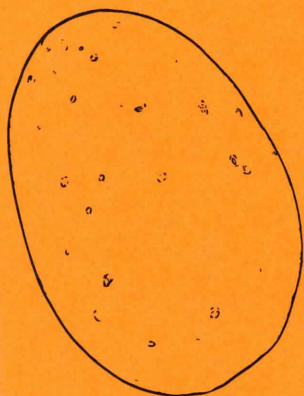


Potato: An Adventure

&

Victor.



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Potato: An Adventure

It was finally time, the day that Potato had heard about his entire life. Stories that had been passed down from his parents and his grandparents. The day that Potato would finally be put in a crate along with all of his potato pals and sent to Ralph's, where they would fulfil their destiny of becoming something greater. Potato had always dreamed of this day, hoping that maybe he'd be purchased by a loving family, made into salad, given a massage and turned into what the humans called "mashed" potatoes or even something fancy like Au Gratin. One time, Potato heard stories about potatoes being mixed with fruit at this place run by a trader named Joe, Potato didn't really know how to feel about that, he thought he'd be open to the idea. This was his destiny though, he thought; as he rode along in the truck bouncing along the highways and streets, he didn't even mind what became of him. He'd even settle with becoming a french-fry, as long as they were the tasty kind.

In with the rest of them were yams, celery and asparagus, all born locally, he'd even met some of them before back on the farm. The celery were quite friendly vegetables that usually kept to themselves, not ones to cause trouble unlike those mischievous asparagus. Those guys took up the corner space of the truck, twirling their moustaches and making gestures with their hands at Potato that he didn't know what to make of. Then there were the yams. Potato had always heard stories about the yams, how they were kind of a stuck up bunch but until then he'd never seen one up close. Potato didn't think they looked so different, he was pretty similar to a yam and a yam was sort of like a potato, so what was the big deal?

Looking out of the open trailer, Potato began to miss the simple life of the farm. Sitting in a field all day with his head in the ground, this place was all new and scary to him. The cars following behind, the buildings, the dogs walking the humans and this thing he thought might be a cat because it was this speedy little thing with a tail that ran into some bushes as soon as they passed.

"You miss the farm, huh? Probably a little homesick, I bet"

Said Yam, shifting his position to get a better view of what was outside the truck. Potato didn't really know what homesick meant, he'd only heard about potatoes being sick once but that was hundreds of seasons ago from what he heard.

"I guess.....I just miss the farm. I don't know what will be there for me at Ralph's" Thinking about this just made Potato even more upset, even worse, he didn't know if Ralph was one person or just a bunch of humans named Ralph. Yam began to speak, "It's okay, you're just lucky it's the holiday season so I'm *sure* someone will buy you. Usually they donate you guys or just throw you out because you take so long to sell". Potato couldn't believe what he'd just heard, that so many of his friends would just be thrown away! Being given away wasn't so bad; at least they got to lead a full potato life and helped someone but being thrown out? He couldn't imagine it! But by then, he couldn't hold back the milky tears.

There was a loud thunk, the trailer shook violently, tossing each crate into the air. The asparagus lost all their cards and dice, the celery didn't really seem to mind but Potato and Yam were sent tumbling out, bouncing along the hot asphalt to the side of the road. Potato was in shock as he watched the trailer truck speed off, looking into the eyes of all of this lifelong friends as they just stared back, jaws dropped and unable to help. Potato didn't know what to do, he sat along the curb for a few minutes as car after car drove by, trying to figure out what he should do, maybe, with a little luck he thought, the driver would notice and turn around. He waited and waited, hoping the truck would return but it never came.

