

## **System Crash**

Rey Hinojosa

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In the great city of Ashby, Samuel Davidson didn't show up to work. As a garbage truck driver, the trash disposal company had to manage with one missing worker for what they thought would be only a day. Though not greatly diminishing the overall efficacy of the company, his boss could not help but be curious as to why he was absent. Never one to be a 'no call no show', an ever-reliable worker, having been employed by the trash disposal company for over fifteen years, Samuel's boss called his place of residence to see if anything was wrong, offer any assistance should he need it, and after several attempts throughout the day, he gave up and decided to wait a day or two, to no avail. A week passed and Samuel never showed up. Though never close, his boss could not help but worry, but made no efforts to investigate further.

Shortly after Samuel Davidson's absence, five more workers disappeared and fearing it a trend, the boss became concerned about losing the contract. When none of the workers returned his calls and he received angry protests as to why trash had not been picked up in certain locations, he panicked and began the arduous process of covering for the missing workers himself, staying late, and running red lights to finish collecting entire neighborhoods alone. Unable to manage the workload and paperwork, the small trash company lost contracts, and soon enough, what remaining workers stayed began to drift away and the company disintegrated. Samuel Davidson never came back to work and those who worked with him, and were somewhat close, thought he up and left town like he'd always wanted.

Not too far from Samuel Davidson and the trash disposal company, Jeff Barker didn't show up to the job site. Being team leader, his crew struggled to coordinate plans for the UB 12 housing project. His boss called Jeff Barker's home and no one answered, not even his wife Doris and her ever cheerful demeanor. For several days, the boss scrambled to cover Jeff and get the work that needed doing done, focusing on other parts that didn't require Jeff for the housing project. But soon after, the boss began the process of hiring someone else, receiving interview after interview, thinking Jeff had found another job, which was the only reason he could think of for his sudden leave of absence. When the spot had been filled, and after the housing project had been completed, the boss visited the house of Jeff Barker to see if everything was alright. Despite them not being close or exceptionally friendly, the boss couldn't help but think that it was the right thing to do to check up on one of his most reliable team leaders. Upon his arrival, Doris greeted the boss with warmth,

joy and an ever-sunny disposition. They invited the boss to the den, and both he and Jeff Barker sat and talked briefly about each other's life, and when an opportunity arose, the boss inquired as to his departure, in which Jeff Barker's simple reply of "I don't need the stress anymore" left the boss feeling empty as he returned to the next housing project.

At the truck yards, very near the UB 12 housing project, Margo Stein failed to make her seven-thirty shipment. None of the other truckers knew of her whereabouts, nor had any indication of change with her life from the previous evening's outing—which included bar hopping, pool, and dancing at the local discotheque. She made no mention of any discontent or desire to quit, and seeing as how Margo Stein was always punctual and reliable in a tight spot, the truck yard decided to give it a day or two before they began to worry, thinking that maybe the previous evening had been a bit rough on her. But as a few days became the next week, none having heard from Margo Stein, one of her fellow truckers made a visit to her trailer home and found her tending a quaint garden, her loyal companion Souza right beside her, helping dig the freshly laid soil. When inquired if everything was well, her simple reply of "why wouldn't it be?" baffled the fellow trucker.

Down the street from the truck yards, Dana Simpson did not show up to teach his third-grade class. Leaving no word, no suggestion of vacation and notification of illness, the principal scrambled to find an aide who could manage the class while he figured out what happened to his third-grade teacher. After several days of trying to reach his home, he called his wife's place of employment at the bread factory, and they too were puzzled at her sudden leave of absence. With no word from his third-grade teacher, the principal visited Dana Simpson's residence, only to find him, his wife, and two kids lounging around outside in the backyard swimming pool. The pool could only fit the two children and most of the water had already been splashed out of it, and yet, everyone seemed content and the principal was greeted with great hospitality. After sipping on some freshly squeezed lemonade and making himself comfortable in the beat-up lawn chair, the principal inquired as to Dana Simpson's leave of absence, in which the simple reply of "I want to spend more time with my family" puzzled the principal. When asked if he would be returning, the uncertainty of a definitive point in time deflated the principal's sense of return for his third-grade teacher.

