

The  
True Love



Quandary

BOOK 1 OF THE FLUCTSONAS SERIES

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GREGORY VENNVONIS

# FLUCTSONAS

## THE TRUE LOVE QUANDARY

### Book 1 of the Series

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Written by Gregory Venvonis

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Fluctsonas is loosely based on the Vowlenu word "Fluctsona." [Vowlenu](#), a lexicon of funny notions, deep feelings that lack a word in English, and powerful quotes. [Click here](#) to visit the Vowlenu website.

Enjoy the story!

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# Writer's Note

This book is told in realtime, third person POV, and divided into five emotions or mind-states. The emotions relate to how the major character Adam is generally feeling about life and reality for that period of time. It is further divided into days and then four time periods for each respective day. Morning takes place from 4:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Afternoon takes place from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Evening takes place from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Night takes place from 9:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m.

Scripted dialogue throughout the story is intended for character development, and a natural flow of supplemental events pertaining to key characters at that time in the story. Scripted dialogue also contains “emotion tags” which tell you how that person is feeling at that point in the conversation. The character continues feeling that emotion until there is a new emotion tag or the conversation ends.

Dialogue is divided into the following types: face-to-face conversation, talking on the phone, texting via cellphone, and video calling. Each dialogue has special characteristics. Face-to-face and talking on the phone are defined by the characters being referred to by their first name. Texting is defined by the use of emoticons, how the person's name is input on the other person's contact list, brackets, and acronyms. Video calling is defined by each character being referred to by their screenname.

Some grammar and words may appear to be misused, missing, or incorrect in character dialogue. This is intentional in order to add realism

for the characters' way of speaking or texting.

There are "Bridge Scenes" which seek to fill in any sufficient amount of time after a main segment concludes with key and/or supplemental information to the main story. They can cover the following: the remainder of a day, days, weeks, months, or years. They are further divided into "Clusters" which are groups of scenes that are happening simultaneously. These scenes are meant to be told from an observer's point-of-view as if you couldn't hear the characters speak.



# Normalcy

# Tuesday

## Morning

*11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.*

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Normalcy. For Adam Fluxelright, life and reality had been quite stable and regular for as far back as he could remember, at least on the surface. He had assumed that his life was pretty normal, and this gave him a degree of shallow comfort. However, normalcy was becoming increasingly unsatisfying for more reasons than one.

Deep down, he was yearning for radical changes. He was yearning for a truer understanding of himself—an expansion of himself. Was there more to life? Was there more to what we call reality? He wondered occasionally.

As he typed away at his routine desk job, college life was slowly becoming that of a distant memory. College wasn't always the best fit for him. He enjoyed his studies and had a close group of friends that he associated with, but he never felt that he had the full "college experience" like many of his peers. They all seemed to know exactly what they wanted out of college, and more importantly, life. Adam got solid grades and internship opportunities, but it still felt so...empty. He lacked purpose.

He has been a tall and slender guy for as far back as he can remember, sticking out in any given crowd like the sorest of thumbs. His well-mannered and easygoing nature, the byproduct of a rather traditional

upbringing, has given him an advantage in many platonic and professional situations. Additionally, his clean-shaven and sharp facial features, and jet-black ivy league haircut with texture like a kind of spiky, silky grass, always seemed to attract the more mature and classy women of his college. He dated a few of these women—almost always a few years older than him—but the relationships would fade quietly into the wind as those women felt overwhelmed in the relationship or moved far away to start their post-graduation careers.

There was no woman in his life. Everyone around him was busy getting engaged, or at the very least committed to a long-term relationship. They were experiencing true love; he wanted that feeling, and he wanted it badly. True love was something that had been evading him since the day he first desired it. Something deep-seated about his personality seemed to always turn women away in the end, but no matter how hard he thought, he could never figure out why. It was time for a change...It was time to wake up.

Strange phenomena that he couldn't quite explain have been occurring with rising frequency prompting him to deeply introspect. When it came to certain situations, usually social, he felt as if his surroundings would briefly slow down or speed up randomly, and he had no idea why. Maybe it was just in his head, or he was going crazy. Either way, what he was experiencing was not normal. Relatedly, his confidence wasn't always the best, so when it came to making an important social-related decision or thinking of a new idea or solution, he would often begin to doubt himself. This self-doubting had to stop, and it had to stop now.

Leviatropé, the company Adam has been working for, was a monster. Its headquarters was one of the tallest buildings in the entire city. He felt lucky to work for such a massive company; all of that unpaid interning through college definitely paid off. Now, he works on the 21st floor. He's getting up there, but there's still a long, grueling way to go before reaching the top.

The ambiance of ringing office phones and professional chatter constantly filled the building's tightly condensed air. Despite the dense

number of workers, the building provided everyone, even summer interns, with their own independent workspace of varying shapes and sizes. Most of the male workers wear a plain-colored, buttoned shirt with a tie, and dark-colored slacks. Less the tie, this outfit was often casual attire for most of them, including Adam.

With his lunch break looming around the corner, Adam had been hungrily focused on finishing his final task for the past hour in a feeble attempt to make that clock tick faster.

As he was preparing to go to lunch, a young, fashionable, co-worker named Zach calmly called out, “Hey Adam, there’s a package that just arrived for you in the mail room.” Adam nodded his head in a slightly confused acknowledgment before hibernating his computer and gathering a few of his other belongings.

“A package?” Adam thought to himself in shock. He doesn’t receive packages often at work, so he was a bit surprised as he headed down towards the lobby floor to pick it up. The ride down felt too long. Most people who work at the company took the elevator, which could sometimes cause quite the wait.

Suddenly, Adam felt a fuzzy vibration in his right pocket. It was an out-of-the-blue text from his younger brother, Jake Fluxelright, asking how he was doing. He prefers to be called “Jacob,” but Adam had a habit of calling him by his nickname going all the way back to when they were kids. Whatever the reason for the text, it had to be urgent, shocking, or both.

They hadn’t spoken in many years, never really seeing eye-to-eye on many things, so there had to be something deeply motivating him to reach out.

Their relationship wasn’t bad...just different. He was never as ambitious as Adam, and often times, he found himself involved with the wrong crowd. His life was random, unorganized, and spontaneous-- nothing was stable—including his relationships with the people he cared about. He had dropped out of college and was in and out of jobs, but despite this, he still managed to be independent. He could be an

extremely sensitive guy at times letting his emotions get the better of him. Adam wasn't sure how to respond to the text just yet—he'll do it later.

Adam headed towards the rather large “employees only” section located near the receptionist desk in the lobby area. He passed by one of the receptionists, Betty, whom he was fond of when he first started working at the company. Unfortunately, she is married. She smiled and greeted him warmly, and he responded in kind.

Inside the employee's mail room, there was a light-brown box about the size of an average microwave with his name and company's address on it. The lack of a return address and origin struck him as rather odd. “It's probably from my brother,” he confidently thought to himself aloud. Jake was never one who paid that much attention to detail in the past, but at the same time, he never really sent Adam any packages. Maybe this was his way of shyly trying to reestablish a bond after all these years?

With the anonymously sent box tightly tucked under his arm, Adam quickly made his way out towards the parking lot. Betty smiled at him again as he headed out, which he returned in kind.

To his delight, he managed to park near the entrance, which meant for a longer lunch break.

He has grown quite fond of his four-door hybrid car. It still had that new car luster to it, even though its metallic-blue paint had been showing some signs of wear for some time. For Adam, it was more than just a regular car; it was a symbol of achievement. It represented finishing college and starting life as a full-fledged adult.

He quickly popped open the trunk and placed the box inside the very back as best as he could. It was a little disorganized inside, to say the least, but this was something he was used to.

At last, it was on towards his favorite diner, The Median, to tame his growling stomach. As usual, his alternative and classic rock playlist queued up via the car's wireless sound system. Morning commutes have had a tendency to blur together as he'd get lost in the catchy vocals and rhythms of his favorite artists.

As he drove, he calmly began grooving to the rhythms and bobbing his head like a slow-moving bobble-head figurine. While waiting at a traffic light, an older couple in the lane to his right glanced over at him with a sense of endearment as they all waited for the light to turn green.

# Afternoon

***12:00 p.m. – 12:40 p.m.***

## **Adam Fluxelright**

Finally. Adam had arrived at The Median. It seemed a bit busier than usual. (Almost all of the parking spots were taken.) The Median was quite spacious compared to other diners that Adam had been to.

Inside, the diner has a futuristic feel to it—mainly due to the metallic and gray overtones present. The friendly staff, comfortable seating, and distinct home-styled food always brought him back again and again.

Teresa, the young brunette who works at the front, was typically the first person who'd greet him once inside. Because Adam has been a regular customer, she's known his name by heart for quite a while.

“Hey there, Adam! How are you doing today?” She asked politely.

“Oh, I'm doin' alright,” he said plainly.

“Looks like your favorite spot is open today! Follow me,” she said enthusiastically.

Teresa handed him the menu and sat him at a booth where it's possible to partially see the kitchen and observe most of the diner.

As he finished ordering his usual order of chili fries, something kept poking his attention at the farthest corner of his eye. He looked farther to his right--which happened to be somewhat near the entrance—to see one of the classiest women he's ever laid eyes upon. Her elegant, ruby-red dress, voluptuous figure, and long, flowing, wavy-curly, amber-brown hair were absolutely stunning; he had to approach her! The butterflies in his stomach fluttered sharply causing a small wave of anxiety.

After a few deep exhales, he got himself together and readied to walk over. The walk towards this beautiful woman felt like eons. His heart was pounding, but he was as determined as one could possibly be at making a lasting first impression.

There was a man that she was talking to, however. It was ever so

apparent as he got closer to where she was standing. “Could this be her boyfriend?” He thought nervously as he slowed down his walk.

Curiously, upon further inspection, the man seemed quite familiar to Adam. The man reminded him of Matt Pryze, the one person Adam envied at college. It’s hard to believe that he’d be in this diner talking to this beautiful woman of all things, but stranger things have happened. Before Adam could get a clear and definite look at the man’s face, she and the man finished talking, and the man quickly headed for the exit.

There she was standing all by herself—she looked so shy, innocent, and sweet. It was almost as if she was emanating an aura of pureness and femininity that impacted him on a visceral level. Before long, she was directly in front of him, and he began to introduce himself:

Adam (Feeling a bit nervous): Uh...Excuse me, Ms.? I was sitting at the table across the way over there, and I just couldn’t help but notice your positive and elegant vibe...I just had to come say hi to you.

Maria (Feeling a bit shy): Aww...Thank you!

Adam: My name is Adam. What’s your name?

Maria: Maria.

Adam: It’s an absolute pleasure to meet you, Maria.

Maria: Nice to meet you too.

Adam: Oh...yeah. There was a man talking to you just a second ago. He reminded me of this guy I knew from college. You know ‘em?

Maria: Yeah. His name is Matt.

Adam (Feeling surprised): Matt Pryze?

Maria: Yeah.

Adam: Seriously?! I can’t believe it. I know him pretty well actually. We went to the same college. That’s so crazy...

Maria: Really? That’s interesting.



Adam: Yeah, I know.

Adam: What are you doing now?

Maria: Nothing, just here on lunch break.

Adam (Feeling confident): I'm actually on mine too, and I just ordered my food a few minutes ago. You should join me!

Maria: Okay.

Following a quick surge of optimism, he began leading Maria to his booth and walked as if he owned the place. Teresa handed her a menu on the walk over with a friendly smile.

There were a bunch of food crumbs scattered on one side of the otherwise shiny booth seat from the previous customer. He quickly wiped them off with his hand before offering her to take a seat. She found this a little odd but chivalrous nonetheless. Lunch breaks weren't too long for Maria as there were always plenty of customers waiting for her at work; therefore, a Caesar salad was sufficient enough. After placing her order, Adam quietly restarted the conversation:

Adam: So, are you from around this area?

Maria: Oh, no...I actually grew up in the Southeast.

Adam: Wow, you're a long way from home. Did you come here for school or something?

Maria: Yeah, cosmetology, and a change of scenery I guess. I love my family with all my heart, but I felt that I needed to be on my own for a little while, so I could continue growing as a person.

Adam: I completely understand how you feel. You know...my dad was in a similar situation in his early 20's. His mother, Greta, was really, really attached to him, but he felt that it was time to spread his wings and leave home. She was crying and begging him not to move away, but deep down, she knew it was best for the both of them for him to go. It was extremely difficult for him to move, but he finally grew the courage to take the final step. He told me that she had a really bad case of empty-nest syndrome after he left. But

thankfully, she was able to get over it as she started to get grandkids. He ended up starting his own art tutoring business shortly after he left home. This is how he met my mother actually; she was a client of his. Who would've known, huh?

Maria (Feeling intrigued): Oh my gosh! That's so wonderful! I'm a big believer in following your dreams.

Adam: So am I.

Maria: Do your parents still make art together?

Adam (Feeling amused): They do! In fact, they still have the original vase they made together when she was still his client.

Maria: Aww...that's so sweet!

Adam (Feeling confident): It is. It definitely is. I'd like to have that kind of love for myself one day.

Maria: Oh, me too.

In the midst of their conversation, a tall and lanky waiter with hair resembling a silver-like, platinum-blond-colored whirlwind brought their food to the table. He looked like he was in his early 20's, and his overall presentation was a little disorganized. He was moving around really fast like he was running out of time.

As he put the plates down on the table, they slid an unusual distance towards Maria and Adam—as if they were being pushed by wind. It was Skye's very first day on the job, so he gave off a rather timid vibe, but their bright, inviting smiles made the service a lot more comforting for him. A veil of confidence came over his face shortly before speed walking back towards the kitchen to retrieve other customers' orders. After Skye left, Adam and Maria resumed talking:

Adam: How's the salad?

Maria: I like it. It has a nice crunch to it.

Maria: Did you come out to this area for school as well?

Adam: Pretty much. I always wanted to live out here, and I thought that there would be a lot more opportunities available to me. Turns

out I was right; I like this area a lot. The people have been absolutely great to me, and the scenery is amazing. I also work for a really large company that has its main headquarters here.

Maria: So you knew Matt back in college?

Adam (Feeling a bit aloof): Yeah...well...not really. I talked to him a few times...maybe once or twice. I mainly watched him from afar when we had the same classes, or when people would tag him like crazy on social media. He was in the most popular social frat and several groups on campus, so he was constantly talked about amongst students heavy in the social scene. He always seemed to be the life of the party and knew exactly what he wanted in life...and I wanted all that at times for myself.

Maria (Feeling shy): I see...well it does seem like he's doing pretty well for himself. He travels a lot.

Adam: That seems great.

Maria: Oh, I should be heading back to work. I have some clients scheduled that I need to take care of.

Adam (Feeling confident): Okay.

Adam: I really enjoyed talking to you, Maria. Let's exchange contact info and grab dinner sometime.

Maria (Feeling intrigued): Sure!

Maria: Would you like my card?

Adam: Sure! And here's mine.

Maria: Thanks. I'll add you to my contacts on my way back to work. Nice meeting you!

Adam: Likewise.

Off she went. Her beautiful and bright aura merged with the brightness emitting from the afternoon sky as she exited the restaurant. He immediately scanned over her business card as soon as she was gone. "Maria Flowers." "What a beautiful name," he thought to himself aloud as he added her name and number to his phone's contact list.

While he finished up his meal, he pondered the conversation that just unfolded. The butterflies in his stomach fluttered about as he replayed their initial meeting and entire conversation in his mind, but there was only one lagging worry. Matt.

Adam sat in concentrated silence and began speculating in his mind. Is she interested in him? Is she dating him? She didn't say one way or the other, but her number was now in his contacts list. That has to be a good sign...right? It has to be.

In a fog of infatuation, he slid up from his booth seat with the intention to leave and collided with Skye as he was bringing meals to several customers. The gravity of everyone's eyes was now cast upon them both, especially the two hungry men in suits whose meals now lay on the floor. Skye had the most embarrassed and unusual look on his face as he frantically scrambled to help clean up the disastrous mess. The suited men were clearly unhappy prompting Adam to apologize immensely to them. He then handed them each money for their inconvenience and new orders.

After helping to diffuse the situation, Adam walked over to the trashcan and disposed of his plate on the way out. "Have a good day, Adam!" Teresa said gleefully. "You too," he replied.

On his way to the car, he noticed a couple embraced and kissing. The woman—in a red dress of all things—was kissing a man that kind of resembled himself across the street. He felt a quick pinch in his chest—could that be Maria and her boyfriend? Time and his surroundings appeared to slow down for just a few moments. Feint dark-blue hues slightly permeated his vision.

Thankfully, upon closer inspection, the woman looked nothing like her. His thoughts quickly shifted back towards optimism as time seemingly felt normal again. "Perhaps it was a sign of good things to come," he hoped internally.

The door on the driver's side of his car slammed shut. Inside the car, he exhaled in a kind of relief and satisfaction. The bachelor life had been his unintentional mantra since his senior year in college. This could

finally be the beginning of a turnaround, at least he hoped. Thoughts and desires for settling down with a good woman have been creeping up and intensifying as time's gone by. He had a really good feeling about this woman; it was like something he knew deep down in his gut.

So far, the day was anything but normal—previously, he was feeling like he would be stuck in the state of normalcy forever.

With a renewed optimism that he hadn't felt in years, his body started feeling pleasantly light inside as he turned on the ignition and began pulling out of the parking lot...

# Bridge Scenes I: The Remainder of Tuesday

## Cluster I: Tuesday Afternoon II

Maria takes out Adam's business card while riding in the back seat of her CarryZus, an online transportation company, and adds his name and number to her contacts. She seems cautiously optimistic judging by the expression on her face. After putting in Adam's number, she begins texting another person.

Adam is continuing his drive back to work. This time he is listening to his music and bobbing his head to the beat with slightly more enthusiasm than before.

## Cluster II: Tuesday Afternoon III

Maria returns to work. Her clientele kindly greet her before she gets situated at her chair-space. She begins treating her first client's hair contently and makes small talk with her.

Adam confidently walks back to his desk, sits down, and begins working with a tight-lipped content expression on his face.

## Cluster III: Tuesday Evening

Maria arrives at her apartment. She puts her things down and ends

up dropping something. It's Adam's business card. She looks at it, smiles softly, and puts it on her counter next to where she charges her smartphone. Afterward, she gets a text from somebody. She reads it without changing her facial expression and then quickly replies.

Adam arrives at his apartment. He sits on his big, comfortable chair in the living room and then tilts his head back slowly in comfort. He closes his eyes and relaxes. Thoughts of positive change seem to fill his mind. He is growing impatient for the good outcomes that are possibly on the horizon.

## Cluster IV: Tuesday Night

Lying in her bed, Maria is in the midst of reading a book with her glasses on. After a few moments of reading, she puts it on her nightstand and turns off her lamp for the night.

Adam is yawning and stretching simultaneously. He then turns off the television and slowly walks towards his bedroom for the night.

**Hope**



# Wednesday

## Morning

**9:30 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.**

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Hope. This was a feeling that Adam hadn't felt in quite some time. The regular day-to-day routine of working and coming home to a lonely feeling apartment had been quickly becoming the norm for him, so much so that feeling hopeful was an alien sensation. He certainly was used to living this way, in fact, he was quite thankful as several of his peers struggled to find decent work after graduation. The money from his job has been decent; he was beginning to accumulate a small savings and pay off some of his school loans. A few of his co-workers that he had been friends with in his early years with the company had moved up to the higher levels of the building. He hoped that he'd get his opportunity to move up too, even if it was just once.

Beneath his normal presentation, however, lay several personal voids yearning to be filled. It was time to fill them; it was time to fully realize who and what he truly is.

True love was such a void that he had been wanting to fill for the longest time. He had finally become hopeful about finding true love for the first time since college. It's been quite a while since he's been as interested in a woman as much as Maria. Call it a love at first sight thing, perhaps? He never thought something like that could happen (to him of all people), but he was quickly beginning to change his tune.

As he walked back to his desk, he greeted every co-worker that he passed by with a friendly hey or hello.

“You seem cheerful today, man.” Zach positively pointed out as Adam took his seat. For years, Zach was Adam’s best friend at the office and arguably outside of it. They were both in their mid-20s, raised in the same city, film fanatics, and huge music buffs, so they had a good amount in common.

“Definitely, I’m starting to feel like I won’t be a bachelor for long,” Adam said with a grin.

“Oh, yeah?” “Seeing a new chick, I see?” Zach said inquisitively.

“Hopefully. I met this woman and she’s absolutely stunning. One of those one in a million types, you know?”

Zach looked at Adam in positive surprise. He had never really heard Adam talk about dating and certainly not with this kind of enthusiasm. “That’s awesome, man. I’m rootin for ya.”

The manager, Victoria, could be seen in the distance inside of her manager-office—and of course, her window blinds were open. Adam and Zach’s desks happened to be a part of those that were in her field of vision. She seemed as if she had a way of monitoring work activity on the floor, even when it appears that she isn’t looking.

She could be quite stubborn and strict as a boss, yet still command the respect of Adam and his colleagues. Her committed, no-nonsense attitude reminded Adam of his older family members; an attitude that has seemed all but gone amongst his younger peers over the years.

Every day that she came to work, she was well put together. There wasn’t a day that Adam could remember when she didn’t wear a non-gray, white, or black pantsuit. Her jewelry was plentiful yet conservative in style and size, and her straight, light-brown hair was usually in a medium-length ponytail. In the moments that followed, Adam and Zach would quickly continue working whenever she looked their way.

Suddenly, Adam felt a vibration in his right pocket. Could it be Maria texting him? He pondered hopefully. Victoria had just stepped out of her

office, possibly to take her lunch break, so he decided to check his phone. It wasn't Maria, but an out-of-the-blue text from Leo Wanemacher!

Wow, that was quite unexpected, he thought to himself. Leo was his best friend for most of their years in college, and Adam still considered him one of his best friends despite falling out of touch for a while. They had slowly lost touch shortly after graduation—life could get pretty busy sometimes.

Leo was always knowledgeable about the most interesting subject matter. Social situations with him were quite entertaining but sometimes at his own expense. He began a text conversation with Leo before Victoria charged back into the office:

Leo W.: [Hey man! It's been too long since we've talked buddy. How ya been? =)]

Adam Fluxelright: [Leo! I know...sorry about that. I've been good. Wbu?]

Leo W.: [Good good. I wanted to tell you that I'm in your area right now looking for a new place I'm startin a new job here soon!]

Adam Fluxelright: [Really?! Awesome we need to hangout ASAP. Tonight good?]

Leo W.: [Perfectilicious. When/where?]

Adam Fluxelright: [There's a bar called Cruster's in downtown. I get off at 5 but I gotta stop by the store before I head home. Let's meet there at 7]

Leo W.: [Sounds good. See ya there]

Adam Fluxelright: [Alright]

Calmly, he put his phone back in his pocket—there was still no sign of Victoria. He wasn't one to slack off for very long since he took his work rather seriously.

There was more paperwork to do before he headed home, so he began working diligently and rapidly until his shift was over. Leo and he had a lot of catching up to do; it had been years since they talked on a

regular basis. I wonder if he's tried to talk to a woman since they last spoke, Adam thought to himself. Well...I wouldn't bet the farm.

# Evening

***5:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.***

## **Maria Flowers**

The evening was cool, unusually cool for this time of the year. For the last several evenings the dry heat was only moderately tolerable. Maria opened the door to her apartment and placed her belongings on the little, antique table originally owned by her grandma, who passed away last year.

Maria liked to feel as close to nature as possible whenever she could, so she turned on her ambient music and began watering her plants. Her apartment has all sorts of pictures and paintings of various plant life and natural environments. Many pieces of her furniture are eco-friendly and are made from materials such as bamboo.

It was time to start cooking dinner. Italian has been her favorite kind of food since she was little. She has loved cooking and tended to eat pescatarian; however, she will eat poultry on occasion. This evening, she was preparing fettuccine Alfredo with a side of bread.

As she waited for the pasta to cook, she figured it would be the perfect time to return her missed call. It was from Matt. Actually, there were two missed calls, both from him within a few minutes of each other. He must really want to speak with her, she figured. Or maybe he dialed her number by accident the second time.

She paused in silence. She needed to clear her mind and ready herself for the conversation. He's a tall, muscular guy with a dark-colored buzz cut slicked forward by pomade, and sometimes, she can feel kind of intimidated by his vibe. She dialed his number, and after two rings, there was some ruffling on the other side of the call as Matt picked up the phone:

Matt (Feeling pessimistic): Hello?

Maria (Feeling reserved): Hey, Matt. How are you doing?

Matt: Did my girl stop by your salon today?

Maria: Yeah, she did.

Matt: I thought you said you'd text me when she got there?

Maria: Sorry, I've just been so preoccupied, and...

Matt: Whatever. It's cool.

-Three second pause-

Matt (Feeling indifferent): What's up?

Maria: Oh, not much. I just got back from work and started making dinner.

Matt: Okay.

Maria (Feeling curious): Um, do you know anyone named Adam Fluxelright from your alma mater by any chance?

Matt (Feeling conceited): Uh...yeah, I remember that guy. He was such a complete failure. I could tell he looked up to me. Kinda sad.

Matt: Can't really blame him though, a lot of people did. Why?

Maria (Feeling reserved): Well...I ran into him the other day after you and I met at The Median, and he recognized you.

Matt: Haha, go figure. I'm still in his mind even after he graduates! I bet he tried to hit on you too, right!?

Maria: He was nice...

Matt: Yeah, okay. He's a pushover. A total pushover, no doubt...I've been surrounded by them my entire life.

Maria: He didn't come across that way to me.

Matt: Look, guys like that...you never see them do anything worthwhile. They settle for mediocrity and live their life in futility. They're absolutely forgettable.

-Three second pause-

Maria (Feeling a bit sad): That's so harsh...

Matt: It is what it is.

Maria: My food is almost ready. I need to hang up now, okay?

Matt (Feeling pessimistic): Alright, we'll talk soon then.

Maria: Bye.

She hung up and cupped her phone in both hands as if she were holding a delicate baby chick. A degree of sadness and confusion had come over her. Why doesn't Matt like a guy like Adam? He seemed so nice and genuine, she thought to herself. It was clear that she didn't totally agree with what Matt thought of him, but she couldn't help thinking about what Matt said—as if there could be a slim chance that he was right.

***5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.***

### **Adam Fluxelright**

A wave of chatter, items being thrown into carts, and check stand beeps meshed together to create the soundtrack of a busy grocery store. It was Wednesday evening, and a lot of people were picking up groceries after work or school. Adam was amongst those engaged in this regular routine.

He was in the mood to try out some new foods; whatever caught his eye he would buy. This time, he decided to casually go down every aisle in the store hoping to find everything he needed old and new. First, he got the usual: a loaf of bread, potato chips, pasta, some oranges, a hand of bananas, spinach salad, ramen, mushrooms, cheddar cheese, canned tomatoes, iced tea, and microwave pizza. There was a big sale on beans and brown rice—foods he rarely ate—so he bought them.

When he reached the cereal aisle, something stuck out with strong intensity. He carefully looked over the different boxes of cereal until one brand seemingly illuminated.

“Purrr-Puss.” That's a brand of cereal he had never heard of before. On the front, it had a multi-colored, grinning cat with a white cloud levitating above its head. Above the cloud was a golden question mark. The box overall had a kind of velvet-purple color, like the kind most associated with royalty. The cereal had marshmallows in it, just like the

cereals he liked as a kid. “What an interesting looking box,” he mumbled to himself. There was something mysterious about this particular cereal; it was almost as if there was something supernatural behind it. He was compelled to grab a box and then head for the checkout station.

The middle-aged woman in front of him in line kind of reminded him of his mother, Maya. He should really give her a call, and it’s been a few months since he’s spoken to her. She tended to worry herself sick if he didn’t keep in regular contact. There was something urgently important that she wanted to tell him, but their last phone call was rather brief, so she didn’t get a chance to elaborate on what it was. He’ll make the call before the coming Monday. It’s a promise.

As he opened his trunk to put groceries inside, he noticed the mysterious box from yesterday still tucked in the very back. He had almost forgotten about it—there’s been so much on his mind since then!

With the last grocery bag stuffed in, the trunk was full to the brim. The trunk was slammed shut; then, he slipped into the driver’s seat of his car. Before closing the door, he shot a text to Leo, [On my way], he wrote. A wave of anticipation came over him as he was about to be reunited with his best friend from college. He closed the door, turned on his ignition and queued up one of his favorite alternative and classic rock playlists. His head-bobbing intensified as the second song played.

On the drive towards Cruster’s Bar, Adam thought about his friendship with Leo. They haven’t seen each other in person since their graduation party at Adam’s old college apartment. Leo decided to go back to his hometown and look for work, while Adam chose to intern at the company he currently works for in the city. Occasionally, they’d speak over a video call or text, but communication between the two has slowly withered away.

“What could he have been up to all this time?” Adam thought aloud as he ground through rush hour traffic. Leo was always a very nice guy and a loyal friend, but his overall presentation wasn’t the most popular with the “cool kids” as Leo would say.

Leo was chubby, kind of short, nerdy, and had wavy-styled, dusty-



red hair like that of a ginger. His bright eyes and innocent resting face were enough to make anyone feel at ease. He was a big jokester, but honestly, there would be times where it would be a little too much. Adam always thought that if Leo toned it down a bit, people, especially women, would take him seriously. That's not to say he didn't want Leo to be himself, but just to recognize that there was a mature side to him that could shine through more. Adam witnessed this first hand back in college when Leo helped one of their mutual friends quit binge drinking—a nasty habit picked up in their friend's freshman year.

Adam had been concerned about Leo in the past with respect to professional situations. He didn't think employers would take him seriously during interviews once they'd actually hear him start speaking. Maybe he's changed for the better; after all, it seemed like he's finally gotten his career going.

The traffic was especially bad tonight, yet Adam had finally arrived at Cruster's with time to spare. The vibe was pretty low key tonight; classical jazz was going in the background. The place was dimly lit as usual, which added to the feeling of somber ambience. He took a seat on one of the barstools and decided to get some tonic water instead of alcohol—he had to get up early tomorrow. Besides, he didn't drink that often, but if he did it was usually just for celebrations of some sort.

It was now 7:10 p.m., and Leo was running a bit late. He hadn't responded to the text Adam sent out before leaving the grocery store, but it was the kind of text in which not responding could be considered to be within regular text etiquette. While finishing the rest of his tonic water, he waited, yet there was still no sign of Leo.

Wait a minute...could that be him? Adam thought to himself optimistically. That familiar dusty-red hair and distinct penguin-like walk began to emerge through the entrance. It had to be him!

As he slowly waddled his way through the entrance, Adam made eye contact with Leo and waved him over with enthusiasm. They both sped up their walk and finally embraced with a distinct pound hug:

Adam (Feeling enthusiastic): Leeeoooo!

Leo (Feeling enthusiastic): Aaaaamm!

Leo: You still look exactly the same buddy! It's like you haven't aged a bit. I'm startin' to lose my hair over here!

Adam: Haha, I don't know about that. You're looking well though, man!

Leo: You too, buddy. You too.

Adam: Let's go sit by the bar over there and catch up.

Leo: Alrighty!

Leo seemed happier than he was last time they spoke. He's definitely put on some pounds and had a scruffy neckbeard, but he looked well nonetheless. It was as if his wardrobe hadn't changed at all since college. He was wearing the same kind of cargo shorts, and a buttoned shirt with a trippy graphical t-shirt underneath. They both made their way over to the barstools to continue their conversation:

Adam (Feeling hopeful): So, how are things going Leo?

Leo (Feeling hopeful): They're goin' really, really good right now. This really awesome startup liked my ideas and thought I would make an awesome coder to boot, so they hired me on the spot! I told 'em that I just gotta find a little spot for me and Purpei in town. Then I'll be buzzin' like a bee.

Adam: I'm really happy for you, man.

Adam: Who's Purpei by the way?

Leo: She's my kitty! The newest member of my family. You know how I love animals and all. I saw her at the shelter last year, and I just had to rescue her.

Adam: Well I know she's in good hands.

Leo: Oh yeah! There's no doubt about that. She loves it when I hold her, and I pet her all the time especially after she eats her food.

\*Laughs\*

Adam (Feeling playful): You've always been an expert momma, haha.

Leo (Feeling playful): They don't call me "Mr. Mom" for nothin'!

Adam: You're right about that!

Adam (Feeling hopeful): So tell me about this job? It sounds like it's a great opportunity.

Leo (Feeling hopeful): Oh it definitely is. It's a startup, and they're developing an app for geeks to meet or date other geeks. It's right up my alley!

Adam: No doubt about that, sounds like it's a perfect fit for you. I know you were interested in coding and stuff too back in college.

Adam: How's the love life going by the way?

Leo: Oh, you know me...same old same old...just me and the ol' noggin. I'm thinkin' I could possibly get lucky with the app we're making and find a nice lady who likes sci-fi stuff as much as me...

The bartender standing a few feet away couldn't help but overhear their conversation. "You thinkin' about makin' a dating app?" he said with a sneer. Leo slightly nodded.

"I tried investing in something like that once. It ended up being a huge bust, and I lost most of the money I started with," the bartender said hopelessly. "I'd quit on that startup if I were you man. It ain't gonna happen. I've had to keep working this job late hours to recoup my losses and support my kid," he told Leo.

The guy was tall and muscular with a long, scraggly beard, and a tiny, red-dyed ponytail that looked somewhat unfitting on him. He was very intimidating to Leo, so Leo didn't want to disagree with him; the bartender seemed oddly on edge.

As the bartender continued his pessimistic talk, Leo became increasingly nervous and sweaty. Adam nudged forward. "Sometimes you have to be persistent and keep trying. Rome wasn't built in a day you know." Adam said calmly. "Take it from me, I know th—..."

Suddenly, the bartender slammed his veiny, clenched fist onto the countertop causing Adam and Leo to quickly pivot back in their seats in surprise. The bartender's body language gave off the feeling that he

could lunge forward in the blink of an eye. “You think you know me, guy? I put 110% into what I do and never get any damn credit from anyone,” he said in frustration. Adam and Leo both sat in a concentrated silence petrified by the bartender’s unhinged behavior and glaring eyes. “I work...then I work some more, and then I get told it’s not good enough. So you know what...you know what?! I gave up. I packed it in and quit. It ain’t about me anymore anyway. I have a son to take care of...maybe he’ll have a different outcome than me.”