Yam was sitting just a few feet away and as much as he didn't like it, he knew that he'd have to work with him to see Ralph. After all, Yam was the one that made him feel so bad in the first place. "Yam, you okay?" Potato called out but there was no response, Yam simply turned away from Potato. "Yam, listen....get up. Ralph can't be too far from here. We can make it" Again, there was no response from Yam. Potato finally made his way to face Yam and there was no hiding the milky tears at this point. "You're gonna get all dried out if you keep that up, we gotta go. I'm sure we're close, come on!" said Potato. Still, Yam didn't reply, letting out a deep sigh he decided to go ahead a bit to see if Ralph's store was nearby. As he made his way down the sidewalk, he heard steps behind him and looking back carefully, he saw Yam following behind, still sniffing. When he called out once more, "Yam, get up here! Look!" Yam finally swallowed his pride, running up to Potato and they stood in awe side by side, as they both saw what they'd been looking for. Way off in the distance, barely recognizable, it was the sign of Ralph. "That'll take weeks, months, seasons to get there!" Exclaimed Yam to which Potato replied

"It might but do we really have a choice?" and so the two set out down the sidewalk of 7th street.

As they walked along the sidewalk, seemingly unnoticed by all of the humans around, they were interrupted by a bush that had appeared to have become alive. Shaking violently and growling both Potato and Yam stepped back in fear. Yam grabbed Potato, clutching onto him, placing Potato between the bush and himself when out shot a dog, sending leaves flying. The dog stared at Yam, then at Potato, then at Yam and finally rested her gaze on Potato with a look of bewilderment before leaping forward, grabbing Potato in her jaws, growling and swinging her head back and forth before releasing him covered in slobber. Potato and Yam regrouped as quickly as they could, looking their now panting attacker in the eyes as she rolled her tongue out and drooled on the concrete.

"I'm Sam" Said the Dog before rushing forward and sniffing with vigour. "Sometimes I just get a little carried away; you don't look so bad though. You're good. Yeah, you're doing okay. What are you guys doing? Aren't you guy's vegetables? What are your names? I'm Sam!" Potato and Yam introduced themselves to their new compatriot before Sam spoke again, "So where are you guys going?", "To Ralph's" said Potato. "You mean....the big place down that way? Yeah....I know that place. They're jerks. A bunch of humans named Ralph are in there guarding food and sometimes they let people take it but not me, they just chase me out" The memories of seeing steaks of all shapes and sizes rushed into Sam's mind, along with the disappointment of not being able to feast on them. "Why would you guys want to go there?" Sam asked. "We've been waiting to go there our whole lives. If we don't get there, then how will I become french-fries, scalloped, mashed or Au Gratin? It's what we were born to do!" said Potato, as Yam nodded in agreement, "Would you be able to take us there?". Sam looked at Potato, then at the sign, then at Potato, then the sign once more and finally rested her eyes on Potato said, "Climb on!" lowering her head for Potato and Yam to climb up and grab onto her collar.

Sam took off down the sidewalk, moving nearly as fast as the cars that drove by, while Potato and Yam held on for dear life as she ran headfirst into traffic, weaving in and out of the many cars and even more sounds of screeching tires and honks. They ran down the main street through front yards and sprinklers, only stopping periodically when Sam felt the need to viciously assault the water

exiting the sprinkler heads. Before long they'd arrived at the front of the massive building, watching from behind a bush as hundreds of people walked in and out of the store, leaving with tons of food. "See, they just let them take it! They won't even share any with me" Said Sam while burying her head into her paws. As Sam began pacing around in the planter, listing all of the various foods that the humans won't share with her, Potato noticed a truck just like the one they were riding on before drive behind the building. "Sam, have you ever gone to the back of Ralph's before?" said Potato, "Yeah but they have people named Ralph back there too, they're usually moving boxes and stuff inside. Sometimes you can sneak in that way" Replied Sam. Before Potato had time to suggest it, Sam sprang into action. She darted across the parking lot, running through the legs of one particularly large human before arriving to the rear of the building. Sam was right, there were several Ralphs back here but far, far less people than before.

