

**mr. dead in cloudcity  
otherwise known as MR. DICC**

Lately, all mr. dead did was jumping rope and eat apple pie. He had a huge crush on Lady Grape. These facts summed him up pretty neatly. Over the years, mr. dead had actually had a number of crushes. First, there had been the beautiful Electra, who had been hired as an intern at CloudCity Date Inc. He'd look at her from across the aisle (she was assigned two desks to the left), dreaming of her, yet at the same time mortified. When she got up, mr. dead would work up the courage to try mutter something, then curse himself when she passed by his desk, leaving him in shambles. He was in quite a sorry state. He didn't know Electra was a prototype robot part of a trial sample of two hundred sent out by iCloud Robotics. They were to test on live-interaction with humans. After a few months, a bug was detected in the main source code, potentially leaving the robots vulnerable to third hacking parties. Project Electra200 was rolled up ahead of date for safety measures, and the robots were called back. Electra quit from one day to another, without explanation. Mr. dead was devastated.

Soon after, he noticed Fat Betty. She had an enormous stomach and ate all day long, from Walkers crisps to sweet bread rolls, vanilla pudding and caramelized popcorn that crunched in her mouth. But mr. dead was unfazed. It was the inside that counted. Once, he leaned in close to her while asking for report 2087Y/30Aug. Her breath smelled of peppermint chewing gum. To him, this was proof.

"In what world?" Billy asked him later, thinking him weirder than usual.

"The breath is the manifestation of the soul. She has a nice breath," he said calmly, Buddha-like in his conviction. Fat Betty was destined for him and he for her, because according to his personal assessment, they were both nice people.

He made up his mind to ask her out on the third Thursday of Fluff Cloud Month. He grew increasingly nervous as the date drew near. A week before he was to man up and pop her the question, Fat Betty began convulsing at the McCloud Fastfood Drive-Through. She died the following day in an extra large hospital bed reinforced with steel to carry her massive 156 kg. Autopsy revealed that the excessive amount of peppermint chewing gum had lumped together in her stomach and prevented the necessary nutrients to be absorbed into her bloodstream. She had such a severe electrolyte imbalance and depleted levels of potassium, magnesium and calcium that she was used as an amusing freak anecdote the next twenty years at CloudCity Medical School. Mr. dead was devastated.

Then his interim boss, Suffragette, came along. She'd been selected as Bully Aries' replacement during *his maternity leave*. Bully Aries had been born a girl, Honeypops, but realized at age eleven he was transgender. At age sixteen he started hormone therapy, but couldn't yet afford top surgery or genital reconstructive surgery. A state-funded therapist managed for the next couple years to hold the psychological body dysphoria at arms length. But while he saved up, both were unpleasantly surprised when, after a drunk night out with gay Latinos, Bully Aries resulted to be pregnant. He said to remember nothing of the evening. He decided to keep the baby, and the therapist quit. A world in which men got pregnant had gone mad.

Suffragette, however, proved to be an even stricter boss than Bully Aries. The colleagues at her former workplace had secretly baptized her after the militant way in which she bossed around her subordinates, and a curious accident: she'd stood up in a meeting held by the board of directives, furiously claiming she would not let her vote be discriminated against simply because she owned a vagina. No one knew how her vote would've been discriminated against, but her performance had left quite an impression. Soon, the nickname stuck.

Mr. dead admired Suffragette for her force, her character, her willingness to go over dead bodies in order to get what she wanted. She didn't shy away from throwing tantrums or drilling people into the ground. Everyone hated her. She was the anti-hero of the company's 41th floor, but mr. dead was in awe of her.

"I don't get it. At least Bully Aries had a reason to be a dick. I mean, he technically doesn't have a dick, but you get it. Like, with the testosterone shots he's on. Seems they cause heavy mood swings. That don't excuse his fucking highly inflammable temper, though. I still don't forgive him for calling you 'a bipedal ignoramus with zero reasoning capacity'. D'you reckon ignoramus to be latin? But, like, he can't help it, I guess it's the shots. He's like the rabid dog of a charity cause. Am I being mean? Still, fuck that guy. But

Suffragette ain't cutting it either. I dislike her 'more. It's not because she's got a vagina that magically all of the worlds problems been transferred to 'er shoulders. She's a bitch, darling. Get on with your life," said Billy.

But it wasn't that easy for mr. dead. He froze in the presence of that great woman with snow-white hair and balls triple the size his own. (Even though she always made it a point she had a *vagina* and the vagina had to be *respected*. He respected the vagina, but mr. dead also wanted to put his dick inside it, politely and reverently.)

On a good day, mr. dead reasoned that a woman like Suffragette would have to be seized by power. She was a cold man-eater, ate men like him for breakfast. He couldn't show up all sweet-natured and cute. This called for MASCULINITY. A Blitzkrieg that would leave her fainting into his arms. So he resolved to walk through her office's door, grab her by the waist, and kiss her till SURRENDER. What would happen next, he hadn't thought through yet. It would sort itself out, he hoped, because he was running out of time. Bully Aries was already due to return in two weeks time.

