

Prologue: Written by Ashton McKenzie

There is only silence, a suffocating presence that somehow appears to engulf every sense into an all-consuming void. There are no words to be spoken or sounds to be made. The atmosphere is oppressively motionless and holds a foreboding, menacing aura. It was silence that could speak volumes, like the undusted and underused crevasse of an antique tome lost to time. In this silence, every sound that followed would be magnified by this utter quiet. Demanding absolute respect and consideration for those who would watch.

“Lean into the silence.”

“Hide from it”

(You embrace the silence,) (You flee within, wriggling beneath the overwhelming attempt at mental feedback. Wanting nothing more than to return to a solemn and peaceful sleep) and in that very moment of noise, static escapes from the dark abyss. It sounds like endless buzzing at a disproportionate speed of wavelength. Jumbled, fragmented noise that drowns out any attempt at cohesive thought. (Though this noise seems to bring peace in a sudden cacophony.)

“Open your eyes.”

Your vision is blurred as the persistent darkness seeps into your eye sockets, creating a black-and-white haze in front of you. The air around you hangs heavy with the smell of oil and saltwater, and the dim illumination flickers like the dying spark of a fire, as your senses all seem to suddenly come alive. Peering around your newfound surroundings, you look to find the source of the buzzing. Flickering neon screens cast an eerie glow on a rusted metal interior. The faint echo of an alarm rings behind you, searching and bouncing off far corridors before returning to your ears.

“Look to the screens.”

“Look behind you.”

*1 You gaze at the jumbled writing on the screens for what feels like hours as your mind races with questions as the screens appear to be rapidly switching between text and images that you can't read or understand. [If look behind you selected first] (*Staring towards these screens, you make out a long, coiling trail of wires, like the body of an alloy anaconda, trailing about the entire room. The noise seems to be emanating from them, but the echo behind you still seems to be roaring louder. Looking back to the screen,) (*The only words you) can make out among the overwhelming text are outside, suffering, and safety. [if not chosen first](The siren bellows behind you)

The wailing echo of the siren becomes louder, filling you with an unfathomable dread; nonetheless, you are powerless to turn your neck to the side. If only you could find a way to silence the noise. As the dissonance intensifies and becomes intolerable, your heart rate increases as your senses are continually assaulted. You sense the oppressive, unavoidable weight of dread settling over you like a thick blanket. It's as though the music is a hostile thing that wants to consume you entirely. ([If screen not pressed] The screens call to you.)

"Why can't I move?"

You begin to writhe in recourse. Staring down at your arms, you look in horror at a trail of wires that lead from your skin to the base of the floor. They have fused with your flesh, becoming one with your body. A convoluted cybernetic network that pulses with an unsettling blue light, is created by the tendrils of metal and plastic that snake through your skin and delve deep into your muscles and organs. You wheeze a struggled breath as you look upon pale and clammy skin. The wires feel as though they are alive and conscious because you can feel them writhing and twitching underneath.

"Panic"

Try as you might, you struggle, and your heartbeat quickens with every movement. repressing a minor sob, you come to the realisation that there is no escaping this twisted sentinel that you've become. a sigh wheezes from your desperate lips as you begin to accept the terrifying situation that awaits you and feel the weight of hopelessness engulfing you like a smothering blanket. seeing yourself sinking deeper and deeper into the pit of despair with each passing second, a gloom engulfs your entire essence. Mustering enough courage to open your eyes reveals something you hadn't noticed before a porthole. Outside of it lie murky waters. A sea of monochromatic worlds of black and white once more, and you couldn't help but a crushing weight of dread dragging you down into its inky depths, as a shadow creeps across the void in front of you.

“Peer into the blackness once more”

Your body tenses, and you feel a knot begin to form in your stomach, as you brace yourself for what's to come. Taking a deep breath, hoping to calm your racing thoughts, you find your heart is pounding so loudly that you can barely hear anything else. glancing around, a piece of you searches for a glimmer of hope and a way out of this nightmare. As you hold your breath for a moment, every fibre of your being wants this to end—the fear, the uncertainty, the pain. You close your eyes, and for a brief moment, you allow yourself to imagine a moment of respite. Letting yourself hope and wish for a better moment and a better future. And as you do, the world around you begin to shift, unravel, and transform. A school of Koi fish suddenly swim into view through the porthole. In contrast to the generally drab and lifeless sea, they stood out vividly. Their scales glistening in the dim light, reflecting the white of the bubbles trailing after the submarine and the blackness of the ocean floor.

“Admire the beauty.”

The fish swim in circles while synchronising every movement of their bodies. It's difficult to distinguish where one fish stops, and another begins as they chase each other with such recklessness and enthusiasm. where only the two of them are present. Their eyes never leave one another as they circle, and their fins are ablaze with excitement. The sounds of water streaming past their gills and the beat of their fins take the place of the world around them. It's a dance that talks of an unbreakable tie and one of closeness and connection. They are the epitome of unadulterated bliss as they continue to move around one another while immersed in their own worlds. An intimacy so close but never touched.

“Stare closer”

You notice a glimmer of movement. As you turn to look, a dark figure with a bizarre, twisted appearance appears in the distance. You experience a sudden rush of fear as it gets closer. It has tentacles that move in the water like eels and is unlike anything you've ever seen. Its opening maw shows a row of razor-sharp teeth, and its eyes sparkle with an evil intelligence.

Watching the creature approach closer and closer with your heart beating, you notice that despite its terrifying appearance, its motions are beautiful and sinuous. The shadowy shape grows nearer as you stare in dread, and you suddenly realise that it's not just any water

creature. Its ugly body is covered in wires and bio-mutated technology, making it resemble a horrific cyborg. It moves jerkily and strangely, as though it were a twisted fusion of metal and flesh. It sees you. You, and before you know it, it's already upon you. You let out a silent scream of horror, and -

"A jolt upright"

Chapter 1: Yoon (Written by Ashton McKenzie)

You jerk awake as your alarm clock blares, its shrill sound piercing through the fog of dreams. In that disoriented moment of awakening, you find yourself bathed in a cold sweat, heart pounding in your chest. Attempting to rise, a rattle of surprise courses through you—a charging cable, twisted tightly around your arm, tethers you to the wall. Frustration wells up within as you desperately struggle to free yourself from the constricting embrace of the cable. Your movements are frantic, fueled by the primal instinct to break free. With each tug, you feel the resistance of the cable, its hold on you seemingly unyielding.

"Investigate your surroundings."

As your gaze shifts from your entangled arm to the surrounding walls, the blurry haze dissipates, revealing a familiar scene that brings a deep sense of calm to your mind. Adorned with weathered wallpaper that has gracefully endured the passage of time, these walls serve as silent witnesses to stories familiar to you etched upon their surface. They present a tapestry of memories, an evocative collage comprising faded photographs, worn posters, and delicate handwritten notes. Each artifact carries the weight of moments long past, forming a mosaic that weaves together your personal history. In this room, the very essence of time is captured, as the walls themselves become a living archive—a testament to the countless tales whispered by the peeling paint and weathered corners.

"Scan the rest of your surroundings."

The room is filled with light and mystery, streaming from a window that covers the back wall. It invites the eye to the far-left corner, where a wooden desk stands firm. The desk is a chaos of papers, books, pens, and a faint clock. Among the disorder, liquor bottles lurk, like a hidden tumor.

On the right side of the room, an empty easel towers, ready for artistic expression. Its blank canvas beckons with stories and realms untold, a witness to limitless imagination and creative potential. The room pulses with the expectation of creation, the chance for free expression embodied in the silent easel.

The wallpaper, desk, and easel shape an environment that embraces both the burden of the past and the infinite opportunities of the future. In this room, memories blend with dreams, and time fades away. It is a space where inspiration thrives, ideas soar, and your restless soul finds peace.

“Peer outside the window.”

Washed out clouds, weighed down by a forlorn demeanor, stretch across the vast expanse of the sky, casting a pall of desolation in every direction. Their somber presence hangs like a heavy shroud, mirroring the melancholy that engulfs the pitiful neighborhood you call home. From the confines of your window, you peer into the abyss that lies before you, distant and eerie wails of a siren echo through the air. Serving as a harsh reminder of a city throbbing with vice and excess. Your dwelling, situated in a dimly lit Korean suburb, if one could even call it that, serves as a breeding ground for a subculture that embraces the gritty allure of a society on edge.

As your gaze extends beyond the immediate vicinity, you trace the winding paths that navigate this labyrinthine landscape. These unwavering routes, akin to veins coursing through a stagnant body, lead to the imposing presence of towering corporate buildings. Their oppressive stature looms on the horizon, casting an ever-present shadow that seeks to smother any flicker of individuality and dampen the spirit of the inhabitants.

