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PRISONER OF MY OWN EGO: THIS IS MY EGO SPEAKING

Jessica Lee

4:17 a.m. — Dream State

Inhale. Exhale. Quickly! My breaths feel irregular — one quick puff, hold another for two seconds, then seven rapid gasps — but my lungs expand and compress on the irregular beats, delivering oxygen to my pumping limbs and pulsating heart. I reach behind my shoulder and suddenly there's an arrow in my hand and the forest ground stops moving beneath my feet as I fit the arrow to the bow, smoothly pulling the quill to the corner of my mouth. I instinctively know what to aim for: between the pale eyes. A difficult target because of the white, bushy eyebrows furrowed around it, obscuring my view. But I let the arrow fly anyways. *Thrum.*

Abruptly, without warning, the arrow flies toward me. Did it spin? Flip around? I have no time to ponder this, and caught off guard, I can only stand still, the oxygen no longer willing my body to move. Then I see it. An apple. On the arrow's head. And it's still speeding...

6:00 a.m. — Beep. Beep. Beep.

What is happening? *Beep, beep, beep.* Something so disorientating, but maybe, just maybe, if it's ignored... *beep, beep, beep...* it's almost rhythmic, peaceful, over and over... *beep, beep, beep...* and "if I went back to sleep for another while and forgot all this foolishness" — all this *beep, beep, beep* — "but that was totally out of the question" because there it went again.¹ *Beep, bee* — no! It must be stopped. It can't be. Morning already? First class, second class, from one hard chair to another, class, class, class... the thought sickens me. What if I just stayed? Here, in the warmth of these covers with no sunlight rising through the blinds quite yet, and surely Mom and Dad would understand because they must have been in my position before — the morning when the dawning thought of getting out of bed was just absolutely too depressing.

How many hours of sleep did I get last night? Five? Six? "People must have their sleep" to think properly and my thoughts can't be orderly because now I'm thinking of my agenda for the day, calculating the exact minutes of my shower to be on time, and well, technically I missed that opportunity, but it's okay because that's what dry shampoo is for, and I'll have to make a mad dash across campus.² God, I need help. I need coffee.

6:30 a.m. — Caffeinated

Ah! Power coursing through my veins! I can conquer the world — where should I begin? Russia? No, no, Russia is always a bad idea. I think instead of my roommates still in bed and in their own respective dream states — all blissful and heart-warming, I'm sure — as I sit in class. Maybe I should try that. Just once, to sleep in... “Anyway, who knows whether that wouldn't be a good thing for me after all,” a definite change to the morning of class, class, class.³ Listening to a man perched on his desk — a peculiar habit of his — while we sit down below.

Maybe if I tell Mom and Dad, that it is sucking the life out of me, slowly but surely, they would have to understand. And of course, not literally sucking the oxygen out of my lungs, but it might as well be because what good is this oxygen — carried in my blood and delivered to my heart and brain and limbs — if my limbs will only occasionally raise a hand, my brain uselessly staring at him while my heart, well, what exactly does the heart do in a classroom? But they wouldn't understand as the older generation never does, and if it weren't for my parents, I would have marched up to him a long time ago and “let my heart out to him.”⁴ My heart, my true desire to explore the vast ocean — not the literal ocean, I would tell him, but something just as vast and expansive and unknown — and to never come back. But my God, look at the time! I'm going to be late for class.

7:00 a.m. — Class SF_351-PP_SEC08

He informs me that I'm late as I walk in, perched on his desk. I want to snap at him — the caffeine is still bubbling through my veins, you see — and inform *him* that I've never been late before and this morning, I woke up just a bit more lethargic, almost not quite myself, and honestly, I'm not feeling well, because what other explanation is there?

I fantasize myself telling him this and inwardly cringe at his imaginary response: we “very often simply have to overcome a slight indisposition out of regard for the” University and “your performance recently has been most unsatisfactory.”⁵ I would try to explain it's not a “slight indisposition” that can be easily disregarded because I've never woken up with such strange thoughts before, with such striking sickness toward the class. I would try to point toward my rather satisfactory performance, but what's the point, the end goal of that so-called satisfactory performance if it's overshadowed by such miniscule tardiness? I cannot imagine a good outcome, so I just take a seat.

