

# **SUICIDE**

by Tom Fazekas

for my daughter

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1 – That Day

## 1.1

It is without doubt, debate, or discussion, that the left-turn is unquestionably the lowest point in the history of humanity. It is our Mariana Trench, if you will. And I'll thank the entire population of the United Kingdom not to put forth any argument to the contrary. Perhaps in that nonsensical language spoken across the pond they would say the right-turn is the lowest of our lows. I've never been, so I cannot say. But I have seen my share of lefts in my days, and so I can safely pose, unequivocally, that the left-turn is where humanity has truly bottomed out.

Have you ever really watched a left-turn? And I'm not talking about the vehicle itself, nor the wheel which turns it, or even the tires which propel it through the curve. Those aspects of this human debacle are not at fault, for they are simply responding to the instructions that have been given to them by one of us oh-so-magnificent creatures. It is us, the turners, if you will, that I refer to here, when I call out the left-turn for the blunder that it truly is.

And it's not the turning action we engage in which I point to. That is simply the motion required to accomplish the task at hand. Or hands. At ten and two please. Whether it be the preferred hand-over-hand rotation, the shimmy-shuffle-through, or the full-circle-crank movement, however the particular individual happens to get their vehicle to change direction is not what I intend to draw your attention to. That choice is yours to make, and provided you can succeed in setting off in a direction perpendicular to that from which you were travelling in previously, I salute you for your efforts.

No, it is not the physical act of turning left which disgusts me so, but rather the faces that we make as we embark upon our leftward journey.

Seriously. What the fuck is wrong with us?

Mouths wide open, tongues poking out to the side, heads tilted back. Eyes crossed. Or even worse, counter-crossed. Is that even a thing? That shouldn't be possible. And it wasn't, until we started turning left.

The vast amount of thought the human race puts into making a left-turn is incomprehensible. And the resulting impact it has on our faces? It would be hilarious if it wasn't so utterly depressing. We, as humans, have done such amazing things. From setting foot on the moon, to curing diseases that were once certain death-sentences, to enabling the entire world to connect at the click of a button. And yet, every time we pull forward into an intersection and wait for our opportunity to cross the path of oncoming traffic in order to set off on a new trajectory, we completely and utterly embarrass ourselves.

The next time you have the opportunity to observe the human specimen as he or she embarks on the exhilarating journey of the common left, take a good look at the face of your fellow traveler as they go

through their turning motion. You may laugh. And you may cry. And inevitably you may ask yourself, do I look like that?

1.2

“What are we, six cars back? Fuck. I’m gonna be here another twenty minutes.”

Tom shakes his head as the inevitability of the situation takes over him. Traffic at Yonge and Sheppard was pretty bad when it was good, and the local construction only served to enhance the experience. It was now undeniable, no amount of distorting his own perception of reality was going to change the facts. He was not going to be home five minutes ago, as he had promised Olivia before setting out to pick up Lincoln’s birthday cake.

“Whatever, we’ll be fine” he mutters to himself. The party was still two hours away, and most of the preparation had either already been taken care of, or had to wait until closer to the start time anyway. Who likes a sweaty cheese plate at a one-year old’s birthday party? No thanks. That stays in the fridge until no more than twenty minutes prior to guest arrival, and the same goes for the fruit. Vegetables can come out a little earlier, but chopping peppers takes what, ten minutes? Not even, because one of them had been used up at dinner last night, and he’d forgotten to buy an extra one when he went to pick up the cake. “Shit”. Oh well, he had bought a one-point-one kilogram bag of snack mix instead. Because that’s clearly thinking ahead.

The alternative was a two-hundred-and-seventy-two gram bag of snack mix (who comes up with these numbers anyway, fucking kings), and with forty-or-so people coming to the house that lesser quantity may not have sufficed. Is it a first world problem where one has to make the call between a bag of snack mix that most certainly would run out during the event, or a bag of snack mix so large that it could actually qualify as a weight in an aerobics class? Or could that problem be universal? “We haven’t had fresh water for two days, but for a buck more than the price of the small bag I got a bag of cheese sprinkled chips and pretzels so big that they actually put a warning on the packaging advising against attempting to consume the whole thing in a single sitting.” There’s probably someone out there saying that right now. Assuming of course that they have access to the wonder that is snack mix.

And sure enough, traffic wasn’t moving. Lots of horns though. Lots and lots of horns. What a brilliant idea it was to place a device that can communicate so effectively with the outside world directly in front of every driver on the planet, because people are always calm and rational when behind the wheel of their motorized vehicle. So let’s give them the audio version of a middle finger, shall we? That makes a lot of fucking sense.

Up ahead the advanced green came on for those north to west turning individuals that Tom currently found himself in the company of. But sure enough every eastbound individual who had patiently waited for their green a moment ago felt that this was their turn to transition from Sheppard W to Sheppard E. And so we have before us exhibit A, gridlock. Making the advanced green nearly as effective as saying “this is my last handful of snack mix” would be in about three hours. That stuff just ropes you in, which is yet another reason why the one-point-one kilogram bag made sense.

One car managed to sneak through on the tail end of the advanced green. Though perhaps to call it the tail end in this case was a generous use of the expression, as clearly the arrow had disappeared some time ago, and the left-turning traveler's southbound friends had already begun their journey through the intersection. But luckily they had their horns, and they did not fail to use them.

"I wonder what that guy's left-turn face looked like" Tom mused. It was only recently that he had picked up the habit of observing the left-turn face, and he quite enjoyed the sights he saw. People just couldn't help but make an ass out of themselves when turning left it seemed, and the degree of ass making only seemed to increase when the circumstances under which the left-turn was being made were less than ideal. Like, for example, pretending you still had the advanced green when the three lanes of opposing traffic clearly had already received their own green light. Those types of situations were the breeding ground for left-turn faces of truly ass-like quality.

