

## It's Like Fighting a Supervillain

A couple sat on a pair of wire chairs outside of a restaurant waiting to place their order. He intermittently held eye contact with her as he shuffled in his chair. It was a hot day early in the summer and he was hoping she couldn't see the sweat stains on his back. She was hoping he couldn't see the sweat pooling beneath her armpits.

He had heard good things of this French restaurant and had been waiting to take her to this place since they first started talking. It was toward the outskirts of Skum City, so hopefully that would mean there wouldn't be much chance of getting caught in a brawl. His hair wasn't sitting quite how he wanted it to when he was styling it this morning, but hopefully it looked good for her. Her brown hair looked beautiful as the sun revealed the countless tones usually hidden underneath artificial light.

She was excited to try something from the menu in front of them. His hair looked so cute with some of it sticking up in the back. There was something about his nervous smile that made her smile too. If only he could maintain eye contact with her so she could enjoy the color of his irises.

A purple blur whizzed past them followed by a gust of wind knocking their menus into the air.

*Was that Crepe Palace?* Momentum thought as he swung through the air. He held two miniature harpoon guns in his hands. Sticking out of each barrel was an anchor attached to a long rope threading through the gun and onto loops of wire hanging pooled on a belt attached to his waist. One was currently anchored above in one of the many tall buildings. As he prepared to fire his other anchor to continue moving, he craned his neck back to stare at the random couple.

*That was the place we went to together last—*

Momentum collided with a sign attached to the side of a building. He slid down the brown printing that spelled out “Springer’s Clocks: The hour hand made by our hand”. After falling a short distance, he landed on the sidewalk. The muffled sound of clocks clicking and ticking could be heard through the glass windows.

A gloved hand reached out to him, and he grabbed hold of the yellow spandex.

“Dom, you must stop looking backward when you’re swinging,” Tensile said.

Momentum brushed some debris off his purple spandex suit. He bent down to retie his shoes as they had come loose while whirling through the air. The tips of his boots were coated in steel that was prime for bashing criminals with.

“Sorry, it’s just—” he stopped talking as he already knew what she would say if he told her what distracted him. She wouldn’t have understood. She couldn’t fathom looking backward while swinging.

“How did you even catch up to me?” Momentum asked.

“Cutting through the buildings is a lot quicker than swinging around them,” she said. She adjusted her purple, leather jacket. They had been training together for months now, but Momentum kept making the same mistake of looking back. You’d think it would be obvious to watch where you’re going when swinging at high speeds, but somehow, something would always break his focus.

A gray ball rolled up to them and unfolded to reveal a man. He wore a light gray, skintight suit with large, curved metal pieces covering his back. The backing of his suit was a

darker color and split into seven darker colored panels covering him from his head down to his legs. Six fake arms limply stuck out from the panels on each side of the suit.

“What are you two doing back here? Wishing Prism is a few more blocks down,” Pillbug-Man said.

Momentum opened his mouth in preparation for admitting to his mistake.

“WAIT! Are we doing a quick pep talk before the fight? I’m so glad that lesson stuck with you,” Pillbug-Man said. His voice raised in pitch as he got more and more excited thinking about pep talks.

“Yeah, we were just about to put our hands in,” Tensile said. She tightened the endless, purple scarf that cascaded down her chest then extended her hand outward. Momentum briefly looked over to her then down at her hand. He put his hand over hers.

Pillbug-Man put his hand in then said, “Team on three. One. Two. Three!”

“Team!” they shouted.

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Pillbug-Man rolled across the ground tearing up concrete as he approached Wishing Prism who hovered in the air. He had two strands of dark green cloth stretching down from his shoulders and past his feet. They flapped in the wind as smoke spewed out of thin air. A golden triangular prism floated where the man’s head should be.

Tensile spun her scarf through the air, crashing the cloth against the countless mirages of herself that surrounded her. She regretted having to eliminate each of these women with long, black hair that naturally curled in on itself stylishly covering their foreheads in dark locks from

existence. To remove perfection from this realm seemed like a fruitless endeavor. Alas, there could only be one.

