

CHAPTER 2 - PONTIFICATION

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The problem with done is that you're not done done.

I'm a software engineer by day and we have a saying. It's not done unless it's done done. Haha, ok, so now you roll your eyes at me now? I told you my life was mundane. The idea behind done done is sure, you might be done with something, but if the task is still being worked, even if it's not you working on it, then it's not done done.

Sure, I was done, but I had to hope that there was work still left to be done. As long as breathe still filled my lungs I had to believe I wasn't done done. I knew though there wasn't a calvary coming, nor was there a lone hero that would come in and save the day. I knew this to be true, but I had to stall for as long as I could. It was hard, only because my mind wandered. I let it, only because I was out of ideas.

The steel of the pistol glimmered as it made it's way towards me. It of course couldn't speak but it did have this strange look of satisfaction. Knowing that it's soul purpose in it's inanimate life was to destroy, cause pain and eventually to cause death. It's wielder also intent on using the weapon for it's intended purpose.

I'm not afraid of death. In fact, this isn't the first time in my life death has come knocking on my door. It's just I don't know what I should be thinking about before dying. Wondering if you left the stove on or the garage door open just feels like a waste of time. Yet, if you think about it, it all feels like a waste of time.

As death was approaching all I could think about were my life's regrets. I shouldn't have gone to the college I had and wasted all that money. Why didn't I spend time doing things I loved instead of working so much? If I would've worked out more I probably would have had a much better social life. What could I have done differently to make her love me? Hell, to make her notice me? Did I leave my garage door open?

The thoughts running through my mind about dying are drastically different then the ones I had when I was a kid. When I was 10 years old my life changed. I was just your normal run of the mill kid who developed a huge lump under my arm. One day I'm playing with some buddies playing soccer in the yard and the next I'm in a small quiet doctor's office waiting on pins and needles for a doctor to enter the room and share the results of my blood work.

I remember my mother and father quietly reading their magazines as we were all huddled in a small room waiting for the doctor to return with all my lab results. The knob on the door turned and a few moments later my doctor came in with a rather large red office folder. Throwing it on the counter and leaning against it she began to speak.

What's amazing is how a word, a phrase or a simple sequence can change your life. I mean, really change it. I'm not talking a hot shower and a Diet Coke after a long day's work change your life but *really* change your life.

"I'm pregnant."

"I want a divorce."

"I'm sorry, Your *insert name of someone really important to you here* didn't make it through surgery."

I'm sure there are many things that could change ones life, but it's not all negative. Life can be amazing and there can be positive phrases or simple sequences that can change your life too.

"I love you".

"Will you marry me".

"1. 50. 34. 54. and the lucky power ball number is 7" as it just so happens to be your lucky lottery ticket numbers.

"I'm pregnant".

"You're hired".

As my doctor began to speak the phrase that was uttered that ended up changing my life was a simple four word phrase.

"Your son has cancer".

I didn't just have cancer. I had stage 4 Hodgkins lymphoma. I'd later learn it was on my lungs and in my blood and in my bones. I suppose the phrase wasn't spoken directly to me. It was to my parents but it was my life changing phrase too. As the air

slowly left the room, all I could remember going through my head was death. Cancer had always been a death sentence and in the small town I'm from nobody I knew who had cancer had survived.

As the man with the gun approached me there was a light knock on the door. He looked at the door and then to me. An angry smile showed his perfectly white teeth and before he rushed to the door he kicked me across my face leaving me to fall to the floor. My vision was fading in and out and I was doing everything I could do to fight from simply passing out.

"Alex, he knows, but he doesn't know everything" whispered the lady just a few feet away from me. "Don't fight it, just rest now."

"Who are you?" I mumbled.

A simple wink of her eye left me more confused than ever and with that my eyes closed and I fell unconscious. And to think, all of this started with a brick thrown into my car window just a few months ago.

I can't tell you where one goes when they fall unconscious. I can only tell you that wherever I was in unconscious land I woke up in a small room that was clearly in a doctors office waiting room. I had been here a thousand times before. Not only in real life, but in my countless nightmares too. People ask me all the time if I remember having cancer as a kid and the answer is always a resounding yes. Not because I remember every waking moment, but because the nightmares do not let you forget.

There are about 20-30 that I've had over the past 20 years. They are all exactly the same too. There isn't any variations to them, nor is there changes in their duration. They always start and stop at a certain point in time. I get to relive it all in perfect ultra 4k clarity whenever my mind finds it necessary.

The room was bright. I remember the placement of every tongue depressor, the box of gloves, the thermometer, the cuff that gets too tight over your bicep to count your heart beat and a stack of magazines in the corner. Nothing really strange or unusual here but for some reason this time it all felt different and I couldn't quite put my finger on it.

An older woman about 5'3 walked in with a large glowing smile on her face. Her long white coat was in pristine condition as her stethoscope hung around her neck. Her name badge read 'Dr. O'. The name of course was shortened, it stood for Olender.

