



By Robert Standish

Reprinted by kind permission of the author. This story was originally published in **Issue 2**.

WHY WE LIKE IT:

We can't remember the last time we read a monologue of not so 'quiet desperation' that moved us as much as 'IF'. This is the kind of introspective writing that is often attempted (too often in our opinion) but seldom mastered. There is heartbreak in every word of this outsider modern day apologue and every sentence is a 'barbaric yawp' that punches the reader in the mind's gut. Sure, there are a few typos and grammatical missteps throughout the text but we felt, in this case, the rough edges only add to the plaintive honesty of the narrator's voice; so we left them in. What you read is what you get and what you get here is what we love. Quote: 'One thing I preach is put your oxygen mask on first then help others'.

So cold; this dampness is hell, it seeps inside me, separating me from my skin. So thirsty.

I got nothing, just the taste of my own spit. I am so desperate for something to drink. I should lick the moisture off the grey concrete; no way, if they taste the way it smells around here, not a chance.

I am starving, I have starved myself for so long, in every way that a person can starve, my soul is a useless shell; stomach empty, heart empty, fighting to hold on to my last ounce of humanity, but why, for who or what reason, who cares, devoid of my rights, I know I have some, but feel that they have all been taken away, no one to hear my plea; that time has past.

Only one thing fills me, a word, one small fuckin word, IF; what IF.

The power and importance of "IF" is so obvious, but only after regret is born from choices made. A two letter word that's the result of many every second guess, every mistake, a path I didn't take, what if I stuck around a little longer at a job I didn't really like and see the offers that were on the way. I failed to see the big picture, and what is it that I really didn't like?

What *IF* I didn't treat her that way I eventually did and saw her beauty and value for what they were as I lost my way. Choosing loyalties can build as well as destroy. Each person you allow

into your life is given the power to tear it apart. How many people did I push away, I kept my pain and anger inside and it became the stranger within I grew to hate, it wasn't her it was me, always was. That is the surprise, the reveal of truth once you answer *IF*.

IF, should be an evaluation, made before and not a question asked when it all goes completely to shit, but usually second guesses are always messes.

The solution is actually very simple, you need to learn how it feels and what it sounds like when your inner voice and intuition speak and do all it can to prevent you from leaving your path. So what is the sound of my first impression, or intuition? You know, you have heard it before and felt its hand try to persuade you but may have never followed through.

So learn to trust in yourself and if you learn to recognize it early on the little things of little or no consequence, you can train yourself to see it, and the signs are easier to read resulting in a life of success.

What I didn't understand or recognize at the time was I was fighting against fate. I made an enemy out of the one person that was trying to save me. Every time I would stumble and fail I would ignore the outcome that was trying to push me in the right direction. I would resist it instead of following my inner self preserving voice of reason, and I failed to follow through on the times I had success. I assumed it was luck and fleeting so I stopped repeating.

Sitting on the wet unforgiving concrete, my mind fights to free me from this reality and make my accommodations less imposing. Despite everything I have ever done, I put myself here, the path forks in many ways sometimes you see it coming and just go blind until it passes. Was I afraid to succeed or was I just stupid? I want to escape, I need to. Regardless of where I would try to escape to they will come for me, that's what they do. Honestly I am now counting on it.

I will wait here and cower as every sharp sound cuts through me. I need something to force the show to start.

The show, the flash before my eyes that tells me if I am done or have just begun, I need to kick start that moment. There were signs everywhere along the way, so many signs, and I never learned to read them until now. I spent my life oblivious to so much. One thing I preach is put your oxygen mask on first then help others. I never took the time to do this for myself and put others first and here is the reward. The lesson is if you live for others first they will do their worst and sacrifice you first, so poetic and pathetic.

I have nothing left to bargain with I sacrificed everything I had or will ever have, so I am left with no way to pay the bill anymore. How many of us have a list of *IF*'s?

Every noise here echoes with empty cold hate, every sound impossible to distinguish, painful to my ears stabbing me into submission; I feel the hate, it approaches from all sides and mostly from within. I have learned to look back and see all my faults for what they really are. Ha, for the first time I have decided to put the mask on myself and look where I am.

