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Sam Bannon
Butler University

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The Life of Jack Redford, Albuquerque Beetle

Sam Bannon

Jack Redford loved his life. He had everything. Granted, there were some aspects of his life that he did not particularly enjoy – like the fact that he technically was a stink bug and he couldn't fly and was happy. He lived in a bustling urban city, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and had a beautiful newlywed wife who was expecting their first children. After all, what more could he ask for? He was a dentate stink bug beetle living in a great city with a great wife, and a family on the way. He was two months old, about a third of the way into his life. His life was just beginning. Jack Redford was happy.

Jack, like most of his kind of beetle, stayed home all day under he and his wife's rock until dusk, when he would go scavenge the area for small bits of plants to bring back to the home for dinner. However, food was unfortunately becoming few and far between for Jack and his pregnant wife with the recent drought that had struck Albuquerque. It wasn't quite the Goldilocks climate that he and his wife had come to expect – dry enough so it was habitable and hospitable for them, but not too dry so that the plants, their food, couldn't live. The continual lack of food Jack would shamefully bring back became a strong point of contention in an otherwise fruitful and fight-free marriage. With his wife already irritable due to the hormones and the larvae growing inside of her, the pressure continued to build and mount like a dormant volcano that was not going to be dormant for too much longer.

The date was April 5, 2009; one week before it happened. The time they spent at their home together during the day was almost completely silent. Typically, when two beings are comfortable around each other, they can blissfully share a silence together. They don't feel that they need to yak about mindless, trivial things in order to feel comfortable. They can just sit there and be comfortable in silence. Of course, Jack and his wife had shared many of these instances. Who was more comfortable around each other than two beetles who loved each other? However, the silence between the two on that day was almost painful, and certainly not a comfortable one. Jack's wife was angry, she was hungry – and she blamed him. It hurt Jack that his wife was shutting him out due to things out of his control. It wasn't as if he simply brought back less food because of some incompetence or lack of ability to

provide – he brought home all that he could, because a man provides. It wasn't his fault.

Jack was sitting there, in silence, next to his wife, living in his own head. Jack, normally a confident beetle, was skittish and nervous. A million thoughts went racing through his mind like the cars on Gold Ave during the rush hour. *What do I say to her? How can I assure her that everything will be okay? How can I tell her that I have no control over this without her exploding in anger? Can I have a conversation with her, or will she just continue to incessantly shun me? Surely, there must exist some combination of words. There must exist certain words in a certain specific order that can cause her to not be so cantankerous.* All of these sprinted through his head. Finally, after hours of silence, Jack finally settled on what to say. However, he butchered the delivery and felt like he come off scared. He weakly said to her, “hot one today, huh?” He instantly regretted it. Out of all the thoughts that ran through his head, *this* was what he settled on? He thought he was an idiot. However, it became exponentially worse after his wife's response, or lack thereof. She simply looked at him and walked away like he wasn't there.

The date was April 6, 2009; six days before it happened. The night before with Jack and his wife was contentious. He brought home even less food than he had been bringing. He noticed his wife was becoming skinnier from the malnutrition. He became terribly concerned, not only for his wife, but the larvae on the way. He felt helpless, like he was a David going against a Goliath – except this time, David did not have a sling, and Goliath squashed him. He brought home even less food that night. His pregnant wife continued to not speak to him, and she continued to get weaker and more malnourished.

The date was April 11, 2009; one day before it happened. Jack Redford never felt any animosity towards his wife throughout the ordeal, but especially not know. He loved her; he always had. However, with less food each night, she and the larvae became increasingly starved. Toward the end, Jack liked to tell himself that he she didn't talk to him because she was too weak to talk, but Jack knew it wasn't the case. She had not spoken to Jack in about a week. Jack's wife blamed him for her and the larvae's starvation, whether it was fair or not. The piercing looks she would give Jack only served to make him feel ever more dejected. Once again, they sat together in a painful silence throughout the day. She sat there, blaming her husband for her starvation, and he sat there, concerned for his wife's well-being, and impotent to do anything about it. Eventually, Jack left to forage for food in the crevasses of the sidewalks in the city, while his wife stayed home, silent.

Jack himself had not eaten in the previous two days. He had given his portion of the food to his wife, but it still was not enough for her. When he was out searching for food, he was determined to bring home an abundance of plants for his wife. He felt that she maybe did not have much time left, but

he was unclear on how much there could be. He thought he had maybe another week to give her enough food so she could not be starving anymore. Jack was frantic in his search at dusk. He knew it was dangerous, but it was a risk he had to take for his wife – Jack had to venture into Gold Ave, and try and find food there. He was desperate. He knew if he could simply just find enough food tonight, he could potentially get his wife talking to him again, and help save her and the larvae. He needed to find the food. He knew there was not much out there, but there was some – and he was desperate to find it.

