**“If you are armed...”**

If you are armed and located at Glenmont Metro Station, please shoot me, I beg you.

Aim and fire straight ahead for the head, the temple, slightly angled downward. Make sure the bullet goes through   
Take the shortest route straight through my brain to the hippocampus.   
If I'm lucky, I'll feel, how the bullet tears through my brain, just a few decades.

I understand, it sounds horrifying, but by doing this, you will be doing me a huge favor. Die from the gunshot AS FAST AS POSSIBLE — the best thing that can happen to me right now.

My trial began about ten thousand years ago, at 10:15 this morning. I'm doing some side work to earn extra income.   
I'm what they call a "trial participant" or "subject.",   
who takes untested medications so that doctors can study the side effects. О Once it was a medication for kidneys, several times - something for blood pressure or cholesterol reduction. This morning I was told that the medication I took is some kind of nootropic, enhancing brain function.

Hroughout all this time, I have never felt any effect from these medications. In other words, none of the medications they tested on me ever stirred me up, relaxed me, or had any effect on me whatsoever. Perhaps I always ended up in the placebo group during the trials, but either way, I never felt anything.

Today, everything was different. This crap actually worked. They gave me a pill at 10:15 and then asked me to wait in the reception area until I was called in for a series of tests. "Just 30 minutes," said the lab technician to me.   
I settled on the couch in the reception area and flipped through a couple of articles from the "Psychology Today" magazine on the coffee table. Ince I wasn't invited back to the office, I finished reading that magazine and picked up "US News," reading it cover to cover. Then I read an old issue of "Scientific American." What are they doing in there for so long?

I lazily glanced at the wall clock. It was only 10:23. I managed to read all three magazines in just eight minutes. I remember thinking back then that this day would be long. I was right.

There was a small bookshelf in the reception area with old books. When I stood up to approach it, it felt like my legs were barely functioning. Not in the sense that they had become weak, but rather as if they had become slow. It took me a whole minute to get up from the couch, and another two minutes to walk to the bookshelf, even though it was just two steps away.

Among all the books on the shelf, I chose a volume of "Moby Dick.". The same problem I had with my legs extended to my hands as well. It felt like an eternity as I reached out for the book, and I even grew bored while waiting for my hand to make contact with its cover.

I dragged myself back to the couch and collapsed onto it as if in slow motion. It reminded me of the astronauts' jumps on the Moon under the conditions of low gravity. Here, I opened "Moby Dick" (slowly) and began reading from the phrase, "Call me Ishmael." I managed to reach the point where Ahab throws his pipe into the sea (that's, damn it, the thirtieth chapter) when I was called in for the tests.

He lab technician asked me:

— How do you feel?

— "Sluggish," I replied.

— In fact, it's quite the opposite. The perception of the world around you as slow is a result of your heightened speed.

— But what about my legs? My hands? It feels like everything is in slow motion.

— The sensation of your body moving slowly is due to the accelerated functioning of your brain. At this moment, your brain is operating at a speed that is 10-20 times faster than normal, allowing you to think and process information at an accelerated rate. However, your physical movements are still bound by the principles of biomechanics, which impose certain limitations on what you can physically accomplish. In reality, you move faster than the average person. The lab assistant illustrated this with a depiction of a person running. However, because your brain is so far ahead of your actions, even your acceleration feels remarkably slow to you.

As I descended onto the couch, it felt as if I were falling in slow motion. Even though my muscles were moving sluggishly, the force of gravity still acted upon me. Yet, even gravity seemed weaker in this state. The heightened speed of my brain, working ten times faster, allowed me to accomplish extraordinary feats. I managed to read thirty chapters of Moby Dick in a mere fifteen minutes.

During the series of tests, I particularly enjoyed the physical ones. I effortlessly juggled three balls, then four, and eventually six. The slow motion of their movements made it a rather uneventful task. Each ball followed a leisurely trajectory, allowing me ample time to position my hand (also moving slowly) beneath it before tossing it again. Corn rings were tossed into the air, and I gracefully caught them using chopsticks. They even scattered a handful of coins, and I swiftly calculated their total sum before they had a chance to touch the ground.

The cognitive tests, while not as enjoyable, provided valuable insights. Finding a word in a 50-word text took me a mere three seconds. Navigating a complex maze on a sheet of paper only took two seconds. Answering detailed questions about a presentation shown at a rapid pace of 10 slides per second was achieved with 95% accuracy. I was informed that my performance on the Knopf scale exceeded 250, surpassing any human capabilities.

