

Chapter 11

Room C305

Wednesday February 28th

8:43 AM

Nothing like being midway through a semester and finding very little excitement in learning the next complicated topic of a complicated course. The classroom was filled with furious scribbling, mixed with dazed thoughts, as Dr. Drayfus tries to keep up with us.

“Is everybody following along? Good, now the next idea can be confusing at first, but it’s actually quite simple. Here we have... moving average, rolling average, and running average. All the same, essentially. Now, the way this functions is basically like a boxcar; you add on information that helps benefit the entire structure. Now, a moving average is a calculation for analyzing data points, creating a series of averages of different selections of the full data set. This is important when you research to use to better help any fluctuations, it allows you to pinpoint the problem, without having to redo or change anything else due to the unweighted mean. It can be adjusted. Now take note of this next formula for the simple moving average, because this is what mathematicians, engineers, and economists will use to be able to better calculate. Look at this graph, representative of a stock. We will take the p_1 , p_2 , and p_N , and will use these to symbolize the closing prices in a stock. Now, some people shout out numbers.”

“20!”, “9!”, “72!”

“Good! Good! Now because 72 is a reasonable end price we are going to use it for these p points. And then use 20 and 9 for actual k data points in the mean squaring SMAk. So you

have 72 minus 20 plus 1 plus 72 minus 9 plus 1 plus 72 divided by k or the mean of k data points. And with this, we can conclude that it is roughly 13.034! Now, next we have to apply it to figure out the cumulative moving average...”

I really did love Dr. Drayfus' teaching sometimes, but his class will forever scar me for different reasons. Not because the mathematics was tricky, and Dr. Drayfus was good at keeping things engaging, but sitting in the fog of my memories and the literal musk of my former friend, my mind would clearly never let go of the past.

This semester truly went differently than I thought it would. Doing things I never thought I would like, meanwhile experiencing things I never dreamed of being apart of. As I sit in my usual 8:30 AM lab, it has become clear to me that despite having broken up my bond with Parker. I glance up from my note-taking as Dr. Drayfus describes more definitions, peaking through the corner of my eyes at Parker.

Parker had quit texting me starting Monday, though I was not really sure why. But I guess it was nice he didn't seem to be after me anymore. At least, it was nice on my end. But Parker definitely still seemed to be struggling quite a bit. Parker, from the looks of it, had reverted to his old self, except for one basic change. He always looks sad. Hunched back, messy fur, unfocused eyes. Part of me was guilty for just ignoring him, but also Parker knew what he had coming. He clearly was smart enough to leave me alone from the basic signs that I just didn't care for him and his behavior.

Luckily, I had started hanging out with my AXK buddies. I thought they were a weird group of people at first, but honestly, I was looking forward to learning more about them. The only problem is that I am an introvert to the extent of having a problem of lending myself to people. I was supposed to be finding time to hang out with the people in my group, but I am just

so huddled in and embarrassed about making myself look like a fool that I haven't gotten anyone to hang out with. I had all their numbers. Yet procrastination was a bitch. And it was already Wednesday! Fuck! Half the week was gone. Man, this semester really was going too quick, wasn't it?

Buzzzzzz. Buzzzz...

My brain reattaches from my momentary mental drift off as I return to taking notes, jotting them down quickly to avoid losing any of the lecture.

Buzzzzzz. Buzzzz...

I adjust my legs to avoid the buzzing feeling in my jeans from my phone in my pocket. My pants accentuating the phone's buzzing, its jittery vibrations massaging my thigh and crotch. Ugggh... phone companies and their unintentional shitty designs.

I quickly finish the last of the new formula I'm writing before grabbing my phone as yet another: *Buzzzzzz. Buzzzz...*

I open my messages to see three texts from... Jonathon!

They read:

"Hey this is jonathan!"

"Are you the elf guy or whatever?"

"If so, do you wanna hang tomorrow afternoon, you know, for the frat requirement?"

My eyes widen with glee. It's almost as if Jonathon read my mind.

I quickly type back, "Oh hey!!! Yeah, I'm the elf guy lol. And I'm down for tomorrow afternoon. Whaddaya thinking of doin?"

I stare at the phone, waiting for a response. I was not used to be such a relaxed texter, but I wanted to try and relate to someone relaxed as Jonathon. Something about that laid back nature was something I wished to have too, instead of being so prim and proper.

Three dots pop up and I sit up in my chair taking a glance at the lecture to make sure I wasn't missing any new slides and information. I look back at my phone to find the three dots have vanished and then a new response pop up.

“idk”

My heart sank at that. How assuring. I try to provoke an idea from the fox, not knowing many good ideas since most of my days involve studies. And knowing Jonathon, he would think I am nuts to suggest anything school related.

