

ABSURD  
By Mohammad Khan

A car ran into me and I flew a few feet before I kissed the hard concrete. A pool of warm blood filled beside my face. I writhe from pain and can hardly speak. I hear people rushing to my aid. In a fleeting moment of consciousness, a single thought passes through my head: huh, they actually do care.

Eric wakes up in a hospital bed with a broken wrist and many bandages and stitches covering his forehead. A hand woven red and blue bracelet sits atop his cast. The room was white and bland. The tv ran on the news. A girl sits beside the bed reading a book, *Pride and Prejudice*. It's Bridget. She wears dark rimmed glasses with fiery red hair tied in a ponytail. A small red and blue hand woven bracelet sits on a table beside Eric and sits on Bridget's wrist. She looks up from her reading seeing that I'm awake.

"Your mom asked me to be here", she says. She puts her book down and faces me. "How are you feeling, Eric?"

"She couldn't come herself", says Eric spitefully.

"You know she wanted to but-"

"But she was busy or didn't have the time. Just like graduation, birthdays, and anything that requires emotional engagement", said Eric finishing her sentence. He's heard it a thousand times before.

Bridget doesn't respond. She stands and grabs her book. "I have work in half an hour. Take Care. I'll be back afterwards."

"I'm not going anywhere." A black notebook sits at his bedside.

Bridget stops and turns around. "Almost forgot, Hannah wishes you well."  
Bridget hands him a letter.

Eric perks up. "She did?" His cheeks redden slightly as he reads the letter.

Bridget smiles. "I have work, but I can cancel if you want me to stay."  
Eric doesn't respond, he's too engrossed with the letter from Hannah,

Bridget leaves Eric alone with the bland TV running. He's focused on the letter, absorbing and analyzing each word, syllable, and meaning.

He looks up and sees Bridget left behind the bracelet still sits there. Eric wears a similar bracelet. He puts the letter down and flips through the channels.

He stops on a *It's a wonderful life*. The entire family embraces George Bailey in its climatic scene. The love and warmth emanate from the screen filling the entire room.

Eric stays captivated by its warmth. Inspired, he places the letter in his black notebook, flips to a fresh page, and begins writing.

He begins. "March 15. I think I've found her."

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**5 DAYS LATER:**

Eric and his best friend, Steven, stand in Eric's bed room. It's messy with clothes on the ground and a trash can in the back. The wall is bare except for Hannah's letter framed.

Eric's wounds have scarred, but he still wears a cast with the bracelet atop it.

"I'm going to do it. It's the only way. Steven.

"This is too far. You can't hurt self just to show how much she cares for you. Try talking to her first."

"I'm too timid and I'll mess up if I do." Eric points to the framed letter on the wall. "I have to know Steven. How she actually feels for me. I don't know of any other way."

"What about Bridget?"

"Bridget? She's different- she's a friend."

"So you're going to kill yourself?"

"Fake kill myself, but yes."

Steven thinks for a bit. "No, I-I can't. This isn't right."

"Eric", his mother calls. "Come set up dinner." Eric slumps down the steps towards the dining room and Steve follows. The walls of the house are bare except for a few paintings of flowers. Calendars, receipts, and coupons fill the fridge along with one happy photo of 4 year old Eric.

He and his parents sit at the dinner table quietly eating. Steven eats quietly.

"How's school", asks dad. "Keepin your grades up?"

Eric doesn't even look up. "Fine." He slouches in his chair and doesn't hide his morose face, begging for attention.

"Eric, don't slouch", says his mom. "Honey, did you hear about Albert Jones?"

"No", says the father, "What happened?"

"He's getting married. Met a nice girl. Broke a leg for her."

"That's great news! Reminds me of myself."

She laughs. "A half-dead proposal?"

"Still said yes."

"How could I not", she replies in a quiet voice. She looks at Eric. "Y'know, Bridget's a great girl, I'm sure if you broke an arm she'd sworn."

"I don't think Eric needs to break an arm for Bridget."