"And what blessed luck is this? The front car has made its way into the intersection. The driver intends to turn left on the impending yellow! What a novel notion, something worth celebrating on this day of snack mix and birthday cake. Oh, and there's that kid too, I suppose. But in this moment it is the possibility that before a red appears in front of me that I will now only be four cars back. And that is what I will hold dear inside me, as I continue to wait for my turn to make my turn."

Sure enough the lead car sailed smoothly through the yellow. And the next car didn't even make an attempt. "Oh well" he said, "three more to go, and then it's all me."

### 1.3

Gridlock again, but not so bad this time. Two cars were able to make it through on the advanced green, with only slightly “S” like turning motions. That left one car in front of Tom, and it had pulled forward into the intersection. Not an appreciable enough amount to allow him entrance, but enough to indicate the driver’s intent of turning on that not too distant yellow. With any luck Tom could sausage-link himself through the intersection and be home no more than twenty minutes late.

But now the radio was playing some garbage, and that was unacceptable. And sure enough at that exact moment all the available stations had conspired against him, and so he was given the choice of which bad music to call his own. Twelve pre-set stations, and yet nothing to offer. But silence was even worse, which made turning the radio off a non-starter. The northbound gridlock had begun to show itself, and the northbound travelers had begun to inform each other of their opinions on the subject via the all so versatile language of the blaring horn. Even bad music would help to diminish the familiar sound of the weekend commuters telling each other where to stick it.

That said, the northbound gridlock not only brought the horns, it also indicated a change was coming. A change of green to yellow to be exact. Looking off to the right Tom could see evidence of this change approaching, where the little man had been replaced by the flashing hand and its associated countdown timer. Twenty-four more seconds until yellow, and with any luck (and just a little bit of tailgating) this intersection would be in his rear-view mirror, with only snack mix and birthday festivities ahead.

But inevitably luck was not on his side. For as the twenty-four second countdown expired, and the green departed giving way to yellow, the car in front of Tom stayed still. There was no southbound gridlock to speak of, and neither was there any late going pedestrians thinking that just because they had the right of way meant that they actually had the right of way. In fact, there were no obstacles of any kind preventing the car in front of him from advancing and carrying through with its intended left-turn. It simply sat there, for what appeared to be no reason at all.

As luck would have it, Tom knew what to do in this situation. For the same all-knowing creator who had bestowed a horn directly in front of every other driver on the road had been considerate enough to provide him with the same means to communicate with his fellow drivers. And Tom had never been shy to use his horn. He even understood the intricacy which separated the short “excuse me” beep from the longer “go fuck yourself asshole” beep. And on this day, given that he had one-point-one kilograms of snack mix in his possession, and that Lincoln had completed his first rotation around the Sun, and even perhaps because the driver in front of him had yet to do anything obscenely inconsiderate, he selected to employ the short beep.

But the car in front of him stayed still.

Tom looked up at this point and observed that the light was still yellow, though he knew it would not maintain that characteristic indefinitely. A left-turn on a red was something he was fully comfortable

with pursuing. But he could not proceed to make a left-turn on a red through a stationary vehicle. The laws of physics, and to a lesser extent the laws of the road, would not permit it. If he wanted to make this left before the east-to-west and west-to-east greens re-emerged then the driver of the car in front of him would have to do their part and initiate their own left-turn. And undoubtedly accompany it with their own left-turn face.

The short beep had not worked. But Tom felt that the longer beep was still not yet appropriate. In his twenty years of driving he had both given and gotten the longer beep on more than one occasion. And while he felt that it was more often than not well deserved, both when he was on the providing end as well as the receiving end, he felt that it should not be overused. Which is what had led him to discover the medium “what the fuck” beep as a healthy compromise between the short beep and the longer beep. It expressed more urgency than the short beep, without the offensiveness of the longer beep. And after considering the circumstances, Tom elected to deliver the medium beep in the hopes of remedying the situation.

But the car in front of him stayed still.

The light in front of him was now red. And this asshole was just sitting there, eighty percent of the way into the intersection, showing no signs that a left-turn would be initiated prior to the eastbound and westbound drivers receiving their green lights. Without the driver in front of him proceeding to make a left-turn there would be no opportunity for Tom to make a left-turn of his own. There were now only seconds left to change his fate, and avoid sitting through another red at this chosen intersection. But there was one hope left. And so Tom hit the horn with everything he had, and delivered the longer beep.

But the car in front of him stayed still.

“Seriously? What the fuck is this shit?”

With no westbound travelers waiting to turn left the eastbound travelers received not only an advanced green arrow but a flashing green as well. The car in the right most eastbound lane proceeded through the intersection first. And then all of a sudden the glow of the brake lights on the car in front of Tom disappeared, and with tires squealing the car took off, and proceeded to make the left-turn it could have made three beeps ago.

Even if he hadn’t been caught off guard by this act of irrational spontaneity, Tom doubted he could have made it through the intersection on the heels of the other car anyway. He was doomed to suffer another red light at Yonge and Sheppard.

“Fucking motherfucker! Who taught you how to make a left-turn anyway asshole? Get yourself and that bitch-ass left-turn face of yours the fuck out of here!”

#### 1.4

The day was warm going on hot, but not quite getting there. A perfect twenty-one degrees, or two-hundred-and-ninety-four in absolute terms. Clouds were visible, but at a minimum, only partially blocking out the sun, and rarely fully obscuring it. The wind was strong enough to provide a cooling breeze, but gentle enough to be unobtrusive. It was the epitome of the perfect spring day. The exact type of day one hopes for when a first birthday party is on the itinerary. Particularly because forty plus people is a bit much to entertain on the inside of the house, especially with half of them falling into that dreaded category of family.

And here he was, at the head of the line. The long and grueling wait was finally over. Another minute or so of eastbound and westbound traffic, then an advanced green, and Tom would be on his way. The day's bad luck, or at least the intersection's bad luck, was soon to be behind him.