“What are you thinking?” I texted.

I rack my brain. What would someone like Jonathon like? He seemed to be sort of a sneaky, but fun person. Most likely competitive. I thought I should probably go for something more complex, out of the ordinary, but great to still have a decent time. And that's when an idea floods my brain as I immediately type it in and hit send.

“Arcade?”

Soon a response pings up, *“Not bad. Meet me at The Gaming Ghost tomorrow at 5 pm. See ya then!”*

I smile and nod happily to see that I actually for once, had plans other than studying. I check the location to find it right outside campus, and I save the date in my phone calendar. My smile widens as I imagine all the fun tomorrow would bring. Spending the evening with someone new, and I hoped that I would make enough of a good impression that Jonathon would like me.

But even if he doesn't, I was already much more confident from just the thought of finally stepping out of my comfort zone.

Fuck yeah! That felt really good to be able to do. I smile at myself, amused at how much my mind has defaulted to swearing nowadays, most likely Matthew's influence. But I was fine with it. At least he is someone I know has good intentions. He was someone I could trust. And therefore, I could also trust myself.

32 hours and 15 minutes later

Thursday February 29th

The Gaming Ghost Arcade

4:58 PM

I am walking up to the entrance to the Gaming Ghost. The cool night breeze bristles my already pristine, sensitive skin. I shiver a bit, winter was no joke. I look at the neon sign with what seems to have the letters surrounded by the infamous Pac-Man ghosts, hence the name. I look down to see that under the entrance are benches to which a fox tail is facing me, twitching in the breeze. Jonathon.

I clear my throat, "Jonathon?" I ask just in case there is some other fox guy also in the same location and bench as my supposed AXK group member.

Sure enough he turns around and waves, before taking out ear buds from his large fox ears, I wonder quickly to myself what ears buds he has to make that seem comfortable, but I shrug as he stands and sets his hands in his pocket.

"Can we get inside here? My ass is gonna swell and explode in this cold."

"You have fur. Doesn't that make it easier."

“Doesn’t make it any easier dipshit! And I’m not an entire fucking animal Josiah, I am part human.”

“Well, all fox features could’ve fooled me.”

“Yeah well they shouldn’t, cause you have no idea how much I’m freezing right now.”

I shrug and smirk to my new dramatic fox friend, “Well, I bet my guess wouldn’t be too far off, given I’m not necessarily enjoying the weather either.”

He frowns, “Great. Well, when you are done acting so fucking coy, can you like get inside? I wasn’t really kidding about my ass.”

I snicker as I rush to the door. “Oh sorry, how thoughtless of me. Let’s get inside then.” I open the door before smirking again, “Ladies first.”

He rolls his eyes as he walks by, “Shut up. I ain’t no lady.”

I walk in behind him, his tail brushing against me as his fur puffs up to reach out for any heat possible, “Could’ve fooled me from your whining.”

“Yeah, yeah. Cheap talk, mister.” Jonathon rolls his eyes, “Anyways, we are in. What do you want to do? I’m not a big arcade person, so I’ll let you lead the way.”

“Well, if I’m honest, I’m not really an arcade person either. But we can look around.”

I walk up to the counter to a man running the desk, I notice his name tag reads: *Caleb*. He smiles as he asks, “Welcome to the Gaming Ghost! Which pack are you looking to buy?”

“Uhhh... let’s see...” I look down at the sign on the desk to see the different options.

Pinky Play - \$15 for 30 minutes. Blinky Play - \$30 for 60 minutes. Inky Play - \$45 for 75 minutes. And Clyde Play - \$100 for 120 minutes.

I look at Jonathon, who is staring at the desk too, before his green eyes flick to look at me, probably curious about my staring as I ask, “What option do you want, Jonathon?”

He looks back at the options, “HMMMM... uhh maybe Blinky? I don’t really care, though. Up to you, man.”

I shrug, “I like the Blinky one too.” Content with the choice, as it gave us decent time in the arcade while also time to do stuff afterwards if we wanted.

I turn and announce our pick to Caleb before he nods and brings it up on his device before pointing to a credit card scanner. I fidget with my pocket to grab my wallet before I see an arm reach past me and tap a card to the scanner, as I hear Jonathon announce, “I’ll pay. I offered so, it’s on me.”

“Oh. Thanks! You didn’t need to!” I say flabbergasted.

Jonathon frowns, “What are you the action police? It’s not like we are on a date, so it is no big deal. Plus, you’re slow.”

I chuckle in response, the abrasive nature of Jonathon never quits amusing me, “Thanks? I guess?”

“Whatever,” I simply respond.

Caleb hands us a card with the Blinky ghost on it as he invites us into the main arcade, explaining, “Your time starts once you play your first game. You have unlimited tokens until your hour finishes up. Have fun gaming!”

