

Creaitne by Victor Malzac

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I used to be a good-looking guy, yeah, I was good-looking, no word of a lie. Back then, I was God's gift to women, and not just to women: to men, to dogs, to the police, to firefighters, to soldiers, to all of mankind on earth; they couldn't look me in the eye for more than a few seconds. I was ripped, I had muscles everywhere, even in places you didn't know muscles existed; yeah, there wasn't a muscle I hadn't worked on. I used to oil myself all over, my whole body smelled of fresh oil, I washed myself in olive oil and I drank it from the bottle. And I felt strong, I felt a real man all the time, out in town, anywhere; I don't know anyone with as much muscle as me, anyone as fit or as perfect. I'd slayed every man's goal – I had more muscles than all the rest of them put together.

And I'll tell you, yeah, look at this photo of me, see? I was that giant, I was, that was me, in the photo, can you imagine? That giant was me; everyone would look at me in the street.

Yeah, there's no shame in it, I can stand proud and say it: everything about me was perfect back then, I was at my peak. And on the street the women would look at me, the dogs would look at me and the men didn't dare look at me; I was slapping men on the shoulder, and in the cars they were looking at me, people were rolling down the windows and giving me the eye, once a boy even took his phone out to film me; I was so good-looking, all eyes were on me and cameras too, as if I was Brad Pitt but, except, you know, I was even better than Brad Pitt, yes I'll say it, I was triple his weight. You've got no idea how good-looking I was when I was young – look, look at the photo. Come and take a look. Come on, don't be afraid, I'm not like I used to be, I'm not going to attack you, I'm easy, come and have a look. Look, I wasn't just a muscleman, I was quite simply the best of my generation, I was, I was the most biologically able-bodied, as virile as you could get. Imagine that, on the street in front of you, those giant arms, those abs. What would you do faced with that? What could you do? I was the best, I really was. That was me, I was that man, I was him, everyone loved me, I was that perfect body people wanted for themselves, I made everyone jealous, what could I do? Look, you've seen it. In the photo, you can see, the photo of me

when I was young, I was strong, I was the best, no word of a lie, I could pull your head off, I was good-looking and yeah, it was down to my work and my work only, because you don't get like that simply by being born, it's just not possible. From working out every day, seriously, and everywhere: I mean in the park and in the street, I can work out anywhere, nothing can stop me, I'll do push-ups on the pavement while I'm waiting for the bus, I'll do pull-ups on the bus as it's going along, I'll work my triceps on the edge of the bath. Nothing can stop me. You had it all in my body, you had the greatest things in life, you had muscle strength and complete masculinity; I'd bulked myself up on my own through my own hard work, you know it took a lot of work to get there, I can tell you, I wasn't born like that. My life had no meaning when I was young. For a long time my life was really flat, I had no passion and I wasn't naturally good-looking; it took a long time for me to find the key to life. From when I was born to about fifteen, it's fair to say that nothing ever happened, that's for sure, I'm not wrong in saying that, I had nothing special in my life back then, nothing exciting, there was no inspiring story. Well, I dunno, I'll be honest with you, yeah, no, well I didn't have a, what do you call it? I didn't have a spark for life, you see, I was bored all the time. I wasn't good-looking before I was that fit. Yeah, it must come as a surprise when you see me looking like that in the photo, I know, but it's the God's honest truth, it was simple, you don't have to think too hard about it, there were reasons. I neglected my body like most normal people with no ambition, who don't work out; I was like everyone else, I mean, I didn't feel good about myself at all. I had rolls of fat like normal people, people who eat crisps and do nothing; I didn't care what I ate, I didn't count calories, carbs or fats, none of that, I was miles away from thinking about carbs and curls and bulking, I never looked in the mirror. Before, it was simple, I did nothing all day, no sport, back then: I hadn't seen the light, I mean the key, the key came later. I had none of that – no passion, no friends, none of that, and I know why I had nothing, there's a reason for everything: it was just because I lived in the country, because of my parents.

I didn't actually have anything that was my thing, nothing, no hobbies, no subject at school, and nowhere, no particular place where I'd say to myself, 'Yeah, I like this, this is what I like doing'.

