

## Mistakes Were Made: Teela Davis

I made a mistake,

Dan reread the words he'd typed so far, pausing and sitting back, unsure how to proceed. He had indeed made a mistake, to put it lightly. Lucky for him, he realized it almost immediately, unlucky for him, the revelation didn't much matter. He huffed at that thought.

That's what got him into this mess in the first place, matter.

Well, maybe not matter specifically, but the idea of it. The idea of things being made up of other even smaller things, banging around in constant discord yet harmoniously sticking together all the same... particles, it was all about the particles!

Dan picked up his pen and made a note on the Post-it next to his computer, the one the size of his hand, and scribbled out: particles, dancers, samba-correlation? He frowned at the note, crossing off the flagrant nonsense and rewrote something more coherent and competent.

particles  
dancers  
~~samba~~-correlation?  
cha-cha

Yes, that was it, much more understandable. If he was losing his mind, he needed to make sure what he left behind made sense. Otherwise, how would anyone realize the mistake? Detour done, Dan turned back to the large monitor in front of him, kneeling up on the chair to make his eyes level with it.

I made a mistake, and all hope is lost.

Dan pursed his lips. Was that a bit too melodramatic? Was he over-sensationalizing the facts of the case? Dan had never considered himself prone to histrionic fits, but then again, he'd never been in a situation like this before. He'd never really questioned his place in the world either, accepting he was but one fleck of particle-made matter floating amongst other such organisms on the surface of a questionably inhabitable planet.

Now he realized just how small that felt. Still, he decided, no need to be hammy. He deleted the newest addition.

I made a mistake, and as such, I will not be in tomorrow.

There, he sat back and thought, that's better. He did feel a bit out of sorts for not giving the typical two weeks of time beforehand, but it was a necessary evil. He wasn't sure he would be in tomorrow, or simply be tomorrow at this rate, so he figured something was better than nothing.

Yes, better something than nothing.

Although, his hands hovered over the two feet of keyboard, maybe that was a flawed ideology to have in hindsight. Particles hadn't just gotten Dan here, now kneeling on a stack of books set atop the cushioning of his ergonomic chair, canceling out the comfortable human-engineered efficiency; the drive for results also had a keen hand in the matter!

Better something than nothing!

It was his boss' motto, maybe even his daily affirmation. That would explain quite a bit, actually. Dan shook his head. This wasn't the time for introspection; it was the time for facts! Which, now that he looked over what he'd typed so far, it wasn't quite right, was it? He hit the backspace and replaced the offending line with something better suited.

Mistakes were made, and as such, I will not be in tomorrow.

Yes, that was more correct, less subjective. Something is better than nothing, but something worth doing is worth doing properly and shouldn't be rushed, an idea Dan has remembered a little too late.

Engineering and harnessing the particles shouldn't have been so hard, it was matter right? Food matter, but still. Dan knew matter, he'd studied it for years, it was his bread and butter. So he'd gone ahead on the hypotheticals, he'd done the testing. Particles, cha-chaing around each other, ready to be replicated, grown. BIG Bountiful crops to end world hunger! He had been sure, he had been-

A thought occurred to him and he stood up on the chair, grabbing the pen with both hands, crossing off cha-cha and instead putting down watusi. It was the steady bob, the slowed down flailing. Right? Had to be...

Mistakes were made, and as such, I will not be in tomorrow. You will find my final notes next to my keyboard. Please refer to them for a reversal proposal.

That should do it, right? If they couldn't understand straightforward notes, there was no other way he could possibly make it make any more sense. They were *simple*, right to the point-

The unholy and completely banned ringtone of a cell phone reverberated off of the desk butted up to his, interrupting his thoughts. Dan stood up on his stack of books to look over the layers of papers and contraband junk food littering the surface. He rolled his eyes and turned back to his computer. Rob... Dan sighed as the tone continued, relishing the silence when it stopped.

That's something he wasn't going to miss, Rob, and all of his annoying habits. Like today, he thought, Rob had come in earlier than him, and now was off who knew where! Eating Cheetos and not doing his job.

Or, had been eating, the half-consumed bag had been carelessly tossed atop the desk and cheesified puffed corn pieces littered the surface. And, Dan noted, it looked like an ant was taking advantage of the free spread. Gross, Dan sniffed, hoping it would stay on Rob's side although he already saw the pest beginning to traverse the letters that spilled over onto Dan's desk.

Making a mess *and* leaving his phone on ring? Terrible scientist, Dan thought, crawling onto the desk surface to lean over his keyboard.

Mistakes were made, and as such, I will not be in tomorrow. You will find my final notes next to my keyboard. Please refer to them for a reversal proposal. The particle projection beam was miscalibrated and thusly an inverse in our proposed hypothetical process stands to reason

Dan took a moment to catch his breath; cardio had never been his strong suit. But, there was something to be said about running around your keyboard to kick up the old heartbeat. Maybe he could take up running. If things worked out.

