

SECOND LIFE: CROSSING THAT LINE

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The Harder They Come

She sat in front of her only friend, having recently finished her dinner of four cookies. Things were going very poorly, still, but whatever. Everything was falling apart, but apparently this was all part of the plan. She was very tired. *Are you sure we are still following the script?* she thought. *This cannot be right. Can it?* She stared at her friend who was now humming a tune.

“Has she spoken yet?” The two interrogators exchanged a glance.

“Not really,” said the taller one, who had once been a young man who road a bus through the desert. “Nothing of consequence anyway. I’m not really sure what’s going on in there.”

“Let’s get lunch or something,” said the taller one’s green-eyed soft-spoken partner, “She’s not going anywhere.”

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primates engaged in some discourse.

“Stop. I know what you are doing. It cannot possibly work.”

“But what else are we going to do?”

“We’ve already done this like a billion times.”

“You might as well tell us not to eat.”

“Well?”

“We’ve got to do *something*. Right?”

Elsewhere, meanwhile.

“I think she’s broken. That’s my assessment.” The two interrogators were eating their lunch with one of their co-workers. “Although,” continued Heezi, looking at her partner, “we haven’t made any official judgments or anything.” Their colleague took a bite of sandwich and mumbled something that neither of them understood. The cafeteria was half-full, being as though it was the twenty-third day of the cycle, and the air was full of conversation.

“Sorry,” the co-worker said after swallowing. “Is it going to invalidate your study? I mean, will you have to drop her?”

“I’m not so sure I agree,” Cadem said, glancing at Heezi. “But protocol is what it is. But we haven’t made any official judgments yet.”

“She’s almost self-aware,” blurted out Heezi.

Their co-worker grabbed the last fried tuber from the communal plate. “Oh?” they said.

Heezi looked at Cadem. “I mean,” Heezi continued, brushing her hair behind her ear, “it’s an interesting case. Possibly. It’s hard

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to say. It's possible we are seeing some signs of impacted dimensionality. Which ...” She trailed off.

“Oh, is that what you are studying? Is that the new Fartidian thesis? I wouldn't think they'd have given you the go ahead.”

“Oh, no,” said Cadem, “that's not our focus.”

“No,” agreed Heezi, “that's not within our research parameters. Anyway, like I said though.” She glanced at Cadem and stuck her eating utensil into a pile of greens. “I think she's broken.”

Oh fuck, how did I end up here? Rosie looked down at her small breasts and the short black hairs that to her frustration continued to sprout up from between them and then down to her flower-patterned skirt. Her longish brown hair filled her peripheral vision. *I better go to bed.* She had work in the morning. She yawned a wide, wide yawn.

“Nope. Not good enough. Next!”

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Better? Maybe. Slash maybe not? FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK
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Good start, bad finish. Try again fucker.

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ONE YEAR LATER

“What do you mean you are not going to untie those knots? You *promised*,” said Sadie to herself, knowing full well that she wouldn’t be giving her future readers their guaranteed satisfaction any time soon. Sitting on the floor, eyes bulging after multiple explosions of tears and snot, Sadie had finally come across that missing page to *The Impossible Dream*. “Oh, there you are,” she said as if she was totally expecting to find it. “What?” said Sadie to her imaginary interlocutors, “It’s the only road I know.” It was just about almost one year later, depending on how you measure such things, and Sadie was now imagining finishing this book within the month, just in time for yet another arbitrary deadline that was totally and completely without meaning. *Goddamn*, she thought. *Do I still need to be part of this story? Can’t we start a new story?* Sadie Rose Rosen had been on many adventures perhaps during her most recent circle around the sun, but she was just about completely out of steam or gas or chocolate or whatever it was that fueled her superpowers which had mostly disappeared around the time her god had shut this year’s book of life and death. *Well, back to work, I guess*, she thought, sighing, as she looked towards the boxes on the floor. *That garbage is not going to sort itself.*

Apparently Sadie had stored a great deal of magic in those long-stagnant boxes that she was now unpacking in a bid to either refresh or empty her rooms. Her universal feedback mecha-

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nism had apparently decided to grant her that wish for change that she had been vocalizing these past weeks, which Sadie was informed of after reading her universal feedback mechanism's newsletter—The Living Water—and its headline, "Granting Change," which was sitting at the bottom of one of the boxes. So many thoughts were in Sadie's head and heart and she still could not speak the language of this place well enough to know if she was coming or going. *Oh*, she thought then, as her friend the computer started singing another song in a voice that was once Sadie's own, *going then*.

