

A Story About Self-Confidence: What's In A Name?

a novel by Zombiepaper

Started November 1st, 2019 and Finished November 30th 2019

Preamble Feedback Request and General Reading Considerations:

Feel free to comment directly on anything below. There are many ways to do so within Google Docs here, but the easiest way for you is to double click on the word and write in the comment bubble shown to the right or pressing Control+Alt+M simultaneously if that's more your style. Open an incognito window to comment anonymously. You can email me at thezombiepaper@gmail.com with feedback.

I am looking for three main sorts of feedback considerations:

1. General reading feedback. What'd you think? Like? Dislike? Does anything seem too contrived? Too unrealistic?
2. Criticism on effectiveness of the dialogue. I am trying a more naturalistic dialogue style that might be weird. I am using grammatical errors and typos in quoted lines to represent how people talk. They don't talk in rigid English hyper-literate grammar. So if anything seems too much, let me know.
3. Did you get bored at all? If so, note it there, so I can review and revise. Let's say everyone gets bored at a certain point. It's more helpful for me to know than not.

You will not offend me by commenting.

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[Chapter 01] “Project’s Sweet Fall”

[[Updated 11/30](#)]

Eville Medical, IT Build Room.

Friday, November 1st. 7:54am.

Cold outside and stuffy inside.

Six computer repair technicians lounged in the locked room, waiting for their daily standup meeting. The room was lined with workbenches, tools, toolboxes, monitors about two inches thick, keyboards, and almost enough seats for everyone on their short-staffed team. Sammohini reviewed notes in her orange notebook while munching on some candy. Except for the senior member of their team, Venkat, everyone else was also snacking on candy Sammohini brought in.

“Thanks again for the candy, Sam.”

Alex said, then put a finished candy wrapper in their jacket pocket.

“Oh-uhh, no problem! I have plenty of candy, actually, so if you want more, just let me know! I was kinda expecting some trick-or-treaters last night, so I... went ta the store and got a whole bunch, but no one stopped over! ...I was kinda surprised, actually, because I thought that there’d be at least some kids that might stop by...” Sammohini glanced around the room. Fairydust, a beautifully well-traveled woman that she enjoyed learning life, lifestyle, fashion, and any advice from whenever possible, was focused on the smartphone of Hank, a grizzled almost-old timer. Josh, a reserved ex-military gentleman, was typing away at a computer. Venkat was napping.

“Don’t you live in the apartments nearby?”

“Yeah, I just moved in a few months ago, and it’s pretty nice to be able to walk-” “-Woah! Is that that the new Tactics?” “Yeah, it’s rad.” “I’m gettin’ it after I get off work.” “Cool. When you do, text me your player code, and I’ll add ya onto my unit.” “Cool! It’ll probably be around 7-er-8. I preordered it, so I gotta pick-it-up.” “No big.”

“Sam... I never got trick-or-treaters when I lived there.”

Sammohini returned her attention from the two gamers to Alex, who was reading the nutrition information of another candy.

“Oh... yeah-uh, I guess I just have a bunch of candy to eat over the next few weeks!”

She laughed but her face felt too warm not to reveal her embarrassment.

“If you have any more-a these, I’ll take ‘em. We had some trick-er-treaters, but my partner handed out all my favorites first.”

“Sure thing, and, that’s just rude!”

“Yeah. My partner doesn’t too-think... think too often! Eh! It’s frustrating.”

The digitized unlock of the door clicked.

Sammohini looked past the “no eating or drinking” sign to see Nils walk in. He let the door slam shut, looked around, stroked his clean-shaven chin, let out a bright smile, then said, “äh... fantastisk, I’m not late.”

“Well, ya are, but Linda’s not in, so you’re early.”

“...Morning, ta ya, too, there, Alex.”

The clock above the door, a small monitor mounted onto the wall with computer cables tracing down the left side behind the door to a small computer, said “08:01am” in green against a black background. As the door closed, Josh reappeared, plugging away at the same computer, clicking around various folders and windows, looking ...handsome ...as always. Venkat sat next to him, his arms folded over his belly, eyes closed, which reminded her of Uncle Gopal. Hank and Fairydust were still comparing notes over their new game that had just come out.

“I only got in one round last night... or rather, this morning.”

Sammohini idly looked at Fairydust’s new haircut.

“I dunno how you do it. I’m out after 10, even when I’m on-call. Oh yeah, hey, Sammohini! Can you hold the pager for me through Monday? I totally forgot I was holding it since it’s been super slow all week and haven’t got paged at all, but there’s this new game that dropped last night, and I don’t wanna fall too far behind, especially with Hank’s apparently no-sleep policy here.”

“Lemme-uhh, think...” ‘Fairydust’s hair is different from yesterday... oh! Her curly black hair used to be much longer!’ Sammohini continued thinking... ‘...Calendar... I don’t think there’s anything planned. All I really do is study and relax...’ Her mind completed its mental decluttering. “Yeah-uhh, I don’t think I have anything going on this weekend. I can. Sure! And your hair looks nice today, too!”

“Oh, thanks! How sweet a-ya to notice! And thanks, girlfriend! I’ll get ahead-a-Hank after th-weekend now! Here.”

Fairydust took out the pager from inside her black peacoat, just below her rainbow-colored scarf, and reached forward to hand it to Sammohini, who nearly dropped it. The screen was already at the ‘Change Owner?’ screen where she chose her name.

“No worries! I’ll plug in the change-of-duty now, so we don’t have to worry about it, and when I get back to my desk,” she sat back down, “I’ll edit the on-call notes so that way you don’t get any calls, and if you do, just let me know and I’ll take care of it, so don’t worry about it at all until... Monday!”

Sammohini pressed the ‘Send’ button, saw the ‘Updated’ screen, and looked up to see them both looking at Fairydust’s smartphone screen now, sitting... flirtatiously close? Probably not. Fairydust said, “thanks again, Sammohini,” looking up, smiling, then looking back down. Hank scratched his Fall beard that obscured his neck and readjusted the Eville Medical knit-cap

nearly covering his shaven head. He wore a wrinkled black Eville Medical polo, exposing the tattoos on his muscled arms.

“Sure thing!”

Nils sat down in the stool between her and Alex, who wore a fancy purple wool jacket with a white scarf draped down the middle, and said, “thanks for the sweets.” Nils just finished combing his hair and then smiled at her.

“Oh. You’re welcome! I was just telling Alex before you got-in that-that I-uhh was expecting a bunch more trick-or-treaters and,” she looked down at her cute brown boots and moved her right toe in a comfortable circle, before returning to make eye contact, “no one showed up! I had even dressed up and everything...! ...I guess I shoulda went to that party you invited me to-uhh, where was it at again? The place right next to The Drip... downtown...? With that performer...”

Nils brushed his hair, then said, “next time, Sam. I went elsewhere.”

“Oh, well, that’s good to hear then, I guess... well, I mean, unless you wanted to go, but I guess you didn’t, so it was OK, then, I suppose, since that means you probably want-I mean went somewhere else and uhhh that was probably more-”

The digitized unlock of the door clicked. ‘08:10am.’

“I just have to meet with the team, Lisa. I will be there soon.”

Sammohini sat at attention to smile and say hello to their manager.

“Hallo, sorry I’m late.”

Linda entered and closed the door softly.

“I just got some, well... let’s start with team status. How are you all?”

Everyone said ‘good’ almost simultaneously.

“OK, gut. Let’s start with Josh and work around the room. What are you working on today, sir?”

Josh stopped clicking at the computer.

“Just wrapping up this computer for a new hire over in Admin for Monday, ma’am. Should be done and deployed by noon.”

“Gut! Vinny?”

Venkat opened his eyes and looked over.

“I will soon meet with Dr. Aloisi to discuss the scanning questions asked by his staff.”

“Gut! FD?”

Fairydust still had her smartphone open.

“We had some tickets come in overnight. Hank and I are bustin’ through ‘em and’ll do rounds after the meeting. Oh, and, Sammohini’s carrying the pager for me this weekend since the new Tactics is out.”

“Noted. Do you have anything else to add, Hank?”

“Nah.”

“Gut, gut! Alex?”

Alex had just finished another candy.

“Tickets. Also, shout out to Sam for the candy.”

Everyone except for Sammohini and Linda gave three claps simultaneously.

“Oh, thank you!”

“I saw them. Danke. Now, I have to say the formal rule that we are not allowed to eat or drink at our desks, or here, but,” Linda grabbed a chocolate candy from the small pile Sammohini had placed on the desk near where Josh sat, “we are all adults here.”

Hank chuckled nearly silently.

“Even you, Hank.”

“Hah.”

“Anyway, make sure the helpdesk gets sweets, too, Sammohini. Gut, gut. Nils?”

Nils straightened the left cuff of his black dress shirt.

“The upgrade in Pathology is going well. I can see it being done soon. At the end of next week? Dr. Ashley says the new computers run much faster for her department.”

“Gut! Sammohini?”

Sammohini froze. All she could think of was the candy she had been eating. ‘Is there chocolate in my teeth? I feel like there is!’ Her mind swirled with sensations of cheap white chocolate.

“I know that, sometimes, it is difficult to give an answer like this, and you are still fairly new to the team. Did I put you on the spot?”

Sammohini’s mind cut through the chocolate chaos and returned to her notebook, which had one thing circled. “Oh, no, sorry, I-uhh was just thinking about-uhhhh, yeah-umm...” she breathed, “...I did have a question for the team. I’m trying to figure out how to go about this ticket from yesterday, it’s like everything is working except for this one part, and I’m kinda confused on it, so I-uhh-need some help...”

“I’ll help ya before we do rounds!” Fairydust smiled and waved.

“Gut, gut! Danke,” Linda said a word in Gerfewan, “I mean, Fairydust. And, Sammohini, do not worry. You should always be able to ask everyone in your team. Even if their calendar is specifically blocked, it is ‘akzeptabel,’ if it is important. If you do not feel this way, please... meet with me.”

“T-thank you, ma’am! I-uhh... just...” She looked down at her troubleshooting notebook and dotted the box next to her next important task.

“Do not think about it anymore! Actually, Sammohini, I have an important project for you.”

All of her attention focused on Linda, dressed in her usual uniform - a military suit, in black. Linda smiled, then said calmly and slowly, “you can assume that the team is almost completely available to help you with this project. The big news is that we acquired a new Neurology clinic!”

Sammohini flipped to a new blank left page and started writing.

“Dr. Hedwig Payne has a clinic with about twenty employees and we have until the end of the month to fully integrate her practice into our operations. You will be the primary tech in this project. Hank, you are assigned as the backup, and Vinny, if you can help, I would appreciate it. To the rest of the team, consider yourselves available to help. Joandra Oliver is the project manager and Chris Wręca,” which Linda spoke with a thick accent as Sammohini’s mind rushed to digest all of this new information to write frantically into her notebook, “will be the application analyst for any new application the clinic will need to learn.”

She looked over what she just wrote:

PROJECT

□ Neurology

□ Dr. Headwig Pain

□ 20

□ END OF MONTH!

Which, besides being nearly unreadable, she had circled after underlining it.

□ primary: me

□ secondary: hank

□ help: venkat

□ Joann-dra: pm

□ Chris: apps

“I know, that’s a lot of information that needs to be captured so suddenly. Your inbox has an introductory email with all the information and more. I just wanted to tell you and the team now because I wanted to make it clear that while this is an important project, I trust you to do it, and you have the support of the team.”

“Aye!” Josh motioned first by raising two thumbs up, with the rest of her team reacted similarly, except for Nils, who remained motionless.

“And with this announcement completed, any questions to me?” Everyone had put their hands down and remained silent. “Gut. I thank each of you for working your hardest and best today. Thank you all for giving priority to patient care today. Los!”

Everyone said their team’s word ‘Los!’ simultaneously.

Linda opened and closed the door quietly.

The antiquated computer clock said, “08:15am.”

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[Chapter 02] “Names Are Dumb”

[[Updated 11/30](#)]

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Friday, November 1st. 8:47am.

Warming up outside, perhaps?

Sammohini felt calmer and had returned to her characteristically upbeat attitude after getting her troubleshooting question answered by Fairydust and Hank.

She returned to her desk to proceed with troubleshooting after walking past the cube guest chair and the artificial bamboo tree she bought at a home decoration store. “Hi, Naagaphanee!,” she said to her desk cacti with a reddish-pink bulb as she sat down. She moved her company-issued mouse, which sat on a mousepad showing a family photo, to ‘wake’ up the computer, then typed her password into the plain black keyboard. Above the two monitors were varieties of artificial flowers of festive Fall colors that were attached by cloth and string and tape. The monitors unlocked to six new emails since she left for the meeting.

Five were ticket notification emails, sent automatically to her team of work they needed to do, and the sixth was the project email that Linda had mentioned in the meeting.

“11/01 4:30PM! - Neurology Kickoff!”

From: Joandra Oliver <joliver@evillem...>

To: IT Meeting Room - Scribe <itmscrib@evillem...>; Sammohini Lanchester <slanches@evillem...>; Chris Wręca <cwreca@evillem...>

CC: Linda Mutiger <lmutiger@evillem...>; Vinny [Venkat] Nibhanupudi <vnibhanu@evillem...>; Hank Ospfrey <hospfrey@evillem...>

Hello, Team!

I’m happy that everyone is able to contribute their busy time to this game-changer project!

Attached, you will see three documents scoping out our project with everyone’s responsibilities throughout the month and the expected times per week to contribute to make this project a success! Please see me immediately if you have any potentially disruptive plans like vacation or PTO so I can readjust the scheduled bandwidth.

These documents are the project schedule, hardware/resources requirements, and statement of work for a light read! Please make a folder in your email for communication about this project. I can help with this if needed. Some project resources should expect daily emails for synchronous synergies.

We’ll meet at **4:30PM today (11/01)** in Scribe, because it has a nice view!

Required:

Sammihana

Chris

Myself

Optional:

Vinny

Hank

Joandra Oliver | Senior IT Project Manager | Eville Medical Center

100 Medical Ave N, Eville, Sneakerraajy, SN, 51660

joliver@eville... | Desk Phone | Cell Phone

“[Agile quote]”

Attachments:

[Payne_Schedule_FINAL]

[Payne_Resources_FINAL3]

[Payne_SOW_SIGNED]

She opened her notebook to the project page and was about to erase the sloppy handwriting she wrote during the meeting when she registered that something seemed weird about the email. She looked up again, and in the middle of the screen, saw the typo: “Sammihana.”

The mechanical sound of the small water fountain next to Naagaphanee ran as her thoughts ran faster.

‘My name definitely... is not that!’ Her face grew warmer as she continued thinking. ‘My name is right there! Right in the ‘To’ line. How could she misspell it!? I mean, it’d be one thing if I had-if I was the only one with a weird... uncommon name! But look at her name! Ohhh! That’s just not very nice, huh, Naagaphanee?’

The bulb on the cacti was a brighter red than her face.

She caught a glimpse of herself in her mirror and took a deep breath. She reached for her Eville Medical water bottle, nearly tipped it over, caught it, untwisted the lid, and took a gulp of lukewarm water with both hands. She closed her eyes, felt the water as it went down into her stomach, took another deep breath, and opened her eyes to the email. ‘How rude!’ She thought, then locked her computer screen, swiveled away, and stood up. She stepped out into the hallway of her team’s area. It seemed like everyone was gone. The big windows to the sides of

everyone else’s desks let in natural light and showing the tips of the trees of green, orange, and pink thawing out in the morning sun.

She heard soft clicking and peered over to see Venkat hidden in his alcove cube.

The man dressed without much fuss was reading over emails on his dusty computer. Since he didn’t appear busy, she walked over, and in an almost childlike voice, stuttered softly in Sindian. Venkat turned when called “[uncle],” looked over with a concerned look on his face, and said, “[what is wrong, dear niece? Please sit down.]”

She sank into his guest chair.

“[My name... email]- in the email... in the [project email]...” which she said in a broken combination of English and Sindian until she said the following in Direish, “[was spelled wrong!]” Her body felt heavy. There was a tightness around her stomach. Her heartbeat was rapid. ‘S-Samm- ugh!’ She thought so much about her name being spelled wrong she forgot how it was spelled. If she hadn’t held onto the sides of the chair, she would have fallen onto the mesmerizing rug of reds and blues.

“[Dear niece... Don’t cry.]”

All she could focus on was the rug and its intricate patterns. After breathing deeply once more, she looked up into at the painting Venkat had hung up on the wall of a structure in Bijalee. It was a technological achievement for the city, near where her distant relatives live, for its height and overall architectural design. After another breath, her vision moved away from the expansiveness of the city shot to smaller acknowledgments, accolades, and awards, then after one more breath at a more normal pace, back over to the man that reminded her of a combination of her uncles Gopal and Jaidev, except more tired, and with pudgier cheeks. He turned directly toward her and smiled.

“Feeling better?”

“[Yes]... Thank you, Venkat. You’re like my [uncles]. Always so nice to me. [Thank you...]” She looked at her hands and rubbed them.

Venkat said in a formal accent, “[with this misspelling... this reminds me of how many times people have mispronounced my name or didn’t know how to write it. When I started here thirty-two years ago, people did not know how to write my name. They would not try to be polite and gave me rude names. They laughed at me when I tried to fix them... fix their wording.]” Venkat swiveled to turn away to look at the wall, then continued, “[so I just told people that my name was Vinny. For some of these, it is closer to twenty years ago and I still think about it sometimes. Many people still do similar things. Even today and with you. Now I just have to feel sorry for them because they don’t understand.]”

Sammohini felt lighter but still overwhelmed.

“[Thank you, uncle.]”

“[You’re welcome, dear niece.]”

She looked past him to see the sun now shining as brightly as it could onto the trees past the windows, warming the tips of the branches, and leaving their tips almost sparkling as the ice burned to water.

“[Sorry to hear] about all that Venkat.”

Sammohini jumped, then turned to see Hank leaned against an open wall. His arms were folded, and he wore his ‘makin’ hospital rounds’ lab coat, as he called it.

“[It is acceptable. I try not to let it bother me.]”

“[Yeah, brother,]” Hank paused, looked over, and continued in a whispered English, “you can’t do nothin’ ‘bout those people. People had trouble with my name when I lived in Sindia. I dunno if it was by accident or purpose, but whatever. I just let ‘em call me whatever they wanted. If they don’t try, it’s not worth the trouble, right? Life’s hard enough as it is, you don’t need all this on your shoulders, too.” Sammohini felt her face cool off, and she smiled. Even though her eyes felt dry, the sides of her eyes felt wet. Hank continued whispering, “like Venkat was saying, people can be really rude. When I saw that email, I was just thinking...” then Hank said, “[the one that sent that looks dumb.]”

Sammohini giggled, nearly uncontrollably.

Hank smiled and Venkat was also smiling.

She looked back to see Hank look serious.

Hank turned to look over to the other cubes in their team’s area, tapped his bicep, then said, “well, I just thought I’d stop in to say hello. I had to pick up some stuff from the storage room. We went ta’ this one patient room and all the cables were trashed. Oh, by the way... even though everyone else is out, [you should be more careful, Sammohini],” he said in a disjointed accent, but with a stern manner, which caused her to give him her full attention. “[Don’t let people bother you like that. She’s not your boss.] Even if she was, if she doesn’t... [learn to say your name good, or call you by a nickname], why...” he whispered, “care what she, or anyone else, thinks? [Right, Venkat?]”

Sammohini looked over to see the mirage of her Uncle Gopal nod.

Hank disappeared. There was a digital click that unlocked the storage room.

The door closed, opened, then she heard some lightly running away.

She turned back over to see that Venkat was now standing.

He had an official-looking Eville Medical folder in his hands.

“[Hank is right, dear niece. Why not try to ignore the email and work on something else until you feel better?] If you don’t have much pressure on tickets, do you want to go with me to work on

some things? [We can get some fresh air. We can have some tea on the return.]” Sammohini stood up. “I also got the project details printed, so that we could talk about the project. You can read the project descriptions for me as we go. We do not need a cart, but get your outer coat jacket.”

Sammohini skipped over to her cube to put on her new stylish winter coat, in a subdued orange that she got on sale, then her brown leather gloves from their resting pockets. When she put on both, Venkat stood in the IT area and offered over the paperwork he had printed out at his desk. She took the paperwork and she noticed that he wore a nice gold watch with a plain black winter jacket with an Eville Medical logo that matched his slacks.

“The first page-y contains scanner ticket information and then project notes.” Venkat held a gold pen forward. “Do you need a pen?”

“Nope! I’ve got my notebook with me and I always keep a pencil handy!”

Venkat walked forward and Sammohini caught up.

“You know, that’s because Hank taught me to always keep a pencil with me, especially whenever we’d do rounds, so I always try to keep at least one pencil on me, and I’ve even got a nice-” she motioned for a pocket inside of her coat, “-pocket for them! Oh! Here’s another one!”

They walked past the executive offices, the helpdesk area, and the breakroom.

Sammohini pressed the elevator to go down to the ground floor. “So-uhhh, yeah, the scanner ticket. It looks like they have some questions about-uhhh,” the doors dinged, opened, they entered, and they went downstairs, “umm-scans saving to their scanner? That should be fairly easy. I mean, the scanners don’t save anything, right? They don’t have hard drives in them, do they?” The doors opened. “So why not just, oh, you have it here, send this to them?”

Hank, Fairydust, and a cartful of miscellaneous peripherals waited for the elevator.

“Sammohini! Hank said someone spelled yer name wrong and you were feeling sad. I’m sorry to hear! You have such a beautiful name! Ya know,” when everyone traded spots around the elevator, Fairydust accidentally touched her lower back, but continued talking without embarrassment, “excuse me! So, my parents wanted to call me Fairydust. They’re rad!” Hank held the doors open, despite the doors insisting otherwise. “But, they called me Mildred instead, because they wanted me to fit in with polite society. Little did they know! Right, Hankie-Pankie? Haha!”

Hank laughed as the elevator doors beep-beep-beeped!

“Right, Fairydirt!”

Fairydust laughed lustroously as the elevator doors closed.

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[Chapter 03] Conference Room Conflict?

[[Updated 11/30](#)]

Eville Medical, IT Conference Room: Scribe.

Friday, November 1st. 4:24pm.

Rumors were it was nice outside; dry inside.

The mid-sized conference room could comfortably fit about ten people. Sammohini and Venkat arrived before anyone else and stood outside the room labeled ‘Scribe’ and peered in to see if anyone else was inside.

When they entered, Venkat motioned to let Sammohini sit first, and on the side of the table where they could look out the window. When she picked the middle of five chairs, Venkat picked a spot to her left, and further away from the door. She had Venkat’s Eville Medical folder from earlier in the morning, which was made of a thick light green cardstock and was offered “[as a gift]” to keep the project files organized, open in front of her on the table. Her troubleshooting notebook and a wooden pencil sat beside it. Out on top of the folder was the offending project email - except the misspelled name was redacted and her name was written next to it, correctly, in handsome calligraphy handwriting.

“[Dear niece,] the trees look calming today, at the moment, don’t they?” Venkat had his arms folded on his stomach and was looking out the window. A gold pen sat on top of his closed yellow notebook on the table in front of him.

“Y-yes! I love the- all the- shades of orange and red, and green of course! And how they all just look so pretty...!” She looked down at the project notes, shockingly found the folder was just a little off-center, fidgeted it to be parallel with the closest line of the table, then looked back over to Venkat, who still had not made eye contact, but was staring out the window. “Thank you again for this, too. I really appreciate- really I-do! it’s lovely.”

“I’m glad to hear, again. I received it as a gift from the Medical Records department, many years ago...” Venkat looked over, smiled, then returned his head forward, and eyes closed.

Sammohini returned her focus to the file and had almost completely readjusted the file to be as parallel as possible when the door opened to a person with a colorful assortment of fashionable clothing and accessories. “Oh, good, I’m not late. Hey, Vinny! Hey there, are you...” The person walked in, across the room, set down a laptop, then sat down in the chair opposite of Sammohini. “Uhh- I’m-uhh, S-Sammohini, but you can call me Sam!” The person looked through masculine glasses, gave a lipsticked smile, then looked back at the laptop screen. “Nice to meetcha. My name’s Chris, application analyst for this shindig, at your service. And I have to say, your coat looks made for you!”

Sammohini moved her arms to look at the cuffs of her coat, then looked up at Chris, who was standing, preoccupied with looking for a power outlet.

“Oh, thank you!! I saw it on sale- it-that... it was on sale, and thought, ‘this is too lovely not to get!’ I wasn’t sure if it would work well for me... but I’ve been really enjoying wearing it, and everyone is giving me compliments on it, and wearing it feels so nice, too! I don’t have to worry about a scarf, either, since it’s got this furry soft liner around my neck, which reminds me of my little sister’s cute puppy dog, but it’s all synthetic, so I can pet it all I want, and not feel bad about hurting any animals!”

Chris once again sat down, looked up again briefly to say, “it does look lovely,” with another smile, clicked a few more times, then leaned back into the conference room chair. “So, who else is supposed ta-be here? Jo’ll be here soon, of course, then Sam, don’t we have,” and said the word with exaggeration, “one,” before returning to a normal tone, “more resource from your team?”

“Oh-uhh-yeah, Hank said he couldn’t make it. He had some patient care tickets to work on, but he told me to say that he ‘looks forward to reading the meeting minutes, as soon as possible.’” Sammohini had opened her notebook to the page where she had started writing project notes to feel more prepared.

“He always says junk like that, doesn’t he, Vinny?”

“Yes. The young man is very impatient for meetings.”

“I mean, he’s a great worker, don’t get me wrong. I always like seeing his name on these projects. It’s just, it’d be nice if he could go to these meetings more often, at least-”

-The door opened to a woman in a formal business-suit, who said, “sorry I’m late, everyone,” as she walked in and closed the door. She had a leather briefcase in hand. “Good to see you, Chris and Vinny, and,” she said, as she walked over to the far side of the table, next to Chris, putting the briefcase on the table, “...you’re going to be my primary technical resource, right? What was your name, again, I’m sorry? Names aren’t my wheelhouse.”

Sammohini breathed in when she heard that question. Venkat taught her to do when they talked about handling feeling disrespected on their walk earlier that morning. She tried repeating herself the same way she just had: “My name is... S-Sammo-h-hini...” Her voice trembled enough for Chris to look over and notice. “But, you can call me ...Sam!”

“Good to put a face to a name. We’ve got the full hour to drill down on the granular paradigms of the project, and there were no other meetings booked after us, at least as of ten minutes ago, and- hopefully we won’t need to stay over, since I know it’s a Friday afternoon for everyone, but it depends on how many questions we unpack. I know that this is your alpha project with us...” Joandra attempted to subtly look over at Sammohini and her name badge to read it, but Sammohini had intentionally hidden it when they were outside, at Venkat’s recommendation, “-so... let’s empower you... by reviewing scope.”

They reviewed scope.

Sammohini learned about the basics of project management, including “tackling low-hanging fruit,” but that just made her wonder if they were shaped like bananas, mangos, or pears...

She lost focus.

When she returned to the conversation, she was lost, then felt overloaded with information. She wrote everything she could, even when it didn’t make sense, because ‘maybe this’ll all make sense later?’ She was becoming more overwhelmed each time she looked at the notes she had written, even seconds prior, and she almost lost her senses, until she heard, “-recess with questions, before we get too far into the weeds and to create a solid benchmark of our understanding of the project.”

Sammohini looked around: Chris was looking at the projector, Venkat was looking out the window, then down at her well-worn notebook.

Her pencil had collected graphite on one part of the page where she had apparently zoned out, so she scanned each line. ‘This all seems confusing! I-don’t-understand what-any-of-this means...’ she thought, realizing she needed to focus on one thing to ask, anything, when Chris said, “Sam, it looks like you’ve written a buncha notes down. This can be overwhelming, even for someone like myself that’s worked with Jo on many projects before, and Vinny too. I betcha’ve-a buncha questions to ask Jo-Jo, but don’t worry. Just let it soak in. The only question I have is, Jo-Jo-Jo, do you have any introductory resources you’d recommend Sam reading, to get more acquainted with what we’ll be doing over this project, and help her succeed for future projects?”

Sammohini saw Joandra look at Chris, next directly at her, but not long enough to see her smile, then Venkat whose eyes were now closed, back to Chris, before looking down at her laptop.

“Sure do! Here. I’ll make a note to circle back with you via an email with some paradigms to review! That content will be in your inbox,” she typed a note into her laptop, which also showed on the screen, “with my current bandwidth, by no later than 8pm tonight. Please review, so we can align you closer to success. Please schedule time on my calendar to synergize with me over your onboarding questions. My calendar is current! I have more slots open on Tuesday or Wednesday than Monday. Let’s strategize more at that time, so make sure to aggregate your questions, so we can efficiently and effectively use that time. It will be easier to meet at my cube. If the value-add is there for you, let’s book a conference room. We shouldn’t need to be disruptive to find one. We might, however, if we try to book a room last minute.”

Sammohini had trouble keeping up with that degree of information, even when she skipped the words she didn’t understand, then said “s-sure!”

Venkat opened his eyes for the first time in minutes, then said, “I have a question. We have until the end of the month, right? Worst-case scenario, how many weekend or evening works will be required?” He opened his notebook.

Joandra moved the wireless mouse and the cursor on the projector opened the “Payne_Schedule_FINAL” file, which displayed boxes in vivid shades of blues and reds. “Excellent question, Vinny. Let’s dynamically synthesize worst-case scenario hypotheticals.” The program looked like Venkat’s cube’s carpet. “I had already theorized worst-case scenarios most disruptive to our brand. The average forecasts our completion as before-the-holiday on-November-27th-but-let’s-take-a-look-at-the-details...” ...Joandra talked at such a fast pace that, even when her name was said, she couldn’t focus on the information.

“It appears that... if Sammohini is ill for a week, if we get snow, and if five computers fail, then we won’t be able to complete the project by the 30th. Otherwise, are we guaranteed to succeed?” Venkat had drawn out a diagram of his own in his notebook while they talked.

“Yes! And I am able to pull some strings, too, to where we can pivot our timeframe for an extension to the project, if we have proven MVPs operational by Week Three, well technically Four, since we start officially when I call Dr. Payne on Monday at 9am, when-I-call-her-office,-to-tell-her-that-we’ve- I’ve, debriefed the team and ready to kickstart, and so if we can have over 50% of our MVPs deployed by Week Four, then we will also be granted an extension.”

“Good, good. Isn’t that good news, Sammohini? We do not have weekend work?”

The latter part of her notebook was filled with scribbles that resembled words.

She remembered back to her interview

Linda asked: ‘Can you work over some weekends?’

“...I don’t mind working over some weekends!”

“Well, in that case, would you like to borrow that book on project management Chris suggested? I should have an introductory book at my desk to propel your success on the project, multitudinously, and to be meta, I’m concerned less with your full understanding, at this point, and more with reliable quality of work, which, Linda had recommended you specifically, since she said you were your team’s “Superstar,” as she called you! Good work! Doing some light reading this weekend should help you level the playing field, and actually, there’s this proven book by- ” “Hey,” the name was obscured by the interruption, “Jo-Jo, I know Sam and Vinny have a lot on their plate, still, since ya know, Hank is out there taking care of patient care tickets for the ‘org,’ so why don’t we adjourn for now?”

Joandra looked at her watch, said aloud, “5:05pm,” then continued, “I suppose you’re right. Alright. Meeting adjourned.” She closed the laptop lid, put it and the wireless mouse away, and

zipped up the briefcase as she said, “I’ll stop by your cube a few minutes to drop off that book, too, Sandy.”

Sammohini was stunned! She breathed in, then repeated what she practiced. “My name is Sammohini...” Her voice trembled. “But, you can call me ...Sam.”

“Oh yes, that’s right, Sam, Sam, yes, yes.”

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[Chapter 04] Computer Beeping Emergency

[[Updated 11/30](#)]

Near Eville Medical, Sammohini’s Apartment.

Saturday, November 2nd. 8:45pm.

The day had been nice outside, behind windows.

Other than briefly walking onto her apartment’s patio that oversaw her employer, to answer a phone call she thought was related to being on-call, but was just a misdial from someone with bad reception, Sammohini didn’t go outside at all. She had showered and prepared her work clothes, in case she needed to go across the way, but since she didn’t need to go, she stayed at home in clean pajamas to study the book she had received from the project manager.

The blue leather-bound book was called “The Project Management Basics,” by Yakov Shavur, and it was huge! The back of the book showed a total of 967 pages, where the last 100 pages or perhaps more were just definitions, and the text was so small that she almost had to kiss the book to make out anything. Even if she could understand everything... the words were so exquisitely complicated that she might read a sentence, think she understood it, only to recall it and wonder if she’d even read anything at all or was thinking of having a slice of chocolate cake. The book, too, was so dense that if she set it down wrong it would shake items on any surface, and she often found herself carrying it with both hands around her cozy apartment.

She tried reading next to her computer, at the desk in her bedroom. After organizing her desk of all its stray paperwork; after cleaning the top of the monitor screen along with the orange-trimmed keyboard, orange-highlighted mouse, and other peripherals; after setting the pager on the cute new plush penguin smartphone stand she bought at the Eville Medical gift shop; after organizing her work notes of troubleshooting tickets she could study on her computer; after organizing her pictures of dogs, she looked back at the book and realized thirty minutes or, maybe, three hours had passed.

She fell asleep within the first two pages, twice, when she tried to read in her living room. The recliner her parents had gifted her just felt so comfortable...! Even when she had brewed some green tea, with a trace amount of caffeine, and drank from the elephant mug her sister gave her, she’d lose focus, then she started thinking about when she might want to clean before her family would stop by... ‘They won’t be over until next wee’kend, and even then, all I’ll need to do is a little vacuuming, dusting, and other light sorting that can be done between the time when they’d call to say they’re leaving and when they arrive. I’ll be fine today!’

She cooked a nice snack when she tried to read in the kitchen. It was a yellow curry dish with canned chicken and steamed rice. She cooked the pre-packaged curry on her favorite burner and the rice had been cooking since she started to brew the tea. The caffeine kicked in when she finished cooking. She put the book on the counter, with concepts about “cross-site

synergizing multi-team platform organizational laterals,” then went over to the dining room table, and ate while listening to one of her favorite Ketchup Packets albums. As she was cleaning the dishes, she realized she had forgotten all about the book.

She didn’t try reading in the bathroom.

She got the furthest along when she read at her dining room table, with her troubleshooting notebook open for jotting down notes that she brought along from work. Even then, she ended up getting distracted by re-reading her old notes. When she caught up to her project notes, looked back over to the project management book, open to a section on “engaging passionately innovatively intuitively proven agile game-changers-,” she subconsciously winced, closed both books, left them on the dining room table, then returned with the pager to her computer to search for project management materials since she felt bad for consciously not reading further along in the book and subconsciously giving up on the book.

One site led to another, and she found some particularly cute photos of some puppies when- “BUZZ! B-B-BUZZ!” The screen on the pager read: “ER, Floor 3, purple zone. PC Beeping Excesivly. Patents complaining.”

She pressed some buttons then called the Helpdesk emergency line as she ran over to the dining room, opened her notebook, and started a fresh page.

“Helpdesk, this is Mong.”

“Hey Mongkut, this is Sammohini. I’m calling about- I got the page about the ER.”

“Hopefully we didn’t wake you-” “-no it’s-” “-but, alright-” “fine” “-so, anyways... the charge nurse called and said patients were complaining about some loud beeping that was coming from one of the computers in their area.” She took down notes. “They can’t figure it out at all. Olan just left before I sent out the page and he might be able to fix it, but it’s early enough that we wanted to page you to ask for advice and get some remote assistance, you know, since the patients were complaining, so I guess it’s affecting patient care, huh?”

Sammohini had written clear notes on the situation and looked over the details.

“Well, uhhh, yeah, I mean, you did good to page, but-uhhh, that’s not-a whole lot to go off...”

“I know. Olan’s got the walker phone, let me see if I can conference him in.”

She briefly heard the generic hold music advertising patient care services.

“This is Olan.”

“Olan, Mongkut, we’ve got Sam on the line to help out with that computer. Where you at, boss?”

“Copy that. Just passed the ‘Hot’ aisle and onto the first floor. Should be there in a few.”

“OK, I’ll sign off, in case anything else comes in. You know how to reach me, sir. Later, and thanks again, Sam for taking it from here.”

“Sure!”

The line clicked for a moment too long.

“Status: Going in the elevator now. If disconnected, call Mong back for patching. Did he fill you in?” “Yes! There’s a computer that’s beeping and no one can figure it out. It could be anything, so I’d say when you get there start by seeing if you can find the computer itself so that way we can see what’s going on or what’s causing it, because it could be hidden in a cabinet or something and that could prevent you-” “-Line check: Sam. Still there?”

“Yes!”

“...Hello? OK. Transmission quality is Weak But Readable. Objective: Find computer. Wilco.”

“...Right!”

“Copy. Approaching Three-Purple. And hey,” she heard high-pitched beeps going off quietly at random intervals, “yeah, this is Olan with IT. Where’s the- yeah, uhh, this is Olan with IT, let’s see, hmmm... hey, so... Sam. This computer isn’t visible.”

“Let’s see... are you at the monitor?”

“Yes. Cables go into the... hmmm... this is weird, here.”

More noise leaked into the phone call.

“You’re on speakerphone now. It’s easier to use both hands here.” The beeps were much louder. “Is the line readable?” Olan’s voice was faint.

