

The Window

by

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You stare out the fortieth floor window of the meeting room. You stare at the building across the street, at the Sears Tower in the distance, at the cloudless blue sky behind everything.

Johnson drones on about projections from the head of the table.

You don't care about projections, or profit and loss statements, or even investor confidence indices. Instead, you devoutly wish a plague of seizures upon Johnson and all his kind. Or not. You find it difficult to care.

You stare out the window.

Johnson drones.

It occurs to you that there must have been a time when

you did care. Perhaps that caring time had seemed, at the time, like a happier time; but you cannot imagine -- here with your rear-end numb in your seat -- in what possible way it could have been happy. Your heart pumps indifference through your veins like thick, dirty oil.

And so, you decide.

You stand.

Johnson drones on about his new hyper-mathematical proof of the elastic nature of quantum foam, which is odd, since, although you are fairly certain that your company makes exfoliating bath foam, you are absolutely certain that it does not make hyper-mathematical quantum foam.

Lasky, however, to your right, and Rajiv, to your left, do not stop listening.

You shrug.

You do not care.

You take a running start and crash through the window. The double-paned, thermally sealed, floor-to-ceiling, unbreakable glass breaks.

You hang momentarily in mid-air, forty stories above the ground. The Sun reflects a thousand times off a thousand mirrored windows, like a thousand days passing all at once. And then gravity embraces you with an almost audible sigh.

You fall.

That is to say, you plunge headfirst to what will certainly be your certain death in an instantaneously decelerated lump of human meat on the sidewalk below. You squirt blood from a thousand cuts, the shards of window glass buried in your flesh quivering in the howling slipstream, scraping nerve-ends like a thousand cheese-graters.

You plummet. Your heart twists and writhes and flaps like a torn parachute. You become nothing but a runaway adrenal gland hurtling without brakes down rails of wind. You windmill your arms, tearing the air to rags around you. Your bloody red, shredded, 100% cotton shirt flutters from your forearms like shattered wings. The wind tears at your hair, flaps your eyelids against your eyeballs, batters your screams back down your throat like used vomit.

A spot on the sidewalk grows larger and larger.

You are just beginning to think that maybe this wasn't such a good idea when --

-- Your head jerks up. You suck in a sharp gasp of breath. Your eyes pop open. You wake up.

Johnson drones on about the virtues of various risk management strategies.

To your left, Rajiv twirls a quarter from finger to

finger, first left to right, then right to left, like a practicing magician. Perhaps he noticed you falling asleep; perhaps he didn't.

You do not care.

Johnson's monotone flattens with excitement as he refers you to Chart F, but he only succeeds in conveying a palpably counter-productive hypnotic ennui.

You do not care about Johnson's presentation. You do not care about Johnson. You do not care about Johnson's thoughts or analyses or dreams or feelings, or even whether he lives or dies.

You remember crashing through the window in search of that long ago, faraway time when you were happy. The memory recedes into the mists of indifference. Your life - - when you can generate the merest scintilla of a flicker of interest in it -- is little more than huge chunks of disappointment glued together with the spittle of frustration.

You stare out the window.

Johnson drones on about the religious symbolism of food preparation in the Canterbury Tales.

You do not care.

You stand up and sprint at the window, shatter it with a sound like the woodwind section of the Chicago Symphony

Orchestra being flattened by an L train. Pieces of broken glass explode around you, glinting in the sunlight like a halo of gold and diamonds. You dive into the canyon of skyscrapers.

That is to say, you plummet like the woodwind section of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra pitched out a window. You quickly accelerate towards the center of the Earth.

To dive or plummet -- that is the question.

The crucial difference lies tangled in the concept of free will. If you do indeed possess free will, then you will be able to stop the downward tendency of a dive; on the other hand, if you lack free will, then you will continue to plummet whether you want to or not.

Therefore, you flap your arms experimentally and think very hard thoughts about stopping; but, of course, you do not stop. You always suspected that this free-will thing was nothing but a load of horse manure. Regrettably, the confirmation of your suspicions does not bring you any satisfaction.

You continue to plummet, a thrashing lump of human meat that has spent decades kidding itself that it's in control of its own destiny, when in reality it is apparently pre-destined to become a catastrophically re-arranged lump of human meat twitching upon contact with the

sidewalk.

Perhaps, far above, Johnson has leapt after you, but you do not care.

You plummet.

You suddenly realize that the popular conception of Death as a skeletally spectral figure, caped and hooded, shrouded in an aura of dread and mystery, wielding a scythe, is wrong. Death is, instead, a sidewalk.

