

Memento Mori; *what to do if your parachute fails*

by James Bugler

Ch 1- Abe Grant cannot fly

'What's the difference between flying and falling?' I wonder as air whooshes past my face louder than the screech of the jet engine I'd just left behind. 'Is it how you end up?' Is flying distinguished by a safe landing while falling is categorized by an eventual injury?' The ground is screaming towards me as I dive through the atmosphere. terminal velocity. I calmly do a half roll and look up to see the C-17's cargo bay closing slowly and five of my comrades to the sides of my vision, in the air with me. They still don't know. 'No. That can't be it.' I continue to think 'Because what if a swallow lands funny after travelling 7000 miles by air and breaks a leg. It still *flew* throughout all its journey..' My team begins to pull their pilot chutes as we approach 500 meters. That gives me less than 10 seconds. 'Maybe It's about who you are. A bird flies but I fall. I was never meant to fly. Maybe that's why this is happening... I was always meant to fall.' Around me, the paratroopers deploy the parachutes. And I can practically feel their shock and anxiety growing as they notice I'm still free falling. We must be 150 meters. The ground feels so close. It is so close. I wish I could see the stars instead. I take a breath in and close my eyes, trying to remember how stars looked and awaiting the impact.

Ch 2- Contextual interlude

When a Person suffers a fatal traumatic Brain injury such as the complete severance of the Medulla oblongata (lower Brain stem), a timer is set as the Heart stops receiving the extrinsic nervous signals it requires and ceases to beat. This means the Brain will no longer be nourished by the oxygen and glucose provided by blood. Neither will it benefit from the removal of waste CO₂ the blood had provided. This means your timers length is decided by what snuffs the light out of your consciousness first. Be it anoxic depolarization as Brain cells run out of oxygen to respire with, hyperglycemic encephalopathy when there is no more glucose to fuel your cerebral respiration, or CO₂ narcosis. Where there is too great a concentration of carbon dioxide in your neurons leaves no more room for whatever oxygen remains in your carotid arteries. Best case scenario, your Brain could keep chugging along for another 6 minutes. Worst case; you will die in less than 1.

However, studies have on multiple occasions shown the nature of the Brain's functions during those last moments to be similar to that of dreaming or recalling a memory.

Researchers observed bursts of electrical gamma waves in the last moments after the pulse's asystole (flatline). These waves are the fastest, highest frequency signals of the Brain. Used for complex cognitive operations such as learning, perceiving, and remembering. These findings have led some optimistic Scientists to believe there *may* be a fleeting conscious experience before all Brain function finally ceases in an event poetically coined; the wave of death.

Ch 3- Abe grants eyes are closed

"Abe". I hear it faintly. Someone called my name. I'm lying on something vaguely soft. Through my closed eyelids I can identify a soft white light. Sort of like a gentle cousin to the harsher kind you'd see in a hospital. In fact, that must be where I am! I must have somehow survived the impact and clung on long enough to get to the base's infirmary! "Abe" That voice was calling me again. It was louder but still a soft whisper without urgency. It was familiar. Uncannily familiar. And yet I didn't recognize it. Well, surely, it's a nurse. "Abe. Open your eyes." I realise with a start that my eyes are still closed and promptly open them as I sit up. The white light floods my sensitive vision. Quite literally actually. For a second, I can see only the calm cool white glow. Then, as my eyes adjust and the glow dims, I still see nothing but white ahead of me, except less blurry in a somehow intangible way. A very crisp but featureless white. With a sense of panic slowly mounting, I twist myself to the left. I see nothing. I whip around to the right, but my field of view remains barren of anything to perceive. That is until I reach the very furthest my neck can turn and in the very corner of my eye see a hand. The panic quickly turns to confusion as I move the rest of my body to see what this hand connects to and find an arm. Then a shoulder. Finally, as I bring my knees to my front, I find myself face to face with a boy. Dressed all in grey. Kneeling in a perfect white void on an invisible floor with his feet neatly tucked beneath his self. Looking almost superimposed. But there is no way I could be mistaken. He was perfectly, clearly there. Visually he was impeccable. I don't mean to say he was perfectly beautiful, though he was almost winsome in a boyish way. There were 'imperfections' all across his person. Freckles, scratches, a delicate peach fuzz down the side of his neck and an incredibly scruffy hairdo. No, the visual perfection was the clarity I could see him with. I could make out more details on his face from about 2 feet away than I ever had on anything before. even with something right up to my eye. I could notice those blemishes. I could make out the tiniest wrinkles, see the tentative strips of dead skin, still hanging on around the edges of a scratch that were suspended by contacts with the rest of the scab's surroundings only about a hair's width across. He looked at me, unperturbed by my gawking. His eyes calm and still. The iris a shade of blue I could only describe as a humble azure. Then, the boy blinked and the spell was broken. I nearly flinched at the flicker of movement before gathering myself and dumbly saying; "this isn't a hospital".

