The Time That I Died

I remember the moment of impact. There was panic gushing through my veins as we watched the car in front of us abruptly halt. Then the divine experience of our car overcoming the oppressive law of friction, and indeed seaming to jump the rails of reality. We held our breath, and this is the part I remember the best. Our old clunker, floating over the black ice like a ballerina, a graceful pirouette that seamed to stop time itself as the blizzard whirring around us slowed and then halted. Nature its self seamed to watch that car spin through those perfect hovering ice crystals. This was when we hit the unforgiving concrete of the median. We were going 40 miles an hour, the car didn’t have air bags, and my laptop just had to be open on my lap blasting the song “*Timebomb*” by The Old 97’s. The fact that me, my three roommates, AND my laptop survived that impact was miraculous. So miraculous in fact that what follows can be nothing other than the story of my death, ascent to heaven, and (even more amazing) return to earth and the life that I had known.

Now, I’m not a religious man, but the way we managed to hit that median just right, with the front corner of the car, so precisely in fact that the car was able to spin around and turn that head on collision into a picture perfect rear end collision, flattening virtually every inch of unimportant space that steal frame contained. At the very least this was highly suspect, but, at the time, this didn’t cross my mind. Which reminds me…

I stumbled out of the leaky corpse of that vehicle and into a nightmare. During the math I had somehow managed to give myself a head wound that was now gushing blood. My roommates were shouting each other hoarse.

Pat: “What did you do to my car!?”

Stevie: “I’m so sorry!”

Matt was just standing there and shaking his head. I know. Very provocative.

Cars continued to wiz down the Toronto highway. Noticing I was the only one of us who was hurt and might have a concussion, I quickly reached an even more alarming realization; I was the only one of us still thinking clearly and there was no way in this hell I was going to get these other men to listen to me long enough to explain that they needed to get on the median and watch for other cars that were now very likely to come crashing down upon us. I jumped on the median and joined in the shouting match, holding a damp sleeve to my oozing head. That was when my surprisingly rational mind came to an even more alarming conclusion. We were now stranded in the middle of nowhere, in a Canadian blizzard, worse I didn’t even know if our phones worked in this country, even worse I didn’t even know what fucking number to call. Do they even have 911 in Canada? And all the while, cars continued to wiz by to their potentially deadly destinations, and blood kept pumping out of my throbbing head.

Enter the first miracle, a police car mere meters from our crash had seen the accident and was swerving through traffic to make a road block for us with his car. Flares were thrown down and we were once more in a vehicle, safe and warm. And I was once again in the front seat of a car. My heart started senselessly picking up the pace as the burly officer handed me some napkins for the blood. He was a Canadian trooper and therefore extremely nice. Our conversation went something like this.

“Had a bit of an accident didn’tcha?”

“Ya”

“I’m so sorry man”, that was Stevie, he was the enthusiastic one of my roomies. He was also the one who crashed the car five minutes ago, which, coincidentally, hadn’t been his to crash.

“…” That was Pat, he was currently playing the part of the silent roommate, although, he normally had a great sense of humor, and yes, it was his car. There followed a long bit of silence interspersed with the officer talking jargon into his radio...

Eventually Pat spoke, “Sir, thank you so much for picking us up.” (echoed thanks from the rest of the vehicle) “So… what happens now?”

“Now I call a tow truck to clean this up, we follow it into the nearest town and I find a good place to leave you guys safe and sound.”

The look on Pat’s face could have defined the word forlorn “Any chance for the car?”

“Not likely, judging the amount of damage on that make and model. No that’ll definitely be a write off”. Then the officer turned to me, “now let’s see what we got here”. He gently drew my head closer to a light source. “That’s some gash there. You’ll definitely need some stitches and you may have gone and gotten yourself a concussion. “ He released me. ”Better see a doctor right away. You got health insurance?”

“Oh, no, no I don’t, not in Canada anyway.”

“Hmm, could be some bill”

“I don’t think I could afford it. I’ll have to wait till I get home to Colorado”

“Well, I’ll tell you what, if you can get a parent to pay for it, then just avoid hitting it again, have one of these other guys watch you, and I’ll see what I can find in my first aid kit to help you out.” At this point he’d followed the tow truck into some rinky dink local town and dropped us off at a Denny’s (I’d been staring at the road the whole drive, holding my breath like a schizophrenic, trying to prevent a crash by shear force of will every time we had to slow down).

The officer gave us his card, the tow truck company card, and some first aid supplies. He said, “I’ll try to make out in the report that it was an accident, didn’t seem like there was much you lot could have done. Don’t tell anyone I gave you all my first aid supplies because we’re not supposed to do that, and give me a call if you need anything else.” The cop drove off as we walked into the Denny’s sorrily towing the meager belongings we had saved.

