

**GRAMMATICALLY-ENHANCED TRANSCRIPT OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT
FOR THE PURPOSES OF A TAXICAB-LICENCE**

“I’M NOBODY IN THIS BIG DARK CITY, but I’ll defend that position with my life if required! Will I leave one day or will I always stay, I’ve no idea if someone asked me, but I’d probably not hold it against them. I’ve not been known to exert undue pressure on people in order to survive, but I submit myself to large quantities of my own coercion so that I can get by from day to day. You see, the world isn’t what you take it to be, nor is it part of you or of anyone you care to know. It’s an undying thing, the world is, and you’re just passing by without leaving so much as an indent behind you. And even when you set out to mingle with the next person, it turns out they’re well outside your reach and wish nothing of the sort. Beyond me, everything is! Well beyond me, as far away as the stars can be! So, listen to me for now. *This* is my music! Stop and pay attention to this violin of my voice, this humdrum of my bodily sounds, the swish and whooshing of what I’m all about! I know I’m playing something far too sentimental for anyone to care, but I’ve something to say. And here it is: the world’s a simple enough place, life far simpler, people the simplest of them all. Yes, I know that most people stick to the given *to grow, to mate, to multiply*. But I’ll stand by my own home-grown truth: to appear and then disappear, that’s all there is. Why make it more complicated than it is? Why screw up matters with shilly-shallying? Why obscure when you can illuminate? And if you’ve got to stand up for something, do it! Oppose whatever it is that needs opposing! Not to oppose is to accept, to accept is to condone, to condone is to endure, to endure is to stomach, to stomach is to die. So, if you don’t oppose you die. Yes, you must oppose!

Surviving in this shed has not been easy, I can tell you. Built from scraps of anything I could find, water now leaks from three of the four corners of the dammed place, and I’ve been sneezing for some three days now. When I say sneeze I mean rupture and shudder in the most painful way. I’ve got this permanent cough and a temporary earache. Last year I suffered from pneumonia, which meant a stay of three weeks in hospital. But then the summer was good and my lungs recovered. I get a bad cough went it rains, worse when it snows. My skin’s flaking far too much for a girl who’s 17 years of age. I’ve a sore on my upper lip and another on my upper thigh. I’ve been raped several times, I lost count. It was even more painful because I’d taken those men to be my mentors, father figures if you like, since I never got to meet my father. I don’t even know who he is or was. Mother used to talk of a lion-hunter, a sword-eater, a

gangster, a poker-player, an angel, a god. It all depended on what she'd stuck into her body that night. And if I were to meet my father one day I would not know what to do, what to ask. Flesh of my flesh, love of my life, light of my days?

“Everyone has something to say, you just have to ask. I've something to say, too. But then no one asks for my opinion. And even if I give it to them, no one will listen. I know that at least I could've voted this time round, but then I'm of *no fixed abode*, as it states in this form I've to fill in. Now that's an expression I don't know, though I can guess what it means. I can find out what it means from the context, as they say. My belief is that the world's like that. Nobody knows what it means, but then you can guess what it's about from its surroundings. Yeah, from the context. The world and its context. That would be what surrounds the world, and so you become what surrounds you. Some say I'm surrounded by paranoia, and I'm convinced that's what's wrong with the world. Its context is paranoia. It's like when you think that you may not be able to eat again for several days, then you get paranoid. I'm paranoid now, because I ate yesterday, I've had nothing to eat today, and I'm not sure whether I'll eat tomorrow. Eating food has become a mystery to me, and certainly the source of my paranoia!

“I thought of ending it all today with a rope and this hook under the bridge. It's that simple really, ending it all in moments! There, done! But perhaps that's too easy a solution, not testing enough. I like to be challenged, if only because I've only ever been challenged, at every stage and every day. Nothing has ever been given to me as a prize or a reward or a gift or a compensation for my losses. No, not once.

“I heard of this man who was sentenced to die, and it appears that he said that his true death sentence was not the one decided by the judge, but the one handed to him on the day of his birth. Must the act of birth be such a terrible thing that it deserves certain death? Something like that he said, I was told. I suppose the difference between him and me is knowing when. It's not a matter of *if* but *when*. When... when... when? Now that is a challenge, to live without knowing when it will all end!

