

That Which Does Not Kill You (Only Postpones The Inevitable)

by Stephen Heger

Harold Smithe awoke that Tuesday morning precisely at 6 am. He did this every day for as long as he could remember. Even on the weekends when his schedule varied. Well, varied slightly. He lay in bed trying to wake up and mulled over the things he needed to accomplish for the day. How to make those goals come to fruition. Harold felt he was doing extremely well for a single guy of twenty-seven.

After a quick shower it was time for breakfast. Oatmeal, four fresh strawberries, two egg whites and a cup of decaf. All organic, naturally sourced and in eco-friendly packaging. His doctor had told him that he really needed to watch what he ate and what would happen if he didn't. Heart disease, high cholesterol, hyper-tension, diabetes, and numerous other illnesses he was sure he never wanted to have. With the last sip of his coffee he downed his multi-vitamin, Adderall, and half a Xanax.

He got dressed in his navy blue suit and blue grey striped tie. One of two colors of tie he was allowed to wear to his job. The other being a grey blue striped tie. The latter tie having thicker blue stripes than the other which had thicker grey stripes. What was available to wear and other guidelines were strictly laid out in the employees handbook. The handbook also covered facial hair, shoe color, skirt length, jewelry, tattoos, and expectations of the company. On the back of the handbook were the lyrics to a song actually written by one of the employees expressing how wonderful and giving the company was. He briefly wondered what would compel someone to

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even get tattoos. Did they not realize what the career damaging potential for something like that could be?

Harold checked his watch as he stepped outside of his town-home. Exactly seven-fifteen. Like the day before and just like tomorrow will be. He turned, locked the door and then briefly scanned his street. His town-home was a very safe shade of taupe that was called Evening Serenade. Every fourth house from the start to the end on the cul-de-sac was Evening Serenade. Tucked in between were houses painted an equally safe color with exotic names that belied their timidity. Rustic Fire, Tuscan Sunset, and Morning Frost. The trim matched every house perfectly with its slight variance in hues.

He had chosen the Contemporary Colonial floor plan for his town-home. So had one third of everyone else that had moved into the community in that there were only three choices. But it was at least his choice. A decision it had taken months for Harold to finally come to due to the amount of factors involved. The most important being 'which one was him'?. Which one of the three expressed his individuality? In the end he felt that he had chosen the right one. One that when his friends and neighbors would walk up, they knew it was simply an extension of him. Of Harold. Strangers would have a good sense of him before he even opened the door. All this even though he had only ever spoke to one neighbor and that was accidentally while getting the mail.

He walked to work which was only a quarter of a mile away. Very close to work. This subdivision relied on the work/home proximity as much as the company did. It was a symbiotic relationship. As he walked out of the subdivision he notice that every feature of the landscaping was immaculate. Precise. The HOA assured every one here of that. Harold lauded their efficiency.

Arrival at work occurred at exactly seven forty-five. This gave Harold ten minutes to make a quick stop to address any appearance

issues before arriving at his desk exactly five minutes prior to the strict work day start time (covered in the employee handbook).

Harold was good at his job. Something he wanted to be remembered for because that's what counts when all is said and done. He wanted his legacy to be a grand one and he also wanted to pass this on to his child. When he had time to have one. But first he would have to meet that special someone with the same values and principles, and, well, work ethic. But he had numbers to crunch, bottom lines to be met, and quotas to be fulfilled. In a few years he could think about settling down and finding a spouse. He could work on being fulfilled.

Every day during lunch he took a half mile walk. His doctor had advised him to do so and he found it a good time to think about things like his portfolio, listen to podcasts that could further his career and also catch up on any hot political issues he could bring up during small talk in the break room. He would then stop in the locally owned fair-trade cafe and have a veggie-burger with non-GMO tomatoes and gluten-free flat-bread along with a glass of complimentary water that was triple filtered. He knew this because they told him so.

After work he would go to the gym which was another perk of working for the company. His work-out regimen went as follows: cardio training on Monday, Tuesday was weight training, Wednesday he took off (the doctor had advised him to), hot-yoga on Thursday, and spinning on Friday. Staying in shape was a huge priority for him. He took pride in his diligence and his appearance. That and he never wanted to be fat. Never. Be. Fat. He shuddered at the thought. How could people let themselves get overweight he thought to himself. Something he'll never understand.

The evening consisted of coming home and engaging himself in social media. He engaged in several likes on Facebook but nothing with any actual opinions. His supervisors had made it quite clear

that the company checked on how its employees carried themselves outside of the work environment (covered in the employee handbook) and he didn't want anything to get in the way of his upward mobility. Just in case they checked he had 'liked' a funny cat and dog video, the trending topic of the day, and one that was a middle-of-the road America is Great article. His status read 'Had another great day at work. Feel lucky to have a job like I do.' A little drama on the television and news snippets for conversation fodder and it was time for bed.

That night, after masturbating to Kim Kardashians ass and an Ambien, he laid down in his eighteen hundred count sheets thinking about how absolutely wonderful he had it and he smiled. Not bad for twenty-seven he thought and mentally patted himself on the back. Jack Johnson serenaded him softly in the background as he faded off into the sleep of the dead.

Harold awoke that Wednesday morning precisely at 6 am. He did this every day for as long as he could remember. Even on the weekends when his schedule varied. Well, varied slightly. He lay in bed trying to wake up and mulled over the things he needed to accomplish for the day. How to make those goals come to fruition. Harold felt he was doing extremely well for a single guy of twenty-seven.

While stepping out of the shower, Harold slipped on the floor and cracked his skull on the side of the toilet and landed awkwardly causing his vertebrae to snap. He lay motionless on the cold floor, unable to move while his brain hemorrhaged at an alarmingly slow rate. Harold had forty three minutes before he lost consciousness to think about how much he really hated the color Evening Serenade as well as his job. That his life over the last ten years was a combination of a Nike commercial, Starbucks advertising, and a military recruiters promise. Told how to feel, dress, eat, and think. How to feel ashamed. Then he thought of what it would have been

like to paint and write. To sing and dance. To actually cut loose at least once. To have that wife and child he didn't have time for. To do the things he'll never be able to do. His final thought before his brain shut down was how much he missed the taste of bacon. Which he hadn't had in what seemed like forever. Because he was told by his doctor that he shouldn't. Then he died.

Epilogue:

Alex Gunderson stepped into the town home with the realtor and put his hands on his hips and looked around. Alex was still in his navy blue suit and grey (thick) and blue (thin) tie since he had just come from work. He thought how awesome this place was. How so him it was. The Colonial style and Evening Serenade was perfect. It reflected who he was and wanted to be. Wait until everyone at the company got a load of this. Not bad for a single guy of twenty-seven.

