The Remaining Body of a Gage Fanfic

Uma Breakdown

Sunnydale High, High summer. A line of sand on the horizon, slowly bowing in the centre with clumps of grass and small insects.

A figure walks along this line, walking north along the coast, the sun setting on their left and eyes watching from under that sun and from under the water.

Back to the start. There’s nothing for a long time. Before this Gage didn’t exist and then Buffy Summers arrived and suddenly Gage exists, and they’re a ‘he’ and that ‘he’ is part of the swim team at the highschool and on his first day in existence things are already pretty melancholy because his friend is dead, and their skin is all in a steaming pile on the beach, cut off shirt and Lollapalooza tattoo and there is a heinous stench and some screaming. Total bummer.

This was meant to be a party, beach fires and night surf and keg stands and sexy waterboarding celebrating the only good sports team in Sunnydale History having a chance at a state championship of some sort.

But instead, the beach stinks and people are screaming. This is how Gage starts. No wonder he’s depressed.
That was Friday night, but that’s not even the start. Gage, leaving the beach with all the foul odor and screaming suddenly remembers the first day he joined the team.
That was a nervous day.

Oh my, a slick entrance.

Waiting uneasy but bury that for now. Hands somewhere, waiting.

Just off the main street a single lane between the backs of houses, past an indoor market and opposite a pub with flags and posters hanging out over traffic if there was any. Still waiting, half in half out of the property, under the garage door. There’s no pavement on this side of the street so it’s either on the road or inside and uninvited. Hands somewhere, the sun comes out and with it the sweat and then it goes in and the water goes cold. Still waiting, ten minutes now since acknowledgement that says don’t ask again I’m coming. Gage tries to worry less about creepyskin by tracking through the remembered sounds since arrival.

The car leaving.

Knocking on the panelling.
‘are you interested in this? Do you know why you are here? Wait here.’

Running water like a pond, green and synthetic.
Playstation startup noise, blue and shiny.
Traffic from the main street hundred yards in either direction, muddy grey brown.

Finally, the coach returns, little man with a big presence. Wide trousers with tight cuffs, school shoes. Rolled up Sun on one pocket, miscellaneous shit in the other. Long arm allen key for pointing, some other shit that rattles.

‘do you know why you’re here?’ repeated.

Gage responds, affirms.
Little head like a scone, smart little eyes. Sharp.

Gage fills the gap under those eyes, lists personal bests in 100m freestyle, history of water activity, awards, philosophy.

The eyes smile on, ask Gage their name

‘Gage Petronzi’

‘welcome to the swim team Gage Petronzi’

After this, there is so little time to think. Training takes up everything. Gage pulls the ugly sweater over his head, harsh against skin already sensitive from chlorine. Bleaching out the microbes and tightening the pores. He enters the lecture hall, amongst so many other male bodies in black and sand training wear. He studies the skull of the boy in front. Muscles in shoulders strong but loose from mornings massage circles with the B team. The neck shaved with an off centre angle, the 2mm stubble of hair starting from the bottom left. Passing more muscle and that place at the base of the skull, the indentation made to fit so many parts of a body.

An elbow
A wrist
A forehead
A palm
A cheekbone

Gage stares at that indentation, with its perfect diagonal bisection of dark hair over dark skin. Like a flag for a hyphenated politics.

Gage pours a glass of doped water from the jug in the armrest he shares with the next, empty, seat. He takes a drink as the lights are turned off and the speakers crackle once before the sound of
a pulsing synthesiser arpeggio starts. A soft square wave repeating perfectly. He feels the first effects as the training film begins.

Over this full and satisfying sound, repeating and locking, comes the first images.

Grey bodies, flat in silhouette plunge feet first into a pool.

The camera rapidly cuts between three fixed positions. The body, mid-air, a few degrees off vertical, cuts through steam with a halo of light around it. The surface of the water cutting across the lens, immediately before curved toes break the summer face and destroy all image. Finally from deep below the surface that same break is repeated, a tiny explosion of bubbles in a green/black frame.

Over and over, different bodies, but the same solid breaking through three surfaces.

The drugs in the water have the same effect during every one of the twice daily lectures. Starting with a pleasant tingling in the outer corners of the eyes and an equally pleasant feeling in the neck that sprinkles it’s light down the spine as he rubs it against the seat, settling lower in the movie theatre style seats. A voice starts speaking, explaining the origin of Terra.

98% of sunspots occur at 19.5° latitude.
Looping spouts of energy.
Forming a ball.
Spinning.
Solid surface expanding, swelling, drifting out away from the sun.

A ball, crusting over, all land and shallow seas, where marsupials could walk in any direction and eventually return to the world navel.

A smaller earth.
Tiny Terra.

And then years later an outside race upgraded the planet, adding water from their home world and DNA from their bodies.

Mistakes were made, and at a point when the visitors had cause to drop nuclear warheads on the surface of the planet,
creating deserts and mutation among the population that had been spared and sent to the protection of underground caves.

And the tiny planet grew larger and from those refugees grew the human race, solid and perfect.

While this lecture continued, drugs worked their way further down Gage's spine, working and firing under his tailbone, and between his hips.

First in the sockets and the horror of overwhelming sensation as wormed and inched further details of muscle and tendon.

The drug colouring all the water in his body and stimulating nerves.

Opening up eyes closing them again.

Eyes closing, just little bit of white, the film still playing and the music repeating.

The back of the student's head, the indentation, stubble, now sweat and too much.

