

The Incredibly Boring Life of Peter Black

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Chapter 1: The Last Normal Morning

6:35 AM: The alarm clock buzzed with the most annoying buzz that any electronic clock has ever made. The buzzing made its way into the neural network of the brain of one, Peter Black, computer analyst. Peter, of course, did not recognize the buzzing right away as a mere alarm clock. This was because he was in the midst of his most usual dream. In this most usual dream he wasn't merely Peter Black, computer analyst. No, he was *Blake Rock, man of intrigue!*

Blake was busy disarming a bomb that would destroy the entire planet if he did not save the day. Of course, standing beside Blake, was Tiffany Moore, his stunningly beautiful and intelligent cohort. Blake had just removed the cover plate from the hydro-nuclear bomb placed there by his arch-enemy, Dr. Ingo.

"Damn, it looks to be encoded with a non-linear, octet, binary algorithm!" he muttered. "This might be a bit tricky."

"I know you can do it, Blake," whispered Tiffany in a most assuring way. "You're the greatest non-linear, octet, binary code expert in the world."

"Yes, I am," thought Blake to himself. He went to work on the bomb. As the timer counted down, it looked like it was the end. Then, with five seconds left, Blake entered the abort code. The bomb's counter stopped with three seconds left.

"Geesh, still three seconds left. That wasn't even close!" Blake said with a smirk.

"I knew you could do it Blake!" bubbled Tiffany as she and Blake embraced. "I love you!"

Their lips drew closer and a warm, wet, sloppy kiss was on its way when suddenly a buzzing sound came from

the bomb. Blake looked at it. The bomb began to count down again; then...BOOOM!

Peter awoke. He looked at the red, glowing number on his clock, half expecting to see the numbers on the bomb counting down. No, it was a clock. It was his clock, and it was showing 6:35 AM. Actually, it was really 6:30 AM. Peter had set his clock five minutes ahead so he could force himself to rush and get ready quicker. It never really worked because he knew it was really 6:30 AM and he had time to hit the wonderful snooze bar.

After the third hit on the snooze bar, it was really time to get out of bed. As a matter-of-fact, he was now running late. This was not unusual. Peter was always late, and he didn't much care if he was on time or not for his job, because no one seemed to care if he was late, or even early for that matter. To Peter, it seemed as if he were invisible to his coworkers and boss. He hated his job.

He sat up in bed. He felt cold as he got out from under his warm, gray blanket. "God, I wish I could stay in bed," he thought to himself. But he had already used up all his sick time on other days when his bed felt too warm to leave. Besides, the bills needed to be paid. He hated it. So despite what he wanted to do, he stood up on his worn, beige carpet, donned his red and brown-checkered robe and went to the kitchen to make some oatmeal and coffee.

He didn't really like oatmeal, but it was something he always had for breakfast, so he figured, why bother changing now? He had seen all the breakfast pastries and sweet, crispy cereals on the television, but after all, he was thirty-two years old and living on his own. If he wanted to eat oatmeal, he would eat oatmeal. He hated oatmeal.

He also hated instant coffee. "A nice cup of fresh brewed would hit the spot now," he thought. He looked at the coffeemaker he got from his aunt Vicky for Christmas sitting on the counter. It had a sixteenth of an inch deep

layer of dust on top of it. He hadn't even used it once since he got it. Now it was November, and it would be too much work to make some fresh brewed. He drank the microwave-heated cup of brown liquid that he told himself was coffee. He hated it. He hated it all; his oatmeal, his coffee, his job, and especially, his life.

When he was a child, he always thought that things would be exciting when he grew up. He imagined life would be an adventure. Not that his childhood was anything too thrilling to begin with, but he believed his adult life would get better. But it wasn't to be. There he sat stirring his coffee and eating his oatmeal; hating it all. Moreover, he had no will whatsoever to do anything about it. He may have hated it, but it was predictable. He liked that.