In the background of the battle, Momentum swung across the street picking up civilians so he could relocate them farther from the fight. The green storm of energy forming above Wishing Prism cast an eerie aura that contrasted the purple spandex of his suit and reflected off the metal around his waist.

Instantaneously, he felt lighter. Each movement he made felt predetermined and perfectly executed. He could control his inertia as he whirled through the air and effortlessly spun from civilian to civilian.

Pillbug-Man was stopped in his tracks by a man in bright orange spandex. He wore a long cape, and a large “J” was printed on his chest. Pillbug-Man uncurled and stared at his unaged friend.

“Justice?” Pillbug-Man asked. His heart pattered at the sight of his long-gone enemy to almost best friend.

“Indeed. It is good to see you, Nemesis,” Justice said.

He said the word. He called Pillbug-Man his nemesis. His brown beard was perfectly trimmed around his face and his abs were incredibly chiseled, but Pillbug-Man knew this wasn’t real. This was a manifestation of his greatest wish. Wishing Prism was trying to slow them down.

“You’re—You can’t be real. You’ve been gone for decades,” Pillbug-Man said.

“I have been waiting for the right time to see you again.”

“I know what you did that day. Even if you did come back for me, I wouldn’t want to be your friend anymore. You’re a monster. It’s because of you that all those people died on S-Day,” Pillbug-Man said. The emerald tinted clouds continued to grow above them.

Justice rolled his eyes as he let loose a calm sigh. He said, “You caught me. I am not real, but the fact that you did not help the actual me enough will always be real.”

“I was always there for you. I always believed in you.”

“If that was true, then why do you spend your days trying to atone for it?” Justice asked.

“It’s not atoning. I’m just making no other superhero turns out like you even if I have to train every single one of them,” Pillbug-Man said.

“You disappoint me even in the afterlife,” Justice said. He slammed his fists together and cracked his knuckles. One step at a time, he approached Pillbug-Man who slowly stepped backward.

“You never could hurt me when you were a villain. Maybe you can try now? It could not hurt to give it a shot,” Justice said. He smirked as Pillbug-Man staggered away from him. Pillbug-Man knew it was a mirage. He just had to believe that, and Justice could be easily dispatched.

A metal boot flew through the back of Justice, and he erupted in a plume of green smoke. Momentum skid to a stop next to Pillbug-Man.

Pillbug-Man laughed nervously before saying, “Wow, you must have done a good job fighting your mirage to be able to help me out.”

“I never had anything show up,” Momentum said as his hook retracted back into his gun.

Pillbug-Man wondered how it was possible. He had seen Justice and Momentum had seen clones of herself. There was no way Wishing Prism forgot to make Momentum's wish come true. It was supposed to be the same for everyone. He would summon a manifestation of the person or thing you wanted most.

"Interesting. I think it is about time we wrap this up!" Pillbug-Man said with a wink.

Pillbug-Man wrapped into a gray ball and rolled forward, increasing in speed. He rolled off a car, rocketed upward, uncurled, and uppercut Wishing Prism crashing his fist against the triangular prism. Wishing Prism fell backward and tumbled across the ground. Numerous smaller golden prisms slid out of his pockets. Pillbug-Man stuck the landing as Wishing Prism fell unconscious.

At that instant, the weight of the world bore back down on Momentum. His movements became uncertain, and he could feel his sweaty hair latching to the back of his ear. The plaque stuck to his teeth returned to perception and his stomach felt tight against the lining of his pants.

"Wishing Prism is going to prison!" Pillbug-Man shouted. He briefly maintained his pose before hunching over. His lungs tore oxygen out from the air flustered by his burst of action. Beneath the suit, his once muscular legs were now covered in saggy skin. His once auburn hair now stained gray. His once wide eyes now struggled to stay open past eight in the evening.

"Getting a tad old for this. Regardless, that's how you knock a criminal unconscious. I learned that because of experience from the other end!"

Tensile walked over and stared at the body on the ground. She said, "You can't just knock someone unconscious. It is an unbelievably small middle area unconsciousness falls between brain damage and them getting back up."

