

HUMAN ERROR

30 stories beyond common sense

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Foreword

The human soul is a labyrinth—dense with dead ends and unexpected passages of escape. Within its narrow corridors echo thoughts we've never dared to speak aloud, fears hidden behind the masks of everyday life, and hopes quietly smoldering beneath layers of habit.

As a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, I have witnessed many people navigating this inner maze, searching for solace, meaning, and a glimmer of light. Some find themselves circling endlessly, retracing the same worn paths, trapped in quiet repetition. Others discover hidden doors, arriving at destinations they never imagined possible.

The stories in this collection carry their footprints. They are questions disguised as narratives: What does it mean to belong to a society that molds us even as it devours us? Who am I if I no longer exist in the memories of others? What remains of us once the roles we have been given are stripped away? How true can truth be when everyone agrees upon a lie? And, perhaps most poignantly, where precisely is the fragile boundary between reality and the narratives we construct to endure it?

Some of the characters in these tales are trapped—in silent relationships, in fabricated identities, in worlds they no longer recognize. Others resist, armed with self-awareness, with irony, and with a defiant kind of optimism that keeps them standing. There are those who sink, and others who,

even in their final moments, discover a reason to carry on—slipping through the cracks in their own existence and breaking free from endless cycles.

Yet it is not only individuals who lose themselves in repetitive paths. Their homeland, too, appears trapped in an endless loop—oscillating between memory and oblivion, glorifying its past while resisting a genuine understanding of it. It longs for progress yet erects barriers to any meaningful change. Generation after generation is raised with identical expectations, only to confront the same disillusionment.

A country perpetually “in crisis”, forever anticipating an elusive “turning point”, yet immobilized by persistent dysfunctions. Corruption evolves but never disappears; institutions recycle themselves rather than truly renewing; citizens learn to survive in stagnation because it is all they’ve ever known.

Literature—much like psychotherapy—does not aim to interpret people or societies through clichés or rigid categories. Instead, it strives to reveal us as we truly are: complex, contradictory, simultaneously tender and harsh, capable of profound solidarity yet aching with loneliness.

That is why the texts you are about to read do not attempt to define humanity through fixed patterns or simplistic terms. Instead, they allow individuals to wander, stumble, laugh, and tremble—to recognize or reject themselves on every page. They place them face to face with the choices, the relationships, and the fateful decisions that shape their destiny. At the same time, they critically examine their encounters with technology and power.

The narrative—at times allegorical and subtle, at others incisive and direct—pierces through the personal, the social, and the political. Not in any narrow ideological sense, but rather in the way politics quietly saturates the marrow of everyday life, infiltrating silences, illusions, and self-sustaining systems.

It invites the reader to recognize familiar paths, for ultimately, personal and collective experience unfold through the same recurring patterns. If anything binds these narratives together, it is the relentless pursuit—undertaken equally by people and societies—even when the destination itself remains uncertain. Perhaps within this ceaseless wandering lies the profound essence of what it truly means to be human.

As you immerse yourself in these narratives, I hope you become lost—and in doing so, discover something deeper within yourself.

Dimitris Papadimitriadis MD MSc

Psychiatrist - psychotherapist

The Button

Mr. Anestis did not hate the world; he had simply ceased to find any reason to love it. At seventy-two, it seemed as though his life had ended long ago—squandered in trivial conversations with indifferent people, endless queues at government offices, and monotonous family gatherings where everyone spoke simultaneously but no one truly listened.

The final drop that caused his cup to overflow had fallen six months earlier, when his wife, Eleni, left him. She had departed quietly, leaving nothing behind except a note placed gently beside her gardenia plant:

“I’m tired. I’m off to live. Take care of the plant.”

Anestis tended to the gardenia with a kind of reverence, as though it were the last fragment of a vanished life. He watered it carefully and whispered to it softly—not because he believed it could hear, but out of habit. After all, people never listened; why should a plant be any different?

And so his days drifted by, dulled by the monotonous hum of television news, the whine of mopeds racing down the narrow street, and the idle chatter of strangers at the nearby open-air market. The world seemed resolute in its march forward—indifferent, impatient—and Anestis saw no reason to follow.

Until the package arrived.

It was an unremarkable cardboard box, unmarked by any sender. The postman—a young man with an earring and the detached air of someone already elsewhere—had dropped it at the doorstep without so much as ringing the bell. The label bore only his name, written in an elegant, unfamiliar script: *Anestis Lagos*.