Down the street from the school and earlier that morning, Elsa Hubbard left her bus on the corner of Sturgeon and Main Boulevard. After several long-out-of-focus-minutes, the passengers, all six, began to take notice and inquire as to where their bus operator had up and went to and whether or not she would be returning. In this most unlikely of scenarios, no one having ever been prepared to handle such an event, the passengers filed out of the bus, some angry, some befuddled, but all left in a kind of stupor that left the edges and corners of buildings and doors a bit sharper and more focused; they too decided to call it a day and return home, and not worry about getting to their job at the steel factory, the small bakery, the deli, the maid cleaning service, the post office, or the daycare. As for Elsa Hubbard, the last that was seen of her was several weeks later in a salon getting her nails and hair done.

Elsewhere, Julia Hampton decided to not show up to the hospital where she was a surgeon. For ten days, she disappeared off the grid, not answering her phone or front door when concerned friends showed up to her apartment. Friends and co-workers posted on social media missing photos and involved the police who issued a state wide search. A family member with a key came from the next town over and found her eating cereal with her French bulldog Larry, binge watching a show on Netflix, and surprised anyone was worried. When asked why she didn't notify anyone of her sudden leave of absence, Julia's simple response of "I didn't think anyone would mind" baffled and angered everyone. Why didn't she answer my calls? Did she not hear me knocking on the door? What makes her think she doesn't need to work? Why risk losing her job with such a tough economy? Julia Hampton never returned to work, and having been put on paid administrative leave indefinitely, people soon forgot she even worked at the hospital.

In another location, at a time very near Julia's sudden leave of absence, Hasan Shamrat left early from his job, notifying no one, and was seen by a coworker a few days later, leisurely drinking an espresso at a coffee shop around the corner from his house, reading War and Peace, seemingly at bliss with the warm summer light pouring through the window. When asked why he left and if he was coming back, his simple response of "maybe, don't know yet" baffled his coworker. The group project they were working on in the real estate development firm could not move forward without him, and to much consternation from the firm's leading developers, Hasan's input could not be duplicated, so the project stalled and eventually had to be scrapped, costing the firm millions and its credibility. Hasan was subsequently fired from the firm. His severance pay, and selling of his two-story town home, cushioned his travels abroad, and he was never seen again by anyone from the great city of Ashby.

Sometime near Hasan's travels, Juan Gabriel Castro didn't show up to teach his class on The Socio-Economics of Gentrified Urbanism. In fact, he didn't show up for the rest of the semester. The university, in which he was recently granted tenure, scrambled to continue on with the course, but found no suitable replacement, largely in part to the rambling notes and personalized structure of the course—he did after all, write the book on the subject. Eventually they had to drop the class and refund students their money. No one knew what happened to him, not even the secretary he was cheating with, who was so torn with grief, decided against her best judgment to confront him and his wife at home. To her dismay, she found both he and his wife bunkered down in their home, having stockpiled their pantry with bulk food and paid their bills for the next two years, both neglecting to tell anyone that they would not be coming in to their respective occupations indefinitely; until they felt like it was necessary to do so, and neither worried of the consequences to losing their savings, job security or references for future work. The secretary soon followed and left her job, never to be seen again.

Someplace, not too far and not too long after Juan Gabriel Castro and his wife decided to stay home and rekindle their marriage, an entire morning shift of baristas at a popular franchise didn't open at 5 am. The manager arrived and set up alone, struggling to make orders in the morning rush, upsetting many custom-

ers when he couldn't get anyone to come in and help. Eventually the customers sought out another coffee franchise not too far from this one and were met with the same experience. None of the employees had shown up and the manager struggled to meet all the orders, making wrong ones, getting some mixed up, and making god-awful coffee. Customers became infuriated, especially at the managers' incessant prostrating. There was no coordinated effort, no postings on social media about protests, or walk-outs, and to many, nothing seemed out of place as rush hour traffic remained as congested as ever.

