

NOTHING DERIVATIVE

Logan fished the phone from his pocket and flicked on the screen. He unlocked it with a swipe of his index finger, leaving a smear of salt and oil.

He opened his inbox and narrowed his eyes, judiciously, at the top unread message, sent at 10:02.

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They had, they thought, very little time.

They scurried ahead. Three men donning stained unicolor tee-shirts, raw denim, and worn-in rigger boots. Their hair slipshod, either crewcut or curtained. They strode apace, possessed of some rhythm guilty men keep.

Jack, among them, checked the time without pause and thought soberly to himself that these fleeting moments could be a former life's. Each of which would be guaranteed some reserved space in his recollection should he do well to remember them. To pick them, like photographs suspended in a darkroom wet with pre-processed film; hanging like fingers paused before the pianist strikes the opening key.

For one such moment he recalled how his maw, at family get-togethers and birthday parties, would tease him about how the dimples on his cheeks flared his ears out when he smiled. Jack was beaming today, helpless in the fight against it. This was a time of grand renewal, or so hinted something visceral.

Logan kept abreast of Jack as they stutter-stopped up to a crosswalk. Heavy westbound traffic had sealed off their route for what he safely assumed would be the next twenty or thirty seconds. His feet tapped and tapped the curb until a couple car lengths of room opened in both directions when, in unison, they bolted off again, weaving around a braking minivan as they darted across the intersection and up Front Avenue. Logan's arms swung by his side, brushing against his round and youthless waistline. With each lungful of air his breathing labored more.

Logan married in June. He remembered shaving his hair under duress. He remembered being fitted for his tux, where he and Riley, a groomsman, waited on their phones outside the changing booth while the tailor lowered boxes wrapped in filmy polyester tape off shelving units and searched, box by box, for something that wasn't there. Finding nothing, the tailor ordered in a pair of wool wide-leg dress pants with a forty-three-inch waist and threw in a complimentary outseam hem for the trouble. Today Logan wore a thirty-eight and a grin more gloating than smug.

Jack, the tallest of the three, craned his neck to see above the crowds of pencil-skirted bankers and put-together hedge funders brandishing briefcases, clip ties, hands-free earpieces. An out-of-towner stood languid in his periphery, levelling a camera to her squinting eye; a viewfinder pressed to the brow, a grin busy at the mouth. Tourists, and the dying of the lunch rush.

Overhead, he made out the liquid crystal displays and the peeling billboards and the sun-dimmed neon signage and the frenetic commuter hordes of Providence Line Terminal no more than a block north. Jack ran, patting his

pockets: *phone, wallet, tickets, phone, wallet, tickets*. He gathered speed, rushing headlong.

Riley lagged a couple sidewalk slabs behind, having been arrested a moment at a time by the occasional passerby. “Jack—” he cried out. “Jack, buddy, slow it down.” Moving forward still, Jack spun to face his summoner and returned a glare that brought Riley back to the wedding.

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“Lo, get your ass over here. You think you can slip away that easy?”

“Riley, my man, what’s the hurry for, huh, we got all night don’t we.”

“Sit that ass down. Right here. There you go, now get this in you.”

They drank.

“Eh, isn’t it a sin to be pounding like this at the church?”

“Jack—hey Jack, we’re Christians, aren’t we?”

Jack joined them at the bar, crashing on the stool between them.

“We’re no Christians tonight. Isn’t that right, Lo?”

Logan let out a smile, appeasing Jack.

Logan’s elbow propped his bodyweight against the rickety countertop, his right hand cradling his chin, his head bobbling on his thinning, sweating neck. A haze corrupted his vision. He felt the weight of Jack’s arm wrap around his shoulders, corralling him tighter into earshot.

“What do you say boys, we got an hour ‘til last call. What do you say we make another run at the dancefloor, huh?”

A couple mute seconds prompted further egging from Jack.

“Ry, remind this boy why we’re here. You only get married once, don’t you? Getting effed up is a goddamn rite of passage, is it not?”

Riley met eyes with Jack, signaling his joining in.

“Maybe the kid just needs another one of them bathroom breaks,” Riley said, sliding an index finger under his nose.

“Hey, hey we’re not about that tonight, we’re not bringing out the big guns with Hailey present. You know she can sniff it out like gasoline at a tire yard. You know what buddy, enough talk, let’s go. How about we find that bride of yours eh, that’ll put some life back in them bones.” Jack pulled Logan off the stool, grabbing him around his waist before transferring the sweat from his palm onto his dress pants. Pocket check: *phone*, ____, ____, *phone*, ____, ____.

Surprised to see no resistance, Jack started toward the bandstand with Riley and the groom in tow. The banquet pavilion was covered by a tall, oversized gazebo whose creamy white tarpaulin covered the glittering night sky.

