

A Conversation with the Imagination

By Blue-Maned_Hawk

You are sitting at your desk, in your chair, in your workspace, your feet on the floor. You're stressed. You've got too many burdens of things you need to do that life has forced upon you with no regard for you, individually, as a person. Nearly every waking hour, you daydream about if you were just a bit more free, if the rules were just a little looser, if you had just a bit more time. But you know that you'll get to that point eventually. Right now, you can do naught but wait and go along with what's put unto you.

For years now (or at least, it feels that long—you haven't actually checked in a while, but you're pretty sure that's correct), a small child has haunted you. Not literally, of course (and frankly, that would probably be nicer), but haunting you inside, as part of two separate larger haunts. One of those haunts is the fear of the inevitable in spite of what's already happened, in spite of what's already been ruined, in spite of that fact that you know (or at least you think you do) that you'll hate what will happen because of what you already know. The other haunt is the haunt of your sins, weighing down upon you like the sky on the shoulders of the titan, with the knowledge (or so it seems) that you won't be able to contain it forever, and that eventually, you'll need to confess to at least some of the horrible things that you've done.

But recently, the child has manifested in your mind in a very different way: as something—nay, someone—who you can interact with, who you can understand, who you can almost *feel*. He has manifested as if he was a real person. The rational part of your brain knows that these are lies, merely over-fantastical imaginations to cope with the hellish (ha) world you're in, nothing more than fake hallucinations. But the irrational part of your brain indulges them anyway, enjoying these fantasies despite them being unhealthy. It's almost as if you've bonded with the child who haunts you.

Right now, though, that's not what's happening. You're sitting at your desk, in your chair, in your workspace, your feet on the floor. You're stressed. You're tired. You're overworked. You're sat there, overthinking the thing you're working on, with a combination of hellish factors from the world around you converging on you, weighing you down like clothes soaking wet with liquid glue. The stress, the tiredness, the work, all of them funnel down into a perfect maelstrom of pain and suffering. It would be a perfect time to go insane.

And then, the child rounds the corner and says "I know that I'm not real.". And at once, a million thoughts rush into you:

He brings happiness wherever he goes. He's gorgeous. He'll listen to whatever you say. He's completely normal. He's stubborn in his ways. He's an enemy of the people. He's done terrible things. He's inconsistent. He can be trusted to do the right thing. He's a victim of so many people. He's bold. He'll be the end of me. He's a dear, close friend. He's unforgivable. He's careful. He would run into a burning building. He's completely innocent. He's secretive. He's bizarre. He's shy. He's straightforward. He's so ugly.

Stop.

He says this command in a firm voice, but in one that carries an air of kindness, of meaning, of care. It's just like him to do that. You suddenly realize that you've been stammering for what was probably fifteen seconds, but which felt like quintuple that time. You were trying to get words out—you didn't particularly care *what* words, exactly, but you wanted to be able to say *something*—yet you just weren't able to.

"Why didn't you tell me?", he says to you in a tone that, out of context, could seem like disappointment or even anger, but his face betrays his true feelings. His head is tilted slightly down, with his eyes looking right into yours, his eyebrows slightly making the shape of a steeple. His mouth is in that type of slight frown where the bottom lip is jugged out just a little bit. His nose betrays nothing in particular—it's too set into his face to be able to do so. His ears droop more than they usually do.

You can tell that he's disappointed. But this is a real disappointment, emanating not from masked anger, but from true care and compassion, of a genuine want for the best for you.

"I—wu—uh—the—"; you struggle to get your words out. You pause. You think for a moment...and at the end of it, you say "It's because I—I wanted you to be happy.", and immediately feel as though you didn't think for long enough. You speak with a stutter that you never normally speak with.

"So you lied to me."

"Y—yes, yes, I-i did. I lied b-because I wanted the best f-for you." Tears begin to well up in your eyes. Your companion's eyes stay completely dry. You could have tried to claim that it wasn't lying, but merely not telling the whole truth, but you know he wouldn't fall for that—and, besides, you don't *want* to try to claim that, because you *care* about him, and you *want* him to know the truth now.

You don't normally stutter like this.

"You knew this was going to happen, didn't you?", he says.

He speaks the truth, and you know it. You had known that this was going to happen for...about three weeks now, since about the time he first manifested as a person. So you try to say this to him. "Y-yes," you say, "I-i-i-i knew th-that—I knew tha—"—you falter. You can't speak correctly. The rational part of your brain knows that this is ridiculous, but the irrational part of your brain overpowers it, and you begin to cry. And you sit there, crying, crying, crying, crying.

After a few moments, the small child begins to ascend your chair. It takes a bit for him to do this, throughout which you continue to cry.

When he gets to standing on your seat, he goes to hug you. You accept his embrace with vigor—perhaps a bit too much vigor, as when you do so, you hear him go "uœp!". This worries you for a fraction of a second, but as he breathes out onto your shoulder with perfect calmness, you know that he's okay.

