Welcome to Madness

by Elri (angelrider13)

Summary

Everyone knows that you can't be Mad. It's all a matter of perspective, you see. One simply can't be Mad because Madness isn't a state of mind. Not anymore. Madness, dear heart, is a place. Let's go together, shall we?

Notes

So this was all inspired by Alice: Madness Returns and this very odd, very creepy dream I had. Started as an idea for a short story I had to write for a class of mine and it turned into this. Still turned it in.

See the end of the work for more notes

Come with me
Into the trees
Let's get away
Just for one day

It was quiet.

Very quiet.
And empty.

The room was almost silent and almost empty. There was one boy, just one, and he was a small boy, small and fragile and breakable. He was very pale and very thin; not too thin, mind, but thin enough to make him look delicate, as if his bones were made of glass. His dark black hair was a messy mop a top his head and his eyes were a bright, sharp, pale blue.

And he was quiet.

He was reading. And the only sound in the room was that of pages turning every few minutes. He sat, curled up on his bed, book in his lap, reading. It was a fascinating book, the first new one he had seen in a very long time. There were no tears, no missing pages, no folds. The cover was smooth and unblemished. It even had that new book smell. The boy liked that smell; it was a nice smell. It was also a good book. It had been ages since he had read a good book. Or, well, a book in general. It had been the first to catch his eye in the box of them that had been brought in for him. The box that now sat at the end of his bed. The box that was filled with books. He liked books. Books held other worlds within their pages; worlds full of adventure and make believe and interesting people. Books held things he never got to see any more. But he didn't mind so much. He had created his own world after all and if he couldn't see something in real life, then it wasn't really a problem.

And since it wasn't a problem, he did not feel bad for quietly sitting on his bed reading the day away.

He looked up as the door creaked open and a woman walked in. She was tall, to him at least, and a bit on the plump side and wore a long sleeve red dress with a white apron over it. Her brown, grey-streaked hair was pulled back into a tight bun on the top of her head. She smiled kindly at him as she walked into the room, carrying a tray which she set down on the table in the center of the room. Her face was worn with age and always seemed tired, but somehow, she always wore a smile for him. Mathew thought that it was awfully kind of her.

"Good afternoon, Mathew," she said.

Mathew smiled up at her, closing his book and sliding off the bed. "Hello, Ms. Martha," he replied, bare feet padding across the floor as he walked over to her. He climbed into a chair and placed his book on the table as he took his seat.

Martha glanced at it briefly as she poured a cup of tea. "Alice in Wonderland?"

Mathew beamed. "Yes! It's a lovely book," he said, patting the book's cover, "Alice is bit like me I think, but she's a bit silly." The woman just smiled and placed the cup of tea in front of the excited boy. "Oh, tea! Just like at the Mad Hatter's. We can have a tea party, Ms. Martha! To celebrate your Un-Birthday!"

Martha chuckled. "How thoughtful of you, dear. But what about your Un-Birthday?"

The little boy pressed his lips in thought for a moment before his face lit up. "We can celebrate them together!"

"That sounds like a lovely idea, Mathew. Do you want any cream in your tea?"

"No thank you!" The boy took a careful sip of the tea and looks up at Martha curiously. "Ms. Martha, what kind is this? It tastes different."

"It's Chamomile, dear," she said, not looking up from arranging the tray. "Sarah just got it from the market today. I thought you would like it; a bit of a change from the Earl Grey you've been
having every day."

Mathew blinked and looked down at the steaming liquid in his cup before taking another sip. "It's good!"

Martha smiled. "I'm glad you like it, dear. Here's your lunch." She placed the tray in front of him. "Thank you, Ms. Martha."

"You're welcome, Mathew."

"Say Ms. Martha?" Mathew asked as the woman went to change the sheets on the bed, "Why do you think a raven is like a writing desk?"

"I can't say that I know."

Mathew frowned a bit. "That's a shame; Hatter never got his answer in the book. It's a very good question, I think." He pushed his food around his plate with a sigh. "I wish I could go to Wonderland. It's a much more interesting place than this room."

Martha chuckled at his pout. "Have you been arguing with the doctor again?"

The boy stuck his nose in the air and crossed his arms over his chest stubbornly. "We wouldn't if he would stop being so silly."