Adam and Leo didn’t move a muscle as they listened to the bartender pour his heart out, and some people looked on. The area turned silent from its usual somber ambiance, but hopefully, something was about to change the mood.

With newfound courage, Leo attempted to explain to the bartender that he could, in fact, relate to his situation. He told the bartender that ever since graduation he had been struggling to find work, and sometimes even getting laughed out of interviews, but he never stopped trying. Now, he’s about to start working for a company doing something that he’s extremely passionate about.

Adam chimed in as well. He explained that he’s had difficulty finding true love and staying in the habit of maintaining regular contact with friends and family. He told Leo and the bartender simultaneously that his brother had reached out to him and recently met a woman who was like something out of a dream. Both of these things happening for him were completely unexpected, and Adam emphasized that the unexpected is bound to happen in one’s life and can often turn out to be positive in the long run.

Following a long pause, their optimistic words slowly began to marinate in the bartender’s clouded mind. He was calming down. “Sometimes you can put 110% in something yet nothing seems to work. Maybe there’s something that can be improved upon where you can re-focus your efforts?” Leo said seriously, clearing his throat.

“You know...maybe you’re both right...life has just been so hard for me. I’ve always been a fighter, but there’s no reason for me to stop now.

Thank you for reminding me of that.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Leo, “no worries,” Adam said simultaneously with Leo.

The bartender started cleaning up the drink he knocked over when slamming his fist against the table and apologized for the outburst. Adam and Leo exchanged names with the bartender, Chad, as to continue steering the interaction towards a more friendly direction. He gave them both some free drinks—non-alcoholic as they had to get up early—and left to the employee’s area, presumably to finish cooling off.

The situation was diffused. That was one of the more heated conversations involving a complete stranger that Leo or Adam had experienced in a long time. Time felt like it had slowed down immensely for Adam throughout the interaction; it felt like eleven or twelve minutes went by to him, even though ten minutes had passed in actuality. He didn’t think too much more of it, however.

Adam and Leo discussed the interaction with each other for several minutes, but it was getting late, so they decided to finish up their prior conversation:

Leo (Feeling hopeful): Dude...You mentioned earlier that you’re seeing a lady?! Tell me about ‘er!

Adam: (Feeling hopeful): Well...we’re not seeing each other right now, but I’m hoping that it goes in that direction. Man, would I be happy.

Adam: I met her at this place I go to for lunch yesterday. I thought the interaction went really well! She kept smiling at me and seemed increasingly interested as the conversation kept going; I’m planning on asking her out soon.

Leo: Dang. She must be somethin’ else. I don’t remember you going straight up to girls very often back in college.

Adam: Oh, she definitely is. This is going to sound crazy, but...I think she could be the woman of my dreams.

Adam: I’ve just got that feeling in my gut.

Leo: Dude, I can't wait till I find a woman like that myself. I hope one day that I do...

Adam: You will, man. It's like you said earlier, you just gotta keep being persistent.

Adam: On that note, I think it's time we head home. We both have to get up really early.

Leo: You're right. It's been great catchin' up with you buddy.

Adam: Likewise. We'll definitely keep in touch moving forward.

Leo: Cool! You'll be my first guest when I get my new place.

Adam: I look forward to seeing it.

They again embraced each other with their distinct pound hug and enjoyed a moment of endearment. Adam waited for a few minutes to verify that Leo's CarryZus ride picked him up before heading over to his own car.

He remembered the groceries in his trunk, so he would have to drive home a bit faster than usual. Luckily, traffic had really died down, and he had downloaded some new songs last night. He'd be home in no time.

# Night

*9:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.*

## **Adam Fluxelright**

Well this was just great. Adam had just arrived at his apartment, and it appeared someone has parked in his assigned parking spot—he really wanted to go unwind. This kind of situation doesn't happen very often; the apartment complex is well organized.

As he was dialing the number for the night manager, he saw a younger, blonde woman with a big, red purse frantically speed walking towards the unknown car parked in his spot.

He pulled down the passenger side window and asked if that was her car. “Yes!” she said anxiously. “I had to run upstairs and give my brother something very important. There was nowhere to park. Sorry!” The woman said. He politely told her that it wasn't a problem as she quickly got into her car and pulled out.

Hopefully the perishables are still fresh, he thought to himself. To his dissatisfaction, he was going to have to make two trips up the stairs despite overloading his arms with groceries and a computer bag.

While grabbing the last two grocery bags in the back of his trunk, the mysterious box he received yesterday became visible. He debated whether or not to take it upstairs now or tomorrow. He chose now. With the box tucked under his arm, he headed back upstairs for the night.

His apartment was somewhat junky but not as bad as usual. It was a one-bed, one-bathroom with a decently sized living room. It wasn't the newest or best-looking apartment by any means, but his distinct furniture and decorations made it feel like the place was truly his, not just an ordinary rental.

Yesterday, he began organizing the clutter around his apartment and putting away some of the dishes. He had a terrible habit of leaving dirty dishes in the sink, but he had a few nifty solutions to minimize the

amount of them. To avoid doing more dishes, sometimes he would put foil on a plate or in a bowl, and then put his food in the foil. Once he was done eating, he would simply ball up the foil with its contents and dump it all in the trash.

There was a little space left on the kitchen counter to set the remaining grocery bags. He set the mysterious box on his mini-table in the corner of the living room.

As he plugged in his phone to charge on the countertop, he noticed a new text...from Maria!

She texted him: [Hey, it was nice meeting you yesterday =). I hope you're doing well]. He tightened his lips in a smile and slightly shook his fist in victory. This was a positive sign of interest, he thought. He texted her back saying, [Likewise, hope you're doing fine too].

His mood was elevated, so it was a good time to organize his stuff a little bit more before going to bed. As he was putting things away, he thought about a wide range of situations that had happened today, from his meeting with Leo, to the woman who had parked in his spot, so she could run something up to her brother.

Then it hit him like a sudden jolt to the head. The text from his distant brother, Jake, remained unanswered. Adam still wasn't sure exactly how to respond. He thought about a response while getting ready for bed. His response had to be perfect. Jake would often take things too much to heart even if it was meant with innocent intention. He was especially sensitive if anyone implied that he was a momma's boy in any way or teased him about his short, curly, black hair.

Adam turned off the lights and headed for the bathroom to brush his teeth. "I've got it," Adam said excitedly. He wasn't going to mention that it had been a long time since they spoke or anything about their previous strife. Instead, Adam wouldn't even mention the strife, and he'd address him by his full name, Jacob, instead of his diminutive name, "Jake." Also, he would ask how mother was doing. He knew Jacob was closer to their mother more than their father and that he had a tendency to reach out when something was dire, shocking, or both. It had to be about mother,



he thought. Adam began texting the following message: [Hey Jacob. How are you and mother doing?]. . .but he stopped himself. What if he took this the wrong way? He could think that I think he's too much of a momma's boy or something, Adam thought. He decided not to send the text—it was late anyway. Besides, the last thing he'd need is to send the text and wake Jake up when he was trying to sleep.

# Thursday

## Morning

*9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.*

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Zach was out of the office sick today. Adam texted him assuring to do his best to cover some his regular tasks, which he was extremely thankful to Adam for. Zach primarily had some filing left to be done; Adam had plenty of experience with filing as an intern...more than he had wanted.

As he was working, his eyes kept meeting with Victoria's whenever he'd wander them off the computer screen or his documents. There was something about her permanently focused facial expression that made a person naturally get back to work whenever she narrowed in on you.

Adam walked over to Zach's desk. There were so many files that remained unorganized; it was clear Zach had been slacking off a bit. Zach worked in the company's department that dealt with their patents and data analysis, so he carried a good amount of responsibility for this section of the company.

He sifted through some of the files in Zach's drawer and was amazed at the things Leviatropo owned. He was totally unaware of some of the technologies that he came across as well—they were game-changing. The lesser important files and documents were then organized by Adam and put back in Zach's drawer, but the more important files

were set to the side. Usually, the more important files of their floor were placed in the big filing cabinets in the back.

With the more important files and documents in hand, he headed towards the backroom. Inside, the lights were dimmed, and the main file cabinet was already opened, strangely. Someone must have forgotten to lock it, which was certainly not protocol.

He began filing meticulously.

Strange noises were coming from the corner of the room. He slowly crept up to investigate and was instantly surprised by what he saw. Two of his co-workers, Sam and Martha, were passionately making out. He looked at them, and they looked back in a state of mutual shock. They tried in futility to appear as if they weren't doing anything out of the ordinary, but it was obvious to Adam what was going on.

Following a long pause, Sam nervously spoke up to Adam, "Umm... Can you please keep this between us? I'll buy you a beer...or whatever you want. Just keep this quiet, please." Adam awkwardly nodded and told them he wouldn't mention it to management. Following a deep sigh of relief, Sam and Martha thanked Adam and quickly exited the backroom. Adam then finished filing and returned to his desk in a rather embarrassing fashion.

Shortly after resuming work, Adam and Victoria met eyes again. This seemed to be happening more than usual today. It wasn't long after that she was power-walking in Adam's direction. Did I do something wrong? He thought to himself. He exhaled, working at his desk with intense focus—as if he didn't notice her walking towards him.

"Adam," she said sternly. "I have some great news for you. Come see me in my office," she said as he looked at her optimistically. He got up and followed her to the office while getting the occasional curious or jealous onlooker.

He closed her office door upon request and took a seat across from her at the desk.

"Adam, I'd like to let you know that your hard work and willingness

to put the company ahead of yourself has not gone unnoticed by us. I'm happy to tell you that you are being strongly considered for a management position," she said calmly.

Adam's face brightened; he had been hoping to get promoted for some time. "I don't know what to say, Mrs. Cauldweldt."

"No need to say anything," she said sternly.

Adam looked at her in a state of excited patience in anticipation for what she could say next.

"Nothing is in stone quite yet. We are still reviewing a few other choices. You'll have an answer next week as to the status of your position."

"Thank you."

She subtly motioned her hands and implied through facial expression that the meeting was finished. He quietly, yet contently, walked back to his desk—Victoria observed him.

# Afternoon

*12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.*

## Maria Flowers

It's been a hectic day at Luscious Hair Beyond.

Maria has been working at this hair salon for almost two years now, even longer than she's been at her current apartment. 1980's pop music was softly playing in the background, and several boxy televisions with static displays gave the place kind of a retro feel to it. The televisions usually displayed channels that showed older films or daytime television dramas. The clients tended to be middle-aged and older women, so the vibe would often give them feelings of nostalgia.

Maria had just finished with a client, who was a teenage girl that had walked over from her high school. The place was now rather clientless, and naturally, she started talking with her best friend at the salon, Suzie Metherdson.

Suzie grew up in a small town in the Midwest. She moved out to the big city last year with a heart full of big dreams, but she has had some difficulty adjusting to the city life. Her hair was long, flowing, straight, and dirty-blonde in appearance; though usually, she kept it in two braided pigtails that touched her shoulders. She always wore a lot of clothing layers, so much so that it was hard to determine her exact body type or figure. The only thing that was certain was that she wasn't overweight, or skinny as a rail. They were both very open with each other regarding their personal lives and were in the midst of opening up their very own hair salon. Suzie was a more conservative, slow-to-open-up kind of girl, so she intended to work behind-the-scenes managing the salon's budget, employment, and legal matters. Maria wanted to be the face of the business and also design the salon's branding. She envisioned the salon as making the client feel one with nature and extremely relaxed. There would be soothing, ambient music; beautiful, colorful plants; and big,

cushiony chairs.

Maria was feeling torn on another matter, however. She was introduced to Matt by a mutual friend a while back. There has been attraction for him...but Matt has a girlfriend, so that's one issue. Another issue was that she met Adam whom she was really starting to like as well. Maria brought this up to Suzie after talking about their plans for their salon:

Maria (Feeling curious): How do you feel about Matt?

Suzie (Feeling concerned): Um, he's way too arrogant and flashy, Maria. I don't think he fits you at all. Besides, doesn't he have a girlfriend...?

Maria: Mhm.

Suzie: Yuck...I don't know what you see in him. I'd never be interested in a man like that. Heck, my parents would kill me if I brought someone like that back home.

Maria: Well...he does go for what he wants? I don't know...

Maria (Feeling hopeful): I did meet this other guy during my lunch break the other day. I'm starting to like him. He seems pretty nice.

Suzie (Feeling interested): Oh really? What's his name?

Maria: Adam.

Maria: He was very chivalrous and seemed so confident in himself from the moment he walked up to me.

Suzie: Now he sounds like he could have potential, Maria. You should th-...

Suddenly, new clients arrived; one was an older woman with her granddaughter who had the longest, frizziest hair imaginable. Maria knew it would be a challenge, but she was more than willing to take care of the young girl if chosen.

While the receptionist at the front booked the young girl's appointment, Maria reviewed the most recent part of her text conversation with Adam. She smiled and then prepared to tame the

jungle.

***2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.***

**Adam Fluxelright**

Victoria had stepped out of the office with someone important from the upper levels. This was not something Adam witnessed very often. Usually, their appearance signaled something big was on the horizon for the company, or someone was being relieved from their position. Both Victoria and the man from the upper levels had stern looks on their faces, so it was likely the latter.

Twenty minutes later, she was still out of the office, and a new text just hit Adam's phone. Adam looked from side-to-side to make sure the coast was in fact clear and then looked at his phone. Zach was texting him to make sure everything was okay as far as his workload.

Adam texted, [Yeah man it's no problem at all! Just focus on feeling better.].

Five minutes later, Zach responded with, [Alright thanks dude! I owe you some drinks when we both get a chance.]

Adam smiled and told Zach that he'd look forward to it. He also told Zach about his other friend, Leo, and that, [it would be nice if he joined them since he always makes things more entertaining.].

Before Adam could see Zach's response, he heard Victoria marching back from the upper levels. She still had the same stern look on her face as she made her way back inside the manager's office. After some scrambling to hide his phone, Adam promptly went back to work.

## Evening

***5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.***

**Adam Fluxelright**

Adam's shift was over. He was finally ready to text his brother. He thought about how to word the text perfectly and figured at this point in

the evening that Jacob wouldn't be busy working or at dinner.

Before pulling out of the Leviatropé parking lot, he sent his brother the following text: [Hey Jacob, everything going ok?]. That was the safest text he could think of. Surely Jacob wouldn't misinterpret that in any way, he thought.

Close to his apartment, a new text notification chimed. His brother had replied! Quickly, he arrived at his parking spot and prepared to text him back—taking care to come across modest:

Jake: [Don't you mean Jake? Lol]

Adam F.: [Lol, you're right. Everything good?]

Jake: [Yea I got a new job and stuff...working as a mailman now. You?]

Adam F.: [Good to hear. Yup things are fine. No big news. Might get a new position at work...nothing in stone though.]

Jake: [Speaking of news, I got some of my own]

Adam F.: [What's that?]

Jake: [Got my gf pregnant...you're gonna be an uncle]

Jake? My little brother...a father? He pondered in disbelief.

Jake never wanted children. I suppose this was a testament to the spontaneity that has been Jake's life, Adam thought. Adam was concerned as to whether or not Jake's lifestyle provided the ideal situation for a child—he hoped so:

Adam F.: [Really? I'm excited! Have you told mother and father?]

Jake: [Nah, I figured I'd let you know first since I used to tell you everything growing up anyway]

Adam F.: [Lol, I remember those times]

Adam F.: [You should come out to see me sometime man. I'd love to catch up and meet your fg]

Adam F.: [gf\*]

Jake: [Sounds good. Not sure when that'll be though...life's been



hectic]

Adam F.: [I understand. Just lmk when/if you'd like to meet]

Jake: [Sure. Ttyl]

Adam F.: [Take care it was nice to hear from you again]

That went surprisingly well. Jacob seemed just a tad distant but nothing that was unlike him. Adam was still completely processing Jake's revelation...maybe fatherhood will finally get him to live a stable life, he hopefully thought.

The sky had darkened during the time he had been texting Jacob. He just remembered that he really needed to call his mother. There was something urgent she needed to tell him. He figured it was too late to call her, however. Besides, he still needed to process the thought of spontaneously becoming an uncle before figuring out how to break the news to her.

# Night

*9:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.*

## Leo Wanemacher

Leo cracked open the door to his hotel room, waddling in with Purpei inside her kitty crate. He had been looking at new places for most of the day; there were a few that he was really interested in.

His precious Purpei was a very intelligent cat, and sometimes, she would figure out how to open her crate if she's feeling ambitious. She had a fuzzy-brown coat that had an orange tint to it. Her eyes, innocent yet mysterious and curious, could melt your heart. Interestingly, there have been several times in which her yawns and meows sound almost like words too!

As the lights were dimmed on, Purpei came out of her crate to eat the food given to her by Leo. He then microwaved some pizza turnovers for himself—his go-to meal.

He sat at his desk and browsed the latest tech news. It was truly amazing reading about some of the developments that were just around the corner!

Next, he watched a few parody videos that spoofed his favorite sci-fi films and shows. There was one in particular that almost made him spit out his drink: a space horse video that recently went viral. There were times he thought about getting into video making but felt anxious any time the opportunity presented itself.

As he was disposing of his food, he heard some ruffling going on in the other side of the room. Purpei was being especially aggressive with her chew toy. Leo thought this was precious and went to pick her up:

Leo (Feeling happy): Aww, I love you kitty! \*Pets Purpei\*

Purpei: \*Purrs\*

Leo: Are you almost ready for bed, Purpy?

Purpei: \*Yawns\*

She slipped out Leo's arms and resumed chewing on her chew toy. Apparently, there was some unfinished business left. Moments later, Leo grabbed his tablet and lay down on his bed.

After browsing various articles on his news feed, he stumbled across an article about parallel timelines that intrigued him. It mentioned that scientists had recently unearthed a series of ancient texts that described a mysterious, ancient civilization. They apparently believed that it was possible to transport oneself into another timeline, but the mechanism was unclear. Reports of items and people disappearing or reappearing were supposedly described in the texts. According to the article, the civilization was not confirmed to have ever existed and was a probable hoax. However, this kind of story was right up his ally.

Purpei had stopped chewing on her toy and began rolling around on the carpet. This was one of her signals that she was quite tired, so he guided her to her bed, though sometimes, she liked to sleep directly on his bed! Afterwards, he washed up and climbed into bed himself. Distantly, Purpei seemed to murmur something linguistically intelligible, but Leo didn't seem to notice...

***10:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.***

**Matt Pryze**

There was a cold and dark wind going in the night. It gave this particular wealthy neighborhood a distinct air of spookiness. Inside a massive, gaudy mansion, loud voices could be heard periodically. Voices, one lower pitched, the other higher could be heard if the mansion wasn't as isolated from the others as it was.

Matt was in the middle of a tense argument with his live-in girlfriend, Nikki Felcharst. He essentially takes care of her financial needs, buys her virtually whatever she wants, and provides her with a stable living situation. Their relationship has been quite superficial in the past but overtime she has grown to care about him beneath the surface. Without him she would still be living a hard life; she's done several things that she

wasn't proud of and wished dearly that they could be taken back.

Being adopted, she never really knew her biological family other than her brother for a short time who lived with her in the same orphanage. He ended up being chosen by a different family than her and never saw him again. Her well-off, adopted family all died in a boating accident during a routine vacation which she ended up not going to for rebellious reasons. It was just her all alone in the world.

She has the symmetrical face, brown blonde hair, and physique of a runaway model, but not much about her physical presentation was natural anymore. Her personality came across as fake and plastic, but beneath it, the real Nikki desperately wished she could come out.

Matt has had a tendency of surrounding himself with beautiful women since he was in high school. It one way he evaluated his own self-image. His relationships with women tended to be entirely superficial holding looks as the paramount quality. This was an attribute that he picked up from his father; it was always something he has despised about his father, yet he found himself practicing the very same type of behavior.

Matt arrived home late tonight. He hadn't bothered to answer Nikki's phone call or her texts the whole evening. This wasn't a routine deal; it only seemed to happen when he was out late or out of town. It was expected that she wouldn't be happy about this, but he didn't seem to care that much. When he walked inside, she was at the door waiting for him in frustration:

Nikki (Feeling frustrated): Where have you been...why haven't you responded to me?

Matt (Feeling indifferent): You know...out.

Nikki: What do you mean out? You always say that...

Matt: Look, Nik. I'm a very important guy as you know, and sometimes, I have a lot going on, so I don't get a chance to do every little thing I want to do.

Nikki: So I'm just some little unimportant thing to you? Is that it?!

Matt: You're very important to me.

Nikki: I can tell when you're lying...stop lying to me!

Nikki: There's someone else, isn't there?

Matt: Stop being crazy...I care about you. You should appreciate how hard I work to support the two of us.

Nikki: Yeah? I bet that's what you tell your other ones...isn't it? Get away from me!

Without saying a word, Matt attempted to console her, but she pushed him back. In frustration, Nikki then shattered some antiques of hers and Matt's that were on a table—including an older picture of Matt and his father at some sort of a professional event in a very expensive frame. Silently, he watched her aloofly as she vented her frustration. She then stormed off towards the stairs. Seconds later, he heard a door slam shut. After a small sigh, a cocky and sinister smirk was painted on his face as he plotted how the night would end.

# Friday

## Morning

*10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.*

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Zach came back to the office today, but it was clear that he was still a bit under the weather. There were several tissues scattered all over his desk and in his trashcan. He was also unusually quiet when he and Adam started making small talk. This wasn't like him, so something had to be going wrong in his personal life. Zach was usually pretty open with Adam, so he figured when the time was right Zach would let him know of anything going on.

From the corner of his eye, Adam noticed Zach periodically checking his cell phone and gliding his thumb up and down with a rapid pace. He would almost never do that on the clock.

There was still no word on the promotion. Adam wondered if he was going to get it at all. Victoria was a meticulous woman with a sharp memory. Certainly, she would notice that Adam, was rarely late for work, picked up other people's workload without being asked, and has innovated with his work in the past, he thought.

Adam had seen two co-workers talking to Victoria for lengthy periods of time today; both of them had toothy smiles on their faces as they walked back to their desks. There was certainly competition for this position, and it was down to the wire between the final contestants. Adam

just wanted closure, and it couldn't come soon enough.

While on a quick break, an air of optimism with a dash of nervousness came over Adam. It was time to ask Maria out on an official date...finally.

He sent a text telling her that he's going to be getting off work early and asked if she'd like to grab an early dinner at Soe-Soe's Restaurant set for 6:00 p.m. Despite its rather ordinary sounding name, Soe-Soe's Restaurant was an upscale restaurant that was located right next to the pier.

Nine minutes later, he got a reply...she agreed!

"Yes!" he said to himself, doing a reverse fist pump. A few co-workers looked at him with raised brows.

***11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.***

### **Leo Wanemacher**

A CarryZus car just pulled up to a busy plaza. Out waddled Leo with a computer bag strapped to his shoulder. He intended to do a little exploring today as he was still getting re-acquainted with the surrounding area.

There was an interesting looking frozen yogurt and beverage shop called "Froyobert" that caught his eye; seeing a place like this was an extremely rare sight where he grew up.

It was absolutely packed, but he decided to go in anyway. The good thing about this place, so far, was that there was plenty of room inside and out to sit.

This was the first time he's had frozen yogurt in a long time, so he was going to go to town. He chose a large-sized cup, and the original vanilla flavor. He had the woman serving his order smother the yogurt with gummy bears, waffle pieces, and cookie dough until she looked at him like enough was enough. He still wanted yogurt chips; however, they were out of them in the front, so she told Leo that they'd get them from the back and put them on while he paid.

After placing his order, he waited off to the side with the other

customers.

Two minutes later, a female employee brought out a cup of frozen yogurt that looked just like his order at first glance. He went to go grab it, but as he did, she called a different name, "Suzie M.! Your order is ready! Suzie M.?!". Shortly thereafter, Suzie went to grab her order, and afterwards, Leo's order finally came. Leo got his spoon and napkin then headed outside where it was less crowded.

As he was walking towards a table, he lost his balance on a bunch of date fruits that were lying on the concrete causing him to spill most of his toppings and an amount of yogurt on Suzie's book that she was reading at her table (thankfully none on her dirty-blonde hair or any of her layers of clothing). She looked shy and slightly displeased by this incident as he frantically offered to wipe the mess off her book. "I'm so sorry ma'am!" He said awkwardly. She looked at him as if she wanted the incident to hurry to its end so that she could get back to reading her book. "Anything else I can do for ya, ma'am?" He asked politely. Sternly, she responded with, "No, that's fine." He nodded and continued walking over to the table he intended to sit at. He pulled out his tablet and started reading an article about the latest in virtual reality. Soon after, the embarrassing incident fled from his mind.



## Afternoon

***12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.***

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Adam brought a sack lunch to eat in one of the conference rooms that functions as the primary lunchroom.

A man he had never seen before was also there having lunch. He was a lanky man wearing a baby-blue dress shirt with a thin pink tie, and black dress pants. A talk show playing on the television prompted Adam to engage in small talk with the man, who turned out to be quite friendly.

His name was Walter. He was a part of the upper management who had come down to the mid-levels of the building to check-in with several of the mid-level managers, including Victoria.

Walter asked him how long he had been working at the company in which Adam responded, “Since graduation about six years including interning.” They had that in common; Walter had been working at the company after graduating college a decade ago. Adam told him that he was hoping to move up in the company, but there were other people more experienced who would likely be considered over him. Walter politely interrupted Adam while he was starting to express a bit of doubt. “Heh, I used to think just like you, Adam. I’m not that much older than you, and I was able to move up over people more experienced than me. There are other qualities that people look at beyond experience. Trust me,” he said confidently.

Adam’s face optimistically brightened. “You’re right.”

As he finished his meal, Walter told Adam that he hoped everything would turn out alright. They shook hands, wishing Adam good luck. Walter walked out the door. Shortly after, Adam disposed of his finished lunch and confidently walked back to his desk.

***1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.***

## Maria Flowers

Luscious Hair Beyond felt quite lonely today. There were hardly any customers, and a few of Maria's co-workers, including Suzie, were either sick or had the day off. It was basically her and another co-worker by themselves in the salon waiting around for customers to come in. Following thirty minutes of waiting, Maria was getting hungry and thinking about asking her boss to go to lunch.

Suddenly, someone familiar to Maria walked into the salon: Nikki Felcharst.

She was an off-and-on, regular customer of Maria's at the salon but tended to come in when she was feeling down. They greeted each other, and Nikki sat down in Maria's chair. After Nikki told Maria to do her usual request and made small talk, they started talking about the larger subject on Nikki's mind:

Maria (Feeling concerned): You seem a little down today, Nikki. Is everything going alright with you and Matt?

Nikki (Feeling upset): No...and I don't know what to do.

Maria: What happened?

Nikki: Well...we got into another huge fight yesterday inside our mansion. He's just been out late so much, and it bothers me a lot...

Maria: Oh, no! Did you try speaking to him about it?

Nikki: He wouldn't listen to me, so I walked away from him...we even slept in separate rooms. We haven't spoken since our fight.

Nikki: I just want to be a good woman to him, but it's like he enjoys making me feel hurt.

Maria: I know how you feel. Sometimes you just have to see it from his perspective. He might feel like you're being too selfish. Talk it out with him and listen to his concerns first. I think that'll get him to open up to you more.

Nikki: I hope you're right...I want to make it work. He's done a lot for me, and I still love him. Sometimes, I just don't know if he loves me

back.

Maria: He does. Just talk to him, Nikki.

After their conversation, Nikki's mood slightly elevated. More customers were starting to flow in, so they shifted to lighter topics. Once Maria finished up with Nikki's hair, she thanked Maria for the beautiful job she did and giving her advice. They hugged, and Nikki left Maria a big tip before exiting.

***2:30 p.m – 5:00 p.m.***

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Back at his desk, Adam noticed that Zach was gone. According to another co-worker, he wasn't feeling too well and headed home early. What a bummer, Adam thought to himself. At least he would have a relatively long weekend to get better.

Thankfully, there wasn't much work left to do on Adam's part, and he was ready to head home to prepare for his date with Maria! He knew it would be a special evening—butterflies in his stomach and passionate electricity filled him just thinking about it. After promptly finishing work, he clocked out and jetted downstairs to his car.

On the drive home, a song on Adam's playlist reminded him of his mother; it was a good time to call her back. He used the touchpad in his car to dial her number.

But, to his surprise, the call went straight to voicemail. This was odd. It wasn't late at all, and she rarely has her phone off; she was adamant about keeping it charged and on, in the event one of her loved ones has an emergency and needs to contact her. He called back and left a voicemail asking her to call him back as soon as she gets his message.

Next, he called Maria to confirm the date and work out a few details. After a few rings, she answered in her distinctly shy but friendly tone. She confirmed with him that the date was still on and that she was looking forward to seeing him soon. He asked her if she needed a ride in which she politely declined—she has a ride there already. "No worries," he told

her calmly. He was just about to pull into his designated apartment-parking spot, so he exchanged a few pleasantries and let her go.

Inside his apartment, he decided to take his mind off the date for a little bit to avoid getting too anxious. He turned on some electronic dance music to get himself pumped and began organizing his apartment. Dishes were being cleaned left and right; it was rare that he had this many dishes clean. He had to look for a cupboard with extra space to put some of the newly cleaned dishes as a result of having so many.

The box of Purrr-Pusss cereal he bought the other day fell on the floor after opening one of the cupboards. He looked at the box for a moment. Somehow, he hadn't realized that the name was a play on the word "purpose." Seeing the multi-colored cat on the box with the cloud and question mark above its head made him think strictly of cats.

He tucked the box back in its original cupboard shelf and put the extra dishes in the shelf underneath it. For some reason he hasn't wanted any cereal since buying it the other day; it was almost as if something in his mind was telling him to wait for the right time to open it.

# Evening

*5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.*

## Adam Fluxelright

Showtime was near.

Adam was set to meet Maria in less than an hour. Nerves were starting to set in as he was picking out which clothes he'd wear to the date; a black dress shirt and dark-blue jeans. The watch his father gave to him for graduating always brought him good luck, so he decided he'd wear it to the date.

Jumping out of a quick shower, he put on his clothes, styled his hair, and brushed his teeth. He sat at his table and started saying some positive affirmations, hoping this would put him in the right frame of mind.

As he was walking over to unplug his phone, he noticed the mysterious box still sitting on his mini-table in the living room. He thought about opening it but decided not to in case traffic was worse than usual. It could be something that's too distracting, he thought internally. He then hurried out the door to his car.

The drive towards Soe-Soe's was quite relaxing. Traffic was unusually clear for rush hour, and he felt really good about how the date would go. Typically, he would play some soft classic rock before an important event; it calmed him.

He inched closer and closer to Soe-Soe's with his favorite rock song on repeat.

Before he knew it, he had arrived at the Soe-Soe's parking lot. He was a little bit early, so he reclined back in his car seat. There was a beautiful radiating sunset above the ocean, perfect for the evening's occasion. It was a good thing he picked a place by the pier! He looked out into the ocean as a source for inspiration and motivation for the date. Doing this calmed him and further elevated his mood.

Five minutes before six, he called to let her know he had arrived.

But the phone went straight to voicemail...Why would her phone be off? I'm sure she knows we're meeting shortly, he thought to himself. In a fog of anxiety, he sent a text letting her know that he was at the restaurant. 6:03...still no callback or text response. Feelings of doubt began to plague his mind and body. Am I being stood up? He thought. 6:11...he called again, as those feelings of doubt and anxiety intensified. Straight to voicemail. It was at this moment that time and space noticeably slowed down...his heart was pounding deep and slow. Sounds of the outside world quieted down; all he could hear was his heartbeat and shallow breathing. 6:18...his phone was as quiet as an empty library. His surroundings were developing an eerie dark-blue hue which he didn't to understand. 6:25...still nothing at all. He had invested so much emotion towards her, perhaps too much in such a short time...He was beginning to accept the likelihood of being stood up. But why would she do that? Why would she lie to him like this? It made no sense. There had to be an explanation but maybe there wasn't. Maybe he just wasn't good enough for her in the end...6:30...radio silence. He felt himself slowly releasing her as the person he thought she was. Time and space started to feel slightly normal again as he was coming to grips that he had been coldly stood up. He prepared to head back home.

***6:30 p.m. – 6:35 p.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

An aged, black sedan was driving at a moderate pace on the road towards the wealthy part of town. It was windy but nothing that was too disruptive.

Inside the sedan, sat Maria in the passenger seat with her friend Suzie driving. They had been driving for a bit longer than expected mainly because Suzie didn't know her way around this part of town very well. The drive became smoother as they got to an area Maria was familiar with—she had been in this area a few times before.

Suzie was displeased with the words coming out of Maria's mouth; she just couldn't understand why Maria was doing what she wanted to

do. Maria was oddly excited about the decision she had made, in fact, it was as if this was her plan all along. Suzie tried her best to convince Maria not to go down this route, but it didn't seem to matter in the slightest. Maria was in need, and her mind was made up. There was no turning back. For a good amount of the drive, Maria has been on the phone with someone. Suzie knew exactly who it was. It was Matt.

Maria and Matt had been discussing several personal details leading to the climax of the conversation:

Matt (Feeling indifferent): You know, I'm planning on heading out of town soon. I've got business, you know how it is.

Matt: You're meeting up with me, right?

Maria (Feeling shy): Mhm.

Matt: (Feeling conceited): Good, good. You're going to be a success now, girl.

Maria: I hope so.

Maria: I know this was a little spontaneous, but I really need this.

Matt: I hear it all the time from girls, and this wouldn't be happening if you weren't cute. Remember that.

Maria: Haha, stop it.

Matt: Please...don't be afraid admit it.

Matt: I'll see you later.

Maria: Ok, bye.

