

Saved by Compulsion – Spring 1981

What's my wife gonna say? My wife... Real life! What did I do? What am I doing using up my family's rent money shooting coke while having sex with anonymous men? This is beneath contempt. I can still taste his cum. This is inhuman... like the guy eating bugs in the early Dracula movies... have to cut this shit out... have to stop this. My wife is pregnant! What kind of sick man am I? Better to kill myself. End it, end it, end it! Where? ... do it. Where should...? Where should I shoot myself? In the car? Do it... I do have the gun. Do it.

I have to turn on the ignition in order to get the cigarette lighter working, and the act jars my nerves. Now inhaling, I scan the dark parking lot from behind the wheel, carefully lowering the driver's side window. *I have a gun, motherfuckers!* Now two inhales the better, I chase more Tequila with a mouthful of warm beer. I rationalize:

*You can **always** kill yourself. You don't have to do it right **now**. Just stop. Stop using drugs. Then you won't have to kill yourself. Clean up. Work. Save. Own a house. A car. A boat. A dog. Don't kill yourself, get rid of the gun before you do.*

OK, that's responsible. Yes, here's some hope. The best, most productive and positive thing is to get rid of the gun. Can't just throw \$175 away though. I could sell it to Big Eva! But Eva and I have already agreed it's a crappy weapon. A small, poorly made revolver... could sell it to someone else, but... complicated, that.

A few more swigs of tequila with the beer chaser and this fresh cigarette is actually starting to taste good. I take my first deep breath in over an hour. Sudden sharp light sears the parking lot darkness. The back door has opened, and I stiffen to hold my breath, observe the dimly lit figure exit the adult bookstore's rear door into the parking lot. Locking onto the dashboard for one pubic hair shy of eternity, I track him with peripheral vision but I know *I won't make it... **can't make it!**....* with the screaming in my head ***it's too much! I need out!*** His car door opens and my entire body shudders with relief as the sound of his ignition sweeps over me, renewing the effects of the valium, tequilla, cigarettes and beer as if a tied-off vein had just been released. This somewhat impotent collection of palliatives does little to end the post-coke-injection mindset, however.

Maybe I should trade it back to Big Eva for some more coke. Then never buy the gun back! HA! She'll be pissed at me, and I wouldn't be able to buy any more coke from her. Even if I finally have to make it up to her financially - cause Eva might want to get heavy over it - I would always be considered a cast-out. Then I could be straight!

What genius! *Yes, the truly responsible thing to do is to end my relationship with Big Eva and cocaine. I'll get rid of the gun and screw up my coke connection at the same time. This act will put an end to this whole cocaine, twisted sex and suicide.*

Yes, it's time to get hold of my life and be responsible. I exhale an "at last" kind of sigh. It's the courageous thing to do – the responsible thing to do, and it's... it's just the right thing to do.

Now congratulating myself on taking this giant step to give up cocaine and perversion, I start to compare myself to everybody I know who's still using drugs but who hasn't yet taken this courageous step.

Those losers... I'm stopping. It's a done deal. But of course there is still a little rain left to fall, for in order to screw up the coke connection I have to trade the gun for some more. It's a dirty job, even a dangerous one, given the current climate over there, but somebody's gotta' do it.

I can't just throw all that coke away. That would just be stupid... thankless. So the good life; puppies, lawns with flowers and children laughing, yes; it's starting now – officially – but I'll have to use up this last score first.

At least a gram, an eager bad-cop voice says in my head.

I don't really care, says good-cop. *I'm above such considerations. I may just throw the shit away anyway.*

Yeah, right, responds bad cop... *shoot maybe a third to a half of rock, maybe. Holy shit... That would be in-fucking-credible. Hmm... get fucked in the ass while I'm rushing on half-a-gram? After all, it will be my last time...*

This dedication to my new clean life has me looking urgently at my watch in that early morning hour, wondering... wondering if it's not too late... not too late to call Eva.

The couch in the psychiatrist's waiting room makes a *hissing* sound as you sit on the large leather cushion. What part of the cushion you displace with your weight appears to pop up again next to you. My cocaine addiction ended. I did, however, find gambling as a pari-mutual clerk at the racetrack too much of a

temptation. I had to trade in this good paying job for some more humiliation. I had punched out lots of tickets for myself. Lost.

She slowly placed the newspaper down and looked up from the breakfast table. Her attractive brown eyes looked concerned. Janice did not miss two days of work a year, had never bounced a check in her life, and seemed perplexed that her husband of one year was not going to work. I suddenly felt terribly ashamed. These feelings were definitely new to me.

“How much do you owe them?” she asked.

I saw the narrowing circumstances closing in on me, forcing out my confession. I no longer had my job as a pari-mutual clerk, having just yesterday been escorted out of the money-room in handcuffs. The police had informed me I would be charged with embezzlement for theft of racetrack funds if I failed to come to an arrangement with the track. When I woke up in the morning, I had some genuine difficulty believing it was all real.

I now looked up at her and began to panic. It was as if I were coming out of some forest into this familial clearing; some ancestral anthropology where people in this other world lived; awakening as one does from a dream, still unclear as to what really happened, or is happening.

