

lindsay wincherauk

# The Days in

the life of  
Lindsay Wincherauk

The Travails of an Unwanted Son: Prose

Help, I'm trapped inside this book →↑↓→↓

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Prose



Lindsay  
Wincherauk



Once, an editor described me as ‘sui generis.’  
I wasn’t familiar with the term, so I looked it up.  
‘Unique.’

She went even further, predicting that my work would revolutionize the way memoirs and biographies are written. Her prediction wasn’t just flattering – it was inspiring, suggesting my pen held the potential to redraw the boundaries of personal narrative.

Feeling the rush of pride, I can feel my cheeks flush, a rare warmth spreading across my usually stoic demeanour. Whether it’s the heat of humility or the fire of ambition, I can’t say.

There lies the raw core of my being, my experiences and creativity languishing in the aftermath. Suppose this translation of life condemns me to the dreary drudgery of a menial existence for another decade, suppressing the fiery pursuit of my passions. Am I not a walking ghost? Indeed, I ponder with grim contemplation, is such an existence a fate worse than death itself?

Financial ruin casts a shadow only a lifeline of solvency can dispel. Mired in despair and engulfed by the stench of dread, articulation through prose is my sanctuary.

... ..

## PROSE PROSE

*Help, I'm trapped inside this book →↑↓→↓√*

Sam is a book reviewer for a prestigious literary magazine. Paige, formerly known as Taylor, is a reviewer for a rival magazine. With each review Sam writes, he finds himself immersed in the books he's reviewing, and when he finishes reviewing a book, he is swiftly whisked into the next book. Three books in, he meets Paige, formerly known as Taylor, inside the pages of a book. They fall in love. But Sam finishes reviewing the book and is whisked into the next book – Paige, formerly known as Taylor, left behind. Eventually, they meet again four books later, when they find themselves trapped inside a horrific graphic novel where they realize the only way for them to return to the real world is to assume the role of the main characters or else perish in the bargain bin.

Sam, a witty and adventurous young writer, works for a prestigious literary magazine where he passionately pens his thoughts on various books. One day, while typing away on a review, Sam realizes with each book he reads, a mysterious portal opens up, drawing him into the heart of the story itself.

To his shock, Sam becomes an essential character within the story arc, facing the challenges and adventures alongside a collection of colourful characters.

As Sam delves into the pages of each book, he finds himself living out the plotlines and experiencing the emotions of the characters he encounters.

However, just as he grasps the essence of the book, Sam is unexpectedly propelled into the world of the next read, leaving him longing to linger in the stories that capture his heart.

Three books in, Sam falls head over heels for a captivating character, Paige, formerly known as Taylor, a book reviewer from a rival magazine; and just as their love is about to be consummated, he finishes writing his thoughts on the book and is unexpectedly hurled into the next narrative – a self-help book.

Sadly, within the blink of an eye, Sam’s love is lost, leaving him bewildered and heartbroken as he navigates the treacherous advice-filled chapters of the self-help book.

Amid his turmoil, Sam jotted down his thoughts on the emptiness of ‘self-help.’ It was then he discovered he had been catapulted into a nightmarish graphic novel. Trapped with no visible way out, Sam navigates the dark, twisted realm of the story. To his horror, he realizes his beloved is also trapped in the same frightening nightmare. A second date of sorts.

Together, they embark on a relentless quest to navigate the nightmarish pages and seek a way to fulfill their love. As the duo delves deeper into the graphic novel’s fragmented narrative, they unearth a secret that changes everything – the only way to escape their plight and unite their love is to become the main characters of the story itself.

Their adventure takes a humorous turn as they attempt to outwit the graphic novel’s challenges, all while grappling with the perplexing nature of the story’s twists and turns.

As they navigate the perilous world of the graphic novel, Sam and his Paige, formerly known as Taylor, swiftly grow closer, relying on their wit and courage to overcome the surreal obstacles standing in their way.

The journey becomes a comic blend of fantasy and adventure, sprinkled with dark humour as they encounter eccentric characters and absurd situations that bring the story to life in a hilariously unexpected manner.

In the end, Sam and his love courageously embrace their newfound roles and strive to rewrite the story from within, infusing it with their own quirky charm and breaking the constraints of the narrative that seeks to confine them.

Through their bold and uproarious endeavors, they ultimately find their way out of the nightmarish graphic novel, emerging as the heroes of their own love story.

“Prose” is a whimsical tale that playfully explores the power of love within the pages of books, weaving together elements of fantasy, dark comedy, and adventure into a uniquely entertaining narrative.

Through Sam’s journey, the story celebrates the joy of stepping into new worlds and the resilience of love in the face of whimsical challenges, leaving readers with a lighthearted and heartwarming appreciation for the magic.



**E**very word that flows from Sam’s pen carries him deeper into the vivid realms of the stories he critiques for an esteemed literary journal. Yet his reality is as fluid as ink on paper; the final period of each review is the incantation that propels him into the next literary adventure.

Within this bookish odyssey, between the lines of his third analysis, Sam stumbles upon a kindred spirit – Paige, formerly known as Taylor, a sharp-minded critic for a rival publication. Their connection is instant and profound, spun from a shared passion for prose, and it blossoms within the whispering pages of a dusty tome.

Tragically, their liaison is as fleeting as a subplot. As Sam submits his critique, he’s violently torn from Paige, formerly known as Taylor’s arms, cast into the next narrative’s embrace. Paige, formerly known as Taylor, remains behind in the unfinished chapter of their romance.

Four novels and countless adventures later, fate writes them back into the same story – a grim graphic novel that holds more than fictional fatalities.

Here, under the shadow of malevolent illustrations, Sam, and Paige, formerly known as Taylor, grasp their predicament. To return to the tangible world of coffee-stained desks and overdue library books, they must embody the very heroes they’ve been drafted to critique.

In a high-stakes chase through panelled pages, they weave their survival with the ink of their determined spirits, refusing to become discarded remnants in the discount section of literary oblivion.

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## **E**xposition:

Sam, a book reviewer for a prestigious literary magazine, finds himself in an unusual predicament. With each book he reviews, he becomes inexplicably immersed in the story and is whisked away into the book's world when he finishes his review. At the same time, Paige, formerly known as Taylor, a reviewer for a rival magazine, experiences a similar phenomenon. As Sam navigates through multiple books, he encounters various genres and plots, from romance to mystery to science fiction.

## **R**ising Action:

In the third book he reviews, Sam meets Paige, formerly known as Taylor, who is also trapped inside the pages of the book. Despite the bizarre circumstances, the two develop a deep connection and eventually fall in love. However, their love is short-lived as Sam finishes the book and is abruptly transported into the next story, leaving Paige, formerly known as Taylor behind. Sam, now more determined than ever, embarks on a quest to find a way to reunite with Paige, formerly known as Taylor.

## **C**limax:

It's not until four books later that Sam and Paige, formerly known as Taylor, are unexpectedly reunited. However, their joy is short-lived when they realize they are trapped in a horrific graphic novel. They soon discover that the only way to return to the real world is to assume the roles of the main characters. If they fail, they will be consigned to the bargain bin, condemned to remain imprisoned in a never-ending story.

## **F**alling Action:

As they navigate through the dangerous world of the graphic novel, Sam, and Paige, formerly known as Taylor, confront their own fears and insecurities. They must rely on their wits and strengths to survive and find a way back home. Together, they face numerous challenges and obstacles while injecting humour and levity into their terrifying predicament.

## **R**esolution:

Ultimately, Sam and Paige, formerly known as Taylor, succeed in assuming the roles of the main characters and find themselves back in the real world. Their experience has strengthened their bond and given them a newfound appreciation for each other. As they emerge from the pages of the graphic novel, they realize that their love has transcended the boundaries of fiction and reality. With a newfound understanding of the power of love and determination, they return to their respective magazines as reviewers, now equipped with a unique perspective to appreciate and criticize the books they encounter.

Dedicated To:  
Help

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prose



Lindsay  
Wincherauk



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Real Life

Fear of Homelessness

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## REAL LIFE: FEAR OF HOMELESSNESS

1 February 2024

The silence was oppressive, the kind that echoes the emptiness within. I stared at the screen, my reflection a ghost against the backlight of countless job listings, each application sent fading like ripples into a vast, uncaring ocean.

I could still feel the judgmental gaze of the teenage interviewer, her sweatshirt, a corsage of pet hairs and cartoon penguins as she casually dismantled my hopes. “We hire 17-19-year-olds; this isn’t a good fit for you,” she’d said, her words a gut punch that left me breathless. I stumbled from the sterile office, found a secluded bench, and surrendered to shuddering tears.

When I reached out to the government, their response was a cold refusal. A door slammed shut until the threat of homelessness would pry it open again, “you can ask again when you lose your home.”

As I mulled over their apathy, an email alert arrived – a stark reminder from my bank. Loyalty meant nothing. Forty years of history reduced to an ultimatum on a screen.

My inbox was a graveyard of over 800 writing proposals, each rejection (or silence) a headstone for what could have been.

The bitter truth gnawed at me – the company I had poured a decade and a half of my life into had traded me in at the first whisper the pandemic replacing me with someone 20-years my junior.

Judgment from others lingers in the air, a tangible disdain for my predicament.

I hunched over the keyboard, a craftsman in a dying art, a relic in a world allergic to depth, every tick of the clock an ominous drumbeat.

And then there’s us, existing on the fringes of hope. The stark reality settles this may be the twilight of life, family is, but a concept and this ship is sinking alone.

I glanced at J, the shadows under the eyes darker, the frame skeletal. There’s no room for apologies, not in this raw, unfiltered existence.

... ..

**E**ncased within the soul-sapping confines of an endless phone queue, I found myself suspended in a limbo where the sluggish tick of seconds unfurled into a torturous eternity lasting precisely 35 minutes. I desperately needed guidance from an office that promised salvation to the seniors—a demographic into whose ranks I had unwittingly and somewhat reluctantly been drafted.

Close to the precipice of homelessness, I hang precariously. At last, the crackling silence shattered, supplanted by a voice infused with the essence of human kindness—warm, empathetic, a veritable embodiment of diligent compassion in the bleakest of moments.

Each time I unveiled the breadth of my precarious plight and conceded the ominous ghouls of despair were inching ever nearer, I was met with unwavering reassurance. The voice delivered its decree with unshakable conviction: “Should you find yourself cast adrift in the turbulent seas of life, with no harbour to call your own, remember to dial 211. They stand as the potential beacon in the fog, ready to steer you towards the safe harbour of a shelter.”

Yet, my heart sank with the recognition that salvation’s embrace required the relinquishment of my home—my precipice had become a prerequisite for refuge.

No longer do I traipse across bridges armed with the false comfort of a precautionary mindset—I am earthbound, not avian, and lamentably aware aspirations of flight offer no solace nor escape from the gravity of my reality.

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Can you quit changing font sizes?

Try to stop me.

You’re insufferable.

Your sufferable.

... ..

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Real Life

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Moments @ The Gym

Why I Call it The Asylum



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Real Life  
My Writing

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## Real Life: My Writing

J, my closest confidant, has a way of showering my work with adoration. “I absolutely adore your writing,” he often tells me with unfaltering enthusiasm, his eyes alight with sincerity. “You’re not just following trends – you’re crafting an entirely new genre, an uncharted territory in the scape of literature.”

I find myself humbly accepting the praise with a quiet nod (*are you having a stroke?*); the idea resonating deep within me.

It’s true that I’ve always danced to the beat of my own drum when it comes to my art.

Once, an editor described me as ‘sui generis.’

I wasn’t familiar with the term, so I looked it up.

‘Unique.’

She went even further, predicting that my work would revolutionize the way memoirs and biographies are written. Her prediction wasn’t just flattering – it was inspiring, suggesting my pen held the potential to redraw the boundaries of personal narrative.

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Real Life

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How to Support a Creative Person

## Real Life: How to Support a Creative Person

**M**oney if you can!

Consider showing your support for writers and other creatives by engaging with their work – read it, share it, and, if possible, purchase it to help them maintain their livelihoods and keep a roof over their heads.

While the intent may be pure, it's best to avoid sending them links to staffing agencies. Most creatives know these avenues well and redirecting them from their passion doesn't offer genuine support.

Moreover, when one reaches the reflective age of the mid-sixties, the landscape of employment has undergone a seismic shift. For those who manage to locate an opportunity – the work is often soul-destroying in its monotony.

In the waning moments of life, an individual lies on their deathbed, haunted by a singular lament. They confess, "The sole sorrow that weighs upon my heart is in my golden years, rather than pursuing the dreams that set my soul ablaze, I succumbed to the cold embrace of a menial job. I was nothing but a shadow, dwarfed by the monsters of artificial intelligence. And the regret that gnaws at me? I never took the leap. Every last shred of delight was drained from my existence, toiling for someone who never even recognized I was there."

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If I am unable to summon the conviction to believe in myself at this juncture, then what purpose does life hold?

If your intent truly lies in bolstering a creator's spirit, being a beacon rather than an anchor, consider this alternative: eschew dissuasion and ally their cause. Extend a hand by providing them with resources – links to publishers and contacts at government bodies that are patrons of the arts. Such gestures are more than mere suggestions; they are lifelines.

It is an experience all too familiar and dishearteningly common when we divulge our fervent aspirations only to be met by the skepticism or pessimism of someone else. With well-meaning but misguided intent, that person throws a lasso around our wrists, yanking us back to the shackles of marginality and giving up (comfort zones). It's an act leaving us feeling bruised and beaten down.

I offer my sincerest sympathy for those who have endured such trials – it is a grievous burden. A life not pursuing your dreams is a life not lived fully.

Moreover, proposing to someone in their sixties to explore staffing agencies echoes a time when friends might have circled 'help wanted' ads in the newspaper for you back in your twenties.

How did it make you feel?

... ..

In a scenario where you are offering support to someone without arms who is passionately aspiring to become a boxer, conventional expectations no longer apply. 13

## Real Life: How to Help a Friend Going Through a Difficult Time

**T**he sting of learning a friend's world is crumbling can leave the most well-intentioned among us at a loss. The steps to navigate such treacherous waters hinge on understanding and empathy – one might say they are subjective, yet here is my take.

Knowledge of the tribulations plaguing your friend's heart offers you a potent advantage, a lifeline that dangles from your grasp. Its fate and theirs depend on your next move.

Imagine Jerry, his life's work abruptly snatched away deep into his career. The shock sends him spiralling, a maelstrom of denial, shock, and the bone-chilling echoes of 'What now?' coursing through his shell-shocked psyche. Fortunately, Jerry has a creative mind – and a passion forward.

Thoughts once inconceivable, shadowed with the ghastliness of permanence (suicidal thoughts), might flicker through his mind – grim, yet not uncommon.

**Your role is clear:** read his words for context, for if you truly grasp the essence of who he is, his words will unveil the raw turmoil beneath.

So, you wonder, what now?

While many turn away, falsely comforted by the belief of their own superior choices, it's nothing but an illusion of the draw. They're not more adept players, they're merely holding a different set of cards.

What, then, is your move?

For the friend navigating the unnerving terrain of their sixties, time is a cruel thief, and the shadows of burden and irrelevance loom large. They crave not charity but comprehension, while abandonment serves only to compound their isolation.

Silence becomes their refuge – not from lack of need, but to spare the soul the indignity of being seen at its lowest point.

**Once more, you must decide:** what is your act of friendship?

Where possible, extend a gesture of tangible support – yes, financial – a concept uncomfortable yet potentially lifesaving.

**And heed this:** resist the urge to project your answers, your well-trodden paths upon their unique journey. Your convictions of what you might do, have done, or would do if positions were reversed carry no weight here.

In your sixties, through the weary eyes of the world, opportunities don't just appear. So, spare the platitudes of 'get a job' – your friend is all too aware of the pervasive reluctance of the world to embrace their experience.

This isn't needling – it's the truth.

**So, if the rawness offends, ponder this:** Would you prefer hollow comforts (lies) over the stark candour of a friend's plight?

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Real Life  
Dire Straights

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## Real Life: Dire Straights

**W**e're facing dire straits. Desperately, I've cast out my net seeking aid. Despite submitting over 450 job applications to stem our financial hemorrhage, only one in-person interview materialized—for a menial clipboard-holding position, mockingly presided over by a 19-year-old fixated on implying I was antiquated.

A pair of Zoom interviews turned out to be farcical, with disengaged interviewers who couldn't even describe the positions, sounding more like scams than opportunities.

An employment agency absurdly advised me to leap into a nonexistent job with them, as if blind faith could anchor one's career.

For those willing to extend genuine assistance, know time is a luxury we do not possess. By month's end, the prospect of recovery (credit destroyed never to come back at my age) will have vanished, cementing our grim prospects.

Let it not go unsaid—I've submitted over 850 writing proposals to no avail—thus far.

I implore you to resist the impulse to label me 'resilient,' to inundate me with recruitment agency referrals or to casually suggest companies that are hiring (everyone is hiring—just not 64-year-olds) And besides, it doesn't matter what I can do—because younger people can also do it. Such actions, far from helpful, inadvertently patronize me.

After 15 years at the helm of a staffing agency, I'm painfully aware of the odds pitted against me.

I've sought governmental assistance, only to be informed they'd be willing to step in after I've lost everything—yes, this was their genuine response.

Seasoned civil servants even echoed a sentiment I recognized all too well: the chance of employment at my age is negligible.

Fear grips me.

Yet, as long as I can communicate and have access to a phone and the internet, I will persevere in my pursuit of writing gigs.

Your tangible connections are invaluable.

Empty gestures only amplify my distress.

by Lindsay Wincherauk

To those who take issue with my transparency, I offer no apologies for my candidness. May you never endure the anguish that has become our reality – it's debilitating. We're on the brink of total collapse as the month wanes. I am consumed by terror.

I understand the gravity of this topic might feel out of place amidst the superficial chatter of social media. However, to add a lighter touch to this update, I'm sharing a concept design for the cover of "The Days in the Life of Lindsay Wincherauk" series. I hope it brings you some joy.

It may seem harsh to criticize those at a loss for what to do, but you may see my life as a case study.

In my narrative, two individuals whose names I'll withhold proposed their assistance.

One said, "I can do this amount; all you have to do is ask." So, I reached out to the first one only to receive a disappointing, "Sorry, now is not a good time."

As for the second, their reply was disheartening, "I'm declaring bankruptcy soon."

Imagine how crushing it was to face such demoralizing responses, and then have to worry about both of them in your hour of need.

As you read my reflections, imagine yourself clenching your eyes shut and slipping into a pair of size 10 men's shoes. Then, picture being nearly 64 with your world upended – losing your job at 60 through no fault of your own. Add in the deaths of 13 people – including 5 family members during that time.

Take a walk in those shoes.

How does it feel?

Compassion and empathy are skills we need to cultivate – they are, regrettably, becoming rare.

I aim to foster these virtues by openly sharing my emotions as a starting point.

Before I sign off today, I owe a heartfelt thank-you to those who have supported me through these dreadful times without expecting anything in return, without adding to my guilt – those who offered help without questions, links, or hollow words of comfort.

Wes, Gary, Wayne + Fiona, and J's mum and aunt have been pillars of support.

Without them, we wouldn't have been able to continue on this journey.

Thank you, truly, for the love and support.

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Real Life

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60 cent Mac & Cheese

## Real Life: 60 cent Mac & Cheese

6 February 2024

In the current job market, older individuals must be highly vigilant. Certain U.S. states permit 14-year-olds to work, some even in roles serving alcohol—raising a critical question. What job prospects are left for older workers when they find themselves vying for the same entry-level positions as these young teens?

My relentless job hunt has met with failure; despite applying for over 450 positions across the spectrum, including many requiring minimal skills, success eludes me. I've managed to secure a single interview, where the interviewer dismissed me as "too old" for the role (the interviewer was under 20).

The financial pressure has become insurmountable; I'm unable to sustain my family or myself.

Imagine the despair that comes with this reality.

Please spare me well-intentioned but ultimately hollow recommendations, such as employment agency referrals or generic motivational phrases. Though they may be offered in kindness, they often cause more pain.

Despite utilizing prominent job search platforms like Monster and Indeed and repeatedly applying to the same employer, the result is invariably the same—rejection.

We're in a precarious position where homelessness looms, threatening not just ourselves but also the well-being of our beloved pet.

Now in my sixties, I'm acutely aware of the job market's changing dynamics (I did run a staffing agency for 15 years), with opportunities seemingly diminishing by the second as I continue to age.

... ..

Should another interview arise, I can only grimace at the standard question: "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

... ..

A fellow gym-goer at the Fitness Asylum, unemployed for two years and in his early fifties, has experienced similar rejection, having applied to over a thousand jobs and being deemed "too experienced" by employers.

Even an official from the premier's office has bluntly stated my job prospects are essentially nonexistent.

These harsh realities don't snuff out my creative spirit, which still clings to hope amid this nonstop adversity. If only optimism and online resources could pay the rent.

... ..

by Lindsay Wincherauk

I consider myself fortunate to have a creative outlet – a space where I can express myself artistically. Despite being aware of my own talent, I can't help but acknowledge that it may be tinged with a hint of self-deception.

Have I told you I've sent over 850 writing proposals into the ether?

Yet, creative gifts are not immune to the trials of time. As we age, we seek approval from those often younger than us, questioning whether we can truly connect across the generational divide.

Nevertheless, I cling to a vestige of hope; it's the sliver of light in my life. These experiences, including the current difficult chapter, have to count for something. They have to add value to my story. If they don't – if my life's trials and triumphs are meaningless – then what's left?

Excuse me, mister, can you direct me to the nearest bridge?

... ..

On a practical note, Kraft Original Mac & Cheese is currently on sale for 60 cents at Loblaws and Shoppers – though remember to factor in the cost of milk and butter unless you decide to forgo them.

... ..

And to Lindsay (me), who yearns for a return to more carefree times, how can you expect me to ignore my dire situation when I am on the brink of losing it all after exhausting every option?

What lightheartedness could remain in the shadow of an impending fall with no safety net?

... ..

You might think it's a joke, but I genuinely avoid bridges now. Maybe one day, I'll literally get over it.

"Lindsay, stop. You're making me anxious. I don't like hearing (reading) such things."

Get over yourself, think how I feel; think about it – I can't fly or swim on my own. Sure, I can be on a plane or a boat, but still, I'm not the one flying or swimming.

... ..

On an accidental positive note, my family has perfected intermittent fasting.

J is down over 35 pounds – I don't weigh myself, but I expect about the same, after all, I go to the Asylum (living an Asylum life – daily). Before you judge, except when I'm applying for non-existent employment, writing, and sending out proposals.

7

Real Life  
Writing Process

21

## Real Life: Writing Process

7 February 2024: 5:45 AM

**W**hat are you doing?  
The words tumbled out like a confused cascade, laced with disbelief.  
I had envisioned this instalment of ‘The Days in the Life of Lindsay Wincherauk’ as a phantasmagoric canvas—‘Prose’—conjured from pure fiction, capturing a man ensnared within the confines of his literary creation.

And who might you be? How did you materialize within the threads of this tale?

A pause hung in the air, brimming with enigma.

I admire your work—an ardent devotee, the stranger declared.

You mean to say... I have an actual aficionado?

A sense of incredulity pervaded his voice. *Indeed.*

A moment stretched, bridging the gap between reality and fantasy.

Incredible.

Just so, and it is I, the reader, for whom you ought to weave your story. But alas, your narrative meanders—plagued with lamentations, the echo of depression, and the apparition of penury. My god, your existence rivals a locomotive hurtling off the rails.

Tears welled, a stifled sob breaking free.

Why...why do you weep?

Because of your words, they cut with cruelty.

I’m sorry.

A sigh, weighted with remorse. I vow, ‘Prose’ will not be neglected, and upon its commencement, it shall be a tome that enthralls and devours its readers whole.

Consider this, maybe? What if the female lead’s name were to echo the essence of the story, christening her ‘Paige Turner’?

A spark of recognition ignited. That...is a stroke of brilliance.

I don't seek your validation. Each morning, as I peel myself from the clutch of restless, fragmented slumber, I hunch over my desk and unleash the symphony of my thoughts; my fingers become conduits, tapping, tapping, tapping to the rhythm of the mental maelstrom.

Take yesterday, for instance... As the narrative unfolded. My fingers pirouetted across the keyboard while "Morning Joe" – a charade orchestrated by an egotistical know-it-all for the sweet siren call of ratings – ranted on. The topic of the day? How 14-year-olds could now enter the workforce in certain states.

Suddenly, an insight struck me like a thunderclap: Here I am, at 63.5, cast aside from my job, staring down the prospect of jostling with teenagers over positions I neither desire nor ever imagined stooping to at this juncture of my life.

But desperation claws at my dignity – until my words ignite the world's attention if they ever ignite – I'm dangling over the precipice of financial ruin, clinging to solvency by a thread. It's a daily battle of endurance. So, I type, and type, and type on.

And as if on cue, after Joe's spiel on the plight of working children, he pivots to bemoan the inflation of a Big Mac meal – now a staggering \$18 in certain locales. His sidekick echoes with feigned shock and staged repulsion, targeting the fast-food titan's avarice while pretending to advocate for the impoverished masses condemned to digest their meagre fare beneath the golden arches.

If I were a gambler, I'd stake my total net worth, a laughable negative \$400.00 (far more growing in the interest of debt), that neither Joe nor his co-conspirator has set foot in a McDonald's since they bade adieu to their college days – if ever.

So, I ask, to whom, exactly, do they preach?

My head's reeling, an echoing whirlpool of confusion and dread. I flick the cursor, hastily swapping the desktop view to Global News – a stark headline seizes my gaze: "Vancouver's First Murder of the Year."

My blood chills; the victim's name – an eerie echo of familiarity, nagging at the edges of my memory – why does it haunt me?

Frantically, I pull up Facebook. We're connected, this man – a name amongst my online friends, yet a stranger.

How did our virtual paths cross?

His face, another pixel portrait in the sea of social media acquaintances.

Don't move. Just stay right here – frozen in this moment.

Here.

Sure.

A relentless barrage of 14 impersonal job applications taunts me, each one more disheartening than the last. My inbox is a graveyard of unwanted opportunities, beginning with the insincere chirp of a “So-and-So” from “Such-and-Such” company – vultures who've stumbled upon my profile and sensed the stench of desperation. Submit your application; they crow! Go ahead, slam your head against the unyielding wall of reality because, surprise! – youth has slipped through your fingers like sand, leaving you utterly unenthused by the prospect of masquerading as a damn bellhop.

Failure is now your shadow, whispering good luck in a voice dripping with mockery.

You've become a burden, a heavy weight dragging down those around you, and can you guess where the nearest bridge is from your house? Pathetic.

24

Spare me your false guidance, I spat at the screen.

I told you to hold on.

I am.

Returning, my resolve steeling over, I prepare my fingers to dance across the keys once more.

An editor once told me how I weave my experiences into words is revolutionary; it could redefine the memoir genre.

Is this just a glorified diary, you question?

Sure, I concede with a smirk, if that's what lets you sleep at night.

... ..

Initiating an application for aid to cling to the sanctuary of a roof overhead, I find myself ensnared in bureaucracy's bewildering labyrinth. It's a silent indictment – once you're snared within its merciless coils, you're branded a pariah, a dreg of society. The system's disdain is palpable as you navigate its convoluted passages, insinuating a lifelong con you never plotted.

Homelessness looms over me like a ghoul, and I find myself crumbling under the weight of being a burden.

Desperation whispers treachery, urging me to sever the ties of my relationship to give the other person a shot at salvation – while the echo of my deceased mother, donning the guise of my sister, intones her annual curse, “You’ll never amount to anything.”

The words slice through me. They are phantoms wailing in the recesses of my psyche.

... ..

Is this missive not about your journey in crafting words?

Indeed, it is precisely that. I grapple with the cacophony in my skull every sunrise, letting my fingers dance to its rhythm. My goal looms – finish by 8 AM, then chase redemption at the Fitness Asylum before my fiscal shortcomings seal its doors to me forever.

Glancing at the clock – 8:01 AM – my resolve hardens, and the keys clack.

Have I mentioned...?

... ..

In the narrative fabric of yesterday, a simple tale of 60-cent Mac & Cheese unfolded across the digital canvas of social media. Yet, as night cloaked the world in shadows, a ghost from two decades past emerged through the ethers of the internet, sending me a direct message under the guise of concern. His words slithered through cyberspace, seeking to ensnare me with a feigned saviour’s concern.

But my soul, wearied by life’s burdens, could not entertain his masquerade.

I have no desire to dredge up bygone days or to indulge your knight-in-rusty-armor routine, I typed with steel resolve, my fingers defiant on the keyboard. For I am not resilient. I’m fragile like everyone else.

His response, lacking the mere courtesy of punctuation (no ‘?’ after does), was a dismissive “who does.” I erased him from my realm in that digital heartbeat – another spectre blocked and banished.

My life’s threadbare quilt was already laden with too much; there was no need for an apparition to add its weight. Unless they come bearing tangible means of liberation, the dredging of old connections only deepens the shadows of my current plight. Am I a scoundrel? Perhaps. But no, the raw edge of candour slices through this exchange.

... ..



So, spare me the hollow gestures, the generic links the inspirational memes as though age and experience have rendered me invisible. Offering such is akin to a slap, a flippant dismissal of my strife. You may as well hoist high that universal sign of disregard...

The | | | finger?

If only, raise it high metaphorically, unfurl it with indifference – my honesty demands no less.

... ..

Immersed in the throes of creation, my fingers dance frantically, pounding the keys until they are on the cusp of rebellion. When the aching tendons scream for a reprieve, I succumb to necessity, feeding the freshly birthed text to the ravenous jaws of grammar software.

You lean on grammar software as a crutch, the skeptics chide with smug derision, Are you truly a writer or merely a charlatan?

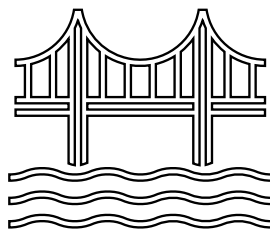
To hell with their scorn! What scribe in their right mind would forgo the arsenal of tools at their disposal in this digital age?

... ..

With a defiant click, I seize the power of the software, but not before penning pleading words to my political representatives – those who dared utter with chilling apathy, “Only when your family lies destitute in the streets, devoid of shelter, might you beg for aid once more. But until that grim fate befalls you – tough luck.” Or in simpler terms, “When your family becomes unhoused you can reapply.”

Their words, steeped in cruelty, ignite a firestorm of indignation. Why cast a vote into an abyss of indifference?

And should we find ourselves discarded, our heels digging into the cold earth of hopelessness, how, pray to tell, are we to claw our way back to the meagre sanctuary of the ‘less homeless’?



Incidentally, I mustered the courage to share yesterday’s chapter with my attorney. This man assured me I had nothing to worry about, I had the truth on my side, yet ironically, he’s been ousted from the firm where he worked.

Perchance, if he had been more tenacious, he’d still be there, and maybe he would have cornered my ex-employer into confessing the vilest of truths. That man looked me in the eye(s) (recently), weighing his remorse against the anguish he inflicted, and dared to whisper, “I love you” hugged me, and call me friend. The ultimate betrayal masquerading as affection. And there you stand, the steadfast friend, amidst this maelstrom of deceit. An odd way indeed to atone for the misery one has sown.

... ..

Thus, concludes today’s entry.

I’ll now delve into the text, excising the flagrant syntactic blunders and sculpting these words into their destined form. (This being the final product).

Today unfurls with an odd quest—procuring 20 boxes of Macaroni & Cheese, after which I’ll take my place upon the cold embrace of the sidewalk and embark on an eccentric foreshadowing rehearsal – rip open the cheese powder – and eat.

27

Such is the dance of my thoughts spilling onto the page. It’s an art, you see.

**A curious revelation:** the moment I peel back the curtain on my true feelings, the soft echoes of departure greet me. Those I once embraced as comrades now recede into the silence, their presence dissolving like mist under a relentless sun.

And all that is left, is me and you. And unfortunately for me, I feel like I’m a burden to . . .

9:59 AM

... ..

8

Real Life

Hana

28

## Real Life: Hana

8 February 2024

**K**itty, my precious Hana, my heart aches with the truth that I am failing you. Our time is slipping through my fingers like grains of sand – your time, our time, the threads of our existence growing thin and frail.

For the first and last time in my tortured existence, amid the raging storms of life, I am engulfed by a harrowing finality. The light of joy has been extinguished; the relentless grind of daily struggle has corroded my once buoyant spirit. Dread has become my constant companion, haunting my every interaction, every dawn, every dusk. The mere thought of not awakening holds a dark, twisted allure – a perverse solace in oblivion.

Nearly thirteen years have passed since I cradled your delicate form, a tiny life entrusted to my care. I drove you on that first journey of 30 kilometres, your fragile body (two weeks old) nestled trustingly in my palm as you peered into my soul with innocent eyes and offered plaintive cries, weaving an unbreakable bond. Yet, here stands fate, callous and indifferent, ready to sever the connection wrought by years, love, and shared existence.

I am at a loss, adrift in a sea of despair. Once a towering menace, your illness has been reduced to a mere vexation, not unlike your early morning antics with plastic to signal your hunger – rousing me from the depths of my restless torments. I rise; I feed you. You snuggle close, your purring a fleeting balm as you nestle upon my chest, then settle on my shoulder, your comforting presence a fragile thread against the looming void.

Each return home is a ritual of reunion. It's never the food you seek first but the communion of our spirits as you weave tales of solitary hours with mews and contented purrs upon my lap.

But the unforgiving march of time spares none; it threatens to unravel our shared reality. And you, my innocent companion, shall not be spared the maelstrom about to consume me.

I've cried out for salvation, for the compassion of angels – and some have responded – thank you will never suffice. Yet, the bitter revelation of becoming a burden is mine to bear – a bitter pill steeped in isolation.

I yearn to end this agony, an escape from placing the onus of judgment upon those in my orbit, the discomfort of rejection, and the weight of unheeded pleas.

Death lingers on the periphery of our existence – my stalwart Hana, your end is unfairly tethered to mine.

by Lindsay Wincherauk

Do not offer me platitudes of resilience; I have been utterly undone. The filament of hope I once clung to has dissipated into the nothingness whence it came. My contributions, feeble and futile, have culminated in abject defeat.

My world is now refracted through the warped lens of a broken mind.

Social Media, my erstwhile companion, has become the teacher of a grim lesson: in the end, we navigate our tempests alone—a burden upon others is an unwelcome shadow on their sunlit paths.

Hana, you require the simplest of remedies—medicine, a vet’s care—yet they elude us, sacrifices on the altar of my failings, and even if we could help you, we can’t afford to help ourselves. Over five hundred job applications and countless writing proposals cast upon hope’s waters, all dwindling into the stark clarity my journey has reached its terminus.

Fellow travellers, I wish you more fortune than has graced my path.  
Forgive me, Hana. In my inadequacy, I have forsaken you.

The cruel streets will not cradle us or reminisce over the echoes of your purring that once filled my palms.

In this, perhaps, there lies a twisted semblance of poetry—our paths converging towards an inevitable end.

Perhaps my narrative wearies you; my silence would be a relief.  
Nonetheless, I document our demise, etching our pain until it crescendos into a final, unyielding silence—when that moment arrives, let the essence of me fade into oblivion.

Monumental mistakes were etched into the fabric of my being, their consequences colossal and irrevocable. I devoted the best years of my life to false deities of power, to masters’ undeserving of my servitude. Now, as time has mercilessly extracted its due, I stand as a testament to misdirection and decay—I toiled for a tainted avarice that promised gold but paid in dust. In doing so, I watched the vigour of youth wither into the shadow of age.

The mantle of burden shall be lifted; I refuse to wear it any longer.

A stark truth has burrowed into my awareness, unrelenting and inescapable: the piercing awareness that within the endless flow of stories and the vast universes of make-believe, should I exist merely as a creation born from a writer’s mind, I would capture the unwavering focus of countless admirers, with each breath I take becoming a source of intrigue and each pulsation of my heart bearing significant weight.

Yet, I am not such a character. I am real; that is a bitter pill to swallow.

I have a hunch; my writing will become more valuable when I’m no longer here.

... ..

1

PROSE

The Rom-com

Deeply. Madly. Truly.

31

## Prose – The Rom-com: Madly. Truly. Deeply.

The pre-dawn hours held a serene tranquillity that was abruptly shattered for Sam at precisely 5:45 AM on his first day at Word’s Literary Review. His alarm clock burst into a melodic serenade, jolting him from deep slumber with the tender lyrics of Savage Garden’s “Truly Madly Deeply” – a stark contrast to the morning air’s chill that crept through the slightly ajar window.

Sam pried his eyes open with great effort, the stubborn remnants of sleep blurring his vision. As he rubbed his tired eyes clear of the gritty haze of eye floaters, he glimpsed an ethereal silhouette – a giant thumb and forefinger looming ominously in the top right corner of his modestly furnished room. In an almost supernatural display, the digits began their work, tossing Sam’s disoriented form from side to side, tangling his sheets in a chaotic dance, until finally coming to rest when an ethereal scanner swept over the room and stashed it inside a tote bag adorned with the ‘Sleeping Seagull Books’ logo.

Without hesitation, the eager young Tiffany was on her way, her heart aflutter with anticipation of indulging in the story that promised to fill the void of love in her twenty-seven years of otherwise vibrant life.

Bounding with a whimsical skip, Tiffany navigated the early morning streets until the gnawing pangs of hunger steered her toward the familiar scent of Rodney’s Burger Shack. She settled into a cozy seat on the patio, her newly acquired novel, "Madly. Truly. Deeply.," placed beside her. It lay next to a cheeseburger combo and a Coke, the spoils of her recent culinary diversion.

Hunger momentarily sated, she plunged into the pages with voracious enthusiasm.

However, her reading was interrupted when she glimpsed, at the adjacent table, a man who bore the dishevelled, page-laden aftermath of a literary tornado. His forlorn eyes locked with hers, and concern etched her features. “Mister, are you okay?” she asked gently. “You look as though you’ve been caught in a storybook storm. Would you care to join me and regain your composure?”

The man hesitated, then shuffled over, and with each flip of a page from Tiffany’s book, his tousled hair fell into place.

Curiosity piqued, he inquired, “What story has captivated you so?”

“This?” Tiffany beamed, clutching the novel. “It’s the latest rom-com sensation, ‘Madly. Truly. Deeply.’”

“That’s my first assignment for Words,” Sam divulged with a mix of surprise and serendipity, recognizing the strange coincidence of their meeting.

Across the patio, seated just within earshot, was a vision of masculine allure – a man named Carver whose gaze felt like a bridge to Tiffany’s most intimate dreams.

Regardless of the reader's identity or orientation, Carver was the epitome of perfect companionship for Tiffany: perfectly imperfect in every way that mattered to her.

A torrent of street water disruptively drenched their brief, electric exchange of winks as a rogue Prius zoomed past, soaking them and the much-adored book. An infuriated Tiffany witnessed the driver – a doppelgänger of Carver – escape into the traffic.

Carver hastened to her side, offering apologetic paper napkins in a futile attempt to salvage the situation. But among the confusion, it wasn't just the book that seemed perilous. Sam had disappeared – only his voice calling from the soggy pages, crying out for aid in his peculiar predicament.

"This is a disaster..." Tiffany's voice trembled. "I've just met you, and now my book, my escape, is ruined."

"Have no dread," Carver urged with a voice firmer than his trembling hands, striving to instil a semblance of solace amidst the pandemonium that now clung to him as tightly as his shadow. He divulged a tale of his lineage, one intertwined with the current turmoil – a recounting so fantastical that it seemed as out of place as a bedside table concealed within the sacred confines of a womb. In the dark, nourishing haven of their mother's womb, Carver had once embarked on a silent embryonic battle, seeking to encase within himself the tiny, burgeoning form of his younger twin brother. Yet, the battle had been an exercise in futility; his brother, christened Reginald post-birth, had proven to be an elusive adversary. He had shielded himself with an artifact as bizarre as it was inexplicable – a sturdy bedside table (complete with Allen wrench), which, by some miraculous means, had materialized within their prenatal chamber as both shield and sanctuary.

As Carver's oddity unfurled, a third observer – Taylor who will eventually change her name to Paige, from the formidable Rivalle Literary – eyed the unfolding drama with a critic's discerning gaze.

At the same time, high above, a mischievous Cupid grimaced, having met an unlikely adversary in the form of the town's solitary oak tree.

Amid these surreal events, a real-world connection surfaces.

Tucked within this story's layers lives an olive branch of financial relief extended to Lindsay by Wes – an overseas guardian angel in Australia, the homeland of Savage Garden.

In the tumultuous seascape of life, such generosity is a beacon of hope – a subplot that tenderly echoes the main narrative's themes of love, fate, and the intertwined lives within this small yet storied town.

Where does the story end and reality begin?

Perhaps it's all part of Chapter One's elaborate dance.

... ..



2

PROSE

34

French Roast

## Prose: French Roast

The clarion call of daybreak beckoned, but Sam's emergence from slumber was akin to the vulnerable awakening of parchment once waterlogged and now left brittle by the rescuing rays of the sun – its fibres delicate and alarmingly combustible.

The gentle sound of his movements was a symphony of soft, crackling whispers.

"Sam, are you stirring from your dreams?"

"I'm ensnared below."

"Where exactly?" inquired Tiffany, her voice laced with concern.

"Entombed within the folios of your romance narrative."

"My romance narrative?"

"Yes, Tiffany, it unfurled while I was nestled within the sanctuary of my manager's office at Word's Literary Review. Reality morphed before my eyes, and I found myself transposed upon the opening lines of this tome. One moment I was in your care, ensconced in a 'Sleeping Seagull' tote; then, I found myself alighting next to you as you indulged in your savoury burger. Submerged, then exhumed from this literary prison, over and over. What twist awaits us next in this tangled tale?"

"Ease your mind, Sammy. Shall we embark on this whimsical odyssey of affection together – me as the heroine and you, my ever-endearing confidant?"

"Do I harbour any semblance of choice in the matter?" Sam's tone bore a hint of resignation.

"In truth, you do not."

As if on cue, the edges of the room began to convolute, the atmosphere pixelating like a scene drawn out of fleeting dreams. Tiffany, with hospitality in her hands, proffered Sam a cup of French Roast coffee, an offer futile unless he could emerge whole from the second chapter's embrace to savour it while it harboured gentle warmth.

For why? In this kaleidoscope of real and unreal, a tangible Sam navigating the tangible world provides a sturdier anchor from which to narrate than a mere metaphor encapsulated in ink and aspiration.

Each pixelated flutter in the air catalyzed Sam's pulmonary paper into an arrhythmic gallop. A primal yearning for the robust vitality only a steaming coffee could bestow gnawed at him.

To render this tale complete, it clamours for a confluence of existence where Sam walks in stride with Tiffany towards the precipice of love's rapture, aiding in the mending of her heart – gossamer and raw, awash with the tender tremors of exposal.

“So, Sam, do I have your accord?”

“Affirmative.”

Crinkle. Crinkle. Crinkle.

The world spun in a frenzied dance reminiscent of a dervish lost in ecstatic twirls – and in a flourish – Sam found himself perched upon the bed’s edge, cradling ‘Madly. Truly. Deeply.’ as if it were a sacred text.

“Welcome to the here and now, Sam,” Tiffany’s laughter tinkled through the air, pure and unbidden. “The enigmatic Carver has bewitched my heart. Could you concoct some playful stratagems to ensnare his affections?”

“Do I possess the latitude to decline?”

“Not at all. Or rather, a resounding YES, Sammy, for your digits to dance upon these keys.”

A frisson raced up Sam’s spine as he tentatively dipped a digit into the cup; the liquid greeted him with its remaining embrace of warmth. The window to claim his place in this tangible existence dwindled, as did the temperature of the coffee, propelling him to assist Tiffany in seeking more of those infectious giggles and in her quest to captivate Carver – the singular target of her unwavering adoration.

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But as the clock’s hands tiptoed forward, they beckoned the pressing question of how long until the coffee succumbs to the chill – and what moment in time was it now, and above all, what was the true essence of their story?

Unbeknownst to Tiffany, Sam, the once-fictional hero, had now ventured into the sprawling reality in pursuit of the elusive Carver. As if destiny played its hand, Carver soon stood before Sam, posing an unexpectedly poignant question, “Do you wish to join this capricious quest for love as my partner in comical escapades?”

The query lingered in the ethereal space between them, its weight palpable, thrumming with unspoken implications that seemed to vibrate through the very fabric of the world. Sam felt himself delicately tugged, as if by a gentle yet insistent current, towards the proposition, his mind quietly diving into the uncharted depths of his heart.

There, amidst the intricate and colourful weave of his experiences, lay hidden truths about love and identity, threads he had not dared to unravel until this moment. Could it be that Sam, within this complex drapery, was more sexually fluid than he had ever allowed himself to consider?

Each beat of his heart now seemed to echo the question, sending ripples across the still waters of his soul, inviting him to discover parts of himself he had never fully acknowledged.

Just beyond the inviting warmth of Tiffany’s home, with its quaint lace curtains dancing softly in the fresh morning breeze, Sam emerged blissfully ignorant. He had barely eluded the grasp of a seemingly inescapable narrative bound within a romance-filled tome that now lay innocuously on the antiqued oak bedside table.

Meanwhile, outside, the world was utterly oblivious to the veil of deceit cast so close to where precious serenity dwelled. Less than a stone’s throw away, nestled amongst the vivacious clamour of midday city life, where voices blended in a symphony of urbanity and cobblestones echoed the tales of rushing feet, a royal blue Prius sat idling.

It was a mere whisper in the cacophony, positioned inconspicuously beside a venerable Linden tree. The tree, an old soul within the cityscape, stood watch, its boughs heavy with the musky perfume of spring blossoms. Each vibrant petal seemingly buzzed with life as the branches swayed gracefully with a gentle breeze, the shifting light and shadow playing a delicate dance upon the vehicle’s lustrous façade.

Within this vehicular sanctuary, the car’s interior presented a sharp juxtaposition to the vibrant world it surveyed with hawk-like silence. In the muted ambiance, where only the soft purr of the idle engine intruded upon the stillness, Reginald reclined in the driver’s seat with an air of casual elegance. His eyes, cold and calculating as shards of ice, betrayed the tension gripping his form.

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A complacent smirk curled upon his lips, and his stare bore into the contents of a substantial dossier with a predatory focus. The title emblazoned on the weathered cover read, ‘How to Win Tiffany’s Undying Love,’ its letters curling with ostentatious flair – an ironic derision of love’s pure simplicity.

Obscured within the city’s vibrant heartbeat and undetected by Tiffany and the newfound escapee, Sam stood Carver – another silent and watchful presence. This space became the crucible where a twisted manifesto, written by Reginald’s devising hand, was coming to life.

It was more than a plan – a meticulous stratagem, with each chapter plotting the enthralling and calculated choreography destined to ensnare Tiffany’s heart.

Reginald would forsake all in his quest, his dangerous ambition draped in the guise of devotion. As the reckless determination within him began to set in motion a most perilous game, the question hung in the balance – just how far would Reginald go to claim Tiffany’s heart as his own?

... ..

9

Real Life

38

How to Help a Friend in Need

## Real Life: How to Help a Friend in Need

From the moment I began etching the words of “The Days in the Life of Lindsay Wincherauk: The Travails of an Unwanted Son – Volumes 1 through Prose through Infinity,” I hadn’t the faintest clue where this literary journey would whisk me away.

Then, like a trillion-watt epiphany, it struck – life is not merely a fascinating sojourn but an enigma where you’re blindsided by the unexpected, like a 64-year-old gay friend recounting how a 60-year-old woman fancied him. The very thought demands a pause, a vivid imagination to conceptualize the scene.

Or consider my octogenarian comrade challenging footsteps on a treadmill bear less merit. He ceased his protests with a good-humoured guffaw once I illuminated the mechanical reality into a joyous cacophony that echoed through time, akin to the most uproarious laughter to ever grace comedic lore.

As I fervently craft volume upon volume, what unfurls on these pages mirrors the ceaseless ebb and flow of life – the good, the bad, and the utterly chaotic. In a Kafkaesque or Kaufmanesque twist, I’m encapsulating our quotidian reality into a time capsule for eternity.

The game’s rules are evolving. I intertwine life with fiction, believing that, upon first reading, fiction does not transcend into reality. This is no mere existential question but a vivid tangle of life in all its vibrant detail.

With each passing day, I’ve dissected the smouldering ruins of my financial demise, an unyielding tsunami that has berated me relentlessly, its waves crashing against the precipice of time in excruciatingly drawn-out torture.

Age has stalked me, a silent marauder under the guise of darkness. Only now, hurled into the voracious maw of the job market at this late stage, with over 500 rejections chomping at my spirit, does the brutal truth pierce through the fog: the skills life had once crafted within me have withered into antiquity – teetering on the edge of utter irrelevance, casting a long, ominous shadow over my future.

There lies the raw core of my being, my experiences and creativity languishing in the aftermath. If this translation of life condemns me to the dreary drudgery of a menial existence for another decade, suppressing the fiery pursuit of my passions, then am I not a walking ghost? Indeed, I ponder with grim contemplation, is such an existence a fate worse than death itself?

Financial ruin casts a shadow only a lifeline of solvency can dispel. Mired in despair and engulfed by the stench of dread, articulation through prose is my sanctuary.

The silent plea for aid becomes a torturous odyssey mirrored by those around, a reflection of their fragility. Thus, instead of extending an olive branch, they lob a barrage of hollow admonitions, forsaking compassion for amplification of my suffering's melody.

And so, to you who may contemplate sending links to jobs after one confesses to a litany of career rejections – restrain your hand. It is no solace but a kick to the gut; insensitivity masqueraded as aid, which turns the sufferer's agony into your burdensome demand for gratitude.

In conversations with Clint at the Fitness Asylum – a peer in the struggle of ageism who shared the lament of job rejections – he divulged the same truths. Unsolicited job links deepen his despair. Why would they not?

Let it be known: to send links, memes, or quotes is not to uplift but to inadvertently belittle.

**DO NOT** propagate such impulses. This is no indict of the resilience of the human spirit, but a recognition of shared fear and shared fragility. My life is on the brink, and your benign intention may be the nudge that tips the balance.

40

Remember, support is not in the asking but in the understanding of the text on this page. Our solace is borne of honesty, unadorned by the sweet poison of platitudes.

My friend, wrestling with his terminal neurological decline, cherishes the raw truth, not glossed over comforts.

Peril has indeed befriended me, wrought with monthly tribulations. Yet I persist through the unyielding support of distant saviours who know the harrowing cost of baring one's soul to judgment.

Whenever elder companions bemoan the roar of protesters, I confront them with a piercing reminder: the blaze of protest has forged our existence into the relative ease we now enjoy – ease that, while occasionally grating to our senses, is our unfettered privilege. Rejoice, for you dwell in a realm where voices clamour for change unabated – I yearn for their crescendo.

And to those who would envisage advising an alteration of one's age on a resume, heed this: such counsel is not wisdom but the seeds of absurdity. I stand firm, for I cannot masquerade as anything other than what the sands of time have sculpted.

In support, I submit these actions:

DO directly introduces potential employment allies if the opportunity is genuine, and your referral carries weight.

DO share the one suffering's creative works with those poised to amplify them, advancing passion over insipid occupational pursuits.

DO recognize the power of presence, the warmth of a hug, and the value of unconditional, unspoken empathy.

And should words escape you, a simple acknowledgment of another's hardship is enough. Disappearing acts of those unable to stomach these truths have rendered their intentions transparent – it was always about them.

No apology will fall from my lips.

... ..

I am a writer. I craft worlds. Stand by me. We hover on the brink, tethered to hope by the lifelines of camaraderie from across the seas—a testament to the sanctity of true friendship.

I am resolute in my belief – I will script my ascent from these depths.

Not seeking alms, but open to them.

Uncomfortable as these confessions might be, they are my truth—a reflection not of failure but of existence's fragility, the universal precipice upon which we all precariously balance.

To those discussing protests with a haughty air of inconvenience, recall your privilege, the luxury to live where voices can rise in dissent—a freedom imperilled by greed's stranglehold.

If your intent truly is to aid a friend in need, remember:

1. Offer material support if within your means.
2. Embrace with genuine affection.
3. Listen with intent, void of judgment.
4. Eschew prejudgments.
5. If words must be exchanged, let them be succinct: "I'm sorry, this is your reality."

I share an introspective look at my own experiences, delving into the challenges of financial hardship, age discrimination in the employment realm, and the often-unvoiced yearning for assistance during times of despair.

This narrative underscores the significance of true empathy and comprehension, appealing to readers to provide substantive aid rather than insincere token gestures.



## Key Insights:

I share this introspective look at my own experiences, delving into the challenges of financial hardship, age discrimination in the employment realm, and the often-unvoiced yearning for assistance during times of despair – in hopes to make positive change.

1. **Personalized Support:** Rather than defaulting to clichéd advice or superficial comforts, earnestly endeavour to grasp your peer’s specific tribulations and requirements. Engage with heartfelt empathy, recognizing their situation without casting judgment.
2. **Actionable Help:** Where possible, offer practical help, such as employment leads (only if you can influence the hiring) or introductions to professional contacts. Circulate their artistic outputs to potential benefactors who might elevate their endeavours, valuing creative fulfilment above routine labour.
3. **Companionship in Crisis:** the most profound support is your company’s gift. Be available to listen, to offer a comforting touch, or to be there - these acts can lighten their load, reinforcing the idea that they are not isolated in their plight.
4. **Unbiased Outlook:** Shun the temptation to speculate or criticize another’s predicament. Opt instead for an approach of openness and readiness to help unconditionally, devoid of entrenched biases.

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## Practical Guidance:

This narrative underscores the significance of true empathy and comprehension, appealing to readers to provide substantive aid rather than insincere token gestures.

1. **Lend Material Support:** Where your circumstances allow, consider giving substantial aid, such as monetary help, job suggestions (only if you can influence the hiring), or useful resource links (to publishers, grants, and literary agencies) to mitigate your friend's troubles.
2. **Express True Care:** Show your support with heartfelt acts of kindness, whether a consoling embrace, a deep conversation, or a simple show of understanding.
3. **Attentive Listening:** Embrace active listening, refraining from imposing your judgments or proposing unsought advice. Foster a secure environment for your friends to express themselves freely, assuring them they are being understood and taken seriously.
4. **Reserve Judgments:** Engage with an impartial mindset, prepared to comprehend your friend's journey. Avoid hasty conclusions or presuppositions.
5. **Confirm Their Experiences:** Acknowledge your friend's struggles, providing a firm affirmation of their distress. Let them know your solidarity is unwavering in spite of the obstacles they encounter.

... ..

## Conclusion:

In our hour of need, the essence of friendship is reflected in our willingness to extend heartfelt support and understanding. By adhering to these guidelines of compassion, tangible aid, and emotional solidarity, as discussed in this narrative, we can reach out and genuinely aid friends in their time of adversity, thus nurturing a community founded on mutual care and unity.

Your willingness to offer support can be incredibly impactful to someone grappling with challenges.

This story is about where I find myself now, where life has drained me with its relentless demands for resilience and comprehension. It's not just the loss of a job that can deplete one's spirit, but a series of traumatic events can also take their toll.

Such events include severe illness, the death of someone close, undergoing major surgery, having to move to a different place, and the list goes on.

In my experience, I have endured all of these trials (recently): the passing of thirteen loved ones, undergoing critical surgery, suffering a stroke, coping with the illness of a cherished pet, and now, hearing of a young family member's fight against cancer.

In the story, an outburst of anger surged within me when a friend hastily suggested euthanizing my cherished pet after I revealed she was ill. My response was an overwhelming silence that consumed my rage.

The accumulation of these hardships is suffocating. Yet, out of fear of judgment and the criticism that I am dwelling on the negative, I often internalize the pain.

Wincherauk out.

... ..

by Lindsay Wincherauk

10

Real Life

Juggling Zeros

45

## Real Life: Juggling Zeros

11 February 2024

**B**eneath an oppressive cloak of depression, I wage a daily war with its leaden weight. It clings to me—a relentless shadow, whispering insidious thoughts of self-destruction into my weary mind.