The three tried to think of the best way to get inside while hiding behind some boxes. Yam was the first to suggest it, "We need a distraction. Sam...see that Ralph over there, do you think you could make him chase you away from the door?", Sam nodded and began moving low to the ground, slinking through the parking lot, until the three of them were just outside the door where the Ralph was. Sam bolted inside, knocking down steel racks of bread, barking furiously, grabbing chip bags in her mouth and tearing them open, darting around the rear of the store while narrowly avoiding the hands of every Ralph. As fast as Sam was, there was one Ralph that wore a shirt unlike the others, a particularly large and mean looking Ralph grabbed Sam and held her down, yelling something about "animal control". Sam whimpered and considered her life choices, thinking about all of the tasty food that was so close, yet so, so far away when several large boxes fell on top of the Ralph, releasing her from his grasp. High above on the shelves stood a group of asparagus that once more, made hand gestures at the Ralph that Potato did not understand. Sam ran over the Ralph, grabbed a very fresh piece of salmon in her jaws while trotting past Potato and Yam only pausing to let out a muffled "You're welcome" as they waved their appreciation. The distraction had worked perfectly, giving Potato and Yam more than enough time to run through the door and make their way inside, running through the stockrooms and freezers and into the produce section. The section that they'd been told about their entire lives.

Potato and Yam marvelled in it, the clean cool environment, the sprinklers that regularly bathed some of the vegetables. To think, that all these vegetables and fruits were living harmoniously, hearing each of them share their hopes and dreams as to what they might become brought a smile to Potato's face.

Potato and Yam, with the help of Sam, had made it all the way from the farm, truck, streets and to the store, finally. Potato boosted Yam up into the racks, then Yam reached down and pulled him up. All of their Potato's friends rejoiced as they saw him once more and they included Yam in the celebrations too. Potato noticed that plenty of his potato pals had already been picked up and taken to good homes, the thought of some of his childhood friends becoming part of a well-balanced family meal brought a tear to his eye. Yam hugged Potato, telling him that he would have still been on the street if it weren't for him before taking his place with his fellow yams. Eventually, a weary human female came in with her hair dishevelled and bags under her eyes, with a few human children in tow. She scanned the selection of goods as each Potato, Yam, Orange, Celery Stalk and everything in between, began shouting out to be plucked and taken home. She reached in and grabbed Potato, along with a few of his friends. They all let out cheers, giving one another high-fives as they all were dropped into the clear plastic bag, even the modest Celery let out a reserved fist pump and a nod. As the commotion began to settle, Potato was able to hear her say, "So what do you guys think about Au Gratin tonight?"

Victor.

The Bridge

There was no fighting it, it'd come to a dead stop. Placing the car in neutral he began to check the time feverishly, muttering incoherent obscenities with every glance, cursing time, his phone and the situation. He was trapped two miles passed the last exit and a quarter mile onto the bridge, where the crowd had gathered on the road way. With a twist of the key, he cut the engine and along with it any ambient sound that he had to accompany him. As he sat with his hands wrapped tightly around the steering wheel, knuckles bared white from the grip, he began to focus on the light murmur from the crowd. What were they saying? What could be so interesting that they block traffic and inconvenience hundreds of people on a Monday? Other drivers began to try and answer those questions, abandoning their now trapped vehicles, showing their interest and frustrations with hand motions of acknowledgement to those that had done the same. Not to be left out, he pushed the car door open, making sure his door came in firm contact with the Jaguar that was now sitting directly beside him on a freeway and begrudgingly grabbing his coffee, croissant and phone before making the trip up the roadway.

Each of those weighted steps toward the crowd seemed to pull his perpetual scowl even lower. This of course was Victor's natural state, a seemingly bone deep grimace that resulted in his only expressions ranging from utterly displeased to utterly displeased and today, he was utterly displeased. Victor's eyebrows furrowed, wincing slightly as he made sure to displace each side mirror with his hips, nonchalantly of course but it still brought some pleasure and perhaps a smirk (if you could call it that) until he made it to the rear of the crowd, where he sipped his coffee and began listening in. Victor sipped the coffee. It was terrible. "He's been up for there for a while, I think he's getting ready to jump" said one, "Oh yeah, I think I heard him yelling about medical bills or something" said another. The crowd cooed and empathized with the perceived plight of the man. He took a bite of the croissant. Not so terrible. It had redeeming qualities he thought, unlike this collection of human garbage that had drifted to the halfway point of the bridge. He looked beyond the crowd and could

see a lone man, young...ish, standing on the opposite side of the railing. *This* brought the thoroughfare to its knees at 6:47 on a Monday morning?

