

Theory of Everything

By: Kaleb Stone

I was fast asleep when I heard banging on my door. When I ignored it and instinctively tried to go back to sleep, my mom came in. “It’s eight o’ clock, time to get up!” She yelled, ensuring that I was awake and could no longer return to the dark realm of sleep. I opened my eyes slowly and looked up towards her. I had to squint because she turned on the light and it almost felt like I was looking up at the sun.

“I’m awake!” I said, trying to get her to leave me alone. “Good, you need to help your father clean the barn in half an hour, so be ready!” She told me loudly as she walked out of my room and down the stairs.

I sat up in my bed and pulled my notebook out from under my pillow where it was hidden. I breathed a sigh of relief as I flipped through what I had worked on. The night before I was up for a while drawing random things. I drew anything I laid my eyes on, a tree, a door, a bookshelf, anything at all. I had just wanted to draw, but I couldn’t let my parents know this, or else they’d throw away all my supplies. It had happened before when they learned I had wanted to become a writer. Sadly, that dream died, just as they wanted it to.

I got out of my bed, changed out of my bedclothes, and walked down the upstairs hall to my bathroom. Our house was fairly large, bigger than most houses, yet still not nearly as big as a mansion. I brushed my teeth and then went downstairs to grab a quick breakfast. Mom had already made pancakes and left mine in the microwave. They were big pancakes, and I wasn’t very hungry, so I only took one. It was a bit colder than usual, but I didn’t really mind. After eating my pancake, I went outside to help my dad, as I was told to do.

I was tired from what I did the night before, but I probably didn't seem too much different to my dad. I was never particularly enthusiastic about farm work, despite how much my parents wanted me to be. Despite my tiredness, I only messed up once or twice more than usual, which is still probably more than I should have. After helping dad clean the barn, I was told to help tend to the crops. After two or three hours of work, I went inside to take a shower.

XXXXX

I awoke to the sound of ringing. It was eleven, and my alarm clock was screaming at me to wake the hell up. I sat up and heard the beeping of car horns, sirens in the distance, and other sounds I've long since gotten used to hearing since we moved out to the city two years before. I walked out to the bathroom, brushed my teeth, showered, and then went downstairs to make breakfast. Mom was already at work, so it was up to me to make breakfast for myself. This is how it always was, as dad certainly wouldn't make it for me, and mom was always so busy in the morning that she couldn't either. I wasn't feeling up to making anything remotely fancy, so I decided on making a basic peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I made three, realizing that one wasn't quite enough, and I was pretty hungry.

There weren't many rooms in our apartment. As far as apartments in the city go, it wasn't the smallest, but it could certainly be larger. There were two bedrooms, a single bathroom, a small kitchen, a living room, and a small closet. Nothing more. We've been living like this ever since dad lost his job.

I walked into the living room and sat down. I looked over at dad as I ate my sandwiches. He was sitting on his recliner, watching tv with a gaze that seemed more like he was looking at nothing at all, just as he normally did. I gazed at him with a mix of emotions. When this all first

started I would look at him with pity and sadness in my eyes. The sadness never faded, as it really was a tragic thing, but the pity did. In its place was anger.

He'd been in his depression ever since he was fired from his job as a police officer. He had dreamed all his life to be a cop, and he blew it by shooting an innocent person out of self-defense. At least, supposedly it was self-defense. The courts certainly didn't see it that way. Having had his hopes and dreams crushed, he sank into endless despair, and cannot motivate himself to do much of anything. I doubt he even remembered me.

I glanced at the clock on the wall; eleven-thirty. I still had about an hour and a half before I was meant to be at her house. That meant I could sit back and relax for a while, but I wouldn't. I would never, because that would go against everything I stand for.

XXXXX

I got out of the shower and decided to relax and draw some more random things. My parents weren't making me do anything at that exact moment, so I figured I'd make the best of it. After about an hour or so of that my dad came into my room. I heard him knock and I quickly hid my notebook under a blanket before he came in.

"Your mother needs help cleaning the bathroom downstairs." He told me, as both a statement of fact and a heavily implied command at the same time.

"Alright, be down in a minute." I replied casually. He left and went downstairs to do whatever it was that he was up to before mom presumably forced him to come up here. I don't know why, but they always seemed to forget that texting is a thing, or alternatively they just refused to remember. I grabbed my notebook out from the blanket I hid it under, quickly touched

up my drawing I was working on, a very overly detailed portrayal of a lamp, then went downstairs to do what I was told.

