

Memories of Lost Time

10-page writing sample

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Cast

Vanessa

Tom

J.J.

Benjy

Quinn

Setting:

A prison, the present.

In 2010, more than 1.6 million people were incarcerated in a U.S. prison. – The Bureau of Justice Statistics

289 inmates have been exonerated and released from prison based on new DNA evidence. – The Innocence Project

The Department of Justice now estimates about 50% of all inmates have mental health problems.

356 state prison inmates were murdered from 2001 to 2006; there are no statistics given for federal prisons. – The Bureau of Justice Statistics

(Act 2, Scene 1)

(The lights come up on J.J. He is separate from the others in the cells. The cells have turned around, so the inside is now facing the audience.)

J.J.:

So what if I'm pissed? Don't I got a right to be? I'm a fucking ghost. When a person dies, they shouldn't stay behind. But I'm still here. Ghosts have no souls and no heart and that's what pisses me off. No one deserves that. People all act like what happened to T is really sad and messed up injustice – but what about me? I'm the ghost now. I deserve some fucking sympathy too. When I was little, I used to think that if I tried hard enough I could focus all my anger into a beam that could shoot out of my hand and fry anybody on the spot. Like a superhero – or a super villain. I'd steal comic books from the Walgreens and imagine that this life was just my secret identity. It made all this crap easier that way. Like if Clark Kent lived in my neighborhood and didn't have enough money to buy his own comics. I never thought my super power would be to become a ghost. What a lame power. So stupid. I'm sure you all want to know why I did what I did. You can blame me for the whole thing if you want. I never claimed to be smart. Other people thought I was but let me tell you – smart people don't end up in prison. T and I were cellies for three years. Believe it or not, it's actually the longest period of time I've ever stayed in one home.

(J.J. rejoins the others. TOM and BENJY are in their usual cells. J.J. begins pacing.)

TOM:

What do you really want to talk about today?

J.J.:

Why do we have to talk at all?

TOM:

We don't, but you do.

J.J.:

Stop that.

TOM:

Do you want to try reading again?

J.J.:

No.

TOM:

Chess?

I said to fucking stop. **J.J.:**

You're pacing again. **TOM:**

So what? **J.J.:**

It's distracting. **TOM:**

Fuck. **J.J.:**

You swear so much. **TOM:**

I got a right to. **J.J.:**

But you don't need to. **TOM:**

I want to. **J.J.:**

It's also distracting. **TOM:**

So? **J.J.:**

I'm trying to read. **TOM:**

I'm so tired of having the same conversations. **J.J.:**

We could talk about something new. **TOM:**

We got nothing new. **J.J.:**

So you think we've said everything we'll ever have to say to each other? **TOM:**

J.J.:

I'm not in the mood, T.

TOM:

Do you want to talk about Pastor Dave again?

J.J.:

No.

TOM:

Let me know when you change your mind.

(J.J. separates himself from the others.)

J.J.:

You don't really want to know all about each and every dull day in prison. Neither do I. No one does. It's literally like – nothing. Each day was like that and that's why that night was so grinding. Lockouts were always like that. The worst of the worst. Just thinking about it makes my skin itch. It pisses me off too. Treated like that. Less than children or dogs. Burdens. It was so damn quiet too. Sometimes we get rain and you can pass hours just listening to it. I used to try and count the raindrops. That sounds stupid but – it was something. Sometimes we get this crazy wind and that can occupy your time too. I'd imagine it ripping apart the world outside. Pulling up the dirt and trees and sending them flying through the air to crash into everything. So cool in destruction. Maybe the wind could get strong enough it could blow the entire prison over and then it would all be done. But that night was just dead. There was nothing. Nothing in an already nothingness.

(J.J. rejoins the others. QUINN and VANESSA enter.)

J.J. (CONT.):

Man this sucks.

TOM:

So you've said.

VANESSA:

It's only for one night.

J.J.:

So? That doesn't make it suck any less.

TOM:

Let's play chess. We can use something else for the bishops.

J.J.:

I'm just gonna get all confused again.

TOM:

I'll help you keep track.

