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Just One View

Trey Anthony Guillory

"I think about killing myself." Gordon hit the back button to rewind the video by a few frames and then hit play.

"At least once a day I think about killing myself. I get these thoughts and just think how easy it would be. Easy to do, and easy to not have to deal with things anymore. I doubt that I will, but I still think about it." He stared at his face in the video—brown hair covered by a blue hat, hazel eyes hidden behind glasses, and a scruffy beard. He always looked shaggy in his videos, no matter how many times he tried to comb his hair and beard.

He watched his confession play to the end. He'd been sitting in front of the computer for the last three hours editing the video, making sure it was ready before uploading it to YouTube. Once it was on his video channel, he'd compulsively check the view count every few minutes. He'd done this dozens of times before, but this time was different. Instead of uploading a video reviewing a TV show or movie or video game, he was spilling out his darkest thoughts to strangers on the Internet. He'd gotten negative comments before by internet trolls who take joy in belittling people from the safety of their chairs, but he wondered if the comments would be worse, or at least feel worse, this time. He was exposing himself to that kind of ridicule, but hoping for a more positive reception.

Once the editing was done, he began the upload process. It consisted of clicking upload and then waiting for views, however long it took. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Then he turned to look at the curled up ball of white fluff in the corner of his room.

"What do you think, Bigby? Good video or bad?"

The dog exhaled loudly and then stretched into a more comfortable position.

"Yeah. I hope it's good, too."

The video finished uploading. Gordon shared it to the usual Facebook feeds and websites and then began his self-torturous waiting game. After five minutes, he had one view. After ten, he had two views. After thirty minutes, he had three views.

Gordon let out a long sigh while closing the window and exposing his desktop background. Three people stood in the picture—an older man wearing a blue baseball cap with his arms around a young girl and a young boy. The boy was Gordon. All three shared the same smile. He pushed himself away from his desk and walked the few steps to his small, unmade bed. Sheets and pillows were scattered from the mattress to the floor. On the table next to the bed was a blue baseball cap with his keys, wallet, and electronic cigarette inside it. He picked up the e-cigarette, placed it between his lips, and

took a slow drag from it. The green light from the e-cig reflected in his glasses. He exhaled softly. The vapor drifted lazily from his mouth and disappeared into the air.

He clicked open the web page and stared at the number, willing it to increase. No such luck. He shook his head, doing his best to put the number of views out of his mind. *It's been thirty minutes. What were you expecting?* He grabbed his hat from the nightstand and pocketed its contents, then he set the hat over his brown hair. He looked at the dog in the other corner of the room. "Want to go for a walk?"

Bigby stood slowly and stretched.

"I'll take that as a yes."

Gordon stood outside of the house he shared with his mother. The e-cig hung between his lips, and Bigby's leash was wrapped around his wrist. Up and down the street he could see the neighbors' front yards, each showing signs of Christmas; lights were in the process of being strung up, plastic Santas stood their ground. The Christmas spirit wasn't what was going through Gordon's mind when he saw his neighbors preparing for the holidays. *Why would they judge me? They don't know me,* Gordon thought, taking another long drag on the e-cig. He looked away from the houses and back to his own, which only showed signs of construction. He looked down at his dog and watched Bigby perform his usual routine of circling a fire hydrant and then relieving himself on it. *I'm sure they have their reasons.*

The next morning, Gordon woke, as usual, to Bigby walking on top of him trying to wake him up.

"Morning, Bud."

Bigby barked right in Gordon's face, then began to lick him repeatedly. Gordon yawned and reached for his phone, immediately checking to see if his view count had gone up while he was asleep. Before he went to bed, he had reached ten views, and now it had gone to fifteen. His views were also joined by a comment waiting for him to read.

"FIRST!"

After closing the YouTube app, he checked his text messages. Two messages were waiting on his phone—one from his sister and another from Margaret. He read Margaret's first.

"Saw your video. Glad you felt confident enough to put it up. Still meeting this afternoon?" He responded, "Yes," then put off reading the message from his sister, Charlotte.

He stood up from his bed and opened the bottom drawer of his nightstand. He pulled out a small green bottle labeled "Prozac 40 MG" and popped the red and green capsule into his mouth. Then he began the rest of his morning routine. Feed Bigby, then check the view count. Shower, then check the view count. Walk Bigby, then check the view count. By the end of the routine the count had risen from fifteen to eighteen. *Slowly, but surely,* he thought as he slipped on his cap and glasses and walked out into the kitchen.

His mother stood at the new counter she had installed a month ago. Her glasses rested on the tip of her nose. The string that kept them from falling from her neck disappeared beneath her curly, brown-grey hair.

"Morning. I made biscuits," she said, not looking up from the remodeling plans she had been pouring over for months as she reshaped their house.

