

Warning for Violence, Implication of Child Death, Implied Sex (post), Torture, and Psychological Distress

Mankind is predisposed to its own destruction. That was the reasoning for all this.

Three million years of competition in the African savannah, where mankind's closest ancestors felt the confidence to no longer hide in the trees from his more savage erstwhile cousins and greater family of life, to learn to hold the world in his own hand and beat something else to death with it or fling it with perfect precision into another's eye — that is the history of the species. That, and yet somehow, cooperation. To tend, to care, to take the wounded away, splint their bones, mourn their loss, and plan ahead. Violence and Thought. Competition and Contingence. Light in the dark.

It was a lofty idealization, one that demanded that its own paradoxically discussed self-evidence be used as the template for everything else, and that dichotomy has been the spinal column of many a foundation throughout history across the globe. TwentyTwo Five was but one of many such to work in that mantle, something that hoped to be the brain of all the rest. A chamberlain, not an advisor but one whose presence ebbed everything else around it. The great wandering mind, who'd see the world get ripped apart, ideology ripping continents asunder, and the evolution of societal levels and thoughts through, working off another — from its hand.

It had never yearned for global control, or such similar megalomaniacal ideals — it would be but the grease. The whispers in the wind, the portents of splayed animal carcasses, the reports of a new dead body that would spurn geopolitical tension and gains. The competition to keep The Game *going*, instead of one side deciding to end it all. To decide what would keep the quo alive, to some design. To make two and two five, and everything else in place forever.

Or so it had been mused. So it had once maybe been. So had once been said, but those days were long gone, dying even when they'd been dreamed.

Now? Something lone walked down halls, halls once been home to maybe a small hundred. Now? A dozen, if even that. Not yet a ghost, for it had not yet died — but the rot was there now, the stain on the coffin already chewing through the wood, the worms crawling out of the meat. Now? No pretense of a dream that had any impact on the broader, material world outside its grasp — a grasp long, insidious, and demanding. Now, eyes flickered to a wall of sterile metals, off-green to try and give some distant and vacant idea of life.

Water dripped from corner where the wall met the roof, the stain having climbed like mold. Not a puddle formed, not yet. But the sign was clear. Something, somewhere, in this loaned and hollowed out dream, something had burst, and nothing was coming to replace it. Another thing gone, another thing to lose.

One must wonder, how would one feel to live in these spaces? What purpose drove lives like this now? Who would be in its ranks...?

... A toothed smile, under shifting red eyes. The tongue clicked, thoughtfully, in tune with the clack of footsteps down the tiled floor. So many thoughts.

A few people. One less now. It was odd, that for something that demanded so much command and understanding of the world, that something underneath them could escape. **Truly** escape, to such an extent that it couldn't even be understood how it had been done.

Something like that needed to be studied.

Interrogated.

But **with the one who needed to be studied now gone**, and with few souls left, one would need to inquire deeply in specific areas. With specific souls, few left there may be.

That last remaining one should be useful, at least. It should know this.

The room was pitched black, save for a single light, its shimmering essence something that demanded one to squint, make sense of the shapes around them and make sense of their haze. As far as could be discerned, there was a one-sided observation window for the room, somewhere, probably. Somewhere to keep an eye on all this, this dark room with only a chair, a table, and this one soul.

It wasn't the first time this set of circumstances had been done, and it was used to this by now. Not the room, though that was also used to this – no, *it*. The person sitting there, sweltering under the light, looking at the table, darker than dark. It...

Lizzy Mitchells could feel its teeth.

A slick tongue gliding at the back and edge of every molar, canine, and flattened, chipped slate of an incisor, trying to ground itself. It was an unerring, unseemingly intense awareness of the self at its disposal. It could feel its lips, chapped, each tooth sliding across the cracks like a delicate finger gliding across the smooth finish of a blade. It could feel the pulse of its heart, blood swinging back and forth of the arteries of its neck. It could feel the twitching of its ears.

The whorls of its fingertips, the grinding gristle of its intestines, the gap of its ribcage, the compressed squish of its toes, the creaking of its spine, the chemical decay of so many dyes and makeups, the metal in its mouth sliding against the roof of it, the slow rot and decay and flaking of its skin, the grinding of its teeth, the emptiness of its stomach.

Lizzy Mitchells, aged 21, was in a state of self-awareness that few ascetics could reach at such a tender point in one's life. If prompted, it could likely stick a needle through its throat, and evade every muscle, every vein, every bone, and pull it back out. It was nothing **but** awareness, a mind that knew all, and—

And yet this zen brought no emptiness.

Lizzy Mitchells mind could not stop thinking.

