

The Obituary Section

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The Obituary Section

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[GRIAN]

Well, I found another old statement that's completely misfiled in the middle of all these recent ones- this one is from 1981. What it's doing in here next to a statement from 2016 I have no idea, but so long as it is, I may as well record it now.

Statement of Sloy X. P., regarding a new hire at his newspaper. Statement originally taken June 9th, 1981. Statement begins.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Statement:

[Click]

[GRIAN]

Etho... ugh.

Well, I found another old statement that's completely misfiled in the middle of all these recent ones- this one is from 1981. What it's doing in here next to a statement from 2016 I have no idea, but so long as it is, I may as well record it now.

Statement of Sloy X. P., regarding a new hire at his newspaper. Statement originally taken June 9th, 1981. Statement begins.

[GRIAN (STATEMENT)]

I got killed three days after my thirty-fifth birthday.

I don't know how much attention you all pay to world events- it certainly looks like you haven't dusted in here in the last century or two- but if I tell you I was a newspaper editor in the Soviet Union, I'm assuming you can probably put *some* pieces together.

I was the managing editor at a large daily paper out of Samara in southwest Russia, the Daily Recap. I started out there as a reporter a year or so after finishing school- I never had the voice for radio- and did enough good work that within a few years I got promoted to beat editor for city news. I got trained on the copy desk, and then in another couple years when the managing editor retired, I was the top pick to replace her.

And I was *good* at my job. Really good. As a reporter, I got my projects done and I did them well, and I *stayed out of trouble*. Like- in any job in journalism, there are some areas where you have to toe the line, and I didn't really mind doing that. It kept my head on my shoulders and let me write about things that mattered.

If it was up to me, I'd still be there, *but*-

It started with a job opening.

We had an opening for an obituary writer. I had been mostly handling it myself while we searched for someone, but I knew it wasn't my best work and I was busy enough that I couldn't really give it my full attention.

The thing about obituaries- or, they're properly called life stories, when they're reported- is that they're *uncomfortable*. Nobody wants to call up grieving friends and family and say hello, I'm from the newspaper, can I talk to you about the loved one you lost yesterday? It requires a degree of tact and professionalism, and I didn't want to drop that on any fresh reporters. And I was willing to do it myself, but I certainly wasn't *good* at it. I wasn't nice enough for it, to be honest. I'm too blunt for interviews like that.

So when we finally got a qualified applicant, I was willing to overlook some of his... quirks.

This would prove to be a mistake.

He put his name down as Pix. He obviously wasn't Russian- he was competent at the language, but clearly not a native speaker. I guessed he was from somewhere in western Europe, but I didn't ask.

All I cared about at the time was his qualifications.

He said he didn't have much experience in journalism, but he was formerly a funerary worker, so he had a lot of practice with writing eulogies and talking to grieving loved ones. It was good enough for me.

There was *one* problem. He wasn't a Soviet citizen. I asked him how he'd wound up here, but he sort of shrugged it off. To be honest, I figured he was just a British communist or something who'd decided to jump ship. He wouldn't be the first.

I was willing to let it slide, in any case. I snuck him onto the payroll and had him use my byline. He was a pretty quick study- I was actually surprised, since he hadn't worked at a newspaper before. He said he'd just gotten used to picking up new jobs in his time, which I thought was funny because he didn't look like he could've been much older than me.

Things were smooth for the first six months or so. I was honestly impressed with his work. It was obvious he had a lot of care for it- *never* printed an inaccurate detail. Reporters who've gone to journalism school mess up more often than that. It was like he had a sixth sense for it.

We would even get calls and letters every now and then from friends or relatives of the deceased, thanking us. They always asked for me, since he was still writing under my name, so I took the calls and then passed the messages along. I asked him once if he wanted help trying to get papers, since I figured if it was me it would bother me to not be able to take any credit for my work, but he said no.

In any case, we came to be pretty good friends, I guess. Pix was really social, but I don't think he ever got really *close* with anyone else in the newsroom, mostly because he acted like he was allergic to talking about himself. I'm not the cheeriest guy, which tended to put people off, especially the people who worked for me, but he didn't seem to mind. I think he liked me because I never really asked him any questions.

Now I wish I had, it would've saved me *a lot of trouble*, but hindsight is twenty-twenty.

Anyways, things were going well, Pix was doing great, the newspaper was doing great, everything was great.

And then a government official passed away.

I didn't even know who he was until he died. Some local Party man. Unremarkable except for the circumstances of his death- which I suppose you could also say about me, *ha*. Anyways, he died, and there was a statement released, it was all very sad, whatever. I sent the statement along to Pix's desk to write up and didn't think anything more of it.

Sometimes the conditions of a death aren't exactly the same as what the authorities say. So what? Like I said, sometimes you have to toe the line. I *thought* he would have the good sense to keep his head down.

Unfortunately for *both* of us, he didn't.

The story he wrote up- it wasn't exactly an investigative piece, but it was as detailed as all his other work. Which would have been *fine*, if most of those details weren't already in the process of getting buried.

