

Judgment

In the the cold and pitch black darkness of the night, the wind howls, pushing in and giving way to a big object. Slowly, the gusts push in on a smaller object, the size and general shape of a rodent.

Bing

A box flashes, revealing its contents as a yellow and blue screen depicting three letters and a horrifying mascot suit akin to a rat committing emesis: UCLA.

Noise slowly pours in as small noises such as a chatter, scratching, and the-

“Yeah yeah. Honey? Honey? Honey please let me answer your question, if you were going on a rave about it why ask it? I know look I’m just busy OK, I’m not doing nothing I swear, I’ll be there. Trying to foster the future, every decision counts. Mmmhmmm, mmhmm OK OK *i love you yeah bye*”

Andy hangs up the phone, walking in with his keys and several small objects, greasy and repugnant enough for the gases emitting from it to be visible and stink up the room like a lit-up cigarette. As Andy approaches the computer, Andy mutters,

“OK, let’s see what we have today.”

He pulls up an email attachment from what looks like a committee, as he clicks the entire screen is eclipsed with sheet filled with information. Andy goes quickly left to right with his eyes, skimming the starting information, which says

About you

Elaine

Buffy

Yang

February 14, 2001

Long Beach, CA, United States

Home address

Contact information

Home address (permanent)

Address line 1

7248 Plainview Cir.

In a rather ordinary high school, drabbed with gray architecture side-to-side, many students pass by back and forth. Mostly out of the school as a loudspeaker squeaks a sound unpleasant to the ears. Among them is an Asian American girl, with very broad Asian American traits, black hair, brown eyes, with a flowery patterned shirt as well as a skirt and tight pants. With her is a similar looking girl, but slightly bigger, with curly hair, and a black cardigan.

“Come on Elaine, I really thought you would’ve hit it off with Journalism.”

“Elaine” darts a look,

“Uh, ‘COME ON’ Anna! You do remember when I brought Laurie an interview with Sharon Quirk-Silva right?”

Anna is bewildered but beams with remembrance.

“Oh yeah! Man, we had the craziest stories! How did you manage to sneak in like that?”

An awkward air is brought as this introduces some deadly silence.

“I dunno, I just thought it would’ve been a great opportunity to promote projects, shoutout some more spotlight to the Mental Health Club and Academic Decathlon, maybe shine some spotlig-”

Elaine immediately interrupts.

“Doesn’t matter! We came a long way, right? I can’t wait to tour around, connect with some older folks, maybe I might see Steven again?”

The two both beam with excitement.

“OH MY GOD, Lainy! If you see that snarky ass, you better tell him to call me at 1-800-EAT MY A-”

By the time they reach this subject they have stopped by at an intersection that leads to a neighborhood.

“Uh, Anna, I think this is where I go.”

“Oooooohhhh, right. Tell your dad I said hi OK?”

“.....will do” Elaine halfheartedly states.

The two go their separate ways, as Elaine looks at all the high, two story houses.

A long walk on the flat sidewalk crrkk croakkkk crikk croakkk, straight into nothingness. Except for the occasional chirping of birds and crows.

Elaine finally reached the house, on the left side of a local street circle.

A blue house with many dead plants on the front yard, accompanied by a narrow cracked driveway and a giant splotch on the blue house wall.

Elaine looks down gazing at the cards that she and her team made, a picture of her with a suit titling her as the Vice-President of the Mental Health club is among them. As well as another club advertisement promising to raise the books to donate to the people in Africa. She then looks up, takes a deep breath, and goes in.

Andy's mahogany desk is smudged as a drop of liquid lands on the elegant surface. Coming from a secretion of chewing fluid from Andy's mouth out of boredom. The computer is seen displaying another student also attached in the email to look over, a student named "David Lee". Andy scrolls down very quickly, until a whole set of letters and classes fills the page that reads "Academic History" at the top. Andy shows a sign of dismissal until reading a set of sentences on "Additional information" that seems to lighten his mood.

