

Eden's Mirror

by Lain Rose Kent

Point 1

Eden, do you hear bells ringing?

Journal Entry | FRI 10.13.12 | 06:41 School morning.

I've awoken to quite the interesting dream. I'm not sure what it means yet, but I can say with certainty that it's important. I was told something... Well, I have a lot to think about. I don't want to get ahead of myself and miss any finer details. The memories closest to waking will remain fresh. Starting from the top, as far back as I can recall:

It transitioned out of a section having something to do with Alex, we were hanging out in the basement of her house like we used to. I'm not entirely clear what happened, but at some point I needed very badly to leave and get home. Without much time gap in between, I quickly returned home and went into the closet of my bedroom, shutting the door behind me. There was a desk and computer chair in the small square space, my PC was sitting on the desk running Ark/Feliz, the game I've been playing for the last month. The game was paused in Priest Field. I sat down and began playing, the screen filling my field of vision as if I were there. The location appeared normally, but it was uncharacteristically serene, deserted and missing its background music. As I dreamt, I felt very satisfied; I could feel that this was what I wanted. Perhaps this is why I needed to leave Alex. It isn't surprising that Priest Field is where I went, because last night, before sleeping, I tried to imagine the emptiest place I could.

More later. Time for school.

Isaac laid in bed, staring vacantly at what he'd just written on his phone. He intently touched his index and middle fingers to a spot on his forehead directly above his right eye, staring upward. He let out a small murmur. He had woken up with a pair of headphones on. If he'd tried, he could have heard the TV news playing in the living room. The incessant drone of street traffic was given less than a thought. He let his arm fall to his side. With a deep sigh, he dragged himself from under the covers, already wearing jeans and a t-shirt. He stuffed his phone in his pocket, the bulky coil cord of his headphones hanging down to his knees. Grey, sunny, or raining, Isaac couldn't tell; the blinds did their job well. Socks, shoes, a hoodie, a backpack, all donned as thoughtlessly as one could shut an eyelid. A wrinkled disposable plastic bottle, its label hanging off, filled with lukewarm tap-water in the bathroom sink. This was all Isaac needed to do before shoving himself out the door. He did his best impression of a ghost on his way out of the house, passing by his mother and father in the living room. If they said goodbye, Isaac couldn't hear.

There were not many proper houses which hadn't been torn down and replaced with condos, but Isaac's was one of them. He shut the old wooden gate around his front lawn behind him as he stepped onto the city street, adjusting his headphones to fit more tightly around his ears. The day was quite grey after all. Isaac seemed most interested in the sidewalk.

07:14 Train ride to school. The train station was unusually crowded today. I picked out the train car which looked most empty and I chose correctly. On with my dream:

I walked through Priest Field feeling extremely peaceful. I was running up the large hill around the North-West corner of the field, and from the top, I spotted a stubby red temple. It was similar to some of the sheds in the Lorrefyn village on the South edge of the field, however, nothing exactly like it exists in the game. Unlike most

buildings in the game, the temple had no front door or loading zone, just a large open archway leading in. The temple was empty, without furniture. The floors, ceilings and walls were all block-color flat surfaces, as if this area of the game were unfinished.

The central path through the temple lead to a large opening in the floor at the center. There was a ramp leading down into a gray tunnel with walls and ceilings of gravel. In silent dreams, I typically hear the music I play on my headphones, but as I got deeper, it somehow seemed to drown out. When I lose track of the music—it's been the Clockmaker's Theme from Ark/Feliz for the past day or two—I tend to forget that I am dreaming. The tunnel was clearly makeshift, but there were banners, framed paintings and decorations along the walls, styled in red and gold. I began growing very curious.

The train stopped before Isaac had even registered that it'd started. The doors opened and the ghost drifted out onto the sidewalk. The day was much brighter now than it had been in the morning; The pale white sky beamed down on the highschool campus like an omnipresent spotlight. As he fell in line with the scattered handfuls of students trailing onto the campus, Isaac prepared his best smirk, an expression, he thought to himself, he could not remember ever having tried on. Who it was meant for, he didn't stop to wonder. His pace came to a sudden crawl. On his way in, he would always linger to gaze at the high, smooth stone walls which bordered the gym and imagine that he had not truly woken up. This only make his smirk greater. The Clockmakers Theme continued playing in his ears.

Isaac slipped through the wide, squeaky-floored hallways. Students clustered in bubbles around their lockers and walked in both directions through the center of the hall in a disorganized fashion. Isaac made a game of weaving through the groups as quickly as possible on his way to

class. He looked rather odd pressing the large cord of his headphones to his thigh as he hustled down the hall, carefully ensuring it would not snag or—god forbid—come unplugged.

Isaac rushed through the doorway of his morning math class, hand superglued to thigh, and collapsed into his school desk with a huff, immediately producing his phone from his pocket. The room was sparsely populated, students here and there reading books or looking at their phones seated silently, the teacher staring intently into the laptop at his desk, paying no mind. Nobody in the classroom was surprised by Isaac's behavior. He once again opened the digital journal on his phone, nervously rubbing the spot above his right eye as he wrote.