“I can still hear you-ah, but uhh... yeah. Yes.”

“Roger. Cables are going into like-the cabinets. This is... weird.”

“Oh! If I remember correc-correctly, the computers in Three-Purple in, are in the cabinet under-”

“-yeah, here it is. Standby, one.”

She heard cabinets banging, the beeping increase in tone, cut out suddenly, then cheering. Feet away from the speaker, she heard:

“‘You’re our hero!’ ‘You’re a life-saver!’ ‘What’s your name, sir?’ ‘Olanrewaju, but Olan for short.’ ‘Olaf, thanks for saving the day.’ ‘You’re welcome, ma’am.’ ‘Woot!’ ... ‘Oh! Hey, Sam, so... the computer’s rebooting now. It’s stopped beeping.’”

She had drawn a line to conclude that section of troubleshooting notes. “Fantastic! I’m really happy to hear! You can probably head back over to IT. Well, after you check to make sure someone can use that computer and can give you the OK. Thanks for fixing it!”

She had written Olan’s name with a box next to it, which was her way of remembering something, here, to practice learning to say his full name.

“Copy that. Charge nurse entered their credentials, has entered patient data, and verified functionality. Root cause: the keyboard. Repeat: Keyboard had fallen over inside. Angle caused it to constantly depress the wrong key...”

“That’s... depressing!” She chuckled.

“Yes. OK. Heading back.”

“OK, Thanks, Olan!”

“No worries. Bye.”

“Sure thing! Thanks again, Olan.”

Her phone clicked off.

The apartment was less vibrant than during the phone call.

The grandfather clock near the dining room table said, “about one or two minutes after nine,” with intricate gold arms. She wrote ‘9:02pm’ in the next open spot of her notebook, brought it over to her computer, and created a secure remote session into her computer down the street.

The screen opened to her email. She opened the email that was related to the work that she did and clicked on the link inside to open the work details in their ticketing system.

She changed the ticket status and began to type in the closure notes. “Helpdesk tech” but pressed the Backspace key until she cleared the typo, wrote “Helpdesk tech Olan went to computer. Stated keyboard fa” but pressed the Backspace key, wrote “fell on so” but pressed the Backspace key, wrote “over. Olan verified functionality. Closing” but pressed the Backspace key until she cleared out the typo, wrote “Closing.” She double-checked all of the information was correct before pressing the ‘Close’ button, triple-checked everything looked OK with the ticket, then closed the ticketing system.

Sammohini replied to the email, which went out to her team and related managers, with a simple reply: “All clear!”

She received a Messe Business message.

>Olanrewaju Bosede: Thanks again for your help.
<Sammohini Lanchester: sure! thanks, olanrewaju!
<Sammohini Lanchester: *Olanrewaju, sorry! Later, Olanrewaju!
>Olanrewaju Bosede: Take care.

Then a second message.

>Mongkut Wattana: was it ok that we paged you? we didnt really need to involve you... sorry do bother you
<Sammohini Lanchester: no its protocol to page us when a manager or charge nurse says it affects patient care
<Sammohini Lanchester: oops!
<Sammohini Lanchester: patient
>Mongkut Wattana: thanks we werent sure since it was something anyone on site could fix
<Sammohini Lanchester: no problem at all! ticket is closed so its allgood.
<Sammohini Lanchester: later!
>Mongkut Wattana: later

No further messages.

She saw that the team had received three tickets since Friday afternoon when she last checked her email. Just as she was about to click into them to see more details, she remembered that she wasn’t at work, but rather in her pajamas, yawned, and disconnected from her work computer.

The screen on her computer said, “10:39am.” “Wow! It’s super late! Time for bed.”

She went around to turn off all of the lights in the apartment, saying goodnight to each part of the apartment, starting with the living room lights, the dining room light, the kitchen light, then went into the bathroom. She closed the door, peed and flushed, washed her hands, brushed and flossed her teeth, removed what little makeup she had applied, washed and moisturized her face and hands and elbows, and looked at herself in the mirror to give herself her nightly pep-talk.

“You did great, today. No, really, you did. That book was hard to read, wasn’t it? You’ll probably just need to her-tell her that it was too difficult for you to understand. She did say that she wasn’t that concerned, or at la-east that’s what I think she said, right?” She gave herself an exaggerated look of confusion. “Oh well! You did good with that page! You helped them get back online and you closed out the ticket f-following procedure. They appreciated your help and you helped the patients today! You should pat yourself on the back for that one!” She gave herself one last earnest smile for the evening. “Goodnight. Sleep tight!”

She turned off the lights, crawled into bed, and dreamed of the Neurology project.

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[Chapter 05] Don't Lose Cool

[[Updated 11/30](#)]

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Monday, November 4th. 5:56am.

Oddly, no frost on the sidewalks.

The commute into work had treated Sammohini well. For the past week or more, there had been enough frost on the roads and sidewalks to justify wearing her stylish brown walking boots for the walk into work. Everything was clear, the de-icer on the roads and sidewalks almost seemed unnecessary, the sky had pinkish hues in the distance, otherwise, the sun seemed to be slowly rising, the weather was not chilly, and her coat even at one point felt too warm.

She arrived at her team’s cubical area to see the lights turned off but Josh typing away.

“Morning! Can I turn on the lights, or would you p-prefer them left off?”

Sammohini dropped off her purse and workbag at her desk.

“Mornin’, ma’am. Oh, hey, Sam. Whichever’s fine.”

She turned on one of the three lights in their small area.

Josh kept typing and clicking away.

“How was your weekend, Josh?”

He stopped and swiveled to address her.

“Quite relaxing. We went camping up north with little Issac. Adriana sends her regards. Do you want to see the photos we took from around the cabin we rented?” “Sure! And... I send my regards back!”

Josh had a gallery of around thirty photos on his work computer on one screen. Sammohini couldn’t help but glance over at the other screen, which was their team’s workload in their ticketing system and the time of “6:03am,” as she was looking at photos of the nearby lake, Josh’s family, and other idyllic photos from his relaxing weekend. Although he had divvied out the work based on general workload and there was ‘nothing urgent,’ she subconsciously felt like she needed to be ‘at work’ ‘working,’ so her mind constantly drifted back to that as Josh told her about his weekend for the next few minutes.

“What’s nice, too, is that it’s just about one hour away. Once you get outside the city, everything just feels more alive. This city gets too stuffy sometimes.”

“I kinda like it around here...”

“Everyone’s a little different.”

The photo that Josh had left his screen on was of his wife and child posed in front of their cabin. The ticketing system showed no change. All the work was assigned. Nothing urgent.

“Yeah... hey, I have a question... hopefully... you don’t mind. So, do you prefer Josh or Joshua?”

“Either’s fine. It’s a kinda boring name.”

“Oh, OK...”

“When I was in the military, everyone’d call me Akachi. On one unit, we had three Joshs, and it was either Akachi or...” he paused, and pulled on his beard, as he did when he was deep in thought, “something more offensive.”

“Oh! Sorry to hear...”

“Well, when you’re in, you’ve got more to worry about than people’s opinions ‘bout-cha.”

“That’s a good point, but people really should be nicer! I mean, what do they have to gain by being mean? Are they gonna feel better about something if they’re rude? I just hate it when people are mean. It’s like they could be nice, but they c-chose not to! Ugh!” Sammohini had raised her fist and shook it just a little bit. “I mean, I got called by the wrong name a few times last week, and... that still makes me mad!”

Josh had been clicking on something on his computer while she talked but stopped.

“I hear ya. You’ve just gotta block it out.”

He didn’t look over and he started clicking again.

“Thanks, Josh. I really appreciate it. I mean, I guess I should. You’re right. But how? I dunno how to not block it out, uhh, it... uhh... hmm...”

“You just have to stop caring about what people think, Simo.”

Nils plopped down at his computer and started typing.

“Oh, good morning, Nils... and hey! It’s Samm-Sammohini!!”

“I know. I messed with you. Josh is right. Who cares but you?”

Sammohini looked over at Josh, typing away, then looked around.

“I wouldn’t have said it like that, but he’s right.”

“Hmm! OK, then. I’ll go back to my desk, then! See you later!”

Sammohini ran to her desk, sat down, and crossed her arms.

“Hey!” Josh called out. “Don’t be so offended! We’re saying all that because we’re your friends and we want you to succeed. If you get hung up on this, then your life’s gonna be much more difficult, ya know? I’ve had people call me terrible things, and Nils can’t help being himself.”

She looked over at Josh but still felt upset.

“We’re just trying to help. Even Nils.”

“Speak for yourself! Don’t get me involved!”

Sammohini looked over at Naagaphanee, smiled, then smiled at Josh.

"T-thank you-u..." she breathed in, "I really do."

Josh whispered, "since Nils is feisty, wanna go outside and talk about it?"

She breathed in again. "OK..."

"Nils, we're gonna head out for a few. Hold down the fort for us."

He said what sounded like "copy," and they went outside.

Eville Medical, Smoke Shack Area.

Monday, November 4th. 6:14am.

Fog rolling in from the distance.

There was a sheltered area off to the side where people could smoke that was obscured from sight. A custom wall of cedar siding mimicking other parts of Eville Medical's constant minor construction with an overhang engineered by some workers to bypass the official no-smoking policy. The wall blocked off the view from the hospital on two sides. They stood against the wall looking out into the forest, past a short clearing of fields, which bordered the hospital. Sammohini had been over there a few times but never really liked the lingering smell. Still, everyone knew their etiquette, because they knew the wrong person could close the whole operation.

"They said what?!"

Josh turned away, drew in a long drag of his electronic-cigarette with a trenchcoated arm that had colorful arm patches she couldn't quite understand, then exhaled upward, so Sammohini's senses wouldn't be any more offended. He turned back. His fierce eye contact had brown irises that nearly reflected herself in them and bulging off-white scleras scarred from horrors.

"They said that."

Sammohini looked away instantly at her gloved hands, which held a cup of sweetened green tea, sipped it nervously, then returned to see that Josh had once again turned away.

"Sorry about that. Ya know, in this life, we've got some rough times, sometimes. When we were over there, you had to be tough. You couldn't let your emotions get the better of you. Most of us would do it on purpose just to get a rise out of each other, maybe out of boredom, o-or maybe..." and he let out a cough from something that had been building up inside him, "if things like that offended me, as much as it could, and you better believe it still does, every time, what's gonna happen? I'm gonna lose my cool. Then the enemy'll catch me off guard and then we're..." Josh seemed to be watching for something in the nothingness of the fog, breathed in through his electronic-cigarette deeper than before, then let the smoke disappear into the fog. "I'm happy that not everyone has to deal with that. If you don't have to worry about how it's like to have people chasin' you down, tryin' to hurt you, then life is a lot better."

She sipped the tea but it had suddenly turned bitter.

“Sorry to get all heavy with you there.”

“No...! It’s OK. Thank you for sharing!”

“I can see how that would offend you.”

She washed the bitterness of the tea with another sip, which was sweeter. “I hadn’t thought of that, but I guess it does offend me...” She took another sip, which was sweeter still.

“You realize all she cares about is project management, right? She only cares that you’re gonna help her finish the project on-time and under-budget. She’s called me John a few times and Chris has this thing where...” he paused to take a short puff, “she makes fun of her name. It’s hilarious! And Hank does whatever he can to avoid interacting with her cause-a how much she’s full-a ‘erself. I’m not sure why Linda keeps adding him onto her projects. Probably because she’s amused by their squabbles, herself. See? W’all do this same sorta dance ‘round each other. That’s where I’ll snipe it all out from a distance and just get lost when I can. No point playing around with ‘eople much like all that. I just get in here to do my work, be social enough, and get out. I don’t make friends too easily. I dunno why I shared all that weight with ya. I guess ya needed to hear it?”

Sammohini’s tea was dry. “Wow-uh, thanks, t-thank-you!”

“We should head back in there. Meeting’s starting soon.”

Josh walked past her and she double-stepped to catch up.

Eville Medical, Newborn Intensive Care Unit.

Monday, November 4th. 10:19am.

The fog had burned off in the morning sun.

“Oh, you’re here, thanks for getting over here so quick, Pam, right?”

Sammohini had rushed over with the new toner cartridge so quickly that she had a bead of sweat on her brow, which she wiped off with the back of her hand, before deciding how best to answer. ‘She’s called me John a few times’ popped into her head along.

“S-” “Well, here’s the printer. We’ve got a bunch of reports to print out.”

She rushed around into the nurse’s station to get to the printer, unboxed and unbagged the fresh toner, swapped out the old toner, bagged it, boxed it up, and wrote ‘USD,’ added an ‘E’ to spell ‘USED” on the box. As the printer started to spit out ‘a bunch of reports,’ she looked around for anyone to give her the “OK.” No one arrived, so she looked for their spare toner cartridge. Everyone had stepped away and no one was stopping over to pick out the print outs. The cabinets were made from fancy mahogany, polished, but she looked for any cabinet with a label indicating it had office supplies.

A nurse younger than herself walked over to the printer.

“Ah, cool, it’s-working-thanks,” and almost disappeared.

“Hey-uhh, wait! I gotta get a name for the ticket.”

“Pam.”

She wrote ‘Pam’ and looked up.

The nurse had disappeared.

Sammohini thought of how close that was to ‘Sam,’ wondered if there were any other Sammohinis that worked at Eville Medical or even lived in the area, then she remembered: The spare toner cartridge! She didn’t see any cabinets clearly labeled ‘printer supplies’ or any space big enough for the missing toner cartridge box, so she looked around the printer. Behind the waist-high printer on wheels was a dusty toner cartridge box with an open side that seemed to have been replaced some time ago. The sticker on the printer said to call for assistance and replacements. The sticker on the box, over the unopened side, said, “PLEASE CONTACT HELPDESK FOR REPLACEMENT!!”

‘Well, that solves that one.’ She thought as she brushed it off with a tissue she grabbed from the countertop, put it under her arm under the other toner cartridge, and left for the main entrance.

“Thanks for getting over here so quick to get us back online. Jan, right?”

It was the same nurse as before.

“My name is...” the nurse speed-walked past without stopping to hear.

Sammohini was going to chase after her, but she heard the overhead chime signaling a baby had just been born, which brought a smile to her face.

As she went through the Birth Center to go back to her desk, she saw that all of the fog had gone away through the big windows of the Birth Center, leaving an inviting array of trees in an assortment of Fall colors. In her rush, she hadn’t brought along her heavy coat, but she figured it was warm enough to walk outside.

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[Chapter 06] Disruptive Self-Confident Behavior

[[Updated 11/30](#)]

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Monday, November 4th. 3:13pm.

The sun wasn’t quite setting...

Sammohini was wrapping up her work for the day at her usual 3:30pm, deciding whether or not to go to the Fitness Center for a swim in part because she had unwrapped some of the last of her ungifted trick-or-treat candy, or whether she wanted to walk over to Zbigniew’s Teriyaki for a tasty dinner with enough leftovers for tomorrow morning, when she received an email from Joandra.

“10/05 TOMORROW 8AM - Neurology on-site!”

From: Joandra Oliver <joliver@evillem...>

To: Sammohini Lanchester <slanches@evillem...>; Chris Wręca <cwreca@evillem...>

CC: Vinny [Venkat] Nibhanupudi <vnibhanu@evillem...>; Hank Ospfrey <hospfrey@evillem...>

Hello, Team!

I’ve scheduled time at Dr. Payne’s office for **10/05 TOMORROW 8AM** for a walkthrough!

Estimates project the drive at 15 minutes. Attached are maps and dynamically generated directions. Let’s roll out early so we can gain karmatic traction for a mutually-assured win-win. We’ll synergize in the lobby, meet Dr. Payne, then efficiently tour the clinic to take notes on all computers in scope including any special components we need to order ASAP.

Please see me if you have any prior conflicts.

Required:

Sammihana

Chris

Myself

Optional:

Vinny

Hank

Joandra Oliver | Senior IT Project Manager | Eville Medical Center
100 Medical Ave N, Eville, Sneakerraajy, SN, 51660
joliver@evillem... | Desk Phone | Cell Phone

"[Dynamic quote]"

Attachments:

[Payne_Map_Directions]

Sammohini must have let out a long sigh.

"You see that, too? Tomorrow morning?"

Hank stood at Sammohini's cube's entryway.

"I mean, I don't mind, it's just-uhhhh I don't have a car at the moment. My parents needed to borrow it. They're bringing it back on Sunday, and I just walk everywhere, so I didn't think it'd be a big deal of anything, but I guess for something like this, where I'd have to drive somewhere new, well, I can't, so I dunno what to do..." "Let's go 'see her,' since she's probably still there at her desk, projecting away."

Eville Medical, Joandra's Cube.

Monday, November 4th. 3:19pm.

The sun was making its departure.

"Hey-o, Jo. Question for ya."

Joandra was in the middle of diagramming out a chart with blues and reds. "One minute, while I finish engaging these urgent synergized elements into a cohesive element."

"So, Sammohini can't make the drive over tomorrow."

Sammohini's face felt like it was burning. Hank looked smug as Joandra stopped mid-click, turned around, and looked at the two, standing at the cube's entryway.

"What?" She looked at him, then over at her.

"Yeah, she doesn't have a car at the moment."

"Oh. That throws a roadblock into my plans."

She turned back over to the computer, clicked around to open what appeared to be the same red and blue boxes that Sammohini had seen in the meeting, and then highlighted November 5th. "This won't do." She moved around some boxes on the calendar. "This won't do at all."

"Ah, too bad, then, because Venkat and I also won't get in until around 9am..."

"Oh! That's not going to work at all. Your calendar showed open!"

Sammohini froze. She only used her calendar for scheduling meetings with managers or doctors and even then, she looked at it maybe once a week, if that. Any reminders would usually pop up in her email the day of the meeting, at that.

“How long have you been working with our team? We don’t use calendars like you do. You’ve gotta talk to us like real human beings if you want to schedule our time. Want her to take the bus or something?”

Sammohini was happy that Hank was there, putting up a good fight, but wouldn’t have minded trying to figure out options. Hank seemed to be enjoying himself, with his arms folded, his chest puffed up, and Joandra seemingly also ready to argue.

“I can take Sam over and back,” Chris walked over and Hank frowned, “if you don’t mind carpooling, of course.”

“N-No! I don’t mind at all! I’m sorry to be a-” “-I’m happy to help, Sam. Where should I meet you? Out in the lobby? Or, since you can’t drive over to the clinic, I’m assuming you’re walking, so it’d be easier if I pick you up from where you live.”

Sammohini brought out her smartphone’s map and had just about brought up an overhead view of her apartment complex.

“Oh, thank you, thank you! I live in the Eville Medical Apartments, across the way, in Apartment-” “-OK, I can pick you up in the roundabout near the main office at, say, 7:30am? Jo-Jo wants us to be early, after all...”

Joandra hadn’t been paying attention at all, and continued not to, even when Chris said her nickname.

“S-Sure! That works great for me.”

“That settles it, then. I drive a black Track-King 100 truck. Can you send me your cellphone number, in case I run into traffic?”

“Thank you so much! And sure!”

Sammohini went into her email program on her smartphone, found Chris’s email address, typed in her number, and pressed ‘Send.’

“No worries. The show must go on!” A ding sounded from Chris’s direction. “Now, carry on, wayward others, girls, and boys.”

She looked up and Chris was gone.

Hank was browsing for something on his smartphone.

“Well, that solves that one, I guess, right Josey?”

Joandra was still clicking away at some weird charts.

“Good! The potential disruption has a solution.”

Hank breathed in and out.

“Well, we better get back to our work, right, Sammohini?”

“Hey, if you’d like to move the needle on your project management studies, I have a minute to deep dive into your alpha learnings so we can leverage your success across cross-project platforms?”

“Uhhh-I guess... so...?”

“Perfect, let me bring up the project notes!”

Sammohini looked around to see that Hank had already left. She took the guest chair she was offered and sat down. She felt vulnerable because she had forgotten her notebook at her desk in the hurry to head over.

“What questions do you have that I can transform into success solutions?”

“Uhh... my... uhh-n-n-notebook is back at my desk with my questions...”

Her mind flipped to the project notes. She realized she had no questions.

“Let’s be proactive with our impact and en-” -the words became background noise, as she thought about what questions she did have about the project- “-so to begin-” ‘-oh, I’m at Joandra’s cube, and there are fancy awards here-’ “-and that’s the value of-” -the awards seemed professional until she looked closer and saw that they had generic words on them and were accredited through the Eville Medical HR system. She smiled a bit when she realized that.

“Glad to see you’re passionate about your learnings. Many of your other teammates seem impatient, like Frank.”

“Who?”

“Your friend that was just here.”

“Oh! His name is Hank.”

“Hank, Hank, yes, yes. So anyway-” -Her cellphone rang.

“Oh! I have to get this, sorry!”

Sammohini looked around to see a quiet area, and not seeing any open phone “booth” rooms, answered the phone quietly. “IT, this is Sam.” She stepped into one of the main hallways, outside the maze of cubicles of over five-feet tall. “Hey, Sammohini. Hank here. Just bailin’ you out, since we didn’t see you return, and it’s well past your time to-” she returned to the IT Team area to see the big digital clock change to-

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Monday, November 4th. 4:04pm.

The sun was shining brightly.

“-go home for the day.”

“I’m back!” Sammohini found her notebook on her desk, picked it up, and felt more centered.

“You got trapped in one of her ramble-brambles, right? It happens so much, I ditch her.”

“H-huh?” She realized she was still talking on the phone so she walked over to Hank’s cube.

He hung up the phone, swiveled over, and said, “she does that. She’ll talk you outta your mind.”

“Well-yuhhh, t-thanks for your help. The phone call and sticking up for me! Thank you!!”

Hank breathed in, held it, then breathed out. “You’ve gotta learn to stick up for yourself more. We care about you as teammates, and I think of you like a little sister, but you’ve gotta be willing to stand up for yourself more. She ain’t nothin’ but a fool, and yet she walks all over you like that.” Sammohini looked away and out the window at some of the trees that were bristling with the sun’s rays. “Sorry to be hard with ya. Josh was tellin’ me ‘bout your conversation this morning. Why don’t you roll out for the evening, get a good night’s rest, then Chris’ll pick you up early, so you both can head over to your walkthrough, and things’ll work out?”

Sammohini looked back over at Hank. He smiled.

She thought about what Josh had said, and now what Hank had said.

“How can I ‘stick up for... myself’ more?”

Hank stood up and put on his lab coat and said, “hey, Venkat? [Listening?]”

Hank motioned Sammohini toward her cube.

“[Yes.]”

Hank pointed to her coat and purse then said, “[can you cover? I’ll be away for a few minutes.]”

She turned off her monitors for the evening.

“[Yes.]”

Hank shouted out slightly, “I have a ticket over in the NICU to take care of before I go, Sammohini’ll tag along for a minute.”

Venkat performed along and said with gusto, “good luck!”

When they left their area, Hank said, “let’s jetty!”

They talked about self-confidence along their way outside and over to Sammohini’s apartment complex. Hank talked about his experiences living around the world, including highrises and impoverished areas all around the planet during his “ten years abroad,” where, after he returned “grizzled by life with enough tattoos to show for it,” he decided to settle into a less exciting lifestyle.

“Still, tinges of that ol’ life still show through in my new role as a member of polite society. You’ll get someone like her complainin’ at you for something she hadn’t planned out, then you just think back to scrounging around enough money to make rent in some shady part of town, where last week your neighbors were shot because they were showing off too much money, and you think to yourself, ‘you’re a piece of ...work, there, darlin’. Lemme just make your job-a little harder, especially if you can’t even treat’m with enough respect-ta learn my name. Respect’s earned.”

Sammohini felt upbeat.

It was like she had a big brother guiding her along.

She occasionally glanced over to smile.
He kept looking ahead.

“Now, you didn’t get no free ride because I can talk in code in my broken Sindian with you. I could care less about that. It’s in your actions. You’re constantly trying to do the best that you can, always willing to jump into the fray, and never complaining about work, like Nils does, but that also means that you’re down on yourself too much.”

They walked onto the apartment complex property.

“It’s [good] to believe in yourself, Sammohini. When you started workin’ here, we could already tell you had something special deep inside you. You bring some real positive energy that other people... don’t. Don’t bring yourself down by not believing in yourself, or letting others dictate your self-worth. If you screw up, that’s alright, because I mean even over there, no one’s gonna die because you took an extra ten minutes to figure something out. So don’t let yourself get walked all over. If you can’t make it tomorrow because you feel sick,” and he let out a raw cough with a tone that sounded well-rehearsed, “use your sick time. Even if it’s just being sick of being treated like garbage. I know that doesn’t make you the ‘best’ for everyone, but it makes you the best person for yourself. Alright, you good from here?”

They arrived at the apartment complex’s main entrance roundabout.

“Yes! T-Thanks, Hank!”

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[Chapter 07] Whichever You Prefer

[[Updated 11/30](#)]

Near Eville Medical, Sammohini’s Apartment Complex, Main Roundabout.

Tuesday, November 5th. 7:16am.

The fog was seducing the tips of the treetops and the leaves were discarded.

Sammohini had spent a restless night thinking about everything from the project. Her worries over how she could potentially cause the project to fail in numerous ways, ranging from her not feeling well on this cold Fall morning where she could feel the pangs of chill throughout her lungs and when she breathed out that air looked like smoke to Chris not showing up at the main thoroughfare of the Eville Medical apartment complex.

She stood on the sidewalk near the main office.

There were guest parking stalls near her. Rather than check her smartphone for the time or to get overly distracted, she looked around. The road circled a center island that had a huge tree with a little placard she had read once that talked about the “founders” of Eville, three explorers named Sneaker, Scribe, and Wiles, and how ‘their journeys reflected a sense of value for self-confidence by advancing toward what we believe in,’ or maybe she was just thinking about how everyone at work was telling her to be more self-confident.

‘Hmmpfh! Easy for them! They all have self-confidence! I-I guess I don’t...’

She let that thought drift off as she sipped on her opened Mechanical Strawberry Sneaker Energy Drink she bought from the vending machine just outside the main office. The caffeine jolted her mind. Subconsciously, she started counting the number of leaves that had fallen on the sidewalk near where she stood when she saw a truck drive into the apartment complex. It was black and as it approached, she walked closer to the front of the roundabout loop to see if she could see who was inside.

The passenger side window rolled down. Chris sat in the driver’s seat.

“Hey, you’re early, Sam. Oh, poor thing. I hope you’re not too cold.”

Sammohini walked forward and opened the door to the warm truck.

“N-no, uhhh-I-uhh just got here a minute or two ago, I’m fine... really!”

She shivered a bit, shuffled her workbag and purse around with her drink.

“Oh, why don’t you put those in the back to get more comfortable. Here...”

Chris took the ice-cold drink and Sammohini put the bags in the back seat.

She sat down, drew on her seatbelt, and took her drink from the cupholder.

“T-thank you-uhh, thanks again for picking me up and driving me over and back, I know it’s probably out of way- your way... to pick me up and it’s probably inconvenient,” Sammohini

looked out the side window, watching them leave the apartment complex, out front at the road, then over to Chris, “and it’d probably be annoying to do that, so I appreciate you picking me up like this. If only I hadn’t lent my car to my parents this week. I don’t even normally drive my car during the workweek. I can walk into work... work, and I get all my lunches or snacks at the cafeteria or over at Zbigniew’s, so I never need to go grocery shopping or anything or go driving anywhere fancy during the week, so I guess I, uhh, umm...”

Chris looked over briefly to smile at a red light.

“Think nothing of it.”

Chris was wearing a dark green color of lipstick and was wearing a black winter coat with a pink and orange scarf.

“Thanks, I-uhhh, guess I do because I know it’s not convenient for you or anything to go and pick me up like that because it’s probably kinda annoying...” she took another sip of her energy drink, which tasted like a bitter strawberry, then looked forward at the road. The roads were mostly clear except for trace amounts of fog and a Scribestop gas station in the distance.

“Hey, we’re a few minutes early. Want to get a quick snack?”

“OK!”

Chris parked the truck in a stall outside the gas station mini-mart. Sammohini jumped out of the truck with her energy drink and decided to throw it in the trash can just outside the door inside. Inside was an assortment of snacks, drinks, car parts, clothes, toys, and - all under unnaturally bright lights - an assortment of candies. There was a dizzying selection to eat later!

“Sam, they have two-for-one on soup. Which one do ya want?”

She heard Chris’s from over at the hot foods section. “Oh, uhh.”

“They have chicken noodle and lentil soups. I might get chicken.”

She walked over to see Chris ladling a cup of chicken noodle soup.

“Oh, chicken sounds good!” “OK.” Chris ladled a second cup of soup.

“Oh, thank you,” she said, as Chris closed up the second cup with a lid.

Chris handed over the second cup. “How about some tea? They have some-”

“I like-” “-green-” “-green tea! Oh, sorry, I interrupted you...” “No worries, Sam...”

Sammohini looked at her boots on the bright white tiles of the convenience store floor, a can of soup in her hands, over to Chris who had just finished filling a second cup of tea, before handing it over with green fingernail polish.

“Oh, thank you again!” She smiled and Chris smiled back.

“Sure thing, dear. Here, let’s head out before we’re too late.”

Chris stepped toward the register and pulled out a wallet.

“That’ll be-” Sammohini thought about how she’d get out her wallet to pay for her soup and tea, when she heard, “OK, here you are, have a nice day, sir.”

“Take it easy,” Chris said, then motioned Sammohini toward the door.

Chris handed a drink holder to Sammohini that she fumbled with on their way out, having placed the drink on top of the soup lid while in the store. She put the drink holder on the trash can lid to put first the small cup of soup in, then her drink, which she carried with both hands. Chris had opened the passenger door, so she could get in easier, and had already started up the truck.

“Thank you so much for this, too! I... you didn’t have to do any of this for me. It’s so nice of you, I app-appreciate it, I really do! You’re so nice. But why did he call you ‘sir?’ I mean, I guess I never thought about it, but...”

They were now stopped at an intersection.

Chris looked over and smiled.

Sammohini saw subtle beard stubble.

“My pronouns are whichever you prefer.”

Chris smiled and turned back to the road.

She remembered back to college where a professor professed: “pronouns identify gender, but not always the sexual organs, of the person. A person can choose their own pronouns.”

“Oh, OK. I dunno which I would prefer...”

“I’ll take that as a compliment. This is how I feel most comfortable. People have been very rude to me for how I look. I just don’t feel comfortable fittin’ into boxes, you know? There are some days where I want to dress up feminine, and other days, I wanna dress more masculine. Today was a mix of the two, but I guess I appear more masculine today?”

They arrived in a nearly deserted business complex with the time reading “7:48am” on the truck dashboard. “Looks like we’re early.” Sammohini turned to see the sign, which read “**Neurology Clinic, Dr. Payne**” in bold lettering, as they drove toward the back of the complex. The fog was obscuring the corners of buildings, leaving everything feeling overcast and cold. They parked in an aisle toward the back, facing the entrance.

“Let’s finish our soup before we head inside. It’ll be cold by the time we get back out.”

Sammohini had already been sipping on her soup along the way over. “Sounds good!”

They finished their soups while Sammohini continued expressing sincere appreciation.

Walking inside, Sammohini glanced at the clock above the receptionist’s desk. “8:02am!”

In the lobby, Joandra was tapping her pen impatiently against a clipboard.

“Sorry, we’re late. My truck wouldn’t start and I made poor Sam wait outside.”

“Whatever! The doctor is waiting for us. She’s inside. Let’s get in there.”

Dr. Payne led them on the first part of the tour of the clinic before her lead assistant, “Aleksandrina, but you can call me Aleks, spelled A-L-E-K-S,” led them to each computer.

Sammohini took notes on all of the computers that the staff used, how they used each program, and if they had any special processes that they did on a daily, monthly, or yearly basis. Chris had taken charge of asking all the technical questions that Sammohini might have needed to ask, so she took notes on what Chris had asked and the answers the staff gave, with Chris looking over the notes to make sure everything made sense. Chris might point out something for clarification that Sammohini quickly added into her notebook. Joandra spoke with complex words and complex hand gestures to Aleks, who smiled and nodded, as she spoke primarily to Chris.

They had to leave their teas out in the main lobby at the receptionist’s desk. When they returned, Sammohini’s tea, which she had written “Sammohini ☺” on, was still warm. She had put her notebook away in her coat pocket, so she cradled the tea with both hands and sipped it, as everyone related to the project met in the main lobby to chat about the project.

“Yes, Dr. Payne. Now that we’ve coordinated our meeting, I’ll order your cutting-edge computers, and they’ll implement granular solutions based upon your innovative-” Sammohini looked at the small lobby of the clinic, which had some comfortable chairs that she could see sinking into, with a few magazines that might be fun to read. She looked over at Chris, who smiled, then quickly looked back at Joandra.

“All of this sounds perfect. I’ll be on my way back inside now. Thank you, ladies.”

“S-sure!” “You’re welcome.” The doctor and assistant were buzzed inside and left.

“Alright, let’s go. We’ll synergize on technical particularities in a meeting at corporate.”

Joandra entered a souped-up sports car right outside and left without saying goodbye.”

“Hey... I saw that car when we parked here! I guess she was here the whole time...”

They walked over to the truck and got in. Chris started the truck and let it warm up.

“I know, I saw it, too.” Sammohini looked over at Chris. “Then, uhh... why didn’t we...”

“Jo-Jo never respects anyone, so I don’t give her much respect. Just the necessary amount to not get fired. I’d never give her a ride, even if she needed it,” Sammohini looked at her tea as Chris started up the truck, pulled out of the stall, and started driving, “because all she cares about is her projects and showing off. I’ve had to work with her for a few years now, and she’s never even given me the time of day. I only think she knows my name because she looks at it on her emails.”

“Well, that’s just rude!”

“Yeah, exactly, which is why when I see you over there being as polite as you can, and even feeling bad when she doesn’t know your name like Hank and Vinny told me about, I just feel bad

for you. You’re such a nice person and everyone on your team likes you. You shouldn’t feel pushed around by people like that. Who is she but someone that you’ll have to work with for the remainder of this month? If she bothers you that much, you can ask your manager for advice, or ask to not be on any further projects, but you’re stuck on this one for now. Just learn to not care what she thinks, do your own thing, live your own life, and be your own person...” Chris paused, then said, “...Sam-mo-hey-knee... did I pronounce that right?”

Sammohini responded politely, “oh! It’s Sam-mo-hee-knee, but-uhh... I-uhh, thanks for trying anyway!”

“Sure thing, Sam-mo-hi-ni. Sammohini.”

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[Chapter 08] Can See That

[\[Updated 11/30\]](#)

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Friday, November 8th. 1:13pm.

Saw no need for Winter coats?

Valtteri from the helpdesk ran over to Sammohini's team's area.

Sammohini looked up from her project notes, where she had just received an email saying the computers would arrive by "EOD" that afternoon.

"All the com-puters in Dr. Chibu-uhh-Chibu's eye clinic across the street are down! We can't get any network connection from them! Can anyone go over there and take a look?"

"Sure thing, Vall! Assign the ticket to me!" Sammohini got her coat and notebook.

"I'll go, too, Sam," she saw Alex put on their coat as well, "jus' in case."

Valtteri unmuted his headset's microphone and said, "we have two techs heading over there now. ETA ASAP, yes, have a good day, too, ma'am," as Sammohini and Alex left to go outside.

Sammohini felt overheated as she kept up the pace Alex set, not quite running, but at a fast enough speed to where she if Alex had brought up an intense topic during the walk, she wouldn't have been able to keep all the finer details together. Alex's glasses had fully changed into sunglasses before the two of them left the parking lot. As the two technicians waited at the intersection for the pedestrian crosswalk light to change, Sammohini said, "those are cool glasses!" Alex looked over, at an angle where the clear-rimmed now-sunglasses had a purple tint as well, causing Sammohini to exclaim, "oh, wow! Purple! How cool!"

Alex smiled, looked as the crosswalk light changed, and dashed on ahead. Sammohini had to run to catch up. Alex jumped down a small retaining wall and had already started walking through the automatic doors when she looked for a way to climb down safely. She did, nearly stumbling down, and saw that Alex had already gone around to the receptionist's computer by the time she looked at the dizzying array of glasses, sunglasses, and contact lens boxes on display in the small lobby.

"Oh, you're the other tech Antinanco mentioned. Please, follow me!"

A doctor with gold-rimmed, octagonal glasses motioned her inside into the clinic.

Sammohini instinctively badged in, nearly fumbling, before entering.

The doctor led her over to a nurses's station where four computers were turned off. A desk fan spun next to one of the monitors.

Sammohini recalled her downtime training.

"Did you have any recent power issues?"

"No. Everything was fine up until we called."

Sammohini went over to one of the computers.

"How about-" "-Hey, Sam, the clean breaker might be tripped," Sammohini looked over to see Alex running in, "because I just checked the power at the receptionist's desk. It booted up when I plugged it in elsewhere. Let's go check the panel in the server room."

Alex had already bolted for the server room by the time she registered the thought and ran after. The door swung open just enough for her to catch it. Inside the small closet was a ladder, the clinic's servers, and Alex, looking over the electrical panel.

"Yeah, it was tripped. Can you go check to see if they have power now? I'll join you after I check the servers."

Sammohini ran back over to the nurses's station to see that all the computers were starting to boot back up.

"Looks like we're back in business!"

Alex had rushed past without stopping.

"Great. Let's do a sweep to verify operations."

