

## 5. FORTY HOURS OF HELL

“Have you got a new job?”

“Do you know something that I don’t know?”

“You tell me!”

“I work pretty hard!”

“I’m glad that someone keeps active.”

“I wouldn’t consider myself a slouch.”

“Should we be prepared for something big?”

“I have been putting all my time into writing something new.”

“Are you on a deadline?”

“I’ve taken every second that I have to make this sound good.”

“You’re working around the clock.”

“I’m on a schedule.”

“Do you take any time off?”

“Even when I’m not writing, I’m listening to myself. I’m thinking about the story.”

“How many hours do you work in a week?”

“Quite a bit.”

“Over forty?”

“I don’t really keep track.”

“It’s not as if it’s back-breaking work.”

“It isn’t. But that’s not quite the point. There’s a lot of soul-searching. A lot of realizing that there are some really great opportunities that have slipped out of my fingers.”

“Does writing help you get some of that back?”

“Sometimes. But it can also increase the anguish.”

“Make it all appear more hellish.”

“That’s a little bit of an exaggeration. But bad things do happen to good people.”

“You see yourself as a good person.”

“I would like to be.”

“So you’re doing a lot of penance in the hope that you might obtain just a couple of moments of peace.”

“Sounds like a fair trade.”

“Is it getting any better?”

“I’d love it to get better. But there is tragedy that is hot on my tail.”

“That’s why you checked yourself in.”

“That’s why I checked myself out. I needed to get something done if I wasn’t going get overwhelmed by my problems.”

“It was that simple.”

“There’s nothing simple about it.”

“Don’t you think that you’re enjoying your own pain?”

“I’m not a masochist.”

“There is no satisfaction in your suffering.”

“It does help me feel that I’m alive. But I’m not going to indulge pain for its own sake.”

I'm only training myself to increase my endurance.”

“That is going well?”

Desi wants to go to the symphony. I have been in a meeting for one of my new scripts so I can't answer my phone. She sends me a text. If I can make it before seven thirty, she has a ticket for me. I am running late when I finally get her message. I decide to take a short cut to try to make it on time. Things are going well until I see brake lights flashing in the distance. My heart stops. I'm not going to make it.

I'm in the left lane in the hope that I might make the best of my time. Now I am trapped with no hope of getting off at the next exit. I am sitting here in traffic just hoping that the jam might get untangled. I am gripping the wheel and cursing. I reach for my phone to call Desi. But she doesn't pick up. I have no hope. If I don't make it, I won't be able to learn her secret.

Other cars twist around me so that they can get off at the exit. A few bounce of the grass median with the same intent. I am boxed in unable to do a thing.

I know that there is a car that is ahead of me where the driver has even less options. He is waiting to be rescued by the emergency team. If they fail, this may truly be the end of his options. I seem to identify more with his fate than with mine. I imagine Desi deciding on silence as a permanent resolution.

“Do you love her?”

I hate this delay even more. My wits are being tried.

I stare at the clock as it reinforces my helplessness. Even if I am able to weave a path around the other cars, I cannot make it on time. Desi has little choice if she wants to make the event. She was already planning to go. It was more of an afterthought to invite me along.

I turn my neck so that I might catch a clearer glimpse of what is transpiring ahead of me. I am trying to catch a glimpse of the crushed metal.

If I close my eyes, I can put all of this out of my mind. All of use can be driving free without any impediment. When I arrive home this evening, this wait will be part of my past. But the driver ahead may have no more past or future.

I see a tow truck rush past in the oncoming lane. There is one car with its front-end bashed in. I can only imagine what the other car looks like.

The could keep us here for hours. If someone has died, they might have to keep us here until the investigation is done. There are only a few minutes to spare. How does it feel to have a precious life so much in the balance? That driver had plans of his own. Maybe they were much more critical. A lost opportunity is being transformed into the loss of opportunities.

I want to get out of my car. But there is very little that I can do. I am a voyeur that is deriving a degree of pleasure from my safety. And I am angry about what is going on. Why have I been put out by someone else's negligence. Even if it was his last decision, it is the one that has an effect on me.