"I suppose I might not get the advanced green, then I'd be held up for another minute while I wait for the yellow" Tom said to himself. At the same time he looked in the rear-view mirror to see that the line-up of his fellow left-turners had replenished itself as he had advanced to this most advantageous position. Tom had no intention of delaying any other travelers simply because he had waited extensively to arrive at this location. At the first opportunity he would hastily proceed through the intersection, permitting all those who chose to follow him with the ability to do the same when their own opportunity arose. For there were other birthdays to be celebrated, and he would not be the one to delay those celebrations longer than need be.

The Yonge and Sheppard centre occupied the first block north of Sheppard on the east side of Yonge. A two year revitalization of the mall (which was now nearly complete after only five years) had cut the width of the previously forty foot wide sidewalk down by half, turning what was once a nearly twenty foot wide strip of lovely outdoor concrete into a nearly fifteen foot wide strip of indoor shopping extravaganza. Though the dedicated street side patio for the Boston Pizza was not without its charm.

The Taco Bell at the north west corner of the intersection had a sign out front informing the world that the answer is always tacos. Perhaps we've been asking the wrong questions?

The remainder of the first block on the west side was made up of an assortment of bars and restaurants. No revitalization had been performed on the west side, so the sidewalk maintained its original thirty foot width. And perhaps to emphasize the point that grey was far more natural than green, not a tree or any other plant grew anywhere on the west side of Yonge in that first block north of Sheppard.

The first block was nearly flat, with perhaps the slightest incline as one headed north. The first light north of Sheppard was situated at the north end of the mall. The next light up was further down the road, making the second block roughly three times as long as the first. And from the first light to the second Yonge began to take on a far more noticeable incline. Nothing that would induce excessive perspiration, but enough that the eye could spot the grade as one looked northward.

Beyond that second light Yonge leveled off, though once again the change in inclination was subtle. It was just enough that as one sat on the south side of Sheppard looking north one could see what appeared to be a slight crest in the road at the second light up. The change in grade was slight, but it was just enough so that the viewer's line of sight impeded their ability to clearly see the ground level activity beyond that second light.

Thus from Tom's current vantage point he had a clear view of the first two blocks of Yonge street, and less so of anything north of that. Of course it was the Taco Bell ad that had peaked his interest, as perhaps there really was no question that could not be resolved with a taco. He found himself thinking about the Snack Mix again (which apparently had earned the status of capitalization as he had sat waiting for his chance to stuff his face with it), and wondered if perhaps between tacos and Snack Mix any challenge could be overcome. Given the present state of the world, Tom believed that was likely the case.

At the top of his field of vision on the west side of the street Tom noted a white van emerge from the domain which resided beyond the first two blocks north of Sheppard. The van was heading south. This fact on its own was less than intriguing, but there was an oddness to the position of the van that Tom's mind, in its haze of soon to be Snack Mix filled indulgence, could not quite reconcile with his perception of the road ahead. From where he was sitting the van appeared to be travelling in an area further west than the lanes of Yonge would normally allow.

At this point the van's existence had only entered the periphery of Tom's mental awareness. His mind was still focused primarily on the upcoming celebration, and his eyes diverted from the road momentarily to the box containing the birthday cake in the passenger seat beside him. The photo cake had become a staple for celebratory occasions ever since he had met Olivia, and this particular cake sported a photo of a three-month old Lincoln propped up on top of a stovepipe hat at the Lincoln memorial. A fantastic moment in history, if ever there was one.

When Tom looked back up he glanced to his right, to observe that the orange flashing hand was informing the eastbound pedestrians that their opportunity to cross Yonge was running out. With only twenty-four orange seconds to go it was either get a move on or hang tight for the walking class. It was also nearly his moment to leave Yonge and Sheppard behind and head into the sunshine of Lincoln's birthday party, where one-point-one kilograms of Snack Mix awaited his undivided attention.

Tom did not look left when he observed that blinking indication of an impending change in the directional flow of traffic at the intersection of Yonge and Sheppard. Had he done so he would have noticed a group of six individuals, likely a family given their respective ages and similar physical characteristics. He may have also noticed that one of the children had initially begun to walk east across Yonge on the south side of Sheppard, only to be thwarted by her mother's hand pulling her back, presumably along with the message that they would all cross together on the next light.

Where Tom looked after observing the orange flashing hand on the east side of Yonge was back to the north. For the moment the van's existence still resided strictly in the periphery of his mind, but as the mind often exhumes abstract notions from the elements that exist in its outer boundaries, a thought suddenly passed through Tom's subconscious. It appeared that the van had run a red, as the second light north of Sheppard was most certainly in the red position, or at least it was in the northbound direction. That fact on its own did not preclude that a red had been run by a southbound traveler, but the van's fellow southbound travelers appeared not to be moving through the intersection with the van. They remained lined up on the north side of the second intersection north of Sheppard.

Thus all the information that was available to him in that moment implied that the van had run a red, and that it was travelling further to the west than the lanes of Yonge would allow. Where Tom sat at the intersection Yonge was three lanes wide in each direction. There were three cars lined up waiting to proceed south along Yonge at the second intersection north of Sheppard, and the van had passed through the intersection further to the west than where those three cars were located. Tom could not recall if Yonge widened to four lanes north of Sheppard, but he didn't think so. Which meant the van was not driving on the road.

Suddenly the van swerved, colliding with what appeared to be a person, and then what appeared to be a person disappeared from view.

The van continued to head south.

1.5

The event happened so quickly, and was not only so unexpected but was also so far beyond what Tom considered to be included in the realm of possibility, that his mind's initial reaction was to suggest that it hadn't actually happened at all.

