

Epiphany

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<https://www.vangoghgallery.com/painting/starry-night.html>

***Starry Night* (1889) by Vincent van Gogh**

A lone man walked along the side of the road of the Brooklyn Bridge, ignoring the flashing headlights and angry cab drivers shouting profanities as they drove by. He sported a flat cap and overcoat bejewelled with a lifetime's worth of tears never properly repaired, scars never fully healed. Beneath were clothes so worthless in his eye that it was shameful to even look at his own reflection. His uneven stride forced him to keep a slow and encumbered pace amidst the rat race of New York. The psychologists said it was psychosomatic, though how a man could pretend to limp for almost four years seemed to puzzle us all. He paused to flip up the collar of his coat as he felt the chilled evening breeze push him from behind before continuing on, hunching over as he went.

He stopped, not wanting to walk any further and looked out beyond the urban metropolis that unfolded along the East Riverside. Unbeknownst to the cars going by, he pulled himself up onto the railing of the bridge and used the suspension wiring to hold him steady on his two good legs. "When I was young, I looked up to my father; so just like him, I wanted to become a salesman," he yelled, as if calling out to someone across the stirred waters, "but after I enlisted, my dream was to become a war hero, like I am tonight." Though his lies never reached the ears of the rat race of fools who didn't hear.

Content with the belief that no one was listening, he continued on, "Leo, I *know* you can hear me!" His shivering hand reached inside his coat pocket to find the comforting cool touch of Leo's flask. The causes behind his shaking hands weren't from the cold nor the liquor, but his

own fear. The lone man hastily drank the stale water inside to calm his nerves, he'd been clean ever since he enlisted, not a trace of alcohol coursed through his veins.

"I am a selfish man. Although I have been blessed with my life, I also wish to take it away," he cried, "but"—his voice began to rise—"but you didn't have a choice, did you?" He turned his attention to the cloud covered sky, as did we. "Leaving me here..." his words began to drift. He gazed down at the flask in hand and grasped onto firmly before loosening his grip again and raised it up to his lips. The gentle, quiet words he whispered were overpowered by the waves and the wind. Though the moon caught a glimpse of his bittersweet smile from under the brim his flat cap. Content with the message he had left, the lone man threw the flask as far as his arms were willing into the East river. "God bless, Leo. God fucking bless you," he called into the unknown.

The two of them had enlisted together, but only one had returned.

It was nearing midnight and the constant barrage of cars driving by had subsided to merely a handful. The young man stood in silence with only the intermittent shudders of his shoulders exposing his hushed tears. "I had no other choice," he choked on his words, the heavy burden of taking a man's life seemed to have taken a toll. "There was blood everywhere and I - I had no other choice," he said again to try and justify his actions, "your leg was gone, and you were screaming so much. You told me you wanted to die. You looked so peaceful when I complied." The man shuddered before retching into the river.

He used his hat as a cloth, exposing his expression in the moonlight and the toll of becoming God; the unshaven face, the bloodshot eyes, the several painful bruises that cover a little less than half his face. "As the officer on duty, I took out my .45 and put one in your head," he paused as he remembered more of his painful past, "I shouldn't get to decide who lives and who dies." His lip tremored and unfrozen tears threatened to fall.

"I came home, and everyone acted like I was a hero. I never felt more of a sham in my entire life." He brought his tremoring hands to cover his face, only to then look down at his palms and recoil in disgust of himself. The sudden movement almost made him lose balance on the railing, though he was too preoccupied on the transparent blood on his hands to notice.

"Your old man is still doing fine in sales," the man reassured, "it would have been nice to tell you all this in person, but where I'm going doesn't allow visitors. You never liked the hot anyway." The solitary man didn't say any goodbyes to the living and decided to greet the dead. He leant over the edge of Brooklyn Bridge, the wind desperately trying to push him back. He let a deep breath before turning to face the cars. His hands stretched out into the icy air of dawn, as if he embraced his death with open arms. The lightest tilt of his toes skyward sent him falling.

Rather than feeling the cold of the East River, he felt the coarse texture of an array of fishing nets of a trawler passing beneath the bridge. He opened his eyes only to be greeted by us stars above and laughed.