

NOT AGAIN (M4F version)

(Optional SFX. Car pulling up to a stop and shutting off. Car door opening and closing. Walking on pavement. Melvin can begin speaking at any time during these SFX.)

Melvin: Ok, Melvin, get it together. You're smart, you're handsome, you're confident. You're smart, you're handsome, you're confident. You're smart, you're handsome, you're...

(Whining at his own perceived incompetence.) Ugh! If I'm so confident, then why do I have to try talking myself into believing it?

(Angry with himself for whining.) No! Now, stop it, Melvin. You are not going to do this! Stay positive. Put those negative thoughts to death. Have no mercy for them because they don't have any mercy for you. Kill them right now before they kill you! If you let yourself overthink this, you'll find a million reasons to back out that aren't really there. You overthink everything. It's what you do. It's why you're good at your job but suck at relationships.

(Whiny.) Ugh. How can I invent and create a device to map my own mind and project my thoughts onto another target and yet not even have control of my own thoughts and emotions?

(Angry.) Now, Melvin, what did I just say? Stop finding problems with yourself!

(Whiny.) I don't have to FIND problems with myself. It's not like they're hidden.

(Angry.) Ugh. Melvin, what did I just tell you? What did I JUST tell you? Now, come on. Shut up! You're not going to get what you want if you keep this up. You're not going to get...

(Swooning.) her.

(Calming down both sides.) Ok, stop. Just stop. You're starting to act crazy. You're talking to yourself. You're obsessing over her to an unhealthy degree and it's making you focus on every way in which you think you're unworthy of her. Now stop it! Stop all of it! This is borderline psychotic behavior.

Oh, come on, Melvin. It's not psychotic. Don't be so hard on yourself. You've haven't lost it to that degree. Wishing she could be yours is one thing. Losing all touch with reality is another matter altogether. Then again, I am talking to myself like I'm a split personality.

No, I'm not! This is me just sorting things out, psyching myself up. I do this all the time.

I'll grant you that you're a little obsessive. You've definitely dreamt about her every single night for a month. I'd say that qualifies as an obsession.

(Remembering with longing.) That dream last night was so vivid, so real, so... loving. I'm pretty sure my subconscious is trying to broadcast a message to me with a big, fat, glowing neon sign. I've been pining secretly for her for too long. My heart's desire isn't just leaking through my pores anymore, it's starting to explode out of me.

I want her arms wrapped around me like they were last night. I want her smiling sweetly as she caresses me with her warm, loving gaze like she was last night. And just like last night, I want her to... Well, maybe I shouldn't talk about it any longer. Don't want any not-safe-for-work ideas to spill out as I'm walking into work. That could be bad. Very, very bad.

But that doesn't change the fact that I need to stay focused and do this right. Shut up for now, Melvin, but don't you shut up when the time is right! You've got to tell her how you feel.

Today.

It's going to happen.

Ok, Melvin, psych yourself up. You're smart, you're handsome, you're confident. You can do this. Tell her how you feel. She's going to respond positively.

(Distressed and yet hopeful.) She's just got to.

(Composing herself.) Time to shut up for now, Melvin. We're heading into work. Carl will help me take my mind off my problems. He's always fun to joke around with. Unless he's not working security today. I hope he doesn't have the day off. I need to relax a little.

(Optional SFX: Door opening. Scanner recognizing Melvin's badge.)

Hi, Carl. How's it going in security today? Lot of testing on the schedule. That put any extra stress on you guys?

(Pause.)

Yeah, the red tape can be so annoying. I hear ya. Took us nearly 6 months to get the green light to go from phase 6 to phase 7.

(A little nervous.) So... is my intrepid lab assistant already clocked in and back there?

(Pause.)

Yeah, a little stressed. You know me, analyzing everything to death, and I've got something monumentally huge coming up today.

(Pause.)

(Deflecting as Carl misunderstands what she's referring to.) Uh, yeah, "WE." WE'VE got something monumentally huge. Today's test. That's totally what I was referring to. We're finally good to go on a human subject.

Speaking of testing, I hear that section 31 is testing today as well. (Coyly.) Or are they testing yesterday?

(Pause.)

(Playfully.) Oh, come on, Carl. At least confirm that it involves time travel in some way. It's not like it's the best kept secret in this place.

(Pause.)

(Friendly.) All right, all right, I know. You're not allowed to discuss it. Geez. The company finally had to go and get a competent security guard. That makes it so much more difficult to find out things you're not supposed to know. The box of doughnuts I gave you yesterday would have gotten more out of your predecessors.

(Pause.)

(Excited.) Oh, God, yes, what we're doing is so cool. Releasing the full potential of your brain to connect with other people using only your thoughts, as well as the ability to...

(Pause.)

Ok, fine. I'll stop talking. Sheesh, you take your job way too seriously.

What about the guys in 19? They're just working with new uses for cow dung. What kind of shit have you got on them?

(Pause.)

Ok, I relent. You win. I'm leaving. But you could at least roll your eyes at the lame dad-joke there. See ya, Carl.

(Optional SFX: Footsteps to his lab.)

(Snickers.) Thanks for that Carl. Your playful banter helped get my mind off of...

(Back to worried.) ...her. Oh no. I'm back to worrying about how she'll react to my confession.

Oh well. I'm here. This is my door... to my office... my lab. There's nothing else to do but go in and see what happens.

(Pause.)

AUUGGGHHHH! I'm stalling. Just go in!

(Optional SFX: Chime of the security scanner as she badges in the room. Door opening and closing.)

(Trying to fake normalcy.) Hi there, buddy. Get a good night's sleep? Don't want you tired during today's trials.

(Pause.)

Ugh. Me either. I was so excited, I couldn't sleep all night.

(Pause.)

(Deflecting.) Right. Excited for the test. Yeah.

(Pause.)

Really? Everything's prepped and ready? Wow, you got here early, didn't you.

(Disappointed.) Oh, man. I was looking forward to using the prep time to...

No, forget it. Let's move on.

No, wait, this isn't right. Let's not move on. I've got to do this now. Before we get started, I need to tell you something that's on my...

(Pause.)

No, I'm not going to jynx what we're doing. It's not about the test, it's about...

(Pause.)

