

A Test of Physics and Loneliness by Sofia Staley

I have never known what love feels like. Living in Downtown Denver, there are people everywhere, but no one bothers to care. They only see the concrete in front of their feet and the coffee in their hand. Don't get me wrong, the city crowds are wonderful, but how are there so many people and I am still alone?

I walk faster, heading for the small coffee shop on 22nd St. I have finals; I didn't have time for existential crisis, only caffeine and textbooks.

Just yesterday, Professor Moors had pulled me aside to inform me that if I failed tonight's Physics exam, I would be forced to withdraw from the class since I had flunked the rest of the course.

I thanked her, and walked to the bathroom. I cried, hitting the stall door. Dad said this would happen. He told me I wasn't meant for university. He had said people like us could be mechanics, waitresses, and baristas. I couldn't be an author, lawyer, or an artist. He said he didn't want me to have false hope. He just didn't want to lose his cook, laundress, and housekeeper.

For once in my life, I just wanted someone to tell me I could do it.

I wiped the tears away, checked my face, scrubbing fiercely at my cheek freckle. Ever since I was little, I would scrub my cheek freckle when I was upset. It reminded me of my mom, who would pinch it when I was little. Not that it meant much, since she left a month after I turned three.

Enough self-pity. I need coffee and to study for the test that very well could doom my education.

Walking into Kaffi's, I hear the familiar jingle of the door and find my way to the "leather" booth in the corner. The only other person is Miguel, the barista. Cinnamon is scattered across the cash register, and the booth is covered in coffee stains. It makes me feel at home. I set my books down, calling to Miguel, "Black coffee, no cream or sugar, please." I mean business.

He just nods and starts working on my drink. I sit down and dive into the Physics textbook. It's all hopeless. It's all nonsense. What was I going to use this for anyway? I try to

concentrate on the formula,
$$X_c = \frac{1}{2\pi f c}$$

It all swims together.

"Excuse me," Miguel calls. I turn quickly, my arm flailed out to grab my coffee. Instead, I knock the cup out of Miguel's hand.

"Oh my gosh! I am so sorry!" Miguel just sighs and sulks back to the counter. I turn back to my work, embarrassed.

A few minutes later, he comes back with another coffee.

Bitter. Good.

"What are you working on?" Miguel slides into the bench, sitting next to me. Was he being nice to me so that I payed for two coffees?

"Excuse me? Oh, Physics. I'm studying for my final in a few hours."

He pauses. "Can I help? I love Physics Ms... I just realized in the past year you've come to the shop, I have never asked your name."

"Lizzy, Lizzy McAlister." I want to say no to this frustratingly handsome, talkative barista. Truth was, he might save my failing grade.

"Fine, but my coffee's free."

"Deal," he says.

Hours pass. We hunch over my scribbly notes. We only stop for scones and more coffee when he closes shop.

I stare out the shop window to the city. The sun had slipped behind the clouds a long time ago, but Downtown Denver's lights still lit up the sky. The illuminated mountain range reminds me of the hikes Lucas, my ex-boyfriend, would take me on. I smile sourly, remembering the times I would gush about him to Patricia and she would shake her head and tell me he would let me down, and hold me back.

I watch Miguel wipe down the counters, singing quietly.

I glance at my watch— it was almost 12 a.m. I had something I had to do tonight, didn't I?

Wait... No!

"Miguel, it's been great but it's all for nothing! I missed the test!"

"Really?" He looks at the clock on the wall, and sees the time.

"Oh." He looks at me sheepishly. "I'm sorry I kept you. It's my fault, so maybe we can talk to your professor?" She would never let me retake it. I was going to have to withdraw. Dad was right.

"Well, we could... um, how about we have another coffee while we think about what to do?"

"Only if you throw in another scone."

He throws a scone at me; I laugh in the face of pure doom. As we sit back down to think about how I won't fail college, I think hopefully Miguel and I can do this together.

Maybe I wouldn't fail Physics.

Maybe I could prove my dad, Lucas, and everyone who said I wouldn't make it wrong.

Maybe Miguel and I could become friends, or something special. I blush at the thought. Miguel stares at me and smirks, as if he can read my thoughts. I turn redder, and shove him playfully. He shoves back, his hand lingering on my arm. It's his turn to blush. We smile nervously, and look back down at the textbook and crumpled notes.

I think, maybe just maybe, I'm not so alone.

Physics and Loneliness aren't so different. The equations are complicated and the answers aren't easy. People rarely find the correct answer, or the one they want. Looking at the textbook and Miguel, I smile.

Maybe, I just found the answer for both.