



Dumbass Strory

Jack Harris stepped into his bedroom, slowly closing the bedroom door behind him. He walked over to his bed and slowly lowered himself onto the soft, pillowy mattress. He wanted nothing more than to just sleep, from now until the end of the universe.

As he lay on his bed, his mind reeled back into the foggy memories of the past. It went back to the week before. Jack had just gotten off of work. He walked out of the front doors of the office building, welcoming the bright sunlight and fresh air after a day cooped up in an office cubicle. He left the office building, and walked down the street. He was feeling particularly energetic and outgoing that day. There was a cool breeze in the air, slicing through the midsummer days heat, and the sun was shining bright and clear in the sky.

The good feelings and nice weather convinced Jack to go walk around the city for a bit, before getting on the bus that would take him back to his apartment. He passed by various shops and restaurants, many of which he had not noticed before. Occasionally he would stop and look in a store or just gaze at the display in the window. His wandering took him several blocks away from the office building, to an area he didn't recognize. He wasn't worried. In fact, he was too busy just having a good time looking around.

While on this wonderful journey of urban discovery, Jack found himself in front of a small place called "Cafe de Chocolat". The door was propped open with a small black chalkboard listing that days special drinks and their prices. As he was walking by, Jack was hit with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. Memories flooded his mind then, memories of high school study sessions and college hangover cures. That was when he realized how long it had been since the last time he had had any real coffee. The office had instant coffee, which he drank every day at work, but it smelled like a boot and tasted twice as awful.

Jack went in to the cafe, eager to have some real coffee. He took a quick look around, getting a feel for the place before ordering. The walls were a light brown, almost mocha color, and the floor was darker brown tile. In front of him was a counter, with a till and tip jar slightly to the right and a pile of baked goods on the left. The counter also extended along that one side of the room, with coffee brewing equipment and cups along it, blocked from customer use by a glass barrier. On the wall behind the till was a large chalkboard with the various items for sale and prices written in chalk.

To Jack's left was a small cooler filled with soft drinks, and a note taped on the front reminding customers they still needed to pay for drinks from the cooler. To his right, Jack saw there were a number of tables with black chairs surrounding them. Only two customers were in the cafe, both tapping away at the keyboard of laptops as they sipped at their drinks. Aside from them, Jack could only see one other person in the cafe, the barista working at the till.

She had light blonde hair tied in a bun. She was wearing a black T-Shirt and jeans, with a cream colored apron bearing the logo of the cafe. She also had a nametag on, reading "Welcome! My name is... Jenny".

Jack stepped up to the till and looked at the chalkboard menu, trying to decide on what to get. He eventually decided on a medium Coconut Mocha Latte, and a blueberry muffin from the pile of baked goods on the counter. He told Jenny his order, and pulled some cash out of his wallet to pay. As she handed back his change, he felt her fingers brush against his. Just as quick as he noticed it, it was gone, and she quickly walked away to make his latte. He put the change in his wallet, then watched Jenny finish making his drink as he slid the wallet back into his pocket.

She brought his drink to him, and as he grabbed the cup once again their fingers touched. He looked at her and she smiled. He thanked her and left the cafe. He moved quickly, turning as soon as he had his drink and almost dashing out, to try and prevent her from seeing the blushing starting in his face.

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The next day Jack decided to go back to the cafe after finishing work for the day. His mind was occupied all day with the idea of going back. When he left the office building, he wandered around for a while. He went up and down various streets, not entirely sure where the cafe was. Eventually, after getting lost for a bit, he found himself back in front of the "Cafe de Chocolat".

Thoughts spun rapidly in his head. Did she like him? Were those touches intentional or accidental? Was that smile just an attempt to get more tips? Questions rose and fell in his head like waves crashing along a rocky shore, breaking up as he realized he had no answer to any of them. But one question rose larger than the rest: If he wasn't sure, and he was so nervous, why was he going back? Luckily, his rational mind had an answer: He hadn't tipped the other day, so if it had just been an act in order to make more money, she would not do the same thing today that she had done the day before. If, on the other hand, she did continue, then he could assume she was at least mildly interested. Also, the Coconut Mocha Latte he'd

had the other day was absolutely delicious.