Stop interrupting me. Yes, I know you're excited about the test. So am I. But I really need to say something first. It's important.

(Pause.)

(Defeated.) Ok. I suppose it can wait until we're done.

(Reluctant admittance.) Maybe it would be better to tell you when we're celebrating our success today.

(To himself.) And maybe I'm just so afraid of what you might say that I'm stalling again.

(Optional SFX on everything she says she's doing in the next few lines while he gets ready for the test.)

(Sigh.) Ok, turning on the recorder. For reference purposes, this is November 26th. Looking at the clock on the main terminal, it is now just after 8:00 AM. 8:02 and 33 seconds to be precise.

I'm picking up the neural transmitter, or as we like to call it, the coach's headset, and placing it on my head. Now, let me take a seat and strap this thing on tight. We don't want it shifting around during the test.

(Brief pause.)

It's secured. Powering on. We're only going to raise it to 5 percent power to start off with. Adjusting the levels accordingly.

(Brief pause.)

All the lights look good. We're at full power. Run a diagnostic.

We'll be primarily focusing on the amygdala, the hypothalamus, the limbic cortex, and the precuneus. We'll see what comes across to the receiver and how clearly my thoughts can be understood.

(Brief pause.)

Everything looking good on that diagnostic?

(Pause.)

Great. The map of my brain is already in there, but let's double check before we begin in order to make sure everything is still synched. Don't want any new thoughts since yesterday to mess up the program.

(To himself.) It's not like what I'm thinking about now is new though.

(Speaking normally again.) Ok, we're good to go. The system is scanning my mind. With any luck, it will perceive my thoughts and soon it will send them to the receiver you've got on right now.

(Pause.)

(Annoyed but feigning a smile.) Yeah. Thanks. Good luck to us both.

(Irritated sigh. To himself.) I'll apparently need luck. Planning and determination have both failed me.

(Pause.)

No. I'm sorry. I don't mean to sound annoyed. I know I should be excited right now. This could be the culmination of years of research and hard work. I'm a bit irked with myself at the moment.

(Pause.)

No, it has nothing to do with the test. I'll tell you all about it when we're done.

(Pause.)

(A bit irritated.) No, I'm... I'm ok, really.

(Pause.)

I'm good, I'm good. I'm just going through something at the moment. That's all. Nothing to concern yourself with, at least not right now.

(More obviously annoyed and a little heated.) Look, I told you earlier that I wanted to tell you something. You're the one that said we should just move on with the test and to tell you later, so let's just drop it for now.

(Pause.)

(Apologetic.) No, I'm sorry. I'm not upset with you. I'm just...

(Letting his anger come out more.) I'm really pissed off at myself right now.

(Pause.)

(Normal.) No, there's nothing you can do. Well, actually, there is, but...

(Then upset again.) ARRRRRGGGGHHHHH! Why can't I just say it!?!? What is wrong with me?

(Pause.)

Yes, something like that. There's something I really, really, REALLY want, but I've been too afraid to go get it.

(Pause.)

What? No, not like a puppy. Nothing I'd tie up and put a leash on or...

Well, come to think of it, maybe that's exactly what I'd do.

Whoa, whoa, whoa! Stop! Don't go there, Melvin. Get your mind away from that.

(Pause.)

Why? Because you're about to read my mind if everything goes right.

(Panicky with the sudden realization.) Holy CRAP! You're about to read my mind. Abort. ABORT! We need to shut this down right away.

(Pause.)

No, the system isn't malfunctioning, it's just that...

(Optional alarm heard in the distance followed by a rising energy hum.)

What the...? What is going on? What's that alarm all about? And are the lights flickering?

Oh, no. This can't be good. Is this us?

(Pause.)

Well, if it's not us, then what...?

(Optional culmination to the energy hum. It can be whatever you want. It doesn't have to be an explosion, but something along the lines of one huge burst of something interrupts the speaker and then it's gone. Whatever you choose will repeat later if you use SFX.)

(Silent pause afterwards.)

(NOTE: FROM NOW ON, WE'RE IN A TIME LOOP. IF YOU WANT TO ADD AN AUDIO CLUE FOR MOST OF THE RESTARTS, YOU CAN IF YOU THINK IT WILL HELP, BUT I DIDN'T FEEL IT WAS NECESSARY. TO HELP MAKE IT CLEAR TO YOU, TIME JUMPS ARE INDICATED BY "PAUSE" IN ALL CAPS.)

(Slowly waking up.) Ugh. My head. What happened? What was that noise all about?

(Sudden realization.) Huh? Hey, what's going on. I'm tied up and strapped to my chair. What the...?

How long was I unconscious? What time is it?

(Shocked.) 12:31!?! I've been unconscious for 4 and a half hours? What's been going on in that time? Why hasn't somebody come in here and...

Hey! You're up. Why are you just standing there? How long have you been awake?

(Pause.)

That long? Well then why haven't you untied me? And who tied me up in the first place?

(Pause.)

What? That doesn't make any sense. Why would you do something like this?

(Pause.)

No, I don't know. It is not painfully obvious. Why do you think it would be obvious? Why would you tie me up?

(Pause.)

Protect me? From whom?

(Pause.)

From myself? What is that supposed to mean?

And why is it darker in here? Did you dim the lights, or are my eyes not working correctly?

(Pause.)

What? I can't hear you clearly now. Speak up. You're groaning slowly and painfully like something out of a horror movie that's preparing some sort of ungodly ritual.

(Pause.)

That's closer than I realize? That's eerily cryptic.

(Starting to become truly afraid.) Ok, you're really starting to creep me out right now. Where did that knife come from, and why are you fondling it like that? You look like you're auditioning for the part of the Joker. Get me out of these ropes.

(Pause.)

(Things are getting creepier.) Alright, you stop it! You're seriously frightening me right now. What's gotten into you? What's with all of the melodramatics?

(Pause.)

(Confused.) Hate me? Why would you hate me?

(Pause.)

(Stressed.) What are you talking about? Deserve to die? For what? What have I done? This isn't like you. Where did this come from?

(Panicky.) No, there's plenty of time for more words. The time for talking is not over. You stay back. Don't come any closer with that knife.

(Terrified.) Ok, the joke's over. The prank has worked. You're really scaring me. Ha ha. You got me, now please stop.

