

Will walked the sidewalk (where else would he walk?), and thought of nothing in particular. He ran his fingers over the protective covering of a new forearm tattoo, and wished that it'd stop itching. He shoved his hands into his pockets and distracted himself with the grains of sand he found in there. The tattoo began to feel better.

It was late December, just a few days before Christmas, and he was walking back to his parked car from an afternoon meeting with his therapist. Angela. She was new. Well, new to him. He'd had his fair share of therapists. Angela was a breath of fresh air, though, and Will was really enjoying his sessions with her. She was a good person, and it made him feel like his ability to notice it proved he must be one, too. She was muslim, and so gracious. Whenever they met, she gave him tea (two milk, two sugar) and snacks (like almonds, or trail mix). Will's mother had passed away last year – incredibly sad for him and still so, so raw — when Angela found out, she donated \$25 to the SPCA on his mom's behalf. Who does that? For someone who often felt a little inconsequential to the world, overall, it made him feel like the way that he cared about the things he cared about was sometimes enough to inspire good in people. And that, maybe, was a way to have an effect on the world, in itself. This is probably what it meant to surround oneself with good people.

To, like, manifest a better reality just by talking about it with them. If you showed them the good things that you thought about, they'd start to think about them too.

It was a chilly day, grey and overcast. He liked to park a few blocks away, where the cherry trees blossomed in the spring and where the parking was always free.

He was walking an ordinary stretch of road in downtown Dartford. It started at the busiest intersection in the small town, all buses and taxis and a few thousand commuters. It ran southwest until its driveways were more homes than barbershops, micropubs, and veterinary hospitals. Dartford was sort of a sister town to Halborough, just a ferry ride away across an eponymous harbour. There were bridges to take, too, but Will knew that the ferry was the only way to fly. Halborough was much, much bigger, and had supported the region's commerce for decades. Dartford was a little more stunted, a little dirtier, and a lot more charming. As he walked along, Will wished he'd live there someday. He appreciated the how the older brick buildings mingled with the new glass-and-corrugated-metal ones. His longtime friend Pete had lived here once, he recalled—it was actually pretty impossible for him to separate Dartford's streets from memories of Pete, although he hadn't been able to visit Pete much in the couple years he'd lived here. In fact, he was going to see Pete tomorrow; so weird that he'd think of him now.

Pete and his partner Ainsley had moved to Winston a few years ago. It was a very small town, about 40 minutes away. Will actually spent plenty of time there in his teenage years. Pete loved the quieter life he found there.

Will was wrapped up in a medley of emotions, at the moment, when he thought about visiting him. That was the therapy talking, but it's good practice to label the feelings that you get, throughout the day. He felt excited to see his friend; they'd known each other for over 20 years now, man. They first met while working retail at Pets Inc, a sort of locally-owned big box store of pets & supplies. Great place to meet a lifelong friend; fucking around when you're supposed to be working and suffering through the surprisingly busy weeknights together. He felt nervous; it was supposed to snow a lot — the weather apps were forecasting a major blizzard between this afternoon and tomorrow — and he knew Pete would get all twisted about him driving back & forth to Winston in that mess. It wasn't a big deal to Will. Highways can get slippery and his snow tires weren't exactly brand new, but he'd driven in worse. And he felt, what was it? Old, I guess. Every holiday season they got together to watch A Muppet Family Christmas, and it was just about the only yuletide tradition that Will still had left.

See, Will had kind of a long streak of bad luck. So many wonderful experiences and achievements were in the shade of broken hearts and lonely nights. In no particular order: Will had

had girlfriends. They all had either cheated on him or been self-destructive. Will had gotten married. Sara was a particularly difficult partner, and before he knew it, he was trapped in a dangerous relationship (that he'd infused with too much love to be able to leave). Will had a son. Clay now lived with his mother (the ex-wife) and preferred not to talk to Will at all (I mean, why would he? Will encouraged him to keep a tidy room and do better in school, while Sara doted on him and let him stay home to be schooled there). Will couldn't find a job that he liked. Will hadn't made a home of any of his various apartments for more than a couple of years, max. Will's mom had died. That was a particularly awful time. She was such a giving woman, all smiles and a singsong voice, even in the last few years when she was losing grip of where she even was. He needed this tradition: A Muppet Family Christmas was gonna happen tomorrow, come hell or high water, to be honest.

As a 16-years-clean NA member, determination was a precious resource he knew how to mine. In fact, he'd just received his medallion last month, heavy and embossed and cast in what felt like pure copper. Whenever he earned a new token, he always kept it in his pants pocket for a week or so. It was a never-ending source of strength, and Will felt a surge of pride whenever his fingertips brushed against it (rather than the distinct non-feeling among the sand & dirt that he ran his fingers over now). But he had the good habit of trying to live practically, and he couldn't stand the possibility that he'd lose the thing.

After that first seven days, he always stored these precious awards in a glass bowl on a living room shelf. These medallions were rewards that he deserved, in a private way that no one else could truly understand, even if they'd already earned their own—those were theirs, and his were his. Each one was made of metal, sure, but was imbued with long nights and overthought doubts. They were made of the very days of his life, and they were priceless to him.

His feet bounded on, and he felt the distinct chill in the Harbourside air.

