

The Sign

The day to day monotony was beginning to make me doubt there was any real reason for my existence. My life was like one of those really annoying pop songs stuck on repeat, only my song was also out of tune. It was maddening. I ate, slept, and worked with the occasional trip to bathroom to liven things up. However, one day out of the blue while running on the hamster wheel of my existential wasteland, I came across a sign that would change the landscape of my life forever.

On the window of bus #22 was taped a tattered white sheet of paper with handwritten words in black permanent marker that simply read, "Become an Exorcist." At the bottom of the sign there was a phone number 1-800-555-2471 on little tags that could be torn off by interested consumers. Go ahead and laugh, I certainly did. What nonsensical hippy would be dumb enough to fall for such a ridiculous scam? Yet, inexplicably, I found myself tearing off one the tags and stuffing it into my jacket pocket where it remained completely forgotten for many months.

The seasons passed, and I kept on keeping on. I'm not what you would call a "go-getter." I scrape by doing only the bare minimum that I need to survive, preferring to fly under the radar. Yet, somehow, my performance did not go unnoticed by my employer. I realized this when September came, and the economy crapped out forcing my company to let go some of its lackluster employees, myself included.

The following weeks my life became even less thrilling than before. I would sit on my couch, massage my temples, and contemplate my waning severance package. My depression weighed on me heavily, making my thoughts thick like a dense, soupy fog. Miraculously, I managed to pluck out tidbits of ideas from this fog and put them together to formulate a plan to get me out of this rut. Not the plan of a sane person, mind you, but a plan nonetheless.

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Although the depression didn't evaporate with the formulation of the plan, I felt a small burst of energy that stemmed from the tiny bud hope that it offered me. I peeled myself off the sofa, brushed off the 3 days' worth of potato chip crumbs, and putting one foot in front of the other, made it the door. Opening the door, I became aware that it was uncharacteristically cold for October, so I begrudgingly grabbed my jacket and headed off into the city to set my newfound plan in motion.

As the chilly wind bit at my bare skin, I shoved my hands deep into my jacket pockets. Can you guess what I found? Well, you're probably wrong. I found used, wadded up tissues stiff from dried snot. I shoved the tissues back into my pockets and forced myself to focus on the task ahead. There was a light at the end of this dismal tunnel as long as I could just see my plan through to fruition. The trees wept their tears of red and gold on me as I made way through the dreary streets to the old Langston Bridge. I stood looking out over the frigid water of Langston River, the sun reflected off the ripples looking like a million star bursts. It would be a beautiful way to go, but before I could take the plunge, self-doubt sank in. Was it too cliché to jump off a bridge? I ultimately decided yes. Besides, with my luck, I probably get rescued before I could drown, but most certainly only after I had already broken my neck. Being paralyzed is the only thing that could make my life suck worse. I felt my heart sink a bit, but this was not a dead end, no pun intended. I wouldn't let this deter me from my plan. I just needed to do this one thing right. So, I kept moving. My next stop was Davis Gun and Rifle.

Entering the gun store, the attendant glanced up from his crossword expectantly, but disappointment shadowed his eyes when he saw me. "May I help you?" His voice was gravelly as if he spent the last 5 decades chain-smoking.

"I'm looking for a gun," I said.

He raised his eyebrows. "What kind of gun?" he asked.

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I knew absolutely nothing about guns. I shrugged. "A hand gun, I guess."

The gentleman just nodded and pulled out a variety of guns and rambled off their specs. It sounded like alphabet soup to me. He must have known that he lost me because after about a minute he stopped and said, "Don't know much about guns, do you?"

"Is it that obvious?" I replied sheepishly.

"How about you tell me what you want it for, and I'll lead you in the right direction."

Stunned by his question, I reflexively said, "self-defense." The clerk reached for a girly looking model. Visions of bullets bouncing around in my skull and being in a vegetative state ran through my mind, so I quickly added, "But I don't want something that will just slow a guy down, I want something powerful enough to take him out."

The clerk nodded. He looked at me coolly, knowingly. "I know exactly what you have in mind." I felt as though his eyes were piercing me. Could he know my plan? Am I that transparent? He pulled out a manly revolver from his case. "This is a Smith & Wesson .357 mag. It has a 4" barrel with seven shots and adjustable sites. Usually goes for about \$900, but it's your lucky day, because I will let this baby go for just \$800." He looked at the revolver affectionately. "This is what I carry when I'm in a revolver kind of mood."

"800?" I asked, as if I hadn't actually heard him. I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. I looked down at my hands nervously. "I think that is a little out of my price range. What can I get for about \$100?"

He chuckled. "A sling shot."

I exited the store even more down trodden than when I entered. I can't even afford to kill myself properly, I thought. I leaned against a light pole waiting for the light to change so I could

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cross the street. Cars passed by, their drivers oblivious to my existence. My eyes were burning from the tears that were threatening spill over, and not to mention all those damn leaves were aggravating my allergies. I reached down in my pocket and pulled out one the wadded tissues. As I blew my nose, I noticed a tiny slip of paper floating lazily to the ground. I moved to pick it up. It took me a moment to remember that silly little sign on the bus. "Become an Exorcist" it had said. I stared at the number for a while thinking of the absurdity of it all. Then something unexpected happened, I found myself smiling. It felt like I hadn't smiled in years. Then something came over me, I can't say what it was, but my smile turned into a giggle. Then the giggle transformed to a full laugh. It continued to build momentum and before long, I was in a full belly roll. The pressure of the laughing, with a little help from all the chips I had eaten earlier, caused me to fart. That escalated my laugh to an outrageous roar. Strangers were stopping to stare, and kids were pointing at me, but I didn't care. I hadn't felt this good in years. Everything was going to be okay. Life could be good again. The laughter continued until my sides ached and my eyes overflowed with tears. I guess that's why I didn't notice bus #22 before it was too late.