

## Thoughts

thoughts are not generally distinct entities, but rather  
a smoothly planed continuum  
each bleeding insuperably into the next –

however,

sometimes it is possible to find an edge  
and break successive thoughts apart  
and this was one of those times.

--

the third-to-last thought he had  
concerned the randomness of it all  
(and by “it all” I mean life, existence, the universe, and so on) .  
when he was ten and a putt broke left instead of right  
and cost them the Ridgeway Furniture NJ Father-Son Par-3 Golf Tournament  
his old man touched his shoulder and said  
well  
it’s a game of inches .  
and now, in his third to last thought, he realized  
that this applied not just to the cut of grass or the slope of a green  
but to life/existence/etc.  
had he not left his keys in the pocket of yesterday’s jeans  
he would have left the apartment 35 seconds earlier  
he would have made the light at Centennial Drive  
he would have been (at 70 mph) approximately 64% of a mile further North  
when a semi driver changed lanes without checking his mirror first  
and swept into a 9-seat panel van  
and they both cascaded like waves over the traffic behind them.

--

the second-to-last thought he had  
was regretful, melancholy, a feeling of  
Well-If-This-Is-It-Then-What-Have-I-Accomplished, which  
(though he didn’t know it)  
is quite a common second-to-last thought .  
the small percentage of a second that this thought occupied  
left him disconsolate  
or at least underwhelmed  
because he lived in a studio apartment  
with faux-wood laminate cupboard-fronts that he had said he’d change eight months ago  
but didn’t  
and working the counter at Ace Hardware, even as a manager  
was not a good use of his degree

and generally he knew that he was a bright person who could do more  
but didn't  
and his parents, who had paid for his degree, knew that too  
but never said it outright  
though his mom did say once (last month? or maybe when she called on yom kippur?)  
how long do you think you'll be working there? with a bit of a tone .  
and the worst part of all  
    (apart from the fact that there was no possibility of pressing the brake pedal in time  
    to avoid the panel van, now sideways and head-height  
    and perhaps eight feet away)  
was that he wasn't unhappy actually  
and might be perfectly content to stay at Ace Hardware for a year, or two, or maybe  
the rest of his life  
and be one of those crusty old hands prowling the aisles in paint-stained jeans and red vest  
who always knows which screw goes with what  
and wears a tape measure on their belt.

--

the last thought he had  
was related to what had come before  
but nonetheless distinct enough to be parsed.  
it was a feeling of unexpected but real relief –  
relief that  
after all this was over  
he might be freed of the burden of expectations  
he might be cheered for doing simple little things  
like walking  
or sitting up, or what-have-you .  
or alternatively, he might be remembered in glowing terms  
lionized for the haloed potential of what he might have done  
rather than criticized for what he actually had done.

when the first corner of the panel van  
pierced the windshield,  
there was no time for him to smile, or even  
send the electrical signals to the many muscles lining the corners of his mouth  
which might have begun the process:  
but despite that he was happy in that final moment.  
his last thought was a pleasant one

although -- it must be said --  
not for the right reasons.

© Alex Burtzos, [www.alexburtzosmusic.com](http://www.alexburtzosmusic.com). All rights reserved.

**Reproduction is illegal.**