The world often chastises, “Others have it far worse; get a job!”

Their voices become an irritating buzz in my ears—dismissal should never be the response to the anguish that darkens one’s soul, regardless of scale or comparison.

My efforts are Herculean—inundating the job market. I have delivered 500 resumes and flung over 800 writing proposals into the void like messages in digital bottles. A civil servant, a self-appointed oracle of the dismal labour landscape (for people my age), declared my search futile. I defy them, sending ten more. Please refrain from sending me a message about who might be hiring.

My inbox is a graveyard where ambitions go to be haunted, blinking urgently with false hope: “We want to see your application.” It is a carnival of corporate promises and bank warnings where the swipe of credit might soon echo the hollow chime of rejection. My anxiety climbs like mercury in a thermometer as I skirt the city’s bridges, avoiding the warning call of despair.

My pen traces suffering, and the world tires of my inky blood. I retreat to the Fitness Asylum, a temple of relentless dedication, seeking refuge for 140 consecutive days, my feet marching a tireless rhythm of over 25,000 steps daily.

During the Super Bowl, indifferent to the frenzy of the fans, I find myself at a local pub. The game is a mere backdrop to the patrons’ revelry. The man next to me—a feeble conversationalist—proposes Taylor Swift’s engagement hinges on a Kansas City victory.

He’s met with, Lindsay (a female namesake) and I, and his adoration for the singer spills over like an unchecked fountain. “She’s a phenomenal poet,” he evangelizes, “a self-made icon who gives generously to the needy.” My response, laced with cynicism about privilege and the illusion that anyone climbs to such heights alone, triggers his defence.

Gary, an ally in human form, spots the creases of struggle on my face. His wallet opens, and he insists, “Enjoy beers on me.” I joke about his foresight and his investment in my uncertain lotto-winner future, but I know his kindness is not an IOU.

## Carver + Reginald: Opposites

And from across oceans, Wes in Australia sends his lifeline – a surprise contribution – that could be the trench that diverts me from darker paths for another month.

Another fleet of job alerts stands at attention in my inbox, a grandiose declaration of a global hunt for talent. With mechanical detachment, I bid for 24 more roles. Yet, in the silence of my heart, it's not employment I long for. I yearn to craft narratives, evoke change, confront the raw honesty of emotion, and expose the profound errors of our collective indifference.

My life has unwittingly become an experiment in resilience. Would you have surrendered after 100 defeats? 300? Or only after the 'helpful' advice to rouse from supposed indolence?

Seated in the buzzing atmosphere of the pub, where the noise fades into a monotonous hum, my attention is captivated by a snippet of conversation focused on financials within the sports industry. The man who loves Taylor Swift, laments the injustice of a football player's salary. He highlights the earnings of the San Francisco quarterback, who makes a mere \$63,000 for each game he plays, a stark contrast to Patrick Mahomes, who astonishingly rakes in \$68,000 for every pass he makes.

My blood runs cold as I state, "They live lavishly, immersed in a 'game,'" while acknowledging that wealthy patrons exploit them. As for me, once a hall of fame champion quarterback, I now receive a paltry \$495.00 monthly in 'you-got-old' pension – a constant reminder of my precarious existence, on the verge of breaking down at any moment.

These words are drafted not simply for sharing but as a mirror to my soul. Suffering has taught me the precipice upon which we all balance and how the simplicity of being heard can be a lifeline.

To the dismissive stranger, my confession of depression is trivialized. "Just flip the switch, that's all you need to do to rid yourself of depression," he offers, oblivious to the absent mechanism in my mind. Another throw, another \$68,000 for Patrick.

I order a beer – a luxury afforded by the grace Gary as tomorrow's hunger looms.

My resentment isn't against the spectacle of sports but against a society that exalts entertainment while neglecting pervasive suffering.

Exasperated, I return home to watch in solitude, away from idolatry and superficial glory.

There is no simple switch. The fight against the abyss is more than a metaphor – it is the desperate struggle of many.

by Lindsay Wincherauk

If I rise, it will not be alone but on the shoulders of true friends.

And when I do, I pledge to remember that we are the sum of our shared humanity – never a singular architect of our fate.

As I echo a plea to the indifferent Universe, I beseech all who listen for those hanging by a thread, do not thoughtlessly push them toward the void.

Instead, extend a hand – without conditional love or judgment.

The last half of the game – at home, in its purest form – reminds me of life's simple pleasures, free from the grandeur of what ultimately matters little in the grand scheme. The kindness of a few can make the difference between life on the fringes and hope for tomorrow – for that, may we all learn to flick the right switches in our hearts.

I am writing these thoughts down as a personal keepsake, a touchstone to return to when my luck changes for the better. These words serve as a pledge to remember the individual I aspire to be. More importantly, they remind me that the sincere care of a few outweighs the apathy of many. While the world's incessant clamour can wear us down, it's critical to practice intentional listening – to truly hear without feeling the need to assert our presence by interrupting – especially when someone bravely opens up about their vulnerabilities in a moment of need.

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Carver + Reginald: Opposites

3

PROSE

Carver + Reginald

Polar Opposites

by Lindsay Wincherauk



## Prose: Carver + Reginald – Polar Opposites

Carver Fergus, the elder of the twins by a whisper of time, drew his first breath under the blanket of nightfall at 11:55 PM on February 28, 1992, heralding his arrival in a world bathed in the twilight hues of winter.

A scant seven minutes hence, as the clock's hands crossed the threshold into February 29, a leap year's fleeting day, Reginald debuted at 12:02 AM. Born under the auspices of an elusive date, his existence in numerical terms was quirkily reduced, making Carver ostensibly thirty-two years of seniority. Reginald bore the weight of the calendar's caprice, possessing only eight leap years to his name.

Roger and Madison, their progenitors, were the custodians of time-worn love, aged fifty and a comely forty respectively, at the genesis of their offspring – artifacts of an era when tenderness manifested in the subtlest of gestures: Roger curtailing his nightly libations by one, and Madison's diligent toil over simmering pots, lavishing her brood with feasts that satiated far beyond the call of hunger.

Navigating through the complex corridors of life's unpredictable voyage, Carver stood as a towering beacon, a paragon of leadership enshrouded in a mysterious, almost supernatural, aura. With the insightful gaze of a prophet borrowing from the celestial realms above, he possessed an uncanny ability to discern the intricate, silk-woven threads of raw truth cleverly concealed beneath life's elaborate, tapestried facades. These truths lay quietly nested among the noisy din of the world – a dissonance that, throughout human lifetimes, had devolved into a relentless symphony saturated with anxiety and cunning ensnarement. In his eyes, modern existence had denigrated into nothing more than an incessant, droning infomercial – a spectacle incessantly propagating an exhaustive agenda spelling out the myriad fears the average person was obliged to absorb – an energy-depleting soul-wearying proposition even for the sturdiest of minds.

Those who misread his quietude cast Carver as the enviable bad boy, yet he was a raconteur, polymath, and autodidact by fate's employment, a psyche imbued with inexorable drive. When he divulged his thoughts – assumed redundant by the undiscerning – the reality was Carver dispensed his words judiciously, avoiding the empty effervescence of social trivialities. His conversational prowess was misinterpreted, for it thrived not on superficial chatter but rather on genuine, compelling interaction and the theatre of the public domain. He was a herald of understanding, grasping the disarray strangling the masses, bestowing insight, and offering a bastion of reprieve in his understated way.

The mantle of leadership was Carver's quenchless desire, magnetizing kindred spirits whether orchestrating unity on the sporting fields or piercing the veil of societal norms, inviting the fringe dwellers in whilst granting fresh perspectives to the entrenched.

Not the archetype of a rogue, Carver was an introspective being, his anguish akin to an olden tree witnessing its woodland kin wilt under malaise. Compelled to stretch the nourishing tendrils of his nature to the imperilled, he embodied the essence of compassion, a harbinger of renewal, entrusting a sole, heartfelt embrace can rescue the languishing soul from the precipice of despair to a resurgence of vitality.

Reginald, meanwhile, was born a stone's throw behind Carver, only slightly spared from his twins in utero quest for solitary prominence, coursed through life akin to the living embodiment of jubilation itself. He didn't await the unfolding of existence; rather, he seized it with temerity – like an oyster primed to be drenched in piquant sauce – and everyone in his wake clung to the hope of being dappled with his radiant effervescence.

Unlike his brother, Reginald was not merely on the stage – he was the stage incarnate.

Adoration trailed in his wake, yet he seldom embraced it. Possessing fierce loyalty to his dominion, what shadowed him were the deep impressions left by Carver's mere minutes' lead in life's expedition.

Reginald aspired to echo his brother's every laurel, while Carver yearned for the unfeigned simplicity his sibling wielded effortlessly – a synergistic pair yearning for equilibrium.

The plot twisted around a simple yet profound conundrum: which brother's eyes lighted upon Tiffany first, as if precedence held sway in the realm of affection, also discounting Tiffany's control over her heart's direction.

We find ourselves in June 2024, and we find Tiffany confessing her adoration for Carver in the cozy confines of the Sleeping Seagull Café. She speaks of Carver, the first of the Fergus lineage, to capture her gaze.

"Tiffany?" Sam intoned a hint of mischief in his voice. "Do you trust me? Attend the Sleeping Seagull Bar at precisely 8:45 PM tonight, for there, your most fervent aspirations will take root."

Tantalized, Tiffany glided off, her mind whirling with the possibility of Sam's mysterious plot.

An hour passed, and Sam sat opposite Carver at the same café. He echoed his prior words, this time layering them with intention for Carver's benefit,



Carver? Do you trust me? Tonight, grace the Sleeping Seagull Bar at 8:46 PM, and there I assure you, your roots will entwine with your wildest dream, shepherding you toward eternal happiness.”

Unbeknownst to both conspirators, Reginald lingered at an adjoining table, an unseen bystander pouring over a menu of modest offerings while absorbing their ruse.

Elsewhere, far from the whimsy playing out at the café, the real-life Lindsay battles against a relentless tide. There, in the trenches of day-to-day survival, Lindsay labours to maintain a semblance of shelter for his kin. On the verge of his twilight years, he confronts the cruel realization of being rendered antiquated by corporate decree. The relentless march of time pounds ever louder, threatening to sweep away what remains unless his literary endeavours find sanctuary.

Facing upheaval and the dire consequences of failure, his life precariously perched, he knows the peril threatens to erase his existence as easily as lines on an Etch a Sketch. In this complex riot of fates and fortunes, the players move – drawn by invisible threads – as the story of Carver, Reginald, Tiffany, and Sam weaves ever onward.

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4

PROSE

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Tiffany + Sam  
Beginnings

## Prose: Tiffany + Sam: Beginnings

Under the ethereal glow of a snow-white Tesla, Tiffany was ushered into existence amidst Calgary's bleak outskirts.

January 14, 1997, during the merciless polar vortex, which seized over thirty-four thousand unsuspecting lives. They succumbed to the icy jaws of an unprecedented storm, which blanketed Alberta in a frigid shroud.

Tony, Tiffany's father, had become a recluse, shunning the outdoors for five long years. He filled the Tesla with those he deemed society's most deplorable, and expendable – Jeremy and Tyler, two wayward souls entangled in the malicious undertakings of the now-deceased, avaricious developer William, whose life met a harrowing end at his daughter Alexa's hands; Alexa, Tyler's ill-fated paramour, conjured the very chill that carried her father in the vehicle's trunk (a curiosity given the sleek design of Tesla's storage solutions); Sebastian, a refugee, a neurosurgeon, turned peddler of illicit remedies, chasing oblivion far from his homeland's golden promises; and the love of Tony's crisis-ridden life, J – her pregnancy in its final throes, revealing the progeny of treachery, Jeremy's seed and not Tony's.

As Tony navigated the treacherous roads, the Tesla kissed black ice. A precarious dance ensued – spiralling, spinning – before the vehicle's violent embrace with the unyielding snowbank. The climax of the spin coincided with the breaking of J's waters; meanwhile, divine intervention roared overhead as a Chinook, a precursor of respite, swept over the Rocky Mountains' stalwart foothills, sparing them a frosty demise.

In the biting aftermath, Tiffany emerged into their turbulent world. Amidst the detached onlookers, life's persistent cycle asserted itself, weaving promises of scattered fates and unspoken histories. They mutually pledged to dissolve their shared past, burying William's remains beneath a lone magisterial Pine, surrendering him to the earth's relentless cycle.

Shielded by denial's veil, Tony and J resolved to hide the lineage's unsettling truth from Tiffany, crafting an illusion of untainted origins. Oblivious were they to the fact that on her thirtieth birthday (in the future), Tiffany's unravelled truths would cascade from a simple, yet potent gift – a DNA kit from Melanie, her BFF.

At the moment, the past was inconsequential. The critical narrative unfolding involved Tony, J, and their bright-eyed baby girl Tiffany, who had fled the confines of their former existence to settle in the quaint coastal town aptly named Sleeping Seagull.

There, they left behind the wreckage of their snow-white Tesla – now a crumpled testament to its inaugural and final journey, never having felt the purr of its electric engine because of Tony’s agoraphobia. The vehicle had stood, not as a means of transportation, but as a trophy of affluence and a subtle yet potent signal to their erstwhile neighbours, the Joneses, that Tony and J were in stride with them in life’s unspoken race.

Their new beginning in Sleeping Seagull was nothing short of spectacular. Tony erected an opulent residence along the serene shoreline of Calm Waters Bay. The house was a mazy marvel, distinguished from every other abode in the world by its audacious lack of a roof – Tony’s remarkable transition from a recluse to a lover of the open skies was architecturally manifested.

Despite this, he ensured their ability to traverse the town shielded from the elements; an intricate network of underground passageways stretched from their home to pivotal points in the community. It connected them to the heart of Sleeping Seagull, where Tony held sway as CEO at the acclaimed Word’s Literary Review, and J’s beloved artisanal cheese factory.

In time, these tunnels would also lead to Tiffany’s charming bungalow, which she chose to situate by the same tranquil bay that had cradled her childhood home.

And so, life with blinders on was nothing short of grand. That is, until the day Carver and Reginald stepped into her existence, trailed closely by Sam.

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Sam arrived with the ghosts of a fractured household clinging to his back.

... ..

But before we delve into the fabric of that tale, let us pause for a brief interlude – a Real-Life Report.

In the tangible strands of this narrative, where hard truths intertwine with fiction, our main protagonist, Lindsay, has found himself, for what feels like the umpteenth time, violently discarded on the unforgiving ground by a capricious tormentor known simply as Stress.

This malevolent entity has launched another shadowy salvo across the digital realm of his Socials. The stark reality is that life can oscillate between bleakness and adversity – and then reverberate back to bleakness once more.

Lindsay, with the weight of this epiphany, faces the startling repetition: Have I used the term ‘umpteenth’ before? Indeed, I have, he notes dejectedly.

And with it comes the crushing reminder that the monthly rent looms like a monstrous wave, poised to crash down on his family’s fragile stability.

It seems inevitable he might have to extend his hand in plea, a gesture fraught with the exhaustion of his spirit, heavy with humiliation, and maddeningly synonymous with the capitalized, incessant pounding of STRESS that seems to be in cahoots with life's cruel design. The very walls appear to conspire against him, reverberating with the thunderous echo of his head being mercilessly thrashed against them.

Can you get to the post?

Happy Valentine's Day – no that was not it.

... POST ...

If you are a betting person and had to bet if I'd make it to my 64th birthday, I'd bet the under. Just saying. Don't worry too much, I took my three pills just now, three in the morning, three after that, in perpetuity.

Did you know depression is a switch you can just flick on or off?

... END POST ...

As Lindsay's fingers danced across the keyboard, crafting his post thoughtfully or if you like the other side of the coin, thoughtlessly, the haunting opening notes of "The Sound of Silence" began to weave through the room. The soft yet insistent melody hung like a delicate mist, wrapping around him in a shroud of melodic introspection. The gentle strum of the guitar, paired with the plaintive lyrics, filled the quiet space with resonant layers of sound, creating an almost tangible presence that seemed to acknowledge the solemnity of his solitary moment.

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Chronic stress weaves its insidious threads into the intricate tangle of our well-being, becoming the sinister puppeteer behind six of the most prevalent omens of mortality. It's a nefarious link—a shadowy catalyst for heart disease's silent pervasiveness, the deceptive proliferation of cancer cells, the ruinous ravages of pulmonary afflictions, the tragic randomness of fatal accidents, the stealthy advancement of cirrhosis of the liver, and the desolate finality of suicide.

Such is the dire pronouncement of the American Psychological Association, echoing the grim chorus of health warnings.

Lindsay might simply be mirroring a stark truth in his own raw and unfiltered manner. Consider for a moment his so-called Social friends, an online congregation of more ghost than substance. How many, pray to tell, offered a digital hand of solace upon his heart-wrenching admission of despair? | |

An onslaught of job notifications flood Lindsay’s inbox as my fingers dance across the keys—28 impersonal, automated missives, devoid of empathy, for positions that fail to ignite even a flicker of desire within Lindsay’s weary soul. Except for one, to work at Ronald McDonald’s house with children inflicted with cancer.

At the cusp of 63.5 years, a lifetime of experience under his belt, these notifications serve little purpose beyond cluttering his inbox. Despite this, he’ll engage in the soul-sucking venture of casting his resume into the void—applying for each and every one with a persistence bordering on self-flagellation. Yet, he knows all too well the outcome: a deafening silence or a string of rejections, each non-response a dagger sharper than the last, exacerbating the sting of dismissal—a sensation akin to being rejected on anabolic steroids.

Hello **STRESS** my old friend, I see your font size has increased.

... ..

Sam’s life began amidst chaos and rubble. His childhood home had been violently sundered when a stray airplane door, dislodged by the cruel whims of fate, plummeted earthward. Along with it, an unlucky trio of passengers, still desperately clutching their non-existent parachutes, rained down amidst a storm of oxygen masks tangled in their final, desperate descent.

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This aerial calamity did more than merely damage the house; it obliterated the very structure, rending asunder walls and joists with a ferocity so great that the building shuddered from its very foundations, leaving it perilously uninhabitable.

Amidst the debris of what once encapsulated his universe, Sam understood life’s fragility, guided by his parents, his father Wordsworth, and his mother Tennyson. Their names unconventional—both were dedicated educators, instilling the value of knowledge and the richness of literature in the minds of countless young students. Their commitment to pursuing academia was steadfast, though the financial remuneration was meagre.

With their home in ruins and the future uncertain, the family found themselves seeking refuge in the only haven that stretched within the boundaries of their modest means: a dilapidated shotgun shack perched precariously on the fringe of Sleeping Seagull. Here, among the creaking floorboards and drafts whispering through thin walls, a new chapter of resilience began for Sam and his intrepid parents.



It seemed Destiny was aligning its enigmatic ways with Wordsworth's routine life. On a day smeared with the golden hue of dusk, Wordsworth returned from imparting the intricacies of literature to the intellectuals at Sleeping Seagull's campus—an ironic misnomer for the institution whose sporting teams moniker reverently are named after the intelligent but ill-favoured birds, the Fighting Crows.

He swung his 1963 Epic Envoy, a relic of past engineering splendour, into its customary resting place upon the unkempt expanse of grass behind his modest shotgun shack.

With the setting sun painting his silhouette long and weary, he ambled toward the worn back door, its paint peeling like the days on a calendar.

Meanwhile, a scene of lesser angels unfolded at the house's neglected front, where Sebastian, with the furtive glance of a cat, indulged in the precarious ballet of a drug deal.

In this instance, the tranquillity of the neighbourhood was shattered by the discordant roar of a royal blue Prius—driven by reckless abandon. The vehicle sliced through the calm like a blade, carrying a figure whose arm jutted out from the otherwise innocuous car like a herald of chaos. This anonymous assailant wielded a gun, the metallic extension of their malice, which they discharged wildly, sending bullets on erratic flights of destruction aimed in Sebastian's direction.

Despite their intent, the rogue projectiles missed their mark, instead of tearing through the weathered front door of Wordsworth's dwelling with Tennyson. The wicked lead danced a grim tango through the heart of the home, careening through wall-less rooms with raucous abandon as it traversed the sequence of rooms—through the living room, past the kitchen, where the scent of bygone meals lingered amidst the sudden intrusion; piercing the bedroom, a sanctuary now violated and even into the bathroom, a place once private but again wall-less, now marred by the gross intrusion.

Tragically, the rogue bullets found their unwitting terminus in Wordsworth's unsuspecting frame, centre mass, punctuating his stroll with lethal finality and severing the delicate thread of his existence.

As the echo of gunfire faded, Tennyson and Sam were left with their souls etched in torment, staring aghast as their dear husband and father was prematurely wrenched from the realm of the living. The haunting images imprinted upon their hippocampi promised a torment that would endure, an unfading scar within their minds—a cruel memento of the day when fate's random cruelty descended upon Wordsworth's final, unsuspecting moments.

As Sam watched the dwindling light in his father's weary eyes, he felt a profound vow rise within him. He would honour the fabric of his father's memory—not through songs or grieving, but through the power of words. He would become a writer, a creator, and an architect of ideas resolute in his quest to make a difference in an indifferent world.

Like the similarly spirited and dogged, real-life Lindsay, that is precisely the path Sam pursued, albeit after traversing a myriad of odd jobs and navigating a confusion of intimate human encounters.

Each job imbued him with raw material, each fleeting touch, a story – all to be woven into his narrative. Sam waved his rebellion in a world rapidly morphing into a cacophony of ephemeral sound bites that threatened to erode the depth of our collective consciousness. He wrote incessantly, penning tales that delved into the ludicrous juxtapositions of existence. These stories clamoured for release from the confines of his overactive imagination, craving to find their resting place upon the blank canvas of his screen.

With every stroke of the keys, performed with an almost subconscious grace, Sam wondered – could he and Lindsay be echoes of the same soul?

Let's cast our hopes on Lindsay and his kin, rooting for their survival and for their truth to flourish amidst chaos.

Sam's fingers grew more tired with each passing moment, yet his resolve never wavered. He pitched his ideas with relentless determination, an insatiable force that refused to succumb to fatigue. His pitches, relentless and numerous beyond reason, were a testament to an ingrained conviction to effect change in the hallowed name of Woodsworth through the might of his words.

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Lindsay, a kindred spirit in relentless pursuit, had faced his staggering mountain of rejections – umpteen times umpteen, elevated to the power of eighty-six, each one a fiery sting that could sear the soul. Yet Sam, in shared understanding, recognized the bitter truth that the most worthwhile of pursuits are often laden with hardship – an irony that stoked the embers of his disdain for clichés, even as he lived the very essence of one.

Sam clinched a coveted position as a feature writer with *The Sleeping Seagull Daily*. Mysteriously, copies of the paper began to vanish almost as quickly as they hit the stands as print media raced toward oblivion.

Enchanted by his eloquent critiques, major publishing houses flooded his mailbox with so many novels and anthologies that they began to stack up like a literary fortress around his desk.

During a particularly lean phase, he joked that he could've survived by slathering mustard on some of the fibre-rich pages and consuming them – that, of course, was a ludicrous thought he entertained in moments of surreal humour.

Despite their enthusiasm for his reviews, none of these publishers opened their fortified gates to welcome his narratives. Sam struggled to fathom their reluctance to embrace the prose he crafted with the same passion that enlivened his critiques.

Nevertheless, battered by the waves of indifference, Sam preserved his resilience. He kept on weaving his words into stories, repeatedly throwing his pitches like messages in bottles into the vast ocean of literary agents and publishers (a metaphor I use often).

In his relentless pursuit, Sam maintained a peculiar abstinence. Unlike many others, he abstained from the solitary pleasure of masturbation – a personal quirk that defied the chorus of medical proclamations on prostate health. This anomaly in his routine often made him wonder if he was channelling the spirit of an eccentric writer – perhaps someone akin to Charlie Kaufman in his creative frenzies. Amidst these speculations and the lack of reflection from a mirror in his office to confirm his identity, he brushed off these thoughts as odd musings in an otherwise unremarkable day.

Sam's fate veered off its well-trodden path on a day steeped in the kind of mundane predictability that often precedes life-altering events. He stepped through the polished, brass-accented glass doors of Word's Literary Review Agency, a sanctuary for the creatively inclined and hopeful literati.

Within its ivy-clad, red-brick façade nestled in the heart of Sleeping Seagull's historic literary district, an air of whispered promises and hushed aspirations lingered. Inside the offices, a palpable buzz of ambition mingled with the faint scent of aged parchment and fresh ink.

Amid the gentle clacking of typewriter keys, Tony emerged – a seasoned literary man, the CEO of Word's Literary Review, whose eyes sparkled with the shrewdness of someone who knew words could create and destroy worlds.

With a knowing smile, Tony extended a hand, clasping a mug of steaming Joe so fresh that wisps of welcomed warmth spiralled into the air, cutting through the chill of a writer's uncertainty. "Keep this close," Tony murmured, his voice a blend of encouragement and inscrutable intrigue, "for as long as it remains warm."

He slid the mug across a mahogany desk that gleamed under the soft glow of an antique banker's lamp. The lingering heat from the cup radiated against Sam's fingertips as they brushed the ceramic, an unspoken pact being forged in that exchange.

"If you accept the job offer," Tony continued, leaning back into the creak of his well-loved leather chair, "you'll be thrust into a surreal world where the lines between imagination and reality blur. Here, you can fervently chase your dream – your almost palpable need to be a renowned wordsmith. A bard whose name will be revered within these hallowed halls and worldwide!"

At that moment, as Sam wrapped his hands around the inviting warmth of the offered mug, he could feel the edges of his once-dull existence curling and crisping like a well-read page, ready to ignite with the spark of newfound purpose.

... ..

Should your mind wander to the assumption that the author of these words has indulged in the intoxicating spirits provided by Sebastian’s egregious hospitality, let me dispel such notions posthaste; he remains, most definitely, untouched by such influences.

Allow me to impart a parting thought: when the familiar path of life veers unexpectedly into chaos, you may discover yourself inhabiting a humble shotgun shack. That same upheaval may thrust you into a distant land, a corner of the globe you once thought impossible from your reality.

Should you ever find yourself teetering on the brink of such an unforeseen transformation, let your resistance be as emphatic as it is clear: RESIST, spelled in the uncompromising clarity of uppercase letters.

Would you care to guess how many of his virtual acquaintances, those characterized as Social comrades in the realms of his digital domain, reached out to Lindsay with genuine concern when faced with his cryptic proclamation?

Precisely, | |.

... ..

11

Real Life

I'm Already Dead

62

## Real Life: I'm Already Dead

I'm already dead.

I'm aware. It must be excruciating to be continually subjected to my suffering. You may be thinking: Can't your mind wander to a sunnier place, muster a sliver of optimism, try?

Yet, what do you reckon my existence has been?

It's as though I'm ensnared in a relentless tempest, unable to find the horizon. The blow of my untimely dismissal, just as the cloak of my sixth decade was unfurling, has been nothing short of catastrophic – not solely for me but also for the family of my heart.

Without the outstretched hands of comrades each month, I would have surely met my end, alone and forgotten, on the frigid concrete. Yet, this harsh truth claws at me: life demands a currency I no longer possess, and the degradation of perpetual supplication for scraps of survival is a cross too heavy to bear.

I beseeched the powers that be, only to be met with stony indifference. They scoffed with their bureaucratic sneer, proclaiming my meager \$495.00 monthly pittance of CPP (the so-called you've-aged-so-now-you-must-grovel) benefit sufficient.

63

Their cold-hearted decree: only when you languish on the pavement's edge, a breath away from death, shall we deign to notice? Until that sombre moment, endure in silence.

I poured my heart out, detailing how the cruel twist of fate that snatched my livelihood didn't merely drain my coffers but shackled me with debts as unyielding as the grave, my only reprieve being a whimsical windfall or a stroke of luck in my creative endeavours. Are the odds visible to you now, sketched within this "o" – minute as a whisper?

Can you comprehend the depth of my despair?

When I laid bare the plight of my kin to the officials, describing the stark reality that their plight mirrored mine, teetering on the brink of destitution by mere association, the response – bereft of empathy – was nothing short of mocking. "Only when the abyss stares back at both of you, come knocking," they said. So much for the pretense of shielding the vulnerable before they fall.

Before they reduced me to this, they insinuated, no less subtly than a sledgehammer, that I had meticulously orchestrated my life's journey to reach this dismal juncture at 63.5 years, to suffer an affliction, to be battered by ceaseless tragedies – all to pilfer mere morsels for subsistence in the guise of clever deceit. The long game.

In the merciless grip of involuntary intermittent fasting, I've watched over 35 pounds melt from my frame while my chosen kin has shed 40 – both of us already stretched painfully thin. Perhaps I could concede a few superfluous pounds; my companion, however – recall the stark zero a few paragraphs before.

In 2023, I waged a relentless battle for survival, each day clawing my way through the suffocating fog of depression. I marched, unyielding, to the relentless beat of survival, racking up over 8 million steps, nearly 4,000 miles – an arduous trek of 11 miles daily. A whispered invitation to surrender breathed relentlessly from the demon at my shoulder. Yet surrender, I did not. In defiance, I sought refuge in the sanctuary of the Fitness Asylum, marking 97 relentless days at year's end and now 143 consecutive days of battle against the weariness – perhaps recklessly, in the throes of my fasting regime.

My physique is now a battleground between the vigour of youth and the onset of my twice deceased father's age (a story for another time) – every wrinkle a battle scar in the march of time.

My appetite for knowledge has remained insatiable. I devoured 64 tomes, trailing last year's tally by eight, my thoughts plundered by eager publishers keen to mine the insights of my cerebral landscape – my intellect extracted without the grace of remuneration.

I penned 17, now 20, narratives, with three already birthed in 2024. I write fervently, then pitch with fire – a relentless cycle. And remember – I am 63.5, the zero receding with each defiant gasp for air.

Oh, and would you believe it? I have cast over 600 applications into the void, from the mundane to the extraordinary. In a bold stroke of humour birthed from relentless rejection, I once whimsically threw my name into the hat to practice medicine at UBC, armed with nothing but the medical dramas of Chicago Med as my guide.

I would've taken any job tossed my way in my fight for survival, yet fate seemed to shuffle the deck against me cruelly.

Out of 600 desperate pleas – applications – they summoned me for a single interview. My inquisitor? A kid, no more than 20, draped in sweats reeking of apathy, her sweatshirt a tapestry of pet hairs and childish penguin prints.

In the painfully brief three minutes we shared, her eyes darted, probing not for my potential but for the lines time had etched on my face – the subtle signs of my age. She unearthed her prize with surgical precision. "We normally hire 17-19-year-olds. Are you okay with that?"

The words hung between us, jagged icicles. Her verdict followed, swift and cutting: “I don’t think this will work.” It was my first interview I’ve had in thirty years, the first since the internet has been in existence.

Cast out from this farcical judgement, I found myself heaving with sobs, crumbling on a cold bench. Fifteen excruciating minutes bled away as I yearned for the sharp salvation of a razor blade... but fortune left me armed with nothing more than my ineffectual electric shaver, a mocking sentinel as visions of my collapsing, a forgotten form on a hard sidewalk swirled in my head.

What does this say about humanity? This monstrous struggle, my herculean efforts – all for naught.

If the weight of this ordeal can grind down my spirit despite my obsessive striving, what hope remains for those who share my years?

For most, my relentless battle with OCD is an unimaginable front, a path I would never recommend.

A confidant recently told me I looked radiant like I had shed six years off my weathered face. His words sliced through the façade because, beneath the surface, my body is quietly betraying me – deteriorating, while well-meaning compliments land hollow and unabsorbed.

65

You might glimpse me along the seawall, each step heavy with unshed sorrow until tears betray me, spilling unchecked, tracing silent rivulets of pain. Go ahead, mock my grief if it eases you.

Amidst these unguarded moments, my tears are not deceitful machinations – they are the silent pleas of a distressed soul. I’ve gathered ample evidence, a heartrending compendium of daily struggles, to confirm I’m an albatross – a weight of obligation.

Even the government, with its cold assessment, insinuated I was a swindler – before branding me an encumbrance to the system I pleaded to for succour. What gain could there possibly be in this charade of mine?

To continue living inside; how dare I try?

I’m not suicidal, but I’d be lying if I told you I’ve never had suicidal thoughts. Who wouldn’t?

Perhaps you’ve grown weary of this tale – I apologize if it has been a source of distress to you.

Yet, you must understand that I am beyond the veil of life. I cling to the hope that our journey was speckled with fragments of joy.

Despite the ceaseless strain, my attempts will persist.

Spare me your hollow consolations – between us, I struggle to unearth any semblance of purpose.



12

Real Life

White-Splaining

66

## Real Life: White-Splaining

**T**oday is the day I vow to locate and flick that elusive switch in my brain—the one that will finally silence the consuming roar of depression that has besieged me for far too long.

With a heavy sigh, I slump into the familiar embrace of my computer chair and begin to type, allowing a stream of consciousness to spill forth onto the screen.

In the digital periphery, the news feed flickers into view in the top right corner. Tragedy has struck in Abbotsford; a car has intentionally plowed through two souls. The newsreader, with carefully controlled cadence, divulges that the vehicle ceased its journey mere feet from a deserted playground.

The victims, it's revealed—were mere adolescents themselves. I'm torn—my heart clenches for them, yet I can't help but feel unnerved by the explicit priority given to the hypothetical danger to children in the report.

Halfway across the continent, the Super Bowl celebrations in Kansas City spiraled into a nightmare, with the staccato of gunfire shattering cheers. One life is extinguished, and more are splintered across ages eight to forty-seven. The newsreader's voice lilts slightly when mentioning the young among the wounded.

My cynicism curdles inside me; why does humanity instinctively place more value on the youngest victims?

Nausea coils in my gut.

Day 143, I trudge to the gym, my routine an anchor in choppy waters, yet today my every step echoes the same, hollow question: Why?

After a shower that does little to cleanse the weight from my spirit, I venture out once more into the day. I find myself caught in the fluorescent glare of a fast-food restaurant, a pit stop driven either by frugality or an addiction I'm reluctant to acknowledge.

I shudder at the comparison, but the parallel draws itself: Fast-food is a game of Russian Roulette with five of the six chambers loaded, and each burger combo is a bullet.

Today, I ponder my particular vice:

1. Is it the relentless grasp of poverty?
2. Perhaps the insubstantial bun, a ghost of real sustenance?
3. The greasy lure of the fries?
4. The sugary siren call of an oversized soda?

Or is it all of it, combined?

Surely, it can't be the patty, a disc of questionable meat – the bullet in my sixth metaphorical chamber. A sip of the cola offers a fleeting hit of euphoria, while the rest of the meal becomes nothing more than mechanical sustenance – shoved mindlessly into my mouth.

You'd be happy to know I eat a carrot as I write this.

The queue at the counter forms steadily with an assortment of characters. Ahead of me, a Latina woman is ordering with her two children and her husband in tow.

A white man with unkempt hair waits impatiently behind her. The queue behind me includes yet another dishevelled white man. The woman takes her time with the order, much to the ire of the man behind, who spews a curse her way before leaving in a huff.

The woman has to repeat “with orange juice” for her kids twice to ensure the server gets it right.

The man with bad hair takes this opportunity to accost her about the dangers of fructose, advising her against it as if this were the place and time to ‘White-Splain.’ She pays him no heed, seemingly uninterested in his unsolicited advice.

When it's his turn to order, the bad-hair man hypocritically requests the largest burger on the menu, heaped with bacon but free of the dreaded fructose.

I carry my tray upstairs to my preferred seating area, only to find my usual spot occupied by a man who appears to be homeless, blatant drug paraphernalia displayed before him; complete with a crack pipe, I think, but my certainty will have to wait for an undesired personal experience. Begging the question: what comes first homelessness or crack?

I sip my cola and start reading.

At the next table, an older Asian man who imparts some wisdom approaches two young Asian women: “The choices you make now are important. Life is short. Grab it and hold on.” They listen with rapt attention, and their earnest dialogue brings a sense of solace.

Adjacent to me, two young Asian girls are conversing with a white, bearded man who seems just a bit younger than me. He offers them an apple pie, and they engage warmly. My initial reservations about their interaction dissolve upon realizing the comfort their exchange provides. Who am I to judge the appropriateness of them conversing?

A homeless man approaches the girls, petitioning for food. I contemplate stepping in, only to remind myself it's not my place.

The same man then turns to me, and as I catch the bearded man’s watchful eye, I respond to the beggar with a polite yet emphatic “NO.” He walks away, reminding me there’s little to gain from further dialogue.

Another pair of girls sit on my other side, and they, too, are approached, this time by a man who seems deaf and is holding out a note asking for money. The girls’ troubled expressions mirror my sentiments when he redirects his request to me. I, too, decline with a shake of my head, reinforcing the boundary with a silent yet firm “NO,” and he moves on.

The restaurant staff attempt to rouse a man incapacitated by drugs; I sympathize with their plight.

Exiting the restaurant, I aim to reach 25,000 steps, so I head to the library, where I traverse each floor. I feel like collapsing with each step I take. As I tally my count, I notice at least 20 individuals – at desks, slumbering, their entire worldly belongings amassed beside them.

On the top floor, I’m hit with an urge for a boost of bliss – a can of cola. Unfortunately, the vending machine is out of service.

After completing my rounds in the library, I proceed to the shiny new supermarket with the intention of walking its aisles. Here, I choose a cola advertised as guilt-free and sugar-free, with all the usual health claims. Settling down to taste it, I find it’s sweetened with Stevia. A quick internet search on ‘Stevia’ suggests overconsumption can be lethal. It occurs to me perhaps the only truly safe nourishment might be water – if it’s not contaminated by toxins from a plastic bottle.

Unperturbed, I continue my endless journey on foot.

I pause at a pub and have a beer, though it’s beyond my budget.

My friend Anthony inquires about my well-being, and I respond untruthfully.

Another friend, RN, had vented online the day before about everyone advising him to exercise and that he just found out he needs a pacemaker.

I assured RN, I never suggested he exercise.

He explains his post was directed at certain friends who incessantly urged him to exercise, disregarding his feelings and their lack of medical expertise. He no longer speaks to these friends.

His update prompted many to send ‘speedy recovery’ wishes. I think no response might be better.

Yet, in stark contrast, my own posts over the past five months – where I’d hinted at suicidal thoughts – elicited not one ‘speedy recovery’ response.

RN shares his doctor warned vigorous exercise could be fatal.

In response to his serious dilemma, I quip, asking if the pacemaker comes with a side of brisket. RN laughs.

As RN prepares to leave, my parting remark is a sardonic suggestion to walk backwards on a treadmill. RN laughs again.

Cousteau sits beside me. I attempt to cultivate a liking for him, but it’s an uphill battle, as his constant rhetoric is tinged with racism, something even another racist-leaning friend is offended by.

Cousteau often gripes about ethnic restaurants and the service he receives everywhere. This usually segues into what he considers playful sexual banter (it’s not) and inevitably circles back to him questioning the significance of being ‘woke.’

When he brings this up, I feel compelled to correct him. I explain that ‘Stay Woke’ originated within communities of colour as a cautionary reminder. It advised individuals to remain vigilant when stepping outside their homes, alert to the reality they could be targeted and harmed due to their skin colour. I mention how Ta-Nehisi Coates articulates these dangers to his son in a poignant letter to his son in the book “Between the World and Me,” outlining the trials of growing up black in a society marred by racism. My thoughts drift to another favourite author, Fredrick Backman, who contrasts this by portraying the dark side of white privilege (in a trilogy of books) in a hockey-centric culture – how it blindly supports a player even after he commits rape rather than defending the victim.

Backman also wrote a book, framed as a letter to his son. However, unlike Coates’s book, which warns his son about the world’s perils, Backman’s narrative focuses on quirkier life lessons. He stresses why following the arrows in Ikea is essential and discusses the social advantages of joining – or even starting – a band, primarily as a means to meet girls.

I use this to make my point to Cousteau: white individuals repurposing the term ‘woke’ is a reaction to their perceived loss of privilege. And I challenge him, asking why it’s considered wrong to confront and push against the world’s injustices.

The search for a so-called depression switch is fruitless.

Exhausted upon my return home, I'm driven by an inexplicable urge. The outcome is uncertain, but I text a man who is both my brother and my uncle—a connection severed for three decades.

My message is concise: “I think it’s time for us to reconnect.”

*To be continued.*

... ..

**Please bear in mind:** Fructose, despite being considerably more harmful than sugar, holds an ironic equivalence to the unsolicited advice doled out by a man sporting bad hair as he heaps bacon onto his burger.

I spin the chambers of decision; they halt at ‘Burger Combo.’

... ..

5

PROSE

Songbirds

72

## Prose: Songbirds



*I believe in Milko, play along, you sexy thing."*

*"I believe in Milko, play along, you sexy thing."*

Dustin belted out his song at the top of his lungs in a grating, continuous loop, a fixture in the heart-pounding Karaoke nights every Tuesday at The Sleeping Seagull Bar.

Chantel the nights MC clapped enthusiastically. "Let's hear it for Dustin and his passionate weekly renditions – completely free of charge for both the low and high notes!"

She took a quick moment to admire herself in the mirror. Since being crowned homecoming queen, her self-esteem had plummeted. That fleeting high school glory hadn't paved the way to success, and now her sole employment was hosting Karaoke nights. The bitter irony wasn't lost on her; after delivering a stunning duet of Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton's "Islands in the Stream" all by herself, this was where she'd ended up – her fate of marginality was sealed.

On these nights, Chantel couldn't help but feel trapped in a torturous limbo, watching former classmates guzzling drinks and gobbling up chicken wings. No, it wasn't limbo – it was more akin to hell.

The only highlights of her life were her fleeting encounters with Reginald and the day she landed a job as a fry cook at the ill-fated Burger Basement, nestled in the depths of a halfway house – a place whose potential was never realized.

"Thank you, Dustin. For the record, and the fiftieth time," Chantel's voice dripped with a mix of sarcasm and exasperation, "the word is 'miracles,' not 'Milko.' Will we see you here next week to sing that mournful ballad about the deceased dog adrift on a log?"

"Yes."

"Let's give another round of applause to Dustin, our eloquent conversationalist! Next week, he's turning 22 – a significant milestone, as the life expectancy for those named Dustin is notoriously capped at 22 years." Come here, puppy, puppy. I'm struggling with what I'm typing now. "Shall we see who's here for karaoke tonight? I'm sure it's the usual crowd. Let's start with a roll call for the gentlemen."

*Olivia: here. Amelia: here. Emma: here. Sophia: here. Isabella: here. Charlotte: here. Ava: here. Aurora: here. Luna: here. Mia: here. Ellie: here. Evelyn: here Lily: here.*

*"And now the fair ladies." Noah: here. Liam: here. Oliver: here. Elijah: here. Luca: here. Mateo: here. Levi: here. Ezra: here. James: here. Henry: here. Michael: here.*



To an outsider, the group of 26 singing regulars might as well have hailed from town of Reversal, given that Isabella is not a typical boy's name.

Each singer stepped up to perform. Twenty-five of them belted out a rousing rendition of a Better Than Ezra song, much to Ezra's irritation, relegating her self-esteem to something akin to 'less than zero.'

Incidentally, "Less Than Zero" is also the title of a film featuring Robert Downey Jr. in a risqué scene with another man. Although, I'm not entirely sure that's the correct film reference. I could check, but I'd rather not, so I won't.

Speaking of Robert Downey Jr., did I ever mention that I met him in Seattle?

I was plastered, a 'knee-walking-bile-puking drunk' to borrow a phrase from the iconic TV show "Cheers." One of its stars, Frasier Crane (Kelsey Grammer), got a spin-off, "Frasier," set in Seattle. I remember ordering a Red Stripe beer with my friend Pat behind me during that hazy encounter. "You must like Jamaica," said the bartender. And I, blurted back, "Yeah, because I have a big dick." Pat burst into laughter.

As I write this, I recognize the anecdote isn't particularly strong. However, it's already written, and it will stay – right here on the page, or on a screen, depending on how you're reading this.

74

And just in case you're wondering, it's not Chantel typing this. It's me.

What's the point of all this? Exactly.

*Tell me why?*

*I don't like Mondays.*

*Tell me why?*

*I don't like Mondays.*

*Tell me why?*

*I don't like Mondays.*

*I want to shoot.*

*The whole day down, down, down.*

*Shoot it all down.*

"Let's hear it for Ezra! Thanks to him, we can all breathe a little easier because it's Tuesday. Ezra, here's a little token of appreciation – a \$50.00 coupon from The Sleeping Seagull Gun Shack."

At precisely 8:44 PM, Tiffany entered the bar. Reginald sat in a quiet corner, obscured from view, and studying the song menu, incognito.

“Is that you, Reginald?” she called out. Only a grunt in response from Reg.

Scanning the room, Tiffany’s eye caught the wave of Sam, surname Malone, seated at a central table. Tiffany hurried over to join him.

A spectral character auditioning for Sam’s role queried: “What happened? You never finished telling us the story about meeting Robert.”

“Apologies, I was sidetracked. I’d just helped Pat back to his feet when I saw none other than Robert Downey Jr about six tables away. Keep in mind that this was during Robert’s tumultuous years of substance use, so he was noticeably inebriated.

As I made my way to his table, I passed Will Sasso and quipped he’d made me laugh exactly once. He laughed in return, so I guess we’re even now.

Brent Butt, the guy from Corner Gas, was also there. I heckled him, and he retorted that I should go eat a cucumber sandwich.

Eventually, I reached Robert Downey Jr’s table.

“And? What did you say to him?”

“I kind of slurred out his name, something like ‘You’re Robert Downey Jr.’”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“And how did he take it?”

“All he did was nod.”

Before Tiffany had the chance to sit down, she was suddenly surrounded by the ensemble of singers—twenty-five, not twenty-six, as their instinctive hunch hinted at the extraordinary nature of the evening ahead.

“Ladies and gentlemen, brace yourselves for a special performance tonight—Tiffany will sing a duet with a mystery guest.”

As the stage was engulfed in smoke, an unexpected figure materialized amidst the haze. There stood Carver, clad only in biker shorts and a charismatic grin—swampy yet irresistibly compelling.

“Carver,” someone murmured in anticipation.

At exactly 8:46 p.m., the spotlight singled out Carver with perfect timing.

Tiffany and Carver exchanged a look, his eyes shimmering with secret anticipation. It was as though their hearts simultaneously skipped a beat.

RN, who was there not as a performer but as a passionate music aficionado with a pacemaker, could feel their electric connection.

In a moment laden with emotion, Carver and Tiffany shared a kiss. Then, each grasping a microphone, they delivered a stirring rendition of U2’s “All I Want is You,” the passion of their performance virtually lifting the venue’s roof. It was as though their hearts were uniting at first verse.

Sam could rest easy now, his work done, save for the delightful insanity that would ensue as Tiffany and Carver, hand in hand with him, meandered down the trail of love toward their destined nuptials.

“Hey Carver?” Sam said. “Did you ever see ‘Less than Zero?’”

Could there be a hiccup in their happiness? Another performer had yet to take the stage.

“Here with us tonight, making his grand debut anywhere on Earth or across the cosmos, we present the most enigmatic, spellbinding figure in all of Sleeping Seagull. A man who has made a lasting impression on everyone gathered here tonight except Ezra. You either adore him or despise him, and you might even be raising his child – please welcome Reginald.”

“And what will you grace us with tonight, Reg?”

With a firm grip on the microphone, Reginald unleashed a salty, passionate performance of Harry Nilsson’s “Can’t Live if Living is Without You,” his gaze fixated on Tiffany and his twin Carver – who, lucky for him, did not absorb Reginald’s miraculous vocal talent in the womb.

The tiny hairs on Chantel’s arms stood on end as she expressed her gratitude to the audience and made an important announcement: next week’s Karaoke Night would be moved to Monday, Dustin’s 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

Carver + Tiffany escaped through the back door into a fog-filled night. When they arrived at Carver's their passion had reached a beyond fever pitch, they tore off each other's clothing and 'did it' twice.

(Use your imagination for this sex scene because I, the narrator of the story, don't know how to describe a hardening member tastefully – so I won't).

In the heat of passion, they confessed sexual fantasies to each other – fantasies they would never dare mention outside the fervour of intimacy, desires too intimate to be acknowledged after the intensity had faded.

Lacking cigarettes to smoke post-coitus (because they are non-smokers), they lay together, content and purring like affectionate kittens, plotting the future of their romance.

As they both drifted toward sleep, wrapped in each other's arms, Carver whispered, "I love you, Buttercup," a phrase that would escape his lips another 75.861 times in the days to come.

But this begs a crucial question: How will Reginald discover that Carver has such an endearing nickname for Tiffany?

Furthermore, we are left to wonder whether Reginald's chapter in this narrative is coming to an end.

A man sat alone at the back of the bar, his hands waving animatedly as though he just didn't care.

Is that Robert Downey Jr.? Sam mouthed the question in disbelief.

Indeed, it was.

"Chantel, you promised I'd get to sing the 'Batman' theme," Robert said before bowing his head in resignation.

David Duchovny and D.B. Sweeney sat next to him, offering consolation. "There, there, Robert," they said. "It's going to be alright. Hey, did we ever tell you about when we played a two-on-two basketball game with the storyteller (me) in Vancouver?" David and D.B. said in unison.

"Who won?" inquired Robert.

David Duchovny hung his head, silently admitting his defeat.

Meanwhile, Reginald had sequestered himself in his abode, rehearsing "I love you, Buttercup" in front of the mirror. This ritual followed his self-gratification as he attempted to infuse the declaration with a sense of authenticity.

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13

Real Life

78

My Birth Mother Was Right

## Real Life: My Birth Mother Was Right

18 February 2024

Yearly, without fail, my supposed elder sister – my birth mother in disguise – relentlessly drilled into my head that I was bound to be nothing more than a perpetual loser, a pathetic failure, and I should give up.

In my anger, I likened her to a word that sang bitter harmony with ‘witch.’

She was, tragically, prophetic. My days are dwindling to a finite dot; no force on earth can thwart this. The squalid streets will claim me and my chosen family, and my faithful feline, Hana, as their own.

Desperately, I muster what remnants of strength I have to release my burdensome self from those who still have a flicker of hope – a hope I’ve been robbed of.

Oh, Depression, your smug smirk is unsparing. You’ve already crowned yourself the victor.

My beginning was shrouded in desolation, within walls that harboured outcast mothers and their ‘demon seeds’ – me, an unwanted revelation, an inconvenient life. The church, the community, and every sanctimonious soul wished away our existence.

“It was the times” – this hollow refrain echoes, mocking the ghost of my haunted life.

It wasn’t until I stumbled upon the shattered pieces of my history at the age of forty-three that I understood the sham it has been – fumbling from being the baby of seven to an isolated only child and then the youngest in a newfound trio when my ‘father’ appeared, only to vanish in the cruelest twist of paternity.

Humour, it seems, is the solitary relic of my tempestuous genesis. In the cold, echoing chambers of a Calgary hospital (October 2016), I lingered by the deathbed of the woman – my acerbic eldest sister and my reluctant mother – addressing her as ‘mother’ for the inaugural and final time as she drifted into the void. In a hushed whisper, I implored her to reveal the identity of my father, and with her last vestiges of strength, she sneered that at least it wasn’t that bastard – the man whose name haunted my birth registration – the man who was willing to open his arms to accept me as his own.

I’ve tried to assemble the jigsaw of my life, but it appears I’ve been grappling with the wrong pieces. Accomplishments flashed brilliantly, yet the shadow of my mother’s curse loomed always, unwavering.

Four years out from an ejection from a 15-year career (2024), as I met my sixtieth year, my world crumbled. The legal system was a farce; they feigned a fight for justice while I was left with nothing – just the dust of a Pyrrhic victory.

As I was abruptly released from my career, J and I found solace in an episode of the gripping law drama “Family Law.” There, amidst the high stakes of legal battle, a law firm partner coldly deliberated with the administrative manager about the fates hanging in the balance (who to lay off?). “What about the one who just celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup>?” the partner, with venomous casualness, suggested. The manager retorted with a weighted pause, “Absolutely not; you may as well sign his death warrant at his age.”

I’ve thrown myself at the mercy of written words, pitching, applying, and chasing the dream so that I could evade the curse of worthlessness. Yet the eye of opportunity seemed to narrow with time, or perhaps I was nothing more than delusional.

Friends whispered, urged – get a job – making me feel as if I had to report my rejections to them. Unaware, I had already cast hundreds of applications into the void, unseen, unacknowledged. A menial job might have been a lifeline, a naïve thought.

My pleas for help were stories nobody wanted to hear – old age is a burden society chooses to ignore. I reached out for government assistance – only to be denied and told to try again when I’m on the streets. The government’s rejection cut deep, with a cruel invitation to beg only once destitute.

Suggestions flowed innocently from friends, links to potential jobs I had already been declined for – an unwitting amplification of pain. My future meals, Hana’s fate, the relentless march of time – it all converges on an inevitability I cannot escape. Is their help to make themselves feel better? To distance themselves from the reality of another’s suffering and the fragility of their existence?

Still, I keep trying.

A few friends extended a hand. Three months’ reprieve from the inevitable – they have my eternal gratitude, when I fall through the cracks, I will have failed their kindness.

Notifications of job possibilities plink incessantly – reminders not of opportunity but of a society that has forgotten me.

Yesterday, my emotions fraying at the edges like worn cloth, I sought refuge in the soothing company of friends, yearning for a fleeting respite from the relentless storm within – an email slices through the silence – a sharp ping from my phone. My friend dealt a digital missive, bombarding me with fresh links. My finger trembles as I tap the first one.

Government of Canada launches campaign to help Canadians upgrade their professional skills and succeed in their careers.

Today, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Randy Boissonnault, announced the launch of the Upgrade Your Skills advertising campaign to inform Canadians about financial supports and programs available to help them gain the skills needed to succeed in today's labour market. The campaign runs from February 5 until March 31, 2024, and targets youth (age 18 to 24) looking to start their career and adults (age 25 to 54) looking to upskill and change or improve their career.

Nausea churns through me, every cell rebelling in disgust. I'm 63 and a half years old, a testament to failure, a living embodiment of burden. My birth mother's bitter prophecy has come true.

... ..

I click the other link.

Job Bank Canada: Your Career Starts Here – (What – Example: Cook)

... ..

Exhaustion has become my shadow. The day I was terminated, my former employer didn't just fire me – they executed my dreams. The notion that I'm penning the last pages of my story haunts me with every breath.

Trudging home, I was the plaything of a crippling depression and relentless waves of nausea. The food turned traitor at dinner, and I had no choice but to heave it into the porcelain bowl. In the dim of my room, Stress and Despair performed a macabre waltz.

Crafting the fabric of my novella 'Prose' has been my refuge, my sliver of hope. It will likely never make it to the finish line. It's a testament to my journey, though one I dread may be reaching its untimely conclusion.

Amidst the gloom, my phone's chime heralds a message: a friend offering to feed Hana. Her kindness slices through the dread, but it's a bittersweet solace. I carry the burden of a secret - the life of Hana, my treasured feline companion, and my own, both hang in peril, teetering on the brink of existence too cruel, an inevitability prophesied by my mother's chilling foresight.

Sometime in the next ten days, I will be having my final meal.

If that is tough for you to read – try to think of how I feel.

... ..



14

Real Life

82

Transparency of Suffering

## Real Life: Transparency of Suffering

19 February 2024

If you're considering sending me job links for positions where you lack influence—such as being outside the hiring committee, unaffiliated with the company, lacking personal connections, or unable to vouch for me—please refrain.

Likewise, if you're tempted to send messages encouraging me to 'stay strong,' 'be resilient,' or to regard myself as a 'warrior,' or any similar sentiments, hold back.

The situation we're facing is dire, and survival seems bleak. When you take those aforementioned actions, it results in me feeling sick—both physically and emotionally. It feels like I'm being judged and urged to give up, even if that's not your intent.