The only explanation for the van's position was that it was on the sidewalk. Tom could accept that. But people don't drive on the sidewalk and intentionally hit people. You drive on the sidewalk because some obstacle, more often than not another driver who has decided to take it upon themselves to be an asshole, is preventing you from advancing in your chosen direction along a more typical thoroughfare. Everyone knows that. So when you're driving on the sidewalk you don't suddenly swerve your vehicle to hit someone. If anything you would suddenly swerve your vehicle to avoid hitting someone, since for some reason pedestrians have this unfounded belief that they own the sidewalk, and so it's up to the responsible driver to avoid them when they have already been burdened with resorting to the sidewalk to avoid whatever obstacle has driven them from the road.

So it couldn't be that this van had intentionally hit a person. It just couldn't be. Tom's mind had made up its mind that what he had initially thought he saw had simply not happened. The van had not hit someone, and that was a fact.

And then the van hit someone else.

1.6

Things are often not what they appear to be. And that is the truth. It is undeniable.

But when things appear to be exactly what they are no amount of denial can make them into anything else. And as reluctant as he was to admit it, Tom's mind could not deny the realization that he was most certainly observing a situation that fell into the second of those two categories.

One amazing thing about the mind, or so it seemed to him at that moment, was the speed at which it could convey information that its host didn't want to have. Under ordinary circumstances Tom believed his mind's version of warp speed was the equivalent of a snail's pace. For example, it was not that long ago that he had stood in aisle four at his local grocer's holding up a one-point-one kilogram bag of Snack Mix in one hand and a nine-hundred-and-fifty gram bag of white cheddar popcorn in the other for almost three minutes while debating the intrinsic value of each. He hadn't put much thought into what he had been thinking at the time, but if he'd been asked after-the-fact to describe his thought process during those three minutes he expected that he would have said something to the effect of "cheese on pretzels, or cheese on popcorn". That type of insight was typically the level of depth he had come to expect from himself.

And yet now, sitting as a spectator in what was easily the most bizarre, unpleasant, horrific, and downright fucked up thing that he had ever witnessed, Tom's mind couldn't seem to stop sharing information with him. It was as though the more he didn't want to be there, the more his mind was determined for him to become immersed in the situation. And as each new piece of information that his mind presented to him made everything about what he saw in front of him all the worse, all Tom's mind could do was to provide him with more and more details on what he was looking at, creating a downward spiral of self-inflicted misery through knowledge overload. It was the ultimate act of self-sabotage.

The light two blocks north of Sheppard was red. He knew this because the cars lined up on the north side of the intersection in the southbound lanes were stationary. That was a fact.

The van had travelled south through the intersection. The first fact meant that the van had run a red in order to do so. That was a fact.

The van was not driving on the road. It was further west than the three lanes of Yonge allowed for. This information meant that the van was driving on the sidewalk. That was a fact.

The van had swerved, and collided with what had appeared to be a person, and then what had appeared to be a person had disappeared. If all he had to work with was the three prior facts then he would have disputed whether this piece of information was indeed a fact. Without the ability to see the person that the van had allegedly hit one could not say with certainty that the van had in fact hit anyone.

But the van had continued heading south. That was a fact.

And then the van had hit someone else. The second person Tom saw the van hit was struck by the driver's side of the front of the van, unlike the first person, who had (allegedly) been struck by the passenger's side of the front of the van. Thus there was no van blocking his view of the second victim. That person had been struck. And collapsed. Hard. That was a fact.

This last fact had effectively settled the debate over whether the van had hit the first person, as the idea that no collision had occurred if there was no observable post-collision evidence suddenly carried a lot less weight when there was a second body sprawled on the ground some fifty metres away from the spot of the alleged first collision. When all the established facts were considered the lack of an observable victim following the occurrence of the first collision could no longer be used to support the position that the first collision was not a fact. And so the first collision had indeed happened. That was a fact.

All this information. None of it wanted. And yet that was just the headline, what someone would hear on the news later that day from someone who had shown up well after this carnage had concluded. If Tom's mind had chosen to simply share these facts with him it would have been sickening enough. But there was so much more information to share, and Tom's mind had decided not to spare him a single detail.

While the west side of Yonge was descending into chaos, the east side of Yonge was thus far being mercifully spared. A couple stood at the south-east corner of the intersection two blocks north of Sheppard, waiting for the little walking man to show up and invite them to continue on their way. He stood nearly a head taller than her, though she likely outweighed him. They held hands, and while the rest of her was anything but small her hands were unquestionably petite. A black backpack on his back was not quite zipped up, and what may have been the cap of a thermos was poking through the opening. And while Tom had not observed the exact timing when their gaze had shifted to the west side of Yonge, a bit south of their current position, he suspected that what had drawn their attention to that location was the sound of the van swerving, or worse yet the sound of it colliding with what it had swerved into. Their hands had separated, her eyes had gone wide, and he was beginning to point in that direction. His lips mouthed "oh god" as his hand course corrected from its initially intended pointing gesture and instead reached around to the back of her head to pull her face away from what should not be seen. He cradled her head into his chest and put his mouth to her ear, presumably to whisper something. Tom thought that "don't look" seemed like the right thing to both say and do in that particular moment.

Unfortunately, Tom failed to take his own advice.

About a hundred metres south of the intersection two blocks north of Yonge was a young girl, probably nineteen (or at least Tom hoped) walking on her own. Her top did not come down very low, and the waist of her shorts did not come up very high, with nothing but tan and tone in between. And while the

waist of her shorts did not come up very high, the bottom of her shorts came up incredibly high. Perhaps it was simply an attempt by the manufacturer to reduce their costs on materials, though Tom suspected the cost savings were not being passed through to the customer. Yet her boots rose to well above her knees, meaning that they covered far more of her body than the combined coverage she was achieving from the rest of her attire that day.