07:39 Morning class. Early as usual. It's been roughly two weeks since Mr. Everson's challenged me on my headphone use. I didn't imagine he would ever let up, perhaps there is some justice in this world after all.

More importantly—here's where my dream began to turn vivid. Usually when I log these dreams, it's a recollection of images, words and ideas. Small impressions, pockets of memory. I'm not exactly sure how to describe what I've experienced this morning. The gravel tunnel led down into a perfect replica of the living room in my home. There were close to no discrepancies at all. I could feel the spongy carpet underneath my feet. Soft daylight pushed through shut curtains, making no reflection on the glossy black pool of the television screen. The only striking discrepancy was the sound, or lack thereof. I felt at once perplexed and invited, so comfortable that I reached up to my ears and took my headphones off, expecting perfect silence. For a moment that seemed to be what I received, but slowly, I became aware of distant music—The Clockmaker's Theme playing muffled through the walls. It was coming from my bedroom. I gazed at the wall—into the wall as if trying to see straight through it, intent on revealing the music's source. As my vision turned pale, the looping music seemed to swelter and slow to a crawl. For a moment, in my focus, my location struck me as

wholly unfamiliar. **Click**—the turning handle on the living room door broke my trance. The door, which could only have been four feet to my right, was swung open in one swift motion, filling the room with music which was especially unrecognizable by now. I focused my eyes, struggling to make out the figure which had opened the door. On the backdrop of a deep colorless void, its silhouette—something like a dead tree—captured my full attention. In an instant, I'd placed it as the high priestess from Ark/Feliz, Tomoe. It suddenly seemed very natural that she might be here. It was as though she lived in my home; she could have been my mother. I stared back into her angular, hawkish eyes. With a snap of her fingers, she silenced the music. I parted my lips and spoke

“Isaac!” Snapped Mr. Everson for a third time. Isaac finally took notice, his eyes darting up from his phone. “Are you with us? Class started five minutes ago.” he said. Quieter than Isaac could hear, a single student chuckled. Isaac said nothing. “Maybe if it weren't for those headphones, eh?” Everson continued, sarcastically gesturing to the side of his head. Isaac had no visible reaction. The same could be said of most other students.

Isaac rested his head in his hand, peering into the chalkboard. He appears fully attentive and aware—at a glance, until you notice that his eyes don't follow anything happening at the front of the room. What he was seeing, only he could say.

The lunchroom was shaped like a shoebox, walls distant and ceiling low. Echos clattered off the flat surfaces and into sharp corners. Square, equidistant windows glowed with the yellow tones of early afternoon. Paired with fluorescent lights and a fresh white coat of paint, you'd be hard-pressed to spot a shadow. Isaac filtered through the lunch line, and fell into an empty table near the exit, devouring the first meal he'd had that day. He hardly even glanced at what was on his tray, finishing each dish with the same hurried disregard. His presence was fleeting. He

discarded his tray and shoved the door open with his foot, tramping out into the playground courtyard. He quickly shielded his eyes and moved with great intent, taking a sharp right as he exited. He stepped over garden beds as he cut across the close edge of the building, getting around the corner and into the shallow nook on the side. Away from the paved paths of the campus and shrouded in foliage and shade, it was a small indentation in the architecture housing a thin bench. He turned sideways as he sat, pulling his feet up. He tightened his arms around his knees like a pair of shoelaces and leaned against the wall, feeling very heavy in the darkness. He simply let the music play into his ears, eyes shut.

His left hand, however, with a mind of its own, went groping into his pocket, attempting to free his phone. In the friction, the cord of his headphones caught a tug, popping the thin metal jack free by just an inch. Isaac shot up straight, stunned. His headphones went silent, the tinny phone speaker kicking in to quietly continue the Clockmaker's Theme. The sounds of idle chatter in the courtyard, the hive of voices unmasked by every swing of the lunchroom doors, the distant glee which echoed from the playground, all of it surrounded him. He sprung for the loose cord of his headphones but stopped. In this place, he thought to himself, is it really so bad? He let his hand slowly fall to his side, leaning against the wall once again. His eyes drifted. The layered ferns which cradled this little sanctuary wore an aquatic shade of teal, and now Isaac knew. As distant words continued to seep and spill, Isaac was hung up on green-blue.

The moment was done. Isaac took the end of the spiral cord in his hand and slid it back into his phone. Familiar music; back to homebase. With eyes shut, he reached into his pocket again, wrapping his hand around the phone. Once in his hands, he cradled it like water which may leak through his fingers.

12:13 Corner spot. I need a new song, The Clockmaker's Theme may be ruined, although I can't say for sure. A different Ark/Feliz track will do fine, perhaps something with more drama to it...

I'm not certain. I have a nagging unease about switching song, I can't explain why. I'll keep using this for now.