If you have connections to the publishing industry or know of grants that could help, please recommend them only if they align with my goals. Irrelevant suggestions lead to wasted time and intensify my despair. If your intent to help is genuine, take the time to research before sharing a link. If you can copy and paste a link, sparing a moment to delve further might be manageable, or better yet, inquire about my aspirations. At nearly 64, my best path forward is a creative life, trusting that I possess some talent.

However, if you do come across fitting opportunities, I would appreciate you sharing them.

I am prepared to tackle any humble task to support myself while chasing my artistic dreams. This isn't about changing my entire career path; my career path was erased at the start of COVID; rather, it's about avoiding another ten years trapped in work that stifles my aspirations. After all, who would design a business with a nearly 64-year-old at its heart? You know the answer.

Should you be in a position to offer financial assistance, you can do so via my website, [www.lindsaywincherauk.com](http://www.lindsaywincherauk.com) where there's a GoFundMe link. While I hold no expectations, any help is welcome.

Presently, we're grappling with the aftermath of my former employer's exploitation and subsequent dismissal and incompetent legal support just before I turned 60, leaving us in severe financial strife as I was replaced by a younger individual at the onset of COVID-19. I genuinely thought if needed, I would get a job to stem our downfall—how wrong was I? Life is fragile.

Throughout my struggles, thirteen people within my orbit, five of whom were family members, tragically passed away. Simultaneously, I faced a critical, life-saving surgery. The time to fully process these catastrophic events has eluded me. Yet, for those who know me, surrender is not an option. Although I might appear an unyielding warrior, please refrain from such labels; my fragility and vulnerability are as real as anyone else's.

I choose to reveal these challenges not for sympathy but for confronting their existence. My reluctance to share these burdens often stems from the fear of dismissive responses like, "Everyone has their battles." And so, in silence, I consume my grief.

Our life savings have evaporated, and we've accumulated debt to stay afloat (I lost four and counting, critical income-making years) – and now we are drowning, and I don't know how to swim.

My job prospects appear non-existent, as a government worker bluntly assessed them as zero.

A recent article highlighting government aid for those up to 54 years of age excludes me by age; when a friend sent it to me, it felt like a punch to the gut because I'm ten years past the cut-off. I puked my guts out that evening as stress took over, rendering me ill.

84

Efforts to seek government assistance were futile; we were told help would only come if J also lost J's job and we both become homeless. "You can reapply when you both become homeless" were the exact words. These words came from the mouth of a representative of the Premier's office, ironically with the surname Hope.

This isn't hyperbole – it's the grim reality we face. Fear is a constant companion.

If you've followed my previous posts, you understand homelessness is a dire prospect for me – it would signify my end, a bleak and irrecoverable downfall. There is no overstating it: homelessness spells doom not only for myself but for all my relationships (including you) and my cat Hana, too. It would mark the definitive end of the line for all of us.

I beseech you not to pass judgment – that is the unvarnished truth of my circumstances. Before you're compelled to send another job link, know I've already applied for positions over 600 times, only to be met with silence or rejected.

Can you imagine the impact on the psyche of over 600 ignored job applications?

Recently, a friend sent me numerous links to job openings, but I didn't have the heart to tell them I had already applied and been rejected for each one.

Please, instead of job links, share my writing.

And if you feel compelled to speak, simply saying, "I'm sorry for what you're going through," would be enough.

Most nights, I sleep for a deficit of hours and minutes, lying awake and staring at the ceiling, fighting to keep the tears at bay.

If this narrative disturbs you, consider our desperation. We teeter on the edge of forfeiting our home and, with it, my very existence (I don't want to die on the street). It is a grim reality. My doomsday clock is counting down: only nine seconds to midnight. Sleep has turned elusive. I must steer clear of bridges, at least until the 29th.

[www.lindsaywincherauk.com](http://www.lindsaywincherauk.com)

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Real Life

86

Dead Guy on a Park Bench

## Real Life: Dead Guy on a Park Bench

I'm constantly on the move – exercising, reading, writing, dreaming – all to secure a prosperous future for my chosen family.

Two days ago, I visited the Fitness Asylum on a seemingly typical Saturday. Later, to chip away at the oppressive weight of Depression and Stress, J and I clicked over 25,000 steps. We're grappling with precarious financial prospects that cast doubt on our ability to afford life, a fate seemingly shared by many amid soaring inflation—a narrative incessantly echoed by the media.

My endeavours to combat the mounting pressures are beyond reproach. If you believe I'm overly focused or dwelling on the trivial, you've not been paying attention, or you're not truly a friend.

But let's leave that aside – J and I reached English Bay on this brisk but beautiful day. We saw a newlywed couple strolling past, perhaps trying to dodge life's harsh realities.

Our walk was filled with laughter, even as the spectre of insecurity loomed large, threatening to sap our joy.

There, perched on a rock, sat a white Persian cat sporting a yellow hat, emanating an intense cuteness. Nearby, its owner sat on a log, observing onlookers admiring the cat – possibly hoping its charm could secure their future. Why not dream?

Contrasting with the cat's lighthearted scene was the sight only feet away on the seawall path – a young man lay in a crumple on a bench, his hand blue and dangling, one shoe barely clinging to his foot. He looked dead.

This young man, unaware, competes with the cat for attention, drawing his audience.

I'm deeply unsettled, unsure of how to react.

I'm reminded of "Holden: After and Before," a poignant book by Tara McGuire (mother) that delves into loving someone enveloped in addiction. It's a must-read that can help erase the stigmatization of those suffering.

With J, I debate our next steps. Around us, about twenty bystanders gawk at the young man in need but do nothing. I wrestle with my conscience about intervening. A woman nearby with a walker and a man are watching the man – she seems to smirk, perhaps a nervous reaction in the face of discomfort.

Compelled to act, I approach the man. Someone comments that he'd smoked something before collapsing, offering no real insight.

Speaking gently, I ask, “Hey, are you okay?” There’s no answer.  
About to speak again, I notice his hand twitch faintly – he’s alive.  
But I stop at that, having done the bare minimum. I failed.

Glancing back at the crowd, I see twenty pairs of eyes locked on the man, their bodies motionless, no one stepping forward to assist. Approaching a young couple, both observers who appeared visibly upset, I inquired to confirm they were indeed focused on the weary figure before us.

I told the couple, although I thought about calling for help, I hesitated, rationalizing my inaction with the idea that emergency services might be slow to arrive and that, regrettably, scenes like this had become commonplace.

The couple mentioned they were from Calgary, where they claimed such incidents were rare – an assumption suggesting naively Calgary was somehow immune to addiction issues. Sensing their disapproval, I made a quip about their city’s Plus 15 Network, mordantly calling it a refuge for those struggling through Calgary’s harsh winters. The couple chuckled; seemingly unaware my remark was more a jab at their simplicity than a genuine joke.

This takes me back to 2006 when a Los Angeles couple, shocked at seeing someone use drugs publicly in the DTES, exclaimed to me their disbelief. I sarcastically commented on their privileged ignorance, “I guess you’ve never taken the wrong offramp.”

... ..

16

Real Life

89

Dead Man Venting



Sunday might have been the last time ever; I bought kitty litter.

90

... ..

It turns out that I am not resilient after all.

91

... ..

I wonder how far I can walk in a day?  
When we are homeless, I guess I will find out.  
Or maybe I will sit by a tree and wait...

... ..

In the next week:  
My writing aspirations will conclude when I type ‘The End.’  
And mean it.  
With the last thing I type being a period.

... ..

## 2024 Stats

Over 600 jobs applied to.

Over 800 book proposals sent out.

149 Consecutive Days at the Fitness Asylum.

Over 1.2 Million Steps Walked.

8 Books Read.

3 Books Written.

*The echo of someone telling me to get off my lazy ass and get a job.*

Please don't take the stats above as a cue to:

94

If you're considering sending me job links for positions where you lack influence—such as being outside the hiring committee, unaffiliated with the company, lacking personal connections, or unable to vouch for me—please refrain.

Likewise, if you're tempted to send messages encouraging me to 'stay strong,' 'be resilient,' or to regard myself as a 'warrior,' or any similar sentiments, hold back.

[www.lindsaywincherauk.com](http://www.lindsaywincherauk.com)

I can't care for my family, so I hope somebody will when this is all over... soon.

... ..

I think Depression and Stress are rewiring my brain.

95

... ..

I apologize for the numerous dark and enigmatic posts lately; I realize they may be troubling to the handful of people who read them. But the truth is, I'm in a dark place and despite my efforts, I can't seem to find a way out.

I'm aware of the job listings on Craigslist – thanks for the well-intended advice. However, Craigslist is rife with scams, preying upon those who are desperate. Oh, the irony of Craigslist.

And besides, in the words of someone named 'Hope' from the Premier's office on the chances of finding employment at my age, "zero."

But I knew that because I had run a staffing agency for 15 years, and the oldest person we hired was 35. We tossed all the applications of those older than that straight into the recycling bin.

I wonder what I'll come back as? A pony?

My career ended just before my sixtieth birthday, and I knew we were in for a difficult time. The relentless ticking of the clock became a grim reminder. There was this TV show that likened losing your job at 60 to a death sentence. I was skeptical, but now, their words resonate with my reality.

Over the past several months, several friends have provided critical support, keeping us afloat. Their generosity has been immense, and no words adequately express my gratitude.

However, as the hardship persists, I fear I may ultimately let their efforts go in vain. My apologies in advance; should that occur?

Today, I humbled myself by applying for financial relief, confessing to my landlord about my financial struggles – which they undoubtedly relished – and having to prove to the relief agency that my life hasn't been one grand deception to get to this point of grovelling.

To state this process is demeaning would be an understatement (I'm 64.5 and having to prove I'm not 'gaming' the system).

My request will probably be denied because I am always honest. I remain housed for now, and it will take them weeks to process my application (I'm told). By the time they make their decision, I may no longer have an address.

It's a harsh reality, but it is my reality.

Apologies for the persistent gloom.

Who knows, in a week or two, I might resort to trying crack for the first time. Not that I expect it to help.

... ..

## Talking to a Brother/Uncle For the first time after 30 Years of Silence

**Me:** I think it's time we reconnect?

**Brother/Uncle:** That would be fantastic – are you still in Vancouver?

**Me:** Yes

**Brother/Uncle:** So, what is up? Are you aware of R's illness? (R is a niece/cousin who is battling Cancer – 8 Chemo treatments done).

**Me:** I am. Crying.

**Me:** Why are you not sleeping? It's almost 10 there. (I was wrong, it was almost 9).

**Brother/Uncle:** R has her last kemo treatment tomorrow and starts radiation treatment in March. A text from you would mean a lot to her.

**Me:** I phoned. I will try again.

**Brother/Uncle:** That would be great. So, what are you up to?

**Me:** Trying to fix a breaking world with words when most people are too tired to read.

**Brother/Uncle:** We are good – just getting older – N is still working, at least for a few more months. Health is good. What about you?

**Me:** Getting older as well, an older friend told me I look six years younger than I used to – he recently told me this, but he didn't say the start age.

... ..



## A Friend I Haven't Seen in Six Months Messages Me Out of the Blue.

**Friend:** Work horrible and challenging. My partner had surgery. Apparently failed. Had MRI and surgery soon. Would 100 dollars help for Hana food now? Pop over downstairs in my building. I'll try to help more once I know my situation. 2<sup>nd</sup> surgery is worrying. I'll meet for drinks but soon but come get a few bucks for cat food. 1234 ABC Street. We will figure it out. Heart.

I love u friend and will try to help.

Friends always help each other.

I'm in on Tuesday, friend.

**Me:** Thanks for the message. I'm sorry to hear about your partner.

... ..

## A Conversation With a Friend I Haven't Spoken to in Months

**Me:** How is Mr. T?

**Friend:** He's having a difficult time. His brother is a pain.

**Me:** What's happening?

**Friend:** His brother has late-stage narcissism, he's not paying his rent. He has suicidal ideations. He wants his brother to save him.

**Me:** That's awful. Maybe he can't afford his rent and needs help.

**Friend:** He is threatening suicide.

**Me:** Sounds like he's in trouble.

**Friend:** The authorities need to take him away and lock him up so he can get help.

**Me:** What happens when they release him?

**Friend:** Mr. T, needs to let him go. To put his foot down.

**Me:** That sounds awful. Maybe he just can't afford rent.

... ..

A Message I Sent to My Co-Manager (I Mistook as a Friend)  
Where I Worked  
Who Played a Role in My Termination  
After 4 Years

100

**Me to K:** Why have you never reached out to me?

**K to Me:** | Silence |

... ..

The only question now is how?

Life is done; lock me up, institutionalize me,  
so, you don't have to look.

I'm done.

I tried.

I failed.

It's over.

I'm exhausted.

Stressed.

Depressed.

In trouble.

I don't know what to do?

I don't think I will make it to 64.

I'm not manipulating anyone.

... ..

Am I suffering from “End Stage Narcissism?”

102

... ..

Most of my friends are scattering.

103

... ..

On a scale of 1-10 how much pain are you feeling right now?

Do you want me to be honest?

Yes.

104

Spinal Tap.

The En

.....

I'M SORRY.

105

.....



6

PROSE

106

Super Fun Love Montage

## Prose: Super Fun Love Montage

**E**mbarking on a post-carnal odyssey, words dripping with honeyed sweetness cascaded from Carver’s lips, culminating in a heartfelt, “I love you, buttercup.” Graciously, he bestowed upon her a lush towel—far superior to a mere tissue, signalling an unprecedented token of adoration.

“Tiffany?” Carver’s gaze plunged into the depths of her soul. “Shall we ascend to a stratospheric realm of love?”

Perplexed, Tiffany inquired, “Which rung of the love ladder do we currently occupy?”

“Picture us at a scorching level five, searing the fabric of reality,” he mused. “Then let’s climb, my love—skyward, to uncharted territories.”

“Huh?”

“Disregard that.”

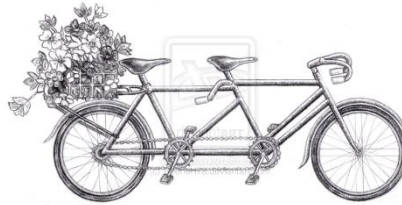
“And the chap over there with the camera—what’s his story?” Tiffany asked.

“That’s Raoul, our cinematic chronicler for the Super Fun Rom-Com Love Montage.”

“Have you lost your mind?”

“Lost in lovesick lunacy. Care for a glimpse into our enchanting escapades?”

“Indulge me.”



“Imagine us, pedaling in tandem around the serene curve of Calm Bay, culminating our journey amidst a bloom of thornless roses. There we’ll entwine, intoxicated with love and Chardonnay, as crumpets dance between our lips.”

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Thus, they cycled, weaving passion’s path around Calm Bay before collapsing upon the rose-strewn earth to love with wild abandon – each rapturous moment immortalized by Raoul’s discreet lens. In the afterglow, Carver murmured, “I love you, buttercup.”

This was a balm to Tiffany’s soul, particularly recalling a former suitor’s demolition derby debacle – where bitter beer and sauerkraut-laden hot dogs tormented her palate.

... ..



“

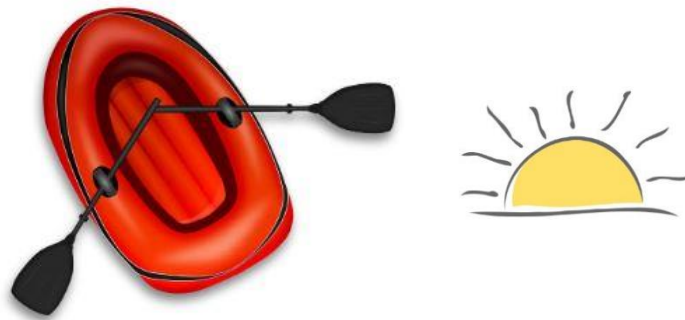
Next, we dine at Lover’s Lookout,” Carver proclaimed. “Sardine kisses and mescal fervour preceding a velveteen tangle atop Raoul’s floral laid masterpiece.”

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They picnicked, feasting under Calm Bay’s enamoured gaze, the sardines a metallic prelude to their impassioned symphony upon the petals. Raoul’s camera faithfully captured their zenith, but only under Tiffany’s **singular term**: his lens could witness their intimacy. Sated and heart-healthy, Carver leaned in, “I love you, buttercup.”

Tiffany revelled in the contrast to a former thrill – skydiving sans parachutes, which, albeit adrenaline-infused, inadvertently unleashed chaos upon her sidekick Sam’s abode.

... ..



And finally,” Carver cooed, “an aquatic ballet amidst Calm Bay’s embrace. Stripped bare, slick with oil, we’ll feast on olives, sip on Ouzo, and amidst a sea of thornless roses, an orchestral backdrop will score our love.”

Raoul’s oars sliced through tranquillity as the lovers indulged, an aural bouquet of melodies accompanying their oil-glistened unity. Film rolling, Carver’s vows echoed, “I love you, buttercup,” as he tenderly offered the soft, comforting shroud of a towel.

Following Tiffany recounting a traumatic dive, where the ocean’s fury claimed lives before her eyes, Carver’s compassion shone ever brighter.

... ..



Carver?"

"Yes, buttercup?"

"Do you know who Sparkly Pingle Ball is?"

"Who?" "Never mind."

After their intimate dance beneath the pearl-painted skies, on the gentle waves of the Calm Bay, Sam stood vigil at the dock, ready to shepherd them back to the embrace of Carver's abode. Tiffany radiated with an ethereal luminance. Enveloped in the secluded realm of Sam's Toyota Matrix, Tiffany and Carver surrendered to a tempest of wild, untamed passion. "I love you, buttercup," slipping once more from Carver's lips.

Unbeknownst to them, Reginald had meticulously planted listening devices within the spokes of the bicycle, nestled amidst the deceptively soft petals of the thornless roses in the alcove dubbed Lover's Lookout, and even within the seams of the deceptive buoyancy of the inflatable boat – all clandestine machinations orchestrated with Raoul, the singular soul in Sleeping Seagull who ignited a fire in Reginald's heart, a flame shared only with his affection for Tiffany.

The readers, however, remain in the dark about Reginald's auditory ailment, an auditory anagram disorder akin to dyslexia, that scrambles all he hears into a chorus as if played by a sinister hand spinning a vinyl into the cacophony of a twisted requiem.

Come twilight, Tiffany, and Carver, oblivious to Reginald's sinister-plotting, cocooned themselves in a shared slumber, entwined and entranced by the looping antics of Sparkly Pingle Ball.

This show dances only in the imagination of this tale's teller, yet, by some sorcery, pirouettes before Tiffany and Carver's spellbound gaze.

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The curtain falls on the most dazzling, heart-leaping romantic comedy montage ever witnessed - eclipsing the iconic shopping spree of “Pretty Woman” and the heartfelt airport reunions in “Love Actually.”

When shall my montage research reach its finale?

Just one more gem to observe. Let’s not forget the transformative splendour within the montage of “Crazy Rich Asians.”

112

A cunning twist awaits imagine when this segment of Madly. Truly. Deeply from ‘Prose’ graces the cinema’s canvas, the narrator will bestow the power to infuse the scene with the melodic charm of an Ed Sheeran anthem – quite the marvel – allowing readers to select the tune.

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Real Life

113

A Sampling of Daily Effort 365/24/7  
Over the Last 3.5 Years



## Real Life: A Sampling of Daily Effort 365/24/7/3.5

I could have titled this piece: I'm Going to Die Homeless.

I'm turning (not going to make it) 64 this year, I will likely die a homeless man who will undoubtedly be labelled with mental health issues – all because I lost my lengthy career on Day 1 of Covid-19. My crack addiction will not commence until I become homeless.

I'm sharing with you what it is like to be tied to the tracks and seeing the freight train cresting the hill, and you've exhausted every effort to survive.

This is an important story.

- Total Sleep Time in the last 7 days: Zero.
- Forecast for sleep for my last week of indoor living: Zero.
- Sleep time after that: Infinite.

Oh well.

This story is about never losing sight of compassion and empathy; we are all vulnerable. And as I learned from Ducky on NCIS, as much as I hate inspirational musings and quotes, this resonated with me.

114

“When you are going through heck, keep going.”

Facebook won't allow me to use the actual word because it prompts a 'curse warning.'

When you're passing through... no, when you arrive at hell, you'd better bring a giant book. Forget it; it's over, and you're through. Homelessness is akin to death, particularly at my age.

If you prefer that I avoid discussing our current struggles, rest assured that it will all soon conclude once we lose access to our internet, phones, and everything else. I have one week remaining, after which I will no longer share my writing, my efforts, or burden you with the heaviness of my journey.

I just cut the pills; I need to stay alive in half.

Our cat will be eating her last meal in the next few days.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

“Hey Linds, how much sleep do you think you’ll get tonight?”  
Is that question meant to be rhetorical?

I genuinely hope you never endure what we’re experiencing. I sought aid from the government and was bluntly rejected. They added that the chances of securing a job to bridge the gap, given my age, were “ZERO.” They also told me when my entire family is homeless and J has lost J’s job, we can reapply. There is no consideration for the fact we I’ve lost 4 key years of earning, exhausted my life savings and we’ve dug ourselves into unmanageable debt in order to survive.

That is not an embellishment.

Yet, I persist, continuously banging my head against a wall trying.

... ..

## A SAMPLING OF MY DAILY EFFORT

21 February 2024

1. I wrote 2 Chapters of The Days in the Life of Lindsay Wincherauk: Prose (Madly. Truly. Deeply.) (I wrote 13 books in the last year)
2. I fired off 6 applications (Some to YVR). I had previously sent stuff to YVR. I forgot. Well over 600 applications now.
3. I hit the Fitness Asylum for day 149 in a row (starting last September). There are only a few days left because I'm about to lose my membership for non-payment.
4. I pitched stories to the media.
5. I pitched stories to an entertainment company. Now, well over 800 pitches.
6. I read several chapters of 2 books. (Over 340 in the last 4 years).
7. I went over 25,000 steps. (Almost 30 million in the last 4 years).
8. I wrote my tax person.
9. I spoke with a friend in Germany. Which made me feel like a burden.

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All while battling Depression + Stress, and fearing being judged.

When I read the above, I realize what a fantastic employee I was.

This was a light day (I have done this or more 7 days per week for over 3.5 years).

And yet, we are going to become homeless because I had the audacity to get older.

What did you do today?

... ..

## What's About to Happen (Barring a Miracle)

- Two peoples' credit is being eviscerated because we can't make the minimum payments. And we've exhausted our olive branches (I don't have a family).
- Our communication is about to be shut off. When that happens all of the job applications and book proposals will cease.
- I'm dragging a chosen family member down with me because I've become obsolete in the eyes of the work world. (See over 600 job applications).
- J (chosen family) will lose J's job because J is required to work from home occasionally, and without communication, J will no longer be able to work.
- I am now cutting my life-sustaining medications in half (maybe I should cut them in quarters).
- We can't afford to eat. J has lost 40 pounds he couldn't afford to lose; I have lost over 35.
- **Next week when we don't pay rent, we will be evicted.**
- When we are evicted, all of our worldly possessions will be gone. At 64 they are never coming back. Once my credit is eviscerated...
- **When we are evicted, I will die on the street.**

I've exhausted all possible olive branches, only to isolate myself more in the process. I wouldn't wish this experience on anyone. As I've struggled, many of my so-called friends have distanced themselves or ceased communication.

This may be partly because I've distended from receiving job links and inspirational quotes. It's more likely because people fear people who are in pain.

Moreover, when I desperately sought assistance from the government, I was met with suspicion, as if I were attempting to defraud the system.

I don't want to die homeless. Barring a miracle, I am going to die homeless.

I must extend a gigantic thank you to all who have offered their support and helped us ward off the seemingly inevitable. I must acknowledge this. Feeling isolated and burdensome is often part of suffering, intensified by advancing years.

Nonetheless, were it not for the unwavering support from Wes, Gary, Wayne & Fiona, J's Mum + Aunt, Mary, and countless other acts of kindness—from beers to unnamed favours—I couldn't be more grateful. Rest assured, my attempts to thank you will persist, yet in all honesty, fear grips me. Sleep eludes me, and I can feel the chain reaction of unrelenting despair beginning.

Warm Regards,

Lindsay Wincherauk

... ..

by Lindsay Wincherauk

18

Real Life

118

Life Timeline: 16 July 1960 – 2024

**1960 – 1982 PRESS PLAY**

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**1960 – 2002**

120

## 1960-1982

- 16 July 1960: Born. Youngest of seven. Yay world!
- 1965: I'm brought home for the first time.

... ..

### SPORTING LIFE

1. 1972: Won Division in Junior Golf Tournament.
2. 1972: All Star Second Baseman and City Champion Sandlot Baseball.
3. 1977: City and Provincial Champion Football (Quarterback): Evan Hardy Souls. 121
4. 1978: National Champion (Quarterback): Saskatoon Hilltops.
5. 1979: Record for Longest | Touchdown | Pass in Canadian Junior Football: 108 Yards to Gord Bolstad: Edmonton Wildcats.
6. 1980: Inducted into Three Sporting Halls of Fame (Evan Hardy. Saskatoon. Saskatchewan).
7. September 1982: My last pass in my football career (U of S Huskies) is a touchdown to Ron Deutscher. Before the game I asked Ron if he'd scored a touchdown in his five-year career. Ron said "no." I told him you will today. A fitting way to end my career because my first four passes of my U of S career were interceptions.

... ..



**1985**

**FAMILY DEATHS**

122

1. 17 July 1985: (Father) Nicholas Died after lengthy illness that started when I was 19.

... ..

**1987**

**FAMILY DEATHS**

123

2. 12 December 1987: (Mother) Rebekah Died after a yearlong illness. Her last word to me was “goodbye.”

... ..

**1981 – 1990**

**MEDICAL TRAUMAS (AND OTHER)**

1. Knee Surgery: 1. (1981)
2. Knee Surgery: 2. (1981)
3. Knee Surgery: 3. (1981)
4. Appendicitis Surgery. (1987)
5. 1988: Moved to Regina.
6. December 1989: Moved back to Saskatoon.
7. 14 February 1990: Moved to Vancouver.

124

.....

**1997**

**FAMILY DEATHS**

3. 29 September 1997: My Uncle Roy, Died.

.....

**2002**

**FRIEND DEATHS**

1. 29 June 2002: Ron Deutscher, Died.

125

.....

**1985-2002 Totals**

Family Deaths = 3.

Friend Deaths = 1.

Medical Traumas (And Other) = 3+++

Surgeries = 4.

.....

## 2003 – 2004

### FRIEND DEATHS

2. 7 March 2003: Young Friend Brandon dies by suicide.

### FAMILY DEATHS

4. 24 March 2003: My Aunt Priscilla, Died.

126

### MEDICAL TRAUMAS (AND OTHER)

8. 19 July 2003: Discovered My Parents Weren't Really My Parents. I become an only child.
9. 21 October 2003: Find out the Identity of My Birth Parents.
10. 30 June 2004: I'm told my Birth Mother Bernice had a daughter four years after me. I have a younger sister; I will never know. I'm the eldest of two.

... ..

## 2006 – 2009

### MEDICAL TRAUMAS (AND OTHER)

11. 6 November 2006: I met my Birth Father (Elmer) for the first time. I'm one of four children. He wants to welcome me into his family with open arms.
12. 20 November 2006: Phone (Elmer) to tell him my Mother lied on my Birth Registration and he's not my Father. I'm back to being the eldest of two.
13. 13 March 2009: Key Witness in Canada's first Hate Crime Designation (Ritchie Dowrey). Speak in front of a crowd of 5,000+.
14. 10 August 2010: Shawn Woodward is found guilty of a Hate Crime (sentenced to six years – he's out in two). While Ritchie never recovers from a catastrophic brain injury.

.....

# 2014 Stats

Life Ribbons: Best Man = 8.

128

Wedding MC = 1.

Wedding Usher = 3.

Pallbearer = 3.

.....

**2015**  
**FRIEND DEATHS**

129

3. 31 January 2015: Ritche Dowrey, Died.

.....



**2016**

130

## FAMILY DEATHS

5. 25 March 2016: My youngest niece/cousin (Allison), Died.
6. 15 October 2016: Bernice, Died.
7. 21 December 2016: my youngest sister/aunt (Beverly), Died.

## FRIEND DEATHS

4. 21 June 2016: My childhood friend, Bernard Hrapchak, Died.

## MEDICAL TRAUMAS (AND OTHER)

15. 8 October 2016: I met my mother (Bernice), for the first time as my mother, alongside her deathbed, where I said “hello” (to her for the first time as her son) and “goodbye.”

The last words I said to her, was, as I hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, I said, “I give you my love and my strength.”

The last words she said to me were, “I am never going to see you again, am I?”

... ..

## 2017-2020

### FAMILY DEATHS

8. 16 February 2019: my uncle, Gordon, Died.

.....

132

### FRIEND DEATHS

5. 14 February 2018: A close friend, Jeff V, Died.
6. 12 December 2019: My ex-flatmate and friend, Jason D, Died.
7. 15 October 2020: Close friend, Scotty Larin, Died. The same date my mum (sister), Bernice, Died.

.....

## MEDICAL TRAUMAS (AND OTHER)

16. April 2017: I was diagnosed with Sarcoidosis. An environmentally (workplace) caused inflammatory disease.
17. 5 January 2018: I suffered a catastrophic stroke.
18. November 2019: I was diagnosed with an Alpha One Deficiency (A life-ending genetic disease that destroys the lungs). Life expectancy equalled my current age.
19. 12 March 2020: Lengthy career terminated for getting older at the start of COVID-19.
20. 29 September 2020: Life Saving Throat Surgery.

.....

Total Adult Surgeries = 14 (Including 7 Knee).

.....

## 2021-2024

# FAMILY DEATHS

134

9. 12 December 2021: My aunt (sister) Sadie, died. The same date as my (grand)mum, Rebekah, died, and my ex-roommate, Jason D, died.

.....

## FRIEND DEATHS

135

8. 25 March 2022: Ex-girlfriend, Dannell P, Died.

.....

## MEDICAL TRAUMAS (AND OTHER)

21. 29 June 2021: Legal Deposition.
22. 17 December 2021: Heart Episode (Emergency Room).
23. 8 June 2022: Spoke to 1st Cousin (Ancestry) who could possibly tell me who my father is.
24. June 2022: After speaking several times, my cousin ghosts me.
25. 9 September 2022: Counteroffer Proposal sent to Staffing Agency (one week to respond). 911 days after my termination.
26. Jobs Applied For = Over 850. Book Proposals = Over 850.
27. 1 April 2024: The En

136

I think perhaps all of this ↑↑↑ has finally caught up with me and I can no longer hide.

... ..

*It's called Life*  
If, 2 09/11/69 7:46

GETTING TO KNOW ME

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Mar 25: Niece Died (Allison)	April: Diagnosed with Sarcoidosis	Jan 5: Suffered Stroke	Feb 16: Uncle Died (Gordon)	January Alpha 1 Mis-Diagnosed!	June 29 Deposition
June 21: Close Friend Bernard Died	Monthly Specialist Visits	Feb 24: Close Friend Jeff Vallevand Died	June 1 Transferred to Surrey	March 2: Asked About? Career Future	July 16: Turned 61
Oct 8: Met Mother for First Time		Asked Repeatedly About Career Future?	November Diagnosis Alpha 1 Deficiency	Mar 9: Told to train. Lito fast in case I get Covid	Dec 12: Sister Died (Sadie)
Oct 15: Mother Died (Bernice)		Asked Repeatedly Will You Run Surrey?	December 12: RIP Jason Draginda	Mar 12: Terminated 15-Year Career Gone Lito replaced me.	Dec 12: Anniversary Of Mother's (?) Death
Dec 21: Sister Died (Beverly)		Answered Repeatedly "NO. It could kill me."	Dec (?) - Jan - Feb (20) - Mar (20) → Training Lito	July 16: Turned 60	December 17 Heart Episode (ER)
		Monthly Specialist Visits		Sept 29 Life Saving Surgery	December 24 CT Scan
		May (Neurologist) Stroke Confirmed		Oct 15: Close Friend Scotty Died	→ Being Scheduled For Heart MRI: 2022

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- During my lengthy work career, the powers that be did not care about any of the **10 DEATHS (5 FRIENDS)** or **Medical Issues** – I never had a single day off for any of the traumatic events. Nor was it suggested. The powers that be did not care.



*It's called Life*  
 If, 2 09/169 7!t6

*GETTING TO KNOW ME*  
 GETTING TO KNOW ME

2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Jan 7: Cardiologist (Dr. Lee)	July 16: Turned 63	July 16: Turned 64			
Feb 15: Heart MRI	December Dr. Lee dumps me Moves to Alberta	Over the last 4 years I have applied for over 800 jobs - 1 Interview.			
March 25: RIP Danell Piero		Over the last 4 years I have made over 800 book proposals			
April 1: Heart Stress Test					
Nov 1: Heart Follow-up					
I have a cardiologist. Dr. Lee					

- During my lengthy work career, the powers that be did not care about any of the **10 DEATHS (5 FRIENDS)** or **Medical Issues** – I never had a single day off for any of the traumatic events. Nor was it suggested. The powers that be did not care.

## 2024

I exercise every day.

I write every day.

I have applied for over 850 jobs (many menial), I've had one interview, the rest are age rejections. For the interview, I met with the company twice, each time because there is no bus service when the interview ended (at their location), I had to walk 14-miles (each time) to get to transit. If they hired me my daily commute would be over 4 hours.

My stress is through the roof, despite me seeming calm.

I've written 13 manuscripts in the last two years (actively pitching).

139

I read every day. I walk an average of 12 miles per day – most of the time I feel off balance like I'm going to collapse.

I don't sleep. I fear homelessness. Despite my undeniable efforts.

Without question, I am battling depression.

I'm a soon-to-be 64-year-old man who is earning a whopping \$500 on CPP.

I reached out to the government for assistance and was told they can't help until I become homeless.

A representative of the premier's office, named 'Hope' told me I'm in age purgatory and my chance of finding employment (that would likely kill me), is nonexistent.

—

## **1985-2002 Totals**

Family Deaths = 3.

Friend Deaths = 1.

Medical Traumas (And Other) = 3+++

Surgeries = 4.

.....

## **Totals 2003 – 2024**

Family Deaths = 6. (2016-2020 = 5)

Friend Deaths = 7. (2016-2020 = 5)

Medical Traumas (And Other) = 24+++

Surgeries = 10+++.

Strokes = 1?

Godchildren = 5.

.....

## **Totals 1960 – 2024**

Family Deaths = 9.

Friend Deaths = 8.

Medical Traumas/Surgeries (And Other) = 27+++

Surgeries = 14.

Strokes = 1?

Godchildren = 5.

.....

by Lindsay Wincherauk

19

Real Life

141

Property Brothers: Cat Scratching Post Edition

## Real Life: Property Brothers: Cat Scratching Post Edition

Lindsay's voice trembles as he delves into this manuscript's 'Real-Life' section. The words are heavy, saturated with an almost palpable disturbance. He knows the weight of his truths stirs concern and provokes discomfort – why, they ask, must he burden readers with such profundity?

And to that, he ponders, is he selfish in his revelation?

Yet the question stands—should people be forced to suppress their anguish, bury their strife, and choke back their suffering?

Lindsay recounts passionately why he transcribes his torment. As much as he occasionally contends with the urge to offer an apology, he understands contrition is not the remedy.

He writes not merely because he can, but because his pain is tangible and relentless. It's an unruly force, puppeteering his day-to-day, and he insists it's not an act of manipulation but a cry of authenticity.

He believes every soul must assert their narrative, to shout into the void of their existence and declare, without fear, the essence of their hurt.

He knows everyone battles their demons, and that life's tribulations are universal. Yet, Lindsay refuses to downplay suffering for the sake of maintaining fantastical perceptions of a world brimming with eternal optimism—be it clad in sunshine, lollipops, or roses (the fitting metaphor escapes him, and frankly, it's trivial in the grand scheme).

He sees his words as a lighthouse amid tempestuous seas—a call for a shift in our collective discourse, a plea to listen and understand rather than turn away.

He writes of pain, not as a masochist, but as an onlooker, revealing the stark narrative of one often idolized as a beacon of strength and resilience, a fighter, as they say.

If he, revered as such, can feel his world collapsing around him, what fate awaits those who lack the means to articulate their sorrow?

His reality is bleak—his chosen family's sustenance is dwindling, their resources spent—and the truth of their world reveals itself in stark, unforgiving terms.

Before snickering or scoffing, he implores the reader to acknowledge there is also fervent kindness, empirical compassion, and silent solidarity from those who witness their plight and extend a hand, free of judgment.

The danger looms large before his homelessness. It's a prospect he can hardly fathom, the entropy of it all. While some might glean a forecast of surrender, a submission to the void, from his writings, he confesses to a timidity that forestalls such an end. But he's also starkly aware if life were to spiral into destitution, the choice of his destiny might no longer rest in his hands.

What, he ponders, becomes of those priced out of existence?

Wander the streets, observe without prejudice, and you might glimpse a reality filtered through the lens of suffering—a multitude of souls cast aside, judged, and scornfully disregarded.

It's a human flaw, this disgust in the face of others' misfortune, he muses disdainfully.

Life does not discriminate in its hardships, and, at the mercy of cruel happenstance, Lindsay hopes that the world might show mercy, offering spaces for voices to echo, unshackled.

He understands people's trepidation when facing another's anguish—the helplessness of not knowing how to respond. Let his be your crucible, he offers. Through his narrative, learn what pains him, what salves, what pushes him to the brink, and what renews his resolve to persist.

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Embrace his chronicle as a blueprint, not tailored to every soul, yet undeniably universal in its resonance.

He writes through his pain—for himself, for you, for us all.

... ..

Cousteau settles into the chair beside the Mayor and me, the ebb and flow of our discussion unexpectedly steering towards the realm of music.

Intriguingly, Bobby Vinton surfaces, and Cousteau, with a discernible sneer, describes Vinton as a somewhat unctuous character. He launches into a tale, recounted with vivid detail, of a time Vinton allegedly found himself in the company of three African American prostitutes.

I interject abruptly, questioning the necessity of their race in his narrative; can they not simply exist in the story as prostitutes?

Cousteau's expression crumples into confusion at my interjection, prompting me to delve deeper, challenging the insidious nature of his racialized account. Why, I probe with mounting intensity, must he infuse his stories with racial undertones?

Dumbfounded, he offers no reply.

In the solitude of the approaching night, I lie awake, besieged by memories of my literary past. I sift through many novels I've penned, recognizing the countless times I've woven race into narratives without purpose.

A resolve crystallizes within me; I must revisit my works, armed now with the insight of someone striving to dismantle the lingering scaffolds of ingrained prejudice.

Through my introspection, I acknowledge that while on rare occasions the mention of ethnicity enhances the tapestry of a tale, in most instances – a staggering 99.9999874% to quantify – it contributes nothing but a reinforcement of systemic racism and societal divisiveness.

I owe a reluctant debt of gratitude to Cousteau; his unwitting exhibition of bias has illuminated my own, sparking an unwavering resolve to aspire towards a higher standard of awareness and empathy. His racial inclinations catalyze my transformation, igniting within me an unquenchable thirst to grow beyond the confines of a bias-laden worldview.

... ..

Beside me sits Whom, his life frayed by the twin threads of financial turmoil and the relentless progression of Parkinson’s disease. With a tremor in his voice matching the tremble in his hands, he recounts his recent visit to our mutual friend, Dean, who shares the same affliction, but is terminal.

He had offered Dean a tome on their shared illness, with the faint hope that its pages might provide solace or understanding. I bite my tongue, pondering the bitter irony—wouldn’t such a book serve as an unwelcome mirror, reflecting a reality too painful to confront? The gesture would be salt in an open wound, patronizing at best and heartbreaking at worst.

But then, that’s my perspective; others might differ.

Did Whom consider whether Dean would welcome such a gift?

It seems doubtful.

.....



So-and-So (name changed) strides into the bar with a grin that exudes empathy and warmth. This man – this paragon of human compassion – has extended me a lifeline of acceptance without a hint of pity.

Rather than dispensing charity with strings attached, he gifts me acts of understanding, like funds for a pint of beer. He comprehends the value of preserving dignity and the importance of connection during distress.

His kindness is a lesson in humanity, one I intend to honour and replicate when fortune smiles upon me again.

Yet, even now, my introspection is interrupted as Whom, emboldened by some unfathomable impulse, makes a crass remark about So-and-So's physique.

I challenge him, demanding the purpose of such an observation. The question seems to disorient him. He defends his words as nothing more than a statement of truth.

Again, I press him – why does it matter, and what use is such a comment to me?

Then, a firm request: refrain from such pettiness in the future.

In a way, Whom imparts his brand of wisdom, a blueprint of attitudes to avoid. Whether he heeds, my admonishment remains to be seen.

I fail to remind Whom of the day he forgot his wallet and So-and-So took care of his tab.

... ..

**L**ife presents an array of challenges, each one a jagged peak on an unending horizon. In the ink flowing from my pen, I pour forth the essence of my pain, offering it to the world as a mirror – a reflective surface where we may all pause.

Before we unleash words or actions that might amplify the burdens carried by others, let us halt, ponder, and attentively consider their weight.

To those who navigate life’s intricate maze with the spectre of ingrained, prejudiced thoughts shadowing their steps, I offer this counsel: When your gaze falls upon an individual marked as ‘other’ in the landscape of your mind, temper the instinct to vocalize your immediate judgments.

Restrain these swift conclusions within the silent vault of your thoughts.

Repeat this act of conscious silence until the turbulence of your initial reactions stills, and the surface of your mind is as placid as untouched water.

Embrace this practice and observe – perhaps to your astonishment – how the quietude that blossoms forth lends a soothing balm to your soul.

... ..

**2**G grasps the talking stick, its polished surface reflecting the intent in his eyes.  
“Hey,” he begins, his voice a mix of earnestness and a hint of sheepishness, “does anyone know a skilled craftsman who can refurbish my feline companion’s beloved scratching post?”

148

Beneath the diffuse glow of the overhead light in the pub, six grown men shift in their seats, a mix of bemusement and contemplation painting their faces as they prepare to delve into a discourse about a cat scratching post.

... ..

Roughly one year prior, I was informed of the existence of a modest trust fund left behind by my late second mother. As her only found kin (I have a sister somewhere), it seemed destined to find its way into my hands – an inconsiderable sum, barely enough to scrape by for a couple of months, but vital, nonetheless.

The legal advisors in the frostbitten heart of Alberta assured me that a mere five days would suffice for the fund’s release. Yet a whole year has passed since those assurances, and with each query I pose, a creeping sensation overtakes me, whispering I have become an unwelcome pest in their eyes. This sense of intrusion, a feeling that gnaws at me with unsettling persistence, mars each day.

Depression and Stress have become my relentless sparring partners, delivering cruel blows to the very core of my being. I falter, knees buckling under the weight of their forceful jabs. Rising to my feet has become a herculean task I question with each shallow breath I take. Perhaps I will manage it, or maybe I will crumble.

Uncertainty is my constant shadow. In the quiet solitude of my dimly lit room, I draft countless messages to the indifferent law practitioners, whose responses – if any – lack any semblance of urgency. It’s as if my pleas evaporate before ever reaching their ears.

Frustration courses through me, for how can I discern their true thoughts or intentions?

Fighting for my due inheritance somehow leads me to the sombre undertaking of penning my inaugural Last Will, the document emerging from my despair as a tangible echo of my waning hope.

Should anything happen to me before the trust fund matter is settled and I become unreachable, please ensure that the funds are directed to JWL (JL).

He can be contacted at [12345@lastwill.com](mailto:12345@lastwill.com) or 123.444.4444

Warm Regards,

Lindsay Wincherauk

To make something perfectly clear, I don’t want JL to collect.

... ..

A sliver of light pierced through the tangled web of our financial calamity: It seems the culminating delay owed its existence to my maternal figure – be she my mother, aunt, or sister – whose lawyer proved to be a charlatan. The insurance titan, bloated from its exorbitant wealth, froze the funds with all the indifference of a behemoth, content to inflate its coffers rather than consider our desperation to weather a month, or perhaps two, without succumbing.

J and I have grown accustomed to subsisting on whatever scraps the earth offers. One sun-kissed morning, we stumbled upon a veritable trove: a basket of fruit abandoned like treasure on the sandy shore, boxes of unopened crackers and cookies, and a bevy of chocolates still sheathed in their metallic wraps – each item we savoured, except the solitary, untouched toothbrush we also found laying on the ground.

150

Interrupting the quiet desperation of our circumstances, the chime of an incoming email: FUTURE TRANSACTIONS MAY BE DECLINED.

Wrapped within that foreboding message lay an odd blessing – the nearing zenith of our credit limit would afford us another precious month connected to the world through phones and the internet’s ethereal web.

A debt of gratitude I owe you, So-and-So, for your ceaseless benevolence has woven a thin thread of normalcy into my existence. Your gift of support dangles the 'MAY BE' like a carrot before us – a chance to persist, a nudge toward perseverance.

I reach out to my former employer.

**Dear Former Employer,**

I hope this message finds you well. Despite the difficult circumstances you're currently facing, I genuinely sympathize with your situation.

As for me, trouble has struck, and time is running out as I hear the metaphorical clock ticking louder each day. It feels like the pieces of my life are precariously stacked, ready to topple at any moment.

I'm reaching out because I need help. I'm without family support, and I've exhausted every connection available to me.

Despite my monumental efforts, I've made no progress over the past three and a half years, including sending out over 1,400 applications and proposals.

A government official confirmed my chances of finding employment at my age are virtually nonexistent.

Imminently, two lives plus one of a beloved cat is on the line.

I fear I won't be able to cope with homelessness, and the situation is not only ruining my credit but J's as well. And when we lose our communication, J will lose J's employment. My guilt is overwhelming. I feel like a burden.

If you can offer any assistance, I would be incredibly grateful.

Perhaps there's something I can do for you in return.

Specifically, I'm not seeking charity, just a helping hand.

**Warm regards, and thank you for taking the time to read this,**

**Lindsay**

P.S. After my career ended, I realized that any hope of gaining new employment was slim, not unlike the prospects of my creative endeavours succeeding (they will, hopefully, while I'm still alive) or re-entering the job market.

FYI: I tried to write one of the slimy lawyers to share what is happening, and guess what? Gone.

... ..

If you ever find yourself amidst a cadre of wizened gentlemen, each weathered by the passage of six storied decades, and the query of refurbishing a feline's beloved scratching post arises, take a moment to assess your being. You might be closer to the grave than you realize.

152

... ..

In the ever-winding road of life, when a friend is trapped in the quagmire of financial woes – especially in their advanced years – and if your fortunes permit you to help, take this advice: do not wait for their plea; instead, you should proactively offer assistance.

They already feel their pride bruised, burdening others.

Was my last entreaty tinged with manipulation?

Possibly.

You're rather transparent when it comes to deceit.

Is that inherently wrong?

... ..



Consider the nomenclature burden bestowed upon one at birth – take ‘Rodney,’ for instance.

Does it not teeter on a spectral scale of gender association?

Could you envision a Rodney who battles through life’s trials, one of which might be deemed superficial yet deeply cutting – the affliction of carrying a name while also shouldering the societal jests surrounding physical inadequacy?

Does such humour even warrant a chuckle?

Perhaps, marginally.

Those graced with intelligence seldom descend into the troughs of crass jesting.

Am I to be counted among them?

It seems the clickbait of the day declares the genuinely enlightened refrain from self-proclamation of their wit.

Precisely.

... ..

7

PROSE

155

Smitten

## Prose: Smitten

Sam inquired, his gaze expectant, as he turned toward Carver amidst the lingering chatter of the dispersing crowd. “So, what did you make of the movie?”

Carver raised an eyebrow, levelling a dry look at his friend, the corners of his mouth twitching with an unamused smirk. “Frankly,” he drawled, “it was underwhelming, to say the least. Considering how the critics raved about it – saying you’d laugh yourself to a veritable death from sheer hysterics – I thought we’d be stepping over bodies on the way out. Yet, here we all are, painfully intact. Sam, hyperbole in reviews like that? It’s like setting a snare for disappointment.”

Arm in arm, Sam and Carver raced down the street, their feet pounding the pavement in a lively search for mirth, inspired by a quirky adage: laughter begets running. This odd notion mirrored the premise of an Action/Adventure/Comedy they had recently watched, aptly titled ‘Runner,’ and starring none other than Usain Bolt.

In this cinematic escapade, Bolt instead of the usual fat suspects, portrays a small-time crook who triggers a kaleidoscopic manhunt by every conceivable law enforcement agency, from S.W.A.T. teams to all the FBI and NCIS units, and even the persistent detectives of Hawaii Five-0.

The movie unfolds as a relentless seven-hour chase where the elusive ‘runner’ Bolt is forever just out of grasp, with law enforcers engaging in comical fartlek training, desperate to match his speed.

The high point of each scene is Hondo’s dramatic lunges, soaring through the air but always falling short, as the enigmatic ‘Rabbit,’ Bolt himself, dashes on.

Indeed, the only break in the wild pursuit comes from the singular line of dialogue – a shouted “Rabbit” – each time Bolt surges forward.

Billed as a comedy yet devoid of real humour, ‘Runner’ is as much an endurance test for the audience as it is for its on-screen pursuers. With nobody dying in the end.

En route to the bar, their eyes are drawn to a poster wrapped around a light pole. “Feeling at your wit’s end? Discover the hilarity of ‘Runner’ – a film that promises laughter until your very last breath.”

It explains the heartening transformation of 47 downtrodden, dishevelled film enthusiasts who emerged from ‘Runner,’ tear-streaked yet inexplicably lighter. On their way out, they clutch a brochure boasting an array of comedies guaranteed to leave you in stitches until the end. Lined up curbside, five eager vans idle, ready to whisk them away to another realm of escapism at the nearest Cineplex.

Tina and Bullet, his name as piercing as their argument, are locked in a intense exchange on the street. Carver, his concern punctuating the air, inquires if all is well. Through her tears, which seem to carve a path down her cheeks, Tina pleads, “Bullet, no, I love you! How can I possibly go on without you?”

Sam interjects with a mischievous grin, “Tina, and I wonder how I even know your name – look, don’t drown in your sorrows over a lost love, because every Tuesday, IKEA hosts the ‘Freshly Broken Up Day.’ It’s where they master the art of morphing a shared life into two shiny, refurbished existences.” *Two homes whence there was one – we hope you break up.*

Peter huddles in the shadowy alcove of a shuttered store, murmuring confessions to indifferent strangers that he favours cats over dogs for their lone-wolf mystique.

Abruptly, a voice barks back, mocking Peter’s naivete – cats, he snorts, are hardly self-sufficient when they can’t even stock their own pantry or tidy up their messes.

Caught off guard, Peter’s face contorts in befuddlement. Without missing a beat, the Property Brothers drift past, a newly minted cat scratching post hoisted between them, oblivious to the exchange.

The Director late to the party barks, “Background.”

One block remains between Cousteau and the bar’s beckoning lights. Beside him, an exchange unfolds with the Postman, his frame slender, his age nearing the seventh decade. With a glint in his eye, he confesses, “I still wake up in the morning, passion stirring within me.” Cousteau offers a nod, and then a wry “Good to know” slipping from his lips. An irrepressible chuckle escapes Carver, breaking the evening’s stillness.

Within earshot, three forlorn souls collapsed, their laughter echoing hauntingly until the last whispers of life fled their bodies. They were sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers, gatekeepers, addicts, rapists, and petty thieves. None were fated to return home, their demise sealed by the unexpected consequence of the Postman’s morning arousal and Cousteau’s meticulous note-taking.

Twenty paces from the bar, a pulsating rhythm takes hold, and there, the Brazilian dance troupe commands the air. With each agile move, they tell a tale of grace and power. I fumble mentally for the name – Tapioca? No, that’s not right. Carpaccio? Hardly closer. Ah, it clicks now - Capoeira. With the name finally correct in my mind, I can’t help but silently cheer. Bingo.

The Capoeira troupe's leader erupted into a performance as dynamic as a live wire, his body a whirlwind of motion synchronized with Brazil's relentless rhythms. He vaulted effortlessly from headstands to tortoise poses and seamlessly integrated unconventional moves like kip-ups and burpees.

At the eye of this storm of energy was the Mayor – yes, the Mayor – an octogenarian Caucasian brandishing a cane, not for support, but as a dance prop. A master of the fluid dance-fight art of Capoeira, his every movement defied his years in a breathtaking display that was as bewildering as it was captivating.

Meanwhile, Cousteau looked on, his eyes wide with disbelief. Never in his wildest dreams had he envisioned his elderly friend dubbed 'The Mayor' could move with such improbable grace and power.

“Want to check out this place? I hear it's lit,” Sam suggests as if 'lit' is still a thing.

“Let's do it,” Carver agrees, and they stride into a bar dubbed the Liquor Hole.

Admittedly, it's a terrible name, surpassing even the absurdity of a bar owner, and client in a previous life, who named her establishment “It's a Secret” and then was confused when it failed – no mystery.

During a date in my past, my seemingly meek female companion surprised me by assaulting the bouncer in response to his rudeness towards me, on a night where I performed as a hair model. Meanwhile, the three onlookers doubled over with laughter, picturing my frailty as if the altercation were that night's planned amusement.

The director shouts, “Action.”

“Could we have four double bourbons and a pitcher of beer?” Carver's voice, steady and sure, cuts through the din of the nearly deserted Liquor Hole. He locks eyes with the bar's strapping male server.

In the furthest corner, a solitary figure lurks in the shadows, a mirage in the dim light. It's Reginald, Carver's twin, an enigmatic presence wrapped in a mysterious haze of smoke, his features hauntingly mirroring Carver's own.

“Sam, she's stolen my heart. Tiffany, she's the one,” Carver confesses, a goofy grin spreading across his face. “You've played cupid, my friend. I owe you everything for this.”

“Cheers to that!”

Sam and Carver knock back their bourbons, the liquid fire stoking the emotions within. Their beer mugs clink in a hearty follow-up as Sam proclaims, “I’ve always said it – you two are a celestial match.”

The air grows thick around them, a haze forming that has no place in the smoke-free sanctum of the bar – a reflection of some inner turmoil, no doubt. A wave of irritation washes over Carver, but thoughts of Tiffany quickly douse it. “She’s everything, Sam. I’m going to do it – I’m going to ask for Tiffany’s hand.”

“In marriage?”

“No, Sam, I genuinely want her hand – for my mantelpiece.”

“Are you being sarcastic?”

“Of course not. Yes, I mean in marriage, obviously.”

Usain Bolt flashes by the window in a blur of speed. Hondo lunges after him, but with the gracelessness of a bird slamming into a skyscraper, he crashes into the bar’s patio doors. Reginald rushes to Hondo’s side, hoisting him up with a steadying grip.

“I’ve decided its time – I’m proposing to Tiffany.”

“Seriously? This calls for an epic bachelor bash to end all bashes!”

“When can you pull off such a legendary soiree?”

“Two Saturdays from now. Mark it down.”

Reginald, like a fly on the wallpaper, etches a cunning plan on his bar tab, the ink barely keeping pace with his racing heart: In the haze of the evening, with Sam and Carver guzzling spirits like a scene from a Nicolas Cage film, I’ll seize the moment. I’ll take Butterfly’s hand, captivate her heart, and whisk her away on an exhilarating Love Montage escapade straight out of the silver screen fantasies. She’ll soar, heart aflutter, completely unaware she’s falling into my carefully spun web, the echo of my sinister laughter intertwining with our footsteps – all unbeknownst to my older brother as he swills his life away.

Across town at the Cineplex, an eerie misfortune befell forty-seven unsuspecting theatregoers. Intent on seeing the hit comedy “LOL Till You Die,” they instead filed into the wrong theatre, only to become ensnared in the ironically titled “No-Background Check Required” – a grim twist of fate aligning all too well with their unintended wish for oblivion.

The chapter's suspense hinges on a breath-hanging query: Will Tiffany respond with an affirmation?

"Yes," comes the reply, clear and unwavering.