(Pause.)

What are you rambling about? Death is not the answer. Oh, my God. You're really serious. Please, just let go of me. Back away and we can talk about this.

(Growing in intensity.) Please. Please, don't do this. I don't want to die. I DON'T WANT TO...

(PAUSE.)

(Slowly waking up.) Ugh. My head. What happened? What was that...?

(Sudden realization.) Huh? Hey, what's going on? I'm tied up and strapped to my chair. And... and I'm still alive. What just happened? My chest. There's no wound where the knife went in. Did I hallucinate it?

What time is it? 12:31? No time passed. How is that possible? Did I dream it?

Hey! You. You're up.

(Fearful concern.) And you're still holding the knife. What's going on?

(Pause.)

Yes, "still." Didn't you just rant some craziness about wanting to kill me? Something about putting the negative thoughts to death in order to protect me from myself, and then you stabbed me.

But... if you stabbed me, then why aren't I dead? Or am I dead? Is this purgatory? What's going on?

(Pause.)

Yes, you said that.

(Pause.)

And that. You just said that a few minutes ago. What's happening?

(Pause.)

Don't lie to me. You just said all of that. Or at least most of it.

(Fearfully.) Ok, calm down. You just stay over there and we'll talk about this. We'll figure out the real problem.

(Pause.)

(Increasingly frightened.) No, I'm not the problem. You've got it all wrong. Something's going on. This isn't like you. Please. Please stop. I'm scared.

Oh, God. No. Please don't kill me. Stop. It's happening again. Please. I don't want to die. I DON'T WANT TO...

(PAUSE.)

(Slowly waking up.) Ugh. My head. What happened?

(Sudden realization.) What the...? I'm back. I'm still tied up and strapped to the chair.

And there's no wound. No blood. No anything.

WHAT IS GOING ON?!?!

You. You're up.

(Nervously. Tentatively.) How... how are you feeling right now?

(Pause.)

Hey. Hey. Stay with me. You're not making any sense. Tell me slowly and calmly. What's going on? What are you thinking right now?

(Pause.)

Oh, God. You still want to kill me?

(Pause.)

Yes, "still." This is the third time I've woken up tied to this chair. The last two times you were a homicidal maniac and you don't appear to be any different this time.

(Pause.)

Oh, God. It's happening again.

(Brief pause.)

Yes, again.

(Pause.)

You have too done this before. Twice. And you need to stop.

(Pause.)

No, I'm not the one that's not making any sense. Well, that's not really true. What you're saying doesn't make any sense. What I'm saying doesn't make any sense. None of this makes any sense.

(Pause.)

No, this isn't negativity, it's confusion.

Wait. Negativity. You mentioned that before. What does that mean?

(Pause.)

You are so creepy and downright frightening when you sneer and smile like that while brandishing that knife.

But why? Why are you like this? This has never been like you before. What's with the sudden inexplicable shift in...?

Wait. Why didn't I see it before? The device. The test. The receiver's on your head and I'm still wearing the transmitter. Have we been synched and active for the last 4 and a half hours? And for how much of that were you unconscious? Have my thoughts been somehow embedded into your sub-conscious mind? Are you not just reading my thoughts but being driven by them?

By my anger towards myself?

The readings on the panel. Let me see them. Move over just a bit to your right. I can't see them with you in the way.

(Pause.)

No, not closer to me. Move over to your...

Oh, no. You're not trying to help me see, you're moving to kill me again. No. Stop! Please. I don't want to...

(PAUSE.)

(Slowly waking up.) Ugh. My head. What...

(Suddenly alert.) Wait. 12:31. Time loop. Death. Oh, God, this IS purgatory. Or hell.

Ok, you, stop! Just stop. I don't know why you want to kill me, or why you didn't simply do it while I was unconscious if you do want to kill me, but, for some reason, you felt compelled to tie me to this chair and wait for me to wake up first before you did, but it might have something to do with the devices attached to our heads right now. Let's think this through. We're scientists. We analyze problems and come up with solutions, so let's solve this one together. There's a problem. Don't focus on the anger, focus on the solution.

(Pause.)

What do you mean, "how do I know all of that?" You told me.

(Pause.)

Yes, I just woke up. This time. But before that...

(Realization.) Wait, I missed this one too. You're not resetting in the same way I am. You don't know what happened before now. Why am I the only one that gets it?

(Pause.)

Oh, no. That line of questioning seems to have pushed this forward more quickly.

Stop. Stay back. I don't want to do this again. Please, just...

(PAUSE.)

(Quickly waking up. To himself.) Ok, I'm up. I'm awake. Now think, Melvin, think. What's the next piece I'm not seeing?

You keep repeating. She doesn't. The devices are on our heads. They could be messing with her thoughts somehow. She's suddenly become a deranged psychopath that wants to kill me.

No, not me. She wants to kill the negativity. She wants to kill the negative thoughts. What if...?

(To the listener. Fake smile. Fake happy.) Hi there... buddy. How are you feeling right now? Because I have to say, you look marvelous, especially after going through whatever we just went through. Whew. That was crazy. Am I right?

Have I ever told you that you look especially cool wielding a knife like that. And you're so smart. You have been the most fantastically amazing partner I've ever had.

(Getting a little flustered.) I mean lab partner. Not, you know, like, partner-partner. Not that you wouldn't be a great partner. I mean, you ARE a great partner. Always have been. I am so blessed to have you in my life.

(Pause.)

Yes. That did something. You're calmer this time. Confused, but calmer.

(Pause.)

Good. That's so good to hear. I'm glad to know that my words have helped you feel better about what you're doing.

(Pause.)

(Stunned.) You... you do? You care for me? You've always loved me?

Wait. Is that real? That can't be coming from me. Are those thoughts yours?

(Pause.)

(Scared, worried.) Wait, what do you mean you're going to rescue me from myself? Oh no. You mentioned something like this before. You're killing me to save me. You're putting my negative thoughts to death by killing...

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up.) I'm back. Ok. Where were we? 12:31. Time loop. Knife to the chest. Oh, my God, does this suck.

Whoops. No negativity. Gotta stay positive. But not positive about you. It's got to be focused on me.

