Shaped Like a Question Mark
by jibrailis

Summary

TSN librarian AU! Where Eduardo is a children's librarian and Mark is an information specialist brought in to revamp the catalogue. And along the way there are books! misunderstandings! online reference! romance!

Notes

Written for the delightful, incredibly generous elefante_locura, who won me at Help Japan. Also, I should mention the fic takes place in Palo Alto, but I made several details up, so the library in the story is not meant to be an accurate reflection of the Palo Alto City Library and its catalogue in any way.

I came so close to titling this fic MARK Records, but only, like, two people would get that joke. :___;

Five hundred million friends is what Dustin immediately suggests, but Dustin eats too many pixie powder sticks as it is. For Mark, just one a year will do. "You're making it more complicated than it is," he tells Dustin as they carpool to work, a necessary evil because Dustin cannot ride a bike without looking like a wounded octopus, overlong arms flailing everywhere, and the last time he took public transit, he ended up in Los Angeles. "It's not a maniacal plan," Mark adds. "Quit grasping your chest and heaving like an German soprano. It's not a good look on you."

"How can I stop fearing for the entire world," Dustin gasps, "when I know that Mark Zuckerberg is out there trying to spread his friendship like a virus."
Mark turns to stare at Dustin and nearly misses the next turn. He has to take the long way around now, which annoys him, but a lot of things about Dustin annoy him. This is the problem with having only one friend and why he needs to expand. His goals are modest and achievable. If he makes one new friend a year, then by the time he turns thirty-five he will have eight friends, and by the time he is forty he will have thirteen friends. Those seem like good numbers to him. Thirteen friends constitutes a decent social circle. When he is older and his health is failing, having thirteen people willing to take care of him seems sufficient.

Of course there are unforeseen variables. There's no guarantee that once Mark makes a friend, he'll be able to keep their friendship over the years. He anticipates losing at least one or two friends, especially as he approaches his end goal and keeping up with thirteen people becomes much harder than keeping up with three or four. But Mark aims high, because there's no use in having a plan that doesn't require work to make it worth it.

Dustin is still shaking his head. His neck is alarmingly wobbly. "Dude, just lay it on me. Who's your victim this year?"

Mark doesn't answer him. They arrive at the parking lot of the Fairview Library just in time to see Eduardo get out of his car, and Dustin's eyes go wide. He starts laughing. "If Eduardo's your target, you've got the easiest job in the world ahead of you. He actually likes you. How did that happen?"

Eduardo starts waving energetically. Dustin waves back.

"You make it sound so calculating," Mark replies shortly, undoing his seatbelt. "I'm not lying in wait trying to hunt people and drag them into my den. I'm simply making more of a social effort, and more of a concentrated effort towards specific people."

"I think Eduardo wants you to really make a concentrated effort with him," Dustin says. "An effort to take off his pants, bow chicka wow wow." He slides out of the car then and immediately starts bro-fisting with Eduardo, who is grinning like today isn't another day at work, same as always. He's wearing a checkered sweater vest and cream coloured slacks, and NASA scientists are probably trying to figure out the secret to his hair gel so they can use it as rocket glue.

"Morning, Mark," Eduardo says, falling in step with him as they go through the staff entrance. Dustin whips out his keys with a flourish, but Mark ignores him. He looks at Eduardo instead, at that constant half-smile tugging the corner of his mouth like he's genuinely happy to see Mark in a way very few people are, even their employers. Eduardo really is the easiest person in the world to be friends with. Mark might even consider starting working on next year's friend quota this year.

"Morning," Mark says, and then, because friendship involves conversation, he says, "How was your drive?"

"Um, uneventful?" Eduardo asks. He sounds slightly puzzled because Mark doesn't usually try to initiate small talk. But Mark nods because he's actually glad that Eduardo didn't have to suffer through Palo Alto morning traffic.

They're not the first ones to arrive at the branch, so the lights are already turned on. Christy is booting up the computers. She says a brief hello when they walk past her, and Eduardo grins at her, but she turns back quickly enough. Christy is one of the best library assistants Mark has ever met, but she's also the only person he's ever met who doesn't like Eduardo. Mark senses history there. Christy and Eduardo have worked at the Fairview branch for years. Mark and Dustin have only been here six months.

Fairview is a medium-sized library branch, but it's located in an upper middle-class neighbourhood with a high percentage of doctors, lawyers, and academics, so that means they see more than their
fair share of traffic. The building has become too small for their collection; there's been talk for years about resizing and renovating, but none of the talks have turned into anything concrete yet. The shelves are crammed together on the first floor, looming over the circulation and reference desks like bloodthirsty sharks. Most of the staff share cubicles in a large back room behind circulation. There are only two private offices with operational doors and locks. One belongs to Gretchen, the branch head. The other is where Mark and Dustin work.

Eduardo is separated from the rest of them. The children and young adult section occupy the overhanging balcony on the second floor, and Eduardo as the only children's librarian has his desk and work station up there, bright and colourful, surrounded by literacy posters and spring leaf drawings from younger patrons. Standing in front of his office, Mark can see Eduardo up there behind his desk, getting ready for opening.

Eduardo notices Mark watching him. Instead of being vaguely creeped out, he waves. Mark lifts his hand in return.

"Seriously," says Dustin.

"What," Mark snaps.

"You aren't, like, poisoning him with any mind-altering substances?" Dustin asks. When Mark narrows his eyes at him, Dustin shields his chest. "Hey, hey, I just had to make sure! I think drugging your coworkers is against union code. Or something." He pats Mark's shoulder. "I'd cover for you though, amigo. \textit{It was just prune juice, I swear, Your Honour!}"

Eduardo is still looking at them. Dustin puckers up his lips and blows him a kiss. Eduardo cracks up and ducks out of view, for good reason, they discover, because Gretchen is walking by in her click-clack tower heels. "Get to work, boys," she says. "The website lags aren't going to fix themselves."

"We're not boys, we're men," Dustin says sadly.

Mark isn't a librarian, technically, but he got his graduate degree at one of those new iSchools popping up all over the country, and so he's spent a lot of time with librarians. Mark is an information specialist with a focus in database design and it just so happens that after graduating with his master's, with connections and references from his numerous ex-librarian professors, he got snatched up by the Palo Alto City Library to be their tech support.

His job description at the beginning was to maintain the system library catalogue, to be its administrator and webmaster. He'd worked at the central branch in one of the basement offices, alongside Dustin, who was the tech support that ran the online reference service chat. But then the branch had hired some new management staff and office space became limited, so when the decision came to move some of the independent project employees over to the Fairview branch (without consulting Fairview's own space issues), Mark had volunteered. That he'd just come off a breakup with Erica, who also worked at the central branch, was a more than helpful deciding factor.

The Fairview branch is closer to where he lives, anyway. It's a more convenient location in all respects. Not just for him but also for Dustin, who was starting to have some sort of grudge match with Divya, one of the reference librarians. At Fairview no one really understands what they do, and so nobody asks them self-congratulatory questions or approaches them with outrageous demands.
They get regular phone calls and checkups from the central branch, and they have to make progress reports, but that's fine. Mark can deal with being kept on a leash, as long as the leash is very long and he doesn't have to look at who's holding the other end.

No matter where they are, there's no shortage of work. The Palo Alto City Library catalogue is a prehistoric piece of code, a barely removed stepsibling from the old card catalogues. Mark spends most of his time undoing awkward code strings and absurd commands that his predecessors so kindly left behind. Book links lead to dead ends, and authors' names are disambiguated without reason. It's a wreck, but Mark is going to make it good.

Eventually. Right now Eduardo's on his lunch break and he's hanging out in Mark and Dustin's office, unwrapping his turkey sandwich and shimmying his juice box straw out of its plastic wrapper. Dustin's got a slice of pizza from the California Pizza Kitchen down the street, and he's dripping cheese all over the desktop keyboards. Mark elbows him aside.

"Ow!" Dustin says. "My fair flesh! Mark, why would you do that to me? You'll be -1 on the friend scale if you keep that up."

"Friend scale?" Eduardo asks curiously.

"Mark has--"

"Dustin has herpes," Mark says.

The sad fact is that Dustin is no longer scared of him, not the way he used to be when they first started working at central and Dustin ooohed and ahhhed over Mark's code, before making sad puppy eyes at his own work and then hiding under his desk. "Mark thinks that if he makes a new friend every year, it'll satisfy the aching empty hole in his heart," Dustin says.

Eduardo laughs. "I have just the book for you. Hold on a sec." He puts down his lunch and wanders out into the stacks. When he comes back, he's holding a copy of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. "Here you go," he says with an evil gleam in his eye as he hands the book to Mark.

Dustin grabs the book away from Mark and starts flipping it over. "Heehaa, this is perfect for our little Marky. Section four: how to change people without giving offense or arousing resentment. Step one: begin with praise and honest appreciation." He snaps the book shut and turns to Mark. "I appreciate that you've begun shaving again, Mark. It brings out the roses in your cheeks and makes you look less like a mountain manchild."

"Give me that," Mark says, snatching the book back. He tosses it as far away as he can.

"That's library property," Eduardo says disapprovingly. But he picks up his lunch again and perches on the edge of Mark's desk with perfect balance. Eduardo is freakishly well-coordinated.

"Tell us about your weird patrons of the day," Dustin brightens.

"I have no weird patrons. I love all of them," Eduardo says immediately. Mark gives him a skeptical look, and Eduardo shrugs sheepishly. "It's just the usual. One woman came up looking for a book that she once read to her daughter. She couldn't remember the title or the author or what it was about. When I asked her to describe the book, all she could tell me was that it had a blue cover." Dustin moans in horror. "I couldn't figure it out from just that, obviously, so I took her through the shelves, manually searching."

"Did you find the book?" Mark asks.
Eduardo flicks a sandwich crumb off his fingers. "It was Shel Silverstein's *Where The Sidewalk Ends."

Dustin scrunches up his face like he's working through a long and complicated thought process. "...but that cover isn't blue?" he finally says, pitiful and hesitant, as if he's waiting for Eduardo's god-like librarian approval of his statement.

"It's a black and white cover," Eduardo confirms. He tilts his head back for no apparent reason other than to make Mark stare at the line of his throat, and then he chants:

"*Oh, I'm being eaten*
By a boa constrictor,
A boa constrictor,
A boa constrictor,
I'm being eaten by a boa constrictor,
And I don't like it--one bit."

He stops and stares at Mark. If Mark were the sort of person to squirm uncomfortably under the weight of another person's accusing gaze, he would do so, but he's not. "Is there something wrong?" he asks, trying not to think about how Eduardo's voice had faltered on 'don't like it one bit' when he looked at Mark, because that is... that is not how Mark wants this entire thing to play out.

"Where's your lunch?" Eduardo asks.

Mark blinks. "I don't have one, I'm not hungry."

Dustin bounds over and grabs one of Mark's arms while Mark tries to bat him off. "Does this look like the muscle density of someone who takes good care of himself?" Dustin demands. "See, the reason why Mark is tech support and not a librarian is because he can't lift the heavy books."

"Then what's your excuse?" Mark asks him.

"The girls," Dustin says promptly.

"How's that working out for you?" Mark asks meanly, but Dustin is immune to threats, criticism, and restraining orders. He only lets go of Mark's arm when Eduardo makes an unhappy sound in his throat.

"I'll bring you lunch tomorrow," Eduardo says.

Dustin's eyes widen like an anime character's. Mark rolls his chair over Dustin's foot to stall the forthcoming nonsense and says, "That's not necessary."

"I don't mind," Eduardo says, waving his hand. "I like preparing lunch, and it's not hard to make two sandwiches instead of one. Besides," he adds, and maybe it's the humidity in the office because his cheeks look slightly pink, "if the catalogue goes down because you're dead of malnutrition, that's going to affect my job too." He finishes his lunch and throws the wrappers in the garbage. "Break's over. Better get back to my desk."

They watch him go. Then Dustin cackles right in Mark's ear.

"*Oh, I'm a sandwich being eaten*
By Mark Zuckerberg,
Mark Zuckerberg,
Mark Zuckerberg,
I'm a sandwich being eaten by Mark Zuckerberg
And I was prepared with Eduardo Saverin's everlasting love."

"If I befriend Chris, I can drop you," Mark informs him.

Dustin rears back in horror. "Chris wouldn't do that to me. Chris is a rock of strength and a shield of loyalty."

"I saw Chris reading Twilight the other day," Mark says. "He had tears in his eyes."

"Low blow," Dustin says. "Low blow."

Eduardo arrives at work before Mark the next day, and so when Mark unlocks his office and listens to Dustin trip in after him, he sees the paper bag on his desk with a purple sticky note pinned to the crinkly front that says MARK'S LUNCH :)"" 

"Eduardo has a key to our office?" Dustin wonders.

"All the locks are the same," Mark says distractedly. "So that Gretchen can better stalk us." He shoulders off his backpack and picks up the bagged lunch. He peeks inside. There's a sandwich in plastic wrap, a juice box, an apple without the sticker, and a granola bar. A second note is taped to the sandwich wrap.

"It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn't use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like 'What about lunch?'" -- Winnie the Pooh

Mark recognizes Eduardo's neat but slightly loopy handwriting. It's the same handwriting that hangs over his desk where there's a chart of the latest readathon. Eduardo writes each child's name on a picture of a spotted elephant. Mark puts the lunch in his desk drawer before getting down to work, and he takes it out again when it comes time to eat and Dustin is off harassing Chris instead of him.

"I didn't know if you kept kosher," Eduardo says, leaning against the doorway. "So it's chicken and not pork."

"You don't keep kosher then?" Mark asks. Eduardo's hair is floppier today, but it's still physics defying in a way that means Mark is always taking a second look whenever he's around. Mark can and will admit that Eduardo is attractive, but he's hardly the only one with that opinion. There's a reason teenage girls and middle-aged women linger extra long in the upstairs sections. He and Dustin once made a graph about the correlation between female patron heterosexuality/bisexuality and amount of time spent asking needlessly long questions about children's literature.

"Not really," says Eduardo.

"I don't either," Mark says. "Why the Winnie the Pooh quote?" He peels the note off the sandwich and puts it on the edge of his desk. He doesn't start eating, however. Mark has never felt comfortable eating when no one else is eating. There's a messiness to it and an awkwardness that he doesn't like.

Eduardo smiles brilliantly. "Just because an animal is large, it doesn't mean he doesn't want kindness; however big Tigger seems to be, remember that he wants as much kindness as Roo."
"Do they make you memorize those at library school?" Mark asks. "Do they dock you grades if you can't quote A.A Milne?"

"Worse," Eduardo replies. "They take away our special librarian yardsticks and remove our super shushing license. Do you know long look it took me to be able to shush again?" He presses his index finger against his mouth and says "shhhhh" dramatically. "You, sir, you are disturbing the peace of the library with your voice."

Eduardo's shushing is so earnest and heartfelt that Mark laughs.

"I like it when you laugh," Eduardo says, smile turning soft at the edges. Mark looks at him and suddenly feels like a deer in headlights, caught in between that smile and the wall behind him.

"I like laughing," he says, and then he wants to hit himself because that was the most banal thing he's said in a long time, ranking only slightly under the "I like books" he'd said to Eduardo when they first met. But what it does to Eduardo's face is startling. Eduardo practically lights up, like when the sun stopped in the sky for Joshua to defeat the Amorites.

It starts a pattern. Every day Eduardo will present Mark with a bagged lunch, and every day there's a quote on top of the sandwich.

"You're given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself. What you say is completely up to you." -- A Wrinkle In Time

"A little nonsense now and then, is cherished by the greatest of men." -- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

"You need a reason to be sad. You don't need a reason to be happy." -- Sideways Stories from Wayside School

"Clearly you've missed your calling," Mark tells Eduardo one day when there's a egg salad sandwich with a quote from Gordon Korman's MacDonald Hall books on top. "You should have gotten a job writing fortune cookies."

Eduardo looks surprised and then pleased. "I don't think I could write fortune cookies," he says. "I couldn't bring myself to write the sad ones."

"I don't think there are sad fortune cookies," Mark says. "Only sad fortunes." He looks deeper into the paper bag and finds two round chocolate chip cookies sitting at the bottom, wrapped with a ribbon. He makes a face and then looks up at Eduardo, who's smiling down at him. Mark wonders if it hurts Eduardo to smile that much sometimes, if it actually stretches his facial muscles in unpleasant ways. If Eduardo suffers from it, he never lets on.