J.J.:

I can't believe Benjy actually ate one.

BENJY:

Boingy Benjy.

VANESSA:

I'm sure he'll pay for that later too.

QUINN:

Ha! Yeah, that might hurt a little.

TOM:

So the pencil is my bishop and the eraser is your bishop. OK?

J.J.:

OK.

(J.J. and TOM begin to play chess.)

QUINN:

Do you know what caused the lockdown, 'Nessa?

VANESSA:

No. I guess it's something on another block.

QUINN:

I wonder what.

VANESSA:

Who knows? Sometimes I think the warden just orders lockdowns so we have something to do.

QUINN:

That wouldn't surprise me.

J.J.:

Is that my bishop or yours?

TOM:

Yours is the eraser.

J.J.:

I thought mine was the pencil. I wish Benjy hadn't eaten it.

BENJY:

Yummy, yummy in my tummy.

VANESSA:

Oh Benjy, why would you do such a thing?

QUINN:

You can always wait to get it back, J.J.

J.J.:

That's gross.

TOM:

I wonder what happened to the other one.

VANESSA:

I'm sure it will turn up.

J.J.:

I suck at this game.

TOM:

We could read instead, if you want.

(J.J. separates himself from the others.
QUINN and VANESSA exit.)

J.J.:

Before I was a ghost I was a dumb motherfucker. I ain't never made a smart decision in my life. Dumb motherfuckers are pretty low on the totem pole. They don't get nothing we haven't fought for. For smart people, things come easy. Not for me. Nothing ever does. To get any mail in my building you'd actually have to wait for the mailman because all of the boxes were broken and stuck open. All of 'em. So if you weren't there when the mailman got there then people would just take whatever you got just to be nosy. The grocery store's fridge always stopped working around noon, so if you wanted to get milk, you'd have to be sure and go in the morning and stand in line for the milk like everyone else. Otherwise it would all be bad if you tried to go later. I hate that it was that way. And now it's in my veins. I can feel it running through my arms and into my chest – that feeling. Even ghosts feel that. (*A beat.*) Because I had to fight for everything I was always looking for another weapon. Weapons make it easier. Make you more deadly. In prison you want to be dangerous. Even reading can be a weapon. So I let T teach me how to read. He liked it too. Made him happy and it gave us something to do. And it was another thing I could use to try to claw my way up that totem pole.

(J.J. rejoins the others. TOM has a book and is pointing something out to J.J.)

What's this word? **TOM:**

I don't want to do this. **J.J.:**

Sure you do. **TOM:**

Quit doing that. **J.J.:**

You said you wanted to do this. **TOM:**

I know but – **J.J.:**

Just tell me this word. **TOM:**

T – tr – tu – trie – try. **J.J.:**

Good. Keep going. **TOM:**

To. Fuh – flull – fluh – flie – fly. **J.J.:**

Now read the whole thing. **TOM:**

I saw a – cat – try to – fly. That doesn't make any sense. **J.J.:**

The library didn't have any beginner books so I had to improvise. **TOM:**

Figures. **J.J.:**

Try it again. **TOM:**

J.J.:

This is stupid.

TOM:

Come on.

J.J.:

I saw a cat try to fly. Reading's fucking hard.

TOM:

It gets easier the more you do it. And rewarding.

J.J.:

Rewarding?

TOM:

Sure. You get to discover some wonderful stories.

BENJY:

Benjy loves story time. It makes him go boingy! Boingy Benjy.

J.J.:

Read your own stories then.

TOM:

Actually, it might help you to read to Benjy. He's an attentive listener.

J.J.:

You had to say that.

BENJY:

Story time! Story time! Story time!

(J.J. separates himself from the others.)

J.J.:

Fuck this. I'm a ghost and I don't have the fucking patience for this. Hell, I didn't have the patience for it before. Fuck, fuck, fuck. You want answers. Well fuck you. I've never been good in my life about giving straight answers, but you don't give a fuck about that. You don't want to hear about how I always managed to get a free box of milk at school by tricking the dumbass taking my nickel into thinking he'd already taken it. I did that for like a year and he never caught on. I loved the strawberry milk the best. It was sweet and you could almost chew the sugar in it. No you don't care that I'd steal the peanuts from the grocery store because they just left 'em in an open bin and you could grab about fifteen without them noticing. No. You want to know how T and I could live together.