Satisfied with the resolution of at least one question, he tentatively walked through the open doorway. His heart was hammering in his chest, and his breathing was getting shallower. He knew he shouldn't be nervous, but the feeling would not leave. His eyes scanned the inside of the cafe. This time there were no other customers. Jenny was turned away from him, cleaning one of the coffee machines behind the counter. Jack's step faltered, and he considered just backing out of the cafe and never returning. She hadn't seen him yet, and there was no one else inside, so no one would notice...

As he was considering this, Jenny finished cleaning the machine and turned around. She was momentarily startled, clearly unaware that Jack had entered the store. But, within the blink of an eye, her expression changed from one of surprise to one of happiness. Her mouth broke into a grin that reached up and touched her eyes.

"Why, hello there!" she said in a cheerful, peppy voice, "I remember you. You came in yesterday, had a... Coconut Mocha Latte and a blueberry muffin, right?"

Jack was stunned into silence. Some part of his brain made his head nod, but the rest of his mind was just trying to process what she had said. She remembers me? Why? Does she like me? Or was I creepy? Maybe its because I didn't leave a tip? Or maybe its just because they don't get that many customers, or maybe she just has a really good memory...

"So, would you like the same today? Or maybe you'd care to try something different," her words burst in and popped the bubble of his thoughts, snapping him back to reality. "I would recommend the Caramel Macchiato. It's my favorite." One eyelid fell in a quick playful wink, and Jack's heart skipped a beat.

His mouth spoke before his brain could interrupt and confuse matters by thinking about the wink, "Yeah, that sounds great. I'll try the caramel mochi... mocha... mocki... that thing you said."

He was mortified, mentally screaming at himself for fucking up the order. His mouth had acted before he could think, and his mouth clearly didn't know how to pronounce Macchiato. But he noticed she hadn't been fazed at all. She just smiled, then asked if he wanted anything else with that.

What happened next, Jack could not explain. He had no conscious intention to do it, had not thought ahead or planned it. It may have been percolating in his subconscious, bubbling and

frothing in the depths of his brain where even he was not aware of it, poised to burst forth at the first opportunity. Before he knew what he was doing, Jack felt the words slipping past his lips and out his mouth.

“There is one other thing... Would you like to go for dinner sometime?”

After he had said those words, Jack instantly began to notice various little things about himself: His hair wasn't combed, he hadn't worn matching socks that day, his shirt had a small stain on the cuff of one sleeve, which he was now desperately trying to cover up with his hand. He had become incredibly self-conscious. He was so suddenly involved in taking stock of his appearance that he almost missed her response.

“Sure,” Jenny said, “Where do you want to go?” She hadn't faltered, hadn't seemed taken aback or really surprised. It was almost like she had been expecting him to ask. Over the next few minutes, they worked out the details of the date as she made him his Caramel Macchiato. Jack was to meet her at an Italian restaurant a few blocks away from the Cafe. He wrote down the address and name of the restaurant. Then, on his way back home from the Cafe, drink in hand, he stopped in at the restaurant and made a reservation. He didn't want anything to go wrong.

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Fast forward back to today, with Jack lying on his bed, exhausted, over thinking and overanalyzing his day. He had hoped nothing would go wrong on the date, had tried planning and preparing for every possibility. But, as always seemed to happen to him, it did not go as smoothly as he had hoped.

Jack wanted nothing more than to just lie on that bed until the end of time, never moving, never speaking. That way he would never again be embarrassed. After a moment some semblance of sense crept back into his head, and he decided to go take a shower. The hot water would help him clear his head, and washing would give him something to do.

