



chicken first

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~~Based on a true story~~

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It's funny, I don't particularly know where this came from, or why. I was driving back home—a 4-hour drive after spending time with my wife and her family for a few days—and it just came to me.

I think it's because I was sharing this story with her. It wasn't the first time I'd shared it, but I think it was the first time I realized how desensitized I was to it. It's one of

many such "stories." I don't feel desensitized; maybe I feel the world is a bit oversensitive.

So there I am, barreling down the inter-country road, and I see it so clearly! I should write about it.

My hand on the steering wheel, the roar of my 2.0-liter Subaru XV filling my ears, my thoughts trail across the desert. I examine the past five days and my interactions. I remember sitting in the hospital with my wife (we're okay, don't worry), and I could visualize it, even the "Based on" being crossed out on the cover.

God, I love that car. It's funny, the bonds we create with inanimate objects.

But our story, while it does entail my love for my car, is about my love for my Lancer—a car I lost nearly five years ago. I know this might sound strange, but I think it's probably the best car I've ever driven in my entire life. I loved that car. It was a 2006 1.3-liter Silver Mitsubishi Lancer.



To give you a true picture of my experience, I'll be completely honest with the details. I was working at an ERP implementation company. The office was quite far from where we lived. Funnily enough, most people who knew we worked in Shafa Badran usually said people come FROM there to the city center to work, but we were the opposite. And when I say "we," I mean my brother and I.

I had been working there for just over a year at the time, and my brother was a new joiner. I was able to hire him to keep us close. That's another bond we sometimes take for granted—our bonds with our brothers. I honestly feel sorry for those who don't love their brothers like I love mine. I don't think it's possible to have such a feeling with anyone else. It's different.

One lowly Thursday, we went to the owner asking for an early dismissal. We concocted quite an excuse, saying our cousin was getting married and we needed to get a haircut. This excuse was a lie. I think he knew it was a lie as well. Other than beautiful weather that day, there wasn't anything special—we just wanted to head home a bit earlier.

Our plan was to pick up some fried chicken from a street that overlooks a beautiful valley in Jordan, called Abu Nseir Lookout Spot. We had tried this chicken for the first time about a week earlier, and it was delicious—honestly, so good! We didn't want the chicken to get cold on our way home, nothing's worse than cold soggy chicken! So we thought might as well stop at the lookout spot and eat it there, enjoying the weather, gorgeous painting like scenery, and each other's splendid company! The lengths we went to just to have hot fresh chicken!

We'd passed by the valley almost every day but never took the time to really look out and take in the beautiful nature. It's one of my favorite spots in Jordan, or at least it was.

The chicken took ages to get ready. I remember waiting in the car because there was nowhere to park, so I kept moving the car around for people to pass while my brother got our chicken.

I don't remember if they were slow or just super busy. That area is usually packed anyway.

It's crazy to think now that if they had been just 10 seconds faster or slower, my whole short-term future would have been completely different.

It's insane how much of a difference 10 seconds can make sometimes.

I wonder if my life would have been cataclysmically different if those 10 seconds had gone my way, or if things would have just ended up the same through different paths. I don't usually think like that—I don't really build pseudo-realities. Maybe that makes me a bit more stubborn, or a bit thicker when it comes to learning from my mistakes.

My brother, sweat on his brow from battling the line to get our chicken, comes back to the car. I can't picture that too well; it's a bit blurry now. I, of-course, pointed out the obvious “you were gone for ages”, frustrated, my brother just told me to get on before the chicken got cold.

My brother, rightly so, always wore his seatbelt immediately. He straps himself in for our 10-second drive.

Those 10 seconds again...

I battle my way onto the road—it's an absolute jungle! Ten seconds later, I signal to pull into the sidewalk to park. My brother takes off his seatbelt and rustles with the chicken. The aroma fills the car, even with the windows open.

Then it all changed. The whole day changed.

As I'm stopping, we get pushed forward, and the car spins 180 degrees on its axis. I yell out, "Oh shit!" I'm really embarrassed by that. Why didn't I mention God? Why was it something so basic and so... useless—even worse, a slur?