They're here, who am I kidding they were always here, because they are me, judge and jury. I know I have to go, and without any direction I know exactly where, instinctively. I don't deserve the right to cry right, I have no tears left anyway. The task at hand takes over the emotions that would normally stop me, I have no choice so fuck you inner voice. I have accepted all of this, that doesn't mean I agree with it, just that the fight is done, I left myself vulnerable when I was at my weakest. Even as the shadows force the darkness into my soul there is still a price to pay, one that I can afford. I get to my feet and start walking.

I am left alive long enough to know the pain of living past my usefulness, to see life move on without me and how quickly I fade from importance and be forgotten, even hated. This is living the day after and seeing how it will be when you are gone for good. I don't recommend anyone learning this lesson, it hurts. Its much worse than the death itself, living through it to see the other side is the worse pain imaginable. I have never hated anyone enough to ever wish this on them. Not totally true, I hate me, I never cared to take the time to love myself, is this the birthplace of hope or repenting faith? I have no idea. I was afraid, before, but not now; now that I accepted the end, truly accepted it unlike the pretenders that just cut, without the intent to kill.

I emerge from my prison beneath the overpass and prepare to join the suicide society, I choose this bridge because I don't own a gun. Every member has their own exit strategy. I step off a full member and free fall to an awakening that should explain everything, I do this with such clarity and determination, I have accepted my actions and know that the sun will rise for everyone tomorrow, once their clouds clear it will be better and their show can continue, mine went as far as it was ever going to I guess.

One step and the show has started. I race to the river below and consider if I had cared and protected myself would I have ended up here. This is real and not dream I will ever be able to wake from. My mind remembers the turning points, I moved past it, ignored it but never forgot it, I just failed to see it for what it was meant to be, it's where I stumbled and never recovered, we all have one of those moments, our *IF MOMENT*.

What walked me off the bridge was that I ran out of reasons and the ability to stay.

I didn't leave a note, shit, this is a questions that answers itself, if you really know me then you know.

The show must go on so we learn to stop making the same mistakes, is anyone aware of this? It's supposed to because it's intended to out live the audience and be performed by the ones still left standing. I finally succeeded at at last one thing, I succeeded at not fitting into my own life, I remain an outsider in my own existence. I consider that *IF* I could go back I would not change anything about anyone around me, I would change me. The last step was my first step, just too late.

Since I was removed from relevance and neatly packaged away I can leave clean and my list of *IF*'s is done.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The story of 'IF'. I find that there have been times of great mental stress and anxiety that force me to question what I am doing, not doing or choices I have made or failed to make. I found that I stopped trusting myself and was asking IF, I had made a different choice would I have been better off. 'IF' I learned to listen to my inner voice and went with my first instinct how would I have succeeded, Inspired by own list of 'IF's' that I did not include with the story as it was far too long to include. I was inspired by my own life experience and the need to pass this along to my song as wisdom and a warning to trust in himself and how. I wish someone told me when I was his age or younger, but would I have listened? I don't know. What 'IF' I did?

I like to write about subject matter that is not familiar to me so I can learn along with the reader. My favourite author would be Edgar Allen Poe, as I like how he was able to make me feel the words and emotion through few words but say so much. R. William Standish

BIO:

Robert Standish is an aspiring writer and devoted father of three. After several years in the film and television industry in Canada, he has had the chance to meet some amazing people, travel and experience things, not for normal consumption. As a camera assistant and operator he has been in the line of fire on many occasions and inside explosions and crashes, just to name a few incredible opportunities. 'Chalk Outline These Thoughts 1 and 2 and a fiction novel 'The Secrets Men Keep', most recently the creator of a collection of poetry entitled 'The Passion Hidden Within'. (*Amazon and Kindle*) I have found most recent success with three poems published on Terror House Magazine and soon a short fiction story will be published in February, it is my hope to extend and expand my exposure and develop as many relationships as I can. Now transitioning into a creative writer who has self-published four works and counting, Robert is setting his sights on the next project.