I am feeling really small in my attitude. It's just that I have no connection to this driver. He has only touched me by his mistake. That little act on his part has made me angry at the poor sap.

I am totally useless. Nothing is going to change it for me. I am trapped.

My entrapment is only temporary. I am feeling every second. It only makes it more hellish. I don't feel a thing. I'm not in pain. I'm not holding my breath. I'm not waiting to be

rescued.

The driver is in such a precarious situation. He has given up his being to other people. That is the worst feeling. All his determination will come to nought if his rescuing angels fail in their mission.

They say that the first eight hours are the worst part of a crisis. Everything is on the line. After that point, it is just automatic.

I have no idea where I am. Worse, I realize that no one else knows that I am here. I am not going through any self-reflection. I wonder if anyone will ever find me. I imagine that this will be my grave.

The car is so mangled that I am unable to open the door. I can barely move. I am afraid to disturb the vehicle due to the fact that I might be even more crushed by the metal. I lie here immobile. I wonder if I have been paralyzed. I try to feel my body. I don't even want to know how bad it is. I can barely move my head to find out. I have been fitted for my coffin.

I try to scream out. I don't have the will. I have been drained of all energy. What difference would it make. Who is close enough to hear?

I can't even see the highway from here. Perhaps I have been tossed into the woods. It is too dark to recognize anything. There is not even enough light to accustom to the darkness. I only dangle here in the car.

I close my eyes. It doesn't make any difference. It is all the same.

Even if fire rescue were here, there is little that they could do. My body has been reshaped by the accident. My tools for survival have been stretched. I cannot be put back together again.

I imagine that I am away from this place. It is a night club. I am lost in one of my familiar pursuits. The music pulses around me. I am ready to make my move. Then I am reminded how bad things are. I can't let my dreams engage themselves long enough to provide me solace.

I try to make up fantasies to occupy my time. I can't hold a thought long enough in my brain. I only feel panic.

Why have I been put in this place? Is this my punishment for being an unfeeling person? I have never been a patient person. That is probably why I have had such difficulty staying with another person. I never wanted to admit to my solitude. That is why I have tried to make myself the life to the party. Now the party is over. I am over.

I haven't been here that long. I am sure that the worst is yet to come. But the sheer brutality of the moment is so abrupt that I can't imagine that there is a suffering beyond this. If I am to attain that understanding, I cannot do it with my concentration. I will have to wait for the future to overtake me.

At this point, I cannot see a face that will guide me in my fatal hour. There is no guardian who is offering her hand to take me to a place of bliss. My insides offer no respite. It is an eternal now, an eternal here.

My breathing is somewhat regular. My body is doing all that it can to adjust to the shock. Much of its power to resist has dissipated. I concentrate on a feeling that could provide the relief that I seek. It is my temporary analgesic. I feel the sentiment wash over me.

It seems like only a few minutes. But I am finding a way to hang on. I want to survive. I

don't want to die like this. How much can the body bear? How much life is in a person? If you take away some of the life, is there something that remains.

What is hope? How can it offer a bridge to the other side. Is it only an accompaniment for our pain? Can hope ever liberate the self from its feelings of desperation? Are those feelings real? Do they offer a method to extricate the self from the quandary that enclose it?

Hope, it is not enough. But it is my only succor. I cannot use my ingenuity to succeed. I cannot move so my best plans will have no effect.

I have no idea how long I have been here. But I can see the day breaking through. I feel a general exhaustion. My pain is not localized. I feel an overall throbbing. Perhaps the core of my injuries have made me numb to the full extent of my pain.

I want to inventory my injuries. On that basis, I might be able to calculate my odds of survival. Perhaps the steering wheel has crushed my chest in. Or the air-bag may have minimized the effects. I am too scared to give in to my pain. I don't want to feel too much because I am afraid what I may be missing.