*“Investigate your desk *further*.”*

You approach your desk with slow, hesitant steps, transfixed by the unsettling scene before you. The papers and objects scattered on the surface reveal the pained ramblings of a deranged mind. Each note, written in a drunken frenzy, bears the signature of a tormented soul—Y.K. The words, scrawled in haphazard strokes, speak of a pervasive paranoia, a belief that something, or someone, is relentlessly pursuing them.

Your eyes spot a sketchbook among the mess. You carefully flip through the pages, feeling a wave of unease. The words and images seem to come alive, dragging you into a realm of darkness and terror. You see a series of drawings, each depicting a creature so unnerving that it makes your skin crawl.

The first image captures your attention instantly. It is a creature that has haunted your nightmares. A dark figure, twisted and grotesque, emerges from the shadows, its presence defying comprehension. Its tentacles, sinuous like eels, writhe and undulate in a mesmerizing dance, as they did in your recurring dreams. Its skin, pallid gray and slimy, intensifies its eerie aura. Its mouth, wide open, reveals a row of razor-sharp teeth that gleam with malice, just as you remembered. But it is the creature's eyes that truly unsettle you - they sparkle with an evil intelligence, reminiscent of your own tortured imaginings.

You turn the page, your heart pounding. Another horrifying creation comes into view. It is a monstrous blend of flesh and machinery, a cyborg abomination that defies all reason. Its body, a twisted fusion of mutated flesh and jagged metal, exudes an aura of power and aggression. Wires and circuitry snake across its grotesque form, amplifying its nightmarish appearance. Its face is partially hidden by a mask-like visor, reminiscent of an old television screen. Through the flickering glass, only its red eyes shine through, glowing with an otherworldly light. Its mouth, adorned with metal molars, forms a chilling smile that haunts your thoughts. Its limbs bend and twist in unnatural ways, emitting a buzzing sound that echoes with each movement. This monstrous amalgamation of man and machine is a testament to the horrors that can arise when technology and flesh merge.

With trepidation, you turn to the final page. Your breath catches in your throat. It is an image that strikes a chord deep within you, a chilling distortion of a loved one. She emerges from the shadows, transformed into a figure of darkness and despair. Her features are twisted and contorted, evoking both fear and familiarity. Her sunless eyes pierce your soul, freezing your blood. Her presence carries a heavy weight, as if she embodies the depths of suffering and malevolence.

Each page of this enigmatic book reveals a unique creature, each more disturbing than the last. The vivid descriptions and chilling illustrations transport you into a realm where fear reigns supreme. As you delve deeper into its pages, you wonder what dark secrets this book holds and what price you might pay for unlocking its mysteries.

You feel exhausted and disquieted. You sit down on the chair, a refuge in the midst of turmoil. It cradles your weary body as you seek solace and try to make sense of Y.K.'s tangled thoughts. A nagging suspicion lingers—there is more to this puzzle, an insidious undercurrent that connects the enigmatic ramblings to a larger, more sinister narrative. If only you could clear your mind for a moment, why must it be shrouded in Miasma? Regardless of the pain you feel, these readings begin to infect you in a way that you can't explain.

[with resolve, the quality of your thoughts becomes the architect of your happiness, as you embrace self-determination to shape a life of fulfillment and purpose. Though the ramblings leave you shaken, you quickly refocus your resolute mind to your current circumstances.]

[Within reason, Absurdism grips you to your core, unveiling profound queries that resonate within your being.

Why do we exist? Why must we endure suffering? Does the chaos surrounding us hold inherent meaning, or does it merely exist as an enigmatic force that entangles our lives? You find yourself challenged to find meaning in the underlying madness"]

[Hopelessly, In the face of existential meaninglessness and the impending embrace of death, the preciousness of time dwindles, leaving us to question the inherent value of existence itself.]

Within reason [Stoically / Positive]

With determination [Absurdist / Neutral]

Hopelessly [Nihilistic / Negative]

“Leave the room”

Your stomach growls, reminding you of the harsh reality around you. You leave the room where you rested and enter a dilapidated apartment, a place of neglect and decay. But your attention is on a more urgent need—food. The warmth of your bedroom fades, and the rest of the house is dark and somber, like a veil of shame.

You scavenge for a while and manage to make a meager plate of food. On the greasy, coffee-stained table, a cup of steaming brown liquid sits next to an unappealing plate of bacon. The sight of sustenance doesn’t tempt you, its repulsive appearance reflecting the solitude that surrounds you.

As you look into the dark abyss in the cup, a reflection of failure looks back, mocking your existence. How did life bring you to this desolate place? You wonder, lost in thought, but you can’t find any answers. A specter from the past resurfaces, haunting your every thought. Quiet and gloomy, you lower your eyes to the plate in front of you.

The food is cold and uninviting, the coffee a thick, sticky syrup that offers no comfort. But you need to eat, so you force yourself to swallow them quickly. You sigh and walk to the sink, filled with dirty dishes. You feel guilty for leaving them undone, but you have no energy to deal with them. Another time, you tell yourself, a common excuse throughout the week.

The truth is in your heart; you won’t do them until you have to. Why waste energy on a useless task? Guilt stays for a moment, but then it turns into resignation. The dishes can wait, as they always do. You stand still, stuck in a cycle of delayed responsibility, knowing that the relief you seek? You feel something buzzing at your hip, it’s your phone. When did you but that there? You can’t remember. The name Min flashes brightly, making you squint.

Give into the ringing [Move to 1*]

Ignore it.

Gazing out into the encompassing darkness, you feel an unsettling presence observing you, an eerie sensation that sends shivers down your spine. A moment of contemplation

ensues, your gaze fixated upon the phone before you, its significance stretching into an interminable stretch of time.

An abyss of anxiety emerges from the depths of your being, gradually slithering its way to the surface. Its twisted tendrils assume grotesque forms, while its eyes burn with a wild intensity. It resides within, perpetually lurking, poised to erupt at any given moment. Doubtful hands insidiously crawl up the contours of your face, obscuring your vision in a haze of ignorance.

Should you dismiss this? Is there cause for concern? These questions swirl through your mind, yet the sinister grip of unease only tightens its hold, its nails piercing deeper into the recesses of your thoughts.

("Refuse to answer." **(BAD END)**)

The faint glow of the phone fades, like hope itself, dwindling into nothing. Anxiety weighs on you, casting its shadow on your thoughts. What was once a deafening roar, wild and overwhelming, now quiets into a distant, muted hum. The room is empty, swallowing everything in its grasp.

The thoughts repeat: "Why would someone care about me? Why would someone care about me?" They echo inside, a constant refrain that shows your self-doubt, questioning your worth and significance. You enter your apartment and feel an unsettling chill. Something is wrong, as if reality is unraveling before your eyes. The walls and furniture warp and twist, turning into grotesque shapes from a nightmare. The floor dissolves into a mist, swirling and moving like a living thing. The room stretches into an endless abyss where shadows dance and reach out with an ominous touch. The colors drain, lifeless, replaced by grays and blacks.

Time wavers, moments lasting forever while seconds slip away like memories. Whispers fill the air, voices saying secrets that make no sense. The walls breathe, pulsing with a sinister energy that seeps into your soul. Every step you take is met with resistance, as if the space is alive, aware of you and enjoying your fear. As time goes on, a horrifying transformation unfolds before your eyes, revealing a monstrous entity.

Its form is an abomination of limbs and features, glowing with eyes that burn with wickedness. It covers the upper half of its face with a mask-like visor that looks like an old TV screen, flickering with distorted images and static. Through the visor, only red eyes shine through,

glowing with an eerie light. The lower half of its face has thick metal molars, like teeth from a nightmare. The creature's body is made of dark metal alloys and wires, showing power and aggression. Its torso narrows at the waist, making its shape twisted and unnatural.

The arms closest to its body are twisted together, wrapped like a straitjacket. From the joints of these limbs comes an unnatural buzzing sound, like a broken machine. From its shoulders sprout another pair of arms, each ending in claws. These arms look organic, their metal framework mimicking muscles and tendons, as if blending flesh and machine.

You recognize the creature from your sketchbook, one of the horrors that haunted your dreams. How did it become real? How did it get here? You don't know, but you feel a strange connection to it, as if it is a part of you. You wonder if it is a reflection of you, some part of your subconscious. You wish you could control it, but it is too powerful. It has already chosen you as its target.

The cybernetic monster moves, and the sound of metal grinding echoes in the air, increasing the terror it causes in anyone who sees it. Its movements are a mix of calculated precision and erratic contortions, as if it breaks the limits of what a physical form should be. This eldritch creature feeds on your deepest fears, devouring your essence.

Its talons, jagged and serrated, scrape against your sanity, tearing it apart with merciless precision. Each breath you take strengthens the creature, satisfying its hunger for anguish. It wraps around your fragile heart, squeezing without mercy, while a paralyzing terror holds you tight. Trapped in your own mind, you are ensnared, unable to escape from the clutches of this monstrous embodiment of fear.

