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Flipped

THE LIVES OF THOSE WITH MENTAL DISORDERS

By Teresa Hoskins

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Math Lesson

Ms. Lena Risotto

Briiing, briiing, briiing

The analog school bell rang. Recess was over. It was time for class once more. Ms. Risotto let out a deep breath, centering herself. Her fifth graders had been rather squirrely before lunch, but recess should have burned off some of that excess energy. Math today shouldn't be too hard, just practice problems on the lesson she had taught them the day before.

Ms. Risotto straightened the papers on her desk. Math had never been particularly easy for her in elementary school, and her own teachers had failed to give her the assistance that she really needed. So as new teacher herself, she was determined to help all of her students succeed.

Of course not *all* of her students would be able to master *everything*, that would be a pipe dream, Ms. Risotto admitted to herself as she watched her students file into the classroom, hanging up their coats by the wall. What she *could* do however, was ensure that each of them felt like she was putting in effort to help them, so they didn't feel neglected. Even the ones she wasn't... *personally* fond of. She felt as though she'd been successful in that these first two weeks. Spreading out her time out among her students, and putting personal feelings aside. In all subjects, but math especially.

"Welcome back, Young Scholars," Ms. Risotto greeted the children warmly when about half of the class had entered the room. Some of them mumbled greetings in return. "I hope recess went well. Remember to hang up your coats before taking your seat, then start on the assignment on the board." She motioned to the white board, where she had written, in neat letters:

Today's Math Lesson:

Practicing with Negative Numbers,
pg. 14, problems #1-30

"Remember if you have any questions, ask your neighbors first. If you and your neighbors get stuck, then you can ask me," Ms. Risotto reminded her students. She was a big advocate of group learning, and she hoped to get these fifth graders to really start working together.

As the last three students entered the room, Ms. Risotto's smile stiffened. Forcing herself to push through her tension, she repeated her instructions now that everyone was in the classroom. She scanned the room as she spoke, but her gaze kept drifting back to those last three students.

Always the last do anything she wanted them to do and the first to do everything she didn't want. Diego Arboleda and his two accomplices—er, friends. Latasha Ber... Burgess and... Ivan Wick? Ms. Risotto glanced at her seating chart. No, it was Evan Wicker.

Only two weeks into the year, and already those three were giving her a massive headache. Especially Diego. She was eternally grateful that she had decided to start the year by seating

everyone alphabetically, keeping those three apart by chance. From what she could tell, Latasha and Evan weren't all that bad, it was Diego who was the ringleader, the one who never listened. He didn't even have the respect to look at her while she was giving instructions. Blatantly ignoring her, opting instead to continue the conversation with his friends.

"Let's remember to take our seats quickly, and not lag behind please," Ms. Risotto called out. Though it was technically a general statement, her gaze was fixed on the trio, who, of course, were the last ones standing by the coat rack.

Evan at least turned to look at Ms. Risotto as he peeled off his coat. Latasha followed suit though she didn't turn around. Diego, as expected, just continued to blather on, not even unzipping his jacket.

With a glance around the room, Ms. Risotto confirmed that the trio were the last three standing. She sighed internally. Was this really what she was going to have to deal with all year?

It was time to call them out a bit more directly. She moved slightly closer to the trio, so she wasn't yelling at them across the *entire* classroom.

"Could you three please take a seat? Remember our after recess routine?"

This time both Latasha and Evan gave her brief glances, and both started heading to their desks. Diego began to follow, then stopped, seemingly realizing he was still wearing his jacket, and he rushed to shed the outer layer.

"Diego, once you take off your jacket, please head to your seat and get ready for math," Ms. Risotto asked him. That should be enough, right? She shouldn't need to hover over Diego by now. It should be perfectly clear by this point what he was supposed to be doing...

Except it seemed that hovering would be necessary, as Diego made straight for Latasha's desk after taking off his jacket. Ms. Risotto held her tongue at first, since Latasha's desk was on a semi-reasonable route back to Diego's own desk. Perhaps he would merely make a final comment to her and then move on. As Diego made a full stop at his friend's desk however, it was clear that was not going to be the case.

"Diego. Please go back to your seat, it's time for math." Ms. Risotto cut off the conversation before it could get going.

For the first time since he'd entered the room, Diego looked at his teacher.

"Sorry Ms. Risotto!" He gave a hasty apology, scuttling away from Latasha's desk. Ms. Risotto resisted the urge to roll her eyes as she moved back to her own desk. She had heard more apologies from Diego alone than all of her students combined from when she'd been a student teacher. What was more she still couldn't leave him alone; as Diego, instead of heading back to his own desk, made a beeline for Evan's desk, where he began to speak with his other friend.

"Diego. **Please** sit down. This is the fifth time I've asked you." Ms. Risotto waited expectantly, as the boy turned to look at her a second time.

“Sorry, Ms. Risotto!” the boy apologized. Again. Man, was she getting tired of those apologies. But as he was now making a path for his desk, Ms. Risotto pushed down the irritation that was building up, looking down at the problems she’d worked out for today. Negative numbers. It was a concept that she remember struggling with as a young child. Some of her students had seemed pretty lost yesterday, in particular Jiang and Raúl, her two English language learners. She had been warned about the special difficulties of math with children who didn’t have English as their first language. One would think that math would be easy, since it was all numbers, but in reality she knew math was heavily language dependent. If she could she would like to spend most of today—

Loud whispering broke through Ms. Risotto’s thoughts. Automatically, she looked to Diego’s seat. Sure enough, though he was finally sitting down, he was talking with his neighbor, his desk bare. Great. It appeared as though she still needed to hover. Not exactly how she wanted to be spending her time. She waited until she was right next to him before saying a word.

“Diego.”

“Y-yes?” Diego turned to look up at his teacher.

“Please stop distracting Mika, she’s actually working.”

“But I was just asking her a question about whether or not she thought that the humans in Star Wars and really human humans, like us, or they’re non-humans humans and we just call them humans because it’s convenient, because that could mean that they have a completely different biological system on the inside and they—”

“**Diego.**” Ms. Risotto cut Diego off, more than a little irritated at Diego’s rambling. She did her best not to let it show though. After all, she had a duty to each and every one of her students, no matter how much trouble they made. Or how much they annoyed her. Taking a deep breath to calm herself, Ms. Risotto continued, “I understand you just wanted to ask her a question, but unless it’s about math, this isn’t the time for it. Recess is over. It’s time to focus on math. Alright?”

“Alright...” Diego looked down at his empty desk, though he made no move to pull out his book. It seemed it would need a little more prompting. Once again she fought a strong urge to roll her eyes.

“Now, please pull out your math book and begin. We’re on page fourteen.” She instructed, folding her arms. She waited as Diego slowly slid out his math book. Then he opened it at frustratingly lethargic pace, flipping through the pages. One. By. One. When that was done he dove back down for his notebook. Could he take any longer? Sure his desk wasn’t organized, but it wasn’t *that* chaotic either.

Was he going slow on purpose?

No. Ms. Risotto quickly dismissed that thought. Diego wasn’t a great student, but she also knew he wasn’t *that* kind of student either. Or at least she didn’t *think* he was that kind of student. Every day it seemed he was doing something different to procrastinate on starting or, on one

occasion, disrupt the entire class. No, she shouldn't assume that he was annoying her on purpose. That is an assumption that should never be made about a student.

Holding that thought in mind, Ms. Risotto waited with ever thinning patience for Diego to get out his notebook and pencil, and finally start working.

"Thank you Diego, now please begin. We're practicing what we learned yesterday. If there's anything you don't understand, just ask, alright?" Now, she could finally go and help those who were struggling. As soon as she looked up, she saw a hand in the air, and she strode off to the aid of Kobe, on the other side of the classroom.

Ms. Risotto was kneeling by the desk of Raúl when she noticed it. The sound. The tapping. The metal of an eraser hitting the surface of a desk. She knew exactly where that sound was coming from even before she looked up.

Diego was repeatedly hitting the end of his pencil on his desk. The action itself *technically* wasn't a problem, even though Ms. Risotto herself found it annoying, as long as...

Mika glanced over at the noise. It was clearly drawing her attention away from her own work. If Mika was being bothered by it, then the other students probably were as well.

"One, moment Raúl," Ms. Risotto spoke quietly. The boy nodded, focusing on the problem in front of him. "Diego!" She called, "Please stop tapping your pencil, it's distracting those around you."

Although Diego instantly reacted to the sound of his name—which was a nice change for once—the vacant look on his face didn't give her much hope that her instruction would be effective. With another sigh, Ms. Risotto turned her attention back to Raúl.

"So, Raúl, this is what I was explaining yesterday, do you remember?" Ms. Risotto asked patiently, as she worked through a problem with Raúl.

Raúl was doing well. He wasn't moving through the problems very quickly, but she could tell that he was starting to grasp the concepts, and that was the main goal.

Ms. Risotto got to her feet, aiming to check in with the other students while Raúl tried the next problem on his own. That was when she heard it. Again. Over and over.

"Diego."

"Hm?" The boy started. His mind clearly had not been on math.

"Please stop tapping your pencil and start working." She waited until Diego actually seemed to be working before she began checking on his classmates.

Ms. Risotto was actually able to make some rounds through the class, checking in on the other students. Everyone seemed to be progressing smoothly. Jiang needed a little extra attention, but after that she was breezing through the problems. A touch of warm pride began to well up in her chest. She was happy that all of her students were doing so well, even though it was only two weeks in.

Finally the last students she had to check on were the five that sat in a group with Diego. As she approached the cluster of desks, Ms. Risotto noticed Diego, leaning back in his chair.

“Diego, all six feet on the ground, please.”

The boy looked at her, confused. A flash of irritation shot through her. Though Ms. Risotto separated herself from that feeling, recognizing that he might not have understood the phrase. As soon as that thought crossed her mind however, she remembered she’d already used it multiple times this year, with Diego specifically no less. Either way, she decided to give him the benefit of the doubt this time, and clarified by pointing to his chair.

“Your chair, Diego.”

She instantly regretted pointing it out from a distance, as Diego’s immediate reaction was to slam the front legs of his chair into the ground, producing a loud bang. Ms. Risotto pursed her lips, inhaling sharply as several students giggled, notably Evan and Latasha. Diego smiled at their reactions. Folding her arms, Ms. Risotto gave Diego a look void of even a trace of amusement.

“Do you think that was funny, Diego?”

The boy’s eyes widened. “No! Ms. Risotto! It was an accident, I’m sorry!” He claimed quickly.

“Then make sure it doesn’t happen again.” Ms. Risotto was sure to communicate with her eyes that there was no room for further discussion, in addition to warning Diego of the potential consequences should such an action reoccur.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Diego responded as he turned back to his math.

Satisfied that her message had been clearly conveyed, she nodded firmly. With that matter settled, Ms. Risotto began to check on the progress of the others at Diego’s group. They were all doing well, making reasonable progress. Before she could get to Diego himself however, she was pulled away by another question. Then another and another. By the time that Ms. Risotto was able to turn her attention to Diego once more, several more minutes had passed. Her shoulders dropped in dismay. He was doing it again.

She strode over to his desk, ready to repeat what she had said once again. She was really beginning to feel like a broken record. Her mood soured further as she neared and realized that he was not *only* leaning back in his chair, but he was tapping his pencil as well. The sound just wasn’t as audible this time since he was tapping on the book instead of the desk. Ms. Risotto was getting seriously sick of repeating herself to this kid. How many times had she asked him to stop tapping his pencil? Not just after recess, but that day, that week, in the not even two full weeks that they had been in school, she’d already lost count.

“**Diego.**” Ms. Risotto placed her hand gently, but firmly on his math book. There was no way he could ignore her like this. As he looked up at her, the pencil stopped, so she decided to focus on the chair. “Were you listening?”

“Yes, I am.” Diego’s tone of voice just made her clench her jaw.

“I didn’t ask *are* you listening, I asked *were* you listening, which, it’s clear you were not.” As soon as the words left her mouth, Ms. Risotto regretted them. Her tone was far too irritated. She was letting her personal feelings bleed into how she was interacting with Diego. Ms. Risotto sighed. She needed to calm down. She was being *so* unprofessional right now. She attempted to take deep breaths, clearing her mind. Diego was driving her up a wall, but the mark of a good teacher was not letting that show in how you interacted with the kids. It was obviously a skill that she had not mastered as well as she thought she had.

“I didn’t hear you before...I was working.” Diego’s quiet response sent a surge of hope through Ms. Risotto. Was it possible? Had he actually been making progress? Had she been wrong?

“Oh?” A brief glimpse of his notebook was all it took to send her spirits plummeting once again. “You’re only on number nine? Everyone else is at least half-way done. *And* you haven’t been showing your work.”

“I did it in my head.” A pitiful excuse to be sure.

Holding her irritation in check, Ms. Risotto breathed deeply. Not showing his work was a problem yes, one which should be addressed, yes, and would be in due time, but not right now. Glancing down at the boy, she internally shook her head. Despite their entire discussion, he was still leaning back in his chair.

Steadying herself, she dove straight into the heart of the matter. “Of course neither of those are why I came over here.”

“They’re not?”

“No, they’re not.” Ms. Risotto retorted, trying her best to keep her tone even. She waited, looking down at the boy, but Diego just started back at her blankly. The gall of this child was ridiculous. Did he seriously not know what he was doing? At this point she had to consider whether or not he was doing this on purpose.

“W-why did you come?”

“Are you serious?”

That innocent act. Oh that just irked her so badly. She was so ready to be done with this child.

“Y-yes.” Ms. Risotto couldn’t tell if Diego’s sudden timidity was genuine or faked. At this point it didn’t really matter either way.

“Your chair Diego. Where is it?”

This kid actually had the cheek to look down at his own chair. Like he didn’t know exactly what he was doing! As if that wasn’t enough, he dropped forwards as if to make a repeat of the earlier scene, barely catching himself in time.

“Sorry,” Diego offered a half-hearted apology, before lowering himself the rest of the way in an exaggerated fashion.

Ms. Risotto bit her lip. How the hell was she supposed to deal with such an impertinent child? Well, she *knew* what she should do. She had just been hoping that she wouldn’t need to use any disciplinary measures this early in the year.

As she opened her mouth to lay down the law, a conversation from that morning popped into her mind. Before school she’d been preparing her lesson plans in the teacher’s lounge, while also seeking advice on how to deal with Diego’s ridiculous behavior, and admittedly complaining a touch too much. Mr. Kurucz had been there, Diego’s 4th grade teacher. He had expressed surprise that Diego was acting so poorly, and had shared with her his suspicion that Diego had ADHD.

ADHD. Right. They had mentioned that in her schooling. Kids who can’t focus and fidget all the time. Boys who talk too much and girls with their heads lost in the clouds. That sounded kind of like Diego.

With that thought in mind, Ms. Risotto took a deep breath. She wasn’t sure if she was fully ready to accept Mr. Kurucz’s assertion of Diego’s ADHD, but on the off-chance he was right, she would need to change her tactics. Just ordering him from on high wasn’t going to work. She had to get down on his level, have a discussion with Diego about his behavior. Right. A discussion. He should be old enough to understand if she explained the problem to him. She knelt down to next Diego’s desk, so that she was just slightly below his eye level.

“Diego this is the sixth time I’ve told you this, *today*.” She emphasized in a firm, but not angry, tone. “And the second time since recess. Every time you say you’re sorry. And not just with the chair. Sorry doesn’t just make everything okay. Sorry means that you’re going to try and change, that you won’t do something again. You’re a fifth grader now Diego. You really need to be able to listen to what people say. I know it can be hard sometimes, but you still need to do it. You’re a bright kid Diego, you just need to listen more.” That sounded good. Reasonable. It should work just fine.

“Yes, Ma’am.” Diego agreed.

See? Even Diego himself seemed to respond positively. Not bad for a first try.

“Good. Now get back to work.” Ms. Risotto smiled. As she stood, moving to respond to raised hand, she felt quite pleased with herself. If that was all it took, then dealing with ADHD kids couldn’t be *that* hard. Maybe if Diego was younger, but as a fifth grader? He was reasonable. It seemed like this was going to be a good year.

Diego Arboleda

“They say that she was elected, so that obviously means that everyone had to vote for her right? And since they have an entire planet, there must have been, like, a bajillion votes or something. So they obviously couldn’t all agree on the same person, especially with the different alien species and everything! I bet all the Gungans tried to vote for a Gungan queen instead!”

“But that still doesn’t explain why Amidala is a *teenager*. You need to be *at least* fifty to be a monarch. It’s in the constitution,” Evan explained, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose, confident.

“Nun-uh,” Diego shook his head, “That’s to be *president*. And this is Naboo! We don’t even know if they *have* a constitution.”

