

THE LAST DAY

Marcus Moonen

2024

*For my desire to become an disembodied observer
drifting on the winds of deep time.*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright.

Published by Marcus Moonen

© 2024 Marcus Moonen

Visit marcusmoonen.com for more information about the author and other works.

1

He first became aware of the pain in his neck, after that, consciousness came swift and harsh. He must have slept in an awkward position, his head turned or the pillow propped up wrong under his head, for his neck to hurt like this.

He tried to remember what position he was in when he woke up, but by the time he was awake enough to formulate the question, he had forgotten how he had been lying just half a minute ago.

The pain would subside quickly enough, but was there... Yes, there was also a headache. Again. Sometimes he couldn't tell right away if he had a headache, he sort of had to feel for it to be sure. It felt like a numbness that didn't quite register as pain, until he focused on it. These headaches had been a relatively new thing.

Still in bed, eyes closed, contemplating, as he did most days, to just get on his other side and try to sleep. Sleep more. Sleep longer. Sleep forever. In these moments he hated consciousness. "I guess I hate life", he thought.

2

Sometimes he was surprised how, without really noticing it, he had slipped into a rock solid morning routine over the years. It made him feel old and sort of stuck, it felt like rust on a hinge.

It starts with urination, then brushing teeth. Followed by defecation, then wetting his hair, drying it to where it's not completely dry, combing it backward and ruffling it into something passable. Usually followed by a second round of defecation. He was regular. In more than one way.

The morning would be halfway gone before he had some breakfast, had this been a normal day, but it wasn't and he decided to eat something, even though he never really had any appetite. "I should..." his thoughts began, but he cut them off before he could finish it with "eat something healthy" and

grabbed the bread rolls he bought yesterday from the cupboard.

They were stale, they always are the next day, but he threw them in the airfryer to revive them. "Zombie breadrolls", he thought, with a wry smile, that existed only in his mind, not on his lips. "Not completely dead, but definitely no longer alive." The thought made him shudder a bit and he quickly opened the fridge to get the cheese, red pesto and the last of the lamb's lettuce. He paused for a second, stared into the light of the fridge and decided. He grabbed a hard boiled egg as well.

3

Routine once again took over when after breakfast he put in his earbuds and continued listening to his audiobook, while he put away the dishes and cutlery into the dishwasher, refilled the water bottles, wiped down the kitchen counter, threw the dishtowel on the laundry pile, noticed that was piling up, filled the washing machine, reflexively looked at the drying rack where the last load was still hanging, took off the dry laundry, threw it on the dining room table and started folding laundry.

It was coming up on noon.

4

He had sat looking outside the window a bit, while still listening to his audiobook. At a certain point he realized he had missed the last couple of minutes of the book as his mind was drifting.

He stopped the playback, opened the window and stared off into the distance as the chilly autumn wind hit his face. There were clouds, it was cloudy. "There are many different ways for it to be cloudy", he said to himself. Today was a good cloudy day. Not just a grey monotonous covering, but large, defined monstrous mountains of clouds.

This type of weather always reminded him of Thursday. He couldn't remember if he had seen a particularly impressive cloudy sky on a Thursday when he was young, but he supposed that must

have been the case. How else would he have associated such clouds with Thursday?

5

The laundry was done and if it wouldn't rain, the wind would probably help dry it faster, so he put the drying rack outside and hung the laundry. He enjoyed the wind, but he still had a bit of a headache and his neck still hurt. "It is too cold to be outside in a t-shirt", he thought, immediately followed by "Fuck, I'm really getting old."

The wind was picking up. "This maybe wasn't a good idea." He hung the last towel on the rack and looked up, feeling his neck and a flash of frustration at the pain. "They said it would start like this", he remembered.

The first doubts started to creep in, and he wondered why he even bothered with the laundry at all.

6

Still stuck in his routine, but now very acutely aware of it, like an itch in the middle of your back, where you just can't reach, or your sock bunched up in your shoe just a bit, but enough to become very uncomfortable and causing pain with each additional step, he was doing his financial administration.

As the minutes passed, he got angrier and angrier at himself for not being able to break free from this learned, rote, even conditioned behavior. The banks were closed. The economy was over. Why was he still doing this?

Two forces within him clashed and the older one, the quieter one, won. And he continued working in the spreadsheet, saying to himself that it would be better if he finished it. "It will feel like finishing a

book, or completing a project", he thought, balancing his budget for the very last time.