Jack scuttled out of the alley where their rock was into the busy, bustling Gold Ave. He took one step with one of his six legs, and he immediately had to step back into the alley. There were people, giant human beings, all around. He knew there would be some, but he hadn't a clue that there would be so many. The odds of Jack being able to frogger his way through the unrelenting river of stomping feet were minimal, but he had no other choice. He needed to get about 48 inches to the other side of the sidewalk in order to get to a ridge, where small bits of plant are sometimes held. Jack felt that he was on a suicide mission, but he was out of options.

Jack peered his head out from the corner of the alley, hoping to catch a break in the flow of feet. For a small interval of time, there weren't any. But, finally, he found one. He scampered out from the alley and scurried across the sidewalk as fast as he possibly could. As more and more feet came pounding his direction from seemingly all sides, he thought about his wife. He thought about how he loved her, and how he was doing this for her. He ran harder. He was almost there. The people seemed to be stampeding toward him. He thought about his wife more. He ran harder. He was almost there. Finally, just as it seemed he wouldn't make it, he leapt into the crevasse of the sidewalk. He was safe. He could finally look for the food his wife desperately needed.

Jack was in the sidewalk, safe from all the feet that were too wide to step on him below. The more people above, the more likely it was that there would be food in the cracks. However, the drought that caused his family's shortage of food was far more reaching than he had even anticipated. There was no food anywhere in sight.

"No, no, no, no, no..." Jack frantically screamed. "No! This can't be!" Jack darted down the sidewalk for what seemed like eons to him, just trying to find something before dark. He didn't have a lot of time with which to work, as beetles only can search for food at dusk. He was running out of time. Panic-stricken, he continued to search, but he knew it was hopeless. There was no food here. He waited a small bit in the crack of the sidewalk, defeated, realizing his wife and larvae would have to go another night with little-to-no food. After the foot traffic on the sidewalk died down, he made his way back to the alley. As he was going back, he felt like crying.

His wife, critically needing food and expecting it, sat there, waiting

for her husband to get back. She heard his voice before she saw him. He feebly said, fighting back the tears, “hey, sweetie.” She turned to him and saw that Jack had brought back no food. “I’m sorry, but there—” before Jack could finish, she cut him off, and spoke to him for the first time for the first time in about a week. With the little energy she had left, she plainly said, “fuck you, Jack.” She walked away, and Jack simply just sat there, hungry, terribly saddened, and alone. More alone than he had ever been. He didn’t know how much longer his wife and the larvae could last with such little food and nourishment.

The date was April 12, 2009; the day it happened. The day Jack awoke to find his wife and her larvae dead. They had starved. Jack, at first, thought she still was not talking to him. *She wasn’t speaking before, so what would change that, especially after last night?* Jack thought. Until Jack began to realize that she was not moving, he did not think anything was more wrong than it had been. But, sooner rather than later, Jack realized that she *wasn’t* moving, and this caused him to grow concerned. In the back of his mind, he knew what had happened. He knew she was dead.

He cautiously crept over to what he hoped wasn’t his wife’s lifeless carcass. “Honey?” he probed, “are you feeling alright?” There was no response. Jack swallowed and tapped her on the side with his front right leg. There was no movement from her. He was fighting back the tears, hoping and praying that the worst had not happened. But he knew it had. “Honey...?” he softly repeated. He tapped her again, this time much harder. She toppled over onto her side, legs and antennae stiff. Jack felt what he thought would be the worst feeling he would ever experience. He was right. His wife, and his unborn children, were dead.

He was paralyzed with sadness. He could do nothing but stand there and look at her lifeless body with tears in his eyes. He wept, blaming himself for what had happened. He held her body, clutching the woman that once loved him and was full of life. Upon holding her, he thought back to the night before and what she had said. That was the last thing she ever said to him. He clutched her body tighter and cried harder.

Jack Redford hated his life. He had nothing. He had indirectly killed his wife and her larvae. He wanted nothing more than to be a dad, and now that was gone. He felt like his life was over. He decided to go on a walk. He had no direction in mind. He was going to keep walking until he couldn’t anymore. He set off with tears in his eyes.

Jack had no idea where he was. It seemed like a bad part of Albuquerque, but he had no way of knowing. He made it to the corner of Pacific and Commercial. He did not know how far he had walked. The only sound he could hear was the rush of a freight train barreling by. There was one man around him, a man dressed in yellow with white shoes. Jack ducked down into the sidewalk crevasse for safety like how he had done before, but

he soon realized that this man was friendly. He crawled across his hand, almost playing with him. He needed to feel something other than the emptiness he felt.

He heard a pair of footsteps approaching. The second man greeted the first man, so he assumed the second man would be friendly like the first. The next thing Jack heard was the second man say, “damn, bitch!” An instant later, Jack Redford felt the most excruciating pain he had ever felt in his life. His entire body was smashed into the sidewalk by the second man’s shoe. The man twisted his foot, and swiped it across the sidewalk, erasing any semblance of Jack Redford. Jack Redford was dead.

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