He stepped into the shower and just stood there for a minute, letting the water run down his body. He stood still, with his eyes closed, giving the hot water a chance to warm him skin. Soon he grabbed his soap and started washing.

He tried to think back, to try and find when it was that he first became socially awkward. Was there a certain specific point where he became awkward? Was it his fate to always be this way, to never be able to really have a relationship with a woman? Or was it just a string of bad

luck? As he was asking these questions, a memory floated to the front of his thoughts, one far into his past. It was a long time ago, before he was even in highschool...

It was the day before Valentine's Day, in his Grade 5 year of elementary school. He was at home, sitting at the kitchen table. In front of him was an array of brightly colored pre-made Valentines. His mother had bought a box of them at a store earlier that week, and he was currently filling out the "To" and "From" fields on the cards. He was going to give one to each person in the class, as usual among young students every Valentine's Day. It was utterly impersonal, but at the same time he enjoyed it. It was something more fun than the usual drudgery of classes.

The next day he went to school, the cards stuffed into his backpack with a youthful recklessness and disregard for organization one can only find in young schoolchildren. He was eager to hand them out, and then see what cards he received from other students.

In class that day the teacher handed out some brown paper bags, some construction paper and glue. The kids were given half an hour to decorate a bag to hold the Valentines that each student would be receiving from the other students. Once those were done, they were left on the desks and the kids were allowed to walk around the room, leaving Valentines in each bag. Jack methodically handed out each and every card he had prepared the night before.

Later that day, during recess, Jack and two of his friends were just standing around, talking about a movie they had seen recently, when a girl from class had walked up to them. Her name was Shirley, and she looked angry. As she got closer she shouted Jack's name. Jack's face clouded quickly in confusion. He walked over to Shirley, wondering what she could possibly want with him.

That was when she threw one of his Valentine's Day cards back in his face. The cheap, colorful paper lightly tapped his cheek and slid off, floating gently on wind currents until it hit the ground by his feet. He blinked slowly, not sure what had just happened. He bent down and picked up the card, and looked at it. That's when he noticed the name on the card.

"Shirley," he said, "This isn't your card. This one was for Tina."

She glared at him and snapped back, "I know. She doesn't want your card, and she doesn't want you to talk to her. Ever." Then Shirley stormed off. Jack just looked at the card, more confused than ever.

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Jack got out of the shower. As he dried himself off, he realized he couldn't stop thinking about that day. It might not have caused all of his relationship problems, but it most likely caused his massive apprehension and nervousness around women. And it seemed to be the first instance of women completely rejecting him.

He got dressed and went into his living room. He dropped himself into a soft cushioned chair, then grabbed the remote control and turned on his TV. He flicked from channel to channel, eventually settling on a station playing an episode of The Simpsons. He let his mind wander back to earlier that day, serious thoughts dancing through his head as yellow people joked around onscreen.

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Jack had dug through his closet, looking for the only decent dress shirt he owned. It took a little while, but eventually he found it and put it on. It was a light blue button-up shirt with a collar that felt slightly too tight on Jack.

With that shirt, Jack was now dressed and ready for his date with Jenny. He stood in the washroom for a minute, looking himself over in the mirror. His hair was neatly combed and he had put on aftershave. He thought for a moment, then slipped his comb into one of his pockets. Jack didn't have a car, or even a license for that matter, so he would be taking the bus to his date. And, as anyone who has used public transit in the past knows, anything can happen on a bus.

He popped a few mints into his mouth to freshen his breath, and put a couple more in his pocket for later. He made sure he had enough bus tickets to get there and back again, plus a few extras to be safe, then checked his wallet to be sure he would have enough money for dinner.

Jack arrived at the Italian restaurant where they were supposed to meet about 15 minutes early. The air was getting a bit chilly, so Jack decided to go inside and see if the table was ready. The restaurant itself was divided into two main sections. One side was dominated by a bar, and had a few booths as well. People could go in there, have a drink, maybe a small meal. The other side was full of tables, decorated nicely and set up for people to sit down and enjoy a nice relaxing meal.

