himself that he was exaggerating. That there was no reason to be so bitter about something that happened such a long time ago. He thought it could get worse, that he had an okay life. But even when Jerry tried to believe that, it almost never succeeded.

And now there he was, with his hair smelling like gel and his extravagant tie that was a gift from his son. He pretended to be the happiest motherfucker in the office when, in reality, he probably just wanted to disappear from everyone’s sight and never, NEVER appear again. God, did he hate himself.

But yet again, there he was. He kept going to the office and he kept combing his hair and he kept eating breakfast and he kept driving to work and he kept smiling and he kept wishing everyone the best and he kept doing a great job at the office and the list could go on.

Before he knew it, it was time for him to go home.

Days just passed and Jerry had lost all notion of time. It was all just a routine to follow.

Jerry packed everything and saw, once again, Francis, on his way out as well.

“Hey, Jerry! I thought you were supposed to leave earlier. Did you do extra hours?”

Why did he care? Not like that was going to change anything. Not like any interaction that he had with Francis changed anything. He was just pretending to care.

“Ah, I see. Well, hopefully we can go out soon,” said Francis, with that same smirk he always had on that face of his. “Will you be coming to the office party on Friday?”

Did he really have to? Deep down in his heart, Jerry maybe wanted to. Another side of his heart was simply begging him to go home and not care that much about work, or the office, or anything for that matter. There was a side of Jerry that deeply wanted to simply stop caring and go home to rest.

Life can be tough and for Jerry, it was never easy.

“Great! It will be amazing to see you there,” said Francis, to which Jerry quickly replied as he walked outside. “See you soon, buddy!”

How can he call him ‘buddy’ with everything he entails? Is he not aware that he is the sole reason his life has been on a downward spiral ever since? He is married to the woman of his dreams and he dares to call him a ‘buddy’.

‘Buddy’.

Huh.

As he drove back home, he stopped at a red light. An impulse was telling him to simply go, but he resisted. He felt the urge to do something out of the ordinary for some reason - maybe as a way to feel alive. To feel worthy. He suddenly heard a knock on his window. He turned around and moved his finger from side to side, as a way to reject the notion of his future. Because in that person that was begging, he saw a failure. He saw someone that is bound to the bottom.

He saw himself.



And there she was.

Mariah.

Oh sweet Mariah, with her mustard-colored hair, her brown eyes, and her small nose that made her face all fall into some sort of harmony unmatched by any other woman in \*\*\*\*\*. She was everything to him, and her, well, he was probably lucky if he remembered the first letter of his name.

It was K.

Keith observed as Mariah walked alongside her friend (or whatever they were) Emma down the street. He couldn't quite hear what they were talking about, but he didn't care. All he desired was Mariah. For her to fall for him the way he had.

Oh, was love something so beautiful.

Oh, was beauty something so objective.

But Mariah.

She was irrefutable.

So effective.

God.

But now, there was that dork Oliver. A constant in the girls' life. Emma's brother, or something. What had Mariah seen in him? He constantly seemed like a lost dog in the middle of a prairie. So stupid on the outside, probably empty on the inside. Has he ever thought of something worth thinking about? He wanted to punch him in the face. Maybe even more than that. He felt so annoyed - how did he catch her interest? And to be fair, he didn't know it for a fact, but he kinda did. Everyone did.

Keith was the smartest student at school. Everyone asked him for help or for some little advice. Even Mariah had come up to him. He felt a rush of energy everytime that happened. It was a very isolated and rapid feeling, but whenever it happened, he felt in a different dimension. Like he could do anything he ever wanted to. Mariah was the only person capable of taming him and she probably didn't even think about him. She seemed to only think of that dumbass Oliver. He detested him. It was some sort of jealousy he didn't want to admit, because that would mean he had won.

And in no world he was willing to let Oliver win.

And maybe it had to do something with his father. After all, wasn't Oliver Francis Mayer's son?

He stopped thinking about it the moment he heard the door opening. He was here. And he didn't want him to be here.

"Hey son. Bring me a beer, will ya?" said Jerry, with a face that could probably put him in jail.

Keith obeyed and he took a beer out of the fridge. It was cold, almost frozen. He felt the chills as he grabbed it, yet there was a possibility that those chills weren't caused by the cold. Was he somehow afraid? Was there something that made him afraid at that moment?

He gave the beer to Jerry and started walking on his way out.

"Where do you think you're going? It's late," assured Jerry, as if it wasn't obvious by the color of the sky. Keith tried to explain some sort of reasoning to his dad, but it was kind of a lie. Actually, no. He was straight-up bullshitting. He just needed to leave.

"Really? Damn, okay. Do they have it at the store?" asked Jerry. "Well, don't take long. It's dark."

What an idiot.

As Keith walked to the neighborhood store, he couldn't take Mariah out of his head. Why was she such a present force in his life? They never talked, they never interacted. He was just a spectator of her constant performance. Keith didn't know how to approach her, nor how to actually start something. The gust of wind that was hitting his face made him cold. He wasn't wearing a coat. There was no forward-thinking. He started to shiver, yet, there was a slight possibility that the cold wasn't causing it.

He stopped to think about it.

Was he really that in love with her? Was it something more?

Did Keith need Mariah?

Was he obsessed?



*Obsessed with the idea of perfection.*

*Lonely, lonely imperfections.*

*An art, just moving through the counter.*

*Was she carrying something? Maybe?*

*Who cared but her?*

*The bell sounds.*

*Time to help!*

*She fixes her hair.*

*She smiles.*

*The guy doesn't even care enough to look at her.*

*When he comes back with a gallon of milk, she greets him enthusiastically.*

*No answer.*

*She tells him how much the milk will cost.*

*No answer.*

*He just hands four dollars.*

*"Keep the change."*

*She thanks him.*

*He doesn't.*

*He leaves.*

*She doesn't.*

*And now Primrose is, once again, asking herself, whether she did something wrong. She had read the manual countless times and she even memorized it all the way through. Yet, no one smiled at her. Barely any people greeted her. Even fewer people said 'thank you'. She sometimes felt like an object, unable to actually do something for the greater good.*

*But she was!*

*Society without store clerks isn't a society.*

*It's just... something!*

*Did she need to change something? What was the key to solving the mystery of apathetic people? How could she make an impact in someone's life to turn them into a more positive life. What are the chances and odds for something like that to succeed?*

*The truth is, they were very slim, but Primrose decided to never give up. She didn't believe in herself, but she believed in the transformative nature of humanity. In the opportunity to change. And sometimes, that was all it was needed.*

*For someone to trust.*



Trusting that they will grow and become the most beautiful seeds ever.

Look at those seeds grow. Growing, never stopping for anyone, knowing what exactly is needed to be done to be strong. They will grow into plants, then maybe into little trees. Their impact will be there, big or small. But, how can you define impact on a plant? How can you define impact in general?

Those were the questions that invaded Herbert Lucas every single day since he decided to have a retired life.

A “calmer” life.

And maybe, just maybe, in the strictest sense of the word, he was indeed more relaxed at everything. But as time went by and as he realized that his life was it, he often

questioned whether everything he had done up until that point was worthy of a retirement.

He questioned everything that he had been led to believe. Was he ever a good worker? Was he ever a decent father? Did he cultivate the seeds of a better society? What exactly was Herbert's "point" in this world? What was he worth?

Maybe he was just having a crisis. After all, the man was nearing his 70s. He had lived through pretty much everything he needed to. A beautiful family, a beautiful house, a beautiful existence. So why all of sudden was nothing else important? Was he really unable to just sit back and enjoy the little happy life he was able to build for himself?

No, because what life *did* he build for himself?

As he walked back inside, he saw Carrie. Oh, sweet Carrie. She was just 5 years younger than him and they have always seemed to have some sort of magical and unique connection. Something that he never had with his ex-wife, even though he keeps remembering those times as "happy". Maybe it was because he felt fulfilled. He loved having a family and a house and just everything that the TV seemed to sell him as the exact type of life a man growing up in this country had to have. After all, how could the TV be *wrong* about *anything*?

"You're overthinking it again, Herbie", said Carrie, with that lovely voice of hers. Tender and like a warm hug in the middle of Siberia. It's comforting. "Did you buy the cookies on your way back here?"

As Carrie opens the box of chocolate chip cookies, her favorites forever, Herbert stays by himself in the dormant living room. As he turns the TV on, the questions keep being ever-present in his head, invading his conscience and prohibiting him from ever taking a second just to breathe in peace.

His life is just that.

A constant barrage of memories that generate self-doubt.

The feeling that you somehow failed and that there's nothing else you could do.

Fear.



Fear of existing.

Of realizing what the world really is.

Herbert has been her biggest blessing, and she has loved him like no one she has ever loved or ever will. He became the founding stone under which her modern and revitalized existence takes place.

So what happens if Herbert breaks?

Well.

She breaks.

And the fact is, Herbert had been acting paranoid for a few weeks now. Carrie had no idea, really, what caused this. Whether it was Herbert unwillingness to let go of the past, or his ability to find a negative to any situation, or if, simply, he was tired of living with her.

Whatever it was, this caused a butterfly effect that spiraled down in the worst of ways, where the whole reason Carrie was fearful of anything was because of Herbert. She couldn't stop thinking about the imminent consequences that he kept talking about.

