



The Loneliest Man Who Ever Lived

by Gary L.M. Martin

Prologue: The Preparation

"Is she almost ready?"

Doctor Severin looked past the technician blocking his view. He couldn't see the subject in the treatment chair, but he could see her hands splayed out, vibrating, her fingers pointing in every direction, as the sounds of the machine could be heard all around them.

"Almost," said Severin. "Is this really necessary?"

"This one will be a tough nut to crack. Antisocial. Unlikeable. He even has latent suicidal tendencies. A real mess. She'll really need to be really motivated for this one."

"Is he really necessary to the program?"

"His ratings are off the charts. He makes some of the ones we acquired look like morons."

Severin looked at the woman in the chair, her eyes glazed, her body shaking, and nodded.
"I think she's just about done."

Chapter 1: Sunday

Would he kill himself today?

For Harry Crater, the answer was probably no.

Probably.

Harry Crater had given suicide a lot of thought. Which was not to say that he was planning to kill himself. At least, not today.

He just liked to know all his options.

Harry had considered all the possible ways of killing himself. He didn't like *any* of the options.

Jumping from a bridge was out. He hated the noise and rush of oncoming traffic. In fact, jumping from *anywhere* was out. Harry had a fear of heights. He didn't want his last few seconds of life to be sheer terror.

Slitting his wrists was out too. Harry had a terrible fear of blood, and didn't like the idea of mutilating himself *at all*.

Pills didn't work for Harry either. Once he took them, the time spent waiting to die from the inside out would be pure terror for him.

Shooting himself on the head would be quick. Harry had a compression gun, and he could do it. But then he thought about how gory it would be, to have a gaping hole in his head. It was *less unattractive* than the other options, but still, *not very alluring*.

And then there was drowning.

Harry loved the water. He lived in Battery Park City, on the southwest edge of Manhattan, and walked by the water every day on the promenade, and then onto the wharf which was perpendicular to it. He imagined what it would be like to just step off the wharf, into the deep, flowing Hudson River. He would sink to the bottom quickly. He would hold his breath, and then run out of air, and then start to choke. It wouldn't be pleasant. But maybe, just maybe, it was something he could do.

And so Harry went on the wharf every day, and looked down into the water, considering his options. He never decided in advance what he was going to do. So far, he hadn't done it.

So far, then, Harry had elected to kill himself the coward's way.

The really slow way.

The *easy* way.

By living a boring life.

Each day brought him one day closer to his death. Each uneventful day stripped him of a day of his life. It was a tedious form of suicide, and a very, very slow one, at that, but one that, for the most part, suited Harry quite well. For Harry was quite *cautious* in everything he did. Even when committing suicide.

But Harry still went out onto the dock every day, and looked into the water, and wondered if today was the day. Today the water was grey, to match the clouds above, as the sun was in the advanced stages of setting. That's when Harry liked to come out, when the sun had fled, and the sky matched his mood.

He stood at the edge of the wharf, and looked into the water. He studied the pattern of the waves. He wondered, as he had many times before, what it would be like. How quick would it be? How much pain would he feel? How much distress?

"Are you going to do it?"

Harry looked around. There was a woman, standing ten feet behind him. She was dressed in a beige hat, a long, beige coat, and beige high heels to match. She had either blonde or brown hair. Harry couldn't really tell, in the fading light.

"I'm sorry," said the woman apologetically. "I didn't mean to interrupt your concentration. Please, go ahead. Don't mind me."

"Go ahead and what?" said Harry, his voice feeling rusty to his own ears.

"Kill yourself. That's what you were going to do, right?" the woman said.

"What makes you think that?" Harry asked.

"Well... it's obvious," said the woman, smiling for the first time. Harry would always remember that. Her first smile. Even before he knew her name. Even before he knew who she was. It was pert, cute smile, one that showed no teeth, only beautiful red lips which carried only a hint of the pleasure she was capable of inflicting on a lover.

"You're looking into the water, and kind of bent over. That's not the posture of a fisherman," said the woman, and she walked forward now, with an air of authority. "Nor a hydrologist, or an olympic swimmer or a yachtsman or a marine biologist," she said, coming around the other side of him. Harry shrunk back, feeling she was invading his space. Which she was.

She leaned her face close to his and smiled. "No, my friend, you were looking at it as if it were a doorway. But a doorway... to where?"

Where indeed?

Harry's jaw almost dropped open. He had never met such a perceptive woman before. He looked into her eyes, of a color he couldn't determine in the fading light. They seemed to smile at him as well.

And then she took a few steps back, and said, "Well, go ahead. Don't let me interrupt."

Harry looked at the water, and then back at her, and didn't know what to say.

The woman slapped her own thigh. "How thoughtless of me. You probably don't want to be killing yourself in front of an audience. It probably robs you of the mood. My humblest apologies. I'll leave you to it."

And then she walked off, back to the promenade.

Harry watched her as she walked down the wharf, a slowly declining figure. And then, when she was about halfway back to the mainland, she turned and, seeing him staring at her, gave a cheery wave, before resuming her walk back.

He watched as she reentered the main coastal walkway along Battery Park City. He watched as she walked along it, shrinking to a beige figure, and eventually a beige dot.

And then she was gone.