“According to my *official* sources,” Latasha chimed in, “She was elected by humans *only*, since that’s who she ruled over. Her age was due to the belief those of us who are younger have a pure form of wisdom that adults don’t.”

“Aw, yeah, kid power!” Diego and Evan excitedly high-fived.

“Specifically, they often choose young *women* for that reason. Boys are still just stinky,” Latasha stuck her tongue out at her friends.

“Hey, you’re the stinky one,” Evan shot back pushing Latasha playfully.

“But why?” Diego stepped between his friends before Latasha could retaliate. “What’s the difference? I mean there’s obviously a *difference* between boys and girls, but what does that have to do with a type of wisdom that adults don’t have? I don’t think humans have that kind of difference with boys and girls, do we? Of course that’s assuming that they’re humans. We call them humans, but are they *human* humans, or *non-human* humans? What if they actually have *actual* differences that human-humans don’t?”

“Hm, that’s a good thought... We should do that tomorrow, I’m already smarter than the both of you!” Latasha teased Evan, as the both of them headed off.

“Well then we should also hav—oh!” Diego stopped in his tracks, realizing that he was still wearing his jacket. He stripped it off in a hurry, hanging it up on the hook, before rushing after Latasha.

By the time he caught her, she was already sitting at her desk, math book out.

“But if we were to give an advantage to you like that, we would have to consider what other differences there would be. Like what if in these non-human human girls are wiser, but boys are funnier or something?”

“Isn’t only being funnier kind of lame though? Like, maybe they’re overall more charming or something?”

“That could work, but how wou—”

“Diego, please go back to your seat, it’s time for math.” Ms. Risotto cut Diego off.

Diego’s head snapped up, Ms. Risotto was staring at him, arms crossed. He didn’t know her that well yet but he could tell she wasn’t happy. Diego really thought that she needed to do more during recess she never seemed happy after.

“Sorry Ms. Risotto!” Diego hurriedly apologized, rushing away from Latasha’s desk. As he scurried back to his own desk, Diego saw that Evan’s desk was practically on his way might as well just tell Evan what Latasha had said just now.

“Hey Evan, so Latasha suggested that—”

“Diego. **Please** sit down. This is the fifth time I’ve asked you.” Ms. Risotto cut Diego off once again.

This time when Diego’s head snapped back around, Ms. Risotto was tapping her fingers on her table, eyebrows raised expectantly. Uh-oh, that meant she was really serious. Diego hadn’t seen Ms. Risotto do that, but he’d seen other teachers with that expression and it was never a good sign.

“Sorry, Ms. Risotto!” Diego scampered back to his desk, where he plopped into his seat. He seriously needed to consider the possibility that what they had been referring to humans weren’t actually human humans though if they were non-human humans that would completely change everything.

“Hey, you know Star Wars, right?” Diego leaned over to his neighbor, Mika, speaking to her in a hushed tone.

Mika looked up from her math book, blinking in surprise, “Um...yes?”

“Do you think that the humans in it are human humans or non-human humans? Like, they look like us, but could be completely different on the inside but we just call them humans because it’s easier and they look like us?”

Mika frowned, “But isn’t it the future? They even mention Earth and all...”

“Ah, no, that’s *Star Trek*. They are *definitely* human humans. I said *Star Wars*, which—”

“Diego.”

Diego jumped as Ms. Risotto manifested right next to his desk.

“Y-yes?”

“Please stop distracting Mika, she’s actually working.”

“But I was just asking her a question about whether or not she thought that the humans in *Star Wars* and really human humans, like us, or they’re non-humans humans and we just call them humans because it’s convenient, because that could mean that they have a completely different biological system on the inside and they—”

“**Diego.**” Ms. Risotto stared at Diego intently until he quieted down. “I understand you just wanted to ask her a question, but unless it’s about math, this isn’t the time for it. Recess is over. It’s time to focus on math. Alright?”

“Alright...” Diego muttered glumly, slumping down in his chair. He hated math. Math was stupid. He much preferred space. Diego was going to be an astronaut someday.

“Now, please pull out your math book and begin. We’re on page fourteen.” Ms. Risotto commanded.

Under the oppressing eye of Ms. Risotto, Diego slid his math book out of his desk, flipping it open. Slowly he fingered through to page fourteen. Still Ms. Risotto stood by his desk, like a sentry. Sentry. What a cool word. They did the same thing as a guard but a sentry was just inherently *cooler* but of course then there were vanguards which was the coolest of the people whose job it was to protect things.

As he considered the hierarchy of coolness of protectors, Diego rustled through his desk for his pencil and notebook. Protectors was also a good one but didn’t really have the same power behind it although there was a protectorate or was that someone who was being protected? Diego could never remember.

Fishing out his notebook from the chaos, Diego plopped it down, pencil in hand.

“Thank you Diego, now please begin. We’re practicing what we learned yesterday. If there’s anything you don’t understand, just ask, alright?” With a smile, Ms. Risotto turned and walked away. Diego was surprised; he hadn’t realized that she had still been there.

Diego finally looked at the math book. His nose crinkled. It was the same thing as yesterday. They had to do it **again**. But it was so *boring* the first time. He already knew how to do this and what was the point anyways? It’s not like you could have a negative of something anyways, much less a negative of a fraction of something but wait what if you *could*? Have a negative of something like a negative engine or something that instead of creating energy took in it wait no that wouldn’t help at all that would be completely counterproductive but the question still stood what if there was somewhere in the universe where you could have negative things oh! Or even better what if there was an *alternate* universe where instead of have positive amounts of things people instead only had negative amounts of objects which would really make things difficult now that Diego thought about it unlike this math which he should probably start before Ms. Risotto got upset again and made things difficult for *him*.

Diego glanced at the first problem. Three, over four, minus five, over four. Or three-fourths minus five-fourths. So both of the denominators had the same thing in them, four, so really he only needed to look at the numerators which made the problem really be three minus five if it was five minus three it would be two but since it was the opposite it would be negative two of course he couldn’t forget the fraction so it would be two over four or two-fourths which simplified to one half—oops! Make that *negative* one-half, Diego caught himself, darkening the negative sign on his paper. So the next problem was one-sixth minus six so the first step would be to make six into

a fraction so that he could compare the numerators the denominator would have to be six so it would match that meant that he had to multiply

“Diego! Please stop tapping your pencil, it’s distracting those around you.”

Diego’s head popped up at the sound of his name, body freezing. Ms. Risotto was kneeling at a desk across the room, but she was looking directly at him. Pencil tapping? Distracting people? Diego glanced around at his neighbors. Mika was looking at Ms. Risotto too probably because she’d said something but everyone else was still working didn’t that mean that Ms. Risotto was the one was distracting people? And besides he hadn’t been tapping his pencil had he? Well whatever it wasn’t that important not the problem at hand the problem at hand was one-sixth minus six, hehe that was a funny joke he’d have to tell it to Evan and Latasha later. So one-sixth minus six what he had to do was hang on was he tapping his pencil again?

No. He wasn’t. False Alarm.

One-sixth minus six that would be an easy one but he should definitely make sure that he wasn’t tapping his pencil he didn’t want to bother anyone after all.

Diego stared intently at his pencil, as if daring it to move on its own. It remained steady however, clutched firmly in his hand.

He didn’t think that he’d been tapping it though he remembered that Mr. Kurucz had told him that he tended to tap his pencil though Diego himself had never realized when he was doing it why would he want to do that one-sixth minus six he’d have to work with well the exception would be using a pencil as a drum stick but then that was *drumming* a pencil not *tapping* the pencil he needed to look at the denominator and he knew for *sure* he hadn’t been drumming his pencil before that one-sixth one-sixth that was a tempo or maybe that was six over eight he preferred to drum when there were other people who were going to help him make a song which could be in one-sixth tempo if that was a thing it wasn’t nearly as much fun when he was the only one doing it, drumming that was, not tempoing how would one tempo anyways? It would be really nice to use real drum sticks one day and on a real drum set too not just a desk maybe when he was older like his sister he could start a band Latasha would probably be into that Diego knew that she played the cello maybe she could learn the guitar or maybe they could make a jazz band that would probably work better anyways since Evan played the trumpet and wasn’t a very good singer maybe Mika would be interest

“Diego.”

“Hm?” Diego blinked, eyes focusing back on Ms. Risotto.

“Please stop tapping your pencil and start working.”

Working? Oh that was right! The stupid math! Where was he? One-sixths minus six. Denominators had to be the same that meant he had to get six over a denominator of six to do that he should multiply six by six right? That was a square number squares were cool that’s why square numbers were cool didn’t like math but out of what he didn’t like, square numbers were the thing he didn’t like the least six squared was thirty-six also a good number in general he had liked the

number thirty-six even before he had learned about squares so that would be thirty-six over six take away one from that would make it thirty-five-sixths next was negative one-fifth minus one-fifth that was easy canceled out to zero, why was that even a problem? Waaaaay too basic anyone could see that answer next was one half minus one half also zero, seriously, what was with these problems? Wasn't like the whole point of a negative number the fact that if you put a negative something with its positive something, you had nothing? Whoever wrote these problems apparently thought that that wouldn't be obvious but whatever next one-third plus one-third two thirds that didn't even have a negative in it were these even the right problems? Yeah they were that's what Ms. Risotto wrote on the board. Weird. Next was one-third minus negative five-thirds so this was a bit different because he was taking was a negative number he had

“Diego, all six feet on the ground, please.”

Diego glanced up at Ms. Risotto, eyebrows furrowed. Six feet? What was that about? He only had two although there were some alien species he had designed with additional appen

“Your chair, Diego.” Ms. Risotto elaborated, pointing deliberately at his chair.

Looking down, Diego realized that he was leaning back on the chair's legs.

Diego abruptly shot forward, the chair's front two legs hitting the ground heavily. The majority of the class looked up at the noise. Diego gave a half-smile in embarrassment.

“Do you think that was funny, Diego?”

“No! Ms. Risotto! It was an accident, I'm sorry!” Diego promised, slightly alarmed.

Behind her, Diego noticed a couple of his classmates stifling their laughter. Had the noise been funny? He hadn't thought so but apparently some of the other kids did if it they thought it was funny then maybe he should make it again just to be sure...

“Then make sure it doesn't happen again,” Ms. Risotto commanded, her icy tone chasing away any of Diego's thoughts about making a noise like that again.

“Yes, Ma'am,” Diego muttered, avoiding eye contact with her.

After a few moments, Diego's eyes slid back to his math. He really didn't want to do it. He didn't get what the point was, especially not of negative numbers it's not like you could have negative amounts of anything and even if his alternate universe existed where you had negative everything instead of positive everything that still wasn't important to *his* life that was alternate universe Diego's life though he supposed that alternate Diego would find the concept of positive numbers useless what would his name be anyway would it still be Diego? Or would it be like Diego backwards? That would make it Oh-guh...oh-gud...diego....oh-gay...dee-eh-guh-oh, Oh-gay-dee, Oh-gay-dee? Wait no that would be if it was a mirror universe where everything was swapped though what was the difference between an alternate universe and a mirror universe anyways? And could a mirror universe really be a total mirror of everything that wouldn't make any sense there would be too many weird things like their whole fifth grade class be teaching one

adult and people might age backwards or age normally but be born super smart and get dumber but then society would probably just be a huge mess

Next to him, Mika coughed.

Oh, that's right! He was supposed to be working on math! The stupid, boring math, where was he again? Only problem six? Well that shouldn't be too bad out of *thirty*?! That was soooooo many they already had done a bunch yesterday too.

Diego sighed heavily, resigning himself to an afternoon of boredom.

He figured he should probably get them done maybe if he finished early Ms. Risotto would let him do something fun Mr. Kurucz had let him do that he had a book on the Mars rovers in his backpack it was a really complicated book too at least high school level and published by NASA proper he had gotten it just recently when his older brother wait! He had to actually get done first! So problem six that was one-third minus a negative five-thirds minus a negative is a positive so six-thirds which is two next is negative four-fifths plus seven-eighths just make it seven-eighths minus four-fifths need a common denominator twenty, no, forty so it was thirty-five-fortieths minus thirty-two-fortieths three-fortieths next was two minus thirteen-eighths would be sixteen-eighths minus thirteen-eighths goes to three-eighths which could be reduced to can't be reduced so that's the final answer next is nine-fifths minus five-eighths common denominator is forty again so that would

“Diego.”

Ms. Risotto's hand suddenly materialized on his math book, causing Diego to jump.

“Were you listening?” Ms. Risotto asked bluntly. She was trying to hide it, but Diego could tell that she was annoyed with him like his older sister when their mother told her to play nice but she was still upset.

“Yes, I am.” Diego responded earnestly.

“I didn't ask *are* you listening, I asked *were* you listening, which,” she paused briefly, displeased, “It's clear you were not.”

Diego's face flushed slightly. He *had* been listening. Really he had been. He just...didn't hear. Was that really the same thing?

“I didn't hear you before...I was working.” He mumbled.

“Oh?” She peered at his notebook, “You're only on number nine? Everyone else is at least half-way done. *And* you haven't been showing your work.”

Diego's shoulders slumped as he avoided looking up at Ms. Risotto.

“I did it in my head,” Diego muttered to himself.

“Of course neither of those are why I came over here”

“They’re not?” Diego looked up at her in confusion. Then why was she here?

“No, they’re not.”

There was a moment of silence between them as Diego’s brain spun trying to think of a reason for Ms. Risotto to come over. She would come over if he had a question but he didn’t have one he would have raised his hand if he did he hadn’t raised his hand, had he? Maybe he’d been stretching and done it accidentally. In his confusion, he glanced up at her. Ms. Risotto was waiting expectantly expectant like his mother when she knew that he’d gotten in a fight with his sister and she knew that *he* knew that *she* knew and was waiting for him to tell the truth about it. Except he didn’t know this time.

“W-why did you come?”

Ms. Risotto’s eyebrows dropped as she narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “Are you serious?”

“Y-yes,” Diego responded meekly. He wanted to slump down in his chair. He didn’t like how she was standing over him. At least with his mom he knew what he was in trouble for.

“Your chair Diego. Where is it?”

Looking down, Diego saw with horror that the front two legs were off of the ground. As he dropped forwards he caught the edge of his desk, stopping his fall abruptly. He remembered what happened earlier. He didn’t want to get embarrassed again.

“Sorry,” Diego mumbled an apology as he carefully lowered his chair back down, barely making a sound.

Ms. Risotto stared at him for a long moment before sighing. She knelt down next to his desk, speaking in a soft, but firm tone. That was weird. Diego resisted the urge to pull back. She was kinda close to him.

“Diego this is the sixth time I’ve told you this, *today*.”

It was? He didn’t remember that. He remembered, um, one, maybe two...

“And the second time since recess.”

He *did* remember that one, so three. That one was embarrassing.

“Every time you say you’re sorry. And not just with the chair. Sorry doesn’t just make everything okay.”

Then what was he supposed to do? If you do something wrong you say sorry or perdón if he was at home.

“Sorry means that you’re going to try and change, that you won’t do something again.”

Well he was *trying*. He *meant* it when he said it. It’s not like he was *lying* or something when he said sorry. At least not on purpose...

“You’re a fifth grader now Diego.”

What did his grade have to do with it? He was the same age as he was at the end of last year it’s not like anything that big happens in the summers well there are sometimes and he supposed there *had* been that huge family debate abo

“You really need to be able to listen to what people say. I know it can be hard sometimes, but you still need to do it. You’re a bright kid Diego, you just need to listen more.”

...

“Yes, Ma’am,” Diego murmured, lowering his eyes to his work.

“Good. Now get back to work.” Ms. Risotto nodded finally, as she stood up, responding to a raised hand across the room.

Diego stared glumly at his paper, head resting on his hand. He *had* been working. And he *had* been listening. He *always* listened. Just sometimes people said things and he never heard them. How was he supposed to know every time that they said something? Ms. Risotto in particular seemed to expect him to be able to read minds which would be cool if he could but he couldn’t. But that was what she expected. And if that was what she expected...well, it seemed like it was not going to be a good year.

“He had been listening. Really he had been.
He just...didn't hear.”

Diego Arboleda, age 10, male, 5th grade student. Diego has a burning passion for everything space related, whether fictional or non-fictional. He is highly intelligent and is in the “Highly-Capable” program at his school, making him double advanced in math. His future goal is to be an astronaut and be the first man on Mars. Unfortunately he has yet to realize that being an astronaut requires quite a bit of math.

