

# Maxwell's Demon

**Evan Thomas Way**

I hope somebody would find me if I got lost, he thought.

Arty Sheppard stood at a street corner, staring at a black and white, photocopied picture of a young girl of about nineteen that was taped to a lamp post. Her name was Brianna. She was lost. At least that is what the piece of paper said, and there was no overwhelming evidence to prove the information false. Not yet, at least.

Not yet. What if she was kidnapped? God help her. What if she didn't get lost at all? What if someone made sure she was never found. What if someone made sure she was lost forever?

Arty shivered at the mere idea. The pixilated, low-res copy of Brianna James' face was gray and lifeless. The eyes were flat, the pupils only little squares in square iris', inside sharp cornered oblongs. This was not a person. This was a shadow.

Maybe this is how memories look to computers. If computers could see the

memories that I have, would the sun look like a massive square block of fire in the sky – would it see pixels in the moon? Would the stars simply appear to be blinking cursors on a blank screen?

Grass is green = 10010100010

Grass is green and damp =  
10010100010 + 0010010

Grass turns brown and brittle =  
100101011 + 011011101

Arty turned over equations of zeros and ones, sentences and paragraphs of binary code, matrix upon matrix. Fibonacci numbers and Nested Loops. He considered Ackermanns Function – a function of parameters whose values grow so fast that eventually all mathematical notation breaks down. In essence, an equation that can only live continually in the mind. Even then, it cannot be fully grasped or completed. He wondered if computers, speaking only in these languages of logical functions and set parameters, could

understand something as intrinsically complex as even the simplest particle in the universe. Could it even understand the genetic structure of Cyanobacteria, the simplest of all life forms on the planet? Could it understand the travel of light through space? Could it understand the smell of dried lavender, or the sound of rain upon a rooftop? Could it understand experience?

A computer could never find this poor girl. It could not understand the meaning of lost, however many definitions of the word it could give you. It wouldn't understand the motivation behind her disappearance – a computer couldn't grasp the mind of the sick pervert who stole this young girl away from her family and friends, to do who knows what.

Arty scratched his head, and sighed. He looked away. The signal across the street was still a red hand, holding firm, commanding him to stay where he was. The image was created by a bunch of small red light bulbs, organized to form the shape of a hand. It was pixilated and unrealistic – much like the photo of the lost girl.

And yet here I am, standing still only because the engineered, computerized hand is telling me to. It's the only thing keeping me from crossing the street whenever I choose, and I don't question it for a second.

The mid-day traffic was sparse.

There seemed to be the sound of cars hanging in the air, more than actual cars present at the moment. The sounds of their departure and arrival clung to the dust particles in the air that the vehicles themselves created.

It was June 22nd. A Tuesday. 1:37 PM.

I'm not going back to work. I can't. Not now, not after seeing this photo. Not after seeing that face. Poor girl. Poor poor girl.

And then: Poor me. Poor poor me. I'm not going back to work. Not now. Maybe not ever. I can't ever seem to get things done there. I can't ever seem to think straight.

Arty tugged on the neck of his sky blue button-up shirt, loosening the knot of the black and white striped tie, giving his neck room to breathe. He ran his hand through his thinning, brownish gray hair, just then realizing what he looked like. He seemed to forget so often. He felt the softened wrinkles around his mouth, the furrowed lines in his forehead. He felt his sagging chin.

I'm so old. Arty bent down onto one knee and began to untie the laces of his brown leather work shoes. First the right. Then the left. Once both shoes were off, he tied their laces together in a tight knot that he learned in the boy scouts when he was quite young. He couldn't believe he remembered how to tie it at all. He slowly stood up

again, and could feel his joints tighten and creak, his back straighten, one vertebrae at a time, each one more painstakingly evident to him than it ever had been before. When, finally, he stood erect, he swiftly swung his shoes (now tied together by the laces) over his head and tossed them deftly into the air. They cascaded through the sky like a bird tumbling acrobatically – left shoe over right shoe, right over left. As they flew, Arty could have sworn that the connected shoes took the form of a number 3. A perfectly symmetrical shape, representing a human idea. The shape held, froze, just long enough for Arty to witness the miracle, only to break again, landing evenly draped across each side of a telephone wire, and hanging there, motionless once again.