Momentum skid to stop next to her. He said, “I don’t know, Mallory. Looks pretty unconscious to me.”

“Dom gets it. That was pretty exciting, right?” Pillbug-Man asked, nodding chalantly toward Momentum. He had been working to pull Momentum out of a slump for a while now. It would be done in due time.

“Yeah, it was a little fun,” Momentum said before giving a quiet laugh. He wasn’t sure if he was comforted by Pillbug-Man’s indiscrete hints. Did his empathy outweigh Momentum’s new awareness that others could see through his facade?

“I almost saw some life in those eyes when you crashed into the mirage of Justice,” Tensile said.

“We’ll rekindle that love of life for you, Dom. All in due time,” Pillbug-Man said.

“I wouldn’t say that’s—” Momentum began to say.

“Nope. Say nothing more. You needn’t feel any guilt. Each hero must have a journey of self-discovery, and this is yours,” Pillbug-Man said without letting Momentum say another word. Pillbug-Man was familiar with helping others and he would pull Momentum through this slump in due time.

“I’ll handle the clean-up. We can’t have anyone getting their hands on this magic crap, but I will meet you guys at the 7-Eleven tomorrow for our next lesson in heroics,” Pillbug-Man said.

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That night, Momentum sat at his bed playing with one of Wishing Prism's triangular prisms. He flipped it across his hands knowing what it was capable of. He had felt the power of a wish being granted earlier today. For a brief period, there had been levity. For less than a minute he had truly enjoyed his current life and stopped looking backward.

Time was what he had been told would make these things occur. Perhaps time would make his wish come true, but he now had an opportunity to skip to the end.

He spoke quietly to the innate prism when he said, "I want to love myself." Momentum didn't know what he expected, but he at least thought there'd be some smoke or maybe some lights when he made his wish. Instead, the prism sat quiet in his hands. Disappointed, he went to bed.

In the quiet of the night, he could hear that his heart was bleeding. Darkened, viscous droplets hit the ground and rung out in moments of silence alerting him to problems still unsolved. Rose-tinted glass surrounded his soul.

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Later the next day, Momentum sat outside a 7-Eleven with Pillbug-Man. Pillbug-Man quietly sipped on the large, red straw jammed into his Big Gulp as the evening sun beat down on them both. He had filled his Big Gulp with each of the different slushie flavors, so he was drinking a gray mush at this point. Momentum had stuck to only filling his with Dr. Pepper flavored slushie.

Just a few blocks down the street was where they had fought Wishing Prism. The road had been blocked off so it could be cleaned up for cars to drive on again. No villain activity was

predicted for today, but their time together would be a chance for Pillbug-Man to impart another lesson.

“You would not believe how hot this suit gets,” Pillbug-Man said as he continued to slurp down his drink.

“Can’t you take some of it off?”

“Never! Not while I’m on duty.”

Tensile stepped out of the 7-Eleven with a lemonade flavored Vitaminwater. They both booed her when they saw she had not gotten a slushie as well.

“I bet you think you’re better than us because of that,” Pillbug-Man said, smiling as he looked at the drink in her hands.

“I don’t need to get a healthy drink to show I’m better. It’s already a commonly accepted fact,” she said with a slight smile as she sat down next to them.

Momentum scoffed before saying, “Have fun drinking sour water.”

“I will,” she said.

They quietly sipped their drinks. Few people walked by this section of the town, but the rare passerby would crane their head as they tried to understand what Pillbug-Man was wearing.

“The real reason I asked you guys to meet me at this 7-Eleven was because we need to work on our one-liners. It’s the pinnacle of heroics. The phrase as you knock someone out. Something like, ‘You’re going back to your cage you overgrown avifauna!’ In this game, similes and metaphors are your friend,” Pillbug-Man said.

“What’s the difference between those? Isn’t it just that a simile uses like or as?”

Momentum asked.

“Don’t be a simpleton, my prodigy. A simile uses those words but that’s because it is to say something is *like* something else. It’s frail and timid. It’s afraid of making a statement. A metaphor is to say something *is* something else. You’re calling someone out then. There’s no room for misconception.”

