

CHAPTER 19

The parts, as small as they may have been, held within them some form of intelligence or instinct. They were frightened by ends. Every one of them, without exception, was of the opinion that ends were *useless* - that they served no purpose in our otherwise perfect society of pieces and creation. We could just as easily go on forever, if that's what we wanted, but that choice wasn't given. We were instead presented with an end.

"It's unfortunate and upsetting," life would say, standing before you. "I understand all of that. But this is how things have always been. You are done here. This is where it ends."

Beginnings were different. Those were treasured. It's quite possible that a beginning could not exist without an ending, and if this was true, perhaps complaining wasn't the answer after all. You could not help but feel grief, in either case.

Those peices weren't very accepting of this fact. They were not prepared, in any sense of the word, for this to happen.

It wasn't part of their purpose to take a gander at the future, and their "future prediction" facilities - or whatever else you could call such things - were limited to finding the answer to a single question: "are we, at this moment, passing through the *final tunnel*?"

The answer to that question was "yes."

Care stood up in front of her nearly completed machine, prouder than she ever had been before. While this was a nice moment, the commotion was unsettling. The pieces weren't happy about this at all.

"What?" she asked, placing her ear to the happiness engine. "What's wrong?"

In a disturbingly large quantity of languages, all in an instant, over ten thousand variations of "the end" were catapulted into her. She was sent back several feet.

"It's about to end," said the rectangular piece, having finished sobbing. "Say goodbye."

"What do you mean?" Care asked, standing back up.

The room was polluted with fear, and nobody could hide from it. Feeling immense emptiness at this stage, the rectangle sniffed one last time and continued.

"You're never going to make that engine," it began. "You're never going to make anything."

"Why not?" she asked.

"It's the end, Care. *You're over.*"

The room started to shake; coming upon this realization, the rectangle ran back to the corner. The remaining pieces - the *unsafe* ones - cowered in fear, but with nowhere to go. Instead, they participated in one last group hug, causing the happiness engine to glow with warmth. The screaming calmed down; it seemed as if the pieces were finally ready, that they accepted everything that was going to happen.

Except for that lonely rectangle. He missed his only opportunity to go out with a bang, and instead spent his last minutes in the corner of a cold, dark room, crying.

The entire happiness engine - and all of the love it contained - burst into flames, before finally exploding right there in front of Care's eyes. All of that time, all of that effort - none of it mattered. It was all gone in a matter of seconds.

She wasn't aware that her body was on fire, as well. And that the entire room was collapsing. The only picture in her mind was a heavy, circular piece, and what would have happened if it had been retrieved. Nothing else was of interest. It was all gone.

Before she could even notice, the tunnel had vanished.

Marvin didn't see himself as the kind of man who would, without hesitation, plunge forward at a small child with an axe planted firmly in his hands. He always viewed himself, instead, as the victim of such an act. It was a pleasant feeling, to have turned his fate around in such a way.

It wasn't exactly his intention to kill at that moment, but he was certainly ready to.

Care had woken up a second earlier; upon viewing this dangerous weapon, she released a quick shriek of terror and rolled off the bed. Marvin felt a smile emerging and forced it away. He didn't want to appear happy.

The dolls were waiting for her anxiously. They sat on the other side of the room, holding hands, meditating. Care collided with several, and all connection was lost. You could swear that those dolls were not frowning a moment ago, and yet suddenly it was clear that they were.

Care didn't understand. It was safe, before. It was peaceful, before. She had reached the end of the tunnel, only to be greeted by this monstrosity of a fate. It was like birth all over again.

The black paint watched in amusement. It knew everything.

All of the doors and windows were open. Full access was granted to every breeze, every insect, and every lunatic. With no exception. This old man, here, was essentially *invited* into the house. And none of this seemed to matter to anybody except for Care and Marvin.

As it appeared that lying on the floor wasn't the safest option, Care stood up and ran for the stairs. Marvin - as was typical, gaining the incredible ability to make his eyes vibrate through the power of confidence and recreatory murder - followed her down. The stairs screamed in pain and fear.

Care was dealing with several problems at once. The house was cold. She was about to die. Her head was throbbing with pain.

She gripped her forehead tightly, but none of that seemed to help in the slightest. This sensation was apparently coming from the very center of her head.

Marvin was approaching. He took his time, however, as he was in a state of patience that he had never once experienced.

"I have over a hundred orange bandages," he said, stomping his feet as he walked down the stairs. Care's screaming, which began only a few short seconds before taking her last step down the stairs, would not cease.