“Thank you!” I nod and grab the card before walking into the arcade area, having to adjust my eyes to the dark room and neon lights everywhere. But I was surprised by just how many classic arcade games there were. 8-bit games, air hockey, claw machines, basketball and bowling games, ticket prize games, hammer game.

I stare at everything as I comment. “Wow... there’s a lot! Well, what do you want to do?” Turning to Jonathon, who is also looking around, his fox eyes shining with the lights of the arcade.

“I don’t fucking care. Just pick something.”

I sigh at the lack of excitement, frowning as I ask, “You alright? I know you are pretty tough, but you seem off. We don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

He looks at me and frowns as well, “What? What the hell does that mean? We are here aren’t we? So let’s do stuff! I already paid, so let’s not waste money okay? How about the bowling thing?”

I look as he points to an open machine and I smile and nod, “Fine by me.”

I go and scan my card before the game lights up and audibly instructs us to grab our balls and go. Jonathon and I grab and start rolling balls in. I got some lucky first shots, but Jonathon was a beast when it came to precision, getting consecutive 4000, 5000, and 10000 scores. It’s no surprise that as we bowl our ten balls, my score compared to his was not impressive, 27000 to 41000.

I look at him defeated as he puts his paws around his mouth and sings his triumph in my face, “Suck iiiiiiit.”

I laugh at him and joke, “Nice singing.”

“Yeah, nice bowling. Oh wait, you lost! Better luck next time!” He jokes back.

If there was one thing you could depend on Jonathon for, it was firing you up. I scan my card again, ready to beat that smug fox, “I guess next time has arrived.”

We play again, and I did a lot better, but as I look at the scoreboard it reads, 36500 to 38500.

“Damn. So close!” I say excitedly.

Jonathon laughs, a genuine fun laugh full of fox chitters, as he says “Sucker!”

While, I was never gonna stop Jonathon’s cockiness, I didn’t want to, this was becoming very fun very quickly.

I then chuckle, before grinning widely as I look around at games, “Alright, time to humble the fox.”

Jonathon only scoffed, “Bud, I am not humble, I would think you could understand that by now.”

“Yeah. But, I know everyone can be humbled somehow. Air hockey. Now.” I demand as I walk over to an open-air hockey machine. Jonathon following right behind.

“You ready?” I ask, looking at him.

Before receiving an unenthusiastic look from Jonathon as he states, “Born ready, pal.”

We each go to opposite ends and ready ourselves. As I scan the card, a disc flops out on my side. I grab it and prepare to serve, before hitting it in Jonathon’s direction, only for him to hit right back in a straight shot to my goal, as I shriek. “Wait! What? No!”

Jonathan chuckles as he smears his victory in my face, “Better step up! Don’t want to be a loser the whole night now.”

I growl a bit as I grab the puck and ready it again. We play a few rounds, each of us getting five lives each, well, until Jonathon ripped one away from me. However, I eventually catch up by stealing three of his lives in a row.

“Alright, beginner gloves are coming off. You asked for this.” Jonathon says in an obvious attempt to try and make me nervous.

But, my cockiness sure didn't help as Jonathon made an entire comeback stealing three lives from me, in the span of what felt like a minute. I now needed to be careful to avoid losing my last life. I grab the puck and set it up, before hitting it at Jonathon who hits it back, and an intense brow-sweating match goes off, volleying back and forth as I finally get a clear shot and wind up and whack the puck and it goes flying towards Jonathon, but who was just a hair too slow to try and stop it.

I shoot my arms up in victory and chuckle, "Yeeeeehhehehes! Woo! That was good."

Jonathon playfully gives slow claps to me, "I admit. That was well done." He smile and grabs the puck on his side before setting it down, signaling me back into the game.

I smile giddily as we begin another good volley, but not quite as heated. Jonathon knocks the puck into a wall on his side, ricocheting back at my side before I knock at it, sending it towards Jonathon's goal, but nearly missing as it hits the wall on Jonathon's side hard and comes barreling back past my mallet into my goal, as I toss my mallet away in defeat.

Meanwhile, Jonathon laughs as he walks over and slaps my back, "Good game, man! Nice one! But looks like luck is in my favor today! What would you like your butt kicked at now?"

I think and look around before making my way to a shooting game with targets and water guns, which he joins in with. We don't play it for long, as both of us won with ease, dispensing a nice stash of tickets which we pocket for later.

Next, I head to the basketball machine and look at him, and he nods. I scan my card as we each take a side, and the basketballs are released as the timer starts. We each start grabbing balls and shooting them. I hear consistent buckets being made from Jonathon who is smiling widely as I attempt, but am rather poor with my shooting ability. Eventually, the timer counts down and

buzzes at the end of the game. As I toss the rest of my balls up to the net above. My side's score with 54 against Jonathon's score of 92.