(Faking positivity.) Hi there, buddy. How are you doing after that... whatever that was? Are you ok? Because I'm feeling great. You know what I learned from this whole ordeal? I'm pretty awesome. I just love being me.

(Pause.)

It's true. I have such a fantastic life. I've got wonderful friends like you, a marvelous career that lets me explore whatever my heart desires, and I'm... I'm... Ah, I'm smart, I'm handsome, and I'm confident. I'm smart, I'm handsome, and I'm confident. I'm...

(Giving up.) You know what? It's clear on your face that you can see right through me. Even I don't believe what I'm saying.

But, hey, I'm trying to be positive. I'm trying to have a fresh, clean, favorable attitude about myself. Isn't that something? Doesn't putting to death the negativity mean building me up and supporting me and making me feel loved instead of frightened?

Yeah, that made you stop to ponder it. Can we talk now about why it is that you want to kill me without you charging forward and planting your knife in my...

Whoops. That did it. Here you come.

(Rushed.) Ok, here are some thoughts of puppies playing.

Nope. Too little, too late. AAAAAAAHHHHHH!

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up.) (Deep inhale.) Ok, positive thoughts. Positive thoughts. Lots of puppies. And some kittens. Kittens are nice. Puppies and kittens that love you and want to play with you and adore you. Yeah. Cute little bundles of fluff.

That's nice. Isn't it? Of course it is. It's incredibly nice. You look so happy now. Which is good. Puppies and kittens are wonderfully happy and relaxing and...

(Concerned.) No. I see your confusion. You're wondering where the happy little furballs came from. Stay with the cute, adorable, loving little pets yipping and mewling away. They're so adorable, aren't they?

No. No. Don't think about the negativity. Don't wonder why you were desiring death just a minute ago.

(Angry with himself.) Dammit, Melvin. Why do you have to keep bringing that up? Next time, stay with the puppies.

But if I stay with the puppies, I'll never get an answer out of her? I can't find out what's going on by trying to stay positive.

Aaaaaand, here she comes again. Alright, dude, just get it over with. I want a fresh start.

(Pause.)

Huh? Why did you stop? You've never stopped before. Why did you stop this time? Aren't you going to kill me?

(Pause.)

Yes, I know that's what you want. You want to plunge the knife into my chest, so why haven't you done it?

(Pause.)

Well, I... suppose you're right. I'm not quite as afraid as I should be. Repetition will do that to you. That doesn't mean I'm not frightened, mind you. A knife in your chest is extremely painful. I hate it. I hate it every time you do it and I'd rather you never stab me again, but...

Oh, that did it. Here it comes.

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up.) Ok, this is getting really annoying.

YOU!

(Pause.)

Of course, you. Who else is in the room. Tell me, quick. Why do you want to kill me?

(Pause.)

I don't care if that statement surprises you. That's not an answer to my question. Tell me quickly before your instincts kick in and you just do it. Why do you want to kill me?

(Pause.)

Yes, it would help me out. It would help me a great deal. I'm trying to understand what's happening here. It might help me move the plot forward a bit if you would simply explain to me why you're feeling what you're currently feeling and why you desire to kill me so...

Hey, why are you moving towards me with the knife? You don't have to get closer in order to answer my...

Oh. Duh. Murder. I have no idea why that caught me by surprise.

(PAUSE.)

(Snapping awake.) AHHH! I'm awake. 12:31. Time loop. Here we go again.

Ok, you there, asking why you want to kill me gets a bad response. I won't get any answers that way. How about if I ask you to remove the helmet. Let's see what that does.

(Pause.)

Oh, for crying out loud. Don't look so shocked. We've been over this 5... no, 10... Oh, my God. Am I losing track already of how many times it's been? We've already been over this several times. I wake up. You look all menacing and terrifying right before you plunge the knife into my chest, then we do it all over again.

(Pause.)

Yes, you're very frightening. I hate this. I hate all of it. Being stabbed to death is not something I want to relive over and over and over and...

Oh, my God, here you come. That was not the right line of questioning or attitude, was it. Well, here we go again...

(PAUSE.)

(Snapping awake.) Waking up. 12:31. Positivity doesn't work. Puppies don't work. Asking why doesn't work. Trying to remove the helmet doesn't work. Not being frightened doesn't stop it completely. What haven't I tried?

What about losing it?

(Very upset.) Ok, moron, I am really starting to get sick of this.

(Play acting what's been happening.) AAAAHHHHH! Knife in the chest. AAAAAHHHHH. Knife in the chest. Aaaaahhh. Knife in the chest.

(Normally.) At first it was terrifying. Now, it's just redundant. I mean, seriously, WHAT THE LITERAL HELL!?! Are we destined to be stuck in this stupid loop forever!?!

(Pause.)

Oh, don't look so confused? I'm getting there. It's not easy trying to make sense of your own multiple deaths. I think I'm already in double digits, or close to it. You keep stabbing me and stabbing me. And honestly, why?

(Pause.)

Oh, shut up already about the negative thoughts, and the needing to put me to death, and the blah, blah, blah. That's not what I was talking about. This time I'm talking about why you're

using a knife. I know you've got a gun in your jacket there. You've had a concealed carry permit ever since that altercation with the muggers.

(Pause.)

Yes, that gun. Go ahead and pull it out.

(Pause.)

(Sarcastically.) Yes, yes, yes, it's veeeeery scary. Ooooooooooh, so scary.

(Upset again.) That's just the point. You have a gun. Why the knife? If you want the negativity erased and me dead, why don't you just shoot me?

(Pause.)

(Seriously considering.) Yes. I guess the knife is more frightening. A gunshot to the head is simple, quick, painless. And I might not even have any time to react. Whereas the knife in the chest is not only more painful, the walk towards me is extremely terrifying. It gives me more time to ponder...

(Annoyed.) Aaaaaand you're coming towards me again. Ok, Melvin, fear is definitely a factor. It's more satisfying to her when you're scared. Remember that.

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up with an annoyed sarcastic giddiness.) HEEEEEEYYYY! Wow. 12:31. No time has passed. Would you look at that. Wow. I'm tied up and strapped to this chair. YAY. You want to kill me right now. Woohoo.

(Pause.)