The only times I went out, my whole life, they weren't my choice, I was never the one who chose where to go; that would have taken a lot of guts and no, I know, it sounds weird I know, but it wasn't my thing, guts, back then, and when I did go out, I can tell you, it was

cringe to be honest, every time it was like brain death, every Sunday: to put it simply I died. Died of boredom I mean. It was about getting out into nature, or in truth just the flat landscape or big retail parks for the stores, shopping, shoes, that's what it was like going out with my family, and sometimes I went to the independent cinema with my father but I never watched the movies; we went to see old films that no one ever watches. And apart from dying on those trips out, there was nothing, I'd seen nothing of life. No I had nothing I wanted to do like everyone else; they all had their own things but I didn't have anything that was my thing, no, I wasn't signed up with the tennis club or the rugby club, I didn't go in for cooking competitions, I wasn't a millionaire like I could have been with muscles, but I'll get to that later; to put it simply, friends? What friends? How can you have friends with the pathetic body I had? I got that they didn't like me with that body; they didn't invite me to birthdays and even if I'd been invited I would have said no, definitely not, I don't want to go; when I was smaller I was shy, I couldn't. Everyone I knew, everyone I came into contact with when I was younger, it was all set out for them, I mean, I'm talking about people my age. They already had a future mapped out thanks to their parents and what they were into, their jobs, even the biggest try-hards; they went to modern cinemas, not independent cinemas, they talked about the latest movies I never saw and the new rappers I wasn't allowed to listen to, they had Nikes and new trousers from fancy places, they talked about their holidays and we didn't have holidays; we never went anywhere, we stayed at home all the holidays, not that we were even poor. People my age, they all had things to do, like on Sundays or Wednesdays, they went off to have fun, went to the cinema, went ice skating, horse riding, swimming, all that, but I didn't; at the time I was a nobody, see? People didn't get that I was destined to be the man in the photo; no one would have even dreamed that I'd become the man I needed to become, and so, like I said, I was always on the sidelines, I was always different from the others – it was my destiny. I did nothing at all, not like other people my age, I always had plenty of free time but I didn't go out and they didn't invite me, you know; even then I was too different from the others; the others didn't want to talk to me for long, the others kept to themselves, all those scumbags, all those idiots, they were going off doing things together, yeah? So how do they feel now, those idiots? They didn't get who I was, who I was going to be; they didn't know, all those idiots, that I'd be better-looking than the American actor Brad Pitt they'd go and see at the movies, they didn't know I'd be triple his weight now, or at least in the photo, ha! I did well, huh? How do they feel now, all

those idiots who didn't want to talk to me? I wonder what they must be thinking now, I'm sure some of them will be dead by now, anyway. And so I just stayed at home back then; I was bored in my room all on my own because my parents stopped me from doing anything. Sometimes they'd knock on my door to tell me to come and eat or they'd take me somewhere in the car and they'd say, 'Hey, let's take you out,' yeah my mum would say that, she'd say 'we'll take you out' like I was a dog on a lead, so I'd get in the car and it would take a long time. If they offered to take me to Decathlon to buy shoes, for example, I'd say 'OK,' yeah 'OK,' I never said no, and then it went just like this: I'd get in the car and put on my seatbelt; obviously I always put it on and at the time I wasn't as big, I could still put it on – now I can't anymore, belts don't fit me, I'm not a belt man like I used to be – and I'd put on the seatbelt and then the car would start and we'd set off. I kept seeing the same thing through the window: it was flat, the countryside where I lived, it was always the same; there was wheat everywhere or churned-up earth, all year round, winter or spring it was all the same to me, the landscape was always crap and I was looking out of the car window, looking at it over and over again, all the same, always the same road, the road we took every Sunday, always the creepy fields, with scarecrows sometimes, the empty, flat fields, always the same fields, the same countryside and the same roads, the engine noises in the same places; I knew the engine noises by heart on that road and I knew when I was allowed to open the window or not, I always knew when the seatbelt was going to suffocate me, I watched it all go on and on, it was where my Sundays started, every Sunday – it made me want to kill someone. And then after forty-five minutes they'd tell me, 'That's it, here we are!' so I had to undo my seatbelt, open the door and get out, and yes, even then, from that moment on, I felt a kind of unease deep down because I could already see the trip home ahead: I was already thinking about it, yeah, I really didn't like the thought of it, and I knew that after going in the store or whatever we were going to do, we'd have to do everything again in reverse, start absolutely everything all over again from start to finish, go back on the road, with the fields and the engine and listening to the news on the radio, go back in the car again and do everything the same again, just the same for forty-five minutes but in reverse.

