

The weather and specific yet unspecified location are of no importance at this point in time.

Unremarkable and insignificant, the narrative surroundings in which you might currently find yourself are kept for a later mention in passing, as they should be. Instead of a wide range, how about instead, I bring you to a small apartment in the suburbs?

Not *inside*, of course, because that would be rude, and it's not like either of us has the keys anyway. But merely to the fifth door on the right on the second floor, room 205, at an affordable price of \$575 a month.

The relative importance of these numbers and this address are mostly up to you, but if you take a look— whether through your mind's eye or otherwise— you might find the forthcoming events to be of some sort of interest.

It's unbeknownst to me, of course, whether or not you've ever been particularly fond of people-watching, but stay for a while regardless.

There was a knock on the door.

Oliver hadn't been doing anything. Granted, if he *had* been, he knew it wouldn't have been anything important. Besides, what was he supposed to do with so many bottle caps anyway?

He glanced over at his watch, which was resting on the table beside him.

2:48.

He probably should've been asleep, seeing how the slightest jolt would have woken him up anyway, but he was insistent on organizing the caps. By color. Maybe tomorrow, he'd do it by date—if he managed to remember the days he came into possession of said bottle caps. He decided a sweatshirt and shorts were acceptable enough to answer the door.

What the hell...

It was a superhero.

Now, slow down.

It shouldn't have been much of a surprise, all things considered. No, what was more surprising was his stupid *costume*. Now, superheroes' costumes had been silly before—*supervillains* were often worse—but this guy truly had no standards.

He was wearing a cape and bodysuit that were much tighter than anything Oliver ever cared to wear, but it was an almost irritating fluorescent yellow. He was much taller and much more well-built than Oliver, and wrapped from head to toe in bright yellow and white, with an insignia on his chest that appeared to be a badly disguised lightbulb. The worst part was, he had a *hat* on. A tacky, annoying, highlighter-yellow colored hat with the same insignia that couldn't help but remind him of the hat he was assigned at his old fast-food job simply because of the sheer ridiculousness of it.

Apparently, clothes told you a lot about a person—Phoebe had told him that countless times—and looking him up and down for a few seconds gave him a pretty good idea of the man standing in front of him.

This guy's an idiot.

"Hello, young man!" he greeted.

His voice was deep and booming, almost sounding like it was reverberating through the room.

"I've been watching you closely for about a year now, and I wanted to finally meet you in person!"

As he spoke with overdramatic pronunciation; a bright light shone behind him, while a chorus of angels sang, his cape flapping in the wind.

Now, what wasn't right is that the trees weren't moving. The wind seemed to be isolated to move his cape and only his cape—ridiculously adorned with the same insignia on his chest. Even his hair was still, which either alluded to insane amounts of hair gel, supernatural wind, or both.

I'm going with both.

"Well, look alive, son!" he yelled, patting him on the shoulder. "Can I come inside?"

Oliver was no stranger to unannounced house visits. He'd gotten a few visits from reporters, and occasionally someone trying to sell him something, but he'd learned how to evade them or otherwise get them to leave fairly quickly without being rude. What he didn't know was if this guy deserved to be spared from his wrath.

"Why are you here at this time? And come on, man, I don't know who you are. Why are you asking to come in?"

"What do you mean, 'at this time?' It's nearly two in the afternoon," he said, grinning with his hands on his hips, cape still aflap.

Right, other people don't sleep at this time.

As if he was even sleeping.

"Son, I wanted to meet you! I thought it wise to-"

"Wait, wait, hold on. Who are you...?"

"Oh, you don't know *me*? I'm a famous superhero!"

He laughed triumphantly.

"How famous can you be if I, a civilian, don't know who you are?"

Immediately, the light switched off and the wind and music stopped.

What the...

"Hmm, you certainly are a feisty one. So quick to jest, too! Alas, I must inform you that I know for a fact that you are *not* a common civilian! You, my friend, are a superhero, like myself! And a fairly good one at that!"

