

'Take Me Back'

What is your favorite word? he asked her and pinched the muscle just above her knee.

I hate it when you do that, she said and brushed his hand away. It returned and she thought his callused fingers looked like lumps of barnacles.

Come on, what's your favorite word?

I don't know? Phonetically?

We can start there, he said.

The sex was not good enough for this shit, she thought. How long must she suffer fools to elide isolation in this city.

Mine's 'voluptuous', he said. Go ahead, say it. Come on, it feels good to say it. VO-LUP-TUOUS.

Are you implying something? she asked.

He smiled and pinched her leg again.

She looked at the unshaven scruff that wiggled up and down his throat when he spoke. It reminded her of the whiskers under the bloated chins of the manatees she would pet as a kid in Florida. Then she gazed back out her window and saw the 3rd billboard that day for 'Past Life'. Ubiquitous. That's a fun word, she thought. Ubiquitous... like the green Prius they drove in, passing countless other green Priuses on Sunset Blvd. The eyes of the man on the advertisement seemed to follow her. It was like the universe was telling her something. "The universe is telling me something?" She critiqued her inner voice. I've lived in LA too long.

How fucking sad for someone to buy into that, he said looking up at the billboard. People are willing to end their lives as they know it just to relive shit they've already done? No sense of adventure.

She looked at him and drew a deep breath through her nose. His cologne smelled like testosterone siphoned through a semester at UCLA. It could be worse, she said.

What?

Living.

Jesus, that's depressing, he said.

I don't know, I used to do some pretty cool shit. Maybe I've lived enough to just coast through memory.

Jesus, babe.

Come on, she said. Don't you ever wanna go back and relive the best sex you've ever had?

Give me ten minutes, he simpered and scraped his barnacle fingers upwards along her thigh. Then he pointed out the window at another Past Life ad placed on the back of a bus stop bench.

'Living *your* best life... again' he read. Well, clearly they've got a clientele.

This was true. The company was making bazillions selling people their own recycled memories. They had found a way to tap into one's amygdala, extract the best memories and facilitate the reliving of them. Even those a client could not recall on their own. The catch was that once one submitted to this 'treatment', no new memories could be formed.

That's one step away from Kevorkian, he said.

Their clients are depressed, but it's not suicide.

They're catatonic wastes of space, he said pressing on the gas. Draining their life savings to lay in a dark vat of nostalgia? That's not living, babe.

Can you slow down? She was gripping the edge of the seat.

I bet they're using these people somehow— some sort of fucking energy zap or—

STOP! She yelled.

He slammed on the brakes. A woman wearing only a t-shirt had jumped into the street and danced inches away from the front bumper. She seemed ecstatic to be performing whatever number was playing out in her brain, until she stopped

suddenly and hissed at them. Shouting something about cocaine in the eighties and hell, she made her way across the street into oncoming traffic.

Jesus Christ, he said. Do people just forget I'm in a two ton piece of metal that will FUCKING CRUSH THEM!

Is a Prius two tons? she muttered.

The woman bent over and slapped her bare bottom at the Tesla that had halted just short of her Tony-award-winning perineum. Another couple stepped around her in the crosswalk barely looking up from their phones.

I swear I'm done with this shit, he said to himself.

She was done too, she thought. Living in memory sounded nice... safe... placid, like the photograph of the mountain rill weaving through the landscape behind the model, paid to be a scientist, smiling on the Past Life billboard.

It's creepy, he said. They might as well make us androids.

Already in a flesh prison, she said pressing her forehead against the window.

Christ. Hey, no offense taken here, he said. You might be ready to turn into a robot but I myself happen to like my life.

As he turned onto his street, she perked up as one particularly kitschy embellishment caught her eye. How many times had she seen this without taking note of it? A concrete manatee holding a mailbox made of barnacles.

Synchronicity, she said.

No, babe, it's singularity. And we're getting fucking close.

No. My favorite word... it's synchronicity.

-Cookie