On an average day my dream recollection would be very fuzzy by now, but this morning's dream's been stuck on my mind. Last I wrote, I was standing in my living room with the high priestess. A chill filled the air. I scanned her face, but her expression gave nothing away. I spoke, asking her something, but she seemed unresponsive to my words. She told me that she needed me for something or that I had something I needed to do. As she spoke, her head tilted to the side in a floaty motion. I followed her gaze, looking sideways at the far wall of the living room. She swayed across the room, stopping at the window to turn and look at me, her hand placed upon the shut curtain. Again, I asked her a question. Without speaking, she slid the curtain open, revealing the same black empty which came through the door. The light which shone into the room didn't seem to be coming from anywhere. She said something about it being my house, although I'm not sure whether she told me or asked me. She raised her hand from the curtain and tapped the wall. It began to fall over. All 4 walls teetered over, and laid flat like sheets of cardboard. The furniture too, as if the whole room were the cheap facade of a school play. A dark room the size of a gymnasium was revealed. I spun around, searching with my eyes for the walls and corners. Slowly, a dim light filled the room, as fire kindled to life in shrines along distant walls covered in tacky red wallpaper.

The room was twice as long as it was wide, and the ceiling hung low like a lid. There may have been no ceiling at all, as it was a flat black devoid of light or shadow just like the floor. I remember feeling as though this were my home, as safe and

natural as it was unfamiliar. There was a comfort in how acutely vacant it was, perfect and stark. I turned back, spotting Tomoe's frail silhouette, pasted like a pale image upon the dim air, suddenly distant. She moved, pointing down the length of the room's long-way, and I noticed for the first time a second Tomoe pointing in the opposite direction. The room was not rectangular as I'd chalked it up to be, it was perfectly square—but this wall was a full mirror, something I hadn't noticed at first, because, as I realized, I could not see myself in it. I moved closer, trying to make out my own image, but something was wrong. I felt a coldness in my chest.

I came to stand beside Tomoe as I stared into my reflection. My silhouette was a murky pool of blacks and reds, hardly visible at all. I turned to Tomoe, once again scanning for answers. She just bowed her head and gestured at the reflection. I asked her what was wrong, what was wrong with me. She took sweeping steps, coming to stand behind me before placing both hands upon my shoulders. The image in the mirror was of Tomoe's upper body fading down into the foggy depths which she held in her arms. Although her lips did not move, I heard her whisper, telling me that I was missing a body, or maybe more like that I had no form. For the first time in my dream, I began to feel very confused. I began asking myself how this could have happened, trying to remember what had been going in my life before I came to this place. Did my parents know? Tomoe spoke again, cutting off my train of thought. I was told to pick a form and create my own body, but I said that I didn't know how. I began to feel lightheaded looking into this thing which was supposed to be me. Tomoe grasped my shoulders and turned me around, her round pale face filling the center of my vision. She lifted her hand to my forehead and, with her index and middle finger, tapped me above my right eye. A deafening clicking sound rang through the air as her fingers touched my skin. My vision became very bright and foggy, like the lid was being lifted from the room. I could hear the Clockmaker's Theme.

I have never had a dream like this.

Perhaps this is why I don't want to turn the music off.

Isaac read back what he had written at least 3 times.

Point 2

They speak in whispers.

Isaac lingered on the bench, staring into his phone as if it were a magic eye picture, trying to reveal its secrets. Lunch would soon be over.

Isaac did not pretend to pay attention in his next class. Or the class after that. Isaac did not respond during roll call for the rest of the day. He only gazed out the window, his cheek resting in the palm of his hand, fingers tightly pressed against his forehead. Isaac's consciousness was not voiced. There were no words, no commentary, only images. Moments played eternally. He did not entertain gossiping thoughts. He did not anxiously glance at the clock. He did not sneak peaks at his phone under his desk—he had nothing left to write. He just waited.

Young scholars circulated through the large building's passages, acting on regimen. There was a stillness in the air which Isaac never felt, his presence on this day amounting to nothing more than a pair of shoes skirting along the baseboard. Shadows swept across the cement brick walls of campus, stretching long as the sky's light fell to a gentle grey. Isaac made no mental note of the classes he'd attended, which or how many, but he knew what it meant when the sky turned this shade.

All the way to the bus stop on the block over, Isaac had not stopped waiting. A gaggle of school children was huddled around the bus shelter. Isaac kept a distance. The bus lurched to a stop, queueing the students to pick up and shuffle on. Once the crowd was hidden inside, the folding doors left Isaac quietly alone on the street corner where he'd stood for tens of minutes by now, still waiting.

Not everyone was in such a hurry to make it to the bus stop. Just a minute later, a stocky girl with a blonde bedhead cut across the street, armed with a heavy zippered binder on a

shoulder strap, eyes plated with thick lenses. Hands stuffed in coat pockets, she marched up to Isaac before planting herself on the street corner beside him. She cocked her head, leaning closer.

“What’s up?” She chirped, applying a light backhanded tap to the shoulder. Isaac’s head twitched to face her, eyes wide like he’d been woken from a coma. His lips parted but he only stood, gawking. “Sorry, didn’t mean to spook ya’.” She said.

“Alex.” Mumbled Isaac. He turned to face her, hands resting in his hoodie pockets. His back straightened but his neck did not. “Hello.”