"And how is Dr. Cross being silly?" Martha asked, humoring the boy.

"He says I'm mad." Mathew scoffed. "It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard!"

"How so?"

"Because I can't be mad; it's not possible."

Martha hummed, smoothing the new sheets down over the bed. "And why's that?"

Mathew stopped then, putting down his fork and staring at Martha's back. He sighed. "Oh, Ms. Martha, you don't understand either! You think I'm mad too! Silly! I'm just as sane as anyone else."

"Well, dear, I don't really think anyone will believe you." Martha said, turning around to face the boy again.

Mathew clucked his tongue in disapproval. "It's all a matter of perspective, Ms. Martha. For all we know, I could be perfectly sane and everyone else is mad. Besides, a person can't be mad."

"Then what is madness if not a state of mind?"

Mathew grinned a cheshire grin then, showing all of his teeth. "Silly, Ms. Martha, you sound like that silly doctor. Madness is a place."

Martha blinked at that, pausing in her work. "Well that's an interesting theory. I suppose that means sanity is a place too?"

The boy beamed at her. "Of course!"

"I suppose that it also means you can leave madness any time you like?"
Mathew laughed. "Yes!" Then he paused, grinning up at the woman, a strange gleam in his eyes. "But I'm afraid it's much too fun to leave." Martha just hummed as she folded the old sheets and put them in the hamper. Mathew ginned, a sudden idea hitting him. "Ms. Martha, Ms. Martha! You can visit me in Madness!"

The woman laughed. "Can I? I'm afraid I don't know how to get there."

Mathew rolled his eyes. "That part's easy! It's leaving that's the hard part," he said before hopping off his chair and walking over to the nurse, "But I can take you there."

Martha raised an eyebrow, and gave the boy a humoring smile. "Take me to madness?"

"Yes!" the little boy chirped, holding out a hand, "Let's go together, shall we?"

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**Let me see you**
**See all of you**
**Let me see you**
**Stripped down to the bone**

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Mathew sat at the table, idly swinging his feet back and forth as he hummed along to a made up song. It was a strange tune, one that always seemed to be in his head. He could never remember the words, but he could always feel them on the tip of his tongue, as if they were waiting for the right moment to spill from his lips. His hand moved back and forth absentely, the pencil gripped loosely, but firmly, between his fingers as he lightly dragged it over the paper. Left, right, curve, straight, curve. Lines took up the empty white space. It didn't look like anything in particular, just a random series of lines. Yet Mathew made each mark slowly and deliberately, as if he was following a carefully laid plan that only he could see.

Time ticked by slowly, and, as usual, Mathew paid it no mind. Time was perceived after all, and if one had the right perspective, then really, no time was passing at all. On the other hand, it could pass so quickly that everything had already ended by the time anyone bothered to notice. It all depended, really. Mathew supposed that he'd slowed time down today; because Ms. Martha hadn't shown up yet. She wasn't late, at least according to Mathew, because if he perceived time as being slower, then really her walking in the door at this very moment would make her early. But if he perceived time as being faster than she was most definitely late. The boy thought that would be very much like the White Rabbit, he was always worried about being late. But no, time was slow today; Mathew had already decided.

It was all a matter of perspective, you see.

So Mathew continued to hum, absently drawing on his paper.

A few hours later – or perhaps it was a few minutes – the door opened and a woman walked in. She was younger and thinner than Ms. Martha with short blond hair that just reached her chin. The skin on her face was smooth and clear, it didn't have the same wrinkles that Ms. Martha did. It didn't have the same kindness either. Ms. Martha was the only one whose face showed open kindness, everyone else tried to hide. Mathew couldn't understand why people would want to do that, but everyone had their own way of doing things he supposed. This woman moved stiffly and purposefully, set solely on doing her job. She wore the same red dress and white apron but she was definitely not Ms. Martha.

Mathew tilted his head to side in confusion, but greeted the woman none the less. "Hello, Ms.
"Hello, Mathew," the woman said shortly, her tone somewhat clipped and guarded.

The boy was silent as he watched the nurse pour the tea and place it front of him. He stared at it before looking up at Alexis. "Where's Ms. Martha?" he asked, the ever present curiosity of a child in his tone. After all, Ms. Martha was supposed to be taking care of him for the entire week, but it had only been one day.

