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A Prayer for the Killers

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A Prayer for the Killers

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Like everybody, I have my story. But they all seem so typical already. I mean, with all the guest essayists and headlines and constant news, it seems to me that we've already been at war for a long time."

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DANNY UEBBING

A PRAYER FOR THE KILLERS

Like everybody, I have my story. But they all seem so typical already. I mean, with all the guest essayists and headlines and constant news, it seems to me that we've already been at war for a long time.

Doubtless, the tragedy was ostensibly shocking, like all tragedies are, but nevertheless, a firm wake up call for America.

Yet even this theory is already lapsed over.

I want to tell you something different. Something, I warn you, that might come off a bit off-color, however also holding a theory that has been held in the minds and in the down-winded voices of so many, but is yet widely unpublicized.

The notion first hit me in church. I was attending Mass with my family at the church at St. John Fisher College, where I also attend school, and it got to that point when the priest asked the people what they wanted to pray for. Certain individuals immediately called out their wishes and grieving, and after every one, the priest would lead the unanimous response: "Lord, hear our prayer." And every time the people complied. And the sun was shining through the courtyard window and everything seemed to grow more and more hopeful after each prayer was sent. I closed my eyes and tried to picture the prayers floating up to heaven on little rolled-up diplomas like I'd done as a kid. But each time I closed my eyes, I couldn't help but think of the image of that second plane colliding and exploding into the building. Even in church, I was haunted by the horror.

And then I thought to myself, "What kind of man would do something like that? What kind of man would have the audacity to do that? To awaken the American wrath?"

Any true American man, like the courageous fire fighters of the FDNY and the Police Officers and others would charge into the invading smog, risking their lives, helping in a heartbeat.

But I'm talking about the bad guys; the hijackers; the evil ones; the killers.

For hours, I had stared at the photo of a man named Mohammad Atta in the corner of the newspaper. Another man's photo was shown next to him, but I couldn't pronounce his name, and I didn't care to make the effort. But this guy Mohammad Atta broke a certain comfort inside me.

A security that nothing like this could ever happen was slowly dissolving into reality as

I had stared so numbly into the screen that morning. "We will retaliate!" I thought. "We must."

As I continued to watch, the feeling broke into the realm of paranoia. For this man named Mohammad had the most eerie look. His cheeks were flushed pale as if he'd never seen the light of day. And then there were his eyes, the most absent and eerie dead eyes staring right up and into me. I remember my English teacher back home always used to say, "the eyes are the windows to the soul." This got me thinking, "Where is his soul right now?" Wherever it was, I could only hope that it was in pain. Torturous, torturous pain.

Yet then again, on a far too distant other hand, the Gospel that Sunday had gotten me in the 'turn the other cheek' kind of mode, so I had mixed thoughts and emotions. And as I stood there in church, listening solemnly to the many prayers going out for so many people, so many lonely, dying people in the world, I wondered: who will pray for Mohammad? Who will pray for him?

He must've had one hell of a downfall—two years of planning his whole life, I predict must have been dedicated to evil. But just think about it for a second: he is still human. The lowest of mankind, but still a member. Then I remembered Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* book and how artful and yet so profoundly devoid of sentimentality the feelings that everybody deserves to be saved. They deserve it simply for being human. A brother. A sister. A family.

I know all this seems kind of childish, like when I was kid, saying to the girls, "I love you, but only under God and not the other thing," but I just couldn't help it. I wanted to pray for killers. I wanted to do it right there and then in that church, in front of everybody. I wanted them to be saved. Saved with all the rest. I could just picture myself raising my voice grandly and saying, "I'd like to say a prayer for the killers! Mohammad Atta! Osama bin Laden, or whatever his name is! And all the other 19 hijackers whose names I cannot presently pronounce!" I thought that last part would take the edge off a little. But I was too afraid the people wouldn't respond. They wouldn't say, "Lord hear our prayer." And the whole thing would blow up in my face and I bet from looking around that even a few of the church attendants would've probably attacked me. So I held my tongue.

I don't know. It seemed like something Jesus or Moses would've done. I knew I was right, but I didn't have the moral courage to submit. But it doesn't matter. I am not Jesus. I am not perfect. I, too, hate. But it doesn't matter because 'we're the people, and the people stick together.'