

Float On

Polychromatic glass shards exploded in all directions as the old lamp hit the hardwood. All Peter could do was stand there in the doorway holding the second to last box and gape at the beautiful chaos that he was powerless to prevent. He put the box down and shuffled carefully to where the remains lay. Speaking to his deceased lamp, he said, “I could have sworn I put you in the center of the table.”

Peter thought he saw something move out of the corner of his eye, but resisted the pointless urge to shout, “who’s there?” There was nobody. Peter swept the shards into a metal dustpan he found in his closet and chucked the old cord into his *Saints* trashcan. He took a single shard of purple glass from the dustpan before dumping the remaining pieces. It was as long as a pen and fat, with roles of glassy blubber billowing over each other. He liked it. He held it in his hand as he picked up the box he had just brought in and resumed the long and arduous task of unpacking.

Being new to this part of town, he couldn’t believe the luck he had. It was a gigantic loft apartment, room for four people at least. He had a beautiful view of the park from a window the size of a Volkswagen, a skylight in the master bedroom, and an inset den area warmly carpeted. The only flaw that could be seen was a crack in the wall that was wide enough to place a half a deck of cards in. It was better than anything he could have dared hoped for. The only problem is he used to say that about Dana.

The lamp was the last thing that survived Peter’s relationship before the move. It was a handmade lamp that was composed of different hues of blue, green, and purple glass shards, which suited no one but the girl who made it. She was a happy dirty Vegan. Eventually, she turned into a nightmare hippie girl who, among other things, demanded that he give up eating vegetables bought from the corner market because of their “cruel treatment on the farm.” Peter could recall a “Relationship building exercise” she had them do where they were to write down a single word that could sum up the other. For Dana, he wrote “squiggily.” For him, Dana wrote “straight.” That’s when he began to doubt their relationship.

Peter dug through his boxes and put out all his possessions; Appliances, toiletries, and flatware were key components. He set out his picture frames, within them were photos of beautiful places he had cut out of magazines. He never allowed himself the expense to go anywhere. His clothes were sadly similar to each other, no one standing out over the others, just a mass of same.

Peter finished unpacking, and by then it was eleven. Peter went around the house with a post-it pad and a pen and tagged various places as reminders (buy lunchmeat, get new shower curtain, disinfect toilet, etc.) Dana hated how he did that, because she considered it tragic how the earth and its trees should suffer for his lack of a good memory. Easy for her to say, he thought, being someone with a good memory. But he didn't need a good memory at work like she did.

He still expected his phone to ring every night when she got off work. The apartment was as silent as the grave.

As he smacked a post-it to his Cuisinart to get coffee, his stomach rumbled. He turned to his fridge and opened it to find a lonely bottle of Riesling. He looked at his watch and considered running out to grab something to eat. Ultimately he decided not to waste gas, in a way relapsing to his old mantra of thought WWDWMTD: What Would Dana Want Me To Do? Instead, he downed a glass of wine by himself in commemoration of his new apartment. The apartment didn't congratulate him. As he prepared to walk into his room he felt something sharp in his pocket. He pulled out the glass piece, stepped over to the crack in the wall and jammed the piece into it for safekeeping. As he lay in bed that night, he was awoken by the unconfirmed sound of Dana's rain stick, but then went back to sleep.

Peter was awoken that morning, as he would every morning after, by his landlord, Mr. Stanz, playing TAPS on his bugle. Peter groggily got up and lurched like a zombie to the kitchen to get some coffee-less breakfast. A satisfying crunch that usually reached his ears from a closer distance made him look down. His box of Alphabits, whose scenic home was at the top of the fridge, had apparently committed suicide in the night, spilling its innards on the floor. Peter wiped the crushed L, M, N, and O off of his foot and began hand sweeping all of the letters into a pile. As he did, he noticed a clearing in the middle of the sprawl had a word very neatly spelled out: Hello.

“Hello, cereal.” Peter swept up all the spilled letters and tossed them in with the lamp remains. He moved to the mahogany colored cabinet he had placed the plates and bowls in the previous day, and found nothing but cups, and vice versa for the cup cabinet. Peter squinted at the cabinets, released a “huh?” and assumed that he made a mistake. He opened the fridge and reached for the incredible edible eggs. The carton was open, and instead of eggs, he found light bulbs.

Peter didn't eat breakfast. Breakfast food never stayed in his stomach, he thought, but also because it cuts into his pre-work video game time.

Like all young working professionals, Peter was an avid gamer, withholding his youthful button mashing skills as a means of stress relief and distraction. For several years, Peter didn't have many friends, or really any friends. The people he knew at work could be classified as acquaintances, and he never tried to get to know them at office parties because he never went to any. He struggled to remember by what miracle he had met and fallen in love with Dana at all. He wondered how she didn't think he was boring from the start. It may not be fair to call Peter a loser, but since life isn't fair, what the hell.

Peter saved his game, got dressed, found four eggs in light bulb sockets, and grabbed his keys from the hook by the door. Peter chalked everything up to a sleepwalking habit he had as a child, and left for work, not revealing at all that he noticed that all his pictures were upside down in the frames, simply saying, “Weird.”