7

Around 4 p.m. he got hungry again. Annoyed again for getting hungry at 4, when dinner is at 5, 5:30. If he ate now, he would spoil his appetite for dinner. He thought of his mom's voice as this went through his head, but he couldn't hear it anymore. It had been too long since he last heard it.

Allowing his thoughts to distract him enough to sneak off to the kitchen and grab a handful of potato chips, some nuts, a hunk of cheese, stuffing it into his mouth, eagerly chewing and swallowing it down, satiating his suddenly ravenous appetite just a little bit, he felt fear for the first time.

It hadn't originated in his thoughts, there was nothing coming from his senses, no tv, no internet, not even radio, which had become popular again since the announcement, 7 months ago telling him

why he should be afraid. It was an animal fear, ancient and deep. He thought that this must be what animals felt when they heard, or more likely felt, the infrasound of tectonic plates shifting, or when they felt the change in atmospheric pressure before a hurricane.

8

He had caught himself before finishing the bag of chips and now was heating up the meal he had prepared the day before. Noodles with vegetables and chunks of vegetarian protein. It was ok, even though it wasn't his favorite. He disliked the way the bok choy leaves got a bit chewy the next day, but it was a healthy meal, so he dutifully ate it.

He never even thought about what he would really like to eat as his last meal. Food, for the most part, was practical to him. It had to be healthy, nutritious and not taste horrible. But now, spooning the slippery noodles into his mouth, he wondered what food he would really, really enjoy at this moment.

Tears started welling up in his eyes when he realized he couldn't think of anything, anything at all.

9

After dinner, dishes. The dishwasher was full enough now, he decided, putting in the glass he used to drink the water from one of the bottles he put in the fridge this morning. Turning it on and running it on the long, but somehow eco-friendly program. He never quite understood that, as it seemed contradictory to him, even if it perhaps saved water, the electricity used would surely offset the benefits, no?

He looked around the kitchen. It was tidy, if not spotless, but he felt satisfied, walking into the living room, he looked over to the dining table where he saw some books he had been rummaging through this afternoon. Looking for... He wasn't sure. Resignation? Acceptance?

A 20th century French existentialist philosopher, a 19th century German philosopher who looked like his brain was a weapon, an English writer that took the most audacious way out and an American psychologist who departed on the words "Why not?" and "Beautiful."

Something from inside him grabbed him by the throat. He swallowed hard and took a deep shuddering breath. Steadying himself, he thought, "Leave the books, it's ok to have books on the table, books aren't clutter."

He switched off the light.

10

He was brushing his teeth. "It's only 9:30 p.m.," he thought. "Quarter to ten at the latest." He was aware, reluctantly, that he was avoiding his reflection in the bathroom mirror. He thought that if he saw his own face, he might cry. Just for thinking that, he felt the saltwater well up and nearly spilling over the brim of his eyelids. He never felt so alone.

He crawled into bed, and tried not to think about alarms, or the next day, or... Nothing that would follow that thought would be good to think about, now, he realized. So he pulled up the duvet with one hand and with the other he bunched up the pillow under his head and neck, thinking that he should find a good sleeping position or he would wake up...

Again the tears started to come.

After a minute or two the cataclysmic feeling passed and he was able to breathe normally again. Over the years he had had problems falling asleep. He had tried many different techniques, exercises and most he thought, were bullshit. Perhaps they worked for somebody, but not for him.

The only thing that worked for him, if he got lucky, was slowly breathing in and out, while visualizing, or trying to visualize, the stars. This was the hardest part of his technique, he nearly always got distracted by his own thoughts, but usually that was ok, because the thoughts would transform into dreams by themselves and sleep would come.

He started breathing slowly. In and out. This was the last time he would have to do this. In and out. I'm outside at night, looking up. Why didn't he live his life with other people? In and out. Hiding away in his routine, in his small life. In and out. He was looking up, but he could only see the clouds. No stars. In and out.

He started to feel heavy, sad and heavy, like a fallen tree trunk in the rain, soaking, for a very long time in a forest, that is slowly becoming marshland.

In his mind he started seeing a timelapse of the forest becoming a swamp, becoming a lake, growing into an ocean and overhead the sky flickered.

Then the sun was gone, the world ocean froze over, there were no clouds anymore and the only thing that could be seen, had there been anything left alive to see it, were the stars overhead.