The Denny’s was empty, of course it was, as I soon found out when we opened my laptop, we were in the middle of nowhere. Smack dab between Toronto and Montreal, our now impossible destination (seeming farther away then Eldorado). Why had we been making that six-hour drive in the first place? I thought about it, and then it all flooded back. We were on a road trip in search of the Canadian dream. It was the week after new years and we wanted to all go on one last adventure together before winter break ended and we all had to go our separate ways.

And here we were, stranded, in the middle of nowhere, in Canada. No Canadian dream, no money, in a Denny’s. Stevie used some of his wrestling know how to help me bandage up my head wound. Now that it was clean, I could get a better look at it. The gash was about an inch tall and half an inch wide right below my right eyebrow, not so bad, but I’d never drastically changed my physical appearance before and it would take some getting used to. Not to mention, I looked like a leper in that black hoody and white gauze. Stevie apologized again for something that wasn’t even his fault and I told him no to worry about it. Then we went back to the table.

The owner came out to our booth to ask if we were OK and heard our story. He instantly offered us a free booth, and got us some water. “You boys can stay here as long as you want, don’t have to order a thing.” He brushed aside our thanks “it is no problem, no problem at all” Then he started up a conversation with us about the stripper population of Montreal. I won’t go into the details, but it was probably one of the funniest conversations I have ever had with a stranger. By the time he left we were cracking jokes about our accident with a vengeance.

“You know what the worst part about it was? We had just filled up on gas” communal groans, “If we’d had the good sense to crash 10 minutes earlier, we’d have 40 dollars right now!”

The conversation turned towards what story I should tell everyone in America when they asked about my scar (I particularly liked one about a dangerously aggressive woman with a high healed shoe). And finally, with the balm of humor as our only defense, we finally turned to the most important subject of the evening: What the hell were we going to do next?

From this point to the next, it was a seemingly divine pull that found us on a bus to our intended destination, Montreal. Crashed car or not, it seamed we had no choice but to go.

You see, we had all called our parents for help getting home, and Pat’s father was the one who suggested the plan. Since we didn’t have enough money to take the bus back to the U.S., we were going to take the bus to Montreal and he’d meet us there. Then followed a long string of some of the nicest people I had ever met.

-The owner of the Denny’s who had offered us a free booth.

-The Denny’s employee who noticed we looked stressed and offered to smoke us down after her shift.

-The taxi driver who called up every friend he knew to try and find us a cheaper trip to Montreal (a failed, but exceedingly nice effort)

-The cashier at the bus terminal who held the bus for us specifically while we got our things in order.

And then we were on the bus, and once more off to Montreal.

It was a six-hour bus ride. The bus had Internet, which meant that we had six hours to find a very cheap place to stay in a city that didn’t speak English as its main language. We were looking at motels; They were all too expensive. The luminescent, unfeeling screen seamed to be reading us our verdict as the hours progressed.

Enter the second miracle. A gorgeous girl with short brown hair turned around in her seat. “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to eavesdrop, but you guys can totally stay at my place.” This single line made me smile so much I wanted to cry. It turned out that this girl was not only our salvation, and one of the nicest people I’d ever met. She was being all these things on one of the worst days of her life. She had just been dumped by her boyfriend while being brought to meet his family. She’d had to pretend everything was OK with them and then take the bus back with the guy. Worse, she still had feelings for him. She explained this whole complicated process over drinks at the local bar. We met her roommate the next day and they gave us a tour of the city. We were enjoying ourselves so much that we asked Pat’s dad if he could pick us up a day later. And then it hit me: We were staying in a city where every street was named after a saint. Ever since the accident everyone had been unbelievably kind to us. Miracle after miracle we had been drawn here, like metal to a magnet. And now we were in the city of angels. Statues of the majestic figures had been erected on almost every saint named intersection you could care to look at. And… I was happy. In the face of all the horror we had almost had to face and my own mauled appearance, I was happier than I had ever been before. So, I thought, is this what death was and we didn’t even know it? Was this heaven? Because if so, I was satisfied. These people, this entire country had risen to help us out in our time of need, and it meant more to me than the world.

As for the Canadian dream, this was it. At the exact moment of impact, when our journey had really begun, we had been destined to find it. We had actually been living it ever since. The dream is this: No matter how low you fall, no matter how desperate your straights become, there will be people to help you, people to give you a hand up when you fall. It wasn’t about money, it was about people. In the USA, if this had happened, there probably would have been people swarming to make money off our misfortune. But here the police, the students, the Denny’s Managers, even down to the cab drivers, they were all there to help. You need not fear the fall because there will always be someone to help, and that, is a beautiful thing.

It was only after leaving that amazing place and returning to Boulder that I knew I was alive. Indeed, that the whole experience had even happened. My roommates and me had said our goodbyes and gone our separate ways, but I was left with the most wonderful of souvenirs; A small scar on my forehead with an amazing story, and something even more special.

Now,

Whenever I’m in the passenger’s seat of a car,

My heart begins to race,

And I am reminded,

Of the time that I died,

And went to heaven.