The day is rolling over me. I am freaking out. I have difficulty orienting myself. I try to survey the mass of broken glass and bent metal. I can't completely open my eyes. Has my fear made it impossible to grasp what has happened. Whatever is going on, my body has been convoluted by the accident. Try as I may, I cannot wake up.

I wonder if I experiencing all this in a state of semi-consciousness. Has the trauma been so severe that I have simply shut down? At this point, I can't make sense if this is really daytime. The light seems to be going dark. Perhaps clouds. Or a storm.

My head aches. The pain is blinding. That may be why everything seems to be going dark. Or I could be close to death. I'm not even sure if I can feel my body. I am in the state of suspended animation.

I am deep in a coma. I can't pull myself out of it. I notice some of the details of the accident. For the most part, I am hardly here. I don't even know where I am.

I try to shake myself together. To gain a sense of my body. There are only transient image. Bits of pain. Explosions of sensation. I can do nothing create any sense of unity. I lie here helpless.

I wish that all this time passed would serve me in good stead. It would bring me closer to rescue. But I could be out here for months. Does anyone know to come looking for me.? I had friends. I don't have any now. My doctor isn't going to come for me. It's even doubtful that a passing car would know that I am here. I have no idea what road I am on.

I am the screamer in the nightmare.

What if I have lost a lot of blood? I am surprised that I am even alive. Will I last much longer? I am unable to assess the damage. I feel as I can smell my own blood. But what does that tell me?

What would I have to do to dislodge myself? I have been transformed by my circumstances. I have been molded by the metal.

The metal may have pierced my skin. It could have destroyed a vital organ. I can't possibly be conscious. I am barely alive.

I want to review the events that led to the accident. I can't remember any other cars on the road. I slipped on a patch of wet highway, and I smashed into some trees. Is that how it

happened?”

I wake up. I open my eyes. I can sense that night is starting to fall. All this time, and no one has found me. My terror is increasing. I have already been here for almost a full day. I am no closer to rescue.

There is still no sensation in my body. I try to feel my pain. This seems like certain proof that something serious has happened to me. I work to create an image of the body. I let my desire that image. I am trying to bring myself back to life. But it does not seem to be working.

I need to concentrate more. It is so hard to focus. I work to collect all the different perception. The flashes. There is no continuity.

It is night again. I am touched by an incredible hopelessness to my situation. Here I am in the middle of nowhere. My body is useless to me. Someone is going to need to find me. There has been a positive sign as of yet. I am too afraid to gain a clear assessment of my condition.

I haven't lost my mind yet. I am just a little groggy. Is that reason enough to hang on? I haven't eaten. I am dehydrated. If I could actually feel my body, I would ache all over.

There is no one who is going to find me. My story is simple. I will pass out before I die of starvation. Unless my body is already about to go.

I listen closely to see if I can hear any traffic at all. There's not even a train in the distance. Maybe some animal will find my body.

I still don't have the power to summon my former memories. I can sense snippets of a dream playing against the backdrop of the night. Perhaps a cricket. Or the noises inside my brain. More of a haze.

If I could just get a story going, I could let the details entertain me. None of that. Not even an appealing face.

The pain is now a dull roar. It is as if someone has just struck me in the gut. The wind has been knocked out of me. I am just trying to catch my breath. I slip back again.

I try to clench my fist. I feel that I am moving the fingers to form the clench. I tighten up. It is all imagination.

Can I even feel any of my fingers? I am having trouble localizing any sensation. I try to hold it together.

I can breathe. That could be a good beginning. I work to create a rhythm. This is a good foundation. What next? Just as I get stronger, I feel that I am beset by the same paralysis. I am probably fucked up pretty badly. No wonder I am in this state.

Such a terrible waste. Such a cruel way to die.

The experience is fraying the unity of the body. Try as I may, I am having difficulty restoring any semblance of that wholeness. My limbs will not respond at all. I feel hunger pangs in my stomach. Or that may be a more serious injury. I have just turned to mush. My will is quite useless in trying to make things better. And I will try anything. I don't know where to start.

