

Prompt: Your character buys an urn and then discovers the ashes are still in it.

Matilda had just moved into a fresh apartment. It was her most panache yet and she loved all things panache. High ceilings, columns, a fireplace with a mantle – Matilda was ecstatic with her find and pleased all her hard work had finally paid off. If she hadn't plucked up the courage for a raise, well her life would have had less panache.

She couldn't wait to decorate it. Buying and selling artwork had developed her eye for aesthetics that were avant-garde yet tasteful. Matilda felt like an interior designer filling her new home with pricey pieces, but one of her secrets was that she bought from the local flea market every now and then, a place she always wondered how it got its name but never bothered to *Google* it.

The other day, Matilda had spotted an antique urn surely from an old Chinese dynasty, or at least, an exceptional copy she was willing to pay for. The printed lotus flowers spoke to her in a way only symbols of tranquility can. Matilda didn't even bother to negotiate and within the hour, the urn was nestled on her mantle between an orchid and a water dragon of jade.

Matilda's cat must have started at the vase for over three hours the next day. Her owner was oblivious since she was at an up and rising gallery selling paintings for dirt cheap. Once she came home though, she noticed Timone entranced by the urn as she had dinner. He didn't blink, in fact, his eyes were so dilated Matilda questioned if he'd gotten ahold of cat nip.

"What's the matter with you?" Matilda teased. Amused, she went over to the urn.

"Look, bud, it's harmless."

Matilda even lifted it up. Timone's eyes widened, never wavering from the urn. She slid her fingers over the lotuses floating on a blue background. As Matilda put the urn back, Timone meowed loudly.

"What?" she asked, "You want me to open it?"

With a laugh, she indulged her cat. A gasp escaped her throat. Matilda stared at the plod of ashes within the urn. Timone leapt onto her shoulder to take a look.

And then Matilda sneezed.

The ashes plumed into a cloud around her, choking the two of them. Matilda sprinted to the shower – her reflection in the mirror one of ashen horror. Washing the remnants of a person she never knew off her skin, Matilda thanked her lucky stars she was not dead just yet.

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had been years. She had looked amused, as if his lack of an answer confirmed something she thought of him that wasn't shared. It wasn't something nice. Rafael resented this strange blow to his self-esteem.

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"Yes," Rafael declared.

Brie chuckled to herself, sipping a chai latte while walking away. Rafael felt like he'd failed somehow. Maybe he could trick her into a date but he shook his head. He'd started to really like this random bookworm and being disingenuous would undoubtedly be the wrong move.

Rafael went home, dejected, and ordered Chinese food. He tossed his three fortune cookies into the trash since they'd mess with his diet. Only steamed veggies and roasted duck, no rice. Then he had an idea.

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"The most? No one's ever asked me that before."

Rafael like the way she was looking at him, like she was really seeing him for the first time.

"Tess of the D'ubervilles."

"Um, okay," Rafael nodded.

He'd never heard of it. Brie bit her lip to bite back her curiosity. They went back to their posts and it didn't come up again.

Days passed once more. Brie couldn't shake it from her mind. She found herself thinking of Rafael now. He'd stopped complimenting her dresses, her work performance, her everything. He'd stopped noticing her.

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"I thought I told you I hated this book?" she stormed over to Rafael's cubicle. He swiveled his chair with a smile but said nothing.

"So you're an asshole now?" Brie glowered at him before walking away. She opened the book at her desk. In it was a giant hole carved through the pages, ruining the whole thing. Inside was a fortune cookie. Intrigued beyond measure, Brie opened it. The fortune read:

Fuck this book. I don't like eels. I like you. Can you recommend me some books to read over dinner?

Prompt: Create a news event (fake or real) and see if your audience can determine its authenticity.