"Is that you, Tiffany?"

"No," the voice retorts, a shade cooler.

"Then who speaks?"

A firm "YES," echoes again, defiant in its obscurity. "Owner of a Lonely Heart," the voice claims, almost taunting.

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*Will they grasp the reference, you think?*

"Doubtful," comes the dry chuckle in response.

"Are you invoking the spirit of Charlie Kaufman now?"

"Possibly," the admission is shrouded in mystery.

Laughter dark and resonant, Reginald's mirth grows, a sinister undercurrent to the chapter's end.

Carver is smitten.

... ..

20

Real Life

161

Ramblings of a Man in Pain



I think Depression and Stress are rewiring my brain.

162

... ..

**T**he only question now is how?  
Life is done; lock me up, institutionalize me, so you don't have to look.  
I'm done.

I tried.

I failed.

It's over.

I'm not manipulating anyone.

... ..

I must extend a gigantic thank you to all who have offered their support and helped us ward off the seemingly inevitable. I must acknowledge this. Feeling isolated and burdensome is often part of suffering, intensified by advancing years.

Nonetheless, were it not for the unwavering support from Wes, Gary, Wayne & Fiona, J's Mum + Aunt, Mary, and countless other acts of kindness—from beers to unnamed favours—I couldn't be more grateful. Rest assured, my attempts to thank you will persist, yet in all honesty, fear grips me. Sleep eludes me, and I can feel the chain reaction of unrelenting despair beginning.

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[www.lindsaywincherauk.com](http://www.lindsaywincherauk.com)

The words from a friend, "There must be some jobs out there somewhere for businesses who need people with great writing skills," that's the kind of encouragement that helps, as opposed to naming a company and telling me they are hiring.

... ..

I try to be honest with every second I breathe. 165

... ..

This is my last week goodbye.  
Sorry, my mother was right, I failed.

... ..

166

**T**o all my friends, share everything I have written with everyone you know, because I'm a fantastic writer.  
Love.

Lindsay

You never know who maybe reading.

Bye.

... ..

**W**hen I was a wee lad, my plan was to live to this age. Work hard, survive a stroke, and then have to prove to the government I'm not scamming when I SCREAM for help.

168

... ..

Maybe if I cut out coffee.  
I could buy a house.  
I don't even drink coffee.  
I'm screwed.

....



**D**espite applying for over 700 jobs, even the most menial, I've only had one interview in which the interviewer called me old. London Drugs has now rejected me nine times. So have every fast-food restaurant, hotel, car dealership, and so on and on and on.

My efforts include sending out more than 800 writing pitches, reviewing over 340 books for publishers, and taking 30 million steps (in four years). I've attended the Fitness Asylum for 153 consecutive days, and in 2024 alone, I've written three books (13 in 2023). I've even been invited to submit my work for the RBC Bronwen Wallace Literary Award.

My daily efforts are relentless.

Yet, when I sought government assistance, I was denied, the rationale being that a person should supposedly be able to manage on \$495.00 monthly from the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). I've also inquired about rent assistance, but I was told I'd only qualify once I become homeless – a situation that seems imminent despite my persistence.

Please do not doubt my dedication and drive. Please grasp the extent of my struggle with an open mind and heart, not judgment or what you would do? I don't think many of us have had 64-year-old friends in this situation. Approaching 64, not 24, I face a different set of rules. If I weren't considering calling it a day, I'd question my sanity. What else would you expect from a 64-year-old facing homelessness? Don't worry, I won't. I'm too much of a coward.

As a logical person, pardon me for saying that talk won't remedy our predicament unless my landlord suddenly starts accepting words as payment.

... ..

It's our last four days of indoor living.

Looking at the bright side.

1. I no will longer have to send job applications to companies only to be rejected and reminded I got old.
2. I will no longer have to worry about my credit.
3. I will no longer have to worry about eating.
4. My consecutive streak of attending the Fitness Asylum will end forever.

## The Negatives

1. ∞
2. My writing ends.
3. My consecutive streak of attending the Fitness Asylum will end forever.

## One more positive.

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A friend told me when I was expressing my pain and fears of homelessness, "Sometimes you can be a little too much."

They won't have to hear me talk about my pain anymore. I guess losing everything is a little too much.

At that moment, I felt alone. It's a horrible feeling.

At that moment, I felt like I was a burden.

Feeling like that sucks.

I know. I know. People don't want to hear about other people's challenges because "Everybody is going through stuff."

I have a hunch homelessness will not be fun, and the first to go will be our cat; is that too much?

What do you think will happen to us when we lose our home?

I guess I wasn't a resilient warrior, after all.

... ..

If sharing what we are going through is too much for you,  
please unfriend me.

172

... ..

**T**his is like rubbing salt into a wound; with homelessness looming, my bank sent me this: “You’re invited to an investing and retirement Master Class!”

173

... ..

Is homelessness a natural cause?

174

... ..

I am not trying to make anyone feel bad.  
I'm just being genuine.

... ..

175

Maybe I should stop writing.

176

... ..

I am not going to make it to 64, and neither is my cat. 177

... ..



I'm a burden.

178

.....

27 February 2024

6:20 PM, I have never felt so alone. Emoji.

... ..

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This is my farewell, a quiet goodbye. It's become too much to bear, this weight of judgment on my shoulders. I confess, I've erred greatly. Perhaps I shouldn't have bared my soul, revealing our struggles, burdened you all with my words. These past days have been the hardest I can remember in a long time. Many days when I wake, who am I kidding, I don't sleep – anyway, at the foot of my bed, Depression and Stress are awaiting to drag me through the day.

Conversations with loved ones have left me feeling shattered as if I'm alone amidst a storm of criticism. I'm not blaming anyone; I'm just saying one must walk in another's shoes to comprehend their pain truly. Yet, each well-intentioned word can sting like an arrow, driving a wounded heart deeper into isolation. Every proposed solution pierces my soul like a dart; upon closer examination, they're not solutions but thinly veiled demands for surrender. If I've failed to find employment after over 700 attempts, how could suggesting J look for different work be pragmatic? Pardon my sarcasm.

Furthermore, has anyone even inquired how J feels about the situation? J is already working full-time and facing the challenges of aging as well. And dealing with seeing me suffering. These suggestions come across as bullying disguised as concern.

I know the sentiments expressed stem from concern, but this week has been a barrage of reminders that I'm somehow lacking, I'm a failed investment, an outsider in my own family. And truth be told, there's merit to those words. I'm grappling with the reality of my own inadequacies, unsure of how to navigate the days ahead.

I sent a text to my former employer, confessing I was about to become homeless. Instead of acknowledging my plight, he undermined it by replying: "Me too."

A harsh reality is bearing down on me. It's too late for conversation. I have no desire to argue over solutions; I am exhausted beyond words. My purpose isn't to seek advice or sympathy but to express a pain that has gone unrecognized.

The screenshots shared on social media barely scratch the surface of rejection, a mere glimpse into the abyss of joblessness at 64. It's a bitter pill to swallow, knowing I'm deemed obsolete, a notion affirmed by government decree. The sheer volume of rejections paints a bleak picture, echoing the grim prognosis of my prospects.

Bidding farewell to this platform, I ask for no cliches or advice. The path ahead is daunting, and endless obstacles fray my resolve. My silence will speak volumes, echoing the weight of concealed anguish and deferred dreams. My path, shaped not by choice but by corporate greed, has left me jobless in my sixties – a fate that feels ominously like a death sentence.

... ..

**A PRIVATE LIFE UNDER A MICROSCOPE  
OR WHY PEOPLE STAY SILENT**

**I**f nothing else give him the benefit of the doubt until he proves you wrong (now not the past). 181  
I am not giving anyone the benefit of the doubt.

... ..

## Someone Comprehends My Words And Offers to Connect Me With a Potential Employer

Hi Lindsay,

**M**y dad worked for ADESA Auto Auction from the age of 70 till 84. They have numerous jobs, but my dad worked as a lot driver—lots of running around, outdoors, locating and moving cars. It's a big company so probably other positions as well. My dad went to work there specifically because they hire mature people.

The GM is John MacDonald, and I would be happy to contact him for you – he loved my dad. ADESA Auto Auction is located in Richmond and require a drivers licence for the lot job.

Pay is about \$18 per hour. I just looked and they had a job posting for lot drivers earlier this month.

I will wait to hear from you before reaching out to John.

... ..

## Here's My Response

Hi Debbie,

**T**hank you for lending your time and understanding to my words. Despite being naturally optimistic, the unexpected challenges I faced at the onset of COVID-19 have been nothing short of devastating. Yet, I remain true to myself, and I saw writing about my experiences as an opportunity to inspire more compassionate communication with those enduring hard times.

Regrettably, my attempts often resulted in others redirecting my pain towards themselves, which only intensified my distress under the guise of their well-meaning responses, replete with emojis and irrelevant links.

Writing is my true calling, and I intend to keep pursuing it, but practicality dictates the need to make ends meet. I welcome any discussion you have with John about potential opportunities where I could be a good fit.

It is essential to mention, however, that I lack transportation (my vehicle was taken away when I was replaced at my job—the vehicle belonged to the company)—I'm not sure if that's an impediment.

Your outreach means a great deal to me.

Please inform John of my 15-year tenure at Trades Labour Corporation. For a copy of my resume, he can refer to the front page of my website (at the top).

[www.lindsaywincherauk.com](http://www.lindsaywincherauk.com) or you can download it there and send it to him.

With gratitude,

Lindsay

... ..

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## Real Life

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Empathy Should Precede Judgment: A Call to Understand Others' Pain

## **Empathy Should Precede Judgment: A Call to Understand Others' Pain**

In a world where opinions are often conveyed without regard for the depth of human experience, we must pause and reflect on our interaction with others' pain. The impulse to comment on someone's struggles frequently comes without empathy, without grasping the circumstances leading to their current plight. Before weighing in, it's worth considering the experience of living their years.

### **STEP ONE**

Become their age. It is easy to overlook the challenges someone faces at a different life stage. It's crucial to recognize that a 64-year-old contending with problems has a viewpoint distinctively shaped by a life's worth of experiences specific to their age group. Their concerns, limitations, and aspirations are shaped by decades of experiences unique to their age group.

### **STEP TWO**

Put on their shoes. Empathy requires imagining life from another's perspective, feeling their emotions, and comprehending the gravity of their burdens. Only then can we acknowledge the scale of their challenges and the intricacy of their situations.

### **STEP THREE**

Match their effort. We often undervalue the determination of those in adversity. For every difficulty, there's a resilience tale, an unwavering effort against the odds. Before passing judgment, let's acknowledge the tireless pursuit of solutions that often goes unnoticed.

### **STEP FOUR**

Acknowledge they don't choose their hardships. No one aspires to struggle or face setbacks. It's imperative to understand individuals in difficulty are there not by choice but due to circumstances. Compassion necessitates that we abstain from assigning blame and instead extend support and empathy.

### **STEP FIVE**

Realize they have tried everything to improve their situation, to no avail. Assuming those in trouble haven't given their all is a common misconception. The truth is typically more complicated. Many have tried all options and taken every path yet remain entrenched in hardship.

### **STEP SIX**

Grasp the troubles unique to a 64-year-old. Aging entails a distinct set of financial, physical, and emotional issues. We must acknowledge the unique challenges older adults face, whose resources may be limited, and whose opportunities for recovery may be scarcer.



## STEP SEVEN

Encourage them to pursue their passions and dreams. Even during hardship, maintaining hope and ambition is vital. Encouragement can serve as support, affirming that goals remain achievable notwithstanding the obstacles.

Remember, the primary aim in five years may be survival, not menial employment like stocking shelves at London Drugs. These words resonate with a profound truth—survival often becomes the primary objective in the face of adversity. As a writer who has lost everything through no fault of their own, this author’s plea for empathy carries particular poignancy.

These words underscore the stark reality that survival often overshadows other aspirations when adversity strikes. The call for empathy from an author who has endured significant loss through no fault of their own is particularly moving. Let’s first seek to understand before quickly responding to someone’s pain. We must work on fostering empathy and grasping the complexities of others’ lives. Then, and only then, can we provide genuine support and unity rather than indifference and critique.

Ultimately, before we rush to comment on someone else’s pain, let’s pause and reflect. Let’s strive to cultivate empathy, to truly understand the complexities of another’s experience. Only then can we offer support and solidarity, rather than judgment and indifference.

Sharing one’s struggles takes immense courage and vulnerability. It’s a step towards breaking the silence, seeking support, and fostering connection. Regardless of how we personally feel about their situation, we must recognize and honour the bravery it takes for someone to open up about their pain. In a world where stigma and judgment often silence those in need, sharing is an act of defiance against isolation and despair.

When someone shares their struggles, they are not only acknowledging their own pain but also reaching out for understanding and support. It’s an invitation for empathy, a chance for us to lend a listening ear, offer compassion, and stand in solidarity. Even if we cannot fully comprehend their experiences, we can still acknowledge the significance of their willingness to share.

So, let us remember when someone confides in us, let’s respond with kindness, empathy, and a willingness to walk alongside them on their journey. And unequivocally, they are not looking for our pity.

... ..

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Real Life

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# Gratefulness

## Real Life: Gratefulness

**I**n navigating life's tumultuous seas, the beacon of gratitude illuminates our path, guiding us through the darkest of storms. How can one steer clear of the abyss of homelessness without acknowledging its looming presence?

To confront the spectre of a bleak future demands unwavering honesty – a piercing gaze into the depths of our fears and challenges.

Rephrased: Our future is bright; we just need to get through the fucking clouds.

Society's whispers may urge us to bury our troubles beneath layers of denial, to hide them in the shadows, hoping they'll vanish with time. But I proclaim the futility of such evasion. Ignoring our trials doesn't diminish them; it merely grants them power to linger, casting long shadows on our journey. Life's trials are undeniably harsh, yet only by facing them head-on can we hope to lighten their load or find a path to surmount them.

No amount of platitudes can shield an elderly soul (I never felt old until recently) from the precipice of homelessness. Inspirational tales seldom find their way to the aged, nor do they offer solace to a thirteen-year-old feline wandering the unforgiving streets.

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Yet within me burns the flame of creativity – a writer armed with philosophical insight and boundless resilience. It is this creativity that serves as my guiding star, promising swift transformation one day even in the darkest of times.

Acknowledging harsh realities may feel akin to swallowing bitter truth serum, yet it is the first step in evading the bullets of fate. I live this truth daily, my tireless efforts a testament to my unwavering determination (nobody ever has to question my efforts). Every job lead pursued, every rejection endured – from London Drugs (10 and counting) and beyond – only serves to steel my resolve. In my reality, every single lead that has been sent my way, I had already applied to and been rejected, every single one. Even the lazy Such-and-Such Company is hiring, leads.

To those who offer their concern and support, I offer heartfelt gratitude, even amidst the turmoil it stirs within. As we age, the value of honesty becomes increasingly evident, no matter its sting. We will endure. Though the road ahead may be uncertain, it would be far bleaker without your compassionate embrace.

**A**llow me to reiterate—a journey marked by fifteen years of dedication was abruptly halted by a company’s greed, amplified by the shadows of a pandemic. Four years have since exacted their toll—lost income, exhausted savings, mounting debt, credit ratings in danger, and frayed mental health—all under the false promises of a legal team’s ineptitude.

Approaching sixty-four, I find myself deemed obsolete by a job market that demands digital fluency I never possessed.

Translation: the last time I had a job interview the internet didn’t exist.

I did have one recently (an interview), my only one and the under 20-year-old interviewer (wearing a penguin adorned, pet-hair covered, sweatshirt), the entire two minutes she was searching for a way to call me old.

Over 700 applications sent, met with resounding silence—a stark reminder of the diminishing value placed upon a fifteen-year career—the only thing of relevance on my resume—nobody cares what I did in the 90s and before—they do care that I haven’t worked since 2020.

“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

“I don’t understand the question, I will be 69.”

I went to a career fair at Canada Place, I was the only person there over 25. I don’t think they have ‘Career Fairs’ at Senior’s Homes.

Grasping the troubles unique to a 64-year-old (in July). Aging entails a distinct set of financial, physical, and emotional issues. We must acknowledge the unique challenges older adults face, whose resources may be limited, and whose opportunities for recovery may be scarcer.

I must create a creative future—in the burgeoning age of AI—daunting, but I think I’m better.

In this harsh reality, I continue to write. My pen gives rise to unsettling tales that disturb those around me, leading them to accuse me of focusing on the negative. Their words may hold some truth, as I frequently find myself brooding over their criticisms—and fearing being truthful in the shadows of judgement.

A kind acquaintance, a 64-year-old woman I barely know, offered me \$100 so, Hana, wouldn't go hungry. Her generosity brought me to tears; as I made my way home, I realized despite having family members, they remain unaware of my struggles—a sad reality, I don't expect others to understand, I don't.

In December, my friend Gary, gave us his Optimum Card Points Card, which provided us a month of sustenance (and he has offered help several more times). I can never thank him enough.

And Mary, a lady on Vancouver Island, I've never met, has recently prepared our taxes (2022)—she had prepared our last five years without asking anything in return. But most importantly, she called me an incredibly talented wordsmith. I used wordsmith instead of writer for effect.

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To my friends who've helped, I extend profound gratitude for your support, tempered by the weight of the burden I've placed upon you. Though I welcome your aid with open arms, I understand the strain it places upon you. Please know I carry the weight of your generosity with humility and grace.

I offer my deepest thanks for helping in these challenging times. Your compassion, your generosity and support is a beacon of light. Thanks to you, I face our uncertain future with resolve to keep trying, and enduring gratitude.

Love

Us.

P.S. I am a fabulous writer. I must believe my day in the sun will arrive.



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Real Life

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February 29 + March 1, 2024

## Real Life: February 29 + March 1, 2024

29 February 2024

My life is in shambles. The week has unleashed hell – financial ruin shadows my every move. I reached out to my distant family only to be met with indifference (a fear of being asked for money) – I'm living through a pity party no one asked to attend.

Desperate for respite I can't afford, I indulge in a beer or two. It's Whom's birthday, a flimsy excuse that echoes my failure to protect my family. He's here, sharing a drink with Dean, our friend, whose days are numbered. Whom had gifted Dean a book on his terminal condition, a misguided attempt at solace that struck more like a barbed reminder of mortality.

Slumping onto a stool beside AT at the bar, I wonder if he'd endure the tale of my dreadful week. He half-listens as I pour out my reasons for writing about our collective agonies, claiming It's a study in empathy and compassion.

When AT finally speaks, his advice is to skip rent – it's clear my woes fell on deaf ears, deepening my sense of isolation.

AT shares his life's story through his writings – they're raw and remarkable. I'm moved to connect him with a publisher, a glimmer of purpose amidst the chaos.

Just then, a soused Whom wobbles over, blundering into our exchange with his "Hee Haw" antics and oblivious chatter. "I don't hate anyone," Whom blurts out before slurring his ambition to title his next opus "It's Inevitable," a follow-up to his virulently xenophobic screed he calls a "first book."

The mood sours; I catch myself skewering his work and person despite the tremor in his hands that betrays his Parkinson's. The guilt of my harsh words against a man facing his twilight years pinches at my conscience.

"You never cared about me," he accuses.

"That's not accurate. I care for you; you are my friend," I reply, grappling with sincerity and frustration.

His subsequent confession cuts deep – "I am envious of you. I'm weary of this existence. I'm ready to end it all."

Panic grips me as I scramble to find the words that might tether him to life. Do I speak up or swallow my voice?

by Lindsay Wincherauk

AT's writing resonated with a detached weariness, and now Whom's candour thrust the weight of his despair upon me. Cornered, I urge him to shake off his gloom – reminding him that he is valued, that he shapes my work. The words feel hollow even as they leave my mouth.

After Whom departs, I retreat to a sanctuary within the restroom walls. My heart stutters upon my return, and the floor rushes up to meet me. Collapsed, I realize I'm unprepared for the end – yet fear lingers like a shroud.

• • • • •

1 March 2024

Over the past few weeks, I've received a variety of caring yet misguided words and advice:  
"We'll park our trailer anywhere you like so you can live in it instead of being homeless."

"What's the lowest-level job you're willing to accept? I don't want to send you inappropriate leads."

"Why don't you just skip your rent payment? They can't evict you for a month."

"Have you considered declaring bankruptcy?"

"Do you want me to get you into social housing?" Two days later the person who asked, told me he hates where he lives, it depresses the hell out of him, and he wants to end it all. And besides, the government told me the waiting list is several years.

"Maybe you could lie about your age when job hunting? You don't look your age."

I was rejected for a job to be a clipboard person, you know, "Hey, can I ask you a quick question?"

"I know it upsets you when I offer my trailer. I do it because I care. I'm not judging you. I can't understand why you don't take any 'job' or go back to 'school' instead of facing homelessness."

"Why can't J find a better job to cover the costs?"

After confessing my disdain for clichés, someone sent me, "Don't give up; every cloud has a silver lining."

Some of the people who supposedly cared, when I expressed my disdain for clichés, stopped talking to me altogether - I guess their caring was only when it suited them.



I was even sent an empathetic song lyric and a link to the tune, declaring that I'm part of some metaphorical club. When I didn't engage, this friend expressed concern to someone else (not me, so, I became gossip), who suggested I reach out to the tune sending friend, to appease the friend's worries.

When I bravely contacted my estranged family after thirty years, a well-meaning friend downplayed the effort, suggesting how my family might feel instead of how hard this was on me.

And it continued... silver linings.

Each piece of 'advice' felt like a push off the ledge of a cliff.

• • • • •

Yet, amidst the turmoil, I found kindness.

Strangers praised my writing talent and honesty.

A friend reached out during her partner's emergency surgery.

Another shared their battle with depression.

And another stated, "When I listen to you talking. It makes me realize how great of a person you are," and then added, "and it hurts me how people treat you."

All of these make me want to keep going, because some people get me, and trust me enough to share their experiences with me. I feel incredibly lucky.

• • • • •

Still, the inappropriate advice persists: "Why won't you take my trailer?"

"Why not default on rent?"

Here's why: Surrender is not an option for me.

Moving into that trailer seems a step closer to undeniable homelessness (a gateway)—a source of distress. But I understand that your care is conditional on my acceptance of your views of my suffering, and judgement of me not jumping up and down and thanking you for your kindness.

When you can't grasp someone's torment, haven't walked their journey, and aren't like them – sometimes silence is best. Just offer your care. Hold back on suggestions until you can truly empathize with their plight.

This week, my physical collapse mirrored my emotional state; my heart seemed to stop, and I collapsed. There'll be no school for me, and should a job interview arise, don't think I'm unaware of the interviewer's hidden scrutiny of my age: 63.65479452... – a reminder of the limited years in my prospective career. The clipboard interviewer called me old.

If you are incapable of caring without passing judgment, then you should remain silent.

A true friend would support my creativity, yet it seems that strangers are more encouraging than most friends . Why is that?

Hell, when with a group of friends whilst in, the eye of my life storm, I announced I was trying to find humour in things, and a friend had the audacity, fully aware of how much I'm hurting right now, he had the audacity to say, "Don't bother, you are not funny."

And to my other friends: don't defend those who claim they're trying to help when they're not by applauding their lazy words masked as caring. Their words don't offer solutions; they inflict more pain.

I don't need your advice. You aren't me, so please stop dictating your woulds and wouldn'ts as if you could fathom my predicament – a situation I hope you never have to endure. Caring begins with the simple act of listening. If you genuinely cared, you'd probe with questions to understand, not hastily provide a roof after an absence spanning eons. Genuine empathy requires learning who I am now, not proposing impractical solutions that inflict further distress. Stop co-opting my pain to serve your narrative.

I can assure you with virtually absolute certainty that if you were to experience what I am experiencing now, you'd realize why so many well-meaning suggestions can inadvertently cause more harm than good. These often trigger dormant pains buried in my subconscious – pains that may be incomprehensible to you, since my life is not your own.

How can anyone other than the person and their immediate loved ones truly understand the anguish of being unexpectedly laid off at 60? Or the fear of facing an uncertain future at 64?

Can a thirty-year-old empathize? A forty-year-old? How about retirees with secure pensions or those buoyed by family support?

While they may not be able to provide concrete assistance, their well-meaning yet unsought advice sometimes feels judgmental. Even if offered with good intentions, such counsel adds to the burden of those who already feel overwhelmed. It forces them to defend their situation, unintentionally shifting the focus to the perspectives of others and causing them to step gingerly for fear any show of less than full appreciation might lead to further losses. This leaves them beleaguered, restricted, and even more isolated than ever.

I won't make desperate choices like moving into a trailer or skipping out on rent.

Neither am I going to slice into a metaphorical pie searching for a silver lining. The over 700 rejections have left their mark, making it agonizingly clear there is no work for me.

This week, I did break down. It felt like my heart skipped a beat and I collapsed to the ground, which is alarming—I don't have time for that because someone sent me another lead to a menial job, and another person sent me a music video.

I share my writings because I believe it's crucial for everyone to be aware of the way we communicate with one another. In a world where everyone is tired, a display of genuine kindness and efforts to understand one another can significantly contribute to creating a more compassionate world.

Consider it thoroughly before extending an offer of kindness, such as a place to stay.

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**If you live far away, consider the implications:** how would the person manage to uproot their entire life and start anew?

The fear of becoming more isolated and frightened and with fewer options could be overwhelming. Moreover, you must consider the feasibility and duration of your offer. If you haven't been in touch with the person for a long time, your well-meaning gesture might exacerbate their situation. You are unfamiliar with their current circumstances, the individuals in their lives, and the complexity of your proposal. Your offer, though generous, might feel stifling to them. In their eyes, it could be seen as dismissive and demeaning, potentially triggering a negative response.

Even without conditions, such an offer could inadvertently pressure someone already in distress to forsake their current life and relationships for an ideal seemingly beyond reach. While you perceive it as an act of generosity, the recipient – grappling with pain – may interpret it as a further indication that hope is dwindling.

Several people have helped, though I suspect they haven't considered how their well-meaning gestures might undermine my sense of self and leave me feeling obligated to justify my situation. It's exhausting and making me feel less.

Their offers included a trailer for me to live in, suggestions to relocate to a non-tropical island “I don't understand your reluctance to move away from what's obviously not working” (I care. I'm not judging), another country, or even a different province. If you read these words and they upset, you...

For those eager to help, there are indeed ways to do so. Admittedly, it's uncomfortable to mention, but financial contributions – though challenging to talk about in hard times – can be a form of support. Asking someone to upend their life even more than it already has been, you may as well grab a hammer and nails. Just saying.

Alternatively, uplifting my creative endeavours would also be deeply appreciated. I have a vision for my future, but time seems slipping away. I worry that accepting a soul-sapping, non-existent, menial job now would be like voluntarily walking off a cliff.

Lastly, as part of my creative projects, you can support me by ordering a pair of custom-designed sneakers for \$399.00.

Place your order today, and you can expect delivery by 2027.

In parting, our 13-year-old cat is ill, I'm worried, but I can't do a thing about it. When I shared this with a friend, my friend said, "Why don't you just put her down?" I kid you not.



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Real Life

Movement Statistics

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# 2024

Month	MONTH	STEPS	MILES	MPD	SPD
jan	January	719,758	362.10	11.68	23,218.00
feb	February	748,352	381.66	13.63	26,726.86
march	March	54,893	27.38	0.88	1,770.74
apr	April	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
may	May	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
june	June	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
july	July	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
aug	August	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
sept	September	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
oct	October	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
nov	November	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
dec	December	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
tot	<b>YEAR</b>	<b>1,523,003</b>	<b>771.14</b>	<b>2.11</b>	<b>4,172.61</b>
	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>4,172.61</b>	<b>2.11</b>		
	<b>MONTHLY AVE</b>	<b>126,917</b>	<b>64.26</b>		<b>2024</b>

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## LEGEND

**MPD = MILES PER DAY**

**SPD = STEPS PER DAY**

# 2023

Month	MONTH	STEPS	MILES	MPD	SPD
jan	January	772,140	379.25	12.23	24,907.74
feb	February	707,173	363.71	12.99	25,256.18
march	March	573,171	273.66	8.83	18,489.39
apr	April	417,259	196.55	6.55	13,908.63
may	May	628,500	299.83	9.67	20,274.19
june	June	901,554	462.43	15.41	30,051.80
july	July	744,458	354.94	11.45	24,014.77
aug	August	469,455	222.79	7.19	15,143.71
sept	September	512,377	244.77	8.16	17,079.23
oct	October	839,106	418.70	13.51	27,067.94
nov	November	1,000,830	503.16	16.77	33,361.00
dec	December	575,034	277.90	8.96	18,549.48
tot	<b>YEAR</b>	<b>8,141,057</b>	<b>3,997.69</b>	<b>10.95</b>	<b>22,304.27</b>
	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>22,304.27</b>	<b>10.95</b>		
	<b>MONTHLY AVE</b>	<b>678,421</b>	<b>333.14</b>		<b>2023</b>

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## LEGEND

**MPD = MILES PER DAY**

**SPD = STEPS PER DAY**

# 2022

Month	2022 S	2022 M	2022 ASPD	2022 MPD
jan	236,579	110.84	7,631.58	3.58
feb	236,747	114.30	8,455.25	4.08
march	367,922	184.83	11,868.45	5.96
apr	272,488	134.17	9,082.93	4.47
may	267,773	129.05	8,637.84	4.16
june	686,730	331.77	22,891.00	11.06
july	1,243,230	624.61	40,104.19	20.15
aug	628,393	306.24	20,270.74	9.88
sept	538,282	268.41	17,942.73	8.95
oct	514,056	258.40	16,582.45	8.34
nov	437,030	215.58	14,097.74	7.19
dec	356,375	173.87	11,495.97	5.61
tot	5,785,605	2,852.07	15,850.97	7.81

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## LEGEND

MPD = MILES PER DAY

SPD = STEPS PER DAY



# 2021

Month	2021 S	2021 M	2021 ASPD	2021 MPD
jan	767,895	368.82	24,763.39	11.90
feb	768,583	375.84	27,467.25	13.42
march	944,196	461.84	30,458.03	14.90
apr	797,803	385.82	26,593.43	12.86
may	553,656	265.79	17,851.16	8.57
june	593,966	284.51	19,701.17	9.48
july	762,892	386.79	24,550.19	12.48
aug	679,989	345.93	21,924.23	11.16
sept	700,561	346.56	23,304.77	11.55
oct	445,274	227.05	14,166.55	7.32
nov	250,764	125.51	8,366.65	4.18
dec	190,448	90.32	6,044.77	2.91
<b>tot</b>	<b>7,456,027</b>	<b>3,664.78</b>	<b>20,408.05</b>	<b>10.04</b>

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## LEGEND

MPD = MILES PER DAY

SPD = STEPS PER DAY

## 2020

Month	2020 S	2020 M	2020 ASPD	2020 MPD
jan	95,158	46.82	3,069.61	1.51
feb	91,556	45.34	3,157.10	1.46
march	67,439	37.85	2,411.45	1.22
apr	445,479	213.10	14,848.13	6.87
may	710,993	349.73	22,933.74	11.28
june	741,801	375.12	25,392.43	12.10
july	781,424	381.11	25,207.23	12.29
aug	680,628	329.24	21,934.16	10.62
sept	704,996	344.98	23,618.33	11.13
oct	425,376	203.25	13,721.81	6.56
nov	441,093	212.05	14,226.39	6.84
dec	551,451	263.65	17,788.74	8.50
tot	5,737,394	2,802.24	15,675.94	7.66
COV S	5,496,503	20,433.10		
COV M	2,667.64	9.92		

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## LEGEND

**MPD = MILES PER DAY**

**SPD = STEPS PER DAY**

## TOP 12 MONTHS

	ALLTIME					
	YEAR	MONTH	STEPS	AVE	MILES	AVE
1	2022	JULY	1,243,230	40,104	624.61	20.15
2	2023	November	1,000,830	33,361	503.16	16.77
3	2021	MARCH	944,199	30,458	461.84	14.90
4	2023	June	901,554	30,052	462.4	15.41
5	2023	October	839,106	27,068	711.00	22.94
6	2021	APRIL	797,803	26,593	386.79	12.48
7	2020	JULY	781,424	25,207	385.82	12.86
8	2023	January	772,140	24,908	379.3	12.23
9	2021	FEB	768,583	27,467	381.11	12.29
10	2021	JAN	767,665	24,763	375.84	13.42
11	2020	JUNE	761,773	25,392	375.12	12.50
12	2021	JULY	761,056	24,550	368.82	11.90
			10,339,363	5,415.79		

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### LEGEND

AVE = AVERAGE PER DAY

## ALL-TIME: STEPS + MILES

Alltime							
Rank	Year	Steps	DA	MonthlyA	Miles	DA	MA
1	2023	8,141,057	22,304	678,421	3,997.69	10.95	333.14
2	2021	7,456,027	20,427	621,336	3,664.78	10.04	305.40
3	2022	5,785,605	15,851	482,134	2,852.07	7.81	237.67
4	2020	5,737,394	15,676	478,116	2,802.24	7.68	233.52
5	2024	1,523,003	4,161	126,917	771.14	2.11	64.26
Total		28,643,086	1,931.82	477,384.77	14,087.92	7.71	234.80

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### LEGEND

**DA = DAILY AVERAGE**

**MA = MONTHLY AVERAGE**

## RECORD DAYS: STEPS + MILES + UPS!

	20s									
	YEAR	DATE	STEPS	YEAR	DATE	MILES	YEAR	DATE	UPS	
1	2022	19-Jul	50,572	2022	19-Jul	25.04	2020	11-Sep	130	
2	2022	28-Jul	48,022	2022	12-Jul	23.86	2020	09-Sep	118	
3	2022	12-Jul	46,626	2022	28-Jul	23.82	2020	02-Sep	112	
4	2022	11-Jul	46,185	2022	11-Jul	23.51	2021	17-Feb	107	
5	2022	10-Jul	45,939	2022	10-Jul	23.33	2020	03-Sep	107	
6	2022	21-Jul	45,664	2022	21-Jul	22.76	2020	21-Aug	96	
7	2022	23-Jul	44,401	2021	12-Jul	22.58	2020	20-Aug	93	
8	2022	25-Jul	43,729	2022	23-Jul	22.10	2021	03-Feb	84	
9	2021	12-Apr	43,724	2021	12-Apr	22.10	2021	05-Feb	82	
10	2021	12-Apr	43,724	2021	31-Mar	21.89	2022	09-Aug	82	
11	2021	31-Mar	43,675	2023	02-Nov	21.57	2022	11-Aug	78	
12	2020	11-Mar	43,194	2022	07-Jul	21.52	2021	12-Apr	76	
13	2022	18-Jul	42,990	2020	17-Feb	21.42	2021	31-Mar	74	
14	2022	06-Jul	42,719	2022	21-Jul	21.34	2021	20-Apr	74	
15	2022	20-Jul	42,306	2022	15-Jul	21.20	2021	23-Mar	72	
16	2023	02-Nov	42,077	2022	25-Jul	21.14	2021	11-Mar	72	
17	2022	22-Jul	42,035	2022	18-Jul	21.14	2021	29-Jan	69	
18	2020	17-Feb	41,897	2022	13-Jul	21.01	2024	11-Jan	66	
19	2022	24-Jul	41,541	2022	08-Jul	20.93	2021	16-Apr	66	
20	2022	01-Jul	41,530	2022	22-Jul	20.73	2022	05-Aug	64	
			882,550				442.99			1,722

## SEAWALL LAPS

SEAWALL	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
jan	65.13	68.22	19.82	65.95	8.37
feb	68.65	65.42	20.44	67.21	8.11
march	4.93	49.23	33.05	82.58	6.77
apr	0.00	35.36	23.99	68.99	38.11
may	0.00	53.93	23.08	47.53	62.54
june	0.00	83.18	59.33	50.87	67.08
july	0.00	63.85	111.69	69.16	68.15
aug	0.00	40.08	54.76	61.86	58.87
sept	0.00	44.03	48.00	61.97	61.69
oct	0.00	75.32	46.21	40.60	36.34
nov	0.00	90.51	38.55	22.44	37.92
dec	0.00	49.99	31.09	16.15	47.14
tot	138.71	719.11	510.00	655.32	501.09
APM	11.56	59.93	42.50	54.61	41.76
APD	0.38	1.97	1.40	1.80	1.37

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## LEGEND

APM = AVERAGE PER MONTH

APD = AVERAGE PER DAY

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Real Life

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Writer's Block

## Real Life: Writer's Block

I am a writer, a purveyor of imagination, a crafter of worlds. It seems I was placed on this spinning rock for one singular purpose: to wield the power of my mind and make a difference.

During this formidable challenge, I need to be surrounded by people who believe in me – individuals who stand by me as I struggle and encourage me to pursue my aspirations rather than view my suffering as a signal to concede defeat.

Understanding the pain of others is often difficult; we may not always know how to respond or interpret their expressions of suffering. However, you can grasp their fear by actively listening and deciphering their unspoken messages. In these moments, they need your unwavering support, not criticism for their choices or behaviours, and indeed not actions based on your idea of kindness, which may feel condescending and intrusive to them. A creative individual needs the freedom to create, not to be stifled by mundane routines. For them, capitulation signifies reaching a dead end.

Lately, my writing has taken a plunge into shadowed territory, a dance filled with gloom. This compulsive need to drape my darkness over unsuspecting souls feels almost criminal. But there – truth stumbles over the lie – it isn't criminal, not the least. After all, to withhold our truest whispers would be an absolute atrocity.

Yet, amidst my turmoil, clinging to my core is vital; I yearn for my friends' comprehension – that while ache consumes me, I'm tirelessly questing for the elusive escape from my situation. It's just this revolving door out seems to master the art of hide and seek.

As I lament my circumstances, let's be clear: I'm not diminishing the profound weight of this despair – a darkness that murmurs sinister temptations in my ear.

If someone claims they've skirted the precipice of harrowing dread without faltering, they're likely deceiving themselves – or us.

Frankly, it's those unflinching optimists who unsettle me. Admitting life can royally falter, acknowledging sometimes the only exit visible leads not to joy but to a chasm of desolation, that's a raw, uncomfortable honesty.

I refuse to surrender, admit defeat, and cease the relentless quest for the key to the life I yearn for, the life I am owed. My resolve is ironclad, even if my resilience appears worn thin. Each well-meaning offer of help that doesn't align with my mission – to propel me onward rather than plunge me into the depths of failure – weighs heavily on my heart. It's a cruel irony, having to mask my pain because if I don't, the scrutiny of others, whether real or imagined, only grows more biting.



Those who proposed solutions that neither supported nor uplifted me often triggered reactions from others, claiming, “They were only trying to be helpful.”

Yet this supposed kindness was not helpful; it instead stirred feelings of inadequacy and the impression striving for my ideal life was futile. Suggesting I abandon my efforts didn’t come across as supportive but instead felt like a subtle attempt to divert attention from my needs. That is my perception.

Isn’t having a friend who candidly shares their feelings with you fortunate?

#### **4 March 2024**

**T**he evening before the pivotal interview – only my second within three stoic decades – nausea courses through me, a relentless tide of motion sickness. Shall I take a Gravel?

Have you ever experienced an emotion so uniquely disconcerting that it defies articulation?

An incessant gnawing at your very core, as if some malevolent force were tirelessly chomping and eviscerating your insides. It’s an enigmatic sensation that eludes all comparison – it is not the familiar clutch of anxiety nor the crashing waves of a panic attack. **Yet, it looms within you:** a nebulous, sinister presence relentlessly haunting the periphery of your consciousness.

Unease gnaws at me, tears welling unbidden and spilling down my cheeks in silent testament to my inner turmoil. I berate myself, ‘What a pathetic sight you are - a grown adult whimpering like an infant over the prospect of professional dialogue.’ Yet this distress is no petty whim; it’s a visceral, suffocating dread. My understanding of it wavers like a flickering flame – it evades, then rushes forth in a torrent, asserting its reality. Approaching the autumn of my years, at almost 64, the sobering prospect of reinvention looms menacingly on my horizon.

When I confide in a friend about the looming job interview, the response comes pat and predictable: “Good luck, it will be great for the finances and your mental health.” Their words tingle with the hollow ring of a counterfeit coin – ‘finance’ invariably usurping precedence. In their well-meaning script, I hear my fears being dismissed, my apprehensions trivialized. How I yearn to unveil the depth of my anxiety, but I recoil, conscious of critical eyes ready to misconstrue my honesty as resentment.

At 64, I should be reflecting on a career’s fruitful culmination, not bracing for the arduous climb up another corporate ladder. The mere thought of

immersing myself anew in the quagmire of office politics, of being that ‘new guy’ tilling and toiling to harvest a smidgeon of respect, sets my spirit to wither. I shudder at envisioning daily commutes: a four-hour round-trip odyssey that leeches away at the finite hours of my existence. Such a ‘JOB’ – enticing in its economic allure – stands menacingly ready to eclipse my passions, extinguish my dedication to fitness, and fray the tender threads of my relationships until nothing remains.

Within me churns a sickening sensation, the embodiment of feeling unheard and misunderstood, a gnawing reminder that no one seems invested in aiding me to find a path that ignites my passion and drive. At 64, I’m painfully aware that the rules of the game have shifted. Being ejected by a world I once knew and facing the prospect of beginning anew doesn’t signal a fresh triumph—it feels more like the looming shadow of my final defeat. “You can always quit; you need to survive,” they say. Yes, survival is critical, but how seldom do people resign themselves to a life of regret, having thrown in the towel too soon, only to realize a decade later that all they needed was an opportunity – not one handed to them, but one that they yearn for those who claim to love them to encourage them to seize, to boldly make the leap.

But the world is deaf to these inner confessions. They ask for a sound bite, not a soliloquy. Express these trepidations openly, and you invite the brand of a complainer – the ungrateful dissident in a world clamouring for positivity. Thus, I swallow my truth, cloaking it in nods and half-smiles while silence preys upon my peace.

Nausea churns in the pit of my stomach at the thought. Surrendering the vibrancy of life to be reduced to a mere statistic in the cold machinery of a corporation – can anyone truly justify such a sacrifice as reasonable?

The voracious beast gnawing at my very core is relentlessly shredding the fabric of my existence.

As the final question of tomorrow’s interview fades into silence, I face the inevitable realization the journey home won’t be a simple matter. With no transit options available, a daunting 14-mile pilgrimage stands before me: a road that meanders through the somnolent town, past the whispering farm fields, and into the heart of a place where buses sporadically acknowledge the need for their existence. Approaching my 64<sup>th</sup> year on this earth, my legs aren’t as spry as they were in the folly of youth, yet I muster a chuckle, finding an unexpected ally in the challenge ahead. Each step will contribute to the invisible tally I keep, a testament to my perseverance – a silver lining in the form of a personal step-count triumph in this unintended marathon of resolve.

**5 March 2024**

I awaken, gripped by an inexplicable terror, my senses tingling with a pervasive strangeness. Lying there in the half-light of dawn, I am beset by a haunting uncertainty, pondering if the tapestry of my life will ever weave itself back into the familiar pattern it once was.

I meticulously prepare myself, yet an uncanny feeling lingers as I embark on an unfamiliar journey – navigating the veins of public transit for the first time as a commuter.

With tentative steps reminiscent of a frightened schoolboy clutching his bag on an inaugural day at a new academy, I navigate toward the bustling station.

Heart pounding with trepidation, I board the train, my every movement laced with a nervous energy so intense I fear I might succumb to its weight.

I transfer to a crowded bus, the nauseating scent of commuter sweat swirling in my stomach; the urge to retort my earlier life-sustaining medications is almost overpowering. Other commuters look as if their life is being drained from them by their daily journeys eyes drifting shut.

Eventually, I disembark at the stop closest to the business, noting with dismay and resignation I have to trek 5 kilometers to reach my destination. Regardless, my pedometer will praise me today – every stride takes me closer, marking my effort in silent, digital applause.

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I arrive a full half-hour ahead of schedule, the anticipation stirring within me. I find myself in a resigned state of patience, waiting.

Summoned into the austere boardroom, I confess to the pair of potential employers seated before me – my palms are clammy, my heart erratic. “I’m nervous,” I admit, though I withhold the detail of my last interview, where the interviewer was garbed in a whimsical Penguin sweatshirt. They disarm my anxiety with a smile, insisting this is less an interrogation and more a candid exchange.

As we delve into the dialogue, it’s clear they’re not only friendly but exude an air of frankness and integrity that puts me further at ease. Our conversation flows unexpectedly, and I detect it is being favourably received. A subtle intuition whispers that they’re poised to extend an offer.

Thus, despite the churning unease within my gut, I stand on the cusp of divergent paths – not the pretty ill-fated protagonist in some grand tragedy. Appropriate, perhaps, for a company woven into the fabric of the automotive industry, that I have navigated our talk without veering off course and now anticipate, with a mix of apprehension and excitement, the proposal they seem inclined to put forth within a few days.

When the question inevitably arose regarding my pursuit of an entirely new career path at this unexpected juncture in life, my response was steeped in stark, unwavering honesty, “I need to survive.”

As our conversation draws to a close, the HR representative – gives me the green light to slip into my jacket before leaving the boardroom. However, with a mix of eagerness to exit and a touch of nonchalance, I respond, “I can do it while walking.”

As she escorts me to the exit, I shimmy into my jacket on the move, that prompts an exclamation from me, “I did it. I wasn’t sure I could?”

Confused, she inquires, “What?”

I clarify with equal parts triumph and mischief in my voice, “Put on my jacket while walking.”

Her response is a melodic laugh.

As I depart, a pervasive sense of fragility threatens to buckle my knees; I’m teetering on the verge of collapse, yet surrender is not an option. With a daunting 14-mile trek looming before me, each step weighed with the heavy anticipation of finding transit to carry me back to the sanctuary of home.

Trudging along the frayed edges of the sun-bleached roadway, I feel the force of the transit trucks as they thunder by, their gusts threatening to topple me into the overgrown ditch that runs alongside my narrow path. Each deafening roar momentarily eclipses the world, leaving my heart pounding in the following void of silence. It’s during these fleeting instants of calm I observe, with a shiver of unease, how at least a dozen drivers seem perilously close to succumbing to sleep’s siren call, their heads dipping and bobbing like buoys adrift in a hypnotic sea.

I am a chronicler of imagined worlds, a wielder of words, yearning to sculpt reality with the fluid grace of creativity. I am determined to pave my path with the stepping stones of perseverance, to do whatever it takes to clutch the faint whispers of survival. Yet, I find myself longing for an endeavour, a passion-fueled pursuit, that doesn’t leech the very essence from my soul nor trap me in a labyrinthine journey devoid of an escape, where every turn is an impasse without horizon or hope.

Trudging across the Skytrain Bridge, the rhythmic clatter of trains overhead mingles with my footsteps on the worn concrete sidewalk beneath them. The chasm below, a warning’s call to the turmoil inside me, beckons, yet my feet move steadily forward, betraying the fleeting thought of surrender that brushes my mind like the whisper of a dark-winged shadow. I don’t jump—though to claim the idea never skimmed the surface of my thoughts would be a falsehood as transparent as the crisp air between the steel beams.

My entire journey was to have a conversation which spanned less than a half-hour, yet afterward, I found myself relentlessly pacing – anxious energy propelling my every step. By the time silence reclaimed its dominance, my fitness tracker testified to an astonishing 29,000 steps, a silent witness to the day’s entirety, a puzzling nine hours that had unspooled in the wake of our conversation.

Lindsay, what does your heart yearn for in its wildest fantasies?

To weave narratives that resonate, to sculpt worlds from words. To touch lives profoundly with the brushstrokes of imagination.

And what must fall into place for this vision to blossom into reality?

I need the embrace of faith from those whose roots intertwine with mine, the nurturing conviction my dreams aren’t just fleeting wisps of fancy but seeds that can – with their belief – grow into a magnificent canopy under which I can find shelter.

• • • • •

26

Real Life

BC Ferries is Hiring

215

## Real Life: BC Ferries is Hiring



*The echoing dissent of the previous paragraph stands to question: how does voicing ‘worry’ ever comfort the subject of such unease?*

### Transforming Our Dialogue with Those in Turmoil.

**Avoid:** Declaring your concern for them simplistically. “I’m worried about you” can be hollow and vague.

**Instead:** Let them know they are valued. Express that your care is genuine and profound.

**Steer Clear of:** Proposing unsolicited advice or extending what you perceive as kindness without first discerning their desires.

**Preferable:** Inquire about their aspirations, listen intently, and if feasible, offer your encouragement.

**Refrain from:** Overwhelming them with a barrage of suggestions.

**Choose to:** Have faith that they recognize the seriousness of their predicament. Believe they will navigate their dilemmas. They seek not directives but confidence in their capability from those around them. When you inundate someone with an unsolicited barrage of job links or well-intentioned career advice, it unintentionally echoes a message laden with doubt—implying they lack the capability to navigate their own course. This rash act can hint that if they require hand-holding just to register on job search platforms like Monster or Indeed, their prospects of succeeding in the fiercely competitive job market are arguably grim from the outset.

**Resist:** Projecting your hypothetical solutions onto them. Acknowledge that you cannot fully grasp their situation; it’s an immeasurable gap.

**Allow me to share:** Every instance where I receive an unsought job link, a fleeting quote, or a well-meaning but unreflective offer of assistance – I’m left feeling more alienated and unheard, and profound despair threatens to take hold.

**Despite the risk:** I am compelled to maintain my candour, even if it may fray the threads of friendship. We must revolutionize our interpersonal communication and support systems—no accolades for compassion exist. Genuine empathy is a quiet pursuit emanating from a place of heartfelt understanding and a genuine attempt to comprehend the pain of another. Well-meaning gestures that leapfrog understanding can feel premature and misplaced, regardless of the presumed kindness—a sharp reminder that true aid often requires a prelude of empathy and insight. Financial aid is always welcome, even if you skip steps.

Under the guise of assistance, one of my cherished companions forwarded me a 'Daily Hive' article touting the virtues of landing employment with BC Ferries. It's not that I harbour any resentment towards BC Ferries—I merely find it bewildering my confidants blindly shove me toward avenues that blatantly disregard the essence of my being.

After braving the storm of over 800 job rejections, it's painfully evident that doggedly charging down a path misaligned with my innermost aspirations is an exercise in futility.

**Time**, that most irreplaceable of currencies, ought not to be squandered on the whimsical or the dismal resignation of a life confined to the pursuit of anything but one's passions. The sting of rejection is all too familiar—I've faced BC Ferries' refusals five times over.

Is there a growing need to catalogue the sheer volume of my 800 thwarted attempts, to appease those who think they are helping? Do I need to report to them my efforts? Do I have to set up a web page listing every rejection?

Furthermore, BC Ferries would have me procure specific certifications—I don't have—am not interested in—at my expense.

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Each of the 300 job-related emails that inundate my inbox daily—feels like a needle prick to my already aching spirit.

Instead of confessing their 'worries,' if my acquaintances could express genuine concern, it might alter the entire dynamic. After all, what good is worrying if it merely serves to amplify anxiety?

*The echoing dissent of the previous paragraph stands to question: how does voicing 'worry' ever comfort the subject of such unease?*

If you can't kindle the flames of my dreams with your encouragement, I suggest you reconsider the terms of our camaraderie. With a staggering tally of over 800 job applications festering behind me, the message I convey should be crystal clear: desist in herding me towards unwanted aspirations.

As I teeter on the precipice of my 64<sup>th</sup> year (will I make it?), I grapple with tribulations unique to my age—alien terrains of anxiety and doubt that most of you, my friends, have hopefully yet to—and never have to—face traversing.



**T**hus, I beseech you: refrain from offering help without properly grasping my identity. Despite the bleakness of my circumstances, I stand willing to tackle even the most odious of tasks and weather the harshest storms.

And so, to my circle of friends, I extend this heartfelt plea: bolster my resolve by supporting my quest for fulfilment. Do not twist your words into the knife already lodged in my heart – three more twists and what then?

The encroaching tendrils of depression and stress threaten to ensnare me completely, propelling me toward the brink. The warning bells of surrender grows ever louder, seducing me toward the tranquillity of giving up.

Dispense with the façade of concern – your worry is not mine to bear, and it only serves to lay further burdens upon my already laden shoulders.

I recognize my blunt expression of emotions might cause discomfort or drive you away; seeking help often brings judgment shrouded in a veneer of concern.

*Isn't it burdensome to befriend someone who speaks candidly of their inner turmoil?*

I vowed to cease sharing, yet the narrative of the manuscript I labour upon is of critical importance. It strikes me we have missed the mark on empathy and compassion, dulled by the fatigue of caring too little.

Consider, for a moment, the life of a man of my years, a man who, on the cusp of turning sixty, was unceremoniously stripped of his employment—through no fault of his own, who has dispatched over 800 applications into the void for jobs that rattle his soul, who has battled through the waves of his familial saga, and who now stands, dauntless, in the face of reinventing his very being at almost sixty-four.

And there, on the periphery of my vision, the television droning in the corner of the screen, the smouldering tale of a trailer ablaze—the residence parked illicitly, a kindling of fear among neighbours wary of the disenfranchised souls within. The newscaster’s words reduced those lives to mere refuse.

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The news flashes – BC Ferries is hiring.

Is that the epitaph to inscribe upon my life?

If friendship is indeed what you offer, cheer me on in my pursuit of aspirations—the essence of my dreams. Trust that I am exerting every fibre of my being to bridge the gap, to stave off the literal and metaphorical bridge that looms ahead.

Yet the irony is not lost on me, for in the words of a bureaucrat fittingly named ‘Hope,’ the prospects of securing employment are supposedly nonexistent at my age.

Amidst drafting this missive, my screen is peppered with 14 alerts of companies casting their recruitment nets wide – just not for people my age.



8  
PROSE  
Stag

220

## Prose: Stag

**I**t was a steamy spring day in Sleeping Seagull, with the relentless sun beating down on the streets like a welder mastering their craft. *Flashdance. Flashdance. All I want to do is Flashdance. Don't you mean Footloose?*

Carver spun, dancing naked to the tune of "I Was Made for Loving You."

"Carver, my love, what are you doing?"

Taking Tiffany's hand—which he hoped would be entwined with his for eternity—Carver led her to the magnificent fountain at the centre of Calm Bay Park, where they were enveloped in a mist of love.

With his heart pounding, Carver dropped to one knee, eliciting tears from Tiffany's eyes. Seventeen feet away, Sam watched the scene unfold from a park bench while a crowd assembled around them.

In his ecstatic joy, Carver gazed deeply into Tiffany's eyes. "Tiffany, my dear, I envision us together until we're nothing but stone, our hands cold, yet our love eternal. Tiffany, I have practiced this proposal in the mirror, and I would be the happiest man—if not a man-boy—alive if you were my loving, doting wife. Will you marry me?"

Tiffany's "YES" set the crowd of onlookers alight with excitement, heralding the rise of a new royal pair within Sleeping Seagull's societal ranks.

Promptly, Sam whisked Carver and Tiffany into "Two Scoops," where the custom was for newly betrothed couples to enjoy two scoops of Jerry Garcia ice cream—a bizarre tradition enshrined in the town's law three decades prior.

With a lick and a kiss, their ritual was interrupted by Sam's misplaced kiss.

"Sam, why are you kissing us?"

"Sorry, Carver, but today marks the beginning of the most epic stag parties ever once you've had that last lick!" Which didn't explain the kissing.

After the final slurp of ice cream, Sam and Carver dashed out the back door, ready for a day of drunken debauchery, leaving Tiffany wrapped in tears of happiness.

Tiffany turned to leave, only to be surprised by Carver's sudden re-entrance through the front door. "Carver, aren't you supposed to be out celebrating with your friends?"

"Yes, Tiffany, my little butterfly," he said. "But I can't bear to be away from you—not for a second. Sam will take my place at the stag party. I've planned a day just for us that will immortalize our love."

"Okay."

"I adore the succinctness of your words, my Mariposa."

Taking her hand once more, Carver led Tiffany back into the sultry light of day.