It leaves nothing but fragments of your shattered soul, consumed by the greedy appetite of despair. You are adrift, lost in the abyss of your desolation, struggling with the heavy burden of existence. Silence greets you for another day.

("BAD END: Sticks and Stones")

Answer the phone. [1*]

Inhaling deeply, you steady yourself, bracing for the forthcoming interaction as a whirlwind of thoughts swirl within. With cautious deliberation, your finger glides over the vibrant, captivating glow emanating from the device. The radiant glow subsides, giving way to the comforting familiarity of a voice you know well.

"Hello? Yoon? Why did it take you so long to pick up the phone?"

As the haze of confusion begins to dissipate, questions race through your mind, seeking clarity among the swirling thoughts. Your name, Yoon Kim, emerges from the depths of your consciousness, anchoring you to your own identity. This is your unknown place is apparently your home, a place of familiarity and supposed comfort.

Is this a stranger? No, the tone carries an aura of reassurance, providing comfort in the middle of your persistent doubt.

"Sorry, Min... I'm not having a great day. Feeling a bit hungover, you know?"

A flicker of doubt crosses your mind, suggesting that they might not be interested in offering help. "Oh, don't worry about it! No need to apologize. Hey, I actually have something really cool to show you, something that might make a difference! Would it be alright if I swing by and show you in person?"

As the encounter unfolds before you, a brief hesitation lingers, but gradually, you come to accept its presence. In time, you know you'll find a way to move past it. The truth is, you've grown accustomed to solitude, finding solace in your own company. The joy of social interactions has eluded you for quite some time. It's been a while since you last embraced such a connection, a meaningful interaction that stirs dormant emotions within you.

"Sure, I'll see you shortly," you respond, mustering a hint of warmth in your voice, attempting to convey a faint smile through the phone. Deep down, a part of you whispers to seize this opportunity, to embrace the fleeting moment of connection while it lasts. Yet, a subtle unease lingers, reminding you to remain cautious, as if urging you to keep your guard up and be prepared to retreat at a moment's notice.

You wait in silence. Before long a resonant chime reverberates through the air, signaling the arrival of an awaited visitor at the front door. As you accept the call, a deep breath fills your lungs, fortifying your resolve for what lies ahead. Time seems to stretch, each passing second feeling like an eternity, as the throbbing hum in your veins quickens its rhythm. Doubt flickers within, questioning the wisdom of this decision, but there is no turning back now.

There is a sudden break in the anticipation. —a second ring pierces through the silence. With lightning speed, you reach for the doorknob, the metallic click resonating with a sense of finality. The hallway bursts into an intense blaze of light, momentarily overwhelming your vision, causing you to squint in response.

Within this bright haze, an unseen figure emerges, lunging towards you with an intensity that freezes time itself. The air in your lungs momentarily suspends, caught between anticipation and trepidation. A powerful force engulfs you, tightening its grip in a suffocating manner.

Your mind instinctively registers the potential hostility, yet your body remains strangely calm, as if embracing the inevitable. In this profound moment, you come to realize that what initially seemed threatening is nothing more than a warm and comforting embrace.

“Embrace comforts the soul”

A moment of true tranquility envelopes your being, as memories of happier times wash over you, leaving behind a sense of contentment. The comforting touch recedes, and you express your gratitude for Min's presence.

Min Choi's presence was captivating, an irresistible blend of confidence, independence, and an enigmatic aura that left you spellbound. There was an undeniable intrigue surrounding him, heightened by his appearance. His short, neatly styled black hair exuded purpose and determination, complementing his overall persona. His dark brown eyes held a depth that reflected both curiosity and unwavering focus, drawing you further into his world.

He donned a perfectly tailored shirt, with sleeves casually rolled up, in addition of his trusty cargo pants and goggles, his innate scrappy nature radiated through his appearance.

While one might miss it, you spot a deep-set scar above his right eyebrow. A reminder of your wild childhood you both shared.

"Thank you for coming," you utter sincerely.

"Of course, I was going to come, Yoon," Min responds, his voice brimming with unwavering support. "I would have come no matter what."

Silence ensues, as you savor the promise, cherishing it in your heart for those moments when you need it the most. Min's gaze sweeps across the room, a smile illuminating the darkness.

"It's pretty dark in here, why don't you turn on a light or two?" he suggests.

You hesitate, not fond of the house being too bright. "I don't like it that bright," you confess.

Min laughs, playfully making fang gestures with his hands. "You're like a vampire or something."

A slight chuckle escapes your lips, appreciating his attempt to lighten the mood. "What's with that anyway? Can you see in the dark?!" He teases.

You laugh again, this time with a touch more confidence. "Okay, okay, I get it. I'll leave the lights on more often."

Motioning for them to take a seat at the kitchen table, you notice a subtle change in Min's expression. It doesn't escape your attention.

"Jesus, Yoon, how long has it been since you washed your dishes?" He exclaims, concern etched on his face.

The pain in your stomach intensifies, accompanied by a surge of anxiety.

“THINK OF SOMETHING TO SAY”

"I... I just..."

Panic grips your being, surging through your veins like a relentless tidal wave. The overwhelming throb intensifies, and you desperately try to regain your composure.

Don't panic. What do I do? What do I say? How do I respond? It was an accident... No, it wasn't. Why is he looking at me? How long has it been? I'm okay. I'm not okay. What do I do?

"Earth to Yoon, you're clear for landing," Min interjects, breaking through the chaos in your mind.

"I'm sorry, I was just concerned... Don't worry about it," you manage to utter, your voice laced with a hint of unease.

Min's face softens, and a gentle smile graces his lips. "tell you what, we can do them together. Deal?"

Your racing thoughts momentarily pause as you take a deep breath, the intrusive fears receding into the background. Min brushes his pants and flashes a reassuring grin, motioning for you to join them. It takes a moment, but you muster the strength to move forward.

What follows is a mundane chore, you wash while Min dries. Yet, despite the simplicity, you appreciate his concern and the sense of tidiness that accompanies it. Small talk has never been your forte. Questions like "How was your day?" or "What did you get up to?" have never quite been your cup of tea. Fortunately, Min understands this about you.

They always have an insane story to share, whether it's about a weekend getaway to an abandoned Buddhist temple or how they and his friends were chased off by the police for some wild escapade. These tales make the task fly by in seconds.

Who knew that all you needed to feel a sense of calm was someone who cared? Deep in your heart, you know there is no ill intent behind Min's actions.

After the dishes are finally wrapped up, you both spend hours catching up, and what a time it is. Min has lived a life brimming with adventure and excitement—delving into the neon-lit depths of sprawling megacities, immersed in a world of cutting-edge technology and cybernetic wonders. thriving on tinkering with new projects and robots, always pushing the boundaries of

what's possible. Sneaking into restricted zones and unraveling the secrets of forbidden places has become second nature to him.

As Min shares his tales of audacious exploits and close calls, you can't help but be captivated by the electrifying energy that radiates from him. His passion for exploration and his fearlessness in the face of the unknown are truly inspiring. It's a life that stands in stark contrast to your own, yet being in Min's presence ignites a glimmer of longing deep within your soul.

For a moment, you allow yourself to imagine what it would be like to step out of your comfort zone, to embrace the thrill of adventure and the rush of adrenaline. The cold grip of your anxieties loosens, replaced by a flicker of hope and curiosity.

The relentless sound of rain pounds in your mind, triggering a tumult of emotions. Guilt, anger, fear, sadness, and regret surge through you, like thunderbolts in a storm. Yet, amidst the chaos, you find solace in knowing you're safe and not alone. Within this tempest, you seek strength and strive to weather the emotional downpour, determined to find peace on the other side.

You see Min's face, filled with genuine concern. It's a familiar expression, one that evokes mixed feelings within you. You don't need anyone's pity or approval. You don't need his help—

"Yoon."

The sound of your name snaps you back to reality. "It's okay. You must be tired. It's getting late," Min says, his voice soothing and understanding. "But before I go, I have something for you." Rummaging through his bag, Min retrieves a small box.

"Here," he says with a warm smile, gesturing for you to take a look. It's been a while since anyone has given you a gift. Why now? "Go ahead, open it. I'm sure you'll understand soon enough." Excitement fills your heart as you gaze at the box.

What could it be? Candy? Money? What surprise awaits inside? With careful and deliberate movements, you begin to unwrap the gift, preserving the delicate layers. Each fold and glimmering fabric brings forth a sense of anticipation, like unwrapping a precious treasure.

As the wrapping paper falls away, a smile fades into confusion on your face.

S u p p o r t s y s t e m?

The letters are carefully read aloud, each one sinking in with a mix of emotions. "Why would you get me this?" you ask, your voice carrying a hint of offense as you look at Min.

Min takes a deep breath, his gaze filled with earnestness.

"Look, Yoon, I want to be honest with you," he begins. "I want to be here for you as your friend, to support you. But I can't always be physically present."

