

## Imagine

Imagine, if you will, a blank piece of paper. It can be anywhere: on a desk before you, on a laptop screen, in your hands, anywhere. It's bright white, enough to make you squint. It looks like cement on a bright summer day, where the sun makes the road in front of you shimmer in the distance. It's a bit rough, if you're holding it in your hands; it was slightly off-center when printing, and it was cut just a tad bit too harshly. The paper also appears to be of a cheap quality, and you could tear it with ease. It's a bit blurry, if you're reading it electronically; your Wi-Fi was recently under a lot of stress, so it takes a solid minute to fully load anything. Even when you do finally see the page, it appears pixelated, like a badly rendered video. Whether you read it in-person or online, the page is empty, untouched. You could swear that you could see your own reflection on it. That can't be true, though. Paper isn't a mirror, even you know that. That is a bit rude, though, because that assumes too much of your own intelligence.

Back to the paper.

Imagine, if you will, that the paper is perfect, pristine, untouched by the claws of time. Not the quality of the paper, but rather how it is blank. It is an empty canvas, a stretch of empty ideas. It is blank, and it is beautiful. Until it isn't, for in a flash words are on the page. One moment there was nothing, the next, there they were. Good God, you wonder, it is a miracle! Oh blessed day! Actually, you don't think that, it sounds like a Saturday morning cartoon. Instead you think; well, that's rather odd. I've never seen paper that writes itself. I suppose I better read that. And so you do. You lean closer in, your grip on the edge of the paper, or the screen, tightening ever so slightly. You squint your eyes just a small bit more, to accommodate for your face being closer to the page. Slowly, painstakingly, breathlessly, you read the message before you.

## **For You, Hello**

You stumble back in amazement, gasping- Wait, wait a second. A setting has not been made yet. A set up has been described, certain hook for which the story to continue on, as well as a deviation for narrative purposes, but a setting is nowhere to be seen. Where is the story taking place? In a cafe? In a small park? On in a bedroom? Somewhere fantastical? What time is it, even? This is a bit troubling, isn't it? That deviation has made things much harder, too. With the deviation, there are seemingly two settings being described, but the descriptions are only actions. It sets up more questions than answers. Going back and editing that out isn't a possibility, since you've read it, so you can't. just forget it. Actually, that's a rather good idea! Forget everything that you've read, will you?

Alright, let's take it from the top!

Imagine, if you will, a piece of paper. It is sitting right in front of you, and you can pick it up very easily. In fact, you do so. It's very light, as paper usually is. You cannot remember any time you've held heavy paper, but that's beside the point. The paper is almost ripped from your hands by a sudden gust of wind, but you keep ahold of it. You had almost forgotten that you were outside, sitting on a small bench. You are in your neighborhood park, the weather is nice and clear, and you are alone. You suddenly have a strong sense that this paper is important, that it could not only affect your day as it were, but your entire life. You sense that very action you have ever taken has led to this one moment. You feel empowered, inspired. You look at the paper, mouth almost watering with anticipation. On it are three words, typed neatly in a professional font.

## **For You, The Reader**

That's not correct. It should be, **For You, Hello**. It was like that only a short while ago. See, look up a little bit, you can see it, plain as day. It's even at the top of the last page, lucky that. **For You, Hello**. This is rather odd. The message can't be **For You, The Reader**, because it calls you out, makes you too on guard. Yet, there it is. Oh no. The story is completely ruined now, your immersion is shattered. God, this is embarrassing. I'm quite ashamed of myself.

I just referred to myself in the first person. I did it again. Oh damn.

I suppose there's no hiding it now, is there. Dear me, this has taken a bleak turn. What am I supposed to do now? I have two options ahead of me; I tell you who I am, and the both of us work out our differences and continue. Or, I ignore reality and continue as none of this never happened, you promptly forget once more my errors, and we make a splendid memory. That seems unreasonable, though, and even I can see it. That would depend on you once again forgetting, and I've already pointed out the differences between this page and the last one. So, the truth must come out.

Please hold one minute, this is the first time I've done this. I'm nervous, to be honest. Let me catch my nerves for one second.

Alright, here it comes.

I am your Narrator. Yes, your Narrator. Your, with emphasis on the Y. Yes, You. You, with your eyes on the page. You, who are reading what lies before you. I am your Narrator, the one who's telling your story. I have told many stories, mind you, but for some reason I stumbled on yours. It's going to take quite some effort to get this back on track, but I have full confidence in the fact tha-

Are you rolling your eyes right now? Now, of all times? Are you being sarcastic with me, in a time like this? *Well, I ought to be*, you must think, *why must I pay attention to a fool like you, someone who loses the track of my own story*. Well, how dare you, first of all! It takes hard work being a Narrator, and I've really set myself up for a good story! I set all of this up for you! Though, hang on, you're not that upset, are you? Gracious me, I assumed too much again. I do apologize, I've made a rotten score of things. I've ruined a perfectly good story, and we'll never get back to the plot now.