Peter worked among boxes. Some call them cubicles, but Peter felt like he was inside a whack-a-mole game, because whenever others stuck their heads up he felt the urge to whack them on the head, if not for a particular reason then simply to be noticed. Peter was the mail guy. He pushed a cart around performing an obsolete job that most likely would come to an end once the office moved to completely electronic communication. Messages would have no corporeal existence and just be a part of the untouchable netherworld of electronic impulses that we assume is really there. Peter already felt slight at his job, like a phantom whose presence people ignore but notice the evidence of once he's gone.

He had tried reaching out to them before, asking a group of people to lunch, but found empty desks when he returned from the bathroom. Whether this exclusion was absent minded or intentional Peter didn't know, but he hated it all the same. Since then he spent most nights playing videogames alone in his apartment. He was content in his dissatisfaction.

Peter spent the evening sitting in the park watching people and doing everything he could to not think of Dana. The park wasn't the place to do that. Everything from the runner girls with their bouncy ponytails to the ducks and geese smacked him in the face. He stared at the setting sun, trying to blind himself and wondering why; why is it that the moment you realize how happy you are to have someone your life, they go away forever?

Peter came home that night to play videogames until he got frustrated, look up Porn while eating ice cream, and then go to sleep to have dreams of having weird vegan sex with Dana only to wake up breathing heavy and seeing a dark blurry shape move through his room.

A knock came to Peter’s door one evening as he was eating some cold Easy-mac and doing a crossword, struggling with an eleven-letter answer for “Movie tagline: ‘They’re Here’.” Peter got up to answer the door, and as he reached the doorknob he felt a cold surge envelop him, as if he was standing under a raging air conditioner. He reached out with his goose pimpled arm and opened the door. A man was standing there with blond hair, a gut, a green shirt, baggy shorts and a pair of flip-flops. He stared silently at Peter with a pair of gray eyes and the grin of a five year old.

“Can I help you?” Peter inquired, not opening the door entirely.

As if he wasn’t expecting a greeting, the man looked flustered and sputtered out, “Oh, uh, hi neighbor!”

“Hello” Peter replied, not entirely happy to find out that this guy considered him a neighbor. “I wasn’t aware there was anyone else on this floor.”

“Uh, well there is” said the man, now looking at Peter more intently. “I’m Ray. Ray Thomas.”

Peter introduced himself and tried to shake his hand but Ray just looked at it sticking out. Then Ray launched into this story about how he and the previous tenant exchanged keys and that he still had them. Instead of offering them over to Peter, he suggested that he should keep them in case Peter locked himself out. Then Ray left, down the hall and gone. Peter, for whatever reason, didn’t like people with two first names. He closed the door, and stuck a post-it on it, reminding him to change his locks immediately.

The next morning, Peter went to Mr. Stanz about Ray Thomas. In response, Mr. Stanz slammed the door in Peter’s face saying, “There is no Ray Thomas.” Peter turned and headed to the bus, just saying, “weird.”

A few days later, and a few more eggs in his light fixtures, Peter changed his locks. The next day after work, Peter got lost in the supermarket trying to find more substantial meals to make. He floated into the Pasta and seasoning aisle and passed through it laboriously. The smell of garlic reminded him of how Dana’s kisses used to taste. That’s why he couldn’t eat at Olive Garden anymore. He left the aisle with nothing, and left the store only buying the same cheap crap that he always did.

A cold chill came to Peter when he got home, and he heard the sound of his TV when he entered his apartment. He sidled into his foyer closet and grabbed the nearest weapon he had. Tennis racquet in hand, Peter peered around the corner creepily and saw Ray on his couch watching reruns of *Kolchak: Night Stalker*. Standing down with his Princeton Tech saber, Peter walked in behind the couch and glared at the bastard with two first names. He tossed his coat on the table and took a few more steps towards the couch. “Let yourself in, *neighbor*?”

“Yup” said Ray, watching Darren McGavin being chased by a headless motorcyclist. He was wearing the same clothes he wore days before.

“How could you, Ray? I changed the locks last night.”

Ray looked up at Peter and gave a malicious smile, “I wondered when you’d be doing that.”

The hair on the back of Peter’s neck stood up, and he clenched his fingers around his racquet. He looked at Ray and didn’t see homicidal maniac, but he did see thieving ass-clown. “I’m going to ask you to get out before I call the police.” Peter imagined Ray running around his place and screwing around with his stuff. The eggs, he thought, what was it about the eggs.

Ray turned the TV off with a highly considered tap of the remote and sat up on the couch, “Okay Pete. I’m gonna level with ya.” He looked Peter in the eye, put on his kindergarten smile, and said, “I’m a ghost.”

Peter blinked, took a deep breath, and said, “That’s nice, but it’s still no reason to fuck around with my stuff. Get out.”

Ray’s smile faded from his face and he looked at Peter as a ghost would if his scare tactic had failed. “Um, did you hear what I said? You’re talking to a dead guy.”

“Uh huh.” Peter was not impressed with Ray’s argument for why he should be in his apartment. “And you need to go, I’ve got stuff I need to do.”

Ray looked at Peter as if he were a Neanderthal, surprised and a little disappointed. Ray reached for the bendy reading lamp next to the couch, focused on his hand, and bent it up to his mouth to say, “Hello? Is this thing on?” into it.

Peter just stared. Ray let go of the lamp, saying, “That’s a lamp.”

“Get out.”