“Nope.” he replied “no it is not. And I am guessing, you’d like to know what *it*,” he gestured to the brilliant white void, “*is*”. Hearing him speak stupefies me even further and at this point, entirely dumbfounded, I simply nod shyly. “All right then” he begins. Pushing off from his knees into a stand “you’re clearly confused. I’ve heard everyone tends to be. But if it’s any comfort, you’ve already been here.” At this point, he starts to pace a short line. “In fact, you have *technically* always been here. So, have I. You might not remember, but we’ve actually met here hundreds. No. Thousands of times before now. The only difference this time is that you’re conscious.” As he finishes the sentence, my mouth opens to say; “are you trying to tell me I’m dreaming? Or what, in a coma?!” “No no not a dream or a coma. I should have been more clear Abe. We’ve always been a little vague haven’t we.” It hadn’t occurred to me that this boy would know my name, but I suppose that’s the least unusual thing that’s happened here. And what was that about ‘us’ being vague?.. “So ok, yes.” he continued “Don’t worry. Hold your questions for just a minute and all will be made perfectly clear. Firstly, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Abraham. And I...” He gestures to himself with both thumbs, grinning as he speaks “...am your superego. I am a part of our mental tripartite responsible for your psyche. As your *humble* superego, I am responsible for your sense of morality. I’ve shared a mind with you since you were 5 years old and in the twenty-six years since, I have helped you build a pretty decent moral compass if I do say so myself”. He is incredibly animated as he explains all of this. Gesturing wildly with hands between himself and me. “So, are you,” I ask, “like my subconscious or something?” He pouts a little and furrows his brow at this. Resting his hands at his side to better ponder the question, squinting a little in one eye and looking up to the sky into the vacant void past my shoulder. Looking thoroughly pensive for a second or two. “Ehh, not really” he manages to eventually decide “Ok. It’s a little complex. You’re what is called the ego. You are the conscious part of the mind that has a sense of self. I don’t have that sense of self, so I suppose *by definition* I am *sub*-conscious. Now,” he goes on to say “What you’d consider the actual subconscious is somewhere else. It’s officially known as the id. The final third of the tripartite but it doesn’t really need to be here” He pops up off of his knees at this point and points down at the ground “since its only purpose in your brain is to manage your sort of, physical needs. Eating, sleeping, all the sort of, *savage* urges. You can see why you wouldn’t want that here while we’re trying to do this. It would be ...*distracting*”. Hold on a minute. What does he mean ‘*what we’re doing here?*’ and ‘*distracting?*’ “Distracting?” I say voicing the confusion from my monologue, “from what? You still haven’t explained anything about this...” I wave my hands around me “...place?” He looks down at me, still lying on the floor. “Ok, yes. There is just so much to say. You’ll have to forgive me. Abe.” he takes a deep breath “You are dying.” I almost laugh “Well I’m clearly just fine. Can’t you see?” I drag my heels towards my thighs and my knees up before pulling my upper body up to meet them without any protestation from my core