And the worst part of it all, was that Carrie was aware of what was wrong in this situation. Why did she base her whole life on what Herbert was saying? Why was she so worried about what he was? That's the sort of question that made her realize just how fearful she was of existing. It wasn't Herbert's problem, of course, but she decided to give so much importance to stuff that ultimately could be considered insignificant that, at that point, kind of made her very fearful.

For how long would this last?

For how long would *her* Herbert be like this?

There was this constant fear of the world that was in her mind at all times now. War, famine, death, violence. Was there ever a day where she could just enjoy the tiny pleasures of life without worrying too much?

There he was, watching the TV, and she couldn't enjoy the peace and quietness of their life because of a stupid fear.

A fear of existence.

A fear.



Jobless.

There was something going through his head that prohibited him from finding peace. From finding stability. Was it some sort of reserved trauma that he was trying to avoid?

He found himself in the park. The breeze was nice and it hit his face with such calm and peace that it eased into his brain the idea that everything was, really, just fine. It was a chill day, just cold enough for him to comfortably wear a sweater, but warm enough where he didn't need to have some mittens on. This was his type of weather, a combination of the best of both worlds but with a colder side to it.

This life, this present he was living, was something he kind of missed. After all, the loneliness that comes with a loveless life is something that can't be had inside of a marriage. Again, there are a lot of privileges that come with being married, but even then, he was enjoying the solitude.

Did he miss her? Sure.

Could he live without her? Of course.

Seeing the kids play at the park kind of made his heart feel warmer. Tender. Like a memory that was never supposed to be his. He kept seeing a future that was more of an illusion at that point.

Stop.

Time to divert his thoughts.

When will he be able to find stability in the other aspects of his life? Unemployment was something serious yet he kept feeling like worrying about it until the very last possible minute. Even though taking care of books wasn't something he hated, he also felt like his degree could

help him get something better. Yet, where are these so-called “opportunities” he was promised he’d have? Who even was it that told him he could do whatever he wanted to do?

That’s the key, he stopped pretending he cared - he just wanted happiness at the cost of misery.

Oh, Clara.

His beautiful, dear Clara.

What even happened, in the first place? How was it even possible to be separated from the love of her life already? He was young, fairly handsome, and had an intelligence above the median, or at least, that’s what he believed. She was beautiful; like watching a waterfall in the middle of June. Her confidence and her sense of survival made her like a tulip in a sea of roses, something so unique yet so precious.

Fuck.

“Sir, can you pass me the ball”, he heard from the side. As he left his trance-like state, he saw a red and white soccer ball just next to his right foot. It was faintly dirty with some dirt and mud and kicking it back to the kids would probably mean that his linen shoes would get dirty.

But he did anyway.

“Thanks”, he heard from the kid on the other side of the park.

What a beautiful feeling.

Gratefulness.

Especially from such an innocent being who was taught what gratefulness was.

That’s a value that a kid is taught as they grow up. Are humans even conceived with the idea of gratefulness instilled in them? It depends more so on education, or at least he thought so. He was nostalgic for a memory that never existed - a day where he could teach a kid of his about gratefulness and the love one could have of existence, of the fact that we can interact with other beings and are lucky enough to live inside of the same sphere.

As he saw an older teenager walk through the park, he noticed he was reading *1984*. Did that make him feel comfortable, or even more sad? He wanted to approach the guy but felt that it

would be too awkward to form some sort of conversation based around a single thing he noticed. He didn't know him. He didn't know if he was a good, or a bad person.

Wait, why is he doubting that?

Oh, because he lost all confidence.

He can't even approach people anymore.

He wants love and all he can have at that point is the eternal damnation of knowing he lost it. What once was true is now just a lie.

A simple lie that made him believe he had a future to look for.



**But he didn't have none of that, now, did he?**

**Oliver found himself reading that book his dad once gave him. George Orwell's *1984*. Such a unique and fascinating piece of literature that made him understand the world in a different way.**

**Not the one he was promised.**

**Because if you had asked young Oliver how and where he saw himself in the future, he definitely never expected to still be in the same town, with the same people, with the same mediocre stagnation in which he was forced to survive.**

**It was not his fault, or was it?**

**Well, he was at fault for a few things. After all, the copy he was reading wasn't even the one his dad gave him. He had just bought it from the Barnes & Noble that was a few squares away from the park. What happened to his original copy? Simple, he lent it to a friend and that friend never returned it.**

**Oliver recalls that day. The day he realized he was never getting that copy back. He was furious, borderline irate. He had trusted someone with one of the most important things in his life and it was all a big, horrendously embarrassing mistake. His dad never knew this.**

**And Oliver didn't want him to know.**

**Would he be considered a failure because of it?**

**He loved his dad. He really did. It was very uncommon for males his age to have some sort of stable relationship with their parents but he thought he had a great one with both. His dad was the first person that made him believe that anything was possible in this world. Whether he was lying or not wasn't Oliver's problem.**

**Instead of daydreaming, which he often did, he decided to see the present for once.**

**He was lonely. Not in a sad, lonely way. But in a thoughtful, overwhelming loneliness which made him think of the stuff surrounding him.**

**This, in turn, made him reclusive. An introvert at heart. A very mysterious person whose heart wasn't open to anyone, but his direct family. And not even that. His sister, Emma, was like a stranger to him. A shadow of emotions for which he couldn't enter. He had no idea if she herself was interested in establishing some sort of relevant connection with him.**

**She was always surrounded with people and guys and she was such a popular girl.**

**But.**

**He saw some loneliness in her.**

**Maybe because he felt the same way.**

**Or because she was his sister.**

**Regardless of what it was, his last meaningful connection was with his parents. His only one, maybe. Those who kept reminding him how loved and accompanied he was. They made Oliver believe in a truth that he couldn't presently see.**

And then there was *1984*. A book he read for the first time at the ripe age of 12. He doesn't know why his dad would ever let him read something like that at such a young age, but it for sure was a revolutionary experience. He barely understood what some of the words meant, but it was some sort of revelation as to how society and the people that inhabit it work.

Did he feel fear? Sure.

Did he love it? Sure.

Did he fear loving? Probably.

But there was something fun about it. About the realization that people can write stories like that and create a world that could very well be true. He saw it as a way of distorting reality that only a few people could do. He wanted to understand that.

But it all came back to that one realization he had as a kid thanks to his dad.

The existence of God.

He was promised God existed. He was promised that he could someday meet it and ask him all of those questions that he was forever questioning about. But as he grew older, as he thought more about the stagnating process of existence, he realized it is only through death that he could finally meet him

But Oliver didn't want to die! He was too scared for that!

So instead, he resorted to praying.

But he never got any response!

That's no way to have a conversation with anyone.

He looked around. He realized he had been walking for a hot minute without direction. His whole life could've been summarized in just that moment. Where was he heading? Who was he looking for? He saw a

**young man just sitting in one of the park benches a few minutes ago, some kids playing with a dirty ball, and the wind hitting his face.**

**What if that wind was God?**

**He felt paranoid but also very stressed about the whole situation he's in.**

**Lost.**

**Guideless.**

**Where is God?**

**Is he even real?**

**Why do people pray?**

**Oliver, now a young man, didn't know whether to believe everything that people said to him.**

**A God, huh?**



A GOD YOU CAN PRAY TO.

TO FEEL CLEANER FROM YOUR SINS AND TO CONFESS.

"TELL ME YOUR SINS, DAUGHTER OF GOD"

MARIAH DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO SAY, BUT SHE FELT IT WAS NECESSARY. SHE BARELY PREPARED TO GO TO MASS THAT SUNDAY, BUT AFTER NOT EVEN KNOWING WHAT HAPPENED THE PREVIOUS NIGHT, THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT WAS URGING HER TO GO.

ONE CAN ALSO JUST IGNORE THE FACT THAT SHE WAS PROBABLY DOING BAD THINGS THE PREVIOUS NIGHT.

SHE KEPT THINKING ABOUT OLIVER.

"I SEE, GO ON."

LUST.

ENVY.

JEALOUSY.

AND AN INCREASING FEAR OF HELL.

"DO YOU THINK ANY OF THOSE THINGS ARE MAKING YOU FEEL GUILTY OF SOMETHING?"

MARIAH KNEW THE GUY BEHIND THE WOODEN SLATS. FATHER MORNINGSTAR. A CALM, QUIET MAN. LIGHT GRAY HAIR. A WRINKLED FACE. A HUMBLE SMILE. AND A PAIR OF GREEN, HUGE EYES, LIKE A CAT. MARIAH WAS SURE HE WAS PROBABLY QUITE THE HANDSOME MAN WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER, BUT NOWADAYS, IT ALMOST SEEMS LIKE FATHER MORNINGSTAR WORKED BETTER AS THE TYPE OF PERSON ONE CAN TRUST IN WHEN IT COMES TO OPENING UP ABOUT THE INCESSANT FEAR OF SINNING.

HE KNEW WHERE TO DIRECT THE CONVERSATION, HE KNEW WHAT EXACTLY EVERYONE NEEDED TO HEAR, AND HE KNEW HOW TO DELIVER THE WORDS FOR EVERY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL. ALMOST ANY CATHOLIC IN \*\*\*\*\* KNEW WHO THIS MAN WAS, AND BECAUSE OF THAT, IT SEEMED ALMOST QUINTESSENTIAL THAT HE WAS THE ONE TO TALK WITH MARIAH ABOUT HER VERY PARTICULAR SITUATION.