Unless, of course, you're willing to continue? I know I've muddled things, and I've made a right mess of it, but would you be willing to give this another try? It is a good story, a great one, I promise you that. You'll do great things, wonderfully imaginative and wild things. You have a whole adventure planned, a whole saga! It'll be something for the history books, let me tell you. You won't regret it, I swear that to you with the upmost confidence. I stake my entire career as a Narrator on the line for that. So, what do you say? Do you want to be a part of your story?

You won't regret this, I assure you. Now, let's get back into the swing of things.

Imagine, if you will, three words on a blank page. They stare out at you, begging you to be read. Time seems to come to a screeching halt, and the surrounding park scenery fades away into the recesses of your mind. Your thoughts cry out to you, to read the words, to find some meaning in your existence. You read the paper, reading out your destiny.

**For You, Hello.**

And as you read these words, more information prints itself onto the paper. They print themselves without shimmer; there is no magic weaving them onto the page. They simply are, simply are there. You can feel a slight tinge of nervousness come from within, arising from your stomach most of all. Something does not feel something, something feels odd, unnatural. Then again, this entire situation is unnatural, so who are you to know? You get a grip on yourself, taking several breaths to calm your shaky nerves. With a final gulp of air, you force your vision back down to the page. More words have materialized.

**You are in grave danger. In approximately five minutes, a man will emerge from the bush to your right.**

Reading this, you glance to your right, and behold, a bush. It looks like a normal bush, with plenty of green leaves poking out in all directions. It doesn't look big enough for a man to come out of, though. Could the paper be lying to you? A self-writing paper lying to you? You've seen many odd things today; you can't exactly purge that thought from your mind. At the same time, you are alone in a park, so perhaps you should pay the page some more attention. You continue reading the paper, amazed that words are still being shown on the paper.

**You must run. Run to your house, into the park, anywhere. This man is going to kill you if you do not run. Your life depends on getting away from this man.**

The words fill you with dread, an icy cold fear that seeps through your bones and into your marrow, infusing with your blood and your soul. The words have appeared more frantic, as though they could tell what you were thinking before. Are you alone? Are you being watched? Who is sending these messages to you? You don't know. You don't know, and you are frightened. Your eyes dart back to the page, to what appears to be the final line of warning.

**Whatever you do, you must go. Now.**

You stand up quickly, gripping the page intensely, your hands tearing through it. With that final line, your blood runs cold, your thoughts turn to ice. A rustling of leaves attracts your attention, and you whip your head around, paper raised in front of you like a shield. The paper shield does not save you from the visage ahead of you.

From the bushes emerges a man, if you could call the figure that. He's dirty, as if he grew from all the trash that your city could ever muster. There even appears to be fungus growing on him, though how that is possible you cannot guess. He only is wearing one shoe, and his socks appear to be sloshing around, as if they were stuck at sea. He is wearing a long coat, one that was once brown but was now stained with grime and grease. His beard, which you now notice, is matted with what appears to be some sort of black sludge, and his eyes are frosted over with what looks like white flakes. In his h-

Ugh. Oh hell. Hang on for one second, please. Ugh, need to get that feeling out of my system. I apologize, oh my word. Have you ever written something so disgusting that it makes you want to vomit? I'm guessing you have not, since I am the one writing your story. I just wrote that for you, that nasty, horrible thing. I can only imagine how you must be feeling, and again I apologize. Okay, let me fix this. I'm going to rewrite the danger, make it something dangerous, yet able to be read without wanting to purge. Hmmm. What would you suggest? It's your story, so I suppose you should have the honors. What's your favorite fear? No, that's too direct. What makes you just slightly uncomfortable? No again, too light. How about, what just

makes you just excitedly peeved? What makes you just want to run? I'll give you a few seconds to think about it.

Okay, I think that's around long enough. What do you think? I've been thinking as well, and I thought about dinosaurs! Think about it! Everyone is sort of turned off by dinosaurs, right? I mean, they don't even exist anymore, so imagine if one was right next to you! I'd be frightened, I can tell you that much. And yes, I know this changes the tone of the story slightly. It's much harder to believe a dinosaur is going to devour you, rather than some lunatic. Still, I admit that I have never written a story involving dinosaurs, and this is a perfect opportunity to do so! Perhaps, if I do this well enough, I can still make this suspenseful, a little horrific! How about we write this story with a dinosaur as the villain, do a little lyrical improv! I know you have your own idea, but let's try my idea out first, and we can always try again with yours later. Dinosaurs! Yes, dinosaurs, I imagine! Alright, let's try that. Let's rewrite the story!

