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Flash Fiction Samples

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Enjoy these quick jolts of strange and humorous prose fiction from my personal archives.

THE SACRIFICE

Dave's heart raced. Sweat seeped through his collar and dripped onto his keyboard. His eyes were afire with a pale, terrible light, and his mouth uttered strings of unbroken words in a language not meant for man.

His mind splintered. A voice, unheard and shattering, bellowed. "PERFORM THE SACRIFICE."

Dave's skin melted as he gripped the totem, its softness caving under his clenching fist. He plunged his arm elbow-deep in the broiling black liquid, his frothing screams an echo of the hissing pit.

"There goes Dave again," said Phyllis, from the cubicle opposite. "Crazy bastard loves his coffee and donuts."

THE GREAT SITCOM PURGE

Eight hundred floors up, behind a massive desk in a darkened office, a sausagey finger emerged from the folds of a huge leather throne and pressed a red button marked "CANCEL".

Halfway through an admonishment of his roommate vis à vis proper conjugation of Klingon verbs, Sheldon Cooper's eyes rolled back, and his spiderlike form collapsed.

Barney Stinson experienced a paroxysm of agony before dematerializing. The blonde he was talking to spat her cosmopolitan all over the bar.

Chandler and Joey died the moment their high five connected, and when Seinfeld's door opened, Kramer's rigid corpse fell across the threshold.

THE HUNT

The savannah hums in the dusk. Apatosaurs honk and snort, shuffling their grazing lips across the dusted mahogany turf. They have travelled far today, and their bellies swing heavy. The blazing disc in the sky is dropping, and the cool of night approaches. The herd moves as one in a wheeling arc, lumbering toward the river: a twisting brown ribbon of life.

The predator surfaces in the muddy shallows. She makes no ripple. The waterline conceals her toothy, crooked grin. Her glassy eyes are as old as the earth and just as patient. She feels the clay rumble underneath her, and dips silently out of sight again.

The sauropods approach cautiously. They skirt around the high water mark, tentative, their throats cracked with thirst but their bodies singing with danger. An elder buck cannot contain himself any longer; he thuds awkwardly down to the shoreline and dips his slender neck. His kin follow, knocking chunks of sand to plop into the opaque surface of the river. As they lap at the water, their tiny eyes flicker anxiously, catching nothing but the flat expanse of silt and the jagged piercing sunset.

The buck is sated. He raises his head and turns his body. There is a burst, a spray, and the crocodile's teeth clamp into the bones of his tail. His eyes roll, white and wild, and he screams into the twilight. The others scatter away from the waterline with hoots of alarm. The prey is dragged, inexorably, into the water. He struggles feebly as his hindquarters disappear into the murk, and the predator thrashes its head to silence the movement. As the apatosaur's neck recedes into the bloodstained river, the sarcosuchus clambers onto the buck's back, her jaws yawning wide for the kill.

Her body shimmers in the growing gloom, little points of light crawling across her thick and ancient scales, and her flesh seems to vibrate in the air. She freezes in confusion, and issues a shuddering hiss. The sparkling light intensifies, and in a bright flash the predator is gone. The apatosaur pulls itself out of the water and up the bank toward his mate, dripping.

Inside the flagship, the reptile's body materializes and slaps wetly onto the floor. She swings her head back and forth in utter bewilderment. Where is her meal, so recently within her jaws? The taste of blood is fresh on her tongue! There are no savannah smells here, no groaning of eager prey, no beating, tender hearts for her rip and swallow. There is cold, and silence.

The pacifier makes a sizzling crack as it arcs over the crocodile's huge frame, liquefying her brain. She goes rigid, twitches once, and expires.

A lean figure steps out from the gloom, and vocalizes its triumph. The Hierarchy, watching from the gallery, slides his cloak aside to join his hands in three derisive claps.

"Well done, Praetor. I trust this trophy will satisfy your cravings, for the time being?"

The hunter parts his mandibles in a horrifying smile, raises his pacifier in salute, and bows. “It will make an excellent addition to my collection, Your Magnificence.”

BUENOS AIRES

I stopped in the hallway. The peeling wallpaper, yellowed with heat and tobacco smoke, caught my arm as I swayed and fell against it. The gurgling suspicion in my belly had hardened into a knot of agonizing certainty, and my skin flashed hot, then cold, then hot. I was sweating so much it was vulgar.