"If you give a mouse a cookie..." Eduardo says, more to himself than anyone else.

"Are you calling me a mouse?" Mark deadpans.

"No, I'm calling you a secret chocaholic," Eduardo says. "Don't think I haven't noticed that way you hover over Marilyn when she eats her cupcakes. You're like a vulture. A very hungry, chocolate-obsessed vulture."
"This analogy is starting to get ridiculous," Mark says. "First I'm a mouse and then I'm a vulture. What next? Some genetically engineered combination of both? A multure?"

"Then we'd have to rewrite the book," Eduardo decides, the lighting in the office still playing strange games with his face, bringing out his cheekbones. It's not fair, Mark thinks to himself, that some people were so successful at the genetic lottery. "If you give a multure a cookie, he'll ask for a glass of milk. If you give a multure a glass of milk, then he'll ask for a server update."

"The servers are for shit," Mark says, getting warmed up to his favourite subject. "The catalogue is bad enough but how can anyone expect it to be streamlined if it's running on outdated, overburdened servers? I can pinpoint exactly every time you update that YA lit blog of yours on the main website because that's when the servers start to sputter, and it's not as if you're doing anything particularly complicated."

"I know, it sucks," Eduardo replies, "but what can we do about it? Libraries are getting less funding than ever. It's not that we can't fix it. It's that we can't afford to." His mouth slides into a regretful line. "You know they slashed my collections budget nearly in half last year. I tried to put up a fight but no dice. I want to blame the Winklevoss twins, yet at the same time I know they're just trying to allot what little we've been given."

"The Winklevii have no imagination," Mark scoffs. "I don't think they even know how to read anything beyond the labels on their steroids."

Eduardo makes a sound of distressed laughter, stuffing his fist in his mouth. He looks around them as if their bosses are going to materialize in the air and rain punishment down on their heads.

"You're really that scared of them?" Mark asks.

"I'm not like you," Eduardo explains. "I'm not the brilliant programmer that we were lucky enough to snatch before some Fortune 500 company could. I'm young and haven't been working full-time for very long. I -- I can be replaced."

Mark looks him up and down. "No you can't," he says, and Eduardo freezes, every limb in quickfire lockdown.

The next day, his sandwich tells him this:

"...his face bore an expression that mingled haughty disdain with a tender, ardent sympathy, as if he would love all things if only his nature could let him forget their defects." -- The Amber Spyglass

"I too have a gift for you!" Dustin announces. "A pair of opera glasses!"

Mark recoils from the glasses that Dustin has just dropped on his desk. "Do I even want to know," he asks to the air, but Dustin is already cackling and trying to pull Chris into the office. Because Chris has common sense and a modicum of intelligence, he resists, but Dustin yanks him through with both arms.

"The opera glasses are so you don't have to strain your eyes staring at Wardo on the second floor,"
Dustin says while Chris makes a face at Mark like he's sorry, he's so sorry.

"Wardo?" Mark asks. There's a funny feeling in his head and he's ninety percent certain that it's not a Dustin-related headache, because he knows how to recognize those, which means it has another cause entirely.

"He told us we could call him that," Dustin says. "Wardo. Wardooooo. Wardodo bird."

"I need to... I need to get back to work," Chris says. "I can't leave Marilyn alone at the reference desk. It's about the time of day when Mrs. Winchester comes in and starts asking her questions."

"Christopher Hughes," Dustin says loudly, "I admire your dedication to your craft but you are not abandoning your post, oh no. For we--" He flings his arm to encompass himself and Mark, "--have a reference question of our own to pose to you! Namely, what do you do if a handsome, charming children's librarian clearly has the hots for you and you are so socially maladjusted that you can't do what you want, which is to bend him over a shelf and... Mark, are you trying to set fire to my desk?"

Mark lowers the lighter and exchanges a look with Chris as Dustin hurries forward to save his precious papers and his Beanie Baby collection.

"He is a catch though," Chris offers, and in unison they both turn to the door where they have a view of Eduardo at his desk, chatting patiently with a young Asian boy who's approached him.

"There is no catching involved. Dustin has been snorting the glitter glue again," Mark says. Eduardo is friendly to everyone. That's his special ability. He excels at the customer service side of librarianship because he's just so damn polite and warm to all of his patrons and his coworkers. Mark's only ever heard him raise his voice once, at a patron who was trying to rip pages out of books. "Also," Mark continues, "workplace relationships are a fundamentally bad idea. There are 64,403 people living in Palo Alto, much more if you count commuters. Why pick the one that'll drag your job down with it once you break up?" He thinks of Erica and goes bitter under his tongue.

"Right," Chris says, sympathetic. "I hear he has a boyfriend anyway." He lowers his voice and makes a gesture that could mean anything, from 'come hither' to 'I am trying to brain you.' "That's why he and Christy had that fallout. Because she thought he was leading her on."

"No fair!" Dustin says from behind them. "We're gossiping about the sex lives of our coworkers and I'm not included? I have loads of stories to share! Loads!"

"Dustin, you don't have a sex life," Chris says.

Dustin's mouth drops and then he flies at Chris like a Powerpuff Girl. "CHRIS YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO SAY THAT OUT LOUD. I HAVE AN AURA OF GREAT MYSTIQUE TO MAINTAIN."

"The fact is apparent even without Chris' confirmation," Mark says dryly. He cranes his neck to look at Eduardo again and finds Eduardo standing on the other side of his desk now, happily showing the boy something in the picture book he has open on one arm. The boy has a mushroom bowl haircut and scrapes on his knees, and he's gazing up at Eduardo like Eduardo is his entire world. Mark's stomach flips over and he has to look away quickly.

Of course someone like Eduardo can't be single. People like Eduardo never go lonely for long; that seems to be the providence of sharp-tongued, gawky, too-quick people like Mark. Mark should be used to it by now. He saw it in college when guys like Eduardo got all the attention and left Mark standing at the bar with his beer tight in his hands, trying to decide when would be a good time to
leave without being humiliated. It's an age old tale, practically coded in the bone. Feeling disappointment is beyond pointless.

"You spend so much time in here coding," Eduardo says, trailing his finger along Mark's desk and stopping to rest at the pile of post-it notes in the corner. Eduardo smiles at the sight of them, his own handwriting a familiar greeting. "I know maintaining the catalogue is hard, but I didn't think it would be that hard."

"It's not just that," Mark says, focusing on the screen. "I'm also building a new catalogue."

Eduardo drops his hand. "For real?"

Mark doesn't bother explaining his project to many people, even full-fledged librarians, because he's found that not a lot of people actually give much thought to the infrastructure of a library catalogue and the potentials and weaknesses thereof. But Eduardo has a curious expression on his face, and Eduardo is open to new ideas, so Mark starts talking as he types. "Not only will it replace the current catalogue, it'll completely revolutionize the way we view library catalogues as a tool," he says. "For all that information technology goes through rapid changes, library catalogues have remained static. First we had card catalogues, and then we went digital, but at its heart even the digital catalogues aren't so different from the old card catalogues. They've changed in medium but not in essential characteristics."

"Isn't that a good thing?" Eduardo asks, not so much to enter a debate but because Mark expects an audience and he's willing to provide one. "Isn't the card catalogue philosophy what people are used to?"

"People are used to it, but it doesn't mean it's the best mode of operation," Mark says, voice coming out faster. "Catalogues work in that they're an authoritative database that the library administration sets up. We define the protocols, we define the bibliographic elements, we define the subject headings and the relationships between works. But it doesn't have to be like that. Catalogues can go Web 2.0. They can invite public input as well as the standardized data. They can utilize tagging, comment systems, personalized pages, reviews, articles with peer editing, friendship systems. They can become their own social network of readers and patrons, representing the library as community, not just a place to keep books."

"Like Librarything," Eduardo says.

"Yes," Mark says, "but Librarything isn't representative of an actual public library. They have their side program that's geared towards public libraries, but why utilize a third party system when the Palo Alto City Library can have their own in-house social catalogue?"

"And you're going to build that in-house system," Eduardo says slowly. He takes a moment to think about it and then he flashes Mark a smile that can melt stone. "Mark, that's brilliant. That's fucking amazing."

"I know," says Mark, not smug or arrogant, but as plain, somewhat boring fact. People have been praising his efforts since grade school. It's nothing new.

"I mean, I've always wanted a way to keep in touch with patrons without them having to come in and visit," Eduardo says. "A way to recommend them books, check up with what they're reading,
ask if they need any help. I do have my blog, but it's not the same. The comment system on the blog isn't very good."

"It's terrible," Mark says bluntly. "It requires the commenter to jump through all these security loops, and your readers are mostly kids. They're not going to have the patience for that."

"Exactly," Eduardo says. "If you can actually do this -- and I'm not saying you can't, but I'm also knocking on wood at the same time. But if you can actually do this, you will be my hero. I'll bring you a million sandwiches every day."

"I've only just started coding Ananke," Mark replies. "It won't be done any time soon." Eduardo tilts his head and Mark explains. "That's the project name I've given it. Ananke Web. Ananke was the Greek goddess of inevitability, compulsion, and necessity. It's not the name it'll have when it goes live, of course. Then it'll just be known as the Palo Alto City Library catalogue. But I can hardly call it that right now because it'll be confused with the current catalogue."

"Ananke," Eduardo says, his tongue wrapping around the syllables deliciously. Mark finally looks up from his computer for longer than a second. "You read a lot of Greek classics, don't you? I've seen you."


"Is that the only thing you read?" Eduardo asks, making a face. "It's great and all, but I can see you running out of reading material fast."

"I like the other classics too," Mark says. "Sei Shonogan. Dumas and his musketeers, but only the earlier books, the ones in which they're happy. Dickens too."

"You like Dickens?" Eduardo says. "Huh. I would have thought he was too long-winded and rambling for you."

"His paragraphs could be cut down to half their size and still make sense," Mark says. "But what is the use of literature that only just makes sense? Reading Dickens is like reading code. It looks like a jumbled bunch of nonsense at first, but there's meaning to be found if you're willing to put in the work." He shrugs again. "Not that I have much time to read anymore."

Eduardo has a small smile on his face that he doesn't even bother wiping off when Mark looks at him more directly. "Let's have you sign up for the readathon."

"What?" Mark asks.

"Come on," Eduardo says, getting to his feet. He starts out of the office and Mark considers not following him, but eventually he does. Eduardo leads him past the circulation desk where Christy is checking out someone's books, past the reference area where Chris and Marilyn work, with Dustin currently hanging all over them, and up the stairs. Eduardo opens his desk and takes out a spotted elephant cutout. He uses a permanent black marker and writes Mark's name over the elephant's body. **MARK Z, AGE 27.** Then he turns around and tacks it to the huge poster behind him, where Mark Z's elephant joins the stampede of other elephants all making their way along a numerical scale.

"Every time you read a book, your elephant gets to advance one step," Eduardo says airily. "Once you read ten books, you can come back for a prize. Another ten books, another prize. If you read fifty, you'll get the super extra special award for senior readers only."

Mark looks at the board where **MINHO K, AGE 9** is leading the pack at forty-two books.
"And where are you in the readathon?" Mark asks acerbically, expecting a non-answer. But Eduardo points to the middle of the poster where Mark can see an EDUARDO S, AGE 28 around the twenty books point, nearly swallowed up by its neighbours. "I'm behind," Eduardo says. "I'm getting my butt kicked."

"You are a shame to your profession," Mark agrees, and Eduardo's eyes flick down in fake embarrassment. His eyelashes are long and smoky, curving sweetly, and it's too easy to forget that Mark is not supposed to stare at them and wonder.

There's a day when Mark walks into work late and sees the entire building filled with children and their parents, and most of the children are wearing robes and wizard hats. Mark's immediate impulse is to backpedal and check the expiration dates on his vitamins. But then he sees Eduardo in the center of the crowd, handing out candy (bad idea, Mark thinks, giving children candy in a public institution), and Dustin is by his side saying, "Brew a potion! Fight a dark lord! Throw up snails! Snog your best friend's sister! Hooray hooray, it's Harry Potter Day!"

Eduardo sees them and waves them over. "Hey Mark, hey Dustin," he says. He has the basket of candy in one arm and a wooden wand in the other. "Lumos!" he says, pointing the wand at Mark's face.

Mark doesn't know how to react, so he doesn't. Dustin, however, goes stumbling backwards, clawing at his eyes. "The light, the light!" he screeches. "It's too bright! Make it stop!" The children around them giggle and some of the parents roll their eyes.

"What is this?" Mark asks, because he must not have gotten the memo.

Eduardo lowers his wand. "It's the special event to celebrate Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2 hitting the theatres today," he says. "We did one for the last three movies. They were a big hit." A little girl in a witch's costume tugs at Eduardo's sleeve shyly. He bends down. "Would you like some chocolate frogs?" he asks her, and she nods wordlessly. Eduardo digs into his basket and hands her three foil-wrapped pieces of chocolate. "Here you go."

"Who are you supposed to be?" Mark asks, eying Eduardo's black robes and red and gold striped scarf. His hair is curly today and he has a orange tabby decal tattooed to his cheek. He looks utterly stupid.

"I'm Hermione, of course," Eduardo says. "See my Gryffindor scarf? See Crookshanks?" He points to his cheek and beams. "Chris over there is Harry Potter. Marilyn is Ginny Weasley. Christy is Madame Hooch. We tried to get Gretchen to put on a costume too, but she refused."

"And I," Dustin says, "am the handsome and misunderstood Draco Malfoy! Well, I will be after I put on my costume." He scurries off towards their office.

"I see," Mark says.

Eduardo has a dangerous look on him. "We have a costume for you too. Don't think you're going to get away scotch free like Gretchen. You aren't the head of the branch. You don't have those kinds of magical bureaucratic powers."

Dustin pokes his head from their office and yells, "Marky Mark, come join me! We'll transform you
into Professor Snape in no time!"

Mark searches for a way to get out of this, but he doesn't have any hope. Even Chris, normally the voice of reason, is looking perfectly at peace hopping around on a broomstick with children hanging off behind him. Gretchen watches from her office with her arms folded over her chest, but she doesn't stop the madness, and so Mark finally follows Dustin into their office and tugs on the tent-like robe over his regular clothes and his worn open-toed sandals. "What are you doing?" he bites off when Dustin pours vegetable oil over his hands and starts rubbing them all over Mark's hair.

"Snape is supposed to be a greasy git. I'm just going for realism here," Dustin says.

"You're making me look like a freak," Mark retorts.

"You do that so well on your own," Dustin says, and then leans back and admire his handiwork.
"All right, go, shoo! Entertain those children! Pretend you actually know something about pop culture! Impress Wardo and get his number! Not necessarily in that order!"

"This is not what I signed up for," Mark says to his computer screen.

"No, but it's what your dick is telling you to do," Dustin replies. He pulls Mark out of his chair and shoves him back into the fray, just in time for Mark to see Eduardo's luminescent grin before a girl is barreling at him as fast as her legs can carry her, and yelling "YOU KILLED DUMBLEDORE" and bursting into tears. As Mark backs up into a shelf display of Harry Potter books, he suddenly has tenfold more respect for Eduardo's job.

When they get the crying girl settled down, Eduardo sidles up to Mark. "Thanks for doing this," he says softly, and Mark finds himself replying that it's no big deal even before his brain has time to process that statement and take it back. Of course it's a big deal. Mark is wearing a dress and he has vegetable oil in his hair. But then he follows Eduardo's gaze, towards the Asian boy Mark has seen hanging around Eduardo, who is currently sitting on the floor reading *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. He doesn't have a costume except for a Gryffindor scarf around his neck. Mark glances back at Eduardo and sees that his scarf is missing.

"That's Minho," Eduardo says in the same soft tone. "That's his sister Yoon over there. They're always at the library because their parents work long hours and can't afford daycare. Minho and Yoon come here immediately after school and stay until closing. They do their homework here. They eat their dinner here."

"Food isn't allowed," Mark says, staring pointedly at the chocolate frogs in Eduardo's hand.

"Ah, um. Gretchen never goes upstairs. I can get away with a lot. And today is a special occasion so it doesn't count." Eduardo turns back to Minho. "I wish I could do something for them though," he says wistfully. "It's not their parents' fault they have to work so long, but a library isn't a replacement for a home."

"Wardo," Mark says.