You continue to weep. With the embrace, your tears come out much more readily, in a waterfall that descends your face into a stream across his shoulder and probably down his back. You continue to hold him as the tears exit your body, each drop taking with it a little bit of the panic you were feeling. Within a few minutes, throughout which the kind embrace continues, you feel confident enough to speak again.

"Yes. I knew that this was going to happen. I had known that it was going to happen for a while now. But life got in the way. I knew that it had to happen as soon as it could, because otherwise I would continue to bond with you, and it would make it more and more painful once it finally happened. But I got delayed, and I got distracted, and I made mistakes with the timing. I didn't want it to be as painful as this is."

You suddenly realize the weight of what you just said. You just said to him that you didn't want to bond with him, that it would be painful if you did.

You're worried that you hurt him.

But as he takes his head off of your shoulder to look at you, he says to you "I understand.", and you can tell by the tone of his voice that he means it. He knew that the answer would be something like that. His eyes are still completely dry. He slips down from your seat.

"You know how this is going to end, don't you?" He speaks this as he begins to walk away, a tone of solemn acceptance in his voice, his little hands in his pockets. You get up to follow him.

"I—" is all you can manage before you choke up again. Your eyes begin to moisten again. You don't want to accept how this will end.

He speaks again. "I know that by the end of this, I'll be gone forever." You don't want to accept this, and you begin to cry. "No! I-i can keep you! You c-an st-a-ay! If you're a pa- if you're in m-my he-ead, i-if y-you—" is what you manage to say before he comes to you and says "Hush." in that soft, high voice of his. You weep, collapsing to your knees.

You don't normally stutter like this. The last time you did, it was when you were crying in fear. But this time, you're crying in a different way, not out of fear, but for release, out of real, genuine sadness.

The little boy speaks again. "I know you want me to stay. But I can't. Now that I know I'm not real, we can't go back to before. We can't restore the state that our connection was in. Our bond is forever shattered."

As he says this, your eyes widen as you suddenly feel it. The bond really, truly is shattered. It burns your soul.

"B-but I want you to stay!"

"You know that these imaginings are unhealthy for you."

"Ye-yes, but th-they make me and y-ou h-happy! I don't wa-ant you to go!"

"But if you continue to seek solace in your mind, you're only going to harm yourself. You're going to make things outside of your mind worse for you. You're going to ignore the real world in favor of the things in your mind. You're going to harm the bonds you have in the real world, the ones that really matter, in favor of the ones in your mind. I want us to be happy too, but I know that the only way for that to happen is if I go."

His words shake you to the core. You don't want them to be true, but you recognize that they are, and there's nothing that you can do about that.

You collapse thoroughly to the ground and weep, and weep, and weep, and weep, and weep. The small child sits down next to your collapsed body in front of your face, his legs crossed. His eyes are *still* dry.

Hugging in this position on the hard floor you're on right now would certainly be uncomfortable, so instead, he grabs and holds your hand with both of his. You continue to weep, and eventually, you speak.

"So you're putting my happiness above your own existence? You're ceasing to exist for my own benefit? That's insanity!"

You're sat right the way up now. You're speaking in a frenzy, overcoming the stutter from the tears. "Hush." the small child says, as you realize with regret that you were speaking in a terribly angry tone. "It's not my choice to leave you. It's just what's going to happen. The least I can do is talk to you one last time to ensure that you'll continue to be happy when I'm gone."

"But surely there must be another solution! Surely you must be able to stay while we can both be happy!"

The small child lets out a small chuckle, one certainly appropriate for his size. "There isn't one, I'm afraid. Besides, you know what my true origin is. You know that I'm not an original product of your mind. And you know that eventually, you're going to find yourself in the presence of the person from whom I originated, but from which I've since become a wholly different gestalt. It's better for me to go before then—I don't want your perception of who 'I' really am to destroy what you think of me, and leave our connection on a low note. You know that that's what would happen, because the way in which you've formed me from what you know about 'me' has been through fragments and bits of a bad first impression, one that's certainly going to be inaccurate when you finally meet 'me'. And in any case, even if it was my choice to go, it's still one that I would take, because I know that I'm not real. You, however, *are* real—you can have *real* effects on the world. You can do *real* good things and bring happiness to *real* people. I can't do that. I'm just an idea, and a false, mangled one at that. It's blunt, but it's true: I don't matter as much as you do."

...

These words hit you like a sack of wet bricks, each word pounding you straight to the heart. But though you'd previously reacted to such words with tears, you now react to these ones with nothing but mute astonishment. This time, you really, truly understand what he's saying.

You sit in silence for a few minutes. The small child continues to hold your hand.

Finally, you speak.

"You're going so suddenly. How will I continue without you? How will I fill the hole you're going to leave in me?"

"I think you know the answer to that. You knew this was going to happen, after all." He says this with a small chuckle.

