

Mark Owens carefully considered the two options he had at hand. One was blunt. It was simple. It showed the answer. Although, with this decision, he would never have to deal with the consequences of the aftermath. It was death. But it was selfless, or so he thought. It was compassion. But it was also cruelty. It was the contradictory end that would start a new beginning.

The other—it was complicated. It showed the answer, but Mark was unable to fathom the consequences. It was life. But it was death. However, this death would be arguably worse. It would be an existence, but it would be devoid of any warmth, any kindness. Nothing would be able to fill the pit of death that would grow to the core of his soul. Every breath would be pain, and every heartbeat, daggers piercing blood through his veins. It would be hurt. But it would only hurt himself.

The first decision would hurt who he loved most in the entire world, who he loved most his entire life. It would hurt *her*. It would be a death for her; that was decided under the assumption that *she* would live. *Would this decision ultimately create death for her in life?* Yes. Mark had thought that. And it would.

As far as he was concerned, both decisions were death. Ironically they both were life as well. In both cases, only one would live. In both cases, the one living would have to live forever knowing that they would be without the one they loved most. And *that* was death.

Mark shifted in his chair uncomfortably, hoping that by uncrossing his legs he would improve circulation by supplying blood to his brain—maybe it would make it work. There had to be another option he didn't think of. But Mark couldn't think of one. The room was chillingly cold, and he wondered how anyone could ever stand places like this: dim lighting, though it was two in the morning, poor air supply, uncomfortable chairs, and the failing heart monitor that constantly reminded him of why he was here. Mark shifted again stretching his back as he heard a relieving crack in his aching bones.

He was only nineteen. But for the past few days he felt like he had aged decades. The dark circles under his eyes and his pale complexion emphasized this sentiment. He felt numb as though his eyes had glazed over. Nothing could have happened around him that would have caused him to take his eyes off of the woman standing in front of him. Jenny could have stormed

in blaring that the nation was under a terrorist attack; Mark wouldn't move his gaze or even take a breath in response to the supposedly shocking news. If that did happen, it would not surprise Jenny. He had never left the woman's side in the five days she had been there.

Jenny was a sweet girl who recently graduated at the local nursing school. She was awkward and had not the slightest idea at how to comfort Mark with this sort of *thing*. To be honest, the whole thing confused her. To her, she only saw one option. Jenny was a very compassionate and beautiful young woman but she lacked insight into consequences. She never imagined what *the woman* would think of Mark's decision. She never believed how it actually would *kill* her. And she would never know.

Mark was sitting in his uncomfortable brown chair with a tacky printed cushion on the wooden seat. His arms were propped on his legs as if he was watching something miraculous happen. His eyes were glazed over, staring, producing the same effect. His once glistening dark hair now looked grungy and worn. No doubt he had not left the room often, only when Jenny had made him, and it was hard enough the first time, so she had stopped fighting him.

His muscular figure looked sluggish and defeated, which was not a stance he usually wore, especially not the first time Jenny had seen him walk in the building. Jenny's tiny figure bounced over toward him, it was hard for her to stop being perky, one of the reasons she was never good at comforting those in grief. Her short blonde hair effortlessly glided past her shoulder as she grew closer to him. She knelt down. She knew he would never look up to her, removing his eyes from *her*, so she knelt close to the ground where she could at least see his eyes. That way, at least she would feel like he could hear her under his dejection.

"It's almost two-thirty in the morning, Mark." She said, gently grabbing his arm. He offered no reception of her suggestion or touch, any more than one would look at the speck of dust that landed on their arm.

She looked into his eyes, and saw what she thought were tears forming.

Excusing herself she said, "Well, I'll get you some coffee." Standing up she tilted her head at him for a sign of approval. "Two teaspoons of sugar?" she continued.

He closed his eyes in response, but it was the liveliest expression she had seen on him in days.

“Okay.” She exhaled, grateful knowing he wanted completely dead inside.

When she left, Mark knew he had a decision to make. That was the first time anyone had suggestively informed him of the time. The understanding was that he might leave to return to his home and collect his thoughts. He had thought about it—wished for it even. But he never did.

Once Mark had fallen asleep and dreamt of them together. He was happy and so was *she*. It was before all of *this* had happened. It wasn't even significant. They were both watching TV together on their old ash brown leather couch. They were discussing how American Idol had “gone downhill” in recent years. And they discussed their distaste for their current cable provider. They weren't laughing and they weren't even smiling. But Mark *loved* this dream. For the first time in almost a week, life felt normal to him. He wasn't depressed; he wasn't strained, or worried. But he was normal.