Of course, you want to kill me. Why wouldn't you want to kill me? Killing me is so much fun for you and soooooo enjoyable for me.

(Pause.)

What? You can't be serious. I have too mentioned this before. Ok, not, like, so blatantly straight-forward, but I have said it many times, you know, sub textually. Leaving little hints here and there. Things like, "I am so angry with myself," and, "I'd rather be dead right now," and, "I'm so lame and worthless."

(Normal, self realization.) Oh, my God. Those might not have been casual epithets. There might actually be some truth to that.

(Catching himself getting off of her intended course. Back to fake, sarcastic joy.) I mean, of course there's truth to that. I would love to die. Being murdered at your hands would be the greatest thrill of my life. Or rather, the greatest thrill of my death. Whatever. You know what I mean.

But only if you were to use a knife. To be stabbed to death would be the ultimate enjoyment.

Well, what do you know? A knife. You've got a knife. Goodie. Now you can rush right over here and do me a huuuuuge solid by planting that sucker right into my chest. Go on. Do it. Right now. Stick me right in the chest and watch me bleed out. That sounds fantastic.

(Pause.)

No, really. I loooooove being stabbed over and over and over. It's fan-fricking-tastic.

(Acts like he's truly pondering his next thought.) Now, a gun, on the other hand, would certainly be terrifying. I don't think I could handle it if you were to be pointing a gun at me. No, sir. Not in any way.

(Pause.)

(Mock horror.) What? Oh, how could I have forgotten that you have a gun on you at all times. Oh, nooooo. What ever shall I do? If you were to simply shoot me in the head with that gun, I'd never get the pleasure of the knife in my chest. And I really, REALLY wanted the knife in my...

(Optional SFX: Single gun shot.)

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up.) It worked. Oh, thank God. That was a much easier transition. Now to figure out how to repeat that while working towards a solution to this...

(Startled realization.) Hey. You. You're holding a gun.

(Pause.)

(Annoyance.) Yes, yes, yes, you're going to kill me. I've heard it a hundred times before. Who cares?

(Genuinely curious.) But... the gun. That's new. You've never had the gun out before.

Holy crap! I'm able to change the starting parameters.

(Pause.)

No, I don't mean that you've never had it out in the lab before. What I meant was that you've always had the...

(Catching himself.) You know what. That's exactly what I meant. You've never had the gun out before in the lab. That's too bad. You should be brandishing weapons more often from now on.

(Pause.)

Frightened? Why would I be frightened? Weapons are awesome. If company policy allowed it, I'd put weapons in the break room for people to use on each other at lunch time. Very relaxing.

(Pause.)

You think I'm joking? Point your gun at me right now. Go ahead. Do it.

(Pause.)

There you go. It's pointed right at my head. Do I look frightened to you?

(Pause.)

That's right, because I'm not. Pull the trigger. What do I care? It's not only not frightening, It'd be fun. A good murder from time to time is exhilarating.

But you want to know what really terrifies me? Seeing the readouts on that panel behind you. Thank God you're standing in the way. You've been in the perfect position to keep me from seeing those figures for quite some time now. Thank you so much for that. It proves you care about me.

(Pause.)

(Acting concerned.) Hey, hey, what do you think you're doing? I just told you to stand still so I couldn't see what was behind you. Don't you move to the side.

Heeeeeeey. Come on now. You stay put.

(Acting increasingly frightened.) What are you doing? Why do you hate me? Don't keep moving. I'm going to see the monitor if you keep doing that. NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

(Quickly, calmly, rationally.) Finally, I can see what's going on.

(Alarmed.) Holy crap on a cracker, the system is fully functioning and I mean fully functioning. We should only have it up to twenty percent functionality at most. Most levels are up to 40 percent and the amygdala levels are past 80.

(Confused.) But, with the levels as they are, you should still only be able to read my thoughts. You shouldn't be affected by them. So why...

Huh? What?

(Brief pause.)

(Mock offense and fear.) Not at all. How dare you suggest such a thing. I'm not faking terror. I'm definitely terrified by those readings. Did you see? The Amygdala readings are hugely, nay, terrifyingly predominant, followed by the hypothalamus, limbic cortex, and precuneus readings. Doesn't that scare you?

(Pause.)

(Grasping at straws.) I am NOT trying to trick you. I love being murdered. It's those readings that freak me out.

(Realization.) Wait. It really is those readings that freak me out. The amygdala is the part of the brain that controls fear and anger. If that's off the charts, that could be what's causing this surge of hatred in you and a desire to feel my fear.

(Happily.) That could be it. The explosion, or whatever caused it, could have influenced our test somehow. Now we're getting somewhere.

(Irritated.) No, stop. You don't have to raise your weapon. Ok, I was trying to trick you, but I was making progress.

Aw, hell.

(Optional SFX: Single gunshot.)

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up. Apathetically.) Huh? Oh, hi. What's up?

(Pause.)

Yeah? So what about it?

(Pause.)

No. I'm not wondering why I'm tied up right now. Why? Should I be concerned?

(Pause.)

I'll grant you that it's never happened before... as far as you know.. but... I don't know, it just doesn't feel like that big of a deal. Does it to you?

(Pause.)

Duh. Of course it was you. Who else is here to tie me up.

(Pause.)

No, that doesn't make me afraid of you.

Look, I'm a little tired after what just happened here. I'm going to close my eyes and rest for a bit, so unless you've got anything new to add to this picture...

(Rolling his eyes.) Ooooh, a gun.

Yeah. Don't care.

(Pause.)

You heard me. I couldn't care less.

(Pause.)

A knife. I have to admit, that does change things. Now I care even less.

(Pause.)

That's right. That's what I said. When I told you that I couldn't care less when you had a gun, I was wrong. I should have said that I could care less. There was one thing I couldn't care less about and it was you holding a knife. Can I go to sleep now?

(Pause.)

No, I'm not going to tell you what would terrify me. What kind of idiot do you think I am? You're obviously looking for that information in order to use it against me for some reason. Why would I tell you that? What reason could I possibly have to tell you that reducing the amygdala levels is the most frightening thing I can imagine?

(Acting like he's fallen for her trap.) Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. You tricked me. Ignore what you heard. I'm not afraid of that at all. You turn back around and face me. Don't you go near that console with that wicked grin of yours.