After the tests, they sent me home, explaining that the effects of the medication would gradually wear off in about two hours. They encouraged me to make the most of this accelerated state by responding to work emails. The journey back home, however, proved to be quite arduous. Although it would typically take around 35 minutes to travel three subway stations, in my accelerated reality, it stretched into several days. Every step felt agonizingly slow. Despite my best efforts to run as fast as I could, the laws of biomechanics restricted the speed of my physical movements. This disconnect between my mind and body prevented me from accurately perceiving my position in space and responding to the environment. I felt like an awkward giant, constantly misjudging my speed and colliding with walls and objects. In the elevator, I crashed forcefully into the wall, unable to halt my finger in time as I pressed the button. The pain I experienced lasted much longer than usual, lasting for 30 to 40 minutes instead of a fleeting moment.

The elevator ride was interminable, taking four to five hours to descend seven floors, as I meticulously inspected every detail of the elevator walls. Eventually, I made it to the subway, and surprisingly, running became somewhat enjoyable. Despite my slow motion existence, I still possessed control over my feet, arms, and turns. After a few blocks, I adapted to the discord between my mind and body, gracefully navigating through pedestrians on the sidewalk and narrowly avoiding passing cars with seemingly minimal effort (though in reality, it took minutes).

I spent approximately an hour riding down the escalator, sprinting along the platform, and then grew incredibly bored while waiting for my train for a mere six minutes. While there was plenty to observe in the bustling subway station, my accelerated state left me longing for the companionship of "Moby Dick," a volume I had neglected to bring along.

The train stormed into the station, unleashing a thunderous roar that reverberated through my heightened senses. The screech of the subway brakes, usually high-pitched, transformed into a long, deep sound reminiscent of a monotonous tuba solo. It dropped several octaves, affecting not only the screeching brakes but also all other sounds, reaching the verge of unbearable. Voices became distorted, resonating in a much lower frequency range, while the cries of a baby in the subway car morphed into melodic whale-like songs. Sharp noises like car honks and rumbling trucks metamorphosed into muted rumbles akin to distant thunder.

Back at the research center, conversations with the staff were still audible, but now, in the damn train, it became impossible to discern their words. The effects of the medication only intensified, extending my stay on this endless train ride for what felt like an eternity. The baby's whale-like melodies and the tuba-like solo of the brakes filled the air, their frequencies far removed from my limited perception. However, my sense of smell remained intact, capturing the distinct odors of bodies, the pungency of the train brakes, and even the less pleasant scents of the subway car.

Finally, I reached my apartment, sprinting from the doorway to the main room at full speed, yet feeling as if I were leisurely drifting along the calm currents of a lazy river. The relief of being home washed over me, and I sought solace in the pages of "One Hundred Years of Solitude," a book I had recently started. I flipped through the pages with such speed that some of them tore, but despite the rapid movement, I found myself skimming rather than truly reading. Merely three minutes had passed since my return. Lost in the depths of the internet (oh, the eternal wait for modern computers to boot up), I found myself frustrated by its sluggishness. Loading a new page took an hour, while my eyes darted across the content in a fraction of a second. I devoured countless articles from my feed, and yet, only three minutes had ticked by. Just three minutes.

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I delved into the books from my long-awaited "must-read" list, managing to complete two of them. Another four minutes slipped away. Perhaps if I could find respite in sleep, the effects of the medication would subside. Unfortunately, the accelerated part of my brain responsible for this state was not conducive to sleep. Despite the days (or so it seemed) of wakefulness, my body stubbornly clung to the notion that it was still 1:25 in the afternoon, defying the urge to succumb to slumber. Nevertheless, I attempted to force myself into sleep: a leisurely 45-minute stroll to the bedroom, a gentle descent onto the mattress as light as a feather, closing my eyes, and lying there for hours (which in reality amounted to a mere 10 minutes) until surrendering to the futility. Sleep eluded me. It became increasingly apparent that I would remain trapped in this slowed-down prison for several days, if not weeks.

So, I turned to Zolpidem for aid.

The sensation of the pill gliding down my throat accompanied by a sip of water left me feeling nauseous. It felt like a lump obstructing my breath, sluggishly making its way down my esophagus.