In my seat — much lower than I remember it being — I am suddenly hit with a desire to blurt another discovery. How have I never noticed it before? That man needs a haircut. Badly. Not just on his head,

where his dark mop flops over his ears so untidily it's a miracle he can hear himself talk (which I'm not entirely convinced he can, evidenced by the amount of times he repeats himself), but his beard too. Can he eat without also consuming hairballs? Or without a crumb from last night's dinner? He constantly "plucks uneasily at [his] beard" which was annoyingly a different shade from his white, bushy eyebrows always drawn heavily over his pale eyes — eyes that were currently boring straight at me.⁶ I look away.

In the middle of class, he assigns a group activity, and I want to protest and raise picket signs. I somehow lose myself to another fantasy where I petition for a more cheerful assignment or even delegate the work evenly among my group members. I imagine what would happen: I'd grow hives, most likely, at the thought of dismissing an assignment for a simpler, more cheerful one. Cheerful? More like petty. I take these assignments very seriously; they are not meant to be cheerful. Maybe I could delegate the work evenly among my group members... I'd "get sick at the very prospect" and possibly even have an aneurysm.⁷ Shaking off any other possibility, I know, as always, I would "in the end, go over all the figures and calculations" myself, and thus my peers — if you could call them that, as peers suggest equals whereas I am far superior — are of little help to me.⁸

I think it's the caffeine that caused such bizarre hallucinations — two in a row! — so I decide to stay quiet instead, allowing the caffeine to simmer and fade.

9:00 a.m. — Class FYS_102_SEC43

Does this story make any sense? It's absolutely ridiculous, unfathomable. Gregor Samsa wakes and all he can worry about is getting to work on time? Work, work, work. No thoughts about coffee, or even doubts about going to work at all! Furthermore, his boss (his peculiar desk-sitting habit sounds oddly familiar), family, and heavily-bearded lodgers are all atrocious. If I were in that situation, I'd give them a piece of my mind.

What is Gregor so scared of? It's like he has a miniature President Snow in his mind, killing off any and every rebellious thought by manipulatively containing his spark of hope from bursting into flame. Gregor's spark of hope — the mere possibility of paying off his parents' debt, sending his sister to the conservatory, letting his heart out to his boss — are "ill-defined hopes, all of which led to the conclusion that for the time being he had to stay calm."⁹ "Ill-defined," of course, simply because he refused to take control of them and so they never became explicit. If his hope burst into flames, Gregor would snatch up a bow and arrow, and shoot President Snow between his ridiculously bushy eyebrows — a show of power and control. Instead, he remains calm and constantly worries about work, work, work — never mind that he has a rotting apple in his back (*gross*).

And what's wrong with the rest of the Samsa family? Gregor thinks of them all as incapable inferiors — his father “couldn't be expected to overexert himself,” his mother a “victim of asthma,” and his sister “still a child.”¹⁰ If only he'd just share the burden of providing for the family, Gregor would realize they're all perfectly capable human beings and not, in fact, too old or too young.

10:30 p.m. — Finally. Bedtime.

Now, after the day's exhausting work, this morning seemed full of odd thoughts, so hazy and vague that it is impossible to remember them, but they're lodged in my mind, like... an apple stuck, there to stay and rot because I couldn't very well shoot it. A constant reminder of earlier thoughts, angry thoughts — they were angry, right? Angry and tired and frustrated at something, something just out of mind's reach, but sleep's lure pulls at the edges until I can hardly feel the rotten apple at all, and maybe I had just imagined the whole thing anyways. An apple in my mind? I obviously need rest. It had been a real exhausting day, full of classes, classes, classes... oh! Almost forgot. Need to set the alarm. 6:00 a.m.

Notes

1. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 11
2. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 12
3. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 12
4. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 12
5. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 17
6. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 46
7. Kafka, *Poseidon*, 1
8. Kafka, *Poseidon*, 1
9. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 26
10. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 30