

Kitami

A short story by Danny Obillo

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KITAMI DECIDED ON becoming an online model. Yes, Kitami. All 5'8 of him. In the darkness of his room he reached for the tub of styling wax that had been resting in a bowl of warm water for around 10 minutes now (he very much preferred his goop to be somewhat runny) and rummaged his fingertips through his short hair. He eventually settled on a messy, though perpetually cool, front-forward fringe as he stared at his sullen face in the small mirror on his desk for an eternity.

'Can I pull it off?' he asked himself, in earnest.

Of course, there was an expected hesitancy in Kitami's sudden excursion, but that feeling didn't come from any insecurity about his current physical appearance. Kitami did work out, that was a certainty. Perhaps, if he went through his old notes he would have realised that he had been revisiting his old training regimes around 25 times a year, that is around two times every month, not bad for someone who, for the most part held down a strenuous 9 to 5. Any nitpickings he may have had with whether his body was up to scratch for his new chosen profession were not any real reason to warrant a need for Kitami to frame himself into a square crop.

Kitami had already considered it a better stratagem to lure in any prospective followers with a genuine attempt at being 100% honest. He knew this would prove to be a very difficult undertaking to pull off if he were to model. He gathered that the nature of such things primarily took root (more or less) within a systematic and intentional rephrasing of reality. And it was with this dilemma Kitami had his first creative block- that misplaced twig that could very well be the only one needed to derail the entire project. The ideological pitfalls of online modelling were already staggering, the mere thought of concepts such as "strategy" or "attempts at honesty" or "for the greater good of likes" were fundamentally bordering on sociopathy.

He thought about this for a while, quickly mulling over other ideas that would not need for him to show off his positively average torso. He knew very well that this outburst may have been yet another knee-jerk reaction to something he had long buried and this all may have been an innate urge to simply express how he was feeling. But quickly, Kitami back-tracked and this insistence led him to believe that the idea was in fact an incredibly logical and organic solution to what had eventually become a problem for him.

Just a few minutes before his revelation, Kitami had flicked and scrolled through a ton of pictures of incredibly gorgeous women, recommended to him within the architecture of his favourite app. He went along with the feed and studied these images of the 'ideal female form' until he felt something in his brain wear out suddenly. It was somewhere during this aimless scrolling when Kitami thought to himself:

'These people look virtually all the same.'

If he was being dishonest he would attribute his realisation to nothing more than boredom- a digitally-induced lag activated through an unflinching bombardment of information, so to speak. But he knew

very well that his discomfort actually arose from the fact that nothing he saw seemed to be working for him sexually.

The sight of these models, would turn him on for a good few seconds, but after this, there had developed a very serious disconnect. This had been happening regularly and so his frustrations built. Soon after closing the app, he would often think about the faces that he did find attractive, trying to refigure what he now preferred in a woman's physicality, and ultimately in their sex. But this always ended with Kitami becoming incredibly fed up. Kitami realised that- past a basic ogle- he had begun to look into each of the model's eyes, analysing their smiles, coaxing out some glimmer of soul. The diminishing sizes of their bikinis ceased to even matter any longer.

But very quickly, a new temporary routine had developed and Kitami started pondering things like:

'Who were these people were in the grand scheme of online popularity', or

'How much happier did they truly feel whilst they plying this trade (if it were indeed monetised at all), or

'How to deal with the inevitable stress in an environment with a thousand other anonymous competitors?'

A sense of anguish would always overcome Kitami, one different from the pains that had recently manifested in his chest. It was a rooted annoyance, distinctly opposite from any jealousy. It was a distrust of everything that had pervaded his privacy. The whole construct of the digital sphere, as it were, had begun to take hold in his most intimate of moments and Kitami hated it.

AND SO KITAMI paused for a quick smoke, he opened one half of his curtains and pushed out the window to its fullest tilt. Outside was indeed a fine day. He watched on idly over the front door of his shared house, careful in avoiding the new neighbours who had taken to settling in during the past few weeks. Unfortunately for them, their friendliness and enthusiasm were very much the opposite of where Kitami felt he was in life. His reluctance to face new people also extended to him avoiding the back garden for today, with his fellow tenants deciding on having a barbecue with their young families.

Kitami looked over the red ceramic roofs of this typically-terraced East-End street and in his mind he began to plan out his online gallery carefully, purposely leaving out that all important first live post, the pivotal jump-off moment. He would try to spend this inspiring day figuring out that particular dilemma. It seemed like one of those days where the inescapable sweat could actually produce some sort of *eureka* moment from inside its shiny folds.

He lost himself quickly in thought of the various permutations of images, themes and the backdrops that were immediately available to him. He finally remembered where he had that remote switch for his stashed DSLR and as quickly remembered his old college training. He did for a fleeting moment have an interest in photography back when people still used 35mm spools and waited a week to collect their prints from their local *Boots laboratories*.

