

(Static fades in and cuts. A beat of silence.)

There were so many times when I did not know who I was. Without them. Without the kids, I mean. And without him.

(Music fades in.)

There was never a time when I had my own identity. At first, I was the genius's child. I was the potential prodigy by genetics who never lived up to expectations. Right away, everyone knew that I could not be like him. And they were visibly disappointed. I could never be like him. I wasn't so driven or focused or what-the-frick-ever. I also wasn't as smart.

And that wasn't... great, you know? But I don't remember being all that unhappy about it. I remember unhappiness, yes. But it wasn't a directed unhappiness. It was just... in my head, swirling around. And it made sense.

Even if my memory is not so accurate, being Dad's kid was horrible. I mean, I gave myself a whole new parental figure. So there's that. I didn't get what I was owed as a child: love, care, affection. If it weren't for Dr. Alexson, I would never know what those things are.

And then the next thing I remember is being like a mom to these kids. I've taken care of them for so long. And, really those are the only two eras of my life: the miserable daughter and the not-great mother. I don't suppose that's all too original of a struggle. A lot of people have never really had their own identity, and for them, it's also been all relational. But for me, it's not so simple. Or maybe it might not be, I don't... I don't know.

I can assume, but I cannot know. There was a time when I was my own person, wasn't I? It's... That has to be the case. I just don't remember it. And Dr. Alexson's suggestion that maybe, that maybe Dad did it... Well, it... even when I really hated him, even when I was genuinely scared, this theory did seem a bit far fetched. There were just too many moving pieces. Too many loose ends. And way too much speculation. But now... Well, I never knew exactly what kind of research my dad did. And for a long time, that did not bother me. I think maybe I... I was technically programmed to not let it bother me. Or maybe I just really didn't care because why would I care about him at all. He is... who he is. At this point, that's all I can say. I can't make any defenses or qualifications. He is who he is, and I am who I am. For whatever that may mean.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

I had a chance to go through some of the papers. In the bundle from Dr. Alexson's office. It's not like I know how Dr. Alexson got them, but he had them. He had them, tucked in this bundle that was meant for me, and now I know... not nothing. I know I have a bunch of pieces I need to put the puzzle back together.

For one, there's something I should have maybe read already before all of this. It's a research paper. One of Dad's many articles published some place. Some... Okay, you can't technically call it a vanity press; that term has a very specific meaning. But Dad largely publishes to stroke his own ego. He doesn't need to do it anymore. Not formally. Everyone in the field wants to know what he's doing. And when they find out, they toss around words like 'innovating' and 'exciting' and 'unheard of' amongst other things, and all of that is meant positively. All of that is meant in praise of him and

whatever it was he was doing. Something I had never stopped to think about.

Something that was never discussed in specifics.

I can't believe I overlooked that aspect of it for so long. I can't believe that this didn't phase me. That I didn't know, and that I was kept from knowing. It wasn't just him. No one has ever clearly spelled out what he was doing. Even at his many galas. All those parties. It was never said. The donors don't need the details for that, and they And okay, the point of those things isn't to be scientific, it's to be self-congratulatory. You don't need details for that, and they probably would not understand them anyway. In fact, it saves everybody some time to leave 'em out. Time that can be used for someone to further stroke their own ego whether it be about how generous you are or how good your event is or how much money they have that could have given but did not. Or that's what I always thought anyway.

Maybe I was right. It's just more than that. Sometimes, people, Sometimes people.... Sometimes when they were talking, people would glance out of the corners of their eyes at me. As if to see how far away I was. As if to see if I was listening. And of course I was not. I couldn't bring myself to.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

When I tried to look at the documents in front of me, it's the same thing. It's hard for me to bring myself to look now. In the privacy of this makeshift lair. My head is just.... Pounding. Absolutely pounding. Like it's trying to make me look away. But I can't.