Frankly, you consider the concept of Death incarnated as a sidewalk as a disappointment -- and a bit insulting. You might at least have hoped for some answers from a spectral figure -- enigmatic answers, perhaps, but tangible -- but a sidewalk?

How typically disappointing.

The tide of shadows rises up the sides of the buildings, slowly snuffing out the Sun's thousand reflections.

You do not want to die as a disassembled lump of human meat on the sidewalk. Perhaps -- just perhaps -- you do care after all.

You try to think even harder about not plummeting anymore.

The slipstream around you seems infinitesimally lessened. Somehow you grasp the hope that, at the last

possible second, you will save yourself, your out-spread arms will somehow transform into wings and seize the air, and you will then soar on sunlit spirals of updrafts into the blue sky, a lump of human meat no more.

The sidewalk rushes up to meet you -- slower, you think, perhaps just a little slower than before. If given time, you --

-- You snort. Your chin jerks up from your chest. Your eyes snap open. You wake up again.

Johnson drones on.

Rajiv twirls his quarter. Lasky sips water.

You simply cannot conceive how Horatio Alger forced himself to keep at it, day after day, week after week, year after year.

Johnson's words begin to blend with the low, ever-present hum of the ductwork. Whether this means that the machinery is becoming more Johnson-like, or that Johnson is becoming more duct-like, you do not know.

You stare out the window.

You suddenly realize that, as horribly sterile, pointless, immaterial and frustrating as your dreams are, they are still a damn sight better than Johnson on his best day.

Johnson drones on about the exciting opportunities

available in the current exchange rate.

You stand and rush at the window. You strike the glass at full speed, leading with your face.

The glass does not break.

You bounce off the window with a dull thud that reverberates through all your bones. The glass shivers, resonating with a low tone. You snort blood past the vicious pain in your nose. You blink. You stare out the window, at the building across the street, at the Sears Tower in the distance, at the blue cloudless sky behind everything. All of it hangs right in front of you.

You lurch forward again. You know the glass will break this time. You know it.

At the last moment, you fling your forehead at the window as hard as you can in your best imitation kung-fu, action-hero head-butt, whip-snapping your spine like a bullwhip in order to focus every last ounce of energy you can muster on --

-- CRACK.

The glass does not break.

You bounce off. You sway in front of the window, your inner ears like two gyros working against each other. A fiery pain spider webs across your forehead. Your stomach turns inside-out with queasiness.

You slam your face against the window again; you bash your face; you smash your face against the unbreakable, thermally sealed, double-paned glass.

You hear your forehead crack and crack again and again until the bone feels soft. Your teeth loosen in your gums. The bridge of your glasses slices into your nose. A lens pops out and falls to the floor. You do not care. You smack your face into the glass again and again and again.

It is all right there, right in front of you.

The glass does not break.

You catch your breath, sucking in air through your mouth. You drool blood down your chin.

You do not hear Johnson. You do not hear anyone.

Funny. They are the ones who seem stunned, but they don't know; they don't see; they don't feel; they don't understand; they don't think; they don't care.

You, on the other hand, pile-driving your head repeatedly into the unforgiving glass, seem perfectly lucid to yourself. In fact, you think you have never behaved in a more lucid manner in your entire life.

You take a deep breath and charge.

Your face cracks against the glass like a gunshot, and then again, and again -- crack, crack, crack -- as fast as a pistol being emptied in a panic -- crack, crack. Blood

splatters in a star-pattern on the window. A blurry image of your face appears on the glass in smeared blood, staring back lopsided at you as if it were hanging on just the other side of the glass, waiting for you to join it.

You ignore the pain, but your legs buckle. You collapse to your knees. You sway left, then right, a slow pendulum. Your glasses have broken off. The world is a blur, but you know that the building across the street is still there, along with the Sears Tower and the blue, blue sky.

You thud your face into the window with all your remaining strength. Your cheekbones shatter. Your front teeth break. You swallow the pieces like sharp aspirin. You pound your bloody, sledge-hammered, pulpy stump of a face against the window.

The window does not break.

You sag against the glass, which cools your skin. Your face squeaks along the window as you slide to the floor. You close your eyes. Your face goes splat on the carpet. The shag drives itself like a thousand needles into your wounds. You feel hands lift you, carry you. The feeling is nothing at all like flying.

You know for certain that you are going to lose this job, just like all the others.

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You do not care.

- The End -