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Opening extract from
This isn't What it Looks Like

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PSEUDO-MANIFESTO*

1. Truth is only stranger than fiction if you're a stranger to the truth. Which means you're either a liar or you're fictional.
2. A realistic story is a story lacking in imagination. (What does *realistic* mean, anyway? Would you say something is true-istic?)
3. I've never met a joke so bad I didn't like it. Then again, I've never met a joke.
4. When in doubt, you can't be wrong.
5. Whether it's chocolate or socks, the rule is the same: the darker the better.
6. There is more to life than chocolate. There is, for example, cheese.
7. If a waiter accidentally serves you a burger with mayonnaise, it's not enough for him to scrape it off. He must order you a new burger.
8. It's pronounced *sue DON im us*.
9. Secret? What Secret?
10. I know you are, but what am I?

*A *MANIFESTO* IS NOT A FIESTA FOR A MAN. IN FACT, IT IS NOT A FIESTA OF ANY KIND. IT IS NOT EVEN A *FIESTO*. RATHER, IT IS A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES. USUALLY POLITICAL OR ARTISTIC PRINCIPLES. BUT YOU COULD WRITE A MANIFESTO ABOUT ANYTHING. FOR INSTANCE, CHOCOLATE OR CHEESE. A *PSEUDO-MANIFESTO* IS EITHER A FAKE MANIFESTO OR A MANIFESTO WRITTEN BY PSEUDONYMOUS BOSCH. SO PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE CALLED IT A *PSEUDO-PSEUDO-MANIFESTO*. BEFORE READING FURTHER, WHY NOT WRITE YOUR OWN MANIFESTO? THEN YOU CAN SEE HOW MANY WAYS MY BOOK FAILS TO MEASURE UP TO YOUR IDEAS ABOUT THE WAY THINGS SHOULD BE. JUST DON'T TELL ME ABOUT IT.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

AT A CERTAIN POINT IN THE FIRST 150 PAGES OF THIS BOOK THERE WILL BE AN EMERGENCY DRILL. PLEASE FOLLOW ALL INSTRUCTIONS AND BEHAVE EXACTLY AS YOU WOULD IN A REAL EMERGENCY.

THANK YOU.

P.B.



*AS YOU WILL DISCOVER, I HAVE NUMBERED THIS AND SEVERAL OTHER CHAPTERS NEGATIVELY, SO TO SPEAK. ALAS, I CANNOT TELL YOU WHY WITHOUT GIVING AWAY TOO MUCH. BUT IF YOU HAVE STUDIED INTEGERS, YOU MAY WELL BE ABLE TO GUESS. YOU KNOW, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT A
(CONT.)

How shall I put this? I must choose my words carefully.

(I know how you are. Always ready to jump on my mistakes.)

Somewhere, at some time, a girl walked down a road.

I say *somewhere* not because the where is secret, although it is.

I say *some time* not because the when is secret, although it is.

And I say *a girl* not because her name is secret, although it is.

No, I use these words because the girl herself did not know where she was.

Or when.

Or who.

She had woken standing up. With her eyes open.

It was a very strange sensation. Like materializing out of nowhere.

NEGATIVE NUMBER IS A NUMBER WHOSE VALUE IS LESS THAN ZERO, AND THAT THE "HIGHER" THE NEGATIVE NUMBER IS, THE LOWER ITS VALUE. THUS, WHEN YOU ORDER TWO NEGATIVE NUMBERS IN SEQUENCE, THE HIGHER OF THE TWO ALWAYS COMES *BEFORE* (HINT, HINT) THE LOWER. NEGATIVE TEN COMES BEFORE NEGATIVE NINE, AND SO ON, UNTIL YOU GET TO ZERO AND THINGS TURN NORMAL – MORE OR LESS.

Her fingers and toes tingled. The tips of her ears burned (whether from heat or cold she wouldn't have been able to say).

Sunspots lingered in her eyes, blurring her vision. But when she looked up she saw there was no sun. The sky was cloudy.

Had she fainted? Did she have concussion? (She knew that confusion and blurred vision were symptoms of concussion, but she couldn't remember how she knew it.) She touched her head, but she found no injury.

Gradually, the sunspots disappeared and her vision cleared. She looked around.