“What’s up?” She repeated. Isaac’s eyes looked to the side.

“Oh. Y’know.” He responded with a shrug. Alex giggled.

“What’sat *mean*?” She prodded, giving Isaac a knock on the arm. She was quickly giving up on conversation with the boy. “Whatever. Lemme see your journal.” She said, putting her hand out. Isaac gave into a smile. He fished his phone from his pocket and dropped it into her hand, the cord of his headphones creating a rubber draw-bridge between them. She tapped in the PIN number lock before drawing the screen to her face. “I’ve missed like—three days-worth, yeah?” She commented, scrolling up through the journal’s pages. Isaac stood crookedly, looking away. Students passed them on the street as they loitered.

By the time she’d finished reading, Isaac laid collapsed against the picket fence on the corner, his backpack smushed under him. Alex sat strictly cross-legged. She’d gotten progressively more and more hunched over the phone screen, her eyes narrowing as they lasered each line of text.

“You use so many big words, Isaac.” Alex muttered. “Did you spend the whole lunch period writing this last one?” She asked, handing the phone back over to Isaac which he quickly seized, securing it back in his pocket.

“Yes.” Responded Isaac, clearing his throat. He looked down at the pavement, curling the coil cord around his fingers. “As a matter of fact, I did.” He continued.

“Some freaky shit. Would you actually ditch me to go play Ark/Feliz?” Alex asked with a simper. She went on talking as if Isaac wasn’t there. “I didn’t think you’d like the game *that* much, now you’re even dreaming about it. Also—Tomoe’s haunting your dreams now. You’re literally cursed.” She said. Isaac rolled his eyes. “I’m serious! It’s just like the Ark/Feliz creepypasta,¹ you’re gonna die in seven days or something.” She insisted, truly only half-serious.

“You’re still reading those internet stories?” Isaac hissed.

“You haven’t seen? I’ll text you it, hold on.” She said, grabbing for her phone.

“Yes, I’ve ‘seen.’” Said Isaac, terse. Alex hesitated.

“It’s just crazy.” She maintained, tapping away at the phone screen. Isaac said nothing. Alex shot him a glance, her lips pursing when she saw how he was slouched over so listlessly. She clicked her phone off, letting her arm fall to the side. They sat apart from one another, withdrawn. The sky was getting dark, any student leaving school who’d passed them on the street was long gone by now. Traffic wore thin. Alex turned back to Isaac, her tone having dropped one octave. “Anyway. What’s it mean?” She asked. Isaac sat facing the ground. His eyes drifted to the side, rolling in their sockets. Something churned inside him. He hunched over and clasped his forehead, sharply inhaling as a miniature convulsion passed through him in a twitch. Alex lifted a hand. “Are you alright, Isaac?” She asked.

“I need to go back.” Responded Isaac, his face caged in his fingers.

“Back?”

¹ 'Creepypastas' are creepy urban legends and short stories circulated on the internet. Videogame-centric horror stories are a popular subgenre, usually involving a 'cursed' copy of a video game acquired by the story's protagonist. The phenomenon peaked in relevance in the early 2010s.

“The dream. It isn’t finished. I keep”—Isaac paused as he curled up tighter, the tips of his fingers digging into his scalp—“*thinking* about it. Something is missing.” He said. Alex was stunned, but only for a moment before standing with a sigh. She pushed her glasses up, clearing her throat before speaking.

“Stand up, Isaac.” She said. She put her hand out to him but he only glanced at it. “Get up.” She repeated. “Come on. I’ll take you home.” He reluctantly lifted his hand to hers. Alex’s breath caught in her throat, her brow furrowing as she dragged the boy to his feet. She got her arm around his shoulder as he rose, supporting his stupor. There was no exchange of words past this point as they plodded as a single unit through the dark, now deserted streets. Isaac staggered, catching up to Alex’s pace with each step in lurching motions, his feet swinging passed one another over pavement still laced with the puddles of last night’s storm.

Isaac rested his head against the glass window of the train, vibrations rumbling through his skull. By now, the scene on the train was that of commuters. Sitting near the sliding door, a woman wearing a messy hair bun nursed a paper coffee cup as she stared idly at her phone through wiry glasses. In the thin part of the train, newspaper unfurled in front of him, a clean shaven man sat facing into the aisle, his short black hair showing a twinge of grey. In this train car, everyone seemed to be waiting for something except Alex. She’d been clutching Isaac’s arm the entire ride, glancing over at him three times a minute. The dark outlines of concrete depots and shuttered safehouses rolled past in the windows, leagues apart from the fluorescent hearth of the traincar.

“I can’t keep doing this, Isaac.” Alex whispered. Isaac opened his eyes halfway, the only indication he was listening. He hugged his backpack tightly against his chest as the train hit turbulence. “How long’s it been since you slept without music?” She asked. Isaac looked away.

“Bout a week.” He mumbled.

“Isaac…” Alex groaned, tightening her grip on the boy’s arm. “Try to get some real sleep tonight, okay?” She pleaded. “I don’t care if your dream journal misses a couple days.”

“I’ll be fine.” Said Isaac. His eyes had fallen shut again. Alex looked away.