As she hung up the phone, Suzie looked at Maria with slight contempt mixed with disappointment. Maria's face was painted with moderate guilt in response. Suzie was a very traditional girl, and she felt that she shared this in common with Maria to a large degree. They became friends at the salon initially because they shared a lot of the same outlooks when it came to dating, lifestyle, and fashion. Additionally, their ambitious nature when it came to entrepreneurship drew them even closer together. For that reason, there was a small part of Suzie that understood. Maybe Maria felt that she needed to do what she could to get ahead or move up,

Suzie reasoned. Despite this, it still struck her by surprise when Maria told her she wanted to go meet with Matt. She did not approve of Matt and remained dumbfounded as to why Maria even bothers with him.

***6:35 p.m. – 7:50 p.m.***

**Adam Fluxelright**

Still frozen and isolated, Adam struggled to find his grounding. It's now 6:35, and he was ready to go home. He turned on his car, prompting his calming classic rock playlist from before to queue up. It did not have its intended effect at all this time; in fact, it made things worse as it felt ironic in the moment.

As he was backing out of his spot, he noticed a black sedan slide up near the entrance of the restaurant. Out came a woman in a draped, blue dress...it was Maria! A rush of positivity and good feeling filled his mind and body. He quickly pulled back into his spot as he noticed her waving off the sedan and pulling out her phone to text.

After she finished texting, he heard his phone vibrate. The message read: [Hey! Sorry I came really late, please don't hate me =( . Had an important phone call regarding business. Are you still inside?].

He checked himself in his rear-view mirror to make sure he looked presentable before quickly rushing out of the car.

A soda can lying on the floor almost caused him to trip, but he smoothly regained his balance. He made an audible reaction, causing Maria and others to turn in his direction. He met eyes with her, both of their faces lightening up. They embraced in a powerful hug:

Maria (Feeling concerned): Are you ok? You look a little pale.

Adam (Feeling a bit off-balance) Yeah, I'm doing a fine. It was just a little hectic getting here.

Maria (Feeling hopeful): I know it was! I'm so glad to see you!

Maria: Sorry, I was super late! You're not mad at me, right?

Adam (Feeling hopeful): No, not at all...sometimes life just happens. I understand.



Maria: Thank you!

Adam: Ready to go inside?

Maria: Sure!

Adam put his arm around her lower back and chivalrously guided her into the restaurant. The restaurant had an elegant and ambient feel.

Xepaview, users said the food is one of the best in the city; there were hundreds of five-star reviews. For Adam, it was coming as no surprise as to why the place was so popular.

They requested a booth at the check-in desk. The host politely guided them to their seating. Adam politely motioned for her to sit first on one of the booth seats and then sat beside her. The host gave them both their menus and told them to enjoy their meals. They both said “thank-you” and started looking over their respective menus:

Adam (Feeling content): Hmm...I think I'm going to have the  
Trenette al Pesto

Maria (Feeling interested): Oh! That sounds really good. You know, Italian is my absolute favorite. I'm thinking about trying something new, but I'm not sure what to get...

Adam: Do you eat any meat?

Maria: Hmm, no not really. It's really rare that I do actually. It usually makes me sick.

Adam: You really should try the Bucatini with Ricotta and Marinara Sauce; I've heard it's tasty.

Maria: Oh, that sounds delicious!

As they finished deciding what they wanted, their waiter, Rayne came to introduce himself. His hair was black with a subtle, dark-blue hue, and short with side-swept bangs. Most of his hair had their tips dyed baby-blue, interestingly. He was a young man, most likely college-aged, and quite slender like someone who runs frequently, and of average height. His presentation and appearance were exceptionally neat-looking.

“Are you two ready to order tonight?” He asked rather calmly. They

both replied with, “Yes,” and told Rayne the meals they would be having respectively along with sparkling water.

“Thank you. I’ll get your guys’ orders in right away. Let me know if there’s anything else I can do for you two,” he said enthusiastically. Maria nodded. After Rayne left, they resumed talking:

Adam: So you’re a big fan of Italian food too huh? High five!

Maria: High five! Yes, I am. My mom is a very traditional, Italian woman, and she was taught that one way to show you care for your family is to cook for them and cook often.

Adam (Feeling intrigued): Really? My mother has a similar mindset. I love her...but she can be a bit of a health freak when it comes to what she cooks and eats.

Maria: Was she like that when you were growing up?

Adam: Oh, yeah. She used to make us eat our veggies like crazy growing up. If we went too many times without eating them she wouldn’t cook us our favorite foods or let us watch our shows. She was really strict. Sometimes, father would feel bad for us and take us out for fast food in secret, haha.

Maria: That’s adorable! My stepdad is just like your dad! He often would spoil us when we were younger, and he’s treated me like I’m his own. I’m very thankful to have him in my life.

Adam: Did you know your biological father?

Maria (Feeling curious): No, well not really. I have this one foggy memory of him briefly watching over me when I was a really young girl. Next thing I remember is that he had to leave me and my mom in the house we were in.

Adam: Ah, that’s too bad. Have you tried to look for him?

Maria: No. not really...I mean it’s crossed my mind occasionally in recent times, but I haven’t really felt the need to yet. I’ve always looked at my stepdad as my real dad anyway, so that’s probably why. My mom has never really mentioned my biological dad, and I

never really ask her about him so...

Adam: Well it's good that you have a loving father figure in your life regardless.

Maria (Feeling hopeful): Definitely. When I was younger, I used to style my stepsister's hair. She'd have the thickest hair you'd ever see, but she had a habit of not taking care of it back then. She and her father, Marco, motivated me to start doing hair as my career. I'm thankful because I absolutely love it!

Adam: You know what? I think you'd do great having your own hair salon. You seem like you'd be cut out for it.

Maria: Crazy you mention that...let me tell you why I was running late by the way. I've actually been trying to open a salon with my friend Suzie. We had been trying to get financing for several months until I spoke with Matt Pryze earlier about it. We were having a pretty lengthy conversation, and he told me that he was willing to finance the shop for me depending on whether or not he closes a deal. We're going to be meeting and discussing the details before he leaves for vacation next week.

It was right at this moment that Adam felt a big weight lift off his shoulders. Now he knew why she was late, and it seemed rather benevolent. He was finally feeling like himself again.

In the midst of their conversation, Rayne stopped by to deliver their meals. "You two need anything else?" He asked politely. With smiles on their faces, they both said that everything was perfect.

"Let me know if you guys need anything, just wave me down if you see me!"

There was a man celebrating his 100th birthday a few tables over. It appeared that he was a veteran since he was dressed in an older-styled army uniform.

They could see multiple generations of his family; there had to be at least three generations descended from him sitting at the table. Rayne had brought the man his cake and was part of the restaurant crew

singing him happy birthday; Rayne really started to take it away at the end of the song! Everyone was applauding, even the toddler in a highchair next to the veteran (perhaps a great or even a great-great-grandchild). This prompted Adam and Maria to positively comment on Rayne's singing, and eventually led to a conversation about ambitions:

Maria: So did you have any ambitions like singing as a kid?

Adam (Feeling hopeful): I did. I wanted to pilot and design craft... operating planes, helicopters, and all that stuff. I had a pretty big imagination as a kid, so I also saw myself piloting and designing spacecraft too.

Maria: Oh, that's nice. So I take it you have a big trip to Mars coming up!?

Adam: Haha, not quite. I work at Leviatropé in downtown. One day though, I'll take you to Mars!

Maria: Oh! I can't wait!

They were both finished with their food, and shortly after, Rayne returned with the check. Adam couldn't believe how fast time went...an hour already? He thought to himself. He asked Maria if she was willing to go walk with him along the pier. She happily agreed.

As Adam was getting ready to pay the check in full, Maria politely refused and offered to go dutch with him. With a smile, Adam agreed. He left Rayne a sizeable tip for his great singing and service. When Rayne came back to their table, he seemed quite excited yet abnormally sweaty for some reason. They thanked him for his service as he picked up the bill booklet; he was enthralled when Adam told him he didn't need change.

The sun had just about set, and it was getting dark. It was a little breezy outside, and Adam wondered if it would get too cold for her, but she insisted she was doing alright. They walked towards the pier, and to his pleasant surprise, Maria clutched his arm as they walked.

***7:50 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.***

**Leo Wanemacher**

Leo was beginning to narrow his choices for where he wanted to live. There were three apartments that he liked the most and was hoping to get one in the coming days. All three allowed cats and were in the price range he could afford.

One of the apartments' complex had videos that showcased the building, and the interior of the units. With the swiping of the screen, and a tap on the screen by his stubby fingers, he queued up one of those videos on his phone while lying down on his bed.

Midway through the video, he called Purpei over to have a look at the cat that was shown briefly walking in the apartment. "Look Purpei, that kitty looks just like you!"

Purpei responded with a yawn and went to drink some water from her bowl. Leo, with innocently raised eyebrows, looked at Purpei endearingly and went back to watching the video.

After the video finished, he began to wonder how Adam was doing on his date with Maria. Adam seemed very enthusiastic based on his earlier texts. Leo couldn't remember Adam being so enthusiastic about a girl, so she had to be something special.

Leo thrust himself off his bed and waddled to his cupboard for some barbeque-flavored chips while he continued to think.

Back at his bed, he looked at his phone contacts tab. There weren't many entries outside of family, Adam, and a few male friends from back home that he rarely spoke to anymore. He was thinking of sending a text to Adam to see how everything was going, but he felt it'd be best to let Adam continue on his special evening without disturbance.

This brought attention to his own love life. It had been many long years since a girl's shown any kind of interest; being a bachelor was well used too. Nonetheless, he had the tenacity to keep trying to find love. He hoped one day he too could have some luck with a girl and that she'd end up making a nice mommy for Purpei.

# Night

**9:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.**

## **Adam Fluxelright**

The night was dark, but the sky looked clear and vivid. Many of the stars and constellations that weren't usually visible were as visible as they could possibly be.

The sound of hearty laughter emanated from Adam and Maria's happy faces. They were holding hands and enjoying their surroundings. She wanted to stop and look across the ocean at the night sky. One of her favorite constellations was Loraiin's Belt; something about it made her feel at peace.

Adam had gone to a small retreat in the mountains with his family last year; he still had the photos from the trip on his phone. In some of the photos you could see the stars and constellations, but they were somewhat hard to notice.

He asked if she'd like to see the photos from his trip, and she responded with delightful intrigue. She was having trouble seeing the stars and constellations in the photos, so to get a better look, Maria reached into her purse and pulled out the biggest bottle cap glasses he had ever seen...He laughed and had to say something:

Adam (Feeling playful): You have got to be kidding me...

Maria: What's wrong?

Adam: Those glasses...they're huge! I'm surprised you didn't bring your calculator with you...

Maria (Feeling playful): Adam! Shut up! I think they look cute.

Adam: Only a nerd would say that!

Maria: Oh, I know you think I'm the biggest nerd in the whole world now!

Adam: Well there's one thing about you that definitely isn't nerdy... Adam and Maria paused for a moment looking at each other with bright, glassy eyes...and then it happened. They kissed. A rush of electricity flowed through both of them; the moment felt perfect in every way. They were in their own world...just the two of them without a worry or concern—it felt like it was going to last forever.

“You're smile,” He said passionately.

“You're so sweet!” She said in a high pitch. Adam lovingly smiled, looking into her eyes that slowly began to water. It's been a long time since he's felt like this—the amount of happiness inside was almost overwhelming.

He held her hand, and they continued happily walking off into the distant night.

***9:30 p.m. – 9:40 p.m.***

**Matt Pryze**

A subtle wind was blowing in the background of the wealthy neighborhood. The gaudy mansion was unusually quiet tonight...was this good or bad? One could only begin to wonder...

Matt and Nikki were speaking to each other for the first time since she blew up last night. She had calmed down, and with Maria's advice in her mind, they had been talking openly about what they wanted to get out of the relationship. Surprisingly, they came to a good understanding of where the other was coming from.

He got her to understand that he's a busy man and can't spend as much as he'd like to with her. Other times, he was simply stressed out from doing business, so he needed time to himself to unwind and think about the day. (He had done this since before having even met her.)

She explained how important it was for him to spend more alone time with her. Her lack of family, and trustworthy friends meant that she needed that sense of security from him.

Furthermore, she desired more say in the relationship. Matt usually made most if not all the decisions when it came to their lives—even the

simple ones—and she wanted a fair degree of autonomy. He understood.

To further solidify the conversation's positive direction, Matt proposed a resolution:

Matt (Feeling indifferent): Baby, let's go on a vacation. We both need it.

Nikki (Feeling hopeful): I was thinking the same thing. Where do you want to go?

Matt: Let's fly to Hadarri'i. I go there all the time; you'd love it there.

Nikki: You're right...and I could get a beautiful tan over there.

Nikki: When are we going?

Matt: I could have us on a flight out on Tuesday morning.

Nikki: Baby, I'm so excited. This is just what we need! Should I pack for a week?

Matt: Two.

Nikki: Oh my! I love you, baby!

After confirming vacation plans, they hugged and kissed but with a degree of stiffness. Nikki paused for a moment and told him to "hold on a second." Matt looked at her curiously, and in his mind, he expected that there were more problems on the horizon.

She left to one of the rooms upstairs and shortly after brought down a new vase and ornaments to replace the ones she broke yesterday. Also in her hand was the old picture of Matt and his father in a new, pearly-white frame. Matt was surprised.

A warm embrace and kiss were shared. With a cocky grin, he suggested that they go upstairs for the night.

***9:40 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.***

**Adam Fluxelright**

It was late, and the night had turned windy and cold.

Maria and Adam emerged from the misty night walking back towards Soe-Soe's. The night felt magical; it went exactly as both hoped



it would go, if not better.

But it was getting late. Maria called Suzie to come pick her up in front of the restaurant, appearing subtly excited to tell her how the night went. As the wind picked up, Adam firmly put his arms around her, waiting for Suzie to come.

Fifteen minutes later, Suzie pulled up to the curb, rolling down the window with a smile and waving. Maria introduced Adam to Suzie, and they had a happy exchange of words.

Before getting in the car, Adam and Maria looked at each other; his arms were wrapped around her lower back and her arms on his shoulders. They told each other how great the night went and shared a passionate kiss. Suzie smiled.

Maria elegantly walked towards the passenger seat and off she went.

Adam was alone again. But, this time it was different. He felt truly happy for the first time in a long while. There was a sense that one of his personal voids, true love, was beginning to fill. The kisses he shared with Maria were something different altogether—something almost supernatural. Any previous doubt from earlier in the evening thinking that she was anything but a special woman began slipping out of his mind like water off a cliff. Through the ups and downs, holding out hope truly served him well.

# Bridge Scenes II: The Weekend.

## Cluster I: Saturday afternoon

Adam is laying on top of his bed completely splayed out. Saturdays are typically his lazier days where he gets to unwind from the hectic workweek. He's is looking up at the ceiling in a happy state of mind. He is thinking about how much the date went better than expected, and the moment he kissed Maria.

Leo is out browsing the first apartment he was interested in with Purpei in his arms. It is an extremely small studio that could make one feel that they quite literally live in a box. One of the managers of the building is showing him around the place. Leo comes across as if he is extremely claustrophobic; there is hardly any walking space inside. The neighborhood wasn't exactly his most preferred which was something he didn't realize prior to showing up. Purpei growled at the manager while he and Leo were discussing the studio apartment's amenities. The manager looks scared.

Maria is talking on the phone with Suzie about the plans for their salon. She appears to be extremely excited as it seems there's a high chance that their dream is about to become a reality.

## Cluster II: Saturday Evening

Adam and Leo are back at Cruster's. They appear to be happily chatting presumably about what's been happening the past week and

their college days. Chad, the bartender who they got into a heated conversation with earlier in the week, wasn't there. Perhaps he didn't have a shift this evening.

Maria is cooking dinner, peacefully dancing to the music she has playing in the background.

## Cluster III: Saturday Night

Matt and Nikki are cozied up on a big, plush couch watching an On Demand movie. She looks very content, and he looks somewhat bored.

Leo is in his hotel room reading and laughing at whatever he is browsing on his tablet. Purpei is working on her chew toy near him on the floor.

Adam is lying down on his bed. He has a look of content and appears to be browsing his and Maria's text conversation window. He begins typing something but then hesitates, likely not wanting to text her too late.

## Cluster IV: Sunday Morning

Adam is sitting at his desk and browsing videos on his laptop. He checks his phone and realizes that there is a missed call and voicemail from his mother. The voicemail seems relatively short and nothing unusual about it judging by the amount of time the phone was up to his ear. Afterwards, he resumes browsing.

Leo is being shown around in the second apartment of his top three. Again, Purpei is with him, but she doesn't seem to mind the place. The floorplan is a one bedroom one bathroom on its highest floor, the 10th. He looks out the window barely able to see downtown. It gives the impression that this apartment is quite the ride from work.

## Cluster V: Sunday Night

Nikki is happily packing for the trip to Hadarri'i with Matt. She has two large suitcases open along with another medium-sized one. She is filling the medium-sized suitcase with all types of designer makeup, jewelry, and accessories along with some medications. She is filling the two larger suitcases with all types of clothing, so many that one could think that she was getting ready to move out.

Maria is in her apartment having just finished cooking dinner, and listening to music. She is also organizing the small amount of clutter around the place. She then gets a text, and then looks at it inquisitively before replying.

# Happiness

# Monday

## Morning

*8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.*

### Adam Fluxelright

Happiness. It was an ideal quilt to mask the oddities and uncertainties looming beyond the present scope of perception. Adam could sense that one of his major personal voids was beginning to fill, but by no means did he feel whole. There would be a price to pay for this happy state of mind that he now found himself in, after all, he was now going down a path for which there is no return. Hostile circumstances were beginning to brew right beneath his unassuming visage and only time would tell if he could handle what was to come.

It was a bright and early day as he prepared to go to work. The clouds were fluffy and bubbly, and the pleasant bird songs played like a calming soundtrack in the background. Adam was feeling good about himself and life in general. Colors seemed brighter, and uplifting music suddenly had an appeal. Along with his usual white-collared shirt and black slacks, he picked out a bright red tie for work as opposed to his usual darker-colored ties—something he rarely did.

The drive to work was pleasant. Traffic was lighter than usual, and he didn't have to honk his horn once. Furthermore, no one tried to cut him off or tailgate him. It was really something to behold. Usually, these kinds of traffic games were typical business and would irritate him greatly. The best way he knew how to block it out was to get into his music, but

even that didn't always work.

This time it was working for sure. He got into the lyrics of a few of the songs that played, and sometimes, he even sang along if they were motivational. Though his singing wasn't the best, he sang so much, and with so much enthusiasm, that the driver's side window began to fog up like a shower's sliding door. He chuckled and felt embarrassed after noticing that this was happening.

There was plenty of parking at the office. He parked close to the main entrance.

Betty, the receptionist he liked when he first started at Leviatropé, was there as she usually was to greet him. They smiled at each other as he walked by towards the elevator. No longer did he feel any shred of attraction for her like before however. Although he had found out she was married, there was still a small part of him that had hoped someday things would change, previously. With Maria at the top of his mind, he now viewed her purely as a platonic work-acquaintance.

One of the main elevators he usually took to get to the 21st floor opened as soon as he pressed the up-arrow button to his shock and delight. Usually, he had to wait a while before one descended to the first floor.

Zach was back at his desk. He looked healthy, yet sad to a degree. He hadn't said anything to Adam, so he figured Zach wasn't ready to talk with him.

Adam began working with a renewed energy and enthusiasm that he didn't have before; his fellow co-workers noticed this distinctive change in him.

The office was quite harmonious, even Victoria had a big smile on her face. He could count on one hand the number of times he had seen her smile like this over the years.

She was talking with a man in her office about something important. Shortly after, the man walked out of her office towards the exit. Adam was pleasantly surprised to see who the man was. It was Walter. Adam

tried to make eye contact with him, so that he could make a friendly acknowledgement, but Walter didn't seem to notice or meet eyes with him.

In the middle of an assignment, Zach greeted Adam, "Hey man." Adam looked at him and asked how he was doing and if everything was alright.

"Well, I'm over that bug I had, but things aren't so great with my fiancé at all,"

"Oh no! What happened?"

Zach's face visibly slumped as he explained: "She's been absolutely distraught and not herself...her father recently got sick. The last month she's been driving out an hour and a half to go see him, and as of last week, it seems like he's going to reach that breaking point soon."

Adam expressed sympathy for Zach's situation by patting him on the back and continuing to listen. "Do you know him well?"

"Yeah, he's a great guy. I got a chance to meet him once over the holidays and we really hit it off. We like the same football team, fishing, cars...you know." Zach said sadly.

Adam told him that he hoped the situation works out in their favor and to keep him posted on how it turned out. Zach was appreciative of this gesture and then they both went back to work.

Victoria suddenly got up from her desk after organizing several papers on her desk. She started walking in Adam's direction. Was he in trouble? Did she seem him talking on the job with Zach? Thoughts like these quickly flowed in and out of his mind.

Before he knew it, she called out to him, "Adam, come to my office please," she said politely.

He didn't know what to expect; she seemed so jovial this morning, but usually, she would be as hard as a rock. She told him to have a seat before sitting down herself. Adam took a deep breath and stiffened his back in preparation for what she might say.

Then it happened. Words that he had been longing to hear for



years. “Adam, I have good news for you. You are going to be promoted to Corporate Manager effective in two weeks. I was recently informed that I will be getting promoted to Regional Manager, and you will be taking my place running this part of the office,” she said happily.

Adam couldn't hide his excitement. He quickly jumped from his chair, “You don't know how much this means to me, Mrs. Cauldweltdt!!!” He also congratulated her on her new position in which she responded with grace.

Once he got his new position, Adam would be responsible for the following: hiring, firing, and overseeing employees within the 20th and 21st floors, distributing specific types of workload to these employees, and managing general operations. She would be shadowing him for the next two weeks while they both make the transition to their new positions.

They then went over some of the paper work such as legal documents, and she started to mentor him on the ins and outs of the Corporate Manager position. He was like a kid in a candy store during this entire process.

# Afternoon

**12:00 p.m. – 12:45 p.m.**

## **Maria Flowers**

A CarryZus car pulled up to the curb of The Median. Maria stepped out with a smile. She was meeting up with Matt during her lunch break to finalize the financing for her new salon.

After grabbing a table, a young man approached her. It was Skye with his hair still dyed platinum-blond. Though he was new to this job, he was really starting to get the hang of things fast. She ordered a small Caesar salad, and shortly after, Matt arrived. They exchanged a quick hug and some small pleasantries. Time was short, so they got straight to business:

Matt (Feeling conceited): That's all you need for your startup costs? I'll cover that and some extra.

Maria (Feeling happy): Really? Thank you so much!

Maria: So, I can give you 15% of the profits...okay?

Matt: I don't need that much. 5% is cool.

Maria: Okay, I'll let...

Matt: I'll wire the money in your account later today. I'm taking Nikki to Hadarri'i for two weeks, so I have to get ready for that.

Maria: That should be fun. I hope you two have a memorable time.

Matt: Yeah. I'm sure, and your shop is going to be a hit with my blessing on it.

As they prepared to leave, Maria heard a voice call out to her from near the entrance. It was Adam! With a lack of intrigue to his face, Matt turned around to get a look at him. Adam walked over as she got up to greet him with a quick kiss. Matt subtly raised his eyebrow up and tightened his lips when he noticed.

Adam spotted Matt and instantly recognized him. Matt looked almost no different from his college days other than perhaps some more muscle mass, a slightly deeper tan, clean shave, and executive attire. When Matt looked at Adam in the eyes—he gave off a look as if seeing a stranger for the first time. Maria noticed that the two met eyes:

Maria (Feeling neutral): Adam. This is Matt Pryze. Matt. This is Adam Fluxelright. He told me you two went to the same college and met before?

Matt (Feeling gloomy): Really? I don't remember you at all.

Adam (Feeling calm): No worries, we didn't talk that much or anything. You too working out financing for her salon?

Maria: Yes, we were actually just finishing up.

Matt: She's going to have the best salon in the city because of me.

-Three second pause-

Adam (Feeling happy) Well...I hope so! She's been working really hard to get it up and running. Thanks for helping her, Mr. Pryze.

Matt: Just call me Matt, guy. I'm sure you didn't call me "Mr. Pryze" at whatever frat party I'm assuming you met me at. Anyway, I gotta bounce.

As Matt was leaving, he bumped into Skye who was bringing a meal and coffee to another customer. Skye was mostly able to keep his balance, but a small amount of coffee splashed out of its cup onto Matt's tie.

"Wow, man...I paid \$500 for this tie," Matt said with slight annoyance. Skye tilted his head down in shame and apologized. "Don't worry about it, kid. I have it in four other colors," he said snobbishly. Maria and Adam looked on, both having a sense of embarrassment for the situation. Skye mumbled something unintelligible and quickly went to dampen a napkin to hand to Matt. He yanked the napkin from Skye without saying a word, briefly wiped off his tie, and then left.

Before Maria headed back to work, she and Adam kissed. They then briefly mentioned the good things that have happened for both of them, and that they'd talk later.

Shortly after she left, Adam sat down at a table and got ready to order his lunch. He brought Skye's spirits back up after the incident by reminding him that he was new and that nobody's perfect. Skye thanked him for the consolation. After finishing his lunch, Adam would give him a big tip before leaving The Median.

***12:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

Maria could barely contain herself as she approached Luscious Hair Beyond. Inside, with a poorly contained giddiness, she whispered into the ears of Suzie and another young, female co-worker, Jaimie, that she will finally receive the financing for her shop. Both of her co-workers were equally excited as they both planned on joining up with her at her new salon in different capacities. Maria and Suzie knew exactly the spot to rent, and with the cash in hand, they'll be able to move in right away. There was the question of how their boss would handle losing three of her employees in this way which remained unsettled.

They went back to working on current and incoming customers' hair.

As Maria worked on a male customer's hair, she thought about the wonderful night she had with Adam. It had been a while since she's been on a real date with a guy; she was an extremely picky person when it came to her love life.

There was something deep down within making her feel like Adam was entirely different from other guys altogether. They just had that special connection with each other, and that feeling was quite intangible. She was looking forward to how things would progress.

A few customers later, Maria's boss was leaving the salon for the day. She was talking with Jaimie about something that put a smile on Jaimie's face. Their boss then walked out the door, Jaimie still quite happy. Hopefully, she wasn't getting cold feet about leaving the salon with her and Suzie.

# Evening

***5:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.***

## **Adam Fluxelright**

The grocery store was less crowded than usual. There were some new employees Adam hadn't seen before at the door to greet him with a smile, and several of his favorite foods were on sale.

Turning his cart into another aisle, another cart collided with his. The collision made him jolt back in shock, but then he got a look at the two behind the other cart...It was Skye directly behind the cart, and he was shopping with Rayne of all people! Rayne calmly said hello to Adam, while Skye frantically apologized for bumping into him.

Adam was nonchalant about the whole incident and complimented the both of them. He told Rayne that his singing the other night was absolutely excellent, causing Rayne to shyly grin. He also told Skye that he handled himself very well earlier at The Median, and that he looked much more confident when serving compared to when they first encountered each other. Skye also responded with a big shy grin. Both commented how nice he and Maria were, and that they'd love to chat again sometime. Rayne and Skye had somewhere urgent to be, so they all said their good-byes and went their separate ways.

Down the cereal and bread aisle, Adam noticed the store was all sold out of Purrr-Pusss cereal. That's strange, he thought to himself. No other cereal seemed to be even close to sold out; it must be really tasty or popular. The box he had at home was still unopened; he just didn't have a taste for it yet—maybe later.

The thought of cereal slowly fled from the top of his mind as he continued his routine shopping. But unbeknownst to Adam, a single box of Purrr-Pusss mysteriously manifested into visibility at the very back of its designated shelf.

***5:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.***

## **Leo Wanemacher**

Near the heart of downtown sat a newly constructed, well-sized apartment building amongst many old and rustic apartment buildings. Several tenants had recently moved into this newly constructed apartment building, and a lot of them brought their pets.

Inside one of the units was Leo cradling Purpei in his arms while being showcased around by a rental agent. This was the last place Leo intended to browse and the place that had uploaded videos of their complex.

He noticed that there was a balcony and asked the agent if he could open the slider door to look at the view. The agent said it was fine, so Leo went outside with Purpei. She let out a meow—the kind she lets out when she's happy—while Leo was observing the amazing view of the city and sky. Leo was excited because he felt that the balcony would give him an ideal location to put his telescope.

Back inside, Leo asked the agent if they allowed pets, specifically cats for this unit. Purpei looked at the agent with innocent glassy eyes as the agent confirmed to Leo that they do in fact allow kittens.

With the most important detail confirmed, Leo was ready to discuss pricing. He brought up the price from his Infarchive search online. The agent politely informed him that the price was wrong, and they actually had a special going for a limited time. Rent would be slightly cheaper for the first year, and all utilities would be paid in full. Leo was completely unaware of this and excitedly told the agent that he was ready to get the place on the spot! Purpei jumped out Leo's arms and happily curled up in a corner of the living room. It seemed as if she already had picked her new, favorite spot.

***6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.***

## **Adam Fluxelright**

What a happy day.

Coming home to a clean apartment, Adam had been anxiously waiting to privately release his excitement. He set his things down and

began throwing his fist in the air while mini-jumping in excitement.

Once he settled himself down to his new baseline, he reached for his phone and began a text conversation with Maria:

Fluxxy: [I got the promotion!!!]

Maria: [Wow really? I'm so excited for you sweetie! =)]

Maria: [I've got some good news too! Matt sent over the money 30 mins ago. I'm finally going to realize my dream!]

Fluxxy: [Awesome news, I'm really happy for you]

Fluxxy: [We should celebrate! Let's make dinner together at my place tomorrow night]

Maria: [I'd love that! What time?]

Fluxxy: [8pm colo?]

Fluxxy: [Cool\*]

Maria: [That's perfect! We can make Italian food. I'll bring over some ingredients and a cookbook just in case]

Fluxxy: [Just what I was thinkin]

Fluxxy: [I'll see you tomorrow...don't forget those nerdy glasses you're gonna need them!!]

Maria: [Lol, you're too much]

A smile grew on his face, but something that he had been forgetting finally came to his attention—the anonymously sent box was still on his mini-table in the corner unopened. No more waiting around. It was time to see what was inside.

Methodically, he grabbed the box and took it over to his larger table in the living room then put it down. He grabbed a box cutter from the kitchen and sat down in anticipation for what could be inside.

The front of the box was opened...and a white object came to the surface. At first, it looked like it was something used to protect whatever the contents were inside, but upon closer inspection, it was not. It was a sheet of paper with text written on it. The note read:

Congratulations! You have received this model plane as a gift from us to you. Use the instructions inside this box to assemble the plane together. Once you have done so, take a photo of the completed plane, text the photo to the number below, and we will give you a special reward! Peace and love to you, Adam.

Now he was certain it came from his parents. They were two of the few people who knew he wanted to operate and design craft growing up, so he started to put two and two together. It was likely some sort of a creative early birthday present—his 28th birthday was next week. Amusing.

While removing the packing peanuts, components to a model plane and instructions to build it emerged. After taking all the contents out of the box, he assembled the plane for an hour. It was harder than it looked, even with the instructions which certainly weren't the best. He decided to take a pause.

This was a good time to call his mother, Maya back. He had some extra time and wanted to update her on the positive developments in his life. There was also something important she wanted to tell him that she didn't get a chance to last time they spoke.

He dialed her number and waited. One ring...two rings...three rings... went by. Finally, towards the end of the last ring, his mother picked up the phone.

"Hello?" She said solemnly. "Mother! I'm so glad to hear your voice. How are things going with you?" He said happily. Although she affirmed that she was doing okay, something seemed slightly off about her. This off-vibe was noted in the back of his mind as he continued speaking with her.

He then told her about Maria, his promotion, and reuniting with Leo; life has been good. "By the way, that plane gift you and father gave me, I thought that was very creative. I bet it was you that came up with it right?" He said cheerfully.

"A gift? What do you mean? We haven't sent you anything for your birthday. At least not yet," she said in confusion.



Adam was somewhat surprised by her response. If they didn't send the box then who did? Perhaps it was as he originally thought: A gift from his brother given as a way to shyly re-establish contact. To his knowledge, the only other person who knew for sure about his childhood dream to his knowledge was Maria, and he met her after receiving the package. Did he tell Leo in college? He couldn't say for sure but highly doubted it; Adam's memory was usually quite good when it came to details like this.

"Have you been taking good care of yourself health wise, Adam?" She said in quiet desperation.

"Of course I have mother...I still eat all my veggies." He said with a grin.

"That's good to hear, but I have something very important to tell you. Please try not to be upset." She said cautiously.

"What is it?"

"I've been diagnosed with breast cancer...The doctors say that it looks as if it's going to keep spreading..."

A cold and sudden shock came over Adam. As the gravity of her words marinated in his mind—it felt as if time and space around him had almost come to a complete halt. All he could hear was his deep, shallow breathing...he and his surroundings became darker and had a ghoulish blue hue. What was this feeling? He never felt something quite like this before...it was petrifying. The more he gave into his inability, in this case, the inability to save his mother, it would feel as if this state of mind intensified. The only thing he felt sure of was the waning control over his thoughts. Eventually, he felt as if he was overreacting...she hadn't even finished explaining the situation.

With watery eyes, Adam seemingly unfroze from his eerie state-of-mind as he became more and more secure in the situation. It's like she said, try not to be upset...maybe there was still hope?

Slowly, he and his surroundings normalized.

He asked if she had told Jacob. She explained that she hadn't had

the courage to because of how sensitive Jacob could be especially with matters concerning her. Encouragingly, she told Adam that she was still in the early stages of cancer, and she planned on trying out a more holistic approach to her treatment. "I have a childhood friend who beat it, and now she's living a perfectly healthy, normal life," she said hopefully.

Adam felt better, though this wasn't the best news to receive, there was still a great chance she'd be just fine after treatment.

Before they hung up, she requested that he'd speak with Jacob about the news. She felt that it was important to do this so Jacob would have a chance to collect his thoughts before talking to her. Adam agreed and said he'd call Jacob tomorrow.

# Night

**9:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.**

## **Matt Pryze**

The night was dark and the wind blew strong enough to start causing structural damage in the wealthy neighborhood. Inside the massive, gaudy mansion, an aura of sorrow and unhappiness radiated intensely about.