I read a book. Ten minutes passed. I read the second one. Eighteen minutes had passed since taking Zolpidem. In anger, I threw the book across the room—it flew slowly and gracefully through the air like a leaf in the wind, then hit the wall with a barely audible long rumble—it was the first sound I heard, it seemed like hours had passed—and then it slid to the floor, sinking like a splash in water. Gravity clearly hadn't changed since morning; the laws of physics remained the same. Only my perception of time had gone mad, which meant I could measure the effect of the medication based on the speed of falling objects. Considering how long the book took to reach the floor, I realized that the effect of the medication was still intensifying.

I read a magazine. I turned on the TV. Disappointedly examined each frame of the news as if it were a slideshow. Turned off the TV.

Read a little more. I read the first two volumes of Churchill's "History of the English-Speaking Peoples"—not exactly light reading. In fact, it was repulsive to read, but considering that taking another book from the shelf would have taken several unbearably boring hours, just sitting and reading Churchill was better. Well, or at least marginally worse.

Thirty-five minutes had passed since taking Zolpidem. I lay down on the couch, closing my eyes. Time passed. Inhalation—a process that took hours. Time passed. Exhalation—several more hours.

I. Couldn't. Sleep.

I needed a new plan. I decided to go back to the research center where they gave me this medication. Maybe they had something that could counteract such a side effect. Well, or some sedative to just sleep through the entire duration until it wore off.

I rushed out of the apartment as fast as I could—hours by my perception—and didn't even bother closing the door. It would have taken too much time.

Down the stairs (much faster than taking the elevator, if I ran), through the lobby, and finally outside. It felt like a long day at the office.

Down the street, maneuvering through the passersby. They probably thought I was moving with inhuman agility. First flight of stairs leading down to the subway. And then, that's when Zolpidem kicked in.

I didn't feel like sleeping. Not at all. On the contrary, the effect of Zolpidem seemed to merge with the effect of the experimental medication I took in the morning. I ran down the stairs, moving in slow motion but still feeling the motion, and then—bam!—everything came to a halt.

The dull hum of the street and the noise of the subway faded away. I was surrounded by perfect silence, unlike anything I had ever heard. Before the effects of Zolpiden kicked in, my sense of time had slowed down, maybe by a factor of a hundred. And then, it slowed down even more, by thousands of times. Every second felt like days. Even moving my eyes or attempting to shift my gaze felt like a slow slide across my field of vision.

All day long, I tried to learn how to walk, run, and jump, taking into account that my brain was working hundreds of times faster than my body. But after the slowdown caused by Zolpiden, controlling my body became nearly impossible. I fell down the stairs. Even though I froze in the middle of a step, I had absolutely no control over my muscles. Mentally, I commanded my leg to move forward—it took hours. And then backward, if it seemed like I would miss the next step. Hours went by just to adjust how much my ankle was bent, and more hours to bend it differently if it didn't work the first time.

Despite all my attempts, I twisted my ankle on the next step. The slowdown did nothing to ease the pain. I endured hours of continuous agony in my twisted leg. It must be that the pain signals traveling to the brain don't work the same way as the nerves in the ears. Sounds stretched out in time, lowering to the point of impossibility to perceive them, but the pain remained unchanged over time. Many hours passed with the increasing pressure on my twisted ankle as I bore my weight on it. Hours of escalating pain.

I stumbled forward, unable to control my sluggish body. Entire days went by as I slid downward, trying to maneuver my torso to avoid hitting my head on the ground. I managed it—I hit my shoulder instead. At first, I didn't even feel the impact, but the pressure and pain increased, hour after hour. The shoulder couldn't withstand it and dislocated in one endless jerk. Several days later, I came to a halt, curled up on the ground, gazing at the floor. The shoulder still hurt just as intensely as the moment of impact. I had enough time to contemplate everything in the world during this fall. If every second felt like a day, every minute of real time took years. Even if the effects of the medication were to wear off in two or three hours, for me, this nightmare would last for centuries.

By the time I hit the ground, I had a plan. I needed to reach the platform and throw myself under a train.

I attempted to get on all fours but underestimated the effort it took to turn, and I rolled onto my back. The shoulder had been hurting for several days and pleaded for mercy. On the second try, I fell face-first, trying to figure out how to control a body that moved slower than grass grows. Several weeks of fruitless attempts passed, and I finally managed to get onto my knees. If it was such a struggle to get on all fours, there was no doubt that walking or running was out of the question.

So I crawled—I crawled through the metro station, weeks on end, observing bewildered people around me. I crawled under the turnstile and onto the escalator.

