

## List of Casualties - Mark Hammond GNGC

I'm sitting in a field of clovers, wondering about what will happen when I die. Will they tell me how many flowers I killed? How many growing buds I stomped on, or moths I crushed under my feet?

I'm wondering if anyone else cares about this stuff, too, or maybe I'm just paranoid. Maybe there's *Hey! Time to Freak Out!* chemicals in the weed I smoke, or I should check the side-effects of my antidepressants for *Chronic Guilt about Existing* warnings.

I wonder if anyone else wants to ask about the lives they could have had if they'd done something different when they were still nineteen and still adolescent, underdeveloped and under the influence. Maybe they would have ended up with a wife or a german shepherd or a body decomposing in the lake after one bad trip to the Coles on the corner. Which decisions mattered most?

Is anyone else curious about the life they could have had if they'd decided to quit work and grow a garden beside the river where they didn't mind getting their socks wet every time they went outside - because hey, maybe treading over water is better than over yellow dandelions, and maybe when I die they'll lay me in an ocean of clovers and weeds and flowering tulips and say 'here's what you murdered when you were living' and I'll be one of the casualties too because I lived and worked and made money and I *killed myself* doing it. But maybe when I'm dead, it will be better because I won't stomp on the crabgrass or butterfly wings anymore.

Maybe when I die, they'll tell me all about my life and then they'll hold my arm gently and walk me to a garden beside the river where I can make it better. Maybe they'll let me live there until I'm ready to die again, this time without the bodies of a hundred-thousand tiny sprouting blades of grass under my boots.

I wonder too about the smell of jonquils for the dead and how close our lovers really are to us. Can they still taste spring in their mouths if they're not alive anymore? Were any of us ever really alive or have we all just been pretending?

I think that if ghosts can hear us, if they can hear music and birdsong and their wives weeping on the other side of the bed at night, then I think they can hear sun rays sweeping across floorboards and moonbeams crawling under the covers; and I think our ghosts might find peace in the sounds the earth makes for them. The dead don't walk on flowers, right?

Do you think anyone else thinks about that?