Oliver playfully darted his eyes around.

"Who told you?"

"Son, you're all over the news! Well, maybe not *all* over the news, but I am fairly certain I have seen you somewhere in something before."

"Yeah, yeah, sure. Anyway, what are you doing here?"

"As I've previously mentioned, I *am* a famous superhero of sorts, whether or not your geeky little fanboy self has heard of me or not..."

Geeky little fanboy?

"...and I wanted to have a serious discussion with you. A meaningful heart-to-heart, if you will," he said, leaning as nonchalantly as he possibly could appear, what with his ridiculous getup, on the doorframe. "Now, can I come inside?"

"So, let me get this straight."

Oliver sighed.

"You came to some rando's house— and I am a rando because we have literally never met— and thought it would be a good idea to have...?"

"A heart-to-heart, an inspiring discussion—even a *manly convo*, as the kids say."

Manly convo? Yeah. Right.

"Listen, uh... Who are you?"

"Well, I *could* tell you my birth name..." He chuckled. "But I suppose, since we're talking as the grand heroes we are, I should tell you the truth."

A single note from a trumpet played in the background, in the rhythm of a fanfare.

"I am *Lightbulb Man!*"

The door creaked awkwardly as he grinned, his pride slightly faltering.

"Is that supposed to be some sort of hero name...?"

"What do you mean 'supposed to be?' It *is* my hero name, and I don't see what's wrong with it," he said, crossing his arms.

Oliver sighed.

There were so many imperfections and mistakes with his entire demeanor— not to mention his costume— that he would've loved to scold him about, but he decided that now was not the time to point them out.

"Look, 'Lightbulb Dude—'"

"Lightbulb Man," he corrected.

"Alright, *Lightbulb Man*, I don't expect you to know all about my schedule, so I'm gonna cut you some slack... But you can't expect me to just let you into my house for no reason, especially when—"

"My, my, what a humble abode you have, son!" he shouted, pushing Oliver to the side and walking inside. "Definitely much smaller than I expected..."

"I—" He sighed. "Okay. Whatever."

Oliver closed the door behind the two of them and followed the man, hoping to keep him from bringing forth mayhem.

"This tiny, smelly apartment of yours is a bit *too* humble. Frankly, it's strange," he said, lightly pushing around a piece of clothing with his foot. "I would've expected nothing short of a small mansion."

"A 'small mansion' seems like an oxymoron. Also, *what?*"

"What kind of little packrat are you? What are all these things?" he asked, gesturing to a wide array of bottle caps, lined up by color. "Do these have something to do with your powers, because-"

"Don't-! Touch those..." He moved his hand away before he could grab them. "It doesn't matter, okay? They're just a stupid thing I like to-"

"Don't worry, I have no intention of probing to find out what you do in your free time." He moved in closer to read one of the labels. "Though, it is still a surprise to me that your tiny room of a house is in such a disorderly state. Didn't your mother ever teach you to tidy your things?"

Oliver scoffed.

"Speak not of my mother, you *weirdo*. I wasn't expecting visitors."

"You should be prepared for anything the universe throws at you! How do you expect to be a decent hero if you can't handle a little surprise...?" he asked, leaning on the edge of the couch.

"You mean *breaking and entering?*"

"A surprise."

Oliver rubbed his forehead as the superhero walked around the couch and examined the rest of the small room.

"Okay, what's your name?"

"*Lightbulb Man*, I already told you," said Lightbulb Man.

"No, your *real* name."

He gasped dramatically.

"Though I am appalled at your distaste for my thoughtfully chosen hero name, I will set this aside and tell you my birth name," he said, grinning. "After all, since we are to be 'chums,' it's imperative that we know each other's names. I am Charles Green, born to Lyle and Maya Green, in the town of-"

"Okay, that's enough," he said, gesturing with his hands to shut him up. "I don't need to know your whole life story, geez. So your name's Charlie?"