Matt and Nikki had gotten into another argument. She was left with red eyes and tears, while he unhappily held his ground. Nikki was starting to have second thoughts about going on the trip. She was suspecting that there was an ulterior motive for going to Hadarri'i:

Nikki (Feeling hurt): Tell me...why do you really want to go to Hadarri'i?

Matt (Feeling dissatisfied) Well, there's a possible business opportunity there. Besides, I wanted us to have a chance to get away.

Nikki: What do you mean business opportunity?

Matt: I'm not entirely sure, but I know they have money.

Nikki: You're not entirely sure? How do you not even know what they're offering?

Matt: I just do, Nik. Stop doubting me. I know what's best for us.

Nikki: You know what's best for us? Everything you do lately seems to be about Matt, Matt, and Matt.

Matt: You're being very unappreciative right now.

Nikki: And you don't listen to your girlfriend.

Matt: Stop. I don't want to hear any more of this trash. Do you know how valuable my time is? People pay to talk to me and hear my ideas.

-Three second pause-

Nikki: All you do is party, party, party...how hard do you even work?  
When is the last time you even did something worthwhile?

Matt took great offense. His career, and by extension his legacy, was one of the most important things to him in his life.

They aired out several points of emotional baggage. Increasingly, he was feeling that she was detrimental to his ambitions. Any time he engaged in business activities, she would suspect an ulterior motive. He wanted someone by his side who would encourage his ambitions, give him needed space and independence, and feed his ego. She wanted a man who would spend more time with her, give her autonomy in the relationship, make her feel safe and protected from the world's ills, and give her a few children of her own to nurture. It was quite the dilemma. It wouldn't be long before the tipping point was reached:

Nikki: You don't care about business do you? It's just a front for you to live out your lavish ways isn't it?

Matt (Feeling unhappy): You don't know a damn thing.

Nikki: I know there's another girl. I bet that's why you want to go Hadarri'i so bad, huh? So you can "hang out" with her?

Matt: Okay...

Matt: You want the truth?

Nikki: Tell me...Now.

Matt: Yeah, there's another girl. In fact, there are many other girls I've been interested in. I'm sick of you accusing me every second of being unfaithful. Do you know how lucky you are to even be in this house? And all the women I come across who would love to be in your position, yet here you are after all this time? Just shut up already. You are replaceable. Don't forget that.

She lost it.

In frustration, she began breaking things. First, some invaluable antiques that she knew Matt had been collecting over the years. One of

them was an angelic figurine given to him by her for their one year anniversary. Then, she broke the vase that she bought him to replace the other vase she broke from their last argument by smashing it onto the marble floor. The final straw was when she took the picture of Matt and his father—the same one she got fixed last week—and threw it at him like a fastball. With his adrenaline flowing, he narrowly dodged it, but the glass frame shattered into a million pieces, causing the picture to develop a big tear and creases.

He had, had enough. He went up to her, grabbed her by the arms in an attempt to stop her erratic behavior, and threatened to call the police. With teary bloodshot eyes, she violently pushed him away causing him to fall back onto a couch and began screaming about how she couldn't take it anymore.

She stormed out and caused a ruckus throughout parts of the mansion causing audible destruction; Matt heard her shouting expletives and frustrated phrases directly at him from a distance.

After a minute or so of this, he decided to find her but then she quickly ran down the stairs toward the exit. Seemingly without taking a single belonging other than the cellphone in the left side of her leggings, she stormed out of the mansion into the dark of the night. Matt went outside and looked on with an expression of indifference. He didn't try to follow her.

# Tuesday

## Morning

***9:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.***

### **Adam Fluxelright**

The office was in great spirits today. The company's new quarterly earnings were through the roof, and as a result, everyone was going to receive a bonus on their next payday. It was also Zach's birthday, and some of the employees threw him a little celebration earlier in the morning.

Adam was continuing preparations for his transition to Corporate Manager before getting into an upbeat conversation with the birthday boy.

As Adam was telling Zach about his promotion, Victoria called him into her office. Adam gave Zach a bit of friendly instruction and advice on what he was working on before he began his walk over. Zach sat back and realized that Adam was about to be his new boss. Adam had been his friend for years both inside the office and out, so it was bound to be a strange dynamic for him. Perhaps this seemingly friendly gesture by Adam prior to walking into Victoria's office was a sign of things to come.

Inside her office, Adam and Victoria were not only going over the ins and outs of his new position on her computer, they were talking personal. Ever since yesterday, it was as if Adam was seeing a completely new side to her. She was smiling, friendly, considerate, and

even a bit humorous. She really seemed like a good, personable woman underneath the hard and stiff shield she wore day in, day out at the office, he thought.

It felt as if he was slowly getting to get to know the real her on a more personal level. They talked a little about their home lives which is something Adam never thought he'd discuss with her. She has been happily married for 28 years and has two children, a son and a daughter. Victoria extended an invitation for dinner with her and her husband when they all have a chance. Adam gladly accepted, thanked her, and headed out the door to prepare for his lunch break.

***11:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.***

**Leo Wanemacher**

Today yielded an unusual sight; Leo was in his hotel room during the day. He had confirmed the move-in with the apartment complex from yesterday and was set to move in about one week. He was in the middle of packing up his and Purpei's things when he got the idea to text Adam to see if he wanted to hang out later on. Five minutes later, he sent a [hey] text. Adam responded minutes later:

Adam Fluxelright: [What's up man?]

Leo W.: [nm, just hangin out with Purpei lol. I'm a little bored here and wanted to see if we could hang out later]

Adam Fluxelright: [Sure, but it has to be right when I get off work. Maria is coming over later]

Adam Fluxelright: [You could come stop by before she comes. Is 6:30 good for you?]

Leo W.: [Yup, will do! Can I bring Purpei?]

Adam Fluxelright: [I don't think my apartment allows pets =( sorry man.]

Leo W.: [Ehh, it's alright I can have my cousin watch her. Just text me before I leave so I'm not goin half way across the world]

Adam Fluxelright: [Lol, will do.]

After his text conversation with Adam, he called his cousin to watch Purpei. His cousin confirmed that he would look after her when he got off of work. Purpei meowed and trotted with some excitement when Leo told her this.



## Afternoon

***12:00 p.m. – 12:50 p.m.***

### **Adam Fluxelright**

The Median was bustling. Back for lunch, Adam was preparing to order chili fries. Skye was on duty again, and he seemed more upbeat and confident than in the past (perhaps Adam's words of encouragement were beginning to sink in).

As Skye took his order, Adam greeted him on a more personable level than before. Skye, once again, embarrassingly apologized for crashing into him at the store. Adam reaffirmed that it was no big deal, leading him to make a joke about it that they both laughed at.

"I've noticed that you're really getting the hang of being a waiter, Skye. What made you want to become a waiter by the way?" He asked politely.

"Well, my grandfather owns this restaurant chain and a couple others. Naturally, I started working in the family business to see if it would be something that'd interest me. He wanted me to learn the business and also make sure I enjoy this line of work." Skye said humbly.

"You're very fortunate, and are you enjoying the process so far?" Adam asked politely.

"Yeah...I mean it's alright. Sometimes it can feel a little overwhelming and hectic, but it's not so bad when you get the hang of it," Skye said confidently.

Adam could relate. When he first started at Leviatropé, he felt overwhelmed with the workload. Eventually, he found ways to cope and make his job responsibilities easier. Still, Adam felt like something was missing in his career despite him being good at what he did and getting to know some of his co-workers on a personal level.

Suddenly, the restaurant had a massive influx of customers coming

in. A large travel bus stopped by to feed its passengers, many of which looked quite plump.

Skye unfortunately had to cut the conversation short to tend to all these customers, but before doing so, he mentioned that his grandfather does routine checks of all the restaurants owned by his conglomerate business. He was coming to this specific restaurant in about a month's time, and Skye said he'd love to introduce Adam to his grandfather.

After giving Skye a hefty tip, they exchanged good-byes. As Adam was walking out of the restaurant, he could see that Skye was moving around so fast it was as if he were a feather blowing every which way in a strong wind.

***12:50 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

With the day off work, Maria walked into her apartment with a fresh bouquet of flowers. Its pleasant aroma added to the already garden-like vibe radiating throughout. She felt at peace and happy as a clam as she placed the bouquet in a vase atop her grandmother's old table. She then turned on calming ambient music and took some time to reflect.

So many things in life were going right. The plans for her very own salon were already well underway—though she's still settling on an official name—her situation with Adam was blossoming, and her relationship with her friends and family were absolutely wonderful.

Speaking of family, there has been a looming question on her mind ever since her amazing first date with Adam. Who was her biological father?

Her stepfather, Marco, has been in her life since she was little, and they have had an amazing relationship. He was virtually the only father she's ever known. Regarding her biological father, she only had a single memory of him. In that memory, his visage appeared shadowy—as if he had no facial features—and he towered over her and her mother, Maritza. He watched over her for a short period of time while her mother gathered something, and then, he was out the door.

The importance of family was starting to sink in. Thoughts of having a family of her own someday were emerging; thirty-years-old was just around the corner. She realized how fragile life could be when her grandmother suddenly passed away last year as a result of complications from a minor car accident. Finding out who her father, and by extension his family, was quickly becoming a paramount issue.

There were so many questions that she had that relating to him. Why did he abandon us? Could there have been a good reason (if a reason could even be considered good in this case), or was he just a flat out deadbeat? She thought internally. Flowers, her last name, wasn't her mother's maiden name or anyone's in her family, so it had to have come from him. "There had to be a point in time where he was in our lives or at least cared for us," she said out loud to herself. It's also possible that he had died, and her mother either never found out or didn't want to tell her. She had to find out as soon as possible.

It had been many years since Maria talked to her mother regarding her biological father at all, but now she felt it was time to ask some questions. Additionally, things had been going so good for her, so she figured that her mother would love to hear about them. She thought of some questions to ask regarding her biological father and then went for her phone to dial her mother's number.

After four rings, it went to voicemail. She left her mother a message to call back. Shortly thereafter, she resumed thinking about a wide variety of subjects ranging from work to Adam, while periodically reading a book.

Suddenly, her phone rang. She rushed to pick it up thinking it was her mother.

But, she let out a small sigh of disappointment. It turned out to be Matt. She answered anyway; he was financing her new salon for virtually nothing in return after all:

Maria (Feeling motivated): Hello?

Matt (Feeling unhappy): What are you up to?

Maria: Not much, I've just had a lot on my mind lately.

Matt: Same here. Things aren't going well at all with me and Nikki.

Maria (Feeling sad): Oh no! What's going on?

Matt: We had a big fight last night...she started thinkin' that I wanted to go to Hadarri'i as a cover to see some chick or something. Totally not even the case. She went absolutely nuts, started breaking all my things, throwing stuff at me, and then just left my place. It was crazy.

Maria: That's horrible...I'm so sorry! Have you talked to her since?

Matt: No. I don't know where she's at.

Maria: I'll keep a look out for her. Maybe she'll show up at LHB?

Matt (Feeling indifferent): Maybe, maybe not. A big part of me doesn't want her to come back—we're just not going to work out.

Maria: What?! You shouldn't say that! She's comes across as a nice girl whenever I've seen her. Maybe she's just feeling really hurt. Let her come back to you and then talk it out.

Matt: Hold on. I'm getting another call...

Maria genuinely felt sorry for both of them. She's the kind of person that liked seeing people stay together, not torn apart in a relationship: family, friend, spousal or otherwise. It was deep-seated in her, due to her own father seemingly walking away from her and her mother. As she pondered about her father, Matt clicked back on the line:

Matt: Someone in the company was asking me something. Anyway, what were you saying?

Maria: I was saying that you should talk it out with Nikki, and try to see things better from her point-of-view.

Matt (Feeling a bit unhappy): Frankly, I don't care anymore. I've tried talking, and she just won't listen. She doesn't get me. I'm basically done with her.

-Three second pause-

Maria (Feeling shy): Maybe you just need some time apart?

Matt: You don't know her like I know her. She's on me like white on rice...a real clinger. What I like about you, though, is that you give people their space, and you're ambitious like I am.

Maria: Um, well that's true. I just like to let things happen in terms of relationships, and as far as my dreams, well I'm committed.

Matt: I like that; I think we should talk more.

Maria: I'm sure we can do some nice business together, but I'm starting to have feelings for Adam...

Matt: Unbelievable.

Matt: What did I tell you about guys like that? They settle for mediocrity and never amount to anything in their lives. You're wasting your time.

Maria (Feeling offended): You're wrong. You don't even know him. He's a sweet guy and knows exactly what he wants.

Matt: I know more about people like him than you think. I've seen them fail all my life and take good women like you down with them. Stop being delusional.

Maria: I'm going to hang up now. I hope everything turns out fine with you and Nikki.

Matt hung up without a reply. The tide turn of the conversation really hurt Maria causing her to tear up the more she thought about it. She tended to be very sensitive to matters that dealt with people she cares for. Hopefully, she would be able to pull herself together before her dinner date with Adam...

# Evening

*5:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.*

## Adam Fluxelright

Adam just arrived home anxiously thinking about how the evening would end. He had some time before anyone was set to come over, so he decided to tinker around with the model plane for a bit.

He was making a little progress on it but was still having trouble putting it together; the instructions were vague and somewhat random. They seemed exactly like something his brother would create. This reminded him. He promised their mother that he would talk to Jake about her condition, so he dialed his number. Surprisingly, after a single ring, he picked up:

Jacob (Feeling indifferent): Hello?

Adam (Feeling a bit nervous): Hey, Jake. It's your brother. Just calling to see how you're doing?

Jacob: I'm okay.

Adam: Same. I've been wondering. Did you recently send me a model airplane as a gag gift for my birthday?

Jacob: No. Why?

Strange. Adam was convinced that his brother sent the package, but here he was denying it. He didn't have very many theories left. There's no way it was Maria, even though he told her about his childhood dream because he got the box before he even met her. So that left Leo as the only possible person. He must've told Leo about his childhood dream in passing and simply didn't remember. But then he thought for a second. It simply could just be a random promotion or even someone from work. He'll figure it out for sure later.

Jacob: You there?

Adam: Sorry. And I was just curious. I got it in the mail last week but

it wasn't labeled.

Adam: Have you spoken to mother at all?

Jacob: No, not lately. It's been a few months actually which is unlike me. I've been putting off telling mom and dad about my girlfriend being pregnant. They're not the biggest fan of her either...

Adam: That's too bad. Knowing mother I'm sure she'd be super accepting in the end. It's her first grandchild after all...Father will come around too.

Jacob: I hope so.

Adam (Feeling nervous): Speaking of mother, I spoke to her the other day. She wanted me to talk to you about something before you talk to her.

Jacob: Huh? What is it?

Adam: Well...she got diagnosed with breast cancer a few months ago...but she's feeling...

Before Adam could even finish his sentence, Jacob lost it. He started screaming at Adam over no one telling him sooner. Adam tried to calm him down, but still, Jacob continued. Jacob was closer to his mother than anybody and was expecting the worse. He started blaming Adam for playing with his emotions and was mad at both Adam and their mother for having Adam break the news first.

In frustration, Jacob hung up before Adam could further elaborate on her condition. Adam feared something like this could happen but not this bad. Historically, Jacob could be quite the loose cannon and take things too much to heart. Adam's happy mood was quickly sapped by the tide turn of the conversation. Hopefully, he would be able to pull himself together before his dinner date with Maria...

***5:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

Still saddened by her conversation with Matt, Maria called Suzie for consolation. Suzie had been warning Maria about the type of person Matt

was, so his behavior over the phone came as no surprise to her. Maria affirmed that she no longer felt attracted to Matt. Suzie's tone shifted from slightly condescending to very positive. This change in her tonality helped uplift Maria's mood, causing her to look at the situation in a different light. Suzie told her to forget about it and to remain friendly with Matt, especially for the sake of their new salon.

Maria had been thinking about flaking on Adam for the night; she didn't want him to see her like this. In response, Suzie told her that flaking or questioning her attraction for Adam would be a huge mistake, feeling that Adam would be understanding of her situation anyway. Suzie's opinion on Adam was very high, and she even sarcastically teased her that if Maria didn't move forward with Adam tonight that she'd think about throwing a look or two his way! This helped boost Maria's resolve, and she assured Suzie that she would forget about the phone call with Matt and have a good time with Adam.

***6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.***

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Adam's phone got a new notification. Leo just texted him saying that he's on his way but running a little late. This bothered Adam just a bit. He preferred giving undivided attention to the people in his life typically on a one-to-one basis, and he didn't like pushing people away. If he came late, Adam may not be able to spend as much time with Maria as he'd like to or even Leo himself for that matter. He decided to do some last minute cleaning and organizing before they all showed up. His apartment was looking the best it had looked in years—maybe even since the first several weeks after he moved in.

His phone started ringing. It probably wasn't Maria or Leo, but he decided to check anyway. The number was one he'd never seen before but the area code was local. He answered and there was a soft static... He was preparing to hang up until he heard a voice:

Hello! You have been randomly selected to participate in our new private pilot training course. You will receive a special discount off your initial deposit just for listening to this message. Press 1 to hear



more about this offer, otherwise, you may hang up this call.

It was some sort of automated message. He still had a dream deep down to pilot and design craft, but he was at a different stage of his life—and certainly didn't have the money or time for an expensive course. He hung up.

Another notification hit his phone. Leo was right around the corner, and thankfully, he wasn't nearly as late as Adam had expected. Adam headed downstairs to let him inside. They engaged in their distinct pound hug and went back upstairs to Adam's apartment.

As he waddled inside, Leo was pleasantly surprised by how clean it looked. He remembered Adam being rather junky in college. After grabbing drinks, they both sat down:

Adam (Feeling content): How are you liking downtown? Found a new place yet?

Leo (Feeling happy): It's great! We found our new place yesterday. Purpei's already picked out her new spot, lol!

Adam: Awesome! You have to invite me over once you two get settled in.

Leo: Plan on it! Once I get the hang of being at a startup, you're welcome anytime. I have some cousins out here too. They'd probably like to meet you. You would all get along great. They like a bunch of scientific stuff like: spacecraft, airplanes, energy, technology, and all that. Didn't you say you wanted to be a pilot a long time ago?

So Leo did know about Adam's childhood dream. Adam clearly told him about it at some point in the past. Still, he wasn't ruling out that the mystery box was sent to him by pure chance or someone at the office.

Adam: Yeah, I did. They sound like cool people. Let's all hang out for sure.

Leo: Perfectilicious! I'll let them know next time I speak to them. One of them is actually watching Purpei overnight; he loves cats too.

Leo: \*Coughs.\* How are things at work for ya?

Adam: They're going great, actually. I just got promoted to Corporate Manager yesterday!

Leo: Wow...Dude, you're startin' to become big time! You're going to own the place one day.

Adam: Haha, well I don't know about that.

Adam: How about you? When do you start working at the startup?

Leo: In about a month. I've been working on my coding skills in the meantime. Gotta be ahead of the curb.

Adam: Very true. Innovation is in high demand for a lot of these companies, especially young companies with big competition already.

Leo: Yup. I have some great ideas that are already cookin'. You would never believe it, but Purpei has been a big inspiration for my creativity.

Adam's phone was going off again, so he decided to go to the counter where it was charging to check who it was.

There were several texts from his brother. He was vehemently apologizing for the way he acted earlier. Adam responded in an understanding way recognizing that he was simply worried and cared deeply for their mother. He explained that their mother was optimistic about the holistic treatment she planned to seek, and additionally, the cancer was still in its early stages. Jacob understood and told Adam that he planned to call their mother the next day. This lifted a huge weight off Adam's shoulders now that everything seemed to be okay between the two.

Adam was quite excited about Jacob coming around that he began pacing around and doing short hops. Jacob's last text was again re-emphasizing his apology to Adam. He happily took his phone over to the counter and plugged it back into its charger. He and Leo then continued their conversation:

Adam (Feeling happy): Sorry, that was my brother. He got into it a little with me before you came over about our mother.

Leo (Feeling concerned): Really...? What happened?

Adam (Feeling concerned): Well, I broke the news to him that our mother was in the early stages of breast cancer, but before I could even tell him that it was in the early stages or that she was trying new treatment, he went off on me.

Leo: Wow...I'm really sorry dude. How is she doing?

Adam: She seems to be doing alright right now. I was just clearing all this up with my brother, Jake, right now over text, and he seems to have forgiven me.

Leo: That's good to hear. Let me know if there's anything I can do to help. I know how tough cancer can be for people.

Adam: I will. Thanks man.

Leo: No problem.

Leo: So everything going well with your new lady friend...Uh what was her name again?

Adam: Maria.

Leo: Oh, yeah. Things going good? \*Coughs\*

Adam: Yeah, they're going great! We're still not official or anything, but I'm very optimistic that things are going to work out. She's supposed to be coming over shortly, actually.

Leo (Feeling hopeful): That's right, you told me! Maybe I could meet her. She sounds like a nice girl from what you've been telling me.

Adam: She is. I'm sure she'd be glad to meet you later.

Leo: You know what you should do?

Adam: What?

Leo: My grandfather owns this really nice restaurant called, "Aurora Neutralis." They serve all types of food, but they really specialize in Italian. You told me she likes Italian food, right?

Adam: Oh, she definitely does. We're planning on making some tonight.

A new text notification just hit Adam's phone. It's kind of early, he thought. It shouldn't be Maria...but sure enough, it was her. She said that she was about to be dropped off in front of his place in about a minute.

As Adam was spritzing on some cologne, he told Leo to text him the name of his grandfather's restaurant, so he wouldn't forget. Leo obliged.

Adam jetted down the stairs—can't have her standing out there all alone in the cold of the night, he thought.

Outside, she was in the midst of tipping her CarryZus driver and waving him off. She then turned around; she was wearing her big, bottle cap glasses. Adam laughed, and she responded with playfulness. They greeted each other with a loving hug and kiss. Shortly after, Adam helped her with the heavy bags that she was carrying and led her upstairs to his apartment.

He chivalrously opened the door for Maria to walk in, and inside Leo was sitting down twiddling his thumbs in slight boredom. When Leo turned around he froze for a second; then, Adam introduced him to Maria as his best friend from college. Giddy as can be, Leo waddled over to shake her hand and introduce himself:

Leo (Feeling happy): Hello, ma'am! It's a pleasure to be acquainted with you today. Name's Leo. Adam's told me great things about you.

Maria (Feeling happy): Maria. It's a pleasure to meet you too, Leo!

Leo: I was just telling Adam that he should take you out to my grandfather's restaurant called Aurora Neutralis. You two would love it, and their Italian food is super!

Maria: Oh! I've heard of that place. Hey, Fluxxy!

Adam: Yeah?

Maria: Can we try the Aurora Neutralis soon?

Adam (Feeling a bit embarrassed): Sure.

Leo: I like your glasses by the way; they remind me of Chelsea's

from the show, Galaxa VT.

Maria: No way! You watch that show? That's like my favorite sci-fi show ever...

Leo: \*Gasp\* Do I watch that show? It's only my favorite show of all time!

Maria (Feeling playful): See Adam? At least someone thinks these are cool.

Adam: Yeah...whatever!

Adam let them talk about their favorite show and the nerdy subjects he wasn't interested in.

Leo and Maria were really hitting it off, and it seemed like they each made a new friend. Leo has confided in Adam that he doesn't talk to women much, so it was good for him to get some friendly practice in:

Leo (Feeling excited): Did ya see the episode where they had to land on a planet with the talking space moles?!

Maria (Feeling happy): Yeah! That was hilarious!

Leo: Hyeh, I know right?

Maria: I hope they visit more planets and travel back in time; the show is super interesting when they do that.

Leo: I totally agree.

Leo: It's gettin' kind of late, and I know you two have a special evening planned, so I should get going. Do you mind addin' me on BabbleGlu?

Maria: Sure, let me grab my phone...

Leo and Maria exchanged social media information and had a friendly hug before he got ready to leave. Adam told him that it was a pleasure having him over and catching up. Leo felt the same way and reiterated having them over to his place when he gets settled in. They did their distinct pound hug, and then, Leo waddled out the door.

# Night

*9:00 p.m. – 10:15 p.m.*

## **Adam Fluxelright**

Finally. Adam and Maria could have some time to themselves. With the quick push of a button, Adam turned on his “slow and relaxing” playlist. Maria began unpacking the cooking supplies and ingredients that she brought over for dinner that consisted of: fresh tomatoes, tomato paste, basil, oregano, cheese, and some utensils. They were planning on making meatless Lasagna with a side of bread and Caesar salad. He already had lasagna sheets, bread, and the salad among other things.

They were relatively quiet while cooking, allowing their body language and emotions to do most of the talking.

Adam was having trouble dicing the onions and tearing up quite a bit from their enzymes. He knew something was off about the way he was cutting them, but he was trying his best to look impressive for Maria. She found this adorable; it turned out he was using the wrong type of knife. She grabbed the utility knife out of its holster and handed it to him with a smile. He was a little embarrassed by this as he thanked her. She was already ready to start layering the Lasagna, so she began setting the table while he finished up dicing the onions and draining the lasagna sheets.

While the food cooked, they sat on the couch and streamed a stand-up comedy episode. Ironically, the comic resembled Leo...perhaps after going on a 60-day diet. The comic even cracked a few nerd-related jokes that made Maria laugh so hard that she snorted, to Adam's amusement.

After the nerd-related jokes, the comic changed the topic towards relationships. Adam and Maria, for the most part, laughed at these jokes but other times felt mutually awkward at the comic's bluntness and vulgarity.

Maria's stomach started to growl quite audibly. Adam looked at her with the beginnings of a laugh on his face and playfully wondered if she was going to eat him. She playfully bit and nibbled at him before snuggling up with him to finish watching the show. He really felt at this point that she was in fact the woman of his dreams

The timer on the oven suddenly went off. Finally, the food was done—they were absolutely starving. They went over and got big platefuls.

After sitting down at the dinner table, they watched the last few minutes of the comedy show.

Once it was over and their plates were cleared, they began talking about the dinner:

Adam (Feeling happy): Your cooking is amazing! I can't believe how good that lasagna was.

Maria (Feeling happy): You know...those onions were the best part!

Adam: I think my tears enhanced their flavor...

Maria: Haha!

Maria: I'm really enjoying myself with you tonight, Adam.

Adam: Same, you've been so sweet.

Adam: You know what? This is one of my favorite songs. Want to dance with me?

Maria: I'd love to.

The night quickly became magical. They slow danced, gazing deeply into each other's eyes. Pure happiness flowed through the depths of their minds as they inched closer and closer to each other. Life had been going so good, and now, they each had the perfect person to share it with. A happy and optimistic state of mind had been fueling their resolves through the uncertain times, and they had no intention of letting up anytime soon. Life was good.

They began whispering passionate nothings to each other as the playlist ended. It wasn't long before they started to kiss deeply and romantically. A perfect state of bliss was beginning to emerge—just the

two of them inside their own little bubble. In the intense heat of the moment, Adam swept her off her feet to the other room. One thing led to another and they made love.

***10:15 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.***

### **Matt Pryze**

Dark and distorted shadows wisped around through the night. A subtle but mighty wind was brewing against an unusually quiet and gaudy mansion in the wealthy neighborhood.

Inside, Matt was cleaning up some of the damage that Nikki caused the night before. Broken antiques and pottery lie about all over his marble floor. Belongings of hers were splayed out all over their room and one of the secondary rooms, and her suitcases' contents were dumped onto the floor. He quickly lost his patience and decided to leave the mess for his staff to deal with.

His favorite photo of him and his father, Dameon Pryze, was badly damaged. Out of all the things that happened last night, this affected him the most. Family and legacy were important factors for Matt, along with his own self-worth. This photo represented all three in a way. It also represented a happier time with him and his father; there were less worries...less oppositions to worry about. Though still active, Dameon's health has been quite variable since the beginning of the year, and the role he has been playing in Matt's life was beginning to diminish as a result. Matt was going to have more responsibilities if something bad were to happen to his father. He would finally have to fully grow up instead of living a life of extended early adulthood.

Then he got a message notification. He went to check his phone and discovered it was a voicemail...from Nikki. Strangely, he didn't hear the phone ring at all. Matt let out a sigh of annoyance as he prepared to listen to the voicemail. There was a five-second delay of silence before she started speaking in a distraught and slightly hysteric manner:

Matt. I'm calling you to tell you that it's over. We're finished...I can't take it anymore! I tried to love you and be a good woman to you



despite my flaws...and my past, but you didn't care. You saw me as vulnerable, and you took advantage of me for your own selfish reasons. All you ever did...was mistreat me and neglect me when I needed you most. I see that now. I don't care about my things. You can have them...or give them to some other girl for all I care. I'm going to go find my way now...I'm going to find my peace. Don't ever call me or try to find me. I don't ever want to speak to you again. Goodbye.

Matt put the phone down and stood in silence for a minute with a degree of indifference, yet rising frustration. His eyebrows scrunched.

He went into one of his kitchens to grab a couple of black trash bags and headed straight for their bedroom. He barged up the stairs and angrily opened their bedroom door, causing a thunderous bang. His eyes were methodically scanning for the most personal of Nikki's belongings.

A stuffed dove plushie that he got her as a gift early in their relationship was the first thing he laid eyes upon. Without hesitation, he gripped it with such force that it caused some of the stuffing to tear out and then threw it inside one of the bags.

There was a relationship album compiled full of their happy times together on one of the nightstands. He grabbed it and chucked it into one of the bags without a second thought. Next, he went into their walk-in closet and tore down as many clothes of hers from the hangers as he could, forcefully stuffing them in the bags until no more could fit.

There wasn't much room left in the bags from what he could tell—he needed smaller objects. Her main purse filled with some of her favorite jewelry, and all her important identifications, including her passport, was in another section of the room. He took the purse and stuffed it on top of one of the bags, barely getting it to fit inside.

There was only one other thing that he could think of off the top of his clouded mind that she held dearly. Her only photo of her biological brother, Ivan—the only biological family she knew of.

Inside one of the cabinets lied the photo inside a shiny, pearl-white frame. He attempted to remove the photo from the frame but was unable

to figure out how to open it. Instead, he viciously broke the frame's glass with his fist, tore the photo into several pieces, and threw as much as he could fit into a trash bag.

Once the bags were full, it was on toward his private yard. The bags were thrown outside, and firewood was retrieved from inside. After bringing it outside, he put it inside the furnace and lit it. He glanced at the trash bags for a moment, thinking about what he had done. Pushing another human being over the top for posing a threat to his will or ego was business as usual.

The next step, though permanent, was something he was ready for. He didn't care anymore; he was absolutely through with her. Without hesitation, he grabbed the bags and chucked them into the roaring fire. He stood back, watching as the trash bags went ablaze while proudly embracing the radiating heat against his body. There was a pent-up firestorm brewing deeply inside Matt, and Nikki's actions were simply the gasoline. This wasn't the first person's life that he's thrown out and destroyed if they went against his will or threatened his ego. It certainly wouldn't be the last.

## Bridge Scenes III: Six-and-a-half Weeks

### Cluster I: Day 1 through Day 15 (Morning)

Adam and Victoria are inside her office going over important

matters. Some of her belongings appear to have already been cleared out. Surprisingly, the two of them are occasionally laughing and smiling together as they are going over the documents on her desk.

Leo is at a furniture and decoration store looking for new items to fill his apartment that is soon to be available. He is looking around at all of the antiques and gets excited when he sees psychedelic wall art.

## Cluster II: Day 1 through Day 15 (Afternoon)

Adam is thoroughly cleaning up his apartment with a big smile on his face while listening to electronic dance music. The model plane sits on his table still incomplete. He organizes the clothing and other personal items Maria left behind neatly in his closet.

Jacob is speaking to Maya over the phone presumably about her breast cancer. He appears to be handling it okay judging from his accepting facial reactions.

## Cluster III: Day 1 through Day 15 (Night)

It is Adam's 28th birthday. He has received several texts and calls from family and friends, more than he expected. Adam is at Maria's apartment, and she had cooked him a birthday cake with a frosting-drawn design that resembled her big bottle cap glasses. They had seemingly finished eating cake for the night and are now playfully dancing. Maria is singing Adam a song which is making him laugh hysterically. An unopened gift bag can be seen in the background sitting on Maria's grandmother's old table.

Leo waddles into an empty apartment with some of his belongings and Purpei's crate. He releases Purpei from her cat crate, and she begins trotting around the place in excitement. He places her bed in the corner of the living room that she loved when they first started looking at this unit.

Matt is sitting at his large dining room table alone appearing to be

conjuring something up judging by the documents on his table. He has a look of annoyance on his face over whatever he is dealing with. He carefully takes a few sips of red wine while going through the documents.

## Cluster IV: Day 16 through Day 30 (Morning)

Adam walks towards his brand new Corporate Manager office with a box of his belongings and sits in excitement. None of the other employees had arrived yet, so he takes the time to do a brief celebratory dance. Afterwards, he walks over to his old desk and starts methodically removing things from it and bringing them into his new office.

Maria and Suzie are visiting the location for their future salon. Some redesigning and slight construction is underway as they look on with pride and satisfaction.

Leo and movers are hauling in the last of his belongings inside of his apartment. He hangs the psychedelic wall art that he ended up buying from the furniture store, up in his bedroom.

## Cluster V: Day 16 through Day 30 (Afternoon)

Maria is on the phone with her mother, Maritza. She looks happy judging by her body language and wide grin.

Inside The Median, Adam, Suzie, and Maria are on their lunch break and eating at a table together. They appear to be getting along great and sharing hearty laughter. Maria then starts showing the two of them photos from her phone. They all look on and smile in unison.

Leo is on the phone with someone. He appears unusually sad and slumped over as he talks to this person. Purpei is in his lap, and he is petting her slowly for comfort.

## Cluster VI: Day 16 through Day 30 (Night)

Adam and Maria are on Adam's couch watching a movie. They are snuggled up under a red blanket. Maria is clutching onto Adam tightly appearing to be frightened by whatever is being shown on the television.

Leo is now completely situated in his new apartment. The night sky is incredibly clear and luminous. With Purpei in his arms, he walks outside to his balcony and enthusiastically looks through his telescope for several seconds. Excited by what he sees, he lets Purpei look through the telescope so that she can see the stars too.