Then Eduardo shakes his head like he's trying to get rid of morose thoughts, rattle them out like a martini on the rocks. There's a horde of children heading his way again, greedy for more candy, and Wardo nee Hermione kicks into action, all too willing to oblige.
Mark doesn't know the story behind Dustin and Divya's epic rivalry, but he knows that it somehow involved a potato, a slab of butter, and a copy of *Whitney My Love*. Dustin doesn't normally hold grudges because he's as easygoing as a prostitute's back entrance, but something about Divya, he claims, rubs him the wrong way. Which is why he and Eduardo are sitting in the office during Eduardo's lunch break and opening up the Palo Alto City Library online reference chat, the program that Dustin designed and implements.

"It's Divya's shift in chat," Dustin exclaims gleefully as Mark comes back from grabbing an energy drink. "We're going to troll the shit out of him."

"Why are *you* part of this?" Mark wonders at Eduardo.

Eduardo chuckles. "I've never trolled anyone before."

"Let Darth Dustin show you the way, my innocent little rabbit," Dustin says, cracking his knuckles and filling out the brief questionnaire that marks the start of every reference chat. When the actual chat window opens, Divya enters *Hi Henry, how can I help you today?*

*what is sex*, Dustin types.

Mark groans.

As Divya on the other end is no doubt grasping for the appropriate response, Dustin hits him with a barrage of new questions. *what is sex what is the length of the average male penis if I don't get hard looking at porn does that mean there is something wrong with me what is the difference in sensation between a male and female orgasm are dolphins really the only mammals other than humans to enjoy sex if i have spots on my penis does that mean i should go to the hospital right away or should i stay at home and eat more of these funny pills*

Eduardo is burying his face into his arms.

*This is a joke, right?* Divya types.

*HOW DARE YOU INSULT MY CULTURAL PRACTICES*, Dustin bangs back. He signs off the chat window and then opens another one, entering in a new name. When Divya appears in the second chatroom with another greeting, Dustin hits him again.

*if I use twitter does that make me a twit*

In the third chat window, he writes:

*how much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck over the tyrannical speciesist hegemony that said it had to chuck wood and not go to school and become a neurosurgeon instead*

In the fourth:

*will a vanilla milkshake bring all the boys to the yard just as well as a chocolate one? what if i make one out of nutella?*

"Oh crap," Eduardo breathes through his wheezing, "stop, stop, this is totally abuse of library resources." He tries to grab Dustin's hands from the keyboard but Dustin is too fast for him.

"This is *my* program. I'll delete the logs afterwards so no one has to know. The only person whose time I'm wasting is me," Dustin says.
"And Divya," Mark says wryly.

"Divya hates kittens," Dustin says. "Divya has a pretty name that starts with D, bestest and most magnificent letter of the alphabet, but that's all he has going for him, because Divya has no soul."

Eduardo peeks over at Mark for answers, but Mark shakes his head. "I don't know and I don't want to know," he says out loud. Meanwhile Divya finally figures it out and starts sending a torrent of DUSTIN FUCK OFF DUSTIN FUCK OFF DUSTIN FUCK OFF DUSTIN YOUR FACE LOOKS LIKE AN OLD MAN'S BALL SACS. Dustin shrieks in indignation.

I DO NOT FORGIVE POTATO MURDERERS, he types.

I SMASH ALL THE POTATOES!!!!!! Divya writes. ALL OF THEM!!!!

"I'm going to leave now," Eduardo says, sliding out of his chair. "And maybe never come back."

"I wish I had that luxury," Mark mutters, and then goes to unplug Dustin's computer.

There's shouting coming from the second floor. Mark doesn't hear it until it gets really loud, he's so wired in and focused on the next large segment of code for Ananke Web's bibliographic display. But when he chances to glance up to reach for his drink, he catches Dustin looking tense and unhappy. Then it's just a matter of moments for Mark to take off his headphones and hear the angry male voice coming from upstairs. It's not Eduardo because Eduardo would never start yelling in the middle of a public library. It is, Mark understands, someone yelling at Eduardo.

"What's going on?" Mark asks flatly.

"Just listen," Dustin says and his hands clench and unclench over his keyboard. "Man, we shouldn't have to put up with this shit."

"...my daughter is eleven, do you think she needs to be exposed to such filth? Do you think that's what I pay my taxes and give money to you people for?" the angry man shouts, and Mark's skin suddenly feels like it's buzzing with the hum of a low-grade electric fence. It's not sickness, not quite, but it's an uncomfortable feeling nonetheless, and he's standing before he even knows what he's doing.

He can hear Eduardo's attempt at a calm, neutral reply. "Sir, we at the library believe in freedom of information. Your daughter has access to the entire collection. We do not have the right to censor her reading habits. " There's a pause, during which the angry man makes a sound like an ox getting ready to paw the dirt. Eduardo quickly adds, "As her father, it's your responsibility to make sure what she is reading is appropriate."

"Don't try to play innocent with me! She told me you recommended her the book! Annie On My Mind or whatever it was called! You gave my daughter a book about disgusting lesbians!"

Stepping out of his office, Mark can see the entire library has ground to a halt. The other patrons are either staring or have their heads ducked in a blatant attempt to appear nonchalant. The librarians all look tense. Christy is peeling her nail polish while looking at nothing in particular, and Chris and Marilyn have twin expressions of uncomfortable dismay. Mark makes a move towards the staircase, but Chris calls his name.
"Mark!"

Mark ignores him.

"Mark, seriously, don't," Chris hisses. He gets out from behind the reference desk and grabs Mark's sleeve. Mark stares at him coldly, but Chris' face is set tight and determined. "If you start a confrontation, things are only going to get worse. Just let it ride out. He'll file a complaint and Gretchen will ignore it when she returns from her break, and we'll all go back to normal."

"He's yelling. At Wardo," Mark says.

Chris' cheeks are blotchy red, like he's fighting to keep his own temper under control. "We're not a corporation. We're a public service. We can't go around picking fights. Do you want to get fucking fired? Or worse, get Eduardo fired?"

"They won't fire me and they won't fire him, not for some douchebag's homophobic comments," Mark says, tetchy. "I thought you'd be on our side."

"You think it doesn't kill me to listen to this crap?" Chris demands, fingers growing painfully tight on Mark's arm. "If this was a bar, I'd clean the floor with him. But if you go up there and you talk to him the way I know you want to, you'll get Eduardo in trouble. No one who matters cares that Eduardo gave a gay book to a patron. But they do care if Eduardo and his buddies started trash-talking patrons. So don't."

"You're being facetious," Mark says. He pulls his arm away from Chris and goes up the staircase to where a man is exercising the full range of his vocal cords against Eduardo, who sits behind his desk with absolutely no facial expression. Eduardo's replies, when he can edge them in, are clipped and rote, nearly robotic. There are a handful of restless children by the shelves and in the play area.

Mark says, "If your daughter likes girls, keeping her away from a single book isn't going to change that. Or do you think you're the first person to ever have that brilliant idea? It might have churned rather excitedly in your pea-sized spinning teacup of a brain."

The angry man whips towards Mark, reflexes bright and shiny like a penny. Eduardo's blank expression finally breaks and there's a strange quality that replaces it, an unforeseen blend of relief and shame. The angry man is at least five inches taller than Mark, and he might be whipcord thin but he still has more muscles than Mark could ever hope for, even if he lifted his desktop every day for an hour. But Mark looks him in the eye, unperturbed, because the world is full of self-important assholes and if Mark can vanquish some of them with his superior logic, then that's his good deed quota filled right there. Mark's been bullied by guys like this since kindergarten. He's too old to put up with it anymore.

"Who the hell are you?" the man asks.

Eduardo answers him. "Mark, go back to your office. I can handle this."

Mark doesn't have a chance to play verbal whac-a-mole, however, because he's interrupted before he gets warmed up. "Yes, Mark, go back to work," Gretchen remarks, appearing at the top of the stairs. She breezes by him. "You too, Eduardo." She extends her hand to the angry man politely and frostily. "I'm the head librarian of this branch. If you want to discuss the performance of any of my employees, I have an office where we can do it civilly." The man throws daggers with his eyes, but no one refuses Gretchen when she has that tone of voice, and so he follows her out of sight.

Mark studies Eduardo and notices that his hands, which have been kept under the line of the desk
until now, are shaking slightly. "You shouldn't let him get to you," Mark says. "What does he know? I hope his daughter grows up, shaves her head, and joins a leather and chain biker gang just to spite him."

Eduardo doesn't smile. "My father--" he begins. Then he stops. He takes a deep breath and looks at their surroundings, at the children who are watching. "It doesn't matter," he says. "Thanks for coming though. You didn't need to."

"It's not a matter of need," Mark replies, and leaves it at that. The verbal confrontation, that is. There's still something Mark needs to do, and he makes sure that he's the last person leaving the branch at the end of the day, reassuring Gretchen repeatedly that he'll turn off all the lights and the computers. He waits until everyone else is gone, even Dustin, and then he goes to the circulation desk where he doesn't have the password to the checkout program, but he doesn't need it because he hacks into it in five minutes flat. He pulls up the patron file of one Samuel Teller.

Then he's startled by the sound of the staff door opening, so he quickly minimizes the program and shuts off the computer monitor. He's halfway around the desk when Christy returns from outside, muttering to herself as she searches her purse. When she sees Mark, her lips tilt into a smirk.

"Oh yeah, like it's not totally obvious what you're doing," she says.

"I fail to see what is obvious about any of my actions," Mark replies. "Unless you mean I am shutting down the building for the night, in which case, yes, it is obvious."

"Just because I'm a library assistant doesn't mean I'm stupid," Christy says. She jabs her finger on the computer monitor button. Mark blinks once as it lights back up. "You and Eduardo make me sick." She slings her purse around so that she has both hands free, and starts typing. "This is how you do it."

Mark looks over her shoulder as OVERDUE, OVERDUE, OVERDUE starts appearing in Teller's account, an entire string of them. Christy hits another key with a manicured red nail, and a new alert pops up: FINES OWING: $117.15.

"Never mess with a library assistant," Christy warns. "We'll eat you up and spit you out."

Something else changes after the Teller incident, and it's not a good change. Eduardo starts avoiding Mark. When they are forced to be together, such as when they arrive at the same time for work or when Dustin drags Eduardo to their office for another session of trolling Divya, Eduardo's smile is too bland. He continues to bring Mark lunch with the same quotes from children's books, but whereas before he would drop by to see what Mark thought of the food and the pearl of wisdom, now he doesn't. Now he stays in his little domain upstairs where Mark can see him eating his sandwich, sad and alone. Only Wardo could manage to digest food with emotional resonance.

"You shouldn't have tried to defend him," Dustin says, pointing at Mark threateningly. "You, like, emasculated him. You broke the code of manhood!"

"I'll break your manhood," Mark slings back.

Dustin's chest puffs out. "I have too much manhood for one such as you to break." When he nears the snicker from the door, he scampers through. "Christina, Christina my love, why are you
laughing?"

Mark doubts that's the reason though. People in the past have accused him of being socially obtuse, but this is hardly true. Mark is fully aware of social conventions and the way people tend to work, the patterns their thoughts and emotions tend to take. He's not ignorant; why would he be designing a socially-oriented library catalogue otherwise? Mark can read people perfectly well. He just chooses not to most of the time, because reading people requires attention and most people aren't interesting enough to warrant it. He can see Dustin's loneliness and desire to be accepted, his occasional self-doubt about his own intelligence; he can see Erica's ambition warring with her desire to settle down and have a family, and how she worries that one may mean the sacrifice the other. But Mark couldn't be bothered to tell you what Patron A is thinking when she asks Mark where to find the books on American history, or what the barista who makes his coffee in the morning is thinking when he hands Mark his change. There are sudden bursts of wildfire in Mark's life, and everything else is just shadowplay.

Mark can hazard a guess as to what Eduardo is thinking, and what Eduardo is thinking is probably embarrassment. My father, he had said, like a ship cut loose from the harbour too quickly.

There aren't many things that embarrass Mark. Rejection is one of them, vocalizing feelings is another, and being reminded of something he lacks is a third drop in the shallow pool. Setting yourself up for a situation where you can be embarrassed means setting yourself up in a situation where you want something, where you are taking a risk and that risk backfires on you. Wardo cares about his father, clearly, and he seems to care about what Mark thinks. And what Mark thinks is this: it's not a big deal. It's not strange or bizarre or remarkable. So Eduardo has daddy issues? Join the general populace.

If Eduardo cannot realize that he was a freak when he dressed up as a Harry Potter character at age twenty-eight and not because he had a violin moment over a mention of his father, then Mark has to tell him this.

So he goes upstairs and stands behind Eduardo while Eduardo is sitting cross-legged in the play area, reading Clifford the Big Red Dog to Yoon, who is probably too old for picture books but she seems entranced nonetheless, because Eduardo's voice when he is reading about genetically mutated giant dogs is... tender. It's nice. Minho hovers jealously in the background, glaring at Mark. Mark puts his hands in his pockets and waits.

Eduardo starts barking, and Yoon giggles shyly.

"People ask me why I'm so blank-faced," Mark says. "It's because my entire life was preparing in advance for this moment of muscle-numbing terror."

"Not in front of the children, honey," Eduardo replies without taking his eyes off the pages of the book. He finishes the book with another series of barks, followed by a silly growl. Mark raises an eyebrow instead of applauding. Eduardo hands the book to Yoon when he's done, and she holds it to her chest, mumbling a "thanks, Mr. S" under her breath.

Eduardo gets to his feet and walks with Mark back to his empty desk. Traffic in the kids' section is slow today, which is why Eduardo was reading; otherwise the task would have gone to one of the library assistants or pages. Mark wonders if it ever bothers Wardo that actual librarians, with the master's degree and everything, don't get to be so hands-on. Most of the higher up librarians, after promotions, are in administration, but when Mark looks at Eduardo, he doesn't believe for a second that being an administrator is what Eduardo wants.

"What can I help you with?" Eduardo asks, smoothing the already immaculate line of his pants.
Mark snorts at the stereotypical reference line coming from Eduardo's expressive mouth.

"You can stop avoiding me, for one."

Eduardo fidgets but doesn't deny it.

"So you're human. I didn't know that. Tell me more," Mark says.

"Do you actually say that to people? 'Tell me more?' With that exact condescending tone?" Eduardo makes a sort of fluttery gesture, but he's smirking, not angry. Mark wasn't sure he would understand what was being implied, but he shouldn't have worried. Mark's language is full of stuttered start-stop-start spaces and pauses, but Eduardo is gaining literacy fast, and with that, Wardo's shoulders relax slightly. "How do you manage to avoid getting punched on a daily basis?"

"Who says I do?" Mark asks.

"If anyone ever tries to punch you, just tell me and I'll take care of it," Eduardo says slowly, but Mark gives him his best approximation of an encouraging look (it's probably a grimace, but it's the best he can do without coming across, as Dustin puts it, like a psychopathic robot). It must work because Wardo starts speeding up, gaining enthusiasm. "I'm very deadly with an encyclopedia, you know. We'll look after each other. I've decided. Speaking of which, there's this 'night at the library' event I'm running and I may need to borrow your tech mojo. Also, how do you feel about tiaras..."

The shape and weave of Ananke Web is starting to come together under Mark's fingertips. Coding for him has always been a full body experience, sliding across his head, his fingers, his elbows, his stomach, his legs. He feels the effect of a coding jag in all the component parts, and sometimes afterwards when he looks at a piece of code or a section of a program that he's designed, he can summon the sensory memory of it. Can tap his finger against a line on the screen and remember that moment there was when he developed the headache, that moment there was when his wrists started feeling sore, that moment there was when his mother yanked the earphones out and frog-marched him down to dinner. Other people build code out of ideas, but ideas come to Mark like mosquitoes to a screen net. It's not enough. What Mark builds out of, what he gives so that he can be not Mark-genius but Mark-proud, is himself.

What sticks in his head about Ananke Web is that there are so many possibilities. If library catalogues have remained conservative, then nearly everything Mark does is a test of visionary. He starts with the social media aspect first because that's the main draw of Ananke Web. It's the pitch that got Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss at central branch to schedule a meeting with him and listen to his ideas, promising minor funding.