"You're going to be pretty," Marvin continued, picturing himself as he held his axe up high into the air. "I am going to cover you."

The world was definitely raining down on everybody, but none of them noticed because their lives were far too perfect. That's what Care was thinking, anyway. It seemed to make enough sense - unless she was just going insane or something. That felt like a possibility, too. Maybe.

She searched around the house for what would hopefully seem like a good place to die - or live, if that was feasible. The back door was much more intriguing than the front, which she had considered earlier. It was almost safer - *glowing*, even. The darkness had taken over every other door, but this one was inviting her. It wanted something that she had.

She approached the door; quite steadily, but still aware of the situation. Or not. Everything seemed to disappear into her head, where the throbbing pain continued to intensify. Opening the door felt marvellous, and an incredible warmth spread throughout her body.

"Where are you going?" Marvin asked, watching as Care took her first couple of steps outside of the house.

Care turned around briefly and uttered a single word.

"Out."

This came as a slight shock to Marvin, but he got over it in a matter of seconds.

"What're you going to do out there?" he asked.

Care's face formed a blank stare.

"Nothing," she said. Her head had suddenly calmed down, like it had accepted everything.

Marvin stomped on the floor and twitched.

"Nothing?" he asked. His axe was singing. "Great."

The universe danced around him; it came to him, at that moment, that this was all just a musical, and we were all having a grand time. The planet waited with anticipation!

"I'm thrilled to hear the resulting avalanche of your discovery," he continued. "And I'm positive: this is a fabulous axe."

But he could wait no longer; if this axe was so *magnificent*, what sort of reward would it deserve?

Only as Marvin regained his position in the world did he hold up the axe again; it smiled back. He charged at Care, wasting more of his precious energy on screaming than on anything else.

Care waited.

When Marvin found himself close enough, he finally decided to act on his wishes. As exciting as this was, it was fairly short-lived; Care took that time to scoot out of his way, intentionally tripping him with her foot. He fell to the ground, but only after his scream came to a sudden halt. Care felt the urge to giggle at this.

Marvin cursed at society. It was not his intention to be lying on the cold ground, but indeed this was the fate presented to him.

The plan, for Care, was to run. But her current distraction was the sight of a small human silhouette, standing behind a tree. He was carrying an intriguing device.

Yes. *Quite* intriguing. Care didn't appear to have anywhere else to run; it would have been a smart move to find help, but up until that moment, the world felt emptier than ever before. The good news caught up to her, ending her temporary delirium. This was a lucky situation.

She attempted to retrieve his attention through jumping and waving. It clearly worked, but his only response was to hide.

This was normal. It's not like anybody was being paid to keep her alive. Care accepted it, but only for a fraction of a second; this happened to be just enough time for her to notice Marvin, once again standing on his two angry legs. His forehead was pumping with glorious juices - the kind you would normally only experience a moment before your equally glorious demise.

Care's goal was a glorious demise. But this wasn't it.

"I *hate* you," said Marvin, shaking endlessly, eyes bulging from his head. His feet were glued to the ground. "I want to take you. I want to take everything away from you. I want to do this, girl. I want you to die, girl."

The pain came rushing back. It wasn't playing around; this time, there were serious problems.

She grabbed hold of her head and shook it violently. Nothing would work. The world was inside of her that day, eating its way out. This wasn't planned - nobody saw it coming - but you can bet that, in the corner of their minds, the opportunity was given consideration. The opportunity to take a poor little human, and put her in a situation that her head could not withstand. Yes, she had it all figured out.

Marvin began to laugh lightly.

"If I don't kill you," he began. "Then I certainly know what *will*."

This wasn't what Care wanted, but it made perfect sense. She, once again, caught a view of the figure in the distance. That friendly little device. All he wanted was to exist, and to have a reason to exist. And this may have been, at last, a happy ending for

him. For his owner, too. Quite interesting footage, this would turn out to be.

"Grip tightly," Marvin said, following his own orders. The axe, feeling this, became very aroused.

Care took her fabulous leave; that is to say, she sprang in the opposite direction to seek help from a smiling camera. Her hands did not move, but instead decided - all by themselves - to grip tightly. The sky above, and the grass below - witnesses to this entire scene - had nothing in particular to say about it; cameras, however, weren't quite as shy.

She could hear them well, those furious footsteps. Marvin was, unfortunately, much quicker than her. The camera, and its owner, did not move a single inch. They were watching. They were experiencing.