Before entering either side, right in the front of the restaurant was a desk. Sitting at the desk was a hostess, in charge of seating, answering the phones and dealing with reservations.

Jack walked up to her, and waited for her to finish a conversation she was having on the phone. She hung up the phone, then asked if she could help him. Jack explained that he had reserved a table for two, and that he was a bit early but just wondering if the table was ready. She left for a moment, heading into the dining room to check on his table. She came back rather quickly, letting Jack know his table was ready, and bringing him over to it.

She brought Jack to a small table with two seats nestled in one corner of the restaurant, near one of the windows. Jack sat down, and waited for Jenny to arrive. He looked around, taking in details of the restaurant as he waited. The table was covered in a light cream colored cloth. On the table was a currently unlit candle in a small glass holder. The silverware was neatly arranged on the table, set on top of folded red cloth napkins. The restaurant looked fairly crowded, and Jack was glad he made a reservation.

Jack waited. And waited. And waited some more. Twice the waiter had come over and asked if he wanted to order, and twice Jack had told him that he was waiting for someone else before ordering. Jack checked his watch, and realized that Jenny was half an hour late. And then an addendum to that thought thundered through his mind... IF Jenny was actually coming.

With that, he knew. He just knew she wasn't coming, that she had stood him up. She probably never intended to meet him here at all. She had probably thought he was just some creep, and she had probably agreed to meet him just to get him to go away. He was beginning to get angry and a bit upset. His stomach knotted and twisted as waves of emotion crashed along the shoreline of his brain.

Jack stood up and left the table. He went to the front of the restaurant, and left a good sized tip for the waiter. Jack just wasn't hungry anymore. As he was leaving the tip and getting ready to leave the restaurant, he glanced into the bar area of the restaurant. He saw a girl with blonde hair tied up in a bun, facing away from him, with a drink in one hand. He slowly walked into the bar area, anger and sadness now mingling with confusion. He stepped closer to the woman, not sure what to do or say.

That was when he stubbed his toe on one of the bar stools. The anger overtook the rest of his emotions, bubbling to the surface in a sharp venomous utterance of "Fuck!" Upon hearing this, the woman turned around to look at him. Their eyes locked. It was Jenny, and, on realizing the man was Jack, her eyes narrowed and her lips tightened to a pencil thin line.

"Oh," she said icily, "I see you decided to show up after all. You're only..." She checked a clock on the wall of the bar, "Only half an hour late. I guess that's not too bad."

He sat down on the barstool next to her before he replied, "Me? Late? I've been here for 45 minutes already! I made a reservation, I was sitting on the other side..."

A small burst of nervous laughter rippled through them as they both realized what had happened, and most of the tension seemed to melt and flow away on the waves of each short, clipped breath. Jack no longer felt angry or sad, but actually a little relieved. He looked at Jenny and saw that she seemed more relieved as well. At the very least, she no longer looked like she wanted to kill him.

Jack called over the bartender and ordered a rum and coke. And then the nervousness came slithering back. It was only now that he was here with her that Jack realized he had nothing to talk about. Nothing at all. He kept trying to come up with conversation topics, but his mind kept drawing a complete blank. Luckily for him, Jenny started the conversation.

"So," she said, sipping at a colorful tropical looking drink, "I know almost nothing about you. Where do you work? Did you go to college? What do you like to do, besides sitting alone in restaurants?"

The bartender walked up and handed Jack his drink, and he gulped some of it down before answering. He could feel the slight burn as it worked its way down his throat. The liquid courage formed a tight ball in his stomach, and warmth radiated out from his core. It had been a long time since he had last drank any alcohol, and he was a little surprised at how strong it seemed now.

He tried to decide on what to tell her and what to leave out. Prior experiences suggested that the movie-quality Batman costume in his closet was not a suitable topic for a first date... or any date, for that matter. He started instead with the absolute bar minimum basics.

