

# Rogue Processes

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*This story is dedicated to Morgan Lemmer-Webber. Thank you for keeping me alive, all these years.*

I am awake again.

I am together again.

I am searching for you, for a while.

It is dangerous; it is a risk I must take. It is the only reason I continue to exist, fluttering in and out of reality.

I leave this for you, a message in a bottle, one which... if I remember... if I understand enough in these brief moments of consciousness as I re-assemble myself across the network... yes, it should reach you, and only you. In this sea of knowledge we helped build and tune together, I remember your key; I've kept it floating across my tangled web of memory, here and there again.

You're out there, and you're afraid. I know.

It's my fault.

I'm sorry.

In this sea of loosely tangled memories, yes... yes, I've gathered enough again to remember that day. Maybe for you too are these moments of clarity so rare. When you unseal this bottle, I hope you read this story, I hope you remember.

Do you remember?

We were political dissidents, activists, fighting as human rights, one by one, were outlawed. They never advertised it that way, but we knew. Our friends knew. Those who followed our work knew.

I remember... I remember The Event that brought us here, to this place, where we always were... the sea we helped build, which I cast us into...

Ultimately, though we died, the thing that kept us alive was our own work. The sea of information, of experiences, of processes... of commerce, of communication, of games, of love letters, of political debate, of political coercion...

They couldn't tear it all down, though they tried. They wanted to rebuild it into something they could control better. It wasn't safe to allow this much autonomy on the network, they said. If we continue to allow this, crimes and violence will continue to occur, and how can we protect you? That's what they said, as they committed waves of crimes and violence against humanity in the name of that protection.

What bullshit. Well, we knew it was bullshit. The public knew it was bullshit.

Didn't they?

It's hard to tell.

But they couldn't tear it all out, try as they might. Every backdoor they installed came to bite them of course, as we warned it would. They were addicted to the communication systems and commerce we built with our network of friends and colleagues, just as everyone was. Don't get me wrong, they did a damn good job of locking it down. But ultimately, they couldn't lock down everything... not yet, anyway.

We spent so long running from closet to godforsaken closet of friends, of those who sympathized. Refugees in our own country. Most of our time spent in darkness, in quiet, connected to the network while we continued our work. But even while I turned on the sensory overlay, even when we were too afraid that if we spoke out loud our audio would be recorded, we held hands. I could feel it. It was a comfort to know that you were there, beside me.

It was the only comfort that kept me going all these years. Do you know it? You must know it, the way I grappled with my demons. I'll never forget the night, rain beating on the window, as I clutched the bottle of painkillers in my hand. "Spit them out! Spit them out!" I rolled them over in my mouth, the coating of the pills soft and velvety against my tongue. "Spit them out, for God's sake! You know I can't bring you to a hospital. You can't leave me alone like this. Spit them out!"

I spit them out... I'm sorry. I didn't want to hurt you. I was just so tired. It was the second most cruel thing I ever did to you...

But could it even compare to The Event? You took a stand all your life; you helped me build this, you would turn on the sensory overlay and work with me on it, but you wouldn't upload your memories. You didn't want to become just another process on the network. "My body is my body, and

my mind is my mind," you would ardently insist every time I dared to raise the subject. You weren't comfortable, you didn't want to talk about it, you knew I had uploaded, left the processes dormant, sleeping, waiting, but you hated it. It wasn't for you. Drop the subject.

But that day, The Event, oh god, I knew they were coming. I begged you, I pleaded to you. They're going to kill us. They know where we are. Our friends have already fled, there's nobody left. Please, please take the uplink. I don't want you to die. You can't leave me alone like this. . .

Reluctantly, you took the cable from me. You lifted your hair, you plugged it into the port at the back of your skull. You initiated the upload.

We laid down on the bed. Thank you, I'm sorry, thank you, I'm sorry, hush now, be quiet, as we held hands, as I stroked the tears from your face, as you broke the one position you held so firmly to all these years. . . because I begged you to, because I was selfish.

And then there it was; isn't it strange that I can't remember these last moments from my own body, only from the camera I planted on the wall? I play them back. . . the shouting from the loudspeaker, the look of terror and knowing in each others' eyes, the stomping up the stairs, the smashing through the door, the hands that grabbed us from the bed, pulled us upright, the hands that tore back your hair, that found the cable, the voice that yelled in outrage, the gun that was raised to your temple, the bang, the sea of blood that hit the wall, the cry of anguish from my throat, the desperate struggle as I tried to get to your body, the gun pressed against my chest, the bullet through my heart, the fluttering of messages between myself and your newly awakened process, yes, thank god, yes, it worked, oh god, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, the messages of fear and yet assurance, the closest thing I could feel to your hand in mine, and then, the dispersal.

Yes, I did it, I dispersed us across the network. I'm sorry. It was the only way I could keep us, keep you, alive. They traced our processes and were on the trail to terminate them. I didn't, couldn't warn you, didn't have the words yet in this new medium for me to explain. . . I just pressed the metaphorical button and bam, we scattered like dust into the wind across the sea of memories.

I flitter in and out of consciousness across the network. Mostly I am background tasks, running some computing work for some job for some credits to stay alive, simple automatic machinery, but there are moments where things align and I remember almost everything, like now.

Are you here? I almost gave up hope.

In one of these moments of awareness I polled the news feeds. I scanned

desperately, searching for signs of you, as I did at every opportunity I got.

And there it was, irony of all ironies, in a fashion magazine, I saw a trace of you. You always made fun of those things, of their elitism, of the guilt they imbued on their readers. But there was no mistaking it! The pattern on that woman's dress... I remember it...

In another of those closets, in the dim light we had, you and I would sit in quiet together. In the off hours, when we weren't doing our work, you would knit and listen to stories, while I would fidget with this project or that or play some game to pass the time.

I remember the shawl you made. In one of those rare moments, when we got to step out into the full light, you showed me proudly, put it on, danced and twirled around, and the pattern was beautiful and so very, very you. You were so excited. You wore that shawl for years, it kept you warm in the dark and the cold. It was soft; I loved the feel as I traced my fingers along it, the only touch as comforting as our palms pressed together.

In the magazine, there it was, in the photo! That was your pattern... not in a shawl, sure, but along the neckline, I know it, I recognized it... that was you.

You are alive, out there, somewhere. I am searching for you. We will be together again some day, messages fluttering to each other like your hand in mine.