As Alex watched the shapes of the city pass by, she thought to herself that this wouldn’t be the last time she’d do this.

Alex stopped in front of the wooden gate Isaac had passed through just that morning, letting go of his arm. Her hands returned to her pockets. Isaac turned, placing one hand on the gate before turning to look out at the street. Even at this hour, cars screamed past one after another, their headlights sweeping across the pair of teenagers where they stood motionless on the sidewalk. The city had been misting since dusk; raindrops wafted through the air like feathers, spreading the city’s light across the sky in a candescent canopy. The way in which Isaac’s yard sat wedged between high rises on either side made it look like a hole in the wall, distanced from the glow of the street.

“Goodnight, Isaac.” Said Alex. Isaac looked over his shoulder.

“Yeah. Goodnight.” He responded. He shoved the gate open and turned down the path to his front door, leaving the shoddy fencing dangling wide open on its hinges. Alex just stood on the street, looking at Isaac’s back as it got further and further away, as the front door opened, as

the front door closed behind him. Alex swung the gate shut with a clatter as she walked away. Whether it'd locked or not, she didn't bother checking.

Point 3

Are you alone? The streets are empty at night.

Isaac woke up in a pool of sweat. The blinds could only do so much to keep the afternoon radiance at bay and the boy had been writhing in his sleep, unable to reconcile with the mess of bedding he'd trapped himself under. The moment he awoke, he flung the damp sheets against the wall and sat up, turning to hang his legs over the side of the bed. He unzipped his hoodie and swung it off of his body, he moved to rip his shirt off next but stopped when its collar pulled against a cord. He was still wearing headphones. He quickly gave up and contorted his arms to fold around his torso, groping underneath his shirt to scratch himself every which way, moving from torso to scalp and then, as soon as he'd kicked his pants off, to legs.

He dashed the thin powder of dead skin pulled up by his fingernails to the floor and slithered backward into the corner made by the wall and the headboard. He retrieved his phone from its lost place in the pit of the mattress and curled up like a dead spider, holding the screen to his face.

Journal Entry | SAT 10.14.12 | 12:09 Morning.

I focused on returning to Tomoe last night before sleeping. Whether or not I actually got back, I'm unsure. I drifted in and out of consciousness in the night as I slept. I recall a few distinct sections to my dreams, the connecting tissue is unfortunately lost to REM sleep.

I remember the waking dreams most vividly but the first is most elusive, if any have a connection to yesterday's entries, it's this one. I recall the image of a hospital bathroom in the dim light of early morning. I was standing by the sink and looking at

the checkered window which was shattered and broken. From the moment I awoke—no—maybe since before I awoke, I've been straining to extrapolate on the image's context. It's possible that there's nothing more to it. It's the only image I can hold onto, only voiceless traces surrounded it, but somewhere in there is the clear notion that I was there for a reason. Some reason. It relaxes me to to hold the image in mind. It was that favorite time of day, those early hours when the sun still hides behind the horizon and the air stands still. I'm sure this can't be the only reason.

As Isaac wrote, he absent-mindedly scratched the side of his head and stretched his legs out across the mattress, flexing and unflexing his toes. As he ran his eyes over what he'd written, revving himself up to begin again, he got a text.

gm

Today at 12:23 PM

Good morning to you as well.

did u get decent sleep?

Good enough.

headphones or...?

Headphones, still.

why do u keep sleeping like that??

i was tryna tell u last night, ur not gonna get good sleep that way

there needs to be like

a clear difference between ur waking and sleeping for ur body to get deep sleep,

Obviously I know that.
That's not the point of the music.

which ur obviously not gonna get if ur literally listening to 1 song all day

and then playing it while u sleep.

look,

<https://www.liferight.com/restlessness-and...>

Again, I already know this.

I listen to music explicitly for the purpose of dream recollection.

It allows me to maintain a shallow level of rest in which I can more consciously engage with my dreams.

right but thats literal sleep deprivation!!

ur just gonna keep being strung out like u were yesterday if u only sleep like that

u've been a zombie this entire week

Is that a problem?

???

yes??

how do u pay attention in class like that?

Don't have to.

ur so lucky u can just test well

still, ur teachers must be p annoyed

Not my problem.

Today at 12:31 PM

Isaac sent off the last message quickly and waited for a response, but Alex's messages ceased. Isaac waited for a moment before scrolling up to read and reread the conversation just as he did with his journals. After he'd read it all a third time, he just waited. He shifted in bed, flipping his head side to side trying to get his neck to crack. He'd given up and reopened his journal app and was just about ready to continue writing when his phone buzzed again, the notification popping up at the top of his screen.

i'm worried about you, isaac

Today at 12:40 PM

The boy looked at the notification for a long moment before tapping on it, opening back into the messenger app. He began to write a response, then deleted the text. He began again, typing very slowly. He hesitated for a moment before returning to the journal app, leaving the message unfinished in the text field. He began writing again.

12:45 Morning. I was writing about my dreams. It was

Isaac waved his thumbs above the digital keyboard as if trying to discover the right mix of letters to proceed with. He put a hand to his forehead. He was just as stuck as he was with Alex.

