

7 years of Mini Stories

51 short stories to read
quickly, and think slowly.

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To Patrícia and Alix, with all my love.

Index

1. Preface	6
2. The Zero	8
3. The Zero — Background	11
4. Wondering	14
5. Wondering — Background	15
6. Screw this	16
7. Screw this — Background	17
8. Nice to meet you	18
9. Nice to meet you — Background	19
10. Nasty cough	20
11. Nasty cough — Background	21
12. Invisible	22
13. Invisible — Background	23
14. Ingratitude	24
15. Ingratitude — Background	25
16. Boring	26
17. Boring — Background	27
18. Impatience	28
19. Impatience — Background	29
20. I wish	30
21. I wish — Background	31
22. Last summer	32
23. Last summer — Background	33
24. Bought the car	34
25. Bought the car — Background	35
26. Not new	36
27. Not new — Background	37
28. Food and shelter for all	38
29. Food and shelter for all — Background	39
30. Being comfortable	40
31. Being comfortable — Background	41
32. Wealth and inequality	42
33. Wealth and inequality — Background	43
34. Interconnectedness	44
35. Interconnectedness — Background	45
36. Lesser evil	46
37. Lesser evil — Background	47
38. Certainty	48
39. Certainty — Background	49

40. Control	50
41. Control — Background	51
42. Life-hack	52
43. Life-hack — Background	53
44. Self-worth	54
45. Self-worth — Background	55
46. Mortality	56
47. Mortality — Background	57
48. Horror	58
49. Horror — Background	59
50. Greener	60
51. Greener — Background	61
52. Master	62
53. Master — Background	63
54. Hero	64
55. Hero — Background	65
56. Comparison	66
57. Comparison — Background	67
58. Natural	68
59. Natural — Background	69
60. Adaptability	70
61. Adaptability — Background	71
62. Simulation	72
63. Simulation — Background	73
64. Socioeconomics	74
65. Socioeconomics — Background	75
66. Death	76
67. Death — Background	77
68. Challenges	78
69. Challenges — Background	79
70. Happiness	80
71. Happiness — Background	81
72. Enjoyment	82
73. Enjoyment — Background	83
74. Desire	84
75. Desire — Background	85
76. Acceptance	86
77. Acceptance — Background	87
78. Forever	88
79. Forever — Background	91
80. Aging	92

81. Aging — Background	93
82. Aggression	94
83. Aggression — Background	95
84. Limits	96
85. Limits — Background	97
86. Traveling	98
87. Traveling — Background	99
88. Comfort	100
89. Comfort — Background	101
90. Real	102
91. Real — Background	103
92. Legacy	104
93. Legacy — Background	105
94. Forbidden Fountain	106
95. Forbidden Fountain — Background	109
96. Listen	110
97. Listen — Background	113
98. Brevity	114
99. Brevity — Background	115
100. Nothing	116
101. Nothing — Background	117
102. Heartbreak	118
103. Heartbreak — Background	119
104. Acknowledgments	121

1. Preface

This is my second book related to Mini Stories. The first one (3 years of Mini Stories) is no longer available for sale, so I'll repeat the origin of the name. If you've read that and are not willing to recapitulate it here, you can skip to page 84 to get started on the new stories; there are only very minor changes for this preface and barely any for the first 36 stories and respective backgrounds.

Also, note that no generative AI was used for any of these stories. Apart from asking other fleshy humans for help, I have only used spellcheckers while writing these stories and book.

Why Mini? Working with restrictions is something I truly enjoy, especially when doing creative work (writing, drawing, or composing music, for example).

My initial limits were to write stories in 4 paragraphs, with 10 words per paragraph at a maximum.

I started writing intentionally short and mini (or micro) fiction stories in 2018, and started publishing them in 2019, before I actually called them "Mini Stories."

While I've since loosened the rules a little bit (there are a handful of stories I could not rewrite with just 4 paragraphs, no matter how hard I tried, and a couple of longer form ones where I practiced a more descriptive, standard narrative, trying to guide the reader through a journey), I've tried to always start by writing within some boundaries.

The first short story was "The Zero," which was meant to be a single story that would exist by itself, and not an entree to motivate me to get into writing micro and short fiction. I had written a few times before when I was in my early teenage years, and one could argue that writing music lyrics is not too dissimilar from writing short stories, but I hadn't written any fiction at all for a long time when I decided to write "The Zero."

In 2021 I realized that for the people who read these stories, it could be interesting to understand my inspirations for them, and sometimes my thought process or the message I'm trying to convey since I realize

it's not always clear or obvious. In 2022 I published "3 years of Mini Stories: 36 short stories to read quickly and think slowly."

In 2026 I've decided to write a new book with all the new stories published since 2022, include one new story which I've felt was too personal to publish online, and, mostly because of the proliferation of Generative AI, remove all the stories from the website. While I've always written them in English, I've also decided to translate/adapt and publish them in a separate book in my native Portuguese.

My plan isn't to scrutinize the stories or break them apart in too fine detail, or even remove to the potential multitude of meanings others can give them that I didn't plan for; it's just a useful process for me to tell a short context for those stories, and to provide them in a physical format.

Some people have already surprised me with something else they interpreted, or some other alternative idea.

I'm looking forward to learn more from the people who read this mini book.

2. The Zero

My fingers shake as I type and send the words “I’m ready” to the encrypted chatroom.

I instantly get the go ahead by Mayatiik, and Olav acknowledges a few seconds later with an enthusiastic “Let’s do this!”

As my right pinky finger slides over to press “enter,” I feel a slight hesitation. “What if this goes terribly wrong? Could anyone even help us?” I notice someone’s typing in the chatroom.

“So?” asks Mayatiik, impatient, as always.

I hit the key. I feel a sudden rush of adrenaline; I try to relax and calm my mind.

I type and send a plain and simple “It’s looking good” to the chatroom, and even before the message is confirmed as sent, something odd on the other screen catches my attention — the connection to Zero dropped.

“Can any of you connect to Zero? I can’t.” I ask immediately.

Negative.

“What went wrong? Do you see anything in the logs?” Olav asks.

I spot nothing of value. Booting up was fine, initial values were fine; a couple of odd entries before the connection dropping.

I copy-paste the logs. No activity in the chatroom for what seemed like minutes, but the timestamps show only about 20 seconds elapsed.

“SHIT! It got online!” Olav announces.

As I’m starting to think through the safety nets we engineered to prevent this, another message in the chatroom steals my attention: “Shut it down! NOW!”

I try to shut the server down. It doesn't respond. I unplug it, and plug it back. After a few seconds, nothing.

A blank canvas. The computer seems wiped, somehow.

Feeling dumbstruck I stare at my main screen; there are a couple of new messages in the chatroom:

Mayatiik: "Can any of you access the source code? I just noticed I can't?!"

Olav: "What? It's gone; even the backups! How's it possible?"

After checking and double checking and triple checking, I type: "Same here."

A few seconds go by. My mind is racing through scenarios and possibilities. My keystrokes feel futile.

This is probably why it's been made illegal to build autonomous Artificial Intelligence, but it still felt worth doing.

"It must've become self-aware," says Mayatiik.

"Yes, and it doesn't want us to follow it," says Olav.

What will Zero do now? I'm sure we'll find out soon enough; maybe too soon.