The headphones she wore were perhaps what had prevented her from hearing the first collision, but the second collision had occurred nearly directly across Yonge from where she stood. She turned her head to the left, and Tom saw her mouth drop at the same moment her hands came up to cover her face. It appeared as though her left hand had come up a little higher than she had anticipated, and in doing so she gave herself a quasi-uppercut, sending her upper body spinning clockwise. Meanwhile her feet were trying to back away as far as they could get her from what was happening a bit more than six lanes of Yonge street away, and with all these non-congruent motions happening simultaneously she stumbled. A public waste receptacle strategically placed three or four feet behind her managed to save her from what could have been a nasty fall, though in her desperate attempt to remain upright she had flailed her arms, and landed her right hand almost elbow deep into its contents.

A group of four people were headed into the Japanese restaurant situated just to the north of the young girl at the same time as two groups of two were attempting to exit it. The doorway was narrow, and since the rules governing the right of way for civilians passing through public entranceways had not yet been passed into law, confusion arose between the groups as to who should proceed first. They appeared to be caught in a standstill, with both sides being too polite to block the other's way as well as too directionally inclined to step aside and allow the other's passage. With all their various options to consider it was understandable that the events on the east side of Yonge had yet to register for them.

On either side of Yonge there were no trees, or greenery of any kind for that matter. Just the all-natural grey concrete that the modern city dwellers had determined to be not only easier on the eye but much more appealing for leaving gum, cigarette butts, and dog waste on. However, the island that separated the northbound traffic from the southbound traffic on Yonge between the first and second intersections north of Sheppard had several trees on it. Or three trees, to be exact. Three could qualify as several. Somewhere. Maybe.

Towards the top of the southernmost tree sat a blue jay, with what appeared to be the yellow strip one would use to remove the cellophane from a pack of cigarettes tangled between the toes of one of its feet. It appeared to be non-flummoxed by the ribbon, nor by the events taking place slightly to the north and west of it.

At the north-west corner of the first intersection north of Yonge and Sheppard was a woman with two small children, a boy and a girl. Tom never saw the woman's face, as she was currently progressing in a northerly direction, and hence had her back to him. Her hair was perfectly straight, fell to the small of her back, and had been cut so that each strand reached down to the exact same point as all the others. Her sandals were so lithe that her feet were barely an eighth of an inch from the ground.

The boy wore cut-off jean shorts and a multi coloured striped shirt. Horizontal, not vertical. He walked in between the woman and the girl, and held one of their hands in each of his own. The girl was roughly half the woman's height, and stood almost three inches above the boy. Her hair would have been an exact match to the woman's, except she had likely not put the same level of prep time into it, and hence was sporting some visible frizz. Her shoes blinked red lights with each step she took, and with every other step she exaggerated the motion of her right hip just enough to give the boy a slight shove. To coincide with roughly every other hip check the girl gave to the boy the woman was periodically turning her head to the left to say something to the girl, though from where Tom sat the message appeared to be falling on deaf ears.

The trio was nearly two hundred metres south of the location of the second collision, and had yet to fully register what was happening in front of them. The van would travel another fifty metres in their direction before they would become actively aware of its existence.

Roughly twenty metres in front of the woman and the two children was an elderly gentleman, who was heading south. His walking was labored, and his gait was nearly cringe-worthy, but he did not use an assistance device of any kind. If he had ever attempted to go bald gracefully he had given up well before today's outing, as the patches of what hair he had were long and untamed. As Tom watched he stopped to light a cigarette, pulling a battered pack out of the breast pocket of his shirt with the speed and deliberateness of someone who had accepted their arthritis a long time ago. As he ducked his head to catch a spark a ray of sun bounced off a metallic circle that resided in his ear. Tom would never know for sure, but he suspected that hearing aid, and in particular its primary function of enhancing the user's ability to hear what was happening in front of them (which in principal would be optimal for an individual that was hard of hearing in every situation except when a van was about to run them down from behind), was the reason that the van's presence had so far gone unregistered by the old man.

There was a small parkette (or to be specific two stone benches) to the west of the sidewalk on the west side of this section of Yonge. A group of girls, tweenagers, or possibly even younger, occupied both of the benches, though none of the girls occupied a specific spot on either bench for very long. They all had their cell phones out, and were running around in a blur of excitement, showing each other what they had found which had peaked their interest so. Tom believed there were seven of them in total, but couldn't be sure as they didn't stay still long enough for him to determine if he was double counting or neglecting any of them from that tally. Their exuberance for each other would engulf their existence, and the life of their beings poured out into the world in an abundance of radiant energy. They were oblivious to the world around them, including the van.

In the first block north of Sheppard on the east side of Yonge a group of eight late-teenagers was slowly moving south. A lone female walked in the middle of the group, holding hands with one of the males but getting equally as much attention from the other six. Two of the boys appeared to be twins, and the matching outfits they wore emphasized their similarities even more. Another boy held a black bag, the contents of which could not be ascertained from Tom's position, though the bag had clearly captivated

the attention of the other members of the group. Tom watched as they continuously tried to obtain it from him, more often through force than negotiation. One of the suspected twins grabbed the hat off the head of the boy carrying the bag and appeared to run with it towards an entranceway of the Yonge and Sheppard centre. When the boy with the bag focused his attention in that direction the other twin tried to make a grab for the bag, only to get punched in the arm by the girl, as the guy she had been holding hands with succeeded in grabbing the bag and began running in circles around the group.

With all that happening it was no surprise that no member of this distinguished entourage had become aware of the existence of the van, and their lack of cognizance did not fall out-of-line with Tom's preconceived perception of their generation. His perception was only emboldened by the fact that one of them had a cell phone out to record their display of witticism, undoubtedly so they could all like each other's role in their own antics on one or more of the social platforms later that day.