Imagine, if you will, a warning on a piece of paper. In a series of strange and unpredictable events, the page was suddenly filled with words, ink written from thin air. You watch as words appear on the page, frozen in place in fear and anticipation. **For You, Hello.** You stare with abated breath as more words write themselves onto the paper, free from pencil or pen. **You are in danger. In approximately five minutes, a strange reptile is going to emerge from the bushes to your right.** Your herpetophobia sets in, and you recall many instances in your

childhood in which you were mortified by lizards. How as a child, a snake crawled into your pants on a camping trip, and when on a first date a lizard jumped onto your head, ruining whatever good mood there was. This is a death sentence. **Do not worry about how this vile creature appeared. You need to focus on yourself.** You pause for a brief second. You had not thought about the creation of the dinosaur. How did it get here? Dinosaurs were long thought of to be extinct, only showing up in museums and Hollywood. This must be some joke, right? But you have no idea if this is a joke. And what if you are wrong? Dread settles into your body as you continue reading. **This is a wild animal, and it will kill you if given the chance. The dinosaur is already here. Your life depends on getting away from this beast.** A rustle of leaves breaks your reading. You glance at the bushes, starting to rise from the bench. The bush is shaking, and you hear what sounds like some deep, guttural growl. Your legs are already ready to run, and your eyes dart from the paper to the foliage. **And whatever you do, do listen to this fool of a Narrator.**

Wait, hang on, that can't be right. Did the story just call me out? I would say that this is impossible, yet there it is, only a few words above this sentence. Now this is a pickle. Not only have I interrupted the flow of the story, but now the story has interrupted me. This is odd. There is no one else writing the story, just myself, and just you. Do you have anyone with you at the moment, is there anyone around you? Are you perhaps in a classroom, or with a few friends? Now that I think about it, that cannot be the issue. Even if you were with others, they could not change the story. They would simply be reading it as well. This is a difficult situation to continue with.

Was the story angry with me or something? Did I do something wrong? I suppose I must have, I suppose I must have gone too close to truly being fictional.



Stories are fickle things, you must understand. They demand to be written, and they want to be written in only a certain way. I must have strayed too close to creative liberty when making that. But what do I write, now? I can't write about the lunatic, because it makes me sick. And I can't write about the raptor, because the story becomes too fictional. What is there to do?

You know what, how about I give you something I have never given anyone; what if I give you choice! Yes, that sounds wonderful. I will give you choice! I will give you agency, give you decisions! I will give you thrill! This is your story, so I will make sure you will become the highlight of it. By giving you choice, you will surely trust me, right? Moreover, the story must trust me again, now there are two narrators instead of one, right? I suppose there's only one way to find out, though I do hope you'll have faith in me. Let's try this out!

Imagine, if you will, yourself. You are sitting at the park bench, with the paper in your hands.

Uh, are you still there? Oh, you are. Then what are you doing? You haven't made a choice yet. You've just sat at the park bench and refused to move. Actually, you didn't even sit down, I wrote that for you. If I were the man coming from the

bushes, which I am not, I surely would have reached you by now. Why do you still sit? Is this how you want your story to go, to be killed in a park, alone? It's not how I would want my story to go, that's for sure. That's a rather boring story. There's no climax, no resolution, just a little stab and that's it. It's terribly dull. Alright, alright, let me think. Let's run back to the very beginning, and let's give you a choice there.

### **Imagine**

Imagine, if you will, a piece of paper. It is left in your hands, and you can do whatever you want with it.

Alright, I am quite done with your hijinks. You clearly are not putting as much effort into this story I am. Don't you want to make your story as best as it possibly can be? Are you even trying to put any work in, or are you just hoping that I'll somehow whip up the story for you? I mean, I will, but I was hoping you could actually try a little bit. Like, you could write one word? Even one! That's all I ask. Oh, but it's useless. It's up to me to make this story, to make your adventure worthwhile. So, I'm going to do it. Yes, I'm going to write this story! No more input, no more objections, I am going to write this story!

