

P.C.C.

9,874,235 wakes up and lethargically walks to the bathroom. After finishing his morning routine, he heads back into his bedroom and to his closet where his Politically Correct Cop uniform hangs. He dresses capriciously and without conviction until he is adorned in grey from head to toe. He glances at his reflection to find a facsimile of his father. He quickly looks away.

He trudges into the kitchen and puts on a pot of coffee. Once it's done, he pours coffee into a decal-less coffee mug, and sips joylessly at it. As he sits at the table, eating his oatmeal, he looks over at the calendar. *Three weeks away from my 27th birthday.* He takes another sip of his coffee, with no changing result. He contemplates adding Jameson to it.

Once he finishes his breakfast, he grabs his gun. After double-checking to see if the safety is on, he holsters it. He considers taking another look in the mirror, but decides against it. *Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.* Before he leaves his apartment, he grabs his keys off of the 3,000,000-page tome *The Code of Conduct to Living in an Unoffending Society* that features all the laws he enforces, and that took him a full year to memorize. He swipes his daily reading for the train, and walks out of the apartment.

As he rides the subway train to work for his morning commute, he reads out of a joke book. He reads it every day because it's one of the few publications that is completely innocuous. Despite reading his favorite joke--"What's the difference between a Caucasian and an African-American man ordering food? Nothing—they're both people who have different genetics that caused them to have various traits."--he can't laugh, even smile, because if he reveals that he's happy, someone who is sad may take offense to it (and vice versa). Even if he is allowed to laugh, he wouldn't.

He looks up from his joke book. He stares at where the advertisements that used to decorate the cars would be, now replaced by arbitrary numbers. On one of the signs, it has 3,270. This reminds him of his impending birthday. Even though he knows his assigned friends—everyone is assigned three close friends and ten acquaintances as to not leave anyone friendless—will make his birthday celebration enjoyable, something else is bothering him. He remembers the day he was sworn in as a PCC...

“I’m proud of you, son.”

“Thanks, Dad,” he replies out of his half-smile.

“I always hoped you’d follow in my footsteps. Who knows? Maybe one day you’ll sit on the Council of Considerate Living like me. Wouldn’t that be great?”

“Yeah,” he says perfunctorily. His father hugs him, something that’s too pure to be confusing, and walks away. He watches his dad schmooze with other council members, but he looks away after a few seconds because his gaze is caught by the flowers blooming in the sun.

The subway rocks, and he snaps out of his daydream only to find a couple sitting across from him. The two sit there staring straight ahead, not giving any overt public displays of affection, but he’s been on the job long enough to see the tell-tale signs—knees rubbing together too often to be an accident and stolen glances are the two biggest ones. Because of his father’s and the original members of the Council of Considerate Living’s laws, you are matched with a partner of society’s choosing, one chosen by the Council. They choose arbitrarily between several options for mates: male, female, transgender, homosexual, animal, or personified inanimate object (once he arrested a man married to a garbage can because the man threw out a plastic bottle in it, which, obviously, is highly offensive to garbage receptacles worldwide). Even still, sometimes love does find a way into the pairing, and it has clearly in these two.

He remembers back when he was a boy and his father told him stories about what it was like to date before. “You used to have to go over to a stranger and strike up a conversation out of nothing! And you weren’t even guaranteed that the other person was interested in you, or even that they would be nice to you. Can you believe that? It was barbaric.” He never understood why it was barbaric, even without ever experiencing it himself. To him, it sounded exciting, like it was a game where the winner received the best possible prize.

He gets off the subway and walks out onto the street. Hundreds of people walk with their eyes carefully positioned halfway between looking down and looking straight ahead—
545,012.25: making eye contact with another person can be construed as cat-calling or harassment—and he snorts involuntary. Panicked, he looks around quickly to discover his gaff goes unnoticed.

“9,874,235, we have a 497,384.86 over on W 52nd and 10th Ave.”

“Copy, 10,523,909. I’m in the vicinity. I’ll head over and be there ASAP. Over.”

He walks leisurely the three blocks to reach the crime scene to find 10,523,909 leading it. A swell of pride rises in him, so he buries his head down and looks at the ground to avoid any outward signs of it being seen.

“9,874,235, can you help me?”