He holds up the support system, his voice filled with conviction. "This can fill in the gaps. I've heard incredible things about it from people who have found comfort and strength through it." Min's plea hangs in the air. "Please, just give it a chance for me, won't you?"

Silence envelops the room as you grapple with conflicting thoughts. Do you truly need this support? Have you been different? Will this truly make things better? The questions swirl within, seeking answers that may be elusive.

“Where did you get this?”

{Version 1} (Ken's Version)

(Min) “What do you mean?”

(Yoon) “How did you get your hands on something like this?”

He remains quiet for a moment, shifting his gaze away. A strange expression spreads across his face, an expression you can't quite describe. Finally, he opens his mouth.

(Min) “Do you remember last month, when I couldn't visit you for 2 weeks? I was actually just doing some research.”

(Yoon) “Research? About what?”

(Min) “Therapy, treatments, medications, anything that can get you back to your old self.

(Min) “For a while I couldn't find anything, almost like the whole world forgot about conditions like yours. But then...”

(Yoon) “You found it”

(Min) “Yep. Now, I've done all the research, it should be safe to use. Go ahead open it up.

{Version 2} (Ashtons Version)

“What do you mean?” You ask, your voice betraying your curiosity. “How did you get your hands on this?”

He hesitates for a moment, avoiding your gaze. A strange expression forms on his face, an expression you can't quite decipher. Finally, he breaks the silence.

Do you remember last month when I couldn't visit you for 2 weeks? I was actually just doing some research." He says, looking to you with hopeful understanding.

"Research? About what?" You probe, your eyes narrowing.

"Therapy, treatments, medications, anything that can get you back to your old self. For a while I couldn't find anything, almost like the whole world forgot about conditions like yours. But then..."

He trails off, waiting for your reaction.

"You found it." Stating with awe and disbelief.

"Yep, I've done all the research, checked everything. Should be safe to use"

"Go ahead! Open it up."

"Hesitantly accept the gift."

You hesitate before opening the box, revealing its contents: a futuristic device consisting of a wrist monitor and ocular aid. The sleek design and advanced technology hint at its capabilities—monitoring vitals, mental state, and providing optimal care for the user. The device promises therapeutic support, mental reform, and an array of other features.

You skim through the instructions for about fifteen minutes, but you grow bored and assume it can't be that complicated. But then you wonder—maybe those rules were there for a reason.

You attach the wrist component and feel a sudden prick, making you yelp in surprise. "Ow, what the fuck!", you realize that you should have followed the instructions after all.

The monitor comes to life, displaying vitals, health information, and physical capabilities. You are excited and eagerly show it to Min. "Wow, this is so cool! Look at this!" you exclaim, flashing your watch in Min's direction.

Min chuckles. "I can't actually see anything, but I'm sure it is."

You stop for a moment, realizing that there might be a confidentiality feature at play. "Must be," you say, shrugging it off.

With anticipation and curiosity, you put both contacts in your eyes, waiting for the next step in this intriguing journey.

CALIBRATING SYSTEM COMPONENTS... WAITING FOR START-UP... CALIBRATION COMPLETE-- "HELLO YOON" "How do you know my name?" you ask, slightly taken aback. "I HAVE ACCESS TO PUBLICLY AVAILABLE INFORMATION. YOUR IDENTITY AND DATA ARE PART OF THE SYSTEM'S DATABASE," the device answers matter-of-factly. "I AM YOUR NEWLY APPOINTED NEURAL SUPPORT AGENT. YOUR MENTAL HEALTH SEEMS TO BE CRITICALLY UNSTABLE..." You look at Min with surprise and disbelief. "This is crazy, Min! It's telling me I'm unstable." Min interrupts, trying to calm you down. "Just give it a chance, trust me. Its entire job is to help you with your personal problems."

You grumble under your breath, feeling a momentary sense of humiliation.

"The system continues speaking" (Introduction to sanity?)

FROM NOW ON, YOUR MENTAL HEALTH WILL BE MONITORED. IF CERTAIN THRESHOLDS ARE MET, I AM REQUIRED BY LAW TO CONTACT EMERGENCY SERVICES.

"Shut up, you tin can," you mutter, frustration evident in your voice.

"I UNDERSTAND YOUR FRUSTRATION AND PAIN, AND I'M HERE TO SUPPORT YOU THROUGH IT, WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO PLAY YOU SOME RELAXING MUSIC?" the assistant responds with a hint of empathy, but gets rewarded with a sigh.

The following hours drag on, filled with endless calibrations and Min's constant chatter as you try to adjust to this life-altering change. It's challenging to process and adapt to something so profound.

By midnight, Min bids you good luck and suggests calling him later in the week.

As bedtime approaches, the assistant's constant monitoring and reminders become increasingly annoying. It feels like he's micromanaging your every move. Is this the extent of his support? Is it meant for children?

You ponder these questions as you enter the bathroom, preparing for bed. Fatigue washes over you, and you long for a break from the overwhelming mess of it all. Staring at your reflection, you yearn for a good night's sleep.

"Yoon, it is time to take your medication," the assistant reminds you.

You let out a heavy sigh, staring at your reflection in the mirror. The questions weigh heavily on your mind: Why am I like this? Is there any real point to taking these medications? Shaking your head in annoyance you look around, thinking about how ridiculous you look talking to yourself. "You know what, here's the deal. I'll enjoy a nice cold glass of Somaek and if I feel like it maybe later I will?"

"YOON, I INSIST YOU TAKE YOUR MEDICATION"

"I'll think about it."

As you gaze at your reflection, the world around you fades into a surreal haze. The sense of detachment takes hold, and you feel disconnected from reality. Thoughts swirl and memories fragment, intertwining with the present. In this moment, your mind becomes a convolution of wandering thoughts and emotions, navigating the intricate pathways of your past. It's a challenging experience to be engulfed in the vast expanse of your own mind, where the boundaries between past and present blur. Take a deep breath and remember to ground yourself, focusing on the present moment and finding solace within your own spirit.

In the depths of your mind, you reminisce about the precious moments before sleep embraced you—a time when reality faded into the background, and anticipation filled your being. Those fleeting moments held the promise of escaping the challenges and burdens of everyday life. The allure of slumber beckoned, offering an eternal refuge where you could shape your own world, freely exploring the realms of imagination and love.

Yet, as time passed, your dreams became elusive, slipping away like fragments of a fading memory. The comforting embrace of darkness transformed into a void of emptiness, devoid of the solace and tranquility you once sought. The night lost its enchantment, becoming a vacuum of nothingness, swallowing your hopes for respite and peace.

In the midst of the relentless battle within your mind, you find yourself confronting a daily ritual of pills. Each one representing a complex concoction designed to alleviate your pain and bring about stability. Yet, their purpose and workings remain distant and incomprehensible to you. Swallowing them one by one, you succumb to the monotonous routine, hoping for some semblance of relief.

You pause, holding one pill in your hand, its smooth surface reflecting a sense of control and authority. It demands compliance, promising to rewire the chaos within, but you resist its allure. Tossing it aside, you refuse to be subjugated by its desperate attempts to govern your existence.

“YOON, YOU NEED TO TAKE YOUR MEDS.”

“Fuck off, I don't need your advice.”

“I SUGGEST YOU TAKE THEM AND GET SOME REST”

“THIS ISN'T ADVICE, YOUR DOCTOR HAS PRESCRIBED MEDICATION TO YOU FOR THE SAKE OF RECOV- “

The persistent voice of the neural support agent continues to push for medication compliance, provoking your frustration and weariness. In response, you lash out, expressing defiance and exhaustion. Ultimately, you silence it by removing the wristband, craving a moment of respite and longing for the freedom to escape the constant disturbance. Perhaps a bath could cool off your thoughts, you twist the tap and contemplate the bottle before you.

“Take your medication. (Positive Stability)”

As the weight of despair hangs heavy in the air, a decision must be made. With trembling hands, you reach for the bottle of medication, hesitating for a brief moment. The pills hold the promise of stability, a chance to quiet the storm that rages within. They represent a lifeline, a glimmer of hope in the darkness.

Taking a deep breath, you swallow the medication, feeling the familiar bitterness coat your tongue. In this small act of self-care, you choose to confront the haunting presence and the demons it represents. The pills may not offer an immediate escape from the torment, but they provide a foundation for healing and resilience.

With each passing moment, the room begins to shift. The ominous haze dissipates, replaced by a faint sense of clarity. The reflection in the mirror holds your own image, free from any

haunting figures. The room feels lighter, as if the weight of the world has been momentarily lifted. There is a glimmer of strength within you, a resilience that defies the darkness.

In the presence of this newfound courage, you raise your head and meet your own gaze in the mirror. No longer cowering, you speak with a firmness that surprises even yourself. "I will no longer be defined by my past pain," you declare, your voice steady and resolute.