“What about an analogy?” Tensile asked.

“Please don’t bring up random words, Tensile. This is serious business,” Pillbug-Man said, ignorant of that word’s relevance. Tensile rolled her eyes.

“It’s coming back to me. I remember learning about that in English class. Similes and metaphors are stupid, especially in stories. People should just say how they feel. Why hide it?” Momentum asked.

“Well, where’s the fun in just telling people how you feel? That’s not very coy. Saying you feel sad doesn’t do anything. Do *you* feel anything if I say I’m sad? No, because I know for a fact you are not very apathetic, Dom” Pillbug-Man said.

“Do you mean empathetic?” Tensile asked.

“Both apply. Metaphors and similes sell emotions. It allows the heartless fools of the world to understand. Even the most scientific among us know what it feels like to stub a toe. So, if I compared that to the feeling of breaking your heart then you suddenly understand how I feel,” Pillbug-Man said.

“Sounds like a lot of semantics to me,” Momentum said.

“You say semantics, I say see-my-emotions cause I got em!” Pillbug-Man said as he lifted his slurpy triumphantly into the air. Momentum stood up and struck a pose as if he had just uppercut a supervillain.

“Let me try here . . . Time to put you back where you came from like a boomerang!” Momentum shouted.

They stared at him quietly as they wondered how to respond.

“Come on guys. It wasn’t that ba—”

Momentum collapsed to the ground. It felt like a rock was pushing its way up and out of his throat. His esophagus burned as this object scraped against his innards.

“Dom! Are you okay?” Tensile asked. She watched as he dry-heaved trying to remove something from within.

His chest flared with pain while his airways clogged. Momentum’s eyes watered as a pink object slipped out from his mouth and onto the ground. It was a crystalline ball that rolled to a stop leaving a trail of blood. In the center of this sphere a small fire burned. This flame defied the laws of nature as there was no opening that could be providing it oxygen.

“It’s never good when you throw up an object,” Pillbug-Man said.

The spherical rock slowly floated up into the air and began expanding in size. Its smooth edges began to crack, and more rock pierced out randomly. It continued to grow, and the shape molded until it resembled a human figure wearing a long dress. The crystalline creature’s face was featureless, and the surroundings reflected off its salmon-colored skin. Seeing that yet

another battle was about to start, the few civilians around them fled to the surrounding streets. If any of them had the money to, they would have already moved their homes to New Hope City.

With a roar, it waved its arm and shards of glass sprayed out at Momentum. Pillbug-Man rolled to the right and tackled Momentum out of harm's way. Tensile ran at the beast and whipped her scarf at it. It bounced off the creature's skin. It roared and threw another clump of glass forward. Tensile pulled her scarf tight between her two hands. The glass bounced against the taut cloth and rocketed back into the monster. She shook the cloth briefly to rid it of any glass shards before wrapping it around her neck again.

Pillbug-Man smelled the air. The sweet scent of flowers filled his nose. He looked around. There was nothing but buildings and concrete as far as the eye could see.

Momentum stumbled to his feet and fired his anchor into the building to the right. He accelerated upward as he launched his body into the air. With two more swings, he had maneuvered himself so he swung into the creature from behind. His metal boot crashed into the creature's skin and a rupture of pink glass sprayed out against him. He tumbled against the ground.

“What is this thing and why did it come out of Dom?” Tensile asked.

“Why was Dom the first thing it aimed at?” Pillbug-Man asked.

“Those two things must be related,” Tensile said.

“This seems supernatural. Dom, did you mess with any of Wishing Prism's stuff?”

“Maybe a little,” he said as he slowly picked himself back up.

“What did you wish for?” Pillbug-Man asked.

He considered how to phrase it to not make himself seem weak. “I asked to clear myself of any issues.”

“Ugh. Who knows what happens when someone inexperienced uses those weapons,” Tensile said.

“Wait, you actually did that though? That’s wonderful! If this is a manifestation of your inner struggles that means I can finally help you by punching it! This is so much easier!” Pillbug-Man said.

