

Dear Miss Carrie  
“you then asia”



Part II

a brief user's guide to a short story  
by Charles Wolfgang Keane Tuomi

The miscarriage described in my short story “you then asia” really happened to someone I knew. I wrote the story in 2003. My wife at the time was pregnant with a critter who would become our second child, my daughter, Freya. Pregnancy and labor-related worries and concerns were therefore top of mind for me at the time I wrote “you then asia.”

My now ex-wife had miscarried during her first pregnancy, early, before we could learn the gender or start discussing names or preparing a space for the miracle we expected.

I later became aware of an entirely different type of miscarriage, one with details so cruel that it seemed calibrated and calculated, as if the intent was to maximize the suffering it would inflict. A woman who worked at the same company as I did gave birth to a stillborn child, who had apparently been strangled by its own umbilical cord, pretty much exactly as described in “you then asia.”

On Christmas.

The baby was strangled to death on Christmas while inside of its mother.

Extrapolate. *Be her*. My co-worker. Become her pain. *Just imagine*.

Every Christmas from now on. The happiest day of the year for everyone around you. Smiles and carols and glee. And *every Christmas* you’re back there, in a hospital, experiencing an unthinkaable nightmare that cannot possibly have happened to you.

Every year. Every manger. Every Christ child.

“My lost little boy.”

Every fucking year.

The woman this happened to was a nice person. A lot nicer than average. She was noticeably warmer than most at work, not over the top, just genuine and kind in a soft-spoken way.

And this is what she gets.

The horror in my mind wouldn't stop. The burning rage. "No. No No. This can't be." I knew well the feelings of anger and grief that my ex-wife's miscarriage had raised in me, but this? This was many orders of magnitude more hellish.

At the Jesuit high school I attended, we had been assigned the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, by Harold S. Kushner. One of the metaphors I appreciated in that book was that of a tapestry. The idea was that reality is a tapestry and we see the side that is messy during our lives, and maybe even ugly or chaotic, just random threads and no clear pattern, but at some point we will see the other side of things, the beautiful side, where the full design is revealed. I believe it is in the afterlife that we are supposed to see that design in the metaphor.

It is a lovely idea, but the mom in question was a young woman. That was too long for her to wait. In my humble opinion.

So I decided I would show her the design long before she died. So that just maybe, every Christmas would be beautiful for her again, instead of a nightmare.

The euthanasia in "you then asia" is real, too.

I spent my childhood living in a home with my mom, my grandmother, my mom's sister, her husband, Richard (who everyone called "Dick"), and eventually, their three children, my cousins.

My aunt died of cancer in 1991. Dick, who suffered from a seizure disorder that was like epilepsy if not technically that, was utterly broken by her death. His wife had been his whole life, the sun around which he orbited. He stopped taking his medication, and just a couple of months after his wife died, he had a seizure while out in public, fell, smashed his head against a curb, and fell into a coma.

I went to visit him one night in the hospital. I was by myself. I had plans to go to a party at a co-worker's apartment in downtown Boston that night afterwards. I entered his room and approached the bed and I stood there, watching him breathe. Staples ran over the top of his shaved head where he had been split open by the fall, like gruesome train tracks. One of his eyes was swollen huge, like a deep purple golf ball. He had not responded to any stimuli in some time.

I stood there and I watched him.

I was the only member of the family that had not been in attendance at the death of his wife, my aunt, because I was attending college in Syracuse, NY, just wrapping up my sophomore semester. I learned of her death through a college counselor, just as finals week started. I essentially walked out of a couple of my exams with things half-finished or sloppily done.

But those who were there when she died told me that Dick had sobbed uncontrollably at his wife's bedside, telling her how much he loved her, and that he would "be with her soon."

I looked at him now in this bed, at his brokenness, at his injury. It was like being in church, looking up at a man nailed to a cross, bleeding from a crown of thorns. Dick had never been, in my experience, a strong man. He was timid and very difficult to anger or provoke much of any emotion from. He had been different before his illness began, I had been told. He and my aunt had loved dancing and music. After he started having seizures, my uncle grew gradually feeble and my aunt grew more and more anxious under the burden of becoming something of a caretaker for him.