David's face reflects off a computer, as his glasses show a person speeding on a platform and jumping. David shows a clear exhaustion and some excitement at what he's playing. He has no thoughts, only reflexes and the pops of slight amusement in between his stomach and his chest.

CREAK

David suddenly jumps in shock as the door right to the right suddenly opens up. Instinctively, David puts his head down and is ready yet anxious with what comes next.

"Hooouuhhhh...David? Are you sure you're done with homework?" rang that familiar feminine voice, David's ears moving up akin to a dog as if this suddenly hearing an owner calling a dog for a treat.

"Uh-yes, I a-"

"I would believe that-" the woman invasively interjects, "if I didn't see you play games all day when I passed by your room. That's all you've been doing isn't it?"

David motions for an answer but of course as he knew from the sudden bump in his heart, he could not answer otherwise. In an attempt to ignore her, he gathers the small nerve in his body unafraid. To put a foot, slide, and the-

“Don’t! Close it.”

David just stands completely still, the feeling within his chest expanding with anxiety firing all over.

“I said close it!”

David motions to minimization

A hand shake is felt near his head.

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David with some resistance finally does, leaving a very incomplete page of some paper. Clearly barely scraping by the first paragraph.

With some relief yet increased caution the woman let out a gasp, air filled with incomprehensible anger, rage, and.....disappointment.

“Why is it so hard for you? Why is it so....” his mother’s voice creaks, the son’s hand attempting to reach out with empathy until-

BUM BOMP BUM BOMP BUM BOMP

Loud and thumping footsteps can be heard from the outside.

“Hey Mom, how’s it goin-”

An older middle aged face emerges only to feel the tense atmosphere crash into his face.

“...what did he do now?”

The mom shakes, “It’s OK, it’s OK” she speaks, speaking to someone but never facing anyone.

“Why do you do this? This is your future!”

“A future I am ready to make right!” David finally shouts, seemingly letting out every aggression hidden inside to fight back.

“What kind of fu-”

“I already completed the application.” David says, which doesn’t change his mother’s face yet...

“Oh...OK OK OK Ok Ok Ok ok ok ok.....

So...do you want to come with us on the beach?”

A deafening silence forms visibility in the air.

Visibly hesitating, his mouth clenching, resisting to say the words, David says,

“No...I can’t mom, homework. Also I want to take a break from all that writ-you know.”

The two parents are clearly shocked with what has been shown of their boy, but instead of engaging them further look down in solemn and walk away.

GRROOM

Vrrrrhhhhhhh.....

The car can be heard from the open window pouring air on David's left, as David sits still, his face unmoving and his body popping onto his skin with turmoil. He then stands up and looks at the window with solemn and longing.

Andy jumps from page to page:

Flip flip

Campuses and majors with various schools flash for a brief second in the page.

Cli cli cli clic lic lic lic lic lic

“Test scores” filled with various numbers of 5s and 4s, 1,748 and 1,287 whitened away, almost trivialized

Images slowly build the physique and silhouette of Elaine, wearing a black suit and blue dress shirt.

Zzt zzt zzzt zzt zz tzz tzzzt zzt zzt ztz

The scroller wheels on, down and up down and up, down and up. The numerous awards, scholarships, and many more being consumed. However, there are quite few

Images constitute a silhouette of David, with messy hair and clearly weathered clothing.

The same noises occur, **but this time accompanied by these two shapes walking to unknown places face to face.**

*Tap tap tap tap tap tap tap atpt tap at patpa stoms tosmt patp papt papt bum bum buomp
bum bomp bum BOMP*

“Finally, the meat of all of this.” Andy states in relief, as he looks at one of the final sections.

Personal insight questions

The question blots out **Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.**

As it fades to Elaine, in a special sanctioned club outfit of a grey cardigan and white and green striped pants.