The escalator during rush hour moved at the speed of a glacier inching into the sea. As I descended, I surveyed the crowded platform. On the signboard tracking train arrivals, it said the next train would arrive in 20 minutes. Twenty minutes—it was a whole year for me. I would have to linger in the metro station for an entire year, awaiting death. I slid off the escalator, spending several days observing the worried faces of office workers. I managed to crawl to a bench and curl up next to it, trying to find a position that didn't disturb my injured shoulder.

But the situation worsened as much as it could.

The slowing down on the stairs was merely the beginning of the interaction between the experimental drug and Zolpidem. And now, they were working together in full force. I blinked—and years of darkness followed. I had already lost my hearing, and now, blinking, I lost my sight as well. Years of absolute darkness and silence, filled only with the pain in my injured shoulder.

My accelerated brain tried to fill the void of sensory deprivation as best it could. Voices spoke to me, singing in nonexistent languages. Patterns, faces, and colors flickered before my closed eyes. I remembered my entire life—and invented a new one for myself. I forgot English. I fell into despair. I prayed to God. I became a god. I created a new universe in my imagination and brought it to life. And so, again and again and again.

My eyes opened with the slowness of tectonic plates. Weeks—faint flickering, weeks—a glimmer of light, weeks—a narrow slit through which I could see the metro platform: passengers' ankles near me and an announcement on the opposite wall.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out my phone—a motion that took decades. How can I describe this unbearable boredom? It surpasses even the pain in my shoulder. Every thought that could come to my mind has already been thought a thousand times. The advertisement on the opposite wall remained unchanged, and people's ankles didn't move. Not at all. The boredom was so thick that it felt tangible, as if stone and metal bands were squeezing my brain. There was no escape from it.

What could I do? If I were to jump off the platform before the train arrived to hit me, I wouldn't die. I would endure endless pain, stronger than falling down a flight of stairs. But most likely, some kind soul would save me before the train arrived, and I wouldn't be able to do anything when the train actually appeared.

My suffering would be eternal.

So, I have to wait for the train and throw myself right under it. When it hits me, I will feel myself being torn apart for centuries before I finally die, and it will all come to an end. I have lived hundreds of lives on this bench. My soul is much older than any person who has ever lived on Earth. The majority of my life consists of flashes of pain in my dislocated shoulder, lying on the subway platform, and observing the same things: advertisements and someone's legs.

This post is my Plan B. My final prayer. My adventure. I have spent several lifetimes typing this post, hoping that someone will read it and realize that my suffering needs to end. Someone who is currently on this platform. Someone who will find the man lying near the bench, the one who crawled down the escalator recently. Someone who will kill this man as quickly as possible. A shot to the temple.

If you are armed and happen to be at Glenmont Metro Station, please shoot me.

**“Knowledge is power”**

Some say that if we had discovered it earlier, everything could have turned out differently. Perhaps we could have even harnessed it for our own benefit. But I strongly doubt that, and everything has already happened as it happened. The alarm was first raised by biologists. Samples of bacteria or something along those lines went missing. Not that they were particularly important or necessary, but it happened all over the world on the same day. Not everyone reacted immediately, of course, but the global scale was determined fairly quickly. The police scratched their heads, and a specially assembled team composed of leading experts from developed countries, including the best detectives and security specialists, scratched their heads twice as vigorously. No traces, no leads, no motives. The mere thought of the organization that must have been powerful enough to pull off something like this caused such panic among law enforcement agencies that they deployed all their resources and turned all their agents and informant’s upside down. Bioterrorists (and even regular terrorists caught in the net) were apprehended in droves and stacked up like firewood. Even environmental activists, defenders of the ecosystem, got caught in the crossfire. Green parties were thoroughly shaken wherever they existed. Nothing.

Then the worms disappeared. Not all of them, of course, but everywhere. That's when things stopped being funny. Governments tightened the screws, allowing the police to kick down doors and twist arms practically anyone they pleased. The military was given the same permission. Just in case. How long this would last, it was hard to say, no matter how much luck we had on our side.

Naturally, all the strange reports were investigated, so when it became clear that the latest signal about something strange and incomprehensible wasn't the product of someone's inflamed imagination (and mentally unstable individuals of all kinds were extremely agitated amidst the ongoing events), an incredible number of people from all corners of the world rushed to the remote taiga, from where the information originated. Cars got stuck on the road, and the drivers enviously glanced at the snowmobiles passing by. Among the latest, heavily sighing, they looked up at the helicopters flying overhead. Rumors circulated that within a day, a huge landing strip had been cleared in the forest to accommodate transport planes. Although that was probably more of an artistic exaggeration. I didn't see it myself, at least. In short, we scared the hell out of that guy. And no wonder: anyone would be frightened by such a multitude of vehicles and uniforms of various styles and origins.

