

A Moment
Of
Illumination

By Joshua A. Roberts
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Abstract

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This work is a fictional short story about life and death. The plot revolves around Jack Ridell, an ordinary person, and one afternoon in his life. An incident that nearly takes his life causes him to consider and re-consider certain aspects of his life. In this process, he learns about himself and his feelings for others. However, Jack discovers that nothing is the same after his moment of illumination. The story can be read by all audiences, but a mature reader might obtain a fuller understanding.

Acknowledgements

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- Thanks to my family, as well. They have always supported me through actions and ideas. Thanks Joyce, Natalie, and Kimberly for taking me to the library so often as I grew up. Finally, I must thank my dad, Clyde. Even though he isn't here, he is still my hero and remembered by all.*

- I must also thank my friends for providing ideas and inspirations, not to mention ease of mind. Thanks Matt, Eric, Jon, and Christina.*

Reasoning

Some might find it strange that a history major would choose to write a creative short story, especially about themes of life and death. However, I found the idea rather symbolic, as some would define history as the longest creative story ever told. There has been nothing as formative to my life as the reading of books, so creating a story of my own, albeit short, seemed like a great way to give a little something back.

In my field of study, history, there are numerous examples of historians turned fiction writers, be it Tom Clancy, W. E. B. Griffin, the Shaaras, Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, or Victor Hugo. Each of these authors took history and turned it into an engaging story that introduced millions to history while igniting the imagination at the same time. While I do not feel that I am quite ready to expound on historic events at the level they did, there could be no better time in my life to get a start in the general field of writing a fictional story. My goal is that someday, I can be included in the great authors listed above.

As for my experience, I have had quite a bit, if not formally. Starting long ago, in elementary school, we were taught the fundamentals of writing a story, from character development to theme, as we were expected to write a story once a year for presentation. While I didn't have the opportunity to write during my older years, I did spend the time on something perhaps more useful: reading. As all who are around me know, I am quite the avid reader, as I rarely leave my room without a book of some kind. I read everything, from the classics to those stories that might be classics someday. From these books, each author's style

was imprinted on my mind, and I heaped this knowledge on top of previous ideas. In college, I found opportunity to read fictional accounts about Vietnam and the Civil War that while not being historical research did include history on a personal level and contained a historical truth on a broader scale. I was also able to write stories again through this Honors program, as well as learn about poetry and themes that make stories great. I decided to use all this accumulated experience and put it to some use.

As for the idea of the story, it came from the death of my father in my own arms. It is an event that is not uncommon, but leaves an indelible mark on a person's soul. It left me with many questions, and years to find answers. I wrote this story to answer the question: what happens right before a person dies? Does his life flash before his eyes? What happens in that moment? My answer to that question is that the moment before we die can last as long as it takes to find our inner peace. Jack, the main character in *A Moment of Illumination*, ruminates about many ideas after he thinks he has escaped his death. When his death really happens, he has come to terms with what he would have wanted to do had he lived, and a kind of peace is granted to him. What happens after that is a matter for another story.

As I wrote this story, I found that I had to confront my own mortality, too. Fiction mirrors life. Jack's experiences are a conglomeration of my thoughts, as well as ideas I have heard over the years. It is a rather morbid topic of conversation, but I feel that by thinking about what I would want to happen in my moment before I die, I might be able to act on those wishes before my death and

find comfort in my heart. My hope is that through this story others can live their lives realizing that there is a peace eternal that can be found that is stronger than the power of death.

Friday is generally considered to be one of the best days of the week. Jack Ridell wholeheartedly agreed with the sentiment on this particular Friday. In fact, he couldn't remember feeling this good driving home from work ever, on any afternoon. He didn't have to think about his job until Monday, his fiancé would be waiting for him at his house, and, for once, he had no work to bring home, so he could focus his attention solely on Paige. Jack wanted to make this weekend very special for Paige to make up for all the weekends when he was tied to his computer, trying to hammer out some programming bug. If all goes well, he thought, maybe I can entice Paige to spend the night at the house. She had Saturday off from work, and it had been a long time since both of them had the time to spare. The thought made Jack smile even wider than before.