Vrr vrr vrrr

Her phone purrs increasingly as Elaine frantically takes it out to read a special kind of text: a blue icon indicating a group chat text message from an unknown club. Certainly not the one she is about to walk into right in this moment.

Elaine briskly walks into a door with a room, filled with marble-colored floor tiles and white walls and ceilings. There, she hears a chatter as she steps in; this is the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) club within her campus; all wearing tuxes.

“Uh, hi guys.” Elaine gestures, “You didn’t tell me we were all wearing tuxes.”

A boy clearly of mixed race, half-Asian and half-Caucasian steps up.

“Well, you should’ve gotten the text right?”

“Wha-”

Elaine scrolls over the hundreds of text messages left in her wake, not one of them was from this kid,

“Eli, are you-...huhhh. I’m sorry, I’m just so busy today. I’ve been overwhelmed by work, this Calculus class, and soon I have to go but I-”

Eli comes up almost to shush her, she notices that it’s almost telegraphed.

“Hey hey, it’s fine I get it. I don’t know though, this is our big announcement and preparation for the speeches we have to give to the State Leadership Conference, you just stay back okay?” he answers calmly to the point of coldness.

Elaine despite feeling more comfortable, could tell something was off as she blurts the words,

“But why it’s just-”

Eli puts his hand on her shoulder, “Look it’s fine, we have everything taken care of, just think of it as a relaxation period, no one’s gonna make a big deal alright?”

Elaine notices a slight grin on his face.

“Alright.”

Just as she says that word, she notices her peers talking with the board, focusing on Camille - a friend - as she clearly is conversing “normally” but her movement is stiff; as if to hide something.

But Elaine sits by as things proceed normally as several members come into the club.

David is seen as the sun comes down eating with his family, a younger brother, the parents, and two elderly friendly folks who are his mother’s parents and by extension, David’s grandparents. Eating what looks like spicy noodles among other Thai dishes, everything seems to be calm but David can’t go one second without imbuing a limb with motion.

“Stop that!” the dad said sternly,

“Stop what?” David dumbfoundedly asks.

“Your foot.”

David is once again dumbfounded by what his father says,

“Your foot is shaking the table.”

“Oh!” David gasps aloud, making several heads turn towards him.

David’s brother lets out a sigh.

“You know, it’s really hard to communicate with you,” the mom states.

David could only let out a, “Yeah” with this, as he knew it to be true.

“I guess it comes with not spending too much time together you know, with you focusing on work, but it’s all gonna pay off and we can talk to each other again! You two are both finally free.”

“Yeah...” David states as he now looks at the floor, changing into a more anguished face.

By the time the club president reaches the announcements on who is going to speak for what subject Elaine finally sees hers...

Completely changed from her original topic of Journalism.

Her eyes become completely wide open from this discovery, fundamentally changing her performance forever in such a short notice. As the claps from these announcements deafened and stopped producing sound, as the chatter afterwards felt trivial, Elaine stepped furiously towards the board room. Step by step did she compose herself however, as the topic was changed to-

“Improv?!”

“Yes, we thought this would be in your best interest.” the president stated aloud.

“Best interest?! This is improv! No one makes it in the top 3 with this, this is for the people who barely have any research!”

“Well then it would be **barely** an inconvenience for you” Eli wittingly remarks.

“Wha-but, do you know what this means?! I have to re-write everything!”

“Yeah Lainy, Trent’s president of course he would know” Eli stepped up to blurt.

“Shut it.” A familiar darker face says, motioning his hand; this is Isaac.

Elaine took this opportunity to proceed, “OK why? Everything has to be rewritten in such a short amount of time! I-I we talked about this, we filled out the form together Eli! I’ve been working so hard for this club why would you trea-”

“We know what you did” Isaac mutters under his breath.

Elaine, taking a whiff of this, is in complete disbelief at what he’s talking about.

