

## Death of a Memory

I can't forget the dead puppy that was on the side of the road. Its fur was still a soft golden hue when I drove past it. Every Monday through Friday for three weeks, and on some weekends, I had to drive past its small form, which could not have been longer than two feet, as I exited I-15 onto Sahara to get to class. There it lay, its stomach open and its guts painting the shoulder. By the time I had seen it, the bleeding had long since stopped, yet the shade of that red never left my mind. It's the shade of red I see every time there is road kill, and the insides of whatever poor animal was on the road become its outsides, strewn over the canvas of black asphalt.

Within that first week, I had already started to dread driving up that exit ramp. Seeing a symbol of cute innocence so gruesomely displayed was a miserable way to start my day. As I drew closer to the final resting spot of that puppy, I saw what looked to be a new puppy, dead, while the old one disappeared. It took only a few moments to realize that it was actually the same puppy, hit once more, moved a couple of feet forward, and ground into the blackness beneath it. The small wish I had to pick up that poor puppy and bury it somewhere more befitting than a trash filled freeway shoulder was no longer possible. The coat of fur that had once adorned its being could no longer be differentiated from a piece of cut up carpet tossed out like litter. That is, if it weren't for the vague shape, a body with a head and four legs, that it lay in.

It wasn't until the fourth week of seeing that mournful sight that the street sweepers had finally come along to complete their duties. All that was left of the poor puppy was the imprint it left on the road, a shadow. To many, I imagine, it would be difficult to recognize that shape, which was only a few shades darker than the road it was on, as the last echoes of a puppy. But not to me. I remembered.

A year has passed since then, and that shadow has been erased by the showers and storms of the sky, and drawn over by the tire marks of drivers who cut through the shoulder as they merge onto the road. Even though I can't see its shadow anymore, I still remember that puppy every time I merge onto Sahara.

Perhaps it wasn't a puppy, but instead a dog of miniature stature like my very own dog, that I still call a puppy even though he is six, that jumps onto me and smothers me in kisses and barks like he hasn't seen me in years, even if I simply leave the room for a moment to grab a cup of water.

Perhaps that dog was a stray that wandered down the freeway along the shoulder, for what must have been a considerable distance, before happening upon the entrance to Sahara and realizing that it was on the wrong side of the road to continue its journey and that it had to cross here or forever remain trapped at this dead end, and then being hit by a car that had little to no chance of reacting to such a small creature at such high speeds in such short distance, in what could have possibly been in the middle of the night, at such low light conditions.

Maybe it was loved by its stray dog parents, or it had a family that hopefully loved it and didn't leave it out on the side of the road to die a dog's death. If that dog did have a family, then maybe they weren't careful while driving, and the dog fell out of the window. Alternatively, it might have been gutted by some sicko and left in the shoulder—as when I first saw it, its stomach was cut open and it wasn't flattened, yet, the second time it was hit, it was flattened, so it begs the question of how such a small dog could possibly not be flattened by a two thousand pound vehicle the first time, but get flattened the second time, but then that also reminds me of all the cats I've seen with only their heads smashed and brains strewn about, perhaps because they walk differently than dogs, so maybe its just the nature of road kill to only be partially

crushed or cut open—or maybe it is none of those things, or all of those things, or a mix between them in some capacity, or in no capacity, at all.

Whatever the case is, I remember that dog. I take a moment every time I see road kill and pray while driving, hoping that I do not kill an innocent animal myself, and praying that the soul of the innocent dog, or cat, or coyote, or pigeon, or rabbit, or any other animal that tends to be killed in vehicular manslaughter, has a great time in animal heaven. I buried the dead birds I came across, so that they can be offered one of the highest forms of respect that humans give to their dead, a burial. But there are some things I can't bury. Things that I have no choice but to carry. Things I choose to remember, to live on for even if I forget.

I choose to remember the friendships that have died, for I have so many of those. Those friends, as I knew them, have long since passed, replaced by individuals bearing their names, walking around in their skins. I spent so many late nights on calls, voice chats, and FaceTimes with them. The cacophony of bullets ringing and explosions blaring in my headphones, as lights flashed in the darkness of my home, were the iconic sights and sounds of our adventures. Years of my life, a decade of gaming, half a lifetime spent exploring stories and worlds with my ragtag team of heroes, villains, companions, and enemies; those memories are all I have left of our time together.

I choose to remember all the text messages we sent. Walls of words and phrases and memes and selfies containing our friendships became murals covered in beautiful mosaics of green and blue with white symbols, describing the epoch of who we were and what we did together for the archaeologists who will one day dig up and study these ancient traces of us, our future selves.

I choose to remember all of the beautiful sights I've seen in this world: the breathtaking

monoliths of clouds swept away by the wind, the lush forests with winding streams and hidden gems that were burned to ashes, the beaches and shorelines of my childhood vacations that may sink under the sea, gifts that nature has bestowed upon us that I greedily accept.

I choose to remember all of the delicious food that my tongue has forgotten. Meals handled with love and care by my parents, dishes passed down through centuries by societies and civilizations, born from both strife and serendipitous accidents alike, culminating in a feast or a snack to share with good company.

I choose to remember all of the ways that the humans, nay, *the people* before us have marked this world to tell us that they were here too, alive like us, walking through every day like it was the present and not future history.

I choose to remember for that dog who died on the side of the road nameless, afraid, and hopefully not painfully.

And I hope that even if my memory of those three weeks fades, I can carry on the remembrance of that dog, the story of that dog, the existence of that dog, through the habits that have so deeply settled themselves into my being because of that dog; unconscious in nature, but purposefully chosen. I hope that even if those habits fade too, whether by the degradation of my body by accident or age, or by the degradation of my mind—as my family assumes happened to my grandfather with dementia—or by the change in the person I am today, that I can carry the weight of that dog, light in being but infinite in its legacy, through the actions I have taken in my life. I hope that those actions continue to cascade across time, across people, across generations, and across physical phenomena, settling into the Earth itself.

I hope that even after the memory of that dog dies, long after that dog had already died, the echo of its memory persists like the shadow its body left on the canvas of the street. And I

hope that even after its echo fades—just like how its shadow dissipated back into the nothingness of the black asphalt—it stays alive through the actions I take. And I hope that through those actions, its echo will live on in the lives of others the same way that it will eventually live on in my mind: imperceptible, forgettable, but undeniably there.

I hope that even as generations pass and civilizations pass, even as our species passes on into the great unknown, followed by our home planet, our solar system, and eventually, even our universe, that our actions here on this tiny blue speck—small in the grand scheme of things, but infinitely large in the magnificence of its life—can shift just a few atoms at the end of it all, as the entirety of *everything as we know it* fades into nothingness. I hope that our actions ripple and shake and tremor and rage and cause a chain reaction long enough to make it to the end. And even if it doesn't, I choose to remember that dog for as long as I can, until I can't.