Matt is on vacation in an exotic country. He is sitting in a private booth at a very lavish nightclub surrounded by all kinds of beautiful women and alcoholic beverages. As they all were talking and having a good time, one of the women makes an advance on him and they begin kissing.

## Cluster VII: Day 31 through Day 47 (Morning)

Leo is at his new job's location for the first time. He sits down in one of the chairs at the team meeting and is listening to the manager speak about something. He notices a cute and shy-looking woman sitting on the other side of the group and then looks away when they meet eyes.

Adam is interviewing his first job applicant ever. She is a young, attractive, and very professional-looking woman. Although Adam looks slightly nervous, they increasingly appear to be having a great interview session. The woman appears to be somewhat excited based on what she is hearing from Adam.

Maria and Suzie are sitting down with their manager, presumably giving her their one week notice for quitting. Their manager seems caught off guard and slightly bothered by this judging by her stiff facial expression and body language.

## Cluster VIII: Day 31 through Day 47 (Afternoon)

Leo is several hours into his first official team meeting. Several people from the orientation are present, including the woman that Leo noticed at the orientation. He seems absolutely fascinated by what the manager is discussing. He notices that the woman is also very interested.

Adam is on the phone with Jacob. They are both talking jovially and sharing a few laughs. Judging by their facial expressions, they seem to be getting close as brothers again. During this phone conversation, Adam is tinkering around a bit with the model plane.

## Cluster IX: Day 31 through Day 47 (Night)

It is Sunday night, and a beautiful woman slowly walks out of a luxury suite. Inside the suite, Matt is gathering his belongings and packing to go home tomorrow morning. The night is dark, but the city from outside the balcony door is somewhat visible. The city is quite tropical. As he finishes packing, he looks outside the balcony door with a look of ominous content.

**Bliss**

# Monday

## Morning

*6:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.*

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Bliss. The intended final destination. This is what Adam had been yearning for since he was a child. This feeling...this wonderful feeling. Everything seemed to be going right, and nothing seemed to detract from his mood.

Something seemed off about this feeling of bliss, however. He always thought bliss would feel more...complete? There was a deceptive quality about bliss for Adam, as if he was merely experiencing a projection of the real thing. He was experiencing true love for the first time ever, but other personal voids continued to lurk in the darkness beneath the light.

It was still so surreal. Adam was the new Corporate Manager and sitting inside an office that he had been looking into from the outside for years.

Victoria now rode the elevator a bit longer in the mornings; she was getting close to the top two floors where the highest-level executives worked.

The employees at large seemed both happy and relieved that Victoria was gone and Adam was in. Some of them were clearly jealous and didn't exactly hide that fact during office gossip. It didn't really bother



him because he was on top of the world.

There were so many other things going right: he and Maria were now in a relationship, his income had risen significantly, his social circle was rock solid and expanding, Jacob was starting to open up to him again, and his mother was starting to feel almost normal. He was experiencing bliss for the first time in his entire life.

Zach walked into Adam's office with some updates on a project he'd been working on. Adam was happy about the progress made and told him that he's doing a great job. Zach was quite gloomy, however. "Everything okay with you, Zach?" Adam said politely.

He quickly slumped his head and mumbled, "No."

"Did something happen with your fiancé's father?" Adam speculated. With his head still slumped downward, Zach let out a sarcastic chuckle.

It turned out that his fiancé could be seeing another man. On her BabbleGlu account, she recently changed her profile picture from a picture of them together to just her by herself.

There was a man in the comments portion of the new photo who posted, "love you, stay strong" in which she replied to it with a heart emoticon. Additionally, her relationship status has been hidden for several weeks, and there was a possibility it had been like that for longer.

She had been driving down to visit her father, who lived about an hour away and sometimes stayed the weekend to be with him, supposedly. Zach wasn't friends with her father on BabbleGlu, but he decided to send her father a request in light of this development. He's not even entirely sure if her father was even sick or if it was just a ploy to keep driving down to see a guy.

"Dude, I am so sorry...Do you need any time off work or anything?"

"Yeah man especially if this turns out the way it's looking like it'll turn out. I don't know what to do. I've loved her for so long," Zach said sadly.

Adam was nodding in concern while trying to figure out what to do simultaneously. They had to get back to work, and there were new

prospects coming in for interviews soon. He was in a tough spot as Zach's friend and now boss.

Suddenly, Zach broke down. Other employees couldn't help but laser in on the situation. This was a side of Zach that Adam had never seen before.

Zach began explaining how the relationship started and all the good times they shared together. The box of tissue that Adam had on his desk was nearly empty as a result of Zach's seemingly endless tears.

Adam had an interview scheduled in about five minutes that he had to ready himself for. He was doing his best to be a friend to Zach, while still being cognizant of his work duty.

After looking at the clock for the final time, Adam had to take control of the situation: "Zach, man. I'm truly sorry about your situation, but I have an interview scheduled in five minutes. We can talk about this later, but you have to go back to your desk. Please."

"What, you think because you're a big shot now that you don't have to have the patience to deal with little people like me anymore? Give me a damn break," Zach snapped.

Adam paused and gave him a look of pitiful impatience.

"I'm sorry...that was really uncalled for. You've given me plenty of time, and I've been on the clock the whole time. I'll get back to work." Zach said meekly. Without any other words spoken, he slowly got up and crept back to his desk amongst the piercing eyes of onlookers.

With the Zach situation diffused for the moment, Adam readied himself for the interview process. This was only the second time he's done it, so he still felt relatively new at it.

The phone on his desk rang. The woman on the other line told him that the interviewee was on his way and should be walking in any second. He sat back in his chair, waiting patiently.

The main door to the office floor opened and in walked...Matt?!

It couldn't be Matt, why would he be applying to Leviatropé? The name on file was completely different too, so this was quite bizarre. The

interviewee was talking to an employee near the entrance, presumably to be directed towards Adam. Adam was looking at him carefully, but it was still hard to make out his face completely up to this point. The interviewee slowly walked toward his office, while Adam squinted his eyes trying to get a better look. As the man got closer, Adam realized that it wasn't Matt after all; however, the man might as well have been Matt's twin.

The interviewee greeted Adam with a happy, yet nervous smile. Adam did his best to get him to feel relaxed since he knew exactly where the man was coming from. He was applying for a job in the software department, and Adam knew how intensive that would be.

Following a series of interview questions, it was clear this person knew his stuff. He was clear, concise, qualified, and as he got the hang of the interview, became more personable and friendly. The man mentioned that he worked for an aerospace company prior to applying to Leviatropé and felt that he was in need of a change. Adam was so impressed with his presentation and credentials at such a young age that he decided to hire him on the spot.

***9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

Today was Maria and Suzie's first official day of business. "Green Sky Hair Salon" displayed beautifully on the front of the building with flowery decorations surrounding the logo.

Inside, the spacious salon would make one feel like they entered a heavenly garden. There were plants scattered throughout, beautiful nature-based artwork on the walls, and even a few waterfall decors. Employees were dressed in elegant, rose-red, outfits.

Maria and Suzie would be taking on a mostly managerial role as opposed to hair styling, and at least one of them would be present at all times during the salon's operating hours. In addition, Maria would focus on the salon's branding, social media, potential business deals and products, and marketing. Suzie would focus on the salon's budget, accounting, employment, and legal matters. They had six stylists, three

salon assistants, and two receptionists on payroll or independently contracted.

Jaimie, a hair stylist from Luscious Hair Beyond, was also in attendance for the grand opening. She had agreed to join Maria and Suzie at Green Sky, despite the possibility of a bump in more hours by their ex-boss. Jaimie felt that it was time for a change and that the atmosphere at Green Sky would be an overall better fit for her.

They could barely hold in their excitement as they opened their doors for business. Many customers, some of whom were regulars at Luscious Hair Beyond, were waiting to be allowed in. The nice, older woman and her granddaughter who has the longest, frizziest hair imaginable were both there as well. To Maria's delight, her hair looked better this time around—she must have been utilizing Maria's hair care tips. The girl was extremely excited to be at the salon and begged her grandmother to be treated by Maria. The girl's name was Micaela. Though Maria intended to handle matters related to the salon's presentation today, she happily made an exception for Micaela who seemingly idolized her.

***9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.***

### **Leo Wanemacher**

Today was Leo's first real day on the job. Last week his plate was full of team meetings and briefings to attend before finally getting down to what he really wanted to do: coding. He learned a lot about the startup's overall vision and what they wanted to do with their first app.

The app would be called, "PoinSoul." The focus of the app was to bring people who identify as geeks or have a hard time socializing, together.

Their office building was nestled in the heart of downtown, which made it easy for it to get lost in the sea of concrete. On the inside, the office was nice and modern, even though it was on the smaller side. Most of the employees had small workstations with just enough room for a laptop, charging station, a stack of paper, and a few personal belongings.

(Privacy, while working, was not something to expect at this startup.)

As Leo was getting his coding underway at his workstation, he spotted a woman working on one of the workstations across the way. She was the other new employee at the startup who he first noticed sitting near him at the company's orientation and team meeting over the last several weeks. She was slim, yet verging on the chubbier side, with long, wavy, brown hair. She wore clear-framed, circular glasses and had a light dusting of freckles on her face. There was something about her that seemed quite reserved, but maybe it was only because she was new.

In a rare bout of courage, Leo walked over to talk to her as her back was facing him. "Hey there, ma'am...My name is Leo. Are you new here too?" Leo said shyly.

She turned around and looked at him in a slightly confused manner. "Um...yeah I just started today. My name's Maggie...Maggie Bagstin," she said nervously.

Leo smiled and extended his hand for a handshake. "Nice to meet you...I like your glasses! I think they look totally awesome lol!"

Maggie quickly shook his hand and smiled slightly, appearing to be somewhat flattered that someone complimented her glasses.

"Thank you so much, Leo! I don't mean to be rude, though, but I'm a little busy. Was there something you needed?"

"No, ma'am! I just wanted to say hi to you since I don't really know anyone here. Would you be fine eating with me in the lunch room this afternoon?"

"Um...sure! I don't like feeling all by myself."

Leo was internally ecstatic. It took a lot for him to go up to a woman he didn't know at all and actually say something to her. He shook her hand again and happily waddled back to his desk to continue coding till his lunch break.

# Afternoon

**12:00 p.m. – 12:45 p.m.**

## **Adam Fluxelright**

There was something unusual going on at The Median.

As Adam was walking inside, the place was littered with people in executive attire. According to Teresa, corporate has stopped by to check up on them. She was quite nervous yet seemed even friendlier than usual to Adam.

Adam took his seat. Skye blew past and then quickly backtracked to his table. “Adam!” Skye said. He motioned to the other waiter who was about to take Adam’s order that he had this order covered. “My grandpa is here today! I wanted you to meet him, remember?”

Adam nodded and ordered chili fries. After taking his order, Skye went to the kitchen area to put it in and pull his grandfather away from the crowd of executives.

Like a soft breeze whipping by, Skye was back at his table with his grandfather standing next to him. His grandfather’s plumpness filled out his pearl-white, three-piece suit which had a magnificently fresh luster to it. His hair was tied up in a small ponytail, and he had a bushy, white beard that both had a degree of brightness about them. He had a distinctive red, blue, and yellow colored and striped suit pin that looked like it was the shape of a diamond. “Adam, I’d like you to meet my grandpa, Lucent. He owns the entire restaurant chain!” Skye said enthusiastically:

Adam (Feeling joyful): Hello, sir. It’s an honor to meet you.

Lucent (Feeling joyful): The pleasure is all mine. My grandson here has told me good things about you.

Adam: I absolutely love this place. By the way, Skye told me you also own Soe-Soe’s Restaurant. Is that correct?

Lucent: He would be correct.

Adam: That's wonderful. It's a very special place to me now; it was the first place I ever took my girlfriend. We absolutely loved the food.

Lucent: Why, that's good to hear. You should bring her around to my main restaurant. It's a beauty...five stars...the absolute best you'll ever visit and eat your fill of!

Adam: I'd love to. What's the name of it?

Lucent: The magnificent display of color...Nature's pure radiance... Something that should flow through warm and cool alike. That would be Aurora Neutralis, young man.

Aurora Neutralis...Where had Adam heard that restaurant name before? He knew someone had recommended it recently, so he quickly ran down a list of names in his head while continuing to talk to Lucent.

Then, it hit him like a ton of bricks. Leo told him back at Adam's apartment. He mentioned his grandfather owning a restaurant called the Aurora Neutralis! That meant that Lucent was Leo's grandfather and Skye was Leo's cousin...or brother? What a small world.

Lucent: Well gentlemen, I must continue to be the shining light for all those suits in the back kitchen. It was a pleasure conjoining with you today, said young man.

Adam: It was a pleasure.

Lucent gave Adam his business card, shook his hand, and joined back up with the other executives who were touring the place. After looking at the business card, Adam realized that Lucent's unique last name, Visaygris, was different from Leo's.

Skye brought out Adam's chili fries and asked what he thought of his grandfather. Adam thought highly of him, though there was something about him that felt quite perplexing. He asked Skye if he had ever heard of Leo Wanemacher. Skye shook his head up and down and confirmed that they were in fact first cousins; then, he wondered how in the world Adam knew who Leo was. Adam had a look of delight, mentioning that

Leo was his best friend in college. Skye found it extremely coincidental and was unaware that Leo had moved out to the area but was interested in seeing him.

Adam mentioned that Leo was planning a little apartment welcoming party Tuesday evening and that he was sure Leo would love for him to stop by. He told Skye that he'd text Leo later on to confirm.

Before Adam paid the food bill, he got Skye's cell phone number—he almost forgot to get it. Lucent, who happened to be walking by with several people, told Skye to make sure Adam's meal was on the house. Adam smiled in surprise.

***12:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.***

### **Leo Wanemacher**

The lunchroom was quiet and empty as Leo and Maggie entered. For lunch, Maggie brought a veggie sandwich with a container of strawberry yogurt. Leo brought pizza turnovers and a can of diet soda.

They sat down and started eating rather quietly. Leo looked at her as he finished chewing his food and asked, "Well, ma'am, how does your food taste?" She quickly tried to chew her food in order to answer his question as fast as humanly possible. "It's good...I've been trying to eat healthier lately," she said meekly.

Leo could relate to her goal; he held up his can of diet soda and chuckled. In response, she slightly smirked and continued eating her yogurt.

An awkward silence filled the air. Leo, desperate to further the conversation, decided to throw out a compliment: "I really like that you eat right. I wish I could be as disciplined as you, but jeez, a dude can't go long without some snacks! Lol."

She laughed slightly. "Thanks for the compliment."

Leo asked if she had been living in the area for long in which she told him, "No, but I moved from Oregon about two months ago to look for work." She's also mentioned majoring in graphic design and intending to help with the layout and presentation of the app.



Suddenly, her phone started going off. It was a phone call from someone who had a distinctive ringtone assigned—the theme song from one of Leo’s favorite shows, Galaxa VT.

After she let the call go to voicemail he shouted, “OMG, that’s the theme to Galaxa VT! I’m the biggest fan in the world. You watch?!”

She looked at him and smiled. “Yeah, I’m the biggest Galaxa VT geek. I’ve been watching it since middle school!”

Leo went for a high-five which she returned playfully. After discussing the latest episode, they discovered that they also had other favorite sci-fi shows and interests in common. The vibe of the conversation did a complete turnaround. He was now in business!

It was time for a giant leap of faith. Leo went back to quietly eating his food as a way to buy time to build up courage for his next move: asking her out.

As she was getting up to throw away her food and head back to work, Leo said, “Excuse me...Maggie?” She stopped and turned at him in slight surprise. “There’s this really cool planetarium in downtown, and I know you said you like stars and all that...I wanted to see if you’d like to go check it out with me sometime?” He said courageously.

“Sorry, I actually have a boyfriend,” Maggie said sternly.

Those were the words Leo certainly did not want to hear. He tried his best to mask his disappointment, but his body language told a different story. Nevertheless, he tried to pursue a little more—he really liked her. “Oh, that’s okay. I bet he’s really cool,” he said meekly.

“He is. He’s very cool,” she said while positioning herself to leave the room again. If he couldn’t go on a date with her, might as well try to just be friends with her first, he thought, so he asked to be friends on BabbleGlu.

“Sorry, Leo. I don’t really know you yet, and I only add people I’m close to. It was nice talking to you though!” She said quickly. Afterwards, Maggie left the lunchroom with a degree of haste. Leo’s self-esteem took a hit when it already wasn’t the highest to begin with.

Feeling down, Leo texted Adam to see if he wanted to meet up at Cruster's after work. He responded with, "Yes" and that he could meet up with him at 6:00 p.m. This brightened Leo's mood a bit, and he hoped this would help take his mind off Maggie. Besides getting friend zoned, Leo was enjoying his new job so far since he could code often; there was a lot of autonomy and flexibility too.

He went back to his desk, passing by Maggie who didn't want to make eye contact with him.

Once he got into his coding, however, it got a little easier to keep her out of his mind.

# Evening

*5:00 p.m. – 5:50 p.m.*

## Maria Flowers

The first day was in the books for Green Sky Hair Salon. Suzie had just left to go home after taking care of some of the accounting work. Maria now had the backroom office to herself and was taking it all in. Everything went perfectly. Anything that could go right went right: they had more customers than anticipated, the feedback from them was essentially all positive, everyone was on time and ready for opening, and her employees looked incredibly happy.

Her phone started ringing as she was preparing to leave. Matt was calling her from his personal number. She decided to take the call thinking it had to be something important:

Maria (Feeling joyful): Hello, Matt?

Matt (Feeling conceited) Hey. How was the first day of business?

Maria: It was wonderful! You should've seen all the smiling faces and beautiful hairstyles today. My dream is actually happening!

Matt: Remember who gave you his blessing. Your place was born to be successful like everything else I touch.

Maria: I won't forget what you did for us, Matt. Thank you. By the way, have you made any contact with Nikki since your guy's break up?

Matt: Nah, I'm beyond caring about her. She's probably with some poor chump by now. If only he knew what he was getting himself into.

Maria: Aww, that's too bad. I really thought you guys made a good couple, at least for a time.

Matt: You know who else would make a good couple?

Maria: Who?

Matt: Us.

Did he just say that? Maria stood on the line dumbfounded not sure what to say. An air of coldness came over her, making her feel quite stunned. She paused for a moment, trying to figure out what to say:

Matt: Hello?

Maria (Feeling confused): Um...you know I have a boyfriend, right?

Matt (Feeling unhappy): Who? That Adam guy who said he went to school with me? That guy is weak. I could see it in his eyes when I saw him at The Median.

Maria (Feeling offended): What?! He is not...He's been through so much in his life.

Matt: Haha, yeah right. All these guys say that they've "been through so much." It's a sad joke. If you spent some time with me you'd forget about a guy like that in a heartbeat.

Maria: I don't want to be rude, but I want to keep what we have strictly professional and friendly. Okay?

Matt: Give me a break. I can easily tell when a girl is interested in me. I know you were interested in me before this loser showed up.

Maria: He's not a loser...I've already told you this!

Matt: And...?

Matt: Look, I'm an honest guy, and I tell it like I see it. Your boyfriend is a weak guy. A really weak guy. He's the kind of person I prey upon in business deals.

Maria: You're making me cry...I'm not going to keep listening to you talk badly about my boyfriend.

Matt: Whatever. You'll see the light one day. Ever since you met this Adam guy, you've become an emotional wreck. It's pitiful. Talk to me when you've come to your senses.

Maria: I'm not interested in you, okay?! Just leave me alone...

please.

Matt promptly hung up after Maria uttered her last words. She started sobbing at her desk as Matt's words sank in deeper. She thought about Adam and why she was attracted to him to begin with. For starters, he was confident, handsome, polite, ambitious, and assertive.

Her sobbing mood would soon transition back to a happier one as she began to flush Matt's negativity away like garbage. All of the sudden, his generous investment towards her salon was making more sense: Matt wanted to be with Maria.

This had been apparent the entire time, but it was something overlooked by her for some time. He was so used to getting any girl he wanted, so Maria rejecting his advances was something he simply wasn't used to. She wasn't sure how to handle the situation without alienating Matt or giving him what he wanted—which was completely out of the question.

***5:50 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.***

**Adam Fluxelright**

Inside Cruster's, Adam grabbed a barstool and brought another one closer to save for Leo.

Chad, the bartender who got into a minor confrontation with Leo and Adam almost two months prior, was serving tonight. They hadn't yet made eye contact as Chad was busy tending to other customers and talking with his manager.

Adam just received a text from Leo saying that he will be coming in shortly. After looking up for a moment, he made eye contact with Chad but neither said a word to each other.

Leo came waddling through the entrance and headed towards Adam. They did their distinct pound hug, and both took a seat:

Adam: (Feeling optimistic): How was your first day at work, man?

Leo: (Feeling indifferent): It was good...I love coding and that's all they have me doing right now. The people mostly seemed cool. It can be hard for me to break the ice though...

Adam: Yeah, that can happen sometimes. Did you meet anybody there yet?

Leo: Well kinda. There was this girl who really caught my eye named Maggie, but she had a boyfriend like they always do.

Adam: Man...That sucks man! Well you could always try just being friends.

Leo: I tried, but she seemed like she didn't want to be bothered with me. We have so much in common too.

Adam: Just keep being persistent, man. Things will work out. If I wasn't persistent, I wouldn't be with Maria right now.

Leo (Feeling hopeful): I gotta hand it to you, she's a great girl! How's the relationship thing going by the way? \*Coughs\*

Before Adam could answer, Chad walked up with a stern look on his face. They both greeted him politely.

"I wanted to thank you both for what you told me a few months ago. I've been taking action in my personal life and people are respecting me again," Chad said happily.

Adam and Leo simultaneously told him, "That's great!"

Chad expressed regret again for the way he treated them and said that any drinks they'd get tonight were on the house. Chad looked at Leo and asked if he was still working on the dating app. He told Chad that he was, but that the app was also for friendly meetups, not just dating. Chad nodded and told them to let him know if they wanted anything to drink.

They ordered and resumed their conversation:

Adam: Oh, yeah. I almost forgot. I ran into your cousin Skye at the Median earlier. I had no idea you two were related until he introduced me to his grandfather who owns the entire chain. You never told me about your grandfather!

Leo (Feeling content): Really? I never did? But yeah, Grandpa's been quite successful in his life. He started Aurora Neutralis some time after high school, and now, he owns several other restaurants under its umbrella. The restaurant business wasn't for me though.

How's Skye doing? I wanted to invite him over to my new place! I'm sure Purpei would like to meet him.

Adam: Yeah! I already told him about tomorrow night at your place.

Leo: Cool. I should also invite his brother, Rayne, over. He really likes kitties like me, especially Purpei lol!

Adam (Feeling surprised): No way!

Leo: What?

Adam: He was the waiter for Maria and I's first date! He had a really good and calming singing voice. It's crazy. I met two of your cousins and didn't even realize it!

Leo: Lol, wow! That is crazy dude. They don't say it's a small world for nothin'!

Leo's phone started ringing. He told Adam that he had to take it and that he'll be right back. Strange that he was rather secretive with the phone call; he's usually quite candid when it came to answering calls.

***6:30 p.m. – 6:45 p.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

The aroma of nature's bouquet filled the air. Maria was back inside her apartment and in good spirits. The phone call with Matt was mostly out of her mind, but she still hadn't figured out how to diffuse his attraction without alienating him.

She put on some calming music and took a moment to clear her mind. There was a lot going on in her life, and so many positive developments. She didn't want anything to detract from that.

As she basked in the goodness of her circumstances, she got the urge to talk to her mother, Maritza. They hadn't spoken on the phone in a month or so, and several things had happened like her and Adam becoming official, and her salon going live. Maria had made plans to fly up to visit her on Saturday but was considering canceling as there was so much to do with the salon.

There was still the issue of her biological father that she kept

forgetting to bring up to her mother. This time she'll delve deeper into the situation.

Her phone started ringing in the other room. With haste, she went to go get it. What a coincidence! It turned out to be her mother calling. She happily answered the phone:

Maria (Feeling excited): Mom! Hello!?

Maritza (Feeling happy): Hi honey. How are you doing this evening?

Maria: I'm doing great. My life is really full of joy right now!

Maritza: I'm glad to hear that sweetie. Tell me what's going on with you.

Maria: Well, mom. Adam and I are official now, and things really, really have been going great between us! Our leases are about to be up, and I'm hoping that we can get a place together soon too.

Maritza: That's wonderful! It sounds like you two are getting quite serious. Just make sure you're not moving too fast or anything.

Maria: Oh, I'm not mom. You know I'm really picky with guys...

Maritza: Oh, I know...I'm just being a little overprotective. How's your new salon coming along by the way?

Maria: Today was actually my first day of business! Mom...there were so many customers and they were so happy! Suzie couldn't believe how well everything went. She thought things would be a little disorganized to start.

Maritza: You're becoming such a mature and ambitious woman, Maria...well you always were mature and ambitious, but to see things coming together for you warms my heart. Marco is in the other room, and he would love to hear all this good news about you. Want to talk to him soon?

Maria: Sure!

Maria knew this was going to be another long conversation...talks with her mother always are. She plugged in her earpiece and prepared dinner while her mother started catching her up on the rest of the family.



**6:45 p.m. – 7:15 p.m.**

**Adam Fluxelright**

Back at Cruster's, Leo waddled back to his barstool with an unusually melancholy look. There was even an extra slump to his posture that made him appear like a hunchback; though, his demeanor quickly changed back to its normal, happy-go-lucky appearance as he reacquainted with Adam:

Leo (Feeling okay): Sorry about that, momma called.

Adam (Feeling joyful): No worries, man.

Leo: Yeah, you know how that goes.

Leo: So about Maria. She looks quite unique dude. What's her background? \*Coughs\*

Adam: I'm not completely sure myself. I know her mother is Italian. She doesn't know her other half for sure because her biological father hasn't been in her life, unfortunately.

Leo: That's too bad. We're both lucky to know our parents. I couldn't imagine if I didn't know one of mine or both.

Adam: Yeah, I agree. She has a stepfather in her life that she treats as her father, though.

Leo: Well, that's good. On a lighter note, tell me something else...Is she really as big of a geek as she says she is?!

Adam: Haha, yeah she is. I give her flack about it all the time. She has a bit of a secret hobby collecting plushies and a few figurines from all of these different shows and movies. Naturally, anytime we see some plushies on TV or in public, I tease her about them as being her long lost pets.

Leo (Feeling happy): I would have never expected that! I wonder if we have any of the same figurines. We both like some of the same shows.

Adam: Maybe so, maybe so. Perhaps you guys could make a trade!

Leo: Dude, that'd be awesome. My collection could use some

work.\*Laughs\*

Leo: Does she like to read a lot?

Adam: A little bit, why?

Leo: Dang, I was hoping she'd be into reading, especially comics. I have a lot of those in storage!

Adam: Yeah, man I don't know. I'd have to ask her, haha.

Leo: Right. Well, it's gettin' late, and I'd better go hit the hay. I have a job now...no more late mornings for this guy!

Adam: Same here. We'll see each other tomorrow at your place! Have your figurines ready, maybe Maria will want to trade haha!

Leo: Oh, I will.

Leo and Adam left a nice sized tip for Chad and wished him well. Chad responded in kind and told them that he'd be around. Before walking out, they did their distinct pound hug and went their separate ways.

Tomorrow should be an interesting day at Leo's apartment. Leo was set to host four guests—a rare and unusual amount for him even going back to his college days.

***7:15 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

Dinner was cooked and Maria was finally back on the phone with her mother. She had a lot of catching up to do with her stepfather; they hadn't spoken in quite some time.

Maria had been anxiously waiting to work in the question about her biological father into the conversation. Usually, she'd tended to get into lengthy conversations with her mother about a wide range of topics, and before they knew it, it'd be late, and they'd have to go. But after telling her mother further details about her hair salon, she would finally begin uncovering the answer to a lifelong question:

Maria (Feeling curious): Mom. I have an important question to ask you. I'm going to be thirty before I know it, and lately, I've been feeling that this particular subject is something I need to know at

this point in my life.

Maritza: What is it honey? It's not about pregnancy is it?

Maria: No, mother. I have certainly given that thought, but that's not what this is about.

Maritza: Okay, go on.

Maria: I want to know about my father...my biological father. I've never really asked you about him, but I'm ready to know now.

Maritza (Feeling surprised): ...Oh dear. I didn't think you'd ever ask me. That man has long been out of my life, and it might be better to keep it that way honey.

Maria: What? Why?

The tonality in Maritza's voice dramatically shifted. After much grief, Maritza began breaking down the details surrounding Maria's father. It turned out that Maria's father was an adulterer; she had caught him cheating several times throughout their relationship. They were together for years, off and on. Towards the end of their relationship, he told Maritza that he had to go away on business for a few weeks. Before leaving, he stopped by Maritza's house to pick up some key belongings of his. Twenty-six years later, this was the last Maritza would ever interact with him. However, Maritza with an odd stutter to her voice began explaining that weeks after Maria's father had left, she found out that he was a petty criminal responsible for theft and other crimes. Maritza thought he was an honest working man until she discovered that truth. How she discovered that truth, she didn't disclose.

An extended period of disappointed silence followed; then, Maria resumed speaking:

Maria (Feeling sad): Wow, that's unbelievable.

Maritza (Feeling sad): Well now you know who your father is dear. Not much of a man.

Maria: You never told me his name.

Maritza: Gregory Flowers.

Maria: So I do have his last name. Why didn't you ever try to look for him when he disappeared...?

Maritza: Well you have to remember this was before all the modern technology we have now. He didn't have a cell phone number, and his business number was disconnected when I tried to call it. He told me his parents died in a car accident and that he had a brother who wasn't close to him at all. I never found out his brother's name or anything. Gregory had been slowly taking out his belongings from my house over the course of time and took most of them the last day I saw him. I didn't even realize what was happening.

Maria: I understand. I still want to find him. If anything, I want to know why he could just leave his daughter and spouse behind like they're dirt.

Maritza: Some men are just bad eggs, baby. But, I wouldn't have you if it weren't for him, so at least I can thank him for one thing.

Maria: That means a lot mommy. I do have another question though. Do you know any other details that could help me find him? What about the house...did he leave anything at all?

Maritza: Well...I do have a chest full of things he left behind that I've been keeping which you may find of some help. I've been keeping it for this long just in case you ever felt the need to try and find him. I certainly don't want to. I couldn't ask for a better man than Marco. When you come visit us later this week, you can have it.

Maria: Thanks. I know I'll find him. Just knowing his name is a big help.

Maritza: I wouldn't expect too much when or if you do find him.

Maria: Oh, I'm not. I just want closure, and I want him to know what he's been missing out on all these years.

Shortly after confirming the day and time that Maria would be arriving to see them, the two hung up. Maria sat in silence and thought about what she had learned. She thought about the aspects of her personality and even her own appearance trying to figure out what could have come from

her father's side. There were still so many questions left that needed to be answered. She wasn't sure where he lived, if he was still in the country, or even alive. One way or another she wanted closure, and the box of contents that her mother was keeping seemed to be the first step.

## Night

**9:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.**

### **Leo Wanemacher**

The night was cold, unusually cold for Leo. He still felt a little down about what happened with Maggie, and the phone call with his mother didn't help matters either. Purpei was at her usual corner of the living room, and she seemed more active for this time of night. Leo found this endearing and went to go play with her:

Leo (Feeling playful): Purpei...Purpei!

Purpei: Meow...Meow

Leo: I have your favorite chew toy! Come and get it!

Purpei: \*Walks over towards Leo\*

Leo: \*Gives the toy to Purpei and picks her up\*

Leo: Good kitty, I love you so much!

Purpei: Meow...\*Nibbles on Leo\*

Leo: You love daddy too don't you?

Purpei: Maria.

Wait a minute. Did she just say Maria or was that just in his head?

Leo looked at Purpei in confusion prompting him to ask Purpei if she loved him a second time. Again, she responded with what sounded exactly like "Maria." He put her down and let her trot over to her bed. This has never happened before, although there have been times when her meow's and purrs sound almost like words. This was different; she actually said a word and it was clear. He thought this was so cool since

the idea of a talking cat was something out of science fiction.

Why would he say “Maria?” He thought internally. Purpei didn’t even know who she was or that he had been thinking about her ever since they first met at Adam’s place...

Leo went to make dinner, not pizza turnovers this time. Instead, he cooked an Italian-styled rotini pasta with cheese dish. It was one of the few dishes he knew how to cook by himself.

Today had been a long day, so he decided that he was going to eat on his bed. On the right side of his bed was a rather small night stand. He moved aside the lamp, lotion bottle, and alarm clock to make room for his pasta bowl and can of soda. Then, he dimmed the lights, got his laptop, and proceeded to lie down on his bed with it.

He didn’t check the latest technology news or viral videos like he usually did when he first goes online. Instead, he logged into his BabbleGlu account—something he didn’t do all that often.

There weren’t any new messages, just one comment on his profile picture...from Maria. In his profile picture he was wearing a t-shirt with some of the main characters from Galaxa VT, a show they both liked. She said how much she loved the t-shirt and that they should speculate on what’s going to happen next season.

He clicked her name and opened her profile. Her profile picture was her and Adam looking very happy at the beach. Leo scrolled down and looked at the mutual interests that they shared in common—more than he had thought at first. This made him feel so light and happy.

Next, he went to her images. There were photo albums titled: me, my interests, me with Adam, my family, and friends. He opened a “me” album containing pictures of her at various locations...His heart began to race as he looked at more pictures of Maria.

Taking a moment to gather himself, he stopped and decided to send the first message he’s ever sent to her. It was regarding her thoughts on the next season of Galaxa VT. Afterwards, he went back to viewing her pictures...again the ones just by herself. Very few of the pictures were

selfies, and the ones that were came across as visibly awkward for her. Most of the pictures of just her were clearly taken by another person. There were a few pictures of her and Adam embedded in the “me” albums—he would scroll past those quickly.