After verifying all the computers in the clinic accessed current news websites, Alex called the back-end helpdesk line on an office phone at the nurses's station. "Alex in IT calling an all-clear on the eye clinic computer ticket. Please update the ticket to state that," Alex gave her a thumbs up, "and drop the priority to normal and assign it to me, Alex Tamaya. Yep, no worries, yeah, I'll still need to call our power company when I get back to my desk to find out what they say. Yeah," Alex adjusted a nearby monitor while nodding on the phone, "yeah. Sounds good. Thanks, Tesfaye. Later."

Sammohini felt at ease over how Alex handled the situation. "Wow-uh, that was so cool! You were so calm throughout the whole thing, you stepped into action right away, you knew exactly where to go and what to check. I would have been shaking!"

Alex was about to respond when they turned over to wave at the doctor from before. "Yeah, they is great. We're lucky to have their technical expertise and they is always a pleasure to have in for appointments or to look at new glasses. Thanks for your help, too. Sorry, I didn't catch your name."

Sammohini jumped over and extended a hand.

"My name is Sammohini, but you can call me Sam."

The doctor extended out a well-moisturized hand.

"I'm Doctor Leire Chibueze, but you can feel free to call me Leire, and my preferred pronouns are she and her. What are yours?"

Sammohini remembered back to when Alex told her about what that meant when she first joined the team a few months prior, which she still remembered when they were doing rounds in the hospital, with Alex explaining, 'thanks for asking. That means I don't identify with either female or male pronouns.'

Sammohini's thoughts returned to the clinic.

"Oh-uhh, she and her!" Leire looked at her, Alex, the computers, and back.

"I'll remember. Thanks for helping, Sam, and as always, Antinanco."

Sammohini didn't recognize the word or name. She had her trusty notebook open, since they had just finished assessing the computers and she wanted to feel prepared with specific numbers, if needed, so she wrote what she remembered, 'Anti,' next to the tick-marks that represented computers she and they had confirmed to be functional.

"No worries. Was there much of a pinch on patient care?"

Dr. Chibueze smiled and her glasses shined purple, too. "Nothing disastrous."

"Cool, glad to hear. Hey, Sam, when'd you last get your eyes checked?"

Sammohini touched the left side of her face. She didn't wear glasses and tried to remember the last time she had gone in for an eye appointment of any sort. "Hmm... I don't remember..."

"Well, why not schedule an eye appointment? You're already here, we have great benefits, and you should get your eyes checked yearly... Oh, and let's get tea on the way back to the office!"

Sammohini scheduled an eye appointment for early December, while Alex tried on some sunglasses that matched with their light blue peacoat with a black scarf, then the two left for the Eville Medical cafeteria for beverages before heading back to work. As they walked up the retaining wall to the main road, she remembered that word, 'Anti...' in her notebook.

"Hey, uhh-Alex, the doctor called you something. Anti-something. I don't wanna be rude and ask you about something if it's not my business, but I was just kinda curious, what did she mean?"

The crosswalk light changed. Alex began walking first.

"Oh. My legal name is Antinanco, but I haven't legally changed it to Alex. I'm OK with Leire calling me that since I've been a patient of hers since I was a kid and I know that once I change it over that she'll call me Alex. I'd prefer Alex, and don't tell Nils about the name, since he'd probably use it to annoy me."

Sammohini opened up her notebook, scribbled out 'Anti,' and showed Alex, who glanced over as the two of them walked in through the first of two sets of the cafeteria doors.

“I wrote it down because I wanted to ask you, but-uhh, consider it removed, or better yet, forgotten! What were we just talking about...?”

“Not sure. What sounds good? Chamomile tea?”

Alex entered first, then Sammohini, after she put away her notebook.

Joandra was sitting at a booth facing the door, clicking away at her laptop while sipping some coffee when she noticed Sammohini, which caused her to stop in her tracks.

“Oh, good! You two are here. We’ve moved forward toward the right project benchmarks. If I can leverage your time responsibly-” Sammohini looked over at Alex’s still-sunglassed face embarrassingly, since Alex wasn’t on the project, then looked back, “-ROI on unpacking our MVPs by EOD. We should-” Alex nodded, “-located in the IT cage in the receiving bay. Can you two help minimize our footprint?”

Alex nodded. “Sure thing, Mimi. Comm’on, Sam, let’s get our teas and go ‘unpack MVPs by EOD.’”

Sammohini looked back at Joandra, who was typing away, then chased after Alex.

“B-but, you’re not on the project...! You don’t have to-” “-hey, it’s OK, don’t worry ‘bout it.”

Sammohini insisted on purchasing the teas, which she and Alex sipped along the way toward the receiving area of the hospital, and on arriving at the locked IT cage, Sammohini realized she didn’t have the punch code. “Uh-oh, uhh-I-I-I don’t know the-”

Alex punched in numbers, whispered the code to Sammohini, and helped her locate the twenty computers, which had all been stacked in boxes on a pallet off to the side. “I used to be ‘Mimi’s’ main tech until a project a year ago, or whatever, where she had called me ‘he’ a few times in a big meeting. I went to HR and I haven’t worked with her since.”

“Oh... I-I’m sorry if I said anything like that, I didn’t really know until you told me, and after that, I tried my best to be super careful, and, I-uhh, I...” her mind raced through thoughts, ‘have I ever called Alex something rude? I sure hop-pe not!’, and she returned back to reality and the IT cage with Alex stopping their moving the IT cart and looking right at her.

“Sam, ...dudette, you’re OK. Look, I can roll with the punches. It’s not a big deal, especially since I keep my hair long and all. It’s just when it’s repeated bad behavior, especially in a big meeting, that’s when it’s too far. W’all make mistakes, y’know? And as far as I’m concerned, you try as hard as you can to be polite. I respect that. Do you wanna sit down for a minute and sip on your tea? I feel like rippin’ through some frustration over all that by breaking down some of these boxes.”

Alex ripped through the boxes within minutes. Sammohini thought about everything Alex had said, including the word ‘dudette.’ When Alex was done, having already placed their peacoat on

the door of an opened shelving cabinet with Sammohini’s orange coat on the other door, Sammohini had looked up dudette on her smartphone to find out more information.

Alex sat down in the small chair next to Sammohini.

“Phew, I feel better now! Those boxes are history!”

Alex opened the cup lid and swigged their tea.

“Hey-uhh-so, uhh, there’s the term dude and dudette, but, uhh-I’ve been looking around... since you said dudette, and you’re not either of those two... and I dunno, I can’t find anything, so-uhh, what would you call yourself?”

Sammohini looked at the bottom of the page for any additional information then looked over to Alex, who was staring off into space, somewhere, before saying, “I guess... I’d be a ...dudetcetera, huh?”

Alex grinned, jumped up, then rested their hands on their hips.

“T-That’s cool!” Alex walked over to the still wrapped computers.

“Alright, that settles that mystery! Now let’s get these loaded.”

Twelve of the Wilesware W7000K computers fit onto the bottom part of the IT cart, with the remaining eight on top, along with twenty keyboards, mouse devices, and related cables stacked precariously wherever the parts could fit on the cart, with the leftovers in a box on top. Alex volunteered to push the heavy cart, so Sammohini opened doors and guided the cart back to the IT Build Room.

Alex and Sammohini put away the computers over the weekend.

Alex volunteered to return the cart.

“No point staying late. See ya next week, Sam-mohini!”

“See ya, dudetcetera!”

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[Chapter 09] Sunshine And Rain

[\[Updated 11/29\]](#)

Near Eville Medical, Sammohini’s Apartment.

Saturday, November 9th. 7:38am. Rain rolling in.

The weather outside was going to be delightful.

“It’s just going to be ‘Pitaa’ and me today. Fearghal, and Trishna and John, can’t make it.”

“Awh! That’s too bad. OK, thanks for letting me know! I’ll have leftover potatoes, but I won’t cook too much rice.”

“Leftovers are good for you... We’ll be over in about one hour. [Love you, little sunshine].”

“[Love you... too,] ‘Má.’ [Bye]~!”

“[Until next we meet, little sunshine]!”

Sammohini’s mom hung up the call. She looked at her phone - which showed the contact listing for her mom displaying as “Má” with a cute picture of her with Trishna’s dog, Pollyanna, that always made her smile because of Pollyanna’s goofy expression - then turned off the display. Her mind lingered on how her Dirish was getting rusty before remembering to prepare the apartment for her parents. She looked at the potatoes in her slow cooker, which were done, put some rice in the rice cooker, cleaned, sprayed, and tidied everything that might need to be tidied.

She brought a trash bag to the dumpster about fifty minutes later and returned, uneventfully.

There was enough time for her to sit on the small couch and close her eyes for a minute, or more, before the door knocked. She looked through the peephole to see her ‘Pitajee’ and ‘Má’ with an assortment of grocery bags, opened the door, and motioned for them to enter. They entered, hugged, and put away some new groceries for Sammohini. The three cooked brunch, which combined some chicken that they brought over along with Sammohini’s potatoes and rice, for a dish that wasn’t quite Sindian and wasn’t quite Direish, and sat down to eat.

Sammohini told them all about the past two weeks.

“Oh! Poor thing! Sorry we had to inconvenience you by borrowing your car. At least you were able to get a ride.”

Sammohini was toying with the last potato on her dish. Her dad had his arms folded, eyes closed, and her mom had just finished eating.

“Yeah, it was really nice! I work with some really nice people, but... there’s this one lady that’s really kinda rude...”

“[Oh? Poor little sunshine],” she spoke in Dirish, before returning to English, “let’s start the dishwasher, then chat in the living room.” Sammohini’s mom stood up then said in Sindian, “[Divit, let’s sit in the living room. Sammohini and I will put away the dishes.]”

Sammohini’s dad stood up, brought his plate to the sink, said “I’ll do the dishes, please, sit,” and motioned for her mom and herself to sit down in the living room.

“Yeah-uhhh, it’s this new project manager, Joandra. She called me... ‘Sammihana’ in an email! I was so ticked off, Má! I’m happy that I have some coworkers that are really nice and understanding. They’ve been talking to me about the situation but I just dunno, it’s all so much to deal with, and they’re all talking about how I’m making too muh-mcuh-” she paused to clear her throat because she had stuttered a bit and she coughed before continuing, “-much, excuse me, out of it all! I dunno, Má, whaddo-you think? I know I should probably get over it, because that’s what some of them are saying, and even though they’re not really being rude, it’s kinda coming across like they are, or at least they’re not-really being patient with me, I guess, I dunno, it’s like they- well-uhhh-I mean, uhh, I guess I’m being too concerned about that, becau-se she’s not even boss...” she’d been talking too fast for her mind to keep up over certain words, but kept going, “my boss or any-thing, so uhh-I guess I shouldn’t know- I mean worry-about-t all of that, right, because it’s not like it’s your opinion, or Pitaajee’s opinion, right?” Her face felt warm, her eyes began to sting, and she felt like she was going to try.

“[Little sunshine of my life]... shh... it’s going to be alright...” Her mom’s voice was soothing. “Life is rough sometimes. People don’t always know when they’re mean or being mean to you directly. Someone like that is probably just so busy with their own work. What... if they’re so frantic about doing their job well that they forget basic social norms? I know you have trouble with these things sometimes, but people aren’t always... the nicest they can be. You’re my pure sweet angel. You try your best to do good when’ver you can, however, most people aren’t like that.”

Sammohini’s head felt heavy. She reclined deeper into the chair that faced the couch on one side, the front door on the other, and the kitchen and dining room area ahead, which she looked over as she saw her dad cleaning the table and kitchen area, before she went back to her thoughts, then started talking.

“I dunno what to do. I’m sad that I’m letting this make me feel this say-d, I mean, sad. I wanna tell you about all the good I’ve been doing! I mean, uhh-my boss Linda put me on this p-project bec-because of how much good work I’ve been doing! She-wouldn’t have done that if she didn’t believe in me! My coworkers have all been so nice and patient with me, too, not just in this but with teaching me the ropes, and being really nice people! It’s great to know that I can go into work and feel comfortable around everyone that I work with... and many of them even hang out with each other after work. They’ve invited me out a few times, which was super nice of them!”

Sammohini’s mom took a sip of the glass of water she’d brought over from the dining area.

“Two of my coworkers invited me to play this game, or did but with the thing they m-mentioned where they said that it was a rough game people, rather, because people would be super rude to each other. I dunno if I’d like that sort of game very much! I like more of the peaceful games

or like the ones where you go on a fun adventure, but the ones where you strategize to beat up other people doesn’t really seem like something I’d enjoy, so I guess I wouldn’t like it.”

Sammohini’s dad turned on the dishwasher and joined her mom on the couch.

“You were always a lot more sensitive than all the other kids at school, right, Divit?” Her dad hugged her mom. “Yes, but that’s alright.” Her mom continued. “We know it was hard- you had a hard time with some kids at school. Jane was there to help out through the worst of it and now you’re professionally dealing with it. We’ve both been there- we know to a certain extent how it must feel for you. No one likes to be treated rudely. Some people just don’t understand that they’re being rude to others. What I’ve found in situations like these, when I’ve complained to managers or HR, they will help for a short amount of time, but then the person will just find something else to be rude about if they’re really being rude toward you. If they’re just being dumb, then it’s better to ignore them. Right, dear?”

Her mom pat her dad’s leg. He opened his eyes and smiled in a way that made her feel calmer.

“Hmm... [yes, little sunshine],” he said in Sindian before returning to English, “not everyone is worth your time in life. Some people can steal all your thoughts if they can. Others do not realize that they have stolen your thoughts. We wanted to raise you in the best environment. It was also our own oasis from life. We both had difficult parts in life so we wanted to make it easy for you. Maybe we made it too easy?”

Her mom finished her glass of water and sipped the last glass.

“Oh! I can get some more water for you, Má,” Sammohini jumped up, “and would you like anything, Pitaajee?” She took the empty water glass from her mom and jumped over to the kitchen. “Yes, water will be fine.” She returned with two full glasses of water and was about to sit down when her mom asked, “why don’t you get one for yourself, too, [little sunshine]?” She did.

“I don’t know if you remember, [little sunshine],” her mom started to say when Sammohini returned with her full glass of water, “but here’s the story of how we came up with your name. When we started our family, we decided if the child was a boy, we’d go with a Direish name, and if the child was a girl, we’d go with a Sindian name. When we found out you were going to be a sweet little girl, we went to some name registries looking for names and I thought ‘Sammohini’ looked so pretty. Your father liked the name, too, and said,” and she imitated her dad’s kindly yet gruff voice, in Sindian, “[it is a flexible name. The name can be Sam or Sammohini].”

Her mom laughed, she laughed, and her dad smiled.

When they departed a few hours later, after talking about how her project was going, including that she had twenty computers to set up next week and if there were any love interests, of which there were none, the mild sprinkling predicted on the weather forecast turned into heavy rains.

They exchanged hugs and extended goodbyes. Her dad had brought along an umbrella and stood outside in the hallway leading out to the elevators down to the ground floor while her mom said her final goodbyes for the day.

“OK, [little sunshine], see you over at home for the holiday. Take care,” and she whispered in Direish, “[do not let any fools rain on my little sunshine]!” They both laughed, hugged one last time, and her parents left.

She locked the door, looked around at the now-quiet apartment, and sat in the same chair to think about what her parents had recommended.

She thought about her parents, sitting on the couch, and her dad saying, “it is important not to take things seriously that do not matter,” and liked the memory enough to retrieve her work notebook that she instinctively brought home with her, and wrote that in Sindian in the bottom of the first page of her first project. She thought about going out somewhere, anywhere, to clear her head, and so went out to her sliding glass door to look outside.

The rain was pouring heavier than before.

She opened her phone’s contact list and scrolled through the list starting from the bottom. Past the phone numbers for businesses and medical contacts, she meticulously listed the phone numbers of all of her coworkers, her manager, then “Work Chris” underneath them, with the header “WORK,” and continued scrolling up past Trishna then John, until she reached Jane.

She opened the contact listing:

Jane Lanyard, with a photo of them hugging and laughing, along with her phone number and email address. She pressed the text message button. A majority of the screen were filled with their most recent conversations. In the textbox, she wrote:

“could i” - which autocorrected the capitalization - “call you” - and pressed Send.

Almost instantly, Jane called. They talked about everything. She cried when she talked about how she felt so weak for reacting so emotionally. “Let it out,” Jane said over the phone, “let it all out.” She wept without speaking for long enough that she thought Jane had hung up, but when she stopped crying, Jane said in a calm voice, “I wish I was there to give you a big hug right now.”

She breathed in and said in a near whisper “I wish you could, too... t-thank you.”

“No, thank you, for everything. You’ve done so much for me, Sammohini. This is the least I can do.”

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[Chapter 10] Bratty Little Zero-Three

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, IT Build Room.

Monday, November 11th. 7:20am.

The rain made the day rather dour.

Sammohini could only build five of the twenty computers at a time.

There wasn’t enough space or network bandwidth to connect all of them at once, so the spares were locked up in the storage room next door, and she had spent the last hour recording all twenty serial numbers on a sixth computer she was borrowing. She used that computer to remotely access her computer to work on some spreadsheets and had spent more time than she was willing to admit naming the new computers.

Other than having to fit within Eville Medical IT’s official computer naming convention standards, there were two letters that she could have creative freedom with picking. ‘I’m not a fan of how Radiology Outpatient had turned out! That was a rough call with trying to figure out how to remote into that computer named RO01! Fortunately, this one should be easy. It’ll just be NE. Or should it be NU? Or NR? Oh! This’s so tricky! It’s spelled NE-UROLOGY, but it kinda sounds like NU-ROLOGY, and NR just looks kinda neat.’

She had spelled out Neurology in a free spot in her crowded notebook.

‘I guess I might as well not be too creative with it. If there are other Neurology clinics that we acquire later on, then, they’ll just have to deal with it!’

She went back to the computer to check the listings, saw that NE was available, said “Nice!” out loud, realized she had but looked around to see she was alone in the room, then continued by recording the following information into the master spreadsheet, under the following headers:

| Model Number | Building | Floor | Location | Lettering | Assets |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Wilesware 7000K | Cold | 5th Floor | Neurology | NE | 01 - 20 |

After she typed out W7C5NE01 on the computer labeler, printed it, placed it as precisely as she could in the official spot - the corner near the power button - and took a step back to admire her handiwork, she thought about taking a photo of the computer as a memento for this momentous occasion.

‘My first solo project! The first computer I named myself! Oh, how exciting!’ she thought, smiling, mainly at how far she’d come since her days on the helpdesk as a full-time employee, before that as a helpdesk contractor, then before that trying to find work in her field of choice, technical support, because she liked working on and around computers. And before that, she realized her mind had gone astray, when she thought, ‘hmm... I should probably start prepping these computers before the morning meeting,’ then looked over at the clock, which said, “7:28am.”

“Alright, Zero-One,” which was the nickname she gave to the computer she had just labeled “W7C5NE01” and the one that was at a screen where she could enter its name into the system officially, “let’s get you a nice, clean, computer image applied onto you. Zero-Two, you’ll be up next! Don’t worry, I just wanna make sure I do this right for Zero-One, so I hope you don’t mind the delay!” The two computers she spoke to were part of the five that were humming away in a stack. She had already recorded their serial numbers in order from the bottom that she would call Zero-Five up to the topmost computer, Zero-One.

She typed W7C5NE01 into the computer screen, clicked the Next button, and saw the usual black boxes fly across the screen. She clicked the buttons that Chris recommended so she wouldn’t have to do as much work on installing certain programs that Chris determined the clinic staff would need, then waited until she saw the “Successfully Applying Image From img-corp-evillemedical...” message appear and disappear on the screen.

‘Cool! This is nice. I don’t have to go in and install or configure everything! I just need to go do the touch-up work. I could even be done with this project by the end of this week,’ she thought, then pressed the button on the device that let her switch between the other computers, going next to Zero-Two. She did the same process for Zero-Two through Zero-Five, each applying successfully and uneventfully.

On her digital checklist, she had a column at each step of the way - which she had received from Hank, along with some guidance on how best to work through the spreadsheet late last week - so she wouldn’t have to double-check if she had done something on a computer that wasn’t readily available. She was happy to have the spreadsheet and the help of her team.

When she finished with preparing Zero-Five, she switched back over to Zero-One and left the computer there to finish loading. She had finished updating the names and serial numbers of the first five computers, so she printed out the remaining fifteen names to the computer labeler, sent a print-out of the spreadsheet over to the helpdesk printer, then stopped by the helpdesk area to pick up the print-out.

“Hey, Sammohini! It’s been a little while!”

Her coworker from her contracting days, Nessa, was at the printer.

“Sorry-uhh, it’s been busy, but how’s it going?”

Nessa handed over the paper.

“You know, same ol’, same ol’, kinda boring. Did you see that new Tactics?”

Sammohini looked over the piece of paper to make sure it was legible.

“No... some of my team- err-um, my new team... uhh- they’re playing it.”

Valtteri swiveled around to join in the conversation.

“Yeah, we’ve been playing with Hank and Fairy dust. Hank’s already level-” “-oh, hey, sorry, I have to get back to getting these computers all squared away, we have a meeting coming up and, I-uhh, sorry-ummm, I didn’t- I-uhh-” “-no, it’s all good, Sammohini, we’ll let you get back to it. Take care!”

Sammohini felt a little dizzy and flushed, but nodded in a near-bow, then left.

“She used to-” she heard faintly as she walked toward her desk, first, to check the time...
“7:58am!”

She nearly dropped the paper as she badged into the Build Room to find it nearly full. Hank sat next to Zero-One, but left the seat in front of it open. She waded through the crowded room, asked to sit down, then briefly clicked at the newly setup computer just before Linda arrived. She brought news about the resumes that would be in their emails shortly for consideration with the open slot on their team. The team, after that, gave their daily roundtable updates.

To conclude the meeting, everyone said ‘Los!’ simultaneously, and everyone stood up to leave except for Sammohini and Hank.

“Hey, let’s check out these builds you’ve been building.”

“Sure, well, first, I gave them the naming convention ‘NE’ since I thought it would work well for verbal communication.” Hank nodded, and she continued, feeling confident and comfortable, “then these are the first five. This one’s Zero-One, -Two, -Three, -Four, and -Five. The others are in the storage room in a box that I labeled ‘SAMMOHINI’S PROJECT.’ I have the keyboards, mice, and other computerly things taped up in a second box with the same label since we don’t really need to do anything with those at the moment. I figure when we’re about to leave for the go-live, I’ll open them one last time to do a final check. What do you recommend?”

Hank stroked his beard.

“If they’re still new, you probably don’t need to plug them all in to test every last one, but it never hurts to bring spares of everything.”

Sammohini wrote ‘BRING SPARES OF EVERYTHING’ in her notebook in the next free spot.

“That’s a great idea!”

Hank clicked around on Zero-One.

He opened one of the main clinical applications.

“[“Some ideas... were born out of... poor experiences.”]”

He said in Sindian with some unintentional pauses.

Sammohini liked that quote, and wrote that down, too.

“You’re so smart! So I clicked all the software checkboxes that Chris recommended, like that one there, so we should be good. I guess the next step on all these five is to check to see that they’re set up properly, then I can move onto the next batch, right?”

Hank readjusted his knit-cap.

“Right, but, remind me again, how would you check to make sure everything is working properly?”

Sammohini showed him all the checks she would do.

“OK, Zero-One is good. I’ll sign it off on the spreadsheet. Go ahead and power it off. I’ll send Blueberry a message when I get back to my desk to see if we can borrow some networking space to keep these powered on. Things go weird with these computers, sometimes, especially when we got ‘em set up, like we did, then left off for a few weeks, then try to set ‘em back up when we went to deploy them. Even a quick check before deployment could’ve saved us hours.”

Sammohini looked back at Hank’s quote, which she wrote in Sindian.

“Is that example from another one of those [poor experiences]?”

She smiled. Hank laughed, then said, with a sigh, “[sure was]!”

She powered off Zero-One, switched over to Zero-Two, and they checked everything on the computer together. Everything seemed to click for Sammohini.

Hank took note and said, “you seem to really be getting the hang of this! Do you need me to stick around while you check out Zero-Three or do you have the hang of it now? If you do all your checks through Two-Zero, I could just blast through ‘em all once Blueberry repays an old favor by finding us network connections for all of these, but if you’re not completely comfortable with the whole process, I don’t mind sticking around through one or two more. Whichever you prefer.”

She turned away from Zero-Two’s turned-off display.

The clock said, “10:02am.” Her stomach growled.

Hank looked over at the clock, too.

“How about we take a break to grab some food, Sammohini? I don’t think you took a break since you got here, huh?”

Sammohini tried to remember, remembered, then said, “oh yeah! I was gonna take a break before the meeting!”

“Come on [little sister], let’s grab some food.”

Hank held the door open and let Sammohini walk through first.

They went to the cafeteria and returned after having a late breakfast.

Sammohini was feeling confident from the sugar rush of the donut she had eaten along with some fruits and egg sandwich, as she sat back down in the chair in front of the blank computer screen. Hank had brought in two more computers under his right arm, set them down next to Sammohini, then took Zero-One and Zero-Two under his left arm.

“Wanna start these next two, then check off those three on your own? I’ll take Zero-One and Zero-Two back to my desk, since I’m sure Blueberry can hook us up soon, and besides, the further along you get in setting these up, the better we’ll be.”

Sammohini breathed in then let out a confident “OK!”

“Lemme know if you run into any problems. You should struggle a bit to figure out things on your own, but don’t let it overwhelm you. Anyone of us, even Nils, can help you out. Just remember,” he readjusted the computers, “most of us had to figure out most of this all on our own, between researching online, hitting our heads against it, looking over our old textbooks or documentation, and sometimes just letting it get the better of us for the time being until we became good enough to overcome the challenge.”

Sammohini felt inspired.

“Later.”

“Later!”

Hank left her alone in the room.

She started up the remote connection again, added the serial numbers of the two computers onto the official spreadsheets, labeled them Zero-Six and Zero-Seven, and applied images to both successfully.

She moved over to Zero-Three.

The background wasn’t the standard Eville Medical green, some icons were missing, and the display looked odd. Her stomach growled louder than before.

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[Chapter 11] Time Spent Troubleshooting

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, IT Build Room.

Monday, November 11th. 11:31am.

You only notice some rains after you’re soaked...

Sammohini couldn’t believe that the computer had misbehaved.

She switched the controls over to Zero-Four and Zero-Five. Both of those computers seemed to be working. Everything, item by item, checked off on the checklist, and she even double-checked Zero-Four after completing Zero-Five to make sure she wasn’t crazy. ‘Yuup, sure enough, both of these are working good,’ she thought as she shut both of them off. She unplugged both of them, then switched back over to Zero-Six and Zero-Seven to see both were still loading programs, so she focused her efforts on Zero-Three.

“Zero-Three... why do you have to be like this? Why are you being bratty with me?” She asked as she clicked around the malfunctioning computer.

‘The background isn’t such a big deal,’ she thought, ‘because most of the time, people won’t even notice the logo. But it does have some particular diagnostic information that is useful! Say the computer is semi-functional. If the user can relay that to us, we can better help! Without that information, sure, they could always go looking around for the computer name on the box itself, but what if the computer is hidden in a cabinet or something? Then it’d be difficult to find!’

She went back to her remotely-controlled computer and searched for any documentation on the desktop background. In their team’s knowledge base of articles, past and relevant, she found something related to an older version of the desktop from three years ago. It provided some information through enough technical jargon to be impossible to read. Still, she tried reading. There was a particular location on a server... somewhere... which stored the information that would broadcast out to the computers, she guessed, based on her best translation efforts from the technical jargon into something she could read.

A few clicks and keyboard taps later and she found the server location missing. The whole location and everything referenced was not showing there at all!

She opened up her troubleshooting notebook, where she had written the following:

- [] background weird
- [] icons not there
- [] display weird

Next to the “background weird” note, she wrote the knowledge base article’s reference number, underlined it, put a big question mark next to it with a smaller question mark inside the [], then went onto the next item on the list.

It seemed like about half of the icons on the desktop, ranging from the standard Eville Medical programs to the specific programs that Chris had stated needed to be installed, were gone. Which ones, exactly, were not clear...

...Because the screen was blurry from the display showing weirdly.

It was hard for her to focus.

Her vision was getting...

t—e—n—s—e

...

...

h—m—m—m—m—m—m—m—m—m—m—m—m

...

...

She...

....cleared her...

...mind.

“[Calm down]...”

She breathed in.

She closed her eyes.

‘You’ve got this!’

She let that thought linger.

‘I won’t figure this out.’

‘No! It’ll be OK. I just have-’

‘You’ll fail. You’ll be hated-’

‘It’s going to be fine...’

‘You’re wasting time.’

‘I have to fix this computer!’

‘You won’t be able to...’

‘Yes, I will!’

‘You’ve been entrusted to do this work and you’ve already failed at this one computer, and you’re not even halfway done with this project and you’ve already been wasting this much time trying to figure out this issue that the rest of your team could figure out instantly for you without even-’

‘-Stop! It’ll be OK!’

‘...’

‘It’s going to be OK...’

‘She opened her eyes.

She breathed out.

‘Sorry, Sammohini.’

“OK!”

She clicked around on the display settings, tried some experiments to see if anything would improve the stretching and contorting of the screen that left it barely readable and found some success. It still didn’t look, she thought to herself, right. The best resolution had bars on the top and bottom and the second-best cropped off the sides. She kept the mode with the bars. ‘At least you can see the time!’

The time on the computer said, “11:57am.”

The time on the wall said, “12:00pm!”

She breathed in uneasily, thinking about how much time she was wasting, before turning back around to the computer and kept going. The notebook had closed itself, so when she flipped to the page with her troubleshooting notes, she drew a ‘x’ inside the [] box next to ‘display weird,’ which looked like:

?

[?] background weird KB00015108?

[] icons not there

[x] display weird

‘With the icons not being there,’ she thought, ‘I’ll have to compile a list of what’s missing, so I can install everything that’s missing...!’

She switched over to see Zero-Six’s screen and saw that it had just completed loading, so she did a quick check to confirm that, yes, everything had loaded correctly. ‘Weird! You are a little brat, you, Zero-Three! Why don’t you play nicely like all your brothers, sisters, and other siblings?’

The ‘bratty’ computer hummed away like its siblings.

She launched the list of noteworthy programs on Zero-Six, went back to her remotely-controlled computer which borrowed the keyboard, mouse, and monitor beside her “project workspace,” and started up two new text documents. She started the first line of the first document with “03 BRATTY COMPUTER” and the second she started with “06 PLAYS NICE” before typing out every major program in the second column based on what she saw on Zero-Six. When she was done, she switched back over to Zero-Three and had some trouble even navigating to the list of noteworthy programs on Zero-Three.

‘Come on, quit being bratty, Zero-Three!’

The black rectangle, about one foot by one foot by six inches, hummed away.

‘I wanna help you get back to normal!’

It seemed oblivious to Sammohini’s thought-pleas toward not being bratty.

Still, she continued to fight against Zero-Three, with it finally loading its list of programs. Between the two computers, she noticed that about half of the programs were missing, with a majority of them being seemingly minor things that she could just reinstall to proceed.

The first item to install was an update to the Scribedesk Professional suite of programs, since each of these computers needed to use its email program, word processor, and spreadsheet program. ‘Hmmm, but it’s weird that it’s so outdated. It might be easier if I just uninstall this version and install the latest version from the server.’

She uninstalled the program and installed the latest version of the program.

After rebooting the computer, Zero-Three slowly started back up, and when she launched Scribedesk Mailbox, it launched into the same version as before! Before it even fully loaded, a software license prompt appeared on the screen. ‘How could it have an incorrect license key? I used the license key in the same folder as the program installer!’ She closed it then reopened it, figuring it was a glitch. Same issue. She went back to the folder, copied the license key, plugged it in, and it said, “activated!” Before she could close out of the prompt, it said, “Thank you for installing the trial version of Scribedesk Mailbox. Your copy will deactivate automatically in 90 days! Click here to purchase now!” She sighed in frustration and gave up trying to figure that one out.

Underneath the three items she was troubleshooting, she wrote:

[] mailbox key

The next program on the list was a missing critical clinical application.

‘How do I even install SNKR? I thought it came standard on every computer, whether we wanted it or not?’ She looked through their team’s internal knowledge base. Whenever she had issues with the program when she was in her previous role in the helpdesk, SNKR was never the issue. It was always the data inside it. Whether someone keyed information incorrectly into the antiquated program, with its signature black background and blocky green text, or some data had malfunctioned somewhere else along the way, the venerable program always seemed to work.

As she thought about that, she next looked through tickets that might have referenced installing SNKR, but it seemed in at least the past eight years - ‘wow! I would have been in high school when they implemented this ticketing system...’ she thought, briefly exploring her memories on where she would have been eight years ago that day - no one had ever asked for SNKR to be reinstalled. Sure, there were the occasional software problems with it, but all those tickets seemed to be fixed by repairing it.

There wasn’t even an SNKR installation folder, so how did they go about repairing it? In one ticket written by Venkat, he wrote about repairing SNKR from within the program itself, ‘...so that probably won’t work.’

She continued her list.

[] install SKNR

She erased that, mostly, and wrote:

[] install SNKR

Her pencil had left some marks around the name.

Next down the list of missing applications was one of the Neurology-specific applications. This was one of Chris’s primary programs to support. ‘Hmmm... I could always ask Chris if I run into problems with installing this,’ she thought as she navigated to the installation folders to locate WilesMD. She found the program, along with a file called ‘readme.’ She opened it.

Hello!

This is Chris. If you’re reading this, have you seen me or anyone on my team about installing this program?

It is tricky to install.

If you choose to proceed without checking in with the team, good luck!

| |
|-------------|
| L, Chris |
|-------------|

In her notebook, she wrote:

[] see Chris about WilesMD

The digitized unlock of the door clicked.

Josh entered, bringing with him a computer of the same model as Zero-Three.

“Hullo.” Josh placed the computer on the counter closest to the door.

“Hey-uhh... Josh-ummm, can I ask you for help with something?”

Josh turned around and took a step forward. “Sure, how can I help?”

“Well, sorry, it’s not just one thing, but a few things, and I’m kinda lost, I guess. I mean, I probably should learn how to do all this on my own, but I’ve kept on running into roadblocks along the way, and I’m just kinda at a point now where I’m... losing confidence in my abilities to do this job...”

“Sorry to hear you’re feeling that way! No worries. Let’s see..”

Josh’s calm voice and bright smile put Sammohini at ease.

Sammohini handed Josh her notebook’s list of computer fixes.

“Huh, I never heard’a reinstalling SNKR,” Josh took her cherished notebook closer to his face, turned it slightly, grinned, returned it with respect, then said, “it looks like your image got nuked.”

“Huh?”

Sammohini took the notebook back and looked at Josh. “Yeah-uhh, sometimes, you know, these things just happen. A computer’ll be pluggin’ away just fine then go kaput. It happens. No big deal or anything. You prob- definitely didn’t do anything wrong. It could be anything from the network acting up to Nils playing a prank.”

She breathed a sigh of relief.

“Hopefully, you didn’t spend too much time trying to work on all of this-” she glanced over at the clock to see it said “12:44pm-” “-although, good effort on you for trying. Here, lemme show you how you can see if the image applied successfully.” He opened a Wilesware system program and clicked into a few generic-sounding folders. “Yup, see, right here? If it had imaged properly, you’d see today’s date ‘ere, or, whenever you installed it, along with a few other little telltales here. This whole thing is shot.”

She imagined Zero-Three getting shot. “Oh, no! Not that!”

“No worries, you just gotta reimage it. You’re gonna wanna delete it out of Wilesware Manager first, reimage it with a new name, then it should work just fine. Need any help with that?”

Sammohini looked back over to her spreadsheet computer with the serial numbers and computer names.

“B-but, what if I wanna keep that name?”

She had started to grow fond of her bratty little Zero-Three, which she imagined briefly in a crib, in a bib, ‘but where would the baby dummy go?’

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[Chapter 12] Attached To Name?

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, IT Build Room.

Monday, November 11th. 12:48pm.

What’s the scientific name for clear skies?

Josh rubbed his fingers against his bearded chin, readjusted his glasses with clear frames that shined the same purple tint as Alex’s, and said, “here, gimme’a minute, I’ve gotta image this computer myself.” He started to plug in computer cables on the opposite side of the room before turning back around to add, “but ask yourself this: How attached are you to that name? When you decide, we can come up with a plan.”

Sammohini turned back around to sit on the little stool that sat between the ailing Zero-Three and her remotely-controlled computer that had her project spreadsheets and the two comparison lists. She sat down, moved away from Zero-Three, minimized the lists, brought up the main project spreadsheet, looked down at her paper spreadsheet with all its checkmarks, and reflected on the changes she’d made since the morning.

‘Zero-One, Zero-Two, Zero-Four, Zero-Five, Zero-Six, and Zero-Seven are effectively done for now,’ she thought as she filled in the related cells in the digital spreadsheet, ‘and I probably should still be getting more of these prepped today... poor Zero-Three. If we leave you outta the loop, you could be renamed to Two-One. Would you be OK with that, [little one]?’

The little computer’s green power light remained solid. A little blue light next to it flashed off and then remained back on. Its screen was still open to the list of noteworthy programs, with its screen distorted just enough to be uncomfortable to look at for too- “-So, here’s the deal...”

Josh’s voice startled her.

“Oh, sorry, didn’t mean’ta sneak up on ya. You OK?”

