THE FINAL FRAME

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WAKING TO THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR!

Published on
Booksie

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From the depths of ultimate blackness comes a white flash.

Even though my thoughts are new and strangely foreign in meaning, the flash leaves a photographic impression somewhere in my brain-film which makes me think of the image left in your brain after staring at the filament of a light bulb and switching out the night light.

Some time later (?), another brilliantly, blindingly, bright white flash, this time, a little bit fogged around the edges.

Sooner, another flash and very quickly after that, another, repeated in quickening, bright succession until they slowly piece together a picture of a room I am in.

I seem to be lying down as I can see the bottom of a white, metal, tubular framed bed and the obvious bulge where my feet stand pointing skywards.

I try to turn my head but that doesnâ t work.

I listen carefully and hear the soft humming of an air-conditioner (?) and the very soft repetitious electronic beep of some sort of alarm (?)

I try to move my eyes and they too are frozen, limiting my vision to almost dead-straight ahead.

My vision is like a picture in a frame and I slowly absorb the content, trying to find something familiar to let me know where I am and why Iâ m here.

A wall dead-ahead, a picture (slightly skew) dead-centre, low level fluorescent lights set back in the suspended ceiling. The blank screen of a T.V. Set angled down towards me from one of those tasteless, swivel wall-brackets.

My mouth seems cemented together as I try unsuccessfully to open it, hoping to call out to someone, somewhere.

For the first time, panic.

Somewhere in the distance I hear muffled mumbles of conversations. Female voices and every now and then, a dark, male voice. Nothing clear enough to hear what is being said.

Some time later, the soft beep turns itself into a loud continuous buzzing. Itâ s coming from somewhere close to my left ear. The left hand corner of my picture frame flashes with a pink aura.

I hear the loud click of a door handle connecting with the lock and I briefly see a white shape speed past the left side of my picture frame.

Curtain sliding on itâ s track and the strong smell of garlic accompanied by a soft voice.

â Itâ s alright Mr Brick, weâ re just going to change your drip for you â make sure you donâ t dry up on us!â

If I could have moved, I would have recoiled from the fat, bespectacled face of the woman that suddenly presented two-thirds of her face in front of me. The source of the smell of garlic explained itself, as left-over odours from last nightâ s supper wafted into my nostrils.

â Mr Brick? Mr Brick? Come on Mr Brick, wake up, Iâ m sure you can hear me Mr Brick? I think youâ re just pretending to be asleep so that I can come and give you your bed-bath, you naughty thing, Mr Brick!â She giggled.

The fat face went out of my frame (thank God!) and she continued chirping to herself somewhere to the left of me.

My frame started to change. I heard what must have been the sound of her foot pumping on a pedal. The ceiling faded away at the top and the bottom of the frame expanded showing the rest of the room from bed-level downwards.

Her hands grabbed my shoulders and pulled me further forward into her musty, ample breasts. I could feel pillows being stuffed behind my back.

A comb raked violently through my hair.

â There we are Mr Brick, canâ t have you looking anything but your best for your visitors now can we? Not long now to visiting time - Iâ m sure Mrs Brick will be coming to see you. We know how much you like that, donâ t we Mr Brick?â

Iâ m in a Hospital (Nuthouse?), thatâ s obvious. Iâ ve been hurt (badly?) thatâ s obvious. Iâ m paralysed or even worse(?), thatâ s obvious.

The sound of the door closing.

My frame now captures my arms, the right one folded neatly across my waist and the left one lying by my side. Sticking plaster holding a clear pipe (the drip?) into my arm and then disappearing outside of the frame.

I try to re-focus my eyes as thereâ s something blurring the image when I look down. I canâ t see anything but a blur, but judging by the sounds, Iâ m on some sort of a breathing machine as well.

Haze.

Grey.

Black.

White, as I came back from dozing off(?), prompted by the now familiar sound of the door handle. Someone is coming in.

â Oh, my God, help me please Betty!â I shouted from silent lips to my beautiful loving Wife, Betty, who had now appeared before me like a vision. At last, someone who can explain to me whatâ s going on, where I am, and get me the hell out of here, back home where I belong! My mouth didnâ t move. No sound came from my stationary lips.

The door clicked, closing on its automatic spring.

â Oh God Arnie, how long is this shit going to go on, for Christ sake!â she spat. No smile, no loving, warm, welcoming, Wifely, kiss to greet me.

â Fucking Insurance Companyâ s full of crap as well, Iâ m tearing my hair out over all this shit Arnie! Why the fuck couldnâ t you just die like any normal fucking person? Theyâ re refusing to switch off the machines and every day is just eating into our savings! Fuck you Arnie!â

Someone smack me please! Wake me up and say I was having a bad dream, Please!

Betty, my beautiful Betty? Whatâ s happened? Whatâ s happened to the beautiful, loving, caring Wife of four years? My dream, my soulmate, my Life?

â Fucking bullets should have done their job Arnie, but no, you had to be hanging on to your miserable little life when the Medicâ s arrived, had to make things so difficult, like you always did! Fuck you Arnie!â

Think back Arnie, think!

A flash. This time not a white one.

A hand-painted sign, outside a shop. â Brick-a-Bracâ . Yes, my business, my shop, Arts and Antiquities, the love of my working life. Like a fly on the wall, I can see me, see my back, working at a bench in the backroom, a magnifier strapped to my head, examining a gilded Jewellery box. Yes, Mrs Jardineâ s jewellery box, in for valuation, hopefully, sheâ ll be short of cash again and let me buy it at a fraction of what itâ ll be worth when it's fully restored.