Its thoughts were slow in an endlessly speeding crawl, every flickering thought swarming through in enormity. Everything moved transparently, as if the actions that hadn't yet occurred and those yet to do were in the same instance. High speed footage of glass warping like water as it shattered, timelapsing again and again, the slowest of actions at blistering speed. Trying to ground itself.

Recall. Restore. Think into the shadows, drives of something lost.

Recall it, in your eyes.

Its body moved. The hands guided themselves, one gripping carefully, painfully, around simple instruments of wax and paper. The other, a soft-plastic covered booklet. It leafed through the pages, and began roughly smearing the crayons across the page, paper that felt rough and cheap to the touch, tongue against its teeth. The crayons dug and stroked against the paper as though they would tear it apart through brute force, actions of a physical pain rooted in their soul, the inertia scraping into the bone like collapsing metal digging into the desk.

This all felt like pain.

Lizzy couldn't remember how it had arrived here. What Lizzy did know was this:

It's ability to colour within the lines was lackluster. It hadn't used **a colouring book** in years, since yesterday, or the day before yesterday, or the day before that, or before that or when it had been thrown in here when she had failed to report back, or tomorrow when this all happens and is told to do this and it can't But It Had To. It Had To Focus. Recall. Stay in the lines, keep the color composition right, soft and firm. Make it accurate. Think on the reference material, the light on the grooves of the face, the folds, the shadow of the face. Her...

Lizzy breathed in through a filled nostril, wanting to turn, wanting to press its hand against its face, to force out the snot the blood the dust the tears the bile the shit of all these hours, hours, **hours, years** of its life away, but it just had to remember,

Whatwashername?

Wheredidshego? Whatwasitoher?

Why is she gone?

That was the question, that's right, that's what it remembered being asked. Just think and explain it all. When was it? Lizzys eyes tore away from the page to find the right crayon, the right colour of her pallid face and cocked grin, the right answer, and felt the world turn on its side, light smearing into the laughing dark as **it remembered** Tracy B

Her lips didn't taste like cigarettes, like weeks old steak, like dirtied porcelain, like mud or blood or oil or a corpse or like anything that came from a metaphor at all. Just lips, same as any persons, hungried and pressed against its own.

If Lizzy was wishing to be truly honest, Its love was rather unbecoming as a kisser.

She was crude, the skill of a middle schoolers first nervous attempt at owning up to their crush, inexperienced, shy and needing to relax. It was new to her, this intimacy that came naturally. They were in an alley, the rain around them, laughing, enjoying the night and the money. No booze, funnily. Nothing worth shit. Just themselves, and whatever sweets they could get. Some nice clothes. They weren't even something lecherous, hidden away, hands and teeth over another, it was just...

They were together, and that made Lizzy laugh. To love this thing like this, to enjoy it under the day where no one would look at them and know what they are beyond partners (partners), to relax, to have that one up over it, that one level of experience and comfort the usually all-experienced killer possessed, and to see her for what she actually was.

Lizzy's heart sputtered and flew, pulling free from it, blinking, breathing, smiling into those eyes that looked back, bashful, unsure, so unlike that almost fanged snarl of a smile, the words that spilled like pus out of a wound. Try as she would, did, deny it, hiss such vile nothings, Lizzy knew, as her love mumbled words that...

Lizzy smiled, even as Tracy turned into the smoke, the puddles, the words lost in the half-known wind that made Lizzy feel like it was crying but why was it crying it's a beautiful day it's raining its shining the ceiling looks like, no no no we're changing, but remember, remember, *remember*,

Tracy cared. Cared to see Lizzy laughing, loving, doing what they did best. Both of them.

Lizzy had lovingly sighed, a harsh, violent sound on the ears, rattling through the pipes just as it did. Its head emerged from the radiator as a malformed helm of violent gnashing teeth and oily tongue. Steam condensed and gave way to smoke as Lizzy crawled out, and its snout gored a childhood toy, carelessly left the ground. The corpse now impaled across its forehead, Lizzy howled in glee as its love stepped out from the mist as well.

Nightmares darker than could be thought from any childrens mind moved through the room, working as they did. No survivors, no exceptions. A dog that had known nothing but the love and comfort of a family its entire life howled and leapt, the bloodlust of ancient predators guiding it on half-forgotten instincts. A crack of a pipe, a whimper, scream, and final hushing breaths, and it died just as humanely as anyone else in this building. Quieter than the rest, though.

Lizzy tittered, stumbling out from the room, slicing it in half with the charring touch of its blade, making lazy, happy swings at the first person to come across it. It didn't really remember where they were right now. There had been so much talk, so many details on geopolitical circumstances and a greater wider picture to all of this, of wanting to break something utterly to change perception in an area. Really, that last bit had been the only thing it cared to remember.

To break. Destroy.

Kill. It looked down at the face of the person it had lunged a chain at, or what was left of it, and thought about that mound that could only be called human from past context.