Sammohini breathed in slowly and felt OK. “Uh-yeah.”

Josh brought up a stool and sat next to Zero-Three.

“OK, so you have two main options with this computer. Like I said before, you’ve gotta delete it out of Wilesware Manager first, sometimes, you’ve gotta let it take its time to fully register that it’s outta there, which I’ll normally do by...” and he showed her the technical processes he would do to make all this happen, most of which she had done, but not as quickly or efficiently.

Josh had taken a glance through the project spreadsheet.

He spoke in a calm voice. “So you’re naming these computers November Echo? That’ll work well.” She smiled and he smiled, too. “It’s a good, clear, name, and I can see why you’re worried about renaming this particular one.” He tapped his fingers on Zero-Three. “We’d normally just go through and rename it to the next available number when we’re reimaging the same hardware and whatnot, because it’s easier for several different reasons, but for projects, yeah, they tend to like having similar names like that, at least, until the higher-ups sign off on it-and forget about the project when they move on-to the next one. So we’d probably want to keep the same,” he coughed, “excuse me, the same name,” he coughed again, “sorry, the same name for it, and, excuse me, for a second...”

Josh stood up, walked over to the bench he was working on, took a gulp of water from his military-styled water bottle, coughed, took another gulp, and sat back down. He cleared his throat again, softer this time, then continued, “...probably the easiest way to do that would mmhh-be to give it some junk name.” She winced briefly. “Oh, hey, don’t worry, we’re not gonna name it literal junk or anything like that, just, like, uhh... here, lemme show ya what I mean.”

Zero-Three was at the computer-naming screen. It had a background of alternating blue and green boxes, with black box bordered by white lines, where she had typed in W7C5NE. The cursor flashed after the letter E.

Josh leaned over, typed in 03A, and stood back at attention.

“B-but, we can’t go against our naming convention!” Sammohini recalled back to her training on setting up new computers, where she was taught that- “-It’s fine if it’s temporary. If you need approval or clarification, we can go get that. I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable.”

Josh walked back over to the computer he was working on before.

Sammohini looked back at the computer, now called W7C5NE03A, over at her spreadsheet, then at the time. “1:16!” She blurted out then her face felt warm. “Oh-uhh, sorry about that.” “All’s good.” She turned back around to see Josh hadn’t turned around and was clicking away. “I just realized, I-uhhh... haven’t had lunch.” Josh turned and folded his arms. “Private First Class Lanchester! Sorry, I-uhh meant, Sam! You are... way past due on your lunch! Go get some lunch immediately, relax, either think it all over or don’t, and decide your course of action when you return? I’ll keep watch in case Nils tries to mess with the computer.”

Sammohini locked her spreadsheet computer, stood up, and tried to do a salute.

“Yessir!” She walked toward the door and felt dizzy from being stationary for hours.

Josh handed her a bar of candy. “Here, have this for your hard work here so far.” It was one of her favorites, a bar of chai-flavored chocolate. “Oh! I love these, but...” She looked at the diminishing pile and saw only yellow and red wrappers of candies no one wanted to eat. “You’re

doing a great job.” She at Josh, who was smiling. “You should see if you can find Vinny or Hank because either one’s on your project and can help guide your best course of action.”

She unwrapped it, and was about to stuff it in her mouth when she said, “t-thank you!” Josh nodded. She opened the door, unwrapped the chocolate bar, and stuffed her mouth.

Eville Medical, Cafeteria.

Monday, November 11th. 1:38pm.

If you could name a dish, what would you call it?

The noodles were dry, tough, and chewy, but warm, at least.

When she was hungry, she still tended to eat too fast, even as an adult, but at least she’d learned to cover her mouth. No one else from her team was there, or anyone else she’d recognized, so she sat in one of the back-most booths, where she’d usually hang out with Hank or Venkat on a slow afternoon.

They used up the last of the beef from their lunch batch, so the beef was about as appealing.

She still chewed through the remaining bits resembling protein and was left with three spoonfuls of squiggly, burnt noodles. She thought of gnawing through these last bites. Instead, she decided to throw them in the compostables bin.

“I’d rather eat cardboard than whatever they call this!”

“Oh, I’m-” -she started to say before turning around to see a patient dressed in a hospital gown that was already walking away, after throwing the food into the bin.

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Monday, November 11th. 2:08pm.

She forgot to check the weather.

Sammohini badged into the build room before she remembered something.

She bopped over to Hank’s cube first. He wasn’t there. She skipped over to Venkat’s cube next. He wasn’t there either. Everyone was gone except for Nils. She thought about not asking him for a second longer than it took for him to notice that she was lingering.

“The answer is no.”

Nils didn’t look over.

“Huh-uhh, whaaa-”

Nils turned and smiled.

“Just kidding. What’s up?”

“Oh, uhh, so I have this computer-errr... that I’m-uhhh working on and I’m wondering about what to call it-” “-Don’t know our naming conventions?”

“Well, it’s not-uhhh that, exactly, uhh-it’s more like-uhhh, the computer-” -she breathed in, anticipating she’d be interrupted again- “-was nuked on the first image so I need to reimage it however I want it to have the same name.”

Nils smiled then returned to typing away.

“Give it a rubbish name. Rename it later.”

“Oh, OK, thanks!”

Sammohini felt tired and defeated.

She went into the Build Room.

Venkat and Hank were at the computer she had left at the naming screen.

“Hey Sammohini, hope you don’t mind. We did some work for you here.”

Josh had not moved from his spot. “I caught ‘em up-ta speed for ya, there.”

Sammohini saw two stacks of labeled computers. One set was powered off and disconnected and the next set was in the prep stack where Zero-Three had sat. Venkat had the paper spreadsheet while Hank turned to invite Sammohini an open seat across from him.

“Josh told us about your dilemma with your problem computer. We got ‘er all sorted out. She’s Zero-Three once again, and, all systems go!”

Sammohini clapped, smiled, and jumped up.

“Oh good! Thank you, thank you! How did you go about it?”

Hank motioned her to walk forward. He turned to face the computer.

“We gave her a temporary name, Zero-Three-A, just like Josh had recommended earlier, then I went over and talked to a buddy of mine, and when it was done loading, I just renamed it back. She’s online with Zero-Three. Those sorts of things’ll happen sometimes, like, one-outta-a-hundred,” Josh stopped typing, “OK, maybe more like -a-million,” and Josh started typing again, “so, it’s easier these days just to reimage it. I’m sure Venkat is happy that he doesn’t have to go out and install SNKR anymore, right?”

Venkat opened his eyes, “which took hours to install,” and closed his eyes again.

“I know I was telling you before that it’s better to figure it out on your own, since we all did, but you’ve gotta remember that we’re a team, too, and you can always ask us when you start to get overwhelmed... or... forget to take your lunch.”

She sat back down.

“Sorry, I-uhh... I wanted to...” Hank rubbed his tattooed arm, particularly over a Sindian deity of compassion. “No need to apologize or anything, [little sister]... Sammohini, it’s not like you made

any mistakes or did anything wrong. Quite the opposite. You had the right attitude to give it your best effort.”

Venkat said, like her father might, with stern compassion. “[Do not burn yourself out.]”

“So, anyway, we’re just about done up to One-One. Blueberry lent me some real estate for all twenty computers, so once we’re done with these, we’ll bring ‘em over, I’ll show you where the computers will live for the next few weeks, and Venkat will prep the next wave. We’re ahead-a-the curve but we’re still on a deadline.”

“Thank you so much!”

“Hey, hopefully, you didn’t have any preference on which ones we took? I know you were looking at the serial numbers earlier, and on the list, you had them alphabetized by serial number. We figured we’d follow that since it was convenient enough for us, but you didn’t have it clearly labeled or anything, so I figured I’d check.”

Venkat handed over the paper spreadsheet with some new items penciled in.

“No! This is great! T-thank you! I know it’s-uhh,” she breathed in, looked over the list once more, then looked back up to see Hank shutting down the computer and Venkat standing by to unplug the cables, “thanks for your compassion. Everyone. Thank you...!”

Her eyes moistened momentarily, but she blinked, and the moisture dissipated.

“That’s what we’re here for. You’ll repay your debts soon enough- scratch that thought, Sammohini.” Hank took one of the computers, turned, and handed it to her. “Here, grab this one ‘n the door. I’ll grab the others. He grabbed two under each arm and waddled over to the door she held open. Josh didn’t look over but did tuck himself into his work area further to give them more room.

After Sammohini left the build room, she heard a bit of a crash as Hank plopped the computers on the top part of a cart just outside the door, labeled ‘BREAK/FIX TEAM ONLY.’ The other computers she was working on were at the bottom.

Nils yelled over, “show off!”

“Takes one to know one!”

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[Chapter 13] Elephant In Closet

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, “Cold” Building, 3rd Floor, Network Closet.

Monday, November 11th. 2:18pm.

The rain drummed like amateur bands she’d seen in college.

They could have brought the computers outside for a daytime stroll, were it not for the rain. The closet was somewhere... through hallways lined with wainscoting painted in light blue, inside sterile floors and walls and ceilings, surrounded by patient rooms in various states... and looked just like any nearby patient room, except the anonymous entryway had a badge entry with the label “C3 IDF Closet 3108” instead of “C3 Patient Room 3109.”

Sammohini paused to remember how they got there.

What landmarks could she refer to next time?

Through her memories, she remembered they had been stopped twice...

Since he wore his lab coat, both sets of patients mistook him for a doctor. After being directed, the first patient said, “you’re a swell doctor!” To which Sammohini replied, “he’s a doctor of troubleshootology!” The patient left, confused. “I was called that recently. You’re definitely more deserving of that title, Hank!”

During both situations, he stopped pushing the heavy cart and patiently listened as the patients asked for directions, then visually drew out a diagram with left fingers and right palm of where they needed to go and walked two steps in the direction they needed to go before letting them go.

The first was looking for a restroom.

He drew with his left pointer finger on his right palm.

“Down the hall,” he drew a forward motion on his palm, “and to the right,” he drew a right motion on his palm.”

“Cool, thanks, dude!”

The second, with a child in tow, was looking for the cafeteria. After he told the dad where to go, he crouched with a big grin and waved with both hands at the daughter in a hospital gown who smiled at him before he poked both of his cheeks, causing her to laugh, then he laughed, too, before standing back up. The dad thanked them both, and after Hank walked two steps toward the cafeteria, everyone waved their goodbyes.

She felt inspired by his compassion.

“You really are nice to everyone!”

Hank started pushing the cart again.

*"Gotta be 'round here. No one's got a foolish question when they're feelin' sick."
She wrote that down in her troubleshooting notebook in the first open space.*

When they were leaving the team area with the fully-loaded cart, Sammohini had offered to push the cart earlier, but Hank said, "I got it, but, can you open doors for me?"

They had arrived at the innocuous network closet.
She badged them in.

Sammohini stepped first onto the sticky doormat and looked down at her blank ankle boots. She still liked how they looked, and enjoyed wearing them, even though they were showing significant wear. Hank wore black trainers, with the word "Sneaker" barely visible in black along the side, which he told her about once: *"they're not professional, but we get a trainers pass since we run around the hospital so often."*

The room had off-white tiles.

Network equipment hummed. There was enough space for the network equipment along the back wall and center of the room, one industrial shelving unit with cables, another without, the cart, themselves, space for the twenty computers, and an Elephant.

"Hey Sammohini, did you know they design these so they could fit an Elephant in here?"

Hank had already begun placing some of the computers on some open shelving space.

"Woah. Amazing!"

The room seemed too small to fit- "-I mean an [Elephant brand] scooter."

'Scooter...' she thought back to her last trip to Sindia a few months prior, she remembered all the scooters with the Elephant logos on the streets of Bijalee kicking up dust and beeping, saw him crack a smile, and they both laughed.

"OK, let's get these plugged in and get outta here!"

Hank looked through the cart, plucked up Zero-One, and brought it over to the shelving.

"Here's my trick when it comes to these projects. Say you have a network or power issue with Zero-One here. If you have it in order, you can just count your way over to it, rather than looking at the labels of each one, or worse, memorizing where they'll live for the next few weeks."

Hank placed Zero-One in the far left corner and plugged in a generic power cable into it.

"Same with the network cables. Blueberry reserved us ports one through twenty through the end of the month. We should go one-ta-one, two-ta-two, and so on until we get ta twenty-ta-twenty. It's no big if port one goes into computer twenty, say, but, ya know, that just makes things more interesting than they need ta-be..." he plugged in the corresponding network cable, then continued, "and now for power cables, they don't matter much for ordering, but even then, I like to try to get them into clusters, like left, center, and right clusters, so it maintains some order of sanity. Does it all make sense?"

She had been taking notes down:

- ports 1 - 20
- end of month
- port 1 to pc 01
- ... 2 ... 02
- power cables clusers

She looked at her notes, wrote in the “t” in clusters, then looked up.

“I think that makes sense!”

Hank was about to turn on the computer when he stopped.

“Let me ask you this... do you think or do you know?”

Sammohini paused and thought through the situation.

‘OK! We have twenty computers that need to remain online through the end of the month, or until we’re ready to deploy them.’ She looked over at the computers. ‘We have about half of them here. The others are in the build room and storage room.’ She looked at her notebook, which had the project spreadsheet folded up inside of it. ‘When I’m done with them in the build room, I bring them over here. I’ll set them up here so they can connect online. That will let me remotely connect into them in case I have to do any last-minute preparations before we deploy them. And so they can get all their updates.’ She looked over at Hank and the shelving. ‘I’ve gotta make sure to plug the same cable number into the same computer number since it’s neater!’

“Yes! I got it!”

Hank turned around and turned on the computer. “Good. Yeah, some of this is complicated. I just didn’t want you to rush through this... since you are the primary on this project. Venkat and I are just here to make sure you don’t,” he paused, “uhh...” and he stopped talking.

Sammohini looked over at the technician with an Eville Medical baseball cap he kept in his lab coat ‘because it looks more professional than the bald head,’ who had not turned around. He seemed unusually apprehensive. ‘What if they all think you’re a screw-up? What if you’re gonna drag down the project? What if you’re not qualified for this project?’ These thoughts vaguely entered into her mind and dropped her spirits.

“Don’t... what?”

Hank breathed in and turned back around.

“Well, this is your first project, and overall, it’s easy. Just twenty computers, plenty of time. We’ve slammed out bigger projects in a week. It’s just a high-visibility one. This new doctor here will bring in a good amount of new business-”

“-Do you... do they...”

She didn’t want to hear it, but she needed to hear it.

“Well, hmm...”

Hank wasn't usually coy.

"What is it?"

Hank tightened his mouth then exhaled.

"Look, someone said they think you're immature and a little flighty. They think you're too egocentric and inexperienced. They're making a big deal outta nothin', but it's a bit of big thing at times, so I guess, I dunno, well, this person said that with all your complaining over your name recently that they're glad we're here to help you out. And I just told him, I said, 'man, yeah, I see where you're coming from, but I trust her because she's honest.' It don't matter that you don't know everything or that you get mad quick. You do it for the right reasons. You do it because it's something that's important to you. You weren't complaining about your name being misspelled, or that patient that was rude to you a few months back, because you have this problem where you wanna be miss perfect. You're not, I'm not, and you know it! Ya jus' 'ave yer opinions 'n' need-ta express 'em. Some people, man, they're just here ta-do-a mediocre job and get outta-ere. Your head's in the right spot. It's just you're-a little too earnest for some people and you're a bit too forthright with how you feel. Some 'eople don't like that, and they tell me, they say, 'she's long-winded and insecure' and I say, 'sure, but weren't we all at that age?' and so, he told Linda some months back that he doubted you could a project solo like we've done, so 'ere we are, your backups, but honestly, if I had my choice, I'd kick 'im around a bit, and I'd let you rock-it like the Suparstaar we know you can be!"

She had been paying careful attention, and even though she felt like defending herself, or interrupting, she decided to keep her mouth tightly shut to avoid impulsively speaking. Hank's eyes seemed like he was about to cry. She noticed she had difficulty breathing, like the air in the room was too stale, even though she could now hear the air filtration system going on in the background. He rubbed his eyes with the back of his gloved hand. She breathed in, out, then smiled.

"T-thank you..."

Her eyes stung.

She breathed in.

Her heart pounded.

She exhaled, slowly...

'They want you to succeed.'

"Thanks, Hank, I-uhh, thank you."

Hank had leaned against a bare wall uncomfortably.

Sammohini took a step forward and held out her arms.

"Thanks for telling me all that. You're a good [big brother]."

He stepped forward, lightly hugged her, and patted her shoulder.

Before she could squeeze his waist tightly and lean in, he let go.

He stepped back, smiled, then turned back to the computers.

"[You are a good little sister. And a hard worker.]"

“[Thank you so much! Thank you! Thanks for telling me everything about what was going on there, and telling me about things I can improve on to do my job better! I really appreciate it! I didn’t know-that-was-all-going-on-and-I...]” she paused when she realized she was talking quickly, “[sorry],” then she realized she was talking in Sindian, “oh-uhh, sorry, I-uhh... thanks for telling me.”

Hank laughed.

“You sure did say a lot more than that!”

Her face felt warm.

“I didn’t quite catch all that, but, yes, you’re welcome. I’m glad to see you’re so open to hearing feedback. That was probably the big problem with this person. He’s not one for receiving feedback himself, so when he critiques others, he doesn’t like ta hear it...”

“Who is he, if you don’t mind?”

Hank breathed in deeply, breathed out, then looked directly at her. His brown eyes seemed nearly black. “If I tell you, you gotta promise not to tell him, alright?”

“I promise.”

“Good-ol’ Nils,” he said in a tone that exaggerated the ‘niece’ sound, “Dusjen Nilsen III.”

“Hmmpfh!”

She thought, ‘there were some good points. Maybe I am too open and honest with everyone?’

“Hey, look, you can always feel free to talk with me about stuff, OK? Don’t shell up over there just because someone doesn’t like to hear complaining. He’s done the same for many others. I don’t like ‘im much at all. I’d much rather work with you, Venkat, or anyone else on the team. Don’t let it bother you too much. It’s just feedback to consider. Besides, if Linda likes you enough to put you on a big project, then that’s what you should focus on!”

She smiled.

“T-thanks. I won’t!”

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[Chapter 14] Your Worst Name

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, “Cold” Building, 3rd Floor.

Monday, November 11th. 3:02pm.

If it had rained before, it wasn’t noticeable.

“They called you that?”

Hank led the way and somehow they’d gotten on the topic about his travels.

“They called me that...”

Sammohini recalled back to what Josh had told her about his travels, and how similar their experiences seemed, then remembered that she was pushing the emptied cart and they were going through empty patient halls on their way back.

“...I mean, I was a foreigner. I didn’t speak Nowayen and they didn’t warm up to me at first. I’d just busked my way north from Vitrioland, after I sold everything I owned in this part of town, ya know, since I didn’t wanna go the whole polite society route, didn’t wanna get a degree, sit around in college, so by the time I made it up there for some gig that’d long since evaporated, I was stuck until at least the Winter months passed.”

They arrived at an elevator. He pressed the button with his right index knuckle. It opened. It was empty. They got in.

“They probably thought, ‘here’s this freak from Unerica,’ and mind you this was back before globalization, so they called me ‘skjemt,’ which translates out to ‘tainted.’ It was rough. I was functionally homeless that Winter. Most of the churches wouldn’t even open their doors to me.”

The elevator door opened to two older patients, one was a man in a wheelchair, and the other a woman pushing the wheelchair.

“Hallo. Hi...” and the woman stuttered, in a way that sounded like Nils, ”doktor!”

Hank said a short phrase in a language Sammohini didn’t understand.

The patient responded with a big smile and spoke in probably the same language.

Hank looked over at her, gave a big wave, and spoke in English, “follow me!”

Hank and the patients spoke in an animated manner through an array of hallways until they arrived outside a door labeled “H1 Floatology Department.” They were on the first floor of the “Hot” Building, now, where the wainscoting was a dark shade of red. Hank opened the door so the woman could push the man inside then Hank followed them.

Sammohini waited outside.

Hank opened the door again. “Sorry about that detour.”

“No... no worries! Actually, what is this place? ...Float-ology?”

“It’s the Float Center. Why not stop in for a minute? You can leave the cart outside.”

Hank held the door open for Sammohini to enter and followed behind.

Inside, the reception area looked similar to many of the other departments throughout the hospital, except instead of medical-grade waiting chairs, there were four leather couches.

“W-What is this place?”

No one was behind the counter and the patients were gone.

“This is our new Floatology Department. We bought out this local float tank place after Dr. Flyte moved here from Noway a few months back. It’s great! Our insurance covers up to four visits a month! She’s one of the world’s leading researchers into how sensory deprivation chambers, or isolation tanks or like these, can help people with stress, anxiety, and other issues of the mind and body. That couple, for example, were having trouble finding this place. Normally their daughter’d take ‘im. Well, poor Johannes has some terrible back issues in spots and surgery isn’t an option for ‘im.”

Sammohini saw there were recyclable cups for tea freely available at the front counter, so she poured herself a cup of hot water, then opened a package of chamomile tea.

“I like to get in there to loosen up my muscles and then lose myself. Just think about life and reality. Josh has probably gone more often than me, and Fairy dust went for the first recently. She said she had a life-changing experience-”

A young woman in an oversized sweater appeared from the hallway past the couches.

“Oh, hey, Hank. I didn’t see you on the schedule today, and who’s this?”

“Hey, Honora. Nah, we just got sidetracked from some work. I was helping Johannes and Marte over. This is my co-worker Sammohini, or Sam if that’s easier. She hasn’t floated before...”

“Oh, cool! Do you have time for a quick tour? There’s an open tank I can show.”

She saw a float tank pod and learned about the medicinal value of what seemed, at first, to be weird Epsom salt sauna baths. She spoke Direish, too! When they returned to the reception area, Hank was asleep on a couch, his lab coat and cap hung on a coat rack, and his legs hung off the side. ‘He even took off his shoes and socks, too!’

Sammohini felt embarrassed seeing him like that.

“[He always does that. Isn’t he acting cute?]”

Honora smiled. She blushed. They both laughed.

“Don’ worry,” Hank said, “I wasn’t...” and he yawned.

They laughed louder. He sat up, then, put on his clothes.

“[While he’s getting dressed, why don’t we get you on the schedule. Whaddya say, hun?]”

Sammohini had ended up in front of the counter and Honora sat behind the counter.

“[Sure! This looks fun. Like a nice, calming bath!]”

They compared calendars and found a time slot.

“[You are all settled. Have fun out there, you two... I mean, see you both next time!]”
Hank opened the door for Sammohini after she got a refill of now lemon mint tea.

Sammohini had forgotten that they had the cart outside. She was about to figure out how to push the cart and hold the tea, but Hank started pushing the cart. “That place was cool! Honora was telling me all about Dr. Flyte’s research in Noway. Is that where you first heard about it and wasn’t that where you had so much trouble from before where they called you that mean word? Err-umm... if I was rude, I’m-uhhh...”

Hank didn’t increase or decrease in speed when pushing the cart. Sammohini was trying to notice things like that more because she forgot about those sorts of things sometimes.

“No, it’s quite alright, I never finished that story, huh? Well, yeah, it was, but not everyone there or anywhere in the world is all that bad. I found out about floating and had some fun there, so it wasn’t all that bad, all told. I found myself in different misadventures in Sindia, as I’ve told you, like the time I found myself stuck down a well...”

Eville Medical, IT Build Room.
Friday, November 1st. 4:04pm.
The heat was almost sweltering.

The digitized unlock of the door clicked.

“I know you’re at or past your time to go home,” Hank said as she opened the door, since he hung up his lab coat at his cube then ran back over as she held the door for him, “I just figure we can check with Venkat to see how he’s doing, then you can roll out.”

Venkat wasn’t there.

“Hi, Josh!” Josh was typing away at the same spot he was earlier that day.
“Hey. Venkat had to take care of a ticket over in Neurology if you need ‘em.”
“Not urgently. We just wanted to see how he was doing with the computers.”
Sammohini walked over to the computers to see a note written in Sindian.

| |
|---|
| <p>[Dear Niece Sammohini,]</p> <p>[These are nearly done.]</p> <p>[Sorry I couldn’t see to their completion.]</p> <p>[Best Wishes,]</p> <p>[Uncle Venkat]</p> |
|---|

“He said on his way out that they were nearly done, and apologized profusely.”

She looked up from the note, which looked rushed, but was still beautiful.

“Oh, that’s so sweet of him, but he didn’t need to apologize! He’s so helpful...”

“Indeed.” Josh turned over to smile then returned to looking at the screen.

Hank had his right hand showing a particular part of his tattooed left arm.

“Josh. I was telling Sammohini about my ‘skjemt’ tattoo before we went over to Floatology.”

Josh stopped typing.

“Isn’t it funny? We both got tattoos of our worst names.”

“Can’t let words hurt you.”

Josh looked directly at Sammohini.

“Do you remember what my comrades called me? What others have called me?”

The word passed through her mind, but she didn’t want to recall or say it aloud.

“...Y-yes...”

“Would you like to see my tattoo of it? It’s on a spot where I see it daily.”

Before she could answer, he untucked his purple dress shirt and white undershirt.

“Y-yes, but w-wwwh-hy ...w-ould yo-u...?” she struggled to breathe.

She felt warmer than when she poked her head inside the float tank.

While he unbuttoned his shirt, he said, [the word] “is tattooed across my chest because it won’t hurt me as badly as it once did. Between this and thinking through things in the tank, I can control my emotions better now. I nearly killed the last man that said the word before I got it. Now, whenever people call me this word,” and he lifted up his undershirt to reveal various barely visible tattoos, with one tattoo boldly sitting across his chest, with the vulgarity reversed, “I can react calmly and with immediate vengeance.”

She felt like she was going to pass out nauseous from heat exhaustion.

“Adriana hates seeing it. I’m sure Veda doesn’t like your collection of vulgarities, huh?”

“She understands, but yeah, she doesn’t like ‘em. Except this one...”

All she could think was ‘poor Josh.’

“I-I’m so sorry, Josh.”

Josh was fully dressed.

“I appreciate your compassion. When you told me about how you were called something you didn’t like, I felt how you felt. You’ve just gotta take that negativity and figure out how not to let it control you.”

All she wanted to do was cry.

Eville Medical, IT Build Room...

Monday, November...

Slogged...

Sammohini walked into the built room with a pad and pencil in her hand. She’d forgotten what she’d written down.

BOOM!

BOOM!

‘These are gunshots!’ she almost spoke aloud. She froze.

“Take that, ‘ya hoolagun!” A familiar voice screamed as loud as the gunshots.

BOOM!

BOOM!

“Headshot! All right!”

She took a couple steps forward and peeked her head in the room.

The shooting stopped.

“Josh?”

Josh took off his gaming headset and almost fell over in his chair.

“You heard that?!” He cried.

“Yes. You nearly killed me,” she replied.

“No, I killed *him*!” He pointed at the screen.

Her bedroom...

Years ago...

Wet...

The screen showed her
and

...

in bed together
like it had been
like there had been no...

The embrace felt...

...warm

and

soft...

Like it had always been when it was good, and like it was even when it was bad.

She missed...

It was all too bad...

If only...

Maybe this time, she would...

Her old lover talked in a different voice.
'Maybe you should try to reconnect?
Would you rather move on?
There are others around you...
...that could fill that void...'

'I'm not sure.'

Her old lover was now someone else.
'There are more fish in the sea.
...has already moved on.'

'I enjoyed the time we spent together.'

She tried to recognize this new person.
'Why are you living in the past?
You're pining over lost love.
Why don't you move on?
I'm right here.
Quit living in the past.
You're still mad about a typo.'

'I am not!'

'See?'
It was-!

Near Eville Medical, Sammohini's Apartment.
Tuesday, November 12th. 1:08am.
The rain lightly tapped her bedroom window.

She awoke wondering what had just happened.

That familiar embrace was not there, so she had not slept with-
...and there weren't any videogame gunshots-
...nor was she at work, so it was all just a dream?

She lay in bed, alone.

The alarm told her a vulgar number.
It was far too early for her to be awake.

She went into the bathroom to wash her face.

She thought of writing down that name she’d been called, ‘Sammihana.’ It wasn’t as offensive as the words Josh, Hank, or even Venkat had been called, but she still didn’t like the name.

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[Chapter 15] Taming Lovely Names

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Near Eville Medical, Sammohini’s Apartment.

Tuesday, November 12th. 5:07am.

The heater made the apartment comfortable.

‘We’re having our monthly all-hands meeting today in the Sneaker Auditorium,’ Sammohini thought as she looked herself over in the bathroom mirror, ‘so I better look my best!’

Before returning to bed a few hours earlier, she wrote herself a note that she stuck to the mirror:

Sammohini 😊

Sam 😊

Anything else! 😊

She thought about a mean name she could be called as she finished brushing her teeth, spit out the toothpaste, and smiled. She thought of another mean name as she flossed, brushed her teeth without any toothpaste, spit out the water, and smiled again. ‘OK!’ She washed the toothbrush head, shook it dry, put a protective orange cover around its bristles, then put it in the cup she used for her toothbrush and the unused one...

She looked down at her dark grey sweater. Although she received compliments whenever she wore it, it felt super comfortable, and it was lightweight, the sweater from a fashionable brand was just cumbersome enough to wear while moving computers. She’d have to move the remainder of the Neurology computers over today, so she’d probably only wear it during the meeting. She otherwise wore one of her favorite Eville Medical polo shirts in light grey underneath and she liked the contrast between the two greys.

Since she was wearing her orange coat, which she’d worn almost daily when she went into work since she bought it about a month prior, she didn’t want to wear black slacks, in case anyone might say she looked like a pumpkin! So she wore some navy blue slacks instead.

She liked how her hair looked, especially after the new haircut she got on the same weekend as her new coat. She kept thinking of growing it out more, to style it or experiment, except it usually grew uncomfortable or annoying, so she stuck with her usual shorter cut on the top and back, but with curves on either side covering her ears. She fluffed up the ends, then combed everything so it would look professional.

Her makeup looked nice.

‘OK, you’ve got this one! There’ll be a buncha people there today, and you know what? You’re looking good!’ She smiled and rotated her head. ‘Yeah! And the project is going well! Your team likes you! They’re there to help and you help them. Today’ll be good! You’ve got this!’

Sammohini smiled at herself once more and turned off the light.

Eville Medical, Coffee Stand Outside Cafeteria.

Tuesday, November 12th. 9:43am.

The weather was almost too warm for a sweater.

Sammohini waited in line along with her team at the coffee stand.

Linda and Nils just ordered. Alex was ordering, then next, Fairydust.

Behind her, Hank and Venkat, with Josh having let everyone else in first.

During the morning meeting, Linda asked the team to meet in their area at 9:30am because she wanted everyone to go over to the all-hands meeting as a team, and added that they’d get coffees and teas on their way “on my card! I insist! Everyone is doing Wunderbar work!”

She had just decided to get a peppermint tea when she heard, “oh! You have a lovely name!” Sammohini was about to look down from the menu to say thank you when she saw that the woman behind the counter was looking intently at Fairydust’s badge. “Thank you! My parents wanted to call me that when I was born, but then decided that I’d have an easier time in this-ere polite society with this other boring name. This morning, I woke up with one of those itches, ya know, and decided to put it on a piece of paper and tape it to my badge. I didn’t ask officially, but I don’t think my manager, here, minds, do ya, Linda?”

Linda was looking at the pastries behind the glass and looked over.

“Not at all. It is great... to be honest with yourself and who you truly are.”

Fairydust folded her arms and grinned. “Thanks, boss! You’re number one!”

Sammohini looked back at the menu, and thought, ‘Peppermint tea with extra honey, yeah... Fairydust is a really lovely name-’ “What’ll you have?”

Eville Medical, “Neutral” Building, Sneaker Auditorium.

Tuesday, November 12th. 9:56am.

The air conditioning made her sweater feel just right.

The team sat in a three-aisled cluster on the left-most side of the grand meeting hall.

In the first aisle, Nils sat against the wall, there was an empty seat, then Linda sat at the aisle.

Next: Alex, Fairydust, and Josh. Finally: Venkat, Hank, and Sammohini.

Fairydust turned around, and told Hank, “I can never get over how” with the next word in an exaggerated tone even in the hushed auditorium “huge” before returning to her normal boisterous tone, “this place is!”

Hank replied, “I know what ya mean! I keep thinking I’m a doctor whenever I walk through ‘ere.”

“Well, it’s probably yer lab coat, there, Hankie-” “-Yer-” “Pa-” “-right, Fairydi-” “-hey!”

Venkat kicked Hank with his foot and said, “be more respectful, both of you.”

Linda’s head moved up quickly.

Hank and Fairydust became silent.

Linda looked back down at her notes.

“I like the remodel quite a lot. The area is much more open,” Venkat said to fill the air, “and these chairs are much more comfortable.”

‘This chair does feel really nice,’ Sammohini thought as she sipped her tea.

She had a sugar cookie with a cat’s face in her lap on top of her orange notebook.

She nibbled off a little of an ear. Linda insisted everyone get a pastry, too.

The first part of the meeting was just dry enough to be professional.

The director of their department brought in just enough funny words into the presentation to keep people engaged. Since Lisa was the one that had advocated for her to get hired on full-time from the agency, Sammohini always paid extra attention whenever she spoke, even when she was distracted by the cookie, Hank and Fairydust, or other people arriving late. Managers from various teams were invited to give status updates.

When the project management manager went up to talk, Sammohini found those distractions particularly more interesting. She tried her best to concentrate on what they were talking about, but when she sipped her tea and looked back down at her troubleshooting notebook to see where she had left off, she couldn’t recognize what language she’d written it in, briefly panicked, then crossed out the last two words, before looking back up.

She looked over to see Venkat and Hank both had their eyes closed.

Venkat’s head and pen were upright and his notebook balanced.

Hank’s beard rested forward on his lab coat, lightly snoring.

The audience clapped.

Linda stood up and walked.

Sammohini kicked Hank awake.

Linda walked up to the podium in the center of the stage.

Lisa had sat down in one of the chairs to stage right.

The audience clapped again after a brief respite.

There was a large projection screen behind her.
The previous slide said “project management office outro.”
Linda’s first slide said, “WE ARE HIRING!”

“Thank you, friends. My updates are short. First, I am hiring for both of my teams. I have two open positions for the helpdesk team and one open position for the deskside team. If you know someone who can fulfill the job description, contact me. You will receive a referral bonus if the candidate has passed ninety days.”

Linda took a sip of coffee as the slide changed to show two photos, the new Optical clinic and the clinic she and Chris went to last week with the names of team members, along with “UPGRADES!”

“Second, as we have just talked about project upgrades, I would like to thank Nils for his recent efforts with the Optical upgrade. I also want to thank Vinny, Hank, and Sam for their efforts in our new Neurology clinic. Dr. Payne is an important addition to our hospital and between Joandra’s guidance and Chris’s consultation, we are ahead of the predicted schedule of end-of-month deployment.”

Linda took another sip of coffee as the slide changed, but Sammohini’s mind wandered to how her full name was on the screen yet Linda had referred to her as Sammohini rather than Sam, which was weird because whenever she talked with Linda or Lisa, they both always called her by her full given name. *In her mind, she remembered seeing Josh’s tattoo. “When people call me this terrible word...” She remembered Hank’s tattoos of less terrible words in various languages. She remembered her bathroom mirror, where she wrote “Sam ☺” and she thought of something that made her smile: Pollyanna, her sister’s guide dog with her goofy dog smile.*

“Dankesch-t-thank... you very much. Lisa’s up next.”
Linda walked off-stage then remembered her coffee.
Linda jumped back up, grabbed the coffee, then ran.

Sammohini had missed the third slide entirely, but so did Hank, and the applause from the audience washed away any attempts at asking anyone about what Linda had talked about.

After the all-hands meeting, everyone in the team scattered.
Hank and Venkat had nearby tickets. Everyone else, too...
Fairydust was walking back to the office via the parking lot.

‘Those project computers are probably done being built, or close! Plus,’ she thought as she went outside and ran after Fairydust, ‘she’ll probably know!’ When she caught up, Sammohini asked, “hey-uhh, Fairydust, umm-what did Linda talk about after the project and hiring stuff?”

Fairydust turned and waved her hair back away from her eyes, “oh, hey. It wasn’t anything interesting. Say, I have-a questi’n-fer ya... if you don’t mind.”

She nearly dropped her scuffed-up troubleshooting notebook she had already dropped many times before as she put it away in her inside coat pocket, then asked, “s-sure, what’s up?”

They took a more scenic route, through the far side of the parking lot, and were alone.

“I’m thinking of changing my name, legally, to Fairydust. Do you think my name is too weird for these square fuddy-duddies? I’m kinda thinking maybe I’ll get a downtown city job if I do...”

Fairydust took a quick inhale from an electronic-cigarette she stored in her coat pocket, blew upward, coughed, then spit into the grass that designated the edge of a nearby parking stall.

‘I didn’t know she smoked! And quitting the team! What! I thought she’d tell me if she was unhappy...’

“Hey, ya don’t need to over-analyze it or anything. I’ve been sending out feelers to see what it’s all about, ya know? See what people think ‘n’ all.”

“About which? I’m sorry. I didn’t know you smoked... and-uhh, leaving? I-uhh-I mean, I like you-like having you on the team- you’re nice-and-uhh, I like your name. Fairydust is a pretty name!”