But first, before we get to the worst, we still need to talk about the store: so, yeah, we need to, because we'd just got to the store and the worst was still to come, and as I said, we'll use Decathlon as an example, let's say we were at Decathlon for my shoes. So yeah, that's all fine, but back then I didn't really know what sport was, so I didn't care, I didn't get

it, and I'll say it again: I was half asleep, I was pretty passive, at the time I wasn't at all the man you see in the photo, I had no reason to live yet. So I didn't look at the shoes in the store, I didn't know my shoe size, my mother knew all that, she often picked out my shoes for me, and so I didn't get Nikes; I never had nice Nikes like the others, or maybe I didn't even dare look at them or imagine them on my feet, I don't know, but I know it wasn't about the money: we had money, we had quite a lot of money because my father was a French teacher and I won't even mention my grandfather who was an engineer or something like that, yeah, we had all the money we needed to buy stuff like that and we'd come just for that, we'd supposedly come just to make me happy and get me out a bit, except that I didn't want to get out and it didn't make me happy. Anyway, I was half-asleep, I'd just wander around a bit. I'd say yes or shrug to everything, I'd look at the stuff and I'd be vaguely interested: oh yeah hiking, oh yeah running, tennis, yeah, great, I'd say 'mm' when they talked to me and dragged me around the store; it must have gone on for two hours at least. And often, right at the end, just as we were about to leave, my mother would remember we'd come to buy me some shoes and we'd forgotten to buy me some shoes, so to get it done as quickly as possible because the store was going to close in twenty minutes, they'd go back to the hiking section and deliberately grab the ugliest shoes there. First of all my mother would take some normal ugly shoes, some black ones, and my father would say, 'Wait, those ones are grey, green and brown, they'll be better for his flat feet, don't you think? They've got a military look for a Sunday walk, they're fine I think, huh? He'll walk faster I think, they're better, they'll do, they'll do,' they'd talk about me right in front of my face but they wouldn't say a word to me, they wouldn't ask me for my opinion; I wasn't yet like I am now, of course, and of course I don't even need to tell you the shoes my father had picked out were even uglier than the first ones – I'm pretty sure my father purposely picked out the ugliest ones in the whole section, and he always, always took a size bigger than I needed because he didn't know my shoe size either, and so after that I'd be flapping around in my shoes.

I wasn't going to complain, no, I admit I was just going along with my parents, that's all, you know, no, I wasn't paying attention, and basically, let's be clear about it once and for all, it really didn't matter what shoes I wore.

But after all that – the shoes, the hiking section, going to pay and all that – it wasn't over yet, yeah I had ugly shoes, in the wrong size, that I didn't even want, but no, it wasn't

over at all, the worst wasn't over, the worst was still to come: after walking ten miles round the store we had to go home, there was the journey home in the car, and after forty-five minutes we were finally home, and when it was over I went to my room without saying a word, and that was that.

And that, from when I was really young until I was fifteen, was what I did every Sunday, to be honest I did it for fifteen years of my life, and the worst thing by far was the car, it was killing me slowly. Anyway, that was my life: my room, then school, then my room and the car, from my room to the car to go to a boring place I had no choice over, the place, school, store or whatever, then the car, my room at last, evening meal, sleep, alarm clock, room, shower, room, school, room, then Sunday, car, walk, then room, bedtime, shower, school, and all this non-stop with the car in between.

So let's be clear, I didn't like independent cinema and especially not the cinema my father went to; you see, my father's a nerd. My father likes it old and sweaty, black and white, and for him the best, the 'absolute must', as he'd say, were silent films, they were 'the absolute must', silent films where nothing happened, with a dreary double bass and violin in the background, or else it had to be a man and a woman just talking for hours. Cinemas make me sick, I mean cinemas like that. I don't get cinemas, I mean, they're no fun, I think they're pathetic. We used to go to the cinema once a month, and of course it went hand in hand with the car, that independent cinema with the old people in there, and the seats, I hated it. Yes, it bores me to the point of brain death, sitting on a black velvet folding seat for two hours without moving, it's like watching paint dry, honest to God, it's pointless; no, there's no point in inflicting death on yourself like that, especially when you want to become a real man. And it's even worse with my father and his old films: you know the kind of films, you know those independent cinemas for the kind of people who have to use their brains and think all day long because their bodies are mush, you know the kind – teachers, ministers, lawyers like Alizée's parents – well, that's my father, it's just what he's into, and you can tell black and white films are made for people like that, people who don't really like life, or only in moderation. It's the same people who make the anti-alcohol adverts – you know the ones

I mean, everything in moderation as far as they're concerned, everything within reasonable limits, and then they go off and have a bottle of wine when they're done. And in old films like that the pictures often aren't great; they seem to do it on purpose so they're crap and so the sound is quiet, with jazz or piano music and no talking too loud, and obviously no special effects or ripped actors saving the planet or loads of women, no, never, I'd never seen that in any of my father's films; everything's been done so you don't have too much fun with old movies like that; anyway that's what my father watched, and he forced me to see them too...