One picture stuck out the most: a year-old Halloween photo, and she was dressed up as a main character from another sci-fi show that they both liked. His face moved forward towards the screen. The outfit really pronounced her motherly assets, childbearing hips, and made her look almost indistinguishable from the fictional character that she was cosplaying. He couldn't stop staring at the photo, and a part of him felt wrong for doing it, but he continued anyway. Purpei began meowing in the other room for a few moments before becoming quiet again. After confirming that Purpei had stopped meowing, Leo reached over towards his night stand and then got comfortable. Soon after, he was visualizing himself in Adam's place by her side—how lucky he'd be. The deepness and vividness of his imagination led to him passing out on his bed not long afterwards.

***10:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.***

**Matt Pryze**

The dark night's winds were periodic, coming and going at a moment's notice. A gaudy mansion sat in a wealthy neighborhood isolated within a touch of emptiness.

Matt was inside with incredible anger and frustration boiling inside him. He had always gotten his way in virtually every facet of life, but this was really the first time he hadn't gotten his way—even going back to when he was an infant.

Maria was rejecting him—the woman he truly wanted—for someone he thought was beneath him in every way imaginable. He couldn't understand why this was happening and why she would choose Adam over him. As these thoughts boiled up inside him, he began breaking various things in his living room. Nothing seemed able to calm him down in this fit of anger.

He was grabbing a picture frame from behind when all the sudden he froze in place. It was another photo of his father, Dameon, in executive attire. He thought about what his father would think if he saw him carrying on in this manner, so he stopped. Matt and his other family members wouldn't have the life, or the opportunities they've had if it weren't for his father.

Matt was calming down, but the pain of being rejected by a woman he greatly desired still remained. Desperate to fill the void, he did something that he hadn't done in at least a month. He reached for his phone and dialed Nikki's phone number.

To his surprise, her number had been disconnected. He threw his phone down on the couch and retrieved his laptop.

He sat down and logged into his personal BabbleGlu account. There were more messages and comments than he could count since his last login, mostly from women and people wanting to do business of some sort. He attempted to go to Nikki's profile, but it was private. She apparently had taken him off of her friend's list. Furthermore, when he tried to send her a message, he got a notification stating that "this user has blocked him." This irritated him quite a bit. Even though he threw Nikki away like garbage, deep down he'd still get off if he knew that he could have her back if he wanted to. Clearly this wasn't the case, and she meant what she said in that voicemail.

Matt had no idea where Nikki could be. She had no family as she never knew her biological family, and her adopted family all died in a boating accident. She had few real friends that she trusted—perhaps two at the most—leaving very few people who'd know where she was at a given time.

One of Nikki's real friends, Melanie, still kept in periodic contact with him. She and Matt dated for a short period of time before he got involved with Nikki but decided to remain friends as a result of the lack of romantic chemistry; however, they connected on a friendly basis. He texted her to see if she knew where Nikki was.

She replied relatively fast and was surprised that he still cared



about Nikki at all. He told her that he didn't really care but was looking for closure (in reality it was more than that). She told him that she hasn't spoken to Nikki in more than a month, but that it wasn't unusual to go that long without talking to her. Melanie was unaware that Nikki's phone was disconnected and told Matt that she had a good idea of where to find her and would get back to him tomorrow night.

He now had every intention on finding her, but for the wrong reasons. He didn't love her anymore; this was all about filling a void that Maria had created. In one of his secondary rooms, he noticed a picture of him and Nikki on a mini-table. In frustration, he slammed the photo facedown and proceeded to lie down on the bed to ponder her whereabouts. With a heavy mind from business and the situations regarding Nikki and Maria respectively, he ended up passing out.

# Tuesday

## Morning

**9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.**

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Adam had just finished talking with a man from the upper floors regarding his performance. The man was quite impressed with the job Adam was doing so far, noting that productivity was up, and filing was more streamlined. Hearing feedback from a higher up was just the thing he needed to solidify the confidence in his job.

Suddenly, while looking outside his office window, Adam noticed Zach behaving in an increasingly erratic manner. Co-workers were looking at him as if he were crazy.

Adam couldn't have disorder in the office, especially right after he got such good marks from his superior. As he got up to go see what was wrong, Zach simultaneously got up from his chair and headed over to Adam's office. Adam sat back down and waited for Zach to come inside his office. Zach slammed the door shut with the most devastated look on his face and frantically started panting before dropping the terrible news.

"She's pregnant Adam...She's pregnant!" He said angrily.

Adam wondered why he was so upset about this; he was under the impression that he still loved his fiancé despite him suspecting her of cheating. Then, Zach added the unfortunate fine print to the matter: "So I'm just sitting here at my desk, and she sends me this long, awful text,

and what the hell does it say? That she's breaking off the engagement, pregnant and...is telling me...my brother...my damn brother is the father!"

Adam had no idea what to do in this situation other than to try to console and listen to him understandably further vent out his frustrations.

"I knew something was up, but this—this is beyond my wildest dreams. Part of me doesn't even think she's telling the truth and is just trying to call off the engagement in the coldest way imaginable...but why?" Zach said before hyperventilating.

Enough was enough, and Adam had no choice but to put his foot down in the politest way he possibly could: "Zach...brother, I think you need to go home for the day. Someone else will take care of the rest of your workload. I'll make sure of it. If you're up for it, we could go grab something to drink after I get off."

Zach's hyperventilation slowly decreased as Adam's reasonable thoughts began to sink in.

"I think you're right. I'm leaving now." Zach rushed out the door, while passing his desk without taking any of his belongings or shutting down his computer. After he left and everyone returned back to work, Adam quietly retrieved all of Zach's belongings and put them safely aside in his office.

***10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

Suzie and Maria were in complete disbelief. Not only were there more customers than yesterday, but quite the waitlist was building up. Their phones were constantly ringing from prospective customers asking for directions or wanting to set up an appointment. It was incredible.

Sales for the first day were through the roof, and their second day was already on pace to eclipse that. Part of them didn't understand how their business was blowing up so fast. They were totally confident in their salon, but like any small business starting out, they expected the road to be a little rocky at first.

Maria told their receptionist that she and Suzie would be in the back sorting the mail among other things and to let them know if there were any urgent matters. The receptionist nodded and Maria headed towards the back room office with Suzie. As they were checking the mail, Suzie remarked, "Can you believe the amount of customers we're getting? This is so unreal... Back home, I'd have never seen so many people inside a place like this!"

"I know it's crazy! I'm so excited! This is what happens when you're passionate about your dreams. Success just follows as my stepdad always told me," Maria said joyfully.

There was a large piece of mail that caught Maria's attention. As she opened the contents it seemed to be some sort of court-related series of documents. "Oh no!" Maria said shockingly. Suzie looked at her and wondered what was wrong. "We're being sued by Luscious Hair Beyond!"

"What?! What did we do?" Suzie said. The documents claimed that their company, Green Sky Hair Salon, had unlawfully stolen long-term employees and copied their branding. They would have fourteen days to respond to the lawsuit or heavy fines would be incurred. Maria shook her head in disbelief. She had been working on the concepts for Green Sky with Suzie completely independent of her old employer. The ideas they drafted were completely original and inspired from their own passions, at least she thought they were.

The employees that left did so freely without any kind of bribery or offers from Suzie or Maria, so how could they claim this was unlawful, she thought internally. "What are we going to do?" Suzie said.

"I don't know right now, but this is totally unfair! We didn't do anything wrong so they shouldn't be able to even take us to court. I'll talk to my boyfriend about it. He's usually good with this kind of stuff," Maria said hopefully.

"I guess this is a part of being in business for ourselves now, Maria. We have to deal with vultures and learn the ins and outs. I can't believe they'd do this to us. I always thought our boss was such a nice lady."

Suzie said remorsefully. Maria looked at her and gave her a sad nod. They decided to set the documents aside for the moment and continue thinking of all the positives that were coming to them. In their minds, they were committed. A lawsuit like this wasn't going to stop them from fulfilling their dreams.

## Afternoon

*12:00 p.m. – 12:45 p.m.*

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Zach's outburst was still fresh in Adam's mind, making it extremely difficult to concentrate on work. He decided to take his lunch break and unwind by himself in his office.

His focus shifted towards thinking about Maria and how she was doing at her salon. Additionally, he was looking forward to seeing everybody at Leo's new apartment later in the night. Leo texted him earlier confirming everything was set to go and that his grandfather would also be stopping by briefly. That brought the total to six. Adam couldn't ever remember Leo hosting more than three or four people at once back in their college days. This had to be making him feel anxious, Adam thought.

Adam's phone was ringing.

"A blocked number?" He said out loud. This was such an unusual occurrence that he felt compelled to answer it. To his shock and amazement, when the voice on the other end started speaking, he thought it was Leo, so he responded accordingly. But then, he realized it was actually an automated phone call saying the following:

Hey, man. Do you think your girlfriend is cheating on you? Well do we have the answer for you! At "No Surprises Diagnostics," we offer affordable lie detector testing and hidden camera services. All you have to do is schedule an over-the-phone consultation with us, walk into one of our locations to get you setup based on what you've ch

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Adam hung up the phone mid-sentence. He had heard enough about cheating spouses and refused to believe Maria would ever do something like that to him. However, there was no doubt that in his moments of weakness he'd worry about the possibility of it happening...but he'd

quickly wipe the thoughts away with more level and positive thoughts. He did find it strange that the person's voice sounded like Leo but didn't think too much of it and continued to eat his lunch.

***12:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.***

**Leo Wanemacher**

Inside the lunchroom, Leo sat by himself consuming pizza turnovers and diet soda. The setting reminded him of the day before when he failed in getting a date with his co-worker, Maggie.

Coincidentally, the door to the lunchroom slowly opened, and through it crept Maggie. Both of them made awkward faces of acknowledgement as she walked over to the refrigerator to retrieve her sack lunch. Without saying a word she sped walked out the door and audibly closed it on her way out. Leo couldn't figure out what he did that was so wrong. She was going out of her way to avoid eye contact with him the whole morning and now this just happened.

His attention quickly shifted from Maggie to his apartment welcoming party later at night. He was looking forward to it, immensely so, yet he was very anxious about the whole thing. Five people would be the largest amount that he's ever hosted by himself. There were times when he was a kid that he had birthday parties, but those were all carried out by his mother at their home. His apartment was freshened up and food purchased over the weekend in anticipation. Primarily snack food would be served as well as his favorite rotini and cheese meal. He knew most of his guests were big on Italian food, so it seemed to be the opportune meal for him to cook.

He would also be seeing Maria for the second time. She was the only woman on his mind now, but there was only one major hurdle, Adam. He kept trying to suppress his growing infatuation with her to no avail, after all, she was his best friend's girlfriend. It didn't matter though, because deep down, he wanted her for himself. She was quite literally everything he wanted in a woman: beautiful, gracious, feminine, driven, and even a geek like himself. Additionally, they had a lot of common interests, and they both had Italian ancestry.

There was now even a small part of him that felt jealous of Adam because he could get someone like her and he couldn't. Besides, Adam never had any problem getting women; he would just find another girl after Maria and he eventually broke up. Then, Maria would fall into Leo's arms, and everyone could be happy. Leo wanted them to break up and for her to fall into his arms—certainly in a way where Adam wouldn't be the wiser.

Leo continued to confidently eat his meal when he remembered that he had messaged her on BabbleGlu last night. He checked his inbox on his phone but to his dismay she hadn't replied. He was slightly discouraged but not for long because he had a plan to start turning her to his side: buy her something she loves. On the way home from work, he was going to buy her a plushie from the local comic book store, Zhackey's, as a token of their friendship.

After eating, he stumbled to his feet and threw away his empty plate and soda can. With a quick dusting of his somewhat poorly tucked in buttoned-up shirt and tie, he confidently waddled out of the lunchroom with his shoulders and head held up high.

On his way back to his workstation, he saw Maggie sitting at hers, but he continued looking straight ahead with an intense focus without making eye contact. There was a new girl on his mind now, so Maggie was quickly becoming old news. It wouldn't be more than a few seconds before he was slightly hunched over at his workstation with those stubby fingers of his enthusiastically clicking and typing on his laptop until his shift was over.



# Evening

*5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.*

## **Adam Fluxelright**

Adam was now leaving for work and on his way to the grocery store. He remembered that he promised Zach that they'd go out for drinks if he was up to it, so he had texted Zach before clocking out. The parking lot of the grocery store was just around the corner, and there was still no word from Zach. He called Zach, but the call went straight to voicemail. Adam seemed to have his answer and settled the plans for the rest of the night. Maybe Zach will be more open to consolation tomorrow, he thought to himself.

There were two young people at the front of the store working for a local charity that gives to the homeless. Adam felt in relatively good spirits and decided to donate \$35, something he hasn't done in a long time. The two young people thanked him graciously stating that it was the biggest single donation they've received all week.

Once inside, he picked up his usual groceries. They had a few Purrr-Pusss cereal boxes in stock, so he decided to get another one since they seemed so hard to come by. He was determined to finally try the cereal when he got home once and for all.

As he took his groceries to one of the check stands, he noticed something peculiar. There was a cashier wearing a seashell necklace who looked just like Matt. It was just like yesterday when he first saw the man that was interviewed, who also looked like Matt. Adam did a double-take; the cashier's nametag read "Chris," so once again he realized it wasn't Matt. Maybe it was a long lost relative? Adam sarcastically thought to himself. The cashier gave him a friendly look as he processed Adam's order.

Out-of-the-blue, the cashier asked Adam if he was an airline pilot. Adam replied that he wasn't and wondered why he asked. Chris told him

that he just got back from vacation and that the airline pilot that was aboard his plane home looked just like him. Adam looked at him curiously and told him how interesting he thought that was. As Adam finished paying, Chris told him to have a wonderful day in an unusually calm voice.

Adam really got into his music on the way home. He was excited about tonight and the general direction his life was moving, especially with Maria. His windshield and all of the passenger-side windows began to fog up as he passionately hummed and sang the songs on his classic and alternative rock playlists.

Next, he played some electronic dance music to get himself pumped up for the party. He was doing his best attempts at grooving to the beats as one can do in a car seat. If he wasn't strapped in, he would've very well been breakdancing.

Before he knew it, he was pulling into his apartment complex parking lot. It felt like no more than eight or nine minutes had gone by despite the store being at least ten or fifteen minutes away depending on traffic. He had a strong sense of missing time, but he wrote it off as the result of his happy imagination.

Once inside his apartment, he put away all of his groceries with haste. The first box of Purrr-Pusss was still sitting in the same place it had been for months.

It was finally time to open the box and see what all the craze was about. Since the expiration date was shorter on the old box, he decided to open the old box first and put the new one away in the cupboard.

He opened the box to find a cereal with lots of marshmallows in it with cereal shaped into letters of the alphabet, numbers, periods, question marks, and exclamation points. The punctuation marks were made out of gold-colored marshmallows, the numbers of some kind of mixture between wheat and nuts, and the letters appeared to be purple corn bits with sugar. He poured some into a bowl full of milk and ate his first bite.

He thought it was absolutely delicious and eating it made him feel

like he was a kid again. He totally understood why the cereal was so popular...or at least he thought.

At first, he ate the cereal without looking directly at the spoon before putting it in his mouth. But then, he revived an old childhood habit of his. He decided he would move his spoon around in the bowl and then look at the contents before eating.

To his utter amazement, a word was perfectly spelled out when he lifted the spoon out of the bowl, "FLIGHT."

What are the chances that it spelled a word on his first attempt? Nonetheless, this odd coincidence was enough for him to stop eating the cereal for the moment and ponder the relevance of the word. Flight is something birds do, but birds weren't really a subject of interest for him.

Then he got it. Airplanes, and more specifically craft are capable of flight. Of course! He had wanted to pilot and design craft as a child, and as he got older, he got further away from that dream due to it feeling out of reach for him. His job as a Corporate Manager was going great, and he certainly was enjoying a bigger salary; still, something just didn't feel quite right. He couldn't see himself doing this type of work forever or even working at Leviatropé for the rest of his career, if he really thought deeply about it.

The little kid in him was still alive and well as the delicious taste of the cereal was proving. He still wanted to be involved with craft...at least in some way. The more he thought about it the more he came to the conclusion that he needed to look into it. Perhaps that phone call from almost two months ago about the special offer for pilot training wouldn't have been such a bad idea. The only problem was that he was so busy with work and his social life, so it would be hard to find the time. He continued to eat the rest of the cereal without looking, deciding to leave his childhood passion for another day.

The next logical trigger to come out of this revelation for Adam was to continue working on the airplane model. There wasn't a whole lot left to do, so he could try and finish it before Maria came over. It had been a while since he had worked on it, several weeks in fact. There were only a

few more steps on the instruction sheet left to complete, so he turned on some music and got busy.

While working on it, Maria texted him saying that she's right around the corner. They planned on heading over to Leo's apartment together, and she really wanted to talk to Adam alone beforehand. He was just about finished with the model plane and expressed a small amount of anxiety about not getting a chance to finally finish it.

Maria had two heavy bags in her hands. They were full of clothes for the party and toiletries—she was planning on staying the night at Adam's place afterwards. They were both ecstatic to see each other and had quite a bit to catch each other up on.

Once inside, Adam put her bags down in the bedroom and offered her some of his left-over pasta. He heated up some white tea for himself; then, they both got a plate, sat down and started talking:

Adam (Feeling joyful): Mother's doing much better, and Jake is talking to me like old times again. He's planning on visiting me with his girlfriend soon. How are things going with the salon?

Maria (Feeling content): Baby, it's going wonderful. The customers...the employees, they all have been so happy and full of hearty laughter!

Maria (Feeling distraught): I did get a little bit of bad news today, though...

Adam: What happened?

Maria: We're being sued by my old employer...They're claiming that we copied them and stole their workers!

Adam (Feeling confused): What? That makes no sense. You didn't copy them...you've been working on this for a long time before you even started working for them, right?

Maria: That's true, and I certainly didn't take their employees! They all came because they liked our concept, we didn't offer them anything.

Adam: Sounds like they don't have much of a case.

Maria: What should we do? I brought the documents with me so you could take a look at them.

Adam: I'd fight this thing and wouldn't settle. They have no case or basis for their claims. It's a frivolous lawsuit. Where are the documents?

Maria: They're in my pink bag.

Adam went to get the documents out of her pink bag and brought them to the table. He meticulously sifted through the documents and raised his eyebrow a few times while doing so. Additionally, he began looking certain things up on his phone. Maria looked at him inquisitively and anxiously. As he looked closer at the two main pages of the set, he laughed. Maria was bothered by this and slowly got a little impatient with him:

Maria: Why are you laughing?

Adam (Feeling ecstatic): Haha, you're not going to believe this, but these documents are completely bogus. They're fake!

Maria: What...? What do you mean?

Adam: These documents are full of typos, and this law office doesn't even exist. Not to mention the formatting is completely off for this type of lawsuit.

Maria (Feeling excited): Wow! So what does this mean...? Were they trying to intimidate us or something?

Adam: That's exactly what it looks like. This was a very unsophisticated move by them...very unprofessional. They likely couldn't afford to go through the legal process or lawyers wouldn't take their case. I wouldn't worry about this any further.

Maria: Thank goodness. I can't wait to tell Suzie...I should go text her right now!

She texted Suzie the good news and then got ready for the party. After eating a little bit more pasta and finishing up his tea, Adam got ready as well. They chose to keep the phony lawsuit documents instead of

throwing them out just in case something strange were to happen, or they wanted to take reverse action.

***7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.***

**Leo Wanemacher**

The big party was almost here. Holding a plushie, Leo waddled inside his apartment with the intent to complete last-minute preparation before guests arrived.

When he was at the comic book shop, he decided on the perfect plushie to buy Maria. It had to be one that was expensive and from a show that he, and more importantly, she liked. He ended up getting her a dove-like character plushie that was from one of the shows they both liked, insisting that the cashier get a brand new one from the storage room.

After getting home, he put it in his bedroom with his own plushie collection so that no one would really notice it. This was going to be his night to make a covert impression on her. He didn't care if it was a long shot. He had to try and slowly inch his way closer to her. Coincidentally, Purpei let out another meow that sounded strangely like the name "Maria." This was different this time, however, as it sounded more like a legitimate meow than her actually saying Maria.

As he finished setting out all the food and decorations, Adam texted telling him that he thinks he's outside the complex. Leo anxiously told him that he'd be right down.

Outside, Leo waited but didn't see them. He suspected that they were lost since it was a rather busy street and neighborhood.

Just as he was taking out his phone to call Adam, he saw Adam's metallic-blue hybrid coming down the road. Leo frantically waved him over and told him where to park. He continued to stand in front of the entrance while they parked and walked over.

Adam and Leo excitedly greeted each other and did their distinct pound hug. Adam looked extremely fresh and well put together as if he were getting ready to do a magazine photoshoot.

Leo stopped and looked at Maria with a twinkle in his eye...she looked absolutely stunning to him in her elegant, purple, maxi skirt and black top. He sarcastically and jokingly expressed disappointment over her not wearing her “geeky glasses” to the party. She laughed and smiled as Adam chuckled subtly. Leo and Maria engaged in a friendly hug—which seemed like quite a long hug. Adam looked on and made a slightly uncomfortable smile.

Once inside, Adam and Maria complimented Leo on how his new place looked. A lot of the apartment buildings near downtown tended to be on the older side.

Purpei excitedly came up to everyone from her corner while looking up at each of them for attention. Leo introduced Adam and Maria to her prompting Adam to crouch down and wave at her briefly. Maria was beside herself at how cute Purpei was and became anxious to hold Purpei in her arms. Perfectilicious, he thought to himself. Not only did Maria have all the qualities he’s looking for in a woman, but she already liked Purpei as well.

Leo got a text from Rayne saying that he and Skye were on their way and should be there in about fifteen minutes. Maria went over to sit on Leo’s couch while petting Purpei—Leo followed closely by and sat with them. After watching Maria pet and make cute noises towards Purpei, he decided to break the ice:

Leo (Feeling excited): Wow! She sure does like you Maria. She’s going to think you’re her mama now! \*Laughs\*

Maria (Feeling playful): Haha! Well that’s okay. You’re such a pretty cat, aren’t you baby?

Purpei: Meow.

Leo: I’ve had her for a year now. I love her to death. You’d never believe it, but she’s given me creative ideas before, and there’s been a few times her meows sound just like your name! It’s so cool.

Maria: Really? She’s a talking cat?! That’s so awesome. Purpei, my name is Maria...try saying my name sweetie.

Purpei: Meow.

Maria: Oh, I bet she's just a little shy! Maybe she only talks to you Leo. You must be special, huh?

Leo: \*Laughs\* Yes ma'am. I'm her papa, and she's the best little kitty in the world.

Adam looked on at Maria and Leo from the kitchen area. He thought it was endearing that the two of them were bonding the way they were. It was important to him that his friends, family, and spouse all could get along. He didn't like arguments and would avoid them whenever he could. For him to get into an argument of any kind he would either be completely sarcastic and playful, or deeply upset. There was no in-between.

As Leo and Maria were talking and petting Purpei, Adam got himself something to drink and sat on a hard chair directly across from the couch. He decided to interject himself into the conversation:

Adam (Feeling joyful): She seems like such a wonderful cat. Do you have any treats I can give her, Leo?

Leo: Yeah, they're right next to you behind the flower vase.

Adam: Oh! I see them. I don't know how I missed them. Here you go Purpei!

Purpei: \*Growls softly\*

Leo: Uh oh! I think she's full. Sometimes she can get moody when people try to overfeed her.

Maria: Would you like to hold her, Adam?

Adam: I'd really like to...but I'm kind of allergic to cats.

Leo: What? Really? You never told me that dude.

Maria: Oh come on Adam! Just hold her for a little bit, she's so soft and cuddly.

Adam: Okay, okay. I'll hold her for a second.

Maria got up and placed Purpei in Adam's lap after some initial last



second hesitation on his part. He looked a little awkward holding Purpei, and sure enough, he started sneezing uncontrollably. Purpei quickly jumped from his lap and went to curl over in her corner of the room. Maria went over to Adam attempting to console him, and he responded that he'd be fine.

But then, Adam's nose started to run, and he developed small rashes. Leo went over to the other room to get a box of tissue for Adam, which he was thankful to him for.

After ten minutes of sneezing, Adam was returning to normal. He apologized for his allergic reactions stating that it usually doesn't happen that fast and strongly when he's exposed to cats. Purpei came out from her corner of the room and casually trotted around the three of them as if everything was back to normal.

Leo got a text from Rayne saying that he and Skye were outside his complex. Leo told them that he'd be right down and off he went to go let them in. Adam and Maria talked to each other for a brief moment:

Maria (Feeling concerned): Baby, I'm sorry...I shouldn't have encouraged you to take Purpei. It was wrong of me.

Adam (Feeling content): It's alright. I know you didn't mean any harm.

Maria: I would never do anything in the world to harm you sweetie.

Maria: ...I love you.

They had a warm embrace and kiss. This was the first time she ever told him that she loved him. A part of him hadn't been so sure, even though she seemed to care for him deeply. A rush of pure bliss came flowing through his body...everything around him just seemed so luminous and vivid. Time and space around him felt as if they were slightly speeding up but in a way that he could possibly influence or control somehow. This was a feeling entirely new to Adam, and he didn't know what to think.

At a moment's notice, the door to Leo's apartment was opening. Three men walked inside the door: Rayne, Skye, and Leo. Rayne and Skye were each holding a gift for Leo. The walk from the parking area all

the way to Leo's apartment typically takes around ten minutes but for Adam, it felt like it took them a fraction of that time.

Rayne looked very metro and fashionable in appearance. He had a long, blue scarf fastened around his neck, a tight-fitting leather jacket covering a plain, light-blue, v-neck shirt, and dark-blue skinny jeans.

Skye also looked fashionable, but he was clearly going for more of a slightly messy look. He was wearing a gray beanie that covered most of his hair, a white, long sleeve shirt that was a little too big for him, and baggy, blue jeans.

Adam, Rayne, and Skye all greeted each other politely, yet oddly, as they were still in a state of disbelief of how they all coincidentally were connected to each other. Adam re-introduced them both to Maria by reminding them that they both waited on him and Maria at different points.

Rayne noticed Purpei on the other side of the room which brought him excitement. He liked cats almost as much as Leo and has watched over Purpei from time to time when Leo has needed a catsitter. Rayne calmly flowed over to the other side of the room and began caressing her.

Once things were settled in, Skye asked Leo if it was okay if he could get something to drink. Leo said "sure" and told him where to get everything that he needed. Skye was quite parched from a hectic day, so he blew by the rest of the guests to go get a glass of water with haste.

After drinking a full glass and refilling it, he walked over to where Adam, Leo, and Maria were talking. On his way over he bumped into one of Leo's mini-tables knocking Leo's vase over in the process:

Skye (Feeling embarrassed): Oh my goodness...I'm, I'm so sorry Leo! I...I really need to be more careful! I do this kind of thing way too much.

Leo (Feeling considerate) It's okay dude. It happens to the best of us. Even Purpei has knocked some stuff over.

Skye: I'll buy you a new one, I promise!

Adam: Do you guys need any help cleaning up?

Leo: We got it dude.

Skye: I'm so embarrassed...

It seemed like every time Adam sees Skye he's involved in some sort of a clumsy accident. Some people are just that way, Adam thought to himself. Skye seemed less clumsy at The Median the more confident he became at his job. When Adam first met him, he was completely nervous and sporadic. Now it's a totally different story when he waits on Adam.

As Leo and Skye finished cleaning up the mess, they rejoined Adam and Maria in a friendly discussion:

Maria (Feeling joyful): So Skye, how do you like your job at The Median?

Skye (Feeling confident): It seems alright...I started off kind of all over the place. You should've seen me on my first day. I was out of control, blowing around like quick gusts of wind...If my grandfather didn't own the place I probably would've been fired to tell you the truth.

Adam: Don't be so hard on yourself, man. It was your first day, so things are going to be a little rocky. You should've seen my first day at Leviatope. It was a disaster; I did a bunch of tasks completely wrong. My boss was pissed as heck, but I was able to bounce back in a big way.

Skye: Wow, really?

Adam: Yeah, and I recently just got promoted to my old boss's very position.

Leo: My first day wasn't perfect either. It was tough for me to meet anyone, especially this lady...she won't even look at me.

Adam: Hey Rayne! Are you going to come join us?

Adam: That's odd did you say something that offended her or anything?

Rayne (Feeling calm): Yeah, be there in a second.

Leo: No way. I just tried to introduce myself and be friends with her

basically.

In the midst of walking over, Rayne announced that Lucent was on his way over and should be out front in about ten minutes. Leo showed some excitement because he hasn't seen his grandfather in a while. They didn't have a distant relationship or anything like that, but at the same time, they weren't extremely close either.

Rayne: Hey you guys. I'm really in a good mood tonight, I'd like to sing a couple songs for everyone. Would you all like that?

Adam: Yeah. That would be awesome man!

Leo (Feeling excited): Yeah!

Maria: Adam and I absolutely loved your singing at Soe-Soe's!

Skye stood there still rather embarrassed from breaking the vase, and he didn't acknowledge Rayne's request; nonetheless, Rayne calmly started singing while everyone else sat back and listened.

Each song was more intense and louder than the one before it which got everyone really excited. Adam and Maria complimented him saying that he should look into some sort of singing career. Rayne said that he's given it thought here and there but never really pursued it.

He was noticeably pouring sweat after singing several songs causing him to take a short break to covertly gather himself. The final song he would sing was a song about love. Adam and Maria really got into the lyrics of the song, causing Leo to cringe.

In the middle of singing this song, Rayne began sweating even more. It was so much that his clothes were developing wet spots, and he was beginning to drip sweat onto the floor. "Are you okay, Rayne?" Everyone asked. He nodded and stated that this happens to him sometimes, and he doesn't know why. Leo handed him some towels. Rayne quickly went off to the bathroom to dry off.

Lucent was in outside. Rayne was still in the bathroom trying to get himself situated, so Adam offered to walk down with Skye to help bring Lucent inside.

Off they went leaving Maria and Leo alone in the living room. This

was the moment Leo was waiting for: complete isolation with his crush. He told Maria that he had a special surprise for her in his room and that he'd be right back. She looked at him curiously, yet also in a friendly way.

A minute later, he came waddling back with a dove-like plushie in his hand. Maria's eyes widened like a kid in a candy store:

Maria (Feeling ecstatic): Oh my goodness! Is that a Doveliana plushie?! I absolutely love her! Where did you find this?!

Leo (Feeling happy): Zhackey's comic book store! I thought you would like 'er.

Maria: I love it! How did you know I'd like something like this?! I'm a big collector of little plushies, but I kinda keep it secretive haha.

Leo: Well, you could say a little birdie told me! \*Laughs\*

Maria: You're funny. Do you collect stuff like this?

Leo: Yes, ma'am. I have a decent-sized collection, but I'm a big figurine guy mostly. It would be nice if you showed me what ya have. We could trade sometime!

Maria: Haha, maybe. Most of the stuff I have, I like a lot. You'd have to have something really good!

Leo: Well we like a lot of the same shows, I'm sure there's somethin'.

Leo: By the way, did you see my message on BabbleGlu?

Maria: Oh, yeah. I'm so sorry. I've been so busy and didn't get a chance to reply to you yet but I will!

Leo: No problem, ma'am. What do you think of the party? Do you like it?

Maria: It's nice! I'm having a lot of fun, Leo. We should make this a regular thing.

Leo: I think so too, that would be really nice.

Leo (Feeling shy): Um...

Following a long pause, Maria politely mentioned that she had to excuse

herself. She placed the plushie by her purse and went to check her phone for any messages. There was a text from Matt. She was expecting the worse—something about being with her—but it turned out he was inquiring about Nikki of all people. He had asked if she had shown up to her new salon at all, and she texted back, [No.]. She felt relieved as it appeared he finally realized that she wanted to be with Adam and was attempting to rekindle things with Nikki.

Shortly after, the front door opened. Lucent was the first to walk in followed by Adam and Skye. Lucent was wearing the most radiant, white suit Adam had ever seen. There wasn't a single spec of dirt on his outfit, and Lucent was almost completely covered up (he even had white gloves on). He looked as plump and jovial as he did when Adam first met him at The Median. Purpei remained in her corner of the living room seeming rather shy.

Lucent and Leo embraced and began talking; it had been quite a while since they've spoken. Afterwards, Lucent handed Leo an envelope and told him that he may be surprised to see what is inside. Leo enthusiastically thanked him and said he would open it later. Lucent looked at Maria:

Lucent (Feeling jolly): Here must be the woman who is the talk of all towns. Your name is Maria, would I be correct?

Maria (Feeling joyful): Yes, sir. It's an honor to meet you. Everyone here has told me a lot about you.

Lucent: About me at present? What has everyone said about me at present, may I ask?

Maria: That you own all these franchises and are very intelligent, not to mention having your success while starting from nothing. You actually inspire me. I have a salon that I just started with a friend of mine, Suzie. We want to see it grow leaps and bounds! We'd love to one day open up franchises all over the nation and even start our own hair care line. I don't put any limitations on my dreams, and I intend on achieving them.

Lucent: Said Adam, your girlfriend is a magnificent, young woman with a wonderful head on her shoulders. May I share a guidance with the two of you?

Adam (Feeling happy): Sure, we would love to hear.

Maria: Please.

Lucent: A man is once young...things unexplainable to him...strange phenomena happening at a moment's notice and typicality blinded him from the truth, the realest truth. Another man...another energy, a destructive one, holding this realest truth uses it for the wrong aspects, all the wrong. Then it happens...said young man loses what he holds dearly by being subject to this use and Said Young Man's own youthful ignorance. Pain and confusion comes for said young man and what he cares for, much ruination. Only thereafter with ultimate realization of truth does Said Young Man regain what he wants and know what he is.

Adam: I'm not sure I understand what you mean? Am I missing something? I apologize.

Maria: I'm not sure either.

Lucent: You will know the concept when the reveal is necessary.

Adam and Maria looked at each other dumbfounded and then back at Lucent. They had no idea what to do other than nod their heads in gratitude. They knew he was a very intelligent and successful man, so they took his words in and put them in the back of their minds the best they could.

Lucent: I was told said Rayne was here tonight with us all?

Leo: He's in the bathroom, grandpa. He was singing for all of us and started sweating really bad for some reason.

