Episode 4

My Other Self

Hello, I'm Richard Winterbottom.

This is Rick's Bite-Sized English, Season Three, Episode Four.

Each week, I tell a short story and then pause to look closely at a word or phrase that's worth noticing and trying out for yourself.

There's a new episode every week. Follow along if you'd like to stay with the series.

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I liked the cafe best in the early morning, when it was still quiet and I could find a table and sit undisturbed with my coffee and newspaper. By late morning it would be full of office workers chatting breezily over a late breakfast, shoppers in from the suburbs not yet weighed down by their bags, and groups of old ladies lingering over their coffees. By that time it was no longer a place for quiet reading. At that time , if I came at all, it would be to meet a friend and stand at the bar talking over a glass of beer.

Lunchtime, which never began before two and stretched well past four, was different. I often came once a week for their excellent-value three-course lunch, sometimes alone, but more usually with a couple of colleagues. I never came in the evenings.

It was at one of these lunchtime repasts that it began. On the far side of the room I noticed a woman in a red beret looking my way. She wore a broad grin, which had nothing to do with the two companions at her table, to whom she seemed to be paying no attention. Each time I looked across the room she was looking back at me. By the end of the meal her gaze had become a stare and it was more than a little disconcerting. I was sure I didn't know this woman. Did she know me?



It certainly seemed that she did. As I was leaving the restaurant she ran up to me, arms wide, ready to embrace.

'It's you', I can't believe it, I'm finally meeting you. I love your work'. I stood still. I wasn't sure what to make of this.

‘I saw you in The Nutcracker’, she added, as though this would make everything clear.

‘I don’t think he’s who you think he is’, one of her friends said. She blushed a bright red, blurted an apology and disappeared.

A simple case of mistaken identity, I thought. Don’t we all sometimes see people we think we recognise, friends or acquaintances, who at closer sight, turn out to be complete strangers?

A few months later I was walking along the promenade near my house. I live just a few minutes from the beach and it’s a popular place for people to stroll, locals and visitors alike. It’s a place where you’re always likely to meet someone unexpected. A young man approached and stopped me.

‘You’re one of my heroes’, he said. ‘I saw you the other night on TV in Swan Lake. What a performance! ‘Can I take a selfie of us together?, he asked. I muttered an excuse and we parted.

A few weeks later, having forgotten all about the recent incidents, I was sitting at a pavement café drinking a coffee with my wife when I noticed a group of three teenagers looking over at me and grinning broadly. There was none of the slight apology or deference that my previous ‘assailants’ had shown, and they made no attempt to hide their enthusiasm as they came bounding over to where I was sitting to ask me for an autograph.

I hadn't known the person I was being mistaken for, but he was obviously popular. My wife explained to me that he was a famous ballet dancer who often appeared on TV and also, because of his good looks, he was even popular with people who had little interest in classical dance. I won't deny that I enjoyed this last piece of information.

That night I started to think about fame. What would it be like to be stopped whenever you left the house? I searched the Internet for information about this dancer. I watched an interview on YouTube. I have little appreciation of dance but I could see that he was clearly a talented, skilful performer. And he was an engaging personality, he had an easy charm and his responses on a wide range of topics were perceptive and intelligent. What's more, there was a strong resemblance between us, though I had to concede he was better looking. I admired his poise, both on stage and in conversation, but I also felt a mixture of unease and pride about having partly and briefly, lived moments in which I was he.

Fame, for most, is short-lived, and although the dancer remains popular today, media attention around him dropped quite rapidly, and so too did the moments in which I was taken for him.

But the story didn't quite end there. A few years later, I was on a trip to Berlin. One evening, walking back to my hotel, I crossed a square where a crowd of people were standing outside a theatre, the men in evening suits and bow-ties, the women in elegant, flowing dresses that caught the light as they moved. They were waiting for something or someone. Curious, I waited too and a few minutes later the

doors opened and the first few theatregoers filed out. Amongst them was the dancer.



Our eyes met briefly, and for the shortest of moments I felt that neither of us was sure who was who. Then the crowd closed around him, and I was alone again.

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At the end of the episode I describe seeing the dancer and I use the phrase ‘for the shortest of moments’ to talk about the brief period of time in which we were not sure about our identities. This expression, ‘for the shortest of moments’, is used to describe a very brief, almost imperceptible, period of time. It also suggests that the moment was brief but important.

You can use this structure to express a minimal degree of something, time, feeling, or reason, often to highlight how close something came to not happening at all.

For example, you could say, ‘she missed winning the race by the smallest of margins’ or ‘he apologised for his behaviour with the barest of excuses’.

Let me know how you will use this language. Please leave a review or a comment wherever you listen to the podcast.

I’d love to hear from you.

Thanks for listening.

See you next week.

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