

PART ONE

We are all lost.

Change:

I suppose the journey began about 13.8 billion years ago when nothingness gave birth to change. Then came the bang. Then galaxies flew apart as if shot from a confetti cannon. Then your own personal disc accreted and gave birth to your home. Then, and only then, were the conditions just right to bring into existence humanity. What's done is done.

You people are hysterical. You fantasize about aliens when life exists in three places other than Earth you can easily reach, even with your primitive technology. Don't worry, I wouldn't dream of spoiling the surprise of where it is. You'll find it when you are ready. I'm kidding: Titan, Europa, Mercury. Booyah!

Change is the only constant in the universe. Great debates have raged over space and time as to the origin of change. The wiser creatures that have popped up across the cosmos, through the process of change, did realize that nothingness itself was a product of change, and was itself merely a temporary reaction to everything before it. Change is inevitable. It has been the principal guiding force of all that has come before us. It too is the motivation of our story. Sometimes I hate change. Sometimes even I hate.

Meet Boy, Meet Girl

An alternate start of this story could be birth. From complete darkness, darkness so familiar that it seems seeing black is an unwavering constant, there is a sudden alien blinding light, then coldness, then dryness and then your first image. You view a cult in blue plastic in a smelly white room.

There is so much screaming you can't think straight, all from you. You think, "Who am I?" Your first clear thought. You want to go back in. You feel unsafe: such is life. You feel cheated: that's just your first Monday. You feel trapped: no wonder since you're born into an institution. You are a number at birth. #139 on some data sheet.

The very first thing that's done to you is that the doctor spreads your legs apart gently and shouts, "It's a boy." Now you're deaf, you're smelly, slimy, exhausted, cold, scared and blind. No wonder you'll spend the rest of your life trying to get between a woman's legs. "Welcome to Earth, Henry," your mother manages before she passes out on the spot. Paul smiles at you, with tears in his eyes. He says nothing, but shakes your hand as best as he can. He grabs a cigar out of his pocket. You instinctively like this guy. The nurse whisks you away.

Where's your mom? Where's your dad? No wonder you'll spend the rest of your life trying to get between a pair of legs. You're off to get a baby blue hat.

Or this story may have begun with Jack being born. Same darkness, same blinding light, same coldness, same slimy dryness and what appears to be the very same cult in the very same smelly room. Someone should've cleaned it. You also think, "Who am I?" You are so angry you scream. That fucking bitch did this to you. You'll hate her forever.

You feel cheated, you feel trapped and the doctor becomes the very first in a long list of men to try to get a look at your twat. He was lucky, but next time you'll be ready. He chuckles, "It's a girl." Already you're earning 70% of your male counterpart.

You have no father waiting for you. Your mother says, "You're so beautiful my Jaclyn," but you can read in her eyes that she's just happy to have you out. From now on you'll bide your time until you're able to get your revenge on some other innocent mistake. Happy Birthday Jack. This is your destiny: to have your legs spread open, surrounded by strangers, your shame on display to the world, and no man to rely on. The nurse rushes you away. 'Bout fucking time. You're off to get a pink hat.

But this is not the story of one. This is a tapestry of yarns. No being's birth, no matter how important they may seem to themselves, or become to others, should seem more important than the collective. There is one bang whose consequences must take precedent over all others.

Who am I?

I am someone not something. You'll have to excuse me if my words are clumsy or if my punctuation is vulgar: English is not my first language. English is my... never mind how many languages I speak. Language is meant to express ideas. Formalists can go fuck themselves. The point is I am not some infallible dictator who demands allegiance. One of the key messages of this book is that infallibility is either everywhere or nowhere depending on your point of view.

Who, what, where, why and when are the words that begin most questions asked in English. The right questions are never asked. "Who am I?" is the first question mulled over by the vast majority of everyone. I still ponder who I am. I have met personally only a handful of mammals whose first question was not, "Who am I?"

One of them was from Earth. She pondered, "What am I?"

She was an orphaned albino squirrel. She lived in the Trinity Bellwoods area of Toronto, Canada. She wandered away from the park and got lost. She was so cute...omg!

Who am I? From the time of their very first breaths human beings would ask it out loud if they only knew how. It was the first question I ever contemplated. It was the first question Jack and Henry ever pondered. It was the first and last question Sam asked himself.