“Today I felt the rain on my hair, the cold autumn rain on my greasy hair. On my gritty hands, on my dog's gritty paws. My black and white mongrel is a friend as would be expected, but not my best because he's bitten me twice, on the buttocks and on my cheek. The scar I've on my face is in the shape of a crescent. I like to think that's the reason people call me “Loony”.

It's been such a long time since I last heard my real name on someone's lips that I can't really say for sure what it is. I've no documents to prove who I am, no numbers. Not even a social security number, and when I went into hospital for my pneumonia someone lent me theirs for a small amount. What number would mine be, I sometimes wonder. And then I think of possible combinations of digits, endless sevens and fours, and threes and eights, and hundreds and thousands. Yes, I spend hours daydreaming of numbers because you're as good as the numbers in your life: your social security number, your hospital number, your bank account, the amount of diplomas and distinctions, your years of experience, your IQ, the number of children you have, the number of friends, the number of credit cards, the many times you went to the theatre, the weeks you went on holiday, the years of service... No, I'm someone with no numbers, no numbers at all! Except perhaps for the number of days I've still got left. So, who'll take me? Without numbers I don't exist. I'm just Loony with the gritty dog!

"I suppose I've a dream for when I grow up. When I am older I want to be a taxicab driver. Yes, a cabbie! I love the sound of that word! Cabbie! My own boss, my own car! And if I don't like a customer, I'll just tell him to get the hell out of my taxicab. I'll choose whom to stop for, so not everyone hailing my taxicab will get a ride. I'll certainly pick and choose! My very own vehicle will take me everywhere. I won't even need a place to stay, no sir! I'll sleep in the back of the car, and welcome visitors in the front. I can have a summer party if I manage to stop beside a park. My car will be my life, and my life will be my car! A man I know told me that if I give him five dollars a day for five years he'll get me a car, as simple as that. I've been saving with him for seven months now. Don't ask me to add up. I just know I trust this man. I mean, I have to. There's no future for me without my car.

"And so, I'd like to apply to a taxicab driver's licence, yes sir. I know I need an address to get a licence, and I can't just say under Brooklyn Bridge, or on the corner of this and that street, or just in the middle of a square. But look: I've two hands and two feet, a good brain, sharp reflexes. My eyesight can be helped with a pair of spectacles. My hearing is a little impaired now, but I can still hear the horns from other cars, at least somewhat. Isn't all this enough to apply for a taxicab licence? Isn't it, your honour?

"So, this is my favourite pastime: seeing people getting in and out of taxicabs, going and coming on errands of different sorts, hailing cabs, running for them, screaming and fighting over them, going out of their way to get one! A taxicab can connect worlds, change your life, take you to where you've always wanted to be. That's the real power that those yellow creatures

have, darting along the city's streets with the strength of a wild buffalo. They're the ones that truly make this city move towards its destiny, whether final or not, and all else simply follows. And I want to be part of that, oh so much I want to be part of that! With me on the driving seat, people will move faster still and get sooner to where they've got to get to! And what's more important, they'll enjoy so very much the ride in my taxicab! This is the only thing that matters in the end: to enjoy the ride!

“And that's what I'd like to request for myself, to be able to drive my own taxicab, please. Forgive me if I sound too insistent! Too excited, too impatient! But this is the only reason I was brought all the way from nowhere to this place!

“I once met a woman who gave me ten dollars in loose change. It was a lucky strike because I was able to pay for two days car-money in one go, I thought. And after handing me the coins the woman also gave me some kind of conversation. That probably made her feel good. Yes, both the conversation and the money she gave me made her feel better than she'd been for some time, I'm sure of that. I could tell because she looked sad when she first saw me, and then looked happy when she gave me the money. Oh, and she said that she'd write something about me, whatever that could mean. She probably went home and had supper with her family in the warmth of her home, and then thought of me and felt good because of the conversation and the money she'd given me. And then she wrote about me, or whatever. Yeah, when we spoke, she commented on how young I was and asked if I had any relatives. “Don't want any relatives, my father is a killer”, I said. She gasped for air and asked me if my father had really killed someone. And I answered that not in that sense, but in the sense of “my dog is a killer”. “Do you get it, ma'am?” And she asked: “Is your dog a killer?” again not getting it. And then I told her about the deafness that I'm suffering from now. When she enquired about my problem, I asked her to repeat her question. Not that I'm totally deaf, you know, just to a degree and I can hear street noises and car horns, or almost. And then she gave me another ten dollars, this time in two five-dollar bills, which meant yet another two days car-money. No, I'm not going to start to tell the complete truth at this stage in my life. The truth is something I could never handle, and even less afford. And why should I? Where does it say that the truth deserves so much more than what I am and wish to be? The only truth I know is the story of my life. There's no other route for me to follow, nothing else to keep me company but the life I lead.

