

## Part 1

### Me

As I was once driving home from my girlfriend's place late at night, I had no idea that I had only minutes more to live. Of course, dying in a car-accident is always a possibility in this modern world, but this wasn't even going to be a car-accident. Looking back, if I had survived it, what was going to happen to me in a moment could almost have seemed comic...

My girlfriend had called me in the evening, asking me to come straight away. She wouldn't say why, just that it was important. Of course I immediately suspected that she was pregnant, the stupid bitch, although I couldn't imagine how that could have happened, since we had always been careful. As it turned out, she almost certainly wasn't (what a relief!), but she was wondering what would happen if she still was, or if she ever was. In other words, this whole matter was just an excuse so that we would talk about this most dreary and dreaded topics of all: is our relationship a serious one?

It's always the same. I've gone through this kind of thing countless times...

I guess it's natural. The desire to have a child is hidden away in every woman, sometimes deeper, sometimes less deeply. When the time comes to have a child, she likes to have a man by her side who will take care of her and her child. And sometimes she wants to secure that man for herself even long before she's even aware of possibly ever wanting a child. That's because the whole thing is instinctual, and that means it just follows its course, whether you're aware of it or not.

Just why a man would ever want to go for it, that has always been a mystery to me! Maybe if he thinks the coming child is really his own, that motivates him. But in actual fact, what difference does that really make? Children are interchangeable.

Okay, okay, I know that a genetic trait can only survive if it somehow bolsters its own survival. The same applies to an instinctual program. An instinctual program that makes you take care of your own children (who will have inherited that very same instinctual program) will obviously bolster its own survival. On the other hand, an instinctual program that would make us neglect our own children would eventually die out, because the mechanism to make it survive in the next generation is missing.

Of course this is completely clear to me. It's completely logical that we would have an instinctual mechanism that makes us want to produce lots of our own children, and that our ancestors certainly had it too, else we wouldn't be here. But the funny thing is that this instinctual program, being so successful at spreading itself, is now shared by virtually everybody. All children have it, never mind whether they're our own or not. And this applies to all other instinctual programs too. It applies to all genetic traits. We all have virtually the same genome, with just a tiny bit of variation here and there, because for some (rare) genes there are several possible alleles. We can have blood-group A, B, AB or O. We can be black, white, yellow or brown or something in between. But deep down we are all exactly the same!

So why bother to have children? There are so many children everywhere already, and so many people looking after them. Why should I join that crowd? And why should I take care of any one particular child rather than any other, since they're all the same anyway?

Come to that, why should I fall in love with one particular woman?

Okay, okay, if I run after all women at once instead of concentrating on one particular one, I might end up never catching any. It's probably sensible to choose one from among the crowd and run her down methodically. Maybe that's why we fall in love (it's just another of those instinctual programs that survives because it bolsters its own survival).

But deep down, of course, all women are interchangeable, and all relationships evolve exactly the same way. First you feel high, then you feel less high, then you start wondering whether it's serious or not, and then you break up.

Some are skinnier, some are rounder, some are fast, some are slow, but when you finally get down to it, they all taste the same, all the movements are the same, and the whole thing is just a program unwinding itself.

My problem is that I don't see the point in the whole fucking business!

Although right now I seem to be having some other kind of problem. The needle of the fuel-gauge has been standing steadily on zero for many kilometers already. The warning diode has been flashing ever since I left home. I knew I should take petrol, but when my girlfriend called, saying that it's so urgent, I just drove there straight away without stopping at a petrol station. After having talked and talked and talked, and when I finally managed to dismiss her with fake half-promises and sat back into my car at last (we hadn't even fucked, so I really don't know why this whole matter couldn't just have been settled over the phone), I was already much too annoyed to remember that I should stop at a petrol station. Just when I entered the highway I became aware of that stupid flashing diode once again. There aren't so many petrol stations along the highway, and they're more expensive than the ones in town. I just had to hope that I would make it till the next one. You've already guessed what happened next. The engine started sputtering, I pushed the gas harder but it didn't respond, I pushed the clutch, and then there I was, rolling along in silence – the engine had died.

How could I let this happen? How could I be this fucking stupid? It was all my fucking girlfriend's fault, of course, the stupid bitch!

I was on a bridge, there was no breakdown-lane. I switched on all four blinkers to warn the other cars. I let the car roll as far as it would go, then I pulled the hand-brake, had a quick look in the rearview-mirror (there was no other car nearby, luckily) and got out, dug out the luminescent triangle from the boot while nervously looking at the road behind me every few seconds, ran with it to a fair distance behind the car and set it up.