Alexis froze for a moment, hands hovering over the tray as she seemed to collect herself. "She's coming in late today," she replied.

Mathew blinked, confused. "How can she be late if it's so early?"

The woman finally looked at him, brow furrowed, a frown set upon her lips. "Mathew, it is already a half hour past noon."

"Is it?" Mathew asked, surprised, "How odd."

He took a sip of his tea and pouted slightly when he realized that it's back to Earl Grey today. Shame, he rather liked the Chamomile. Alexis didn't speak as she handed him his lunch and set about her chorus in his room. So Mathew took it upon himself to fill the silence with chatter.

"I drew a picture today," he said, "It looks like the Mad Hatter. He has tea parties, you know. They sound fun. I wish I could go to one, then we could celebrate all of our Un-Birthdays together. Ms. Martha and I celebrated our Un-Birthdays yesterday. It was quite fun. Of course, if you turn the paper to the left a bit, it looks like the Red Queen. I don't think she would much like being compared to the Hatter; she has a bit of a temper, you know. Plus she thinks the Hatter is Mad. Of course, everyone is Mad, but it might be unwise to say that in Queen's presence. I get the feeling she wouldn't take it as well as Hatter would." Mathew continued to babble away and Alexis stayed silent the entire time. "By the way, Ms. Alexis, where's Ms. Martha?"

Alexis gave an exasperated sigh, turning to the boy. "I already told you, Mathew," she said, "Ms. Martha is sick, so she's coming in late."

Something flashed in Mathew's eyes and he stared the nurse down. It lasted only a few seconds before the boy's grin was back in place, but it left Alexis slightly shaken.

"Really?" asked Mathew, "That's a shame, I hope she feels better. Being sick is awful. Caterpillar would know what to do. He's very smart, you know. But he talks in riddles, so it's a bit hard to understand him. Cheshire talks in riddles to. I think he does it more though. I'm not sure; they both do it a lot. It gets quite confusing sometimes. It's a wonder Alice can put up with them at all. But she created them in the first place, so I suppose she must put up with them. Can't escape your own head after all. Unless Queen gets you of course. Did I mention she has a temper? It gets the best of her most times. Personally, I think she's just partial to beheading. She seems to rather enjoy it. That and roses. Red roses to be precise. They seem to be her favorite things. I prefer white roses myself, much more beautiful in my opinion. Mustn't say that to Queen though; she'd take it as a personal offence, I expect and then she'd want my head. But I'm rather attached to it." Mathew paused, looking over to Alexis, who seemed to be ignoring him while giving off the pretense of listening. "Where's Ms. Martha?"

The woman tensed for the briefest of seconds. "She's not coming."

Mathew's shoulders slump. "Oh. Pity, she makes a very good debate partner, even if she does think I'm Mad."
"You are mad, Mathew," Alexis said.

The boy just sighed, rolling his eyes. "And you're ignorant," he replied, "But you don't see my running around making claims."

"That was rude," Alexis said sternly.

Mathew shrugged. "So are you. Ms. Martha doesn't tell me I'm Mad; she listens to what I have to say instead of ignoring me the way you do. I like her much better. Where is she?"

"I already told you that she is not coming today," Alexis said, anger creeping into her tone.

"Why not?" Mathew asked calmly, face openly curious.

"Because she is sick."

The boy tilted his head to the side, the strange gleam entering his eyes again. "Why?"

"Because." "That is a horrible reason, Ms. Alexis. Where is Ms. Martha?"

Alexis slammed the rag she had been using to dust down on the table. "She is not, and will not, be coming," she snapped.

Mathew just gazed at her blankly, completely unfazed by her anger or frustration. "Why not?"

"Because of you!" she finally exploded. The boy just stared at her, expression betraying nothing. "She collapsed an hour after leaving your room yesterday and she hasn't been lucid since! She just mumbles about talking flowers and a cat!"

Mathew perked up. "Ms. Martha met Cheshire? How wonderful! He really is a lovely companion; a bit strange though."

"There is no Cheshire, Mathew."

Mathew blinked. "Of course there is. You just said that Ms. Martha met him."

