

Hello, how do I save the World?

By Ariella Tania Amanda

One morning, I realized that I no longer like to be awake; I am not happy with the reality to which I wake. If one day I wake up to a world where that night never existed, I might grow to like it again. But it is impossible. If only we were all plants, maybe the world would not need any saving. If only I was a plant, maybe I could become a hero.

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The phone rang, waking me up.

I looked at the digital clock next to the bed. *Four a.m.* “Ugh.” I turned to the side, curling away from the source of the noise. My jaw tightened. A deep inhale. *It’s nothing, just another annoyance in my life to ignore. Everything will be okay; the sound will disappear, I can, and will, go back to sleep.*

The noise eventually stopped. At that moment I thought I had reached my happy place. For a whole minute, the world was at peace.

But then the phone rang again. I tried to ignore it.

It rang a third time.

That was it. I strode to the wall opposite of the bed to where it vibrated like a demented science experiment. The caller’s id flashed. “You little.” Pressing decline, I imagined my thumb puncturing a hole through the screen, destroying Satan’s sleep-depriving device. But it rang again, declaring itself with an intensity that was not there in all previous calls. By that time, spiting her, I decided, was not worth the effort.

It connected.

“I swear, it better be good or I’m gonna—“

“I almost got kidnapped.”

The line went silent. Neither of us knew how to continue the conversation. After a while, I spoke up. “You drunk?” It was four in the morning.

“Nope.”

“Yeah, that’s what drunk people say.”

“I swear I speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” I can see her in my head with her face straight and her right hand raised.

“Okay. You okay?”

“Yup!” she answered chirpily. “I totally beat their asses.”

“Their? Plural? Okay.” I paused. “Where are you?”

“Look outside, man.”

There she was, behind opened curtains and below; waving wildly with her bouncy bob hair that was as much alive as herself. Alice. I put the phone away from my ear. Inhale. “I have to go get her, don’t I?” Exhale.

“Why the heck would they attack an innocent-looking girl at Pablo’s at three a.m. in the midst of autumn?”

“Why were you at Pablo’s at three a.m. ‘in the midst of autumn’?”

She shrugged. “Dunno. Just bored, I guess.”

Come on, don’t hit her just because she woke you up at bloody four am in the morning. Hold it in. You’re a better person than this. It’s not the first time, you’re supposed to be used to this. I focused on one specific spot on the wall next to her head. It was hard not to glare directly at her. Suddenly, she stood up and started tinkering with the heater. “What. Are. You doing.”

“Your room’s frigid.” She then grabbed my blanket from my bed.

“The heater’s broken.” *My lukewarm-but-still-better-than-freezing bed... I’ll be sleeping on ice tonight.*

She proceeded to snatch my last chocolate bar hidden in the top drawer of my dresser; the downfall of having a childhood friend – they know where you hide your snacks. I stared right at her. She shrugged. “I almost got kidnapped, remember? I didn’t actually get to eat what I ordered.”

“You owe me.”

Alice stuck her hand into her pocket and gave me a cent. Chocolate money.

I gave up. I put the coin in my pajama pocket.

“Anyway, you didn’t answer my question.” She shook away her bangs that was covering her eyes and tucked soft unruly strands behind her left ear before looking straight into my eyes. “Why would they attack someone at three a.m. in the midst of autumn? Aren’t they cold?”

“Aren’t you cold?!” I finally snapped. She looked at me with brows almost merging themselves into her hairline before she erupted in a full-on laughter. My fist clenched. It was very hard holding back from knocking the wind out of her, but I knew better. Definitely. Never mess with a kick-boxing gold-medalist.

Alice almost melted into the floor as the surge of laughter settled down and eyes stopped watering.

“Okay,” I re-tracked the conversation. “You were bored, that’s why you were at Pablo’s at three a.m. In the ‘midst’ of autumn.”

“And hungry.” She took a bite at the chocolate bar. I nodded.

“Maybe they were too, you know? Even criminals can be bored and hungry.”

“Nah. They aren’t criminals.” she dismissed the idea, waving her hand in the air, like getting rid of thick vapor. “Too clumsy. If they are, they’re the weaklings of the group, the underlings that got bullied into buying snack with their own money.”

Like how I got bullied to buy chocolate with my own money; minus the one cent. “So, the system in underground societies works like a primary school?”

“Everything works like a primary school.” Alice nodded at what she had said, then proceeded to stare out the window. “If I weren’t as strong, incredible, and amazing; if I were a frail lady who faints easily, God knows what they would have done to me.” Suddenly, she had this solemnity about her, something I had not seen in years. “They could have sold my organs in the black market, asked for ransom... Oh! And they could have tied me up and forcefully have their wa—”

“I prefer not hearing disturbing details please.” *Yeah. Serious-Alice was probably a projection of my imagination.*

“So that’s it?” Alice turned and looked straight into my eyes. “The start of all the crime in the world, boredom?”