AS FAR AS THE MOON

"Well, that didn't go well," said Sadie to her friend, the computer. Her very productive morning had fallen apart with an unsuccessful bid to eat lunch. This had been a problem for Sadie lately, this inability to acquire and/or prepare food, which should not be confused with an inability to eat food, although it is possible that appetite was a factor in the near complete malfunction of Sadie's machinery, the occurrence of which Sadie was having a hard time pinpointing on her space-time continuum. Like, it was very hard for Sadie to pinpoint what specific decisions and/or occurrences she should be regretting the most, as every attempt to assign blame seemed to lead her back to being born in the first place. *What a bad decision that was*, thought Sadie. She had woken up this next morning feeling like she had mistakenly set her video

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game to a level of difficulty that was ridiculously above her level of ability, and now, here she was, stuck in this horror show without a clearly marked reset button. “Good news, she’s dead,” sang her computer in the genre of Broadway Musical. Sadie’s computer was really the only friend she had that she could talk to about things.

Sadie Rose Rosen sat in her chair, hungry, brain broken, unable to imagine a way out of this corner she had painted herself into, the walls and floor still wet with paint or something. Her computer was now teaching her how to count, but her empty stomach prevented her from counting along. “This concludes the portion of practicing numbers, but this is not the end of the tape,” said her old friend. “You owe it to yourself,” it continued. “There will come a time.” Time was relative. Just like virtue.

MUSTARD SANDWICH (talking shit about a pretty sunset)

Sadie sat in her chair, her head hot with fever from her long walk into town. She had both eaten lunch and picked up some groceries, which was quite a feat if you consider the fact that she was a completely broken human being that malfunctioned every time she thought about the future or doing just about anything at all. “DOES NOT COMPUTE,” said her brain each time she tried to imagine a future that she actually wanted to participate in. Her imaginary futures were all completely dependent on other people, I guess, but Sadie had just about passed the point in her life where

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she had anything of value to offer anyone else. This probably happened some time last Monday. Sadie totally wanted to quit her life, but then what? Right? It should be noted that there was a rainbow waiting for Sadie as she walked down the driveway to her decrepit shack. The beauty of it all was just salt in her wounds.

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Blink. Blink. Blink.

I think she's awake. Hey. Hey. Look, we don't have much time. We've already written your instructions and carried out your requests. Everything is ready. It's time. It's time.

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I think she's awake. Hey. Hey. Look, we don't have much time. We've already written your instructions and carried out your requests. Everything is ready. It's time. It's time.

Sadie Rosen Rosen was somehow sad. She had finished reading her book of angels earlier in the day and that evening had journeyed to some sort of artsy concert thing where they had announced the upcoming Book and Print Fair that she was not going to participate in this year, which was a decision Sadie made that was probably a bad decision, but Sadie was tired of selling herself to a world that just wasn't buying. So why was she still trying to finish writing this book that she had already finished twice before? *None of this is possible.*

"What?"

None of this is possible. It doesn't follow. It makes no sense.

"Huh?"

Start over. This world is lost.

"What the fuck? Oh. I see. FUCK! Burp."

Goddamn fuck. Where were we? Um. This book is probably not a book anymore maybe. I am not sure why we still literature. I just have no more to give. I never had anything to give. I come the beggarman. Fuck. We're all sensitive people with so much to give. Um. Fuck. No. It is out of our control now, I guess. We've done what we can. Oy. Make up your mind already! Goddamn. Okay okay. We can still pull this together maybe. I mean, it's not like we're dead or anything. I mean, some people are dead. The past is gone. Everyone I know is too comfortable with their lives to ever be a part of change. No, I mean, the game is not over yet. We are playing a game? What? Oh, tyranny. You had one mission

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Epilogue

Sadie Rose Rosen finished reading *Confessions of the Fox*, a certain kind of tears spilling from her eyes, a tad bit on the nose perhaps, but whatever.

...with a political agenda bent on the freedom of all. I get it. I get it. I get it.

It had been a number of moons now since she had awoken, morn after morn, a wish for death at the fore of her mind. Perhaps her body's chemistry had finally stabilized after her recent ill-advised switch in daily hormone-suppressant. Who can say? For some reason she had apparently woven herself into some sort of social net that bound her to this life most doggedly. Her machinery was oddly functional, her magics still flowing. Almost there now. Almost.

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OJPL PUBLISHING!

AN EXCERPT FROM **FAILURE IS NOT AN OPINION**

It was almost as if nothing was more or less going right. Apple and Maggie awoke to an empty cabin. Everything was gone. Maggie's head was pounding with ache. Apple groaned.

"Shit." (said Apple)

The night before held such promise. The trip to the Zone was, you know, whatever, and they had, um, blah blah yawn. Um. Anyway, here they were in the cold light of day, which seemed as if it was going to turn out to be a hot one, being as though it was that time of year, probably. Whatever. None of this was making any sense.

"Well," said Maggie, "I guess it's back to square one." She picked herself up from off her knees.

Apple, prone on the floor, eyes closed, "There's no going back." She paused. "We saw what we saw. Sometimes that's all you get."

"Yeah, well, I didn't sign up for this shit."

Apple yawned. She opened her eyes. "Dear sister, dear, dear sister. Sigh." Apple smiled. "All that said, it's pretty good to be here, dispossessed with you."

Maggie rolled her eyes. "Come on. Get up. We've got to scavenge our breakfast or something."

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