So, that's what he did: he walked in, beelined for her, and as he tried to put his lips to hers, he fell through the air. She was a hologram. A fucking hologram. (So embarrassing.) Turns out, CloudCity Date Inc. executives had preferred to keep Suffragette at the headquarters, where she impressively drove profit returns up, and entrusted a high-end hologram to take on the appearance of the interim job. Precautionary measures were taken for it to remain secret, since executives feared it would undermine her authority if leaked she wasn't physically present. All this time, Suffragette directed the hologram from over 400 km away.

The hologram got wiped and repurposed the same day. Bully Aries was offered a generous \$10.000 check to return the next day, and mr. dead was hailed as a hero for exposing the hated Suffragette. He'd gotten rid of her. As he got carried outside the building on the shoulders of celebrating colleagues, mr. dead was devastated. It seemed all his romantic endeavors ended in tragedy.

But soon, he had forgotten all about it. His heart was fully set on Lady Grape. And surely this time, everything would be different.

Mr. dead got home every day at six o'clock. He'd prepare 6 cups thinly sliced, peeled apples. Then, in another bowl, he combined  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar, 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour,  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon,  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt and  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon ground nutmeg. He'd mix the ingredients well, work a little magic and bake a beautiful apple pie. (The apples were tender and the crust golden brown.) While the pie cooled, he took his jumprope and went to the garage. He stared straight ahead as his body droned on. The amount of calories he expended, was the exact amount of calories he took in at dinner. His body weight never fluctuated. He owned the same suit seven times, one for each day of the week. He always looked the same.

That was the monotony of his life. And he was content that way. Always the same routine: drive to work and back home. Prepare apple pie, jump rope, eat apple pie. Go sleep. On Wednesday's he shopped for the week (all the ingredients necessary for 7x apple pie). On Saturdays he met with Billy.

Billy was his best friend. He wasn't really sure how that had happened. At one point she'd just appeared in his life, no questions asked, and had stayed ever since. She had bright blue hair and wore a black leather vest, ripped stockings and heavy, black boots. Her sense of humour was dark, and her taste in music sad and teenage angst. Her gaze was either blank (in space) or intense (in his head). Mr. dead could not have said with certainty how old she was. He knew she sometimes worked odd jobs in the porn industry to make ends meet. Her accent was mixed and plain weird. On the occasion he didn't get distracted by it, he noticed she actually said some smart stuff. Surprisingly deep. (Almost poetic.) Billy and he would go to this abandoned parking lot they'd found a couple years ago. They'd gotten into the habit of calling it 'Heaven 47'. They didn't know why, they just liked it that way. So they'd sit in the car and Billy would blow some joints while mr. dead sat next to her in silence. She was of the opinion that fairy tales always finished too early. They were the middle of the story (the climax), before everything went to the dogs and reached its proper, depressed, sad ending. A fairy tale is "thirty seconds blissful ignorance of the world," she said and grimaced. That was the last time mr. dead had asked her a question. Neither knew what they were doing in the car. Were they thinking? Enjoying each others company? Waiting for sex to happen, even though it never did,

because they were friends? It was strange, and somehow comforting to the both of them. To just sit there in the dead of night, while life outside quietly passed by, leaving them alone to it.

Lady Grape was one big, round, sensual curve that drove Mr. Dead crazy. Her green skin lit up when the sun angled upon it, turning her appearance translucent and golden-tinted. The single leaf of the small, slender tendril atop her head waved charmingly when she moved, a detail that made Mr. Dead shudder with enamourment. He would have written poetry if he could; languorously, dreamily, hot under the collar: meanwhile throwing her furtive, loving glances like Cupid's arrows. But Mr. Dead's intellect was too rough for such artistic endeavors, and alas, Lady Grape did look like the type of woman who needed to be wooed in such romantic and delicately stirring ways. He didn't know how to make her notice him. How to put himself in her path in such a way that would reflect advantageously upon himself? As a gallant, brave-hearted knight, independent of the world, yet sensitive enough to attend to it? Mr. Dead was after nothing less but perfection and in a stroke of self-ascribed brilliance, he turned to Billy for help.

"Darling," Billy sighed, annoyed at his request. She looked over his figure. He had a mashed potato for a nose, crooked teeth (though still acceptable) and a voice higher pitched than most. Still, she judged these flaws mildly. His broad, lanky frame was not unattractive, and the air of otherworldliness around him sharply piqued interest. "Darling," she repeated. He was asking her to turn him into everything he was not: The Cave Man, testosterone-fueled, ego-driven, power-hungry. A Pounding Bear. Something deep within her resisted. It would destroy the sweet, bland character he was, and especially the endearing qualities he still preserved. That natural innocence she fiercely admired without ever having admitted so.