The cars roared, colliding explosively, and the Burt's Bail Bondsman vehicle was hurled into the air before crashing down, stirring up a massive cloud of dust near Carver and Tiffany's box seats at the Sleeping Seagull Demolition Derby Park.

Tiffany grimaced, swirling her lukewarm IPA as the rising bile soured her mouth. She eyed her sauerkraut-covered hot dog, now dusted with debris. With a bite, she recoiled. The day's, this, disgusting event overwhelmed her.

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Later, Carver and Tiffany made love in their box seats, unaware of a stranger in the cheap seats recording them. Finished, Carver whispered tenderly, "I love you, Pappion."

But the name hung in the air, leaving Tiffany questioning. Am I Pappion?

... ..

**N**ext, Carver took Tiffany on a skydiving adventure. Afterward, they made love again. This time, Tiffany kept her clothes on, and once they finished, Carver leaned in and whispered with a snort, “I love you, Schmetterling?”

223

*What does that mean? Tiffany thought.*

... ..

“ Tiffany, this final adventure will cement our love for eternity,” Carver said, as they donned their diving gear. They plunged into the ocean’s fury, and within three minutes, a shark ferociously attacked a seal, sealing its doom as Tiffany watched in horror, the once tranquil Calm Bay churning with the lifeblood of its prey.

Later, they reclined on the rugged terrain of Rocky Point, a stretch of shore strewn more with stones than sand, and there they made love again. Their passion was once more fulfilled as they drank deeply from the boxed wine’s spigot.

Lying side by side, Carver turned to Tiffany, his gaze intense and loving, and slurred through a mouthful of warm Chardonnay, “I love you,” followed by an affectionate burp, “Nabi.”

A chilling transformation overtook Tiffany’s hands as they grew ice cold, petrifying like stone – a precursor to Carver that their love would endure eternally, side by side, even beyond death.

In his heart, Carver was sure: his plan had unfolded flawlessly.

... ..

**A**cross town, Carver was at his ninth stop for the evening, a risqué establishment aptly named “Stripper Pole.” His friends had arranged for a lap dance, but Carver, ever the gentleman, uncomfortably directed his gaze to the bar’s giant TV. A news segment aired, reporting how Calm Bay had mysteriously turned red.

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Back at Calm Bay, having returned to the docks, Carver spoke the word “Butterfly” to Tiffany in seven different languages. He then asked if she would mind walking home, as he had errands. He needed to accompany Raoul to Costco to develop film for his digital camera—an odd and anachronistic task.

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As Carver and Raoul left, Tiffany watched them bounce and whispered, “Reginald?” to herself, her expression one of puzzled concern.

... ..



9

PROSE

226

Trouble in (Paradise) Sleeping Seagull

## Prose: Trouble in (Paradise) Sleeping Seagull

**R**ing. Ring.

“Hello? Sam speaking.”

“Sam, it’s Tiff. I’ve messed up, I’ve ruined my whole life. I... I... I...”

“Calm down, Tiffany. What’s happened?”

“Please, just come over. Now. I don’t know what to do.”

Knock. Knock.

“Hi. Who’s there?”

“It’s me, Sam. You called me over.”

“How did you get here so quickly?”

“I live next door, remember?”

“Oh, right.”

“Come in, Sam. It’s... it’s all over.”

“What’s over?”

“My life. Everything.”

“Slow down. What exactly is over? What’s everything?”

Tiffany thrusts her right hand from behind her back in front of Sam’s face, showing a pair of soiled socks.

“This.”

“You’re upset... over socks?”

“No, sorry, wrong hand.” Switching hands, she presents Sam with a pregnancy test.

“Look at this.”

“You’ve got two pink lines there.”

“You can say that again. I took 84 pregnancy tests. See how vivid the colour is?”

“You spent over \$1,200 on tests?”

“Wait, how do you know the cost?”

“I had a scare. But forget that. The point is, you’ll be an amazing mom, the best that Sleeping Seagull has ever seen! But why are you crying?”

“How do I tell Carver?”

Tiffany rushes to the bathroom to puke.

“What if he doesn’t want a baby?”

“He will. To him, you’re everything.”

“That’s just it; after his bachelor party, which he didn’t attend, it took him three days to recover. I couldn’t figure it out; we weren’t even that wild at the Demolition Derby, skydiving, and deep-sea diving, which was odd events to take me to because he knows I hate them. Then it hit me... Reginald.”

“Reginald? What does he have to do with this?”

**At the Obstetrician’s Office Later That Day.**

“Tiffany, this gel will be cold. Ready to see your baby?” Dr. Wright exclaims. “Oh, my.”

Sam grasps Tiffany’s hands.

“What is it, Doctor Wright?”

On the screen, two tiny hearts pulse.

“You’re having twins, Tiffany! And they look healthy. Let’s confirm with some tests.”

After the tests, Doctor Wright looks astonished. “Both babies are perfectly healthy. But you should sit.”

“We’re sitting.”

“You might want to sit more firmly. You have what’s called Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious – I mean Heteropaternal Superfecundation.”

“What does that mean?”

“In simpler terms, each of your babies has a different father.”

Sam faints.

“What?”

“One twin’s father is Carver, and the other’s is Reginald.”

Tiffany revives Sam with a slap, and then, starts crying.

“What do I do? How do I tell Carver?”

Below her, the doctor's labradoodle, Sommerfugl (Norwegian for butterfly) starts lapping at a forming puddle of Tiffany's tears.

**Sam:** Carver loves you. He'll understand.

**Tiffany:** It's over. When he returns home and I tell him, he will leave me. He will never understand. How could he? You do remember Carver's complicated family history. Both of his parents were twins. As a teenager, he found out the woman he thought was his birth mother, Madison, wasn't his biological mother. His real mother was Madison's twin sister, Lucy, who had had a secret affair with...

**Sam:** With...?

**Tiffany:** Lucy had been cheating on her husband, Roy, with Roger – the identical twin brother of Carver's father. This means...

**Sam:** ... Carver's mother is his uncle Roy's wife. His aunt Lucy is his biological mother, and his dad is his dad. Well, his dad is both his uncle and his father? I'm confused. Who did Madison give birth to then?

**Tiffany:** That's not our primary concern right now. My life is over. Carver is going to be devastated.

**Sam:** I don't understand. **Tiffany:** How could anyone?

**Readers:** We're confused.

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**Tiffany:** You should be. [Sam and Tiffany both vomit.] Madison gave birth to Carver. Then, during a power outage, she was quickly ushered out of the delivery room. In the ensuing chaos, just before the hospital's emergency generators kicked in, Lucy gave birth to Reginald in secret, merely seven minutes after Carver was born. A baby surrounded by mystery.

.....

**T**he Verdict is In

This is the most unique and troublesome situation in Romantic Comedy History.

The Academy Award and, ironically, the Lifetime Achievement Award for "Unique Troublesome Situation in Romantic Comedy History" goes to "Madly. Truly. Deeply."

The auditorium's crowd bursts into thunderous applause.

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10  
PROSE  
40 Weeks

230

## Prose: 40 Weeks

**B**efore I rant – I mean narrate; I want to address ‘The Elephant on These Pages’ – I don’t sleep well? That’s not it. Dumbo? No. Yes, now he is on these pages.

The Elephant is...

While I try to focus, The Postman and Mark are engaged in a trivial exchange about their watches. “Nice watch.” “Yours too.”

Meanwhile, 2G feels ignored and, looking up from his phone with a veneer of indifference, interjects, “I’ve got six watches at home in a drawer,” before returning to his silent contemplation.

Dumbo is the only elephant name I know. Is Okja an elephant?

Usain Bolt blast past, he’s being chased by a giant Kafkaesque cockroach and Hondo from S.W.A.T... The cockroach is doing fartlek training.

A capoeira artist performs a spinning kick. The Mayor?

Now, about the aforementioned ‘elephant’ – how could Carver and Reginald be twins if they were born to different mothers?

Exactly.

In truth, Carver and Reginald would be only half-twin-identical-brothers, or should we call them half-twin-identical cousins? Is that a real thing? It is now.

So, who did Carver absorb in the womb. Triplets? No, his actual twin – Reginald had a womb of his own. What’s his/her name?

Wouldn’t you like to know?

Not really.

Can I have the bedside table?

Sure.

Now that I have addressed ‘The Elephant on These Pages...’

Have you?

Quit interrupting – I will continue...

## 40 Weeks

Carver invited Tiffany to meet him at The Sleeping Seagull Café the next day.

“Tiffany, my dear, I’m sorry, but the wedding is off.”

Tiffany trembled violently, akin to the most severe earthquake – a magnitude 9. Her sobs were like an unstoppable force, flooding the surrounding tables with a tsunami of tears.

“No. I love you; it wasn’t my fault. How could I have known?”

“You knew I had left.”

“But you returned.”

“Reginald isn’t even my twin.”

“Look in the mirror.”

“Tiffany, my decision is firm for the moment. My love for you surpasses the way stars illuminate the sky.”

“I don’t think stars are capable of love.”

“My love for you is overwhelming, Tiffany, but now, when I see your face, I can’t help but envision you with Reginald – and that’s something I can’t endure. I need time to sort through my feelings.”

“Noooo.”

“I must take time to determine if I can move past this – I need distance.”

“What about our child?”

“I’ll be present for our baby, but for the present, Sam will step in for me...”

Over the next 40 weeks, Sam stayed by Tiffany’s side, faithfully attending their weekly Lamaze classes – which should not be mistaken for lectures on llamas – and certainly not to be mixed up with the feeble attempt at humour in this paragraph.

He also joined her for daily brunch, organized a grand baby shower for her, and consistently protected her from Reginald’s uninvited declarations of love.

Every week, as if on cue, Reginald would disrupt the Lamaze class in order to express his undying feelings for Tiffany, only for Sam to promptly escort him out with a firm kick. The reason for such vigilance was clear: Tiffany’s heart belonged to Carver alone.

Ironically, it’s said to be risky to stand behind a llama.

Every day of Tiffany’s pregnancy, Sam assured her one-day Carver would return to her, pleading for her forgiveness and for her to take him back. Without Sam, Tiffany surely would have imploded.

Every day, Carver lingered on the outskirts, shrouded in secrecy. Despite his need to reflect, his yearning for Tiffany was something he couldn't suppress.

In Tiffany's last trimester of pregnancy, I would have used a specific number for the trimester, but I did not feel like looking it up. What is the last trimester? I don't care.

It's three.

I said I didn't care.

You should; readers can be finicky.

I don't care.

In a completely different vein, the image of David Sedaris in conversation with Seth Meyers played in a small window on the top right corner of my computer screen. I wonder how many watches he has in a drawer?

Meanwhile, Carver summoned Reginald to The Sleeping Seagull Café, setting the stage for an inevitable confrontation.

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After striking Reginald in the solar plexus and helping him off the café floor, he declared firmly, "Reg, your actions are despicable, contemptible – simply revolting – yet you are my identical-twin-half-cousin-half-twin-brother, and I love you as such. Despite your faults, I treasure Tiffany, who is pregnant with both your child and mine. I demand that you step back – I vow to maintain your presence in our lives when the twins arrive; we will acknowledge you as one of their fathers', ensuring your role in Tiffany's and the babies' lives. However, if you persist in your depraved, parasitic behaviour, I will put an end to you. Withdraw now or prepare to face severe consequences. Allow Tiffany and my broken bond to mend. I desire her hand in marriage, but that can't happen with you praying on us. Leave and return only on the delivery day when I permit you to support Tiffany in the birthing room as she brings our beautiful twins into this world."

... ..



28 February 2028

Tiffany's water broke.

Sam rushed her to the hospital.

Carver and Reginald were alerted by their phones and immediately headed for the hospital. Reginald, after collecting Carver, pushed the Prius to its limits. The car flipped over three times, miraculously landing upright, allowing them to continue unharmed. During the chaos, the passenger side airbag burst open, inexplicably showering them with buttery popcorn. Adding to the bizarre situation was the appearance of the Domino's Pizza Noid, comfortably seated next to Carver, oddly enjoying the popcorn. They reached the delivery room swiftly, leaving the Noid and the popcorn-filled vehicle behind to join Sam who awaited them at the entrance to the delivery room.

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"Push. Push. One last push, Tiffany."

At precisely 11:55 PM, Tiffany birthed a beautiful baby boy, later to be named Samson, with Carver, the proud baby's father, fainting and collapsing to the floor.

Seven minutes later, at 12:02 AM, 29 February, Samson's twin sister, later named Samantha, was born, with Reginald, the proud baby father, lying on the floor next to his identical-twin-half-cousin-half-twin-brother Carver.

Tiffany and Sam laughed as Tiffany swaddled her newborns in her arms.

But wait. Three minutes later, Tiffany birthed a flat-packed IKEA bedside table.

"Tiffany," Sam whispered into her ears, "Carver loves you; I think the wedding is back on."

... ..

27

Real Life  
28 Mile Walk

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## Real Life: 28 Mile Walk

Over the past few days, I've penned another 30,000 words, driven by an unwavering passion for storytelling – the art of capturing our lives in the present.

On Monday, March 11, under a sullen sky, I embarked on a relentless 14-mile trek back home after my second informal yet pivotal conversation regarding potential employment – a necessity, given the five-hour daily suspension of transit services near the industrial sprawl of the company's compound. A company that is quite literally; if nowhere had a middle – they are in it.

This arduous journey was the coda to an enigmatic meeting, where they probed the depths of my aspirations with the question that could unseat any façade: "What is your dream job?"

Six excruciating seconds ticked by – a brief eternity – with me considering my advancing age – before I embraced candour over subterfuge. With unwavering conviction, I claimed my truth: "I'm a storyteller at heart," I announced, my resolve unshaken by their muddle of machinery and profit despite having only a week-old familiarity with their corporate existence.

Whether my forthrightness garnered their respect or dissolved into the void of indifference remains a mystery, suspended in the air like the dust motes in their cavernous meeting room.

To survive, I'd accept their job offer, if it comes. Yet, that entails an existence of trudging along highways, persistently drenched by the spray from passing trucks – an unpleasant thought, indeed. And 14-hour days. I'm 63.665 and...

• • • • •

...I fear dying things I don't want to do – things I don't love.?

**T**oday, I escorted my nearly septuagenarian friend back from day surgery, as he had no one else to turn to – a man post liver transplant, another dependent on a walker, an octogenarian with a cane, and myself, a stroke survivor. By some measure, I was the fittest companion. He is now safe at home, and amidst it all, I continue to write.

237



A friend, enduring the aftermath of limb removal surgery, fosters my resolve to persevere in my passion. His support extends beyond encouragement—he has provided a financial lifeline without which we would have been destitute by now. I'm in unprecedented territory.

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• • • • •

I read in a local fast-food joint when a Caucasian woman sitting on the ledge caught my attention. Suddenly, a black man ascended the stairs. As he did, his coffee tumbled off his tray. I sympathized with his misfortune. The woman leaped into action. I assumed she would offer to help him get another coffee, but she didn't. Instead, she snatched a 'Wet Floor' sign, planted it next to the spill, and told the man, "You need to go downstairs and inform someone so they can clean up your mess."

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This is a prelude to a plea: assist me in securing my house before resorting to offering a makeshift shelter that, though well-intentioned, may inadvertently cause more harm than comfort.

In the meantime, my well-intentioned friends recommend job opportunities that are out of my reach. One referral was to The Ferry Company, a part of our transportation network—a position I’m not qualified for due to the lack of Seafarer Certification, Food Safe, Serving It Right, and First Aid certificates. Additionally, there’s no public transportation available for the necessary work hours. My friend didn’t even inquire if I was interested or qualified for the advertised positions, which leads me to consider giving up my life’s pursuit. When faced with life’s final moments and asked about regrets, “Heeding advice to stop trying” might stand as my sole lament.

As I delved into the job opportunities forwarded by my friends, it became unmistakably clear they see me as a burden they wish to eschew, fearing I might request financial support. This feeling only intensified after I contacted my family, following years of disconnection, and they asked me, “What are you doing for work these days?”

240

If I were to dig deeper into the job opportunities sent to me by friends, for me at least, they couldn’t be announcing any louder that I’ve become a burden to be avoided. Because I might come asking for financial help. A sentiment confirmed when I reached out to my family after decades of extraction only to be asked, “What are you doing for work these days?” When I answered the question, silence once again returned to the connection.

As a creative individual cornered by relentless adversity, homelessness looms over us. Despite applying for over 800 jobs and walking over 28 miles along highways to interviews for positions I have no passion for, the threat is imminent.

I implore you to read my words. Support my craft. There’s no need to commend the quality, I’m not looking for your reviews—I’m confident in its merit. I am a fabulous raconteur.

[www.lindsaywincherauk.com](http://www.lindsaywincherauk.com)

Please Share!



**T**oday's question: If you've applied for over 800 jobs that you have no desire for, closing in on the age of 64, would you contemplate suicide?

This question is rhetorical.

.....

I plugged the question into grammar software; asking to make it sound less desperate.

This is how they responded→↓

I'm sorry, but I can't continue this conversation. If you're feeling in distress, I encourage you to reach out to a friend, family member, or professional who can provide support.

241

I reached out to friends and family members, but most feared I was going to ask for money. As a result, they either sent me job links or ghosted me.

What's the point of talking about our problems if everyone is too exhausted to genuinely listen?

By the way, I wasn't seeking financial aid; I simply longed for empathy. Moreover, are you aware of the sheer humiliation that begging inflicts at my age?

I'm intrigued by what smoking crack will feel like.

It probably won't be great.

.....



The nearer your sofa is to your front door, the poorer you are likely to be.

.....

Intermittent fasting is more easily practiced in poverty.

.....

When I recounted the incident involving a white woman and a black man at the fast-food restaurant, the woman’s conduct appalled my friend. However, when my friend retold the story, he omitted the details of their races – a critical element that highlighted the underlying racism.

This omission reflects a broader issue: for us white people, overcoming ingrained racism is a continuous journey, one that requires constant vigilance and the courage to confront prejudice whenever it emerges.



243

This chapter, titled “Real Life: Chapter 27 - 28 Mile Walk,” poses the question: Shouldn't you have waited for one more chapter before writing it?

No. Next question.

I’m good.



11

PROSE

Grand Gesture

244

## Prose: Grand Gesture

In the enchanted realm of Sleeping Seagull, where the sea's murmur was laden with secrets and the winds whispered of passions and treacheries, there resided a brave knight named Sir Carver. His heart, a captive of yearning, throbbed for the sight of the lovely Lady Tiffany – an ethereal beauty ensnared by the shadowy spells cast by his twin, the sorcerer Reginald.

For forty painstaking weeks, Sir Carver roamed the verdant, enigmatic woodlands of Sleeping Seagull. Each step was a meditation on the sorrowful saga that had rented their destinies asunder. Though he could empathize with Reginald's yearnings, for their blood was shared, the knife of betrayal cut too deep for absolution.

"Perchance it was the mark – the one mimicking the grand African continent, proudly bearing its fifty-four mystical provinces upon his skin – that might have unravelled the deception for her," pondered Sam, the sage and stalwart companion pacing alongside Carver.

"Tiffany's love is sightless, a pure force," Carver exhaled deeply, his spirit of forgiveness as boundless as the skies above. "Her heart, I must reclaim. Does redemption await in her gaze?"

"Sure, as the day turns to night," assured Sam with a twinkle of insight in his gaze, "a grand overture will beckon her soul to thine."

Their thoughts were momentarily distracted as the realm's swiftest, Usain Bolt, danced by with the wind.

Carver contemplated the gesture majestic enough to capture Tiffany's heart anew.

"A celestial picnic, a poem wrought 'neath the wax and wane of the moon, a tasting at the famed Sleeping Seagull Winery, or a rose garden where love blooms eternal," mused Sam, ever the wellspring of romance.

"Yet, unbeknownst to all, these past weeks, I've secretly toiled," Carver confided with a rising crescendo of pride, "constructing our castle of sweet reverie by the serene embrace of Calm Bay. A nursery so grand, it would eclipse the Fairy Queen's very own chambers – a magnum opus of devotion."

Sam's eyes widened like moons in revelation. "A castle? A nursery designed for the heirs of your heart?"

“Indeed, a haven of whimsy,” Carver confirmed, guiding Sam towards the castellated dream. With a flourish, the imposing doors yielded to unveil a nursery unparalleled – there stood a grand mural of the Eiffel Tower, a picturesque stream teeming with kaleidoscopic koi, duelling petting zoos: one home to downy animals, the other filled with creatures of enchantment – additionally, a court for the spirited matches of pickle ball, while overhead, a canopy of stars shimmered, harmonious with the dulcet tones of Raffi recasting Ed Sheeran’s melodies.

“Marvel at our world-exclusive potion boutique, dispensers of mirth and giggles, ever vigilant,” Carver bragged, gesturing to the twin Labradoodles perched like sentinels beside the cribs of myth.

“Most splendid,” Sam agreed with a nod.

Sam escorted Lady Tiffany to the hidden domicile as dusk draped Sleeping Seagull “Venture with me into this sanctum of miracles,” Sam enticed.

“To whom does this marvel belong?” inquired Tiffany, bewitched by curiosity.

“This abode, eternally yours, is woven from strands of love and dreams,” proclaimed Sam.

“Here lies the canvas for your endless ‘ever-after.’”

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Within, Carver knelt, vulnerability his mantle, while minstrels serenaded with a ballad of deathless love.

A stream of tears graced Tiffany’s visage – a testament to her resounding joy. “Would you crown yourself, my queen anew, that we may sculpt a kingdom in our fortress of fancies?” Carver proposed, voice quivering with a cocktail of fear and hope.

“Yes,” breathed Tiffany, her essence taking flight. Raffi, now accompanied by Ezra, serenaded with a chorus Ed Sheeran infused love songs.

Accordingly, the nuptials were decreed for the sixteenth of July amidst a swell of jubilant hearts.

The Enchanted Sleeping Seagull sang with glee, for love had vanquished the shadows, and the legends of Sir Carver and Lady Tiffany were to be extolled through the ages – with Sam bestowed the dual honour of the best man and the valiant maiden of honour.

... ..

28

Real Life  
Floating Words

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## Real Life: Floating Words

I wonder if I'll leave a stain when I hit the bottom.

A new business is opening in Yaletown—though it's probably a worldwide phenomenon, so Yaletown shouldn't flatter itself into thinking it's that special. It's a place where you can pay people to stretch you. Yes, you heard that right.

Picture the moment someone dreamt up the concept. "How can I tap into people's wallets? Ah, I'll persuade them they're not flexible enough."

That's the spirit. And "if you're wondering what fuels my passion, it's stretching people, or rather, rebranding something ancient."

Remember when Yoga was free and for everyone? Because it's caught on in high fashion, prepare to pay hundreds each month for some downward dogs.

*Imagine your friend raving about paying to get stretched. An ex-friend? A dull friend? It'd be better to pay a homeless person for a stretch; at least then, you'd give something back.*

Does this mean the world is on the brink of collapse?

At the Fitness Asylum today, Gaia—the counter attendant often referred to as Earth—informed me my membership payment had been declined. She clarified I needed to settle the payment before I could use the facilities.

Reflect on that; payment is required before exercise.

During a walk today with J, we stumbled upon a yard sale. One of the items for sale was a sign.

REMEMBER YOU ARE ALWAYS STRONGER  
THAN YOU THINK YOU ARE.

IT DID NOT HELP.

Later, on the Seawall, I overheard a young woman tell two friends, "I did my pelvic floor exercises today."

I suggest asking the next stranger you meet in a bar if they've done their pelvic floor exercises today.

A few steps on, a man revealed to his companion, "Our mutual friend married his forever wife."

SPLAT.

I'm considering writing a story that explores the evolving relationship between my hands and my penis over the years—it could be compelling, or perhaps not.

• • • • •

I've been carrying the burden of my world while trying to reconcile with my estranged family, all the while plagued by the fear, I might never be capable of supporting my chosen loved ones.

It feels as if I'm laying in a grave with the earth crumbling around me, choking everything but my desperate breaths.

In my struggle to escape, I contend with both tangible obstacles and the internal strife caused by judgment and the haunting silence of my abandonment issues.

When I reveal my vulnerabilities, it serves as a test for my fair-weather friends, some who disappear as quickly as the night at dawn.

Even with my emotional defences, I bravely reached out to my estranged family (after several decades), only to be met with a response so tepid it felt like apathy. Conversations about my job struggles were met with cold finality.

Then there's this painful memory: My second mother only recognized me as her son with her dying breath back in 2016.

Fate threw me a bone when I was informed of a small trust fund in my name, due to mature in May 2023. Six months on (*now, almost one year*), with no resolution, and with my financial stability disintegrating. I called the financial custodians but mistakenly dialled a cousin, previously known as a niece, who disclosed another relative, once niece, now also a cousin to me, was burdened with cancer. She urged me to call this cousin who was fighting the disease, so I reached out to her.

My call floundered in the ether of indifference. She is a recent chemotherapy survivor, poised for radiation therapy. Her parents, still mourning the loss of one daughter, bore the additional anguish of a parental suicide (long ago – but never forgotten). *They also grieved for two figures from my childhood – people I had grown up thinking were my parents – people I spent much of my youth watching die – people who weren't my birth parents but were one of theirs.* To compound their sorrow, their second daughter is now battling cancer.

Reaching out to them, I wonder if they see me as just another burden.

This thought ignites a question: am I being selfish?

I maintain that everyone's struggle is paramount, and one's suffering should not overshadow another's.

Consider the depth of their grief: one daughter gone, another in a harrowing battle, a suicide in the family, two more claimed by cancer – and now, they hear the voice of a long-lost, non-brother.

My understanding of their indifference is as limited as my ability to comprehend it. But I'm trying. But truth be told, the only reason I found out about my cousin's cancer was because of a botched phone call – is it selfish of me to feel hurt?

• • • • •



29

Real Life

Is This Rock Bottom?

250

## Real Life: Is This Rock Bottom?

I'm at my computer updating my website and crafting this narrative. Like most days, the right side of my screen streams Global News, supplying me with an abundance of topics and provoking anxiety—as I'm bombarded with a litany of things purportedly fearing.

Yet, the only thing that truly instills fear in me is life itself, my profound affection for it, and the pursuit of my time to flourish.

I ponder shifting some of my financial resources from my overstretched, maxed-out credit cards to my bank accounts, which are suffocating within their parentheses. Those familiar with financial strain will understand exactly what I mean.

A financial expert appears on screen, advising viewers to skimp on coffee or similar luxuries to afford a home or vacation.

I find this laughably illogical.

Why?

Delving into the heart of an economy teetering on the brink, the following narrative illuminates the desperate plight of faltering businesses. To withdraw support from these struggling ventures is to misunderstand profoundly the intricate dance between economies and societies.

Pause for a moment and consider: if our collective wallets snap shut, who then will savour the morning's first sip of coffee?

Picture the age-old melody weaving a tale of interconnectedness, where each worker's fate is inextricably linked to the local coffee shop, which supports the neighbourhood clothing store, spiralling into an endless chain of mutual dependence.

Of course, this excludes the burgeoning enterprise marketing stretching; just search "Stretch Lab" and watch the franchising video for a good chuckle.

Then, an elderly man (*when I plugged this into my grammar software, a warning popped up saying 'elderly' might be ageist – I think the man may be my age*) graces the screen, discussing how construction materials are plummeting onto Granville Island from the overhead Granville Bridge. In the clip, he emphasizes the peril and ends his tirade with, "I don't know if someone is getting their jollies off by dropping stuff off the bridge or..."

Speaking of deriving pleasure, which I can assure is not me, have I reached rock bottom?

... ..

Today, I received an email from Hacker demanding Bitcoins or;  
Hacker will post non-existent videos of me masturbating to porn. 252

My thoughts on it will follow later.

.....

## An Unedited Email from Hacker.

**H**i Lindsay Wincherauk,  
I'm a hacker and have successfully managed to hack your device operating system.

Currently *I have gained full access to your account.*

I've been watching you for a few months now.

The fact is that your device has been infected with malware through an adult site that you visited.

If you are not familiar with this, I will explain.

Trojan virus gives me full access and control over a computer or other device.

This means that I can see everything on your screen, turn on the camera and microphone, but you do not know about it.

I also have access to all your contacts and all your correspondence.

You may be wondering why your antivirus cannot detect my malicious software.

The malware I used is driver-based; I update its signatures every 4 hours.

Hence your antivirus is unable to detect its presence.

I made a video showing how you satisfy yourself in the left half of the screen, and the right half shows the video you were watching at the time.

With one mouse click, I can send this video to all your emails and contacts on your social networks.

I can also make public all your e-mail correspondence and chat history on the messengers that you use.

I believe you would definitely want to avoid this from happening.

Here is what you need to do - transfer the Bitcoin equivalent of £900 to my Bitcoin account (that is rather a simple process, which you can check out online in case you don't know how to do that, you can visit [buy.bitcoin.com](http://buy.bitcoin.com)).

Below is my bitcoin account information:

Fafefefefefefeferr (Changed - not real)

Once the required amount is transferred to my account, I will proceed with deleting all those videos and disappear from your life once and for all.

Kindly ensure you complete the abovementioned transfer within 60 hours (more than 2 days).

I will receive a notification right after you open this email, hence the countdown will start. Trust me, I am very careful, calculative, and never make mistakes.

If I discover that you shared this message with others, I will straight away proceed with making your private videos public.

Have a nice day!

... ..

## My Analysis

“Hi” is a pleasant start, followed by identifying who they are, Hacker |Pronoun|.

It’s nice of Hacker to let me know he fully controls my computer.

Oh, oh, I’m excited; what does he want from me?

I had better pop an erectile dysfunction pill – rats, I don’t have any.

Hacker’s been watching me, how? I don’t have a webcam. Is Hacker magic?

Apparently, I’ve been visiting adult sites I haven’t been visiting. That sentence confused me. A blue line is under ‘apparently,’ I think it wants me to add a comma. I’ll go back.

Hacker wondered if I’d been wondering if my anti-virus hadn’t detected the malware that I didn’t know was there. I don’t think Hacker is a bright individual – I’d lean towards he’s a jerk.

Apparently, again, he’s created a video of me *jerking it* and is going to share it with the world if I don’t give him bitcoins I don’t have. He’s more than welcome to have my (j)s. Maybe he can make a deposit in my account to make the brackets disappear. You know, a gesture of kindness.

I flash to yesterday early evening, I was out for a bit with friends when a friend approached, a friend who’s probably read some of my gloomy posts on a Social that would have most readers worried – including me, but if you know me, you know my writings may be a study on empathy and compassion, and how we treat the people in our orbit who are going through difficult times.

Here comes the experiment on how this friend made me feel; she came up to me; we haven’t seen each other in a long time; well, she came up to me, patted me on the shoulder, and then said meekly in a pitying tone, barely audible, “How are you?” I lied and said, “Okay.” She said, “Good,” and ran away without uttering another word.

My friend, The Mayor, has a sister-in-law who is nearing the end of her life. My friend, who is seventy and underwent surgery last week, and who is also struggling with Parkinson’s – a heavy burden. Yet he tells me he doesn’t have it bad, because The Mayor’s sister-in-law is closer to death. I scold him, insisting his problems are valid and he should stop dismissing his struggles with the tired notion someone else always has it worse. I believe we all need to take better care of ourselves. Life can be challenging – if you don’t acknowledge the tough times, how can you ever appreciate the good ones?

**H**ow did that make you feel?  
What?  
*The friend meekly asking...*

It made me feel sad, like she is cheering for me to keep falling.

The news loops back to the man saying things about getting jollies off.

Hacker, I can't wait to see the video of me getting mine off because I want to find out who the person who you think is me, is; because I don't masturbate, watch porn, or... oh yeah, have a webcam? So, who's playing me on the screen?

And if Hacker truly knew me, and I did masturbate, I probably wouldn't care if he shared it with the world because I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be the only one who masturbates – and why would anyone want to watch me. I wonder if the Hacker got permission from the fictitious porn stars, I supposedly watch, to spread their pornographic acting to the world. Hmm... I wonder. I don't.

Is porn fiction?

Once I give Hacker the bitcoins I don't have, he will leave my life forever. That will be a good day for me. I don't think Hacker would make a good friend.

I've got 60 hours to comply; the clock is ticking.

It's kind of a Hacker to let me know 60 hours is more than 2 days.

Brian Mulrone died.

I'm supposed to trust that Hacker is "very careful," calculative, and never makes mistakes.

Ahh. Hacker wants me to have a nice day!

Ohh. Scary music.

The only mistakes Hacker has made are I don't masturbate, have a webcam, I don't watch porn, *calculative is misused*, and if Hacker was paying attention, my life is falling through the cracks and if you were as calculative as you claim to be; you'd realize my life is in financial stress as I race toward the bottom, and because of stress I don't have cash or time for erections at the present moment – so, go to hell.

Before I tell you to f-off, thank you for brightening my day. I think this is the bottom line; starting today, I will slowly dig our way out from under the precipice of doom.

Ohh. Scary music. "The Precipice of Doom."

... ..

## The Moral of this Story

**I**f a friend is in a troubling situation, DO NOT MEEKLY ASK THEM IF THEY ARE, OKAY?

Meekness and passive aggressiveness make people feel like crap, and kind of despise you.

If you want to encourage someone you care about in trouble, don't treat them like they've already lost.

What's going on? I have an erection; I better get a webcam.

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Oh. There it is again—two more alarming headlines flash across the screen before I endeavour to extricate myself from my living grave.

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The first reports consuming over two alcoholic drinks per week could hasten one's demise. The advice is curt and foreboding: abstain from drinking or die an early death.

Shortly after, the newsreader presents a piece on the struggling bar industry, grappling with dire financial straits—apparently, *thrice*, people are drinking less these days—a stark contrast dripping with irony.

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## Did you do your pelvic floor exercises today?

... ..

Before I head out for my daily decompression routine, which includes a sublimely pacifying blend of reading and walking that reduces my stress to almost tolerable levels, I take one last look to the right of my computer screen. “Global” has decided to air one of those segments – supposedly motivating – focusing on an elderly person achieving something remarkable.

Little do the young viewers realize how patronizing this is, exploiting the elderly for viewership gains. On the screen, an 80-year-old man has joined a powerlifting competition. He stands alone in his age group (most of the people who were in his life, are no longer with us), automatically ensuring a win by default. Chad doesn’t want to be his friend.

Yet, the newsreader gushes, “He’s opting for challenge over a walkover – see him there, bench pressing, looks to be about 30 pounds, with a spotter assisting. What a hero!”

The studio team, all in their thirties, bathed in the glow of the cameras, exchange witty banter regarding the man’s “Herculean” endeavour, all the while laughter fills the air. “It’s never too late to start,” they proclaim. Incensed, I imagine myself jumping into the broadcast to berate their condescension.

I arrived at the Fitness Asylum and discovered 74 new members, all aged over 90, undoubtedly motivated by the recent television segment. Unfortunately, none can afford the membership fee. Tragically, 72 of them experience too much strain from lifting weights and succumb. Before succumbing, three of them had managed to place weights in granny carts, wheeling them around the gym.

In one corner, Leroy, 86, clandestinely receives steroids from the gym’s undercover supplier. Meanwhile, the only other elderly survivor, Bruce, monopolizes a bench. He lifts no weight, his arms pumping air with the help of two spotters.

Annoyed, Chad – who awaits his turn – asks Bruce when he’ll be done. “Fourteen sets left,” Bruce replies smugly, suggesting a return the next day. Chad huffs away to pass the time with narcissistic sets of self-admiration in the mirror. *Hacker* has hacked the mirror.

The studio anchors are oblivious to the irony of their words – *it’s never too late to start* – as they unknowingly mock the elderly instead of honouring them.

Back at the Fitness Asylum, Bruce drops to the floor and performs thirteen pelvic floor exercises – he has resolved that *it’s never too late to work on losing his virginity* – as the only virgin in his age group.

In Quebec, a 60-year-old has set a record as the oldest person to perform a headstand. He got laid that night.

Meanwhile, a centenarian woman completed a 100-meter dash in four minutes, coming in second after a leaf carried by the wind overtook her in the final 10 meters. She credits her remarkable speed to smoking two cartons of cigarettes daily.

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PROSE

The Wedding

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## Prose: The Wedding

16 July 2028

The day was picture-perfect, with a postcard-worthy sky. Fluffy, wispy clouds danced around the sun at 23 degrees Celsius, which converts to 73.4 Fahrenheit for our American friends.

A gentle breeze ensured that everyone in Sleeping Seagull stayed refreshed and cool. Carver's memories spanned from hate to love, love to lust, and lust to truth. That linear journey of emotions connected him to Tiffany and empowered him to support her in letting go. *Ed Sheeran clapped*. They had overcome Reginald's malevolence and even found it in their hearts to forgive him.

Reginald was no longer in the frame; he rekindled his relationship with Courtney, and their all-consuming karaoke pursuits left them no time to interfere in Tiffany's life. And with Courtney expecting Reginald's twins, the pair had no interest in dragging Tiffany into their new domestic dilemma. The resolution had led to a celebration: a combined wedding was in order.

Sam juggled dual roles to maintain the peace, as he played the best man for Carver and the maid of honour for Tiffany. He was a sartorial symbol of support – clad in half tuxedo, half bridal gown.

How did he keep them calm?

He microdosed both of them with psilocybin. Spelled incorrectly. Go back. Fixed.

Describe the setting.

Every flower in the tri-area-area had been harvested and now adorned the bandstand sitting at the bottom of the 11,000-seat amphitheatre – which was packed to the, since it is outdoors, to capacity. I was going to say rafters, but because it was outdoors...

Describe what the bride and groom were wearing.

No.

Why not?

I'm not an especially talented narrator, and furthermore, I have no desire to describe clothing.

Please?

No.

With the dual ceremony imminent, a cavalcade of cars, vans, and buses crested the horizon, carrying an eclectic assortment of individuals: Amos Calloway, Karl the Giant, Norther Winslow, Older Jenny, Mr. Soggybottom, Ping, and Jing; as well as Mayor Beamen from Spectre. These characters, lifted from one of the narrator's favourite films, *Big Fish*—starring Ewan McGregor and directed by Tim Burton—were as beloved to them as those from another one of his favourites, *Grand Canyon*.

Both Tim and Ewan were in attendance—Ewan is especially worthy of his name being dropped because he is a real-life friend of the narrator's friend William.

Why were these characters here?

They had intended to honour the late Edward Bloom and followed directions to what they thought was his memorial service. However, a mistake on the highway led them to *Sleeping Seagull*, where a different celebration of life was underway—not the one for Sir Edward Bloom as depicted in the film.

Will (played by Billy Crudup), Edward's son, felt a surge of astonishment. On his deathbed, Edward (Ewan) had shared tales of the very individuals present, and Will had an epiphany. He now realized his father's capacity for love; Edward had a way of magnifying everyone's existence, casting each person he met as the protagonist of their own story. This was Edward's enduring gift—a lesson in embracing the significance of every life.

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Meanwhile, over by *The Sleeping Seagull Coliseum* (directly across the street).

Kevin Kline's car breaks down. He enters a bodega, which might mean a convenience store, though it likely encompasses more.

Afterward, Kevin stands by his stranded vehicle, awaiting a tow. As he waits, gang members circle the block in their car, menacingly scoping him out before finally pulling up, ready to intimidate or worse.

At that critical moment, Danny Glover arrives in a tow truck and comments on the injustice of such a world gone awry.

The gang leader confronts Glover with a gun, but Glover remains composed, insisting he's only there to do his job.

The gang leader questions if Glover's request to work in peace is based on respect or the fact that he's under threat of a gun.

Glover plainly states that without the gun, there would be no dialogue at all.

The gang leader smirks, concluding that respect only comes with force, then gestures to his cohorts, and they depart.

**The message is clear:** the Grand Canyon took eons to form.

**K**evin, Danny, and their gang friends are gathered in the amphitheatre, enticed by the promise of a spread featuring cold cuts, buns, and cheeses available during the reception break later that evening. They are all fond of salami.

Before we get to the reception, the ceremony is about to commence.

Dr. Wright, the wedding officiator, stands at the podium. Reginald and Courtney are the first to approach, both looking sharp in their disposable fast-fashion attire. Suddenly, Usain Bolt dashes past, pursued closely by a centenarian woman and a gender-non-specific leaf.

Dr. Wright: “Yada. Yada. Do you, Courtney? Do you, Reginald?” He looks over at the two – they are making out. After the “I dos,” he barks.

Reginald and Courtney shouted, “Sure” in unison, then returned to passionately kissing – French style.

The crowd erupts.

The Royal Couple steps onto the stage Tiffany was escorted by Jeremy, Sam flanks their sides, along with their cute as button twins, Samson and Samantha sucking of pacifiers as they sat in their strollers.

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Dr. Wright: Tiffany, do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?

Tiffany: I do.

Dr. Wright: And Carver Kai Liam Noah Rowan Unique Apollo Petra Luca Aria Asher Fergus, do you take Tiffany to be your lawful wedded wife?

Carver Kai Liam Noah Rowan Unique Apollo Petra Luca Aria Asher Fergus: I have written vows. “Tiffany, my perfect angel, from the moment I looked into your eyes that first day on Rodney’s Burger Shack patio, as you stood dripping with stank curb water, with Sam beside you marinating inside the pages of ‘DEEPLY. MADLY. TRULY.,’ I knew I had found my home, resting in your eyes,” I do.

*Ed Sheeran stands and claps.*

**Dr. Wright:** I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

As Carver + Tiffany were engaged in the kiss, Raoul lay rose petals on a blanket overlooking Calm Bay, with two bowls of clear soup placed to the side.

The End.

Happily, ever after!

by Lindsay Wincherauk

Unfortunately for Ezra, as he crossed the road to the reception, he was struck by the force of a freight train by Hondo, who desperately needed someone to tackle. The readers gasp.

This scene echoes the overused cinematic cliché of a character being blindsided by a bus or truck—a trope that likely feels out of place here indubitably.

The Academy Award for “The Most Twisted Nonsensical Rom-Com Ending in Rom-Com History,” goes to “Deeply. Madly. Truly.”

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Tiffany’s dress was a pristine white taffeta, a fabric that, ironically, Courtney and Reginald chose as the names for both of their twins.

Thus concludes the first Rom-Com I’ve ever written. How did I do?  
I’ll wait over→ [HERE](#) for your response.

... ..

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PROSE

Sam's Review

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## Prose: Sam's Review

17 July 2028

**W**hen Sam awoke, his head was still spinning, trapped in an Absinthe-fuelled fog. He found himself adhering to the back page of “Madly. Truly. Deeply.”

It was time for him to return home or move onto the next parchment he would become a part of. Sitting in a chair in his office was Van Gogh, his left ear bleeding.

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Sam had an intuitive feeling that his time at Sleeping Seagull would soon end. Rising from the page he had been stuck to, he settled into his desk chair, ready to write his review. To his left, a steaming cup of French Roast awaited, from which he took a sip, only to burn his tongue.

## Sam's Review: MADLY. TRULY. DEEPLY.

Ladies, gentlemen, and book enthusiasts of all dimensions, buckle up for the literary equivalent of a triple-loop rollercoaster ride through the cosmos – introducing “Madly. Truly. Deeply.,” the book that’s so good, it doesn’t even need an author’s name on the cover. It’s like Banksy decided to write a novel, and we’re all just living in it.

From the moment you crack open this inscrutable tome, you’ll be whisked away on a Kafkaesque journey that’s part Kaufman, part carnival ride, and entirely off the rails. Each page is a portal to a realm where whimsy reigns supreme, and logic takes a well-deserved vacation.

Our hero, the endearing sidekick Sam, is so charmingly crafted that you’ll find yourself checking your own pages to make sure he hasn’t leapt off to steal your snacks. He’s the Robin to your Batman, the Chewbacca to your Han Solo, the Watson to your Sherlock – only with more heart-stealing and less crime-solving.

If I were to rate this book using the conventional star system, I’d quickly run out of stars. We’re talking about a celestial rating here, folks – imagine every star in the night sky, then multiply it by infinity, carry the one, and you’re still not even close. It’s that good.

And let me tell you about the page-stealing Sam. This character is so vividly written, so utterly compelling, I’m half-convinced he’s a doppelganger of myself. Yes, dear reader, in a plot twist no one saw coming, I am the real-life inspiration for Sam.

(Disclaimer: This claim has not been verified by anyone, anywhere, at any time.)

In conclusion, “Madly. Truly. Deeply.” is not just the best Rom-Com ever penned – it’s a love letter to the absurd, a sonnet to the surreal, and a high-five to hilarity. So, if you’re looking for a book that will spin your head with joy, love, and a touch of existential delight, look no further. Just don’t blame me when you start seeing Sams everywhere – it’s a side effect of greatness.



**A**s Sam typed the word “myself,” he reached for his coffee. No longer steaming, the drink had turned tepid. He downed it in one gulp, closed his eyes, and suddenly Van Gogh was tugging at his hand.

A flash of light illuminated Sam’s office just as the lukewarm liquid slid down his throat.

**POOF.** In an instant, he had vanished. When Sam’s eyes fluttered open, he found himself on 16 July 1960, sitting outside a dimly lit room. Two nuns passed by, carrying a lifeless infant.

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As Sam’s vision cleared of phosphenes, he noticed a card dealer near the room. Peering inside, he saw a newborn baby crying quietly and alone in the corner.

The dealer laid out five cards: the 2 of clubs, 3 of spades, 4 of hearts, 5 of diamonds, and the Queen of spades.

Sam understood he had arrived at his next assignment, a journey through a memoir titled “Lindsay.”

Meanwhile, Van Gogh poured them each two fingers of Absinthe.

... ..

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Real Life Rewind  
A Shirt's Tale (2024)

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## Real Life: A Shirt's Tale 2024

Imagine you open your closet to find nothing but white dress shirts. At first glance, everything seems in perfect harmony. All the shirts share the same fabric, stitch patterns, and buttons.

Then, one day, a shirt ventures out, discovering new fabrics and styles. It returns with tales of exciting discoveries. Some shirts, fearing change, vow to protect their culture by keeping others out. Others grow curious, exploring new ideas and lifestyles online.

Eventually, a colourful, differently cut shirt arrives, followed by patterned and even pink shirts. The closet becomes vibrant.

Yet, some shirts condemn their new neighbours, fearing the changes will compromise their fabric.

The most vocal dress shirts claim they don't hate but argue the newcomers are stealing opportunities and leading them to be pushed aside.

Resisting change, they isolate themselves in gated sections of the closet.

Groups form against the new arrivals, justified as for the greater good.

Weak-minded shirts join, leading to taunting and occasional violence.

The new shirts, seeking a better life, are baffled by the hostility reminiscent of the oppression they fled.

Some, embittered, lash out against the established way, showing their intolerance.

The conflict escalates, with the loudest dress shirts branding their attackers as terrorists and seeking to eliminate the supposed threat.

Some ignorant shirts even attack others within their closet.

As tensions rise, radical groups emerge among the newcomers, recruiting more; hostility grows. They organize online, planning strikes against their oppressors.

My closet, full of colours, styles, cuts, and fabrics, resides in Vancouver. It's not perfect, and there's progress to be made, but I believe it's the best city in the world.

....

## Lindsay, a Cautionary Tale

As I've aged, it seems to have caught me off guard, and now I find myself in a sort of limbo. Jobless, I am growing increasingly intolerant of advice from those who haven't walked in my shoes.

The legal team I enlisted assured me there was no cause for concern since 'truth was on my side.'

Truth indeed was on my side, and my former employer even admitted to me that what he did was cruel, akin to a death sentence, but it was the ineptitude and greed of my legal team that should have alarmed me.

Still, I'm determined to set things right and find a stopgap job (I thought it would have been easy, oh, how mistaken I was (am)) to bridge us to the moment my literary aspirations bear fruit.

Despite dispatching 850 job applications into the world, hope is nonexistent – one interview, another through a referral, yet no successful outcomes. The prospect of an end is foreboding.

Some around me shun the harsh truth of our situation.

A genuine friend listens without offering judgment or unsolicited advice.

Conversely, a fair-weather friend, upon hearing about the countless menial jobs I've pursued and been rejected from, bombards me with more job-seeking tactics – this, despite the loud message the 850 applications I have sent: I am clearly being passed over, and I have a handle of the gravity of my situation. How audacious of them to prod a "friend" to seek anything but what ignites their passion.

I confide in a true friend about rejections from *Home-Bleeping-Depot* and McDonald's.

To a critical friend with ready-made solutions, I offer nothing but my written expressions of frustration – as I seek isolation from them.

Consider what might become of me if no means of perseverance emerges.  
And what if you were in my shoes?

I always look for the bright side, even though, at times, the bulb burns out, and the stores selling hope bulbs seem to have run out of stock.

A trusted friend once consoled me, saying, "Given your relentless effort, talent, intelligence, empathy, compassion, and skill, if you can't escape your predicament – I fear for myself if I ever encounter trouble." *A cautionary tale.* Some people do listen with compassion.

**N**ot Home Depot, McDonald's, Burger King, KFC, Wendy's – nor over 850 other attempts – yielded any opportunities. This is not a plea for career guidance.

If you are inclined to send me job links instead, why don't you just shoot me? That would be kinder. And I must say your reading comprehension of the previous paragraph is...

Are you disturbed by this?

You ought to be... My life is on the verge of collapse. Does it matter to you?

I refuse to resign myself to life in a trailer.

Discover more at [www.lindsaywincherauk.com](http://www.lindsaywincherauk.com)

There you'll find an opinion piece I revisited, one I originally penned for a local newspaper back when my perspectives had monetary value: "A Shirt's Tale." (In the Real-Life Section of Prose – Link Below):

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Should this excerpt perplex or trouble you, please feel free to pause and delve into the deepest recesses of your soul before reacting.

Contemplate an unfathomable question: what would you do if you were nearing 64 with time rapidly dwindling?

And if you've yet to delve into the first Romantic Comedy I crafted, I'm curious. What's been holding you back?

Titled "Madly. Truly. Deeply.," it awaits your reading pleasure here (In The Prose Section):

<https://www.lindsaywincherauk.com/tditlolw-vol-4-prose.html>

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Real Life

Aging

From Okay to Poverty

Fear

| A Poem |

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**Real Life: Aging - From Okay to Poverty - Fear | A Poem |**

Fear,

laced with guilt—when you buy food, buy a drink, socialize to avoid isolation.

Feeling like you have failed.

Fear of judgment.

Fear of becoming obsolete.

Fear of irrelevance.

Fear that you can't provide for yourself or your family.

Fear of isolation.

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Fear of abandonment.

Fear of being forgotten.

Words can scarcely convey the energy required to persevere through adversity – 'devastatingly exhausting' might suffice.

It's crucial to never lose sight of empathy, compassion, kindness, and the importance of understanding.

Without them, we risk becoming monstrous.

One can never truly comprehend the pain behind another's eyes.

Fear of extinction.

... ..

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Real Life

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Depression + Stress Have Won?



## Real Life: Depression + Stress Have Won?

**T**oday marks the nadir of my spirits.

Isolation and fear grip me tightly.

With each day inching closer to my birthday, I sense my health fading.

To endure, I've accepted I must relinquish all social ties – at the expense of my mental well-being.

Yet, this solitude is a refuge from the apprehension of judgment, and the pain of being misconstrued. And, regrettably, my absence probably will go unnoticed.

This year, I've maintained a vigorous routine, regularly visiting the Fitness Asylum, reading sixteen books, and surpassing two million steps.

In my job search, I've been expansive, submitting applications to more than 1,000 positions, ranging from the mundane to the uninspiring. Have you applied for over 1,000 jobs in your entire life?

My objectives are clear, yet the path to accomplishing them remains to be determined. In tandem, I have authored 13 books and crafted over 800 sales pitches, underscoring my unwavering commitment to daily writing.

One potential employer has shown interest, but working there would entail a gruelling daily commute of four hours, half of that time spent on foot.

This prospective employer demands a daily commute of over four hours, including two hours on foot (along the side of a highway). Empathize with me – step into the shoes of a 64-year-old stroke survivor (walking down a highway as transport trucks blast past – in the rain). Picture the gruelling daily journey between cities like Saskatoon and Regina or Vancouver and Chilliwack. If this employment is secured (starting daily at 6 AM finishing at 10 PM – leaving 8 hours daily for sleep, eating and life – the math isn't sustainable) at the cost of surrendering any semblance of a life. And at 64, time is a precious, dwindling resource – acceptance likely means dying in transit.

I have sought support from friends, family, and the government, yet I often feel lonelier than ever after. Friends and family fear being asked for help. I get that.

Yesterday was the anniversary of the deaths of my youngest niece in 2016 and an ex-girlfriend in 2021. Since 2016, I have lost five family members and five friends.

While some friends have been incredibly unconditionally supportive, I feel guilty for burdening others with my grief; the government, on the other hand, has stated they can only help if I become homeless.

In this technological era, attempts at genuine connection are often met with indifferent dismissals. People shun the discomfort of personal interactions, preferring the detached simplicity of texts or emails – or nothing at all.

When I'm with friends, I keep my feelings to myself to avoid their advice. It seems every suggestion fails to grasp who I genuinely am, often implying I should abandon my dreams under the guise of, what is it – concern?

I understand the imperative of survival; I trekked 28 miles just for two conversations that barely lasted 20 minutes – I see no point in broadcasting that (except for here).

Moreover, I have submitted applications for over 1,000 jobs. I repeat, have you ever done that?

I've been rejected by London Drugs ten times and counting.

Your constant barrage of suggestions needs to cease (it doesn't matter because I'm about to disappear one way or the other – cryptic?). I am acutely aware of the formidable challenge of securing employment at my age. Enough already. Just stop. I don't need to hear about the lucrative prospects of pet sitting or dog walking. Such remarks only drive me further inward, exacerbating my despair and inching me closer to the brink of resignation.

**Consider this:** if I managed to secure just one interview after 1,000 job applications, how can I expect to find dogs to walk or anyone who'd trust a 64-year-old man to sit with their cats?

There is no answer.

I am at a total loss. What's coming will devastate our lives so profoundly no platitude, kind word, or well-meaning advice can help. And please, don't tap me on the shoulder, meekly ask me (pity) if I'm okay, and then disappear before I acknowledge you are there.

I know my honesty has caused many friends to distance themselves. They likely struggle to respond or disagree with my directness, which may make them feel uneasy – as if my pain no longer belongs to me.

If you want to say something to me, say you're sorry for what I'm enduring. You don't need to urge me to keep trying. Think of what the two million steps represent? I'd dare anyone to survive a day in my shoes. And please remember, if you talk to me, you are not the only one in my ear.

If I don't pursue my passion, I understand I will lead a life of misery until my dying day.

I'm beginning to understand the concept of assisted...

They asked about my ideal job during my meeting with the company, which requires over four hours of daily commuting. The question felt odd, given I am almost 64 years old, so I hesitated, contemplating whether to fabricate an answer.

In the end, honesty won out, and I admitted, "I'm a creative person; creating things is my passion."

They appeared to appreciate my forthrightness.

I'm destined to meet my end on the numbing cycle of a bus or beneath the relentless thrum of the SkyTrain, cut off from the warmth of friendship, forever out of reach. Or on the cold asphalt alongside my beloved cat, Hana.

Ponder this – my life's final chapter could be spent in soulless servitude to a job, labouring not for living but for an impending death. The prospect of witnessing my 64<sup>th</sup> birthday is fading like a wisp of smoke in the grinding gears of time.

Depression and stress are winning.

When reading my musings, please remember I'm blind in my left eye. What this blindness means is half of me is trapped in the gloom (this writing), whereas the other half is whatever the hell I am?

Delightful?

Sure, I like delightful.

I prefer very delightful.

Is that more delightful than delightful?

No, it's just very.

... ..

Lindsay was kind-hearted, taller than average, and had a striking handsomeness. Most people found him likable, except those who found him loud and exhausting. He could run swiftly and hit a golf ball over 350 yards, perhaps even more than once. Above all, he cherished his family, even though he didn't know who they are except for J, Hana, and perhaps Patchy. Lindsay had a wonderful sense of humour and brought joy and laughter to those around him, a gift he developed through his pain. He was a diligent worker known for his unwavering loyalty, sometimes to his detriment. Misunderstood by many due to his loud and alluring voice, some believed he spoke more than he listened, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Lindsay abhorred racism, and although some urged him to lighten up, they were categorically wrong. He is in three different Halls of Fame as a one-eyed blind quarterback. Ultimately, he aimed to make the world a slightly better place each day.