They unfastened and pulled aside the mesh door, exiting the main hall and stumbling out onto the cobble walkway lit overhead by hanging ornamental lanterns, pumpkin in shape and coloured like beer.

They stopped to share one of Riley’s cigarettes and to laugh about the circumstance. The chapel grounds they walked played host to their baptism thirty years prior. “Circle of life,” Riley said.

“Circle of wife,” Logan threw back. They laughed, though unsure.

Having sucked it down to the filter, Jack threw the butt in the garden and hopped up the wooden steps and onto the bandstand. It rang with song and dance. A crowd of some twenty friends and family members cheered as the emcee, Riley’s brother-in-law, cut the music and announced their arrival.

Logan didn’t acknowledge the fanfare. He made his way across the floor toward his bride—Aiden—whose beauty appeared to him like something of fantasy, a beauty demanding his touch to make sure, to be finally convinced, of its materiality. He coiled his arms around her and pressed his forehead into hers, slurring words she could not make out.

“Group shot! Everybody, group shot!” Jack proffered. He held his phone in front of his face.

Riley was the last to gather in the huddle behind Jack. A groomsman in the front said something to get a quick laugh out of the group, and Jack tapped the shutter button on his phone’s front facing camera three or four times until Riley cut him off—

“Wait, Lo’s got to be in the shot.” He turned and called for Logan, who stood alone with his wife—*wife*, he thought—whose head was still nestled against his own. He was mouthing words to her, a mute spectacle.

They waited while seconds passed in twos. Then threes.

Desperate to break the tension, Jack aimed his phone at them, pulled his face back from the screen, put on a stupid smile, and snapped a picture of the newlyweds’ embrace. “This is real touching and all, but how about you get in

one last shot for the night. You know, as a group. Something for Instagram, eh?” Jack waited, his plea made void by the quiet that returned.

A bridesmaid called out to Aiden, struck equally by the confusion and the splendor of the scene.

Logan and Aiden, ignorant to their audience, carried on their exchange which although still intimate could now be heard, faintly, by those closest to them. A string of white lights draped behind the lovers, which cast a soft spotlight on their embrace. It all seemed so heavenly, so peculiar.

The selfie huddle dispersed into a loose mob of onlookers, beginning to encircle them, patiently watching over the scene. The flicker of flash photography illuminated them more. They stood like a perfect silhouette unbridled in their union; that of passions’ unification, that of those specific immaterial substances and not some other things. Nothing derivative.

Riley shot Jack a squint signifying disbelief. He sloshed his beer around the rim of his glass, allowing it to circle once or twice, while keeping his gaze fixed on the performance before him. He waited for the end-scene, for the actors to break their hold on fantasy and return to life as it permanently is. With sound, colour, processing.

Aiden broke from Logan. Words were exchanged moments prior. The groom and bride stood apart trading barren stares between them. Inexplicable tears welled at the foot of her eyes. She turned her cheek before racing down the creaky steps and onto the cobble, then the grass, before kicking off her heels and carrying herself away into the cool dark of June and a life, in some distant future, still to be lived and still to be corrected.

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Riley, Jack, and Logan were waiting under the awning of South Providence Terminal. The next bus on the northbound 2 Line was scheduled to depart in twenty minutes, at one-thirty. Seconds turned to minutes like hours turn to weeks. Logan was breathing heavily, perched on a plastic-coated bench outside the ticket office, between a 'No standing' signpost and an empty newspaper vending machine, its fern green paint fading like worn clothes. Riley stood beside it. Jack was pacing relentlessly along the curb, his eyes scouring the horizon.

"We got time boys, don't worry, we got time," Jack said, "they said two o'clock, right? As early as two." He laughed to himself. "Boys, we're good. We are so, so good."

Logan, adjoined to his phone, had no response. He was tapping madly at the touchscreen, hoping to wake Aiden from her post-nightshift slumber; to finally find an answer.

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Forty minutes prior they were eating lunch out of brown take-out bags.

Riley wiped the dripping grease off his fingertips and onto his spotted jeans.

"You got any more ketchups in that thing, Jack?" He nodded at Jack's bag.

“These are mine, Ry. It isn’t the fifteenth yet buddy, you can’t just be giving them out like that. I mean, I know you’re accustomed to that and all, but they’re a hot commodity, these things,” Jack said.

“What do you mean—you’re low on them? I ordered extra ketchups, I said extra. Didn’t I say that Lo?”

“What’s that?” Logan asked, aloof.

“Check the order; I think they swindled us on the ketchups, man.”

“Yeah, huh,” said Logan.