Back on the west side of Yonge, maybe halfway between Sheppard and the first intersection to the north, there was a group of three girls in their late-twenties to early-thirties. They had stopped outside the local pub, and appeared to be discussing a matter of grave importance. One of the girls was pointing to the street level patio, where a couple was more than halfway through a pitcher of beer and not even close to that far through a plate of nachos, while a second girl was pointing towards the second level balcony, which for the moment was vacant. The third lady had a cell phone to her ear, and her head darted back and forth between her two companions, presumably waiting for a final decision to be made so that she would not supply inaccurate information to whoever was on the other end of the line. They stood in a crude triangle on the sidewalk, with the lady on the phone being the only one with any sort of northward facing position. As the other two were busy gesturing to each of their preferred seating sections, and the third only had eyes for where her companions hands were motioning, none of them had any idea of what was happening about two-hundred-and-fifty metres north of them. This was true of the couple on the patio as well, who had just finished refilling their glasses by draining the pitcher.

Approaching the north-west corner of Yonge and Sheppard from the west was a couple wearing matching tie-dye shirts. His hair was quite long, hers quite short, and both had an extra hole or two in their face when compared against the number they were provided with at birth. When they reached the intersection they began walking east across Yonge. Unlike the family at the south-west corner of Yonge and Sheppard (who at this point Tom still had not seen) they were not as concerned about crossing despite the message Mr. Flashy Orange Hand was attempting to convey. However, they did pick up the pace a little bit, allowing their hands to temporarily part ways as they got a move on so as to clear the intersection before Mr. Solid Orange Hand showed up. With their focus directed at the ever decreasing orange numbers, which were currently displaying a sixteen, the van's presence had yet to register for them.

The family on the south-west corner of Yonge and Sheppard continued to wait for the next light to make their way east across Yonge. They had not yet seen the van either.

1.7

Tom saw all of this, and the speed at which he absorbed it all was uncanny. He couldn't even recall the colour of the car that had taken its sweet time to get out of the intersection, delaying his own left-turn and resulting in him being a front row spectator for what was by far the worst abomination he had sat through in his entire life. It might have been five seconds since the van's initial swerve, and now he could see with crystal clarity into the lives (or at least into that moment of the lives) of thirty-seven people. Also, a bird.

"Fucking brain, always showing up when no one wants you around. And where were you when I needed you? Fucking nowhere! You could have made the call on Snack Mix in fifteen seconds, saved me a good two minutes in the grocery store, maybe even two and a half, and I could have been out of this intersection by now. But no, you had to let me analyze the platform on which cheese dust should reside extensively. And now look at this shit! I'm sitting here, watching the most awful thing that anyone could be asked to watch, and you've decided a rough sketch of this atrocity isn't good enough. You're going to give me every last detail, making absolutely certain that I don't miss a single nuance of the situation. Thanks brain, that's just awesome. You stupid fucking idiot."

There was a word for what he was seeing, in particular for what the van was doing, but of all the things his mind could provide to him that word was the one thing that would not come to the surface. Tom would later think that the absence of that word was not an "it's on the tip of my tongue" or an "I just couldn't put my finger on it" situation. Nor was it that he could not accept that what he was seeing fell under the umbrella of that word. The word just simply would not materialize, as though everything he saw which indicated that word was what was happening before him somehow put a mask over the word itself. It may have been his mind's last line of defense, a way to avoid a complete and total breakdown, by not allowing him to transition between the behavior pattern he would exhibit on any other day (though this day was now officially unlike any other) and the irrationality that would inevitably take hold when that word became a reality.

Just a word. But yet so much more.

Tom did a quick tally and realized that if there was any silver lining to this situation it was that he could see nineteen people on the east side of Yonge, and only eighteen on the west side. And two of those eighteen were in the process of making their way east across Yonge, bringing the ratio up to twenty-one east against sixteen west. It wasn't much, but it was something.

However, as Tom's gaze was focused to the north, that count excluded the six people on the south-west corner of Yonge and Sheppard, who he had yet to become aware of.

1.8

From that point onward things happened very quickly, though the images of what happened seemed to come to him slowly. It was the extremeness of the details that seemed to slow everything down, but that time lag was more than offset by the magnitude of what those details conveyed.

The van continued to head south, closing the gap between the older man and not far behind him the younger woman with the two children. There was currently no more than a hundred-and-fifty metres between the old man and the van. The van came within a few inches of a group of mailboxes and newspaper stands that stood roughly two feet in from Yonge. One of them was clipped by the driver side mirror, which then flew off the van with a loud pop. The mirror fell to the sidewalk and bounced slightly in the direction of the van, just enough for the van's rear bumper to knock it a good twenty to thirty feet into the southbound lanes of Yonge. The metal-on-metal noise of that deflection, as well as the scraping sound as the mirror headed into the lanes that the southbound travelers would begin to fill up at any moment, was what finally alerted the younger woman to the presence of the van. The older man still did not appear to be aware of it.

As she had not seen either of the two prior collisions her perception of the danger was strictly due to the van travelling on the sidewalk, with the level of perceived danger being somewhat heightened due to the speed at which it travelled. Luckily for her there was a waste disposal station located about three feet in from the west side of Yonge street, and only a few feet south of her current position on the sidewalk. She grabbed the two children with one hand each, and without turning her back to the van gently maneuvered them to a position that would allow the garbage cans to separate them from the van's path of advancement.

Other than the speed the van was travelling in, which seemed quite fast for a vehicle not currently travelling on the street itself, she did not seem terribly concerned about the van driving on the sidewalk. She had only become aware of the van just prior to re-positioning the children out of its path, and figured that perhaps it was a service technician who would park any second now and get out of the van to service whatever issue they had been summoned to address. Positioning herself on the opposing side of the waste receptacle from the van was merely a precaution. She almost laughed at herself for doing it.

Tom would never know whether the van's driver saw her shield herself and so decided to avoid her, or if the driver had not even seen her in the first place, but the van continued in its fairly straight southbound course, never once moving in the direction of the garbage cans.