He, as you may have already guessed, lived in the forest and worked as a gamekeeper, spending a lot of time in the wild. During one of his patrols, he stumbled upon... a creature, perhaps. How else could he describe it? According to the forester's account (and considering the circumstances, his description was quite accurate), he found a slender, wriggling creature in a forest ravine. It didn't seem capable of causing any harm or even moving properly, but it looked so alien that our witness raised his rifle, took aim, and fired. The bullet vanished into the creature's body, seemingly causing no visible damage. Swearing to himself, he pulled the trigger again. There was no shot. He wasn't eager to confront it directly, so he decided that the best course of action was to retreat as quickly as possible and report the incident to the authorities. After carrying out his plan, he decided to investigate the cause of his weapon malfunction. He didn't have to think long: all the bullets he had were missing from their cartridges. We learned later that bullets of the same caliber had disappeared all over the world.

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We weren't foolish, and we grasped the underlying principle of the creature's actions immediately. Understanding its physical mechanics proved challenging (even a knife with a highly specific shape, existing as a singular copy, would vanish upon attempting a cut), but the rest was glaringly evident: whenever the creature came into contact with physical objects, they would instantaneously disappear from our world.

Behind the three barricades that separated us from the creature, heated debates ensued. Firstly, the scope of "our world" remained unclear. Did it encompass only our planet or the entire known universe? Some eager minds proposed sending expeditions to the Moon (and I overheard mentions of Mars in the corridors), but it was deemed prudent to reserve such options until all other avenues were exhausted. Secondly, the course of action to take remained uncertain, necessitating prompt decisions.

As expected, our minds were in a state of frenzy and fascination due to the sheer strangeness of the situation. When news reached us that the creature had transformed, sprouting faceted eyes and numerous legs, while simultaneously vanishing along with all the filth, we realized the urgency of our response.

Among us, the most audacious advocated for the immediate annihilation of the creature, suggesting it would be defenseless against heavy flamethrower systems or even (albeit an extreme notion!) tactical nuclear weapons. Yet, we reminded them of the catastrophic repercussions if fire were to vanish from our civilization.

Another perspective posited the utmost isolation of the creature, preventing any form of contact. Opponents of this approach feared that in a scenario where nothing else remained, the creature might erase the air from our reality. Alternatively, if we were to evacuate it in time, it could disrupt the vacuum. The consequences of the latter were beyond our comprehension, compelling us to discard the idea.

It appeared that we were left with a sole option: gradually feed this monstrous entity bits of our reality until a solution could be found. If a solution could be found at all.

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I hope they shot the person who couldn't shoot that annoying magpie (where did it even come from?) themselves. If it weren't for them, the bird wouldn't have learned to speak and acquire the ability to hear.

Until that incident, we were doing quite well. Scientists and engineers were creating new materials and alloys, crafting increasingly strange and marvelous devices, which we shared with the bird as long as it didn't interfere with anything truly important. However, due to the carelessness of the soldier who allowed the bird to hear, we lost the English and German languages in a single day. Bilingual individuals didn't struggle as much, but those who only knew one language were left bewildered, trying to communicate through gestures. We had to teach them how to speak all over again.

But that wasn't as terrible as the fact that the bird's brain seemed capable of grasping abstraction, at least on a basic level. We realized this when objects around us stopped reflecting light. With heavy hearts, we knew it was time to change the bird's diet. Language specialists and cognitive psychologists rushed to us in a panic. While they were on their way, we had to feed the bird with Esperanto and Toki Pona.

Later, we discovered that creating new language structures alone wasn't enough to protect ourselves. We failed to consider that by introducing arbitrary words to the bird, we were actually aiding its intellectual development. One morning, neither schoolchildren in geometry class nor engineers in the design bureau could draw a circle. Definitions and illustrations vanished from textbooks. We needed more complex concepts and abstractions to counteract the bird's influence.

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To our credit, I must say we held on for quite a long time. While some suggested hurling a thermodynamics textbook at the creature and using a perpetual motion engine to fly to Alpha Centauri, conversations with the significantly smarter mass of eyes, legs, and tentacles in the hastily learned language were being conducted by philosophers.