This is what it had been born for. Its love had helped show this, had shared this, what *she* had been made for. Lizzy stopped and gawked over at her work for a few moments on her own kill her work less introspective – eyes hidden in the light-reflected glass and black smear of her face, bent over and using a knife the same way an artist used a chisel to crack stone, to leave an impression. It paid no mind to the fumble movements of its canvas, still living for this long.

She took notice of Lizzy's apt eye and smiled, pushing aside her victims hands without any effort at all, making no mind to the stains of blood coating her. "It's my own little touch." She explained, standing up. "It's easy to desecrate something that's dead, not fighting back. Can rip apart a body easy when that's said and done." She shrugged, flickering her teeth in a ghoulish grin. "Better to do it while they still move. Makes everything more harsh. Will stick in someones mind more. Make for some lovely dinner conversation when whoever is here after has to talk to their family."

Lizzy could almost sigh, almost see **Tracy** so clearly in this moment. Here, she was in her prime. Here, they were the truest the two ever were. Showing their love in the only way anyone ever should; in contrast to the rest of the world. Pushing back. Making their own mark on the world.

This was right.

Right?

... Lizzy thought, for a moment, of the morgue, it's second home. It was normal for a child to be asked to identify so many bodies so many times in their life, righ-

recall.

Violence. Oh, how Lizzy **loved** to engage in that, to let **loose**. And it did, flinging out the door. The apartment complex was a towering thing, patios and hallways and floors on floors stacked over a squared gap, where you could see someones room across a gap of the floors below. It leaped across 10 or 30 feet with its powered form, laughing, and began the violence again on people who had came out, fresh horror in their eyes of the sound they'd heard, not realizing what was there as it chewed through them. They found out quickly though.

This was an environment that had known horror and death in brutal flashes, somewhere used to the boot and the gun and the poison even as they held to their loved ones, and now committed the violence around them or perpetrated by them against these two. Lizzy thought they were so cute. Normies using simple weapons to try and kill them. Clubs, blades, pistols--whatever they could pick up on their way home from school.

It couldn't stop laughing, even as it ripped someones throat out with its teeth. What did these poor fucks think they could do!? Lizzy and **Tracy** were **Stand Users!** They were **EPIC!** THEY WERE **FUCKING UNSTOPPABLE**, AND THESE FUCKING LOSERS WERE PIGS TO A SLAUGHTER, SCREAMING, EHEHEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEHHEHEHEHEHEHEHEHEHEH! An entire life where it had felt so fucking **WEAK**, and now, it could do ANYTHING! **ANYTHING, WITH HER, FOR HER! LOOK AT HER! THERE SHE IS, LOOK AT HER!**

Lizzy's wheezing made it brace against a half-wall, panting for lack of breath from her whirling mania. She looked out across the gap, spectating *Tracy* as she worked through a small crowd.

Tracy didn't have as much fun, brusquely grappling and pinning one victim to club their skull before shuffling off to pounce onto another and repeat the process. It was loud, it was scary, it was too *slowwwwww* for Lizzy. It always pushed *Tracy* to go faster, but **Tracy** would grunt that she had a method, that she wanted to get her hands deep into the thick of it. Feel bone break and blood splatter-

Deep enough that she didn't notice someone try to disturb her process. A better gun, something of slugs and piston, a keepsake of a greater war, aimed squarely at **Tracy's** head without it knowing.

That was the problem with this slow stalking, Lizzy laughed. It vaulted over the railing, its engines revving as it warmed back up, landing on top of *Tracy's* would-be assailant and pureeing them into a steaming mess of blood and viscera that Lizzy would pick out of its teeth and clean from its clothes.

It laughed again, gore falling out of its mouth. It looked over, seeing *Tracy* standing atop a pile of midden of human life. A sight from a nightmare, someone crawling forwards before stopping as *Tracy's* pipe banged their head into the floor. Not a killing blow, from the agonized, coughing groans it made, but close.

Lizzy stared, cocking its head as it stood up, looking at the body with some familiarity. A voice, a face that had been... That was someone newsworthy, right? It blinked, staring up.

"Are we supposed to kill her? The missions'--"

"Do you care?" She asked, and Lizzy blinked, trying to remember who this was. The mind recoiled, the identity of what she had once been fading. The weapon was gone, and now it... It was *her*, smiling. She walked forwards and cupped Lizzy's cheek. "Do you care what they say, or what we both want?"

...

Lizzy stared down at the body, dangling from its chain, like bait on a hook. Eyes staring back through the stain of a bloodied gash of a forehead. So high above the abyss, legs kicking out underneath, while a hand desperately held onto the wire.

Lizzy looked back, and she wasn't there. It looked down and let go, seeing it crash through the ceiling, through it all, into that comfortable bed, bouncing off the mattress, and cuddling against its love.