Diego has attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which is classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder by the DSM-V. This means that he “has great difficulty attending to tasks, or behave[s] over actively and impulsively or both.” This description is true to some extent for all children, but children with ADHD exhibit a significantly higher degree than what is the developmentally norm. There are actually three sub-types of ADHD, primarily inattentive, primarily hyperactive and a combined presentation. This is determined by the number of symptoms an individual exhibits from two categories. Diego has a combined presentation, possessing more than 6 symptoms from both the inattentive and hyperactive categories. Some inattentive symptoms Diego shows in this scene are being unable to attend to details and making careless errors (he forgot a negative sign in problem #2), failing to carrying out instructions and finish his work, disorganization, failing to listen when spoken to by others, and difficulty maintaining attention. The hyperactive symptoms that Diego displays in this scene are fidgeting (tapping hands or feet, squirming), and talking excessively.

Diego was diagnosed with ADHD during the summer between his 4th and 5th grade years, after Mr. Kurcuz, his 4th grade teacher, bluntly suggested the test to his parents after a full year of subtle hinting. This suggestion did not go over smoothly within Diego's full family. A decision like getting someone tested for a mental disorder was not a decision that Diego's parents would make by themselves, the decision also involved his aunts, uncles, grand-parents, older cousins and even some more tangential relations. After a heated debate the decision was made to get Diego tested. The testing was done by a professional not related to the school however, so the school system has no knowledge about the diagnosis. After the results came back positive, the family debate became even more intense, shifting focus to what should be done about the results. Some wanted Diego to take medication, others wanted therapy, others suggested more traditional treatments and still others refused to believe the results of the test. The content of this debate mostly went over Diego's head as he was never fully informed about the results of the test and what exactly they meant.

Essentially, despite being officially diagnosed with ADHD, Diego has yet to undergo any form of treatment, and therefore is functioning identically to an undiagnosed child in the proceeding scene. This means that in order to focus he taps his pencil or leans back in his chair, small actions which he is not consciously aware of. Despite appearances these actions are actually tools that are helping Diego focus.

Morning Coffee

Raj Darmadi

“Raj, this commission is getting settled tomorrow with or without us. I’d prefer it to be *with* us.” The garbled voice of Raj’s co-worker came through the speaker of his cellphone.

“I *know* that. That’s why I’m rushing in for 7:00 am. A whole *two hours early*, may I remind you.” Raj responded bitterly. He really needed to get a new Bluetooth; having to listen to Sharon’s voice being distorted by his faulty cell phone speaker wasn’t helping his mood.

“Well then where are you?”

“On my way!” Raj snapped, checking his watch as he pushed open the door with his shoulder. God he hated not having his hands free. “It’s barely 6:45! Stop being so anal.”

“It’s forty-*seven*. And it’s called being punctual. Something you are obviously unfamiliar with.”

Raj rolled his eyes as he stopped at the counter.

“Good morning! What can I get for you today?” The young woman asked, a forced smile plastered on her face.

It was comforting to see that someone else hated their job as much as Raj this morning. “Hazelnut and caramel in a triple shot white mocha. 16 oz.” He rattled off his usual, pulling the phone away from his ear.

Apparently not far enough, however.

“Are you getting coffee?” Her disdain was clear even from the other end of the line. “You’re seriously taking the time on something as useless as that. Today. How lax are you?”

“That’ll be \$4.50, sir,” The woman said mechanically, the fixed smile not budging an inch.

“Yeah, yeah,” Raj muttered dismissively, juggling his phone as he pulled out the coffee card from his wallet. He handed it to the barista, drumming his fingers on the counter as he placed the phone back to his ear.

“‘Yeah, yeah?’ Oh, *very* professional.” The snide comment pierced Raj’s ear.

“Would you *back off*? Honestly, since when were you this high strung?” Raj cut through Sharon’s lecturing. “And coffee is *not* useless. Half our office *lives* off of coffee.” Raj snatched his card back from the barista, shoving it back into his wallet. “And I’m not being lax. I know *exactly* how long it will take me to get to the office from here. It’s almost like I come here **every day**.”

Raj migrated to a nearby high table, leaning on the surface with one arm. It was so early that he was the only person in the shop besides the barista. Which he supposed *was* kind of a nice change of pace from the normally crowded shop. Or it would be if it wasn't for...

“Yes, and you come in about five minutes late, *every day.*”

That. Raj rolled his eyes, sighing.

“I *heard* that, Raj.” Sharon growled. Her passive aggressive attitude was leaning heavily on the aggressive side today.

Raj pulled the phone away from his ear, running his hand through his hair. God he hated his job right now. This flipping commission was going to be the death of him. Putting the phone back to his ear he responded, “Yeah, and I stay about an *hour* late every day too, so what's your problem?”

“My problem? My problem is your clear lack of professionalism, disregard for punctuality and deficient work ethic. If you don't shape up Raj, and **soon**, you may be the one who costs our entire team this commission that we've been working so hard on. Well, that *most* of us have been so working hard on.”

Holding back a heavy sigh, Raj rolled his eyes, drumming his fingers impatiently as he began to tune out Sharon's lecture. Raj *used* to like Sharon. She was intelligent, organized, a good worker, hell he'd even considered asking her out once upon a time. Now however, the thought of going on a date with her made his stomach churn. Her attitude had soured so much that he could hardly stand being around her during his lunch break. It was this stupid commission, ever since they'd been introduced to it, Sharon had gone from being organized to being a complete and utter control freak, and a passive-aggressive one at that.

It wasn't just Sharon though. This project had whipped everyone on Raj's entire floor into a total frenzy, even those who weren't even involved! Their company had assigned four separate design teams to the request of some huge important company that Raj couldn't be bothered to remember the name of this early in the morning. Instead of the teams collaborating to each cover a different aspect however, some *genius* in management had thought it would be a good idea to use more a competitive system. To 'promote creativity' and 'foster ambition' or some bullshit along those lines. All four teams were to do everything on their own and at the end the client would choose which of the four designs they wanted. The team whose design got chosen would get the commission and...some other benefit, ugh. Raj honestly couldn't remember at this point. Whatever it was he was certain this anarchy wasn't worth it. No one seemed able to spare a thought to anything else. These days Raj felt like he was the only sane one left, not obsessing over '*The Commission.*' Of course getting the commission *was* important, and maybe he *could* be a bit more invested in it but everyone was acting as if it was the first person on mars or something. At this point Raj just wanted to get the thing over with.

“Are you listening Raj?” Sharon demanded.

“Mm, yup,” Raj responded automatically, glancing at his watch. His coffee was taking an awfully long time.

He glanced at the barista. She was working away diligently, so she should have been done by now... She could be new, but no, that wasn't it. Raj recognized her, she often worked mornings. Besides, if she had been new, why the hell would she be working alone? It was possible she just wasn't awake yet. Raj certainly wasn't.

“Is that so?” Sharon hissed.

That did it. Rolling his eyes, Raj responded with no shortage of sarcasm, “Oh no Sharon, of course I was listening to *every word* of your *five minute lecture* about why I'm a *horrible* employee. It's the most engaging monologue since *Shakespeare*. Really, I mean it. I was hanging off of your every word. Honestly, want my advice? Quit your day job, become a writer, share your absolute *genius* with the rest of the world. Sincerely.”

“Sarcasm is **not** very professional **nor** is it appreciated.” Sharon growled.

“Yeah? Well neither is being yelled at before I've had my coffee.”

“I wasn't yelling.”

“Your coffee, sir.”

“Ah, speaking of!” Raj spun around, perking up. He had considered foregoing the coffee today, but considering Sharon's mood, which was most likely representative of the whole office, he was deeply grateful that he hadn't.

“Wait, you're *still there*?!”

Completely ignoring Sharon, Raj strode over to the counter, grabbing his coffee. Without hesitation Raj pressed the cup to his lips. If he was going to respond to Sharon, he needed a sip or two beforehand. Three or four if he wanted to be professional.

“Guh!” Raj gagged in surprised, face twisting in disgust. “What the—?!” He looked at the coffee cup in disdain. The hell was that flavor? It certainly wasn't what he ordered.

“I-is something wrong, sir?” The barista asked timidly.

“I cannot believe that you're still there. At this rate Jake's team is so going to take this from us. All because *you* want coffee. Is it really worth it?” Sharon snapped in his ear.

“Yes.” Raj snapped back. The barista flinched. Raj took a deep breath, pulling his phone away from his ear. As he spoke he tried to keep his voice even, though there was more irritation in it than he would have liked. “I ordered *hazelnut* and *caramel* in triple shot white mocha. This has peppermint or something.”

The barista's eyes widened, her nostrils flaring. Clearly distressed she hurried to give what would probably be a lengthy apology. That was fine and dandy but he really just wanted her to make the coffee he'd ordered so he could leave.

“I’m so—so—I’m—I’m—I—I—...—...”

The barista choked on her words. Her mouth opening and closing but no sound escaping, like a landed fish gasping for water.

“Look, it’s really not that big of a deal. I don’t need an official apology or anything.” Raj assured her. He really didn’t. There was nothing to freak out over. She just had to remake it. “I’d just like my order and...”

Her chest began to visibly rise and fall. There still wasn’t any sound coming out of her mouth. It didn’t look like she’d heard him. Something wasn’t right.

Her mouth hung open as she seemed to gag on her words. One of the young woman’s hands began clawing at the neck of her shirt, the other hand clamped tightly in a fist.

Raj froze, blood running cold. His mind spun, attempting to process what was going on.

Choking. She was choking. The Heimlich. He should do the Heimlich. But that didn’t make sense. She hadn’t eaten anything. What could she be choking on? Could you swallow something then choke on it later? Was that possible??

The woman’s eyes were wider than any Raj had seen before, her chest heaving violently. Her body was desperately trying to suck in the air, but Raj didn’t think it was working. Sweat was gathering at her temples, running in rivets down her cheeks.

Raj met her eyes, glassy and out of focus, but in them Raj saw the terror coursing through him reflected, and amplified, in her.

“Are you alright, what can I do?” Raj asked, breaking out of his stupor. “Don’t worry about the coffee at all, really, it’s not important. I’m so sorry that I reacted like that. It’s completely my fault, it’s been a bad morning for me and I uh...” Raj hesitated as he saw the tears forming in her eyes. He couldn’t tell if she was hearing anything he was saying.

“Oh it’s been a bad morning for you, huh? That’s rich Raj. Way to make everything about *you* instead of focusing on the team which you’re *supposed* to be—”

“Shut *up* Sharon!” Raj shouted angrily, slamming his phone onto the counter. Distraction out of the way, he turned his full attention to the woman in front of him. Well, she was probably a woman. It occurred to him in that moment that she actually looked fairly young, for all he knew she could still be a high schooler.

“What can I do to help? Please tell me. I want to help. Really, um” he glanced at her name tag. “Lindsay? Right? Your name’s Lindsay? I’m Raj. It’s okay. Um,” He fumbled for one of Lindsay’s hands, a white knuckled fist on the counter. He squeezed it tightly. “Um, everything will be okay. Probably. No! Not probably. Definitely. You just need to tell me what’s wrong okay? Then I can help. Just tell me. Anything I can do. Um, can you hear me? Lindsay?”

Lindsay eyes were completely glazed over now, tears starting to leak out of the corners. Her chest was still heaving, whole body trembling. Raj really didn’t think she was breathing

properly, if she was breathing at all. She definitely wasn't choking. But she wasn't breathing. Not breathing... then...

"Asthma!?! Is this an asthma attack? Uh, inhaler! Do you have an inhaler? Lindsay? Do you have an inhaler?"

Lindsay shook her head, tears streaming down her cheeks as they mingled with the torrents of sweat.

"Then help! W-we need help! Medical! Professional!" Raj shouted in a panic as he fumbled for his phone, ending the call with Sharon. Whatever she had to say, he would hear it later. A woman having a, a, a whatever, took priority. Hands trembling, he clumsily dialed 911, holding the phone to his ear impatiently. His free hand gripped Lindsay's once more. She was still trembling, and he was pretty sure her breathing but not breathing had gotten even faster now, and was even more sure that she wasn't getting any air in.

"911, what is your emergency?" A calm voice picked up.

"I need an ambulance! Well **I** don't, but the barista here does! She's having an asthma attack! I think. I-I'm not really sure. All of a sudden she just looked like she was choking, but she didn't eat anything. You need to hurry, oh god, get an ambulance here quickly please, **I don't want to see someone die like this!!!**"

Lindsay Bowman

Today was a mess.

First, Chanterelle called in sick. That wasn't too big a deal. Lindsay could deal with that.

Then, Jesse didn't show. That wasn't too bad. Called. Didn't pick up. That was a bit worse.

Called the manager. They didn't pick up because it was 5:04am. That was worse.

Started all the morning set up. Alone. Three person job. By herself. Constantly checking back for a call from the manager. Nothing. That was when things got bad.

Worked as fast as she could to get everything ready. Opened late. That was really bad.

There was a customer waiting outside when she opened. They were really unhappy. Still no response from the manager. That was horrid.

Now it was 6:47, still no news from Jesse, the manger had yet to call her back and it looked like she'd be facing the morning rush on her own. Could this get any worse?

Oh, that was right. She had a mid-term at 1:00.

Lindsay forced a smile as a customer entered the shop. She greeted them stiffly, pressure suffocating her internally.

“Good morning! What can I get for you today?”

“Hazelnut and caramel in a triple shot white mocha. 16 oz.” The man shot off his order at lightning speed. Lindsay struggled to enter the order before she forgot.

“Are you getting *coffee*?” A garbled voice demanded from the other end of the man's phone. Lindsay watched nervously as the man grimaced, pulling the phone away from his ear slightly. Whoever was on the end of the line continued to berate him, the words indiscernible to Lindsay.

Whatever was happening, the man was obviously in a bad mood because of it. A mood Lindsay had no desire to contribute to.

“That'll be \$4.50, sir,” Lindsay said as evenly as she could, trying to ensure neither her voice nor her smile betrayed her nerves.

“Yeah, yeah,” the man grumbled.

Lindsay's shoulders tightened involuntarily. Had she done something wrong? Was she not polite enough? No, she told herself, it was whoever was on the other side of the phone that was causing the customer's dissatisfaction. ...or was it?

Lindsay silently took the coffee punch card from the man, not daring to make the casual small talk she normally would have.

“Would you *back off*? Honestly, since when were you this high strung? And coffee is *not* useless. Half our office *lives* off of coffee. And I’m not being lax. I know *exactly* how long it will take me to get to the office from here.”

The man retorted to the person on the other end of the phone. Lindsay punched the card as quickly as she could, despite the tremble in her hands.

Lindsay held the card back out. It was snatched away before she was able to say anything more.

“It’s almost like I come here **every day**.” The man spat, spinning on his heel as he stormed over to a table to wait.

Every day? He was a regular? Lindsay’s mind whirled rapidly trying to recall the man’s face, but nothing came up. That was bad. If he was a regular, he would notice that something was different with her today. He would know that she had been ingenuous in her greeting. What if he took it personally? What if he filed a complaint about that? What if he stopped coming all together because she was a horrible server?

No, no *no*. She shook her head, turning to start the man’s coffee. None of that made any sense. It wasn’t like people stopped going to a place because of one mediocre experience, right? Well, not a mediocre one, but what if he saw it as a bad one? No, it wasn’t that bad, and oh **god!**

Lindsay froze, cup in hand and sharpie uncapped, the tip about to touch the paper.

His name. What was his name? She never asked! How could she have been so stupid! Ugh!

Lindsay’s eyes widened in horror, as she hurriedly glanced around. A small mercy, there were no other customers. If she could just finish the coffee before anyone else came, then she wouldn’t *need* his name.

She recapped the sharpie, moving slightly faster than normal.

But what if he noticed? Were people sensitive about that sort of thing? There had been an issue a few months back with something at Starbucks, Lindsay couldn’t recall the details but oh god, what if something that big happened? Something so bad it became national news? She would die of embarrassment. It would be horrific.

As she pumped each flavor into the cup, she glanced over her shoulder at the door.

What if someone else came before she was done? What would she do? What *could* she do? Well instead of calling his name, maybe she should just call out the order. She’d done that once or twice, she’d seen others do it. But wait, if she was making the coffee, how would the other person even order? Lindsay was alone, even if she was able to turn and talk to the other customer, how would she ring them up? Then they’d be waiting for her to finish, and they’d get impatient with her. Then when they ordered they’d be frustrated, and it would be her fault. And then because of that they would—

No, no, *no*. Stop that! Lindsay shook her head. She couldn't let her mind run away like that.

She grabbed the portafilter, pouring coffee grounds into it, tamping the coffee down before twisting it into the machine.

Of course she was able to say she was overthinking things for *now*, but what about in half an hour? Her manager still hadn't called her back. Hopefully they'd listened to her message and knew she was alone, and they were looking for someone to come in and cover but... What if they couldn't find anyone? What if they didn't listen to the voicemail? What if the voicemail didn't even record properly?! What if something had happened to her manager, and that's why they weren't picking up? Oh god! What if something had happened to Jesse?! That's why he wasn't in! That's why he hadn't called! He was in the hospital or worse and she had been sitting her gripping about how he didn't call into work!!