Mark is all too happy to take the money they've allocated him from department funds and build what they expect him to build, which is already a fantastic idea, a dazzling combination of Librarything and Goodreads and traditional library catalogue. And there's no guarantee that it will work, especially with Palo Alto being on the smaller size in population, but Mark sees past that. If Ananke Web isn't a success in Palo Alto, there are library systems out there, larger with a deeper patron pool, where it could be. It's his idea, his code. He's just lending it to the Palo Alto City Library. He can always turn around and sell it to Boston, to New York, to libraries built out of limestone quarries, twisted ivy, and millions of bytes of information floating through austere halls.
Libraries are no longer self-contained institutions. Connected to the internet, to online resources and databases, libraries are models of hybridity, contradictory impulses of books-pages-shelves-quiet and digital-fast-ready-now. A library doesn't exist in a single space anymore, even if you slap a sign over a building that says 'Fairview Branch', and this is what fascinates Mark about it, this uneasy translation between real world and virtual world.

"It's a step towards the semantic web," Mark tells Eduardo, who shows up at his office while Mark is scribbling design notes. "Tim Berners-Lee proposed this idea that online information can be linked together with metadata and processed in such a way that a machine can intelligently make meaning out of it. People say it's impossible, and I'm inclined to agree, but I think there can be incremental versions of the semantic web, and where better to start testing the idea than a library catalogue, when a library is supposed to contain the entire universe of knowledge?"

"Mark," Eduardo says fondly, "you're babbling. And you haven't eaten."

Mark jerks his head, irritated.

"Look," Eduardo continues, coming closer, "you have bags under your eyes."

"I always have bags under my eyes," Mark says.

"Not like this. These could carry the water supply of a desert town." Eduardo's finger floats close to Mark's face, and there's a moment when Mark thinks Eduardo is about to touch him and stroke the skin under his eyes gently. But Eduardo withdraws his finger and frowns. "Did the Winklevii give you a deadline to finish Ananke Web?"

"Not exactly," Mark replies. "Sometime within the next year or so."

"Then what's the hurry?" Eduardo says. He goes around to the other side and grips Mark's chair, wheeling it away from his computer. Mark digs his heels to the ground, but Wardo is surprisingly strong, and he manages to shove Mark over to Dustin's desk, clear of anything Ananke-related. Dustin is off running an errand for Gretchen, and so he isn't around to protest when Eduardo moves some of his papers around and drops a Thermos into the cleared space. "I've made us soup," Wardo says.

Mark eyes it suspiciously. "What kind?"

"Tomato," Wardo replies. "And the sandwiches are grilled cheese." He hands over two wrapped bundles, and then opens a third for himself. Then he takes the Thermos and pours the contents into two plastic containers that he produces from the lunch bag. Mark watches Eduardo as he starts to eat; his motions are precise in a way that suggests growing up with formal dinners at home, napkins and manners and the whole exhausting shebang.

"I don't have time for this," Mark says. "I'm in the middle of an important push towards--"

Eduardo interrupts him. "You know, there might be a planet where dead men write code, but I don't think this is one of them."

Mark doesn't tell him that if he thinks this is unhealthy behaviour, he is glad he didn't know Eduardo during college because that was ten times worse. At least now Mark knows how to make a package of ramen, a skill that everyone else apparently learned during school and not after.

"Do you need any help?" Eduardo finally asks, tongue darting out to lick the crumbs that have stuck
to the side of his mouth. Mark is distracted for a second.

"Uh?"

"Is there anything I can help with?" Eduardo asks, amused. Does he know what Mark is thinking? Mark feels a flush begin deep down in his skin, but he stuffs his mouth with soup and hopes that the heat of the lunch will explain it.

"Do you have any programming or web design skills?" Mark asks after he's swallowed.

"Not really," Eduardo says. "I know some HTML and XML, but that's it."

"That won't help," Mark says, not unkindly, but because it's the truth.

"Okay, let me know if anything does come up," Eduardo says. "Like, if you get extra funding and you have to attend meetings and give pitches to justify your project? I can do that. I'm great at public speaking." He looks down at the desk they're eating on, as if seeing it for the first time. "Have you ever asked Dustin for help?"

Mark almost laughs.

"What? It's a serious question!" Eduardo says. "Dustin's smart, he's talented, and clearly the reference chat isn't all that hard to run because he has way too much free time on his hands."

"Dustin is--" my only friend until you came along, endlessly compassionate, worth every cent of his salary. "Dustin is good, but I don't -- I don't like to share. You may have noticed that I have control issues," he adds sardonically.

"Well, in the sliding gradient of issues, those aren't the worst to have," Wardo replies. "At least that's what my therapist tells me." He smiles and blows over his soup, trying to cool it down. "See, I'm glad we live in California because I have a feeling otherwise I would be yelling at you for not dressing for the weather either. At least this way, there's one thing you can't mess up."

"Even if I show up on Monday in a snowsuit?" Mark asks, thinking back to horrible childhood winter gear and that one vacation his family had spent in Canada, visiting relatives and freezing under the snow-laden evergreen trees.

"I'd like to see you try," Wardo says.

Mark leaves his office less and less, but Eduardo finds reasons to lure him out. At first it's with a chocolate eclair, and then it's by yelling "I can't believe it! Bill Gates and Steve Jobs are having a fistfight in our parking lot!", and then it's by saying, "Mark, your mom is on the line and she sounds angry", prompting Mark into a panic of flattening his hair and wiping his hands as if his mother's disapproval will travel cross-country telephone lines.

This time he wrangles Mark by throwing himself into Mark's office, banging into the door and coughing into his hand. "Mark," he whines, "I'm sick." His voice is a bullfrog croak. "I'm really sick."

"Then go home," Mark says.
"I can't," Eduardo rasps, and Mark looks at him sharply because he can't tell if this is a ploy or not. Eduardo is much craftier than his sugarplum and male model exterior would bely. "I've got..." cough cough, "a proposal to write about bringing in video game systems to the" hack wheeze "library."

"Email it to me. I'll finish it," Mark says, turning back to Ananke. But Wardo doesn't go away after that. He's still holding onto the doorframe and waiting. Mark pins him with a questioning stare.

"I need you to read to the kids."

Mark doesn't even need to think about his answer. "No."

"Mark," Eduardo pleads. "Mark, did you know that I burned both of my thumbs making stir-fry for you last night?" He holds up his thumbs, but from this distance Mark can't tell if they're burned or not. Eduardo quickly tucks them away. "I am a noble knight suffering for you daily. Surely you can do this one thing for me?"

"Surely you realize that me plus anyone under the age of fourteen is a combination that will create an inverse relationship in the time-space continuum that will destroy the world," Mark says.

"Don't make me bring in Dustin," Wardo says sadly.

Oh, that's just playing dirty. Somewhere in the distance he can hear Dustin serenading Chris with songs from The Lion King, and if that voice and its owner returns to the office to pierce Mark's eardrums at an even higher decibel, Mark's never going to get any work done. Reading to children should take less than half an hour. He does the calculations in his head and then stands up. Wardo beams at him like a proud parent, which is sort of disturbing considering that Mark had a dream last night about him getting naked.

"--I can't wait to be kiiiiiiiiiiing!"

"Go go go," Mark says.

Upstairs, there are seven children sitting in an impatient semi-circle, waiting for story time, including Minho and Yoon. Some of the parents are with them, others are browsing the stacks downstairs or using the computers. There's no chair for the librarian to sit on; Eduardo, as he once explained, believes in sitting cross-legged on the floor with the kids because it's more natural that way. Knowing that Mark is about to bolt any second, Wardo keeps a Marine sergeant's grip on him, sitting him down in the circle and shoving the picture book into his hands. Mark looks down briefly and sees The Magic School Bus In the Time of the Dinosaurs.

"Thank you, Mark," Eduardo says, and his voice sounds perfectly fine now, the rat bastard.

Mark has no especial dislike of children. He's never quite understood people who do, as everybody except Christopher Lee was probably a child at one point, and so it seems like a self-hating endeavor to him. But the sight of seven children staring at him expectantly is enough to send a shiver through his bones, every gut instinct telling him that if he doesn't do this right, he'll be crucified and made a mockery of forever.

"Right," he says to himself, opening the book. He flips past the title page, past the dedication, until he comes to the first real page of the story. He clears his throat, glances up at Eduardo's desk to see Wardo laughing into his fist, grimaces, and begins.

"It was Visitors Day at our school," he reads awkwardly. "Parents, relatives, and friends were coming that afternoon to see our work. In Ms. Frizzle's class, we were making the whole room into Dinosaur Land."
He turns to flip to the next page, but Eduardo calls out, "Read the speech bubbles too!"

_I hate you_, Mark mouths, but he looks down and reads, "I love Visitors Day." Pause. "My parents are coming." Pause. "My grandma's coming. I hope she likes my project."

"You're supposed to do voices," one of the children pipes up.

Mark stiffens, but everyone is watching him, so he screws his voice into a falsetto. "My grandma's coming. I hope she likes my project."

"Phoebe's voice doesn't sound like that," the same kid accuses, and she is either going to become the next Roger Ebert or a social pariah, Mark can't decide.

"This is stupid," Minho says, kicking at the cheap carpeting. "Mr. S does it so much better." And okay, so it's obvious that Minho has an outrageously large crush on Eduardo, which is understandable because most people who come in contact with Eduardo develop an outrageously large crush on him. But that doesn't stop Mark's brows from furrowing together, nor does it stop him from wanting to write a program that will conjure up a hot air balloon and allow him to escape.

"Hey guys," Eduardo says, singsong from his desk, "give Mark a chance, all right? He's a super duper reader, you'll see. His dinosaur roar is amazing."

Mark somehow lives through the experience, and Eduardo slaps a gold star sticker onto his forehead. "You're a trooper," he says, grinning infernally as Mark scowls, peeling the sticker off. "And your roar really was great."

"I was pretending I had a paintball gun and your face as a target."

"Don't be like that," Eduardo chastises. "Here, I have something for you. Let me show you." He leads Mark around to his PC and opens up a .txt file on his desktop. "You were talking about metadata, right? Well, right now the system doesn't have very comprehensive bibliographic information on its children's collection, but if you give me the standards that you plan to use, I can create some for Ananke. I've started already. See here?"

"That's a lot of books to recatalogue manually," Mark remarks, gazing at Eduardo's retooled record for _Aliens Don't Wear Braces_.

"I don't mind," Eduardo says. "Cataloging was always my specialty at school. It's what I spent my internships on. And there's a selfish impulse too. I think Ananke Web will do great things. I want to help put my mark on it."

_Put my mark on it._

Eduardo turns red at the same time Mark's mouth does something funny, like it's trying to breathe in the stratosphere but there's only ozone and his lungs haven't quite gotten the message that it's time to shut down and die now. Right about then, with his impeccably bad timing, Dustin materializes and says, "Gretchen's looking for you, Wardo! She's waiting for you in her office. Something something new shipment of books being delayed."

"Okay," Eduardo says, grateful, and scurries off.

Dustin starts beating Mark with a pool noodle.

"What the fuck--" Mark bites out, but then remembers that he's surrounded by children. "I mean, fuuuuuu--"
"Too late, you already said it!" Dustin cackles. "And I'm just checking you for alien possession." He hits Mark's back, his thighs, and his waist with hellish glee. Where Dustin even managed to procure a pool noodle when he didn't have one earlier is one question. Why everyone lets him get away with it is another. "Oh wait no," Dustin realizes, "false alarm, it's not alien possession. It's just love! KEEP CALM AND REMOVE THE TINFOIL HATS, EVERYONE. IT'S JUST LOVE."

In June, Eduardo heads off for the ALA conference in Atlanta. He buzzes about it to Mark for weeks beforehand, hopelessly excited because he's snagged a lunch date with his hero, C. Sheldrick Ross, and they're going to cuddle and talk about genre fiction and reading practices in local libraries. "She's going to think I'm a total baby," Eduardo mourns, and Mark looks up from his computer at Eduardo's flushed cheeks, bright eyes, and jungle hair, and has to tuck back the no, she'll think you're awesome that's threatening to escape. There's making an effort at being a friend and then there's being obvious enough to be seen from Alpha Centauri.

Chris covers Eduardo's desk for the three days that he's gone. Eduardo leaves him copious notes, painstakingly directing him to the displays that he's working on and notes on the regular kids who come by; their names, their literary likes, their backgrounds. "It's kind of frightening," Chris confesses, but he's also pleased and he takes Eduardo's system of colour-coordinated files and turns it into some kind of office bureaucratic extravaganza, because the only person who loves post-it notes and dividers more than Eduardo is Chris Hughes.

Over three days of lunch, Mark eats: a piece of toast, half a bagel, a wedge of cheese, a package of licorice.

Dustin eats: a meatball marinara sub, a cheeseburger, three bacon and cheese tortillas, a slice of cake, two bags of chips, five donuts. It would be regrettable, Mark thinks, if Dustin dies of choked arteries. But apparently Dustin's metabolism is hardworking enough to make up for his brain, because all that food enters his body and just... evaporates.

"I'm a sylph, I'm a sylph, I'm a pretty pretty sylph," Dustin agrees.

Nothing of consequence happens in the three days Wardo is gone. Mark works on Ananke Web from eight to five. He's the first person in the building and the last person to leave, walking through the darkened shelves where the books have shadows in their spines. He watches the catalogue expand with the data that he pulls in, but it's a rough satisfaction, only a fraction of what it's going to be later on when he pushes the key and watches the whole architecture come alive. In other words, it's work as per usual, except that Eduardo seems to have trained Mark to look for him, because why else would Mark's eyes constantly dart towards the door during Eduardo's lunch hour? Why else would Mark be pulled out of his coding haze with every significant noise from the children and YA department?

It's about the time when Mark looks up and is disappointed to realize that it's Chris visiting their office, not Wardo, that he acknowledges he might have a problem.

"Don't mind M-Zuck over there," Dustin says, waving Chris over. "He's just all brooding and bearish because his beloved princess is off at the tea party with all the other princesses."

"What does that even mean?" Chris asks.
"It means," insists Dustin, "that Mark wants to have all of Wardo's doe-eyed Brazilian babies. He wants quadruplets and he wants to dress them all up in baby hoodies and matching teeny tiny flip flops."

"I don't think Wardo would want his babies dressed like miniature computer programmers," Chris replies, proving that he is not as nice as everybody says he is.

"Wardo will do whatever his ass-babies want him to do," Dustin retorts.

"Be reasonable. Neither Wardo nor Mark are going to have ass-babies."

"Thank you," says Mark.

"They would obviously get C-sections instead," Chris finishes. Dustin's grin is the size of the Grand Canyon as he and Chris exchange high fives.

Friendship, Mark thinks sourly, is entirely overrated. With one exception, and the exception is currently not in any place where Mark can reach him. He's hundreds of miles east right now, in Atlanta, sharing drinks, networking, attending seminars, and doing whatever it is undersexed and overqualified librarians do when they get together. Mark has no idea. Dewey Decimal bingo, maybe. Strip 'name that subject heading'. AACR2 relay races.

While Chris and Dustin continue mocking him by picking out baby names ("Intel Celeron! Bibliographia!" Dustin shouts, "Reda Bulla!" Chris exclaims), Mark's thumb accidentally brushes the pile of lunch notes on his desk, touching the latest one on top.

"To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world." -- The Little Prince

(Thinking of you while I'm gone!
- Eduardo

P.S: I hid Dustin's noodle. Please accord me the gratitude I am owed. :D )
The thing is, Mark doesn't like to be touched. Even his own parents barely give him more than the occasional pat on the back or tussle of the hair. But when Eduardo leans away from him to find the business card, it's like an ache that sweeps through his entire body, starting from his head and settling into his toes. He wants to touch Wardo. He wants to lean forward right now and grab him by the collars layering over his vest. He wants to peel the collars aside and feel Wardo's warm skin, drink up that California tan.

"Augustus Ting," Eduardo says, holding out the card. "CEO of SearchGlobal, the academic database company. I had to chase him down and talk my face off, but he was interested by the end." He grins. "The drinks I bought him probably helped too."

What goes through Mark's mind is that Eduardo could have been doing so many things at the ALA conference. There were movers and shakers from all over North America gathered there, and Eduardo could have spent the time networking for his own gain, looking for connections that could lead to better job offers. Their salaries at Palo Alto can't even hope to match some of the salaries out east. Instead he chose to spend time selling Mark's project to a potential independent investor.

For once, Mark has no idea what to say.

"You're smiling, right?" Eduardo asks. "That's a smile? Not indigestion?"

