

Part 1

Through the miniscule holes in the blinds that the strings pass through, the sun shines in at such an angle that it perfectly strikes you in the eyes, waking you via the sudden shock of bright red observed through your eyelids. You sigh and roll over to glance at the alarm clock on your bedside table. It reads 6:59 AM.

Funny, you think. Well, I guess that's fine, since my alarm clock goes off at 7:00.

You shut off the alarm clock before it can go off. You decide to forgive the sun for waking you and go about your morning, getting dressed and wondering what your new job has in store for you. The first-day jitters don't really seem to be affecting you much, though— you're confident in your capability to perform the tasks asked of you despite not knowing exactly what those will be. You also silently wonder as to the probability of the sun hitting you precisely in the eyes as you slept.

Probably only possible this one day out of the year, you reason.

You finish your morning routine and leave your place of residence. Only then do you realize you forgot to pocket-check to make sure you have everything you need. You quickly pat your pockets. One feels slightly thinner than usual. Just from the amount of matter missing as felt through the outside of the pocket, you recognize the missing object as your wallet. You rummage through your pockets to find your keys to go back inside, but those are gone too. You remember that you placed a key under the door mat for this reason, just in case, and you feel a small sense of pride as you lift it up, prematurely congratulating yourself for your foresight. Your heart sinks as you see nothing but a small bug that quickly scurries away, startled by the sudden light much like you were just moments earlier.

Your wallet contains your bus pass, your government ID, your money, and your work ID. You check your watch to see how long you have until you're expected. It reads 6:59 AM. You sigh, and frustratedly wonder if it broke the same time the sun woke you.

You have your phone, at least, so maybe you can get a ride from a friend. You contemplate how much gas money you'll need to pay them for their support before you even pull your phone out of your pocket. That still doesn't solve the problem of not having your work ID, though. You kick yourself and imagine a scenario in which you're communicating with a senior colleague about your inability to enter the building. "Oops!" imagined you says. "I forgot my work ID on the first day because I really wanted to show you *just how important this job is to me.*"

How are you going to get back into your apartment, too? All of these overwhelming thoughts and scenarios resulting from a careless mistake pile up on you, and you fight panic.

“One step at a time,” you reassure yourself as you pull out your phone to call a friend. Your body doesn’t listen, however, and as you descend the stairs to get to the street, you take two steps instead of one and stumble. As the adrenaline pumps through you, you assess the damage to your surroundings. Your body seems to be fine. You didn’t *fall*, just stumbled. Your phone hit the concrete stairs face down, though, and you brace yourself for what you know is coming when you flip it over. You gingerly pick it up and look at the screen.

It’s... fine! It’s fine. There seems to be no visible damage. You turn it on to make sure it still works, and it turns on as normal.

The clock on your lock screen reads 6:59 AM.

You pause and think, even though you know you shouldn’t have time to. Do you have time to? What’s even going on?

Surely the phone’s internal clock isn’t wrong, it has to be connected to some larger server or something, you rationalize. Then... how?

You decide to not put any more thought into it and call a friend for a ride.

“What’s up?”, they say.

“Hey, I was wondering if I could ask you for a favor,” you say, anxiously.

“Depends on what it is, but maybe!” they respond. “Are you okay?”

“I locked myself out of my apartment without my wallet and keys and need a ride to work,” you say, ashamed.

“Oh, I see. What time do you need to be there by?”

“8:45 AM,” you say. “Hey, what time does your clock say it is?”

“6:59 AM, why? That’s plenty of time to get there. Where is it? I’ll be there in about twenty minutes. Sorry to make you wait outside in the cold weather for that long.”

“Oh, thank you so much! I don’t mind waiting, promise. It’s certainly much better than trying to walk. It’s at Time...” you pause, wondering about their clock.

“Time...?” your friend says.

“Yes, sorry, lost my train of thought, Time Crunch Solutions. It’s in one of the big business buildings on 5th.”

“Yeah, plenty of time. Okay, see you soon!”

“Bye!”

You hang up and debate whether to sit on the curb or continue standing. It’s just cold enough that sitting on the curb would sap a lot of your heat energy, but standing would also be uncomfortable for the next twenty minutes, especially if you’re to be standing the whole day at work. You decide to sit with your hands in your pockets to conserve warmth. It works fairly well, and with your mind occupied as to the morning’s events, the time passes very quickly.