The creature quickly devoured ancient philosophy, so we changed tactics and delved straight into contemporary thought. "What does it mean to be a bat?" kept it occupied for a week. "Critique of Pure Reason" captivated it for several months. Some philosophers wept as they lost such things, while others, tongues protruding from earnestness, worked on philosophically interpreting the events. We even fed the creature some of the papers on the subject. Someone even appreciated the irony.

The turning point came when one of the respected professors, engaged in a conversation about Gadamer in the newly constructed language, simply vanished. The question of when the creature would merge one thing with another and make the entire human race disappear was only a matter of how much time it would take. Fortunately, we wisely avoided discussing the topic of induction in our conversations.

Despair reigned in the significantly expanded camp. Some simply wept, some destroyed the hidden reserves of alcohol, and some called their families. "You fools!" suddenly exclaimed a young man, apparently a graduate student, and strode towards the creature. No one thought to stop him.

Approaching the long-uninvited guest, he looked into its eyes intently and, taking a deep breath, uttered:

"I think, therefore I exist."

"Fuck!" was all the creature managed to say before it disappeared.

**"Granny at the window"**

In the late hours of the night, long past three, I find myself in that hazy state of half-sleep, aided by the presence of alcohol in my bloodstream. The room is dimly lit, with drawn curtains.

Suddenly, the door swings open, and my grandmother enters the room. She walks past me without acknowledging my presence and forcefully opens the window wide. Confusion fills my mind as I question why she would open the window during the freezing winter. Interrupting my thoughts, my grandmother mutters something under her breath and tosses a clump of long, black hair out of the window. A sense of foreboding washes over me as I sit up in bed to get a better view. In a disturbingly detached manner, my grandmother proceeds to throw our cat out of the window, its descent appearing agonizingly slow as it disappears from sight. Thoughts race through my mind in an instant—how we're on the fifth floor, how dark and cold it is outside. The entire scene fails to fit into my comprehension, and finally, I manage to find my voice:

"What are you doing?" I shout at her, but fear keeps me rooted to the bed.

My grandmother turns to face me, and I'm horrified by her expression. Her face contorts into a malicious grimace, transforming her into anything but my grandmother—a witch, an evil fortune-teller, even the devil himself. And she speaks:

"Did you know your mother has been to the doctor six times this month? She has a tumor. She's dying."

I struggle to make sense of her words, but her last statement lingers in my mind. I awkwardly attempt to find the right words, asking, "Why? What? What were you doing?" but they emerge slowly.

"Don't worry," my grandmother soothes in a calm tone, "it has to be this way."

She takes a pillow and gradually places it over my face. I realize that I lack the strength to resist or fight back. I simply fade away, growing smaller and more powerless. And in the next moment, I comprehend that it's now my turn. The window. She throws me out, as if I were a cat.

As I descend, seconds stretch into eternity. My final thought—should I relax or brace myself? Does it even matter when falling from the fifth floor? And I decide to relax and let go. The fall concludes with the sound of a pillow hitting the ground. Puff!

Instead of hitting the ground, I open my eyes. I find myself in my room, in my bed, with the door closed. However, something feels off, different from the previous experience. My grandmother is nowhere to be seen, and there is noise and dim light emanating from beyond the door.

Quietly, I step out of my room. Something strange has occurred in the kitchen. The furniture has been rearranged, and a table now sits in the center of the room. Seated at the table is my mother, swaying back and forth as if in a disturbed state. She oscillates between laughter and tears, her face obscured from my view. But that's not what fills me with horror. Suspended approximately twenty centimeters above the table is a pot, spinning rapidly on its axis, while the lid bounces up and down as though something inside is boiling. My mother remains oblivious to my presence; she doesn't look at me.

Once again, I am struck silent, frozen amidst this madness. After a moment, an inhuman, prolonged scream bursts out of me. It's not a shriek or a cry, but rather a roar intertwined with tears. I scream until I run out of air in my lungs.

My scream shatters the silence in half, and several things occur simultaneously. The pot, previously suspended in the air, crashes down with a resounding bang. My mother looks up at me and begins to laugh hysterically.

A voice echoes within my head: "This story can happen to anyone."

I awaken, uncertain of what finally roused me from my slumber. Once again, I find myself lying in my bed. The clock displays 6:47 a.m., and there is noise emanating from the kitchen...