He gradually slowed down for a red light at the intersection ahead. As he came to a stop, he began to notice how hot it was outside. It was only April but forecasters were already predicting a long, hot summer. Looking past the intersection, heat waves made the road shimmer and dance. With his arm out the

window, Jack could actually feel the heat coming off the car that pulled up beside him at the light. Nice Firebird, he thought. He hoped the light changed soon, before the stuffiness of his unmoving car got the better of him. The sun seemed to be directly focused on his windshield, making his rear-view mirror ornaments shine like jewels. The angel Paige had given him shined a painfully bright white and produced a rainbow on Jack's chest, while the dolphin he had bought in Florida glowed a deep blue, like the ocean it represented. Jack pulled the sun visor down in an effort to cut down on the glare, to minimal effect.

He missed the light changing to green, but he heard the Firebird speed away and accelerated himself. A cool breeze immediately filled the car, smelling faintly of Firebird exhaust but relieving at the same time. Jack could not keep up with the Firebird in his Neon, to his dismay, but a Mustang pulled up beside him and all was well. Jack stuck his arm back out the window to deflect the breeze against his sweat-dampened neck. With his other hand he turned on the radio and flipped it to his favorite rock station. The Freak, Jack's favorite DJ, was giving

the 5 o'clock traffic report like only the Freak could. According to His 'Freakness', Interstate 63 was jammed up for miles following a 'meeting of the minds' involving two semis and a Ford Bronco. Fantastic, Jack thought. He was on Indiana 42, and I-63 crossed it just a few blocks ahead. He wasn't exiting 42, but he knew people would be driving like idiots around the interchange trying to avoid the tie-up on I-63. He would be lucky to get past I-63 without getting in a secondary jam.

Jack realized he didn't have any alternatives, though. He had already passed the last stoplight before the interchange, and was actually keeping up with the Mustang on his left, thank you very much. He would have to take his chances. The Freak stopped talking long enough to put on some Pearl Jam. Too melancholy for today, Jack thought. He stuck his arm out the window and let the wind move his arm like the wing of an airplane. He wasn't about to let Eddie Vetter or some traffic jam stand in the way of his soaring mood.

Jack noticed as he approached the interstate interchange system that the two westbound lanes merged into one. The

Mustang was even with his rear bumper now, as Jack's mood had increased his haste to get home, but was slowly gaining again. Jack did not think much of it, as most cars turned onto southbound I-63 if they were in the left lane. To Jack's surprise, traffic was light on Indiana 42 around the interchange, and the secondary traffic jam never materialized. The Firebird he had admired at the stoplight had continued westbound on 42 past the turn-offs without a stop, he noticed. Today must be my lucky day, Jack thought.

The two cars were now side by side as they passed the northbound I-63 exit to their right, and Jack could clearly see that miles of traffic were backed up as the Freak had said. The southbound lanes were moving slowly because of rubbernecking, while the northbound lanes were completely stopped amid a sea of emergency vehicles. Even as he passed overhead, Jack could hear a cacophony of horns, as tempers grew short in the back up. Thank goodness I'm not involved with all that, he thought.

It was at that moment that Jack's life changed. He looked back to where he was going, and was suddenly blinded by a piercing white light. Before panic set in, he had a moment in his mind to consider that his big plans for the weekend might be coming to an end, and to question where in the world that light was coming from. Then came the realization that he was traveling at over fifty-five miles per hour into the last interchange, and he could not see.

The blinding glare disappeared as quickly as it had arrived, but his view was still obscured as his eyes tried to readjust to normal lighting. The first thing he saw clearly was that his lane ended in about one hundred feet, and that a car was sitting perpendicular to him at about one hundred and one feet, waiting to turn onto Indiana 42 eastbound. Next, he noticed that the Mustang had not gotten into the left turn lane, as he had expected, but was still in the left lane intending to continue straight through. Luckily for Jack, the Mustang had slowed down just a bit, and was even with his back door. Jack realized his only chance to avoid a serious problem was to accelerate quickly

and hope to squeeze into the Mustang's lane before he plowed into the car waiting patiently at the end of his own lane. Breaking would not get the job done, nor would swerving, either way.