He brought it inside and placed it on the kitchen table, where it sat like a question. He stared at it for a long time, as though it might reveal its purpose unprompted. At last, he opened it.

Inside was something at once absurd and deeply unsettling: a smaller box, black and smooth to the touch, with a velvety texture that reminded him of cheap magic tricks from old fairgrounds. He opened that, too.

There it was.

A single, bright red button—bold, unblinking, almost taunting. Beside it, a folded slip of paper bearing stark, clinical instructions:

“Press the button and the world will end.”

Anestis smiled. For the first time in years, he didn’t know what to think. He sat at the kitchen chair and looked at the button with a faint smirk. Not of joy. Not of irony. It was a smile of confusion, like the kind that appears on your face when you hear a joke you don’t quite get.

He leaned back and rubbed his chin.

“Well then”, he thought. “Just like that? One push and it’s over?”

He picked up the paper and read it again.

“Press the button and the world will end.”

Nothing more. No threats, no explanations, no fine print at the bottom with legal terms or disclaimers.

His first instinct was to laugh. His second was to throw the box into the trash. The third—and most insidious—was to keep it. He didn't know why, but it seemed strangely reasonable. After all, he had nothing to lose. If it was merely a prank, who would it hurt? And if, somehow, it was telling the truth?

He stood up, walked to the window, and gazed outside. The world looked exactly as he'd left it the day before. Mrs. Maro from next door had brought out a basin of laundry to the balcony but was talking on the phone instead of hanging it. The kiosk owner across the street was fiddling with his phone, while a motorbike zoomed past honking for no apparent reason.

The world hadn't changed—it was still the same hum of daily insignificance, a never-ending parade of people tolerating each other without genuinely caring.

Anestis thought of Thomas—his only friend—who had died of cancer two years ago. When he visited him at the hospital, not long before the end, Thomas had turned to him with eyes clouded by pain and medication and said, voice trembling:

“I don't know whether I want to die just to make this stop, or stay alive just to see if anything will ever change.”

Nothing changed.

Anestis let his gaze drift back to the button. He made no move to touch it, but the thought had already taken root in his mind. It was terrifying how easily he could imagine the world ending.

He pictured apartment buildings crumbling in an instant, streets yawning open, and television screens freezing mid-sentence during a news segment on yet another political scandal. He imagined phone screens flickering briefly before going black, people exchanging puzzled glances—just moments before vanishing altogether.

Not that anyone would truly miss anyone else. The world no longer seemed bound by love, but by machinery grinding forward out of sheer habit. People worked, paid their bills, gossiped in half-sentences, muttered “that’s just how things are, that’s just life”, and then died. Nobody ever paused long enough to ask *why*.

The button lay right there, just inches from his hand. He wasn't sure whether he actually wanted to press it or simply to feel the weight of having the choice.

Anestis didn't press the button that night. He closed the lid of the black box, left it on the table, and went to bed. Not that he found sleep. He tossed and turned beneath the thin sheets, ears attuned to the restless symphony of the apartment building: the upstairs toilet that ran endlessly like a broken metronome, the neighbor's hacking cough—raw and metallic, as if he were trying to breathe out rust—the sudden screech of tires, and someone shouting obscenities into the night.

In the morning, he made himself a cup of coffee, sat at the table, and stared at the box. He stayed like that for a long while, the steam from his mug rising and disappearing into the stillness. Then, without ceremony, he picked up the box and tucked it into the cupboard—nestled beside a dusty jar of

pickled vegetables his sister had given him three years ago, long forgotten and never once opened.

Days passed. The world didn't improve. Anestis began to notice the petty horrors of everyday life more vividly than before—perhaps because he now knew he could end it all with a single press of a button.

The baker who handed him bread with the same fingers he'd just used to scratch his scalp. The supermarket cashier who returned his change without so much as a glance. The man who parked squarely on the pedestrian crossing, then sauntered into the bank without the slightest hesitation, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

But the worst were the others. The ones who saw, who knew, who frowned, who muttered, "Well, what can you do..."—and then did nothing. The woman on the third floor who turned away when she saw a mother and child rifling through the trash. The young man on the bus who pretended not to hear the elderly passenger asking for a seat. The well-dressed gentleman who watched someone stealing from the corner kiosk, shook his head with quiet disapproval, and walked on without a word. Anestis no longer knew who was worse—those who made the mess, or those who put up with it.