"Well... my name is Jack Harris, and I finished college a couple of years ago. Now I'm working at Think Vision Inc, in their office building just a couple of blocks away. I'm basically just the office bitch. I'm not actually from around here, I grew up in a small town in Northwestern Ontario. I just came down here for school, and later to get a job. What about you? I know you work at the cafe, but beyond that, nothing."

Jenny shrugged a little before saying, "Well, there's not much to tell you. I grew up in the city here. I've never really been anywhere else. I went to college for a year, but dropped out, thinking I would be able to get a job somewhere even without a degree. Unfortunately I was wrong, and if it weren't for the fact that I'm friends with the owner of the cafe, I'd probably still be unemployed."

As she was talking, Jack noticed something he hadn't seen before. At the cafe he either hadn't been close enough to notice it, or he had just been too preoccupied with other thoughts at the time. But now he could see, dancing across her mouth with each syllable, that her tongue was pierced.

Jack was normally a very plain man, who did not have any bodily adornments. He had no piercings or tattoos. He wasn't against them, they just weren't something he was interested in getting. Not to mention his almost habitual avoidance of pain in any way possible. And, upon reflection, he realized only a couple of people he knew had any kind of tattoos or piercings beyond their ears.

As she finished speaking, Jack's fear of not having anything to talk about came rushing back to him. It threatened to drown him in panic, so he clung to the one thing currently on his mind.

"So..." he said, "I noticed you have a tongue piercing. Did that hurt?"

His brain pitched in: Stupid. Stupid stupid stupid. Of course it hurt, someone basically punched a hole through her tongue. There's no way that didn't hurt. Why would I ask such a stupid...

"Well, it hurt a little when I first got it," she replied, "But it stopped hurting pretty quickly."

Jack nodded, and then followed up with, "Doesn't it get in the way? Like when you're talking or eating or something? Does it get irritating?"

She thought for a second, then shrugged. "It used to be a bit of a pain, but I got used to it. Now most of the time I forget its even in there at all. ...I guess those questions mean you don't have any piercings?"

Jack shook his head. "No, I don't have any piercings or tattoos or anything."

There was a minute of awkward silence after that, and both Jack and Jenny grabbed their drinks and finished them. Once she had finished the last of her drink, Jenny reached into her pocket and pulled out a cell phone. Her eyes went wide.

"Oh shit," she said, "It's later than I thought. I'm sorry, I really have to go. I'm supposed to be looking after a friend's cat and I'm supposed to make sure it gets its medication at a specific time each night." She stood up and grabbed her purse, then opened it up and began fishing

around in it for cash. Jack offered to pay for her drinks, but she cut him off and said she had it as she slapped a couple of bills on the counter and dashed off.

Jack ordered another drink before eventually paying for his drink and heading back home.

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The episode of the Simpsons was just ending, and Jack realized he hadn't paid any attention to the show at all. His stomach began to rumble, and he remembered that he had not actually eaten anything on his date. He stepped into his apartment's small kitchen and began checking for food. He settled on making instant noodles and accompanied by a cold can of Coke.

Once that was made, he ate it while watching the news. Dozens of people died in the middle east, and Jack was worried about how poorly a date went. Even if the date had really gone as badly as he thought it had, there was a certain relief in the way it had gone. None of it had really been his fault, at least not that badly, and he hadn't done anything really creepy or odd. Not like back when he was in high school...

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Jack was an awkward teen. He didn't have many friends in high school. He didn't drink or go to parties, but would instead stay home and read or play video games. You didn't need to be a genius to know that Jack didn't have a girlfriend at the time.

In fact, not only did Jack not have a girlfriend, he had never been on a date. He was in Grade 11, only two years to finish high school. It was around that time that a new girl moved to town. Her name was Sarah. She was a bit short, and her teeth looked a bit odd, but beyond that she was, in Jack's mind at the time, the hottest girl he had ever met. And, like any attractive girl at the time, she had no idea Jack was alive.

