

## THE SIGNATURE

**D**ear Employer:

This letter is to inform you that I am tendering my resignation from your company and wish to advise you that this will be my last day of employment. It has taken me ten years to live this single day. In this place time stands still. Every second is the previous and the next.

My signature however, has escaped this neverending day, and might be the only indication (aside from my gray hairs and the wrinkles around my eyes) that time has pushed ahead within this frozen decade. If time can be measured by changes, the constant metamorphoses of my signature are the only proof that time has passed through this eternal day. I am able to track its life, like footsteps into the past, through various documents.

In time, my signature has become what it is now, where I have ended up, and somehow I can't remember being anywhere but here: A small sailboat on water. So, aboard this ship ten years later, studying over past records, I sift through a decade of signatures from within the same day that this all began.

I remember my astonishment as I stared at that initial signature that I had used to contractually bind me to your company. It sat like a stamp on the paper, engraved from a sureness earned from

my years of academic preparation. It was chiseled from a rock that weighed with such a confidence that it kept the contract from blowing off the desk. Although I signed in black, it became clear to me then, that as soon as ink hits oxygen, it turns something red.

A few short weeks into that first day the letters of my signature became stone soldiers. A statue firing squad. The thing that meant to end me. Strong and proud, O and N and the rest of them, wearing uniforms and aiming rifles, holding a perfect line and stern faces. Tied to a pole I waited to be executed by my own name that stood so persistent and everfixed. We were two different things, distant, a stranger in a mirror. In that eternal second that opens the doors of death, I shut my eyes tight and think a million things. The first thing I do is admire the penmanship of the letters that represent me and are now facing me and think *they would have been idiots not to hire me*. Second, I wait for the sound of the shots. After minutes pass and nothing occurs, my mind wonders into uneventful curiosities: a checklist of things to do that business day, and from there gets lost in countless, meaningless business related chores that melt into the *what ifs* I've been collecting most of my life. Somewhere between these daily trivialities, from boredom I first began to write the following story. Waiting for bullets to bury themselves into my flesh, I repeated like a prayer the following first sentence: *This letter is to inform you that I am tendering my resignation from your company and wish to advise you that tomorrow will be my last day of employment*. Months went by in that single second, which was expected because that is the nature of final seconds, but it took them so long to fire that eventually the sun ate through the ropes that held my wrists and I opened my eyes one at a time to discover that my death squad had resigned into a few dehydrated cactuses that spread across the desert's horizon. The sky was pulling with such heat above them that it twisted their faces and arms upward as if making them beg for water. Gunless, they secretly and hatefully wished to kill the overbearing sky, and although my signature

had forgotten me and moved on, I was still inside my final second.

I wake up.

I get to the office.

I sign in.

I say good morning to Olivia and we laugh over Ricardo's ties.

I sit down on a chair that will become some part of me. I sink into it and it seems hours go by before I've fully sunk. I look around and breathe to myself. I worry about a pending agreement, but I have trouble remembering whether negotiations begun three months ago or this very morning. Immediately I recall that the negotiations had actually closed last Thursday and I had been commended for it, but at the same time I also recall that that same agreement had pended for so long that the international company whose hands it sat in was hung by a coup before it closed. I loosen my tie and begin to edit a proposal, which curiously seems to have already been finalized.

I feel something staring at me, but when I turn around there is no one there. I repeat to myself that I do not believe in daytime ghosts over and over until I am convinced, then I continue to edit that afternoon's unedited proposal.

I organize papers.

I argue for hours with Michellino about the inadequacy of the order he has placed for the upcoming quarter.

I sign some papers.

In the desert it begins to rain. The cacti are almost tired of holding themselves up, but then they begin to swell with the weight of first water. Everything drinks the water, the reptiles, the hot air

and the broken earth. Some letters slant, ashamed of their exhaustion they blame the wind that never visits this land for their incapacity to hold themselves straight. Some have sat down to rest, some have uprooted and walked off. Two Cs have been replaced with an X and a lower case i has lost its crowning point. I have begun writing the story on some paper as the dried up letters of my signature are being covered in water and they open their spiny mouths to drink. There is more rain and some cactus begin to float to the surface, others sink and feel bloated and alive for once under tons and tons of dreams they had so longed for. I go back to my execution pole and sit against it to continue writing while small drops of water land on my paper. The structure of the story sits inside my head like an incomplete blueprint. Several hands on it, everyone has some words for its construction. As everything floats away I begin to learn to write.

I make phone calls

People yell at me on the phone. Their voices attempt anger but hit sad. Although they speak of urgent matters, I listen to words misdirected toward me but meant for far off unfaithful lovers, frustrated dissident children, dead unappreciated relatives that now lay deaf in coffins under the earth. When the people on the other end of the line realize I'm none of these people and they deflate like fruitless dynamite, I hang up and the phone rings again. It might not be the same person, but it is the same miserable voice.

I feel my wrist.

I feel something staring at me and look up to see if I can find a concealed camera on the ceiling. I am suspicious, very suspicious.

I walk around to see who has made it to work today despite the impossible weather outside.

I photocopy several documents that will be delivered immediately and raced into a future time zone past the sun. They will arrive in the recipient's hands hours before I copied them on the other side of the world.

I argue with Michellino about his incompetence.

I smell something coming from somewhere; I think it is my heart.

I type a letter. Each key I hit sounds sadder than the last.

I sign the letter.

Some things cannot be contained. They leak like water through fingers. It leaked out of me through pens, shaping itself against my realization or will.