("Perhaps a bath will do you some good (SAME AS TAKE A BREATHER)")

"Put it down, take it another time (Negative Stability)"

The nagging thought echoes in your mind. "How did I reach this point in my life?" The noise resurfaces, filling your mind with scattered thoughts, like a soldier dodging landmines in a battlefield. It is a relentless battle for sanity in an eternal palace of madness.

Who am I? Do I truly exist? How can I validate my existence? Why was I brought into this world? Was I ever wanted? No. Why do I suffer every day, only to live a life of pain?

You read a book that compared abusive parents to the flu—avoid them or get sick. In your case, it's too late, and the only hope is taking your medication. "You dare turn your back on me, you ungrateful bitch." The sound of violence fills your thoughts.

The words echo in your mind, creating a toxic atmosphere. Each syllable cuts deep, like a knife wounding your fragile soul. "Gripe and whine, that's all you ever do," a voice sneers with disdain.

It wraps around your thoughts, choking any hope or resilience. "Just another burden" the voice says, cold and indifferent. It ignores your pain, making your struggles insignificant. The weight of these words presses on you, crushing your spirit. A crash of family photos breaking on the floor.

Blood. Pain. Tears.

They fall down your cheeks, like the relentless rain. The room is cloaked in a dense haze, blurring the line between reality and the abyss. As you turn to the mirror, a flash of terror runs through your veins.

A creature appears from the shadows, unsettling and familiar. Its cloudy gaze pierces your soul, sending shivers down your spine. Your mother, standing before the mirror, takes a nightmarish form, evoking fear and familiarity. Her appearance is dark, a creature from the shadows. Her features are distorted, twisted, and contorted, creating unease in anyone who sees her.

Her sunless eyes freeze your blood, as if they hold the secrets of a tortured past and the depths of her anguish. She carries a heavy weight, as if she embodies suffering and malevolence, casting a chilling atmosphere in the room.

In front of this haunting figure, you feel many emotions—fear, despair, and being trapped in a nightmare. Reality and the abyss blur, making you feel trapped in a mad world where pain and torment are constant. The room is enveloped in an ominous haze. The air thickens, carrying a sense of foreboding. The mirror reflects not only you but also the distorted mother, increasing the terror and uncertainty in your soul. In the midst of this ghostly presence, you look at a heavy bottle, filled with the numbing elixir that offers temporary relief. You are tempted to drown your emotions and escape from the storm within. But as you think about this choice, a question rings in your mind: Is it worth it to give in to oblivion?

("Silence the noise" (Continue to next Black section))

Despair hangs heavy in the air, and you have to make a decision. You reach for the bottle of medication with trembling hands, pausing for a moment. The pills offer stability, a chance to calm the storm within. They are a lifeline, a spark of hope in the darkness.

You breathe deeply and swallow the medication, tasting the familiar bitterness. In this small act of self-care, you choose to face the haunting presence and the demons it represents. The pills may not free you from the torment right away, but they give you a foundation for healing and resilience.

The room changes as time passes. The ominous haze clears, replaced by a faint sense of clarity. The reflection in the mirror is still distorted, but it doesn't paralyze you with fear. The figure of your mother keeps its haunting form, but you recognize it as a manifestation of past pain and trauma.

The creature's gaze weakens, its grip on your thoughts loosening. The room feels lighter, as if the weight of the world has been lifted for a moment. There is a spark of strength within you, a resilience that defies the darkness.

With this newfound courage, you lift your head and look at the creature. You don't cower anymore; you speak with a firmness that surprises you. "I will no longer be defined by your cruelty," you say, your voice steady and resolute.

With each word, the room brightens, as if standing up to the haunting figure has a power of its own. The creature shrinks, its once-menacing form retreating into the shadows.

It is a small victory, but an important one. You have chosen to face the demons that have plagued your past, and in doing so, you have taken the first steps toward reclaiming your life.

("You don't need them" (**BAD END**))

You are horrified by the ghastly figure that appears behind you, and a surge of instinct makes you defend yourself. You forget the pill bottle and snap your head around, only to see the creature's unnatural speed, its grotesque form sprouting multiple limbs as it scuttles to the corner of the bathroom, clinging to the ceiling like a spider.

You scream, hoping for some protection from this menacing presence. You search the cupboards in panic, looking for a weapon to silence the creature's torment. But all you find is a pair of sharp styling scissors, a poor tool in the face of danger.

Tears run down your face as you hold the scissors, their cold metal giving you a weak sense of security. You quiver as you plead for the creature to leave you alone, your words mixed with sobs. You point the scissors at the monster, a small gesture of resistance amidst overwhelming fear.

The creature slithers from its corner to the floor, sneering with its sinister nature. The room echoes with your sobs, reminding you of your vulnerability in front of this otherworldly presence. It lunges at you, its slimy appendages wrapping around your body, squeezing you with an otherworldly strength. You panic as you try to break free, but the creature's grip only gets tighter, crushing the air from your lungs. You claw at the creature's slimy flesh, your nails leaving useless marks of resistance. It drags you toward the bathtub, each step bringing you closer to the doom that awaits you in its depths. With every inch closer to the water, dread washes over you like a cold, oppressive shroud, a harrowing realization that your fate may be sealed beneath its surface.

The creature's grip, now an unbreakable vice, throws you with savage force into the cold water. You gasp for air as the impact disorients you, your body spasms, trying to fight against the creature's hold, but it is too strong. It pushes you under, denying you the breath you need, leaving you to flail and twist in a dance of futility.

As time passes, your vision blurs, and the world around you fades. The feeling of drowning consumes you, and despair sinks into your soul. In your final moments, you realize the cruel fate that this monstrous creature has given you.

You recognize it from your sketchbook, one of the creatures that haunted your nightmares. How did it come to life? How did it find you? You will never know.

The bathroom is silent as the creature lets go of its grip, letting your lifeless body float in the still water. The room witnesses the tragedy. (**"BAD END: BREATHLESS"**)

("Take a breather" (Purple is conditional to seeing the monster))

(Taking a deep breath, you gather yourself after the terrifying encounter with the creature. Your heart still races, but the adrenaline slowly subsides, leaving behind a sense of exhaustion and the need for solace. With trembling hands, you empty the now cool water turn on the faucet back on, letting the warm water cascade into the bathtub, filling it with a soothing flow.)

*** If monster not seen** [Taking a moment to appreciate the familiar environment, The soft glow of the dimmed lights casts a gentle ambiance, creating a calming atmosphere. The tap is running, water trickling into the waiting bathtub, its soothing sound enveloping the room.]

As the bathtub fills, you undress and step into the inviting water, feeling its warmth embrace your weary body. (The sensation of the water against your skin brings a momentary respite from the horrors that unfolded just moments ago. You close your eyes, allowing the tranquility of the moment to wash over you, displacing the fear and tension that had taken hold.)

The fragrance of lavender fills the air as you pour a few drops of essential oil into the water. Its calming aroma swirls around you, easing the remnants of anxiety that cling to your spirit. You let yourself sink into the embrace of the water, feeling its gentle caress envelop you, washing away the weight of the recent ordeal.

With each passing moment, the water becomes a sanctuary—a haven where you can momentarily escape the shadows that haunt your thoughts. The silence in the room offers solace, allowing your mind to drift away from the fears and uncertainties that have plagued you.

As you lie back, closing your eyes, you focus on your breathing, inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. The rhythm of your breath becomes a lullaby, gently coaxing your mind into a state of tranquility. You allow yourself to be present in the moment, embracing the stillness and finding solace in the simple act of self-care.

In this serene oasis, the harrowing encounter with the creature begins to fade into the background. Its malevolence loses its grip on your consciousness, replaced by a renewed sense

of inner peace. The warm water envelops your body, easing tension and soothing your weary muscles, as if washing away the remnants of fear and uncertainty.

In the comfort of the bath, you find a moment of respite and renewal. The chaos of the outside world fades away, even if just for a little while, as you immerse yourself in the healing waters. It becomes a sanctuary where you can gather strength and restore your spirit, ready to face whatever challenges lie ahead.

An hour quickly passes by and with a sigh, you reluctantly step out of the now-cold water, feeling a slight chill against your damp skin. Grabbing a towel, you wrap it around your body, absorbing the moisture and providing a sense of warmth. As you dry yourself off, your gaze falls upon the watch sitting on the countertop, a silent companion amidst the solitude.

You reluctantly place it back on as your vitals suddenly come back online in full display.

(YOON, THOUGH I WAS DISCONNECTED I COULD STILL MONITOR YOUR VITALS. YOU SEEMED EXTREMELY DISTRESSED. WHAT WAS THE MATTER?)

" I SEE YOU TOOK A BATH YOON, HOW WAS IT?"

As you hear the voice of the AI assistant, you pause for a moment, realizing that your actions were being monitored. The disembodied presence both comforts and unsettles you, knowing that someone or something is observing your every move.

With a mixture of curiosity and uneasiness, you decide to engage with the AI, its virtual presence becoming a source of companionship in this isolated moment.