I don’t know how or when I made it to my room, but when I came to I was half-sprawled on the creaking, flimsy mattress. My throat lurched, and I turned to vomit yellow in a discreet pool on the floor. Through the gossamer film of my fluttering eyelids I watched the ceiling fan, ludicrously slow. The pain was unreasonable, unfair. I was conscious enough to know I was about to die.

*

Twenty-four hours later, I was proven wrong. If I’m honest, it felt more like a punishment than a mercy. The poison had hit me all at once, like a baseball bat to the gut, completely incapacitating me. I had been a fool.

When I woke, my head pulsed with acid. My mouth was cottony, my tongue leaden. It was night-time, profoundly dark but for the moonlight slanting through from the balcony. I stumbled on wooden legs to the doorway, the night breeze like a gift from God on my face. *That lanky American with the glasses,* I thought. *You bloody idiot.*

Gripping the front of my skull in one hand as though it would fall to pieces if I didn’t, I listened to the tuneless saxophone from the café outside. I hated it. I hated the happy voices, singing and laughing, and the soft clinking of cutlery and glass. I hated the muggy heat. I hated this stupid, beautiful city. My stomach spasmed, and I doubled over, giving a small shout. I hated myself. I felt like crying, and laughed aloud at the childishness of it.

Four hours, a fitful sleep, and a coffee later I was more lucid. I read the cable from Control with a steady hand. Either she gave me the gold willingly, today, or I was to slip on my gloves.

*

“We’re like warrior tribes,” she said. Her accent was thick, but she hid her nationality well. Not that it mattered much here. Her hair had been bleached – recently, by the look of it. She was American to the untrained eye. I looked at the perfect little mole on her cheek, and saw Moscow.

“How do you mean?”

“You know, arguing over who has the biggest stick. Boys with toys. We’ve built a house of cards, and soon it’s going to fall down.”

The dead drop had been changed at the last minute. Now it was *this* café, a mile down the cobbles. I didn’t care. My head still whispered razor-sharp promises of another sleepless night, and I was eager to get it done.

I splashed another shot of firewater, pulled it back grimacing, and slapped the glass onto the wicker table. She smiled at me, raising an eyebrow. “How rude of me,” I said, and filled her glass again too. She sipped at it daintily. I struggled to keep my impatience in check.

“I drank your drink,” I said, finally, and her hand stopped on its way to her mouth. “Last night. In case you were wondering. It was the American.”

Realization spread across her face like the sun wiping away a shadow. She regarded the shot in her hand, and elected to put it down. “Why... why would you do that?”

I didn’t know. I honestly didn’t. Except I did, I was just too stupid to acknowledge it.

“Listen,” I said, my voice low. “Tell me what you want. There’s no time; I don’t know why you’re mucking about. Tell me, and let’s get the hell out of here.”

She smiled again. Christ, she was pretty. “You know what I want. A new identity. A new life.”

“And in exchange?”

“Everything they ever told me. A lifetime’s worth. You know as well as I do: it’s not meant to last. When everything ends, I want to make sure I’m on the right side.”

That tugged a grin out of me, despite myself. I poured again. There was a small sound, a *pyp* that could easily have been a bird or an insect or any number of things, but for some reason I heard it and looked up. Her smile was gone, and I felt a sudden lump in my throat.

She crashed face-first into the wicker table, knocking our drinks onto the stones. People around us cried out and the café burst into a commotion. My nerves were on fire as I scanned the crowd, and in

an instant I saw him: tall, bespectacled, with strands of dark hair sweat-stamped onto his forehead. He lowered his pistol, and ran.

*

At about three o'clock that morning, he found me. It took a great deal of shouting for him to convince me to put down the broken bottle.

"Why," was all I could say, sputtering like the drunken, miserable fool I was. "Why?"

"Do I have to spell it out?" he said, flustered. "She was a dangle, pal. A con. She was onto you from the get-go. She had less gold than you've got in your mouth."

My buzzing head was thick with abuse and fatigue. I should have felt sad.

I felt nothing at all.

I slumped into a chair and stared into space, the room spinning around me. "The drink," I said.

"That's right," he said. "Me. Trying to save your dumb Limey ass. You gave me away at the café this morning, I had to do something."

I looked up at him. "I suppose thanks are in order."

"Nope," he said, pulling up a knocked-over stool and sitting beside me. "Just do me a favour, will ya? Pick up that phone, and order another bottle."