“Thanks,” Gordon replied, almost automatically. She busied herself with the house remodel, and Gordon did his best to keep out of the way. It was easy to do since he hated the constant noise and bother of the construction crew coming in and out of his house all day. He wouldn’t have been as annoyed, however, if one of the workers didn’t sing all day, loudly, and off-key.

“Going to class, then meeting with Margaret. I’ll be back later,” he said as he grabbed a biscuit and headed for the door.

“Okay, see you then.” his mother said from the kitchen, her eyes still focused on the plans.

Charlotte sat on the couch with her roommate and stared at her phone, reading the text she had sent her brother earlier that morning. Her message read, “Want to grab lunch tomorrow?” Gordon had yet to reply.

“Just text him again,” Lynette said as she typed her notes for class into her tablet.

Charlotte sighed. “I don’t want to be too much of a bother.”

“He *needs* someone to bother him.” Lynette put down her tablet and looked at her roommate. “You saw his video. He’s thinking about killing himself. He needs you to step up and be there for him.”

“I guess, but... I don’t know how to deal with something like this!”

“Who the fuck does? Just text him again and take it from there.”

Charlotte nodded and took a deep breath, thumbed in another message and hit send. She stared at the background of her phone. The image was of her and Gordon standing beside a tall man in a blue baseball cap, and all three of them were smiling. *Love you, Dad.* She set her phone to the side and turned to Lynette. “He’s not the only one dealing with this, you know? He *knows* I want to be there for him.”

“Maybe he doesn’t. Your brother’s weird that way. He does his own thing, always on his own.” Lynette picked up her tablet again.

“Yeah, but spreading our family stuff on the internet? It’s like he’s looking for attention from anyone except me.”

“You’re both *very* different from each other. Not even sure how you’re related, but you’re both dealing with things in your own way. So you need to figure out the best way to talk to him.” Lynette handed her tablet to Charlotte.

Charlotte looked down at the screen and saw her brother’s latest video. Below it was an empty comment box.

Gordon sat across from Margaret, whose outfit was particularly loud. Her shirt was covered with bright red and yellow shapes. Each of her wrists was ringed in wooden bracelets that made clunking noises every time she moved her hands. Her bright red, horn-rimmed glasses perched in her nest of curly, red hair. Her office reflected her personality with various statues and paintings from different countries and cultures along with crayon drawings made by some of her younger patients. Normally, someone dressed

this loudly would bother Gordon, but they'd had enough sessions over the past year that her loud outfits had become an endearing trait.

"Any more thoughts?"

"Yeah. Some." Gordon shrugged, not wanting to look her in the eye. "Like... when I'm driving I wonder about driving, off the bridge into the river or walking into traffic."

"Any real desire to do that?"

"No... not really. Just thinking about it. Not trying to do it."

"How do you feel after putting the video up?" she asked, folding her hands into her lap.

Gordon shrugged. "The same... nervous, I guess."

"Nervous about what?"

"Well..." He sat forward in his chair as if telling a secret he wanted no one to hear. "I feel like this video is different. All the others aren't personal. This one is. It's *really* personal. I've gotten bad comments before, but getting them on this one, I'm worried about it."

Margaret looked over to the computer on her desk. "Hm. I haven't checked it since this morning. Have you gotten any comments?"

"Not really. Just someone claiming first comment."

"And how many views?"

"One hundred thirty-eight" Gordon stopped short, but not short enough.

"I knew you were still counting your views. What have we talked about?"

Margaret smiled and shifted her weight.

Gordon sighed and leaned back. "That the view count doesn't matter, as long as I'm enjoying what I'm doing."

"Exactly. Stop worrying about how other people see you and your videos. What matters is how *you* see yourself and your work. As long as you think it's good, it will be good."

"I just worry that it's *not* good. I'm trying to make money from these video reviews, but it's not doing much. The more views I get the more successful I'll be."

Margaret laughed. "You knew this was going to be a long road when you began these videos. You did it to help you get your mind off things right? Making money is just a happy little side benefit that you get to work on slowly. And remember that this video isn't about making money. It's about talking. Getting things off your chest in a place where you feel comfortable. It's not about views or money; it's about you."

They spent the rest of the therapy session discussing other events that had happened since they'd last met. Gordon went through his phone as he walked back to his car. Two messages were waiting for him, both from Charlotte, both asking if he wanted to grab lunch tomorrow.

He sighed heavily as he slid into his car and closed the door. He thumbed into the phone, "Sure."

The drive back home was quick, and the tools lying on his front porch subtly reminded Gordon that his home was still under construction. As if he needed reminding. He walked through his house, avoiding his mother and the work crew until he was safely in his room. Bigby got up from his bed in the corner to greet him and then lazily plopped

down next to the desk where he knew Gordon would sit. Gordon turned on his computer and immediately went to YouTube. The view count had passed two-hundred. The FIRST comment had a few likes as well, and he also had another comment waiting.