After a few minutes Kitami realised that this was a wholly futile experience for him to be dealing with right now. He had planned to meet up with his friend on the other side of London, it would also be the

first time he would meet her newborn son. There also were hesitations with this meeting of course, but for now he retracted on his idea to become an online model to hazard that trip on the tube as *persona non-grata* for now.

Plus, he hadn't been to Queen's Park in a very long while.

THE MID-AFTERNOON certainly confirmed to them both that it was already one of those climate-defying hot summers. Its intensity had been hinted to them within the stuffy carriages of both the Bakerloo and Jubilee lines (the former certainly superior in terms of unbearable), but was compounded by what the great outdoors had to offer. This weekend promised to be the absolute peak of this year's summer, an event that in recent years arrived in three day bursts. An apex likely never to be seen again until next July.

After navigating to Queen's Park, and after a slightly testing few minutes with a restless newborn, Kitami with his old friend, Grainne (Gron-Ya, as the Irish would pronounce) had eventually found a quiet spot in a secluded part of the park. It was a small gated intersection cut from the main grassed play area and away from the giant bandstand, who currently had a local brass ensemble playing a triumphant set of familiar big band tunes from a respectful distance. Almost perfect baby conditions.

'So. Mummy decided to call you Che, huh?' Kitami told the very young boy, resting safely in his arms, 'I hope you take to your name better than I have, I really do! Let's hope it grows on me.'

Grainne had only just now handed her child over to Kitami. She had tried (against Kitami's judgement, given the size of young Che) going to the children's park for a quick go on the most innocuous set of swings, only to find that balancing a newborn in one's arms really compromised her own stability on the apparatus once in motion. There was certain danger to be had. She politely ignored the friendly recommendations against this from the more experienced parents around her, and soldiered on uncomfortably for a few more seconds with hardly a full swing to show for it. Kitami could already tell that Grainne was living off the sweet fumes of something brand new, but these mixed energy levels, however affirming the highs seemed, were still fumes.

'Come on now Kit,' Grainne hushed, 'Don't say that, it's a lovely name!'

Tired mother watched from the bench as her friend very expertly handled young Che, whose reaction towards the heat had become rather unpredictable.

'Che, Che,' he whispered to the child, 'if I say it over and over I'm sure I'll warm to it! Was the name a joint decision between the both of you?'

'It is something we agreed on,' Grainne sighed. 'The both of us, yes. One of the few things. Maybe the only one...'

A gust of wind began to swirl, enough to be felt as welcome respite to the intense shine.

'Not to worry,' Kitami said, 'I have had plenty experience in handling children over the past year and besides, I thought this is why I'm here! To give poor mother a rest!'

Kitami had been standing with Che settled, bouncing to distant rhythms of horns. Grainne, at first found herself on the edge of her seat, unused to the motions and freedom Kitami had seemingly over her son. She eventually let her anxieties go and finally rest back on the bench, consciously taking notes, eager to try Kitami's subtle methods herself. She let them both have their moment and was glad that they had bonded. She took many photos of them both, as Kitami quite effortlessly settled the child against his instinctive squirming, making sure his own shadow covered the baby's face from the intermittent, but brutal glare of the sun.

'You're a natural, don't you know?' Grainne commented, with a slight hint of jealousy that she couldn't calm young Che down as effectively.

Kitami smiled regretfully before feeling young Che stretch out his tiny legs. A speedier breeze had funnelled into the quiet area, likely due to the section being designed in such a way to act like a bottleneck. Kitami brought Che closer into his chest and looked down at his small feet, covered by the white onesie he wore.

'Do you have any socks in your bag?'

Grainne, thinking exactly the same thing, at exactly the same time rummaged through her bag for them, eventually realising that she had left it in one of the pockets of her thin rain jacket.

She stood up and they both focussed fully on the awkward job of putting slightly oversized socks onto the restless feet of a baby who was as tiny as you would expect for somebody born three weeks premature.

THERE WERE VERY distinct times when Kitami thought about being a father. And perhaps the earliest progeny of that idea had come when both his and Grainne's tumultuous relationship was still in full swing, a decade and a half ago. That, ended rather suddenly in an age where they assumed time would never catch up to them. Now, with both fast approaching 40, Kitami had long settled on the fact that they were never meant to be, he also had an inkling that his time to be a father realistically might be up too.

Both former lovers doted on Che as he opened his eyes briefly. Kitami angled him slightly upright, making sure the both of them could properly see the pretty planted viewing area that had overlooking it a central triage of blossom trees, and flowers Kitami did not know the names of.