This past Thursday we all witnessed something truly shocking on *Twitter*, *Tik Tok*, just about every social media platform until the viral video was taken down. The footage involved none other than Queen Elizabeth II who recently passed away on September 8th. The entirety of the United Kingdom has been in mourning since, with minor protests here and there about her son's ascendance to the throne.

In the video, Queen Elizabeth was seen sipping tea in her bedroom at Buckingham Palace. Nothing bizarre there, until it was pointed out what was playing in the background: it was news coverage of her royal funeral on September 19th, this past Monday. Experts are looking into the video to determine its validity. While many people agree it is a fake with footage overlaid into an older video, opposite has pointed out the original source cannot be found. The photoshopped overlay is flawless, raising the question if it wasn't tampered with, is the queen, in fact, alive?

Royalists and fans alike have banded together, hoping beyond hope that she is. Others have postulated a resurrection of some sort. Our sources have determined the upload to have come from TMZ, who stated the video was sent to them from a private number. All of us want to know: is Queen Elizabeth II still alive? And if she is, where is she now? What is she doing? How did this occur? Did she fake her own death and if so, why?

We are left with many unanswered questions for now. On the flipside, if it is indeed a fake, who is responsible for this hoax that has gripped the world? Join us this evening as we come face-to-face with Prince William and how he feels about the situation.

Prompt: Scientists successful teleport an apple but it comes back with a bite mark.

Day 482

This is Jonathan Patel, engineer 21KP, logging today's results. The team and I were initially overjoyed with the outcome of experiment 112. Far from the usual apple sauce, our apple test subject completely disappeared from Platform A. The atomic scan verified the apple's disappearance. Two hours passed before the apple gradually materialized on Platform B; however, it did not return in its original state. There was what appeared to be a bite mark in the apple. Naturally, this quelled our excitement, piqued our curiosity, and baffled the whole team. We're debating on what to report to our superiors. I wonder if I'm the only one slightly concerned rather than amused.

Day 483

This is Jonathan Patel, engineer 21KP, and we were ecstatic to discover the apple's successful journey between platforms intact. It looks like we have pushed the brink of teleportation science into reality. It took two hours for the apple to reappear once more. I was tasked with shutting down the neutron transporter equipment when I noticed a chunk missing from the top of my chair. I don't know how long it's been there, perhaps I just never noticed it before, but it resembles a bite mark. I don't know what to make of it but I'll bring it up tomorrow.

Day 484

This is Jonathan Patel, engineer 21KP, logging today. I pointed out the suspicious chair damage to the team. Cynthia took a laser to its perimeter and carved it out for assessment. We ran it through our scanners while repeating experiment 112 again. Again, the apple reappeared in perfection condition. We decided to replicate our findings eight more times before reporting our discovered secrets of teleportation to Roma. The team and I did a clean sweep to check the lab's contents when Mattco found another abnormal bite mark at the base of Platform A. That makes three. We then came to a unanimous consensus to inform Roma tomorrow after the fourth experiment.

Day 485

This is Jonathan Patel, engineer 21KP. After teleportation and the apple's rearrangement onto Platform B, Cynthia screamed. Something bit out a part of her neck. I've never seen so much blood.

She is in critical condition in our medical unit. I hope she makes it. All of us are stupefied as to what is causing it. Are there entities? Residing...where? And they...eat? I am unsettled by all of this, especially because I know Roma will push through for teleportation advancement and its profits. We don't know what we're dealing with – what we've unleashed. I'm frightened.

Prompt: [Japanese technique → oasis, serpent, tree, egg, gift] Your character is stranded in the desert and finds an oasis.

Adam was berating himself for fucking up so badly. He had been in charge of pumping the aqueducts in the Congo, but that was just a front, a lucrative front at that. Adam was actually managing the most successful mercenary and assassination operation via the dark web with HQ in the middle of nowhere. Hence, the aqueducts. He had his own greenhouses for food attached to an elaborate house he had dragged along via an equally elaborate RV to set up shop. Adam had always enjoyed the life of a hermit. He'd bought the most elaborate sex robot too; she had an artificial personality he adored. Adam named her Eve as a joke. He had been responsible for countless assassinations: Hilary Clinton, Obama, Putin, Renaldo, Britney Spears. The list goes on and on. He never asked questions once his services were purchased.