“Your videos fucking suck. You fucking suck. Please fucking kill yourself.”

Charlotte stared at her computer, something she'd been doing for the last couple of hours. She'd watched Gordon's video a dozen times now. Her brown eyes and cheeks were a damp from crying as she watched it. *Dammit, Gordon. Why won't you talk to me?*

She refreshed the video page to watch it again, and then noticed a new comment under the FIRST. “Your videos fucking suck. You fucking suck. Please fucking kill yourself.”

What the fuck? What an asshole! She began typing a response to it, full of anger, jumping to the defense of her little brother. She was about three paragraphs in when she stopped. *He doesn't talk to me now. Why would he talk to me after trying to fight his battle for him?* She sighed and erased everything she wrote. She stared at the empty comment box. *I need to say something...*

She began to type.

"At least once a day I think about killing myself. I get these thoughts and just think how easy it would be." Gordon lay in bed, his phone in one hand, the small ball of fluff that was Bigby curled up under his other. He ran his fingers through the soft, white fur as his eyes focused on the video on his phone.

“Easy to do, and easy to not have to deal with things anymore. I doubt that I will, but I still think about it. My dad... My dad passed about a year ago, and I haven't exactly been dealing with it very well. It wasn't sudden. He was sick for a long time, and then one day I just...I found him and he was gone. We were close. Before that I was dealing with depression, but after...There are days that I have trouble just getting out of bed.”

Gordon hit pause on the video and scrolled down to the comments beneath it. He re-read the second comment over and over. “Please fucking kill yourself.” Since the comment was left this afternoon, over forty people had clicked that they liked the comment. *Maybe I should. Not like I'm doing anything worthwhile.*

“No.” He shook his head and stood up from the bed quickly, startling Bigby and sending him scurrying to the edge of the bed. He tossed his phone onto the bed and walked across his room. He grabbed his e-cig and took a long drag. He let the vapor drift lazily from his mouth. He shut his eyes and tried to focus on something else. He felt something walk past his ankle and looked down at Bigby, who sat handsomely at Gordon's feet and looked up at him. Gordon smiled and sat down on floor to pet the small dog. Bigby inched closer and then rolled onto his back looking for attention and belly rubs. What else could Gordon do but comply? “Yeah, Bigby. You know how to make everything about you, don't you?”

Bigby voiced his agreement with a quick bark and began licking Gordon's hand.

Play time was interrupted by a beep coming from the bed. The phone screen lit up and vibrated a few times before going silent again. Gordon sighed and stood up, walking back to his bed and looking at the notification. He had a new comment on his video. He hesitated before opening it. Probably another nasty one telling him to kill himself. *Maybe they found a more creative way to tell me I suck?* He opened it on his phone and began to read.

“Things really suck, but I know what you’re going through. At least I think I do. We all have different problems in our lives, and we deal with them in different ways. I lost my dad too, and I’ve been trying to stay strong for my family, but... I think I’m mostly trying to stay strong for myself. But knowing that someone else is going through this, I feel less alone. I hope that this helped you as much as it did me listening to you talk. I’ve enjoyed your other videos, keep up the good work! Also, that guy that told you to kill yourself is an asshole!”

Gordon looked at it on his phone, reading it over and over again. He eventually put down his phone and took to reading the comment from his computer. *Someone actually likes my videos?* He read the comment again. *They’re thanking me?* Before he realized it, a smile overtook his face. He read the comment again and again for the next hour, watching his video with a brighter outlook. *This helped someone.* It was helping in a small way, and just that fact helped him. The views of his video began to rise again, and more and more likes were given to the comment. But he realized it didn’t matter how many views he got, because it only took one person viewing it to make a difference for him and a difference for that one person. He stepped away from his computer and went back to the floor to continue playing with Bigby until they both fell asleep, exhausted and content.

The next morning began much like the previous one. Bigby walked on Gordon’s chest, barking and licking, trying to wake him up. He petted the small dog and reached for his phone to find one message from Charlotte. “Still on for lunch?” He sighed. He wasn’t looking forward to talking to his sister, but at the same time he wasn’t willing to let her spoil his good mood.

A few hours later, Gordon sat across from Charlotte. In front of her was salad, and in front of him was a basket of cheese fries. She was wearing these big, bug-eyed sunglasses that covered half her face. He thought they looked stupid.

“You know those aren’t good for you?” she said, gesturing to his French fries.

Gordon sighed. “Neither is too much sunlight, yet here we sit outside.”

Charlotte sighed and continued to eat her salad. “So... How’s the job hunt going?”

