

## Miniatures of a Life Lived Yesterday

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I was you in a previous life, I said. You was I in a later life, I said. Yes, I said. Yes, you said. You are in me, and I am in you, you said. I said the same. We looked at each other until our eyes rolled inside out. When our eyes were looking into our eyesockets, I tasted your bitter tongue, coming up from my stomach into the cavity of my mouth. My two hands traced circles around the other two. Yes, you say, go on. Yes, I say, I will. Your feet slam into the bedpost. I feel the pain in my stomach. I suddenly exhale. The air leaves your lungs. My lungs feel parched, dry. You lie there. My arm goes numb. Your right leg twitches. My eyes roll back out.

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Too much air is flowing into my lungs - jamming my throat, the consistency of dense bread. It reshapes the membrane of my organs: it pressures blood through my veins. The last thing I see before I go is the dented trunk of the car - dirtied, bloodied.

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He is a curious boy: a sharp set of eyes. I saw his eyes clearly, up-front, because a few seconds after I had laid my eyes on him he looked right back, and shortly after I looked away. But I still felt those eyes piercing into the side of my head, even though I knew he wasn't looking at me anymore. After some time, I looked again in his direction, only to find that he was already looking at me. He had been staring at me all along, he must have been. The instructor asked a question; he responded, with great pause and pride. That was like him. He walked over to the whiteboard and wrote down something in propositional logic. It was probably correct. But I knew that he was looking at me the whole time, even though I had my head down.

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He was a brilliant animator of the body: he filled his face with varied emotive expressions, his arms with humanistic gestures, his legs with lifelike walking and running movements. When he was in front of the camera, it was almost like he was a real person. If someone watched his movies, they'd think he was a real person, not an actor. But he grew old and entertainment grew younger, and his camera was stolen from him. Without the camera in front of him, recording his movements, transcribing his bodily motions into image and sound, he wasn't a real person anymore: just an actor, an unanimated body looking to fill any space of reality, any possible space at all.

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“What’s up?” — “Not much.” — “...” — “How about you.” — “.....” — “...” — “I’m good.” — “...” — “.....” — “...” — “Alright, so are you ready?” — “... sure.” — “..” — “..” — “What is that supposed to mean?” — “What do you mean?” — “..” — “...” — “You just don’t sound excited about it.” — “Of course I’m excited, I don’t know what you’re talking about. Come on, let’s go.” — “No, stop” - “Ouch, don’t fucking shove me” — “..” — “...” — “You know that it’s not about what you, it’s about how I feel.” - “I know, I know, I know.” — “You’re clearly not excited about it.” — “I already told you I am fucking excited.” — “Of course you are.” — “.....” — “..” — “I don’t know what else you want me to do. Shove my fingers into my mouth and stretch it wide, like this, see? Smiling, happy. Excited.” — “Sure. Sure. Whatever.” — “—————” — “—————” — “Okay. Just please go softer than last week.” — “.....”, — “Hey, stop. I said please go softer than last week.” — “————” — “You’re not listening, fucking stop” - “Don’t fucking shove me” - “I’m leaving” - “And I’m not paying” - “You asshole” - “You liar” - “You said you would pay me” - “So you’re just in it for the money” - “Yes you old ass” - “No, none of it” - “You said you would pay me” - “I said you’re not getting anything” - “Fucking pay me” - “No” - “Okay I don’t want any of it anyway” - “Ha, you liar” - “I’m leaving.” — “.....” — “————” — “Wait, no, come back.” — “—————” — “Come back.” — “—————” — “...” — “No” “—————”

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The wind screams, the sonic pitch of air traveling too fast. His jacket balloons, expands, contracts, gestures urgently and aimlessly: a tissue falling through empty space. That cursed body is fated to fall forever - even the ground refuses to meet it.

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The sharp end punctures, then glides across tissue and tendon: the flesh encloses, parts, makes way. The pain pierces; implosion of the senses. The cool steel coats with warm viscosity. It rests for a moment, lodged - paralyzed. Soon it exits where it came in, faster than its entrance: it plunges out into the sticky air, dripping in burgundy paint. The sharp end punctures a foreign body: it glides through, then out; then in, out; in, out; in, out; in, out, in, out; in, in, deeper, out, faster; tendons, organs; in, out, out, higher, plunged in, deeper; tissue, skin; out, in; in, out; flesh; the psychosexual movement of maniacal death. At last it falls onto the freshly painted concrete; the smooth metal chips; it becomes jagged. One body keeps it company; the other retreats away.

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The stars are out tonight. Bright, but not too brilliant; dulled, too accustomed to praise - tired.

The forest sways dark; quiet only in imagination, too loud. Too many sounds.

A body, sitting by the river. Two legs.

A body, standing by the forest clearing. Two legs.

A body, standing by the river. Two legs.

A body, standing by the river. Two legs.  
A body, crumpled over the river. One leg.  
A body, at the bottom of the river. No legs.  
A body, running through the forest. Four legs.  
A body, in the sky. No legs.