He'd seen more than enough. Victor took a large gulp of his swill, then held the cup out at arm's length and released it, letting it fall onto the asphalt which caused it splash all of its sub-par contents onto the legs of the people standing in front of him. He wiped his mouth, exposing the scowl that had reached new heights, his eyes beaming as he walked forward with his head low, placing his shoulder on the pant-suited woman in front of him, cleaning his hands on her clothing. Victor gave her a forced smile (every smile was forced) before pushing on through the crowd, shoving his way to the front. A few of the more adventurous ones had moved into the semi-circular barrier that the railing man had created with his voice, it was surprisingly effective and even made Victor stop, if only for a moment. He was now half way from the human garbage settlement and The Railing Man. They locked eyes momentarily, the railing man fidgeting amidst a flurry of "Get back", "I'll do it man! Get back!". Victor looked down the roadway and spotted the lights coming up to the stopped traffic, just barely visible silhouettes of men holding their tool belts got out and sprinted forward, there was precious little time for Victor do what he felt needed to be done. He locked eyes with The Railing Man once more and shouted with a deep guttural rage: "HEY!", both The railing Man and the crowd stopped fidgeting, with only the breeze and the light hum of a few engines could be heard. Victor raised his arm and pointed with every word said: "Jump, *you* piece of shit! Do it! You see what your snivelling has done? It has only inconvenienced *me*", Victor paused momentarily to allow time for the collective gasps, "Jump....or go and do it at home like a normal person." Railing Man looked at the water which was more than several stories down and then at the crowd. He whimpered uncontrollably then suddenly stopped; wiping the tears on his sleeves he stepped back over the railing and collapsed on the bridge.

The crowd was silent with their gaze affixed on Victor as he stomped through the crowd once more, arms at his side he ploughed through, only to be interrupted by one particularly miserable youth aiming his phone directly in his face. Victor stopped, looked at the young man, then the phone and slowly reached out, placing his long boney fingers around it. Taking it in hand and whipping it off the side of the bridge while maintaining eye-contact with the man. "Have

some class, scum”, Victor said before continuing his march back to the car. He sat down in his 1986 Honda Civic (A classic), started the engine and began to fall in line with the now slowly moving traffic. On the right, The Railing Man was consoled by a few remainders of wind-swept human garbage and police while they led him to a squad car with his hands cuffed in front of him.

Bosco The Cat.

To say that he didn't have routines would have been an understatement. Victor was a habitual man, a reliable man, the kind of man you could set a watch to. He checked the mail at 4:30, he watched the five o'clock news while grimacing at all of the mail and sipped tea until dinner at 6:00. This was a routine that Victor had established a decade or so before and under no circumstances was it to be interrupted.

“Area man who was coaxed off the railing of the bay bridge last June has now published a self-help book entitled, *Life At The Edge* and here he is us tonight to share his harrowing story.” Victor recognized the face. It was The Railing Man, sans the bloodshot eyes and trembling but it was him. He sat and watched the interview, sipping tea while scoffing and stroking his chin. He placed his cup back on the coffee table, sitting back in the chair only to be interrupted by a loud and distinct meow. Victor didn't have a cat, in fact, he hated cats. He hated dogs too and to be fair, hated pretty much everything. The one thing that he did appreciate was his ability to hate, which appeared to be infinite in possibilities. As he tried to ignore it, the meowing grew persistent and looking out the front windows to his porch, he could see the distinct outlines of a fluffy tail marching across his window sill. Victor stormed to the door, pulled it open and sitting there, licking its paw, was a small orange Tabby.

Victor stomped the ground. The cat stared at Victor and gave a slight “meow.” He tried to stepping forward to chase the cat off his porch, it simply took one step backwards and replied with “meow.” For a moment, Victor did appreciate the audacity of the cat but any admiration he had was tossed aside as he lunged forward, grabbing the cat and lifting him to eye level. He read the tag aloud: “Bosco The Cat.” but that's all there was, no address. Just “Bosco The Cat.” The cat didn't have a name, it had a sentence and as he pondered this, Bosco purred.