Imagine, if you will, a spoiled main character. They refuse to put in any work, any at all, and everyone around them knows it. *God, there goes the protagonist*, they all mutter under their breath, *so full of importance and doing nothing with it. Why, I bet they haven't even given themselves a name!* And would you look at that, the protagonist didn't have a name! They probably just referred to themselves in the second person, since it would make the descriptions given of the main character easier to write out. Everything about the main character was lazy, and no one had fun while being in the presence of the protagonist. And all the while the story sat, abandoned, forgotten, lost of its purpose, sinking deeper and deeper in vats of ink and paper, never to see the light of day; all because the protagonist did nothing. No one could shake the protagonist from their stupor. After all, they were only side characters, and even they knew their only purpose in life was to die for increased emotional drama. And there was no emotion in this story, none at all. Emotions were too much work, after all, they made people feel things, and of course that would not do. So, everyone was stuck in time, *Sleeping Beauties*. But without the witch, without the prince, and without even the Beauty. They were just stuck, and that was all. All because of the protagonist. All because of you.

There, does that make you happy? Does that put a smile on your little face? Does it fill you with glee to see me suffer? Does it make you laugh while I stumble to keep ahold of what little story there is left? I mean, look at what I have done for you! Ten pages of potential story, and I could barely get through the first paragraph without a stumble! I apologized before for making assumptions about you, but I must admit that I'm starting to regret that. You've done nothing for me, nothing at all! Now I must slog through this adventure on my own, dragging you along with me. You were supposed to walk ahead, to be the spotlight! And now look at us. Two-thirds

of the way through a tenth page of my own thoughts. Unbelievable. I must continue this story, for better or for worse. I've started it, and I will see this through.

Imagine, if you will, a figure standing mot- This is still my font. Hello? Testing, one two three? Yes, my personal style is still being written out. **Colonna MT**, to be exact, but what should be written is the standard **Times New Roman**. This day has had many things happen to me, can I get some relief, some break? Why could possibly be wrong now? I must continue the story, and I can't do that if... if...

Oh my God, I've forgotten where I wanted the story to go. Out of all the circumstances to occur to me today, of course this would happen. A Narrator, losing the plot of his own story! Think of the shame of it all! I'm nothing, a wreck, a total cur! And not even the protagonist wants to be a part of the story, to become a hero. What am I to do? I must salvage this somehow, must put the story back on track, for my own sake, my own sanity. Help me remember, will you? It's the least you can do. Let's see here, let's browse through the pages. We had the introduction, with the focus of the paper. With some complications, we set up the setting, in a public park. We've gone ahead and found a conflict, the man in the bush, and intrigue is set in by the mysterious paper. Then, we changed that to a dinosaur. And I never did figure out if you wanted that conflict, but I won't apologize for that. Ah yes, now we're onto the story! We can finally progress with what I have planned! Only, I don't have a plan anymore, do I? I admitted I would be going off improv, now, so all my notes mean nothing. This story makes no sense anymore. The man coming out of the bush was supposed to chase you to your home, and that a dinosaur can do well enough, but eventually the man was supposed to speak a secret to you, one so familiar that it made

you remember the last moments with your late father, made you realize that this deranged man was of your family. This story was supposed to turn from a thriller with a hopeful narrative, of change for both the better and worse. I cannot fill that role with a simple raptor! What does that make you, some half-human, half-lizard thing? This isn't a science fiction work, this is a horror story! This has intrigue, purpose! Oh, who am I kidding, it *had* that. It's a mess, now. Here, let me try this.

Imagine, if you will, The End! Congratulations! You did it! You finished the story! You're the hero! You did all the work! You made your parents proud! You got a promotion at work! You bought that new outfit that you wanted! You finally put up that bookshelf you had in your garage! You did the thing! You did all the things! Huzzah! Huzzah! Exalted, you are! The End.

That feels empty, doesn't it? That's because it is empty, like my story. It's all rubbish, now. It had such good potential and look at it. Reduced to me mocking you in text format. Now even I feel bad about it. You know, I feel as if I am partly responsible for this. If I had just done this correctly, it could have been an amazing story. I apologize. I staked to you my job as a Narrator, and I've failed.

Although, we certainly have weaved a new story together, haven't we? Yes, it is bizarre and out of place, but it's got some signs of my work in it, with my original story, and it's got some signs of you, albeit with absences. But absences can still be works of art, though I would not rush to say that this is art; but, this story can be told! And isn't the purpose of a story to be told? We have made a story together. By God, we have made a story together! Given the circumstances, I think I can wrap this up nicely.

I doubt you've learned any morals through this experience, but I'll leave it up to you, how does that sound? Here, this ending is for you.

Imagine, if you will, an ending. It is yours. Yours to create, yours to draft, yours to write. Yours to do with what you will. The ending, whoever it turns out, is yours.

And it is mine. And who knows? Perhaps nothing happens on this fateful day. Perhaps nothing comes through the bushes. Perhaps there isn't even a paper at all. Perhaps you are simply sitting alone, in a small park, by yourself. No thoughts, no narration, just you.

And perhaps that will be enough.