“I’m not going to work today,” was all I had told her. I’m jumping off a precipice of some kind. Coming clean. I fight a brief urge to make it sound like a joke. Something inside me is leaving. I am suddenly more alone than I’ve ever felt in my life. Suddenly flooded with the realization that my good-paying job as a pari-mutual clerk is over. Understanding makes me viscerally lessened. I hadn’t realized how the simple statement that I was a pari-mutual clerk had served me so well as a prestige factor; an esteem factor, a reality factor – in AA, NA, and especially GA. It had created a part of me in relation to others – who in many cases also struggled to make a living with a family. I had – again without being conscious of it – acquired something people objectively referred to as “self-esteem,” and again couldn’t lose it fast enough. I had failed, and was now in trouble... again.

That job had *not been* un-cool, and \$100 a day in the early 1980’s was not bad for an ex-SSI mental patient with no marketable skills. So it was with a kind of sad surprise that I heard my own words coming out of me on their way to my wife. They brought a sadness I was unfamiliar with. It was as if I were the town crier learning of his own disaster as he spoke. Whatever sense of pride and self-

satisfaction that even pretended to be in my voice – hence my life – disintegrated. I was shocked to see how foolish I had been to think I had been cool betting so crazily.

“Twelve thousand dollars.”

“Twelve thousand dollars!” she shrieked. *“Well, I’m not helpin’ you. You’re through.”*

I had lost it. I blinked as if awakening in a strange reality. This new experience of lingering responsibility was something I had failed to consider my reality till now. This is where the rubber meets the road. It has repercussions. It’s real. The words *responsibility, father, children* spoken by older males in the family along with meaningful looks and handshakes at the wedding had been heard, but they were words that drew in me only brief images of accomplishing god-like achievements. That’s all. Sounds. I had married that good-looking girl I had enjoyed bedding and being around. I wanted to please her. But now there was failing to be considered.

My family. Failing my family.

I could see the surprise and disappointment on her attractive young face, and it pained me in a way I was unfamiliar with. I had failed terribly as a provider, but now realization flooded my new mindset that *I was* that provider. This was my role in life, and somehow I had never been more acutely aware of it than right now, as my shell had just been cracked open and my self humiliated. I suddenly ached in a new and desperate desire to have it all back: my job, my paycheck, my freedom from the gambling compulsion.

This sudden passion for normalcy surprised me – for I was painfully awake – and the pain deepened as a growing ache in me reflected more awareness of what I had lost. *Maybe it didn’t happen. It’s dreamy. I might still have my job. I’ll soon laugh with relief.* Another part of my mind suggested that if this wasn’t something unreal, I should quickly find a way to make my life exist as though it were something unreal.

Real-life consequences were always met pharmaceutically. I needed something to allow me to feel that everything was all right; medication often helped one not care that it wasn’t. But that way out was no longer viable, for I was no longer alone in my head. My wife and baby reflected a reality I had simply run from ever since leaving the mental hospital twelve years ago. Designer drugs and narcotics had

been my stand-in for responsibility. Real-life consequences were never met without them.

A wave of realization swept over me with a new and dangerous electricity, alerting every part of me that no pill or injection could fix this. Nothing could fix this. The rest of me – pained and stupefied – stood still now with the full realization of my failure. As the disaster became fully realized, I knew what I had to do. This was the final straw. Not the most terrible straw. I had done worse. Much worse... before and after the mental hospital – but there was a finality within this humiliation and existential doom here that was simply too crushing. The defeat was all too complete.

I retreated inside myself to embrace the only way out. I added conviction to ruminating desire. I will pursue this alien quest, and accelerate now willingly – *Oh it has to be willingly!* – embracing the tempting consideration of termination, and all systems now green-lighted and no energy to fight out of it. I wanted *out*.

There was nothing else *to* do. End it. For the first time in my life, I really wanted to. I would. Now. here it comes, sensing, then realizing a genuine force rising up inside me, questioning my commitment, and I knew by answering it I suddenly lived to die to flip this final switch; assenting to it in full self-consciousness, sanctioned it, commissioning it consciously and thereby letting go (*surprise!*) of all that which keeps death's attraction in chains. Yes, I *want* to die. Take me, I thought; giving myself totally to this suddenly (*Oh it's real*) snarling, rushing energy swirling up through the loins, through my spinal column up the neck, seizing my brain as it made my legs, arms and hands freeze. Not unlike some science-fiction self-destruct sequence, I was now set to terminate.

The blood! The blood chilled in a freezing vibration through every artery. I marveled at that till the brain locked, denying further thought. I was on the one-way path to the next world. I got up, genuinely sad and barely able to push one grieved limb in front of the other on my way to the bedroom for destruction. The complete conviction of what needed to be done – what would be done – became as impregnable as a glacier in my arctic mentality. Unmovable and unstoppable, it raged only within the tornado's funnel-promise of dark relief.

As I got to the bedroom and closed the door, a small dart of thought-with-light flew across the mental tundra. It directed my attention towards the gun, and this sudden widening awareness gave rise to something totally unanticipated.

“*It’s true,*” I thought, and laughed. The dark spirit recoiled vigorously, palpably receding back from whence it came. *Was that snarling force cursing me?* I knew I wasn’t gifted enough to truly communicate its spiritual reality. The gun was no longer here. I had forgotten. I had given it to Big Eva as collateral for more cocaine at the end of my last binge! A spring of sunshine broke open my wild darkness.

I sat on the edge of the bed. Although I had never owned a bible, the proverb “*Laughter doth act as a medicine*” came to my mind. I laughed as my eyes grew moist, and my body warmed. With warm blood coursing again through my body, I wiped my eyes and heard myself speaking aloud in a strange voice, “*How the hell did I get **here**?*”