

FANTASY

One Thought Away

By Cameron Simo

Work has an unspeakable laze to it today. The only things breaking the monotony are the clacking of keyboards and the occasional chats by the water cooler. I take short breaks between each of my tasks and twirl a pen to repel boredom. I wonder if something will ever happen to break me free from this rut of traffic, work, traffic, eat, sleep, repeat. I figured by now that my ballet career would have taken off, though it's only wishful thinking, with my name, Abigail Hilcourt, in neon lights, yet I'm still in this flimsy office chair, waiting for life to get off its ass and put me on top of the world.

How cruelly fate works. I wonder if anyone down there, in the bustling New York City streets, feels the same way. Or maybe they have fulfilling lives, who knows? Hard to tell from up here.

I wonder if they'd want to hear some accountant's opinion of the world. Even if I struck a conversation with them, I wouldn't be able to hear their replies with my manager leaning on the corner of my cubicle, rattling off about the luxurious vacation he's going on this winter, and how he wishes for me to join him instead of his "excuse of a wife." Gross as he is, I can't argue his opinion. His wife is as beautiful as she is vapid. He smiles widely as he bellows out laughter, as if he read my mind. When his gaze crawls up and down my body, I take refuge in the bathroom. Can you guess what I'm thinking now, Mr. "I-Swear-I-Could-Fit-Into-These-Pants-From-College-Yesterday"? There's only one way I'd ever want to see you exposed.

My forgotten cell phone waits for me at my desk upon my return. Mom left a voicemail. A knot forms in my gut as she explains, through stifled tears, that someone held up the family diner. No one

was killed, but they need to close indefinitely to repair the holes that warning shots left in the walls and ceiling. The display cases need to be replaced as well. The garbage can by my feet quickly fills with tissues stained with running makeup as I realize I've used up my vacation days this year nursing hangovers. I also won't have their help paying rent this month.

Information on the news regarding the robbery is hard to swallow. The pixelated image of the suspect invades my living room as Sasha Blannette, an old roommate of mine, reports the story. Since she became the 6 PM anchor, I tune in to admire her perfectly wavy hair. I've thought about calling her after she moved out, but I never found the courage.

If only some brave regulars of the shop stopped that mugger. I'm not sure if I would've, but karma will catch up to him. I can almost see him getting jumped right about now....

Before bed, I check the Powerball numbers. Since living on my own, I've played the lottery in hopes of winning something big, something that'll get me out of this dingy apartment. Sweat coats my hands as I think about holding an oversized cheque over my head in triumph.

8... 19... 34... 57... 12.

Not even close.

I crunch the ticket into a ball and throw it across the room. I collapse face first onto my pillow, clutching my danburite crystal.

Tomorrow will be better... please let it be better.

“... made one arrest at the scene.”

I jolt awake when the radio turns on in the morning. I roll onto my back and, unable to find the motivation to turn it off, stare at the collage of my dancing photos taped to the ceiling as I brush the thin hair out of my face.

“Witnesses say that the assault victim was the suspect involved in the robbery at *Faith's On 8th Diner* in Pittsburgh yesterday afternoon, which officials later confirmed this morning in a press release.”

My head snaps to face the radio.

What did she say?

“Dan Kurel, a regular at *Faith's On 8th*, said that he couldn't do much during the robbery, but he, and other customers at the time of the incident, took justice into their own hands for the Hilcourt family.”

I take a deep, stupefied breath.

“In other news, outrage broke out online last night as hopeful Powerball winners were denied their winnings due to what's been called a communication error. The MUSL states that the wrong numbers were announced last night, and that the intended numbers were 39, 65, 7, 13, and 22.”

Those numbers... they can't be...

I propel myself off the mattress and unravel the crumpled ticket. Between my narrow fingers is a sixteen-million-dollar jackpot with my name on it.

“Holy fuck,” I whisper.

I grab my phone and call my manager to quit. He doesn't answer.
Odd.