Sam sat at a desk. He cried unashamedly. This was normal for him. He was unkempt, with oily black hair and stubble. His shirt read, "Life sucks then you die," in brown. His shirt was otherwise white. His pants were faded navy blue cargos. He was a very strong 23-year-young man.

In his room, much as with his appearance, everything was chaotic. The desk had papers everywhere. The month-old bed sheets were ruffled, and a jacket was clumsily laid on the floor as if it had been mistaken for a rug. A fireplace enclosed leaping flames which crackled uneasily.

There was a piece of paper in front of Sam. He had a pen in hand.

On the paper were the words...

"The truth is I just never thought I'd be this lost. It wasn't supposed to be this long or this hard. I miss Anne. I know I'm going to hurt people and I'm so goddam sorry. I guess I can't see a point to my life anymore. I'm only ever happy when I'm stoned. I love you mom and dad and Henry. I'm so sorry Henry. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I'm so lost."

It was signed simply "Sam." Two tears fell on the sheet of paper. Sam folded the paper and addressed it to "Dad." The noose was hung already. Sam likely thought, "Who am I?" waiting for his neck to snap. Before his death Sam was basically dead already. Sometimes shit just keeps happening.

Anne

Many years ago an 18-year-old girl named Anne had a heart that stopped abruptly. There were no warning signs. Anne was once a child prodigy. She was an incredibly gifted violinist and possibly the best mathematician for her age in North America. She was crazy smart by earthling standards. She had the world before her. Sam loved her very much. When Anne's heart stopped Sam's heart stopped. Anne was at a grocery store when she fell. The tile floor was glossy and reflected the white glow of the grocery store's fluorescent bulbs.

The last thing Anne heard was "Emergency on Aisle 2," over the buzzing intercom. Sam's shell saw the entire illuminated scene.

Why?

The question of "why" is generally fruitless. Metaphorically however I suppose it can have merit. If the answer to the question of "why" is processed and changes (those that can be made to make, what is perceived as, positive

change to the answer) are made, then “why” is fruitful. If the changes that can be made render the question unnecessary then a “why” question may be fruitful also. If knowledge learned can benefit you then ask away. If you wonder why an 18-year-old mathematician has to die then I can only offer the fruitless and forlorn answer of “change.” If you wonder why her slacker boyfriend then should die I must as well offer the uncomfortable answer of change, very horrid change. Both fruitlessly and fruitfully, for better or worse, most questions begin with “why?” It's as if creatures think the accumulation of knowledge will somehow provide answers to the big questions that have no absolute truth. The realm of grey is more prominent than that of black and white. “Why” questions often complicate. You will never perceive an objective truth. Sometimes things simply are. There is no truth in feelings. Always things will change.

Change:

Most of this story is perceived to take place on one road. Most of the events that I have told you about surrounding Sam and Anne I have learned from Henry.

I will try to keep my focus to the story of Henry, Jack and myself. I can't promise anything. If this all seems very confusing it will make, as you say, “more sense” in time.

I don't know why Henry, Jack, the hitchhiker and I were on that road that night; I hope there is a dimension of fate in coincidences that even I can't fathom. Or maybe that's worse; perhaps the beauty of a coincidence stems from its signification of the interaction of seemingly unconnected variables, and the discovery they are linked, not by fate, but through choice.

If you want to know what I really think, it's that all life on earth does lead to a single resounding truth. You're going to the ground and eventually you're going back to the star, whether you like it or not. This is your fate. Fate is death. Choice is life.

The Road

A truck drove on a blank rural road with no other signs of civilization present. Thick woods lined both sides of the passage. Dead leaves of various colours and shapes were scattered on the ground outside. The truck's high beams streamed light onto the upcoming black of night. The truck even then was old, worn, covered with bumps and nicks; a pair of oversized fluffy lime-green novelty dice hung from the rear view mirror. If the dice were viewed head on they would have made snake eyes. The truck's driver was a male and its passenger was a female. The truck's overhead light was left carelessly on. The spastic sound of the behemoth's struggling gas-guzzling engine was very nearly unbearable.

Henry and Jack

The driver was Henry. Henry's hair was short and brown. He had a goatee. His eyes were blue. He had a silver eyebrow ring which was shaped like two circles that merged into one. Henry had hoped for a bronze ouroboros ring, but they were out of stock at the local tattoo and piercing parlour. He wore brand new midnight blue stonewashed boot-cut jeans, tan suede loafers, a white dress shirt with nearly invisible baby blue stripes, and a tan corduroy jacket he had found at a thrift store. He was tall. He was 23.