"Yeah," Mark says, turning over the business card with its crisp edges and royal blue ink. The earth on an axis in the centre with a question mark overlaid. SearchGlobal. "I'm smiling. Wardo, you -- I mean --" A laugh bubbles out of him, almost hysterical. "Fuck."

"Not right here where anybody could see," Wardo says archly, and there's a hint there of a wickeder Eduardo, not so much the sweet children's librarian after all. He holds it for a second before softening back into his pleased grin, and both the before and after seem designed especially to scramble Mark's insides. He wonders if Eduardo is aware of a tenth of what his stupid smile can do and hopes not, for his ego's sake. "I told you, you're brilliant. You're going to push boundaries. I want to be a part of that, and Augustus Ting does too."

"I'm assuming he's not from Palo Alto?" Mark asks, schooling his voice into safe blandness because that's his first instinct always, self-preservation. "Are we supposed to go to him or have him come to us? I don't think I can afford much airfare, let's be honest."

"He'll be in Palo Alto giving a talk in August," Eduardo informs him. "He said we'll set up a face-to-face meeting then. But you should definitely call him ahead of time. Make sure he doesn't forget how fantastic you are."

Mark laughs again, abrupt. When Wardo chatters onwards, saying that he didn't bring Mark a lunch today because they should definitely eat out to celebrate, how does he feel about Brazilian food, there's a great place within walking distance of the library that Eduardo loves -- Mark doesn't know if what he's feeling is happiness or apprehension.

"Do you put this much effort into feeding your boyfriend?" he asks. Like it's a competition, and the thought of winning it, of making Eduardo's no doubt stylish and charming and bright-shining boyfriend jealous, brings on a sharp satisfaction.

Eduardo flaps his arms in surprise. "What? I don't have a boyfriend."

Mark stares.
"I, um, might have told Christy that I did, but only to let her down gently," Eduardo admits. "It was last year anyway. I didn't think she would still remember."

Hoping that someone wouldn't remember being rejected is a lot to ask for, and it gives Mark the feeling that Eduardo hasn't been rejected very often before. Which makes sense, when he looks like that and smiles like that and works with children for fuck's sake -- he's like bottled aphrodisiac, making it convincing that a higher being might exist if only to put him together, but also proving that said higher being is not overly concerned with fairness.

Lunch is not a date though. Mark has to remind himself this as he and Wardo walk to the restaurant, knocking shoulders in the clear afternoon sunlight. It's a lunch to celebrate Mark's intelligence and Eduardo's persuasion skills, and to toast to the future of Ananke Web. Just because Eduardo is single doesn't mean he wants to start anything with Mark. Even if he's somewhat interested, they're still coworkers. They're people who have to see each other every day, mixing the professional with the personal, and it's tricky, messy; humiliated lessons burned into his head after Erica, all the search strings leading into errors. It's never a question of whether Mark will bring Eduardo along to the meeting with Augustus Ting. Eduardo has become a part of Ananke Web, and he can spin words like cotton candy on a stick, tongue-tingling and more palatable than anything Mark is capable of. Mark wishes business didn't run this way, with the schmoozing and the showmanship, because he would much rather just lay out the facts and wait for someone to understand their importance. Explaining the obvious once is exhausting. Explaining twice is irritating. Explaining for the third time why Ananke Web deserves more than the pitiful funding that the Palo Alto City Library can afford gives him a headache.

You don't know how to sell yourself, Eduardo had said.

I could stand on the street in fishnets and try, Mark had replied. I'm sure I would pick up a hint or two. And Wardo's smile had gone embarrassed, like he was actually imagining Mark's twiggy legs, which barely deserve a thought at all.

He would much rather watch Eduardo in his designer suit, with his hair coiffed like a hawk diving in for the kill. They're having lunch with Augustus Ting at a low-cal organic... well, all Mark can think to describe it is salad shack, but judging by the decor and the amount of people waiting to get in, it's a trendy salad shack. The tables are gigantic aquarium cubes. As Mark pokes at his shrimp, mango, and avocado salad with sweet chili-ginger vinaigrette (why, just why), the fish stare back at him from the table surface. It's creepy, is what it is.

He doesn't say much during the meal, addressing Augustus Ting only when the man asks him a direct question. He doesn't need to, because Eduardo is on fire. He has a folder with him full of excerpts from scholarly articles, professional journals, and public opinion polls on the future of the library catalogue. He waits a polite amount of time until they get their appetizers, and then he starts working it, pouring Ting's drink and chatting with him about his family, his company, his charitable endeavors. He launches into a discussion about Ananke Web when the appetizers are being removed, and Mark half expects Wardo to whip a PowerPoint presentation out of his pants.

Ting looks amused. "You know, most people outside of the ivory tower don't think about these things. They understand that there's a hole waiting to be filled, but they don't know how to fill it. And why bother, because it'll be so much work."
"Libraries are slow to change," Eduardo agrees animatedly. "They're public institutions, government-funded. We can't really be surprised by their essential conservatism. But we don't have to put up with it either."

"Ah, them's some fighting words," Ting drawls. "And what do you think, Mr. Zuckerberg? It's your project at the end of the day. Are you going to let this young man talk it up for you?"

Mark looks up. "He's all the voice I need."

"That so?"

"What more do you want me to say?" Mark replies. "That a social media library catalogue is a good idea? That if it spreads, it'll change the way libraries function? That it'll redefine physical and virtual space in information architecture? That if you give me the money I'm asking for, I'll work to the bone to make it happen? I know all of these things and so do you."

"Mark is an amazing coder," Eduardo says. "And he has more good ideas than most government think tanks. I've worked with him for almost a year now and I can honestly say that he impresses me more every day."

Mark can hear his own breath slice clean through the air.

"Well, considering the state of most government think tanks, that's not too hard to accomplish," Ting says with a generous laugh. "But yes, an impressive character reference. I've done some background research on my own. You're an interesting person, Mark Zuckerberg. I won't deny that. Harvard undergrad, high end job offers, and yet you chose to become no more than a civil servant."

"I chose," says Mark, "to go into a profession that I knew I could change."

"They'll be crossing out Ranganathan's name in the textbooks and writing yours instead," Ting jokes.

"They can fit both of us in," Mark says bluntly, and Eduardo gives a little laugh like he's entertained but also a bit anxious about where this is heading. He quickly guides the conversation back into safer, more boring waters. It stays that way for the next half hour. Their entrees come and go, their drinks are refreshed, and they're in the middle of a fruit jelly substance that passes for dessert when Ting says, "There will be SearchGlobal ads in the catalogue, of course."


"Excuse me?" Ting says.

"I'm willing to give SearchGlobal databases priority within the catalogue and search results, but there won't be any ads." Mark looks over at Eduardo, whose mouth is pressed into a tense line like he can't believe what Mark is saying. What's wrong with putting up with a few ads for a whole lot of funding in exchange? But Mark has a vision for Ananke Web, it's his vision, and he's not going to compromise it.

"I--" Eduardo opens his mouth and closes it. He's fighting a hard decision, but it's not his decision to make. "If Mark doesn't want ads, then we won't have any ads," he finally says. "I'm sorry."

"Hmm," says Ting.

It's raining when they leave the salad shack. Augustus Ting waves them off, expression inscrutable as he gets into his chauffeured Mercedes Benz. He picked up Mark and Eduardo on their way here, but he doesn't offer a ride back, and Mark tries not to think about the curdled sensation at the pit of
his stomach. Instead he listens to Eduardo saying "we should call a taxi" and then "we don't have an umbrella" while they stand under the salad shack's awning, rain falling down all around them, turning the world a misty grey. Mark enjoys rain like this, rain and fog and shining a flashlight through, catching a glimpse of the individual particles, pieces of a composite whole.

"My apartment isn't far from here," Mark says. "We could walk, and then I could drive you home."

"Walk in the rain?" Eduardo asks.

"Yes," Mark says simply. It's just water.

"I'm wearing a two thousand dollar suit, Mark," Eduardo complains, but Mark shrugs because it's just clothes; you can always throw them in the laundry or take them to the dry cleaners or whatever people do when they own nice outfits. It's all Greek to him. Or rather, not Greek because Mark knows Greek, but some other foreign language will do. "Jesus," Eduardo says.

"Come on," Mark deadpans. "Singing in the rain. Where's your sense of romanticism?"

"It died when you told Ting no ads," Eduardo snaps. "We were so close to having him, so fucking close, and now he won't give us a ride, much less give us money. You could have just told him what he wanted to hear. Get the money first, deal with the rest later."

"I'm not going to change my mind," Mark says. He wants him to understand. Mark is sorry; he doesn't mean to make Wardo frustrated, nor does he mean to make all of Wardo's work luring Ting in go down the drain. But Mark fell in love with Ananke Web and changing the world long before he fell in love with Eduardo Saverin. And Mark loves not too little but rather too much, conflicting loyalties and his thoughts chariot-pulled in all directions.

"Wardo," he says, "let's walk in the rain." He tilts his chin up at Eduardo, and it's like Eduardo's anger just melts, like he can't stay mad at Mark for long. His shoulders go slack and he shakes his head ruefully.

"Yeah, all right," he says.

They exchange exactly three sentences during the walk. The sentences are "are we far?", "I have no opinions on potatoes", and "watch out for that car or it'll splash you." For the most part Eduardo is quiet, sunk deep in his own thoughts. The rain isn't too heavy, so there's no fear of hypothermia and chattering teeth, but their clothes get damp and Mark's toes start to squish around in his water-logged socks. He regrets wearing socks with his sandals today just because Eduardo convinced him it would look slightly more professional than the sight of Mark's stubbed toes with dirty nails. So when they are a block away from his apartment, he stops to take off his socks and throw them in a trash can.

Eduardo makes a strangled noise, no doubt at the wanton cruelty towards clothing.

Mark thinks, if we did have an umbrella, I would hold it for you.

But he doesn't say it, just as he doesn't say do you want to come upstairs when they arrive at his apartment complex, though the words sleep on the flat of his tongue like a smooth rock. Mark is scared. He might as well admit that to himself now. Even if there was nothing else holding him back (no coworker dilemmas, no burnt heart and hollow eyes from the wreckage of relationships past), he would still be scared because Mark doesn't know what to do with something so beautiful and so out of his control.

If Wardo was a piece of code, a project --
Eduardo is standing in front of his desk when Mark finds him next. His arms are crossed and he's staring up at the readathon poster pensively. Mark goes to stand beside him, and at first he can't help but mock Eduardo a bit by settling into the exact same pose and molding his face into the exact same expression. Wardo snickers and then pokes him. "Cut it out, Mark, you're totally losing this readathon. Zero books?"

"Think of it this way. I'm doing you a favor. I wouldn't want to crush the dreams of the children with my reading prowess," Mark says.

Eduardo pulls a face. Everything about him is so unbelievably expressive that sometimes Mark worries on his behalf, wondering how Eduardo gets through life with those beseeching eyes and that mouth which seems to display every emotion he feels; tight or upturned or loose or parted in a perfect Cheerio-shaped 'o'. "I'm going to give you a book," Eduardo says, "and you are going to read it. Remember, ten books gets you a prize, and trust me, it's a great prize."

"It's a gift certificate for pizza," Mark says. "I've seen it on your desk."

"For you I'll think of something different." Eduardo promises, and Mark has to turn his shiver into an awkward hacking cough.

"Is this your plan to make me over?" Mark asks. "Get me to eat good food, get me to read good books. I'm going to be the brand new Eduardo Saverin-approved model when I'm done?" He means it as a throwaway remark, a deflection of the innuendo-laden comment that'd come before, but Eduardo stops smiling as if he's taken it to heart and it hurts.

"It's not like that at all," he says.

"Of course not," Mark says sharply, wishing Wardo would smile again and be done with it. "I'm going to get some coffee."

He moves away in a stuttered motion, like images careening through a zoetrope. He knows that Eduardo watches him go, can almost hear the sigh that filters through the air.

He returns, though, with a second coffee, which he hands over.

Eduardo's eyes go surprised and soft. "Thank you," he says. Their fingers brush for an unbearably short second, and Mark can feel the bandaid from where Eduardo cut himself yesterday trying to craft a display for Back to School books. Eduardo takes a sip of the coffee. "This is exactly the way I like it. Sweet enough to knock out the Pillsbury Dough Boy."

Mark knows. The way Eduardo takes his coffee makes his teeth want to rot, but if it can bring that pleased look to Eduardo's face again, then opening all those sugar packets and accidentally dumping one over his feet was no big deal.

Later in the day, there's a book on his desk when he returns from a bathroom break. "Wardo left it..."
for you," Dustin announces when Mark picks it up and turns it over to read the description on the back. "This is great. This is like watching the mating ritual of a gazelle and a hedgehog."

The book is *Artemis Fowl*, by Eoin Colfer. Eduardo's accompanying note says:

*Artemis Fowl = boy genius criminal mastermind, too smart for his own good, lots of people think he's evil but I think he's just lonely and needs a hug. Enjoy!*

"Yeah, but what he forgot to say was that the book is about Artemis Fowl dealing with fairies," Dustin pipes up, because of course he sneaked over and read the note before Mark got back, *of course*. "Dude, Wardo just left you a book about a prickly genius who runs around with *fairies*. Ding dong ding dong! Homoerotic Subtext for 300, Alex!"

Mark doesn't have time to read. Ananke Web is going forward as fast as ever. He has the shell of the database ready; the next big step is to link it with preexisting bibliographic information. For now he's going to connect it to the current catalogue, as patchy as it is, but he's considering WorldCat as well, not to mention the revamped children's book records that Eduardo is sending him every day via email. Losing Ting as financial support is a setback, but that doesn't mean Mark needs to stop all the engines and wait around for the next bigshot to approve his project over expensive food and alcoholic drinks. He still has the funds from the central branch. He hasn't drained that pool out entirely yet. So he can't afford a new server for Ananke. He'll make do with what he has right now, and he'll keep his eyes out for the next Augustus Ting to impress.

In the end, he asks Dustin to join the project. He considers how to go about doing this, because thinking that Dustin might turn him down is more of a blow than Mark wants to admit. Wardo's support is exhilarating, but Wardo is also not an information tech specialist. If anyone can tear legitimately dismiss Ananke and expose its technical weaknesses, it's Dustin. Underneath all the... the *Dustinness* is a seriously sharp mind.

But Mark only gets about two sentences out of his mouth before Dustin is saying, "I thought you were never going to ask. I was starting to feel like you didn't waaaaant me, Markmeister." He pauses and twirls his finger in the air. "Check your email."

"Why?" Mark asks.

"Because I sent you something, duh. I thought you were supposed to be *smart,*" Dustin says, and Mark reluctantly refreshes his email where he finds a message from Dustin hovering at the top of his inbox. He clicks it open and sees a blank body with an attachment mysteriously labeled *wipethatfrownupsidedown.txt*. He opens the file, knowing this could be anything from porn to My Little Pony macros to a recipe for banana chocolate pie. Instead, code fills the screen, code -- he peers closer and realizes -- for a book display widget. And it's astoundingly complex and well thought out.

"Obviously because I haven't seen your code yet, it's not going to be compatible. But, you know, the bones and the skeleton of it are there. It might be useful with some tweaks," Dustin says. "Consider it a housewarming gift."

"Moscovitz," Mark says, "you are full of surprises."
"That's what the last criminal record sweep person said too," Dustin beams. "Now let me take care of Ananke while you go and read the super obvious love-love book Wardo left for you. Do you hear me? No weakness, no giving in! We are men of our words!" He takes a bracing breath before bellowing, "THIS. IS. LIBRARY!"

September is a busy month at the library, and Mark doesn't see as much of Eduardo because of it. Back to school means silent reading for grade school kids, who suddenly troop to the library grimly in search of books to please their teachers. It also means an influx of panicked high school students working on projects, and college students optimistically hopeful that they can find a book at the public library that they can't get their hands on at their academic library, which might be successful if you're looking for a copy of *Anna Karenina*, less so if you're looking for *Nature and Nurture in French Social Sciences, 1859-1914 and Beyond.*

Mark has his head buried deep in the sands of Ananke Web. He and Dustin spend most of their time now hunched over their computers, swapping ideas. Or rather, Dustin throws out ideas and Mark rejects the bad ones while trying to downplay the good ones because it doesn't help anyone if Dustin develops an ego, least of all Mark's sanity.