Alexis frowned. "There is no Cheshire; he isn't real. You're just a mad little boy and you turned Martha mad as well."

The boy stared blankly at her for a moment before breaking out into loud laughter. "You can't make someone Mad!" he exclaimed gleefully after he had calmed down, a wide, toothy grin stretching across his lips. "You can't make anyone Mad!"

"Yes you can. And you did it," Alexis said firmly, gathering all of her things up quickly, almost as if she were trying to run away, not looking the small boy in the eyes even once. As she headed for the door, she was forced to stop when she saw Mathew standing in front of it, wide grin still on his lips and that strange gleam in his eyes.

He tsked, playfully wagging his finger at her, eyes never leaving hers. "Silly woman, you can't turn someone Mad if they already are."

Alexis hugged the tray to her chest. "Martha wasn't mad before."

Mathew clucked his tongue disapprovingly. "Of course she was. You are to, you know. Everyone is. They just decide to ignore it, is all. It's all a matter of perspective, you see."
"You're just a mad little boy," Alexis said firmly, almost as if she were trying to convince herself, unable to stop the slight tremor in her voice, before she pushed past him and out the room.

Mathew looked after her, the sly, cheshire grin never once leaving his face as he chuckled softly. "Silly woman. Madness is a place."

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Take my hand  
Follow me down the rabbit hole  
Come back to the land  
Where everything is ours

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Time was rather loud today. More so than usual anyway. It liked to make people get lost in it; lose track of it. It's all part of the Game, you see, and Time is always playing. And if you're not careful, then Time will win. And then Time will laugh. Because Time isn't the best of sports. Still, Time was a better playmate than no playmate at all, even if it was incredibly stubborn and spoiled. It always got it's way in the end, you see.

Tick. Tock. Tick.

It really was odd. Being trapped in the Game. Of course, it wasn't really a trap. You could leave at any time you wished, after all. You just had to be willing to take the exit. There were certain rules, you see. And the rules were always followed. Except when they weren't. Because everything can only bend so far before it breaks.

Tick. Tock. Tick.

"Mathew? Mathew, are you listening to me?"

Mathew blinked and looked up into the face of Dr. Cross.

Ah. That's right. He was having his checkup. Perhaps that was why he was so eager to play Time's game today. Dr. Cross was a smart man, at least, that was his own perception. Mathew thought he was rather dull and not at all engaging. He always wore the same old white lab coat. The same round, silver-rimmed glasses. His iron grey hair was always styled in the exact same fashion as the day before: a comb-over with the part to the right and strands of hair swept to the left. His mustache was always neatly trimmed, not a hair out of place. He always wore a plain, solid colored, button up shirt – today it was pale green – that was tucked neatly into his freshly pressed slacks. He wore the same brown, leather, dress shoes that he had when Mathew had first laid eyes on him. He didn't change much. Ever. Mathew couldn't even begin to wrap his head around how the man could stand to be so utterly boring.

"Hmm? Oh yes, Doctor. I'm listening."

Dr. Cross sighed. "Mathew, you know that this only works if you listen."

"But it's so boring," the boy whined.

"Then what would make it more interesting?" Dr. Cross asked patiently.

Mathew grinned, his eyes lighting up. "A debate!"
The doctor raised an eyebrow. "You want to debate?"

Mathew nodded. "Mm! I always have to listen to you. But no one ever listens to me!"

"I suppose that's fair then," Dr. Cross said, stroking his chin, an almost amused smile forming on his face, "But don't think that this debate will get you out of anything."

The boy's grin turned mischievous. "Whatever do you mean, Doctor?"

"I mean," he said seriously, "That you can't run away from everything, Mathew. There isn't always a way out. Sometimes it's better to face your problems than run away from them."

Mathew's grin widened. "But there's always a way out, Doctor. You just have to be willing to take it."

"And where exactly would this way out take you?" Dr. Cross asked, jotting down some notes.

"Why, to Madness, of course!"

Dr. Cross frowned. "You can't choose to be mad, Mathew."

The boy nodded very seriously. "You are absolutely right, Doctor. You can't choose to be Mad," he said, a strange light entering his eyes, "No one can be Mad anyway, not really. It's all a matter of perspective, Doctor. And Madness is not merely a state of mind. Not anymore."