muscles. With my weight shifted to just below my heels, I spring up to finish standing. It all happens in one fluid movement over the course of about a second. Maybe the tiniest bit more. A fairly decent show of my evidently healthy state. The boy hangs his head and begins to shake it “no. Abe aren’t you wondering?” the boy protests, getting a little worked up “You fell from 40’000 feet literal seconds ago!?! Don’t you think there might be something wrong when you’re talking to your moral compass personified? You’re dying. You snapped your neck when you hit the ground. Your heart has already beaten for the last time. You took your last breath just before contact, seen your last sight and eaten your last meal. You are just here to think your last thoughts. You can hop up like that and see with that clarity that you realised you can because this is your *mind*, Abe.” he calms himself down a bit, breathing out all the frustration He’d accumulated. Then in response to me, now in shambles, looking at him confused said; “Look Abe let me give you a proper explanation. Once and for all. That way we can get on with this. You see, when a Person suffers a fatal traumatic brain injury such as the complete severance of the Medulla oblongata, a timer is set...

Ch- 4 Abe Grant Watches

By the time he finishes speaking, I’m not listening. Back on the ground again, arms loose and hanging in front of me. My jaw slack but still somewhat affixed to its upper counterpart. The boy sits down and looks at me pitifully, but it barely even registers with me. I’m thinking other things. I. I-I-I’m dead? What? It feels so surreal. So impossible even by its nature. I’ve never... I’ve never been dead before. Such a stupid thought. Of course you’ve never been dead before. But what I mean is. I’ve not ever been anything but alive. It's so hard to comprehend. Why am I even here? In my head? What am I supposed to be doing? I should be at least saying goodbye to my family. My daughter. Oh fuck. I’m leaving my daughter behind. Fatherless. And Rachel. No, no no no no. I can’t leave them. It just can’t be like this. I just need to be able to say goodbye. God I really just need one goodbye. How can they know I love them otherwise. They’ll hate me. I’m the father, the husband who went and got himself killed in the army. It wasn’t my fault though. I would have left if I could. I promise, I wanted to go...

Everything is dark. A more natural void this time. With the tiniest fuzzy glow at the perimeters of my vision. A luminance that wouldn't have even registered had it not been for my time in the peculiar white space. My eyes were just closed in a place with normal light behavior. I open my eyes and it is dark. But I can still make out details through the gloom, and I know this is my house. The house I grew up in. Its kitchen. I recognize the slightly tanned linoleum floor with a light spattering of coffee and mud stains across it, the Heavy, near immovable wooden table that hadn’t shifted an inch in the sixteen years I’d lived

there. The whole room, I remember to be overwhelmingly yellow and brown. Autumnal. But now, there's nothing but shapes of grey piercing the blackness of the empty kitchen. 'Or maybe not so empty' I think as I become aware suddenly of a rustling behind me. resentful movement. Angry Breathing. I understand this. I know what's happening in this room. I turn to see exactly what I'd expected. It's me. Not exactly my twin seeing as this *me* had yet to grow out any facial hair and was still considerably shorter than me now. Maybe an inch. Two inches at most though. I know he was sixteen when this happened. I was sixteen when this happened. He's packing the last of his food for later and stuffing a raincoat in atop it all. I know this but I'm not watching. Its just too depressing. I'm remembering. And looking all around the room. It's the first time I've seen it since this very night I'm reliving. Looking down, I see the kitchens three mismatched wobbly chairs and one ottoman that I'd be forced to take for whenever my grandmother came to visit. It was always just the tiniest bit too short to feel level with the table. My gaze at the ottoman was interrupted as a furious kick from my past self sends it flying into the wall behind me with a ferocious clatter. I didn't remember leaving so quickly I think as I raise my view again to see the young me continue walking towards the kitchen door. Out to the hall and then the street. I think to follow him but don't bother. As shitty as this decision was. It was still somehow the best. I wish there was another ottoman to kick. "No, it wasn't" The familiar but muffled voice of the void boy. Audibly agitated. He's sitting in the corner knees up to his face and arms hanging loosely. One hand nervously picking at loose flakes of paint on the skirting board. Head between his knees. His hair looks like that of my younger self who just left. "It was never the best option. It was cruel. It was ungrateful of us to leave them after all they did for us. Maybe not dad but mom?" He begins to tremble as he scratches the paint in his vicinity. Then he explodes. "I SHOULD HAVE PICKED FOR US." He lifts his head and wails into the room, from his youthful face a more mature and experienced truth shines through as it's torn apart with anguish. I recognize it. Eyes tight shut and mouth agape and contorted as it channels a cry. It resonates in an unnatural way that unsettles me. His lungs are empty and with one more sob his head falls again to his knees. Just then, all around me, little pins of grey begin to appear in the walls, on the fridge, every surface in the room was growing these dull speckles. But I was still focused on the boy. "I had to go" I say solemnly "He. He wasn't good. And she didn't help. The army was better for-. *Us*." The boy doesn't listen. Just keeps crying pitifully into the core of his near fetal position. The grey spots are now grown into discs of an off white almost bleached hue and begun to touch off one another tangentially. "w-w-why did you m-make us remember" the boy chokes out through tears. "It was f-f-fine when we'd forgotten" he lifts his head to look at me now. Eyes puffy. "But we deserved it". The words hit like a freight train. I'm almost repulsed. I can't talk to him. I turn to walk away but I've lost all sense of direction in a now all

