

You Are Going to Die

Someday, you are going to die. It's one of the simple facts of life. As everything else changes, the mountains grow old, the seasons shift, the rains start and stop around the world, and the flowers on the windowsill bloom and wither. This stays the same. You are going to die.

At some point in our lives, we have all wondered about the concept of death. When I was younger, I was curious about the dead, where they went and what they'd left behind. It wasn't until I was older, in my teenage years, that I thought about suicide, the idea that i could cause my own death. But I think at that age it would've been, if anything, for revenge. I wanted to tell the world how deeply it had made me suffer, show everyone what they had done in the hopes someone would feel sorry. I think at the time it was the only way I thought I could feel loved.

Suicidality resides on a spectrum. It ranges from occasional thoughts of death, to intrusive thoughts of taking one's own life, to an active intent to commit suicide, to finally both an intent and capability. I had been walking back and forth between intrusive thoughts and active intent for several years, but I can't remember a day when no became maybe, maybe became someday, and someday became soon. I don't think it's for revenge anymore.

It's been said countless times that the meaning of life is love, that we live to love and be loved, but if I'm honest, I don't think that's true. Or maybe it's just me. I don't think I grew up witnessing love in any way. When I was nine, my parents divorced, leaving my alcoholic mother a single parent to an only daughter. To me, "love" was my mom on the couch when I got home, in a blackout by 3pm. "Love" was the bottles she broke her teeth on that littered the kitchen sink

and the living room floor; it was the neighbor's screaming fights that spilled out onto their front lawn; it was high-school relationships that lasted only a handful of weeks. "Love" was the tears on my pillowcase from my high school friend when her boyfriend left her, and the blood on her floor I know will never truly wash out. It's not that I didn't believe in love, it's that I did. But love like this was all that I knew.

I've been working at the coffee shop over on 22nd for a few months now. It's fun sometimes to watch the regulars or listen to one-sided phone conversations as the leaves fall outside, coloring the world the shade of early October. Today, however, it's been raining. And pretty damned hard. The kind of rain where it bangs on the roof and doors and howls to be let in, people ducking through the low doorway with wet hair to escape the weather.

I used to love rain like this. Rain that unapologetically insists on being heard. It made me feel safer somehow, tucked away inside. I used to love the smell of the ground in its aftermath. Now I can only think of how terrible it'll be to walk home in sneakers. Whereas I might usually watch it for a while, today I turn away from the window, deliberately avoiding the knife rack as I head to the back to grab another load of coffee cakes. If I really try, I can avoid the thoughts, at least until I get home. Not here. I glance at the clock, which reads ten minutes till the end of my shift, and sigh.

I keep my head down against the rain as I walk home. My socks are soaked, and I'm miserable, freezing down to my bones. I refocus my eyes to the path to gain control of myself, but only succeed in making eye contact with my reflection in a still puddle under an awning. Since I've moved out, I've avoided mirrors just as much as the knives in the back room at work. Because when I see my eyes, all I see is my mother.

It's not like I'm grieving, it's not even like she's dead, but she's gone. Gone, and there's not anything I can do at this point to bring her back. I haven't spoken to her since I left, she hasn't been sober long enough to have meaningful or coherent conversation in months. I've given up trying to raise her as if she was my child and not the other way around, so I tear my gaze away from the puddle and fix it on the glowing white crosswalk sign above me as the wind continues to blow and my feet move, one in front of the other because that's all I can bear to do.

The wind picks up speed, blowing a mixture of shredded leaves and rain into the air, obscuring my sight for more than ten feet in front of my face. The 9pm October night is pitch dark, and my feet pick up speed til I'm halfway across the intersection. Then I notice another pair of eyes in my periphery. Two headlights break through the fog of debris in the wind, screaming louder than the weather as the driver hangs a sharp right turn, my body blending into the background of the storm. Before I can react, the space between the front bumper and my side closes, and the impact sends me flying.

My senses are in chaos. The first thing I'm aware of beside the pain is the cold, hard ground. I'm only vaguely aware of the flashing lights of the fire and rescue responders as they rush to where I am, my consciousness swirling in and out like waves on a beach, coming in and then pulling back again. The pressure of the asphalt gives way to the pressure of a stretcher as I'm moved to the back of the ambulance, where urgent and yelling voices place a mask over my face before everything just goes dark.

The first thing I hear is the music. Then each of my senses fades in, and I fully realize that I'm not on 22nd street anymore. There's a breeze through my hair, warmer than it should be in October. I look up, and suddenly realize where I am. It's the venue, the old cafe I spent every free Friday night of my late teenage years with my best friend, listening to her boyfriend play the

bass in his band on the makeshift stage. It smells the same: like old cigarettes, like gasoline from the station across the street, and the flowers that grew on the boulevard outside. It's just... missing something.