“Doesn’t seem like you need any help to me. You’ve got the caution tape up. You’ve secured the crowd not to contaminate the scene. You have officers trying to get witnesses to describe what happened. What else is there to do?” He wants to smile to show his protégé a job well done, but it’s against the law, so instead he leaves his statement hanging out there.

“That’s just it—one of the witnesses won’t talk to anyone. She’s being really stub...sorry...”

“Don’t worry about it. I see. Where is she? Maybe I can get some information from her?”

“She’s right over there,” and 10,523,909 points to a woman standing there, arms folded across her chest, and despite the fact that she and the cop are the same height, she appears to tower over him.

“I’ll...uh...see what I can do.”

As he is drawn to her long silken brown hair, with some covering a little of the left side of her face, he wonders how he’ll get her to talk. *I can threaten her by punishment of the law...but I’m sure all of the other officers already did that, and besides, with all of our resources devoted to politically-correct crimes, ones like obstruction of justice don’t get the time of day.* Her small tight lips, long pointy nose, plump cheeks, all of her, all reflect a rancor to the cop that’s badgering her, but he’s sure the other cop must not detect it.

“I’ll take it from here. Hello, I’m 9,874,235. And you are?”

“I’m 8,956,531.” Her voice is squeaky, yet he finds it adorable instantaneously. He is unsure how to respond.

He clears his throat. “Hello.”

He finds himself lingering too long and making eye contact. He comes to his senses and is about to look away when he discovers she’s staring back into his eyes, and he can see hints of the hatred she showed the other officer now focused on him. *I can arrest her right now! I’d have to arrest myself too. Maybe I should—I’m breaking the law.* But the laws are fuzzy to him right now. Her hazel, oval-shaped eyes cloud are all he knows. *I promise to uphold the laws of society where no person, regardless of color, creed, or gender, will be made to feel inferior to*

another through emotions, language, status, or any other way that the interpreter may construe as an attack against one's sensibility.

“Can you please tell me what you saw here today?”

“I didn't see anything. I had my eyes down the whole time.”

“Right. So you're telling me that you didn't see the perpetrator walk over to the victim and tell her that she looked nice today. Am I correct in assuming that?”

He has to look at her now, for official business. He sees a slight smile creeping up her face, but she's good enough not to make it too apparent. *I've dealt with a lot of Ists, but she may be the best at hiding her hatred for these rules.* In his mind, he's smiling too.

“That's what I'm saying.” Her arms stay crossed. He puts his hands down at his sides for a moment. He knows he should be thinking about what his next move is, but he isn't. A breeze blows most of her hair into her eyes and a bit into her mouth. He watches her struggle to fix it.

“Look, I don't...” He stops himself immediately. He lets out a long, deep breath. He rubs his eyes with his thumb and index finger. “Please just give me your number so I can contact you if there are any further questions we have. I know you probably won't answer them.”

He can see it in her eyes—she's laughing on the inside. After a few seconds, she unfolds her arms and she writes down her number on a sheet of paper. She gives it to him.

“Am I free to go now?” He nods in compliance, but before she leaves, he says, “Nice to meet you.” *202,001.05, a person cannot comment on whether or not it is a pleasure of painful experience meeting another person for fear of having conflicting ideas about it.* He watches her walk away.

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He sits at his desk, barely focusing on his cases. *I used to count how many perps a day I brought in. Now I can't even finish a damn report without losing my concentration.* Truthfully, he knows what's behind today's lack of productivity.

"9,874,235, what was with that woman? Why was she being so uncooperative?"

"She's an Ist, 10,523,909." He notices the blank expression on his protégé's face. "Ah, right—your first one. My first year on the job, we still saw a lot of them. I guess there aren't too many these days. Ists started out as your extremists that opposed the new laws when the original Council enacted them. You know, sexists, racists, you name it. I saw quite a few my first few years on the force."

"So what, they don't like the way our society is run?"

"When they first started showing up, my dad told me it was just ignorant people lashing out because they couldn't accept change."

"And what about now?"

"Now?" 9,874,235 searches for a way to make it make sense. "Who knows?"

10,523,909 nods his head, but 9,874,235 is sure he doesn't understand. "No matter what we do, it's never good enough, eh?"

9,874,235 lets a half-smile come across his face until 10,523,909 walks away. He sits back in his chair, stone-faced.