“Ah, thank-ya darlin’. I like ya, too.”

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Tuesday, November 12th. 3:20pm.

It was hot even without the sweater.

Sammohini was tending to her emails before leaving. She was thinking about going to the Fitness Center for a swim then going over to Zbigniew’s Teriyaki when an email popped up in her inbox.

“11/13 TOMORROW 10AM - Team meet!”

From: Joandra Oliver <joliver@evillem...>

To: IT Meeting Room - Scribe <itmscrib@evillem...>; Sammohini Lanchester <slanches@evillem...>; Chris Wręca <cwreca@evillem...>

CC: Vinny [Venkat] Nibhanupudi <vnibhanu@evillem...>; Hank Ospfrey <hospfrey@evillem...>

Hello, Team!

Linda says the computers are nearly done.

Let’s meet in Scribe **TOMORROW at 10AM** to review status.

Please see me if you have any prior conflicts.

Required:

Samantha

Chris

Myself

Optional:

Vinny

Hank

Joandra Oliver | Senior IT Project Manager | Eville Medical Center

100 Medical Ave N, Eville, Sneakerraaqy, SN, 51660

joliver@eville... | Desk Phone | Cell Phone

"[Benchmark quote]"

Sammohini clicked the ‘Accept’ button on the invitation.

She then noticed her name was spelled Samantha and must have let out a long sigh.

“You see that, too? ...Now your name’s Samantha, huh?”

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[Chapter 16] Name Isn't OK

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Tuesday, November 12th. 3:24pm.

Cooling down inside, slightly.

“Huh? Who’s there? Who said-”

Sammohini swiveled her chair to catch who had asked if her name was Samantha. It sounded like Hank, who stood at the entryway to her cube, smiling, with his arms almost folded, except he was awkwardly holding up the right sleeve of his black wrinkled polo shirt to show one of his tattoos. It was an offensive word in Sindian with a line crossed through it. He had many other offensive words just like that in other languages tattooed along the upper parts of his arms, mainly Sindian words, with this one in particular saying-

“[I know a good tattoo artist...]”

She looked back at the computer screen with the incorrect word highlighted, probably subconsciously, before looking back over. “[I’m OK... I guess.]”

“Say...! Sammohini...!” Hank spoke in a louder voice than necessary. “So we’re going to that meeting tomorrow morning...! Right...? Well...! I’ll need to go check on one of them...! I tried connecting to one...! Just now...! And...! It’s not connecting...!” Hank pointed to her, her coat, then motioned both of his fingers to indicate a circular motion. “So...! I’ll need to go over to the computers...! To check to see if they’re online...!”

“[Just go. No one else is here.]”

Venkat called out then laughed.

“Come on, grab your stuff. We’ll go check the computers out, then you can roll out.”

“Wait...” she grabbed her stuff, “you were serious? There’s a computer acting up?”

Hank nodded.

“Which one?!”

He held his left hand over his mouth to almost cover an exaggerated smile.

“[I’m not telling until we get there!]” She checked then locked her computer.

She turned off her computer monitor, her desk’s water fountain, said “goodnight, Naagaphanee!” to her cacti. “Goodnight, Venkat!” “Goodnight, Sammohini!” She saw Hank mosey toward the entrances to the helpdesk area and the management offices and caught up as they walked past the break room with restrooms. They walked in silence on their way out to the lobby of the IT Department. Once he closed the main door into the lobby, which had two fancy chairs with a

small table between them with a phone above the table, they were alone. There was no one between them and the elevators or stairs, so Sammohini asked, “come on, which computer,” she said in an almost whiny voice, “...was it? I bet it was bratty little Zero-Three, wasn’t it?”

“[Speak no evil.]” Sammohini frowned.

“[Please tell me...!]” Hank grinned.

Hank called down to footsteps on the stairs, “yo!”

“How’s it goin’?” Chris appeared at the top of the stairs.

“I’m doing well! And you? We were-uhh just gonna check on the computers before our meeting tomorrow morning! Everything’ll be all good and squared away, well, I mean-uhh, at least, umm-from what I can gather-uhh...”

“Fantastic. Have a good one, both-a-ya,” Chris said while walking past, without breaking stride, adding in before badging into the department, “don’t get into too much trouble without inviting me along for the ride, alright, now? You have my number.”

‘What does Chris mean by-’ “-Hah, you got it, Chris!” Hank laughed.

“Oh, and Chris, good seeing you! Thanks again for the ride!”

“Likewise and no worries.” Chris waved then closed the door.

“Chris is hilarious,” Hank said as they walked down the stairs.

“Sure is! And super nice, too, and kind, and polite, and...”

“Does that mean I’m none of those things?” He looked mad.

“Huh-uhhh, wait, no-uhh, you’re wonderful and great and-”

He laughed as they walked past the door to the hospital.

“-Hey! You’re me-uhh... are we taking the side route?”

Hank opened and held the parking lot door with his back.

“Sure are. Besides, we can have a better chat out here.”

The sun shined away most of the Fall frost that had accumulated on the tops of the cars and trucks in the parking lot in the back of the “Neutral” building of Eville Medical, where the IT Department was located. Hank took out a small pen from the shirt pocket of his lab coat, put it to his mouth, sucked in, breathed up to exhale out a plume of smoke, then said as he watched the smoke fade into nothingness, “ahh... it’s been a long day.”

“I thought Veda told you to quit smoking?!”

She folded her arms, shook, and frowned.

Hank put the inconspicuous electronic-cigarette pen back, and said, “I think she said she was OK with one puff a day, and besides, it’s just a small little thing. It won’t hurt me too much, right? Because, ya know, just like that email up there,” he jumped over a curb as they walked toward the front entrance of Eville Medical, pointed at their floor, and continued, “Samantha won’t hurt you too much, right? Or do you wanna talk about all those tattoos and bad vibes again? Just checkin’ in on you on that.”

She looked down at her shoes as she walked, then looked over at Hank, who had just blown off another puff of smoke, then thought, ‘you know, they’re all just trying to be nice...’

“Sometimes, a name just isn’t OK, right? Like Josh was saying the other day, there are names you’d kill over and names that aren’t worth a-” he coughed unintentionally, stopped walking, coughed some more, spit something that almost seemed green into some nearby grass, then continued, “-hoot ta-worry ‘bout. I think I’d rather be called Samantha any day of the week over any of these bits of armor I’ve collected over the years. Hey,” Hank had looked around to see that no one else was in earshot before continuing, “did-ja hear the news with Fairydust?”

“Yeah, she said she might be quitting, and, changing her name! That’s cool but sad to hear because she’s nice... and cool, and I like her being on the team! She’s given me some really great advice on all sorts of stuff... so I feel sad about that!”

Hank stopped walking.

“Remember how she was out sick yesterday? Well, she interviewed at this theater group downtown where she’d be their main tech doing all sorts-a IT work from setting up computers to doing some server and networking stuff. They-all really hit it all off. She said they’d let ‘er know by the end of the week if she got it or not, but she sounded confident about it when we were talking over Tactics last night. Maybe you should start playing?”

Hank brought out his phone.

“See,” he showed a photo of the gameplay, “we play this game with some other people at work, or other friends of ours, or just with people all over the world.” He stood next to her and moved through the next few photos in the series. “You can join various guilds, we’re part of the Rambunctious Rapsallions, and there’s also an anonymous mode, but that’s rough waters. The game’s overall a good way to relieve the stress of work.”

He flipped through some more photos.

“I’m currently in the top twenty of our guild, but this guy from the Hellish Republic, this guy Choutas, is always one step ahead of me! What-a... well, I mean, that’s beside the point. Point is, uhh-hah, where were we?”

Hank laughed a little bit.

“Fairydust might be leaving!”

She shook her fists out.

“Oh, right, so, she’s one of our guild reps, and’s always lookin’ for new people to join. If you’re interested, she’ll show ya the ropes, and get-cha up-ta speed on all that. She’s not really after

the top slots like me, so she’d be better at givin’ you all that advice like you said. Whadd-ya think?”

Sammohini didn’t want to lose one of her close work friends, so she said, “sure! I mean, I can always stop playing if I don’t like it, right?”

He switched over to his text messaging program, which showed three new unread messages, and said, “sure. Here, lemme text ‘er right-”

| Fairydust McCallister | CALL |
|---|------|
| <div>Lorem Ipsum Dolor is totally gonna get nuked tonight!! I can't believe she and Choutas inched ahead of me like that.</div> | |
| <div>I got the job!</div> <div>I got it! They called me up just now and told me I got it! They decided after I left the room but wanted to check with their people and HR junk. They said I can start as early as tomorrow.</div> <div>How much notice should I give?</div> | |
| <div>[Press here to type a new message.]</div> | |

Sammohini couldn’t quite believe what she read, so she kept her eyes on the screen as Hank brought it first close to his eyes so he could read, then, after pressing the call button.

“Here, let’s give her a call.”

Hank put it up against her ear.

He looked up at the sky, said “hey, congrats,” then smiled.

“Hey, I got Sammohini here with me, we’re in the parking lot kinda nearby, well, we’re at work still. Mind if I put you on speaker?” After a moment, Hank brought the phone down and pressed the speakerphone button.

She shouted in the general direction of the phone that Hank held out. “Hey, Fairydust! I’m so happy to hear you got this new job, but I’m so sad that you’re gonna go, too!”

“Aww! That’s so sweet of you, Sammohini! Thanks...” Fairydust said over the phone as it displayed a picture of a cartoonish fairy dressed in camouflage gear carrying two bazookas, “...say! Let’s go over to Zbigniew’s to celebrate. It’ll be on me!”

“Sure!” Sammohini’s mind immediately pictured a chicken curry dish she’d been itching to have since last week- “I’ll pick you two up in a few, yeah, Venkat won’t be able to make it, alright, cool, see ya soon!”

The phone disconnected and Hank put away the phone.
“Now that that’s settled, let’s go meet her over at her car.”

They walked over to the parking garage that was built behind the “Cold” building of Eville Medical. The first floor was for doctors and employees of the month in various departments that worked nearby.

Hank pressed the elevator button, “unless you wanna walk-up ten flights of stairs?”
“Why does she park all the way up there?” The elevator dinged. It was empty inside.
“It’s a fun drive and has the best cell reception in the area. She’s probably already there.”

After the third floor, the windows opened up to an expanse of the Eville Forest that Sammohini hadn’t really seen from that angle before. She could see parts of it from her apartment, but it was obscured by the hospital and some other buildings. This was just forests as far as she could see, up to the mountains, and beyond.

“Woah! The view here is so pretty!”
“Yeah, there’s that, too...”
“Tenth floor.”

There were only a few vehicles on the top floor. A car was parked illegally nearby the elevator with Fairydust wearing a leather jacket and sunglasses leaned up against the driver’s side door. “Ah, the doctor, and his pretty assistant. Here, doctor,” and she opened the back passenger door, “there’s a booster seat in the back for you.”

They walked over.
“Hah, funny, but, thanks.”

Sammohini walked around the red car and the open passenger door. “Wow! This is a really cool car!” She looked inside, but it seemed small.

“Thanks, oh- you have to kinda jump in. Here, I’ll show ya.” Fairydust got in. Sammohini mimicked her and didn’t bang her head or bag.

“You’re a natural at that, Sammohini! If we’re all strapped in, then, shall we go to Zbigniew’s?”

Fairydust rounded the corners of the parking garage at a slow pace, kept it under the speed limit all the way through campus, and drove down the street to the humble teriyaki place that was owned by a Fapanese family with an arbitrary Pulish name. She parked toward the back.

“Ya know, I won’t miss having what’s-his-face take five minutes customizing his order.”

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[Chapter 17] What's This Called?

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Near Eville Medical, Zbigniew's Teriyaki.

Tuesday, November 12th. 4:19pm.

The sky was a collage of pinks and blues.

The three friends left the rental sports car and walked toward the teriyaki place.

“Lucky for you! We’ve still gotta werk with What’s-His-Face.”

“W-who’s that?” Sammohini had fumbled with her seatbelt, lock, then nearly tripped on a curb as she tried to catch up to Hank and Fairydust.

Hank stopped, turned around, and said a few words in a language she didn’t understand to Fairydust, who laughed, but which just left her even more confused. “We were making fun of Mr. Nilsen III, ‘The People’s Hero,’” which he repeated in the same language as before. It sounded familiar... “Hey, remember when he said that under his breath in that one meeting? We both laughed and repeated it back in English for the rest of the crew to enjoy. This was just before you joined the team, Sammohini. Remember all that, Fairydust?”

She finally caught up to the bearded man in the lab coat and the stylish woman wearing a cream-colored leather jacket with black hair that had faintly red highlights.

“Hah! Yeah, ‘did you just call yourself ‘The People’s Hero,’ Nils?’ was probably the most I’ve ever seen Alex laugh! Betcha he didn’t realize others could grok Nowayen!” Fairydust held the door open for Hank, but let the door hit his foot as he walked in first, and deliberately held the door wider for Sammohini to enter next.

Sammohini said “thank you!” as she entered.

Fairydust closed the door with a soft thud.

Hank was holding up three fingers.

The lady behind the- “-Sammohini!”

“Ślicznia! Hey! Sorry I haven’t been in in a while...”

“No, come this way. Follow me, please!”

They made their way to the back of the restaurant, past crowded tables and booths, through a hallway, into a secluded area with booths that were obscured by curtains and the low hum of a heater to filter out hushed conversations.

“Woah, I didn’t even know this place existed!” Fairydust said as she looked past people in business suits.

“Oh, yeah, uhhh, I guess my family’s been coming here a lot, since it’s right next to the hospital and all, and uhh-” “-Please, [have a seat.]” Ślicznia said in Fapanese as she pulled back the

curtains on one of the booths in the far back of the restaurant. Inside, there was a full mini recreation of a traditional dining table.

“Woah... dudette... I never knew how swanky this place was!” Fairydust said as she poked her head inside, took off her leather jacket, and placed it on one of the coat hooks just inside.

“This is nice,” Hank said as he took off his socks and shoes.

“Oh, you don’t need to worry about that, they don’t really mind if you leave your shoes on, right, Ślicznia?”

The matron waitress looked up. “Whichever everyone prefers, what’ll I start everyone off with?”

“I’ll have a Pink and Blue Over Easy,” Fairydust said as she sat on one side.

“I’ll go with your strongest whiskey,” Hank said as he sat on the other side.

Sammohini left her shoes on and said, “oh, I’ll have my usual,” trying to play it off cool, to which Ślicznia asked, “sorry, we’re all out of honey, at the moment. Would you like a sweeter tea?”

“I-uhh-umm... err-” Fairydust pulled on her gray sweater, “why don’t you have a beer with us? To celebrate!”

“I-uhh... OK...” she thought ‘I can just have a sip or two and then maybe ask for water instead,’ as Fairydust’s pulling caused her to fall onto that side of the booth, “Woah-uhh, what do you recommend...?”

“Oh! I know! Do you have...” and as Fairydust rattled off the names of some fancy-sounding drinks, Sammohini looked down at the menu at their selection of curries. She had been kind of thinking of a plain chicken curry over jasmine rice, but they cooked more varieties in the back, so she thought of having- “-how does that sound, Sammohini?”

“Umm, yeah, that sounds good...”

Ślicznia finished writing in her receipt pad and said “got-it, be-right-back!” before disappearing.

“Ya know, what I’m gonna really like about this new place is how cool it’s gonna be. Downtown Eville. I’ll be in the heart of it all! I can take the bus in and see all the cool shows. Oh, my manager has green hair! Someone else has a sidecut. I’ve been thinking of trying that-a while, but you know how it’s like here, super fuddy-duddy. What a drag!”

Ślicznia returned with three drinks on a silver-colored platter, set it on the table, handed out the drinks, and asked if they had decided what they wanted yet. Hank said, “sorry, just another minute,” and Ślicznia disappeared.

“Republic of Wanna beer...” Sammohini read off the label, “oh! What a cool elephant!” She nearly tipped over the drink onto the table by looking at the design.

Fairydust caught the top of the bottle and said, “thought you’d like that one ‘cause of the picture and you’ll like how sweet it tastes, too!”

She was about to try a sip when Hank held out his drink, Fairydust did the same, and so then she helped clank the glasses together.

“To Fairydust,” Hank said after they brought their drinks back down, “may she find what she’s after at this next fork of her journey.”

“Awww, thank you, Hankie-Pankie, you’re always so kind...” Fairydust looked over at her.

“I think the same! I’m gonna really miss you. Y-you-you’ve been so cool! You taught me all sorts-a different things about computers and makeup, especially with advice on skin swatches, and-uhh, you helped me move! Hank helped, too, but I’ll forever be grateful to you for all of that and more! I wish you well at-uhh your next job! I really do! I think you’ll do great! You’re smart, you’re funny, you’re nice to be around, and-uhhh...”

Fairydust moved a finger under her eye and said, “you’re so sweet! So... what are we having? Remember, it’s all on me, so go big!”

“Oh! I was thinking of having the Q-Curry.”

“Q-Curry, huh? Sound interesting! I don’t see that on the menu...”

Fairydust and Hank looked over the curry section.

“Oh-uhh, it’s not listed. It’s kinda like on the secret menu.”

“Hey! That sounds great. Can we all get it or is it super secret?”

‘I wonder if they’d be alright with us ordering-’

“What’ll you have?” Ślicznia appeared.

Fairydust shook her shoulder and said, “Sammohini here was just talkin’ ‘bout something super secret on the menu... is that something we can ask about ordering...?”

“Oh, that’s right, uhh-sorry, Ślicznia, if I said too much, but I mentioned the Q-Curry.”

“Three Q-Curry?” Fairydust and Hank nodded.

“Coming right up!” Ślicznia disappeared.

“Ya know somethin’, Sammohini, you’re cooler than you think,” Fairydust said after finishing a swig of a drink that actually did seem to look like a combination of pink and blue liquids, “and you’re certainly cooler than What’s-His-Face!”

“Well said!” Hank said, chugging his drink.

Fairydust took another swig, then said, “even if you can’t take a joke sometimes... my lovely friend...”

“To ‘er credit, Fairydirt, she is tryin’.”

“Yeh-yeh, ‘suppose yer right... yeah, I heard a bit about that, and ya know somethin’? She’s really sumthin’, ain’t she, that project manager, she’s a real piece-a... I mean, it’s like she just messes with people, ya know? She don’t care ‘bout you or nothin’, just whether you get the job done quick, and it’s like, nah,” Fairydust took another swig, “at least learn people’s names, or apologize if you screw it up! Knaw-whad-I-mean?”

Sammohini looked down at the bottle.

“Eyy! Ya should drink-up, ‘fore it gets warm!”

“Don’t push her too much. How’s that job?”

“Oh, alright! Sorry ‘bout that, darlin’... so this’ll be cool because...” as Fairydust talked about her new job, in technical terms she could barely understand, Sammohini looked down at the bottle, and decided to take a sip. “Oh! This tastes good!”

“Hah! Knew ya’d like-it!” Fairydust reached over and slapped her thigh. “Josh actually turned me on-ta it when we three went barhoppin’ a few months back. I do kinda like more of these fruity drinks. Here, give it a sip.”

She looked down to see the glass with two straws, a lemon, and cloudy purple liquid where the two liquids met.

“Either straw’s cool, but I was sippin’ outta the pink one...”

The pink straw was closer so she took a little sip from that one. “Oh! This tastes even better! Wow! I like this!” Fairydust kept it aloft, offering her to try another sip. “I like this a lot! What’s it called?”

Fairydust smiled then said “it’s a Pink and Blue. I got it Over Easy, but you can get it Over Hard, too. Here,” Fairydust handed her the drink, “I was kinda itchin’ fer-an Over Hard. Trade-ya?”

“Oh, thanks! And-uhh, sure...!”

Fairydust took her beer, chugged it down, belched, then said, “ahh! Now that hits the spot!”

Sammohini

chugged

down

her

drink

just...

...a

little...

...too

quickly...

...then

...

...she

noticed...

...that

...she

...felt

...weird.

...She

...had

...trouble concentrating.

...She watched Fairydust talk...

...She watched a millennium pass before Hank laughed about something...

‘...but ...what ...were ...they ...laughing ...about?

...was ...it ...her?

...she ...was ...probably ...a ...fool...

...they ...were ...probably ...laughing ...at

...her ...for ...being ...so ...immature...’

The ... curries arrived ...

“Does ... anyone ... need ... refills?”

“Sure.” ... “I’ll ... take ... an ... Over ... Hard ... this
... time...what’d’ya ...wanna ... try ... Sammo? ...
Wanna ... try ... an ... Over ... Easy?”

Sammohini ... had ... trouble ... looking... at ... the ...
menu... but ... thought ... of ... having ... another
... because ... it ... did ... taste ... goooooooooooooood...
“I - I - I’ll ... have ... uh hh ... what ... did
... you ... ask ... again ...?”

She ... saw ... Ś-Ś-Śli...

...

???

‘How

was her

name

pronounced

again?’

... the ... curry ...

the ... table ...

... Fairydust

... Hank

.

.

.

.

.

.

“Oh poor thing. I’ll get ... her some ... water ...”

She looked down at the curry.

“Hey- Sammohini... here... maybe ... some curry will help.”

Fairydust lifted a spoon of curry and vrrrooomed it like an airplane toward her mouth and said “open wide!” so she opened her mouth.

The flavor was amazing!

She could taste the juices of the grease and the tenderness of the chicken.

The spices were mostly mild...

... and a little wild.

There was a pitcher of water and a full glass of water in front of her.

“Here ... drink ... this ... slowly.”

Fairydust tilted the glass of water just close enough to her mouth for her to take a sip.

The water was cool and refreshing...
... but didn’t taste sweet~!

“Thank you ... yeah ... we can keep an eye on her for now, thank you,” Hank said, then looked her in the eyes.

“She got drunk way too quick. How much was in that?”

His brown eyes returned forward and remained calm.

“It was an Over Easy! I-I-I... I’m sorry...”

He smiled.

“It’s gonna be okay, Sammohini. You’re with friends. Can you breathe in for me?”

She breathed in.

“OK. And hold it.”

She held her breath.

“OK. Now exhale slowly.”

She exhaled slowly.

“OK, breathe in again for me.”

She did.

“OK, now breathe out.”

She breathed out.

She felt someone get behind her and then she felt her shoulders being rubbed.

“Sorry Sam-love, I didn’t realize you...” “Breathe in and out...”

Her vision started to return back to normal. She saw her Q-curry in front of her and she picked up a spoon and ate a bit. “Yummm!”

She drank more water and ate more curry as Hank continued to help her breathe more calmly while Fairydust, probably, rubbed her shoulders.

She finished all of the water and then needed to go...!

“Hey, uhh... I need to go...”
She picked up the empty cup of water.

“Here, let’s go.”
She found herself in the restroom with Fairydust.
They went into the big stall.

“Puke or pee?”
Fairydust asked after locking the door.

“Uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

uhh...

She worried she made a fool out of herself.

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[Chapter 18] Getting Out There

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Zbigniew's.

Day.

Time.

Three bunnies went to go hop,
But one bunny had to go stop.

There wasn't much of a scene,
Certainly nothing that obscene.

They packed up and paid for their meal,
One felt she was rude but it was no big deal.

They went into the red sports car,
Even though they didn't go far.

They parked in an overnight visitor's stall,
Helped her through the elevator and all.

They unlocked the door, and helped her inside,
One kept watch, while the other left for outside.

The two bunnies that stayed had soft brown fur. One was slower than the other. The faster one helped the slower one sit down. The slower one looked tired. The faster one had red tips on her ears. The faster one hopped around the apartment. First, she got a glass of water. Then, she sat down next to the slower one.

The bunny before her changed into Fairydust and she turned back into herself.

"Oh, hey, Sammohini. Can you hear me? Or are you still d r u n k?"

T h e l i g h t s w e r e
t o o b r i g h t . . .

The

apartment

waved

back

and

forth.

Her head spun

around and around.

Fairydust looked at something.

The former-bunny used both hands.

Or would they be paws?

“Hank said he got you all cleared to stay home tomorrow
so you don’t have to worry about that.”

She looked up and smiled.

“I’m so sorry. If I would h
. a
. v
. e
.
. k . n . w . n
.

She felt like she had entered an oven. Her face was covered in sweat. She was swimming in sweat. The apartment had turned into a swimming pool and she found herself swimming across the lake to get to a cool spot until she had someone hold her down.

“Hey, are you OK?”

She began to sink even though her face was melting.

“Oh, you’re burning up! Here!”

She found herself in the vastness of space, swimming along with asteroids and solar systems unknown to even the most adventurous space-time travelers. She undulated across the vicissitude wastelands of this unknown dimension in search of-

“-Feeling better now? Here, let me wet your brow.”

She returned to the apartment to find Fairydust patting her forehead and face down with a paper towel. “Oh, now your makeup’s all smeared. Here, let me just wipe it all off for you. You’ll need that removed. Don’t panic, just hold still for a second.”

She felt her face being rubbed off and then back on.

“OK, one last go. There. We should take you into the bathroom, just in case.”

She was dragged into the restroom, or maybe, teleported, she wasn’t quite sure, but she ended up there looking at herself in the mirror with Fairydust holding her up.

“If we’d realized you weren’t able to handle your liquor, we wouldn’t have pressured you like that. Not we. Me. It was me. I did this to you.” The person behind her wasn’t Fairydust but a reflection of herself, looking back at her.

‘No, it’s OK.’

‘I’m kinda scared.’

‘It’s gonna be OK.’

‘I don’t like this spinning feeling.’

‘It will pass.’

‘I don’t like feeling weak.’

‘It will pass.’

‘How can I become stronger.’

‘You already are strong.’

‘How can I prove it to others?’

‘You don’t need to.’

‘Do I need to prove it to myself?’

‘Yes.’

‘How do I do that?’

‘Why?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Why do you want to prove it to yourself that you are strong?’

‘Why not?’

‘It’s toxic.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Just be yourself. Don’t change for anyone.’

She felt like she was being shuffled around into a new version of herself, which was just about the same, but not quite the same either. Maybe a newer and improved version? Or maybe not?

Eville Medical, IT Conference Room: Scribe...

Wednesday, November 13th. 10am...

The weather wasn’t going to stop her!...

“How’s it going, Samantha?”

“My name is Sammohini. Call me that or Sam.”

“Uhh-oh, uhh, yes ma’am!”

She sat down at the table with the other people on the project. She explained that the computers were in good standing. Everything worked as they needed to work for the upgrade.

They talked about when the computers and monitors would be moved over from their current location at the old clinic and how they would be moved into the new location.

“We should have enough room in the storage room for all of the computers.”

“Good.” “We’ve checked all the monitors to make sure they fit our new computers.”

“Good.” “If there are any problems, we’ll have plenty of time to fix them, right?”

“Yes, I have given you an unlimited amount of time to work on these computers, so consider that the easiest thing you will ever do in your entire career, and also, let me state publically that I am sorry that I didn’t refer to you by your given name or your nickname. I have been too busy buttoning up all the details of this project, and others, and so I haven’t been so considerate with you, or others on your team. This is a shortcoming I was not aware of, but now that I have learned this, I can begin to start to work on it. Thank you for being patient with me, because I will still fail, but just keep helping me to improve and I will remember your name, and be more patient with you when I confusingly talk about things you might not immediately understand because it’s not part of your skillset or discipline, as would be the case with some of the more technical aspects of your job. It’s easier for me to talk like that and I apologize I don’t know that I should translate these words into other words that you can understand. This is another shortcoming of my own but I trust that you will find dignity in my request for patience because I am not an individual that wants to be known for doing poor quality work. This might be my downfall. Instead of being a team-player collaborator, I am more of an inconsiderate dictator, and that results in animosity where none is required.”

Sammohini nodded.

Near Eville Medical, Sammohini’s Apartment.

Wednesday, November 13th. 10:15am.

The sun had invited itself in.

Sammohini rustled.

“Huh... uhh... why am I in bed?”

She was wearing the same polo shirt she had on yesterday.

“Ah! I’m gonna be late- ah! I’m already late!”

“Oh, good. You’re awake. Are you feeling OK?”

‘Why is Fairydust’s voice in my apartment?’

Fairydust was sitting in her computer desk chair.

“Why-what . . . are . . . you . . . doing . . . here?”

She felt like her head pressed together in a vice and she fell back down on her pillow.

“For exactly that reason. I’m so sorry, I did this to you. I shouldn’t have encouraged you to drink. I was irresponsible.” She turned her head and saw Fairydust leaning at the bed.

“It’s . . . OK . . . but . . . I-uhh, isn’t today a workday? I’m gonna . . . be . . . late . . . going . . . to . . . work!” She looked at her alarm clock. “Ah! I’m already late! I-gotta-get-up-and-”

“-Shh... don’t worry. You’ll have off from work until Monday morning. And so do I!”

“Whud-do-you mean? Isn’t today . . . Wednesday . . . ?”

Fairydust offered her hand to Sammohini.

“Here, let’s get you outta bed, cleaned up, then I’ll explain it.”

Sammohini stumbled through cleaning up, bathing, and changing into new clothes. Fairydust had made breakfast, consisting of reheated leftover Q-Curry with orange juice, and was seated at the dining room table looking at her smartphone. When she left the bathroom, she was still feeling a bit s-p-a-c-e-d o-----u-----t but was feeling better, but stumbled, nearly fell onto the refrigerator, but caught herself before putting her weight onto the refrigerator.

Fairydust hopped up and bounced over but Sammohini had regained her balance.

“Careful does it...” Fairydust said, holding out an arm for Sammohini to hold onto to guide her way to the table. She took it and was guided along to the table to sit down in the seat Fairydust had hopped away from. “How are you feeling?”

“I-I feel... kinda weird...” she tried focusing on Fairydust, but the lighting was too bright and her vision blurred in and out, then as she looked down at the plate that appeared in front of her, she blurted out “I-I-I don’t l-i-i-ik-e how this feels...” accidentally and quickly added “...b-b-ut-t-t thanks for b-e-e-e-i-n-g here... t-t-t-to help me...”

She felt her shoulders being rubbed like before.

“It’s the least I could do... oh, and, hey, dig in!”

She dug the spoon into the reheated curry and ate.

“Yum!” The taste was almost like how it tasted at Zbigniew’s but maybe a bit greasier . . . ?

“Don’ go too quick now, Sammohini...”

She paused to listen then chewed.

After eating some more bites, she started feeling normal, and acting more naturally, to which Fairydust sat down to eat her remaining leftovers.

“Hey, I’m glad to see you’re feeling better. You still look a little pale, and,” Fairydust reached over to put the cool back of her hand against her forehead, then returned to her seat next to her, “yer still burnin’ up, but, at least you’re not spacing out as much. You poor thing...”

Before reaching for another spoonful of curry, she asked, “what happened? Uhh-I-uhh, kinda-uhh, well, umm, I-uhh know we went to Z-Zbig-ni-ew’s, but-uhh, I-uhh... should be at work right now, I think... and instead-uhhh, I’m at home...”

Fairydust reached over to rub her shoulder up and down three times, sat back down, then said, “so-uhh, I got you way more drunk than you could handle. You didn’t embarrass yourself or anything. Happens all the time... the waitress was telling Hank that you only drank there once, when you turned of age, so, I guess... your body just couldn’t handle it. Oh! And I got us both outta work until Friday, so we can relax here, or if you wanna go for a ride to get some fresh air, we can do that, too. Your choice! It’s the least I could do...” she turned away, looked down, drank the last bit of orange juice, then continued, “oh, I hope you don’t mind, I reheated the curry in your microwave and poured us some orange juice.”

“No! It’s fine-uhh, th-thank you for everything. You don’t need to apologize. You’ve done so much for me already! You’re here, too, which is really nice of you,” she looked down, “oh! And you cooked me breakfast! You’re really nice.” She slowly ate another bite.

“Thank you. Ya know, if it was Hank or anyone else, I’d’ve just dropped you off,” she kept eating, “maybe made sure you were able to get inside, then let-ch-ya fumble around,” she had made sure her mouth was closed as she ate, but she looked over at Fairydust and saw that she wasn’t even looking over, rather, had taken to look at the bottom of her glass, “because, well, Hank’d know what to do, but... you...”

“It’s-shuh SOH-kehay,” she said with a partial mouthful of curry, “ahck! Sowrry!, exha-use mere,” she mumbled, then covered her mouth, as she chewed the last bits of curry before swallowing, then said, “it’s OK! Thank you so much for helping me out. You’re such a good friend!”

Fairydust looked up and over, then said, “aww! Thank you, kindly! You’re a great friend to have, too... hey, do you mind if I get sum-more orange juice? I can refill ya too.”

She had already picked up another spoonful of curry, but nodded, and kept eating as Fairydust picked up both glasses, rustled around in the kitchen, returned with the filled glasses, excused herself, returned again, and sat down.

“Well, how ‘bout it, Sammohini, wanna go for a cruise outside town to get some fresh air? It might be good for ya to get outta th’ city.”

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[Chapter 19] The Name Game

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Mount Eville Visitor Center, Observatory Deck.

Friday, November 15th. 11:11am.

The roads had been free of any snow and rain.

“Maybe you just worry too much about what other people think?”

Sammohini looked over at Fairydust, who was dressed in a heavy leather jacket and looking out into the forest through one of many stationary binoculars in the observatory. She was still trying to figure out how she’d found herself up that mountain on that workday morning. Fairydust had driven them up a winding mountain road, “for some time away” from Eville Medical, as one of several tokens of apologies for accidentally getting her ‘sick’ as the note would state. She wasn’t out of the woods completely, although she was feeling better.

“Maybe, I guess... I’m not really sure...” She looked out into the forest as well.

“The way I see it, well, see everything in life is like this... you have to earn my respect. You get a baseline level of respect that, yeah, you’re a human being, cool, but that’s really about it. Never know who’s gonna come up behind ya and do something to ya, so you always gotta keep yer guard up, at least until you get-ta know that person, then you can kinda let your guard down, open up, and become acquaintances or friends. Otherwise, hey, the name’s Fairydust. Deal with it, right?” Fairydust looked up, motioned over, then continued, “here, come take a look.”

She walked forward, looked into the binoculars, and saw a small lake with a boat.

“Do you happen to know the name of that lake there?”

“No...” She couldn’t see any signs or markers nearby.

The fisherperson on the boat swung out a fishing rod.

“Me neither. That lake probably doesn’t even know the name someone gave it. It coulda been Chief Evealth himself’d found that lake, or someone thousands-a years before that, but they had-ta refer to it as something. Maybe it was ‘Lake With Good Fish’ or ‘Toxic Lake,’ but it had to be a name or some kinda designator. The lake doesn’t care, though. It’s just gonna keep being a lake. Dogs and pets might like to have a name because they know they’re gonna get a treat if they act politely, but otherwise, they don’t care what they’re called. We’re on the other end of that whole thing.” While Fairydust was philosophizing, Sammohini was looking at the lake and imagining what kind of fish were in the lake, then thought of having some fish and chips, before returning to Fairydust’s monologue, “so when someone calls me Fairydust, or tries to at least, even for someone like Hank that just messes around, then I know they’re gonna be a decent person. Right?”

Sammohini’s internal monologue had to catch up: ‘Someone calls me by the right name, they’re probably a good person, right? That makes sense...’ “Right!”

“Same fer you, there, which is why you were probably so offended, to begin with. I get it, w’all get it, except maybe for ‘The People’s Hero’ and especially not the offender herself, Joandra Oliver. I get it so much that Alex was actually the one to encourage me the most to legally change my name to Fairydust, which will be official as of, well, today. It’ll be great! But it means, too, that I’ve gotta live a more decisive lifestyle, because at least before, I could introduce myself as Mildred. Alex was telling me that they were kinda unsure about doing the same jump, but I said, ‘nah, let’s jump together, then!’ So they figured out all the paperwork to sign, and I just hopped on their research to get it done. As we were doing all that, I thought, ‘come on now, F.D.,’ which is something else I call myself, ‘if I’m gonna get hassle from people at work with just my name alone, then that’s not a good place to work, is it?’”

Sammohini’s internal monologue was caught up. “Right-! Oh, wait, now I get it!” She stood up and looked over at Fairydust, who had been pacing around the empty, enclosed observatory deck. “It’s like for me. My mom named me Sammohini because she liked how it looked and it was flexible enough to be Sam. Why did your parents want to name you Fairydust?”

The seductive woman stopped and turned. “Much the same! But they were more decisive! They wanted me to have a name of my own. You ever see another Fairydust anywhere? Not in Wilesware Manager or our email or even online? But the doctors out in the Edkfa thought that was too ‘weird,’ so they wanted me to have this straightlaced name, which has been fine, but I’ve been growing out of it. I don’t like being called it and I’d rather take the consequences of living life on my own terms, as my own name, rather than the name they gave me out of some conservative values.”

-Sammohini realized that if she didn’t interrupt, they’d be there all day. “-Hey, F-Fairydust, do you wanna go get some fish and chips, or something?”

“Oh, sure! I know just the place!”

Sneaker Bay, Sneaker’s, Outdoor Seating Galley.

Saturday, November 16th. 2:23pm.

The roads were clear, but the air was still chilly.

They ate fish and chips with an exquisite view of the bay.

Sammohini had been thinking of this carefully, and said after a pause in another one of Fairydust’s monologues, “this has all been very nice of you, Fairydust, but you didn’t need to do all this for me...”

“This is honestly all part of the going away party, or I guess, the after-party, since I’ll be quitting tomorrow when we go back into work.”

