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Mike Delaney

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Relationships

by Mike Delaney

Spending time with my case manager, Jeff, has been a real treat since day one. The first time we got together was in May of 2014. I was proud of myself for passing pre-algebra with my math disability and was feeling on top of the world. As soon as I walked in the office he asks me where I want to go hiking. I tell him that the choice was his but he asks me to flip a coin. I told him that I couldn't decide between Pattee Canyon or the Rattlesnake so he asks me if the Rattlesnake was good. I tell him yes (That would've been my choice anyway). We drive over to where his house is only to not park exactly where he lives because clients are not supposed to know where he lives. He tells me that he should blindfold me but I respond telling him that I would never come bother him after hours. He tells me that he didn't think that I would.

As we hike we talk about Netflix, politics, and life in general. I never felt so good interacting with another human being like I did with Jeff. He didn't ask me about Asperger's until a week or two after that. I couldn't really explain what Asperger's felt like and in fact always did whatever I could to hide the diagnosis. He knew that I was into creative writing because I told him that it was my dream to become a screenwriter for that was what I was recommended to go into.

Once the summer became too hot to hike we took our meetings to the mall which didn't bring much joy from me because I really enjoyed the outdoors with him. Once our meetings took place at the mall that's when our Seinfeldian humor really took off. He takes the roll of Jerry and I of George. All that we need is Kramer, Elaine, and occasionally a brief time each month with a Newman. Come to think of it, we had somewhat of a Newman one time. We were wandering around Sears back when it was going out of business in the summer of 2015 when this man who worked there greeted Jeff. Jeff worked with this guy at Lowes during a time in his life and Jeff told me that he was unbearable. I kind of got the sense of arrogance from the guy bragging about how he was going to be managing the Sears home-store in a pretentious fashion. We get away from that man and Jeff tells me that he couldn't stand the guy. I felt the same way but unfortunately Newman is the type to be a comedic arch nemesis with and that guy ended up not making the part. Maybe one day me and Jeff could get a sitcom on Crackle so that the community can see what our conversations are really like.

Not every week do we have laugh outs. Like he tells me, "They can't all be the same, each episode sometimes has to incorporate a little drama into it." Two Thanksgiving's in a row I told my family that I was thankful for Jeff. I always notice that Jeff wears olive drab clothing kind of like a communist so I really hope he never gets blacklisted from hop-sings. I remember walking with him around the Rattlesnake in 2014 where he tells me of his disdain for dogs. He complains that they are always on these trails without leashes on. Jeff prefers cats to dogs, claiming that they are much easier to care for.

He did ask me what I could ever do with a degree in creative writing. To be honest, for me there is nothing I can do so I tell him that I want to go into accounting. He tells me that I will make a lot more money doing it unless my writing happens to be good. I will never stop obsessing about accounting. Even if I couldn't be an accountant, I will pursue my goals of being educated in the subject matter.

I consider myself a misanthrope, a hater of the human species. My misanthropy has a lot to do with social anxiety that comes with autism. I find that a lot of misanthropic people have social anxiety and it has nothing to do with wishing ill upon another human being. There is something about Jeff that I can't stand but I always come around thinking of him every single day. I am a unique client of his being that I don't need case management. Back in 2014 he put on the treatment plan for me to utilize socialization. The only social outings I attended back then were at the Socrates café which use to be a pleasant escape for me when people attended. Now I don't have much of anything.

I have problems with intimacy. I don't ever want to marry anyone. The thought of having someone invade

my little fortress of solitude bothers me so deeply that I dream of flying to the moon or buying an island out in the sun. One thing that bothers me about Jeff is he doesn't believe that I'm sick. Every day I wake up feeling fatigued with no motivation to do anything. I told him that I have chronic pelvic pain and he responded with, "Don't only women get that?" I'm able to admit that women are more prone to pain and anxiety, but to completely generalize disorders to only women is just plain sexist. I don't mean sexist as treating men or women as second class citizens but more of a naivety or ignorance.