“But, what the fuck? This is some freaky shit! I’m not foolin’ around, see?” Ray jumped off the couch, bounced over to Peter, and passed through him. Peter gasped and choked on the ghost air that smelled like Guinness

and Cheetos. He heard a rushing in his ears and he felt like he passed through the rectum of a frozen whale. Peter quivered, shivered, and sputtered out, “I have just been violated!”

He wanted to vomit but didn’t. He looked at Ray and said, “I didn’t say you could do that, you jackass!” Peter took a few hasty swipes at Ray with the tennis racquet before conceding to absurdity. “Get out!”

“Make me!”

“What are you, a toddler? Get out of here or I’ll call... I’ll call...”

“That’s right Pete. Who You Gonna Call? Heh heh. That reminds me of something.”

Ray began to sing as Peter walked out of the room and got into the shower to wash the ghost smell out of his hair.

Peter called 911 to report a haunting. It was the operator’s first day and she didn’t know who to report a haunting to. She sent the fire department. No matter how many times Peter said, “he’s right there!” they didn’t see him. Pissed at the false alarm, the firefighters left Peter, scuffing his floors as much as possible. Peter called after them, “But I *am* haunted!” The last firefighter turned as he slammed the door, “Live with it!”

He turned to Ray, and stared for a good long minute. When Ray finally got jealous of the blood rushing to the tenant’s face, he said, “So this is the part where you run frantically to Mr. Stanz to report a haunting and struggle to get out of your lease.”

“Wrong, this is the part where you leave. I don’t have patience for irritating people, and I don’t think being a ghost is a good excuse to be where you aren’t welcome. So beat it. Cross over or whatever.”

“Or what, you’ll call the cops? You can’t do shit, man. This is my place, and I’m not going anywhere.”

Peter stood there, scouring his brain for any possible way to get rid of a ghost. His temple throbbed loudly and it limited his thoughts to movies he saw as a kid. All he could remember was the movie Poltergeist and how they brought a midget into the house. He didn’t know if he would find that in the phone book, but he thought he’d try. He pulled it out of his cabinet and began paging through.

Peter brought in a catholic priest who practiced his exorcism voodoo to no effect. He called a few psychic hotlines that expressed to him their concern for his situation but unfortunately could not make house calls or really work with such things. They did give him his lucky lottery numbers however.

Peter tried going to Mr. Stanz again, but the nut put an orange in his hand and said, “Here’s an orange, call someone who cares.” Not knowing how to call a person with an orange, Peter went back to the phonebook to look up some kind of spiritual expert.

He got some “Ghost Hunter” wannabes to come in and sweep the place with their beepers. They brought along a Medium, though Peter thought that was a generous title considering a woman at her size was a XXL at least. They felt cold and had high readings of spiritual juice or something, and the Medium said she sensed powerful feelings of doubt, dread, and regret in the house. When he asked them how to get rid of it, they looked at him like *he* was the weird one and left his apartment still possessed.

Ray came into Peter’s bedroom that night, several times, to wake him up. Over the next week, Ray made it his mission to be as irritating, frightening, and off-putting as he possibly could be to get rid of Peter. At work, while dolling out paper memos that accompanied a spectral form on the Internet, Peter chugged along, sleep deprived. He blinked often and felt certain that if it were possible to kill a dead man that he would’ve been guilty of whatever degree murder that was.

He looked across the grid of faceless workstations and noticed a bright purple globule in a shape resembling a choad. Peter switched backed through the isles until he came to the desk where the stout purple phallus resided. It was a light shade of Purple and it had eyes that looked surprisedly back at Peter.

“It’s from Pac-Man,” said the worker at the desk. Peter looked away from the shocked dick and at the girl whose desk it lived on. She had bug-eyes. Peter looked back at the choad and recognized it as one of the foes from Pac-Man, just as Bug-Eyes said. He looked back at her and noticed her breasts, which weren’t large, and thought about women. Women made him think about Dana. Thoughts of Dana made him think about a lot of things, one of which being her job. He remembered that she worked for a group that specialized in holistic healing and spiritual awareness, whatever that meant.

He also remembered they were devoted to exploring the paranormal. Ghosts are Paranormal. Dana is Paranormal. Dana.

Peter dropped off the useless memo, deaf to Bug-Eyes saying, “Thanks.”

Despite being a possible way to get rid of Ray, Peter didn’t call. He stared at his phone a few times, wondering how or why he would have forgotten where she worked, but he didn’t call. The thought of hearing her

voice made him ill, and he wanted avoid it at all costs. If there were some way that he could talk to her without hearing her voice, it might work out. Peter stared at the phone, wishing that Stephen Hawking would let Dana use his voice box just this once.

Peter spent a lot of time staring at the phone and not calling Dana’s work. Ray noticed Peter’s distraction, mostly because it rendered his irritation tactics useless. Though Ray spent all his time trying to exorcise Peter from his apartment, like making messes, waking him up, and watching him while on the toilet, he failed. He failed to rid the apartment of Peter just like he failed to remove the chunk of glass in the crack in the wall. Ray had little defense to being ignored, he could only watch Peter shit so many times.

The next morning, Peter waited outside the building for the bus. Ray sidled next to him, causing several others around him to shudder, and said, “Hey Pete, sorry about that lamp I broke your first day.”

Peter looked around at his fellow bus riders, looking for some evidence that someone else was seeing and hearing Ray as well. They all looked down the street with dull faces, indifferent for the bus to arrive, and completely oblivious to a spirit from the great beyond. Peter didn’t say anything.

