

The Time Everyone Disappeared

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The man woke up so suddenly his knees bumped into the surface of the wooden table. Through the window of his office he could make out the tips of buildings, vague in the foggy weather. He looked around for a few seconds, certain to have heard a baby laugh somewhere. Then he remembered and sank back into his leather chair, drowning in sorrow.

“There is no way in the whole world that could be possible,” the loner told himself in a strict voice. He used to use it when talking to his 3-year-old son. Actually, he could still remember the last time he had had the chance to employ it when Daniel was playing a small keyboard, a toy from his grandpa, too loudly for his dad to read the newspapers. So he applied the obvious solution and yelled at him. The memory now seemed as unreal as a dream.

He let a gleaming tear drop to the ground.

He stepped towards the open window and dispassionately realized it was his eighth day in the world of loneliness. He leaned out and stared at the pavement sixty six floors below. The settled idea of jumping crept into his mind like it did every single day since the catastrophe. The wealthy businessman pictured his wife’s kind smile in his mind, a smile he will never see again. He searched through all the moments they had shared, even the smallest things about her, like the way she had been tugging on her blonde curls when nervous and the depth of her aquamarine eyes. He breathed in, fantasizing about the way she smelled.

“No,” he whispered and leaned back from the hollow window frame. “She is gone now. Try to remember this, you idiot.”

The soliloquy has started as soon as they were gone. It occurred naturally and was probably the smartest thing he had done over those eight days for it was saving him from going insane.

He made a couple of long steps across the room, destroyed by his loss, and headed out for his everyday walk. He was in no hurry yet his legs, being used to speed walking, immediately picked up on a brisk speed. The idea that he had somewhere to go, even though it was bullshit, helped him nearly as much as talking to no-one did. But he was still unsure how long he can go without breaking.

He was walking down the street and the fact that it all looked the same was torturous. But there was no yelling of the taxi drivers, no bustle in the café. He started humming *Twinkle, twinkle, little star* out of tune just to scare the silence away.

It did not help one bit. It did not help him escape the craziness slowly creeping up on him.

Yet nothing did, really. Certainly not looking at the bus schedule, realizing no bus is ever coming, nor waiting for the green pedestrian to enlighten his way across a street. Anything you can possibly think of, he tried. He cried, he laughed, he smashed furniture. He listened to relaxing music, he set things on fire. He prayed. He yelled and blared at the silent buildings until his throat felt like he had drank hydrochloric acid. No improvement whatsoever. The only soul left in the deserted world has been asking God or anything out there powerful enough to help him the unthinkable - to get his old life back. For now it was nothing.

After what seemed like ten hours he returned to his office, exhausted and hungry. Since he moved here he had had no desire to eat anything. It was not worth it. He could easily go home and grab a Nutella jar or cook himself some bacon except that was not true. The first day of his loneliness he escaped the lunatic ictus by seconds and that was only because he convinced himself his family had gone for a walk and left him behind to rest. Since his mad run to the office building and up the stairs to the sixty sixth floor he had lost his intentions to ever head back home again, knowing that if he did, the memories, the feelings would kill him.

On the ninth day, he tried something new. He simply refused to let the idea of the catastrophe touch his mind. He went about his day the way he would have if people were around. He waited in the coffee line in the small kitchen even though there was no-one in front of him. He chatted and smiled at ghosts of his imagination. He ate and worked and phoned home just as he would any other day. This new method helped him develop a dam of refusal in his mind and let him do everything normally and effortlessly. The trouble of this new state came about at night.

His head flooded with pictures of happiness that now brought nothing but pain to him. He saw his Daniel's first birthday and his plump legs kicking in the cradle while he received his first teddy bear. Then the nightmare became even worse the businessman's mind throwing various situations at him, uncontrollably sincere in their message: *You should have been happier. You should have enjoyed this more. You should have been more grateful.* These scenes of boring meetings, unnecessary arguments and endless hours of numb unhappiness brought him to his knees. He spent the night crying names full of longing, only to be woken up by the sound of tears flushing down his face.

The tenth day began quietly as the last man on Earth gave the ceiling a desperate look, too tired to show any sign of irritation. He stood up, flexed his muscles and giggled at the thought of his own death.

"Woo-hoo!" he shouted at the city's silhouette, beautifully crafted by the sunbeams, appearing in his window. He made a few weak attempts of dance moves moving slowly but unhesitatingly towards the window edge. He froze and stared into the sixty six floors of nothingness below him. A tiny part of his mind was still conscious of his actions and it fought desperately to overpower the unstoppable wave of chaos. The man on the verge of insanity took the step forward and was caught in midair by a strong masculine hand.

Being pulled up through his office window he hardly recognized what was happening. As more homo sapiens poured into the room and congratulated the loner the only reaction he could manage was to keep asking for his wife and his little Daniel. Then he saw them, safe and sound, and all of his worries melted off of him in the wild hug and the loudest laughter that was ever to be heard. That is why, if you look at any

photo of *Joseph Godling, The Man Who Survived A Drastic Science Experiment* you see a man laughing his head off with his eyes glistening holding his hand around a beautiful young lady with a baby boy.