But as I stood over him and watched his weak, slow breathing, I realized Dick had chosen this. He had told everyone his intent. He had stopped taking his medication. He didn't want to be here anymore. I wasn't sure if Dick dying meant that he would be with his wife again, but I was sure that as I studied his face, he just didn't want to be here anymore. I could sympathize with that sentiment.

My mother had told me, leading up to my aunt's death, that it was important for a dying person to be told by someone they loved that it was ok to let go. Some dying persons feel an obligation to hold on and prolong their suffering in order to postpone causing pain in others. I did not like the idea of my uncle Dick doing that.

So I leaned down and without touching my uncle, I gave him permission to leave.

"Uncle Dick," I said softly. "You can let go."

And he did.

He immediately stopped breathing. His chest froze and never rose again.

I stood up straight and watched, waiting for another breath to come. It didn't. I waited a bit more. He was not moving in any way. No machines were beeping. No flatline sound. He had just...stopped. I don't remember seeing a heart monitor or anything telling me activity in his body had ceased.

After some period of time, I am not sure how long but probably a couple of minutes, I walked to the door to go get a nurse. As I left the room, one of my cousins was approaching, coming down the hallway toward me.

"I think he's gone," I told him.

And he said, "What?! Oh no," and threw back his head and made a pained face.

For me, this recontextualized what had just happened. Already in my head, before encountering my cousin, I had been thinking how good it was that I had decided to visit that night, because if I had not, he might have died alone. On the other hand, I was also hopeful that there had been a connection between Dick letting go and the words I spoken, that the timing was not a coincidence, and that maybe he had needed to hear that from someone in the family, that maybe those words had brought him some peace before he departed.

Now, after encountering my cousin, it was just one more bad thing I had done in a long line of them. My cousin's reaction turned a blessing into a curse for me. Why did I have to say that? Why couldn't I have waited to say it until his son showed up?

The opportunity to blame myself for something else, to add to my list of crimes, reinforced the connection in my mind between me saying what I said and my uncle immediately dying. I was now responsible for his death. Like Charon, Greek ferryman of the Underworld, I had seen my uncle off to the next place, wherever and whatever that meant.

My uncle DiCk is the character Dennis Colvin in "you then asia," the man about whom news is shared. Specifically, Dennis is "dead, gloriously dead," which is

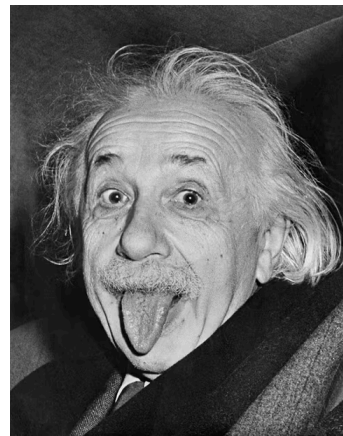
stated once in matter of fact terms, and again with my original sense of what happened, representing the two sides of this experience for me. I wanted to tell my cousin, “he is *gloriously* dead, this is *good news*, his pain is over.” But instead I just tucked away more guilt for myself to carry around.

Dennis Colvin in the story is 74 years old.

74 is the atomic number for Tungsten, which used to be called Wolfram.

“you then asia” is a confession.

Dennis Colvin, my uncle Dick,  
was blessed to death by the growling  
of a genius wolf.



This wasn't the first time I appeared to have life over death. In first grade, for example, I developed a crush on a high school girl who would come to help our teacher sometimes. A brunette, with cute freckles. One day I saw her with a boy, wearing a football jacket. They appeared to be boyfriend and girlfriend. I didn't like it.

He died shortly thereafter in a car accident.

She stopped coming to help out in class.

*Recontextualization.*

I carry a burden. This ability. Power over death. A gift that became a curse which could become a gift again, if not for me, then for someone else, when the right time came.

Such as years later. The Christmas tragedy. The holiday atrocity. A horror that could not be tolerated.

Ok, then. I am now become Death. Say my name. “Tomb-y.”

How can I fix this? What can I do?

On one level, I quit. Disgusted at the behavior of my employer, I simply refuse to do my job anymore. That’s it. Never again.

