

The Suicider (draft)

by Josh Cook

He woke up four hours later in his car in his garage with the worst headache of his life. He lurched out of the car and kicked over a basket of basil as he toddled towards the door to the house. He stopped and scooped the spilled basil back into the basket. It was 4:30pm. Wednesday. His car ran out of gas before the carbon monoxide killed him. Two months of suicide attempts. He was running out of ethical options.

He went into the house, sat down at the kitchen table, and took out his wallet. He had \$27. Not enough for a full tank of gas. "Well," he thought, "Been avoiding Drain-O. Horrible death. Works even if you puke though. Running out of ways that won't put anybody else at risk." He leaned back in his chair. "So much easier if I hadn't been arrested for that weed. And if I didn't faint every time I tried to cut myself. And this weak ass stomach" He slapped his hands down on the table and stood up. "Least it's a nice day. Walk to the store."

He put on his favorite baseball cap and opened the garage to let it air out. He took the recycling to the curb. He put on a clean shirt. As he walked back through the kitchen, he bent over and flipped up the loose hinge on the doorless oven. He left.

"And how are you today young man?" an elderly woman called to him from across the street. She was sitting in a rocking chair in a semi-enclosed porch next to a similar woman in a similar chair.

"Oh, you know, taking care of the basics," he said crossing the street. "How are you doing?"

"Oh, just fine. Just fine."

"And you, Betty, how are you?"

"On a day like this, who can complain?"

"It's true. How's Tim?"

"Like I would know. He never calls, never sends an email. He doesn't even use that whattayacallit,, that book thing, on the Internet..."

"Facebook."

"Right. He doesn't even use the Facebook."

"Is he still with the design firm?"

"Oh, yes. In fact, he just got a promotion."

"That's great. What's he doing now."

"He's now a, oh, it's one of those long titles, what is it Marjory?"

"A coordinator of something. Sounds like they just made it up. More managers and coordinators and chief thises and chief thats than people actually working these days. It's a wonder anything gets done."

"Oh. I remember. He's the Assistant Chief Coordinator of Creative Resources," Betty said, counting the title's component's on her fingers.

"See what I mean."

"Don't ask me what he does. He described it once, but even with him telling me I couldn't surmise what he did all day. But he's got a lot of responsibility and they gave him a raise, so that's good."

"That's great."

"Now all he needs is a girlfriend."

"He'll find someone. He's a good guy making good money. It's only a matter of time."

"Easy for you to say. You're not waiting for grandchildren."

"That's true. That's true. And how are the girls, Marjorie?"

"Oh, they're doing well. Husbands are good. Kids are good. Shiela is walking now."

"No kidding. Shiela is a toddler."

"I know. They grow up so fast. I really wish they lived closer. I only get to see them a couple of times a year."

"Well, it's not like there are a lot of jobs in the movie industry here."

"I know. I know. But still. I wish they would visit more. Just a weekend every now and again."

"Working as hard as they do, they'll have money and vacation time to travel more soon. Then you'll always have the grandkids underfoot."

"I hope so, but they found the time to go to Rome for a week last year."

"With the baby?"

"No, they left her with Tod. They just took the older kids."

"Can you blame them for taking the girls to see Rome?"

"No. I can't. I can't. I went in college and had a wonderful time. But is a weekend every now and then so hard?"

"You and Betty should rent an RV next summer. You could drive around and see everybody."

"Ha. Are you offering to drive?"

"I'll keep my calendar open."

They all chuckled.

"So what are you doing today?" Marjorie asked.

"Oh, not much. Just picking up a few things at the store, and since it's nice out, I figured I'd walk there."

"That's a good idea."

"Walking keeps you young."

"Both of you must be putting your miles in. You haven't aged a day since we met."

"Oh, that's sweet."

"Well, we have been getting out there, now, Marjorie."

"That's true. That's true."

"We started going to the mall this winter. They open early for people to go walking."

"It's nice. We saw George and Phyllis there a few times."

"Oh. That's great. How are they doing?"

"It was a few months ago, but they were doing OK."

"George is fading though."

"He is?"

"Yeah. You don't notice at first, but after a couple of minutes it shows."

"That's too bad."

"It is."

"How is Phyllis handling it?"

Betty and Marjorie shrugged.

"Is there a good way to handle it," Betty said. "I mean, this isn't something he can surmount."