Near the struggling coffee shops, a mortgage and loan company wondered where their Team Leaders and Supervisors were. 14 Lead Staff in total, the rest of the workers operated till lunch on the previous day's projects before they realized their superiors were not present. After numerous phone calls and emails to corporate, word quickly spread that the day was to be settled early and everyone would return tomorrow. That was not the case. After several days of the entire Lead Staff's absence, none having been found, corporate struggled to replace them with little success. Productivity drastically plummeted and soon the rest of the associates began to diminish in suit.

Not long after that, and several miles from the mortgage house, a motor plant saw its entire morning and afternoon crew disappear, supervisors included. Production ceased and the car company lost its marbles trying to figure out where everyone went. Thinking this a ploy from the local union, the car company sought to bring its massive legal and political power into the foray—if they wanted blood, they would get blood. But not even the union knew what was going on. In fact, the union could not sustain itself as many of its managers had also failed to show up over the past few weeks. Neither side could reach an understanding, and both blamed the other for what was happening. The car company decided to hire scabs and train them to work the line, the union having been completely dissolved a few days prior. After several weeks, production stalled and many problems arose when those very scabs started to disappear as well. With no assembly line, no production, no quota, the car company began to lose billions in revenue, and with this, they pressured the government to look into the absence of their entire workforce.

Federal Agent David Wallace was assigned the task of investigating the disappearance of said car company's workers. He was assigned 15 other investigators, 10 of which never showed, so he had to scramble and find more dedicated replacements, and when found, would make their way to the car plant. After the airport closed due to lack of flight coordinators, pilots, and flight attendants, the team tried to make it by train, but to no avail, as every train was delayed indefinitely. Word spread that a general strike had swept across the country, shutting down every major industry, but government officials ignored such claims, calling it a hoax. Why would people not want to work? How long could they go on without it? After a several day delay of waiting, the team moved on with driving, and made it to the great city of Ashby and the car plant two days later.

Greeted by the company's lawyers and reps, David Wallace and team made a list of every employee, their respective address, phone number and other pertinent info. After calls would not go through because of phone towers not operating—no one in the city was present to keep the electricity going—David Wallace assigned his team to go door to door.

In eerie silence, very few people ventured outside and for a city of several million inhabitants, David Wallace thought it quite alarming. With no ability to contact his superiors, use GPS to find the missing employees, in addition to the slow trek to the site, the investigation looked like it would be a long one.

Since the town had emptied, the power grid shut off, David Wallace had to make certain that his team returned before dark, back to the hotel in which they made their base of operations. He made certain that everyone remained in direct contact with each other, and restricted their operations to daylight, seeing as how batteries and candles were in scarce supply.

Getting the investigation to move forward was met by many obstacles. At their base of operations, they were the only ones present as the hotel staff failed to show up shortly after their arrival. The entire building belonged to the team and the staff didn't even bother to lock up, and something as simple as finding toilet paper became impossible. No coffee shop was open. There was no running water. Gas stations didn't operate, mainly because of the lack of electricity, but also there were no attendants available. Grocery supermarkets were closed; empty of workers, empty of food and other amenities, but with no sign of rioting or pillaging. No one showed up for work at any and every job. The team, whose vehicles ran out of gas, had to rely on foot or bicycle (or any wheeled vehicle that relied on its operator for momentum), of which the inhabitants of the city who wandered out, used them to great effect, riding with ease through once busy thoroughfares.

Upon inquiring to those who wandered out as to what was going on, their simple reply of "don't know" puzzled the team. Although greatly unsettling as it was to witness an entire city shut down, they couldn't help but yearn for such a possibility in their own lives. The stress of work, filling out and filing reports, long meetings and continuous protocol shifts wore them down. But they continued on, determined to get to the bottom of this.