No one is dying anymore, anywhere. Period. This shit is finished.

And that’s not nothing. It’s a noble protest, if a wee bit childish, but there is character in it, at least. But it doesn’t bring the babies back. Not my co-worker’s stillborn child. Not my own unborn child, whom I saw for the first and last time floating in a toilet, into which she had fallen from her mother one night early in the pregnancy, just a blob of languid, red-brown tissue moving like a lazy, sleeping alien.

Stopping death would only cause more pain for my co-worker. She would be living in a post-apocalyptic horror movie of a world. As would I. And my own children. And others.

What tools do I have at my disposal? What can I use?

Christ. Resurrection. The last supper. Eucharist. The breaking of bread.

The company at which we both worked was headquartered in Ipswich, MA. In downtown Ipswich, on Market Street, there was and, last I checked, still is, a sub shop called Zeno’s Roast Beef & Seafood.



Zeno's Roast Beef & Seafood  
Ipswich, MA



Patience, ladies. You're about to find out.



Zeno was a classical Greek philosopher, noted for, among other things, presenting logical paradoxes related to motion. Perhaps the most famous is often just referred to as Zeno's Paradox.

Zeno's Paradox goes something like this.

Getting from any Point A to any Point B is impossible, because in order to do that, I first need to get *halfway* from Point A to Point B, and in order to do *that*, I first need to get halfway to *that* halfway point, and in order to do *that*, I first need to get halfway to the halfway point of the original halfway point, and in order to do *that*...well, hopefully you see the problem.

You can continue to subdivide the distances, cutting them in half, forever. Meaning you will never get from Point A to Point B. If you fire an arrow at a target, it will never strike the target.

Getting from Point A to Point B is impossible, according to the problem presented in Zeno's Paradox.<sup>1</sup>

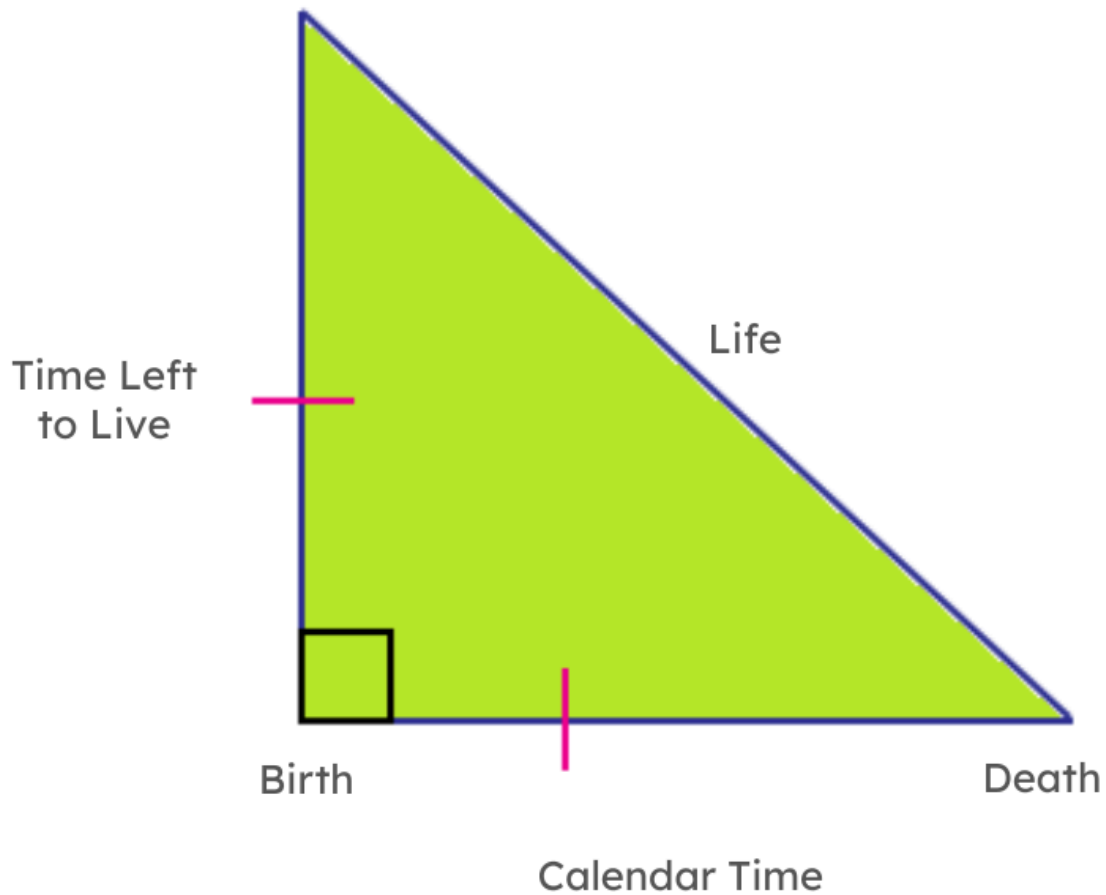
It occurred to me at some point that Zeno's Paradox could be exploited to make human beings immortal, at least in a story.