"It's been a couple of months since we've seen them anyway. We haven't gone back to the mall since Spring."

"And they don't use the Facebook either."

"Well, give them my best when you see them again."

"We will. We will."

"I should get going. Many miles to go before I sleep and all that."

"OK, you have a good day then."

"You too. Good-bye, Betty."

"Bye-bye now."

"Bye, Marjorie."

He waved one more time over his shoulder as he walked away.
"Probably should have just driven into a tree. Not certain. Well."

Mrs. Dodman and her daughters were exiting the convenience store when he reached its parking lot.

"Good evening, Mrs. Dodman. Emily. Kate."

"Good evening. Girls, say good evening."

"Goodood eveninging."

"Did you walk here?" Mrs. Dodman asked.

"I did. I did. Beautiful day. I'm not so far, so I figured, why not right."

"I know. I wish I could walk more. I wish I could do a lot of things more. But with these two having to go back and forth across the city, and work, and things, like getting the roof shingled and everything, I just don't have the time. I'm lucky if I can get on the bike at home for half an hour on Saturdays."

"And where are you two dragging your mother around to?" he asked, bent over at the waist with his hands on his knees.

It took a moment.

"Emily goes to ballet on Hemlock St and I have clarinet by the Halal store."

"Wow, that sounds like fun. And are you going to be the next Benny Goodman?"

Kate shrugged bashfully.

He stood and said, "So things are going well with you?"

"Oh, they are, they are. The girls are doing very well in school and work is going well. Not too far behind on the bills. Can't really ask for much more than a extra week of vacation once in a while, if you know what I mean," she said and society chuckled.

He chuckled with her. "I do. I do. Mortimer doing well?"

"He's fine. We hardly seem to see each other though. He's been working crazy hours. But he thinks he might be up for a promotion so..."

"That's great. Maybe you'll get that extra week after all."

"Well, we'll see."

"I'll keep my fingers crossed."

"Thanks. Anyway, we should get going. Got to get dinner on the table."

"OK. It was nice to bump into you."

"Nice to see you too."

"And it's always lovely to see Kate...and Emily," he said bending over and shaking each girl's hand when he said her name.

"Say good-bye, girls."

"Goodood-byeeye."

"Have a good night."

"You too."

In the store, he looked through several aisles for drain cleaner before the cashier called to him.

"Look at this bastard. Too good to say 'hi' to me now."

"Tito! Hey sorry, man, I was off in my own little world," he said as he walked up to the counter. He reached over and clasped Tito's outstretched hand in an upright, bro-handshake.

"No problem, man. How goes the battle?"

"Oh, you know. You fight as hard as you can and then someone you've never met decides who won."

"Ain't that the truth."

"How bout you man?"

"Livin' the dream, you know."

"Tell me about it."

"No, really, man. I just got a raise here. Maria got a raise at the vet's. We can really pound way on our mortgage. Maybe even save up for like a trip or something. You know. Like Vegas. Or Atlantic City. Maria says she always wanted to go to D.C., which, you know, sounds cool, too."

"Man, Tito, you've got it made."

"I know. I should write one of those self-help books and make a million bucks. Just tell them to marry a girl who doesn't want kids and doesn't give a shit where she lives and the rest is easy. Pad the book with like, charts, and quotes, and bullshit."

"I don't know how you do it."

"Either I'm lucky or awesome and I don't give a shit which, you know what I'm saying."

He laughed. "You're a trip, man. Maria got a sister? Maybe it runs in the family."

"She's got like four of them, but they go for assholes with big cars and want to live in houses with, like, columns in front and shit. I got the only one from that family. You got to fish in other streams if you know what I mean."

"I know. I know. Hey man, I came in for some Drain-O. Where can find it?"

"Go back in time three weeks or wait a month."

"What?"

"There was a recall three weeks ago on Drain-O. I guess some real nasty shit got in it at a bunch of factories, which, like, how do you even know what the nasty shit is when you're talking about Drain-O, but I guess something got in, that, like, gave off these fumes or something. Couple of kids died out in California. Real sad."

"That's terrible."

"Yeah, but, what are you gonna do?"

"You got any other drain cleaners?"

"Naw, man. Funny story. All that shit's made in the same bunch of factories and they don't know which factories had the bad stuff, so all of it's been recalled."

