

SALTWATER BILLIONAIRE

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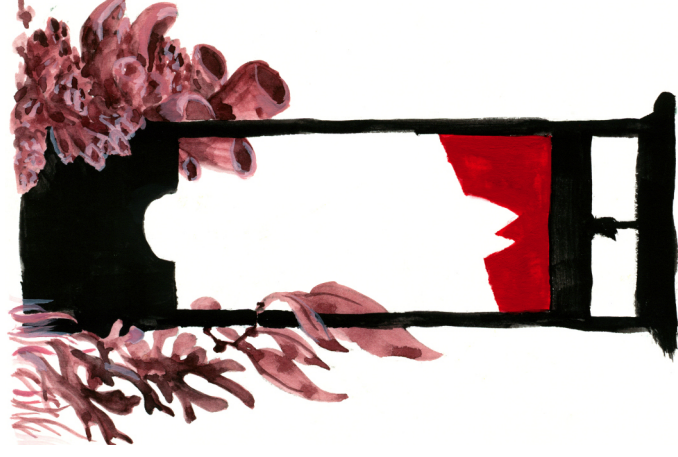
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As they throw you into the circle of stones, you think to yourself,

This is just an execution in slow motion.

You're surprised at the sheer number of people here, but figures that even in the modern era, an execution is still a spectacle. More surprising then is the lack of screens to let the audience get a good look at your impending demise. Instead, you're on the top of a hill, while the crowd spreads in the valley around you, where they can all blink up into the brilliant sun of this beautiful day.

They push you to your knees, and you can't help but think *but I didn't do anything*. Just like when you were twelve

Saltwater Billionaire

Ezra Wu

and they hauled you into the principal's office for making fun of this one girl (— *but you'd never even said anything to her, just laughed when your friends laughed and pointed at her uneven teeth and mismatched eyes*—) and sure, you should've known better, but you never thought about it, about who it would hurt—

And now, twenty seven years later, as they join you in the stone circle now, isn't it exactly the same? All you did was come up with an actually usable pseudo-random generator for the nanomachines, so yeah, Nanobright never would have existed without you. So yeah you got filthy stinking rich. Sure you always wanted to, but who didn't? You never actually thought it would happen, so when it did you had no idea what to do, just followed the crowd who got stinking rich with you. And then they all got the Resaint treatment so you did too (—*but it's not like*

it was illegal, it's not like it was even a misdemeanor, never mind a capital fucking crime—) and now—

One of them steps forward, and given the forest and the hill and the stone circle, you expect them to have a big ol knife. But instead they've got a syringe and the liquid isn't even black or green or putrescent yellow. Someone grabs your arm and rubs a spot on your bicep with an alcohol wipe, and honestly you've had rougher treatment at the doctor's office.

But you know what this means, and you can feel the words fighting to get out of your chest. *But I didn't do anything.*

Don't pretend you wouldn't have done the same. I didn't do anything, I just wanted to live—

You wanted to live forever.

Then they stab you with the syringe. Just a pinch and it's over. They throw the syringe in a sharps bin and stand up. The

crowd, all around the hill, is silent.

The woman who gave you the shot looks down at you and says two words.

"Halichoeres sazimai."

Both she and the crowd turn to leave.



On the flight home—because they've let the roads go to shit and fuck public transit on a day like today—you get a message. It's Brent, who's been with you at Nanobright from the start.

> They get you too, huh?

You don't really want to deal with Brent. You want to get home and crawl into a hole and try to pretend that none of the last six hours just happened. But what the hell, you've just had your death warrant signed. There's a chance going into death alone might be slightly worse

than going into it with Brent.

"Yeah. Did the same thing happen to you?"

> Yup. Last week. I thought I'd be all badass about it and go all rambo on their asses but shit, there were just so many of them.

Some of the earlier ones had tried that—the first ones, the bigger fish, the kind of people who paid your salary—well, equity. Private security forces—public security forces, too, before the whole police sector came tumbling down. A lot of people died, and once upon a time that would have been enough. But something had changed: it'd been bad enough that there would always be some rich bastard, but now, now that it would always be the same rich bastards, forever

So they took matters into their own hands. Specifically, they took you, and all the rest of the bastards rich enough to

afford technological immortality, and they hauled you up onto a sunny hill and—

> So what did you get?

"What?"

> You know. The species. You got.

"I dunno. Some Latin bullshit. Does it even matter?"

Is what you're about to send. But then you remember: now you die when the last individual of that species dies. So it really, really does.



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