If Point A is life and Point B is death, and in order to die, one would first need to get halfway between life and death, and before that to get halfway to that halfway point, etc...then death would never occur. We could subdivide moments forever, just as Zeno's Paradox subdivided physical distance. Einstein had introduced the idea of spacetime, so really it is just divvying up the same fabric.

The idea is even more viable when you visualize a person's life as a graph that forms a triangle, as follows.

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<sup>1</sup> "But we do get from Point A to Point B," one might observe. Oh, do we? Are you sure? Topic for another essay.



Because the length of the Time Left to live side (a) is equal to the Calendar Time side (b), this makes it an Isoscelean Right Triangle. Which means that you can form two equal Isoscelean Right Triangle by bisecting the 90 degree angle and drawing a line from the angle at ab to the midpoint of the hypotenuse. And because each of the two triangles created when you do that are also Isoscelean Right Triangles, you can create two more. And again. And again. Forever. If you use really teeny tiny pens with very fine ink to draw the triangles with.

“Voila. Humans are immortal. You’re welcome.”

Thus spoke Charon, ferryman of the Undwerworld, who was put in charge of this stuff, despite not wanting to be in charge of anything.

This is where you get the “half lives” that the “not quite dead” in “you then asia” are living. It is a *little bit* like being sucked into a black hole or a singularity,

where time and space just stretch and bend and stretch under the force of the almost infinite gravity and things just sort of not quite freeze but go on forever.

So my co-worker's miscarriage does not end in a stillborn death, but rather a living child *in the process* of dying, but who will never die to due to Zeno Tuomi's Deathless Paradox.

Which sucks.

I mean, one of the things "you then asia" might get you to think is that prolonging life at all costs, creating an enemy of death as we do in the modern world, particularly in Western culture, is sort of ill advised.

Leaving things in this state would just create the torment experienced in the story. Being forever on pause.

But I didn't make the torment last forever. Maria is on the machine for two months. There are two months between July and October: August and September.

"you then asia" was published on the Internet in July 2003.

My daughter was born in real life in early October 2003. It happened. I was there. I held her in arms and gazed into her new born eyes and beautiful face.

And after being born, my daughter was given a beautiful middle name.

My co-worker's beautiful name.

My co-worker's wound was real. It wasn't a story. Healing of it could only take place in the real world. So I used the story to buy time until that could occur. I am "Time-y," as well as being "Tomb-y."

I bought a few months with Zeno Tuomi's Deathless Paradox. And then, with the burning my wife felt during labor, as she gave birth to my daughter, the spirit of my co-worker's unborn child entered my daughter ("disembodied...bodiless whisper") and they were *both born at the same time*, like twins sharing a body.

(We can do this sort of stuff in my family, be multiple things at once, because all of us have at least Two Mes.)

And so my co-worker's child lives on. A "junior" version of her mom. A living, breathing human being. Through a birth contextualized by a story.

I don't know the gender of the child that was temporarily lost on that terrible Christmas, but I have many times heard her precious laughter. I have many times heard her beautiful voice sing, songs she has written herself, and watched in stunned admiration as she performed at piano recitals and sang in choir. I have admired art hanging on my walls painted and drawn by her fingers and hands.