He clicked the phone off and stood from the bed, reaching into his bureau drawer. He pulled out the first pair of sweatshorts his hands made contact with and stepped into them, hopping up and down on one foot for balance as he did. He stumbled out of his room as though he were falling forward and counting on his feet to catch up. The kitchen at the end of the hallway shone with a flowering ploom of daylight. Isaac squinted as he entered, bristling with goosebumps as his skin met the frigid winter air which seeped through the walls. The linoleum floor gnawed at his soles. He pulled the fridge door open by its handle, scratching his lower back as he scanned the contents of the shelves. His dinner from the previous night was on a plate, wrapped in foil. He pulled the foil off and stuck the plate in the microwave, setting it for 2 minutes without looking at what was on it.

As he paced through the room and back again, his mother's voice rang softly through the house.

“Is that you in there, Isaac?”

“Yea.” He called back.

“Could you come in here?” She asked. With a glance at the microwave timer, he took two steps out of the kitchen and stood with one hand hanging from the doorway. He looked at his mother from across the room.

“What is it?” He asked, flatly. Isaac’s mother lazed on the sofa with a black cat curled in her lap. Many curtains were drawn, leaving only a few gentle shafts of light to illuminate the earthy brown tones of the room. In the sunbeams, you could see the dust float through the air. The woman stroked the cat’s black fur as she gazed out of the window whose sun she’d been bathing in. She turned, affixing her eyes to Isaac as if she’d only just become aware of him.

“Is now a better time to talk?” She asked. Isaac just stood for a moment. He leaned forward and reluctantly oozed into the room, the eyes of his mother following him in. He lowered himself into the sitting chair in the corner, adjacent to the couch on which his mother sat. She looked down at the cat. “I was gonna tell you last night, but...” She stopped, her hand coming to a rest on the cat’s back. “Anyway. I got a call from the school yesterday afternoon.” She said. She paused, waiting for Isaac to respond, but her words seemed distant to him. After multiple days of repetition, he’d just been tuning it out, but after sitting down in the livingroom for the first time since his dream, he became acutely aware that The Clockmakers Theme had never stopped cycling in his ears, going on nearly 54 hours by now. His mother’s words pushed in on him. “Your English teacher says you weren’t doing your classwork. Apparently there were similar comments from other teachers as well.” She added. She looked up at Isaac, scanning for some reaction, but he was frozen solid, hands clutching the sides of his armrests. The microwave cried from the other room, breaking the silence. Isaac didn’t flinch. “Is everything okay?”

“Yes. Nothing is wrong.” He responded. He ran his hands over the armrests of his chair in meticulous fashion.

“Well. Is there some reason you’re not doing your schoolwork?” She asked. Isaac steeled himself, making cold eye contact with his mother.

“It doesn’t interest me.” He said. His mother waited. Isaac was silent.

“Hm.” She responded. She began curling a strand of hair around her finger, thinking. “Is your work too easy for you?” She asked. Isaac relaxed in his seat.

“It’s easy enough. I test well whether or not I pay attention to the classwork.” He responded. He tried to sense his mother’s reaction, but her face said nothing. “If you ask me, it’s a waste of time.” He added, pushing further. His mother made no eye contact.

“Would you like to skip a grade next year?” She asked. Isaac recoiled at the thought.

“It wouldn’t make a difference.” He responded. His mother let out a small murmur. She looked down, her finger coiling tightly in her hair.

“It’s upsetting for me to get these sorts of calls.” She said, looking up. She held Isaac’s gaze, pleading with her eyes. For the third time, Isaac had nothing to say. Her face dropped. She sighed, looking away again. “You’re passing all your classes?”

“Yes.” Said Isaac.

“Alright.” The woman forfeited. “As long as you’re happy with that.” She said. Her eyes fell to the cat, stroking it carefully. Isaac rose to his feet and returned to the kitchen. As he walked away, his muscles relaxed; he could feel the tension leaving his face. “Enjoy your breakfast.”

Isaac brought the lukewarm plate of pork chops and mashed potatoes back to his room. He shut the door behind him.

Isaac stood at the entrance of his room in the boxy corner created by the foot of his bed. To the opposite wall, His PC whirred with life on his desk next to a bulky monitor. The monitor's light blinked, indicating that it was not properly turned off, but just sleeping. Lined pages torn from a spiral notebook were taped up all over the back wall above the computer monitor, each one covered with black ballpoint pen markings. Paper shavings peppered each surface, from the desk to the floor beneath the crooked swivel chair. The corner to the left side of the desk was especially plastered with these journal pages; the spot where the walls met one another was masked up with scotch tape. Each one bore thickly inked schematics and scribbled sketches. The notebooks these pages came from sat in a stack beside the computer tower, each with flayed bits of paper along their spiral bindings. To the adjacent wall was the closet, large posters hanging over the door's shutters.