After a quick shower, he got dressed and was off to the prison he called work, FasSoftware Inc. He arrived at his work's parking lot at 8:09 AM. "Oh well, nine minutes late already," he thought, but he did not worry because no one would notice he was late. No one cared.

He maneuvered himself around the maze of cubicles to his — which was barely large enough to hold his desk and chair — and sat down. He turned on his computer and waited. He waited for what seemed like forever for it to boot up. Not that he was in any rush to get working. He thought about how much he used to want to be a computer programmer, what exciting programs he would write, and how much fun it would be. Instead he found himself in a job where all he did was check other people's computer codes for mistakes and fix them.

"Not very creative," he sighed to himself as he looked at a particularly boring piece of bookkeeping code he had been assigned to check. He thought of many different ways he could spice up the code, but that was not his job. His job was to fix the problem within the code that was

causing an error message that the inept programmer who originally wrote the code couldn't seem to find.

"How could he miss this?" he mumbled to himself when he came across the offending code. He knew he was twice the programmer those guys upstairs were, but couldn't figure out how to let someone else know. It was just too much work to try to let anyone know. If they did, things might change. Change wasn't safe. Peter liked being safe, even if he hated it.

To the right of Peter's cubical was Vincent McCain. He seemed to be very much like Peter. He said he hated his job and his life too. Vince had big plans though; big plans that 'someday' he would try. Vince would be the president of the company someday. But for all the talk, in the four months Peter had known him, Vince had never done anything with his plans.

"The time is not right," he would tell Peter. "Next week, you'll see."

Peter took breaks and lunch with Vince. They even, on occasion, drank after work at Sully's Bar. Peter hated Vince.

Clara Winkler was in the cubical to the left of Peter's. Unlike Vince, she was bright and cheery. Clara was very cute, always had a smile on her face and was so happy and bubbly that it would make anyone want to vomit. Each morning for the whole three months she had worked there she would skip down the row of cubicles and say, "Good morning!" to everyone, including Peter. Almost everything about Clara made Peter uncomfortable; the way she smiled, the way she talked, how she dressed and how cute she looked. Worse yet, she loved her job.

Peter despised almost everything about her. In spite of this, she was the only person in the world Peter truly liked. Peter once tried to build up the nerve to ask Clara out on a date, but doing so was too risky. She might say no.

Worse yet, she might stop saying, 'Good morning!' to him each day. Since that was the only thing she ever said to him, the risk was too high for Peter. Besides, just the fact that she would answer him would change things. Peter was comfortable in his discomfort.

"Not another sub-routine problem," Peter groaned as more weak code went by his screen. "Don't these guys know what the hell they are doing up there!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" a sweet voice floated over his cubical. Peter look up. It was Clara peeking over the divider. "Well, what did those nuts upstairs do now?" she asked with a smile.

Peter didn't answer right away. This was the first time in all the time they worked together she said more to him than 'Good morning!'.

"Err...oh, nothing," he said out loud, though inside he screamed to himself, "That's it, you blew it, you idiot!"

"They send us down the simplest things to fix, don't they? Those little buggers!" she said in a most annoyingly perky way. Nevertheless, Peter found it quite charming. Peter smiled back at Clara and was about to try to say something when Vince cut in.

"Yeah, those jerks don't know what they are doing. They're all idiots!" echoed Vince from the other direction.

"Oh great, here comes the cavalry. Damn it, Vince!" thought Peter.

"Oh, I am sure they are all a bunch of nice guys," said Clara.

"A bunch of jerks is more like it," rebutted Vince. "You know what I mean, Pete, right?"

"Oh great, pit me against her," thought Peter. He struggled for the right thing to say, then settled on, "Well I don't know anyone up in the programming department, so who am I to say," he said meekly.

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Just then the phone rang. "Saved by the bell," Peter said to himself. He cleared his throat and answered the phone. "Debugging department. This is Peter Black. Can I help you?"