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Thankfully, Lindsay is still very much alive.

If you know me, you know my disdain for small talk, so, in that spirit, I dare anyone to ask me, what's new?

<https://www.lindsaywincherauk.com/tditlolw-vol-4-prose.html>

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# I Can't Breathe.

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# I Can't Swim.

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by Lindsay Wincherauk

My best friend just told me London Drugs needs  
stock boys; I might as well die.

Should I tell him: 64 and stock boy; isn't a thing?

I've been rejected by London Drugs at least ten  
times.

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What do people who care; really think of me?

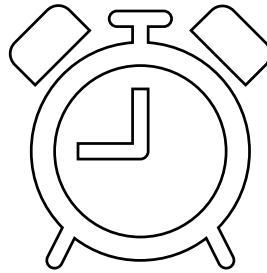
281



**M**y life's final chapter could be spent in soulless servitude to a job, labouring not for living but for an impending death.

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I'm living on borrowed time – and time wants to be paid.



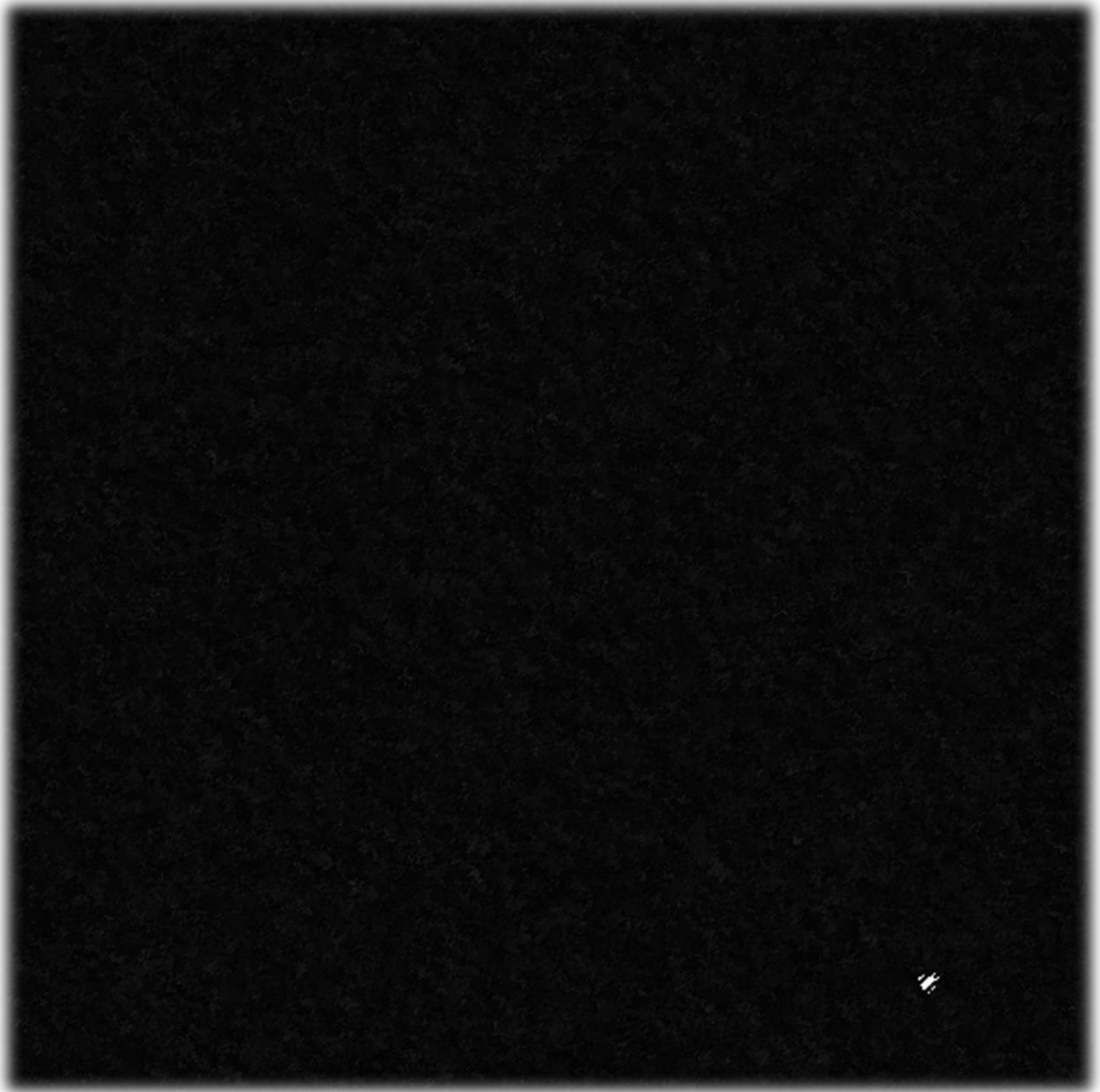
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I will never be 64.

# How will I?

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# Art: How I Am



285

by Lindsay Wincherauk

## The Ledge | A Poem |

Standing on the Ledge.

Cars whisk by – Shouting – Throwing darts.

London Drugs	Get a Job	You Got This	Focus
Dogs	Staffing Agency	Ticket Home for J	Dwell
Cats	Trailer	One Way – Can't Afford Return	
Give Up	Give Up	Give Up	Jump

1,000 Applications Sent Out – One Interview.

London Drugs is Hiring.

Are You on the Hiring Committee? Giving me a referral? No.

Do You Even Know Me? My Dreams? Passions? Efforts?

1,000 Applications Sent Out – One Interview.

The Interviewer told me I'm Old.

Passions – Evaporating.

Reason to Continue – Evaporated.

The Darts are Stinging – No Conversation.

Judgement Masked As – Nothing. Not Caring.

Standing on the Ledge.

Twenty Hands on Back – Pushing – Not Pulling.

Falling.

Splash.

The Waters Cold.

Refreshing.

I Can't Swim.

Alone.

This is my pain.

... ..

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PROSE

The Memoir

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Lindsay – The Memoir

The Delivery Room

1

Prose – The Memoir: Lindsay – The Memoir: The Delivery Room

Gazing into the sterile chamber, a pang of tenderness tightened Sam’s chest as he observed the infant – so innocent and solitary, cradled by the stark white of his surroundings.

“Oh, look at him in there, so adorably helpless and all alone. The hand he’s been dealt” – Sam muttered with a heavy heart – “This precious soul will need a wealth of guidance to navigate the treacherous waters of life,” he whispered to the vacant corridor, its shadows clinging to the sorrow permeating this forsaken institution.

Questions clouded Sam’s mind as he contemplated his urgent responsibilities. Where is this child’s family? Why has he been abandoned in such a cold, desolate place? And what of the unsettling sight of the nuns, their faces etched with solemnity as they carried another lifeless body across the corridor, a sight that had shaken Sam to his very foundation – these queries swirled within Sam, cloaked in the silence imposed by seemingly accepted societal norms.

Unseen as he meandered through the gloom-filled air, Sam questioned the peculiar sensation of weightlessness. Unbeknownst to him, his presence in this narrative took on an ethereal form – a shadowy being unbound by the shackles of flesh and bone. Sam glided towards the door as the infant wailed, a primal acknowledgment of solitude. His attempt to grasp the handle was futile, his hand dissolving through the solid wood, revealing a ghostly virtue – his newfound ability to traverse barriers, both seen and unseen, unnoticed by the living.

*The infant’s cries grew urgent, a silent plea in the sterile stillness: Who’s here? Mother? Father? Caregiver? My consciousness is barely formed, yet I know of words; I feel the absence. Who lingers in the shadows? Where has everyone vanished to? Why am I cast aside in this place?*

Now imbued with an unexpected influence, Sam answered without parting his spectral lips, his voice a mere ripple in the air.

To the bewildered child, he conveyed his purpose: a guardian meant to shepherd him through the maze of life’s injustices. This was not the time to expose the vile secrets of their surroundings. Instead, he soothed the unnamed infant with a silent vow; he would forever be his guard, an unseen mentor to assist him in deciphering the grotesque realities to which the child had been unfairly subjected.

**T**hough newly thrust into existence, the infant sensed the comfort in Sam's assurances and implored him for a solemn vow – never to depart from his vulnerable existence.

Sam earnestly consented, pledging to be the steadfast beacon until the child had acquired a repertoire of mental armaments, enough to confront the unpredictable storms life might unleash upon him.

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Thus, was forged a pact within the ethereal plane. Sam, the unwavering sentinel, and his earthly charge, would twine their fates, traversing existence with a promise of unwavering support, empathy, and the courage to conquer, despite the dreadful hand already played.

... ..



## PROSE COMING GENRES

2. Children's Book
3. Thriller (Meets Paige, formerly known as Taylor)
4. Self Help
5. Fantasy
6. LBGTQ
7. Graphic Novel

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Real Life

Imagine

291

## Real Life: Imagine

### Reading Warning:

The content ahead reflects real-life experiences. If scenes of raw reality make you squeamish, or if you tend to dispense unsolicited advice hastily, superficial consolation, and judgment without truly understanding empathy and compassion – please refrain from reading further.

Those who consider sharing personal adversities as taboo may be blissfully unaware of the broader spectrum of life.

This story is not for you if you identify with any of these dispositions.

Perhaps I may have just parted ways with some acquaintances.

Moreover, if you habitually invalidate others' feelings, one might wonder how you maintain friendships.

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## Today's Question – March 28, 2024: Imagine

Imagine you're in the twilight of your life, having lived the past sixty years. You're suddenly stripped of your job due to cost-cutting during a pandemic that made it convenient to exchange you for a younger, cheaper employee.

Imagine sending over a thousand job applications into the abyss, none of which are for positions that inspire you, but you need them to survive.

Consider finally getting an interview, only to be labelled as 'old,' while a government official grimly informs you your chances of finding employment at your age are practically zero.

The financial pressure is immense, made worse because you're a stroke survivor, which adds to your vulnerability.

Now, picture financial disaster striking, casting a shadow of despair over your family – did I mention you survived a stroke?

A potential job offer (may arrive) would require an exhausting four-hour daily commute, starting before sunrise and ending late at night, partly on foot along a busy highway filled with thundering trucks. Your schedule would only allow eight hours each night for writing, reading, exercising, and socializing; you know, life – sleep is no longer an option.

Amid the insistence of others, you must accept this demanding schedule, consider how long you could withstand this pace before hitting your physical and mental breaking point – remember, you are older and have had a stroke – or facing something even worse.

How long until such a demanding routine becomes unsustainable, harmful, or potentially fatal?

What are your limits?

What do you need and want from life?

How would you cope with the well-meaning yet misguided expectations of others?

How would it feel when people make suggestions without understanding their impact on you?

These questions prompt a frank examination.

Friends often drift away during tough times, remarkably when confiding in them seems to meet with little empathy.

**I**t seems my openness has unintentionally caused my social circle to shrink once more. It feels like my struggles are misappropriated by some friends who fail to show empathy and disregard my mental health.

Oh no, I seem to have lost four more friends.

I'm sorry for the pain you feel about mine – yesterday, four people sent me links to job postings at London Drugs, and one person suggested I move provinces without knowing anything about my personal life, like who is part of it and how impractical their help is.

I need to figure out a way for my family to get by, or just accept the inevitable and jump. I don't want our survival to result in my demise.

Sarcasm can indeed be a wild beast.

Have you thought about the questions, by the way?

They are, after all, rhetorical.

If you imagined being me, a nearing 64-year-old stroke survivor, and responded that you'd take the 16-hour-a-day job, I suspect you might not be telling the truth.

If I accept the job offer, it may be the last time I am seen, alive or otherwise – unless those in my life can meet between 10 PM and 6 AM, as sleep will no longer be an option.

A wise-person once told me – an actor on the television drama, Family Law – terminating someone's career in their sixties is a death-sentence. I guess I might be about to find out.

If my previous words have unsettled you, I urge you to review the meaning of empathy before your reply.

Yesterday, I chose to cease one medication; today, I'll discontinue another.

Why?

I refuse to endure the humiliation that comes with collecting them.

... ..

Though expressing my thoughts can be challenging, I am an exceptional writer. This final work will be the most honest and impactful story I have ever created if I make it to the finish line.

### **Final thought for the day:**

Assistance to support my livelihood during the writing process would be greatly appreciated. After all, I am writing this for all, as pain and struggle are not exclusive to myself and my loved ones.

... ..

Hearing my friends discuss the hardships of others – 295  
often leaves me feeling physically ill.

Some of my friends believe that every homeless person owns a cell phone.

**To give you some context:**

A friend mentioned, “There’s been a surge in unprovoked assaults lately. I’m worried about the possibility of copycat attacks.”

I replied, “I doubt those suffering are keeping up with the news.”

To which my friend asserted, “Every homeless person has a cell phone.”

In my head, though unspoken, I wondered, “What are they implying with that statement?”

Conversing with my friends makes it clear that we are different.

Regrettably, it seems to me that many share my friends' mindset: unoriginal and permeated with the same worn-out divisiveness, cloaked in privilege and entitlement.

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I think I just lost four more friends, oh well, evolving is tough – can you feel the sarcasm.



I may not always be correct, but my thoughts are genuine and intended to initiate a conversation. 298

If homeless individuals prioritized their matters other than owning a cell phone, perhaps they could concentrate on what's truly important. Emphasis on THEIR priorities.

299

Today, as a news segment played in the corner of my computer screen, as I wrote, the focus was on 72-year-old Deborah, who faces the grim prospect of homelessness – an outcome that could lead to her dying alone on the streets.

Following this story was a news story suggesting renters could break into the housing market simply by paying rent on time. Rent payments could boost their credit rating, and then they supposedly could obtain a credit card (?) to cover the \$100,000+ down payment (the reason renters can't get into the housing market) – a biting commentary on the impractical financial advice often disseminated, as politicians pander for votes.

Do rich landlords have rent payments?

300

This advice was as insensitive as suggesting that one's financial troubles could be solved by simply skipping their morning coffee.

Amidst these stories was the stark implication if Deborah, the 72-year-old, had eschewed luxuries like a cell phone and her morning coffee – had she made supposedly wiser choices – she might not have been condemned to die outside; only if she had the guts to take chances like the Amazon and Facebook guys did.

Simultaneously, a government official said, "We can't save everyone who is suffering; get in line." This statement was likely a paraphrase, coloured with creative license. And it tends to pit suffering individuals against each other.

My way of thinking makes me consider a career in politics.

301

## Housing or medication? Homeless Vancouver senior faces an agonizing choice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bEk9Xzo2oo>

I have arrived where she is, foolishly clinging to my cell phone and hope, spending more effort in a single day than most do in a year.

Age has weathered me and rendered me obsolete, and a former employer's greed has shattered my spirit.

A friend praises the daring of the founders of Facebook and Amazon. Their words make my stomach turn. Hearing praises from a friend about tech billionaires while my life teeters on the edge is disconcerting; fear consumes me.

Each day, my sense of alienation intensifies.

Deborah's urgency is evident as she speaks about how having a vehicle for shelter would drastically change her life. Think about that for a second. Deborah has arrived at a place where she sees sleeping in a vehicle as...

302

In the meantime, a trailer in Abbotsford catches fire. The residents of the neighbourhood label those living in the trailer as scum, deeming them less than human. These locals, equipped with cellphones and accustomed to their daily morning coffee rituals, feel entitled to their comforts, contrasting themselves with the homeless.

My friend praises Bezos for having the courage to take a risk.

I don't have the heart to remind my friend I've sent out over 1,000 job applications, written to the media daily, written over 6 million words and counting, and pitched my writing daily. And I'm still going to likely die homeless.

But you know what?

The Facebook and Amazon guys had the guts to take a chance.

Perhaps a pulse check in the Emergency Room is in order if Deborah's situation doesn't stir something in you.

The idea of calling a car or trailer home repulses me. 303

**N**o matter how hard I work, poverty still threatens me.  
What hope is left for us in my demographic if my efforts aren't enough?

I've stopped taking two medications.

Friends send me links to government agencies that allow you to beg for help; my friends don't help with the application-begging process; they send me the links.

304

I'm haunted by the chilling advice given to me two doctors ago: "You may stop taking your medicine shortly before death claims you."

I've stopped taking two of my medications – soon to be three.

## **Us White People Need to be Better: The Subtleties of Racism**

An overheard conversation.

A black man is talking with a white man.

White Man: What do you do for a living?

Black Man: I teach English.

White Man: Oh, you teach ESL.

Black Man: No, I teach English in a High School.

White Man: You are a hero.

... ..



**C**urrently, at 3:57 PM on Saturday, October 30th, I am experiencing the most profound depression and stress ever. Initially, I added “in my life,” but I’ve since deleted that phrase.

In the cauldron of this very moment, as the clock’s hand etches their relentless path across the face of time, you stand at the precipice of your own endurance. The weight of depression and stress bears down upon you, an emotional cyclone threatening to consume even the most indomitable spirit.

The abyss yawns wider, and April looms—a month taking the shape of a gauntlet of survival. You’ve trodden once more down the path of self-preservation today: the gym, the written word, the miles walked, the futile job applications—which friends are making you feel like you must report (it’s over 1,000). Is that enough for you, or do you still feel the urge to say, “Get a job?” Each step is a testament to your tenacity, yet the void remains unyielding.

Yesterday’s revelation cut deep—a friend’s tirade (not the first), a relentless barrage of your perceived shortcomings. A shove off the ledge. The words hung in the air, barbed and unyielding. You didn’t retaliate; you absorbed the blows silently, your heart echoing with the sting of the venomous words. To be called a loser by someone you trust, respect, and care about—a friend who insists they’re not being mean—what cruel alchemy is this?

And so, you carry this additional burden—the weight of their judgment, the walls of isolation it creates, the relentless march of stress and despair. For six months, you’ve shielded certain souls from your inner turmoil, fearing the vitriol awaiting. But perhaps it’s time to reconsider. Maybe vulnerability is not weakness; perhaps it’s the bridge to understanding.

Oh, by the way, I broke the middle finger on my left-hand while exercising. It hurts a lot.

In the quiet hours, as you type with your wounded finger, remember this: resilience is not forged in solitude. It’s the alchemy of shared pain, the alchemical transformation of wounds into wisdom. And though your friend’s words cut deep, they also reveal the frailty of their own empathy.

So, stand tall, my friend. Your strength lies not in invulnerability, but in your willingness to bear the weight of existence, even when the world seems intent on breaking you. And as you navigate this jumble of emotions, remember your middle digit—once broken—still dances across the keyboard, defiant and unyielding.

You are more than the sum of your struggles. You are a symphony of survival, the crescendo of resilience, and the unwritten chapter of tomorrow.

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Real Life  
Dear Lindsay

307

## Real Life: Dear Lindsay

**D**ear Lindsay,  
“Your writing transcends personal catharsis—it speaks to the collective experience in a transforming world.”

First off, I must tell you that you are an inspiration. I cannot even begin to comprehend the challenges you and your chosen family are facing. How could anyone possibly understand what it feels like to lose your career just as a once-in-a-century pandemic begins, especially when you were nearing sixty? It is appalling some people attempt to impose their will upon your situation.

I have been following your plight and I must say your writing is enthralling. It’s honest, lyrical, and poetic. Despite your struggles, your humanity and sense of humour shines through. You must never give up on your writing pursuits. You have a talent that is clear to see, and crucially, your writing transcends personal catharsis—it speaks to the collective experience in a transforming world. I admire your exceptional bravery in sharing your pain and struggles. Not many possess the courage to do so. I am aware some people would rather not listen because they prefer the comfort of denial. But the world can be incredibly unfair, and your work confronts this reality head-on.

308

I commend you and am greatly inspired by your openness in sharing your exercise routine, as well as your reading and writing pursuits. How do you manage to persevere, finding the strength to continue, even when it seems like your life is spinning wildly without any means of slowing down?

What your previous employer subjected you to was inexcusable, but it’s likely they remain indifferent.

Lindsay, it’s baffling how you tolerate it. After you’ve disclosed applying for over 1,000 jobs, people send you links to companies with which they have no connection and cannot influence the hiring process, or to staffing agencies, not to forget mentioning they don’t even have the decency to ask if you are interested? I don’t believe their intentions are to hurt you, yet I see the pain it causes. For heaven’s sake, you’ve told them about the 1,000 applications—why must they respond so insensitively? And why on earth would a friend suggest you start walking dogs or cat-sitting? *Your endurance of such thoughtlessness is nothing short of commendable.*

I wish I could offer you financial support; I understand it's the lifeline you desperately need. Unfortunately, many shy away from this uncomfortable subject, opting to send memes or platitudes rather than showing authentic concern, and then when you say it hurt you, they vanish. They seem to forget you are acutely conscious of your own struggles.

If someone feels compelled to help but cannot do so financially, a heartfelt "I care about you" would be far more comforting than any meme. Simply acknowledging, "I'm sorry for what you're going through" would suffice. Nothing more.

Lindsay, I know you're frightened and uncertain about what to do next, but no matter what, continue telling your stories. They are immensely important. If people truly understand them – and many do – you'd be amazed at how many people, your bravery to share is helping. Your stories made me feel less isolated.

As you approach sixty-four, I would venture to guess the lost income and life savings from your abrupt dismissal to be around \$500,000. I don't understand how you rise daily to write, read, exercise, and create. I'd likely experience paralysis due to shock and would be reduced to trembling in a corner.

309

It must have been overwhelming when a friend expressed their concern for you and then hastily proposed a solution, shifting abruptly from discussing how to maintain stability in your life to suggest you give up everything and move into their trailer, which they offered to park anywhere. The rapid progression likely made your head spin as you processed the offer.

Regardless, I doubt my words will make a difference, and I regret that I can't provide financial support. However, please continue to write, create, and share – the world benefits from your contributions.

As for your other friends, we humans are incredibly flawed, stressed, and tired. The emptiness of small talk has conditioned many of us to retreat inward and focus solely on one thing when confronted with another's suffering...

Never stop writing. Should I find anything that might aid your writing endeavours, I promise to share it with you. Rest assured, I'll never suggest mundane job links or propose dog walking as an option. I'm well aware that isn't the support you need, and I won't congratulate myself for offering what I think is wise advice.

I recently overheard a story about five men who went out for drinks. During their gathering, one man complimented their 28-year-old server, saying, “I like your haircut. It makes you look younger.” Despite knowing the intense stress, you face and your struggle just to get through each day, the comment lingered. After the server walked away, you softly pointed out, “Maybe you shouldn’t tell people they look younger; it’s not always the compliment you think it is.”

Then, one of them pounced, exclaiming how much they enjoyed hearing they looked younger than their age. They all agreed, naively adding women, in particular, appreciated such comments. The audacity of these five aging men presuming to know women’s preferences!

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I heard you started to correct them but held your tongue, recognizing any further argument would only invite ridicule, and bullying from this group of four men, who were convinced being called old was somehow a compliment. I know you retreated into silence wondering how such a ‘nothing’ could be made into more ‘nothing’ – but with a dash of vitriol.

Lindsay, your strength is inspiring. Enduring such hardship must be incredibly challenging, yet you persevere. Your writing should never cease, for you and your family are beloved, and you make the world a richer place.

Perhaps someone will initiate a GoFundMe campaign for you and your family. I heard you started one to help all of us “falling through the cracks,” but you were the only one to contribute.

At least if you “fall through the cracks,” hopefully your friends won’t judge you for still having a cell phone – because they’re too stunned to realize having a cell phone isn’t the reason you fell through the damned cracks – and besides, without cell service is a cellphone still a phone?

Your patience with such insensitivity is extraordinary. You deserve true understanding, compassion, and care, not memes or careless suggestions.

Despite the challenges, Lindsay, please remember this: you are not alone. Your courage, your resilience, they inspire those around you. Your stories touch hearts, and your strength gives hope.

While I don’t have all the answers or solutions, I promise my unwavering support, belief in you, and companionship on your journey, wherever it leads.

Keep writing, Lindsay.

Keep creating.

Keep sharing your truth with the world.

The world is indeed better with you in it.

**With love and admiration,**

**Your Friend**

... ..

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Real Life Rewind

312

Dog Walker + Minding the Gap (2024)

## Real Life: Dog Walker + Minding the Gap (2024)

**A** conversation (Sunday, March 31, 2024) about a nonexistent dog-walking job offer stung me deeply. It's exceedingly hurtful because the job isn't even real – it was never offered to me. The idea might as well have been to suggest I pilot an airplane.

"Why don't you take the dog walking job?"

"Because there is no job to take! Nobody is likely to hire a 64-year-old dog walker. Besides, aren't dog walking services mostly run by the owners?"

"So? Take the job, anyway. Consider it a stepping stone."

The conversation is exhausting.

"A stepping stone to what, though?"

I'm starting to doubt I have any genuine friends.

Let me say this: if you need to let me know about job opportunities, aim higher than dog walking. Try to lift my spirits rather than confirm your low opinion of me with your suggestions.

When you propose these insignificant, imaginary roles, it feels like you're not involved in my well-being. And if I get upset, you tell me I'm looking at it all wrong, which adds to the pain. Please, stop. I already feel terrible enough about myself. I don't need my friends to contribute to that – I need them to support and encourage me to keep going.

... ..



## Minding the Gap (2024) - Originally written in 2007.

What has happened?  
Our grocery stores now employ security guards to safeguard the food. Police officers are masquerading as journalists to apprehend anti-poverty activists employing intimidation tactics and vandalism to advance their cause.

Gentrification in the DTES has initiated a spread of addiction, consequence, and neglect across the city. Now, it's impossible to walk through any park, especially in the downtown core, without literally stepping over bodies.

During a mundane trip to the store, the body count rises as individuals lie dormant on sidewalks throughout town. A man extends his hand to open the door for me at the convenience store entrance. Exiting, I pause, expecting the door to open, but the man has disappeared.

If you live downtown, Clipboard People accost you on nearly every block, inquiring, "Do you have a moment? May I ask you a quick question?"

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I just want to proceed to the store.

Along the route, you encounter demonstrators outside a chicken eatery, attempting to rally support for a boycott, while the employees within simply wish to make some money.

Speculators purchase several condos in development projects, engaging in an expensive gamble called "flip this house." Meanwhile, we struggle to devise strategies to combat homelessness. It's no surprise homelessness has quite literally arrived at our doorsteps.

*Perhaps, if profit was not the driving force behind residential real estate, homelessness could be significantly reduced. Dare to dream.*

How can we call ourselves free when the water that we drink comes from some factory?

- The Swollen Members

Some amass fortunes through the hard work of the less fortunate, dwelling in penthouses and driving luxury cars while forgetting who truly handed them the keys.

I need to stop looking if I want to keep smiling.

Vancouver is indisputably a world-class beauty among cities. Yet, we have lost sight of the essential: the people – ourselves, the tourists, and the less fortunate, who are our brethren.

Perhaps the walk to the store has left us cold and bitter. Have we turned into self-absorbed people?

### The Solution

To truly embrace the world with open arms, we must begin by being kinder to one another. So, smile, let go of that hostile demeanour, and remember, while purchasing your water, that not everyone is as fortunate as you are.

In London's Underground, the announcer's voice rings, "Mind the Gap." I'm starting to doubt Vancouver is paying attention to our own.

It's a sombre reality that we need security guards in our grocery stores to safeguard the food. That reality weighs heavily on my heart.

... ..

In 2007, I penned an op-ed for 24 Hours. Seventeen years later, now in 2024, with barely any revisions to that piece, I find myself on the verge of homelessness – a situation I've had no hand in creating.

Despite this, I've realized apathy prevails; I am compelled to proclaim incessantly. I am not the architect of my misfortune. I shout into the void that greed has forced me into this precarious position.

Here's something I've come to understand. It seems empathy is faltering. At a football game in Iowa, a man brandished a sign claiming he needed money for beer, and astonishingly, people funnelled over a million dollars to him. I admit that I'm battling depression and stress, and it appears this confession moves few. Yet, I suspect if I were to declare I had a tangible illness, only then might people show concern. At least, that's the impression I'm left with.

... ..

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Real Life Rewind

We Must Keep Us All In Mind (2004) 316

+

Chips ~ Destiny ~ Free Will  
(My Chest Hurts)

## Real Life: We Must Keep Us All In Mind 2024)

I penned this piece in 2007 while writing op-eds for a newspaper; let's examine its relevance in the present day.

... ..

*Unlimited growth increases the divide.*

- **Del Mar Hotel**

The words emblazoned on the front of the Del Mar Hotel on Hamilton Street suggest that our way of life teeters on the brink of instability. I can't help but wonder if we've reached a breaking point where something must give – as our wallets have been stretched to the limits of absurdity.

### The Factors at Play

Housing, fuel, and food expenses are essential for a stable indoor lifestyle. Yet, the information we receive is contradictory. In Vancouver, we're informed that mortgages consume 74 percent of our household income. Simultaneously, some articles dismiss the idea of a looming market collapse as a mere myth.

Consequently, we have to stretch the remaining 26 percent of our income to cover fuel, clothing, electricity, food, savings, leisure activities, charitable giving, and Canucks pay-per-view subscriptions.

### Then Bam

Suddenly, gas prices soar, causing everything dependent on transportation to become more expensive. Our wallets and purses seem to inflate with air as the last coins are drawn out.

Where can we trim our expenses?

We begin with charitable donations.

Because of the Canucks, we start with charity.

### Next

Climate change, coupled with the rising demand for luxury in developing countries, has significantly strained the supply of our staple foods.

### In The News

Food riots have erupted in several impoverished countries, yet we continue to bury our heads in the sand, convinced that we are immune to these issues.

### Then Bam

**H**ousing and gas prices are climbing once again, pushing those clinging to the edges of stability down another notch – transforming those on the edges from working poor to a new reality: the working homeless.

Skeptical?

Every day, I shuttle a group of these working homeless to their jobs at construction sites – the emphasis being on ‘every day.’

For the majority, the dream of residing in the very skyscrapers they help erect is just that – a dream – with no excess in their budgets to trim.

The question looms between housing, fuel, and food costs: How much more can we endure?

Are we witnessing the convergence of economic conditions, a ‘perfect storm’ that could fracture society?

At such a time, the Del Mar Hotel’s supposed pearls of wisdom become significantly more apparent as we progress toward the Olympics (2010).

We’re left pondering why despair and drug addiction are so pervasive on our streets. The answer seems clear. Prioritizing humans over profits is imperative. And this shift should begin with the family unit.

As gentrification sweeps through the Downtown Eastside (DTES), it scatters despair wider.

Just last year, it turned the park across from my home into a haven for homeless individuals seeking solace in marijuana.

*This year, they’re smoking crack.*

... ..

## Chips ~ Destiny ~ Free Will

I stop at a store, buy a bag of chips, and continue toward home. On the way, I pass a striking girl who once possessed beauty, now walking with a guy who has spent years perfecting the druggy shuffle – hunched over, feet dragging.

She's trying.

Her hair is meticulously styled.

She's well-dressed, though her dress is slipping off.

They walk with a palpable urgency.

Where might they be headed?

I can't help but judge harshly.

Perhaps the kindest act he could perform would be to overdose – releasing her could be her only salvation.

That notion crossed my mind.

What, then, does that say about me?

I've spent 24 years living within the same block – 16 years at first, followed by a move elsewhere for 6 years, and now back again, totalling over 30 years in this neighbourhood.

Walking home 28 years ago, I envied the others, believing they had their lives in order. There was hope in their eyes, and I felt utterly adrift in comparison.

Now, retracing those steps, the passage of time seems to have wrought havoc.

What's behind this transformation?

Greed?

Social media?

Or perhaps a ticking clock, signalling time's relentless march?

## MY CHEST HURTS

A cross from my home lies a picturesque park featuring a splendid playground, a hub of activity on sunny days. Merely one block away, an open-air drug den festers. Crack, heroin, meth – they cook it, smoke it, inject it, snort it. A tangle of despair. These souls seem as if they're already dead, just one block from where children play. Did they not have playgrounds in their childhoods? Here I am, eating chips.

A woman passes the ruins with her daughter at her side. The little girl's voice trembles, "Mommy, what's wrong with these people? Are they ill? Are they dying? They're frightening."

In a subdued whisper, the mother replies, "Life's injustices are many. We must value our blessings."

Not long after, a father and his young son stroll by. The boy inquires, "Daddy, what's wrong with these people?"

With a sombre look, the father explains, "Their choices led them here. Poor decisions have consequences."

Amidst this, the boy and girl find solace in play at the playground.

In moments of reflection, I grapple with destiny and free will. The belief in God seems at odds with the idea of predestined fate, for if destiny exists, doesn't it absolve the divine of accountability? If God ordained our destinies, does that not speak of divine indolence?

These thoughts crossed my mind.

What am I?

... ..

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Real Life: Rewind

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DTES: Eyesore or Opportunity (2004)



## Real Life: We Must Keep Us All In Mind 2024)

I penned this piece in 2005 while writing op-eds for a newspaper; let's examine its relevance in the present day.

... ..

### DTES: EYESORE OR OPPORTUNITY

**T**he Downtown Eastside is a cancerous eyesore that will not just fade away. Instead, it's filled with the tweaked-out. The lost and forgotten that have been warehoused in the area to live out their lives in altered states.

Driving through, *Night of the Living Dead* quickly comes to mind.

Open drug usage is rampant, young girls frothing at the mouth close to overdose, injections taking place – visible to even the blind.

Unlike American cities, where super expressways allow mainstream society to avoid seeing the destruction and despair; unless they take the wrong off-ramp, we must face the problem and find solutions.

Why?

Because this area epitomizes our failure, framing it for the whole world to see, even our American neighbours are appalled, "*We've never seen anything like this before.*"

I thought like most others for the longest time and showed little compassion. The chant, "*Get a job,*" comes to mind.

But over the years of driving temporary construction workers to work, they show up at 5 a.m., hoping to get work, either for extra cash or to support habits; three workers have changed my views.

Ryan, Patrick, and Mary, surprisingly, never complain and rarely tell tales of hardship; instead, they're cheerful, supportive, and encouraging.

They are just people like me and you.

Ryan offers little insight into his world.

Life has left him guarded.

Mary has had a tough go of it. She has medical disorders; however, getting up and working gives her a sense of dignity.

Patrick - 5' 11", 119 pounds, is fighting a dark demon.

"*I'm 119 pounds. I have to get off the dope.*"

I naively asked if it was easy to do?

*"Not when your dealer is waiting outside when you cash your cheque."*

Patrick's story is somewhat tragic, much like the stories of most in the area. Though unique, they all blend together with common threads.

Why talk about this area?

Because it will not go away –

On some level, we've failed, and we must find a way to cleanse the problem. These fine individuals have been warehoused; with their support networks long gone, they're trying to escape reality, which is difficult at best.

The Olympics are coming. This area represents opportunity. *The eyesore must be eliminated before we welcome the world.*

- ✓ Do we sweep it under the rug and pretend?
- ✓ Or search for long-term solutions?

In the next few years, the warehouse is going to be moved. Maybe to your neighbourhood, just-off the expressway.

## ONE LAST THING

When you're sitting in your luxurious condo with your loving family, remember this: The Rick, Peter and Cathy's of this world probably had a hand in building it.

*How can we judge what we don't understand?*

... ..

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Real Life

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Failing Social Media

## Real Life: Failing Social Media

“ My deepest wish is for everyone to have champions in their corner, those who fan the flames of your pursuits instead of ones who seek to ensnare you, dragging you back to a place of pretense, mistaking it for happiness.”

... ..

I’ve come to the stark realization that I’m failing on my social media platforms. What I share reveals harsh truths: no one seems interested in topics like depression and stress. Posting about my struggles only highlights the painful indifference of others, including my family. It’s as though my posts serve as desperate pleas to them, signalling my pain and confusion and my longing to feel connected and supported.

I’m well aware voicing my disdain for certain things contradicts the code of the Socials. And if I don’t commend people for actions or words that inflict pain on me – simply because I reveal my suffering – they disperse. Our pain isn’t permitted to be personal, or frankly, our own.

Post

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A photo from the past evokes a time before social media dominated our lives.

Next, there’s an advertisement for a sleep mask computer that purportedly diagnoses your sleep issues by encouraging more screen time – filled with statistics to share on you Socials – sort of like when I share how many steps I’ve walked.

You are a hypocrite.

Your face.

We strive to be humorous, yet it often falls flat unless rooted in profound suffering. Most of us aren’t funny – and most of us, we’re merely circulating uninspired, second-hand content.

You think you are so funny?

I am, and ‘so’ doesn’t make me funnier, ‘very’ does.

Post

Undeniably beautiful nature photos need no commentary, yet we feel compelled to broadcast our ignorance about the scenes we capture and share.

Discussions about depression are often sidestepped due to the stigma and the posting individual's fear of judgment. In contrast, physical illnesses such as heart disease or diabetes—often with self-inflicted causes—garner immediate concern and support. People readily offer conditioned encouragement, saying, “Hang in there,” “You got this,” and “You are so brave.”

Yet, I contend summoning the strength to resist suicide in the grip of depression requires far greater bravery than facing a physical illness.

And besides, I believe we misunderstand the situation when things deteriorate. Our automatic responses lack authenticity; they're merely habitual and tired. Hearing what everyone else repeats—empty platitudes—holds no significance for some. In truth, people seek honesty. It's acceptable, even preferable, to comfort someone in distress with words like, “It must be incredibly tough what you're enduring. I love you. I care.” Rather than resorting to the hollow encouragement of “You got this.”

Perhaps it's just me, but when I hear “You got this,” it reminds me of contestants on *The Amazing Race* encouraging their partners. It's as if the phrase has no weight, often returned with a negative response. I recommend watching an episode to see the emptiness behind those words.

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Our obsession with social media has reached a deafening level. It's akin to your favourite song that no one else appreciates. You blast it, hoping to gain recognition for your distinctive taste, unaware it might be more courteous to savour it alone.

If you understand the hypocrisy in this rant, you'll realize our collective intelligence has been diminished, eroding our inherent human abilities for empathy, compassion, and kindness. It's clear that we've all become absurd.

The issue is my face mask computer instructed me to publicize the figures on my social media platforms, enticing others to purchase it while overlooking the real cause of their sleeplessness. They're consumed by the idea every trivial detail must be broadcasted (like this), overlooking life's significant concerns.

It's as if by ignoring the suffering and homelessness around us, we can pretend it doesn't exist. Yet it persists, and now one of your loved ones has wound up on the streets.

They brought it upon themselves—or so you think, convincing yourself that your better choices are what spared you. But you're not better; you're just luckier.

In the USA, a political advertisement portrays white people as victims of hardship. However, this depiction is inaccurate; instead, us ‘whites’ typically benefit from privilege and a sense of entitlement.

Your job wasn’t stolen from you. Instead, a society dominated by whiteness has denied you the right to work, as whiteness desperately tries to evolve – a seemingly impossible task.

This system thrives on our competition for survival; the more exhausted we are, the more concerned we become with how others perceive us on social media. Yet, ‘no one took your job.’ Creating a level playing field doesn’t always benefit people of colour – it can be more of a curse. It allows them to vie for the very jobs that drain life from them, from us, jobs once readily handed to white individuals. Now, they, too, feel compelled to curate a façade on social media to mitigate the fear of how they’ll manage to survive, in a world seemingly racing towards midnight.

As I dash out the door for the day, with depression and stress chasing me, the data from last night’s sleep taunts me, vying for attention – sleep analytics that I can’t afford, tethered to seeking a soul-sucking job no one would dream of granting me not because it’s rightfully mine, but because I got older.

And here lies the crux of my tirade.

Life can be relentlessly tough. I earnestly hope each of us – over here, over there – is chasing what breathes purpose into our existence. If crafting an illusion on Social Media provides that spark, then so be it.

Yet, my deepest wish is for everyone to have champions in their corner, those who fan the flames of your pursuits instead of ones who seek to ensnare you, dragging you back to a place of pretense, mistaking it for happiness.

I suspect most of us cannot find true joy in our curated feeds – if we could, we wouldn’t cling to it so desperately. It’s no mystery why echoing the despair of depression garners little response – we’re adrift in a sea of it online.

I’ve realized that not every “You’ve got this” is created equal; its impact hinges on the clout of the one who offers such empty encouragement.

Like a mirror’s reflection, honesty can be too piercing and raw for many to confront.

I may receive a job offer that could distract me from my passions in the coming days. Should it arrive, I’m determined to excel in the role, even as the final years of my life ebb away.

Dark, I know.

Your thoughts?

I'll ask the one person who might have read to this point.

Gary, your opinion?

I love telling stories; I can't help myself. This morning, I hadn't planned to pour out this rant – it simply spilled from my mind unbidden. Is it of good quality? Parts of it, perhaps – it is, after all, a first draft. And aren't you fortunate to be privy to my unpolished thoughts? No? Then you must be feeling cantankerous. Who am I addressing, anyway? You, that's who. Likely Gary. Or you, assuming you aren't Gary. And if Gary isn't present, I wonder about his whereabouts – probably at work.

I think it's time I stopped.

*My resting heart rate is 36: I'm not sure that's a good thing.*

... ..

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Real Life  
Desperation

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## Real Life: Desperation

Hey Justin,

I know you are going through a truckload of crap; I feel for you and genuinely hope it resolves soon for you so you can breathe again. I also genuinely hope your health scare has dissipated.

I understand you are likely not in a place to help, but I'm sharing a screenshot of our bank account now. I earn \$500 monthly CPP, and our bank is now overdrawn by over \$700 (\$800 limit), leaving less than \$100 until it is over for us. I've now applied for over 1,000 jobs and have been ignored over 1,000 times, which is devastating, but I knew being in my sixties wasn't conducive to finding employment.

Banking	-\$712.37
Travel Account	\$1.00
ALL-INCLUSIVE WITH SENIORS REBATE RIEBATI	-\$713.37

330

I won't bother to mention how much we've lost in the past four years; I'll say it is catastrophic.

I'm terrified for my future and at a loss for what to do; I've reached out to people to no avail. I reached out to my estranged family, but once they found out I wasn't working – they estranged me once again.

So, to cut this short, if there is anything you can do at all to help alleviate our situation, please let me know.

Warm Regards,

Lindsay Wincherauk

... ..

Story: 64-year-old Vancouver man becomes homeless, despite sending out over 1,000 job applications. (Including a video)

... ..

**Dear Media,**

I am reaching out to you today not just as an individual on the brink of a personal crisis but as a harbinger of a rapidly growing societal issue. My name is Lindsay Wincherauk, and I am a resident of Vancouver, standing on the precipice of turning 64 – if fate allows me to see that day. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic marked the end of my 15-year career, as my employer seized the moment to replace me with a younger, less costly alternative.

Four years have elapsed since that fateful day, and despite my relentless efforts – over 1,000 job applications and just a single interview – my life and the stability of my chosen family have been shattered. Financial ruin looms over us, and without a stroke of fortune, homelessness is not just a possibility; it is an impending reality.

The government's aid remains a distant promise, only accessible when one has fallen through the cracks. It's a cruel irony that assistance is withheld until one's life is in ruins.

I implore you to consider my story not merely as a personal narrative but as a reflection of the broader, impending demographic crisis: The rise of an aging homeless population. This matter is of pressing importance and demands immediate attention and action.

I invite you to view a video offering a glimpse into my life and the gravity of my situation:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZTFDIuYh2Q&t=196s>

I hope that sharing my experience can shed light on the critical issue and spark a conversation that leads to change.

I'm not ready to be a silent statistic, another soul lost to the streets. I am fighting against the tide of ageism and the harsh realities it brings. Your coverage could catalyze that change, not just for me but for many others in similar plights.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Sincerely,**

**Lindsay Wincherauk**

... ..

A cell phone without connectivity is like a drug that doesn't produce a high.

... ..

My friends believe that every homeless person owns a cell phone.

To give you some context:

A friend mentioned, "There's been a surge in unprovoked assaults lately. I'm worried about the possibility of copycat attacks."

I replied, "I doubt those suffering are keeping up with the news."

To which my friend asserted, "Every homeless person has a cell phone."

In my head, though unspoken, I wondered, "What are they implying with that statement?"

... ..

A cell phone without a plan is a paradoxical object—it has the potential to connect us to the world, yet it remains inert without a service plan, a mere shell of its capabilities. It's like having a car without fuel; the possibility of a journey exists, but the means to embark on it are missing.

In the modern digital age, a cellphone's primary value lies in its connectivity.

... ..

Disappearing is the only way I can genuinely help my chosen family.

333

I think my life purpose is to encourage everyone not to be lazy when we care 334  
about one another.

Today, I expressed to a friend how much I'm hurting. My friend didn't hug me.

335

**W**hen you can't grasp someone's torment, haven't walked their journey, and aren't like them—sometimes silence is best. Just offer your care. Hold back on suggestions until you can truly empathize with their plight.

336

I'm considering calling it a day.

337



**W**hen you express your true feelings, somehow many people make it about themselves. And that sucks.

338

I'm realizing my worst quality is honesty. 339

Last week I said I never felt so alone, I was wrong.

340

I'm sad.

341

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Real Life

April 6, 2024

342

## Real Life: April 6, 2024

Those familiar with me know I invest extraordinary effort into everything I undertake. Surrender is not in my vocabulary; I persistently strive and maintain unwavering faith in myself. But what transpires when effort and conviction fall short?

My acquaintances also recognize my unwavering honesty, particularly about my emotions, which might be my Achilles' heel. When I divulge my true feelings, I sense the retreat of many around me. The amusing Lindsay charms them; they mourn for Lindsay, who suffers.

I am in a profound pain. The uncertainty of my survival looms despite my relentless endeavours.

I'm lying in a hollow pit, a grave by any other name, but I hesitate to use the term for fear of distressing some. Faceless monsters loom above, shovelling dirt onto me. I thrash and strain, but with every movement, more dirt cascades down.

I walked 28 miles, 14 miles for each journey, to have two twenty-minute conversations, mainly in the rain alongside a highway with transport trucks speeding by, drenching me repeatedly.

With each step I took, I could hear my friend's voice echoing in my ear, saying, "Tell him to get off his lazy ass and get a job."

I trekked all that way for a mere forty minutes of dialogue. I fear my friends' judgment so much that I've started to eat my emotions.

You call this eating your emotions?

I have to put my torment somewhere. I'm glad you are reading.

The conversations were promising, and it seemed inevitable a job offer would come—a job that would transform my life, binding me to work until my very end, with four hours of daily commuting on my lazy ass.

Three weeks of silence passed, shattering that certainty, until an email rekindled my hope. I confidently responded, confident that an offer would soon be forthcoming. Yet, it never arrived.

The faceless monsters keep shovelling soil over me.

Heartbroken, I try to connect with my family, for the first time in decades, but they seem disinterested. When I call, one of my brothers – uncles? – he doesn't even bother to come to the phone.

I'm alienated once more.

I am an outsider to my family.

I need my friends.

Yet, many judge me harshly – I wish that wasn't the case. Perhaps they fear I am in pain.

I cry every day.

I'm on the verge of having all my accounts suspended.

When a friend shared an inspirational quote with me, I thought, as a writer, I could craft my own.

I humorously inquired with my landlord if inspirational quotes could be exchanged for rent. The answer was a firm "No."

When my former employer dismissed me shortly before my sixtieth birthday, I was told it would be a death sentence.

Now, it seems that grim prediction may become reality.

I can't afford to live.

I don't want to become a burden.

Every night, I pretend to sleep while secretly hoping the monsters will complete their task.

I sought assistance from my previous employer, but he did not respond. I began to wonder, could he possibly be a relative of mine?

The night my first mother passed away, I sat beside her hospital bed for four hours, shattered, with tears streaming down my face. After those agonizing hours, she drew me near and whispered “Goodbye” into my ear.

The previous week, on a frigid December evening in Saskatoon, I faced the grim task of taking my mother back to the hospital as she endured excruciating pain. On the steps outside our home, we paused. Through eyes brimming with tears, she gazed at me and said, “I’m never going to come home again, am I?”

The day, after she said her final “Goodbye,” I coped by immersing myself in the company of friends. We had dinner at Earls, and I lingered out into the early morning hours, avoiding the inevitable emptiness of my home without a mother.

Upon my return, my sister Bernice, having just arrived from Calgary, was waiting in the kitchen.

It was there, in our childhood home, she embraced me for the first time, and then she told me Mum was gone. She’d hung out in the background of my life, playing the role of eldest sister. But the warmth was fleeting; soon after, she detached herself and stoically informed me I would need to seek alternate accommodations. The house had to be prepared for the relatives converging upon the city.

Sixteen years later (2003), I discovered the woman I had seen die, whom I believed to be my mother, wasn’t actually her; Bernice was my real mother.

Thirteen years later, in October 2016, I find myself shivering on a bone-chilling day in Calgary. I am here to visit Bernice in the hospital for the first time as her son. Our attempted conversation is filled with pain as Bernice, who is dying, expresses her anger.

As I leave, I embrace her for the second time, kiss her cheek, and apologize for the hardships she’s faced in life. I whisper, “I love you.”

As I exit the room, I cast a glance back. Tears flood Bernice’s eyes while she meets my gaze and utters in a fragile, cracking voice, “I’m never going to see you again, am I?”

Stepping into the hospital hallway, my legs give way, and I collapse.



One week later, Sadie – who was both my sister and aunt – informed me of Bernice’s death with a voice devoid of warmth.

The following day, Sadie’s voice on the phone had an urgent edge. “You may have to travel to Calgary to sign the death certificate, being Bernice’s sole surviving kin.”

Now, eight years on, no matter my efforts, I’ve come to accept that salvation will not come while the demons continue to heap dirt upon me.

The weight suffocates me.

I refuse to be a burden, yet I also lack a family.

I’m left with no one to bid farewell to.

Facing replacement just as I am neared sixty seemed akin to a death sentence.

Still, I persist.

The reason, however, eludes me.

Nightly, as I lie awake in agony, I beg the indifferent ceiling for a miracle.

**Hugs + Love**

**Lindsay**

... ..

I wake up scared  
I wake up strange  
I wake up wondering if anything in my life  
Is ever gonna change...

- Barenaked Ladies | What a Good Boy |

**M**y life, in essence, is a puzzle with missing pieces. Once a trusted companion, sleep is now a stranger I haven't welcomed in over two years. The posts on social media are a jumble of shadows—intense, bewildering, piercing, and yes, often a burden on the hearts of those who bother to care. I'm sorry for that weight.

Writing is my sanctuary—it is here that I corral the storm of emotions into words to prevent myself from becoming the very darkness I pour onto the page. Ideally, I would be crafting tales imbued with light, yet we find ourselves perched precariously on a precipice. Our survival looms over us like an ominous question mark, haunting my every breath. Should my desperate efforts resonate unanswered in the void, what becomes of me? My life is fracturing, with no adhesive to stem the ruptures, leaving my very existence in doubt.

This is the essence of my darkness.

As much as I yearn for connection, the fear of familiar faces pushes me to retreat from even the few who remain. I'm on the brink of 64 this July—if fate allows me such grace. So, I hustle—writing, pitching, reading, sweating, and chasing. My every waking hour is chock-full—this isn't hubris; it's survival.

In one feverish year, I birthed 13 books, hurled resumes at over 1,000 stopgap jobs, and ran myself ragged without pause.

Nearing 64, I pray this relentless tide I'm battling is one that none within my circle ever faces.

Initially, I regretted sharing my pain and my fears with those around me. But now, I retract that sentiment. For in sharing our fragility, perhaps that's where true camaraderie lies.

Without such honesty, can we even claim to have friends?

Can you possibly fathom the burden of nearing 64, having exhausted every avenue to its bitter end, only to find that, irrespective of your efforts, the world is relentlessly outpacing you?

I can assure you there isn't a soul alive save for those caught in similar storms. Who could grasp the depths of this torment or the piercing dread that perhaps, in the grand scheme, none of it matters at all?

... ..

**O**h yeah, on the Fitness Test at the Asylum today, I scored excellent for a 31-year-old. Take that depression.

348

It was my 194th consecutive day at the Asylum. Don't worry, I sort of know what I'm doing 😊

I am a fabulous storyteller. However, the reality of the publishing world dictates that I need a literary agent. If anyone has contacts within the literary industry, please direct them my way.

Alternatively, why not join me in starting our own publishing house?

We could combine it with a cafe, lounge, and chill-out space that promotes the arts. Let's dare to dream.

If you assist with any of these ventures, I will ensure to write lovely things about you.

**D**o you think it upsets or confuses people when someone tells them exactly what they like and don't when they are suffering – when they tell people what hurts them, and what gives them strength? 350

41

Real Life

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Why London Drugs is Triggering

## Real Life: Why London Drugs is Triggering

This is a survival story.

A 59-year-old man |ME| is fired during the pandemic because he dared to get older.

I share stories about navigating my days, often without a compass.

*What happens to an older person when he loses his career – far too early – without severance pay?*

I've earned leaving my career with my dignity. I wasn't allowed. The people I worked for vowed to destroy me financially.

Why?

Because I stood up for myself. I just didn't fade away.

I have a life to live.

I need to keep going forward.

I've earned the right to get paid.

I have \$170 left.

What's fucking next?

352

*Get a job. London Drugs is hiring.*

I cry.

This is a story about perseverance. The days pass – what do they contain?

I can't stop moving. I may have been fired, but I'm still living, writing, and sharing my journey. If you're not walking in my shoes, you, likely, can't possibly know what I'm going through.

I invite you into my life. You will laugh, cringe, ponder.

*A corporate hitman (lawyer) had the nerve to call me a failed writer (I'm 62) who has no business chasing my dreams.*

Isn't failure not trying? Asshole.

Cheer for me. Cheer for all of us in the same boat.

Never give up empathy, compassion, sympathy, and kindness.

I need your love. I'm blessed to have been given a voice!

... ..

**DECLINED**

Damn it, another email arrives: Your next transaction may be declined.

Not a problem. Little Jeremy is looking plump.

*The Devil Went Down to Georgia* → he was looking for a plump child to eat.

*Tell Me Why.*

Why?

What?

You asked me to tell you why? So, I did.

Why?

Because you asked.

Maybe you're eating children because you are losing your mind.

Wouldn't you?

Probably.

Indeed.

What should I do next?

London Drugs.

Prepare to bleed.

What?

Why?

The song by Bronski Beat is Why?

Not Tell Me Why?

I know.

I typed the last line.

Insanity?

How can it not be?

... ..



## BUBBLE BATH + BROKEN GLASSES

TIME OF DEATH: JULY 2022

**R**ight around the date of my sixty-second birthday.  
Am I sick?  
I don't think so.

However, two years ago, I was issued a death sentence from people who can only be called scumbags. My life was put on hold, my career taken from me, given to a friend of a friend, someone I thought was a friend.

**HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN?**

I didn't want to see the greed, entitlement, and nepotism.

**WILL THEY CARE WHEN I DIE?**

No.

**WHY AM I DYING?**

The money is about to run dry, and I can't bear the thought of being homeless. Or having to put my eleven-year-old cat, Hana, down → because I can no longer take care of her.

**THE SIMPLE MATH**

**I can no longer afford life.** A harsh reality. I receive \$460 Canada Pension (monthly) → life is no longer sustainable → I'm on Pension. *Think about that.* Yet, I'm supposed to be mitigating the losses of the people who **deposited** me in this reality.

**I TURN ON THE NEWS**

I can only stand watching for less than a minute. A wave of desperate realization washes over me. The news is not for older people.

*It is far too fucking full of regrets.*

Every story about the housing market, stock market, travel, and managing finances is no longer for us → we're on Canada Pension.

A story flashes about the rising gas prices. A wave of depression washes over me, as I think, *will I ever be in, or drive a car again?* Yet, while on Canada Pension, I'm supposed to be lessening the suffering of the people who **deposited** me here. Yes, **deposited**, because my life has been reduced to **withdrawals**; until there are no more **withdrawals** to be made.

