



A Life without Significance Coming to a Meaningless End

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“Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Macbeth - Act V, Scene V

I never thought I would end up where my life had taken me. I suppose many people have shared that feeling with me and I am not unique in that respect. Granted I had never actually sat down and penned it all out or really even considered much beyond a few months or perhaps a couple of years. But suffice it to say that I had a vague image of where I thought I was going and who I thought I was going to be. The problem with thinking about the future is that it always seemed so far removed; some elusive finish line where I would be happier and smarter and more successful and more spiritually fulfilled. I never thought I would take the path I had taken, that I would see the things I had seen, do the things I had done, or hurt the people I had hurt. I never thought I would end up where my life has taken me. I remember my wife saying those words to me and being unable to console her because I felt the same way. I knew without her saying so that the problem, the problem for both of us, was me. She had wanted to be a professor since she was a little girl, full of aspirations. That was an aspiration she had achieved with stunning success. She loved her job and she was incredibly good at what she did. She had students who admired her and colleagues who respected her. She was so full of life and potential. She had also always wanted two children, a boy and a girl. We, in fact, had two beautiful children together, a boy and a girl, just like she had dreamed. I did not have to wonder about the cause for her unhappiness. Her beautiful and delicate spirit was being crushed under my weight and I was ashamed of myself. The thing is, I had not always been this version of myself. I was normal enough as child and despite the many years of abuse I had endured, I was a fairly normal adult. I was a compassionate man and a loving husband and father. The process of my psychological erosion was set into motion in my early twenties when I decided to study forensic science. Up until that point I was existing on a month by month basis. Finishing high school had created a directional vacuum for me with no clear way of filling the void. I had started taking

some general education classes at the local community college while I figured out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I didn't want to choose a career that I would spend the next several decades loathing. So I took my time. At long last, I finally decided in my early twenties that forensic science was for me. Many people said to me upon asking what I was going to school for that I would never make any money in that field. My response was always the same. I would say that I was not as concerned about making money as I was about having a job that I would enjoy going to for the rest of my life. It was a nice thought. The least I can say is that my intentions were good. As I sat listening to my wife speak and reflecting on my own life, my intentions in that distant point in the past didn't mean shit. Here I was, cold and aloof, unable to forge or maintain relationships, and unable to find joy in the small details that make up life. I would simply look on with an expression of blank detachment or perhaps cold curiosity, but never finding any purpose or pleasure. I had recovered slightly after I put the violence and gore associated with investigating crime scenes behind me, but it wasn't enough to make a considerable impact. Now I found myself stuck in a dead end job that hated as I tried to maneuver through a career change, unhappy and unstable. I had decided to go back to school to study information technology because I knew that I liked computers more than I liked people. One of the pleasures of being a crime scene investigator was that the dead didn't talk. There was never any awkward attempt at making small talk. The dead weren't rude. The dead didn't judge. My wife knew I was trying, but struggling as much now as I had then. She would often ask me if I would ever be the same, if I was ever coming back. She said to me once that the only reason she was staying with me was out of loyalty to the husband she loved and the tentative hope that he would come back to her one day. I felt low when I heard her say that. I felt like a monster and a failure. I felt very alone. But I had seen too many dead babies, too many children with bullet

holes, too many decomposing bodies melting away, too many heads blown to bits by various size firearms. I had been empathetic which made the problem much worse. It seemed as if I could feel the pain and fear and confusion still lingering in the atmosphere. I saw family members collapsing on the body bags of dead children and I felt their anguish. I remembered the details of every dead body I had ever seen. I was haunted day and night by an army of ghosts. I had to take drugs just to sleep. She didn't know things like the television show my son watched caused me to have flashbacks of a cherub like four year old girl. She had a backpack with the show's character on it. Almost every time my son had watched the show I saw her tiny body laid out on a table. I saw her soft hair matted with blood as I brushed it aside to photograph the bullet hole in her head. I kept things like that from her. I had seen a therapist and it didn't really help much. It didn't take the memories away. These were things that I just had to live with side by side. I knew my wife could never possibly understand what I had experienced but my sensitive nature had been fundamentally damaged. I was gone and might never come back. It wasn't easy living with the knowledge of what I had become, knowing what I used to be and what I had lost. They say no good deed goes unpunished. I thought I could be a voice for the dead, but the living and the dead cannot mingle and I paid the price. My lovely wife left me the day after my thirty-fifth birthday and took the children. I was devastated, of course, but showed very little outward expression of my feelings. She had held it together very well. So well, in fact, that I had not noticed anything out of the ordinary during my birthday celebration. We had eaten cake together and talked and took pictures. I had felt her drifting away from me for a long time but it still came as a complete surprise. As I sat in the dark and empty house we had once shared, my mind began to wander. There were so many memories. My life had slowly become an empty husk of those memories. I walked into our bedroom resolutely and sat down on the floor next to the small,