To my credit, I've had my fair share of heart-stopping moments since then, and I've been quite proud of my immediate reactions.

You know those instincts, the ones you don't even think about? It turns out you can even change those.

Our tires slam against the curb—I honestly didn't even know there was a curb there.

For a split second, a fleeting moment, I thought that was all. Until the car started angling to the left, a slow start made more violent by gravity, taking us flying over the edge. What was once a beautiful view of a majestic valley turned into the scariest destination. "Hold on!" I yelled. Again, without thinking, an immediate reaction, stark in comparison to my silent brother.

With our first flip, I could feel my shoulder hit against the window frame, my once-vertical body now contorted as the car flipped onto its side.

It flips again and again.

I can't stress this enough: I'd passed this place every single day for over a year. A ledge leading nowhere, down to the bottom of a bottomless valley.

And then—bear with me—it's as if God took a small ledge and slammed it against the mountain. I don't know why God would want to go through the trouble. It seems so narcissistic saying it, but that's how it felt.

The lancer, now upside down, our stuff, everywhere but where they were. It's a 'No duh!' but it was honestly shocking seeing things I didn't even know were there, now resting against the windshield; honestly a accurate portrayal of the chaos.

It feels like almost instantly, tens of people gathered around the car. The response was huge, and immediate.

The people rushed towards us, a good samaritan pulls me out of the car. I can see one of them packing a M9 Baretta, dressed in civilian clothing. The ledge is right next to a princess' palace, might had something to do with the overwhelming response.

I remember feeling so confused, in shock. I didn't know what had just happened.

They pulled my brother out from the driver's window. They dragged him over me and laid him above me, his feet right above my shoulder.

I heard someone yell, "Where's the other driver?" That's when I realized what had happened. Someone, speeding, slammed into the left side of our car, causing us to spin and flip over the ledge.

Did they fall off too? Are they in worse condition? What happened?

They couldn't find him.

He was in a Nissan Leaf, the color of which must have been mentioned, but for the life of me, I can't seem to remember. He drove off, an Uber driver with two children in the back seat, fiddling with his phone.

"Your brother isn't talking." That was it, I think. That's when I started to feel cold. When the fear started to take hold. "What do you mean he isn't talking?"

I raised my bruised and bloodied hand and reached out to nudge him. "Salah," I started calling his name.

"Salah," my nudges became more aggressive, and my voice grew louder.

"Salah!" I yelled, slapping his legs now with as much power as I could muster.

I couldn't breathe.

The fear took over. I have never felt so powerless, so afraid. "Are his eyes open? Is he moving?" No answer.

The sound of blood rushing to my ears drowned out all other sounds, and ringing flooded my head.

Sirens wailed, knocking me back into the moment, and before I could try again, they strapped him onto a red plastic stretcher.

They loaded him into an ambulance as they started to strap me in. My body was shaking uncontrollably, my heart sunk; the sight alone was too much. The atmosphere was so chaotic.

Strangers shared in the scariest moment of my life. So intrusive, and surprisingly, extremely lonely.

I saw them taking me to another ambulance, closing the doors to the one my brother was loaded into. I didn't know ambulances could only fit one stretcher at a time.

I felt a cold rush from my legs to my back. I unbuckled my straps and stumbled off the stretcher, holding my arm, protesting all the way. "No! Load me in here. I will stand." "We can't; it's against protocol." But no wasn't an option. I finally reached my brother's ambulance, and they agreed to load me in with him. I rested onto the stretcher, and they placed me like a sword, angling downwards as I rested on the bench made for EMTs.

There was something about being placed like that... on my side. I can't place it, but it was off-putting and jarring. Maybe the whole experience was jarring.

My brother was lying there on the stretcher, so peaceful. It was a battle of the mind to turn to him. My whole body fought it. I forced myself to look at him, and with a quivering tone, said, "Salah?"...

... terror filled my heart. Did I kill my brother?

"I just wish we had the chicken first" he says as he turns to me.

THE END