(grunt and then strained) The brain runs on electricity, you could say, if you wanted to keep things very simple. Maybe because your physical body has seemingly somewhat started to betray you and you're getting these... intense migraines like you've never known before. (pained inhale). Everything in the brain is electricity because that's what gets the neurons to work. And sometimes they have to work together. (Exhale) Frick. Frick. Frick. (inhale)

But electricity. The pattern it's supposed to start. It's supposed to practice when you want to remember something. When that fails, when the brain fails, this is part of it. It's not the whole story. But it's part of the story. Neurons. Firing. Patterns. Change the patterns. Change the.... Change...

(Music cuts. Static gradually fades in and out.)

My body isn't my own anymore. My head. My brain. I don't think they could be considered my own.

(New music fades in))

There wasn't any reason for that headache. I had my coffee today. I've been sleeping a little more than I normally do, and I ate. What was going on?

(inhale) I tried, Lucent I really tried, to sit in that... state, but I couldn't. Something was wrong. Something was horribly, horribly wrong. My head was going to explode, it felt like. (inhale) Like I was dying and I needed to get away from that paper if I wanted to stay alive. And I do. I... I do want to be alive just to escape, just to escape him.

But somehow, I knew stepping away from that paper was going to help. And it did. Putting physical distance so that I could not see it anymore helped me. And I don't understand.

I went downstairs to get some water or something or anything. Just to be in the kitchen, mostly.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

But somehow... Somehow Dad was there. And he wasn't there in the evil villain slowly turning around in his chair sense. He was just making himself a sandwich because terrible people have to eat too, I guess. And he was surprised to see me.

For once, I had the element of surprise, so I tried to keep it together. I tried to keep my body stiff and upright. But I couldn't look him in the eyes. No, I couldn't. My eyes were throbbing so strongly that I was worried he could see it or that would pop out of my head and that he would see. But I don't need to make eye contact with my dad to get some water, right? I can just do go into the fridge.

So I tried that. On my way, I think he asked me if I had given the nanny any thought. We still have not hired one yet. I tried to tell him that a bad nanny was pretty much the same thing as not having a nanny because we'd end up firing her and finding a new one anyway. All of that is back to square one.

Which is just factually true. This happens all the time at the office. We hastily hire an administrator just to have a body in the chair, and then, in two weeks, I'm hiring for that position all over again. He had to have known I was right. But of course, he would not admit it. He won't admit anything like that, and he still has not apologized for the

hallway incident, about me being 'stupid' and 'crazy'. A lie which I do think most of the office believes.

With Dad, there's a marked silence where any sort of praise is supposed to be. And I'm only now realizing that there are ramifications to that.

Instead, Dad tells me I'm tired. And it takes every ounce of self restraint I have not to react to that. Because I can't react to that, right? Especially when he did not clarify if he meant tired enough to get a nanny now and buy me some time. Or if he meant, if he meant that he could tell.

I took a bottle of water from the fridge. I grabbed it by the top and tapped it on the counter while I walked by him. No eye contact. No glance in his direction. Just me walking as if I had somewhere else to be. Maybe someplace with the kids. Maybe not. He didn't need to know. But I did playfully or I tried to do it playfully and said that he needed to publish the job posting again, calling out, "It ain't cheap, so you're paying for it" as I walked out.

Thankfully, he grumbled. So I did something right. He was lost in what I said. In whatever human impulse he had. Silence is robotic. Silence is his usual state. Silence would have been deadly. And I did not get silence.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

(breathing) I don't know exactly how he did it. And I can't check. But somehow, he changed, he changed the way the neurons of my brain fire when I try to think back. When I try to remember something. When I try to remember what actually and factually happened.

That's the kind of research he does. Or he says he does this sort of thing to try to revive brain tissue or reprogram what's left. But that's not all he can do. He can do so much more. It's all the same in the brain after all. Or close enough. But he would need a reason. He would always need a reason to do anything. And that's the part I can't figure out.