bleached-white room again. My depth perception disappears in the detailless room, I can't find the wall. Then I realise with a start that it's the void once again.

Ch 5 -Abe Grant Leaves

I've walked for a while now. I'm not sure what direction. Just away. Away from the sobbing boy and that memory. The image flashes into my mind again. Vividly. Like I'm there once more. Like I'm in the kitchen I had just left. The superego curled up in the corner. I keep walking and right as I would come into contact with the refrigerator, it disappears along with everything else in the room and I'm walking through the void again. It's annoying that. Any time I focus too hard on a memory here it just materializes. Indistinguishable from reality. Not that there's much reality here anyways. Maybe I'm just dreaming. Or I'm in a coma. How would I think if my neck snapped anyways. How could all this time have passed in just that tenth of a second? I just don't think I can believe it. "All this around me", I say as I wave my hands about for the benefit of nobody in particular, "It's so clearly unreal. There's no complexity. It's easier for my brain to make it believable that way." I put my hands in my pockets and continue to walk, dragging my feet along the monotonal floor, Indistinguishable from the ivory atmosphere. The laziness of my gait wasn't from fatigue. Or at least not the physical kind. I was just so mentally done. What did all this mean? No one had given me a straight answer since I got here. I say nobody, when the only other one here is that boy. That poor boy. My mind is filled once again with his image, but I quickly dispel it before it can take physical form. Just then, a thought from earlier rises to the front of my mind. Temporarily forgotten but unavoidable. His hair, his voice, His visage as he howled. He said he was my Mega-ego or something. A part of my mind that decided what I thought was right and wrong. When I felt guilt and when respite. And I think he may be telling the truth. Maybe all of this is as he said it is. It's just like, he feels so eerily part of me. The way he reacted to my leaving that night. It was exactly how a part of me felt when it actually happened. I felt so. So ungrateful, so cruel. "We deserved it" the words still run slowly and painfully through my mind. Like hot tar. And I shudder. What if. What if my morality is right. Maybe I did deserve it. I've lived my whole adult life trying to go against that idea but maybe I really was the one in the wrong...

Another memory. Except It's daytime now. A proper hazy summer afternoon. Looking out onto a suburbia from a patchy pale green lawn. The road; sticky and hazy with the heat. I'm outside and there's a fresh wind. A sluggish gust more like but welcome nonetheless in the beating heat of the midday sun. It would be pleasant, (though a little hot) if not for what I know this memory entailed. I look away from the street to the garage I'm sure is open behind me. Right at my feet, kneeled awkwardly on the rough concrete floor wearing only shorts and a grass-stained t-shirt. He's looking behind the tyre into the axle cavity of a