"Charles, son."

"Yeah, I'm calling you Charlie. So-"

"A nickname? I am honored that you consider us close enough to be so friendly!" he said, beaming. "Now, if only I could have your name, I could come up with one for you!"

Oliver was beside himself.

"What is it now, boy? You look pale-"

"You mean to tell me that you don't even know my name? And you're in my house? And you didn't know my name? How-"

"Alright, you don't need to shout at me! *Perhaps* it might've been a wise decision to learn your name before my visit-"

"Perhaps?"

"-But now if you were to stop making such a fuss over *every little thing*, you could tell me your name and this little squabble could be resolved."

Oliver chuckled.

"Squabble, wow..." he muttered under his breath. "My name is Oliver Barrison, uh... born to my mother and father... in a hospital, my liege," he said, bowing and tipping an imaginary hat.

"Oliver Barrison... Not a very grand name, but it'll do. Also, as for nicknames, there's not much to work with..." He sighed and stroked his chin in thought. "No good..."

"So, *Charlie*, what is it that you wanted again?"

"Ah yes, that..." He was about to speak when a cat crawled out from under the couch, curling its tail around his ankle. "Oh! Who's this little guy...?"

The cat was white with brown splotches trailing along its tail and torso, with a distinct marking over one of its eyes. It rubbed up against the base of his leg until he picked it up, cradling it in a rather maternal fashion.

"Amazing, son! You're fighting crime consistently, and yet you've found a way to care for a small creature!" Charlie cradled the cat, petting its head. "I didn't know you liked animals. Caring for all creatures is an important quality in a—"

Oliver looked back at him, grimacing.

"What is the meaning of that expre—"

"I *don't* like cats," he said, scoffing in disgust.

"Oh? Then why do you have one?"

"It's my friend's stupid cat," he said, staring at it rather distastefully. "Her name is *Missy*."

"Missy? What a—"

"Stupid name? I know, but she—"

"---*wonderful* name for such a kind, loving kitten!" he said, bringing Missy up to rub their faces together.

"Okay, maybe you don't want to do that—"

"Do what?" Missy appeared perfectly content with his touchiness.

"Oh, that's not fair. Why does she like *you*?" He could've sworn the cat was giving him a dirty look. "She always tries to hiss at me, and screech at me, and mess up my things—"

"Well, *I* don't seem to have a problem with her at all!"

"---and pee on me, and *stink up the place*—"

"Alright, that's enough of your fussing! It's your own fault for having the cat with you in the first place," he said, bonding pretty hard with said cat.

"I- It's not my fault, it's my friend's, because she needs help with the stupid cat sometimes..." he muttered, "And then I want to strangle it and wring its *teeny* neck until its beady little eyes *pop out of its skull and bounce on the floor*, putting it out of its misery and me out of *mine*, but I can't do that because then *Phoebe* would kill me..."

"I can't understand a word you're speaking; you'll have to speak up," he said, showing no interest whatsoever in learning what he said, seeing as he was already putting the cat down and roaming the rest of the apartment.

"Do you have other animals living here with you, or is she it?" Charlie asked, kicking around clothes and other miscellaneous items strewn across the floor.

"Where are you-"

"This place is so small. And you were correct– it *does* in fact smell like cat waste."

"I- Okay, yeah, seriously, what are you doing?" he asked, walking after him as he walked into the small hallway, looking the place up and down.

"Which one of these rooms is your secret lair?" asked Charlie, about to turn the handle of the first door before Oliver grabbed his arm and pulled him away.

"Quit it or *leave*. I swear, I'm going to kill you..."

"That's a bit overly hostile for a peacekeeping hero, don't you think? What's made you so angry?"

"*What's made me so angry?* I don't know, maybe it's the fact that you literally came into my house- room- apartment or whatever, and you just started *poking around at everything when you...*!" Oliver sighed. "I swear, if you don't tell me what the hell you're doing here, I will *strangle you*."