And there's danger in it, right? I mean, he's way too utilitarian for anyone's comfort but especially mine. If I don't do what he wants me to do or be what he wants me to be.... (more frantic) I'm not being dramatic. What happened with the paper is serious. That headache? Where else did that come from if not from him. It had to be him. And who knows what else he did. No one but him would know. How far would he take it?

(Pause.)

Do I run after all? From him. Can I? Or is something going to happen to me if I do. It actually felt like my head was going to explode. Maybe it actually can. Somehow.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

Maybe he programmed my brain to self-destruct if I get too far away. Is that even possible? I mean, not in a gory, blood everywhere sort of way. The sort of way where I'm unrecognizable from the neck up. But part of the brain deals with involuntary functions: breathing, heart beat, hormones. What if all of that just stops? It could be made to stop, I guess. Or rather, I have no reasons not to guess it could.

But Dad is arrogant. Dad is cocky. Maybe he wouldn't plan for failure. Not with me. Because I was his child, and he feels like he owned me. Like he well and truly owns

me. And up until recently he did. But you do need to plan in case a chair rebels against you. Maybe for once, I can be like that.

I should tell you, though, that I did manage to see Dr. Alexson. And Dad knew. It was Dad's idea, and I swear he was smirking when he told me to bring the office card and some flowers to Dr. Alexson's bedside. Told me I could take all the time I needed there, in fact. In just a few words, with that stupid grin, he spoke volumes. He mocked me. He gloated, as if he did it. As if he caused this. And maybe he did. Maybe he got to in Dr. Alexson's brain before me. And maybe he did program his brain to fail if he mentioned anything to me about this unknown part of my life, about this thing that Dad did. Or maybe this was still part of his plan. And...

Well, Dr. Alexson had to know what Dad was capable of. That's his student was capable of. It's been so obvious, and Dr. Alexson is good at reading people. Or he has been for as long as I've known him. But there was a time before me, and maybe his judgment wasn't so good back then.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

And so he did empower someone who was truly bad to do some truly horrible things in the hopes that things wouldn't go so horribly and things would stay good and pure and people would get better. People would be helped. But Dad's intentions weren't strictly that, and Dr. Alexson made a mistake that could not be undone. He couldn't tame this monster he had made. And maybe he couldn't conquer it in any meaningful way.



Now, Dr. Alexson is lying in hospice care. Dying. Truly and utterly dying. When I got there, I thought maybe he would open his eyes. To look at me. To comfort me. I... Maybe I thought this was all some horrible dream and I could wake up. He'd wake up, and then I would too. And maybe... When I did, I... Maybe I would find you and I together in some capacity, wrapped in each other's arms underneath blankets. Maybe they'd be a fire. Maybe it would be raining outside. It wouldn't matter. It wouldn't matter where we were. We would be anywhere but here.

And I know I'm not making sense, but it is not too hard to sell me a dream right now. Anything is better than this. I'm trapped with an abusive madman. Without Dr. Alexson. Without anyone to support me.

I still can't believe Dr. Alexson is gone. And not even he could save me. He could give me a chance, though. He could, and as I see it, he took that chance on my, on my chance. So I have to go. I just have to, right?

It's a gamble. A big one. But for better or worse, brains change. Even if Dad did something, maybe I can undo it. Brains adapt. Hopefully. Maybe if I just push through. But where would I even go?

I keep holding this small canvas in my hands. It's still that one solid color; I don't know how to bring up the message. None of the lights here work, no matter how I hold them. And my bank account still is not mine, so I can't buy more. Well there's this emergency stash, but I don't know how far this needs to take me, so I can't spend it. I may get one purchase to get this right. I have one chance. One chance to get the right tool. And if I screw it up, I'm down.

(Exhale) My head still hurts. I threw the paper into the corner. Maybe, it's close enough for a low throb. Or maybe it's... Maybe it's just how upset I am.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

But I can't take that paper out of the room. I'd have to stop broadcasting. And... And I don't know. I don't want to do that. I want to keep talking. But that stupid paper and my stupid...

Wait, I think I know now.

(Static starts. Music cuts. Static fades out).

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