beaten-up old car. Long and somewhat sleek but long since past its prime. With lack of care and attention, allowing it to fall to disrepair. A plethora of dents, scratches and patches of rust had left the once orange body ruined. The window of the back left door was cracked but covered up by ugly black duct tape. The tires were worn almost to shreds, and most recently discovered was that the brakes had stopped working entirely. The hopeless child that was me looked into where the brakes were hoping desperately that some divine burst of inspiration would give the knowledge needed to fix them. To make everything just a little bit better. To be good and pay back my parents when they needed me. BANG. The noise startles both young me and my present self. Looking over in sync to the door that's just burst open. A tall man with well cropped dark hair but an untrimmed and shaggy beard waltz's in with a can of lager in one hand and the other resting in front of him. Hanging from one thumb wrapped in behind the belt. "How's the Beatt champ." He says it heartily and slurs the words just the slightest bit. He's been drinking already. "Made any progress on 'er?, I knew you'd be just the right man for the job with all them trains you talk about." young me stays silent and looks dead ahead into the impossible task yet to be completed. I can still feel the disappointment and self-loathing he is like it was yesterday. "what's the matter big man? Cat got your tongue?" Still, I am wordless. Terrified. "What's up with you? have you fixed it or not?" I hear the annoyance rising in him. Undoubtedly amplified by the beers. I feel almost at one with the fearful boy. My mind races. Looking for a way out. Anything to delay the anger and the beating that will come with it. There is only one option. "y-yes." I stutter out. "I-I-it's done. It was just an issue with the umm, what's it called again..." My heart races, my skin goes hot in anticipation of being caught in the lie. "The umm Catalytic converter." It was a word I didn't even understand, but it was enough to fool him. "ATTABOY" he cries. Too loud for the anxious state I'm in and I flinch but luckily, he doesn't notice. "I knew I could count on you boy. And to think, those conmen down at the shop were gonna charge me two hundred fifty quid. HA. Sure showed them didn't we boy, Eh?" I breathe out in relief and look over to him for the first time since he came in. I nod in response and manage a weak smile. My heart still beating like I'd run a mile. "How's about the two of us go for a ride down to the docks to celebrate, sonny. Put her to work and see how that '*catolithium conductor*' job works on the brakes." My heartbeat jumps right back up to overdrive. He's going to find out. He's going to kill me, But I can't tell him. Then He'll know I lied. And if I say no, he'll suspect something up. I'm torn. Damned. In my indecision, I don't even realise he fishes the keys from his pocket and hops into the car's front seat. "Coming?" He says as he starts up the car with a horrible rattly hum. I have no choice. I shuffle from off my knees and to the passenger seat door and just pray all goes well. He knocks the car into gear, Reverses out of the garage and onto the street without even checking the mirrors, bumps the rust bucket straight into second gear to much protestation from the old thing and starts bombing up the road. I realise suddenly that I'm

not in the front seat anymore. I'm in the back. I'm not actually living this. I'm still just observing, as real as all the emotions felt. I'm overwhelmed with relief. It's exactly what I had wished for at the time. For it all to be just a dream, to not really be happening. But I also feel remorse. For the young memory me that still has to experience it. The car approaches the hill to the docks. It's not a large hill. A gentle downward slope of about 50 meters or so. At the bottom is a T-junction. One in which the road we are currently riding along is the perpendicular line. "Oh, Time to test your new and improved brakes Champ. DOWN WE GO." He floors the gas but is still only in second gear from the upwards hill beforehand, and the engine just revs. In his slightly tipsy state, he then starts trying to get his bearings on the gearstick. Knocking it out of gear before attempting (unsuccessfully to bring it back to the first as we build up speed on the slope. "Dad, We're gonna crash" I whine, starting to grasp the severity of our situation. "No, not at all. We have them brakes o' course. See?" He pushes down the breaks to stop the freerolling car but of course nothing happens. He pushes harder. Still gathering speed. I don't want to be here anymore. Real present day me. I really want to go. I try to pull myself from the memory. In a sudden panic, my dad yanks up the handbrake as an emergency maneuver. The car screams and swerves. Slowing violently until it spins and screeches to a stop just at the bottom of the hill, right in the middle of the T-junction. My father turns slowly to look at me. Fury filling his eyes. I had never seen him quite so angry and I wish I could say I never did again but that wouldn't be true. This time stuck with me though... Finally, I manage to pull myself from the nightmare. Disassociate myself from the event. I don't ever want to remember the rest of that recollection. Experiencing it once was enough. I breathe out. Another sigh of relief. The anxiety I didn't even realise had built up flowed off me like water. But something was off. I wasn't in the void anymore. Or at least I didn't think I was? It was similar. Very similar, really. But there was one key difference. Everything was black.

