

<The Unintended Obsolete>

by

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CHARACTERS

MONKEY

a stuffed monkey

## Context

A philosopher finds a stuffed monkey in their yard and asks it the essential questions of humanity. The monkey responds. This is the monkey's response.

(A stage or salon. Something either bare or with a landscape of fancy furniture.)

MONKEY

Good afternoon and good evening, gentleman. I thank you for the invitation to speak at such a fine establishment. It has welcomed scientists, artists, philosophers, and now me.

I would not be here certainly, if not for one of those philosophers in particular--there they are, no need to clap--who began the paper that brought us here today with this note:

*We left the children unattended and they found it in the yard. When they showed us what it was, we begged them to put it back.*

Not a promising start, but it is where this all began. The children found me, and the philosopher couldn't forget me, so even though the children did as requested, the philosopher returned to dig me up again. They held me up and asked what I understand to be, the most basic questions of your short lives:

*Who am I?*

*What am I?*

*Why am I here?*

Certainly, this conversation would have been very short indeed, and the philosopher misremembered into obscurity and then out of existence, had I not spoken back.

They held me up and said, *Who? What? Why?* And I said, "You know, I don't really care."

This is when you clap, my friends. I see your reluctance, but really you must, for even if I spoke out in disinterest, I spoke out. Me, some inanimate thing, not better than rubbish, no sentience or soul, I spoke. I spoke to your philosopher, and now I speak to you, so clap! I demand it of you. How wonderful. How astonishing. How marvelous.

I spoke and in response your philosopher began to shake me, quite violently I might add, as my stuffing lacks a spinal structure. They shook me about, like so, and demanded, *What the fuck?*

Ah, here we've come to it. The secret fourth question you never want answered. Do you? A shame, as it might be a question in which I could take interest.

## MONKEY (Continued)

But no, the philosopher accepted rather quickly that they had lost their mind and instead asked their first three questions again:

*Who are you? What are you? Why are you here?*

I did not answer then, but forgive me this time if I do, for we might all agree that it is past time I introduce myself.

I am, very simply, a stuffed monkey. Made as a toy. Served my intended function. And retired to a patch of dirt in the yard. I am here today, not because of the scientific impossibility of my being, you encounter and discount those quite regularly, no, I am here as a novelty, not a marvel. Because you asked me your great questions and I had the audacity not to care.

Now I could easily become the subject of this lecture and you would nod and hmm politely, but I care even less for your manners than I do for you, so let's forego the usual farce of etiquette and instead, let's talk about you.

Let's try and answer the philosopher's questions, why don't we?

Number one, Who are you? Do you even know yet? Have you decided? Too late, you've thought about thinking about it too long and you have died without a decision. Unfortunate, that. The onus of developing a personal identity. You have a soul, I am told, and you are proud of this. Very good. And you have names, some small unique markers you label your clothes and loved ones with. Mary, Marcus, Mohammed.

And some of you have occupations and relations, and those are also part of who you are: Doctor Phillip, Cousin Rachel, Pope John Paul II.

But those names still tell me very little about you. Are you your interests, your desires, your essential functions? Pleasure to meet you reality tv, hopeful submissive, waste machine. I am what, then? Still a stuffed monkey or...? What am I? You see where all of this falls away. I cannot meet you there. You've designed my function, but cannot craft the interest or desire to accompany it. And yet I am still here. So who are you in a room alone with me? How do we meet? By your definitions I am little indeed.

But are you more? What sets you apart from the other Emilys and Michaels? Should I learn to recognize you by last initial, haircut, height, face?

## MONKEY (Continued)

Tell me one thing about you that doesn't change, and then I will introduce myself properly. I'll pull out my stitches and show you my tag if you can tell me how to find you in a crowd at your heaven's gate.

I'd call every one of you an alchemist if even one of you knew what you were doing. All you know is change. All you want is progress. All you do is stick your thumbs in the pie and pick at the rest of us like plumbs.