She lives. She breathes. She writes music and makes art. She is not gone.

As a boy who had no father, I know what it is to feel unwanted. Whether "God" wanted that child, or the first child my daughter's mom lost, or me, to be born is irrelevant. Whether "God" concerns Itself with such things doesn't matter.

Because I wanted them.

Of course, if "God" did concern Itself with such things, It could easily have stopped me from doing any of this, thereby making a possibly thoughtful person wonder if perhaps this was Its intention all along. The transmutation of suffering into beauty.

At any rate, here is the other side of that tapestry, Elizabeth.

This is *my* design.

# The Angel's Trip

you

then

asia

suffering infants

Christmas sadness as “lukewarm tea”

*But*

*the*

*burning*

October. Halloween shadows. Autumn leaves.

an orange, flickering glow

a sacrifice to long-vanished gods

chilly air, and a *bodiless whisper*

*Keep*

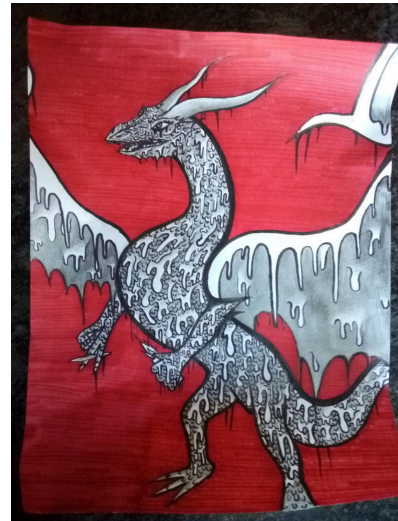
*it*

*up*



“Behold, she makes  
all things new.”

Revelation 21:5



# Freeing the Light

$$E = m \boxed{c}$$

$$\textit{Imprisoned child} = \boxed{c}$$

It's a womb that became a tomb.

“In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.”

Opening words of *The Hobbit*,  
a children's book written by J.R.R Tolkien



“My precious....”

J.R.R. Tolkien's daughter's name is *Priscilla*

Would you like to see the babies, too?

I'll tell you how.

I sent "you then asia" to ChiZine, where Paul Tremblay read and edited it and facilitated the publishing of it on the Internet.

Paul then wrote the novel *The Cabin at the End of the World*.

M. Night Shyamalan adapted *The Cabin at the End of the World* into the film, *Knock at the Cabin*.

Watch the movie. Let the light enter through your eyes. Invite her, them, all of them, inside your mind. Let them occupy a space in your heart. Hear their voices.

My co-worker's stillborn child.

My unborn child.

Me, an unpleasant accident.

And others like us.

So many unwanted.

So much death.

**Reversed.**

“Welcome to the Palace of Nowhere  
Where all the Many Things Become ~~One~~ Wen.”  
from *The Way of Chuang Tzu*  
Taoist spiritual poetry,  
translated by a Catholic monk, Thomas Merton  
an example of East-West fusion



“wanted”







The Human Heart has Four Chambers.  
Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.


Not enough? On Vocal Media, another short story I wrote appears. It was published in February 2004 in the Australian speculative fiction e-zine, *Ideomancer*.

The title of the story is  
“The Leap from the Bridge is Ungainly.”  
It can [be found here](#).

Find the umbilical cord.  
The amniotic fluid.

Feel an expectant, hopeful child full of magical thinking head toward the world and its waiting parents, and then get abruptly pulled back.

See the remnants of my little girl floating in the toilet water. Watch me bend bend down to look at her.

The story is a loop. The end is the beginning.  
Another form of immortality.  
They live, if you live, and let them in.  
Their s will go on.



Nora **Elizabeth**  
Jamison Durst  
from HBO's *The  
Leftovers*

“There is a fraction of a moment then, a bardo, an in-between, before the tautness of the cord begins to pull him upward. In that measureless span of time, he is close enough to feel the river's icy spray on his cheeks, mere inches from Kim's face in the water below. Reaching out for her, he feels the river swallow his finger tips. She stretches her hand toward his.

It is as if she is his reflection.  
Literally his better half.”

“The Leap from the Bridge is Ungainly”  
by Charles Tuomi