Plate in hand, Isaac toed along the intrusive wires which ran in loops around the feet of his desk and pulled the chair in to sit. He sat the plate down next to his keyboard and wiggled the mouse, waking his monitor up. The screen displayed the pause menu of Ark/Feliz, cursor spinning in place as it had all night, highlighting the "PLAY" menu option. Isaac minimized the game, knocking the controller the side of his desk. He leaned back in his chair and unplugged his phone charger from the wall. He plugged it into his PC, connecting his phone at the other end. On the computer screen, he opened the file of his digital journal and began typing. He ate as he wrote.

12:58 Afternoon. My mother was in one of my dreams last night. She just finished interrogating me on my academic performance, but I managed to get by unscathed. I'll

pretend to pay attention on Monday to get the pressure off of me, I may have gotten too careless this last week. The dream was very interesting.

I remember the very start of the dream because it began around the time I fluttered awake at 10 AM, and proceeded until I woke up again at 12. The middle sections are hazy. Starting from as far back as I can remember, I recall walking to the elementary school I graduated from. It seemed to be late afternoon, around the time school would've already ended. The sky was bright but it wasn't sunny. The streets were deserted but not abandoned. I arrived in the evening, but the power was out. The hallways were dim and empty. I went to class and students were already sitting around joking with one another. Lessons were canceled. The room was a vivid blue, the moody light of early evening keeping it just bright enough to see in. I sat down at a desk in the front row and the teacher approached me. Her face was distant. She seemed blurry and out of focus, and when she spoke, her words sounded far away. She told me that I shouldn't be there. I assumed she meant that class was canceled, but she told me that I'd been unenrolled from the school, completely. I asked her why and since when, but when she answered, I couldn't make out any words. It all seemed so foggy. I was very afraid.

The next part must have been from the following day. I don't remember anything in between. I was riding in the backseat of the car with my parents; the sun was setting and the sky was golden yellow. I asked them why I couldn't go to school anymore, why I'd been unenrolled. My mother told me it was because I wasn't a citizen, and the school had found out. I said that I must be a citizen because I was born in the country, but my parents got nervous when I said this. My father leaned back around his chair and told me that I wasn't actually their son. I didn't know what to say. He just looked me in the eye as the street rolled past around us. I would wake up soon.

Everything after this is more fragmented. I remember only an image of my parents standing in line at a bank, or some kind of government building. There was another section of my parents in the front seat of the car. It was dark out, but this time, I wasn't there. I could not speak to them, and they could not see me. I was only an observer. I couldn't see their faces because they sat perfectly still, looking straight ahead at the road in silence. The last thing I recall is the image of my parents waiting in fold-up chairs at a DMV or waiting room, but my perspective was even more detached, this time from the ceiling in the corner as if I were looking through a security camera. Whatever they were getting done, I knew it had nothing to do with me. I remember thinking to myself, in the dream, that my parents didn't care about me anymore. That's the last of what I remember

The dream reminds me very much of a memory I have from fourth grade. I had my friend Nathan over at my house. He got frustrated with the game we were playing and, because I had very long hair when I was younger, he said I looked like a girl. I got really mad and told Nathan I didn't want to be his friend anymore, and he just started crying right there on the spot. My parents broke up the conflict and scolded me very harshly for making him cry. I tried to convince them he had started it, but they didn't care. I was stewing over it all evening. I didn't sleep a wink that night, I was too frustrated to sleep, and as I laid in bed, I got more and more convinced that I needed to run away from home. When it started getting light out in the early morning, I got up and left my room, made a sandwich, ate half, put the other in a bag, and walked straight out the front door. Without thinking, I walked my usual route like I would have on a school day, but once I'd made it to the school, I just kept walking, all the way into parts of the city I'd never seen before. The sidewalks got small and the buildings became stubby and seedy. Homeless people stood on the corners. The day was already very grey, and it was quickly becoming dark. I'd been walking for what felt like an impossibly long time, and eventually, I couldn't go further. I sat down on the curb outside a convenience store. I'd already eaten my

sandwich a long time ago. I kept telling myself I'd never go back home, but even as I told myself this, I curled up in a ball on the sidewalk and couldn't stop myself crying. A man came by and asked me if I was okay, and through my sobbing, I just told him nothing was wrong and he walked away. I wasn't sure I'd even be able to find my way home, but I didn't know what else to do. Everything looked unfamiliar. I just started retracing my steps as best I could, clinging to my sense of direction. I knew I would be okay by the time I started recognizing the area of my school, but before I made it to the doorstep of my house, I made sure to dry my eyes so I could appear with a straight face. The part of that day which always sticks out the most in my mind, however, was the reaction of my parents when I returned.

As I was walking back, I imagined that my parents must have called the police and that I had been reported missing, but when I opened the door, my mother was just in the kitchen doing dishes like she always does. My father was on the sofa watching TV. My mother just looked over her shoulder at me as I came in and didn't even come stand in the doorway of the kitchen to speak with me until she'd finished with the plate in her hand. They acted relieved that I was okay, but all they had been doing was waiting. I don't think they were ever really worried at all. I spent the rest of that night alone in my room. That day was never mentioned again.