"You'd never let me go, right?" Lizzy asked, one night, bruises leaning back into a yellow that was only a few shades shy of its actual skin colour, almost covering the pink and violet that bloomed around it like flowers. Violence was the language of love.

"The fuck?" She had replied, crass as ever, still not dressed in full. She shot a confused look, still settling on her jeans for the day ahead. "You thinking I don't got work to do?" *Tracy's* voice

was testy. Noncommittal in that way she got, when wanting to avoid something that'd make her give more than she'd like to give.

A giggle that echoed like tin sputtered out from Lizzy, trampling over itself. "No, nono, not like that, silly, I'm being serious!" Lizzy sprang up and forwards, the fullness of its form making its love flinch away. Again, a metallic tittering. It sighed, resting comfortably against the nook of Tracy's shoulder, eyes closed in a simple bliss. "But I wouldn't mind if you stayed for her instead of that." It admitted.

"... And why'd you want that?" She(? Who was it again? Her love? The weapon?) had said.

Only laughs, this is what Lizzy had. All that was left, as it held her form. "You know why." It whispered, kissing her on the cheek. "You complete me. You said it yourself, that first day when we met. That you saw it in me." Lizzy couldn't stop laughing. "Remember? That's the exact words – 'I'll complete you'. It was like, you were there, hand sliding out of mine, all sticky and red as we went into the backroom, broke that sink so we could leave. You said, you said I was just like you." Lizzy's hands gripped harder around her, laughing harder, so hard it couldn't see anything through the shaking and blur of its own eyes. "Right? You said that, you said we were part of a pair from the start. And, and a pair doesn't–"

Lizzy's jaw snapped back with a crack, and its head hit... something. Forehead or base? It couldn't tell, everything spun so oddly, feeling surrounded in an ambient heat. That was her, right, cuffing her for talking too much, right? She was still here, right? Its hands reached out, wanting to hug its love, and found it was not there anymore, it wasn't in that room, here in *the* room, in the dark so bright you couldn't see anything but the fractals behind your closed eyes, hands sliding and slipping across the sleek metal of the table. The world was spinning out from underneath, all into the dark, the yawning screaming inside its heart. It held onto the table, trusting that more than itself, using every inch of its self to steady that down.

Its eyes flickered down to the table.

The colouring book looked like shit.

The smear wasn't even in the lines, on the face which was now strangled and gone under ugly yellow-made-green-through-black, it was a scribbled, overlaid mess outside, sprawled half onto the table. Pallid hues bleeding freely in jagged stripes. Dark grey splotches and more.

This wasn't what she looked like. That wasn't even what happened. She had simply left one day, and Lizzy had never got to say a word.

Would any have even helped?

"Why can't I do this right?" Lizzy hiccuped, staring down at the book. Its eyes drifted off from the clearly defined silhouette of its love; the hard-set black lines and all the colours that were supposed to fit in, to complete the picture.

So far from that, was a chickenshit scratched doodle, the fist-doodled sketchings of a child. The person Lizzy loved, hugging it, and smiling.

That had been real, right?

Right? It's vision was blurred, it's mind twisting. It sucked in air over desperate gums, and huddled over the book, sobbing.

What was the shape of its love? The colour? The purpose?

What was it without her, without the memory of what she had *been*?

Red eyes stared. Reports made of characters and numbers, the files skipping over another. The shadow drives were emptying, looping on themselves, again and again and again to worsening quality. What had been there was corrupting. Breaking.

Plastic-tipped hands clicked, and Lizzy Mitchells stood ramrod straight, eyes emptied and hollowed like the smearing jarring transitions of a dream you couldn't remember with the coming of day, it's mind empty and not having not stopped thinking.

It could not stop thinking. Not stop thinking about how it did not understand why she had left. It didn't have the slightest idea of how or why, not without *her*. It didn't matter.

"Recall. Colour in the lines."

Torture didn't need to give answers. It just needed to make results.

In a room in the dark, Lizzy sprawled its hands across the table, grime and blood from broken hands smearing over the shape and colour of that face again.

Red eyes flickered over to a figure of black plastic, metal and fabric, and an eerie blue glass slit of a face. "Any pertinent information about Her?" The head shook, the hand spoke curled, pointer and middle finger clasping the thumb.

"Keep hunting. Focus on the Caribbean. With such a heavy concentration of Stand Users, it's bound she'll have arrived there. Notify me of her, other targets of secondary analysis and interest. Nothing's escaped before, and that is curious." A raised fist to the forehead, pointer finger pointing to the sky.

Abby Cindy Palmer smiled. "Despite everything, I'm almost glad about this. To find her again. I'd love to see what she (*will*) think(s), after all this."