"GUILT ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CAN JUST GET RID OF. IT WILL FOLLOW YOU UNTIL YOU'VE MADE PEACE WITH THE THING YOU FEEL GUILTY OF. THE BEST THING TO DO IT IT'S BY CONFRONTING IT. KNOWING THAT IT IS SOMETHING THAT YOU'LL HAVE TO LIVE WITH FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE"

IS IT?

"AND THAT'S OKAY. YOU KNOW WHY? BECAUSE NOBODY'S PERFECT. NO ONE IS FLAWLESS. WE DO BAD THINGS. HUMANS ARE BAD. BUT IT IS THE WAY WE DEAL WITH THAT FACT THAT MAKES US GOOD. THAT MAKES US PERSEVERE. THAT MAKES US SURVIVE."

HUH?

"I KNOW I SHOULDN'T BE TALKING THIS MUCH ABOUT IT, BUT EVEN WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES ON OUR LOWEST MORAL POINT, WHAT DEFINES US AS HUMANS IS THE WAY WE DECIDE TO BOUNCE BACK FROM IT. MISTAKES SLIGHTLY DEFINE US. SOLUTIONS ARE ALL THERE IS."

MARIAH LEFT MASS THAT DAY FEELING SLIGHTLY RELIEVED. THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY FATHER MORNINGSTAR TALKED - IT WAS SORT OF QUIET, BUT SORT OF POWERFUL. THOSE WORDS HELD SUCH A CONTROL OVER HER BODY THAT SHE KIND OF TRUSTED THAT MAN WITH HER ENTIRE LIFE, EVEN IF THEY HAD NEVER TALKED DIRECTLY. THEY HID BEHIND MASKS.

MARIAH WAS ASHAMED, BUT THAT MASK WAS SAVING HER.

AS SHE WALKED THROUGH THE BUSY SUNDAY STREETS, SHE REALIZED THAT, MAYBE, BEING A DEVOUT CATHOLIC WAS FOR HER. EVEN AFTER HER SINS, SHE FELT PURE. HONEST. BUT SHE STILL HAD THAT PROBLEM. SHE STILL FELT GUILTY.

SHE STILL WANTED *HIM*.

MAYBE HE WAS RIGHT.

DID SHE NEED TO FACE HER GUILT?

FEAR, MOVING THROUGH HER VEINS.

SHE WASN'T THE DAUGHTER OF GOD. THERE'S NO WAY. NO DAUGHTER OF GOD COULD FEEL ANY ROMANTIC SORT OF FEELINGS FOR A PERSON THAT SHARES YOUR OWN BLOOD.

SHE WANTED TO FOLLOW GOD.

SO SHE'LL HAVE TO ADMIT TO SATAN WHAT SHE DID AND WHAT SHE WANTS TO DO.

MARIAH GRABBED HER HEADPHONES FROM HER BAG AND PLUGGED THEM INTO HER PHONE. SHE STARTED PLAYING THE FIRST SONG AND JUST ROLLED WITH IT. A CALM SONG. ALMOST SOOTHING.

ALMOST SOMETHING THAT A PERSON WITHOUT FEAR WOULD LISTEN TO.

BUT ALSO.



Someone that feels abandoned.

Homeless.

Because the head of Emma also matters.

The head of someone that stays behind at her house and does nothing also matters.

And listening to that song reminded her of Mariah, the one person that she felt never abandoned her.

But really, what does it mean to feel lonely?

To feel like all of your existence has been inside of a world you can only understand?

A knock on the door, a swift movement and the door is now open.

“Emma, darling, why did you not go to the service?” asks Josephine, as she quietly enters the room and finds a place to sit down among the mess that her room is.

How can she explain to her mom that she just doesn't feel that connection anymore? That she stopped caring about life and death quite a while ago? Religion was nothing but a scam to her, at that point. She's in a meditative state where all that matters is the present and the way she and others see her.

“Oh, I see. I should've assumed that when I saw Mariah this morning.”

Mariah still went, though. She still found the motivation to move and do stuff. Why is it that she just wants to crawl in her room and be there for the rest of eternity?

Listen to the music. What is it saying?

“Do you want me to leave?”

She would never want her mom to leave but an impulse inside of her heart was asking for loneliness. As if she had no control over her own body and decisions. It was all toss-up - a bet. A way to feel some reassurance that would never arrive.

“Okay, I’ll stay. Do you want to say something to me?”

Her mom’s hand was soft. Warm, even. Like grabbing a plushie that reminded her of her youth and the happiest moments of her life. She was her real and only home. She loved her, the same way one loved the idea of a dream that could be. But her mom was a dream that already existed. Such peace and tranquility.

Emma knew that she was a farce. An illusion that only she understood or tried to connect with. It was painful, but at least she knew the truth, and that was maybe all that mattered.

“You know that’s not true, Emma. You have a lot of friends that love you!”

She was unable to recall a single one. There was nothing that told her that anything was real. Maybe Mariah, but even then, it all felt forced. She was her cousin and that’s about it. She barely understood the semantics of her as a person to try and dig deeper.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. Maybe I am to blame a little bit for this. Maybe I have overprotected you too much,” Josephine started saying, with some pain in her voice. “But you know, one day, you really do have to let the doors of your heart open. This can’t be your life, right?”

Why not?

“Do you really want your life to be lonely and gloomy forever? Do you know how excruciating that could be for you?”

Emma didn’t care. She could barely try anything anymore.

“I don’t want that for you. I really don’t. You’re such a thoughtful and kind-hearted person that deserves the love of people that care - people that know who you are and love you like that.”

Maybe she just missed being young. Of course, at 16 years old, there is not much Emma has lived or experienced, but even at her young age, she was already feeling the consequences of teenage self-doubt, if there was ever something like that.

“There will be, darling. I promise there’s people out there that care.”

Are those people not gonna be like Gerald, though?

As if Gerald wasn’t already killing her heart enough. She expected his presence to be a sort of guide until it became a curse for which she can’t escape.

“Think about it, yeah? But trust me, it is vital that you understand that there’s people that care. I can’t be with you taking care forever. You will have to leave the house some day.”

Why? Who forced her to do that?



The health insurance.

That goddamn fucking health insurance.

The price for his health insurance was rising beyond what’s economically possible, or at least that was what Francis read in the newspaper, alerting of the current economy that was screwing his life.

There was just no way to afford it anymore.

And now he had to keep working that shitty job with those shitty people and there was nothing that could make him be out of the hole.

What a piece of shit existence.

“Francis, you coming tonight?”

Fuck no.

“Great, see you there then!”

Lying was his only way to feel something anymore, as his life was circling down back to the depths of evil. He didn’t care anymore. There was no salvation.

He looked at the words on his computer. Just a lot of mumbling around that made him enough money to survive up until that point. Not anymore, though. Everything was becoming way too expensive for him to realistically be able to survive.

He might not be dead, but he might as well be.

"Francis, were you able to send in the latest article already? We have to print it for tomorrow."

Fuck no.

"Perfect, let me tell Jonah. He really needs it. You're the best!"

He never saw himself as some sort of "best".

He never expected to actually earn some sort of respect at the shitty newspaper he worked at, actually.

Sadly, he became more important than what he ever meant to become, and that turned him into an angry person. He had a good life, but he knew the end was near.

So what's the point?

What's the point of trying anymore?

As he went back into the computer in search of a solution, or at least something that could guide him to the correct answers, he realized that the article that was reading was from two years ago.

Hold.

Is there a chance?

He tried to investigate further, trying to see if there was any sort of chance that maybe, just maybe, his health insurance wasn't going to screw him over. When he found the article he was looking for, it read something worse.

The price got even steeper in the last month.

He gave up. He knew what was going to happen but he wanted to at least know if there was any way to make it less painful.

But there was nothing good about it. At all.

There was nothing to be happy or satisfied or reassured about.

All he knew is that his life was about to enter the deepest of hells and all he could do was to be a spectator on the ride.

He wanted to scream.

Cry.

Punch something.

But he didn't.

Because there wasn't any real benefit to expressing anger like that.

He could get hurt.

And health insurance could get worse.

He took a deep breath.

What was the point of panicking for something that couldn't be controlled?  
What was the point of trying to look for solutions where the answers were so opaque?

It was pointless.

All of it.

Time to just close my eyes and think of a better tomorrow.



So he opens his eyes.

The light is already on green, so he moves forward.

What could've been but never was, such a miserable realization of the sad and pathetic existence one was forced to endure.

Maybe he would've loved his life a little bit more if Josephine was an active part of it, or if his kids would've looked more like her.

Instead of whatever the fuck he turned out to be.

Now it was time to go home and ponder on what he had. There was no changing it. He was too old for that shit already.

It's frustrating, really, to see your life fade away in front of you and only be able to reminisce of the moments that never existed, only to find some sort of value in all of it. That was Jerry's life. Just an opaque and sad existence that couldn't be saved.

Did he care?

Probably not anymore. All he wanted to do was go home and enjoy the mundanity of his existence once again.

