

# intimate garbage - Desert Story

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this is going to be a warts and all kind of post because my computer is on its last legs . . . This is the story of someone encountering a common replicant of themselves on a desert highway



Published on  
**Booksie**

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I could have just as well passed it by. Although the light was bright enough, I could never make sense of the world inside an orb where the light is circular and things are cut off on a curve . . . and it wasn't instant recognition. I think if it were, the smallish little jolt I felt at the smeared glimpse that delivered the oddity to me would have been like a welding arc of 100,000 volts. I slowed down the path of ancient pavement became less granular and more like the solid collective it actually was as it wound through the still lonely desert. I backed up, trying to remember the landmarks that would bring me to it a blackened branch, a whitened crest of blasted canyon wall, the white teeth of a cluster of old keyboards, like the bones of buffalo or mammoths or dinosaurs.

I cast a hateful eye over the shadow of the poor thing as I watched in the rearview, my memory ingratiated for once that it would not be mistaken for my naïve and flippant imagination. Red light from the tailview became eclipsed by the white of the orbs as I backed the transport up to where my subtle horror had begun, at the large end of two lumps on the ground, cloaked in a large garbage bag, cradled by all manner of the discarded, a long, long trailing end with a fanfare end made by the knot of the bag, not unlike a mermaid's tail. I felt the leathery surface of my soul grow a little weary. I didn't want to care, didn't have time to care, didn't have the energy or passion to care, but I knew this shape . . . my life could have carried on. I could have driven on and made it to the meeting, silence my childish curiosity, forget I would have forgotten by two turns, two drinks, two minutes into the porno I watch as a joke only a joke, in bed, asleep, forgotten just like that with another sweet distraction, serving no purpose, sparing no minute, but I wondered . . . deep down, I wondered, and it got the best of me. I stood up on my own two feet out of the transport on tar weeping pavement. I kept the orbs focused daylight-bright on the black and white domino stacked keyboards and monitors and computer mice and all the entwined maggoty cables that snaked between them all. I laid my hands on the bag and wrung it until cool, dry black plastic oozed between my fingers in vulgar waterfalls, and with rendering motion I pulled and stretched until the surface was no longer pliantly roiling but erupted, the unseen swirls intimate braiding curling apart, frozen dead peaks of the ocean, the legs of birds drawn in after death.

The shadow repaid me most cruelly for the violence of my actions. I could not see the contents of the bag without lifting it out. I grabbed it by the arm and immediately it began to flake, so short-lived these things are when they get a scratch. I sat it upright only long enough to remove the bag, and what shocked me wasn't the obvious type of abuse the thing had been through. I mean, what else do people buy those things for? Isn't that what I said to myself the day I signed the 17th contract? Aside from the contract for the face, the voice, the gestures, the neurosis, the penchant for storytelling, et cetera et cetera, all of that in essence, why would I care about the production of things and the use of things? I was leaving the little world behind for money and leisure. But why did they have to scratch out the moles? Why did they have to scratch out my scars? Why did they have to pull out all my hair and paint my eyelids such a gaudy shade of blue?

Its eyes fluttered open, outglowing the orbs for a fraction of a second as it blinked its batteries awake, the light behind them sinking down into acceptable human limits. It found my eyes the way it was programmed to do, and as it opened its mouth to bark out some meaningless, manipulative goad to get me to interact, I waved my hand in front of my mouth much like I had with the kid's toys when trying to sneak around the house at night without waking them. How many times had I laid their robot bear down in the unused bassinet as gently as real, sleeping thing if only so I could not hear the same cycle of commands to humans to play? I did the same thing to her, to it, but instead of laying it gently in baby blankets and too small clothes, her back was clicking key by key through several different alphabets, repeat letters and numbers

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and inadvertent ascii commands. And the surface was continuing to flake. They had discarded it too soon, but now it was hitting the climax of its planned obsolescence, disintegrating at the site of my harsh touch, egged on by the relentless rasps of the wind. So this is how it was going to be . . . so many of my memories up until the point of production captured in this thing, this dead, dying thing, its parts worn out, its once sharp responses challenged, hair ripped out, moles scratched out, eyes drug store blue, a million more where that came from, bravely attempting a start up routine from the ditch, limbs jerking with controlled hesitation, fingers curling like the frayed ends of the garbage bag that would be its only coffin linen. ^ How I envy you.^ It said as it surrendered, heavy head hitting the keys slamming the keys behind it.

And all flickering was done. All clicking was done. No hum to drown out the terrible hollowness of nature, no whirrs beneath to take the place of conversation or make more terrible the lack thereof. And I felt really stupid for being down on my knees before garbage . . . and I could have taken my time with the bright starlight overhead as a healing moment, go the other direction, go home and gather up my children, bring them out there, way out where we could slow modern poisons, wait until they were adults and let them go, pray that they would never find such atrocities for themselves, be mortified if they found it for their mother . . . but the transport was impatiently chirping . . . but the lights of the city seemed so much more sheltering . . . I got up off of my knees, creaking as I stood, feeling light headed and unreal as I sat back down in the vehicle, never minding the urgent beeps screaming from the energy-starved transport, never so much as brushing a hand over my sand coated shins, maybe hoping in the deepest, youngest kernel of myself that they would eat the machine from the inside out.

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