It took me a few moments to realize what she was referring to. “Well, there’s always necessity, crime for survival, hate crime, and yea, Boredom, I guess.”

“Well, it sucks.”

“Yeah, boredom sucks.”

Alice went home shortly after she finished my chocolate bar and I went to bed. I climbed under the frozen blanket. *That’s it? The start of crime, boredom.*

I curled to retain some heat.

How the heck do I save the world from boredom? I closed my eyes.

When I opened them, I was There.

As always, I arrived with my bed. *I did it.* The place was as endlessly vast, white, and empty as I remember. I picked up the handle of the rotary-dial telephone.

“Welcome to the Phone Room, a room for those who seek answers. You will shortly be connected to the wise rock.” It rang twice and was picked up at the third beep as usual.

The small rock answered it.

“Hi again, it’s been a while,” I said.

“Yes, it has,” answered the rock in a monotone but gentle voice. “What query do you have today?”

“Ah, yes. I want to know how to save the world.” There was a pause on the other end of the line. It was a poor attempt at a question.

“What for. The wars are no more. The sciences experience daily progress, and although there are still problems in parts of the world, the situations are slowly improving. You need not to worry. The people are fine.”

I considered it for a minute. “Yes, you might be right. But my friend and I believe that a huge percentage of crime could be eliminated just like that if everyone is entertained. What could protect people from boredom?”

“I have contemplated this many times in the past,” the wise rock said. “And I always come to the same conclusion. It is the purpose of life.”

At that moment, I liked the way it sounded. But I then mindlessly watched the floor, embarrassed at myself who still hadn’t figured out what my purpose could be.

“Take a plant for example.” It continued. I had entirely forgotten that I was participating in a phone call. “The plants are never bored because every moment, they walk on their path of purpose which is to recycle air and nitrogen and provide nutrients for their surrounding life forms. They do what must be done, then their clock stops.”

Are we all bored because we had a taste of fun? Like a bite of the forbidden fruit. I had wanted to ask but decided against it; it seemed too controversial. If the little rock had any pride, asking that question might rip away the only access I have to the telephone. I thought about it for a moment with the receiver still pressed against my left ear. The other end was quiet, unmoving. I spoke up. “What if people don’t really know what their purpose of existence is?”

“As long as you know yours, you have helped saving the world and are a hero.”

“But how? I can’t make others to just magically know what their purpose is, I’m not Superman.” *Though how I wish someone out there could do that to me.*

“What do heroes do?” I thought about it. It continued. “They save the world by helping others. Who are villains? Those who got in the heroes’ way. Since knowing the purpose of existence is the solution to save the world from boredom, knowing your own would be the first step to Herodom. One less boredom in the world. In a similar way, villains are those without the knowledge because they are obstructing the world to achieve its eternal peace.”

I gulped. My back started to sweat. There emerged another question which I did not dare to ask. But the world need saving still. Alice survived. But what about the others who are not an athletic prodigy? I had to ask. I decided to embrace the courage of a hero, “What if I don’t know what my purpose of existence is?” *even if the courage turned me into a villain.*

A gentle whisper. I listened to it attentively before the line got cut off with loud beeping. I had many follow up questions, but the noise was in the way. When it finally dissipated into nothing, an announcement spoke. “To call, please put in your quarters in the coin slot before dialing the number.”

“What coin slot? There’s none!” But there it was, a coin slot, like the ones in train stations, suddenly materializing from a place I did not know. There was no winning for me, there never was; not with Alice, not with the little rock. “It used to be free.” I tried putting my hands in my pocket for my wallet, but there was no wallet, only the chocolate money. I put it in anyway.

It beeped before suddenly another announcement came. “Sorry, you do not have enough credit to make a call.”

Defeated, I put the handle back on the telephone and returned to my bed. The whisper of reply was so straight-forward, it almost seemed like I was back at primary school, getting bullied; but this time, instead of by my jealous peers, it was by a rock, and instead of having Alice to protect me, I was all alone.

Figure it out yourself.

I tried visiting the phone again, night after night, but every time I placed the receiver onto my ear, it would always request a higher sum of change than what I had in my pocket. The chocolate money never returned too, non-refundable.

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I was abandoned.

I was abandoned by a rock because it knew that it is impossible for all of humanity to figure things out; to figure out the exact amount of coins to bring and to find their meaning of existence.

“Then, is it impossible to save the world?”