Lucent: May I check on him?

Leo: Of course!

With a look of gratitude, Lucent walked towards the bathroom located in the backside of the apartment. Presumably, he went inside to check up

on Rayne.

Adam walked up to Leo and quietly inquired about his grandfather. He wondered if Lucent has always spoken the way he's spoken. Leo told him that's how his grandfather has always been, and he has a tendency to act and speak ambiguously sometimes. Adam nodded with a degree of intrigue.

Looking to the side, Adam noticed Skye. He was pacing back and forth and still looked saddened over the incident earlier:

Adam (Feeling concerned): You doing alright, man?

Skye (Feeling paranoid): A little bit.

Adam: Are you sure? You seem to be breathing kind of heavy.

Skye: I'm fine...no really, I'm fine okay?

Adam: Alright, man. Just remember what happened was no big deal, alright? Let me know if you want to talk.

Skye: Okay...

Adam let him be and went back over to Leo and Maria. They were talking about a mutually favorite movie that Adam hadn't seen. Adam went over to get some snacks, came back, and quietly listened to them talk about this movie.

Suddenly, there were a series of storm-like noises coming from the other side of the room. Skye had fallen seemingly causing all kinds of damage and was hyperventilating...All kinds of decorative objects, papers, and plates were being blown onto the floor in a violent manner. The window and balcony blinds, though open, were blowing around unusually wild. Adam, Maria, and Leo looked at Skye and the resulting situation in absolute shock.

Then it all just stopped. Skye was beginning to control his breathing and stand back on the floor as everyone looked at the situation. He had caused yet another mess, this time rather unexplainably—he was deeply embarrassed.

Lucent and Rayne ran out to see what was going on. Rayne looked



much more normal and dry. Lucent looked as jolly as he did before he went to go find Rayne, but Adam noticed that his white gloves were off. His hands looked extremely pale—paler than his face in fact—and almost appeared as if they had a slight glow to them.

As everyone stood in a state of confused silence, Lucent asked Skye to walk over to him. Slowly and silently, he began the long walk over to his benevolent grandfather and concerned brother. In a clear and concise fashion, Lucent began speaking to him:

Lucent (Feeling jolly): Skye, are you doing okay now?

Skye (Feeling embarrassed): Yes, grandpa. I...I don't know what's wrong with me. I've only had something this bad happen to me a few other times in the past.

Lucent: Don't worry. You will be fine.

Skye: I feel horrible about the messes I've caused. I want to stop being like this!

Lucent: I think you just need to sleep this over. This will all be in the past for you soon. You just need some help and a little self-discovery to overcome this.

Skye: I hope so.

Simultaneously, Lucent put his pale hands on the shoulders of his two grandsons and told everyone that he “thinks it's time for them all to go home.” His two grandsons looked at him with a sense of confusion, but in the end, agreed. Adam and Maria offered to help clean up the mess caused by Skye and what they thought were strong gusts of wind coming from outside. They felt bad that all this damage was happening to Leo's new apartment and told Leo that he didn't have to worry about cleaning anything up. Skye also chimed in and offered to help clean up.

It was as if a mini-tornado had struck in part of Leo's living room. No one really had any convincing explanation for what had happened, not even Skye. All he could say was that his breathing seemed stronger and deeper than usual, and the wind from the outside became more violent. Amongst the pile of scattered papers was the envelope that Lucent had

given to Leo for his apartment welcome. Adam decided to hand the envelope to Leo, who was standing several feet away from his grandfather. Lucent told him that he should open it before he headed out. Leo looked at the letter, looked back at his grandfather, and nodded.

He opened the letter. To his amazement, he found two things. There was a check large enough to pay six months of rent, and a handwritten invitation by his grandfather to join the family business in an executive position. Leo didn't know what to do other than give him a big hug and thank him repeatedly. Everyone else looked on with endearment, even though they weren't fully aware as to what Lucent had given him.

Lucent asked him what he thought about what was in the letter. Leo wasn't completely sure but would be open to discussing it further with him. Afterwards, Lucent announced that his chauffeur should be arriving any minute and that he was going to be heading out. He hugged his three grandsons telling each of them that everything was going to be fine. Adam and Maria both complimented him on his demeanor and said that it was a pleasure to have socialized with him tonight. They both were very appreciative of the advice he gave and assured him they would keep it all in their thoughts.

Leo went downstairs with his grandfather and showed him the way out. The rest of the crew were still cleaning things up but getting close to finishing. They began talking amongst themselves as the evening was coming to a close:

Skye (Feeling a little confident): I'm truly sorry about everything, guys. I know I kinda spoiled the night.

Adam (Feeling content): We understand. Try not to think about what happened too much. We can always have another party.

Rayne (Feeling calm): Yeah, you guys. I agree with Adam. I'm feeling better already. Maybe next time I could have you all at my place! I have an absolutely beautiful patio.

Maria (Feeling happy): That sounds lovely, Rayne.

Skye: Will you be stopping by The Median tomorrow, Adam?

Adam: Most likely. I'm not 100% sure though.

Skye: Well you will get the best service from me, that's for sure. I've appreciated your kind words when we've met even though it may not have seen that way.

Adam: I'm really glad to hear that, man.

Maria: You're such a caring man, Adam. One of the many reasons I love you.

Rayne: Aww

Adam (Feeling joyful): I love you too baby.

The living room was back in order. Papers were neatly stacked and organized, paper plates and napkins were straightened out, and everything else was put back in its proper place. Thankfully, not much actual damage was caused outside of some spilled food.

With cleanup finished, they all looked at each other and said their goodbyes. Leo waddled back inside the apartment right before his two cousins were getting ready to leave. The three of them hugged, and then his cousins left.

Adam asked Leo about the envelope. Leo told him that he received a bunch of money, and a position in the family business. Adam wondered whether or not Leo would go for work his grandfather. But, Leo told him in prior conversations that he felt that the restaurant business wasn't for him; perhaps he'd change his tune after seeing the salary. Adam and Maria felt it was almost time for them to leave but decided to stick around for a little longer to talk.

# Night

***9:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.***

## **Matt Pryze**

The night was cold and dark, and the wind was occasionally blistering. Most of the mansions in the wealthy neighborhood had their lights turned off; it was getting quite late. There was one in particular in which every light was turned on.

Inside this gaudy mansion, Matt was still searching for answers as to Nikki's whereabouts. He had come across a few more of her belongings subtly left out in the pink-themed secondary room but has decided not to burn any of more of them.

The level of impatience was building up inside him, however, to find out where she was. He tried dialing Nikki's phone number again, and as expected, the disconnect message played. It was important for him to locate Nikki not only because of his ego but also due to the fact that she knew intimate details about his life—personal and otherwise.

Their mutual friend, Melanie, told him yesterday that she would be able to find out where Nikki was and call him back tonight. He still hasn't heard back from her to his displeasure.

Matt needed to take his mind off the situation for a bit, so he headed over to his main study room.

At the desk, he logged on to his laptop and opened folders on his desktop containing his family albums. There were pictures of his grandparents, parents, siblings, and extended family members. One in particular stood out to him immensely. It was a young picture of his father ecstatically holding up his Bachelors of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering and standing in-between his parents, at a commencement ceremony. His father didn't go to the best school in the world, but he knew how much of an accomplishment it was for his father to get a college degree. He and his family didn't have much, and his father was

one of the first in the family to get a college degree.

As he was relishing in his father's academic accomplishment, he got a text from Melanie. Suspecting that it would be a longer conversation, he called her. She told him that she contacted Nikki's "loser ex-boyfriend" to see if he knew anything.

The boyfriend told Melanie that he hadn't seen Nikki in years. He did mention her calling him a month ago or so, but he thought it was a mistake. Matt let out audible sighs as she relayed this information to him. "Can you check her BabbleGlu account? She has me blocked," Matt said embarrassingly. Melanie wondered why she didn't think of something so simple before and went to check Nikki's BabbleGlu account.

It turned out that Nikki's last blog post was five-and-a-half weeks prior. In it, she stated she was going away on vacation. She also said that she'd reply to her messages after returning. Public comments, some posted within the last few days, were inquiring about whether or not she had returned. The public messages addressed to Nikki have all gone without reply.

Melanie found it odd that she had been posting so infrequently and aloofly since the breakup. When she was still with Matt, she would post at least once a day to her main page. Nikki's online demeanor was also much happier, and her posts were longer and descriptive. Matt thanked her for trying and they hung up.

After thinking about his next move for several minutes, Matt decided that he was going to get a private detective to find her some point soon. This cat-and-mouse game was becoming tiresome.

As Matt slowly started taking his mind off the situation, a personal butler and member of Matt's private security detail, Brick, slowly walked into Matt's study room. Brick was a stern and intimidating presence, enhanced by his permanently fixed, stiff-like facial expression and smooth, bald head. He had no family, other than an ailing mother, and had never been married, nor was he currently involved with a woman.

Brick would carefully pick his moments to check up on Matt; he knew to keep his distance whenever Matt was expressing his frustration

or arguing with a woman.

“Is everything fine, sir?” Brick asked calmly. Matt looked at him while still slightly dazed from his inner thoughts. “Yes, Brick. Just have the filth in the pink room straightened up for me,” Matt said agitatedly.

With a slight nod of the head, Brick moved out of the room to take care of the task.

“Oh, and Brick,” Matt said calmly. Brick stopped in place and turned toward Matt with a look of sternness. “Make sure the winery is properly filled by tomorrow. I can’t have any possible guests thinking I don’t know a fine wine, can I now,” he said conceitedly.

Brick again acknowledged the matter and faded back into the dimly lit hall. Matt resumed thinking about the subjects on his mind, slowly but surely feeling a stronger sense of control.

***9:30 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.***

**Leo Wanemacher**

It was getting quite late for Adam and Maria. Both of them had to get up to go to work, so they thought it would be best to head out for the night. They all shared a few final laughs, poking some heartfelt fun at what happened with Leo’s cousins. Leo offered snacks to take with them, and then, they all prepared to say goodbye.

Adam and Leo were going for their distinct pound hug, when Adam almost slipped on a piece of the broken vase that Skye broke earlier. Fortunately, he kept his balance and afterwards picked the broken piece up. After throwing it away, they successfully did their distinct pound hug and looked at each other with endearment.

Next, something happened that would stun Leo to the core. As Maria said her good-bye to Leo, she gave him two kisses on the cheek (a traditional gesture she acquired from her mother). Leo was internally electrified and did everything in his power not to show his excitement. He offered to walk them out, but Adam said that they were fine. As they told Leo goodnight, Adam held Maria’s hand, and they walked out the door.

The party was officially over, and it went better than expected. Leo

felt proud of himself for hosting such a large-scale party—the biggest he’s ever hosted. His grandfather gave him a large sum of money and offered a lucrative position in the family business. He took a moment to reread the letter his grandfather wrote to him. The words were really sinking in, but at the same time, he really enjoyed coding. Coding was his passion, and he didn’t really see himself as a restaurant executive.

More importantly, he made some important strides with Maria tonight. She absolutely fell in love with Purpei and had a fondness for cats which he didn’t expect. They shared many laughs together, and she was enamored by the Doveliana plushie he gave her. She also said that she’d look forward to trading figurines and the like with him.

Adam looked foolish and awkward several times during the night—unbeknownst to him they officially admitted their love for each other, not once but twice while he was out of the apartment. Anything that made Adam look bad in front of her was a plus. Leo intended on doing anything he could to deteriorate the relationship from behind-the-scenes. He didn’t want to lose his friendship with Adam or harm him, he just desperately wanted to be with the woman of his dreams.

She kissed Leo, not once but twice. He kept replaying that sequence in his mind, becoming more and more infatuated in the process. What would actually kissing her on the lips feel like and beyond? He pondered to himself while pacing around in his living room enthusiastically...What would it feel like to be in a relationship with her? He could only imagine it; his motivation to make it a reality strengthened.

Purpei began to meow. Leo went over to see what she was up to, and then he saw it...

The Doveliana plushie that he had given to Maria was stuffed in the fold of the couch. His heart sank like a rock in the ocean. Was this her way of telling him that she thought it was stupid or didn’t care about it? He thought internally. He got a little teary-eyed as he picked it up. In a state of hurtfulness, he prepared to send a message to Maria on BabbleGlu expressing his frustration towards her lack of appreciation. In the middle of writing the message, he stopped himself. Simple

explanations came to his mind. Maybe it simply slipped out of her purse or she was showing it to someone and forgot to put it away afterwards, he thought optimistically. He erased the incomplete message and instead sent her a message politely telling her she left the Doveliana plushie at his place. His mind was now at ease again. He made sure Purpei was situated and then went to bed after a very successful night.



# Wednesday

## Morning

*8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.*

### **Adam Fluxelright**

The office was bustling this morning in stark contrast with Adam. He was feeling a little sleepy from the night before and beginning to see the first signs of a minor flu.

But with a little white tea and focus his productivity eventually would become virtually normal within an hour.

The desk where Zach works at was empty. Adam also realized that he still had all of Zach's belongings in his office. Zach hadn't come into work today, and he didn't notify anyone that he would be absent. He understood Zach's dire situation, but at the same time, Zach had responsibilities. It wasn't fair to the others who depended on him completing his tasks, or the company which had bottom lines to meet.

He dialed Zach's cell phone number, and it went straight to voicemail just like the evening prior. After a heavy sigh, Adam pulled up Zach's file and looked up his emergency contacts. Listed in the file was his home phone number, and his fiancé's phone number. He called Zach's home phone, and after several rings, it went to voicemail. He debated on whether or not to leave a voicemail and in the end decided against it.

Next, he dialed his fiancé's number. She picked up and inquired as

to whom she was speaking with. Adam told her who he was and that he was trying to find out if everything was okay with Zach. She rudely interrupted saying that she doesn't know what's wrong with him and doesn't care anyway. Adam was radio silent.

She then asked if he had tried the home phone which he replied that he did. After a small pause with distant deep-voiced chatter in the background, she coldly told him, "Well I don't know what to tell you, sir. I have to go now. Bye."

Clearly there was a big disconnect in their relationship, Adam thought as she hung up. Zach's whereabouts were now in question. Adam had no further way of contacting him. All he could do was hope Zach picked up his cell phone in a timely manner at this point.

***10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.***

### **Leo Wanemacher**

Leo's apartment looked as good as new; there were no signs that he had even hosted a party the night before. He was working from home today. His boss allows him to do so for one or two days a week as long as he stays ahead or on top of his coding. Anxiety from seeing Maggie ignore and avoid him wasn't enticing him to come in for the day either. He took a short break to heat up some pizza turnovers and check his BabbleGlu account.

There was a new message notification...Maria had responded to his message from last night! Regarding the plushie, she said that she was, "...so sorry and that it must have slipped out of her purse somehow." To his surprise, she offered to stop by and pick it up after work—and even browse his collection. Additionally, she left her cell phone number, so it would be easier for him to reach out. In the blink of an eye, he added her number to his contacts list. It was one of the few numbers in his phone that was a female's, so this was a huge accomplishment.

He couldn't have asked for a better reply to his message too; he was completely ecstatic. This would be the first time he and Maria would have extended time together completely isolated from Adam's presence.

He sent her an opening text message on his phone letting her know that it was him texting her. Afterwards, he went back to work. Within thirty minutes she had replied to his message. He stopped working for a bit and responded:

Leo (Adam's friend): [I'm doin' great! Purpei already misses her mama lol. So you wanted to stop by to pick up Doveliana today?]

Maria Flowers: [Lol, cute. Yea I can! =) ]

Leo (Adam's friend): [What time could you come by?]

Maria Flowers: [Hmm, does 6:30 work?]

Leo (Adam's friend): [Perfectilicious. I will be done working at]

Leo (Adam's friend): [Five\*]

Maria Flowers: [Ok! I think I remember how to get to your place. I'll see you then]

Leo (Adam's friend): [Looking forward to it. I'll give you my address if you need it.]

Maria Flowers: [Sounds good]

Leo was buzzin' like a bee! Maria would officially be coming over to his apartment alone! The idea of a woman coming over to his place to see him alone was something he had been waiting for, for more than a decade.

Quickly, he prepared himself in any way he thought was effective. He straightened up and organized any small object that was out of alignment. There wouldn't be a single spec of dirt or anything out alignment after he was finished.

He retrieved the nicest shirt and pants he could find and put them on. For the first time in several years, he took the time to put pomade in his hair (usually he goes natural or uses a small amount of gel). By the time he had finished putting himself together, it looked like he was going to prom.

## Afternoon

***12:00 p.m. – 12: 15 p.m.***

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Adam's face was really starting to perspire. He decided to head over to the restroom to check himself out. Once inside, he noticed that his eyes were red, and his face was sweaty. He took a paper towel and patted his face down.

Suddenly, he heard a strange ruckus coming from one of the stalls. It sounded like objects being thrown around and slight breathing as he inched closer. The stall door was somewhat cracked open, and curiosity got the best of him. He passed by the cracked-open door while looking over.

He was surprised at what he saw, but at the same time, it was an expected possibility. Sam and Martha, his two employees, were beginning to get intimate. Adam slumped his head slightly downward in embarrassment as they scrambled to make themselves appear decent. Sam and Martha were absolutely panicked. Unlike last time this happened, Adam was a fellow co-worker, now he was their boss.

They stood there petrified awaiting the grave judgment to come out of Adam's mouth. However, Adam understood both passion and mercy. He was in an amazing relationship himself with Maria, and he knew how things could go when two people are in love. He told them that he would look the other way this time and to keep it professional moving forward. They were deeply thankful towards Adam; Martha was almost to the point of tears. They promised that it wouldn't happen again, shook Adam's hand firmly, and walked out the door.

***12:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.***

### **Maria Flowers**

For the third day straight, Green Sky was doing absolutely

phenomenal. So far everything was going exactly how it went on Tuesday if not a little bit better.

In their backroom office, Maria and Suzie were discussing the lawsuit. Maria confirmed to Suzie that it was, in fact, a phony set of papers—she had even done some follow-up research on Adam's assessment to further confirm the fact.

Suzie was extremely happy about the news. She made the remark that businesses are much more honest in her hometown and that everyone simply "tries to make an honest living to support themselves or their families over there." They both felt bad that their former employer would try something underhanded like this especially considering how hard they both worked for that company.

They would hold themselves to a higher standard than their ex-employer; their employees would actually be treated with respect. Suzie typed up a memo for every one of their employees informing them that they would be seeing a significant bonus on payday in relation to the company sales. Additionally, she wrote about how their old employer tried to punish them for supposedly taking away some of their staff. She said there would be no hard feelings if any of them choose to leave for good and fair reason, and would understand that circumstances could change in a person's life. They felt that creating this memo was the right thing to do and would inspire further positivity within their salon.

Once they were finished with the memo, they sent it out via e-mail, and then, Maria went out and told each of her employees about it. Jaimie seemed quite pleased about the memo and also surprised that their old boss would do such a thing. She expressed to Maria that it only confirmed for her that she made the right decision to work for Green Sky instead. Maria felt vindicated as a result of Jaimie's kind words. After they spoke, Jaimie left the salon as her shift had just ended, and Maria went back to the backroom office with her head held high.

# Evening

*5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.*

## **Adam Fluxelright**

Adam had arrived home a little early from work unexpectedly; his flu symptoms were beginning to slightly worsen. Despite these ailments, his apartment was the cleanest and organized it had ever been. Coming home to an environment like this seemed to improve the cold symptoms he had been having at the office. He prepared some white tea and calmly sat down at his dinner table to think about the day.

His eyes focused directly towards the near-completed model plane. In his mind it was time to finish the model once and for all, so he brought all of its contents over to the dinner table.

There were only two more steps left, and they looked rather simple. After doing the second before last step, he would only have to fidget one more piece around until it fit snugly in place. The last piece was the piece right next to the plane's cone. He let out a sigh of relief as he took the last piece and easily put it into place.

The model plane was finally complete. He took a moment to look over the plane in a state of joy. The model plane's seemingly fictitious company or unit name was, "Big Prize 808."

He remembered that he's supposed to take a picture of the finished model and text it to the number provided in the original packaging. The paper said he would receive a reward for doing so. He thought that the "reward" and "Prize" plane name connection was interesting and creative.

He retrieved the paper with the number on it, took a photo of the completed plane, and texted it to the number provided. There was the expectation for an automated response or phone call, but he received neither.

Bed was calling. Not only did he have flu symptoms, but his energy level was low due to staying up late last night. He put his phone on silent

and turned on some calming music. After setting his cup of tea on his nightstand, he jumped into bed.

There were a lot of subjects on his mind. He thought about work and how he was thriving at his new position. The status of his mother's cancer was appearing to improve, but nonetheless, it had to be tough for her to be going through its complications.

Then, there was the subject of his relationship with Maria. It couldn't be going any better. They were in love, and as of yesterday, he knew that for sure. Both of their leases were ending soon, and both were in the process of acquiring more money than they had before as a result of their growing careers. Soon he was going to ask her to move in with him. This would be a first for Adam, and presumably Maria. Living with a woman was a big step for him, but he was prepared to take it. He softly drifted away in his thoughts...slowly fading into the sleepy darkness.

***6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.***

### **Leo Wanemacher**

Leo got his work done early for the day. Maria was a few minutes away, and he couldn't be any more excited. He made sure to get all of his figurines and plushies organized for easy viewing—they were all over the place prior to today. Some of the remaining snacks he had from the party were brought out in case she wanted any.

Moments later, he received a text from Maria telling him that her CarryZus was about to drop her outside his place. He hurried down the stairs to find her—there would be no waddling of any sort—and make sure she wouldn't get lost.

Finally, he spotted her. She was still in her work attire, yet she looked as beautiful as ever. They smiled at each other, and after they hugged, she greeted him with the same double-cheek kiss from last night. His body language and expression failed to hide his excitement...

Once inside, Leo offered her food and drink. She politely told him that she was doing fine and set her belongings on the counter. He offered to take her coat which she found chivalrous. Maria commented on how

fresh the place looked especially considering that he just hosted a party. Leo told her that, that's how he is...very cleanly. She remarked at how nice he looked today. A big smile was painted on his face, explaining that he always put himself together this way for work.

Purpei came out from her corner of the room and went straight over to see Maria. Purpei softly rubbed her face on Maria's leg. Maria's eyes lit up in excitement as she reached down to pick her up and pet her. In this moment of endearment, they all started talking:

Maria (Feeling joyful): Aww...Did you miss your mommy? Haha.

Purpei: \*Purrs\*

Leo (Feeling excited): \*Laughs\* It looks like she did.

Maria: Do you want to play with your toy, baby?

Purpei: \*Purrs\*

Purpei: \*Slips out of Maria's arms to her toy\*

Leo: Dang, you two have some sort of a connection!

Maria: Haha. I've always loved cats since I was a little girl. We used to have a few when I was growing up.

Leo: Me too. My mom is also a big fan of 'em.

Maria: That's so nice! Oh, before I forget...where's Doveliana?

Leo: Oh! It's right over here, ma'am. Let me grab it real fast.

Maria: Okay!

Leo: Here she is still good as new.

Maria: Yes! I absolutely love her. She will look so pretty with the rest of my collection.

They began discussing Doveliana and the other characters from its respective show, "Fuzzlantia." This led to a discussion on various other television series and sci-fi movies.

Leo then invited her to his room to show her his collection. She seemed absolutely thrilled to check it out. To her surprise, they had several of the same plushies, although his collection was much smaller



than hers. Conversely, his figurine collection was monstrous. He told her that he had been collecting them ever since he was a boy and that he had even more in storage and his mom's house. Since her figurine collection was small, she asked if there were any that she could have. Leo without hesitation agreed to give her a few.

One of the figurines, ironically, resembled Adam, both in appearance and fashion. Examining the figurine for a bit, Maria realized the resemblance. Leo's body language and tone had a slightly noticeable shift when she mentioned Adam. This led to Leo asking about the status of their relationship and how it was going. She told him that it couldn't be going any better and that they were completely in love now. Hesitantly, Leo expressed his happiness towards her regarding their relationship.

He quickly changed the subject into college stories that had the intention of putting Adam in a bad light. One such story was regarding a previous relationship that Adam had been in. He explained that Adam was really insecure in their relationship and constantly thought she was seeing other guys. Adam felt deep down that he was too young for his girlfriend as well; she was a senior, and he was a sophomore. Overtime his insecurity drove a wedge between them, and Leo felt that she used her graduation as an out to break off the relationship.

Leo then told her he wished Adam would be more secure in himself so that he could maintain a relationship for the long-term. Maria wasn't sure how to respond to the story, but inside, she recounted a few of Adam's small moments of insecurity.

Now was the time to strike. They had been talking for a little over an hour at this point, and the sunset looked quite beautiful in the background. During a moment of silence, Leo shakenly mustered up the courage to make his next move:

Leo (Feeling optimistic): ...You know what we should do?

Maria (Feeling sad): What?

Leo: I was thinking that...it would be really cool if...we watched the last few episodes of Galaxa VT right now? I can stream them on my TV in a jiffy.

Maria: Oh...I'd love to, but I think it's getting kind of late. I have to open up the salon really early. Maybe another time.

Leo (Feeling bummed): Oh...alright. I know the salon is really important to you. You just opened it up, right?

Maria: Yeah, and it's very important to me. I've been dreaming of opening my own salon since I was a girl.

Maria: I do have to get going! I had a really enjoyable time looking at your collection...and seeing my precious Purpei!

Purpei: Meow.

Leo: Likewise. You're always welcome to come visit her!

Maria nodded and grabbed her phone. She scheduled a CarryZus to come pick her up in five minutes.

Afterwards, she gathered her things taking extra care towards putting Doveliana and the figurines Leo gave to her inside of her purse. They then engaged in a warm hug, and Maria once again gave him a double-cheek kiss. She told him that he could return the favor—it was a tradition after all! For a split second, Leo thought about going for a quick kiss on the lips but couldn't yet bring himself to do it. He felt that the time was not yet right. Instead, he awkwardly gave her a double-cheek kiss in return, which caused Maria to let out a hard-to-notice laugh.

Leo offered to walk her downstairs, but she politely told him that it was alright. She remembered how to get to the curb outside of the apartment. Soon after, she walked out the door. Leo sighed in relief and did a small fist pump. Purpei looked at him in a curious daze as he waddled to his couch to watch some Galaxa VT.

# Night

*9:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.*

## **Adam Fluxelright**

Adam just woke from an incredibly vivid dream. In the dream, he was getting married to Maria in the most beautiful nature-filled environment he had ever seen. From what he remembered, some of his family and friends were in attendance, and there were other people he didn't recognize (presumably Maria's family). Everyone at the wedding was so happy for them. He and Maria had the happiest expressions that their faces could possibly produce, yet there were also expressions of accomplishment. He quite literally felt that he was on top of the world in this dream, and it felt so real that it was hard to distinguish the dream from reality.

His symptoms had died down a bit, perhaps all he needed was a little rest. He was feeling good, so he decided to get up and log on to his laptop. Maria was online on StreamVisage, a voice chat app. He sent her a message asking her if it was a good time for a video call. She said she wasn't too busy with anything, so he video called her:

Fluxdux1078 (Feeling blissful): How are doing tonight, baby?

NaturaBlissana (Feeling joyful): I'm doing well. Are you feeling okay? You look a little tired.

Fluxdux1078: I've been a little under the weather today, but I'm feeling alright now.

NaturaBlissana: Oh no! Do you want me to come over?

Fluxdux1078: It's not that bad, honestly. I know you need to get up early anyway.

Fluxdux1078: So how'd your day go? Anything on your mind?

NaturaBlissana: It went well actually. The salon was incredibly active. Every customer and our employees were absolutely

delighted to be there! Also, Suzie said that it looked like the sales were just as good as yesterday's!

Fluxdux1078: You have no idea how good it makes me feel to see you succeed. I know you guys are going to go even further. This is just the beginning.

NaturaBlissana: I feel the same way deep down. I just feel so inspired doing this. I love being surrounded by all the happy people and beautiful decorations. That reminds me, I went back to Leo's place today.

Fluxdux1078: Huh...? What for? Haha.

NaturaBlissana: Well, yesterday at the party, he gave me this really adorable plushie from the show Fuzzlantia. It's a show that we both really like. I ended up leaving it overnight, so I went back to his place to get it. Hold on a sec let me grab it...

NaturaBlissana: Look, isn't it cute?

Fluxdux1078: Haha. All of your long lost pets are cute, aren't they?

NaturaBlissana: Oh, shut up! Of course they are!

NaturaBlissana: There's something else I want to mention, but I hope it's not taken the wrong way...

Fluxdux1078: What's that?

NaturaBlissana: I think Leo may like me...

Fluxdux1078: Leo? Really? Nah, I don't think so...plus you're not his type. He was always interested in the quieter blonde-haired girls. There's this girl from his job that he likes right now as well. Maggie I think is her name?

NaturaBlissana: Well, it's just that he seems extra friendly and giddy with me. I don't know. It's just a feeling...I could be wrong though.

Fluxdux1078: Trust me. If only you knew him like I did. He hasn't had the best luck with women or dating in the past to tell you the truth. I think he just gets excited when he's around them, especially if they are good-looking. I wouldn't look too much into it beyond that

honestly.

NaturaBlissana: Aww, that's too bad. He's so nice too...we should help him. You know what? Now that I think about it, maybe I should introduce him to Suzie? I think they could be a perfect match!

Fluxdux1078: Yeah, she seems like someone he'd go for.

NaturaBlissana: I'm going to talk to her about him and see what she thinks! By the way, I've been meaning to tell you...I spoke with my mother earlier this week, and she told me all about my biological father.

Fluxdux1078: Cool. That's good right?

NaturaBlissana: Yeah...a little. Only because I at least know who he is, but it turns out he's not much of a man. By the sound of things he was a criminal and cheated on my mother a lot. She was reluctant to tell me at first because she felt it was best that I didn't know much about him.

Fluxdux1078: That's too bad. Do you think she was right?

NaturaBlissana: Yes and no. It saddens me that my biological father was such a bad egg, but at the same time, at least I know the truth. She has some of his old belongings or something of that nature to give me when I go visit her. I want to see them, and I do want to find him now. I want to be able to look him in the eye and ask him why? Why did you walk out on my mother and me? I also want to show him what he's missed out on all these years.

Fluxdux1078: You should totally find him. I would do the exact same thing too, baby. If you don't get closure, you'll always carry that void inside you. Are you looking forward to going back home?

NaturaBlissana: Yeah, I definitely am. I was telling Suzie earlier about my father, and she told me the same thing. Gosh, it feels like it's been so long since I've been home, and I haven't even been back since I broke up with my ex-boyfriend and moved out here.

Ex-boyfriend. As soon as Adam heard that word come out of her mouth, he started to feel insecure about the possibility of losing her. Time

became inconsistent as if it would stop and go for a second or two—sometimes feeling like there were small pauses.

He worried that she could go back and re-develop feelings for this man. By the sound of it, they only broke up because of a move not because they had any serious issues or disagreements. She sounded remorseful when she mentioned breaking up with him too. Why would she be remorseful about this man if she was in love with Adam? He felt extremely confused. A slight change in Adam's way of speaking, body language, and facial expression was apparent as they continued their conversation:

Fluxdux1078 (Feeling indifferent): I'm sure it'll be a good time.

NaturaBlissana: Yeah, I can't wait to see everyone again! I also have a few friends back home that I've been dying to see again.

Fluxdux1078: Friends...what would we do without them?

NaturaBlissana: Adam, I want you to know that I really meant what I said yesterday...

Fluxdux1078: What do you mean?

NaturaBlissana: That I love you...

Fluxdux1078 (Feeling hopeful): I love you too, baby...You know, I've been thinking a lot lately, and I think we need to be closer together. Our leases are ending soon...what do you think about getting a place together?

NaturaBlissana: I would absolutely love too! I was thinking the same thing!

Fluxdux1078: I'm so happy you feel the same way. Let's talk about it some more after you get back from your trip.

NaturaBlissana: Sounds great! On that happy note, I think I'm gonna head to bed soon.

Fluxdux1078: Me too. I need to make sure I'm healthy for work tomorrow.

NaturaBlissana: Oh, that's right. Yeah, you should get to bed right

away!

Fluxdux1078: I love you so much.

NaturaBlissana: I love you more!

Fluxdux1078: Goodnight, baby.

NaturaBlissana: Goodnight.

Adam readied himself for bed. Despite her wanting to move in with him, he couldn't shake the feeling that it could all go up in smoke if she rekindled with her ex. Then, there was the situation with Leo. What if she was right, and he really liked her? They both have geeky interests, he thought. Maybe the whole time Leo was using Adam to get closer to Maria. Adam hoped that this wasn't the case, else it'd mark the end of their friendship.

Could there be other men that like her that he's not even aware of? It's very likely; she's absolutely beautiful, ambitious, smart, and caring to say the least. The feeling of bliss seemed to be slipping from his grasp as his insecurity intensified. What seemed to be clarity on a perfect relationship was quickly turning into confusion and uncertainty. As he got into bed, these insecure-ridden thoughts polluted his mind.

***10:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.***

### **Leo Wanemacher**

Leo was preparing to go to bed. The earlier meeting with Maria was still replaying in his mind. The feelings of infatuation towards her were ever intensifying. He had gotten so close to making his move with Maria today, and she seemed to really like him. The way she called herself Purpei's mommy already got him thinking that the three of them could become one big happy family. Every time they met it seemed like they had more and more common interests. She was kissing him on the cheeks, which was something he didn't see her do with anyone else. She laughed at all his jokes and had permanent variations of a smile on her face whenever they spoke with each other. In his mind, a relationship with her was an inevitability as long as he played his cards right.

There was only one problem. Adam. While she was looking over

Leo's figurines, she remarked about how good their relationship was going and unfortunately, how much she loved Adam.

Now it was clear that he needed to hatch a plan to break the two of them up...and he needed to do it fast. It was looking as if things were really getting serious between the two of them. With Purpei in his arms, he sat in his favorite chair and began to think of what he could do.

First, he needed to become better friends with Maria and further gain Adam's trust when it came to discussing Maria. The only way that he could continue to do those things was to feign and maintain his innocence in the matter.