I decide to blink my eyes. It is as if I am sending a message to a hidden observer. I work to devise a code. It is giving something for me to do. But it could simply be an illusion on my part. My eyes may have stayed close. I want to blink. I am only imagining that I can see light. I had been somewhat certain what was daytime and what was night. Now, I have no idea.

I guess that goes the same for all my other senses. If I can't tell day from night, I have no idea what is up and what is down. I believe that I am suspended upside down. I could only be exaggerating my own fear. My pain could be telling me that I am all twisted up. I could simply be too incapacitated to know the difference. All that I know is that I can't get away. I am stuck in this body in the worst way.

Don't I still have a desire to break my imprisonment? I want to let go of my suffering, but I don't want to let go of life. Is this the terrible bargain that I need to accept? Will this temporary hell be my permanent sentence? Why should I think that I am any different? It wasn't as if I prepared myself for this. It came over me. And now I have to deal with it. Take it or leave.

I summon what little courage that I have. I need to fight. Each little bundle of resistance can add up. I can fight against my situation. I can overcome!

Who am I kidding? No one is going to help me. I have no idea where I am. And nothing that I do will change what happens to me.

For once, I am ready to come to terms with the incredible solitude of my existence. I have often wondered about my isolation. As I have had less and less friends, I am reminded how little anything means to me. Faced with the most extreme of situations, there is no one to comfort me. This has been happening to me a great deal in recent time. Have I brought this on myself?

Often when we feel alone in the world, we become reckless in the hopes that someone might see our hapless condition and take pity on us. I am starting to believe that I caused the accident intentionally. It is a terrible thing to think that I am so destructive. I have become my own worst enemy.

People are afraid to look at the hidden side of others. Once a fellow human is revealed to be more pathetic than the self, it is enough to cause a person to run away in terror. We have accustomed ourselves to deny the misery of the human condition. When we are placed in proximity to the truly grotesque, we recoil. We wish that we could put the worst out of our mind. These monstrous visages haunt our sleep and engage the most perverse nightmares.

I have cut myself off from all these hideous ogres. Even my former friends have proved to be less than trustworthy. I have wandered alone with no support from anyone. I have felt my disease eating me from the inside.

I don't want to take the blame. But I can really see it no other way. As we recognize our true isolation, we are more susceptible to the calamities of the universe. Beyond our carelessness, we are cast adrift from any sense of social network. We float in the cosmos and hurtle towards the very disaster that will break us apart. I welcomed the accident into my life. We became so intimate that I could hardly wait for its embrace.

When a person takes from life, it's eventually going to catch up with him. You can't disturb the balance without a boomerang effect. I have been waiting for the consequences to hit me. It is as if a tidal wave has rolled over me. Worse. I am being tortured slowly. Too bad my victims couldn't draw some kind of pleasure by observing my pain. They don't have the satisfaction, but this only makes it worse for me. There is no direct connection to what I have done so there is no reason to expect any sort of forgiveness. I am totally damned.

I am seeing my isolation as the foundation of a true hell. I am facing a spiritual

condemnation. I never understood morality. I didn't think of myself as a bad person. I tried to be gracious. People thought that I was fun, the life of the party. I just never waited around to see the aftermath. Who I am, what I have done is now closing in on me. The tiny offenses are all being summed up and, on that basis, I am facing my final judgement. I thought that I could escape. If I didn't hang around, it would amount to nothing. My offenses have caught up with me.

I am not ready to confess. I have not fully accepted this spiritual transformation. I have spent so long surrounded by scepticism. It gave me a reason for the fleeting nature of my pleasure. And that is why I committed myself to the delights of the flesh. Even as I became overwhelmed by own misdeeds, I would only use that as an excuse to motivate further mischief. All the subterfuge, the nasty games, none of that does me any good right now.

If things are so desperate, why don't I reach out for some kind of salvation? I wish that I could. I have been so depleted by this experience, that the little will that I have is only enough to hang on. I have been in the vague state of consciousness. It has been difficult to hang on to that. There are no references to help me return. My pain only lulls me into a deeper lethargy. I am fighting this feeling. Looking for something to help me to hold on. Something to help me not to give in. I will not surrender.