The two shot glasses filled up, she tossed them into the cup before resetting the portafilter for the third shot.

No, no, **no**. Jesse was fine. Probably. He was a bit of the flaky type. Her manager would definitely listen to the voicemail. It was just a matter of time. But what if that time was too late? Or if no one came in? Even if someone could make it, they wouldn't want to. No one would volunteer to come in at 7 am on their day off. She was going to be alone for the morning rush. It was inevitable. She'd have to deal with all of their regulars on their own, what was supposed to be a three-man job. Not to mention anyone who decided to come in on a whim. She'd have to do the cash register, and make drinks, not to mention any food that anyone ordered. It was going to be a complete and utter shitstorm. She wouldn't be able to keep up, she couldn't do it. She was just one person!

The third shot was done, she tossed in it the cup, leaving the extra shot sitting under the machine. Next was the milk. She filled the pitcher, inserting the steam wand and waited for the milk to froth.

Everything was going wrong. She wouldn't make it through the morning. She would be bogged down here forever. But oh god her test. She still had her test to think about. What the hell was she going to do? She had been planning on studying between work and class but the way things were going, she'd end up working over time! She was going to fail this test. It was 30% of her grade. She couldn't recover from that. She'd fail the class. It was a requirement. She couldn't afford to fail this class! Failing this class would mean losing a scholarship. Not just one of them, two, no three! And that third one was the biggest one she had! Without that scholarship she couldn't pay for school. Working her wasn't nearly enough! If she had to take out another loan she would never get out of debt and she'd spend the rest of her life working to pay it off, no matter what kind of job she got. And then if she couldn't pay it off, her family—

No, no, **no**. Lindsay shook her head again as she poured the milk into the cup. She couldn't think like that. She had already been studying the past week. She wouldn't fail just because she didn't get some last minute studying in. Right?

Lindsay grabbed the finished drink, turning to get a lid. As she spun, her left foot caught her right pant leg. Feeling herself starting to fall forwards, Lindsay flailed momentarily, catching the edge of the counter with her hand. As she did, her grip loosened on the drink, the paper sliding out of her hand.

No, no, no, no, no, **no, no**, this couldn't be happening. Her heart pulsed palpably in her chest. Not now. Not *today*. The one time she wasn't careful. The one time. The thing she'd always be afraid of.

The cup hit the ground, the steaming hot liquid splashing all over the floor.

Lindsay instinctively jumped backwards, dodging the burning spray. She stood there, stupefied. Mouth gaping. Her mind blank as it processed the growing puddle on the tiled floor.

It happened. It finally happened. Her worst nightmare from the day she'd started. Three years. *Three full years*. Never spilled a drop. Until today. Why? Why *today*?

Well why not? Everything else was already going wrong so why not this too? And now that her worst fear had been realized, what did the world have in store for her next? Running out of ingredients? Machine breaking down? Spilling a drink on a customer?

Customer!

Jolting out of her daze, Lindsay glanced over the counter at the customer. He was drumming his fingers impatiently on one of the tables.

It looked like he was still on the phone. He hadn't noticed what had happened. Good, good. It would have been bad if he'd noticed. Okay, breathe. Breathe. She needed to get the drink done. As for the old one...Lindsay glanced down at the growing stain as she skirted around the mess. She would have to clean it up later. There was no time now. She'd already taken too long, she could feel it.

Lindsay's hands moved automatically, as fast as she was physically capable.

Too long, too slow. She was moving too slow. She had to go faster. If she moved this slowly she wouldn't make it. Wouldn't make it to her test, she'd miss it. Her strictest professor too. No make-ups without for warning or you were dying. Might allow for a family emergency. If you were lucky. Oh her dad, how was her dad doing? Last time they'd talked he said his knee was aching. Sure it might be nothing, but what if it wasn't? He was getting up there in years, what if this was the beginnings of arthritis? Or if he need a knee replacement? They couldn't afford something like that.

Okay so first the flavors. Done. Then the shots. Small mercy, the extra one should be still be good. Mix those in. Then the milk.

God she hoped the coffee on the floor would be fine. She peeked down at the ground, the puddle was already underneath of her shoes. Her white shoes. She'd have to clean it up later. She hoped she would have a break before the rush to do it. But then she'd also have to deal with getting ready for the rush. There were going to be so many people here, it was always packed for the

morning rush. Barely any standing room. What if a customer noticed the mess? What would happen then? Would they get mad? Be disgusted? Hang on—a coffee spill—that wasn’t some sort of health violation, was it???

The drink was done, for a second time. Breathing deeply, Lindsay firmly grasped the cup with both hands.

You will not trip this time. You will not spill a single drop of this coffee. You will not trip. You will not spill. You will not trip. You will not spill. You will not...

Repeating the mantra in her mind, Lindsay carefully turned around, taking great care to avoid making the same mistake a second time. With the utmost care she set the coffee on the counter, snapping the lid in place.

A small sigh of relief, which did nothing to ease the tension in her body. Now...

“Your coffee, sir.” Lindsay called out, her voice shaking far more than she would have liked.

The man brightened, spinning to face the counter. “Ah, speaking of!” He said as he strode over, he was clearly happy.

Yes. Happy. Good. That was what his expression was saying. What a relief. Good. She could do this. It wouldn’t be that bad.

The man whisked the coffee off of the counter, taking a hearty sip.

Yes. She could do this. Now before the next customer, if she could just clean up that spill...

“Guh! What the—?!”

What?

The man gagged, nearly retching as he pulled the cup away from his mouth. Something was wrong. But she’d done everything right. She’d made a mistake. But what? She’d messed up.

“I-is something wrong, sir?” Lindsay’s voice shook. She already knew the answer. Everything was wrong. She’d made his order. But it had gone wrong. But she could fix—

“Yes.” The customer snapped.

Oh no. That tone. Lindsay’s heart pounded against her ribcage. That wasn’t just an unhappy customer. That was an *angry* customer.

“I ordered *hazelnut* and *caramel* in triple shot white mocha. This has peppermint or something.”

No, no, no, no, *no, no, no*. Peppermint? No, that couldn’t be right. She’d definitely used hazelnut, definitely. The two flavors were right next to each other so she was always extra careful to grab the correct one and always double checked—the first time. Oh god.

Her heart pounded, sounding in her ears.

She'd only doubled checked the first time! Shit! The second time! After she'd spilled!

Apologize. She had to apologize. That would fix it. Yes. Apologize.

"I'm so—so—I'm—I'm—I—I—...—..."

Her—Her words. They—they wouldn't come out. They were stuck—in her throat. Why—why they had—had to come out. Come out. They had—had to. They weren't. Not coming out. Nothing was coming out. And nothing was coming in.

no. no. No. *No. No. No. No. NO. NO.*

Breathe. Breathe. ***Breathe!***

"Look, it's really not that big of a deal. I don't need an official apology or anything. I'd just like my order and..."

The man's words washed over her. She must look panicked. She had to respond. Had to make the drink. First she had to breathe. Why couldn't she breathe? Oh god, it was happening again!

Breathe! Speak! Do **anything!** Lindsay screamed. But nothing came out. Words sticking in her throat. This couldn't happen. Not *here*. Not *now*.

Lindsay's vision blurred as her she felt her whole body tremble. It had been four years since she had last felt this. Last felt the gut-wrenching terror. Last felt like she couldn't breathe. Last been crushed by this feeling of doom. Last had a panic attack.

She was losing control again. She couldn't breathe. She **was** breathing. That's what they'd told her last time. Even if she felt like she was choking she was really breathing. The danger was if she started hyperventilating. She was breathing. Definitely. She was getting oxygen. So why didn't it feel like it?

Her heart pounding against her chest, threatening to burst it open. Her throat constricting, cutting off her words and her air.

The world was so far away now, but she needed to get back to it. Needed to be in control. She couldn't lose control. Not at work.

"Are you alright, what can I do? Don't worry about the coffee at all, really, it's not important. I'm so sorry that I reacted like that. It's completely my fault, it's been a bad morning for me and I uh..."

The man's voice pierced into Lindsay's distorted world, ringing clear inside her head but feeling so far away. She couldn't see him anymore, or smell the coffee on the ground, she could only feel the trembling of her own body, the uncontrolled shaking of her limbs. What was he even saying? Bad morning? That's right—she had to work. Everything was going to go wrong if she didn't work hard enough. She couldn't work hard enough. She couldn't do it.

“Shut *up* Sharon!”

His yelling hurt, buzzing in her ears. She wanted to yell though, to scream at the top of her lungs, but she couldn't. The words wouldn't come out. The air wouldn't come out. The air wouldn't come in. It should be. It **was**. But it didn't **feel** like it. Why? Why didn't it feel like she wasn't breathing? She needed to breathe!

“What can I do to help? Please tell me. I want to help. Really, um. Lindsay? Right? Your name's Lindsay? I'm Raj. It's okay. Um. Um, everything will be okay. Probably. No! Not probably. Definitely. You just need to tell me what's wrong okay? Then I can help. Just tell me. Anything I can do. Um, can you hear me? Lindsay?”

Help? How could he help? There was nothing to do. She just had to breathe. Breathe. Why didn't it feel like she was breathing? What if this time was different? What if she really wasn't breathing? She couldn't. Couldn't breathe. This man shouldn't be trying to help *her*, she should be helping *him*. That was her *job*. Oh god her job. A panic attack at work! Not at work! In public!

“Asthma!? Is this an asthma attack? Uh, inhaler! Do you have an inhaler? Lindsay? Do you have an inhaler?”

No, no, no. That wasn't right. That wasn't what she needed. She needed to breathe. She needed to stop. Stop panicking. Stop this anxiety. It needed to stop. And she needed to breathe. *Breathe dammit!*

“Then help! We need help! Medical! Professional!”

What? Lindsay slowly processed his words. A new surge of panic.

No, no, no, *no, no*.

“I need an ambulance!”

NO, NO, NO, NO.

She didn't need an ambulance! She didn't need that! She really could breathe! It just felt like she wasn't! Once she felt like she was breathing again she'd be fine! She couldn't breathe. She had to be breathing. She couldn't breathe. That didn't make sense. She could breathe. Once she was breathing she'd be fine! Just breathe! Her life really wasn't in danger!

“Well **I** don't, but the barista here does! She's having an asthma attack! I think. I-I'm not really sure.”

Stop! Please, for the love of god! Stop! If you're not sure then **stop!**

“All of a sudden she just looked like she was choking, but she didn't eat anything. You need to hurry, oh god, get an ambulance here quickly please, **I don't want to see someone die like this!!!**”

She wouldn't die! But someone else might! Because that ambulance was coming here! Where it wasn't needed! It should go somewhere else! Somewhere with a real emergency! She was breathing! She **had** to be breathing!

Lindsay tried to scream at the man, shouting at him with all her might. But her words just piled up, clogging up her throat. Each word she tried to force out just made it harder to breathe. Made her body shake more. Made her feel the cold sweat on her skin as her panic rose higher and higher. And she can't—

“She was losing control again. She couldn’t breathe. She **was** breathing.”

Lindsay Bowman, age 21, female, junior in college working part-time as a barista. She is a first generation college student, going to school for wildlife biology. Her only family is her father who has raised her on his own since she was two. He is very proud of her accomplishments but doesn’t have the financial means to support her in college. To pay for school Lindsay holds multiple scholarships, need and achievement based and works part-time during the year and full-time during breaks.

Lindsay has Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and suffers from occasional panic attacks. Generalized Anxiety Disorder, or “free-floating anxiety” means that a person experiences excessive anxiety in many domains. Their anxiety is not limited specific events or activities and the anxiety is disproportionate to the potential consequences. In adults subjects of worry are mundane life circumstances, for example job responsibilities, health and finances, the health of family members, misfortunate to their children or similarly minor matters (household chores or being late for appointments). We see Lindsay worrying about her job, her father’s health (and briefly her co-workers), finances and her academics (which is a common subject of worry for children and young adults).

A panic attack is a sudden, short-lived episode of intense panic which peaks and then gradually fades. There are several symptoms which mark panic attacks, four of which are required for something to qualify as a panic attack. Some of the symptoms that Lindsay experiences in the panic attack described in the preceding scene are shortness of breath, sweating, trembling, a choking sensation, a feeling of unreality and a fear of losing control. A panic attack can be triggered by predictable events or can also occur without warning and with no apparent trigger. It is important to note that a panic attack, on its own, is **not** a mental disorder. Panic attacks may occur in the context of anxiety disorders (as it does for Lindsay), other mental disorders and even some medical conditions.

Lindsay was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder at the age of 15, following her first panic attack where she was rushed to the ER because she believed she was dying. In her remaining years of high school Lindsay sporadically attended sessions with a therapist in order to learn techniques to help her manage her anxiety. She stopping going altogether upon entering college, due to time and financial constraints. In addition, having gone her entire senior year without a panic attack gave her a false sense of security that her anxiety had been “dealt with.”

In this scene we see Lindsay’s anxiety about several events and occurrences in her life, many of which are justifiably stressful, but we see her how her anxiety is disproportionate to likelihood of an event or the possible impact. All these stressors contribute to Lindsay’s mounting anxiety throughout this scene, culminating in a panic attack. As noted before, these stressors are not necessary for a panic attack and instead function to demonstrate Lindsay’s catastrophizing mindset and the excessive nature of her worrying.

At the Airport

Sakina Bonnett

“So basketball with your boys again this weekend, huh?”

“Yeah, all they want to do is practice lately. Kian has his middle school tryouts coming up soon, so of course Jamero thinks he *has* to do *anything* that his big brother does. They’ve been making a big stink about getting everything perfect in our little matches. Studying the rule books even. On the other hand, I think my littlest is just using it as an excuse to play with his big brothers,” Sakina gave a hearty laugh.

“Well of course he is. It’s a factor of being the youngest. Let me tell you, as the youngest of five, when I was a kid...” As her co-worker Vince launched into a story about his lively childhood, Sakina passively scanned the area around them.

It was the lull between the early morning rush and all the noon time flights, so there wasn’t any line to the checkpoint. An elderly gentleman was approaching, without any bags. That was a bit odd. Sakina tracked his movements as he stopped briefly at the entrance to the lines, glanced at the signs, then strode confidently into the staff line.

“Hold that story, Vince.” Sakina cut him off, furrowing her brow.

She didn’t know him. The airport was small enough that she could recognize the faces of all the staff, and there weren’t any new hires she was aware of. This old man wasn’t dressed like a pilot either, and beyond that he looked a touch too old.

Sakina stepped into the man’s path. She was aware that while Vince stayed where he was, he was monitoring the situation warily.

“Excuse me, sir,” Sakina called out while the elderly man was still several feet away. “This is the employee line. Could I see some identification please?”

“I don’t need that.” The old man spoke so fast his words nearly slurred together, not slowing down his pace at all.

Didn’t need ID? That was a new one. Sakina took a step forward, firmly planting her feet on the ground, blocking as much of the lane as she could with her body. “Sir, I need to see some identification in order to let you through.”

“I said that I don’t need that.” The man said at the same break-neck pace, appearing slightly irritated that he had to repeat himself. Unlike his speed of his speech, the old man wasn’t walking that fast, but there was a definite purpose in his stride. Behind her, Sakina was aware of Vince moving closer, serving as a second barrier behind her.

“This is the employee line, sir,” Sakina explained staunchly, “In order to pass through you need to show the proper identification. If you are here for a flight, then I am going to ask that you turn around and proceed through the general boarding line.”

“I’m not here for a flight and I don’t need no ID.”

Sakina’s eyes narrowed in confusion and suspicion. Then why was he at an airport? And trying to get through security? Even with her internal hesitation, Sakina held her ground. The man was only a few feet away now. Instinctively Sakina’s eyes were scanning the man’s body, checking for any possible concealed weapons. He was wearing loose pants held up by a pair of suspenders over a buttoned-up flannel shirt. No obvious bulges, and his hands were out of his pockets, swaying by his sides as he walked. The man had to be at least in his late sixties, more likely well past that. He didn’t *seem* like a threat, and she didn’t want to believe that a senior man like this *would* be a threat. His face was round, kind, folds in his face from years of smiling. Yet even with an overall kind demeanor, there was something unnerving... his eyes.

A vibrant blue, visible from a fair distance but what was disconcerting about them was how wide open they were, as if his eyelids had been glued into that position. The only other time she’d since eyes like that was on some guy they’d stopped who’d been hyped up on stimulants. But this man was so *old*. There was no way he’d do something like that at his age, would he?

“**Sir.**” The politeness dropped from Sakina’s tone. She wasn’t asking anymore. “I **need** to see some identification. I **cannot** let you through without it.”