He usually replies to my texts and calls almost instantly. I check Facebook, out of habit, and cup my mouth as hot tears of disbelief well up. His wife posted on his behalf, calling the sudden accusations against him “sickening” and “false.” In the comments, multiple women, and some men, shared their unfortunate encounters and disgust towards him.

They came true. They came true... holy fuck, they actually happened... Oh my god! Oh my god!



I shiver despite how many layers I put on, and struggle to understand what had happened in the last seven and a half hours. In that time, everything from the day before came true. My heart pounds against my chest whenever my mind wanders, because every thought is now not only precious, but fate changing. Could I make world peace? Maybe, but what if I can't control this power? Could I cause a butterfly effect that destroys the world? Everybody I come into contact with is now in danger if my imagination strays. My understanding of the situation is nearly as empty as the can of chips in my hand. You'd think three large cans of Pringles would solve everything, but I still need more comfort food. If I'm going to get groceries, I should at least pick up my garbage.

Wait a minute...

You know what would be cool? If I could lay on my bed and get this can into the garbage without getting up. But how should I do it?

I think about levitating it. After a few minutes, nothing happens.

Huh. I guess there are some limits.

I then imagine myself lying down and tossing it with my eyes closed, where the garbage lands perfectly in the trash can. I wait a

I tremble from withdrawal at the mere notion of not using my power.

couple of minutes, just in case, then I go through with my envisioned plan. A surprising “clunk” makes me open my eyes and investigate. It worked. I can win any bet with this. I can go viral.

This is insane! What else can I do?

I pepper little experiments throughout my day. I daydream about how excited Mom must be after hearing the news, and she calls moments later. I imagine that the stray cat in the alleyway gets picked up by a family, and a little boy brings it to his parents in the afternoon. I gotta share this with someone, but who?

Sasha!

It'd be so nice to see Sasha and catch up. But... I can't do much with a few packages of ramen and some molding peppers. I don't want to go shopping, not in this condition! I've been through too much today to be thinking about doing errands. Sasha wouldn't mind bringing eggs, spaghetti, soy sauce, ground beef, some *Oh Henry!* bars, and a bottle of wine with her, right? Maybe she would if I put the idea into her head? After her broadcast, of course!

Sasha shows up at my door at 8 PM exactly with grocery bags in tow. We make dinner together and catch up on each other's lives since she left. Turns out she's dating her cameraman.

“Scrawny as he is, he's a sweetheart,” Sasha says. “You two would get along.”

I smile and nod. Thanks for the backhanded compliment.

Sasha talks about her trip to Italy last summer, and how beautiful her cousin's wedding in Venice was. The food, the views, the atmosphere, and the people are all described in such enviable detail that I can taste how cheap the wine I'm drinking is in comparison. She recently moved into a condo with her boyfriend. I can almost feel her disdain for this place. She probably thought I'd be doing better and, to be honest, I did too. I splash some wine into the pasta sauce, then nervously pour my third glass of the night.

"What about you, Abby? Anything fun and exciting?" Sasha asks.

I slap my now empty glass down on the counter and reel my head to look at Sasha. Her and her perfect makeup and hair and figure....

"For the last couple of - hic - couple of years, I've done sweet fuck all since we talked," I slur. "Same boring job, same sh-h-hitty apartment, and same lack of everything you've got...."

I slump onto the counter, alcohol and self-pity lingering on my breath. Is a little bit of fun too much to ask for? I close my eyes and smile as I think about dancing at a club, feeling younger and more alive. The music would be blaring so loud, I wouldn't hear my own thoughts for a couple of hours.

"Aw, hey now, it's okay," Sasha coos. "How about we do a girls' night out like we used to after dinner? I think we'd get into *OAK* pretty easily."

I furiously nod.

The rest of the night becomes a drunken blur.



I wake up naked the next morning with an incessant pounding in my head. Opening my eyes is a struggle. God, what happened last night? Whatever it was, it couldn't have been worth this hangover.