For the last few weeks I have been lying to Jeff about a guy named Ben. I sat next to Ben in Micro-economics in the fall of 2016. He was majoring in social work so his warmness towards me seemed to be very warranted. I told him a lot about Jeff and was thinking about bringing him along to one of our meetings just so he could become involved with the humor. Jeff said that wouldn't be ethical and Ben agreed so I occasionally spent time with Ben. On December 2nd, I took Ben to meet the most interesting man in Missoula, Dan. We meet up at Drew's art show at Betty's Divine for First Friday and examine Drew's art. Drew proceeds to get drunk, so me and Ben go over to Dan's for dinner. Dan and Julie open their doors with much love and we proceed to socialize. The thing about Dan is that I find him to be very socially liberal and accepting. He wants the wars to end and the bigotry to go away. He claims to have supported each party equally in his life. He voted for Obama twice and felt that he was a good president. It came as a shock that he told me he voted for Trump. I remember him at the beginning of the year despising Trump and was certain that he wouldn't vote. I didn't tell Ben that he voted for Trump with him being such a Hillary supporter to the point of thinking that she was a better choice than Bernie.

While we were walking over there he tells me about a couple days ago when I offer to buy him a Snoop Dogg ticket that I don't have to buy him things for him to be my friend and that he had much interest in being my friend. That was unfortunately the last time we hung out. He has texted me twice that month and even left a Facebook message. There is some glitch with my Facebook where I can't add certain people and they can't add me. He asks, "How are we not Facebook friends?" I tell him that I'm only allowed to send him messages and asked him what happens when he tries to add me. He could also only message me. I tell him that I would try to fix it but ended up having no luck in the process. On my birthday, he texts me that he bought an Xbox One and that we should kick it and play sometime. I call him back to see if he wanted to spend time with me but he couldn't that night because he was with his parents who were just visiting. The next time he texts me was on Christmas Day where he wishes me a Merry Christmas. I call him to ask if he wants to go to the Glass Spiders show with me at the Top-Hat on New Year's Eve and he said that he really wanted to. The day before the show, he calls me and tells me that he had to work that night but would like to hang with me after New Year's. I called him while I was at the show to see if he would respond. I leave a message offering to go snowboarding with him but he never responded.

From there on in I kind of gave in to feeling sick all the time and didn't find my company to be worth anybody's time. I know that he has nothing against me, but when it comes to me forming close bonds it's tough for me. I tell Jeff that I don't think he will want me in his life but Jeff says to try anyway. Jeff doesn't believe my solitude is good for me and to be honest I don't think that it is either. I lie to Jeff that I have been spending time with him after messaging him on Facebook. I feel very good about myself when I lie to people to boost my ego. That's something George Costanza does and I do have a real connection to that character.

My relationship issues are not just with my peers but are starting to interfere with my family. There was one time when I believed that family will always be there for me but unfortunately that is starting to drift apart. I lied to my father's brother, Don, that I was on my way to being an accountant. He was so happy to hear the news and was wondering if I was going to take the CPA exam. I also tell him that I am minoring in English and he is also an avid reader. I don't see the point of spending time with family if I can't tell them the truth about myself. The unfortunate truth is that I am seemingly going nowhere with my life with my chronic sickness following me around. They tell me that I don't look sick but looks can be deceiving; it's how I feel inside how my health really is.

I majored in English because I thought that would bring me closer to people. I don't really feel that writing is a good fit for me. The literature courses required for a creative writing major are very challenging for me and I don't seem to trust any of the other professors for any of the workshops. I am switching to accounting because I need minimal communication. I will stop lying to people about being an accountant when I haven't even taken an accounting course. If I do drop out of school it's not because I'm lazy, it's because my health issues are hampering my concentration and well-being to the point where existing is painful.

I make a promise to my therapist that I will keep myself safe. I will have to try to manage my health issues because they are completely invisible. Nobody will ever be able to help me with my symptoms, so it's up to me to help myself. I know how I feel and will take whatever steps necessary to not let these problems take control of my life. Life is very precious. I am what brings my mother and father joy. I will keep on trying to make myself feel better.