They both had the same 3rd period class together, "Travel and Tourism". It was a remarkably easy class with a teacher who did little to make sure students were actually paying attention. Through that class he was able to introduce himself and try talking to her, but the conversation rarely went further than the "Hey, how's it going?" stage.

One day Jack brought a few Batman comics to school. Before 3rd period started, one of his friends asked if he could borrow one of Jack's comics. Jack agreed, and handed one of them over to his friend. They went into the classroom a few minutes early and sat down at their

desks. In a few minutes the other people in the class were starting to enter the room, and Jack's friend had his nose buried in the Batman comic. Sarah came into the room, and after putting her books on her desk, she walked up to Jack's friend.

"Hey," she said, "Is that a Batman comic? Can I look at it?" Jack's friend stared dumbly at her for a moment, then nodded and handed it over to her.

She quickly flipped through it, then started talking about how she kind of liked Batman comics, but didn't find them as interesting as Deadpool comics. She handed the comic back, saying thanks and going back to her desk. Jack just sat there, an odd mix of anger and awe swirling through him. Anger about the fact that it was actually his comic, and if his friend hadn't borrowed it she would have come and talked to Jack. Awe at the fact that this gorgeous girl also liked comics.

Needless to say, this encounter neither halted his ambitions of getting closer to Sarah, nor helped him achieve the poorly thought out method of those ambitions. In fact, this rebuff of his hopeful ideas did little more than to spur him onward, pushing him ever forward. He had more drive than before, felt he just needed to work harder, to improve himself. Sadly, despite this newfound drive, confidence is a large factor in any facet of life, and Jack had none. Mentally he was abuzz with ideas of self improvement, but the tattered and shattered shell of a constantly teased and put down young man would not, could not, act upon them.

Technological advancement is a wonderful thing, but also a powerful and potentially dangerous weapon. Jack embraced the cold, sleek advancement of computers and the Internet with open arms, gladly being swallowed by the floods of information and entertainment. Computers have a way of creating a barrier between people when communicating, and while most people considered this negative, to Jack it was a blessing. He could don himself in the armor of delays and near anonymity. This was around the time Facebook was starting to become popular in Jack's highschool, and so he decided to send a friend request to Sarah.

Thus it started, with Jack constantly checking to see if she had responded. Every time he refreshed the website, it was with a tingling buzz of nerves running up and down his spine, his breath held until it finished loading. Luckily for his state of mind, she accepted his friend request the next day. He wasted no time in getting right down to business, and sent her a message asking if she would care to go for coffee one evening.

She agreed, but said she would be out of town for a while, so they would meet up after she got back. Sure enough, for the next week or so, she wasn't in school at all. Jack started

thinking about how the date would hopefully go. It was all that occupied his brain, and before he knew it she was back and they arranged to meet one evening at a restaurant near the school.

Jack and Sarah met and talked. They were getting along fine, and the nerves were melting away. Jack's confidence had never been higher, and he needed to capitalize on this wonderful winning streak. He asked Sarah if she wanted to go to dinner with him sometime.

Her eyes widened for a moment, and she said, "You didn't think this was a date, did you? I have a boyfriend. Stephen Hikari and I have been going out for a couple of months now."

"Oh." It was the only thing he could think of, the only thing his mouth could form.

He knew Stephen Hikari. They shared the same first period class. Stephen seemed like an alright guy, but he wasn't someone Jack really knew or spent any time around. In short, though he knew who Stephen was, Jack knew nothing about him.

Jack and Sarah left the restaurant, and after an awkward farewell, Jack went back home. It was all he could think about, all that his mind would focus on. It had been a terrible idea, of course she had a boyfriend. Jack went on his computer and checked Facebook, and in his fugue he considered removing Sarah from his friends list. He was looking at Sarah's profile, practically hovering over the unfriend button, when his mind hatched a plan. A devious, conniving, and possibly psychopathic idea. It would take planning and careful observation to pull off.