XXXXX

Stephanie and I had been friends since elementary school. She had long blonde hair and green eyes. She usually wore t-shirts and shorts, mainly because I don't think her parents bought her much else. She was never the most social, I don't think she cared as much as the city girls I normally ran into about her looks.

My family and I used to live out near her, but since moving to the city I hadn't gotten to see her as much as I did before. However, I recently got my driver's license, and my parents bought me a cheap car, so every Saturday I would go out to where she lived to hang out. We usually hang out around the city, as she seemed to enjoy it a lot more than I did. Maybe because it was all so new to her? I would never truly know.

By the time I finished cleaning all my dad's messes for the morning and watering the plants, it was time for me to head out. I grabbed my phone and my wallet out from my room, and my keys from the keyholder by the front door and left to go see Stephanie.

XXXXX

After helping mom clean the bathroom, a rather mundane but all-around unpleasant chore, I went back to drawing. Then I heard the doorbell ring. I stuffed my notebook under my pillow, as I did before I went to sleep, then I practically ran down the stairs to see Noah. When I opened the door, he was standing there in jeans and a jacket. His black hair was slicked back similarly to how a businessman would style it.

“Hello,” he said casually.

“Hi,” I replied.

“Ready to go?”

“Sure, let me just go grab some things real quick.”

We drove together for about fifteen minutes or so after we got to the city, and eventually we decided to stop and eat at a small diner. I talked with Noah about various small things as he drove. I told him about my drawings, the random things I had drawn over the past few days. I told him how I thought it was fun, but it still didn’t feel like the thing for me.

He talked to me about cleaning up around his apartment; about how he watered the plants outside, even his neighbors. They paid him to do it, but that still didn’t mean he had to. He told me how he had to pick up his father’s bags, bottles, and other random shit he had scattered around his chair. That’s what I always liked about Noah. He didn’t have restrictions on what he could do, like I did. He could do whatever he wanted, and he was always doing something.

The diner we stopped at was nice and cozy. It was smaller than most diners, but it used it’s space wisely. It had tables strewn about with a decent amount of space in between them but not so much that it further limited the already small amount of space the diner had to work with. The light of the afternoon sun came streaming through the window through burgundy curtains that were pulled to the sides. We sat at a small table near the corner, so the sunlight wouldn’t hurt our eyes, and we started by just ordering drinks. Noah ordered a coke; I ordered iced tea.

“Noah... why exactly is it that you always work so hard? I don’t think I’ve ever seen you relaxing.” The thoughts I had while we were driving had been pestering me, so I asked him what

I had thought for at least a few years. I had always respected that part of him more than anything else, but I never knew why it was.

He took a second to respond. Then he said, “I have ambition.”

I looked at him, confused. “What do you mean?”

“Ambition is one of the greatest motivators of any human being. Ambition is the seeking of one’s purpose in life, the goal anyone should strive for. Ambition is essential, and should be nurtured in every way possible, even if it means doing little things to keep myself busy, I will not stop striving for things, because I’ve seen what happens to people when they do.”

I watched him as he sat back in his seat and took a sip of his coke. I sat back as well, but I didn’t touch my tea. I was taking in everything he had just said and realizing how real it all was. The silence dragged on for roughly half a minute.

“If ambition is so necessary for you, why do you even bother hanging out with me? I have nothing I strive for, no purpose in life. I’m still desperately trying to find it!” I voiced my deepest fears. He put voice to his most important feelings, so I had to at least try and match that resolve.

“Because you do have an ambition Steph. You may not have a clear goal in your life yet, but you’re striving to find that goal. That’s your ambition.” I was speechless. Before I could figure out what to say, our waiter showed up and asked us what we want. The conversation ended there, and neither of us tried to bring the topic up again for the rest of our afternoon together.

XXXXX

I drove Steph back to her house at around five o' clock. After we ate we walked around the city for a while, looked in some shops, and went to a small park. Overall, it was a fun day. When I returned to my apartment it was almost six. Mom still wasn't home yet, and dad was still slouched on his chair doing absolutely nothing. He disgusted me. I looked at the tv and saw he was watching the news. I wondered why someone who sat watching tv all day would willingly choose to watch the news of all things? Maybe he had nothing else, maybe he had exhausted the rest of the channels of all the content they had to offer.

