
In Medias Res

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In medias res. That's the phrase they use to describe a story that starts off in the middle. More accurately, it starts off during a really exciting part. Something really interesting is happening, and you get dropped right in the middle. It's a neat device. Some movies just deserve better than the typical introduction.

If a story were written about my life, I would want it to begin *in medias res*.

There's just one problem. My life is never that interesting.

It would be a lie to say that my life is devoid of action. My story is told by the clicking of keys. Every annoying ring of a phone that strains off the hook, begging to be snatched up, has its own tale. There is a story somewhere amidst a tableau of stapled copies and paper jams, but everyone is too busy to hear it between the hours of nine A.M. and five P.M., and no one save the foolish spends any other hours here.

My job is meaningless number-shuffling and the adjudication of totally arbitrary digits that somehow add up to the sum of a human being's worth. Somewhere, another person with a task even more repetitive and unnecessary than my own evaluates what I have done and produces equally little valuable output. Yet another person examines his progress and mine as a whole and attempts to extrapolate the total. People and numbers are alike in how easily they can be manipulated with a pen and paper. Strike one name on a list and suddenly someone comes up a few numbers short. Those numbers are the gas bill. They add up to groceries and car payments. They equal a college education for my children. This is my life. I am a slave to numbers. If I could build a time machine, I would go back and find the very first mathematician.

I would slit his throat and cry out in triumph.

I also drive a boring car. It's the best a man of my numbers can manage, unless he's willing to make a few sacrifices. His soul, perhaps. I bet someone, somewhere, can assign numbers to that, too. But enough about numbers; we are talking about my car.

My car is a 1996 Toyota Corolla. It's kind of greenish. Or maybe it's kind of bluish. It is a color that might best be described as teal, but again, it might not. No one can decide what color it is, but for some reason, it is the same color that all 1996 Toyota Corollas have been painted. All of the ones I've seen, anyway. I guess some Japanese businessman decided that if he was going to market a car to boring Americans that it made no difference what color it was. He was probably right. Maybe in some factory in Tokyo they know what color it is. Maybe they don't have a word for it in English.

Someday, I will buy a motorcycle.

Whenever I drive my car, I leave the window down. I don't care if it's eighty degrees or eight. I like the fresh air. Sometimes, I drive with one hand and put the other arm outside the window. I rest my hand against the car door that is the color which cannot be classified and turn up the radio. I listen to NPR. For a brief moment in time, I am not a prisoner. I am not a slave to mathematics, and even my car cannot fully confine me. I am happy.

Then I get home.

I own a modest house. It is painted a very ordinary shade of tan. The shutters are blue, like everyone else's shutters in my neighborhood. There are only three different models of homes in my development. The builder apparently decided to save money by painting them all the same color, too.

I considered purchasing a can of paint one day and painting my shutters, but it went rather poorly. I took a trip to the home decorator supply store. It was a weekend. I stood in front of a color chart, trying to decide which hue might best suit me. It was such an important decision, a landmark if you will. A man's shutters should match his personality, if you ask me. If his shutters and his personality clash, a man can never be complete. Maybe someday I'll publish a book of sayings, and that one will be in there. I will title that segment of the book "Advice about Shutters."

Anyway, I studied my options for a bit. Scratching my head in uncertainty, I spotted a young man in a red vest out of the corner of my eye. An employee! Perhaps he could make a recommendation. I motioned to him and we chatted for a moment. He nodded, understanding my dilemma in choosing from the myriad options presented before me. He seemed to know exactly what to do, and trusting his judgment, I waited while he went off to get a can of paint in the appropriate color. When he returned, I saw only the color of the paint can lid which I knew matched the color of the paint inside. He was carrying it under his arm, lid facing forward. I felt a sudden pounding in my chest. Surely, this was some cosmic joke, some party trick of karma. I shook my head nervously and quietly made a beeline for the exit.

The paint was the color of my car.

So I have not since been to any home decorator supply stores. They know more about me than I do. I am rebelling against their desire to paint everything I own such an enigmatic color. In this way, I feel as though I have some control over my life. I will not be played by fate, especially when it comes to my shutters.

When I came home without any paint, I had to explain myself to my wife. She would never understand the truth. I decided not to tell her. I simply informed her that I had changed my mind. Besides, all of our neighbors will paint their shutters, too, and then we'll be back where we started. She had accepted this, or so I believe, and there would be no further discussion. She will carry the secret of her credulity for eternity.

This is how it is. I come home in the evening and my wife greets me. Sometimes she has prepared dinner, other times not. It makes very little difference. My wife cannot cook. She believes she is excellent, a regular gourmet, as it were, but I know the truth. I will never tell her otherwise, and neither will anyone else. It is not worth troubling her about her inability to prepare an edible meal.

She is terrible in bed, too. She just lies there. We have been married for seven years, and never in seven years has she so much as moved beyond her initial position, back to the bed, face towards me. Perhaps she is secretly Catholic. That's how it was on our wedding night, and that's how it will be tonight. I will kiss her and whisper lies into her ear. She will believe them, like she always does. The lies are much easier than the truth, and she is less troubled.

Today, I am in the attic. My wife is not home. She has gone out with our neighbors, quite possibly to the mall, or maybe to an outlet store. She and I had discussed her intended purchase of a new handbag. The attic is somewhat cold. There are holes in the insulation. One more thing the builders got wrong. At least I know what color it is.

I am sitting on a stool. I found the stool underneath a pile of old, discarded linens. It was a pile of drapes and sheets and coats that no one has worn or used in years. The attic is a good place to be forgotten. Everything that no longer has value finds its way up here sooner

or later, and it is only remembered when someone wants to find an old photo album or plans to have a rummage sale. I used to like rummage sales.

I have a bottle of champagne. It is sitting in ice, in one of those neat little buckets on a tripod of sorts that they bring to you in fancy restaurants. There are patterns of grapes embossed on the tripod, but they have gotten rusty with time. The tripod is very old, but the champagne is not. Wine is unusual in the sense that its value often increases with age, and I can only afford very new wine. I have not used the wineglasses in my home in some time, but today, I have one in my hand, and it is filled. I have already consumed quite a bit of it, and even if it is new, the champagne tastes delicious. The bubbles rise to the top of the glass, and I stare at them, mesmerized. They must dislike the glass, I think. They are trying to escape.

I also have a shotgun. I bought it at a rummage sale. It cost me twenty dollars. The owners were in a hurry to get rid of it, I think, because they were new grandparents and did not want guns in the house. They wanted it to be safe for their new grandchildren. My wife wanted to have it in case we were ever being robbed, but somehow it wound up in the attic, alone and forgotten. Like me.

The ammunition for the shotgun was purchased at a sporting goods store.

The barrel of the shotgun is very long. It is resting against my neck. I stare at the bottle of champagne for a moment before looking at my glass. It is mostly full, which is good, because I am about to make a toast. Somehow it seems appropriate. That is where my story really begins, I suppose. And I think about it for a minute. What should I toast?

So I decide, right then, that I always loved movies that started with an exciting scene, right in the middle of the action. It was perfect.

“To *in medias res*,” I said, closing my eyes and raising my glass. I bring it to my lips and savor champagne.

I could have begun here, in retrospect. Maybe it would be exciting. It could even be *in medias res*. But it would have been a very short story.

I pull the trigger.