Second, he needed to subtly relay any information that could make Adam look bad, to Maria. He already planted the first seed of doubt in Maria's mind: insecurity. Leo had many stories about Adam that he could tell as well.

Finally, if all else were to fail, he would do something that would possibly put his friendship at serious risk with Adam. Leo would tell her that he's been seeing Adam with other women—or worse. A part of Leo felt very guilty for thinking this way, but it didn't matter. He was willing to put it all on the line and even risk a possible confrontation with Adam just to get a chance with her; an opportunity like this may not come for him ever again.

With a plan hatched, Leo readied himself for bed. He meticulously washed out the pomade from his hair and hung his nice clothing back on their racks.

As he got into bed, he motioned for Purpei to jump on top of his bed to sleep. His nightstand was quite clear, and he was feeling very confident when it came to Maria. The lamp was clicked off, and he rested his head on the pillow. Imaginative thoughts of what it would be like to be Maria's boyfriend filled his mind. Excitable energy softly flowed through his body as he drifted to sleep. He could feel it in his veins; Maria would be his soon enough.

***10:30 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.***



## Matt Pryze

The night doesn't get much darker. The winds don't get much wilder and sporadic. It was quite the rare night for the wealthy neighborhood. Only about half of the gaudy mansion's lights were on tonight.

Inside, Matt was sitting alone at his massive dining room table. This table is where in-depth analysis and plans on a massive range of topics over the years have been reviewed and carried out. He had two laptops open, sheets of paper and files scattered all over the table, and several notebooks stacked on each other.

There was still no sign of Nikki, so he arranged for a private investigator earlier to try and track her down. He no longer cared about her as a person; he only wanted to find her for his own ego's sake. In his mind, the issue was basically settled. It was only a matter of time before she would come before him again.

There was someone he had been monitoring for quite some time... a person who seemed to be getting in his way repeatedly over the years. Matt felt that he had seen the last of this person several years ago, but now, that person was causing trouble again—this time he had gone too far. The desire to absolutely ruin this person quickly had intensified as of late. Before Matt was rather complacent when it came to this person, perhaps too complacent. Once this person came back into his life, Matt started scheming meticulously to slowly drive the person off a cliff—and it's been appearing to be working perfectly. There was only but one final step that was needed, and Matt was ready to make it happen.

Nobody was to know what Matt was about to do, nor would anyone stop his scheme. "Brick!" Matt said somewhat loudly. There was no response, and after ten seconds, Matt grew restless.

Again, Matt called for Brick in a slightly more agitated tone. Seconds later, Brick crept into the dining room and into Matt's field of vision. He had been dealing with another matter, presumably something else that Matt had previously requested. "I need you to check and make sure everything is locked and secured, then go retire to the guest house for the night. Now," Matt said calmly.

Without hesitation, Brick acknowledged the request with a nod and by saying, “Sir.” He left the dining room. Matt then gathered everything important that was splayed out on his dining room table and put it all the way in a secure location.

It was time to enact the final phase of his scheme. He headed towards the highest floor of his mansion, shutting off all lights in his path.

There’s a room on that floor bolted shut by three different and unique locks. It’s his most private room in the entire mansion and somewhere he would go to extremely infrequently—he has gotten what he’s wanted in virtually every way his entire life with ease. No one ever went inside but him—it’s a room he wouldn’t even tell his father about.

He pulled out three keys from his slacks pocket and inserted them into their respective key locks one by one. Slowly, he opened the door and turned on the light.

Inside, the room was completely grayscale down to the walls, decorations, fixtures, furniture, and other items. A rush of powerful energy flowed through him as he closed the door and locked each key lock. At this time, he felt that he could do almost anything...or nothing at all. It was truly up to him which path he chose, but he was going to choose to do something...

In the middle of the room sat an unusually large yet comfortable looking dark-gray chair. On a small table next to the chair lay a black, crystal-like pendant that was given to him several years ago by one of the few people he highly respected. It was composed of multiple shards and felt very rigid.

He took it in his hands and utilized it as a kind of motivational tool. After feeling attuned with his own internal energies, he put it back on the table. He sat back in the chair, closed his eyes, and began focusing on exactly what he wanted to happen. He focused himself as deeply as he could physically and mentally, but there was still a struggle for him to keep alignment on the desired outcome. This was not something he did often, so perfection was not yet in his grasp.

Finally, a viable possibility presented itself, and he allowed that

possibility to be realized. He then smiled sinisterly. It was done.

# Bridge Scenes IV: ??????

## Cluster I: ???

A heartbeat soundtrack begins to play at a slow pace in the background. Adam is at The Median eating his lunch. His eyes wander slightly. He sees Maria standing near the entrance-door. She looks so beautiful and radiant. He silently gets up and tries to walk towards her, but as he does, it's as if he's only walking in place. Suddenly, after noticing his lack of movement and looking back up, he can walk towards her normally. He calls out to her, "Maria!" But she doesn't hear him. He tries again, and again, she doesn't hear him. He stops abruptly. He stands there confused and mystified, and wonders why she couldn't hear him. She begins to leave and head towards the sidewalk. Again, he walks towards her, each step sounding noticeably thunderous. He calls out to her again, but she does not hear him. A CarryZus ride comes and she gets in. His vision fades to black.

## Cluster II: ????

A heartbeat soundtrack begins to play at a moderate pace in the background. Adam is sitting in his car at the parking lot of Soe-Soe's Restaurant. He looks out of his window and sees a black sedan slide up near the entrance. Maria gets out of the car wearing a beautiful, draped, blue dress. As she begins to walk inside the restaurant, he gets out of his car and follows her. Once he got inside, a host was already showing her to a booth by herself. He stands for a moment to prepare himself to greet

her for the special occasion as another customer walks inside. To the receptionist, he points to where Maria was sitting, but he wasn't sure if the receptionist even noticed. Nonetheless, he walks toward Maria's table. He inches closer and closer, each step having a distinct thunderous sound. When he gets close to her booth, he calls out to her, "Maria!" "Maria!" She didn't seem to hear him... Finally, he sits next to her on the booth and tries to get her attention... She is totally unresponsive to his touch or words. Suddenly, an unknown man, who walked into the restaurant as Adam was preparing himself to walk over, comes within a few feet of Maria's table. She looks extremely excited to see him. She gets up and they hug enthusiastically. Adam's vision fades to black.

## Cluster III: ?????

A heartbeat soundtrack begins to play at a fast pace in the background. Adam is right outside the cracked-open door to Leo's new apartment. Slowly, he walks inside. He sees: Lucent, Rayne, Skye, and Leo all talking with one another jovially in a party atmosphere. Adam smiles and attempts to join in each of their conversations...but they are completely unresponsive to his touch or words. Adam slowly walks back and observes the four of them in a state of denial and disbelief. It is like he is trapped in his own world or more like a mental prison. He hears the door cracking open where Leo's bathroom and bedroom are located. Maria walks out looking as beautiful as ever and especially freshened up. Everyone quickly acknowledges her in a way that implied she wasn't gone from the party for too long. Adam tries to call out her name, "Maria!" But, she doesn't hear him. He then loudly said, "Why won't any of you answer me!?" Again, no one hears him. As they were all chatting without Adam, someone else walks out from beyond that door. It is the man that Maria was happy to see at Soe-Soe's. Maria and the man kiss, and then, he joins the others who seemed happy to see him. Adam was shocked and had enough of the situation. He starts looking around frantically while beginning to hyperventilate. Adam knocks over one of Leo's vases causing a very loud boom. He falls on the floor as a result and begins

convulsing uncontrollably. Suddenly, everyone looks at Adam in concern and melancholy. Maria then slowly walks up to him with a rather blank stare, kneels down close to him, and softly repeats, "Adam...Adam. Are you alright? Adam...Are you okay?" Her voice seemed to get quieter and quieter as Adam's vision fades to black.

# Confusion

# Thursday

## Afternoon

*12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.*

### **Adam Fluxelright**

Confusion. The beginning of the end. Where did it all go so wrong? Everything was so stable before... Everything was so happy. Adam thought he had reached the pinnacle, but now he has hit a bump in the road. The personal void of true love seemed to be filled, but at the same time, it was almost as if it weren't solidified. Why was this? Why couldn't he keep this void filled for good? His thoughts were becoming increasingly random and unstable, and he had no idea why. He couldn't shake the thought of him losing Maria despite their relationship going well. He was giving into his insecurity, and it was quickly sending him down an unimaginably, undesirable path.

Adam was sick, and his flu symptoms had worsened substantially. He had to call into work early in the morning, telling them he couldn't make it today. It had been years since he was sick like this or had to miss a day of work. This was completely unlike him.

He woke up from his nap in a kind of daze. Though he knew he dreamt, there was no recollection of his dream from the previous night or his nap. All he remembered was complete and total darkness.

It was unusual for him to not remember his dreams at all, especially since having met Maria. She was on his mind a lot today, even more than



usual. This was likely the time she would be on her lunch break, so he decided to text her. He told her that he had to stay home from work today due to his flu symptoms worsening and that he hoped everything was going well at the salon. There was no reply back even after thirty minutes; she was probably having a really busy day at the salon.

He slowly arose from his bed and headed for the kitchen. There were aches all over his body, and his energy level was still incredibly low. Historically, vegetable soup, white tea, and oranges helped him get well in a hurry. He decided to cook some vegetable soup and heat up white tea. Once everything was prepared, he sluggishly brought all of it to his kitchen table and sat.

As he ate, he tried to think in complete silence. His mind was totally blank. All that there was, was complete and total darkness...It seemed like the more he tried to think about something such as Maria, the more he felt the darkness tighten its grip on him.

He ate, and then ate some more. It was quite robotic the way his food consumption was being carried out. He would swirl his spoon around in the soup for five seconds—always five seconds—and then lift the spoon into his mouth, slowly.

Next, he would take a small sip of white tea as to not burn his tongue and start the whole process all over again. He got lost in this robotic process; it seemed like it was going on forever.

Suddenly, there was no more soup left in his bowl, snapping him out of this robotic trance. Why is this happening to me? He thought to himself. It was almost as if he were stuck in that infinite repetition by choice, but he had no idea why. It was so confusing. There was a decent amount of white tea left that had cooled down, so he decided to chug the rest down in one final gulp.

With everything consumed, he decided to get some more sleep. No other activity seemed to make sense. He put the dirty dishes on the kitchen counter and slowly crept back to his bed. He felt confused and exhausted, yet he couldn't keep his eyes shut for more than a few seconds. It was almost as if he was scared to see darkness just like

when he was as a child. The darkness produced by his shut-eyes was static in nature and had an ominous, chaotic feel to it. This was highly unusual and increasingly frightened him...

He got up and opened the window in his bedroom to let in some of the city's ambiance and calming breeze. Afterwards, he went to grab his mp3 player and plugged it into a portable stereo in his bedroom. There was a playlist reserved for those rare occasions which he needed to calm himself down. He queued it up and headed for his bed.

Again, he lay in his bed trying his best to give into the calming atmosphere that he had created for himself. Naturally, his eyes began to close, but this time it was different. He could actually imagine again, though faintly. Perhaps he would have some sort of a dream this time.

# Evening

***5:00 p.m. – 5:00 a.m.***

## **Adam Fluxelright**

Several hours had gone by in what felt closer to a full night's sleep. Adam woke frantically from his sleep, and this time, he had a dream.

Actually, it wasn't a dream...it was more like a nightmare. He was having a heated conversation with Maria about something. All he could remember was that he had been yelling and she was crying like he had never seen before. She was crying because of something he was doing or saying to her. It pained him because he could not recall what exactly was being said or done in the dream to make her feel this way.

Then it happened...the worst thing ever that could happen as a result. She told him she was breaking up with him and didn't want to speak with him anymore. He remembered feeling like he was in absolute shambles as if he were being ripped apart from the inside. Next thing he knew, she was just gone. It was him all alone in a black void being further and further sucked in. He was lost.

Despite his nightmare, he was feeling a little bit better health wise, though nowhere near normal. His mind was still dazed, confused, and filled with a dark emptiness like it had been in the afternoon. He was attributing this phenomena to his flu symptoms; thankfully, food and rest seemed to be alleviating him. It took him a while before he was able to get up and do a strenuous stretch. He quickly stopped stretching as it only aggravated his aches then slow-walked to the living room as if he were a zombie.

The apartment was becoming increasingly disorganized. There were clothes all over the place, unwashed dishes, and various work-related items from the previous day lying around. It was hard to blame him; however, he had been sick.

Despite his foggy state of mind and flu symptoms, he started to re-

organize parts of his apartment, but in complete futility. He just didn't have the will or energy to do so and figured it would be best to do it when he's back to normal.

Besides one of the upper-level managers at work, he hadn't spoken to anyone the entire day. This was not something he was used to because every day he talked to or texted at least one person that he cares about.

He had been sending texts to Maria. She wasn't answering. He tried to call Maria. Again, she wasn't answering. Looking for consolidation from a friend, he tried to call Leo. He wasn't answering. He texted and called his brother. He wasn't answering. In further desperation, he called his mother. She wasn't answering. No one...was answering. Adam felt alone and confused—being sick did not make matters better. Why wasn't anyone responding like they usually do? He thought.

Then, his phone vibrated... a new text message! Ironically, it wasn't from anyone that he had tried to contact. Instead, it was from the number that he sent the photo of the completed model plane to. The message read:

Congratulations on completing the plane, Adam! We understand that our instructions weren't the best, but that was only to make it a nice challenge for you! For following through and sending the photo, we have given you a nice reward for your hard work. We hope you enjoy it! Peace and love to you, Adam.

A reward? There wasn't any reward that he was aware of receiving. Frankly, he was expecting some sort of cash reward or gift card to some related business at this point. Perhaps it would be coming to his mailbox at work, but by the sound of the text, the reward was already given. Strange.

He decided to call the number, and it rang once then faded to silence, not to a voicemail. He still wasn't even sure who or what sent him this. Whoever it was knew his name, but a lot of people and places of course knew his name. Surely, he'd find out who or what sent it to him soon, but maybe he wouldn't.

There were some oranges inside his fruit bowl on the counter. He decided to walk over and grab a few. One of the cupboards was slightly cracked open, and inside he could see the second box of Purrr-Pusss Cereal. For some reason this newer box purchased the other day had more of an appeal to him, so he grabbed it. He finished peeling his oranges and poured some cereal into a bowl with milk. Back at his kitchen table, he began to eat.

Last time he ate the cereal it seemed to reveal a message, "FLIGHT." At the time, it got him thinking about his career choice and whether or not he was making the correct one. He decided that he would pursue his childhood dream of piloting and designing craft in at least some capacity but felt it was best left to another day.

He still couldn't believe that the cereal actually revealed the message. Adam wasn't a huge believer in the supernatural, but at this point, he didn't know what to think. If there really was something special about this cereal, more than ever, he needed guidance from it now.

Calmly, he swirled his spoon around in the bowl for several seconds. He slowly lifted up his spoon, and again a word was revealed..."STAY". Stay? What is "STAY" supposed to mean? He thought. He tried to think about the context of stay, but no scenario resonated.

Unlike "FLIGHT.," he noticed that there was no period at the end of "STAY" which made him theorize that there was more to the message. He ate the milk-and-cereal concoction in his spoon and swirled the spoon around again. Another word appeared, "MIND". There was still no period, so there had to be more to the message.

After quick thought, he ate the milk-and-cereal concoction. Again, he swirled his spoon around in the cereal and lifted it out. Finally, it appeared the last part of the message was revealed, "STRONG." The message was, "STAY MINDSTRONG." This seemed awfully coincidental. His state of mind had been a total mess since last night, and now this message appeared in his cereal? At this point, he was becoming a believer that the cereals' messages were more than just simple

coincidences.

The cereal gave him a moment of certainty. Seeing that message made him feel like everything was going to be fine and that he had been overreacting. Additionally, the oranges that he had been eating also seemed to make an instant impact on his flu symptoms. He was feeling better, and his mind wasn't so dark and chaotic. It was possible to do some sort of imagining again. He imagined himself feeling better and showing up to work, but it still seemed impossible to imagine people for some reason.

He tried to see if any more messages would appear prompting him to begin swirling his spoon around. This time the cereal letters, numbers, and punctuation symbols were completely random. This was a bit disappointing, but he continued eating the cereal until it was all gone.

After finishing, he took the bowl and laid it on the kitchen counter without washing it out.

He tried calling Maria one more time...and then it rang. It rang two times, and in the middle of the third ring, it cut off and went straight to voicemail. Now it seemed like she was completely ignoring him, but why? This was completely unlike her to do this kind of thing; usually, she answered or responded to his texts quite rapidly. Like a slow virus, he could feel the insecurity creep into his mind again. All of these awful questions and concerns about what she was doing or thinking polluted his mind.

Then, he shouted, "No!" to himself.

He wasn't going to let this cycle of insecurity start back up again, so he chose to do the only thing that made any sense to him at that moment: sleep.

He let it all go. Everything that was bothering him, whether it was Maria, or his health...he let it all go. Strangely, this gave him a sense of clarity. His mind was blank almost as if he were starting things over from a different perspective. He hoped this would help bring things back to the way they had been for him. Every light in his apartment was turned off except the lamp near his bed which he dimmed. After getting into bed, he

closed his eyes and drifted to sleep for the night with a blank mind.

# Friday

## Morning

*5:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.*

### **Adam Fluxelright**

To his surprise and delight, Adam's flu symptoms had almost completely waned! He was feeling a little bit better mentally too. As a result, he was driving towards work. He turned his playlist on with his car's wireless sound system after some initial trouble with it and began bobbing his head to the beats slightly out of rhythm.

This time he was listening to electronic dance music instead of his typical classic or alternative rock. He needed energy and to get himself in the mood to tackle his work responsibilities.

Traffic was wild and random. People kept cutting him off and breaking their cars prematurely at stop lights. One person almost rear-ended him as he got off the freeway. This was one of the most frustrating drives to work that he's had in quite some time.

As he pulled into the main parking lot of Leviatropé, there appeared to be some traffic congestion. All of the parking spots seemed taken, and cars were moving around frantically trying to find a spot. Adam was feeling increasingly panicked; he was supposed to be at his desk in ten minutes, and the walk to the office from the parking lot usually took about seven.

Sweat built on his forehead as two minutes went by without getting



a spot. Out of desperation, he rushed back outside to find meter parking.

Suddenly, a car started pulling out of a spot located near the front entrance. Luck was completely on his side today. He pulled in, dried off his forehead, put on his suit jacket, and sped walked towards his office.

He didn't want to risk waiting on the elevator, so he ran up the stairs.

With seconds to spare, he made it to his floor on time. He took a deep breath, calmed himself down, and walked through his floor towards his office. A few employees looked at him but didn't say anything to him as he entered his executive office. He sat down and turned on his computer. There was a lot of catching up he had to do, so it was time to get back to work.

Zach's belongings were still in his office. Adam was officially worried; he hasn't been seen or heard from ever since Adam let him leave early earlier in the week.

Adam took a moment to heat up white tea in his personal microwave. There were still lingering flu symptoms, and he wanted to make sure he had enough energy to get his work done despite them.

Hunger was setting in. Adam was moments away from taking his lunch break. He had been sporadically looking back-and-forth at his clock in a feeble attempt to make it tick faster...to no avail.

Suddenly, he got a knock at his office door. One of the newer employees who was quite attractive, Zara Hitchcox, crept in with the intention to tell him something: "Excuse me, boss? There's a package that is awaiting you in the mail room." Adam looked at her in a slightly confused way, then nodded towards her and replied with, "Okay, thank you, Zara." She smiled softly and headed back to her desk.

"A package?" Adam wondered. He doesn't receive packages often at work, so he was a bit surprised as he took the stairs down towards the lobby floor to pick it up.

Then he got an idea. Yesterday he had received a text back from the mysterious sender of the other package he had received. In the

response, it said that a reward had been given to him. Adam did not recall receiving a reward at the time, so maybe this package was it.

As he was walking towards the elevator, he felt a vibration in his right pocket. Jake had texted him out-of-the-blue wondering if everything was alright. Jake must've felt something was off about Adam based off the text Adam sent yesterday when he was sick. Jake only texted Adam for matters of importance, and this time was no different. Adam thought their conversation would be quite lengthy and wasn't sure exactly what was wrong with him yesterday either. He'll respond later.

He headed towards the "employees only" section of the lobby area located near the receptionist desk. Betty was there at the receptionist desk as she usually was. She smiled and said hello to him, but he was in a bit of a rush and didn't bother to acknowledge.

Inside the employee mail room, there was a package, white in color, about the size of a small toaster oven. The package had his name and the company's address on the label. Like the last box he received, this box had no return address. He suspected that this was his reward for completing the model plane successfully but also remembered that white was Jake's favorite color. This was really getting confusing. His brother told him that he didn't send him anything, though. Adam was growing impatient; he intended to open the box as soon as he got to his car.

With the mysterious package loosely tucked under his arm, Adam walked towards the parking lot. Betty looked at him as he walked out but didn't smile this time. She likely felt a bit alienated by Adam not addressing her as he walked into the mail room. Adam once again didn't acknowledge her.

Due to his earlier luck, he was parked very close to the entrance. His metallic-blue, four-door, hybrid still had its luster but was beginning to accumulate random assortments of thin scratches and dents. Maybe it was time to get a new car. His job was paying quite well, and his relationship was getting serious; perhaps it was time to establish a new chapter in his life for good.

Adam had no patience; this time he was going to find out what was

in the mysterious box right now. He took his car key and split open the box's seal.

Inside the box appeared to be countless pieces of broken, red glass of various sizes, and a piece of paper. He looked at the contents of the box in a confused manner and began blaming the post office for mishandling the box. He tried to fidget with the larger pieces to see if he could identify what it was that was broken.

After a few minutes, something was beginning to kind of take shape. It started to look like the object was either a diamond, heart, jewel, or something similar. He wasn't entirely sure yet, but it was certainly something.

The piece of paper inside the box, from what he could tell was blank, but he picked it up anyway. He turned it over, revealing a letter:

My dearest Adam. Now that you have completed the model plane, you have come to understand your purpose, or shall I say **MY purpose**...not yours. For realizing **MY purpose**, I have given you a prize. The contents of this box represents that prize quite well. Look at it. It's a heart—something you attempted to take from me—that was shattered to pieces. It's your heart, Adam. There are no instructions this time...good luck putting this back together. Peace and love to you, Adam.

Adam was completely dumbfounded.

Someone was clearly messing with him and it was becoming disturbing. This was clearly someone that knew him, and knew him very well. This person clearly knew about his childhood dream to pilot craft, and only a few people knew of it to his knowledge: his parents, Jake, Maria, and Leo. He got the first package before meeting Maria, so that rules her out. His parents, he felt, could never do such a harmful and manipulative thing, so it couldn't be them. Jake and he have had their little strife in the past, but presently, things were great between them. "Why would he do this?" Adam thought to himself, "There's no motivation and besides Jake already said that he didn't send it." So that left Leo. Initially, Adam wasn't sure if Leo knew about his childhood dream, but he

confirmed that Leo did in fact know in a previous conversation.

A motivation for Leo was presenting itself, however. Maria felt that Leo liked her, but Adam didn't believe it. Now it seemed like it could be true, and perhaps Leo wanted to see them broken up. Perhaps this was Leo's way of covertly messing with Adam's mind. It was hard to believe that Leo was capable of something like this, but it was hard to know what to think. Maybe the first anonymous package was benevolent in intention but turned sinister with the second box after he met Maria.

Frustrated, he closed the box with all of its contents inside and then started his car. A degree of paranoia was setting; so many different thoughts were beginning to flood his mind. He was going to get to the bottom of this development as soon as he got home.

It was on towards the Median in an attempt to alleviate his frustration and tame his growling stomach. He tried to turn on his alternative and classic rock playlist via the car's wireless sound system, but it kept malfunctioning. It would come on and then turn itself back off again. After fidgeting with it in-between red lights he got it to work, but it sounded awfully static. He attempted to groove to the soft rhythms, but he was completely out of sync with them. An older couple in the lane to his right glanced over towards him with a sense of puzzlement as they waited for the light to turn green.

# Afternoon

***12:00 p.m. – 12:45 p.m.***

## **Adam Fluxelright**

Finally, he had arrived at The Median. It was more chaotic than usual—there were cars all over the place with some cars parked over two spots. Teresa, the hostess at the front, knew Adam's name by heart. She was typically the first one who greeted him inside. "Hey there, Adam! How are you doing today?" She asked politely. Adam jerked his head and mouth to the side as if he wasn't sure what to say. "Oh...well it looks like your spot is open as usual today! Follow me," she said enthusiastically. Teresa handed him the menu, and sat him at a booth where it's possible to partially see the kitchen and observe most of the restaurant.

As he finished ordering chili fries, something kept poking his attention at the furthest corner of his eye. He looked further to his right—which happened to be somewhat outside the entrance—and he saw her. It was Maria...

...There was a man that she was talking to. Adam couldn't believe his eyes and at first tried to deny it, but he couldn't. She was talking with Matt Pryze...and they were hugging sensually as if they were in a relationship. Her right leg was kicked up behind her in infatuation, and she was looking at his face as if she were in a deep state of attraction—he knew that look very well.

Adam shot right up from his booth seat. As he walked towards them, Matt quickly headed for the exit. As he did, Matt made eye contact with Adam. The look he gave Adam was incredibly sinister yet subtle and quick. Adam's heart was racing in a kind of fury and confusion. "What the hell is going?" He thought to himself.

She was standing there by herself looking as innocent and shy as always. This time it was different; he wanted to get to the bottom of this. Before long, she was directly in front of him, and they began conversing:

Adam (Feeling confused): Maria. I'm glad you're here. I've been trying to talk to you for days now. Is everything okay?

Maria (Feeling annoyed): Adam...? Are you being serious right now?

Adam: Huh? What do you mean?

Maria: Do you somehow not remember our conversation the other night, or is this just another ploy to hurt me even more?

Adam: I'm really confused...we were both happy the last time we spoke?

Maria: I don't know what is wrong with you right now, but you're an extremely insecure man. I couldn't believe that about you.

Adam: Tell me. What did I say to you?!

Maria: Are you kidding me...You accused me of everything imaginable when we spoke on StreamVisage. Out-of-the-blue, pretty much the first words out of your mouth were asking me if I was talking to other guys on the side. Of course I told you, "no," but you didn't believe me did you? Then you told me how confident you were that I was lying and that people were telling you that I was seeing other guys. I kept telling you that you were wrong and that those, "people" weren't telling you the truth. Then I saw a side of you I had never seen before. You got really angry, cursed at me and told me to shut the hell up, you liar. That hurt me so deeply, and I began crying uncontrollably. You didn't even seem to care either. You just kept telling me how you wanted to get to the bottom of my supposed cheating on you and screaming more curse words at me. I can't be with a man who hurt me like you did and doesn't trust me. So that's why I broke up with you.

Adam: What?!? This is totally impossible! I never accused you of any of this, and I never would!

Maria: Adam. Just stop. Whatever games you're trying to play with me. Just stop. You've hurt me enough.

Adam: I knew something was terribly wrong; I could feel it. This is

why I've been trying to call you, but you never seemed to respond to me for some reason.

Maria: See how insecure you're being...again!? This is why I broke up with you.

Adam: I'm not! We had a totally different conversation. Something isn't right. You don't remember telling me about how Leo gave you that plushie and showing it to me?

Maria: Um, he did, but I never told you that?

Adam: You did...I'm telling you the truth.

Adam: By the way, what were you meeting with Matt about just now?

Maria: That's none of your business anymore.

Adam: Please, just tell me. I'm completely confused right now as it is.

Maria: My flight for Saturday got cancelled yesterday, and I told him about it in passing. He was so nice and scheduled one of his company's planes to fly me out to the Southeast, so I could still see my family on Saturday.

Adam: What, he owns a company? I didn't know that. What does it do?

Maria: Why don't you ask him?

Adam: I never really talk to him. I've told you that.

Adam: Another thing you told me in our conversation. You told me your mother told you about your biological father. She told you he was a criminal of some sort and that she still has some of his belongings or something?

-Three second pause-

Maria: Now I know I didn't tell you that...How do you know these things? You're scaring me, Adam...

Adam: I'm telling you we had this conversation! You have to believe

me!

Maria: I'm starting to think something really weird is going on here...  
Adam, I think it's best we just go our separate ways and that's it.  
Okay?

Adam: Please... You've got to trust me on this. I would never hurt you, ever. I love you...

Without saying a word in response, Maria stormed away from Adam at a speed that was bordering on running. His heart immediately stopped, and he could feel it drop beneath the ground and shatter. He was absolutely stunned beyond belief. There were a few bystanders who were looking at him trying to figure out what the problem was. He stood there not knowing what to do with himself and avoided eye contact with any of the bystanders. "There's nothing to see here. You can stop looking at me!" he shouted. Forgetting that he was even starving, he left the Median and went straight to his car.

The door on the driver's side of his car slammed shut so hard that the window developed a few cracks. He began exhaling deeply in a completely panicked state. The bachelor life appeared to be his destiny, but a small part of him refused to accept that fate. He was desperately trying to begin piecing together what just happened. Why was the love of his life claiming he said all these things that weren't true? How could they suddenly be broken up when everything was going so perfectly? He thought. He just didn't have any answers at all and sat in a confused daze, shallowly breathing with his mouth slightly hanging open.

The box that he received earlier was still on top of his passenger's seat; the shattered heart pieces were beginning to draw his attention. At this moment, his heart was feeling quite broken from his unexplained breakup with Maria. This situation he now found himself in was the true love quandary of his life. No other woman had ever been as special as Maria was to Adam, not even close. The love and attraction he had for her was something different and unique altogether; it was extremely visceral. He cared about the women in his previous relationships, but he never thought of them as being true love.



He looked at the note and shattered heart figurine, and then, he began introspecting. The note ominously said, "It's your heart, Adam." He thought about it and became frightened. It was clear that someone, or even several people, had it out for him and were jealous of his relationship with Maria.

The note also remarked about how the plane had to do with his purpose, but at the same time, the anonymous sender's purpose.

Then it struck him like a hardball to the gut. Maria in her earlier conversation mentioned that Matt owns a business, and that business owns planes...Matt's company could have something to do with aircraft or craft in general...So did that mean Matt and Adam have had the same or similar dream of being involved with craft? This was a stunning development for Adam because he thought that Matt had other types of ambitions. Back in college, all Matt seemed to do was live it up and socialize. He didn't recall Matt wanting to do anything with craft, but at the same time, he didn't really know Matt that well.

All of these strange coincidences that have been happening to Adam over the last month...they all had one, glaring connection. Matt. He remembered the name of the model plane, "Big Prize 808," which essentially correlated with Matt's last name (and perhaps his ego). He remembered the employee he hired on Monday that looked just like a twin or doppelganger of Matt. This employee, coincidentally, also mentioned that he last worked for an aerospace company; a company likely involved with craft. He remembered the cashier that also looked like a twin or doppelganger of Matt. Coincidentally, the cashier asked him if he was an airline pilot. The cashier also seemed quite off to Adam almost as if he wasn't real, or he was some sort of a distortion of a real thing. He remembered the phone call he received regarding a discount off a private pilot training course. Now that he thought about it, the automated voice sounded quite similar to Matt.

He remembered the call from the blocked phone number that was representing a company called, "No Surprises Diagnostics." They offered services to determine whether or not your spouse was cheating. How rich

and coincidental that was in light of the conversation he just had with Maria. It was almost like an ominous premonition of sorts. Additionally, Surprizes seemed to be a play on Matt's last name, again just like the model plane.

The odd part, however, was that he had no explanation for the fact that this automated voice sounded extremely similar to Leo. Was that just a coincidence? Are Leo and Matt affiliated with each other in a way he doesn't know about? Leo certainly was the only one of the two who knew about Adam's dream to pilot and design craft. Not to mention, Leo texted him the next day out-of-the-blue after Adam received the mystery package. These questions and more were pondered by Adam while in a state of absolute mental chaos. Something really strange was going on and he didn't know exactly what to conclude.

There were too many coincidences involving Matt that Adam could not ignore, but at the same time, none of it made sense to him. If Matt was in fact behind the packages, how would he know so much about Adam, especially when claiming to not even remember him when they ran into each other at The Median? It didn't make sense. They had no beef at all back in college as far as he knew; hell, he didn't even really talk to Matt at all in college.

None of these coincidences or explanations seemed to explain the true love quandary he now found himself in, however. Maria claimed that he vocally lashed out at her while accusing her of cheating, which was something he knew didn't happen. Why on earth was Maria denying that their conversation from last night took place the way it did? No answer was coming to his oblivious mind.

Even worse...she appeared to be attracted to Matt out-of-the-blue when he saw them at the Median. Judging by the look she was giving him...oh that look he knows so well...she was attracted to him, and deeply. Perhaps, in the greatest irony, his so-called insecure thoughts from Wednesday night about other men being interested in her were right, and she was seeing Matt or someone else behind his back all along. Adam was losing it, and fast.

Everything around him, from people walking on the street, to birds in the air, were beginning to develop ominous black and dark-blue hues. Additionally, all things besides himself felt like they were quickly slowing to a halt. There was no denying this strange time-related phenomena anymore. Life and reality were quickly beginning to crumble apart for Adam, and he began to panic. “What is going on...What is going on!?” He screamed out loud. His body felt extremely numb and was shaking uncontrollably as he turned on the ignition...

To see how this all unfolds, buy the next book, *Paths of Parallels*.

[Click here](#) to purchase it on Amazon.

# About the Author

Gregory Venvonis is the word-inventing fiction author of the Mist Beyond and Fluctsonas series', and the creator of [Vowlenu](#), a lexicon of funny notions, deep feelings that lack a word in English, and powerful quotes.

He received his undergraduate degree from the University of California, Los Angeles in Political Science. Inspiration for Fluctsonas and Vowlenu came shortly after graduation. His passion for writing started in middle school where he would write stories in class or during lunch breaks about metaphysical concepts, anime, and various fanfiction.

Raised in sunny Redondo Beach, California, he has always pondered the metaphysical and unexplained with a desire to spread goodness far and wide. He currently resides in Henderson, Nevada.

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