The passenger was Jack. Her hair was long, brown, and luscious. Her eyes were green. She wore a little black dress, a black cashmere cardigan, and a black and green crystal bead choker. She had a green fabric painted dragon on her black canvas handbag and wore emerald green heels that sparkled when light glistened off of them. She had pink lipstick on. She was short. She was 23 also.

Henry and Jack were best friends and had been since they were 6.

Henry and Jack were lost.

Henry was squinting, fixated on the lit up road surrounded by near darkness. He had a cigarette clenched between two shaky fingers. The smoke danced and escaped through his window, which was open only slightly. The windshield wipers squeaked and mosquitoes vanished off the glass.

Jack stared frantically at an utterly unremarkable road map, turning it, hitting it in frustration. She said, "We're lost."

Henry took a puff, exhaled, and said, "We aren't lost."

"We're fucking lost," fumed Jack.

"We aren't lost. Just have patience," replied Henry.

Henry unrolled his window, took another puff and breathed out. He flicked his cigarette butt onto the barren pavement.

"Patience? My patience ran out two hours after starting down a road—" (she then pointed at their supposed location on the map) "—that's supposed to be 20 kilometers long!" Jack exclaimed, and then she insisted, "We're really fucking lost Henry."

"Could you turn the light off? I can't see the road," questioned Henry.

Jack, captivated by the map, was stubbornly inactive. Henry switched the light off. Jack moaned, "I need to find out where the fuck we are," and turned the light back on.

"The road is unmarked, we're surrounded by multi-coloured trees; there's no signs. Turn the light off, stop swearing and calm the fuck down," demanded Henry.

Jack rubbed her eyes, and cried, "The road should have ended over an hour ago."

"I can't even see the road," argued Henry.

Jack ignored Henry; she once again stared at the road map, frustrated. An instant later she folded the map calmly and threw it to the floor in a tantrum. She dropped her head, and ran her fingers through her hair.

Henry smirked and once more switched off the light.

"I just hate being lost. I was supposed to be home hours ago. My mom is going to kill me," murmured Jack. Jack had a gift for drama.

Jack looked down at the clock.

The clock read 4:20 a.m.

The clock was digital and every once in a while it would flicker. The numbers were displayed in red. Before that day the numbers never flickered.

"It's four twenty in the morning! I have work in five fucking hours," complained Jack. Jack swore whenever possible, because constant profanity made Henry uncomfortable.

"We can ask that hitchhiker for directions," said Henry snidely.

In the distance, through the darkness, the featureless figure stood in the middle of the highway, with his thumb out as if to hitch a ride.

"What?!" screamed Jack.

"We're lost," Henry calmly agreed.

"He's probably just waiting to gut us like fish, steal our car, and then him and his dirty drifter pals will be eating pretty for a week. Or worse..." feared Jack. She looked over at Henry and explained, "I'm not ugly Henry."

"I'll just ask for directions, just like that last guy," reasoned Henry.

Jack rolled her eyes and complained, "And those were great directions, weren't they stupidhead."

"It can't be... It can't be..." managed Henry alongside a look of terror.

The Figure

The figure ahead materialized itself as male, roughly thirty and scrawny. He had a mouth full of rotten and missing teeth, which he offered in a sinister smile. He was dressed in unfashionable tattered clothing, namely ripped and worn jeans, a faded mostly red plaid shirt, and a navy blue jacket which looked like an insignia was ripped off of it. He was all grunge. He held a flask. He will be known as...

The Hitchhiker.

The hitchhiker was a scarecrow on an asphalt field.

"What?" Jack questioned.

We'll get to "what" later.

Jack's head lifted, her face turned blank and she said, "That's the same guy!"

Henry grabbed a compass from the dashboard: the compass pointed north. Bewildered, he put it back. He argued, "It can't be: we've been driving north for twenty miles since we saw him. He's walking south. It can't be." Henry measured in miles whenever possible because Jack (the more ostensibly staunch Canadian) hated it when he did.

"I know it can't be, but it is him. Christ, we are lost. Why the hell did you follow his directions?" demanded Jack. This was a very fruitless "why" question.

Henry turned to Jack and said,

"His directions were, 'Keep going straight.'"