Wow. Only took you two questions before you asked about that. “It’s going.”

“You know,” started Charlotte, “I could talk to some friends and see if they know anyone that’s hiring.”

“No, it’s fine,” he replied.

“Well, you need to find something. The insurance money isn’t going to last forever.”

I have found something...

Charlotte leaned back in her chair, teasing the salad in front of her with her fork. “So... What’s up with that video?”

“What video?” Gordon had a feeling he knew where this might go, but he tried to delay it.

“You know which one. The one you put up the other day about wanting to kill yourself.”

Gordon laughed. “Oh, so you do watch my channel. That’s sweet of you.”

“Shut up, you know that I do. Is that for real? I mean what the fuck, Gordon? You just air our family drama on the goddamned inter-?”

“I wasn’t trying to upset you!” Gordon cut her off. “I was just being honest!”

“Well, why the hell couldn’t you be honest with me? I try to talk to you all the time and figure out what’s going on, but you never tell me anything.”

“No, you talk *at* me.”

“Fuck you! I try but all you talk about is your stupid hobby and-”

“NO! FUCK YOU! It’s not a hobby. This is becoming my job. I am making videos, reviewing movies and shows and giving my opinion, and I’m making money from it! It’s not a lot but it’s growing. So give me a goddamned break! This helps me deal with Dad’s death, *and* it can start helping me financially. So just back off, Charlotte!”

His sister sat across from him, just staring at him. He couldn't see her eyes behind her glasses, but tears were falling from beneath them. She steadily got up and walked to the bathroom.

Shit, thought Gordon.

Charlotte stood in the bathroom, staring into the mirror. Her glasses were pushed up on top of her long brown hair, and she wiped away her tears with a paper towel. *That went well...* She pulled out her phone and looked at the picture of her dad standing between them, wearing the same hat that Gordon wears now. They were all smiling. She smiled back at the picture, pocketed the phone and took a deep breath.

As she walked back to the table, she glanced over Gordon’s shoulder. His back was facing her. Her empty seat was across from him. He was looking at his phone, and in the center of the screen was the comment she had written. She did her best to hide a smile as she sat back down. Gordon did the same, quickly switching from his goofy smile to his usual frown. Gordon started, “Charlotte, I’m...”

“Gordon, I’m sorry. You’re not the only one trying to deal with Dad, you know? He died, and you and Mom just shut down and I had to step up... You *never* talk to me, and I’m just trying to help you. I *know* you’re taking this hard, but... so am I...” She looked at her brother. He stared at her quietly for a few moments.

“You’re right.”

“Oh fuck you, Gordon. Don’t patronize-”

“No. Really. You’re right, Charlotte. I’m sorry. I didn’t think.”

“No. You *do* think, but only about yourself. You don’t realize how people are feeling around you. I know that’s hard with everything, but I’m your sister and you just ignore me like some idiot. I *do* watch your videos, and I think you say some great stuff,

but how was I supposed to know you were making this your job. You never talk to me. I just... I want you to talk to me again.”

Gordon sat at his desk, setting up his camera on a tripod. He'd opened a window to let in some natural light. A knock on the closed door got Bigby's attention, and he quickly looked to see what was going on.

“Yeah?” Gordon said, still setting up his camera.

The door opened, and Charlotte stepped inside. Bigby raced over to her and began circling her, standing on his hind legs.

“I know! I missed you too, Bigby!” said Charlotte, playing with the small white ball of excitement at her feet. “So, what's Mom remodeling now?” she asked, lifting Bigby and cradling him in her arms.

“Both bathrooms, it's awesome...” Gordon shook his head and chuckled, finishing his set up.

“So, this is how you do your videos?”

“Yep, record here, then edit, then upload. Easy enough. Just takes a lot of time.”

Charlotte nodded, looking at the camera and the computer as Gordon explained.

“And... How do you get money from this?”

“Depends on how many views I get, subscriptions, stuff like that. It's not a lot, but it's something.” Gordon turned his chair to face Charlotte.

“That's actually pretty cool.” Charlotte smiled at her little brother.

“And, I was hoping you'd do this video with me.”

Charlotte stared at Gordon, her eyes becoming as big as her sunglasses. “Wait, what? Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously, I thought it could be fun,” Gordon said, chuckling at her reaction.

“But... But what do I do? I've never done this. Should I be wearing something else? I mean, I'm in a T-shirt and sweat pants! I can't go on camera!”

Gordon laughed. “It'll be fine. We just sit here and talk about stuff.” He watched as his sister calmed down, and a smile began to spread over her face.

“We just...talk?”

Gordon smiled. “Yes. You and me. Just talking.”

Charlotte returned the same goofy smile he had. “Sounds good.”