





He started watching Lonesome Dove on Amazon Prime Video. He remembered that his Grandpa had liked it. Maybe that was true. Or maybe it was something that his Mother had gotten for his Grandpa as a Christmas present, operating under the assumption that he would like it. In either case, he associated it with his Grandpa, who would have been 63 years old when the miniseries aired on television. 59 when the book came out.

He was 43 and had never read the book nor seen the miniseries. He had read a couple other Larry McMurtry novels, and liked them a lot, but Lonesome Dove (the book as well as the miniseries) had always seemed like it would be mercilessly boring. That was his general attitude toward westerns. There were a few that he had seen and read that he really enjoyed, but he tended to feel like these must be outliers. He remembered his Father watching them on TNT (TBS?) and they bored the shit out of him. Just a bunch of men who appeared to have been covered in oil and blasted with theater-grade grit, crossing broad stretches of landscape for reasons he didn't really understand, and killing or being killed indiscriminately.

This is essentially what Lonesome Dove also is, but he was enjoying it all the same. He was kind of seeing it as a story about failings. Just a bunch of flawed characters, mostly aware of their flaws and lamenting them. Or kind of accepting and celebrating them.

He had been to the doctor recently, because he had a pain in his lower back and leg that just kept coming back. Obviously he assumed this was some cluster of black cells that was going to be the end of him. More likely it was sciatica, or the beginnings of arthritis. He didn't really know, though. He was waiting on the results of some blood and urine tests. The not knowing was really hard for him, he inevitably assumed the worst. Because the worst is out there, and it just comes at you sometimes with no provocation.

And everybody was dying in Lonesome Dove, so it stood to reason that he would die, too. Maybe not from getting his face all bitten up by water moccasins, and probably not from getting run through by a spear because someone mistakenly thought he was trying to kidnap an indigenous child. And he likely wouldn't be hanged as a man-burner and horsethief.

But leg rot might get him. And his denial of his own mortality had been pretty complete up to that point. So he thought he should really confront it, and come to terms with it. He had this thought just as Lonesome Dove cut ungracefully to commercial break, and in the upper right hand corner of the screen, Amazon Prime Video was letting him know that the break would last two minutes and nine seconds, and he figured this was plenty of time.

The first thing was to accept it as a physical inevitability. He was going to die at some point in the future. He studied with Vito Acconci when he was younger, and he remembered making a joke to him that he did not, in fact, know that he was going to die. He knew that a lot of people *had* died, and that it seemed like most people *do* die, but he didn't really know with certainty that *he* was going to die. He also remembered Vito replying that a lot of his jokes made him angry. But he was an essentially sweet man, and he was smiling when he said it.

But now, he probably ought to go ahead and just take it as likely that one day he would be a dead person. Okay. He was alive now, but one day he wouldn't be.

He'd been not-alive before, and he didn't remember it as being terrible, so he could accept that. Harder to accept was the next thing he had to face- even though at the moment he generally wanted his life to be as long as possible, there was a real chance that due to events outside of his control, it might be shorter than he would prefer. And he only had some tiny little bit of input. There was about a minute and fifty seconds left in the commercials, so he still had plenty of time, but this one was difficult.

He had a lot of things in his life that he loved to do, and he had a lot of things that he wanted to experience and accomplish. But more than that, he had a lot of people that he loved very much, and being proximate to them was a thing that he did not want to stop doing. And the prospect of that having to happen was sadly likely, and really scary. He couldn't even bear to consider the other circumstances that would take them away from him. That was for another commercial break.

His phone was charging in the next room, so he really had no escape. He just had to sit with this. The beautiful, painful thing that he woke up to every single day was going to go away at some point, and the

only mercy he could figure was that he wouldn't be aware of it having happened when it did. There was about a minute eighteen remaining.

The commercial was about a medicine for a condition that he didn't know much about. He thought it was maybe something to do with the dermis, like a recurring itchy condition, but it sounded more serious than that in the commercial. At the same time, the commercial wanted to stress that having this condition didn't have to be so bad. There was dancing, and a sunset, and a big meal in a restaurant full of friends. Something funny happened in the restaurant. They didn't say what, but everyone was laughing their heads off. Show don't tell, well done, commercial. At the very end they let you know that the medicine might kill you. It would probably solve all of your problems, but there was a possibility that it would end you completely. They let you know this really fast, and a bit more quietly, while a guy and a lady on the screen were embracing on a sailboat.