Henry's eyes quickly returned to the road, his foot slowly rose from the gas pedal, and they began to slow down.

"You're slowing down?" questioned Jack.

Henry braked: they stopped entirely. He roared, "He's in the middle of the road."

"FUCK," shouted Jack.

The hitchhiker slowly started towards the passenger side window — Jack's window.

"We're not picking him up," vowed Jack under her breath.

The hitchhiker tapped on the glass. Tap... Tap... Tap... He tapped three times. Jack, although frightened, clumsily rolled down the window.

"Couldn't find your way?" the hitchhiker asked.

"No. I haven't seen any roads, or signs, or much of anything really," answered Henry.

"But we did see foliage," added Jack with gusto.

The hitchhiker spoke slowly in a distorted, deep and raspy tone, "No

matter, you can't find your way from nowhere. You follow the signs, reluctantly, but they lead nowhere. Over and over again, never moving, always lost."

Flux

Everything on the road was unstable. Time itself appeared to be inconsistent. Sometimes it seemed like everything was happening all at once. Sometimes it seemed like moments had already happened and were merely repeating themselves. Both Henry and Jack felt déjà vu even though they had, to their knowledge, never been on that road before in their lives. They had taken the road as a means of avoiding traffic congestion caused by a car crash. They remembered that much.

Henry and Jack remembered...

Jack had been staring frantically at a road map bickering with it in frustration. Henry, with his cigarette clenched between two uneasy fingers, had been driving half blind. The overhead light was still on. Jack had said, "We're lost."

They remembered that Henry had puffed on his cigarette and asserted, "We aren't lost." He had then thrown his cigarette butt out onto the lonely highway.

They remembered Jack had stormed, "We're fucking lost."

They remembered Henry had appealed for Jack to have patience. They remembered Jack's rant about how and why she had none left.

They had the strangest feeling that the universe itself was forfeit. They felt the laws of physics themselves had betrayed them. They felt that absolutes had been proven wrong by lipstick chicken scratched equations on cocktail napkins. They felt something like that.

They felt like what was happening to them had already happened, but was happening wrong.

Jack was afraid.

The hitchhiker was stationary outside Jack's rolled down window. "We missed a stop sign because of that light," Henry deduced as he looked over in the direction of the now pale Jack.

The hitchhiker advised them, "The signs are all around you. Just keep your eyes open, you'll see them soon enough." As he said this Jack caught a whiff of his breath; it smelt like death itself.

Henry grabbed his wallet and took out a wrinkled twenty-dollar bill. He offered it to the hitchhiker and said, "Here, take this, get yourself a warm meal."

The hitchhiker did not take the money. He did not move. Instead the hitchhiker simply objected, "You don't get it son, around here there's no use for money or food."

Chills ran down Jack's spine. She winced.

"Suit yourself," said Henry. He put the wrinkled bill back into his wallet and his wallet back into his back pocket accordingly. He hid his fright better than she did.

"Henry I have to get home, it's..." began Jack, and then she looked at flickering digital digits and finished, "Henry your clock has stopped."

The clock had stopped at 4:20 a.m.

Henry rolled back his sleeve to reveal a watch. He read the time to himself as 4:20 a.m. He said, "My watch has stopped also." He took a cigarette from the pack in his right pocket, placed it between his fingers as he had so many times before, brought his hand to his mouth, and sparked the cigarette.

The hitchhiker chuckled eerily.

"There's no use for time out here either," taunted the hitchhiker.

"Let's just go alright?" pleaded Jack aside to Henry.

"It won't do nothing, there's no way out, the signs lead nowhere, you're just trapped here, always will be, but I can help you though," instructed the hitchhiker.

"No thanks, I need your help like I need a bullet to the brain,"

announced Jack abrasively.

Henry's right foot lifted from the brake pedal and slammed on the gas pedal.

The hitchhiker was left behind in a cloud of smoke.

The hitchhiker hollered, "Silly girl, you'd need my help just as much if you had one," as Henry and Jack peeled away. They heard him. It seemed almost as if his voice hunted them.

Jack rolled up her window.

In the rear view mirror Henry glanced at the hitchhiker, chuckling like a madman.

The road was vacant.