But some asshole from MI6 had come to end his career after Queen Elizabeth II was poisoned. The agent didn't kill Adam though. Instead, he dumped him farther out in the desert with a cannister of the same poison. Adam hated the forced irony.

That was about 12 hours ago.

The sun was ruthlessly burning the sand. Adam must have developed second degree burns by the time it set. Just when he thought it was hopeless, Adam saw something dazzling up ahead.

It was a miraculous tree, and *where there's a tree*, Adam thought, *there's water*. He ran to its shade and inspected the delicate oasis. A pond sparkled with lovely reeds protruding around it, but a giant serpent surrounded the whole thing. The beast must have been 30ft. in length at the very least. Adam recoiled. How would he get past it? An apple fell and hit him on the head. He smirked at more forced irony, gift from the sky, but ate it ravenously nonetheless. Adam remained unaware of the serpent's grin. Then he heard a hiss above his head.

"That was too easy this time. I didn't even have to try."

Adam looked around for the speaker but no one was around. His eyes landed on the snake staring at him.

It nodded.

Adam glanced between the serpent and the apple core in his hand.

It nodded again.

Adam waited for an agonizing minute for something to happen. Nothing did. He spotted an egg by the serpent's tail, held protectively.

"What's that?" Adam asked.

It was on the tip of his tongue but he just didn't know. In fact, it felt like he didn't know anything.

"That's knowledge," the serpent hissed. Adam fell over in the middle of the desert covered in burns. Nothing but sand dunes for miles. An empty cannister rolled out from his hand.

Eve waited for him to come home but he never did.

Prompt: A wizard sets off into his usual forest for wand making but a camp of environmentalists are there.

Stalinsky twiddled his rainbow beard as he strolled into Claw Clan Forest. His purple robes and ropes were enchanted not to pick up any leaves or debris as the long fabrics trailed on dead foilage. He was too engrossed with his heft order to notice the woods had gone quiet – too quiet.

Business had been booming for Stalinsky since the boomers decade: many witches and wizards were coming from non-magic families, which meant they weren't inheriting any wants collecting dust. It also meant they could personalize their wants, something Stalinsky highly recommended. Claw Clan Forest was his go to because it had the most diverse set of trees in the world. It never once crossed his mind over his far centuries of wand making that non-magic folk would become interested in it too. They had begun clearing away the other side of the forest three years ago. And now, it was too quiet.

The tucans made no calls. The monkeys were mute, and the frogs had ceased to croak. Stalinsky pushed back some irritating branches out of his face when he came to his most beloved tree: a kapok of tremendous proportions.

He fell backwards in surprise. It had a perimeter of people in tents. Stalinsky considered hexing them all but that would frighten the tree, which would lead to petrified wands. He had a silent agreement with the tree: a few thick branches every other month in exchange for manure from a manticore. Stalinsky had fourteen wants to make from kapok this month, what was he going to do?

Opting to investigate, Stalinsky cast a disillusionment spell to look like a camper, but his beard wouldn't budge.

"Sick face hair, bro," someone called out to Stalinsky as he approached.

"Thanks...bro."

"You here for the protest?"

"Yes, but enlighten me, what are we protesting again?"

"Deforestation, man! The rainforest is under attack."

Stalinsky thought if turtles could talk, they would sound like this unkempt man. He liked him.

"How long are you – we – staying?"

"As long as it takes, bro, as long as it takes."

"Who's attacking the forest?"

"You sure ask a lot of questions," a woman piped in, "Over there, down yonder about a mile. They're scheduled for this tree in the morning. Kapok is priceless." She sighed.