"You're kidding."

"Nope. All that clog removal shit's been recalled. Have you tried a plunger?"

"Yeah."

"Maybe you could try one of those snake things, the thing that's metal with the handle, and is like--"

"Yeah, no, no, I know what you're talking about."

"It's going to be awhile on that chemical shit, so it's either that or a plumber."

"Yeah, no, it's a good idea. Yeah. I'll do that. You sell them?"

"Nope."

"Is there a hardware store nearby?"

"Well, there's one up over the hill."

"Passed the river?"

"YeahNo. Over in the other direction. By the highway. Shit. What's the name of that street?"

"Yeah. Now that you say it, I know what you're talking about. It's over near where you pick up UPS packages, when you're not going to be around, and it's one of those packages where you've got to sign for it, or they can't leave it on the porch or whatever."

"Yeah, that's right. Yeah, it's just another, like, two streets over. Just by where that old department store used to be, you know, that was around for like thirty years or whatever."

"No, yeah, I mean, that was gone before I moved here, but I know what you're talking about."

"Yeah, so there's a hardware store out there. You just take a left out of the parking lot, go to the light, take a right, and then, the turn before you get on the highway, you take that right. I don't think it's a light or anything. And then it's just up there a little ways."

"Yeah, I know where that is, there's a funeral home out there."

"Yeah, and like, a taxidermist or something weird like that."

"Yeah, I know exactly where that is."

"That'll be your best bet."

"Alright, thanks Tito."

"No problem man, I'll catch you later."

"Catch you later," he said as they shook hands again.

It was a long walk, but he got to the hardware store. He found the plumbers snake, grabbed it, and rushed towards the counter. "Why am I rushing," he thought. "Don't even know when the store closes. Just. Rushing."

"Excuse me," he said to a person in a logoed apron, "what time do you close?"

"Seven."

"And what time is it now?"

"Quarter past six, sir. Plenty of time."

"Thank you very much."

"Can I help you find anything?"

He checked the snake's price. "Um yeah, where is the rope?"

"All the way on that side of the store, against the back wall."

"Great. Thanks."

"You're welcome. Have a good evening."

"Thanks. You too."

He found the rope, but only had enough money for the snake and some cheap rope. "Came here for the snake," he thought, "Thinking

like a garrote, even if it breaks. Bad luck with rope so far. Even dad's army stuff broke. Though wire of some kind would be a garrote too. Probably can afford some of that. Might work even better than the snake. Don't want to explain things if I see person again. OK, snake and wire." He found the wire and brought the two items to the register.

"You're a lucky man," the cashier said.

"Oh yeah?"

"That's the last one."

"You know, I grabbed it so fast, I didn't even notice it. Must be that recall."

"Must be. Anyway, that'll be 13.72"

"Sure thi--" His wallet was not in his pocket. "I don't have my wallet."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I left it on the kitchen table. Shit."

"Bummer."

"Yeah. Alright. Well. Thanks anyway."

"You know, you could come back and pay tomorrow."

"Really?"

"Sure. I mean, if your toilet's clogged, your toilet's clogged. Can't let that sit around."

"Um. That's great of you, but it's just a sink drain. I can try a few other things. Someone with that clogged toilet should probably have this."

"Yeah."

"Anyway, thanks for the offer, that's really kind of you."

"No problem. Have a good day, and good luck with the drain."

"Thanks. You too."

He walked past the park, where there was a bench, facing a man-made pond that he'd always wanted to sit on. He sat on the bench.

He looked into the pond.

Then he walked home.

He walked through his unlocked door, brushed passed the curtain of broken ropes that hanged from a beam between the hallway and living room, stepped over the Twister board of vomit stains on his carpet, replaced the bleach and ammonia bottles back on the pile of empty bottles of household cleaners and other poisonous solvents, patted the lid to the aquarium where all the spiders he thought were brown recluses had died, and sat down on the couch. He considered his old tube TV.

He rearranged his furniture so he had more room and then dove headfirst at the TV. The entertainment center beneath the TV collapsed while he was in the air and he missed the TV with his head, striking it, instead with his paunch, which slowed him down enough to make his collision with the wall non-fatal. He sulked back to the couch and laid down.

He was falling asleep stretched out on the couch. "No point in going to bed," he thought. "Be more creative tomorrow."

