

The Suicide Tour

by
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The Suicide Tour is a work of fiction and any resemblance to real persons,
living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Chapter 1

I couldn't commit suicide if my life depended on it.

George Carlin

Debbie Bloom stood precariously balanced—with her toes well over the edge—contemplating suicide.

Not that she thought that the fall would kill her; that wasn't the point. She was standing on a desk, after all, and the carpeted floor was a scant thirty inches below. No, it was the *idea* of suicide that interested her, the concept, the decision; it was the choice to do it today, not tomorrow; on Tuesday, not Wednesday.

The *how* of it intrigued her as well: a gun, a noose. Pills, or pills and a plastic bag. A subway. A car. A high rise. A quarry. A bridge.

Debbie got down from her desk.

“Not *a* bridge,” she said. “*The* bridge.”

The monitor was already filled with its image: The Golden Gate. She sat and rolled her chair closer to the screen.

The photo was mostly fog, the bridge loomed up out of a white-out. A tower, cables. A sense of mystery.

The webpage's banner was flipping through a little flash movie, a cartoon of the bridge and a jumper. The tiny stick figure leapt to his death over and over again beside the masthead:

The Suicide Tour

Backstage at the World's #1 Suicide Destination

It only took her three mouse-clicks to register and pay for the tour. It began at ten in the morning every Saturday.

So. Not Tuesday, not Wednesday, but Saturday.

Debbie sighed. She had never been a patient person. It was Monday. Five days. Five days of waiting, killing time.

There was no hope for it, though, she understood the importance of preparation and research; some things needed to be taken one step at a time, some things needed to happen only when the time was right.

She stood up and stretched. It was nearly five in the morning; she'd been awake and writing since three. After she showered, she had a hair appointment, then she needed to find the perfect outfit for her appearance on *The Iva Show* on Wednesday. A pain in the ass; it meant schlepping downtown from her house in Hollywood Hills and fighting the ugly and ubiquitous L.A. traffic, a task she despised with increasing intensity the longer she lived there.

She needed to call her mother, as well, check in with her regular Monday morning call, listen to a cheerful summary of her mom's schedule for the week, which would include shopping, golf, a movie, probably tennis, surely bridge and lunch with the girls (her mother's posse of fellow Boca Raton retirees and widows), dinner and possibly fishing with Hal, the seventy-two-year-old widower Sarah was seeing.

The irony of the situation struck Debbie with particular force, that her mother had a much healthier social life than she did, enjoyed life more, and had never—not once in her entire life—spent a morning rehearsing suicide, nor ever would.

Eric was still asleep, or so she assumed. She frowned. She hadn't heard him come in the night before, perhaps he never had. When he was home, they slept in separate rooms, ostensibly because the odd hours she kept disturbed him, deprived him of his precious sleep. When he didn't sleep at home, she didn't know where he slept, and since it made her insane to think about it—and interfered with her writing, as well—she tried not to think about where her husband might be, a task she found surprisingly easy. Increasingly, they led completely separate lives; she wrote and he did whatever the hell it was he did, which as far as she could tell had remarkably little to do with his alleged job.

Nevertheless, she needed to speak to him. He was supposed to be at a production meeting that morning; they were looking at some actors for the minor roles in the film version of her second novel, *Jack Martin is Dead*. Details. Irritations. Money. Making money from her writing was much more work than the actual writing was and not nearly as satisfying, but it needed to be done. She sighed. She'd written enough for the day, anyway. The new book could wait, and—when it came right down to it—the suicide could wait, as well.

* * * * *

Even as Debbie stepped into the shower in L.A., Jack Marin—upon whom Debbie had based the thinly fictionalized protagonist of both her novels, Jack Martin—fumbled with the bag of bagels and giant cup of coffee he was attempting to place on the kitchen counter in Laura Greggor's house. It was a chilly March morning in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, about an hour north of Philadelphia and a continent away from Debbie, and what he wanted most in the world was black coffee.

He'd driven his sons to school, for they were staying with him and Laura while his ex and her new husband were at Disneyworld with three younger kids from the husband's first marriage. Jack's son Trevor was in his senior year in high school, Parker was in eighth grade, they both considered themselves vastly grownup, and long past the Disney demographic, so they had eschewed the family vacation. Laura was on her morning walk with Yaps, the miscreant Bichon/Cairn Terrier mix who had been Debbie's dog until she got fed up with his biting, so Jack was on his own that morning in the kitchen, and his hands were full.

The bag of bagels flopped over onto the top-heavy cup of coffee, tipping it over. The cup's flimsy lid popped right off and a wave of steaming coffee flooded over the tile countertop, down the cabinet face, and onto the floor.

Jack snagged a sponge and bent down. The room tilted, ever so slightly, but noticeably. The world and all that was in it shimmered, grew vaguely translucent and Jack was doubled over with sharp, stabbing agony in his chest. He straightened and staggered; the sponge fell from his hand. The black coffee had morphed into a rapidly spreading pool of red blood, blood that seemed to lap at his shoes.

The pain stopped, just stopped, as inexplicably as it had begun.

Jack turned his head carefully, keeping both hands locked on the edge of the countertop, for he sensed that he was being watched.

Laura's dead husband, David Marabelli, was sitting at a table just behind him and to the left, which was not the table that had been there when Jack had walked into the room, but the

smaller one he and Laura had sold when he'd moved in with her and they'd bought a larger table in order to accommodate Jack's family.

The odd transparency and flicker that had suffused the world an instant before was gone, and the dead man looked convincingly real and solid. He was wearing exactly the same clothes that Jack was wearing: a heavy Penn State hoodie over a loose tee, baggy sweat pants, athletic shoes. All of David's clothes looked new, however, the kicks—unlike Jack's—unscuffed, the hoodie crisply navy and white, unfaded, without the small tear in the right sleeve where Jack had caught it on a nail when he and Laura had been replacing a slat on the deck rail the autumn before.

The ghost was reading *The Wall Street Journal*; there was a mug of coffee and a partially eaten bagel on the table in front of him—he had slathered it with butter and jam, Jack noticed.

“Jesus,” Jack said.

“No, but a common mistake,” David said. He waved a hand lightly in the air. “I get that all the time.” He picked up the bagel and took a bite. He chewed thoughtfully for a moment, seeming to savor the mouthful.

David then turned and faced Jack, looking him calmly in the eyes. “Why the hell is it always about Debbie?” the ghost asked.

Jack was sitting on the floor, his legs straight out in front of him, his back against the cabinet, although he had no memory of having fallen or slid down into that position.

The larger table was back in its accustomed place; on it, the copy of *The Wall Street Journal* that Jack had picked up at the end of the driveway was crisply folded, unopened. David was gone. There was a puddle of spilled coffee next to Jack on the floor and it was merely coffee, and still hot.

Jack breathed cautiously in and out and didn't otherwise move from his position on the floor, which is where Laura eventually found him.

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