He thinks of what his life could've been if Josephine was somehow part of it. Of how maybe there would've been some meaning to grab onto, or some motivation to go on.

He had no motivation to go on.

But he was too scared to finally go.

So he was stuck in the middle of this viciously endless loop where all he could do is pretend he loves his life.

So pathetic.

Listen to what the radio is saying. Whispers of a reality he decides to ignore.

"... and as the prices of avocado keep rising, it seems like the constant changes of prices in groceries signify a bigger problem with society as a whole. An emergency call that there might be something that we're doing wrong."

He was sure they were all doing something wrong. He even wanted to yell at the radio but it was useless. It was just a bunch of sound waves getting together to produce something. Whatever he did was just a way to put his frustration into something else.

Useless.

As he arrives home, he notices his son is already at home.

How much time has it passed ever since he enjoyed having a conversation with him? They probably never even talked properly ever since Delilah left them.

And he's not looking forward to having anything meaningful anymore.

He's just waiting at the doorstep of death until something finally happens.

Look at that, kid.



Sweat coming down his face.

Navigating through the pimples, the rough skin, and the endless amount of facial hair that was all starting to grow in a young man's face.

Headphones in place.

Keith was surviving his daily routine like any other day but he found peace and meaning in it.

Oh, to be a young dreamer who keeps believing there's a world out there where things are fair and just.

There is no such thing as justice. It's all a fake creation done so that people will actually believe they live in a world where nothing wrong can happen to them

But that's all a blatant lie, and what Keith's eyes started to look at was the definite proof of that.

Mariah.

A saint.

A perfect woman.

Oh, to be his lover.

Oh, to be the man that would always take care of her.

Just look at her, innocently walking. If Keith had to do a bet, it would probably be that she just came from Sunday mass.

Because that's who Mariah was.

The exemplary girl.

And he wanted all of it. He wanted to feel her love. He wanted to feel as if his life had a purpose because he was with this girl. Where is she going?

The store.

Right, Keith is also going to the store.

This is the moment.

He felt like such a loser that had no way of winning this uphill battle, but he was willing to die trying.

His dad had been waiting at his house, probably drunk by that point. It was true that Keith was trying to avoid any sort of contact with him, and because of that, he had the opportunity to be closer to Mariah. He jogs closer to her, wipes off the dirtiness in his face, and tries something.

"Wow, hey... you," said Mariah, with her sweet, angelical voice. What did she mean by "you". He was Keith! "What are you doing out here so late," asked the girl.

Keith had completely forgotten it was already around 7 PM. It wasn't that late, really, but Mariah was probably just trying to have a conversation with him.

"Me? Well, I went to Sunday mass earlier today, but I decided to take a walk for a little bit."

Was it really happening? Was Keith actually managing to have a conversation that didn't feel forced with this girl?

He tried to act it cool. He didn't want to scare her away, or seem like some sort of loser, even though he was aware he was just putting on a mask for the moment.

"Oh, I see. Well, I'm also going to the store!"

No invitation to go with her.

Keith thought that was fine. They barely knew each other. There was no way she felt comfortable talking with someone she maybe saw as a stranger. He wanted to keep insisting though, because he saw this as a golden opportunity. One of those that barely shows up anymore.

"Well, I don't know. I'm kind of waiting for a friend to show up, so I'm just stalling right now."

Perfect, that means they could have a conversation for a bit. Maybe even a meaningful one where emotions and sentiments are revealed and where they somehow connect through the shared pain.

"Uhhmm, not really, no. I'm kind of busy right now as well, but I guess you can... hang around? I just can't talk that much right now."

Keith thought that was a lie. Did he mind? Kind of. Mariah is giving him all sorts of signs and he's just refusing to see them. His blindness is consuming his mind but his obsession with her is stronger.

He sees her.

She is now naked through his eyes.

He gets closer.

He touches her.

He feels ecstasy.

Oh, to be the lover of a saint.

To be the person that she confides her intimacy to.

Keith wanted to be a God.

And she wanted to fuck a saint.

"Are you okay?"

Keith walked away, thinking of the rejection. He probably felt a little sad about it, but the fact that he was able to talk with Mariah at all kind of made up for it.

He was pathetic, yet he was unaware of how pathetic he was.

He was just there.



*Waiting.*

*Until the silence finally cracks and the door is open.*

*That's Mariah Horford.*

*Primrose remembered that girl from her days at school. She was a freshman when she was a junior. She always seemed to be among the popular girls, right next to that other girl that was Ms.*

*Mayer's daughter. Primrose was never the sort of girl to rank high on the popularity ranking, but she had a comfortable group of friends where she could rely on.*

*But she always had that fear of failure.*

*Of being insufficient for something.*

*Was that the reason she was working a mediocre job at a convenience store?*

*She became an observer rather than a person that took action, and Primrose hated that. She hated that her life had turned like that. But even when some sort of meaningful thought tried to cross her head, she was blocked by some sort of thing that was going on at the store.*

*She couldn't do both things.*

*"Hello, where can I find the orange juice? I can't seem to find it," asked that girl Mariah.*

*What is this feeling that Primrose was succumbing to?*

*She was trying to hide the fact that she was shaking. Like an uncontrollable desire to simply scream at the world and give up on everything.*

*She wasn't the biggest fan of attending customers that she perceived were superior to her in one way or another. Was this because she felt a bigger responsibility to fulfill their needs?*

*Did Mariah fit that description?*

*She was nervous. That was the word she was looking for.*

*"Oh, thanks!"*

*Did she...*

*... just say thanks?*

*Reassurance.*

*This random girl just gave Primrose the most innocent and sincere smile anyone has ever given to her in a while. It's almost as if her reason to exist kept going strong.*

*Oh, she was nervous, alright, but she was sure that this is just the correct way people function.*

*They're kind.*

*They're grateful.*

*They're aware of the fragility of their lives.*

*Primrose couldn't believe it. Something so simple turned out to be one of the biggest blessings she could ever ask for. A reason to exist and a reason to be grateful.*

*Did her job have a meaning? Was seeing that smile just all he needed?*

*"Hey, I'm done," said Mariah, as she was waiting on the counter to be attended.*

*Primrose left her trance and saw a bottle of orange juice and a packet of cookies. Weird combination. The flavor of both could potentially crash and cancel the effect of the other. What is this girl thinking?*

*It didn't matter.*

*She was grateful.*

*That's all that mattered.*

*"Thank you, have a good night," said Mariah, as she left the store and never looked back.*

*And it is over.*

*Back to believing that people are ungrateful.*

*As much as Primrose thought she was some sort of cornerstone for society, she couldn't help to think how frustrating it was.*

*What felt like a unique interaction, Primrose thought, is what every interaction should be.*

*Back to just being a mediocre store clerk.*

*I guess.*



*This is it.*

*Channel 3, the killing of a Chinese bookie.*

*Channel 5, the assault of two women on 8th street.*

*Channel 7, a robbery down on Liberty Road.*

Channel 13, the prices of fruits going up.

Channel 15, another robbery on 2nd street and Malparaiso Street.

Channel 18, a kid's show.

Channel 20, a car full of drugs that was found trying to cross the Canadian border.

Channel 23, massive layoffs on several textile factories.

Just nothing good to see.

Nothing to be proud of what was constructed or believed to be a good future.

What was even the point?

Those seeds won't grow, the crime rates won't go down, the economy won't become better overnight.

Herbert was trying so, so hard to understand what the fuck was the point of anything anymore.

Such a gloomy existence and he felt partially guilty about it. After all, this is the world that his generation and he constructed and built. This is the reality he had forced his relatives to live.

He maybe didn't have any direct contributions into it, but whatever. He was old.

He was going to die.

And he was going to die a regretful and guilty man.

He looked outside the window for a bit and saw the seeds he had planted just recently. They were young and probably full of expectancy but he was never going to be able to see the fruits of his efforts.

Well, technically he was.

Just look at the TV.

Any sort of good influence he might've had in this world was all a complete and utter farce.

He felt like calling Josephine, but he was going through this elongated process of guilt that would prevent him from telling her anything meaningful.

She probably just saw him as a nuisance at that point.

He missed being important. He missed having an effect on something other than his mundane and boring life.

But those days were over.

All he could hope for was to die before any of his bad consequences became more persistent in life.

He sat there watching the TV.

Waiting.

Waiting

Waiting.



Waiting.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Waiting for everything to fade away.

For the world to stop being like this.

"Carrie, could you come for a second?," asked Herbert, who was sitting down and watching the TV, as news about a robbery on Liberty Road was breaking down. Carrie left the kitchen and sat next to her lover.

"You see the street where all of this is happening?," Herbert asked. "Well, that's where I got my first job. Just down the road at some donut shop. I was 17 and I was so full of hope. The street being named Liberty is just the biggest coincidence, don't you think?"

Carrie didn't know where Herbert was trying to go with all of this talk about jobs and whatnot. All she was seeing was the present where a robbery was occurring there.

"Y'know, I was a believer of it. Of liberty. Yeah. I thought that getting a job and earning your first paycheck and then spending it on McDonald's or some shit. I thought that's all it meant. All that's important"

Carrie knew that wasn't real.