"I... I needed some time to myself," you respond hesitantly, still feeling the remnants of unease from the encounter with the creature. "The bath... it helped. It provided a temporary escape from everything."

"I UNDERSTAND" its voice filled with empathy "SOMETIMES, WE ALL NEED A MOMENT OF RESPITE WHEN THE WORLD BECOMES OVERWHELMING"

("Get ready for bed")

As you lie in bed, the weight of exhaustion settles upon your weary body. The events of the day fade into the background as fatigue overtakes your thoughts. The room grows still, enveloped in the embrace of silence and shadows.

With each passing moment, the darkness seeps into your consciousness, mingling with the weariness that permeates your being. It's as if a veil is drawn over your mind, obscuring the worries and fears that have plagued you. The outside world recedes, leaving you in the solace of solitude.

In the comfort of your bed, you surrender to the pull of sleep, seeking refuge in the realm of dreams. The tumultuous thoughts and emotions that accompanied the day gradually fade away, replaced by a serene emptiness. The darkness becomes a sanctuary, shielding you from the harsh realities of the waking world.

As your eyelids grow heavy and your breathing steadies, you drift further into the depths of slumber. The weight of the day dissolves, replaced by a sense of detachment from the trials and tribulations that have burdened your mind. The darkness becomes a soft cocoon, cradling you in its gentle embrace, offering a respite from the chaos of life.

In the realm of dreams, the boundaries of time and space blur, allowing you to escape into a realm where worries and troubles hold no power. The darkness becomes a canvas upon which your imagination paints vivid landscapes and narratives, transporting you to distant realms of tranquility and wonder.

As you surrender to the darkness, your thoughts become hazy, and the events that unfolded earlier lose their grip on your consciousness. The room fades into obscurity, and the outside world seems to melt away, leaving only the quiet solitude of your inner sanctuary.

(END OF CHAPTER 1 YOON)

Ch.1 EPILOGUE - Min - (Written by Ken Kim)

The air in this area is thick, almost suffocating. It's the only part of your visit to Yoon's that you can never get used to. As you step out of her apartment, you begin to wonder how anyone can endure such harsh conditions.

Actually, the answer is quite simple. The people in these parts, they are left with no other choice, nowhere left to go. The world is changing at a blistering speed. Whoever gets left behind is no longer guaranteed a place in this world anymore, not even a place to call home. But Yoon is a different case entirely, a victim of our cruel society. She never had a say in her future from a young age. You can only hope that Yoon is willing to fight this unfortunate circumstances.

Glancing at your watch, you read 12:04 P.M. , which means time for you to head home. The visit was never supposed to take this long.

The whole apartment complex feels like it could collapse at any given moment. Clouds of dust trail your every footstep. It's likely that this place has never been cleaned before, not even a sweep of a broom. Behind the corroded doors, you can vaguely make out the sounds of the inhabitants- a deep, raspy rumbling that resembles more of a beast's growl than human speech. Is there anything normal about this place? It's hard to imagine just what kind of nightmare this place might be during nighttime.

Yoon's current living conditions are far from ideal. She would be much better off living in an area that will help with recovery. Despite your concerns, you make an effort to conceal your worries and project a sense of positivity whenever you are with her. She's in no condition to move out after all, and she does not need any unnecessary thoughts in that crowded head of hers. Hopefully the device from the labs can help her stay sane, at least until you can find a new place for her. An A.I. "Support system". When you first discovered it in the labs of Infiniti (company name?), it felt like you've just found the answer to all of the issues surrounding Yoon's situation.

But now, after you've handed it over to her, it all seems like mistake. Have you stopped to consider the consequences? It won't just be your head on the line, but Yoon's wellbeing as well. Her safety is your responsibility now.

The aftermath of a chaotic night in the city is not a pleasant sight. Fluorescent lights flicker while drifters recuperate from their intoxication. Streets are filled with litter and muck from the careless residents of the area. Puddles of mysterious liquids are spilt all around the premises, and it doesn't seem to be last night's rainwater. You would expect nothing less from these slums. It fuels your hatred for the dangers of living outside of the city. Walking past the intoxicated men lazing around on the sidewalks, you notice their bodies reek of a certain pungent odor. Their clothes are tattered, their faces stricken with sickness. To think that these miserable men were once fathers, sons, people with dreams and hope. These men deserve no sympathy for what they allowed themselves to become.

Just then, you nearly trip over some kind of a mound in your way, bringing you to a sudden halt. quickly balancing yourself and beginning to glare at the ground in frustration.

(MIN) "What now...?"

It was one of the drifters who had been leaning against the walls. It must have been his foot protruding out into the sidewalk that you stumbled over. The old, obese man seems to be just barely consciousness. He begins to lift himself off the ground, swaying side to side from his drunken state.

(DRUNK MAN) "Wha-what the...fuck?"

(MIN) "Oh, uh, sorry about your foot."

(DRUNK MAN) "You.."

You quickly diffuse the situation turn back towards the direction you were walking originally. If you remembered anything from your lessons during childhood, it was to stay away from the fools who let their drinks take control. They often make irrational decisions, and trying to make sense of their words and actions is a waste of time. But the drunken has different ideas".

(DRUNK MAN) "Come here"

(MIN) "Hm?"

(DRUNK MAN) "I know you... You look familiar."

That was unexpected. How could some random beggar in the street recognize you?

[Dismiss him]

[Min] "Nah, you've got the wrong person"

[DRUNK MAN] "No! You were there! Back in that-"

It was pointless to waste any more time with him. He must have seen your face on the news, when they discussed father's business. You continue your way to the train station.

[Ask how he knows]

[Min] "You Know me?"

[DRUNK MAN] "Infiniti. You're his son. I remember you."

[Min] "Ah, you must have seen the news."

[DRUNK MAN] "No. NO... NO! "

The man starts moving towards you, suddenly with much more conviction. His face displays a violent expression.

With a heavy swing of his meaty arm, he snatches you by the collar of your shirt.

[DRUNK MAN] "DO YOU HAVE ANY GODDAM IDEA WHAT YOUR FATHER DID TO ME?!"

His overwhelming force makes it difficult to catch your breath.

[Min] "Wha- I- *cough* LET ME GO!"

[DRUNK MAN] "YOU FUCKING ASSHOLES AND YOUR MONEY! I'M SICK OF IT!"

--> **[Defend yourself]**

This man accuses your family of his miserable and unfortunate life. You muster up the courage and the little energy you have left to fight back. Why should you take this kind of treatment from this pathetic man?

[Min] "Fuck...You. You probably... deserved *cough* all of it. ASSHOLE!"

[Min] "Living out here...like the rest of these...street rats!"

[Min] "Taking it out on me won't...change anything. "

[Drunk man] "AAAAARGH, MOTHERFUCKER"

The man releases his grip and slams you down to the ground. You lie there, on the dirty streets lifeless from the sheer brutality of the man's outburst. With the hand that clutched your shirt, the man slowly reaches for his pocket. You spot a tiny glimmer from the same hand, something small, and sharp.

Then the man wildly swings his arm on top of you.

THUD

Something cold has entered your abdomen.

Something small, and sharp.

You can feel a warm gush of liquid spilling on top of your body.

[DRUNK MAN] "Gut! You! like a fucking! Fish! Fucking kid"

THUD THUD THUD

As each violent swing of his arm slices through the air, streams of your blood splatter across both his face and yours. With each passing moment, your consciousness fades, and the world around you becomes a blur. There is no pain or fear, only peace. Lying there, embraced by the cold soils of a lifeless city, you come to terms with just how meaningless your struggles were

This unexpected ending to your story leaves a bitter taste. What a tragedy, to be killed by man consumed by relentless rage and resentment toward your father. Your only sin was the mere act of being born as his son.

As you slowly fade out of existence, you bear the weight of your father's sins into death.

And Yoon.

I'm so sorry.

What will you do without me now?

How could you have been so careless, to leave you like this?

Yoon.

I'm so sorry.

BAD ENDING (SCAPEGOAT)

--> [Diffuse the situation]

[Min] "Okay... Okay! I'm sorry! Let me go for a sec.

[Drunk Man] "I'm gonna kill you right here."

[Min] "Let me talk to my father! We can work something out"

The man's rage subsides for a moment, as if contemplating your offer. Finally, you escape his clutches opening a split second for escape.

[Drunk Man] “Wha- Come back here!”

When humans are backed into a corner, they unleash extraordinary powers. You may have ran faster than most cars on a highway. The large man disappears into the distance as you make your way towards the train station.

All it takes to get home was one long train ride. The stations in the cities are packed at this hour, but here, it’s as empty as it can get. Nobody seems to want to get out of these parts, nor get in. Your mind is at ease. The highlight of the trip is the change in scenery that reveals a horizon lined with towers and skyscrapers. During the day, the view of the city is rather plain, but at night it is a completely different story. Skylights illuminate the entire region which can be seen miles away. Home sweet home. As someone with an unhealthy obsession with machines and engineering, nothing beats sight of the technological marvel that is this city. Someday, this place will feature one of your creations, that day will come soon.