“You’re being awfully rude young lady.” The man scolded her. It was her job. Sakina’s body tensed as she pushed all extraneous thoughts away, focusing solely on the problem at hand. He was nearly within arm’s reach now and this old man didn’t show any signs of stopping. Even as he neared, he didn’t lower his voice, so he was practically yelling in her face. “Do you know who I am?”

“**No.**” Sakina’s mind spun. Did she know him? Should she? Not that it would matter. Even if he was someone important, that didn’t negate the need for ID. “I **still** need to see ID, sir.”

“Young lady, it is rather rude to make me repeat myself, and I very much dislike being forced to do so.” Without slowing his pace, the old man tried to walk around her.

Sakina side-stepped directly into his path, forcing the man to halt. “As do I, **sir.**” Her tone was final. “I **need** to see your ID, or I **cannot** let you through.”

Behind her, she heard Vince on the radio. Calling for airport security. It was about time. There was something off with this old man. On top of that Sakina wasn’t sure how long she would be able to stop this man by just standing in front of him; being unable to use force limited her options rather severely. If things got messy, they’d need Airport security. Airport security actually had the authorization to use force. She still hoped that wouldn’t be necessary, but this old man seemed rather determined, and he was getting more and more agitated.

“I’m *supposed* to be here. I’m here to teach the pilots. If you don’t know that’s fine, don’t worry about it. It doesn’t concern you.” The man spoke even faster than he had earlier, Sakina had to take a moment to try and parse his words apart.

Teach pilots? What the hell was the old man going on about? Sakina wondered while maintaining her stoic visage. If this old guy wasn’t on something then was he senile?

The old man attempted to step around the other side of Sakina, once again she stepped in front. He glared up at her. The way he was moving seemed far too purposeful for someone who was senile. Sakina opened her mouth to try and reason with the man once again, but was drowned out by his yelling.

“Excuse me, young lady! What *exactly* do you think you are doing? I have told you repeatedly, I am *supposed* to be here! Teaching those pilots how to fly is a *crucial* duty of mine, with which *you* are interfering!”

Sakina’s eyebrows flew up at the man’s assertions. This guy had to have something going on. Whether it was senility or—No. Not relevant.

Setting aside her confusion and surprise, Sakina focused on what was happening in front of her, everything else could be dealt with later. Her job was to ensure the security of the airport. Right now that entailed trying to calm down this old guy, contain the situation if possible and stall for time for airport security to arrive. A brief glance around already told her that containing this situation wasn’t particularly feasible, all attention in the area was already on their little exchange and—

Sakina blocked the man’s advance as he tried to step around her a third time—taking her eyes off of him for even a split second was obviously ill-advised.

“**Sir.** What I am **doing** is my **job.**” Sakina let her voice boom outwards, not yelling, but significantly louder than she had been before. “That means verifying your **identification** to determine whether or not you are **authorized** to pass through here. At this point I’m going to have to ask that you—”

“I don’t *need* identification, young lady! I’ve been *telling* you th—”

“*Calvin?!?!*”

“—at from the beginning! *What?!*” The old man whipped around, responding angrily to what was presumably his name. Upon seeing who had called out to him, a younger man around thirty, Calvin added in the same angry tone “What do you want, Philippe?”

“Wha-What are you doing?!” Philippe was standing stunned at the entrance to the general boarding line, an elderly woman standing next to him.

Family? Sakina’s eyes flitted between Calvin and the two others. No, none of the three appeared to be related, and the logo on the younger man’s shirt...it looked like it could be the logo of the local retirement community, but Sakina didn’t dare take her eyes off of Calvin long enough to confirm that.

“They won’t let me through!” Calvin cried out. Calvin’s attention was drawn to Philippe, allowing Sakina to relax a little internally, though she remained planted where she was, vigilant in case Calvin decided to make a break for it.

“Wh- why...? What? Why would you—? You’re not *going* anywhere Calvin! Natalia is the one who’s getting on a plane, remember?” Sakina glanced over in time to see Philippe motion

to the elderly women next to him, who nodded in confirmation. “You’re not getting on a plane, so, Calvin, could you please just come over here...”

“No!” Calvin crossed his arms. “I need to get through!”

“Calvin...” Philippe took a couple steps forward, as if to enter into the same employee line with Calvin. Sakina took in a sharp breath, body tensing. She did **not** need another unauthorized person so close to her.

Her co-workers thought the same.

“Sir! I’m going to have to ask you to remain where you are!” Another TSA agent cut Philippe off before he put even a toe in the staff line.

“Sorry, sorry!” Philippe backed off, hands in the air. “Calvin *please* come here!”

“Absolutely **not!** I have important business to take care of. And that means getting through here!” Calvin declared, not budging an inch.

“It’s **important** that you come here,” Philippe half-begged, half-commanded his senior. As Philippe did so he unconsciously took a step forward again, only to be met with the imposing figure of the same TSA agent. “Please, if you’d just let me go talk to him.” Philippe pleaded with the agent. “I swear he’s not normally like this, he’s not a danger to anyone. I don’t know what’s happening! Calvin, come *here!*”

“I refuse! *You’re* the one who said we were comin’ here! You know how good I am! I need to show these pilots what flying is all about!”

“I said we could come to *watch* some planes!” Philippe shouted back in exasperation. “And that’s farther down the airfield, not *here*. I never said *anything* about talking to pilots!”

So it looked like he had no idea what was happening either, Sakina noted. By this point she was assuming Philippe was some sort of assistant or nurse who had accompanied Calvin and the woman to the airport. But something had gone wrong. Sakina glanced down at Calvin. His attention was now focused entirely on Philippe. He’d even taken a few steps away from Sakina during their argument. She doubted that he was going to try and step past her any time soon. Now all that was left was to wait for—

“That him?” A flat voice asked from behind her. Sakina turned her head slightly so she could see an airport security officer conferring with Vince in her peripheral vision. After receiving the affirmative from Vince the officer approached Calvin.

“Sir, I’m going to ask you to come with me.” The officer instructed. Sakina noted the officer’s hand was on his weapon. It was still holstered at present, but he was clearly ready for this shouting match to turn physical.

She glanced at Calvin. At this point, Sakina would have to agree with Philippe. Calvin wasn’t an active danger. There had been plenty of chances for Calvin to become physically violent,

but he hadn't. If they could get him to go peacefully there wouldn't be any need for conflict. The question was how to move this stubborn old man.

"What for?!" Calvin demanded, almost insulted.

"Wa-wait a sec!! Hang on!!" Philippe shouted desperately, face pale.

"I just need to speak with you for a bit sir."

"About what, exactly?" Calvin questioned with a mix of suspicious and irritation.

An idea popped into Sakina's head.

"He's going to talk with you about what you're going to tell those pilots," Sakina stepped forwards. She shot the officer a meaningful look. Just asking was useless, but if they played into his ramblings... "If you go with my friend here you'll be able to talk with those pilots. He's going to get you set up in a nice room first."

The officer gave Sakina a small nod, hand relaxing over his holster. He turned to Calvin, "That's right. We'll even bring the pilots to you after we're all set up. Does that sound good?"

Sakina held her breath as Calvin seemed to consider this for a painstaking moment.

"Alright. That sounds acceptable." Calvin relented, giving a thoughtful nod.

"This way then." The officer led Calvin away, heading towards the holding cell where the old man's fate would be decided.

Sakina felt a weight lift off of her chest as Calvin and the officer walked away. That was certainly more excitement that she had anticipated for today. Breathing a sigh of relief, she turned back towards the scanners, meandering towards Vince. Maybe she'd ask to look at the x-rays for a bit. She felt like sitting after that.

"Hey, hang on! What's going to happen to him?!"

Sakina glanced back over her shoulder to see Philippe yelling at a TSA agent.

"Well sir, it will depend on multiple factors..." they were saying.

"I should be able to go with him! I'm his caretaker! You can't just—he's really harmless, I swear! He hasn't—he wouldn't—something weird is going on! None of that made any sense!!" Philippe was shouting half-coherently in desperation.

"You think that old guy was senile or something?" Vince asked in a low voice.

Sakina turned her attention in front of her, where Vince was standing. She glanced at the direction Calvin and the officer had disappeared, then to Philippe pleading with the TSA agent, then to the elderly woman, perhaps Calvin's neighbor of some sort, then across the other passengers, airport workers, TSA agents and security officers that had all congregated due to the commotion.

She shrugged.

“No idea. Don’t know if I’d call him senile, but there was definitely something going wrong in that guy’s head. Not just his head either, his eyes were all messed up, super wide. Only seen that with junkies. That was more than normal dementia or whatever. ”

“Yeah,” Vince nodded pensively. “You’re right ‘bout that.”

Calvin Higgins

It had been a long time since Calvin had been in an airport. Everything looked different now. A lot more screens. There were more screens everywhere. Phones, televisions, monitors. Screens he didn't even know about. More information. People constantly talking at you. It was annoying to be honest. Annoying like people talked loudly on their phone. In public. Or were loud in general. People talking over you. Interrupting you. Constant apologizing. Wet socks. Singing out loud. Unless you were in a choir. Choirs were fine. Didn't have a problem with choirs. He liked choirs. But not humming. Humming was annoying. What was the point of humming? Receiving crunchy peanut butter instead of smooth. People telling him he drank too much. Not being able to drink when he wanted. People who walked too slowly. Untrained pilots.

Right. Pilots. Calvin didn't trust them. Wouldn't go up in the air with them. Better if he flew himself. Hadn't flown much since he'd been discharged. He wanted to fly again. Best thing that had ever happened to him. And the Air Force too. Mostly. He'd lost Melissa because of the Air Force. Or that's what she had told him. He'd didn't get the connection. But that's what she'd said. He'd "come back a different man." That had never made sense. He was the same person. Nothing had changed. Hadn't even lost any limbs in the crash. But that had nothing to do with flying. Well, the crash did. No, flying was wonderful. Though not everyone was as good as him. He was the best. Especially civilian pilots. Military grade might come close. But civilians? Not a chance. That's right. That's why he was here. To train pilots. Help them get to an acceptable level. Now, where were the pilots? They'd have to be near the planes. For the pre-flight check. The ground crew did the check. But any pilot worth their salt would be there during the check. Then again these were civilian pilots. Might not be worth any salt. What was the worth of salt anyways? Sugar would be better, wouldn't it?

Calvin stopped in front of a maze of stanchions. The stanchions marked several possible paths that he could take. Each path had a sign at the entrance. *General Boarding* that was obviously for the general public. Not him. *TSA Pre-check*, The Salvation Army? What were they doing at the airport? Certainly didn't seem like a place they would be. And what was this pre-check that they were doing? Was it related to the plane check? Maybe that's where the ground crew went. That might be where he had to go. But that didn't seem right.

Shaking his head slightly to try and clear his mind, Calvin focused on the third sign. Written on a small gate with white letters was *Authorized Personnel Only*. Ah, that was it. That's where the pilots were. So that's where he needed to go.

Without hesitation Calvin pushed past the gate, following the path laid out by the stanchions. Why were there so many stanchions? Seemed useless. Didn't people know where to go on their own? Honestly, people these days. Needed direction for every little thing. When he was young he figured things out. On his own. No help. Not just where to go either. If these pilots needed this much help it would be a long day. How should he start with them? Basics were always good. Basics is where you start. But they should know the basics. But they were civilian pilots. Basics might be different. They needed to know the *important* basics. The basics he'd learned. He remembered when he had been first learning to fly—

“Excuse me, sir. This is the employee line. Could I see some identification please?”

He jerked his head up to find a woman in a blue uniform standing in the middle of the lane. Identification? Didn't she know who he was?

“I don't need that.” Calvin dismissed her. He was Calvin Higgins, Air Force, Purple Heart Senior Airm—No, Staff Sergeant. For valor and heroism in combat. Best pilot who ever lived.

“Sir, I need to see some identification in order to let you through.”

Wasn't she listening? Was she deaf or something?

“I said that I don't need that.” Calvin repeated, slightly annoyed.

“This is the employee line, sir. In order to pass through you need to show the proper identification. If you are here for a flight, then I am going to ask that you turn around and proceed through the general boarding line.”

“I'm not here for a flight and I don't need no ID.” Calvin shot back at this woman. Flight? Why would be flying? Hadn't flown in twenty years. Last flight had been with Suzanne. Visiting family. Her family. In California. For a holiday. Christmas—No New Years. They always spent Christmas together. Just the two of them. Visited family later. That was a good trip. Better than the other trip. That one had been bad. Summer. Intense fires. Smoke real thick in the air. Fires never used to get that bad. Shouldn't be allowed to get that bad. What they needed to do was—

“**Sir. I need** to see some identification. **I cannot** let you through without it.” The woman's tone was harsh this time.

“You're being awfully rude young lady.” He informed her strictly. Hadn't she ever heard of respecting her elders? That was completely inappropriate. Would have gotten him a beating growing up. “Do you know who I am?” Calvin demanded irritably. Come to think of it, a tone like that *had* earned him a beating. Only once or twice though. When he'd really messed up. He was a good kid. Always respectful. Yes Ma'am. No Ma'am. Yes, sir. No, sir. Properly courteous. There were a couple times though. When he forgot that courtesy. Always a reason though. Couldn't be discourteous otherwise. Needed a good reason. A solid reason. Otherwise you get a beating. Unless your parent didn't think it was a good reason. Then you get a beating anyways. That was why he'd gotten them. Once for talking back to his school teacher. But his teacher had—

“**No. I still** need to see ID sir.”

No?! The gall of this woman! Calvin really didn't like her attitude. Obviously wasn't taught proper manners. That was no good. Unfortunate trend of her generation. Bad sign. Very bad. If her generation didn't know manners, then the next generation wouldn't either. No one to teach them. Always needed to be a teacher. Like what Calvin was doing. But why limit it to the pilots? Could do the same here. Should do the same here. It was his responsibility. His duty.

“Young lady, it is rather rude to make me repeat myself, and I very much dislike being forced to do so.”

She stepped directly in front of him. “As do I, **sir**. I **need** to see your ID, or I **cannot** let you through.”

Such audacity. No respect. Didn't she know to listen to her elders? He was certainly her elder. Where Calvin came from you listened to your elders. Not here apparently. He'd have to spell out why he was here. Since she didn't recognize him. Already a problem in and of itself. Would have to address that later. And respect. So many things to address. Hadn't even gotten to the pilots yet!

“I'm *supposed* to be here. I'm here to teach the pilots.” Calvin informed her coldly. The only response was a blank look. No comprehension what so ever. “If you don't know that's fine, don't worry about it. It doesn't concern you.” Calvin made to walk around her, but she stepped right in front of him a second time! “Excuse me, young lady! What *exactly* do you think you are doing? I have told you repeatedly, I am *supposed* to be here! Teaching those pilots how to fly is a *crucial* duty of mine, with which *you* are interfering!”

The woman seemed even more surprised at that. Obviously a low ranking position. A grunt. A cog in the machine. A machine that was huge and enormous. Spewing out black smog. Bad for the health. Bad for the environment. Big problem, factories spewing out smog. People had known that for generations. But people didn't listen. Never listened. Except when you didn't want them to. Then people always listened. Heard things they weren't supposed to. Rude. That was part of manners. Knowing when to listen and when to not. Also knowing when to shut up. Don't blather on. Especially if the other party isn't interested. That was another thing that annoyed him. So many annoying things today.

Lost in his tangential thoughts, Calvin made to walk around this rude woman for a third time.

“**Sir**. What I am **doing** is my **job**.” The woman stepped in his way. Practically yelling now! “That means verifying your **identification** to determine whether or not you are **authorized** to pass through here. At this point I'm going to have to ask that you—”

Back to that again?! And people thought he was deaf! Which he was not. Nor was he blind. Didn't even need reading glasses. The woman's repeated blocking his path and interruption of his thoughts with her inconsequential requests were beginning to fuel Calvin's temper. He was becoming rather cross. “I don't *need* identification, young lady! I've been *telling* you that fr—”

“*Calvin?!?!*”

“—at from the beginning! *What?!*” Now people were interrupting him?! Entirely different kind of rude! This woman at least had the decency to not do that! Calvin angrily turned around. Philippe and Natalia were standing near the beginning of the maze of stanchions. Ah, Philippe had been the one who called out. Still rude to interrupt though. “Want do you want Philippe?”

“Wha-What are you doing?!” Philippe asked, stunned. Of course he was stunned. Calvin should have been talking to the pilots a long time ago. Long before they got here. Philippe must

be stunned at the delay. Yes. Delays were annoying. Very much so. Especially when you had important business. Like Calvin did.

