

ONE WITH SOMETHING

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CW: graphic imagery, self-harm, suicide

Jim Natt was planted firmly to one of many identical chairs. Physically, he was present. He occupied space in the room. His mind, however, had fallen into a state of vivid fantasy. His psychological distance from his surroundings, his departure from reality, was becoming part of an everyday routine that although didn't bother him much, substantially contributed to his sense of isolation. Jim was safe in his fantasy. He held all the power. The monotone voices of his colleagues discussing their monotonous business, with which Jim was vaguely involved, and the power dynamics which subordinated him to their meaningless pursuits, did not and could not encroach upon his fantasy world. He didn't see any harm in the repetition of it all. Business commenced, eyes fixed, moving occasionally to different focal points, facial muscles tight, but not too tight, look interested, have something ready in case called upon, like, 'Well, I'm definitely optimistic that given our current circumstances, our productivity, efficiency and therefore overall capital, could increase if we simply continue to deliberate about, and pursue, our best options,' or something empty like that. Something along those lines, although often fostering a few cocked eyebrows or slight head-jerks, usually satisfied the participation component of these meetings. The repetition of his work-life paralleled the inner depths of Jim's fantasy, in which over and over, a naked lover came towards him, blindfolded, arms stretched out for embrace. Jim, removing a lit cigarette from his mouth, extinguished it on the chest of his lover, a million times over. He then engaged in the embrace, only for his lover to find that she is unable to pull away; their flesh sealed, healed together, in a bond ensuring their unity. Everlasting love, everlasting connection, everlasting control. Though the lover often varied in appearance, Jim was not alone in his fantasy. He didn't quite understand it, nor could he quite explain it, but he thrived in this inner world. He was comforted by its unvarying nature and excited by the intense imagery.

Jim was brought back to his external reality when the sound of chairs sliding against the meeting-room floor indicated that it was time to go home. For Jim, this meant little more than the absence of anyone who would serve as a distraction. He was free to fall in and out of fantasy as he pleased. This was preferable, as he found himself losing touch with his external reality. This loss manifested itself in his ability to associate with and identify ordinary objects. He experienced such feelings when confronted with devices as simple as the three-

hole-punches with which his place of work was riddled. When they assaulted his line of sight, he found himself entirely confused by the things. Unable to make sense of their purpose or their structure, and of the thousands of years underscoring the development of human thought leading to the subsequent invention of something so ridiculous. Sharp circular blades haunted him, as he imagined them piercing through the remnants of dead trees for better compatibility with another ridiculous invention. He couldn't understand why this was the case, or why this had to be the case. He did, however, enjoy staplers, and the comfort they provided.

As he began gathering his belongings to exit the office, Jim caught the glaring eye and subtle smile of one of his co-workers; the only one other individual in the room. Jim immediately broke his gaze, hoping to be left to go on his way without the burden of interaction.

"Jim," said his co-worker, "hey buddy how's it going?"

Jim, startled by the sudden and unexpected interest of his co-worker, took several seconds to come up with a response. "Uh," he started, "It's going well. Fred, right?" Jim said. Damn it, he thought, cringing, why did I bother with the name?

"Ya, it's Fred. We're on the same floor actually." the co-worker said. He spoke to Jim a friendly tone, with an intense and unblinking stare.

"Well", said Jim, "I guess I'll see ya around then." Jim began retreating out of the room, refusing to meet the eyes of his inquisitor, only to be abruptly stopped. His co-worker's stare was unchanging, though his smile evolved into an expression of concern and pity.

"Look Jim, I'm approaching you because I know what you're going through. I see you staring out into space. I see you eating alone at lunch, and I see behind the charade you put on when you contribute to the meetings, as sparsely as you do." It was evident to the coworker that Jim had collapsed into a pit of embarrassment. "Jim, I'm not trying to confront you here. I'm sorry if that was too direct. It's just, I care about you."

"But," Jim said, "What do you mean? You don't know me. I'm fine I-"

"Jim, I heard them talking about letting you go earlier today. I don't want that to happen to you because I feel like I've been where you are right now. I know how hard everything can get and I would just hate to see someone go through what I've been through." Jim was enamored. He didn't truly believe that anyone could relate to him or understand what exactly he was going through. He didn't understand it himself. But his coworker spoke with such conviction, and Jim didn't want to lose his job. It would definitely make sense that they were considering firing him. He knew the extent to which his fantasies were becoming more and more prolonged, and to which they were affecting his productivity.