“Where did that thing come from anyway? It didn’t exactly fit with the rest of your, well, tight-assness.”

Peter did not like being called a tight-ass because that’s what Dana had called him recurrently till the end. Peter didn’t reply but his face gave off the impression that he was tasting something bitter.

“I’m guessing it was a gift of some kind. But you don’t strike me as sentimental because all of your stuff is practical and your pictures look like they were cut out of magazines. Who gave it to you?”

“Dana,” Peter coughed, breaking his silent treatment only this once, he thought.

“Dana? Oh, the name you yelled as you masturbated the first few nights, right!” Peter was both horrified and disgusted that Ray knew this. He looked down the street desperately for the bus. Ray smirked and said, “I guess I’m not the only one with women issues.”

“I DON’T HAVE WOMEN ISSUES!” shouted Peter at Ray.

“Sure you don’t” Ray stepped aside and behind him was an accosted looking old woman. Others around Peter stared at him. “Uh, sorry.” said Peter.

Peter rode the bus to work, thinking about his women issues.

Peter came home and was surprised to find the place in pristine order, the way he left it. He looked at his boring apartment suspiciously and waited to find the nasty mess that Ray must have left for him. He found none. He went to his room and changed his clothes, coming out to the kitchen in his pajama pants. He was still pissed from the morning, and decided that he didn't need any more provocation. He reached for his phone and dialed Dana's work phone number. The vein in his neck quivered and pulsed with the speed of a ghost train. His eyes focused out his window and he waited for the sad siren that was her voice. His heart stopped as the receiver clicked and the message recording came on, asking for his name, number, favorite color, and reason for calling. When the tone came, he froze until the invisible voice told him that he had exceeded the time limit for a message. He hung up and took a few breaths.

He was in the middle of making his dinner omelet when Ray came through the wall saying, “Hey Pete, how was work?”

Peter wanted to go directly back to the silent treatment and focused on the brown encroaching on his yellow omelet. Ray, however, didn't use his bombardment tactics to get Peter to react like he had before, he just paced around quietly, waiting for Peter to finish making his dinner. Peter turned off the burner and slid his perfect omelet onto a plate and sat down. As he began to eat, Ray sat, or whatever the ghost equivalent of sitting is, across from Peter, passing through the pushed in chair, his torso sticking out of the table. “Breakfast for dinner, eh? I don't know about that. Breakfast food never satisfied my stomach for long.”

Peter agreed with him in his head, but said nothing. He finished eating, cleaned up, and went to the bathroom. Peter had made a habit of closing his eyes when he took a shit to help ignore Ray's staring at him. But this time, he opened his eyes to find a door without a head sticking through it. Peter came out of the bathroom; Ray was still sticking out of the table. “Hey Pete, you want to play some videogames? I could watch you.”

Peter let his face speak to Ray at this point. His eyebrows said, “huh?” his eyes said, “Are you serious?” and his mouth said, “weird.” Peter went over to the TV, turned on his game, and started playing. Ray sat on the couch next to him and started asking questions like, “Is this sequel better than the original?” He also made comments like, “That was a good one” and “Boom-shaka-laka!” Peter didn't respond verbally at all, but definitely showed that he was hearing him. When he finished, instead of following him into his room, Ray just stayed on the couch and wished Peter a pleasant night.

The next few days and nights followed the same chilling pattern of blatant pleasantness that unsettled Peter in the way a normal person would be if they met a ghost. Four nights into this pattern, and Peter can't take the mystery anymore. While at dinner, Peter pushed the other chair out from the table. Ray sat across from Peter as he had been, but didn't say anything. Halfway through his macaroni, Peter skewered three helpless noodles, held them in midair and said, “So what's your game?”

Ray didn't smile, but his eyes did. “What do you mean?”

“What's your game? Why have you gone all Casper on me? You trying to lure me into a false sense of security? Well I'm not. I'm still going to get rid of you.”

“Now hold on Petey, don't think you know what I'm about. You don't know jack about me.” Ray held up his hands as if surrendering, but he wasn't. “To be honest, I don't get to talk to people, haven't for a long time. And I feel like this weird-ass situation could change that.”

“What do you mean?” Peter took a bite of his three cold-dead macaroni. “Haven't other people lived here?”

“Yeah, six of them. Some were ok, others were total douches. I was happy to see them come and go, but you're the only one who's seen me.”

“Really? Weird. Why do you think that is?”

Ray shrugged and looked over to the wall with the shard of purple lodged into it. “Maybe I'm not the only one who's haunting you.”

Peter finished dinner, took a shit, and came over to the TV that Ray had already turned on. Peter flipped on his game and began to play, while Ray watched, throwing in his commentary here and there. While playing through a level, Peter looked over at Ray, floating on the couch, and had a question slice into his mind. He looked back to the TV and said, “Can I ask you a personal question?” Ray looked at Peter and gave the grunt men give to say yes. “How did you, um, die?”

Ray would have sighed deeply if he could have, but there were no lungs for him to breathe. “I, I jumped out of that big window over there.” Peter turned to see the Volkswagen window and could hear the crisp sound of shattered glass and picture the shards litter the floor and spill out onto the sidewalk. A chill came from inside and he guessed that was why ghosts were always cold. “Did it hurt?”