Hey! Stop it right now! Don't you adjust those levels. DON'T YOU ADJUST...

(Pause.)

Well, I'll be. You did it. You lowered them. I can see it in your eyes. You're different now.

So... do you still want to kill me?

(Pause.)

(With overwhelming relief.) Oh God. Oh, thank God. You're back. You're back to normal. That was it. My anger for myself was bleeding into you and infecting you. With the amygdala input heightened for some reason, you were feeding off of my anger and fear.

(Pause.)

Yes, God, yes. I was getting so annoyed with being killed so often.

(Pause.)

That's right. Annoyed.

(Pause.)

Well, I was terrified at first. I'm honestly very surprised at how quickly it became a simple irritation. Immortality kind of sucks, honestly.

(Pause.)

I'm sorry. I know I'm not making any sense. You see, I've been stuck in a... you know what, let's discuss it once you get me out of these binds. Undo me and we'll figure out together what's been going on.

(Pause.)

No? What do you mean, "no"? Why not?

(Suddenly afraid.) Oh, God. Have you been deceiving me? Do you still want to kill me?

(Pause.)

(Relieved, but confused.) Then let me go. Why won't you just untie me?

(Pause.)

Come again. Say what now? I can't hear you very well. Why are you talking like that?

(Pause.)

Like that. That right there. With two voices. It's like you're two different people all of a sudden. I'm only picking up a couple of words here and there because of it. Collection. Protect. Forever. You're sounding a little crazy.

(Brief pause.)

(Startled as listener suddenly loses it.) WHOA! Calm down. I obviously struck a nerve.

(Pause.)

Ok, I got it. Ixnay on the azy-cray. You're not crazy.

(Catching himself.) SORRY! I got it. Don't use that word. Everything's cool. The bloodshot eyes and piercing scowl are totally normal and not in any way freaking me out right now.

Hey, what are you doing? You're looking for something. Untie me, tell me what it is, and we can look together.

(Pause.)

What are you doing with that?

(Pause.)

Of course I know what that is. That's the chloroform we used for plasmid DNA extraction in phase 3. What are you doing with it now?

(Pause.)

Knock me out? Take me home to protect me? That doesn't make any sense. How would you get my body out of the building without anybody noticing?

Why am I concerning myself with the logistics of a kidnapping? The point is this isn't you. Something else must still be off. Let's just get these things off of our heads and then see how we're feeling.

(Brief pause.)

Whoa there, girl. Still a bad idea to suggest removing the helmets apparently.

What are you doing? Don't chloroform me. We need to figure mmmppphhh
mmmmhhhhmmhhhhm. (Or any muffled sound. Quickly fade to unconscious.)

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up.) Great. Now I've got that to deal with. I shouldn't complain. It's a lot nicer than a knife to the chest or a bullet to the brain. And we're definitely moving in the right direction.

(Surprised.) Hey, whoa there. Boy, this time you just came rushing up to me from out of nowhere.

Hey, what are you doing? Get your finger out of my ear. Why are you checking my head? No, my legs are fine. What's going on?

Oh, that's right. You're starting this round with the amygdala levels lowered. You don't want to protect me with my death, you just want to protect me.

(Pause.)

No, I wasn't wounded by the explosion. At least, I don't think I was. Come to think of it, I haven't stopped to consider that yet. Maybe I was. I guess I don't know.

WHOOOP! Whoa there. No need to start undoing my pants. That is definitely fine, really. I'm fine. I feel good. No injuries.

(Surprise.) Wow. Hey, this is... this is actually kind of nice. I wasn't expecting a hug. Not after the time jumps where you tried to kill me. I have to say, this is vastly preferable.

(Pause.)

Oh, that's right. It slipped my mind that you don't know what's going on. Yeah, I did say time jump. I'm not sure how to say this, but we've been reliving the same few moments over and over and over again, only I'm the only one that remembers what's happening. You reset every time.

I realize that sounds ridiculous, but...

(Brief pause.)

Oh. Wow. You just accepted me at my word without any consideration of how crazy that sounded.

(Pause.)

Uh oh. The second voice is back. Did I trigger that when I said, "crazy."

Whoops. Sorry. I didn't mean to say it again.

(Pause.)

Ok, slow up a bit. Calm down. Let's go back to the you that was doting over me and wanting to make sure I was all right.

There we go. That's better. Feeling good?

(Pause.)

Good. You've definitely got a couple of you in there in this particular series of time jumps.

(Pause.)

Yes, series. I'm smart enough to know that I'm not going to solve this in one shot.

Anyway, which one am I speaking to now? Smeagol or Gollum?

(Pause.)

Yes, that's right, I said "time jump." If you want to stay focused on that for the moment, I'm good with that even if I am talking to the Joker right now instead of Batman. I don't know how, but the same moment in time...

(Excited realization.) Time. Oh, my God. Section 31. They're working with time. Something must have gone very wrong.

(Somber realization.) Oh no.

(Pause.)

Well, what if something didn't go wrong? What if something went very right? What if we're their test subjects?

(Pause.)

Think about it. I seem to be the only one that realizes what's going on each time. How could that be unless I was the focal point of the experiment, and the odds of that happening accidentally are...

HEY! WAIT A SECOND! No, no, no. There's no need to go kill everyone in section 31 to protect me. Put the gun and the knife away and come back to me.

(Pause.)

No, I'm ok. I'm grateful that you want to protect me, really, I am, but we don't know that they're responsible. What if they're just as much the victims of this as we are?

(Pause.)

Yes, you can take that chance. Come back. NO, COME BACK!

Awwwww, dammit. She's gone. And it only just now occurred to me that it might be this thing on my head that's making it so I'm the only one aware of what's going on with each reset. Double dammit.

On that note, just to play it safe I should probably stop any further attempts to remove these headsets until I know for sure. Don't want to find out that death is permanent the hard way.

Now what am I gonna do? I'm still tied to this chair. (Sounds of struggling.) No good. She tied me good and tight. I'm not going to get free, at least not any time soon.

Ok, Melvin, you can't get out so use this time to think. If sector 31 is doing this to us intentionally or unintentionally and she kills them, they will just come back once we reset.

But what if we don't reset? What if they stay dead? We only reset if I die. At least, that's the way it appears. I've died every single time.

