

Would You Still Be You

Text for A Shadow Play

by

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In collaboration with
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(Darkness. We hear LANCE'S voice, softly narrating. He is in his twenties. He often refers to himself as Lance. He has been doing this all his life.)

LANCE'S VOICE

October 3, 1985: I was born. There is a certificate.

After that, what really happened? - it's up for grabs. That's for sure.

I am in a crib, giants looking down. They bow. Maybe I have a secret.

Later there is a play room.

Then there is another house. On the coast.

Other stuff happens: cakes, Tangled Sister and Freckled Sister push through. Kiddy gashes. Stitches. Games with swords and shields sisters won't play.

I build a secret raft out of egg cartons, Styrofoam, cork, and Tangled Sister's sock drawer. Freckled Sister helps me launch it. It floats. She puts me on it. It sinks. She pulls me out. We go home and I watch Ninja Turtles. Tangled Sister causes parents to forbid me to make a raft. They forbid me to say I want to sail away. Garage locked. Tools locked. No Turtles for me. I look up spells in my books. I turn Tangled Sister invisible. Years go by in solitary confinement.

Freckled Sister and I are riding bikes on the dunes.

(As LANCE speaks the next paragraph, lights come up to establish a panorama of vacuous apartment houses. The view closes in on one apartment. The view changes to show a cramped apartment.)

The mist rolls in. It rolls between me and Freckled Sister. Gulls caw, waves rake the scruff of the beach, I spur my bike through the crusty patches. The sun breaks through for a - nope, gone. But from that moment someone topples through the mist. Sure. . . a woman. Freckled Sister Gone. New Woman right there. A woman who understands . . .

(The view changes to show LANCE in bed.)

. . . that the boy on the bike is a knight.

She gave him a quest, she asked him to search. She vanished

(An alarm goes off. LANCE gets out of bed and pads to the toilet.)

Every morning, I wake up knowing there is something I am supposed to do.

(LANCE pees.)

It flits around me on the rim of the world. And before it leaves, I have the sensation . . .

(Insipid A.M. music comes from a neighbor's apartment.)

. . . that if I'd woken a second earlier, I would have seen it. But it falls away as usual and when I go back into my head to see if I can find it, all I find are sagging thoughts such as "I gotta remember toothpaste. And a phone number 707-747-8325." There's nothing behind these things. I've looked.

Why had those giants bowed to me?

(LANCE gets dressed.)

I have no idea where I got this shirt. What color is it?

(LANCE turns off the light.)

Later I ate breakfast.

Awake now, yes, intensely aware, my senses immediately attuned to the slightest sound . . .

(We see LANCE crouched, peering at something.)

. . . the smallest change in the field. After all tracking is a knight's art – even if he doesn't know what he's tracking–

(A toaster pops up a piece of toast. The noise startles LANCE, whom we see is crouched at eye level to the toaster.)

I knew not to startle the creature.

(He gingerly removes the toast and examines it.)

Is it alive? Does it know it exists? Anything behind it?

(LANCE chews the toast. His i-Phone goes on. He keeps eating. It won't cycle off.)

I fought the spell.

(LANCE pantomimes trying to prevent himself from reaching for the phone. Finally he is 'forced' to pick the phone up. He groans, then he pops open the phone. His voice is beleaguered – a contrast to his tone so far. Between his answers, we hear Karl's voice as an annoying sound.)

Yeah.

I finished it.

Last night.

Two AM.

Were you going to read it at Two AM?

It's a Power Point introduced by penguins, there's nothing to finalize.

I animated the penguins.

I animated the pie charts.

Yes, I added the BeeGees. The penguins boogey down.

I know how to take a train, Karl.

I know. Ten A.M.

Got it.

(with no conviction) Yeah, it'll knock their socks off. Never in the history of fiber optics customer relations product development has such a power point presentation been crafted. The client'll see visions. He'll want to smoke the damn thing.

Ten AM. I remember, Karl, from ten seconds ago.

Okay, well, my attitude and I are leaving to catch the train unless you want to tie us up some more—

(Karl has hung up; LANCE heads out. He returns to his soft narrative whisper. As he speaks the paragraph below, we see him walking along cavernous streets. Urban noises.)

Would I see the woman of the mists again? Was she among the faces flitting by? If not, why do I walk every day along the same streets where she isn't? Or take trains she doesn't ride on? Why go to an office where she definitely doesn't work?

(By now, LANCE has entered a train station. The ANNOUNCER'S voice could be clear or garbled.)

STATION ANNOUNCER

The 7:40 for Hartford is leaving on platform 17. The 7:45 from New York will arrive at platform 29. Trains for Greensborough are delayed by 30 minutes. No hazardous or toxic substances are allowed on the trains. No oxygen tanks, archery equipment, incendiaries, swords, animals. Passengers and luggage are subject to search.

