

Chapter Zero

If something concludes without ever beginning, does it even exist at all? Or can something that never was still somehow cease to be? Can something only have an ending?

This story is not a story. It is but the briefest of thoughts, an unexpected, creative spark. The simple product of one free and impassioned night. Of penetrating thoughts releasing towards a receptive mind, and of a planting of words upon fertile white space. It was the smallest sliver of a idea that flared up only to be forthrightly snuffed out. An exercise in exploration, and nothing more. It has no continuation, no hope for finality or resolution, and will never grow into anything more. It exists only as a tiny testament unto itself, a concept without conception.

But is a story that isn't told still a story, or does its completion alone qualify its existence? Does its unwritten nature mean that it never was, and do the thoughts that formulate it count for nothing if it fails to reach fruition? Is this story's existence nullified?

Maybe.

Would this even count as a story at all? Stories have characters. They have plots and settings, themes and meaning. This has none of those. It's just you and me, reader and writer, conversing in this ambiguous empty womb.

If this fleeting idea had been given time to mature, however, and its grasping tendrils granted a chance to stretch out and fully take root, would it have become something more? Do we limit the formation of these narrative elements to our conscious mind and active involvement? Or rather, do we understand that with time and attention, with nurturing, contemplative care and the safe spaces we afford them, stories often blossom and grow on their own. Is it different for all of us? How many times have your breakthroughs and answered questions arrived through dreams?

This story is not a story. We can decide it's not. Pull the plug that leeches our mental space and energy and banish its existence from our minds. It's our mind, after all. We are the writers. We preside, decide, and we pronounce total judgment. But as we presume to sit as gods, determining which inklings we let live, and which ones die, how do we judge? By merit? Convenience? Potential or practicality? Could this beleaguered little glimmer have been allowed to continue if it had only been able to prove its worth? Did it possess some inherent, unredeemable defect...or was it just a bad time?

And as we convict the ideas we find unfit, do we dispel them so completely as to wipe away the totality of their existence entirely? Do we truly harbor that power? Why do so many unworthy, unwanted ghosts still lurk in the depths and corners of our minds, whispering of disembodied scenes and broken facets

of inspiration?

Every life has a story, but does every story have a life?

It depends on the definitions, and what we view life to be. But at some point, both life and stories must traverse across the line of existence and reality. We all must somehow reach the state of being alive. Can we trace that event back gradually until it's tiny enough to be considered nothing? Or is there still some small but definitive blip in the time-line that suggests life has begun? A moment when we realize that this idea in our mind is there, and is developing into a story.

If we look at ourselves, we can see these developing stories manifest clearly. Whether heroic or villainous, adventurous or seemingly mundane, long and arduous or regretfully brief. Each of these stories is one of a kind. They're uniquely our own, and even when these stories are cut tragically and shockingly short, it cannot be denied that their life's story still existed. But if they're cut off does that make them any less of a unique and exclusive story? What about when they're ended so early as to never even have started? Can the core concept of a story be considered not living? Is pre-life and unalive the same?

Every story has a life, but will every life have a story?

That's up to us to decide.

This story has become a story. After all, stories have characters. They have plots and settings, themes and meaning. This now has those things. Did I not evoke the image of you and

me, reader and writer, conversing in this ambiguous empty womb. It may not be a very good story, but can its existence be denied as anything other than what it is?

This story is a story, but it will never be told. Its allotted time is over, the night is at its end, and the time for its destruction draws near. Plenty of other projects and commitments scream for attention, loudly competing for priority in our already over-swamped minds, and this story has no voice.

This story is not a story, and therefore will be given no name. It will forever remain as it never was: Untitled. Incomplete. Unfinished. Yet over. Ended. Terminated. A paradoxical legacy.

How are we and our beloved projects any different from what this could've been, save that we were given a chance to live and grow and to scream our stories in the light of day? How are we different, save that we at least had a chapter one?

The End