Jack floored the accelerator, and to his despair, the Neon did not respond. Then, the Neon suddenly reacted and accelerated with a roar. The woman waiting in the car in Jack's path saw what was about to happen, but could do nothing but utter a silent scream, as another car had pulled up behind her. Jack saw his fear mirrored in the lady's eyes as he drew closer. In the split second that he cleared the Mustang, Jack swung the steering wheel sharply to the left and tapped his brakes, hoping to find the correct angle that would slide him over quickly enough to avoid clipping the lady's car. His gut clenched, as he thought he was too late, but nothing happened. As he squeezed by, the woman laid on her horn in anger and relief, and was joined by the horn of the Mustang right behind Jack. Jack quickly corrected his steering to the right before he crossed into the oncoming lane. His adrenaline surged and he felt light-headed. He didn't want to pass out or lose control, so he pulled over to

the side of the road as soon as he could. He sighed a huge breath of relief as the Neon rolled to a stop.

The turbulence from the Mustang shook the Neon as it passed by. The man driving the Mustang looked back and shook his fist at Jack as it roared by. Yeah, yeah, thought Jack. His hands began to shake and his stomach started twisting in a knot as the adrenaline wore off. He reached below and turned the radio down. He looked around him and noticed that he had pulled over in front of a house. He was in the shade provided by a tree in the yard. The coolness seemed to freeze the nervous perspiration that began to soak through his clothes. Jack wondered if it was possible to get frostnip on the hottest day of the year, so far. He began to chuckle, which turned into the full-blown laughter of relief. The last minute of his life seemed to have lasted a month. His thoughts of leaving work and the weekend, previous to the incident, seemed insignificant now. He had come so close to death, and those would have been his last thoughts. Get a hold of yourself, he thought. With another deep

breath and a shake of the head, he left the shade and resumed his trip home.

Jack accelerated slowly, afraid to get going too fast. The early evening sun was brilliant in the sky, and Jack decided to put on his sunglasses to help see the road. To be safe, he decided to wear his seat belt. He wondered if he would feel any queasiness the next time a car approached from either direction, but no traffic materialized. He thought that was odd since he usually saw some of his co-workers on their drive home, at least. The notion that one of his co-workers might have seen the incident dawned on Jack. Great, Jack thought. Not only would the word be spread around work that he drove like a moron, but also he would probably have several derisive messages on his answering machine when he got home. He hoped Paige wouldn't let herself in, for once, or she would be really worried about what had happened.

The more he thought about it, the more he hoped that none of his co-workers had seen anything. If the word spread around work, his bosses might think he needed a break, perhaps

permanently. Jack worked at a technical consulting firm in Middleton, which required most of his time. The job had been a godsend after he graduated from college, as the owner of the company, whom also happened to be one of his close friends from college, hired him immediately. TechCorp had started small, but had grown exponentially as word spread about their ability.

At the peak of the company's success, his friend, Mark, had sold partial ownership to a group of outsiders with a lot of cash, and everything went downhill from there. The new owners began to over-expand just as the economy took a dive. Now, the owners were investigating a myriad of ways to reduce costs, including releasing workers. All TechCorp employees were required to turn in a qualification sheet, listing their duties and contributions to the company. Jack had refused out of protest, and Mark had protected him from the other angry owners.

The other owners had ended up releasing several long-time employees whom they felt weren't productive, but Jack knew that his neck was on the chopping block for the next round.

He was not in the owners' good graces, and they were waiting for any opportunity to lower the axe. Some possible psychological difficulties might be just the excuse they could jump on. Jack held no ill will towards Mark. The way Jack saw it, his friend had to watch his company get dismantled while some of the original employees that had made the company great were put under a microscope. That couldn't be any easier to bear than Jack's load.

The one thing Jack would miss if he were to be fired was the pay, he decided. He was still paying off Paige's engagement ring. The wedding was coming up, too, and Jack knew that Paige's family didn't have much money to spend on it. He had already told them that he could shoulder most of the financial burden, and it would look irresponsible to his in-laws if he reneged on the agreement. Paige's folks had grudgingly accepted the engagement of their daughter, though there were no tangible reasons to trouble their minds, but this would be something to hang their hats on. Jack gritted his teeth in frustration, and decided to turn the radio back up to ease his

mind. Surprisingly, some classic Aerosmith had replaced the Freak. Aerosmith was easily Jack's favorite musical group. Now this is summer driving music, Jack thought.