“They won’t let me through!” Calvin explained. Philippe would fix this. Sort it out. Philippe was a good kid. Calvin had liked him since the first day they’d met. The day him and Suzanne had moved to Sunny Banks. Liked the place. Didn’t like the name. Banks were for the river. But the river wasn’t anywhere nearby. Not even within walking distance. Certainly too far for Suzanne. Their first day. Yes. He remembered it well. He had to carry all of the luggage in. Suzanne was in a wheelchair by then. Had been for nearly a month. Philippe had tried to help. But no. Calvin had insisted. Had to do it on his own. They were his belongs. And his wife’s. Wasn’t going to let anyone else carry it. Was his duty. Though it was courteous to ask. Philippe did that right. The courtesy made a favorable impression.

“Wh- why...? What? Why would you—?” the younger man sputtered. Why? Why was he asking why? Had *he* forgotten as well? “You’re not *going* anywhere Calvin! Natalia is the one who’s getting on a plane, remember? You’re not getting on a plane. So Calvin could you please just come over here...”

Calvin’s temper flared. Was Philippe going senile? At his age?! He was the one who had set all of this up!! “Absolutely **not!** I have important business to take care of. And that means getting through here!” he shouted back. Of *course* he knew that Natalia was getting on a flight! That was why he was here. Why it was important he talk to the pilots. Important he talk to them *today*. Had to make sure that Natalia was *safe* on her flight. How could he just intrinsically trust some pilot without a day of military training?!

“Calvin *please* come here!” Philippe’s pleads cut into Calvin’s thoughts.

“I said **no**. This is important for Natalia as well!” Natalia was a good friend. Not just to him. She was Suzanne’s friend. Her best friend. They only met at Sunny Banks, but it was true. Peas in a pod. Birds of a feather. That was Natalia and his Suzanne. Inseparable. So he had to watch her. Look out for her. Since Suzanne, his dear Suzanne, was gone. It became his job. His duty. Look out for Natalia. Talk to the pilots. Had to do it. Important that he do it. Essential.

“It’s **important** that you come here. Please, if you’d just let me go talk to him.” Philippe implored another person wearing the same blue uniform as the rude woman. “I swear he’s not normally like this, he’s not a danger to anyone. I don’t know what’s happening! Calvin, come **here!**”

“I refuse!” Another flare of anger. What in the blazes did Philippe think he was doing?! *Shouting* at him! *Ordering* him around?! Philippe had never been this disrespectful before! And beyond that... “**You’re** the one who said we were comin’ here!” Calvin accused him, “You know how good I am! I need to show these pilots what flying is all about!”

Philippe’s jaw dropped for a moment, before he yelled back, “I said we could come to *watch* some planes! And that’s farther down the airfield, not **here**. I never said *anything* about talking to pilots!”

Watching planes? Just **watching**? What good would that do? Simply watching planes. Hadn't done that much. No point. Much rather be up in the air. Last time was with Suzanne. Some ten-odd years ago. Long time. After they'd retired though. So not too long. He would have liked to be up there. With them. Flying. Doing tricks. But Suzanne was with him. On the ground. So it wasn't too bad. Enjoyable even. One of their last dates. Before she'd needed it. That wheelchair. When her legs were still strong. Before her bones got weak. When Calvin was still enough to take care of her. Didn't need anyone else. It was just the two of them. No one to nag you. Tell you how to bathe. When to get up. What to eat. What to drink. What not to drink. So what if he wanted breakfast for dinner? Or scotch with his dinner? Or to help him fall asleep? Or brandy. Been a long time since he'd had brandy. Good brandy that was. Who were they to tell him no. It was **his** life. No matter how little of it was left. He'd do what **he** wanted. They couldn't stop him. They could try but then he would just have to—

“Sir, I'm going to ask you to come with me.”

Calvin turned around to find himself face to face with a new arrival. His uniform was different from the others, a dark green inside of the vibrant blue.

“What for?!” Calvin protested instinctively. Was this another person here to challenge him? Someone younger too. He'd had his fill of back-talk. Especially from disrespectful young'uns. Why the next time that one of them so much as—

“Wa-wait a sec!! Hang on!!” Philippe yelled. Calvin decided to ignore him. He wasn't being helpful anyways.

“I just need to speak with you for a bit sir.” This new man explained flatly.

Calvin narrowed his eyes. That was vague. Wasn't in the mood for vague. “About what, exactly?” He snapped. He decided he wasn't going to move a muscle. Not until these people *understood* what was going on. *Understood* why he was here. *Understood* that he was needed. If they wanted him to move, they would have to *make* him.

To Calvin's surprise, it was not the man in front of him who answered, but the rude woman from earlier. “He's going to talk with you about what you're going to tell those pilots. If you go with my friend here you'll be able to talk with those pilots. He's going to get you set up in a nice room first.”

A small speck of hope. Had she finally understood? Was all that *nonsense* from earlier actually worth something?

“That's right. We'll even bring the pilots to you after we're all set up. Does that sound good?” The man added, even nodding in respect as he spoke.

A warm feeling of gratification spread through Calvin. Finally, someone who was respectful. Showing him the proper respect. And even the woman had changed her tune. Perhaps her upbringing hadn't been so horrible after all. It had been a simple miscommunication. Not something he should fault her for. She must have sorted it all out while he was talking with Philippe. How resourceful of her. Perhaps he had misjudged her. Been too harsh.

Calvin turned back to man, nodding. “Alright. That sounds acceptable.”

“This way then,” the man held out a hand, politely guiding Calvin.

Yes, this is how they should treat an elder. With respect. Especially one who was here to do a favor for them! Good for people to be respectful. It would be even better if they offered him a drink. Pilots couldn’t have any, no, they were flying. But he wasn’t going to fly. He could have a drink. A nice, strong drink.

Behind him, Calvin vaguely heard Philippe raising a fuss over something or other. What it was wasn’t of particular concern. He would explain everything to Philippe later. After all the business was taken care of.

Satisfaction was spreading through Calvin as he followed his new man, head held high. He was here to do a service to every passenger on every flight. Going to help Natalia visit her family. Do it safely. And he was finally going to be able to properly speak with someone. Someone who was really going to *listen* to him.

“Staff Sergeant. For valor and heroism in combat. Best pilot who ever lived.”

Calvin Higgins, age 73, male, retired. Calvin joined the Air Force directly out of high school and married his high school sweet heart, Melissa. He fought in Vietnam until he crashed and was honorably discharged. Upon his discharge Calvin took to drinking, as he believed he would never be allowed to fly again. Melissa divorced him 3 years after he returned, claiming that “he came back a different person.” Around the same time Calvin lost his job and ended up homeless. After several years in and out of work and on and off the streets, Calvin managed to find a steady job working with planes and met his second wife Suzanne. Calvin and Suzanne lived together for many years until Suzanne’s deteriorating health forced them to move to a retirement home approximately 3 years ago.

Calvin has bipolar disorder and comorbid alcohol use disorder. Bipolar disorder is where an individual experiences two types mood episodes, two opposite “poles,” depression and mania (or hypomania). Depression is more extreme mood state than merely “feeling down,” although feelings of sadness can play a role. A common symptom is *anhedonia*, or the inability to experience any pleasure at all. In addition to emotional symptoms of depression, there are motivational, behavioral, cognitive and physical symptoms of depression. Mania causes extreme and inappropriate rises in mood, often described as a “high,” and is the state Calvin is in during the preceding scene. While the symptoms affect the same areas as depression, the effect is opposite. Some of the manic symptoms that Calvin exhibits in this scene are exaggerated self-esteem and feelings of grandiosity, a decreased need for sleep (indicated by his abnormally wide eyes), talking more than is usual, at a higher volume and faster pace, and racing thoughts which quickly change ideas and topics.

There are two sub-types of bipolar disorder, type I, wherein a person experiences mania, and type II, wherein a person experiences hypomania. The main difference between a manic episode and a hypomanic episode is the level of impairment in functioning, though that does not make bipolar type II a less serious disorder. The DSM-V notes that if an episode is severe enough to cause hospitalization or if there are psychotic features, it automatically qualifies as a manic episode. It is possible to be bipolar type II, with hypomanic episodes, then experience a full manic episode, changing the diagnosis to bipolar type I. This is the case for Calvin.

Alcohol use disorder is a problematic use of alcohol leading to significant impairment or distress in a person’s life. Some areas where Calvin’s life was affected were a failure to fulfill major obligations (drinking was often a reason he would lose a job), and continuing to drink despite social and interpersonal problems. In addition Calvin suffered from tolerance and withdrawal effects.

Calvin has never been officially diagnosed with bipolar disorder or alcohol use disorder. His bipolar disorder developed during his time in the Air Force. Calvin was originally bipolar type II, experiencing only hypomanic episodes coupled with depression. Only hypomanic episodes

allowed him to remain undiagnosed in his time in the military. After being discharged Calvin began drinking as a form of self-medication for his depressive episodes. The drinking eventually formed into alcohol use disorder and, in combination with his bipolar, costed him his job and first marriage. Over following years, Calvin struggled with alcohol use and bipolar type II, until his 30s. His alcohol use lessened in severity and he managed to get back on his feet, even remarrying to Suzanne. Calvin still struggled with the temptation of alcohol, drinking more than was healthy for his age until he moved to Sunny Banks, where they forcibly restricted his alcohol intake. One can observe Calvin's still present desire for alcohol in the number of times that the subject surfaces amidst his racing thoughts.

In the scene "At the Airport," we are watching Calvin's first ever full manic episode, which means that Calvin would now be diagnosed with bipolar type I. Although in general there may not be a clear trigger that can be linked to someone's switch from bipolar type II to bipolar type I (i.e., a reason someone experiences a manic episode instead of a hypomanic episode), in Calvin's case there is. Calvin's second wife, Suzanne died a couple of months prior to this scene, sending him into a depressive episode. The doctor at Sunny Banks, unaware of Calvin's history of hypomania, prescribed him anti-depressants. Anti-depressants can push someone with bipolar disorder (type I or II) into a manic episode, as they did with Calvin. Calvin's mood had been increasing over the past couple of days, an effect of the manic episode, so Philippe brought Calvin along to the airport in an effort to help cheer him up further. Specifically Philippe was going to take Calvin to a unit of the Commemorative Air Force, a group who flies vintage planes, at the other end of the airfield, which will most likely include other veterans that Calvin could talk with. Along the way, Calvin's inflated self-esteem increased to a level of delusional grandiosity and he got it into his head that Philippe was bringing him to talk to the airline pilots so that Calvin can teach them. This mix of miscommunication and delusion fueled by the inflated confidence of mania is what we see played out in this scene.

Out Shopping

Jeremy Peterson

Jeremy was unpacking the new shipment of dress socks in the back room. The most absolutely exhilarating part of his job! Not. New arrivals were always a drag, *especially* the socks. Not that socks were *inherently* boring, certainly not. There were plenty of interesting and exotic sock designs out there, Jeremy himself owned several pairs he was rather proud of. But dress socks? Booooring.

Jeremy sighed as he stretched. Definitely not the most glamorous part of working at a professional attire store. Actually helping the customers or tailoring was much preferable. He glanced at the clock. Probably time to make a round, check if there were any customers waiting out front, and it was his turn. There weren't any fittings scheduled for today, but they welcomed walk-ins, so checking was always a must. Jeremy gave his co-worker a nod as he left the stuffy back room.

If nothing else, a short walk would relieve his boredom.

"I will *not*."

A rather feminine voice floated back to Jeremy through the store. Sounded like there was a customer waiting. And they brought along a friend. In that case he should probably grab a second stool for outside the changing rooms, people generally appreciated a place to sit.

Now, where exactly were they...?

"We do not." This time Jeremy was able to pinpoint the customer's location, the other side of a tall display in the front of the store. Jeremy rounded the display, opening his mouth to greet the woman and her friend, but stopped abruptly.

There was no friend. Clamping his mouth shut, Jeremy glanced around. The friend was probably just bending down, or out of sight. He craned his neck. Nothing. After wallowing in confusion for a brief moment, Jeremy snapped his fingers. Bluetooth!

His shoulders loosened. Same thing had happened to him just last week, someone with a hands-free device was carrying on and Jeremy made a total fool of himself trying to keep up before he realized he had never been a part of the conversation! Confidence restored, Jeremy prepared his best sales smile, about to step forward when...

"I am **not** going to fail." The woman snapped her head to one side. No Bluetooth in that ear. "I **will** not fail. Not because I'm a woman, and not because I'm Muslim either." The woman snapped her head to the other side. No Bluetooth in that ear either.

Jeremy's confidence wilted. People talked to themselves, sure, Jeremy did it occasionally, but this person...didn't sound like that. It sounded like a conversation, with only one person.

“That’s not true, I’m healthy now...” the customer mumbled something further that Jeremy couldn’t hear. That *really* didn’t sound like talking to herself. It felt... different.

Well that didn’t matter did it? Jeremy shook himself lightly, trying to steel himself to step forward, but something kept stopping him.

The woman spun back to one side, gaze coming close to where Jeremy was standing. Without thinking he ducked, taking refuge behind a clothing rack.

What? Why? Why had he done that!! That was grossly unprofessional! Hiding behind a clothing rack from a customer simply because she was talking to herself?? Unacceptable!

Jeremy swallowed. Even if he told himself that... her actions were rather off-putting. As he peeked around the end of the clothing rack, he couldn’t stop the uneasy feeling growing steadily in the pit of his stomach.

The woman turned back to face the mirror, and Jeremy caught a flash of sadness crossing her face.

A pang of guilt burst through the unease in his stomach. Here he was, hiding behind the blouses, while there was a customer waiting for him. A customer who was feeling down no less! Some people went shopping to cheer up, for all he knew this woman had just been in an argument—or worse!—and here she was trying to make herself feel better, and what was he doing? Absolutely nothing! Even hindering her by his inaction!

Straightening himself up, forcibly inflating his confidence, Jeremy stepped around the blouses into plain view.

“Excuse me, ma’am?”

The woman didn’t look up. Jeremy saw her purse her lips in the reflection and...did she just roll her eyes?

Confidence punctured, Jeremy took a half-step forwards. “Excuse me, ma’am, my name is Jeremy, I’m a shop assistant?” His voice came out significantly more timid than he would have liked.

There was an awkward pause.

Was she deaf? Or maybe hard of hearing? Oh crud, what were those signs that he learned again? He’d learned at least enough sign language to help a customer thoroughly, but it had been years since he’d actually used any. ‘Hi’ was just a simple wave. ‘How can I help you’ was point to himself then it was a fist on an open palm, then moved from his torso out...or was it in...?

Without warning the woman spun around, her eyes frantic for a half-second, before they settled on Jeremy. He barely stopped himself from jumping at the sudden movement, instead funneling all of his energy into maintaining his best customer service smile.

“Yes! My name is Manara Griffith, it’s a pleasure.” The woman introduced herself with an open hand and a friendly smile.

Jeremy hesitated for a fraction of a second before taking her hand. A wave of relief flooded his system that he tried his best not to show as they shook.

“And it is a pleasure to have you here, Ms. Griffith,” Jeremy responded with a practiced ease, before recalling his manners, “—ah, is Ms. alright, or would you prefer a different title?” Didn’t want to assume of course.

“Please, just Manara is fine,” She responded, although Jeremy also detected a hint of something else as she waved her hand. Surprise? Confusion? Perhaps relief? Some people didn’t like having titles at all. Perhaps she was one of them?

“Very well, Manara. Are you just here to look at our jackets and blazers today, or are you here for a full ensemble?” Jeremy began to settle into his usual routine. There was nothing to worry about after all, he’d just been over reacting. Though some unease remained, tugging at the back of his mind...

“I’m here for a suit.”

Made sense, she was standing in the blazers section. With a minor start, Jeremy realized that Manara was in fact currently trying on a blazer. A glaring detail that he had completely missed in his earlier stupor.

“Then let’s hang up that blazer, and I’ll show you to where our women’s suits are.” Jeremy held out his hand for the hanger, as he waited patiently for Manara to remove the blazer.

“Certainly,” She smiled as she slid off the jacket. “Thank you,” she said as she handed over the garment.

Jeremy nodded with a smile. Humming tunelessly he rehung the blazer with expert ease. He strode confidently back past Manara, motioning for her to follow him. “This way, please.”

As they passed through the store Jeremy gave his different spiels about the various store displays and what options were available. Manara nodded as he rambled on.

“Even though we are still an independent store, run by local, small business owners, of course, we are also part of a coalition of other stores that all order garments from the same fashion institute, which allows us to give our customers a significantly larger selection than what we have in the physical store. If we don’t have what you want, than we will know someone who does, or someone who can make it for you. After all everyone is unique, from taste to body shape, no two people are the same. So why should we expect everyone to want the same clothes? Or the same clothes to fit everyone? Which is why of course we offer complementary tailoring, as I’m sure you already know.”

Manara nodded.