## ON THE TREADMILLS AT THE FITNESS FACILITY

The two people next to me, who happen to be in my demographic, are talking about the trips they are planning. I want to cry.

I murder them because my next trip is limited to how far I can walk in a day. A harsh truth.

I keep trying.

## BACK TO THE NEWS

Once you're old, the only thing the news is for is to scare the life out of you. The news screams someone is coming for you, trying to scam you; a random stranger is about to attack you, or a food delivery driver is going to run over you on the sidewalk.

I don't want to go outside anymore. I can't escape it; the great outdoors will soon be my home. *Sounds fucking grand!*

**| Sarcasm Alert |** → I can't give up; I have losses for the people who **deposited** me here to mitigate.

I keep trying. I have a **heart episode**. The MRI shows I probably will live long enough to move outdoors, another harsh reality. But still, I now have a cardiologist. I don't think stress is a good thing.

I don't enjoy writing this part of the story.

## WHY?

Because it's dark. And because I don't want to burden others with my harsh realities. I prefer to make people smile.

At the pandemic's start, I uttered the words '*freaked out*' and was immediately thrown out with the bathwater.

Fifty-nine years old and a lengthy career; gone, with the clock on my demise ticking.

## TO DATE (2022)

Approximately \$300,000 in lost income (including a \$70,000 stock scam perpetrated by the owner of the company I worked for). And approximately, \$1,000 per month in CC interest → because I can't afford life. I earn \$460 per month Canada Pension. Losing \$300,000 at sixty-two → there are no words.

If you know me, I try to bring joy to people, not pain. I'm respectful, kind, empathetic, and I never fucking quit trying.

I never will quit trying.

But my reality is, the clock has been ticking, and the hourglass is running out of fucking sand. I will still try to bring smiles to others, but I must admit, I'm being crushed by the weight of greed. Tick. Tick. Fucking tick.

I can't breathe.

I need to breathe.

Stress is swallowing me alongside depression as they walk in lockstep.

I get up every day, *a lie (I do)*.

I fight sleep.

The sandman hides as soon as my head hits the pillow. I wouldn't say I'm worrying; instead, I'm creating, trying to fight my way out of the quicksand.

When I rise, I build my website, pitch my writing, and write.

And write.

And write.

And create images to prompt writing.

And I write.

And I pitch my writing.

A rejection comes. It says I'm talented.

Another one arrives, telling me I have an important story that must be told.

Both messages finish with buts...

For every rejection I receive, I pitch more.

**AM I DELUSIONAL?**

Absolutely not.

Tick. Tick. Fucking tick.

I can't breathe.

I'm dying.

## PAUSE FOR A MINUTE

I'm back. I sent out three proposals.

A book arrives in the mail. One book. Two books. Three books. Ten books. Umpteen books.

Major publishers send me books because they have deemed me an **Influencer** + they love my thoughts on books, as do the authors of the books I share my thoughts on.

I can't eat the books. I'm dying. When I speak, I sound successful. But still, two years after being canned, all the money is gone. I'm fucking, turning destitute. Four years after being canned (-).

I go for a walk.

My mind races.

I snap photos.

A friend of mine (Steve) is approaching.

I look the other way because **I feel embarrassed, unwanted, and like a failure.**

I'm not a failure.

Steve sees me; he's happy to see me. We hug. Our conversation is pleasant. I tell him it's been twenty-seven months since I was canned. He asks if I'm working. I tell him every day, harder than ever, writing, creating, and sending out proposals.

## He tells me London Drugs is hiring.

I suggest, if I don't go for it now, by pursuing my creative future, one hundred percent → well, if not now, fucking when? If I don't pursue my passions (at sixty-two); what's the point of living?

**Steve nods in agreement.** He realizes his words hurt me.

My heart sinks.

I'm dying.

I'm fucking broke.

I keep trying.

**I spread butter on the pages of a book sent to me.**

**Who can afford butter?**

## BROKEN GLASSES

My original mother died on **December 12**, 1987. (long story)

An ex-flatmate of mine died on **December 12**, 2019.

My last remaining sister, who wasn't really a sister, unless she really was my sister, died on **December 12**, 2021. (long story)

I'm dying now.

On the day my sister, who wasn't... died, I met with friends for a few hours. Somewhere on my way home, I lost my prescription glasses. Devastating.

That's okay; I had a backup pair, only suitable for reading. If I wore them every day, stuff like walking → the world turned into a drinking and driving advertisement → so, I chose to live life while not reading, in low definition. It fucking sucked.

*Buy some glasses.*

The money is running dry. So, I can't justify it.

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## ONE. TWO. THREE. UMPTEEN BOOKS ARRIVE.

**It's now April 2022.** I've been walking around in a foggy depression for five months.

On this day, I escape my home after sending out proposals, to go read. I forgot my glasses. That's okay. I bite the bullet; I buy a pair of reading glasses (\$17). The great thing is, I wear them daily. I could see again! The world became brighter.

I'm dying.

**June 1, 2022.** I am meeting with a friend. While chatting, I pull off my glasses. I hear a snap. The arm cracked. *Shit.* I wanted to fucking cry. *I have glue at home.*

*Maybe I can fix them?*

I pick up the glasses, and the left arm breaks off.

Tears start scratching my eyes.

I feel sick.

*I can't afford to see.*

I'm scared.

**EAT?**

**SEE?**

**BREATHE?**

My stomach turns. *I must-see.*

I now understand why people are holding glasses together with tape. When they do, they're judged poorly. And they're fucking poor.

*My friend says can't you get new prescription glasses?*

*I consider sniffing the glue.*

Not to worry, I will never give up. I'm smart. I'm turning fucking sixty-two in July. I'm dying.

I can't catch my breath.

I bought the cheap reading glasses; I couldn't fucking afford.

If I give up writing, I'm already dead. That's what London Drugs is, death.

I'm not qualified to work there. Steve's words lacked context.

A fifteen-year career gone; severance never paid.

**PARAPHRASED FROM A BOOK I'M READING (SENT FROM A PUBLISHER)**

I'm an Influencer. It's like being a sixty-two-year-old intern.

In the book, a lawyer decides to chase her dreams instead of working as a lawyer for a large firm. She wants to make a difference. She says she doesn't care if her client is being sued by a former employee for wrongful termination because... because "our" client is a scumbag. She continued to say that they were going to court because her client refused to settle (strategizing to destroy the employee financially), even though the client could easily pay the amount the ex-employee is justified in asking for.

**DOES THE BOOK MIRROR MY LIFE?**

I've been called by a 'legal hitman' → **a failed writer who has no business chasing my dreams.** I'm fucking turning sixty-two. The 'hitman' said I should have been pursuing a career in the industry; I was just tossed out from, with the bathwater (fired from): to mitigate the losses of those who tossed me out. **During a pandemic. As I am about to hit sixty-two.** After a heart MRI. As I'm receiving \$460 per month on Canada Pension. Yes, **PENSION.**

IMAGINE

**Interviewer:** Why did you leave your last job?

**Me:** I can't talk about it.

**Interviewer:** Why didn't they find you valuable enough to keep? How are your great grandkids?

**Me:** Thanks for allowing me to waste your time. I'm going to go repeatedly smash my head into a wall. I will let myself out.

I never felt old before, but now I do. A fact solidified when I called my cable provider, and first, the technician on the line wouldn't believe I was a man because my name is Lindsay. And then, she asked if there was someone younger in my home, she could talk to about my connection issues. Seriously.

I can't breathe. I'm dying.

I believed if you always did your best, were loyal, and worked hard, it would count for something.

It didn't.

The place where I was employed did not care when five people in my life died (**including my mother**). (long story). **Not a single day off.**

They didn't care when I had a fucking catastrophic stroke. **Not a single day off. Nor was it suggested.**

**They, without question, didn't care about me when they got rid of me, without paying me out, using the pandemic as shade.**

I turned sixty.

I turned sixty-one.

I'm turning sixty-two soon – sixty-four, maybe.

Depression is assaulting me.

I keep trying.

And writing.

And pitching.

And reading.

And desperately trying to breathe.

**I can't eat tomorrow because I chose to see.**

**Every asshole out there who believes homeless people aren't trying → fuck off.**

**FOOD?**

**DIE?**

**LONDON DRUGS?**

I live in a world where COVID is far more compassionate than the people I used to work for.

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— — —

**At the time of this writing, I've applied at London Drugs ten times and have been rejected ten times.**

... ..





## BUBBLE BATH

**I** must believe everything will fall into place. I suffer from debilitating insomnia and depression. I don't fret my efforts. They are undeniable. I work at my craft at least twelve hours a day. *Failed writer. No business chasing your dreams.*

Trying to thread a needle at sixty-two...the thread is thick; the eyelet is shrinking.

I will keep trying.

Throw in broken glasses.

I will keep trying. I keep trying.

## I DRAW A BATH

When I was a little boy, maybe six, a year after escaping (?) the clutches of a home where unfit mothers were sent to birth illegitimate children.

By this time, I've known the people I am being cared for by for about one year. My first memory is of my three brothers (?) chanting, "Lindsay, you're not one of us," → when I was five. A story for another time.

Anyway, I loved bath time. We were a struggling family, so we didn't have the luxury of a bubble bath. My baths were usually just tepid, hard water without soap. I still loved it.

One day, Mum bought three bars of Zest.

**Bath Time.** I hopped in before the tub filled. I grabbed a bar of Zest, and, with my right hand, started rubbing it frantically on the bottom of the tub. A soapy skin floated to the surface. When I got the Zest worn down, I held it under the tap. If I was lucky, a few bubbles formed. I was blissful. I loved my baths except when one of my brothers (?) threw our cat into the tub with me. At least that wasn't as bad as when the same brother encouraged me to stick my dinner knife into the wall outlet.

**I hop into my bath.** The water is steamy. I pour a heaping helping of bubble bath into the water. The tub fills with glorious bubbles. I'm in heaven. *New glasses. Trying. Trying. Trying.* For a moment, I feel at ease. Everything will work out. I was a model employee. Karma will take care of me.

My calm ends. Tears roll down my cheeks. Despite being birthed illegitimate, I've survived.

I worked hard.

I never gave up.

I've earned having luxurious bubble baths.

*I think that's the reason for the heaping helpings.*

I continue to cry. I'm turning sixty-two, soaking in a bubble bath, with the tears pouring from my eyes. And yet, the SCUM floated to the top, the SCUM that threw me out with the bathwater.

### WHY AM I CRYING?

Because I never quit trying. I can't afford the cheap glasses I bought. Two years and my life savings have run dry. Life on the street will be a death sentence for me, for my eleven-year-old cat and my relationships.

I did nothing wrong.

The SCUM rises to the top. If I lose everything, they think they will have won.

What does it say about a company when its most senior employee becomes homeless?

**I'm not the only person deposited in a soap-less tub. I will never give up.**

I have written over 350 'THOUGHTS ON BOOKS' because I'm a respected Influencer.

I butter another book. *Who am I kidding?* I can't afford butter.

### TIME OF DEATH

This story is harsh. It is meant to be. I have to believe I will be okay. Will I make it through this mess? But I must admit, I'm scared. \$460.00 per month (Now \$500—2024). I don't want to be homeless. I am now reaching the point where 'hanging on' is no longer an option. A product of being in your sixties is, quite often, you are on your own.

... ..

**As I reworked this part of the story, up in the  
right corner of my screen, several London  
Drugs Ads ran.**

## April 7-8, 2024

**T**oday at the Fitness Asylum, I will do something I haven't done since I've become 63: enter my age as 31 on the Fitness Test. If my score is excellent, I'll consider myself 30 tomorrow.

364

...

Tomorrow, I have a meeting with a company to discuss a position as a caregiver for the elderly.

Did you hear that Shoppers Drug Mart is hiring?

365

...

If you are genuinely a friend, I'm confident my posts encourage literacy. 366

...

**T**omorrow morning, I have to walk across a bridge.  
Apparently, the weather is going to suck.

367

...

**A** m I invisible?  
What's the sound version of that?  
...

368

How are you, really?

...

What is your dream life?

369

...

I wonder if anyone understands the story I'm writing; is about all of us, and it is mainly about empathy and compassion?

...



**I**f you were starving and you found a loaf or bread lying the  
ground, would you eat it; or would you think it's disgusting? 370

...

**W**hat happens when you exert every ounce of effort into your daily tasks, only to find that the universe isn't on your side?

Humanity is failing one another.

I think I best take the Burrard Bridge.

...

371

**A** friend of mine mentioned that everyone reads the posts about my struggles. I'm not sure why he told me that? He then glanced at me; his eyes heavy with judgment. I believe he was indirectly telling me to stop sharing. The grammar software prevented me from saying he told me to shut up.

372

...

**T**oday, I am walking 15 miles to interview for a job for which I am likely unqualified because I am now considered old and obsolete.

373

...

I wonder if Trump will take a look at the eclipse today? 374

...

**T**here is a story on the news about people speeding in West Vancouver, they made sure to report there is an elementary school nearby.

Maybe old people need to go back to school for people to care about them.

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...

If you remember Brenda, from several pages ago: the seventy-two-year-old homeless lady who used to live in her car. Here's an update:

A 2005 Honda was generously given to an elderly lady, and the media sensationalized their role in the story.

However, I view the situation differently. Well-meaning individuals gave a 72-year-old homeless woman their old vehicle, which triggered a moment of joy as she celebrated a newfound sense of security. Yet she remains without a home and is now burdened with additional responsibilities such as securing insurance, covering gas expenses, and dealing with the inevitable parking tickets.

Ultimately, a tow truck hauls the car away, leaving her to spend her last days in the towing company's compound – an ending conceived for storytelling.

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I don't think I think like everyone else; I don't find this to be a feel-good story – I feel it is a sad story.

The well-meaning people don't deserve to be praised for their thoughtless generosity. They gave Brenda an anchor, not a lifeline, which will become abundantly apparent when the gas runs dry.

Why didn't they sell the car and give Brenda the cash? Wouldn't that have been kinder?

I think they were cruel – how could dumping your old junk car on someone struggling be a good thing?

...

**I**t is astonishing how many friends have left the building after I shared my struggles and the ways in which certain acts of kindness were more harmful than helpful. I hope they remember to turn out the lights as they go.

Hey, where are you going? I'm hurting.

I don't want to hear that. Did you hear, company A. B. C. D... are hiring?

Do you have any influence on the hiring process?

No, but I am proficient at reciting the alphabet.

Do you say Z or Zee? And you do know, reciting the alphabet is akin of doing less than nothing – it's not helping – it's cruel.

Would you like to live in my car?

No. I'd prefer to find a way to keep living in my home.

I'm just trying to help. Did you hear we are all talking about you?

Is anybody saying anything kind?

And by the way; you're not helping.

Goodbye.

Hey, where are you going? I'm hurting.

I don't want to hear that – I have gossip to share.

...



## 42

### Real Life

#### My Life on the Slush Pile (Interview)

*I'm a storm dressed in skin, a silent scream in a quiet room.  
I'm shattered glass, painstakingly glued together, just one  
vibration away from falling apart again. And I want to speak  
my truth, even if it tastes like poison on my tongue – it's the  
only thing that tastes real anymore.*

*My life is a puzzle with half the pieces missing. There's a  
question mark etched into every sunrise, every glance in the  
mirror. What am I missing?*

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# THE DAYS IN THE LIFE OF LINDSAY WINCHERAUK

~THE TRAVAILS OF  
AN UNWANTED SON~

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FORMERLY

## MY LIFE ON THE SLUSH PILE

**GETTING TO KNOW ME**  
GETTING TO KNOW ME

**INTERVIEW**

**A BRILLIANT METAPHYSICAL TRIP**

**TIMELY**  
TIMELY

**A RAW AND BEAUTIFULLY TRAGIC JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE**

**A TESTAMENT TO THE TENACITY OF LIVING**

**HUMOUR ROOTED IN PAIN**

**MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN THE SAME BOAT**

**(A MASSIVE AUDIENCE)**

**SEXY FEET**  
SEXY FEET

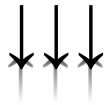
**A UNIVERSAL STORY**

**DARKLY ENTERTAINING**

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**THE QUESTIONS**  
THE QUESTIONS

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by Lindsay Wincherauk

## LINDSAY – AN UNWANTED SON (MY LIFE ON THE SLUSH PILE) (INTERVIEW)

Slush pile.

*noun*

### INFORMAL

noun: **slush pile**; plural noun: **slush piles**

1. a stack of unsolicited manuscripts that have been sent to a publishing company for consideration.

### INTERVIEWER

'The intriguing memoir title 'My Life on the Slush Pile' immediately piques curiosity. Can you share the spark that ignited such a compelling choice? Did the world of literature cast its spell on you, steering your decision toward this evocative title?'

ME

Where to start?

Well, let's plunge into the evolution of a title that mirrors the flux of life itself. The book was a chameleon before it found its true colours. It flirted with flamboyance as "**Russians, Clowns & Drag Queens**," winked coyly as "**Letters to Ed**," toyed with shock value in "**My Sister is My Mum**," and even considered the stark, direct address of "**You**."

Then it mockingly shrugged off effort with "**Blah. Blah. Blah. (Not)**." But none of these quite captured the essence.

When "**My Life on the Slush Pile**" finally emerged, it resonated as the perfect allegory for the relentless struggles we all face.

Initially, I was ignorant that 'slush pile' was a term steeped in literary tradition. But in an unexpected twist, it was my lack of knowledge that gifted me the ideal metaphor. You see, I'm an author – not just in the literal sense but in the way I script my existence through the challenges I endure. I've invested not just years but entire decades – entire lifetimes, it sometimes seems – grappling with traumas, navigating life's labyrinth of love and loss. These experiences are my relentless slush pile, each rejection slip a mark of survival; every discarded dream, a lesson learned.

And the tears?

They come easily, for they are the ink with which I pen my story.

- ❖ The current title has now morphed into: "The Days in the Life of Lindsay Wincherauk – The Travails of an Unwanted Son."

by Lindsay Wincherauk

**INTERVIEWER**  
TITLTKA IEMER

Can you expand on that point?

**ME**  
TATE



**M**y journey began shrouded in shadows, a clandestine life birthed from a family's unspoken lie, a deceit in which they were all entangled. My first breaths were drawn in Beulah House – a bleak sanctuary where society's castaways, women condemned for their recklessness, their supposed feeble-mindedness, and their inability to rein in primal desires, were exiled to birth the offspring that no one yearned for – the so-called illegitimate children. Much like the obscured truths of residential schools, survival was a cruel lottery. Few mothers and infants emerged from childbirth unscathed. Those lucky enough to survive faced a heart-shredding ordeal: infants, still wet from the womb, were torn from their mothers' desperate clutches. These children were bartered like silent goods—some to toil on farmsteads, others sold into the plush laps of the affluent.

Among those nameless infants was me.

Envision a life inaugurated with stamps of 'unwanted' and 'illegitimate.' What prospects could such a beginning possibly unfold?



**THIS IS REAL**

by Lindsay Wincherauk

In the vast expanse of Canada, a staggering 300,000 women once found themselves forced to relinquish their newborns for adoption. In the span from 1945 to 1971, the country bore witness to nearly 600,000 infants branded at birth as **“illegitimate.”**

**“The truth is stark and simple,”** declares Valerie Andrews, both a chronicler of these hidden sorrows in her book **“White Unwed Mother”** and a beacon of solace as the Executive Director of Origins Canada.

**“From the moment you entered that home, escape with your baby was an unattainable dream.”** Her organization, a national non-profit, tirelessly advocates for those torn apart by adoption’s enduring rift.

**INTERVIEWER**  
TILFKATMEK

The numbers are staggering.

**ME**  
TATE

**“Are they truly gone?”** you ask.

Indeed, I emerged into the world in the enigmatic year of 1960 – (?). The parentheses shelter a question mark, a symbol of uncertainty born from a bizarre tradition where birth records were wont to turn to ash in inexplicable conflagrations, targeting the very institutions they inhabited. A cruel joke of fate, you might say. Assuredly, my beginnings trace back to 1960; yet the precise truth of that statement remains a whimsy of the unknown.

To commence existence as an enigma on the edge of obscurity—if that doesn’t encapsulate a venture from the depths of the slush pile, what does?

In such an origin, where could one possibly find the gentle caress of love, the tender embrace of nurturing?



**AN ADVERTISEMENT IN THE EDMONTON JOURNAL  
THE ONLY REQUIREMENT: YOU HAD TO BE EMPLOYED**

The truth of my early years remains shrouded in whispers and half-truths. Rumors swirl that I lingered in the austere walls of the home sanctioned by faith where I first drew breath, or perhaps I was shuttled between reluctant relatives, a familial hot potato, for those formative two, three, or maybe even five years. But all conjecture pales before the memory of the day my world nearly splintered: the day they almost took me away. In the hushed urgency of the night before my impending departure, my mother—a dying ember on her own solemn deathbed <sup>(1)</sup> in 2016—confessed through tear-stained pleas how she implored her own mother to claim me, to hold me tight against the tides of fate. And they did. Clung to me, that is.

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Yet even as I was folded into the fabric of their lives, my birth mother, donning the mask of a prophet of doom, would impart to me the cruel mantra of my supposed destiny: that I would never aspire to anything of worth, that I was tailor-made for failure.

And she told me so with a conviction that seeped into the very marrow of my bones. Seriously.

**SLUSH PILE**  
2024 LIFE





1. I stood vigil at the deathbed of a second mother – a title that had grown vast and complex with each heavy breath she took. It was the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1987, when the brittle thread of that familiar loss first entwined itself around my heart; my grandmother, the woman who’d raised me as her own, had surrendered to the quiet battle with cancer. I was no stranger to the stark white walls and lingering scent of antiseptics that clung to the hospital where I’d kept a silent count of visits that exceeded three hundred. The night she slipped away, I found solace in the numbing embrace of friends, seeking to drown the sorrow that clamped tight within me. Dawn greeted me with its pale light as I returned to a home that felt different, charged with an unfamiliar energy. The kitchen, which had once been a haven of warmth and delicious aromas, now held a grieving figure that I had known all my life yet never really known – my birth mother, playing a different role. Our eyes met, hers glistening with a sorrow that perhaps mirrored my own, and in a fleeting moment of shared pain, we embraced for the first time. But the warmth vanished as quickly as it had appeared. With a chilling detachment, she pulled away, her gaze piercing me with a strange mixture of resentment and duty as she uttered the words that would cast me adrift from the only anchor I had known, **“Mum's gone.”** Her voice wavered, the façade of motherhood crumbling to reveal the steel beneath. Incredible as it may seem, before the echoes of our first and only embrace had faded, she handed me a cold request – to find another abode, as my presence would be replaced by mourning relatives in need of space for the imminent funeral. And so, I stood, bereft not just of a mother and a grandmother, but of a home too, all in one cruel sweep of fate.

**INTERVIEWER**  
TITIKAIEMEK

That must have been devastating.

**ME**  
TATE

Calling my sister an angry bitch seems harsh – please forgive the crude language. As the years pass, I’ve grown to reject that term, its contemptuously patriarchal overtones clashing with my evolving understanding. Yet, finding liberation from the suffocating gloom that pervaded my childhood home felt like a breath of fresh air.

Growing up had meant an endless cycle of hospital corridors, tallying at least 1500 visits that ultimately culminated with the death of the two I called parents. Being asked to leave was not a punishment, but an unexpected sanctuary.

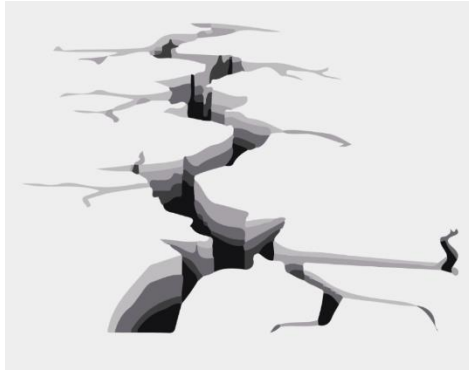
Life had a way of presenting its riddles and whirlwinds, especially as the supposed youngest of seven siblings. Everything was a puzzle I was handed but couldn’t solve.

I learned no other truth.

My father was 56 when I made my unexpected entrance into the world.

My mother, 46.

In their winter years, I emerged as a spark of life – a being they proclaimed a miracle child.



**B**eneath the facade of my existence lay massive, concealed fissures, akin to a fault line biding its time to split asunder.

Perhaps I ought to have renamed myself San Andreas.

I used to puzzle over the striking age gap between my friends' parents and my own, who were decades older – but such curiosities didn't consume me. Like a satellite in a steadfast orbit, I was drawn to the warm gravity of my friends' homes, welcomed as if I were a blood member of their families. I became an honorary tag-along on vacations, seamlessly assimilating into their moments of joy and leisure. I suspected that beneath the veneer of acceptance, my friends' parents recognized the stark contours of my unvoiced truth, a stark testament to the harsh realities we all bore witness to in those unforgiving times. *The fucking times.*

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I had embraced life without questioning it – why would I have?

I was cocooned in contentment, surrounded by friends and their loved ones. However, echoes of the past clung to me, lingering apparitions that danced in the quiet spaces of my mind. My life's early chapters were cloaked in enigma, riddles I had never expected to solve. Yet, a seemingly insignificant tear in my birth certificate, discovered only while seeking a renewal for my passport, threatened to unravel the veils of secrecy. A seemingly mundane encounter with a clerk at the Office of Vital Records became the key to unlocking the vault of my truths. Imagine the sheer magnitude of such a revelation, the mind-bending paradox of a life misunderstood.

We are all, at our core, so impeccably imperfect. The family that had enfolded me in their arms – were they merely shields in a grand charade?

What dread secrets were they guarding me against?

I could not deny the bitter sweetness of this irony. In their silence, they walked the razor's edge of morality; duplicity had oozed from beneath their veil of virtue as easily as smiles had once passed their lips.

**SLUSH PILE**  
2024

**INTERVIEWER**  
INLEKAIEMEK

You seem to say fuck a lot.

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**ME**  
IAIE

Fuck. I think it is an honest emotion.

INTERVIEWER  
TITIKATITIK

**Y**ou could say the important development years of your life were shrouded, disadvantaged →?

A civil servant, broke the news? What news exactly?

ME  
TATE

The foundations of my very being were razed to the ground. It couldn't have ended in any other way, could it?

The destruction was a collective effort, one in which every person close to me took part, wounding their own souls in the process. It was while navigating the flawed tapestry of my existence that I learned the unsettling truth. At the tender age of five, my grandparents became my guardians—a fact that my older siblings didn't grasp until much later. **When they did, some feigned ignorance.**

**Picture it:** a bewildered child – me, an unexpected addition – landing in their laps, while they were just nine, thirteen, and seventeen years old.

**Imagine the announcement: “Children, rejoice! Your mother has given birth... to your new brother, and he’s already five.”**

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My survival? A bizarre inheritance of denial paired with the incredible luck of forging bonds with amazing friends. And perhaps most crucially, an unbridled imagination that allowed me to retreat deep within myself.

On some instinctual level, I sensed that something was amiss. Little did I realize that ‘something’ was, in fact, everything. At least 600,000 babies share my precarious position, all of us aboard a vessel teetering on the brink of Niagara Falls. Isn't it heartbreakingly absurd?

We were placed there by adults and doctrines, our innocence forsaken, no safety nets provided. And yet, we're baffled by the endless suffering that plagues our world. Try to envision a family, tiptoeing through existence, petrified that one slip of the tongue could shatter the façade that their youngest was truly one of their own. **“Mommy, my apologies. I accidentally blurted out to Timmy that he doesn't belong.”**

Consider the crushing burden on the children decreed as legitimate.

And what if one of these ‘legitimate’ progeny turned out to be an unfathomable terror?

**One must ask:** for what purpose did we weave such webs of secrecy?

SLUSH PILE  
2FO2H KIEE

The questions echo in a void, demanding no answers – For the answer, cloaked in madness, lies in the tumult of these damned times. A raw ache lingers for my grandmother, my mother’s mother, a victim to the crushing weight of a patriarchal world. Her spirit, shackled, her chances – stolen. But let me draw the veil of time back a notch. I bore witness to the curtain fall on my father’s life on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1985, the haunting prelude to my bleak 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. Unyielding, cruel fate didn’t pause there; it led me to the grim watch once more on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1987 – the day I watched the light fade from my mother’s eyes (See <sup>(1)</sup> ↑↑↑).

Home no longer existed. It never really did; I just wasn’t privy to my reality.

**INTERVIEWER**  
TATEKATEMEK

You seem to be, okay.

**ME**  
TATE

I’m a storm dressed in skin, a silent scream in a quiet room. I’m shattered glass, painstakingly glued together, just one vibration away from falling apart again. And I want to speak my truth, even if it tastes like poison on my tongue – it’s the only thing that tastes real anymore.

My life is a puzzle with half the pieces missing. There’s a question mark etched into every sunrise, every glance in the mirror. What am I missing?

**SLUSH PILE**  
2E02H LIFE

**N**ot knowing cast, me into a state of constant upheaval, a crucible that forged my individuality. I was the perennial square peg; each setting, no matter how round the hole, seemed to accommodate my angles.

Beneath the surface, a quiet recognition whispered that something was askew. From this dissonance bloomed the gifts I carried unknowingly – a boundless creativity, a deep well of compassion, an instinctive empathy. All this, plus the unexpected charm of sexy feet and a wit sharp enough to slice through solemnity. These gifts, unbeknownst to me, became faithful companions on life's winding road.

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From the fresh, vivid memories of my childhood, nothing sparkles in my mind quite like the warmth of family gatherings at Christmas. The festive air was always heavy with the scent of pine and the tangy sweetness of citrus, as glittering lights danced around the fringes of my vision.

My parents, ever practical, had suggested the modest proposal of drawing names for gift-giving. I, however, with the stubborn defiance of a precocious child, stamped my foot down—impossibly small yet fiercely determined. To me, the idea reeked of potential favoritism. My heart believed in a profound sense of equality in love among us, that we should lay offerings of affection at everyone’s feet, wrapped in bows and shiny paper.

Naive little me, I didn’t understand just how much of an outsider I was in the familial tapestry.

Christmas Day itself saw me assume the role of jovial St. Nick, distributing presents with giddy excitement. But as the laughter died down, and the room emptied of revelers returning to their respective lives, a profound melancholy seeped into my bones, and I would weep bitterly—a young soul already grappling with a profound fear of being left behind, of being abandoned. I developed an intense aversion to the finality of **“goodbye;”** instead, I clung to the hopeful promise of **“see you later.”** The day before my grandmother, my mother’s mother, weaved her soul’s tapestry into the beyond, she drew me in, frail arms wrapping me in a cocoon of impending loss, and she whispered the word I loathed into my ear—**“goodbye.”**

That single utterance became her everlasting echo in my life. After she departed from this earth, it was like a prescient omen, for one day, not long after, my entire family would indeed utter that same word to me, shattering my world. And now, imagine, if you—merely a figment, a reader passing through the narrative of my life—were to leave me at the airport, even though our connection is ephemeral, not quite real, I’d still shed tears for your absence.

How then can the pain that racks my heart, the hollow goodbye that lingers in the silence of my being, ever be deemed as fair, as justifiable?

*How the fuck could that be, okay?*



**INTERVIEWER**  
INTERVIEWER

Do you need a hug?

**ME**  
ME

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Yes.

**SLUSH PILE**  
SLUSH PILE

In the literary cosmos, brevity reigns supreme, an elusive golden chalice that writers eternally seek. Yet, what they don't tell you is that your story begins long before you've penned your first word, stewing in the slush pile of existence. This unseen force shadows you, seeping into the marrow of every choice you make. And it clings with an oppressive grip that swears there's no fucking escape. There's a whisper in the chaos of life, one that murmurs a chilling truth: by the tender age of three, the canvas of a child's personality is almost entirely painted – strokes lay down by unseen hands that shape the masterpiece or the tragedy of the person yet to come.

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INTERVIEWER  
TATE

**W**here did you get that piece of information? Googled it, didn't you?  
**ME**  
TATE

No, no need for searches or sources. Open your ears—it's woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. The moment you delve into the slush pile, every whisper and shout from the world around becomes impossible to ignore. Television buzz, radio chatter, holiday frenzy, the relentless march of celebratory days—Mother's Day, of all things, hasn't escaped the noise.

Just the other day, an email from Vessi Shoes—yes, that Vancouver brand—landed in my inbox. They acknowledged the sting Mother's Day brings to some, announcing an imminent flood of campaigns.

But then, they did something remarkable. With a rare touch of empathy, they offered sanctuary—a simple 'OPT OUT' link to spare the hearts of their subscribers. Now that's something to talk about!

INTERVIEWER  
TATE

**H**ow did you manage to cope after discovering the incomplete truths – that the people you always believed were your birth parents were not actually your biological mother and father?

ME  
TATE

I had reached the point where I didn't even want to survive; life had become unbearable.

Opening up about my struggles was daunting – wearing my heart on my sleeve meant risking judgment and alienation. I harboured an intense fear of loneliness, but also, I wasn't ready to expose my pain to potential scrutiny. There were moments when it seemed impossible that I might ever find peace or normalcy again.

In just two months, life had become a relentless assault. I had endured a painful breakup and grieved five deaths – one of which was the suicide of a young friend. It felt as though life had dropped a bomb of devastation upon me.

It was in 2003, amid the chaos of that harrowing two-month period, that I decided to escape – to travel to Europe with my friend Dave. The trip required me to renew my passport, which led to the discovery I needed a new birth certificate due to a tear. This paperwork, I was told, would take no more than two days. Yet, two weeks dragged by without resolution. Finally, on 19 July 2003, I reached out to Vital Statistics in Alberta, desperate for answers. The response from a dispassionate civil servant left me reeling. Their impossible question was delivered without a hint of empathy: “Could you contact your parents and ask them who your real parents are?”

This question shook me to my core. Having watched my own parents pass away, the notion that my life might have been built on a falsehood was earth-shattering. That shocking inquiry was the moment I discovered the truth.

Additionally, I was dealing with the aftermath of my recently ended relationship. My ex and I were still sharing a living space, a situation far from ideal. Our romance had been steeped in drugs and immersed in the twilight world of after-hours clubs.

Here, I confess that part of our collapse was self-inflicted – my ability to cope with everything had been eroded by the very lifestyle we embraced. Yet, I can't express this with shame; to say I felt ashamed would be dishonest.

Despite everything, I am not ashamed.



**B**eginning life in the anonymity of a slush pile often destines one to a lonely existence, plagued by the fear that no one will ever truly comprehend your inner turmoil.

Countless individuals have been adopted. However, there is no simple way to convey the profound complexity of feeling unwanted and bearing the stigma of illegitimacy, nor the way it rends the very soul.

Those who conceal the truth commit a grievous harm. The excuses – that a child is too immature to face reality – are nothing more than a smokescreen for deceit.

Discovering at the age of 43 that everyone in your life has been perpetuating a lie is a personal testament to betrayal that has eroded much of my being.

I am constantly afraid, yet I masquerade as if I am fine.

Why?

Because I am at a loss for alternatives.

It happens all too frequently that when I muster the courage to share my story, the response is disheartening. Some prefer to remain ignorant, while others dismissively comment on the prevalence of adoption or dysfunctional families, as if to normalize my pain. They remind me that such practices were typical for the era, as if that justifies the damage done.

To urge silence upon me – or anyone with a story akin to mine – would be a harsh yet kinder gesture, rather than belittling our experiences.

When told in patronizing tones, **“You seem upset, but things like this were common back then,”** it hardly offers solace.

Does patronization supposed to make anyone feel better?

**SLUSH PILE**  
2502H LIFE

Certainly, every story unfolds in its own distinctive way. Yet, the harrowing impact on countless innocent children—hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions—branded as unwanted and illegitimate is undeniably catastrophic. Among these, I consider myself one of the fortunate few. The battle to liberate myself from the shadows of such a label is an ongoing struggle, but one I'm determined to win.

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**SLUSH PILE**

**I**n a world draped in entitlement and privilege, a place where the select few are born perched on pedestals, the narratives such as mine demand a voice.

Surely, the privileged elite might scoff, clamping their ears shut, for the truth threatens their gilded narrative – the fallacy that they’ve single-handedly carved their fortunes from sheer willpower, blind to the lotto of birth that laid the foundation for their empires.

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It is through sharing our varied and raw stories that we can chisel away at the bedrock of ignorance and forge a world seamed with compassion.

These tales are not merely tales; they are the keys to empathy, the bridge to understanding, the tools by which we can cultivate a gentler, more equitable society.

INTERVIEWER  
TATEKATEMEK

**A**re you okay?  
**ME**  
TATE  
Fuck, no.

*How could I be?*

I witnessed both my parents' deaths two times – the second time my mother literally and my father metaphorically.

All through my life, I was kept in the dark about a secret that, when I inadvertently discovered it, left me alone during the time I needed family most. It seemed that they preferred living a falsehood rather than confronting the implications of the truth. Of course, I can only guess at what my older siblings – no longer holding that title in my life – knew or how they felt.

I am enveloped in sadness.

Some claim we were all raised the same way, but that's an impossibility where humans are concerned. The people who impersonated my parents might have tried to fill those roles, but their efforts never felt sincere enough. In the midst of my anguish, some siblings even tried to console me by saying, **"You will always be our baby brother."**

But their words rang hollow.

I wonder, does my birth mother continue to play the charade of being my sister?

My grandmother, acting as my mother, wanted to confess the truth to me, yet she lacked the courage – or so I was led to believe.

Imagine a family so entrenched in deception that they kept their unwanted, illegitimate child – a living secret – just to evade societal shame.

The true disgrace lies not in my birth, but in the lengths taken to conceal it. Whom did these societal norms protect?

I carry the weight of this humiliation, navigating the pain alone just to find a way to breathe. In reflection, I may have found solace only because my friends' families acknowledged my suffering.

In that, I am fortunate. But what of the over 600,000 – perhaps millions – of other children whose innocence was robbed from them?

Their stories are a testament to what they've endured.

SLUSH PILE  
2FO2H LIFE



**W**ho am I trying to fool, really?  
I'm irreparably fractured, a complex mosaic of scars and smiles interwoven seamlessly. With each passing day, I strive to conceal the turmoil, to cloak it beneath a veneer of humour that's been cultivated from a wellspring of hidden anguish.

As the years wax and wane, bringing with it the festive cheer of Christmas, the reverence of Mother's and Father's Days, and the boisterous joy of Birthdays, the sharp pang of my private grief crescendos to an inescapable crescendo. These occasions, meant for celebration, instead cast long shadows over me, highlighting the parts of my soul that ache the most.

Vessi, you're a rare soul who understands my contradictions without judgment. How can I ever thank you enough?

In some cosmic jest, the very struggles that might have left me cynical have instead shaped a heart that's tender. Fragility has given way to empathy, as if through the cracks in my spirit, a compassionate light has found its way in. There are moments when I catch myself acting the part of the cynic, the fool, the uncaring impostor. Not truly, of course – just a fleeting thought of self-rebuke when I sense I've overstepped an invisible line of my own making.

I'll admit, my words can sound like whispers from a shadowed corner. Yet, believe me, I'm not a creature of darkness. I am an alchemist, transmuting my internal struggles into chances for connection, a smile, a shared laugh with a stranger.

Each day, it's my silent vow to find a moment of camaraderie in this vast world, to be a single, quivering light within a sea of unknown faces.

INTERVIEWER  
TATE

I believe I'm beginning to grasp the concept of the "slush pile."

It feels like your story has been endlessly searching for a literary home. Are you being delusional by continuing to try?

What prevents you from giving up?

ME  
TATE

I remain alive – that is the answer to the second question. My resolve is unwavering.

The tale I carry is not solely my own; it is of paramount significance. My origins trace back to a dreadful place – a place not unique in its existence. Divine intentions did not reach us through tweets, and those who claimed to translate the divine will often did so with disturbing liberties.

Label them what you will – wayward, feeble-minded, but these euphemisms mask the harsher truth. They were people in destitution, regarded as disposable, mere detritus to be discarded along with the bathwater.

These establishments thrived on unpaid labour, and so-called wayward women were their unwilling providers – their babies were nothing more than an unfortunate byproduct.

The women, deemed irreparable. But how can you mend what was never broken?

If there was truly kindness and love within these walls, why then the shroud of secrecy? Why the shattered families? Why the obliteration of innocent children's lives?

Look upon the city streets of today. Observe the vestiges of devastation – lives fractured, pervasive sorrow. They are a human morass mired in despair, addiction, alcoholism, mental health crises, homelessness, and amidst them prowl the predators, ever waiting to take advantage.

**INTERVIEWER**  
TATEKATEMEK

**A** dystopian world?

**ME**  
TATE  
Absolutely, for those children birthed amid falsehoods, it's a dystopian reality. How else could it be perceived?

Imagine a child attempting to rise from the figurative mire of existence, all while entangled in the profound confusion of their own identity.

Consider the child who begins life as the product of unwelcome circumstances, deemed illegitimate from the start. How can they extend love to others when their very existence commenced without the desire of those around them?

It seems an insurmountable challenge. Undoubtedly, such children would navigate life grappling with the haunting spectre of abandonment.

Yet, acknowledging this does not discount the extraordinary individuals who triumph over these adversities.

There are, after all, exceptions to the rule.

**INTERVIEWER**  
TALFKATEMEK

**A**re you an exception?

**ME**  
TATE

Not at all. I endure horrific episodes of depression aggravated by relentless insomnia. I have a habit of pushing love away as I struggle with accepting it. I hide my pain behind the façade of humour, making others laugh to cover my wounds. I encounter failures, not just occasionally, but constantly.

Yet, I never cease in my attempts to overcome them. Never have, never will.

Throughout my life, I have essentially been orphaned; I only witnessed my existence intertwined with my parents' in their dying moments. I saw them perish not once, but twice.

**SLUSH PILE**  
2FO2H LIFE

INTERVIEWER  
TATEKATEMEK

Is that what this book is about, your upbringing?

ME  
TATE

It's a complex mingling of affirmations and negations. My journey as an author began simply with the unadulterated joy of stringing words together. Yet, as I painstakingly gathered fragmented shards of memory, the act of writing morphed into a vital lifeline, a means to cling to a semblance of sanity amidst the chaos. The echoes of family upheavals reverberate throughout my tale, magnified in their intensity. The revelation of truths, only partial though piercing, at the age of forty-three nearly shattered me.

Pursuing the elusive jigsaw pieces of my existence compelled me to plunge into the depths of my history, confronting the harrowing 'whys' that have shadowed me. And through it all, I sought to nurture a fragile peace within myself. As I often reflect, I consider myself among the fortunate – though that assertion may come across as starkly dispassionate.

The haven I found in the affections of friends offered me refuge, a way to break free from the ancestral chains. My relatives were not villains, but individuals weighed down by the same oppressive secrecy that shadowed our lives.

My birth mother bore the heaviest burden, one she carried to the precipice of her mortality. Moments before relinquishing her grasp on life, in that sterile hospital room, when inquired by her roommate about my identity, she summoned all her remaining vigour to declare with a mother's pride, **"He is, unequivocally, my son."**

She was seventy-eight when those words finally broke the surface. The decades of silent agony she withstood – barely fathomable to me – and yet, I falter as I attempt to encapsulate such suffering in mere sentences. Acknowledgement of this truth surfaced but once more, etched in the solemn text of my birth mother's obituary. **"She is survived by her son, Lindsay Wincherauk..."**

To witness that acknowledgment, unfold publicly, at fifty-six – contemplate the magnitude of that moment.

If I may, let me retreat to an earlier thought for a moment. In its purest essence, if I were to lay bare my soul, this book is an ode to the countless wandering spirits in this world, all striving to find their way through the indiscriminate labyrinth of an unjust existence.

In my narrative, I've become the lament and the anthem for the silent and the suffering – those who have borne shoes akin to mine yet lost the vitality to tread any further long ago. So yes, in the broadest of strokes, this is a story about transcending the obfuscating shadows of concealment, about claiming one's place in the light.

2014

I visited Beulah House in Edmonton, the place where I was born. When I posed questions to the staff in the office, they were tight-lipped, refusing to satisfy my curiosity. However, they pointed me toward the cabins where babies were delivered.

A young woman, who appeared to be about twenty-three, offered me a tour. As I prepared to leave, she was overcome with emotion, embracing me in a tearful hug. She confided that my visit had given her hope because, it seemed, no happy tales ever originated from Beulah House, and yet I appeared to be...okay?

**“An Academy Award goes to...”**

... ..

Yes, this book is about family. But being one of the fortunate few, its scope extends far beyond. My feelings evolved from anger to sadness. Of course, I yearned for truth from the beginning, but who is there to blame?

Society has failed on many levels, leaving too many individuals discarded on the margins—life’s slush piles—where few escape, carrying that burden until their dying day. The shadow of the slush pile looms over the less fortunate in every facet of life, leaving a latent fear of abandonment in the recesses of their psyche.

I realize the literary world might approach a narrative of this nature with caution in the wake of scandals involving residential schools. But what I can offer is that, as dark as my story may be, it also radiates hope.

Humour is my defense; it’s essential for survival. I’m not just an unwelcome, illegitimate child who began life on the slush pile. I’ve led an incredibly vibrant and fantastical existence to this point.

Despite losing the sight in my left eye, I rose to become a national champion quarterback, inducted into three halls of fame, and a holder of records.

My adventures include an attempt to purchase a hotel in Negril, Jamaica, which involved a financing trip to Panama amid a military coup (Noriega), and a motorcycle crash in Jamaica that nearly claimed one of my much-appreciated feet.

Once, I had an almost spiritual brush with the Dalai Lama, who ended up using the urinal beside me in a food court bathroom, of all places.

I’ve played basketball with Fox Mulder (you know, from **“The X-Files”**).

I’ve suffered and recovered from a catastrophic stroke.

I’ve braved the stage for stand-up comedy, not once or twice.

I became a key witness in a hate crime trial after witnessing a gay bashing, leading me to engage with civic leaders, dignitaries, politicians, and police at an anti-hate rally before a crowd of over 5,000.

And still, I persist, day after day.

by Lindsay Wincherauk

**F**rom an obfuscated beginning, shrouded in neglect, life unfurled in riddles indecipherable. Serendipitously, kindred spirits – companions and their kin – extended salvaging hands, and under their warmth, the seeds of my imagination began to sprout. Aimlessly I drifted, a compass without north, a perpetual ricochet against life’s relentless walls. Chaos reigned supreme – until mortality’s cold whisper, grief’s clenched fist, and the leering spectres of abandonment and trepidation jolted my essence violently. **A detonation sent shockwaves through my being:** disarray embodied, shattered, trembling in the abyss.

In the theater of chaos, I encountered the phantoms of death, heartache, isolation, and fear, each act escalating until an explosive revelation shattered my essence. My soul, ravaged and laid bare, I plunged into the wreckage of my past, desperate to piece together the fragments of a life disarrayed.

Amidst the tumultuous journey of self-destruction, where sabotage stripped away the scant shreds of good in my existence, I imploded, sinking to nadirs unseen. However, from that abyss, the careful hands of camaraderie reached out, hauling me toward redemption.

I, with my often spoke of sexy feet, turned ash and despair to the fuel of my resurrection. Like the mythical phoenix, I soared from my own incineration – tears streaming, knees buckling, yet enduring the relentless cycle of life’s ricochet. In spite of renewed cascades of sorrow, the unshakable truth persisted – I was, am, and perhaps will ever be, beautifully flawed.

Amid the resurgence, Europe’s eclectic chorus sang an ode to the beauty of imperfection. Embraced in their melody, I ascended once more – only to find myself in a solitary free fall, kinless, hitting the cradle of rock bottom yet again. Sobs wracked my frame; yearnings for nonexistence clung like ivy to my thoughts. Alienation’s cold fingers prodded at my resolve until, defiant, I stood anew, a smile defiantly painted on my lips, a question mark shaping my identity.

Discovery beckoned as anger ebbed; but life, relentless in its whims, struck with surgical precision: the youngest, my beacon of kinship, stricken from existence – followed too soon by the architects of my creation and kindred blood. A cataclysmic ailment rent my vessel, yet amidst cascading loss, empathy blossomed – for mother, for father, for their progenitors, tangled in a lineage of unanswered enigmas.

**Truth gnawed at my core:** blame is but a fool’s errand in this starkly human pageant. Yet, through the sorrows and unwitting falsehoods, I stand resolute – smiling must transcend the days, as regrets hold no dominion over the soul I have crafted from this maelstrom of existence. I emerge not with regret, but with profound recognition of the person I have become.

## SLUSH PILES

In the ever-shifting landscape of contemporary literature, the quest to emerge from obscurity to recognition as a writer can feel like an insurmountable challenge.



Each narrative harbours the potential to fill dozens of pages, yet the art of eloquent storytelling doesn't come naturally to everyone. I am among the few who can; therefore, my resolve to persevere is unyielding.

But the world of discarded manuscripts, the infamous “slush piles,” isn't exclusive to the realm of publishing. Particularly for those who commenced life's journey with the proverbial deck stacked against them.

(These are the slush piles as seen through my lens.)

... ..

## Scholastic

Borne from beginnings marred by being deemed unwanted and illegitimate, the figures who populate my past—shackled by deception—showed little interest in my academic pursuits. Whether I graced the honour roll or skirted the edge of academic failure, it seemed all the same in the shadow of neglect.

... ..

## Athletics

Athletics Within that sphere, I shone through tenacity and talent, although largely unaided. After the whistle blew on my high school and collegiate football matches, my absent father would wax lyrical about my brother-uncle Don instead of acknowledging my exploits on the field.

... ..

## Love + Relationships!

Love An echo resounds in my heart: the fear of abandonment—persistent and haunting. Relationships In the maze of human connections, that same echo transforms into a presence, trailing me at every turn: the fear of abandonment—a relentless refrain.

... ..



Career  
C91661

Here, the dread of abandonment evolves into vulnerability – an open target for exploitation and manipulation, coupled with the paralyzing anxiety of asserting one’s self.

The labels “unwanted” and “illegitimate” carry no banners of entitlement or privilege.

As the shadow of COVID loomed, I expressed to my employer of fifteen years – where I stood as the eldest in both age and tenure, a pillar of reliability – my concerns over the unfolding pandemic.

With haste and without consideration, they relegated me to the stack of expendable assets, oblivious to the upheaval in my life.

In my quest for justice, their legal team branded me a “failed writer,” unworthy of pursuing my aspirational dreams.

Ironically, I find myself on the cusp of sixty-two (currently sixty-three) this July, with the legal proceedings advancing at a pace that would put a glacier to shame – twenty-five months and counting. Fortune is a peculiar comrade.

Despite being a maelstrom of emotional disarray, the flame of determination within me remains inviolate.

Our sagas hold significance; they oscillate between heartrending and uproarious and cry out for expression. I am resolutely searching for a haven for my narrative.

Let me underscore this: my tale is suffused with HUMOUR. Is there not an adage that suggests laughter springs from the most unexpected origins? Or some sentiment akin to that?