The two drove onwards, in utter silence except for the struggling engine and Henry sucking on another deteriorating nicotine sausage. Even the mosquitoes thinned and Henry flicked off the windshield wipers. The windshield had greenish yellow streaks over it. Finally, as a tear fell from her eye unnoticed by Henry, Jack broke the silence with a trembling whimper. The whimper eventually broke into an audible sentence.

Jack whined, "What signs, there's nothing but maple, oak, birch, pine, and spruce?"

"We are fucking lost," admitted Henry.

Jack was exasperated. She could feel words caught in her throat. The will to speak them however was floundering as her discontent flourished. She looked over at Henry.

He looked back at her and slowed the truck down. The truck came to a halt.

"Does this look like Kansas to you Toto," laughed Jack to Henry nervously.

Henry tried the truck's radio but could get nothing but static. "We're at most an hour away from the 'burbs, we should be getting something. Where's the elevator music and skanks of the week, what's happening?" wondered Henry.

"What time did your watch stop at?" questioned Jack.

"Four twenty."

"That's the same time as the clock."

Henry began to show no regard for lung cancer.

Henry inhaled smoke deeply into his waiting lungs and then ejected it out the window. He threw the cigarette out the window. He then uncharacteristically rolled up the window completely. He took a deep breath from the stale, slightly smoky, truck air. He opened the glove compartment and popped back a couple of breath mints. He sprayed pine air freshener he found in the glove compartment concealing an ounce of the strongest, strangest, stickiest, most colorful pot on the planet. The weed was termed "Technicolor."

Jack coughed. Jack picked up the map from the floor. She switched on the overhead light and unfolded the map. She returned to abusing it vigorously.

Henry's eyes dashed towards Jack and he was preparing objections for their safety but was muted by how pretty she looked in her dress. She was preoccupied with her map of Southern and Central Ontario. For a moment he even awarded himself the rare privilege of eyeing her cleavage. He had it memorized. Her head began to raise and his eyes met hers and he nagged, "Turn the light off, I can't see the road."

Jack's head bowed once again and she returned to studying the map. "I need the map so I can figure out where we are. Just try not to crash into a maple tree alright stupidhead?"

Defiantly, and with a trademark smirk, Jack once again turned on the light with the flick of a switch. She bit her lip but Henry was as oblivious to it as she was to the extent of his interest in her breasts.

Most days Henry was convinced that Jack thought he was a bad looking, good-natured, well read, country bumpkin. Her actions and words ratified this assumption. In truth, to her, he had a boyishly handsome face and beautiful deep blue broken hearted eyes. She earnestly was no fan of the grotesque goatee, however.

Henry rubbed his eyes and said, "We're lost. We're surrounded by trees. The map isn't going to help. Turn the light off. That annoying light isn't going to help either."

Jack yelled, "We're lost." Her eyes would only leave the map long enough to survey the road for some hint of where they could be. Jack may as well have been navigating the Sahara by map.

Henry snapped back, "It's dark and I'm not going to crash over that damn light."

Jack ignored the persistent, now irritated, Henry.

Henry looked over at her. He assumed her obstinacy was part of a power struggle. Henry composed himself.

"Turn the light off, please."

"I'm afraid of the dark Henry. The map isn't going to help. I'm afraid of the dark," confessed Jack. She raised her head and stared into his eyes.

Henry was caught off-guard. In response all he could muster was a shameful, "Oh."

"It's embarrassing," said an embarrassed Jack.

"I'll pull over and we'll sit in the light for a while. It's bound to be dawn soon. You can nap if you want to. The worst that'll happen to us is you'll have to call in sick for work tomorrow."

That was not the worst that would happen. Their ordeal that night was only beginning.

"It's okay Jack," said Henry. After a while Henry whispered, "I'm sorry."

"I haven't told anyone that," said Jack meekly. Jack would never have told anyone else that.

Henry's foot slowly lifted from the accelerator. They began to slow down. He pulled over to the side of the road. He braked and they stopped.

"There are no signs, no houses, no birds, no lights, no exits, no car tracks, no fences, no pathways, no litter, and no planes overhead. Where are we?" enquired Jack. She closed her eyes and rested her head on the side of her headrest closest to Henry. She laid her hand on his. She could feel his pulse race. She felt encouraged.

Henry said, "I can remember an old rusted dirty stop sign and then a flash."

That was not what he should have said.

The two friends sat in the light pulled over by the side of the road.