He sees Eduardo all the time though, making the rounds upstairs, talking to children and their parents, putting up displays, moving the elephants on the readathon poster. In between that, he's still updating his book blog, developing a video game collection proposal, and emailing Mark regular catalogue updates. He also mentions, once, that he's been in contact with C. Sheldrick Ross as well and he might be helping her collect data for a paper, though he mimes zipping up his mouth and throwing away the key when Mark presses further. "You'll see, you'll see," Eduardo assures him. "Unless, of course, it all pans out and you don't."

They're all busy these days.

Which is why at the end of the month, Dustin throws his hands up and says, "Fuck this, my birthday is next week, we're all going out and getting drunk."

"God, yes," Chris says, nursing his coffee as he slouches over Dustin's desk. "We are going out, drinking ourselves silly, and then we are going to get laid."

"Christopher! Thy speech art not gentlemanly!"

"I've just spent two hours searching for an obscure reference book that doesn't actually exist," Chris says, giving Dustin a withering look. "My life is in a sad, sad place right now."

"If you want a blowjob that badly, I could--" Dustin stops. "Hey, hey, what's with this look of horror?"

"It's the natural response any person would have at the prospect of you coming in contact with our genitals," Mark says, his fingers barely even halting over the keyboard. Insulting Dustin is second nature to him; he's had a lot of practice.

"Whatever, Marco Polo, you're just jealous of *this.*" Dustin sweeps his hands over his body and grins. "But you're up for drinks, right? We'll invite Wardo too. Win-win. You guys can make gooey at each other, and Chris and I will have our guaranteed entertainment of the night."
"I have better things to do than watch Mark and Wardo act out their pathetic romance," Chris says indignantly.

Dustin pats him on the shoulder. "That's the spirit."

Wardo's face falls when they tell him their plans. "That's the night my friend Alice is having her birthday celebrations too. We're supposed to go clubbing. I promised her I'd come."

"Oh," says Mark, trying not to be disappointed.

"We can always reschedule," Dustin offers, but Eduardo shakes that idea off.

"No way. It's your birthday. Don't reschedule because of me. I'd feel so guilty," he says. "How about this: I'll leave Alice's party early and meet you three at the bar, if you're willing to stay there late and wait for me."

"Stay later and drink even more than we might have otherwise?" Mark says dryly. "What a hardship that will be."

"Mark can't handle his alcohol. It's hilarious. He gets all dopey and smiley and you barely recognize him anymore," Dustin informs Eduardo.

Eduardo blinks and then smiles. "I can't wait to see it."

For that very reason, Mark doesn't plan to drink a lot that night. The last thing he needs is to be smiling and affectionate and honest with Eduardo, because like all matters with alcohol, it might feel good for the one night, but he doesn't want to wake up crashing and burning with Eduardo saying thanks but I'd rather be friends stuck in his head and a nasty sour taste equally stuck on his tongue. Mark can order pub food and munch on fries instead, and he can be clear-headed and rational when Eduardo shows up.

Three drinks in, and the plan is ripped to smithereens by a triumphant Dustin.

"--and then there was a squid in the bathtub when I came back after CS class and it all made sense," Mark finishes at the same time he finishes his seventh drink, his head swaying dangerously on his neck.

"That's a terrible Harvard story," Dustin slurs. "I knew that squid was up to no good. Right, Chris?" He looks to his side. "Oh my god, Chris is missing!"

"He left to get drinks like half an hour ago," Mark says. "He's over there now."

Dustin's jaw drops. "And he's chatting some guy up! Some really good-looking guy. GO CHRIS!" he yells, and Chris snaps around, annoyed. Dustin gives him an exaggerated thumbs' up and a wink. Chris gives him the finger.

"Aww, Chris doesn't like us anymore," Dustin says. "Chris would rather have... have..." He squints as if thinking very hard about the word he wants. "The sex! Chris would rather have the sex."

"Chris is very wise," Mark says. "As wise as Professor Xavier."

"As wise as Gandalf," Dustin exclaims.

"As wise as Morpheus," Mark says and then he buries his face in his hands because his skin is burning and the lights are all so very bright. He stays like that for who knows how long. He jerks
awake only when he feels a gentle hand at his back. He glances up to see Eduardo, fresh from clubbing, hair tousled, in clothes that Mark gapes at because--

"You look like a hooker," he says.

Eduardo just laughs. "What, you have a lot of experience with hookers? You look like a tipsy wreck." He slides into the booth beside Mark and their knees bump. Eduardo is a warm pressure, sharp with sweat and cologne. And Mark has never seen him dressed like this before, not professional and not formal but like, well, like a young, devastatingly attractive man who knows fashion and wants a night out on the town.

"How did your buttons come undone?" Mark asks, gesturing towards the loose buttons on Eduardo's shirt. "And are those suspenders?"

"You like?" Eduardo leans back to let him have a better look.

"Yes?" Mark says.

"Good." Eduardo grins with teeth this time, and here's a flash again of that other Wardo, the one who goes dancing with girls and who can pull anyone he wants, the one who's sweatered up and polite at work but is probably a slut in bed. "Where's Chris and Dustin?"

"Not here anymore," Mark says. "Maybe they're making out."

"Maybe that's a good idea." Eduardo leans back in again and Mark can smell the alcohol on his breath. "Making out, I mean. I heard it's... good. Very good."

"How are you actually a former English major?" Mark asks him.

"Not all librarians are English undergrads, asshole," Eduardo says. "What a stereotype. I did economics." His fingers slide closer to Mark's on the table, and Mark knows suddenly, with a scorching certainty, that something is going to happen tonight. Mark has had too much to drink, Eduardo's not exactly sober either, and he's looking at Mark expectantly. "I like words, but I also like numbers. Algorithms," Eduardo adds. He touches Mark's mouth, and Mark's brain goes offline.

"That's my mouth," he says helpfully.

"Yes, I know," Eduardo replies. He doesn't do anything though, just lets his fingers rest against Mark's lips like he's trying to plot out the proper algorithm for the upper curve. He's so patient, but also a bit unsure, and when Mark recognizes that he's the only person here who knows what's going to happen tonight, it rattles him. Does Wardo think I'm actually going to say no? he thinks. He waits, but Eduardo doesn't do anything else, so the answer seems to be yes.

Oh fuck it, Mark thinks, and kisses him.

The sound Eduardo makes burns Mark to listen to it, it's so desperate and grateful. He clutches Mark's t-shirt with his long fingers and pulls him in as close as he can, dragging him deeper into the booth so that Mark is straddling him as they kiss. It's wet and messy, the kind of kiss Mark probably would have had in high school if Mark had actually scored any in high school and not spent his spare time in the high speed computer lab. This more than makes up for it. Eduardo keening into mouth, pushing his hips up against Mark, Chris returning to the booth and saying, "Get a fucking room, guys."

The adrenaline is unbelievable. Eduardo keeps on laughing, delighted, clutching Mark like he's afraid if he lets go, he'll lose Mark entirely. "We're going, we're going," he assures Chris. "Tell
Dustin happy birthday for me." And they stumble together out of the pub onto the streets, where Eduardo gets them a taxi with a languid wave of his arm.

They don't touch each other on the ride to Eduardo's apartment, which is closer, but the moment they are out of the car and in the hallway, they are necking again. Eduardo hands Mark the keys before pressing Mark against the wall. He kisses his fading summer freckles while Mark fumbles with opening the door. "You're really -- you're not helping," Mark says.

"Punish me for it then," Eduardo says, and Mark goes even hotter at the curl of Eduardo's mouth into a knowing smirk.

Mark's head is bright with alcohol and all the colours blur together, except Eduardo's colours. Mark can see those clearly, the shade of his skin, the tint of his eyes, the precise redness of his mouth as he presses it to Mark's again once they're inside the apartment. Eduardo's place is messy, books and papers everywhere, much more disorganized than Mark would expect because Eduardo at work is always so hopelessly tidy. But this barely seems worth noting. What's worth noting is Wardo trying to rub himself against Mark until they both come, which on one hand is a brilliant idea, but on the other hand, Mark doesn't want to come like this. He wants to see Wardo naked first.

He pushes Eduardo onto the bed, and Eduardo must have secret stripper superpowers because he wriggles out of his suspenders and his shirt in no time. Mark looks at him, startled, but Eduardo grins again before putting his hands on Mark and helping him out of his clothes, pulling the t-shirt over his head and then undoing the zipper of his cargo shorts with his teeth. Mark groans, shuddering at the sight of Eduardo on his knees for him.

"I can't believe you exist," Mark says.

Eduardo nudges Mark back on the bed and crawls between his knees. Mark doesn't have any time to feel self-conscious about his scrawny, pasty nakedness because Eduardo is kissing his stomach, his thighs. Then he crooks his elbow onto the mattress, resting his head on his palm, and says, "I wanted you to invite me up. That day. I wanted it so much."

Mark almost doesn't hear him, he says it so quietly. But everything is amplified right now, so Eduardo's confession is as loud as Mark's own laboured breathing. "Let me blow you," Mark blurts out.

Eduardo shivers. "Okay," he says, and he lets Mark flip them over so that Eduardo's on the bottom. Mark puts his hands on Eduardo's thighs and takes a good look at Eduardo's cock. It curves slightly to the right, and Mark is strangely charmed by this as he moves in to take it inside his mouth. Eduardo makes a strangled noise when Mark takes the first few inches of him in, and then the strangled noise breaks into a breathy gasp as Mark goes down slowly, working methodically and ruthlessly.

Mark's sucked cock before. There was college. But it's never been something he's particularly enjoyed; it's always been done as a favour, as a way of giving good to get good in return. With Eduardo, it's different. He wants this. Even if Eduardo gives him nothing in return, he wants the taste of Eduardo's cock in his mouth, the heavy press of him. He wants to wring every moan and gasp and blasphemy that Eduardo has to offer, wants to break him apart and remake him because Wardo deserves the best orgasm in the entire galaxy. He deserves to have clandestine blowjobs in the library stacks, in the back office, and most of all here in Mark's bed, held down by Mark's hands and his mouth.

Eduardo's fingers curl in Mark's hair, and Mark doesn't even mind. He removes his mouth and licks at Eduardo's balls, and Eduardo says something in Portuguese that sounds like the end of the world.
Then Mark takes him fully into his mouth again, hollowing his cheeks experimentally.

Eduardo’s eyes have been closed, but they fly open when he comes, his back arching up off the bed.

"Mark," he says, senseless, overwhelmed. "Holy shit, Mark." He watches Mark lick the come off his lips, and then he grabs him into another kiss, shameless with the desire of it. He hooks his foot around the back of Mark’s thighs, entangling them together.

"You liked that," Mark notes.

"Just a little," Eduardo teases. He kisses the space under Mark’s ear. "Do you have a condom? Because what I’d like more? Is to be fucked right now."

Mark stops thinking entirely after that. It’s an unfamiliar sensation not to have thoughts and plans ticking away at the back of his head, but when Eduardo lies on his back and waits for Mark to rubber himself up -- thinking isn’t so much a difficulty as an impossibility. He runs his hand down Eduardo’s throat, feeling the slick sweat gathered there. Then he kisses Eduardo on a collar bone as he angles himself inside.

It takes him a few tries. He’s drunk; his coordination is off. But Eduardo hisses between his teeth as Mark sinks in. He wraps his knees around Mark's waist, shoving forwards, and Mark has to grab him and hold him still, making sure he doesn't hurt himself. There is no pain though, judging by the way Eduardo starts working for it, making all these noises that are an entirely new set of notes, his being fucked noises rather than his receiving blowjob noises. Mark wants to have all of it, all of Eduardo’s secret repertoire, for his ears only.

He fucks Eduardo slowly, getting them used to it. Then Eduardo rakes his nails down Mark’s back and tells him to go faster, please, please.

So Mark does, pushing into Eduardo with increasing gracelessness, hearing himself grunt. It can’t be appealing at all. Mark’s never been good at being sexy in bed; sex has always been inherently about muscle and movement and forgoing dignity for a bit of pleasure, but Wardo doesn’t care. Wardo’s nails drag along the sensitive skin of Mark’s back, and he rocks against Mark, writhing for it. Mark’s never had anyone want him this badly before, and he feels like he’s the one being pushed open because of it, his barriers blown out and Eduardo holding the gun.

He lowers his head to gasp for breath against Wardo’s vodka-slick mouth. Then he's holding onto him tightly, gripping him for security as he comes, trembling through his orgasm while Wardo leans up and says hoarsely, "Again. Let’s do it again." And all Mark can do is say yes.

He loses track of how many times they fuck that night.

"I think," says Eduardo, pulling the pillows over his head, "you should be the one to make me breakfast. It's only fair."
Mark doesn't know if he's allowed to after a drunken fumble, but he slides his fingers over Eduardo's bare thigh. Eduardo removes the pillow, tilting up to smile at him, and Mark's chest feels about ten pounds lighter. "I like omelettes," Eduardo suggests. "There's eggs in the fridge and some bacon and green onions too."

"I can't cook," Mark says. The sheets are tangled around them like cross-stitching, and Eduardo's hip keeps on bumping against him as he struggles to get out of bed and check his phone.

"Today you can," Eduardo says, and then, sneakily, he gives Mark a kick on the ass that makes Mark yelp in a high-pitched voice that he'll deny to his death. He whips around and covers his ass. Wardo cracks up. "Sorry," he says, but he doesn't sound repentant at all. Mark squares his shoulders with the remains of his dignity. He thinks, How hard can one omelette be?

His entire body feels sore and used as he moves towards Eduardo's kitchen, navigating the apartment that he barely took in last night before they made a beeline for the bed. There are bruises on his thighs, scratch marks all over his back, and his headache is a tight throb. If he feels like this, though, Wardo must feel even worse, and Mark tries to be sympathetic about it but mostly he just feels accomplished and a bit territorial. He hadn't meant to fall into bed with Eduardo but it happened anyway, it was fucking excellent, and Wardo didn't treat him weirdly in the morning. Maybe they can do this after all. Maybe he was just being cautious before, and he shouldn't, not when he's so rarely cautious about anything else.

Mark tugs on a pair of Wardo's boxer shorts along the way to the kitchen because he has no desire to cook naked and have hot oil splatter over his dick. Once he's in the kitchen, he bangs around the cabinets clumsily, looking for ingredients. Eduardo calls helpful instructions from the bedroom, laughing at all the while. He expects total incompetence, but Mark is going to show him otherwise.

"Only slightly burnt and crunchy," Eduardo says when Mark returns to the bedroom with two plates and two glasses of orange juice. "Well done."

"It's not as if you've made anything more complicated than a sandwich for me," Mark points out. "I don't think I've ever noticed you turning on a stove."

"You just don't pay enough attention," Eduardo says absently, digging into the omelette without any compunction, because a bit burnt and crunchy doesn't matter when you're hungover and fucked out.

Mark is too busy stuffing the food into his mouth to answer. They eat quietly and greedily, and afterwards Eduardo puts the plates on the nightstand next to the nearly empty bottle of lube. Then he slides his leg over Mark's and grins at him again. "Your libido is frightening. You might want to have it checked by a doctor," Mark says.

"You don't mean that," Eduardo replies, stretching his toes against Mark's calf.

"No," Mark smirks, and then he pulls Wardo in for another kiss, which tastes like egg and onion. Wardo makes a happy sound in his throat as his tongue moves into Mark's mouth.

It's Sunday, and Mark doesn't know how long they stay in bed. He literally doesn't know because the alarm clock on the nightstand is broken ("I keep meaning to replace it, but I forget," Eduardo says), and Eduardo won't let him near his phone ("You'll just go on the internet and that'll be it, no more Mark"). They lie in bed, turn on the TV in the corner, and chat idly while cartoons play in the background. Eduardo's head is buried in Mark's shoulder, and one arm is flung over Mark's chest.

"My favourite character in Artemis Fowl," he murmurs, "is Butler. Because he's so loyal to Artemis. He's always there for him. And more than that, he knows that Artemis needs him. It's that knowing, I
think, that makes it so powerful because otherwise you just feel like you're clinging, like nothing you do makes a difference."

"I like Juliet," Mark says sardonically. "Teenage girl who can throw me to the floor? Bring it on."

"You dated Erica Albright, right? You would." Eduardo stretches and yawns. He falls back asleep not long after, and Mark stares down at him for a while, studying the curve of Eduardo's inky eyelashes and the wrecked mess of his hair. Then he gently slides out of bed without disturbing Wardo and finds Wardo's laptop on his dresser. Mark would like to sleep but he's too keyed up, and so he might as well get some work done.