No. That's not true. I didn't die last time. I was merely rendered unconscious by the chloroform. So, is the reset triggered by my losing consciousness or is that a coincidence?

(Optional SFX: If you used a growing energy sound earlier right before the explosion happened, use the same thing here. It can culminate at any time to get to the next time jump.)

Hey, what's that humming? It's a growing energy source of some kind. It sounds just like...

Oh no. We're resetting, aren't we. Oh well. I guess that proves that it's not connected to me anyway.

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up.) Hey. I'm back. You're back. Are both of you back or are we down to one?

(Pause.)

Both of you it is. Apparently, you either didn't manage to kill anyone in sector 31 or that doesn't affect our situation in the slightest.

(Pause.)

Sorry, I'm suffering through a series of time jumps where I'm the only one that remembers what happened in the previous iteration of my own existence.

(Pause.)

Yeah. Wild, isn't it?

Thank God you believe me so easily in the psychotic stage.

(Pause.)

Ok, Harley Quinn, chill out. You ARE psychotic, but that's ok. You're my psychotic. You want to protect me from whatever's trying to hurt me, and you know what? I'm on board. Protect away.

(Pause.)

Why did you feel it necessary to do that?

(Pause.)

Yes, I said, "Protect away," but in what way was that tray trying to hurt me? Why did you feel the need to fling it across the room?

Hey, you know something, these ropes are trying to hurt me. Why don't you remove them?

(Pause.)

I see the same Brer Rabbit reverse psychology bit isn't going to work anymore. You've become too rational and calculated for that. Aaaaaaand, you're still intent on keeping me for yourself.

Which, I've gotta say, is actually a little endearing.

Oh, God. Am I so desiring you that I'm ok with being your kidnap victim just to have you?

Ah, well. I can ponder that later. For now, tell you what. Mr. Hyde, may I please speak with Dr. Jekyll for the moment?

(Pause.)

Yes, it would be an absolutely wonderful way to protect me.

(Pause.)

Thank you.

Ok, now listen carefully. I think enough of the analytical, self-controlled scientist is in there that I can tell this to you straight, and since it's the right thing to do for me, it will also satisfy the part of you that really wants to keep me safe.

The control panel, you see the readings on it?

(Pause.)

Good. Now, the amygdala levels are reading same as everything else, but we're going to try lowering them some more.

(Pause.)

Yes, some more. Remember? Time loop. We've done this once before. You lowered them for me once and it helped. Let's do it again.

(Pause.)

Well, the first time it helped when you ceased to be a murderous fiend that was trying to protect me by killing me, which you succeeded at doing several times.

(Pause.)

That's what I said. You either shot or stabbed me so many times I...

(Fearfully consoling.) No, no, no. It's ok. Time loop. I lived each time. It wasn't truly fatal. You don't have to cry. You didn't really hurt me.

(Sarcastic annoyance.) Not for a lack of trying.

Oh, why do I have to say exactly the wrong thing every time?

Put the gun away. No! Stop! Don't...

(Optional SFX: single gunshot.)

Aaaaaaaand, that's just fantastic. You shot yourself in the head. And now I have to wait until we reset again to get you back.

(Pause.)

Ugh. Come on. Do they really take this long?

(Pause.)

Oh, crud. Her blood is moving towards my shoes.

(Pause.)

It strikes me that I should be a lot more emotional about this. Listen, I know you can't hear me being dead and all, but don't take my lack of sorrow as an indication that I don't care about you. I do. I'd be horrified and devastated if it were real, but now... well, it feels like I'm aware that you're just trying to prank me.

Still, you literally just took a bullet for me.

I mean, you also fired the bullet so it's not exactly the same thing.

But, I don't know, the fact that you were so wanting to protect me that you took your own life. Is it strange that your death makes me happy? That is strange. Isn't it?

(Optional SFX: End of time loop energy hum begins.)

Oh, thank God. Here we go again. Let's see what we can accomplish this time around.

(PAUSE.)

(Waking.) Ok, let's try this again, shall we? I see you watching over me with concern. It's very good to see you up and alive, by the way.

Anyway, for the sake of speeding this along, let me get right to the point. We're stuck in a time loop in which I seem to be the only one that remembers what happened in the previous trips through it. You've been helping me try to figure out how to get out of it, to which point we have made some progress. We're further along from where we began. And absolutely no bad thing has tried to harm me in any way during each jump. The only thing that's harming me now is the jump itself. Got it?

(Pause.)

Great. So, if you could just get to that control panel and lower the amygdala levels all the way down, that would be fantastic for me.

(Pause.)

You did it. Wonderful. We might get through these next few segments a lot more quickly.

Now that it's off, all we have left is the hypothalamus, and then the combination of the limbic cortex and the precuneus. Next let's shut down the...

Hey, what are you doing? Get back to the control panel. Why are you kneeling in front of me?

(Pause.)

(Surprised.) I'm what?

(Pause.)

(Swooning.) The most handsome? Your treasure? (Voice quivers as he's romantically overwhelmed.)

Oh boy. We've removed any anger and fear altogether. What's left is pure happiness and love at extremely high levels. You're being driven by a never-ending dopamine rush. Your happy feelings of loving me are pushing you forward and you have no internal fear barriers that might keep those in check. The combination is causing you to do whatever you want to keep it that way.

(Pause.)

You'll never let me go again? I can't say that I'm opposed, but first, untie these ropes so I can...

(Brief pause.)

No, I don't want to go anywhere.

(Pause.)

No, you don't have to make me even more secure. I'm secure enough.

Duct tape? Why are you wrapping me up with that?

(Pause.)

But I don't want to get away. Look, we're wasting time. You need to get to the control panel before...

(Optional SFX: Time jump energy sound begins growing again.)

...before that. Oh, well. We started with horror. We moved to psychotic. Now we're at obsessive. Let's see what we can get to next time.

(PAUSE.)

(Waking.) Ok, I'm back.

WHOA! Wow, you were fast getting to me this time. You really are obsessive.

Wait a minute. Before you pick up the duct tape again, hear me out.

(Pause.)

I know you need me more than anything. Believe me, I know. But if you don't do as I say, you can't have me.

(Pause.)