“Today they’ve taken my place on East 58th Street, and I’ve got to find a new location. It’s a gang of four old men, one of them a rapist. I know him from when I was 14 and was left for dead after he assaulted me. Shame that I have to leave the place. It was beside a famous restaurant where they throw away good food. I’d even pay for that food, untouched by whoever ordered it, perhaps it had only been looked at. I bet customers had enough with staring at it, as though it was some work of art. I remember once seeing the tentacles of an octopus in one of their bins, and when I tasted it I realised it was made of coloured sugar, sculpted to look like a creature of the sea. Yeah, some people just look at their food. But I suppose it’s the same in my case. I’ve got to make do with just looking at food. With looking at shoes and books and fountain pens and new jackets, all in shopwindows as if they were works of art in a museum! Untouchable, just to be admired, beyond my reach! Yeah, everything I see is well beyond my reach, well beyond. So far away in fact that I dream that I grow such long, long fingers in order to stretch out and grab what I want and need. But then my other senses are also distorted in my dreams, and I can smell food from a thousand miles and taste it fully in all its glory well before it even reaches my mouth. In my dreams I can also see things that’ll happen in the future, and I can hear what hasn’t yet been said. And when I wake up, I can touch nothing, taste nothing, smell nothing. And my sight’s not that good, and my hearing’s somewhat impaired. No, I feel nothing when I’m awake.

“My oldest memory is of someone hitting my hand. I don’t know anything about such a person, but I still have that scar on the palm of my right hand, rounded and shrivelled like a date. It’s a wound that still bleeds sometimes, like the faint memory of a distant past. But then blood is more than anything a reminder that I’m still here and alive.

“I remember little else, and so perhaps I never lived a past and I was born at 14, as I’ve no memories from before that time. One of the men who live around Grand Central once said that I’ve repressed, I think he said, the things that I don’t like. He also said that I wanted to forget who I was so it stops hurting me. But then I think nothing much happened to me back then. And if it did, it wasn’t worth remembering for too long, I suppose.

“Yeah, I’ve just a handful of memories of Mother and her talk of the man she mentioned most. He’d nearly killed her as he sired me like only a stallion would. He was a coward and a bully, that much I know. But I’m no coward, and that’s because I live in streets brimming with dangers of all sorts. And no bully to be sure, because I keep to myself. So perhaps he was not

my father after all, and the man who sired me does not even know I exist, does not even suspect that he has a daughter who lives out there in the streets! Perhaps he's even a rich man! A famous, powerful and distinguished man! Perhaps he's one of the many people who've given money to this poor and blameless beggar-girl!

“Things are like this for now. Now is now is now... I know I have my dream of driving a cab, but I also know that for now there's nothing else but me and the brief story of my life. I've got my dog, a newspaper, my damp corner under the bridge, my last few remaining dimes. Yes, things can change any minute, but that'll be a different *now*. This *now* is my sole possession, this split second of *now*!

“Life's some kind of personal commitment, whatever befalls you: for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer. No, you can't get much poorer than me, with a torn coat, no underwear of any sort, and just a sweatshirt and jeans. And I heard from a truck-driver that tonight the temperature may drop to below zero. Newspapers keep me warm, and whatever page is left behind I'll read it several times until I fall asleep. Once, on an especially cold night, I learnt the exchange rates by heart. The next morning I could've made some money selling dollars and buying pounds, except that I only had a comb in my pocket, half-toothed and oily to the touch.

“Love is a word I like to say on its own. Love, love, love, I say, and perhaps someone will say it back. There has to be an echo to such words, there must be a meaning to my life. Or what?

“I'm nobody in this big dark city. But it is my city and only mine, for now at least!

“S.O.S.

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