A jingle on the old brass bell, rigged to go off if anyone comes in the doorway.

I turn and walk to the front of the shop and smile at our good old family fiend Joshua Freedman and wonder what heâ d be doing here long after I should be closed for the day.

Whooompf! That felt like a massive punch in my chest. And the noise, a familiar cracking sound. Iâ d spent many hours down at the shooting range.

I look down at my chest where my hands had gone reflexively. They are dripping a deep scarlet sticky stuff.

Whooompf! This time it feels like a punch in the face. A familiar cracking sound.

Blackness.

Grey

Haze.

White.

â Betty, Itâ s Joshua, Itâ s Joshua who has done this to meâ I screamed through silent lips.
â Joshua shot me! Twice! Heâ s the cause of all these problemsâ No sound came from my lips.

The door sound again.

I felt Betty take my hand as heavy steps came along side me.

â Good evening Mrs Brick, and how is the patient tonight?â

â No change Doctor, but thanks for looking in on himâ . Bettyâ s sweet voice replied.

â How long is he likely to stay this way Doctor?â

â As Iâ ve said before Mrs Brick, when someone undergoes massive trauma like Arnie has, thereâ s no way of telling how his condition may change, for better or for worse. The gunshot wound to the body was enough to kill him and if it wasnâ t for the prompt response of the Medicâ s, that would have been the end. What is more worrying as Iâ ve said before, is the head wound. We have no way of telling what the effects of the shattered bullet will be, either long or short termâ the Doctor replied politely but firmly.
â All we know is that Patients in Arnie's condition can be in a Coma like this for hours, days, months or even yearsâ .

A Coma? What is wrong with you people? Look at me, my eyes are open, surely you can see some activity? Surely you can see some brain functions on your fancy machines? Surely you can hear me?

â And of course, the shattered bullet fragments are moving around as the brain tries to repair itself and thereâ s no telling what the consequences could be. As Iâ ve said many times Mrs Brick, Iâ d suggest your prepare yourself for the worst case scenario. If by any chance he comes out of the coma, he will in all likelihood be in a vegetative state and need constant care.â He added in his best-rehearsed Doctor/Patient voice.

â Thank you Doctor, either way, Arnie will be in good hands as Iâ m sure you know.â Betty added.

He mumbled something about forms to sign, but quite frankly this was lost on me as I tried to come to terms with what Iâ d just heard.

What about Joshua? Surely someone saw him at the shop and heâ s been arrested? Someone say something please, I need to know!

The door sound again. I presume the Doctor had left as Betty moved right up to my face.

She whispered, â Fuck you Arnie, why canâ t you just fucking die! From virtually the moment we got married, you changed Arnie â you became the proverbial pain in the arse, so contented with your acquisition that you totally stopped caring about me. About keeping me happy. Yes Arnie, you were all that was important. Physically and sexually you revolt me Arnie. Youâ ve never been a good lover but that might have something to do with the fact that you were still a virgin when we got married!. What a fucking joke Arnie! You werenâ t just a virgin by chance, you were fucking impotent! No wonder I had to take on lovers over the years. Bluntly Arnie, you were fucking useless!â

The door sound again as I started to absorb the scathing attack sheâ d just levelled at me. Who the hell are you to judge me Betty? I screamed silently. I forgave you for your loose ways before we met but can never forgive you for what Iâ ve just heard!

Bettyâ s back to me. Arms encircle her and then one hand pulls her head away from me, kissing passionately, My Betty.

â Letâ s get this over and done with thenâ a familiar voice said impatiently.

â The Doctor confirmed that he could go at any time, what with the bullet fragment moving around the way they areâ said Betty. â Iâ ll watch the door, you do your thingâ .

Sounds. Plastic being unwrapped. Syringe being flicked.

â There we are, that should do itâ the familiar voice said. A smiling voice.

â How long will it takeâ asked Betty.

â Itâ ll probably all be over within the hour as it works itâ s way through with the saline drip. Iâ d suggest we go and get ourselves a bite to eat and keep your mobile switched on - theyâ ll want to break the news to you personallyâ . The smiling voice continued.

My frame filling up with Bettyâ s smiling face.

My frame filling up with Joshuaâ s smiling face.

â Fuck you Arnieâ Betty said smiling, arm around Joshuaâ s neck.

â Yeah, Fuck you Arnieâ Joshua mirrored.

Betty and Joshua walking out the door arm in arm, smiling, laughing.

I screamed. No scream came from my mouth. I screamed again and again.Again and again.

I am still screaming when the door opens again.

â Calm down Mr Brick, now calm down, everything is going to be just fine nowâ shouted the fat garlicky nurse as she picked up the phone on the side table.

â We have a situation in Room 117, Coma recovery. Yesâ ¦â ¦..Mr Brick, â ¦â ¦. Yes, the Patient has regained consciousness and is talkingâ ¦â ¦â ¦.. Yes, no problem, send the team down here nowâ , She finished , putting down the phone and coming over to me.

I turned my head. It moved. I watched as she slowly removed the drip from my arm and rubbed alcohol onto the puncture.

â There you are Mr Brickâ she smiled. â everything is going to be just fine. Mrs Brick is going to be just over the moon when we call and tell her the good newsâ .

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