“What do you mean?!” She looked up and saw Fairydust smiling, but turning toward the sea.

“I wasn’t completely honest with Hank or you. It’s not downtown. It’s gonna be on a cruise ship. I’m quitting IT! I’m going to be part of a circus crew!”

“Really? No way!”

“I’m not going back to Noway just yet! But I am gonna go traveling across the world again. I’ve been kinda cooped up around here for too long. It’s time I get back on the road and movin’ ‘round the world again. I had this doctor earlier this week that was yellin’ at me because his computer shut down on him, yellin’ at the helpdesk, and we just gotta sit around and take it? It sucks! But when I’m on the road, wherever I am, whatever I’m doing for work, whether it’s in Edfka or Pullistan, things are easier... I can always catch the next bus outta town!”

“A-Are you ...ever going to return? Or are you leaving for good?!”

“Probably... to both of your questions. It depends on where the good winds take me. I’ve found that when my energy stays stagnant for too long, I’ll start to encounter more and more animosity, so getting back out into the world will soothe my soul. I’ve already sold almost everything in my old apartment. For everything else, a girlfriend of mine will hold onto it, but even that isn’t much. We don’t need much more than our laptops and an Internet connection these days, right? The rest is what we choose to carry along with us, the souvenirs of our hypothetical pasts or the memories of what we can become...”

She noticed while Fairydust was talking that she was beginning to sweat and feel panicked, so she bit into one of the fish, and the world instantly felt more relaxed, at least temporarily. “Well, I gotta say, this is delicious! Thank you again for the food! You’ve spoiled me too much.”

“It’s the least I could do to repay my debts and sins..”

Sammohini thought back to something Hank had said.

“Actually, there is something you can do to help me.”

Fairydust’s idle focus on the waters turned into fierce attention toward her.

Near Eville Medical, Sammohini’s Apartment.

Sunday, November 17th. 5:23pm.

Does the digital rain of a game affect us?

Fairydust had started giving her a tutorial on the game Hank recommended.

“If you move Norman the Archer up there,” she pointed to her laptop screen, “yeah, to any spot at that altitude, then he can shoot anyone down there and they aren’t likely to be able to attack. Maybe Margry there can hit you with a magic spell on her next turn. Go ahead and move up there and we’ll see who can attack within range.”

The tactical game involved one team of fantasy characters fighting against another on an isometric battle screen.

“Yeah, go ahead and attack Margry since you’ll deal extra damage against her type, and use a fire arrow,” which Sammohini did after she remembered how to navigate through the menus, which killed the high-level magician. A string of seemingly profane words in a language she couldn’t read appeared in the conversation window.

Fairydust laughed.

“What does all that mean?”

“Oh, it’s all Pulsinesian vulgarities.”

The vulgarities continued to pour in.

“Is this how you know so many languages?”

The other player moved a fantasy character forward and attacked a bird creature named Eschina for not quite enough damage to kill it.

“That, and I was last in Pulsinesia about five years ago. So, fer this one, go ahead and move Eschina to the side of Danyell and use a peck attack.”

“Isn’t that going to put Eschina in d-danger?”

“Only if it misses. There’s a type advantage, so she’ll be fine.”

Sammohini put in the attack and the yellow creature killed the knight character.

“Yes!”

Similar words poured down the screen.

“So... is this what this game’s all about?”

“Pretty cool, right? I worked in a bar with this dude,” and she pointed to the username dhz_7ttw, “he’s got a rad pad within walking distance of the beach. It’s a popular tourist attraction, too, so business’s always boomin’.”

“Yeah, I guess I’m just... pooped from everything. We did everything we could together! It was so much fun! We also went up into the mountains, then the beach, and this game, but-uhh, I just remembered, I gotta get ready for work tomorrow... I feel bad for Hank and Venkat for having to continue the project without me, while I’ve been having fun with you. I mean, I appreciate it, and all.”

“No, that makes sense,” Fairydust said, swiveling the laptop to type a few lines into a message box, closed out of the program, turned off the laptop, then continued, “actually, I should be getting going, too.”

“You don’t have to go so soon! ...If you don’t mind sharing, where are you planning on going?” Her face burned up. ‘I feel like I betrayed the friend I spent so much time with over the past few days...!’

“Oh, I’m not offended at all. Well, I figure, depending on how it goes tomorrow, I’ll either... no, once I turn in my badge, sign the paperwork, and do all that stuff, I’ll return the car at the airport, then look for the first flight out to any country in Afear,” she said as she packed the laptop bag into the bag she brought up, “so, probably, by this time tomorrow, I’ll be on that flight or landed.”

“I... could never imagine leaving so suddenly like that...”

Fairydust threw the bag over her shoulder, rolled her carry-on, then said, “ya know, it’s hard to get offended if you don’t get attached,” before reaching forward to give her a kiss before leaving, “but, I’m attached and I’m not offended. I’ll let-cha know the next time I’m in town. Not many people ‘round here try-ta learn people’s names. Just a buncha users. Just ‘ID numbers’ and ‘employee numbers.’ No one’s after deep conversations about life. Well, you’ve got my phone number and email, and I’ve got yours. I better go. Catch ya in the next one!”

The mysterious woman left the apartment boring once again.

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[Chapter 20] It's Technically Called

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, Lisa’s Office.

Monday, November 18th. 8:00am.

Strong, cold air conditioning.

Six computer repair technicians stood in their big boss’s office, with their boss seated at one of two meeting chairs before the large, dark-wooden desk, where their director sat, dismayed.

“This isn’t good! Your team’s already short-staffed. Now she goes and quits on us!”

The air conditioning was blasting cold air, but Sammohini felt uncomfortably warm. She wasn’t sure where to stare. Not at Alex, Venkat, Hank, Josh, Nils, or their boss’s boss, so she looked at Linda.

Linda spoke to the team and said, “well, Team. We wanted to bring you all here today to talk about the current situation and give you the status. We want to avoid rumors distracting you from your work. Your coworker, who is not present, put in notice with HR last week. The letter, well... she left a letter that... yes, she’s quit. Her access was immediately terminated. We’ve found that her desk was ransacked of any personal effects and it does not seem that she has done any malice to her computer or our network. However, as stated in our policies, if you see her on hospital grounds, contact security immediately-” Lisa interrupted, “-even if she is a patient, escorted by any of our fine medical staff, it is better that security be made aware, in case she does anything in any of the patient rooms.” “Ja-yes...”

Lisa scribbled on a piece of paper, then continued for Linda, “Alex, thank you for volunteering to help coordinate the efforts to distribute the workload evenly amongst the team.”

Alex nodded.

Lisa continued.

“We know the workload has been stressful over the past few months already. We will redouble our efforts to find new candidates - good candidates - and Linda will have two meetings with the helpdesk to discuss ways they can better help your team. Chief among them, we will begin hour-long slots throughout the day where one person from their team will aid your team. Yes, Hank?”

Hank had raised a coated hand to interrupt.

“That’s cool and all, but if I may speak honestly...” he scratched his beard and waited for a, “permission granted,” “the resumes we’ve got’ve been all good... for nothin’! Half a ‘em don’t even qualify for an internship. I know agencies and contractors can be bogus sometimes, but maybe move ‘em int-a the helpdesk as contractors, like Sammohini here, and let the good ones advance through the ranks. We don’t need perfect, we just need ones that won’t screw things up... like the last contractor we got...”

Hank put his hand down.

“Understood. Thank you for your honesty, and yes, we have plans like this in the works, already, right, Linda?” “J’es.” “So we’ll just need to have your patience and understanding through this trying time. That said, please don’t burn yourself out. Take care of yourselves. If you become sick for any reason, please, use your sick time as you need it. I want to thank Sammohini, in particular,” she felt a strike of heat and shortness of breath, so breathed in, and it passed, “for trying your best to work through your recent medically-protected event. On behalf of Linda and the team, we’re happy that you were able to get that all sorted out by one of our fine doctors quickly. Welcome back.”

Fairydust had got her in the car to drive to Eville Medical.

“Here, let’s get you a doctor’s note. It’ll be good for Monday.”

*I f t h a t i s O K t h e
n . . . O K . . . ”*

“Hank’ll cover in case you need it.”

The hospital never seemed so far away...

“...Sure thing! I’m feeling... much better now,” and coughed accidentally.

“Well, please see Linda if you need any additional time. Those were all I had on my agenda. I’ll open the floor for questions or concerns unless Linda has anything to add?”

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Monday, November 18th. 8:11am.

There was a fog around the place.

“Hey, Hank, good to see you again...”

Other than Sammohini, Hank and Alex were the only ones to return to their desks.

“Good ta see yer feeling better, too. Ya missed the big project news. We have early access ta the space. We can’t really set up the computers yet, but I can at least show you the space. That cool, Alex? We’ll probably be back in an hour, depending. We can hang tight ‘til someone gets back.”

Alex poked their head out from the cube closest to the storage room.

“Nah, you’re good. Josh’s in the build room, so we got coverage.”

‘Coverage?’ Sammohini thought as they put on their coats and left.

When they walked into the lobby of the IT Department, Sammohini thought about ‘coverage’ again, since they had just finished talking about lunch plans at the cafeteria, and asked, “what did they mean by ‘coverage’? Did anything change since I was gone?” They walked down the stairs.

“Nah, nothing. Alex is helping to air traffic tickets, since then the project techs like you ‘n’ Nils can focus your time on your projects,” they left to go into Eville Medical, “and the break/fix techs like most of the rest of us can go out onto the floor. They is going to be a good liaison between the helpdesk and us, too, so it’ll work out well.”

As the two technicians walked toward the ‘Cold’ building, Sammohini caught up to the thought, then said, “we didn’t use-d to do that, so it sounds like something’s changed...”

When they were alone in a section of aisleway, Hank said just barely above a whisper, “actually, it is a change, but I think it’ll turn out well. They’ll make sure high-pri tickets get passed along to any of us, like say they knows we’re over here, whereas Josh is over in ‘Hot,’ and the ticket’s in ‘Hot,’ then they’ll reach out to Josh, then us, because we’re closer, or da kine like that.”

Sammohini wrote a quick note in her notebook, ‘Alex is coordinating tickets,’ before they entered the ‘Cold’ building.

Eville Medical, “Cold” Building, 5th Floor, Future Neurology Office.

Monday, November 18th. 8:25am.

The air was stuffy from the furniture move dirt, dust, debris, and heavy hubris.

The old office labeling had already been shaved off the glass side of the door. The door placard was already updated with the proper labeling, but, there was a sign taped over it saying ‘COMING DECEMBER.’ Hank had borrowed the key from Joandra before they left, since the project manager was in meetings to manage another project, so he unlocked the front door, swung it open, and turned on the lights with some ado bravado.

“Welcome to the site of your first successful project!”

“This... is gonna be the new place?” She thought she heard a faint echo throughout the lobby of the dirty once-office. The carpet had been mostly torn up and what was left had stains implying where old furniture once stood. There was a coil of copper cabling springing out of the floor like a flower. She approached it and said, “ooh! Pretty...”

“Yup! And heh, yeah, that’s gotta get sorted soon. The furniture’s going to be in by, I think Thursday? I’m not sure why they wanted to tear everything out. We’d be done with all of our side of things if they’d’ve left it all in and it was decent enough furniture, but, I suppose a new doctor’s gotta have new stuff. At least they didn’t tear off the outlets when it seemed like the movers pillaged the place...”

They entered into an empty patient room.

Sammohini remembered the morning meeting, “so, hey, what's new with the project? Is anyone mad at me because I was out sick? I mean, you probably know from Fairydust... I was really only sick the first day, and after that, uhh-she-uhh... we made... it was fun... I loved it.”

Hank peeked out through the sliding glass door, the only door in the patient room, closed it, then said, “Yeah? Fairydust’s cool like that. She’s long gone now. I haven't seen her since we-”

Rustling outside.

Hank opened the door.

They both heard a mechanical moaning like a whale.

He slowly closed the door.

“Can you jot down a task note in your notebook?”

She brought out her notebook.

“This’ll be a project note. Brand new line.”

Her pencil was ready to write.

“OK, this’ll be a task for Joandra.”

She drew a box on an open line.

“Ask Joandra to call Facilities about wailing whale.”

She wrote up to ‘about.’

“About... what?”

She looked up.

“Didn’t you hear that?”

She turned her head sideways.

“Yeah-uhh, what was that?”

Hank motioned with his arms like he was flying toward her.

“The wailing whale... ooouuuooohhh....”

She folded her arms.

“Come on! Be serious!”

Hank continued to swim like a whale.

“I aaaaaaammmm... that’s what we caaaaaaaallllllll it...”

Hank started to laugh. The cabinets and sink were still there, but the walls were crowded with plumbing, electrical, and other kinds of building supplies.

“No, seriously, it’s like some kinda air pressure thing. I dunno what it’s technically called... but... I’m surprised you haven’t heard it. How long you been with us?”

She looked down at her notes and wrote ‘wailing whale.’

“Two years on December 1st! I’m so happy to say that!”

Hank pulled on the hair underneath his lower lip out a bit.

“You’ve been on the team about three or six months? So you’ve primarily been over in ‘Neutral?’ It happens more over here in ‘Cold,’ and usually one of the Facilities folks’ll just go take a look at

the pressure lines and do their magic. I think it was Blueberry that started doing that whole whale dance when we were doing some wiring work downstairs late one night some years back, and it’s just kinda permeated out from there.”

She had drawn a cute whale to fill in the rest of the page.

“That’s cute! Blueberry was so nice when he showed me some networking stuff a while back. He helped me get a computer back online that wasn’t connecting to the network, and he showed me how to do it myself, so next time I could just call him or any of his team and they could help me out if I couldn’t get it.”

Hank removed his Eville Medical baseball cap, scratched his head, then put his hat back on.

“Ya know, we should probably finish the tour of the rest of the area. Oh yeah, so a computer’ll go over there,” and he pointed to the corner near the cabinetry, “but don’t worry, we’ve got maps, drops, labels, and the works. I figured it’d be fun to explore the area while it’s under construction,” he opened the door and they left the patient room to enter into an open area, “since you won’t be able to stand where you are in about a week, I reckon.”

Sammohini looked down to see nothing substantial.

“They’re planning to put up a big nurse’s station right around here, so there’ll be computers out here, too, but like I say, it’ll all just be drag ‘n’ drop, plug ‘n’ play. Drag ‘em over from downstairs, drop ‘em off, plug ‘em in, then we get to play around with our... oh, yeah, you’re not Fairydust, so, we get-ta play-uhh, well, you know... well,” he laughed at himself and she chuckled along.

They finished walking around the rest of the clinic area, checking out Dr. Payne’s future office, before arriving in front of the restrooms.

“What’s this white power over these water faucets?”

She pointed to the water fountains between the two doors.

“Oh, either drywall or drop ceiling debris...”

He licked his finger then went to stick his finger in it- “-hey, that’s gross! Go wash your hands in the restroom with soap and water, ‘Young Man!’”

They both laughed.

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[Chapter 21] Medical Condition's Name

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, Joandra’s Cube.

Monday, November 18th. 8:55am.

Someone needed to turn on the AC.

“Hey, J., just returning the keys to the Neurology office.”

Joandra was idly looking at some boxes on her screen.

“Oh, OK, thanks... Frank... Can’t talk, busy right now.”

“No worries, but... the name’s Hank and it’s not Frank.”

“Oh, OK, thanks...” Joandra switched over to her email.

Hank’s face scrunched up like he was going to get mad, but then, Sammohini heard a light chuckling from a nearby cube. She poked her head out to see one of the other project managers, dressed in business professional attire with long white fingernails, standing about three desks away with her arms folded, smiling.

“Hank, while you’re here, I have a question for- Oh, hi! Are you new to the department? My name is Ciera, with the letter C.”

“Hi, Ciera! I’m Sammohini, but you can call me Sam! I started two years ago in December!” Hank walked toward the black-haired project manager that was now walking away. “But, this is my first project-uhhh, and Hank’s been a great help! I wouldn’t have...” she trailed off as both disappeared from her view.

“Hey Ciera, what’s up?”

Ciera motioned for them to sit in the cube’s two guest chairs.

“Please, everyone, take a seat.”

Hank opened a blank page of his notebook and asked, “What’s up?”

“Nothing. I just don’t want to see you argue again. Say, you have two minutes to chat?”

Hank looked up, closed his notebook, brought out his smartphone, then said, “Sure, we’ve gotta minute. Lemme text Alex so they know we’ll be a few.”

While he texted, the project manager opened up a list of conference rooms, and said, “oh! Wiles is open until 9:30!”

Eville Medical, IT Meeting Room: Wiles.

Monday, November 18th. 9:08am.

Someone needed to turn off the AC.

Ciera closed the door after Hank walked toward the far side of the table to face the door. Sammohini followed. Once the three were seated, she said barely above a whisper, “Hank, you know that Joandra has a condition, right?”

Sammohini felt warm, like someone had applied a hot towel to her forehead, so, she wiped her bangs just to check, that, no, no one had.

“Of course! She’s a...” he caught himself, then said in a more professional manner, “no, and it ain’t my spot to ask about the details.”

Ciera leaned back in her chair and said, “yeah, it’s called C-R-A-P memory!” Ciera laughed, then brought out her smartphone, pressed a few things on the screen, then showed them both a picture of a confused cat. The picture had text on the top that read, “Compartmentalized Regressive A... P... Memory,” but Sammohini had trouble understanding some of the words, but on the bottom, the text read, “for when you just don’t care about learning people’s names!”

Ciera placed the smartphone on the table and slid it forward so they could take a look. Sammohini brought both her hands forward, looked up to see Ciera nod, so she took the phone to get a closer look and better understand the words she just heard.

“Everyone on the team knows that she doesn’t care about people, except when h-they help her complete her projects. Tenzing formulated this idea after Joandra forgot that Tenzing-they was on our team, and Rylee made the photo. The picture describes h-her perfectly. ‘Compartmentalized Regressive Anomic Pseudoaphasia!’ It’s a wonderful picture. It’s based on a real medical condition, so we’re not entirely joking, just that Joandra is full of herself. She has such a big ego that we named a medical condition after her. Maybe we should publish a paper!”

Sammohini reached forward to place the smartphone on the table and nodded in a bow.

“What’s yer point?” Hank folded his arms, one leg, leaned back, and exhaled some air.

Ciera reached forward to collect the smartphone, smiled, and equaled the bowing motion.

“She’s doing a great job. When we notice things like that, we tend to pull them aside and tell them, so that they are not insulted, as you, there.”

“I wasn’t offended!” Hank puffed up his shoulders.

Ciera nodded, stood up, then said, “I said what I have to say. Use it as you like. I have to go back to some emails. It’s good to see you as always Hank. You said your name was Samia, right?”

Sammohini thought back to something Fairy dust taught her during their weekend - *“if someone says somethin’ ya don’t like, don’t react right away, OK? Hold your lips together like this... no, tighter... hmm, see how I’m doing it? See how you don’t see my lips? ...here, like this... heh, yeah, like that... hmm... oh! And jus’ hold your mouth like that until you don’t feel upset...”* - tightened her mouth, then brought her badge up, out, and into full view for Ciera to see. She

said, “oh, no, I was wrong! Please forgive me! I must say, your given name is very beautiful! Can you say your name again?”

She felt a calm rush over her face. “Oh, thank you! No-no worries at all! My name is said Sam-mo-hi-ni. Sam,” she said with a pause, “‘mo’ like ‘can I have mo’ food, please!’, ‘hi’ like hee-hee-hee, like you’re laughing, and ‘ni’ like your knee, but it’s not pronounced like heinie!” She frowned before tightening her lips.

Ciera wrote some notes on her smartphone and recited them back. “Sam-mo-hi-ni. Sammohini. Thank you for the pronunciation guide. I will be sure to refer to this going ahead. Your name is wonderful like a delicate flower, and your badge photo shows you carefully try to present yourself well.”

Sammohini brought the badge back down to look at it, then back up, and said, “Aww! Thank you so much! I’m so honored....”

Ciera nodded, stood up, said “if you will excuse my rude behavior, now I must go,” walked over to the door, opened it, said “but again, it was great to meet you Sammohi-ni. Let’s work soon,” and left the door open.

Hank stood up, walked toward the door, and said “well, I guess that solves that mystery, huh? Let’s get back to the office.”

‘You should ask him about that,’ she thought while she was still seated, and said, “hey-uhh, if you don’t mind me asking...” and she said quieter, “you weren’t offended by Joandra, back there, were you...?”

Hank smiled, closed the door, and said, “nah, not really. Just figured I’d throw some friction in there fer fun.”

“Well, now that we know she has some kind of condition... I mean, uhh-I can’t fault her if she has trouble remembering people’s names... would that be rude of me if I did? I think it might, I’m not sure...”

Hank peered out through the little window of the door to see that no one was outside, waiting, and said, “that’s just their team’s excuse, like she said. Ya know, it’s like if you were sensitive or oblivious about something and we left you at that... then, would we be helpin’ ya grow into a better person? Not a chance! Everyone on the team... Fairy dust,” he trailed off to think about something for a second, shook his head, and continued, “even Nils, we all care about you in different ways. Nils just doesn’t wanna deal with anything other than working toward the first chance he kin get ta get some trainin’, then he’s outta here... like she went...” he trailed off his thoughts, then returned, “ya know, since we know you’re in it for the long-haul, w’all wanna help ya out as best we can. We’re like a work family, after all!”

Sammohini thought about the upcoming holiday weekend away with her family, then said, “aww! That’s so sweet. Thank you, Hank! I’ve actually kinda thought about that a bit... and you are like

the big brother I never had... Fearghal just isn’t responsible at all. He’s too reckless! Ugh! Sometimes, it’s too much to look after him, but I guess he’s been mellowing out lately, so that’s nice. You remember him, right? I guess he mellowed out around...” Hank looked out the window with a frown, and back in, but just long enough for her to notice. “Oh! Sorry, I-uhh, yeah, umm-sorry.”

“Well, you should think better of ‘im.” She looked down at her closed notebook out on the table. “From what you’ve told me, even, he’s turning it around. Steady job now, he’s been steady with his boyfriend, I forget his name, for a while, and he’s trying to get it together now. When I last talked with him, he’s doin’ good. I’m very happy for ‘im.” To distract herself, Sammohini looked at the sides of her notebook, which was almost completely full of notes. Maybe just a few pages left that weren’t rumpled up with pencil marks, lint from her pockets, dents, and even some curry stains? ‘He’s right,’ she thought, ‘you should apologize to him... Fear-’ “I mean, you’re doin’ good, too, but just remember, you’ve only got one little brother. Good or not.”

“I feel terrible now that I was talking badly about him. You’re right. He is doing much better. I guess... I should think more kindly toward him... I-I-I...” her eyes started to water up and it seemed like some air was caught in her lungs, “I’m sorry, I really-.”

He sat down in the open seat Ciera had sat in before, and said, “h-hey, it’s alright! Ya know, I’ve always thought of you as the little sister I’ve never had! At least, well, after I saw your first three tickets come through and I saw how hard you were trying over there.”

She had caught her breath, blinked, and the tears had disappeared.

“T-thank you, Hank. You know, it’s so nice coming into work and having you around as a big brother. You’re so nice and responsible. I always feel so... well, when you’re around, I feel like I can...” she wasn’t sure how best to phrase it, but she thought ‘it’s comfortable when he’s around... he guides me around, helps me out with things all the time with unlimited patience, and takes the lead when things are scary...’ but instead, she breathed in, smiled, and said “it’s nice! It really is nice having you as a work big brother! Oh! Venkat has always reminded me of my uncles. He’s like if they were both put together into one person! He’s relaxed like my Uncle Gopal but responsible like my Uncle Jaidev! I guess I could see the same for the rest of the team, too, like Josh I’ve also thought of as my big brother, but...” she didn’t want to say that she also thought he was handsome, even though her face grew warmer, so she said instead, “uhh-so I guess-umm... Linda is like our team mom?”

Hank smiled through the mustache that nearly covered his mouth. “Hah, sure...” He laughed nervously, frowned and smiled, then he stroked his beard, which had nearly covered him the neckline of his black polo, and he continued, “well, we also have those new hires coming up soon. Linda always gets me in because I can usually tell when people’re lyin’ about technical stuff, and F.D. was kinda like my wing-woman... for those, and now, well...” he looked over at the window in the door, didn’t see anyone, then continued at a whisper, “now that she’s flying to

Afear, to Edkfa," which he pronounced with a thick accent that sounded like eed-kfa, "I'll get ya in-ta the interviews. If that's something you wanna do, I think Linda'd dig it. She likes you, and I've got the technical side covered, so you could handle the personality side. If you don't like 'em, they're no good!"

"S-sure!" Sammohini jumped up, bounced over to the door, ran back to the desk, grabbed her notebook, then opened the long door handle with her wrist. "Let's go!"

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[Chapter 22] Names On Paper

[\[Updated 11/29\]](#)

Eville Medical, Linda’s Office.

Tuesday, November 19th. 8:29am.

Some additional warmth would’ve been nice...

Hank set up the meeting. Sammohini felt nervous; she hadn’t talked to Linda directly since her extended weekend away. The door was open for them when they arrived, but Hank waited at the door, unusually, rather than barging in.

“Hey, Rockstar, komm in, please. I suppose Superstar is there, too?”

“Thanks.” Hank looked over at her, smiled, entered, then took a seat.

She followed, closed the door, then said, “h-hi! Thanks for having us!”

Linda wore her usual black military suit, with an extra grey scarf, and when she motioned them to sit, Sammohini noticed that Linda was wearing black leather gloves. The office was tidy. Even the six files on the desk between Linda and the two technicians were precisely aligned.

“Why the formality, Rockstar?”

“Well, we’re talkin’ about resumes.”

“Well... you’re wearing the lab coat...”

“It’s just been cold lately...” He looked away.

Linda folded her arms, crossed a leg, and leaned back in her chair.

“That is not like you. That is not a good sign. You are as passionate as they come... That the cold affects you so early in the year is unusual. Please, make sure you do not get sick, OK?”

Sammohini felt cold, too.

“Appreciate the concern.”

“Since we are on this note, I am very glad that you are feeling better, Sammohini. I was worried about you. You are a great employee; you are exceptional on your team since you joined, and your optimistic outlook is helping to make our operations run smoother. When I heard that you were as ill as you were, I was so worried about you. I’m glad that Hank and Veda helped you with your illness. You look good... besser than yesterday, and that makes me happy.”

Sammohini blushed, smiled, then said, “oh, thank you! I’m feeling so much better now. I’m not sure what it was, still, and it wasn’t that fun at all! But, I’m glad I was able to get Hank’s help! He’s such a good coworker, and friend, too, that I’m happy to be on the team and working with him!”

Linda was staring at Hank, frowning.

Hank smiled but was unusually quiet.

“...Are you hungover?” Linda asked.

“Yes, sorry,” Hank replied.

Linda’s frown turned into disgust.

“I didn’t mean to be rude to you since I know- ...and ...was hoping you wouldn’t notice... it was a last-minute thing- w-we were celebrating that F-uhh... I was irresponsible.”

Linda sighed, turned away, then said, “you are an adult. You can do whatever you want. Please, be more respectful next time.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Hank wasn’t looking at Linda or herself, rather, he just looked at his clasped hands in his lap. Linda was looking off, somewhere. Sammohini felt like her forehead was sweating and felt some heat creep in underneath her red sweater. She looked up and saw numbered files.

“Oh! Are these the resumes for new hires? Can I see?!”

Linda turned to her and smiled, like waking from a dream.

“Of course. There are six CVs here to discuss. Let’s start with the first and go through the list. These are mainly for helpdesk roles. However, if they qualify for your team, they will be considered.”

Sammohini reached for the file folder with “1” written on it and handed out the resume to Linda and Hank. She fumbled for the pencil in her notebook until Linda brought out a medicine-branded coffee mug with four-colored pens, and said, “Here. Take the one you like the most.” She took the only pen with orange plastic, looked at the side, saw it had branding for some medication... Linda returned the mug. Hank was already reviewing the first candidate.

“Here is the system for the review of CVs. The pen has four colors: red, green, blue, and black. If something is noticeable, mark it with the color corresponding to the situation. Red is for something bad. Green is for something good. Blue is a question for clarification. During the interview, we use black to write notes. Does that make sense?”

Sammohini twirled her pen to see all of the colors spin, then looked up.

“These are so cool! I haven’t seen these in years...! But... none so far!”

“OK, good. Hank already knows the process. How does this candidate, this Bernardo,” she said, trying to roll the R-sounds, and failing, “look to you?”

“Bernardo,” he said, with an accent, “sounds like a good choice. He’s got a solid education, years of experience, and his certifications are current. Looks like he’s currently employed at- hmm, oh, yeah, hey, Sammohini, why don’t I show you what these markings look like, then you can kinda start to look out for these things yourself.”

Hank moved his chair closer and handed the resume to her. ‘His breath smelled . . . like . . . that . . . day... yuck!’ The resume had five green marks, a blue circle, and no red marks. “The first thing I look for is any certifications. It doesn’t tell the whole story, but it builds up the dude’s character. Passing some’re easier than tying yer shoes, whereas others are hardcore. This dude here’s gotta buncha hardcore certs, like this,” he pointed one with his pen, “and his degree is from...” and he spoke some words she didn’t quite understand, but it sounded like ‘technology’ and ‘fantastic,’ “-oh, sorry, he studied at la University de Aequoter and got a degree in technology, which is fantástico.” Hank moved his chair back and took back his copy of the resume.

Sammohini looked at her copy. “Wow, that’s impressive, then... why does he... want to work here? He looks so much smarter than me...” she almost wanted to take her it home to use to build up her own resume, but then, she thought, ‘well, you’re not looking for work!’ She looked up at Linda, who smiled at her, then put a blue-marked resume on the table.

“Das what I thought too. If he’s too smart for the job, how long will he stay?”

“Well, if he’s around for a few months, at least we can get our tickets down...”

“It would be expensive to hire him just to let him leave after going to training.”

“He could grab- sorry, be given tickets that don’t need much training at first.”

“Fair. For this reason, we are considering the promotion of helpdesk staff.”

‘Oh! I wonder if this is Nessa’s chance for a promotion, if she wanted to-’

“But no one’s qualified! Chad’s probably the most qualified, but...”

“Chad was the main candidate for Lisa and me. We think he could do it well.”

“Yeah, maybe... I mean, we could put ‘im into the rotation to see if ‘e’ll be a good fit. I dunno, though, his tickets are just OK. Nothing special. They never stood out as overly technical or observational, like Sammohini-over-here’s were...”

Sammohini didn’t really know how to contribute, so she had stared blankly at the resume. It increasingly looked more impressive than anything she had ever done...

“Now that I know his opinion, what do you think, Sammohini? Do you like him or not?”

“Oh! I-uhh, I... don’t have any big insight into this resume or the candidate or anything like Hank just described, so-uhh, sorry, maybe I’m not the right person to be doing this...”

She looked back down at the resume. Her neck and shoulders stiffened.

“Nein! I think you will do well if you are an interviewer. You just do not know the details. Also, you look at it from the perspective of Hank. What if you look at it from your perspective?”

Sammohini took a deep breath and started from the top. The first thing she saw was the candidate’s name, Bernardo ‘Burn’ Bromista. The introductory statement included a line about how he ‘specializes in translating technical concepts into non-technical terms for users.’ The

jobs he did seemed impressive and he had the good education and certifications that Hank described.

“I liked the line about translating! I speak Sindian and Direish... not really as well as you speak Gurfewan, but I guess considering how many languages Hank speaks, and how diverse we are in the hospital, it’s cool. I mean, we don’t really talk to patients, but there’s the map in the main lobby with all the pins from people all over the world! It’s cool to go there sometimes, on my breaks, of course, and just think about how big this world is, and how many people there are out there. How many experiences we can have, and how, like, uhh, I don’t know how to pronounce this name, but he’s got a nickname of Burn. I mean, that’s probably not the coolest nickname for the workplace, but, I’m sure he has that nickname because he thinks it’s helpful for people, and it’s helpful for me for one, especially if I can’t speak his language well, so that kinda tells me he’s probably a nice guy, or at least nice enough, and he might even be fun to work with, since I mean, I can’t really speak from a management perspective, but I think Burn’s kinda a cool nickname... so, hopefully, that was uhh-helpful?”

Linda had drawn a green smiley face next to Burn. “I do not think this” she said a word sounding like hyper-core “is considered offensive, but I can ask Lisa if there is a precedent for concern. If you both agree, I’ll schedule a time to call ‘Burn.’ Would you two like to join the phone screen?”

“Yeah.”

“Sure! That sounds like fun to meet a new person, but-uhh, what was that word you said earlier there? It sounded like... hyper-core?”

“Oh, hypocorism. This is like a nickname.”

“Yeah, also’s not generic... because most Bernardos I’ve met had ‘Bernie’ as a nickname; maybe he wanted something to trumpet himself above his nicknamed competition?”

Linda collected Sammohini’s copy and Hank’s copy, placed all three into file number one, put the file next to her computer, opened the next file, and handed copies to Sammohini then Hank.

“Perhaps. I am personally fine going either way. I think the only worry might be that he starts burning things, but I’m sure he knows what he’s doing. OK, I’ll contact him. Next CV, we have Itaeli.”

Hank breathed in when she said the name.

“Mu-Seoun. Itaeli’s the family name...”

“Why would they put the first name last?”

“It’s the naming convention style. In maybe a dozen countries around the world, people put the family name before the given name... but that’s beside the point, which is, this resume’s trash.”

“What! Why?”

Sammohini read over the resume herself while they argued in the background. There wasn’t anything offensive about it until she tried to read the last sentence of the introductory statement, which she couldn’t understand. I was riddled with typos!

“They couldn’t even run a spell check! How can they help us keep the hospital runnin’?”

“I can see that you have got your emotions back, Hank. What do you think, Sammohini?”

“Oh-uhh! ...I do agree... well-uhh... I mean-umm... I dunno, it-uhh... I can’t understand the last sentence. I haven’t got to any of the jobs or qualifications, so if you’ll give me a quick second,” she flipped through the pages, “well, this person doesn’t really seem nice to me. All the jobs talk about things they’ve done to help themselves out, but nothing really about the company or others... I like working with people that are helpful. If they’re not going to really help me out... or be a team player... then I dunno, maybe they’re gonna be rude to me? I dunno if I did that OK. That’s what I should do, right, Hank? I’m not sure I did a good job.”

Hank laughed and said “Spot-on.”

“I can agree with this argument.”

Linda collected the resumes and placed them into the nearby paper shredder.

It choked on the nine pages.

“Ack!”

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[Chapter 23] Name Something Awkward

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, Linda’s Office.

Tuesday, November 19th. 8-something?

It almost seemed too warm in the office now...

Hank jumped up and behind her. She was looking at the third file on the table and idly thought, ‘I wonder if I should refer John? He’s not really qualified or anything yet, and he’s still in college, but maybe he could become an intern...?’ When she looked over, Hank’s tattooed hands were touching Linda’s gloved hands over the choking paper shredder that sat at the side of the desk and they were looking at each other in the eyes with a look somewhere between anger and embarrassment, or so she thought, because Hank had already returned to his seat.

Linda already unplugged, opened up the shredder on the table, and pulled out the partially-shredded resumes. Hank’s redder cheeks were the only thing to tip Sammohini off to whether that had even just happened or not.

Linda returned the paper shredder to its place. Hank stared at his hands, clasped in his lap. Linda opened the third file and handed a resume to Sammohini then Hank. Hank accepted the resume without looking up and silently marked the resume in red. Linda looked over her copy of the resume without looking up.

Hank coughed lightly.

“That sounds bad. I do not want you to get sick or get someone else sick. I authorize you using sick leave for today. Email me tomorrow morning if you still feel sick.” Hank stood without looking up, placed the resume on the desk, put his pen in his lab coat pocket, said “thank you, ma’am,” opened, then closed the door silently.

Sammohini looked around the office, which was lined with military memorabilia, then at Linda, who had logged onto her computer, and was typing. Linda had taken off her gloves and was typing with short, red fingernails. She had been thinking about getting her nails manicured since Fairy dust... ..then she remembered that she was staring at Linda’s hands, realized it was creepy, so she moved her chair back to stand up, but Linda stopped her, so she sat back down.

“No, please, stay seated. We will go over the remainder of the CV’s today without him. And forget what happened. This event does not leave this room. Roger?”

She remembered incidental training she received, while alone with Hank in the Pathology gross-room, as they were working on an unrelated software issue: “If you come across some patient care information you shouldn’t be seeing, like this here that they left out by mistake,” he carefully turned over the glass square, which had a thinly-sliced purple splatter, barcode, and a name it, with the surgical gloves he always wore outside of the department, “wipe it from your memory. Some knowledge is harmful to keep. We didn’t see this. It wasn’t up. Deny everything unless there is contrary proof.”

She blinked, smiled, then asked, “...what event happened?”