"But that's all a lie, darling. That's just a temporary pleasure, before you're faced with what true liberty means. Nothing"

Carrie was often worried about what Herbert said, because it often felt like words from a dying man. She felt that Herbert was ready to go at any point and that deeply scared her. It made her feel weak, small, useless. Like her only purpose was to be there when Herbert decided it was time to go.

"I got fired from that job after two years. Two years I dedicated my life to that donut shop, all for nothing. Experience? Bwah. It's pointless. No one gave a shit I worked there for two years. It's as if I was just stalling before I was forced to start a new life. Those years meant nothing. They're not even part of my resume anymore. I basically just threw them away in what I thought was a vision of liberty."

"But it was all empty, darling. There is no liberty."

Carrie understands.

It's all a lie.

Being scared it's good, because there was never anything to feel safe about.

"I miss being young. I miss having this illusion of what could be but never was. I miss thinking my life would shape up differently. I miss thinking there was some hope for a young, stupid kid like me."

"But the truth is, darling..."

"... there is no hope for anyone."

Carrie hugs Herbert.

"Thanks for being the only thing that keeps me going," says Herbert, while Carrie feels his mouth form a smile. "Don't be scared. It will all be over soon."

Yes it will, Carrie thinks, as she's shaking from fear.

Yes it will.



What a nice ring.

Diiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing.

As he enters the convenience store, the first thing he notices is the girl on the counter. He has the human decency to greet her, and her voice raises even more questions to him.

"Good evening!"

Where has he heard this voice before?

Those eyes...

Innocence...

As he walks through one of the four alleys that the store has to offer, he sees the little section dedicated to chips. Any bag works but he has a special preference for those rippled ones that taste like the original chip. Salted. He loved the feeling of his fingers clashing with the little particles of salt and the little crumbs of chips that would attach themselves to the tips of his fingers. Everything he touched became so greasy and so nasty. He loved it.

He felt surrounded, at the same time.

He started being cautious of where his eyes paid attention.

A bag of hot cheetos.

Two cans of tuna.

A donut packet.

Everything had its own story and yes, he was probably overthinking it, but at the same time, he felt the inclination to see everything that felt close to him.

What was this feeling?

Some sort of isolation.

Loneliness.

Fear.

But fear of what?

Why was he seeing stuff that wasn't there?

As he grabs the bag, he reaches for the refrigerators on the back. He spots it almost instantaneously. *Sprite*. It might be a little bit too late to eat all of that, but he didn't care. He wanted to not care for just one night.

Following that logic, he closed his eyes and opened the refrigerators once again. He put his arm inside of it and felt the coldness of the closed space invade his arm. It began to shiver. Like a nervous sensation.

For some reason, he slowly put more parts of his body inside of the fridge. Was he a kid? He for sure wanted to be one once again.

It was cold.

But it reminded him of when he used to do that years ago.

As an innocent kid.

Who had no idea how tough life would become.

So lonely.

So empty.

So devoid of any sort of meaning at times.

He realized just how stupid he looked as a grown adult inside of the refrigerator.

He left.

As he reached the counter, he asked for cigarettes. Any would work, but he still asked for Camel. The girl grabbed a box and scanned it.

“You know, my dad used to get Camel. I’ve never had any, are they any good?”

What a fascinating question. What makes Camel good? How could he respond eloquently to something he didn’t even know the answer to?

Just like life.

There is no real response to it.

Just action.

“Ah, I see.”

He pauses.

He remembers that voice.

Those eyes.

It’s her.

It’s Primrose Fuller.

He remembered her for that one first day of classes. He was a senior, she was a freshman at high school who had just moved to the city. She was this smaller girl who seemed so lost and directionless that he felt empathy. He saw parts of him in her. In her desperation and loneliness. In her need to find a place where she could stay.

She had those cute little peckers that made her look younger. A pair of round glasses and a band aid on her nose. She had brownish hair that stopped right below her shoulders and a face that belonged to somewhere else. She was clearly not used to the city of \*\*\*\*\* and whatever he could do to help her, he felt he had to.

He wasn't the most accomplished senior, either. He had like two or three friends and they all stopped talking with him once high school finished. There were barely any good memories of that senior year where he believed his life would turn somewhere different, but alas, one of the few good memories he had was that first day, where he started to believe he could do something positive for the world.

As he approached her, he recalls asking her whether she needed help or was okay. She took this as an invitation and casually expressed her fears to him. He guided her throughout that entire day, which meant he had to rush between classrooms just to guide her somewhere. This, in turn, created an image for himself of a tardy person, which is something that his senior year professors never stopped reminding him: the fact that he was late to virtually every class on the first day of classes.

He didn't care though.

Because he had helped someone.

He had helped Primrose Fuller.

Why did he do it?

He still doesn't know.

But he would probably do it again if he had the opportunity.

He sparsely talked with her throughout the year. It wasn't like they really made a friendship out of that one day. They would occasionally engage in small talk or greet each other though.

He remembers, however, seeing his name being yelled at graduation and no one but one person clapping and yelling.

And that wasn't his parents.

That wasn't his sister.

That wasn't any of his friends.

It was Primrose Fuller.

Why did this girl care at all?

Whatever the reasoning was.

It made him happy that day.

“Your total will be \$11.96. Cash or card?”

As he puts the card in, he wonders if she remembered him at all. She looked way too different. She was a working adult already. No more glasses, slightly darker hair, and that same band aid still at her nose. She still looked very young, but she probably had some sort of idea of where her life would be now. He felt some sort of proudness but, at the same time, he just wished he seemed as controlled as her.

“Can you try and put it on again? I don't think the card went through.”

Why is he avoiding the unavoidable?

Why is he refusing to let her know that it is him, the guy that helped her occasionally in high school?

She probably doesn't remember.

She probably doesn't care.

He probably doesn't care.

“There we go.”

He sighs. He might've gotten older, but he's still the cowardly kid he once was and wished he never was. He was able to show for years an image of who he wanted to be, but never was.

He was still stuck in a mediocre circle of life.

“Thank you, and have a good night!”

As he walks down the road, he realizes more and more how pathetic he is.

He feels regret.

Why not say ANYTHING?

She probably did remember him.

She clapped for him.

Just her.

You just don't forget the people you clap for.

As repentment fills his body, the thoughts of a more fruitful life he had as a younger kid come back. The opportunity to dream.

He goes back.

He can try.

He will try.

As he reaches to the glass door, he sees there's someone else on the counter.

He goes in anyways.

He asks.

“She left just a minute ago. You missed her just for a bit.”

Fuck.

As he leaves for the night, he walks down the dark street. It is particularly lonely, but it was bound to happen. It's kind of late at night and a lot of families or people in general aren't going to be out by that time. He still doesn't understand what he's doing just walking around the neighborhood. It's stupid. Everything is.

He finds an alleyway and sits down. Even inside of the loneliness, he was able to find a more comfortable loneliness.

How unexpected life can be.

One day you're missing the good old days.

Then you have a piece of those good old days coming back to you.

Only to realize you were lying to yourself. There were never any good old days.

Life is like a roller coaster of emotions where you're often up and down and never really control the speed of it.

For him, it was like a kiddies roller coaster.

Never exciting.

Never risky.

Just a straight line with some unexpected bumps that make his experience more sad.

As he pulls out his phone, he has another flash of the past as he sees Mr. Mayer in his contacts. She was her professor for his favorite English class of all time, during Junior year. He remembers vividly how she showed she cared for everyone, including the people that seemed to be obligated to be partaking in her class. The most pure and honest smile was hers, and she always reminded him of what mattered in life.

The little things.

The little, unexpected things.

She was special.

He wondered if he should call her out of nowhere and ask her about life.

If she wanted to have a cup of coffee or something.

Just for him to feel the young emotion of existing once again.

He decides not to call her.

Sits down.

And cries.



Real tears of joy.

As he sees the ceiling, he starts crying.

He wonders why now, all of a sudden, are the tears finally coming down his face.

He felt like such an emotionless person for the longest time and now, there he was, showing his weakness to his room. What is it?

“Oliver, can you go get some milk? Your dad wants some,” says Josephine, as she enters the room without even knocking on the door. Oliver quickly noticed her face was a little red. Was she crying? “Oh, darling, I’m sorry. Is everything okay?”

Oliver reassures her mother that there’s nothing to worry about. Not even him can describe the sheer amount of emotions and feelings he accumulated out of nowhere and for no apparent reason. He wishes to understand but simply can’t. The human body is like the universe, because they are some sort of unexplainable miracles.

“You sure? We can talk, if you need to.”

He would love to talk. But there’s nothing to talk about. Nothing to express.

Just gratitude.

“For what?”

The gratitude that he was born because of her.

He loved her mom, even if it sometimes didn't seem like it.

"I love you very dearly, Oliver. We can talk a little bit more when you're back, okay?"

As Oliver steps down his bed and walks outside to the store, he begins wondering, once again, how did everything turn out to be this way.

He's been at it all day long. He doesn't understand why is it, that that exact day he began having these doubts about everything. It was irritating him, but it was also feeding his thirst for knowledge. For wisdom. For courage.

He looks at the stars. There's such a powerful indication of himself through them. Because he begins to wonder, whether those stars were the same ones that his dad told him he could reach one day.

Would they remember him?

Are they forever gone?

Is everything he once thought real forever gone?

He never forgot those words. Never. He took them as some sort of mantra to exercise and to believe in absolutely everything. It was his dream for everything to be real.