There is a small house somewhere farther off. I sit under its covered porch and listen to the rain as landscapes drown. Some cacti dance, one cactus caught a cold and is wearing a scarf. I continue to write my story although I've never learned to write beyond the narratives of business. The sky is bruised with clouds and the rain on the ground is chocolate. I continue writing, but after an astounding resonance, which I first mistake for the thunder of the rifles that have finally come to conclude my final second, I look up to see a stampede of thousands of different animals. Their shape eats the bloated cacti as they move across the line of the horizon. Giraffes like Ls, birds crossing Ts; three toed sloths on the backs of Es. They move like waves. I stand up and walk toward them, my signature becoming something I cannot control but beautiful. Before long, in a second, I am surrounded by them. Animals everywhere. I look up to see the shapes of their backs against the sky around us; trunks, wings and horns all cut into the air. I breathe in the odor of life and they move me toward a wooden ship.

What would have been impossible for me to ever predict was that

I will years from now, spend hours on end examining my previous decade through the story of my signature. Like a detective, praying for the talent of code crackers I attempt to decipher what was growing within those scribbles all those years, too large for my frame of bones and confining veins. My soul was jailed inside a box of bones, and would reach out and into the earth, landing like miniature dreams drawn on paper; dreams that perched on signature lines. That is why I will never return.

I sign in and my mouth signs in behind me with a fake smile to Olivia. Within these last few months I have grown an incredible intolerance for her pettiness and her greedy habits.

I sit with my fingers to my wrist listening to the music of my blood. Every pulse is the same one. I wonder to myself if my blood is moving at all. If its not just sitting still, kicking at my pale wrist. For some reason I can't keep count, maybe distractions, but I can never get past the number one.

I feel as if someone is watching me, the same eyes that watch me when I sleep at night.

I say good morning to people. They greet me with the confusion of late evening.

I sit.

I photocopy some papers.

I argue with myself about Michellino.

I organize some things.

I sign something like too many birds weighing down a powerline.

I have come to believe that you too are aware, have always been aware, that under the company, teams of handwriting analysts are contracted out to work all night, acting like shocks on a vehicle,

responding to internal flux, to the small bumps of change. Employee signatures are their gauge. Within those tiny scribbled letters, they locate doubts, pinpoint dead weight, find holes or unlooped Os and then respond to those complex clues in a manner necessary to maintain the company's stability. They unravel the signatures like listening closely to complicated music. *Give this one a raise, demote this one, send this one to Atlanta for the weekend, give this one more coffee; and this one? terminate this one, there is no future for him here.* Those analysts must have overlooked my signature, the minuscule artworks that my unknowing hand left behind, its plots, evolving, drowning, escaping.

Torrents are burying the lungs of the animals that didn't make it on the ship. Rains drown entire cities as we begin to float while the weight of a million animals almost anchors us to earth. I continue to write my story. It has become a lingering process and with all the noise around me I lose parts of it often. Each time I come back to my story, like my signature, it too has changed. My signature begins to sink as the ship full of animals floats away. Even the dark clouds sink in the rising waters. The ocean hides my letters like icebergs; only the tips of them peeked out at the beauty of a bath of lightning and wind. The more I learn how to write the harder it becomes for me to contain my story. The few letters left peek their heads out to look at that last second before being completely submerged, that final second is the second that can hold as many suitcases as ever necessary.

I sign in.

I say good morning to people as they leave work at night.

People yell at me from somewhere far.

I feel some part of my body.

I walk around for no reason. I never notice the weather outside.

I smell something salty coming from somewhere.

I photocopy something and throw it in the garbage.

I argue with someone about someone else, maybe myself.

I type something. But have trouble finishing a sentence that should have read: *deliveries have arrived with an unusual number of broken boxes.* Instead I keep finishing it: *some things cannot be contained.*

I sign a letter.

My signature is just a single line now. A motion of the hand to expedite the processes of this wedged day. A squiggle. It is a calm ocean high above a buried world. From there, from the bottom of the calmest sea, I write obsessively, finishing a story. A wave. It is a curvy terminal line with no heartbeats. My own handwriting has turned into waves also, scribbles, symbols that begin to lose their shape and meaning. My story now begins to create me. The result of me hammering at my story has been a reciprocating reverberation that travels back through the hammer's handle and into my stiff body, shaking the dust off my corpse as it twists my body back to life. It has been complicated, but the story is never straight and like a determined blacksmith I keep striking at it, continuing to inadvertently mold my own body in the process. Under a blanket of solid water that holds so still that many attempt to walk on it before they fall through and soak themselves in the deepest of oceans, I sit reflecting and look at the soft waves of letters that my hand leaves on the paper.

I sign in forever.

I say good something to someone.

I sit.

I organize something for hours.

I sink into something.

I sign in.

I photocopy something.

I argue with someone for hours.

I smell something salty coming from somewhere, I think it is my sailor heart.

I type a story.

I sign it.

Every rare once in a while, an old sunk letter surfaces, floats past the small sailboat. Every once between many months, a soldier, a cactus, a bear, swims past me, reaching out of the surface like a shark's fins; but soon enough they submerge again, leaving only waves. My sail is high and full and I'm moving. Night is falling here, but somewhere, on the other side of the world, someone is waking up.

And soon, me, my story, my signature will become what it is now, where I've realized I have ended up. I can't remember being anywhere but here: A small sailboat on water, writing this story. A story lost in the waves of my unruly penmanship. Letters that cannot be anything but indecipherable scribbles in which phonetic logic is forever trapped. This small ocean, which you hold in your hands now and was sent ten years ago inside a bottle that should have reached you by now. With a looking glass, like rescue aircraft, it would take you ages to find my small forever moving sailboat that eats wind within this story carved of lines, by the time you were to cover it from start to end I will be in a new ocean of letters, on the top of a swelling O or under the crest of a stormy

C. From here I wave to you goodbye forever. I have escaped your day that opens the door of death and I will live two decades in the one ahead in order to make up for what you have taken from me.

Love,