“Look at me ramble, dear me. So, down to business. We have specialized women’s suits, suits made for women, with a working woman’s needs in mind that is, not just a man’s suit modified to a woman’s proportions. Our selection of women’s suits in the store proper isn’t that

large I'm afraid. If you don't find anything to your liking however, we also have a catalog that you can browse through."

Spinning around to face her, Jeremy clapped his hands. "Did you have specifics in mind already?" Manara's expression looked a touch vacant. No matter, wasn't exactly an unusual phenomenon. "Or general preferences?"

"Yes, actually." A minor look of probably relief, "Something professional, but at the same time practical and easy to move in. And I would prefer a shirt that limits the amount of, um," She hesitated, though Jeremy already knew exactly where she was going. "of *skin* that's shown."

"Of course." Jeremy generally favored more modest garments to show customers to begin with, letting them choose if they wanted something a bit more—ahem—open. A customer specifically requesting such however, made his job that much simpler. "That's completely understandable, and a common request for those in the professional world."

He spun back around, eyes scanning the racks of clothing. He already had several in mind that could work, but based on Manara's skin tone, generally body type and... Jeremy glanced back at her—height about five seven or eight...with half inch to inch heels on... so closer to six or seven...

He grabbed three options for now, juggling them in his arms in order to display them. "How are these ones? Can always try on multiple." Jeremy flashed a bright smile.

"The one on the right looks good." Manara pointed to the suit hanging off of Jeremy's left hand. A newer arrival, dark gray and sleek in appearance. It was one of Jeremy's favorites from the most recent collections. He set aside the other two for now.

"Ah yes, wonderful choice. Not too plain style wise, and the neutral palette makes it easy to add a scarf if you want some color, or it's particularly chilly," Jeremy gave a corny grin and a light laugh, holding the suit up closer to Manara, yes this should be the right size for her to try on.

"Well then, shall we start with trying this on? Or would you prefer to browse for a couple other options first?"

"Let's just try this one to start." Manara responded. Was it his imagination, or did she seem more distracted now? Oh well, wasn't particularly relevant.

"Then this way, s'il vous plait and por favor," Jeremy strode ahead, leading Manara around the corner to the changing rooms. He unlocked the door, and hung up the suit inside. Holding open the door, he gave her the basic run down, "So, the suit is inside, all of the pieces are there, let me know if you need anything else, or help getting anything on. If it's a more sensitive area I can get a female assistant if that would make you more comfortable. Any questions?"

"Um, no, I think that covers it."

"Excellent, I'll be waiting right outside then. Just give me a holler when you're done or if anything comes up!" Jeremy shut the door, letting out a breath as he dropped his sales persona.

He sat down heavily in a nearby chair. He'd been so tense to start, and with everything going so smoothly, and so *normal*, he felt a touch silly now.

Though it wasn't over yet.

Whatever, it was going wonderfully. And Manara seemed like a perfectly personable person, if a touch quiet. Nothing to write home about. On the subject of writing home, he should probably give his grandmother a call soon; her 98th birthday was coming up. He wouldn't be able to get up to Maine for the celebration, but he should probably get her a card at least. Maybe a present? But what would she want?

Time ticked by as Jeremy pondered gift options, until the dressing room door opened and Manara emerged.

Jeremy jumped up, flipping back to his sales persona. "Everything feel alright?"

Manara glanced down at herself. She didn't look entirely comfortable in the suit, which was never a good sign right off the bat, but in Jeremy's opinion the suit looked quite good on her. The sleeves would have to be taken in a touch, and the shoulders might be a hair too wide... Even before Jeremy himself finished speaking, he was compiling a list of needed alterations in his head.

"For the most part, the pants feel a touch tight..." Manara spoke with uncertainty, pulling absently at the trousers.

She was certainly correct, at least in the hips and upper calves, lower down the opposite problem reigned however...

Trained to keep his opinions to himself unless asked, Jeremy withheld his own judgements and simply smiled brightly. He held out his arm to indicate a very useful room nearby they had set up, with mirrors and a slightly raised platform specifically for customers to judge for themselves. "Well, why don't you step this way. This will let you see yourself from every angle."

Manara nodded, giving an awkward smile as she stepped on to the platform, turning stiffly to see her own reflection. Jeremy wondered how often she came to this type of higher end clothing outlet. She didn't seem unfamiliar with the procedures, but wasn't comfortable with them either.

After a lengthy silence, Jeremy finally pipped up. "So, what do you think? The pants do look a bit off, but those would be fairly easy to tailor."

"Oh, w-well, its grotlem."

"Grot...lem?" Jeremy repeated, confused.

"My bad, that's Arabic."

"Oh, o-okay," It didn't sound like any Arabic he'd ever heard, but to be fair he hadn't heard a lot of Arabic.

"I-I think I'll try something else. I-I'm not really feeling this one." Before Jeremy had a chance to say a word, Manara had bolted back into the changing room.

The pants didn't look *that* bad... Jeremy thought to himself, but each to their own. He scratched his head as he made his way back to the chair. The unease in his gut had returned once again. He tried to push it away as he waited for Manara to re-emerge; opting to focus on mundane thoughts, like his grocery list.

“Are you *kidding me right now?!?*”

An almost scream came out of the changing room. Manara said something further but he couldn't make out her exact words.

What was wrong? Did something happen? Zipper broke? Button come off? Couldn't get the clothes back off? That had all happened before, the latter more often than he cared to admit. Not as bad as the one customer who couldn't get their *own* clothes back on again, however...

“In *elementary* school, and I did *not* fail it. That was *one test*. And it was on *directions*.”

Jeremy's attempts to curb his own uneasy feelings floundered horribly at that. What was that even supposed to *mean*? What test?

Standing, he approached the door of Manara's changing room. He raised a knuckle to tap on the door, maybe he should get his manager first?

No. Jeremy shook his head. That would be ridiculous. He did that for unruly or rude or troublesome customers, Manara had been none of those things.

He tapped lightly on the wooden door.

“I know what Everest is!”

The irritated response came. Though it certainly wasn't a response to him.

Everest, as in... the mountain?

Jeremy shook his head again, tapping a second time, slightly harder.

“Manara?” He called softly.

“What?” A cold response, but one that made sense! Jeremy's spirits soared as he opened his mouth, only to be cut off once again.

“How should I know? You never make any sense!”

So... not a response to him. And still hadn't heard him. This...wasn't good. Hm. Jeremy brushed the keys on his waist. If it came down to it, he could get into the dressing room, but Manara had been a good customer, and she just seemed sort of... sort of confused right now. Nothing really serious.

At least, Jeremy tried to convince himself that it wasn't serious, even as panic began to well inside of him. A panic imbued with more than a hint of fear.

Though rising alongside the panic, and stronger, was concern. While Jeremy did not fully understand what was happening, he understood the distress in Manara's voice. The concern over that distress drove him to knock a third time, hard, and call out.

"Excuse me, Manara? Is everything all right in there? You've been in there for a while."

Straining his ears to catch any sort of sound, Jeremy waited. After a few moments that felt like so much longer, Manara's meek response came.

"I-I'm fine."

Well *that* was a lie.

Then, louder, but even more distraught, she added:

"I-I just don't want to come out anymore!"

"You...don't want to come out?" Jeremy repeated before he could help himself. That was certainly a new request. He'd heard stories of people in department stores who would refuse to leave at closing time but he'd never had to deal with anything like that here... should he get his manager now? Or maybe there was someone else nearby he could get? He glanced over his shoulder to look for his co-worker.

As Jeremy contemplated his next course of action against the backdrop of his rising panic, Manara whispered something more.

"N-no, I-I'll just stay here."

She needs help. That single thought kept surfacing in Jeremy's mind. This woman needed help. What kind of help she needed however, he had no idea.

"**Just shut up!** And leave me alone for once!"

Jeremy jumped back from the door in surprise at Manara's scream. This woman needed a *lot* of help.

"Hey Manara, um, i-is there anything I can do for you?" He approached the door again, fear and concern fighting for dominance in his heart and mind. "Um, I-I'm trained in first aid and..."

"**No!** I want to be alone! By myself! I don't need you! Just leave me *alone!*"

Ooooooaaaaay. Jeremy took a deep, deep breath. This was very quickly getting out of his area of expertise. No, that was wrong. He'd been out of his expertise from the second he had first heard her talk. But he had a couple more things he wanted to try before he gave up.

"I-is there anyone you want me to call? Maybe family or friends? Maybe they can come and help...?" Family, yes. Family was good. Family typically knew what was going on.

"No, no!" The broken response came. If he wasn't mistaken what sounded like... sobbing?

“Well then how about—” He started, but was quickly overrun by her shouting.

“There’s *no one like that!* None of them would **do that!** You don’t know *anything!*”

Fairly certain that wasn’t actually a response to him, Jeremy pressed on.

“Um, well, then maybe...um, how about the police? I-I don’t want to scare you or anything, but just as someone to help, you know? I-I know in general they don’t have the best reputation right now, but the station is just down the street... And my friend just recently joined too actually, so I happen to know for a fact that they’re all really, um, really well trained, to, to deal with this kind of situ—er, I mean, to help people...” Whoops, that was close. Didn’t want to insult her, especially if she was—Jeremy swallowed. “My point is, that they are really nice people who just want to help and they—”

The door disappeared, replaced with Manara, a completely plastic grin on her face. It took every ounce of will power Jeremy had to not to recoil at the sight.

“I’m so sorry. I’m not feeling well today. I think I’ll come back some other time.”

Jeremy blinked rapidly, attempting to process her words.

“U-um, are you...” He began, not entirely sure where his sentence was going.

“Yes, I’m positive. Just feeling a bit off, heh heh.” The laugh Manara gave was so forced it was terrifying, “Thank you so much for your help today. Really it was a pleasure.”

With that Manara pushed her way past the dumbfounded Jeremy. Something inside of him was screaming that this was wrong. This wasn’t how it should be. Not only her behavior, but that he shouldn’t just let her walk away. All of a sudden his concern wasn’t only concern for her.

Jeremy recovered enough to spin around and cry out one more time.

“W-wait Ma’am!”

“Yes?” Manara responded without turning around.

Jeremy took a deep breath. Asking as evenly as he could, “Ma’am are you sure you’re alright?”

She turned around, her grin was under so much pressure that the slightest nudge would make it crumble.

“I’m fine. Everything is fine.”

Manara Griffith

This blazer had a nice feel to it, sleek, not too gaudy. It would be good for a first impression, but something was still off about it.

Manara turned to see her back half in the mirror. The problem could be the shirt that she was wearing underneath. Its multi-layer design could be causing the blazer to sit awkwardly.

“Maybe I should have worn my white button up...” Manara mumbled to herself, as she attempted to smooth the blazer down over the shirt, to no avail. Well, her current clothes weren’t too much of a concern, she was here for a full suit, not just a blazer. This was just browsing.

She took off the blazer, carefully returning it to its hanger, and neatly tucking it away on the rack. Manara let her eyes wander over the selection, trying to pick out ones that she liked, and would fit her new position. She had just recently been promoted, after six years of hard work. Her promotion entailed moving to a new office, in a new building, with new co-workers, many of whom she would now be supervising. She wanted to make the best first impression possible, and felt a new suit would not only help her look the part, but also give her a small boost of confidence.

“It’s not going to work out, you know.”

Manara froze, hands stuck in their positions pushing apart the blazers. After a few seconds she resumed browsing, pulling out another blazer that she liked. Carefully taking it off the hanger, she pulled it on, standing in front of the full length mirror once more.

“It’s simply too hard for you, hun.”

This time Manara glanced over her shoulder, hoping to see someone behind her. Despite knowing there was no one there. Despite recognizing the voice. Stubbornly, she turned back to face the mirror, smoothing down the new blazer.

“You’ll only be a disappointment.”

That wasn’t true. Her family had told her so many times how proud they were of her. Especially after everything she’d gone through after graduation. Dr. Floyd had praised her progress, perhaps even more than her family.

“Hun, you really think they’ll respect a woman?”

Of course they would respect a woman. Why wouldn’t they?

“Women are not fit for business. If you want a career, hun, teaching is the only place you could possibly succeed.”

Manara set her jaw, refusing to listen to the raspy voice of that old crone. She hadn’t seen the hag since middle school, but apparently that didn’t stop the witch from nagging her.

“That’s why you’ll fail, hun. Why you have already. You’re attempting to do the impossible.”

“S why ya fixin’ ta blow somethin’ up once ya get angry ‘nough.”

“I will *not*.” Manara snapped, head whipping around to glare over her right shoulder. *That* one got to her. People like *him* had *no* right, and knew absolutely *nothing* about—Her eyes widened. She spun back to face the mirror.

“Course ya will, ’s’what yer kind does, ain’t it?”

“That’s such bullshit,” Manara muttered angrily to herself, as she straightened the blazer again. “And you know it.” It was that abhorrent ‘preacher’. An extremist who barely knew the tenets of the faith he hollowly claimed to practice. What did he know about hers?

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous, dearie. She would have to know how to make a bomb first. You know, that hard chemistry stuff? She’s not smart enough for that. That’s why women are better off at home taking care of the children. At least Muslim women know that. Don’t they, hun?”

“We do not.” Manara spoke in a clipped tone, jaw clenching. Great. Now the hag was weighing in (inaccurately) on her culture. She’d at least had the restraint to not do *that* in middle school. Manara could feel the rage boiling up inside of her, but she couldn’t get angry. Oh no. Her anger was what *they* wanted.

“Couldn’t do chemistry, or biology, abysmal at math. You *do* remember having to retake Geometry, don’t you hun? Seriously, what do you think you’re trying to do here? You’re insulting anyone who’s ever helped you. Squandering their time, their effort. All that consideration. Wasted. On a silly little girl trying to reach above her station.”

“I am **not** going to fail.” Manara announced stubbornly, glaring to her left. “I **will** not fail. Not because I’m a woman, and not because I’m Muslim either,” She snapped her head back to her right, daring a rebuttal.

“Then it’ll be because you’re insane.”

Manara’s blood ran cold, inhaling sharply.

“You’re nutty. Crazy. Loony. A bonafide *psychopath*.”

Her grip tightened on the blazer. This was a new one. “That’s not true,” she muttered. “I’m healthy now. That’s why I take medication, to keep me grounded.”

“Oh, yeah? Then why are you talking to voices in your head?”

Manara’s eyes widened, as she reflexively spun to her left, seeking the source of the voice, this new voice, one she didn’t recognize at all. Not that it would matter if she did. The voices didn’t exist. They were just in her head. That’s right, in her head. Even though they really sounded like they were coming from outside... No, they were **not** real. She had taken her medication today, right? There’s no way she would have forgotten to take it. Not now, when she was so close to what she’d worked so hard for. No, she had definitely taken her medication today. She couldn’t have forgot. Definitely. It was impossible. Right?

“I told you it was pointless, hun.”

Manara swallowed hard, eyes downcast.

“Excuse me, ma’am?”

Manara pursed her lips. Great. A fourth one. At least this one wasn’t berating her immediately. Probably would given enough time though. They always did.

“Excuse me, ma’am, my name is Jeremy, I’m a shop assistant?” What should have presumably been a statement ended up more as a question as the voice moved closer.

So they had jobs now, was that it? Wait. Hang on, no. This was—!

Manara spun around as she realized her mistake, plastering a smile on her face. Standing in between the clothing racks, wringing his hands nervously, was a sandy haired young man. The deep purple vest he wore confirmed him as one of the shop’s employees.

“Yes!” Manara chirped. How much had he heard? Did he hear anything? Did he hear her? Had he heard *them*? “My name is Manara Griffith, it’s a pleasure.” She stretched out a hand.

“Careful, don’t let him know you’re crazy.”

Jeremy seemed a touch relieved as he took her hand, or was that just her imagination?

“And it is a pleasure to have you here, Ms. Griffith—ah, is Ms. alright, or would you prefer a different title?” Jeremy interrupted himself.

It appeared that even if he had heard anything, he was pretending that he hadn’t, which was fine with Manara.

“Tch, ‘Ms.’ How uncouth. It should only be Mrs. or Miss.”

“Why’d ya go an’ tell ‘im yer first name? ’S obvious whatcha are.
‘E’s gonna be scared of ya now.”

“Please, just Manara is fine,” She waved a hand. Not everyone was a raging Islamophobe.

“Very well, Manara. Are you just here to look at our jackets and blazers today, or are you here for a full ensemble?” He asked pleasantly.

“I’m here for a suit,” Manara responded evenly. She could do this. Just had to ignore them.

Jeremy smiled bright, “Then let’s hang up that blazer, and I’ll show you to where our women’s suits are.”

“Certainly,” Manara had completely forgotten she was still wearing it.

“Prolly thinks ya were tryin’ ta steal it.”

“Thank you,” Manara handed the blazer over to Jeremy, keeping her face as neutral as possible. She twiddled her thumbs as she waited for him to put in back in its spot.