It's partly my fault, if I'm being honest. I had gotten lazy about double-checking his work, since it was always flawless, so the only person who looked at it before it ran was the copy editor, and

problems like 'will this put someone on a government hit list' were well above her pay grade. So it was in the paper the next day. By the time I realized, half the city had seen it.

And *my* name was on it.

I thought about leaving the city, about trying to leave the country, but I never even made it that far. I hurried home, unlocked my front door, and- that was that.

To be honest, I don't remember the actual moment. Pix tells me I got shot twice in the back of the head, and the, uh, forensic evidence seems to back it up. All I remember is everything going dark.

And then I woke up with my mouth full of dirt.

I couldn't see, and I could barely move, and everything felt *wrong*- too cold and almost *rusty*, like all my joints were clogged, and there was something caught in my lungs.

Everything was dark. I couldn't tell which way was up, so I just shoved at whatever was in front of me. I got lucky- they buried me shallow. Didn't bother with a coffin, obviously. It was just a few inches of dirt, and then I was clawing at air.

My brain wasn't really working right. I was just- reaching for anything I could grab onto to pull myself out of that hole. Eventually I managed to brace a hand against the ground and push myself up enough that my head broke the surface. I should have been able to breathe again, but I *couldn't*; my whole throat and chest still felt clogged with *something*.

It was still dark- it was the middle of the night, in fact- but after the pitch darkness of the grave it may as well have been high noon. My eyes didn't want to focus. I had to blink for a minute or so before my vision started clarifying, and even now it's still fuzzy.

I was half out of a fresh grave, and I couldn't see my hands very well but I knew there was something wrong with them. They felt numb in patches, like I'd gotten a horrible case of frostbite. I think I thought at the time that might've been what happened, because there was a layer of snow on the ground.

I could barely think at all. Nothing hurt, but every part of me felt half-frozen and numb. It was still snowing, lightly, and once I could see better I realized I was somewhere in the forest past the outskirts of the city.

It was nighttime in the middle of a Russian winter, and I should have felt cold. I should've been *freezing*. But I just... didn't.

I tried to clear my throat, and sent myself right into a coughing fit that shook my whole body. Eventually I managed to hack up a horrible glob of dirt and blood and god only knows what else, and I at least felt less like I was suffocating, but I could still tell something was *very* wrong with my breathing.

And I realized there was a book in the dirt in my lap, resting right over where I'd been buried.

I recognized it immediately, even with my eyes not working properly. It was one of Pix's notebooks. I remembered it because he'd never really used a standard reporter's notepad; he always liked these little leather-bound things much more.

I didn't know what it meant, that it was there, but I knew it had to mean *something*, and it gave me something to cling onto. It was a lead to follow.

I hauled myself up out of the ground. It didn't- *hurt*, exactly, to move, but I could *feel* things in my shoulders and back and legs cracking, and *something* cold and mushy dripping down the back of my neck.

And I started dragging myself back towards the city, tracking dirt and mud behind me.

It was fortunate it was late, and cold. Nobody was out to see me limping my way down the street with... I didn't have a mirror, and I didn't *want* to stop and... assess things, but... I knew I couldn't look good.

I was still in the clothes I'd been wearing when I was killed, and the jacket had a hood to pull up over my head. It took me a few tries, because my fine motor control was all but gone.

And- the more I moved, the more aware I was of how *quiet* it was inside my chest. I was breathing, more or less, because air was rasping in and out, but my heart just... wasn't *beating*. I hadn't noticed it at first, when I'd woken up. My brain had been too scrambled, and I was still avoiding taking full stock of myself. But my heart... I couldn't ignore it. It felt like a rock inside my chest.

Nothing hurt. That was what was worst. It made it much harder to even try to convince myself I was still alive.

The sun was just rising by the time I got back to the Daily Recap building. On the way in, I passed my assistant managing editor, Lyarra, on her way out. She said hello to me and I nodded, and-

I think she saw my face. I don't know if she recognized me, or if she realized- I don't even know what she saw. I hurried to the newsroom before she could ask me any questions. She called after me, but she didn't stop me, and when I glanced back again she was gone.

Nobody was in the newsroom yet, except for a couple photographers who'd been working overnight. I pulled my jacket a little tighter around myself and ducked into my office. They didn't notice anything, or if they did they didn't say anything.

Being in a warm building just made it more obvious how cold I was, how thoroughly I'd lost the heat I was supposed to need in order to live.

When I looked down at my hands, they looked so pale they were almost blue, and- there was no real way around it, not in proper lighting. The skin was *coming off*, torn and peeling away, exposing dry muscle. There was still grave dirt under my fingernails.

I didn't know what else to do. I wasn't sure how my voice would sound if I tried to talk. So I just sat there, and waited for Pix to come in, and started flipping through the notebook.

It was about me.

Literally- it was a complete recounting of my entire life, from my childhood forwards. It was Pix's handwriting, all jagged and rushed; I'd read enough of his notes to recognize it immediately. I had no idea how he could have known any of it. There were details and anecdotes in there nobody except my parents would know.

When I skipped ahead, it ended with me getting shot twice in the back of the head.