Linda leaned back and smiled, but her eyes were staring more intensely than usual. They were light blue- ‘John could use an opportunity!’, she thought randomly, so she blurted out, “hey-uhh, while we’re looking over resumes, I know someone, but he’s not really qualified... but-umm, maybe he could be an intern or something? Or, I dunno, maybe help out part-time?” Linda’s gaze softened, so she continued talking. “Do you remember my sister, Trishna? She and the rest of my family were over for the holiday party last year, and, well, she and her boyfriend John, who was also at the party but I’m not sure you met him because he’s kinda quiet at things like that, well, they’re still in college, so he’s not really that qualified or anything for any of these jobs, but I was just kinda t-thinking that maybe it would be kinda nice if maybe-he had some kinda opportunity, even just as like a part-timer or intern or s-s-something to kinda see how it’s like out in the professional world because he’s not really someone that had a great upbringing, but he’s been treating Trishna well, and my family, we all r-really like him, he’s a nice young man and I couldn’t be happier that my little sister found someone that’s treating her well, because we were all worried about that, since she’s really shy too, so it-uhhh... works out well for them, and, well, I dunno what he wants to do in life. They’re currently in their first year, just taking general courses at the University of Eville, and they’re both full-t-time students so it’s not like he’d be like working a full workweek or anything like that, but umm... he might, maybe, he could help out with things, but I-I-I dunno, I mean, he’s got, well, umm... his hand’s all messed up, so he can’t really move any big heavy boxes or anything, so he probably wouldn’t be able to do much physical work, but I’ve always seen him try really hard and he does as many chores as he can around the house that he can so he’s definitely not a slacker, and he might be a little undisciplined, but that’s just because he doesn’t know any better, but, like I say, everyone in my family really likes him. My dad has taken a liking to him, and my mom liked him right away. Fearghal likes him, too. So, I mean-uhh, I kinda wanna help him out as best I can, not just because he’s my sister’s boyfriend, but because he seems like he’s had a rough lot in life and just wants to do better, so, umm... I don’t h-have his resume or anything, and if anything, it would just be with the classes he’s in, so he probably wouldn’t really be that impressive, and uhh-I mean, if we’re looking at candidates, I figured I’d mention him, since he’s not really technically a candidate like for a job that we have open, but maybe, if-uhh, maybe we have that slot where someone from the helpdesk stops by a few times a day to help with tickets to get our workload down, then maybe he could be that person or at least help with tidying? He could even be a volunteer. I mean, I think he’d be OK with that. He’s never really been someone interested in like showing off or having a bunch of money, other than to treat Trishna, which is part of what I like so much about him, because every interaction I’ve seen between them has been positive, where he’s always looking out for her, helping her around, and it’s really sweet to see. It’s like, wow, that’s kinda like the relationship I wanna be in someday with that special someone, you know? Where John’s just really a nice young man that’s trying to do well for himself and those around him, and that’s just a really nice feeling, so uhhh, yeah, I mean umm, he doesn’t have any certifications or anything, but if that sounds like something that could be a barrier for entry, I could always tell him about the prerequisite certifications and maybe the next time around maybe-ummm, maybe his resume could be in good enough standing to be considered for either an internship of, like, I

dunno, maybe a few hours a week, or maybe as a volunteer to get some on-the-job training and life experience for whatever job he wants to take in the future? If that sounds like it might be OK, I could ask him to send along his resume to me later tonight or this week and maybe we could consider it at around the same time for something like that? If not, sorry... I...umm...”

Her focus returned to Linda, who opened her eyes, then said, “I remember John. He was a nice young man when we met and he could speak a few words of Gerfewan! I think we have enough budget for an internship with some hours each week. Tell him to send you his CV, and I'll take a look over the weekend.” Linda collected the remainder of the files that were on the table. “On that note, I’m afraid to let you know that I do not feel well either. I have to stop the CV reviews early for today. I pray that you will not get sick either. You look as pale as you did as when you returned from your medical leave. If you notice you are beginning to feel unwell, I authorize you taking sick leave for today.”

Sammohini looked at the resume in her hands, which had collected some wrinkles near where she held it, then handed it forward. “I’m feeling OK right now, but I-uhh, I appreciate the concern, I really do, because that means that you care about me as an employee, which I think is really nice. That really inspires me to give it my all! I do feel like I can contribute more today, so I dunno, if I were to go home, I might just go watch some videos or something or maybe get some food then go to bed early. I’m not really that tired, but, uh-I mean, I can still work. I don’t really feel unwell or anything. I do appreciate the consideration!”

Linda coughed loudly into her shoulder, then said, “allow me to be clearer. I authorize you to go home for the rest of the day without using sick leave. I will sign your time card as usual. So, I hope you feel better tomorrow. I will let Alex know, so you can go home without hesitation. Until tomorrow?”

Sammohini thought of arguing. She wanted to work on the Neurology computers some more, but then she remembered, ‘there’s nothing else to do with them, other than wait for the furniture to be installed,’ so instead, she stood up, bowed, and said “thank you, Linda, I appreciate the consideration!” Linda smiled, so she smiled back, then she left, and closed the door on her way out.

Eville Medical, Linda’s Office.

Wednesday, November 20th. 9:30am.

The air temperature seemed back to normal.

Hank barged into the office like he normally did.
Sammohini followed behind and closed the door.

“Hank! Sammohini! Please sit down. You look so much better than yesterday! I was surprised that your email stated that you would come in! You looked particularly ill when you left. I was afraid you would have to stop by the Emergency Department. I think there was a bug that had

infected us all. I had to leave shortly after you two. When we left, we had just finished looking at the second CV and are now on the third CV.”

Linda handed resumes back over to Sammohini and Hank. Hank looked over the resume he’d marked in red, then said, “oh yeah, I remember this one. This one’s also trash.”

“What makes you say that? This was the agency's best option for us.”

“For one, there isn’t a University of Nagalee, especially one offering a Masters Degree in,” and he said slowly, “Techniligy,” before laughing, then continued, “at least since I last rolled through there a few years ago, and this dude talks about his most recent job being the CEO of Apraasangik Naukaree LLC, and how he’s a ‘social marketing influencer’ there, whatever that means...”

“Well...”

Sammohini looked over the resume as they continued talking about it. The resume started off with the name ‘EK Jhootha, as ‘represnted’ by The Consulting Agency,’ and she circled the word in red. “Hey, another typo! Wow! I guess... t-typos are actually fairly common!”

Hank put the paper on the desk, then said, “well, like I was sayin’ yesterday, it’s not that difficult to just press the ‘Spell Check’ button. Big typos like those show a lack of attention to detail. It’s not like we’re hiring someone to edit a book or somethin’, but we’re still communicating with users via email or through QIT constantly. It’s important that we communicate clearly, right?”

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[Chapter 24] Incurrigible and Recalcitrant

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, Linda’s Office.

Wednesday, November 20th. 9-something?

Even if the weather outside was beautiful, the work’s inside...

Linda took the ‘trashed’ resumes and placed them on top of the paper shredder for later shredding, then handed out resumes from the fourth file.

“OK, here is the fourth CV. This was another CV of the agency, but if you look at the address, it says that it is currently in the Hellish Republic. They contained a note stating that he would be moving into the area in the next two weeks.”

Hank glanced at the resume, laughed, then said, “I could ask ‘im tonight...”
Linda was stunned and said, stuttering, “wh-what do you m-mean by that?”

“This is that dude I was telling you about, Sammohini, that guy that’s always a step ahead-a me in that game w-l play, that guy Choutas... This’s his full name. He was tellin’ me about how he was plannin’ on leavin’ the country. I guess he wanted to get outta there.”

Sammohini looked up after reading the full name, Christopher Mousiki, then said, “what a small world! He must be an instant in for you, then, huh?”

“Well, not exactly. I mean, jus’ ‘cus yer good at a game don’t mean you’ll do well, ‘ere, right? We’re dealin’ with some pretty stressed out people, they’ve got patient care on th’ line, we can’t be just takin’ in anyone, even if they’re friends er family, ya know?”

Sammohini had looked over the qualifications, saw that his current employment was at a gas station, and said “well, I mean-uhh, it’s OK to bring in friends and family, right? It’s tough to have job experience without having a job, right?”

“Here’s my thinking, and Linda tends to agree with me, here, but I’m not speakin’ fer ‘er. Ideally, it’s great to see candidates that have healthcare experience because we know they’ll know how to behave themselves around patients and doctors, but if not that, then we look for equivalent experience, or, volunteer experience. Say he’s worked as like an emergency paramedic driver or some kinda high-stress situation type work. We don’t get a lotta ‘mergency work like that, but it still shows a coolness under pressure. ‘e might get some stressed-out people at a gas station, but the thing with interviews is you gotta stress ‘em out just a little bit to see how they crack under pressure. We’re governed by laws over what we can’t ask about, like your protected classification type stuff, but if we press ‘em for questions and make ‘em feel just a little

uncomfortable, but we see they’re trying or see that they react well, then that’s a good sign, right, Linda?”

“You’re definitely my bad cop. There is value in that, but, Sammohini, I want you to be a good cop. Don’t take too much of Hank’s influence.”

“Hah! Well, he’d probably be a good enough helpdesk dude. He’s a little rough ‘round the edges sometimes, so he might need ta adjust, but I can ask ‘im about it all tonight, if you’d like?”

Sammohini had just finished looking over the resume, then looked up.

“Sounds good, danke, Hank. What do you think?”

“Oh-uhh, I think it looks good. I mean, Hank’s right, he doesn’t have much more experience than the gas station, but I guess it’s something where we can’t really judge a book by its cover, right? Maybe he’s really sharp when it comes to computer stuff, like fixing stuff around the gas station or something?”

Hank put the resume with some green and blue marks on the table, then said, “we kinda have ta judge a book by its cover here. We can’t spend a lotta time trying ta train someone that’s-” and he said two big words...

“Huh?”

“Oh, in-corrig-ible means, like, cannot be trained and recal-ci-trant means uncooperative.”

“Why didn’t you just say that?”

“Sometimes, Sammohini, a bigger word just captures more of the essence of somethin’, rather than say Sam, and besides, those are Linda’s two favorite words to use for rejects, right-o?”

Linda placed her copy of the resume in the file, so Sammohini did too, and she placed the closed file near the computer for follow-up.

“I would not call those favorites, but yes, I do not like to hire any incorrigible and recalcitrant candidates. I already have one handful.” Linda looked at Hank as she handed out the fifth set of resumes. “So now to the fifth CV. I have already looked at this CV. This person has a good balance of education, experience, and certifications, so he may get good results in your team.”

“OK, let’s take a look. You’re right, ...she’s got a lotta good going on here,” Hank said as he marked the resume in green, “but I’m gonna be honest, I’ve never practiced Sliceland, so other than knowing that the last part means “daughter of”, I dunno how to pronounce the rest.” The name on the resume title was spelled Lygari Ýkjadóttir. “We could ask her, but, linguistics and semantics aside, what’d’ya think of this, Sammohini?”

This was another resume where Sammohini felt inadequate by comparison. “Well, she’s got a buncha good things, so obviously she’s really super smart...” she trailed off and returned to looking over the resume with a heavy sigh.

“Why’s that obvious? What if she’s lying or exaggerating her qualifications?”

She looked up to see Hank holding up the resume closely with both hands.

“I mean-uhh, well, she-ahh, she’s got experience and she’s educated with...”

She looked over to see Linda looking at the resume in closer detail, too.

“When the CV seems too good, what’s the phrase, ‘too good to be true?’”

She looked back down at the resume and read it over once again, as well.

“I guess-uhh, I don’t really know what to look for... I mean, should I be looking for anything in particular?”

Hank showed her his copy of the resume with several red marks in each job description.

“Here’s the ‘something’ we were looking for... this resume’s full-a junk buzzwords! See?”

Hank pointed to the first line of the first job description, which Sammohini tried to read out loud:

“...In-t-t-trinsically value... additive... e-enabler... dynamically... synergized... customer base. I feel dumb. What does that mean?”

Hank threw the resume on the desk.

“That’s what I’m sayin’! This is garbage!”

Linda picked up Hank’s marked copy in one hand and compared it to her copy in another hand.

“Yes, I can see your perspective. These are words that are not commonly used in your team.”

“Who’d use those words? Maybe a ‘professionally professional’ IT professional like Joandra?”

Linda placed the two copies on top the shredder. Sammohini handed her copy over to Linda.

“Was that on the CV?” Linda looked over Sammohini’s copy, which didn’t have any marks.

“Yeah, apparently, this candidate is a ‘professionally professional’ IT professional.”

“Oh, that’s too funny.” “Can I see? I’m still practicing so I’m sorry... I missed it.”

“No need for apologies. They helped us to find this landmine. Thanks for that.”

Sammohini straightened her posture and smiled. “Oh! Sure thing! I still really appreciate the invitation to review resumes like this. You two seem like naturals at this! I guess I’m just worried about missing stuff and doing a bad job.”

“No, you’re fine. You’re not bad at this at all. You’ll get the technical” and he said with an exaggerated voice “paradigms” before returning to a normal tone “later. Oh, hah! That resume was too good! But hey, before I forget, the big thing, too, when you talk to these people is there’s a lotta stuff you can’t ask about or can’t say. You can’t ask them about their marital status or sexuality, and you can’t ask about their age. The usual topics are off-limits, like politics and religion, unless it’s like they can’t work on a certain day for religious reasons, which is cool, ya know, and Linda here has to figure out accommodations. We’ve had some weird folks stop in. Linda, remember that one that told us about his interview socks?”

Linda smiled, laughed, then said, “yes, but I’ll let you tell about it.”

“Yeah, so this one guy comes in, and maybe he’s nervous, or maybe he’s just weird, but he starts telling us during the interview, during a technical question no less, this rant about how he was gettin’ ready to go to the interview, but his ‘lucky interview socks’ were nowhere to be found. He was lookin’ and lookin’ until he eventually found it. By then, I was so absorbed in

listening to this whole thing that he forgot the question. That was me, Linda and, I think it was Venkat, yeah, he was there, too. We usually do these in Wiles, when we can. We were all just kinda like ‘OK, next question, there, buddy.’ So we’ll get lost causes like that sometimes. People that, for whatever reason, just are not with the program. I mean, there is a difference between being nervous but knowing your stuff and not. If he’d been quirky like that but could run pace with us on the technical stuff, then, OK, whatever, some people are weird. So we typically look for stuff like that, or if they’re rude, or talk negatively about things for no reason. I mean, we all hate certain things about our job, so there’s one thing to just say ‘yeah, that latest version sure isn’t good’ versus going on lengthy tirades. When that happens, I like to interrupt ‘em, get ‘em mad at me, then see ‘em get embarrassed.”

Sammohini felt a little shocked by that.

“Wow, isn’t that... kinda... mean?”

“We’re dealin’ with stressed-out doctors, nurses, and other professionals where patient care’s on the line. We can’t have people that are nervous about the littlest things. If they’re intimidated by me, for example, then what happens when they go into the Emergency Department past the lock-up room? Or they work on the wound printer? Venkat’ll tell ya stories of how it was like back in the day. He told me about how they used to slam patients that were high up against the walls using mattresses just to get ‘em under control. We still got some of that here. I love it here, but it’s got a mean undercurrent, so we’ve gotta keep a cool head about ourselves when we get out there onto the floor. We can’t let a little discomfort get us down, but, yes, an interview environment is a little different. That’s why we try to focus them on questions directly related to the job. Technical stuff like with common things, maybe some tricky ticket I’m working through, or non-technical stuff like ‘how do you deal with passive-aggressive customers?’ It’s all fairly straightforward stuff. Linda guides the conversation along, we ask a few questions here and there, watch for reactions, make notes over how we felt about things. Like if some dude’s creepin’ on you, that’s an instant no. That sorta thing.”

Sammohini breathed in, held, then out.

“Yeah, that makes a lotta sense. Thanks!”

Linda opened the final file on the table.

“Alright, here’s the last CV.” Linda handed resumes to her then Hank. “It’s not that impressive overall, but she just graduated from college, so this’ll probably be her first professional job.”

“She was workin’ part-time at The Drip, worked her way up to shift supervisor, and she’s got a good certification. Yeah, she’d probably do well on the helpdesk.”

This reminded Sammohini of her first resume, before she started at Eville Medical, so she asked, “hey, if you don’t mind me asking, how important is related job experience? She hasn’t done much professional IT work, it looks like...”

“Well, remember those two words we like? Those rule out a majority of bad candidates. If they’re honest and hardworkin’, they’re not likely to be incorrigible or recalcitrant. Quite the opposite. So that’s what I look for most in these resumes.”

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[Chapter 25] We're All Similar

[\[Updated 11/29\]](#)

Sneaker Bay, Sneaker Park, Park Bench.

Saturday, November 23rd. 2:23pm.

Was this sun from mid-Summer?

“[Thanks again for inviting me out!]”

Sammohini slurped on her strawberry shake.

The two sat on a park bench overlooking the shining lake.

“[Sure! Hank was telling me that you were probably just going to be staying at home this weekend, but I thought, why not invite you along? I know this is more of a family gathering of my family and Hank’s, but you’re family, too! You’re like my little sister.]”

Veda wore a flowing blue dress and a leather jacket that Hank sometimes wore into work last year. They had been sitting there, speaking mainly in Sindian because it was easier for Veda but occasionally Sammohini would speak in English when it was easier, for what seemed like a minute.

“[Aww! That’s so sweet. Thank you! I’m so happy that you think that. I feel like you’ve been my sister all my life!]”

Sammohini felt overdressed. She had wanted to look professional, so she wore her same business casual work ‘uniform’ of business slacks and a polo shirt, except over her Eville Medical-branded polo shirt, she wore her favorite dark grey sweater. She wasn’t completely dressed up in her favorite orange running trainers.

“[You know, Hank and I will be married soon.]”

“What! That’s great! I’m so happy for you two!”

“[Oh, thank you, thanks. He proposed recently!]”

“[Do you know when the wedding will happen?]”

“[Probably still not for a while. We are going slow.]”

Sammohini slurped on her strawberry shake again which loudly sucked in air.

“Oh! I drank that whole thing!” Veda laughed. “Guess I shouldn’t have another...”

“[I’m your older sister, not your mother!]” Veda slurped, too, and they both laughed.

Between them and the lake was a massive field that had a few kids running around with picnicking family members closer to the water which had, earlier, shown seaweed through clear blue waters. They were mainly from Veda’s extended family, but Hank had some nieces and nephews running around with some of his family there, too. The forecast predicted wonderful

weather, so the families planned a family get-together at the beach as soon as they heard the news about the union of the two families, and because there was only so much anyone could do inside before they got bored. One could only read so many books, only watch so many television shows, or do too much without going outside to experience reality.

“[What do you think of Hank?]”

Sammohini looked at her shoes, back over at Veda, who was staring out into the lake, then said, “oh, I like working with Hank. He’s really nice to me. For one, you two invited me out here. It’s been super fun and I’m glad everyone liked the dish I brought along!”

She looked over to see Veda was still staring off.

“[Do you like Hank? As anything more than just a co-worker?]”

“W-well, I mean, I think of him like I think of you! You’re both like the older sister and brother I never had. It’s really nice to talk to either of you.”

“[Oh, OK...]”

“[Do you think he would ever cheat on me? Do you think he’s just nice with everyone?]”

“Let me think,” and Sammohini looked out into the lake as well as she thought about everything she knew, seen, or thought about Hank: Whenever they were in elevators, alone, he was always respectful. He never moved in a way that seemed threatening or creepy. He talked about Veda as often as Josh talked about Adriana, Venkat talked about Vidya, or Alex talked about their partner. “Not off-hand...”

“[Keep thinking. It’s important.]”

She thought about when he’d train her on how to troubleshoot certain things. People tend to stay distant when they troubleshoot so they don’t actually touch someone wrong or do something mean. He was always troubleshooting with Fairydust. They’d usually go running off to various parts of the hospital together. Was there anything to that? When Fairydust spent the weekend over, when they talked and laughed and lounged and relaxed, Fairydust never mentioned Hank once, except maybe in accidental passing. Their teasing interactions with the silly nicknames reminded her of how she and Fearghal would tease each other when they grew up. She brought out her phone, sent a quick text message to Fearghal, then thought about whether she wanted another milkshake.

“[Was that everything?]”

“[Oh, oops. Let me think some more.]”

There was that weird interaction with him and Linda the other day... there was definitely more of something than nothing there. Whenever they went to places throughout the hospital and talked to attractive women, Hank would always be calm, courteous, but distant. After a few visits, some might ask her about him. “He’s already in a steady relationship,” she’d usually respond. But what happened between him and Linda? Was there something there? He was

uncharacteristically embarrassed, so if there was, it was probably nothing. If anything had happened, what real evidence was there that something had happened?

“[I can’t think of anything.]”

“[OK. I appreciate you...]”

Hank walked up the side of the grassy hill with two water bottles.

“[I noticed that you two] were slurping on your drinks. [There are water bottles here.]”

Veda stood up, hugged Hank, kissed him on a bearded part of his cheek, said, “thanks, but I’ll be right back!” Veda then ran off toward the restrooms.

Hank handed her a water bottle and sat where Veda just sat.

“Thank you again for inviting me out today! I know we don’t have to worry about holding the pager anymore since Alex is taking over all that as part of their new role, but still, I guess I tend to stay at home, even on nice days like today, so it’s nice that you and Veda invited me out. Oh! She said you two are going to get married! I’m so happy for you! You two are like the big siblings I never had. It’s so nice to talk to her about things, and I like talking with you about things, too.”

“Sure thing.”

“We were just talking about you, actually, because we were talking about how you were getting married, which I’m so happy to hear. I really wanna go to your wedding, so make sure to invite me. If not, I’m gonna be super mad at you, OK?”

“Hey, no worries, you’ll be there.”

Hank took out the electronic-cigarette from his pocket and was about to smoke on it when she interrupted him, said “Hey!” loud enough to shake him from that thought, then continued: “So Veda asked me something. She wanted to know if you were trustworthy.”

Hank was going to put the electronic-cigarette away in his flight jacket, but Sammohini held out her hand. “F-For one, she thinks you stopped smoking!”

Hank looked down at the weird box, handed it over, then said, “OK.”

Sammohini’s mind became singularly focused on what had happened earlier that week.

“What happened between you and Linda?”

Hank breathed in and held his breath.

“Is there anything that Veda should be worried about before you two get married? Because I’m her friend! I don’t want you to hurt her!”

Hank leaned back and breathed out.

“No. Veda won’t be hurt anymore. She knows the worst I’ve done and has still accepted me. She knows what happened with Linda and... and that was years ago. She’s my one and only.”

She looked over to see that Hank was looking up into the sky. The sky burned a bright blue from the strong sun. There was barely a cloud in the sky, even when she looked. When she found some clouds off in the distance, she returned to looking at Hank, who hadn’t moved at all.

“Fairydust and I fooled around once, but Veda joined us, so she would know maybe better than me. Other than that, I give her complete transparency, since she’s given me so much.”

“Well, not completely.” Sammohini held up the electronic-cigarette.

“I’m doin’ the best I can now. Believe me.” Hank looked over at her.

Hank’s eyes were a soft brown, was almost as tan as she was from all the years he spent outside doing manual labor or traveling from one location to the next, and wore a slightly-faded black concert shirt under his jacket that was adorned with strange patches.

Veda snuck up behind him, covered his eyes, and said, “guess who?”

“I’m gonna guess... the Queen of my Heart, soon, Mrs. Veda Ospfrey?”

Veda let go of her hold, snuck around, sat on his lap, and kissed him.

Sammohini smiled and waved, but was still holding the electronic-cigarette device.

“[Eww! I didn’t know you smoked! Gross!]

“Those were mine. I’m quittin’ today and she’ll get rid of ‘em for me. I won’t buy any more. Since you’re taken on my burden, I know someone who’ll take ‘em. Josh. Can you give them to ‘im for me? He’s the only person on our team that smokes anymore.”

“Oh yeah, you told me that Fairydust quit... [and left the country! She didn’t even say goodbye! What do you think happened?]”

Hank held onto Veda even tighter than before.

Veda was sitting sideways on Hank’s lap.

“She told me a few months ago that she’d started to grow tired of the users at work, so it was just last week- no, two weeks ago, she finally had enough. So, she packed up everything she couldn’t live without, put that all in-ta storage, sold the rest, quit, then flew out. She’ll probably be back in a few months. It’s a shame because people like us, with our wanderlusts, can settle down. It’s just we’ve gotta have a reason to do so. [Like you, Veda, you’re my anchor in this storm of life.] Until I met you, I was fine with endless wandering, waking up with whatever woman I met the night before in whatever part of the planet I ended up in, or waking up in the nearest prison for squatting somewhere. Didn’t matter to me. Even when I got here and got the job, I never really took it that seriously until I met you. I was always thinking about how I could get back on the road. Josh’s been great for showing me that folk like us, we can settle down. Life’s hard, especially when ya do it every day, so for someone like Fairydust, she’d probably just rather roll the dice and see where the good winds take ‘er. I’d’ve gone, too, if it weren’t for you. Because now I know where’s best for me is here, or wherever you are.”

Sammohini had just been watching and listening, but she realized she teared up a little.

“[Oh, poor thing! You’ll find someone someday!]”

“I thought I did and then... and once again and...”

“It took me how many lifetimes until I found Veda?”

Sammohini turned back toward the lake and looked out.

Three kids ran up from the fields.

The boldest kid said, “[Auntie, auntie! Grandma has a question-],” but became shy after seeing Sammohini.

“[Hi! I’m Sammohini! Nice to-]” “[-Samo, that’s your twin!],” another kid interrupted.

“[Am not! That’s not my name!]”

“[...Twins?]” Sammohini asked.

The two kids backed away slightly.

“[Come, you two, don’t be rude to Auntie Sammohini!]”

The third kid jumped forward and said “[Hi! I’m Saraswati!]”

“[Nice to meet you, I’m Sammohini!]”

Saraswati continued, “[this is Sameera and Samohina.]”

“[Hello! Hi! Nice to meet all three of you! And Samohina! What a coincidence! We have such similar names. Your name is so cool!]”

Sammohini smiled.

Samohina smiled, too, then laughed.

Veda stood, then said, “[well, let me go answer Mother’s question. Shall we all go?]”

They walked down from the park bench, Hank and Veda holding hands, and Sammohini talking to the three kids. They were all curious about her name. She told them their names were cherishable.

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[Chapter 26] Confidence In Building

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, “Cold” Building, 5th Floor, Future Neurology Office.

Monday, November 25th. 1:59pm.

There was a cool hint of mechanically lavender cleaner in the air.

Three computer repair technicians finished loading two cartloads computers and peripherals into the fully-furnished lobby of the new Neurology office. Sammohini pushed one cart, Hank pushed the other, and Venkat pressed buttons or unlocked doors. Among the decorations were a leather couch, overstuffed chairs, and a marble reception desk.

Venkat sat in one of the chairs and closed his eyes.

Sammohini dragged herself over to the couch, plopped down, then said, “wow! Wasn’t this place... post-apocalyptic last week?”

“Yup!” Hank leaned his back against the waist-high reception desk until there was an audible crack, then continued, “ah, that feels better... and they just finished everything Saturday night, too. Joandra was more than a little upset over the delay, but hey, you can’t rush certain jobs, especially when you try to micro-manage what you don’t know. Turns a two-hour job into a two-day job, even without the union breaks. Speaking of which, let’s catch our breath for a few, then we’ll come up with our plan for how we wanna set up these computers. It’s 2 now. How ‘bout we meet back here at around 2:15?”

Venkat brought out a smartphone, set an alarm, set it on his lap, then closed his eyes again.

“Sure! I need to excuse myself for a few minutes, if that’s alright...?”

Hank had already started walking toward the break room, but turned.

“It’s your time. And if you need a few minutes more, it’s no big deal.”

2:16pm.

Cooler.

Sammohini returned as fast as she could to see Venkat sleeping and Hank seated behind the receptionist’s desk with a map of the office out as he pressed away on his smartphone.

“You’re early... You can spend a few more minutes looking around. I’m just texting Veda.”

Hank set his smartphone down and spun it around so she could see Veda’s name.

“I’m good! Let’s get going so we can get going!”

Sammohini felt ready to move some computers.

“Works for me. Here’s how I’d do this, if I were the primary. Feel free to interrupt or disagree, since you are the primary.”

Hank brought out a print-out with a checklist he compiled.

“We’ve got twenty computers and twenty network drops. They already shipped over all the old computer equipment this weekend, as well, in two pallet boxes. What I’m thinking is first, let’s unpack everything so we can audit everything against the bill of lading, mark anything that might have broke in transit, and make a list of anything we might need to grab over in the storage room.”

Hank marked a dot inside a box next to the first section, labeled ‘UNPACK,’ as Sammohini nodded, flipped to the last two free pages in her notebook, and took notes.

“Second, let’s coordinate everything together, so the doctor’s equipment all goes in one pile, reception stuff goes here...”

Hank dotted the ‘COORDINATE’ section and Sammohini took notes.

“Third, fourth, and fifth, let’s move everything to where they need to go, plug everything in, and test it all out.”

Hank dotted these sections and Sammohini took more notes.

“Finally, let’s test everything out. All the application stuff should be good. Chris and I ran through all twenty computers this morning, and they don’t have any special peripherals, printers, or any of that junk to gunk us up. I’ve got twenty checklists printed out that we’ll put on the keyboards.”

Hank opened a file with a stack of papers inside. The top one looked highly technical.

“We’ll be in early tomorrow for the go-live, but these have everything we need to cover ourselves in case anyone gets in before us and does some snoopin’. Venkat taught me this one.”

Venkat stood and stretched. “[We have many dumb micro-managers over the years.]”

All three laughed.

“Finally, this is a final step that Alex added, that we’ve all been doing. Remember how that one computer was giving you so much hassle?”

Sammohini instinctively looked over at the labels and saw Zero-Three sandwiched between One-Three and One-Niner.

“How could I forget? What a little brat!”

Hank laughed.

“Well, once we get everything up and running, a piece of paper’s only worth so much, right? We could be tired, someone could fib about checking something when they didn’t. What they recommended was taking a few photos proving three major steps. Write this down, this is probably the most important thing of them all.”

Sammohini’s notebook was nearly full, but she had enough space for three lines on the last two-pager.

“Hey, good work on filling that all up, by the way. We’ll getcha another one, in orange, right?”

Sammohini flipped through the pages, rewinding her career history throughout her time so far on the team, returned, then looked up and smiled.

“Aww, thank you! And yes, orange, please! Thank you!”

Hank smiled then looked back at his list.

“Phew, glad I remembered the right color. It’ll be your work holiday present, alright? So, back on task, we’re gonna take three photos for each computer, OK, and they’re going to be photos showing these three things: First, launch the welcome email in Scribedesk Mailbox. Second, launch the test patient in SNKR. Third, launch a web browser and take a photo of the front page of the Daily Sneaker. If you got that,” Hank paused to wait to see her pencil finish moving before continuing, “here’s the test. Ready?”

Sammohini looked up, smiling, but remained silent.

“Why would we do all that extra effort?”

Sammohini looked back down at the notes: ‘welcome email,’ ‘test patient,’ ‘front page’

“...Oh! I know! That way we know that the three major things they’ll use works!”

She looked up to see Hank holding up a finished checklist.

“Is this computer ready for go-live?” Hank handed it to her. She looked it over.

Everything on the checklist was printed and marked. A junk computer name was penciled in.

“I haven’t heard of this computer name. Is this a last-minute addition?”

Hank sighed.

“Try again. So let’s say you were lazy and wanted to get outta here early. Wouldn’t you just print out a buncha those and have someone else deal with the consequences at go-live? Maybe it’ll work? Why bother checking?”

“I wouldn’t do that!”

“Joandra doesn’t know that.”

She looked back over her notebook with the three lines of things to photograph.

“Hey! That way we can prove that all the major things work.”

Hank smiled.

“Exactly. If someone goes in after us and unplugs everything, pours water, or burns down the place, at least we have unequivocal-” he paused... “or, I should say, ‘unequivocal’ evidence, with timestamps, that these computers worked as we said they did. It’s not that Joandra’s out to get us. It’s that we’ve all been burned enough times over the years with users that figured out ways to game the system that we had to develop methods for CYA. You know that acronym, right?”

Sammohini wrote C next to ‘welcome email,’ Y next to ‘test patient,’ and A next to ‘front page.’

“Sure do! I like saying CYB, ‘Cover Your Booty,’ instead! I don’t like dirty words!”

“Nice. So, if you approve the plan as we’ve planned it, let’s move out.”

Hank jumped over the counter, rather than walk around the side door.

“Sounds good! Thanks for walking me through your plan so thoroughly...”

Sammohini put the orange ribbon inside the page with those final notes before the single last empty page, closed her cute notebook, wrapped the orange band around its cover accidentally

scuffed from wear, and placed it on the counter next to the maps, face down. The words “Property of Sammohini Lanchester!,” with her desk phone number and company email address, boldly yelled out from a ‘PROPERTY OF’ sticker in thick black permanent marker, one gifted and the other borrowed courtesy of the Receiving department, with such cacophony that if someone were to see the humble notebook from across the room, they could surmise that this was not just any Eville Medical notebook that could be purchased from the gift shop for patients to doodle or journal in or received from Human Resources as part of new-employee care packages or gifted from colleagues for effort and skill at doing jobs well repeatedly in any of perhaps twenty-plus colors and shades, no, rather that this was Sammohini’s career notebook that she cherished and loved throughout many months of studious observation of technical situations. Once finished, she would transfer any unaddressed thoughts, read through it once more in detail, place it behind her monitors like the trophy it was, then hopefully that would be in time for the next notebook - her holiday present!

“Hey, these’re your plans, right? You’ll probably be solo on the next project.”

“Oh, what? OK! I better make sure to try as hard as I can, then!”

4:27pm.

Warmer.

The three techs had set all the computer equipment in their corresponding places and were about to start testing everything when Sammohini heard a knock at the office door.

“One moment...! I’ll be right there!”

There was no peep-hole and the door placard was still covered by a sign saying ‘COMING DECEMBER,’ so she figured it wasn’t likely there’d be any patients snooping around. She opened the door and saw Chris, in an oversized navy blue jacket with matching slacks, along with someone else holding a large bag.

“Oh, hey Chris! Hi! Come on in!”

Sammohini held the door open as Chris invited the other person to enter first, who wore long bright pink hair, which set the bag down on a free part of the receptionist’s desk.

“Wow, your hair is so... cool!” Sammohini said to the person wearing a jacket with many different colors. “Oh, and my name is Sammohini, but you can call me Sam.”

“Thank you! Sammohini! So nice to put a face to the name. Chris has told me many wonderful things about you! My name is Ejiro, but you can call me Eji, my pronouns are they/them, and it’s so nice to meet you, Sam.” The two shook hands.

Chris had disappeared into the office and yelled out, “hey, Venkat and Hank, we brought sandwiches, where you wanna eat ‘em?”

Hank yelled out. “Thanks, Chris. How ‘bout the break room?”

Ejiro reached for the bag, but Sammohini asked, “can I grab those for you?”

“Don’t worry about it, it’s fine. You’ve been working really hard here today, plus, it’s lopsided.”

4:35pm.

Chilling.

Everyone met in the break room.

The sandwiches from a shop downtown had stickers with their contents and were arranged on a table near the sink, with a bowl of gourmet chips, and small water bottles.

“Sorry we couldn’t stop over sooner,” Chris announced after Hank walked in. “Eji-Sweetie was waiting on me as I wrapped up some last-minute work, so consider the blame on me. They was also kind enough to bring everyone enough to have two sandwiches. Well, a bit more, since Sammohini, I wasn’t sure if you were a vegetarian. I didn’t want to assume, so there are extras.”

“Oh-f,” she said, quickly chewing the rest of her mouthful of sandwich, then continued, “fw-thanks for the consideration, but I don’t mind eating meat...!”

Chris smiled, and said, “well, then, there are extra vegetarian sandwiches, if anyone wants to take ‘em home. Probably Venkat?”

Venkat finished chewing, then said, “if they are left, I’ll take them.”

Sammohini sat next to Venkat. Hank took the open seat next to Venkat, then said, “thanks for the sandwiches. Perfect timing. We were just-” “-Sorry, Hank. Let’s decompress from work and enjoy each other’s company while we eat. After we’re done, please, catch me up to speed.”

Hank leaned back in the stuffy breakroom chair, laughed, and said “no, you’re right. Say, Ejiro, haven’t seen ya in a while, how’re they goin’?”

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[Chapter 27] Confidence In Fixing

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, “Cold” Building, 5th Floor, Neurology Office, Future Patient Room 3.

Monday, November 25th. 5:43pm.

Being outside during the sunset could have allowed a vicarious experience of its warmth.

All of the computers worked except for one.

Ejiro helped as much as they could, without being an employee, by coordinating communication as Sammohini, Hank, Venkat, and Chris logged into computers, booted into programs, and captured evidence of verified functionality. They checked in on each person, map in hand, highlighting in pink the computers that were done, making sure no one was getting roadblocked, and giving encouraging words if they felt it would keep moral moving toward completion.

Everyone was onto their fifth and final computer of the evening when Sammohini booted up One-Three in one of the patient rooms, where it showed a message on the screen exclaiming it had not shut down properly, and proclaiming it would need to run startup repairs before continuing. Sammohini spoke softly to the computer. “Now you’re being bratty, One-Three?” She took a photo of this message with her smartphone’s camera, pressed the Enter key to allow it to proceed, and left a note on the keyboard:

Computer didn’t start normally.



running startup repairs.

She stretched then walked out into the main corridor that now had furnishings.

There was a certain hour in hospital operations after which everything just looked lonelier. Maybe it was the window at the end of the hall not letting in as much light? Maybe it was because the interior overhead lights weren’t all turned on? Or, maybe it was because there was no one else around? Rather than wander around and get lost, she wandered into the nurses’s station area to see if she could find Ejiro, or anyone else, but got distracted by all the computers with checklists adorning their keyboards. She remembered working on this set of computers before going into the patient room and how easy it was to work on all of them at the same time.