"Why are you here?"

"Didn't you call for me?"

"What do you mean?"

"You want to be rescued. I can help."

"What can you do now?"

"Are you willing to admit that you've been an asshole?"

"What are you talking about? I never thought that I'd have the chance to talk to you again."

"I know what I said."

"So what is this all about?"

"What do you want it to be about?"

"What can you do for me now?"

"You want to be saved. I can help you out."

"What do I have to give you in return? It's really too late to go back."

"I know that better than you. I left you. And I don't want to relive the past."

"I don't remember it happening that way."

"You're still feeding your ego at a time like this."

"It's not as if I'm going to change my opinion because I'm desperate. I did the right thing."

"Right for you."

"We could have never made a life together."

"That's your excuse."

"You stopped loving me."

"How could I have acted any differently?"

"You could have loved me when I needed you."

"After the shit that you pulled."

“That was later on. You stopped caring before that.”

“I stopped caring because there was nothing to care about. The only person that you can love is yourself.”

“I gave you everything that I had.”

“But you don’t have a soul. You don’t know how to love yourself.”

“Are you here to give me a soul?”

“I’m not your fairy godmother. There are no wishes to grant.”

“So how do I get rescue?”

“You’ve given up. You gave up long ago.”

“I need the will to survive.”

“Do you have that? Or are you hollow inside?”

“How do you know about that?”

“At this point, I know about everything.”

“How do I wake up?”

“You’re not going to wake up.”

“Kiss me!”

“I have no more kisses to give.”

“Kiss me. Please, kiss me.”

“No more kisses!”

“Please, kiss me.”

“Hold on sir. We’re going to try to get you out of here.”

“What?”

“You’ve been in a bad accident. We’re doing everything that we can to get you out. You just have to try not to move.”

“Whoa?”

“I know that you’re still a little groggy. We’re going to get you out. It is going to take some time. Please be patient.”

“We’ve got a real mess over here.”

“How long has this guy been out here?”

“I don’t know. Maybe a day, a day and a half. He’s lucky that those kids stopped. No one would have seen his car.”

“He must have been going pretty fast when he hit the curve.”

“I don’t think that it was all his fault. It gets a little foggy here. And he probably didn’t see the curve in the road until it was up upon him.”

“What about the sign?”

“It’s been out for a while. Someone stole it, and they haven’t got around to replacing it.”

“You’re going to need a big saw for that.”

“I just hope that there’s still some life in him.”

“He was trying to talk.”

“He needs to save his energy.”

“I didn’t see much blood.”

“You can’t see everything from that angle. It’s still dark out here.”

“I just hope that someone can put him back together.”



“This car is a mess.”

“Good thing about the air bags.”

“But the car flipped over. Nothing could help him in that kind of situation.”

“He’s going to need some real help from his guardian angel.”

“If there’s anything bad in his past, this is the time that it’s going to catch up to him.”

“You have this twisted sense of justice.”

“The universe cares for its own.”

“What does that mean?”

“You can’t get away with your shit forever.”

“No one deserves this.”

“That’s why he needs the angels!”

“Where’s the saw?”

“They’re getting it. The rescue unit is standing by. They’ve done all that they can. They just need someone to cut him loose.”

“They will be quick.”

“He really is lodged in there. With his injuries, they have to watch out they get him out. If he falls against something, he could really screw himself up.”

“I’ll try to get in there to brace him. I’ll need your help.”

“There’s barely space for one person plus the guy with the saw.”

“I’ll stay out here and pray.”

“It’s better that you try to squeeze yourself in there.”

I am lying down in the back of the ambulance.

“You’re a pretty lucky fellow.

“What?”

“The airbag, the way that you hit. The car took the brunt of the collision. You just floated in midair.”

“I couldn’t feel my hands. I couldn’t open my eyes.”

“A lot of that was the shock. Paralysis. “

”Have I lost a lot of blood?”