"Unlikely!" he boasted. "You're much smaller than me, and likely weaker, as well. But either way, I suppose I've been overly absentminded now."

"You *think*...?"

"My visit today was not without purpose. In fact, I came to offer an opportunity to you– a proposition, if you will. I wanted to offer you myself– as a mentor, to shape you into the best hero you can possibly be!"

"Huh?"

Charlie walked out of the hall and back into the living room.

"You're a new hero, son. And for only being in this sort of business for a year or so... Started when you were eighteen, yes?"

"Uh... Yeah?"

Where is he going with this...?

"You're so young, Oliver. You've already made a sort of name for yourself, even if it's not a first-page, show-stopping appearance. You should be proud of yourself, but there are many things that you still need to improve on." Charlie faced him, starry-eyed but judgemental, and grabbed him by the shoulders. "You often deviate from the high standard that professional heroes such as myself work to maintain, and I want to help you remedy said situation."

"Remedy said *what* now?"

He let him go and motioned to the couch and floor.

"This is no way for a grand hero to live. Frankly, you fail to practice and hone in on plenty of techniques that heroes— such as myself— use daily when fighting crime. I am offering you the chance to work alongside a hero of my skill level. Just think of all the progress you can make! You can work with me, kid, and be my loyal sidekick!"

"*Sidekick?*"

"Just think about it! We can work as the fictional heroes once did! BearBoy and Ronan!"

"What- Wait, *who?*"

"You don't know?" Charlie looked at him in confusion. "The famous fictional hero duo, BearBoy and Ronan? Y'know, that cartoon series in the 1960s? With the hero who'd been orphaned at a young age, and his trusty sidekick? They're rather famous!"

Oliver snickered. "Wait, you mean like *Batman and Ro-*"

"Hey!" Charlie waved his hand at him. "Not them! *BearBoy and Ronan!* They're *much* better than those other heroes you mentioned. You must watch out for copyright infringement, Oliver!"

Why would I have to worry about that in my own-

"Anyway, whichever you choose to see it as, I'm sure you get the point. I came here to talk to you about this, and see how soon we can arrange things to—"

"No thanks," he said, walking over to the door. "Was that it? Because then you can—"

"What do you mean, 'no thanks?'" He cleared his throat. "Do you not realize what a great *opportunity* this is...?"

"Yeah, I'm good. Now, are you going to leave...?"

"But why not? Is there something stopping you?"

"Nope," he said, shrugging. "I really don't care, honestly. I've been doing things just fine on my own, thank you very much, and I don't need your help to make me... Well, more like *you*."

He held in a snicker.

"There must be something...!" He walked up to Oliver. "I'm sure you need to improve on *something*! There has to be at *least* one thing that can lead to me having to mentor you!"

"Look, have you been keeping up with the statistics? The crime rates have been declining, no?"

"Well, yes."

"And no 'evil villains' have hunted me or my family down, right?"

"A-Ah, right, but I-"

"And I haven't made a big mistake, or gotten seriously hurt or anything, in the year I've been doing this... Right...?"

"Right..."

"So," he said, opening the door and motioning to it, "I can handle things just fine, and you can leave now! Thanks for the nice little visit, but I should probably sleep now."

"You really don't-"

"Nope, I'm good. Bye-bye now," he said, practically pushing him out the door.

"I- well, if you truly aren't interested in the slightest, I guess-"

"Okay, thanks!" And with that, he shut the door.

Finally. Thought he'd never leave.

Oliver sighed and sat back down on the couch.

Now to sleep, I guess. I have to wake up in about eight hours, anyway. I could get a decent amount of sleep today.

He laid down, staring up at the ceiling.

Now would be the optimal time for Oliver to actually sleep, but whether or not he does is beyond anyone's control. We can only hope he will allow himself to succumb to his inevitable beddy-bye time, even in the light as it is.

At this moment, we will leave him. Worry not, friend, about the fruitless cycle we've all taken.

This is only the beginning.