Ray fidgeted a bit. “The wind in my ears felt kind of good, but the impact, I didn’t even feel it. The next thing I knew, I’m on the sidewalk and I see myself, a sloppy mess. I tried to run away but I couldn’t leave the sidewalk directly in front of the building. The only place I could hide from it was, well here.”

“When did you do it? I mean, how long ago?”

Ray would have taken another deep breath then, “Six years ago.”

“Why did you do it?”

Peter instantly felt ashamed at the bluntness of his question and wanted to retract it. Ray never looked away from the TV screen. He paused for a while, and Peter felt worse. “Pete, have you ever played Mario, or Tetris?”

Peter saw this as a change in subject, and said that he had, thinking that the answer should be an obvious “yes” to anyone living in the world today. “Have you ever had a game of one of those that you start off strong, making all the right moves and getting in and out of trouble with ease, but then you fuck up, and make a stupid mistake? You try to make up for it, but that just leads you to another mistake, and another, until the shit piles up and you have fucked up everything beyond redemption and you decide it would be better to kill yourself and start over than let yourself fail to succeed this turn.”

Peter’s heart raced for two on that couch, and he wished he had a better answer than, “yeah I have.”

“Well I didn’t get an extra life. I didn’t get anything. No light, no Nirvana, no Elvis. Nothing but this. Six years of it. And its not like it’s been six years of isolation, that would drive me crazy. No, I’m in a world full of people that can’t see me, hear me, or touch me... Having people around is, is like showing a man lost in the desert a picture of home. It’s worse than isolation.” He didn’t look away from the screen until Peter finished his level and didn’t float on to the next one. Ray turned to Peter then. “That’s the state I’m in: Forgotten, but not gone.”

Peter stared at Ray, as he had at any of the strangers he met who shared something personal with him: with admiration, pity, and regret. Peter let the space between them oscillate for a minute or so before he looked back at Ray and said, “Do you want to see the newest game in this series?”

Every night for a week, Peter came home to eat dinner and play games with Ray. They would talk mostly game-speak but they also just shot the shit about pointless subjects like weather and food when the conversation stagnated. Peter always tried carrying conversations on gaming with Dana but she simply wouldn’t.

Peter came home one night and opened his cabinets and fridge to find no food. Rather than loose himself in the supermarket he decided to order a pizza, the closest thing to Italian food he could have without imagining a vegan with a soft smile. Though Ray felt a little depressed at the thought of his favorite food being so close yet untouchable, he and Peter got a kick out of letting Ray hand the pizza guy the money. They both thought he shit his pants.

As he grabbed a plate and popped the cap off his beer, Peter asked over his shoulder, “So what’s with the haunting thing? Can’t you think of something better to do than spook people all the time?”

“No, not really” said Ray, slouching in his chair.

“So what do you do now that you can’t scare me away?”

“Oh, watch TV and try to play videogames or use the computer. Though I usually lose the power to move the mouse or hold the controller after a few minutes. It’s hard to do stuff when, you know, you’re dead. I can’t do it for very long. It works for most of its purposes, like terrorizing the previous tenants of this apartment.”

“Huh, ok. So what’s your favorite ‘haunty’ thing to do? That egg and light bulb shtick?”

“Actually, my favorite is what I like to call ‘the Knock.’ It’s basically me knocking on the door so that people can answer it for nothing. Heheh, it’s so simple yet I find something sublime about disappointing people’s expectation of someone being at their door when it’s knocked upon.”

Peter bit through the greasy cheese that left the pizza box orange. Ray decided to distract himself from the food by asking a personal question. “So Pete, what’s the story with that glass piece and the lamp? Who’s Dana?”

Peter had a mouth full of provolone, tomato sauce, and mushrooms, and gained a lump in his throat that made him choke a little. He recovered, swallowed, and took a sip of *Blue Moon* to wash it down. “Well, uh, why do you want to know?”

“Why? Because its weird and because it’s on your mind and your wall. I mean, you jerked off to her for god sakes.”

“Ok, Ok. That’s enough of that. She’s well, an ex.”

“An ex? Pff! More like *the* ex. What’s she like?”

“She was a girl I dated for a long time and now we’re not together, ok?” Peter took another bite of warm grease on dough.

Ray furrowed his spectral brow and folded his arms together. “Dude, I told you the nature and motivation of my death. I feel that’s some pretty personal shit, and I want some from you.”

“Well I don’t like talking about that kind of stuff. It’s too personal.”

“Personal shit makes talking worth something. All the other shit is just pointless.”

Peter looked into Ray, and saw for the first time that there was nothing but air. There was nothing to him anymore, no substance, except for what he could say. Peter was physical, but he felt he never said anything of value. He just floated along silently. “She was a great kisser, I guess, and she had a weird sense of humor.”

“Ok, there’s something, what else?”

“She, she liked to make her own meals and hated the mall. We used to spend off days in bed together and read the same book at the same pace so we could talk about it.”

“Aww, how trite. Where did you meet?”

He recalled it nearly every day, sometimes several times. It was nothing but by a strange quirk that they had even met. “About three years ago at my old apartment complex. There was a big Halloween party at the pool house. I didn’t know too many people there, but the flyers were up on the bulletin board for everyone to see, so... I usually didn’t do parties or Halloween at all but I felt like this was a chance I could take. I went as a zombie. I put on make up, ratty clothes, and even had a piece of paper pinned to me that said, ‘sell your unused brains: ask me how.’ Heh, I was actually excited for it. But when I got there, I realized it wasn’t a costume party.”

