

The Lottery

Paul sat down at in his worn leather chair for what, in his mind, would be his last day of work ever. He enjoyed that thought. Over the past few months Paul constructed and followed through with a master plan that would get him out of his job, and much more, forever. He was very happy with the progress of his plan. He was borderline excited to go through with it - and excitement was something that Paul hadn't come close to feeling in a very long time.

Paul's plan was to take his own life. It was something he had thought about for a long time. It was something he had come close to, but he was never satisfied with the idea of doing anything without proper planning. So Paul decided that the best way to go about it was to systematically ready himself, in particular by diminishing his bank account to a flat zero dollars. He began this process by spending ruthlessly but after only a few days he was not happy with himself. He always knew himself to be a very fiscally responsible person, and ending the life of someone who was not him was not his objective. So Paul planned more meticulously and after creating a suicide-budget he came to the conclusion that his last instance of spending would fall on this particular day - a day which also happened to be his 46th birthday.

\$8.50 was what he had left in his account, the exact amount of a sandwich from his favorite deli which was local to his office. He thought it was perfect. So when lunchtime came around he had the sandwich delivered to the office. He sat alone, savoring it, with a smile on his face. This caught one co-worker's attention as he passed Paul's door, and he exclaimed "wow, when Paul is smiling you know it must be a good sandwich!". Paul nodded. It was a good sandwich.

Time seemed to slip into the future for Paul as he fulfilled his mundane tasks for ideally the last time. Soon enough he looked up at the clock yellowed with age in his office and saw it was 4:35 pm. With this he smirked, got up from his desk, and started to walk around the office. His plan was to admire anything he was leaving behind in this world, but frankly he found it hard to. Everything felt dull, lackluster, and frankly gray. He was happy to think about not seeing any of these objects again.

As he was doing this two co-workers busted into his mental space.

"Happy birthday, Paul!" yelled Charlie, a man who always seemed to have too much fun no matter what he was doing.

"We wanted to give you something before the day was over," explained Cheryl, who always looked like she was trying very hard to hide the fact that she was overweight.

Paul didn't expect this, and stumbled over his own thoughts for a moment, but then managed to say thank you.

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From behind his back Charlie revealed that he had bought Paul a bottle of Gentleman Jack. "We all chipped in to get you this bad boy," Charlie said.

"I told them all not to get that for you, on account of the fact that you have a little problem with booze," Cheryl chimed.

Paul smiled a bit. He had been trying hard not to touch alcohol for a while but he figured it would be nice to coupling the end of his life with a smooth whiskey. Paul thanked Charlie.

"And this is just a little something else." Cheryl passed Paul a red envelope with a card inside.

Paul opened the envelope and looked at the card. The front of it consisted on generic free-domain clipart of party balloons and the words "Happy Birthday" in comic sans. As he opened the card an index-card shaped object fell to the table. Paul looked at it.

"It's a scratch-off! Come on, play it now," Charlie squealed.

Paul took some time to register this. Nowhere in his master plan did he account for anyone being generous. This could be bad, but he thought what are the odds of me even winning anything? Worse comes to worse, I win two dollars and I'll stop at a 7/11 on my way home for a pack of gum.

Charlie passed him a quarter and slowly Paul began to scratch off the scratch-off. He watched the numbers that were revealed diligently and with each one he scratched slower and slower. He began to realize that he was wrong about the odds of him winning. Charlie watched over his shoulder and started to beam.

As Paul finished revealing all the numbers Charlie burst out. "Oh my god, can you believe this?!"

"What?" Cheryl asked.

"Paul just won a million dollars for life!"

That was the last thing Paul heard. His mind began to race. His master-plan was destroyed. Never did he account for winning a million dollars, no less a million dollars "for life" - a term which seemed nothing but cruel to him.

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Cheryl looked surprised. “Wow, Paul’s never won anything!”

Mentally, he was at the edge of a cliff embracing his ending. He was ready for it. He purposefully brought it on. And now, he felt as if he was suddenly pushed back hundreds of yards away from that edge. He could run as fast as he could, covering those yards, and dive off the cliff, but that was not what he wanted. That was not his plan.

“Happy birthday big man!” Charlie exclaimed. He slapped Paul’s back in a brutal show of congratulations and Paul teetered. The room spun as Paul was drowning in disbelief.

There’s no denying that a million dollars for life is a large sum of money. A person who is suffering might use that money to help them work through the suffering, like therapy and counseling, and ideally end it. But for Paul, a million dollars for life kept him away from ending his suffering.

He sunk back into his chair and stared at the dull walls. He didn’t have to work here any more with that kind of money, but there was no denying that if he quit now he would have to come back here at least once to fill out the proper paperwork. That morning Paul planned to never come back to this place again. Then another thought terrified Paul - he might even get a severance package, adding more money to the fund he tried so hard to drain. He rushed for the bottle of Gentleman Jack and took a swig. His co-workers danced around him with so much joy that it seemed they won the lottery - Paul certainly felt that he’d done anything but that. Between another swig he examined the bland, fat people he called his peers. Their dancing and joy seemed to mock him. His co-workers unknowingly basked in the irony that they destroyed Paul’s plan to kill himself.