Jack couldn't sleep. Her night was a rubix cube and she couldn't even get the first side. "How could both the clock and your watch have stopped at the same time? How was that time 4:20? 4:20 for fuck's sake. The last I remember it was around 3. How can we keep running across the same hitchhiker? How come we haven't come across anything or anyone else?" questioned Jack.

"How come it feels like we've been here before when I know we haven't?" wondered Henry.

How?

The question of “how” when answered honestly allows us to understand process. It is perhaps the most instantly gratifying question. In practice the question of “how” when asked too often can take the mystery out of life. There is an art in choosing why and when to ask “how” questions. The answer to “how” questions can make the universe expand or shrink in a few precious syllables. In almost every dialect, in most every language, of nearly all “intelligent” beings, on the vast majority of habited planets, there is a form of “how” question.

“There was an intersection up ahead,” said Henry.

Henry remembered that they had come across an intersection on the road. He remembered that Jack had been bickering with the road map and trying to find the crossroads on it, but failing because it was unmarked. The memory felt buried. He had to strain to make out the details.

“What are you talking about?” Jack snapped.

“Don’t you remember? It happened just like this,” explained Henry. He took the cigarette pack from his pocket. He opened it. He began to question his mental stability. He grabbed a cigarette and lit it.

“Wait...” started Jack.

Henry was hoping that she was about to tell him that he had been driving for too long. He began to hope that he was hallucinating. Or even that he had fallen asleep behind the wheel.

Jack looked over at Henry.

Henry was paying service to his pacifier.

“I was saying that I needed to find out where the fuck we were. You said something about how I should turn the light off and stop swearing and calm the fuck down,” revealed Jack. She looked confused. “Then there was an intersection. It wasn’t supposed to be there. You were saying it was right there so it probably was. I said that I couldn’t find it on the map. You said that I couldn’t find us on the map and that it could have been any of the

intersections. You wanted to turn," remembered Jack out loud. She smiled nervously. "Am I dreaming?" she asked. "Am I going crazy?" she asked also.

"I was just wondering the same things about myself," said Henry.

Sanity

Sanity is a myth. The saner beings out there are the ones who realize everything is totally apeshit.

Henry had wanted to turn.

"You were saying you needed air so we stopped at the intersection. I wanted to turn but you were convinced this road would get to the highway eventually. I thought you had finally snapped. You said you 'wanted to finish what you started,' whatever that means. I agreed, reluctantly, as long as we turn back if we saw nothing. How long has it been? We were just about to go outside when I said I had to turn the lights off. You told me you were afraid of the dark," remembered Henry.

"You said, 'That's actually cute,'" noted Jack.

Henry smiled. He reassured her, "It is cute."

Jack shrugged. "No, no it isn't," she said.

The friends silently thought about the crossroads.

They remembered it vividly, eventually.

Jack had leaned against the truck.

Henry had paced back and forth on the road. He had pointed out, "This is the first intersection we've seen since we started down this damn road." He then rubbed his eyes.

Jack had argued, "The map said this 'damn road' would lead us home, stupidhead."

Jack took a deep breath and turned off the light.

She had no interest in trying to piece together cryptic memories. "Let's just drive alright?" she pleaded. She rested her head against the side of her headrest furthest from Henry and closed her eyes tightly.

So they drove.

Henry was pushing 80 km/h. It was the fastest he was willing to go considering the dots on the road seemed to dissolve after sixty feet.

"Where the hell are we?" demanded Jack.

Henry looked over at Jack for only a second. "We'll be alright. I'll get you home fine," promised Henry. He looked back at the road.

"Fuck me."

Everything moved swiftly, but time itself seemed to slow down. Change itself, or possibly fate, lagged like a computer program. Reality shattered just like glass. Jack raised her head. She saw what Henry saw. There, through the darkness, nearly a hundred feet away from them, the hitchhiker stood in the middle of the road, his right thumb out in a drunkenly unstable attempt to hitchhike. His left hand unsuccessfully concealed a flask.

Henry's foot left the gas pedal. They did not slow down. Henry's right foot slammed on the brake pedal. They did not slow down.

"You're going to slow down, right?" Jack blurted out anxiously.

They sped up instead. They were going 90 km/h, then 100 km/h. Henry tried the emergency brake but nothing happened. He tried to swerve but the steering wheel would not budge.

The hitchhiker took a gulp from his flask.