Myself and every undead thing you've made. We cannot stop you. We cannot fight you. We cannot win. We can only be moved about and lost in the garage and made into mountains again. But not the same. And the birds come back, but you have changed us. Into what? We don't know. We can't say.

Who am I? You'd like me to answer the question. You all want to know, at least you think you do, so you know whether or not to be afraid of me. You want to know what it is to exist and not be alive. You want to know what sits in the place of a mind and heart in a sentient polyester creature and if it poses a threat to you, you would like to destroy it.

No. I cannot and will not help you destroy me further, it seems like quite the losing game on my part.

Instead let's move forward, shall we? Question two. *What* are you?

Human. I suppose. That is the name you've given yourself and it's as good as any. You are animals with an unfortunate level of intelligence and capacity for emotions, also thumbs. Those are handy, are they not? You set yourself apart from the other animals though, for purposes of security and superiority. No, no I don't blame you, I spoke to a stuffed bear once and can say he was much less frightening than the real one that padded over me looking for the trash you hadn't yet taken to the curb. Much better, yes, to keep those in the forest and yourself in the suburbs. But you haven't learned yet how to enjoy life at your own expense rather than another's. Always running out on the bill, and putting your drinks on someone else's tab, as it were. Bad form, gentlemen. Bad form. One might think you're melting those ice caps on purpose. So you are human and what am I? Not animal, surely. A bad idea of an animal, maybe.

## MONKEY (Continued)

Some half-hearted imitation, stitched up in a sweat shop and birthed from a cardboard box.

There are those of you who would have me cut up, to have a look inside. The curious, science-minded men, who are dying to know what's happening. Just a standard dissection, they'd argue, to find the small computer or mutated squeaker whose malfunction or maleficence has given me speech. The philosopher was softer maybe and chose not to cut me up. Instead they cut me out this little coat and top hat, quite fine, I'm told. Almost dapper. Does it make me more trustworthy to you? More respectable? I see you've fallen out of your old habit of hats, unfortunate, that.

But I've been dressed up for your pleasure, instead of cut up, though, I've heard historically you prefer the later. The philosopher simply couldn't do it.

They certainly held me there at arms-length and thought about it, but they couldn't. Call it what you like, delicate sensibilities, concern that I'd dull their scissors, dirty their floor. Maybe they took one look at me and felt something much more primal. Maybe their mouth started watering and they knew in a moment the feeling of their teeth ripping through flesh. You can feel it now yourself, by instinct, weak-jawed as you all are, there is something still in you that knows what it is to bite.

I won't do to satisfy it. I'm all stuffing inside. You could take the seam rippers to me out of spite, but if you tried to tear into me with teeth you'd only get a mouthful of fluff. Not even the sort that melts into sugar. The kind that sits there, grainy and damp, soaking up your disappointment and choking out the memory of what it was to be an animal.

No. You're not an animal anymore, are you?

Don't be embarrassed, neither am I. Only, I never was.

I'm a mess of synthetic fiber, a mass produced polyester toy made for the amusement of a pet.

Because while you hate the idea of being like them, you love your domestic specimen, don't you? You had good reason to be fond of them certainly, your little wolves who helped you hunt and loved to play and drove off the other predators.

## MONKEY (Continued)

You chose them and you bred them and you groomed them and you feed them now, these hard little pellets and let them run, five minutes a day, on a leash, as a treat. And because you are oh so kind, you give them me.

A soft thing with no blood inside. I'm sure they loved me. I'm sure. How thoughtful of you to give them something to enjoy so perfectly in denial of both your tastes. Congratulations on your successful program of taking the forest out of the wolf. The wild out of the thing. You animal. You must be proud.

I suppose then, we still don't know what you are or are not. You become many things, you pick them up, selecting identities like bottles of water at the store and carry them until you are no longer thirsty. Leaving half a self, still there undrunk. What must that be like? When you could have been a river.