There's something... deeply uncomfortable about having your whole life put down in a book. Stuff you thought nobody else would ever know. It makes you feel small. Insignificant.

At eight-thirty, Pix came into the newsroom. He glanced around, caught sight of me in my office,

and I *watched* all the blood drain out of his face.

I pointed at the chair in front of my desk. He winced, stepped inside, closed the door behind him.

I shoved the notebook across the desk towards him and asked him what he'd done. They were the first words I'd said aloud since- coming back, and my voice sounded like I'd been gargling rocks.

He said it had been an accident. I said that didn't answer my question.

He was quiet for a long time, and then he started explaining.

He said he was in the business of commemoration. Of memorializing the dead. It was a talent of his, he said. He'd been doing it for a long, long time. I asked him how long, and he didn't really answer, but I got the sense- well, I got the sense he'd been around much, much longer than I had.

He said he'd felt responsible for my death, because he *was*, and he'd done the only thing he could think to do, which was write down my life story so it could never be lost or buried. Apparently it had worked... more effectively than he'd thought it would.

And now I was back.

I asked him how long it would last. He said he didn't know. Whatever was animating me, keeping me moving, it could last twenty years, or fade in the next hour. I told him that if that was the case, I was his problem until I died again.

He sighed, and said that was fair.

It... hurt to leave the newspaper. I wanted to stay. But I knew I couldn't keep pretending to be- alive, still, forever. Sooner or later someone *would* realize I was *missing half my skull*. So I left a note saying that Lyarra should take my place, and left.

I've lasted this long. Pix and I are thinking of heading to America next. I've never been, but I'm looking forward to it, assuming I don't drop dead on the boat on the way over.

If I do, though, it's sure not my problem anymore.

[Click]

[Click]

[GRIAN]

Pix. Pix. *Where* is that old-

(Papers shuffling)

Aha. [Statement 9091029](#). I knew it. That name scribbled at the top- it *could* be Pix something. Pix R.?

There are... some commonalities between the two, certainly. This theme of knowledge of people's lives and deaths... I *would* say it couldn't be the *same* man, given Statement 9091029 was given more than seventy years before this one, but- well, Zedaph doesn't seem to have aged a day in five decades, so it's certainly not impossible.

Anyways, I can at least verify that the statement giver was real. The Daily Recap is still one of the

largest daily newspapers out of that area of Russia. They've recently moved to an all online model, but their archives are all up online, and their managing editor from 1975 to 1980 was indeed a Sloy X. Pavlov. Unfortunately, the life stories from that time period are all under his name, which does track with the statement, so no further clues there about Pix, whoever he might be.

(Door opens)

[GRIAN]

Hm? Oh, hi, Pearl.

[PEARL]

Hey! Have you eaten today? Do you want to come get dinner with me?

[GRIAN]

I have, but I could still eat. I'm just finishing up this statement.

[PEARL]

Ooh, what's it about?

(Footsteps, approaching)

[PEARL]

Oh! I didn't know you could read Russian.

[GRIAN]

What? I can't.

[PEARL]

Just staring at that printout for fun, then, were you?

[GRIAN]

I, um...

Huh.

(Clears throat) Dinner, then?

[Click]

Supplemental:

Chapter Notes

(also relates to [mirror image](#).)

[Click]

[GRIAN]

Mumbo! Just the neurotic I was looking for- Does the name Pix R mean anything to you?

[MUMBO]

(Barely awake) Grian, it's eight in the morning. *(Yawn)* At least let me make tea before you start with the interrogation.

[GRIAN]

That's what I thought you'd say. Water's already boiling.

(Water pours)

(Begrudgingly) Here. Osmanthus green, just for you. Now answer my question.

[MUMBO]

Never heard that name in my life. Little odd, isn't it? *(Sipping hot tea)* Pix. Strange name. Why, does it mean anything to you?

[GRIAN]

Not *yet*. But I think it did to Etho, and I want to know what. So if you find any mentions of a Pix, anything about supernatural knowledge of people's entire lives, any obituary clippings archived in weird places, pass them along to me, if you don't mind? I had Scar working on it a few months ago, but I think he gave-

Oh-

Watch out, your throat is sort of... sinking. Is it the hot water? Mumbo, stop *melting*-

[MUMBO]

(Garbled Mumbo noise)

[Click]

End Notes

i am not russian and not an expert on russian history! i did my best at research but im sure there are some inaccuracies there jgdhsljkfd please forgive me. i AM however a working

journalist so those parts should be mostly accurate.

samara is a large city in southwestern russia, i chose it as the setting because of the name's similarity with samarra, iraq, known (among many other things) for the story of the [appointment in samarra](#).

i used the name sloy instead of zloy because he mentioned on his tumblr that zloy was his 'edgelord teenage' name and hes been switching to using both. also hey sloy if you find this fic somehow i love the recap hope this isnt too weird have a wonderful day sir o7

thank you for reading! and if you enjoyed... perhaps consider leaving a comment?

ALSO, the day after posting this, the [podfic for elephant's foot](#) just went up, so perhaps consider giving that a listen as well!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!