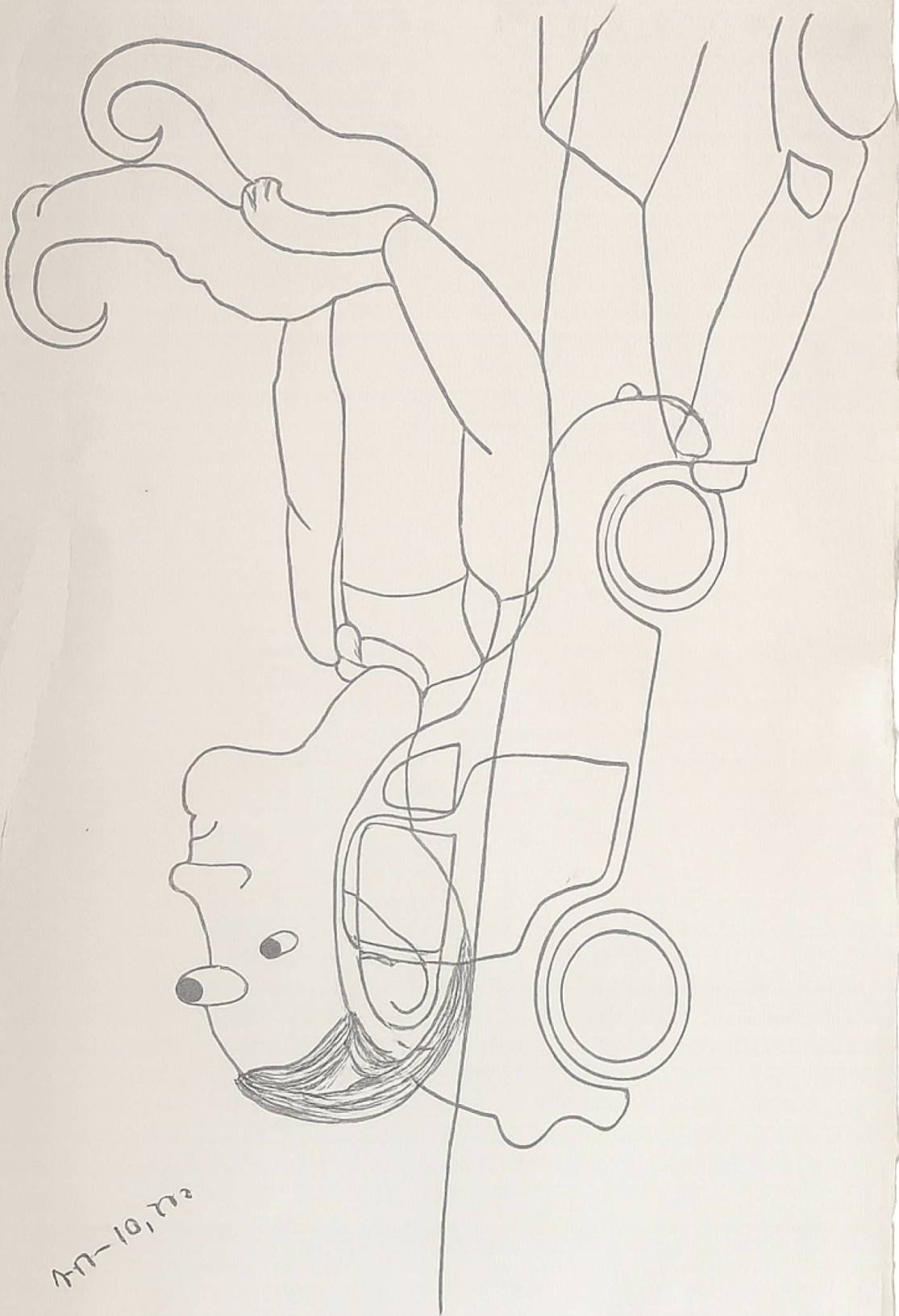
The commercial distracted him, and had eaten up quite a bit of the time he had to get square with all this. Just twenty-six seconds left, and here he was trying to

remember a time in a restaurant when he had ever laughed that hard. His elbow actually had a recurring itchiness, but it didn't seem bad enough to take the pill.