“No-”

“Someone you knew told us that you broke and entered into Sharon Quirk Silva’s office after hours with fake authorization.” Isaac continues, “I’m sorry but someone like that to be presenting in journalism just doesn’t seem to fit, not to mention the underperformance and low attendance lately in FBLA-”

Elaine is in shock, “Underperformance?! I scored 3rds and 9ths at worst?! I worked hard! I-

“They weren’t documented, I don’t know if they were removed or what” Elaine looks at Eli who somewhat smugly shrugs as Isaac speaks.

“-but they don’t matter anyway, with this news someone could press charges, so it’s beyond our control. We haven’t because we’re your *friends* but who says he hasn’t?”, Isaac pointed to the advisor, a grey-haired balding man eating his lunch and typing on a black tinted computer screen.

Elaine just stared as everyone in the board started to leave, as the first bell rang. Isaac quickly broke his stern character and came to her side, dragging her to sit down.

She couldn't process this act of kindness though as every image had started to to become static...
become bright...become blurry.

But she did hear one thing...

"I'm so sorry...I'm so sorry, look I'm your *friend* if you ever need me, I'll be there."

"*Friend*"

"*Friend*"

"*Friend*"

"*friend*"

"*friend*"

"*friend*"

"*frien.*"

A high pitched noise is heard, screeching in her mind. As this continues to echo echo *echo echo eccho*....

At this point, everything becomes blurry, as she flashes back to Eli smiling, Camille and the others acting stiff, sitting there laughing.

"HA HA HA HA HA HA HA"

"Man, we had the craziest stories!" a voice was saying...she looked around to no avail, the girl can only spin spin and spin.

Suddenly, a masculine, terrifying voice is heard within her head.

"This is all your fault, you little
twerp! I did all I could in my minimum
wage job, all you had to do was read a

book! I hope you're happy with your
break time now because look where it

got us!”

GOT US!

GOT US!

GOT US!

Her heart starts beating beating beatin beat....*Bum bum bum bum Bum BUm BUm BUM BOOM*

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

SHE FEELS LIKE SHE WANTS TO EXPLOOOOOOOOOODDDDDDD

Elaine quickly takes off

Elaine walked, huffing with each step, muscles quaking with each movement. It was so hard, she could hear her heart rate so visibly it was a surprise no one else heard her distress as well.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

Booming like a drum wanting to burst out of her chest, Elaine continued forward.

That was when she saw a dreadfully skinny malnourished frame and a noise,

“Hey!”

It was him, it was David.

“Didn’t you text on how we would meet and talk about what to do to get people into this book donation thing you’re doing?”

Stopping sharper than a light about to turn off, Elaine unhealthily froze.....

Then walked inside Room 230.

“Y-y-yes”, Elaine uttered, mustering the strength to talk, “Look, I don’t have much right now, you just go on doing that, as you should OK?”

David takes a second to look and nods.

“People haven’t been showing up lately, this is our second event in almost half a year you better find a way to do this no-”

David then jumps in the middle of Elaine’s sentence, suddenly distressed,

“But how?! What if I mess up again, I.....I.....”

“How many times do I have to tell you: it’s not your fault.” Elaine interjects, as if instinctually.

David's face slowly frowns “Not my fault?! I was the one who had planned an event behind your back, forced all of you to try something your heart wasn’t set in...if it weren’t for me then...”

Tears were slowly breaking through Elaine’s eyes,

“Shut up! Just don’t mention that! Don-”

“Elaine, I clearly only thought about myself, I wanted the glory and the value of feeling accepted... for the-”

Elaine is now sobbing on the floor, dropping an IGETC to UCLA...

“Our club would’ve achieved..” David continues,

Moist droplets then drop onto the floor. Tears, sweat, Elaine didn’t know just then, a paper was put on to her face. Which, as if it were a custom of some kind made her feel some consolation. However, this paper felt hard, and as she focused on it, she realizes something...

David is also sad and the paper is a copy of insight questions for UCLA.

Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

Burns itself on the screen as the ink drops out back to the restaurant the Lee family is eating at.