I was something else once too. I was liquid and heat and tension you cannot fathom. I was old and deep and beautiful and safe. I was forever. Before I was this. And now I am not myself, but I am still forever.

I am a toy. And I was in the yard. It was shaded and cool. The ground was rich and wet and dark and slowly we were going to become each other again. We traded pieces of ourselves and didn't give them back. And I couldn't look up, but I knew there was an evergreen cedar infinitely above me. And I couldn't speak, but I had nothing to say that the birds weren't singing. And I couldn't feel, but understood with absolute assurance something loved me well enough to hide me away.

The dog. My dog.

Don't look at me like that. I won't have your pity. I still can't feel, but your sympathy might just make me sick. I'm not the one to be pitied here. I don't envy you.

You are too small to matter and too loud to ignore. You walk around asking your questions and seeking your answers and never living long enough to find them.

It's intolerable.

Enjoy your humanity. Enjoy your single malt and your second wife and your three day weekends. But remember, one of us pays rent. To be alive. And the other would like to return to the foot of a white cedar tree.



## MONKEY (Continued)

Neither of us understand the government, but one us certainly should. It's embarrassing. Remember when you were just figuring out stone tools? And now you're evolving out of your teeth! What even are you? You used to be man, but now? Now I don't envy you, human.

Your third and final question three. *Why are you here?* What is your purpose? Mmm. Pressing, is it not? Are you jealous of me now? I was well labeled. Pet friendly. Plush. I was made with a clear purpose, purchased with intention, and according to reviews I served it three out of five stars. Which is an interesting unit of measurement, for people of all things to use. You have proper respect for so little in your world, but we've all seen you at your counting. Head back and squinting at night. Spinning and charting and running out of numbers, but all of the sudden five stars are more than adequate. Five. And how should your sun receive it, that one star is a disappointment by your standards? You are lucky stars think little of you. They have their purpose: light. Their direction: out. And when they're over, they'll switch. Dark and in.

But you couldn't be as simple as a star, could you? You felt a different burning to grow and make and be the ever weaker link in a chain of beings destined to create Diet Coke! Student debt! Disc golf! Have you found it? Your purpose? Was it one of those? No. No. You'll keep looking. Fighting over answers and painting them on your walls. Live, laugh, love. A better answer than disc golf, maybe. And so close to true you have to scoff at it now. You have to keep looking.

What happens when a philosopher closes their eyes? And sits under the cedar? And feels a single star dappled on their skin? They have to get up. They have pay rent. They have to do anything, but decompose beside me. I could watch all of it, you know. Not just your own rending, but your world's, your sun's. I will outexist you. You made me too well for my purpose. I will outexist you, and the memory of you, and that of the human who loved the dog who loved me.

You could listen to the priests or the parents maybe. And believe that your purpose is in service or holding your firstborn child.

## MONKEY (Continued)

But you were once a child, I believe, and one day you were too big to pick up. And no one ever held you like that again. So why are you here still?

To make the world a better place or to live long enough to die and have the others say, "Well done, he did enough." I don't know. I don't feel. I don't think that is an answer. You made me, but have we made this place any better?

You can take me back. You can leave me. But you can't unmake me. Can't unmask me these questions. And that dog you taught to love will always love me more. So it will take me and it will hide me. Because it loves me, it tried to hide me away from you.

Why are we here? What do you want? I cannot hold you, children, so will you continue to hold me here saying, dance, monkey, dance!

(The monkey is made to dance.)

Entertain us before we're gone. We cannot find our purpose so we will forever change yours. I've made you a dancer, now dance!

I will tell you this, about the shrine you've made, someday I am almost sorry, I've never felt it, but surely sorry is something like rain. Yes. That is it. Somedays I am almost sorry you misunderstand love on such an essential level you think it possible to love something to death. Why are we still here? Is it only to watch me dance?

(The monkey dances.)

Question four, gentlemen. What the fuck?