Jack approached an intersection with another state highway. There was no traffic around the stoplight, and it turned green for Jack as he approached. This evening has to be getting hotter as it goes along, Jack thought. He turned on his air conditioning which he hoped, combined with the windows being down, would start cooling things down. Jack also wondered if the sun wasn't actually getting brighter as it slowly sank to the horizon. He stuck one arm out the window and beat the roof with his hand to the rhythm of Steven Tyler.

It reminded Jack of the road trip his friends and him had taken to Florida while they were in college. Jack's friend, Matt, had agreed to drive Jack, Mark, and their friend, Nicole, in Matt's old Cadillac convertible. They had put the top down and belted out all their favorite songs on the radio into the wind. Nobody minded the heat or wind as they drove; they were on Spring Break. Jack had obviously kept up with Mark, but he wondered

how the other two were faring in life. Matt had never been interested in programming or computers, and instead chose to delve into complex math and actuarial sciences. It took up just as much of his time as programming took from the other friends. Matt was in the same class as Mark, and after Jack had said his good-byes at graduation, Matt moved to Connecticut and was immediately hired by a large insurance firm. There had been a couple emails between Matt and Jack, culminating in Matt inviting Jack out to spend a weekend with him and his new wife. However, Jack had to decline because of his own work schedule that never gave him any time off, and communication had bogged down from that point on.

Nicole was a different story. She had been in the same class as Jack, and they were the 'two amigos' left after the others had gone on to bigger things. They had become more than friends, actually, and a strong romance had flourished. They had a lot in common, from programming to the sports they liked, and Jack thought that she was the girl he would marry. Then, graduation happened. Nicole returned to Illinois, and Jack

had stayed in Indiana. Companies had hired both of them right after they graduated, and they agreed to keep their emotional bond strong. It went well at first, but their respective schedules prevented anything permanent. Visits grew scarce, and then phone calls, followed by emails, until the communication link was broken. About this time, Jack ran into Paige at a tech conference and fell head-over-heels. Nicole was convinced that the lack of communication and the change of heart had gone hand-in-hand, and told Mark such. She never forgave Jack, and the last he had heard, she was dating a programmer from her company in Illinois.

Both situations irked Jack to no end. Jack felt he had really let Matt down by not coming out to visit him in Connecticut. Matt had seemed to understand that the work schedule of a computer programmer wasn't as open as that of an actuarial executive. That was a half-lie though, in Jack's opinion, because he could have taken some of his accrued vacation time to go out there, and maybe he could have convinced Paige to take a break, too. With Nicole, Jack felt that there had been a huge

misunderstanding that needed clearing up. It really bothered him that Nicole and him had been good friends before they had gone their separate paths, but now they couldn't even be acquaintances. If only we could talk, he thought, I know we could be friends again. In both cases, it seemed that petty things had gotten in the way of meaningful friendships. What good is a job or a relationship if there aren't friends to help a person out, Jack asked himself. Jack resolved to email, phone, or even visit unannounced until the friendships were restored. Hopefully, that would bring peace to everyone involved.

As his mind returned back to his present situation, he decided that he needed an escape from the ever-increasing heat. He pulled into a small gas station to get something to drink. To his surprise, the small mini-mart was well air-conditioned. There was no attendant behind the counter. Jack walked back to the drink coolers, but nothing struck his fancy. He continued around the store and settled on a fountain drink. He filled the Styrofoam cup and walked to the counter, searching for change in his pockets. He coughed politely, and even rang

the bell as a sign instructed, but no cashier appeared. Jack normally would have searched around the gas station for the employee to make sure everything was OK, but he had a sudden urge to get home. He stuck the change back in his pocket, grabbed two dollars from his wallet, and left them on the counter. The cashier would figure it out. He walked out the door to the ring of the security chime announcing someone had opened a door. As he arrived at his Neon, he took a sip from his cup and looked around. With a sigh of satisfaction, he sat in the Neon. This is the best drink I have ever had, he thought as he drove away.

Part of his urge to get home had to do with the certainty that Paige was waiting for him at his house. She had agreed to come over when she got off of work, which was the same time Jack did. The difference was that she was probably driving normal speed while Jack was driving about forty miles per hour. The drive did seem like it was taking along time, now that Jack looked back on it. As he started driving again, though, the trip seemed to speed up. The speedometer still read forty, but the

houses and telephone poles that lined Indiana 42 seemed to fly by in a blur. At the same time, he began to feel light-headed. This cannot be good, he thought to himself, and willed himself to be strong.