Your friend appears in their bright purple Volkswagen Beetle. They’ve attached oversized decal eyelashes to the headlights as if they were huge, comical eyes. It’s so incredibly tacky, and you can’t decide whether you’re glad or ashamed to be riding in that car on the way there. You decide to be glad and appreciate the inherent humor in the entire situation.

“What time does your phone say it is?” you ask.

“I’m driving,” they say. “I haven’t looked since we hung up, and I’m not about to look now.”

“Your dashboard clock says it’s 6:59 AM, which is the time it was when we called.”

“That’s... definitely interesting,” they say. “I’m not sure why that might be.”

“Yeah, me neither. My clock read 6:59 AM when I woke up—”

You pause, realizing that you have no idea how long the clocks have been frozen at 6:59 AM. You could be way later than you think.

Surely they'll understand, especially if I'm not the only person this is happening to, you think. But of course, I am the only one who would've forgotten my wallet. Ugh. Your friend snaps you out of your thinking.

"So your clocks have been stuck there too?" they ask.

"Yeah," you say. "I hope I'm not late."

They shrug. "If it's happening to everyone, then they'll understand."

"Something like that," you say, not convinced.

"Do you wanna listen to music? You can choose."

"Sure," you say. "Is The Mountain Goats okay?"

"Always."

"Have you heard their newest album yet?"

"Nope!"

"Let's start, then!"

You put on *Clean Slate* and gently bop to it with your friend in their bright purple and many-eyelashed Beetle towards 5th Avenue while all of the clocks are stuck at 6:59 AM. You choose once again to laugh at the absurdity of it all.

Your friend gently pulls over to let you out on 5th Avenue. It's not nearly as busy as you would've expected. You figure it has to do with the clocks thing and shake your head, feeling as if you must be lucidly dreaming.

"You okay? Need anything else before I go? Do you have a ride home figured out?"

"I'm okay. No, not yet, but I'll let you know when I figure something out."

"Okay. My shift starts at 11, so I won't be around until 8-ish. I hope you don't have to wait that long."

"Yeah, me too. Thanks again for the ride, I'll let you know!"

“Of course, any time!”

You watch as they pull away. You gaze up at the various tall buildings on the side of the street and remember which one it is from the interview. You enter the lobby and freeze. No one is in the lobby. More concerning, no one is behind the front desk. It seems eerily quiet.

You walk up to the front desk. On it lies a hastily folded sheet of paper, with “Michael T.” written on the front. You unfold it and find a note typed in Georgia. *What a terrible font*, you think while reading.

Hey, pandemonium in the office today. Head to room 113 ASAP, we need as many folks working on this as possible. It’s down the hallway on the right if you’re facing the direction you were when you walked in.

You put down the note and walk down the right hallway, contemplating how the note didn’t account for the chance that you could’ve entered the front door walking backwards. You find room 113 and try the door. It’s locked. There’s a note on the door. They again picked Georgia as the font. Frankly unforgivable. Like, someone had to click on the dropdown menu and manually select Georgia, of all fonts. The thought makes you sick.

A bunch of systems got fried today. You’ve probably noticed the clocks are all stuck at 6:59 AM. This is a big problem. The solution to this puzzle is the key to this room. Thanks.

You glance at the knob. Its lock is secured via a four digit code on a nine digit keypad (1-9). You continue reading the note.

(Continued on next page)

There are four people. Those four people each have different names and like different colors, drinks, and The Mountain Goats albums. These attributes are indexed from 1-4 from left to right.

Names: Jovi, Joy, Jonah, Jamie

Colors: Blue, Pink, Red, Yellow

Drinks: Water, Milk, Tea, Coffee

Albums: Jenny from Thebes, Sweden, Getting Into Knives, The Sunset Tree

Jonah likes blue.

The person who drinks milk likes yellow.

No two people share the same index of attribute (e.g. no one likes blue and also water).

Digit 1 is the sum of the indices of Jovi's favorite drink and album.

Digit 2 is the sum of the indices of Joy's favorite color and drink.

Digit 3 is the sum of the indices of Jonah's favorite drink and album.

Digit 4 is the sum of the indices of Jamie's favorite color and album.

(Move on to part 2 once solved)