

February 2000

There were clothes thrown all around his room. Wrinkled, soil-stained jeans littered what was once his writing table: It was meant to be a runway from which his thoughts and dreams could take flight. Now, the table served no other purpose but to hold laundry that would never be washed. He held no vision for his life, nothing for which he could hope. Perhaps there was a time when life held the promise of a future where love and easy laughter were all possible. But for him, life proved itself to be a liar who claimed that anyone could become whatever he or she could dream of becoming. But for him, there would be no love; there would be no simple smiles. He didn't even harbor self-hate or wallow in despair anymore. Despair needs hope, but his reflection was little more than an empty face that had no hope to reflect.

It was 6:00 am. The winter sky was a sheet of black ice off of which hopeful prayers bounced back to the frozen earth. For him, there would be no more prayers, anyway: No more asking God for absolution that couldn't come. Besides, he no longer knew the difference between his life and his sins: They had melded together into a single, numbed-out and isolated abyss. The last of his tears had been pouring out of his now dry eyes since 3:00 am. His cheeks were razor-burned from the years of collecting pain slicing down his face. Now, though, all the blood-laced tears had gone silent. Their screams were mute. His life was over.

He looked at the detritus with which his room was littered and he couldn't help but think that his life was also littered with knowledge that he was worthless. There was no beautiful truth hidden behind his pain. Without any doubt in his mind, his life was not now nor would it ever be a mission to fulfill. When he was a kid, he believed with all of his heart that life would present a ladder upon which he would climb out of a life mired in violence and alcohol. But, even though there were times when he could see glimpses of that ladder, those glimpses proved to be nothing

more than a mirage. The truth for him was that life was an oiled slide descending into nothing but a collection of scattered memories that evidenced his absolute failure of a life. He had nothing to offer the world and he was finished offering nothing.

There was a time when tequila would fill the vacuum. He'd let the liquor consume his soul and then he'd float comfortably numb on top of the tequila pond. Soon, though, not even the tequila-pond scum, or marijuana's sweet smoke, or Zypreza's heavy blanket could cover the fact that all that remained of him was shame: He hated himself for the fraud he had become. His life was little more than a downward spiral ride towards nothing but smoke and mirrors. He was an inhabitant of hell and it was from hell he wanted release.

His car seemed to start itself. The temperature outside must have been well below freezing, as a thick sheet of ice formed on the windshield. Like a well-trained horse, his car meandered through Santa Fe and headed north along I-25, until it found the sacred Pecos wilderness. He would dance with the hawks, free from the earthly hell which had bound him for far too long. The car inched along the narrow road that was only slightly bigger than a well-maintained trail until it came to a rest near a cliff that had once served him as his own unmarked scenic overlook. Trees surrounded his walk towards the cliff; they were like prison guards that marked his last path and witnessed his death march. Yes, he was a dead man walking, but only for a little while more. The early morning sky was still grey and peppered with clouds that threatened to dump even more snow on the already buried and frozen earth. The wind froze his breath as it left his mouth. But, even though he was only covered in a t-shirt, he couldn't feel the cold. He was already partly out of his body and there was no bringing him back to his prison cell.

He inched his way towards the edge of the cliff and looked down. The Pecos River ran fast and hard down below, but he was too high up to hear its raging flow. From where he stood, the jagged grey rocks that shot through the water looked more like pebbles that could get stuck in someone's shoe. He looked at the last few hundred feet of his life and thought that the entire flight would last little more than a few seconds and then it would come to a violent and sudden end. He closed his eyes, imagined a God in whom he no longer placed faith, drew a deep breath, and screamed towards the frozen sky, "Why have you forsaken me?"

He didn't jump right away; instead he stared into the deep and wide valley below. It was more than Nietzsche's abyss looking back at him: Instead, it was his own eyes that looked at him. They were the eyes he wore as a child, still carrying all the hope and promise that childhood fantasies allow. Those eyes were still innocent, unaware that through the years he wouldn't develop the courage to live his life on his own terms. As a child, he wanted to be good. Not rich, not famous: Just good. But as he stared down into his last trip, he knew that he was anything but good. Good people don't hate themselves. He wasn't bad, though, either. He was worse than bad because, while his toes stiffened and his fingers froze, he realized that he was a coward who had rightfully died a thousand deaths and then cursed himself for being that coward. He ran from his pain because he was too weak to stand there and face it head-on. And now, it was over. His childhood eyes faded into the cold and harsh wind and all sounds stopped. He took a deep breath, exhaled, bent his knees, and prepared for takeoff...