

# Once My Flesh Slipped

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The Flesh walked down a dirt path; a rattling approached. From the mist ahead emerged a man-sized bird creature. It was only a feathered head on two legs, beak jutting out of the cage that enclosed its head.

It walked up to The Flesh and asked, "Lookin for somethin?"

"No."

The bird looked into the swirling mist. "I am. I think it was a cat I was looking for. Yeah, that's it, a sweet little cat. I let it go so long ago and— I really shouldn't have done that. Y'know? I miss her so much." The bird looked back to The Flesh, "I think you're lying."

“Excuse me?”

The bird reiterated, “I think you’re lying. I think you’re looking for something but you’re like me and forget sometimes.” The bird moved past The Flesh with a swaying gait, “Unforget for me alright?” He disappeared into the mist. The Flesh continued down the dirt road.

Ahead a concrete portal loomed. Towering concrete walls shot from the sides of the door into the fog, the trees backed away from them. Behind those walls stretched topless rectangular towers, each dotted with hundreds of windows. The Flesh looked down and followed footprints inside.

Down the corridor the Flesh walked. It was as if a great worm had swallowed him. The roof was so high that four of him on top of one another couldn't reach it, and the walls were so far apart that he could wander to and fro, roving right then back left then right again. Soon the corridor took notice and mimicked him. It careened gently to the left, then the right, then the Flesh was at a river.

He lounged in the soft grass with his legs stretched out, watching the water flow. He admired ripples around a small pebble just at the water's edge. They were so smooth, each ripple itself shook with smaller peaks and valleys. Then a tadpole swam up to the pebble followed by an entire Polliwog of them poking and looking around.

The Flesh leaned forward to get a better look. They were so small and fat, but their bodies sparkled a willow green in the sun and their tails waved calmly against the rushing water. The Flesh sat back and lifted one foot that he dropped onto the top step.

He was out of breath and his feet were sore from the climbing. Nothing lit the stairwell but a red exit sign hanging over the doorway out. He looked down the stairwell, the light only illuminated the top two flights, the rest was swallowed in dark.

The Flesh stepped out of the exit onto a bridge. He tried looking out to see where he was but a concrete wall put itself between him and the world. It was just taller than him by maybe an inch. He tried looking to the sky but a ceiling of thick fog was laid above the bridge. It didn't swirl, rather it imposed itself like a roof of steel vapor.

As he entered the room across the bridge he stopped suddenly. To the right of the room was a half wall. It didn't block the way to the exit on the opposite side of the room but it came right up to it, where you couldn't look to the exit without seeing it. There was something on the other side of that wall.

He walked towards the exit. Behind the wall he could feel a small pale creature waiting hungrily for him to walk into its trap. About halfway to the wall he felt something else. A gargantuan hog standing there. It wasn't waiting for him but when it saw him it would eat him. He could almost hear its porcine snorts behind the deafening scream of silence. As he passed the wall there was nothing there. Still he kept his eye on the spot where he could feel the malice until his hand brushed on the exit and he stepped out of the room. Into another stairwell, this time lit by an orange oval light on the ceiling.

The Flesh descended and the stairwell remained aglow in orange. He walked around around again deeper and deeper and the stairwell remained aglow in orange. He looked

back up from a mile down and saw the light as an orange star far above, the stairwell's handrails twisting around around around like the hundreds of pairs of teeth of a worm trying to eat the sun and the stairwell remained aglow in orange, at the bottom as at the top.

Down there was a door which The Flesh entered, it led into a room of fluted pillars and fog. The light there was white but far away and hidden behind the fog. On the ground were footprints. As he followed them, people behind the pillars began to whisper. He tried listening but he never could make out words, only could-be words, sounds superimposed over several lexical positions. His face began to grow hot and he forgot about the footprints, wandering to pockets of non-chatter, or with less chatter, just trying to reach the end through this endless fog and room of voices. He knew not where he was; if he was in the middle, at the beginning, near the end? He wandered with hollow meaning just trying to reach the end. But he grew tired and decided to sit against the trunk of a tree.

Above him the branches rustled languorously with the calm wind. Far off the world seemed to drop into an eternal blue sky. The sun peeked through the leaves and filled his eyes with a sudden sunburst. He breathed in, filling his lungs again with the cool air, then breathed out as he rose over the next hump in that long concourse and dropped into its valley.

This room was endless too. His eyes began to itch. He reached up and rubbed his right one, as he rubbed his left he heard running behind him. His head spun around and he rushed to the top of the next ramp to see who it was, but then the running stopped. He saw no one behind him so after staring for another moment he continued.