'Kit,' Grainne said, breaking a perfect moment, 'I caught him at it again,' she continued with a wilting sigh of defeat.

A sense of dread came over Kitami, his grip on the child became slightly firmer. Such a young kid and so many possible problems already. He hesitated saying what first came into his mind, which was a conversation they had months ago about whether hypothetically it would be okay for a child to be brought up into the world, essentially fatherless. He knew very well the difference between words said in frustration versus the situations people actually find themselves in.

Grainne set the soles of her trainers on the varnished wood of the bench, making sure the worn down tread had gripped on it enough before she slowly slunk her shoulders onto her knees. She let out a sigh

in replacement of an answer from her former partner and watched on as two people she cared for deeply quietly danced under the sun.

Kitami purposely mimicked the gentle sway of the branches, attempting to hide any nervous energy. He figured that any rhythm in movement should have some semblance to what appeared in front of he and Che. Kitami was fully aware that he may have looked slightly ridiculous, but it soon did not matter. He continued dancing a pee-pee dance and purposely distanced himself from continuing a historically-tiring conversation, one they had had plenty times now.

‘Say something Kit, please,’ Grainne asked, desperate for some kind of nurture.

‘You both need to talk,’ Kitami eventually replied. ‘You both need to focus on this young chap right here,’ he said, watching the calm on Che’s face as he finally fell asleep again.

‘Focus is all that matters in these moments.’ he continued. ‘Here, I’ll show you how to hold him so he doesn’t get too antsy.’

Grainne thought about it. She already knew how Kitami would answer, also knowing this very conversation incredibly well. There was a brief moment where what she saw in front of her fit perfectly into some idealised picture she had visualised many times before the birth. She watched Kitami as his entire focus was on the new addition to planet Earth. Nothing was to disturb that.

‘Not yet,’ she said, ‘I’ll let you two enjoy your bonding session.’

A BEAUTIFUL BLONDE lady wandered into the quiet area, hopping over a small ankle-high fence that furnished the central gardens. She wore grey sporty leggings and a denim over-shirt that covered a simple white vest. Her going over to the central garden island was in fact an utterly normal thing, families had been casually venturing over to take quick photographs closer to the centrepiece. The girl, as pretty as she was, did not appear on Kitami’s radar until Grainne had brought it up.

‘You see. He’d be all over that if he were here,’ Grainne interrupted, as Kitami slowly switched holding arms, careful not to disturb Che’s peace, building up enough momentum and enough sway to arouse both of their inner Zen out into the forefront.

This lady was possibly the very last thing on Kitami’s mind. The first thing, was undoubtedly vomit. After attempting to shoosh young Che, and as soon as he carefully leant him over his shoulder, a projectile of sick flew onto his t-shirt. It didn’t bother Kitami at all. It was a duty he had seen other people tackle time and time again, it was something he, in a weird way was happy about. Something real he could tackle. Kitami laughed at his weird sense of glee.

‘He’d be sitting probably over on those benches right in front of her,’ Grainne said, fixated on the lady, ‘he’d probably be using baby as an excuse to get a better vantage point.’

Kitami, still swaying to the rhythm of a distant brass ensemble, found himself facing Grainne. He turned around slowly, with a deft sense of his own footwork, and carefully alternated his bouncing movement whilst judging the weight of young Che in his large hands, which cradled the baby’s torso almost fully. He looked up at the lady who was sat down on the grass, with a background of what he

guessed were pink-flicked lilacs and white peonies. Kitami caught a glimpse and immediately thought, 'that camera position must be doing something awful for the glare... but it is a necessary move', her face was slightly chubbier than he had thought on first glance.

'Is the sun in your eyes?' he cooed to young Che, who looked perpetually worried at his early age.

Grainne backtracked her train of thought and focussed on her child. 'He's really relaxed with you, he really is.'

'But you're only a few weeks old, aren't you?' he whispered loudly to Che, 'I bet you are relaxed with everyone!'

Again there was a silence between them, one whose energies were mixed with an obvious awkwardness and a focus on Che. Kitami did ponder for a second whether this was because their conversations from now on, would have this small foreign entity invading the closeness they had recently re-secured. One quickly built upon after a natural few years away from one another, a time spent realising their own separate romantic lives. Or was this hesitancy more to do with a subject they never quite reconciled?

Treating this as a new friendship devoid of any history proved to be a difficult thing for Kitami to achieve, perhaps even a shining example of true futility, but they had both somehow managed to get to this point in time together again. This, complication in Kitami's hands was actually a welcome addition to and a positive turn of pace to their relationship. Perhaps Che had actually ushered in with him a change in both of their maturities?

Grainne seemed to pull herself out of her mini-slump and extended her legs on the bench, her back nestled comfortably on her rucksack with all the softness of baby belongings packed in all the right places. Finally she relaxed.