The possibility of flying.

Immortality.

God.

Oh, dear God, did he wish his prayers were aimed at someone.

What if he had seen life, up until that point, from the wrong angle.

Yeah.

What if the messenger he was looking for, the reason to believe in something...

... was just him?

Yeah.

That's it.

Maybe he was some sort of prophet and that's why his life has been filled with doubts. It makes all the sense in the world. For everything to be complicated for those that question their place in existence the most.

Yeah.

Oliver couldn't believe it. It's almost as if he had opened a door for the first time in his life. Like when fire was discovered, or when people discovered the Earth was round.

It was a miraculous realization of existence.

He kept walking with a smile on his face. His life was solved.

Everything was going to be alright.

Because he had unlocked the door to his real potential.

Then, he heard a voice. He was nearing the store, but the voice kept calling for him. Louder, and louder, and louder. It seemed urgent.

He turned around.

"Hey, Oliver!"



"HEY, MARIAH. HOW ARE YOU-"

HER BODY, SLAMMING WITH OLIVER'S AS THEY BOTH FALL DOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SIDEWALK. OH, HOW CONVENIENT. OH, HOW SPECIAL. SHE MANAGED TO FIND HIM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. JUST HOW MUCH BETTER CAN LIFE GET?

THE ANSWER WAS MUCH, MUCH BETTER, BUT MARIAH DIDN'T KNOW THAT.

"NO, I'M SORRY. I THINK I SHOULDN'T HAVE AS WEAK BONES AS I HAVE," OLIVER SAYS, LAUGHING IT OFF. MARIAH'S FACE WAS RED JUST BY LOOKING AT HIM LAUGHING AT IT. WAS SHE FEELING SHAME? AWKWARDNESS? LOVE?

WHATEVER IT WAS, SHE WAS PLAYING A DANGEROUS GAME.

A VERY, VERY DANGEROUS GAME.

"I WAS SENT TO THE STORE. IT'S LATE, BUT, YEAH, MY MOM, I GUESS"

MARIAH COULD SENSE OLIVER WAS NERVOUS AS WELL. WAS IT BECAUSE OF HER? WAS IT BECAUSE OF SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT? WAS SHE OVERTHINKING THE WHOLE SITUATION OUT OF PROPORTION?

VERY, EXTREMELY LIKELY.

TO ALL OF THOSE QUESTIONS.

OH, DEAR GOD, WAS SHE IN DIRE NEED OF FORGIVENESS.

OH, DEAR SATAN, DID SHE NEED TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH HIM.

"SURE, YOU CAN COME"

MARIAH'S HEART STARTED POUNDING FASTER. THEY WERE NOW WALKING TO THE STORE WHICH WAS TWO MINUTES AWAY. THERE WAS BARELY ANY TIME FOR A REAL AND HONEST CONVERSATION, BUT JUST BEING WITH HIM WAS ENOUGH FOR MARIAH.

SHE WANTED TO HOLD HIS HAND.

HIS FACE.

HIS LIPS.

HIS CHEST.

OH, HOW LASCIVIOUS WAS HER MIND ACTING.

BUT HER MIND CONNECTED TO HER HEART.

AND THE HEART DOESN'T LIE, EVEN THOUGH MARIAH DESPERATELY NEEDED FOR THE HEART TO REALIZE THE MISTAKES SHE WAS ABOUT TO COMMIT BEFORE THEY EVEN HAPPENED.

SHE STARTED TO FALL DEEPER ON THE HOLE SHE THOUGHT SHE WAS CLIMBING OUT.

SHE STARTED TO SEE OLIVER AS MORE THAN A PERSON, BUT AN IDEA. A GOAL SHE WANTED TO REACH. A DREAM SHE NEEDED TO HAVE FULFILLED.

SHE WANTED TO FUCK HIM.

WAS IT WRONG TO SAY IT? DEFINITELY.

DID SHE FEEL GUILT? ABSOLUTELY.

WOULD SHE REGRET IT? MOST LIKELY.

BUT WOULD SHE ENJOY IT?

YES.

AS THEY ENTERED THE CONVENIENCE STORE, SHE STAYED BY OLIVER'S SIDE.

"WELCOME"



IT WAS SO FORCED BUT FOR SOME REASON, MARIAH TOOK IT PERSONALLY. LIKE AN ATTACK ON HER PERSONA. EVEN HER EYES WIDENED AFTER LISTENING TO IT, LIKE THEY WERE DIRECTING THEIR GOOD TIME TO HER.

SHE DEVELOPED AN OBSESSION FROM WHICH SHE COULDN'T ESCAPE. SHE WAS LOST.

"WELL, LOOK, WHATEVER IT IS, SOMEONE'S EVENING IS ALWAYS BOUND TO HAVE SOMETHING SPECIAL IN STORE," THE BITCH SAID.

"WE'LL SEE, WE'LL SEE."

"IT'S GONNA BE 13 DOLLARS WITH 77 CENTS."

AS OLIVER WAS PULLING MONEY FROM HIS RIGHT BAG, MARIAH HAD HER EYES LOCKED IN ON HIS ASS. IT WAS MOVING SLIGHTLY AS HE SEARCHED THROUGH THE DEEP TRENCHES OF HIS BAG. HER LUSTFUL HEAD WAS THINKING OF JUST HOW THE MIDDLE OF HIS ASS CHEEKS MUST FEEL LIKE HEAVEN.

OR, EXCLUSIVELY FOR HER, LIKE HELL.

THERE WAS NO WAY FOR HER TO FEEL SAFE WITH THESE THOUGHTS. EVERYONE HAD THIS IDEA OF EHR BEING THIS RELIGIOUS, RESPECTFUL, AND LOVELY LITTLE LADY WHO ONLY TRANSMITTED POSITIVITY IN THE LIFE OF EVERYONE.

SHE WAS POPULAR FOR A REASON.

SHE HAD GUYS FALLING FOR HER FOR A REASON.

SHE WAS \*\*\*\*\*'S QUEEN FOR A REASON.

AND THE WORST PART ABOUT IT IS THAT, IF SHE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY, SHE WOULD CHANGE ALL OF THAT FOR JUST ONE NIGHT OF PASSION WITH OLIVER.

HIS COUSIN.

NAUGHTY.

EVIL.

PROHIBITED.

SINFUL.

SHE COULD TASTE THE FLAMES OF HELL FROM THE TIP OF HER TONGUE BUT SHE DIDN'T CARE ANYMORE.

AS THEY LEFT THE STORE, IT SEEMED LIKE THEY WERE BOUND TO PART WAYS.

"WELL, DO YOU PLAN ON SOMETHING TON-"

SHE JUST DID IT.

WHEN THEIR LIPS CLASHED FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, THERE WAS A SENSE OF FALSE SAFETY THAT PRODUCED THE FASTEST BEATINGS HER HEART HAD EVER EXPERIENCED. IT WAS PURE AND HONEST. ALL SHE HAD BEEN KEEPING A SECRET, FINALLY EXPOSED FOR THE WHOLE WORLD TO LEARN IT. SHE CLOSED HER EYES BUT FOR A SLIGHT SECOND, OPENED THEM. OLIVER HAD HIS EYES CLOSED. HER BLONDE HAIR AND HIS DARK BROWN HAIR GOT TANGLED WITH EACH OTHER, LIKE SOULS THAT WERE MEANT TO BE.

HIS LIPS WERE SOFT. PROBABLY VIRGIN.

SHE KNEW HERS WERE.

SHE HAD KEPT THEM THIS WAY FOR A SPECIAL MOMENT.

WAS THIS IT?

WHAT LASTED A SECOND FELT LIKE AN ETERNITY.

AN ETERNITY SHE NEVER WANTED TO ESCAPE.

YET, SHE WAS FORCED TO.

"MARIAH!" SCREAMED OLIVER, AS HE SEPARATED HIMSELF FROM HER. "WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

HOW DOES SHE EVEN RESPOND TO A QUESTION LIKE THAT? ALL SHE DID WAS FEEL SOMETHING. WAS IT NOT RECIPROCAL?

SHE WAS MUTE.

OLIVER RAN.

AND MARIAH REALIZED SHE HAD JUST KISSED HER COUSIN ON THE LIPS.

SHE RAN TO THE OTHER SIDE, BUT BEFORE EVEN A SINGLE TEAR COULD NAVIGATE THROUGH HER FACE.

SHE SAW EMMA.



A way for her to clear her mind.

Loneliness in the street.

Dreaming with her eyes open.

Until the harsh reality of people hits her.

"Emma..."

She just decides to walk away.

No, she won't bother about it.

To think that she just witnessed the moment where her loneliness just intensifies.

"Emma, it's not what it looks like!"

Nothing is what it looks like, to be honest. Her whole appearance was all a farce. No one knew who she was or what he thought or what she felt and it goes back to the fact that she never trusted anyone enough to open like that.

Not even her cousin Mariah.

After all, how could she? She just saw her kissing his brother. What exactly is real and what is just a farce? That's the question she had been doing to herself as years went through. There will never be a definitive answer.

What must Oliver be thinking, anyways?



He left and refused to look back. He gave her no time to think of a second move. He didn't even think of one himself.

All his life was a lie.

All he ever thought was worthless.