After many weeks of investigating, relying on sustenance from people's houses they visited, every worker was accounted for, alive, safe and well. Upon inquiry as to why they did not show and what they intended to do for income, their reply of "we don't need to buy anymore" baffled the team. The workers then returned to play cards or other such games in which families could gather around a table with a candle and enjoy, inviting the team to join in. Upon inquiry as to food, their reply of "we can grow everything we need in the community gardens" frightened the team. Upon inquiry as to how everyone managed to leave at the same

time, the workers' faces became puzzled. They had no idea that the entire city, in fact the entire country, had done the exact same thing. There was no coordinated effort. What neighbors and close friends who maintained contact—as best they could—said when asked as to the meaning of their leave of absence, the expenditure of their savings, and payment of property tax and rent in advance, how they knew the electricity and water would go off without knowing that the entire city was doing the exact same thing, their simple reply of “there is already so much to go around, we don't need to make anymore” demoralized the team. Who could've predicted that so many people would feel the exact same way? It seemed as natural to them as breathing clean air, which as it happened, became a real thing with the lack of a commute and industry.

Federal Agent David Wallace became highly suspicious of these motives and conjured an elaborate scheme by some unknown group that coordinated all the citizens to a general strike. After a several week journey on foot and bicycle, and what remained of his team, he made it back to HQ, and David Wallace reported to what remained of the government entity that assigned him the investigation, because as what happened in the great city of Ashby his team was sent to inspect, happened there as well.

When word finally made it to the president, who was completely unaware of anything out of the ordinary, since the extraordinary loyal skeleton crew who remained at the White House did their due diligence in maintaining the back-up generators, convincing him of elaborate plans for repairs and construction, to build an illusory shield to the failing world outside, finally noticed something was amiss when he pressed the diet coke button and no one arrived to deliver it to him. He became infuriated, called his staff in, word having to be sent out in person since none of the phone towers had been working for several weeks now, and when only a few of his cabinet members arrived, the president demanded to know what was happening, and what the most extreme measures he could enact were. After several hours of deliberating and confusion, the oval office decided on David Wallace's conspiracy theory of a shadowy cabal convincing everyone to stop working.

Later that day the president gave a speech on television, with only one camera operator who spent a few hours figuring out how to connect and set up the equipment. The president, without the action of congress, who too had disappeared, declared a national emergency and declared it illegal to not work and that swift justice would come to those individuals who did not show up to their jobs. Not realizing the massive scope required to move the economy through working from the very bottom, the president rambled on for an hour or so in an unhinged speech that called for unity and stressed the importance of the booming economy that he single handedly up-lifted from the do-nothing liberals. He called in the National Guard and asked for quick mobilization, but without any way of reaching the governors and generals and massive amounts of soldiers who went AWOL, the bite of the government could not reach anyone.

There was no concentrated force in which to enact the will of any institutional body, no police, no fire-fighters, no hospitals, but also there was no crime in which communities could not solve, no fire in which neighbors did not gather to eliminate, and no medical emergency in which the community didn't try to alleviate, and although not entirely successful every time, could mourn together and move forward with having learned a lesson and the ability to mitigate it from happening again. A silence carried across the land, and in the span of a few months, the world diminished in size, condensed into small insular neighborhoods in which people lived, and communal gatherings in which people acknowledged one another through smiles, handshakes and hugs, and enacted plans of action to create clean water sources, methods for collecting and disposing of garbage, dismantle power plants and factories, disassemble walls and prisons, committees to repair roads and organize land for farming.

Seemingly in a small way, with the exclusion of participatory action to the ensnaring web of a career and drudgery of means and modes of production, the world still moved forward, but in a wholly different system that left everyone the ability to live, to connect to their neighbors, and no longer worry about the future and uncertainty of fiscal markets. It was a complete disintegration of the system and order whose primary good was production over the value of those who comprise it, make it, and consume it. Everyone had been convinced they no longer needed what the allure of clever marketing produced, or that what they had already wasn't enough to hold them. Everything they needed to survive had been made already, and slowly methods of trade and skill traveled in intricate systems that threaded connections people never thought possible, and never strained to reach beyond the means presented in the moment. Old ideas birthed fresh systems in which people could reach deeper into the earth and higher into the sky without losing sight of each other.

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