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Lucas Roberts
College of DuPage

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Floating Away

Lucas Roberts

I squeezed the wheel with both hands, sweat lubricating it as I let the image of the stranger's car float away. You are a danger to society with your poor driving, and you should be bitten by dogs is an automatic thought. I don't have to let my automatic thoughts rule me, do I? Just let the thought of the car float into you, float out; the anger, the unwarranted judgment, the visceral, physical sensation of blood pressure rising and nerves tightening. If I don't fight them, the thoughts will go away. That's what they said.

They could have missed three green arrows. So that's a positive thought.

It was hot. The sun highlighted the cracks in my windshield and the eddies of dust in the cabin. I wanted to open the window, open both windows for a delicious air river, but there were probably forty people nearby exclaiming and strutting and letting their smells out all over the place. So that was a nope. I should have fixed the air conditioning.

Or I could be the boss of my own mind! I could take this opportunity to be positive like I apparently was five years ago when I first met Alicia. Look! The sunshine! It zazzles like an electric beam and bounces off of poor and rich alike. That building over there is, frankly, an underappreciated architectural masterpiece. It could be described as a drab check-cashing place with misery soaked into its rocky pores, but that's the negative effect affect talking. It could just as fairly be described as a sturdy marblesque financial institution, solemn gray-black like a knight in mourning.

I reached my hand over to the passenger seat to check my package-still there. Worth way more than air conditioning, I thought, and I felt a little smile bubbling. A real one, with a current from lip corner

to lip corner to the base of the spine. I didn't have to dredge it up with mindful recitations of mindless mindfulness exercises-

HOOOOOOOONK!!!

I dashed a foot onto the accelerator just as I processed that I'd been viciously honked at and just before I saw the yellow arrow turning red. I went through, car speeding but mind slow like swimming in molasses and everything was too bright. I heard more honks and felt tire squeals like razor cuts and then I was going straight again, head throbbing and temperature too high.

DAMMIT. Why did people honk? I didn't honk, I never honked. I was raised properly. I just let that person from before go, didn't I? Just let them sit in their car at the corner and play on their phone because it's rude to be rude. I started as a car blurred past me dragging its noise, a tiny red thing like a toy. Was it the guy who honked at me? It probably cost as much as the house we sold. No, it couldn't have been the barbarian horn-punching misfit, that guy must have missed his turn and that's why he was furious with me.

Maybe he was visiting his elderly grandmother one final time at the hospital and she had cancer. One of the really bad ones. And every second he spent missing lights was a second away from Nana's last words. See? That's positive affect talking. Maybe he just wanted to get out of this rathole neighborhood, where they had an armed robbery two weeks ago and only my wife wants to move in.

That was mean. People aren't rats.

People were nice to me. They said that just because I, technically, have an at-risk mental state doesn't mean anything bad will happen. Not at all! Violent, repeated thoughts are surprisingly common and they involve family members because the sick juxtaposition triggers steroids like mad. Wouldn't care if it were the mailman, would I? I should just remember that everything I say here stays between

us and oh, I need to turn in my firearm. It's just a precaution, and they'll be telling the judge that I'm perfectly suited for occasional visits.

I drove slowly, picking my way through the potholed streets. I kept seeing that red car, who logically didn't honk but in my waking-dream he did, whipping by just beneath the surface with a peeling rubbery squawk every time I took something in. Shack houses with peeling paint, squawk. Old cars with no tires, squawk. A spinning glass windchime that took red from the sun and bounced it up and down- squawk!

Here she was. Her house was objectively the worst, in my opinion, ankle-high grass and drunken fallen gutter. Maybe I wasn't the only one of us who needed constant help. I scooped up the package like it would run away and clutched it to my chest.

I vibrated as I froze in my car. What was I doing here? She could sandblast the flesh from my bones with one stare, make me shake and whimper. Remind me without speaking of the details she left out of divorce court proceedings because they weren't lascivious enough- that's why she was ending it! Not funny. Truth hurts. Don't pass judgment on yourself don't live in other people's thoughts which are only your thoughts feelings aren't facts just let it go let it in let it out let it float away-

"DADDY!"

I expanded with numinous light and forgave my enemies. I jumped out of the car and dropped the present and a flapping angel tore down the lawn and into my arms. She was happiness perfected, she was perfectly smiled and eyed and all wiggly and radiant. I saw my ex-wife leaning against the corner of her shack, and I was right, she was giving me a stare. I didn't care anymore. The next six hours were for me and my perfect, and we were going to eat ice cream.