“If you’re not prudent, he’s going to think you’re deranged.”

“This way, please,” Jeremy led Manara through the store.

“You should not even be here, hun. To begin with, a place like this shouldn’t even exist. Women. Wearing suits? The absolute disgrace of it. Why a woman would ever want prance around dressed as a man is beyond me. Pretending to be a man will only lead to failure. You’ll be stigmatized. Cast out from society, hun. Oh it pains me to think of your future if you continue on this path. No one respects a woman trying to take charge.”

“Our selection of women’s suits in the store proper isn’t that large, I’m afraid. If you don’t find anything to your liking however, we also have a catalog that you can browse through.” Jeremy was saying.

Manara stopped midway through an absent nod, blinking. How long had Jeremy been talking? How much had he said? She hoped he hadn’t asked her any questions.

“Did you have specifics in mind already? Or general preferences?” Jeremy asked.

“Yes, actually.” Manara smiled. It didn’t seem like she’d missed anything terribly important.

“If you’re really going through with this, then you’ll need to use your natural assets. Something low cut, with sex appeal, hun. That way you can at least seduce anyone into listening to you.”

“Something professional, but at the same time practical and easy to move in. And I would prefer a shirt that limits the amount of, um,” Manara coughed, “of *skin* that’s shown.”

“Cleavage? Can’t even say a simple word? It’s the only part of you that’s worth anything. Well, that and one other thing...”

“Of course. That’s completely understandable, and a common request for those in the professional world,” Jeremy ran off to grab a couple examples.

“Course she can’t say cleavage. ‘E’s a *man*, ain’t he? Shouldn’t even be speakin’ ta ‘im without an escort! An’ her hair! ‘E can see it all! ‘Er chest is the last thing she oughta be worryin’ ‘bout, she’s already showing her face, and all of her hair ta this complete stranger!”

Manara breathed in deeply, closing her eyes. She didn’t even want to *begin* thinking about how utterly *wrong* all of those statements were. The stereotypical nature was only the start, after that...

“How are these ones? Can always try on multiple.”

Opening her eyes, Manara found herself facing three different suit combinations.

“The one on the right looks good.” She pointed to a dark gray suit, the blazer looked like it was designed to button center chest, and she like the singular pleated slots on either side, kept the ensemble from looking too plain.

“Good? Are you serious? Hun, that’s the opposite of what I said!”

“Ah yes, wonderful choice,” Jeremy smiled, putting the other two away. “Not too plain style wise, and the neutral palette makes it easy to add a scarf if you want some color, or it’s particularly chilly,” Jeremy gave a light laugh.

“Or if ya want ta cover yer entire body in one of ‘em black sheets.
That oughta go with the color, too, right?”

Manara mechanically returned the laugh. Stubbornly ignoring everything except the words coming out of Jeremy’s mouth. She forced herself to wonder how often he used that joke.

“Well then, shall we start with trying this on? Or would you prefer to browse for a couple other options first?”

“Oh, yes, more options! We need to find something that won’t
make you look as though you’re trying to cross-dress as a man!”

“Let’s just try this one to start.”

“Then this way, s’il vous plait and por favor.”

Jeremy led the way to the dressing rooms. He held the door open for Manara to enter.

“So, the suit is inside, all of the pieces are there, let me know if you need anything else, or help getting anything on. If it’s a more sensitive area I can get a female assistant if that would make you more comfortable. Any questions?”

“Oh, I get it, ya have ta dress like a man ‘cause yer backwards,
barbaric people think women can’t do nuthin’ ‘cept have brats. That it?
This whole shindig boils down ta that. Provin’ yer own filthy culture is
inferior.”

“Um, no, I think that covers it.” Manara was starting to feel a tad overwhelmed.

“Excellent, I’ll be waiting right outside then. Just give me a holler when you’re done or if anything comes up!” With a smile Jeremy pulled the door shut behind him, leaving Manara standing in the small changing room, surrounded by hostile forces.

“Honestly, you think this will help you succeed? Dressing like a
man? It’s utterly ludicrous, hun. I told you time and time again, you
should focus on fields you are better suited for. Did I not teach you better
than this?”

“I remember what you tried to ‘*teach*’ me...” Manara grumbled as she began to change, “Tried to teach me all of your old-fashioned, backwards, sexist views. How you ever became I teacher I don’t know.”

“I became a teacher because I was *competent*. And because I was right! I mean just look at yourself, look at your history! Your peers. How far have the **men** you graduated college with gotten by now, hm? How high up are they in their careers? And where are you?”

“That is not a fair comparison.” Manara slid off her shoes to change pants.

“Because you’re crazy and they’re not?”

Manara froze. There it was again. That new voice.

“No...” She responded through gritted teeth. “Well, the diagnosis was part of it b—”

“They got farther because they’re not insane. Makes sense.”

“*And* because they’re men.”

“Prolly helped that they ain’t monkeys.”

“Would you *listen* for once?” Manara hissed. “The diagnosis set me *back*, yes. But if you look at it comparatively to the time *in* the field, I am just as far as *any* of them.” Manara angrily pulled on the jacket of the suit. “So I would now ask that you all kindly, *stuff it*.”

With that, she pulled open the door to the changing room. Outside, Jeremy stood quickly, a bright smile quickly taking over his face.

“Everything feel alright?”

“For the most part, the pants feel a touch tight...” Manara admitted.

“Well, why don’t you step this way,” he motioned to a small alcove by the changing rooms. The walls were lined with mirrors and there was a small pedestal in the center. “This will let you see yourself from every angle.”

“Oh yes, your ego would just love that, wouldn’t it?”

Manara stepped up on the pedestal, ignoring the derisive comments. It really felt like they were scrapping the bottom of the barrel now.

Yes, just like she’d felt, the pants didn’t fit quite right, they were too tight around the hips, then too loose in the legs.

“Better off with a skirt. Wouldn’t look like a butch.”

“Or cover everythin’ up. Stop pretendin’ ta be like *us*.”

“Isn’t this nice. Everyone can see each of your flaws with all these mirrors. Like you’re in the spotlight. Under the microscope. That Jeremy

kid can see right through you. Each and every flaw. Reflected between these mirrors. Over and over. I wonder if he can see the insanity too?"

A wave of self-consciousness washed over Manara. She didn't want to be standing here anymore. Not on this pedestal. Not in these clothes.

"So, what do you think?" Jeremy offered helpfully, "The pants do look a bit off, but those would be fairly easy to tailor."

"Oh, w-well, its grotlem."

"Grot...lem?" The assistant tilted his head, looking at Manara in confusion.

Manara's blood ran cold as the man repeated what she said. Grotlem. That was wrong. She'd meant to say alright. She'd *said* alright. Except she hadn't. It was happening again. It wasn't just the voices, she was making up words.

"My bad, that's Arabic," Manara felt a pang of guilt about lying to the assistant, but it wasn't like any harm would come of it, right?

"Oh, o-okay," The assistant nodded, though he didn't seem thoroughly convinced.

"I-I think I'll try something else." Manara hurriedly stepped down, the embarrassment rising through her chest and into her cheeks. "I-I'm not really feeling this one." Without waiting for Jeremy's response, she almost dashed back into the changing room, unintentionally slamming the door behind her.

Manara flinched at the sound of the door slamming. No, no. That was so wrong, that so *weird*. She's handled that entire situation wrong!

"That's because *you're* wrong, you know."

"I am—" Marana stopped herself. She wouldn't respond. She wouldn't give them the gratification of her response.

"Just like all yer people. Yer whole family ain't right. Yer whole *religion*. 'S perverse. Makes me sick. Ya oughtad be ashamed of the disgustin' practices that yer *depraved* relatives run 'round doin'."

Manara angrily unbuttoned the jacket, then the shirt underneath.

"Well now, don't you think 'wrong' is a bit harsh of word to use for a poor little girl like this?"

Manara grit her teeth. It was that sickeningly sweet tone that she'd always loathed. The tone that was oh so 'sympathetic' while really demeaning you the entire time.

"I mean, there's really nothing *wrong* with the little hun, she's just *disillusioned*. Thinks she can do a man's job. As a woman her place is in

the kitchen, married, taking care of children. She's just far too *emotional* to be in anything complex. She just doesn't realize it yet."

That completely outdated thought process just made her want to—ugh!

Manara pulled back on her own shirt.

"Does she even have emotions though? You know some people, they end up so crazy they don't have any. She might just be reaching that point. So insane, can't feel a thing. Look at her."

"A woman without emotions? How horrid!"

Manara pulled off the suit pants, trying not to be too loud in her pent up rage.

"Maybe it'd be better if she didn't have no emotions. It'd keep 'er from lashin' out. From gettin' violent."

"She must be emotionless, or at very least not care about anyone. Not defending herself is one thing, but to not say a single word in defense of her family?"

That one stung. But still, she kept her mouth clenched shut.

"And I mean, look, she doesn't even care that she's walking around in society as such a revolting mess. The disproportionate ramshackle abomination that she calls her body is one thing, couldn't change that without more effort than a vagrant can muster, but she could spare the time for better make-up. At least *attempt* to cover up the hideous hide she calls her skin. And don't get me started on her clothing..."

"Are you *kidding me right now?!?*" Manara half-screamed in frustration, tearing at her hair. "Attacking my family, my religion, my sanity, my self-esteem isn't enough, now you have to go after by *body image* and *fashion sense?!?* How low can you go?!"

"Compared to you? We're standing on Everest."

"You do remember Everest, don't you hun? That's the *really* tall mountain. I know you failed geography and all..."

"In *elementary* school," Manara shot back, glaring at the corner where the voice of that old hag was coming from. "And I did *not* fail it. That was *one test*. And it was on *directions*."

"I'm thinkin' the lady doth protest ta much..."

"You know, hun, the one in Asia?"

"I know what Everest is!" Manara cried in frustration.

"Hm? Good for you. But question, why's it relevant?"

“What?” Manara asked. Her eyes ached and she was tired. Why couldn’t they just leave her alone? “How should I know? You never make any sense!”

“Oh, the poor thing. Don’t fret, hun.”

“Certainly, ain’t yer fault ya got the attention span of a gnat.”

There was a loud rapping on the door. Manara jumped, stifling a small scream.

“Excuse me, Manara?” It was Jeremy’s voice, sounding as timid as when he had first introduced himself. “Is everything all right in there? You’ve been in there for a while.”

She had? How long had it been? Too long, for certain.

“I-I’m fine,” Manara lied, though she knew her shaking voice betrayed her. “I-I just don’t want to come out anymore!”

“You...don’t want to come out?” Jeremy repeated slowly.

“Afraid to face the world now, hun? Just because you’re not smart doesn’t mean you’re worthless. A woman’s intelligence is irrelevant to begin with. You only need your looks.”

“But don’t you remember? She’s grotesque.”

“Oh dearie me, you’re right. Such a shame. An ugly woman...”

“Heh, guess that just makes ‘er worthless then, don’t it?”

“N-no, I-I’ll just stay here.” Manara backed herself into the corner, sliding down the wall. “They’re all out there...” she muttered to herself as she buried her head into her knees.

“So the incompetent maniac decided to hide in a closet? How deplorable. And pitifully naïve. You really think this room will protect you? Ha! Oh no. We’ll still be with you. You can’t get away from us.”

“**Just shut up!**” Manara screamed, “And leave me alone for once!”

“Hey Manara, um, i-is there anything I can do for you? Um, I-I’m trained in first aid and...”

“You can run and run but we’ll be right there behind you. In front of you. Around you. Even after everyone else has abandoned you, we’ll still be here. That’s a promise. We’ll never go away.”

“**No!**” Manara’s hands clutched at her hair, tearing it away from her scalp. “I want to be alone! By myself! I don’t need you!”

“It’s not a question of need, or even want. Simply a question of *fact*.”

“Just leave me *alone!*”

“You’ll **never** be alone.”

“I-is there anyone you want me to call? Maybe family or friends? Maybe they can come and help...?”

“No, no!” Manara sobbed.

“*No, no*. Oh, shut yer trap! ‘Fraid of yer family seeing this? Ain’t nuthin’ they ain’t seen *before*. Or, wait, that it? Ya ‘fraid this time they’ll be fed up with yer drivin’? ‘Fraid they’ll go back ta them oppressive ways ya call traditions? ‘Fraid they’ll kick ya out? Shun ya fer the rest of yer life? Or maybe they’ll lock ya up. Never let ya see the light of day again.”

“There’s *no one like that!*” She screamed. “None of them would **do that!** You don’t know **anything!**”

“But we know everything about you, hun.”

“Um, well, then maybe...um, how about the police? I-I don’t want to scare you or anything, but just as someone to help, you know? I-I know in general they don’t have the best reputation right now, but the station is just down the street...”

Police...? Why would... police?

“And my friend just recently joined too actually, so I happen to know for a fact that they’re all really, um, really well trained, to, to deal with this kind of situ—er, I mean, to help people...”

Deal with this kind of situation? What kind of situation was this?

Her body felt cold.

“That’s right. The police. Help! Help! She’s a nutcase! A complete lunatic! If you don’t stop her now she’s going to lose it and go on a murder spree with a pair of nail clippers!”

She stood up abruptly.

“My point is, that they are really nice people who just want to help and they—” Manara wretched open the door, cutting Jeremy off.

“I’m so sorry. I’m not feeling well today. I think I’ll come back some other time,” Manara forced out the words.

“U-um, are you...” He began meekly.

“Yes, I’m positive. Just feeling a bit off, heh heh,” she gave an airy, strained laugh. As she spoke she edged around him, aiming for the door as fast as she could. She had to get home. Had to call Dr. Floyd. Had to take her meds. She couldn’t be here anymore. “Thank you so much for your help today. Really it was a pleasure.”

“Running away are we? Not going to face our problems? Just a blatant lie then turning tail? How pathetically predictable.”

With that Manara turned to all but book it for the door, the need to get out of the shop completely consuming her.

“W-wait Ma’am!” Jeremy cried out, Manara almost ignored him, but stopped at the last moment.

“Yes?” Her voice was significantly higher than usual.

“Ma’am are you sure you’re alright?” She could hear the concern in the young man’s tone.

Manara turned back to the attendant, smiling so brightly her face ached.

“I’m fine.”

“Disappointment.”

“Filth.”

“Psycho.”

She spoke through a clenched smile.

“Everything is fine.”

“The voices didn’t exist. They were just in her head. That’s right, in her head.”

Manara Griffith, age 36, female, is a Muslim of half-European and half-Pakistani descent. She recently received a promotion to manager of a new site. Manara takes her heritage very seriously as her grandmother, who immigrated to the United States in the 1950s from Pakistan, was very influential during her childhood.

Manara has Schizophrenia. While schizophrenia is rigorously defined in the DSM-V, the possible symptoms vary widely. The variation is the reason that previous editions of the DSM had many schizophrenic subtypes, although the DSM-V eliminated them. Even with the variation seen in schizophrenia, the DSM-V requires that an individual must experience at least one of the following symptoms to receive the diagnosis: delusions, hallucinations or disorganized thinking and speech. Schizophrenia is often a severely disabling disorder and a difficult one to treat for a variety of reasons. Only approximately 20% of those diagnosed with schizophrenia have favorable outcomes and a very small number make a full recovery.

Manara developed Schizophrenia at the age of 26 while she was finishing graduate school and preparing to enter the work force. In this highly stressful period she visited home, where a family friend noticed some early signs of Schizophrenia and recommended her to a co-worker, Dr. Floyd. Since her symptoms were noticed early Manara was able to restore her previous level of functioning, though the process took several years and required a lot of familial support. Manara suffered from both auditory hallucinations and disorganized thinking and speech, the latter of which included neologisms, or made up words (such as “grotlem”). Manara’s auditory hallucinations consisted of two voices which attacked her, both of which corresponded to real people she had known in her life. The female voice was that of a middle school teacher who took a dislike to Manara. The male voice was that of a television personality (he claimed to be a preacher but lacked any credentials from any denomination of any faith) who ran a heavily anti-Islamic program that Manara had the back luck to stumble upon as a child. Manara was fortunate as she had several protective factors, including early recognition and familial support, which are thought to increase the chances of a favorable outcome.

In this scene Manara is suffering a relapse, and is in what is technically known as “partial remission,” meaning she is only experiencing a part of the defining criteria of her disorder. This is why she is experiencing auditory hallucinations but her speech or thinking are not disorganized to a noticeable degree. Manara’s relapse is being triggered by the stress of her promotion, specifically her concerns over whether she’ll be able to fulfill her role with her diagnosis of Schizophrenia. In regards to her auditory hallucinations, the two voices which Manara was familiar with from her previous schizophrenic episodes are joined by a new third voice. This voice is not that of anyone that Manara knows and, like the other two, takes to attacking her.

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