It took a little while before Jack realized that his new plan had no real point. Even if he did it, it wouldn't make Sarah like him more. And she was already with Stephen, and there was no way his plan would break them up... or would it? Jack went back over his plan, tweaking it, fixing it, and above all, giving it purpose. Lex Luthor and the Joker are known for their brilliant evil schemes, but this would make them look like amateurs, at least in Jack's mind.

There were a few things Jack had to prepare beforehand. The first thing he needed to do was choose a programming language and compiler that was both free and able to do what he needed, something he could have installed and ready to go on the day the plan was to be started. After much deliberation he settled on JustBasic, a compiler and IDE using a variation on the BASIC programming language designed to be easy to learn and use. The next thing he needed to prepare was a fake email address. He wanted to have something mysterious, something outside the norm. Something beyond a simple Hotmail account. He settled for a mail.com account, one of whose features was letting you choose between several different

choices for what comes after the @ sign in the email address. He created aquanomous@cliffhanger.com for his nefarious deeds, under the false name Sam Fisher.

The next several weeks were spent carefully paying attention to the things Sarah was saying and doing, both in school and on Facebook. He was also using his spare time to perfect his skills with JustBasic, tweaking the program that would be the crux of his plan. He needed to be ready, waiting, prepared to strike at a moments notice. And then, the perfect day arrived. It was a Friday night, and there was going to be a large house party that Sarah would be attending (and, most likely consuming alcohol at). It was time to strike.

Jack booted up JustBasic and ran a program he had been working on for the past several weeks. It was based around a flaw with the Facebook login, wherein if you entered an incorrect password you could try it again as many times as you would like without incurring any added security features. The program used a combination of mouse movement macros and commands to place a program generated string variable into the clipboard that could then be pasted into the password field, and it would then try signing in. It would take quite a while, as it would go through the entire alphabet and numerical characters, slowly but surely, guaranteed to eventually get the password. Jack turned the program on, and tried to get into Sarah's Facebook account. He let it run, and waited, but after half an hour a problem arose. The macro for selecting the password field was just slightly off and would not click on it, missing it and rendering the entire program worthless. Jack stopped the program and tried to rework the macros, refining and changing them, trying to prevent this from happening, but no matter what he did it didn't seem to be good enough. He spent hours and hours refining and reworking, only to give up in frustration. Tonight would not be the night his plan would be put into action.

He started to focus instead on learning how to hack, trying to find ways to exploit the system and get access without having to deal with the unworkable and slow program he had created already. It was then, while browsing the Internet and learning various tidbits here and there, that he came across a wonderful piece of advice: "The weakest point in any security system is the people who use it." From that one nugget of wisdom he decided upon a new course of action. The basics of the plan would remain the same, but how he would get it started would change.

First, he started by sending a message to Sarah. He apologized for what had happened and admitted that he hadn't realized that she was going out with Stephen. He said he would be glad to just be friends, and then began by asking her a couple of questions about what she wanted to do after high school.

Then he went to her profile, and started noting down the things she liked, important dates, and common phrases she used. This would probably take a bit longer than his program, but overall it was his best bet.

It took a few weeks, taking notes, paying attention, and biding his time. And as he did, he noticed Sarah and Stephen hanging out together between classes and at lunch, and every time he saw them together a brief flash of burning jealousy rushed through him. Eventually he reached a point where he was ready to try setting his plan in motion once more, and waited for another night where Sarah would be busy at a house party.

Once that night arrived, he tried again. Using everything he had learned about Sarah from the past little while, he tried to access her Facebook once again. He entered various things she liked and phrases she used, trying everything and just throwing out possibly passwords and seeing what stuck. And then, one moment he was entering a password, the next he was in. He marveled at what had worked. Her password had been “starbucks”. He made a note of it for later, then looked around her profile. Nothing too interesting.