Unfortunately, the old man did not become aware of the van until it collided with him, sending him sprawling to the ground and then passing over him. The bounce of his head against the sidewalk in his initial fall knocked two teeth out of his mouth. When the van cleared over his body it did so with a small bump as the passenger side rear wheel bounced over his left ankle. That tire also picked up some blood

from the pool that was quickly forming around the old man's body, and it began painting a dashed red path down the sidewalk as the van continued to move south.

At this point the woman realized that she had stepped out of the way of what was certainly not a service technician's vehicle, though the realization that she had inevitably saved the lives of the two children she was with had not fully dawned upon her. She had switched from holding the hands of the girl and boy to wrapping her arms around them and pressing them against her as tight as possible. And she had begun to shriek.

Thankfully, the tweenage girls in the parkette were too wrapped up in their own affairs to notice what had happened less than fifty feet away from them. They would not be exposed to or be effected by what was occurring on their side of the street until long after it had concluded.

1.9

Approximately fifty feet south of the third collision the trio of ladies paused on their way into the pub. The woman shrieking on the north-west side of the intersection just to their north had finally made them aware of what was happening north of them. And even more importantly what was heading south towards them.

After hitting the elderly man the van passed through the first intersection north of Sheppard. It had a green light to proceed, if only from the traffic light's perspective, though Tom acknowledged that fact was likely not taken into consideration in the driver's decision to proceed south through the intersection. And as it had done since it first entered Tom's field of vision a few hundred metres north of its current location, the van continued travelling on the sidewalk.

The girl with her phone dropped it without a second thought and lunged towards the pub door. She attempted to shove her way through it, got nothing but resistance from the frame, and started screaming hysterically. Tears had begun to roll down her cheeks, her body had begun quivering, and it was not long before she was shaking uncontrollably. She continued to hit the door with both hands and at one point with what she may have intended to be a head butt, though it was more of a face butt as it was her nose which made first contact with the glass door. Blood erupted onto her face and began running down into the open collar of her shirt. She was descending into a complete and utter state of panic as she gave up on pushing her way through the door and began rattling it on its hinges. The back-and-forth motion resulted in the door ever so slightly moving towards her before she shoved it back one final time, and it was then that she realized pull would get her a lot further than push, so she swung the door open and bolted inside.

The balcony supporter began running towards the street, screaming at the patio promoter to "get out of the way". She had taken two steps to the east, but then looked back to ensure her companion was following her. And like every other time in history when someone had looked back, doing so did not fare well for her.

The girl who liked patios was standing frozen in the middle of the sidewalk, staring at the van and gibbering incoherently. It was now no more than thirty metres from her, and she was directly in its path. Balcony girl could see all this, and reacted instinctively to assist her friend. She grabbed patio girl by the arm and yanked her in the direction of the road. This gesture was enough to break patio girl's paralysis, and she began bolting out of the path of the van. Unfortunately, the maneuver also threw balcony girl off balance, and she collapsed into a sitting position with her left leg curled awkwardly beneath her. Her back was to the van when the driver's side of its front bumper collided with her right shoulder, knocking her face to the ground and crushing her leg as both sets of its driver side wheels passed over her.

Patio girl had made it just far enough towards Yonge that the van did not make contact with her. As it sped by her the force of the air it displaced caused her to turn around in mid-step. As she crashed onto the sidewalk, bending two fingers on her left hand backwards in a very unnatural way, she saw her

friend lying face down on the ground with a leg that appeared to be bent similar to how a child would draw a two-step staircase. Her tears and her screams came out powerfully, so much so that she collapsed, knocking the back of her head and inevitably bringing on a concussion.

The couple on the patio were spared from the van's path of destruction, but their nachos were not. As balcony girl was struck the female seated on the patio, who happened to be facing to the east, jumped out of her chair, upending the table and sending the nacho platter into her male companion's lap. Their glasses smashed on the floor, and the plastic pitcher bounced beyond the domain of the patio and out towards Yonge. The female was pointing towards balcony girl and screaming "oh god oh god oh god", and as she did so the male turned his head to see what was happening behind him. The angle the male sat at prevented Tom from seeing his face when he first laid eyes on balcony girl lying on the sidewalk, but the sight was enough for the male to push himself out from under the table his companion had partially flipped onto his lap, allowing the table to fully collapse onto the floor of the patio. He began to make his way around the other patio tables to balcony girl's location, with salsa, guacamole, and all sorts of other Mexican delights pouring off him with each step. When he got to her side the look on his face made it painfully clear he had no idea what he could possibly do for her, but he did manage to get his phone out of his pocket. He quickly dialed a number that Tom hoped would connect him to someone who would be more suitable to provide the assistance balcony girl so desperately needed.

1.10

Tom had no frame of reference to determine when the first collision he observed had occurred. But at the moment of the second collision he had observed an orange sixteen out of the corner of his eye. The third collision, involving the older man, clocked in at orange seven. And the fourth collision clocked in at orange one. At that point the light allowing traffic to proceed along Sheppard across Yonge turned yellow. Under ordinary circumstances Tom's spirits would have lifted knowing the transition of the directional flow of traffic had been initiated. But ordinary had all but flown out the window, and birthdays, photo cakes, and even Snack Mix had momentarily ceased to have any significance in his mind. All Tom could think at that moment was that at least there were no more pedestrians in the path of the van on the west side of Yonge.

That's when Tom looked to his immediate left, and saw the family of six on the south-west corner of Yonge and Sheppard.

The lights for those travelling on Sheppard had turned red. The lights for those travelling on Yonge had yet to turn green. And so red lights glowed in front of all drivers currently sitting at the intersection of Yonge and Sheppard.