“It looks like a miracle. A few scratches. But nothing too serious. None of your bones seem to be broken. They’ll do a full run through when they get you to the hospital.”

It still doesn’t make any sense. I can move my limbs. But I am too hesitant to try anything. I am keeping myself as motionless as possible.

“You can move your hands.”

“I can.”

“Move them.”

I try, but nothing happens.

“This is going to be a lot harder than I thought.”

They are trying to joke with me. I’m having a lot of trouble playing along.

“It’s going to take a while for you to get over what happened to you. Even the shock is quite a big deal.”

My breathing is quite halting. I know that I’m a mess. And I’m feeling cold.

“Hang on. We’ll be there soon.”

The ride to the hospital seems longer than my wait for rescue. I can feel every second divide into further units of time. With them come the incredible sense of nothingness. I want something that I can hold on to. I want to scream out. But it would seem too silly at this point.

“I’m freaking out.”

“You have nothing to worry about.”

“Why do I feel so shaken up?”

“You’ve been through so much.”

“It’s just a strange feeling.”

“We’ll be there soon.”

Indeed we are. I am whisked inside the hospital. I wait a while before they get to me. When they do, it is the model of efficiency. I am probed and turned and twisted. I didn’t think that I had the body to bear this kind of treatment. But I come out all right.

“We’re going to keep you in here for observation.”

“What did you find?”

“You are a little dehydrated. A few scrapes and bruises. But nothing too serious. You are remarkably lucky.”

I smile, “I’m not near death.”

“Much closer to life.”

I want to tell myself that I have survived a great ordeal. This is a rebirth. I lie back in my bed and try to sleep. I am restless. But the drubs knock me out.

I sleep soundly. I cannot remember any dreams. It is a wonder that my experiences were so extreme, and that I came through it all with such a feeling of confidence. There is a bit of a letdown. I guess that I had hoped for some greater reward, a spiritual enlightenment. I had given so much of myself. I just want something in return.

“You missed the symphony.”

“Is that all that you have to say?”

“We have to quit meeting like this. Do you have a target on your back?”

“I don’t even know how I ended up like this.”

“I could be your driver for a while.”

“Did they call you again?”

“I thought that you asked them to call.”

“How’s your writing going?”

“You’re the one who seems to have so much to write about.”

“You want to know that I remember very little from my time trapped in the car.”

“Why was that?”

“I don’t know. My body just didn’t have enough to help me think about things.”

“How did you survive?”

“On sheer desire. I hardly fantasized. Every time that I tried to get going, I would just shut down.”

“It’s lucky that someone found you.”

“I have no idea how they knew that I was there.”

“I think that someone saw your car when they stopped on the side of the road.”

“I can’t wait until I get home.”

I wonder what is the hold up. I know that I'm going to be late. I probably should have taken a detour. I have waited to long. I am trying to move over to the lane next to me. But the cars are blocking my road. If I move slightly, I'll ram into the car next to me.

I try to maneuver. I move back and forth.

I'm never, never, going to make it.

Why should I let it bother me? It shouldn't. If it wasn't meant to be, then I can't worry about it.

I see an opening. All of a sudden, I am traveling on a road that is totally unfamiliar. After a few turns, I am no longer sure if I am going east or west.

The road has no other drivers on it. I figure that if I speed up, I will come to an intersection that will tell me where I am.

As I pass through a curve, it seems as if another driver is veering towards me. I do everything that I can to take evasive action. The car doesn't even notice me. I am trying to regain control.

I brake, and I am starting to skid. I try to come out of it. I can feel my car roll. I can feel my body being crushed as the air bag opens.

My car has crashed into the woods. It is far off from the road. No one can really see me when they drive by.

"What is going on up there?"

"There's some guy in a wreck. They're trying to cut him out. But it's probably too late."

I'm not sure if there's time to find me. I have been out here for quite a long time. Almost forty hours of sheer hell.

"What do you remember?"

"I remember going off the road."

"We're going to try to get you to the hospital as soon as possible. Just hold tight!"