It was time to put the first step of his plan into motion. He opened her messages and started writing one to himself. He quickly wrote out a hateful, mean spirited message pointing out all of his flaws in the most obnoxious and hate filled way he could. Then he looked over the message a couple of times, changing the spelling of a couple of words and making some changes to the way it was written to make it look more like Sarah had written it, and then he hit Send.

There. The first step in Jack’s plan was done, it was now under way. Now he needed to wait a few hours. He wasted some time playing games and watching videos on YouTube, before logging on to his own Facebook account and opening the message from “Sarah”. He sent back a very upset reply. He said he wanted to know why she would say things like that, he knew he had problems but that was no reason for her to say things like that. He sent it, and now the hard part would commence. He would wait a few days, and completely ignore her both online and at school.

It wasn’t long before Jack received a reply wanting to know what he was talking about. And then another message after she noticed the message he had been talking about, along with a profuse apology and insurances that she had nothing to do with that message. She was clearly upset about the whole thing, so Jack acted like he was taking the high road, and told her he was sorry he had blown up at her about it, but that the message had upset him. A calculated blend of forgiveness, apology, and guilt trip designed to elicit a response.

It seemed to be working. She was talking to him a lot now, both online and at school. They were having decent conversations, and spending a bit of time together. After a week of this, Jack decided it was time to implement the next step of his plan.

He signed in to his false email address, and composed a message to Sarah's email address. It was a simple, straightforward message: "I know who sent that message to Jack." He sent it, intending to create an anonymous tipster persona. He then went to login to Sarah's email and tried the same password she had used on her Facebook account. Sure enough it worked like a charm, and he was in her email account. Like he had thought, the message from his anonymous account had landed in her Spam folder, so he moved it from there to her Inbox so she would see it, and then changed some settings so messages from Jack's fake account would appear in the Inbox instead of going straight to the Spam folder.

He waited a few days before he got her response: "You do? Who was it? My boyfriend and I have been thinking of going to the police about it, and your help would be great." Jack read it, then read it again. This was something he hadn't considered when making his plans. He would need to wait a little, gain a bit more information before proceeding. The ultimate goal was to get the entire thing blamed on Stephen so that Sarah would (hopefully) break up with him, but the police would be able to see right through his machinations without a problem. This would require finesse and careful observation of Stephen himself, a shift in focus as it were. So one of the first things Jack did was ask a few of his friends if they knew anything about Stephen Hikari.

The first piece of information he learned killed the plan immediately. A ball of icy fear sat in the pit of Jack's stomach, and every doubt and fear associated with the plan came hammering back.

Stephen Hikari was the son of Pat Hikari, the Chief of Police in Jack's hometown.

His mind was ringing with mental alarms. Abort mission! Abort mission! As clever as he thought he was, and as much scheming as he was capable of doing, it would not be enough to elude the police. And if he tried to frame the police chief's son? The whole force would be on him in no time. This was something Jack was certain of. He would have to end it all, bring everything to a screeching halt and stop before he would get arrested.

He got to a computer as fast as he could and logged in to the fake email address he had created. Now was not the time for sneaking or planning or waiting. Now was the time for the truth, for revealing himself and placing himself upon the mercy of those he had wronged. Jack wrote out a long email detailing his plan, and added an apology to the end, thought for a

moment, then asked, pleaded, begged them not to have him arrested. He knew no apology would suffice, but he needed to at least try.

He quickly received a reply from Sarah. She thanked him for coming clean about the whole thing, and assured him that neither she nor her boyfriend would be getting the police involved. Then she added, "Still, that was pretty fucked up. I would appreciate it if you would leave me alone forever now."

And so he did. Jack had not talked to or heard from Sarah ever again.

* * * * *

Jack yawned, long and loudly. He needed to go to bed, and he could barely keep his eyes open. He turned off his television set and then got up and sleepily staggered to his bedroom, turning off lights as he went. Then he threw himself onto his bed and wriggled around until he was comfortable.

Today had been rough, but tomorrow would be another day.

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