After attempting to battle the creature for about ten more minutes all they had accomplished was getting additional, meaning more than the morning’s zero, glass shards ingrained in their body. They hid behind a car to catch their breath as serrated fragments sprayed around them.

“You said this was a manifestation of your issues, right? I thought you said you were seeing a therapist, Dom,” Tensile said.

“I was, but I felt we had made enough progress.”

“Maybe you need to revisit that therapist,” she said, followed by a short chuckle.

“I understand what you’re going through, Dom. I lost my best friend many years ago and I still think about him every single day. It’s like a cloud you can’t get away from constantly keeping any sunshine from healing your skin,” Pillbug-Man said.

“That was a good simile,” Tensile said.

“Thanks. We’re going to get through this together,” Pillbug-Man said. He looked at the cuts and scratches etched across his arm. The glass had torn into him like thorns on a plant. It

shouldn't hurt as much as it did. He had gone through much worse in his youth and managed to pick himself back up. How could a few scratches sting so greatly? These scratches felt more along the lines of abrasions or perhaps even lacerations.

"I—I can't keep going. I'm too weak and it's my fault we're dealing with this. If I had just dealt with my problems quietly like everyone else then none of this would have happened," Momentum said. Pillbug-Man looked at Momentum and saw his grandparents. Weak eyes. Hopeless words. A broken heart. His dad may have not been able to save his in-laws, but he never gave up trying. Pillbug-Man would do no different today.

"Dom, look into my eyes when I say this. No one deals with these things quietly. You are not too frail. You are not adrift. You are not beaten. We are not leaving your side until this battle is won. You are not alone."

Momentum's body shook thinking about continuing the fight. Blood seeped from his nose like a creak in the spring once the ice began to melt and the water had been finally set free to flow once more, soaking in the fresh air. His body was the beaten shore as the waves grew aggressive while the storm rolled in. Shards of glass etched his body. If each were a small, black circle you could connect the dots to make an animal, but who's to say what it would be.

"No! I'm not strong enough. Stop trying to help me. If I could be helped, I would have been already," he said.

"You don't need to be strong right now. We're strong enough to get you through this. That's what friends do," Tensile said.

"You listen here, Dom. I'm going to tell you what I told an old friend a long time ago and you better listen closely because this may be the best sentence I have ever crafted in my entire

existence. False strength comes from thinking you have to do everything alone. True strength comes from knowing you have people that can help you bear the load," Pillbug-Man said.

Dom sat speechless. He was astounded by his friends unyielding belief in him even when he had given them no reasoning to believe otherwise. How could they speak with such confidence about his own abilities given his performance? The ship was littered with holes, but they insisted on bucketing out water. The sun was setting, but Pillbug-Man would spin the entire world just so Momentum could have one more hour of daylight.

The creature began floating upward.

"Woah. It can't start floating up. That's cheating!" Pillbug-Man said.

Momentum peaked out and attempted to fire a harpoon into the crystal creature in hopes of reeling it in, but it avoided the shot effortlessly. He was not willing to go in for another kick as he feared a spray of glass.

"How are we supposed to beat this now?" Momentum asked.

Tensile analyzed their surroundings, assessing how high the buildings were. She could leap out of a window and attempt to bring it down with her, but their adversary was too far away from any jumping off point to reach by herself. She needed something to gain distance with. A plan burst into her mind, and she began giving commands.

"Dom, I need a taut zipline. If you can get up in the air, then you can fire a shot into the buildings on opposite sides of the streets. I will be waiting on an upper floor and assuming you keep those lines connected, I can slide down them and kick the creature," Tensile said as she pointed to the window she would be waiting at.

“I’ll be a sitting duck then. It’ll shoot me with glass,” Momentum said.

“You aren’t alone in this, Dom. I shall be a decoy,” Pillbug-Man said. Minuscule shards of glass lodges themselves across his body. They were invisible to the eye, yet each movement caused him to wince. Knowing this was his best shot of saving Momentum, he ignored the pestering of his muscles.

Tensile held out her hand, “On three?”

Pillbug-Man put his hand in, “One.”

Momentum put his hand in, “Two.”