On the fifth day, Anestis took the box out of the cupboard. He didn't open it. He just held it in his hands. He now knew he was never going to throw it away.

It had become a small piece of hope, paradoxical as that may sound. A last resort. A way to stop the world from continuing as it was.

But... should he? Was it right to destroy something just because it had rotted? Or should he allow it to decay completely, to see if something new might grow from the ruins? Anestis chuckled softly to himself.

“I’ve grown old and ended up philosophizing with a button...”

He put it back in its place and went to water the gardenia. The button could wait. The world kept turning. For now.

Anestis had become a spectator. Not that he’d ever fully belonged to the world, but now the distance felt absolute. He wandered the streets like a ghost in someone else’s dream, watching people move like marionettes in a theater of the absurd—repeating the same gestures, the same routines, day after day. Mechanically. Mindlessly.

He saw a bus driver shut the doors in the face of a breathless young woman running to catch it. He saw the same young postman again, dropping a package onto the pavement with practiced indifference, too uninterested to ring a bell. He saw an old man collapse outside the bank—and the crowd simply stood there, watching. Not a single person stepped forward.

“Someone call an ambulance”, a voice urged from somewhere within the crowd. But nobody moved.

Anestis went home and opened the box. The button was still there. Always there. Still. He looked at it, the way he had looked at it so many times in recent days. It wouldn’t be hard. In fact, it might be the easiest thing he’d ever done. One press, and it’s over. No more lies. No more hypocrisy. No more tolerance for rot. To him, the world now resembled a corpse refusing to be buried.

He closed his eyes and raised his finger over the button.

And then—something strange. A rustle. The faintest stir, so soft it was barely a sound, coming from behind him. He turned slowly. The gardenia.

It had grown. Its branches stretched beyond the rim of the pot, its leaves rich with a deep, vibrant green. And there, nestled among them, a single white bloom—delicate, luminous, impossibly alive. More alive than he had ever seen it. Anestis stood motionless, gazing at it for what felt like a very long time.

Then he looked back at the button—and laughed. Not a bitter laugh, not one born of cynicism or despair. But a quiet, honest laugh. Light, almost childlike.

He closed the box, fitting the lid with care, and returned it to its place in the cupboard. Then he walked over to the plant, dipped his fingers into the soil, and gently loosened it, feeling the cool earth give way beneath his touch. For the first time in months, he felt something unmistakably alive in his hands.

The world would not end today.

Anestis had stopped eating properly. By the sixth day, he didn't feel hunger—just a vague weariness that didn't seem to come from his body. The box had become the center of his life. He didn't open it often anymore, but he knew it was there, in the cupboard, next to the pickled jars and cups he no longer used. The idea of the end had settled in his mind like a slow-working poison.

Who had sent him the button? Who decided he should be the one to hold such a decision in his hands? And why now?

But perhaps that wasn't the real question. Perhaps he should be asking: Why not? He wasn't a saint. He wasn't a hero. He was a tired man who had lived long enough to know things would never change.

On the television, a politician lied so fluidly it seemed he believed every word. Prices climbed, pensions dwindled, and somewhere far away, a bomb exploded—yet the world barely blinked.

He went to the market. The greengrocer short-changed him and when Anestis pointed it out, the man just shrugged: “Oh, come on now.” In the square, a woman sat weeping softly on a bench. People walked past, eyes fixed straight ahead.

At the bakery, a mother yanked her child's hand and whispered harshly, “Don't stare. It's rude.”

The world permitted all of it. The world was collusion—draped in the thin disguise of apathy.

Anestis returned home, more exhausted than he could remember being.

He opened the cupboard, took out the box, and set it gently on the table. He lifted the lid. The red button awaited him—unchanged, unmoved. It simply was, certain in its stillness. It held no opinion, no morality. It was not a threat, nor a promise. Just a device. A mechanism. It demanded nothing. The choice was his alone.

And then—he paused.

For the first time, he didn't think of the world. He thought of himself. Not as a victim. Not as some righteous judge. Just a man, sitting at a kitchen table, hand resting beside the button, breath moving in and out.

He realized that if he pressed it, he would never know.