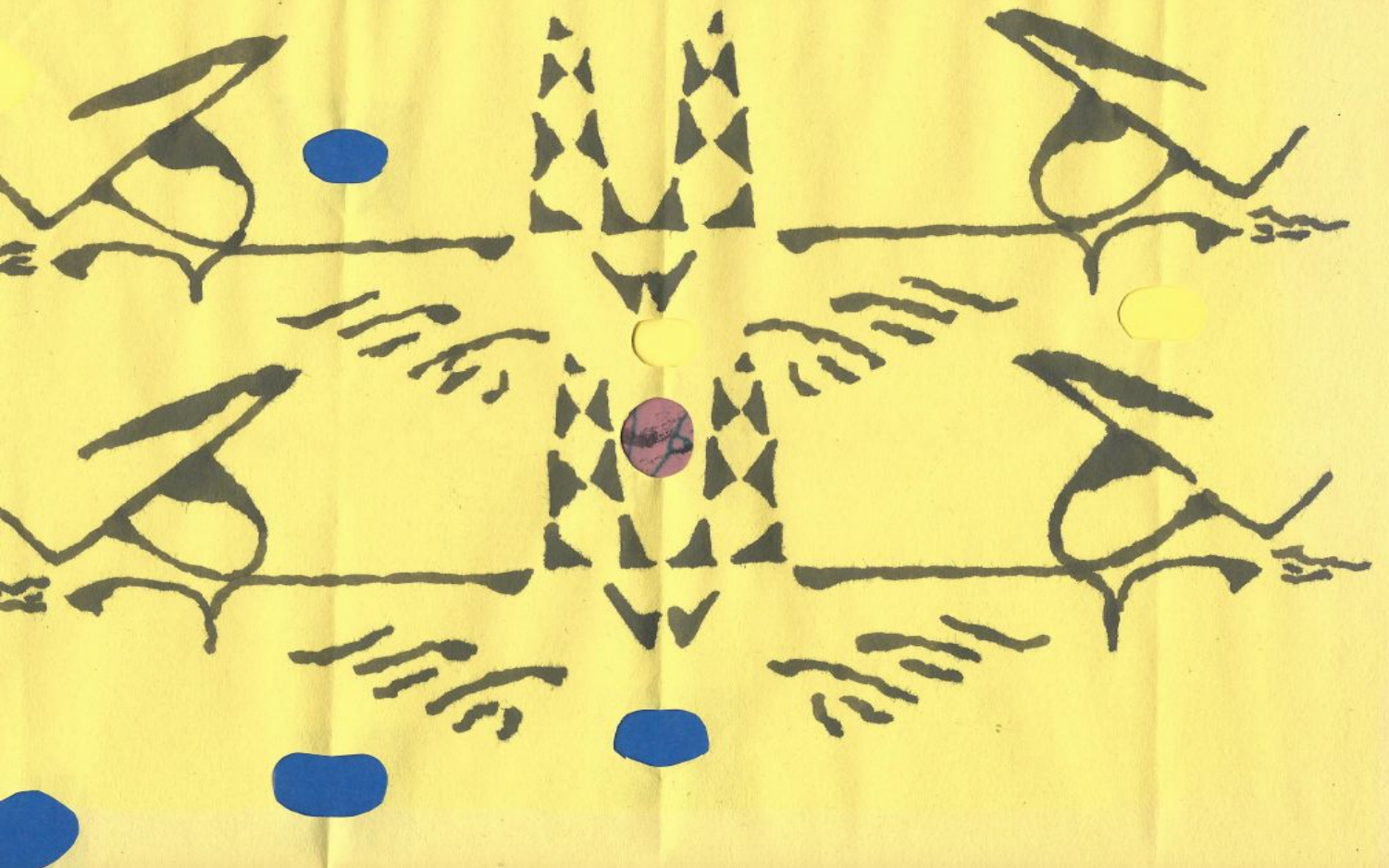
His whole life he had felt like he was trying to get everything ready. To get all of these situations in order so that everything could finally begin. He was forever wearing this hat that dangled a carrot in front of him, just out of reach. He was aware of that, and knew that this was a condition that he should probably adjust a bit. But was it really so bad? Would it really even make a difference if he was suddenly able to start fully embracing the present? Ultimately? Sometimes he tried to meditate, and he could get like three or four good breaths in before he started thinking about the fact that he was almost out of Wasa crackers.

Seven seconds. The commercial break was nearly done, and so was he. He tried to think back to what had been happening in the show before the break started, and he couldn't even begin to remember. Had he made any progress? He thought so. But for now, Robert Duvall was back, getting naked and jumping in a stream, and he was happy to not have to think about anything at all.





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