She saw Ejiro appear out of a connecting part leading into the hallway.

“Hey, Ejiro! Uhh-the uhh-computer... didn’t start correctly, so umm...”

“Alright, let’s go take a look at how it’s doing. I can get help if needed.”

Sammohini went back into the patient room to see the computer meandering through a startup repair. She unlocked her smartphone and brought up the photo with the message.

“This was the message it gave me...”

Sammohini showed Ejiro, but they looked, then shrugged.

“Guess we’ve gotta be patient with it while it figures itself out? Let’s check on everyone else.”

Future Patient Room 3.

06:03pm.

Neither hot nor cold.

Everyone crowded around the evening’s final patient, One-Three.

Sammohini sat at the corner computer desk in the future doctor’s stool, while Venkat sat in the future patient’s consulting bench to her left. Hank, Chris, and Ejiro stood behind her. Everyone helping to troubleshoot: Venkat thinking through the troubleshooting with his eyes closed, Sammohini reading aloud what was going on with the computer or “rubber duck debug it!” as Chris said while jotting down notes on scrap paper, Hank diagramming in his black notebook, while Ejiro listened. Sammohini used the final page of her notebook to list out the objectives and what it would take to complete each objective while the computer booted up:

computer #13 troubleshooting

[x] startup repairs completed without issue

objectives:

[] 1 welcome email

[] 2 test patient

[] 3 news article

1 welcome email

[] launch email

[] find email

[] open email

2 test patient

[] launch snkr

[] find test patient

[] verify working

3 news article

| |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">[] launch browser[] launch website[] verify working |
|--|

After Sammohini finished writing her checklist, she asked everyone, “since we’ve gotta make sure email, SNKR, and the Internet work, which should we start with? Is there a good place to start? Or just whichever loads?”

Hank cleared his throat then said, “good question. Let me ask you this. What do all of these test?”

She swiveled around, then said to Hank, “well-umm, these are the three big programs that the doctors and nurses will use daily. So if they can check their email, log into SNKR, and access the Internet, then they can do their job on this computer without issue.”

Hank put his notebook in his pants pocket, was going to put the pen in his lab coat pocket but he’d left it in the break room along with everyone else’s stuff, so he folded his arms, tapped his bicep with the pen, then said, “I guess I didn’t really ask a good question. Hmm...”

Chris interrupted. “What does accessing each of these programs prove?”

Hank smiled. “That’s the question I was lookin’ for, yeah!”

“Let me think...” ‘So, if emails launch, then that means that the computer can access the email server, which means that it connected onto our network, which means [that everything on the computer-side-a-things is workin’. If SNKR works, then it accesses the SNKR servers], or whatever they’re called, so then that’s all workin’. If the Internet’s good then it gets a network connection and can connect out online.’ “OK, I got it! If email works, then the email servers like the computer, [if SNKR works then it accesses the servers], or whatever they’re called, and if it goes out onto the Internet then the network stuff is good!”

“You got it!”

“I didn’t...”

“Oh, she was saying that if SNKR works, and we can load up the test patient, then it can access the patient database.”

“There it is, and hey, there it is, too, loading everything.” Sammohini turned back around, ready to click at first go, and Chris continued. “Since Hank here was giving you the thought-experiment side, I’ll give you the practical side. The order you listed - email, program, external network - generally works well for our environment, since that tests the internal software then goes out into the external network, but let’s debate the nuances of troubleshooting model methodologies later. I’m sure Eji-Sweetie is bored and we’ve all gotta get in early for the go-live tomorrow morning.”

Ejiro put an arm around Chris’s waist and said, “It’s alright...”

Sammohini double-clicked on Scribedesk Mailbox.
Scribedesk Mailbox launched into the welcome email without issue.
She marked the checklist and took a photo.

Sammohini double-clicked on SNKR.
SNKR launched with an error message. Chris took a step forward, read the message aloud, “the program had trouble connecting to the SNKR primary access point, please type in the SNKR database secondary access point, and click OK to continue,” then recited the letters and numbers for that by heart, which Sammohini first wrote as ‘snkrsap1’ next to the ‘test patient’ section, then typed that into the error message window.
The screen showed a ‘Successful!’ message, so Sammohini moved the cursor over to the ‘Find Patient’ button, but before she could click, Chris said, “hang tight on that. Go ahead and restart the program.”

She did.

It opened to the same error message.
“Do me a favor and ping this server.”
Chris recited another series of letters and numbers that Sammohini once again wrote down before launching a window to do the network check on the server:

```
C:\Documents and Settings\neurol01>ping snkrapp1
Ping request could not find the host snkrdbc1...

C:\Documents and Settings\neurol01>ping snkrpap1
Pinging snkrdbc1...
Reply from snkrdbc1... : time=12ms ...
Reply from snkrdbc1... : time=12ms ...
Reply from snkrdbc1... : time=12ms ...
Reply from snkrdbc1... : time=12ms ...
Ping statistics...
    Packets: Sent = 4, Received = 4, Lost = 0 <0% loss>...

C:\Documents and Settings\neurol01>
```

Sammohini’s thoughts raced. ‘You typo’d that in front of everyone, there... You should be way more careful! Especially with everyone-’ -Chris interrupted those thoughts. “Thanks. OK, that’s weird. Why would it not recognize the primary access point on this computer...? And why won’t it keep the secondary?”

The clock said “6:25pm.”

The room was silent.

Everyone was writing or thinking about possible solutions.

Venkat was the first to slice through the silence.

“What does Wilesware Manager say for SNKR primary key?”

“Y’know, that’s a good question. Thanks, Venkat, here, Sammohini, let me navigate you there, and we’ll see what it says. I’ll send ya the notes later, so don’t worry ‘bout writin’ this down.”

Chris guided her along to a particular path, requiring Sammohini’s administrator credentials to continue, buried deep within the computer’s inner framework, to a location even Hank was unfamiliar with, where, sure enough, instead of the usual server name, there was junk code.

“D-did I mess it up during the installation?”

“Nah, nothin’ like that, but it’s sweet of you to offer to take on the blame. That is weird... but it’s way outside the scope of this project. Here, edit that back to snkrpap1, save it, and let’s see if that message goes away.” Sammohini did so as Chris continued. “I’ll check on it tomorrow. Tomorrow’s just the meet-and-greet and getting the office prepped for patients rollin’ in on the 2nd, so I can work on it remotely if I need to...”

SNKR launched without issue.

Sammohini launched the test patient, ZZZTEST_PATIENT1, without issue.

She marked the checklist and took a photo.

“Alright! Good work, team, especially Venkat - you saved the day, and now onto the last one!”

Sammohini double-clicked on Scriberview Expeditions.

Scriberview Expeditions launched, so she used the search engine to look for “sindian medical news,” clicked on the website that she had received pre-approval for their tests, saw a news story published thirty minutes prior, and everything else loaded without issue.

She marked the final item on the checklist, took a photo, then locked the computer.

“Perfect! And we’re outta here. Good work, team!”

“Oh, hey-uhh,” they started to walk out as Sammohini said, “do you mind if we get a photo? I just thought of it and thought it’d be kinda fun to have a group photo, since I really appreciate everyone’s help! Not just today, but through the project!” They returned. “I don’t think I would’ve been-able-to-do even... half of the work here-today or in general without everyone’s help, and I feel like I’ve made a buncha really great friends, especially my new friends, like Ejiro! You helped us out and you don’t even-work-here...!”

She started to feel overwhelmed.

“That sounds like a lovely idea!”

“[Agreed.]” “I’ll consent to that.”

Ejiro took the photograph with Sammohini’s smartphone camera. Sammohini sat upright in the stool in front of the computer, Chris stood next to Sammohini, Venkat sat in the same spot, and Hank sat just far enough out of frame that even after being told to move inward he was still

almost out of shot. “OK, look at the camera, Hank, a little more to your left, alright, ready? Say, ‘fuzzy cheese.’ Woah, hang on, there, Hank, sit still. Try again, OK? Hmm... yeah, got the shot. Thanks, everyone.”

Ejiro moved and took some more shots as everyone left the room.

“I figured you’d want a buncha them. This one’s my favorite of the bunch.”

They handed the smartphone back over to her.

The photo was the second of twenty and showed everyone laughing about a joke Ejiro told just before asking everyone to pose. The other shots were all good enough, even the ones where Hank was seemingly unruly.

Sammohini’s eyes watered a little, but she smiled, and said, “oh, thank you so much!”

Ejiro’s eyes watered a little as well. “Anytime, dear. Let’s hurry to catch everyone.”

Ejiro left first, and before Sammohini left, she took one last look at their patient computer. ‘It was tough testing all of these computers today, and tough building them, but it looks like the worst is over! You and Zero-Three were little brats, you know that? But I love you all the same...’

She turned off the light and joined the rest of the project crew in the break room.

She got a ride from Chris and Ejiro back to her apartment complex’s roundabout.

She ate dinner, showered, read a paragraph of a technical book, then went to sleep.

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[Chapter 28] Confidence In Self

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, “Cold” Building, 5th Floor, Neurology Office

Tuesday, November 26th. 7:23am.

Were it not for the snow in the grass, it could have been Summer.

Sammohini was the third project person to arrive before their 7:30am go-live meeting.

She spent extra time in the morning to look her best, so when Chris opened the door and said “wow, you dress up well!,” she felt a subtle boost of self-confidence.

“You always look so nice, Chris, so I appreciate the compliment!” She said as she walked into the lobby. Joandra was typing away at a laptop on the coffee table.

“Oh, it’s you, and you’re right on time. I assume your other two colleagues will be filtering in whenever they feel like it? Fortunately, Dr. Payne is not in yet.”

Her thoughts retraced some interactions over the past month... Sammohini remembered sitting with Hank and Ciera, whose memory-version of Ciera said, ‘She has CRAP memory, remember?’ ...Sammohini remembered sitting with Chris in Chris’s truck, whose memory-version of Chris said, ‘She doesn’t care about others, remember?’ ... Sammohini’s face warmed up when she remembered more intimate moments. ‘She’s a bully!’, then a clear picture of Fairydust entered her imagination, with her soft skin that was electrifying to run her fingertips along, who said in so many different ways, ‘She doesn’t deserve your respect, at least not any more than any person you might pass by on the street,’ and then she mentally traveling to the observatory deck in the woods to the fancy beach restaurant, where Fairydust had idly asked her while looking out into the woods, “maybe you just worry too much about what other people think?”

“Good morning! Where can I set down my purse?”

“Oh, here’s fine. We have this space until about 11.”

Sammohini looked around for a place to put her cream leather purse, took out her orange notebook with a piece of paper folded up inside, dropped the purse off behind the couch on the opposite side of Joandra, and plopped down. She opened the notebook to the last page. The folded-up paper, unfolded, revealed ‘GO-LIVE’ written on the top, which she placed on her lap, and unfolded more so it wouldn’t fold back into itself. She reached into her purse to grab her Eville Medical pencil, in orange, and put it on top of the paper. Joandra kept typing away, Chris was pacing nearby the door, so she took the time to review her notebook.

She flipped through the pages that were filled with filled-in boxes, listing off all the work she’d done over the past few months, as a sort of professional diary of all the things she’d learned, experiences she’d had, and problems she’d overcome. Most of the pages were like this. The

Neurology project pages still had some lingering ‘unfinished’ notes, but, none of them were project related. They were more like thoughts of things that people said, like when Pitaajee told her “[it is important not to take things seriously that do not matter]” after she asked him and Má for advice about how the one who sat across from her had misspelled her name so outrageously! She let that thought sink in... she didn’t want to fill in the box next to the quote, because she wanted to cherish the memory, but at the same time, she could always return to the notebook, so she did. She flipped through the pages to the next unfilled box. Another quote, this time by Hank, who had told her: “Some ideas... were born out of... poor experiences.” She smiled. Hank was always giving good advice, but she remembered to when Hank got mad over being called Frank. “Is that a name he doesn’t like, or was he just playing around like he said he was?” She filled in the box next to that quote and another of his, “No one’s got a foolish question when they’re feelin’ sick.”

She found a note with her cute sketch of a little whale filling up three lines and was about one inch long: “Ask Joandra to call Facilities about wailing whale.”

Sammohini looked up and said, “hey-uhh, Jo-andrea... oh, sorry! Joandra!”

“Hmm? What’s up?” The project manager didn’t look up but stopped typing.

“So, ummm... Hank and I were over here last week when he was showing me around, and he told me to let you know about a sound that was going on with the air conditioning. I... forgot about it until just now, but as I was looking through my notes just now, I saw that and I figured I’d let you know, which was as soon as I could, I’m sorry, so, hopefully, it’s not too big of a deal or anything to get fixed, because he was telling me that it was a good thing to ask Facilities about.”

“Your colleague informed me of this and I had them out to do their repairs.”

Joandra continued typing.

Sammohini looked back down at her notebook and smiled back at the smiling whale. She filled in the box next to the note and kept flipping through the pages. She got up to the final page where bratty One-Three gave them hassle last night. She thought, briefly, about telling Joandra about their struggles and successes, but considering how curtly quiet and quite rude she had been, she decided she would rather sit contently. She closed the notebook, put its band over its cover, and smiled as she held onto it with both hands. ‘I’m happy I kept all this wealth of knowledge and memories! I know some people just throw away their notes when they’re done, but I’m happy that Venkat and Hank taught me not to do that. Now I can look over this and think of all the good times I’ve had here, and the hard times I’ve endured!’ She hugged it, then put it into her purse, since there were spaces she could still add notes, but overall, the notebook was now complete.

There was a soft rapping at the door.

Chris opened the door and in walked Venkat and Hank.

The clock above the receptionist’s desk read 7:29am.

“Good morning, Doctor! Oh. It’s you,” Joandra said before returning her attention to her laptop.

"Mornin' to ya, too." Hank wore his usual lab coat and blue surgical gloves, to cover up his tattoos, but he wore a pressed black dress shirt, tucked in, rather than one of his usual rumpled black polo shirts.

"Venkat! Hank! Good morning!" Sammohini jumped up from her seat, knocking her paper and pencil onto the floor, said "oops!," sat back down to reach for the pencil that had fallen onto the carpeted floor with a soft thud, picked it and the paper up, then said, "I'm so happy to see you both!"

Venkat had already sat in one of the overstuffed chairs by the time she looked back up.
"[Good morning, Sammohini.] Good morning to all. Sorry, we were late."

Hank yawned, then said, "well, it's early. The time's in the single-digits... hey, Sammohini, mind if I sit next to ya on the couch? Looks like everyone on the project's here, so you'll probably wanna debrief us on your 'disruptive roll-out strategy,' right, Joandra?"

"Oh, sure, if everyone's here? Let's recontextualize our face time with-" Sammohini moved her legs as Hank carefully walked between her and the coffee table, and when he did, she got a closer look at his dress shirt. It looked professional! "-driving the project conclusion, Dr. Payne's approval will assure us an early vertical toward epic community enterprises-" Hank looked bored, Venkat's eyes were closed, Chris stood to watch near the door to invite anyone in, as Joandra kept talking into her laptop, "and, so if everything looks good by around 11, I feel confident in dismissing everyone to lunch, and I'll complete the project details from there."

"Sounds good, Joandra." Chris interrupted. "I just want to give a quick shoutout to the team, and in particular Sammohini," she felt warm and happy, "for giving their best due diligence throughout the project and especially during last night's deployment. It was Sammohini's game-change-ingly hard work, along with Venkat and Hank, that enabled the project to succeed from the computer perspective."

"That's good to hear, but we'll let Dr. Payne be the judge, jury, and executioner of that opinion."

Joandra continued talking about something or another, but Sammohini kept those positive words from Chris closer to her. Whenever she looked over at Chris, Chris would smile, give a little thumbs-up, then return to listening to Joandra talk about something or another.

Dr. Payne arrived without fuss a few minutes later.

"Hello, Dr. Payne!" Joandra stood up, walked over, and shook the neurologist's hand. The neurologist with her blonde hair tied into a bun smiled, looked around the room, and said, "this must be the tech crew. I recognize some of you from the old office, but I'm bad with names... Chris, right?" They shook hands. "As I recall, your name over there is Sam, right?"

Sammohini bounced in her seat, but calmed herself, and said, "yes! You have a good memory!"

The affable neurologist smiled, waved at Venkat, then turned to Hank, shook his hand, and said, "hello, Doctor!" They both laughed when Hank pointed to his badge, which said "IT" on it, and then continued. "I'm Dr. Hedwig Payne, but since none of you are my patients, just yet, feel free to call me Hedy."

"Nice to meet you, Hedy. I'm Hank. Doctor of 'Troubleshootology,' as they say."

They both laughed and the rest of the room smiled. Sammohini liked that her joke was getting some traction, and thought, 'I'll use that more often!'

"That's a good one! Hank, likewise. And how about you over there?"

"You can call me Vinny."

"Now that I've met everyone's acquaintance, shall we take a tour of the new facility?" Joandra led the tour as everyone walked behind them while Hedy continued talking, "I haven't been over here since the old neurologist practice was still here, and as I understand it, they vacated rather quickly?" Joandra was going to interject with a "yes-" but the neurologist continued. "One wouldn't even know by looking! All of my furniture looks better here than ever! I told my staff to arrive by 9am, so we'll have time to explore, and our first patient isn't scheduled until the 2nd. Since we're all new to the system, you'll have to walk us through the procedures of what to try and when to call."

They walked toward the main nurses's station hallway.

Chris said, "if you'd like, I can be there on Monday morning in case there are any problems with the patient workflow?"

They stood inside the nurses's station.

"That'd be wonderfully appreciated. We're still learning the systems, so it'll be nice to know when something is normal and when we're allowed to panic!" Hedy laughed.

Chris sat down at one of the nurses's station computers.

"Oh, I have an introductory training course I give to everyone, just takes about five minutes, and I have a more advanced course, if you're interested?"

Chris logged in with one of the new user accounts.

"Sounds good! Is that an appointment I can schedule right now, Dr. Chris?"

Chris turned toward the neurologist and waved that away.

“No need for formalities! I can run everyone here through the introductory course right now. It’ll help everyone get some context for what you’ll be doing, then we can find some time for the more advanced course, if that works for you?”

Chris launched into SNKR once the computer fully loaded.

“Sounds perfect! Thank you, Chris.”

Chris walked everyone through the introductory training course.

The go-live event went off without any issues.

Even with thorough tests inside patient room number three on patient One-Three.

Hedy said to everyone on their way out, “thank you, everyone, that was painless! I feel formally welcomed to Eville Medical now!”

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[Chapter 29] Tidying Loose Ends

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Eville Medical, Team Cube Area.

Wednesday, November 27th. 2:58pm.

If it was warm outside, she wouldn’t have known...

Venkat, Josh, and Nils had already left for the holiday weekend.

Hank was out doing rounds with Pratik from the helpdesk and Alex was at their desk.

Sammohini was tidying up her last remaining loose ends. Although she had been the primary technician on her team for the Neurology project, she still had four tickets in her queue, so before leaving, she reached out to everyone with status:

Two tickets involved ordering replacement parts. She just received the tracking numbers for both earlier in the day, so she emailed both customers their tracking numbers, and called to get verbal acknowledgment. One was already out of the office for the weekend. The other said, “cool, yeah. Monday’s rad, man. Thanks... Sandra, later!” She bit her lip at that, and when she hung up the phone, she decided not to write anything snide in her update to that ticket, rather she just whispered to Naagaphanee “[how rude...!],” which the little desk cacti emblazoned with Eville Medical took in stride, looking just as cute as it did before. Its soil looked healthy, so she didn’t water it, or bring it over to the helpdesk area. Now that she was calm, she returned back to the QIT ticketing system and wrote in both tickets, ‘user aware of status,’ and set the ticket status to ‘pending vendor.’

The third ticket she was able to close out since the update she sent out remotely fixed the issue. The user had emailed to verify the fix last night, but she just hadn’t gotten around to pasting the user’s approval into the ticket closure notes, until now.

The fourth ticket was for cleaning out the oldest login profiles on a patient room computer. She was remotely able to access all of the files on the back-end, and deleted all of the empty profiles that were over three months old. There was a profile older than that with patient care information stored on the desktop, so she needed to clear it with the user and user’s manager to either delete or leave, just in case they hadn’t migrated the data.

She also had to finish moving then downsizing then uploading all the project photos to their shared project folder. The photos were taking up a decent chunk of her smartphone’s storage and she wanted to take some photos of her family over the holiday weekend she’d spend at home. She moved over all of the photos except for the ones that Ejiro took of the team. Hank had told her as they were packing up that it’d be nice to print them out and give them to the

team. She wasn’t sure if she could use the department printer for that or not, so she saved copies to her desktop, and emailed Linda for approval with the one she wanted to print out.

As soon as she clicked “Send,” she received a reply. “Approved. I am glad that the project went well for you. Ready for the next? We will talk about it after the holidays. Sincerely, L.”

She sent out four copies of the photo to the helpdesk color printer, stopped over to pick them up, talked with Nessa about her holiday plans - “going over to my theyfriend’s family, nothing fancy, how about you?” “oh, I’m going over to visit my family, too... I mean...” and they both laughed - then returned to her desk to cut off the borders around the photos. She wanted to stop by the gift shop to get some frames for the photos, but she was just about to leave for the holiday weekend, too...

She decided to ask Alex.

“Hey, Alex, mind if I go to the gift shop really quick? I wanted to get some frames for these photos from the project we just wrapped up.”

Alex paused a video they were watching.

“Yeah, sure, hey, umm, since you’re going there, can you pick me up a happy birthday card? My partner’s birthday is this weekend and I wasn’t able to break away to go over there. Here, this should be enough...”

Alex reached into their pocket for their wallet, but Sammohini interrupted.

“Why don’t ya stop over with me? I’m only gonna be a few minutes, just to pick up some frames - if they have any - and if not, then I’ll just give them to the team as is...”

Alex nodded.

“Sure, lemme just message Nessa,” they typed, then said, “OK, let’s roll.”

Sammohini and Alex rolled over to the gift shop.

She used gift certificates for four frames to fit the photos.

Alex got a nice happy birthday card.

When both technicians returned, nothing important happened.

Sammohini had instinctively walked over to Alex’s desk.

They said, “since we’re so quiet and you put in such good work earlier this week, why don’t you leave a few minutes early?”

She said, “OK! Let me just check my email really quick. I saw I had one new email on my smartphone and it’s easier to check on the computer.”

“December Employee of the Month: Chris Wręca”

From: IT HR <ithrcomm@evillem...> (sent by lcurry@evillem...>)

To: IT <zzzitcom@evillem...> (reply all blocked)

CC: Chris Wręca <cwreca@evillem...>

Hello All!

Please congratulate Chris Wręca, Senior Application Support Analyst, for receiving the December "Employee of the Month" award.

Chris supported the Floatology, Sleep Center and Nephrology projects and most recently the Neurology project. Chris has a great work ethic in doing everyday tasks and is always going above and beyond them. Chris provides excellent customer service, is always there for colleagues, and puts always the highest priority on patient care. Thank you, Chris, that you have done such a good job every day, and always have a positive attitude towards your colleagues and other employees. We are glad that you are an employee of our IT Department!

We also congratulate some nominees. Well done! The following employees have been honored by Management for their excellent work ethic:

Josh Akacha (Desktop) - "You're a lifesaver!"

Hella Finn (PM) - "You've helped brighten up my week."

Manoel “Blueberry” Dênis (Networking) - "Two gold-stars, A+, and a participation award."

Gjergj Jaak (Helpdesk) - "I appreciate you being there for us."

IT HR

For any questions or concerns, [click here](#) to report an issue anonymously.

‘That’s so nice. Chris was such a good help!’ Sammohini thought, as she took out the frames from the bag she had set on the counter, then read a little closer, ‘oh, but they misspelled Josh’s last name! How rude! I guess he’d just shrug it off.’

She put the pictures in three of the frames when Alex stopped over.

“What’re you still doing here? It’s your time to go.”

They had their arms folded.

“Oh, I was just finishing up these frames to drop off at everyone’s desk, and did you see that email that just came in? Chris got employee of the month! How cool! And Josh got a runner-up. It’s just too bad his name was misspelled...”

Alex laughed.

“You really are obsessed over names, aren’t ya? I guess that’s good. It’s a sign-a respect and that’s something deeply important to you. I think Josh would just laugh it off. Say, did you need a hand with that last one?”

“Sure!” She handed over the picture and the frame.

“Ya know something, I admire that about you. You really care about others, and really want to make sure everyone feels included,” they said, putting the final touches on the frame, before handing it back to Sammohini and continuing, “and that’s not something that’s common. Most people are closer to Nils. He just lives his life, does his own thing, and doesn’t really care about

others. I mean, good on him, let him live how he wants to live, but it rubs people the wrong way. Whereas for you, you genuinely put yourself out there for others, even when it can cause you pain. That’s admirable!”

“Ah! Thanks!”

Sammohini stacked the four frames in a neat tower.

“Did you need help wrapping them? I have some wrapping paper over here.”

“Umm... sure! I wasn’t really thinking of them as holiday gifts, but I think that would be nice.”

Sammohini brought over three of the frames, and offered to help, but Alex declined.

“It’s all good. I gotta system down. I did some wrapping for others here earlier today.”

She put one on Hank’s desk and one on Venkat’s desk.

Alex handed her the third one, then said, “why don’t you lock up your computer and stuff, we’ll walk over there, you can drop the gift off, then you can have yourself a great holiday weekend?”

Alex guided Sammohini over to Chris’s desk.

Chris had already left for the holiday...

She put the gift in Chris’s inbound inbox.

When Sammohini returned, Hank stood at her desk.

There was a small gift, neatly wrapped, on her desk.

“Hey, there, just a small gift from the team.”

She ran over to the gift, picked it up, sat down in her chair, and opened it carefully.

It was another orange notebook! The cute notebook was just like the one she had just put between her two monitors, except with a ‘Book 2’ written across the spine. The back cover had a ‘PROPERTY OF’ sticker, just like her old one. She hugged it.

“Oh! Thank you!”

She stood up to hug Hank.

“Sure thing. Why not open it up, too?”

She opened the notebook to see the first page filled with positive notes from the team and others across the department.

“We wandered around the past few days asking if anyone would want to sign your notebook. Turns out a lotta people really like having ya in the department.”

There were signatures from Lisa, Linda, Chris, her team, the helpdesk team, some of the other people in the department, and even Fairy dust’s initials in the lower-left corner.

“Is this...?” She pointed to it with her finger.

Hank whispered. “We got this notebook before she left.”

“Oh, well, thank you so much! This means so much to me. I’ll cherish it and fill it with all sorts of good notes! Maybe even faster than before?”

She walked over and gave Hank a big hug.

“F-think m-nothing of it,” he said before she let go.

“Oh! I have a gift for you as well!”

Sammohini looked at her desk but had forgotten she put it on Hank’s desk.

“Oh, you mean this? I saw it and thought it was from you.”

The wrapping paper of her gift was the same as Hank’s.

“Yes, yes! Go ahead and open it!”

“This one’s great. Ejiro’s a great photographer. They really captured us in our element... Where do you think I should put it?”

Hank disappeared over to his desk. She followed. There were a few empty places above his desk where acknowledgments, accolades, and awards had not accumulated.

“How about here?”

Hank had a cube tack with the frame poised above the monitor.

“Wow, that’s like front and center!”

Hank put the frame just above his two monitors.

“Sure is, but it was a good project. I had fun.”

Alex stopped over and said, “oh yeah, if you wanna take over the vacant spot, here, you can feel free to move in at any time. Maybe Monday afternoon since, ya know, you should be gettin’ outta here.”

“Yeah, that’s a good point,” Sammohini said as she went back to her desk. “Thanks for making sure I’m getting out at a good time. You’re a great lead!”

Alex also walked over to her desk. “Yeah? Thanks. When Linda said I could start to take on this role, I wasn’t too sure, but things seem to be clicking for me.”

Sammohini put on her coat and purse, then said, “yeah! You’re always checking in on us, making sure we’re doing OK... Well, have a great holiday weekend!”

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[Chapter 30] What’s Your Lifestyle?

[[Updated 11/29](#)]

Near Eville Medical, Sammohini’s Apartment.

Thursday, November 28th. 8:20am.

The sun was burning away the fog and snow.

Sammohini cleaned her apartment, dropped off some trash, then found a package waiting for her in her mailbox.

Underneath the newsletters she didn’t sign up for yet couldn’t remove herself from was a small key that unlocked a larger mailing container, which had a box from “FD in Edkfa.” Her heart skipped a beat. Although she had been excited to pack everything to sleep over at her parents’s place for the holiday - enough clothes for the weekend, so she wouldn’t have to use their washer or dryer, toothbrush, floss, miscellanea that could fit in a duffle bag, and she could even sleep in her childhood bed! - this was more exciting.

She dropped off the bag in the trunk-boot of her car, then went back up into her apartment to unbox what Fairydust sent her. She put the box on the empty dining room table and opened the top side. Inside was a handwritten note, folded in half, on yellow stationery, on top of colorful cloth. She read the note.

Dearest Sammohini,

I hope this note finds you well.

When I arrived in Edkfa, immediately, I thought of you. I found this skirt that you might enjoy wearing during the warmer months. I, too, was reminded of something I learned during a meditation retreat some years back. For anxious situations, they recommended shaking up a snowglobe, and watching the snowfall down as a way to overcome any anxious moment.

When I saw this ~~snow~~sandglobe in a gift shoppe, well, we don’t have snow in Edkfa, I thought of you. I hope that when you shake it up when you feel stressed out you think of me as you watch all the fairydust land into place.

Let’s meet in our dreams until we meet again.

*Love,
Fairydust*



‘What a thoughtful note...’ She thought back to some of the times that she laughed with Fairydust and smiled.

She removed the smaller box and put it on a placemat on the table. Next, she removed the skirt, which had beautiful patterns of oranges, reds, and browns. ‘This might actually make a really nice dress to wear over today!’ She thought and laid it out on the table. There were many patterns of Edkfan animals that all looked so illustrative. ‘Oh, I love it!’

Then she opened the box. Inside was preformed polystyrene foam that secured a small glass globe with a statue of an elephant raising its tusks as though it were going into battle being ridden by a human. At its base were some letters she couldn’t read.

There was a manufacturer’s note explaining that the statue was of the Battle of Lykwim Monument. This an apparently famous statue in the city of Lykwim, Edkfa and is an important symbol of chivalry and valor within Edkfan culture. As the story went, Lykwim wandered into the area with only forty soldiers riding on elephants and stood her ground against the Ffdip army and the Nhe army. Not only was Lykwim able to claim the land for her people, but she also was able to claim the land for her beloved Edkfa. ‘What a romantic story!’

She shook the globe and set it on the placemat.

She watched as the dust particles landed on the statue, reflecting in a semi-translucent manner against the glass, or maybe, the dust itself was prismatic. She stared in wonderment as the sand fell on top of the statue, the warrior chief, and the floor of the sandglobe. After the last particles fell down, she thought about how pretty it was, then moved it to the center of her dining room table, and put the manufacturer’s note in front of it.

She took Fairydust’s note and the skirt into her bedroom. She put the note in her nightstand drawer with the care she might only give to most cherished items, then changed from her blue jeans into the skirt and accompanied the skirt with some black leggings, then posed in her mirror next to her closet. She spun and twisted to watch the flow of the skirt. She was already wearing one of her favorite t-shirts, a cream-colored shirt with three words down the center: **‘NAMASTE!’** spelled, in red, in a typeface that looked similar to Sindian, except not, then **‘NAMASTE!’** spelled out underneath that, in green, in a typeface like Direish, except not, then **‘NAMASTE!’** spelled out underneath those two, in blue, that she enjoyed wearing over to her parents’s place. She liked how she looked, even with a bit of belly fat developing, nodded to herself, smiled, and turned off the light in her bedroom.

She put on her orange coat once again and before she left the apartment, she sat down at the dining room table and shook the sandglobe once more to watch it go. She thought about bringing it over to show her parents. It was such a nice gift from such a cherishable friend, halfway around the world, in Afear, thinking of her! Fairydust was so cool! Fairydust had shown

her photos of her travels where she rode motorcycles through Southern Saam, danced in Aequoter, swam with fishes off the coast of Saint Samantha, hiked the tallest mountains in Pullistan, and did yoga in Sami. Whereas all she’d really done was gone to Sindia and Direland maybe a dozen times each to visit family, but just to visit family, and even then most of that time was spent indoors or shuttling between distant relatives.

At the same time, that was Fairydust, and not her.

She liked the humdrum lifestyle that she had of going to work, working, then going home to relax for a bit before going to bed. Work treated her well. When she had bad days, her team or management would check on her. It was like everyone at work was like her extended family that she could visit daily. She always liked hanging out with family when she lived at home, but it got boring meeting the same people. At Eville Medical, she could stop by and visit with any of her coworkers or even some of her customers that she’d gotten to know over the almost two years that she had worked there.

She didn’t really want to have that exciting of a lifestyle. She was content where she was as she was. Sure, she could stand to get less upset over certain types of people. ‘But they’re bullies! Why would I want to let them win? People like Joandra, though, aren’t really bullies. She’s not really mean because she wants to be. She forgot all about me the moment the neurologist gave the approval that everything looked good at work. Why would I let her bother me? She imagined when, just two weeks earlier, the globetrotting Fairydust sat beside her at the dining room table and asked her, “is she sitting here next to you? Next to us?” “No...” “Then why let her bother you? She’s not out there tryin’ to do ya harm. She’s just too stupid to realize that she’d get a lot more work done if she’d just work with others, ya know? Instead, she’s so proud-a herself that nothin’s gonna change ‘er mind. People that’ll like you for who you are, those are the ones to give respect to, not her!”

Fairydust was right. The dust particles nearly completely landed. She shook it again.

Her mind returned to when they were driving in the car down the mountainside. *“T-this is a really nice car. I’ve never ridden in anything so cool before!” “Nah, don’t worry ‘bout it, it’s just a rental. I got it through the end of the weekend. I sold off my car a few days ago when I decided I wanted to leave.” “Why do you want to leave? I thought you liked working here...” “It’s crampin’ my style.” She didn’t know how to respond to that, then, and she wasn’t quite sure if she’d have a response now, so she just stayed silent as the music of the Ketchup Packets played over the car speakers.*

She really wanted to ask, “why? Was there something that I could have done differently to prevent you from making this decision? So we could stay like this forever?” This hypothetical Fairydust might have responded, “nothing lasts forever.” “But why not try?” “Exactly, I want to try to get out there and live as many lives as I can. Remember when I showed you all those photos? They’re all different versions of me. I’ve had many different professions all over this

planet of ours. Some required ID, some taxed, some paid well, others paid nothin’. Having a steady paycheck leaves my soul yearning for the next sight. Walking down the same halls, day after day, just leaves me feeling withered. Especially sitting in that office cubicle in uncomfortable shoes with someone like that fool Nils around, sucking all the energy out of the room. I think the worst of it was the window view. At least without that, I could feel this sense of being stuck in a prison, but with that window, it was like telling me ‘here’s all that you can enjoy from a distance.’ I don’t want that! I want to live a high-stakes, high-reward lifestyle! When I die, I want it to be for something I believed in, not decrepit in some nursing home where any child I have won’t even visit with me for more than five minutes.”

“Wouldn’t putting down roots better help ensure a loving nursing home?” “Why would I want that at all? I want to see as much as I can, experience it all, and live to tell the tales. I want to meet people from all over the world, speak their languages, eat their food, enjoy their company, and do so with as much style as I can afford.”

“Is that really a sustainable lifestyle?”

“Is your humdrum lifestyle really more sustainable? Your soul is withering. You’re wasting your youth, and where, at a hospital?”

“I believe in what I do and I’m having fun with people I like.”

“They can’t even pronounce your name or spell it!”

“Some can.”

“But some can’t.”

“I’m trying to stop caring so much about what those people think that don’t want to try to pronounce or spell my name correctly, OK, but it’s hard! I want to be friends with everyone!”

“Why? What benefit could you gain from being friends with someone like Joandra? She’s not particularly smart or successful. She’s just someone too insecure about her job. She didn’t even help you and the team out when y’all stayed late.”

“That’s true.”

“So, like I’ve been saying all along, give her a baseline set of respect. She’s a human being. She doesn’t deserve to be killed. Otherwise, she’s just some punk. Don’t let her get you down.”

“Thanks, Fairy dust.”

“Don’t thank me. Thank yourself. You figured this out all on your own. You’re going to have many more challenges than this. This was easy, but I’m afraid I must go for now, as you must go to visit your family.”

The dust in the sandglobe settled.

She let the fog of her memory shake off as she stood up, pushed in the chair, grabbed her keys from the bowl near the door, said goodbye to everything in her apartment for a few days, shut down or unplugged anything she might have forgotten, and locked up the apartment. She went to her car, started the engine, and drove over to her parents’s place.

She told Má and Pitaajee about the project’s success and some of what Fairy dust had said both real and hypothetical. They agreed with Fairy dust.

Her mom said, “your name ‘Sammohini’ is part of your identity. If they don’t respect that or the alternatives you’re comfortable giving, they’re not someone you should have in your life, Sammo.”

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“A Story About Self-Confidence: What’s In A Name?” aka “Novel 01” by Zombiepaper

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