"I can't help you," she said resolutely. If he wanted to wreck himself, then fine, but she would not help destroy him, such a beautiful creature, she thought. Mr. Dead remained in silence for a while. Outside, it had begun to rain on Heaven 47. He turned to her, visibly upset, and pleaded with his kind eyes.

"No," Billy repeated and lit another joint, blowing the smoke up the burnt ceiling of the car. All his attention diverted to the giant NO Billy had posited him, Lady Grape was out of focus. The refusal came as a lack of faith in his capacities, his good character. He felt Billy thought him unworthy of a Lady. It wounded him deeply. It made him angry. He *rebelled* in his interior, as if to prove to himself he did not need Billy to convince a Lady. Emboldened, (reckless, one would almost say) he bought a bouquet of Cloud Roses and had them delivered the next day to Lady Grape's desk. It read a surprising straightforward, no-nonsense invitation, a simple "your admirer" underneath. Hadn't even bothered to sign the card. Next, he bought a new suit, got in his car, and drove to the venue. It was the same McCloud Fastfood Drive-Through Fat Betty heart's had gone into a standstill.

"You?" exclaimed Lady Grape shocked when she recognized him as he barged through the door. Almost brutish, he took her hand, placed one kiss on the back of it, looked up with flaming eyes. She was taken aback. Such an outburst of energy (!!!) radiated off him, such Male aggressiveness, that it instantly turned her on. They sat down and ordered food. Lady Grape delicately picked at her Cloud Fries, Mr. Dead drank a pink confettied Cloud smoothie. Neither said anything. Lady Grape mistook his fury for sexual anticipation, the electrifying vibes making her swoon. Mr. Dead studied her glaringly under the neon hard lights. Her act of haughty elegance wore off, seeming ridiculous. She terribly looked out of place. *Billy would sit comfortably, would make fun of me. Attack that burger like she hadn't eaten in three days... I'd enjoy watching her eat...* (It hit him like a bullet in the head that he resented Lady Grape. Away with the poisonous thought! Dismissed as folly and nerves!) But Lady Grape and the hyper-sexual gaze she gave him (longing and to his mercy) were cheap. The Male Ego in his pants grew. He knew why. Something to do with the full power over her body Lady Grape delegated to him with those fuck-me eyes. He paid, took her home, into his bed. It would be quick, satiating his frustration. (He had never gone this far astray from his principles.) He didn't care. She didn't resist. He put himself inside her and began pumping. (He forced himself not to care.) The physical enrapture consumed him wholly. Lady Grape gave screams of pleasure and held onto him as moved above her, first bodily organic but more and more mechanically as the nothingness of what he was doing assaulted him in his heart.

"What happened then?" Billy asked, her eyes wide open. The little light around dilated the pupils.

He gripped her tighter; feeling it coming, like a fast-forward explosion in him. Lady Grape's breath came in jerks, her mouth was half-open and her eyes were half-closed. He drove himself one more time deep into her with all his muscles, and she let out a long, living scream of desire: mr. dead ejaculated, her tender, green flesh ripped under his hands and Lady Grape spat open onto the walls and into mr. dead's face.

"She's dead? Another one?" asked Billy.

Mr. dead didn't know what attitude to adopt to that question. Billy retreated back into her seat and suppressed an absurd smile at the narration.

The atmosphere in the car was humid and damp. The windows were steaming up. What glow there was of the moon, which hung high and solitary over their heads outside, filtered into their laps as some soft, magic light.

"I am a problem," mr. dead said after a stretch of slow, painful reflection. He lived through the ensued weighted pause with the spirit of a broken man.

"Well, mr. dead, maybe you should just give up on it. Maybe love isn't for everyone," said Billy. Mr. dead glanced sideways. She looked infinitely sad, her face turned upwards to the ceiling of the car. Realizing what she'd said, she closed her eyes.

"Do you mean some people never find love?"

She smiled, randomly, and looked at him again. In the silence that passed, her shining eyes were cast down. It broke his heart, though he did not know why.

"No, mr. dead. People always finds love. But love does not always find them."

He contemplated the image of her. He was struck.

Timid, mellow light shone in her hair, her eyes glazed with brilliance. That face, full of ache and tenderness, appeared to him as if he saw it for the first time. Soaking in the clear moonlight, she was enchanting.

"Sometimes, people wait and wait, and love just never comes. Even though they are right there, in plain sight," she said and bowed her head forward-down.

Mr. dead found himself leaning in, "And what if it does?" he asked, taking himself by surprise. Yet through the confusion at what was happening he felt an unalterable certainty of it being right, as if this was meant to happen all along.

"What if it suddenly all makes sense?" he asked.

"That doesn't happen in real life," she said, just inches away now.

"But what if it does?" he insisted, almost closing the gap.

"Then we're just in another fairytale," she whispered.