I mean it. I'm living in a time loop. We both are. We keep resetting back to this moment, but I'm the only one that's aware of it. If you tie me up further, if you try to take me home and keep me forever, it's not going to work. We're only going to reset back to this moment. You'll continue to try over and over and over, and you'll keep failing over and over and over. To keep that from happening, we have to stop the loop.

(Pause.)

Wow, you're really on it and ready to go. You accept me at my word so easily in these stages.

Ok, now that the connection to the amygdala is all the way off, you need to lower the levels drawing from the limbic cortex, precuneus, and hypothalamus together, but not all the way. Let's drop them slowly to make sure there's not too great of a shock to your system.

(Pause.)

How much did you lower them? Halfway?

(Pause.)

Good. Good. We should take just a minute to get you acclimated to this setting before moving on. I want to make sure nothing harmful happens to you by moving too far at once. How do you feel?

(Pause.)

Of course I'm concerned. You... mean a lot to me.

Hey, are you... are you crying? What's wrong? Did it harm you? Are you hurt anywhere?

(Pause.)

Well, if not, then why are you...?

Hey, wait a minute. Why are you coming back towards me so aggressively? Did we miscalculate? Are you angry?

(Long held kiss.)

(Overwhelmed.) Oh my. That was... I've been wanting to do that for a long time now.

(Pause.)

(Laugh/cry.) Yes, really. I was so afraid that you'd reject me if I said anything.

(Pause.)

(Overwhelmed.) Oh, wow. You say the most beautiful things. I didn't realize you had it in you. Your words are pure poetry. This is so magical.

(Kiss followed by a swooning sigh followed by several deep breaths.)

(Reluctantly.) Look, I REALLY don't want to say this right now, but... this... might not be you. We lowered the intensity of my happiness and love areas of the brain, but we're still in them. You're being influenced by... by my love for you.

(Pause.)

Trust me, I do want to believe that. I want to believe that it's really you, but... untie me. Let me go.

(Pause.)

You see. You still don't want to let me out. The same area of the brain also houses anxiety. And believe me when I say that my anxiety where it concerns you was on full alert before we began today's test. You're too afraid to let me go because you're too afraid you'll lose me... because I'm too afraid that once we lower all of the levels... I'll lose you.

(Pause.)

Thank you. I want to believe that.

(Kiss.)

No, stop.

(Pause.)

I do love it. I do. But it's not real. It can't be.

(Pause.)

No, please stop pleading with me to let you love me. We need to... we just have to...

Aw, hell. I've died so many times already. I've earned this. I can spend just one loop with you.

(Several kisses.)

Undo the ropes.

(Kisses.)

I'm not going anywhere. I want to hold you. I want to love you back properly.

(Kisses.)

There. At last, I'm free. I finally get to...

(Interrupted by the hum of the energy that will reset them.)

YOU'VE GOT TO BE FREAKING KIDDING ME! NOW!?! I CANNOT CATCH A BREAK! JUST ONCE, I'D LIKE TO...

(PAUSE.)

(Waking up. Deep sigh, then with a melancholy tone.) 12:31. We've reset. And I'm untied.

(Brief pause.)

There you are.

(Soft, somewhat mournful laugh.) Hey. It's alright. I'm not going anywhere.

(Pause.)

No, I told you I'm not going anywhere. I'm happy to just hold you for a minute. I want to stay like this for a while here in your arms. Go ahead and grip me tightly. Make sure I don't leave you.

(Pause.)

I know. I know you mean it. And... I love you too. Even if it's just the device making you say that right now, I mean it. And once it comes off, I'll still mean it.

I didn't think it would take all of this to get me to confess, but I'm glad we're finally here. And, even if it's not really you, I'm glad you're holding me back.

(Soft kiss.)

I've loved you for months. I was just too afraid to say it. I was always too afraid.

(Pause.)

Afraid you wouldn't love me back. Afraid you would refuse to hold me like you are now. Afraid for a lot of things.

(Pause.)

No, you're wrong there. I haven't overcome my fears just yet. You see, I'm not really confessing to you right now. Not the real you anyway. I won't have overcome my fears and it won't be a true confession until after I do this.

(Optional sound of a lever being pulled or a button being clicked or whatever you think is appropriate to shut the machine off.)

(Somber.) The system is off. You can finally remove the receiver. I'm taking off the transmitter. It's over.

Now it's just you. (Sigh.) It's just little ole amazingly perfect you.

(Pause.)

Yes, you definitely deserve an explanation. You deserve a lot of things. Most of all, you deserve this.

(Kiss.)

You already know what I'm going to say, but before I say it again, I'm sorry I couldn't say it before. I'm sorry I let my fears get the better of me.

Believe me, I am truly sorry on that note. If I had managed to banish my fears before today, maybe we could have been making out over and over and over. That loop would have been much more enjoyable, but admittedly much harder to have tried to stop since I wouldn't have wanted to try.

(Pause.)

Loop. Yes, I'm sorry, I got off track. Like I said, you deserve an explanation, but that will come later. Right now, I just need to tell you, the real you, a you that's not being influenced by any of my fears, or my self-loathing, or my anxiety, or my... longing... that I love you. I've loved you for a while now. I should have said it before, but here, right now, I'm telling you absolutely that I love you.

(Deep breath.) I know it's not fair to expect an answer right away from you, given all we've just been through and the fact that this is catching you by surprise right now, but...

(Kiss.)

(Lost in a dreamy state.) Hmmmm?

(Pause.)

Was I going to say something else? I don't remember.

(Pause.)

No, I don't think I need to remember. Just tell me you love me again. I've waited so long to hear it.

(Kiss.)

I think it's about time that we...

(Alert.) Wait a second. Time. Listen. Do you hear it?

(Pause.)

Me neither. I don't hear anything. No energy surge. No power build-up. Nothing.

(Pause.)

I'll tell you later what that means. But as I was about to say, I think that you and I deserve to take the rest of the day off. In fact, we need the rest of the week.

(Pause.)

Nope. No buts. You're coming with me. I'll tie you up if I have to. It would only be fair after all of the times that I was...

No, I shouldn't go there yet.

Come with me. I've got a lot to tell you and even more to show you. And now, I've got all the time in the world to do it.