Couldn't I just...?

I think about how great I'd feel without a hangover. My head would be clear, my muscles wouldn't be sore... holy shit, the aches are going away! Wow, if only it were always this easy!

I suddenly feel something on the other side of the bed. A man... is sleeping next to me? His jawline, his hair, the shoulders; he's exactly my type! Oh God, did we...? I peek under the covers, and the final box on my list is checked off. I want to kiss him, but I don't want to wake him up. He's perfect like this. I put on some pajamas to get the handsome angel in my bed some water.

The rest of my apartment is a disaster, and reeks of sweat and liquor. How wonderful would it be for the strangers passed out in my living room to clean up their mess? I can only imagine, and suddenly, they're all awake. They promptly follow the instructions laid out in my imagination. I watch it happen, and gawk at the precision. They leave when the place is spotless without saying a word. Damn, I'm getting better at this. I wonder if I used my power last night. If only I could remember. And that hunk in my bed, what a time that must've been. Well, I mean, if I can control what some drunks do before they leave my house... what's the harm in using it for a little fun? I tremble with excitement.



At parties, the question of what you'd do with unlimited power often comes up after a group has drunk a few beers. My answer? I'd construct my ideal life. After realizing the extent of my power, I did just that in one year. I cashed my winning Powerball ticket, continued dating the angel from the club, bought a house, got hired by the prestigious dance academy of my choosing, and came up with choreography that my class mirrored flawlessly.

I don't need to pay for gas or dinner, deal with traffic, or wait for my students to slowly learn their routine. All of the fame, fortune, and convenience I could ever want is just one thought away. Life is effortless, perfect even. But, even then, a familiar feeling has slowly crept back into my mind, one that I thought would no longer be an issue with everything I could ever want....

Life has a predictable laze to it today. The only things breaking the monotony are the clacking of tap shoes and the frequent repetition of the same songs. I take short breaks from my tasks, twirling a pencil to repel fatigue. I feel myself slipping in and out of consciousness, but even if I got caught sleeping, I could get away with it. By now, my class has gone home, yet I'm still in a flimsy office chair, waiting for something unexpected to happen.

How dull fate has become. The excitement I feel when I look at my display case of trophies is gone. Only I know how those were truly won. I think of the dance ribbons lining Mom and Dad's mantle....

I want to go home.

I message Thomas, my boyfriend, and I tell him I'm going to visit my family in Pennsylvania. Rather than wait for whatever his reply would be, I think about how understanding he would be that I'm taking the weekend for myself. Such a text came through within a couple of minutes. I wonder if he'd do that if I didn't think of it.

I don't bother packing. I need some spontaneity in my life again before I go insane. I tremble from withdrawal at the mere notion of not using my power. God, has it gotten that bad? No, I can quit anytime. I grip the steering wheel with all my might and vow to not use my power this weekend.

I pull out of the parkade, grinning like a teenager first learning to drive. This feeling... it's freedom! I roll down the windows. The air is fresher. Red lights are brand new; I almost forget what to do. The radio is playing random songs, and I'm tapping the steering wheel to

the beat. I'm singing and dancing. People probably think I'm crazy. Is that traffic?

"Yes!" I holler in glee. If people didn't think I was crazy before, they must now.

My heart suddenly drops when I notice why the traffic is thick.

A car went onto the sidewalk and crashed through the front window of a diner. Police and ambulance vehicles swarm the area. Police tape blocks off both pedestrians and cyclists making it even slower for vehicles to move forward.

I could think about the police letting cars through until I pass, but I won't. Are those people alright? Is anyone hurt? I can't imagine what it'd be like if I got into a crash. This one doesn't look too bad, but what if I swerved on the highway and collided with someone - God, the daydream is so vivid, I feel queasy.

I shiver.

It's okay, I'll get there soon enough.

Easy does it, Abigail.