

Troy Solomon

MAG/TRF 400

Wake Up Call

I can see flashing lights going off in the back of the house, which was merely separated from the front of the house by a small wooden fence. I peer over the fence to take a look at the newly renovated back yard. Twinkling lights border the rim of the house. The pool is moderately sized, making an almost perfect oval shape. There is a beautiful cluster of various different trees, plants, and bushes surrounding the backyard, creating a tropical and exotic vibe.

So calm. So care free. So *peaceful*.

Then my phone rings.

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Every morning Maris would wake up and have a cup of coffee. She sat on the back porch where all you could hear was the sound of life. The birds greeting each other good morning. The sound of cars passing by from the front of the house. Light music playing from the house across the small grassy backyard. Her obsession with coffee eventually seemed to rub off on me – considering I began drinking it when I was two years old. No I am not addicted, shockingly, but I really enjoy the taste and the experience that coincides with drinking a cup of coffee.

One of the greatest moments I have had in London thus far was simply sitting in Costa drinking a cup of coffee and watching life happen out the window.

I ordered my large Americano with cream, only this time I asked to drink in instead of take away. I was given a very large coffee mug – one so large it had handles on

both sides of the cup for extra stability when holding it. I could smell the dark, toasty aroma floating from the cup up into my line of smell. I found a small round table in the window, big enough for just two people, and I sat down. The windows were large. They shot up from the floor to the ceiling with no window decorations to impair my view. From the outside, it would appear that I was sitting in a large glass box. As if I were trapped. From the inside, the world was at my fingertips. I watched as people walked through the tiny alleyway. Some were clearly in a hurry; easily spotted by the light sprint they had started. Others, mostly foreigners, were moseying about with a map in one hand and their fingers pointing to the clothing displays in the windows. Directly across from me is a pub. It was only two in the afternoon so the pub was rather quiet, however there was a man and a woman outside chatting over glasses of wine. I watched as the pigeons crawled their ways through the street in search of any scraps they could find. Their heads bobbed back and forth while their bodies continued forward. Every so often someone would come trampling by, sending the pigeon into a near frenzy. Workers from the neighboring clothing stores would occasionally come outside to wash the windows, or smoke a cigarette, or talk on their phone.

All throughout my visual exploration, the loud sound of the baristas working behind me made the tranquility outside seem chaotic and sporadic.

My attention turned to watch as the baristas turn on the steam pipes to heat up the milk into a foamy froth. I watched the station one over make two perfectly measured shots of espresso. The baristas miraculously took all of these ingredients, and more that I couldn't see, and created a large drink that I couldn't begin to name. I never got these crazy kinds of drinks. I kept it simple and plain with a regular cup of coffee, just like

Maris did. I wanted to maintain the essence of simplicity and calmness, just like the world I was watching outside. Even nestled into a metropolis like London, you could still find peace and quiet. The kind of peace and quiet I had experienced every morning when I would wake up and have a cup of coffee with Maris on the back porch.

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I love being high. The anticipation that builds when you rise further and further from the ground. The danger of falling fills my veins with adrenaline. There's something mysteriously intriguing about danger. It gifts us with the feeling that we are about to take our very last breath and we see our life flash before our eyes. In that mere instance, where we see our life in retrospect, we remember life isn't guaranteed. We realize that there is a distinct division between having life and living life.

Between being alive and *feeling* alive.

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Maris was short. Barely reaching five feet and one inch. Her view of the world was skewed by her lack of altitude. From down there she couldn't see things that people up here can see. Large crowds terrified her. The busy commotion of a bustling city would swallow her whole.

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Maris loved being h

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“Life lives, life dies. Life laughs, life cries. Life gives up and life tries. But life looks different through everyone's eyes.”

-Anonymous

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I took a little trip to the London Eye. I walked in the door to purchase my ticket and a wave of excitement came over me. I felt like I was in Disney World waiting in line to go on Rockin' Roller Coaster. I handed the woman my 17 pounds and proceed down the narrow walkway. I reached the doors that lead me outside, swiftly pulled them open, and there it was. Standing 135 meters above the water was my adrenaline rush. I paused for a moment to fully take in my surroundings. There was a large crowd of foreigners to the left of the entrance dancing and singing in unison. The words they were using were far from understandable, but their mood was clear. They were happy. Happy to be together. Happy to be in London. Happy to be alive.