“For a good hour, I stood against the wall next to the bathroom trying to pretend like my face wasn’t flushed under the greasepaint. I was about to leave when, from another direction, she was calling my eye. She came with a friend who lived there, and they were both dressed up. Her friend was a nun, and she was a belly dancer. She had rings on her fingers and bells on her shoes. She jingled and sparkled when she walked. I couldn’t stop staring at the flowers tucked into her curls.”

“The two of them came over to me, and they just started talking to me, said they liked my costume. Dana laughed at everything I had to say, it was kind of weird. We talked for a while, drank a little. Then she started to dance, you know, belly style, and I lost it.”

“Whoa, she sounds pretty cool.”

“She was...” Peter grabbed another slice and bit into it slowly, picturing the face Dana made when she laughed. “She was great. She cared a lot about the environment and animals, and she, well, she cared a lot about people... especially me.”

Ray looked at his friend who bore greasy eyes. “What happened?”

“It fell apart.” Peter wanted to leave it at that.

“It fell apart?” Ray wasn’t satisfied. He stood up, slid over to the fridge and, with concentration, opened it. He pointed to the other eleven bottles of beer inside and said, “Have another drink.”

By beer 10, Peter was fucked. He was a lightweight and couldn’t control himself. He ranted for fifteen minutes about Dana when Ray realized this tactic of getting people to open up felt better when he was drunk too.

“Do you, do you know, hey? I mean, yeah, she called me boring when she was pissed and made me doubt every shred of confidence I ever grabbed on to. And yeah, she bit my dick the first time she gave me a blow job and she used to get mad really easy, but she gave me so much joy and I feel like she was so beautiful and I miss her toothy smile... and nipples.” Peter reached for another beer and Ray reordered what was said so it would make sense. “Hmm, she sounds like a bitch to me.”

“Yeah, but she was a special bitch. And she was pretty, but not bitch pretty, you know, where she’s so pretty you feel like she’s always too pretty for you.”

“So what does the special bitch have to do with the glass in the wall?”

“She, she used to keep things, little retarded things that were junk, like napkins from hotels and broken toy pieces, and keep em all over the place. She said she had a memory tied to every little thing and didn’t want to throw those memories away, which I thought were ridiculous to keep little shits like that but now I did with the purple piece.”

“And what does the purple glass mean?”

He opened his mouth wide but no sound came out. He froze for a second, chasm in his head drying out. Eventually the hole sealed itself and he looked at Ray. Peter’s eyes were glazed like a fine ham but his words rang true, “I don’t want to throw what we had away.”

Ray pawed at his face and scratched at the scruff he didn’t shave off the day he killed himself. “Ok Pete, get up, I have some therapy for you.” Peter slid off of his chair and then got up off the floor. He pointed at Peter’s iPod that was attached to some speakers. “Pete, I want you to play the song that comes to mind when you think of

Dana, the bitch that broke your heart. Listen to it, feel the emotions it brings, and when the song is over, let the feelings end too.”

“Did you come up with this?”

“No, but I watch a lot of daytime TV.” Peter fumbled with the dial a bit until he found the song while Ray said words like “angst” and “bitch.” Suddenly the speakers belted out the Jackson 5 hit “I Want You Back.” Ray was disgusted and Peter began to cry and moan hard. Ray tried to turn it off but Teeto wouldn’t shut up.

When the song ended Peter continued to cry and Ray tried to get his attention. “Hey! Hey waitaminute! You want her back? You broke up with her, right?”

Snot gleamed under Peter’s nose and all he can force out was a childish, “Nuh uh.” Ray would have smacked his forehead if he could have. “So you’re telling me if you could talk to her again you would try to win her back?”

“Uh huh” said Peter.

“Bad move man, she may have made you happy sometimes, but that girl is poison to you.”

“POISON! Yoo my dad or somethin!?”

“Yes Luke, I am your father.” Ray rolled his non-existent eyes.

“But, but remember the time we made a clay pot together and then made muddy love.”

“That’s from a movie you stupid bitch. Now grow some stones and get over her.”

In a fit of drunken rage or a emotional stupor, Peter moaned like a banshee as he ran to his bedroom and closed the door. Ray yelled after him, “Goodnight Pete!”

Peter yelled from inside, “G’nite you.”

Peter had a headache at work. Though painful, it didn’t affect his productivity. The clacking of keyboards caused his dehydrated brain to try and punch its way out of Peter’s head by way of his temple. Through the pain, Peter could recall what had happened the previous night, and was surprised and even amused at what he had said. For so long, all of it had been sloshing around in his head, percolating and stewing in his thoughts everyday so that it boiled over into everything he did. The thoughts never changed, they just became boiled down and more concentrated, never giving him an opportunity to pour it out and let the breakup juice ooze out of his ear. At the inexpensive price of a hangover, he felt better inside, despite literally feeling worse. Handing out memos and such,

Peter kept thinking about Ray, and started formulating conversations he wanted to have with him and questions that he could ask. Bug-eyes offered him some grapes from her lunch, and Peter just thought it was a weird thing to do.

Peter came home and ate cold leftover pizza. He joined Ray on the couch and they proceeded to make fun of an episode of *Ghost Whisperer*. As they watched, Peter asked Ray, “Why haven’t you crossed over, or whatever it is?”

Ray shot back, “Don’t know how.”