(As the announcer speaks, LANCE stands in a line, he gets a ticket, checks the time, walks along the platform to the train. We see different angles of train big and small. LANCE enters the train. He makes his way to a seat. He notices the people near by. We see them as he sees them — wispy, craven, dull, featureless.)

LANCE

There was something wrong with these people. These people were fat. These people dripped. These people would have gladly made Power Points for Karl. Christ, even their earlobes were dull.

STATION ANNOUNCER

In the event of an emergency, go to the nearest exit; leave your belongings and . . .

LANCE

Belongings! They wanted stuff and they had stuff, and their stuff had ruined them. Jesus! That's it! I had the right idea from the beginning? Push the raft out. Sail away with nothing. Vikings to the new world.

That's what slipped away in the morning.

(The train starts off with a lurch as LANCE speaks the paragraph below. We hear a screech of metal and the rhythmic click of the wheels on the track. Scenery goes by slowly, then faster, humming. Bridges, buildings, power lines pass. LANCE stares out the window at the scenery. We see the head and shoulders of the characters. The train goes over water. Lance stands.)

There's nothing to lose if you-you-you – I could not think of a word, but wasn't that – the fact I couldn't put a damn name to it – wasn't that the beauty? Out into space where the path was lost. Away from the training wheels, insurance, maps. No way back, burn the bridges, burn the ships, swim away from Karl! Toss it all and float.

(He strips off his clothes and dives out the window into water. He is in a diving suit. Others are diving with him. He is delighted. They swim around.)

"I bet no one's ever done this," I said.

"You'd be surprised," they said.

"Where is the woman of the mists?" I interrupted.

(Light dim off. Or the ocean morphs back into the train. LANCE is sitting clothed. The train comes to a station. It is misty. We hear German spoken in the background. A woman gets on and does what LANCE narrates.)

LANCE

A woman got on and wanted to sit across from me. Strangely, she reached out a hand although she did not know me.

I took it.

"Is it usually so foggy this time of year?" she asked.

"I've never been to this station," I replied. I noticed I was speaking German.

"Well," she said, "I'm afraid it is going to ruin my hair."

I noticed she wore a magnificent silk gown. Her hair – or wig, perhaps – was beaded with damp. So was mine.

(LANCE now appears to be wearing a powdered wig, ala Mozart.)

"Let's go inside," I suggested.

The palace doors opened.

(LANCE and the LADY go through a window and into a ballroom and waltz. Or the train opens up and it's now the ballroom. After they dance, they bow to each other.)

"I hear you are giving it all up," she said.

"I am," I said. "It's all arranged."

"It's such a big palace," she said. "How will you ever do it?"

"I only have a toothbrush and some clothes," I laughed. "Not even toothpaste."

"You are like everyone else," she laughed. "But what about the basement? My God, the basement – have you ever been

down there? The servants get lost in it. One almost died of starvation there. And the royal gardens, and waterfalls, the peacocks, the lavender bushes. And the cows, the livestock. And your thousands of farms and forests and the mountain ranges, your oceans. Vienna itself!"

(The waltz ends. LANCE and WOMAN bow, and are now seated again facing each other. Light dim off.)

It would be harder than I thought. All I had accumulated since birth. That would have to go, too, it seemed. If I could even find them all.

(The train goes over a trestle bridge. Ta-ka-ta. Ta-ka-ta. Out the window, below the train, we see an island in the river. LANCE goes there to the Taiko drummers. An ABBOT hands him a drum stick and leads him to a drum. He shows him how to strike the drum. LANCE looks around. The ABBOT gently turns his attention to the drum. He indicates LANCE must repeat the sound. LANCE does.)

LANCE

How long?

"You are just like everyone else," said the Abbot.

(LANCE plays the Taiko drum. He gets better. As he plays, the setting disappears. From his body emerge objects, people, stuff. They hover near him. Finally, he puts on a burst of energy and they fly away. Dim out.)

(When the lights come on we hear faintly and then louder and louder, the thunder of horse hooves. A Japanese Yabusame horseman rides parallel to the train.)

"This one is for you," he told me."

(LANCE jumps out the window and on to a horse.)

"Hold on with your ankles," the warrior said. "No hands. You see those three targets? Send an arrow to each one. Put an arrow to your bow. If you weigh even one thought,

one opinion, one hope, one judgment, one emotion. If you bring one of your sisters, or a piece of your apartment, you will fail. Nothing, not even toast or you will miss."

I reached behind me and pulled an arrow from the quiver and placed it on the string. It was like placing one hand into my other hand. One. Two. Three arrows found their marks.

"You are just like everyone else," he said.

(We see other people in the car, each engaged with adventures and fantasy of their own. After a while, the train enters a pocket of mist. LANCE continues.)

The train went into a pocket of mist. I was rocking gently, but could see nothing. I heard waves. When the sun came out, I saw I was on a raft.

(LANCE is on a raft. There is a woman on it, too.)

END