The running began again as he entered a dip. When he leapt up to the next peak and looked back, it stopped. He kept his head turned and walked forward. As soon as his line of sight dipped below the peak behind him the running started again, and as soon as it broke over the peak the running stopped. He continued forward, up and down, silence and rapid footfall, up and down like theta waves. Each time the running got closer and closer, he had no recourse but to continue. Soon it was just a dip away. The Flesh hesitated for a moment then entered another valley. It began again and quickly he leapt to the next peak, but as he looked back it kept running, now right in front of him stretched the field.

This time it was awash with tall steppe grass singing a paean as it bowed and nodded in the wind. Grand mountains cloaked in blue morning haze rose to guard the borders of the world. Among the grass were flowers of yellow and pink who occasionally poked out their blooming faces to peek at him. Butterflies and bees flitted between them, the former listlessly the latter busily. The Flesh closed his eyes and sighed. Behind the tree he heard the gentle rushing of water. He opened them again, his eyes burned as he tried looking to the end of the blackness.

His fingernails bled, his knees and elbows were rubbed raw. His shoulders ached from curling in to avoid the walls. Dust clung to his skin as it mixed with sweat, caking small patches all along his arms. Sweat ran down his forehead onto his eyelash where it was cut and fell to the bottom of the pipe as two. He was looking for someone. He'd forgotten until now. Ahead there was a faint light now; he continued to crawl.

He came out to a courtyard cast in a dull bluish grey. It was corralled by a chain link fence which itself was contained by baleful windowless skyscrapers. The only spots it could slip out were narrow alleyways that he could not see the ends of. In the center of the courtyard was a bench wrapped around a grey stone pillar that went up into the sky.

The Flesh pulled the rest of himself out of the pipe and stumbled wearily to the bench. He began to sit, but about half the way down his legs began to scream, they burned as they bent. The Flesh stopped. Across the courtyard was a doorway, beyond it another hallway, but in the door was a footprint.

He shouldn't have much further to go. Surely whomever he was looking for had to be at the end of the hallway. Now he struggled with a small reminder. It was a waste to sit now, but he was so tired. He stood back up. He'd rest once he found who he was searching for.

The roof here was low and though the yellow light over the entrance remained where it was, its reflection on the glossy walls followed him deep into the darkness. He had a companion in a radiant stripe on the wall. However it soon was gone just like its source and he was left alone. Nevertheless, he could still see. His hands were still there because of an ambient white light over his body. A musty underground smell soon gave way to the smell of fresh air and the darkness gave way to a tree.

It was situated ahead of two side passages. The grey trunk grew up straight, twisted roughly over itself, then exploded into a million branches that bore bright green leaves. The Flesh sprinted towards it upon seeing it. It grew grand as he closed in, the roof receded making way for mighty branches that grasped at heaven. Then he turned right into a side passage, losing no speed.

There was no roof in these halls, only an inky expanse above. The walls clawed at his shoulders. He still ran, taking turns at blinding speeds. Right, left, right, right, left, left, left, right. The walls flew past. His heart raced and his lungs heaved. There was no light. Every turn he took just before slamming into a wall, all were on instinct. He couldn't stop his legs.

Holes appeared in the walls rapidly and after a final turn the walls fell away entirely. He stopped. There was no more hallway. Before him stretched a barren waste, a cracked grey land with no life, no wind. He looked up to the sky and met its bowed nose with his, it hung so close to the ground. He then looked down at the sheer concrete face of the city wall.

He looked up to the sky far above; cloaked in the splendorous panoply of stars and nebulae it turned slowly in a joyous drunken waltz. The stars all sung for the heavens' dance. Below him under light of the stars slept a valley of jade. Near to his cliff was grass bowed in slumber and far away, guarded by a lone tree on a hill, was a forest. The northern wind brought to him the clean scent of the river that flowed through the forest. He leaned over the edge of the cliff to smell it better.

He was dropped into a mousy maze by a long hide chute. Above, an overcast of dust motes meandered about. The maze was quiet. It wasn't oppressive silence but it was total, like a quiet office. Before him were footprints. He took his time following the footprints now, making sure he kept his eyes glued to them. How long he took he had no idea, but eventually the

footprints led him out of the maze into a verdant field domed by an azure sky. Wind blew gently over the grass and fluffy clouds passed, bringing shade to visit then continuing on their journeys.

The footprints continued down a dirt road. He didn't have to glue his eyes to the footprints anymore. If he meandered off the grass would tell him, so he was free to soak this place into his eyes. It felt familiar.

He came to shoulder with a ditch and stopped. Along the ditch were trees and at the bottom was a small creek, a polliwog of tadpoles passed. Most unusual of all, under a tree sat a girl halfway in the ditch. She had fair skin and fiery hair. He knew her. He walked over and sat down next to her in the shade of the tree and she reclined her head on his shoulder.

"Where've you been?" She asked.