“What do you mean you don’t know how? Dead people do it everyday.”

“Well I didn’t.”

“Why not?”

Ray was quiet till the commercial break. “That shit is scary.”

“What, peach flavored pimple remover?”

“Yes, of course, you dick!”

“Oh, sorry, you mean ‘crossing over?’”

“Yeah, ‘crossing over,’ ‘moving on.’ Whatever you want to call it, it’s scary. I mean, this place is all I know. It’s all I’ve had. I’ve got memories and shit I don’t want to lose, and I don’t know what it’s like to move on. I mean, shit, what if I get lost on the way, or screw up again? I, I don’t know. And I don’t like that. That’s why I stay here I guess. I’m content to be in this state, even though I hate it.”

Peter let the cold food slide into his stomach splash the gastric acid on the gooey walls. He rubbed the sauce from the corners of his mouth let its cold slime stick into his fingerprints. Ray looked at the TV and didn’t say anything else. Peter had a lot on his mind, enough for two. He wanted to help Ray, if he could.

“You know Ray?” He turned to Peter. “For a dead guy, you’re awfully lively.”

They laughed at Peter’s weak attempt at humor, and continued to ridicule what was on the TV.

The next few nights, Peter actually looked forward to going home from work. For him, going home meant hanging out with a friend. It meant talking, laughing, and videogames. It meant that he could be in his little hideaway from the cruel world and still not be lonely. He ignored his coworkers as much as they ignored him now. He didn’t notice that Bug-eyes had placed a Pac-Man model next to her choad. It didn’t matter to him.

Peter came home one night with a case of beer and a bucket of what Dana would have called “Kentucky Fried Cruelty.” Peter munched on the dead chickens while Ray brought up the Jackson 5.

“Pete, You need to let go.”

At first Peter thought he was talking about the drumstick in his hand.

“Dana was important to you, I get that. But this wallowing in self pity and shit is fucking lame, you need get on with yourself.”

Peter liked the idea but didn’t know how the hell he could just “do it.” “Ok, kemosabe, how do I move on?” Peter was being more of a smartass than he realized.

Ray looked away, his gaze first meeting the window, the window he jumped through. No hairs could rise on his neck. Then, he looked to the other side, and saw the glass piece. The chasm it filled wasn’t satisfied. He turned back to Peter, who was moving on to a breast. “Well for starters, you need to get into some more intense shit than Mike and Teeto.”

“What do you have in mind?” Peter took another bite, chicken flesh getting wedged between his teeth.

“I’ve downloaded a bunch of stuff with your iTunes account, it took me all afternoon to do it.”

“You bought stuff on iTunes?!” Peter sprayed breading across the table. Ray got up, went over to the computer and clicked the mouse. “If you had *The Clash* already, I wouldn’t have had to.”

The fury of Great Britain loosed itself into Peter as the songs played. First he loved it, and then he hated it. In the end he was feeling every note and pounding every emotion. Hours into the night, Peter drunkenly danced to “Train in Vain” seven times in a row, with Ray dancing with himself as well.

“You say you stand/ by your man/ so tell me something/ I don’t understand?/ you said you loved me and that’s a fact/ and then you left me/ you said you felt trapped/ well some things you can’t explain away/ but my heartache’s in me till this day/ Did you stand by me/ no not at all/ Did you stand by me/ no way...”

The song ended and Peter spun around and landed clumsily on the couch. “How do you feel now?” Ray was still sober and completely dry for having danced for three hours straight.

“Good” Peter sighed, “kind of pissed too, but good.” Peter breathed heavy excited breaths. He actually did feel better. Those Daytime TV shows aren’t complete crap after all.

“What would you do if she called?” Peter’s phone rang a special melody and Peter jumped from the couch. He gaped at Ray, saying, “Does being dead make you psychic!?”

“That’s her ring?”

Peter nodded and stared at the shaking phone as he approached it gingerly. Its tone was happy but its buzzing sounded like an angry bee or a broken vibrator. Peter reached for it but pulled back, thinking of the bite in Dana’s voice when she was mad and the way she could make him feel guilty of his feelings. “Go on, Pete, this is your chance to let it happen. Get some closure.”

Peter stepped towards the phone but didn’t reach for it. “Do you know what you want to say to her?”

He turned to Ray and revealed his throbbing neck. “Yeah, I do. I want to tell her that I loved her, but by the end, it was like we were killing each other. I wouldn’t tell her she was hurting me and she would be furious that I was hurt. I want to tell her that she gave me a lot of confidence, sometimes, but she never believed me when I told her I loved her, or when I told her she was beautiful, and that cut me. She wanted me to be everything to her when I could only be me, and that apparently wasn’t good enough.”

The phone had stopped ringing at this point, but Peter didn’t notice. He began pacing around the room like a tiger in his pen. “I hated how devoted she was to changing me, and how she thought it was for my own good. Yeah, I’m not perfect, but I’ll decide when and how I’ll change. And after we broke up, I hated the silence. That silence between us killed me, but what was worse was when we would see each other and pretend like we never dated. We were friends. Now we’re nothing.