"Then what is it?" The doctor asked calmly.

The doctor was very good at that. Mathew thought it was part of what made him so boring. He was always so calm, so collected. Always in control. It was odd really. To be so...perfect. To seem unbreakable. But everything is breakable. Mathew knows. He'd seen it after all. And everything can only bend so far before it breaks. Everything can only ender so much before it had to run away.

"My good doctor," he said, a cheshire grin splitting his face, showing all of his teeth, eyes gleaming, "Madness is a place."

Dr. Cross shifted in his seat slightly, tearing his eyes away from the boy and looking at the sheet of notes in front of him. "An interesting notion," he said, clearing throat, "Does that mean one can come and go as they please?"

Mathew tilted his head to the side slightly, grin never faltering. "Oh, I'm afraid it's not that simple, Doctor. Arriving is easy. So very easy. It's leaving that's the hard part."

"And why is that?"

"Well you can't open a locked door without the key, now can you, Doctor?"

"I suppose not," Dr. Cross agreed half-heartedly, "So you are locked in this place? This madness?"

The boy's grin faded some and a look of slight confusion took its place. "Mmm...I suppose. But not really. It's all part of the Game, you see. The key is easy enough to find. But the door likes to move, it never stays in one place."

"And why does it move?"
"Because if it didn't, then it would be easy to find! And where's the fun in that?"

"I suppose an easy game isn't very fun, is it?" the doctor asked.

Mathew nodded in agreement. "Right!"

"Perhaps you can tell me more about this game?"

"The Game?" Mathew asked, tapping his chin with a finger, "Well...it's a bit hard to explain. But the winner wins everything, you see. That's why the Game is so long."

"And what is everything?"

"Mmm? Well that's the question, isn't it?" Mathew said, eyes gleaming, "Is it really everything? Or is it, in fact, nothing at all? It's all a matter of perspective, Doctor. The winner is the one who unlocks the door, you see."

Dr. Cross raised an eyebrow as he wrote. "So the winner is the first one to leave this madness?"

"Not at all, Doctor. The winner is the one who takes control."

"Control of what?"

Mathew's brow furrowed in thought and he pressed his lips together into a line. "How would Cheshire explain this?" he pondered aloud, "He's always so good at explaining. Then again, he's also good at telling you everything and absolutely nothing at the same time. He's a reliably unreliable source of information, you see. What was the question again?" The boy paused. "Ah, I remember. Well, control of the mind, Doctor. That is the prize."

Dr. Cross frowned, pausing in his note taking and looked at the boy in front of him. "The winner of the game controls the mind?"

Mathew gave him a coy smile. "Indeed. It's all rather hard to explain to someone who isn't part of the Game. Cheshire says it just sounds like a bunch of nonsense to them."

"And is this Cheshire playing the game as well?"

"No, no, not at all! Cheshire has no interest in it, you see. To him it's all a great show, a grand play," Mathew said, smiling at the empty space next to him, "He likes watching more than playing. He's the Guide, Doctor. He's the only one who knows all the rules."

"And how does one play the game, if one does not know the rules?"

"The rules change, Doctor. They change every day; they are different every second. But the rules always have to be followed. The rules aren't allowed to be broken. Except when they are. Cheshire is very specific about the rules. Sometimes they like being broken, you see."

"So this Cheshire makes the rules?"

Mathew grinned that wide, toothy grin and Dr. Cross suppressed a shudder when a haunting chuckle echoed in the room. A chuckle that didn't come from Mathew. It was only his imagination. "Not at all, Doctor. Cheshire just knows the rules better than anyone. I suppose Queen knows them second best, but she isn't one for rules that she didn't make. She has a bit of a temper."

"Interesting," Dr. Cross said, "So everyone has to follow the rules?"
"Except when they don't." Mathew agreed with a nod.

The doctor made a noise of acknowledgement as he jotted something down. He felt something in the air change and the hair on the back of his neck stood up, as if someone was behind him. Which didn't make any sense because he and Mathew were the only two people in the room right now and no one had opened the door. But it felt like someone was there. And even though his brain told him it was impossible for someone to be standing behind him when Mathew was right in front of him, he couldn't stop his body from turning so he could check.