“Three,” Tensile said.

Pillbug-Man curled up into a ball and started crashing forward. Shards of glass flew toward him and covered his trail. His body ached as he forced himself to continue rotating forward. He couldn’t stop until this was dealt with.

Tensile broke into a sprint and crashed through the front window of a building to their left. She needed to get up the stairs before Momentum got into position. She ran into the lobby and approached the backdoor. Tensile whipped her scarf forward so it wrapped around the doorknob and tore it back, ripping the door to the stairway off its hinges. Two stairs at a time, she climbed upward.

Momentum peaked out from behind the car and assessed where to begin his approach. In his periphery, Pillbug-Man continued to draw the creature’s fire. He needed to be careful of where his grappling hooks pierced the building as if he were to use a window as an anchor it

would simply shatter, resulting in him losing position. He saw the three movements he had to make to gain verticality before he could get into position.

He aimed his left arm out and lined up his sight on the wall. With a boom, the grapple flew out and pierced into the concrete. His arm was ripped taut as the gears in his gun began to tear the metal cord back. Dom burst into the air, gaining the creature's attention. He flew upward toward the building to his left. Wind crashed into his hair. Before colliding with the wall, he fired his right gun. The metal wire rung out as the gears dug into them yanking Dom to the right. The crystal creature changed targets and fired glass shards at Dom. Most of them narrowly missed him unable to keep up with his changing trajectory, but one shard pierced his right arm.

Pillbug-Man uncoiled upon noticing the creature had lost interest in him and watched from below as Momentum screamed out in pain. The muscles in his arms continued to be pulled on regardless while the gun retrieved its cord. Tensile watched from her position in the building to the left as Dom continued to fly toward the right building. Anxious to release the tension on his right arm, Dom aimed his left arm on the building Tensile stood in and prepared to get into position. A burst of steam erupted from his left hand as the grappling hook shot out and latched itself onto the building. He released the right grappling hook and began flying toward Tensile, ready to get into position.

This time, the crystal creature fired its glass at the wire. It snapped. With nothing connecting the wire to the building, it immediately twisted back onto Dom's belt, and he began falling downward.

"NO!" Pillbug-Man shouted. He looked around for something he could use as a ramp and coiled back into a ball. He raced forward toward a parked car with an angled hood. Pillbug-

Man's spherical form rolled up the car and he rocketed through the air. He soared upward and uncoiled. Tensile watched through the window as Pillbug-Man flew into Dom and pushed him upward.

"Just do it with one wire!" Pillbug-Man shouted before falling back toward the ground. He angled his back downward and skid to a stop as the metal plates grated against the concrete. Dom used this new momentum and spun around midair. He aimed his right arm toward Tensile. The anchor rocketed out from the barrel and lodged itself into the wall. The teeth of the glass shard dug into his flesh as the movement shook his arm. He began closing distance with the wall, biting his lip to cope with the searing pain.

Tensile leapt through the window creating an eruption of glass. She held her scarf taut and fell onto the wire. The scarf held her weight as she slid down it closer to Momentum on the other end. Her body rocked back and forth as she gained momentum.

"Throw me!" Tensile shouted as wind rushed past her. She let go of one end of the scarf just before crashing into Momentum. He grabbed that end with his left arm and threw her at the creature. She spiraled toward the creature and collided with it, knocking it to the ground. Right before they smashed against the street, Tensile kicked off the monster and flipped back onto the ground.

Tinted glass erupted from the ground and for a brief moment it appeared as if the sky was pink. The shards clattered against the concrete around them as they soaked in their victory. The small sphere rolled to a stop against the ground as the fire still burned within it.

"Return to nothingness you transparent travesty," Tensile muttered.

"I think that one was just an insult," Pillbug-Man said.

The orb began slowly floating upward. Momentum returned to the ground next to them.

“Wait, that looks like what happened when it first formed,” Momentum said. Tensile knocked it out of the air with her scarf and the orb rolled across the ground before floating back up into the air.

“I think this monster must exist somewhere. It used to be within you, Dom. When you wished it gone, you expelled it into the world. It can’t be destroyed,” Pillbug-Man said.