Now I just had to wait for some nice guy to stop and give me a lift. Luckily this happened almost immediately. A car stopped in front of mine, a fattish, moon-faced young bloke got out and asked if he could help. I felt so ashamed to have to admit that I had run out of petrol! But he didn't laugh. He asked me if I had a hose to pump some petrol from his car into mine. I answered that I didn't, and he said he didn't have one either, unfortunately. He offered me a ride till the next petrol station, and I accepted gratefully. I got into his car which somehow smelled of old socks, and he drove off.

"This never happened to me before!" I offered with an embarrassed smile.

“Oh, you know, things like this can happen,” he answered philosophically, peering into the dark ahead of him while he seemed to be leaning over his steering wheel. I made no further effort at conversation, and neither did he. He let me out at the next petrol station (which wasn't even that far away), I thanked him and he drove off with a wave of one big paw.

I bought a canister, filled it with petrol and hitched a ride back to my car. This was easy, I just explained the problem to a young couple who were filling up their car, and they couldn't really refuse. I sat behind the girl who strongly smelled of perfume, and nobody said a word. I just called out when I saw my car with the blinking indicators on the other side of the highway, but the guy had already seen it and slowed down. He stopped, I jumped out with my canister, and he quickly drove off again, since this really wasn't a place to stop a car.

As I ran across to the middle of the highway, I saw a car stopping right behind mine on the other side, switching on brightly flashing blue lights. Fucking hell! The fucking police! Couldn't they have just driven past a minute or so later, when I would already be safely on my way again? Now I would have to give them huge explanations, perhaps pay a fine... Fucking hell!

By this time I only had seconds more to live, but of course I didn't know that yet.

I jumped over the plank in the middle of the highway with my canister. It must have been quite funny for the policemen on the other side to see – one second I was there, the next I was gone!

You see, as I told you before, this part of the highway was on a bridge, an enormous bridge set up on tall, square, concrete pillars, very ugly - but you're not really aware of any of that while driving on it, especially at night. The problem, in my case, was that actually there were TWO bridges, one for each direction, with a narrow gap between them. I fell right through that gap!

I can't recall what I was thinking while flying through the air into the utter darkness below me, although I do remember holding on to that stupid petrol canister with all my might. I guess my last thoughts as a living human being must have been very trivial. Perhaps I was just thinking that this was the bad ending to a bad day. I guess I couldn't really believe that I was really going to die. I mean, the whole thing was just really much too silly!

I lost consciousness on impact, but I regained it soon enough, it seemed to me. At first everything was dark, but by and by I could make out the outlines of some trees nearby, and then I saw myself as well, from above, as if I was hovering a meter or two above my own body...

Of course I had read about these out-of-body experiences that people supposedly have when they are close to death, and of course I didn't believe they were in any way REAL – just some crazy images synthesized by the brain when it is deprived of an adequate supply of oxygen. And since we all have the same kind of brain, we also produce the same kind of images when we're dying – there's really nothing miraculous in this.

Just it seemed to last a really long time, this out-of-body experience. I told myself that this might be because I was experiencing time differently. Maybe I was living through the last few seconds of my life as if they were an eternity. Just how was it possible that I could still think so clearly? Maybe my brain wasn't in such a bad state after all. Maybe I was going to survive.

But what about the rest of my body? I tried to feel my body, tried to “find” my toes, “feel” into them, but I couldn’t, as if I didn’t have any toes. I didn’t “find” any other parts of my body either. That meant I must have broken my neck – my brain wasn’t connected to the rest of the body anymore...

But then I should still have had phantom-sensations at least. Isn’t that what you’re supposed to feel? Don’t people go on “feeling” their arms and legs long after they were amputated?

How could I just not feel anything?

So now I looked at my body, which was sprawled out below me. It looked normal enough. I couldn’t really see where the damage was. Just the eyes were strange – wide open and staring. If I had seen anything through them, it should have been the tall high-way bridge from underneath, and a bit of the night-sky, surely...

I wanted to blink, but nothing happened, as if I had forgotten how to do that. I just went on seeing that body below me, no change.

Eventually I still started seeing what I thought I should be seeing through those eyes – the highway above me, a bit of the night-sky covered by some twigs from the trees nearby. But in spite of that I didn’t stop seeing the body lying on the ground as well. It seemed I could see all the way around. All the way around a spot a meter or two above my body. It was very strange.

Eventually I started seeing people with flash-lights coming towards me through the underbrush. I tried to call out to them: “Here I am!” But of course no sound came.

They bent over my body. One of them took my pulse and shook his head. As I was watching from above, they shone a flashlight straight into one of my eyes, but nothing happened. The man who had taken my pulse turned away, took a few steps away from my body and lit a cigarette.

This made me angry – weren’t they going to reanimate me or something?

It seemed not.