

## Manslaughter

It had started in 1989, the string of murder suicides in this town. An old lady crossing the street. A pickup truck careening towards her, sandwiching her between the nose of the truck and the closest telephone pole. Groceries flying everywhere. The driver of the truck, a woman in her early 30's, got out of the vehicle and stabbed herself with some of the broken windshield glass. She missed the artery and ended up in a coma in the hospital where she'd been sitting for the next thirty years.

Since then, there had been sixteen murder suicides. A woman who had dropped her hair dryer into the bathtub where her husband was lounging. She then plunged into the bath herself. A little girl who had tipped her dresser over on her little brother and then tipped her mother's onto herself. A construction worker who let the carabiner slip on his coworker, plummeting him to his death, then later followed him backwards off the edge of the roof. Other coworkers said it almost looked like he'd been pushed from the front of the shoulders. "Murder suicide," deemed the police.

In the ICU, two floors above where the woman in the coma lay, a husband and wife team were being hurriedly deposited, unconscious, suffering from severe burns. The husband had lit the curtains of their bedroom with his cigarette on fire before going for an early morning stroll. Upon arriving home and seeing their house engulfed in flames, he darted into the building himself, soon-to-be murder suicide number seventeen.

He pulled his wife out of the burning wreckage, instead, throwing her onto the sidewalk and then collapsing behind her, immediately losing consciousness. They were rushed to the hospital and the doctors weren't sure either one would make it. "She's flatlining!" "I need CPR!" *Beeeeeeeeep*. The wife's pulse hummed. The husband's accelerated, as if he was being suffocated by the tension, the balance of his wife's life on the edge of the precipice. Murder or attempted murder? Or...

*Bu-bum. Bu-bum.* The wife's pulse came back online, and her husband's normalized. Both patients were set up in hospital beds until their consciousness could return and their vitals normalize.

Three floors down, a tormented soul returned to a comatose body and a damned spirit. The soul, tormented by what was not ever a murder at all, but a manslaughter. The spirit, damned by the indistinguishable difference. The body, comatosed by the failed attempt at a rectifying suicide. The comatose body gasped, and then the soul and spirit both left in peace. *Beeeeeeeeeeep*.

Since 2019, there has not been a single murder suicide in this town. There have been two cases of manslaughter, both of them ending in jail time, but not in death for either offender.