When he awoke from the dream he had felt more overwhelmed and shattered than prior to falling asleep. It was because he knew that *this* was reality and he needed to make a decision.

He was already gone before a naively confused Jenny walked into the room with two coffees.

Showing no signs of life he had shown since the news, Mark achingly sobbed as he drove himself home. He was in no condition to drive, and it was no surprise to him when he nearly swerved into the other lane numerous times. But given the odd hour of night, he had only ever seen two cars the entire trip home. He was so disoriented from his raging sobbing fit, that he hasn't even remembered unlocking the door and walking upstairs to *her* room. Soon he found himself opening her cherry-stained night stand and opening her diary. He flipped through and read her accountants of their days together—what she thought about how he looked one day, or what he said other day. But most of it was the same, that she loved him above all else and absolutely found him to be the center of her world. She had always said that she never wanted another man in her life because he was and would always be her one and only Prince Charming.

He could still hear her angelic soft whispers that matched her sweet angelic face. And he loved her so much it hurt. She was a god-send. And with that impression, Mark had imagined her beautiful in death, such that she would never decompose nor would her body be tainted after it was placed deep below the earth. As he continued to flip through her diary, and her recollections,

and her pictures, he began to cry harder than he had ever in his life. He felt a pain stronger than any emotion he had ever felt in his entire life, something that devoured his being and consumed his soul. He read over and over again about how much she loved him and how she would do anything for him, but over and over again she stated that she wanted him to be strong for her in tough times when she couldn't be tough. And as the diary entries grew closer and closer to present day, her wishes grew more and more noticeable.

He knew what she meant and she meant his biggest fear. She meant the second option. And this would kill him. He lay down on her bed, wailing as he stopped attempting to contain his cries. Squeezing his body tighter together he shut his eyes closed tight remembering everything he had with her. It hurt—knowing he would never have new memories again.

After composing himself he grabbed a picture from her mirror and left the house, without making an attempt to wipe his face but merely collecting his composure.

Picture in hand he entered the building. Soon he entered *her* room. Jenny saw him and nodded her head. Slowly he sat on *her* bed and thought of what to tell her, what to confess to her, what to admit to her. But eventually, he developed into his mind what he wanted to say.

“I know you love me.” He started. “And I love you, but what you’re asking me to do is so hard.” He looked at the ground. “And if you weren’t in the position you were in, I would be so pissed at you right now. I wouldn’t talk to you for weeks.” He looked back to her with tears in his eyes and said, “But I know I’m not blessed for that kind of time.” Clutching her hand harder he continued, “So I’ll do what you want but know that when I get *my* time for *this* you’d better apologize for putting me through this hell.” He forcefully chuckled. “But I love you more than anything, and I know I’ll never love another woman like you, never owe as much to another woman like you, and never contemplate giving my life for another woman like I did for you. Because death for you...is worth it. And I hate that you won’t let me do this.” He whispered, running a free hand through his hair. “Because I would do it! I’d do it all for you...because I love you.” He said with his voice rising, then lowering his voice again he said, “And I’d do what I’m about to do for you.” He left kissing her cheek. He nodded outwardly for Jenny to come in. Never releasing her hand, Mark stood up kissing her forehead and Jenny came in and watched him peacefully.

Squeezing his eyes tight he stood up and watched *her* face as Jenny injected the fluid. He felt *her* squeeze his hand and he put his hands over his eyes and started weeping as he dropped to his knees. He listened to *her* last breath as he groaned louder. Jenny was aghast as she dropped to her knees with him, wrapping her arms around him, as he convulsed and sobbed. After a few deep breaths he collected himself and stood pushing Jenny away with her arms still half open.

Staring at her arms palm up, he looked into her eyes and back to her hands before handing her the picture he so desperately clutched in his hands all this time. Taking the picture in her hand, she watched him leave much more subdued—destroyed than when he came in the first day.

Another nurse came in and asked how he was.

“He didn’t want to.” Jenny answered emotionless.

“The heartless bastard.” Answered the other nurse.

“No.” She paused before smiling as she replied. “He didn’t do it *because* of her.” The other nurse gave her a confused glance as Jenny continued. “No, I understand. He didn’t want her to have to live without him. He’d rather suffer without her than have her suffer without him.” She gasped. “It’s really quite—it’s quite beautiful.” She stuttered.

“Well what do you have there?”

“A picture.” She hadn’t examined the picture before until now. “I guess it’s of them together many years ago.” Flipping it over she noticed words written in cursive, a boy’s hand-writing.

“What’s it say?” The other nurse inquired.

““An angel on earth, the angel that created me...my mother.””