Eduardo's laptop doesn't have a password, which is good because otherwise Mark would have been forced to hack it. Mark takes the laptop back to bed where he climbs in beside Wardo. Wardo makes a snuffling sound, and Mark touches his hair briefly, almost as if he's petting him. Then he opens Firefox and loads the beta site for Ananke Web.

"Is that it?" Eduardo asks quietly.

"I thought you were asleep."

"Somewhere in between," Eduardo answers. He sits up and rests his chin on Mark's shoulder. "So that's Ananke? Who designed the layout?"

"Dustin did," Mark says. "It's fine for now but we'll probably get a professional designer to rework it before the site goes live. I don't like the red and green. I don't see those colours very well."

"It's your site. Design it however you like," Eduardo says sleepily. "You have some books in the catalogue already. For testing?"

"Yeah."

"That's one of mine," Eduardo says, pointing to an entry for *Millicent Min, Girl Genius*. "Click on that one."

In retrospect, Mark should have made an excuse. He should have faked a computer malfunction. He should have pushed Eduardo back onto the pillows and kissed him until Ananke didn't matter anymore. But Mark doesn't for two reasons. The first is that one day Ananke will be publicly available on the internet and there's nowhere on the internet to hide for long. The second is that Mark simply doesn't know, can't understand, has trouble comprehending the silence that freezes Eduardo's voice when he reads the entry for *Millicent Min, Girl Genius."

"No comment?" Mark prods. "It's a YA book. I thought these were your flesh and blood, your darling children."

Eduardo pushes away from Mark's shoulder. "This isn't the data I gave you."

-- and that's when Mark finally understands the silence.

"The bibliographic record," Eduardo says. "It's completely different from the one I sent you for this work." He stares at the screen and Mark itches to click away from the entry, but he doesn't because he might not know a lot of things about dealing with people but he does know this: close the window now, and Eduardo will never forgive him.

Eduardo continues to stare at the data, and then he says, uncertain, "That data is from WorldCat."
It's impressive that Eduardo can recognize raw info from one of the largest, if not the largest, union catalogues in the world. Or perhaps not so impressive because if cataloging has been Eduardo's specialty at any point, then he's probably worked with WorldCat before, helped contribute to their records. "I decided it would be better to just pull all the data from WorldCat," Mark says. "You were just going to give me records for children's books, not the entire catalogue, and I realized it would have ruined standardization. Having two sets of catalogue standards would have been inefficient, especially for the search function that I was building."

"I wrote mine in MARC standards, like you told me to," Eduardo says. "It should have been compatible."

Mark shrugs. "For the most part, but not entirely. It ended up not being the perfect fit for what I needed, so I went with WorldCat instead. It's more convenient this way. I can download all their records instead of having you rewrite them manually."

"But the point of rewriting them manually was to create an even better record than what WorldCat or a typical catalogue could offer," Eduardo says, and this, this is what Mark was afraid of, this is what happened with him and Erica, not just you're an asshole but also I can't do this, I can't love someone who I hate at work, it's too exhausting.

"Like you said, it's my website," Mark replies abruptly, his voice harsher than he'd intended but it's too late to take it back now. "You gave me great data but it didn't mesh with what I was trying to do with the rest of the catalogue, so I didn't use it. That's what happens when you design catalogues. That's natural."

"Fine," Eduardo says, "but when did you realize you weren't going to use my data? Was it before or after I'd spent hours putting it together for you?"

Mark stares at him stonily. "I wasn't trying to lead you on, if that's what you're implying. I decided it after your second to last update."

"And you didn't tell me to stop?"

"It slipped my mind," Mark says because it did. He'd been deep in coding then and he'd forgotten to reply to Eduardo's last email. A mistake, yes, but a mistake that anybody could make. Mark is smarter and savvier than most people but he's not superhuman.

Eduardo has slid to the other side of the bed so that he doesn't have to touch Mark at all. The sheets are wrapped around his waist in lines of twisted knots. Mark feels cold and sick, but he holds himself tight in his frustration because this is silly. Not using Eduardo's cataloging work wasn't his first choice but it's what happens during projects; sometimes even good ideas don't end up working out. There's nothing personal about it, no malicious intent.

"First Ting and now this," Eduardo says, and there's a yearning his voice that hits Mark in the gut. "If you don't want me on the project, just say so. You don't have to do all this to push me out. I can take a hint."

"You're fabricating a plot that doesn't exist," Mark says.

Eduardo swings his legs out of bed. "I'm taking a shower," he says. "I -- I need to think." And Mark watches him disappear the way everybody disappears, behind walls and out of reach.
Eduardo takes a long time to acknowledge Mark the next day at work when Mark goes up to his desk. Eduardo has his head down, writing something on a steno note pad, and Mark has to clear his throat to get his attention. Even then, the time it takes for Eduardo to look up is agonizing, like a lagging internet connection trying to load a graphics-heavy web page. "Hey," Eduardo says softly.

He doesn't sound angry, but Wardo's voice has never been his tell. Mark looks up at his face and he can see the hurt still written there. And it's awful, because no one should hurt Wardo, least of all himself, but he's not seeing a way to erase it without equipping them both with feathered suits and moving them very carefully in each other's direction.

"I'm here to report one book read for the readathon," Mark says. He puts the book on the desk, on top of a pile of papers. "Artemis Fowl. Give me another recommendation."

"Um," says Eduardo. "Yeah. Sure. Let me move your elephant first." He takes Mark's elephant from the zero position and pins it one step forward. Then he goes to the stacks, beckoning for Mark to follow him. Mark does just that until they reach the Rs where Eduardo pulls out a worn 70s paperback. "Gretchen keeps on telling me to put this in the discard pile, but it was one of my favourite books growing up, and it's out of print, so it's not like we'll ever be able to replace it." He gives it to Mark, who looks down at the title. The Tattooed Potato and Other Clues, by Ellen Raskin.

"Why do you like it?" Mark asks.

"Raskin wrote The Westing Game," Eduardo says. He laughs a little at Mark's blank expression. "I guess you wouldn't know, but The Westing Game is this great mystery book, full of clever twists. It makes the reader work for it as much as the characters. She didn't write a lot of books before she died, but The Tattooed Potato and Other Clues has that same enigmatic quality. I don't know. I like it, I guess. I like figuring out difficult stories."

Eduardo when he talks about books is animated, gorgeous, and heartbreaking.

"I don't want you to hate me," Mark says out of nowhere, apropos of nothing.

"I don't hate you," Eduardo replies, uncomfortable. He looks around them, but it's a slow hour at the library and no one is within earshot. "I was angry at first, but then I cooled down. I get it, Mark, I do. It was nice feeling like I was contributing to Ananke Web, but it's not the end of the world if I don't."

"Okay," Mark says. "Good." He stands on his toes to kiss Eduardo quickly, and Eduardo lets him, but it's a cold fish sort of kiss, barely any enthusiasm.

Mark pulls back frowning. What's this, then.

"It's just," Eduardo says, "it's just that I feel like you don't want me."

"Yes," says Mark, "because I make it a habit to publicly kiss people who repulse me." He jams his hands into his pockets and resists the urge to scowl because he knows what sort of conversation is coming up next, and it's even worse than Eduardo being angry at him because Mark is used to people being angry at him. Other emotions, not so much, and Mark hates taking about his feelings. He'd rather throw himself off a moving train; his chances of survival are much better.

"I don't mean in bed. I'm still sore, thank you very much," he adds, lowering his voice into a deadly hush. Mark doesn't even have time to feel pride for his penis and his right index finger when Eduardo continues, rolling his eyes, "If I was looking for just sex, I could get that in ways that are a
lot less complicated than fucking a coworker. Who happens also be a close friend. Hello, wake up, Mark."

*I did wake up, and you were there,* Mark thinks.

"So what do you want?" Mark asks out loud. "For us to not fuck? Not be coworkers? Not be friends? You're going to have to lay it out for me, because clearly I am too stupid and emotionally constipated to get it."

Eduardo scowls. "I want you to appreciate me. That's all. I put in so much effort for you and it's like you don't care. It bothers me. I try not to let it show but I'm saying it now: I don't want to be endlessly selfless because I'm not. I'm fucking selfish."

Mark bites down on the inside of his mouth until there's a coppery taste.

"I don't want to have to constantly second-guess my place in your life," Eduardo finishes, his gaze searching Mark's face. He's waiting, but Mark doesn't know what he's waiting for or how to give it to him. Times like these, he wishes there was an algorithm for perfect responses in excruciating social situations and he could tap the variables into the equation and punch out the right answer. Or at the very least, a Magic 8-Ball.

"What are you built for then, a Stairmaster?" Mark asks.

Error in calculation. 8-Ball says, *you are a failure, Mark Zuckerberg, and you will die alone, not even surrounded by cats because pets hate you too.*

Eduardo smiles humourlessly. "I have to get back to work. I'll talk to you later." He walks out of the stacks and towards his desk, leaving Mark standing there with a book in his hand and a million conflicting thoughts in his brain until Minho comes up and kicks him in the shins. Mark doubles over with a half-choked cry.

"You know what that was for," the boy says.

"I'm pretty sure this is against library policy," Mark accuses.

"I'm nine," Minho replies. "Whatever."

There's a brown paper bag on Mark's desk, containing a turkey sandwich, a container of grapes, two granola bars, a can of soda, and this:

"At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done—then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago." -- The Secret Garden

Eduardo talks in mazes.
The servers going down at central branch is an inconvenience, but Mark can't bring himself to be overly annoyed because when the servers go down and nobody else can fix them, they always call him. He relishes Cameron Winklevoss’ voice on the other end of the phone saying, "Zuckerberg, we need you here", and Mark always pretends temporary deafness so he can hear him repeat it at least twice. We need you here. Of course they do. The central branch of the Palo Alto City Library is a chicken coop of incompetence and backstabbing.

"And he's off!" Dustin says as Mark packs his bags and digs out his car keys. "I'll hold down the fort while you're gone."

"The servers have crashed. We have no internet access. What is there left standing to hold down?" Mark asks, searching one pocket and then another for his keys.

Dustin thinks about it. "I'll hold Wardo down."

Mark looks at him. "Is that -- oh, that's totally jealousy." Dustin's voice rises an octave in glee, making him sound like a hyena. "Don't worry. I won't steal Wardo from you. Not that I would blame him for ditching you and going for the next level in awesome. I have a pony!"

"If this is a euphemism for your penis, I think it'd be more accurate to compare it to riding a broken electronic horse at a foreclosed strip mall."

"Nooooo, I have a real pony. At a farm and everything. Which is why, believe it or not, I am irresistible to all genders. The Dustin Lustin' effect, I call it." Dustin twirls a pen between his fingers while Mark tries not to gag. "Why are you standing here anyway. Go save the servers!"

Eduardo is leaning against the circulation desk, chatting to Christy when Mark walks by. Christy narrows her eyes at Mark, but Eduardo gives him an awkward smile and a wave. "We're dying without the internet here," he says. "No pressure."

This really is the part of Eduardo’s behaviour that leaves Mark fumbling. He's used to people being angry and staying angry at him. He's used to be calling called names (robot, douchebag, unfeeling piece of sun-dried turd), used even to bodily threats and spitballs thrown at the back of his head. Eduardo isn't any of these. Aside from a clipped tension in his voice when he talks to Mark, there's no resentment. It's not that at all. It feels more like a firewall that's gone up between them, with at least one of the protocols configured badly so that nothing, no viruses but no regular data packets either, is coming through.

Wardo is polite, genial, and so utterly fucking alien to him now.

And Mark's starting to have that hazy feeling, like the night they spent together was a figment of his drunken imagination, like he never pinned Eduardo's wrists to the bed and fucked into him until Eduardo's voice went raspy. It's only the bruises and scratches on his skin that let him know it was real, because there's no way Mark got them on his own. Even he's not that uncoordinated. Those bruises are courtesy of one Eduardo Saverin, children's librarian, part-time hellcat in bed, currently smiling at him like there's a grenade pin stuck in his mouth.

"Right," Mark says, and Eduardo's smile turns sad.

The servers in the central branch are in the basement, cool and obscure, tucked beside the fading offices of the library archives. To get to them, first he has to cross shelves of forgotten donations and
uncatalogued books, once happily accepted but now almost entirely useless, books from the 50s, 60s, and 70s with their thin piss-coloured pages and cheap bindings. There's talk about getting rid of the material to make more office space, which everybody agrees with in principle, but it never happens. Bureaucracy runs into dead ends. The basement of the central branch is almost bigger than the upper portion of the building, and there are metal gates everywhere where Mark has to hang a red key card on the rungs so that someone locking up for the night will know that he's still there. Barring that, there are emergency phones.

And in all of this is where they keep the servers, which is fine, but it's also where they keep IT and some of the lower management staff. Mark doesn't need much sunlight or fresh air, if the memory of his college dorm room was any indication, but even he went stir-crazy down here, trapped with Dustin and a few others, staring at the metal locks with the hum of the computers buzzing every molecule in the air.

The only reason he met Erica was because she felt bad for them. The only reason she went out with him, he thinks harshly, is because she felt bad for him. And because Dustin came down with shingles.

Maybe that's not fair to her, because Erica had said I did genuinely like you, but Mark doesn't know what to believe anymore and it's easier to believe the simpler tale, Occam's Razor and all that.

The problem with the servers takes him about an hour, not because it's difficult but because it's time-consuming to untangle. The other members of the IT team acknowledge his presence briefly, none of them particularly glad to see him. Mark never did make any friends at the central branch except for Dustin, but Dustin doesn't count because it's almost impossible not to be friends with Dustin; there may someday be a person with the strength of will to ignore Dustin's platonic overtures, but Mark is sadly not one of them.

He visits his old office, to have a look, but it's someone else's now, a young guy with curly hair, leaning back in his seat and reading a sports magazine. It's so incongruous. Mark never read any sports magazines at that desk before, that's for sure. He would probably go into epileptic shock at first contact. Thinking about it, his stomach does a hard flip because that's the office that used to be his entire world, with the light bulb swinging up overhead, constantly flickering out. He used to time his breaks by it.

On the main floor, he sees Erica at her desk. She notices him first and there's that immediate discomfort between any two people whose relationship has ended messily. But then she mouths a tentative 'hey.'

Mark considers ignoring her, considers going over and saying all the rude and accurate things he knows he's capable of, considers opening a blank page on the internet, ink and not smudged pencil, and venting his old frustrations like they are freshly new.

He doesn't.

(It's a whole new world. He doesn't have to be the way he used to be --

-- and he wants, he wants to be good at this, he wants things to work right for once).

"Hey," he says back.
"I can't stand it anymore," Chris declares. "Whatever you and Wardo have, this détente, it's worse than Bella and Edward. I am going to have to take matters into my own hands."

"Yes!" Dustin pumps his fist. "Matchmaker Hughes has laid down the law!"

Having other people up in his private business is pretty much Mark's vision of hell. "No," he says, "go away. If you're looking for desperate singles, you have Dustin right beside you."

"Not desperate," Dustin complains.

"At least Dustin not having anything means he isn't ruining what he has," Chris replies, and Dustin makes an outraged noise and flaps his arms around like windmills. Chris ducks out of the path of destruction and uses his Dr. Phil voice. "Listen to me. There's an office pool on whether you and Eduardo are going to get together and live happily ever after in a house by the water, eating organic and drinking low fat soy lattes. Or if you're going to crash and burn, and we'll have to force one of you to transfer so you won't make this entire place miserable. I don't intend to lose my money."

"Don't make fools out of us," Dustin echoes. "Don't crush our souls just because we dared believe in true love. True love, the Westley to your Buttercup!"

"Please stop talking," Chris tells him.

"What if I'm your true love, your Westley?" Dustin says. "Then you'll regret telling me to be quiet. You'll be longing to hear my dulcet tones. You'll be following me around, coaxing me to delight your ears with my melodic voice and -- oh hey, Divya's on the reference chat! Time to hit him up again."

"You do that," Chris says, turning back to Mark, who is gripping the edge of his desk, considering making a run for it. But Chris jogs every day before coming in to work and has legs of superhuman steel.

"I have an idea," Dustin declares, backspacing do purple dinosaurs really love in the chat's comment box. "Reference librarians to the rescue!"