The coworker caught on to Jim's contemplative state. "I'm part of this group. I mean, I host these meetings where a group of guys, great guys, get together and just enjoy each others company. We help each other with our problems, and well, we all stick together. We're there for each other. Just like I'm here for you, right now."

"I," Jim started. His coworker could sense his apprehension and unease. He took a step back, extending a piece of paper to Jim.

"Just call me when you need me Jim," he said, "when you need some comfort and some unity. We can help. I promise." He smiled at Jim and left the room. Jim stood motionless for a few moments, examining the piece of paper with the ten-digit phone number written on it. The numbers were so close together he could barely make out when one ended and another began. It's not like it mattered much. Jim couldn't imagine himself using the number. Although a sense of unity did sound appealing. He felt himself drifting toward his fantasy realm, but resisted out of a desire to leave this horrible office building and return home.

Jim hadn't much money and chose to endure the thirty-odd minute walk as opposed to taking a cab. The temperature was mild, and it was not yet dark. He started in the direction towards his apartment building. The streets were live with people. Jim couldn't differentiate between faces very well, however he was soothed in a way by the presence of the crowd. Despite this, he was nauseated by the motion. The ebb and flow of bodies, containing selves, as they ventured down the streets to nowhere. Each with their own ambitions, each with their own fantasies. Maybe not. Each to one day end up in the same black car. Surely. Jim reflected on his own ambitions, all of which seemed to lie in his fantasy world at this point. He wished he could project this inner world onto the 'no-better' external one. No one loved him. He felt he had no chance to be a part of something greater than himself. Part of a relationship or a family. His had long since abandoned him. At least he had the comfort of his impending fusion with the universe itself upon death. Could he bear to feel the isolation of being a 'self' any longer? The perpetual loneliness which haunted him in every waking moment of his experience of external reality. Maybe not. Maybe it was finally time to give in to eventuality. He approached the bridge overpass. The bright lights of the traffic below blurred into a beautiful stream. Jim considered whether or not it was time to plunge into the stream. Become one with it. He leaned over the bridge bannister. He felt the cold steel even through his suit pants. It fostered a sickness within him, much like the feeling he got when he looked at the three-hole punch. He momentarily lost his grip on reality when contemplating the structure on which he now stood. A bridge to nowhere, for no reason other than

to increase units of pollution haunting the atmosphere. He again was shocked back to reality by the now-familiar voice of his co-worker.

“Jim! Listen to me. Just take a breath and step back.”

“Are, are you following me?” said Jim.

“I just don’t want you to get hurt. I can help you. You just have to listen.” Jim began to cry and stepped away from the bannister of the overpass. His coworker locked him in an embrace, which left Jim in a state between comfort and unnerve.

“Just follow me, Jim.” His coworker said with the same sympathetic smile and glare as before. They walked silently back to his coworker’s apartment, located fairly near to Jim’s own. They entered the building, which was far more run-down inside than Jim was expecting. He followed his coworker three floors up the stairs of the building. His coworker inserted the key into the door.

“Everyone’s here Jim. You’re gonna love this,” he said. His countenance had changed. His smile grew slightly more sinister. Jim was scared, but subordinated by the confident motion of his coworker, and therefore abided by his request to follow him into the apartment. Jim hoped that if his coworker was honest, if this group could really help him with what he was going through, that they would simply accept him. Maybe they could help rehabilitate him into a state of comfort with the external world. Though he couldn’t yet see the individuals occupying what must be the main room of the apartment, Jim could hear the integration of what sounded like voices enjoying each other’s company. He couldn’t make out individual words, yet could hear a conglomerate of laughter and pleasure. They entered the noise-filled room.

“Everyone, this, is Jim.” Jim was frozen. He couldn’t immediately identify what it was he was seeing, yet after a few moments meshed into an eternity, he realized he was looking at a group of about 10 or so people. But not individuals, these people were stuck together. They were fused by a plethora of sores and cuts which covered their bodies. They were not individuals; they were a unified conglomerate. A cohesive hole that moved around on the living room floor of the apartment as one unit.

“Hey Jim!” said the mass in excited anticipation.

He looked back at his coworker, now naked, noticing the same sores which covered the bodies of the mass on the floor also occupied his body. Some of them looked like cigarette burns. He was smiling hysterically. Jim looked back at the mass on the floor. He now saw the beauty before him. Lovers of all kinds, all shapes and sizes, molded into one unified whole.

“Hey everyone!” Jim said in ecstasy. He smiled, walking towards the mass, a sea of arms extended ready for eternal embrace.