Arty gasped, held the breath long, then slowly released it. He sighed and shivered, as if God had just revealed the deepest of truths to him and him only. Arty looked to the sky, and stared deep into the blue void. For a moment, just a moment, he could swear he saw the lines of a grid rise from nothing and begin to appear, spread across space itself.

I see numbers reflected in life – shapes representing ideas, and ideas created to explain the shapes, and shapes created once again to represent the new ideas – I see this pattern over and over again, like a mathematical

equation -- 3.141592653589793238  
462643383279502884197169399375  
– There must be a pattern, even given  
unt0 things seemingly dev0id of  
pattern a1t0gether -- I d0 n0t believe  
in existence Outside Of pattern and  
repetiti0n.

Arty's thoughts began to drift into a spiral, falling down through his being, circling around coherency, void of origin or conclusion. He began to walk. He walked away from the telephone pole, from his shoes, from the poster advertising the tragic loss of a young woman. He stumbled – his legs began to feel heavy and mechanical. Unnatural. His black socks became covered in dirt and leaves and debris. Rocks stabbed into his feet as he made his way down the street, wandering, his physical body very closely representing the patterns of his disjointed thoughts.

It was night. Arty lay on a park bench, surrounded on all sides by a sparse ring of trees, and then a small patch of garden in which various flowers grew, each beautiful and unique, each an individually beautiful within the parameters of its species. Arty lay, face towards the sky, a single star reflecting in his eye – it looked as if there was someone lost in the dark forever inside of his eye, and the light of the star was the light of their lantern, searching for an exit or some sign of life.

Arty drew lines between the stars,

## *Maxwell's Demon*

forming shapes – the hands of a child reaching for their mothers comforting arms. A teardrop. A snowflake. The face of a young girl – was it that poor girl from earlier? Was it that poor Brianna, the lost girl, the disappeared girl, the stolen girl? Was she in the stars now? No one would find her there, of course! No one would ever dream to look in the stars, but that's where she is. I see her there, looking out, calling for somebody to see her, to notice her, to understand the magic that she has found.

A siren howled in the distance, signaling the moral failure of another person. Perhaps it was a just a drunk old man. Yet perhaps, perhaps it was a successful business man, grown so strung out and tired of his life that he couldn't take it any more. Maybe he robbed a 24-hour market. Maybe he ended someone's life. Maybe he hadn't really done anything at all. Maybe the cops were just bored that night.

Arty was crying. He felt hopeless, looking into the stars that were at once both a constellation and the melancholy face of a girl – a child, even! Was her disappearance just the part of a pattern? If there is no existence outside of repetition, then why should anyone bother doing anything? Arty was sick to his stomach. The stars rattled off the Fibonacci sequence, where the first two numbers of the pattern add together to equal the third, the second and third

added together equal the fourth, and so on and so on, forever. Is this life just a piece of that pattern, or is that pattern just a reflection of life? Perhaps both are true – for our small minds can't understand the duality of this universe we live in. Perhaps both are true, yes. The world can be equal parts logic and emotion, equal parts fact and opinion, truth and relativity. There must be equilibrium, otherwise all things fail. Just like Maxwell's Demon – without equilibrium, eventually one side will overtake the other in all ways, and all things will become either one or the other. Either searing heat or freezing cold. Either eternal truth or endless opinion. The body must have equality between thoughts and feelings, the heart and brain must work equally and vigilantly, forever and ever, otherwise the scales will tip, and we'll all keel over the edge.

As the sun rose, the stars began to fade, and so the face in the stars faded as well. Arty wiped the tears from his eyes, choked down a final sob. He held his hand out, upraised towards the sky, a final farewell to a girl he never knew. His eyes were closed tight, because he could not stand to see the girl disappear again.

God, Arty thought. I sure hope somebody will find me when I get lost. I sure hope so.

So begins my poem / And my cause to versify / My need to clearly show 'em / That I surely would not lie