"What're you talking about Steven? Of course he does", says Eric's dad.

"It's what everyone does. It's how you find someone?"

“But can’t it be changed”, asks Steven. “Do we have to?”

Eric pushes away from the table. “Can I be excused?” He leaves without waiting for an answer.

Eric reaches halfway up the stairs and hears his mom say. “It’s may I be excused. Not can.” Steven and Eric’s parents continue their bickering. He closes the door behind him.

His room’s silent, the sounds of his family don’t reach him.

He grabs his notebook filled with journal entires and sketches of how he’ll die, and sits on his bed.

He flips the entry titled March 15 and reads quietly to himself. “I think I found her.” He trails off, skimming the rest. “She doesn’t know she likes me. I need to go further than just pain. Faking my own suicide will show her how much she truly cares for me.” He hears the front door closes.

From his window, he sees Steven walking to his car and driving off.

He falls onto his bed and goes to sleep.

Eric’s phone vibrates. It’s a call from Bridget. He groggily looks at his phone. What could she want, he thinks. He puts the phone on silent and goes to sleep.

Someone knocks on his door.

“Eric”, says his mother softly. She pushes the door open and turns on the light. “Eric something’s happened.”

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A gray casket is being lowered as people cloaked in black suits and dresses surround it. Steven, Eric’s parents, Hannah, and other close family. Eric is nowhere to be seen.

Hannah’s long brown hair hangs from beneath her black hat. She tightly clutches dark-rimmed glasses and a letter as the casket is buried.

People walk by her offering condolences.

Steven walks by. “How are you doing? I know you two were close.”

Hannah looks at the buried casket. “Where Eric?”

Steven shrugs. “I don’t know. I thought *he’d* be here. He was close with Bridget.”

“I can’t believe she’s actually gone. I told her it wasn’t a good idea. That she should just talk.”

Steven sees the letter in her hands. “She left something for you?”

Hannah looks around. “Not for me.” She sees someone sitting on a bench in the distance. Steven follows behind her.

From a distance, Eric sits at a bench rubbing the bracelet on his wrist. He’s in the same black attire, a small envelope sits from his jacket pocket. Hannah and Steven walk to him.

“Eric”, says Hannah softly. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

Eric doesn’t look up. “Yeah thanks.” Hannah sits beside him and hands him the envelope.

“She wanted you to have this.”

Steven sensing his presence is superfluous. “I’m sorry about Bridget Eric.” He puts a reaffirming hand on his shoulder. “Take care. I’ll see you later.” Steven leaves them alone.

“Damn”, says Eric folding the letter. “I wish I knew earlier. I wish I saw. Maybe she’d still—” He brushes off the falling tears. The white envelope falls out of his jacket.

“what’s this”, says Hannah. She picks up the letter. It says addressed. *For Hannah*. With a glance to Eric, she opens the letter.

“It was meant for you”, says Eric. “I was supposed to be in there... not her.”

“Eric, I can’t—this isn’t right.”

He nods. “I understand.”

“No, no, no. I mean hurting yourself.” She moves closer to Eric and faces him directly. Eric looks at the ground as she continues. “There are people who truly care about you and wouldn’t want to see you hurt.”

He scoffs. “No one cares. It’s just transactional. It’s a means to an end. Bridget saw it too.”

“But she was wrong. You cared for her. And so did I.”

“And what good did that do her? She’s still 6 ft under. We cared but she didn’t know or could tell that anyone did.” Eric looks at Bridget’s letter again. “Just couldn’t see how much people did.”

“Maybe you’re not seeing it either.”

Eric scoffs. “My parents met through pain. My father was half-dead when he proposed. I don’t know how else to know. Steven and Bridget were the only ones that cared. No one stays.”

“I am. And I do care.” She looks at the letter addressed to her. “Eric, you can’t go on like this.”

Eric looks at her. “I don’t know if I’ll ever get better.”

“I can help you.” Hannah rests her hand on his shoulder.

“I’d like that.”

As they embrace in a warm hug, Eric thinks to himself, she really does care.