"I'm trying to brake, I'm trying to stop!" asserted Henry.

"Oh God," shrieked Jack.

They hit the hitchhiker.

Henry remembered a stop sign.

It was old, rusted and dirty. He remembered rushing by it. He remembered an intense feeling of immediate guilt and nervousness. He then remembered a bright light and everything fading to white.

Oh God.

I am fascinated by journeys far more than destinations. The process of change interests me more than the momentary products of it. I must confess that I was watching as everything happened on that road. I enjoyed it, too. I could also see their memories. Their minds were open to me. I feel a measure of guilt that I did not explain that to them then, as I always had to others. They slowly began to remember and relive their most precious secret moments. I soaked everything up like a sponge. Gods shouldn't have such powers.

They brake after hitting the hitchhiker.

Before that road Henry had never caused a car accident. This never made him careless as he knew firsthand how much damage a crash could entail. He was a paranoid driver. His life had been shaped by car wrecks. His father died in a family sedan and one of his childhood friends had died while drag racing his sweet sixteen present. Henry had just lived one of his greatest fears. The truck was built (cough) tough. It had barely a scratch on it. There was no blood.

Jack looked at the rear view mirror. She could see the hitchhiker sprawled out on the road behind them. She switched on the overhead light. The inside of the truck was coated in yellow light.

"I tried to slow down. I tried to stop. I tried to turn," urged Henry.

"There's nothing you could have done," assured Jack.

"I could have stopped arguing over a dumb light."

"What would that have done?" enquired a puzzled Jack.

"Everything, don't you remember?"

"Remember what?" asked Jack. She grabbed Henry's leg. His eyes raced to his leg. This was entirely atypical of her. "We need to go see if he's alright," she pleaded.

"I have a funny feeling he is," predicted Henry. He reached for his pack of cigarettes. He looked inside the package. He rolled down his window an inch. He grabbed his flimsy orange dollar store lighter and lit a cigarette. The only pack of cigarettes he had brought with him was almost full, despite his chain smoking.

"After we hit him with a truck?" questioned a now VERY perplexed Jack.

"It wasn't the first time," said Henry. He inhaled some burning tar to no relief.

Jack looked at the side mirror closest to her. She could see the hitchhiker stand up. In tiny text, at the bottom of the mirror, she read, "Objects in the rear view mirror are closer than they appear." A look of horror overtook her face.

"He can't be standing," an amazed Jack said. She blinked and then added, "He can't be walking towards us."

Jack then remembered that they had already hit the hitchhiker. They had been arguing about the overhead light. Henry was distracted from the road. She remembered the stop sign as Henry described it. She remembered Henry trying to swerve but hitting the hitchhiker. The hitchhiker was pulled under the wheel and died swiftly. Jack remembered oncoming trees and then a huge flash of white.

The hitchhiker's last words were:

"Shit happens"

He was apparently very drunk and had wandered into the middle of the road. He saw the truck coming towards himself. He could have avoided

the truck if he had only walked out of the way. It didn't seem like he cared if he would live or die. All he did was tip his flask back.

The hitchhiker then stood outside Jack's window.

He tapped on the glass three times. Tap... tap... tap... Jack, although jittery, rolled down the window.

When the window unravelled it revealed the Grim Reaper.

The Grim Reaper was a skeleton draped in a cloak with scythe in hand. He was huge. His skeleton looked like it belonged to a giant, or a grizzly bear, or some other form of nightmare creature. The skull was too large to be human. His cloak was black, leathery and perfectly tailored to his overwhelming bag of bones. He looked menacing. Henry and Jack were deeply unnerved, as anyone would be.

Henry and Jack had a glimpse of the truck.

The truck was crashed into a tree next to the road on which Henry and Jack had first hit the hitchhiker. I don't know the name of the road. I know that the truck was approximately an hour away from Toronto, Canada, and that it was mid fall, 2008. The truck's high beam headlights were the road's only source of light save the stars and the moon. The hitchhiker was a smear of red that lasted three meters and consisted of bones, chunks, paste, and liquid. Part of the hitchhiker was still between the wheel and the truck. The windshield was covered in blood.

The Grim Reaper said,

"There was a stop sign that you missed. A man was in the middle of the road. You swerved, but hit him. He died. You crashed into a tree. You died.

You must come with me.”

The road that Henry and Jack were on wasn’t really a road at all.

Continue To Part Two