It was Mr. Rufus — his boss' boss — the president and CEO of the company, and he wanted to see Peter in his office right away.

"The Big Guy wants to see me? What did I do? I didn't even think he knew who I was," Peter mumbled with amazement, then left for the boss' office.

Mr. Rufus' office was neat and sanitary, as was Mr. Rufus. An air of importance surrounded him like the stagnant cloud of the cigars he smoked. He had a way of making a person feel small and insignificant just by being in the same room. Peter always felt small and insignificant, so this wasn't a problem. What was a problem was why he was called into the president's office in the first place. "Why Peter Black?" he wondered as he sat uncomfortably in an oversized leather chair in front of Mr. Rufus' oversized oak desk. Mr. Rufus was busy making some sort of stock deal on the phone

"I said buy at five and sell at thirty-four. You're going to break me if this deal goes through any earlier. Wait until it hits thirty-four or I'll have your head on a platter!" He paused to listen. "It will, I tell you," he said into the phone. "Good!" he finally said, then slammed down the phone receiver so hard that Peter felt sorry that a phone should take such abuse.

"Mr. Black, is it?" Mr. Rufus turned suddenly to Peter.

"Yes," said Peter in a voice so wimpy it was barely audible.

"How long have you been with us?" asked Rufus.

"Twelve years," Peter replied.

"This is it," Peter thought. "I'm getting laid off, or worse, fired. And just when I was about to, possibly, try to, talk to Clara." His mind drifted for the shortest of moments then snapped back to reality. "What am I thinking? What about the car payment, the rent, and the cable modem payment? How will I pay them? Will I need to sell the coffeemaker aunt Vicky gave me for Christmas?" He took a breath. "Calm down," he said to himself. "Things won't be that bad." He looked up at the stern face of his boss. The man seemed to have no mercy. "Yes they will!" his mind confirmed with panic.

Mr. Rufus looked at the now sweating and lightheaded Peter. "I want to ask a favor of you," he said.

"Yes! Of course! Anything you need, sir!" Peter said with relief.

"Your office is next to a Ms. Winkler's, is it not?" asked Mr. Rufus.

"Oh great, now the president of the company wants me to play matchmaker for him, with Clara no less," thought Peter silently as his voice answered, "Yes, it is."

Mr. Rufus stood up and walked to a small bar in the corner of the room and pulled out a crystal bottle with a golden liquid inside. "Some Scotch, Peter?" he asked.

"Er... Yes, that would be nice," answered Peter. Rufus handed him a glass, which Peter sipped slowly. The Scotch had a smooth, nutty taste. "This is much better than the cheap bottle of Scotch aunt Vicky got me for Christmas the year before she got me that darn coffeemaker," Peter thought.

Mr. Rufus sat on the corner of his desk and looked at Peter. "I want you to keep an eye on Ms. Winkler for me. Monitor her. Check what she is doing during the day. What I am saying is, we, the Board of Directors that is, want you to spy on her for us."

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"Spy on Clara? What on earth for?" asked Peter in a most surprised way.

"My boy, we have reason to believe that she is working for a rival company and giving them our secrets," Rufus said in the most dramatic tone he could manage.

"What secrets? Last time I looked we were producing bookkeeping software for fast-food restaurants. There is nothing very secretive about that," said Peter. He heard his own words and wished they had not come out in such a sarcastic tone.

Mr. Rufus stood up, and then sat back down in his big oversized leather chair behind his oversized desk and pointed at Peter. "I suggest you keep close tabs on Ms. Winkler, if you want to have a job to come back to tomorrow!"

"Yes sir. I will sir. Thank you sir," groveled Peter.

"Now, get back to work!" commanded Mr. Rufus.

"Yes sir. Right away, sir." Peter turned to go out the door.

"Black!" yelled Rufus.

"Yes," said Peter. He turned around nervously.

"Give me back my scotch glass!"