

BOB

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I'm Bob.

I sort things.

My psychiatrist says it'll pass, that it's just a phase, but... I just don't see it happening. He's got me on this medication, some kind of antidepressant, sleep agent, wonder drug, placebo... whatever. I don't see how paying \$120 a bottle for this sugar pill is going to help me get some actual sleep. I take them anyway. The quack still insists on me attending our meetings. I think I'll stop going soon.

One evening, my fiancé caught me in a frenzy, sorting all of her footwear in the order of flip-flops to sandals to shoes to boots. She left me the next day, saying that my "manic" sorting was tearing our relationship apart, that it was too stressful for her. Coincidentally, I was fired from my job for sorting all of the office's pens (in the order from violet to red) when I should have been doing useful work. I've sorted my pantry based on food preparation temperature. I have a ton of places I want to travel to, so I've been collecting maps for a long time. They're sorted, as well. The North Pole is first, then Alaska, Colorado, Greenwich, Arizona, Panama, and finally, for some ridiculous reason, Death Valley.

Every night it's the same dream. Well, dream isn't the right word, it's more fitting to use the word nightmare. I know I'm myself. I feel like myself, I talk like myself, I act like myself, I sound like myself, but I don't look like myself. I'm some kind of monster, and I'm surrounded by floating particles. I'm trapped in a cage divided by one wall directly in the center. There's no way out. Some particles are fast, some are slow, but the average speed of the particles between the two sections are the same. Through some unexplainable means, I seem to know the speed and position of every particle. Every time the dream starts, I try to get out of the cage for a while, I fail to do so, and instead get the overwhelming compulsion to sort the particles. So I do. Using a hatch in the dividing wall, I let the faster ones pass through to the side to the left of the partition, and the slower ones I sort to the right side of the partition.

Soon after I finish sorting the particles into their compartments, I suddenly appear in a different setting, somewhat like a courtroom, but a whole lot larger. I'm put on trial for violation of the second law of thermodynamics. The judge, some kind of giant anthropomorphic owl is shouting and waving his wings at me. I'm being accused of decreasing the net entropy of a closed system

with no increase in the entropy of the rest of the universe. I don't have a lawyer, and I don't have a defense since I have no reason for my actions other than my obsession. For my punishment, my forehead is stamped with the puzzling inscription

$$S = k \log W.$$

At that point, I wake up, always rubbing my forehead.

For as long as I can remember, I've been having this nightmare. I think it might be the cause of my sorting obsession, but I try not to think about it. The more I do, the more depressed I become. I had a talk about the dream with my psychiatrist, and he said that I was, in fact, violating the second law of thermodynamics (it seems he was rather interested in physics during his collegiate years). He said that creating a temperature difference between the individual compartments where none had existed before violates the law, and that to do so without violating the law would require some work to be done on the cage. This intrigued me. If I could violate this law, what was keeping me from breaking any other laws?

Since that meeting, I had developed an undying impulse to challenge authority. I went to the beach and tried to throw cigarette butts all over the place, just to create some disorder. I was satisfied for an instant, but I ended up just picking them back up and sorting them based on color. The next day, I stole some spray paint from a hardware store in town, and painted my dream's self image onto the brick wall behind the building. After that, I went down to the local coffee shop and joined the anarchist society. We had an excellent time challenging authority, and I got so excited that I broke a storefront window.

During my next psychiatrist visit, he had some devastating news. The shrink had talked with one of his colleagues who was in the physics department at his university, and they came to the conclusion that I was not actually breaking the second law of thermodynamics. It seems that in processing all of the information of where each particle is and how fast each particle is moving, I'm actually creating much more disorder in the universe than I'm undoing in the act of sorting the particles.

If only he had known how much this bit of knowledge would upset me.

I went back to the storefront window in an attempt to repair it, but I guess the police weren't too pleased with the fact that I broke it in the first place. I ran from the scene and tried to clean the brick wall, but the spray paint wouldn't come off. I started going crazy, realizing that I was destined to only temporarily sort things. Nothing would ever stay the same. I came upon the realization that the universe would eventually end in a dramatic heat death. I figured that nothing I could ever do would matter at all. What was the point of actually doing anything?

Eventually, I ended up returning to the hardware store and buying a length of rope. I could hear people talking about me. "What's he going to do with that rope? Is he going to make some intricate sorting machine?" I decided that I would hang myself that night from an apple tree in my backyard.

I've been told that your life is supposed to flash before your eyes when you die. The only thing that flashed before mine was an unsorted pantry.