'I always thought you'd make a good father Kit,' Grainne said.

'Well, I'm not sure about that. But... I am a rather brilliant uncle,' he said to Che, whose eyes were struggling to stay open in the piercing light of midday summer. Kitami again heard an audible sigh come from the bench. He suddenly felt a flash of a forgotten memory from his own childhood appear, one of the few worth any substance. It involved young Kit handing over Daddy one of either a flathead screwdriver or a Philips, whilst restoring a dining-room chair that had fallen apart. One Kitami's own Mother nagged dear old Pa about for ages. It was with this Kitami also sighed deeply.

'So what is going on with you Mister?' Grainne said. 'Any of those little birds on the horizon flown over to you yet?'

'Ha!' Kitami breathed out sharply, not anticipating many questions about his own personal life to be tackled today. 'I had been thinking about it up until very recently. But I've made a conscious effort to sort myself out first. I need to finalise that tricky business regarding selling the house off first.'

'So, would you define yourself as single now?'

Kitami thought about it, it was an answer that frequently changed. 'Neither, to be fair. there's a lot for me to contemplate before I should even begin taking that seriously again. If ever.'

The breeze yet again picked up and swirled a visible line of pollen like a gymnast's ribbon. Kitami immediately walked over to his old friend and placed Che into her arms with extra care. Che began moving, stretching out his back until the tips of his toes pointed to all compass points.

'It's easy,' Kitami told her, 'adjust the feel from your hands to how he reacts. He will get comfortable eventually.'

Grainne stood up and again the stresses in her face became visible. Perhaps it was the worry of not being able to provide her child with the level of comfort she so desperately wanted for him.

'Just work with each other and make sure you are comfortable enough to carry him once he does settle. If not, dancing is always the best medicine!'

BEFORE RE-ENTERING HIS house, Kitami lit up a much-needed cigarette. He had purposely held out in the park earlier and he was reluctant to smoke outside the station after he had said his farewells, as there was a middle-aged man doing an intoxicated dance of sorts.

He briefly thought about his day and immediately remembered the lady in the park, how, although incredibly attractive, he found the awkwardness of her posturing incredibly off-putting. He eventually figured that it didn't matter really, a day like this is certainly something you had to take advantage of. There was a lot to be said about the tricks one instantly learns when dealing with cases of extreme light and shade.

The more he thought about this random girl, the more he realised that his recollections were very limited. He saw her more as some kind of strange mirage emanating from the brilliant weather. He found it a struggle to remember the shape of her legs, what size her breasts were, or even if she had worn sunglasses or not. She seemed both as natural and as manufactured as the central garden and the misplaced tropical heat that had graced today.

He only thought about the lady remembering that Grainne's gaze was fixed onto her as they left. Kitami knew that she was trying to figure out any possible allure this woman had over her audience. He remembered letting out a timely laugh to try and settle her worries. It didn't detract from her conclusions. He remembered offering to hold Grainne's bag to the station, but she refused. He remembered trying to help attach Che onto Grainne's chest with one of those slings Kitami was always curious about, but that too was denied.

KITAMI LOOKED AT his phone for the first time since he had left and flicked down the images on his favourite app. They whizzed down the screen at a frightening speed if it were were all just a set of strange surrealisms traversing time and space. Forward and back, back and forward. Pausing when the feeling came to him. All of this control at his fingertips. All this time, he was very conscious that his cigarette had burned at a consistent rate and that his internal anguishes still played out to the whims of true, slow burning time.

He paused briefly on the flash of full body images of women curled up in wicker chairs or lounging on airbrushed beaches, their olive skins glistening under a Caribbean sun. He paused on one picture where

the model's hair had been caught in a moment of apparent random fury, she still looked perfect. Oh, what were the chances? Kitami, again felt drained at the mere sight of a handful of posts. His heart again calmed to a dulled pain.

Kitami never noticed how his new neighbours had already parked up at front, readying the gate for a large purchase coming into their new home.

'You're looking good today, Kit!' the woman said to him, smiling as bright as the sun. 'But less of that eh?' she said jokingly, following a smoke swirl with her index finger.

'Thanks! And yes, I have to cut down at least!' Kitami said, struggling to remember her name.

Her husband or partner closed the boot of their car and brought out something the size of a medium office whiteboard, under his arm, it was also obviously as light as one also.

'Kit! have you been on holiday or something? Liking your tan, mate,' he said. 'Some people just react perfectly to the sun.'

Kitami laughed and made a friendly comment that made the couple giggle, as they paused for a brief chat. He placed his phone in his pocket, wafting away the lingering plumes of his cigarette and simply enjoyed the idle company for once.

The End

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