Peter stepped to the table where the silent phone waited. He looked down at it, waiting to hear the jingle that would announce a voicemail. It never came. Peter slammed his fists down on the table, and then kicked over the chair. He began pacing hard around the room. “I hate how guilty you made me feel. I hate how you still make me feel! I hate how even when you’re not around, you can still...” Peter tripped over the chair he threw slammed his back in the wall. He felt a sharp pain and could feel the back of his shirt start to cling to his back. He touched his fingers to his back and they came up bloody. Peter’s hot forehead became cold and his face became whiter than a ghost. Ray watched Peter horrified. He stepped away from the wall and drizzled warm blood onto the floor.

“Ray-“ Peter said, before he fell to the floor. Ray ran to him but couldn’t do anything. He just reached out his cold useless hands and chilled Peter to the bone. He drew away and shouted at him to get up and call for help. He tried to get up, but just leaked more blood out of the deep cut as long as a chicken leg. Ray ran to the table and looked at the phone. He pulled his hand back, reached out with what fiber was left of his being, and smacked the phone onto the floor.

Peter reached for the phone and dialed 911. The girl on the other end recognized his number and was about to reject his call before she heard him ask for an ambulance.

“Sir, are there? What happened sir?”

“I’m cut,” he said.

“Are you alone sir?”

“N-no.” Peter dropped the phone and tried to grab at his back to stop the bleeding. The voice of the operator squeaked from the phone frantically, but he couldn’t pick it up.

Ray was pacing nervously now. He grabbed at his sandy spectral locks and furrowed his ethereal brow. “Shit, Shit, Shit! I’m sorry Pete, god! I’m sorry I got you all pissed with that music! Just take it easy and wait till the paramedics arrive.”

Peter was loosing his grip on his wound, a chasm that wouldn’t close. He wasn’t looking at anything.

“Ray.”

He kneeled down closer. “Yeah Pete?”

“Do you regret it? Giving up?”

Ray looked at the bloody trail on the floor. His eyes stopped on the cruel spike sticking out of the wall.

“Always.”

Peter shifted, causing the blood to spurt a bit. “You know... this ‘wallowing in self pity’ shit is lame.”

Ray forced a smile, “Yeah, right it is,” and he rubbed his hand over his face.

“Get over it... you stupid bitch. Let go.”

Ray looked through the fingers on his face at the Volkswagen window. He could feel the glass giving way under his weight, and hear the wind in his ears.

“Besides Ray, you should feel good. If you hadn’t been here, I’d probably die in a little while.”

Ray looked at his dying friend. He stood up. “You’re right.” He walked over to the front door, and with care, opened it. The light from the hallway shown on Peter, and somehow Ray’s dearly departed shadow lay cast over the bloody floor. “Thanks for helping me matter, bitch.”

“I had to learn the hard way just to let her pass by.”

When the paramedics came in, he watched his friend go away, muttering, “The cut was deep, but I was hurt more when I was alone.”

Peter got 23 stitches on his back that night, and a scar that would last a long time after. He was in the hospital over night and went home the next afternoon. Peter walked home in a funny way, despite the fact that his legs were completely fine.

Peter entered his apartment, and gave the courtesy, “Hey Ray” he had given before. The blood was still on floor, and his phone was right where he left it. He wasn’t on the couch or in the kitchen. Peter walked into his bedroom and the bathroom with no spectre. Peter walked back into the kitchen calling his name a few times. He heard a crunch when he stepped near the fridge and saw the Alphabits had jumped again. They spilled out onto the floor chaotically except for one blank area where 7 letters neatly spelled out “goodbye.”

“Oh no, Ray! No!” Peter hobbled unnecessarily out into the hall and down the stairs, yelling out for Ray. He stepped out onto the sidewalk and looked for a fool in a green shirt and flip-flops. There wasn’t.

Peter went back upstairs and slumped near the refrigerator. He stared for a long time at the emptiness of his apartment. It was quiet and lifeless. Like a tomb. It was livelier, Peter thought, with a dead man in it. He squeezed the bridge of his nose and then took a deep breath. He glanced over at the wall where he had cut himself and didn’t see the purple shine that had been there for so long. For a second Peter wondered if the piece was lodged inside of him, but realized it was in there too tightly to be knocked loose so easily. It had to have been pulled out. He looked at his Alphabit message again, and realized there was more to the message. Just below the seven solitary letters, almost lost among the other random ones was the friendly word “Bitch.” Peter had to laugh one last time with his friend.

After a miserable weekend alone, Peter went to work. He delivered his memos and mail with the same efficiency he always did, but with a slight and unnecessary limp in his step. Peter mindlessly passed notes to his coworkers that didn’t look up to say thanks. Peter was nearly finished with a round when he saw Bug-eyes sitting at her desk with a cheerful Pac-Man lording over her cubicle but no choad. He walked over to her desk and placed her envelopes down. She was eating grapes.

“Thanks,” she said to him, “Did you hurt your leg?” Peter took another look at Bug-eyes and noticed her cute haircut and skinny nose. He looked over at the happy egg yoke and said, “No just my back, and it kind of hurts when I walk. What happened to your cho- eh, ghost?”

“Oh, he disappeared off my desk one day when I was out to lunch. I’m not sure where he went but I suspect Mary over there. She’s been eyeing him funny for weeks.” Peter glanced down at her mail and saw that her name was Janine.

“Do you *play* videogames Janine?”

“Hmm, only if I’m with other people.”

Peter smiled back at Pac-Man.

“Grape?” she offered.

He took the grape in his hand, popped it in his mouth, and to spite himself, thought the word “Weird.”

By Dan Wolff

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