Ch -6 Abe grant flies

A new void. How exciting. I dread the memories I'll be forced to relive here. I turn a full 360 degrees to find any sort of a landmark but find nothing. "Great. Not even a void boy to explain stuff to me this time." "I wouldn't be too sure about that" remarks a rather deep voice. Not ridiculously deep but enough to have a rich aural reverb. "Oh, and who are you then?" I reply flatly to the darkness. Still spinning since I wasn't really sure where the voice had come from. "I believe you've already learned who I am. But don't fret, I won't play games with your confusion. I am your *id* Abe". "really" I begin to reply? "Because I got the impression from my superego that you might not be the most capable speaker." The darkness seems to chuckle. It's the timbre of a cello or maybe even a double bass. "Well,

are you not talking to me now? I would recommend trusting me on this. Seeing as how you don't have a lot of time left." Not much time? That caught my attention. "What do you mean not much time? I thought I had unlimited time? And besides why not just die now. What am I supposed to do anyways? So far, I've just been walking through a bunch of nightmares and listening to a snotty kid's wail about my choices. I really couldn't get out of here sooner to be honest with you." The darkness is silent at this, but I sense a feeling of sympathy emanating gently from the fathomless horizons. Finally, id speaks "You have no set purpose here besides what you want to do. Whatever makes passing on a little easier. A little reward at the end of life for if you endured it. Or a couple of last memories for the road if you had fun on the journey. I suppose that makes some sense, but there are so many more questions buzzing in my head... "Well go ahead and ask them if you'd like. I'll most likely be able to answer any you have for me." I'm puzzled by his answer as I'm sure I didn't say that out loud. How could he have known to answer as he did though? The inky sky seems to almost smile, but I see nothing. "Yes. I can hear what you say in your head as well as what's aloud. Really, there's no such thing as out loud here, all of what you say is still IN your mind. But anyways. Go ahead and ask those *mysterious* questions If you'd like." "Ok yes" I collect myself. "Well, I suppose they all sort of boil down to one topic really." I keep awkwardly shuffling in circles as I speak. Unsure of where to direct my words."The superego. What happened to him?" Another brief moment of silence from the id. Totally still until he speaks again. "That's quite the question. And the answer I most definitely can provide. But It's a long story so prepare yourself. It all begins long ago. When we were born. Conceived even. At a certain point during our body's formation in the womb, I came into being. And it was just me. I controlled us directly by my will, even though the infant body could rarely fulfill the task. In that time, I made sure I cried for food, cried for sleep, cried in fear, even cried for attention. The only thing I could do to ensure all our physical needs were met. I had a purpose. A responsibility. And I worked my very hardest to fulfill it. Then one day, when we were about 3, you arrived. It was explosive, revolutionary; we began to comprehend and understand; emotions gained depth beyond a meant to achieve survival needs. I didn't realise what had been missing until you were here but after that I could never imagine The mind without it. Without you. I found myself further and further to the back of your mind. But it didn't bother me. I still had my part to play. I was just in awe watching you move us so masterfully. You were so chaotic, uninhibited, and free. Our incredible ego, Abe. At about 5 though, our last friend joined us. Abraham. At first, he was very quiet. He sat with me back here. In the subconscious expanses of your brain. I would show him all the amazing things you did. He seemed so interested. And he was. Just... for different reasons. He was there to see what you do, how people react to it and then decide whether it is right or wrong. Now as rosy as my vision of our early life was, I will accept It was less than perfect. But the issue was that Abraham didn't know that. Nobody

