

The little boy hadn't known anything other than his room: four white walls, smooth except for the small hatch that opened to give and take food and other things, and except for the gigantic door that has never been opened. The boy couldn't remember any human contact in all thirteen years of his life. All of his lessons were given through a TV screen on the wall, teaching him all of the things he would need to know before he joined society when he turned eighteen. The screen taught him about math, history, and manners, and the screen explained that he wouldn't be allowed to have any human contact until he was grown. The screen never explained why, and the boy never questioned it.

The boy was sitting on his bed, reading a book that the hatch had given him, when something entirely new happened: the gigantic door opened. It opened just a bit, and the boy didn't see what was on the other side of it, but, through the opening, a girl slipped through. She was about the boy's age. She was very pretty, with dark, curly, wild hair and green eyes and brown skin. She gracefully closed the door behind her and sat down next to the boy.

"Hello," she said.

The boy didn't know what to say, so he stayed quiet.

"My name's Abigail. The adults sent me to be your friend. What's your name?"

The boy shrugged. "I don't know."

"Well, that's peculiar." She thought for a moment, looking straight ahead at the door. The boy watched her, taking in her three dimensional presence. He had never been in the same room as another person, much less had one sitting inches away. She smelled nice. The boy didn't know what the smell was called, but it reminded him of the little cakes that the hatch would sometimes give him. He didn't know that people had smells.

“Do you want a name?” the girl looked at him intensely. She looked right into him. The screen had never told the boy that someone could look at you so thoughtfully, kindly, and strongly, but Abigail looked at the boy in all of these ways.

The boy nodded. “How about Luke?” the girl asked. The boy, now Luke, nodded again.

Abigail seemed pleased with herself. She gently kicked her legs and looked around the room. She took everything in, noticed every detail. Luke had a feeling that Abigail saw more in the two minutes that she spent looking than he had seen in thirteen years.

Abigail swung her legs and hopped off the bed. She started walking around the edge of the room, tracing her finger on the walls. Sometimes she would stop and look closely at the texture of the wall, then continue on again. Luke watched her, silent, but wanting her to say more. He liked the sound of her voice. He knew that she would talk more if he asked her a question, but he didn't know what to ask.

She spoke again anyway, still walking along the edge of the room. “Do you want to hear a story?”

She didn't look up at him, so he said, “Yes, please,” using his manners, like the screen taught him.

Abigail took a few more steps, then began, “There was once a great painter. One day, she painted a big, beautiful painting of a man sitting in a chair. The painting had an ornate, gold frame, carved with lions and roses.” The boy did not know what lions or roses were, but he didn't want to interrupt to ask.

“The man in the painting was sitting in a comfy chair, and he was holding a teacup. Beside the chair was a statue of a woman, who was looking at the man in the chair, and the man was looking at her. Even though they were both only paint, they somehow seemed alive.”

“Why were they looking at each other?” Luke asked. He had many other questions, but he knew he could ask them later.

“Because they were best friends,” Abigail said simply. After a moment, she continued. “They were best, best friends, and then they fell in love. Even though they were best friends, though, they didn’t meet until the woman was a ghost, which is why she’s a statue. She is stuck in the universe, but she still has her best friend.”

There was a comfortable silence between the two. Then they continued talking. They asked and answered each other’s questions. When the light turned off automatically, Luke went to bed and Abigail slipped out the door. Luke felt very lonely that night, but he brightened when Abigail returned the next morning after his breakfast. She left every night, and returned every morning for days, then weeks, then months, and then years. Abigail was the only human that Luke knew during those years, and they became best friends. Eventually, they fell in love. They grew into adulthood together, over five years, and they knew each other deeply. They had no secrets except for one: Abigail would never tell Luke where she went at night. Luke didn’t mind, and they were best friends until Luke’s eighteenth birthday.

He didn’t know that it was his birthday until, when the door opened, a stern looking woman came in instead of Abigail. She explained to him that it was time for him to join society. Luke walked out the door for the first time, expecting to find Abigail outside, but she was nowhere to be seen. On the wall beside his door, however, was a painting with a gold frame. The

painting was of a man in a chair and a statue looking at each other lovingly. Luke stepped closer, and he saw that the man looked just like him, and the statue looked exactly like Abigail did when he saw her yesterday. The plaque below the painting read: "Best Friends" and said that the painting was painted eighteen years ago.