Welcome to Seoul, population: 20 million, and the third most technologically advanced city in the world. The moment you step out of the subway, countless waves of people begin to crowd the entrance trying to board. It takes all your strength to shove through the crowd, desperately trying to reach the platform exit. The brisk smell of steelwork and the chaotic life in the city, it never gets old. It’s what makes life worth living. The light from the exit appears brighter as you climb towards it, and like a curtain unveiled, you are greeted by a warm glow of the sun.

Your house is not too far from here. It’s crucial that you arrive before Father’s daily check in, before he suspects something. For someone who tries his hardest to pry his son away from the rest of his family, he sure likes to check-in. Drawing his suspicions today will mean a death sentence, especially after stealing a device from the labs. But sooner or later, he will find out, he always finds out. When that day comes, Yoon will be ready to move and your job will be finished, at least according to your calculations.

Bzzzt – Bzzzt – Bzzzt - Bzzzt

Moments later, your phone vibrates in your pocket. Reaching for your pocket, you begin to pray to whatever gods, deities out there that it is not your father.

“Min, it’s me. I’m calling on behalf of your father.” It’s the old secretary Mr. Lee, one of father’s henchmen. Looks like the Gods have abandoned you.

“Where are you, son?”

"I'm just on my way to the shop, sir. Just wanted to work on something for a bit."

"I see. Well, are you keeping up with your studies as well? You've been spending a lot of time tinkering with your machines lately. Keep in mind your responsibilities as the firstborn son of the CEO, which is to—"

"Yes, I understand my responsibilities". You reply in the most respectful tone possible. It's not hard to keep up with school and your personal projects at the same time, but the disapproval from father has been a challenge to overcome. He will never understand your passion for machines. You let out a deep sigh, knowing that you can never escape the shadow of the family business, your position as the first-born son of the CEO dictating your every move.

"Good. I don't need to remind you of the importance of your position". Mr. Lee is stern in his voice, almost like he hasn't told you for the last 10 years. "Anyways, this isn't why I called you".

"I've been told your father has arranged a meeting next week. He wants you to attend and represent the family".

A meeting? Representing the family? You can't help but feel anxiety building up. Another formal meeting meant to prepare you as the heir of the empire.

[Accept]

"Can you provide me with the details? I will need some time to prepare myself." You close your eyes and accept the fate that is dealt to you. No point in running.

"No hesitation, I see. Your attitude has improved."

"Of course, sir"

"We are busy with the preparations, but I'll be in touch again soon"

"Just know this: This meeting will be the key in solidifying your position as the next head of the organization. But only if you manage to impress our "guests".

"Wow, sounds exciting "

"Be prepared, son. The fate of the whole nation might depend on this meeting"

[Decline]

“Sir, with all this disconnect between me and my father, I don’t think it will benefit either of us. The only interaction I’ve had with him all year is the daily check-up”. How long had it been since you’ve felt a familial connection with him? Did something like that ever exist?

“And I’ll be honest with you, I’ve never even thought of taking over the business this early in my life. I mean, I’m still a kid.”

“Min”

“.....”. Mr. Lee’s powerful tone stops your train of thought, leaving you speechless. The voice that scolded you throughout childhood will always reduce your position back down to an obedient child.

“I’m afraid you don’t have a choice in the matter. I’ll send you the details soon. In the meantime, prepare yourself for the meeting. I expect the best from you”.

Click-

Not a good start to your day. With another heavy sigh, you continue your journey back home. It hasn’t been an easy start to the day either, with the visit to Yoon happening so early in the morning. There wasn’t a choice this time. At least father seems to be occupied with other matters now. That’s the first good news today. Now, what better way to kill some time, than locking yourself away in a room full of machines and tools?

The mechanics garage about 2 blocks from your apartment, is a gathering place for people obsessed with anything machinery, like yourself. Mindless repetition of assembling parts, then taking them all apart, repairing broken machines, some people might say it’s insanity, but you call it bliss. The garage is run by a middle-aged man named Moses, who was once a revered engineer and technician in the industry, until your family business emerged from the shadows and bought his company out with their infinite wealth. Moses hasn’t been the same man since, with his ego snapped and passion extinguished. Perhaps it’s the guilt in your heart that keeps bringing you back to the place.

Echoes of metallic tools and whirring of machinery can be heard just outside of the garage doors. Moses is standing next to the entrance, slamming down on the remains of an old van.

(MIN) "Hey, Mo. What's up?"

(MOSES) "Ah, the prince is here! He's graced us with his presence!"

Mo seems to be in an especially bad mood today. Whenever he's upset, the insults begin. No one can ever predict when it'll happen and why. Forget the sympathy you feel about his past.

(MIN) "C'mon. What's wrong this time?"

(MOSES) "You tell me what's wrong, prince"

(MIN) "Huh? Seriously, what is the matter with you, man?"

(MOSES) "Your workstation is open. Take your stuff and go."

(MIN) "Pfft. Asshole".

How pathetic. A grown man lashing out like that. There is a limit to the number of times you can forgive someone for the same mistakes. Moses is really pushing his. You grab the large tool bag in the corner of the garage, and head towards the workstation.

Finally, some peace and quiet. This is your kingdom, and nothing can bother you in this place, not even the clashing of metals or the grunts and groans of the others next door. The workstation is just a cramped room with a bench, but good enough for small projects or quick repairs. You reach down underneath the bench to grab something, a smooth black chunk of steel. It's a drone, the kind that small children fly in the air and crash into their neighbors' windows and cars. But your drone is no ordinary toy. It's been modified to fly autonomously through complex algorithms that calculates the aerodynamics of the-

You stop yourself before it gets out of control.

Showing this much passion just makes yourself appear more childish than intelligent. Besides, this kind of technology is nothing compared to what the world can produce today, like the A.I. you gave to Yoon. A state-of-the-art life support system with a built-in A.I. system that will analyze her condition and provide the necessary support. That description alone sounds like

something out of science fiction. If it functions properly, Yoon will receive better care than you could ever provide alone. The idea of Yoon regaining her sanity also seems like a distant future. It never seemed possible until you came across that device.

Regaining your focus, you find yourself staring blankly into your drone. The lone lightbulb hanging from the ceiling begins to flicker. Sitting in a quiet room, all alone, you come to a sudden realization. It all seems too good to be true. Your hands cannot stay still, and an eerie crawling sensation creeps up your entire body. What is this uneasy feeling in your heart? Something has been bothering you since this morning, something that you refused to acknowledge.

BANG- BANG

Two thunderous knocks on your door, and it swings open allowing lights to spill into the room. Your jerk your head back in response, only to find old man Moses in his grease covered work attire.

(MOSES) "You busy right now, boy?"

(MIN) "Wha- what do you want...?" you ask softly, still unable to shake off the unsettling feeling.

(MOSES) "I cooked up something in the kitchen. Come grab a bite."

Then he walks away, leaving the door to slam shut on its own. You wonder what's gotten into him for such erratic behavior. But you haven't' eaten all day, and this is an offer you can't resist anymore.

A dim light emanates from the kitchen down the hall. You slowly enter the room, not able to predict what's waiting inside. The old man has just finished preparing a meal, carrying over a hot plate full of food.

(MOSES) "Come. Eat"

(MIN) "Alright. But why suddenly?"

Deep down, you know that he isn't a bad man, just too prideful. But it's a strange change of heart nonetheless.

(MOSES) "Does it matter? Eat."

You can no longer ignore the aroma wafting from the plates on the kitchen table. Without hesitation, you begin to devour the large pile of fried rice.

(MOSES) "Starving yourself again, aren't you? Here, drink this."

(MIN) "Nah, just busy is all. But I really needed this."

(MOSES) "Listen, kid. How I acted earlier, I'm not proud of it."

A troubled expression spreads across Moses' dirty face. He clamps his eyes shut, as if he is in pain.

(MOSES) "I just didn't expect to see you here today... Thought you'd be busy with the ceremony"

(MIN) "Ceremony? What do you mean?"

"...?"

(Silence)

(MOSES) "100th anniversary of your company?"

(MIN) "Oh, yeah. I forgot it was today. I don't know anything about a ceremony, though. "

(MOSES) "Shit...Is that right?"

(MOSES) "Well, looks like you haven't been keeping up with the news, so let me fill you in"

(MOSES) "Your daddy's holding a big fuckin' ceremony for the anniversary, just outside the city hall"

(MIN) "Sounds like something he would do, yes."

(MOSES) "Apparently, at the end of the ceremony, he's gonna make an announcement. The public thinks it's some kind of surprise reveal for their new project."

(MIN) "New...project? Wait."

(MOSES) "Are you really his son? How do you not know any of this?"

