

## Why Humans Lost Their Reset Button

Flash Fiction by Rod Galindo

996 words

Mr. Jones killed himself at 2:16 a.m. on a Saturday morning, but didn't regret it until noon the next day.

Hundreds of social media posts lamented his death. Frantic calls between family and friends ensued. Tearful discussions arose. All of these vexed him. The unexpected level of loss that enveloped his siblings, children, parents, and so-called friends overwhelmed him. Why was his ex-wife crying, of all people? She hated him!

Why all this compassion all of a sudden? He was certain everyone around him would be better off without his irresponsible bumbling, without his incessant poor judgment. Poor life choices had caused all his problems. He was nothing but a waste of time and air.

But apparently he had been wrong, and none of it mattered in the slightest. He could see it on the faces of his coworkers and family. People he didn't even know gushed over him. Via social media, he learned how loyal a friend he had been, how wonderful a father, how kind a soul. He read it over the shoulders of the living; he could no longer work a keyboard, of course. His mind screamed. *What have I done? I've made a terrible mistake, literally the worst one of my life!*

Jones did have an option, however. The same Second-Chance Reset Button granted to everyone. He had nearly forgotten it existed, but how? He reminded himself that a person only gets to use it once. *Once is all I'll need.*

His mind dove for the ethereal button, and collapsed onto it. He saw a white light, brighter than the sun. But it didn't hurt his eyes, for he had none. If he'd had a body, the pain that came next would have engulfed him from head to toe. Instead, it ripped his soul in two. Soon, a searing fire and a numbing cold assaulted his being. He heard the wincing buzz of a dentist's drill and the screech of a thousand nails on a thousand chalk boards. Did that mean he had ears again? The repugnant stench of vomit, skunk, sulfur, and death sent him reeling, but no

amount of twisting or turning would allow him to escape. A dozen other senses he never had in life careened into an abyss of disgust and revulsion. During this episode that seemed to last an eternity, he had time to decide that it was a million times worse than the most excruciating pain he had ever experienced in life. Worse than the pain from the drunken accident he himself had caused all those years ago that had crushed his arm, shoulder, and pelvis, ruined his career, dissolved relationships, and sent him into the downward spiral that had so recently ended at the end of a rope. Then, in another instant, the pain was gone, replaced by a shocking calm.

Mr. Jones shivered and instinctively gasped. *Where am I?* He reached deep within himself to find the courage to pry his eyelids open. When he finally succeeded, he found himself standing on a chair in a dimly lit, filthy apartment. He was once again in his own kitchen. A noose hung loose around his neck, the other end tied to the decades-old light fixture he had stared at so long and hard a few days ago, trying to decide if it would indeed hold his weight. Below him, on a table just big enough for two, was a hand-written note. He recognized his own handwriting: "My dear children, please understand that this was not your fault. Don't ever allow my failures to hold you back."

Horrified, he yanked the noose from his neck, the motion setting him off-balance. He fell from the chair, and heard his left forearm snap when he hit the linoleum. He backed into a corner of the kitchen, wild-eyed, staring up at the rope now swinging to and fro, but this time the deadly loop was empty of its former occupant. Jones slumped down the wall, collapsed in a heap, and wept. Not because of his arm, which was now beginning to ache. No, he welcomed the pain; it meant he was *alive*. The tears were those of joy. He stared at the noose. *What were you thinking, Jones? It's not like you get a second chance, you fool! Next time you may not be so lucky as to come to your senses at the last minute!* He picked himself up, and promised himself this would never happen again.

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Mr. Smith killed himself at 2:16 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon, and regretted it in less than four hours.

Every news outlet carried the breaking story. Seventy-one people had died in the explosion. At least 250 others had been injured. The "Terrorist"—the authorities hadn't pieced together an identity or a motive yet—had detonated himself during the National Anthem. Smith's wispy essence smiled at the video that played in an endless loop on TV and social media. He had timed it perfectly, just after the fitting verse, "The bombs bursting in air," when all the drunken, patriotic buffoons were staring at the despicable flag of their prideful nation. Smith was quite pleased with himself. It was like shooting fish in a barrel.

But then one of those conservative news analysts he hated so much caught his attention.

"We got lucky today, Charlie," the man said.

The lead anchor frowned. "How so?"

"This could have been a whole lot worse! Had the terrorist blew himself up in the stands near the first turn, rather than near the starting line, those two fuel trucks parked there surely would have gone up like the Fourth o' July! Had that happened, so many more folks may have been killed. Hundreds if not thousands could have been injured, especially if the grandstands had given way..."

Mr. Smith cursed his shoddy calculation of yield and blast radius. Next time he wouldn't make the same mistake.

He wasted no more time, and triggered his ethereal reset button.

End