He set him down and yelled, “Piss off, cat!” to which Bosco

replied, "meow?" He then grabbed the hose, aimed it at Bosco which caused him to scamper off the porch and behind a bush. As he walked back into the house, Bosco followed him to the doorstep once more. "Meow", Said Bosco as his tail swashed back and forth. Victor was done battling Bosco The Cat, he looked him in the eye and flipped him off for a healthy ten to fifteen seconds, closed the door and began to make dinner. Bosco purred.

On Offices

"Did you see Jeanette yet? She just came back from maternity leave", "No." Replied Victor, with clinched teeth. For some *reason* she was still standing there. Victor thought he had delivered all of the pertinent information to Celia with "No.", he had acknowledged that Jeanette was a co-worker, that he was unaware of her return and had not seen her. Furthermore, he was most displeased that she even existed, so why, why was she still standing there? He stared at Celia, which most of the time encouraged people to leave his vicinity. It wasn't working. "I'll....say hi", Victor said in a low and drawn out tone which appeared to satisfy her because at that point, she did leave.

He had made it through half the day without interacting with the rest of the "slime" that resided in the building as him from 7AM to 4PM. During lunch, Victor usually made sure his interactions were kept at a minimum by moving all of the chairs, except one, to the other tables in the lunchroom, that way he would be able to sit alone. Unfortunately, it had happened. He dropped his sandwich in disgust, took a deep breath and slowly raised his head. Jeanette was there, "Would you like to see my baby photos? His name is Anthony! He weight a little above seven pounds and he's perfectly healthy", Victor seemingly cringed in physical pain by this information and to some, it may have been mistaken for some horribly warped version of a smile. "He's cute isn't he?!" shouted Jeanette while forcing the photos in front of him. He stared at the photos thinking to himself, "What awful people would do this? Creating this tadpole like mass, finance adsorbing creature that smelled terrible and wasn't even a productive member of society. No, this isn't *cute*, this is another spot infection on the surface of the world. I don't even know what this is but I hate it."

"Sure he is" Replied Victor, sliding the pictures toward Jeannette. She collected them and began speaking once more, "Victor, I've been working here for a while now, what exactly do you do?", "Security." he replied. "What do you mean?", "I mean security."

Jeannette let out an uncomfortable laugh, "Care to elaborate?" he needed to be rid of this troglodyte person. Pausing for a moment, he then cleared his throat and said in a loud enough voice for all to hear, "I read all of your emails, not just you, all of you. I read all of your emails every day. I do internal security. I make sure that you are all living up to your no-compete contracts and that nothing we develop leaves this office, intentionally or unintentionally. I know who is dating who, who hates who and I've accidentally seen some of you naked." Jeanette laughed and gave Victor a pat on the shoulder while others actually wondered if it was true. A few of them stared wide eyed at one another and excused themselves back to their desks. Productivity rose 34% next quarter. Everyone received a bonus.

On Retirement

A habitual man, as it were. A newspaper in the morning with coffee, the rocking chair, maybe a croissant on the porch. Then lunch. A half sandwich with soup from that hippie commune place down the street, saving the other half for an afternoon snack. Of course, you know how dinner goes.

Retirement was not only easy for Victor but enjoyable. It allotted him time to do all of the things he'd wanted to do through feigned senility. The mailman? Oh the names he was called. The neighbour kids who would walk across his lawn? They received the hose and were accused of being communist.

As he stood on the porch taking the last sip of his tea, he nodded while surveying the neighbourhood. Deciding that his work for the day was done he then said, "Come on Bosco, it's time for dinner." while stepping inside.

Notes for Potato: An Adventure

Notes for Victor.

On Retirement

A hot bath and a good newspaper in the morning with coffee for making things may be a pleasant thing. But, I think, a hot bath and a good newspaper in the morning with coffee for making things may be a pleasant thing. But, I think, a hot bath and a good newspaper in the morning with coffee for making things may be a pleasant thing.

Remember that not only I, but Victor has a job to do. It is not only I, but Victor has a job to do. It is not only I, but Victor has a job to do. It is not only I, but Victor has a job to do. It is not only I, but Victor has a job to do.

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