Given she'd been at the hospital for so long everybody just called her Dr. O. Her hair, although dyed black, had grey hair throughout. It was short, neatly trimmed as if she had been in the military. Of course I knew she had been, in fact, the entire hospital was on a military base. My father being military meant that I'd get treatment on a military facility.

I reached out from the table to shake her hand as I always did. She grabbed it and shook. Her hand was massive, or perhaps it was just that as a 10 year old I was so tiny, but either way it was a confident shake. I'd only known her for a few weeks but she exuded confidence. She exuded hope and she had such an amazing attitude. When you are in a bad predicament, like having cancer, having hope and a good attitude is as good as the pills you pop.

"Alex" she said "There isn't much time, we need to get this done as quickly as possible so we can continue your treatment without delay. Take this."

She opened up her palm to reveal a small white pill.

"It's to help you fall asleep so we can perform the surgery. I don't want you to be awake for this and seeing as it's only outpatient you'll just need something for a short while."

I took it and swallowed. I didn't even need water. In the short time since my diagnosis I was already accustomed to swallowing a plethora of pills on an hourly basis. It got to a point where I could do it without much fanfare. Or a glass of water for that matter. This was also true for my blood being drawn. Every hour on the hour I'd get a prick in alternating arms as my blood would be sampled and sent off somewhere for evaluation.

I looked down at my arms and saw they were bruised incredibly badly. If you didn't know I was undergoing chemo, one might think I was on drugs. A lot of drugs.

"We can't even draw blood anymore your veins are so tender and weak. That's why we are putting in a pick line.

Do you know what a pick line is Alex?"

I nodded. It was a six inch tube they'd put in my arm with a bit of dangling rubber bits so that way I wouldn't have to get a needle stuck in my arm all the time. I would however have to care for it so it wouldn't get infected until a more permanent Broviac would be installed. As painful as that sounded, this was

actually a welcome relief. It means I could sleep through the night without interruptions while the nurses took samples of my blood and more importantly, it meant that incompetent nurses could no longer miss my veins while randomly stabbing me for blood.

About an hour passed and I had fallen asleep. Except I hadn't fallen asleep because of the pill I was given, I had fallen asleep due to boredom. Dr O came into my room, grabbed my arm and started to disinfect my arm to prepare for the procedure.

She removed her scalpel from her metal pan and began to make a small incision on my left arm. I wanted to open my eyes but I was so scared. It really did hurt but it wasn't too bad. I thought perhaps I'd say something, but then I wanted to be brave. That's all I kept hearing the past few weeks.

"Just be brave Alex. Just be brave".

She slowly pushed the tube into the incision she made. Blood was rushing out and within a few moments I could feel the bleeding subside. In just a few more minutes I could feel the tube slowly sliding up my arm. She began to suture the tube into place and then began to clean up the mess that was made. As she was cleaning up my incision there was a light knock on the door.

I kept my eyes shut.

I wanted so badly to just be brave. Sometimes being brave meant that the nurses would sneak popsicles to you in the middle of the night without anybody knowing. Being brave had it's perks.

In the thousand times I've had this nightmare, the door opens and then I wake up. End of nightmare, typically look around feeling my arms to ensure they were not in pain, then proceed into shivering as if I'd just woken up in the Arctic and yet somehow laying in a pool of my own sweat. Not this time. This time the reel kept spinning and the movie in my mind kept playing. I kept my eyes shut intent to see what would happen next. I could hear the door open.

Was this true? Did this really happen? Was I just envisioning this? Perhaps it was a story I had told my self repeatedly and even though it was a story it was my own falsely created reality?

"It's time" the man said.

"No it's not" responded Dr O. "He seems to be responding positively to the treatment in just the few weeks he's been on it. Now please, go away"

"You know this is short term." the man responded. "This can't last and you know it. Besides, you're giving him four times the recommended dosage of chemo that you'd give to an adult just to keep pace. God knows what you'll have to do with the radiation. It's a losing battle. Save your patient. Advance our research. Do the right thing doctor."

I cracked my eye open ever so slightly to see a man standing in the doorway wearing military fatigues and a beret. He sat a briefcase on the countertop next to the magazines, entered a passcode and opened it. There was a vial inside marked with a radio active designation. Chemotherapy is always marked radioactive or labeled with "This has been known to kill people in the state of California" warning label.

He picked up the vial and as he drew in the contents into the syringe it glowed a soft blue. He flicked it a few times and extended his arm as if waiting for Dr O to take the syringe.

After a brief pause, she did.

"He's going to die, you know this. Do the right thing doctor. Leave your findings in the GENISIS folder and return it to me at once" the man ordered and turned to leave the room.

I closed my eyes and I could hear the faint sobs coming from Dr. O. A few moments had passed, a few deep breathes and a few sniffles and into my arm flowed a warm rush of fluids entering my body.

Not a moment later the sleeping pill had kicked in and my world slowly faded to black.