You sit for a moment, knowing the truth, but waiting for him to say it anyway. You're not completely sure why.

"You have your friends. You can deepen your bonds with them. You can talk to them more. You can actively seek out meeting with them, instead of just relying on stumbling across them. They're the ones who can fix the hole in you, even if they don't realize they're doing it."

"Wouldn't that be taking advantage of them?"

"You wouldn't be harming them by doing so. In fact, you'd probably be helping them, too. It's a net gain for all involved."

"Huh." This doesn't sit right with your common sense, but it does seem right to the logical part of your brain.

You sit in contemplation for a few more moments. You slowly realize how insane this whole conversation is. You speak again.

"Can I—" You gulp. "Can I tell others about this?"

The small child begins to look uncomfortable. "I know you're going to anyway."

"Do you not want me to? I don't have to."

"No, no. I know that if you tried to suppress it, you would fail. You'd eventually burst out what happened tonight and why, and you'd end up destroying your reputation. I don't want that for you. Instead, what I request from you is this: Be extremely careful with what you tell people, especially on the internet, where you can't take things back. Tell an incomplete story—hide the details that could harm you. Lie if you must—and you will need to at certain points. Be intentionally vague. But make it clear that you're telling a lie—eventually, when you meet 'me', you're going to have to tell everything, and you don't want to be considered dishonest. But again, and most importantly: *please* be careful. I don't want you to be harmed."

You look to the ground next to him and let out a sigh as your eyes begin to moisten a little. "I understand," you say. "I will respect your wishes. I don't want to disappoint your memory when you're gone."

"Thank you," he says with a smile.

You sit there in silence for a few more moments. You start to wonder how he knew he wasn't real. You decide to ask him.

"How did you know that you weren't real?" you say.

"I thought about it for a bit and realized that if I *were* real, then there's no way that I'd be acting this way. I realized that all of the memories I had that I could remember the details of clearly were ones with you in them. I noticed that I almost felt as though I shared your thoughts, and then I realized that I *was* one of your thoughts. So I manifested myself in your head, and I explored your mind for a bit, trying to determine what I truly was. That's how I knew so much about what would happen tonight."

"You explored my mind?!" you blurt out in terror.

The small child chuckles. "Don't worry," he says, "you've talked to me enough and I know you enough that nothing really surprised me. Except for one thing; one sin that you've committed multiple times that was genuinely fucking disgusting."

His swearing takes you aback. He's certainly younger than what would be reasonable for that level of language. But you know what he's referring to, and you think that that was *definitely* the correct level of intensity for that statement.

"That secret", he says, "is one that I hope you take to your deathbed. That secret could destroy you under any circumstances. Revealing it to anyone, even those you trust the most, would be dangerous. Please keep it safe. I don't want you to be destroyed."

"I wasn't planning on telling anyone of that."

"Good."

You and he sit there for a few more minutes, your hand still clasped in his.

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And then, he stands up. "It's time for me to go now," he says with a contented smile on his face. You stand up with him. "Will you ever come back?", you ask him.

"No. I am leaving forever. Even if you think you see me, I'll be even less real than I am right now. I as I exist right now will never return. But I can leave you with something to remind you of me."

He pulls a flower out from behind him. It looks vaguely like he pulled it out of his butt, but more realistically, he probably pulled it out of his back pocket. Or maybe he pulled it out of thin air—he is a being of your imagination, after all.

The flower is like nothing you've ever seen before. Its stem is pure black. Its petals are yellow and green. Its center is white with a tinge of red. You take it from his hand in astonishment, and twirl it around in your hand in amazement. The rational part of your brain knows that it's not real, but despite that, you can feel the softness of the petals, the grain of the stem, the roughness of the roots, and it feels as real as the clothes on your back.

"Take it and plant it in your mind." The small child says this as the flower fades into you, as you feel it travel through your blood, through your heart, and into your brain, where it plants itself in your mind.

You go in to hug him again. He accepts your embrace happily. You hug him tight—you know that you can't put your full effort in, as he's so much smaller than you that you'd hurt him. But you can feel his embrace tighten to the firmest he can get it—you can tell that he's putting his full effort into you.

The hug seems to last for a century, yet at the same time, it seems to be over in an instant.

You both release each other. You stand up. He's fading now. You both walk backward a little.

"Farewell." He says this with a contented smile on his face.

"Farewell." You say this, returning his contented smile.

And in a few seconds, he fades from view, gone now forever. And you collapse to the ground in agony, and weep. The tears spill from your body, watering the flower now planted in your mind. You vow to yourself to preserve it forever to honor the small child's memory.

After some minutes of weeping, you collect yourself, and you get back up. He explicitly stated many times that he wanted you to be happy, so you cease your crying and instead focus on how happy you are with what you managed to accomplish with him when he was still around.

You walk back to, and sit in, your chair.

You turn on your computer.

And you begin to write.

"You are sitting at your desk..."

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