This was the world. Curious, curious people. All they wanted was entertainment. All they wanted was that feeling of superiority; that feeling of safety. If Care could experience this herself, perhaps she would take a liking to it. But, at least in this lifetime, she was on the other side.

And this head of hers, as disruptive as it was - she appreciated it. No pain in the world was worse than this, but that wasn't a matter of concern. The matter of concern - or, rather, the only truly *good* news in the last week - was that, in the next minute, her dream was about to come true. And it was all on tape.

She tripped, falling a mere two feet away from me. The degree of her suffering was quite clear from her expression. Marvin continued to follow.

In the center of Care's head, I can only assume, was some sort of chemical substance. In the center of *my* head, I can only assume, was some sort of intense satisfaction.

If one were asked, for no *apparent* reason, to compare the size of her head at one moment to the size of it at the next moment, it would be quite natural for him to experience some amount of confusion. Why would there be a difference, after all? This "confusion", however, would be microscopic in comparison to the absolute bewilderment involved in *confirming* the size change. In other words, one may laugh at an unusual idea, but the moment proof is presented, this laughing will surely cease. And I, along with Marvin, were done laughing at this point in time.

To put all of this in simpler terms, Care's head was growing at an unbelievable rate.

Marvin stopped, and his axe hit the ground. We didn't talk. We forgot that words existed. We forgot that axes existed.

Nobody made a single noise - except for Care. Care was screaming.

It was quite natural. Her skin was losing its ability to be a part of her body, after all. If that sounded like some sort of overexaggerated statement, it wasn't.

That wasn't the shocking part, actually. Marvin didn't have it in him to feel any kind of sympathy at this point, and the whole idea of a head growing to large proportions was familiar enough. However: for this to somehow backfire in some stupid, unnatural way, did not occur to him. Not even once!

For my own safety, I ran a fair distance away, hid myself behind a tree, and pointed my taper in a satisfying direction. (By "satisfying direction", I of course refer to the direction of that *giant bloody head* in front of me.) It was a happy feeling.

Care's veins were in the midst of some kind of terrifying claustrophobia. It would have taken buckets of restraint to keep from remedying this; it was, unfortunately, a useless consideration, given the fact that not even a single ounce of restraint had existed in any of us that day. Her veins, therefore, could only make the obvious decision - breaking free of their hideous cages and reaching out into the world.

This was the shock. This is what Marvin suddenly dreaded.

As Care veins, infinitely enraged, burst out of her shattering body, Marvin could only stare forward and give in.

Half of them planted themselves deep into the earth, in effect anchoring Care to the ground. The other half swept forward and grabbed Marvin by the feet, causing him to fall over.

It was great.

The veins were burning up. The anger polluted the air. The fear fled in fear. The camera listened.

Marvin screamed.

It was wonderful.

For a brief moment, I allowed my tongue to escape from my mouth. Delicious. Absolutely delicious. It took a long time to finally accept it, but I was indeed enjoying every second.

I pictured a dancing couple. As perfect as they were, and as much as they adored each other, they certainly weren't going to enjoy raising a child. If given one wish, for them it would most definitely be to dance forever. To lose all interruptions. To *forget!* And we were all winning, here. We were *all* going to dance.

Whose side was I on, in retrospect? Well, perhaps Hil was not such a bad person after all. Maybe all he wanted was a happy ending. Maybe all he wanted was for everybody to live their own personal dream. As long as I continue to assume this, then Hil will always be a good person in my mind.

And for this reason, I make one last assumption: that Care's fate, as horrible as it was, had special meaning to her. That it was all part of her dream. This, my friends, is what keeps me from falling apart every remaining day of my life.

Before Marvin had a chance to scream again, everything around him simultaneously caught fire. The veins, in all of their rage, created just enough heat for this to happen. Upon realizing this, I ran even further away.

Care was still screaming in pain. The skin on her face had removed itself, and her blood had begun its escape. Her head was still growing.

The idea suddenly caught up to me that Marvin, consumed with fire, was most likely dead at this stage. An unfortunate side effect, but from my knowledge, he had no dreams to speak of. It saddened me.

This *was*, however, a happy ending, for the size of Care's head had finally reached its peak. There was a long moment of suspense, in which I wondered to myself whether or not this would end the way I had imagined. If, perhaps, everything would be ruined. The idea filled me with fear, but it was a silly fear - nothing bad was actually going to happen.

Care screamed one last time, taking a deep breath afterwards.

After one more dreadful silence, I experienced for the first time the wonderful taste of resolution. Care exploded, in the most literal way possible, into hundreds of bloody pieces.