knew there was anything wrong but me. Only I knew there was a lack of affection for us. A contempt even. But I was too transfixed by your.. Your *consciousness* to do anything. Eventually, when you started school at six, your superego had taken in all the meanness, anger and ignorance as the norm. The baseline. Then all the normal things children do like beg to stay up late or ask for money from your parents ended badly for you. You tried to do them but got in trouble for it. Abe wouldn't have been bothered. He still knew he wanted to watch the movies that were on later and buy the things he wanted but Abraham understood as those around him did. Really he's less a part of us as much as he is a little part of everyone we grow up around. He saw the unfair situation as reasonable and thought it to be morally wrong of you to be '*Ungrateful*' or '*whiny*'. All that stepping on eggshells however, left him very delicate. And when I finally realised how bad the situation had become and pushed us to up and leave, He couldn't handle it. A little bit of him broke. A little bit of you broke. But you stuffed it down, and he never properly healed. He came to hate me for making us leave. A truly bitter and misguided hate. And it made an impact on your life too. You had all sorts of issues with relationships until Rachel. But she helped. Maybe even Abraham would have gotten to heal a bit through that unconditional love. But you died too soon. Much too soon. You know, he was really so very excited to meet you. If not for anything else, it is tragic that we failed him then." The id goes silent. It's a lot to take in but I am glad for the knowledge. Finally, some straight information. "I had no idea" I say. "I. I kind of feel bad. It's my fault isn't it. I didn't deal with my emotions properly. I'm the reason he never recovered." silence from around me. "Well yes" id replies "But you were never taught. You are responsible directly but your parents' part to play, even though indirect, hangs far far heavier." It feels genuinely relieving to hear that. As in, an almost physical weight suddenly disappears off my back. Decades of guilt. Gone. Well. Almost gone. I almost smile. But not quite. One thing begins to fill my mind as I become aware of this alleviation of my burden. One question. "id," I begin to ask, "will Abraham have any of this peace?" The black surroundings sigh. "Unfortunately, I think not. I have spent the last 13 years telling him all the things I've told you and a million things more. Now, only minutes remain before we die. Before we all fade away together. I think it may be too late for him. It is truly heartbreaking, but we simply must accept it." "Yeah, I suppose we do." I realise I am still moving in circles, albeit far more leisurely, but I'm beginning to get dizzy, so I stop before saying "He's been damaged and a little bit neglected for a long time and while it's not all my fault, it was some. And I accept that. I can move on, you know?". As I finish this sentence, and more importantly as I think this thought. As I genuinely believe it in my very heart. The darkness begins to break out in white pinpricks. Like from the memories but far more radiant. The '*sky*' also lightens a bit around the edges of the horizon to create a gradient from inky black to a warm streetlamp yellowy hue. I hear id chuckling one last time as if far away before slowly saying; "don't be scared. It will all be just all right." I look

again to the sky to see if the pinpricks have grown much but instead am startled by something else entirely. It's the stars. It's the whole Night sky. A sliver of a crescent moon hangs between the shining stars and with its small bit of extra light, I can see that I'm in a park, on a bench watching the night sky on a warm August night. I can't make out her face, but I know in my heart the person beside me is Rachel and the lump between our arms, wrapped up in the blankets we brought to throw over ourselves, is my daughter. 5 days after she was born. The night after we came home from the hospital. One of the best memories of my life. And it feels so real. I feel so in control again. After all this time I've spent falling. Lost and confused. It only took a couple minutes with my own agency, and now I've soared again. Flight is just controlled falling. I smile and lay my head back against Rachel's and admire the spectacular night sky. She leans wordlessly onto me as I feel my consciousness bleeding away. 'It really is like falling asleep' I think passingly. I hear the park go mute; the smell of cold night air leaves the back of my throat. I'll miss breathing fresh air. The beautiful stars and moon in front of me go dim and then disappear. I'll miss them too. Then I feel the pressure on my neck and the separate little pressure on my lap going numb. I'll miss them more than anything. And then, it is truly silent but for my fading minds decelerating chatter. I feel like I'm less and less there every second, but I'm not going anywhere else. Until the last of me remains in my mind. Still just enough to sustain a last gentle conscious stream of love. Not sure who I am loving. Who even I am. But loving just as much. Then There is nothing and the world is without Abe, id and Abreham Grant