The blue lights from the massive Ferris wheel gave the entire evening atmosphere a jovial glow. Everything seemed happier. It was like being high. Things seemed to move in slow motion – as if you were meant to capture every little detail. As if you were meant to slow down in the middle of this chaotic city and see real life for the first time.

I made my way to the entrance and staked my place in a very short line, maybe three or four people in front of me. Not before long I was next to board. The wheel continuously turns, even as you step off the platform and into the capsule. The threshold between the two was like a dividing line between two worlds. One filled with people and noise and life, and one that was isolated and quiet and empty. I stood at the north end of

the capsule for the first leg of the flight. I watched as Big Ben and Westminster Abby shrank smaller and smaller, until it seemed as though I could squish them with my fingers. I made my way around this new world I had entered. I watched out the west side – trying to find my flat. All I could really see was the tall “BTOpen Zone” tower, with its large panoramic screen and tall pointy antenna. The rest of the west end was rather a blur. Small buildings and winding streets made it hard to identify any particular important landmark. I switched to the south end. That was when it hit me.

The first rush. I looked down at the ground and the small ant-sized people signing and dancing and I then realized how high I was. Thoughts of falling and crashing into the ground raced through my head and forced me to latch onto the railing with an immense grip. My heart began to race and knees began to feel unstable. It wasn't very noticeable from my exterior actions, but internally I was terrified. The wheel paused for a moment and I snapped out of it. I exhaled the breath that I had been holding for about 45 seconds and I could still feel the electricity burning through my veins. I felt alive. As the decent began, I felt less and less alive. The thrill began to die away. One instance I was the king of the world, high above sitting on my throne; and the next I'm back down to the peasants level. Back down to reality. It was like I shrunk. It was like I was five feet and one inch. It was like I was seeing the world through Maris's eyes.

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Death is more universal than life; everyone dies but not everyone *lives*.

--A. Sachs

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It's Thanksgiving at 7:13pm. My phone rings and I ignore it to avoid being rude in front of my best friend's family; with whom I spend every Thanksgiving. I then receive a text message – it is from my father: “Call me ASAP”. But he knows its Thanksgiving, why would he need to speak with me so urgently. I excuse myself from the warm, and rather crowded living room to make my phone call. The phone rings continuously and I begin to get annoyed. Internally I am arguing with myself, “Why would he tell me to call him ASAP if he isn't going to answer?” The ringing stops and a muffled voice responds. “Troy, are you there?” I ask him what is going on and he tells me he will call me right back. My heart begins to race. As I await his return phone call I pace around the outside driveway. Its very cold and I have no jacket – I didn't expect this to be such a dragged on phone conversation. I can see flashing lights going off in the back of the house, which was merely separated from the front of the house by a small wooden fence. I peer over the fence to take a look at the newly renovated back yard. Twinkling lights border the rim of the house. The pool is moderately sized, making an almost perfect oval shape. There is a beautiful cluster of various different trees, plants, and bushes surrounding the backyard, creating a tropical and exotic vibe. My eyes gazed over this mini oasis and I could picture what it must look like in the summer. The sun shining with the water nice and warm. I could imagine the large waterfall that protruded over the water's edge pouring water creating a gentle ripple effect down the length of the pool. So calm. So care free. So peaceful. Then my phone rings. My daydream vanishes and I answer the phone. “Dad, what is going on?” My dad takes a deep breath and sighs through the phone. He's crying. No, he's sobbing. “Troy, your mother died.”

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My mom was only 50 years old when she died. Half of her life she did not spend living and doing everything she's ever wanted to do. I, on the other hand, do have the opportunity to live and experience what this world truly has to offer. I have the opportunity to discover the difference between being alive and *feeling* alive. Between having life and *living* life. We begin dying the moment we take our first breath on this earth. It is our responsibility to make that breath, and every breath that follows, count towards a greater something. So take your time. Soak it all in. Don't just see life – *feel* life – because you never really know if your next breath is going to be your last breath.

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Rest In Peace: Maris Solomon Ladofsky

January 1, 1959 – November 26, 2009