

Denial

Category: Pretending

written by Joe Amaral | October 11, 2018

It was a dark and rainy night, the man was wearing a black t-shirt, and he wasn't in the crosswalk when the bus hit him. There were no sodium streetlamps, only narrow headlight beams. The bus driver didn't see the man, only a shadow in the beam. Then came a disembodied thump that sucker-punched the poor man to the pavement.

Any pain must have been brief. The back of his head was mush and brain. His airy lungs were like water balloons, popped. I watched bystanders perform sopping CPR. Every chest contraction was a countdown clock. Blood diluted by spinal fluid sieved out his ears in bilateral streams, puddling in the street.

It was useless to try saving him. I cringed as the bystanders passionately called for more help. Nonplussed, I knelt down, my knees quickly cold and wet through my jeans. I had no gloves, no medications, only my breath and firm voice in damp mist and dim light. I put on a mask of encouragement.

There was nothing to do but fake it, make a token effort. I coached the courageous Good Samaritans, even though the man was very dead. Eventually, I told them to stop, thanked them for their strength, for their intent to do what they could. It was an attempt they will never forget: not a victory, but a loss.

What else is there to do but shake hands, "good game" it, then go home, warm up and change clothes? Drive around, listen to music, ponder life. How quickly such an incident disappears in cataclysmic bursts. Drink beer, gulp ice cream with sprinkles and hot fudge, as our windowpane eyes fizz, therapeutically assured.

I will simply take a shower in the rain, scrub my face in befuddlement, and check my fingernails for evidence of a person who once existed. I will fall into a dreamless sleep pondering what cannot be prevented. The scary stuff occurs when I'm awake. It's worth it to act like everything is okay.

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