My eyes widen at that difference, "Wow, that was really bad for me."

Jonathon smiles and shrugs, "It's okay, man. Basketball doesn't work for everyone. Anyways, what's next? Claw machine?"

"Actually, can I try again?" I say, dissatisfied with such a poor performance. "I just want to do it solo and work on my shooting skills."

Jonathon nods, "Okay, I'll watch from this side." He moved off a bit and watched as I scanned my card and the basketballs released towards me. And I start my pursuit again.

I start off a lot better, making more baskets, but as the timer reaches the last 20 seconds, I panic. So I quickly grab a ball, as the timer quickly dissipates down to the 10 second mark, the anxiety causing me to not really pay attention to my aim as I just shoot in a last second attempt. Missing the net completely as it hits the backboard, bounces down heavily on the machine's ground, and bounces straight at Jonathan's head as it nails him in the forehead with a *THUNK*, sending him falling back with a loud "YOWW!"

He grabs his head as my face flushes with guilt, and my heart pounds. Grabbing the stray ball and throwing it back in before the timer ends. Before I turn and rush to Jonathon clutching his head, on the ground.

"Oh fuck! I'm so sorry, Jonathon! Are you okay?"

He waves me off, "It's fine, Josiah! Just hit a little hard. I know you didn't mean it."

I reach to grab his arm and help him up, as he grumbles. I apologize again. "That was crazy! I'm sorry. I panicked. I don't know why!"

Jonathon peeks at me with one eye open with an irritated expression, “Dude! I said it’s fine! Geez, I already have a headache from the ball, don’t make it worse.”

I clamp my mouth shut as I help him stand in case he falls over. Watching as he rubs his head, his ears drooped, making him look very vulnerable, much to his discomfort.

He grumbles audibly, but most likely to himself, “Grr... might be a concussion. But, I should be fine.” He shuts his eyes as the lights of the arcade seem to be messing with him.

“We can stop. Do you need a doctor? First aid?”

“No no, Josiah. I’m fine. Really.” He squints at his watch and pats my arm, “We still got 20 minutes on our card, you keep playing!”

“You sure?”

“Yes...” The fox growled, “Man, do I need a megaphone? Geez. Yes. I’m sure. Keep playing.”

I chuckle, “At least your wit is still intact.”

“Yeah, no thanks to you,” he says, looking at me, pain mixed with humor in his eyes.

I nod and help him over to the claw machine, “Here, you recommended the claw machine, I’ll get you something to make up for the basketball.”

“Better be gold or something.”

I nod while smiling, as I grab my card and scan it. I could see that the claw machine seemed to be filled with squishmallows, which all looked very comfy, no lie. I grab the joystick for the claw machine and aim it around, while most strategy games were too much for me, claw machines were my kind of jam.

I control the claw and aim it over a dragon plush, something I think Jonathon might be into having, so I hit the button to have it go down and it seemingly grabs it, to which I smile. But

then, as it lifts back up it misses and grabs on the ear of a panda squishmallow, it wiggles as it is carried over and dropped in the hole. I shrug at it, knowing it would have to do.

I grab it from the box and hold it out for Jonathon, who was still rubbing his head as he looked up at it and then at me, before grabbing it. “Thanks! It’s perfect!” He grabs and nuzzles his head against it for comfort. I could only imagine how much it must be throbbing.

Meanwhile, I was shocked at the fact that he actually liked it, figuring he’d have a snide sassy comment to make at it. I smile before taking him with me to do some other games.

We went in a photo booth. We went to a hammer machine, which he decided to try and did really well. Before we made our way to some of the big wheel machines, and did some cranks there. I was lucky to hit a couple of jackpots while Jonathon was not getting as much, due to his lack of force with the lever, due to his head. He seemed to slowly be able to bear it more, but it didn’t change the fact that he was still a bit sensitive.

Eventually, we reached our time limit with a big set of tickets that we brought to the gift shop to transfer. Caleb was there when we arrived and told us that we cashed in about 645 tickets. We were fairly happy with this and got a couple of candies using the tickets and left the arcade to see a steady snowfall, to which both of us shivered a bit. I looked at my watch to see it was now nearly 7 pm. My eyes widen realizing we had lots of time left of the night.

So I turn to him to say, “Look. I still feel like I need to do more to make up for hitting you in the head. Maybe we can do something you want now! I picked arcade, so let’s do something you want to do.”

At first Jonathon seemed to show heavy disinterest in doing anything, as the cold made him shudder and totally miserable. When suddenly his expression changes. I see him to turn to me, before smiling, “Come to my car. I know just what to do.”