“No—no, actually, check, I made a point to say that, didn’t I, to ask for extra. This’ll be the last time I use that goddamn app, I swear to God.”

Reluctant, Logan fished the phone from his pocket and flicked on the screen.

He unlocked it with a swipe of his index finger, leaving a smear of salt and oil.

For a moment he forgot why he had opened it. Meandering through his dashboard, he found two notifications. He opened his inbox and narrowed his eyes, judiciously, at the top unread message, sent at 10:02 from Grand Gala Casinos and Gaming Ltd.

Subject line: Congratulations, Logan Monahan, You’re a Grand Prize Winner!

Jack, now finished his meal, reached in the bag and grabbed a handful of ketchup packets and threw them on Riley’s lap. “You want ketchups bud, there you go.”

“I knew you had them in there. Son of a bitch.”

Jack ran his hands through his hair, slicking each part to its side. “Buddy, you’re the loudest guy. Just take your—”

“Wait, wait, stop,” Logan interjected. He shoved his phone in front of Riley.

“Tell me this is isn’t a scam.” Riley studied it closely.

“What the hell is this, Lo? What’s this about a ‘minority share’?”

“I don’t know. It had to be Aiden. It has to be. You know she’s always on the computer, she’s always on that thing, on her iPad and whatnot, she’s always entering these contests on the internet you know, that’s what she does.”

“And she entered in your name?”

“No, no, she entered in *ours*. Look, look at the last line, it says ‘Agostino, Grant, and Monahan Industrial Painters’. She obviously put the company down for the contest. It’s one of those corporate sweepstakes—she couldn’t just put herself down.”

“Wait, she entered a contest for AGM Painters, did she?” asked Jack. He snatched the phone from Logan’s hand and read the message on the screen.

“Yeah, I’ve seen those online scams before and this doesn’t look it. Look at the address it’s from.” He pointed to the bottom of the text, carefully sounding out each syllable:

fulfillment@grandgala.com

“That’s legit, boys, that’s got to be legit.”

“I thought so too,” said Logan, looking to Riley for countenance. Riley bobbed his head in agreement.

“And, what, a share in the company? That’s what we won?” Jack asked.

“Ten percent. Or five and a cash prize,” said Logan. “We got to get over to their head offices though, and, like, soon. The consultation is at two this afternoon and it’s ten to one already. Oh my god. Oh my god, I can’t believe this.”

“I’ll call up Don and cancel our two-thirty. We have to make this, we got to get moving, we have to cash in on this,” Riley said.

“I got bus fare boys, yeah yeah, I got tickets, let’s go, let’s go,” Jack spat out.

“I don’t think we got a lot of time.”

They left their bags on the grass and ran.

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1:34. Riley, Jack, Logan—all three standing, waiting.

Jack was quiet now, glancing down at Logan’s feet. He cleared his throat.

“I have to ask. Do you think this’ll cover the cost of the operations, then, Lo? I mean, at least some of it, huh?” Riley probed.

“I don’t know,” said Logan.

“It would,” he thought. “Maybe”, he said.

The truth of the situation began to entrench itself in Logan's mind and he could not fight it or move himself to resist. He wanted a legacy, he wanted something to leave behind. The thought of his being able to provide that carried with it a visceral sense of something too great; too great but to reduce him to tears yet too vain to expose them.

While Riley and Jack were attuned to the road, waiting for the Line 2 bus to round the corner, Logan made sure not to look up from the sidewalk, being too ashamed to confront himself.

"This could be it, this could be it, this could be it." His head rang so.

Jack swung his arm around Logan. Some offering, some consolation.

"Wait a second, buddy, wait a sec," said Jack. "This is what you need. This'll get you on track. We'll all be okay."

Riley looked away, opting not to bear it. He could not hear the words exchanged between them. He kept his attention fixed, pretending to search for the bus.

Moments later, a bus screeched onto the transit bay. It was heading in the direction of South Terminal. It sputtered toward them.

"I think this is it, guys—come on," said Riley. Still with his arm embraced, Jack looked up toward the street. Logan didn't move.

The bus pulled close to the curb, blowing some fallen leaves onto the waiting deck. It screeched forward, and forward still. Still forward.

They were almost convinced it was going to ride past them, destined for somewhere else, until it rocked to a halt a few metres further. The driver pulled the parking brake as the bus sunk down to loading height.

The commuters, tourists—all those around them—gathered their things and prepared to board.

They resumed waiting, as the doors had not yet opened.

Logan lifted his chin, facing the terminal before him. He stepped forward, squinting at the sunlight while Jack remained in place. The sunshine cast his negative image onto the bus in front of him.

His eyelids slack below his brow; his eyes dilute, waiting. Waiting for something that would never come. Some process. Something that couldn't be.