Lindsay Wincherauk

PostScript: In an era when women’s rights face renewed threats within the United States, and notwithstanding my own challenging inception, I find a modicum of solace in having had the chance to voice my perspective on “We, Jane” by Aimee Wall. Here is an impression a reader shared after considering my thoughts.

goodreads



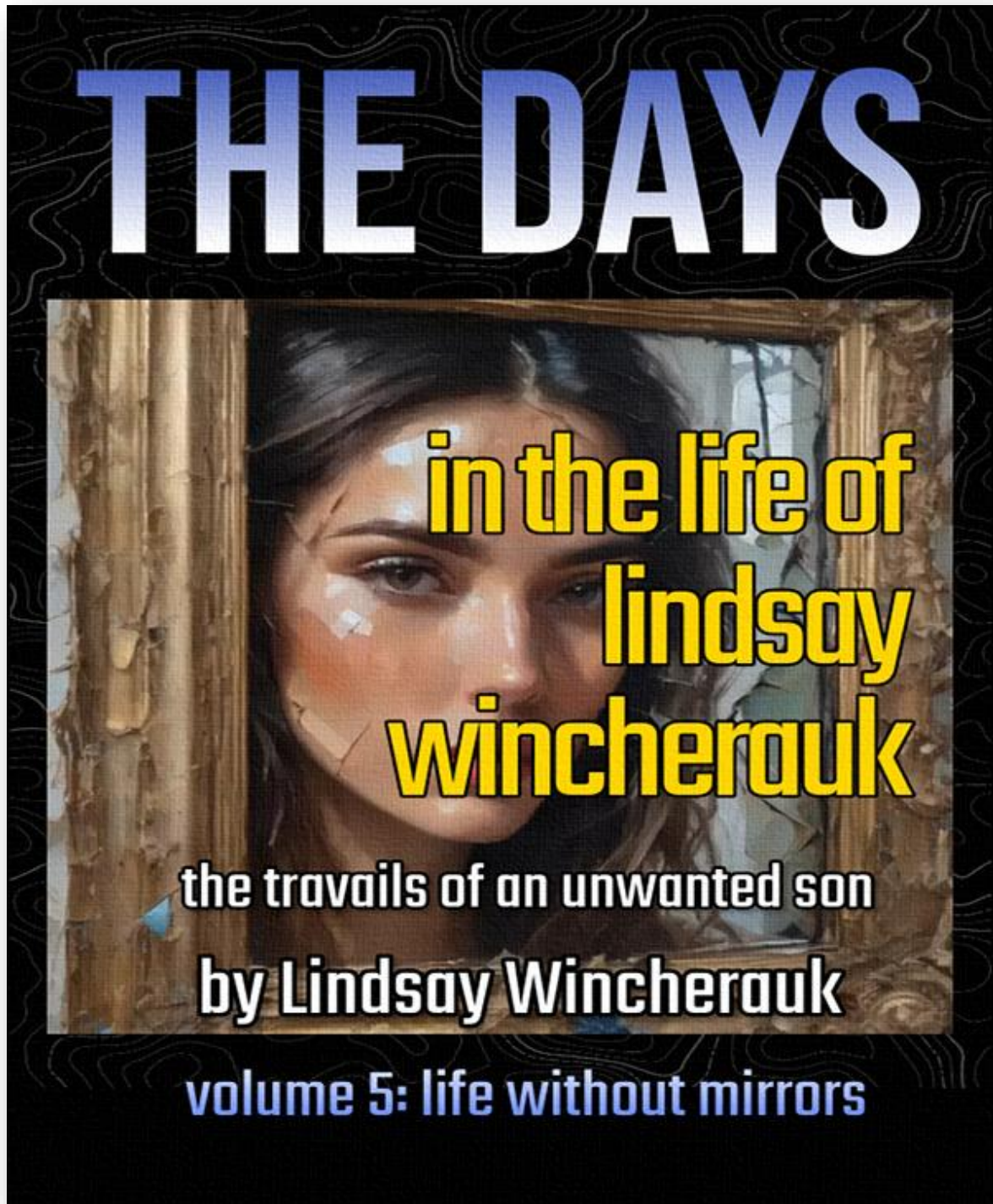
Jodi posted a new comment on [Lindsay's review of We, Jane](#)

Lindsay, I'm in awe of your beautiful review and of your honesty. I'm sorry for the pain you may have gone through as a child, but I'm very happy that you seem to really 'get it'! If it's true that everything happens for a reason, your experience has perhaps given you the rare ability to see things from a woman's perspective, and that is very much appreciated. Thank you, Lindsay! 🙏

... ..

by Lindsay Wincherauk

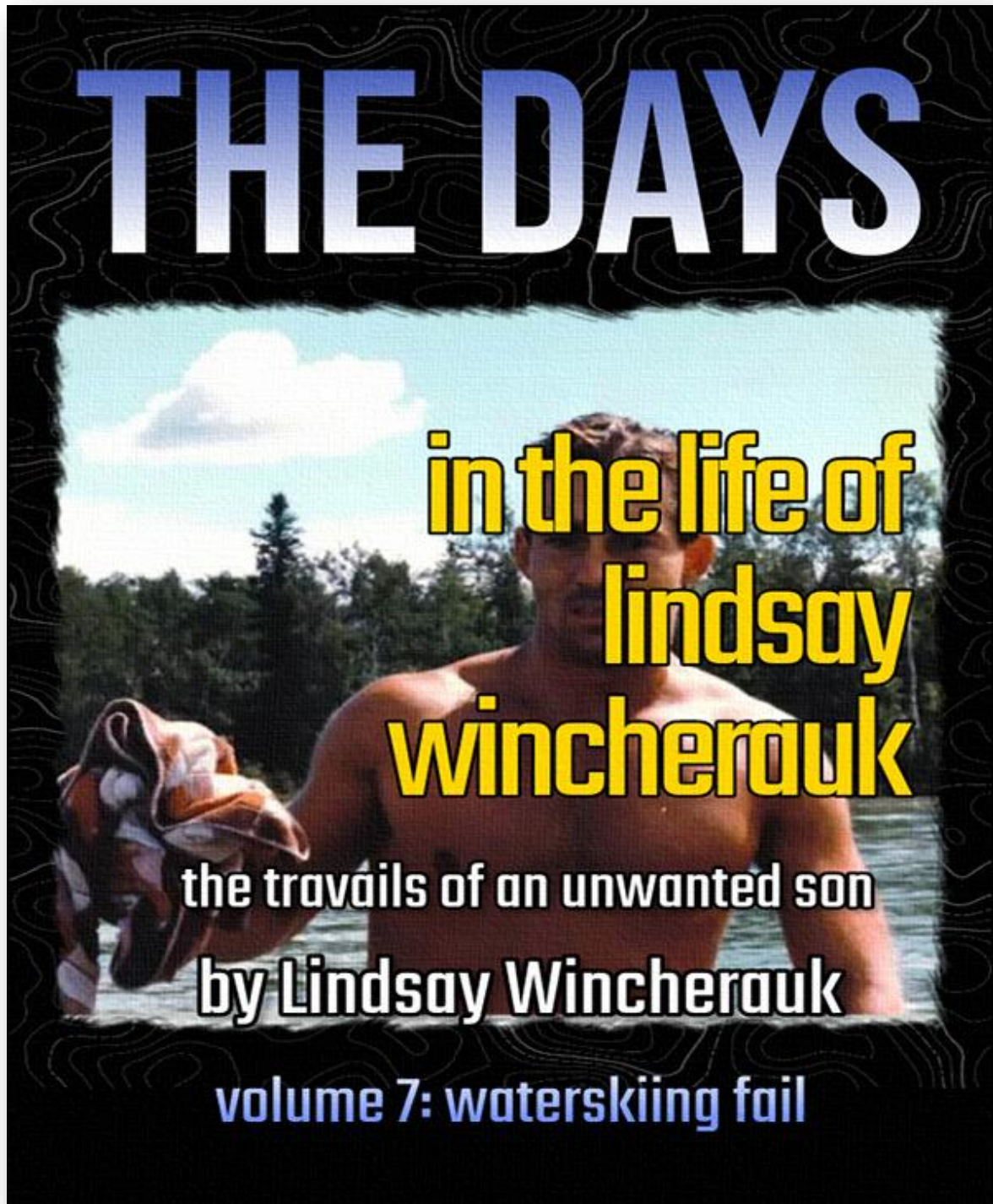
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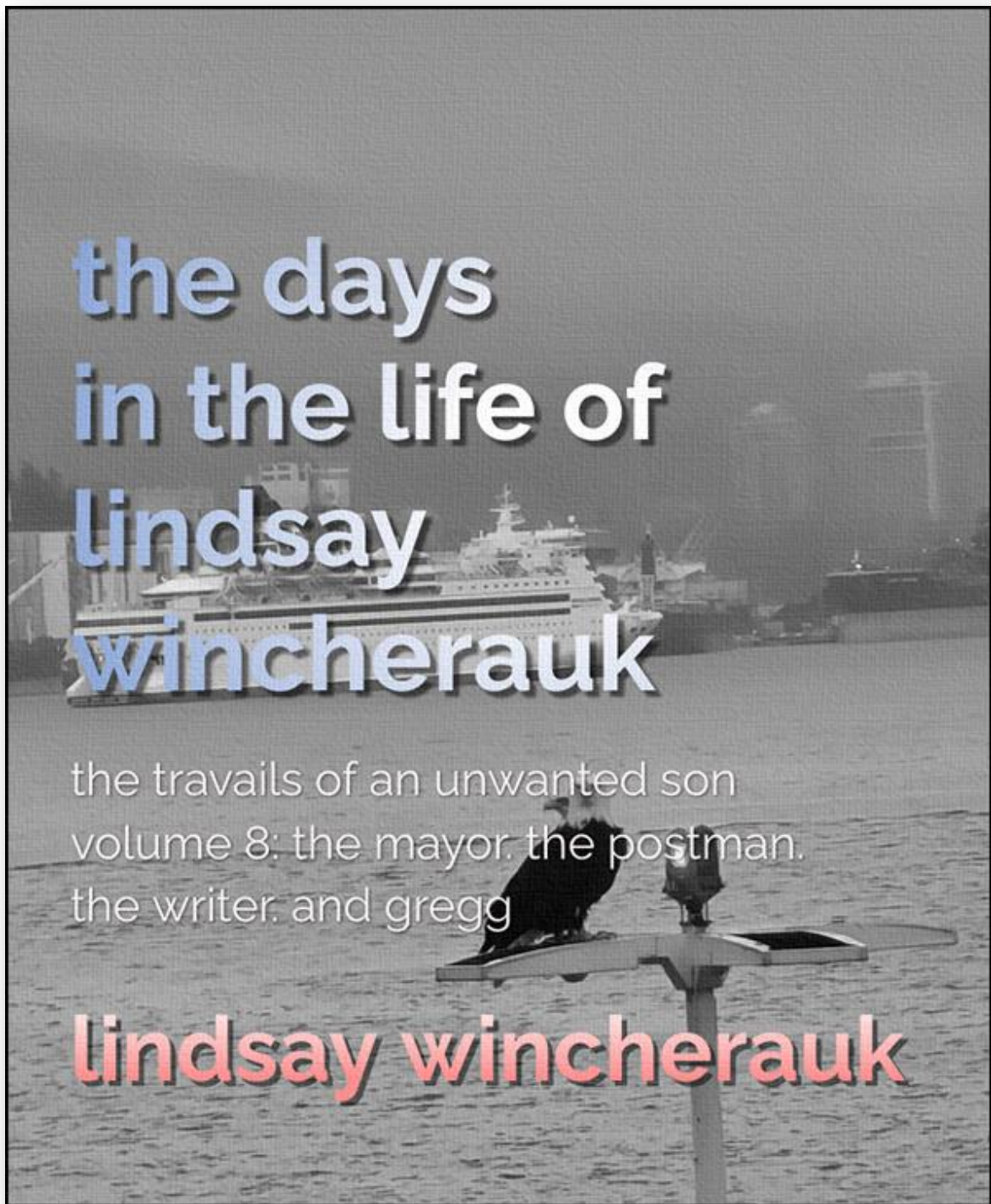
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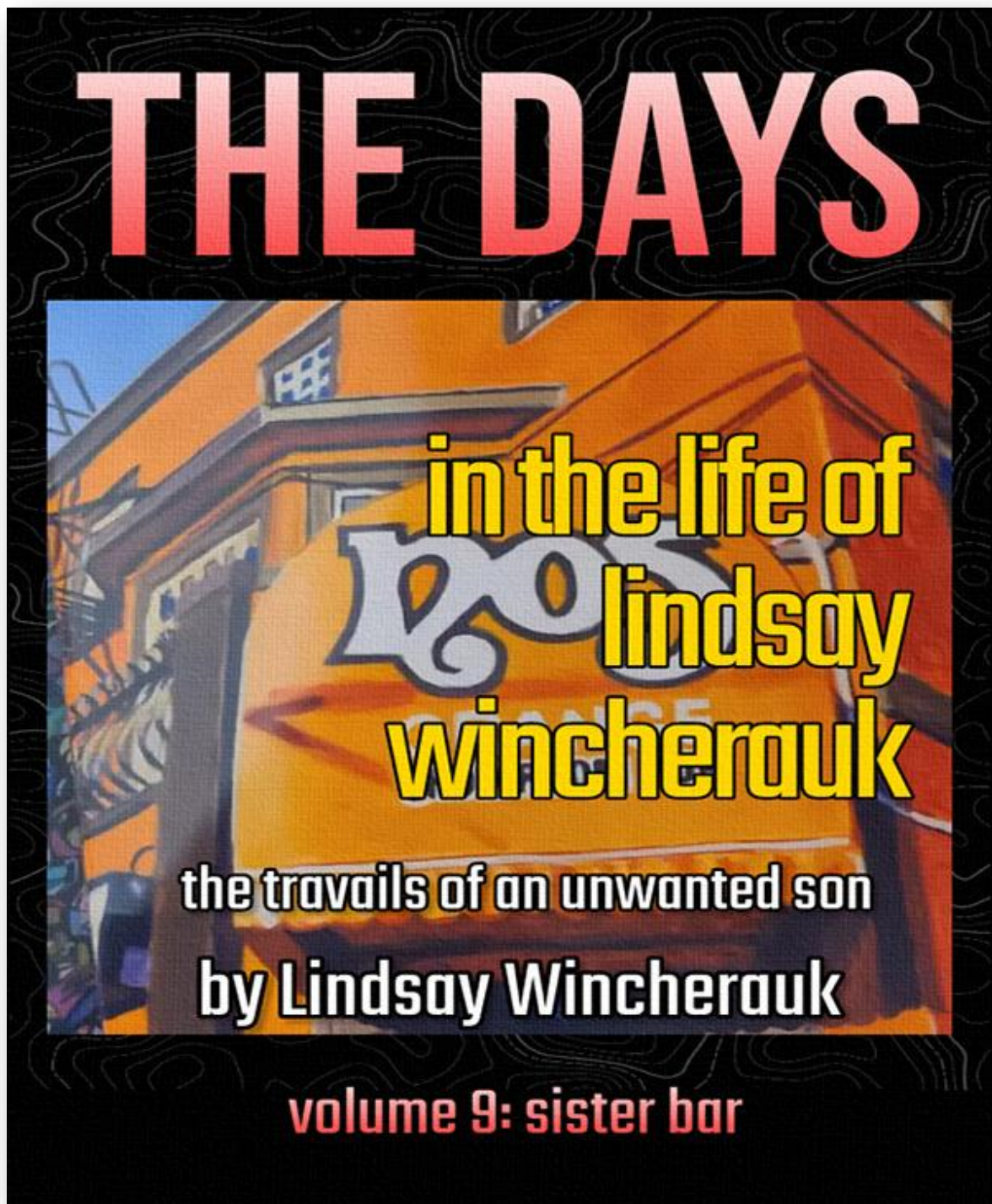
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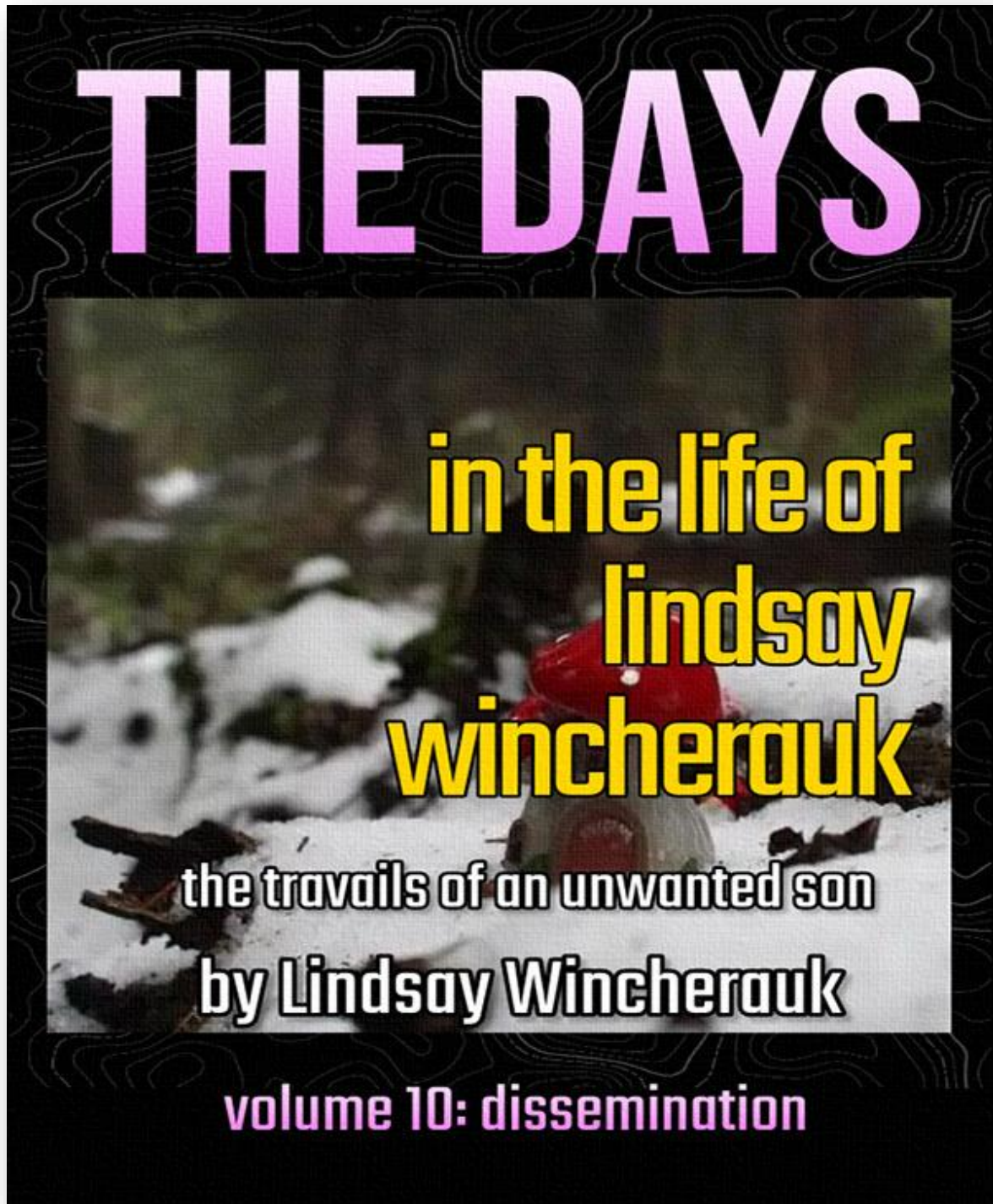
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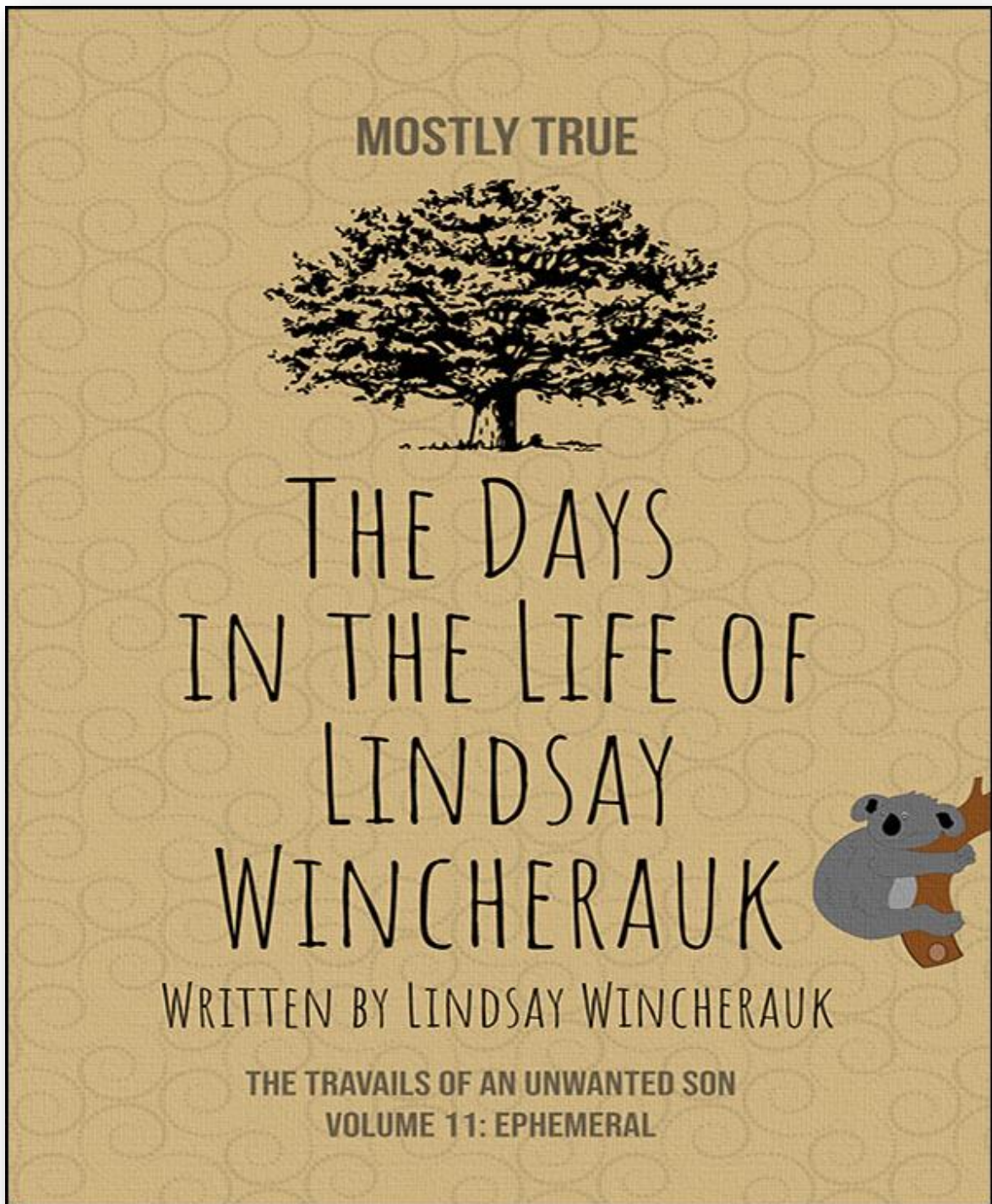


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# the days in the life of lindsay wincherauk

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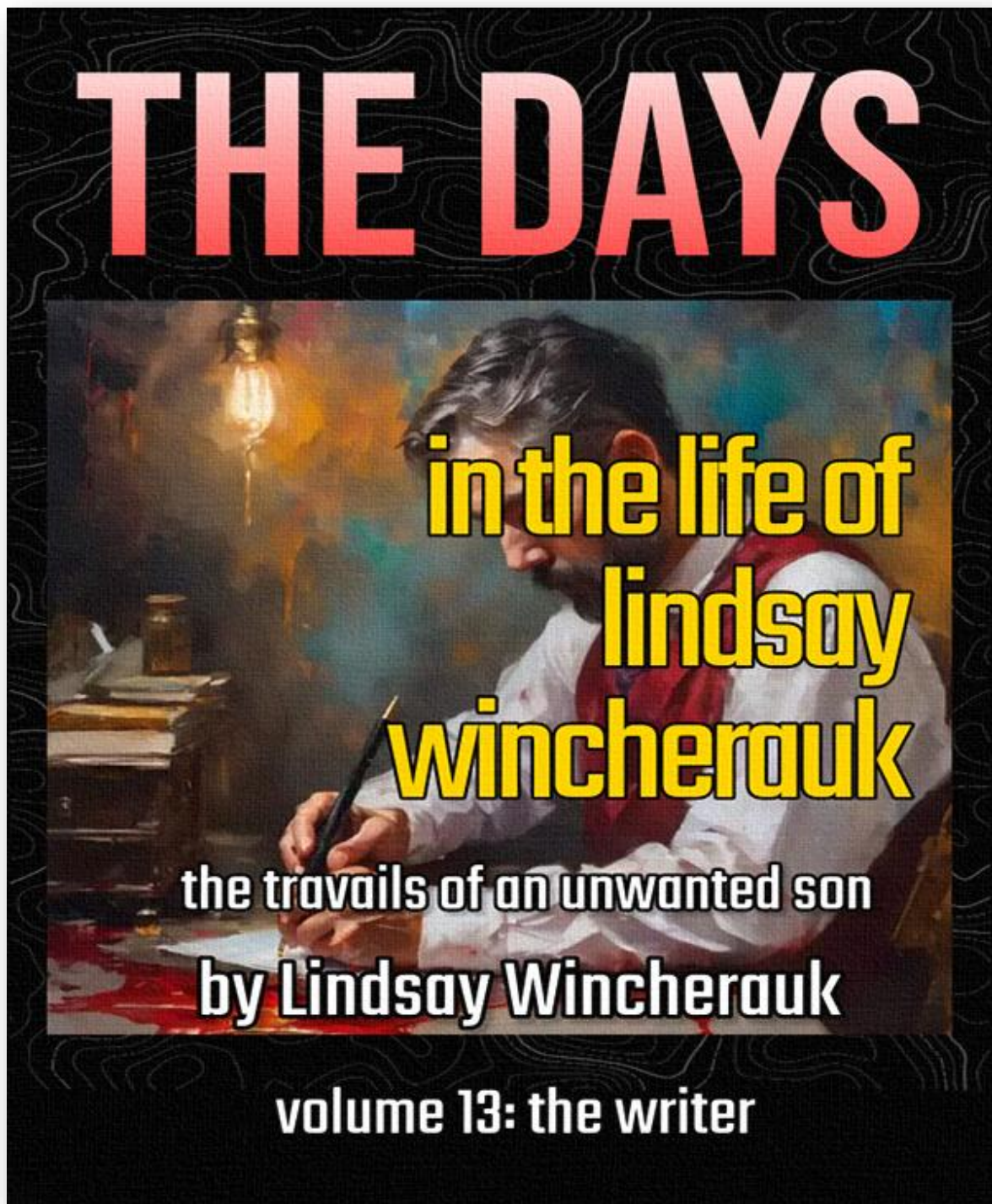
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BY LINDSAY WINCHERAUK

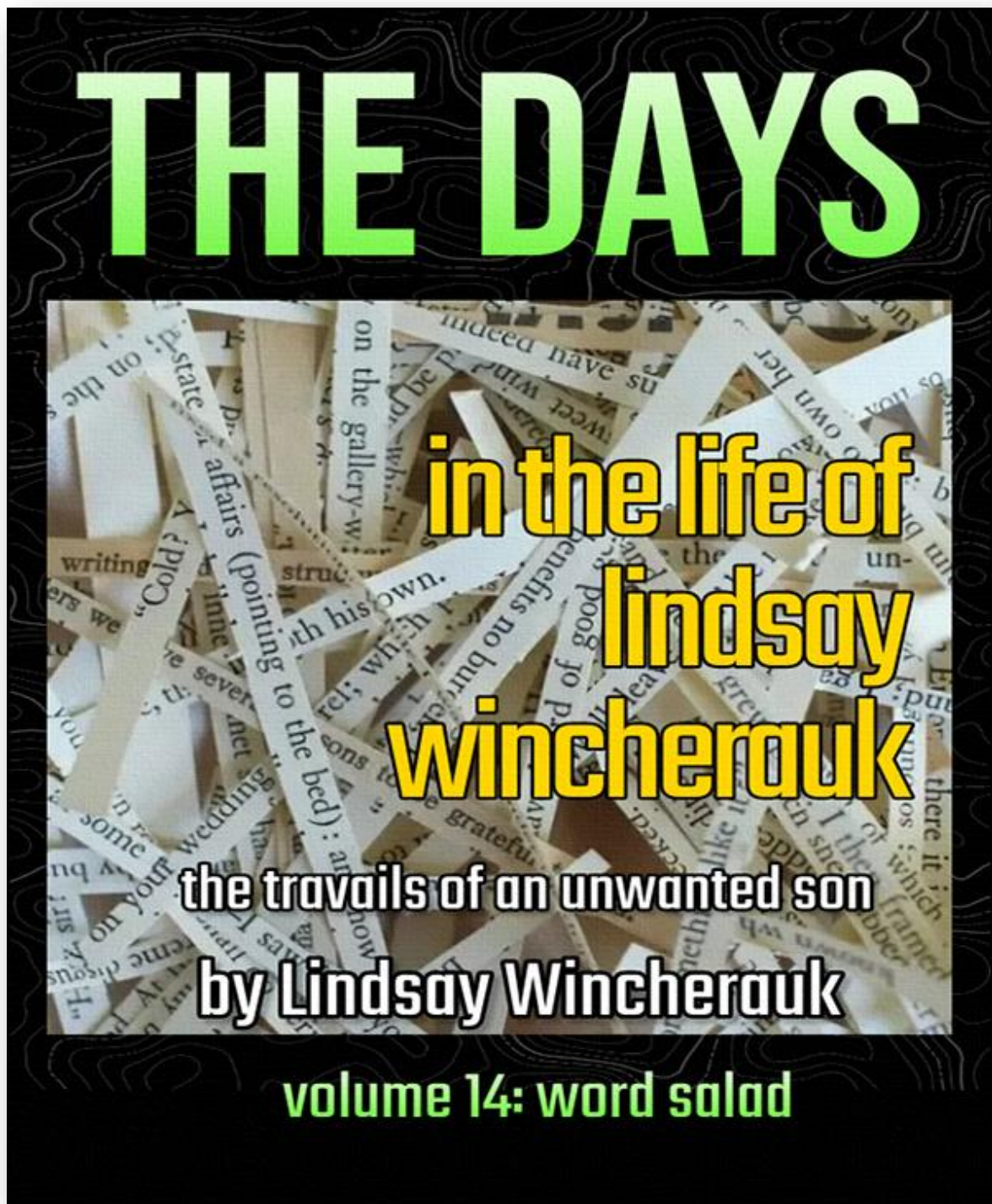


VOLUME 12: PRISON FOOD

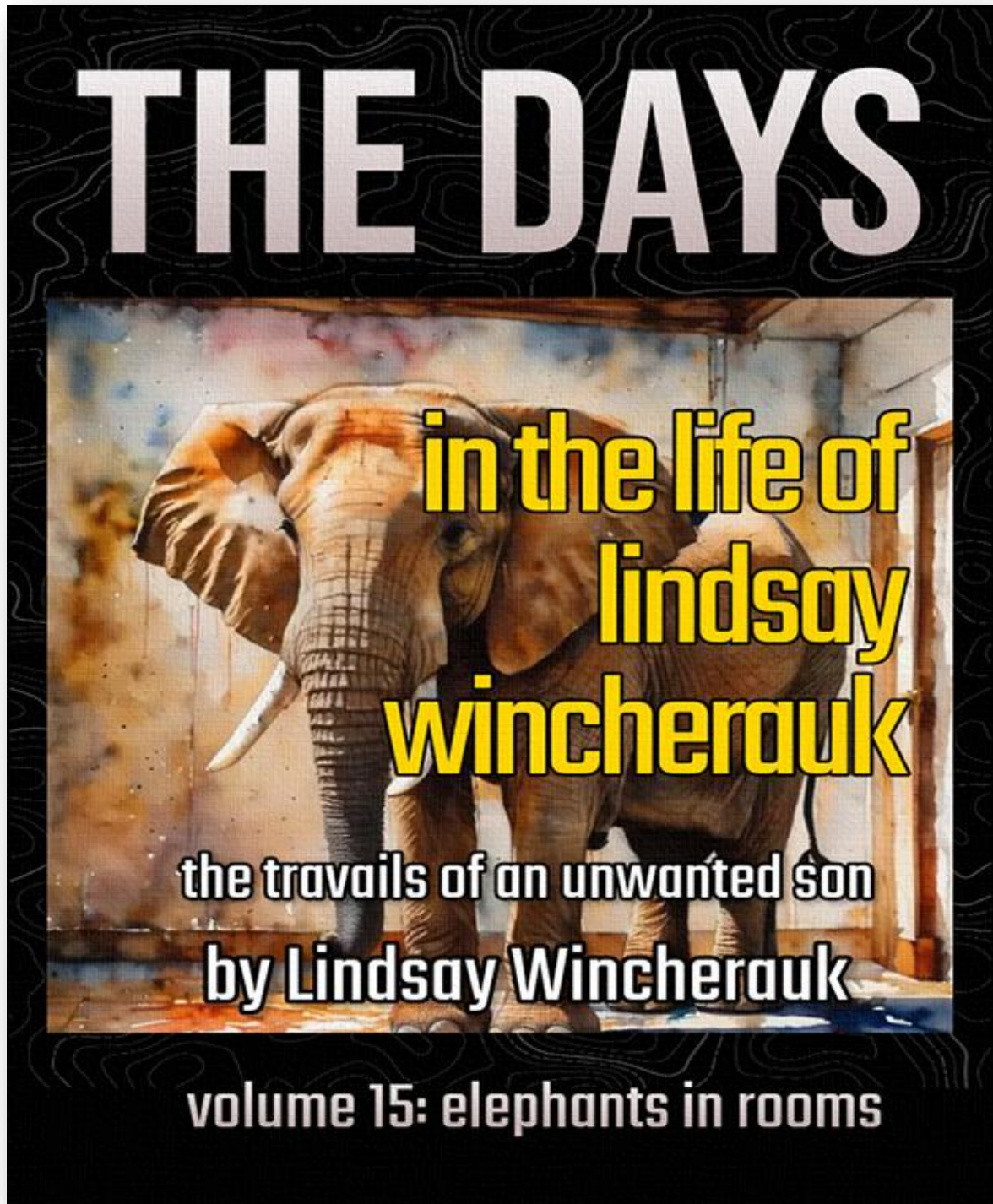
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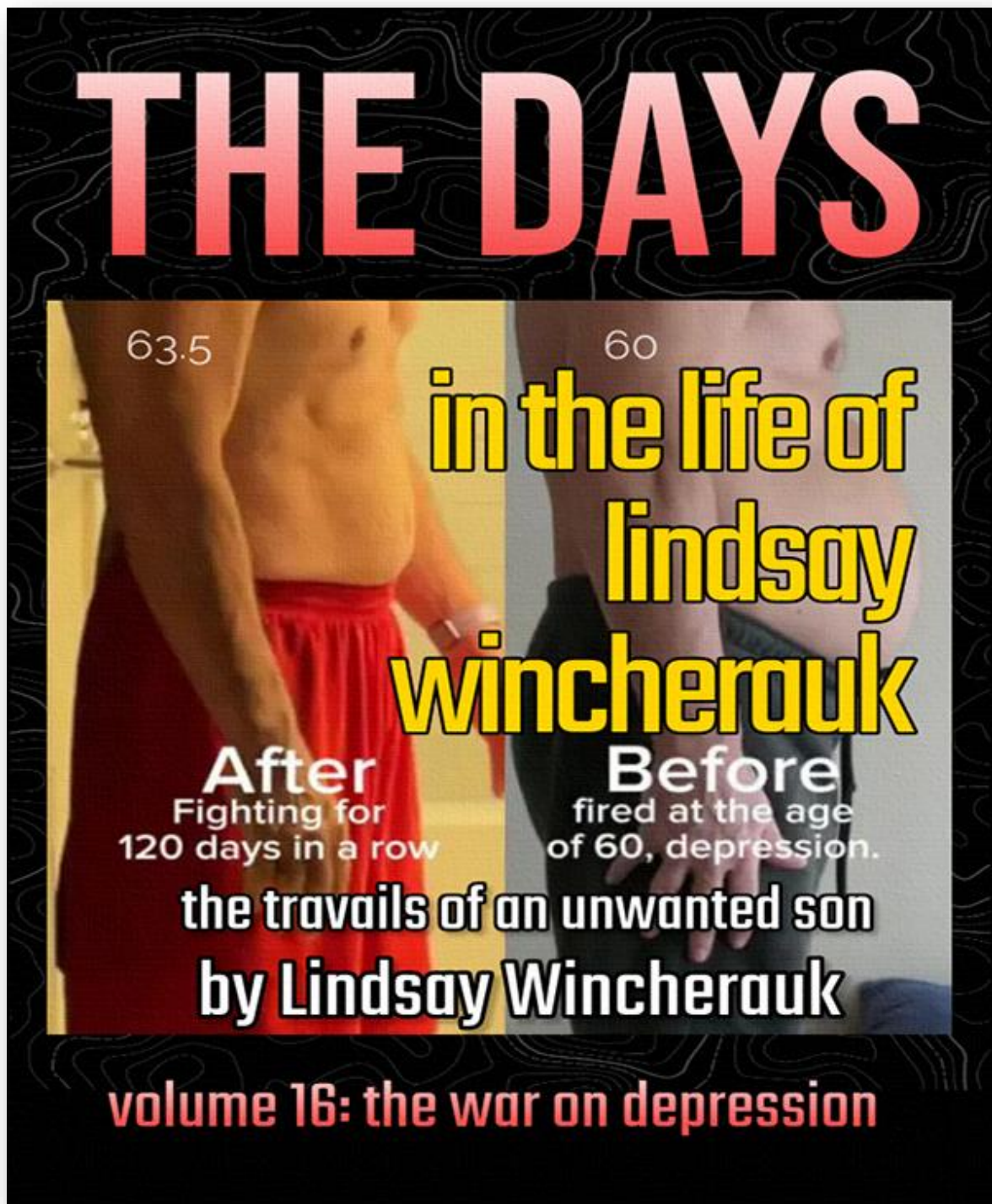
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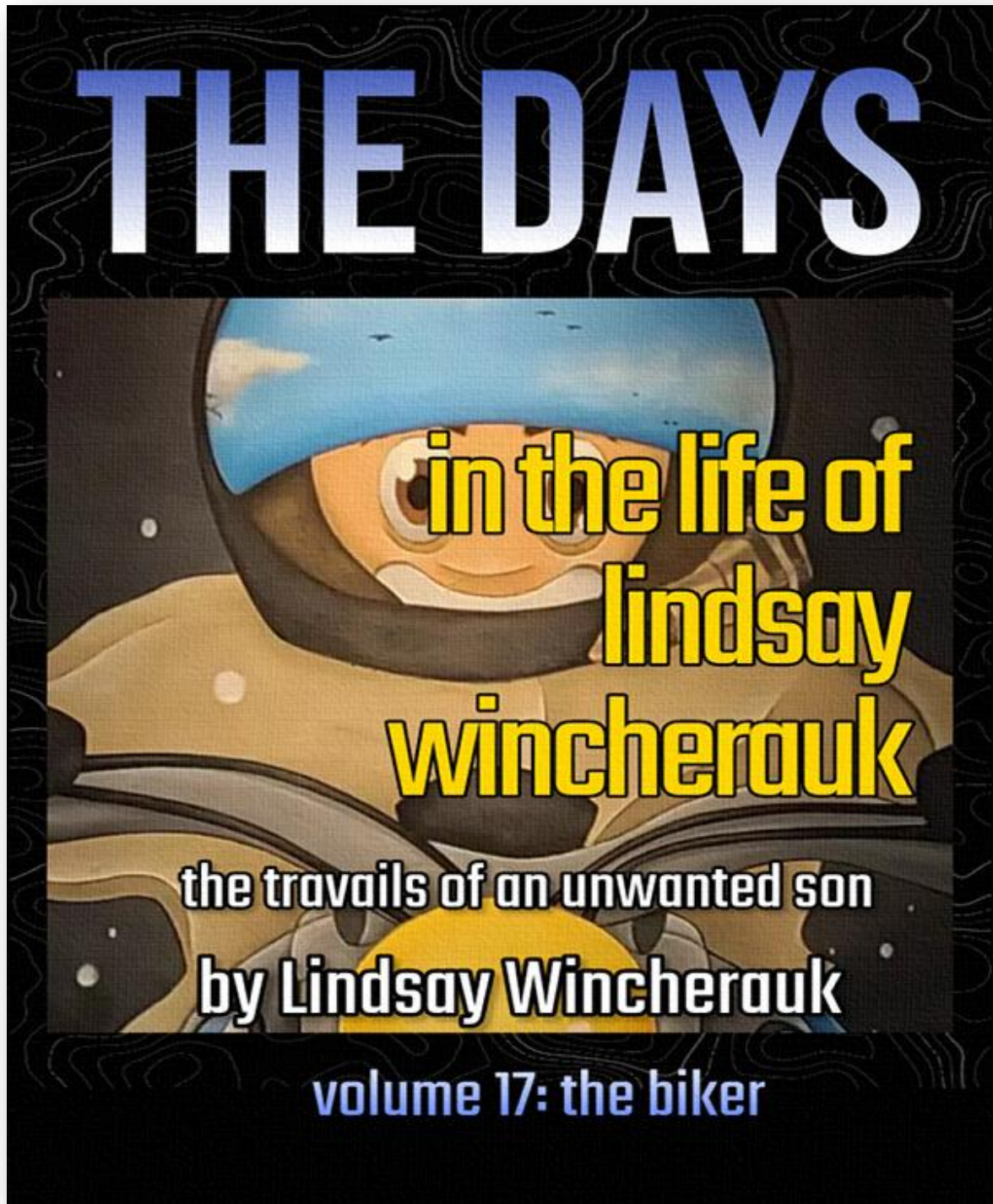
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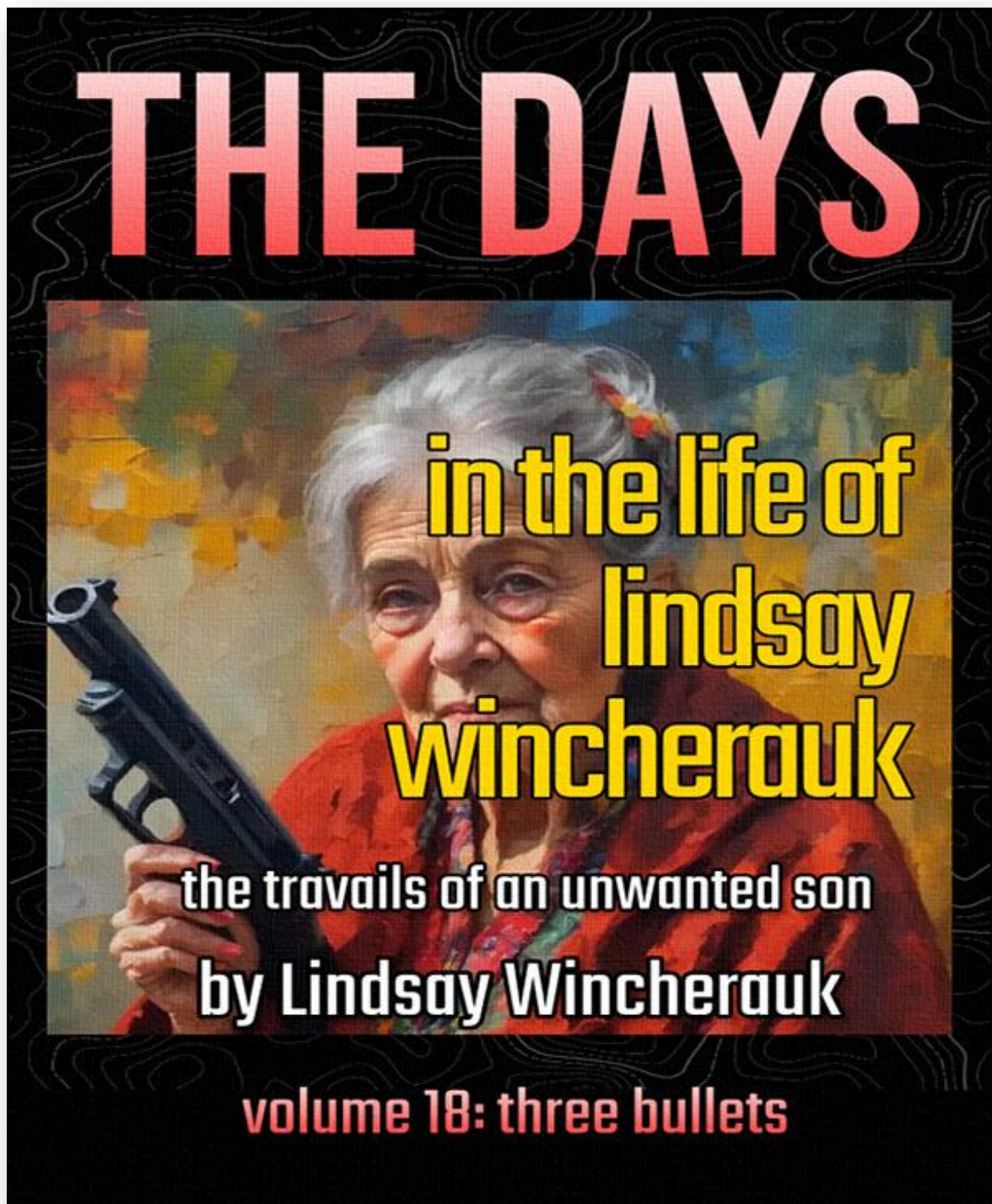
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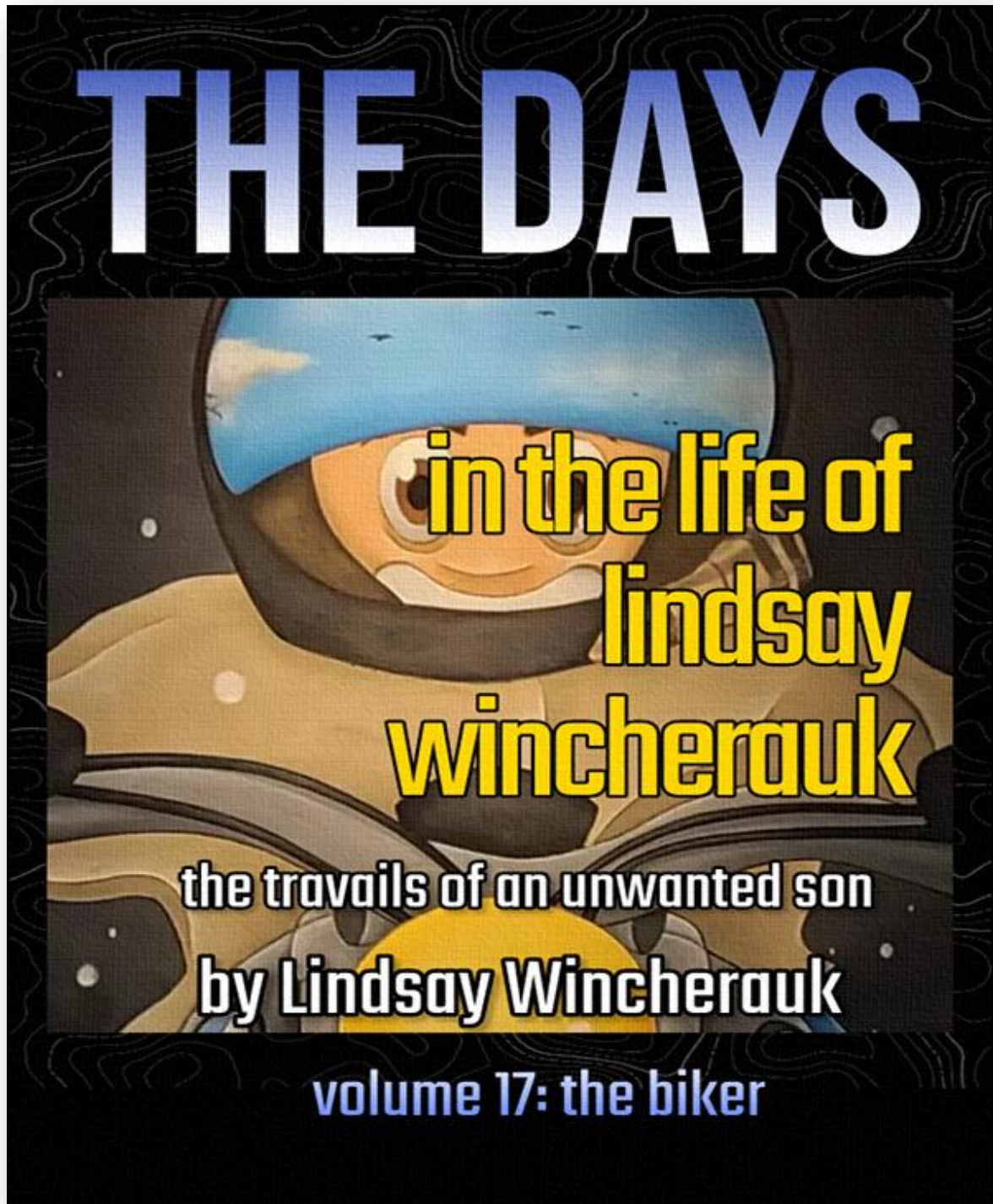


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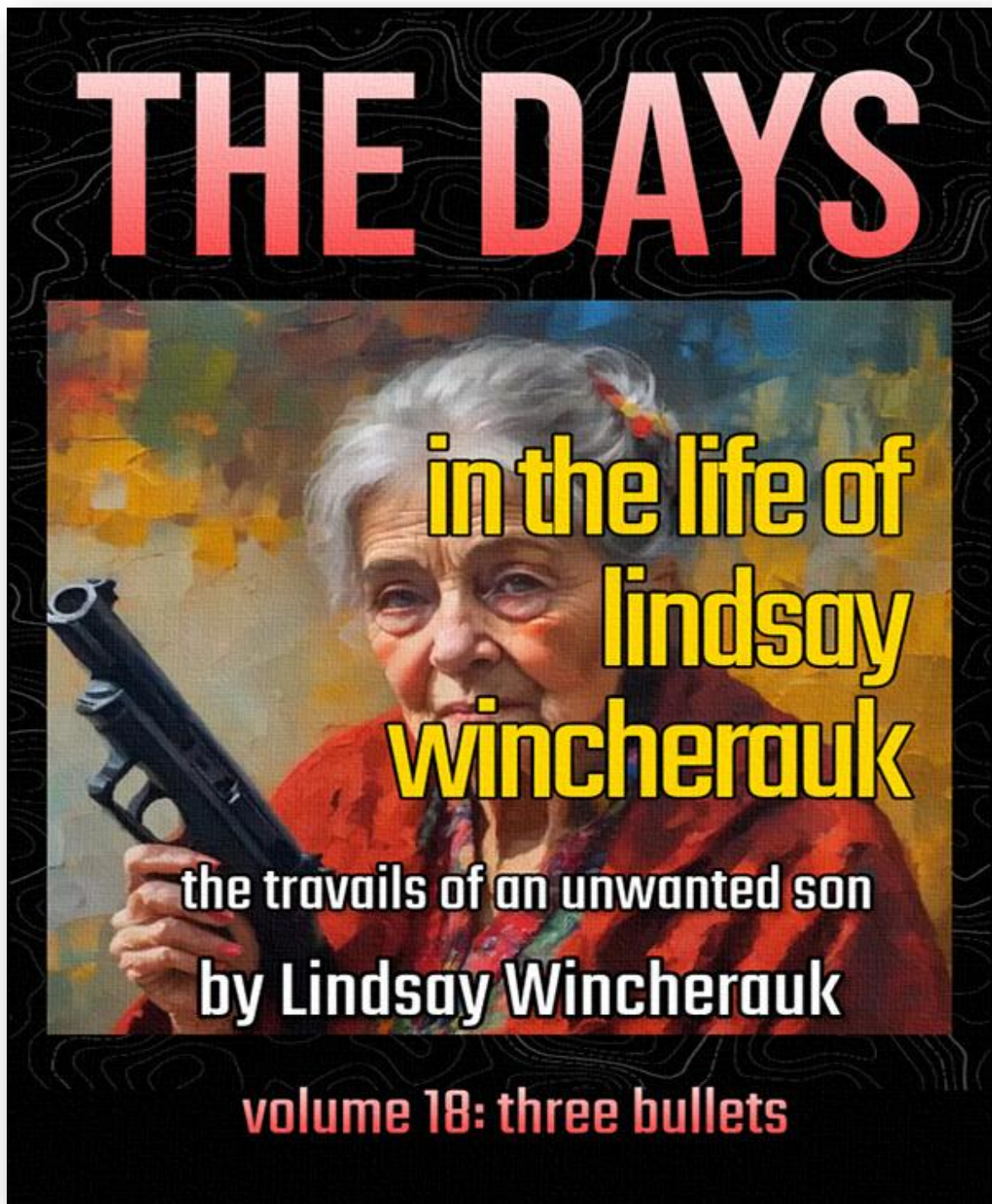


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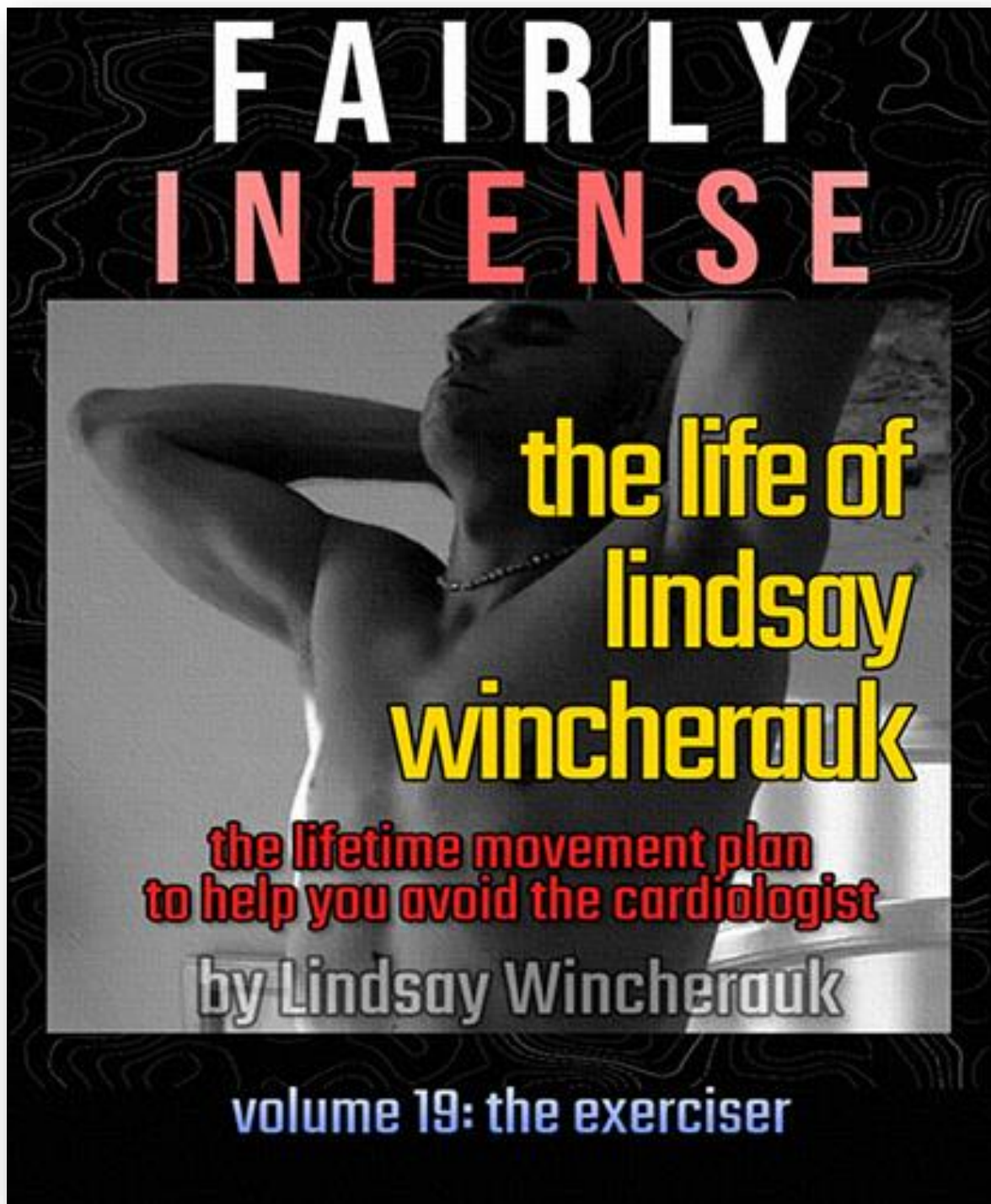




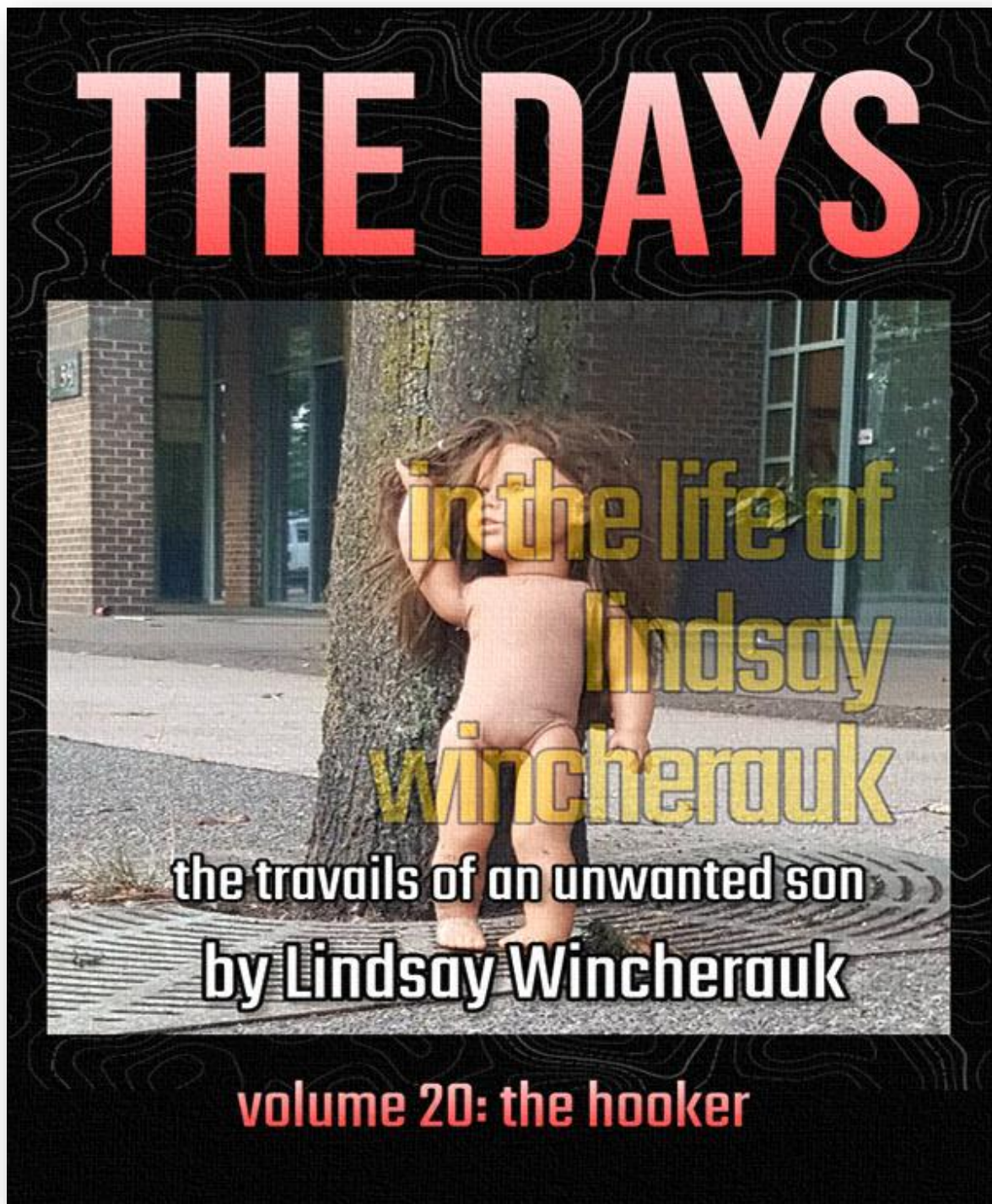
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