As he walked, he thought about the advice Angela had been giving him: it was nice to do something positive for yourself after a session. He thought about what he could enjoy, on his way to the car. Downtown Dartford. What a quirky and gritty little place. Reminded him of Pete. Shit, I wish I could see Pete right now, he thought.

Halfway to the car, he glanced across the street. And there he was. Pete.

Standing there, by a spa's front door, wearing his tan coat and stupidly big brown knit-it-himself scarf. An iPhone in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. *Was it Pete?* It was funny, the detail that convinced Will: the coffee that he held wasn't in a paper cup, but a white ceramic mug, the kind you'd have at

home or in a mechanic's garage. Hilarious. That's Pete, alright.  
What the actual fuck?

Will exclaimed his friend's nickname ("PDash"; it's a long story), and cut straight across the street to meet him. A car honk and a huge hug later, Pete was telling him about his day. Apparently he and Ainsley'd driven to Dartford in the morning so she could get her nails done before the holiday break (hence the spa he was waiting outside of). They paired it with a café splurge – they loved that shit – and they were heading back home soon. Before dark, if they could. Will felt his heart rising as he chatted his friend, all bounce and helium, and wondered how this was even happening. Gawd, he really loved chatting with Pete; they had such an invisible link of time and common values between them that made them more than just pals. They were brothers, really. He realized, after a few minutes, that he wasn't even really listening to what Pete was saying; the word choice and the body language alone were enough to communicate the shorthand that they shared. Will just sort of basked in that. Pete was clearly a little tired (that's Pete for you), and he was going on about work, family, and the holiday break. But the conversation that Will was enjoying was conveyed in genuine smiles, relaxed shoulders, and animated hand gestures. How refreshing, to meet an old friend and connect. Connect as more than 21st-century participants; but as humans, as energies. It was exactly what he needed.

After another nine minutes of idle words and meaningful hugs, they parted ways. Things that start spontaneously often end that way, too. Will stood a little taller and moved with a little more swagger as he walked this side of the street before crossing back to the side he was originally on, at the next corner. He passed one of those Community Cupboard things, just in front of a United Church (he always looked but rarely took), and wondered what the odds were. How about that? Bumping into Pete in that way. Of course, Pete had his story for being far from home today, but Will had to wonder, in an abstract way, if he'd done this. Was it so farfetched to think that maybe Pete was here in Dartford today because Will had manifested it, himself, somehow? Like, had Will's thoughts reached into the recent past and influenced Pete & Ainsley to come to town today? It's not all that unbelievable, if you think about how little we know about the universe, right? With just a thought, maybe *he'd* done this. Ha.

No, wait; he hadn't *thought* about Pete; he'd *wished* for him. Right? Will couldn't say that he remembered, exactly. But he was pretty sure of it. He tried really hard to recall. Racked his brain.

In a moment's time, it wouldn't matter.

*Had* he wished for Pete? Had he wished for anything else? What a funny thought. He'd been to Dartford dozens of times and never met, like, a genie before. At least, not that he knew of.

It was a weird little place, with its share of strange characters. He wished he knew what was going on. He didn't even mean to.

His feet were on autopilot, and he kept moving forward, towards the car. He could see its salt stains now.

The idea came to him, and its pieces all began to fall into place. He *had* wished for Pete. He'd straight-up wished it. He was on the only street in Dartford that granted them to its walkers. No street in Halborough did that. None in the rest of Canada, either. He couldn't explain how he knew what he knew about this goof-ass idea, but it sure made a lot of sense. Will knew that, along this stretch of sidewalk, between somewhere-back-there and somewhere-up-ahead, he'd get whatever he wished for. Anyone along this particular strip of concrete would. And they did. Believe it or not, he was the first to catch on. But sometimes realizations dawn on you more like a novel idea than actual confirmed data. It sort of felt silly to him. Like, he'd made Pete appear, but Pete had started his day and his trek to town *long* before Will walked this route and wished that wish. It all tracked, but that couldn't be all there was to it. Who knows what was truly going on? Coincidence, unlikelihood, a glitch in the Matrix or whatever; the idea was as ridiculous as it was intimidating. Where'd he come up with this idea? And shit, if it were true, what should he do with it? What was his responsibility here? World peace? And anyway, it couldn't be. Who ever heard

of a wish-granting street? He flip flopped on the idea as he wandered on. I mean, it was a pretty big idea.

Will was a man who spent a lot of time in his own head (like most of us, really), and the next thing he knew he was at the car. Finally coming to a stop under the blossom-less cherry trees, he slipped his fingers under the door's handle and paused. Hell, he thought, might as well go for broke.

He wished he could see his mother again.

Nothing changed.

He waited a moment, decided he must look pretty odd to anyone who happened to be watching, and climbed into the cold car. Unsure of what to do next, he realized that he was holding his breath. With a weighty exhale, he made a slow sort of shrug, and wondered... well, wondered what to think of it. Did... did he make some mistake? Had he already wandered past of the invisible boundary of the wish bubble? Was the magic, like, over? Was it ever there?

He turned the key in the ignition, and told himself that, well, there wasn't really any way to know. He exhaled again.

He put the car into drive and lifted his foot off the brake. Large flakes of snow had begun to fall. He turned his wheels into the road, already a little slick.