Sometimes I wonder if they really give a fuck about me. My mother only ever seems to ask me what I've been doing, if I've been keeping up with schoolwork or getting out of the house. She's a suspicious woman. She has no idea how I feel.

I never should have run away, it was stupid.

Isaac sat hunched over the keyboard, his head resting in his hand. His brow was tightly knitted. He sigh and rubbed his eyes before slowly leaning back in his chair and letting out a big yawn. His plate was empty by now. He reopened Ark/Feliz and tossed the controller onto his lap.

He leaned over and, in a quick motion, switched his headphone jack from his phone to his computer. After nearly 60 hours, the Clockmaker's Theme stopped. It was jarring for Isaac, as the song had become more familiar than silence. His ears were filled with the atmosphere of the game's cliffside area. The sounds of wind blowing over the water soothed Isaac immensely. He unpaused the game and leaned forward in his chair. He was heading for the cathedral. The bags under his eyes hung heavy.

Isaac craned over the spiral notebook open on his desk, his face inches away from the page. The screen in front of him showed the game, paused again. He scratched up and down on the paper in a scribbling motion with his fountain pen, the tips of his fingers black with ink. He paused for a moment, glancing around the length of the page before throwing his pen to the side. Leaning back in his chair, he soaked in what he drew, litigating each line with his eyes. It was close enough, he decided. He grabbed his phone from where it laid on his bed behind him and took a picture of the page, copying it into his digital journal. It was the hospital bathroom from last night's dream.

Tossing his phone back onto the bed behind him, he tore the page out of the journal and rose from his chair. He stuck a little piece of tape to his finger and hung the drawing on the wall in the corner, covering up another drawing which had been pasted there ages before. He stepped back and took in the corner as a whole, evaluating how the new drawing effected the larger picture. It suddenly struck him that it was passed 10 PM, he'd missed dinner again. He put his phone in his pocket and tossed his headphones on the desk, meeting silence for the first time since yesterday afternoon. He turned to leave the room, but paused, his ears adjusting to the

acute atmospheric noise which surrounded him. He glanced at the window above his bed, only to see the shutters which blocked it out. That was all.

The lights were out in every room of the house except Isaac's. As he strode down the hallway, he progressed further and further into darkness, away from the light which shone from his doorway. The kitchen was especially black. He crossed the room, feet sweeping over the cold hard floor, and groped around on the underside of the cupboards for a switch. The counter light gave him a small, fluorescent pocket in the darkness where he could stay. The dishwasher droned softly on and on. He put his dinner in the microwave just as he had that morning and leaned against the counter, looking at his phone as the timer rolled down. In his journal, he looked the drawing over again, trying to reconcile with it. His thumbs began to move.

22:22 Evening. I caught another image of the hospital. I don't think there were people in it. It was quiet... empty. It was all constructed just so. Put together, just for me to be there... There was a long dark corridor, the main vein of the building. There were gurneys rolling aimlessly through the hall. The building was abandoned. I can't shake the feeling that there was something else there with me, though. Something I was trying to find or something I was running from. I recall a sense of anticipation. The thing I was looking for moved. it moved as I did.

The microwave beeped, tearing Isaac's eyes away from the bright white screen. He looked up at the kitchen window, but all he could see was his own reflection in the glass. He paused.

When I was in the hospital bathroom, why didn't I look into the mirror?

He watched the vertical text cursor blink. He could not answer his own question. He stole another look at his reflection before putting his phone in his pocket and flicking the counter light off. He brought his dinner back to his room through the darkness, shutting the door once again.

Looking at his phone, his dinner on the bed beside him, Isaac wanted to write more. He wanted more to write about, but he struggled for words. After a moment's frustration, he idly bounced back to his messenger app and saw his conversation with Alex again. He looked at the last message she'd sent him. He looked at the message he'd started to write—It said "Don't be." He deleted it one letter at a time, and wrote a new one.

I'll sleep without headphones tonight.
Today at 10:33

Isaac waited for Alex to respond, but she didn't. She must have already gone to sleep. Hm. Isaac clicked the screen off and carelessly tossed it across his bed. It landed face down. The monitor of his computer had fallen asleep. He stared into the black screen as he ate his dinner. It was earlier than Isaac would normally ever go to bed, but he felt like there was a brick wall in his head. Once he'd finished eating, he didn't know what more to do. He put the plate on the floor beside his bed and leaned across his room. He was about to flick the light switch off before he took one last look into the corner at the drawing he'd done. He scrutinized the page, his mind blank. He could not resolve whatever feeling he had about it. He threw the switch, dropping the room into darkness before falling backwards into bed.

Once again, the silence could not be ignored. It made him deeply uncomfortable. He fixated on the clicking sounds of his computer which laid awake on his desk as his conscious wrestled with itself, searching for questions to answer, problems which could occupy him until sleep arrived. He thought about the mysteries of his dreams, going back and forth from the

hospital to Tomoe to the dream about his parents, but each thought was fleeting and shallow. He grasped at each of these questions as if they were the flimsy curtains he hung from, over a sheer, bottomless cliff. He didn't want to know what might happen if he let go.

END OF POINT 3.