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He gets back to his apartment that night. He puts the keys on the book, goes to his kitchen, and makes himself some oatmeal. He has a shot of Jameson with it, but it does nothing to add to the taste. As he chews, he takes out her number and places it on the table, right in front of him. He finishes his meal and gets ready for bed.

He lies there for hours without sleeping. It's gnawing at him, but he's doing his best to fight it. He looks over at his clock—3:25AM. Impulsively, he gets up and walks to the kitchen. He picks up the number from the table. *It's late. What would I even say to her?*

But he wants to talk to her. Desperately.

So he calls.

After several rings, she answers, her voice laden with sleep. "Hello?"

"I'm sorry to be calling so late, but we spoke earlier today. I'm Officer 9,874,235."

There is a long pause before she finally says, "Yes?"

"It's urgent that we meet. It's about the case."

"Can we meet at a diner?"

"Actually, I was hoping we could meet at the park downtown. East 4th Street and 2nd Ave." *At this time of night, there's no chance of anyone overhearing us.*

"And this can't wait until tomorrow?"

"No."

After another long pause, she says, "Fine. See you in twenty minutes."

* * * *

He arrives there first and finds a bench. He's anxious, more nervous than his first day on the job. His legs are restless, and they won't stop shaking. The park is deserted, perfect for their meeting.

She walks toward him. He feels his breath leave his body, and, despite himself, he can't stop staring at her. "Thank you for coming." His words feel clumsy coming out of his mouth.

"Is it always necessary to meet witnesses at almost four in the morning?"

"No."

Another long pause. Even though they've become frequent in their encounters, he still hates them. "Then what am I doing here?"

"Tell me why..." She tilts her head to the side. *Look at her, pretending she doesn't understand the question. She's good.* "Why you're an Ist."

"You know why."

Then something strange, something that he hasn't seen a person do at him in public since he was a child, happens: she smiles. Yes, a law-breaking, lifetime jail sentence-inducing smile. His stomach churns, a sensation he's never felt before in his life. *Am I dying?*

If I arrested someone for breaking all the laws we are breaking, it would be a career-changing arrest. There aren't any promotions though, because that would mean that someone else feels insecure about working in a higher or lower position than another. *I could get an accommodation for exemplary performance,* and it almost makes him feel better because the accommodations are meaningless, because if one person is awarded one, everyone else gets one too.

"What's wrong? Your face blanched."

He doesn't understand what she means. This can lead to confusion--*and the law-breaking continues!*

"Are you OK?"

"I don't think so. As a matter of fact, I think I'm dying."

"Why? What is it?"

"My stomach...it's grown tight. I feel a bit weak."

She laughs. The two of them are being very brazen about their criminal activity, but he likes hearing her laugh. For some inexplicable reason, it brings him joy to see her happy.

“You’re not dying. Those are called *butterflies*.”

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The two sit on a park bench for hours, a very risky move, but 9,874,235 doesn’t care. In fact, he doesn’t even think about how dangerous it is to be having such an open and frank conversation in public now that it’s getting to be daytime. All he cares about is hearing her voice, because she makes sentences sound like songs.

He learns she’s an English teacher, a profession that typically has the most arrests. Usually he focuses on the negative effect language has on people, but listening to her talk shows him how people can make words work for them in a positive way. For him, it feels like a whole realm of possibilities has been introduced. *Statements can be made using synonyms, antonyms, whatever. She’s an artist!*

“What made you become a PCC?”

“I guess you can say that it’s my ‘life’s calling,’ but I never *thought* about doing something else.”

“What’s changed that?”

“You.”

“How? All I’ve done is tell you about myself.”

“Maybe that’s all I needed.”

Her smile makes him shiver, but he feels a warmth throughout his body that he’s never experienced. He leans toward her to kiss her, to feel her tiny lips against his. As he inches towards her, his heart pounds faster than it ever has. His hands tremble—he hasn’t felt nerves since his first week on the job—so he puts one on the park bench behind her to hide it and as a futile attempt to steady himself. She’s redolent of jasmine.

Is she noticing the same thing with me? Is she having all these sensations too? But he forgets quickly that as his lips are about to touch hers.

And then he hears yelling.

“Freeze! You’re both under arrest.”

He turns to see several Politically Correct Cops encircling the bench.