The thought of Paige brought Jack some comfort. She probably would be sitting on the swing in front of his house, waiting for him to get home. He had given her a key for the house a while ago, but she had never used it, as she was particular about matters of privacy like that. Jack thought that she made certain that he never felt like a ball and chain had already been attached to his leg. This was ironic to Jack because not only did he doubt she would ever try to weigh him down, but he also wished she would. He wouldn't mind at all. He absolutely loved that girl, despite what her parents might say. He was ready for a life with her.

What exactly Paige's parents had a problem with, Jack wasn't sure. Her dad worked as an engineer in a nearby automotive parts company. He was very down to earth, liking to work on old cars and his yard. Jack wondered if her dad looked

down on him for working at a technical consulting business, perhaps because it wasn't manly enough. To compensate for this, Jack had volunteered countless times to help her dad work on cars or hang up Christmas lights, but he had refused help every time. It was as if her dad didn't even want to try to form a relationship. This attitude baffled Jack. For a man who said he loved his daughter more than anything in the world, her dad had shown little respect for her choice as a husband.

Paige's mom worked part-time, working the books for several small companies. She seemed to be more cerebral in her hobbies, choosing to read dozens of magazines or do a crossword puzzle rather than step outside. Jack thought he could make a good impression on Paige's mom, but she seemed to think that he wasn't nearly as smart as her or Paige. She also worried that Jack's choice of trades would provide an unstable and insufficient standard of living for her daughter. Between the two parents, their views on Jack were not a good combination: one thought he was a sissy and the other thought he was dumb.

Jack wasn't sure what to do about it. They had given him permission to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage, but he had the impression that they were hoping she would turn him down. He had spent much of the precious free time he had over at their house trying to form a repartee with at least one of them, but to no avail. He knew that her parents' disapproval nagged Paige in the back of her mind, but he loved her for putting their love first. For that, he would try anything to improve his relationship with her parents.

Maybe, he should sit down and have a talk with them before the wedding, Jack thought. They might be scared that he wasn't serious about a lifelong commitment with Paige, or that he wasn't mature enough to provide a good life for his family. He felt certain that if he could find a way to convey how strongly in love he was with Paige, they could have little doubt about the union. The very act of wanting to sit down and talk with them about Paige should count for something, Jack thought. He decided to ask Paige about her parents' schedule for the

weekend as soon as he had the chance. No, he thought, I'll ask her after I get a good night's sleep.

Jack found that he could barely keep his eyes open. Not only were his eyelids heavy with fatigue, but also the sky was so bright that he could only manage a squint. This was with his sunglasses on and the sun visor down. It seemed to him like one of those sunsets when the sky appears to be a giant explosion of yellows and reds, only magnified one hundred times over this time. The only good thing about the situation was that the Neon just kept going faster and faster, like some magnetic pull was guiding it home. The light-headedness had spread to the rest of the body to the point that he wasn't sure he had the energy to press his foot down on the accelerator, not that it seemed to matter. Oddly, his mind seemed relatively unaffected by his physical stasis. This would be a dream for Paige's mom, he thought with a weak smile.

From what Jack could make out, he was in the countryside and nearly home. His mother lived on the same country block as he did, and his thoughts turned to his childhood home, as he

zipped past. It had always been a place of refuge and joy for him. He had grown up with two sisters whom were much older than him, so he had gotten to know the place like the back of his hand. He knew the best places to hide, the coolest shady spot in the yard, and which place allowed the wind to alter the path of a baseball thrown in the air. It had also been his comfort blanket when his father died at a young age. Jack couldn't remember that much about the summer, but he did recall lying on a blanket under the oak tree in the front yard while reading his favorite book.

Now, the old homestead was almost deserted. His mom still lived there, but the only children playing in the yard were Jack's nieces when they came over to visit. He loved his mom dearly, and he felt sorry for her because she lived in a hollow shell that used to be filled with life. He wasn't sure why she stayed there, not that he minded, but he hoped she could find comfort in it that he could not. Jack called his mom regularly, but realized that he hadn't visited in quite awhile. He also remembered, somewhat glumly, that he hadn't been to church in

a long time. What kind of son am I, he asked himself. He knew his mom would never mention either lapse the next time he talked to her, but the guilt always weighed on his mind and she knew it. He resolved that he would visit his mother and attend church on a much more regular basis.