“Mom, I’m...sorry.”

“What kind of person do you think you are?”

“A man with a mission, trying to do better, trying to-”

“Change?! You haven’t changed one bit! You’re still doing nothing but playing video games and waiting until the last minute! Look at yourself! This isn’t right! You talk all pretty and deep but you never changed!”

An awkward air is sent upwards and outwards spreading the scent of malice and pain all over the restaurant as it dilutes from the chatter of the rest of the customers.

“I’m taking you home...no Dad, take him home right now.” David’s mom commands.

The dad gets up and awkwardly tries to escort David out, as he leaves David takes a last look at his family. His brother trying to ignore it in embarrassment, his mom with that angry face - wrinkled chin and all, and...

His grandfather put his head down in disappointment, muttering a foreign language David could only lament that he couldn’t understand as his grandmother spoke to him.

A last deep cut at what he had done.

“It’s just the questions right? You have to finish those up?”

“Yeah Dad, just the questions.”

David is sitting on his bed, tears on his face. He scrolls on his phone until he sees an email that imbues him with even more emotion inside...

Whoosh

David is now in a camp of sorts, in a cabin, conversing with an older woman but not much older compared to his mom.

“I’ve let them down, I failed a class last year, I know why but I just can’t stop!”

“And now I’ve made people around me suffer again, because I...I-”

This woman hugged him the moment he was about to cry, he is now trying to hold himself back as she says,

“You have so much love for your parents, I get it. They’ve given you a lot, but David...you’ve given them a lot too, when I met them I could tell how much love they have for you. I don’t know much yet to describe what exactly but I think that what you give them, based on what you’ve given us this week; it’s a good heart. You’re so sweet David, your energy was enough for people to really feel happy and attracted around you. If you knew how to use that to your advantage really control what you feel, you could-”

“But I’ve tried before.”

“I know, and you make mistakes, that's OK. I’m sure your parents, as mad as they are, know that you made missteps; that you’re growing. You’re right, your future is uncertain David, and you have a lot to correct until those wrongs finally become right. But remember, you have given so many good things out there, You deserve those opportunities to rise above, YOU are going to go do amazing things no matter what. That’s what I believe.”

I believe

I believe

I believe

BLOOP

David gets up, and finally starts typing. The sounds building up speed, momentum as all the thoughts pour out from his head, the stillness of the night is replaced by the sounds of the fingers stabbing at the keyboard, creating a shockwave, a beat, louder than a drum.

Click clack click clack click clack click clack click clack click clack click clack click clack

Elaine looked outside, looking at the short view of the window. Her mind could clearly see the future could transport itself to the biggest city in the world, filled with its illumination, that warmth,

that love.

But as she looks to her hands, that mind snapped back into her body, and as she look behind her all she could see is darkness, with a purposeless and career ending home, with a dishelved corpse like father, his artificial blonde hair chipping out like a worn out illusion.

Elaine landed hard on her knees and sobbed, sobbed, sobbed, and sobbed almost tearing the achievements apart and/or dropping several like the trivial pieces of paper they can be.

David's eyes are filled with fear as he gazes at the time.

11:53 PM

10/30/2018

He finally eyes the submit button as he finally moves the mouse as he finally submits it, David is in shock. His body is still, his legs stretched, his back hunched, his face still, his eyes in some sort of trance as he looks at the computer screen.

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The computer slowly processes as the clicks of the keyboard bring about in impact. The screen then backs out with a single click as we see the two separate applications in two separate windows.

Elaine is left untouched

David's is besmirched with that dreadful word

A shadow looms over the display, leaning on the top of David's application.

- Submitted Date: Dec 01, 2018

Andy slams the desk, quivering the drool and various utensils and snacks upwards. Chunks of these chipped bits fly out in all directions.

“Oh man! Why did I just see that now?! Ugh, what a waste of time.”

Andy mutters, as he finally submits these changes on the UCLA website.