“9,874, 235, what are you doing?”

“10,523,909, we were just talking.”

“Just talking? We’ve been monitoring you for the past two hours—you’ve violated 32, 198 laws! You looked as if you were about to kiss her, so if we hadn’t stopped it, that would have been another. All through ‘just talking,’ eh? Let’s go, you two. You’re both under arrest.”

“No! Wait!” 9,874,235 stares at her for several seconds. He cannot bear the panic-stricken expression she has. He’s nauseated at the thought that he’s inflicting this upon her. He watches her ever-so slightly chew on her bottom lip.

“I did it. I threatened her life if she didn’t commit these acts with me. She’s innocent.”

“What are you doing?” she whispers. “We’re in this together.”

“No. I can’t let them hurt you.”

He rises to his feet and takes a step forward, away from her. He puts his hands out in front of him, and he waits to feel the opposite side of the handcuffs for the first time. 10,523,909 approaches him warily, and 9,874,235 can sense the reticence of his protégé.

“I surrender fully. I am ready to accept the consequences for my unlawfulness.”

He turns to look at 8,956,531. The color from her face is gone, and she is still aghast. He gives her a small nod to assuage her, maybe himself too, that it will be OK. 10,523,909 puts the

handcuffs on his wrists. He feels the cuffs clamp down on his wrist, and he feels an enormous amount of pressure now.

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He shares a jail cell with six other prisoners, despite that the cell only has two beds. Three sit on a bed, and the one benefit of this is that it keeps them all warm. Even though they all are in jail, none of them talk in order not to risk further exacerbating their charges. They all sit and stare straight ahead at the grey concrete wall. He counts each piece, over and over. He's gone over the wall at least 1,000 times, but each time brings no new revelations. Just grey, grey, grey.

"9,874,235, you're not supposed to be allowed visitors. I can get in deep trouble for this, but come with me. I can only give you 5 minutes. Make them count," 10,523,909 says.

9,874,235 walks out of his cell and follows 10,523,909 to the visiting room. The sensation to cry rises in him when he sees 8,956,531 sitting on the opposite side, the two separated by double-paned glass. She smiles meekly, but it's enough to bring brief comfort to him. "It's all I can do for you," says 10,523,909. The two shake hands. 9,874,235 sits down on his side of the glass and picks up the phone.

"I'm looking into finding you a lawyer. We'll try to beat this thing." He doesn't respond, and his face shows his downtrodden state. "I know there has to be *somebody* that can help."

"Look, I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I've been to these trials as a witness for the prosecution. I know how they work...but thank you for giving it a shot."

"You can't give up. Not now, after we *just* met."

"I'm not giving up. Actually, there is something you can do to help."

“Anything. Just name it.”

He searches for the way to say it—even asking for this he doesn’t know how to articulate it, which is why he knows she’s the only one who can do this. “I need you to help me write my closing argument. We only have a few minutes.”

“I can’t do that. I’m not a lawyer!”

“When was the last time you heard of a case a lawyer won? We both know that lawyers don’t have the ability to sway anyone because they’re handcuffed by the law. If they try to object to an argument, it’s against the law—opposing council may take offense to being disagreed with. If they try to question a witness, another crime—maybe a juror or a council member is upset at how aggressive the lawyer is being.

“But you, you can make them listen to my point with the power of language. Please say you’ll help me. We don’t have much time left.”

He tries to make eye contact with her, but she’s staring down at the ground. Suddenly he doesn’t notice how cold the jail is. His eyes are screaming for her to help him, if only she would look at him.

“I’ll do it.”

His eyes finally find hers, and at that moment, the pain in him is so acute that he can’t even think about anything else. He barely can get out the words “I wish I got to kiss you.”

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He is taken to the Council. The building where they hold court is a massive display of nothing, with no ostentatious columns or designs. It is an ominous, neutral grey building that features several thousand pews, all filled with people waiting to receive their sentences, and several hundred raised benches that seats the members of the council. The members consist of a

males and females for all forms of beings, races, and religion in order to make sure that every demographic is represented. He's witnessed the process in action as a PCC, and he knows first-hand that rendering decisions can take *years* for everyone's concerns to be addressed in order to pass a sentence.