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They told me not to get close, not to look at it too long, not to touch it. They told me it was sacred, that it was holy, that its purity held all the world together. They told me why are you looking for so long, look away, only a few seconds at a time, the energy is too strong. They told me stop looking, stop getting closer. They said stop, stop, stop now, stop, stop. They pull out their knives and say stop, stop, stop now, stop, stop. They scream do not touch it, pull your hands back, stop reaching forwards, stop it now. They raise the metal blades high in the air, muscles tense. But the ground begins shaking and the knives flow into silvery liquid, and all dissolves into space until space itself collapses.

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Metal shines off round arcs along stretches of hot pavement. The simmering air holds space still; action potentials in the static frame - tires perched, engines humming. Movement is inverted; temporality corrupted. An hour passes faster than a minute. Slowly, the tires begin to melt; burnt rubber coats the concrete, metal frames sink to the ground. Coagulating rubber bubbles and boils, spills over, runs wild; moves synchronously, hardens. The silky metal erupts into the drenched ground: fills it full, pierces it whole. The people inside begin screaming, screaming, but she does not hear them, and the vehicles continue to sink into the skillet; remnants of boiled organs and curdled blood stain the metallic rubber. She takes a handful. Yes, this will do, this will do fine. Power sources are not easy to come by these days.

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A scratch to the head. Itching, searching. Soft hands digging against soft hair. Searching, searching. I'm not sure what he's looking for because there's nothing in that vacuous head. Looking, reading. Slow, like his wit. Stopping, like he always does. Leaning back and stretching, two thick arms spread wide. A show-off, a show-boat, too confident. Overconfident. Drinks from his water bottle, which is much larger than what any normal person would carry around. Dribbles some water onto the table. Incapable of oral motor control. Wipes it with his sleeve, like an unhygienic child. Reads two more lines but then stops again because he's incapable of prolonged intellectual stimulation. Crosses two hands in the front and raises his sweater high, pulling up his t-shirt until it struggles against his chest. The hem falls down when the sweater's off. He knew what he was doing. A flirt. Show-off, show-boat.

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I'll ask him if he wants to go out.

He'll say no.

I'll look at him. He won't look back.

I'll wave at him. He'll pause for a little bit, nod.

I'll walk towards him. He'll become visibly uncomfortable.

I'll say hey how are you doing. He'll say nothing much, like they all do.

I'll keep on standing there until he says something less stupid. He'll look at his feet, make noises through his nose.

I'll tell him that he's stupid, that he's socially awkward. He'll glare and mutter shut the fuck up under his breath.

I'll demand what did you say you fucker. He'll flare up and clock me hard straight on the nose.

I'll clutch my face in pain and give him a shark kick in the knees, then another. He'll crumple to the floor, a sack of disjointed bones.

I'll ask him if he wants to go out.

He says no.

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Real horrorshow. Viddy in and out, sploosh, the krassney vada flows out everywhere, yes, malenkey first and bolshkey next, real horrowshow, very good. Put your hand nice on that wood handle, real strong, don't rub your rooko all over your grimy litzo you piggish sviney, keep all the vada in the vada. Raise it high, real veesockey, then plunge it in again. The krassney moloko spurts, bubbles, yes, put it in the chashk, quickly, faster, before it runs smooth. Slooshy the screams. It's a real musikey concert. Don't stop, don't stop, why are you stopping you meeshey gloobzhey? Eedtey, go, stop, don't point it at my litzo you gloopey idiot, put your rookey down, stop, stop.

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#### Grocery list

- Six tomatoes
- Two bottles of ketchup
- Baking soda
- Cornstarch
- Corn syrup
- Red food coloring

- Yeast
- Two large knives
- Six small onions
- Three chocolate popsicles
- A knife sharpener
- Two dark sunglasses
- A blowtorch
- A pitchfork
- Two heavy-duty cloths
- Dark, sound-absorbing fabric
- Thick rope, at least 10 feet
- Zip ties
- Two bandanas
- Salt
- A paring knife
- Pig liver
- Two large black trash bags
- A teddy bear -- small, with sad eyes

Please have it delivered at 11:00 PM tonight. The door is open, please leave groceries inside.

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I reach out my hand to him. How are you doing, I offer.

I look at the outstretched hand. I pause a little bit, enough to make him doubt himself. I grasp it, more firmly than he grasps mine, and say I'm fine and how are you.

He waits too long before he responds. He says he's fine.

He doesn't respond. I resume reading.

He returns to reading. Perhaps he is not one for socialization. Or perhaps I have already irked him in some way.

The pages rise and fall softly under my fingers.

I wonder what I could have done differently.

He is still standing in front of me. Nice to meet you, I smile at him, and he nods and turns away. Bizarre.

Nice to meet you, he says finally. Alright, I'll leave.

How soft his hands were.