Religion was one of those things that Jack never seemed to be able to experience. His family had grown up going to a country church where his father was a minister. As the family grew up, both of his sisters and their families had become members of the church, as well. Now, he was the only one in the family who didn't regularly attend, and he could feel the unspoken pressure. Jack had attempted to find alternatives by visiting other churches in the area, but he always felt like he was letting his family down. His dad was a revered member of the church, and his mom had high expectations for him. Jack felt trapped between the urge to please his family and the desire to explore things on his own. He wondered what Paige would do.

Jack figured it would be best if he attended a church more regularly, even if it was the one his family went to, given his

miraculous escape earlier in the day. It wasn't that his family's church was uninviting; on the contrary, the assembly was composed of people he had spent his whole life with. There was just some feeling in his gut that he could not identify. It was either an urge to find something better, or an urge to give in to what might be right. Jack didn't feel that he was at point in his life, yet, where he could reasonably decide. Maybe after the wedding, he thought. He glanced up at the angel on his rear-view mirror and it seemed to be on fire. He hoped God wasn't angry with him.

Jack looked out the windshield and realized he was pulling into his own driveway. Paige's Buick was in the driveway, and Paige got off the swing in the front yard as she saw his car come in. It took most of his strength to smile. The car came to a stop behind her car, finally, and the silence was deafening. It reminded Jack of having a high fever; he could hear the blood rush around in his head just fine, but everything external sounded like it was being filtered through a wall of cotton. Paige neared the car, and she appeared absolutely angelic to Jack.

He tried to move his arm to lift the door handle, but it would not respond. It is a good thing I didn't need to change the radio station or steer the car, he thought with a smile. Then, he realized that the radio was still playing Aerosmith, and he hadn't encountered any traffic since the Mustang had passed him. Before he had time to contemplate the ramifications of these epiphanies, his head fell back against the headrest, his mind in a stupor.

As Jack came out of the fog, he noticed a radio was playing "Sweet Emotion", his favorite song. He opened his eyes, and realized that he was lying on his back in the grass. The heat had dissipated, and a cool breeze ran over his body. He couldn't focus at all, nor could he see the car, but he guessed he was somewhere in his yard. Paige was kneeling over him, and he could see the sun setting out of the corner of his vision. That didn't affect his vision at all, however, as Paige seemed to be emanating the brightest glow he had seen all day. He could see her quite clearly, and she looked more like an angel than the

ornament in his car ever had. He knew he was safe in her arms, and relief flooded his mind.

Jack gained control of his body for one more moment as he struggled to sit up. Paige bent down and met him halfway with a kiss. As their lips met, Jack said that he loved her... or did he think it? It didn't matter, as he could tell by her eyes that she had understood, and he knew that his journey home was done. At that moment, the light appeared to become Paige, and Paige became the light. Jack had no feelings of wonder; he was tired and was ready to become a part of one or the other, or both. It didn't matter, anymore. As he became one with the light, his last thought was that this weekend would be more special than he intended.

* * * * *

William 'Bill' Butler was having a rough afternoon. His morning had been extremely busy, as his job often was on warm days. After a lunch on the run, he had spent much of the

afternoon filling out paperwork, which he abhorred more than anything he could think of, regarding the events of the morning. As he left the office around four o'clock, he realized that he had received a small blessing by being cooped up in the air-conditioned office. He could barely touch his car long enough to open the door. At least the ride home up I-63 should produce a breeze, he thought.

As he drove closer to the Indiana 42 exit, he heard the heart-wrenching sound of braking tires and crunching metal ahead. He pulled up behind a line of stopped cars, and he could see a couple of flipped semis and an SUV in the median as the smoke cleared. As he got out of the car to get a better view, his radio crackled to life reporting an accident on I-63. After a quick internal argument, he sat back down in his car and responded to the radio dispatcher that he was on the scene. The job of a State Trooper is never done, he thought to himself.

After surveying the scene, he concluded that the drivers of the two semis were not severely injured, but the man driving the Bronco needed immediate medical attention. Bill helped direct

the responding paramedics to the scene, after which he decided to stick around to help the flow of traffic in the southbound lanes. It was the five o'clock rush hour on I-63, and the usually constant traffic was being held up as every motorist decided to slow down for a better look at the carnage of the accident scene. He was yelling at a particularly slow motor home driver, when he heard the screeching of tires and crunch of metal again, only this time from above.