Mistakes were made, and as such, I will not be in tomorrow. You will find my final notes next to my keyboard. Please refer to them for a reversal proposal. The particle projection beam was miscalibrated and thusly an inverse in our proposed hypothetical process stands to reason the numbers calculated by myself

Dan shook his head, craning it upward. No no no... that wasn't right. He took in a large breath and started jumping around his keys, mindful of the open spaces beneath them.

Mistakes were made, and as such, I will not be in tomorrow. You will find my final notes next to my keyboard. Please refer to them for a reversal proposal. The particle projection beam was miscalibrated and thusly an inverse in our proposed hypothetical process stands to reason the numbers calculated by our tem r nt crct n nd frth xmnat. polgs llbhr

Dan was truly winded, and as he stared up shifting his head left to right reading for mistakes, he sucked in lungful's of air. It wasn't as eloquent as he would normally type, but he supposed it didn't matter and would have to do. Ha, matter, watusi-ing around

like no other. He shook his head, hoisting himself up the 'D' key to sign off. He jumped up and felt the key sink under his weight.

# d

The key on its return to a resting position flung Dan up and he had enough sense to aim his body in the direction of his next target, landing just barely, and catching the edge of the 'A' with his fingers. He stood up and after a few extra hops got the letter.

# da

This springboard sent him halfway there, and he hit the keys with a run, leaping across them to get to his final destination. He only had one key press left in him and he wanted to make it count. He jumped, hoping for the best.

He had a few seconds of hang time before smacking into the key with much more force than he intended, like belly flopping into a pool, and the resulting clack was deafening. He rolled off, avoiding the gaps on his way and sat on his desk, staring up. Well... he supposed it was close enough.

# dab

He stood up, and after catching his breath, walked over to his Post-it note, by now a good mile long, with dejection. He had to admit, he was second guessing watusi, the flailing wasn't it. He knew that now, but it was still just out of reach what the answer was.

Dan sat down on the pen, ready to wait for his superior or... Rob, when a rustling from the canyon dividing both their desks caught his attention. Or, no not a rustling, a whistling, it was a whistle!

Whoa, he thought, wishing he'd had a notebook in his pocket when he'd gone into the particle room, this was something! He was no ant scientist, but surely even those who were would have been floored by this.

Ants whistling 30's big band music? And he thought the day had been weird so far... what a lark!

He jumped off the cap and waited for it to come closer, holding in his breath. Finally, FINALLY the creature uttering those notes crested into Dan's view and his smile fizzled. An arm waved at him and he reluctantly waved back, not bothering to hide his scowl. This was not the scientific discovery he wanted to make.

A few minutes later, his lab partner finally made it to the Post-it, and offered an armload of Cheetos in greeting.

"Dan! Hey buddy, can you believe it!! We did it! Well, we did it in reverse, but we did it!" Dan wanted to ignore him, but when you are one of two marginally small specks of dust sentient enough to talk, you can only do such for so long before it gets weird.

"You don't say Rob." His lack of enthusiasm didn't seem to faze Rob, who dropped his armload and rushed Dan with a hug, covering them both in orange powder. They separated and Dan tried to beat all of the dust off, but it was futile. Small particles are a pain that way.

"So, glad as I am," he lied, "to see you. Have you given any thought to... undoing this?" A blank expression stared back at him and he sighed. Why had Dan been given so much intelligence, only to be surrounded by idiots? He sighed and tried to explain.

"It's a dance, Rob, it's a dance. I thought it was samba," he saw Rob open his mouth and cut him off, "no I know it's not, crossed it off and put cha- cha." He waited for Rob to follow, nodding, and when he opened his mouth to speak this time, they both said "watusi," and nodded, before frowning.

"It's not."

"I know." They sat down on the pen, each feeling the answer lingering on the tip of their collective tongues.

"It's close."

"I know." They looked at each other and hummed. But that, that was something wasn't it?

"What were you humming before?"

"Swing."

"Swing," Dan repeated, "swiiiiing..."

Time stretched between them, broken by distracting hums and fidgety movements. Overtime with Rob was looking to be worse than usual. After a bit, Dan snapped at him to stop being so jittery and it was like time stopped completely in its little particulate track around the universe.

“That’s it,” Dan cried and they yelled in unison, “JITTERBUG!” They stared at each other and whooped, cheering each other with fistfuls of junk food.

“Yes, it’s so clear now! Jitterbug, of course! It’s the buzzing!”

“The bouncing!”

“The beat.” Dan kicked the food out of the way, and dragged Rob up from their perch. He wrapped his arms around the pen’s grip and got into a lifting stance.

“C’mon, grab the other end; we’ve gotta write this down!”