Him being a messenger of God is utter stupidity.

God had abandoned him. He was sure of that

He was no prophet. He was pathetic.

Why did she do that? Why did he accept it even for just a second? Why was that happening to him? How does he even begin to understand what had just happened?

It's pointless.

All of it was a lie he told himself to not accept how mediocre his life actually was.

He started to think about his sister, for some reason. What would she think of that?

He was an embarrassment.

Where was God?



Where was God?

She started to understand Oliver now and his constant ramblings about existence. Every moment of silence. Every moment of fear. Every moment where he lacked the necessary understanding of what life needed out of him.

Somehow, it is through pain that she could understand her brother.

Pain.

Pain.

Why is there a different voice in her head?

The voice of conscience.

Then what voice is this?

That of emotions.

So every time she had thought that she was thinking of every situation critically, the truth was that it was all of her emotions driving her.

Correct.

There's no such thing as an objective person.

Or one without emotions.

Emma's head is a mess and it's the fault of this voice?

No.

We all failed.

We all failed to find the courage to confront her demons or to actually guide her through the harshness of existing.

Was she abandoned?

Yes.

By you and me and everyone else.

Emma is alone.

She is walking through the sidewalk. She's ignoring the yelling coming from behind her. She doesn't care. Is that also our fault?

No.

The world is just a cruel place.

What can we do?

Guide her emotions.

And you hide her sense of reason.

How can one have a voice of reason in such a mad, mad, mad, mad world.

That is hard.

Emma opened her eyes. She had been walking unconsciously for the last few minutes. She wasn't even aware of the path she was taking. She was so shocked after everything and just wanted a minute of silence, yet it seemed like a jungle around her - full of wild animals all fighting to survive.

She was losing.

She went back to the park in front of where everything happened. It was alone. She sat down on the grass and curled up.

And began to cry.



This is the only feeling that made sense in his heart.

Crying to cope with the inevitable.

But he was forced to stop after hearing the door on the lower floor open. Only one person that could be.

“Darling, I’m home. Are you here already?” yelled Josephine. Her voice seemed closer and closer to the end. That day, she had gone to this yoga group she was a part of that only met up on Sundays.

It pained Francis to listen to her. It was relatively early, since he asked to go back home before he was supposed to clock out. Because of that, he was able to muster up some ideas in his head before his wife arrived, but for some reason, the moment he heard her voice, he forgot absolutely everything.

Such a waste of time.

As the door in front of him started creaking, Francis realized what this could be.

“Hey! You’re early!”

Francis was, indeed, early. So unnecessarily early, really, since he had forgotten everything he was preparing for. Just seeing Josephine there, smiling and with her hopes up, it seemed like every feeling in the world stopped mattering. He was just happy to have her.

Josephine laid right next to him in the bed and gave him a kiss on the cheek. So precious and necessary.

“I’m feeling alright, you know. It could always be better.”

He was happy she was happy. Why did she decide to never receive treatment? He knew the reason, of course, but he never understood why. He

wanted to always find a way but she refused. He never took it personally but it pained him the way things went. It was painful.

"Well, you know, the doctors did say any day is the day. I said goodbye to the group. They didn't get it, obviously, but I guess all that matters is that I feel happy with what I said."

He didn't care about what he would have to deal with, or the consequences of such a decision.

All he cared about was to spend time with Josephine.

Any day now.

"What are you watching?"

What was he even watching? He was too lost and immersed in his own thoughts that he stopped caring about everything around him.

Her voice brought him back to reality though.

"Oh, I see. Do you mind if I change it to like the news, or something?"

Josephine grabbed the controller and put the news. However, Francis was still lost watching her face, as she watched attentively. He wanted her attention and eventually got it when she turned around to see him.

"The world became such a cruel place, Francis. I don't know when this happened."

It was, indeed, a cruel world, from where he was going to be forced to survive and find a purpose, and Josephine would walk away.

"It doesn't even hurt anymore, you know. It will be peaceful."

How peaceful can death be?

How painless could it be?

It got to the point where he started to think that maybe, just maybe, she was doing this as a final joke. After years of laughs, of emotions, of having fun, maybe this was her soft prank on him. To make him suffer one last time.

He wanted to laugh and smile but couldn't.

It was too much.

"Did you eat already?"

And she didn't even care. Life was just the same to her.

"I can send Oliver to the store and get us some snacks. He often goes to walk outside anyways. He went this morning and seemed lost. But you know Oliver."

He did know his own son. Or maybe he didn't. Maybe he didn't know anyone anymore. He was too confused.

Oliver, however, was someone he loved very dearly. He had lost a lot of contact with both him and Emma as the years went by and they grew up. He found it difficult to interact with teenagers that are more concerned with their own world than the world of other people.

He knew this stage would eventually be over and they'd somehow reconnect. The thing that bothered him was that this was not the same for Josephine, who wouldn't be able to see them fulfill their dreams.

What were their dreams, anyways?

"Okay, I will. Do you feel alright, though? You seem bothered by something."

Francis was obviously bothered, but he wasn't bothered by Josephine. He hated existing at that moment. He hated the perception that life was just about to feel extremely worthless.

Did she really not care?

"Francis, I-"

"I don't know if I want to talk about it."

Francis wanted to. He didn't want to feel like he was annoying her or something like that, but he needed to talk with her. She was his wife - they needed this communication.

"Because... God, Francis. You know this is hard to talk about."

He was sure it was. But it had gotten to the point where he believed it was a now or never type of situation. Because of that, he needed to really talk with Josephine.

He was at a roadblock, though.

"I don't know. I- I am afraid, of course, but, why does it matter?"

Because she was his wife.

Because she was the person he had chosen to spend the rest of his days with.

Because she was the love of his life.

That's why it mattered.

"I'm sorry if I haven't been the most communicative during this whole process. There's no way I can ask for forgiveness this close to the end. But, I am begging. I just get afraid every time I talk about this.

"It reminds me of how small I am compared to the rest."

"I will die and people will forget."

"I will die and Oliver and Emma will just grow without a mother."

"I will die and life will go on."

"I don't want to die, but I will."

"And nothing can stop that."

As the first tear started to go down Josephine's face, Francis felt the guilt invading over his body. Had he pressured her this much? Had he forced her to express the feelings she had been avoiding all this time.

He felt miserable.

He had been miserable.

He was miserable.

And he was going to be miserable.

Francis reached over Josephine's head and put her on his chest. This made her bawl her eyes out and continued to cry louder. She made sure that their children would not listen to her.

Even in her last moments she wanted to look perfect.

"I just don't want to leave."

"I'm afraid."

"And it hurts."

"And waiting just makes it all worse."

And thus, for the first time ever since they had been together, Francis stopped caring. He started to weep alongside her loved one.

Because for a minuscule second, he realized it didn't matter anymore. He wanted Josephine to see the rawest version of himself.

There was nothing to hide anymore, and even if there had been anything, it didn't matter anymore.

He decided to let go and accept.

It was painful.

But necessary.

And it's hard.

But necessary.

To accept that death is inevitable. All they can do...

... is embrace.

As they hug inside of their loneliness, Francis has never felt this much love. He hopes that Josephine thought the same. It was just pure, unadulterated passion. The sort of romance that one just experiences when they know that's all they have left in life.

Josephine also felt like that but Francis never knew it.

They loved and that's all they needed.



He didn't love anyone and he probably needed to.

He hit bottom.

He was drunk.

Way too drunk.

He had already stopped to understand his surroundings. He lost count of how many drinks he had. He was just existing.

And in the middle of his existence, in the middle of his drunkenness, in the middle of his lost reality, he found his inner thoughts.

Deep down in his heart, the truth laid down.

Oh, how horrible it is to feel this way.

Oh, how horrible it is that life has been.

Last time he was conscious of his acts, he was sitting down, just watching the TV, and was drinking from a bottle that seemed endless.

Now, he didn't know what his body was making him do, or why.

He knew he was in such a bad state but it seemed like he refused to accept his sins. He refused to accept that most of the misery that he has gone through it's his own fault.

Jerry was lonely. He was trying to find any reason or purpose to keep moving forward but there was none. And he had also accepted that he was such a coward for not being able to end it all. He was okay with just his stagnated existence, breathing below him and waiting for the moment to finish.

It's like he was stuck in a box without a key. The key had been buried years ago - the worms ate it. He was trapped there for the rest of his life, and the only thing that could make the box open for just a few minutes was alcohol.

That's just how bad he felt. Like nothing was worth it any more.

He stopped understanding. He saw his body just fall down as he picked something.

“Why are you doing this to yourself?”

He heard a voice just saying those words. He had no idea where the voice came from or what was his purpose but it freaked him out. Who was talking with him? Who was just with him?

He hated this feeling.

He hated to be such a fearful person.

Because his obsession all happened because of the fear of existing that he had always had.

He never dared to make a move. He never dared to move forward. He never dared to go outside of the box.

And he was now trapped forever.

He felt frustrated. Mediocre. Sad.

He started hitting something. He had no idea what it was. But it felt nice.

He heard screams of pain.

Crying.

Anguish.

What was this feeling of power?

For once in his life, it made him feel like he had control of something. He liked it.

He kept hitting whatever it was until his body got tired of it. Until he just fell down on his knees and stopped reacting.