black safe under my nightstand. I pushed the rubber buttons on top, listening to them beep in response, and waited for the click of the lock. The small but heavy door popped open and I retrieved the 9 millimeter pistol waiting inside. Pressing the muzzle of the handgun firmly to my temple I promptly pulled the trigger. They say suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem but my problem seemed to be anything but temporary. I had soldiered on for a long time and I could go no further. I was spent. I knew exactly how to angle the shot for maximum effectiveness. I knew better having seen several suicides where someone had shot themselves in the head only to destroy the frontal cortex. Those poor souls survived as mere savages until they succumbed to exsanguination. But I knew to position the muzzle closer to the ear and I angled the shot to destroy the core of the brain which controlled the heartbeat and breathing. But head wounds bleed profusely. As long as I didn't completely botch the job and end up just shooting both of my eyes out with a shot too far forward on the temple, I should not have anything to worry about. The hammer dropped and struck the firing pin causing the cartridge inside the firearm to explode. The bullet pierced the right side of my skull. The hot gas that propelled the projectile forward poured into the entrance wound tearing the skin into a seared star shaped hole. The bullet continued deeper into the core of the brain at which point I lost consciousness. I did hear the sound of the gunshot if you're curious. Some people will say you do not hear it, but really, how would they know. I heard it, if only for the briefest moment. The hot gas followed the trajectory of the bullet and continued to expand. My right eye was forced forward out of the socket giving me a bug eyed look. The expansion of the hot gas caused my skull split in several places in the fashion on a watermelon dropped on the ground. However, my fractured skull was held in place by my scalp unlike a broken watermelon. At this point copious amounts of blood began to drain out of my nose and down my chest. My eardrums had ruptured and I was also

bleeding lightly from my ears. The hollow-point projectile mushroomed as it passed through my head. The bullet violently tore out of the left side of my skull. What seemed like several ounces of blood went airborne behind it, spattering the wall and leaving a dotted line across the carpet. The pistol flew from my now unconscious grip and hit the floor. The expended cartridge casing jammed sideways in the automatic ejection port causing a stovepipe jam due to the lack of force exerted against the recoil. My body went extremely rigid momentarily, then slumped forward before slowly tipping onto its left side. It seemed that about half the blood in my body proceeded to flow from the head wound, pooling on the floor around me. When everything went black I began to hear a loud tearing sound. It was similar to the sound one might hear when tearing a sheet of paper in half but much more amplified. I felt the sensation of being yanked forward by my chest. The blackness of unconsciousness gave way to a flash of brilliant lights and suddenly I could see again. My vision was crisp and clear. Colors were much more vibrant, almost cartoonish, and everything seemed to give off its own light. I could inexplicably see more dimensions of everything which was slightly confusing. It took some time until I realized I was hovering before my body. I looked down and surveyed the grotesque scene. The left side of my face was flat against the bloody carpet. The pool of blood had long since dried and was now black and cracked. My right eye was still protruding giving me the look of a pug but the eye was now opaque. The skin on my body was beginning to turn dark. I noticed there were flies in my nose and mouth. A yellow puddle had begun to form around my body as the fat was starting to liquefy and seep out onto the floor. I tried to move but I just kind of flailed my limbs about in the air. That didn't seem right. I thrashed about for a long time before giving up. I hung my head and just floated there in the middle of the room. I noticed through the bedroom window that the sun had changed position several times as I floated there. I had watched as the sun dipped beyond the

horizon and was surprised that the world didn't actually become darker. Everything was incandescent and there was an ambient light that seemed to penetrate everywhere. There were no dark corners, no shadows, and most definitely no night. I saw the sun set several times but it didn't feel as though much time had passed at all. As I floated there, occasionally thrashing wildly, I heard knocking at the front door. My body must have begun to smell so strongly that the neighbors could smell it by now. I guessed that it was probably the police performing a welfare check after the neighbors complained of the smell. It was hard to tell how much time had gone by. If the police were knocking at the door then it must have been at least several weeks. I looked down at my body. It was black and bloated. It had definitely been at least several weeks. Time was passing very differently. It seemed to have no meaning for me anymore and I was only vaguely aware of its passing when I was paying attention to the bedroom window. I still had not figured out how to get down. While I hung there, suspended in midair, I watched two police officers bury their noses into the crook of their elbows as they entered the room where what was left of my body lay. They cursed at the repugnant smell of my body's putrefaction and poked around the room a little. After spying the gun which lay near the corner of the room, a good two feet from my body, they gratefully backed out of the room. I heard one of them make a radio call as they headed back toward the front door and to what was no doubt refreshing outside air. I was amused to watch everything unfold. It was a break from the confusion and frustration of being, in effect, paralyzed. A young man with a camera was there the next moment. I'm not sure how much time had passed. He moved around the room taking photographs. He tried to maneuver around my body in order to get closer to the gun and slipped on the greasy carpet. He landed on his knees in the pool of goop surrounding my body. I felt bad for him. He only had my wet back to steady himself against as he regained his footing. He swore and left the room. I could

hear raucous laughter coming from outside. That was the last I saw of him. I'm sure he had come back to finish the job but I wasn't paying attention. I realized that unless I was paying attention, the living were like ghosts to me. They moved about unseen and unheard only occasionally drawing my attention to their movement and voices. What caught my attention now was that my body was being moved. The personnel from the Office of the Medical Examiner were better dressed for the occasion with white jumpsuits to protect against the body fluids. They placed a plastic bracelet around my body's ankle and rolled it into body bag. It was all terribly familiar. They wrote my name and a number on the side of the body bag and lifted it up onto a gurney. After they had wheeled my body out of the room and out the front door to where their white van would be waiting I noticed the two police officers talking near the doorway. "Did you see his fucking eyeball, man?" The one who was speaking used his hands to make a bulging gesture near his own eye. "I could barely make out his face," said the other one. "The dude was melting right into the floor." He paused and looked the thick pool of fluid still on the floor where my body had been. "I don't think I'll be able to eat for a week," he said finally looking away. The first one laughed a sinister laugh. "You'll get used to it." He clapped other one on the shoulder as they both turned and walked out of the room.

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