"Oh, that's just Cheshire," Mathew said, "He wants to know what you're writing. He's a curious little cat. Well, he's not so little actually, but you know what I mean."

"Ah…yes," Dr. Cross said slowly, turning back to face the boy who smiled at him innocently. He forcefully ignored the hot puffs of air on the back of his neck. It was just his imagination. Nothing was there.

"Are you alright, Doctor? You look a little pale."

"Mmm? Oh, yes, Mathew, I'm fine. I think that will conclude today's session," the doctor said gathering up his notes.

Mathew blinked. "Already? Time is moving rather fast today. Or am I moving slow?"

"Neither," Dr. Cross assured, "We just got a lot done today, is all. Perhaps you can tell me more tomorrow?"

The boy grinned. "Okay!" he chirped.

"Good day, Mathew," Dr. Cross said with a calm smile.

"Bye-bye, Dr. Cross," Mathew called with a wave.

The doctor resolutely ignored the faint outline of a large cat sitting next to the boy. It was nothing but his imagination.

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_I'll give you roses_
_I'll paint them red for you_
_Let me melt away_
_All the shades of grey_

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The boy stood in the center of a field. A seemingly endless field. He was surrounded on all sides by yellow-green grass that came up to his knees. The grass was soft and smooth, without the rough earthiness he was used to. No matter what direction he looked, all he saw was grass. There were no trees. No bushes. No flowers. Just grass. Just soft, yellow-green grass as far as the eye could see.

The sky was blue. A very bright, very deep blue. So blue that it looked unnatural. The clouds were a pale pink and curled in an intricate pattern of swirls that stood out against the vast deepness of the blue sky.

He stared at them for a while, taking them in. He couldn't remember how he got here. Or where here even was. But for some reason, it didn't seem that important. When he finally managed to tear his eyes away from the strange sky, he saw a door.
Just a door.

It stood in the middle of the field. There was nothing in front of it, nothing behind it. It was just a door. A simple, off-white door. The knob was made of brass, as were the hinges. The paint looked old, and a little worn, but at the same time brand new.

Next to the door sat a cat. It was the strangest cat the boy had ever seen. It was a very large cat, it's head coming up to his waist. The cat wasn't any specific color, it's fur seeming to shift between shades. It's body was translucent, like it was there, but not completely. It's bright, molten gold eyes bore into his, a gleeful, curious smile stretch across it's face. For a while, they both just stared at each other. Finally, the boy spoke.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The cat's grin widened. "Why, I'm you of course," it said, voice smooth and deep and the boy, for some reason not finding it at all strange that the cat could speak, decided that cat was a he, "But if you wish to call me something, you may call me Cheshire."

"Okay," the boy said, "Where are we?"

Cheshire tilted his head to the side curiously. "Where indeed." He got up and walked over to the boy, pacing around him. "Do you remember?"

"Remember?"

The cat paused, coming to a stop in front of the boy and looked up at him with those piercing gold eyes. "Hmm, I suppose you don't. Remembering is pain, after all, and pain is agony. Would it truly be best to forget?"

The boy frowned. "I don't know," he answered, "But if I forgot, that means that I didn't want to remember it in the first place, doesn't it?"

Cheshire grinned and the boy noticed for the first time how sharp his teeth were. "Very true, little one. The mind is a fragile thing. Fragile things are easy to break. And when they do the edges are sharp, dangerous."

"So not remembering is dangerous?" the boy asked. The cat just grinned at him, eyes flashing mischievously. "But what if I don't want to remember?"

"What is forgetting, if not running away?" the cat said, "Remembering is harder, is it not? Remembering is pain. So perhaps it is better not to forget."

"But what if I want to?"

"My dear boy, who said you couldn't run away and still remember?" The boy looked curiously at the cat, who turned toward the door. "There's always a way out, you know. You just have to be willing to take it."

The boy stared at the door, feet slowly carrying him to it. He glanced at Cheshire, but the cat only grinned. He reached out, hand coming to rest on the brass knob. Taking a deep breath, he turned the handle and opened the door.

There's always a way out.
The door is open
The path is clear
Put on a smile for me
Welcome to Madness, dear

End Notes

Creepy right? But in a cool way. At least I think so. It does make me question my own mental stability though.

(For the record, my writing professor gave me an A on this.)

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