

On Life In Linear Motion

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I used to live on the line. The line is a rope, a structure of sorts, suspended in a never-ending mass of water. I can still picture it, as clear as day. There is tension to it, it doesn't hang, although as for where it comes from and where it is headed, no one knows.

The water itself is clear up close but it plays with a symphony of colors the further away you look. It shines brightly in the middle, strands of light skipping through it, dancing and braiding each other's hair. Shimmering.

Then the green creeps up on you, tendrils stretching out here and there. Slow. Patient. The farther you are, the deeper the color gets, eventually becoming rich and virtuous, like a mind that has grown wise with age.

At the very edges, it sinks into the darkness, as full and as alive as the light. Ancient, it holds many secrets.

I was born clinging onto life, onto my mother who was my lifeline and later onto the line itself. I grew slowly, my limbs growing longer and leaner, my skin more taut, my eyes seeing more the more I looked. The line was my world. Exploring it, the rope the world hung from and onto, I explored my strength. My world was diverse, a myriad of lifeforms, endless. And it was linear.

That was my childhood. Beautiful, fascinating, straightforward. But then I started growing up. Growing up meant becoming curious and it meant growing discontented. I started to stray further and further from my home colony, following the line into the vastness, until I could just barely see the place I had started from. I wanted to know. I wanted *more*. *Who am I, really? How do I find myself?*

And then I met the water snake. A snake is a peculiar creature. A messenger of sorts, it is neither here nor there, neither good nor evil, it belongs nowhere and yet is present everywhere.

The first thing I saw were the eyes. Dark and gleaming, they had a kind of depth about them that one would do well not to spend too much time gazing into, lest they find themselves lost to reality altogether. There was a rich yellow within them, swirling, thick. It was as if it was the eyes that spoke to me then, not the thin, curling mouth, nor the sharp, polished tongue. I never saw them blink.

"Ssstop", it said and so I did. I knew there was no saying "no" to snakes. My mother hadn't raised a fool. "Who issss it that ssssstands before me? What isss your bussiness here? Anssswer in earnessst. Ssspeak."

"Oh..uh..most...uh...esteemed..uh.. snake, I haven't come to do harm. I'm just looking around, is all." As you can tell, my eloquence tends to wane alongside my sentences. *"As for me, I could tell you I was born on this very line, that I have spent my life here but what would that really tell you? There isn't a whole lot that's memorable to say about me."* You must understand, snakes have this magnetic quality in them. It draws you in and lures you into spilling all your thoughts and secrets.

"Thhhat much issss clear." Snakes have pension for sarcasm, it is one of their less endearing traits. This one was no different. Maybe it's the word "sarcasm" itself that they like saying. *Sssarcassmm.*

"Sssssoo, you are in need of assisstance. I shhhhall sssssupply it," it continued. Not that I could recall asking for help but that is just the way snakes are. They like meddling in things. They say it makes life interesting.

"Thanks, I guess?" I had done my best not to sound rude and ungrateful but being polite simply isn't a part of my nature. You can't fight who you are.

"Sssay, what isss it ththat you know about the world?" Before I could reply, it continued. *"Nothing, that isss what you know."* It had been a rhetorical question, then.

"In order to sssee, you musst go to where the line isss not. It isss only when the line endsss that true knowledge beginsss."

This took me by surprise. The line. Ending. I had never even entertained the idea. To me it had always been a constant, stretching as far as my eyes could see, in front and behind me.

"The end of the line? Is there really such a thing out there?"

"Go," said the snake, *"and find where you begin."*

And so I went. After all, you don't say "no" when a snake tells you to do something. My mother would have been proud.

I don't know how much time I spent on traveling the line, nor do I know the distance I covered. It could have been days, or months, it definitely felt like years. The light never changed and the line never ended. Along the way, I saw many things. I saw life and I saw death, I saw the cyclical repetitions of communities just like mine, though perhaps a bit different in style and form. I met other travelers and realized there was no difference between where the line's end and beginning.

Once I met a king without a crown. It turned out he was genuine. I met a kind with a crown, too. Turns out he was a crook.

Once I saw magic. There wasn't much to it, really. It all comes down to words. We would have called it "science" in my town.

None of it meant much, though. I had seen the line, I had met many people, but I still knew nothing. About who I was. About the world. About where the line ended.

And then I met the water snake for a second time.

I was angry, "pissed off", even, if you prefer that kind of language. I had done what it said, I had searched for the line's end and I had found nothing so far. I thought, *What were all those years for? For nothing?*

I told the snake so too. It didn't respond. I screamed, I raged, I let all my anger out. Still, it said nothing. Then it came towards me. *"Sssilly child, " it said. "You did not lisssten."*

Now desperate, I said *"But I did, snake, I did. I searched as far as I could go and still, nothing! There is nothing out there! There is no end of the line!"*

The snake was closer now, so close that I could see my reflection, or at least something rather like it, glistening in its pupils. *"Sssilly child, you are misstaken."* What I had thought was my reflection now began to move of its own accord. It looked around, as if awoken from a trance and, looking back at me, it winked. Then, waving slowly, as if to say goodbye, it turned it's back on me.

"The line doesssn't end sssomeplace far off, it endsss right here, by your ssside. All you have to do isss let go of it. What liesss out there is everythhHING. Ssse for your sself. Sssee yourssself" And with that, the snake slithered off the rope and swam out into the open waters, twisting from one side to the other until it was no longer in sight. The last thing I had seen in its eyes was my very own face, looking back at me, yearning, imploring.

A snake is a creature that is, in its essence, rather like a line and it is perhaps this similarity that drives it away from the line and its security, that gives it the gusto and the power and the chutzpah to let go of it. But a snake is made, not born. It is an idea, not a form, and at that moment, I had decided to become one.

And so, just like the snake had told me, just like the snake had done, I found the end of the line, right then and there. I let go.

Drifting is a dangerous motion, dangerous because it embodies slowly moving away from something, letting go and setting out onto a new path, but also dangerous because it is cunning, because sometimes you don't realize how fast and how far you've drifted before it's too late. I guess, as with everything, it depends who you ask. For me it was a bit of both. Drifting away from the line, from my line, was terrifying. Not knowing what was going to happen and feeling like I had no control over it was terrifying. Being alone was terrifying. That is, until I learned how to swim.

Life in the open waters, in the off-line places is scary because it doesn't have all the answers. It's scary because it is real and because you can't always control it. But it's worth it if you learn how to swim.