...So no, it's pretty simple, I'm telling you that I didn't give a shit about that movie; it could have been any film really, I didn't want to see it, but it was the day I had to go off and do something with my father, because he and I didn't get along and not just that, we'd got to the point of not being able to stand each other at all, so my mother had set it up ages before, see? Since I was twelve they'd seen there was a big problem, so they said, well my mother had said, 'You need one day a month together, no shopping, none of that, never mind, one Sunday a month you're going to do something together with your father, some father and son time, man to man,' she said. So there I was, on a stupid Sunday afternoon in a stinking old cinema, a tiny cinema at that because it was the independent cinema and there wasn't even sweet popcorn, there was only salty; anyway it was going to be totally crap as usual: it was the Sunday of the month when I had to die of boredom and have an argument with my father. But I didn't. That was the day I met Schwarzenegger.

Yeah, I loved that film; yeah it's true, I can say it now, I don't mind admitting it: I was blown away by that film; it was the first time I'd ever enjoyed watching a movie. I wasn't checking the time every ten minutes; it was the first time I'd left the cinema and wanted to go straight back in and watch it all again because it was really great; it had revenge in it. I dunno, I found the character inspiring, smart and realistic, and he was all muscles; Schwarzenegger was a magnificent man, a role model, the ultimate, even. I wanted to be like him. I was sixteen, I was still puny and I'd just been handed the key – I mean, I'd just had my eyes opened and I didn't know how to go about sport back then; but as for him, he really can do sport, the character in that movie is so strong, he's super solid, he has the muscles for it, he turns a wheel and he gets his revenge, he's stubborn; it's impossible to reason with Schwarzenegger: no one can stop him slaying his goal because he wants revenge for his father's death. He has monstrous ambition, he has charisma and muscles – muscles more sculpted than I ever believed possible; you'd think it was me in that photo I showed you. At the beginning, Schwarzenegger's turning a wheel, he survives, he's the last survivor; all the others have died but he keeps turning, turning for hours and weeks, it's like that: he keeps going, stronger, stronger than all the others and he looks good; he's bound to appeal to women, that guy, from working like that he'll have had women, for sure. And then I got it: I understood what real work was, the real thing, I'm talking about – not table tennis or gymnastics, nothing like that – I'm talking about real sport; I understood how to become a man and become a gladiator and look hard and kill everyone. I told myself that's what I had to do through sport, but not just any old sport, no: with bodybuilding, building muscle, bodybuilding; it was the top of the heap, the giant among giants, the almighty; it was sheer genius, because today's muscleman is a bit like the gladiator of our times, in a way. That movie turned my life around: the atmosphere, the loud music, but most of all that character and his muscles and that face of his, yeah, when he's brave and wants to kill everyone, the blood he drinks from the carotid artery of a crocodile, the raw flesh he eats from a skewer, damn, his shoulders, his arms, his enormous pecs and more than anything I mean the man behind the character; it all changed my life but that man in particular, I admired him: that killer, that man who did it all on his own and who came out on top, the governor of California, the giant Mr. Universe, the top of the heap in US dollars, the hero for future nations and for men who need the key and the path to get there, Schwarzenegger, Arnold Schwarzenegger, ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER! That guy, that hero, mankind's great hero,

that all-time hero with his work and his muscles, his shiny sword with blood all over it when he's fighting, when he grosses three hundred million dollars in the end, that man's glory – oh my God, what an ending, how can I put it? It was all the emotions in one hit. Deep down, my fight to be loved by women was the same thing; it was me, I was that film, it was completely me from start to finish: what he says at the beginning, in front of the army he says, 'That which does not kill us makes us stronger.' I wanted to have that kind of power and look at the camera as if I was about to smash it up or eat it, be a man, a serious man, never smiling, get my revenge, yeah get my revenge, I'm not sure what for but get revenge; now all I had to do was get as ripped and good-looking as Schwarzenegger.