(MORE.)

J.J. (CONT.):

I don't blame you. Sometimes I wonder about it too. Well it's because all that time he was fucking nuts. And I mean off the fucking deep end crazy. No shit scary crazy.

(J.J. rejoins the others. It is just after J.J. first arrived at the cell.)

TOM:

Welcome to our new home.

J.J.:

I'll sleep on the top bunk.

TOM:

Why don't you take the bottom? I like to hang a light from the ceiling and read.

J.J.:

I don't give a fuck. And while we're at it, I'm no fucking faggot, so don't expect me to put your dick in my mouth. If you try, I'll bite the fucker off.

TOM:

That won't be an issue. Before we move further, however, we need to get some things straight.

J.J.:

Do we?

TOM:

I know you think you're suddenly in charge here, but you should learn more about me first.

J.J.:

What you think I need to know?

TOM:

I am here for life without the possibility for parole. That means I'll never get to leave until I'm dead. They even thought of giving me the death penalty. At my trial, prosecutors said I killed a woman named Molly Harrison. I caught her alone one night in a field and tied her spread eagle to the ground, using stakes. Two of the stakes – I hammered right through her wrists. I stuffed a gag in her mouth and that would eventually lead to her death. After stripping her naked and raping her, I started to carve her up. Because of the gag, the blood pooled in her lungs and throat, eventually drowning her. Then I hollowed her out. Prosecutors said it was like I turned her into a human coffin. I even burned lines into the grass around her to trace a coffin around her body.

(MORE.)

TOM (CONT.):

To make the job complete, I stuffed some of the brush into her and then lit it on fire. Prosecutors then said I roasted and ate her organs. So, J.J., now I think we know where we stand. And I'll take the top bunk.

(Pause.)

J.J.:

Uh – that sounds good.

(J.J. separates himself from the others.)

J.J. (CONT.):

So fuck yeah I was scared. You would be too. Living with a crazy mother like that. Other prisoners began to respect me to because they didn't want to be around a guy like that either. Freaks you out. I sometimes thought he would – Jesus. For the first week I didn't want to sleep. Finally I did, and I woke up in the middle of the night thinking he was ready to chop my head off or some shit. But he was sleeping too. Who knew that crazy fuckers like that could sleep so peacefully. He had other weird stuff too. T never smoked but loved fire. He'd light matches and just stare at them. But he was always polite to me. That made it worse somehow. Like I wouldn't even see him coming if he suddenly snapped again. Turned me into a living coffin. So now you can get why I was so pissed that night. For three fucking years I thought the dude was a scary badass. But that was all horseshit. He ain't never done nothing. DNA says he's innocent.

(J.J. rejoins the others.)

J.J. (CONT.):

So you really didn't do it.

TOM:

No. I didn't.

BENJY:

Tommy gonna go free. Tommy gonna go free.

J.J.:

All this time and you were the wrong guy.

TOM:

I'm sorry I never told you, but –

J.J.:

I get it, T. Everything is a weapon in here. Even the truth.

TOM:

It's not like I don't trust you.

J.J.:

Course not.

TOM:

Believe it or not, I will actually miss you.

BENJY:

Tommy gonna go free. Tommy gonna go free.

TOM:

I mean, it's been three years.

J.J.:

Three years together in this small little room.

TOM:

We're like –

J.J.:

I thought you were fucking crazy.

TOM:

I feel a little crazy now.

J.J.:

Sure. But I mean, I thought you were scary-gonna-kill-me crazy.

TOM:

Guess I'm not.

J.J.:

Guess not.

TOM:

This all doesn't seem real.

J.J.:

I keep thinking about that word you taught me. Status something.

TOM:

Status quo?

BENJY:

Tommy gonna go bye bye.

J.J.:

The thing about our status quo is that for three years I thought you were fucked up. Some kind of monster. But now we have a big change in our status quo.