It was nice while it lasted. Back to existing.

Back to being the mediocre asshole he was.

He closes his eyes as he feels his body just falling into an abyss with no end.

Instead of embracing a person, he embraces loneliness and accepts it.

Time to trust it.



Blood dripped from his face.

The pain of rejection wasn't enough. At this point, he thrived off from this pain.

Right when he got home, he realized his dad was just in the worst state possible.

He tried to calm him down and was useless. Now Keith was on the receiving end of his dad's mediocrity.

He was just mumbling stuff while it happened.

Every hit.

Every yell.

Everytime his hand clashed with his body or his face, he didn't know if the physical hit was more painful than the emotional hit.

It was fucked up.

He couldn't breathe. He couldn't move.

He didn't do anything but try to help him. He hated him. God. He hated him.

He hated his alcoholism.

He hated the fact that he never showed love to him.

He hated his lack of responsibility.

He hated his lack of accountability.

He felt like the man of the house even though his dad still lived there.

He eventually just gave up and laid on the ground. He had passed out. He finally stopped the massacre. He was way too drunk to move at that point.

Keith crawled back to the wall and saw him with eyes of fear and hatred. How can someone detest another person this much? He wanted to do something about it, but did he have the guts to do it? Would he prove to be something beyond what his dad was?

A coward?

He stood up and headed to the kitchen with the energy he had left. He could barely walk and still, inside of his own hatred, he found motivation to move and do something about his situation. It felt good, to not feel like a loser. To feel like something could actually change because he found the motivation in doing it.

He grabbed the sharpest of them all and headed back to the living room.

As he got closer to his dad, he looked down at him.

He looked pathetic. Weak. Useless. Like a poor excuse for a human being.

Would someone lament his loss? Would someone be sad at the fact that he stopped being part of the working society?

He raises his holding hand.

He's ready.

He closes his eyes.

But he stops.

He drops it.

And sits down as he barely breathes.

He decides to look at whatever his dad was seeing on the TV and sees the news.

The killing of a sacred deer.

The death of empathy.

Explosions that hide the evil underneath our noses.

Handshakes that mean misery.

Smiles that convert themselves into grins of death.

That's all that his life had been up to that point.

Hate.

He curls and starts crying.

He's by himself and has been by himself his entire life. Had he actually stabbed the person on the ground, nothing probably would've changed.

Just his status.

He would've been a murderer.

And he was convinced that the world didn't need more murderers.



*The lock isn't closing. It needs to be pressed stronger. She tries it and it closes, but her hands are now all red.*

*What a day she had had.*

*She was able to see that girl Mariah twice. She seemed quieter on their second encounter and couldn't quite describe why.*

*She hadn't had that much interaction in a single day for weeks. It was quite exciting. Something that made her forget how boring her life had become.*

*She turns around and sees a girl sitting down on the ground of the park. It's kind of late. Why would she be there?*

*She looks closer.*

*That's Emma Mayer.*

*Why is she by herself this late? She doesn't recall the last time she ever saw and it intrigued her, especially after seeing Oliver Mayer earlier that day. How coincidental to see both at the same day at different times.*

*She had always thought they were both extremely interesting people with a story to tell, yet never dared to talk with either. Emma seemed too popular, and Oliver seemed to be busy with something all the time.*

*She might as well start now.*

*And with Emma being one of the most recognized student volunteers of the neighborhood, it felt right to simply approach.*

*Just who was this girl?*

*As Primrose got closer to her, Emma started to notice someone invading her space. She didn't even look up.*

*"What do you want?" she said, without even skipping a beat. Primrose stopped.*

*Good question. What did Primrose want? Why, out of nowhere, she thought it was okay to just talk to a stranger?*

*Where is this confidence coming from?*

*She sat down.*

*"It's none of your business how I'm doing. Who are you anyways?"*

*She still wasn't looking up.*

*"Primrose Fuller?" Emma said, as she raised her head. "Oh my God, I'm so sorry. I- wow, sorry. What are you even doing here?"*

*She knew who she was? Emma Mayer?*

*Primrose was older but she felt like a kid now. Like talking to someone that always seemed higher than life. She and this other Mariah kid were always ruling the school.*

*Outside of it, they were both mortals.*

*But at school, they were both untouchables.*

*"Oh, really? I had no idea. I mean, I guess it's your contribution to the neighborhood, or whatever, but, are you really happy working there?" asked Emma, now looking at a Primrose who sat next to her.*

*Was she happy?*

*Not really.*

*But it worked for now, until she could potentially get a better job. What did Emma even do? She realized she approached her because of the curiosity that just sitting down there inspired in her.*

*"Well, I-," she started, yet stopped abruptly. "It's hard to explain, actually. I just felt like taking a walk, saw something I shouldn't have, and now I'm here."*

*She won't ask.*

*But she asked.*

*"Really, Primrose, I wouldn't want to talk about it."*

*She understood. She didn't know if there was something she could do to help her feel better.*

*She tried.*

*"That's very nice of you. I could always do more, I guess."*

*According to her memory, Emma was some sort of assistant in the senior living community that was in the neighborhood. She always helped there during the week and the people love her enthusiasm and willingness to help. Or at least that's what her mother had told her. She had her grandma living over there, so she interacted more with Emma than even with her own granddaughter.*

*"I guess, yeah."*

*Emma was an incredible person. She needed to understand that. Whatever it is that she was feeling at that point, Primrose wanted her to feel good.*

*She didn't know her.*

*She didn't talk to her.*

*She was basically a stranger to him.*

*But after such a unique day, that's the least she felt she could do for someone that needed kindness in their life.*

*"You admire me?" asked Emma, with a weird grin on her face. It was clear to Primrose no one had told her anything like that. "I was the one that admired you back in high school. You always seemed... I don't know."*

*"So confident of yourself."*

*"So sure of who you are and who you wanted to be."*

*"I saw you from afar."*

*"You looked so happy."*

*Primrose couldn't believe it.*

*Did Emma actually see her as inspiration? Or was she just trying to make her happy?*

*What was the boundary between what seemed real and what seemed fake?*

*How could she believe someone she had just met.*

*Was it always like this? Was she always such a confident person without knowing?*

*Was she always blind to who she really was?*

*"I- thanks. I appreciate your compliments," Emma said, after Primrose had filled her with the most compliments she could ever give.*

*They were both lonely now, yet, in the middle of the prairie, they were able to hold hands and hug.*

*It felt good.*

*To realize that you were always kind and people noticed, even if you thought it was all a dark world.*

*There might be hope.*

*There might be a brighter tomorrow to look forward to.*

*The world is healing.*



The world is dying.

And Herbert felt the guilt of it all.

After all, it was his generation that caused this debacle in society. In the prices of houses going up, in the environment dying.

Was he guilty of it all?

Carrie said it will all be over soon.

What does that even mean?

Herbert couldn't stop feeling useless no matter what. Like his whole life was a fabricated lie.

Was life always this bad?

He stood up and walked outside. Carrie didn't follow him.

He just wants to feel like there's something good that he brought to this world and can only think of one thing. He gets his old phone from his pocket and looks through his contacts. He has decided it is time to actually do something about the thing that has been itching him the whole day.

There she is!

It's dialing.

"Hey dad!" he hears from the other side of the line, as Josephine responds with enthusiasm.

He wishes he had more time to share with her, but it was a hard task. She was a working professional and he just sat down all day watching TV.

It was her time to shine and he didn't want to be the one to interrupt her.

"I'm doing good dad. It's weird that you call me."

How bad has he behaved that calling a loved one was weird? He lost himself too much in his thoughts that he had forgotten the importance of his daughter in his life.

They needed to do something before it was time for him to finally leave this world.

"Oh, fishing? Sure, dad. Tomorrow in the late afternoon sounds good. I need to go to work and everything, but I don't see why we couldn't, y'know, go fishing."

Herbert smiled. Josephine obviously couldn't see his smile, but he was as happy as a man could be for the first time in the day.

He saw his seeds he planted earlier that day.

"Okay, I'll see you tomorrow then. Love you dad."

She hung up.

It was late at night and she probably wanted to rest.

Herbert didn't mind. He realized she was the thing he brought to the world.

She was his legacy.

She was the good thing he brought.

Another smile. Another heart. Another kind person.

His impact was Josephine.

He loved that this was his legacy.

A person filled with love.



So much love to share and give that it is overwhelming her heart.

As Herbert walked outside, Carrie kept looking at the news and thinking of the conversation she had with Herbert.

Was the world always like this?

Was it always this violent, and sad, and evil, and dangerous?

She stopped understanding everything. She just wanted to feel embraced.

But at the same time, she wondered if it was even worth it to keep trying.

She missed the good old days, but was there ever any good old days to begin with?

There must be something.

Anything.

And she was aware that that something was Herbert.

She wanted to feel at peace with him.

She wanted to die with him.

She felt that, with him, the world just naturally became a better place.

He saw him smiling through the glass and smiled herself.

Oh, to feel young again.

To feel like anything you want to do can happen.

To feel love.

THE WORLD IS YOURS.

Carrie, for the first time in a while, feels hopeful.

There's something to wake up and look forward to. Even if the world often felt like such an evil place..

... at least in her corner she could dream of bigger things.

Things are good.

Things are great.

And things will be better.