She had no idea where she was.

She seemed to be in the countryside, but of what country wasn't immediately apparent. There were fields to either side of her, but they were dry and empty. Trees dotted the landscape but in no obvious pattern. There were no signs of life.

Be systematic, she told herself. If you retrace your steps, you'll figure out where you are.

But she couldn't remember a thing that had happened before she was where she was. It was as if she had been born a moment ago.

Who am I...?

The realization that she didn't know her own name

came over her belatedly, like a chill you don't notice until you see your breath clouding in the air.

She felt uneasy but not exactly frightened. Real amnesia, she knew (although she couldn't remember how she knew it), was exceedingly rare. Most likely, her memory would return in a moment.

She decided the best thing was to walk.

The walking was not easy. There were no signs or street lights to guide the way. The road was not paved, and it was riddled with rocks and tree roots and mud holes.

She stumbled more than once, but she trudged forward. What else was there to do?

An hour passed. Or maybe two. Or was it less?

She didn't see anyone else. Until she did.

Ahead of her, just a few metres off the road, a little boy was climbing a big tree. Like a cat, he made his way on all fours out onto a long branch. Like a cat, he got stuck.

"Father..Father!"

His cries grew louder, but nobody came.

I wonder if he'll recognize me, the girl thought. He could be my little brother for all I know.

"Don't worry, I'll get you down!" she shouted.

If the boy heard her, he showed no sign. "Father!" he kept yelling.

An old hemp rope lay beneath the tree. The remains of a swing. The girl picked it up, then automatically started to climb the old and twisting tree trunk. As if it were the natural thing to do. As if she had rescued many other children before.

Remember the Three-Point Rule, she told herself. But she couldn't remember how she knew the rule.*

"You shouldn't climb up trees if you're too scared to climb down," she said when she came close to the boy.

He ignored her, continuing to yell for his father. It certainly didn't seem as though he recognized her.

"Are you deaf? I'm trying to help..."

The boy's shirt – little more than a rag – had caught on a branch. As soon as the girl started to untangle him, the boy jumped in fright – and almost fell out of the tree.

She gripped him tight. "Careful—"

He screamed, "Goat! Goat!"

At least that's what it sounded like.

"Calm down – you're okay."

She gave him a pat of reassurance, but his cries

**ALWAYS CONNECT TO WHAT YOU'RE CLIMBING WITH AT LEAST TWO FEET AND ONE HAND OR TWO HANDS AND ONE FOOT. YOU MIGHT REMEMBER THIS HELPFUL RULE FROM A HIGHLY EDUCATIONAL AND FRANKLY RATHER BRILLIANT BOOK CALLED IF YOU'RE READING THIS, IT'S TOO LATE.*

only grew louder and more hysterical.

"I'll get you down, no problem."

Expertly, she tied the rope to the tree. A *Buntline Hitch Knot*, she remembered the knot was called. But she didn't remember how she knew the name.

She tugged on the boy's shirt collar. He clung to the tree branch, refusing to move.

"Goat! Goat!"

"Is there a goat down there? Is that what's scaring you? Don't worry, it won't hurt you. Goats don't eat people. Tin cans, tennis balls, maybe – but not little boys. Not usually, anyways." She smiled to show she was joking, but he didn't smile back.

Eventually, she coaxed him down by gently placing his hands on the rope – then forcibly pushing him off the branch.

"Pretend it's a fire pole!" she called after him.

He slid down the rope, a look of terror on his face.

As soon as his feet hit the ground, the boy bolted.

"You're welcome," said the girl under her breath.

In the distance, a man – presumably the boy's father – waited. He wore a plumed hat, dark waistcoat, and big, billowing sleeves. He looked like a musketeer.

He must be an actor, thought the girl. Maybe there is a theatre nearby.

The boy was still crying about the goat as he jumped into his father's arms.

The girl waved. But the man didn't acknowledge her.

Gee, people are really friendly around here, thought the girl.

Shaking her head, she returned to the road – and stepped right into a puddle.

She grunted in annoyance.

As she shook water off her foot, she looked curiously at the puddle. The muddy water reflected blue sky and silver clouds and a flock of birds passing by.

But there was one reflection she could not see: her own.

Not *goat*, she thought.

Ghost.