

Suicide

By Alexei Edwards

I want to depict a story of a no- one, not just any no- one, but a no- one who had a real story to tell. His outward life was perhaps not that extraordinary; he was a twenty-something, working in sales, single and relatively popular with the few friends that he actually had. It was his inner life that was the most interesting, and disturbing. It is disturbing in that it has so much in common with many people currently residing in this wonderful country of ours, which is an ominous indictment, given the nature of his psychological processes.

His problems stemmed from an insular neurosis and an incessant and seemingly, un- provoked propensity for worry. This internal melancholy initially drove our protagonist to thoughts of fleeing suddenly from those closest to him as if it was an act of rebellion to desert his friends. This motivation suggested that he felt comforted by the idea that there were people pining for him. This thought process was borne out of insecurity and a secret and desperate want to feel needed. The stream of thought then evolved, some would say naturally, into thoughts of removing himself from this world, permanently.

The focal character in this tragedy is named Peter, and we already know a small amount about him, but let me paint a vivid picture to bring him to life in your minds. Peter was 29 years old and stood at 5'10, which annoyed him a great deal. The main reason for his irritation at his supposed lack of height was that when he was 14 he had set himself a target of wanting to reach 6'0 but unfortunately stopped short of it by 2 inches. Setting a target to achieve a particular height may seem like a strange thing to aspire to, but a precocious 14 year old deemed it necessary for no other reason than an arbitrary and inbuilt desire for a challenge- if you could call it that! This greatly upset him and, to the average man, this was a fact that could soon be forgotten, but to Peter this was of paramount importance for no other reason aside from wanting to achieve his initial target to which he clearly failed; a failure that only existed through his eyes.

He had mousy brown hair and small eyes, the colour of which was hard to distinguish due to their size. When Peter was tired, people would often say that he resembled a Chinese man, which was in jest, although there was a canny likeness that could not be denied.

He was of average build, a shape that he became content with after being quite unabashed at his comparatively meagre weight during his early 20's. Peter was always concerned about how people perceived him. He was a hugely perplexing and complex character; reticent one minute, ostentatious the next. It was clear that generally speaking he did not like people looking at him and was content with being

a peripheral figure; however, there was a side of him that showed itself in rare glimpses that craved the limelight and was always seeking validation and acceptance. Therein lay the contradiction that Peter embodied.

Peter's story began on a Monday, quite fitting given the ominous connotations the day has with the average working person.

He awoke to the sound of the monotonous alarm buzzing over and over again, with its same monotonous tone; and, like every morning, Peter turned it off, safe in the knowledge that he had prepared another alarm to wake him up precisely 10 minutes later.

Sure enough, 10 minutes later, the second alarm sounded to which he set about snoozing for the next 30 minutes until getting out of bed was an absolute necessity.

Monday began like every other day, with a set procedure of brushing his teeth, showering and having a bowl of cereal before embarking on his trip to work. Externally, Peter was an incredibly average man, some would say mediocre, and conducted himself in the same way as most other man first thing in the morning, with moderate attention to personal hygiene but just enough so it did not show, or smell.

Internally, he was extremely mercurial and would incessantly worry, and this day was no different. He would constantly look at himself in the mirror to make sure he looked presentable at the very least. Peter was obsessed with having a healthy complexion in his face because he thought it made him look more appealing to the opposite sex. He liked the notion but even if he did manage to rouse a reaction from a woman, he would not normally act accordingly, choosing rather to wallow in a state of egotistic indulgence that was only ever fleeting. He was considerably more content with the idea of things rather than the practical application of the ideas that filled his frequently plagued head.

Anyway, I digress and Peter's story simply cannot wait.

Peter left his small, self-contained flat to embark on his journey to work. He knew how long it would take to get in to work, and had taken the time to formulate various possible routes in the event of excessive delays or cancellations. Today, there were no such cancellations and Peter reached Turnham Green station in good time. It was once he reached the platform that a peculiar feeling seemed to resonate within him.

Due to his modicum of preparation this particular morning, he felt a little tired and his propensity for disappearing in to his neurotic headspace seemed to have a stronger grip over him. As he stood on the station platform, surrounded by a colony of like-minded workers, he stared hypnotically at the train track. This strange feeling did not have a name, nor could he place the reason for it coming into fruition at this