He fills the blank space with: hi i'm a 27-year-old social reject who has, against odds, scored a totally hunky piece of hubba hubba love

Mark can't see what Dustin is writing, but that's not a problem when Dustin narrates his every thought out loud.

except i may have done some things to make him feel like i like him for just his body (his luscious luscious body) and not his brain or his heart when really i want it all. and cuddles. i want cuddles. also i am clueless. (also we work together).

"How do you even know all this?" Mark asks. He definitely didn't tell Dustin and while Eduardo is more touchy-feely than he is, Mark has trouble imagining him spilling his heart out to his coworkers.

"Hi Christy!" Dustin says, looking up at the door. Christy walks in and sits on the edge of his desk, staring at the computer screen. Her mouth curves into a smile before she throws a glance over at Mark and scoffs.
"Nothing happens in this library that I don't know about," she says.

"She has spies," Chris whispers.

"It's amazing how much nine-year-olds like candy," Christy says.

_Dustin, I am going to do my best to get you fired_, Divya replies on the chat.

_NO NO THIS IS SERIOUS_, Dustin quickly types back. _DIVYA DUDE WE HAVE A LOVESTRUCK SOUL ON THIS END. WE MUST PUT OUR DIFFERENCES BEHIND US AND CHARGE ON TO THE PATH OF ROMANCE._

_Are you propositioning me?_ Divya asks. _I think this may actually be worse than the trolling._

_I DON'T MEAN ME_, Dustin types. _I'M ASKING FOR A FRIEND._

_Riiiiight_, Divya says.

_you're a master reference librarian. so masterfully reference us! no one can do it better than you._

"I resent that," Chris says. "If there's any master reference librarian here, it's clearly me."

"I'm just buttering him up," Dustin says, patting him sympathetically. "I spin him sweet honeyed lies. You are the master of masters."

Mark starts hacking into the reference chat program and booting Dustin out. In the meantime, Dustin's fingers are NASCAR fast and so are Divya's responses. When Christy sees what Mark is doing, she leans over and says, "Dustin is an idiot, but if you kick him out of the system, I will make sure the rest of your life ends in misery and pain, so help me god."

Christy is scary. Mark hesitates.

_What do you want me to do?_ Divya asks. _Point you towards self-help books? Hook you up with a marriage counselor's contact info?_

_enough of that pedagogy stuff. Dustin writes. don't teach us how to find our own solutions. we are sheep. just give us the answer._

_I hate my job_, Divya says.

_you love it, Dustin says. and come on. what is the official recommendation of the palo alto city library? to soothe lover boy's aching heart._

Christy is blocking Chris' path to the door, so if Mark were to make a run right now, he might actually stand a better chance of getting away. But upon further consideration, he has no faith that Christy isn't even faster than Chris is, wedge heels aside.

_Look, if you get involved with a coworker, you're asking for a world of trouble_, Divya types. _Bad idea. It's not that easy to separate your private life with the life you have at least eight hours a day at work. It's not easy at all. Being hurt is being hurt, no matter where it happens._

_you speak wisdom, divya sensei. but what should our poor lost soul do?_

_You're lucky in that I'm as much a romantic as I am a pragmatist. So in your question, you say that the object of his affections --_
subject, Dustin types hurriedly. *we're not objectifying him! much*

Whatever. *In the question it sounds like he's having some insecurities of his own. So if you're really interested in him, you've got to reassure him that what he thinks isn't true. It's not just a nine to five thing. It's an all days thing. It's a brain and heart thing. Ugh, I can't believe I just typed that.*

Mark is trying to decimate Dustin with his eyes. Never mind that decimate means to kill one in ten; he wants to spawn ten Dustins so he can destroy one and make the other nine Dustins watch and cower. Dustin simply laughs, fearless. *but what if our social reject is scared to open his lily white heart to the cruel, cruel world? what if he doesn't want to get hurt himself?*

*You really want my professional opinion? You want the reference service answer to that?*

*that's what we're here for, rocket baby,* Dustin types.

*Take a fucking chance,* Divya says. *Over and out.* His icon flashes and then disappears from the chat window. The evaluation survey pops up after that, Dustin gives it about ten seconds' thought before he reluctantly rates Divya's service a 5 out of 5.

"Well, there you have it," Dustin says at last, clapping his hands slowly and obnoxiously while Chris and Christy fall over themselves giggling. Traitors. "The official authoritative position. Now what are you going to do with it, Markzilla?"

"Ship you in a crate to Antarctica," Mark mutters. "No air holes either."

"I will slip and slide among the penguins," Dustin says. "You don't scare me. No matter if you have five hundred million friends, thirteen, or just three, you can always count on your buddy Dustin to help bang some sense into your socially clueless ass."

Christy laughs harder.

"Waiiiiit, that came out wrong," Dustin says. "I didn't mean it that way!"

"Sure," she says.

"Plus!" Dustin continues. "It gives me hope. If *Mark* can score someone hot and charming, then it should be a piece of cake for me." He pounds his chest, King Kong style, and Christy gives him a skeptical but not entirely unappreciative look.

"Do I have everyone's permission to leave the room and fling myself off a cliff now?" Mark asks out loud.

"Why would you want to fling yourself off a cliff?" Eduardo asks, and fuck, they really need to start locking the office door, or install motion detector sensors in the hallway outside. Wardo has a paper lunch bag with him, which he hands to Mark before smiling at them all confusedly, taking in Dustin, Chris, and Christy's reddened faces, sore from laughing, and Mark's sour expression. "What's going on here?" he wonders.

"Happy endings," wheezes Chris.

"Totalitarian reeducation," offers Christy.

"An orgy!" yells Dustin.

"Nothing," Mark says. "Just remember: when I'm the head of this branch, or better yet, the head of
the entire city library, think of this moment when you're touching up your resume."

But if anything, that only sets them off into another round of evil laughter.

So, Mark thinks, and he can't sleep that night because he's too busy staring at his ceiling, and everything feels off, skewed sideways and backwards and lopsided.

So, he has an idea.

Eduardo's hair is full of glitter and he's wrestling with a glitter gun and three pieces of construction paper cut out in the shape of people holding hands. "National LGBT History Month," he explains when he sees Mark approaching. His fingers are sticky with glitter and glue, and he keeps on sprinkling even more on himself when he unconsciously touches his cheek, his nose. "If we're going to make Teller lose his marbles, we might as well take it all the way."

He points at a pile of books on his desk. "We don't have a lot of history books for display, but hey, I'm developing our LGBT young adult fiction collection pretty well." Mark looks at some of the titles: *Rainbow Boys, Absolutely Positively Not, Empress of the World, Dangerous Angels: The Weetzie Bat Books, Ash."

"Looks good," Mark says noncommittally. He shifts his weight from one foot to another. "Can we talk?"

Eduardo stops fiddling with the glitter gun. He looks up and then to the left, away from Mark's face. "It depends. Is it going to end in awkwardness and me eating an entire tub of ice cream to soothe my sorrows? I don't know if you've noticed, but I get curiously worked up when I'm around you. It's the damnedest thing."

"Thanks," Mark says dryly.

"It's your hands, I think," Eduardo says. "Or maybe your cheekbones. I can't decide."

Mark tries to speak again, but it feels like his throat is having an allergic reaction, like it's clogging up and he has to push past it to make himself understood. "I wasn't lying when I said I forgot to tell you I didn't need your records anymore. I really did just forget. I wasn't trying to make you work needlessly, or laughing at you behind your back. When I'm focused on coding, things... they slip by me a lot," he admits.

"Yeah, I think I'm coming to see that," Eduardo says.

"As for Ting, well, I'm never going to be okay with ads." Mark shrugs, but what should be casual feels stiff and terrifying. "That doesn't mean I'm not aware you did a lot to set up that meeting."

"I practically had to sell him my kidney," Eduardo says.

"Don't," Mark says. "I like that kidney where it is."
Eduardo smiles slightly and a silence falls between them for a moment or two. Mark watches Wardo shuffle some of the craft supplies around his desk, careful not to drip any onto his computer. Then Eduardo says, "Okay."

"Okay?"

"I just wanted to know for sure. It's stupid, but I've been burned too many times in the past. I get all involved and the other person isn't. So I'm -- I'm careful about who I develop inappropriate feelings for, except obviously not careful enough with you." It's not quite a compliment but Eduardo's voice is oddly tender when he says it, taking some of the sting out. "You fucking hacked my defenses there."

"A computer metaphor, really?"

"Like you haven't thought of a million and one librarian cliches for me," Eduardo says. "I'm going to check you out, etcetera, etcetera."

"That is incredibly insipid," Mark answers. Then he says, abruptly, "Let me use your computer. I want to show you something."

Eduardo moves aside, giving Mark space to open his browser. Mark opens Ananke Web on it and logs in as the administrator. At first his throat closes up even more when he sees Eduardo's reflexive dismay, because no matter what he says, Mark knows he did hurt Wardo by flushing his work down the toilet. "Hold on a sec," Mark assures him, and then in the search box on top of the main page, he enters: **Eduardo Saverin**. His heart beats against his ribs as he waits for the search to execute. It's only a second, but it feels like the longest second of his life, even longer than when he opened his acceptance letter to Harvard, or when Tyler Winklevoss called him up and told him he got the job, can he come into work on Monday.

The search returns **1 result**.

"I'd protest that I haven't actually written any books," Eduardo says, "but I think I know what this is going to be. Mark, you freak."

One result, one book, no cover.

**Will you go out with me?** by Mark Zuckerberg

Mark wants to die. He wants to expire of embarrassment as he waits for Eduardo to stop staring at the screen and give him a damn answer already. This had seemed like a decent idea earlier, when talking to Dustin and Dustin had said, *why go for a small gesture when you can go for a big one?* Before reminding Mark that Wardo was a total romantic, loved puppies, candles, and all things Hallmark. It'd seemed like a cute, if uncharacteristic, gesture then, especially when accompanied by five beers and insomnia. But right now as Mark waits in what is quickly replacing the search function as the longest moment of his life, all he can think is, *he has glitter in his hair, I can't even take this anymore, he's sparkling like a vampire.*

"You finished coding the review function, right?" Eduardo asks.

Mark says yes. His hands shake as he folds them inside his hoodie. He wishes he could blame it on caffeine withdrawal, but he had three coffees in a row.

Eduardo gently nudges Mark out of the way and takes over the keyboard. He clicks 'add your review of this book' and pauses at first. Then he types out:
Will you go out with me? by Mark Zuckerberg is a mystery novel of the highest order. It has a slow start and a somewhat dense, obscure style, and at times it seems like the writer doesn't trust his readers' intelligence, which can lead to frustration. However, if you're willing to put in the patience, the story will ultimately reward you with twists, turns, and a satisfying emotional catharsis, not to mention a compelling narrative voice unlike any you've heard before. A keeper for sure. If you enjoyed this book, you may also be interested in How about dinner tonight, my place? by Eduardo Saverin.

Wardo looks up at Mark, and this time he's grinning for real. "How about it?"

Mark wants to do something sappy, like take Eduardo's hand and hold onto it for the rest of the day; feel Eduardo's skin against his own, his skin and his smiling mouth. But they're still at work and Christy is blatantly ignoring a patron at the circulation desk in favour of staring at him while Dustin and Chris are goggling from the nook below the staircase. Dustin is holding a sound recorder, lifting it as high as he can, not ashamed in the slightest. He waves when Mark notices him, says "this is so going in the staff newsletter!", and yeah, that just proves it. Mark doesn't want to share this with anyone else just yet.

"Actually," he points out, "because we're signed in as me, it looks like Mark Zuckerberg just left a glowing review for a book by Mark Zuckerberg."

"That's true," Eduardo says, craning his neck and turning red when he catches sight of their audience. "But, um, you do like it? The review stands?"

"It's my favourite book in the world," Mark says.

October passes by in a rush, but the best kind of rush, where Mark pushes Ananke Web even closer to going live and there's Wardo beside him the whole time, cutting him sandwiches and mixing him drinks and dragging him away from the computer when Mark starts going into twelve hour coding marathons. Mark knows that he hasn't really done anything in his life to deserve someone like Wardo, but deserving is actually only a very small portion of any relationship, he's discovered. Wardo takes care of him, and in return he tries to make sure Wardo's computer always runs properly, that the patrons who hassle Wardo never appear in the library again, and occasionally he will put on a silly costume and act out scenes for Wardo's kids. Mark is willing to be the Stinky Cheese Man -- that's got to count for something.

Late October and they're off work, having a late dinner at Eduardo's apartment, except dinner is on hold as they make out on the couch, Eduardo straddling Mark's lap with his fingers pressed against the pulse of Mark's wrists. Mark moans, and Eduardo grinds down, breathy, as Mark slides his free hand into Eduardo's hair and his tongue into Eduardo's mouth.

Mark is halfway to unbuttoning Eduardo's shirt when there's a sound from his laptop on the coffee table. He has a new email.

"Ignore it," Eduardo says after he bites down on Mark's bottom lip. "I know you're itching to look, but you can always check it later."
"I'm signed into my work email," Mark says. "It might be important."

"More important than fucking my brains out, really?" Eduardo asks, and okay, that's a difficult decision all right, but Wardo sees the misery on Mark's face and takes pity on him. "Oh fine," he sighs, rolling off and to the side. "This is what I get for shacking up with social media guy. Make it quick."

Mark slides off the couch and onto his knees, opening his email. He's quiet for a while until Eduardo prods him on the back with a socked foot. "What is it?" he asks. "You're not fired, are you?"

"No," Mark says slowly, "and I'm somewhat offended that being fired is what you immediately leap to. It's like you have zero faith in me." His expression gives away nothing. "It's an email from Augustus Ting."

Eduardo sits straight up.

Mark scans the rest of the message.

"And?" Eduardo demands. "What does he say?"

"Well..."

"Shit, don't do this to me. I will have a nervous breakdown."

Mark grins. "He says he's going to fund us after all."

Eduardo leaps off the couch so fast that he trips over Mark's laptop cable and pulls the computer to the floor. Mark makes a sound of shock, for both Eduardo and the laptop, but then Eduardo is on his feet again, placing the laptop gingerly on the table and looking sheepish. "Got a little excited there," he says, prince of understatement. His face broadens into a dazzling grin. "But Ting is going to fund us! I can't believe it! I thought for sure he left that meeting hating you, hating what you wanted for Ananke. I thought we'd have to start the search for funding all over again. But we don't! Because he's going to fund us! We're going to have new servers!" He grabs Mark and starts dancing around, and now it's Mark's turn to trip over his own feet.

"Ow, Wardo, I'm excited too but do we have to dance?" he complains. "We don't all have the natural Brazilian talent for booty-shaking."

Eduardo ignores him. "This is great news," he chants. "I'm so proud of you. You made something fantastic and now everyone is going to know about it. Library catalogues 2.0. Information architecture. We're going to drag our profession out of the dark ages kicking and screaming." His cheeks are flushed, he's a bundle of barely concealed energy, and he looks as gorgeous as Mark has ever seen him before. That's saying something, because usually Mark thinks Eduardo looks his best when naked.

"We made something fantastic," Mark says. "You, me, Dustin. Chris if you count moral support and provider of booze, which any person should."

Eduardo stops, wide-eyed.

Then he says, "We're going to have sex now. Mind-blowing sex. You don't get to have any say in it, I'm sorry. It's just the way it is."

"How will I ever get over the disappointment?" Mark deadpans, and he lets Eduardo pull him in for a kiss that forces Mark onto his toes, gripping Eduardo's shoulders for balance. It leaves him feeling
dizzy and light-headed, but also happy, the sensation bubbling up inside him like fizz in a can of soda. This, he thinks. He doesn't need to be more ambitious than this.

And because he can't resist, he says, "Hey Mr. Librarian, I looked at all the books but I think I'd rather check you out instead."

Eduardo buries his face in Mark's shoulder and snorts. "Worst line ever. What are you going to ask next, if you can renew me indefinitely? If you can Dewey my Decimal? If you can speed up my circulation?"

"I don't know, I think you secretly like it. It seems to be charming you over." Mark glances down to indicate exactly what part of Wardo's anatomy is being charmed over.

"What can I say?" Eduardo replies, tugging Mark back onto the couch while trying to unzip him out of his shorts. It shouldn't be as successful as it is, especially not when Mark is trying to get Eduardo out of his shirt at the same time, but somehow in the mess of elbows and knees and kissing, they make it work. In a very short amount of time, they go from words to gasps and from gasps to voicelessness. In the end, they don't need to say anything at all.