The news headline said something about a prison break. Apparently a group of prisoners had broken out of the city jail. Most of them were caught, but a pair of them were still on the loose. I watched for less than a minute, then turned away to start making dinner. As I was walking to the kitchen, I checked my phone and saw a missed call from Stephanie.

XXXXX

Noah dropped me off at the end of our incredibly long driveway. I told him that was good, I kind of felt like walking down it. I wanted to enjoy the day's breeze a bit longer before I went inside and started drawing some more, unless of course my parents had assignments for me. I wondered what I wanted to draw next. A bird maybe? Or maybe something as simple as a fence? The possibilities were endless. I was so preoccupied with my thoughts that I failed to notice the unfamiliar blue van parked outside our house.

I opened the front door and called out, "I'm home!" I didn't hear an answer. I thought that they were probably just out back doing something, tending to the crops or cleaning pens or something like that. I decided to just head to my room. I was walking up the stairs when I heard

the voices. It sounded like two men talking, and neither of them sounded like dad. They sure as hell didn't sound like mom.

"Who's there?!" One of them yelled as he started moving towards the stairwell. I was frozen, not just because of the unfamiliar men, but because I saw a small trickle of red liquid at the top of the stairs. It looked sort of like runny ketchup. At that moment, I realized what had happened while I was away. With that realization came a cold fury I never knew I had in me.

I ran. I sprinted down the stairs, and I could hear the guy who was on his way move quicker, and the guy he was with started coming too. I turned the corner just in time to avoid a gunshot from the top of the stairs.

"Don't let the bitch get away!" I heard one of the fuckers yell from upstairs. I flung the door open, and practically jumped out of the house, barely dodging a second shot. I ran around to the side of the house, seemingly without any plan. To the fuckers who had just killed my parents, I probably just seemed like I was running away for dear life. That wasn't quite true. Dad had told me a few times in the past that he had hidden a pistol by the side of the house. He said it was a precaution, and that it could help save my life someday; I told him he was crazy. It turned out he was right.

I heard their footsteps following me, gaining quickly. I barely turned the corner before the first guy got out of the house, barely dodging the third bullet they shot at me. I saw the bush I was looking for, reached into it, and grabbed the gun. The murderers were clueless.

I crouched. I felt like the eye of a hurricane. Everything around me was terrifying, unfamiliar, and deadly, yet I was calm. I knew I was about to kill a man as he turned the corner,

but I didn't give a fuck. In fact, I thought that he deserved to die slower for what he had done. A bullet was too good for him, but it'd have to do.

He never saw it coming. He turned the corner, gun out, ready to shoot a little girl who was running for her life, but he wasn't ready to face a stone-cold killer. It was over in that instant. Without a moment of hesitation, I shot the fucker in the head, killing him instantly.

"Holy shit!" That was his companion. He was following the man who I had just killed and had seen what happened to him. He knew he was next. The tables had turned, so he ran away from me back into the house.

I could've called the police right then, but the thought didn't even occur to me. There was but one thing in my head at that moment, and it was the desire to finish off the fuckers that killed my parents. I went back into the house. I turned the corner cautiously, like they do in those war movies, the pistol turning the corner before I did. I didn't know exactly how much ammo I had left, but I knew it was probably enough. It had to be enough, because it hadn't even crossed my mind to grab the gun from the guy I killed.

The house was quiet. Just like it was when I had come in less than a minute ago. I crept around the house stealthily, searching for my prey. I found him quickly, because he didn't get very far. He was hiding in the kitchen, just around the corner from the entry hall. He had his gun out, but he didn't have enough time to react before I blew his brains out, just like I did to his friend.

After the deed was done, I crumpled onto the floor, exhausted. With the adrenaline running out, I came to terms then and there with what had just happened. My parents were dead, and I had just killed two men.

Most importantly, though, I had achieved my ambition. I had found my purpose in the world. It was a simple purpose, all things considered, but a nice one. The reason I was born into this world was to protect. I lived to protect and avenge those I cared about, and it felt amazing. It felt glorious!

Once I calmed down, I called the cops, and then I called Noah. Calling him made me feel calm and reassured me that I still had someone to live for. Calling him achieved it's purpose, even if it went to voicemail. Simply hearing his voice was more than enough.