particular time. It began to spread across his entire body and then, all of a sudden, he heard the distant echo of the train, furiously making its way towards him. Then this enigmatic and seemingly ominous feeling began to take a more vivid shape and suddenly, he had this strange urge to jump in front of the train. He pictured the reactions of those around him and considered whether the impact would kill him, or just injure him permanently. He then thought of the affect this incident could have on the driver and the commuters. As the train drew near and the light began to fill the tunnel, the feeling in him became stronger and stronger; his feet shuffled to the yellow line that commuters are reminded that you should not cross. To Peter, just standing past the line was normally an act of defiance but suddenly this new found feeling began to take hold and as the train approached, Peter's thoughts intensified and moved in a montage of violent and bloodied sequences. As the train rushed by, he breathed a sigh of relief. Those around him, who noticed his presence, just saw a man eager to be on the train and en route to work. Inside however, Peter was a maelstrom of confusion bewildered by how capricious his mind seemed to be behaving. 'Why was I so forcefully drawn to an act of suicide?' he thought to himself as he boarded his train. Peter struggled to see where this desperate act came from and it concerned him. Peter got in to work, on time as usual, and was thinking intently about the 'incident' on the station platform a matter of minutes earlier.

Even though Peter was a man with a tendency for dark thoughts, he had never even contemplated suicide and now not only had this feeling begun to pollute his thoughts, physically he was being drawn to this desperate act. Peter could not shake what had happened this morning such was his neurosis. Inevitably, he failed to make any sales and his distracted mind reached the point that he forgot customers' names and he even addressed a woman he was speaking to as a Mister, much to the customer's irritation.

This is probably a good place to add that Peter worked in telesales, selling advertising space for a little known UK travel publication. It was a job he was not particularly enamoured with but he had been doing it for so long, he had grown used to it as one gets used to watching mind numbing television after a long day at work.

Peter was in normal circumstances perfectly capable of carrying out his job to the standards required. He was in no way exceptional but he always met his targets and the customers he spoke to would always remark on his patience and cordiality. Today was different though and he simply could not concentrate his mind on a specific task. His mind rattled from one place to another, desperately searching his minds conduits, trying to place the source of the fatalistic feeling that now embodied him.

17.30 had arrived and Peter could finally escape and return to his home where he could continue to

scrutinise his inner self in hope of some form of answer. At the back of his mind though, a curiosity arose as he tentatively approached the station. Would he have a similar feeling again or was his experience in the morning merely an anomaly. As he boarded the escalator for the dreaded descension, he decided to walk down as if some kind of impatience took over him and a feeling to get whatever lay in front of him over-and-done-with. Each step became heavier and as he reached the precipice, his stomach began to hurt and it felt as if it was devouring itself.

Peter had a weak stomach and this is what would happen whenever he suffered from bouts of anxiety. As he approached the platform, the loud thump of his heart started beating intensely into his ears, his breathing became a little stuttered and he could only breathe in short gasps. This was before he had reached the platform. Everything that was happening around him in the here and now was of no consequence; Peter was completely possessed by abstract and ominous projections of the future. As he turned the corner to the platform, he could not bear to look at the empty track and his sense of balance began to fail him. He then opened his eyes to see the train already at the platform. Peter could not believe that he had not heard its arrival and with surprise and relief, he boarded the train, quietly contented at not having to go through another potential emotional hijacking. The train was filled with commuters, each one in their own world; reflecting on the day, anxious about something, looking forward to a particular event. Peter remained in the corner, trying to remain inconspicuous. This was not difficult in such an impersonal and busy atmosphere.

Eventually, he arrived at Turnham Green station and edged past a man who refused to budge. This kind of ignorant and rude behaviour always seemed to irritate Peter and he would always carry this frustration around with him as if some parasitic part of him needed this pain as some kind of sadistic sustenance. He would never be able to communicate his anger though, always choosing to keep it to himself, and this instance was no different.

As soon as Peter got home, he collapsed onto his bed with his feet dangling from the end, staring blankly at the ceiling. He did not even turn on the light and rather chose to remain there, masked by the dark, in a state of perpetual bewilderment. The suddenness of his perceived appetite for suicide had struck him and he could not shake the inevitable sense of foreboding. It was time to take a logical step and look at his life closely. He asked himself questions that he had not yet answered himself; simple questions that very few people actually ask themselves. Am I happy, and if not, then why? Are there things in my life that I could do better?

For Peter, he firmly believed in cause and effect and random, unexplainable occurrences simply did

not enter in to his vocabulary. There was a reason for everything and he was determined to source what exactly it was that made him feel the way he did earlier that day.

The next morning, Peter awoke unusually without the monotonous sound of his multiple alarm system. His eyes shot open of their own accord and darted from left to right. Numbness filled him and because there was no alarm, he felt disorientated and confused as to where he was. 'Could this be a dream?' he thought to himself. He had only had a couple of hours sleep but tiredness was the last thing on Peter's mind. He slowly rose up and sat at the end of the bed, completely still, staring outwards but focusing inwards.