"9,874,235, these charges against you are quite extensive. The only reason we haven't called for immediate action and are willing to hear your testimony is because of your father, 6,263,198. He was a great man. We used to be so proud of the work you did, because it continued his legacy. But *this!*" The Indian female, who is the first to preside over the proceedings—everyone in the council gets a turn--hits the list of charges with two fingers. "How can a Politically Correct Officer commit all these acts in a span of 2 hours? You were hired to uphold the law!"

"And I've done that for 6 years. I've enforced these rules without once questioning them, and, as my record shows, done so in an exemplary fashion. I've arrested over 138, 000 perpetrators in my career.

"But after today, I'm not sure I did a damn thing that was worth doing. No, I know that what I did, what we are doing, was and is wrong.

"When the Founding Fathers created the Bill of Rights, the first amendment they created was freedom of speech. These wise men saw it a necessity to a functioning society to have the ability to criticize, contradict, and call to action their government and fellow man. They understood that in order to hold people accountable, language was needed to express the degradation of society. This was the only way.

“But people warped the law’s intent. People used words to *oppress*. Epithets and slurs came into existence to enslave others. To marginalize those that didn’t live according to another’s beliefs. Whatever the reasons were.

“And they discovered words can hurt people more than armies ever could. Language can denigrate races and sexes in order to make them feel inferior. We used our ability to speak, a gift that was bestowed upon humans only, in a perverse way: to *hurt* others.

“But, you know, there’s something funny about it. Once society started clamping down on what it deemed politically incorrect, something else happened: some of the beauty of life was oppressed. Because without ever seeing examples of intolerance, we never see acceptance. Without ever allowing ignorance to be expressed, we never know true insight and understanding.

“We can’t hinder expression because someone else may not like it. How will people as individuals and society learn to grow if they are never challenged to understand another viewpoint? If we’re all allowed to only say what’s acceptable, then we’re only in neutral. We’re not living, but co-existing. We will never get to experience both the beauty and pain of life. Yes loss hurts, but it does because of *love*. The same thing with joy and sadness, and anything else. That’s what the Ists know and are fighting for. If we’re too preoccupied making sure that every single person won’t find what someone says or does offensive, no one will remember that life is all about taking risks. Unfortunately, those risks sometimes hurt people, but, as Isaac Newton’s Third Law of Motion argues, for every action there is a reaction, and we need to trust in people again that they’re smart enough to know the right reactions to *all* actions.”

The male Indian council member, now in charge, says, “The fact remains that you *willingly* broke the laws, ones that you are quite familiar with. And you offer no remorse for those actions. Does anyone else on the council want to add anything?”

One of the council members, a female Golden Retriever, barks several times. The rest of the council nods.

“That’s a very good point,” a Croatian male says. “It really was a very good speech. Do you have anything to add?”

The Croatian male looks at the male Golden Retriever. The male Golden Retriever wags his tongue. Then the council members all have quizzical expressions. 9,874,235 can’t help but laugh—he sees, finally, how ridiculous it all is.

He watches the council all cast their vote, and though it takes several minutes to finalize the decision, it feels like a matter of seconds to him. He looks over at 8,956, 531. Her tears hurt him. He continues to stare at her when the council announces that they’ve tallied the votes.

“You are sentenced to death immediately.”

Her tears come down now as if they were held back before by something. He feels his own cheek moisten, and he goes to dry it up with his hand, but it’s grabbed by his wrist and placed, along with the other one, behind his back in cuffs. The prison guard pushes him toward the holding cell to stay until his execution will take place.

He goes to turn his head to see her one last time, but she isn’t there. His heart is beating so fast as he’s scanning the court room. He can’t find her anywhere.

And then he feels two hands on his chest. He turns his head to the front to see *her* standing in front of him. He’s so relieved, he smiles. She smiles back. He uses all his strength to drag the guard so that he moves closer to her. And when he’s close, he moves in to kiss her. And she keeps smiling as she moves her lips closer to his. He feels the guard fighting back, but he won’t budge, no matter how powerful the guard’s attempts to pull him away are. Even several punches to his back won’t stop him from inching closer and closer and closer until...

He's finally pulled away by the guard. As he's yanked back, he can still taste her. The guard drags him toward the door. *It's only a matter of time now.* And as he's pushed through the door, out of the court, into his holding cell, to wait for his death, he only has one thought: *it was all worth it.*