

It was death he feared most. Everyday he would wake up thinking he was an inch closer to the end of his life. He had managed to make his apartment risk free, so that at least it was the only place he would always be safe. He didn't own any sharp objects like knives or scissors, and because of that he bought all of his food already cut into chewable pieces, not very big either because he could choke on them. He slept on a mattress on the floor to avoid falling from the bed and hitting his head. All of his floors were carpeted, except the kitchen and bathroom, so that if by any chance he tripped on something, his fall would be buffered by the three inches of wool. In the kitchen he wore the socks he never took off, the childlike ones that had rubber circles on the soles of the feet to avoid slipping, and to be sure, he also wore shoes that had the same anti-slipping mechanism. In the bathroom, in front of his bathtub, which he had never filled for he could drown in it, were five towel mats one after the other placed one footstep apart until they reached the door. The bathtub's floor was covered with rubber mats that had holes for the water to go through, and he had built in two drains so there was no water accumulation.

His favorite TV show was "*One Hundred Ways to Die*" not because he enjoyed seeing the absurdity of the bad luck someone had to have in order to be destined to such deaths, but rather because he saw it as an instructive show that helped him improve his apartment and lifestyle to avoid mortality. He didn't have any pets, friends, or family members who he kept in touch with. Pets could turn suddenly aggressive and kill him, since he only went out of his apartment when it was completely crucial, he hadn't met

anyone to consider a friend, and his family got tired of all of the conditions he placed on everything; he was all alone.

Days came and went in which all he did was work on his computer. He worked by writing a blog in which he talked about literally everything: from comic books, TV shows, and literature to physics and fun facts. He had started the blog around the same time his fear towards death grew stronger and he couldn't leave the house. As a result, he wrote about death statistics and dangerous things to avoid, and it reached so many ratings he decided to live off it. The advertisements asking to appear on the blog paid him very good money, and that's how he didn't even have to leave the apartment to make a living.

Tuesday night, he was getting ready to go to bed, brushing his teeth in the bathroom and washing his face. He looked up at the mirror at his own reflection, his hazel curls wild on his head, his chestnut eyes hard under his bushy eyebrows in a frown, his face completely shaved smooth, and his lips chapped from the air conditioner. When he looked at himself he thought he could even pass as a teenager, sixteen maybe, judging not only by his face, but also because of his lanky body that seemed to lack even the slightest hint of testosterone; his Marvel Iron Man t-shirt seemed to be hanging from his bony shoulders, and his matching pajama pants were so loose it seemed that his legs were only made of bone without any flesh. Who would guess he was fourteen years older than what he appeared to be.

Suddenly, an alarm went off, but not an alarm clock, it was a loud ringing. He didn't know what to do, was he in danger? The loud, frantic ringing seemed to increase in intensity, numbing his ears and annoying him greatly. His heart began pounding in his chest, chills ran throughout his

whole body, and he began feeling the waves of anxiety that, just like the ocean tide, went up down his windpipe making it hard for him to catch a breath.

He felt his mind take him back to the time when it all started. He was thirteen and was skipping school so he could buy a videogame that was just being released. Just like this time, there were loud noises around him, not alarms going off, but sirens and screaming. He remembered the thousands of people stampeding down the streets like cattle, not minding what they stepped over or what they left behind. He remembered the thick smoke filling the atmosphere and sky, as well as everyone's lungs, which mixed up with the screaming and sobbing resulted in frantic coughing and choking. He remembered being paralyzed in the middle of the street, all his senses completely numb except for his sight, which was focused on the two tallest buildings of New York City being knocked down into debris by the two planes. After that, there was no going back; he fell into the deep pitch of fear, and never came out, regardless of how many times he was told to look for help. He never thought it was his problem, but the rest of the world who was sick with ignorance of just how close they could be to end of their existence.

Then, someone started pounding on the main door. He hurried, although not running, towards the door, carefully stepping on each towel mat on the floor, grabbing his bathrobe and putting it on, and then walking faster through the living room until he reached the door. The pounding increased progressively in strength and in frequency. He finally opened it up, and a tall, young, black haired woman in purple pajama plaid pants, a UCLA blue sweatshirt, and white slippers was standing in front of him with both a perplexed and frightened expression on her face.

"It's the fire alarm! Move, we have to evacuate the building!" she screamed.

"WHAT? This cannot be happening to me. Not today! I have to go grab my emergency kit, and I'm not wearing my safe clothes, and..."

"Move your butt out of this apartment if you don't want to suffocate," she commanded.

"Okay, but these clothes, as well as yours, could catch fire any second. Not to mention your shoes that are probably the most unsafe shoes on earth; you could trip on those things and break your legs," he blabbered.

The woman didn't hesitate one second and grabbed his bathrobe sleeve, pulling him forcefully out of the apartment and leading the way to the stairs. She didn't walk down the stairs as much as hopped them down, two and three at a time, while he hung on to the hand bar and carefully stepped on one at a time.

"I am trying to help you! Walk faster, we only have one story to go."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not going to compromise my survival by being reckless trying to save my life. That is completely absurd," he pointed out.

"As you wish, freak," she mumbled under her breath while jumping the final set of stairs.

When they reached the lobby, there were about forty people going out the door between the police cars, ambulances and fire trucks. They both walked out and stood outside the building on the opposite side of the street watching a cloud of smoke form between the darkness of the sky. The night breeze was frosty and smelled of smoke, while it brought along the dancing ashes.

His whole world stumbled down. He couldn't sleep in his apartment where his life was, where everything was just like he liked it; there were no risks, no worries, and everything was all measured out and foreseen. On the other hand, what was his life in that precise second? Uncertainty. Where was he going to sleep? Where was he going to eat? What was he going to eat? Where would he get money to get by? Should he call his family? Was he going to get sick without a coat on? There were a million questions popping into his mind, and he didn't have the answer to any of them. It was the first time in his whole planned out life, that what happened was not on schedule. Things were slipping out of his hands more than he could handle, just like he remembered the first time he went to the beach trying to grab a handful of sand and watching it slide through his fingers. He was standing in the middle of the street without a clue of what to do next, and completely vulnerable to death's sickle.

"Hey, neighbor. What's your name again?" the woman asked.

"Trevor. What's yours?"

"Annabel. Like Poe's poem," she said smirking.

"I hate that guy, all he could think about was death," Trevor alleged repulsed.

"Yeah, one could argue someone like that never truly lives. Anyway, let's go to the dinner or something, I'm starving."

"But that is like five blocks away, it's freezing, it's almost midnight, and I'm wearing a robe and pajamas..."

"Come on, Trevor, let's go," she said pulling on his sleeve and leading the way.

"Okay, Annabel Lee," Trevor grinned.