

Almost the end

I almost killed myself last night with a toy gun.

For the past three days, I've been camping out on my living room floor, with one eye on the TV and the other on my book on the history of the KGB. The whole purpose of this exercise was an attempt to make crucial decisions about my life, and a possible future. At one stage, I stretched out to a small cabinet – conveniently accessible from a seated position – to obtain a packet of headache tablets. Searching for the tablets, my fingers touched the toy gun I had acquired a few months ago in a moment of boredom. The motivation behind the purchase was mainly to amuse myself – to try and shoot small holes in a few items in my apartment, whenever my gray matter reached boiling point. The headache tablets were required at that time for precisely this reason.

An hour or two after I had discovered the toy, my older sister telephoned from London. Within the first few seconds of the conversation I mentioned, to her annoyance, that I always think of her when I try to sort out what the next step in my life ought to be. I explained to her that she had no blotch of idle months on her professional reputation, that she had made the right decisions at the right times and that her life in the last half decade had shown a steady upward curve. Compared with her relatively straight path to success, I have taken a more uncharted route.

Wise as she is, she advised me not to waste time brooding over the past, and to not concern myself too much about “bad decisions” I have taken over the years. I instinctively sensed a younger-brother-who-have-messed-up-and-older-sister-who-tries-to-show-him-the-way argument. The result was inevitable: I had to defend my seeming lack of direction.

And that's exactly what it is – apparent lack of direction. I'm convinced there has been a purpose behind everything in my life to this point. I explained to her that I needed the last five years to sort out what life is about, what I wanted to do

with my life, and perhaps most importantly, how to reconcile the latter with the necessity of a regular income.

Our conversation was cut short when she had to answer another call (she was calling from her office). I spent the next five minutes in deep contemplation about the middle class ideology that dictates that any person older than 24 who are not making money, must necessarily be classified as a “loser”.

But I know better than to underestimate the intelligence of middle class citizens, or their ability to tolerate divergent views on life. For example, they do not expect *everybody* to work in an office – they’re not that narrow-minded! After all, they do have their heroes who are rock stars and writers and actors. Of course, most of these people make money, and in some cases lots of it. So much more reason to idealise them.

My sister phoned back, and I immediately proceeded with the defence of my unique perspective on life. She confessed to being a little confused, but also demonstrated sincere sympathy. “Why don’t you come to England?” she finally offered her standard advice of many years. I explained that I am currently working on a master plan, that I’m contemplating returning to South Africa at the end of the year, and that I need to make decisions on these issues before I can consider something like a holiday. Whether she realized that I was intentionally being vague and that I tried to create the impression of being someone who knows where he will be at his next birthday, I can’t say.

The conversation started to wind down. We expressed the mutual hope that everything will go well with the other and said goodbye. I kept staring at the floor, with no particular thoughts to entertain or comfort myself.

The next moment light from the TV reflected on the toy pistol. In an attempt to demonstrate displeasure about my eternal confusion, I picked up the toy, pressed the cold plastic barrel against my sweating forehead and pulled the trigger. Nothing, as I expected. I walked over to the cabinet and managed to extract a few of the hard plastic pellets from the cluttered drawer, excited over the distraction a duel with the

cereal box will provide. In an attempt to extricate the magazine, I accidentally pulled the trigger.

To my surprise and shock – considering that I had pressed the thing against my forehead just seconds before, a barrage of pellets exploded from the barrel. In a scene reminiscent of a Wild West shootout the pellets first hit the hot water geyser, a few meters from where I was standing, transfixed, and then they ricochet into the bathroom. After several bounces, the pellets came to rest in the bathtub.

“I could have killed myself,” I mumbled nervously at my reflection in the mirror.

A few moments later I came to my senses. What was really the possibility that a small, hard plastic pellet could go through my scalp and penetrate my skull to entrench itself in my confused brain? The reasonable conclusion was then made that I could have hurt myself, but that fatal consequences were unlikely.

It was only about an hour later that I thought of the short news story that might have appeared in a local newspaper, had I ended up in a hospital to have a small plastic pellet surgically removed from my forehead: *“A 30-year old man unsuccessfully attempted suicide late last night with a toy pistol, after a telephone conversation with his career-oriented older sister. A small plastic pellet got stuck in his forehead because of the attempt, and the man was admitted to the emergency room shortly after to have it removed. A nurse said that while he was in a stable condition, the physical and emotional scars from the incident would probably be visible until he hit his midlife crisis in a decade or so.”*

Convinced that I had been given a second chance, I threw the toy gun back in the drawer, and there and then swore off violence as a way of finding my way in life. I collected the scattered remains of the almost cursed pellets, and while doing so I could swear I heard the cereal box moving out ever so slightly from behind the coffee bottle.

NOTE:

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