Then I find her in the crowd. She's heading towards me, not a day older than when I saw her last. My vision is sharp, sharper than a dream but the edges are faded like an old photograph. I look at her, and she's saying something but I cannot hear it. She laughs at me. Oh my god, she laughed at me and I can see the lines in her face and how her emotions settle in them like her makeup, and how I can see myself reflected in her eyes. She hands me the cup of gas station noodles we're sharing, and I down the broth, head thrown back so I can see the bottom of the paper cup. It tastes like summer. She pulls my hand and the cup falls to the floor as we stumble in front of the stage, and my body stutters at the movement of the dance but I let myself get lost in it. And she smiles, and all I can think of is how beautiful she never stopped being. Then I tilt my head back, and the stars outside swallow me whole.

The cotton of the stretcher is back beneath me, and I'm rolling, running through a long hallway. It feels like the nurses and EMTs are all shouting, they're shouting so damned loud and my head is splitting open right there and every thought I have is leaking onto the floor. It must be, there's no other way it could hurt this bad. Every breath feels like it is tearing my two lungs further and further apart in my chest. Then we pause to turn a corner at the end of the hallway and I fall through the stretcher and the floor and the earth, Alice chasing the white rabbit, and then I stop and open my eyes again.

There's a flower in front of me. It's a dark reddish pink, the color you can't pick because it's too expensive to grow. It's a window box flower, a look-but-don't-touch flower. Nevertheless, there's a boy attached to it, holding it at the stem. His hand is stained with dirt and some sort of

paint, grasping it tenderly and avoiding the leaves. He beams at me, and his bottom front tooth is missing. And the memory hits me like a slap. The neighbor boy, he was ten and brunette and completely and utterly in love with me, a girl just as young in a ponytail and overalls.

The boy looks nervously at his shoes, and I can see courage gathering in him. Maybe I'd liked him too, little fifth-grade me who just wanted to be loved, loved by someone who didn't have an obligation to care about me. And if anything, he might have been the first person to do so. To genuinely, unapologetically, love me on purpose. Even if it was through stolen flowers. I looked up from my feet to his eyes, and he met my gaze. "It's for you." No sooner than I reach out to accept it does the earth tilt again, and I fall back into a hospital room.

The voices are still so loud. People are moving in and out of the room I'm in, which I cannot see very well. The voices of the doctors are reaching me in fragments of "critical" and "trying" and I have lost so much blood my fingers are pale. And for a moment, the reality of the situation sinks in. As much as I wanted to die before, now that I'm faced with the very real possibility of death, it seems... terrifying. Then, the alarms of the machines around me pick up and I go under yet again.

This time, when I come to, I'm in my childhood bedroom. I stand back to check my surroundings and try to figure out which memory I'm holding residence in. Something isn't right, though. The furniture is rearranged strangely, all piled in a corner under a sheet. The stark white walls are bare, not filled with my old drawings. Then I hear a shuffling sound outside the door behind me. I swing around, and god it's her. It's really her. My mother. And I can see the light in her eyes before it left. She's sober, young, smiling, and holding two gallon buckets of light pink interior paint. She's looking at me, a tiny five-year-old girl in a room that feels so big and filled with possibilities, and I begin to cry. My mother drops the smile along with the cans of paint as she runs towards me. She folds me in her arms before asking me what's wrong. And there, in

my younger self, in my mother's arms, with the fresh memories of my friends, lovers, and family, it occurs to me that maybe the Romantics were right. Maybe it really is the little things. Maybe life doesn't need a special meaning to be worthwhile. But if it had one at all it would be this, this here and then and now. Maybe I didn't want to die. Maybe I just wanted to go home.

I lean deeper into my mother, pushing my little face into her neck, and trying to hold onto the body for her that I've created in my mind. The more I lean, the more the memory cannot hold me, and I slip. It's the strangest sensation, one of falling both down and asleep at the same time. I fall through my dream, deeper and deeper until I can see the hospital room, but my view isn't the back of the door and my scraped, pale fingers on the sheets anymore. It's me. On the bed. And I can hear a flatline.

They say that when you die, your hearing is the last sense to leave you. And I can feel it happening. I can't smell the sterility of the room anymore, or feel the sheets on my skin. My vision is fading, until all I'm aware of is the frantic sounds of the room.

"Manual defibrillation. Charge on 150."

I don't think I want to go. I want to stay, I want to sit in my apartment and eat gingersnaps and serve hot coffees to regulars and watch the clouds pass by again through the sky.

"Charged."

I want to paint, I want to cry, I want to laugh, I want to get sugar rushes and jump into cold water. I want to watch it snow, and trip and fall, and write.

“Ready. CLEAR.”

“Charge again on 200.”

I want to drive, I want to watch sunsets, I want to laugh and hold babies and blow out birthday candles and drink orange juice. I want to watch it rain. Why did I ever hate the rain? I am here, listening and dying and I would give every atom in my body just to see it rain.

“CLEAR.”

And my hearing, my last sense to go, slowly fades out.

I think there's something fundamentally unappreciated about what we have never known a lack of. Every single conscious and unconscious moment, we are alive. Painfully, miserably, joyfully, pleasurably – unmistakably – *alive*. And everyone is capable of wanting to leave until they are faced with the door. “I want to die” turns slowly into “I want to go home”, “I want to sleep”, “I want to read a book, or sit in the sun” – “I want to live.”

“Time of death: 11:32 P.M.”