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WHEN I FINALLY woke up in the early hour of the morning, to the sound of wind and hailstone pounding the balcony door, I felt sad and pessimistic. I was completely unsettled, feeling lonely, miserable and down in the dumps. "*I shall sleep it off.*" I said to myself, but I was tossing and turning in bed until I became exhausted, and finally realized that sleep had deserted me. I tried to ponder, but I was unable to focus on one thing at a time. "*What is the matter with me?*" I have never had this feeling before. I was always energetic and full of life. I wondered why I can't shake the feeling of worthlessness and helplessness off? All my ambitions and initiatives began to fall apart like dry autumn leaves being rattled and carried on the pre-storm wind away to an unknown destination. All my dreams are crumbling in front of my eyes and nothing I could do. "*I am going to light a fag, it may help soothe my anxiety.*"

As I got out of bed, I experienced a terrible headache and my vision blurred. The room began to spin and I struggled to reach for the pack of cigarettes on the kitchen

table. Finally, I tapped one out, lit it and inhaled a few puffs that I kept in my lungs long enough to soak up all the nicotine and chemicals I needed to relax but, I did not feel any better. I looked at the wall clock and it was four fifty in the morning.

I sat on the edge of the bed, burying my head between my hands and squeezing it hard hoping to relief the excruciating pain. My mood was low and I became disinterested, feeling exhausted and agitated. However, the sweet smell of marijuana carried in the breeze from the apartment next door, gave me a new insight into life and I yearned for. "*I must roll a joint now, figuring where am I going to get hold of a dope at this time?*" I thought of Jamie, the drug mule, the creepy man who would not give credit to his own mother.

I eliminated Jamie and resorted for a hard drink instead. I reached for a virgin bottle of Red Label and with a quick half turn, the seal cracked with an astonishing squeaking sound echoed in the room and added to my headache. I looked around for a glass, a mug, or even a bowl, but there was none at hand. All were stacked dirty and mouldy in the kitchen sink teeming with ants, forming a double line excavating as much as they could to store them for the rainy days.

I turned the bottle to my mouth and swallowed long until my eyes bulged and my throat set ablaze, but my headache did not recede. Life was burdening me so much that I thought to end it now and save myself the pain of living. All my aspirations and plans began to vanish slowly and nothing I could bloody do to stop it.

I went outside to the balcony of my fourth level apartment. It was cold, dark and windy and the black

clouds crisscrossing the grey sky with the howling gales heralded the approach of a hailstorm. I felt it was the end of the road for me, and I contemplated jumping. *"No! I am not going to end it this way and leave this mess behind. I was always tidy and meticulous; people will talk bad of me."*

I went back inside, put my white and blue checked smock on, and began cleaning all the dishes, saucepans, mugs, glasses and pots. I dried them all and put them away where they belonged. Afterward, I made the bed, arranged the chairs, drew the curtains closed and slumped on the couch faced down and cried. I shed the tears of despair, as I chewed over the horror of death and the trepidation of the unknown.

I pondered through my tears, as the images of my home started to knock on the door of my rusted memory. I was afraid that after half a century in alienation, my home might never recognize me. As this notion crossed my mind, I became anxious that I would be wasting my time and all my efforts would be in vain. The speed of my emotions, created an atmosphere of uncertainty and I had neither the energy nor the willingness to do anything about it. I tried to get off the couch, but I was light-headed and fell back feeling numb, anxious and empty. However, the home that I left at the tender age of eighteen has called on me again and I longed to see it, to touch it, to inhale the laden air with the scent of pine, and to sleep in the open under the blue clear sky counting the infinite number of stars. Those images became alive and lifted my spirit slightly.

The storm strengthened with strong wind, heralding the approach of a hailstorm. It hailed marble-sized balls of ice pounding on the balcony door so hard that could

shatter the glass. I heard a sudden bang as the gust of air unlocked the window and slammed it against the wall and a gush of cold icy wind entered the room. This brought me back to my sanity, but it was not long before I lapsed again, and the urge of ending it all, became stronger and more tempting.

"I must do it now. There is no going back." I got up and went to the balcony. The hail relented, but the cold icy wind was still blowing, sending a chill, that travelled fast to the core of my bones.

I tried to mull it over, but my ability to function or concentrate was diminishing by the minute. The sadness and the feeling of guilt, dominated all my thinking, as I tried to climb-on to the edge of the balcony wall, but I was too deadbeat. It was almost impossible for an old man riddled with arthritis to climb the three-foot wall with two extra feet of railing, which was added last year after my good neighbour Brett fell four stories to his death. After a couple of attempts, I gave up trying.

The thought of dying without seeing my home, sent a shiver down my spine. I closed the balcony door, returned to my bedroom, and slumped on the bed wondering. *"What is the matter with me? Am I going insane or is the thought of suicide become more appealing than life?"*

The hailstorm returned with awesome force, pounding the window with crushing strength that could shatter the glass to small pieces, and the dogs in the neighbourhood began to howl. *"I must end it now."* I got off the bed, took my pyjamas off, folded them neatly and put them in the drawer. Then, I took off my red G-string underwear and gazed into the mirror for the last time. My reflection was not encouraging, so I decided to put it back

on and take it with me. It was my favourite underwear. I opened the balcony door and went outside. It was still windy, but the hail ceased. I tried again to climb the five-foot wall, but failed, as the wall was slippery and my energy was drained.

I went back to the room and after searching for a moment; I found the aluminium three-stepladder and carried it outside. I positioned it beside the wall and scaled it to the third step that put me in line with the balcony wall, but not high enough to clear the railing. I smiled to my success and stood upright. I gauged the distance from the fourth floor to the street below. I thought it would be about three seconds free fall before I'd hit the ground. It would be a quick and snappy way to finish it off with less pain and suffering.

I kept my balance well, standing on the third step of the ladder in the face of a strong wind and a slippery surface. I did not feel the cold despite being completely naked except of my G-string underwear. I raised my hands as a flying kite ready to execute the jump of my life, but a flashing thought held back my action.

"Life is full of trouble, but worth living." I saw it in my mind's eye and wondered why I was about to commit suicide, while others would give anything in return of a longer life. At that moment, I thought of death as a long nap of no awake, and an end of all trouble. Then with the tenacity and the willingness to put an end to it all, I bent my knees and lowered my hands ready to spring, and clear the metal railing of the balcony wall.