Within seconds of his awakening, the analysis began and Peter began to scrutinise the conduits of his mind, searching for any traces of the feeling that blighted him just hours before. Upon initial analysis, there appeared to be nothing remotely self-destructive or suicidal lurking there; well, nothing new anyway.

He checked the time. It was almost to the minute the time he would normally wake up. He remained where he was, transfixed and fearful of the unknown that lay in front of him. The night before was tumultuous, with Peter breaking out in tears for no apparent reason. He thought about his childhood, and the early promise that he exhibited. As a boy, he was a little more gregarious and his peers found him amiable, but as he ascended in to adulthood, a quiet bitterness and paranoia began to permeate his mind and it gradually became stronger. He became more and more comfortable living in isolation and by a particular regime. Initially it did him a lot of good but then soon, the structure that he had built began to take control of him and he became obsessed with maintaining his regime. This charting of his past in his mind filled him with pain and disappointment, and culminated in him crying. Even through this melancholic moment, he made sure he stifled his crying because he did not want anyone else to hear. As far as he was concerned, this was personal and it would remain so. This behaviour was symptomatic of the way Peter's mind was constructed.

The cold light of winter spread across the room where Peter sat meditatively and the notion of pathetic fallacy began to creep in to his mind and he gave out an ironic and bitter laugh. It was in this moment that Peter made a decision and with that, a certain contentment began to show, and he set about getting prepared for work. This decision brought Peter to an ease he had possibly never felt- well, not a time he could recollect.

He swiftly carried out his morning routine but this time there seemed to be more of an enjoyment in doing it. There was certain fluidity and he felt as if he was doing it for the first time even though he had

been undergoing the same procedure for a few years. Peter then departed his flat and walked down the road, becoming aware of the details of his journey; details that he always declined to notice due to being so absorbed with what was happening in his headspace.

He realised that he had never looked above the buildings he would pass every day. Just by looking up, he noticed a whole new undiscovered territory; some of it daubed with quite artistic graffiti that the usually snobbish and conservative Peter decided he quite liked. Peter felt a relaxation that he had not felt for a very long time and as he stepped over the horizon, he could now see Turnham Green Station, staring at him, awaiting his presence it seemed.

This sight did not trouble Peter and he stepped in to the station with a newfound energy and confidence although the source of the confidence seemed to have quite an ominous undercurrent. It seemed rather strange that someone could suddenly transform from a neurotic, socially awkward man to someone who is at one with all that is around him.

Today was a particularly busy day at the station due to there being severe delays and a plethora of people filled the platform. This did not faze Peter in the slightest and he nonchalantly negotiated his way through the swathes of commuters to the edge of the platform. He now stood there, awaiting the train with his eyes closed in a state of meditative exaltation. Peter had displayed such contentment on this morning because he had reached a state of mind where he had come to terms with the prospect of death and felt that these feelings within him reflected a deep desire to die. As far as he was concerned, he must not ignore this strong drive and he decided to obey it. As he stood there, his mind was empty and at peace, and the echo of the train began to fill the tunnel he eagerly stood so close to.

Peter slowly shuffled his feet closer to the yellow line and slowly edged passed it, his heart then started to beat faster and adrenaline coursed through his body at an alarming rate. As the train grew closer and closer, everything around Peter seemed to slow down but his thoughts grew more and more lucid and suddenly, something completely unexpected happened. Peter began to doubt. Through his quiet meditation and sheer lucidity, he began to think that owing to the newfound awareness that perhaps this could become a new chapter in his life. He felt he had undergone a positive transition and maybe this was not the time he should die. The echoes became louder and the light now began to fill the perimeter of the tunnel. Peter's mind was racing but everything around him still maintained its slow, calculated pace. This was his chance to change for the greater good and become anything other than the lonely tele-sales agent he had transformed into. He took a couple of steps back, opened up his eyes and a smile radiated his face, but this decision had reduced his spatial awareness. Peter did not realise that there was a commotion

happening behind him and the platform was over pouring with people. There was a little nudge in his back and it pushed him a little further towards the track. By now, he was literally on the edge and there was no space for him to return. Due to the commotion, everyone was completely absorbed. The train then started to emerge through the tunnel and the eager, impatient commuters wanted to get on this train and due to this, a pulse of pushes and barges fed through the crowd. Peter was then pushed in to the space in front of him as the train was powering on to the platform. He did not scream but rather he closed his eyes and as before, everything slowed down around him. The train hit Peter, smashing into his head and it killed him instantly. Within the last few seconds of Peter's life, he did not have his entire life flash before his eyes; nor did an ethereal light fill his imagination but his mind emptied and he thought of nothing as he met his death.

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