“It can’t just stay out here,” Tensile said.

“It’s okay. I know what I need to do,” Momentum said as he approached the floating orb. He reached up toward it and Pillbug-Man swatted his arm away.

“Let me take it. I don’t have much longer left here anyway. It can die with me in ten years, maybe fifteen if I’m feeling lucky. You got at least sixty to go.”

Pillbug-Man had watched his father wear himself to the bone to make those that never valued him happy. He could do the same for someone who actually cared about him. Momentum looked into his eyes. Pillbug-Man’s eyelids were patterned with crevices and peaks of age.

“No. It’s my problem. I am the one that has to carry it,” Momentum said. He knew it was his own responsibility. It was time for him to hold this part of himself. It was time to come to terms.

“But I can help you. I can take it away. You can finally be happy,” Pillbug-Man said. He yearned to make sure just one person would be okay. He was willing to give up anything to not lose someone else.

“I already am,” Momentum said as he took the orb out of the air.

He stuffed it into his mouth and swallowed. It got stuck in the top of his throat, so he pushed it down again, swallowing harder. Summoning all his might, he forced his issues back down. It scraped against his insides resisting being sent back to where it came from. Momentum could feel it scratch and cut his throat as it moved down.

His body thrashed upward, and his spine arched backward before he slowly toppled to the ground. He fell looking up at the sky. The blue slowly dimmed to let in black as his body continued to approach the ground.

The plinking of water echoed as a bucket filled. It was placed by his friends to catch each droplet of his heart so it could be poured back in. Whether the heart is half-full or half-empty wasn't the question. Instead, the only unknown is when it would be refilled.

His body radiated wonderous colors. When he looked at his hands, they played back memories as if his skin was a screen. Every decision was shown in vibrant hues as his body projected each moment into the dark abyss. Recollection of who he once was cascaded against the perception of what he was going to become.

Each body part began to embrace its own memory. His legs glowed green as memories of picnics and parks irradiated off him. Pillbug-Man and him were sitting in the grassy plains on a checkered picnic blanket. It was a cool fall day, and they were laughing as Tensile cocooned herself in her never-ending scarf in an attempt to stay warm.

The dark blues of innumerable night skies illuminated his arms. Pillbug-Man held a lightning bug in his hand and was attempting to explain the similarities of them to pill bugs. Momentum and Tensile listened to him as they stared at the stars, stagnant in the sky. It was a comfort to know the stars would still be there tomorrow.

His torso flashed through violet tinted images of anyone who had ever shared one piece of themselves in hopes of building up someone else.

“I should’ve been better,” Dom said to Mallory. They were walking back to their dorm after a long day of classes. The sun was setting in the distance, making the buildings appear black against the orange sky.

“I can’t relate,” she said. Instead of carrying an overstuffed backpack like Dom, she wore a satchel that only functioned to hold her laptop.

“I just spent so long never feeling like enough. It’s easy to make a habit out of it,” he said. He watched her to see if she would show some semblance of emotion.

“You’re enough for me,” she said, continuing to avoid eye contact, or at least remaining uninterested in creating it.

“. . . But I’m just you’re friend. It’s different,” he said.

Mallory looked over to him. Her brows were furrowed, and she grit her teeth as she spoke, “Are you saying my judgement isn’t *good enough*?”

“No—I . . . I just meant that . . .”

She looked at his forehead and noticed sweat beading on his skin. Was it because his backpack was too heavy, because it was a warm evening, or was he just not used to having to walk around?

“My judgement is flawless, so *do not* question it,” she said.

“Thank you . . . I think,” he said as they continued to walk down the street.

Bright red flared across his head pouring over the memories of those he'd loved. A rainbow of moments all leading to that singular instance.

“I want to love myself.”

Momentum fell into Pillbug-Man’s arms. On his bedside stand, the triangular prism had opened. Green smoke slipped out of the open casing and dissipated into the stale air.

“So, are we meeting again tomorrow?” Tensile asked.

“Obviously! We never finished coming up with your one-liners,” Pillbug-Man said as they walked off together.