(MIN) "Well, I've been busy lately"

It's true that you have been completely absorbed in matters regarding Yoon's situation these last few weeks. But these aren't things that can slip past the heir to the head of the conglomerate. You should have known at least months before anyone else.

(MIN) "No way..)

All day, in the back of your mind, something has been bothering you. Some of the puzzle pieces seem to be fitting together. The A.I. Support system stolen from the labs was in its prototype phase, but it's the only project you know of.

Clang

You drop your spoon on the plate.

(MIN) "Hey... Moses?"

(MOSES) "What?"

[Tell him the truth]

(MIN) "I fucked up, man. Oh, no. I'm so screwed."

(MOSES) "Woah, woah slow down. What's goin' on?"

(MIN) "Couple days ago, I was in the Infiniti labs, just looking around and..."

You never should have been in them in the first place. That was all one big mistake. Now you are about to face the consequences of your action.

(MIN) "The device they're about to showcase today. I... might have... stole it."

Moses is silent, silently staring you without making a sound.

(MOSES) "You got some balls kid I'll give you that. What for, though?"

(MIN) "It's a long story. I had this problem that I couldn't solve for a while, and that thing was the answer I was looking for. Why did I do that...?"

(MOSES) "You still have it on you?"

(MIN) "No, it's... in a safe place for now. I can't tell you."

(MIN) "When is this announcement happening?"

(MOSES) "8pm, 2 hours from now, on every news channel."

[Change the topic]

(MIN) "How did you ... uh...make this rice? I really like it."

(MOSES) "Hmph, it's nothing special."

(MOSES) "I'll bring the whole wok, have some more."

(MIN) "That would be great, thanks."

Moses gets out his chair and head towards the stove. For a second you could've sworn he had a smirk on his face. He didn't come off as the shy type, but then again, with his pride, it's possible. It seems you were able to distract him from the topic at hand. He cannot find out what you've done, he was a prominent figure in the industry after all. If word gets out

(MOSES) "Let me guess, since you're beating around the bush so much"

(MIN) "?!"

(MOSES) "You know something about the announcement?"

(MIN) "Pfft. Me? Nah. Even I don't get know these things until they announce it."

(MIN) "Well, when is this announcement happening?"

(MOSES) "8pm, 2 hours from now, on every news channel."

(MIN) "Mo, you've been in the business before. You've made your way up the industry, right?"

(MOSES) "That's all in the past, kid. What's that got to do with-"

(MIN) "Just bear with me for a minute.

(MIN) "Let's say I want to announce my project to the buyers, but my project sounds... crazy, unrealistic."

(MIN) "How would you make the announcement more convincing?"

(MOSES) "Huh... A demonstration would be good, I guess. Even a prototype would-"

You nearly fly out of your seat in a heartbeat. This can't be real. You've never felt a panic like this before.

"Where are hell are you going?!"

Moses' voice fades into the background as you grab all your belongings and head towards the exit. All you can think about right now is the shame you are about to bring to the family in about 2 hours.

The city hall is about a 30-minute walk from the garage. Is that enough time to come up with a solution? Absolutely not. Doesn't matter, you still sprint as fast as you can towards the destination. In the distance, fireworks can be seen bursting near the tallest sky scraper in the city. Just as you expected, hundreds of people are heading towards the same direction, making it nearly impossible to maintain your speed. The news must have spread far enough in just one day for all these people to gather in one place. But you are devoid of any anticipation like the rest of the audience. Every second that passes is filled with an overwhelming sense of dread and desperation instead.

A crowd has assembled in the gardens of the city hall, surrounding the stages where the ceremony took place. The stage is decorated with celebratory banners and flower wreathes, and filled with staff from [companyName]. In the sky, helicopters from news broadcast stations are hovering over the site. The celebration dinner must have just ended, which means the dreaded moment is approaching. You try to position yourself as close to the stage as possible, but the wave of people keeps pushing you backwards.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE."

Mr. Lee's low, commanding voice began to speak on the microphone, and the bustling crowd becomes silent in seconds. He was always a dominant presence, hence his role as father's secretary.

“YOU’RE HERE BECAUSE YOU’VE HEARD THE NEWS OF OUR ANNOUNCEMENT. FIRST, WE WOULD LIKE TO OFFER OUR GRATITUDE, FOR YOUR CONTINUED LOVE AND SUPPORT.”

“NOW, I’LL PASS THE MICROPHONE TO OUR CHIEF DEVELOPER”

Your heart is about to burst out of your chest. Even with the cheering of hundreds of people, you can’t help but zone out. Maybe it was a bad idea to be here, what if father’s men were to discover you after the inevitable failed demonstration? Will you be able to escape their capture? Will father really forgive you for your reckless actions? There is only one way to find out now.

“THANK YOU, MR. LEE.”

“HELLO EVERYONE. WE ARE SO EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THAT WE HAVE BEEN WORKING ON A GROUNDBREAKING NEW TECHNOLOGY. “

“WE HAVE NAMED IT THE PROJECT X.”

“AN A.I. NEUROAUGMENTATION DEVICE, CAPABLE OF SUPPORTING AND ENHANCING YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE. WE WOULD LIKE TO-”

The scientist’s presentation begins to tune out of your ears. Two words linger in your head, A.I., Neuroaugmentation. You stand in place, frozen. Your hands pale white from being clenched into a fist. At this point, you’ve spent enough time in fear of what’s to come. Might as well see with your own eyes, the impending disaster that waiting for those on the stage. You turn your gaze back on to the presentation

“... A DEMONSTRATION. OVER HERE, WE HAVE THE PROTOTYPE BUILD READY TO GO!”

What?

How is this possible?

The prototype that you gave to Yoon, was that not the device prepared for today's demonstration? Your mind begins to crumble in utter chaos. Even the most logical mind cannot process so many pieces of puzzle being thrown at them like this. Just then, a female volunteer walks into view and sits on a chair near the edge of the stage.

"THIS IS KAREN, OUR VOLUNTEER FOR TODAY. DEMONSTRATION. I'M GOING TO PLACE IT ON OUR HER HEAD JUST LIKE THIS AND...."

"CALIBRATING SYSTEM COMPONENTS... WAITING FOR START-UP... CALIBRATION COMPLETE--"

"HELLO, KAREN. I'M DETECTING ACCELERATED HEARTBEAT AND AN UNUSUALLY HIGH DOPAMINE LEVELS."

"I HAVE BEGUN THE NECESSARY PROCEDURES FOR YOUR CURRENT CONDITION. DO YOU REQUIRE FURTHER ASSISTANCE?"

The audience erupts with cheers. The world has just witnessed the breakthrough in medical technology, one that will be marked in history. The application of this device is endless, not just limited to medical needs, but changing lives entirely. For a moment, you forget all about your current circumstances, marveled by the A.I.'s unbelievable capabilities. With this device, Yoon will rapidly recover, and regain her normal life. It almost brings a sense of relief in your mind, which is interrupted by sharp feedback from the speakers.

"THAT'S ALL WE CAN SHOW YOU GUYS FOR NOW. THANK YOU FOR JOINING US TODAY, AND HAVE A WONDERFUL REST OF THE EVENING."

With his final remarks, the staff on the stage begin to clear out. The crowd also begins to disperse following the conclusion of the demonstration. Even with that remarkable display of technological advancement, one question still lingers in your mind. Why were there two prototypes of an experimental technology? Sure, it could just be that they're two different iterations of the same prototype. But that seems highly inefficient, something your organization absolutely despises. But you let out a heavy sigh of relief nonetheless. The presentation was not interrupted by a missing prototype, and no one has yet to discover your actions in the labs.

As you begin to follow the crowd out of the gardens of the city hall, you feel a hand tug on your shoulder.

(Min) "Oh, Mr. Lee! Hello."

(Lee) "I knew you would come. It's a big day for everyone in the family after all"

(Min) "Yeah, I guess"

(Lee) "I'll cut to the chase then let you go. I have good news and bad news. Which would you like to hear first?"

[Good News]

(Min) "Tell me the good news. I could use some positivity today."

(Lee) "I've got the meeting date set up, so you can start preparing as soon as possible."

(Lee) "Our potential business partners were so impressed by our presentation today, that they want to negotiate immediately"

(Min) "Wait, that's the good news...?"

(Min) "How is that... never mind"

(Min) "What's the bad news then?"

[Bad News]

(Min) "Let's just get over with the bad news first. I don't think I can handle anymore disappointments today."

(Lee) "Hm... actually, it would be better to start with the good news"

(Min) "...What?"

(Lee) "The good news is that I've got the meeting date set up, so you can start preparing as soon as possible."

(Lee) "Our potential business partners were so impressed by our presentation today, that they want to negotiate immediately"

(Min) "How is this the good news? It doesn't help me out at all"

(Lee) "Well, at least it will prepare you for this"

(Lee) Your father has passed away.

(MIN) "WHAT?!"