A hand through the gap of the itching wool, underneath, sweat repeat taste of drugged water nerve repeated pulse drifting swelling repeating out from the sun arc of light hand through gap drug rubbed up against the seat looping sweat stubble stretch muscle taste gap indentation through hand head pulse repeat dive between hips breath water lower beneath breathing sweat corner of eyes breathing repeat breathing. Hand through gap in itching wool.

The lecture continued for a few more minutes and then stopped before Gage regained focus. Others left the room, stepping over his body in the dark. Most still breathing hard, hands out steadying on anything that could be touched and was real.

The training goes well, weeks stretch out. Mornings waking up, the stink in clothes chemical and still painful to mucus membrane. The swim team as one hard bodied mass of slick muscle and lines in the water, zoning out everything else that isn't liquid and flesh.
That was a long time ago, and now Buffy Summers is here, and there is screaming and bad smells at the beach and Gage's friend is just a pile of skin it's looking more complicated than just training and massage and making out.

It is definitely more complicated. In fact, it's not as fun as it first seemed. The coach is more and more controlling and everything seems to be tainted with the chemical of failure. The swim team is constantly under watch, movement is analysed, breath, heart rate. Organs are monitored, focus groups examine the quality of shine on the swimmer's skin, impossible angles of dives are demanded by the public and all members of the team are photographed, filmed, sonographed and recorded at every moment. Being a member of the swim team is shit. Gage should know that now, as the star none are more under scrutiny than him. But he doesn't know, he's been soaking in chemicals and focused the stare at himself with such intensity that everything's about that.

The only thing to hate, the coach says, is failure. And then the coach calls Gage a failure.

Gage keeps moving, keeps training, but that doesn’t diminish the self-loathing.

It can push it away, when you keep moving things go numb and fall away. Limbs, Skin, lungs, liver, DNA and all your left with his pumping plasma. Just the lymph nodes being worked by movement.

Training provides an immediate release, but then the effects come back harder. Depression, fractures, all the signs of abuse. A normal life is becoming impossible. A night out, a kiss and then the other person is spitting in disgust and leaving Gage broken and left in the alley behind the club to be walked home by none other than Buffy Summers. What a total failure.

The only way to cope is more training. More input, more output, more motion. Just that base system, water and bodies. And then even that starts to go wrong.
Gage’s body starts to ache, and someone peed in the pool and the team had to keep practicing in it anyway.

Working on breathing technique in Johnathan Levinson’s piss.

Every bone hurting and skin itching and flaking and swallowing is so difficult with a swollen neck and cramping muscles one after the other and this heinous stink following you around, being dragged behind and everyone looking even here in the locker room.

Gage is just staring at his unlaced shoes on his feet, sitting on the wet bench in a highschool somehow open late into the night.

He stares at the shoes, the laces hanging, pale off white, dirty. Wet.

His whole body aches, and feels heavy. Same as every other day, and same as every other day he tries to avoid pauses like this, don’t look just keep moving.

The pauses takes hold and stretches out.

He looks in the mirror in front of him. A full length mirror between every 5 grey painted lockers. His skin hangs, pale.

The skin feels heavy, hangs, still wet. Aches.

Hunched forward, arms still hanging toward unlaced shoes he sees the hanging flesh which covers his major organs. The bulge over his liver and intestine. Hanging, stretches out. Aches. Pale grey to off white in the mirror.

The flesh is heavy, holds, until it doesn’t.

Wet, heavy, dirty, it hangs lower and lower.

Aching, a slow tear, and the bulges is hanging toward unlaced shoes.

All Gage can feel is the ache and the stink in the air as the broad heavy fold of organ covering flesh hangs and drops next to his shoes, and the water pooled around him mixed with Jonathan’s pee and now some blood and other fluids.

In the mirror, in utter horror stares at what is underneath that fallen torn off white bulge and as the sulfurous smell of rotting fish and seaweed rolls into his lungs and gags and his eyes fill with water and drool hangs down from his open mouth.
Gage looks up, an unable to feel surprised at a figure standing by the mirror looking at him now. He didn't hear them enter and now in the mirror can seeing the hanging remains of milky gristle from ears translucent hanging down as hunched rolling forward he passes out what's left wet hard after the fall bang on dirty tiles under grey painted lockers.

There's nothing for a long time, and then there's water.

Black, but wet, felt more than anything. Small splashes close up, bigger ones further away.

There's nothing for a long time again.

Now there's vibrations, feelings on skin, proprioceptive extension. There's skin, then there's more skin further out. All of this starts realise that it's Gage.

This Gage realises that there is not just black, but grey and white, and blue, and green and red. The water is cool. Other figures bob about around. That skin that is further out, that space that is full and still permeable can feel. The figures move their bodies and through and Gage feels it. The bodies are touching, while meters apart. If Gage concentrates they call feel all the bobbing bodies, movements.

The bodies in the water look at them. Look at Gage.

They move in the water and Gage feels it. On skin, on muscle wet. A tingle on nerves that could be inside or outside the body and at this point on it does not matter which. Toes curl, solid pressure, holding different parts of this body. Of these bodies together. Like a dance, tension and eased pressure. The boundaries of each are overlapped and would be confusing if it it didn’t feel like this and so good.

The boundaries between the bodies of the bobbing figures bisect through the group at multiple layers of sensation. All of them felt.

Gage looks at the bobbing figures which are just like them. Made for the water, organs that work with the sea, that connect. Lines of muscle that fit waves. Black green red surface that
reflects the ocean and the sun that’s setting. Gage looks up with the last of that red light and sees the figure disappear along the line of sand dunes, the coach out of a job with no one to train. The swim team moves together on a dance in the tide and the sun completely sets over Sunnydale.