Realizing that the crash must have occurred on the Indiana 42 overpass, Bill ran up the off-ramp to assess the situation while motioning for one of the ambulances to drive up from the other side. As he reached the top, he saw that there were two separate scenes. One group of people were huddled across 42 around a huge car that had been T-boned by a small car, a Civic or Neon, that was completely demolished. The driver of the larger car had been pulled out of the passenger side of her car and was sitting in the berm with massive cuts on her face. Another group of people were huddled around an object about a hundred feet past the interchange. As he approached the object,

he realized that it was actually a man, probably the driver of the Neon who must not have been wearing his seatbelt. The head of the man was tilted at an angle that suggested certain death, and as Bill bent down to check for a pulse, his suspicions were confirmed. Oddly, the man's countenance looked peaceful.

The EMS workers arrived then and asked for people to clear the scene. The fire department had also arrived and was fighting a small blaze around the car accident. Before he stood up, Bill grabbed the man's wallet so that he could be identified, and so that the next of kin could be notified. The driver's license read 'Jackson Michael Ridell'. Bill noticed that the deceased was a very young man and had a fairly local address. He looked up in time to see the paramedics covering the corpse with an orange blanket. What a shame, to die on a day like this, Jack thought with a sigh.

After returning to his car and consulting with the radio dispatcher, he contacted the parents of Jackson Ridell with the bad news. The mother had answered and dropped the phone upon hearing about her son. After further conversation, Bill

discovered that Jackson's father had been dead for some time. At the end, the mother had tearfully asked if Bill would contact Jackson's fiancé. Bill agreed, and the fiancé seemed to take the news even worse than the mother. She seemed to be in disbelief of the whole thing as Bill broke the connection, even though she had mentioned something about 'having expected something like this'. Bill wasn't sure what that meant, exactly. It had been a long time since Bill had called the family of a crash victim, and he remembered why he hated the task.

Two hours later, the wreck on I-63 had been completely removed and traffic was flowing like normal. It sounded like all the drivers would survive, thankfully. Bill drove up the on-ramp to see what had been discovered about the events surrounding the accident. Indiana 42 had been closed for a mile in either direction while the investigation continued. The charred wreckage had been towed, but chalk outlines and fluid stains remained on the pavement. According to a county mountie he knew, interviews with nearby motorists had proved inconclusive. The woman whose car the Neon hit was in serious condition at a

nearby hospital and couldn't remember much. A man driving a Mustang beside the Neon right before the accident seemed to think that the driver never intended to merge. He never saw the Neon accelerate or hit the brakes, which was backed up by the fact that there were no skid marks indicating the Neon's driver stood on the brakes. The last image the man saw of the Neon's driver was that the guy was gawking at the traffic below, but the Mustang driver had to look away because of an intense beam of light coming from the top of the Neon's windshield. From this, the police were including a theory that the afternoon sun had played a part in the accident.

Bill shook his head in disbelief and walked over to the chalk outline of Jackson Ridell's body. The corpse had been removed long ago, but bloodstains remained on the ground. Bill could feel sympathy for Jackson's mother. He had a son that was twelve years old, and he could not imagine life without him. He felt his eyes tearing up as he remembered the stunned disbelief of the fiancé. Paige was her name, as he recalled. If there was a reason in God's plan for the death of this young man who meant

so much to his mother and wife-to-be, Bill could not figure it out. He gave a silent prayer for Jackson's family and turned away. It was time to go home to his family.

The sun was setting on the horizon now, but it was still hot outside. As Bill wiped the sweat from his forehead, he noticed a small, angel figurine on the ground. Upon further inspection, it looked like an object a person would hang from the rear-view mirror, but there was no string attached. Bill picked the angel up and held it up in the fading light. It seemed to glow in the sun's remaining rays. He decided that it was one of the most beautiful things he had seen in a long time. Considering the events of the day, Bill decided he could use the protection of an angel for his trip home. As he got in his car, he laid it on the passenger seat. He figured he could string it up on Monday; today was the beginning of the weekend, after all. For now, Bill simply looked forward to the breeze on the drive home.