Yes, it is, Stalinsky thought. He was surprised most of the non-campers weren't from the area. Fair-skinned folk. Strange accents. Different language but Stalinsky had mastered communication skills before magic, one of the requirements.

"I'll be back," he headed in the direction the woman indicated.

When he saw the bulldozers, saws, what have you, Stalinsky gave one flick of his wand. They all vanished, including the workers.

"The trees will eat well this year."

Prompt: Your character finds a photo in their phone of themselves sleeping.

Carmen stared at her phone screen, speechless. She wasn't sure if she should be upset, amused, or worried. Or all three.

“Whatcha looking at, babe?”

“Nothing, babe,” Carmen said to Kyle, “Did you take this picture?”

She showed him one of her sleeping.

They’d only been dating a month, hence the lack of original pet names, and Kyle had only been over twice since she was out of town for two weeks on a work trip. She was definitely in his own bed in the photo. Her knee jerk reaction with Kyle was red flag if he took the photo, but he answered, “No, that’d be creepy. Old lover?” he winked, trying to hide his awkwardness.

“Definitely not. It said it was taken last week.”

“Was not me. You seeing someone else?”

“No—

“Only joking. What day was it taken?”

“Thursday.”

“I was over on Wednesday.” Kyle poked her nose. Carmen went silent.

“You ok?”

“Sorry, I just...don’t know what to make of the photo.”

“Want me to come over tonight?”

“No, it’s ok.” Carmen wanted to be alone.

That night, Carmen decided to sleep with the lights on. She crawled under her warm blue blankets, unsettled. Taking off her glasses, Carmen set her phone on the nightstand. Then she grabbed it, looking for the photo again. The flash had been used, how did that not wake her up? And then Carmen noticed 44 deleted photos in the folder, except she never deleted photos. After a moment of hesitation, Carmen clicked them open.

Photos of her sleeping appeared.

Carmen screamed and threw her phone across the bed. The flash started going off repeatedly.

The phone took photo after photo – of her. It had landed at an angle on her pillow

“What the fuck?” Carmen said, at ease it was only her phone and not a person. She picked it up and unlocked the device. The camera flipped to take selfies. Carmen tried to exit out of the app but it wouldn’t budge.

A text came through at the top in banner form: *Lick the screen, Carmen.*

A flood of them poured in.

Kiss the screen.

Lick the screen.

I’ll kill you if you don’t.

Love me.

The camera was clicking incessantly. Carmen tried to click on the message to enter the chat but it wouldn’t work.

Last chance, get undressed.

Carmen remained seated on her bed. Her phone exploded in her face. Carmen’s body crumpled to the floor.

Prompt: She died and she was your mother. You remember when she got turned back on.

Mama died in 2045. They turned her back on in 2056. I thought I’d be over the moon to have her back, even if she was partially inorganic. Same memories, same preferences, same everything, it’s just that, she died when I was 16. She still can’t seem to process that I’m 27 now, still treats me like I’ve learned nothing. Mama dislikes all the pets I’ve accumulated, especially my

donkey. She doesn't like how I went off grid with Ray to live on a self-sufficient farm instead of pursuing cybergenetics like I was gonna. She abhors how I didn't bring Papa back, but what did she expect? She can't complain though, really. She's solar charged and heaven knows we get enough sun, so I tend to the animals and crops. She floats from room to room, keeping to her promise of never working a day in her second life. I know she's bored but I don't know what she can do. It seemed like a good idea at the time. Ray went a bit AWOL and I needed someone to talk to, but mama wouldn't listen. Typical. It's just that, I'm concerned he'll do it again and I...can only hope he doesn't. But he loves me, the animals, he'd never harm us. If he deactivated mama, it wouldn't be the end of the world – I've lost her once, I can do it again. It's just that, well, I'm honestly a bit scared. We only have one neighbor left for 100 miles after the great drought in 2057 and if he offs that one too, then there's only me.

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