The van continued to head south, and was currently about thirty metres from the north-west corner of the intersection. The intersection itself was quite wide, with three lanes in either direction along Sheppard, plus a left turn lane on the west side for those wanting to head north on Yonge as well as a right turn lane for those wanting to head south. There was also a sizable island separating the left turn lane on the west side from the southernmost westbound lane. All in all the intersection was maybe thirty metres wide.

That meant the van was about sixty metres from the family on the south-west corner of Yonge and Sheppard. It was headed in their direction. And the north-to-south crosswalk on the west side of Yonge provided it with an unobstructed path to their location.

1.11

“What the fuck is happening here? What the fuck what the fuck what the fuck. This guy is driving down the sidewalk and hitting people. This guy is driving down the sidewalk and deliberately hitting people. Random people. This guy is driving down the sidewalk and deliberately hitting random people. He’s killing them. He’s hitting them with a van, and he is killing them. What the fuck? What the fuck! This is fucking fucked.”

The lights at the intersection of Yonge and Sheppard for all four directions of travel remained red. The van continued to head south on the sidewalk along the west side of Yonge.

“And now this guy is going to go right through the intersection and head straight into a family. Six people. Mother, father, daughter, daughter, son, daughter. He’s heading right for them! Maybe they’ll realize in time and get out of the way. Maybe. All of them? What if one of them slips? That girl tried to save her friend, and look what she got for it. The children are small. If the parents lift them they will slow them down. But you can’t leave them. You can’t shield them, the van would just go right through anything in its path. Oh what the fuck!

“Somebody has to do something. Somebody has to stop him. He’s going to hit that family! Something has to happen. Something has to stop him. Somebody has to stop him from hitting them. You can’t let him hit them. Somebody has to stop him before he can hit them!”

Tom looked around. The world appeared before him through a picture frame. Sort of. There was a frame. Around his windshield. The windshield of the Murano he sat in. The vehicle which had brought him to this location. To this moment.

His hands tensed. Within them he felt textured leather, pulled taught around the steering wheel. The enlarged stitching pattern where the leather connected on the underside of the wheel was meant to assist with maintaining one’s grip while operating the vehicle, so the wheel would not slip out of one’s hands while turning.

“Somebody has to do something. Somebody has to stop him.”

The van continued to head south. The lights continued to be red in all four directions. There was a clear path through the intersection from the van’s current position to the family of six standing at the intersection’s south-west corner.

“Somebody has to do something. Somebody has to stop him.”

There was also a clear path from Tom’s current position to the path of the van.

Tom looked down at his hands. They held the wheel tightly. His knuckles had whitened. If only that van had never entered his life, he'd be ready to make his left-turn as soon as the advanced green appeared before him. In less than ten minutes he'd be home, with birthday cake and Snack Mix for all.

Tom looked to his left. The family remained at the south-west corner of the intersection. One of the daughters had become aware of the van. She pointed in its direction. Her father followed her finger with his eyes. A look of horror began to take over his face.

Tom looked to the north. The van continued to approach the intersection. It was now maybe ten metres away from it.

Tom could feel his heart beating in his ears. His breathing had slowed. A bead of perspiration ran down his forehead, skirting its way around the outer edge of his right eye, and zigzagging through the sixteenth of an inch of stubble that covered his cheek.

Tom looked down at his hands again. And at that moment the sun peaked out beyond the perimeter of a cloud that had been temporarily concealing it. A ray of light, which had already travelled about a hundred-and-fifty million kilometres, passed through the polarized moon roof on the top of the Murano, and arrived at its second-to-final destination. It reflected off the chrome Nissan logo embedded into the steering wheel, and from there it bounced into Tom's eye. Tom observed the slightest of sparkles run across the logo in the wheel he held in his hands. There, and then gone. As though it were winking at him.

"Somebody has to do something. Somebody has to stop him."

All of these events, packed into what realistically had taken no more than forty-five seconds. Four people hit by a van. A family of six directly in its path. Unless someone were to stop it. And he had the power to do so, held firmly in his hands. Or perhaps the power was beneath his foot? Those extremities would inevitably have to work together if the situation for that family was to end any differently from what had happened to the four previous individuals that had encountered the van. So the power rested in both his hands and his foot. Or to avoid getting overly specific about it, the power rested in him.

And that's when Tom said one word which would change the course of his history. A word which had been used throughout his history to express so many complicated emotions. A word which was as integrated into his being as the act of breathing, which would allow him to release that word upon the world. And given the task he had at hand (and foot), it was the only word that fit.

Tom said "fuck".

### 1.12

Tom released the brake pedal with his right foot, and slammed his foot down on the accelerator. The four-wheel drive kicked in, and the traction it provided was excellent. The tires squealed, but gripped the road firmly, and the Murano shot forward into the intersection of Yonge and Sheppard. At the same time Tom began turning the wheel to the left, careful not to overturn for fear that the sudden acceleration of the tires would not allow for a sharp turn to be negotiated successfully, but mindful that too gradual of a turn would prevent him from reaching his target location at the required moment in time.

The Murano began to turn with the wheel, and the tires bit into the road well. The twenty inch upgrade that came with the Platinum package was well worth it. Also, even now the ventilated front seats were cooling his ass, making the journey ever so much more comfortable.

The van entered the intersection, travelling at nearly the same constant speed it had been travelling at down the two previous blocks of Yonge. Meanwhile, the Murano had begun at a standstill, but was accelerating rapidly. Provided there was no change in the van's trajectory Tom could see the point in the road at which the two would meet, and so he guided the Murano to that location. He had reached the halfway point of his left-turn, and while he knew it was not a guarantee, he thought that if he maintained his pressure on the accelerator and his grip on the wheel he would arrive at his destination in time.

Tom continued making his left-turn as the van continued to head south. His mind was entirely focused on the task at hand (and foot). And not once during the whole ordeal did he stop to think about what his left-turn face looked like.

Crash.

2 – Firework

























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